

Naomi's Room  
by  
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**EXT. CITY - DAY**

A vista of ancient towers and mosques as reflected in a gleaming modern office block.

Old and new - shimmering tensely together.

Crying gulls lead us across more of this exotic skyline - east and west, past and present - held together by spectacular bridges across a vast churning river.

The city of "Istanbul, Turkey."

The setting sun, seeming impaled on the spikes of the Hagia Sophia building, is a fierce circle whose edges blur and ripple into a consuming haze.

**INT. NAOMI'S BEDROOM - DAY**

The same blood-orange light flooding into a room tipped on its side. Everything is normal except the angle and the strange filter distorting the view. It is -

A bedroom as seen by five-year-old NAOMI as she pulls a sweater over her head, sharpening her view of the room.

She turns at the sound of FAINT SCRATCHING and zeros in on an antique model house resting on a table under a distinctive round window.

The toy house is a massive edifice, handcarved in the style of Turkish Gothic, with a topsy-turvy roof.

She goes over and reaches deep into the front door to click some familiar hidden switch. This snaps open a panel in the roof making the scratching louder.

She scrapes forward a stool and steps onto it - her feet craning onto tip-toes - and peers into the house.

From inside, a small pair of lurid RED EYES gleam back at her.

They belong to a baby mouse - pink-skinned, without hair, almost translucent.

Naomi peers inside unblinking, but friendly.

From down the hall a man's voice calls out her name, but she ignores it.

NAOMI

Here. Wait. I got you something.

She extracts some bread from her pocket and pushes small pieces inside.

MAN'S VOICE

Naomi. Let's go.

**EXT. HALLWAY - DAY**

It is her father, CHARLES HILDERBRAND, passing down the hallway. The decor is equally Turkish, but Charles, like the whole family, is American. He raps on her door, which has a florid, cutesy sign - "Naomi's Room".

CHARLES

We've got people arriving any minute.

He moves on to the next bedroom door.

CHARLES (OS) (CONT'D)

Jessica. How we doing?

**INT. JESSICA'S BEDROOM - DAY**

JESSICA is Naomi's elder sister. She's about 12. Bright and lively, pleasantly self-conscious.

JESSICA

I'm ready, I'm ready.

She's not ready at all.

CHARLES

Sweetheart, we've got guests arriving any minute.

JESSICA

Who? I can't hear anyone.

Right on cue, the doorbell SOUNDS.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Alright. Two minutes.

CHARLES

One.

JESSICA

None!

**INT. PARENTS' BEDROOM - DAY**

Charles's wife LAURA applies the final touches of lipstick in the mirror - her lips a pursed 'O.'

CHARLES  
That's probably the Adivas.

LAURA  
What do you think?

She shows him her outfit.

CHARLES  
You look great.

LAURA  
You're not even looking.

He makes a point to stop and look her over approvingly.

CHARLES  
Oh wait. There's something missing.

LAURA  
What?

He grabs her and kisses her extravagantly.

LAURA (CONT'D)  
Thank you. Very helpful.

**INT. STAIRS/FRONT DOOR - DAY**

As they descend the stairs to the front door, it's Laura's turn to have a sudden thought.

LAURA  
You're not changing?

Charles looks over his jacket and calculatedly loosened tie.

CHARLES  
What for?

LAURA  
Sweetie, it's a house-warming, not a ceramics lecture.

She takes his half-mast tie and removes it. There, that's better.

**INT. LIVING-ROOM - NIGHT**

A rattling array of plates and glasses ascends in semi-darkness, coming to a halt. It turns out to be a dumb waiter.

We follow the tray of glasses as a MAID collects them and ferries them past some traditional Turkish musicians setting up in a corner.

The guests are a sophisticated cosmopolitan crowd, drinking and smoking, including the people Charles will be working with at his new job, like ANDRE and his WIFE.

ANDRE'S WIFE

I still don't see why the college needs to bring someone over from America to re-catalogue its artifacts.

CHARLES

Well, it's not just a warehouse inventory. I have to authenticate everything too.

ANDRE'S WIFE

Ah. So you get to say what's real and what's not.

CHARLES

That's me.

**THE MUSICIANS**

Are now playing background music. Glasses are refilled and the conversations are more animated.

Naomi and Jessica ferry over some dishes from the dumb waiter to the buffet table.

Charles checks to see how Laura is doing and she turns to introduce a couple in their 60s, the ADIVARS.

They say hello, shaking hands.

MRS. ADIVAR

We were just saying, we've lived next door for 30 years and never seen inside.

MR. ADIVAR

No one's lived here before.

CHARLES

I couldn't believe it either. As soon as we stepped inside, I knew we'd take it.

LAURA

Then it turned out we already had a connection with the place.

MRS. ADIVAR

How so?

CHARLES

From the top bedroom, I looked out and realized I could see the park where Laura and I first met.

LAURA

He was doing his postgrad. I was doing my backpack ski tour.  
(making a face)  
Not an auspicious beginning.

CHARLES

She thought I'd never leave and I thought she'd never come back.

This does not get a laugh from Mrs. Adivar.

MRS. ADIVAR

I couldn't move to another country. Not with children.

CHARLES

The job just came up at the right time, that's all.

He looks to Laura for agreement. She nods - a united front. But Mrs. Adivar still radiates disapproval. Mr. Adivar deflates the tension by offering up his glass to say cheers.

MR. ADIVAR

So you've come full circle.  
Sagliginiza!

Charles, we might notice now, only drinks soda water.

THE MUSICIANS

Discreetly pack up, replaced by a hi-fi playing up-tempo modern music at the request of a few tipsy guests who have started to dance.

Naomi joins in as the song enters its crescendo, clapped along by some increasingly tipsy guests looking on.

Jessica, too, cajoles her Dad into joining in. They hold hands moving round in circle. Nothing fancy, just having fun, as the music gets more intense and the guests more boisterous.

**INT. FRONT DOOR - NIGHT**

The aftermath. Guests tumbling home. "Thank you. Great night. See you on Monday."

Charles heads inside to face the mess. A sigh. It could be worse.

**INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT**

He finds the Maid tidying up the kitchen with Laura and Jessica's help.

CHARLES

Well, the early reviews are in. Two thumbs up. Particularly those little things with the... You know...

LAURA

Your new colleagues seem nice.

CHARLES

Really nice.

He starts to help tidy up.

LAURA

You want to make sure Naomi's tucked in. It's our big day tomorrow. We've got an early start.

CHARLES

I thought today was our big day.

JESSICA

Why, what's tomorrow?

LAURA

Christmas shopping.

Charles makes a playful grab for a bottle of half-drunk wine as he leaves.

Jessica takes in her mother's amused reaction. It's something she hasn't seen for a while. Her parents are really happy.

**INT. NAOMI'S ROOM - NIGHT**

The scratch of pencil across paper. Stick figures taking shape. Naomi draws vigorously under her tiny lamp.

Charles waits, holding open her bed covers.

She keeps on drawing very scratchily, humming busily.

CHARLES

Don't mind me.

When she glances at the toy house, we realize she is covering up the sound of something. She swivels noisily on her chair, but not enough to cover the unmistakable sound of SCRATCHING.

Even Charles hears this.

CHARLES (cont'd) (CONT'D)

Naomi. Sweetie.

She casually swivels round: "What?" An unmistakable SQUEAK sounds over her innocent features.

CUT TO:

**THE TOY HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER**

as Charles roots around for the mouse's hiding place. He thinks he's found it. Presses something... But it only makes the front door snap shut.

CHARLES

All right, where is it?

NAOMI

It's in the secret place.

CHARLES

Oh, the secret place. Not the regular place?

(Naomi - not playing along)

Come on, where is it?

She shrugs - palms out.

NAOMI

I told you it's a secret.

CHARLES

Hey. You want to go shopping or not?

NAOMI

We have to go. I've got to get presents for my friends.

CHARLES

Which friends? You haven't started school yet?

She shows him her drawings - three stick children.

NAOMI

They want dolls.

CHARLES

Well, they're not getting anything until you put this friend back outside.

He scoops her into bed.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

First thing tomorrow. That's the deal.

He gives her a goodnight kiss and switches off the light.

NAOMI

You forgot the curtains.

CHARLES

No I didn't.  
(yes he did)

He goes to the window, pausing before he draws the curtains shut - lost in the view for a moment.

She gives a cough.

NAOMI

Don't mind me.

He 'comes to' and leaves, knocking over her little chair in the dark. She goes to complain, "Hey. My chair -" but he playfully yanks the blanket over her head.

**INT. BEDROOM/BATHROOM - NIGHT**

Laura finishes up in the bathroom, drying her face, drying her hands.

She returns to find Charles already in bed.

CHARLES  
How d'you feel?

LAURA  
About tonight?

CHARLES  
Tonight. Settling in. The big move.

She gets in alongside him, taking a moment to consider with immense gravity. Then gives this airy verdict:

LAURA  
*Hmmm... Simdilik her sey iyi.*

CHARLES  
Hey. Me too.  
(beat)  
Meaning?

LAURA  
So far, so good. The girls are already picking up bits of the language, did you hear?

CHARLES  
Quicker than me.

They look around their new bedroom. Even with its unpacked boxes and travel cases, neither one of them can quite believe their luck.

He starts to meddle with her bathrobe.

CHARLES (CONT'D)  
You're not changing?

LAURA  
This is hours of work.

He chases her under the covers as she reaches for the light. Click.

**EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT**

We see their house properly for the first time - in silhouette. It has a familiar shape. More than familiar in fact.

It's identical to Naomi's massive toy house with the same topsy-turvy roof and circular top window.

Their bedroom light goes off as we dissolve nearer to the house... Up the drive to the facade, rising up past -

The front door... Up over the stone walls, centuries old...

Past the upstairs bedroom window, reflecting the city lights down below, and onto the distinctive circular window of Naomi's room - a reflected cityscape of silhouetted towers and mosques.

The peaceful image starts to wobble and vibrate gently seemingly shattered by -

**INT. KITCHEN - DAY**

The CLATTER of dishes and cutlery into the sink. The cheerful chaos of the family clearing up breakfast, getting ready to depart.

Laura squeezes past Charles, full of lingering playful affection, as she moves things along.

Jessica takes her plate to the sink as -

**INT. NAOMI'S ROOM - DAY**

Naomi's own hands are extracting the mouse from the toy house.

**INT. KITCHEN - DAY**

Laura with Charles -

LAURA  
You got everything?

He nods.

LAURA (CONT'D)  
Cash? Phone? Keys?

Charles nods: Yes, dear.

LAURA (CONT'D)  
I'll just get Naomi's stuff, then  
we'll go.

She leaves and he checks his pockets. Cash. Phone. No keys.

CHARLES  
Shit.

Jessica looks up "appalled."

CHARLES (CONT'D)  
You didn't hear that.

He looks for the keys, trying to be systematic about it.

Jessica saves him the trouble. With a little magician's flourish, she lifts up the newspaper. Ta-da. They're underneath.

**INT. HALLWAY - DAY**

Naomi descends the stairs, hands cupped over her mouse.

She threads her way through the family getting ready, clearing up, heading off to find coats etc. - unnoticed - to the back door.

**INT. HALLWAY - DAY**

Laura buttons up her coat, just so. Shouts up the stairs.

LAURA  
Naomi. Brush your teeth. Wash your  
hands. We're going.

**EXT. HOUSE - DAY**

But Naomi is outside. She lays the mouse on the ground. Regards it without expression.

It doesn't move. She lifts the head, but it flops back uselessly.

LAURA (OS)  
Naomi!

**INT. HALLWAY - DAY**

Charles, Jessica and Laura are all ready and waiting, looking up the stairs.

LAURA  
We're ready!

Behind them, Naomi enters from the kitchen, holding out her palms.

NAOMI  
All gone.

**EXT. HOUSE - DAY**

The front door opens. The family emerges excitedly - Laura helping Naomi button up her coat and fix her red mitten. Clearly, this is their little ritual.

She extends her hands so Laura can put on her mittens - just so.

**EXT. RIVER - DAY**

A PROW sharply slices through water. A ferry heading across the river.

**INT. FERRY - DAY**

Naomi watches the receding shoreline intently. Her red mittens discarded and forgotten on the seat.

Some other KIDS throw bread off the side, provoking a huge swooping flurry of GULLS.

Naomi turns back from watching the world go by. Looks innocently up at her parents. One, then the other. Discussing Christmas presents.

LAURA  
What if Jess, you come with me, so we'll get Dad his present first.

CHARLES  
"Presents," plural, surely.

LAURA  
Then we'll meet back up for lunch and switch. Then you go with Dad in the afternoon and get *my* present.  
(pointedly)  
(MORE)

LAURA (CONT'D)  
Just the one. Something simple.  
Nothing lavish for me.

Jessica watches their banter, getting more used to this new era of good humor.

CHARLES  
We'll meet up at 12 under the main clock at the mall?

**EXT. FERRY DOCKS - DAY**

The ferry arrives and docks, chased by crying gulls.

**EXT. DOCK - DAY**

Back on dry land, Laura makes a big deal of kissing Naomi goodbye, sprucing her up.

LAURA  
It's Christmas remember. Make sure Daddy gets you whatever you want.

CHARLES  
Not that we want to spoil you or anything.

LAURA  
(big hugs)  
Oh no such thing.

Charles and Naomi head off, crossing the tram line. Jessica and Laura wave them off. Laura suddenly realizes something.

LAURA (CONT'D)  
Wait.

She holds up Naomi's RED mittens and shouts.

LAURA (CONT'D)  
You forgot your mittens.

NAOMI  
I'm okay.

She demonstrates by tucking her hands up inside her sleeves.  
Charles smiles - "Can't argue with that."

**EXT. SPICE MARKET - DAY**

The bustle of merchants and shoppers intensifies. Baskets piled high with spices of every color imaginable. Rows of food - olives, dates, fish.

Charles and Naomi move through the growing throng, making their way on to -

**EXT. GRAND BAZAAR - DAY**

The high arched entrance to the Grand Bazaar - gateway to another world.

Charles and Naomi move into the covered hallways - some narrow, some wide - stuffed with shops, stores, vendors, merchandise - rugs, plates, jewelry, evil eye bracelets, exotic animals, and, of course, toys.

**INT. TOY STORE - DAY**

A MERCHANT shows off his rows of dancing dolls. Thanks to their cheap crudeness, they're a little creepy up close.

CHARLES

Go on, knock yourself out. Whatever you want. Sky's the limit.

The Merchant understands enough English to see an opportunity. He brings down his fancy dolls too - the imports - from the top shelf.

But Naomi has a very specific idea of what she wants.

Her hands rove over a range of dolls down below - the cheap ones - making very considered selections.

NAOMI

I want one for each of my friends.

CHARLES

As many as you like.

She tugs at the limbs, testing them thoroughly. Quite the connoisseur.

The Merchant failing to hide his disappointment.

