

Script Seven Hundred Square Feet II

SEVEN HUNDRED SQUARE FEET

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cast

JAMES MURPHY, 56, pilot, African-American.

GLORIA MARCETTA, 44, chef, former flight attendant,
Italian descent, Caucasian.

PAUL MURPHY, 14, son

DESCRIPTION

James and Gloria live in a West Side apartment in New York. Their busy professional lives are immobilized by COVID-19, and they are forced to face the empty room where their son Paul lived before his death at age 7. They also have to confront the issues in their own marriage and a society that is breaking down before them. In the end they find a way to reset. Along with all that, this play is a chronicle of 2020.

FEBRUARY 25

*JAMES stirs in his sleep next to wife GLORIA.
They awaken, before dawn.*

GLORIA:

Hey, hey...Are you all right? You were mumbling?

JAMES

Ohhhh

shakes head, reaches out
....Wow. That was strange. We were out on the street...Paul and I. We were looking for you. People were running, screaming...Chefs were in the restaurants, banging pots and pans. A lot of wind. Cracked sidewalks.

GLORIA

You were digging your fingers into my back.

JAMES

I was holding Paul's hand. Squeezing it. We were walking past Lincoln Center. I couldn't tell if it was a terrorist attack or a tornado or what. All this noise and dust. People on loudspeakers. Helicopters flying low. It was really specific...Then I remember something about the East River lapping up against the FDR...And that's where it ended.

GLORIA

I thought you were at Lincoln Center.

JAMES

I know. Like I said, strange. Maybe the wind blew us over there. And we passed Bloomingdale's. It was OK.

GLORIA

That's a relief. How old was Paul?

JAMES

Must have been three, four.

GLORIA

What was he wearing?

JAMES

He was wearing...that black baseball cap, and the white windbreaker.

GLORIA

He never had a white windbreaker.

JAMES

I know. It's a dream, Gloria.

GLORIA

So that must have been nine years ago, if he was four. That was Sandy, right?

JAMES:

Yeah, the storm. We weren't even here then. We were in London, remember?

GLORIA

Do you dream about him much?

JAMES

Last couple of weeks, for some reason. You?

GLORIA

I did, right after. Leading up to his birthday I always have a dream or two. He always asks me if we can have a dog and then I wake up.

JAMES

I don't like it. I don't like it when you wake up and he's not there. One time I even walked into his room before I woke up.

GLORIA

I had a real vivid hospital dream a couple of months ago. I didn't tell you about it. I got up and went downtown and then I had to come home at lunch. Too tough. I laid down and cried for two hours.

JAMES

(hugs her)
Let's go face the nation.

*they go into the living room, he makes coffee,
she checks her phone*

GLORIA

Your Dad texted me.

JAMES

Why you and not me?

GLORIA

Because he's always had the hots for me. And who can blame him?

JAMES

He has the hots generally. That's why he loves the home. Lots of women his age. He said, "James, I'm gonna go out with a bang."...Any e-mails?

GLORIA

looks at phone
Yes. Barack Obama is very disappointed in me.

JAMES

He's hard to please. That's why I like it when I fly back into JFK and see that big picture of our current President on the wall.

GLORIA

Well, those China flights are about to be a thing of the past.

JAMES

Why?

GLORIA

Why? You don't read the papers? You buy five of 'em a day.

JAMES

You talking about that flu? Bullshit. We've lived through SARS, MERS, FUBARS, whatever.

GLORIA

Just don't fly to China anymore. You don't have to. You've got pull.

JAMES

You nuts? I love Shanghai.

GLORIA

Shakes head.
You love ventilators?....Anyway, I've got shrimp
scampi tonight. If you go out can you get Pinot
Grigio?

JAMES

We've got a bottle.

GLORIA

I repeat, can you get Pinot Grigio?

JAMES

laughs, grabs jacket
Gotcha. Be back in a minute. You going back to bed?

GLORIA

Like you said, what do you want me to do? Just come
back soon. I don't want to start dreaming.

MARCH 8

*GLORIA gets up at 10 a.m. JAMES is in living
room, making out a list*

JAMES

Coffee is right there. And we need some.

GLORIA

So you're going out again today?

JAMES

Already been once. But yeah. I survived yesterday.
Except for this big ball with red spikes that latched
onto my arm....

GLORIA

shakes her head
But wear a mask. I understand why the low-information
voter might not wear a mask....

JAMES

You mean, the dumbass.

GLORIA

I understand why the dumbass might not a wear mask.
What is your excuse?

JAMES

Because all we've got are these N-95 masks that the
hospital workers need. I'd look like an asshole.

GLORIA

Okay. Why are you fiddling with your phone?

JAMES

Well, there's this text loop with some of the guys.
It's kind of like a toilet paper hotline.

GLORIA

Are we low?

JAMES

Three rolls left...Now here's Stevie, saying he found

some over at Gristede's on Second Avenue...George found some at Red Apple.

GLORIA

So what? You can't get more than one roll anyway.

JAMES

Yeah, but at least you get an idea. Did you order some on eBay like I said?

GLORIA

Yeah. Delivery on April 20.

JAMES

Ugh. Stevie says Duane Reade on 71st is out.

GLORIA

We need paper towels worse. Just look on the website. Duane Reade and Walgreens.

JAMES

Okay. That's my project for the day. That and a power nap. What's yours?

GLORIA

Conference call with Giuseppe, work on Senior Lunch at Holy Trinity, call Beth, read the papers...That'll just about do it.

JAMES

The church isn't closed?

GLORIA

Haven't heard different.

JAMES

It's quiet out there.

GLORIA

Except for the sirens.

JAMES

Except for the sirens.

gets jacket

GLORIA

What now?

JAMES

Come on. I need to get the papers.

GLORIA

Yeah, but where are you going?

JAMES

Smiler's. Blueberry muffins.

GLORIA

Eight hundred calories a pop.

JAMES

Or I'll stand at the door and talk to Robert. He's there all day and people rush right past him. Give me a break. I can't sit here and watch the death numbers climb all day....Look, I'm not going to get much. I'm not going to use the elevator. Walking six flights, I might need a ventilator myself.

flips on TV

NEWSCASTER

And, in sad news today, the men's basketball team at Columbia has closed ranks around its coach, Dexter Moore, just as the Lions are closing in on the Ivy League championship. Moore's son Franklin, only five years old, is in critical condition with a rare childhood disease, medullablastoma. A GoFundMe page has been set up...

GLORIA

Sharply

Off, please.

JAMES

changes channel

Sorry. What bad timing...I haven't heard that word in two years.

GLORIA

It's OK. We need to talk about the 25th anyway.

JAMES

sighs

Right. He'll be 14. You used to get him a cake from the restaurant, right?

GLORIA

Right. And he would pick out a play. Was *The Ferryman* last year or the year before?

JAMES

Last year.

GLORIA

Remember the usher who kept wanting to use that seat?

JAMES

We kept telling her someone was coming. She thought we were nuts.

GLORIA

quietly
Imagine that....But what about this year? I'll come up with something, maybe something with salmon.

JAMES

holds her around the waist
You always do. Always marry a chef, unless she makes you clean up.

GLORIA

Always marry a pilot. They don't panic. At least that's what I tried to tell Dad.

looks out the window
Fourteen. You might think this is a little strange, but why can't we talk to him? If we do all this other stuff on his birthday...what's the harm in bringing him back, every now and again? I want to see if he has acne. I want to know what he's listening to.

JAMES

If he's 14, he won't tell you what he's listening to.

GLORIA

What are his grades, what school does he go to?

JAMES

You're serious. Just conjure him up somehow? Some sort of mind trick?

GLORIA

Can't we do that? Fix him a plate and just start talking, and something will happen. You'll see him the way you want. So will I. You'll hear him the way you want. So will I. Otherwise we just sit here and watch the walls push us together, and we cry and get drunk and...how long can we do that?

voice breaks

If we're not going to use his room can we at least change it, make it look like a teenager lives there instead of a child? There is literally nothing else to do, James. This is the time. God is tired of waiting for us.

JAMES

gets up, hugs her again

Please. Hang in. I used to be so happy that we found a way to get through his birthday. Like we accomplished something. Even if we avoided something. Then the next day was the worst day of the year.

GLORIA

You going on the toilet paper hunt?

JAMES

Yeah. But I'll probably be Scott-free.

GLORIA

Well, don't feel bad if you come up empty. You're still my Prince Charmin.

JAMES

laughs

Can I tee it up any higher for you? Later.

Ninety minutes later. James returns.

GLORIA

What's in the bag?

JAMES

Super-size Pinot Grigio. Eggs. Coffee. Ritz. Cheese.
One lonely roll of paper towels.

GLORIA

Nice going. How many stops?

JAMES

Just two. I was good.

GLORIA

But no toilet paper?

JAMES

holds up a small box
Imodium. Next best thing.

GLORIA

laughs
Resourceful. I knew you were a flight attendant at heart..

MARCH 11

GLORIA

OK. Here's the new thermometer and the oxygenator-doodle.

JAMES

The what?

GLORIA

Put your finger in there and it measures the oxygen in your blood. If it's 95 or over, you're fine.

JAMES

And if it's not?

GLORIA

Well, I'll miss you.

JAMES

laughs

Please don't panic about this, OK? It's under control.

GLORIA

Talked to anybody in New Rochelle? It's not under control. They think the guy caught it on a train out of Grand Central. The whole town is sick.

JAMES

The President says it's under control,

GLORIA

He says Obama founded ISIS. Or vice versa.

JAMES

No, that was Hillary...but, seriously, they're talking about closing schools? They're putting hand sanitizers about 10 steps apart at JFK. We're not flying to China anymore.

GLORIA

Thank you for that.

JAMES

But what is going on?

GLORIA

I don't know. You know how I get these feelings.

JAMES

Yeah, Italian intuition, like when your dad told you not to marry the black guy and you did anyway.

GLORIA

Yeah. Like that. We're not getting as much traffic. Not even full on Saturday. And -- you weren't here -- they wouldn't let us give the sign of peace at church Sunday. Had to give each other these hand signals, like a third base coach. Something's going on. Somebody knows something.

picks up phone, dials

Beth?...Hey... .No, we're fine. What are you hearing about this virus?...Yeah, China. James was flying there tomorrow but they canceled. So it's no big deal? Well, you're right, Jersey's probably the last place it wants to go...You OK?...Yeah...Tonight it's Vitiello Tonnato. Yeah, right, just whipped it up. After I started it Monday. But it will do the trick...Sure, he's here...Wait a minute.

turns to James, laughs

Beth wants to hear you do Morgan Freeman from Shawshank ,...Says she needs a laugh.

