

FOCUS
FEATURES

LAVA FILMS LLC

PASSENGERS

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BLACK

Silence. Then a low BUZZING SOUND, growing louder. DOGS BARK - just a few, then more, barking together now - panicked, desperate, rising to a fever pitch until finally... A SHARP CRACK splits the air and we...

SLAM IN

MANHATTAN STREET. WIPES BY US LIKE A SMEAR, LIKE WE ARE MOVING THROUGH IT, LIKE WE SEE IT ALL FROM

A SUBJECTIVE POINT OF VIEW - DISTORTED, OVERSATURATED - SEEN THROUGH SOMEONE'S EYES, SOMEONE RECKLESS, WILD... SOMEONE NOT ALTOGETHER WELL.

INTO A BAR... SURROUNDED BY NEON... BLINDING... HUMMING...

A GIRL... NICE EYES... NICE LIPS... WOULD BE NICE TO...

HANDS PAW HER FACE... CARESSING, KNEADING HER SKIN LIKE A BLIND PERSON.

A GUY... ANGRY, SHOVES HIMSELF BETWEEN US... PUSHING...

HURST OUT ONTO THE SIDEWALK... FALLING IN THE STREET... HONKING CAB... YELLING... THEN CUT TO:

A HAND CUPPING WATER... DRINKING...

A POND NEAR CENTRAL PARK SOUTH. CLIMB THE RAILING OF A STONE BRIDGE... DIVING... HIT THE WATER...

BLACK OUT FOR .2 SECONDS THEN CUT TO:

A ROOM... MUSIC POUNDING... BONG LOADS... FIRES UP... BAGS OF MOIST HYDRO...

PAN THE ROOM... SOMEONE ASLEEP OR DEAD... MUSIC POUNDING.

OUT A WINDOW TO A FIRE ESCAPE... STUMBLE DOWN IRON STAIRS...

A CROWDED SIDEWALK... BEE-LINE FOR SOME GUY... TAKE A SWING - CONNECT... HE'S DOWN... KICK HIM IN THE HEAD...

STAGGER AWAY... LOOK BACK... GUYS IN PURSUIT... RUNNING...

DIZZY... FALLING FORWARD ONTO THE SIDEWALK... BY A CHINESE JOINT... LOOK UP AT THE FISH-EYE SAFETY MIRROR AT THE ENTRANCE...

A MAN'S FACE... WARPED BY THE MIRROR... EARLY 30s, STRONG FEATURES, INTELLIGENT FACE, PROBABLY SOME KIND OF PROFESSIONAL... BUT LOOKING LIKE HE'S BEEN THROUGH SOMETHING ROUGH, AND

SHIT... THAT'S WHAT I WAS AFRAID OF.

THAT'S ME.

BLACK OUT

FADE IN:

INT. CAB - MANHATTAN STREET - NIGHT

Rain pats the windshield between skipping wiper blades... and I don't remember any of that.

I AM CHARLES ROTH

and I am the passenger in this cab.

I talk to a friend on my cell phone as we stop at a red light.

CHARLES

I'm still uptown - I'll get there when I get there.

The light changes. Traffic moves. But not us. Aggressive HONKS from behind. I tap on the Plexi partition and make another call. The cabbie doesn't budge. More honks. MANY MORE. I hit the glass harder and tell the guy

CHARLES (cont'd)

It's green.

He still doesn't move so I BANG on the glass - his head snaps up AS HE WAKES FROM HIS NAP. He gets his bearings and steps on the gas.

INT. MATSURI - NIGHT

9th and 16th. Hip at the moment and as busy as any restaurant can be on Friday night. I'm at a table with friends

GILL AND DIANA

A married couple whose wits compliment each other. We're not quite as drunk as I'd like to be. I finish my vodka in one swallow. I drink therefore I am.

GILL

Easy there cowboy.

CHARLES
I have to drink this way. My doctor told me I
have an alcohol deficiency.

GILL
Might want to get a second opinion on that.
I'm surprised you can even walk after last
weekend.

CHARLES
What happened last weekend?

GILL
You tell me. I'd never seen you so out of it.
You were like a crazy person.

I pretend I know what he's talking about.

CHARLES
Well, it was a crazy party.

He shakes his head.

GILL
I saw you on the street, Charles. You walked
right past me and took a swing at some guy.

CHARLES
Did I hit him?

GILL
You don't remember, do you.

CHARLES
I have no idea what you're talking about. I
didn't see you.

GILL
You did but you didn't recognize me. It was
weird.

I study his face. He's not kidding. I look away and take another
drink but there's nothing left in my glass.

GILL (cont'd)
You're blacking out, my friend. It's called a
warning sign.

CHARLES
What is this, an intervention?
C'mon guys...

DIANA

Charlie, we just want to make sure you're okay.

CHARLES

I am okay. What can I say - someone must've slipped me something - I don't know...

The waiter brings another round.

DIANA

Where's Yvette? She's late for your little party.

CHARLES

Yvette is history.

DIANA

Oh, no. I liked her.

I shrug.

CHARLES

Sorry, Di.

