SPARK

Written by

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INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

The sound of lights buzzing can be heard. Then we hear footsteps of dress shoes echoing.

A male detective wearing a dress shirt tucked into khaki pants walks down a grimy hallway. He holds papers in his right arm.

TRACKING SHOT

The detective stops at a door with a card scanner next to it. He scans his card and the red light on the scanner turns green. He opens the door and walks in.

From outside the room, we see someone sitting at a table. His head is faced down. The door closes--sounding like the locking of a vault. The scanner light turns red again.

CUT TO:

INT. OUTSIDE THE INTERROGATION ROOM

We look through the glass into the cucumber-lit interrogation room. We can't hear from outside, but we see the detective sit across from the man and set down his papers.

We slowly creep closer.

The sound of soft panting comes in.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

At the table, we watch from behind the man who sits across from the detective. The soft panting continues.

MAN
I'm not a bad person, man. I'm not.

DETECTIVE
I never said you were.

We cut to see the man from the detective side of the table. His head faces down. His hair shields his face as he weeps.

DETECTIVE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Just tell us what happened.

The man controls his breathing. Looks up. This is JAMES. 21-years-old. He looks exhausted and distraught. He's sweaty and has scruffy hair.

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JAMES
(collecting himself)
I was so lonely.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

A crowded cafeteria. Loud chatter everywhere. James noticeably sits alone at a table. As he sips his drink, he observes the room.

He notices a pretty girl walking on the other side of the cafeteria with her lunch. His eyes gaze on her.

JAMES POV

The girl sets her food down on a table with her friends. As she's about to sit down, she scans the large room and lands on James. They make eye contact. James sits there in awe. She smirks in a flattering way.

She starts walking over to him. He doesn't know what to do. He just stares as she approaches.

She makes her way to his table. James looks up at her.

GIRL
(flirty)
Hey, I just saw you sitting over here. You seem like a really cool guy. I was thinking maybe I could take your number and we could get to know each other?

James exhales speechlessly. Opens his mouth, about to speak, when...

CUT TO:

The girl sits across the cafeteria, eating and talking with her friends. James watches from his lone table fantasizing. He shakes his head and snaps out of it. Back to disappointing reality. He gets up and leaves.

EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS - DAY

James walks along a sidewalk between dorm buildings. He's tense as he walks, avoiding eye contact when passing people as if he'll turn to stone upon looking anyone in the eye.

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Two girls approach, walking from the opposite direction. He looks up and nods at them with a shy smirk. The girls notice but pretend to not see him as they resume their conversation. James looks down and continues walking.

In the distance behind him, a man who looks like he's in his 40s with scruffy hair and a beard, watches James.

INT. DORM ROOM - AFTERNOON

James lays on his bed in a gray, dark, isolated room.

JAMES (V.O.)
I had nothing. No friends. No activities. No motivation to do my pointless schoolwork.

CLOSE ON HIS FACE

His head lies on the pillow, but his lifeless eyes are open.

JAMES (V.O.)
No escape.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM

JAMES
I hate being stuck in that gray area. You know? Like, in between being happy and completely breaking down... There's just that middle section of nothing. I was stuck there.
(beat)
I wanted to crossover so badly. Just be sad. Let it out. FEEL something. But I couldn't. I was stuck in this void of emptiness.

(looks at detective)

To me, being barely above rock bottom is worse.

The detective nods. Understanding.

DETECTIVE
And so what'd you do to cope with this 'lost' feeling?

James squints his eyes, confused.

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JAMES
Nothing.

INT. DORM ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A bottle of pills sits on his desk. Some pills are scattered next to it.

We pan over to his lifeless face lying on the bed. He grabs his phone from his pocket and brings it to his face. A bright pink light from the screen reflects in his eyes.

JAMES (V.O.)
I needed something. Someone.

We see the screen. A dating app opens-- “Spark!” The bright, lively visuals boxed within the phone completely contrast the gray, depressing environment surrounding it.

He checks out his dating profile. Pictures of him smiling, partying. Almost a different person to what we’ve seen of him to this point. (POSS. OMIT)

He goes to the main page where there are women’s profiles. He starts mindlessly swiping.

UP CLOSE ON JAMES - BACK OF PHONE IN FOREGROUND

James’ eyes stare at the screen as if he’s in a trans. The pattern of his swiping finger creates a rhythmic tapping sound. It goes on for a few moments.

WIDE SHOT OF ROOM

Suddenly, the tapping sound stops.

UP CLOSE AGAIN

James stares at the screen, no longer swiping.

We cut to over his shoulder to see his screen. He has a match. It’s a pretty, 19-year-old girl named EMMA SMITH.

He leans up. It’s a spark of energy that we haven’t seen. He tosses the phone on the bed and gets off. He goes to his desk and picks up a water bottle.

The phone sits focused in the foreground on his bed as he drinks his water in the background. The phone suddenly chirps. He looks over and picks it up.

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JAMES (V.O.)
I knew it was weird to begin with. She messaged me almost immediately, which I guess is... rare for me.

It's a message from Emma: "Heyyy!!"

He squints--a little irked by the message--but can't help but smirk.

