

winston

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CLOSE ON- a slow water drip landing on white tile...

Drip...drip...drip...

CUT TO:

INT NYC'S 14TH ST YMCA/INDOOR POOL- DAY

An Olympic-sized indoor pool. The muffled sounds of echoing voices and splashing water reverberate off the white-tiled walls and ceiling...

CLOSE ON- BARE FEET working their way along a DIVING BOARD with a creak...creak...creak...then coming to a stop at the very edge.

REVEAL: a MAN, early 60's: unshaven, fit but pale. Dark swim-shorts, shirt and swim cap, goggles in hand.

This is our hero ELI.

He dons the goggles, takes a deep breath, raises his arms...and everything goes completely SILENT as the world waits in suspense...

Then Eli dips his knees slightly, doing a test bounce or two...and finally dips deep and LAUNCHES himself into the air, hovering gracefully for a brief moment...

...then PLUMMETING downwards, racing dramatically down towards what turns out to be the CONCRETE BOTTOM OF THE EMPTY POOL...

...and Eli becomes aware of this much too late, windmilling his arms frantically as the concrete bottom of the pool RUSHES towards his HORRIFIED FACE and...

SPLAT!

We get a flash overhead view of Eli's broken body, limbs spread, head at an odd angle, eyes wide in shock, blood spreading rapidly across the pool floor...

SMASH CUT TO:

INT ELI'S BEDROOM/BROWNSTONE- MORNING

Eli jolts awake, GASPING, sprawled across his bed:

ELI

Fuck.

He lies very still for a moment, waiting for his pulse to return to normal.

We are in a large, neatly furnished bedroom of a West Village brownstone: king bed, two night tables, a dressing table with a vanity mirror, and French windows looking out onto a leafy maple.

CLOSE ON THE BEDSIDE CLOCK: tick...tick...tick...

CLOSE ON THE TREE OUTSIDE THE WINDOW: the leaves rustling on the branch...

CLOSE ON ELI: as he hears the FAINT SOUND OF BREATHING...

He cautiously turns his head to look at the other side of the bed, but it's vacant, just rumpled sheets.

Eli looks towards the foot of the bed and discovers the source of the breathing:

A PUG (LARRY) is squatting at the end of the bed, watching Eli: the pug's bulging eyeballs and lolling tongue give the impression of an animal incapacitated by a recent head trauma.

Larry blinks at Eli, then jumps off the bed, revealing a fresh pile of DOG SHIT. As the dog exits:

ELI (CONT'D)
(calling after him)
Great! Thank you!

INT ELI'S KITCHEN/BROWNSTONE- MORNING

Sunlight slants through shuttered windows, lighting up modern appliances, white marbled counters, and a sink overflowing with DIRTY DISHES.

Eli enters, holding the dog out in front of him like soiled laundry. He crosses to the back door, puts the dog down, and gives him a little shove with his foot through the DOG DOOR.

Then he crosses to the coffee machine.

He checks the pot, but it's empty. He checks the timer on the machine, swearing under his breath, and violently hits some buttons...

VOICE
Sleep ok?

Startled, Eli turns to see his wife LYNN (50's, silk pajamas, hair in a loose pony tail) leaning against the fridge, arms crossed, watching him, amused.

ELI
 (covering quickly)
 Fine. Fantastic. Best sleep ever.

LYNN
 You sure? You seem a little jumpy.

ELI
 I'm not jumpy. I'm completely relaxed.

This is blatantly untrue.

They give each other a long look, and we sense something hanging in the air between them, we just don't know what it is yet.

Lynn glances at the coffee machine.

LYNN
 One of these days, you're going to have to learn how to make your own coffee.

ELI
 I don't want to make my own coffee. I want you to make my coffee. Also: your dog shit on the bed again. That thing should be shot.

LYNN
 Maybe he's trying to tell you something.

Eli turns back to the machine.

ELI
 (low)
 Maybe he's trying to tell me he should be shot.

He hits some more buttons, and it clicks on: success!

He turns back and Lynn is GONE. Eli stares blankly at the spot where she used to be, then focuses in on some pictures hanging on the fridge.

He crosses the room to examine them- photos of Eli and Lynn, a takeout Chinese menu, a dry-cleaning receipt- and then focuses in on one specific picture:

CLOSE ON: a much-worn and folded PHOTO OF AN OLD, RUNDOWN FARMHOUSE...

Lynn glides out of the pantry, startling him again:

LYNN

What's with the farmhouse?

ELI

Nothing. It's just some picture I found.

LYNN

(with a knowing look)

Oh yeah? Where?

ELI

I don't know. I can't remember.

As if to prove how insignificant the picture is, he crumples it up and tosses it in the trash. Lynn raises an eyebrow at this, then lets it go:

LYNN

You working today?

ELI

That's the plan.

LYNN

Well...you know they say God laughs at people who make plans.

ELI

They also say he laughs at racist jokes, but that might just be a rumor.

Lynn guffaws at this, and Eli glances at her, pleasantly surprised. He turns back to the coffee machine and watches coffee drip into a mug:

Drip...drip...drip...

Eli glances out the window to the tiny back garden filled with rows of ROSES.

ELI (CONT'D)

Your roses are really...

He turns back towards her, just in time to catch her disappearing out of the room.

ELI (CONT'D)

...thriving.

INT HALLWAY/BROWNSTONE- MORNING

Eli steps into the hallway, coffee mug in hand.

ELI

Lynn?

He stares down the hallway at a CLOSED BATHROOM DOOR. The pug pads over and looks up at him.

ELI (CONT'D)

(louder)

I take it back about the dog, Ok? He's a good dog. He's a great dog. If all the other dogs in the world were choosing a king, they'd chose him.

As he says this, Eli looks at the dog and shakes his head- *not really-* but there is no reply from the Lynn.

The dog gives Eli a reproachful look and walks away... leaving Eli alone in the hallway.

There is a pile of unopened mail on the hallway table next to A VASE OF HALF-DEAD ROSES, and Eli considers the mail vaguely as he takes a sip of coffee, then almost spits it back in the cup- *yuck!*

After a moment, he becomes aware of a SOFT SCRATCHING NOISE. He looks around, focusing in on the front door...

PUSH IN SLOWLY ON THE DOOR...with the creepy sensation: SOMETHING IS OUT THERE...

Frowning, Eli moves down the hallway, then reaches cautiously for the doorknob...

EXT BROWNSTONE- MORNING

A tree-lined street populated by brownstones...

Sunlight glancing off windows, cars rolling through mud puddles, spattering the curb, pedestrians hustling past, kicking up dead leaves...

IT'S FALL IN NEW YORK. Eli cracks open the door to find:

A PALE, SKINNY 6 YEAR OLD BOY WITH LARGE BROWN EYES (NOAH) CROUCHED ON HIS DOORSTEP.

Eli isn't sure what he was expecting, but he wasn't expecting this.

ELI

(opening the door wider)

Oh. Hey. What are you doing out here?

Noah does not respond, just stares wide-eyed up at Eli.
Then Eli notices that THE BOY'S FINGERTIPS ARE BLOODY...

ELI (CONT'D)
(concerned)

Hey...

He looks down at the door and sees the DEEP SCRATCHES the boy has apparently dug out of the wood with his own fingers. *What the hell...?*

Eli takes a closer look at the boy. Noah has a wandering eye, which gives him a vaguely lost look as he stares up at Eli blankly.

Eli immediately goes into protective mode:

ELI (CONT'D)
(gentle)
It's ok...what's your name? Do you live around here?

NOTHING. Eli turns his head to look searchingly up and down the street, but no one seems to be missing a young boy.

When he glances back down at Noah, he realizes the boy has stepped passed him to the doorway, and is now URINATING on Eli's foyer floor.

ELI (CONT'D)
Hey!

Eli takes a step towards Noah, and the boy gives him that same BLANK LOOK, then BOLTS down the steps...

ELI (CONT'D)
(calling after him)
Whoa...wait...

...and Eli quickly realizes the kid is barreling straight towards the BUSY STREET!

ELI (CONT'D)
(panicked)
STOP! WAIT...

Eli plunges down the steps after him as Noah ping-pongs between parked cars blindly, then RUNS RIGHT OUT INTO TRAFFIC.

Eli pursues, waving his arms at cars frantically:

ELI (CONT'D)
(to the cars)
WATCH OUT!

There's the sound of brakes SQUEALING, horns BLARING as Noah disappears from sight, and for one horrifying moment, Eli is convinced he sees a flash of Noah's shirt under the tires of a taxi...

...but then the traffic clears, and the pavement is empty, the boy VANISHED.

