

"The Mess"

by
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"The Mess"

FADE IN:

1 INT. BIXLER HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT 1

DARK. Images of the family: photos caught in moonlight. *
LIGHT FROM PORCH WINDOWS. INDIE ROCK MUSIC, BUILDING. *

TRACK ACROSS ROOM with figure on front porch. WE STOP ON *

THE FRONT DOOR. Light through opaque glass. A shadow sweeps across the glass. The DEADBOLT KNOB turns. The door pushes open slowly. A hand finds the wall switch. LIGHT fills the somewhat messy room. *

JIM BIXLER, 42, straight-arrow, suit, tie, steps inside, *
tucks his keys away. He glances over at A WHITE GARBAGE BAG *
leaning in the kitchen doorway.

The bag's ribbon tie isn't quite cinched, and trash has *
spilled out onto the Mexican tiles. *

A door SLAMS CLOSED OS.

JIM
(calls out)
Ash? Who was supposed to take the
trash out tonight?

He sighs, spots the dishes in the sink, goes for the bag, *
repacks and seals it with a perfect reef knot, and heads back *
out the door, leaving it ajar. WE STAY THERE, HEAR TWO BAGS *
being deposited.

FROM OVERHEAD: Jim re-enters, straightens pillows, chairs, *
etc.. He trips over something, a pair of women's shoes, *
tucks them under an arm. *

2 INT. BIXLER HOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS 2

Same MUSIC emanates from Ash's room. Not loud. Just *
annoying. Jim raps on the door. A "KEEP OUT" SIGN hangs. *

JIM
Can you turn it down, Ash?
(nothing)
Ash? Please?

A grunting response finally comes back, muffled by the door *
and music. He can't make it out. Not untypical. *

He turns, walks the short hallway to the master bedroom. *

3 INT. BIXLER HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS 3

Jim flips on the light switch and freezes where he stands. He looks around. Women's clothing strewn across the bed, haphazardly, as though someone were in a hurry and couldn't make up her mind.

The dresser. Drawers pulled open, hose and underwear hanging out. Cases on top open, costume jewelry scattered about.

The closet. Jim looks inside. A mess. The shoes drop from his arm. They fall into a pile of mismatched shoes. *

Something's building inside Jim. He closes the bedroom door behind him. Ash's MUSIC MUTES. A CRUNCH underfoot. Jim bends to pick up a RED LIPSTICK. *

JIM

(sotto)

Jesus, Pam. C'mon.

(draws a long breath)

C'MON!!

CLOSET: He grabs at her dresses and yanks them off their hangers. He bundles them, throws them, lets out a ungodly, primal, guttural utterance that shocks even him. *

He turns slowly, ROARS in anger and makes for the bed, swoops up the womenswear, spins with it in his arms, then opens his arms and lets it all go, CLOTHING FLYING SLO-MO in a whirlwind. *

The force throws him back onto the bed; clothes rain down all around him.

The dresser. Jim BELLOWS in anguish, rises like a demon from a netherworld, and makes for the drawers, pulling them out, one by one, sending their contents flying.

He uses an arm to make a clean sweep over the top of the dresser. Boxes, bottles, brushes, are all now airborne.

Jim is a crazy man, spewing nonsensical expletives, whirling in a fit, his body contorting. This room, this mess, spins around him, and Jim goes down in a heap. JIM'S FIST, too tired to pound on the carpeted floor, merely raises and lowers soundlessly and repeatedly.

He rolls over and STARES UP. His own rage has beaten him up and sucked out his lifeforce, drained his battery. He extends an arm and makes a vain attempt to clutch the bedspread, fails. He will try again... soon.

PRE-LAP The sound of WATER RUNNING.

