>> Welcome to "The First Twenty."
I'm James King. For this episode, rather than focus on a specific moment in the first twenty, Irish playwright Enda Walsh states a simple fact and asks a simple question -- "From now on, everything will be different, but how?"
This monologue is an emotional look at how we absorb our past and how even when our memories become fragmented, the past is utterly part of us, neither bad nor good, but just is. Sarah Street's captivating performance is sure to have you reflecting. Filmed at the Irish Arts Center in New York, this is "Afterwards."

>> There's a pattern, and we all know that, but not always consciously. There's a -- a certain time for breakfast, and before that, a time for waking up by some internal what-you-call-it that in itself is mysterious. The body just knows that at a specific time, at a certain sequential time -- I've never acknowledged the mystery of it. It's not exactly a skill that needs drawing attention to, as I'm doing right now, something passed down, ancient, I want to say the word "human," but I get very nervous about using that word -- I think we all do now -- and we wake up. I imagine it's the brain that does the actual waking, but very often, it feels like the bladder, like it's tipping over,
and we wake for fear of...
That's never happened to me.
There was a friend -- Was it a boyfriend?
A man, right, 'cause of the quantity of...
Yeah, he wet the bed once or twice.
Things ended, obviously, between me and him.
Unlucky in love.
I said that to someone once.
There was a coffee and a finished breakfast, a diner -- American word, not mine -- and a woman, I think, let's just call her a friend of mine, and she was, uh, holding my hand across the table in a caring sort of way when I said those words to her, because I imagine, before Joe, I was, um -- Well, I don't want to speak too clearly of emotions and give a false impression, but, again, I don't want to fictionalize what can't even be remembered clearly, or even towards clearly, or even in the vicinity of clearly when all clarity is slipping away, basically.
Well, you must feel the same way I do.
Perhaps not to the same magnitude.
Or maybe even more.
But since that day, when we all woke up as usual and stepped out into the morning, life's fallen away a little.
The life before is what we're calling it.
A tiny word, "historical," obviously, as if it's already become nothing.
One day, we were all standing on a cliff, and then that day happened, and since that day, we're all standing on less of a cliff, and what's fallen away,
we're calling "before," and
where we're left standing now
is -- is what we're kept busy
with, this...something.
So, what exactly has fallen
away?
And to what has it fallen into?
Good question.
And too early to be answered,
probably.
And it's best to keep on moving
forward.
I mean, that's what we're all
saying to each other.
"That was then and this is now."
But having said that, and
wanting to hold on to at least
one memory before it all
disappears, there was a car, and
not our car -- and by "our" car,
I mean Joe and me.
And the windows were down, and,
uh, another couple who are
nameless, they're in their seats
in front of us, and their
windows are down, and it's
evening inside and out, and
still hot, and it's not the city
that I'm standing in, and it's,
uh, not where I was born,
either -- not in Ireland.
[ Gentle clacking ]
And we were safe -- you know, me
and Joe.
Safe and, uh, loose, actually,
and, um, warmed not just by the
sun, we were warmed by our
drinking what the other couple
called evening cocktails, hence
the looseness.
The breeze through the window --
more of a wind, really, 'cause
of the speed of the car, the
heat of the air -- and there was
this...music playing on the
radio [scoffs] and, oh, the
scene is golden, somehow.
Because there was me and Joe in
the backseat of that car, and
I-I-I felt something falling off
the cliff a little earlier. I saw it, almost, and what were once much fuller images of a girl are now just small pictures where she's standing on a school stage with other children and faceless parents somehow smiling, of the same girl behind a birthday cake, her fingers in her ears, the same girl submerged in her bath acting dead, all were once rendered in a much fuller, more satisfying story, but slimmed right down to words and single pictures, with each one demanding my presence. A cliff, the sea. Oh! What a terrible metaphor. A past made up of I want to call them memories, but -- but maybe not even my memories because so dulled and -- and faded they are, and lacking content or emotional connection, and -- and often, I'm not even in them. So maybe just given to me, these memories, in script form to -- to play some sort of role? Like the brain shows me pictures of weak-bladdered ex-boyfriends or spoken therapy in diners, where these thoughts aren't even mine is the feeling. So, when I'm on a bus, like I was earlier, or walking on the streets, or -- or in the shops, and I see that cliff falling away, I-I try to hold on to these pictures of me as a girl, of my family and loved ones, of a place called Ireland, of a-a journey I must have taken, because I'm not there, but here in this city, and still, somewhat present I am in -- in these pictures and bound to them and -- and made by them, but with each...passing day, w-with each other hour, there's less of me, is -- is the point I'm
trying to make.
