

Daven Haven

by Daniel J. Irwin

“You don’t have to come out with us, Em.”

“It’s a supervised visit, Jim. You know, with supervision and all that.”

“Come on, Emily. I’m not going anywhere with him. Where am I gonna go? My mom had to drop me off for Chrissakes.” Emily’s eyes shot bolts of anger at her ex-husband.

“All right, just play with him in the sandbox. I’m going to be right here in the kitchen.” Emily Knott took a step back, but she could not help herself. She warned, “I’ll be watching.”

Her husband sighed quietly and chose to say, “Thanks. I thought if Aidan is comfortable with me, we might walk over to Jack Cooper’s place across the road.”

“Jesus Christ, Jim! You just said you weren’t going to take him anywhere!”

“Em, you know what they’re planning over there. They’re going to burn Jack’s dad’s place down, finally get rid of that haunted-looking dump. There’s some training exercise set up by the Casonville Fire Company. I heard there’s going to be like five different companies over there. Tell me a kid that wouldn’t want to see all those fire trucks.” He raised his eyebrows as if to say, “Why don’t you see this from a kid’s point of view?”

It was her turn to sigh. “You don’t know anything, do you, Jim?” Her eyes burned with an intense look that told Jim she had not forgiven him one bit for getting into trouble. Their marriage had ended after he went to prison, but it began to die the day he told her about what he believed were land and timber deals that were legitimate, deals that the District Attorney, Brian Steltzer, was now looking into. Steltzer was a

former classmate that Jim had never liked. He had informed their lawyer that he was going to seat a grand jury, looking into land, timber, and mineral rights fraud. Jim's business would be the main focus. All these memories flooded into both Jim and Emily's minds as the flash of anger dissipated from her eyes. "Look, while you were in Rockview I had Aidan tested. He isn't like full-blown autistic, but he's what they call on the spectrum.

"What are you talking about? Look at him. He looks fine."

"God almighty, Jim. We talked about this before the divorce, before you, you know, went away."

"Yeah. I remember you...well, you know it's been three years and it's not like I got to see him any."

"I wasn't taking him to Rockview, and the court agreed with me."

"All right. All right. I didn't come here to fight. I just want to see my son. Can I do that? Please?" Emily motioned for him to go out on the back porch. She watched him go down the steps, wondering if she should go with him, hoping Aidan would not freak out. She stepped out the back door, deciding it had been stupid on her part. Aidan wasn't ready for this. Then she heard Jim speak.

"Hey, buddy. How's the equipment running?" he asked from about ten feet away from the sandbox.

"Hi, Dad. The loader's not running right. I've got all these logs ready to go and no way to get 'em on the truck." Emily was both relieved and saddened. What might have been? The saddest question for anyone.

As Emily retreated to her small dining room, Jim walked forward toward his son.
“Is there something I might do to help? Can I sit down with you?”

“Yeah.” Aidan never looked up from the loader. “How would you load it?”

Jim sat down on the edge of the sandbox he had built when Aidan was just two years old. It was twelve landscape timbers, bolted together at ninety degree angles, three to a side, close to 64 square feet. Emily, or maybe her boyfriend, had painted it John Deere green and kept it full of sand.

“You warm enough, Bud. Sure you don’t need a jacket?”

“I’m fine. How would you load it?”

“If my loader was broke down?”

“Yeah. How would you load it?”

“I think I would have to get the loader fixed.” Jim smiled at his own joke.

Aidan kept his focus. “But, if you couldn’t, how would you load it?”

“Well, that never happened to me. I’m not sure,” admitted Jim.

“But say you had to get it to the mill today or they won’t pay you. How would you load it?” Jim leaned down to try to look his son in the eye. Aidan turned away and picked up a toy skidder. Though he wanted to understand his son’s obsessions, he simply did not have the knowledge to know how he should respond. Just play along, Jim told himself.

“Well, if I absolutely, positively had to get it there, I would, let’s see. I would take out these two stakes from the trailer. Then I would use the skidder to pick up one side

of the tree and try to place it behind the back stake. Secure it with my straps. Then I would take the skidder..." He reached out and said, "Can I see your skidder?" Aidan gave it to him without hesitation. Jim started acting out what he was saying, using the sticks that Aidan had stacked up in the sandbox. "Then I would lift the other end like this and after releasing the one end, try to push it to the other side of the trailer. It would take a lot longer, and you wouldn't be able to get much of a load, even if you had a Tigercat 635, but you could get some logs to the mill."

Aidan laughed a strange chuckle. "That's funny."

"What's funny, Bud?"

"That's the same thing, Daven said."

"Daven? Who's David, Bud?"

"My friend. He's sitting right there." Aidan pointed to the far corner of the sandbox. "He told me you were inside the house, talking to Mom. That's why I knew it was you that spoke to me." Jim had thought he just recognized his voice and the way he had always said, "Hello" to his son, since Aidan had never turned around. Now he realized that Aidan did not, could not, remember much of him. Jim had missed him terribly. Though Aidan was just a toddler when Jim went away, there was a connection between them, if for no other reason than their eyes. Emily could never say Aidan wasn't Jim's kid. Their pale blue eyes matched almost perfectly. Now Jim could not even see his son's eyes. Aidan only looked up to talk about a friend who was not really there. Then he looked down again at his toys. Father and son sat in silence.

