

"Soul Ascension"

By

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For Kimmi

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The screen is black. In the darkness, we here a rhythmic mechanical squeaking sound: "SQUEAK... SQUEAK... SQUEAK..."

FADE IN:

EXT. AN AMERICAN SUBURB - PRESENT DAY

In a moving shot, we follow the front wheel of a bicycle as it passes through a leafy American suburb. The wheel is the source of the squeaking sound. The one wheel is joined by a second traveling beside it.

We pull back to see two men on bicycles, BROTHER JOSHUA and BROTHER JIM, riding side-by-side. They are clean-cut young men in their late teens or early 20s. They are dressed in identical outfits: white dress shirt and tie and dark dress pants. They are both wearing backpacks and bicycle helmets. Obviously, they are religious missionaries canvassing the neighborhood. They could be Mormons, but we're not sure.

In close-up, we see the name tags they are wearing...

"Brother Joshua"

...and...

"Brother Jim"

FADE TO BLACK

FADE TO:

In a vague darkness, we hear the sound of a residential doorbell: "DING-DONG!"

The blackness splits apart from the center to reveal...

BROTHER JOSHUA and BROTHER JIM standing on a front porch. They are seen from the perspective the WOMAN who has just opened the door.

BROTHER JOSHUA

Good morning, M'am. I'm Brother Joshua and this is Brother Jim, and we're going through the neighborhood today talking to people. I wonder if we could have a few moments of your time to talk to you about the life after this one. I think we have some information you may find useful.

WOMAN (V.O.)

You know, I'm really busy today. I've got two sick kids, and I really don't have time to talk.

BROTHER JOSHUA

Sure, we understand. Family always comes first. Can we at least leave a brochure for you?

WOMAN (V.O)

Sure, no problem.

BROTHER JIM hands a brochure through the door.

BROTHER JIM

I hope your kids aren't too sick. What's the matter with them?

WOMAN

It's nothing serious, just something that's been going around the school.

BROTHER JOSHUA

I know you're very busy, but I hope you'll take some time to look at this information. It's important not just for you but for your whole family. The good news is that there is a Heaven, and we're all entitled

to eternal life. If you have any questions at all, there's information on the back about how to contact Brother Jim or myself.

WOMAN

(moving to close the door)

Thanks, I'll look at it.

BROTHER JIM

(as the door closes)

I hope your kids get better soon.

The screen folds in to black again as the door closes.

FADE TO

In a vague darkness, we hear another residential doorbell, a different one this time: "DONG-DING!"

The blackness splits open from the center as before to reveal...

BROTHER JOSHUA and BROTHER JIM standing on a different front porch, also seen from the perspective of the resident.

BROTHER JOSHUA

Good morning, sir. I'm Brother Joshua and this is Brother Jim, and we're going through the neighborhood talking to people. I wonder if we could have a few moments of your time to talk to you about the life after this one...

MAN (V.O.)

Sorry, I don't have time.

The screen folds to black as the door rapidly closes.

4.

CUT TO:

In a montage of scenes, we see BROTHER JOSHUA and BROTHER JIM rejected at door after door, always seen from the resident's perspective. One after another, the doors go...

"Slam!..."

"Slam!..."

"Slam!..."

No one in the neighborhood wants to hear their message.

CUT TO:

BROTHER JOSHUA and BROTHER JIM are sitting at a picnic table in a neighborhood park, eating their bag lunches. Their bikes are leaning against a tree in the background. They are both looking very discouraged.

CUT TO:

BROTHER JOSHUA and BROTHER JIM are biking side-by-side through the neighborhood, in a scene similar to (if not identical to) the opening one.

CUT TO:

EXT. HAUNTED HOUSE

Wide shot of a dilapidated house, seen from the street. You could almost describe it as a haunted house. The lawn is overgrown and the paint is peeling. A low picket fence in the front of the yard is missing many of its slats. A railing on the front porch is broken.

BROTHER JOSHUA and BROTHER JIM pull into view on their bicycles and park them in front of the house. They look up at the house with trepidation.

