

Schism

By

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TEASER

COLD OPEN:

INT. DARLING'S SET NIGHT

On the set of "Darling's Prime Time Darlings", JAMES THOMAS (31) sits across from DIRK DARLING (early 40s) who clutches at an EMMY.

James' wolf-like nature almost utterly contrasts the intellect in his eyes. He's dressed in street clothes.

James stares at Dirk with utter contempt.

Dirk has a cocky smirk and strokes his Emmy award like a Bond villain. He wears thin glasses and is wearing a casual suit. He carries himself with an Orson Welles demeanor.

A popcorn popper and a black reel sit on the desk.

DIRK DARLING

Welcome to "Darling's Prime Time Darlings". I'm Dirk Darling and I would like to welcome tonight's guest. He is the writer and creator of "Schism", Mr. James Thomas. Good evening, James.

James remains silent. Dirk rolls his eyes.

DIRK DARLING (CONT'D)

What's it now, James?

JAMES THOMAS

(angrily)

What the fuck do you think?

DIRK DARLING

I must remind you that this is a family program. For such a big guy, you are hilariously thin skinned.

JAMES THOMAS

You've done nothing but slander me for the last nine months!

DIRK DARLING

If you have a problem with the way I critique, then improve. You're stuck in a creative rut.

JAMES THOMAS

Isn't that why you became a critic?

DIRK DARLING

No, it's why my ratings are better.

JAMES THOMAS

Was that before or after your first wife left you?

James taps at his wedding ring. Dirk taps at his Emmy.

DIRK DARLING

Still dusting empty shelves in your trophy case? Schism is remarkably easy to judge. Same contrived plot and wooden characters.

JAMES THOMAS

I suppose anyone sitting on their fat ass nitpicking because of their own bitterness would bitch about the more successful.

DIRK DARLING

"Bitter"? The precocious mind who let his ambitions stagnate his career shouldn't talk about bitter. If you put this much effort into creativity as you do spite, you wouldn't be a failure. Now a joke: Why do they call you the 'Phantom of the Emmys'? Because nobody has seen you there!

James slams his fist down and sits up.

JAMES THOMAS

You think that's funny, huh? You point out trivial shit to your audience at your little cliched desk with the popcorn popper. What's funny is you think you matter!

DIRK DARLING

Want to know what's really funny? I got mine.

Dirk slides his Emmy over to James.

JAMES THOMAS

(shouting)

You son of a bitch!

James punches Dirk as hard as he can. Dirk collapses onto his desk, and James pounces on top of him. Dirk's Emmy breaks under James' weight.

INT. LIVING ROOM MORNING

In the lavish living room, James shakes his head on a large couch. BETH THOMAS (31), JACKIE ROGERS (31) and CRAIG ROGERS (32) sit across from him.

Beth has a cat-like demeanor and has a soft but firey personality. Generally introverted but approachable.

Jackie has razor sharp wit smashed under bottles of vodka. She's barely coherent yet remembers everything.

Craig is the definition of Brainless Beauty. Is a classical handsome and attention seeking.

A small stack of files and a laptop on the coffee table.

A bookcase on the wall has several awards that read "ELIZABETH THOMAS", and an adjacent shelf is filled with empty platforms and a small folded paper that reads "BECAUSE OF SONS OF BITCHES".

On TV, security rushes in and tackles James. SASQUATCH (early 30s), throws James to the ground effortlessly and tases him. James squeals and faints. Silence.

Beth grimaces and James has a blank but irritated expression. Jackie laughs hysterically with her arm around James.

A large framed picture of Gustave Dore's PARADISE LOST hangs above the television.

JAMES THOMAS

Thanks for replaying that, Jackie.  
I never would've remembered.

JACKIE ROGERS

That technique was money. I'll show  
you in slow mo.

James grabs the remote and throws it across the room.

CRAIG ROGERS

Good thing Dirk had security on  
standby.

JAMES THOMAS

(pained)  
That was my security.

Jackie snickers.

BETH THOMAS

James, I need you to focus today.

JAMES THOMAS

I know, Beth, I just want to put this behind me. We've been gone for a long time.

BETH THOMAS

"We" never left. But just one thing before we go in.

JAMES THOMAS

What's that?

BETH THOMAS

It's gonna be hard, but for the love of God, don't be yourself!

JAMES THOMAS

(sarcastically)

That's encouraging, babe.

CRAIG ROGERS

Wait, I almost forgot.

Craig sets Dirk's shattered Emmy on the coffee table.

CRAIG ROGERS (CONT'D)

Counts as a win, right?

Craig raises his hand for a high five.

James flips him off.

