

RELATIVE TIMING

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FADE IN ON:

**INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

It's Netflix and Chill, lights dim. Illuminated by the glow of the TV, JESSICA and RYAN (30s) snuggle on the couch.

JESSICA  
Isn't this romantic?

RYAN  
Um, yeah. Sure is.

He pulls Jessica close - sneaks a peek at his phone over her shoulder. Anything but focus on the screen.

JESSICA  
Eyes on the movie, Slick. You're about to miss the best part!

Ryan dutifully looks. Stifles a yawn. Jess notices, frowns.

JESSICA  
You never did like rom-coms.

RYAN  
I'm paying attention. This story's... uh, loads of fun?

JESSICA  
Really? Quick: summarize the plot.

Her gotcha question scores points. Ryan hasn't been watching. Jessica pulls away and turns to the TV - annoyed.

Suddenly: a brief FLASH between couch cushions. Followed by a haunting groan, and a VOICE!

VOICE  
Paaaaain...

Jessica swivels towards her husband.

JESSICA  
The least you could do is not complain!

RYAN  
That wasn't me!

He looks around, confused.

RYAN

Did you see a flash of light just now?

JESSICA

(pouts)

Don't play games, Ryan. That was from the TV!

Ryan looks unconvinced. He burrows one hand between couch cushions, and retrieves a crushed DORITO.

But nothing else. Jessica isn't looking. Ryan shrugs, crunches the snack down.

**SUPER: Ten years later.**

Forty year old Jessica and Ryan perch on the couch. Based on their positions, their nightly routine hasn't changed much.

Though this evening's not romantic. Ryan browses beer websites. Jessica remote-logs into work.

JESSICA

(pre-occupied)

What's for dinner tonight?

RYAN

I'm in the mood of Won Tons. Let's order Chinese.

JESSICA

We did that Tuesday. I vote Thai.

RYAN

*Thai Palace* doesn't deliver. You volunteering to pick it up?

JESSICA

No. Tomorrow's my deadline! Until the Powerpoint's finalized, wild horses won't drag me off this couch!

**Suddenly:** another brief flash of light. And a tortured word:

VOICE

Get.

Jessica and Ryan freeze.

JESSICA

Did you hear that?

RYAN

Yeah, but...

Memories connect. Ryan's face lights up.

RYAN

It's just like that voice we heard.

JESSICA

Seven years ago?

RYAN

Wasn't it ten?

JESSICA

Whatever. That was you, bitching about watching *Passion Eternal*.

RYAN

It wasn't me, then or now. And this time, you heard it too!

Jessica eyes Ryan, unconvinced.

JESSICA

How do I know you're not faking it? I wasn't watching your face when "it" spoke.

RYAN

You saw the light, didn't you? That proves your "he faked it" theory wrong.

JESSICA

I don't have time for lame jokes! Lemme guess, you buried an L.E.D. inside!

Jessica furiously digs into the couch, but only finds: a COIN. The couple share awkward looks.

RYAN

See? Apologize.

JESSICA

If it wasn't you, then what? A ghost?

Ryan pouts, and glances at his phone calendar.

RYAN

Dunno. But I'm recording the time and date: May 5th. 9 PM!

**SUPER: Ten years later.**

Jessica and Ryan (50s) sit on the couch and stare at the cushions. Jessica shines a flashlight between the crevices.

JESSICA

I see nothing. Except for a cushion we should've reupholstered years ago.

RYAN

You're jumping the gun.

JESSICA

How so? It's May 5th.

RYAN

Yeah: 8:57 PM!

JESSICA

This feels stupid. Every year we do this. Nothing happens, of course.

RYAN

Honey, today's the ten year mark. If my theory's correct, one decade's the sweet spot.

Jessica rolls her eyes.

JESSICA

Why would a ghost wait ten years between words?

RYAN

Maybe time flows differently in limbo? Dunno.

Suddenly: a brief flash. Jessica and Ryan jump back, startled. The now familiar voice intones:

VOICE

O...

Ryan trips, hits the floor.

RYAN

Ow!

JESSICA

Shhhh!

But it's too late. Neither witness hears the full word.

RYAN  
What'd it say?

JESSICA  
I don't know. You were complaining.  
Talking over the damned ghost. Do  
you ever stop?

RYAN  
I almost hit my head. Don't you  
care?

JESSICA  
Of course, honey. But what did it  
say?

RYAN  
"It"? So you do agree it's  
legitimately a ghost? At least  
that's one step forward.

JESSICA  
Don't change the subject. I think I  
heard it say "off".

RYAN  
"Off"? That doesn't make sense.  
(thinks)  
I know. It said "Out!"

The couple exchange creeped out looks.