BROTHER JIM

Do you think anyone lives there?

BROTHER JOSHUA

We'll find out.

They carefully open the front gate, which creaks ominously. They gingerly make their way up the front steps and onto the porch, careful not to step on any floorboards that might break through.

They look down and see a doormat immediately in front of the door. The design of the doormat is cheerful, modern and upbeat, in contrast to the rest of the house. It says...

"WELCOME TO OUR HOME"

Beside the door is a doorbell button, newer than one would expect for a rundown house like this. It is an "industrial strength" doorbell button that no one could miss. Above it is stapled a crudely hand-lettered sign that says...

"WELCOME ALL!"

BROTHER JOSHUA pushes the button, but there is no doorbell sound from inside the house, no sounds at all. A beat passes while the two of them stand around uncomfortably.

BROTHER JOSHUA pushes the button again.

Now there are the sounds of clunky activity inside the house. We hear a heavy bolt being thrown, then the door opens only about an inch. We can see that it is still fastened by a door chain.

A bloodshot eyeball appears in the opening of the door, but the resident says nothing.

BROTHER JOSHUA

Good afternoon, sir. I'm Brother Joshua and this is Brother Jim, and we're going through the neighborhood talking to people. I wonder if we could have a few moments of your time...

The door closes.

The two missionaries turn to leave after yet another failed contact. They start down the steps of the porch.

Just then, the door behind them opens wide.

The young men are startled. They turn around and move cautiously toward the door.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM OF HAUNTED HOUSE

BROTHER JOSHUA and BROTHER JIM cautiously poke their heads inside the door. It takes their eyes a while to adjust to the dim light, but it is clear that the home is a jumbled mess. The living room looks like a storage room for a garage sale. There are miscellaneous personal effects piled high. We see a plumber's toolbox, some women's purses, a vacuum cleaner, a hard hat, a set of encyclopedias still in their original boxes, pizza boxes, piles of printed matter -- all stacked together haphazardly and covered with dust. It is like opening a pharaoh's tomb.

Through the center of the living room, there is a narrow passageway through the junk, like a winding path through a forest. Walking away from us on the path, we see the hunched figure of a man. We can't see his face, only his gray hair.

BROTHER JOSHUA
(hesitantly)

Sir, I wonder if we could have a few minutes of your time...

PALLID MAN (V.O.)

Come into my study.

BROTHER JOSHUA and BROTHER JIM look at each other apprehensively, then cautiously follow the man. They thread their way through the piles of debris in the dim light.

The PALLID MAN moves down a hallway toward a brightly lit doorway. He passed into it, and the missionaries follow.

CUT TO:

INT. THE PARLOR

The contrast between this room and the last one is startling. This room is brightly lit and almost antiseptically clean. It isn't a study exactly, because there is no desk in sight. It is more like a doctor's waiting area or interview room. There is nothing on the walls and only three pieces of furniture: a sofa, a padded Victorian parlor chair and an end table between them. On the end table is a pot of flowers that are impossibly colorful and cheerful; obviously, they are fake.

The PALLID MAN motions the young men toward the sofa, while he very slowly sits down in the Victorian chair. It is only after he is seated that we get a good look at him. He is an elderly man of undetermined age, and he looks like death warmed over! His skin is almost white, as though he has never seen the sun. His eyes are wet, gelatinous and bloodshot. His back is so bent that his head is angled toward the floor and he has to look way up to see the visitors.

PALLID MAN

So... How can I help you boys?

(When the PALLID MAN speaks, he conveys a lecherous and disturbing air, as though everything he says has a devious double meaning known only to him. He speaks slowly, with many long pauses. His mouth is pink and wet, and he is almost drooling.)

BROTHER JOSHUA

I really want to thank you for making time for us. I know you must be very busy...

PALLID MAN

No, not busy at all. I've got all the time in the world for fine young men like yourselves.

BROTHER JOSHUA

...Well, we're going through the neighborhood spreading the good news about Heaven. The good news is that there is a life after this one. It's a beautiful place, and we're all entitled to go there as long as we make the right choices in this life.