Now Jim was stuck. Emily had told him Aidan was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. He did not know what that meant. Though he wasn't buying it, he also did not want to upset his son. So, for once, Jim France did not follow his impulse and say, "There's no one sitting there." Instead, he went with, "Ohhh. Sooo, Dave is your friend, huh?"

"Yeah. He comes over when I'm playing in the sandbox. And his name's Daven, Dad, not Dave or David." Aidan started loading the sticks into his log truck the way his father had told him he would do it.

"Oh, sorry. So, Daven, like raven?"

"No, his name's Daven Haven." Aidan laughed again. "Daven said you must be a fortune-teller or something cause he said that there was a raven over at his house just yesterday."

"He just told you that?"

"Yeah." Aidan loaded another log.

"Bud, where, umm, where does Daven live?"

"Across the road." Jim looked over his shoulder. He could see the very top of the roof on the old Cooper place. There were already some people milling around. He saw the tail end of a fire truck at the edge of the property.

"Do you mean at the old Cooper house?"

"I don't know. He just said on the other side of the road."

“Well, okay. Might be up Weston Street I guess.” Jim wanted to move on. He wasn’t sure how to handle Aidan’s imaginary friend. “You know, Bud, the fire company is doing a training exercise over there. They’re going to burn that old, spooky house. You won’t have to look at it anymore.”

“That’s good.”

“Would you want to go over and see all the fire trucks? I was friends with the son of the guy who lived there.”

“No. Daven told me all about it. Said Jack Cooper owned the place now. He told me they were going to burn it.”

“He did, huh? You sure you don’t want to go? Those fire trucks are pretty cool.”

“I like my logging truck. I’ve got to get it loaded and take it to the mill.” He methodically placed another stick on the trailer just as he father had described.

“Besides, Daven already taught me about fire safety.”

“Is that right? What’d he tell you?”

Not once did Aidan take his eyes from the skidder and truck. “Like never play with fire. Never play with matches. Don’t leave a fire alone. You got to watch it. If you would catch on fire, roll on the ground to put it out. Things like that.” Aidan was in first grade this fall and Jim came to the conclusion that the stuff he had been taught in school was simply being transferred to his “friend.”

“Well, that sounds like good advice.”

“I guess so. He said he wishes there had been fire exting...exting...”

“Extinguishers?”

“Yeah. He wishes they had been around back in his time.”

“Oh, so he’s not from our time?”

“Nooo, Dad. Look at his clothes. There like from...a long time ago.” Without thinking, Jim looked over to where Daven was supposed to be. All he saw was sand. He looked beyond that, towards a ridgeline called Windy Hill, for a few seconds, growing angry with himself that he hadn’t been here for his son the last three years.

“You’re right, Bud. I should have noticed that. What time is he from?”

“I don’t know, but he promised me I could find out.”

“How’s that?”

“He said we could switch bodies and then he could see all the cool things we have and I could go back to when things were better.”

“When things...wait how are you...”

“It will just be temp...temp...for a few hours. Mom and I watched this old movie last week where a mom and her kid switched bodies. It was funny. Mom said there are other movies like that. There’s one really old one where a boy switches places with his dog. She said she would try to find it on YouTube. I think she said there is another one called 17, or maybe it’s 18, Again.” Jim’s anxiety settled down a little. It was just a movie. However, it still upset him that Aidan thought going back in time would make things better.

“I remember those. I think there’s one where a lawyer turns into a dog too.” He smiled a little, reached out, and tousled Aidan’s hair. He did not react one way or another. “You sure you don’t want to go look at the fire engines? I just heard another one pull in.”

“No. I’m okay. It’ll be lunch soon. Mom said I can have a cupcake cause it’s a big day for me.”

“Oh yeah. Why’s it a big day?”

“Cause of you coming.” Jim did not know how to take that. Three years ago his son had been quiet, sure, but he had also laughed a lot and was more active. Now he just seemed distant and when he spoke it was blunt.

A deep sigh from Jim was followed by, “All right, Bud. I’m going to go talk to your mom and then I am going to go over to say hello to my friend, Jack.”

“Okay.” He did not look up as he pushed the log truck across the sand.

“I’ll be back.”

“Okay.” Jim got up, but did not move towards the house for a few seconds. He just watched his son play. Then he looked to the corner of the sandbox where Aidan’s imaginary friend sat. There was a reluctance to leave him, but he had a few questions for Emily.

As Jim reached the steps from the deck, Emily came out onto the porch. “So, how’d it go?”

Jim wanted to let loose with his fears and anger, but held back, knowing that would end even his supervised visits. “Has Aidan told you about his imaginary friend?”

“You mean Daven? Yes.”

“And that doesn’t worry you?”

“No. The doctor said it’s fine at his age.”

“Does he have any real friends at school or around here?” He motioned to the few houses along the road.

“His teacher says plays with *some* kids *some* of the time during recess, but he’s pretty withdrawn.”

“How long has this been goin’ on?”

“I think you know the answer to that.”

“Right. I figured that’s what you’d say.”

“Do you want me to lie to you?”

“No, you did enough of that when we were married.”

“Do you really want to go there?”

“No. Actually I don’t. I just...look Aidan said it was his lunchtime. I’m going to go over and say hello to Jack before they light his dad’s place on fire. Do you mind if I come back after that? I’d like to play with him a little more.”

“We’re going over to my mom’s at one. You can talk with him until then.”

