

# JIM - JOHN

*Exit Emily, John watching her angrily. Silence. Jim pulls the light chain, turning off the light, then emerges and closes the door.*

*John goes to the kitchenette and takes a bottle of whiskey from the top of the refrigerator. He goes to the shelf of cabinet where he keeps glassware and grabs a glass. He pauses, thinks a moment, and tentatively adds a second glass.*

JOHN. Want a drink?

JIM. Do you have any craft ales?

JOHN. Craft—?

JIM. Like an IPA?

JOHN. No!

*John takes only one glass, for himself, pours and downs a whiskey, then refills. Silence. During what follows, John sips at his second drink.*

JIM. You told her to fire me.

JOHN. You can get another job. It's nothing personal.

JIM. Trying to strangle me and getting me fired seems pretty god-damn personal.

JOHN. I'm sorry I strangled you.

*Pause.*

JIM. Why do you think he did it?

JOHN. Read my essay.

JIM. You volunteered on a suicide hotline, don't they—

JOHN. I took my mom's place. After she got sick. She'd volunteered there for years.

JIM. They don't give you any answers, when they train you?

JOHN. Read—no, they don't. They specifically don't. You're there to listen. You are asking for a simple, pat, conversational answer to why people end their lives. There isn't one. My essay is the best "answer" you're ever going to get.

JIM. You say people kill themselves more often in Las Vegas than anyplace else. That a person here is more likely to kill himself than be killed.

JOHN. Got a problem with that?

JIM. No, that seems to be true. Is it the gambling? The hopeless pursuit of some flashy, noisy American dream?

JOHN. What do you think?

JIM. He had an argument with his parents. He was not the first teenager to storm out of the house and peel out of the driveway. But I can't speculate as to what was going through his mind.

JOHN. You've never curled up in the corner of your kitchen and wanted to die?

JIM. Why would anyone want to die?

JOHN. Because there's no road forward. And you just want the pain to stop. And you don't care how.

JIM. Did something...bad happen to Emily?

JOHN. Do yourself a favor—just stop thinking. Whatever she is, she is. Take it from me, you don't want to go down that road and start questioning her integrity because of—

JIM. I know she's tough.

JOHN. She's better than both of us.

JIM. You don't know that.

JOHN. You honestly are too young to have any idea—

JIM. Oh, here you go again, trying to diminish me.

JOHN. What's to diminish?

JIM. Oh fuck off.

JOHN. I dealt with people like you every day back East. To people like you, writing isn't a job. It's a lifestyle. It's golf.

JIM. I'm not some kind of dilettante.

JOHN. No, you're a particular kind of dilettante. You're one of those people who hangs out at Elaine's eating shitty food so you could gawk at Tom Wolfe.

JIM. Elaine's? That's been gone for years.

JOHN. I know. I miss it. I met George Plimpton there.

JIM. Yeah? What did you talk about?

JOHN. Football.

END →

*They lock eyes.*

JIM. Don't try to stare me down. I had older brothers. I will fuck your shit up.

*John is "WTF" incredulous. Enter Emily.*

EMILY. All good. Let's get to work.

JOHN. What did your elves have to say?

EMILY. Let's get back to work.

JOHN. The ones waiting in their offices on Sunday night. You wouldn't fly out here without a plan B. I know they're working on something. Something you're gonna run instead of my essay.

EMILY. There's always a plan B. At eight A.M. Kankakee time, the presses start running. Either your shattering and sure-to-be-award-winning piece or "Congressional Spouses and the Burdens They Bear."

JOHN. Fuck. All right, let's get this done.

*Blackout.*

*On screen:*

MONDAY 5:00 A.M.

*Lights up. Emily, John, and Jim are still at it. The water bottles and tumblers are empty or half full, and two pizza boxes clutter the coffee table. What was a neat stack of notes has become a large mound of papers. Jim is seated at the small table. Emily is on the sofa. John prowls.*

JOHN. The bricks were red!

JIM. Except they are brown! There are brown bricks near the base—

JOHN. AT the base!

EMILY. (To Jim.) And what's your problem with the base?

JIM. There are two structures, the casino-hotel and the tower—

EMILY. Forget I asked. "At the base" is fine.

JIM. It's not fine.

EMILY. It's acceptable! (To John.) But the bricks. I saw the photos he attached, they look brown.

JOHN. Yes. They LOOK brown. But at dusk, the night I saw them,

they were red. You have to be there at that time of day—

JIM. —and the angel of death will come to you and magically refract the light and you will see red.

JOHN. Perception! Heart! I almost said "blood-red."

EMILY. Too much.

JOHN. I know it's too much, that's why it's not there! But toddler-shit brown over there doesn't even like—

EMILY. No legal action from the brick company, so it's fine. Next.

*She pages through the essay.*

Page eight. Quote from the suicide center's director: "The best suicide hotline call will result in five answers to these five basic questions—"

JIM. —you don't have any notes for this bit.

JOHN. I didn't record it.

JIM. Didn't record it.

JOHN. You take out a tape recorder or a notebook, people start performing, altering their—look. That's what she said.

EMILY. (To Jim.) Did you contact the director?

JIM. Yes.

EMILY. Did she confirm this?

*He hesitates.*

JIM. Yes. Ish.

EMILY. Move on.

JIM. He mentions a chapter in the suicide center's manual, "How to Handle Calls from the Major Hotels," but there's no "manual" or "chapter," it's a thin loose-leaf binder and that section is a one-page list of hotels.

JOHN. O praise the Lord, all ye nations: praise Him, all ye people. For His merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the Lord endureth for ever. Praise ye the Lord.

EMILY. What's that?

JOHN. That is an entire chapter. From the Bible.

JIM. That's not a chapter, it's a psalm.

JOHN. —with its own chapter number—