

FADE IN:

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

A plexiglass barrier on a desk twists the sunlight around the room like a prism onto a young family of three.

They're stationed six feet apart and masked per requirements.

JUDITH (17), an angsty teenager that broods a leave me alone attitude, drowns out the world with her ear buds wearing a hoodie sweatshirt that encompasses her like a blanket.

She wilts tired and worn out.

JUDITH

This is ridiculous. They know we
live together.

ERIC (43), the kind of everyman you might have a beer with on occasion, reads a magazine from the clump stretched out on a coffee table.

Judith focuses on the worry in her mother's expression.

STEFANIE (41), the mirror image of Judith with streaks of gray hairs you only notice if you're close, paces like a nervous trainwreck.

ERIC

Come on, Stef. Can you just sit
down for a moment?

STEFANIE

This is it.

ERIC

Why? Her last check up was fine.

STEFANIE

I just know it.

JUDITH

You know, I'm right here.

Eric slaps down the magazine then anchors himself in front of Stefanie.

ERIC

Stop. Please.

Stefanie trembles with nervousness.

STEFANIE

I can't just shut it off.

ERIC

Can we slow down?

STEFANIE

If her numbers are bad, it means protecting her from everything.

ERIC

That sounds like you want to lock her in the cabin and throw away the key.

JUDITH

I know, right.

THE DOCTOR, proudly sporting scrubs and a name badge that displays "THEY, THEM, THEIR" pronouns, knocks and enters.

Stefanie peers through their facemask and face shield to get a read. Nothing.

ERIC

So... what's the news?

Behind the barrier, they remove the face shield with a thud, distressed.

DOCTOR

Her eGFR is below 15. We thought it could be a mistake but....

ERIC

What's that all mean?

DOCTOR

She's going to need a transplant.

Stefanie plummets to her knees, emotional.

Eric comforts her but is shoved away.

ERIC

How long do we have?

DOCTOR

If we're lucky, a couple of years. Our recommendation is to get her on hemodialysis and see how long we can prolong it.

Judith closes her eyes, aggravated, then intensifies the volume of her ear buds.

The music blares as they talk it out.

Judith mimics the piano track onto her knees for a perfect match.

SUPER - A little over a year later.

INT. HOUSE / GIRL'S BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

Happy eighteenth birthday balloons float aimlessly around the room to read eighty-one.

Judith slouches on the bed in the same hoodie. It's faded with time and sports a tare on the back.

A variety of kidney and headache medications highlight the top of a dresser.

Judith scrolls through her phone. Her ear buds drown out the world. She finds a recipient (DAD/ERIC) to text.

Judith (TEXT) **She's on the moon today. Can you pick me up?**

Eric (TEXT) **I'm already waiting outside.**

The horn from Eric's old truck chirps in the distance.

INT. HOUSE / HALLWAY - EARLY MORNING

Judith tiptoes through the hallway then peeks into Stefanie's bedroom.

Stefanie weeps quietly into a pillow then turns away when their eyes meet.

Judith wipes the door casing with her sleeve to draw a crescent moon in dry erase marker.

EXT. TRUCK - EARLY MORNING

The steep mountain peaks conceal this small town in the middle of nowhere Colorado.

Eric blasts the heat in his old Ford F150 truck while he waits.

Judith races to the truck to avoid the cold air. She jumps in with a slam of the door.

ERIC
Hey, easy on the truck.

Eric, annoyed, taps her shoulder with the back of his hand.

Judith shrugs.

Eric yanks out an ear bud from Judith.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Hello?

He scorns her with a look.

JUDITH
OK. I'll take em off.

Judith removes the other ear bud.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
Happy?

ERIC
It's a start.

JUDITH
Then what?

ERIC
Just talk to me.

JUDITH
Can we just go?

Eric hits the gas pedal and they're off.

INT/EXT. TRUCK, TRAVELLING - EARLY MORNING

Eric plays with the radio to find a good station. A familiar song comes on. He hums to the beat.

ERIC
Hey, I remember this song. Didn't you sing this all the time?

JUDITH
I don't know. It's just a song.

The radio crackles with the movement of the truck.

ERIC

Yeah, maybe. But I remember you singing it as loud as you could. You knew all the words too.

JUDITH

That was a long time ago.

ERIC

Maybe for you.

Silence fills the truck followed by static pops of the radio teetering back to life.

Judith taps her foot as she searches for the rhythm and words again.

Eric enjoys the moment no matter how brief it might be.

EXT. MEDICAL CENTER - EARLY MORNING

A brick building, the largest in the town, stands three stories tall. It has patches of paint to cover old sign placements.

The old F150 stops in front.

ERIC

Just text me when you need a ride back.

JUDITH

I'll be fine. I need to "keep active" anyway.

Judith exits with a slam of the door behind her.

ERIC

HEY. Easy on the truck!

Judith glimpses an old Jeep Wrangler with a hardtop that looks like it's seen better days. The paint has cracked with heat damage and the tires don't seem to match.

INT. MEDICAL CENTER, TREATMENT ROOM - MORNING

The DIALYSIS MACHINE hums in use.

Judith listens to music and scribbles into a wire bound college ruled notebook. Her left hand holds tubes covered by her hoodie sleeve.

Judith's notebook looks plastered with random thoughts and ideas. Every edge of the page has been used, yet she finds more space to write.

VANESSA (58), the nurse, enters. Her scrubs have a few buttons with positive quotes that reflects her wise old owl vibe.

VANESSA
Hey, how are you doing?

JUDITH
I'm ok.

Judith hides her arm before Vanessa can examine it.

VANESSA
Would you mind if I take a look?

JUDITH
It still hurts.

Judith avoids the view of her arm when Vanessa rolls up the sleeve.

VANESSA
It's fine. It's doing exactly what
it's supposed to do.

Vanessa pulls the sleeve to cover the tubes.

VANESSA (CONT'D)
Any word from the doctor about a
transplant?

JUDITH
Still waiting.

VANESSA
How long can you wait?

JUDITH
I don't know.

VANESSA
Are you still writing?

Vanessa checks on the machine.

JUDITH
Yeah.

VANESSA

Are you going to play something for me sometime?

JUDITH

I don't know.

VANESSA

I see you writing all these songs.

JUDITH

I know. They aren't ready yet.

VANESSA

Doesn't hurt to share them once in a while.

JUDITH

Maybe. Do you still have the keyboard?

Judith points to the ceiling.

VANESSA

It's still up there. I leave it there for you.

JUDITH

Mind if I head up there later?

EXT. MEDICAL CENTER, ROOF - DAY

The flat rooftop with insulation rocks and steel roof ventilators is Judith's oasis. All the town can be seen from its vantage point. The view of the mountains makes the small town feel even smaller. A shed and chair await her getaway time.

Judith breezes onto the roof with a rare smile.

She sees the Jeep as it drives off.

Judith moves the chair then places the keyboard onto it. She unfolds a blanket, sits, then studies the notebook.

Judith practices like a polished artist.

INT. HOUSE / LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Judith enters to eerie quiet.

Dirty dishes fill the sink.

JUDITH

Mom?

Judith tiptoes through the house to the hallway.

INT. HOUSE / HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Judith reaches the hallway to peek into Stefanie's bedroom.

Nothing has changed.

JUDITH

Don't you work tonight?

Judith snaps on the light and draws a sad face emoji onto the casing under the crescent moon.

INT. MOUNTAIN COFFEE SHOP - EVENING

It's an old coffee shop with aging counter tops and not many visitors. It's the kind of place that's familiar to locals and may be the only reason why it's still open.

Stefanie wipes the counters and keeps busy with side work.

Eric enters, watches for a moment, then rests at the main counter.

ERIC

Can we talk?

STEFANIE

It isn't going to change anything.

ERIC

Don't be like that.

Stefanie wraps silverware into napkins.

STEFANIE

So you can blame me for this?

ERIC

Can you stop for a minute?

STEFANIE

I'm at work.

ERIC

There's nobody here.

Her pace accelerates with every wrap.

STEFANIE
There will be.

ERIC
Who?

Eric surveys the nearly empty coffee shop.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Stef. I know we're going through a lot. But please, don't make me the bad guy. I just want to help.

STEFANIE
We don't need to be rescued.

ERIC
Are you sure about that?

Stefanie dumps the silverware onto the counter then rushes to the restroom.

OLLIE (52), the cook with all the grease in the kitchen wiped onto his apron, peeks through the two-way door.

OLLIE
Come on man. Don't leave me a fuckin' hurricane to clean up.

ERIC
Hey, Ollie. I'm sorry.

INT. HOUSE / GIRL'S BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

Stefanie rattles chairs and vacuums the living room.

Judith pulls back the hood of her sweatshirt to listen.

She cracks the door and glances into the living room.

Judith hops back into bed with a push of her ear buds into place.

INT. HOUSE / LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Stefanie cleans and organizes literally covering the same spots over and over.

Judith stops at Stefanie's room to erase the door jamb and draw something new.

Stefanie catches her, questions driven by mania.

STEFANIE
What are you doodling?

JUDITH
It's nothing.

STEFANIE
How are you? Is everything ok?

JUDITH
I'm fine.

STEFANIE
Do you want me to make breakfast?

JUDITH
NO. I'm okay.

STEFANIE
Let me wash that hoodie and fix
that tare.

JUDITH
MOM. I just washed it the other day
anyway.

A honk from outside grabs their attention.

STEFANIE
Why is he here?

JUDITH
Why do you think?

Judith rushes out the door.

INT. HOUSE / HALLWAY - MORNING

Stefanie finds the drawing on the doorjamb. It's a raincloud complete with lighting, rain, and wind.

She wipes it off with her thumb.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM / STAGE - DAY

THE STAGE, hidden behind some old curtains overlooking a basketball court, seems forgotten in time with dust on a piano and some other musical equipment.

Judith props her phone onto a stand craved out of Styrofoam trash.

She grabs two stress balls from the piano to squeeze and stretch her fingers.

Judith lifts the fallboard and presses a few keys to check the tune then opens her notebook to play.

JUDITH

I can do this.

She presses record on the phone.

(Note: The song is EET by Regina Spector. This is just a holding spot for an original song that is reflective of Judith's creative spirit.)

JUDITH (CONT'D)

(Singing)

It's like forgetting the words to
your favorite song. You can't
believe it. You were always singing
along. It was so easy. And the
words so sweet. You can't remember.
You try to feel a beat, eeet-eeeet-
eeet Eeet-eeeet-eeet.

Judith stops abruptly wincing in pain.

She moves to the open back door then leans against the opening to massage her wrist.

Kids, in the distance, fight over a toy as the parents come to break them up.

Judith recognizes the Jeep parked close to the school.

JAMES (22) shy, quiet, rumped like he's possibly homeless watches from his vantage point. He rolls down the window.

They make eye contact and James turns away.

Judith shakes her fingers then heads back to the piano.

She writes a few more lines into the notebook.

With a deep breath, Judith restarts.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

(Singing)

You spend half of your life Trying
to fall behind You're using your
headphones To drown out your mind
It was so easy And the words so
sweet You can't remember You try to
move your feet, eet-eeet- eeet Eeet-
eeet-eeet

The piano can be heard across the stage through the open doors of the high school gymnasium.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM / STAGE EXIT - CONTINUOUS

The back of the stage has a set of steps for access.

Music echoes into the yard.

The sound draws James from his Jeep for a closer listen.

James slides onto the steps. A teardrop slides down his cheek.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM / STAGE - CONTINUOUS

Judith fights through the pain to complete the song.