JAMES

takes phone, begins speaking deeply

I think this is the excitement only a free man can feel...A free man at a start of a long journey whose conclusion is uncertain...until he gets to Exit 10A...I hope I can make it across the border without some asshole squeeging my windshield...I hope to see my friend and shake his hand...I hope the smokestacks of Weehawken are as gray and yellow as they have been in my dreams. I hope. But mainly I hope I can keep my hands off the ladies until I can get that Visa endorsement again...

(hands phone to Gloria)

GLORIA

Beth, take it easy! James, I think you killed her...Take deep breaths, hon. Yeah, he brings Morgan out at the best times...OK...say hello to Marvin...Yeah, James should be in show business, I agree. I've been wanting to send him to the circus for years. OK, I love you.

JAMES

(laughs)

It takes so little sometimes...What's Beth's job now, exactly?

GLORIA

She's the head of the nurses at the emergency room at Rutgers. Flu season is always a pain. Hasn't been too bad this year.

JAMES

If they're going to stop people from flying altogether, maybe we should run down to Texas, see Dad.

GLORIA

Absolutely. I'll check with Giuseppe.

Pauses

But, remember. that's where we spotted the lump.

JAMES

Yeah, on Dad's sofa. It hurt to the touch. But that's also when Dad took all of us to the rodeo, just outside Sherman. Remember how Paul loved it?. Just loved it. Kept saying he was gonna be a bull rider.

GLORIA

And he taught Paul that Tanya Tucker song and he sang it all the way home.

JAMES

(sings softly)

"When I die, I may not go to heaven
I don't know if they let cowboys in...

JAMES AND GLORIA

"If they don't, just let me go to Texas...
Texas is as close as I've been."

(they embrace on the couch, despondent)

JAMES

We can't stay here tonight....

GLORIA

Hell no.

JAMES

Maybe go to Bruschetta.

GLORIA

And a movie?

JAMES

You interested in The Photograph?

GLORIA

Sure. I don't care. Let's watch it twice. Let's just stay
out. Stay out all night.

JAMES

Sure.

MARCH 21

*in living room. Gov. Cuomo is conducting a
briefing on TV*

GOV. CUOMO

..."We are literally scouring the globe looking for supplies...We have apparel companies that are literally converting to mask manufacturers in the state of New York...We are going to send one million N-95 masks to New York City today. It won't get us through the crisis but it will give them a significant contribution...Total numbers of positive cases is up to 10,000...six thousand in New York City...In this crisis, think of ourselves as first responders. Your actions can either save or endanger a life..."

GLORIA

I wish he were President. Don't you?

JAMES

I wish he were mayor. Or somebody was.

GLORIA

What happened to 15 cases and then down to zero, and it disappears like a miracle? Isn't that what your boy said?

JAMES

It's just taking a little detour, that's all. We'll be marching in the Easter parade.

GLORIA

Easter's about three weeks away, and we've never

marched in the Easter parade, nor do we know anybody who ever did, nor would I ever admit that I even knew anybody who ever considered marching in the Easter parade..

JAMES

I don't know how long I can keep listening to this guy. Takes him an hour to give you five minutes of news. Then, after he scares the hell out of us, he starts telling us about his family. It's like he's working on a spin-off of a sitcom. Watch "The Cuomos," starring Joe Pesci, with Henry Winkler as his smart-ass brother Chris. He should just say, "Everything's closed, you can't go to work, don't get sick, have a nice day."

GLORIA

They shut us down this morning.

JAMES

Oh. Sorry.

GLORIA

It's OK. I'm not surprised. Giuseppe thought we might still be open for take-out. Take-out, can you believe that? Ossobuco Milanese, rattling around in a white paper bag?

JAMES

Pinot Grigio in a Dixie Cup. Just like in the cockpit.

GLORIA

laughs
No, you didn't!

JAMES

No, I didn't...So, what do you want to do today? Other than the obvious?

GLORIA

The obvious. How romantic.

JAMES

I just think we have to come up with a schedule. If we don't we'll just vegetate, and all of a sudden it'll be Saturday.

GLORIA

It IS Saturday.

JAMES

shrugs
That's what I'm talking about. .

GLORIA

You want a schedule? Really? Air Force style?

JAMES

Lunch from 12:30 to 1:30. Read from 1:30 to 2:30.
Walk until 3:30. Housekeeping after that.

GLORIA

Let me get my address book.

JAMES

How about foreplay at 4, then actual sexual activity,
and maybe a glass of wine at 5?

GLORIA

Actual Sexual Activity. Sounds like a warning from the Emergency Broadcast System. Besides, what would we do after 4:15?

JAMES

Well, maybe we move up the wine a little bit.

GLORIA

sighs
All the things I said I didn't have time to do...and now I have time to do them and I didn't really want to do them in the first place. .

JAMES

Those 10 pounds I wanted to lose, and now I can't play tennis, and I'm trapped in a place with an Italian chef.

GLORIA

Well, if you want to take on a task...There's always his room.

JAMES

pauses, speaks softly
His room. Right.

GLORIA

I mean, it's about time, right? Maybe after his birthday?

JAMES

Maybe. But what do we do with it? I don't want to set up an office in there. I know you don't. .

GLORIA

A music room? Maybe get that piano, finally.

JAMES

That way we wouldn't have to throw stuff away. I thought about a guest room for Beth or your mom. But that's too much. Pack up all the clothes...Not during this shit. We're headed for a depression. We can't do depressing things. I wish we could pave it over, like a swimming pool.

GLORIA

I wish we could move to Jersey and maybe actually HAVE a swimming pool. In a big fucking house.

JAMES

Not now, Gloria, please. It's the city. This is our city. There's two kinds of people...

GLORIA

Yeah, yeah. 'Those who live in Manhattan and those who want to.' I've heard that shit from you so many times...

JAMES

And we're the ones who get to.

GLORIA

Get to.

JAMES

You want to go to Broadway or do you want to go to the Hackensack Community Players or whatever? You want to ride the bus into work every day and get off

at the Port Authority, or go to the Port Authority at midnight and come home? We don't have a car. I LIKE not having a car. We don't have to take care of a yard. I LIKE not having to take care of a yard. I like our friends. I don't want to live in Siberia.

GLORIA

You forget. I grew up in Siberia. I was the cart girl at the golf course. We hung out at the diner every day after school. It wasn't so bad. I had my people, too, just like you. I went to Paterson Catholic and St. Peter's. You know all that. You never had a problem with that.

JAMES

It didn't matter where you were from...But, here, if I want to have a beer I can walk a block-and-a-half and be with nine guys I know. The guy at Smiler's pours my coffee the minute I walk in the door.

GLORIA

We can train a guy in Jersey to do that, if it's so fucking important.

JAMES

When we went to Cartier's that time and we saw Ahmad Rashad and Phylicia? That's Manhattan.

GLORIA

Oh, don't be such a starfucker. I guess you forgot the security guard following you up and down the aisles, too.

JAMES

Oh, they don't have racists in Jersey? Bullshit. They'll be tailing my ass the moment I get off the Turnpike. And we'd have to buy a lawn mower. And hire a gardener.

GLORIA

Or you could apply your Air Force training. If you can fly a B-52, you can learn to spread mulch.

JAMES

And we'd live in a place just like every other place on the street. ...Why do you do this? Why do you always pivot to this when we start talking about Paul?

GLORIA

I don't know. I guess I think about it when I trip over the coffee table every morning, and when we have to walk sideways down the hall with our grocery bags, and when I realize that the lobby of the restaurant is bigger than our kitchen. I wasn't claustrophobic before we moved in here.

JAMES

Well, sweetie, buckle up. These walls aren't going to be moving backwards. Not for the next few weeks.

GLORIA

The other thing about having a nice house on a nice street in a nice neighborhood is that we can try again.

JAMES

Try again?

GLORIA

Are you being dense or stubborn? Try again. A baby.

JAMES

A baby. A substitute.

GLORIA

No, a substitute would be if we had a baby in this place and in that room. A new life for us and a new life IN our life. And don't start with my age. I can handle it. Doesn't that appeal to you, just a little bit?

JAMES

pauses

I thought I retired from diaper-changing. Didn't we have some sort of ceremony?

GLORIA

You can still do it. Muscle memory.

JAMES

So, on the list of reasons to move out of here and into the wilderness, where are you putting a baby?

GLORIA

What difference does that make? Do you want me to beg you? I just think about peace and quiet. You have no idea how much this subliminal noise is driving up our blood pressure.

JAMES

OUR blood pressure?

GLORIA

And I need to spend time with Beth. Speaking of, I was supposed to hear from her yesterday. She had that test.

JAMES

So call her.

GLORIA

picks up her phone

Yeah, Beth...I didn't hear from you. Just call me or text me. We're just sitting here looking at each other and thinking how we could have done so much better...

(laughs)

Not really. Call me. Love you.

JAMES

That's a little weird. She texts, what, three times a day?.

GLORIA

I'll just call Marvin.

dials again

Marvin, hi! Are you busy? No, we just thought we would have heard from Beth...Yeah. Oh. ..So how is she?..Say that again. Since when?...Well, how could that happen?...How is she? Oh, geez. When are you going back there? OK. Take it easy, Marvin. Look, you know they got great doctors there...Where are the kids? OK. You want me to come?

James looks at her, shakes head

I called and got voice mail. OK. You gonna take her phone to her? At least we could Face Time...Yeah, you're probably right. Look, Marvin, you got to stay in touch with me. You can't leave me hanging. Please. OK. I know. You gotta hold on, be strong. Sure...Love you.

hangs up

JAMES

So she's in the ICU.

GLORIA

sits down, stunned

You know what he said? They're making them use the same facemask all day. They've been using towels. Then they ran out of towels. They don't have enough gloves. What the fuck. Why don't we see THAT on the news? Just because it's happening in Jersey.

JAMES

How bad?

GLORIA

She is still breathing OK but her fever went to 103. Bad sore throat. She can't smell anything. That's a great hospital, James. Best in the state. It's not supposed to be a hellhole. They're 90 percent full now. How could they not be ready for this? They knew it was coming.

JAMES

Don't worry. I can trade off. I took one of George's routes the other day. He can do Charlotte tomorrow. He'll have about seven passengers anyway. I can stay here.

GLORIA

Thanks, but you don't have to.

starts to cry

Not another one, God. Come on! Don't do this to me. Not now.

MARCH 22

4 pm. JAMES is in the apartment by himself.
GLORIA comes in.

JAMES

quietly
How is she?

GLORIA

No worse. Fever's a little bit down. Doc said she might be breathing a little better. Long way to go. How are you? I couldn't sleep, so I just went down there. I'm sorry I didn't tell you.

JAMES

I saw where you were. That's fine. How's Marvin?

GLORIA

Honestly that's why I went. I knew I wouldn't see Beth, and I knew how shaky he is. You know him.

JAMES

I do. I told you from the beginning she married down.

GLORIA

I was there at the Christmas party when you got drunk enough to tell her yourself.

JAMES

Did I tell him, too? Ah, who cares? He really is a wimp. Thank God he's in a low stress job.

GLORIA

He's a high school principal.

JAMES

Yeah, they just belch out all these idiot students, year by year, no accountability, nothing happens.

GLORIA

Roselle Catholic. Seventy percent of them go to 4-year schools.

JAMES

He must have a strong assistant.

GLORIA

Well, his wife might be dying,,James.Sorry you're a shit mood while my sister has COVID. I'll say it again. I'm sorry I ran off. I hope I didn't worry you. I would have been back earlier but they cut down the train service.

JAMES

I understand. Long day. I didn't want to go out in the rain. I didn't watch the death count. I found a Law and Order marathon. That got me through five hours.

GLORIA

The Chris Noth phase or the Jesse L. Martin phase?

JAMES

The Jill Hennesy phase, which I consider slightly superior to the Angie Harmon phase but maybe not as strong as the Carey Lowell phase...

GLORIA

All right, all right....So you just sat here?

JAMES

Eventually I turned off the TV and laid on the couch and looked at the ceiling and just thought about what it would be like, sitting here by myself for good. Because I knew you didn't have a mask. And I heard all the sirens. They were really bad today. And I was wondering about if anything is really worth anything, and whether I'd ever made a difference to anyone, because they can teach any fool to fly these planes, and if this is all there is. You know, fun stuff like that.

GLORIA

If that were true, fools would be flying those planes. Did you think about Sully?

JAMES

Actually I thought a lot about Sully. I remember when he came from the Academy one Christmas. I was about nine years old and he walked into our church with that uniform on. He was styling. But everybody in the place turned around and saw him and then they started clapping. The preacher started it. You could go up and talk to him and he'd tell you about flying. He would treat you like an adult. He made the world seem very serious, like there was stuff out there that mattered. Yet he was friendly. He was like an uncle that didn't match up with the rest of the family. .

I always wondered what was going on inside him, What happens during his bad days, does he ever get down, does he have secrets? I mean, you land a plane full of people in the middle of the river with 12 million people on both sides of you....There aren't many people you can share that with.

GLORIA

Maybe you're overthinking.

JAMES

Maybe. But then, how many people know about Paul? I mean, a lot of people know about Paul. But I don't mention him. Somebody might ask how we're doing and then say, 'How're you doing? Really?' They look over

the top of their glasses as if they're really asking some profound fucking question. Like, 'Hey, you can tell me.' No, I can't tell you and I'm not going to. So I always admired that about Sully, like he wasn't going to show everything he was feeling. But I still wonder.

GLORIA

One night after work I had a really long conversation with Giuseppe about Paul. We locked the door and we sat at a table just off the square, and the people were walking by and we were drinking wine, I mean a LOT of wine..I think you were in Mexico City or someplace -- and I had snapped at some people, and then I fucked up a dish, and I just needed to sit there for a while and reassemble myself..

JAMES

Shelter in place, kinda.

.GLORIA

Yeah, and I wound up telling him everything about Paul growing up, and his sense of humor and his vulnerabilities, and then about getting sick and all the details of that, all the chemo and the surgeries, down to the bone. And I told him about us not really knowing him at all. I got through it without crying, somehow. Then I woke up and I was hung over and I just lost it, lost it for a couple of hours, but I had to go back in, and, as soon as I did, I felt stable again. Like I had a reason for going on.

JAMES

Sure. That's what the workplace is.

GLORIA

And that worries the shit out of me, James, because we don't have that right now. This is a test. We can't hold back from each other. You've got to knock down some of your walls. I've got to choke down some

of my thoughts and not say everything I'm feeling..

JAMES

That's genetic.

GLORIA

I know. It's hard. But I know exactly what you were feeling today. I can't stand being alone here when there's no place else to go. I mean, physically. I just get out of here and I don't know where I'm going, but I'm gone. And now I can't even do that, or shouldn't...I'm sorry. I should have told you. We could have gone together today. That might have been fun. But that was me, just panicking.

JAMES

holds her

That's why we have to plan. We can't just wake up in the morning and say, la-dee-dah, what's up? And we have to plan for Paul's birthday. I mean, if we're going to bring him back...

GLORIA

Yes. It can't be random. It's gotta be realistic...

laughs

Listen to me -- 'realistic.' It's got to look like it might have happened. Not like he just beamed himself down on the spur of the moment. I'll work on it. I'll give you the big shopping list, because you've got the good mask.

JAMES

That's the only good thing that happened today. I got these masks from the academy.

Holds up blue masks with AFA on the front

GLORIA

Wow, that's sharp. And the little falcon. I'd be damn proud to wear one of those.

JAMES

Yep. Off we go, into the wild blue yonder. I never knew what that meant. Now I do..

GLORIA

hugs him
Yep. Off we go.

MARCH 28

GLORIA, JAMES and PAUL are sitting at the dining room. PAUL is wearing a golf shirt and jeans. JAMES is wearing a sport coat, a cream-colored dress shirt and khakis. GLORIA is wearing a black dress with half-sleeves.

GLORIA

I didn't remember whether you liked fish. You probably liked everything but fish. But everybody likes pasta.

PAUL

Boy, I sure do like this.

GLORIA

Salmon tagliolini. And that's summer squash with basil. And, of course, tiramisu.

JAMES

Even without the wine that's about 60 bucks at the restaurant. For you? \$29.99.

PAUL

Worth every penny. Every time I tell somebody you're a big-time chef they get all excited. For that matter, Dad, whenever I talk about you being a pilot...same thing.

JAMES

So we're not nerds yet?

PAUL

laughs
Not yet. When does that happen? Sixteen?

JAMES

I think so. How's basketball?

PAUL

Not bad. I played OK. Didn't shoot it that well but they finally got me playing some defense.

JAMES

What are you? Six feet now?

PAUL

Yeah.

JAMES

Your grandpa is about 6-2. He had a brother who was 6-5.

GLORIA

My dad was 5-foot-8. But he weighed about 220.

JAMES

But he was the LeBron James of the kitchen, I can tell you that.

PAUL

How's Grandpa in Texas? I miss seeing him.

JAMES

Assisted living. I'm holding my breath.

PAUL

Anyway, one coach thinks I can be on a travel-ball team this summer. He said a lot of coaches show up and evaluate.

JAMES

Just don't turn pro before that.

PAUL

laughs
I won't.

GLORIA

How were your grades?

PAUL

Three point two, something like that. We're doing online now, but not for grades. I might take some classes this summer. I don't know.

GLORIA

Were any of your teachers fun or smart or anything?

PAUL

Mr. Lafferty in history. We had U.S. history this quarter. We were just studying 9-11 when we stopped. That must have been unbelievable. Where were you guys?

JAMES

smiles at Gloria
Funny you should ask...

GLORIA

Yes. You have a vested interest in 9-11.

PAUL

How?

GLORIA

clears throat
Once upon a time, there was this princess from Jersey who was working as a flight attendant while trying to save enough money to pursue her dream of culinary school in Italy. She was beautiful, talented, funny and, above all, humble.

JAMES

to PAUL
But kinda full of it.

GLORIA

She was flying from Atlanta to Los Angeles on the morning of September 11, 2001. Suddenly and without warning, the pilot informed everyone that he would be landing in Phoenix. No explanation given.

JAMES

Meanwhile...

GLORIA

Meanwhile, an aging and lonely pilot had just landed his plane in Phoenix. As his passengers filed out, he went back to wondering why his life was barren. And then he got the news that his flight back to New York had been canceled, as well as every other flight, going anywhere.

JAMES

So the pilot and the crew took a van to the Embassy Suites near the airport. Just by chance, the flight attendant and her crew were headed in the same direction.

GLORIA

And they would be there four days. By the time they got off the van they realized what had happened. Before they even checked in, they went to the lobby and watched this horrible day unfold in New York.

JAMES

The pilot had such presence of mind that he immediately called Hertz and reserved a car, because, for all he knew, he would be driving back to the city. And even if he wasn't, he knew he didn't want to spend all week in the hotel.

GLORIA

So the gorgeous flight attendant...

PAUL

Gorgeous, now, huh?

GLORIA

...comes back down to the bar in the evening and sits with this hapless pilot, who had no idea that his life was about to gain some meaning...

JAMES

Actually we were so traumatized that we just kept watching TV all night. But the next morning at breakfast....

GLORIA

Free breakfast, which is why it appealed to him..

JAMES

He talked to the Jersey princess. And did the same thing at lunch. And then by the pool. Two days later he drove her to the Grand Canyon. When they were finally cleared to go back home, they weren't sure they wanted to go...

GLORIA

Except they both lived in New York. Two years later they were married. Three years after that, here you came.

PAUL

That must be so weird. Everyone else is so freaked out about 9-11 every year. You guys celebrate.

JAMES

Not out loud. We both knew several people who were killed. A guy who used to work at the airport as a firefighter, he joined NYFD and was in the middle of it. You had to go through it to really know. It's the first time in my life that I really didn't know we were going to be all right.

GLORIA

And this is the second time.

PAUL

Really? Come on. It'll go away.

GLORIA

In times like this, that's why God and I invented tiramisu.

PAUL

takes a bite

Wow. Just perfect, Mom.

JAMES

So. Are you being careful?

PAUL

Careful?

JAMES

Is it time for us to have The Talk?

PAUL

No, Dad! I'm 14. Don't you think I know all that stuff?

JAMES

No. I'm talking about the real Talk. The one about the cops.

GLORIA

Hold on. What do you mean, you know about all that stuff? You've got a girlfriend?

PAUL

No, I mean, we don't have "girlfriends" anymore. I've got...you know, friends. Do we have to...?

JAMES

No. We don't. Not till later. Happy birthday. You're looking good.

GLORIA

You'll come back soon, right?

PAUL

laughs
I think that depends on you. Remember?

JAMES

Right. We love you. We miss you. Did you check out your room?

PAUL

I did. It looks the same as it did. Weird. You've still got my seven-year-old clothes.

GLORIA

We're having a rough time with that.

PAUL

shrugs

It's OK. Really. You can toss 'em. But bring me back anytime.

GLORIA

OK, Paulie.

PAUL

shakes his head as he fades out
Pleeeeeease, Mom.

JAMES and GLORIA look at each other.

JAMES

How was that?

GLORIA

I don't know. I mean, pretty well. Didn't you think?

JAMES

It did. Now, is that just wishful thinking? Odds are he could have a neck tattoo or a drinking problem, too.

GLORIA

He wasn't telling us everything. So, yeah, that was normal. I am not going to over-analyze this. I'm just not. I'm not going to apologize, either. But I do have one regret.

JAMES

What?

GLORIA

He didn't clear the table.

JAMES

A 14-year-old on his birthday? I thought you wanted to get real.

MARCH 30

JAMES and GLORIA enter Paul's room.

JAMES

Clothes first, or books?

GLORIA

It'll be easier on me if we start with the books.

JAMES

Yeah..

GLORIA

And the trophies. The little guy got a lot of trophies, considering...

JAMES

Participation trophies, but...

GLORIA

Not all of them. The flag football team finished second when he was six.

holds up book
"Football Skills And Drills." Really?

JAMES

shrugs

That one can go. How about "Goodnight Moon"?

GLORIA

Not on your life. That is a classic. Oh, man.
Remember some of those nights, trying to rock him?

JAMES

holds up another
We're keeping this.

GLORIA

"Go Away Dog"?

JAMES

First book he ever read out loud from cover to cover.

GLORIA

Oh, yeah! And here's Babe Ruth Saves Baseball.

JAMES

Look at this. I'm not sure you should see this, but...

GLORIA

Quiero a mi mama porque...

*sits down, dabs at eyes, looks at pages with
animals and their children*
No, I'm OK....Quiero a mi mama porque...Camina junto a
mi...Me mantiene bello y limpio.

JAMES

There's one about 'papa,', too, somewhere around
here....Look, this was one of his favorites: The

Adventures Of Morris The Moose.

GLORIA

He laughed about the part where all the kids put their coats on his antlers.

JAMES

That's a keeper. Remember how much fun that was? Every night we'd lie on his bed and read. .

GLORIA

Here's Mad Libs. We can toss these.

JAMES

Can we save one?

GLORIA

(laughs)

That's why it's taken us seven years. We're not even close to throwing this stuff away. Why? Just to create some space in this little compartment, I mean apartment....

JAMES

Here's his T-ball uniform. The Amsterdam Ants.

We can probably donate the basketball, right? The gym at the church?

GLORIA

Yeah. Let me look at some containers. If I can figure out some different ways to put this stuff somewhere, maybe we can use this room without having a nervous breakdown.

JAMES

Getting rid of the bed...

GLORIA

Yeah, that's No. 1. That really isn't a problem for me. He spent so many miserable nights in it.

JAMES

holds up a journal
Wow. I've never seen this. First day, first grade. Shall we?

GLORIA

sits down on the bed
I'll listen, James. But I can't read it. Go ahead.

JAMES

"Paul Franco Murphy, Sept. 6, 2012. I like to read books and I like to play basketball. I like to watch Thomas The Tank. My mom is a cook and my dad flies airplanes. He is gone a lot. I like the Yankees and the Knicks. I wish I had a dog. I am sick a lot. I like spageti but I am not hungry when I am sick. I hope I feel better someday."

GLORIA

gets up, shoulders shaking, walks to bedroom

JAMES

I'm sorry, sweetheart. I should have read it to myself first.

GLORIA

lying face down in bed
James, it's too hard.

JAMES

I know. Okay. We'll drive down to Jersey soon, We'll

look around.

GLORIA

Please.

APRIL 2

JAMES and GLORIA are in the apartment.

JAMES

reading the paper
Nearly 2,000 deaths yesterday.

GLORIA

making coffee
For the country.

JAMES

No, for us.

GLORIA

You mean one thousand.

JAMES

No. That was two days ago. Yesterday there were
1,957. In the city.

GLORIA

I don't think we're going to be making that Easter
Parade.

JAMES

They even closed the playgrounds.

GLORIA

Oh, forgot to tell you. Beth is home.

JAMES

Since when?

GLORIA

They discharged her late last night. She's in a wheelchair and she can't taste anything and she's lost about 10 pounds, and Mom says her eyes look a little funny, and she's still in pain. But her breathing is better.

JAMES

So Marvin goes to the basement. Where do we go? Where do I go if you get it?

GLORIA

points at Paul's room

JAMES

Yeah. Plus, it delays the inevitable.

GLORIA

I tried, late last night. I think I got one bag together of his pajamas and some of his T-shirts and stuff. I'll take it to the church, sometime.

JAMES

Don't do that by yourself anymore. OK?

GLORIA

OK, I didn't mean to, I just was up, and there wasn't anything else to do, and I can't stand watching TV anymore and listening to the same old doctors talk about stuff they don't know. I know Sanjay Gupta better than my gynecologist.

JAMES

So we're going to need a new pursuit. Something that's interesting, and we can do ourselves. Something we can do ourselves, something that won't drive us both crazy. And we never quite finish it.

GLORIA

Whew. I thought you were going to say jigsaw puzzles. We've got all these movies to watch. Imagine if this had happened when there were five channels.

JAMES

And no internet...

GLORIA

So let's designate a couple of movie nights. Friday and Saturday.

JAMES

That will be fine, unless NBA TV shows the Knicks and the 1970 championship. Or the 1973 championship.

GLORIA

They had TV back then?

JAMES

I've seen it before. Willis Reed limping out of the locker room for Game 7 when nobody thought he would play. The Lakers were done right then and there.

GLORIA

You mean Walter Reed.

JAMES

No, Gloria, I mean Willis Reed.

GLORIA

No, your President was going to Walter Reed Hospital the other day and he called it Willis Reed.

JAMES

Honest mistake.

GLORIA

Nothing honest about...OK, let's don't start. What do you have in mind?. Maybe arts and crafts? Origami?

JAMES

How about chess?

GLORIA:

Sure. We need more confrontation and conflict.

JAMES

And strategy. Let's make it interesting. If I win we stay here. If you win we move to Jersey.

GLORIA

laughs
Sounding pretty cocky there, Captain. You're not nearly as strategic as I am.

JAMES

Right. Flying a 747 across the Atlantic takes no planning at all.

GLORIA

I'm talking about seeing the big picture. Do you even remember how the pieces move?

JAMES

The bishop goes diagonal, right?

GLORIA

Right. Just like Bishop O'Connor, at the New Year's Eve mass.

JAMES

So let's do that. It'll be good to see all the hidden antagonism get unleashed.

GLORIA

That's better than pairing off with the neighbors like they're doing on the third floor. They're pairing off.

JAMES

No!

GLORIA

That's right. Nico and Gina, from Italy. They're establishing, uh, diplomatic relations with Trevor and Charlotte, from London.

JAMES

You made up those names.

GLORIA

I swear I did not.

JAMES

So who told you?.....Dumb question. Robert, of course.

GLORIA

So does that appeal to you? Getting to know our neighbors a little better?

JAMES

On this floor? I don't think Randy and Richard will agree to it.

GLORIA

I was just kidding. Imagine when those relationships turn bad, and they're all stuck together in this fucking building.....and that was a Freudian slip, sorry.

JAMES

phone beeps
Okay. I've been dreading this.

What?

JAMES

Text from Martha. "The hospice folks say Dad has a couple of days left. He isn't responding, and he hasn't eaten lately. He's not suffering. I don't expect you to do anything. Will be in touch."

GLORIA

hugs him
Honey, I'm so sorry. I wish my parents had loved you the way Ellis loved me. I didn't have to do a thing.

JAMES

I've been waiting for this for over a year. I've already got my eulogy.

GLORIA

And now...

JAMES

Now they can't have a memorial service. Or maybe they will. Should I try to get there or wait? Should I fly commercial? Or should I just wait?

GLORIA

Oh, if we'd only gone when we said we were going to...I'm not going to tell you what to do. But nobody expects you to be there, not until they can do it right. Can I read what you wrote?

JAMES

I need to go back over it. Let me call Martha and see what they're doing. People in town will bring more food than they've ever seen. It'll be exhausting for them. And they're not putting him in the graveyard, so...

GLORIA

This thing. This thing is bad, James.

JAMES

No mercy. It makes you sick and it locks you up and it messes up your kid's education and it won't stay put. It makes you play defense every minute, every day.

GLORIA

And, then, on top of everything else, it won't let you say goodbye.

APRIL 6

(9 a..m. JAMES and GLORIA are at the dining room table, with bagels, cream cheese and deviled eggs, reading from New York newspapers.

GLORIA

You want to be the Times today or the Post?

JAMES

I'm feeling elite today. I feel like playing squash and going to Brooks Brothers. So I'll be The Times.

GLORIA

Okay.

JAMES

clears throat

"High on the Himalayas, on a rugged plateau dotted with empty mud huts, an exodus has begun. "In the village of Dyhe, crops are stubby, dead stalks. Water is scarce. The only school closed a few years ago. With dwindling food, most families have packed their belongings and left, driven out by a faceless man-made enemy. They are Nepal's climate-change migrants, and there will be more. "'I love this village,' said Sonam Chhring Gurung, 76, one of the final holdouts, "but I can't survive here much longer.'" Glacial melt has accelerated along the 1,500 mile expanse of the Himalayas. Yak herders say they are struggling to

find grazing patches for their animals. Scientists have found that rising temperatures could spread malaria and dengue to new areas of the Himalayas, where mosquitoes have started to appear in the highlands."