Eli stands for a moment, heart pounding in his throat.

WHAT THE FUCK JUST HAPPENED?!? He looks around, but no one else seems to have noticed.

How is he the only one seeing this? The sun seems suddenly too bright, the traffic too loud.

Across the street, Eli's NEIGHBORS (two CHECHEN brothers with buzz cuts and indecipherable tattoos) dump a heavy-looking rolled rug into the trunk of their car.

If there isn't a body in that rug, there should be.

Overhead, a SEAGULL circles...and Eli stares at it for a moment, feeling like he's in The Twilight Zone.

Eli glances back at his brownstone just in time to see LARRY in the open doorway, sniffing the foyer, then raising his leg to add his own mark to the wood floor. Then he hunches over to add some shit, too...

ELI (CONT'D)
Are you kidding me?!?

INT KITCHEN/BROWNSTONE- MORNING

Eli fills a bucket while muttering under his breath:

ELI
...shit on the bed, shit on the floor...

INT HALLWAY/BROWNSTONE- MORNING

Eli heads for the front hallway, bucket in hand:

ELI
...maybe I should start shitting everywhere, see how you like it...

VOICE

Eli?

Startled, Eli looks up to see SUE ANN (40's, manicured, real estate woman) in the doorway. She smiles at him nervously, taking in the urine and shit-covered floor...

SUE ANN

Barbara said I should stop by to assess the, um, condition of the brownstone to price it...is this not a good time?

ELI

Well, that depends: did you bring your haz-mat suit?

SUE ANN

Maybe I'll try another day...

ELI

Okey-doke. Thanks for stopping by!

Eli closes the door in her face.

INT HALLWAY/BROWNSTONE- MOMENTS LATER

Eli is on his hands and knees, cleaning the foyer floor. As he does, he hears footsteps, then a knocking. *Really? She's still out there?*

Eli cautiously peeks out the mail slot, and is surprised to see the WIDE, UNBLINKING EYES A CHILD.

Shit, that crazy kid is back!

ELI

Fuck...

Eli quickly stands and FLINGS open the door to discover, NOT NOAH, BUT A YOUNG, HYPERACTIVE GIRL (RUBY, 4) and her startled mom (PAM, 30's, looks like she needs a drink).

PAM

Oh! Dr Adler! Sorry to knock...but you weren't answering downstairs...

Eli quickly pulls the door close to him, blocking their view into the hallway.

ELI

Of course, our appointment. Sorry. I'll change my clothes and be right down.

INT ELI'S INNER OFFICE/BROWNSTONE- DAY

Brightly painted walls, small couch, kid table, stacks of picture books, and buckets of toys lining the walls...

Eli sits on the floor near Ruby, trying to get her to focus. He does a magic trick, making a block appear and disappear in his hand...

...and Ruby screams with delight. Eli hands her the block and smoothly segues into the task at hand:

ELI

And that one goes where...?

After a moment of thought, Ruby correctly fits the block into a box with different shapes carved out of it.

Eli raises a hand, and when Ruby gives him a high five, Eli holds her hand for a moment and looks her in the eye:

ELI (CONT'D)

Great job, Ruby. I'm proud of you.

Ruby responds with a shy smile...

EXT ELI'S OUTER OFFICE/BROWNSTONE- DAY

Eli stands in the open doorway, consulting with Pam while Ruby bounces around her. Behind Eli, we see his desk stacked with files, bookshelves overloaded with medical texts, and DIPLOMAS AND COMMENDATIONS on the walls...

ELI

...and her focus really has improved...

PAM

I know...it really has...

As they talk, Eli is momentarily distracted by a *car horn BLARING- the sense of a SMALL FIGURE DARTING PAST- and Eli's heart LEAPS into his throat...*

...but when he glances that way, THERE'S NO ONE THERE.

ELI

(shaking it off)

Anyway, she's doing great.

PAM

Thank you...

Suddenly, she gives Eli a grateful hug. He smiles, but as she collects Ruby and they exit, Eli's face falls...his UNEASY FEELINGS back in force...

...and we see how he had been holding it together for Ruby and her mom.

INT THERAPY OFFICE/UNIVERSITY CLINIC- AFTERNOON

A small, nondescript room in a university clinic. Eli sits on a couch across from his THERAPIST (JOANNA, late 20's, still trying to get her footing with Eli)...

JOANNA

So. What's new?

ELI

Oh, not much. Woke up. Brushed my teeth. Made coffee. Oh, and then I found a small boy scratching his fingers bloody on my front door. When I tried to help him, he peed on my floor, then ran out into the street and almost got hit by a car.

JOANNA

Are you serious?

ELI

I'm dead serious. It's like he marked his territory and then ran away.

JOANNA

Former patient?

ELI

Nope. Total stranger. Weird, right? My life has turned into a Dali painting.

Joanna waits. Suddenly:

ELI (CONT'D)

How many narcissists does it take to change a light-bulb? Just one. All he has to do is hold it in place while the world revolves around him.

Eli laughs. Joanna smiles politely.

ELI (CONT'D)

Wow. Tough crowd.

Joanna gives him a curious look:

JOANNA

Why are you here, Eli?

ELI

Is this an existential question?

JOANNA

No, a practical one. Every week, you show up, voluntarily, only to spend the whole 50 minutes talking about pretty much anything other than how you really feel.

ELI

My friend Jackson said you were a terrific young therapist and told me you'd enjoy the challenge.

JOANNA

So your idea of therapy is a contest.

ELI

Only when I'm winning.

No reaction. Eli sighs.

ELI (CONT'D)

Look. Maybe there's just nothing to say.

JOANNA

Or...maybe you're in denial.

Eli laughs.

ELI

Of course I'm in denial. I'm supposed to be in denial. It won't last, so can I just enjoy it for now?

JOANNA

Are you enjoying it?

ELI

Not especially.

Joanna thinks for a moment, then chooses her words carefully:

JOANNA

Look, under the circumstances, it's perfectly normal to feel...

Eli immediately jumps in, cutting her off:

ELI

What, sad? Angry? Confused?

JOANNA

Sure. All of the above.

ELI

How about inconvenienced? Like this whole situation she created is very inconsiderate. I mean, hey, I can't even use the hallway bathroom anymore.

Joanna sits up a bit at this.

JOANNA

And by "she", you mean your wife Lynn...

ELI

(cutting her off)

I don't want to talk about my wife.

Joanna leans back in her chair.

JOANNA

(agreeably)

Ok. Let's talk about how you don't want to talk about that. How does not talking about it make you feel?

Eli shoots her a sharp look.

ELI

Fantastic. It makes me feel fucking fantastic.

Joanna clearly hit a nerve. She backs off:

JOANNA

So how's work?

Eli shrugs.

ELI

It's fine. Now that I've adjusted the medication dosage of every child in lower Manhattan, my work here is done.

JOANNA

Why are you trying to downplay what you do? I mean, you've had a long and incredibly successful career helping troubled kids...

ELI

Well, now you're just kissing my ass.

Joanna gives him a sharp look.

JOANNA

Is that what you think?

Eli considers this, then admits:

ELI

No. It's true I've had a long and successful career...but...

JOANNA

But what?

Eli gives her a look:

ELI

But...I don't think I can do it anymore.

There. He said it. And now that he's finally not deflecting, we can see how much pain he's really in...

CUT TO:

EXT FRONT PORCH/BROWNSTONE- DAY

CLOSE ON- THE SCRATCHES ON THE FRONT DOOR...

REVEAL ELI, staring at them. THEY ALMOST LOOK LIKE LETTERS...LIKE SOMEONE WAS TRYING TO WRITE SOMETHING OVER AND OVER, BUT WAS UNABLE TO FORM THE SHAPES...

Eli reaches out and touches the grooves with his hand:

THE KID MUST HAVE BEEN THERE FOR A WHILE...TRYING TO SCRATCH HIS MESSAGES OUT? OR TRYING TO SCRATCH HIS WAY IN?!?

Eli pulls out his keys to open the front door, but as he reaches for it...IT SWINGS OPEN. Eli stares, frozen.

INT HALLWAY/BROWNSTONE- DAY

Eli steps cautiously inside.

ELI

Hello? (calling out) Larry? (beat) Lynn?

NOTHING. And then a soft *drip, drip, drip...*

Eli reluctantly turns his head to stare at THE CLOSED BATHROOM DOOR.

SLOW PUSH-IN ON THE BATHROOM DOOR as we become aware of a low buzzing...that gets louder...and louder...

