

THE BOY WHO COULD READ TOMORROW

by TOMÁS URTUSÁSTEGUI

CHARACTERS

James a boy, 10 years old
Ralph his father, 40 years old
Frances ... his mother, 33 years old
Herman a painter, 65 years old
Maurice a young man who wishes to marry, 25
years old
Lefty a criminal, 24 years old
Rick a criminal, 20 years old
Patricia a lottery ticket vendor, 40 years old
Louis James's uncle, 38 years old
Ellen James's aunt, 34 years old
John James's cousin, 11 years old
Anita James's cousin, 10 years old
Arabian ambassador
Waiter
Dancer
Police officers

Several of the parts can be doubled.

LOCATION

As described in each scene.

TIME

The present.

MUSIC

Original music if possible to suit the different moods.

Copyright © 1984 Tomás Urtusastegui. All rights reserved.
Translation copyright © 1998 Mike Pope. All rights reserved.

Family room in a middle-class house. Frances is talking on the telephone.

FRANCES: I tell you, I can't...no, I already have something every day...please understand....no, not Friday either, I play cards then...that night is even worse, I have a dinner. I'd love to, but I just can't be a thousand places at once. I'm really sorry, you know I'm always willing to help ... yes, fine, you call me or I'll call you ... yes, ok dear, bye. *Hangs up the phone.*

RALPH: *Looking through the drawers of his desk.* Have you seen an envelope I left here yesterday?

FRANCES: It was boring old Betty. She wanted me to go with her to the shelter. I'm tired of those filthy children and dealing with people like her who always want everyone else to do everything for them.

RALPH: I asked you if you've seen an envelope.

FRANCES: If I did, I don't remember. This house is full of slob who just leave stuff everywhere. If it weren't for me running around cleaning up the whole day, this place would look like a pigsty.

RALPH: Have you seen it or not?

FRANCES: I put some papers in that box. *Points to it.*

RALPH: *Opens the box and finds the envelope.* Thank goodness! These are important papers. If I get this deal, we'll go to Europe.

FRANCES: Really?

JAMES: *Seated, reading the newspaper.* Me, too?

RALPH: I'd love to take you, but you have school.

Besides, there's nothing in Europe for kids.

JAMES: Well, then let's go to Oceanview. It's been a long time since you took me to the beach.

FRANCES: No way! The last time I burned myself to a crisp and came back all red. And the bugs! If I'm going to go someplace, I want to enjoy it, not suffer. *To her husband.* What does your deal depend on?

RALPH: If Martínez Hinojosa becomes governor. If so, we get to go.

FRANCES: Martínez Hinojosa, **el Huesopronto**?

RALPH: That's the guy.

JAMES: The newspaper says that they elected Dr. **Lambiscorres.**

RALPH: What are you talking about? The election isn't until tonight. Give me that! *Snatches the newspaper from James and searches for the report.* It doesn't say anything here about that. *Severely, to James.* You're turning into a liar and that's a bad habit! Where did you see something about the new governor? *Throws the the newspaper back at James.* The professor is the last-place candidate. I don't even know where you got that name.

JAMES: *Reading.* "Yesterday evening in a surprise move, the ruling party nominated Dr.

Lambiscorres. He was immediately congratulated by all present, who declared him the official candidate and commented that he was the perfect man for the job."

RALPH: *Wonderingly takes the newspaper again. Looks for the report but doesn't find it. Approaches James and taps him on the head.* I won't have anyone making fun of me, you or anyone else, do you understand? *To Frances.* See what happens when you spoil him.

FRANCES: More likely it's that school you put him in. If it had been me...

RALPH: I don't have time to discuss this, we can talk about it later. *Takes his briefcase and gets ready to leave.*

FRANCES: I'm leaving too. Margaret is going to stop by to pick me up at 1:00.

JAMES: Aren't you going to eat here? You said that after dinner we could go to the movies.

FRANCES: Who said that?

JAMES: You did.

FRANCES: I don't remember.

RALPH: He doesn't deserve to be taken anywhere, the little liar.

FRANCES: Tell the babysitter to fix you something to eat. Remember that I don't want you to watch TV all day. I'll call around 7:00 to see how everything's going.

The parents leave. James turns on the TV. He sits down and watches it, bored.

Next day. James is still watching TV. His parents enter dressed in different clothes.

FRANCES: Can you give me the check?

RALPH: Later.

FRANCES: I have to send in the payments for my credit cards today.

RALPH: Where's the newspaper?

FRANCES: *Takes it from the table.* Here. You never find anything anyway.

RALPH: Today they announce who won.

FRANCES: Didn't you say it was Martínez?

RALPH: That's who I think. Martínez got the candidacy. *Reads the newspaper. His face shows surprise.*

Lambiscorres won! The report is just like what James said yesterday. That's impossible!

FRANCES: Like he was clairvoyant! *To James.* Who told you? *James doesn't answer because he's watching television. His mother turns it off.* I told you not to watch so much TV. Who told you?

