

FADE IN:

INT. JAMES' FLAT - DAY

TAP. A goldfish bumps up against the inside of the large glass bowl and then swims a lap of it.

The goldfish bowl is on a counter, next to which sits a large plate containing a MOBILE PHONE, some sort of ADAPTER and a single CAR KEY with a card luggage label with illegible text on it.

TAP TAP.

The room is minimalist and immaculate. A designer arm chair sits in front of a flat screen TV; Rokit speakers perched on stands either side. Under the TV, neatly stowed is a computer console with a wireless controller and headphones on top.

In the corner of the room is a STANDING DESK. On the desk is an iMAC, with an open INDESIGN window displaying branding for what appears to be a new product. Behind the INDESIGN window there is an image set as a desktop background: A young man stands, suntanned in ankle deep sea foam with an attractive woman of the same age piggy backing on him. They are both beaming carefree smiles.

In front of the iMAC a GRAPHICS TABLET is placed perfectly adjacent to the KEYBOARD. The only clutter is a packet of screen wipes placed next to the tablet.

The goldfish is up at the glass again.

TAP TAP.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Outside the flat, the SQUEAK of a bicycle chain precedes its appearance as the anorak clad cyclist rolls past a couple of teenagers, LAUGHING and play fighting.

Earnestly observing this scene from behind a rain streaked window, is JAMES (37), clean shaven and well groomed. He is the same man as seen on the desktop background, but 10 years older.

TAP TAP TAP.

INT. JAMES' FLAT - CONTINUOUS

From inside the double glazed windows the outside noises are audible but muted.

James reaches for the window lever and shifts it 45 degrees. He takes a DEEP BREATH and pushes the window. A WHOOSH of air moves his fringe - the sound of it almost deafening. All the street sounds that were previously calm are all of a sudden cacophonous and discombobulating. James keeps hold of the window lever in a vice-like grip and cranes his neck closer to the window frame. His nose breaks the threshold as he leans further. He closes his eyes, INHALING through his nostrils. The sounds dissipate ever so slightly as he EXHALES from his mouth. He opens his eyes.

He closes the window - THUMP. The sounds dissipate instantly.

James pockets the phone from the large plate, grabs the car key from the bowl and reads the note on the luggage label: "DON'T CRASH IT. PROUD OF YOU. HAN xxx".

At the window he points the HONDA KEY down onto the street at a new Honda Jazz and clicks the UNLOCK button. Nothing happens. He cycles between LOCK and UNLOCK to no avail and then spots the hazard lights of an old HONDA FRV further down the road flashing in time with his button presses. He SIGHS.

James realises that his key holding hand is shaking. He checks his left - same. He wears a wedding band on his fourth finger. He clenches his fists tight.

CUT TO:

INT. FLAT BATHROOM - DAY

James takes a prescription box from the wall mounted bathroom cupboard. He pulls out the single layer. All the recesses look empty but one. He turns the packaging over and squeezes out the last pill into his palm. He places it on the sink, next to a glass tumbler of water. He depresses all the plastic recesses within the packaging, just in case - to no avail.

James stares a moment at the empty packet, observing the folded repeat prescription form protruding from the box. He pockets it, then drops the box into the small, empty bin. He picks up the pill but fumbles it between his thumb and forefinger, dropping it into the sink. Mortified, he freezes, watching the pill bounce towards the plug hole. The pill rests precariously on the plug hole. Still frozen he sighs with relief.

He closes the cupboard, revealing his pale, clammy face in the mirrored doors. He uses the glass tumbler on the sink to wash down the tablet.

The goldfish simply looks out of the bowl as a door SLAMS. The goldfish is alone now.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY.

James strides with purpose to the car, refusing to be overwhelmed by the intrusive sounds all around him. Under his left arm he has a dog bed with price tags still on and clutched in his left hand he has a dog toy in its packaging.

CLICK. James yanks the door handle and throws the bed and toy into the passenger seat and then throws himself into the driving seat, SLAMMING the door behind him as though the air is toxic.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

The street sounds disappear with the closing of the door and James exhales, relieved. He takes a moment in his new cocoon.