JESSICA  
It's ordering us to leave our home?

RYAN  
(shrugs)  
If it takes this long to even utter  
one sentence, I doubt it could do  
us much harm.

**SUPER: Ten years later.**

Based on the wall calendar, it's May 5th again.

This time, Jessica and Ryan (60s) have summoned a CROWD. It's  
practically a ghost party. Some partiers sit on the couch for  
a front row peek. Those who can't, gather around.

Ryan checks his watch: 8:56PM.

RYAN  
The moment's nigh!

JESSICA  
 "Nigh"? That's a bit dramatic.

A BALDING MAN turns to his jewelry draped WIFE.

BALDING MAN  
 You dragged me here to stare at a  
 damned couch? I'm missing footies.  
 This party best improve. Fast!

Jessica puts a finger to her lips, and pulls the group close.

JESSICA  
 How often does anyone have a chance  
 to see a bona-fide, confirmed  
 supernatural event? Don't ruin the  
 moment for everyone else. Shhh!

Suddenly, a flash of light! That voice echoes once more.

VOICE  
 The.

And then falls silent. Members of the crowd exchange  
 disappointed looks.

BALDING MAN  
 I came seven blocks for "The"?  
 This is bullshit.

WIFE  
 Harold, you were right. Time to go.

Jessica reaches out.

JESSICA  
 Wait. We've got wine. The night's  
 still young.

BALDING MAN  
 (grumbles)  
 We aren't.

JESSICA  
 Stay. Let's hang out!

Shaking collective heads, the crowd exits - leaving Jessica  
 and Ryan alone. The two plop down on the couch, depressed.

JESSICA  
 Honey, want a drink?

RYAN  
 After tonight? I'll take two.

Silence washes over them.

JESSICA

Huh. A whole new sentence. What's our friendly ghost going to say next?

RYAN

Question is, will we live long enough to hear the end of it?

Jessica shrugs, gulps Chablis.

**SUPER: Ten years later.**

Seventy year old Jessica and Ryan rest on the couch. An OXYGEN TUBE snakes under Ryan's nose; the TANK hisses on the floor, by his feet.

Jessica checks her watch: May 5th, 8:58PM. She pokes Ryan.

JESSICA

It's coming soon. Turn that off!

RYAN

Turn off my oxygen tank? Are you trying to kill me?

JESSICA

No! I - I just want to hear that voice again. You can breathe just fine on your own for a few seconds. Afterwards, plug it right back in.

Ryan shrugs, shuts the tank off.

The two lean towards the couch crevice, like it's a holy fount of wisdom. Reverence and anticipation in old eyes.

RYAN

(whispers)

"Pain. Get Out. The." What follows?

JESSICA

Neither of us will know if you don't stop yammering.

RYAN

Honey, I'm savoring the moment. Is that so wrong?

The couple glare. Bickering's about to break out, when -

A sudden flash. Followed by that damned voice...

VOICE

Couch.

Then - like through so many decades - it's gone. The couple stare at each other, unable to process the new data.

RYAN

"Pain. Get Out. The Couch." The couch what?!? Is it telling us to get new furniture? That wouldn't be so terrible. We've been staring at this fucking thing for years!

(beat)

We've both worn ass grooves into it by now.

JESSICA

Ryan, please. Just let me think!

Settling back on the couch, Jessica muses - puts her feet up.

JESSICA

Remember when we didn't really hear it that time? Because of you?

Ryan stares at her. Fiddles with the oxygen tube in his lap.

RYAN

It wasn't my fault I fell. And exactly what did you think it said?

JESSICA

Hmmmm. Which word was in question? "The"?

RYAN

No, darling. Was it "Get"?

JESSICA

Or wait.. It was "Out". And I heard "Off!"

RYAN

"Pain. Get Off the Couch"? That doesn't make any sense. Is it telling us to exercise more?

He glances at his life partner - then himself.

RYAN

Though, we could both stand to lose a few pounds. Ghostly or not, advice like that's not wrong.

Groaning, Ryan lifts the oxygen tank off the floor, throws it on the couch at his side.

RYAN  
Damn, that's heavy.

JESSICA  
Don't. Your heart!

The cushion depresses under the heavy metal weight.

Between the crevices: Something else GROANS, too. A dim light flickers, a vague FORM. Whatever's trapped under the couch doesn't quite have a face.

But one wispy eye sheds a glowing tear.

Outside, sudden unseen commotion: Ryan GASPS for breath.

JESSICA (O.S.)  
I told you to put that tube back  
in. Ryan - oh dear God. Honey bear!

Ryan death rattles. Company is coming.

The trapped ghost smiles.

FINAL FADE OUT: