

CHANCE ENCOUNTERS

FADE IN

EXT. PROVIDENCE COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY

The sidewalk bustles with foot traffic. Trees are in autumn leaf.

MYJA BEECHAM, 22, rides his motorcycle into an empty parking space and cuts the engine. He sits there, not removing his helmet, not taking his hands off the bike's controls, and stares at the Georgian-style building that occupies an entire block of downtown Providence, Rhode Island.

Finally Myja dismounts and removes the helmet and leaves it on the seat. He wipes his palms on his black leather jacket.

He takes a deep breath and heads inside the building.

INT. PROVIDENCE COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY

Myja makes his way to the Superior Court and slips in the door past the "Quiet - Court in Session" sign.

INT. SUPERIOR COURT - DAY

Myja stands just inside the door and watches Justice JAMES M. GUSTAFSON, 42, intently.

James, from his perch at the bench, listens, a bit glassy-eyed, to A.D.A. MARY KRUPSKI pepper the DEFENDANT with questions while the man's attorney, MATT MITCHELL, chomps at the bit from the defense table.

Light from a window catches on the smoked glass in the door Myja had entered, and James casually looks up. His blue eyes widen as he stares at the young man staring back at him.

MATT MITCHELL

Your honor?

James keeps staring at Myja.

MATT MITCHELL

Your honor. I said I object.

JAMES

(half to himself)

So do I.

James blinks a couple of times, then looks down at the defense attorney.

JAMES

What? Oh. Court will render its decision when we reconvene at two o'clock. Court is in recess.

He bangs the gavel.

As the courtroom clears, James walks up to Myja. He holds out his hand.

Myja impatiently wipes his hand on his jacket again, then accepts the man's gesture.

James looks him up and down his 5'10" athletic frame.

JAMES

You look good. I always knew the Beechams would take fine care of you.

MYJA

You--

His voice breaks. He clears his throat and visibly tries to relax.

MYJA

You know who I am.

JAMES

(smiling)

Of course I know who you are, Myja. You are named after me, after all, in a manner of speaking.

Myja crinkles his brows.

MYJA

Why haven't we ever met then?

James glances around him, then hooks his thumb to indicate the door to the left of the bench.

JAMES

Hey, how 'bout we continue this in my chambers? I'm a justice of the court, I have chambers.

He shrugs at Myja's lack of response.

JAMES

I'll have a nice lunch brought in. You can take your jacket off, get comfortable.

James reaches out and rubs the thick, black leather between his fingertips.

JAMES  
Good quality. Goes great with the boots.

They start down the middle of the courtroom towards the bench.

Myja hooks his thumb over his shoulder.

MYJA  
Goes with the motorcycle. Claire says, "You get the bike, ya gotta get the uniform." I'm just gonna ditch the wheels in Baja.

JAMES  
Oh, who's out there you know?

MYJA  
No one. Just always wanted to thumb my way from Baja to Barrow, Alaska. Y'know: work odd jobs, live off the land.

James chuckles.

JAMES  
Reminds me that semester I spent in Sweden, when I was just a few years older than you are.

He outright laughs.

JAMES  
Man. I haven't thought about that in years.

James shakes off the memory.

JAMES  
You got that graduation money I sent?

Myja nods.

MYJA  
I gave it to Dad towards a new rudder for the Paulette's Dream.

Myja cocks a brow at James's reaction to the name.

JAMES

I meant that money for you. I figured: the motorbike, the clothes. I mean, like, how much does fishing bring in anymore?

Myja shakes his head.

MYJA

Everyone chipped in for the bike as a grad gift. The jacket and boots, I got. Fishin' was good this summer...kinda.

James nods noncommittally.

MYJA

So now I'm headed west. I thought I...Um...I...

Myja trails off and waits as James opens the door to his outer office. Myja follows the man inside.

INT. JAMES'S OUTER OFFICE - DAY

TOMMY PRATT, 26, James's law clerk who looks like he should still be in high school, stands up from behind his desk.

TOMMY

Justice Gustafson, sir, Matt Mitchell's on the line. He's screaming his head off that he and his client don't appreciate being left hanging with an objection pending. He wants to remind you, sir,--

JAMES

He wants to remind me? Tommy, hang up.