GLORIA

pretending to be mortified
I had no idea.

JAMES

My favorite part was, 'Yak herders say they are struggling...' as opposed to the times when yak herders are living the good life, going to the theatre, that kind of thing....

GLORIA

OK, the Post: Can I do the headline, too?

JAMES

Of course.

GLORIA

Mafia Soldier Serving Time For Mob Hit Fears
Coronavirus Will Have Him Sleeping With The Fishes.

JAMES

Good call, sweetie!

GLORIA

"Reputed Gambino soldier John Matera, who pleaded guilty to conspiring to whack a government witness in 1998, has been diagnosed with the deadly disease and fears he might die behind bars, according to court documents. 'I'm sick as a dog, I have every symptom, it's in here like crazy...man I don't want to die, 21 years and a cold kills me, what a schmuck,' Matera

wrote to his lawyer Seth Ginsberg in an e-mail on April 1, according to court papers. "It's so crazy here, no one is here and these people are treating us like we did something wrong, It's a mess here," Matera, who is being held at FCI Danbury, added in another e-mail. Since his diagnosis, Matera has been isolated to be the special housing unit at the prison. Ginsberg wrote, "Matera suffers from a debilitating, painful and frightening range of symptoms in an environment constructed for punitive rather than palliative purposes," Ginsberg wrote in the appeal. He added Matera has served nearly 90 percent of his 28-year sentence."

JAMES

Who knew? Who knew the prison system was designed to punish you? I must say, the Post scooped the hell out of the Times on that one.

GLORIA

Two papers in one city on two planets.

JAMES

I love it. It's entertaining. If we lived in Jersey we'd be reading about school board meetings.

GLORIA

And we'd actually have room to spread out the papers.

JAMES

I noticed you were kinda getting into the Post there.

GLORIA

I had so much to choose from. There was the \$10 million lottery winner who was charged with murder, the list of visitors to Jeffrey Epstein's jail cell....all kinds of news you can use.

JAMES

Anyway, that was outstanding. Let's go walk.

GLORIA

Where we going?

JAMES

Times Square. Broadway. We can check out all the plays we're missing.

GLORIA

We can stand in the cheap tickets line, just for the hell of it..

JAMES

We can hit the Stage Deli and find some park bench somewhere..

GLORIA

Sure. Grab the sanitizer.

6 PM that night. JAMES and GLORIA are relaxing on the sofa.

GLORIA

What now? We're not scheduled to do anything until 11. You put that in the calendar. Along with a smiley face. I liked that.

JAMES

Well, right now I want a big-ass, greasy SMOG pizza from Goldberg's..

GLORIA

throws head back, yells
Oh, God. Oh, God. Yes! Yes!

JAMES

You said you weren't going to make those sounds until 11.

GLORIA

Just get your ass off this couch and do it! Ooooooh!

JAMES

Hold that thought. I'll be back in 45 minutes.

returns with giant pizza box

JAMES

holding pizza slice with sausage, mushrooms, olives and green peppers
If it was my last day on earth and I had one pizza to order, and if I hadn't ordered from Ray's in the previous three months and hadn't had the heart catheterization that is required, this would be it.

eating pizza
Mffffmuffpfff...

GLORIA

I know what you mean... Next time we read the papers like we did today, I'll do the Times but I always have this impulse to crumple it up. They killed our restaurant last year, or tried to. I know the Post lies all the time, but people just read it for the

headlines anyway.

JAMES

Remember the one on Hillary: Deleter Of The Free World?

GLORIA

How about when Barron Trump was born and they had one that said, "You're Sired"?

JAMES

What if somebody told you we'd elect somebody named Barack Obama twice and then Trump?

GLORIA

Remember Obama's first time? We put the front page of the paper on the trundle bed with Paul the next morning.

JAMES

That was somewhere between the second and third champagne bottle. For you, I mean.

GLORIA

Yeah, you had to fly out that morning. Couldn't drink at all. Fortunately I was there for you, hon. I had your back.

JAMES

Flew to Amsterdam. The plane was full of Europeans. They were more excited than we were.

GLORIA

Your dad called, really late, that night. He was partying, too. You were asleep and we talked for an

hour.. Boy, was he jacked up.

JAMES

Yeah. I remember he told me later, "I never thought they'd make us President of anything."

GLORIA

When is the service?

JAMES

Friday. Zooming it. How's Beth, by the way? She went nuts for Obama, too, didn't she? .

GLORIA

Oh, yeah. Knocked on doors for him. Quit speaking to her best friend from high school over him. They still aren't speaking...She's all right but not great. Still can't walk.

JAMES

laughs bitterly
Just like the flu.

GLORIA

Yeah, Your boy in the White House isn't doing much winning these days.

JAMES

Yeah. He's just a human Post, trying to be a Times...I'm getting sleepy.

GLORIA

Me, too.

JAMES

Just think, Glo. We just about made it through a whole day without a crisis. How about that? .

GLORIA

Quick, turn off the phones.

(they embrace on sofa)

APRIL 8

In the apartment. Gloria and James are playing chess. Gov. Cuomo is speaking on TV:

It is Gloria's turn, but she has stared at the board for the last two minutes.

JAMES

impatient

Anytime today would be fine, Glo.

GLORIA

I can't move.

JAMES

I know. I could have told you that two minutes ago.

GLORIA

Then why the fuck didn't you, Bobby Fischer?

JAMES

I thought you'd see it. So that's yet another impasse. What's that? Three in a row?

GLORIA

A metaphor for our marriage, you think? .

JAMES

I guess that's better than the other term.

GLORIA

What's that?

JAMES

Stalemate.

GLORIA

Ouch.

JAMES

The problem is that you get yourself in those strange positions.

GLORIA

Are we still talking about chess?

JAMES

Yes. Although...

GLORIA

So what's the problem?

JAMES

Well, your king wasn't in check. Therefore, even though you had no place to go, that wasn't checkmate. I didn't do anything to put you in danger.

GLORIA

Okay, so you're saying that if you had the rook on the back line and then the pawn waiting for me when you moved the queen on the same line the king was on...

JAMES

Right, then I would have set you up. That's checkmate, but if the king is just sitting there with his thumb up his ass and you still can't move anywhere, that's an impasse

and nobody wins.

GLORIA

Can we get a chess set where the king actually does have his thumb up his ass?

JAMES

Just concentrate, okay?

GLORIA

Well, actually, Mr. Grandmaster, it was you who caused that impasse situation if you're actually describing it correctly.

JAMES

I did? I guess I got distracted by the dear governor.

GLORIA

I wasn't listening. What'd I miss?

JAMES

I was just waiting to hear about the exploits of the daughter's boyfriend. I mean, if he's not going to show us tapes, I'm not really interested.

GLORIA

Any numbers? The boyfriend's shirt size?

JAMES

Seven thousand something dead. But New Yorkers are tough and smart. Or what's left of them. That's what he says.

GLORIA

Problem is, so is the virus.

JAMES

Oh, and in the Times it says he's bringing in funeral directors from around the country to help with the overflow. So, yeah, we can tell our grandchildren we had a funeral directors' shortage in New York in the year 2020.. Along with a PPE shortage and a testing shortage.

turns the TV off

Do you want to go out today? I don't.

GLORIA

No. I feel like I'm on a treadmill. Except it's been so long since I've been on a treadmill..

JAMES

I was downstairs, but Robert wasn't at the door. He's got Covid, too.

GLORIA

Oh, no. He's what, mid-70s?

JAMES

Yeah. We can't lose him. He's like the CIA. He knows everything and everybody in the building.

GLORIA

conspiratorially
Maybe he knew too much.

JAMES

There were three units available when I bought this place. He steered me to this one. He said the heat didn't work in one, and another one was right next to a tuba player in the symphony who liked to practice at night. Remember him? He recommended this one as long as I could put up with the old man who lived

next door and, every once in a while, thought he was Joseph Stalin and walked around with badges on his jacket.

GLORIA

Tuba player on the second floor. Oh, God. Not that we've slept much anyway, the last seven years.

JAMES

Robert lives in Queens. When he's not here, he's at Belmont Park. I think that's why he got sick. His system couldn't take three days without the ponies.. I wish I could go see him.

GLORIA

You can't. Let me be clear on that. But what CAN we do?

JAMES

We can work on Paul's room...nah, not really. I ducked in there the other day. I tried, but I couldn't throw anything away. Some of his fingerpainting, his little spacesuit. I felt like God would reach down and smack them out of my hand.

GLORIA

Let's just hide.

JAMES

Sure. I'm paralyzed today. Maybe it's sinking in? Seven fucking thousand people? In one day? That's two 9/11s, plus another thousand.

GLORIA

The other problem is that it's Easter week. And you just buried your dad and you couldn't even go. I thought the Zoom service was as good as it could have

been.

JAMES

Should have been in person. We would have gotten together and told more stories. I felt like I had to speak my piece and get out, plus Zoom acted up. Classic case of using something that would have seemed like a miracle five years ago and getting pissed off because it doesn't work perfect. But ain't that America?

GLORIA

So where do you want to go?

JAMES

I want to go back to the USA in 1976 or so. But I really want to bring Paul back. What about Easter brunch?

GLORIA

Let's do it. But I don't want to do anything else. No Good Friday.

JAMES

That's fine. I gotta admit, I'm hanging onto my religion by my fingernails. Nobody ever told me why God had to take him.

GLORIA

takes out a bookmarked Bible
 "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory...While we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things which are not seen, for the things which are seen as temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

JAMES

Where's that from?

GLORIA

Second Corinthians.

JAMES

Light affliction, just for a moment?

GLORIA

It wasn't light and it's not a moment and we didn't deserve any of that and he especially didn't. We also don't deserve living in Manhattan with two good jobs and good health and sound minds and good friends and the ability to buy any damn thing we want. So let's not blame God, OK? Especially since it's only 10 minutes until Jeopardy.

JAMES

Keeping it in perspective.

GLORIA

Why, thank you, dear.

JAMES

standing
That wasn't a compliment. I'm going downstairs. Gotta make sure the new guy is all masked up. Tape Jeopardy, OK?