END TEASER

ACT 1

EXT. STEELE PRODUCTIONS PARKING LOT MORNING

A lone JAGUAR pulls into a parking spot. A light dusting of snow covers the ground. A BMW pulls in behind it and parks. License plates read MICHIGAN.

James and Beth step out of the Jaguar. Jackie and Craig exit with Jackie carrying a Duffel bag. James hits his head getting out.

JAMES THOMAS

Fuck!

BETH THOMAS

There's a door there, babe.

JAMES THOMAS

This is why I wanted to take the Jeep.

James looks at the studio and takes a deep breath.

BETH THOMAS

Breathe in, and breathe out. Just like in class.

James smiles at Beth.

JACKIE ROGERS

Didn't know you could take Lamaze classes to practice shitting a brick.

James smirks and storms towards the studio.

INT. STEELE PRODUCTIONS DAY

James, Beth, Jackie, and Craig walk into Steele Productions.

A giant marbled statue of a skinny man wearing a football helmet pointing outward while holding a bag with a dollar sign on it sits in the center of the massive lobby.

James cringes.

JAMES THOMAS

(groaning)

Ash really did build the statue.

BETH THOMAS  
It's his building. One more  
thing...

Beth looks over James' shoulder. James smirks as the same  
four burly guards in tactical gear approach him. Sasquatch  
chuckles at James.

BETH THOMAS (CONT'D)  
You wouldn't have come if you knew.

James shakes his head at Beth and laughs.

JAMES THOMAS  
(blows out)  
I don't need security. For the  
record, I would've.

JACKIE ROGERS  
Security isn't for you, dumbass.

A swarm of reporters surrounds James.

James takes a Weighted Bookmark out of his pocket. Beth pulls  
him back shaking her head, and James puts it back.

Sasquatch takes the Weighted Bookmark out of James' pocket

Security hurries the group forward.

REPORTER #1  
Mr. Thomas! Do you think Hollywood  
is ready to take you back after  
what happened last year?

REPORTER #2 (O.S.)  
Mrs. Thomas, how does it feel to  
finally win an Emmy?

REPORTER #3 (O.S.)  
James, is it true you pissed  
yourself when tasered?

JAMES THOMAS  
I'm gonna add a whole new meaning  
to "breaking news".

James storms to the reporters. Sasquatch pulls out his taser.  
James rolls his eyes and backs away.

JAMES THOMAS (CONT'D)  
(to Sasquatch)  
So, get married yet, big guy, or  
(MORE)

JAMES THOMAS (CONT'D)  
 does the tribe still offer up  
 virgin sacrifices to ya?

SASQUATCH  
 (chuckles)  
 I missed you, James.

James and Sasquatch fist bump, hurting James' hand.

JAMES THOMAS  
 You're one of the few who did,  
 Sasquatch.

SASQUATCH  
 You have no idea.

JAMES THOMAS  
 The hell does that mean?

Jackie, Craig, and Beth drop back. James turns around and  
 mouths "The Hell?". Craig flags the press over.

CRAIG ROGERS  
 (to the press)  
 Over here! Mr. A-List is taking  
 questions.

REPORTER #2  
 Mr. Rogers, can you confirm reports  
 that you and Brock Tarnowski are  
 working together on a new project.

Craig flinches.

CRAIG ROGERS  
 No. I've had my moment in the stars  
 now. Please go. I'm pretty sure a  
 squirrel is riding a unicycle as we  
 speak or some shit.

The press is escorted away by the rest of security. In the  
 distance, Sasquatch throws James into a room. Sasquatch nods  
 to Jackie. James moans in agony off screen.

CRAIG ROGERS (CONT'D)  
 (anxious)  
 What did you tell him?

BETH THOMAS  
 Only that they wanted a meeting.

JACKIE ROGERS  
 Well, I came prepared.



Jackie pulls a football helmet out of a Duffel bag.

INT. STEELE PRODUCTIONS BOARDROOM MORNING

ASHTON STEELE(43), bald, thin, with a bushy beard, sits with two executives, JOE HARRIS and RACHEL HARPER at a long table across from James, Beth, Jackie, and Craig.

Beth, Jackie, and Craig are wearing football helmets and thick padding.

Jackie is rocking back and forth.

The room is grey, and the table has a modern quality. Four large files sit on the table.

ASHTON STEELE

First off, I'd like to thank the network for sending Joe Harris and Rachel Harper from the network.

JAMES THOMAS

This is definitely a season two meeting.

Jackie falls forward and slips out of her helmet.

ASHTON STEELE

You okay, cuzzo?

Jackie flips him off.

ASHTON STEELE (CONT'D)

Good. As I was saying, we have reservations. Rachel?