4 INT. BIXLER HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT 4

SINK FAUCET RUNS WATER. JIM'S HANDS MOVE UNDER THE WATER. *
SLO MO. He scrubs a dish. *

DISSOLVE TO:

Jim wipes down the black stove top. *

DISSOLVE TO:

Jim sets a mop and pail down. FROM OVERHEAD, he mops the *
tile floor. He stands by the kitchen exit, mop in hand. He *
carries the bucket and mop to the utility room. WE STAY *
until he returns. TRACK WITH HIM as he heads for the hall. *

5 INT. BIXLER HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT 5

Jim at Ash's door. He tips his head against the door and *
utters a heartless, barely audible... *

JIM
Clean your room.

HE TURNS TO US, walks into the master bedroom. *

6 INT. BIXLER HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT 6

Jim, on the landing, stares. HIS POV: a disaster area. *

SERIES OF TIGHT SHOTS: *

1. Jim scoops up a single gold hoop earring and places it *
just so in the top drawer of a small, black felt-lined box. *

2. Jim making the Queen-sized bed, tucking in a final corner, *
and turning down the spread, so it forms a crisp triangle. *

3. Jim in the closet, as he hangs clothing on hangers. *

4. Jim, still in the closet, on his hands and knees, coupling *
 each of his wife's shoes with its partner and aiming the *
 pairs toe-out toward him. Perfect.

DISSOLVE TO:

Jim, in PJ bottoms, slippers, and a T, sits in a side chair *
 in the corner of his clean bedroom, waits. He switches off *
 the light beside him. The room falls dark, the only light
 from outside. His breathing is uneven and shallow.

A burst of light makes a broad sweep across the room.

A single SLAM of a car door in the distance. Jim waits.

The sound of FOOTSTEPS outside, brisk, well-paced, CLICKING *
 on tile, and a DOOR OPENING and CLOSING.

It is clear there is now someone else in the house.

PAM (O.S.)
 Hello! Jim, Ash!

WE HEAR A RAP ON ASH'S DOOR. *

PAM (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Ash, are you still up?
 (a beat)
 Honey? Turn the music off soon, okay?

FOOTFALL, closer. The light FLASHES ON. PAM BIXLER, 40, *
 tall, brown hair, blue eyes, barely in the room, kicks off *
 her heels. One flies through the dust ruffle, under the bed.

Jim's eyes fix on the place where it went in. She spots him.

PAM (CONT'D)
 Jim?

JIM
 Yes, Pam.

PAM
 Are you okay?

Jim's head twitches.

PAM (CONT'D)
 Room looks nice. Thanks for
 straightening up. I was running late
 and blasted out of here in a hurry.

JIM
 I assumed.

PAM

You look funny.

She pulls off her earrings, drops them on the dresser, tosses her purse onto the bed. Jim's head cranks, eyes aimed directly in the spot where THE PURSE lands.

Jim moves to the bed, lifts the purse off, walks past Pam toward the closet, and hangs the purse out of sight. He then * collects the earrings, drops them in the jewelry box, and sits back down.

Pam can't help but smile, tries to hide it.

JIM

Do you think this is a joke?

PAM

I was kind of hoping.

JIM

It isn't.

PAM

(really eyes him)
I've never seen you like this before.

JIM

Though it's not entirely unexpected,
is it?

PAM

What?

JIM

How long have we been together?

Pam pulls off her jacket, is about to sit on the bed.

JIM (CONT'D)

DO NOT SIT ON THE BED!

Pam steps back from the bed.

JIM (CONT'D)

Beds are for sleeping on, not sitting on. Not eating baked barbecue chips on, not discarding rejected clothes on, not playing games on, not scrapbooking on, not painting toenails on. Sleeping. Just sleeping.

PAM

That's the rule?

JIM

Yes.

PAM

Just sleeping? Nothing else.

JIM

(clears his throat)
And anything that might arise from
sleeping or one's attempt to sleep.

PAM

(shuts the bedroom
door muting music)
You mean screwing?

*

JIM

That is what I meant. Yes.

A stifled laugh. (ALONG WITH PAM'S, behind her hand)

*

JIM (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. Did you just laugh at me?

PAM

No. I don't think so.

