

STICKS

Written by

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Based on, *Sticks*  
by George Saunders

1	FADE FROM BLACK	1	*
	<p>HARPER (V.O.)</p> <p>My dearest Jim. I hope you didn't find this until after, or I'll be awful embarrassed. I can feel the end coming.</p>		* * * *
2	EXT. SUBURBAN STREET-DAY	2	
	<p>The day is gloomy and overcast. Autumn leaves have blanketed the multiple lawns that surround a cul-de-sac. All but one. JIM pushes a manual lawnmower across a manicured green lawn in front of a two-story colonial house.</p> <p>Jim finishes mowing before he stops and removes his cap, wiping sweat from his brow.</p> <p>CUT to Jim raking up the grass trimmings.</p> <p>CUT to Jim hauling two canvas bags around to the side of the house.</p> <p>CUT to Jim. There is a rectangular patch of bare dirt on the lawn. He begins hammering a length of wood into the ground at the front of the patch.</p> <p>The hammering rings out through the quiet street. On the cracked sidewalk leading away from his house, there's one large tile of cement that has several footprints printed messily into it, and behind it on the sidewalk a faded brown-red stain trails away. Beyond that, much of the sidewalk is overgrown with weeds and ivy.</p> <p>A group of trashcans lie haphazardly on one driveway, open but their contents long blown away.</p>		
3	EXT. ABANDONED HOUSE, BACKYARD-DAY	3	
	<p>*Hammering O.S.*</p> <p>The hammering continues, farther away and muffled slightly. The backyard sits overgrown. Brown, dirty water sits stagnant in a plastic bowl. Grass and weeds grow unkempt. Ivy creeps up a rusting metal playground where a pair of swings gently sway in the breeze, the hinges squeaking.</p>		
4	INT. ABANDONED HOUSE-DAY	4	
	<p>*Hammering O.S.*</p>		

As the hammering continues, the house across from Jim's sits empty. Through the dusty-caked bay window, we see an aged leather couch, a rocking chair with paint chipping and on the moldy carpet sits the body of a dog. Flies buzz around the dog's head.

5 EXT. JIM'S HOUSE-DAY 5

Jim finishes driving the piece into the ground. He takes another length of wood and fashions it into a crossbar to form a cross.

He goes inside his house through the front door.

6 INT. JIM'S HOUSE-DAY 6

Jim walks through the entryway. On the wall are framed photos, a few paintings, all well maintained. The photos show Jim at various stages of life, surrounded by friends or animals or stood beside a woman in an elaborate costume, difficult to identify over the clothes or makeup.

There's some rummaging and noise off-screen before Jim walks back, carrying a large bundle of red and white clothes. The door opens and closes off-screen as the picture sits on the wall.

7 EXT. JIM'S HOUSE-DAY 7

Jim places the clothes on the wooden cross, revealing it to be a Santa suit. He adjusts and fiddles with the coat, pants and hat until the sit just right. He turns and looks up at the grey sky as a breeze blows through the street.

He zips up his jacket and goes inside.

8 EXT. JIM'S HOUSE-DAY 8

Snow billows fiercely over the street. The Santa suit has been affixed to the cross with several zip-ties. The house is dark save for one window on the ground floor. A vertical sliver of orange light bisects the window.

9 INT. JIM'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM-DAY 9

The room is lit with several candles, and a string of Christmas lights are stuck along the tops of the wall all around the room.

Jim sits in an easy chair with a tray extended over his lap. A steaming helping of canned food and rehydrated vegetables sit on the plate. On the table next to the chair sit a remote and a bottle of wine.

Jim looks around, rubbing his hands before grabbing the wine and pouring a glass. He tastes the wine then sets his glass down on the tray. He picks up the remote.

The old TV across from him flickers to life and shows 2D cartoon snowflakes falling over the screen before the speakers start playing *Here Comes Santa Claus*. Jim watches and starts eating his dinner.

On a large shelf behind Jim, another picture sits, beautifully framed. An even younger Jim wears a tuxedo stands next to HARPER, a dark-haired woman in a wedding dress. Following are several more pictures with frames themed after holidays: Halloween, Christmas, etc. In each one, Harper is dressed in full costume as the classic holiday mascots.

10 EXT. JIM'S HOUSE-DAY 10

The sky is clear and blue, birds chirp and the grass is green. The debris on the street has mostly blown or been washed away. The misshapen sidewalk tile is clean of stains.

11 INT. ABANDONED HOUSE-DAY 11

The dog's body is mostly skeletonized on the floor. The house is still as light shines in, filtered through the dusty window.