**AT THE TILL**

Naomi presents her final choice.

CHARLES  
You're absolutely sure. Those are  
the ones you want?

She nods decisively.

CHARLES (CONT'D)  
Alright, you got it.

He hands them over to be wrapped.

**INT. BAZAAR - DAY**

On they go, through the increasingly teeming corridor, Naomi clutching her own shopping bag.

CHARLES  
Make sure you tell Mom I offered.

They browse trinkets, clothes, lanterns. Nothing else much interests her though.

Not until they find the shadow puppet show. Karagöz and Hacivat - Turkey's answer to Laurel and Hardy - battling it out.

Hacivat, as always, says his pal has "ruined" his cunning scheme. Karagöz, as always, replies: "May my transgressions be forgiven."

A crowd of mostly kids laughs at the antics behind the illuminated screen - not quite getting the subtext of the supporting cast, the drunkard Tuzsuz Deli Bekir and his wine bottle, and the flirtatious siren Nigâr.

Charles stops to watch, too. The sounds of the bazaar get subtly abstract as he gets drawn into the show.

These expertly animated figures darting behind a lit-up screen.

NAOMI

looks up at her father. His low angled profile, suddenly far away, caught up in show.

The hurrying flow of shoppers barely notice as she imperceptibly wanders off into the stream of people, drawn back to a SELLER with the exotic animals.

He has a basket of writhing pink mice, which he feeds to his snake, enjoying the reaction it provokes from all the riveted onlookers.

Charles is oblivious - caught up in the shadow play as a Dragon enters. Its fiery red eyes swooping around behind the screen, terrifying the cowardly drunkard.

Customers wipe the frame. Each time, Naomi is a little further back, a little smaller. Each time it feels like she is going to disappear until -

Charles turns to share Naomi's reaction.

But she's not there. Just customers passing by. He looks left, then right. He turns around confused but she's -

Right next to him. On his other side. Repeating herself more loudly to cut through the rising noise.

NAOMI  
I said, Come on, Dad.

#### **INT. CAVAHIR MALL - DAY**

The muffled quiet of a cavernous 7-floor glass and steel atrium - the city's largest mall.

For some reason, Laura and Jessica both gaze straight upwards, heads tilted right back.

Actually, it's the huge clock face, which covers the whole ceiling. Two massive blue hands click together for 12pm.

Just as Charles and Naomi arrive. Bang on time.

#### **INT. MALL - DAY**

The family heads to the elevator leading up to the food court. Laura trying to peek in Naomi's bag.

LAURA (OS)  
So what did you get? I want to hear  
all about it.

Charles still seems pensively affected by the puppet show, more than feels right.

It's peaceful here. There's space to gather one's thoughts - lots of space.

It takes the 'ping' of the elevator doors starting to close to snap Charles out of it.

He makes a dash and sticks out a foot. The doors snap back.

The family squeeze on and face the front. His little victory smile to Jessica is cut short by a polite cough from behind.

Charles twigs and presses the 'Close door' button. But nothing happens.

He shifts back farther into the elevator. Now the doors can shut, which prompts a long-suffering cheer from among the passengers as -

SUDDENLY AND INEXPLICABLY

Naomi steps back out... Slipping her hand free of Charles' grip as the doors close over

- her face as she gives what looks like a little wave.

The doors SNAP shut and the lift rises noisily. Laura and Charles exchange a look. "What was that about?" It all happens so quickly, despite the moment being stretched out with everyone's reactions.

Charles hits the button for the next floor.

CHARLES

You stay on, I'll go down and get her.

Next to him, a couple of MATRONLY ladies share an indulgent smile. "Kids."

#### **THE ELEVATOR OPENS**

Charles gets out. Hits the button for the other elevator going down, not exactly in the mood for playing hide and seek.

#### **THE ORIGINAL ELEVATOR FLOOR**

He returns and scans the area and its more sedate flow of shoppers. He is mildly irritated now. She must be here somewhere. But the longer he looks, the more his expression changes.

Laura and Jessica emerge from the elevator, wondering what's going on? Charles shrugs. They fan out, widening the search.

Amid the unhurried traffic of affluent oblivious faces.

They speed up, looking everywhere. But there's still no sign of her.

Charles turns into a shocking close-up. So close we can see every detail as the first hint of panic takes over his face.

**EXT. MALL - NIGHT**

Barking, shouts. The RED mittens are waved under the snouts of a pack of German Shepherds. Breath steaming in the night air.

**INT. MALL - NIGHT**

The dogs trawl the now deserted shopping floors, followed by police, staff, Charles, Laura. Jessica.

Their shouts of "Naomi" grow faint. Unanswered.

We pull up and back to show the full scale of the mall - as big and high as a city block.

**INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT**

Naomi's tiny face - now we see it, now we don't. It's the photo in Laura's locket as he fidgets with it.

She sits by the desk of a detective, INSPECTOR BEY, a native in his 40s. He is a breed apart from the regular detectives; more astute, more diplomatic.

BEY  
Eye color?

LAURA  
Green.

He types in the details for the missing person's report.

BEY  
Hair color?

LAURA  
Light brown.

BEY  
Distinguishing marks?

The two hands on the wall clock tick apart, this time to show it is just after midnight.

Charles paces up and down next to Jessica, who's huddled on a bench.

CHARLES

You want me to get a coffee or something? Something to eat?

Waiting around is agony. He has to do *something*. But she just wants to sleep.

A COUPLE OF CLEANERS

head home for the night. Passing some POLICE DOGS noisily barreling through the door.

Charles turns to see. But the dogs are only excited for their dinner. Jessica pulls her coat tighter, exhausted.

CHARLES

Why don't I get you a blanket?

He looks around for someone to ask and gradually he begins to sense something is not quite right. The dogs also seem to sense it. He scans the station as we notice it too.

All the sounds are disappearing...

Laura is making sure Bey gets every little detail down. Probably more than he needs, but her voice trails off.

LAURA

She's really friendly, but she can be a little shy with strangers. (So they have be gentle...)

A busy typist but her keys are falling silent. Conversations, a gesticulating wailing drunk, all gradually without sound.

He pop his ears discreetly, but it has no effect.

Charles sees Bey excuses himself to Laura - "Hold on, one moment" - as he takes a phone call. But it's all silent.

Charles moves to the drinking fountain and gulps it down. That's all we hear - water and him swallowing.

And the monstrous ticking of the clock on the wall: 12:03am.

And the ticking of his own watch: 12:03. And the ticking of the wristwatch on a PASSING MAN's arm, placed on his shoulder, as the man steps round him: 12:03.

MAN

[Excuse me.]

(NOTE: All foreign speech is shown in square brackets, but will appear in subtitles if needed.)

Instead of the man's voice, Charles hears a SQUEAK like a un-oiled hinge and a WHOOSH and then a sickening THUD.

Then just as suddenly, the noise of the station rushes back up.

People, prisoners, are trying to get past him. Normal life. Normal hearing. Detective Bey at his side -

BEY

...I said, We've just got a description that matches your daughter. They're bringing her over now.

**INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT**

They head excitedly out to the car park.

BEY

We got a report from one of the ferry docks. She was on one of the boats going back and forth.

LAURA

Who's she with now?

DETECTIVE

The Harbor Master. Actually, his wife. She wouldn't go with anyone else.

LAURA

Like I said, she can be a little shy.

Charles follows with Jessica, relief bursting through as a police car pulls up.

BEY

Here they come.

A DRIVER and POLICEMAN get out and open the back passenger doors.

Out comes the HARBOR MASTER, then his WIFE who smiles as releases her protective arm around Naomi lost under an oversized hooded coat.

WIFE  
[She fell asleep.]

LAURA  
Oh sweetie, what happened to you?  
Where did you get to?

Naomi sleepily clings to the Woman's waist. Laura crouches down.

LAURA (CONT'D)  
It's okay. No one's mad at you.

The Woman soothes the child and removes the hood.

A feral looking gypsy face peeps out. A girl. Same age. Same hair. But not Naomi.

Laura's face falls.

The Child can't feel like she's done something wrong and blurts out something alarmed: In Turkish.

Disappointment quickly seizes the onlookers. It's so palpable, the Child buries her face into the Harbor Master's Wife, bursting into tears.

HARBOR MASTER  
[But this is the child. Like I told  
you -]

**INT. POLICE CAR - MOVING - NIGHT**

The family in the back seat as Bey and a driver take them home.

**EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT**

The familiar silhouette of the house. The police car pulls to a stop. They get out.

**INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT**

The front door opens. The family enters, followed by Bey.

BEY  
First things first: let's get a  
photograph for the missing persons  
circular.

But only Laura isn't listening. She's moving towards the kitchen, drawn by the sight of Naomi's coat over a chair in the back room.

**INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT**

She touches it to make sure it's real. And it is.

She scans the room, putting two and two together, and tests the back door nearby. It's unlocked.

LAURA  
She came home.

She hurries back to the stairs, giving the coat to Bey as proof.

LAURA (CONT'D)  
Naomi. She's here.

She starts up the stairs.

LAURA (CONT'D)  
Honey!

Jessica follows, Bey too. Every one, that is, except Charles, who is moving into the other room.

**INT - LIVING-ROOM - NIGHT**

It is very softly lit. Just a small lamp. But an angle of spilled light leads to something...

... Under a bureau. Easily missed. Just a paper shopping bag. Just like Naomi's from the store.

Charles drifts through the partition doors as everyone disappears upstairs.

LAURA (OS)  
Naomi! We're home!

He reaches the bureau and uses his foot to inch the bag into view.

It's definitely the bag. There are the dolls they bought.

Charles already knows it's wrong. He staggers back. His hands hit the wall to steady himself as -

Laura's voice changes when she doesn't find Naomi in her room.

LAURA (OS) (CONT'D)

Naomi!

Charles's hands explore the wall behind him and the most awful thought hits him.

He turns to face what his hands are feeling -

The dumb waiter hatch.

LAURA (OS) (CONT'D)

Naomi!

### **ABSOLUTE DARKNESS**

Up high, a thin band of light appears. It widens vertically to show we are looking up from the bottom of a brick shaft.

The thin band becomes a square of light into which Charles pokes his head. He peers down at a dark round shape in the foreground.

Charles opens the hatch wider, sending in more light so we can make out the murky shape.

It is Naomi's head face down in a puddle. An elbow sticks spastically upwards behind it.

Water drops plink down, rippling shadows over her face.

Charles runs for help, unblocking the hatch. A full square of light shines down. A split-second flash of Naomi's features.

Her eyes wide open beneath the red-streaked water - serene, smiling even, as -

ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE

### **EXT. HOUSE - DAY**

Detectives, forensics, policemen hurrying about in the cold dawn. Laura in the throes of an awesome hysteria trying to block -

Two CORONERS carrying the tiny white body bag to a waiting van. The body bag is locked with a padlock and a sealed form for the morgue officials.

CORONER

[It's the regulation. She can't ride in the van.]

Laura grabs the van door in a frenzy, not understanding. Charles barely able to restrain her, Jessica lost in the chaos.

Curious, shocked FACES gather to watch as grief and frustration boil over. Her howls of grief are so painful, the detectives and drivers have to look away.

**INT. MORGUE - DAY**

The airless gloom of the waiting room.

The family sits, fidgets, paces up and down. Completely in shock and disbelief.

An OFFICIAL passes outside the ribbed glass and both parents pounce.

LAURA/CHARLES

What's going on?/What's  
happening?/Where's Detective  
Bey?/When can we see her?

The Official looks distinctly uncomfortable as -

**INT. MORGUE - NIGHT**

Latex gloved hands unzip a large evidence bag and remove a strip of iron covered in blood-flecked sewage.

Bey watches as the Mortician sprays off the muck to reveal the iron strip is about 2ft long and flat like a sword.

MORTICIAN

[This is what you found in the  
shaft?]

BEY

[Right where she landed.]

Bey draws a little diagram to show the iron strip bisecting the shaft.

BEY (CONT'D)

[It was like a brace between the  
pulley struts.]

MORTICIAN

[How deep was the drop?]

BEY

[I'd say, about fourteen feet.]

The Mortician takes his latex-covered thumb and runs it lightly along the edge of the cleaned up iron strip. A test to see how sharp it is.

The taut rubber splits open instantly.

**INT. MORGUE WAITING ROOM - NIGHT**

The Mortician enters to collect Charles from the waiting-room, but only Charles.

LAURA  
Why can't I see her?

Bey intervenes gently but firmly.

BEY  
We need to talk to your husband first.

LAURA  
I want to see her.

BEY  
And you will. When we have all the details.

LAURA  
I want to see her NOW.

BEY  
Mrs. Hilderbrand. We need you to wait here. With your daughter.

He means her other daughter, Jessica, watching from the chair terrified.

**INT. MORGUE HALLWAY - NIGHT**

The Mortician leads Charles until they stop at a set of swing doors. Bey steadies Charles for the ordeal ahead.

BEY  
It is for you to decide if your wife should see this.

Charles steels himself. Only to find he can't take the first step. The Mortician has to ease him gently forward.

MORTICIAN  
Please.

In they go.

**INT. MORGUE - NIGHT**

A gauzy darkness gives way as a sheet is pulled away revealing the Mortician and Charles standing over us.

The Mortician waits as Charles finally finds the strength to look down.

His daughter lies there: cold, stark, serene. Barely five years old.

The two men stand by a row of sheeted bodies. All six feet long apart from this one.

MORTICIAN

Don't be alarmed if you think you see her move. It's quite common.

We push in on Naomi's blue-white features - Charles staring at her face, willing her to come to life.

But of course she doesn't. He puts a hand to his face, seemingly finished.

The Mortician lifts the sheet back but Charles suddenly grabs the man's wrist. Makes him pull the sheet back down. All the way -

Over her shoulders.

Over her torso.

All the way down over her waist.

Charles's gaze follows until revulsion floods his face.

Images from the day before assail him: Naomi tucking her hands up her sleeve... Her red mittens... Her hand slipping free of his... Her waving hand as the lift door snaps shut -

He drops the sheet and staggers back into a trolley. A metal bowl CLANGS to the floor.

CHARLES

Oh my God -

He collapses and we see a flash of Naomi's corpse. Her hands have been cut clean off.

**EXT. STREET - DAY**

A bunch of kids make their way to school under a leaden sky.

A new neighborhood. Modern. Geometric. Functional. Home is now the sixth floor of a high rise apartment block with security cameras and a doorman.

"Six Months Later."

**INT. KITCHEN - DAY**

We find the family is at the breakfast table. Just the three places now.

The decor and furniture are equally nondescript. The kind of place you move into in a hurry.

LAURA

Jess?

Jessica doesn't look up from her book.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Jessica? You hear that? I'm picking you up today. About 5.30.

This means Jessica will have to wait - again.

JESSICA

Why can't I just get the bus? I'll make sure I'm with someone.

LAURA

I prefer you to come home with one of us. I'm sorry. I do.

