

# Hello, My Name Is James

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# Chapter 1

A loud beeping echoed through the small semi-lit bedroom. An arm shot out the side of the plaid comforter, slamming a hand on the noisy alarm clock silencing the disturbance. Pulling the comforter off him, James let out a long yawn while rustling his brown hair.

*Ok, no more late nights at El Felipe's after work. I think I'm still drunk from those six shots I did.*

A gurgling in his stomach confirmed his notion. Jumping out of bed, James clasped a hand to his mouth as he swiftly rounded the corner directly leading out of his bedroom to the bathroom. Quickly dropping to his knees, he lifted the white toilet seat and disgorged the once sweet but now pungent substance known as alcohol into the toilet. The mixture of green and blue reminded him of one of the specialty shots he drank last night. His upset stomach also remembered by thanking him again, erupting some more into

the toilet. Pulling the handle, a whooshing noise emanated from the porcelain. He rose awkwardly to his feet. Stumbling to the sink, he rinsed the bile taste from his mouth. James splashed cold refreshing water on his face, waking him some more. Looking into the mirror, he saw tired brown bloodshot eyes staring blankly back.

*At least today is Friday. Woo hoo, casual Friday. Management thinks that casual day is hip and trendy, and will increase productivity. Why they think that I will never know? The one thing I do know is that I hate my job. Each day is the exact duplicate of the day before and will be the day after. Everyone hiding in their tiny cubicles, making them feel like home, and hanging trinkets, photos, and stupid comic strips up. They're foolishly feigning their love of working there everyday. My shack, as I call it, is like my life. Plain. Nothing adorns my makeshift home except one thing. A photo of me, hitting my high school's baseball team's winning homerun in the state championship game. It makes me happy. It reminds me of when my life was full of joy and I felt unstoppable. It reminds me of...*

Ringling loudly from his bedroom, the phone snapped him out of his thoughts. Lazily, he walked back into his bedroom. Pulling the silver phone out of the charger, James flipped the top up.

“Hello?”

“What’s up James?” Frank asked.

“Trying to get to work on time.”

“Do me a favor could you pick me up a medium cup of java on your way in?”

“Yeah, it is my turn. Hey, Frank do you remember last night at all?”

“No way, bro. I was lit up! I don’t even remember climbing into bed last night. Hey, I got to let you go, I got another call.”

“Ok, see you at work.”

Pushing the red button on the keypad, he sat down on the bed and glanced at the time.

*Time to get in the shower and not enjoy another day of work.*

Stretching his back, he clumsily walked into the bathroom. Pushing the blue shower curtain to his left, he twisted the shower knobs, and a rain of water started to pour down. Taking his black boxers off, he slung them into the hallway. Sighing, he turned on the radio that was sitting on the sink counter.

“The weather currently is 73 degrees and it looks like it will be a fine sunny day. And in sports...” the radio shouted, as he entered the shower.

A gentle sprout of warm water covered his tired body. He stood there still thinking about his life. About what he could have been if he tried a little harder. Harder in school, harder in relationships, and all together, harder in life. A

new favorite song of his played on the radio and he sang the lyrics. Even though James was tone deaf, he still liked to sing his heart out at karaoke night at Al's Bar. His friends always told him that he sucked at singing, but he didn't care. He would rather have them be truthful than lie by telling him he sounded good. That's what friends were for. To keep you grounded and know that they had your back in any situation. As the warm water soaked his six-foot frame, James closed his eyes.

*I'm twenty-six years old and I'm not happy with the state of my current life. I need some sort of change. I need some sort of new identity. I just need a change of pace from the normal everyday routine.*

Turning the shower knobs off, James stepped out of the shower and landed on the blue bath mat. After toweling himself dry, he wiped the foggy mirror with his hand. He checked the clock on the radio and he knew he had to be out of his apartment in fifteen minutes. If he were late to work again, he would be suspended without pay for one day. That's something James couldn't afford to have happen. Quickly, he brushed his teeth and went into the bedroom to get dressed. Since it was a casual dress day, he decided to wear a t-shirt from a concert he recently went to with his best friend Frank. He slipped the shirt over his head and pulled on a pair of faded jeans. After he finished tying his sneakers, he headed back into the bathroom. Combing his straight

brown hair into place, he turned the radio off. Passing by his bedroom, he remembered to grab his cell phone, and then exited the apartment. After locking the door, he took a quick glance at his neighbor's door. Maybe one day he would get the courage to ask Jennifer out on a date, but right now he had to concentrate on getting to work on time. Quickly descending the stairs, he went out the entrance of the building. It was a beautiful, warm, and sunny morning with barely any cloud cover.

“Yeah, today is going to be all right. I can feel it.”

Climbing into his 2001 maroon coupe, he started the ignition. Switching the radio to his favorite morning talk station, James put on a pair of cheap silver sunglasses. Pulling out of the parking spot, he started making his way to work. The one good thing about his work was that he lived only a few minutes from the place, especially during the cold winters in the suburbs of Chicago. He spotted the coffee place coming up on his right. The maroon car pulled into the drive-thru, and he placed his order into the speaker box. James saw the usual person working the drive-thru window and gave him a polite nod.