He places his phone in the dock. At the bottom of the map reads: 2HR 51MIN - ETA 15:32. He pulls a charge cable from his pocket, inserts one end into the phone and holds the USB end to a non-compatible socket, squinting.

JAMES  
(under his breath)  
Shit.

INT. JAMES FLAT - DAY

Next to the goldfish bowl, on the plate sits the adapter.

INT/EXT. CAR - DAY

James looks over his shoulder back to his building. He contemplates a moment, takes the door handle and pulls it releasing the door. Street sounds flood into the car and the deafening roar of a passing bus causes him to SLAM the door back shut.

James adjusts the rear view mirror so he can see himself. He raises his eyebrows and puffs out his cheeks. Then he adjusts the mirror to a serviceable angle.

CLUNK. He inserts the key into the ignition.

INT/EXT. CAR - MOVING - DAY

James is sitting close the steering wheel which he has in a white knuckled, ten to two death grip. He carefully navigates narrow country lanes.

The rearview shows a car following a little too close. He checks his wing mirror; it's so close. His BREATHING quickens. A darting glance over his shoulder and then a lay-by comes into view up ahead.

He indicates - TICK TICK TICK - and pulls into the lay-by, the following car nonchalantly passing, an elderly man at the wheel.

James collects himself.

CUT TO:

EXT/INT. CAR - MOVING - DAY - LATER

James pulls the car into a small gravel driveway just off the road

EXT/INT. CAR - COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

James stares at the relatively large cottage in front of him. It's a little run down and seemingly isolated. He shuts the maps down and pulls the phone from its cradle. 20% battery warning shows. He activates low power mode and attempts to call Han back. It doesn't connect. No signal. He holds his phone up in front of him up and realises that POPPY (40s) is watching him from a downstairs window. He flashes his friendliest smile and waves. She remains still without acknowledging him. He stops waving but his hand remains elevated for a few seconds then he drops it. He puts his phone in his pocket.

James wipes the palms of his hands on his trousers, grabs the door handle, takes a deep breath and pulls - CLUNK.

EXT. COTTAGE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

James is at the front door, waiting nervously. Even the quiet countryside is overwhelmingly loud to James.

He looks around him. The weeds have taken over. He turns back to the door. The black paint is dull, cracked and peeling.

He becomes impatient and raises his closed hand to knock. He notices a knocker in the style of a bulldog. He uses it.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

James pulls his phone out to check the time. 15:46.

He quickly pockets his phone when he hears the CLINK, RATTLE and SCRAPE of the inside door chain being removed. The door opens slowly but not all the way.

Poppy remains partially obscured by the semi-opened door. She looks awkward and rigid in a neck brace.

JAMES  
Hi, Poppy?

POPPY  
(confused)  
Yes?

JAMES  
It's James.

POPPY  
James?

JAMES  
We spoke on the phone yesterday.

POPPY  
Oh.

Poppy takes a moment then opens the door trepidatiously. She is wearing a knee length pleated white skirt, white blouse with a lace collar and a baby blue cardigan. She wears her blonde hair in a bob with a short, blunt fringe. The most striking aspect of her ensemble though is the neck brace.

POPPY (CONT'D)  
You'd better come in.

JAMES  
Thank you.

James passes Poppy, walks a few more steps and turns to her for direction. She takes one last look outside, awkwardly scanning the drive with her immobile head before closing the door. She SLIDES the safety lock back into place and looks through the peephole.

Poppy turns to James who is unsuccessfully attempting to mask his curiosity. She simply smiles at him. He smiles a reassuring smile back.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I don't suppose you have a charger  
for -

POPPY

(interrupting)  
Certainly.

James retrieves his iPhone from his pocket, handing it to Poppy.

JAMES

It's a lightening...

POPPY

(interrupting)  
Would you like a drink?

Poppy's received pronunciation is mellifluous.

JAMES

Just some water please.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The room is tidy. The furniture is mostly glossy, varnished wood. The surfaces are mostly uncluttered, with the exception of a large mahogany table by the window on top of which there are crocheting materials and face paints and brushes on the table and a pile of neatly folded kids clothes.