“Thanks, Em. Okay, I’ll be right back. I’ll call my mom to come and get me at one or a little before that I guess.”

“Mmm.” Jim walked through the kitchen and the living room, exiting the front door like he still lived there. Emily was none too pleased, but she held her tongue. He was already out the door, and it probably wasn’t worth it anyway. Instead, she went to the back door and called for Aidan.

Jim crossed the street and headed up the driveway. The spooky old house of one Jackson Cooper Sr., who never went by something as friendly as Jack or “Coop,” stood about 200 feet back from the road. It sat on close to five acres of land. Right now it seemed that at least four of them were occupied by emergency vehicles. There were all kinds of trucks. One ambulance sat back by the fence row that separated the Cooper place from the Morris home next to it. Jim saw one of the town’s two police cruisers and a state trooper’s SUV. They did not make him uncomfortable. His supposed crime had been of the white-collar variety. Even so, they seemed to be looking at him strangely. A lot of firemen in full gear were standing around, but he could see there were a good number of them inside the structure as they walked past the large, but thin, window panes of the house. Finally, he saw Jack.

“Coop!” he yelled.

The big man turned and smiled. “Hey, Jimmy! What are ya doin’ here?” They came together and embraced. Jim could see one of the cops from town eyeing him up.

“Over across the road. Em let me come and visit Aidan today.”

“Really? Huh. How long you been out?”

“About two weeks. Been lying low, staying with my mom.”

“How’s Patty doin’? She all right? I heard she was having some problems.”

“Seems to be in remission. Thank you. I appreciate you asking.”

“Good to see you, man.” Jack slapped Jim on the shoulder. “So, did you come to see the old house go up in flames?”

“No. I just wanted to say hello. I figured you’d be here. What a smart way to get rid of the old place. Probably hard to sell with that thing sitting here.”

“You don’t know the half of it. Hey, you want to take one last look around?”

“Oh, I don’t know. Aidan will be done with lunch soon. If I remember right, I only came here a couple of times. Not a lot of memories for me.” Jim smiled.

Jack laughed. “Yeah, I bet. Probably cause I remember smoking pot with you up in the attic every time you came here. *And...*I remember we got so paranoid we thought there were voices coming from the walls?”

“Hey, in all fairness, your dad never took care of this place. It’s looked like a haunted house my whole life. Even without getting high I probably would have heard voices in that attic.”

“Well, we’re about to send it to hell for good. Come on, one last time. Can’t go up to the third floor and the attic, but you can see there’s no skeletons in the walls or anything. The fire company opened up most of it.”

Jim looked at the iPhone his mom had gotten him. “All right, man. Real quick. Gotta get back then.” Jack started walking towards the door and Jim followed.

Jack began to explain as they went. “So glad to see this thing go. I hated this place. Hated coming here. My mom would drop me off to visit my dad and wouldn’t come back till Sunday night. I’d spend almost all my time outside, even in winter. My dad just thought I liked being outdoors. The reality was I hated being inside his house.”

A thought popped into Jim’s head as they reached the back door. “Hey, man. I should’ve said something before. I was sorry to hear about your dad passing.”

“Oh, no problem. Thanks. Yeah, he died, oh, it’s been over a year now.” Jack stepped inside. Jim saw two firemen approaching and stayed on the first step.

“You can’t come in here,” said the lead fireman.

“Till you burn it down, I own the damn place,” answered Jack. “So, I think I’m going to take one last look around...if you don’t mind.” Jack was five inches taller than the man’s helmet and even with all the gear, he was at least a hundred pounds heavier. The firemen walked away without saying another word. “Come on, Jim.”

Jim walked in and past Jack. “Damn. You were right. I remember there being at least walls in here. And where’s the kitchen?”

“Had to check the walls for asbestos, but the truth is my dad, over the years, removed a lot of the drywall himself. Just left bare walls. Sold the sinks and tubs and those big radiators to Lovey Salvage.”

“Well this should go up pretty fast. It’s just a shell.” They walked past what had once been a dining room and into a smaller side room.

“I hope so,” sighed Jack with an air of relief in his voice.

“This room looks the same,” said Jim as he stepped through a doorway.

“Yeah, they wanted to show some new firemen how the flames can get trapped in the walls and how to look for hidden dangers. This room fit the bill. For some reason my dad never tore this one up.”

“Wonder why?”

“This was the parlor, or that’s what my dad told me. Supposed to be for entertaining guests, but of course, Dad never had any. You know back in the day, when someone died, they would lay them out in here. People would come to your house to visit instead of going to the funeral home. For some reason...well, I guess because this house was a big-ass home back in the day, my extended family would have their funerals here.”

“Yep, I remember you telling me that...and I see you still got those creepy photos of old people. Man, even the kids look old in these pictures.”

“I know. Never understood why my dad kept those. Any picture from the 1800s always looks weird to me. First off, everyone; man, woman, and child, has resting mean face. And nobody is good looking, not one person.” Jim laughed at that.

“I hear ya, man. The funny thing with that is...well, sorry, but I read a lot while I was locked up. What I was going to say is; the funny thing is that these historians I read, they always talk about how beautiful some woman from the past was and then when you see a picture of her, at best you’re thinking, ‘Well, I might, maybe, after a drink or two.’”

“Exactly.”

“So, are these folks, they all relatives of yours?”