PALLID MAN

Have you made the right choices?

BROTHER JOSHUA
(taken aback)

Well, um, yeah, we're trying. Brother Jim and myself have accepted Jesus Christ as our savior, and we're going our best to follow the path that God intended for us.

PALLID MAN

Then why don't you go there now?

BROTHER JOSHUA is momentarily tongue-tied, so BROTHER JIM steps in.

BROTHER JIM

Well, we still have a mission here on Earth. We're trying to get as many people as possible to join us. Heaven is a wonderful place, but you also want to have all your friends and neighbors there with you. You don't want to see people

suffer if you can do something to help them.

PALLID MAN

But if you had to go, you would be ready?

BROTHER JOSHUA

Definitely. I mean, no one knows what God's plan is. We just have to do the best we can on Earth, and when God calls us, He calls us.

PALLID MAN

Do you want to go there?

BROTHER JOSHUA

Well, of course. Who wouldn't want to go to Paradise? I think both Brother Jim and myself would be ready, no matter when it happened. We've both lived clean lives. We've been saved by Jesus. We haven't used drugs, because our faith wisely tells us not to. We don't use profanity, and we haven't fornicated or, like, hurt anybody. Speaking for myself, I can say that I'm probably as ready for Heaven as I'll ever be.

BROTHER JIM

And I feel the same way.

PALLID MAN

Oh, good.

There's an awkward pause. The missionaries obviously aren't connecting with the man, so BROTHER JIM tries a different tack.

BROTHER JIM

So, do you live alone?

PALLID MAN

Oh, no, Daddy lives with me.

BROTHER JIM

Oh, your father lives with you?

PALLID MAN

Daddy lives with me.

BROTHER JOSHUA

Well, maybe we could talk to him, too. We're interested in anyone who might be open to the word of God.

PALLID MAN

I think Daddy would very much like that. You see, Daddy's not well.

BROTHER JIM

Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. Is he very ill?

PALLID MAN

Yes, I'm afraid he doesn't have much longer.

BROTHER JIM

Oh, dear. I can imagine what a burden it must be for you taking care of a sick father.

PALLID MAN

No, Daddy is no problem at all, but I know he would very much like to see you...

...before he goes.

BROTHER JOSHUA

Well, I think we could do that.

PALLID MAN
(out of the blue)

How much do you weigh?

The missionaries look at each other awkwardly. The question seems to be directed at BROTHER JIM, so he answers.

BROTHER JIM

Me? I weigh about 155 pounds. Why do you ask?

PALLID MAN

You look very healthy.

BROTHER JIM

Well, thank you. We ride bicycles, so we get a lot of exercise. That's one advantage in what we do.

BROTHER JOSHUA

A major advantage.

PALLID MAN

And you eat healthy meals?

BROTHER JOSHUA

Well, yes. Our faith teaches us that our body is God's temple and we have to take care of it. We eat balanced meals, and as I said, we don't use drugs. We don't smoke, drink or use caffeine, which is another kind of drug. Both Brother Jim and myself are very healthy,

because we choose to take care of
God's temple.

PALLID MAN
(barely containing his glee)

Oh, good, good, I LIKE healthy
boys!

This stops the conversation dead in its tracks. After
a beat...

BROTHER JIM

Listen, I know you're very busy,
and I think we've taken up enough
of your time...

PALLID MAN

Not busy at all.

BROTHER JIM
(standing up)

We have this brochure that we can
leave with you. On the back of the
brochure, in case you have any
questions, is some contact
information. If you call that
number, someone from our church
will get back to you.

PALLID MAN

But don't you want to see Daddy?
Daddy would be very disappointed if
you dropped by but didn't see him.

BROTHER JIM catches BROTHER JOSHUA's eye and shakes
his head: "No!"

BROTHER JOSHUA

I guess that would be okay, but
just for a minute. There's a lot of
people we still have to talk to.

PALLID MAN

Come.

The PALLID man rises from his chair and leaves the room.

BROTHER JIM
(whispering to BROTHER JOSHUA)

We got to go!