POPPY (O.S.)

Please make yourself comfortable  
and I'll bring it through.

James enters the room and walks to the window. He looks out for a moment then inspects the crocheted blanket on the table. It is embroidered with the name 'Jacques'.

Above a fire hearth, a mantle displays a framed photograph of a twenty something Poppy, posing next to a beautiful Cocker Spaniel, both of them standing on a First Place Podium, Poppy holding a huge trophy cup, smiling a huge smile. Next to the framed photograph is a smaller, silver replica of the trophy.

Other framed photographs show Poppy around the same time period, with the same Cocker Spaniel, in various other Dog Shows. James picks up a framed photograph of young Poppy hugging her prized Cocker Spaniel.

Just then Poppy appears behind James, holding a tall glass of milk. James is unaware of her presence.

POPPY (CONT'D)

Cocky.

James is startled, nearly dropping the frame. Poppy doesn't register his fright. The memory of Cocky evokes a smile.

POPPY (CONT'D)

He was my favourite. Such a good dog. The best in show.

Poppy is thoughtful, holding a glass of milk in each hand.

POPPY (CONT'D)

It's all in the training you know?

James nods.

The smile drains from Poppy's face.

POPPY (CONT'D)

Please, sit.

James steps over to a comfortable looking armchair. It is positioned opposite an ornate dining room chair and separated by a coffee table with a single coaster on it - a dog's portrait on it. He slowly lowers himself into the dining room chair, sitting upright.

POPPY (CONT'D)

Take the armchair.

JAMES

I'm fine here.

POPPY

But I insist.

James obediently switches seats.

POPPY (CONT'D)

Good boy.

James finds the praise jarring.

Poppy places a James' glass of milk on the coaster, keeping hold of her glass as she sits down, carefully, keeping her back straight.

James looks at the white contents of the glass. He looks at Poppy and smiles politely. He hesitates.

POPPY (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

JAMES

I don't really drink milk.

Poppy reassures him with a smile.

POPPY

Of course you do.

James flashes an embarrassed smile. Poppy doesn't break eye contact and her smile remains firmly in place. James' eyes wander about the room. His smile fades as he realises Poppy is still watching him with anticipation.

JAMES

Actually, milk's good.

Poppy CLAPS her hands together.

POPPY

(gleeful)

Wonderful.

James picks up his glass and notices Poppy's glass being raised in his direction. He pauses and extends his own. CLINK. Poppy still maintains intense eye contact during their non-verbal toast. James downs half the glass and pitifully attempts to hide a grimace with a grateful smile. He places the glass back on the coaster.

He eyes the table of crafts.

JAMES

You have children?

POPPY

(defensively)

No.

JAMES

Oh, I just thought...

POPPY

I'm not a people person.

(beat)

Do I seem to you like a people person?

(beat)

I'm not.

James attempts to avert an awkward silence with a long sip of his milk, finishing the contents. Poppy looks pleased as she studies James. His discomfort is palpable. He avoids eye contact, once again, by looking around the room, anxiously rotating the wedding band on his finger.



The ongoing silence is unbearable.

JAMES  
Where's Prudence?

POPPY  
Prudence?

Poppy looks confused.

JAMES  
The dog?

Poppy breaks eye contact, concentrating, as though deciphering code. She looks back to James.

POPPY  
Dog?

JAMES  
Yes. From your advert. The poodle.

Making certain she understand James she reaffirms her understanding of the situation:

POPPY  
You - want - a poodle.

JAMES  
(relieved)  
Yes.

POPPY  
I'm not surprised. They are very obedient. It's all in the training.

Poppy becomes animated. She leans in.

POPPY (CONT'D)  
I want a little French Bulldog.

James' doesn't respond.

Poppy CLAPS her hands together, excited.

POPPY (CONT'D)  
Jacques! That's what I would name him! Isn't it just... magnifique!

James does't share the excitement. Instead he furrows his brow.

JAMES  
Is there a poodle here or not?

POPPY  
I don't sell dogs.

JAMES  
I can show you the...

James pats his trouser pocket, quickly remembering he handed his phone over.