JIM

You're not sure?

PAM

Not a hundred per cent. No.
(re her jacket)
Anyplace special you want this?

Jim rises, snags the jacket from her hand, heads up onto the
landing, closet light on, disappears into closet, light off.
He returns to his post, sits.

*

*

*

PAM (CONT'D)

If I wanted to sit right now, where
would I do that?

Jim thinks a beat. He rises, gestures toward his chair.

*

PAM (CONT'D)

That's okay. I'll stand.

JIM

(sits back down)
Have you had drinks tonight?

PAM

Have I had drinks?

JIM
That was the question.

PAM
Two glasses of wine. Is that okay?

JIM
How long ago?

PAM
What?

JIM
What time did you and "the girls"
finish up? Huh?

PAM
An hour or so ago. I think.

JIM
So, right now, would it be fair to say
that you feel like you have all your
faculties about you?

PAM
Would it be fair to -- Okay, what the
hell's going on with you? I'm not
some little wet-behind-the ears **entry**
level salesman you can push around and
intimidate. Cut to the chase, Jim. *

JIM
Oh. Okay. Do you love me? *

PAM
I have to answer that right now?

JIM
Yes, you do.

Using both arms behind her, Pam hikes herself up, so she's
now sitting on the dresser. Jim's eyes toss daggers at her.

PAM
Can't sit on the bed. Don't want you
to give up the only other approved
seating location, so, there you go.

JIM
So, you would acknowledge, at least,
that you now have the room to sit on
top of your dresser.

PAM

O-kay. I will acknowledge that. I said I was sorry I left a few things laying around. I told you I was --

*

JIM

A few things?! A few things?!

PAM

Look, I said I was sorry. Do we have to turn this into another lecture series on the importance of being perfect?

JIM

Yes. As a matter of fact, we do. You need help, Pam.

PAM

I need help?! I need --

JIM

A few articles of clothing or the occasional piece of jewelry or footwear strewn about is one thing. This room was a catastrophe.

PAM

You're exaggerating.

JIM

Am I? The shoes in the living room. The trash tipped over in the kitchen. **Not to mention the bag outside that never made it into the can.** And your closet. My god. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?

*

*

PAM

You know, I'm about one word short of smacking the living shit out of you.

*

*

JIM

You never answered my question.

PAM

Which was?

JIM

Do you love me?

Pam, fit to spit, wipes her mouth with the back of her hand.

JIM (CONT'D)

It's a simple question.

PAM
 No. No, it isn't. Not right now.
 (hops down)
 I'm sitting on the bed!

She goes for it. Jim leaps.

JIM
 No, you're not!

There's a scramble, bodies rolling, legs kicking, arms flailing. In the end, Pam's safely on her haunches, hands gripping the bedspread. Jim teeters near the edge. Pam extends her leg toward him, shoves. Jim thumps to the floor.

PAM
 You made me do that!

JIM
 Get off there.

PAM
 I will not!

Jim stands up, hovers over her, rage in his eyes.

PAM (CONT'D)
 (teary, she reclines)
 This is so sad.

JIM
 Now you can stay there.

PAM
 Thank you.

Jim walks back to his chair, sits.

JIM
 I do not **question** your fidelity or
 begrudge you your random night out
 with the girls. I wonder, **however**,
 why someone who purports to love
 another would **deem** it necessary to
 provoke in him a reaction so excessive
 that it could, in fact, imperil him.

*
 *
 *

PAM
 When I get out of bed, I'll **find** a
 dictionary and answer you.

*

Pam pushes a pillow against her face.

JIM

I'll simplify: are you trying to give me a goddamned heart attack?!

That stifled laugh again. (Not Pam's this time) *

JIM (CONT'D)

That's funny, too, huh?

PAM

No. It's not funny, and I'm not trying to give you a heart attack. I'm sorry I'm messy. But you knew that about me going in. You knew that, Jim. Remember?

JIM

Yes. I thought I could change you.