“Ok, we got two medium coffees both with cream,” the cashier said, while James handed him the money.

“Thanks,” James replied.

He put the two white coffee cups in the cup holders and headed toward work realizing that he only had five

minutes to spare.

*I can't be late. Hopefully I will make it on time.*

James got caught at a traffic light and waited impatiently for it to turn green. As soon as the light changed, he floored the accelerator, causing his tires to spin momentarily. He quickly drove down the side street and saw his workplace come into view. He parked in an empty spot near the entrance to the building. Grabbing the coffee, he ran toward the front entrance quickening his pace, concentrating on not spilling the coffee.

“Good morning, James,” the receptionist greeted.

“Hey, April,” James replied, as he walked quickly past her making his way to the time clock.

He took his time card from the rack and swiped it through the electric device, stamping his time.

*I'm two minutes late.*

Shrugging his shoulders, he made his way to Frank's cubicle.

“Hey, Frank. Here you go.”

“Sweet. Thanks, bro.”

“Well, it looks like I'm late again. This sucks, I am only two minutes late, but they are going to count that against me anyway.”

“Damn, James. You got to get up earlier. How many marks do you have left?”

“I'm out, so I am sure at some point during the day I

will get called into Mr. Wells' office. Listening to how being late affects the company and blah blah blah.”

“Well, you better get to your desk in that case. If Mr. Wells sees you talking and knows you're late, you will be in even bigger trouble.”

“Yeah, I'll see you at lunch. You want to hit up Maggie's?”

“Sounds like a plan. I could go for a nice steak sandwich.”

James turned, making his way through the maze of many cubicles finding his own. Sitting down, he turned the old PC on. His job was simple. He took the manufacturing reports that he received from the supervisors, and placed them into the Excel program on his PC. This list was updated every morning. Since it was a simple job, he took his time to do it. He had other small tasks to complete during the day like calling customers if their supplies haven't arrived on time, or emailing new lists of supplies his company needed. Pretty simple. To make his day go by faster, he usually played an online game of trivia. He had always liked testing his mind, something that this job would never do. The good part was that his computer was out of visual range, so if a co-worker approached he could minimize his current game. However today, he was going to have to work his best, knowing about the possible suspension he would be facing. His old computer finally booted up, and he clicked on his

email starting the program. There was one new message from the Human Resources department.

“Great,” James said.

Double clicking the message, his intuition was right.

[James, I would like to see you in my office as soon as you are able. Thanks, Joan.]

Taking another sip of his coffee, he placed the Styrofoam cup on his desk and headed toward the HR department. Frank saw him head in the direction of Joan’s office. James’ forehead started to sweat, and a slight pounding began in his chest. Taking a deep breath, he politely knocked on the door.

“Come in.”

“Hey, Joan. You wanted to see me?” James asked, looking at the forty-three year old woman.

Joan looked the same as every other day. Her brown hair was tied into a bun and her black-framed glasses hung on her tiny nose.

“Yes, it seems that you were late again this morning. This is your tenth time being late, and that is all that is allowed before a suspension is handed out.”

“You already got notified for today? Can I go home today and count that as a suspension?”

“No, you have to be suspended for an entire day. That will be on Monday. James, I need you to sign this to confirm that we had this talk,” she explained.

James picked up the black pen, and signed his name on the line.

“What happens if I am late again?”

“You will serve another day suspension without pay. I will give this to Mr. Wells to sign, and it will go into your employee folder for the record.”

James exhaled, left Joan’s office, and made his way back to his desk. He had a new message in his inbox.

[So are you off on Monday?]

Shaking his head, James put his fingers to the keyboard and typed his reply.

[What do you think Frank? I can’t wait until lunch to get the hell out of here.]

He hit the send button and leaned back in his chair with his hands on top of his head. Glancing to his left, he stared at his high school baseball photo displayed in a silver frame. It was the only personal thing that he had in his cubicle.

“Get to work, Mr. Schilling,” a voice said from behind.

Jumping forward in his chair, James got his hands ready to pound away at the keyboard, but stopped.

“Frank, you’re an ass.”

“Scared you didn’t I?”

“No. I was afraid that you were going to mug me,” James joked.

“Why is it every time a black guy silently comes up behind a white boy, they instantly think they are going for your wallet? Besides, I know you don’t have any cash.”

Even in the times of political correctness, the two friends joked about racial humor. People who didn’t know them well enough gave them odd looks, but it was all in plain fun.

“You got that right. I am so broke it sucks.”

“Don’t worry. I’m taking you out tonight. It’s Friday night and I got your drinks. Maybe I will have you work it off later.”

“Work this off,” James said, pointing to his crotch.

Frank let out a laugh and shook his head. “That’s why you’re cool. You can always dish out what you receive. I’m going to take a piss. Get me when you’re ready to eat later.”