DIANA

Charlie, you can't just have one night stands for the rest of your life.

CHARLES

Excuse me - three months. And anyway, why not? All this monogamy has gotten completely out of control. It's like a religion for some people.

Gill laughs and kisses Diana's cheek.

GILL

I gotta pee.

He stands and makes his way to the men's room. I pound my shot.

DIANA

Charlie, I don't like that you're alone - tonight of all nights.

CHARLES

I'm not so thrilled about it myself.

DIANA

Then do something about it. You dump these women before you even know them.

CHARLES

I know them.

DIANA

But they don't know you. There must be something you don't want them to see.

CHARLES

That's not it.

DIANA

Well what is it?

CHARLES

You think I'm hiding something?

DIANA

How would I know? You dumped me before I ever had the chance to find out.

CHARLES

Believe me, I did you a favor. I would've made your life miserable.

She just shakes her head.

DIANA

Jesus Charlie, you're a pessimist.

CHARLES

Yeah... I guess I am.

We're interrupted by a chorus of "Happy Birthday" from Gill and a couple of waiters holding a cake with lit candles... happy birthday to you.

INT. CHARLES'S APARTMENT BUILDING - HALLWAY - NIGHT

I push my key into the lock as MY NEIGHBOR

WINONA WHITEHEAD

returns from having walked her dog. She was seventy last week, and walks with the spring in her step of an ex Broadway dancer.

WINONA

Charles. Wait a sec.

I lean my head against the door frame for balance as Winona slips inside her apartment and returns with a small present, loosely wrapped in Christmas paper. I unwrap it.

CHARLES
Oh wow, cuff links. Thanks.

WINONA
Sure. Happy birthday, kid.

She kisses my cheek, and leaves. Sweet old wacko.

INT. CHARLES'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

I hit the phone machine on my way to the bedroom. It tells me in Stephen Hawking's digitized voice:

MACHINE
You. Have. Zero. Messages.

INT. CHARLES'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

I look at myself in the bureau mirror. Winona's peck of lipstick on my cheek.

I open an old wooden box on my dresser containing a couple of watches, silver dollars, a photo of me and some girl I forgot about, and more than a few of these old pieces from my nutty neighbor. I have to sing

CHARLES
Happy birthday to me.

I crumple the photo, toss my new birthday jewelry in the box, and listen as

A LOW BUZZING resonates from somewhere.

It grows louder... seems to fill my head. I must be more wasted than I thought. My skin tingles like a sensitized shell. The buzzing fuses with the sound of BARKING DOGS somewhere in the building - a fever pitch of barking. The room grows dim even though the lights are on. I COUGH AND STUMBLE. What the fuck?

A SHARP CRACK SPLITS THE AIR... and the next thing I know...

I AM FUCKING

A SERIES OF IMAGES SEEN FROM THE SUBJECTIVE POINT OF VIEW -
DISTORTED, OVERSATURATED.

I AM FUCKING - I don't know who it is, all I know is that it's great and that I will never stop fucking.

SHAPELESS FORMS push into each other like soft putty.

NOW I'M IN THE PARK and on the other side of the path I see

THE SHIMMERING APPARITION OF A WOMAN - lovely looking, seeming to float just above the grass.

THE WOMAN, more solid now. Standing on stone steps. She WIPES DROPS OF BLOOD FROM HER NOSE.

BACK IN BED - HER HAIR undulates over a body - my body.

MOUTHS move along each other like mating snails.

Shadows on shadows. Moans. Pleasure. Rhythm. Rhythm. Rhythm.

AN ANTIQUE PEN, gold with an engraved herringbone pattern. Its sharp nib glides on paper, leaving a sinuous line of black ink.

HER MOUTH, HER LIPS whispering:

WOMAN

If only you could see...

A CRUMPLED BALL OF PAPER goes up in flames, turning to black ash, like a miniature sun burning out.

A TEAR FALLS, SPLASHES ON SKIN.

AN END. TOO ABRUPT. We drift apart. Like two space stations uncoupling and floating off.

EST. AERIAL - MANHATTAN - DAY

Cloudy. Monochrome. Heavy. A rusty dead whale.

INT. CHARLES'S APARTMENT - DAY

I'm struggling to wake at the foot of my bed, trying to coax my eyes open. My mouth cracks apart and I hear myself in an older man's voice say

CHARLES

Fuck me.

Now concentrate asshole, and do something brave... like get out of bed.

I put my feet on the floor and knock something over - AN EMPTY CHAMPAGNE BOTTLE. Another one next to it. Okay...

I move through the apartment, trying to refresh my memory.

AN ASHTRAY overflowing with butts, some with magenta lipstick marks.

A BROKEN CHAIR

CLOTHES STREWN EVERYWHERE

THE ANSWERING MACHINE LIGHT BLINKS.

I hit play and Stephen Hawking says:

MACHINE

You.have.twenty.two.new.messages.

What? And they play.

GILL (MACHINE)

Just looking for you, Charles. I'll try your cell.

WALTER (MACHINE)

Charles, Walter. Give me a buzz.

