

# I'm Thinking of Ending Things

*I'm Thinking of Ending Things* (stylized as **i'm thinking of ending things**) is a 2020 American surrealist psychological thriller<sup>[1]</sup> film written and directed by Charlie Kaufman. It is an adaptation of the 2016 novel of the same name by Iain Reid. The plot follows a young woman (Jessie Buckley) who goes on a trip with her boyfriend (Jesse Plemons) to meet his parents (Toni Collette and David Thewlis). Throughout the film, the main narrative is intercut with footage of a school janitor (Guy Boyd) going to work, with both stories intersecting by the third act.

*I'm Thinking of Ending Things* was released in select theaters on August 28, 2020, and on Netflix on September 4, 2020. It received positive reviews from critics, who praised the two lead performances and the cinematography.

## Plot

A young woman contemplates ending her approximately seven-week relationship with her boyfriend Jake while on a trip to meet his parents at their farm. During the drive, Jake attempts to recite a poem he read when he was younger, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality", and asks the young woman to recite an original poem of hers to pass time. After she recites a morbid poem about coming home,<sup>[a]</sup> they arrive at the farmhouse owned by Jake's parents. Jake takes her to the barn, where he recounts a story about how the farm's pigs died after being eaten alive by maggots. Throughout the film, the main narrative is intercut with footage of an elderly janitor working at a high school, including scenes in which he sees students rehearsing *Oklahoma!* and watches a romantic comedy film.

Upon entering the farmhouse, the young woman notices scratches on the door leading to the basement. At dinner with Jake's parents, she (whose occupation and name change throughout) shows them photographs of her landscape paintings and explains how she met Jake at a trivia night in a bar, with narrative inconsistencies. Later, she notices a picture of Jake as a child, but becomes confused after initially recognizing the child as herself. She receives a call from a friend with a female name, and a mysterious male voice explains that there is "one question to answer". Over the course of the night, Jake's parents transform into their younger and older selves, though nobody on screen comments on this. When the young

## I'm Thinking of Ending Things



Promotional release poster

<b>Directed by</b>	<u>Charlie Kaufman</u>
<b>Screenplay by</b>	Charlie Kaufman
<b>Based on</b>	<i><u>I'm Thinking of Ending Things</u></i> by <u>Iain Reid</u>
<b>Produced by</b>	Anthony Bregman Charlie Kaufman Robert Salerno Stefanie Azpiazu
<b>Starring</b>	<u>Jesse Plemons</u> <u>Jessie Buckley</u> <u>Toni Collette</u> <u>David Thewlis</u>
<b>Cinematography</b>	<u>Łukasz Żal</u>

woman takes a nightgown down to the basement to wash, she discovers several janitor uniforms in the washing machine and finds posters for Ralph Albert Blakelock exhibitions that have images of paintings seemingly identical to her own. She also receives another call from the same mysterious voice.

On the drive home, Jake refers to several events that evening which the young woman does not remember and then claims she drank a lot of wine. Word association leads to an extended critical discussion of John Cassavetes' *A Woman Under the Influence*.<sup>[b]</sup> The couple stops at Tulsey Town, a drive-through ice cream stand, whose employees are students at the janitor's school. When the young woman is leaving, an employee with a rash says they are scared for her.

<b>Edited by</b>	<u>Robert Frazen</u>
<b>Music by</b>	Jay Wadley
<b>Production companies</b>	<u>Likely Story</u> Projective Testing Service
<b>Distributed by</b>	<u>Netflix</u>
<b>Release date</b>	August 28, 2020
<b>Running time</b>	134 minutes
<b>Country</b>	United States
<b>Language</b>	English

Jake and the young woman cannot finish their sugary desserts, so he stops at his high school to throw the ice-cream cups away. After a heated argument in the parking lot about the lyrics of "Baby, It's Cold Outside", they share a kiss. Suddenly, Jake has a flashback of the janitor watching them from inside the school and decides to confront him, leaving the young woman alone in the car. Eventually, she decides to look for Jake inside the school. She meets the janitor and asks him where Jake is, but she cannot remember what Jake looks like. She tells the janitor that nothing happened between Jake and her on the night they met, instead claiming Jake made her uncomfortable by staring at her.