JUDITH

(Singing)

Someone's deciding, Whether or not
to steal. He opens a window just to
feel the chill. He hears that
outside a small boy just started to
cry 'Cause it's his turn But his
brother won't let him try

(More Piano Solo)

It's like forgetting The words to
your favorite song You can't
believe it You were always singing
along It was so easy And the words
so sweet You can't remember You try
to move your feet It was so easy
And the words so sweet You can't
remember You try to feel the beat-t-
t-t-t-t- t-t

Judith crosses her arms over her chest then taps to match her heartbeat. Her breathing calms and demeanor relaxes.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM / STAGE EXIT - DAY

James, at the bottom of the steps, appears lost in memories.

Judith, startled, rushes back into the building.

JUDITH
HOLY SHIT BALLS!!

James wildly jumps to his feet and rushes up the stairs.

JAMES
I didn't mean to scare you.

JUDITH (O.S.)
You know this is a school, right?

JAMES
I was just listening.

James raises his hands, non-threatening, then slowly backs down the steps.

With the courage to finally say something, he turns back.

JAMES (CONT'D)
By the way.. You're really good.

Judith cautiously peeks out the door.

JUDITH
What?

James coughs uncontrollably.

Judith rushes down to check on him but not closer than six feet.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
Are you ok?

James finds his breath and the coughing subsides.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
You get used to it after a while.

JAMES
What?

JUDITH
The thin air. Snowbirds always have trouble with it.

JAMES
Snowbirds?

JUDITH
People that just come up for the
ski resorts.

JAMES
That's not me.

JUDITH
Really? Then why come here at all?

James shrugs.

Judith lingers a moment. She barely notices the rumpled shirt. Judith smiles when she reviews his cute features.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
I hope you find what you're looking
for.

Judith fits her ear buds into place then waves good-bye.

EXT. HIGHWAY REST STOP - NIGHT

It's a little outlet for drivers to rest then get back onto the road. The school is visible in the distance.

The Jeep hides at the end of the row. The bad suspension rocks from movement inside.

James, reclined in the passenger seat, shivers unable to sleep with the sound of the piano echoing in his head.

CUT TO:

INT. LAS VEGAS STAGE PIT - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

A cleaner version of James plays guitar for a Las Vegas production.

AVA (22), a beautiful piano player with soft features and delicate hands, plays across from him and smiles.

Sounds of loud knocks on a front door wakes James from his sleep.

BACK TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY REST STOP - MORNING

James finds himself still alone. He exits to stretch and struggles to breathe as he walks.

INT. HOUSE / HALLWAY - MORNING

Judith tiptoes through the hallway to peer into Stefanie's bedroom.

The room is empty and the house is quiet.

Judith sees the door casing has been cleaned and bites her lip a moment. She draws a happy face with a question mark next to it.

INT. HOUSE / LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Stefanie quietly reads a book on coping with anxiety. She seems tempered and even keel.

Judith cautiously approaches then breaks the quiet.

JUDITH
No cleaning?

STEFANIE
Hey. You're up.

JUDITH
That's what typically happens when
I WAKE up.

STEFANIE
How are you feeling?

JUDITH
I'm fine.

STEFANIE
Is your wrist ok?

Stefanie reaches for Judith's arm to check on it.

JUDITH
I told you I'm fine.

Judith pulls it away.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
What we really should be asking is
if YOU'RE fine.

STEFANIE

I am.

JUDITH

Are you?

STEFANIE

So, sometimes I'm a little moody.

JUDITH

A little?

STEFANIE

Yes. A little.

JUDITH

You don't see it?

STEFANIE

See what?

JUDITH

Hmm.. Let's see. The mood swings, the mania, the nights you seem to move furniture like it's never good enough. Random people out in the cabin.

STEFANIE

Don't talk to me like this.

JUDITH

Why? Are you afraid of the truth?

STEFANIE

You have no idea what you're talking about. Or what you think you know.

JUDITH

Then explain it to me.

STEFANIE

I wish I could. You don't know what it's like for me to be helpless in this.

JUDITH

I guess I'll get the chance to see for myself.

Judith pushes in her ear buds and rushes out the door.

INT. MOUNTAIN COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

James enters and seats himself at the lunch counter. He sets down a similar wire bound college ruled notebook, then picks up a menu. James examines his wallet to see only a few dollars.

STEFANIE

Hi. How are you tonight?

James smiles and nods back.

Stefanie carefully keeps a six foot distance.

She observes his rumpled features.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)

Can I help you?

James finds the cheapest deal on the menu.

JAMES

May I get a coffee and some pancakes?

STEFANIE

Decaf?

JAMES

Just regular coffee is fine.

She pours a cup then gently slides it over.

James reaches for the cream and sugar.

STEFANIE

Can I get you anything else?

JAMES

No. I'm fine.

STEFANIE

The pancakes will be right up.

James watches Stefanie place the order then assist other customers.

James reaches for his notebook. He writes with much more structure and organized intent.

JAMES (V.O.)

The air is so light. Like nothing I've ever felt. Will it take me home?

James struggles to breathe.

STEFANIE
Are you okay?

JAMES
Excuse me?

STEFANIE
Are you feeling alright?

James gives her a nod.

Stefanie recognizes his notebook.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)
My daughter has something similar.

The order bell rings and Ollie slides a plate of pancakes under a heat lamp.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)
Syrup?

James nods his head for a "yes".

Stefanie squeezes the syrup then slides the plate still careful to keep her distance.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)
Here you go.

Stefanie goes back to her side work.

James hides a wry smile.

INT. MOUNTAIN COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

James's head droops as he falls asleep at the counter. He fights to keep his eyes open but they get heavier.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE LAS VEGAS STRIP - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

James tunes an old acoustic guitar that looks like it's seen better days too.

The open case sits a few steps away.

James strums the guitar for a small crowd of onlookers.

He plays a song with a noticeable talent.

A few onlookers dump a few coins and bills into the case.
Others don't even acknowledge he's there.

OFFICER DANIELS, a seasoned police officer with a burned out demeanor, listens intently for a few moments with surprise.

He's hit by a moment of recognition.

FLASH - James opens an apartment door for Officer Daniels.

OFFICER DANIELS
Hey. Do you have a permit to be out
here?

PASSERBY
Let him play.

ANOTHER PASSERBY
He's good. Leave him alone.

James nervously strums the guitar and stares at the ground.

OFFICER DANIELS
Stop. I'm talking to you.

JAMES
Can I help you officer?

OFFICER DANIELS
You don't remember me?

JAMES
Should I?

OFFICER DANIELS
Last year?

JAMES
No. What do you want?

OFFICER DANIELS
What the hell are you doing here?

JAMES
I'm just trying to make a few
bucks.

OFFICER DANIELS
That's not what I mean.

James shrugs his shoulders.

OFFICER DANIELS (CONT'D)
You're talented. But you look like
your one bad night from jumping off
a building.

JAMES
Excuse me?

OFFICER DANIELS
I know we didn't meet on good terms
the last time. But, this place
looks like it's eating you up.

JAMES
Do you think you know me?

OFFICER DANIELS
I was there. Remember?

James packs his guitar then scatters change and bills across
the floor.

Officer Daniels picks up some of the bills. He pulls out
another \$200.00 from his wallet.

JAMES
You don't know anything about me.

Officer Daniels places the money in James's hand.

OFFICER DANIELS
Take this. Looks like you need it
more than I do.

James reluctantly accepts it but struggles to give it back.

JAMES
I don't need your charity.

OFFICER DANIELS
Trust me. You need it. Now, get
outta here.

Officer Daniels steps away with his partner.

His partner shakes his head.

James, fully packed, rushes from the street.

BACK TO:

INT. MOUNTAIN COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

Stefanie cleans continuously. It's as if she doesn't have an off switch.

Ollie knocks in the kitchen pass-through. He throws a cleaning towel at Stefanie.

OLLIE
Hey. Stef.

Stefanie looks back.

STEFANIE
What?

OLLIE
Kick him out.

STEFANIE
It's okay.

OLLIE
I don't know. He could be dangerous.

STEFANIE
No he doesn't. He looks more lost than anything.

OLLIE
Come on. Don't go all Mother Teresa on him. He can't sleep here.

STEFANIE
Shut up.

OLLIE
Wake him up.

STEFANIE
Don't worry about it.

The sound of loud knocks on a front door wakes James as Ollie purposely drops a pot in the kitchen.

James, startled, shakes his head to wake then knocks over a coffee cup.

JAMES
Shit.

STEFANIE
Let me help you.

Stefanie, with a moist towel, wipes down the counter top.

JAMES

Sorry.

STEFANIE

It's okay. It's not your fault.

Stephanie cleans the mess then throws the towel into the kitchen.

OLLIE (O.S.)

Missed me.

JAMES

What was that about?

STEFANIE

He saw you falling asleep.

JAMES

Oh.

STEFANIE

It's okay. But really, you can't sleep here. I'm sorry.

JAMES

It's alright. I'll be out of your hair in a minute.

James yawns and stretches.

STEFANIE

There's a motel 6 about ten miles from here if you need to get some sleep.

JAMES

How much do I owe you?

STEFANIE

Don't worry about it.

JAMES

That isn't how it works.

James pulls the last of his money and lays it on the counter.

Stefanie reaches for his notebook.

STEFANIE

Don't forget your book.

James receives the book with a frown.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)
I'm really sorry.

JAMES
Why? You aren't kicking me out.

STEFANIE
I just feel like I am.

JAMES
Don't worry. This is a coffee shop
not a motel. I get it.

STEFANIE
Well, have a nice night.

Stefanie watches James walk to his Jeep.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)
You're such a jerk.

OLLIE
What? You kicked him out.

EXT. MOUNTAIN COFFEE SHOP, PARKING LOT - NIGHT

James focuses back into the coffee shop from his Jeep.

JAMES (V.O.)
Suddenly it hits. From under the
mountain tops. A last hope for
life.

James turns the ignition but the Jeep sputters and stops.

Again, he tries.

Again, it sputters.

James taps at the gas gauge that reads empty.

His eyes droop tired and off to sleep.

JAMES
Take me. Please.

James coughs wildly again.

CUT TO:

I/E. JEEP WRANGLER, TRAVELLING - FLASHBACK

James weaves through traffic. He nearly crashes into a few cars but always finds a way to miss.

JAMES
YOU DON'T FUCKING KNOW ME.

James punches the roof and steering wheel.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Why the fuck are you still
breathing?

James slams the brakes in traffic.

Other cars screech to a halt to avoid him.

BACK TO:

INT. HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - EARLY MORNING

Judith, perched on the couch, blankly searches through her phone.

Stefanie plucks an ear bud from Judith.

STEFANIE
Shouldn't you be getting ready?

JUDITH
Why?

STEFANIE
You know why.

Stefanie crosses her arms.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)
I don't want to fight with you.

JUDITH
Why? You're so good at it.

Stefanie walks into the kitchen to avoid an argument.

INT. HOUSE, KITCHEN - EARLY MORNING

Stefanie practices meditation exercises.

Judith storms in, unchanged, to grab a couple of bites of breakfast.

STEFANIE
You're still not ready.

JUDITH
How ready do I really have to be?

STEFANIE
Washing that sweatshirt would help.

Judith storms off.

There's a knock at the front door.

Stefanie peers out the window to see Eric. Her tension overrides her exercises.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)
Why are you here? I can take her.

Eric taps at his watch then decides to enter.

Stefanie steams over to the empty sink to wash dishes.

ERIC
She ready?

Stefanie grabs a small stack of clean dishes.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Stop it Stef.

STEFANIE
These are still dirty.

ERIC
Please?

STEFANIE
There are still spots.

ERIC
Can we have a normal talk about our daughter for once?

STEFANIE
You mean MY daughter.

Eric stews over that comment with a disappointed smirk.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)
She's out of control.

ERIC
You're out of control!

Eric pulls a dish from Stefanie.

Stefanie dries her hands but immediately looks for something else to clean.

Eric positions himself in her way.

STEFANIE
Please....step back.

Stefanie trembles with anxiety unable to keep still.

Eric backs away.

ERIC
Slow down.