VICTORIA (MACHINE)

It's Vic. Charlie, why didn't you say Hi. You acted like you didn't know me. Come on, call me - okay?

WINONA (MACHINE)

Charles. Please, there are people trying to sleep.

Winona was upset. And the rest play on. Late happy birthdays and people looking for me. I glance around.

SOME CHOPPED STRAWBERRIES

A KNIFE

DRIED BLOOD - SPATTERED ON THE WALL, SMEARED. A small pool congealed on the floor.

I check my hands. SPOTS OF BLOOD but NO CUTS ANYWHERE.

I'm feeling queasy, confused - nothing's making sense. I try to clear my head, jar the explanation loose - but it's not coming. Next to the pool of blood I see

AN ANTIQUE PEN. Maybe an old Mont Blanc. Whatever it is it's beautiful; gold with an engraved pattern.

As I bend down and grab it, A SHARP PAIN STABS ME IN THE BACK. I reach for the source of the pain but can't get to it.

INT. BATHROOM

I go to the mirror, twist my body to see the reflection of my back. Something has pierced the skin between my shoulder blades. A SMALL TRIANGLE OF SHINY SILVER, dried blood around the wound.

CHARLES

What the hell?

I look at THE ANTIQUE PEN in my hand. The point, the nib, is missing, broken off. I look at my back again and there it is, the missing nib, stuck in my flesh.

That I can't reach it is not nearly as disturbing as the fact that I can't remember how it got there.

BACK IN MY BEDROOM

THE CLOCK READS: 09:50

I punch a number into the cordless and get a hold of Gill at work.

CHARLES

Gill. It's me. I'm late.

GILL (PHONE)

No shit.

INT. CHARLES'S APARTMENT BUILDING - HALLWAY - DAY

I lock two locks in the door behind me, each movement shooting pains through my back.

DOWN THE HALL - WINONA

Whistles "Shall We Dance" to her dog, then sees me. Winona - always one to shoot from the hip - tells me

WINONA

You look like hammered shit.

CHARLES

Yeah, well-

WINONA

You had Mister Burns barking at all hours.
Christ, Charles if you're going to be doing
that kind of stuff you might at least warn me.
I was young once, a couple of times, but-

Mister Burns is the diminutive PUG at the end of her leash. I hurry
past saying

CHARLES

I gotta go.

EXT. ST. VINCENT'S HOSPITAL - DAY

I flick a cigarette, step on it in stride, and enter.

INT. ST. VINCENT'S HOSPITAL - EMERGENCY ROOM - DAY

I lean gingerly against a poster describing in Spanish how to give
the Heimlich, and check off the questionnaire on what diseases and
drugs I've had. One of them is still a short list, knock wood.

I MAKE X'S in the boxes and for some reason I'm drawn to those boxes
and THOSE X'S. There's something odd about the way they look and
somehow they take me to

A FLASHBACK:

THE SHIMMERING APPARITION OF THE WOMAN

IN CENTRAL PARK. She wipes blood from her nose and looks at it on
her hand like it's happened to someone else...

IN MY BEDROOM - Pulling off her clothes...

HER MOUTH moves softly over my lips...

A VOICE

Mister Roth?

That's me. I'm startled back to my body and

INT. ER TRIAGE - DAY

I am sitting on an exam table with my shirt off.

A DOCTOR

with a cockeyed name plate reading LIPMAN and looking like he could be my nephew, is working on that pen nib in my back.

LIPMAN

Mister Roth - sit up a bit.

Then silence except for the sounds of the tweezers and the chatter in the background. I seem to hear everything magnified as the

THE NIB slides through the skin.

LIPMAN (cont'd)

How did this happen exactly?

A good question.

CHARLES

Uh, I don't really know, unfortunately.

LIPMAN

Anything like this ever happen to you before?

CHARLES

You mean, have I been stabbed in the back with a pen before? No. It was my birthday yesterday. I just got more wasted than I thought.

He seems disproportionately concerned.

LIPMAN

Anything else seem strange today?

CHARLES

A few things, why?

LIPMAN

Well, let me ask you - what day do you think this is?

MY EYE - a twitch.

CHARLES

It's fucking Tuesday, why?

LIPMAN

Is your birthday still the fourth?

CHARLES

Yes.

LIPMAN

Because it's the seventh today. It's Thursday the seventh, Mister Roth.

CHARLES

Shit.

LIPMAN

Have you misplaced other sections of time, say, in the past few months or year?

CHARLES

Look - I sometimes drink too much, it's true - but nowhere near as much-

LIPMAN

I'm not interested in your drinking. How many times has this happened to you?

CHARLES

Once or twice, maybe...

LIPMAN

When?

CHARLES

About a week ago.

LIPMAN

Other times too?

I think for a moment.

CHARLES

I don't know - two or three years ago maybe. I disappeared for a couple days.

He writes something down. I don't like where this is going.

LIPMAN

I think you should see a specialist for this kind of thing.

CHARLES

What kind of thing do you think this is?

LIPMAN

He'll explain everything to you.

THE NIB is tossed into a stainless pan with a CLINK.

EXT. FLATIRON BLDG. - DAY

The sharp wedge of a building that splits Broadway from Fifth.