TOMMY

Sir?

JAMES

Hang up the phone.

Tommy looks down at the phone, then hovers his finger over the blinking "Line 2" button.

JAMES

It's not a bomb, Tommy. Hang up.

Tommy punches the button. He looks up with a growing smile.

TOMMY  
I didn't know you could do that to  
an attorney.

JAMES  
You can today.

James watches his law clerk look from him to Myja and back to him.

Tommy crinkles his brows.

JAMES  
Have lunch sent in from Hemenway's  
to my chambers, then take the rest  
of the day off.

TOMMY  
The rest of the day?!

JAMES  
Tommy, I'm not a slave driver.

The clerk bites his bottom lip for a moment.

TOMMY  
Yes, sir, but you've never let me  
take a whole afternoon before.

James narrows his eyes at him.

JAMES  
Lunch from Hemenway's, then go  
home. Walk the dog, nail your  
fiancée to the wall, just do  
something that isn't here.

TOMMY  
(picking up the receiver)  
Yes, sir. Oh, yeah. Charlie called.  
Mrs. Gustafson got that appointment  
after all, so he's delivering her  
downtown then coming over here to  
discuss those papers with you.

James looks at Myja, then at his law clerk again.

JAMES  
Call him back and tell him no can  
do.

TOMMY  
I think they've already left the house, sir.

JAMES  
Then do whatever you need to do to get a message to him.

Tommy stares at his boss, gulps.

TOMMY  
Yes, sir, Justice Gustafson.

INT - JAMES'S CHAMBERS - DAY

James ushers Myja into the oak-paneled, book-lined, and handsomely-decorated office. James solidly closes the door.

MYJA  
Wow.

James tosses his robe onto a chair, then walks around the massive mahogany desk and sits in the fine leather chair.

JAMES  
Take your jacket off.

Myja just stands there.

MYJA  
Um...No thanks, if it's all the same.

JAMES  
(frowns)  
Sorry 'bout that out there. It's just that--

MYJA  
It's just that you don't want anyone to know I'm your bastard son from a one-weekend fuck fest with my mom.

James looks him straight in the eye for a long moment.

Myja stares back at him.

The silence between them fills the chambers.

JAMES  
Oh, I see. You're waiting for some big fuckin' reaction from me.

Myja gulps.

James takes a deep breath, then smiles, way too broadly.

JAMES  
Listen, it's the best for everyone.

MYJA  
Not for me. I've got a brother and  
sister I want to get to know.

The smile immediately disappears. James points at him.

JAMES  
That is not going to happen.

Myja stares at him, sweat trickling down his cheek.

MYJA  
And you, I mean, you're my...my  
father. Do you know how much you  
don't know about me?

With deliberate slowness James sits back in his throne-like  
chair and pyramids his fingers.

JAMES  
You and me, okay, that's fine.  
Letters, occasional phone calls.  
But I assure you, you are not going  
to have any contact with Charlie  
and Caroline.

MYJA  
Mom and Dad asked nothing of you.  
Okay, Dad did, that one time, but  
he was at the end of his rope. You  
owe me my own flesh and blood.

James's eyes blaze.

JAMES  
I don't owe you one fucking thing,  
boy.

The broad smile returns.

JAMES  
But, hey.

He leans forward and opens a drawer and places a ledger of  
checks on the desk. He opens it and picks up a pen.

JAMES

Ten thousand dollars, and you don't have to waste time working during that trek of yours out west or wherever the hell you said you're going.

MYJA

You think I'm here for money?

JAMES

Frankly? Yes. That's all you Beechams have ever wanted out of me.

He starts to write a check.

JAMES

Hell, twenty thousand. That should buy a lot of keeping you away from us.

James glances up at Myja. He rakes the young adult up and down with eyes filled with disgust.

JAMES

Everyone's got a price.

Myja stares at him.

MYJA

I came 'cause I'm going to be far away for a long while and who knows what could happen.

James flares his signature at the bottom of the check, then looks up.

JAMES

Well, I've discovered money makes a nice, soft safety cushion.

Myja stares hard-eyed across the big, beautiful, cold, heartless desk, its owner mirrored in its polished surface.