Stefanie crosses her arms to hold it together.

ERIC (CONT'D)
She's eighteen. Going through
problems I can't even imagine. And
we don't know when a transplant
will ever come available.

STEFANIE
That's how you explain it?

ERIC
Yeah. It's the only way I know how.
Don't you remember? It was the same
for you.

STEFANIE
I had to care for a toddler at the
same time.

ERIC
It wasn't just you.

STEFANIE
My dad was no help.

ERIC
Your dad didn't try to lock you
away in a cabin. This world isn't
going to kill her.

STEFANIE
I've done a perfect job of that
already.

ERIC

I need to believe a transplant will come.

STEFANIE

You don't understand. This wasn't supposed to happen to her.

ERIC

But, it did. We just have to work with what we got.

STEFANIE

We don't have anything.

ERIC

Who's decision was that?

Eric stares at Stefanie in silence then walks away and out the door.

I/E. TRUCK, TRAVELLING - MORNING

Silence fills the truck.

ERIC

Anything you want to tell me?

JUDITH

No.

ERIC

What's going on between you two?

JUDITH

Why do you care?

ERIC

Don't give me that attitude.

JUDITH

Don't worry about it.

ERIC

I choose to worry.

JUDITH

So you can make my life miserable too?

ERIC

I'm not trying to make your life miserable.

JUDITH
Coulda fooled me.

ERIC
I'm still trying to help.

JUDITH
Just don't ask me what's going on.
You already know.

ERIC
I'm just concerned.

JUDITH
Don't. I get enough of it from mom.
I don't need it from you too.

ERIC
We've been there and we've made
mistakes.

JUDITH
Some more than others.

ERIC
We want to guide you through this.

JUDITH
I think I have the right to live my
life. What I have left of it
anyway.

ERIC
I get it. But, you don't have to be
alone in all of it either.

JUDITH
I am alone in this.

Eric silences himself because it won't make a dent.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
I'll figure this out on my own.

ERIC
You don't have to.

The truck stops.

ERIC (CONT'D)
I don't want to fight with you.

Judith exits with a slam of the door behind her.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Hey. Easy on the truck.

EXT. MOUNTAIN WOODS, BEHIND THE COFFEE SHOP - MORNING

A beautiful landscape of trees towers over the coffee shop. A large mountain looms behind it. There's a small path outlined through the trees down to a creek not far away.

James wakes then reaches for his notebook.

JAMES
Still breathing.

James walks the path and takes in all the beauty.

JAMES (CONT'D)
I guess this is as good as any
place to end up.

James finds at the creek to rest and catch his breath.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM / STAGE - DAY

Judith practices different finger exercises on the piano. She takes short breaks to massage her wrist.

James knocks on the open door.

JUDITH
HOLY SHIT BALLS!!

Judith, not sure how to react, stands.

JAMES
Sorry. I didn't want to scare you.
Do you mind if I sit out here?

JUDITH
Why?

JAMES
You're good. It's comforting.

JUDITH
It's kind of stalkerish too.

JAMES
Fine. I'll leave. I'm sorry.

James turns.

JUDITH

No.. I'm sorry. I just don't know you and I haven't really played for anyone.

JAMES

Why not?

JUDITH

I don't know.

JAMES

You don't have to see me. I'll be outside.

JUDITH

But, that just makes it awkward.

JAMES

Would you mind?

Judith slowly takes a seat at the piano.

James finds a chair to sit.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I'm James.

He holds out his hand.

Judith covers her hand with her hoodie sleeve before she reaches back.

JUDITH

Judith. But, most people call me Jude.

JAMES

Nice to meet you.

JUDITH

I don't know many songs.

JAMES

Play what you know.

JUDITH

Do you play?

JAMES

I play. But, I'm better with my guitar.

JUDITH

Tell you what. I'll play something for you, if you play something for me?

JAMES

I don't have my guitar.

JUDITH

There should be one around here.

Judith points to a guitar case close by.

Judith scans through her notebook to pick a song. She fiddles with the keys a moment.

James grabs the guitar case then returns to the seat.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

Now. Don't judge.

Judith breathes deeply in and out to calm herself, hits record on the phone, and with some hesitation, plays.

(Note: These songs should be originals. The goal is to have each character reveal something about themselves in the song that they don't have the words or emotions to quite express.)

Stunned by her talent, James applauds.

JAMES

Wow. Do you know how good you are?

Judith blushes and smiles ear to ear.

JUDITH

Your turn.

James removes the guitar and tunes it.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

That looks old.

JAMES

It's probably older than both of us.

James strums to make sure it's tuned.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Don't judge. This isn't mine.

James plays a song that's equally as good. He coughs and destroys the vocals at the end.

JUDITH
Are you sure you're ok?

JAMES
I am.

JUDITH
That was amazing till you blew the last few parts. I was going to stand up and clap but... you know the coughing kind of killed it.

JAMES
Yeah.. Story of my life I guess.

James packs the guitar.

JAMES (CONT'D)
I guess I'll leave you to it.

JUDITH
Thank you for listening.

JAMES
Keep it up. You could be really great someday.

James places the guitar back where he found it.

JUDITH
We can only hope. It was nice to meet you.

JAMES
The pleasure was mine.

James pauses at the door. He turns back with a wry smile then pushes his door to leave.

INT. MOUNTAIN COFFEE SHOP - AFTERNOON

A few guests are scattered across the coffee shop. This is about as busy as it gets.

Stefanie enters for her shift.

STEFANIE
Hey, Ollie?

OLLIE
Yeah? What's up?

STEFANIE
Has that guy's Jeep been out there
all day?

OLLIE
I don't know. I've been working?

EXT. HIGHWAY REST STOP - AFTERNOON

James unpacks a sandwich at a bench with the notebook ready.

JAMES (V.O.)
So many people. Travelling a long
lost road. All of us strangers.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM / STAGE EXIT - AFTERNOON

Judith slowly peers out hopeful. No one is there. She
searches the yard for his Jeep. Still nothing.

Finally, Judith recognizes James at the rest stop.

CUT TO:

INT. LAS VEGAS STAGE PIT - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

James strums his guitar.

Ava races out of a backroom in a panic. She moves erratically
around the pit.

James carefully sets down the guitar.

JAMES
Hey. Calm down. What's wrong?

AVA
There's no work. There's nothing.
We have nothing. They're going to
stay dark into next year.

JAMES
We'll get through this.

AVA
How?

JAMES

This is Vegas. They'll start opening back up. They have to.

AVA

We can't just wait and hope.

JAMES

We'll get through this.

Loud knocks on a door snaps James to attention.

BACK TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY REST STOP - AFTERNOON

Judith sneaks up on James as he's lost in thought.

JUDITH

Hey.

James quickly turns surprised.

JAMES

Hey.

JUDITH

Everything ok?

James coughs.

JAMES

I'm okay. Just thinking.

JUDITH

Would it be ok if I sit with you?

JAMES

I guess.

JUDITH

Do you really like my piano play?

JAMES

Absolutely. It reminds me of someone. She was really talented.

JUDITH

An ex?

JAMES

Something like that.

JUDITH
How long have you been playing
guitar?

JAMES
Since I was ten or so. My mom
gifted me one when I was little.

James nervously shuffles from sharing too much.

JAMES (CONT'D)
I need to get going.

JUDITH
(Dripping with sarcasm)
Leaving this wonderful town so
soon.

JAMES
We'll see.

JUDITH
I would love to hear you play
again.

James stands, smiles, and walks away.

Judith, disappointed that he left so quickly, slumps.

INT. MOUNTAIN COFFEE SHOP - AFTERNOON

Stefanie fixates on her side work then attends to guests needs. When she has a moment to rest, her emotions run hot and cold as she rehashes her arguments with Judith.

James enters and finds a booth to lay low.

Ollie pops his head out of the kitchen to get Stefanie's attention.

OLLIE
Hey. Stef. He's back.

STEFANIE
What?

OLLIE
He's back.

Stefanie recognizes James at one of the booths. He blankly stares out the window.

STEFANIE
Hey. Sorry about the other night.

JAMES
No need to apologize.

Stefanie grabs a clean glass and a pitcher of water to bring to the booth.

STEFANIE
Coffee and pancakes?

JAMES
No thanks.

STEFANIE
Water?

James nods.

Stefanie pours a glass.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)
I felt I was being mean the other night.

JAMES
I was just really tired. It won't happen again.

STEFANIE
Are you sure I can't get you anything else?

James shakes his head "No" then sips the water.

Stefanie returns the pitcher back onto the counter.

INT. HOUSE / GIRLS BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Judith types at a computer and adjusts levels on what looks like simple recording software. Judith places a small microphone on top of a piece of styrofoam.

Judith taps the record button.

CUT TO:

INT. THERAPY OFFICE - AFTERNOON, FLASHBACK

A simple gray sofa, calming decor, soft lighting, and mood music feel overdone.

James, bored out of his mind, stares blankly at a counselor.

COUNSELOR

James. We can't continue to sit in silence during these sessions.

James shrugs saying "so what."

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)

I see you in group. You try so hard to allow everyone the time to talk. I've even seen you go out of your way for some of them. But, you're still not processing this.

JAMES

What do you expect me to do?

COUNSELOR

I expect you to open up and allow yourself the time to get through this.

JAMES

Or what? Do I need to get a dog? Find a book to write in?

COUNSELOR

That could be a start.

Stone walled and closed off, James shakes his head.

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)

You have to accept that you are not responsible for what happened.

He's heard enough and quickly exits.

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)

You can't run from this.

BACK TO:

INT. MOUNTAIN COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

James sips at the water to enjoy the warmth of the building.

STEFANIE

Is that your Jeep outside?

James stares off into the distance.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)
Are you ok?

JAMES
Excuse me?

Stefanie waits for an answer.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Oh yeah, that's mine.

STEFANIE
Have you been here all day?

JAMES
Is it ok to be parked out there?

STEFANIE
Yeah. I'm sorry. I was just
curious. Did you stay with someone?

James doesn't respond.

Eric enters and sees Stefanie with James.

Ollie, spatula in hand, looks ready to start a fight.

OLLIE
Hey. Are you here to cause a mess?

ERIC
No. I ordered a special. Who's the
kid?

OLLIE
Fuck if I know. But, he's been here
a couple of days this week and
hasn't ordered shit today. Better
watch out. She has that Mother
Teresa look in her eyes.

Eric interrupts their conversation.

ERIC
Can we talk?

STEFANIE
This has to stop.

Stefanie rushes away.

Eric lingers a moment.

ERIC
Who are you?

JAMES
Excuse me?

ERIC
What are you doing here?

JAMES
Nothing.

Eric chases down Stefanie at the lunch counter.

ERIC
Ollie tells me he hasn't ordered
anything?

STEFANIE
He just did.

ERIC
Stef. I know that look.

Stefanie pulls a plate of food from under the heat lamp and yells through the kitchen pass-through.

STEFANIE
I need another special.

ERIC
Hey, that's mine.

STEFANIE
Not anymore.

ERIC
You said we can't just help every
random stranger that pops in here.
We talked about this.

STEFANIE
You told me she could be just fine.

Stefanie steps around Eric to reach James's booth.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)
Here's your order sir.

JAMES
I didn't order this.

A smirk and a look back at Eric.

STEFANIE
Compliments of him.

Stefanie reverses back over to Eric.

James watches them argue.

ERIC
I get that you need to do this
sometimes. But, we can't give
everyone a free pass.

STEFANIE
So, I should just let him go sleep
in his car tonight?

ERIC
You don't know that.

STEFANIE
I feel I need to do this.

Their voices are muffled to James as he strains to listen.

Stefanie points at the door and Eric finally leaves. She
returns to James.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)
I'm sorry about that.

JAMES
Are you ok?

Stefanie, taken aback, questions herself to answer.

STEFANIE
No one has asked that and expected
an answer in a while.

