

EARNING WINGS

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. - A PATHWAY ACROSS A BRIDGE - NIGHT

A cold November night, about 11 o'clock. A quiet road with pathway and bridge awnings on either side. A car goes past but it is one of few that does here at this time of night.

In near distance a figure is walking, slightly hunched into his overcoat, and smoke visible- not clear from this distance whether it is from a cigarette or the cold.

A YOUNG MAN is standing on the wrong side of the bridge awning. He glances towards the WALKING MAN nervously, and then back ahead of him, looking down over the bridge.

The WALKING MAN is approaching closer now: he's wearing ear buds, and is indeed smoking a cigarette, which he has pretty much finished, and flicks to one side, into the road. He slows his pace, considering the YOUNG MAN.

YOUNG MAN

Nothing for you to see here. Keep walking.

WALKING MAN has stopped now, removes buds from his ears.

WALKING MAN

What was that?

YOUNG MAN

I said there's nothing for you to see. Just keep on going.

WALKING MAN steps a little closer to the YOUNG MAN, not close enough to touch, probably about five feet away, but close enough that we can now see him more clearly under the nearby streetlight which casts a weak spotlight on the two of them.

*He's mid forties. Craggy features but not unattractive.
Probably around six foot.*

WALKING MAN

You okay?

YOUNG MAN laughs humourlessly, a short, sharp bark.

YOUNG MAN

Yeah, I'm great. That's why I'm
about to jump off a bridge.
Seriously- no offence but would ou
please fuck off.

WALKING MAN holds up his hands to show he's got no intention of coming closer, but in a way that also shows he doesn't appear to have any intention of 'fucking off'. He's now about three feet from the YOUNG MAN, but doesn't seem interested in coming any closer, but seems more interested in looking over the bridge.

CUT TO:

A view of what is below the bridge. About twenty feet down there are train tracks. There is also graffiti scrawled everywhere, and rubbish strewn around the tracks.

BACK TO:

WALKING MAN

I'm guessing you're not here to add
to the graffiti. Things that bad?

The YOUNG MAN looks at him, and we get a first good look at him. He's in well dressed-pressed jeans, a Barbour jacket, and good haircut. Probably in his late twenties/ early thirties - a little difficult to tell because his babyish face looks ancient through tiredness.

YOUNG MAN
(Listlessly)
 Worse.

The WALKING MAN nods, takes a cigarette packet out of his inner pocket and lights one. The YOUNG MAN's eyes flicker to the man, the packet, and then the cigarette.

WALKING MAN
 Want one?

YOUNG MAN
(shaking head, although clearly wanting to nod)
 I quit.

WALKING MAN
 Yeah, these things will kill you -
 wouldn't want that.

YOUNG MAN
 I guess you're right.
(starts to reach towards the offered pack, and then pauses)
 Are you going to try to be a hero if I reach out for one of those?

WALKING MAN
(very casually)
 Nope.

The YOUNG MAN looks suspicious, starts to reach out tentatively, and the WALKING MAN moves forward ever so slightly, causing the other to flinch back as though burned. The WALKING MAN holds his hands up to show nothing 'heroic' is intended. He steps slightly away from his position to place the packet and the lighter on the bridge's ledge, about a foot from the YOUNG MAN and then moves back to his previous position.

The YOUNG MAN sidles along the railing, holding on to it with one hand, opens the cigarette pack with the other, clutching the pack to his chest in order to be able to open it with his shaking hand. He lights a cigarette, inhales once, breathing in heavily before putting the packet back down on the ledge and shuffling back to his previous spot.

The WALKING MAN moves forward, takes the packet and lighter back and returns to his previous spot.

YOUNG MAN

(clearly relishing the
cigarette, blowing a long
plume of smoke out)

Thanks for the cigarette, but
seriously, you should leave now.
You don't want to be around for
what's coming.

WALKING MAN

(shrugs, and nods, both
minuscule gestures.)

I can do that. Do you want me to
leave the packet? Have you got time
to smoke a couple more?

