

A DOORWAY WHISPERS

Written by

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INT. HOSPITAL, INTENSIVE CARE UNIT - DAY

JAMES (40), unshaven and rumpled, strides down a hallway, nearly running, a bouquet of flowers in hand.

His face is tight, eyes steady, breathing deep. He passes doctors, nurses, other visitors without noticing.

He angles past a nurse's station, heads for a patient room.

INSIDE THE ROOM

James slows, moves to the foot of the bed by the window.

His FATHER (80) lies there, wasted and pale, barely more than a skeleton connected to humming machines.

Seeing James, his father immediately brightens.

FATHER

Little Jimmy! You grow a pair yet?

James glares down at his father, jaw clenching. He reaches into the flowers, pulls out an automatic pistol.

James aims at his father, FIRES.

A SPOT OF BLOOD on his father's chest.

FATHER

I said, you grow a pair yet Jimmy?

James fires again; more red spreads across his father's hospital gown. His father starts to laugh.

JAMES FIRES AGAIN AND AGAIN, FACE TWISTED IN RAGE.

FATHER

You think this changes anything?
You think this changes anything?

JAMES KEEPS FIRING. HIS FATHER KEEPS LAUGHING.

FATHER

Hey, you grow a pair yet Jimmy?

INT. JAMES' BEDROOM - DAWN

James lies in bed, curled on his side in a tangle of sheets, just waking. He groans, rubs his face and looks at the clock.

INT. PUBLIC LIBRARY, REFERENCE DESK - DAY

James punches keys on a computer, looks up at a PATRON.

JAMES

Okay, the first edition is out, but there's a 1988 trade paperback on the shelf. That's in fiction, last row, all the way to the back.

INT. PUBLIC LIBRARY, BREAK ROOM - LATER

James sits alone, a half-eaten sandwich pushed aside.

He's reading through a worn SPIRAL NOTEBOOK. The pages are filled with narrow columns of hand-written text, much corrected, annotated, underlined.

On the table, his cell phone buzzes. He grabs it.

JAMES

Yeah.

INT. HOSPITAL, INTENSIVE CARE UNIT - LATER

JAMES strides down the same hallway from his dream, heading for the same patient room, his notebook in hand.

MAUREEN (45), James' sister, leans against the wall outside the room, tears streaking her face. She looks up.

MAUREEN

Jimmy.

He pushes past her into the room.

MAUREEN (O.S.)

Jimmy...

IN THE ROOM

The medical machines are silent. James' father lies dead.

James stares at the body. Maureen steps up behind him.

JAMES

When?

MAUREEN

About half an hour ago. I'm sorry.

James creeps to the head of the bed, leans closer to his father, as if expecting him to speak.

INT. HOSPITAL, COFFEE SHOP - LATER

James and Maureen sit over coffee. He opens his notebook.

MAUREEN

Is that it?

JAMES

Yeah. My whole life since leaving home. Each year by country and occupation. Each glimmer of joy and blaze of disappointment. All in cunningly crafted couplets.

MAUREEN

Why'd you wait so long?

JAMES

It wasn't finished! I didn't want to give him one more reason to slam me. You know how he is. Was. Now it's a hundred pages of bullshit.

MAUREEN

Might make a good movie.

JAMES

Not enough action.

MAUREEN

You always talked about killing him some day. Put that in.

JAMES

That was just talk.

INT. PAWN SHOP - DAY

James pushes a PISTOL CASE across the counter.

JAMES

What can I get for this?

The PAWN SHOP GUY (50) opens the case, takes out a PISTOL.

PAWN SHOP GUY
Glock seventeen... Got the permit?

James puts some paperwork on the counter.

PAWN SHOP GUY
Perfect condition. You a cop?

JAMES
Poet.

PAWN SHOP GUY
Really. I suppose you think the pen
is mightier than the sword.

JAMES
Well, it hasn't been so far.

PAWN SHOP GUY
Amen, brother. So, uh, three
hundred?

JAMES
Fine.

PAWN SHOP GUY
Lemme write this up.

The pawn shop guy steps away. On the street outside a passing
CAR HORN screams. James turns to look.

His father stands on the sidewalk, looking right at him.

James stares back, frozen. His father turns away, paces
slowly out of sight.

James runs for the door.

EXT. PAWN SHOP - CONTINUOUS

James bursts out of the shop. His father is nowhere in sight.

INT. PAWN SHOP - MOMENTS LATER

James returns to the counter, shaken, breathing hard. He
opens his notebook to the last page, grabs a pen. His eyes
bore into the page.

PAWN SHOP GUY
Okay, need a signature here.

JAMES

One second.

James writes a few short lines.

PAWN SHOP GUY

Get inspired all of a sudden?

JAMES

Something like that.

EXT. PAWN SHOP - LATER

James heads down the sidewalk. His cell phone rings.

JAMES

Hey.

MAUREEN (V.O.)

The funeral home screwed up. The viewing's at six.

JAMES

No problem. Wanna hear my new poem?

MAUREEN (V.O.)

Uh, okay.

James stops, glances at a trash can next to him. As he speaks, his eyes well up.

JAMES

Elder flesh fails. Weary screaming chapters end. A doorway whispers.

MAUREEN (V.O.)

I like it.

JAMES

Thanks. See you later, okay?

MAUREEN (V.O.)

Later.

James pockets the phone, wipes his eyes.

He opens his notebook, looks at the new poem. He tears out that page, drops the notebook in the trash, walks on.

The End