

To a Stranger

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1 INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - A HALLWAY. DAY. 1

We fade in on:

MARK - a man in his late 30s who, on the surface, is entirely unremarkable - is waiting on a bench in the hallway of the hospital. Mark is miserably weary. He is alone, looking straight ahead. The world around him is moving in fast-forward; Mark is living in slow-motion.

This is intercut with quick flashes of:

A policeman (JAMES) in a locker room, face hidden, joking with his COLLEAGUES.

A lawyer (MARK) in his office, head buried in a file, seated at his desk.

In the locker room - the policeman collapses. His colleagues rush into action.

In the office - the phone on the lawyer's desk rings. He picks it up. A stricken look passes over his face.

In the hospital hallway - a NURSE knocks into a small table beside the bench, bringing Mark back to himself.

2 INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - SURGERY THEATRE. DAY. 2

A surgeon (BENJAMIN) face hidden, hands bloody, calm and competent, operates on a man's shoulder. The incision is in his left armpit. The surgeon leans back, satisfied.

BENJAMIN

That will do. You can close up.

He's already walking away before a team member swoops in to take over.

3 INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - A HALLWAY. DAY. 3

Back in the hallway, the nurse catches a vase of flowers before disaster strikes, puts it down, and goes on her way. A double-headed hydrangea blossom has fallen out onto the floor. Mark picks up the flower and contemplates it.

BENJAMIN - dressed now in surgery greens and lab coat - comes to stand in front of Mark. His back is to the camera. Mark takes his time raising his eyes to meet Benjamin's.

BENJAMIN

Mark Farthing?

MARK

Yes.

He reaches out - offering a business card. Mark takes it.

(CONTINUED)

BENJAMIN

I'm Dr. Benjamin Cummings. I'm--

MARK

I know. James?

A beat. We finally see Benjamin: he is in his mid-30s with great hair, and an intelligent face.

BENJAMIN

(annoyed by interruption)
Your brother has been moved into a recovery room.

MARK

Did you... did you get it all?

Another long moment of silence. Benjamin doesn't answer.

MARK (CONT'D)

(distressed)
I... I see. Ah. Thank you. Doctor.

Mark stands up to shake Benjamin's hand. Benjamin does not take it. Mark drops his hand and jams it into his pocket. Benjamin resumes his previously aborted spiel:

BENJAMIN

The surgery was, as far as I am allowed to say, a complete success. While this form of cancer can metastasize, I am confident that Mr. Farthing will have a complete remission. I'd like to consult with his MD-Team and schedule a follow up to discuss targeted chemotherapy to prevent recurrence.

MARK

(paleaxed)
I... all right. I can schedule it.

BENJAMIN

See that you do. The team will recommend a psychiatrist when he has been discharged. You'll be taking him home in two days.

MARK

I will?

BENJAMIN

The incision was under his left armpit. Ensure that he wears loose clothing and doesn't rotate or lift his arm extensively for at least one week. This includes no video games, and no reaching.

MARK

But... I mean, you can't give someone with no--

(CONTINUED)

Benjamin offers Mark a scathing look.

BENJAMIN
Consult with his physiotherapist
for a recovery regime.

MARK
But the... the tissue...

BENJAMIN
With all due respect, there is a
reason that I am head of the
oncological surgery team here.

MARK
Ah. Yes. I just, I read--

BENJAMIN
On the internet, I presume?

MARK
Yes?

BENJAMIN
Trust me when I say that my word is
worth more than Doctor Google's.
Now, if you'll excuse me, this has
been a very long day and I should
like to check up on your brother
and then end it.

MARK
Uh? Yes. Thank you. Can I go in--

Benjamin doesn't wait for him to finish before walking off.

MARK (CONT'D)
Asshole.

4 INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - JAMES' ROOM. DAY. 4

JAMES is asleep. The camera lingers on his face and, surprise, James and Mark are identical twins. James is more fit, his face less weary and more tanned.

Mark lets himself into James' room quietly. He sits in the chair by the bed, watching James' face intently. Mark reaches out and places his hand on James' chest, feeling him breathe.