So, there was a car, and -- and not our car, and by "our" car, I mean Joe and me, and the windows are down, and another couple, who were...still nameless, they're in their seats in front of us, and -- and their windows are down, and it's evening inside and out, and still hot. And, uh, it's not the city here I'm standing in. And -- And it's not -- It's not where I was born, either -- not in Ireland. And -- And we were safe -- me and Joe. Safe and loose and -- and warmed by our drinking what the other couple called evening cocktails. [Chuckles]
And not New York or back home, and not a city at all, but a town, its name forgotten. Never mind. Carry on. And, um, there are strangely shaped houses on the edge of this town.
The heat is -- is dry up here, hence the beer I'm holding, and the evening is horizontal, but the view is vertical -- I want to say mountains. And somewhere here is Joe, but I've yet to place him here alongside the nameless couple and me on their outside porch, and the man is saying something about football, and I thank her for the drinks, and, uh, fiddle with the snacks and aware of my waist and skin and teeth and the sound of my Irishness, which she likes, but he's indifferent to. There's a dog, a small dog, curled at my feet -- If it could talk, it would tell me to [bleep] off -- and something unpleasant in the man standing on his parched lawn, standing
like a bear in flip-flops, his
toenails raggedy.
His talking is constant, like
mine is right now, but his
talking is controlled, sort of
even mind.
Off the cliff and in the sea,
and this terrible metaphor, too
late to change, and the whole of
my past has disappeared from
that day since, and moment by
moment, it disappears from what
we call "before," when that was
then and this is now, and too
frightened to ask, "What happens
next?"
But, um...
holding on to that evening
before, with the car and the
open windows and warm breeze
and, uh...
Where is Joe, exactly?
The man's talking is constant,
and I'm -- I'm too loose, and
into her questions and in
between sips, 'cause, uh,
evening cocktails now, and
questions about back home --
answer generically, the Irish
way.
I -- I give her what she wants
to hear, and, uh, stay in this
last memory a little while
longer, n-not wanting to reach
that moment of -- of me and Joe
in the car just yet, and stay a
little longer with off the cliff
and in the sea and this terrible
metaphor too late to change,
and, uh -- and the whole of my
past has disappeared from that
day since.
And moment by moment, it
disappears to what we call
"before," when...
And, uh, me, silent and sitting
on that porch and listening to
questions about Ireland in that
strangely shaped house with the
view of a mountain and I-I want
to say the word..."touse"?
Touse?
I don't even know what that word means.
And the drinking is, uh, souring her and him, and my feet burning on the porch, the dog growling at their broken fence, and...telling it to [bleep] off, his -- his talking raggedy and raised now, as is his hand, her face clumsily struck, him stammering out apologies, her slapping his head -- the ridiculous theater of the two of them.
And then later, when the sun's turned the evening golden and in the back of their car, in a town -- I've forgotten -- and the windows are down, and [sighs] Nameless Couple are in their seats in front, and the air is hot...
§§
§§
§§
Whose hand was in mine?
[ Gasps ]
[ Soft clacking continues ]
§§
§§
§§
And, uh...
there must have been a childhood and parents for me, and brothers and sisters, maybe.
A house, of course.
W-Woken each morning by some internal what-you-call-it.
§§
Everything is gone.
All is forgotten.
Everything.
§§
So, what now?
§§
§§
§§
§§
[ "Nothing Arrived" by
Villagers playing ]
>> § Savanna scatters
§ And the seabird sings
§ So why should we fear
§ What the travel brings?
§ What were we hoping
§ To get out of this?
§ Some kind of momentary bliss?
§
§ I waited for something
§ But something died
§ So I waited for nothing
§ And nothing arrived
§ It's our dearest ally
§ It's our closest friend
§ It's our darkest blackout
§ It's our final end
§ My dear sweet nothing
§ Let's start anew
§ From here on in
§ It's just me and you
§ I waited for something
§ But something died
§ So I waited for nothing
§ And nothing arrived
§ Well, I guess it's over
§ I guess it's begun
§ It's a losers' table
§ But we've already won
§ It's a funny battle
§ It's a constant game
§ I guess I was busy
§ When nothing came
§ I guess I was busy
>> § When nothing arrived
>> § I guess I was busy
>> § When nothing arrived
>> § I guess I was busy
§ Oh, oh, oh
>> § When nothing arrived
>> § I guess I was busy
§ Oh, oh, oh
>> § I waited for something
§ But something died
§ So I waited for nothing
§ And nothing arrived
§ I waited for something
§ But something died
§ So I waited for nothing
§ And nothing arrived
[ Song ends ]