MYJA

Well, then, mister, you've learned nothing.

James narrows his eyes at him. He slides the check across the desk.

Myja looks down at it.

MYJA

You can take that check, judge--

JAMES

You will address me as "justice",  
young man.

Myja snorts.

MYJA

Take that check and shove it up  
your fuckin' ass, mister.

James shakes his head.

JAMES

Working-class trash.

He snorts.

JAMES

You probably stole that jacket. The  
bike, too.

Myja's jaw muscles work under the skin as his dark eyes brim.

James stands.

JAMES

You try to go anywhere near my  
children--

MYJA

I am one of your children!

James glances quickly at the door.

JAMES

You try to go anywhere near my  
children, and I will make your  
young life very, very unpleasant. I  
suggest you do not test me on this.

Myja angrily slaps tears off his cheeks.

MYJA

Dad said this was a real mistake.

JAMES

I absolutely agree with him.

James crosses his arms.

JAMES

I will not have you breeze into our lives and destroy the respect I have spent their lifetimes earning from my son and daughter.

Myja stands his full height.

MYJA

That's the way you want it?

JAMES

No, boy, that's the way it's going to be. Unless you want to disappear into the Rhode Island Department of Corrections, I suggest you get the fuck out of here and never, ever come back.

Myja turns and storms out of the office, past his half-brother CHARLIE GUSTAFSON, 17, who jumps aside, his hand still on the door knob.

Charlie, captain of his high school swim team, could be a male model. James, still handsome and fit, makes beautiful sons.

Charlie watches after Myja, then walks up to his father's grand desk.

CHARLIE

Who was that, Dad? Some lost cousin or something?

James finishes tearing up the check and puts the pieces in his breast pocket. He stares out the door for a long moment, then returns his attention to Charlie.

JAMES

Nobody.

Charlie shrugs.

CHARLIE

Oh.

Tommy brings in the Hemenway's sacs of lunch.

JAMES

Hey, look! Lunch!

Charlie regards his father's bright expression with skepticism.

CHARLIE  
 You okay, Dad? I'm just here  
 because of those papers. And the  
 Platinum AmEx.

Charlie rolls his eyes.

CHARLIE  
 I don't want to have lunch with  
 you. I got things to do.

James's bright expression dims. He reaches for his wallet.

JAMES  
 Well, I would like to have lunch  
 with you.

Charlie shrugs again.

CHARLIE  
 Whatever.

EXT. PROVIDENCE COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY

Myja races around the side of the building somewhere it is  
 dark and hidden. He lets sobs overcome him. He falls against  
 the wall and slides down and hugs his knees to his chest.

The wave of emotion finishes washing over him. He hops to his  
 feet and races to his bike. He guns the engine and points it  
 in the fastest route out of Providence.

He stops to use a pay phone.

MYJA  
 Dad?

DON  
 (on the other end)  
 Myja? You okay? My God, what is it?

MYJA  
 Oh, Dad.

DON  
 You went to see James.

MYJA  
 Yeah. I wish I had listened to you.

Silence. Myja's eyes then widen.

MYJA  
Dad, why are you crying?

DON  
When you have your own children  
someday, you'll understand why.

MYJA  
Dad?

DON  
Yeah?

MYJA  
I love you. And, well, thanks.

Myja gulps, bites his bottom lip.

MYJA  
Um...Dad, you okay?

DON  
Be safe, son.

Myja grins, promises he'll call often, and hangs up. Slipping on the helmet, Myja walks over to the bike.

EXT. SOMEWHERE ON MERRITT PKWY, CONNECTICUT - LATER

Back straight, head held high, tapping his finger on the throttle to a tune in his head, Myja speeds down the country highway. He passes a hitchhiker.

He cranes his head when he notices the traffic slowing down up ahead. Before he knows it, he's stopped along with everyone else.

He hears laughter. Myja glances to his left and watches with a growing frown a TEENAGE BOY and his DAD as they share an easy laugh at some story the son is animatedly telling.

He clenches his hand into a fist and surprises even himself when he slams it against the throttle while gritting his teeth. He takes a deep breath.