Rachel sits up and grabs a file.

RACHEL HARPER

James, you're a cunt!

JOE HARRIS

(whispering)

Rachel! We were supposed to reword it! No exact quotes!

RACHEL HARPER

Oh, well. To elaborate on what I said before--

JAMES THOMAS

--As you so eloquently stated.

RACHEL HARPER

It's you. Schism is one of the top rated sitcoms streaming, but the network has had it with your antisocial, anger-driven altercations.

JAMES THOMAS

I hate alliteration.

JOE HARRIS

You can't afford ANOTHER Dark Darling incident.

JAMES THOMAS

The dastard. Okay, so I obliterated one critic's face...

Rachel opens a file.

RACHEL HARPER

Your diatribes forced seven writers on your staff to quit, you physically assaulted two directors, and you're tanking the ratings. Dante wrote a special circle in hell for you!

James sits up to speak. Beth slams down on his fist as hard as she can. James readjusts himself.

JAMES THOMAS

These are a thing of the past.

RACHEL HARPER

It's not that easy.

Ashton opens the thickest file on the table. It's filled with resignation letters.

ASHTON STEELE

We contacted your staff. If you come back, most of them will quit.

JAMES THOMAS

Good. They won't help me win an Emmy.

Everyone in the room collectively groans.

BETH THOMAS

You don't... fucking need it!

Ashton hands files to James, who flips through them.

ASHTON STEELE

Danny Yale has no problem directing, but he hates you since you got him banned from all Academy events.

CRAIG ROGERS

That makes sense.

JAMES THOMAS

Remind me again how I could smuggle a viper into the show and plant it on him?

ASHTON STEELE

Marsh Clemons quit immediately, stating: "James can fuck himself with a muffler after a thousand-mile road trip."

Craig looks confused.

James slides a file to Craig. The file contains pictures of a FIRE EXTINGUISHER, a CHALK OUTLINE, and a picture of HAN SOLO FROZEN IN CARBONITE. Craig groans.

CRAIG ROGERS

Oh. Forgot about that.

ASHTON STEELE

You also refuse to cooperate with the network. We can't do business with you!

JAMES THOMAS

My show is not a business!

RACHEL HARPER

You're in show business.

JAMES THOMAS

You're not the first person to say that to me.

RACHEL HARPER

And you still didn't learn?

JAMES THOMAS

In order to succeed in show business, you have to compromise with both producers and sponsors to meet a reasonable middle ground creatively and professionally.

ASHTON STEELE

And you haven't done so...why?

Ashton mouths "Please".

Craig starts filming discretely on his phone.

JAMES THOMAS

Look, I understand my acerbic personality may...

Ashton looks disappointed and shakes his head "NO" to Joe.

JOE HARRIS

We're making you a generous offer.

Joe hands James a sealed envelope. James opens it and frowns before throwing it on the table.

JAMES THOMAS

(shouting)

You're paying me to stay at home?!

ASHTON STEELE

It's cheaper than keeping you.  
Jackie will take over as showrunner effective immediately so we can begin the transition.

Craig glares at Ashton. Jackie flinches.

JAMES THOMAS

I created the damn show!

RACHEL HARPER

Refuse, and you and your show will be canceled.

James growls, storms out of the room, and leaves the envelope on the table. After a pause, James storms back in and takes the envelope off the table and storms back out.

END ACT I

ACT II

INT. LIVING ROOM EVENING

James stares at the check.

Beth rubs James shoulder. Jackie and Craig scroll through their phones.

JAMES THOMAS

So it's official, I'm being banned  
from my own creation.

James throws the check, but it lands back on him.

JACKIE ROGERS

I wouldn't say that. "I've been  
banned." It's already in effect.

James snarls at Jackie, who snickers under her flask.

BETH THOMAS

You don't have to deal with a  
studio now. Go indy again! What  
about your short stories?

James smiles at Beth.

Jackie hands James her phone. We see an article titled "JAMES THOMAS OUSTED FROM SCHISM". James eye twitches. Beth smirks at Jackie.

Craig sees his video cued on her phone and snatches it away.

JACKIE ROGERS

Yeah, the universe doesn't want you  
to smile. They're also saying  
Schism is on the chopping block.

CRAIG ROGERS

I'll save your show, bro. I did it  
before.

James, Beth, and Jackie dart their seething heads to Craig.

James springs out of his chair.

JAMES THOMAS

I need a minute. Shows gone, the  
world knows... Are you live?!

Craig looks at his phone and inches away. James storms off.

Beth stands, but James mouths "I'm okay". She nods and sits.

Jackie fist bumps James as he walks away. Beth watches the game again. Beth lays her head down on Jackie's lap.