PAM

People don't change. Not about things like that. They change their hair color, their weight *if possible*, religious *affiliation when necessary*, but some things are... just part of who you are. *

JIM

Those parts can be changed, if a person really wants to.

PAM

No. I disagree. What if I said to you, if you don't change, I'm leaving.

JIM

Are you saying that?

PAM

No... I don't think I am. *

They both sit there a long moment.

PAM (CONT'D)

Did you and Ash have dinner?

JIM

I got home late. She shot right into her hole without so much as that usual glare of disdain and repulsion. Wonder what her room looks like.

PAM

She's a good kid. A messy room should be the least of our worries with her.

JIM
You don't catch it early... Never
mind.

PAM
Look, let's bury it for tonight. You
want me to fix you something?

Jim shakes his head slowly.

PAM (CONT'D)
What do you want?

JIM
I want you to make an effort. That's
all.

PAM
Can we both make an effort?

JIM
Me?

PAM
Yes, you. Things can't be perfect all
the time. They don't need to be. We
could live some flawless life 'til
we're eighty, then... I don't know, a
huge chunk of piss ice could drop from
a jet flying over and cave the roof in
on us. Then we lived all those years
being perfect for what? Huh?

JIM
Am I supposed to answer that?

PAM
Yes, please.

JIM
We'd both know that up to the final
moment when the ice crushed us that we
tried to do it right.

PAM
Do what right?

JIM
(gestures around him)
This. Life. Home. Work. Tying off
a trash bag. Hanging up your clothes.
Pairing your shoes. Being parents.
All the little details.

PAM
You didn't just call being a parent a
detail. Did you?

JIM
You know what I'm saying.

PAM
Look, you've got to let some things
go. Just let them go. It's okay.
(a beat, then sotto)
Pairing my shoes?

JIM
But, what do we lose if we give up
trying? That's what scares me.

PAM
You know what scares me? You talking
about heart attacks. C'mon, sit with
me. Get over here.

Jim gets up, steps closer to the bed.

PAM (CONT'D)
It won't hurt. I promise.

JIM
(mutters)
Bed's for sleeping.

PAM
I know. I know.

Jim finally sits, reluctantly lies back.

PAM (CONT'D)
(strokes his hair)
I'm sorry I made you almost have a
heart attack.

JIM
Had a shit day at work.

PAM
And I made it worse. But I still say
it wasn't that bad.

JIM
You're wrong.

PAM
Right.
(climbs out of bed)
(MORE)

PAM (CONT'D)
I'm gonna see what Ash is up to, then
I'm going to bed. Light on or off?

JIM
Off. You can't sleep in the light.

PAM
Some people can.

The light flicks off. Jim lies there. In his mind, he revisits it all. Clothes strewn about, shoes, closet, dresser. He also revisits his rage, and the nasty animal lurking inside him that just had to come out. A SCREAM OS.

PAM (O.S.) (CONT'D)
JIM!! HURRY!

Jim bolts out of bed, stumbling in darkness, bellowing in pain as he **trips on the landing step-up.** *

JIM
Shit!

He finally finds the door, **and is out.** *

7 INT. BIXLER HOUSE - ASH'S ROOM - NIGHT

7

MUSIC CONTINUES, **frantic.** Jim runs in. Pam **stand beside ASH BIXLER, 17, whose legs are spread and tied to the end of the bed. She's wrapped and bound in a garbage bag, arms inside the bag, her white bra protruding from holes torn at the chest. She's gagged with packaging tape. Lipstick tears have been painted on her cheeks. She's barefoot. RED KISS MARKS on her feet.** *

Pam's hands are shaking as she **pulls a blanket off the bed to cover Ash and** tries to catch an end to begin unravelling her daughter's face. Ash is **GRUNTING, thrashing. Her JEANS on the floor.** *

PAM
Scissors. Find me some goddam
scissors!