Jessica dumps her breakfast, barely touched, and heads out.

Charles doesn't agree with Laura but he doesn't press it.

Another day in the new house.

**INT. UNIVERSITY - DAY**

At least he has his work.

Charles goes through various artifacts, checking them off against a list. He works with his team - seen at the opening party. He is no frills, but they respect.

One PRETTY YOUNG WOMAN even has a bit of crush. But he shies away from her glance.

**INT. UNIVERSITY - DAY**

A MAILROOM BOY pushes a card, delivering the post. Some routine bills and memos etc. for Charles. Also a handwritten envelope addressed to him - with no stamp.

There is something about the jagged penmanship that makes Charles open it immediately.

But instead of the usual crank letters, he finds a map of Istanbul with a cluster of red dots forming a rough circle over one part of the city.

**INT. CHARLES' OFFICE - DAY**

Charles waits while ANDRE, his colleague from the opening party, unfolds the map and attached note.

ANDRE

I thought all the crank letters and calls had stopped.

CHARLES

They had. This is new. New handwriting anyway.

Andre reads the note, his face betraying some uneasiness.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

What does it say?

ANDRE

It says every dot is a children who died suddenly... "that I know of."

Charles screws it up and tosses it into the trash.

**EXT. COLLEGE - DAY**

The colleagues the old limestone building, heading out for lunch. Charles declines, veering away on his own.

**INT. CAFE - DAY**

A bustle of coffee-making and cigarette smoke. Charles sits in a booth at the back - a regular spot for him, judging by the way the WAITER serves him.

SONIA  
Professor Hilderbrand?

CHARLES  
Yes?

He looks up to find an ELDERLY WOMAN by his table.

SONIA  
My name is Sonia Debelka.

CHARLES  
Yes?

SONIA  
I tell you my name because I am a  
serious person.

He doesn't recognize her.

SONIA (CONT'D)  
I have to talk to you about your  
daughter.

CHARLES  
Wait, you're not from the press,  
are you?

SONIA  
- No. -

CHARLES  
Because I've got nothing to say.

SONIA  
No.

There is a heavy agonized pause as she searches for the right words.

SONIA (CONT'D)  
I know what you are feeling.

CHARLES  
You can't have any idea -

SONIA  
I know because I lost a child, too.

She speaks so simply Charles can't help reassessing her.

The drab pathos of her coat, her wrinkled haunted face,  
fiercely lined from a lifetime of insomniac horror. The  
fingernails on her gnarled hands chewed to nothing.

Her hands give an involuntary movement.

SONIA (CONT'D)  
The same way as you.

**INT. CHARLES OFFICE - DAY**

She unfolds an old newspaper story and hands it to Charles. It has a photo of a boy - her son. A boy who died after catching his hands in a threshing machine.

They have repaired to the privacy of his office. From her bag, she removes a large worn manila envelope.

It is stuffed with yet more newspaper clippings, obsessively preserved and ordered in clumps with rubber bands. She starts laying them out, covering his work surfaces.

SONIA  
I come to you because you're a professor. They will listen to you.

Charles surveys her clippings:

A child who was hit into a bus. A child who drowned. A child who fell onto a set of railings. A child who was electrocuted. An orphanage burned to the ground...

Death after death after death.

SONIA (CONT'D)  
None of these are accidents.

She circles a finger over her evidence.

SONIA (CONT'D)  
This is the work of something inhuman -

Charles is already wondering if letting her in was a mistake.

SONIA (CONT'D)  
Something evil.

She looks in him in the eye.

SONIA (CONT'D)  
The closer I get to death, the more clearly I see it. I think you see it too.

CHARLES

Look. I'm sorry for your loss. I am. But these are random tragedies - accidents.

SONIA

This is the work of a spirit -

CHARLES

No, my daughter's death was an accident. She fell. She put out her hands to break the fall and -

Sonia CLASPS his wrists with her gnarled bitten-down hands, as if divining for some special power in him.

SONIA

You found her body, yes?

She tightens her grip - her bony hands are eerily strong.

CHARLES

So?

SONIA

How did you know where to look?

He can't answer this and she knows it. Her piercing eyes burn into his.

SONIA (CONT'D)

Something told you, didn't it.

He pulls away, but she clasps his hands tighter, rattling his coffee cup, spilling it.

SONIA (CONT'D)

Something you can't explain.

Her strength is alarming.

SONIA (CONT'D)

These are not accidents. Your daughter's death was not an accident -

He pulls free emphatically - more violently perhaps than he intended - scattering her papers everywhere, knocking over a chair.

SONIA (CONT'D)

This is a cursed place. You have to know that.

CHARLES  
(heading out)  
Alright, that's it. I'm getting  
security.

She looks lost and panicked - helpless. She was so sure he'd understand.

**INT. UNIVERSITY HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER**

A SECURITY GUARD accompanies Charles back to his office.

CHARLES  
Let's sort this out without making  
a scene.

But when they get to his office. There is no sign of Sonia.  
Just a tell-tale fire exit door left ajar.

And the flurry of hastily dropped clippings - death after  
death after death.

**INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT**

The pulsing red digits of the bedside clock. Charles lies in  
bed unable to sleep, Laura curled up away from him.

When he catches himself absently rubbing the inside of his  
wrists - where Sonia gripped him - he realizes sleep is out  
of the question.

**INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT**

He gets a bottle of water from the fridge, throwing light  
over the photos of Naomi, watching from the far wall.

He gulps it down, surprised at how dehydrated he is.

As he drinks, a strange light suddenly refracts and flickers  
through the glass.

He twists the bottle, trying to recreate the effect.

Is it coming from the outside? He switches off the light, so  
he can see out the window.

All is dark. Just the distant view of the city bridge.

Until in the distance, a pair of headlights comes over the  
hill.

As they dip and reappear, then swing round a bend and send a wash of reflected light across the ceiling, which reflects off the dangling pots and pans and in turn hits the bottle in his hand.

A quick, but definite flicker of refracted light.

Satisfied, he switches the room light back on and finds -

A TURKISH GIRL

Right in front of him.

CHARLES

Jesus Chr-!

This spectral face, staring right at him, lifeless, blue-white. As stark and solid as day.

The bottle smashes on the tiled floor. A wash of shards spreading around his bare feet.

When he looks back, the Girl is already halfway out the door.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Wait.

Charles moves after her, but glass shards plunge into his bare feet, forcing him to pull up in agony.

By the time he gets to the hall, it's empty and silent. No sign of anything unusual except the blood he is smearing on the floor.

#### **INT. KITCHEN - DAY**

Sunlight and silence. And Jessica picking at her breakfast. Laura enters, pausing over the blood stains on the floor. Two dark red spots like a pair of eyes.

And the scattering of glass pieces, hastily swept to one side.

JESSICA

I didn't do it.

#### **INT. CAR - DAY**

A leafy street. Charles sits in his parked car, deep in thought, watching something across the road. It is, we now see, their old house

On the passenger seat next to him are Sonia's mass of clippings, gathered together in their tattered envelopes.

He has kept one unfolded: the girl who suffocated in an abandoned refrigerator.

Up close, she looks eerily similar to the one he saw the previous night.

**EXT. STREET - DAY**

The old house is now all lit up. A police car turns into the driveway and pulls to a stop.

As the sound filters up, it becomes clear Charles is thinking back to the night Naomi died.

STATION MASTER (VO)  
She wouldn't speak to me. I think  
my uniform scared her.

LAURA (VO)  
She can be a little shy with  
strangers sometimes.

STATION MASTER (VO)  
That's why I got my wife to come  
take her home.

Charles watches the Patrol Man knock on his old front door, accompanied by the Station Master's Wife and the small, hooded Girl.

The door opens and a glare of light leads him into -

**INT. OLD HOUSE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)**

His own flashback. Charles, once again, finds his way to Naomi's shopping bag under the bureau in the living-room.

LAURA (OS)  
Oh sweetie, what happened to you?  
Where did you get to? ... It's  
okay. No one's mad at you.

He leans against the wall knowing what he's seeing in the other room is all wrong.

STATION MASTER (OS)  
But this is the child. The one I  
found. Like I told you -

Charles looks round to see what his hands were feeling. We are much closer this time, so we see every thought cross his face as something tells him to open the hatch.

SONIA (VO)

So how did you know where to look?

He recalls hearing the SQUEAKING hinge at the police station. And the time on the three clocks: 2.17, 2.17, 2.17 ... The time of her death.

And then he's back in the living-room on the fateful night, making the same noise, as he opens the SQUEAKING hatch and peers in, somehow knowing to expect the worse.

**EXT. STREET - DAY**

Back in the present, his old house sits in thin sunlight. Deserted. Locked up.

SONIA (VO)

Something told you, didn't it.

Charles starts the car and drives off, chased by her words -

SONIA (VO) (CONT'D)

Something you can't explain...

**INT. DEN - NIGHT**

Items are pulled out one by one - toys, clothes, books.

Charles is going through a chest of Naomi's lovingly kept things. Half in remembrance, half in the hope of finding a clue.

He looks over the sign to Naomi's old bedroom. He flicks through her drawing book. Unremarkable pages of stick men and flowers. Then blank pages.

Charles gets to the last drawing Naomi did. But it's a meaningless mess of squiggles roughly forming a circle.

JESSICA

Has noticed him from the hall. She watches quietly. The perfect sister she'll never replace.

He moves onto Naomi's clothes. The pockets of the coat she wore on her last day, but they're all empty. And of course her red mittens.

The only thing left is the brown shopping bag. The three doll she bought, still in their wrapping.

His mind flashes back to Naomi testing their limbs at the bazaar...

Charles opens her book again and finds her stick figure drawings. The one of Naomi with her "three friends."

He studies it more closely. This time, he notices none of them has any hands. Feet - but no hands.

LAURA (VO)

Honey?

**INT. DEN - MORNING**

Laura's blurred shape hovers over us in the early light.

LAURA

Honey?

He blinks awake in his chair as she opens the curtains. He has spent the night in a chair with a blanket, watching the spot where the girl appeared the night before.

But everything is normal. Nobody came. The girl did not return.

LAURA (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

How can he begin to explain honestly?

CHARLES

I couldn't sleep.

LAURA

I thought we were going to go over vacation ideas.

She puts down a couple of ski resort brochures.

CHARLES

I'm sorry. I got caught up with work.

She notices the trunk of Naomi's stuff still open. "That's work?"

She puts Naomi's things back in the trunk - just so - and shuts the lid.

LAURA

Come on. We're supposed to be moving forwards.

**INT. CAR - MOVING - DAY**

The noisy ill-tempered crawl of Istanbul's daily gridlock. Charles' distant profile, preoccupied with his own thoughts, as he drives Jessica to school.

Up ahead, two red traffic lights glare harshly in the stark morning shadow.

**INT. AMERICAN SCHOOL - DAY**

They turn into the school driveway, which circles around a large tree, and stop. A swam of smartly dressed children converge on the entrance. To Charles, everyone of them is a potential ghost now.

Jessica stares at her feet, unable or unwilling to move. He is so distracted, he doesn't notice. Finally -

JESSICA

I miss her too you know.

It takes Charles a moment to process the intensity of what she's feeling. Too long really.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

You know Naomi and me had a secret plan for when you and Mom didn't get on. We used to walk in front of you and hold hands. We figured you'd see us and want to be close too.

She desperately wants some reassurance from him, but his own emotions are in freefall too.

Outside, this babble of children. Inside, the heavy silence of clogged grief.

All he can see are these children closing in on him - getting louder and more unsettling. Giving him strange glances. Demanding his attention. Especially one GIRL who comes right up close to the window -

GIRL

[You're not looking! You're not looking!]

She turns to show off her handiwork. A pair of scissors plunged into her neck. Just like the story in one of Sonia's clippings.

Spurting blood all over the windscreen.

**INT. BAR - DAY**

A dark smoke-laced bar. Charles enters and sits on a bar stool, avoiding his reflection in the mirror.

The BARMAN automatically places a glass of beer in front of him.

Charles looks around the murky room. Nobody here knows his history. Nobody knows to stop him.

So suddenly the glass is half empty and his day is bearable.

A bottle of spirits is ferried over to a table of guys well on the way to boisterous oblivion.

Charles watches them forgetting their troubles happily. If they can do it, why can't he?

He gulps his drink and slams the glass down. A circle that turns into -

**EXT. STREET - DAY**

A bottle cap, being spun loose. Charles is in his car clutching a bottle of spirits wrapped in brown paper. He takes a HUGE swig.

He is about to swallow, when he catches his face in the rearview mirror.

He turns away, and shuts his eye but it doesn't help. He sits there, mouth full, a man teetering on the precipice.

Until, finally, finally, he spits it out the window. It looks plain uncouth to a passer-by. Charles doesn't even notice. All he knows is that he has to get help and fast.

His heart is thumping. Sweat dots his brow. He starts up the car and pulls away.

**INT. CAR MOVING - DAY**

The open bottle, he realizes, is still in his hand. It's as if someone else put it there.

He spots a trash can on the opposite side, goes to turn but can't. The light is red. He waits. His indicator clicking. Telling himself to stay calm.

The light goes green. He swings a U-turn and heads back to the trash car when out of nowhere -

A RED-HAIRED GIRL

runs RIGHT into his path. He slams on the brakes, but it's hopeless.

He hits her full on, SLAMMING her out of sight and under the car.

The sickening THUD of impact. The terrible double-jolt of instant death under the wheels

**EXT. STREET - DAY**

The car SCREECHES to a halt with the WRENCHING of metal as his side-view mirror is RIPPED off against a parked car.

The bottle flies loose SMASHING against the side window - an explosion of glass and booze.

**INT. CAR - DAY**

Fat red droplets slowly come into focus - dripping from the steering wheel.

Charles' knuckles slowly release the wheel and wipe his dazed face flecked with blood and booze.

His hearing is muffled - distant shouts, hurrying footsteps. Murderously harsh sunlight hurting his eyes.

He slowly remembers there was a girl involved.

CHARLES

Oh God, no ...

**EXT. STREET - DAY**

He gets out and runs back to the point of collision.

But the body is not there. Not under the car. Not even between the nearby parked cars.

Onlookers inch closer, baffled by his actions as he looks around.

Didn't anyone see the child?

CHARLES  
You didn't see that?

See what? The dog? A dog is YELPING, running free, with no owner in sight.

The OWNER of the car that Charles hit, inspects the damage - his sense of violation building as he smells the booze.

OWNER  
Hey!

Charles runs past him, back to his own car and checks the front grille.

There are no dents on the front bumper, no scratches, nothing. Just a telltale reflection of a building above him.

Charles stares up at the unmistakable icon of the Galatea Tower - just like in the clipping.

OWNER (CONT'D)  
[I said, Hey!]

ON-LOOKER  
[You want us to call 112?]

The irate Owner sees the bottle label amid the blood and shattered glass.

OWNER  
[Screw the ambulance. You call the police.]

**INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT**

Laura makes her way to a reception desk.

Steeling herself for what she will find. And for what she will have to say.

**EXT. HOSPITAL CARPARK - NIGHT**

They walk to her car. Charles is bandaged up - his cuts all treated.

They get in, but she doesn't start the engine just yet.

**INT. CAR - NIGHT**

She has something to clear up first.

LAURA

The police said you swerved to avoid a dog.

It's the official story now, so he doesn't disagree.

LAURA (CONT'D)

They also said they had to breathalyze you.

CHARLES

It's standard procedure.

LAURA

Only if you've been in a bar.

She looks across at him, trying to contain her feelings.

CHARLES

I wasn't drunk. I'd had one beer. One.

The windows have begun to mist up, shutting out the rest of the world. Just their breathing and the rustle of their overcoats.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Today was the first time, I swear it.

LAURA

They said the car was *drenched* in alcohol.

CHARLES

I bought a bottle of spirits. But I was looking for a trash can to dump it. I did a U-turn. I skidded. It smashed all over me.

It sounds ridiculous.

LAURA

Don't make me drag this out of you.

CHARLES

I took a swig. I admit it. It was in my mouth. But I didn't do it. I spit it out.

There. He said it. The truth.

He looks her in the eye, facing up to the depth of her sense of betrayal.

**INT. JESSICA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Jessica gets into bed.

JESSICA  
Is he okay?

LAURA  
He's fine. It was just a dent.

Jessica knows not to push it. Laura says goodnight. Closes her bedroom door.

Jessica sits in her bed. Feeling lonely.

**INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT**

Laura finds Charles at the table, fully expecting her next announcement:

LAURA  
You know the agreement.

He certainly does.

LAURA (CONT'D)  
We said, if you ever slipped, you'd have 24 hours to get help, or -

She steels herself to do something she's never done before - give him an ultimatum.

LAURA (CONT'D)  
You'd have to leave.

He holds up a business card for a psychiatrist, Dr. Ayshe.

CHARLES  
I already got a number from the hospital.

But it's not enough to quell her anger.

LAURA  
I don't understand. You know you can't drink.  
(MORE)

LAURA (CONT'D)

You know what it cost us before.  
You know it doesn't solve anything.

She's unable to contain her anger.

LAURA (CONT'D)

What makes your day so much harder  
than mine?

She looks him in the eye. She genuinely wants to know. But how can he begin to tell her without sounding insane?

**INT. CHARLES' DEN - NIGHT**

He quietly shuts the door and uncovers Sonia's newspaper clippings.

Specifically the story of the girl who fell from the town tower. A photo of the Galatea Tower is marked with the girl's fall.

Charles unfolds the clipping to find the girl's photograph. He angles his desk lamp for a clearer look. There is no doubt about it, this time.

She is identical to the girl Charles hit.

**INT. PSYCHIATRIST'S OFFICE - DAY**

A worldly woman in her 50s studies pages of notes. This is DR. AYSHE, the name on Charles's business card.

Charles sits opposite, a little like a defendant awaiting a jury's verdict on his testimony. Sonia's bag and its contents are even laid out like exhibit A.

Finally, just when he starts to look around -

DR. AYSHE

How many of these strange children  
have you seen altogether?

CHARLES

Two. That I'm sure of.

DR. AYSHE

And the premonitions?

CHARLES

One. The time in the police  
station.

(MORE)

CHARLES (CONT'D)  
 But I hear other things a lot,  
 strange noises, ambient echoes that  
 don't make sense.

DR. AYSHE  
 Not yet, anyway.

She lifts her head, gives him a look. It is impossible to tell if she is joking.

DR. AYSHE (CONT'D)  
 And you think your experiences are  
 connected with whatever 'force' is  
 causing all these deaths?

She indicates the array of clippings he has laid out for her.

DR. AYSHE (CONT'D)  
 "Lamia."

CHARLES  
 I'm not saying I believe it. I look  
 at it logically and I know it's  
 completely crazy.

He rubs his face, his eyes hollowed out from lack of sleep.

CHARLES (CONT'D)  
 But trying to ignore it feels more  
 crazy.

Dr. Ayshe squeezes some lemon in a glass of tea. He might as well be talking about the flu.

DR. AYSHE  
 Well, for the logical mind,  
 supernatural experiences can be  
 very challenging. If you're wrong,  
 you're crazy. And if you're right,  
 you're doomed.

She resumes looking over her notes.

CHARLES  
 (not wanting to press the  
 issue or anything -)  
 So which one am I?

DR. AYSHE  
 Neither.

She takes a suck on her lemon, without even a wince. Charles looks at her like she's the crazy one, an irony which she is not averse to enjoying.

DR. AYSHE (CONT'D)

What you're experiencing is a perfectly natural stage of grief. What we call the Affective Phase.

She puts aside her notes now; this is all textbook stuff.

DR. AYSHE (CONT'D)

When the pain of losing a loved one becomes too great, people often suppress their feelings. In the case of a sudden, seemingly senseless death, even more so. In place of their grief, these people create a new world for themselves. They can do it with drink or drugs. They can regress into childhood fantasies or obsessive behavior.  
Or -

She gestures to show this means Charles.

DR. AYSHE (CONT'D)

They can construct a parallel universe with its own rules. A new world that is able to make sense of their tragedy - like a supernatural one.

Charles

I didn't construct this woman Sonia Debelka.

DR. AYSHE

No -

CHARLES

And I didn't construct these children. These deaths are all documented -

DR. AYSHE

As you've shown me, but your subconscious is ingeniously fusing them together to supply the meaning you need.

She pauses.

DR. AYSHE (CONT'D)

None of these children you see are boys. All of them are girls.

She finds that very revealing. Does Charles? She flips back a page to check a detail.

DR. AYSHE (CONT'D)

This woman who contacted you -  
"Sonia Debelka." What did she do  
apart from read about Naomi in the  
paper?

CHARLES

She lost a child with identical  
wounds.

DR. AYSHE

So this is a woman who has spent  
her entire adult life collecting  
local newspaper clippings searching  
for her *own* explanation. That's -  
what? - 50 years spent looking for  
someone who matches up until she  
finds you. I call that an  
acceptable coincidence.

CHARLES

But how could she know I would see  
these children?

DR. AYSHE

You only saw these apparitions  
after she'd told you about them.

CHARLES

But the girl I hit in the road -  
she was identical to the one in the  
newspaper.

DR. AYSHE

Which you had already seen!

He leaps from his chair and leans his forehead against the  
cool glass of the window, staring out over the city.

CHARLES

Then why does it feel so real?

She waits until he turns round before replying.

DR. AYSHE

Because you want it to.

**INT. DR. AYSHE'S OFFICE - DAY**

Charles leaves her office, clutching the box of clippings.  
That was not what he wanted to hear.

DR. AYSHE (VO)

The more terrifying you can make  
the world, the bigger excuse you  
give yourself to drink.

**INT. CAR - DAY**

He throws Sonia's envelope onto the front seat, spilling the  
contents, slamming his dented door.

He is tired, indignant, frustrated.

And now he will be humiliated.

A piece of paper is peeping from the inside of Sonia's  
envelope. It is a brighter shade of white because it is not a  
clipping, but a prescription.

He unfolds it and reads the patient's name:

*"Sonia Debelka."*

And her dosage:

*"Pedakin Reskalith-HF 900mg ... Effexin 20mg ..."*

**INT. PHARMACY - DAY**

A white-coated DRUGGIST looks over the prescription.

DRUGGIST

Reskalith is a brand of lithium  
orotate. It's a mix of  
anticonvulsants and emotional  
stabilizers.

CHARLES

Like an anti-depressant?

To put it mildly.

DRUGGIST

At these dosages it's more likely  
to be used to treat a severe mental  
disorder. Something like acute  
bipolar or schizo-affective  
syndrome.

## CHARLES

In other words, you mean someone  
who's crazy.

It is not the terminology he would use, but the Druggist  
shrugs, Yes.

**EXT. PARK - DAY**

Charles walks slowly back to the office. Overtaken by a group  
of CHILDREN on some school trip.

Happy, normal children swarming around him. No ghosts, no  
stark white faces, no howls of agony. The way the world is  
supposed to be. One KID smiles at him.

Two more are even marching in front of him, holding hands.

Charles can't help it. He feels like a fool.

**INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT**

Charles feeds all the papers and clippings - all his mania -  
into an incinerator. Pouring on lighter fluid. Setting it  
alight.

He makes sure everything get consumed by the flames, even  
Sonia's bag. Sparks crackle and pop, forcing him to step  
back.

The roaring flames have a soothing, almost hypnotic effect on  
him. Long after the last clipping has curled to nothing, his  
eyes are transfixed by the flames.

His gaze pushing deeper into the ROARING fire as it dissolves  
to -

**EXT. SKI RESORT - DAY**

Pure white snow.

Jessica, Laura and Charles take a ski-lift up to the top -  
the family's long planned vacation.

It's a world away from the city - clear blue sky stretching  
out across mountains - above it all.

**EXT. SLOPE - DAY**

Jessica snaps in her skis and sets off down the slope with real abandon. Chased by Laura - whooping with joy. It's like they've never seen the snow before.

Charles follows - a little more tentatively, but only at first.

He skis faster and faster, the wind pummelling his face. It's a huge release for all of them.

**EXT. WINTER RESORT - DAY**

It's a sleepy, unhurried place. The complete opposite of the Bazaar.

Charles ambles through with Jessica, browsing for some souvenir. She hangs on his arm a bit and he likes it.

**EXT. SKI RESORT CONDO - NIGHT**

The remains of dinner. They're sitting together noisily playing a card game - Cheat - complete with outraged displays of wounded innocence and blatant bluffing.

This is Charles coming alive again and back to his best - playful, deadpan, super charming.

Laura catches herself glancing at him. It's like falling in love again.

**INT. SKI RESORT CONDO BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Laura - hair wet, in a bath robe - brushes her teeth, wiping the away the steam to see herself.

Charles emerges from the shower, towelling down. A half-look as they prepare for bed.

She rinses her mouth. All done. Gives him a proper look this time.

Well?

**INT. SKI RESORT CONDO BATHROOM - NIGHT**

She pulls him towards the bed, not letting him even dry off.

There's something very hungry about it, intensely needy.

The towel and bathrobe only get in the way as they fall onto the bed, this huge eruption of repressed emotion.

Her cheeks and throat are flushed as she pulls him close. The kissing is exciting. Raw.

But suddenly it's too fast or too aggressive - for him.

He's trying to slow it down, or worse stop it completely. In the intimate emotional eco-system of marriage, she immediately detects something's off.

She tries to continue - pushing him back, taking more control.

But it's no use. It's all wrong.

**INT. BATHROOM - DAWN**

Charles gulps down some bottled water. What the fuck is the matter with him?

It's like his throat is sandpaper. And his forehead is burning up.

**EXT. SKI RESORT - DAY**

Jessica waits for the chair lift, yakking with some kids, mostly boys who like her.

Laura watches from the terrace, over breakfast. It's nice to see this: Jessica attracting attention, encouraging even.

She takes Charles's hand, sitting next to her, somewhat distant, wanting to share her parental pride. At least they've got one thing right.

CONCIERGE

Mr. Hilderbrand, phone for you.

A CONCIERGE hovers into view with a phone. Charles thinks this is a mistake until -

CONCIERGE (CONT'D)

A Detective Bey.

Charles takes the phone.

CHARLES

Yes?

**INT. SKI RESORT CONDO- DAY**

Charles closes his suitcase. Gives Jessica a goodbye kiss. Clearly, he is returning early.

LAURA

If it's so urgent, they can at least explain why.

CHARLES

Whatever it is, I'll be right back.

He kisses her goodbye at the door. She holds on to him, wanting him to stay. But in a strange way, it's a relief for Charles to leave -

The jollity of the resort, the harsh bright glare of the snow. It's like he's no longer comfortable in his own skin.

As he goes, we register the impact on Jessica.

**INT. CEMETERY - DAY**

A forest of crumbling headstones. Charles is led by a POLICEMAN past once lavish stone tombs, now ruined and strangled in dead ivy and misshapen fungi.

Waiting up ahead is Detective Bey. He doesn't wave.

BEY

You are friends with a woman called Sonia Debelka?

CHARLES

No.

BEY

Well, she knows you. She has your name and address.

He is holding a see-through evidence bag. A mad mess of torn-out reference pages and scribbled notes.

CHARLES

I met her once. She came to my office a few weeks ago.

BEY

Any particular reason?

CHARLES

She'd read about my daughters's  
death in the papers and decided we  
had a ... kinship.

(for want of a better  
phrase)

She lost a child in similar  
circumstances.

How can he explain it further without sounding insane?

BEY

So she wasn't a close acquaintance?

CHARLES

No. I met her once.

This makes Bey's next job a lot easier. He gestures to a hive  
of police activity up ahead. "In that case, see for  
yourself."

BEY

We found her body early this  
morning.

They get closer and see the familiar white of a body bag. It  
lies on the ground, still unzipped, having its tag filled out  
by a CORONER.

Charles gets closer and sees Sonia's petrified face -  
bizarrely spotted with burn marks.

BEY (CONT'D)

This is her, the woman you met?

Charles gets out a nod as he takes in the spattered blisters  
on her clothes and skin.

CHARLES

Christ. What happened?

BEY

Heart attack most likely.

CHARLES

What was she doing?

Isn't it obvious?

BEY

Digging.

He indicates the Coroner can now zip up the bodybag.

CHARLES

But the burn marks?

BEY

Some kind of acetic acid. She was probably performing some kind of "purification ceremony" when she had a seizure. She probably dropped and smashed the jug of acid here.

He leads Charles to the front of the grave and motions how it would have splashed over her front.

CHARLES

She was going to pour acid into the grave?

BEY

Not the grave exactly. *Cehennem geçidi*. A "gateway." And not just pour it. Set it alight.

They step aside as an oversized box of matches, soggy from the wet grass, is bagged and taken away.

BEY (CONT'D)

It's local folklore. A gateway is a hole that releases an evil spirit. If you find the hole, you can burn it "clean."

He shakes his head at the idiocy of it all.

CHARLES

Did she?  
(trying to sound equally dismissive)  
Find a gateway.

BEY

Of course not. *Bunların hepsi saçmalık!*  
(realizing Charles' Turkish isn't that good)  
"It's all...nonsense. Gibberish."

For further proof, they two of them ponder the headstone, all in Ottoman Turkish, dating back centuries.

The stone is covered in moss except one part which - judging by the scraper and moss remnants - Sonia must have scraped clean to reveal some kind of engraved circular motif.

Bey puts a hand on Charles' shoulder, mistaking his stillness for bewilderment, and confides an amusing little secret.

BEY (CONT'D)

The good thing is she was an escaped asylum inmate, so no one expects it to make any sense.

Charles plays along, "reassured," allowing Bey to barrel off and shout at his team to wrap things up.