INT. FLATIRON BLDG. - MORGON CORP. - DAY

Translucent panels and stainless steel fixtures. So cool it's sterile - but I like it. I hurry to my office, passing WALTER.

CHARLES

Hey Walter.

WALTER

Yeah, thanks a lot, prick.

What's that all about? Gill meets me and isn't pleased as we walk.

GILL

Hey man, I can cover your ass if you leave me a voice mail or something.

CHARLES

Sorry.

GILL

Hope she was worth it. God, you look like shit.

CHARLES

I've heard. Talk to you later...

I turn a corner and Gill stops.

GILL

Where are you going?

CHARLES

What...

GILL

Thursday at Three? Andreeson meeting in two minutes, right?

CHARLES

(remembering)

Oh shit. Yeah.

GILL

Are you ready? 'Cause Mercer is gonna be pissed.

And here comes MERCER now. The boss, the owner. Forty five and casually dressed like a new-media, rich man.

MERCER

Charles, you made it.

He puts his arm around my shoulder sending shooting pains through my stitches.

MERCER (cont'd)

Don't bullshit me now, are you okay?

CHARLES

Yeah, I'm fine.

MERCER

You don't need to go to rehab or anything like that, do you?

CHARLES

No. Don't worry, I'm gonna close Andresson for you, we're gonna get the video game.

MERCER

I'm not worried about the video game, I'm worried about their entire media division - that's what I want.

CHARLES

So do I. We're gonna land it.

MERCER

Not if you crash and burn on me.

CHARLES

Have I ever let you down?

MERCER

There's always a first time.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

No old folks at this table. Kids rule the world. Mercer leans way back, listening to our strategy. I'm in my element, in the zone.

CHARLES

We hit them on every point of contact. We get our filter words buzzing in every outlet until we've got news anchors and VJs mouthing our tag line like puppets.

Mercer chuckles.

MERCER

Okay, but they've been in bed with IT Marketing for five years, why should they come to us?

CHARLES

Because we deliver the kids. We know how to get inside their heads - we own them. We can flip 'em on like a switch - and I've got the numbers to prove it.

INT. CHARLES'S OFFICE - DAY

I worked hard for this view. A filter fan sucks up smoke I blow at a rack of TV monitors.

I write notes with one hand and fast-forward a test commercial with the other. My eyes are glued to the shredding image, staring deep into the static. I see my reflection and

FLASH TO

HER FACE - soft, sleepy, framed by tousled hair - an angel. She whispers:

WOMAN

If only you could see...

THE PAPER GOES UP IN FLAMES

THE ANTIQUE PEN snatched by FINGERS WITH PAINTED NAILS

SOMEONE KNOCKING ON THE DOOR LOUDLY...

I spring up, startled from the dream. The cobwebs clear.

CHARLES

What is it!

INT. CAB - NIGHT

Not the door at all but a CABBIE knocking on the plexi-glass between me and him. I look and see I'm stopped outside my apartment. I get my shit together and climb out.

INT. CHARLES'S APARTMENT - DAY

I hold a piece of CRUMPLED BURNED PAPER. Black and fragile except for an inch on the bottom. Some markings there - CROSS-HATCHING, like a row of interconnected X's - XXX. I put it carefully aside.

THE KITCHEN - LATER

I scrub the blood from the counter and the fronts of the drawers. I follow the drips to the floor and see

ANTS SWARMING

on a dried-up strawberry from the other day.

I pick it up and open the trash can, but... wait a minute. I rinse it off under the faucet and see that it's not a strawberry at all... it's

A HUMAN FINGER.

Not a whole finger. The first knuckle and a half or so. With a manicured and painted nail.

I drop it on the counter. Freaked. Then pick it up with a paper towel and go to put it in the trash, no, change my mind. The freezer. Shut the door tight.

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

A HOMELESS MAN sits on the sidewalk against a steel parking sign post. He's scratching his arm, hard and deliberate, like he's trying to get to the bone.

I step past him and head inside.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

A LINE OF CAFFEINE ADDICTS await their morning fix. I'm bleary-eyed, need mine badly.

CHARLES

A large coffee please. Black.

I pull some crumpled dollars from my pants pocket and with them THE SMALL PLASTIC BAGGY which contains THE FINGER I found earlier.

CHARLES (cont'd)

And can I have some ice please, in a separate cup?

I pay and move aside. Glance around and then open the baggy. FOUR SOME CRUSHED ICE around the finger. Reseal it. Put it in my pocket.

EXT. STREET - DAY

I'm walking down the street and SLOW DOWN as my eye catches a NEON XXX sign in a video store window. THE RED from the X'S glows and seems to spread out toward me. XXX - I look at them and they look at me.

INT. STRAUB INSTITUTE - DAY

I sit opposite DR. DENIKER. He's a serious man with an unnerving calm about him. He flips through a calender while I study my PALM PILOT.

DENIKER

And what about the time two-and-a-half years ago? Tell me those dates again.

CHARLES

2002. Sometime between January 12th and 15th.

I HIGHLIGHT THE DATES in my palm pilot.