BETH THOMAS  
Feels like high school again.

JACKIE ROGERS  
Yep. At least I'm not writing for A  
dumbass, again.

Jackie gestures to Craig. Craig scoffs.

CRAIG ROGERS  
Whatev's. With James away, we'll  
need to make a few changes. I  
nominate myself to lead the charge.

JACKIE ROGERS  
You lack even the most rudimentary  
writing talent!

CRAIG ROGERS  
And what have you written, dear?

JACKIE ROGERS  
"Schism", you know, the show that  
made you relevant again after you  
flopped in "Independent Cherish".

CRAIG ROGERS  
We were both there, Boris Yeltsin.  
Why do I catch hell for it?

JACKIE ROGERS  
"Jackie Rogers: Drunken writer."  
"Craig Rogers: Emmy, Golden Globe,  
A-List" --

CRAIG ROGERS  
Either way, what the hell were they  
thinking making you the showrunner?  
I saw you flinch.

JACKIE ROGERS  
This was supposed to be interim.  
You know damn well I don't want it!

CRAIG ROGERS  
You should've refused. You're under  
qualified.

JACKIE ROGERS

I just finished up a season. You  
can barely hold a pen.

CRAIG ROGERS

You traced it! I've written before!

JACKIE ROGERS

I kept your old college essays. I  
didn't know professors drew  
laughing faces on final papers.

Craig's face drops. Jackie takes a breath.

Beth looks upstairs.

JACKIE ROGERS (CONT'D)

I don't even know where to start.

BETH THOMAS

I'll get James' notes.

Beth runs upstairs. Craig and Jackie follow her from the  
couch. The coast is clear.

CRAIG ROGERS

You're not my showrunner. I'm  
carrying "Schism"!

JACKIE ROGERS

You're an actor who can't make me  
give a fuck! Carry this dick!

CRAIG ROGERS

You're coherent for a shabby lush!

JACKIE ROGERS

You're pretty Oscar-free for an A-  
lister!

Craig flips Jackie off. She catches it, blows it back as a  
kiss, and winks at him.

INT. BEDROOM -- EVENING

In a dark bedroom, James stands at his desk staring at the  
check. The room is decorated in wolves and cats. The room has  
muted greens and blues. Almost forest like.

The bedroom door cracks and Beth peaks through.

James sets it down and walks past an open closet. Dozens of AWARDS are littered at the bottom, including an ACADEMY AWARD for BEST SHORT. James looks at his desk, covered in script notes and screenplays.

James sits on the bed and lies back. Beth lands in James' lap from out of nowhere like a cat and hugs him. James clutches at his heart.

JAMES THOMAS

Damn it, Beth!

BETH THOMAS

I don't like seeing you like this.

James hugs Beth and sits up.

JAMES THOMAS

How do you knock a man out and still lose the fight?

BETH THOMAS

A tactical taser?

James smirks at Beth.

BETH THOMAS (CONT'D)

The fight isn't over. Jackie runs it, and Craig and I still star. You can still win.

JAMES THOMAS

Dirk got what he wanted. Another "sub par" show swept away. He didn't believe in it. No one did.

BETH THOMAS

You know what it means. I do, too. People love your work regardless, and all that matters is getting you to do what you love. Get back to why you write and quit chasing what you don't need.

James looks at the check.

JAMES THOMAS

(sarcastic)

I'm sure the crew will be delighted to --



BETH THOMAS

I'm fully fucking aware of that,  
just know that piece of paper over  
there only means they're right  
about you.

James holds Beth and sighs. Jackie walks in holding her phone, wearing a sly grin.

JACKIE ROGERS

Ash just texted me. Read it.

Jackie hands Beth her phone. Beth reads aloud.

BETH THOMAS

Hey, cuzzo! Got any bitters?

JACKIE ROGERS

Not that one.

Jackie scrolls her phone down. Beth reads aloud.

BETH THOMAS

Fuck life, my back is going bald,  
too!

Jackie takes her phone.

JACKIE ROGERS

Damn it! Ash set up a meeting with  
a potential director tomorrow. He's  
keeping it under wraps. James, Ash  
wants to talk about transition...

James runs his hands through his hair. Jackie groans and puts her phone in her purse and sheepishly pulls out her flask and hands it to James.

JACKIE ROGERS (CONT'D)

Just don't kill it.

James waves it away. Beth hugs James. He takes a deep breath. Jackie envelops both of them and hugs.

JAMES THOMAS

We were having a moment.

JACKIE ROGERS

Now WE'RE having a moment.

James puts Jackie in a headlock and they all smile. James lets them go and grabs his computer.