...and shit! Eli's realizes: IT'S JUST HIS PHONE, vibrating in his pocket. The moment broken, Eli answers:

ELI (CONT'D)

Hello?

VOICE

Jesus, I can't believe I finally got you. I've left like 5 messages. (beat) Eli, you there? It's Gail.

ELI

Yeah. I'm here.

Larry appears in the hallway in front of Eli and stops to stare at him.

VOICE

Look, I'm sorry to be stalking you, but I've got this kid, the court is making a decision...

ELI

(interrupting)

Listen, Gail, I don't think I can take on anything new right now...

Larry crosses the hallway in front of Eli and sits, staring at the bathroom door.

VOICE

Just hear me out, this is a unique situation...

ELI

I have to go.

VOICE

I emailed the file, at least take a look!

But Eli is already hanging up.

ELI

(to Larry)

Hey. (Larry looks at him) Stop that.

Larry turns and walks away, Eli watching him go...

INT SUBWAY CAR- DAY

Eli is seated by the door, a LARGE GIFT BAG in his lap. Across from him are a trio of middle-aged Russian sisters, overloaded with shopping bags.

Next to them, a small girl holds a melting red popsicle. Eli stares as the popsicle drips down the girl's wrist and...

Drip...drip...drip...

FLASH ON: the drops landing in a pool of BLOOD ON A WHITE-TILED BATHROOM FLOOR...

Eli shudders and looks away, past the girl and the women to his own reflection, distorted in the subway window...

EXT PARK/POND- DAY

A kid's party, with what appears to be an ANIMAL THEME: balloon horses, cows, turtles. A jumpy house, a couple small tents in bright colors, a clown juggling next to a table loaded with presents...

The chaos is overwhelming. Eli slips quickly through the crowd, dodging wound-up kids and harried parents, but then running right into his cousin STAN (50's, beer belly), who slaps him on the shoulder:

STAN

Eli, my man!

ELI

Hello, Stan.

Eli tries to move past but Stan sticks with him.

STAN

I thought I saw you at the movies the other day! I said to myself, wonderful, he's going to the movies!

ELI

Wasn't me, Stan. Must have been my doppelganger. Which is not good...

STAN

Why, what do you mean?

ELI

Doppelgangers are paranormal phenomenon that bring bad luck.

Stan is a little thrown by this:

STAN

Oh. I never knew that...

ELI

Not that I believe in that stuff, ghosts and whatnot. Turns out all those so-called near death experiences, the "going to the light" with this feeling of peace and happiness, is really just a simple combination of oxygen deprivation and overactive neurotransmitter activity. When you see the light, what you're actually doing is watching your own brain cells expire.

STAN

(smiling nervously)

Well, I'm sure there's more to it than that...

ELI

Nope. There isn't. The truth is, every experience you have is nothing more than the result of a complex set of neurochemical transactions.

Stan frowns...

STAN

Wow, that's heavy.

ELI

Good chat, Stan.

Overhead, a SEAGULL caws...

...and Eli quickly moves past. People give Eli big, slightly strained smiles as he goes, and Eli dodges them all, starting to feel surrounded.

Near a picnic table loaded with juice boxes and snacks, a group of stout, coiffed women are eagerly gesturing to him, and, looking to escape, Eli spots a TENT with a young girl (SOPHIE, 9) alone inside.

He quickly crouches down and goes in...

INT TENT- DAY

Eli settles in next to Sophie, who does not look up, too busy organizing a pile of coins into small stacks.

Eli exhales with relief.

ELI

Phew. Hectic out there, right, Soph?

The girl shrugs, uninterested.

SOPHIE

I wanted a reptile theme.

ELI

I know.

SOPHIE

Horses and cows aren't reptiles.

ELI

No, they are not.

Eli adds some coins to her pile and Sophie smoothly incorporates them without making eye contact.

Then Eli reaches into the gift bag and extracts a STUFFED GREEN LIZARD with a bow around its neck.

ELI (CONT'D)

How's this for the theme?

Sophie glances up, and her eyes go wide.

ELI (CONT'D)

Happy birthday.

She grabs the lizard, hugging it tight, then finally gives him a quick smile.

SOPHIE

Thank you.

ELI

You're welcome. Are you enjoying the party?

SOPHIE

I don't like parties.

ELI

Me, either. Wanna make a break for it with me, hit the road?

SOPHIE

Mommy says no hitting.

ELI

Your mommy is right. She's always right.
It's kind of a curse.

Sophie gives him a searching look.

SOPHIE

You look different, Grandpa.

This takes Eli by surprise.

ELI

What do you mean? Different how?

Sophie gives this some careful thought, then decides:

SOPHIE

Smaller.

Eli stares at her. *It's like she somehow put her finger on exactly how he feels.* But before he can respond, Sophie ends the conversation:

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

Anyway. Bye.

She crawls out of the tent.

ELI

Ok. Bye.

Eli stays for a moment, the vibe different now that Sophie is gone.

The party continues all around but is muffled and obscured by the cloth of the tent, with dark shapes coming and going, overlapping, and fading back...

And then, Eli spots *A SMALL DARK FIGURE, MOTIONLESS* as the other shadows move past and around it...

As Eli watches, *the dark figure EASES CLOSER, seeming to stare at Eli through the cloth of the tent...making the hair stand up on the back of Eli's neck...*

...and Eli suddenly *LUNGES* for the exit...

EXT PARK/POND- DAY

...and emerges from the tent to discover that *THE DARK FIGURE IS ACTUALLY JUST A CRANKY-LOOKING CHILD*, whose face is smeared with chocolate.

ELI

Oh. Hi. (beat) Do you happen to know if they have any chocolate at this party?

The child giggles and runs off and Eli almost bumps right into BARBARA (late 40's, bobbed hair, tailored button down shirt, black jeans):

BARBARA

Dad! You made it! And you're only (checks her phone) 40 minutes late.

ELI

Please. It's a kids' party. Kids have no sense of time. You know: like dogs.

BARBARA

Bet that goes over big with your patient's parents. Anyway, you missed all the excitement. Aunt Ida took a Xanax and tried to eat the legos off the birthday cake. (offering) Juice box?

She hands him one and he takes it. There is a hint of tension between them: Eli and Barbara have always butted heads, possibly because they are so similar.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Did you see Sophie?

ELI

Yes. She says you strayed from her reptile theme.

Barbara rolls her eyes.

BARBARA

Jesus christ, do you have any idea how hard it is to find lizard and snake-shaped balloons?

ELI

You're an event planner, isn't there some sort of secret handshake?

BARBARA

Yes, dad. We all meet under a bridge at dawn. Like trolls.

ELI

Well, as I always say, at least you're putting that psych degree to good use.

BARBARA

Oh, I use it. (pointedly) I'm actually using it right now.

ELI

Ha.

Eli suddenly gets serious:

ELI (CONT'D)

You know, the way Sophie was avoiding eye contact with me just now was concerning, I haven't seen this kind of behavior with her before...

BARBARA

(cutting him off)

Dad. She's pouting. All kids do it. This is a party, ok? So can you just be Grandpa?

ELI

Right. Sorry. (suddenly seeing) Well, well, look who decided to put in an appearance...

ON SOPHIE, across the lawn, talking to a MAN in a business suit, crouched down next to her, holding a gift. (This is SOPHIE'S DAD JEFF, late 40's)

The man sees Eli glaring, and quickly looks away.

BARBARA

Dad, Jeff is her father, Sophie asked him to come. Which he did. Which was nice...

ELI

(doubtful)

Was it?

BARBARA

(exasperated)

Oh god, just give me that, already. It's like watching a toddler try to open a safe.

Eli has been struggling with the juice box straw, and now Barbara grabs it and fixes it, changing the subject:

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Listen, I need to talk to you...

She hesitates. She and Eli relate by joking with each other, and they both find it difficult to broach sensitive topics...

BARBARA (CONT'D)
(clearing her throat)
I...um...received a strange message from Sue Ann...something about a haz-mat suit?

ELI
Huh. I have no idea what that's about.
(looking up) I never realized Manhattan had so many seagulls...

BARBARA
Dad...

ELI
...what is that, global warming?

BARBARA
(blurting out)
Dad! I'm worried about you!

Eli gives her a surprised look.

ELI
What do you mean?

BARBARA
It's just...well, it's been 6 months.
Staying in that brownstone, it's so...I don't know...morbid!

Eli stares at her.

ELI
It's not morbid, it's where I live. Where I still live. You and Sophie are both welcome to stop by any time.

BARBARA
(trying to backpedal)
Wait...Dad...

ELI
(cutting her off)
I love you. And now I have to go.