The YOUNG MAN looks at his watch, and we can tell it's a reasonably expensive one.

The next train is due in eight minutes. I'll be okay.

WALKING MAN (CONT'D)

You're starting a bit early - a chance you'll get caught. Is that what you want?

YOUNG MAN

(*Shaking his head:
dismissive, but not
particularly angry*)

This isn't a cry for help. I just wanted to make sure I didn't miss the train.

WALKING MAN

Yeah, they can be unpredictable:
although normally late rather than early...

YOUNG MAN

(*Sarcastically*)

You're a funny man

WALKING MAN

(*Apparently missing the sarcasm completely*)

Not many people think so.

YOUNG MAN

Again, thanks for the cigarette funny man, but you're not going to stop me from doing this, so just get yourself on home. I don't particularly want to spend my last moments talking to a stranger. No offense.

The WALKING MAN takes a puff on his cigarette, which is down to the last few drags now.

WALKING MAN

I've no intention of trying to stop you. I don't want to go over there as well.

(MORE)

WALKING MAN (CONT'D)

I just wonder if you'll tell me one thing?

YOUNG MAN

(*sighs heavily*)

What?

The WALKING MAN takes one step closer - not close enough to grab him, or even spook him, more as if he wants to be able to drop his voice a little, as if worried that prying ears might over hear something they shouldn't.

WALKING MAN

Have you squared everything up?

The YOUNG MAN backs away a little, his foot slips slightly, and he instinctively grabs at the railing.

YOUNG MAN

(*regaining his footing and a small amount of composure*)

What do you mean? 'Squared everything up'?

WALKING MAN

Do you have anyone? Friends?
Family?

The YOUNG MAN groans, and for a moment it seems as if he will jump.

WALKING MAN (CONT'D)

(*holding out his arm, gesturing for calm*)

Whoa, whoa...easy now. Take it easy.

YOUNG MAN

(Wiping his eyes)

I have a family. A wife. A little girl. Eight months old.

WALKING MAN

And have you told your wife you're doing this?

YOUNG MAN

(Dismissive)

Of course not.

WALKING MAN

Don't get me wrong. I don't care why you're doing this...

The YOUNG MAN looks at him, and confusion flickers in his eyes, wondering if this is a trick: whether he's expecting an explanation. Unsure.

YOUNG MAN

You wouldn't understand.

The WALKING MAN nods/ shrugs again- and again, a small gesture.

WALKING MAN

Probably not. But as I say...I don't care, so it's a moot point. My question is (pauses) will she be surprised?

YOUNG MAN

(Genuinely confused)

What do you mean?

WALKING MAN

I mean will she be surprised that you've chosen to do this - to end things this way? If there's no... (*shrugs, considers to himself a moment*), you know- no letter, no phone message I mean.

YOUNG MAN

I... I've left a note- it's in my wallet. (*pats his jeans pocket*)
Here.

WALKING MAN

So you're hoping you don't get mangled up too much and they can still find something on you.
(*Pauses, considering*)
Hmm. I suppose it could happen.

The YOUNG MAN blows out smoke, and drops the finished cigarette onto the tracks below him. He watches it fall and land.

YOUNG MAN

(*his shaky voice belies his response a little*)

I get it, you're trying to freak me out. Don't bother. I'm doing this - there's no other choice.

WALKING MAN

Of course there is... there's always a choice. What's so bad? Is she cheating on you?

YOUNG MAN

No!

(*a little arrogantly*)

She'd never do that.

WALKING MAN

(*A little conspiratorially
- two men together*)

Are you cheating on her? Did you
get caught?

YOUNG MAN

(*resignedly*)

I lost my job, OK? We're going to
lose the house. The car.
Everything. She doesn't know yet.

The WALKING MAN stifles a small laugh, and pats his thigh, as though he's just heard a joke - not a rib tickler, but something that is vaguely amusing.

WALKING MAN

(*Almost apologetically*)

I'm sorry. Please forgive me - it's
just that that's even more cliched
than my suggestions.