“I don’t know. I think so. A lot of different last names, not just Cooper. You got Jones, Taylors, don't know, Havershams, this one here is, let me see, Blums.” Jack moved to another wall and kept pointing. “Over here you got Adamson, Harris, I forget that one, Lewis...” Jim was staring at one old photo, which could almost qualify as a daguerreotype.

“Who’d you say this family was?”

“What?” Jack turned back to see what Jim was looking at. “Oh, that’s, that’s the Havershams. Yeah, that’s a creepy one, huh?”

“Looks like it. Did they live here?” asked Jim.

“No, but they were relatives. My dad told me that story more than a few times. My old man, I swear, I think he did it just to freak me out.” Jim had always been scared of Jack’s father, Mr. Cooper, but decided not to add on by bad-mouthing him. There was no reason to speak ill of the dead, and he remained silent. “See, these three children here, they were laid out here in the parlor for a funeral, or at least their caskets were. Dad said there wasn’t much left of them.” Instead of explaining his last statement, Jack went in a different direction. “Let’s see if I remember, it was Ellie, Elijah, and Elizabeth.” Jack pointed to them as he said their names.

“What happened to them?” asked Jim, steering the conversation back to where he needed it.

“Died in a house fire.”

“Really?”

“Well, that's what my dad told me," admitted Jack. "Worst thing is their brother, the one right there, supposedly started it.”

“No way.” Jim was a bit stunned, as we all are when fate doubles down on misfortune.

“Yeah. So, the story goes, at least I think, he was just messing around with the fireplace. I don't believe he was playing with matches." A strange look came over Jim. Something struck a chord, but he could not recognize the note.

"Why would you say that?"

"Well, I always thought my dad was just trying to scare me into not screwing around with them, but I also don't think they had, like, run-of-the-mill matches back then." Jack shrugged his shoulders. "I dunno. That part of dad's story never made sense to me."

"Was he arrested or anything?" Jack was about to make a snarky comment about prison and getting away with murder, but in the nick of time remembered where Jim had spent the last three years.

"David? No. Dad said the family never cooperated with the local sheriff. Remember there wasn't much law around here back then. No state troopers or anything. But, I guess he was seriously messed up after that. Killed his brother and his sisters. Burned down the family home. He ended up quitting school in, like, the eighth grade. Dad told me he didn't even make it to twenty. Died from tuberculosis. Probably

never had a happy day after the fire happened. My dad told me that all the kids would tease him and bully him.

"How so?" asked Jim without his eyes ever moving from David's.

"People talk about bullying today, but them kids back then were just as mean. They would taunt him with actual fire. Throw burning matches, or probably sticks at him. From then on, he was terrified of fire...and the kids at school. Again, I don't know how much B.S. my old man was throwing at me. A lot of this doesn't ring true."

"You'd be surprised how fast people can turn on you." Now Jack fell silent. He turned to look at Jim, sad to know that his old friend was a pariah in Casonville, and worse, he knew it.

Jim took no notice of his friend's empathy. The blurred vision of an innocent family had captured Jim's gaze and would not let go. He was drawn to that moment, that burst of reflected light captured by the daguerreotype. The family did not know that the universe was about to demand a tragedy. We all owe it at least one, but the Havershams staring back at him had no idea what was coming. How could they?

"What happened to the rest of the family?"

"I don't know. Dad always ended the story with..."

"Hey, you guys gotta get outta here. We're 'bout to light the top two floors," yelled a fireman from the door.

"I guess we should head outside," agreed Jack. "It's time to let go of the ghosts."

That snapped Jim's attention away from the picture of the Havershams. "Sure. Yeah. Time to go. I'm sorry, I was staring at the picture. What did you say happened to the family?" They started walking towards the door in what used to be the kitchen.

"Oh, Dad just said that some great uncle of his stopped by the house they were renting and everyone and everything was gone. People, horse and wagon, furniture; all gone. Weird thing is, no one had seen them leave. This is after David had died. No one knew where they went. And nobody heard from them again." Jim exited first. As Jack was walking through the door, he gave a note of finality. "So ends the story of Daven Haven."

Jim reared up like a horse that's seen a rattlesnake. He spun around, went back up one step, and asked, "What did you say?"

Jack looked at him funny, but still managed to reply, "That's how Dad would finish every time he told the story. "So ends..."

"No. No, the name. What was the name?" Jim had moved up to the same step that Jack was on. He moved with an urgency as if he had left something valuable inside.

Jack looked into his eyes and saw a mixture of anger, fear, and confusion. "It's what the kids called him, Daven Haven. It was like a demon name they made up. They would taunt him with it. Daven Haven Daven Haven. They'd chant it." Jim looked inside the door for a split second and then was gone. Jumping off the steps to the back door, he hit the ground running, heading down the driveway at a full sprint. Jack watched him go, wondering how his friend had changed in the last three years.

"Em!" yelled Jim as he burst through the door of his old house.

Emily knew she had to cut this off or it would only get worse. “Look, Jim! You can’t just come busting in here!” He was bouncing through the living room and into the dining area. “This isn’t your home anymore.”

Jim did not slow down, but asked questions he knew the answer to. “Okay. Okay. I don’t want to fight. Where is he? Where’s Aidan?”

“What? He’s out..he’s out back, in the sandbox where you left him.” For some unknown reason, most likely fear, Jim looked out the window of the kitchen, even though he could have seen him from the deck in two more steps, without delaying to check. Aidan was pushing a dozer through the sand. Jim took a deep breath. “What is wrong with you?” demanded Emily.