DENIKER

You're sure.

CHARLES

Yeah. It was the week before my sister's wedding and everyone was pissed at me for disappearing.

He marks it on his calender. Then studies my file.

CHARLES (cont'd)

I still don't get it. What's happening to me?

He closes his eyes, rubs his temples.

DENIKER

Let me tell you what we know. Of the early cases, seventy percent were in the homeless population - and that's going back two decades. Some were substance abusers, some mentally ill, some neither.

What's he talking about?

CHARLES

But I'm not a homeless person.

CHARLES (cont'd)

It's not confined to any one group, Mr. Roth. It could be diet, alcohol consumption, chemical imbalance or some kind of brain incident. We're not sure what makes people prone to contracting this disease.

CHARLES (cont'd)

So it's a disease.

DENIKER

Did I say disease? I meant disorder.

CHARLES

Okay, but what kind of disorder?

DENIKER

Basically, we see people that are losing days, and we don't know why.

CHARLES

How many people?

DENIKER

Not too many.

CHARLES

What does that mean?

He regards me in a distant way.

DENIKER

Are you afraid of needles, Mr. Roth?

CHARLES

No, of course not. Why?

DENIKER

I'm going to recommend you see a doctor at the Columbus Center.

He pulls a BUSINESS CARD from his desk.

DENIKER (cont'd)

He's conducting research trials of a new treatment that seems to be effective.

CHARLES

Okay.

DENIKER

It's not a cure per se and officially it's experimental so you'll have to sign a release.

I take the card.

CHARLES

Fine, whatever. I just want it fixed.

INT. CHARLES'S OFFICE - DAY

I'm on the headset, dialing.

As I listen to the other end ringing, I pull open a desk drawer. Inside is

THE BAGGY WITH THE FINGER

Most of the ice has melted by now. The finger is a dark purple.

A voice picks up.

VOICE (PHONE)

What.

CHARLES

Sy, it's Charles.

SY BLACK (PHONE)

Hey Charlie, what's up?

CHARLES

Have you finished those photos?

SY BLACK (PHONE)

Almost. Works been getting in the way.

CHARLES

This is work buddy. Real work. We're paying you.

SY BLACK (PHONE)

I know, I know. Give me a couple more days.

CHARLES

Okay, but I need a favor.

SY BLACK (PHONE)

What kind of favor?

CHARLES
Kind of an odd one, really...

CUT TO:

A MANGLED BODY

Of no particular description other than it is clothed and died violently. I am somewhere...

EXT. BROOKLYN - NIGHT

...Alongside the southbound BQE where I find

SY BLACK

Photographing the dead body for the coroner. Sy is about thirty I guess and, like most people currently in my life, not entirely sane.

CHARLES
What happened to her?

SY BLACK
Him.

CHARLES
How can you tell?

SY BLACK
Same way you tell on a puppy.

He hands me a flood light and tells me to

SY BLACK (cont'd)
Tilt it down by his feet.

Sy changes cameras, then lays down close enough to smell the dead man's bloody toes. He focuses and fires.

SY BLACK (cont'd)
So what's cooking?

CHARLES
I lost a few days this week.

This is serious so he jokes about it.

SY BLACK
Maybe they'll turn up.

CHARLES

I don't think so. Neither does the doctor.

He stops shooting, looks up at me.

SY BLACK

Then there's some shit I better tell you.

INT. SY'S LOFT BUILDING - BROOKLYN - NIGHT

A four story walk-up and we're walking up.

SY BLACK

At least you woke up at home. Guy downstairs - perfectly normal guy, woke up on the Queensboro Bridge two months ago missing his ears. Doctors said it was a sleep-walking accident.

CHARLES

Mine said I had a chemical disorder.

SY BLACK

No one I've talked to thinks its a chemical disorder.

CHARLES

Well what the hell is it?

SY BLACK

There's so many stories, man, so much shit, who knows the damn truth - know what I'm saying?

INT. SY'S APARTMENT - LATER

Brick walls support exposed beams and a serial killer's obsessed number of photos everywhere. In the b.g. A POLICE SCANNER squawks communications between dispatch and cops.

CHARLES

They told me there's a treatment I can try - some kind of shot.

He laughs.

SY BLACK

Oh yeah man, there's like shots and shit you can get.

He pulls his shirt off. His is a ghoulish, sinewy body.

SY BLACK (cont'd)

I mean if there's a buck to be made, somebody will make it off us, right?

He turns his back to show that HIS SPINE IS DOTTED WITH PARALLEL TRACKS OF DIME-SIZED CIRCLES from the middle of his back down to his sacrum.

CHARLES

What the fuck is that?

SY BLACK

The shots, man. Haloperidol. I did them twice a month last year.

CHARLES

Jesus Christ. Why didn't you tell me?

SY BLACK

It's not fucking contagious, man. You didn't get it from me.

CHARLES

I didn't say I did.

But maybe I did - I hadn't thought of that.

CHARLES (cont'd)

Do the shots work? Are you okay?

SY BLACK

Who the hell knows? It's like they're passing out Tylenol for brain tumors.