5 EST. JAMES' CONDO BUILDING. NIGHT. 5

A condominium overlooking the harbour.

6 INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE JAMES' CONDO. NIGHT. 6

Mark walks towards James' condo, juggling grocery bags, a garment bag, and a suitcase. He fumbles with the keys.

A neighbor comes up the hall behind him. From the back of his head, it is clear that it is Benjamin, but Mark is unaware.

(CONTINUED)

MARK
Hey, sorry, could you help me
figure out which--

The neighbor ignores him, lets himself into his own condo and shuts the door.

MARK (CONT'D)
(to himself)
Asshole!

7 INT. JAMES' CONDO. NIGHT. 7

In the entry is a narrow table with a bowl for bric-a-brac. The entry way opens immediately onto an open-plan living room/dining room/kitchen. This is the home of a bachelor - flat-pack furniture, dust, sporting memorabilia, liquor-bottles-as-decor, and leather. There are framed photos on the wall of James' police graduation, his certificate, and a goofy photo of Mark wearing James' dress uniform hat.

Mark lets himself in and drops everything. James' cat HIGHTOWER greets Mark at the door.

MARK
Hello, you menace.

Mark scratches Hightower, then hauls his bag to the spare room. Mark pauses in the door of James' room.

8 INT. JAMES' CONDO - JAMES' BEDROOM. DAY. 8

This is clearly a bachelor's bedroom, too; everything in here is designed to seduce.

The closet is open, and Mark moves to close it. He pauses, and looks up at the safe resting on the top shelf above James' uniforms. He reaches up. Hesitates. He tentatively tugs the handle. Nothing. He tugs harder. It doesn't open. Mark closes the closet door.

9 EST. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE. DAY. 9

Corner of Murray St. and Orde St.

10 INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - HOSPITAL ROOM. DAY. 10

Mark is sitting by James' bedside, fidgety and reading through a stack of medical pamphlets and printouts.

James watches TV, doped up to the gills. It's a cop show. James snorts at some antic on screen then grimaces.

JAMES
Fuck, ow.

MARK
(without looking up)
Don't move it.

JAMES
I didn't move it. I laughed.

(CONTINUED)

MARK
Then don't laugh.

JAMES
Yeah, yeah.

Mark sighs, long suffering, and finally looks up.

MARK
Does it hurt? I'll call a nurse...

Mark moves toward the door, but stops when James says:

JAMES
Fuck's sake, Mark. I'm fine.

MARK
I'm just trying to--

JAMES
I know.

MARK
It's not like you'd ever speak up.

JAMES
I know! Okay? I know! Fuck... owwww.

MARK
See, this is what I'm talking
about! You never let me help.

JAMES
I'm a grown-ass man, and I don't--

MARK
You do! Shut up, you do!

JAMES
Jesus, you shut up. I'm not dying.

MARK
(furious outburst)
Not anymore!

They are both surprised by the force of Mark's anger.

MARK (CONT'D)
Do you have any idea what this
has... what I've been... goddammit.

James, uncomfortable by this display of emotion, resumes watching TV. Mark takes a moment to get himself together.

MARK (CONT'D)
You want a coffee?

JAMES
(snide)
Do your pamphlets say I'm allowed?

(CONTINUED)

MARK
(angry again)
I'm just trying to make sure that
you-- aww, fuck. Who cares what
they say? Do you want a coffee?

JAMES
Yeah.

MARK
Yeah. Fine. Yeah.

Mark leaves the room.

11 INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - A HALLWAY. DAY. 11

Mark leans against the wall, taking a moment to breathe and calm down. Then he heads towards the cafeteria. The double-headed hydrangea is still in the vase by the sofa. He plucks it out and chucks it in the garbage.

12 INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - CAFETERIA. DAY. 12

Benjamin is at the end of the coffee line. Mark hesitates when he realizes it's him, then nuts up and gets in line.

There's a curl at the back of Benjamin's neck. Mark becomes transfixed. When Benjamin pays and turns to go, Mark moves to say hello. Benjamin doesn't notice him, and walks by.

Mark deflates. Then he steps up, and orders two coffees.