INT KITCHEN/BROWNSTONE- EVENING

Eli sits at the kitchen in front of his laptop, skimming the FILE Gail sent him.

We catch bits of official docs, psychiatrist notes, medication dosages, school reports, etc...as Eli reads out-loud to himself:

ELI
...history of aggressive behavior...
oppositional-defiant...repeated school
expulsions...4th placement...

He scans through, clearly not focusing, his daughter's words ringing in his head. After a moment, he gives up and closes the laptop...and stares at the TRASH CAN...

FADE IN the sound of CLASSICAL MUSIC...

INT LYNN'S OFFICE/BROWNSTONE- EVENING

A small, orderly room with a window looking out onto the rose garden. Framed artwork from children's books on the wall. A woman's sweater draped over a recliner.

A DESKTOP COMPUTER PLAYING CLASSICAL MUSIC...

Eli sits at the desk, FARMHOUSE PHOTO that he retrieved from the trash can now in hand. As the music plays, he stares at the smoothed out photo, flicking the lights on, off...on, off...

...and the photo appears, disappears...appears, disappears...

Finally, Eli gives the farmhouse photo one last searching look...then carefully folds it along the old seams...and slides it gently under the blotter on the desk...and we get the sense that THIS IS WHERE HE FOUND IT.

Then he hits a key on the desktop, the MUSIC CUTS OUT, AND: BLACKOUT.

With a sharp inhale...

CUT TO:

INT BEDROOM/BROWNSTONE- NIGHT

Eli's eyes pop open. He's in bed. It's the middle of the night. And SOMETHING WOKE HIM UP.

He lies in bed, staring at the ceiling, trying to figure out what it was.

Then he hears it again, SOME SMALL SOUND COMING FROM THE APARTMENT...

INT KITCHEN/BROWNSTONE- NIGHT

Eli enters cautiously.

Across the room, he sees that THE DOG DOOR IS SWINGING SLIGHTLY...like something just CAME IN.

ELI

(low)

Larry?

He thinks he can hear faint SNORES...

INT LIVING-ROOM/BROWNSTONE- NIGHT

Eli peeks in...and the pug is curled up on the couch, SNORING.

Hmmm...he just came in but he's already snoring?

Eli glances out the window...and sees a hint of MOVEMENT in the darkened window across the street. *The Chechens? Watching him?*

Tense, he steps to the side of the window and cautiously peeks out, trying to get a better look...and CRASH!- he accidentally knocks over a lamp, scaring the CRAP out of himself.

Eli glances up and, across the street, the shadow in the window resolves itself into a harmless coat on a hook.

Eli looks at Larry, who is still snoring and has missed all of this.

ELI

You're a terrible watchdog.

INT BEDROOM/BROWNSTONE- NIGHT

Eli gets back into bed, and stares up at the ceiling.

ON THE TREE LEAVES: casting fluttering shadows across the ceiling...

ON THE CLOCK: tick...tick...tick...

ON A WHITE FEATHER: floating down towards the floor...

ON ELI, FROWNING: IS THAT A SEAGULL FEATHER?

Trying to get comfortable, he rolls over...

...and NOAH IS STANDING RIGHT THERE BY THE BED, STARING AT HIM. Eli GASPS and almost falls off the bed...

INT KITCHEN/BROWNSTONE- NIGHT

Noah is seated at the kitchen table, playing with a toy car as Eli pours a glass of milk.

The boy looks like he's been sleep-walking: his hair is sticking up, his face is smudged and bleary-eyed, and he's in pajamas and just ONE SHOE...

...but the weirdest thing is HOW NORMAL HE SEEMS RIGHT NOW. Like he's perfectly at home here and not someone who crawled through a dog door into a stranger's house.

Eli, on the other hand, is totally freaked out but trying to play it cool. He sits and carefully slides the glass of milk across the table to Noah. Noah looks at it for a long moment...then picks it up and takes a sip.

Eli takes this as an opening:

ELI

Do you do this often? Sneak in through people's dog doors? (teasing) You didn't pee anywhere I should know about, did you?

No response. Noah just sits there, milk mustache and all, blinking at Eli.

What is he doing here? What does he want?!?

ELI (CONT'D)

Do you know your phone number? Or do you think you could tell me where you live?

Suddenly, unexpectedly, Noah gets up, goes around the table, AND THROWS HIS ARMS AROUND ELI, HUGGING HIM TIGHTLY.

And EVERYTHING STOPS.

Eli can barely breathe. And then he finds himself hugging Noah back, tightly...and there is an intensity that grips Eli, some kind of profound sadness that seems to be flowing between the two of them, and for a moment, Eli feels completely overwhelmed by emotion...

...and it's as though the ice that has been numbing Eli's heart has just STARTED TO CRACK...

Then Noah pulls away and looks at him...and the moment is over. Eli blinks back at him. *Shit. Now what?*

ELI (CONT'D)

Ok. Listen: we need to figure out where you live. Your parents must be worried. I'm going to make a phone call, ok?

Noah watches as Eli pulls out his phone and dials 911:

911

911, what's your emergency?

But Eli realizes Noah is headed out of the room. Down the hallway, he sees NOAH IS HEADED FOR THE FRONT DOOR.

ELI

(into phone)

I'm sorry. I made a mistake.

Eli hangs up...

EXT BROWNSTONE- NIGHT

Eli comes out his front door in time to see Noah headed down the block...

EXT STREETS- NIGHT

Staring blankly straight ahead, Noah walks calmly down the deserted street.

A couple paces behind him, ELI FOLLOWS. One after the other, they pass through the flickering light and shadow caused by the street-lamps and trees.

The moon is half-hidden by clouds, and the whole scene has the feeling of a half-remembered DREAM...

They turn corner after corner, the streets all blending into each other...

EXT APARTMENT BLDG- NIGHT

Suddenly, Noah stops in his tracks. Then he turns and approaches the front door of an APARTMENT BUILDING. There is a KEYPAD by the door, and Noah punches in the code and the door opens easily at his touch.

Eli watches him disappear inside, then, unsure what else to do, FOLLOWS HIM IN...

INT HALLWAY/APARTMENT BLDG- NIGHT

Noah comes to an apartment doorway that is slightly AJAR. He stops and looks up expectantly at Eli.

ELI

(low)

Is this where you live?

Noah just waits. Eli puts a hand out, touching the door, and it SWINGS OPEN. Noah and Eli exchange a look:

So now what is Eli supposed to do? Just leave this kid here? What if he doesn't even live here?

Eli peeks in...

INT LIVING-ROOM/APARTMENT- NIGHT

Eli steps cautiously inside the darkened room.

ELI

Hello?

He takes another step into the room and suddenly, a woman in a robe (DENISE: 30's, spiky hair, Juicy sweats) lunges out from a bedroom doorway, MACE IN HAND...

...AND SPRAYS ELI! Eli lets out a strangled yell...

ELI (CONT'D)

AAAAAHHHH!

...and stumbles back, tripping over a small table and crashing to the floor. Denise flicks on the lights and advances on Eli, ready to spray him again:

DENISE

(fierce)

Don't you move or I swear to god...

ELI

(waving her off)

No no...don't...

DENISE

What are you doing in my apartment?!?

ELI

Your son!...I'm...I'm with your son!

Now Denise sees NOAH, fully clothed, standing in the doorway. Denise crosses to him, staring:

DENISE

Noah? What...what are you doing? What happened? Are you ok?

She takes him by the shoulders, searching his face. Noah just gives her a blank look.

DENISE (CONT'D)

(turning on Eli again)

I swear to god, if you put your hands on this boy...

ELI

I didn't do anything! He was in my house! He came in through the dog door and scared the crap out of me! (as an aside) Are my eyes bleeding? Cause they feel like they're bleeding...

DENISE

(to Noah)

You left here? While I was sleeping?

Noah looks at her, then gives a solemn NOD. Then he turns and disappears down the hallway towards his bedroom, leaving Denise, who turns and looks down at the incapacitated Eli, realizing: *whoops*.

INT LIVING-ROOM/APARTMENT- A LITTLE LATER

Eli is pressing a wet cloth to his swollen eyes while Denise watches critically.

DENISE

I mean, you have to understand, a strange man shows up in my house...

ELI

I know, it's ok...

DENISE

I've never even used that Mace before, I didn't even know if it worked...

ELI

Oh, it works. It definitely works. My eyeballs feel like I rolled them in a bowl of broken glass.

Denise shakes her head, looking down towards Noah's bedroom door.

DENISE

That kid's gonna be the death of me.
(quickly) Don't get me wrong, when he's
not freaking out, he's one of the
sweetest kids in the world.