JAMES
Why?

STEFANIE
Long story.

Stefanie still keeps a careful distance between herself and
James.

JAMES
Is there something wrong? I can
leave if you don't want me here. I
don't stink. Do I?

STEFANIE

No, nothing like that. I'm just cautious around people I don't know.

JAMES

I'm not sick. But, I can wear a mask if you'd like.

STEFANIE

Nobody wears them anymore anyway.

Stefanie peers into James's eyes.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)

Are you sure you're ok?

JAMES

I'm fine.

STEFANIE

You sound like my daughter.

JAMES

It's nothing. Really.

STEFANIE

Running from something?

JAMES

Maybe.

STEFANIE

Where are you going?

JAMES

Nowhere. Just driving.

STEFANIE

Driving?

JAMES

I don't know what to say. I got into my Jeep a couple of days ago and just felt like...

STEFANIE

Getting away?

James nervously eyes the exit.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)

Am I bothering you?

JAMES
I'm not used to being questioned.

STEFANIE
I'm sorry.

JAMES
It's okay.

Stefanie rolls silverware into napkins.

STEFANIE
More water?

JAMES
Sure.

Stefanie pours James another glass.

James appears lost in his thoughts.

EXT. JEEP WRANGLER - NIGHT

James shivers and holds his arms close to keep warm.

Stefanie approaches with a gas can.

James lowers the window.

STEFANIE
Do you need a place to stay?

JAMES
No. I'll be fine.

STEFANIE
You're going to tough it out in
your car?

JAMES
It's worked so far.

STEFANIE
It's going to get cold out here. I
don't know if sleeping in your car
is the best thing to do.

James brushes it off like it won't matter.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)
I have a place you can sleep.

JAMES
Why would you do that?

STEFANIE
It's a way for me to help. Besides,
where else are you going to go?

JAMES
I don't know.

STEFANIE
I insist.

JAMES
I couldn't pay you.

STEFANIE
We'll figure it out.

JAMES
How?

STEFANIE
There are a few things I could use
some help with around the house.

James debates with himself to accept.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)
What other options do you have?

James realizes that she isn't going to take "No" for an
answer. He gives in to her demand.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)
Have you ever had the measles or
chicken pox, COVID?

JAMES
No. Why?

STEFANIE
It's nothing. What's your name?

JAMES
James.

STEFANIE
Stef.

James reaches to shake her hand but she hands him the gas can
instead.

Stefanie looks back with a wry smile and waves for him to follow.

INT. HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - MIDNIGHT

Judith's phone glows in the darkness of the room.

Stefanie hears the loud music coming from Judith's ear buds. She clicks the lights on.

JUDITH
You're home early.

STEFANIE
It's almost midnight. You should be in bed.

Stefanie searches a drawer.

JUDITH
What are you looking for?

STEFANIE
The cabin keys.

JUDITH
What the hell. We just talked about this.

Judith storms off.

STEFANIE
It's not what you think.

INT. CABIN - MIDNIGHT

It's a simple cabin with a few amenities such as a heater, television, a small desk, and a sofa bed. There is a little counter with a small coffee maker.

James hauls in his guitar case and backpack then sets them next to the door.

STEFANIE
How long have you been playing?

JAMES
A while.

STEFANIE

I played piano. I tried to teach my daughter but.. We kind of lost interest. She used to sing too.

JAMES

She doesn't anymore?

STEFANIE

She got older and things changed.

Stefanie brews some coffee. She cleans a few places with a rag and moves around some cushions for the sofa.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)

There isn't much. But, there's a pull out bed in the sofa. Coffee in the nook over there and a full bathroom.

JAMES

Do you ever stop?

STEFANIE

What?

JAMES

Working.

STEFANIE

She leaves this place a mess. Someone's got to clean it.

JAMES

Your daughter?

STEFANIE

Yeah. She uses this from time to time to get away.

INT. HOUSE / GIRLS BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Judith watches but can't tell who her mom is talking to.

JUDITH

Please don't.....

INT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

James examines the sofa for a moment and sees the bed he can pull out for later.

STEFANIE
Need any help?

JAMES
I got it. But, thanks.

Stefanie moves the cushions.

James stops her.

JAMES (CONT'D)
I can get this later.

James coughs with labored breaths that don't quite fill his lungs.

STEFANIE
Still having trouble with the air?

JAMES
A little.

STEFANIE
It takes a couple of days. Well, we
can talk in the morning.

Stefanie exits.

James looks over the cabin. He stops the coffee pot from it's brew.

JAMES
Why did you let her talk you into
this?

James searches through his backpack to find his notebook. He sets it on a table to write more notes.

EXT. CABIN - EARLY MORNING

Judith spies outside the cabin. She quietly places the key into the lock.

The knob turns and the door opens.

A startled Judith steps back from the door to see James.

JUDITH
HOLY SHIT BALLS!!

JAMES
It's you.

JUDITH
Are you following me?

JAMES
Hey. Look. I'm not. Your mom
offered me a place to sleep. Do you
need to come in for something?

JUDITH
I'll come back later.

INT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

Judith views a notebook on the table. She rushes in and nearly pushes James out of the way.

JUDITH
What the hell!! You're here one
night and start reading all my
shit?

Judith smothers it with her arms.

JAMES
That isn't yours.

JUDITH
Like hell it isn't.

JAMES
Take a look.

Judith examines the book to realize it isn't hers.

JAMES (CONT'D)
You can put that back.

Judith places the book onto the table and searches her hiding spot. She finds her notebook in place where she left it.

JUDITH
Sorry.

JAMES
I wouldn't have read it.

Judith, embarrassed, rushes out of the cabin.

INT. MEDICAL CENTER, TREATMENT ROOM - MORNING

Judith searches through her notebook but seems distracted.

VANESSA
What's on your mind this morning?

JUDITH
It's nothing.

VANESSA
Is he cute?

JUDITH
What?

VANESSA
Whoever is on your mind.

Judith smiles embarrassed.

VANESSA (CONT'D)
Hey, I was wondering if I'd ever
see one of those.

JUDITH
What do you mean?

VANESSA
I love it when you smile. He must
be cute.

JUDITH
It's just nice to meet someone new.
That thinks I'm normal. I played a
song for him.

VANESSA
He gets a song and I don't?

JUDITH
I promise to play for you someday.

VANESSA
You'd better. I'll look forward to
it.

JUDITH
Might be nice to look forward too.

INT. HOUSE / KITCHEN - MORNING

James sips at some coffee at the kitchen table.

Stefanie slowly prepares more coffee but appears weepy and
tired.

STEFANIE
I'm sorry about this morning.

JAMES
Has anyone ever told you that you apologize a lot for things that are out of your control. It's not your fault.

STEFANIE
Not exactly.

JAMES
Did she tell you we met?

STEFANIE
Really?

JAMES
I thought you said she didn't play piano.

STEFANIE
She doesn't.

JAMES
She does AND she's really good.

STEFANIE
She is?

James nods his head.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)
It's been difficult between us lately. We can't really talk.

The coffee machine dispenses some coffee.

Stefanie pours a cup of coffee and brings it to James.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)
Do you want more coffee?

JAMES
Aren't you going to have any?

STEFANIE
I don't really drink it.

JAMES
You don't need to go out of your way for me.

STEFANIE

It's okay. If I don't make it for you, it'll just go to waste.

James gives her a wry smile.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)

Well, let me show you around.

EXT. HOUSE / YARD - DAY

Autumn leaves sprinkle the ground from the weather change. The cabin hides down the driveway. A couple of large trees mark the edge of the property. Chunks of a tree stump remain scattered next to the cabin.

STEFANIE

My parents owned this place before it was given to me. This has always been home. Where's home for you?

JAMES

Never really had a steady one.

STEFANIE

Why is that?

James cuts her off.

JAMES

What do you need done?

STEFANIE

I need the yard cleaned. Firewood. It snows pretty bad sometimes in winter.

JAMES

Really? It snows in Vegas like once in a blue moon.

STEFANIE

Vegas?

James's already said too much, he turns away.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)

Well, if you stay here long enough, you'll see plenty. It's really pretty. What brought you here?

James resists from saying more but gives in.

JAMES

When I was ten, my parents moved to Colorado to get away from the city.

STEFANIE

What happened?

JAMES

My dad and I ended up in Las Vegas.

STEFANIE

What happened to your mom?

James coughs with another labored breath.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)

Let me get you some water.

JAMES

I'll be fine.

STEFANIE

Are you sure?

JAMES

Yeah.

STEFANIE

I'll stop with the questions.

JAMES

It's okay. I just haven't.....
really talked to anyone like this
in a long time.

STEFANIE

You seem nice. I don't know if
running away is the best answer.

JAMES

I have my reasons.

STEFANIE

You don't want a reason to go back.

James shakes his head "No."

STEFANIE (CONT'D)

What are you going to do?

JAMES

I don't know.

James appears lost in his thoughts to work out the details.

STEFANIE
Why do you think you ended up here?

JAMES
An empty gas tank.

STEFANIE
Fate perhaps?

JAMES
That would be a first for me.

Stefanie walks slowly to the door. She looks back at James as he prepares to get to work then smiles.

EXT. HOUSE / YARD - DAY

James cleans all the fallen branches and debris from the front of the house. He moves slowly and appears pale from the activity.

Eric pulls up in his truck and quickly exits.

Judith hops out with a slam of the door.

ERIC
Hey. Easy on the truck.

Eric sighs and shakes his head when he sees James.

Judith springs out to the yard.

JUDITH
You don't have to do this.

JAMES
It was the deal I made with her.

ERIC
What is this?

James extends his hand out to Eric.

JAMES
I'm James. How are you?

Eric doesn't extend his hand out.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Okay.

James continues to pick up the branches from the yard.

Eric looks over to Judith.

ERIC
Go back to the house before you get
sick out here.

Judith races to the house then looks back through the window.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Listen. I don't know who you are.
Stefanie feels better when she can
help others. But, don't take
advantage of this.

JAMES
I won't.

ERIC
I mean it.

JAMES
I understand.

Eric walks to the door.

He looks back at James, disappointed.

INT. HOUSE / LIVING ROOM - DAY

Eric enters without knocking.

The noise spooks Stefanie from her daze.

STEFANIE
You need to stop this. This isn't
your house anymore. You can't just
barge into my life and dictate what
I do.

ERIC
What are you thinking bringing this
guy here?

STEFANIE
He needs help.

ERIC
You need help.

STEFANIE
Do you feel that's your job?

ERIC
Who else is going to do it for you?

STEFANIE
I'm done with this. We don't need
you.

ERIC
Is that really what you want?

STEFANIE
Yes.

ERIC
That means no more rides. It means
no more texts in the middle of the
night. If you don't need me, I need
you to say it.

STEFANIE
We don't.

Eric pulls back surprised.

Judith listens from the kitchen.

Eric finds her.

ERIC
Please. Just stay away from that
guy.

Eric holds back from saying what he wants to say then rushes
out the door.

INT. HOUSE / LIVING ROOM - DAY

James relaxes on the sofa. He sips at some water.

JUDITH
Takin' a break.

James nods.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
Can I get you to listen to
something?

JAMES
Sure.

Judith turns over her ear buds and hits play.

James listens intently.

JAMES (CONT'D)
This is really good.

He removes an ear bud.

JAMES (CONT'D)
This is so good. Why haven't you
told your mom you play?

JUDITH
I have my reasons.

JAMES
I don't know what's going on but,
you should show her.

JUDITH
In time, I guess.

James hands back her ear bud.

JAMES
I gotta get back out.

EXT. YARD - AFTERNOON

James struggles through more yard work.

Stefanie sheepishly strides over.

STEFANIE
How's it coming?

JAMES
It's coming along.

STEFANIE
You don't have to do it all today.

JAMES
I know. But, I may not have another
chance.