JAMES THOMAS

Beth ... I need a minute.

Beth nods, kisses James, and she and Jackie turn to leave.

Craig explodes in holding his phone to his face. He's live on Facebook and has been on for some time. James' eye twitches.

CRAIG ROGERS

Exciting times, everyone! We may have a new director!

(beat)

Oh hey, James! Known this man for my entire life and he's never looked this bad.

James scratches several keys out of his laptop. Beth stares at Craig with white-hot rage. Jackie shakes her head and chuckles nervously as she attempts to slither away.

CRAIG ROGERS (CONT'D)

So, Wolfie, what's on your mind?

James clinches his fist and stares at Craig, who laughs.

CRAIG ROGERS (CONT'D)

Oh, we can't do that.

(holds phone up)

Witnesses! Fun fact time! James has severe social anxiety and his nipples get hard when...

James takes short breaths and his body tremors. Beth runs to Craig and slaps the phone out of his hand, grabs Jackie, and they rush out of the room.

INT. EXECUTIVE OFFICE -- DAY

James, Beth, Jackie, and Craig meet in Ashton's office. Craig wears thick makeup on his cheek and sunglasses. The room is large and has a modern aesthetic. A framed photo of Ashton, Jackie, Craig, Beth, and James hangs on the wall.

ASHTON STEELE

I'm glad y'all... time out. Craig, are you wearing makeup?

CRAIG ROGERS

It's nothing. Before we go further, I believe I should have the say in the show's creative --

James digs his nails into the desk and draws back.

CRAIG ROGERS (CONT'D)  
Disregard. Who's the director?

JAMES THOMAS  
Before we get started, I know I'm  
not the easiest person to work with  
--

ASHTON STEELE  
Massive understatement.

James sets the check on the desk.

JAMES THOMAS  
-- but what do I need to do to get  
back?

Ashton smiles.

ASHTON STEELE  
Well, since the Dirk incident --

JAMES THOMAS  
It's Dirk the Dastardly, Ash.

ASHTON STEELE  
Okay... Since the Dirk the  
Dastardly incident... I like that.

JACKIE ROGERS  
Back on track, Q-tip.

ASHTON STEELE  
Nobody is dumb enough to work with  
you. This guy called us last week  
and we had a serious conversation  
after you left to bring him on.

BETH THOMAS  
Only one person wanted to work on a  
critically acclaimed show?

JAMES THOMAS  
Wait. How long have I been exiled?

JACKIE ROGERS  
A while. So, who is he?

James grimaces and looks around the room. Intercom buzzes.

CAROLYN (O.S.)  
Mr. Steele, the cretin for the  
director position has arrived.

ASHTON STEELE  
Send him up right away.

Ashton accidentally leaves the intercom on.

ASHTON STEELE (CONT'D)  
The guy is, well... Strange. Not fun strange, either, but an "I drink cat urine to stay young and refreshed" strange. His name slips my mind, but he's a real funny looking fellow, too.

CAROLYN (O.S.)  
How did you forget that guy's name?  
You couldn't lose him in the sea!

Craig flinches. Ashton turns off his intercom.

JACKIE ROGERS  
Says anorexic Gandalf.

ASHTON STEELE  
He looks like some kind of mythical creature. Like a Gremlin, or a Gargoyle, or...

JACKIE ROGERS  
A vampire?

ASHTON STEELE  
That's it!

CRAIG ROGERS  
Oh, no ...

BROCK TARNOWSKI, 40s, rises from behind Ashton's chair. Brock never stops grinning and is vampire-like. He wears a red velvet button up shirt.

BROCK TARNOWSKI  
Hi, Craigie!

Craig runs out of the room screaming.

James stands up and inadvertently hits Beth's chair, sending her flying.

JAMES THOMAS  
How the fuck did you get in here?!  
The door was closed!

BROCK TARNOWSKI  
That's no longer important.

JAMES THOMAS  
It just happened!

Beth stumbles to her seat and James mouths "I'm sorry".

Jackie stares daggers at Brock and pulls a fifth of vodka out of her cleavage and chugs it.

BROCK TARNOWSKI  
Yay! It's a celebration!

James reaches into his pocket and searches. After a second, he frowns and takes his hands out.

JAMES THOMAS  
Damn security.

ASHTON STEELE  
Last week, Brock expressed his willingness to work with James, which is a blessing seeing as we're uninsurable.

BETH THOMAS  
What do you mean "uninsurable"?

ASHTON STEELE  
Risk management has a field day with James. Keeping him away helps.  
(to Brock)  
What's with you and Craig?

BROCK TARNOWSKI  
Craig and I filmed my masterpiece "Independent Cherish" together.