He responds: "What's up! How are you?"

Emma: "Pretty good."

James: "Where you from?"

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM

JAMES
It started with typical small talk... then it got weird.

INT. DORM ROOM

James lays on his bed. The light is on now. He's wide awake, waiting. His phone's on his desk. It chirps. He looks over and picks it up excitedly.

As excited expression turns to confusion.

Emma: "1507 Anthony Ave."

He looks up from the phone, thinking.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM

The detective listens with his hand on his chin.

JAMES
I mean, who sends their address to a complete stranger? I asked where she was from. I didn't even know how to respond to it.

DETECTIVE
But you eventually did, right?

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JAMES
I mean, eventually, yes.
(beat)
I wasn't going to.

INT. DORM ROOM

The phone sits on the desk. James leans back in his chair staring at it with his arms folded.

JAMES (V.O.)
I was just curious... if it was even a real address.

He picks up the phone and starts typing something. We cut to the screen to see a birds eye view of the house on maps.

JAMES (V.O.)
It was only seven minutes away.

He looks up, shakes his head. He sets the phone on the desk again and leans forward in his chair putting his head between his knees.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM

JAMES
Look, I know it was stupid. Anyone would have known it was a catfish as soon as they saw those red flags. I mean, her name was "Emma Smith."

INT. DORM ROOM

His head still between his legs.

JAMES (V.O.)
... but my desperation blinded me.

Suddenly, the phone chirps again. His head shoots up.

He picks up the phone and checks it.

Emma: "Come hang!"

JAMES (V.O.)
I know she was trying to hook me.

He looks up from the phone again. Can't resist a little smirk.

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JAMES (V.O.)
... but I bit anyway.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - LATER

James drives. He's showered and tidied up now. He checks himself out in the mirror - makes sure his hair looks good. Sniffs himself.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

The car pulls up across the street from a house. Turns off. The neighborhood is dimly lit and empty. The house is dark-- it's unclear if there's anyone inside.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

James looks at the house through the passenger side window. He breathing tensely. He grabs his phone. Opens Spark.

Texts her: "Im here"

She replies: "Yay come on in!"

James puts his phone in his pocket. Looking at the house, he takes a deep breath, unbuckles, then opens the door.

EXT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

James slowly walks towards the house. He's nervous. He stops for a second in the driveway. He takes out his phone and texts her.

James: "Wait are you here?"

Emma: "Yes? Lol"

James: "Why are the lights off?"

She doesn't reply. He waits a minute. It's dark and windy. There are trees and dark patches all around him.

The sound of a footstep on leaves is heard somewhere. James eyes are widened. He looks around.

Without time to think about if there's someone there, the house light switches on. His phone chirps.

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Emma: “Is that better?”

Uncomfortable being in the dark driveway, he walks towards the house.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM

The detective listens -- locked in to the story.

JAMES (O.S.)
You know, it’s interesting...

ON JAMES

JAMES (CONT’D)
I was scared shitless.
(beat)
But honestly, it’d been the most
I’d felt in months.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

James knocks on the door, more paranoid now about what’s outside the house rather than inside. The door opens.

It’s Emma. She looks just like her picture. She’s pretty and friendly.

EMMA
Hey!

JAMES
(hesitant)
Hi.

The wind blows. He just stands there.

EMMA
Did you... want to come inside?

James snaps out of it. Chuckles.

JAMES
Yeah, sorry.

He enters, looking outside one more time before closing the door. The howling wind gradually increases before going silent as the door slams.

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INT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

James looks around. Emma locks it the door behind him.

They're in the living room. There's a semi-rectangular couch and a TV connected to a small kitchen and dining room. In the corner of the living room, a staircase leads upstairs.

EMMA
(walking to the kitchen)
Make yourself at home. Feel free to sit on the couch, I was just going to get us some waters.

JAMES
Ok, sure.

He sits on the couch. Looks around.

POV: FROM TOP OF THE STAIRCASE

We see James sitting. Still nervous.

ON JAMES

JAMES (CONT'D)
So, do you live here alone?

EMMA (O.S.)
No, I live with three roommates, but they're out of town right now.

Emma comes back in the room with two waters. She's smiling.

EMMA (CONT'D)
(handing him the cup)
Here you go.

JAMES
Thanks.

EMMA
So I was just thinking we could chill. Talk. Maybe watch a movie or something?

JAMES
Uh, sure.

He's unsure how to read the friendliness. He's tense, but gradually becoming more comfortable.

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EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT - ESTABLISHING

We slowly push in on the house. Murmurs of talking from inside. The wind quietly blows.

INT. HOUSE - LATER

Emma holds the remote looking at the TV, which is O.S.

EMMA
So what kind of movies do like?

James sips his water.

JAMES
(nervous)
Uh, I mean, I don't care. I'm cool with whatever.

EMMA
(smiles)
Cool.

A brief pause.

JAMES
I was honestly surprised when I matched with you.

EMMA
Why?

JAMES
I don't know. You're pretty I guess.

EMMA
Well, so are you.

James laughs.

JAMES
(shy)
Yeah... I mean, thanks.