STEFANIE
Are you going to leave so soon?

JAMES
I really don't know how long I'm
going to be. We'll see. So what's
going on between you and Jude?

Judith watches from the window to listen in.

STEFANIE

Like I said, it's just been
difficult between us lately.

JAMES

You're trying to look past what's
really happening.

STEFANIE

How did you know?

JAMES

Know what? I'm just guessing.
Mothers and daughters fight all the
time. Don't they?

STEFANIE

Not like this.

JAMES

Did you and your mother have it any
different?

STEFANIE

We did.

JAMES

Perception has a funny way of
skewing things. If I asked her
about it, what would she say?

STEFANIE

She'd probably turn up the volume
on her headphones.

JAMES

See.

STEFANIE

I'm just trying to help her manage
her life.

JAMES

Isn't that for her to figure out?

STEFANIE

Perhaps. I have just been through
it.

INT. HOUSE / LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Judith seethes with anger as she listens to music on the sofa.

Stefanie enters.

Judith erupts into confrontation.

JUDITH

What the hell? Are you gonna give him my whole life story?

STEFANIE

Please. I'm really tired. I don't want to get into this right now.

JUDITH

This is happening to me. Not US. ME. And you tell everyone like you want them all to feel sorry for US. I don't want anyone to feel sorry for us.

STEFANIE

Just you?

JUDITH

It makes everyone avoid me like it's a plague. I want to have a normal life for once. Meeting him made me feel normal.

STEFANIE

I can't give you normal.

JUDITH

Clearly.

Judith storms back to her room and slams the door behind her.

Stefanie weeps then falls to the ground exasperated.

INT. HOUSE / LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

James enters to see Stefanie laid out across the floor.

JAMES

Hey. Are you ok?

STEFANIE

I'm fine.

JAMES
What can I do to help?

STEFANIE
I don't know.

JAMES
Let me help you up.

Stefanie blocks his hands from touching her.

James steps back.

Stefanie works up the energy to lift herself from the ground.

James stays close should she fall.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Which one is your room?

STEFANIE
First one to the right.

James opens the door.

JAMES
Can I get you anything?

STEFANIE
I just need time.

Stefanie falls onto the bed and rolls to her side.

James pulls the blankets up. He returns to the hallway and sees an images on the door jamb. It's a half moon with one side weeping.

INT. HOUSE / HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

James knocks on Judith's door.

There is no answer so he knocks harder.

Judith answers expecting a fight. She sees James.

JUDITH
HOLY SHIT BALLS!!

Judith closes the door but James stops it.

JAMES
What the hell?

JUDITH

What the eff. This isn't your house. Get out before I call my dad.

JAMES

Don't you care?

James points to the other room.

JUDITH

Oh that? That's pretty normal for her.

JAMES

It doesn't change the fact that she's struggling right now.

JUDITH

Yeah. I know. She always is. Some days she's sunshine and rainbows. Other days she's like she's on the moon or something. Don't step into something you don't understand.

JAMES

This isn't hard to understand. Whatever this is, you two need to work it out.

JUDITH

Why? You're not staying long anyway. Why would you care?

JAMES

You can't just avoid it.

JUDITH

There isn't anything I can do.

JAMES

Sure there is.

JUDITH

She doesn't listen to me or my dad.

JAMES

Fine. I don't need this anyway.

JUDITH

What did you just say?

JAMES

I think you heard me just fine. I'm
outta here.

James turns to leave and out the door.

EXT. HOUSE / YARD - AFTERNOON

James carries his guitar and backpack to the Jeep.

Judith stands in front of the door to prevent him from
leaving.

JAMES

You want me gone. I'm gone. I don't
need this. Now, get out of my way.

JUDITH

You're right. She needs help. But,
I don't know how to help her.

Judith weeps, vulnerable. Open and honestly, she lets out her
emotions.

JAMES

I don't know how to help her
either.

JUDITH

Can you just be here? Maybe she'll
listen to you.

JAMES

I'm not here to do that.

JUDITH

Please.

The "please" triggers a memory for James.

JUMP CUT TO:

INT. LAS VEGAS STAGE PIT - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Ava weeps as she presses at the piano keys. She looks back at
James for comfort.

AVA

Please. I don't know what to do.

James hears her but doesn't react.

BACK TO:

EXT. HOUSE / YARD

James places down the guitar and backpack then rests his hand on Judith's shoulder.

JAMES
I can't promise anything.

INT. HOUSE / HALLWAY - EVENING

Judith walks through the hallway to investigate Stefanie's bedroom.

Stefanie weeps quietly into a pillow. They make brief eye contact. Stefanie smiles before she turns away.

Judith closes the door, wipes off the door jamb with her sleeve, then draws a stick figure with a parachute.

EXT. HOUSE / YARD - THE NEXT DAY

James places all the branches into one big pile. He pulls out the bigger pieces that might make good firewood then tosses them to the side.

Judith places on work gloves and races over.

JAMES
How's your mom?

JUDITH
She's ok for now. Sleeping till forever at the moment.

JAMES
Where's your dad in all this?

JUDITH
Eric is not my real dad. I wish he was. Well, he is. Just not biologically.

JAMES
He doesn't seem to like me.

JUDITH
I don't think it's you.

James shrugs his shoulder in agreement.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

I don't know my real dad. I don't think she does either. But, Eric has been around since I can remember.

JAMES

Why would that matter?

JUDITH

Because.. We've needed to search for blood relative.

Judith jumps in to separate the wood.

James stops her.

JAMES

I got this.

JUDITH

I'm sick. NOT FRAGILE.

JAMES

I just want you to throw the little pieces over there. I don't think you're fragile.

James points at the smaller branches while he pulls out larger ones for firewood.

JUDITH

Oh.

JAMES

What do you mean you're sick?

JUDITH

She didn't tell you?

JAMES

Tell me what?

JUDITH

I thought for sure she did.

JAMES

She just said you two were having issues. I don't know. Mother daughter problems.

JUDITH

There is a little more to it than that.

JAMES

How so?

JUDITH

Can you promise me something?

JAMES

What?

JUDITH

If I tell you, you can't look at me different.

JAMES

Why would I do that?

JUDITH

Because you will.

JAMES

I'm not going to treat you like a sick girl if that is what you're thinking.

Judith draws up the courage to show James her left wrist. Her arm close to the wrist has a medical device that is widening the vein. This is a typical device for hemodialysis.

JAMES (CONT'D)

What am I looking at?

JUDITH

It's for my dialysis.

JAMES

Is there something wrong with your kidneys?

JUDITH

Ya think?

JAMES

Hey. I've heard people live a long time on dialysis. It's not that big of a deal anymore.

JUDITH

It is for me.

JAMES

Why?

JUDITH

Cause I have stage five CKD.

JAMES

How many stages are there?

JUDITH

Five.

It's a lightbulb moment as his expression changes. He realizes her situation is more dire than expected.

JAMES

Wait. Are you saying you're dying?

JUDITH

Maybe??? If I can get a transplant, I'll be able to live longer. But out here, who knows.

JAMES

Your mom can't be a donor?

JUDITH

She had the same thing. She got a transplant from my grampa.

JAMES

Which is why she worries about getting sick.

JUDITH

Yeah. COVID was really tough on us.

JAMES

COVID was tough on everyone.

James stops working. He coughs and steps away from Judith.

JUDITH

Are you ok?

JAMES

Stay away. I said I wouldn't look at you different. But, I can't be here right now.

JUDITH

You promised.

JAMES

I know.

James rushes away to the cabin.

INT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

James enters then searches for a cup to pour some water into. James hyperventilates. He drinks the water to calm his breathing.

JAMES

You shouldn't stay here.

CUT TO:

INT. LAS VEGAS STAGE PIT - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

James and Ava sit in silence.

JAMES

Let's leave this place behind. We don't need to be here.

AVA

Where are we going to go? We don't have any money. We can't even busk for change. I can't live like this.

JAMES

We can find a way.

AVA

I'm scared.

JAMES

We can make it work.

BACK TO:

INT. HOUSE / STEFANIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Stefanie lays in bed silent but awake.

Judith enters and lays on the bed next to Stefanie. Judith cuddles her arms around Stefanie and holds her tight.

JUDITH

I'm so sorry.

STEFANIE

It's ok.

Judith cries and searches for comfort.

Stefanie doesn't push away the embrace.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

James stares into the ceiling as he tosses and turns to get comfortable.

JAMES

How did I end up here?

James sits up to scribble into the notebook.

INT. CABIN - EARLY MORNING

Judith looks around the cabin. She watches James sleep but have difficulty breathing. Judith reads from his notebook open on the table.

JAMES (V.O.)

Is it natural to be afraid of taking my life? Driving to some no name town. Travelling aimlessly into someone else's disaster? Why did I agree to this? I should have just jumped into that river. I should have just crashed the car on the road. I wouldn't be here for this.

James turns in the bed.

Judith turns pages to not make a sound.

JAMES (V.O.)

How could this be any different?

JUDITH

What's wrong?

Judith gently rubs his cheek. She wipes away a tear then nudges on his shoulder.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

Hey.

James wakes to see Judith next to the bed.

JAMES
Why are you here?

JUDITH
I need your help.

JAMES
I can't help you.

JUDITH
I just need a ride into town. I
have a dialysis scheduled this
morning.

JAMES
What about your dad?

JUDITH
He isn't coming.

JAMES
You know, I'm leaving.

JUDITH
I just need a ride to the doctor's
office.

JAMES
Where's your mom?

JUDITH
She's on the moon today. I usually
call my dad when that happens.

JAMES
Why me?

JUDITH
Because, you're still here.

James realizes that she isn't going to accept "No" just like
her mother would do.

JAMES
This is the part when you go
outside and wait for me.

Judith sees the guitar case by the door.

JUDITH
Hey. This is yours?

James quickly hops out of bed and to the bathroom.

JAMES (O.S.)
Be careful with it.

Judith opens the case to admire the guitar.

JUDITH
I'm still struggling to learn. It's
hard to play with my wrist.

JAMES
You play piano just fine.

James packs all of his belongings into the backpack. He sees
the notebook open on the table.

JUDITH
That's different. I don't need my
wrist as much.

James closes the book then places it into the backpack.

JAMES
Close that up. Let's go.

JUDITH
You're really leaving?

JAMES
Yeah. I can give you a ride but
it's now or never.

James rubs his temples to relieve the pressure of a head
ache. He finds an aspirin bottle and pops a couple to ease
the pain.

JUDITH
You know those aren't breath mints.

I/E. JEEP, TRAVELLING - MORNING

James drives in silence.

Judith waits for an opportunity to speak.

JAMES
What are you staring at?

JUDITH
Please, don't leave.

JAMES
I shouldn't be here.

JUDITH
You said you'd help.

JAMES
I know what I said. But, I am not
your guy for this.

JUDITH
Just talk to her. She won't listen
to me.

JAMES
Have you really tried without
making it a fight?

JUDITH
Please, just one time. She's all I
have and I know I can't do it.

JAMES
What about your dad?

JUDITH
She finally drove him away.

JAMES
He was just there the other day.

JUDITH
She cut him out of everything.

JAMES
I think you're relationship with
him has nothing to do with her.

JUDITH
Just help me one time. If she
doesn't listen, you can go.

JAMES
You're just like her.

JUDITH
How?

JAMES
She doesn't accept a "No" either.

INT. MEDICAL CENTER, WAITING ROOM - MORNING

James reviews pamphlets and other reading material as he waits on a sofa. He touches the sofa as it triggers another memory.

CUT TO:

INT. THERAPY OFFICE - AFTERNOON, FLASHBACK

James again appears bored and blank.

COUNSELOR

Are we finally going to talk about this?

James doesn't acknowledge the question.

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)

We can't continue to go in circles.

JAMES

What do you expect me to do?

COUNSELOR

Open up. Let someone in for once.