JAMES: Told me what?

FRANCES: How the heck did you guess what it would say in the paper today? You must have a friend whose father works at the newspaper.

RALPH: Answer her!

JAMES: Nobody told me. I read it.

RALPH: You're lying again! I see you haven't learned your lesson.

JAMES: It's true.

RALPH: *Gives him the newspaper.* Read.

JAMES: What?

RALPH: What's there. See who's playing today.

JAMES: *Reads.* "Centerville easily defeated Riverdale three to one. Top scorers were Smith, ..." *Ralph snatches the paper. He searches it, shaking his head incredulously.*

RALPH: But the game isn't until today!

FRANCES: It wasn't yesterday?

RALPH: So it's true?

FRANCES: What is?

RALPH: That James can read what hasn't happened yet! *Thinks. Smiles broadly.* This is fantastic! It's much better than if Martínez had won. We'll be millionaires!

FRANCES: I don't get it.

RALPH: We'll know everything before it happens — the stock market, the price of gold, what teams will win

...

FRANCES: *Enthusiastically.* Yes, you're right! I'll know what dresses my friends will wear to receptions!

RALPH: My business will take off!

FRANCES: I'll make them look ridiculous! I'll be able to wear the same thing that they're wearing!

RALPH: *To James.* Well done, my son, well done. *Strokes his head.* Congratulations!

FRANCES: I'll know what movies are worthwhile ...

Both parents leave happily. James makes as if to speak to them.

JAMES: Dad! Dad!... *His father doesn't hear. James stays behind sadly.*

Change of light to indicate the passing of time. Same location. Frances is talking on the phone. James is sitting next to her with the newspaper in his lap. He's tired and bored.

FRANCES: How lovely of you to call, Doctor, it's been a long time since I've had the pleasure of speaking to you. What's that? *Smiles. Proudly.* Yes, yes, it's true. How did you find out? From Robert? That's strange, it's been ages since I spoke with him, too. Well, it doesn't matter. What can I do for you? Yes, of course. One moment, please. *To James.* Look up the price of gold tomorrow. *James doesn't obey her.* What are you waiting for? I'm talking to Dr. Fredericks, he's an important contact for your father! *James searches.* Hurry!

JAMES: It went up 5 dollars an ounce.

FRANCES: *Into the telephone.* It will be going up 5 dollars an ounce. That's right, 5 dollars, yes, 5. *Smiles.* I'm becoming an expert in the gold market. No, no need to thank me, you know that we're always available to help you. Yes, of course you can call tomorrow. Yes, at the same time. Say hi to Anita for me. Goodbye! *Hangs up. The phone rings again immediately.* Hello? Nancy, how wonderful! Yes, we're very proud. Of course, I'll ask him, just a moment... *To James.* Look in the social section to see how the yoga conference came out. *James throws away the paper in desperation and runs out of the room crying.* James, James! *Into the telephone.* I'm sorry, my son has left. I'll call you back in five minutes. *Hangs up. Leaves, looking for James.*

The front of James's house. James is walking back and forth in front, looking sad. He kicks an empty can. An old man approaches him.

HERMAN: Are you James? *James acts as if to run away.* Wait! Don't go! I'm an old man, I won't hurt you!

JAMES: *Suspiciously.* What do you want?

HERMAN: Is it true that you can read tomorrow?

Without answering, James goes toward the door of his house. Please, don't go. I suppose lots of people have been looking for you. I tell you, my situation is different. *Smiles.* Everyone always says that their situation is different.

JAMES: *Bothered.* What do you want?

HERMAN: Look, I'm old and poor. All my life I've painted, painted pictures. It's the only thing I know how to do. Yesterday I submitted all my canvases for an exhibition. Stupid me! It's going to be a disaster. Today I was ready to say goodbye to this world, but something brought me here... *Presses his hands to his chest. Calmer.* Could you tell me if it says anything in the newspaper about my show?

JAMES: *Tenderly.* Sure. I'll be right back. *James leaves. Herman waits at the door without moving. James returns with a newspaper. He's smiling widely.* The exhibition was a success. Almost all your paintings sold and the critics compared you to someone named *(Reads)* "Leonardo." *Makes a face as if he doesn't know who that is.*

HERMAN: Really it says that? You're not kidding me? Remember, I'm a poor old man.

JAMES: It's true, there are several reviews and even photographs. *Looks at the newspaper.* I like the one of the two women in the river. What's it called? *Shows him the newspaper. Smiles.* Sorry, I guess you can't see it.

HERMAN: It's called "Dusk." *Practically crying with emotion.* You don't know how happy you've made me. Now I can die a happy man.

JAMES: I'll read you the articles. There are three here, but there might be more. *Sits down next to the old man and starts to read. It gets dark.*

The library in James's house lights up. James is reading a book. Suddenly a man appears in the doorway and walks toward James. James is alarmed and tries to shout. The man runs and covers James's mouth with his hand. James kicks and thrashes.