12 EXT. JIM'S HOUSE-DAY 12

The wooden cross has a flannel shirt and pants on, too small to be Jim's, a wicker basket hangs from one sleeve and perched on the top is a straw hat with cloth bunny ears sticking out of it.

13 EXT. JIM'S HOUSE, BACKYARD-DAY 13

There's a sizable chicken coup at the back of the house, as well as a large shed and some garden beds with different vegetables growing.

Jim whistles as he scatters seeds into the coup, the chickens cooing and pecking at the food.

He opens a hatch in the coup and takes out several eggs. He moves on to the shed.

\*

14 INT. JIM'S SHED-DAY

14

Jim enters. The wall to his left is lined with cages containing live rabbits of varying sizes. Jim looks all of them over before stopping at a plump white one. He takes it out of the cage, shushing it as it kicks its feet out.

JIM

I know, bud. I know.

He takes it out of the shed.

15 INT. JIM'S HOUSE, BASEMENT-DAY

15

Jim walks down the steps into the basement. He flips a switch and fluorescent lights flicker on, droning as he steps through. He wears an apron that has a few decades' worth of stains on it, including a still-wet spatter of blood.

He walks past a large workbench and a space with clothing scraps, mannequins, and wigs scattered around in organized chaos, a costumer's work station.

On a metal shelf are more pictures and bins of tailor's supplies. A framed picture in the center shows Harper and Jim in matching Leprechaun outfits. Lying folded under it is a note with the words 'TO JIM' written on it.

Jim tears his eyes away and walks out in a huff, killing the lights. His footsteps echo in the dark room as he goes up the stairs and out, the door slams shut behind him.

16 EXT. JIM'S HOUSE, BACKYARD-DAY

16

Jim is knelt down in the garden bed picking zucchini off of a large vine. He pauses and winces, rolling his shoulders and sitting upright as he stretches his back.

He drops his garden shears in the basket with the produce and brings them inside.

17 EXT. JIM'S HOUSE-DAY

17

The sun shines bright. Heat radiates off the cracked grey asphalt of the street. There are patches where the lawn has turned yellow.

An American flag hangs down over the front door. The cross is dressed in a faded blue blazer with red and white striped plants and a matching top hat.

18 EXT. JIM'S HOUSE-DAY

18

Autumn leaves fall once more as a black cloak adorns the wooden cross. Jim secures a rusty-beyond-repair garden scythe to one side of the crossbar. He steps back to look his work over before there's a SNAP and the whole thing falls over.

Jim lunges to grab it but catches the scythe's blade. He cries out as his hand is cut, bleeding. He groans and huffs as he clenches his bloodied hand and rushes inside.

19 INT. JIM'S HOUSE, KITCHEN-DAY

19

Jim stands over a wood-burning stove. A small pot holds boiling noodles with a wooden spoon sticking out. His right hand is bandaged so he stirs with the left. Next to the stove is a half-empty bottle of wine.

He takes the pot off the stove and dumps the water in the sink.

Hanging on the wall over the sink is another picture of Jim and Harper, sat at a bar smiling.

20 EXT. JIM'S HOUSE-DAY

20

The cross is back up, now with extra stakes surrounding it for support. It still has the scythe and the cloak, as well as the framed picture hanging from the 'neck' of the figure.

21 INT. JIM'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM-NIGHT

21

Jim sits slumped in his easy chair, snoring. The wine bottle sits empty next to a stained glass on the table next to him. Rain drums against the window and wind howls outside.

There's a CLAP of thunder, and Jim startles in his chair, waking up.

He shakes his head and looks out the window. A flash of lightning illuminates the cross. There's movement and then nothing. He rushes to the door.

22 EXT. JIM'S HOUSE-NIGHT

22

Jim rushes outside, barefoot and half-drunk. He stumbles across the wet lawn. He makes his way around the patch of dirt-turned-mud to the cross. It's gone.

\*

The metal scythe lies twisted and sizzling as rain hits the reddened metal. The wood is scorched and scattered in a million pieces. The picture is nowhere to be found.

\*

\*

JIM

No. NO! Harper!

Jim digs through mud and grass around the base of the cross. Water splashes around and the rain quickly soaks him. Thunder CLAPS again. He starts crying, tearing up wads of grass and soil.

SHOT WIDENS

Jim collapses as the rains comes down, his hands covered in mud. The black cloak clings heavy to the wooden cross.

\*

23 EXT. JIM'S HOUSE-DAY

23

The sun shines, steam rising from the wet grass of Jim's lawn. The once carefully bordered patch of dirt is now a mess of grass and mud. There's a divot in the mud by the cross and several footprints leading from the patch to the front door. The cloak and scythe have fallen, the cross is bare.

A pair of muddy socks and pants sit in a heap on the stoop.