She abruptly stands.

DENISE (CONT'D)

Time to sage. I swear, I've been saging
this house practically every hour.

ELI

Sage?

So that explains that weird smell. Eli looks around. Lots
of hippy dippy stuff. Denise seems pretty eccentric.

DENISE

Yeah, sage. For the bad vibes.
(considering him) You look like you could
use some sage, too.

ELI

I'm good.

Eli glances down the hallway towards Noah's room.

ELI (CONT'D)

Does he talk?

Denise shrugs.

DENISE

He used to. I don't know what's going on.
He's had a ton of diagnoses but nothing
seems to help. (shakes it off) You don't
want to hear this. I'm sure it all sounds
crazy to you...

ELI

I've heard worse.

DENISE

Anyway, I promise he won't come to your
place again. Even if I have to tie him to
the bed. (off Eli's startled look) I'm
kidding. I don't do that. Noah! Come say
you're sorry, please.

No response. The place is eerily quiet.

DENISE (CONT'D)
(suddenly nervous)

Noah?

She turns and hurries down the hall, Eli following.

INT NOAH'S BEDROOM/APARTMENT- NIGHT

They come in. Noah is seated on the floor, drawing furiously.

DENISE

Noah?

Noah FREEZES, not turning around.

DENISE (CONT'D)
(softer)

Sweetie?

Noah slowly and mechanically turns his head to look, not at Denise, but PAST HER TO ELI. Then he holds up THE PICTURE he has been drawing.

Eli reaches a cautious hand for it.

REVEAL: it's A VERY DETAILED DRAWING OF WHAT LOOKS LIKE ELI'S GARDEN, with the ROSES, the BACK DOOR of the brownstone, and the DOG DOOR a black rectangle at the bottom corner...*giving the whole scene a dark energy...*

Eli is stunned.

ELI

Wow. This is my house.

Denise looks closer:

DENISE

Nice. Looks expensive.

But Eli is staring at Noah now:

ELI

(to Noah)

How did you do this?

Noah is engrossed in a toy car and ignores him.

DENISE

It's kind of his thing. Drawing. Pretty impressive, huh?

"Impressive"? This kid is some kind of crazy savant.

ELI
(to Noah)
Thank you.

No response. Eli exits, followed by Denise, and only then does Noah turn his head to watch them go...

EXT APARTMENT BLDG- NIGHT

Eli stands outside the building, drawing in hand, staring up at Noah's window. He's all alone in the dark...in the middle of the night. On a strange street...in front of a stranger's building...eyeballs aching from the Mace...

...and wondering: *HOW IS IT THAT HIS LIFE HAS GOTTEN SO OUT OF HIS CONTROL?*

And for a moment, he swears he can see Noah's face up in the window, staring back down at him...

INT NOAH'S BEDROOM/APARTMENT- NIGHT

Noah watches Eli, tiny down on the street, staring back up at him...then turning and walking away.

Noah watches until Eli has completely disappeared from sight, then turns back to face his darkened room. He shoots nervous looks at all the corners...

...then his bedroom door opens, and Denise enters, blanket and pillow in hand.

DENISE
Hey, buddy. I'm a little lonely. Ok if I sleep in here with you tonight?

Noah nods, relieved.

DENISE (CONT'D)
Ok, get in bed.

Noah climbs in, pulling the covers up close. Denise hands him his teddy bear, then looks him in the eye:

DENISE (CONT'D)
(looking him in the eye)
Noah: you cannot leave this house at night. Or any time at all without me. Do you understand?

Noah just looks at her blankly. Denise sighs, kisses his forehead, then spreads her blanket and lies down next to the bed.

Noah clutches the worn teddy bear to his chest, watching the walls of the room apprehensively.

HE SEEMS TERRIFIED OF SOMETHING THAT IS COMING...

Denise's breath softens into snores. And then...*there is a slight movement up in the corner of the room.*

Noah immediately climbs out of bed and lies down next to the sleeping Denise, snuggling up close to her.

His thumb goes into his mouth and he looks much younger now...so tiny, and vulnerable and SCARED...as he stares up at the corner of the room, unable to look away...

His eyes widen as a DARKNESS creeps out from the corner...and then starts oozing down the wall...

...and then from the other corners as well, the same darkness emerges and works its way towards the floor...

...like TENTACLES emerging from some dark nightmare... invading the room from all directions...and heading straight towards NOAH...

Noah closes his eyes tight, trying not to see it...but THE TENTACLES CREEP CLOSER AND CLOSER...

..until Noah opens his mouth and SCREAMS!!!

INT ELI'S BEDROOM/BROWNSTONE- MORNING

Eli wakes up with a SCREAM! He looks around wildly, but all is normal. *The dream felt so real...*

ELI (O.S.)

Has that ever happened to you?

EXT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PLAZA- DAY

Students swarm across the pavement, backpacks on, cell phones in hand, earbuds in...

PAN UP TO- ELI, framed in an office window, holding a hotdog...

INT JACKSON'S OFFICE/COLUMBIA- DAY

JACKSON (60's, long hair, beard, rock T-shirt) is at his desk, finishing a hotdog smothered in sauerkraut and watching Eli standing at his window.

They are in Jackson's office in the Cultural Studies Dept. Tribal artifacts, tropical plants, and obscure textbooks litter the room...

ELI

Feeling like you're in someone else's dream?

JACKSON

(taking a hit off a vape pen)
Constantly. Like, right now, I feel like I'm a butterfly dreaming I'm a man.

Jackson exhales a thick stream of smoke. The smoke dreamily snakes its way towards Eli, who stares at it.

ELI

They let you smoke that in here?

JACKSON

What? It's medicinal. (re: Eli's hotdog)
You gonna eat that?

Eli tosses it to him, then stares back out the window.

ELI'S POV: down below, students swarm out of classrooms and spread across the quad...

JACKSON (CONT'D)

So, who is this kid, anyway? Client?

ELI

No. He just showed up at my house on his own. Out of nowhere.

ELI'S POV: students blend into each other as they go, hard to differentiate one from the other as they move like a current...

Jackson shrugs and takes a bite of Eli's hotdog.

JACKSON

Maybe you're connected. You know, spiritually. I mean, you say you never met before...

Eli rolls his eyes.

ELI

Ok, don't start with this shit...

ELI'S POV: one student, sprawled on the ground, unmoving, like he landed there like that... with a SPLAT! After a moment, he jumps up, just messing with some friends...

JACKSON

What shit?

ELI

You know what I'm talking about.

JACKSON

Hey. More than half the cultures on this planet believe in some type of spiritual world, some continuity of existence...

ELI

(turning on him)

That's because people will cling to any half-assed theory about a spiritual world in order to avoid facing the truth. There's never been a shred of scientific evidence of life after death. Once people are gone, they're gone.

Long beat as they stare at each other.

JACKSON

Gee, Eli, tell me how you really feel.

ELI

I don't feel anything. I'm in denial, haven't you heard?

JACKSON

I haven't. Joanna won't tell me anything...

ELI

She can't tell you anything...

JACKSON

I know, I know, just kidding.

ELI

Besides there's nothing to tell. It's going nowhere.

Jackson gives him a thoughtful look:

JACKSON

Well, maybe you need something more than therapy.

ELI

Like what?

Jackson gets up from his desk and crosses to Eli, putting his hands on his shoulder and looking him in the eye:

JACKSON

Ayahuascha!

ELI

I have to go.

INT COURTHOUSE/DOWNTOWN- DAY

Eli and GAIL RAMOS (50's, Latina, knows her shit) are walking quickly in step down the crowded hallway, passing policemen, court clerks, regular citizens...

GAIL

Thank you so much for agreeing to this.

ELI

How else was I gonna get you to stop hounding me?

GAIL

Did you check the file?

ELI

A little. You know I like to go in fresh...

Just then, Eli spots a CHILD in the hallway up ahead, skipping around a woman who has her back to us. The child looks so GLEEFUL and full of JOY that Eli has to smile.

But as they get closer, Eli starts to realize: wait...is that...*Noah?!? The kid from last night?!?*

As Eli and Gail approach, the boy turns their way, and IT IS NOAH. HE SEES ELI AND FREEZES, ALL THE JOY DRAINING OUT OF HIM.

GAIL

Here he is! Eli, this is Noah...

Now, Denise turns, starting to smile, then sees Eli:

DENISE

Wait, what?!?

Weird, awkward moment. Gail looks back and forth between all of them:

GAIL

Am I missing something right now?