MAURICE: Don't yell! I don't want to have to hurt you.
James continues trying to free himself. If you swear you won't shout I'll let you go. James nods. Maurice lets him go. James starts to run but Maurice stops him. Don't move!

JAMES: *Frightened.* What do you want? How did you get in here?

MAURICE: You should know — they say you know everything! *Laughs.* I came in the window.

JAMES: You should have knocked at the door.

MAURICE: I did that, just like all those people waiting outside. They won't let anyone in.

JAMES: My parents told them not to let anyone in. Ever since they ran reports about me in the newspaper and on TV, all sorts of people have turned up. Some of them want me to tell them sports results, some of them want to find lost relatives, and others want to know about tomorrow's weather or the next fashion trend ...

MAURICE: What about reporters? This way they'd know the news in advance.

JAMES: They've come, too, lots of them. Even foreigners.

MAURICE: Doesn't all this drive you crazy?

JAMES: What is it you want?

MAURICE: I'm afraid that it's a lot like the others.

JAMES: I won't answer anybody's questions. No one!

MAURICE: You'll have to make an exception for me.

JAMES: I said nobody!

MAURICE: Don't you want to help me? If I had your power...

JAMES: I always help, but not any more. My house is full of opportunists.

MAURICE: *Pretending to be in great pain* I'm desperate! I want to get married, but I can't! My girlfriend is very rich, and I don't have anything to offer her. Her family is opposed to our love.

JAMES: That's your problem.

MAURICE: You can help me.

JAMES: Don't even think about it.

MAURICE: All you have to do is tell me the winning lottery number for tonight. There's twelve hours left until the drawing, and I can still get a ticket. The jackpot is 40 million. Just imagine! With that kind of money I could get a girlfriend that's even better looking and has parents that aren't so picky. *Smiles.* You'll help me, won't you? Say yes.

JAMES: No!

MAURICE: What'll it cost you? All you have to do is read the number — less than one minute's work! I'll give you 10 melons in exchange. What do you think?

JAMES: Melons?

MAURICE: *Laughs.* Millions!

JAMES: No.

MAURICE: 10 million is a lot of millions.

JAMES: I said no.

MAURICE: If you don't want money, I'll give you all the toys you want: video games, computers, electronic yoyos, an atom gun, you name it. Or maybe you'd rather listen to the latest hits on a new stereo? What do you say?

JAMES: I say no.

MAURICE: I'll give you 15. 15 million! You'll be rich!

JAMES: I am rich, and it doesn't do me any good.

MAURICE: I beg you.

JAMES: And I beg you to leave. If someone comes in here you'll be in trouble.

MAURICE: I'll give you 18. With that you could help lots of people —homeless children, old people ...

JAMES: *Getting interested.* No.

MAURICE: I'll give you 19, but not a nickel more.

Imagine how much 19 million is! 19! *James shakes his head, but not very convincingly.*

JAMES: I'll only do it for half. I can have a school built with that much.

MAURICE: Not just one. Lots of 'em!

JAMES: You agree, then?

MAURICE: *Sufferingly.* You're taking advantage of me, taking what's rightfully mine. For one minute of work you want to leave me a poor man. But that's fine. Ok! I'll do it. You win!

JAMES: How can I be sure that you'll give me the money?

MAURICE: Do I look like a rat to you?

JAMES: If you won't sign a notarized letter, no deal.

MAURICE: A notary!? A notary at this hour? There isn't very much time till the drawing. Give me the number!

JAMES: If I give it to you, you'll leave, and I'll never hear from you again.

MAURICE: I know! Let's go together to buy the book of tickets. I'll take half and you take the other half. But you'll have to pay for all of them. I don't even have enough cash for that.

JAMES: Ok. Write down the number. *Looks in the newspaper. Reads out loud while Maurice writes.* It's 3 5 6 0 7 9.

MAURICE: Three, five, six, seven ...

JAMES: You're missing zero. It comes after the six.

MAURICE: Are you sure?

JAMES: If you don't believe me ...

MAURICE: I believe you, and you know why? Because you're talking to me like a friend now, and that means we're partners. *They shake hands.* Now go get the phone book. *James gets it and Maurice*

looks up a number. He dials the phone. Lottery office? Miss, would you be so kind as to tell me where ticket number 356079 is for sale? Yes, I'll repeat it: 3 5 6 0 7 9. Seven nine. Yes. Thank you. *To James.* She's looking it up. *Into the telephone.* In Bridgetown? Are you sure?...Do you know where in Bridgetown? Thank you, I'll wait ... *To James* Hand me another piece of paper to write this on ... *Into the telephone* At the booth in the airport. One last question... do you know if it's been sold yet?...Thank you. *Hangs up. To James.* They have it at the airport and she doesn't know if it's been sold yet. *Looks in the phone book. Dials. James watches him carefully.* National Airlines? I want to reserve a roundtrip ticket to Bridgetown for today

...