YOUNG MAN

(*brattish*)

Fuck you! You don't know how much
pressure there's been... how much
pressure there IS on me. Her
parents..."

The WALKING MAN holds up a calming hand

WALKING MAN

Your father-in-law looks down at you. He's a successful man. Doesn't think you're good enough. Oh. He didn't offer you a job working for him that you refused to take because you wanted to go your own way did he?

The YOUNG MAN glares at him, seems about to say something. To deny the facts, but there's apparently something in the words that stop him.

WALKING MAN (CONT'D)

Sorry. I'm playing with you. I'm sure it's nothing as tired a drama as that.

He pauses. Allowing the YOUNG MAN to say something - to agree it is nothing like that. Instead the YOUNG MAN glares at him sullenly.

WALKING MAN (CONT'D)

OK, OK. I don't know anything. I'm sure your situation is dire. My point is - have you explained this to her - your wife, your daughter when she's old enough to understand, explained how much pressure there is on you? Have you left a note that's clear enough for them to 'get' why you did this?

The YOUNG MAN wipes his nose on his sleeve, the previous glare starting to melt into something else- confusion, fear, shame?

YOUNG MAN

I told you... it's in the note. The note in my wallet... in my pocket.

WALKING MAN

Can I read it?

YOUNG MAN
It's private...

The WALKING MAN looks at his watch

WALKING MAN
You said eight minutes before the
train gets here?

YOUNG MAN
(checks his own watch)
Six minutes now.

WALKING MAN
(Nodding and gesturing)
You may want to take that off - it
looks a nice watch. Shame to smash
it up. Especially if your family
are going to be short of money.
Leave it on the side. Leave your
wallet as well. You don't want
someone finding you and taking it.
If the all-important note is in
there then you want to make sure it
gets to your wife. I can deliver it
for you.

The YOUNG MAN is confused, looking at the other, trying to calculate, rationalise, reason. It's not really working for him at this moment in time.

YOUNG MAN
How... How Do I know I can trust
you?

WALKING MAN
(smiling - kindly? Sadly?
Something else?)
Well, of course the simple answer
is you don't.
(MORE)

WALKING MAN (CONT'D)

But I've given you a cigarette. I haven't tried to stop you. What makes you think you can trust whoever finds your body not to help themselves. Anyone wandering around down there is more likely to be a less-than-trustworthy type. Do you trust an unknown graffiti spraying yob or junkie looking for somewhere to shoot up without getting disturbed more than me?

(*Pause*)

Besides, not to state the obvious but you ARE going to be dead.

YOUNG MAN

(*looking a little sick now*)

Can I have another cigarette?

The WALKING MAN places the packet and the lighter where he'd previously put them, and as he does so:

WALKING MAN

I'll leave the pack here. Why don't you put your wallet next to the pack. After... well, in a few minutes, I'll collect them together and I'll take care of the note - take it to your wife...

The YOUNG MAN grabs at the pack, fumbles a cigarette out and lights it

YOUNG MAN

You'll give it to her?

The WALKING MAN nods, and the YOUNG MAN places a nice looking wallet, pale brown, probably hand stitched Italian leather, on the ledge next to the cigarette pack.

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)
(stepping back to his
original position)

The note- it's in the coin pouch.

The WALKING MAN takes the wallet, cigarette pack, and lighter. He puts the latter two into his pocket, and opens the wallet, checking the pouch and, apparently satisfied the note is there, moves on to look at other things in there. He plucks a driving license out from amongst the cards and examines it for a moment.

WALKING MAN

This is your current address James?

The YOUNG MAN starts for a moment before realizing of course his name is on the license.

YOUNG MAN

Yeah, that's it.

WALKING MAN

'62 Wellington Road'

YOUNG MAN

That's it. You promise you'll make sure she gets it?

WALKING MAN

(looking up from the
license)

Of course I will. What's her name?