Then I remember why I'm here and pull out the baggy with THE FINGER bobbing in the melted ice water. I hold it up for Sy to see.

SY BLACK (cont'd)

Nice. Whose is it?

CHARLES

That's the favor.

SY BLACK

It's not like everybody in the city has fingerprints on file, Charlie. Gimme that. It's gonna blow up like a balloon in there.

He grabs a bottle from the freezer. Two inches of Stoli in a fifth bottle. He takes a quick swig, then drops the finger inside and recaps it.

SY BLACK (cont'd)

A chick, I see.

CHARLES

Yeah.

SY BLACK

Did you do it?

It's just dawning on me that that's possible. I sound suspicious as I tell him...

CHARLES

No. I found it on my kitchen floor.

SY BLACK

Whatever. We're not responsible for what we do when... you know, they're taking us over.

CHARLES

They?

SY BLACK

That's what's happening, man. Something is in your brain, making you do all kinds of shit you know you shouldn't. They fuck with your mind, tweak your dreams - it's like something is riding you.

I roll my eyes.

CHARLES

Please. Nothing is "riding" me.

SY BLACK

Yeah man, it is. And the only thing you can do about it is get your shots.

CHARLES

I don't need shots. I just want to know what it is.

SY BLACK

So does everyone.

CHARLES

Someone must know something.

SY BLACK

No one you really want to talk to.

CHARLES

I'll talk to anyone. Who is it?

SY BLACK
There's a guy who was on the commission
investigating this shit.

CHARLES
Have you seen him?

SY BLACK
Yeah. He's a genius, no doubt about it.

CHARLES
So what's the problem?

SY BLACK
No problem. He just put me through some weird
shit, that's all.

CHARLES
What kind of weird shit?

He shrugs.

SY BLACK
Let's just say I'd rather deal with the shots.

EXT. VILLAGE STREET - NIGHT

Walking home. I cross the street and see A SMALL GROUP OF PEOPLE in
the intersection looking down at A MAN LYING IN THE STREET.

Dressed in a suit and tie, HE WRITHES ON THE PAVEMENT like he's being
electrocuted. Cars carefully navigate their way around him.

I go over to the group and check him out. Is he having a seizure?
No. He's laughing his head off. People try to help him up, I lend a
hand... and he lashes out crazily, kicking hard. I jump back. He's
still laughing hysterically. What the hell is happening here?

EXT. BROWNSTONE - BAKUNIN'S BUILDING - DAY

Upper East Side - way upper and far east. I climb the stoop to number
316, matching the address on the back of the photo Sy gave me, just as
the door opens and

A WOMAN

Staggers out, sobbing deeply. Falls along the railing. I reach to
help but she stumbles to the sidewalk.

A MAN - BAKUNIN

steps to the doorway and says to her sincerely in an accent either genuinely British or genuinely affected

BAKUNIN

I'll see you next week, Jennifer.

Jennifer leans up against a parked car. Nods and moves off.

Bakunin turns to me and says

BAKUNIN (cont'd)

The truth hurts.

Fifties. A gaunt face with strong, clear eyes set deeply beneath a determined brow.

CHARLES

Are you Doctor Bakunin?

BAKUNIN

What do you want, exactly?

CHARLES

I'm Charles Roth. A friend said that maybe you can help me.

He just looks me over, says nothing.

CHARLES (cont'd)

He said you're the only one who really knows what's going on here.

BAKUNIN

I'm not the only one.

I take a deep breath and try to be patient.

CHARLES

Okay. But maybe you can tell me anyway. What's happening to all these people? What's happening to me?

BAKUNIN

I don't know what's happening to you.

He turns and heads back inside. What the fuck? I call out to him:

CHARLES

What do you think of the shots, the Halo shots? Do they work, do you recommend them?

He stops, chuckles, turns back to me.

BAKUNIN

You've been to see Deniker. Or maybe you went to Perlman or Fleisher.

CHARLES

Yeah. Deniker.

BAKUNIN

The so-called specialists in the field. Mind you, it's a small field. More like a patch of grass really. They all know perfectly well what's happening. They just do as their told and keep quiet so they don't cause a panic.

(beat)

What was your name again?

CHARLES

Charles Roth.

He shuts the front door and walks past me down the steps.

BAKUNIN

Come with me, Charles Roth.

I follow him to the side of his building where he unlocks an iron gate. We head down some steps, through a passageway and emerge into

A SMALL YARD behind his brownstone.

The backs of other buildings crowd the yard, making it feel like we're in a hole. There are a few old trees but mostly it's overgrown with weeds and brush.

BAKUNIN (cont'd)

Do you smell that? It's an ungodly stench.

I take a whiff of the air. Nothing out of the ordinary.

CHARLES

I don't. What does it-

BAKUNIN

Raw sewage.

He hands me a shovel.

BAKUNIN (cont'd)

Pick a place and start digging.

CHARLES

What?

BAKUNIN

Any place, it doesn't matter.

I look around the yard and now notice that it's pockmarked with small holes, each one a foot or two in diameter, the dirt piled next to it.

BAKUNIN (cont'd)

Go ahead.