JAMES: Two tickets.

MAURICE: Sorry, two tickets, round trip. Yes, two... For my name just put down Maurice ... It is necessary? *Lowers his voice so James can't hear.* Maurice Bartholomew Finkelstein ...Thank you. *Hangs up.*

JAMES: Can you tell me, Mr. Maurice Bartholomew Finkelstein, if you managed to get the tickets?

MAURICE: Don't keep repeating my name, others might hear! *Dials the operator.* I want to make a long-distance call to the lottery booth at the airport in Bridgetown. I think there's only one ... Yes, thank you. Hello! Hello! Is this the lottery booth? Hello, I can't hear anything ... wait, now I can. Look, I'm calling you from Capital City, and I'd like to know if you still have ticket number 3 5 6 0 7 9 for tonight's drawing. What's that? Could you please speak up? *Smiles a big smile.* Yes? Are you sure? Could you please put it aside, the whole ticket book. Don't sell a single ticket in the book. Yes, under the name Maurice Finklestein. Keep an eye on it and there will be a big tip in it for you. Thank you!

Airport in Bridgetown, with passengers and their luggage. At the lottery booth.

PATRICIA: *Young woman, fancy hairdo, heavy makeup. She's talking on the phone, fanning herself with one hand. She's the ticket seller.* Yes, for sure Ernest is going with his cousin, that skinny guy who's so conceited. God, I hate him. Yeah, it's the guy with the blue car. That's the one. You can bet that they'll come sit at our table, but I sure as heck won't pay any attention to them. Yes, I went a little while ago. *She plays with her hair, which is styled elaborately.* And you know what? I don't like what they did at all, I can't believe you sent me to that place. The girl said I had split ends, can you believe that! And that I should cut off, like, two inches ... Yeah, she cut it a lot shorter. She didn't even know what she was doing. Oh well! *Maurice and James enter running. They stop in front of the booth.*

MAURICE: Excuse me.

PATRICIA: Just a second.

MAURICE: Miss!

PATRICIA: I said just a second, I'm talking on the phone!... *Into the telephone.* What dress are you going to wear? The pink one? That one looks great on you. I'm going to wear my blue dress ... no, not that one, this is a new one that I got on sale at the mall. I got it for 29 dollars plus tax. You should see how classy it is.

MAURICE: Miss, please!

PATRICIA: Can't you see I'm talking? *Into the telephone.* It's some guy with a little kid, who knows what they want. Alright, I'll call you later. *Hangs up.* Yes?

MAURICE: Sorry to interrupt, but I'm in a hurry. I was the person who phoned you from Capital City to set aside a ticket book.

PATRICIA: *Smiles.* Oh, right, the number ended in nine, right?

MAURICE: That's the one.

PATRICIA: *Looks for it.* Yes, I put that one aside. *Searches.* You said the whole ticket book, didn't you?

MAURICE: Yes, the whole thing.

PATRICIA: That's strange. It isn't here. I left it in the drawer.

MAURICE: *Nervously.* Look carefully, please.

PATRICIA: *Smiling.* I know now!

MAURICE: So you know where it is?

PATRICIA: No, but I know what happened. I went to get my hair cut. *Shows them her hair.*

MAURICE: *Flatteringly.* It looks great.

PATRICIA: You think? It's for a dance.

MAURICE: Where is it?

PATRICIA: While I was gone I left my cousin Barbara in charge. We call her Babs for short. I bet she sold it. But look, I have another one here that ends in nine. *Maurice falls on the ground, he pulls his hair, stamps his foot, and cries.*

JAMES: You should buy it. At least you'll win back your money. Then you can pay me back for the plane tickets. *Smiles broadly. Maurice continues stamping his foot.*

Living room in James's house. He's reading the newspaper, and is suddenly startled by what he's reading. He drops the newspaper and runs to look for the phone book. He looks up a number hurriedly and dials.

JAMES: *Nervously, into the phone.* Hello! Please may I speak with the ambassador. It's urgent! No, I don't want to speak with his secretary, I want to speak directly with him. Really, it's very urgent! No, it can't wait till tomorrow, I have to talk to him right

now! Tell him that I'm James, the boy who can read tomorrow. He knows about me from TV or the newspapers. Please don't hang up, this isn't a joke! I have this power ... Fine. Tell him that tonight at 12:18 there's going to be an earthquake that destroys the city of Al-Bajan. It's really important that the people be told to evacuate. I'm not lying, I swear. Yes, my phone number is 514-3299. You can call and confirm that I'm not kidding. I'm telling you again it's the truth. You can save the lives of thousands of people! *They hang up on him. Hello! Hello! Waits. Hangs up his phone. He's sad. He picks up the newspaper and starts reading again.*

Middle eastern restaurant. James and his parents are seated on oriental stools. Next to them is the Arabian ambassador. A woman is performing a dance. When she finishes, everyone applauds. The dancer exits.