YOUNG MAN

(Voice hitching)

Rachel

The WALKING MAN looks back down at the wallet, picks a photograph out from one of the credit card slots. He looks at it and holds it up.

WALKING MAN

This is her?

YOUNG MAN

(*Squinting slightly in the
low light*)

Yes. We've been married three
years. We met in....

WALKING MAN

I'll enjoy fucking her before I
kill her.

There is a beat.

*The YOUNG MAN stares at him. The WALKING MAN glances back at
the photo, and then back to the YOUNG MAN. There is the
faintest trace of a smile on his face.*

YOUNG MAN

(*stunned*)

What?

WALKING MAN

I said, "I'll enjoy fucking her.
Before I kill her." Your daughter
too. Not the first part -
obviously. I'm not a monster. But
I'll kill her too.

*The YOUNG MAN doesn't know how to react. This doesn't make
sense.*

YOUNG MAN

I... I don't understa...

WALKING MAN

(*smiling the most sinister
little smile you never
want to see*)

James. You seem to be under the
impression I'm a decent person. I'm
not. I've done some pretty horrible
things in my time.
(MORE)

WALKING MAN (CONT'D)

I did one horrible thing less than an hour ago, which, if you were not about to throw yourself in front of the choo-choo in... three and a half minutes, you would no doubt read about as a major investigation being carried out in the local newspaper within the next day or two.

The WALKING MAN closes the wallet and slips it into his coat pocket. His eyes not leaving the YOUNG MAN

WALKING MAN (CONT'D)

I said I wasn't going to try to stop you from killing yourself. And that is true. I have kept my word. But you need to understand. I am a man who has certain tastes...

The YOUNG MAN moves forward, as though about to climb the railing.

YOUNG MAN

What 'tastes'?

The WALKING MAN moves forward, close enough to grab the YOUNG MAN, but he doesn't seem to have any inclination to do so.

WALKING MAN

I'm a wrong 'un, James. That's not the most scientific of terms, but it gets the point across I think.

*(He pauses, and smiles
that horrible smile
again)*

You have to appreciate my situation. To come across something like this - well, it's just too much of an opportunity not to embrace..."

YOUNG MAN

No. You're lying. You're trying to trick me into...

WALKING MAN
*(Making a shushing
 gesture)*

"Atatatat. I told you I wasn't going to stop you James- I mean that - go ahead - jump now. The train will be here in a couple of minutes- you can break your legs, and it will be on top of you before you know it. My intention is to watch you do it, and then walk over to your house..."

The WALKING MAN glances around at him, as though getting his bearings, and then gestures vaguely in a direction beyond the YOUNG MAN.

WALKING MAN (CONT'D)
 "What's Wellington Road? Probably about five minutes walk from here? Yes, just past the small Doctor's surgery. Well, I'll take a stroll over, and then I'm going to have my fun with your good lady for an hour or so... and then I'm going to slit her throat. And then I'll use the same knife on your daughter."

YOUNG MAN
*(Crying proper tears now-
 not just the little ones
 for himself)*
 You can't...

The WALKING MAN continues to smile, and again makes the hand gesture, as if calming a small child.

WALKING MAN
 "Shhhh. James. Of course I can. I have your wallet, and your keys - silly to keep them in your wallet by the way.

The YOUNG MAN is staring at him in horror now. Agitated. Looking about him at his precariously balanced position, at the barrier between them.

The WALKING MAN is still speaking casually, explaining things to the uninitiated.

WALKING MAN (CONT'D)

The thing of it is, is that 'Time of Death' is a very tricky thing to get exactly right. We're talking an hour's difference, not minutes. So I have plenty of time, even if they were to find your body immediately - and they won't, to have my fun, and for them to still think it was you who went... what's the term- 'mental'? - killing them both before topping yourself... you know because of 'everything'"

The YOUNG MAN launches himself forward from behind the railing trying to grab at the WALKING MAN's coat, but he's clutching at thin air as the WALKING MAN deftly takes a step back out of reach.