INT INTERVIEW ROOM/COURTHOUSE- MOMENTS LATER

Eli and Gail are alone, an agitated Eli confronting Gail, who is totally flummoxed.

GAIL

I promise you, Eli, I didn't even know if you were gonna agree, why would I give them your name?!?

ELI

He showed up at my house, Gail. Twice.

Eli paces, frowning, as Gail watches him for a moment.

GAIL

Well, maybe it's a sign...

ELI

Are you kidding me right now?!?

GAIL

Look, Eli, I can't explain how he showed up at your house, ok? But this child has been through 5 foster families in 2 years, he's out of options. The county eval is gonna get him sent straight to state hospital. But what if he could still be helped? What if it's not too late for him?

Despite his resistance, Eli can't help thinking about it:

ELI

What about this foster mom, what's your take on her? She seems a little off. She was "saging" the bad vibes in her apartment.

GAIL

Lots of people believe in sage.

ELI

Do they, though?

GAIL

So she's an eccentric. Look, she's new...
but she was willing and able...and
sometimes it's the fresh foster parents
who are able to turn around the most
difficult cases.

ELI

Just not with this one.

Gail hesitates, but has to admit:

GAIL

No...not with this one.

Gail realizes ELI'S WHEELS ARE STARTING TO TURN:

GAIL (CONT'D)

So you'll do it?

Before Eli can respond, Denise bursts in, in a panic:

DENISE

Is he in here?!?

Eli and Gail look at her blankly.

DENISE (CONT'D)

Noah? (realizing) Dammit!

She rushes out and Eli and Gail quickly follow...

EXT COURTHOUSE- DAY

Gail is reassuring Denise while Eli watches:

GAIL

We'll find him, he can't be far.

Eli pulls Gail aside:

ELI

Is there anything I can do?

GAIL

Thanks, but we've got this. I'll call you
when we find him.

ELI

Ok. Just keep me posted.

Gail nods and Eli takes off...

INT KITCHEN/BROWNSTONE- DAY

Eli enters, crossing to toss his keys on the counter, when SOMETHING OUT THE WINDOW STOPS HIM IN HIS TRACKS.

ELI'S POV THROUGH THE WINDOW:

ALL OF THE FLOWER BEDS HAVE BEEN DESTROYED. Someone dug up the roses and they are strewn everywhere...

ELI

LARRY!

EXT BACK GARDEN/BROWNSTONE- DAY

Eli comes out to survey the damage. He's staring down at the destroyed flowers when he hears the sound of HEAVY BREATHING. He cautiously turns and sees:

NOAH. Covered in dirt. Mechanically pulling up plants.

ELI

(carefully)

Noah?

Noah does not react at all, just continues pulling...

ELI (CONT'D)

(louder)

Noah!

Still nothing. Eli moves into Noah's line of sight...

...and NOAH FREEZES, STARING AT ELI WIDE-EYED. Eli takes in the boy's appearance: he is covered in dirt and scratches...his hands and arms torn up by the rose thorns...

...but ONE PARTICULAR SCRATCH ON THE BOY'S ARM STANDS OUT. Eli reaches a shaky hand towards Noah's arm and gently turns it towards him:

Crisscrossed by other scratches but still clearly legible is the word "ELI" SCRATCHED PROMINENTLY INTO THE BOY'S SKIN.

Eli looks closer and sees another "ELI". And another. And another. Scattered all across the boy's arm...(and now Eli realizes what Noah was trying to carve into the front door):

Eli eli eli eli eli eli eli eli...

And ELI CAN FEEL THE FLOOR OF HIS STOMACH DROP.

INT ELI'S OUTER OFFICE/BROWNSTONE- DAY

Eli is on the phone in his office, keeping one eye on Noah in the therapy room.

ELI
(low, into phone)
They're superficial. He let me bandage
him up. Yup. Ok, see you soon.

He hangs up, then watches Noah through the door...

INT ELI'S INNER OFFICE/BROWNSTONE- DAY

Eli enters.

Noah is on the floor, playing with trains. When he hears Eli come in, he turns to look at him, and, again, a long moment passes while the two of them stare at each other.

ELI
Your foster mom is on her way. She said
it was ok if we talked, is that ok with
you?

Noah turns back to his trains. Eli carefully places his phone down on the table, hitting "RECORD", then approaches Noah, getting down on the floor next to him.

ELI (CONT'D)
Want to see something cool?

He tries the same trick he did with Ruby, taking a block and making it disappear from his hand.

Noah is not impressed. Eli watches him play for a moment, searching for a different approach.

ELI (CONT'D)
Do you like trains?

Noah glances at him. *Ok, good, a response.* Eli follows this topic, trying to get Noah to engage with him:

ELI (CONT'D)
Me, too.

Eli reaches into a basket and starts pulling out more toy trains. Noah checks them out, carefully choosing his favorites.

ELI (CONT'D)

Do you have any toy trains at home?

Noah smiles a little. *Ok, good. An opening...*

ELI (CONT'D)

Noah...you keep coming to my house. Do you know why?

Eli sees Noah's hand hesitate for a moment before it goes back to moving the toy train along the carpet. *Okaaay...*

ELI (CONT'D)

Do you know this place somehow? Or does it remind you of something?

Noah suddenly picks up his train and HURLS it across the room. Eli immediately picks up his own train and HURLS HIS ACROSS THE ROOM, TOO.

Noah looks at Eli, instantly alert. Eli smiles.

ELI (CONT'D)

Flying trains.

This gets a hint of a smile from Noah. He looks around and sees the books. He reaches for one and opens it.

ELI (CONT'D)

My wife wrote that book.

Noah is staring at the pictures, captivated.

ELI (CONT'D)

She is...was ...an artist. Like you.

But Noah suddenly stiffens.

ELI (CONT'D)

What? What is it?

Eli eases closer, trying to get a better look at the picture, which is populated with people, buildings, a small park...and a *tiny pond*.

Trying to see what has Noah's attention...

And then, NOAH LOOKS UP AT ELI AND HIS FACE CHANGES.

ELI (CONT'D)

Noah?

NOAH'S POV: behind Eli, a DARK TENTACLE IS RISING UP...

And then...it's like the room EXPLODES:

NOAH GOING CRAZY, THRASHING, THEN PUMMELING WILDLY AT ELI, ALL CHAOS AND HYSTERIA, AND TOTAL TERROR...

..AND ELI IS TRYING TO HOLD HIM, TO CONTAIN HIS PANICKED ENERGY, BUT THEN IS FALLING BACK, JUST TRYING TO BLOCK THE BLOWS...

And WE FLASH BACK INTO NOAH'S POV and see that the DARK TENTACLES HAVE INVADED THE ROOM AND ARE REACHING TOWARDS NOAH...

And ALL ELI CAN SEE IS THE PURE TERROR ON NOAH'S FACE...

...as a couple tentacles snake up Noah's body and around his neck, like LARGE FINGERS STRANGLING HIM...

...and another tentacle climbs higher, sliding over his chin...

...and FORCING ITS WAY INTO NOAH'S MOUTH, GAGGING HIM AS TEARS STREAM DOWN HIS FACE...

...AND NOAH IS CHOKING NOW, LIKE HE CAN'T BREATHE...his lips turning blue...

...and a panicked Eli is grabbing at him again, pulling him close, trying to figure out what is happening...

...AS A DEEP VOICE COMES OUT OF NOAH, SPEWING SOMETHING IN GIBBERISH...

And then Denise comes RACING in and grabs Noah, wrapping him in her arms, calming him...

DENISE

Oh my god, what happened?!? What's wrong with him? What did you do to him?

Eli has a hand to his nose, blood pouring out of it...

ELI

I don't know what! He couldn't breathe! Something triggered him and he couldn't breathe!

Eli is trying to help, but Denise pushes his off:

DENISE

It's ok, I got this...(commanding, to Noah) Watch me, Noah, watch!

Denise takes deep, exaggerated breaths, forcing Noah to face her, gradually getting him to mirror her and take his own deep breaths...

DENISE (CONT'D)
 (to Noah)
 Sssshhh...ssshhhhh...

Noah gradually calms as they breathe together and Eli watches, wondering:

WHAT THE HELL HAS HE GOTTEN HIMSELF INTO?

INT LIVING-ROOM/BROWNSTONE- AFTERNOON

Eli, sweaty, distraught, cotton in nose, is drinking whiskey as he replays the AUDIO of the session, listening to the gibberish over and over...torturing himself...

...feeling like he has totally TRIGGERED and hurt this poor kid...but also convinced there is a MESSAGE in here somewhere, if only he could figure out what it is.