What the hell. I stick the shovel into the ground, toss the dirt away. Do it again.

BAKUNIN (cont'd)

Very good. Continue. Let me know if you hit something.

And like an idiot I keep digging.

CHARLES

I need to know what's happening. I need to know what it is.

BAKUNIN

Don't we all...

He watches me dig for a few more moments, then:

BAKUNIN (cont'd)

I like to think of them as particles of subconscious intent, hanging out there in the astral, looking for something to do...

I stop digging and turn to him.

BAKUNIN (cont'd)

Keep digging.

And I do.

BAKUNIN (cont'd)

They're like radio waves waiting to be turned in, looking for a way in to the experiential dimension without the burden of the body. You're like an amusement park for them, or like a car they steal and smash up for kicks.

CHARLES

Something is taking me over?

BAKUNIN

My colleagues would say you have a Passenger. Some think it's a virus, others an alien life force.

(MORE)

BAKUNIN (cont'd)

Whether you perceive it as coming from within or without doesn't much minimize its effect, wouldn't you agree?

I have to stop digging.

CHARLES

So I'm not responsible for this.

He laughs.

BAKUNIN

That's what everyone wants to think - "it's not me, it's not my fault." But I've got bad news for you: you are responsible, it is you. Because they only ride what's inside you already. What's hidden, repressed, primitive. A part of you you don't want to accept.

(beat)

And you're the perfect vessel for them.

CHARLES

Why?

BAKUNIN

You're decadent, disaffected, afraid - very afraid.

CHARLES

You don't even know me.

He laughs again.

BAKUNIN

What would you say to playing a little game?

CHARLES

A game?

BAKUNIN

I'll tell you everything I know about you and you see how long you can go before telling me to stop.

This guy is an asshole.

BAKUNIN (cont'd)

Now, you're in the media somehow, perhaps advertizing.

CHARLES

Marketing.

BAKUNIN

You're not married and can't imagine being so.
You're like a child, afraid of growing up,
afraid of facing yourself-

CHARLES

This could be anyone.

So he tells me details which are mine and only mine.

BAKUNIN

Your worst nightmare is that you'll somehow
lose control of yourself and... do something,
I don't know what. But consequently you have
short, superficial relationships insuring that
nothing will connect emotionally. This has
grown boring but you have nothing to replace
it with. You are in fact utterly disconnected
from that which has meaning and at least once
in the past three years you contemplated
suicide, although deep down you weren't
serious-

CHARLES

Who the fuck do you think you are?

BAKUNIN

Had enough?

CHARLES

Do people pay you for this shit?

BAKUNIN

They do. In cash. Now, you may continue
digging if you like. If not, I just ask that
when you leave you close the gate behind you.
Goodnight Charles.

He opens a back door and goes inside. I stand there dumbfounded and
angry. Then throw down the shovel and storm away. Fuck the gate - I
leave it wide open.

INT. ANDREESON'S OFFICE - DAY

Eighth floor or so on Fifth Avenue overlooking the Library. I'm here
with Walter and Andreeson's team, boards and Powerpoint at the ready.

CHARLES

Now this first group, they don't buy the
advertising, they're skeptical. And they're
just the ones we want, the ones we're gonna
control.

(MORE)

CHARLES (cont'd)

They think they can tune out the noise but we're not gonna let them. Because once we get in their heads the rest will follow.

WALTER

We saturate the market with our filter words and pretty soon every news anchor and VJ is mouthing your tag line like a puppet.

Walter's version of my joke. I just nod my head.

CHARLES

Exactly.

Andreeson's phone is buzzing.

ANDREESON

Just a sec, guys, sorry.

He takes the call, walks away for some privacy. I turn to Walter.

CHARLES

I like that last idea, but where have I heard it before?

Walter just gives me a thin smile. He doesn't care, he's a snake. Andreeson is deep in his call so I get up and stretch my legs. Wander over to a window and look out at

THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

The lions, the steps and...wait a minute.

I SEE A SERIES OF X'S PAINTED IN WHITE ON THE STREET. It's the FIRE LANE down Fifth Avenue in front of the Library.

IMAGES RAM MY MIND like crashing cars. I see HER on the steps. I see HER leaving the Library. I see US WALKING PAST those very X's TOGETHER. In an echoed corner of my head I hear someone calling my name.

WALTER

Charles?

I know it's wrong, but I must get out of here - I must go see. I mumble

CHARLES

I have to take a leak.

And head to the door. Walter looks at me like I just fucked his sister.

EXT. NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY - DAY

Those X'S in the fire lane mark the spot. I stare at them. And they stare back. They MOVE, MULTIPLY. Or at least in my mind they do. Images fracture... morph around them.

FLASH TO:

THE PEN scratching "XXX" on paper.

CLOSE ON HER LIPS: "If only you could see..."

US TOGETHER walking on the steps. It's real.

AND I SIT DOWN ON THOSE SAME STEPS

I'm waiting for her - waiting for something. MY CELLPHONE RINGS but I don't answer it.

CUT TO:

EXT. LIBRARY - LATER

Still there, prowling the sidewalk in front of the lions. Scanning the crowd.