YOUNG MAN
(snarling: like a wild animal now)

"No one would believe I'd do that you sick fuc..."

WALKING MAN
(mildly)

There's a note here James. I haven't read it yet, but I'm fairly sure it'll be damning enough...

The YOUNG MAN vaults over the railing, launching himself at the WALKING MAN.

Adrenaline and his animalistic fury rocket him forward, but the WALKING MAN moves like liquid, side stepping, letting the YOUNG MAN's momentum drive him off balance, and with a small foot movement, and hammer arm lock he takes the YOUNG MAN to the ground, ignoring his cries of fury, frustration and pain.

WALKING MAN (CONT'D)
*(twisting the YOUNG MAN's
 arm up his back)*
 Stay down, boy

The two are statues for a moment, frozen in a tableau with the YOUNG MAN unable to move, and the WALKING MAN apparently happy to keep the situation that way. Below, the 11:43 Express to wherever barrels past. As the sound from the train fades, the WALKING MAN releases the arm lock, and the YOUNG MAN crab scuttles back to the railing.

WALKING MAN (CONT'D)
*(tossing the wallet back
 to the YOUNG MAN)*
 You missed the last train.

YOUNG MAN
*(Glaring, rubbing his
 shoulder)*
 Who the fuck are you?

WALKING MAN
*(Lighting the last
 cigarette from the pack,
 and smiling, slightly
 less sinister this time)*
 You can call me Clarence.

The YOUNG MAN looks nonplussed.

WALKING MAN (CONT'D)
 It's A Wonderful Life?

The YOUNG MAN still looks nonplussed.

WALKING MAN (CONT'D)

Really? Nothing?

Get yourself home, take a shower - your wife will probably still smell the nicotine on you, but I'm sure you can sort that. You'll sort a job as well, you'll sort the house. And if you don't... It's not that big a deal in the overall scheme of things. Certainly not for this sort of bullshit..."

YOUNG MAN

That's easy for you to say... You don't know what it's like trying...

WALKING MAN

(Weary, interest or sympathy dissipating rapidly)

Stop whining. I've had a long day and I want to go to bed.

The YOUNG MAN slowly gets to his feet. He DOES look like a boy at this moment- not sure whether to try to redeem his pride, but scared of a beating. Instead he makes an effort to tough it out with words.

YOUNG MAN

I know you were bull shitting me...
I know that was all bullshit. Don't think you fooled me-

The WALKING MAN holds up the driving license he still has from the wallet.

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)

That stuff was so over the top...

The YOUNG MAN trails off as he sees the Driving License being held in front of him.

WALKING MAN

Just in case you start thinking
stupid thoughts again. I'm keeping
this. Just so you remember - I know
where you live. Now go home.

The YOUNG MAN seems to think about trying to take it back, but then reconsiders. He pauses, apparently trying to think of something to say to allow him to leave on equal footing. Nothing comes. He walks off, with only the briefest of looks back, looking more like a sulking teen than the late 20's/early 30's husband/ father he is.

The WALKING MAN watches him go, smoking his cigarette until the figure recedes and turns a corner. He drops the cigarette, standing on it to put it out.

He turns up his coat collar, and starts to walk in the opposite direction. As he walks, his mobile phone starts ringing.

He fishes the phone out of his pocket and, as he walks into the distance we hear him speaking into the phone. Quietly.

WALKING MAN (CONT'D)

It's done.

As he continues to walk further, he listens as whoever is on the other end is obviously saying something we cannot hear. The one sided call continues as he walks into the distance.

WALKING MAN (CONT'D)

Minor delay on my way home... No
nothing serious... No not
related... Just me getting
sentimental in my old age... Not
that sentimental... Yes... That's
fine. Give me an hour to pick my
stuff up and send a car...
Where?... New York?... Again? No...
Tell me more once I'm in the car.

The man ends the call and carries on walking. As he does so, he whistles to himself. The tune is a slightly haunting version of 'Auld Lang Syne'

FADE TO BLACK.