Jim looks around. *

WE TURN BACK TO THE DOORWAY, PUSH THROUGH IT AND DOWN THE HALLWAY RAPIDLY INTO

8 INT. BIXLER HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

8

WE MOVE ACROSS THE ROOM to the now-rumpled bed and down, where A MAN'S TATTOOED ARM pushes out through the dust ruffle, the hand grasping Pam's discarded high heel shoe.

9 INT. BIXLER HOUSE - ASH'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

9

Pam and Jim are both working on Ash now. Jim uses a pair of scissors to carefully cut the tape away. Pam rips the last layer of tape away from Ash's mouth.

ASH

Owww! Damn! What took you so long?!

PAM

What happened? How long have you been like this?

ASH

Hours! Dammit!
(kicks at her father)
Why didn't you help me?!

JIM

I'm so sorry, baby.

Jim tries to hug her, but she boots him away from her.

ASH

Don't touch me! I don't wanna be touched. Hear me?!

(a moment, then Ash's
nightmare scenario)
WHERE IS HE? IS HE STILL IN HERE?!

*
*
*

PAM

Who, honey? Who was it?

Jim turns toward the door. A MAN DARTS BY in a flash. Jim leaps for the door, and is off after him.

10 INT. BIXLER HOUSE - HALLWAY/LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

10

FROM OVERHEAD: The Man, old jeans, tattered army jacket, no shirt, barefoot, scrambles through the house.

*
*

JIM

Stop!

The Man, still hard to make out in the darkness, has the high heel shoe to his nose. He sniffs, laughs maniacally, flings the shoe. Hits Jim. The Man, gimp, bursts out the door.

*

JIM (CONT'D)

SON OF A BITCH BASTARD!

*
*

Jim heads for the door. Pam flips on the flood lights.

*

PAM
No, Jim! Let him go!

*
*

She chases Jim to the front door.

*

11 EXT. BIXLER HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

11

Jim looks back at her. She extends her hand.

*

PAM
(whispers)
Please. Let it go.

*
*
*

TIGHT ON JIM, as he makes his decision.

*

She takes his hand, pulls him inside. The door closes.

*

WE TRACK ACROSS PORCH to find Pam, Ash and Jim through the window, huddled safely inside. Jim looks out toward us.

*
*

PAM (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Let it go.

*
*

LOOP BACK TO: TIGHT ON JIM, as he makes his decision. He steps back toward her, pulls the door closed. *

JIM

Lock it! *

(calls after the Man) *

YOU CAN'T DO THAT! YOU CAN'T! YOU HEAR ME?! IT'S WRONG! *

He hustles down the porch steps. *

The Man makes for the darkness and is gone. A beat. He steps back into light. His LIPS ARE RED. *

THE MAN

You know what?

Jim stops, there on the driveway. *

The Man reaches inside his jacket, pulls out a small revolver, quickly fires one round back at Jim, missing first, *

The second shot finds Jim's thigh, and as Jim bends for the pain, he looks up at the man in shock, just as a second round explodes in his skull. Jim drops. Pam SCREAMS OS! *

The Man takes two steps toward Jim, gestures with the pistol.

THE MAN (CONT'D)

I GUESS I CAN, HUH?! YOU WHINY BITCH!

He jams his revolver back inside his jacket, runs off. *

WE'RE OVER JIM: His body curled on the driveway, blood pouring from his femoral artery and his shattered skull.

A BLUE LIGHT FLASHING SIGNALS PASSAGE OF TIME

A DETECTIVE leans over Jim's body. The blood flow has stopped and pooled into a brownish coagulant. *

In the bg, WE HEAR PAM SOBBING. She's clutching Ash, who's wrapped in her blanket. They huddle near their open front door, a FEMALE COP consoling them. *

The Detective looks over at them, then back down to Jim.

DETECTIVE

Jesus, what a mess.

JIM'S EYES STILL OPEN. The Detective confers with a UNIFORMED COP. *

WE CRANE up from Jim and the Cops, revealing the full crime scene, the grieving family and the home.

*
*

FADE OUT.