The young woman discovers Jake at the end of a hall. They watch as people dressed like themselves and the janitor engage in a ballet,<sup>[c]</sup> which ends when the janitor's dancer kills Jake's dancer with a knife.

Having finished his shift, the janitor enters his car, but does not start the motor. He experiences hallucinations of Jake's parents arguing and animated Tulsey Town commercials. The janitor then takes off his clothes and walks back inside the school, led by the hallucination of a maggot-infested pig who tells him that "someone has to be the pig infested with maggots", that "everything is the same, when you look close enough", and that he should get dressed.

On an auditorium stage, an old Jake receives a Nobel Prize<sup>[d]</sup> and sings "Lonely Room"<sup>[3]</sup> from *Oklahoma!* to an audience of people from his life, all of them in theatrical old-age makeup, who give him a standing ovation when he is done. The emotional Jake stands there to gaze upon the audience for an uncomfortably long time as the scene fades into solid blue.

In the final scene, the solid blue fades into a shot of the school parking lot the next morning, where the couple's car is absent, while the janitor's truck is still parked and now covered in snow.<sup>[4]</sup> Towards the end of the credits, scraping sounds emanate from the engine of an approaching snowplow.

## Cast

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- Jesse Plemons as Jake<sup>[5]</sup>
  - Ryan Laughtner Steele as Dancing Jake
- Jessie Buckley as Young Woman<sup>[5]</sup> (who is referred to by several names throughout the film, including Lucy, Louisa, Lucia, and Ames)
  - Unity Phelan as Dancing Young Woman

- [Toni Collette](#) as Mother<sup>[5]</sup>
- [David Thewlis](#) as Father<sup>[5]</sup>
- [Guy Boyd](#) as Janitor<sup>[6]</sup>
  - Frederick E. Wodin as Dancing Janitor
- [Hadley Robinson](#) as Laurey<sup>[e]</sup> and Tulsey Town Girl 1
- [Gus Birney](#) as Aunt Eller<sup>[e]</sup> and Tulsey Town Girl 2
- [Abby Quinn](#) as Student<sup>[f]</sup> and Tulsey Town Girl 3
- [Colby Minifie](#) as Yvonne<sup>[g]</sup>
- Anthony Grasso as Diner Manager<sup>[g]</sup>
- Teddy Coluca as Diner Customer<sup>[g]</sup>
- [Jason Ralph](#) as Yvonne's Boyfriend<sup>[g]</sup>
- [Oliver Platt](#) as The Voice (of the animated pig)<sup>[7]</sup>

## Production

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It was announced in January 2018 that [Charlie Kaufman](#) was adapting [Iain Reid](#)'s novel *I'm Thinking of Ending Things* for [Netflix](#), as well as directing.<sup>[8]</sup> In December, [Brie Larson](#) and [Jesse Plemons](#) were cast in the film.<sup>[9][10]</sup> In March 2019, [Jessie Buckley](#), [Toni Collette](#) and [David Thewlis](#) joined the cast, with Buckley replacing Larson.<sup>[11]</sup>

[Principal photography](#) began on March 13, 2019, in [Fishkill, New York](#),<sup>[12]</sup> and was completed on April 29. As of November 7, the film was in [post-production](#).<sup>[13][14]</sup>

## Release

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*I'm Thinking of Ending Things* was released in select theaters on August 28, 2020,<sup>[15]</sup> and on [Netflix](#) on September 4.<sup>[16]</sup>

## Critical reception

[Review aggregator](#) [Rotten Tomatoes](#) reports that 82% of 262 critic reviews are positive, with an average rating of 7.5/10; the critics' consensus for the film reads: "Aided by stellar performances from Jessie Buckley and Jesse Plemons, *I'm Thinking of Ending Things* finds writer-director Charlie Kaufman grappling with the human condition as only he can."<sup>[17]</sup> On [Metacritic](#), the film has a [weighted average](#) score of 78 out of 100 based on reviews from 46 critics, indicating "generally favorable reviews".<sup>[18]</sup>