POPPY  
You must be mistaken.

JAMES  
I don't...  
(beat)  
Never mind. Look, I'd better go.

James leans forward, hands braced on his knees, about to stand.

A muffled WHINE emanates from another room. James turns his head. He looks at Poppy for confirmation of his sanity. She sips her milk, maintaining eye contact with him but giving nothing away.

The house is deathly quiet once again. James listens, poised.

A BARK breaks the silence.

JAMES (CONT'D)  
Is that...?

Poppy's eyes light up.

POPPY  
(interrupting)  
She's awake.

James encourages an explanation by raising his eyebrows at Poppy.

POPPY (CONT'D)  
What were we talking about?

JAMES  
How you don't sell dogs.

POPPY  
Oh. Yes.

James gives Poppy a knowing look.

JAMES

If you've had second thoughts about selling her, I understand - you don't know me. But if you change your mind I can promise you that I will treat her like a princess.

Poppy looks forlorn.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Maybe you'd like to visit her every once in a while?

POPPY

Oh, no.

Poppy looks out the window.

POPPY (CONT'D)

It's not safe out there.

EXT. COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Far away, the diminutive figure of Poppy looks out of the window, surveying the serene expanse.

INT. COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

James nods sympathetically at Poppy. She is still looking out the window and doesn't catch it.

JAMES

I don't like leaving home either.

Poppy turns back to James, silently urging him to continue.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Sounds like the first line of a joke doesn't it? Two agoraphobics and a dog that needs walking?

Poppy leans forward in her chair, smiling, eyes flashing.

POPPY

(ecstatic)

Isn't it wonderful!

James takes a moment to respond.

JAMES

Do you have family around?

Poppy's smile suddenly fades.

The framed photographs in the room conspicuously lack anyone other than Poppy and Cocky.

BARK.

On hearing Prudence, Poppy regains her cheerful demeanour.

POPPY

You must meet Prudence. Will you  
meet her won't you?

James stalls a moment.

JAMES

Actually, I should get going. Do  
you mind grabbing my phone please?

POPPY

(despondent)  
Oh, I see. Wait here then.

James nods. Poppy stands slowly, stiffly and limps out the room.

On a shelf nearby James notices an urn next to an oil painting of the prolifically photographed Cocky.

James blinks hard and rubs his eyes as though fighting sleep.

The painted dog begins to move its mouth along with the unmistakable canine WHINING from next door.

James looks down at his hands. There are steady but swimming in and out of focus. The PERSIAN RUG under his feet looks as though it is moving. James looks up. The whole room sways as though he's at sea.

JAMES

Poppy!  
(beat)  
Poppy, I need my phone!

BARK.

James stands unsteadily. He staggers to the doorway and out into the hallway.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The next door he comes across is the source of the barking.

He waits a moment outside the door. He leans in and puts his ear up against it.

WHINE. The dog is crying.

JAMES

Poppy, are you in here?

James takes hold of the door knob, blinks hard but then changes his mind. He turns away from the door and zig-zags his way down the expanding and contracting hallway for the front door. Arriving at the door, he fumbles with the chain, seeing it double before his eyes. With a CLINK, RATTLE and SCRAPE, the chain is released but the door does not open.

Poppy's ethereal voice beckons James from afar.

POPPY (O.S.)

James?

James continues to work on the locked door.

POPPY (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Your phone.

James gives up on the door, turns and staggers back up the hallway until he is outside the closed door again. He hears the dog WHINE from within.

JAMES

(slurring)

Poppy?

He takes two attempts to grab the door handle and then turns it.

CLICK.

He pushes the door. It SQUEAKS open, James keeps hold of the door knob for balance.

INT. LOCKED ROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

In the corner of the room, looking up at him with big, sad puppy dog eyes is PRUDENCE (11), a little girl with her face painted like a dog, as though she's just returned from a school fete. The make-up is colourful and she is painted with a hang-dog expression. She sits in a rigid plastic dog basket, lined with blankets. Around her neck is a wide, leather collar, secured with a padlock. A long chain runs from the collar to a metal plate mounted on the wall.