BACK TO:

INT. MEDICAL CENTER, TREATMENT ROOM - MORNING

Judith quietly watches television as the dialysis machine runs. She searches through channels for something to watch.

Vanessa attends to Judith's wrist.

VANESSA

Is that the guy?

JUDITH

That's James. He's staying in the cabin right now.

VANESSA

Oh yeah?

Judith smiles but doesn't say anything.

VANESSA (CONT'D)

Is he sick?

JUDITH

No. Why?

VANESSA

Your parents let me quarantine in the cabin last year when I was sick.

JUDITH

Really?

VANESSA

Yeah, they've been helping people for like the last year or so. Truckers who couldn't find a hotel. People that needed to quarantine. Cute strangers apparently.

JUDITH

I didn't know that.

VANESSA

She's been helping a lot of people.

JUDITH

Who helps her?

There is a tap on the door before James enters.

VANESSA

I'll leave you two.

Vanessa winks at Judith before she leaves.

JAMES

Hey, how long does this thing take?

JUDITH

About four hours.

JAMES

You could have warned me before I decided to wait for you.

JUDITH

I'm sorry.

JAMES

Mind if I sit?

JUDITH

Sure.

James finds an empty chair to plop into.

JAMES

So, what does this machine do?

JUDITH

It filters my blood. I don't know how it works but.. I feel a lot better when it's done.

JAMES

How often do you have to come here?

JUDITH

Three times a week.

JAMES

That's like every other day.

JUDITH

Pretty much.

James carries a pamphlet and gives it to Judith.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

What is this?

JAMES

What do you know about Bipolar disorder?

JUDITH

Nothing really.

JAMES

Your mom is tired a lot then she gets like this mania right?

JUDITH

Yeah, I would call it something like that.

JAMES

I was reading this pamphlet in the waiting room and I saw this. It sounds a lot like what your mom is going through.

JUDITH

Are you serious?

JAMES

Yeah, take a look.

Judith looks over the pamphlet and recognizes many of the symptoms.

JUDITH
Holy Shit balls. This is totally
her.

JAMES
The pamphlet is about this
medication you can take for it.
But, I don't know your mom well
enough.

JUDITH
This is exactly right.

JAMES
You should show her this.

JUDITH
We need to talk to her.

JAMES
I can't.

JUDITH
You promised.

JAMES
It isn't my place. Mental health
isn't an easy thing to bring up.
People think it's about being
crazy. They just have challenges.

JUDITH
This is why I'm asking for your
help. I can't say it like you just
did.

JAMES
But, you're family. It doesn't have
to be perfect.

JUDITH
I can't do it alone.

JAMES
What about your dad?

JUDITH
He'll just make her tune it out.

JAMES
I am not your guy for this.

JUDITH

Like it or not you are. Why would you bring me this if you didn't want to help?

James stands and opens the door to leave.

JAMES

I don't know.

JUDITH

Please, don't run from this.

James looks back but says nothing.

EXT. MEDICAL CENTER, ROOF - DAY

Judith strums James's guitar flustered in the chair.

James opens the door to the roof then walks over to the ledge careful to not look down.

JAMES

Vanessa told me I'd find you up here.

Judith focuses on her notebook while she continues to work out the music.

JAMES (CONT'D)

What do you write in yours?

JUDITH

Stuff.

James recognizes that she even has some talent with the guitar.

JAMES

I thought you said you were still learning.

JUDITH

What do you think?

JAMES

If you hold it a little differently, you can make it easier on your wrist.

James holds out his hands to take the guitar but she keeps it.

JUDITH
I can figure it out.

James, careful to not provoke and make her more angry, finds a comfortable place to sit.

JAMES
I don't want to get involved.

JUDITH
Why not? You're already involved.
You could have left but you're
still here.

JAMES
You have my guitar. Besides, I'm
the last person you want helping.

JUDITH
Why?

JAMES
I came here running from my own
shit.

They share a moment of silence not exactly knowing what to say to one another.

James coughs still finding difficulty with the air. He looks toward the mountains.

JAMES (CONT'D)
It's nice up here.

JUDITH
It's my spot.

JAMES
How so?

JUDITH
I've been here so many times they
let me come up here to get away for
a while.

JAMES
The mountain sure does make you
feel small.

JUDITH
I like to think I'm bigger than the
mountain.

James questions her with a look to explain.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

Well, the mountain is boring. It's always going to be a mountain. It's almost like it doesn't have a purpose. I have control over what I do. I can affect what happens to me.

JAMES

Are you sure? The machine down stairs says otherwise. Besides, the mountain may have purpose. It's not always going to be a mountain. One day, it could be the bottom of the ocean. It just changes slower than us.

JUDITH

What are you trying to say?

JAMES

For someone that says they can control what happens to them, it seems like a lot happens TO you.

JUDITH

That's not what I mean.

JAMES

Then what do you mean?

JUDITH

I mean I can control how I choose to deal with it. I can hope for something better.

JAMES

Yeah maybe. We still can't change anything.

JUDITH

Why are you being like this?

JAMES

You're asking me to involve myself into your mom's mess. Your mess.

JUDITH

And you're just trying to avoid it even though you act like you want to do something.

Judith quickly places the guitar back into its case. She packs up a few things to leave.

JAMES

Hey, look. I'm sorry.

JUDITH

Why won't you help me?

JAMES

Life seems to be a lot more random. We all make choices. Sure. We can all choose how we deal with it. But, it's ours. You can't just dive into someone's shit and expect them to be happy about it.

JUDITH

What about you?

JAMES

What about me?

JUDITH

Why did you come here in the first place?

JAMES

What do you want me to say? I have my reasons. I've made a lot of mistakes in my life. They didn't lead in any kind of direction. My choices just changed slowly till one day I ended up in this mess.

JUDITH

I think that's really pessimistic. I don't want to think that it's all random. You ended up here, of all places, with US. There has to be a reason. Or what's the point?

JAMES

What if, there is no reason? What if, you can't find a purpose? What if, it doesn't make any sense? What if, it is as pointless as that mountain. You're pushed into existence. You didn't choose to be here. You just... ended up here.

JUDITH

I'm not going to buy into any of your suicidal bullshit.

JAMES

Excuse me?

JUDITH

I read your little notebook.

James's anger boils to the surface.

JAMES

You had no right.

JUDITH

You're the one that left it open. You wanted someone to read it. You basically dared me to open it the other day.

JAMES

You don't know what it's like. What I have to live with.

JUDITH

What do you think I have to live with?

JAMES

What? You have people that care about you.

JUDITH

I am in pain every day.

JAMES

And you try to make everyone else feel it like you do. That's what you control.

JUDITH

What's that supposed to mean?

JAMES

Why do you think you fight with your mom all the time? She already knows you hurt. She's been there. You don't have to remind her. She's the way she is because of you.

JUDITH

Try it on see how you like it.

JAMES

I have my own.

JUDITH

At least you can do something about it. I have to wait for something terrible to happen.

James stands onto the ledge.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

I've got news for you. I've more reason to jump off this building than you.

JAMES

You don't know my life. You don't know what it's like to lose someone you care about because you didn't do enough.

JUDITH

And you don't know years of hospital rooms and kidney stones. You don't know about dealing with a crazy mom or knowing that your father isn't your real dad. You don't know what it's like to hope for someone to die. You don't know what it's like to be stuck in a small town watching everyone around you know that you're sick.

JAMES

You're not the first person to have those issues.

JUDITH

And you are not the first person to experience loneliness either.

JAMES

How far is it to the street?

JUDITH

I'm not looking.

JAMES

How far!

JUDITH

I'm not going to watch this.

JAMES

What if I was your match and that was my purpose? What if you could have a new kidney today? All I would need to do is jump.

JUDITH

I'm not going to watch you do this.

JAMES
Would you stop me?

JUDITH
Don't.

JAMES
This is for you. This is what
you're hoping for. If someone has
to die to let you live, why can't
it be me?

James raises his arms out and looks into the sky. He leans
back ready to fall.

Suddenly, Judith wraps her arms around him to pull him back.

James grabs onto a pole to stop their fall. He has to use all
his strength to pull them back to safety. James can feel
Judith tremble in his arms.

JAMES (CONT'D)
I'm sorry.

The emotion runs through her and she cries like never before
on his shoulder.

JUDITH
I'm scared.

JAMES
I know. I am too.

INT. HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

The lights flicker on and James finds a mess of broken dishes
on the floor. He's careful with his footsteps walking through
the debris.

JUDITH
And the day just gets better.

JAMES
She did this?

JUDITH
Ya think? But, new dishes. Yay.

Judith sarcastically mimics a cheerleader.

JAMES
Do you really think this is the
best time to talk to her?

JUDITH

I don't want to lose her.

James breathes in but can barely hold it. He appears pale and there is a blue tinge in his lips.

JAMES

Okay. It's now or never.

JUDITH

I thought you didn't want to get involved.

JAMES

I don't. I didn't.

JUDITH

Why now?

JAMES

You're right. Out of the millions of places I could of ended up, why here? Why now?

Judith picks up the shards of broken dishes.

James searches for a broom to clean up the mess.

CUT TO:

INT. LAS VEGAS APARTMENT / LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Totals of recent COVID infections and deaths highlight the TV news.

Ava and James watch on opposite ends of a sofa.

JAMES

It's going to get better.

AVA

What if it doesn't?

Ava, stressed, scratches at her wrist.

James doesn't notice her anxiety.

JAMES

It will.

He leaves.

AVA
Stay with me.

James, already on his way to the bedroom, doesn't hear her.

INT. LAS VEGAS APARTMENT / BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ava lingers over him. She kisses him on the cheek

AVA
I'm sorry.

James, sound asleep, feels it and smiles.

INT. LAS VEGAS APARTMENT / BEDROOM - MORNING

Loud knocks on the front door wakes James from his sleep. He looks over to see the other side of the bed empty.

JAMES
Ava?

More loud knocks.

James finds some pants to put on.

JAMES (CONT'D)
I'm coming.

More knocks.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Ava?

INT. LAS VEGAS APARTMENT / LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

James rushes through the apartment but sees no signs of Ava. He answers the door.

At the door are two LVPD Officers. The lead, Officer Daniels, glares at James. They look as if they've had a long night because their eyes have bags and their COVID masks are stretched thin.

OFFICER DANIELS
Does Ava Richards live here?

JAMES
She does. What can I do for you officer?

OFFICER DANIELS
We are here for some information.

JAMES
She's not here at the moment.

OFFICER DANIELS
Yeah, I know. May I come in?

JAMES
Why?

OFFICER DANIELS
I'd rather not do this on your porch.

James shows them in.

The officers enter and stand in strategic places of the room.

JAMES
What's this about?

OFFICER DANIELS
What's your relationship to her?

JAMES
She's my fiancée.

OFFICER DANIELS
Would you have her family contact information?

JAMES
I do. What's going on?

OFFICER DANIELS
Can you take a seat?

JAMES
I prefer to stand.

James recognizes a note on the counter with his name on it.

Officer Daniels pauses a moment because he's about to deliver the worst news. He hates this part but pushes through the expression to explain.

OFFICER DANIELS
Last night we found.....

James already knows what's coming before Officer Daniels can even finish his sentence. His ears ring and fade to silence as he screams out in agony.

BACK TO:

INT. HOUSE, BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Stefanie lays in silence on the bed. She clutches a picture of Judith.

James slowly enters the room.

JAMES
Hey. Are you awake?

Stefanie doesn't respond and James slowly closes the door before she snaps together.

STEFANIE
It's okay. I'm awake.

JAMES
Can we talk?

STEFANIE
Sure.

Stefanie slowly rises from the bed.

JAMES
Would you mind coming into the other room?

STEFANIE
Okay.

JAMES
Jude and I just thought you might be hungry.

Stefanie, visibly depressed, composes herself.