13 INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - BEN'S OFFICE. DAY. 13

Benjamin breezes into his office - he is a Very Important Doctor, so his corner office is equally impressive.

A middle-eastern family waits for him already (MOTHER, FATHER, and son, IZAD), fearful and hopeful.

BENJAMIN
Ah... the Khosas?

The father nods.

Benjamin scoops up a folder from his desktop, and turns his back to the family to peruse it. Benjamin's expression betrays his misery. He hates having to do this. He takes a deep breath, puts on his mask of cold disinterest, and turns to the family.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
Mr. Khosa, Mrs. Kohsa... Izad. I'm
glad that you've been referred to
me. You have the best on your side.

Mrs. Khosa makes a desperate noise and holds her son closer.

14 INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - JAMES' ROOM. DAY. 14

James - dressed and ready to go home - sits on the end of the bed. Mark stands to one side of it, Benjamin on the other. There are hydrangeas in the vase on the side table, and Mark can't tear his eyes away from them.

BENJAMIN

I am quite confident that we caught every tumor. That you will be entering a course of chemotherapy is, obviously, nonnegotiable. But at this point it is more of a safety procedure than a necessity.

MARK

There's no question of that.

JAMES

(to Mark)

Dude, you could let me--

MARK

Sorry. Of course.

Benjamin watches the byplay with indifference.

BENJAMIN

You will attend.

JAMES

Yeah, sure.

Benjamin looks to Mark for confirmation, but Mark is too chastised to comment.

BENJAMIN

Good day, Mr. Farthing. And welcome to remission.

JAMES

Yeah, man! Thanks! Feels awesome.

Benjamin clearly does not like being called "man." James sticks out a hand to shake. Benjamin does not take it.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Right, right. Sorry. Thanks doc.

BENJAMIN

You're welcome.

Mark stands now. The brothers leave the room. Benjamin stares after them, his expression unreadable. His eyes drop down on

(CONTINUED)

the Farthing twin's bodies for a moment, then jump back up. He shakes his head, annoyed with himself.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
(to himself; snide)
Ah yes, very professional, doctor.

Benjamin stalks off down the hall in the opposite direction.

15 INT. JAMES' CONDO. DAY. 15

Hightower is waiting at the door when Mark and James enter. Mark's hands are full with James' overnight bag, and a large pizza box. James beelines for the sofa.

MARK
Gimmie a sec and I'll help you--

James lowers himself gingerly down.

MARK (CONT'D)
Or not.

Mark sets the pizza on the coffee table within reach and leaves the room to put away James' bag. Hightower jumps up onto James' lap. James uses his good arm to pet the cat.

JAMES
Hello, you menace.

James opens the box, pulls out a slice, and picks off the pepperoni. He holds it out for Hightower to eat.

16 EST. A LOW-RISE OFFICE BUILDING. DAY. 16

A red-brick office building that has seen better days.

17 INT. MARK'S OFFICE. DAY 17

Mark's office is cramped, but clean. His windows, shaded by cheap vertical blinds, open on an alley way.

Mark rushes in, tie askew and briefcase bulging. His assistant, AZITA, a smartly-dressed woman in her 40s of Indian decent, follows him into the office.

AZITA
I didn't expect you in today.

MARK
I have too much to do.

AZITA
How's James?

MARK

Alive. They thought it was a heart attack but it was...

He stops, not sure he should be sharing.

AZITA

Was?

MARK

Something else. He's sleeping it off now.

AZITA

You should be sleeping it off, too. Have you even been home yet?

Mark has stopped paying attention and is flipping through the folders in front of him.

MARK

Day before last to grab a shower and some clothes. Where's the Okafur file?

AZITA

Dobson can take care of--

MARK

No.

Azita stops fussing and slaps some memos down on his desk.

AZITA

Fine then, if you're determined to run yourself into the ground, here are your missed calls. I'll go fetch the file.

She turns on her heel and marches out smartly.

MARK

Azita! Hey! I'm sorry! I just have to take care of this, okay? Azita? (to himself:) Ah, shit. Get yourself under control, Mark.