BROTHER JOSHUA
(whispering)

We said we'd talk to him, so we have an obligation. It will just be for a minute.

CUT TO:

INT. BASEMENT STAIRWAY

We are looking straight up a flight of stairs from the bottom. At the top of the stairs is a closed door. The stairway and door are illuminated by a single dim light bulb beside the door. On the right side of the stairs is a solid wall, and on the left side is a railing. We can see nothing more of the basement.

We hear the sound of a heavy lock being opened. The door swings open to reveal BROTHER JIM, BROTHER JOSHUA and the PALLID MAN.

BROTHER JOSHUA

...and the thing I like about our church is that everyone takes care of each other. Whenever you get in trouble, there's always someone you can call...

BROTHER JIM starts down the stairway first, hesitantly. He is followed by BROTHER JOSHUA and the PALLID MAN.

BROTHER JIM

Your father lives in the basement?

PALLID MAN

Daddy likes it here. It's very peaceful.

BROTHER JOSHUA

...We even have a sort of social safety net. Everyone is expected to give 10% of their income to the church, which is used for all kinds of good works...

As BROTHER JOSHUA is speaking, something catches BROTHER JIM's eye. There are small things hanging on the wall beside the stairway, emblems of some kind, but because of the dim light, it is hard to make out what they are.

PALLID MAN

Daddy doesn't like drafts, so I'm going to close this door.

BROTHER JOSHUA

...If someone, say, loses their job, the church will make sure they and their family are taken care of until they get back on their feet...

BROTHER JIM looks at the items on the wall, and as his eyes get used to the dim light, the objects resolve themselves into...

Nametags!

The first one says...

"Your AVON Representative
KIMBERLEY"

In the background, we hear the man fiddling with his keys, then the sound of a very solid door lock being latched.

BROTHER JIM looks up with alarm, but BROTHER JOSHUA is oblivious.

BROTHER JOSHUA

...I think you'll find that our church is composed of a rich diversity of people from every culture and race.

As BROTHER JOSHUA speaks, BROTHER JIM studies the nametags on the wall, and the full horror of their meaning begins to dawn on him. One after another in rapid succession, we see a few of the nametags in C.U...

"MUNICIPAL GAS COMPANY: Frederick Thompson"

"County Code Enforcement: Meachem, Richard"

"AAAA Able Plumbing: Tom"

"Visiting Nurse Association: Vera May"

...and finally...

"Brother Scott"

...and...

"Brother Thomas"

BROTHER JIM
(in a panic)

Josh, we got to go!

BROTHER JOSHUA

...Of course, not every race is represented at every congregation...

The PALLID MAN, followed by BROTHER JOSHUA, pass BROTHER JIM on the stairs.

BROTHER JIM
(half whispering, half screaming)

Josh!

They all get to the bottom of the stairs.

BROTHER JOSHUA

...I mean, our ward is almost all white, but there are black and Asian wards, too. Everyone is accepted in the Kingdom of Heaven.

PALLID MAN

Daddy might be sleeping, but if you wait right here, I'll get him up.

The PALLID MAN passes out of view to the left. BROTHER JIM grabs BROTHER JOSHUA's arm and pulls him close.

BROTHER JIM

(breathlessly whispering)

Something is wrong. Something is really, really wrong.

He locked the door from the inside.

They both look up at the door, where there is no latch or doorknob, only a keyhole.

BROTHER JIM

(loudly and assertively)

Sir, could we have some light in here. It's very dark.

PALLID MAN (V.O.)

I'm almost there. Why don't you step over here so Daddy can see you.

Cautiously, slowly, with a deep sense of terror, the missionaries step out of frame to the left. However, the camera remains fixed on the stairway. It is lit just as before, by a single light bulb at the top of the stairs.

PALLID MAN (V.O.)

Ah, here we are.

The stairway brightens up, showing us that the basement lights have been turned on.

PALLID MAN (V.O.)
(cheerfully)

Hello, Daddy!

BROTHER JOSHUA (V.O.)
(terrified)

Oh, shit!

With an audible "Crash!" the screen slams to black.

THE END