The ex-husband gave no prologue. He still had a bit of wildness in his eyes, but the adrenaline was starting to slip from his veins after seeing his son playing peacefully. “What has he told you about his imaginary friend?”

“Why are you going on about this? I told you the doctor said...”

“I don’t give a damn what the doctor said.” They both stared at each other, neither one wanting to revisit the troubled times of their marriage. With the impasse, Jim had time to think rationally for a fleeting moment. “Did Aidan ever go across the street and talk to Jack’s dad?”

“Oh God no. Aidan’s afraid of that house. And he was more afraid of Mr. Cooper. I was so happy when I heard they were going to burn that place down.” Silence. Uncomfortable silence. “What’s going on? What’s the matter?”

“Come on. Come with me. I have to figure this out.” He started towards the door and added, “Please. This is important.” As they went out on the deck, Jim whispered, “Daven Haven is the name of a kid from back in the 1800s. He killed his entire family by burning down their house.” It was an exaggeration, but born of anxiety, not malice.

“What are you talking about?” Jim just lifted up his hand as they approached the sandbox and sat down on the edge.

“Hey, Bud.”

“Hey, Dad. Hi, Mom.”

“What are you doing, Honey?” asked Emily.

“Making a logging road for the next plot,” answered Aidan without looking up.

“That’s a good job,” said Jim. I see you built up a loading ramp for the trucks to pull beside. That’s smart, Buddy.”

“It’ll make it easier to load.”

Jim tried to ease into his questions. “Aidan, have you ever gone over to the big house across the street?”

“No.” He kept on playing with the dozer.

“Never?”

“Uh Uh.” Aidan did not look up.

“Okay.” Jim looked at Emily, who looked back at him as if to say “I told you so.”

“Buddy, do you know anyone named David Haversham?”

“No.” He parked the dozer and brought the log truck, which was now empty, besides the loading ramp.

“I don’t see your friend, Bud. Is he here?”

“You mean Daven Haven?”

“Yes, Aidan. Is Daven here?”

“Is he still around, Honey?” asked Emily.

Aidan looked up and then turned to his left and right. He started to say, “He was just...” Then he turned around and said, “He’s over on the deck.” Both Emily and Jim turned to see what wasn’t there.

“Aidan, can you look at me, Buddy?” asked his dad. Aidan pushed his loader up the ramp, but then stopped and looked to his parents. “Can you tell me exactly what Daven Haven is wearing?”

“Jim, why are you doing this?” He chose to ignore his ex-wife.

“You told me he was dressed in old-timey clothes. Can you tell me anything specific about him?”

“Do you want me to ask him to come over?”

Both Emily and Jim said, “No,” at the same time. Jim then said, “You can just tell us what he’s got on.”

“He always looks like he’s going to Sunday school.”

“Oh, okay. So, he has his nice clothes on.”

“His shoes are weird. He doesn’t like them.”

“What’s wrong with them?” asked Emily, now starting to be more intrigued.

Aidan’s focus went back to his toys, grabbing the skidder and heading toward the neatly planted plot of sticks. “They’re like my shoes, but the bottoms are weird. They’re made out of wood. I asked him what kind of tree they’re from but he didn’t know.”

“You mean he had...has on clogs?” Aidan looked up to his mother and squinted his eyes. She recognized the confused look and said, “He has wooden shoes.”

“Yeah, but not all wood,” answered Aidan.

“Does he have dark hair or light hair like your mom’s?”

“He has black hair like yours, Dad.” Jim stood up and motioned for Emily to follow him. At first, he moved towards the deck, then something in the back of his mind made him walk toward the other side of the yard.

Emily did not know what to think. She was frustrated by her ex-husband, but also getting a creepy feeling from Aidan’s voice. That, above all else, made her mad. She had tried so hard to be understanding of his quirks and eccentricities. Jim had been back for less than two hours and he’d made her uncomfortable with her own son.

“What’s this about, Jim? Why are you acting so crazy?”

“I’ve seen that kid. I’ve seen Daven Haven. There’s something weird about this,” said Jim in hushed tones.

“It’s an imaginary friend that he must have heard someone talking about?”

“Who would have told him except Old Man Cooper? Has Jack ever visited? Did you and Jack hook up while I was gone?”

“Don’t! Just don’t! And no, Aidan’s never met Jack or his dad.” She shook her head and then declared, “You can’t just walk back into our lives and blow it all up.”

“Look, Em. This is freaking me out. There’s a photo of this Daven kid over in the Cooper place. Aidan said that Daven wanted to switch bodies with him.”

“We just saw a movie about that. You can’t...”

Jim interrupted, “I don’t believe in this kind of...whatever this is, but...” He looked down at the ground and noticed shadows coming over them. Then he looked up at the sky and saw dark clouds rolling in. Finally, he looked across the road and saw the trees on the Cooper fencerow swaying back and forth as the wind picked up. “Just wait here. Watch him. I’m going to get that picture.”