“Yes sir, Mr. Johnson,” James said saluting.

He returned his attention back to the photo of his game winning homerun again. He played the scenario over in his mind, like he did many times a week to pass the time.

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“So I think you should get some balls and ask out Jennifer tonight. Hold on before you throw me one of your excuses. I know you like her and I mean like her. Just ask her if she wants to meet up with drinks later and hang out with

some friends.”

James extended his arm out the window of the car, feeling the nice summer breeze, and turned his head toward his friend.

“It’s just that—I don’t know. I don’t think I match the type of person she would date. I have seen some of the dudes she has gone out on dates with. That’s what sucks about living next door to her. I am always bumping into her at the wrong time. Last week I was coming home from work and saw Jennifer and her friend walking down the stairs. This dude had to have some serious loot the way he was dressed up.”

“Well, you never know until you ask.” Frank pulled his blue sedan into Maggie’s parking lot, and shifted the car into park. “Do I have to ask her for you?”

“Frank.”

“James,” he retorted.

“Ok, I will see if she is home after work, and if she answers the door I will ask her. Fair enough?”

“Sounds good. You know I don’t mean to keep hassling you about this, but you haven’t dated a girl in the last two years. Your hands must be cramping up.”

James laughed loudly opening the car door as he got out.

“No, I rotate their schedules and drink plenty of water to avoid cramping the twins,” he said, lifting his hands

up.

“You’re crazy,” Frank responded.

The duo made their way to their favorite lunchtime restaurant that they went to three times a week. The parking lot was scarce of cars so they knew they would not have to wait for a table. The restaurant was nothing special. A small menu and it wasn’t always crowded, so they could take their time eating.

“Hey, guys, your usual table gentlemen?” Cassie asked.

“Lead the way. I like the new hairstyle, Cas,” James complimented.

“Thanks, the blonde highlights took some time, but I’m happy with it.”

The two men slid into the red booth, and Cassie handed them the menus. Since they were frequent visitors she had already known what they wanted to drink, so she didn’t bother to ask.

“I can’t believe my dumbass got suspended.”

James played with the silver saltshaker in his hand.

“What’s done is done. I thought about growing the fro out some more. You know the ladies dig the fro.”

“Ok, disco Frank.”

Cassie returned with two drinks placing them in front of the corresponding person.

“What can I get you, Frank?”

“I have been dying for a steak sandwich. Cooked medium with a side of fries please.”

Cassie took down the order and her brown eyes looked at James.

“I have no idea. I don’t have much of an appetite today.”

She stood there taping the pen to the small pad of paper, smiling.

“All right. Give me a grilled cheese and fries with a side of ranch please.”

“Thanks guys,” she said.

Cassie walked to another table before placing the guy’s orders into the kitchen.

“You eat like a third grader, you know that?”

“Yeah, but it is so good. Maybe next time I will order a peanut butter and jelly sandwich,” James joked.

“The funny thing is that I believe you. Anyway, sales calls are killing me today. I think I made at least ten calls this morning alone.”

“Well, those calls pay for your nice suit there,” James replied, pointing to Frank’s tan suit.

Frank wasn’t required to wear a suit on casual Friday’s, but he always dressed his best at work.

“And they also pay for your drinks tonight.” James was about to speak, but Frank interrupted him. “Don’t worry, I already told you that you don’t owe me.”

Frank saw his friend staring out the window and when James was quiet he knew something was on his mind.

“What’s up?”

James turned his head. “Have you ever had the feeling that your life is meant for something more than it is?”

“Honestly, I am happy with life. I have a great family, great friends, and a great job. I have no complaints. Are you still dreaming of being a pro baseball player? That was forever ago.”

Frank imitated swinging a bat and put his hand over his brow watching the imaginary ball go over the fence.

“No, not sports, but I have always felt that I had a purpose more than working at our company.”

“You’re twenty-six. You have plenty of time to figure things out.”

“Yeah, but the older I get, the more time seems to fly by. I don’t know. I’ll get my life together someday I hope.”

“Well, you can start tonight by asking Jennifer out. Oh, did I just say that out loud,” Frank teased.

“You’re a dork, Frank.”

Frank was about to reply, but Cassie interrupted their conversation placing the meals on the table.

“You guys need anything else?”

“No, we’re fine, Cas. Thanks,” Frank said.

With a smile, she walked away to attend to her other customers.

“True, I may be a dork. Not as much as you, but I know what’s good for you.”

James pondered his friend’s statement and nodded his head yes. Taking a bite out of the sandwich, he gave Frank a slight smile.

“That’s why I love you like a brother because you always seem to know what’s right for me.”

“A better looking, smarter brother may I add.”

Frank looked at his reflection on the window next to him.

“An older brother might I point out,” James added.

“I’m only two years older than you. We’re practically the same age.”

Frank took a healthy bite of his sandwich.

“Sensitive subject there? Let’s finish up and get back. I don’t want to be late from lunch to make my situation any worse.