BEGIN QUICK FLASHES

Sitting in that throne of a chair, his fingers pyramided, James bores into his soul with his hard, cold, love-less stare.

Sitting at their worn kitchen table, his expression one of equal parts worry, hurt, and concern, but most of all, love, Don cries as he holds the phone receiver to his ear.

END QUICK FLASHES

Myja pinches the bridge of his nose, then twists at the waist and gazes long and hard back the way he'd come. He turns back around. His shoulders sag, and he shakes his head. Slowly, he turns the motorcycle around and starts back east down the gravel shoulder.

Myja rides a short distance, then slows when he sees BEN TRUSSEL, 24, standing in his way as he thumbs for a ride.

Myja comes to a stop and cuts the engine. He watches Ben as the young man, who seems as if he's wearing hand-me-downs from some bigger older brother, walks over to him.

Ben holds out his hand. Myja shakes it.

MYJA

You know what's turned Merritt into a parking lot?

BEN

One of those double tractor trailers jack-knifed and flipped, straight across all four lanes.

Myja looks Ben up and down.

MYJA

Hey, you okay?

Ben nods.

BEN

Give me a ride?

MYJA

(frowns)

I'm headed back east.

Again Ben nods.

BEN

Anywhere's fine.

MYJA

I don't have a second helmet.

Ben shrugs and, verifying the straps of his backpack are secure over his bony shoulders, slips onto the seat behind Myja.

Myja roars the bike to life and continues down the shoulder. At one point, Myja has to pull them off onto the grass, and Ben death-grips Myja's shoulders during the bumpy, jerky ride.

Myja glances over his shoulder as Ben frantically tugs and pokes at him. Myja pulls back up onto the shoulder just before where the topography slopes down to the Silvermine River.

Ben practically falls off the bike and stumbles towards the river. Halfway down the slight slope, Ben drops to his hands and knees and vomits. He stands, moves over to the river's edge.

Myja, the bike and helmet behind him, walks up beside Ben.

Ben returns a medicine bottle to his backpack and, getting on his haunches, gulps down a pill with a handful of water, then splashes his face.

Myja gets down on his own haunches.

MYJA

Which cancer you got?

Ben darts his eyes at him.

BEN

Astrocytoma.

MYJA

A real vicious bitch of a leukemia took my mom.

Ben looks at him and nods.

BEN

Sorry.

Myja shrugs. He stands, and Ben lets him give him a hand. They both move to halfway up the slight slope, where they take a seat beside each other.

Despite the thick sweater, Ben shivers. He folds his legs against his chest and wraps his arms around them.

Myja shrugs out of his jacket and drapes it around Ben's shoulders. He narrows his eyes at Ben.

MYJA

Are you sure you should be hitchhiking like this? I mean, with whatcha got and all.

BEN

I don't do it now, then when?

MYJA

That bad, huh? Nothing's working?

Ben looks up, takes in a deep shuddering breath. He shakes his head.

He wipes the corner of his mouth and musters a smile.

BEN

So, where you headed? Back home? Your accent. Rhode Island, right?

Myja nods.

MYJA

Um...Yeah. I was headed out to California, but, some things happened, and, well,...

He rams his fingers through his hair and tips his head back.

MYJA

Fuck!!

Myja calms down and looks at Ben.

MYJA

What you're dealing with, and look what I'm complaining about.

BEN

Hey, I appreciate the distraction. So, which one is it? Parent or girlfriend? That worked up, it's one or the other.

MYJA

Parent. Parents, actually. My dads. Well, my dad, the man who raised me, and my father.

Ben blinks at him.

BEN

Sounds complicated.

Myja nods.

MYJA

I rode down to Providence. Dad said don't, but I didn't listen. James Gustafson is this mucky-muck judge-- excuse me, "justice"...

EXT. SILVERMINE RIVER - A SHORT TIME LATER

MYJA

...and that sonofabitch is my biological father.

Ben stares at him.

BEN

Wow. What an asshole.

Myja tears at some grass.

MYJA

I've never quit anything in my life. God, I am such a loser.

Ben stares at his hands.

BEN

This time next year I'm gonna be dead. I have no choice but to quit.

He looks at Myja.

BEN

You don't. But, hey, slink back home with your tail between your legs.