But Charles is riveted by the engraved circular symbol. He moves closer so we can see it is -

Two SNAKES devouring each other.

He doesn't know what it means, but there is something naggingly familiar about it.

**INT. LIBRARY - DAY**

An ancient leather bound book opens up releasing a swirl of dust motes.

With no little effort, Charles has tracked down a number of reference books with examples of the same circular image from the grave:

Two snakes devouring each other's tail. Old ink drawings, etchings, stone engravings.

PROFESSOR (VO)

It's the symbol of Lamia.

**INT. COLLEGE - DAY**

An owlish PROFESSOR enthusiastically shares his learning as he looks at copies of the images.

PROFESSOR

Vengeful child-killing spirit from Byzantine mythology. She could move on the wind. Drive people insane. Erupt from the earth unleashing fire. There's lots of variations, but always associated with murdering innocent children.

He bends over with a magnifying glass.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D)

The variant on the snake motif is fascinating. One snake in a circle is the ouroboros, obviously - a symbol of rebirth and renewal. But two snakes complete reverses the meaning. Suddenly it becomes good and evil locked in a doomed struggle of mutual destruction.

He sighs in admiration. Offers the glass for Charles to see for himself.

CHARLES

Any reason why it would be engraved on a head stone?

PROFESSOR

If it was a child's headstone from the Byzantine Empire - absolutely. So-called burning fever was known as Lamia's Disease.

He excitedly gets to work, digging up some old leather volumes to share.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D)

She's a minor figure, in many ways; strictly indigenous, but very industrious and spectacularly heartless.

#### **INT. LIBRARY - LATER**

Charles pours over the scattered references to Lamia's handiwork in the Professor's library.

Hours and pages of horrifying images have left him somewhat numb. But something makes him go taut with interest.

It is a drawing of a burlap sack, seemingly fished out from a river, being emptied upside-down by a farmer.

It's a stylized recreation of a startling moment - a dog yelps at the farmer, while onlookers are grouped around wide-eyed.

But no one looks more intently than Charles - his face frozen in the gathering gloom.

For tumbling out of the sack are half-a-dozen amputated hands.

**EXT. APARTMENT - NIGHT**

Wisps of smoke blow across the street, quiet and empty apart from a NEIGHBOR burning leaves.

A cab pulls up, discharging Jessica and Laura back from vacation. They have weather tans. It's been a few days.

The Security Guard comes to help with the luggage. His jollity evaporates when he sees Laura and Jessica's expressions.

They look up and eye the tower block warily, uncertain of what they will find inside.

**INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT**

Charles is nowhere to be seen. They put down their bags. Notice the kitchen hasn't been cleared for a couple of days.

LAURA

You go unpack. I'll sort out dinner.

Jessica heads to her room. Laura moves the other way to Charles's home office.

**INT. DEN - NIGHT**

Charles sits facing the door in the evening gloom, his knee bouncing up and down. He has a book in his hand. Like he's been waiting for her.

LAURA

What happened to you? You missed everything.

She switches on the light and sees the room is covered with a mess of strange books on every surface: print-outs, old files, ledgers - strange inky drawings of gateways, effigies, serpents...

His features are haggard and drawn from lack of sleep. Unshaven too.

CHARLES

The night Naomi died, I had a premonition. At the police station. This *feeling* that something made her do it...

Okay...

CHARLES (CONT'D)

It wasn't a dog I ran over. It was a girl. Who'd fallen from the Galatea Tower ten years ago. I see these children *everywhere. All the time.*

He sees her subtly looking around the room. Is that a jug of acid?

CHARLES (CONT'D)

I haven't been drinking.

Somehow that doesn't make it better.

LAURA

Shouldn't you talked to Dr. Ayshe about this?

CHARLES

I already have. She thinks I'm just trying to create an excuse to drink again.

That doesn't seem so far off the mark to Laura.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Okay. Read this.

He gives her the book. Indicates the spot.

LAURA

"Lamia"?

(he nods)

"Implacable child-murdering daemon of Byzantine mythology whose vengeful spirit scoured the land driving children to their deaths."

CHARLES

Now look at her symbol.

LAURA

Charles. What does this have to do with anything?

CHARLES

Will you just look at it. Please.

He indicates the old ink drawing of two snakes in a circle devouring each other's tail

CHARLES (CONT'D)

This was on the grave at the cemetery, where the old woman died. Sonia. She came to me a few weeks ago. She'd lost a child too. Just like Naomi.

(indicating his hands)

She was trying to tell me all this. But she didn't have all the pieces.

Charles retrieves another book.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Look -

Shows her the drawing of the sack of amputated hands.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

This sack was pulled out of the Bosphorus. It had six severed hands in it - *children's* hands.

(reading)

"When the bodies were never found, many competing myths and legends sprang up to explain the mystery - "

He skips through all those myths to the relevant one.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

"One version even said the children were killed by their own father; that he was possessed by Lamia while building a home on top of the gateway to her burial place."

LAURA

What does this have to do with our daughter?

He gets Naomi's drawing book.

CHARLES

Look at the children. There's three of them, right?

So what?

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Now look at the hands.

Or rather the absence of any hands.

LAURA

Charles. These are stick figures.

CHARLES

Not these.

He has the three dolls Naomi tested at the Bazaar - all their hands wrenched loose "just to make sure."

CHARLES (CONT'D)

And look at this.

He flips through Naomi's drawing book.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

This is the last drawing she did.

It is the rough circle with a V-shape at the top and at the bottom like two rough arrows.

Charles has made a tracing of the drawing, which he lays over the ink drawing of Lamia symbol.

The two V-shapes on the top and bottom of Naomi's weird circle now make sense - they pretty much match up with the two snakes' heads.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

I think that gateway is under our old house. I think that's where those three children were buried. I think Naomi saw them. I think she was driven to jump by this spirit -

LAURA

She didn't jump. She fell -

CHARLES

Just like all these other kids that have died here -

LAURA

Five-year-old girls don't commit suicide!

CHARLES

That's my point. Something *made* her do it.

He taps the drawing of the two snakes. "This."

LAURA

You can't believe this.

But he does.

**INT. JESSICA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Jessica reacts to the sound of her parents' voices spilling into the hallway.

LAURA (OS)  
This is insane. You're insane.

**INT. FRONT DOOR - DAY**

She is trying to stop him as he rummages for his carkeys and jacket.

CHARLES (OS)  
No. It's all connected. You'll see.

LAURA  
What are you going to do? Break into our old house and start digging up the basement?

Actually, that's precisely what he's going to do.

**INT. OLD HOUSE - NIGHT**

The SPLINTERING of wood as Charles jimmys open a window and Charles drops into the dusty basement.

He ascends into the empty house, his old home, plastic sheets crackling underfoot. The place is undergoing many changes after months of no-one wanting to rent it.

New coats of paint, sheets draped over the floor and banisters. A renovation halfway through.

**INT. GROUND FLOOR - NIGHT**

He picks up a hammer from among the workmen's tools, looking for some kind of clue.

Testing the floorboards, the wooden panelling. Checking the back of closets.

He passes one wall that's being knocked through.

He passes another one that's being bricked up - the dumb waiter shaft. The scene of the original horror.

**INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT**

He descends to the basement and its stone floors. TAPPING the walls and the floors, hoping in vain for a hollow sound. Looking behind the big old furnace.

Finally, his gaze settles on a sheet covered item. It's the antique toy house, put down here for safe keeping.

But it's not the house that interests him. It's what behind.

He drags the house aside to reveal the lower dumb waiter entrance, as yet unbricked up.

He opens it up with a recognizable SQUEAK.

**INT. JESSICA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Laura knocks and looks in on Jessica, who's hunched over, writing at her desk.

LAURA

You okay? You want some dinner?

Jessica barely shakes her head.

LAURA (CONT'D)

You've got to have something.

She stays hunched over her desk, SCRATCHILY drawing just like Naomi at the beginning. But Laura doesn't know to make anything of it.

**INT. DUMB WAITER SHAFT - NIGHT**

A WORK LANTERN

flares into life as Charles clammers through and lights up -

THE DUMB WAITER SHAFT

Damp brick walls leaving barely any room to turn. Just the sound of his breathing and some echoed memories from the fateful night.

On each side of the shaft is the remnants of the steel bar that broke her fall.

The very spot where she died.

**INT. DEN - NIGHT**

Laura looks over Charles's desk.

His mad gallery of child mortalities, gateways, serpent insignia, phantom children with no hands in screams of eternal despair:

*"...a child with no hands, unable  
to knock at the gates of Heaven,  
was fated to wander the earth in  
limbo."*

She unconsciously toys with her silver locket - flashing open Naomi's face.

**INT. DUMB WAITER SHAFT - NIGHT**

Charles finds himself quite overcome with emotion. He finds the strength to start moving again.

Searching for some loose stone or tunnel. It doesn't take long to find something - a gap under an overhang.

His light reveals a tunnel that runs off from the base of the shaft. He wriggles his way under pulling a hammer and cold chisel with him.

He is in a small low space with a sunken floor. The size and shape of a coffin.

CHARLES

wedges the chisel and starts hammering, prying away at the brick.

Working it loose.

Drenched in sweat, he has now switched to a sledgehammer. He swings, as best he can in the cramped space, and dislodges a big chunk of brick.

He swings again, his palms blistering.

Sending more bits of stone flying.

With a final almighty swing, a whole CHUNK of brick flies up.

Panting and covered in sweat, he fumbles for his torch and peers in to find -

Absolutely nothing.

The sunken 'coffin', if that's what it was, is as empty and as hollow as a drum. No secret openings. No latches. No bones. Nothing.

**EXT. DR. AYSHE'S OFFICE - DAY**

Dr. Ayshe considers the tormented, exhausted mess sitting opposite her with his raw and blistered palms.

DR. AYSHE

Are you familiar with the Thomas Theorem? It's the basis for any self-fulfilling prophecy.

If he isn't, he soon will be.

DR. AYSHE (CONT'D)

It says, "If a man defines a situation as real, it is real in its consequences."

CHARLES

They're in there somewhere. They have to be.

He has unearthed more evidence for her to study - old property deeds, civic registrar.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Look - here's the census entry for the original owner. See - three children. They've all got birth dates, but no recorded deaths. They just disappear.

DR. AYSHE

Maybe they simply grew up and moved away.

She extends a hand. Stops him bringing out any more papers.

DR. AYSHE (CONT'D)

We have a saying in Turkey. Fall not into the fire to avoid smoke.

Which means want exactly?

DR. AYSHE (CONT'D)

People only choose painful solutions because facing up to the real problem underneath is even more painful -

CHARLES

I lost a child. What could be more painful than that?

DR. AYSHE

The feeling that you deserved it.

She meets his eyes with a level gaze.

DR. AYSHE (CONT'D)

It's only natural. You're human. But you've moved beyond the normal levels of guilt into a very elaborate form of self-punishment. And the consequences are all negative. Which only makes you feel worse and want to punish yourself more.

As she studies his face, a hint of compassion creeps into her manner.

DR. AYSHE (CONT'D)

It's a vicious cycle, but you have the strength to break it.

We push deep into his eyes - wanting so hard to believe her - as the sound of rhythmic footsteps rise up -

**INT. BEDROOM - DAY**

He showers... Shaves under his chin... Knots a tie - not too tight. Careful not to disturb his sleeping wife.

DR. AYSHE (VO)

You have been looking for an answer everywhere except the one place that will actually help...

The footsteps get louder and more insistent.

DR. AYSHE (VO) (CONT'D)

Inside your self.

He inspects his reflection. He's ready.

**INT. BEDROOM - DAY**

He showers... Shaves under his chin... Knots a tie - not too tight. Careful not to disturb his sleeping wife.

DR. AYSHE (VO)  
 You have been looking for an answer  
 everywhere except the one place  
 that will actually help...

The footsteps get louder and more insistent.

DR. AYSHE (VO) (CONT'D)  
 Inside your self.

He inspects his reflection. He's ready.

**EXT. SQUARE - DAY**

He heads purposefully towards a vast modern complex -  
 gleaming in the rising sun.

The footsteps we've been hearing are his own.

**INT. BUILDING - DAY**

Echoing across the cavernous atrium until he comes to a stop  
 at the reception desk.

CHARLES  
 Charles Hilderbrand. Dr. Ayshe sent  
 me.

VOICE  
 Mr. Hilderbrand?

A small round MAN in a Nehru suit walks over and shakes his  
 hand.

SMALL MAN  
 Meyer R. Schkolnic. "Inhuman  
 resources."  
 (ho,ho)  
 I'm your liaison for the day.

He indicates a new direction.

SMALL MAN (CONT'D)  
 Your appointment's been switched to  
 the ???? building.

The Small Man makes a weird twirly hand motion: Turn around  
 and all will be revealed.

**EXT. BUILDING - DAY**

They cross another square, two tiny dots, increasingly bereft of other people.

SMALL MAN

As you can see, it's all very new.  
No signs. No floor numbers.

**INT. NEW BUILDING - DAY**

SMALL MAN

And no help!

The unmanned reception desk is still covered in plastic sheeting.

SMALL MAN (CONT'D)

You have to be a mind reader to work here.

He gives a camp laugh.

SMALL MAN (CONT'D)

Which, as luck would have it ...

He waddles over to the elevators, agonizing over which side to choose.

SMALL MAN (CONT'D)

Ahhh... *Un tiens vaut mieux que deux tu l'auras.* No?

Subtitle: "One certainty is better than two possibilities"

Finally, he presses a button.

SMALL MAN (CONT'D)

Suite 12-07, if I'm not mistaken.

Above them, Charles notices a wall clock, ticking towards 12.03. The doors ping open and he steps onto the elevator...

**INT. ELEVATOR - DAY**

... Only for the Small Man to step back as the doors snap shut.

SMALL MAN

Okay, that was a lie.

Charles realizes that all this strangeness is now very familiar.

The elevator is filled with the same people from the day Naomi disappeared.

MATRONLY LADY

Let's get to it, shall we? It's quite a litany.

It is one of the matronly Ladies who laughed about Naomi. The one with the red earrings. She steps forward with polite menace.

MATRONLY LADY (CONT'D)

You were drinking. You were very close to being fired - again. You were disappearing for days on end. You were screwing around. You were lying to your wife. You were lying to your daughter. You'd just missed her birthday. Her second birthday, if that helps pinpoint it. There were other instances of 'absenteeism,' but we'll confine ourselves to the pivotal incident.  
(her glacial civility is paralyzing)  
If you have no objections.

Charles is not quite sure where this is leading.

MATRONLY LADY #2

(chiming in helpfully)  
The miscarriage.

Now Charles knows exactly where this is heading. He starts pressing elevator buttons. Any one will do.

MATRONLY LADY

Don't be shy. We're all friends here.

The doors open and he exits only to find himself -

IN ANOTHER ELEVATOR

This is older - a vintage cage - with all the same people facing him.