BETH THOMAS  
It was a flaming pile of shit and you know it!

INT. MOVIE THEATER NIGHT

In a large movie theater, a large crowd of well-dressed people storm out of an auditorium screaming. People are in a frenzy and look horrified.

In the fray, a group of ushers led by a manager approach the poster for "Independent Cherish". The poster is a romantic drama. The manager shatters the glass and the ushers crudely rip the poster from the frame piece by piece.

INT. EXECUTIVE OFFICE DAY

Ashton chuckles.

BETH THOMAS

One critic wrote: "The guttural hatred I have for this film could fill Hell twice over. Viewing it was like paying bricks of gold to drink garbage water."

BROCK TARNOWSKI

My Craigie was the star of the picture. There were a few differences, but nothing that couldn't be overcome.

JACKIE ROGERS

Nobody could read the script, what could be salvaged was weird, vile, and sexually angry!

ASHTON STEELE

Well, that stinks.  
(beat)  
He's your next director.

BROCK TARNOWSKI

Yay! We're friends again!

JAMES THOMAS

Question ... who the fuck is he working with?

ASHTON STEELE

Well, that's why you're here.

JACKIE ROGERS

Ash, you've known this for a week and didn't tell me.

James flinches and darts his eyes over to Brock.

JAMES THOMAS

Last week makes sense now.

EXT. THOMAS' LIVING ROOM DAY (FLASHBACK)

One week ago. Early Dawn.

Craig frenetically pounds on James' front door. James pulls the door open. James is fully dressed.

JAMES THOMAS  
Have you lost your...

Craig leaps like a deer into James arms screaming. James quickly sets him down as Craig is frantic and jittery. Craig is wearing an expensive morning robe.

CRAIG ROGERS  
James, you have to help me!

JAMES THOMAS  
Did you try to drink Jackie under the table?

CRAIG ROGERS  
Tarnowski's following me!

JAMES THOMAS  
Not this shit, again.

CRAIG ROGERS  
The restraining order expired last week! I saw him in the grocery store on Saturday...

JAMES THOMAS  
God forbid, a man wants to eat.

CRAIG ROGERS  
... And he was in my bushes when I got the paper!

JAMES THOMAS  
Well, that explains the Hugh Hefner look. Wait, who the fuck gets the paper anymore?  
(shakes his head)  
Craig, the past few weeks have been stressful, but Brock's not out here. Go relax. Take a Craig Day, and forget about Brock.

CRAIG ROGERS  
I'll try.

JAMES THOMAS  
Good. Now get the hell off of my property. I have work to do.

Craig and James flip each other off and fist bump. Both smile. Craig turns to walk away and turns back around.

CRAIG ROGERS  
Wait! Still up for bowling to...

James opens the door wider and Brock appears behind him and starts towards Craig. He is wearing the same red, velvet button up shirt under a top coat.

Craig squeals like a young girl and runs away flailing his arms. Brock reaches out for him.

BROCK TARNOWSKI  
Craigie, I just want to talk!

Brock hits the door and frowns. Brock looks over and sees James staring at him angrily. Brock jumps back and screams. James takes a Weighted Bookmark out of his pocket.

BROCK TARNOWSKI (CONT'D)  
Oh, shit... Hi, Jamie. You're probably wondering why I'm standing in your beautiful dwelling. Well, I was in the neighborhood, and I saw my ol' buddy, Craig. I've been meaning to talk to him, so I met him at his place, but he went for a walk. I followed him, and I saw the opportunity when your window was open, I...

Brock turns to run, but James clubs Brock with the Weighted Bookmark, knocking him out and slams the door.

James steps back out and sets a bag of trash on top of Brock and walks back in.

END ACT II



ACT III

INT. EXECUTIVE OFFICE DAY

Jackie taps her bottle on the desk as she stares at Ashton.

JACKIE ROGERS

I quit.

ASHTON STEELE

You never quit.

JACKIE ROGERS

You expect us to work with this scissorbill?

ASHTON STEELE

I don't know what that means.

JACKIE ROGERS

We shouldn't have to settle for that critical flop wrapped in centuries old suede.

BROCK TARNOWSKI

I bring a lot to the table! I have an idea about an episode where the man is injured and views a murder in his window.

Jackie and James turn towards Brock. James' teeth are bared.

JACKIE ROGERS

One, we write comedy here. Two, that's "Rear Window", dumbass.

BROCK TARNOWSKI

That's not a movie.

JACKIE ROGERS

It's one of Hitchcock's films.

BROCK TARNOWSKI

I think I know movies.

JACKIE ROGERS

Do you know this show?