FRANCES: What a wonderful dance! Such rhythm! Such grace!

AMBASSADOR: I'm delighted that you like it, ma'am.

FRANCES: And the dinner, too — delicious! I loved the main course [El Kepe]. And those cakes! I'm afraid that I'm going to gain five pounds just tonight!

RALPH: I'm grateful to you for arranging this private dinner for us.

AMBASSADOR: It's the least I could do to show my own gratitude for James's warning. The city of Al-Rajan was completely destroyed, but no one was hurt. We would be very honored if you could visit our country sometime. I can assure you that you would be most welcome.

RALPH: It looks as if we'll be thanking each other all night. It's possible that my wife and I will accept your invitation, as we've been thinking about

traveling this year. As for James, he can't go, he's got his studies.

JAMES: We could go for a week. That's not long.

RALPH: We'll see. Right now, you have school to worry about.

FRANCES: And keep reading the newspaper. Look how many people you've helped. *To the ambassador. We're so proud of him.*

AMBASSADOR: I haven't apologized for the terrible way my secretary treated you that day you called. At an embassy ...

RALPH: The important thing is that the warning got through. Every day at our house people show up or call asking for information, and my son always gives it to them. I like that about him.

AMBASSADOR: May Allah protect him.

The waiter approaches and speaks into the ambassador's ear. The ambassador turns to James.

AMBASSADOR: There are two men asking for you at the door. If you want, I can have them say that you're not available.

JAMES: Yes, please do that.

FRANCES: *Showing off her son.* Don't you think you should go, sweetie? It might be people who need something from you.

JAMES: I don't want to see anyone.

RALPH: What will the ambassador think? Just do it.

JAMES: But dad ...

FRANCES: No excuses! Just do your duty. Since you've been given this gift, at least you could ...

JAMES: *Gets on his feet, annoyed.* Ok, I'll go. Excuse me. *Leaves.*

FRANCES: I hope you'll excuse him. I don't know what's come over him. He always used to be ready to help, but now we have to push him just a little. You understand.

AMBASSADOR: I understand. Thousands of people want to know things that are important to them. James is just a child and has the right to have a little fun now and then.

RALPH: He'll have time later.

AMBASSADOR: It can be more than just bothersome, it can be dangerous for the boy.

RALPH: I don't see how.

AMBASSADOR: Some people or countries want certain information.

FRANCES: I'm not worried. The worst that can happen is something like that crazy guy who took him to Bridgetown, nothing more.

AMBASSADOR: May it always be that way. Can I offer you coffee while we wait for James to return?

FRANCES: That would be lovely.

AMBASSADOR: *Calls to the waiter.* Bring coffee for everyone!

Lights dim. The front of the restaurant appears. James exits the restaurant and stops in front of the door. No one is there. A moment later two men run up to him. One covers his mouth so he won't cry out. The two of them lift him up and carry him away quickly. Darkness.

The inside of a shack outside the city. There is little furniture aside from a rickety bed and a table. Lots of trash is strewn around. The two men enter carrying James. With a shove they fling him onto the bed. James protects himself.

LEFTY: I'd keep quiet if I was you.

RICK: Should I tie him up?

LEFTY: No, he can't get away here.

JAMES: *Runs to the window. Shouts.* Help, I've been kidnapped!

LEFTY: *Laughs.* Yell all you want. No one lives around here and no one ever comes here.

JAMES: What do you want?

LEFTY: You can't guess? Information!

JAMES: I won't tell you anything.

LEFTY: Oh?

JAMES: The police will come looking for you. You're going to jail! I'm famous.

LEFTY: That's right. And on top of that you have lots of money.

JAMES: My parents do.

LEFTY: But you're the one who got it for them. Right now I could ask for millions in ransom. But I'm not going to do that. Like you just said, you're very famous and all sorts of people will try to rescue you. It's not a good idea for us to keep you here a long time, so you have to talk now and then you'll take a little trip. It's up to you where end up — you can either go right home or you can take a little trip into the river. *Laughs.* You decide!

JAMES: I'm not afraid.

LEFTY: *Mockingly.* Look at him! He's not afraid, he's a brave little boy.

RICK: *Laughing.* Maybe he's a little cold and he wants us to heat him up a little.

LEFTY: Later. Maybe he'll decide to talk on his own first.

RICK: He won't do it. How about if we start with the funnel and water?

LEFTY: Children always respond better to electric shocks.

RICK: We could rip out his fingernails and toenails.

JAMES: *Very frightened.* What do you want to know?