INT. HOUSE, KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Stefanie, draped in a robe, sits at the table and watches Judith make lunch.

JUDITH
Good afternoon.

STEFANIE
Good morning.

JUDITH
No, afternoon.

Stefanie realizes she's been asleep most of the afternoon.

STEFANIE
Did you go to dialysis?

JUDITH
Yeah, James took me.

JAMES
It's all good. You don't have to
worry.

Stefanie looks around the table to see toast, cereal, and
some cut fruit.

STEFANIE
I'm sorry.

JUDITH
It's okay mom.

Judith serves some eggs onto a plate and brings them over.

Stefanie wipes the tears from her face. She takes deliberate
breaths to relieve her anxiety.

STEFANIE
I'll be fine.

JAMES
This is what we want to talk about.

STEFANIE
Why?

JAMES
Jude is concerned about your mood
swings.

Stefanie blushes embarrassed about the broken dishes.

STEFANIE
I'm sorry. I don't know what came
over me.

JAMES
That's the problem.

JUDITH

Mom. You need help. You're struggling with your mental health and don't see it.

STEFANIE

So, I can't worry about you?

JAMES

Do you think that breaking dishes is about Jude? Or could it be something else?

STEFANIE

You don't know the stress I'm under.

JUDITH

What do you think I'm going through?

Judith feels a sharp pain in her side but plays it off.

JAMES

I can understand your stress.

STEFANIE

No. You can't.

JAMES

Take a look at this objectively. You have bouts of high energy. Swings of almost lethargic sleep. So much so that Jude draws on the door jamb based on your mood. Now, broken dishes everywhere? What else would you call this?

Stefanie closes her eyes as the stress builds up.

STEFANIE

So, you're saying I'm crazy.

JAMES

No. Mental health is not about crazy. It's about recognizing that your mind is different than others and sometimes destructively so.

JUDITH

How do we get better?

JAMES

By acknowledging something's wrong.

Stefanie stands as the mania grows and paces across the kitchen.

STEFANIE

If you're such an expert, tell me why you stranded yourself here.

JAMES

This isn't about me.

STEFANIE

It isn't?

JUDITH

Mom. Let's focus on you.

STEFANIE

No. You two don't get to decide that I'm the one the needs help. I don't see your mental health being any better than mine.

James snaps back at her.

JAMES

Because I know what happens if you don't deal with it.

STEFANIE

What? What happens?

JUDITH

Nothing good.

STEFANIE

Why would you bring him into this?

JUDITH

Because you don't listen to me. Or Dad.

STEFANIE

So, I have mood swings. And you come to this town like some scared kid talking to me like you know better.

JAMES

You're right. I'm not an expert.

STEFANIE

You can leave. I'm not going to have you talk to me like I'm the one that needs help when you clearly need it yourself.

JUDITH

Mom. He didn't have to do this. I asked him to.

STEFANIE

Why?

James boils over with emotion but holds it like a volcano ready to pop.

JUDITH

Are you ok?

Judith places a soft hand on his shoulder.

James calms when he feels her touch. He lets it out softly.

JAMES

My fiancée took her own life.

The words silence the three of them for a moment.

Stefanie realizes the power of his words.

JAMES (CONT'D)

She struggled with it through COVID and the lock down put an enormous amount of pressure on her. Neither of us were working. It was too much.

STEFANIE

I'm sorry.

Stefanie shakes with anxiety.

JAMES

Yes. I struggle with it. I wanted to take my own life. That's why I'm here. It's hard for me to live with the fact that I didn't do enough when she needed help. Now, Jude is trying to do what I couldn't. And you're too proud to admit there's a problem.

Judith embraces James and can feel him shiver with vulnerability.

JUDITH
You're shaking.

Judith removes the hoodie, her armor, and offers it to James. She stands vulnerable hopeful he'll accept.

James slides on the hoodie and Judith hugs him. She grips the tare on the lower back of it.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
I didn't know.

JAMES
How could you?

Stefanie watches James and Judith embrace as he weeps into her shoulder. She recognizes her hand shaking, her nervous pace, and her distance. Stefanie slowly reaches for James's hand.

STEFANIE
How do I start?

She finds his grip.

JAMES
Small. But asking for help is a first step.

STEFANIE
Okay. I need help.

Judith releases from James and envelopes Stefanie in her embrace.

INT. HOUSE / LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

James strums his guitar for Judith.

JUDITH
Thank you.

JAMES
It's up to her now.

Judith feels a pain in her side. She stands and walks to the bathroom.

James recognizes the agony in her demeanor.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Are you ok?

JUDITH
I'm fine.

INT. HOUSE / BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Judith looks into the mirror. She's scared and splashes some water on her face then pats her face with a towel.

JUDITH
It'll pass. The others did. This one will too.

Judith flushes the toilet with a hint of blood in the water.

INT. HOUSE / LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Judith walks by as if nothing is wrong.

JUDITH
I have to go. My dad is coming to talk to me.

JAMES
When?

JUDITH
Right now.

JAMES
I saw you wince. You can't hide it.

JUDITH
Watch me.

INT. HOUSE, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

James returns to see the girls embraced.

Stefanie cries onto Judith's shoulder.

JUDITH
It's okay mom. It's okay.

As Judith sees James, she puts her finger to her lips to keep him quiet.

James silently mouths his words.

JAMES
You've got to tell her.

JUDITH

Not now.

JAMES (V.O.)

This girl is tougher than anyone I've ever met. I know she's in pain. Yet, she finds it more important to comfort her mother.

INT. CABIN - EVENING

James packs his things.

There is a knock on the door.

James opens the door to find Judith waiting.

JAMES

I thought your dad was coming.

JUDITH

He is. I just have something else I wanted you to hear.

JAMES

Why won't you tell your mom?

JUDITH

It's just a kidney stone. It'll pass.

JAMES

Just a kidney stone? You say it like it's normal. Most people have to go to the hospital when that happens.

Judith shrugs it off. She hands him her phone and ear buds then hits play.

He realizes it's another original.

Judith steps in close enough to kiss him.

James removes the ear buds and gently pushes back.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I can't.

The honk of Eric's truck pierces the tension.

Judith slumps then doesn't say a word before leaving.

James packs all of his things into the backpack.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Life is unfair. I can't let her
watch this go bad.

James coughs extremely violent. He collapses to the floor.

James turns pale and his lips tinge blue. He passes out.

INT. MOUNTAIN COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

Eric and Judith relax in a booth after eating to talk things over.

JUDITH
Mom agreed to get some help.

ERIC
She did?

JUDITH
I know. Shocked the hell out of me
too.

ERIC
What are you hoping I can do in all
this? You heard her. She doesn't
want me around.

JUDITH
Just give her the space and time to
get better. She'll come back
around.

ERIC
I still don't trust him.

JUDITH
Why don't you like him?

ERIC
It's not him. It's me. It just
feels like your mom let him in to
get back at me. And now he gets to
do the thing I wanted to do.

JUDITH
And what was that?

ERIC
Have her listen.

JUDITH
Well, she did finally.

ERIC
I hope so. Let me take you back
home.

EXT. HOUSE / DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Eric pulls into the driveway.

ERIC
Call if you need anything.

JUDITH
I will.

Judith exits the truck and slams the door behind her but it hits her wrist on top of the graft instead. Judith grabs her wrist in pain.

ERIC
Easy on the truck. Are you ok?

JUDITH
I'm fine.

Judith closes the door again.

Eric backs and pulls away from the driveway.

A bruise forms on Judith's wrist. She feels the graft has broken.

Judith rushes to the cabin door then knocks as hard as she can and passes out.

INT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

The hard knock wakes James.

James stands and rubs his temples because of a headache.

Out the front window, James finds Judith passed out on the steps. He quickly opens the door.

INT. HOUSE / DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

The situation is dire. A huge bruise forms and swells on Judith's wrist.

James yells but can't find enough air in his lungs to do so. He grabs a strap from his guitar and tightens it around Judith's arm in a tourniquet. James picks Judith up and races to the Jeep.

Stefanie sees James frantic around the Jeep. She runs out to the driveway.

STEFANIE

What happened?

JAMES

I don't know. I just found her on the steps.

Stefanie sees the make shift tourniquet then notices the bruise on her wrist. Stefanie touches Judith's wrist to realize the graft is broken.

STEFANIE

The device in her arm is broken. We need to get her to the hospital.

James reaches for his keys but can barely maintain himself. They get Judith into the front seat.

Stefanie hops in the back then applies pressure to Judith's wrist.

JAMES

Where do we go?

STEFANIE

The main hospital in Aspen. It's off the 82.

JAMES

Are you sure we can get there?

James starts the Jeep and steps on the gas.

I/E. JEEP WRANGLER, TRAVELLING - NIGHT

James speeds through traffic down Route 82 to get to the hospital.

He looks down to the dashboard to notice he's on empty.

JAMES

Come on. We have to make it.

James coughs and almost loses control of the Jeep.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Please, not now.

STEFANIE
Be careful. Are you ok?

JAMES
I can make it.

The altitude sickness alters his vision and the road looks smaller.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Please.

EXT. HOSPITAL, PARKING LOT - NIGHT

James barely holds onto consciousness. He coughs nonstop and can't breathe. James puts the Jeep into neutral as it crashes to a stop into a parked car.

Stefanie, nearly pushed into the front seat, appears to be fine.

An officer witnesses the accident and rushes over.

James steps out of the car bruised but still moving.

JAMES
They need help.

James passes out.

OFFICER
What's wrong?

The officer attends to James on the floor.

STEFANIE
I don't know.. But, my daughter is in trouble. She needs help.

A medic rushes to her aid.

MEDIC
What's going on?

STEFANIE
The device in her arm is broken.

MEDIC
Device?

STEFANIE
She's on dialysis. The graft.

A couple of nurses arrive on scene with a gurney.

MEDIC
We have a female. Looks like a
broken hemodialysis graft in her
left arm. She's losing a lot of
blood. There's a make shift
tourniquet in place.

The nurses load Judith onto a gurney and rush her inside.

STEFANIE
What's wrong with him?

The medic examines James. He sees all the signs of hypoxia.

MEDIC
I need oxygen stat.

STEFANIE
What?

MEDIC
Ma'am, did you know this man is
hypoxic?

STEFANIE
Oh my god. No. No.....I didn't.

Another gurney is rushed out to the accident. They load James
onto it and into the hospital.

INT. HOSPITAL, JUDITH'S ROOM - DAY

Judith sleeps quietly as the dialysis machine hums next to
her. A unit of blood flows down a tube into one arm as the
other gets filtered by the machine.

Stefanie rests in a chair next to the bed.

A nurse enters.

NURSE
He's waking up.

STEFANIE
Thank you so much.

She rushes to the other room.

INT. HOSPITAL, JAMES'S ROOM - MORNING

It's a common hospital room with two beds and a TV bolted to the wall close to the ceiling. The sun shines through the window.

James wakes to find himself attached to an oxygen machine and an IV in his arm.

He removes the oxygen tubes attached to his nose.

Stefanie reaches for his hand to stop him and places it back.

STEFANIE

No, don't. The doctor said you'd been suffering from altitude sickness.

JAMES

I know.

STEFANIE

You knew this was happening?

JAMES

Yes.

STEFANIE

How come you didn't tell us?

JAMES

Would you have let me stay? I came here to end my life, I told you this yesterday.

STEFANIE

Yeah, But you didn't tell us you were still trying.

JAMES

This is the whole reason I drove into the mountains. I knew if I could do it myself, this would take care of it.

STEFANIE

You need help. Just like us. We don't want you to do this.

JAMES

I feel responsible for not getting my fiancée help.

STEFANIE

You chose to help me. It seems like you're trying to make up for it.

JAMES

It doesn't bring her back.

STEFANIE

Sure, sometimes it's going to be hard. I been fighting my whole life. But, I'd give anything for Jude.