GLORIA

goes back to chess board
I will, but I'm also going to figure out how to break our impasse.

JAMES

laughs
Hey, let's do that after dinner. Sounds like fun.
I'll get some wine.

APRIL 12

*JAMES, GLORIA and PAUL are in the living room,
after dinner*

PAUL

That was great, Mom. I don't think you ever made
rigatoni with salmon before.

JAMES

Ahem.

GLORIA

That was your dad. He planned it, shopped for it, and
cooked it. Also got your chocolate rabbit. All I did
was stand by with the fire extinguisher.

PAUL

Awesome!

JAMES

Yeah. We're switching identities. Your mom's gonna
start flying 747s.

GLORIA

Anything to kill another day.

PAUL

I do have to leave around 8 to see a friend of mine.

GLORIA

Is that friend a girl? That's not girlfriend. That's two words.

PAUL

Well, it might be one word. Emily.

JAMES

Really?

PAUL

Yeah. She's a year ahead of me but she plays basketball too. We just like hanging out.

JAMES

Got a last name?

PAUL

Emily Morales. She's from Nicaragua, or her family is. Her dad is a counsel or something.

JAMES

Consul? Maybe works at the consulate? Big shot.

PAUL

Anyway, I thought I'd tell you before I got the cross-examination.

GLORIA

From "moi?" Heavens no, honey. I'm just glad to hear you found somebody you like.

JAMES

So it's time for "the talk"?

PAUL

No, Dad! That ship sailed.

JAMES

to Gloria
Did you get the talk?

GLORIA

Nope. I'm Italian. Some things just come natural.

JAMES

And we always had pigs and chickens at our house,
so...

PAUL

laughs
Come on, Dad!

JAMES

Seriously, maybe it's time for the cop "talk."

PAUL

Yeah?

JAMES

So you might not notice it all the time, but if you're out on the town, they're watching you. You walk into a nice store, they're on point. You even look in a picture window, they will take notice. If they stop you, if they give you any shit at all, just

look them in the eye. Speak distinctly. Do not mumble. Be very nice. Keep your hands in front of you. If they want to see ID, well, maybe you should keep it in your shirt pocket so you're not reaching for stuff. Now, most of this stuff will happen when you start driving, and if you're in Manhattan there's no reason to do that. Only if you moved to some God-forsaken place like Jersey...

GLORIA

All right, move along.

JAMES

But if there is a fight nearby, don't hang around. Don't run. Just get out of there. Keep your head on a swivel. If you're on the subway, keep both hands on the straps or the pole. Don't make eye contact. If you're in a Duane Reade's, make a list, go get whatever you need and then get the heck out. Don't loiter.

PAUL

You're over-reacting.

JAMES

Maybe I am and you won't have any trouble 99 times. The 100th time is the only one that matters. I'm sorry, son, but the world has not changed all that much. Obama used to talk about store detectives following him around. He was a U.S. Senator at the time. There are NBA players who could buy the whole police department. They get pulled over in their own neighborhood just because they drive a Lexus.

GLORIA

Did your dad give you the talk?

JAMES

It was different. Denison was a small town. Not to

say the cops liked us, no way in hell. But they at least knew us. And Dad let us figure it out for ourselves.

PAUL

That was Jim Crow, right?

JAMES

No, I was born in 1974. The schools merged a few years before. We could go anywhere we wanted. We just knew where not to go. And Dad didn't want to plant those seeds. He was different that way.

PAUL

How?

JAMES

He was a Black Pride guy. He told me we were descended from kings. The maddest he would ever get is when he saw you slouching over, not standing straight. He wanted you to take everything on, head-on. He hated victims. He would never say, like you hear today, 'Oh, we've got to be so much better to have a chance.' He would say, screw that. We're already better.

GLORIA

That was where the tennis got started.

PAUL

The tennis?.

JAMES

Right. He didn't tell me what sports to play. But I watched Arthur Ashe play on TV, or at least some tapes. He got me rackets and we'd hit balls back and forth for hours. And then when I started winning

tournaments he loved it. He told me I was beating them at their own game. Because if I'd played football or basketball I would have been just another one. I'm just glad he lived long enough to see Tiger Woods. He must have sat there in the living room and watched every shot Tiger Woods hit.

PAUL

What did he think of Mom? I mean....being white.

GLORIA laughs

JAMES

She could do no wrong. Every time he saw her, his eyes lit up like a Christmas tree. He'd tell me, 'Boy, you didn't deserve somebody like this. You overachieved!'

PAUL

I remember him a little bit. I remember his cowboy hat. And he liked to sing.

JAMES

He had that list of country music lyrics, like, "If you ever get to Houston, look me down"....I've got that around here somewhere.

GLORIA

He also won the Most Shitfaced award at the wedding reception.

JAMES

Hands down.

GLORIA

Of course, my Dad and Mom had already left the party.

PAUL

Why?

GLORIA

Dad had this skin condition.

JAMES

He was allergic to the color of mine.

GLORIA

to Paul

It was OK. One thing I love about your Dad is that he could care less about the stuff that isn't important. My Dad came around. Somewhat.

JAMES

Yeah, he could actually stand to talk to me for five minutes by the end. I'm sure it was traumatic for him. You have to remember where people are from sometimes, how they lived, what they're used to. But you can't stop and wait for them to catch up.

PAUL.

What was the wedding like? I mean, I've seen the pics.

JAMES

Kind of a blur, for me. I remember the vows, and Dad talking to me before he went into the church, and telling stories...And I remember the first dance at the reception: "A Whiter Shade Of Pale."

GLORIA

Yeah. It probably wasn't a first-dance song but what the hell.

to Paul
Well, it's 7:30. Can't keep the lady waiting. Where are you meeting her?

PAUL

This place in the West 90s. See you guys. Thanks for the rabbit. Bring me back soon, OK?

JAMES

Mother's Day at the latest.

GLORIA

Bye, Paulie!

PAUL leaves

JAMES

He didn't even groan when you said Paulie. I think he's focused.

GLORIA

Must be love....So, as you've told me many times, the cook cleans up....And, then, tomorrow. What's on the calendar tomorrow?

JAMES

Unfortunately, nothing. I didn't plan past today. I never know how things are gonna go with him..

GLORIA

Good....because I've been looking at Realtor.com, and there are some really interesting deals in central

Jersey.

JAMES

sings
If I can make it there, I'll make it anywhere...It's
up to you, New Brunswick, New Brunswick...It's just
not the same song, is it?

GLORIA

Just humor me. Okay?

APRIL 25

5 p.m. GLORIA and JAMES are watching Jeopardy

CONTESTANT

I'll take State Capitals for \$600, Alex.

ALEX

"The capital of this state reads like JFK's press
secretary but rhymes with beer."

GLORIA

Pierre!

CONTESTANT

What is Pierre?.

ALEX

Right you are.

JAMES

It's like 'Peer?' Not 'Pee-Air'?

GLORIA

Quiet. I'm on a roll.

CONTESTANT

I'll take "The Eyes Have It" for \$400.

ALEX

This hit by Survivor became the theme song for Rocky III.

GLORIA

Eye Of The Tiger! Duh!

CONTESTANT

What is Doctor My Eyes?.

ALEX

No, sorry. That would be Eye Of The Tiger.

CONTESTANT

Pickers And Grinners For \$800, Alex.

ALEX

The son of a heavyweight boxing champion played this dimwitted character on The Beverly Hillbillies.

GLORIA

Jethro!

JAMES

Too easy.

CONTESTANT

Who is Jed Clampett?

ALEX

Who Is Jethro, that's the question. Jethro...Well, you've all done a great job. Now we go to Final Jeopardy.

JAMES

How much you got, Glo?

GLORIA

Twelve thousand six hundred.

JAMES

None of them have more than \$8,000.

GLORIA

That's right. Don't fuck with me. And I'm betting it all!

JAMES

You don't even have the category yet.

ALEX

The category is Musicals.

GLORIA

Cake! Cake, I'm telling you!

JAMES

Speaking of cake, what's for dinner? I've got the urge for Rosa Mexicano right now.

GLORIA

Whatever. Let me concentrate.

ALEX

We're back, and the Final Jeopardy category is Musicals...And here is your answer: He was the first to sing Razzle Dazzle in the longest running Broadway musical of all time. Go.

GLORIA

Who don't know that? Jerry Orbach in Chicago. Playing Billy Flynn.

ALEX

Like the Jerry Orbach on Law And Order?

GLORIA

Jerry Orbach was on Broadway for years. What's the matter with you, Manhattan expert?. Smarten up.

ALEX

OK. Matt, your answer, please?

CONTESTANT 3

Who was Richard Gere?

GLORIA

My God! That was the movie. What the fuck?

ALEX

Sorry, that was the movie, Matt. I'm afraid you've wagered away all your money. So, we come to our champion, Frank. And you say... "Who was Jerry Orbach?" Perfect. And you only wagered \$300...

GLORIA

You pussy.

ALEX

So you'll be back tomorrow as our champion. Thanks everyone!

GLORIA

You're dead meat.

stands up, straightens blouse
Okay. You were saying? Dinner?

JAMES

Rosa Mexicano?

GLORIA

No, no. I've got a roast in the oven. No problem. I did that while you were doing...actually I have no idea what you were doing.

JAMES

What is this testosterone outbreak you have during Jeopardy? It's over, you won, calm down.

GLORIA

It goes back to a boyfriend in college.

JAMES

The one in jail?

GLORIA

Yeah.

JAMES

If they ever put you in the show you'd be F-bombing Alex, trash-talking everybody.

GLORIA

I would not. I'd be on the cover of People Magazine in three days. Anyway, let's do Realtor.com. You promised you would look at this.

JAMES

I did?

GLORIA

sits down with laptop
You did. Okay. Four bedrooms, two baths?

JAMES

We're going to run a brothel? Why four bedrooms?

GLORIA

Storage. A piano. Just extra room. Breathing. For God's sake. And I'm going to look in a 25-mile radius.

Why?

GLORIA

Because that's as far as I can live away from the restaurant.

JAMES

What restaurant?

GLORIA

What restaurant? The one I've been talking about for five years, James.

JAMES

Oh, So now that's a real thing.

GLORIA

Of course. Good grief. It was always a real thing. I've even got a floor plan. They need a high-end Italian restaurant down there.