LEFTY: *To Rick.* You see, he gets it. Look, kid, I've been planning a job for a long time and I don't want it to fail. I've worked out every detail and I think it's perfect. But I have one problem. My partner

could sell me out and take off with all the loot.
That's what I want you to tell me.
JAMES: I don't understand.
LEFTY: I want you to read whether the job came off and if the cops showed up — if anyone got shot or killed, how much we got away with. I want to know everything.
JAMES: I can't.
LEFTY: *Slaps him.* Yes you can.
RICK: You want me to soften him up?
JAMES: I don't have today's newspaper.
LEFTY: *To Rick.* Quick, the newspaper! ... What are you waiting for?
RICK: I ...
LEFTY: Where's the damn newspaper?
RICK: *Nervously.* I used it.
LEFTY: What do you mean, you used it?
RICK: I had to go to the bathroom. *You know ...*
LEFTY: Idiot! You could have found something else!
Hits him.
RICK: Sorry, boss, sorry!
LEFTY: If that's the way you're going to work tonight ...
RICK: No, boss, I swear.
LEFTY: Remember: one more screw-up like that ...
Makes a gesture like cutting his throat.
RICK: I swear by my mother's grave that I won't let you down.
LEFTY: Go find a newspaper.
RICK: Where? There's nothing around here.
LEFTY: You've got fifteen minutes to find one. *Takes out a gun and points it at him. Rick exits running. Lefty laughs. Puts the gun on the table.*
JAMES: What do you want so much money for?
LEFTY: I guess it's for the same reason that your parents do. I've never had it and I want to see what it feels like. I want to feel what it's like to be you or a politician or a businessman....
JAMES: It doesn't feel like anything.

LEFTY: Is that what you think? Money gives you power! Confidence! Beauty! Youth! Everything! And you say it doesn't feel like anything. Moron! Maybe you're right, money doesn't feel like anything, but what I sure can feel is not having any!
JAMES: Let me go.
LEFTY: Not before you talk. Later we'll take you home sweet home or someplace else. We'll do that tomorrow.
JAMES: Are you going to keep me locked up?
LEFTY: Locked up and tied up. I don't want you to go to the cops.
JAMES: Who's going to untie me?
LEFTY: Oh, some good samaritan will do it.
JAMES: You said no one ever comes here.
LEFTY: Not usually. But they're looking for you.
Laughs.
JAMES: I'll tell you what you want, but don't leave me here alone. I'm scared of the dark.
LEFTY: You, scared? You're not a brave little boy?
JAMES: I'm afraid of the unknown.
LEFTY: Today's the day you get over it. You give us the information and then we'll leave you here all alone. *Cruelly.* Maybe the bogeyman will get you, or a ghost or zombies or rats or spiders or bugs or snakes...
JAMES: I know that you won't leave me here.
LEFTY: Oh?
JAMES: Your partner didn't find a newspaper. He's outside, but he won't come in because he's afraid that you'll hit him.
LEFTY: *Furiously.* I'm not going to hit him, I'm going to kill him! *He takes several big steps toward the door. James runs and grabs the gun, and then points it at Lefty.*
JAMES: Hands up!

LEFTY: *He turns and is confused to see the gun. He decides to attack James, but thinks twice when he sees James's determined face. You little snot.*

That's not fair!

JAMES: I'm leaving.

LEFTY: You win. There's the door. *He moves aside.*

James starts toward the door. Lefty grabs a sack nearby and throws it at James. They fight. A shot is heard. Lefty backs off with an injured leg.

LEFTY: Damn you!

JAMES: *Still pointing the gun at him. Sit down! A loud car can be heard. Tell your partner to come in with his hands up.*

LEFTY: I'll tell you something, you stupid kid. That gun only had one bullet and it's gone now. *Laughs.*

You're not going to get out of here alive, I promise! He throws himself at James. James shoots, but the gun is empty. James runs toward the door. Lefty barely catches him and knocks him to the ground. Rick enters running.

RICK: Quick, let's get out of here!

LEFTY: What!?

RICK: Two cops are after me. I ran some stop signs to get away.

LEFTY: You idiot! *A siren can be heard close by. Lefty gets up and grabs James as a shield. He waits for the policemen to enter. They come with guns pointed at everyone.*

POLICEMAN 1: Nobody move!

LEFTY: Put your guns down or I knock off the kid.

POLICEMAN 2: Careful, he's armed!

LEFTY: Put the keys to the patrol car on that table, then get over by that window. And don't try anything!

Lefty starts to move toward the door with James in front of him. James suddenly kicks Lefty in his injured leg. Lefty falls to the ground in pain. James

runs toward the policemen, who raise their guns and point them at Lefty and Rick.

POLICEMAN 2: Are you James?

JAMES: Yes.

POLICEMAN 1: We were told to find you.

LEFTY: Foiled again!

POLICEMAN 2: Were you scared?

JAMES: A little, but not much.

POLICEMAN 1: Didn't it frighten you to be kidnapped?

What about the guns and shooting and this place?

JAMES: No, this morning I read about my kidnapping so I knew nothing bad was going to happen to me. *He and the policemen laugh. Lefty tears his shirt in anger.*

LEFTY: Oh, is that how it is! You were cheating — you had an advantage!