MYJA

I'm not slinking anywhere. Fuck you already. Who the fuck are you? Some loser on the side of the road with his fucking thumb out.

BEN

Yep. Working-class trash. Your dad pegged that one right.

MYJA

James Gustafson is not my "dad"!

BEN  
Then, prove it. Make your dad  
proud.

MYJA  
Dad is proud of me.

Myja opens his mouth to continue his protestations.

BEN  
Your dad told you not to go see  
this guy.

Ben pokes him hard in the chest.

BEN  
You did it specifically looking for  
an excuse. Tell me I'm wrong. Tell  
me to go fuck myself.

MYJA  
Go fuck yourself! You don't know  
shit about me. A little bit of  
cancer, and you think you can see  
into everyone's soul.

BEN  
No, but I don't have time anymore  
for bullshit, and I know bullshit  
when I hear it. Just go back, you  
quitter.

MYJA  
I told you: I'm not a quitter!

He jumps to his feet.

MYJA  
I'll show you. I'll show you, and  
I'll show James, and Dad, and all  
of them.

Ben is grinning.

BEN  
Add an extra "Fuck you!" from me  
while you're at it, will ya?

Myja's fists are clenched and his chest heaves. Finally, he lets out a huff and sags his shoulders as he watches Ben tug viciously at some grass.

MYJA  
What's happening to you, it's so  
unfair.

Ben shrugs.

MYJA  
You scared?

Ben looks up and takes a shuddering breath. He nods stiffly.  
His eyes start to brim.

BEN  
I don't want to die. I'm only  
twenty-four years old.

He gulps hard.

BEN  
I had it all. I was in graduate  
school, I had an incredible  
girlfriend. Then, one day I haul  
off and slap her. Hard. She left me  
of course. Pretty soon I don't have  
friends left, and every other phone  
convo, I'm screaming at my parents  
about how they've never loved me  
and never wanted me. All the while  
I've got these headaches I can't  
begin to describe.

Ben starts hitting himself in the head.

BEN  
I hate this fucking thing inside my  
head!! It's ruined everything!

MYJA  
Hey, hey, hey!

He grabs Ben's wrists and pulls him to his feet.

MYJA  
Now who's the quitter?

When Ben calms down, Myja lets him go. Myja hooks his thumb  
over his shoulder.

MYJA  
Come with me.

BEN  
Yeah, but to where? Oh, yeah.

Ben starts to slip the jacket off his shoulders.

MYJA  
Keep it. I'd just be ditching it in  
California.

Ben looks at him and grins.

BEN  
Thanks.

He puts it all the way on and zips it up the front.

BEN  
Nice. Warm.

Myja hooks his thumb over his shoulder again.

MYJA  
Up for the adventure of a lifetime?

BEN  
I'm already on that. But it's gotta  
be mine.

Myja nods.

MYJA  
I can respect that. But, hey. I  
can't just leave you out here like  
this. At least let me phone your  
folks.

BEN  
I talk to Mom and Dad at least  
every other night. Listen, I'm not  
running away. Can you say that?

Myja chuckles.

MYJA  
You don't fuckin' let up, do you?

BEN  
Everyone says it's my most annoying  
character trait. My sister says it  
ranks right up there with me dying  
on her. She's really pissed about  
all this. I love her, but that's  
one of the reasons I had to get  
away.

Myja pulls Ben into an embrace.

MYJA

Good luck.

He lets Ben go, and Ben holds out his hand. They shake.

Myja walks up the slight hill and mounts his bike. He slips his helmet on and cinches it under his chin. He guns the engine and starts to roll off.

Myja stops on the bridge crossing the Silvermine. He slips off his helmet and looks down at Ben, who looks back at him.

Myja hooks his thumb over his shoulder one last time.

Ben shakes his head.

Myja relaxes his shoulders. He raises his hands and crosses his fingers. He waves at Ben.

Beaming a wide smile, Ben waves back. He makes the hand gesture of "You, too!"

Myja takes a deep breath and looks up, letting the sun warm his face. He puts his helmet back on and accidentally continues his adventure of a lifetime, his voyage of discovery of Myja Beecham.

FADE OUT