MATRONLY LADY #2

It's not like we're telling you anything you don't already know!

MATRONLY LADY

If you'd just manage to behave yourself, none of this would have happened, would it.

MATRONLY #2

Would it?

MATRONLY LADY

You wouldn't have needed to run away. You wouldn't have needed to change countries, sorry, continents -

CHARLES

- I didn't run away -

MATRONLY LADY

So much baggage. You had to go back 20 years in order to make a "fresh start."

CHARLES

I didn't run away. I faced what I did.

MATRONLY LADY

Fine. Whatever. Very impressive. You owned up. She forgave you. You made things right.

She fixes him with a pitiless gaze.

MATRONLY LADY (CONT'D)

By coming here and losing another child.

MATRONLY LADY #2

You couldn't even hold onto her hand!

The all laugh at this elemental howler.

CHARLES

It wasn't like that.

MATRONLY LADY

It was exactly like that.

MATRONLY LADY (CONT'D)

Why do you think this thing chose you? Pure luck?

The Small Man gives a Naomi-like wave as the doors snap shut.

SMALL MAN

"Guilty feet have got no rhythm."

The elevator suddenly drops, flinging Charles against the wall. The freefall pulls back his jowls like some nightmarish facelift.

This amuses them no end. When he makes a grab for the emergency handle, they laugh even more pitifully.

MATRONLY LADY

You don't get it, do you? He doesn't get it.

MAN

Let's see if we can spell it out.  
The toothpaste is out the tube.

MATRONLY LADY #2

The genie is out the bottle.

MAN

The noose is on and the chair  
kicked away.

Charles yanks the handle, but it comes off in his hand. The sickening acceleration flattens his face against the wall.

MATRONLY LADY

You just can't see it, can you.

She grabs his chin, forcing him to look at her.

MATRONLY LADY (CONT'D)

It doesn't matter what you do, it's  
too late!

The elevator screams to the bottom and certain impact as -

#### **INT. CAR - NIGHT**

Charles blinks awake and tries to get his bearings. His hand is indeed on some kind of handle, only this one opens.

After a moment in this strange darkness, he discovers the nightmare is still going on.

Shadowy FIGURES are closing in on him, hovering over him, shaking him.

He struggles, but they grab him tighter. He lashes out. It's all too dark and close to see clearly. They pounce, dragging him out into the cold.

He lashes out more violently and hits something - a chin? a nose? He makes a break for it only to crumple under the immobilizing WHACK of some kind of stick.

REAL DARKNESS THIS TIME

Charles 'comes to' - seconds later, face down on the road, as something metal SNAPS tight on his hands.

One of the Figures is inspecting out incriminating items from Charles' car: strange old drawings, bunches of recent newspaper clippings and most alarmingly, a bag with his jug of acetic acid (just like Sonia's), flashlight, matches.

Charles belatedly realizes, the figures are PATROLMEN and he is outside the Old House, where he must have fallen asleep.

**INT. DR. AYSHE'S OFFICE - DAY**

Dr. Ayshe takes in Charles's cut lip, bruised, scraped-up face and the red raw marks on his wrists.

DR. AYSHE

I think we've reached the point  
where we have to consider some  
medication.

She writes out a prescription and offers it to him. It's a little like a declaration of surrender for him to accept.

He looks and reads:

*Pedakin Reskalith-HF 100g.*

Is she kidding? It's the same stuff Sonia was taking.

DR. AYSHE (CONT'D)

It's a mood regulator -

CHARLES

(screwing it up)  
I know what it is.

**INT. KITCHEN - DAY**

Laura tidies and cleans unnecessarily; her habit when faced with difficult emotions.

LAURA

We're right back where we started  
aren't we. First your disappearing  
act. Then the calls from work.

Charles sits at the table. His bruised face and ghosted unshaven appearance do nothing to dilute her onslaught.

LAURA (CONT'D)  
Now we've got complaints from the school.

The kitchen is completely spotless now, but still she cleans.

LAURA (CONT'D)  
What's the matter with you? Every time we look like making progress - you have to fuck it up. Why?

It is more of an impassioned plea, than an accusation. But what can he say? She looks deep into his eyes.

LAURA (CONT'D)  
Why?

When she doesn't get a reply -

LAURA (CONT'D)  
We're not moving and that's that. You want to run away. Fine. Go.

CHARLES  
I'm not running from anything. I'm trying to make things right.

LAURA  
Then start with Jessica.

She indicates down the hall to her bedroom.

CHARLES  
I'll go talk to her in a minute.

He gets up and put his arms around her.

LAURA  
Why don't you go now.

**INT. HALLWAY - DAY**

He taps on Jessica's door, slightly ajar.

CHARLES  
Jessica?

**INT. JESSICA'S BEDROOM - DAY**

It's empty. He hears the muffled DRONE of the shower. Realizes she's in the bathroom. He enters and sits on her bed, taking in her things, books, clothes - trying perhaps to re-connect with who she is.

He flicks over a "LIFE AFTER LOSS" pamphlet on her desk suggesting "10 Way to Cope with Grief":

*Read poetry or books  
Engage in social activities  
Eat good foods  
Take time to relax  
Listen to music...*

He gets as far as number 5. Tosses aside in disbelief.

Finds himself inspecting her journals instead - without judgement.

*"What did we do? We didn't do anything. I didn't do anything..."*

*"Dad is mad. Dad is bad. Dad is sad... It's like I can't breathe..."*

**INT. HALLWAY - DAY**

Unnoticed behind him, the hall carpet starts to darken. Water creeping out from under the bathroom door.

Laura sits in her spotless kitchen, turning and turning a coffee cup, her face set firm.

Above her the light flickers.

**INT. JESSICA'S BEDROOM - DAY**

Charles turns more pages and the schoolgirlish handwriting give way to more recent drawings. Harshly ground black pencil making virulent swirls.

A neurotic outpouring of undirected energy on every page. A mass of swirls - like waves, maybe.

No, they're more like flames - curling, encircling.

The sound of crackling of flames. Suddenly he's watching the incinerator burning Sonia's clippings - the sparks snapping at his clothes.

The light flickers above Charles too as the seeping water spreads into Jessica's room.

But he is too engrossed in Jessica's drawings as they leap into color, becoming more overwhelming and intense with every page.

Until the last page is a glistening still-wet impasto of flaming red...

Smudging it with his thumb - it's blood.

**INT. KITCHEN - DAY**

Laura reacts as the light bulb blows out above her.

**INT. JESSICA'S BEDROOM - DAY**

Charles turns and sees a dark stain spreads stealthily across the carpet.

He steps forward and realizes the stain on the carpet is water, squelching under his feet.

CHARLES

Jessica?

Water is now glistening in a POOL by the bathroom door.

**INT. HALLWAY - DAY**

Laura hurries from the kitchen hearing the alarm in his voice.

CHARLES

Jess. Open up.

He rattles the handle, expecting it to be locked. But it opens easily - until the door hits the build-up of water behind the door.

Finally he gets it open and pulls back the shower curtain, Laura following him in.

LAURA

Oh my God.

**INT. BATHROOM - DAWN**

Jessica is slumped in the overflowing shower, still in her underwear, a mess of vomit and watery blood.

A pair of manicure scissors dangles from her fingers, blood leaking from her hacked wrists as -

ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE

An ambulance, a stretcher, rushing medics, frantically loading Jessica into the van as the lights flash and the sirens wail.

**INT. AMBULANCE - MOVING - DAY**

Charles and Laura, next to their daughter, in the back, stuck in a nightmare loop that never ends.

**INT. INTENSIVE CARE - DAY**

A hushed white room.

Jessica in a room asleep - her face pale, her wrists bandaged, as the IV drip is replaced and the heart monitor checked.

**INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - DAY**

Charles and Laura keep vigil outside. Two profiles on the bench, just like at the police station.

There are a few magazines and toys in the reception area. But the big draw - for a couple of restless KIDS at least - is a low table with a model of the hospital.

THE DOOR OPENS

And DR. GAZIRI emerges to taken them aside and give them the news. He is an authoritative professional.

DR. GAZIRI

Jessica is doing very well for us. She's physically stable with no complications. She needs to rehydrate a little more, but she regurgitated most of the pills before they could be absorbed into her system. We had to put a couple of stitches into the cuts.

(MORE)

DR. GAZIRI (CONT'D)  
 But luckily the muscle in the  
 radial artery contracted and  
 limited the blood loss. It probably  
 looked a lot worse than it was.

They're not too sure about that.

DR. GAZIRI (CONT'D)  
 You should know attempted suicide  
 is the biggest cause of hospitali-  
 zation among adolescents. Even more  
 so in families that have already  
 suffered intense trauma.

He gives them a reassuring look.

DR. GAZIRI (CONT'D)  
 There's actually a lot to be  
 hopeful about.

**INT. JESSICA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT**

Laura enters and takes in her daughter, hooked up like some  
 captive alien. Determined to be strong for her.

A NURSE wheels in a fold-out bed and blankets.

NURSE  
 If you need any help, setting this  
 up, just press this button. The  
 bathroom and shower are through  
 there.

She nods thanks as the Nurse leaves, gradually becoming aware  
 of Charles's quite different energy behind her. She steels  
 herself waiting for the other shoe to drop, and sure enough -

CHARLES  
 This is why we have to leave.

Laura closes her eyes.

CHARLES (CONT'D)  
 If she stays here, she'll die.

LAURA  
 This is the best hospital in the  
 country.

CHARLES  
 You didn't see her drawings. There  
 were pages of flames.

LAURA

Dr. Gaziri is the top specialist -

CHARLES

Page after page of fire. You know what they called burning fever? Lamia's disease -

LAURA

She didn't burn the house down. She didn't set herself on fire. She cut her wrists!

She is not going to argue in front of her daughter, even if she is unconscious. She heads for the side-room.

CHARLES

I know you think I'm crazy, but I don't care. This is just like Naomi all over again -

She snaps, turning on him.

LAURA

This is nothing like what happened to Naomi. Didn't you hear Dr. Gaziri? This is our mess. We did this. Weren't you listening? Thirteen-year-old girls do commit suicide. All the time. And not because of some mumbo-jumbo reasons. For real reasons. Because it's *better* than feeling let down and abandoned. It's *better* than watching your father fall apart.

All her buried anger flares to surface.

LAURA (CONT'D)

This is your doing. You did this.

It is a terrible moment and they both know it. If she says any more, there may be no taking it back.

CHARLES

I'm not trying to hurt you. I'm trying to save you.

LAURA

Then stop.

She waits, imploring him with her eyes. But all he can see is the veins on Jessica's arms - tensing and standing out.

And the flash of some ghostly CHILD outside in the hall - SCREAMING in agony.

CHARLES

This is a cursed place. You have to know that.

He is even sounding like Sonia now.

Laura reacts as if he means the hospital. Here? Really? This place with the blankets and vase of flowers.

She retreats to the sideroom in exasperation, shutting the door on him.

**INT. JESSICA'S HOSPITAL RESTROOM - NIGHT**

Safely alone, she can let out the emotions that reflect what she really feels: Her husband is going insane.

**INT. JESSICA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT**

On the other side of the door, Charles is reaching his own conclusion: Sad but accepting.

So be it.

He sizes up the corridor, seeing where the nurses are, making a decision.

**INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - NIGHT**

Bare feet shuffle across the linoleum as Charles steers Jessica, wrapped in his coat, to the fire exit.

He wrestles with the door. It's tricky work keeping her upright at the same time. She is slurred and shaky. Like a happy drunk.

JESSICA

Where's Mom?

CHARLES

She's joining us later.

JESSICA

Under the clock... At twelve o'clock...

She's telling this to a JANITOR who's coming out of the stairwell.

JANITOR  
[Is she a patient?]

He's spotted the hospital tag on Jessica's wrist.

JANITOR (CONT'D)  
[If she's a patient, she can't  
leave from here. She has to be  
checked out at the front desk.]

Charles nods as if it's all fine.

CHARLES  
[We're just getting some air.]

But Jessica grabs the bannister to steady herself - suddenly  
nauseated. It's like something takes her over from behind her  
eyes.

CHARLES (CONT'D)  
Jess -

Out of nowhere, her whole body arcs back as if zapped by a  
massive JOLT of electricity.

JANITOR  
[Holy shit.]

She is slammed backwards onto the steel stairs - her back  
ARCHING violently.

Laura grabs her head to protect it, getting his knuckles  
SLAMMED against the sharp metal steps.

The Janitor races off for help. Hitting an alarm button

MEDICS

leap into action. Calling a "Code Blue."

**INT. JESSICA'S HOSPITAL ROOM/SIDE ROOM - NIGHT**

Laura looks up from washing her face at the noise.

She emerges to see Jessica's telltale empty bed, sees the  
ORDERLIES running past.

**INT. HOSPITAL STAIRWELL - NIGHT**

Dr. Gaziri directs the Orderlies to contain the patient's  
flailing limbs, moving Charles out the way. But the violence  
of Jessica's SPASMS only increases.

DR. GAZIRI  
Get me a flange before she bites  
her tongue. Prep 200mg of Exocin.

A MEDIC snaps open the case, rips open a syringe packet. It's hard to focus next to the animalistic HOWLS.

MEDIC  
Ready.

DR. GAZIRI  
Hold her arm still.

The Orderlies make a concerted effort, straining like a tug-of-war team, as the needle hovers to find a vein.

DR. GAZIRI (CONT'D)  
I need her still.

Finally, the needle goes in and he depresses the plunger of potent pink sedative.

But it makes NO DIFFERENCE.

Laura rushes up to see spasms rip through her daughter's body, sending the men's shoes slipping across the metal. Her knee SMACKS into an Orderly's teeth.

DR. GAZIRI (CONT'D)  
Where's the flange?

The flanged tube is inserted roughly into Jessica's mouth. She is thrashing wildly, it pops right back out.

DR. GAZIRI (CONT'D)  
Hold it in!

Jessica's arm slips free, grabbing an Orderly's fingers - bending them backwards. He screams. Jessica has BROKEN his wrist, snapping it backwards so it dangles uselessly.

The Janitor throws up in his mouth.

Jessica's hospital clothes, ripped in the struggle, reveal her heart pounding against her rib cage. Laura can clearly see it thumping through the skin as if trying to break free.

On the side of her rib cage, the skin contorts, getting stretched into strange points.

DR. GAZIRI (CONT'D)  
We need a brace. The ribs are  
fracturing.

JUNIOR

Brace!

Someone goes running. Dr. Gaziri takes an Orderly's big hand and jams it over the splintering bones - like holding back a dam.

DR. GAZIRI

Press down here or the skin is going to rip open.

Dr. Gaziri has to make a life or death decision.

DR. GAZIRI (CONT'D)

I need 400mg of Methoxilate.

The Junior Medic, already in way over his head, hesitates. This stuff is *never* used on children.

DR. GAZIRI (CONT'D)

400mg. Now.