POLICEMAN 1: *To the criminals.* Ok, let's go! Quick, now!

LEFTY: I can't! My leg is hurt, can't you see?

POLICEMAN 1: Don't worry, they'll fix it for you. *Pushes him. Everyone exits.*

At a farm. James is eating breakfast with his uncle and aunt and cousins.

LOUIS: Pass me the bread, please.

ELLEN: Which kind?

LOUIS: How about the wheat bread?

ELLEN: You've already had five pieces plus two servings of bacon and eggs! You're going to bust a seam!

LOUIS: Oh, you poor nosy people, always watching what I eat.

ELLEN: I don't want you to turn into a beachball, I like you the way you are.

LOUIS: That's because I'm great! *Everybody laughs.*

JOHN: Can I have some more bread, please?

LOUIS: You're just like your father.
ELLEN: He can get away with it, he's just skin and bones.
ANITA: If you give him some, you have to give me some, too! I'd like some more bacon and eggs.
ELLEN: More!? I guess I'm the only person not eating.
JOHN: You pretend to eat like a bird, but I saw you eat a sandwich in the kitchen.
ELLEN: You got me! *Everyone laughs. To James.* What about you? You *really* aren't eating anything.
JAMES: I've had enough.
ELLEN: You have to eat well in order to work.
JAMES: I don't usually eat very much.
LOUIS: These city people! You probably miss the telephone and the newspaper and all the pollution.
JAMES: No, least of all the newspaper. I'm happy that you don't get one here.
ANITA: You like the farm?
JAMES: Oh, yes! I love seeing the animals and learning how to farm.
JOHN: *Laughing at James.* Yesterday he went to grab a chicken and it pecked him good. *Everyone laughs.*
ELLEN: C'mon, don't make fun of him.
JAMES: Oh, it's ok, they're just kidding around. That was the only time.
ANITA: Oh? What about the goat that knocked you down?
JAMES: It didn't knock me down, I was playing with it. When I bent down to tie my shoe, wham! It got me right here. *He rubs his backside. Everyone laughs.*
LOUIS: You'll learn yet. Twenty days isn't very long.
JAMES: It's been that long already? I thought I'd only been here ten days.
ELLEN: That shows that you're happy here.
JAMES: True. At my house we never eat breakfast together, and no one ever makes jokes.

ELLEN: My brother always was serious, and your mother ... Well, time to get to work. *To Louis.* It's your turn today to clear the table.
LOUIS: No, my dear, it was my turn yesterday.
ELLEN: Your nose is going to grow, you're such a liar.
LOUIS: *To James.* Never get married, is the advice of an old man with lots of experience. Oh, I should have stayed a bachelor ...
JOHN: Hurry, dad, we have to see the cow have her calf.
LOUIS: Let's go.
ANITA: Dad, the dishes!
LOUIS: *To James.* Don't have daughters, either.
JAMES: I'll help if you want.
LOUIS: No, don't be silly. You're our guest. *Hands him a rag to clean up with.* Before you wipe up, clear the dishes. In the meantime I'll go have a smoke.
ELLEN: Louis!
LOUIS: He offered, didn't you hear him?

Everyone clears dishes. Louis sits and smokes. Darkness, passage of time. Eight days later James's parents are drinking coffee in the same room.

ELLEN: In my opinion, you shouldn't take him away so soon. He's already put on some weight and he's got some color. When he got here he was as white as chalk.
FRANCES: You don't know how grateful I am for everything you've done for him. I'd like for him to be able to spend more time here, too, but he has to return to Capital City.
LOUIS: Aren't you worried that someone else will kidnap him or that something worse will happen? He's safe here.
RALPH: Not any more. The newspaper reported that he was here. I don't know how they find these things out. At home he'll have someone protecting him. The governor has arranged to provide security.

LOUIS: In exchange for what?

RALPH: Information. It's not easy to arrange something like that. Some people in the governor's office aren't convinced that he has the ability to know the future or that the information is correct. Tomorrow they're going to give him some tests at the university.

FRANCES: So that's why he has to leave today.

ELLEN: I don't know if I'm sticking my nose in here, but anyway, that doesn't matter — out here we're straightforward people. It seems to me that you're taking him back just to exploit him some more, just so he can keep telling you the price of gold or stocks. Leave him be, James is just a boy.

RALPH: *Annoyed.* That's enough of that, sister dear.

ELLEN: I was just saying...

RALPH: It would be better if you didn't say anything.

And now please do me the favor of calling him.

The airplane leaves in two hours and it takes more than half an hour to get to the airport.

LOUIS: He's your son, and you know what's best for him.

ELLEN: *Wanting to change the subject.* Won't you stay for dinner? We can have a barbeque.

FRANCES: We'll have to do that next time. Thanks, though.

James and his cousins enter smiling.

FRANCES: *To James.* Do you have all your things?

JAMES: Yes ...

FRANCES: Yes or no?

JAMES: Actually, I'd like to say here a while longer.