BROCK TARNOWSKI

It stars my Craigie. Of course.

JACKIE ROGERS

What's it about?

Brock shrugs.

JACKIE ROGERS (CONT'D)  
 Prepare for mid season  
 cancellation.

James composes himself and sits up.

JAMES THOMAS  
 First off, I would like to  
 congratulate Brock Tarnowski on  
 his... decorated career. Welcome to  
 the show.

James shakes Brock's hand.

JAMES THOMAS (CONT'D)  
 I say we all celebrate with some  
 coffee. I haven't had a single drop  
 of my usual 5 cups.

ASHTON STEELE  
 I like the maturity, James. There's  
 something I need to talk to you  
 about in the cafeteria.

Beth smiles at James. The group exit the office.

INT. STEELE PRODUCTIONS- HALL MORNING

Everyone walks out of the room. Just as Brock walks out,  
 James pulls him back in and the door slams shut behind them  
 and locks. Brock's squeals erupt from inside and goes silent.

Ashton rams into the door repeatedly.

Loud muffled shouts echo from behind the door. Beth pounds at  
 the door. Jackie tries to pull Ashton away from the door,  
 smiling.

BETH THOMAS  
 James! Open the damn door! He's not  
 worth... You need hi... Open the  
 door!

ASHTON STEELE  
 Damn it! Security!

JACKIE ROGERS  
 Ashton, let it happen. It's meant  
 to be!

Ashton rams the door open.

INT. STEELE PRODUCTIONS MORNING

Beth, Jackie, and Ashton run in to find James holding Brock off the ground and choking him. Brock is uselessly struggling against James. Ashton rushes over to James and karate chops his arms to no effect.

ASHTON STEELE

Damn it! Security! Security!

JAMES THOMAS

Look at me, you piece of shit! If my show ends up a joke like you, I will fuck you up with my 5 iron! Fuck my career up, and Dirk's ass whipping will look like a warm up! An award-winning documentary will be made about it!

Ashton and Beth try to pry them apart until security enters and tackles James.

JACKIE ROGERS

(uncommitted)

No. Stop. It's not worth it. Think of the children.

ASHTON STEELE

James, hallway! Now!

INT. STEELE PRODUCTIONS MORNING

Security leads James down the hall. Ash follows close behind. Ashton stops everyone. James wrenches free and secure stands by. Beth runs up to James. The CHECK falls out his pocket.

A large PLANT sits in the background. Craig is hiding behind it and not well hidden.

JAMES THOMAS

What the fuck are you thinking, Ashton? He's gonna destroy everything.

BETH THOMAS

YOU destroyed everything! He's here because of you!

James freezes.

ASHTON STEELE

Buddy, I love you like a little brother, but the network has you on probation, and every award show now has a protocol named after you.

James mouths "That damn snake again".

JAMES THOMAS

He better put on a good show.

BETH THOMAS

Get your shit together! You're more than a TMZ headline! Keep yourself in check! Okay?

Beth rubs James' arm and nods "yes". James nods painfully "yes" and bites his tongue.

ASHTON STEELE

Good. I talked to the network and you're allowed to write two episodes a season directed by Brock. I fought for you, but they think you should suffer, too.

JAMES THOMAS

All I wanted was my creative freedom.

ASHTON STEELE

So did your team, and you quelled everyone. Accept your world and live in it. Work with Brock.

JAMES THOMAS

He can't be worked with!

Ashton points at James.

ASHTON STEELE

Pot.

Ashton points towards the boardroom.

ASHTON STEELE (CONT'D)

Kettle. You two have a lot in common then.

DIRK DARLING (O.S.)

Of course. Neither has an Emmy.

James turns to see Dirk approaching, dangling his PRESS PASS. He's wearing a prop eye patch.

DIRK DARLING (CONT'D)

The power of the press, Mr. Thomas.

James pounces at Dirk. Security catches him. Jackie walks out of the board room, sits on the ground and starts drinking.

Craig rises from behind a decorative plant and records the scene on his phone.

DIRK DARLING (CONT'D)

It's quite tragic. I genuinely never wanted to see this.

JAMES THOMAS

Fuck you, Cyclops! You wanted me to fail.

DIRK DARLING

My job is to demand quality. I offer a final lesson to a former friend: learn from the stories you once cherished, Captain Ahab.

JAMES THOMAS

Which one of us is Ahab, again?

DIRK DARLING

Are you implying you're the whale?

JAMES THOMAS

Were you implying you're the whale?

Dirk chuckles, picks up the check and folds it into James' pocket. Dirk takes off the eye patch, revealing it healed.

DIRK DARLING

You'll never catch me, Mr. Thomas.  
Consider that your silver bullet.