The Orderlies are running out of adrenaline. Four of them and it's like wrestling a steer.

MEDIC

Ready.

Dr. Gaziri takes the prepped syringe as another rib CRACKS, tearing the skin under the Orderly's hand.

She jabs in the needle and empties it. Jessica's spasm is so violent, the metal needle SNAPS clean off.

**INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY**

Silence. The aftermath.

Baffled doctors gathered round Jessica's body strapped down at the wrists and ankles. She is unconscious now, but still breathing heavily. Even through the chest brace, her rib cage heaves up and down.

An Orderly shows a colleague the flange. It is a piece of rubber thick enough to stop a rottweiler. Her 12-year-old teeth have ground it flat.

The doctors look at X-rays, MRIs and PET scans.

RADIOLOGIST

Her brain is swelling so rapidly, it's causing diastatic fractures along the suture lines.

DR. MUHREN  
That's impossible. That only  
happens in infants.

The Radiologist shows him the evidence.

DR. MUHREN (CONT'D)  
Why did you wait? You should have  
called me the moment this happened.

DR. MUHREN is the senior brain specialist, studying the PET  
scans.

DR. GAZIRI  
We did. This only happened 55  
minutes ago.

Dr. Muhren returns to the thermal screens - a relentless  
rampage of frenzied red.

DR. MUHREN  
This can't be right. Check the  
machine.

#### **INT. INTENSIVE CARE - NIGHT**

But the machines are working fine. The Experts huddle to  
collate their evidence.

DR. MUHREN  
Is it possible she was exposed to  
some kind of radiation leak? Or  
some kind of intense magnetic  
field?

He's clutching at straws and they know it.

DR. GAZIRI  
I gave her enough anaesthetic to  
stop a racehorse. Her heart has  
been going at 195bpm for two hours.  
Her temperature is 108.

Dr. Muhren studies the latest thermal readings. Looks at the  
PET scan of her body.

Jessica's skin has gone a strange burnt red color. The  
surface is so acidic, it has melted the fingertips off the  
Orderlies' latex gloves.

DR. MUHREN  
I've never seen anything like it.

He looks around. None of them have.

**INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - DAY**

Charles and Laura wait for more news, sitting tensely, trying to decode the expressions on the Nurses who enter and exit.

Laura won't even look at Charles. This is just as well because SOMEONE is trying to get his attention - someone that only he can see.

GHOSTLY BOY'S VOICE  
 [When are you going to understand?  
 It doesn't matter what you do. It's  
 too late.]

It is a GHOSTLY WHITE BOY, tugging at Charles' sleeve.

GHOSTLY BOY  
 [In fact, the more you struggle,  
 the worse you make it.]

The Boy tilts his head back with a sickly laugh.

GHOSTLY BOY (CONT'D)  
 [Believe me, I know.]

Across his throat is the raw rope burn of a noose.

**INT. JESSICA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT**

The Doctors react as another SPASM shoots through Jessica's body, making her metal bed SCRAPE across the floor, sending ICE PACKS arranged around her overheating body to the floor.

Jessica's monitors spike. Heart. Brain. Temperature. All racing out of control.

**INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - NIGHT**

Laura reacts first as Dr. Gaziri emerges.

This time there is nothing to be hopeful about.

**INT. DR. GAZIRI'S OFFICE - NIGHT**

Dr. Gaziri gestures for Charles and Laura to take a seat and shuts the door.

DR. GAZIRI

Sit down.

He's not asking. He's insisting.

DR. GAZIRI (CONT'D)

Please.

DR. GAZIRI (CONT'D)

Her heart is beating so violently, it's causing fissures in the arteries. The swelling in her brain is splitting the membranes. Her pH balance has gone haywire. She is producing so much acid, she's corroding herself -

LAURA

Because she fell on some stairs?

DR. GAZIRI

This has nothing to do with falling or stairs. Or cutting an artery.

CHARLES

Then what is it?

Ominous cracks are showing through Dr. Gaziri's professional confidence. A 30-year veteran of the most extreme traumas, and he is overwhelmed.

DR. GAZIRI

We don't know.

They sit. Terrified. It feels like a death sentence. Because it is one.

DR. GAZIRI (CONT'D)

We have to make a decision. Right now. We have the option, if you want, to arrange what we call a "lucid window."

They stare at him quietly.

DR. GAZIRI (CONT'D)

It means we can disrupt her anaesthetic so she regains consciousness. It would only be for a few minutes. I cannot risk making it any longer. The pain would be excruciating. But it would give you a little time together to say goodbye.

LAURA

What do you mean "goodbye"?

They try to take this all in. This is all happening so fast.

LAURA (CONT'D)

What do you mean "goodbye"? She was perfectly healthy 24 hours ago.

DR. GAZIRI

At this point, her condition is so severe, all we can do is make sure she doesn't feel any pain.

LAURA

I don't understand. What are you telling me?

CHARLES

He's saying they can't save her.

LAURA

No, no, no. This can't happen. You have to figure this out.

She's on her feet, standing up to him, grabbing him.

DR. GAZIRI

We're doing everything we can.

LAURA

Then get someone else!

DR. GAZIRI

There is no one else!

Charles pulls her away.

DR. GAZIRI (CONT'D)

You have to understand. Everything that should make it better, makes it worse. It's like she boiling herself alive with everything we give her - sedatives, anti-convulsant, even water. It's like her whole nervous system is... is...

CHARLES

On fire.

Gradually the stark reality sinks in and Laura's strength crumbles.

**INT. JESSICA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT**

It already feels like a tomb. The injection of the anti-anaesthetic is like the last rites, solemnly watched by staff and parents.

The Anesthesiologist withdraws the syringe. Notes the time.

ANESTHESIOLOGIST

She should come around at 2am.  
Maybe a little before.

Laura and Charles look at the clock - that's just 45 minutes.

The medical staff discreetly withdraw to give them some privacy.

One by one they quietly exit until Charles and Laura are alone.

Laura stares at her daughter - her features barely recognizable thanks to the virulent swelling and bruising - barely able to take a step towards her.

CHARLES

You still think I did this?

Laura doesn't know what to think anymore.

Charles takes his wife's hand.

LAURA

How can this be happening?

Her only answer is the beep of the monitor. And Jessica's relentless breathing.

And the unstoppable ticking of the clock.

It is no longer a question of who's to blame or right or wrong. They're all victims now.

Laura doesn't know what to do, so she tidies up the side table with its gesture of some flowers in a vase. But she's a wreck and she knocks over the vase.

CHARLES

I'll get it.

She insists on fixing it, but only succeeds in dropping the vase.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Will you leave it.

The tension in his voice is horrible. What's he attacking her for? Laura carries on regardless.

LAURA

This is the last thing she's going to see.

This bleak room full of apparatus.

CHARLES

She's going to see us. You.

He softens and guides her to a bedside chair.

LAURA

God, I'm a mess.

CHARLES

You look fine.

She touches Jessica's lurid, flaking arm.

LAURA

She's burning up.

She gets a cold press from the ice bucket and dabs at Jessica's swollen forehead. It's more of a gesture than anything.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Maybe we should get some more ice?

Noise filters in from the hallway -

#### **INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT**

The two kids playing with the hospital model, finally lose it. A TANTRUM. Shrieking. Tears. The Grandparent out of her depth.

#### **INT. JESSICA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT**

Charles tries to shut it out as he faces his forlorn daughter strapped down as if on some Procrustean table.

He takes in this grim sight - strapped at the ankles, strapped at the wrists.

Her thickened veins.

Her bestially heaving chest.

The minutes ticking by pitilessly.

His distraught wife. She flinches as the SHRIEKING TANTRUM resumes outside at a higher, more grating pitch.

Charles storms outside -

**INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT**

A NURSE is trying to help the Grandparent take the flailing, thrashing kid outside.

Charles stops. Shouting at them isn't going to help. In fact, as it stands, nothing is going to help.

The Ghostly Boy hovers in the background: "See. What did I tell you?"

Charles turns back and re-enters, but as he does so, his step falters and his face changes. Not with defeat anymore. With an idea.

He looks back at the miniature hospital - a scale model. The idea growing in his mind.

LAURA

Reacts as Charles moves to the bed. His energy changed.

He goes and kisses his unconscious daughter - a long intense kiss on her forehead. He is moving with purpose now.

LAURA

What is it?

He crouches down - eye to eye with her- and takes her wrists in his hands.

CHARLES

We might still have a chance.

She is confused by his sudden intensity. Even more so when he pulls her close and kisses her.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Talk to her.

He gets up, moving to the door.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Keep talking. Don't give up.

It was, she realizes, a goodbye kiss. She follows, panicking, trying to stop him, but he's moving too fast.

**INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - NIGHT**

LAURA

What are you doing? Where are you going?

But he's already out of sight, down the stairs. Her gaze lands on the scale model of the hospital confused.

**EXT. OLD HOUSE - NIGHT**

The jagged silhouette of their old house caught in the swirl of clouds across a night sky.

We hear the

SMASH of glass -

**INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT**

As he kicks in the basement window, only just repaired.

The house feels strangely alive - like an oven - because the builders are drying out the newly plastered walls, still damp under Charles' touch.

He moves past the huge old boiler roaring agitatedly - flames flickering in the pilot light window - to the sheet-covered shape he moved aside on his last visit.

He pulls off the sheet to reveal the antique toy house as we hear his and Naomi's conversation from before:

CHARLES (VO)

All right, where is it?

NAOMI (VO)

It's in the secret place.

CHARLES (VO)

Oh, the secret place. Not the regular place?

(Naomi - not playing along)

Come on, where is it?

NAOMI (VO)

I told you it's a secret.

CHARLES (VO)  
Hey. You want to go shopping or  
not?

The antique replica toy house.

**INT. BASEMENT - WORKSPACE - NIGHT**

Under a work lamp, Charles LEVERS off the roof to find a maze of eerily accurate replica rooms.

He pokes his way through, sweeping out a dead fly, a flurry of dust. He finds closets and corridors, even the dumb waiter shaft and chimney.

But no secret place.

Sweat dots his forehead as the pressure mounts.

His attention shifts to the roof. He flips it over and places it upside-down like a turtle shell, revealing a replica ceiling.

Charles pries this off to expose the innards of the topsy-turvy roof - an elaborate crisscross of beams and struts.

In the centre is one sealed section - the size of a small room.

Charles pokes around this section with a screwdriver, looking for a way in.

Finally, something SQUEAKS.

His work lamp spotlights steps the back of a tiny closet. Using a screwdriver, he finds a sliding panel of ridged wood. Except it only slides back and forth about half an inch.

There's no way in.

He removes his screwdriver to ponder this setback when the panel promptly flops open like a drawbridge.

In the wall is a small, square hole.

Charles brings his lamp nearer and peers in.

**INT. JESSICA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT**

Dr. Gaziri arrives and introduces the Anesthesiologist.

ANESTHESIOLOGIST  
(to Jessica)  
Not long now.

He opens his case of chemicals, starts preparing a syringe.

**INT. CLOSET - NIGHT**

A CROWBAR

wrenches off a brand new modern panel to reveal -

THE ORIGINAL RIDGED PANEL

behind it. It is a little worm-eaten and threadbare, but the same as in the toy house. Except it won't slide to one side.

Charles tries again and again, sweat on his brow now, but it won't budge.

Unlike the replica, this one comes with sliding wooden locks disguised among the ornamental ridges.

He has to figure out the sequence and it's not easy ...

Until Charles finally works out the sequence - the wooden latches must be turned to form a circle.

He heaves the panel to one side - just six inches across, but sure enough it stiffly swings down like an oven door.

**INT. SECRET ROOM - NIGHT**

A FLASH LIGHT

flares into life as Charles clammers through and lights up -

AN OLD WORKPLACE

With sloping rooftop walls, untouched for centuries, thick with floating dust and hardened dirt.

In the centre is a thick wooden workbench.

He wipes away the crud and finds vicious gouges in the corners. Could this be the place where they were killed?

His mind flashes to Jessica's in hospital - laid out with her wrists in restraints.

His flash light scours the tiny room, but there are no other signs. Just something irritating the back of his neck.

He wipes it off - it's like dust, but more flaky. And it keeps coming.

He ducks backwards out the way, only to get snagged by thick dangling mass of cobwebs.

He swipes them away, prompting even more flakes and something worse, which he now sees right above his head -

THREE PETRIFIED CORPSES

Fixed to the low ceiling.

His light clatters to the floor as he falls backwards as -

**INT. JESSICA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT**

The Anesthesiologist accidentally jabs himself with a needle as he prepares to inject Jessica.

He's a cool professional. This is an very uncharacteristic mistake seemingly nowhere.

**INT. SECRET ROOM - NIGHT**

Charles steadies himself and shines the light up again. There they are - the three children, shrivelled and dried, but otherwise preserved.

Bony feet. Mortified faces. Mouths agape. Arm bones that end above the wrist.

The sound of SCRATCHING draws his light downwards to find -

A small pink mouse. A few of them in fact. Eyes glowing red like in a camera flash before they scurry away, slipping INTO the extra thick single column that supports the tabletop.

The column, he sees, is ornate and carved as if with a thousand windows, or vents. Which means it is hollow.

Is it Charles's imagination or can he feel ripples of hot air coming out of it?

THE TABLETOP

Is smashed aside. His light shines into the column to reveal a straight drop down through the bowels of the house.

**INT. JESSICA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT**

The Anesthesiologist pulls out the needle for the "wake-up" dose.

ANESTHESIOLOGIST  
Just a few minutes.

**INT. SECRET ROOM SHAFT - NIGHT**

A FLASH LIGHT

Makes its way down, fixed to Charles belt.

The SHAFT

Is rudimentary and rough, which provides a good grip for shoes, but lacerates the hands.

He gets to the bottom - sweat pouring off him now, his shirt soaked. It is boiling like a furnace.

He has, we see, lowered by rope a bag ahead of him.

It is rough rock and dirt down here, like a low damp cave - slimy and fetid, thick with swirling dust.

But there is no doubt what the point of interest is - some kind of low altar at the far end.

Charles, forced to crouch, moves closer.

Engraved in the stone ledge is a circle about a two feet in diameter. Wiping around the edge, Charles scrapes away what knows how many years of muck and dirt.

Sure enough, the symbol of the two SNAKES emerges.

So what then is in the center?

Then he brings his light closer and closer. So he can take in every detail as he wipes away the slop and muck to reveal

THE GATEWAY

It is a strange, glistening, slightly protruding STONE ORIFICE, seemingly formed by nature in the rock.

Like a screaming mouth or some Freudian nightmare.

**INT. JESSICA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT**

Jessica's eyes gently open. She takes in her surroundings. Looks at her Mother, sitting there, clasping her hand. Or rather looks through her.

There is no sense of recognition.

**INT. UNDER THE HOUSE - NIGHT**

From his bag, Charles eases out his jug of acid.