JAMES

Not like the one here. They can't afford that.

GLORIA

No, this'll be smaller and more casual and more family style but the food will be every bit as good. And it will be something that belongs to me. I need that. Don't you know that?

JAMES

Sure...when were you going to fill me on the details? Like financing it, for one thing.

GLORIA

As long as your ass is welded to this city there wasn't any use. I started dreaming and plotting and then it just got too real in my head.. I'm sorry. We've just got to take action.

JAMES

Okay. Okay. I'm not your opponent. I just didn't know it was getting to that point. I thought you still liked it here.

GLORIA

You're hearing but you're never listening. I used to like the city. Used to love the city, when it was humming. Every now and then it kept us from thinking about Paul. Now it's what I hate about the city.

PAUL:

Blame the city? That makes no sense.

GLORIA

I shouldn't say hate. Now I tolerate it. You think it's happiness. What I really don't fucking understand is that you can't see that there's 700 square feet that I just can't fucking handle any more, James. I don't bring it up because I don't want to bring you down from your cloud. But there's no way I can ride it too.

JAMES

I'm sorry, too. But you gotta tell me more about the restaurant. I like you seeing you excited. I even liked your Jeopardy tantrum. Tell you the truth, it got me kinda excited, too. What do you think? Maybe we can move back dinner for a while.

GLORIA

puts arms around his waist
Sure. But you gotta put it in the form of a question.

MAY 10

(James and Gloria relax in the living room after Paul has visited for Mother's Day brunch)

JAMES

He didn't say anything about Emily this time.

GLORIA

Yeah. I guess it's day-to-day, like everything else.

JAMES

And he keeps asking us a lot of black-white questions.

GLORIA

reading the Times
I'm not concerned about that.

JAMES

No. At least he gave me a chance to tell the Franco Harris story again.

GLORIA

shakes head
I'm finally on the verge of forgiving you for that. And then you bring it up.

JAMES

You LIKED the name. Paul Franco Murphy.

GLORIA

Yeah, but I didn't know the Franco Harris part of it for two years.

JAMES

I shouldn't have told you in the first place...even though it's a tribute to both of us. Franco's dad was black and he met his wife in Italy during the war. What could be more perfect? And then Franco Harris won four Super Bowls.

GLORIA

My son gets named because of football. Christ.

JAMES

Touchy. I just thought you were pissed because I didn't get a Mother's Day present.

GLORIA

I'm pissed about a number of things, including that. I listened to Trump tweet 120 times today.

JAMES

Why the hell would you do that?

GLORIA

angrily
Because he's shit-talking about Obama and what a great job he's doing on Covid-19. And you voted for him.

JAMES

You mean I put him over the top?

GLORIA

Get serious, Mr. Military. You knowingly voted for this creep after he sat here and ridiculed John McCain for spending seven years getting the shit beat out of him in Hanoi!

JAMES

He was kidding! Why is everyone so uptight? He never once thought anybody would take him seriously. And when everybody did, he just said to hell with 'em, they can't take a joke.

GLORIA

Joke? Was it a joke when he started bobbing his head, making fun of that reporter?

JAMES

Dry up. Besides, he grew up in New York. You gotta have thick skin.

GLORIA

Bullshit! This isn't funny.

JAMES

And you're Exhibit A.

GLORIA

I'm from New Jersey, you nitwit. Nobody's tougher than we are. So when anybody at all criticizes your guy, he says, 'Oh, they're nasty. Hillary is a nasty woman. Megyn Kelly is nasty.' Thick skin! You can't honestly believe that. I didn't really marry somebody who is that stupid, did I?

JAMES

Evidently you did. We've got the paperwork here somewhere.

GLORIA

So how can you possibly like him? He's a coward. I've seen you jump into rivers to save kids who were in trouble. This is the first coward we've ever had in the White

House.

JAMES

I don't know. I heard Martin Van Buren was a wimp.

GLORIA

You flew fighter jets and he claimed he couldn't get to Vietnam because he had bone spurs. What are bone spurs? Is that like an ingrown toenail?

JAMES

Look. I'm don't love the guy. I know what he's about. But these are politicians. It's all theater. Remember when Kamala Harris went after Biden in that first debate about busing and tried to call him a racist? Somebody asked her about it later and she just laughed and said, hey, that's politics. It's like professional wrestling, with less professional makeup.

GLORIA

Well, the good thing is that we live in New York and neither one of our votes will count.

JAMES

So why are we arguing? You realize that arguing reduces the oxygen in here.

GLORIA

You were arguing. I was explaining.

JAMES

*hands Gloria print-outs of real estate listings,
plus a Hertz rent-a-car reservation*
Well, Happy Mother's Day. And if you're done explaining, take a look at this.

GLORIA

Wow. Really? Look at all this. And this is our real estate agent? When is she expecting us?

JAMES

Tomorrow at 1 o'clock.

GLORIA

happily
Thank you, thank you, thank you! That's exactly what I wanted. Are you sure about the rental car?

JAMES

No, but we'll wear masks and gloves and bring some Lysol and do whatever we have to do.

GLORIA

That's great. These places look beautiful. I know I've been harping on this. I just didn't think you were listening. Thanks for 12 great years of marriage.

JAMES

Twelve out of 17. Not bad. Minus the last five minutes.

GLORIA

And the virus is calming down a little bit, and the sun is out, and Memorial Day is coming up, and we've still got Michigan in June.

JAMES

holds up wine glass
Here's to June. Do you think we'll make it?

GLORIA

snuggles with him on couch
Let's just make it to November.

JAMES

We will. We got thick skin.

ACT 2

MAY 25

GLORIA and JAMES are back from a walk in Central Park

GLORIA

So you ruled out the house in town?

JAMES

I guess. Look, you wanted to do suburbia, so let's do suburbia. I thought the whole point was to get out of the city.

GLORIA

But we could walk to things.

JAMES

What things? It's New Brunswick. Plus it needs major work. I'm not moving out of Manhattan to do major work.

GLORIA

As if you could.

JAMES

As if I need to.... How did you rank those houses? My

head was spinning after a while. But I say East Brunswick first, by far. Then Old Ridge.

GLORIA

East Brunswick had the big kitchen.

JAMES

And the big basement.

GLORIA

I could have a whole floor by myself!

JAMES

Just what I was thinking. I could put on the headphones when Jeopardy comes on and you could scream to your heart's content.

GLORIA

Hmmmm...you never objected to that before.

JAMES

Yeah, but not with Alex in the room.

GLORIA

But let's not get attached to one house. We'll find more good ones next time.

JAMES

Next time for what?

GLORIA

Next time we go look for houses. We only saw five.

JAMES

How many are you planning to buy? I'm sold on that one in East Brunswick.

GLORIA

There were a couple of bedrooms I didn't like.

JAMES

There were four fuckin' bedrooms! Give one of the bad ones to the dog.

GLORIA

Wait a second. A dog? That's a first.

JAMES

We could have a buffalo herd in some of these houses...Good God. When do you want to go down there again?

GLORIA

I already talked to Sally and she wants to take us to Princeton and Edison on Saturday. And then the listing in Somerset. Now that was beautiful. You saw that one. It had grounds. Grounds! How does that sound? "Darling, let's go out on the porch and overlook the grounds." You could be Colin Firth and I could be Kate Winslet..

JAMES

Could you? I mean, for a night or two?

GLORIA

Geez. Walked right into one, didn't I?

JAMES

Sorry. I liked that listing, too...So when are we going to show this place?

GLORIA

Didn't I tell you? Giuseppe's niece is an agent and she wants us to have an Open House next month, You'll like this. She said, and I quote, "You'll sell this place in about 45 seconds and you'll have enough cash to buy New Jersey."

JAMES

Giuseppe's niece. Is she married to Fredo or Michael?

GLORIA

Maria is her name and they have homes in Manhattan, San Francisco and Hong Kong. She sells property for fun.

JAMES

What does her husband do?

GLORIA

Some questions, you don't ask.

JAMES

So this is all well and good but we still have the same problem.

GLORIA

Paul's room.

JAMES

Just gotta put our head down and do it. Box everything up and take it with us and open it up later.

GLORIA

Yeah, that's the way we do it, James. That's the way we always do it. For seven years..

JAMES

Gloria...

GLORIA

Maybe we can put masks on. That way we won't have to take in any of the pain. Or transmit the droplets, of course.

JAMES

We are using the pronoun "we," correct?

GLORIA

Are we?

MAY 26

GLORIA and JAMES are having coffee and muffins at 9 a.m.

GLORIA

picks up phone
Weird text from Beth.

JAMES

How is she?

GLORIA

Slow going. She can walk for maybe five minutes at a time...She says, 'Is James watching the news?'

JAMES

What does that mean? Maybe Morgan Freeman died.

GLORIA

Now she says, 'Tell him I'm thinking about him.'

JAMES

picks up remote

NICOLLE WALLACE

from TV

Minutes ago, the mayor of Minneapolis announced that four police officers have been fired after the death of George Floyd, 46. He died at a hospital after one of the officers reportedly pressed his knee against Floyd's neck for approximately seven minutes. The victim was reportedly arrested for forgery. One report is that he was trying to pass a counterfeit 20-dollar bill. We have the tape of the incident. I would like to warn you that this tape is very disturbing. You will hear the victim say, "My neck hurts" and "I can't breathe."

JAMES

watches tapes, sits in recliner
What on earth.

GLORIA

My God. That's unbelievable.

JAMES

So that's his head. Right there next to the tire. The guy's knee is pressing his head right into the pavement. Like a grape.

GLORIA

Right.

JAMES

And this cop is holding his knee on his neck for how long? Seven minutes? He's trying to decapitate him. Not just choke him.

GLORIA

Boy, this is going to be ugly.

JAMES

We didn't even do this in the Air Force. We had knee lifts, and we had chokeholds from behind. Didn't the New York cops get rid of the chokehold? Like, a long time ago?

GLORIA

Tell you what. Let me work on dinner tonight and I'll just leave you alone. I'm so sorry.

JAMES

Thanks....but this is just like what Beth said. Make sure James isn't upset by this. Why should I be more upset than anybody else, just because I'm black? Why isn't everyone upset? They ran down that boy in Georgia who was jogging and they gunned him down. Woman in Louisville, they broke into her house and killed her.