RALPH: You know that you can't do that.

ANITA: Let him stay, Uncle Louis! He's even got a girlfriend now! Sam MacIntosh's daughter.

JAMES: *Very embarrassed.* You're lying. *Everyone laughs.*

ELLEN: I promise you that very soon we'll send him for another visit. But today we have to go.

RALPH: Have you given them the gifts we brought yet? I saw them in the living room just now. Or do you just want to leave them here?

FRANCES: I'm so dumb! I almost forgot them.

ELLEN: Don't be silly. *Frances exits quickly to the living room.*

RALPH: She forgets everything except to ask me for money.

Ellen returns. She's carrying two watches that she gives the children. They express their thanks.

FRANCES: We were in such a hurry that we only had time to stop at the airport on our way. *To Ellen.* I brought you perfume. I hope it's the right kind.

ELLEN: The only scent I use here is flowers, but thanks anyway.

RALPH: *Carrying a package wrapped in newspaper.* I brought you a wooden chess set. Sorry about the wrapping.

LOUIS: Thank you. *Removes the newspaper. Looks at the chess set and smiles. James picks up the newspaper to throw it away. Out of habit he reads it. He looks astonished.*

ELLEN: I want to thank you for letting James stay with us. He's a wonderful boy.

JAMES: *Happily.* Let's go, right now.

FRANCES: What happened to you? Before you didn't want to leave and now you're in a big hurry.

JAMES: We can't miss the plane!

ELLEN: *Hurt.* Do you want to go?

JAMES: Yes, Aunt Ellen, and the sooner the better.

JOHN: Didn't you tell me to ask your parents to let you stay?

JAMES: Now I want to go.

LOUIS: Did we do something wrong?

JAMES: No, Uncle Louis, everything was fine here.

LOUIS: So ...?

JAMES: *Indicates the newspaper.* It's because of this.

RALPH: What do you mean?

JAMES: The newspaper has a very important article.

RALPH: Does it talk about you? It must be the one that says where you are.

JAMES: It talks about me and about both of you.

FRANCES: About me, too?

JAMES: I'll read it to you. *Takes the newspaper and reads.* "The latest news. Yesterday — *Aside* which is actually today — an airplane carrying James, the boy who can read tomorrow, disappeared en route to Capital City. Some hours later the crash site was discovered in Hidden Valley by local residents who contacted the police. The airplane was found wrecked, but no serious injuries were reported. James suffered a concussion and his parents both suffered fractures."

FRANCES: Good god!

RALPH: Go on!

JAMES: "The injured passengers were transported to Capital City. James was admitted to the hospital, but examination showed no serious injuries. Later he was transferred to the medical department at the university, where he was subjected to a variety of scientific tests. To everyone's astonishment, it was determined that James, because of the blow to his head, has lost all the special abilities he had previously. From now on he will be a normal boy, the same as any other. This is a loss for the country's scientific community ..."

FRANCES: Dear Lord above!

RALPH: This can't be!

JAMES: I'll be a normal boy. *Enthusiastically.* I'll be a normal boy! *Jumps and shouts along with his cousins.* A normal boy, a normal boy!

FRANCES: I'm not leaving here. The airplane can go back empty.

RALPH: That's it! I should have thought of that. No flight, no accident. *To Ellen.* Now we will accept your offer for dinner. *To Louis.* And a cold beer. It's hot here.

LOUIS: I'll bring one right now.

JAMES: We have to go.

FRANCES: Do you want me to break my leg or get killed?

JAMES: It's just a broken leg. Please, I want to be a normal boy.

RALPH: You should be grateful every single day for having an ability that no one else has. You're a lucky person.

JAMES: No, I'm not. I'm not happy, either.

FRANCES: *To Ellen.* Don't pay any attention to him. He's nervous because of what he read.

ELLEN: I think you should go with him.

LOUIS: I do, too.

RALPH: I've made up my mind. We're not going!

JAMES: *To his uncle and aunt and cousins.* Will you help me carry them?

The cousins' family jumps into action. James's parents, paralyzed with surprised, are tied up. Only then do they try to resist, but can't. Between the five of them, the cousins' family pick them up to take them to the airport. Lights out.

Living room in James' house. James is watching TV with his parents. Both parents are wearing casts on their arms or legs.

JAMES: Do you want to watch cartoons or should I change the channel?

FRANCES: Whatever.

RALPH: *Pounds on his cast.* A month, the doctor told me another month! Of course, he isn't the one wearing this stupid thing...

JAMES: I like this.

RALPH: You like this?

JAMES: Now we're together all day long. We eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner together. We watch TV together, we talk ...

FRANCES: ... and we're bored to tears.

JAMES: If you want, I can turn off the TV and read the newspaper to you.

FRANCES and RALPH: (*Hopefully, eagerly.*) Tomorrow's newspaper?

JAMES: (*Smiling.*) Nope, today's.

CURTAIN