He gasps for air in the stifling humidity, fatigue and cramp attacking his limbs.

He sets the acid down by the altar - the jug almost falling from his tired, slippery grasp.

He eases out the stopper, avoiding too late the eye-stinging wisps of smoke.

He takes a breath to ready himself. Maybe even a silent prayer as -

The sight of the Gateway makes him falter.

His hands are like lead around the glass jug as he tilts it forward, taking the plunge, emptying the jug in one go.

All he can see and HEAR are flashes of Sonia's gruesome final moments in the cemetery - SCREAMING in terror as her jug smashes on the stone, splashing acid all over her.

The lethal torrent glugs into the hole, wispy fumes stinging his eyes and nostrils, making his vision swim with yet more flashes of Sonia's death.

He is braced for a similar reaction - the earth to shake, the walls to scream. But the corrosive tide merely flushes down into the bowels of the earth.

And then the cave is silent. And the house too. Even the low rumble of the boiler has stopped.

Charles sits back on his haunches. Waiting for what? A sign? An explosion? But there's nothing. Not a sound.

Did it work? Did it make any difference? There's no way to tell.

**INT. JESSICA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT**

Laura strokes Jessica's hair.

LAURA  
Honey, it's me.

But the light in her daughter's eyes is fading away.

**INT. UNDER THE HOUSE - NIGHT**

Charles fumbles for his matches. Strikes a light only for the head to crumble. They are the thick cooking kind of matches, but the damp from his sweat ruined.

He strikes another. And another. Wet and useless. Is it his imagination or is the ground starting to rumble beneath him like an earthquake tremor.

He frantically finds a dry match and gets it alight, only for it to fizzle under a drop of sweat from his brow.

**INT. JESSICA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT**

Laura grips her daughter's hand.

LAURA  
Jessica, it's Mom.

Jessica eyelids slowly fall shut as she slips away.

**INT. UNDER THE HOUSE - NIGHT**

Charles shakes out the box. Picks out what looks like the last dry match. Gets it alight. Keeps it alight.

And moves, hands cupped, towards the hole. The flame flickers as his *hands shake*. There is no question he is feeling a tremor beneath him. And now a

**SHIMMERING LIGHT**

Refracts through the empty jug. It is too clear a light to be from the match. It can only be a ghost.

He freezes, feeling a presence behind him, prickling his neck. But the flame is burning down in his cupped hands. He goes to drop the match onto the acid, when he hears a child's disapproving tutting.

It is Naomi. Standing there. Hands behind her back. Frowning.

The match is burning down. His last one.

**INT. JESSICA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT**

Jessica's vital signs are all descending.

**INT. UNDER THE HOUSE - NIGHT**

Naomi is shaking her head: Don't do it. But Charles turns away, shutting her out and puts the match to the hole, just in time, to ignite the acid.

The effect is a brief beautiful glow of fire running into the earth, then nothing.

**INT. JESSICA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT**

Jessica's arm and hand go limp in her mother's grip. The Doctors quietly swap looks, That's that.

**INT. SECRET ROOM - NIGHT**

Charles watches the hole go dark, as if the flames burnt out. Then nothing but silence. And Naomi stepping forward, shaking her head in disappointment.

NAOMI

All you did was make her mad.

She takes another step forward. Is she coming to embrace him or attack him?

NAOMI (CONT'D)

Here -

She steps up close - her skin drained of all blood - bringing her arms out from behind her back into the beam of light.

Charles recoils backwards, smashing the light in a flash of bloody stumps as

FLAMES

Erupt from the hole.

**INT. JESSICA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT**

And Jessica's body SPASMS as if hit by electricity, some unholy noise coming out of her body.

Her readings all SPIKE off the charts as her restraints SNAP TIGHT.

**INT. SHAFT - NIGHT**

Charles scrambles up the SHAFT blasted by scorching heat.

Hauling himself back into the secret room, the ground shaking under him. It's like the whole house is coming alive with rage.

**INT. CLOSET - NIGHT**

He fights his way back out of the closet and onto the landing. Tripping, slipping under this earthquake as billowing black smoke spreads around him.

**INT. LANDING - NIGHT**

He gropes his way to the top of the stairs, struggling to stay upright.

But before he takes two steps, a grating SCRATCHING noise makes him pause.

**INT. JESSICA'S ROOM - NIGHT**

It's Jessica seen through the open door. Carving a circle in the wall using a piece of jagged glass.

She is gripping the broken glass so tightly, blood should be flowing from her palm.

JESSICA

What's round and mean?

Charles steps towards her.

CHARLES

Here let me take that.

JESSICA

A vicious circle.

Well, she thinks it's funny.

He takes her hand. It is solid, but there are no cuts or stitches.

JESSICA (CONT'D)  
You still think this is real?

He gently pries away the jagged glass, which certainly cuts his skin and makes him wince.

**INT. JESSICA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT**

Jessica BUCKS so violently, the stitches on her wrists start to come apart.

Now Jessica looks at her mother with real recognition. She is, without a doubt, in real pain.

**INT. JESSICA'S ROOM - NIGHT**

Charles leads Jessica towards the stairs - she smears a bloody palm on the wall. Black choking smoke is now everywhere, from below come huge eddies of dust and ash.

JESSICA  
I like it here. I want to stay.

Charles sees the ground floor is COVERED with fire - a rippling carpet of flames, crawling up the walls and bannisters.

JESSICA (CONT'D)  
See? It's a good pain.

He turns back the way they came, but the door to her room is mysteriously now closed.

He tries the handle, but it is white hot.

CHARLES  
Come on. Let's go.

He pulls her with him.

JESSICA  
Where to?

He tries the handle on his old bedroom, but it comes off in his hand.

She laughs.

Flames creep up the stairs onto the landing, gathering shocking momentum.

He retreats to the only door left. The one still with the faint outline of Naomi's sign.

He rattles at the door, expecting trouble, but it opens easily.

**INT. NAOMI'S ROOM - NIGHT**

There is Naomi's view - her circular window - and the rolling night-time clouds beyond it.

Behind him the door starts to close on Jessica as her hand pulls free of his.

He turns just in time, GRABBING her wrist as the door shuts on his knuckles, trying to break his grip.

The heavy door SQUEEZES remorselessly, almost severing his grip on Jessica as the hallway is devoured in flames.

CHARLES

Hold on.

**INT. JESSICA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT**

Laura holds Jessica's hand as her body SPASMS again - like another jolt being unleashed through her.

JESSICA

Mom, it burns.

Jessica's nails dig deep into the skin on her mother's hand.

**INT. NAOMI'S ROOM - NIGHT**

With one final almighty heave, Charles pulls Jessica through onto the floor as the door SLAMS shut on the deadly FLAMES outside -

**INT. JESSICA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT**

The Doctors scurry to apply a painkiller as Jessica's piercing SCREAM of agony fills the room.

LAURA

You said she wouldn't feel anything.

**INT. NAOMI'S ROOM - NIGHT**

It is strangely peaceful in here. No fires, no flames. Just the distant glow of moonlight over a trestle table of paints, bottles, brushes.

Charles and Laura are both on the floor. He looks into his daughter's eyes, encouraged. She looks like her old self. Like she trusts him.

He gets to his knees, loosening his already open collar, struggling for air.

CHARLES

Let's get outside. Then we'll be fine.

He tries to help her to her feet.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Come on.

But she shakes her head.

JESSICA

She won't let you.

CHARLES

Who?

She nods at the corner behind him.

JESSICA

Her.

He looks, but there's nobody there. Just darkness.

JESSICA (cont'd) (CONT'D)

Her.

Gradually his eyes adjust and he makes out -

The inky silhouette of a terrifying BLACK FIGURE.

The only details are the two points of moonlight reflected in the piercing animal-fierce eyes.

The eyes are red.

Like two candles. Like two red traffic lights. Like two drops of blood. Like the red eyes of a mouse.

Like the red eyes of the shadow puppet from the bazaar, swooping down on the terrified man.

Like the red earrings of the woman in the elevator -

MATRONLY LADY

It's right in front of you and you  
just can't see it, can you.

And back to those two glaring RED EYES in the present,  
patiently waiting in the dark just for him.

He puts an arm out to protect Jessica, sizing up a path to  
the window - the round window overlooking the park where he  
and Laura first met.

MATRONLY LADY (CONT'D)

You just don't get it. It doesn't  
matter what you do.

He makes a dash for it, dragging Jessica with him.  
Frantically unlocking the window and helping through it out  
into the night air.

Smoke seeps under the door, filling the bedroom.

JESSICA

Come on.

She is waiting for him.

CHARLES

Go, go. I'm coming.

He heaves himself onto the window ledge, then turns. He  
realizes the two Red Eyes have not moved - because they  
don't have to.

He can flee, but it won't end this thing.

He looks into Jessica's eyes - a smile of reassurance.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Go on. Don't wait.

So she sets off along the ledge and jumps down, dissolving  
into the night air.

As she as she's out of sight, he drops back into the room to  
face this thing.

But it's not there. It's has moved.

He scours the room, choking back the rising smoke. And of  
course the Black Figure is right next to him.

Before he can react, this thing grips at his throat, SLAMMING him back against the wall.

He thrashes and flails, but its strength is remorseless.

These flaming red eyes bore into his gaze, his brain, unleashing a torrent of moment-of-death flashbacks -

Fiery drawings... Flames... The incinerator...

Circles - everywhere... Ticking clocks, dripping steering wheels, glasses, bowls, bottles... All smashing.

Fingers tracing circles. "It's all connected." "You're not looking!"

HIS FISTS

pound against this dark mass.

As he remembers turning from the round window the first time they saw the house. "We'll take it."

His wife's loving look...

His elevator ride from hell -

MATRONLY WOMAN

The more you struggle the worse you  
make it.

Charles tries to throttle it back, clutching futilely at its huge black throat.

And sure enough, the more he struggles, the worse it gets. His feet lift off the floor as the life is choked out of him. He kicks out wildly, knocking over a chair.

Just like when he put Naomi to bed.

It's no use. He is choking to death.

**INT. JESSICA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT**

Just like his daughter.

**INT. NAOMI'S ROOM - NIGHT**

The round window recedes - seemingly miles away now.

Just like Naomi's last glance in the mall elevator...

He screams. Just like Sonia in her death throes. Just like Naomi as she falls putting out her hands.

And tries one last desperate act - digging his thumbs into the burning red of these remorseless eyes.

It's like plunging his thumbs into molten lava.

The whole room seems to react - inflammable solvents igniting to unleash a blood-red fireball that engulfs the room. The thing unleashes a Jurassic wail of anger.

Blood splutters into his mouth as he starts to lose consciousness - his sinews stretched tight in his neck. Still he digs his thumbs deeper, gouging at these fiery sockets with all his might.

Amid the roar of pain, he gets a final glimpse of his own face reflected in these remorseless red eyes before they seem to extinguish -

And everything is devoured by the terrible billowing beauty of total annihilation...

**INT. JESSICA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT**

Jessica's panting slows down.

Her monitors drop and settle and her spasm subsides. The Medics are assuming her system has finally given out now.

But Laura can tell otherwise by the grip of her daughter's hand.

And her eyes - screwed tight against the pain - gradually open.

She takes in her surroundings and can't believe it. The pain has stopped.

She's still alive and looking at her mother with genuine recognition.

FADE OUT

**EXT. STREET - DAY**

A shifting abstract pattern of white slowly reveals itself to be falling snowflakes.

The city going about its business in the cold. Haggling. Selling. Drinking coffee. Smoking. Fishing off the bridge. The river flowing out to sea. Cars honking in traffic.

We pick out a figure, who hurries along, bundled up against the cold.

**INT. HALLWAY - DAY**

It's Dr. Ayshe. She makes her way to her office, sorting her mail, sifting to find the right key.

LAURA (OS)

Dr. Ayshe?

Dr. Ayshe turns to the figure emerging from the shadows of the stairwell.

It's Laura.

**INT. DR. AYSHE'S OFFICE - DAY**

The familiar room and chair now occupied by an unfamiliar guest - Laura.

Dr. Ayshe stirring her steaming tea, waiting patiently.

LAURA

I'm sorry. I can't switch off about this. I've got too many questions.

DR. AYSHE

That's okay. Go ahead.

LAURA

The verdict at the inquest - I know it was misadventure. But the police only said the boiler "may" have caused the fire. They weren't 100 per cent sure.

DR. AYSHE

How could they be? The place burnt to ground. They could equally have said it was arson, but they didn't.

She considers Laura sitting there, playing with the rubber band on her folder, her mind clearly going round and round.

DR. AYSHE (CONT'D)

Your husband didn't commit suicide, if that's what you're thinking.

No, that's not what she's thinking.

LAURA  
No... It's just...

How to say this without sounding crazy?

LAURA (CONT'D)  
You know the night he died, my daughter made a full recovery.

DR. AYSHE  
I know she survived.

LAURA  
She didn't just survive. She came back from the dead in a matter of minutes. It was a miracle. The doctors still can't explain it. You know my husband's theories about the house, this spirit...

Dr. Ayshe nods, already knowing where this is going.

LAURA (CONT'D)  
How can you not think there's any connection?

A longer pause this time. Dr. Ayshe doesn't want to upset her, but at the same time...

DR. AYSHE  
Well, there was no evidence, for one thing. The house was bulldozed to the ground. What was left of it anyway. You saw it yourself. They didn't find anything but ashes.

Ominously, Laura produces a folder. Just like her husband, she has conclusive "evidence."

LAURA  
These are Jessica's medical records from the night Charles died. If you look, her readings dropped - literally plummeted - at exactly the same time the neighbors reported the fire to the police -

She hands copies to Dr. Ayshe.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Not only that, there was a tremor reported. The first one in 12 years. You see -

Dr. Ayshe politely looks over the evidence, beginning to feel trapped in her own loop than never ends.

LAURA (CONT'D)

How can that just be coincidence?

Dr. Ayshe takes a moment to find the right tone and approach.

DR. AYSHE

Are you familiar with the Thomas Theorem? It is the basis for all self-fulfilling -

**INT. HOSPITAL - DAY**

The final inferno as predicted by Jessica's drawings.

Laura studies her daughter's notebook, for the umpteenth time, we sense. She is sitting in reception, waiting.

Jessica emerges with a Nurse, helping her with her one bag, which she hands to Laura.

Jessica still bears traces from her physical ordeal, but is otherwise recovered.

JESSICA

Did you talk to Dr. Ayshe?

Laura nods.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

What did she say?

LAURA

That he loved you very much.

Jessica knows this isn't the whole truth.

JESSICA

What else did she say?

Laura thinks about answering, then decides otherwise.

LAURA

Who cares what they think.

She steers Jessica to the exit.

**EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY**

The pair emerge into crisp, clean sunlight.

After a few steps, Jessica takes her mother's hand.

Two increasingly small dots rejoining the throng of the city and it's shimmering, jostling skyline beyond.

**THE END**