Prudence WHINES.

JAMES  
 (slurring)  
 What the fu...

James looks back over his shoulder. Poppy is still nowhere to be seen. James sways on the spot then walks as though through treacle, past an empty dog bed and approaches Prudence in her basket.

He slowly extends his hand out to her.

JAMES (CONT'D)  
 It's okay.

His hand slowly inches closer and closer to her.

PRUDENCE  
 WOOF!

James staggers backwards, caught off guard. He falls onto his backside.

Poppy appears behind James, looming above him.

POPPY  
 (to James)  
 This is Pru.  
 (to Prudence)  
 Pru, this is Jacques; the one I  
 told you about.

James looks up at Poppy as she walks around and stands between him and Prudence. James can't see the large fabric scissors Poppy has clutched in her hand, behind her back.

JAMES  
 (slurring)  
 I'm James.

POPPY  
 Shush. Doggies don't talk? Do they  
 Pru?

Prudence BARKS. Poppy smiles and looks at James as if to say, "See?"

POPPY (CONT'D)  
 And to think they said I'd never  
 train again.  
 (to Prudence)  
 We showed them, didn't we.

James observes again that Prudence's face is painted with a purposefully sad look. Poppy feigns a mournful expression whilst looking at Prudence.

Poppy sighs.

POPPY (CONT'D)  
 My Pru always looks so sad.  
 (to Prudence)  
 You miss your mummy don't you?

Prudence WHINES.

Poppy puts a hand out and strokes Prudence's head and then pats it, turning to James.

POPPY (CONT'D)  
 (hushed to James)  
 Putting an animal down is the  
 hardest thing.

James blinks slowly, barely clinging to consciousness.

JAMES  
 What have you done?

Poppy reveals and points the scissors at James.

POPPY  
 (interrupting)  
 NO!!!

The volatile outburst stops James in his tracks. He says nothing else.

POPPY (CONT'D)  
 I can see I'm going to need to do  
 some training here. I do hope we  
 won't have to do the old snip snip.

Poppy raises her eyebrows at James. He blinks slowly once more. Poppy's earnest expression gives way to a smile. With her free hand she pats him on the head.

POPPY (CONT'D)  
 Good dog.

James' eyes glaze over before closing and he falls face first onto the varnished floorboards with a THUD.

CUT TO:

Clouds move slowly across the sky, gaining momentum into a  
TIMELAPSE of day/night cycles.

CUT TO:

INT. JAMES' FLAT - DAY

KNOCK KNOCK.

The room is as James left it; neat and tidy.

The goldfish swims a lap.

CONCERNED RELATIVE (O.S.)

Hello?

(beat)

James?

KNOCK KNOCK.

CONCERNED RELATIVE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

James? Are you home?

The goldfish maintains its obliviousness.

KNOCK KNOCK.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. LOCKED ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Two half eaten bowls of dog food sit in front of empty dog  
beds. In each bed there is a crocheted blanket; one  
personalised with PRU, the other with JACQUES. Long chains  
fall from the wall where they are secured behind the beds and  
lead somewhere out of view.

KNOCK KNOCK. Somebody is at the front door.

EXT. LOCKED ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Prudence and James are up against the window pane. The latter  
has his face painted as a overtly happy dog. Prudence still  
looks as sad as ever. They wear collars and chains.

KNOCK KNOCK.

PRUDENCE

Bark.



James takes his cue.

JAMES

Woof.

FADE TO BLACK.

**THE END**

ROLL CREDITS.

CUT TO:

EXT. COTTAGE - DAY - POST CREDITS SCENE

SYD (30s) is knocking at the cottage door. KAI (8) stands next to him, though a little behind. They wait.

Syd KNOCKS one more time.

CLINK, RATTLE, SCRAPE. The door opens slowly. Poppy is neatly dressed, standing rigidly upright in her neck brace.

POPPY

Hello?

SYD

Hi, Poppy? I'm Syd. This is Kai.

POPPY

Oh.

(beat)

You'd better come in.

The front door closes.

CUT TO BLACK.

CLINK, RATTLE, SCRAPE.