Karen Han of *Polygon* wrote: "The lack of clear answers and structure can be frustrating, but the strange way the story is told enhances just how real the exchanges between characters feel. The frustration that Lucy feels with Jake, that Jake feels with his mother, that his parents feel for each other, are all uncomfortably tangible, especially as tensions rise. The film's 134-minute runtime is a long time to sit with that feeling, but Kaufman's big divergence from the novel he's adapting is in lending its ending a more buoyant note."<sup>[19]</sup> In his review, Brian Tallerico of *RogerEbert.com* gave the film 3½ out of 4 stars, calling it "a movie that is undeniably complex in terms of symbolism and a more surreal final act than most people will be expecting". He also praised the cinematography, saying that the film's atmosphere is "amplified by a tight 4:3 aspect ratio courtesy of [Łukasz Żal](#) (*Cold War*) that forces the viewer to pay more attention to what's in frame."<sup>[20]</sup> *The Observer*'s Wendy Ide wrote: "This is not cinema that leaves you feeling good

about things. Nor does it tread a familiar path. But *I'm Thinking of Ending Things* is one of the most daringly unexpected films of the year, a sinewy, unsettling psychological horror, saturated with a squirming dream logic that tips over into the domain of nightmares."<sup>[21]</sup>

In a more mixed review, Adam Graham of *The Detroit News* gave the film a C, calling Plemons's and Buckley's performances excellent, but lamenting the plot, writing: "*I'm Thinking of Ending Things* is an unsolvable riddle where the only answer is mankind's hopelessness, and we've been down this road

before."<sup>[22]</sup> For *TIME*, [Stephanie Zacharek](#) wrote: "For every moment of raw, affecting insight there are zillions of milliseconds of Kaufman's proving what a tortured smartie he is. *I'm Thinking of Ending Things* must have been arduous to make, and it's excruciatingly tedious to watch."<sup>[23]</sup>

## Accolades

Award	Date of ceremony	Category	Recipient(s)	Result	Ref. .....
<a href="#">Art Directors Guild Awards</a>	<a href="#">April 10, 2021</a>	<a href="#">Excellence in Production Design for a Contemporary Film</a>	<a href="#">Molly Hughes</a>	Nominated	<sup>[24]</sup>
<a href="#">Boston Society of Film Critics Awards</a>	<a href="#">December 13, 2020</a>	<a href="#">Best Screenplay</a>	<a href="#">Charlie Kaufman</a>	Won	<sup>[25]</sup>
		<a href="#">Best Editing</a>	<a href="#">Robert Frazen</a>	Won	
<a href="#">Chicago Film Critics Association</a>	<a href="#">December 21, 2020</a>	<a href="#">Best Actress</a>	<a href="#">Jessie Buckley</a>	Nominated	<sup>[26]</sup>
		<a href="#">Best Supporting Actress</a>	<a href="#">Toni Collette</a>	Nominated	
		<a href="#">Best Adapted Screenplay</a>	<a href="#">Charlie Kaufman</a>	Nominated	
		<a href="#">Best Art Direction</a>	<a href="#">Molly Hughes</a>	Nominated	
		<a href="#">Best Use of Visual Effects</a>		Nominated	
		<a href="#">Best Editing</a>	<a href="#">Robert Frazen</a>	Won	
<a href="#">Dublin Film Critics Circle</a>	<a href="#">December 18, 2020</a>	<a href="#">Best Actress</a>	<a href="#">Jessie Buckley</a>	Won	<sup>[27]</sup>
<a href="#">Florida Film Critics Circle</a>	<a href="#">December 21, 2020</a>	<a href="#">Best Adapted Screenplay</a>	<a href="#">Charlie Kaufman</a>	Won	<sup>[28]</sup>
<a href="#">Gotham Independent Film Awards</a>	<a href="#">January 11, 2021</a>	<a href="#">Best Actress</a>	<a href="#">Jessie Buckley</a>	Nominated	<sup>[29]</sup>
		<a href="#">Best Actor</a>	<a href="#">Jesse Plemons</a>	Nominated	
<a href="#">IndieWire Critics Poll</a>	<a href="#">December 14, 2020</a>	<a href="#">Best Film</a>	<i><a href="#">I'm Thinking of Ending Things</a></i>	5th place	<sup>[30]</sup>
		<a href="#">Best Director</a>	<a href="#">Charlie Kaufman</a>	7th place	
		<a href="#">Best Performance</a>	<a href="#">Jessie Buckley</a>	6th place	
		<a href="#">Best Screenplay</a>	<a href="#">Charlie Kaufman</a>	Won	
		<a href="#">Best Cinematography</a>	<a href="#">Łukasz Żal</a>	6th place	
<a href="#">London Film Critics' Circle</a>	<a href="#">February 7, 2021</a>	<a href="#">Film of the Year</a>	<i><a href="#">I'm Thinking of Ending Things</a></i>	Nominated	<sup>[31]</sup>
		<a href="#">British/Irish Actress of the Year</a>	<a href="#">Jessie Buckley</a>	Nominated	
		<a href="#">Screenwriter of the Year</a>	<a href="#">Charlie Kaufman</a>	Nominated	
<a href="#">National Society of Film Critics</a>	<a href="#">January 9, 2021</a>	<a href="#">Best Screenplay</a>	<a href="#">Charlie Kaufman</a>	3rd place	<sup>[32]</sup>
<a href="#">Online Film Critics Society</a>	<a href="#">January 25, 2021</a>	<a href="#">Best Picture</a>	<i><a href="#">I'm Thinking of Ending Things</a></i>	8th Place	<sup>[33]</sup>
		<a href="#">Best Actress</a>	<a href="#">Jessie Buckley</a>	Nominated	<sup>[34]</sup>
		<a href="#">Best Adapted Screenplay</a>	<a href="#">Charlie Kaufman</a>	Nominated	