GLORIA

I saw what Will Smith said. Racism isn't over, it's just on tape.

JAMES

Sorry. I know you're trying. But you're not making me feel any better. I'm just going to sit here. Okay?

(At 7 p.m. James is still in his chair. TV is still on)

GLORIA

It's no problem, I can wrap it up and put it in the fridge.

JAMES

preoccupied
I'm sorry, I'll eat it later, I'm sure it's great.

GLORIA

puts hand on his shoulder
You do what you need to.

JAMES

I was wrong. You know how long it lasted? Eight minutes and 46 seconds.

GLORIA

The knee on the neck?

JAMES

Yeah. You know how long eight minutes is? You can't get people off an airplane in eight minutes. The punk did that and the other three cops just sat there. I knew guys like him in the Air Force. They got their whole swagger from the uniform. Strip them and take away their guns and they run like thieves. They're

the first guys to leave you stranded.

GLORIA

I remember Eric Garner.

JAMES

Yeah, His crime was selling vapes...Maybe Dad was wrong. Maybe there's stuff out there that we can't overcome.

GLORIA

He lived in a different world. ,

JAMES

He did. But I think he just didn't want to realize it.

GLORIA

Sounds familiar.

JAMES

Did I tell you about the joke George told me, a few months ago? Probably not. It just occurred to me. Now, this is George, right? He's been in our house, he gave Paul some little wings for his pajamas. I've flown with him for years. We've had dinner together on maybe five continents. Right? He's a brother.

GLORIA

Sure.

JAMES

He says, hey, what do you call a black guy flying a plane? I say, I don't know. He says, A pilot, you fucking racist. Now, is that funny to you?

GLORIA

Actually it is.

JAMES

That's right. I laughed, too. I mean, it's supposed to be anti-racist. And then I kept thinking about it and I said, Why did he tell me that? Did he feel like he needed to remind me that I'm black, did he feel he needed it for himself? You know, he'll go back and say, Lemme tell you this joke, I even told my black friend this joke. You know what I mean? It's just weird. When was I black to him, when was he white to me? And I've known him 20 years.

GLORIA

Have you ever had doubts about me?

JAMES

Not doubts. Not at all. The scariest thing in the world is when I think about life without you. But when you piss me off, or when you make assumptions about what I'm thinking or what I want -- and don't ask me specifics right now, because that really doesn't matter -- I think, wow, the white girl doesn't get it. And if I'm feeling that way about you, the best friend I'll ever have in my life, think about how a stranger feels.

GLORIA

That's right. You know I don't walk on eggshells very well. I'm sure I've said some stuff to you that came out wrong. I had girlfriends ask me about being married to a black guy. I'd say, well, the back of the bus is not so bad and, by the way, fuck you. I lost friends. I almost lost my dad. They weren't friends if they felt that way and he wasn't being my dad when he felt that way. But when I say something wrong, call me out. It's fine. We've handled worse.

TV CORRESPONDENT

"It seems to have calmed down but the next thing you know, you hear the tear gas cannisters go off, and we've seen people get hit with rubber bullets...The organizers wanted to keep the protests peaceful, and the protesters seemed happy that the policemen were fired, but now they're gathered around the Sixth Precinct and there have been cries to set it on fire or take it over. The situation is still very tense here, Angela."

JAMES

You know it's coming here. I'm going to have to get out there amongst 'em.

GLORIA

sighs

Please don't. There's no distancing in the street. You know that. If you get sick it won't do anybody any good. Maybe I should go, too.

JAMES

Thanks. But no. This is something I've got to do. I should have done it long ago.

GLORIA

OK, I understand. Just stay out of the hospital and stay off TV. And out of jail. Can you do that?

JAMES

gestures at TV

It won't be up to me.

MAY 29

9 pm. JAMES has joined a protest march in the Union Square area. GLORIA is at home

GLORIA

on phone with her mother

Yeah, I think he's finally going to do it....That's right!....There's a gorgeous house in East Brunswick, two stories, four bedrooms. Huge back yard. When I went there I felt like somebody pumped air into my lungs, and I could breathe again....Probably five miles from you. We're drawing up the papers this weekend, I think. So now we got to get a car, I've got to get my driver's license, then get another car, then a lawn mower and then a dog...(laughs) No, I don't want Homer or any other yap-yap dog. You can keep him. It's exciting, though....Yeah, I'm concerned about Beth, too. It doesn't sound like she's making much progress....Yeah, I've got the TV on. James is down there marching somewhere. Hopefully with his mask. This got personal with him, of course it did. He's more upset than I've ever seen him....Yeah, I can imagine. Just stay in the house, OK?... So if we have a chance we'll call you Saturday...All right. Love you, bye.

hangs up, picks up her book

CORRESPONDENT

"Sue, we're down here at Union Square where several hundred protesters were chanting 'No justice, no peace,' and clapping and chanting the names of George Floyd and Eric Garner, and it was almost like a street fair there for a while. Suddenly there was another group, some of them wearing camouflage, mostly young white males, began to push and shove and agitate the protesters, and that's when the police reacted...No tear gas yet, but several arrests and an alarming amount of property damage...you see windows broken at Target and Panera Bread, and there were some spray paint on the venerable Lee Strasburg Academy, just off the square...Probably the most serious was a brawl right in front of Il Rifugio, one of the top Italian restaurants in the city...Several adults were shoved through the big picture window in the front of the restaurant, and you can see an ambulance and paramedics trying to get to the scene..."

GLORIA

Oh, my God! Giuseppe!

grabs phone, texts Giuseppe.

CORRESPONDENT

"A tall, African-American man, thought to be in his 40s, has suffered pretty significant cuts to his face and neck, probably sustained when the window was crashed in..."

GLORIA

No! No! C'mon Giuseppe! Answer me!

text comes over phone

I'm here at the restaurant. James is cut up pretty good. They're taking him to Beth Israel. You stay where you are.

Gloria replies

What happened! Are you OK? How bad is James?

Giuseppe replies

I'm fine. We were standing in front. Nothing was happening. All of a sudden James gets hit with a rock or something. About seven guys start breaking windows. James and I and a cop got into it with them. James's neck and ear got opened up. They took him away. I'll go over there and call you, but stay right there. You can see him tomorrow.

MAY 30

At Beth Israel Hospital, in James' room.

GLORIA

walks in

Look there's the Street Fighting Man.

JAMES

smiles, looks inside bag
There's the woman with the Smiler's Deli bag and,
yeah, the Cuban sandwich. Was I a TV star last night?
I bet I was great for ratings.

GLORIA

Wow, you're in a good mood.

JAMES

You would be, too. Find out what kind of drugs I'm on
and buy a shitload.

GLORIA

I'm just wondering how much you paid Channel 11 to
call you a tall African-American in your mid 40s.

JAMES

They did?

GLORIA

Yeah. Fake news....How many stitches?.

JAMES

They said 50, all told. Three different places. I
guess it missed the jugular by an inch and a half.

GLORIA

Ouch, don't tell me that. So when you coming home?

JAMES

Tomorrow, I think. Can we sign the house papers next
week?

GLORIA

We're on Covid time. There are no deadlines. Should I go check out what they did to the restaurant?

JAMES

No. You'll be heartbroken. They did a number on it. Thanks for the food. They're coming in to dress my wounds shortly. You might get a kick out of that.

GLORIA

No, I'll go back. You don't think I slept, do you? Don't worry, I'll save my tantrum until next week.

JAMES

Something to look forward to. Bye.

GLORIA

walks down hall, gets a call
Hi Marianne. Any news?....I am? So the test was right. Wow. Hang on. I'm going to sit down for a minute.

goes to waiting room
OK. Tell me again -- you don't think my age is a problem? I understand.

Well, I'm not sure what we were thinking. I guess we assumed it wasn't going to happen...Oh, sure. Full speed ahead...Well, I don't know what he'll say, and he's in the hospital right now, flying on painkillers. I guess I'll keep it to myself until then. I might need some Quaaludes to pull that off. Thanks, Marianne. I'll see you next week.

(Gloria sits there, eyes brimming)

JUNE 16

JAMES and GLORIA are in their empty apartment. It is empty except for two laptops and Gloria's purse. They are driving to their new home in New Jersey later in the day.

JAMES

Wow. The place looks big all of a sudden.

GLORIA

That's why it sold in three hours.

JAMES

On a Saturday.

GLORIA

We don't have to leave right away. You can have one more blueberry muffin. Or you can go down and talk to Robert.

JAMES

Thanks for getting all this stuff moved out.

GLORIA

I didn't do a thing. I called the movers and got out of their way, and when it came to Paul's room I said, look, do your thing as fast as you can.

JAMES

So we're leaving just as the city gets opened up. That's 2020 for you.

GLORIA

Well, dear. I need to tell you something. I wish I could tell you to sit down but we don't have any

chairs. We've got one more surprise.

JAMES

laughs
OK, let me guess. You're pregnant.

GLORIA

shocked
Who told you? You talk to Marianne?

JAMES

shocked
What? Told me what?

GLORIA

That I'm pregnant.

JAMES

Wait, wait. Start over. You have a big surprise?.

GLORIA

You'll never guess.

JAMES

You're pregnant.

GLORIA

And how did you know?

JAMES

I didn't. So you mean we're really pregnant? That's what you're telling me.

GLORIA

I'm sorry I'm telling you now. I didn't know what to feel, either. Are you upset?.

JAMES

sits on floor, back against the wall, looks at ceiling for 10-15 seconds
Can I just ask you one question?

GLORIA

Sure, sweetie.

JAMES

sighs
Can we just keep the baby in our bedroom, the one in the back? For the first nine months at least? How does that sound?

GLORIA

near tears, laughing
We can.

JAMES turns on his laptop and cues up "A Whiter Shade Of Pale." He and Gloria begin slow-dancing in the empty apartment
(Music voiceover)

We skipped the light fandango
Turned cartwheels across the floor
I was feeling kinda seasick
The crowd called out for more
The room was humming harder
As the ceiling flew away

When we called out for another drink

The waiter brought a tray

*PAUL appears in the background, holding up his
phone, taking a video of JAMES and GLORIA
dancing*

And it was that later

As the miller told his tale

That her face, at first just ghostly

Turned a whiter shade of pale.

End of play