

LADYBUG

by

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INT. AMBULANCE - NIGHT

A LADYBUG crawls on a fluorescent light. Its antennas twitch. Disjointed arms rub together.

Attached to medical devices, MARY JO JAMES, 25, beaten within an inch of her life, rattles on a stretcher as a PARAMEDIC attempts to treat her.

Her face is discolored, swollen, and unrecognizable -- a howling mask. The only beauty that remains is the unborn baby inside of her belly.

*This will be TIMOTHY JAMES, named after his father...*

TIMOTHY JAMES (V.O.)  
God knew us before his creation.  
Most of humanity chose the world  
before they left their mother's  
womb.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)  
So what's the point of living?

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

NURSES huddle around a SURGEON as he makes an incision across Mary Jo's pregnant belly. Medical devices BEEP rapidly.

The LADYBUG lands on a x-ray of an abdomen and a skeletal, fetal image.

TIMOTHY JAMES (V.O.)  
The point or the purpose?

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)  
The purpose.

TIMOTHY JAMES (V.O.)  
God wants to demonstrate his  
forgiveness through humanity.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)  
And the point?

INT. FORD MAVERICK - DAY

Wrapped in a blanket, Mary Jo sleeps in the driver's seat as Timothy James, an infant boy, is awake in her arms.

Outside, Greyhound buses transit in and out of a Chicago terminal.

The LADYBUG crawls on the rearview mirror.

TIMOTHY JAMES (V.O.)  
The ability to discern the fine  
line between what's holy and what's  
not.

INT. RUNDOWN APARTMENT - DAY

Grime and dirt ooze from yellow tiles. Mary Jo scrubs the floor on her hands and knees.

In a stroller, Timothy James (2) stares at the LADYBUG on a rotting, cracked wall.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)  
Since 1999, your congregation has  
gone from a group of twelve that  
met in the basement of your Chicago  
home, to over ten million  
worldwide. You're one of the most  
influential evangelists ever.

Timothy James marvels at the ladybug -- its sheen, spotted armor and white, ink-blot eyes.

TIMOTHY JAMES (V.O.)  
There are many false prophets that  
roam God's creation. And from what  
I've heard through the Spirit, I  
walk the narrowest of paths.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)  
Most of your critics say quite the  
opposite -- that you walk a very  
broad path.

He admires the ladybug, enclosed in the stroller.

A COCKROACH scurries across Timothy James and his warm, innocent smile.

INT. JAMES ESTATE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

The INTERVIEWER, 30s, sits across from Timothy James, 40s, in the classiest home imaginable. Artifacts of gold and silver, scrolls and texts, far from trinkets, are mounted and displayed: a religious museum.

TIMOTHY JAMES  
I don't concern myself with what  
the critics have to say. Only God.

INTERVIEWER

Tell me about your mother.

TIMOTHY JAMES

Mary Jo is with The Lord.

INT. HOSPICE - ROOM - DAY

Mary Jo, 36, lays on a sanitized hospital bed, attached to machines that feed her relief intravenously. She's bald, with a few stray grays that sprout from random areas. Greenish drool crusts on the corner of her peeling lips.

Timothy James, 14, waits by her side, expressionless.

TIMOTHY JAMES (V.O.)

She raised me from nothing. She cleaned projects everyday from dawn 'til dusk to pay our slumlord. She put herself through college.

The LADYBUG lands on her hand, taped with a tube running underneath.

TIMOTHY JAMES (V.O.)

She bought a new car, new house...a new life.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)

She died shortly after her success.

TIMOTHY JAMES (V.O.)

I wasn't of age and had nobody.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)

Legally, your biological father, also named Timothy, was given custody. What was it like meeting him for the first time?

TIMOTHY JAMES (V.O.)

My father was a holy man...

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

TIM JAMES SR., 40s, stained white tank-top, crucifix necklace, does pulls ups on a bar with a lit cigarette.

The LADYBUG crawls on Timothy James' shoe as he cowers in the corner of the basement.

TIMOTHY JAMES (V.O.)  
He taught me everything about The  
Lord. Made me read my bible every  
night.

Tim James Sr. dismounts from the bar and flicks his cigarette  
at Timothy James. Tim James Sr. SMACKS him in the back of  
the head. The ladybug flies away.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)  
Sounds like a devoted father.

TIMOTHY JAMES (V.O.)  
We are to honor our father, to show  
our love for The One who saves.

Before Tim James Sr. exits, he twitches, goes back to finish  
Timothy James with an assault of ill-tempered STRIKES.

INT. CLASSY ESTATE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

A LADYBUG is attached to a portrait of Jesus behind the  
Interviewer.

INTERVIEWER  
So in closing, do you think The  
Lord aligns himself with your  
lifestyle?

Timothy James notices the ladybug, cannot take his eyes off  
of it.

INTERVIEWER (CONT'D)  
Dr. Timothy James?

The ladybug flies away. Timothy James snaps out of it.

TIMOTHY JAMES  
I'm sorry?

INTERVIEWER  
Your lifestyle. Do you consider it  
holy?

TIMOTHY JAMES  
I don't consider anything in this  
world holy. My lifestyle is like a  
line drawn in the sand. Can we  
kiss The Lord a moment before he  
calls our name? Like I said, my  
name is either there...or it's not.

FADE OUT.