Back he ran, this time jogging up the driveway. Flames and smoke were pouring out of the top two floors. He passed some EMTs who were standing in front of their ambulance. They did not notice him. Jim couldn’t see Jack anywhere, but did not think to ask the next group he passed, the three cops. He stopped to scan the scene. Firemen were fighting the blaze and he could hear orders being given by the instructors, which he had heard had come all the way from Pittsburgh. Despite the controlled setting, something seemed off. They were fighting the fire on the top floors, but it seemed like they were struggling to contain it. Jim’s level of anxiety shot through his figurative roof just as a roar of flames erupted from the real one. That’s when it finally registered with him that the wind had come out of nowhere. As he heard the instructors yelling to pull

the firemen out of the lower floors, he finally saw Jack. He was talking with Casonville's fire chief.

Rushing towards them, Jim did not wait to interrupt. Though he saw that they were talking he blurted out, "Jack. Jack. I need that picture. The one with the Havershams. When's this first exercise going to be done?"

Jack answered his query with a question of his own. "What do you need it for?"

"It's my son. It's Aidan. I think he's in danger. I don't have time to explain. When can we go back in?"

The chief interrupted him. "Jim France, right?"

"Yeah," answered Jim before turning back to Jack.

"Jim, no one's going in there. This wind, which was *not* supposed to happen, has sent this show sideways. That house is going to burn. Too bad too. This would've been a good exercise."

"Jack, I gotta have that picture, man."

"Jim, what do you want me to do? I'm not going to let an old friend go in there for a picture that, to be quite honest, I hope burns to ash."

Just then a horrific scream came from across the road. Jim had never heard her sound like that before, but he knew it was his ex-wife. Only one thing could make her scream like that, not a mouse or a snake or a serial killer in her dreams, only something with Aidan could do that, only a mother's love for her child. Jim said no more. Back

down the driveway he sprinted again. The state trooper knew trouble when he heard it. He began to jog down the gravel road. Several EMTs followed.

Jim's worst fears were realized as he rounded the house and saw Emily holding Aidan. She was crying and saying something unintelligible as he approached. "What happened? What happened?" he shouted as he knelt beside them.

"I don't know. I don't know." She was rocking back and forth with him. "Come on, Aidan. Come on, Honey." Jim saw that foam and spittle was on the sides of his mouth. His eyes were clamped shut as if in pain. His body was rigid, with his legs practically sticking out straight from the edge of the sandbox.'

"What happened to him?" Jim thought he said in a calm manner.

"Stop yelling at me!" hollered Emily back at him. "I don't know. We were playing and he suddenly stood up and turned toward the house." Jim reached out to touch him. The boy felt cold and it frightened Jim enough that he grabbed the boy from his mother and laid his body flat on the sand. Then he began to check for a pulse and breathing. As the trooper and the medical team arrived, he felt a heartbeat and saw his chest rising erratically.

"He's breathing and he's got a pulse," said Jim to Emily, but the others heard it as well. Just as he said that Aidan's arms and legs started shaking, almost vibrating. Jim did not know what to do. He remembered all those things that people say. You have to hold their tongue down. No, you should just clear things away from them. He was not sure what was real and what was myth.

A man behind him said, “Teddy, go get the anti-seizure meds. Ma’am we got stuff in the ambulance that can stop this, but we’ll have to do an IV.” Emily did not respond.

“Ma’am, did you hear me?”

“Yes, yes, whatever you need to do.”

As Emily said that, his body went rigid again. His eyes opened wide. Jim cried out, “He’s not breathing!”

“Let me in there, sir. Let me check him.” As the EMT stepped into the sandbox, he said, “Wes, go get the ambulance and bring it over here. Hurry up!” Then he turned to Jim and said, “Let me slide up next to him, sir. We might have to start CPR.”

Jim stood up. He was about to take a step back when he noticed something no one else had. Aidan’s eyes were black. It was not the entire thing like a shark’s eyes can be. Everyone would have seen that and freaked out. Only the irises had changed, and they looked like spheres of coal. That was when it happened. That was when Jim knew his craziest thoughts were not just irrational fears. The world made no sense anymore. This moment in time saw chaos emerge and stability break down. All of the maelstrom swirling around in his head came together in a moment of clarity. Jim knew what he had to do and it terrified him. Yet, he was certain that there was no other option.

Without any hesitation, Jim pushed the EMT aside and picked up his son. Once more he began to run towards the road. The EMT and the trooper were stunned by his actions and did not move until Emily screamed, “Help him! Help my son!” With that, they took off after Jim, who was already around the house and crossing the road. As he went up the gravel driveway, the ambulance with the other two EMTs was coming down.

Jim slid into the high grass that had not been mowed in a long time. The ambulance driver was surprised. He looked at Jim and recognized the boy he was supposed to be coming for, but he still kept going down the driveway, which made Jim's pursuers jump out of the way. They would not catch him now.

Jim sprinted in the direction of the back door, seeing that no one had closed it since they had lit the top of the house on fire. He could also see that the bottom floors of the house were beginning to burn. That was good. The parlor would be ready for them, and Jim knew that such a thought was insane, but he kept running. No one standing there, watching the flames begin to engulf the house, had any idea what was about to happen. From behind they heard a state trooper yelling, "Stop him!" By that time, Jim and Aidan were only a few strides away from the old wooden steps. Even Jack yelled at him, but Jim ignored them all and jumped through the door's frame.

The bottom floor had begun to ignite, but it was not fully ablaze. As soon as he stepped into the house though, the intensity grew. He turned around and looked at the door, now unsure if this was really what he wanted to do. Flames grew around the frame, as if to say, "You can't come back this way." Outside, the fire chief saw the same thing, and hustled to step between the firemen and police officers and Jack who wanted to go in after them.