Emma laughs.

JAMES (CONT'D)
How long have you been on Spark?

EMMA
Not too long. I only use it when I need it. You?

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JAMES
A couple months... This is actually my first time meeting with someone off of it, though.

EMMA
Well I hope your first Spark date lives up to your expectations.

James smiles--it's going well. He looks down for a moment, but something catches his eye. The water in his hand.

There are barely-visible drops of a colored liquid slowly dissolving in the water. He squints at his cup. Now slightly disturbed, he slowly sets the cup down on the flat arm of the chair, trying not to draw attention to it.

He opens his mouth to say something to Emma, who's still looking at the TV with the remote, but before he can get a word out, a shadow coming from the top of the staircase catches his eye. It disappears, and a creak noise on the wooden floor is heard upstairs.

James notices. Emma stays fixed on the TV.

JAMES
Are you sure there's no one else he-

EMMA
What about drama? Do you like drama's? They have a ton of options.

JAMES
(unable to read her)
Uh, yeah I guess, but--sorry--you said there's no one else here right?

EMMA
(smiles)
No, just me. I mean, you can check for yourself if you'd like.

James leans back. He closes his eyes and takes a breath, trying to compose himself.

JAMES
(eyes closed)
No, it's fine. I'm good.

She moves closer to him on the couch. Rests her hand on his.

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EMMA
Don't be so tense.

Then, a LOUDER creak from upstairs. This time it's obvious. His gaze shoots to the staircase, then to the water, then to Emma again who's fixed on him with a smile.

In that moment, James SNAPS.

He aggressively pulls his hand away and GRABS Emma by the neck, whipping her into a headlock. She SCREAMS.

JAMES
(yelling to Emma)
What do you want from me?!

He keeps her in the tight headlock as she squirms. Hyperventilating. Full of adrenaline. He looks upstairs.

JAMES (CONT'D)
(yelling towards upstairs)
I SWEAR TO GOD I'LL KILL HER!!!

He forcefully tosses Emma--"bitch!"--she whacks her head on the arm of the couch before hitting the ground.

James runs to the door and frantically yanks it--but it's locked.

He looks back. LOUD THUMPING FOOTSTEPS approach down the staircase.

James turns back to the door and unlocks it. He heaves it open and runs out the door.

EXT./INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

He flies into his car and starts it. The tires screech and he pulls out. As he drives away, he sees the figure of the man in the doorway watching him leave.

James hyperventilates on the verge of tears.

JAMES
WHAT THE FU--

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM

The detective sits across James, arms crossed.

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DETECTIVE
Did you see the man's face? Can you describe his features?

JAMES
No, it was too quick. But I can give you the address where he was.

(beat)
He was gonna hurt me.

The detective looks down and frowns, nodding his head.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Did you hear me? He's out there. I want to know what you're doing to find him.

The detectives tone shifts. It's no longer

DETECTIVE
James...

James leans in.

DETECTIVE (CONT'D)
It's time to be honest.

He leans back. The detective no longer seems like an ally.

JAMES
(at a loss for words)
Do you not believe me?

DETECTIVE
James, once you leave this room, I can't help you anymore. Okay?

(beat)
What you do now will mean more than what's already been done.

JAMES
What are you talking about?

DETECTIVE
We're giving you a chance to come forward and tell the truth.

James just stares. Dumbfounded.

DETECTIVE (CONT'D)
It's time.

DANIEL MEZZALINGUA

JAMES
I have no idea what's going on. I told you the truth.

A brief pause. The detective looks through his papers.

DETECTIVE
When I asked you about what you did to cope with your depression, maybe you just forgot about the self-prescribed pills you bought.

The detective puts photographs on the table in front of James. It's the pill bottle from James' dorm room in a police evidence bag.

James picks up the photograph in utter confusion, he looks up at the detective.

DETECTIVE (CONT'D)
I mean, loss of memory is a side effect of them... along with extreme paranoia and hallucination.

James looks at the photos. He's stunned. Speechless.

DETECTIVE (CONT'D)
There was no man there, James. No poison.
(beat)
And James, you killed that girl.

Overwhelmed with emotion, James' starts hyperventilating. Close to sobbing, but struck with shock.

DETECTIVE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Emma Smith is dead.

JAMES
No she's not.

DETECTIVE
She is, James.

JAMES
No she's not. That's impossible.

James' shock and fear turns to anger for a moment.

JAMES (CONT'D)
I was being set up. They were gonna ambush me!

The detective stands. Reveals handcuffs from his back pocket.

DANIEL MEZZALINGUA

DETECTIVE
I’m gonna need you to stand up.
This is just protocol.

James stands with the little strength he’s got. The detective handcuffs his hands behind his back.

JAMES
(louder)
I promise, man, I’m not a bad guy!

DETECTIVE
I know. We’re gonna get you the
help you need.

FROM OUTSIDE WINDOW OF INTERROGATION ROOM

We slowly move away from the room. James loudly sobs, accepting the reality of the situation.

JAMES
(yelling)
I’m not a bad guy!!!

CUT TO BLACK.

THE END.

DANIEL MEZZALINGUA