He picks up the PICTURE NOAH GAVE HIM, and inspects it again. It really is an incredibly accurate portrait of Eli's living-room...and a 6 year old did it by memory?!?

At that exact moment, a SEAGULL slams into the living-room window, SNAPPING ITS NECK and tumbling to the ground, leaving a small imprint of impact on the glass.

Eli steps numbly closer and looks out at the dead bird on the ground below.

SMACK! A hand hits the back of Eli's head and he spins around:

ELI
 Motherfuck...!

LYNN is standing there, dressed in a cream Chanel suit, her hair in a neat bun.

She looks so...NORMAL.

LYNN
 Get it together, Eli.

ELI
 For god's sake, Lynn...

Eli stares at her, a million different emotions whirling around inside him.

LYNN

What?

ELI

Why...

He stops himself, instead taking a long swig from the glass.

LYNN

Why what?

He just shakes his head, unable to say what he really needs to say.

Lynn steps closer and reaches a hand towards his face.

LYNN (CONT'D)

I love you.

Eli's face softens. He really wants to believe this:

ELI

Do you?

LYNN

More than you'll ever know.

She smiles...and a LINE OF BLOOD comes out of her nose.

And a look of intense pain crosses Eli's face.

ELI

I don't think I can take much more of this.

INT NYC'S 14TH ST YMCA/INDOOR POOL- DAY

Bare feet walking to the edge of the diving board...

...squeak...squeak...squeak...

Eli stops at the edge, then cautiously peers down:

THE POOL IS EMPTY.

Eli smiles, happy to have not been fooled, and turns to go back when he is SHOVED off the diving board, goes flailing backwards and...

...he's windmilling desperately as the concrete bottom of the pool comes racing towards his face and...

SPLAT!!!!

JOANNA (O.S.)

Who?

INT THERAPY OFFICE/UNIVERSITY CLINIC- DAY

Eli is pacing restlessly. He looks like he hasn't slept, and his eyes are still a little swollen.

ELI

Who what?

JOANNA

Who shoved you?

ELI

Oh. Well, I didn't see their face...

JOANNA

But you know who it was...right?

He just looks at her, seeing her peaked interest...

FLASH ON- the shove...

...and he immediately tries to back out of it:

ELI

Forget it. It's just a dream.

JOANNA

According to Jung, there is no such thing as "just a dream".

ELI

Yeah, well, according to Freud, there is no such thing as "just a banana".

He raises an eyebrow at Joanna's lunch on her desk, which includes a banana.

JOANNA

(undeterred)

I don't think it's just a dream at all. I think it's one of the most revealing things you've said to me in this room.

This stops Eli, and he gives her a sharp look.

ELI

Oh yeah? How so?

JOANNA

In this dream you keep having, you don't die. You just break every bone in your body. So you can't move. You're stuck. You're a broken, shattered man...

Eli goes very still, waiting.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

...and I think it's because you're unwilling to admit how you feel really about Lynn's suicide. I think you're afraid to even look at it.

Eli stares at Joanna for a long, uncomfortable moment, then grabs his coat and EXITS WITHOUT A WORD...

INT UNIVERSITY LECTURE HALL/COLUMBIA- AFTERNOON

A professor (DRAKE, in a wheelchair) is at the whiteboard, underlining a phrase:

DRAKE

"Colorless green ideas sleep furiously".
What was Chomsky demonstrating here?

He points at someone we can't see and they answer:

VOICE

The difference between grammatical and semantic correctness.

Past the professor, we see ELI'S FACE appear in the door window...

DRAKE

Right, there are two distinct levels of language processing at play here...

Eli suddenly starts POUNDING on the door glass and Drake looks over, startled...

INT UNIVERSITY HALLWAY/COLUMBIA- AFTERNOON

Drake wheels out into the hall, surprised to see Eli:

DRAKE

Eli, what are you doing here?!?
Everything ok?

ELI

Can you listen to this?

Without waiting for an answer, he holds out his phone and plays back THE RECORDING OF NOAH.

DRAKE

Um...what am I listening to?

ELI

A session. This 6 year old kid...I'm trying to figure out what he's saying.

Drake listens closely, but:

DRAKE

Well...it's not in a language I recognize, if that's what you're asking.

Now Drake is taking in Eli's intense demeanor:

DRAKE (CONT'D)

Eli, seriously, are you ok?

ELI

(ignoring this)

But it could be a language, right? How would I find that out?

DRAKE

Well...you'd need a link to a special translator...

ELI

Great, can you get that for me?

Drake stares at him.

DRAKE

I'm sort of in the middle of a lecture right now.

ELI

Of course. Sorry. Later is fine.

DRAKE

Maybe you should go home and lie down.

ELI

Yes. Definitely. Good advice! Just send the link, ok?

He hurries out.

INT BAR- AFTERNOON

Eli is drinking with Jackson and playing back the AUDIO on his phone from the session with Noah...

JACKSON
(in disbelief)
That's a 6 year old boy?

ELI
I mean...it sounds like he's trying to say something, right?

Eli watches Jackson closely. Jackson shrugs.

JACKSON
I don't know, Eli...maybe the kid knows Swahili or something. I don't know, man, I'm not a linguistics expert.

ELI
He doesn't know Swahili, he's 6. And the linguistics expert doesn't know, either.

Eli exhales, exasperated.

Jackson takes in Eli's demeanor: he looks sweaty, tense, agitated. Like a man suffering intestinal distress.

JACKSON
I don't get it. You should be excited, you used to love shit like this.

ELI
Yeah, well...

Eli trails off. Jackson gives him a look.

JACKSON
What?

Eli takes a long swig of his drink, then:

ELI
Remember in grad school, when I wrote that paper about Capgras syndrome?

JACKSON
Of course. I memorized all of your grad school papers, as you know...

ELI

(ignoring this)

It's this disorder where the people closest to you seem to have been replaced by imposters. And sometimes it's not just the people. It's the tree in front of your house. The sidewalk. The sky. All, imposters. But it's really you. You're the imposter. It's a type of dissociation. You suffer a shock to your reality, and suddenly, you're on the outside looking in. (beat) That's me. I'm the imposter.

Jackson frowns.

JACKSON

I don't get it.

ELI

How am I supposed to help anybody...when I couldn't even help my own wife?

Jackson gives his friend a long look. Then:

JACKSON

(gently)

You're not an imposter, Eli. You're still you...you're still in there. You've just got to find a way to bust back out.

Eli just stares at his drink, unconvinced...and his own image stares back at him, wavering and warped...

INT CLASSROOM/ELEMENTARY SCHOOL- AFTERNOON

A bunch of kindergartners are collecting their coats and lunch boxes, scuffling amongst themselves, a noisy, overstimulated bunch ready for naps...

Among them, we discover NOAH, a little separate from the rest, quietly putting on his jacket.

And then...a DARK MOVEMENT from the corner of his eye...

Noah FLINCHES, backing away and bumping into some other kids, dropping his pencil box, which spills open, pencils rolling away.

As Noah reaches down to collect them, he FREEZES as he sees a *DARK TENTACLE SNAKE ITS WAY UP THE WALL...*

Some boys behind Noah are play-wrestling, throwing each other around and making noises...

ON NOAH'S FACE- pale now, his eyes dark bottomless pits as the sounds of the boys fighting blends into...

...MORE TENTACLES, RACING TOWARDS HIM AS THE OTHER BOYS' FACES BECOME DISTORTED WITH RAGE...

...and Noah turns with a strangled yell and LUNGES, STABBING A PENCIL INTO ANOTHER BOY'S NECK...

...and the boy SCREAMS and falls to the ground, BLOOD SPRAYING EVERYWHERE...

...and for a moment, TIME STOPS as Noah stands there, looking down at the boy on the ground while all the other kids stare at Noah, stunned...

...and then all the kids are SCREAMING and RUNNING, leaving Noah standing there alone over his sobbing victim, the BLOODY PENCIL still in Noah's hand...

Calm now, Noah seems to hear the faint sound of SEAGULLS overhead...and he looks up, searching for them, and then his eyes roll back in his head and...

CUT TO BLACK

INT HALLWAY/BROWNSTONE- LATE AFTERNOON

A slightly drunken Eli gets back home, opens the front door...and finds DOG SHIT EVERYWHERE...

He stares at the mess for a long moment...and it suddenly seems that this is the last straw...

He feels a surge of RAGE...

CUT TO:

INT BEDROOM/BROWNSTONE- LATE AFTERNOON

All of Eli's pent-up ANGER suddenly BURSTS THROUGH...and he becomes a whirlwind of destruction, almost JOYFUL in his RAGE as he TRASHES the vanity table...the night tables...the curtains...