He starts reviewing the memos.

18 INT. PRINCESS MARGARET CANCER CENTRE - BEN'S OFFICE. DAY. 18

Benjamin finalizes some paperwork with a flourishing signature, then stands and files it away. He strips off his white coat and puts on his jacket as he opens the door.

(CONTINUED)

Outside his office, his ADMIN ASSISTANT is consoling an ANGRY WOMAN. Benjamin quickly shuts it, and opens it again just a little, and peers out of crack to watch.

ANGRY WOMAN

I have a right to speak to him!

ADMIN ASSISTANT

I'm afraid Dr. Cummings has left for the day.

ANGRY WOMAN

Without checking up on my dad?

ADMIN ASSISTANT

Doctor Yin is on shift now and she'd be happy to discuss anything you need to with your father.

ANGRY WOMAN

Unbelievable.

He stalks away down the hall. Ben waits until he hears a door slam, then straightens himself and sails out the door.

BENJAMIN

Well done, Jo.

ADMIN ASSISTANT

You know it wouldn't kill you to talk to them.

BENJAMIN

It wouldn't change my diagnosis either, so there's no point. Night.

INT. MARK'S OFFICE. DAY.

One week later. Mark is on speaker phone with James. He is distracted, shuffling through papers looking for something.

MARK

No, James, in fact I don't think it's a good idea.

INT. JAMES' CONDO. DAY.

James is seated on his sofa and, contrary to orders, is playing a video game. He's got a Bluetooth headset on.

JAMES

The precinct is playing the 107th and I--

21 INT. MARK'S OFFICE. DAY. 21
 Mark points his pen at the phone, scolding.
 MARK
 Cannot bowl.

22 INT. JAMES' CONDO. DAY. 22
 JAMES
 Jesus, mom, it's been a week.
 He throws down his controller, petulant.

23 INT. MARK'S OFFICE. DAY. 23
 MARK
 Your first chemo is tomorrow.

24 INT. JAMES' CONDO. DAY. 24
 JAMES
 (frustrated)
 Stop micromanaging. I'm a big boy.
 I can lift a--

25 INT. MARK'S OFFICE. DAY. 25
 MARK
 You absolutely cannot. If you
 promised me that you'd just sit and
 watch, I would have no problems
 with it, but I know you. You'll
 have a few beers, get it into your
 head that you're invincible--
 JAMES(O.S)
 I don't think I'm invincible--
 MARK
 (angry)
 Yes, you do. That's half the reason
 we're in this situation in the
 first place! You never go to your
 checkups, you never listened--

JAMES (O.S.) (OVERLAPPING) MARK (CONT'D)
 Jesus, Mark! --to what your own goddamn
 body was trying to tell you--

26 INT. JAMES' CONDO. DAY. 26
 JAMES (OVERLAPPING) MARK(O.S.)
 Hold on--! -- and all you care about is
 your goddamn macho pride and
 what your buddies will think
 of you! Well, guess what,
 we're not nineteen any more--

27 INT. MARK'S OFFICE. DAY.

27

JAMES (O.S.) (OVERLAPPING)
Mark!

MARK
--and if you can't handle
yourself like the gun-
wielding, badge-wearing adult
that you're supposed to be
then you can just damn well
put up with your faggot
brother micromanaging you!

There is stunned silence on the other end of the line. Mark
blows out a groan, regretting what he's said instantly.

JAMES (O.S.)
Hey, fuck you. I haven't called you
a faggot in literally a decade.

MARK
I'm sorry.

JAMES (O.S.)
Fuck your 'sorry'. That was low.

Another long silence. Mark is angry still, but it's ebbing.

28 INT. JAMES' CONDO. DAY.

28

JAMES
Fine. I won't go.

MARK (O.S.)
Thank you.

James sits back, stung and pretending like he's not.

JAMES
(falsely nonchalant)
What would I tell the guys, anyway?

A pause.

MARK (O.S.)
You could tell them the truth.

James doesn't like that idea at all.

MARK (O.S.) (CONT'D)
There's nothing shameful in a man
with bre--

JAMES
(sharp)
No.

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