"No one is going in there! Not letting anyone else be in danger until we get this under control!" People stood in shocked silence. Then he yelled, "Well...get the damn thing under control! Let's go!" All of the crews immediately switched gears from a controlled burn to extinguish the fire.

Inside the Cooper house, Jim had made it to the parlor. There was an odd mix of light. Some of it was coming from the large windows in the front of the house, but most of it came from the growing flames. The walls were beginning to burn and the floorboards felt hot. Jim wondered if the fire had somehow gotten underneath him. Through the smoke and flames, Jim stared at the picture of the Haversham family. Then he looked down at Aidan's lifeless body and yelled, "Let my son go!" Nothing happened except the flames seemed to be growing larger. "Get out of my son, you bastard! I swear we will all burn in here!"

With his eyes closed again, but still rigid, Aidan began to speak, "I'm sorry, Daddy. I'm sorry. Please. Please. I'll be good!"

Holding Aidan with one arm, Jim reached up with his other, hoping to pry open an eyelid and see what color his son's eyes were. Before he could, Aidan's eyes opened wide. Jim almost dropped his son, but both arms hugged the boy and he kept his hold. The eyes were black as the bituminous that was once mined nearby. "Get out of my son's body, Daven. I know it's you, Daven! Aidan doesn't call me Daddy and he doesn't sound like that. Now get the hell out of his body!"

A growl erupted from Aidan. The guttural voice declared, "He promised me. He wanted to switch bodies. He wanted to go back!" Then a scared little boy's voice cried, "He promised me!"

Jim was having none of it. "You little bastard!" he yelled right into his son's face. Jim moved closer to the burning walls. "I'm not joking around here, David! Yeah I know who you are! David Haversham, you little freak! You burned your own family and now you want to take my son! I know you're afraid of fire, you son of bitch! Give me

back my son, or I swear this whole house will come down on us!” Too much yelling made Jim take deep breaths and he began to cough from the smoke. Aidan’s body began to twist and writhe, trying to break free from his grasp.

“No!” Aidan screamed, but it was still not his voice.

“We’re going to burn, David! Is that what you want? Is that what you want?” Jim turned his back to the flames, trying to use them without scorching his own son’s face. He coughed a few times, then roared, “Get out of my son’s body, David! Goddamn you!” Jim could feel his clothes beginning to singe and blisters forming on the back of his neck.

“It’s mine!” came the deep rage, but in less than a second, the little boy was back and in rapid fire he said, “Please, Daddy. Please. I won’t do it again. I won’t do it again. Please don’t burn us again. We’ll listen. We’ll listen. No more fire, Daddy, please. No more cigarettes. No, don’t burn her. Don’t burn Ellie! No, Elijah didn’t do it. He didn’t do it! I did it, I did it, Daddy, I did it! Burn me. Burn me.” And within a few seconds the story Jackson Cooper told his son, the single story that everyone believed about David Haversham changed in Jim’s mind. Truth emerged from the cries of a young boy.

“Listen, David! I’m sorry ‘bout what happened to you. I’m sorry about what happened to your brother and sisters and whatever your old man did to you, but you gotta let Aidan come back.” Jim’s pant leg caught on fire. The pain seared him. He kicked the back of his leg with his opposite foot. “My son thinks you’re his friend. Are you? Are you his friend or are you what those kids called you? Are Daven Haven? Do you want him to suffer like you did? Are you going to let your father hurt him too?” Aidan’s body began to writhe once more. Then it shook, vibrating like it did in the

sandbox. “Are you going to let your father kill someone else?” Aidan kept thrashing. “How many friends did you have, David? Are you going to let your father kill someone else? Are you going to let him kill your friend?”

After all the movement, it was quite jarring when his little boy’s body went limp in his arms. A second passed and without opening his eyes, Aidan said, “I’m sorry. I’m sorry. Tell Aidan, goodbye.” It was not his son’s, but a new voice, like a young man trying to set things right.

Jim heard boards crashing. The house of Jackson Cooper was not going to stand much longer. He thought he heard Emily screaming outside, but it was probably a trick of the swirling currents. For a few moments he held on, knowing that he could not leave until he was sure. Then the most beautiful thing happened. Aidan opened his eyes. The black, soulless orbs were gone. Pools of blue had returned. “Hey, Dad,” he said in a quiet voice, almost too low to hear. Jim knew his son was back, but realized without looking that he had also waited too long. They were trapped. As one body, they spun around, trying to find a way out. Fire blocked all the doorways in and out of the room. Jim looked to the one wall that held the picture of the Havershams. The wall was burning around the metal, putting it in a hellish frame, but the photo looked intact. Jim knew what he must do.

The pain in his hand made his throat choke as he grabbed hold of the picture frame, burning the sensitive flesh of his palm and fingers.. Without a moment's hesitation he spun and threw the picture with everything he had. It smashed through one of the big picture windows in the front of the house, not shattering the glass, but punching a hole in it. Jagged shards were still hanging from the frame. A roar began to

grow and Jim intuitively turned away from the windows of the parlor. An instant after he covered his son's body with his own, the glass in all the windows on the ground floor exploded inward. Jim felt the pieces bury themselves into his back and legs and scalp. He almost dropped Aidan, but that hurt him more than the glass, and he caught the boy after only a few inches. Secure in his arms, Jim knew there was only one way to save his son.