Dirk laughs as James fights to get free from security. Security tases him and drags him away unconscious.

INT. DARLING'S SET EVENING

On Darling's Primetime Darlings, Dirk watches the footage recorded from Craig's phone. He strokes the remnants of his Emmy and laughs.

DIRK DARLING

Welcome back! We found out that Schism creator James Thomas, the "Lycan of Literature", will not return as showrunner and will be replaced by Jackie Rogers. Wow... Who would have thought that if people hate you, they wouldn't want to be around you. Either way, your crew is finally liberated, though with Brock Tarnowski in the picture, it's a mixed blessing. Heavy is the head that wears the crown. Keep yours high, James.

INT. THOMAS' LIVING ROOM EVENING

In the living room, James taps his folded arms as he stands close to the screen. Beth, Jackie, and Craig sit on the couch. James' laptop sits on the table.

CRAIG ROGERS

Down in front asshole!

James jumps on top of Craig and chokes him.

BETH THOMAS (O.S.)

Babe?

INT. THOMAS' LIVING ROOM-EVENING

Back to reality. James stares a hole through Craig while baring his teeth. Craig edges away from James.

BETH THOMAS

Full moon isn't for another week.

CRAIG ROGERS

Why the fuck did Ash hire that freak? He's obsessed with me!

JACKIE ROGERS

The vampire's on your side! It's what you always wanted. Someone who agrees with you beyond question.

CRAIG ROGERS

That used to be you!

JACKIE ROGERS

You used to be a respected actor!

CRAIG ROGERS

We used to be on an acclaimed show,  
now we're bickering over a fire!

James takes a step back and runs his hands through his hair.

JACKIE ROGERS

Go bitch to Brock!

BETH THOMAS

I'm yelling 'cause I'm hungry!

JAMES THOMAS

Enough! I'm sorry!

Jackie jumps back. Beth and Craig's jaws drop. James realized what he said and freezes.

BETH THOMAS

I should've recorded that. Nobody  
will believe us.

Jackie walks over to James and checks his temperature with her hand. James turns her around and shoves her away.

JAMES THOMAS

I've known you all since we were  
kids. Craig, you're like a brother  
to me, regardless of your futile  
attempts to undermine me. Jackie,  
we've been a team from the start,  
you sick fuck! You don't deserve to  
suffer for me.

Jackie raises her flask.

JACKIE ROGERS

I'm no writer. I'm just good at it,  
Wolfie.

BETH THOMAS

You don't deserve to suffer either.

DIRK DARLING (O.S.)

For the rest of the program, I'm  
going to list all of Mr. Thomas'  
atrocities against mankind.

Beth mutes the television.

JAMES THOMAS

First my show, then Tarnowski, now  
Dirk the Dastardly. The world is  
laughing at me.

CRAIG ROGERS

Isn't that what you've wanted? You write sitcoms.

James throws his laptop at Craig and hits him in the eye.

Craig writhes in his seat. Jackie bursts into laughter.

CRAIG ROGERS (CONT'D)

Damn it! The corner!

JAMES THOMAS

Go live with that, bitch.

BETH THOMAS

Lycan, we're all here for you. But you need to understand that you need to work with people to make this a reality. Remember like before? We'll always be here.

JAMES THOMAS

Thanks. I feel like I owe everything to you guys.

JACKIE ROGERS

Craig's down. We're even.

JAMES THOMAS

Okay, well two of you then.

CRAIG ROGERS

Just take out Tarnowski.

JAMES THOMAS

I already took Dracula out.

CRAIG ROGERS

Or you could let me help you write. I have ideas.

JAMES THOMAS

You're not clever or bright enough. Outside of scripts, you don't read anything that wasn't written by Doctor Seuss. Good books, though.

Craig's eyes dart open and he smirks. Beth climbs up James' back and nuzzles into his cheek.

BETH THOMAS

We want pizza.



JAMES THOMAS

That's not a debt. It's a demand.

Beth gives James the "puppy dog eyes". James shakes his head and mouths "okay". Beth paws at James' face.

JAMES THOMAS (CONT'D)

I'll tell them to pick up a ball of yarn on the way.

James sets Beth down.

BETH THOMAS

We can make this work, just don't hurt anyone.

JAMES THOMAS

I would never lie to you, so I make no promises.

James kisses Beth and walks to the kitchen.

INT. THOMAS' KITCHEN EVENING

James makes a cup of coffee next to the window. As he stirs in creamer, Brock peeps in.

BROCK TARNOWSKI

Jamie! I'll brief you on production meetings if you help me with Craig.

James hits Brock with his Weighted Bookmark, knocking him back out of the window.