INT KITCHEN/BROWNSTONE- LATE AFTERNOON

Eli takes on the kitchen, now, HURLING plates into the wall...

INT LYNN'S OFFICE/BROWNSTONE- LATE AFTERNOON

Eli sweeps everything from the desk onto the floor...and starts STOMPING on it all...crushing it all to pieces...

INT HALLWAY/BROWNSTONE- LATE AFTERNOON

Really on a roll now, Eli barrels into the hallway, sweeping picture frames from the walls...then taking the VASE with the half-dead roses off the hall table, and HURLING it at the front door!

Broken porcelain flies everywhere, and it takes Eli a moment to realize that a THIN SPRAY OF BLOOD has followed the arc of the vase and landed on the glass of the front door...

What the hell...?

Eli looks down at his hand and realizes he has CUT HIS PALM at some point, and is now BLEEDING fairly impressively...

The sight of the blood flowing down his hand stops him in his tracks...

FLASH ON: BLOOD DRIPPING ONTO A WHITE-TILED BATHROOM FLOOR...

Eli stares at his hand, then takes a lurching step towards the bathroom door...

Drip...drip...drip...

Eli cradles his injured hand while staring at the door, filled with dread at the thought of what's inside...but somehow, finally having arrived at the point of no return...

FLASH ON- A HAND FLUNG OVER THE EDGE OF THE TUB, BLOOD DRIPPING FROM THE SLASHED WRIST TO THE GROUND...

DRIP...DRIP...DRIP...as a small pool of blood spreads across the white-tiled bathroom floor...

Eli takes a deep breath, then forces himself into motion, reaching for the door....turning the knob...and THE DOOR SWINGS OPEN...

INT BATHROOM/BROWNSTONE- LATE AFTERNOON

Eli enters.

IT'S A BATHROOM. JUST A NORMAL BATHROOM. NO BLOOD, NOTHING...the room is pristine.

Eli crosses to the EMPTY TUB and stares down into it...then turns on the water and puts his bleeding hand under the faucet.

The water turns pink as it hits the tub and circles the drain...

Eli turns off the faucet and stares at the blood disappearing down the drain...and suddenly, he is sinking to his knees beside the tub, THE WEIGHT OF HIS LOSS HITTING HIM ALL AT ONCE...

He reaches towards the disappearing blood...

ELI
(under his breath)
Don't...(go)...

...but IT IS ALREADY GONE.

Something deep inside Eli is BREAKING, and he fights the feeling, his face contorting with a mix of emotion:

Pain, loss, shock, anger, despair: *SHE'S GONE. SHE'S REALLY GONE.*

And in the middle of this internal struggle...the sound of CLASSICAL MUSIC drifts into the room.

Eli freezes, listening closer. *Where is that music coming from?!?*

INT KITCHEN/BROWNSTONE- LATE AFTERNOON

Eli staggers in, holding his bleeding hand.

And then he realizes: THE MUSIC IS COMING FROM LYNN'S OFFICE.

Eli goes pale. He moves towards the office, suddenly TERRIFIED of what he will find...

INT LYNN'S OFFICE/BROWNSTONE- LATE AFTERNOON

Eli cautiously pushes the office door open...

NOTHING. NO LYNN, no one.

But from the computer on her desk come the sounds of classical music. Eli moves silently closer, afraid to make a sound, afraid to BREATHE.

He sinks into the chair behind the desk, hits a key...and the music STOPS.

SILENCE. And in the silence..."ding!": the soft sound of an email being received.

Eli checks his email...and the LINK is there, along with a message from Drake: "Good luck. And take care of yourself, ok?"

Like a man sleepwalking, Eli pulls out his phone.

He plays back the recording of Noah, feeding the seeming GIBBERISH into the microphone of the laptop and into the program...

The program processes for a long moment: IT IS NOT GETTING ANY HITS.

So it really is gibberish...

Eli is about to get up...

...when the program gets a HIT and a message pops up on the screen: "LANGUAGE: 17TH CENTURY DUTCH."

Eli stops, staring at it in disbelief. He hits a key to get an audio translation, and in one of those TONELESS, ROBOTIC VOICES, WE HEAR WHAT NOAH WAS SAYING:

VOICE

I'm scared...help me, I'm scared!

Stunned, Eli hits it again and we...

FLASH ON: NOAH, his face distorted with panic as he screams gibberish at Eli...

VOICE (CONT'D)

I'm scared...help me, I'm scared!

Eli stares at the computer...mind spinning...

He knew it! He knew this kid was saying something to him!

But...HOW THE HELL DOES A 6 YEAR OLD LIVING IN PRESENT-DAY MANHATTAN KNOW 17TH CENTURY DUTCH!?

ELI

Fuck.

Behind him, he thinks he can hear the faint sounds of LYNN LAUGHING...

BANG BANG BANG!

CUT TO:

EXT HALLWAY/APARTMENT BLDG- EARLY EVENING

Eli, hand sloppily bandaged, is POUNDING on Noah's door. A startled Denise opens the door to find the frantic Eli standing there:

ELI

I have to talk to Noah!

DENISE

He isn't here.

We realize her eyes are swollen from CRYING...and Eli instantly has a bad feeling:

ELI

Why? Where is he? What happened?

Denise just looks at him...

INT HOSPITAL- EARLY EVENING

Pale and shaken, Eli hurries down a hallway lined with posters of smiling faces, rainbows, and puppies, the posters meant to lighten the atmosphere on what is clearly a PEDIATRIC PSYCH WARD...

Eli reaches the reception desk and shows his ID to the nurse:

ELI

I'm here to see a patient. "Noah Sawyer"?

INT BROWNSTONE- EARLY EVENING

Barbara cautiously opens the door, using her own key:

BARBARA
 (calling out)
 Dad? It's me, I thought I'd stop by!
 Brought you some takeout...

And then she suddenly stops in her tracks, horrified, as she sees the TOTAL WRECKAGE OF THE PLACE:

Broken furniture, shattered picture frames...what looks like BLOOD splattered across the walls...

...and the wide-open BATHROOM DOOR. *What happened here?!?*

BARBARA (CONT'D)
 (panicked)
 Oh no...Dad?!? DAD!!!

Meanwhile:

INT HOSPITAL BEDROOM- EARLY EVENING

A small room with one bed, a night-table, and a window that does not open, the lights turned down low.

Eli enters, the nurse trailing, and...THE BED IS EMPTY!

ELI
 Where is he?

NURSE
 (startled)
 I was just checking him a minute ago!
 Godammit...

She hustles out. Eli lingers behind, sensing something in the room. FEELING LIKE HE IS NOT ALONE.

ELI
 Noah?

Nothing. Shadows are thrown across the wall from the streetlights outside, and the sounds from the hallway are muffled, giving Eli the sense that he is underwater...or back in the tent at the party.

Eli moves further into the room, taking it all in. There is a small cabinet in the corner and he crosses to it.

The door is slightly ajar, and Eli reaches out and cautiously pulls it open to REVEAL: NOTHING.

And then he senses something BEHIND HIM...and turns to see: A BARE FOOT PEEKING OUT FROM UNDER THE BED.

Eli gets down on his hands and knees and cautiously peers under the bed. NOAH IS HUDDLED UNDER THERE, THUMB IN MOUTH, EYES WIDE IN TERROR. He looks at Eli mutely.

ELI (CONT'D)
(softly)
It's ok. You're safe, ok?

Eli pulls a small note from his pocket and reads:

ELI (CONT'D)
(in Dutch)
I will help you.

Noah's pupils seem to get darker. Eli reaches out a hand. Long beat. Then Noah takes Eli's hand and Eli helps him to his feet. Still on his knees, Eli holds Noah by the waist, looking at him, eye to eye.

ELI (CONT'D)
What are so scared of? Do you know?

Noah raises a shaky hand...and points to SOMETHING ON THE BED BEHIND HIM.

Eli stands a steps closer to the bed. Crumpled up by the pillow is a PIECE OF DRAWING PAPER and some crayons...

Eli picks up the paper and carefully un-crumples it.

REVEAL: IT'S A DRAWING OF A FARMHOUSE. And not just any farmhouse...

FLASH ON: the farmhouse photo on Eli's fridge...

FLASH ON: the farmhouse photo on Lynn's desk as Eli hits the lights off...and on...and off...and on...

THE PICTURE NOAH HAS DRAWN AND THE PHOTO ARE IDENTICAL.

Eli turns to look at Noah, stunned:

WHAT IS GOING ON?!?

BLACKOUT