24 INT. JIM'S HOUSE, BATHROOM-DAY

24

Water drops reverberate off the white tiles and steam hangs in the room. A muddy shirt hangs over the curtain rod of the shower. A bloodied, muddy bandage sits torn on the counter next to the sink.

25 INT. JIM'S HOUSE, BEDROOM-DAY

25

Jim sits half-naked, a towel wrapped around his waist on the bed. A new bandage is wrapped around his hand. He braces to stand, rising from the bed before he stops and groans in pain. He's frozen, hunched over in his towel. Slowly, he grabs his lower back and rights himself.

26 INT. JIM'S HOUSE, KITCHEN-DAY 26

Jim takes a couple of pills out of an orange bottle and swallows them, washing them down with a swig of whiskey from an old bottle.

27 EXT. JIM'S HOUSE-DAY 27

Jim's doing more yard work. His facial hair has grown out to a short length, a mix of dark brown and silver. He's sweating through his shirt as he digs through a patch of weeds. The cross is still bare, discolored to a faded shade of brown/grey.

Jim winces as he slowly stands and dusts off his hands. The world is quiet.

28 INT. JIM'S HOUSE, KITCHEN-DAY 28

A door in the kitchen sits opened, showing a stairway going down, illuminated by a single lightbulb dangling by a chain. A loud GROAN is heard off-screen, then a short YELL followed by a series of CRASHES.

29 INT. JIM'S HOUSE, BASEMENT-DAY 29

Jim lays half-under a fallen shelf. The shelf is large and metal, with bits of clothing, thread and sewing supplies strewn about on the ground. A mannequin lies on its side a few feet away, between Jim and the workbench.

Jim groans as he lies on his back, pinned. A shallow cut has opened up on his forehead. He's got one arm free, and he grabs the shelf and tries to push it off him. He pushes, struggling, his face turning red for a second. The shelf budes, enough to pull his other arm out. He relaxes and the shelf sinks ever-so-slightly.

Jim breathes heavily as he wipes the blood off his brow. He keeps one arm braced on the shelf and tries to move around, his shoulders just wiggling around as he fails to find leverage.

JIM

Come on!

He grabs the shelf again and pushes. Something metallic GROANS as he huffs and puffs. There's a DINK and a glass wine bottle rolls out from under the shelf. Jim groans and lets his head hit the cold concrete floor.



Jim's head rolls to the side and something catches his eye. Broken glass trails to a broken, framed picture, face down. Lying ahead of it is the folded piece of paper.

Jim reaches for it, it lies just out of reach.

He looks the other way and sees the mannequin. He can reach it, just barely, but he drags it over and manages to detach an arm.

Sound fades away as Harper's voice reads out.

HARPER (V.O.)

My dearest Jim. I hope you didn't find this until after, or I'll be awful embarrassed. I can feel the end coming.

Jim uses the mannequin arm to pry the shelf up and brace it. He then brings both hands up and pushes the shelf, mouth open in a silent yell of desperate exertion.

HARPER (V.O.)

There's nothing either of us could've done. This was going to happen when it happened, and I'm so happy I could spend this long with you, just the two of us. We've had our good days and bad, but I don't regret a thing.

\*

Jim pushes and pushes the shelf until he can move a leg, kicking out and twisting to lift the far end of the shelf so that his other foot comes free. Tailor's supplies and photos fall and litter the ground as the shelf rises centimeter by centimeter.

He wriggles and shuffles along the ground, moving himself out from under the shelf. With a few more pushes and shoves he slides his way out and the shelf falls flat on the ground.

HARPER (V.O.)

I don't need a big memorial or headstone out front. Just bury me where the sun shines and give my spot a little pizzazz.

He lies there panting and rubbing his bruised body, the color fading from his face somewhat.

Jim sits up and crawls over, getting on his knees as he digs through the mess by the shelf until he finds the note.

30 EXT. JIM'S HOUSE-DAY

30

The sky is partly cloudy and the trees rustle in the wind. Jim stands in the front doorway, reading the letter. His head is bandaged while his hand is not anymore.

He puts the paper in his pocket and grabs a shovel by the door.

31 EXT. SUBURBAN STREET-DAY

31

Jim is uprooting bits wildflowers that have grown unchecked along the street and in the unkempt houses.

32 EXT. JIM'S HOUSE-DAY

32

The surface of the dirt patch has been dug up. Jim sits on his knees, planting the flowers he collected.

HARPER (V.O.)

I've still got all my costumes down here! I know it's morbid, but it's a little funny too, don't you think?

The cross has been replaced with new, fresh wood and has new supports. It is dressed in overalls, a flannel shirt and a large straw hat, like a scarecrow.