JAMES

What if I could give it to you?

STEFANIE

You don't need to die to help her.

JAMES

What if it's my fate. What if I'm supposed to be here for this?

STEFANIE

And what if, you were supposed to live to help her.

JAMES

I don't know if I can.

STEFANIE

What was it you said last night? The first step is asking for help.

Stefanie looks straight into his eyes and James can't find an answer.

JAMES

How is she?

STEFANIE

She's stable.

INT. HOSPITAL, JUDITH'S ROOM - DAY

Eric waits next to the window. He watches the traffic below sipping a cup of coffee.

Stefanie walks over to him then places her hand on his shoulder.

Eric looks at her surprised then down at her hand.

ERIC
He woke up?

STEFANIE
He did.

ERIC
That's his Jeep they're cleaning
up? What happened?

STEFANIE
I don't know. Somehow, she broke
the graft in her arm.

Eric realizes she hit it on the edge of his truck.

ERIC
Last night. The door of the truck
hit her. I thought it just
rebounded because she closes it so
hard.

STEFANIE
And you didn't stay to make sure
she was okay?

ERIC
She said she was okay. I'm sorry.
I've been so focused on us. I
didn't realize it.

STEFANIE
It's my fault.

ERIC
Why did he crash?

STEFANIE
He's hypoxic.

Another surprised look falls onto Eric's face.

The doctor enters to talk with Eric and Stefanie.

DOCTOR
How are you today?

STEFANIE
As good as could be expected.

ERIC
What's happening to her?

DOCTOR

We have the wrist under control. We were able to install a new graft after we got all the material out. But, that isn't the concern.

ERIC

What's the real concern?

DOCTOR

She's going into renal failure. The constant dialysis is helping but she needs a transplant now. We put her on a high priority list. All we can do now is wait and hope. I'm sorry. I wish there was more I could do.

ERIC

What if I could donate?

STEFANIE

We've already been over this. You aren't a match.

ERIC

What about that guy?

STEFANIE

I don't know if he can.

DOCTOR

Who are we talking about?

STEFANIE

James. He came in last night after the crash.

DOCTOR

The one with the altitude sickness.

STEFANIE

Yes.

DOCTOR

His condition is very weak. I wouldn't recommend it.

ERIC

Isn't that his choice?

DOCTOR

It is. But, his body is under tremendous stress.

ERIC
He crashed his truck to get her
here. I would say he wants to help.

STEFANIE
But, he could die.

ERIC
He could be the match we need.

JUDITH
DAD?

Everyone turns to Judith.

ERIC
This man could save your life.

JUDITH
I know. But, I don't want him to
die either.

Eric turns disappointed and leaves the room.

INT. HOSPITAL, JAMES'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Eric enters his room.

James can see the fear and anxiety in his eyes.

ERIC
Can we talk?

JAMES
Is she ok?

ERIC
She's going into renal failure.

JAMES
Why are you telling me this?

ERIC
Why come to Colorado if you know
you're hypoxic?

JAMES
I think you already know the
answer.

ERIC
I do. But why would you stay with
them? Or even try to help?

JAMES

They wouldn't let me say no.

ERIC

That's a child's answer. You could have said no if you wanted.

Eric thinks a moment then turns to leave.

ERIC (CONT'D)

I don't think you really want to do it or you wouldn't have risked everything to bring her here.

James can't find a response.

JAMES

Then let me save her.

The Doctor steps in behind Eric.

DOCTOR

There is a lot of risk involved. Can you give us a moment?

The Doctor pulls the privacy curtain then places themself close to the bed.

JAMES

I don't care about the risk.

DOCTOR

Taking a kidney from you could kill you. Plus, you might not even be a match.

JAMES

Test me.

DOCTOR

Even if it does turn out that you are a match. Her body still might reject it.

JAMES

What are you telling me?

DOCTOR

I'm telling you that both of you may die.

There is awkward silence as James ponders his words.

JAMES

But, we could both live too. She
has no chance if I don't.

The doctor pulls back the curtains and walks over to the
nurse waiting for them in the doorway.

Eric and Stefanie are huddled next to a nurse.

The Doctor whispers into the nurse's ear.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I want to do this. I'll take the
risk.

DOCTOR

Are you sure?

JAMES

More than ever.

STEFANIE

Let's just wait to see what
happens.

JAMES

We don't have time to wait.

INT. HOSPITAL, JAMES'S ROOM - EVENING

A nurse comes in to serve James dinner. He raises the bed.

NURSE #2

Are you ready for dinner?

JAMES

Do you know if my tests have come
back yet?

NURSE #2

No, they haven't.

The nurse sets up a dinner tray and pushes it close to James.

JAMES

Can you do me a favor?

NURSE #2

What do you need?

JAMES

I want to see a patient down the hall and I can't attached to all this.

NURSE #2

You're not supposed to be out of bed.

JAMES

Please? I may not get another chance.

NURSE #2

I'll see what I can do.

INT. HOSPITAL, JUDITH'S ROOM - NIGHT

The lights are off except for the night light next to Judith's bed. She writes a few thoughts down on a piece of paper.

Stefanie sleeps on the other bed of the room.

The nurse wheels James in on a wheelchair.

JAMES

Thank you.

The nurse places him close to Judith.

JUDITH

Hey, how are you?

JAMES

I'm doing okay. How about you?

JUDITH

I'm just writing a few things down.

JAMES

What are you writing?

JUDITH

Lyrics.

JAMES

Another song? Tell me why you haven't told her.

JUDITH

It's my secret. I've been teaching myself to play for years.

(MORE)

JUDITH (CONT'D)

You can find a lot on YouTube. I've learned guitar, piano. I wanted something that was completely mine. Even when everything else wasn't. I was building memories for her. Like a little treasure trove of things she could find if I ever.....you know.

JAMES

You shared it with me.

JUDITH

Because, you shared something personal with me. Do you want to hear this one?

JAMES

I'd love to.

JUDITH

I figured we weren't feeling that much different. We're both at the same place. We just got there in different ways. This song says what we both want to say but don't.

Judith grabs her scrap of paper to sing the lyrics.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

Forgive me. I don't have a piano to play it on.

JAMES

It's okay. I'll imagine it.

Judith moves her fingers into place as if playing a piano then sings quietly to not wake Stefanie.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LAS VEGAS STAGE PIT - NIGHT

The hospital room changes to the Las Vegas stage pit James knows well. He envisions Judith playing the piano and singing this song.

As the song finishes, the scene fades back into the hospital room.

FADE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL, JUDITH'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

James's emotions burst. He slowly rises from the chair to sit next to her.

Judith embraces him.

JUDITH
You have to promise me something.

JAMES
Anything.

JUDITH
Live your best life again.

JAMES
I don't know if I can.

JUDITH
Promise me. If you're a match or not, promise me you'll fight for it.

James cries onto her shoulder and holds her tightly.

JAMES
I will.

INT. HOSPITAL, JUDITH'S ROOM - MIDNIGHT

Judith stretches herself toward Stefanie on the other bed close enough to toss her phone and ear buds next to her.

The phone has a sticky note that says "Play me".

INT. HOSPITAL, JUDITH'S ROOM - EARLY MORNING

Stefanie wakes to see Judith asleep. She feels the phone pressed against her and reads the note. Stefanie taps the phone and it unlocks without a pass code.

There's a video paused on the screen.

She presses play.

JUDITH
(On the video)
I know small steps are hard. I've not expressed how I feel enough either. Especially, to you. I don't know if we'll have another chance.
(MORE)

JUDITH (CONT'D)
 I've bottled up what I've wanted to
 say in music. I want you to hear it
 now.

MONTAGE

- Judith on the roof practicing.
- Judith smiles at the piano on the stage.
- Song after song play.
- James strums a guitar unaware she's recording.

END MONTAGE

JUDITH (CONT'D)
 (On the video)
 I love you.

INT. HOSPITAL, JAMES'S ROOM - MORNING

James sleeps comfortably while the sun shines onto his face.

Stefanie, cuddled up on the chair beside him, sleeps with tissues spread across the floor and Judith's phone in hand.

James reaches for Stefanie to wake her.

JAMES
 Hey, what are you doing here?

Stefanie's eyes are noticeably red. He realizes that she's cried herself to sleep.

JAMES (CONT'D)
 I'm sorry. I wanted to save her.

Stefanie smiles then with a tempered excitement.

STEFANIE
 You can. You're a match.

JAMES
 What?

STEFANIE
 You are a match.

JAMES
 HOLY SHIT BALLS!!

STEFANIE
It's not over yet.

JAMES
But, we can make it.

STEFANIE
You both need to get through the
surgery. But... It's possible.

INT. SURGERY ROOM, DAY

Judith and James lay on operating tables across from each other.

The doctors and nurses prep each of them for the transplant.

Judith and James make eye contact as she smiles at him.

JUDITH
You promised.

Their eyes close as the anesthesia takes effect.

INT. SURGERY ROOM, AFTERNOON

The surgeons finish the last bit of the operation.

Judith and James remain unconscious on opposite tables, stable.

The rhythm of heartbeats on electrocardiograms sound like music.

James's heartbeat erratically flutters then crashes.

A flatline of the electrocardiogram fills the room as doctors and nurses rush to bring him back.

They start chest compressions.

A nurse unpacks an AED device to attach to James.

DOCTOR
Clear!

The shock of the AED convulses James's body.

More chest compressions. A bone cracks under the pressure.

They reset the charge.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

CLEAR!

James's body convulses again.

JUDITH (V.O.)

Promise me.

FADE TO:

EXT. BUS STOP - DAY (A FEW WEEKS LATER)

It's a small town bus stop that might pick up one or two passengers on the way to a bigger destination.

James with a portable oxygen concentrator hanging from his shoulder, bound for Las Vegas, fiddles with the tubing to his nose.

James notices Stefanie and Eric.

Judith emerges from behind them.

James shuffles nervously with their approach. He places the tubing around him like a necklace.

JAMES

Thank you for coming.

JUDITH

It's the least we could do. How are you feeling?

JAMES

I'm good. My chest is sore. But, I'm better. How are you?

JUDITH

Amazing.

JAMES

I'd stay but..

James shakes the oxygen device.

JUDITH

We know.

STEFANIE

Thank you for this.

JAMES

Thank you.

JUDITH
I got my mom back.

STEFANIE
I have a new pill to take that
doesn't make me so manic.

Eric smirks and reaches to shake James's hand.

ERIC
I owe you.

James shakes his hand.

JAMES
You're welcome.

James reaches into his backpack for Judith's hoodie.

JAMES (CONT'D)
I believe this belongs to you.

Judith caresses his hand before he can remove it.

JUDITH
I want you to keep it.

JAMES
It's yours.

JUDITH
Call it a trade.

The bus pulls into the station to pick up passengers.

JAMES
This is my ride. I promise I'll
write when I get there.

JUDITH
You'd better.

Judith hugs James tightly then kisses him on the cheek. She
whispers in his ear.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
We'll make music together.

JAMES
It was why I'm here.

JUDITH
You found a life in thin air.

STEFANIE
Take care of yourself.

JAMES
I will.

James picks up his backpack and guitar then steps onto the bus.

INT. BUS, TRAVELLING - DAY

James reviews the scrap of paper with the lyrics then folds it neatly into his wallet.

The bus travels across the country to it's destination in Las Vegas.

INT. APARTMENT - TODAY

The old guitar hangs neatly on the wall next to a framed picture of Judith with her lyrics. James exits.

INT. CASINO LOUNGE - NIGHT

It's a small stage for an open mic night. James plays his music for a small audience.

Judith, older and as beautiful as ever, settles onto a chair in the back.

James finishes his song and immediately recognizes her. He places his new guitar down and rushes to her.

They are close enough to embrace.

JUDITH
Are you ready now?

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END.