There was no thought to it as Jim raced toward the now open window frames, fire slapping him on the back, adding insult to bloody injury. He leaped through the opening, and calling on the athleticism he once had, twisted in the air. Father and son fell together six feet to the ground. The impact drove the shards into Jim's body even deeper. He wanted to throw up, but vomiting was not an option. The house that saw so many funerals was about to die itself. They had to get away. He sat up, holding onto Aidan, but then in his peripheral vision he saw it and instinctively grabbed the daguerreotype. The picture frame shocked him with a jolt, but then it felt cool or at least normal. They got up off the ground and began to run towards the driveway and the road. They'd gone about forty feet when an overzealous police officer tackled them into the high grass.

There was little fight left in Jim, which is probably for the best or he would have been charged with assaulting a police officer and resisting arrest. Instead, he writhed a little from the pain, and turned to see that Aidan was all right, sitting next to him. A moment later, Jim heard Emily along with a host of others coming to a stop behind him. The cop was already putting on handcuffs. The picture of the Havershams fell to the ground. "James France, you are under arrest for child endangerment and whatever else

we can charge you with. What the hell were you...man! You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you. You have the right to..."

Jim ignored his Miranda rights, partially because he was already aware of them, but more importantly, he needed to know if Aidan was okay. "Buddy, are you all right? Are you okay?"

Little Aidan looked at him and actually smiled. "I'm okay, Dad. Daven Haven's gone." The rough treatment from the town cop did not stop Jim from letting a deeply born exhale out. That was followed by some smoke-induced coughing. Now his body went a little limp as the cop pulled him to his feet. The pain was starting to become so overwhelming that he felt numb. Emily was so relieved to see Aidan all right that she did not yell or punch or kick Jim like she wanted to.

She just picked up her boy and hugged him tight, tears pouring down her cheeks. "Are you all right, Baby? Are you all right?"

"I'm fine, Mom. I'm fine. Daven Haven had to say goodbye. He had to go," explained Aidan matter-of-factly. "Dad told him we were friends and he shouldn't hurt me." Jim started to cry at that, realizing that his son had been experiencing all the horror with him and David.

The fire chief interrupted before Jim could say anything. "You have to move farther away. Come on! We're not safe here."

The trooper said, "Back to Rockview with you, France. This won't look good to the parole board."

Jack picked up the picture that had been in his family's possession for almost two hundred years.

The second town cop flanked Jim and they started to move him towards their patrol car. A panicked scream came from Aidan. Then he began to talk almost as fast as David had. "I'm okay, Mom. I'm okay. Dad saved me. Dad got Daven Haven out. He got him out. Let my dad go! Let my dad go! Mom! Mom! Dad saved me! Daven Haven's gone! Let my dad go!" Aidan began crying, then bawling, and screaming, "Let my dad go!"

"Em. Em, just bring him here. Em, please. Just bring him here." The police officers felt a moment of compassion and stopped moving so aggressively. Against her better judgment, she inched forward. The fire chief was barking the whole time and everyone moved back, but at a snail's pace. The winds were still fierce and the flames were shooting high into the sky. Jim gave the minimum of resistance and they came to stop.

"Hey, Buddy. Hey, it's all right. Calm down, little man. It's all good, Bud. That's it. Calm down. Shhh. Shhh. It's all right. It's all right."

"Daven Haven was my friend," said Aidan. No one was looking on in anger or even confusion anymore. Something had overtaken them. More than anything, the handful of firefighters and police officers really just wanted to know what was going on. Why would a father run into a burning building with his son in his arms, a son who had just experienced a seizure?

“He was, Bud. In the end he realized that. He didn’t want you to get hurt like he was. He let you come back to us.”

“Where will he go?”

“Somewhere he won’t feel anymore pain.”

At that instant, a horrific howl filled the air. Later on, the witnesses would describe it as a mixture of screams, some terrified, some malevolent. They seemed to be combined and then separate and go in different directions away from the house. Everyone jumped back at the horror of it all. Then they jumped again as the large, spooky house that so many children had looked at and wondered if it was haunted, collapsed in a thunderous crash of wood and glass. The home seemed to implode and then fall into the stone and cement foundation. With that, it took on the appearance of an oversized campfire, still burning, but roaring no more.

Relative to what had been happening, the scene now seemed serene. “I have to go now too, Bud. I’ll be back. Don’t you worry,” Jim assured his son, not really certain if what he was saying was true. He had no idea how much trouble he was in.

“I don’t want you to go, Dad. I don’t want you to go!”

Jim looked at his ex-wife and mouthed, “I’m sorry.” She just kept crying. To Aidan, he said, “Shhh. Now it’s going to be all right, Aidan. I think you helped your friend, Daven Haven. So, now you have to be strong for your mom too. I’m going to go with these officers and we’ll have a talk. I’ll be back, Bud. You give your mom a hug now. I’ll be back, Buddy. I’ll be back.” With that, Aidan hugged his mother, the officers

began to pull Jim away, and Jack Cooper called the state trooper and fire chief over to his side.

Jack stepped up beside Emily and Aidan too and said, “Em, everybody, I don’t know what this will mean, but I need to tell you a story. This is what my Dad told me. See here, this is...”

Aidan shouted out, “Daven Haven!”