<u>San Diego Film Critics Society</u>	<u>January 11, 2021</u>	<u>Best Adapted Screenplay</u>	Charlie Kaufman	Nominated	[35]
		<u>Best Production Design</u>	Molly Hughes	Nominated	
<u>San Francisco Bay Area Film Critics Circle</u>	<u>January 18, 2021</u>	<u>Best Adapted Screenplay</u>	Charlie Kaufman	Nominated	[36]
		<u>Best Supporting Actress</u>	Toni Collette	Nominated	
<u>Set Decorators Society of America Awards</u>	<u>March 31, 2021</u>	<u>Best Achievement in Décor/Design of a Contemporary Feature Film</u>	Mattie Siegal and Molly Hughes	Nominated	[37]
<u>St. Louis Film Critics Association</u>	<u>January 17, 2021</u>	<u>Best Picture</u>	<i>I'm Thinking of Ending Things</i>	Nominated	[38]
		<u>Best Actress</u>	Jessie Buckley	Nominated	
		<u>Best Adapted Screenplay</u>	Charlie Kaufman	Won	
		<u>Best Editing</u>	Robert Frazen	Nominated	
<u>Washington D.C. Area Film Critics Association</u>	<u>February 8, 2021</u>	<u>Best Adapted Screenplay</u>	Charlie Kaufman	Nominated	[39]

## Notes

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- a. Which is later revealed to be "Bonedog", by the poet Eva H.D.
- b. The young woman's monologue is taken directly from Pauline Kael's review of the film. A collection of her reviews (*For Keeps: 30 Years at the Movies*) can be seen in Jake's childhood home.<sup>[2]</sup>
- c. Reminiscent of "**Dream Ballet**" performed in *Oklahoma!*. The ballet features the young woman's dancer taking the role of Laurey, Jake's dancer taking the role of Curly, and the janitor's dancer taking the role of Jud.
- d. The Nobel Prize acceptance speech is taken from John Nash's acceptance speech during the finale of *A Beautiful Mind*, the DVD of which is seen on a shelf in Jake's childhood bedroom.<sup>[2]</sup>
- e. In the high school stage production of *Oklahoma!* whose rehearsal the janitor watches.
- f. Seen in a brief sequence with the janitor at the high school that, based on the students' clothing and hairstyles, appears to be set in the 1980s.
- g. In the romantic comedy film the janitor watches.

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## External links

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- *I'm Thinking of Ending Things* (<https://www.netflix.com/title/80211559>) on Netflix
  - *I'm Thinking of Ending Things* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7939766/>) at IMDb
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