ACROSS THE STREET I see Walter and two Assistants leaving Andreeson's building.

I burrow into the throng and duck down. Hiding. This is pathetic - but necessary. After a few moments I come up for air. Walter is gone. I take a look around.

A GUY wipes his nose.

A BLOND WOMAN looks at me.

A KID walks in circles.

SOME GUY stands eating a hot dog. Dropping some of it on himself as sidewalk traffic moves around him like a stream around a rock.

An entire busload of children move en masse like a school of koi, swarming for the library door. I see a few people, heads taller, working against the current. One of them is literally

THE GIRL FROM MY DREAMS

LOSING HER BALANCE and falling forward a bit.

THE BLOND WOMAN steadies her. My girl nods thankfully and smiles with a little embarrassment, then

SHE HEADS RIGHT TOWARD ME. Her hands in coat pockets. Her hair a deep, rich auburn. She dresses simply. She is perhaps thirty, though I am bad with ages.

She passes so close to me I CAN HEAR her breathe and clear her throat. I know her. I have spent two nights with her in my apartment. The veil of memory parts and

IMAGES FLASH in my mind.

I SEE HER SLIM BODY, naked on my bed, her rose-tipped breasts heaving, her arms outstretched, and now

SHE LOOKS AT ME and opens her mouth to speak. She remembers me, I can feel it in my bones. I'll just say hi and we'll-

But she walks right past me. Down the sidewalk. Steps to the curb and snags a cab.

I catch the number on the duty light - 1336 - and take the next one.

INT. CAB - UP SIXTH - DAY

I can see 1336 weaving between the cars ahead. A TRUCK cuts in front of us and I lose her.

CHARLES

Fuck. Get in front of this guy, would you, buddy?

My cabbie does, but isn't happy about it. Mumbles something in Farsi.

1336 stops at a light and we're right behind her. I look through three sheets of glass at her in the back seat ahead. Keep my eye on her and dial my cell phone.

CHARLES (cont'd)

Yeah Gill ... I'm sick, I couldn't stop puking ... no, no, gimme a break, it was food poisoning ... Yeah. What'd Mercer say? ... Shit. Alright, I'll be back soon.

The light turns and the cabs weave their way to the westside.

EXT. 82ND AND AMSTERDAM - DAY

She's four cars ahead, leaving. Walking around the corner on 82nd. I pay and leap out.

Hurry to catch up. Turn the corner and she's gone. I walk along store fronts, looking in the ones I can, but I don't see her anywhere.

EXT. 83RD AND AMSTERDAM - CAFE LALO - DAY

I've been looking for a while. I pass beneath the windows outside Café Lalo where the patrons feet are near eye level... and even from this angle I recognize her.

INT. CAFE LALO - DAY

I'm sitting two tables behind her as she sips a latte and flips through a magazine. I peer around her to get a

CLOSE LOOK AT HER HAND, but it's in her lap, out of view.

She looks up and out the window... and smiles. I look but can't see what meets her approval.

SHE quickly gathers her things and hurries out. I leave money with my bill and follow.

EXT. CAFE LALO - DAY

I watch from across the street as she greets an OLDER FILIPINA WOMAN PUSHING A STROLLER. She kneels down to hug and kiss the TWO-YEAR-OLD GIRL sitting there. She says goodbye to the older woman and takes over pushing the stroller.

I follow. I can hear her and the girl sweetly mumbling to each other. Up Broadway to 84th then across to West End. The foot traffic thins out. Just us now.

I look closer, TO SEE HER HANDS. She wears gloves and has her fingers curled around the stroller handles.

EXT. 84TH AND RIVERSIDE - DAY

It's one of those twenty story Upper West Side deals with doorman, foyer, and brass-framed awning with the address silk-screened in cursive. She angles the stroller through two sets of doors and into her sanctuary and little did I know

SOMEONE WAS WATCHING ME from behind. It's an awkward moment where she catches me red-handed checking the woman out, following her with my eyes.

THE WOMAN BEHIND ME is... wait a minute, she's... familiar.

THE BLOND WOMAN

From the Library steps. She's in her thirties maybe, with long stringy hair and grey watery eyes - a slightly haunted look.

BLOND WOMAN
Do you live here?

CHARLES
No. Is this 106 Riverside?

She points to the awning where 108 couldn't be more prominent.

BLOND WOMAN
(nice try)
108. 106 is across the street.

CHARLES
Ah. Thanks.

She didn't believe me for a fucking second. I leave. I peer over my shoulder as I cross the street and see her watch me until I'm a safe distance away.

OUT TO:

EXT. 106 RIVERSIDE - NIGHT

I'm waiting on the stoop ACROSS 84th FROM 108 RIVERSIDE. I'm tired. Watching people come and go in hats and scarves.

My cell rings. I answer it.

CHARLES
This is Charles... No, I'm still out of it...
Yeah, do it. Check Jan's computer for the
image... Okay.

I hang up... and feel someone standing beside me. It's THE BLOND WOMAN, gloved and scarfed to fight the cold. I figure the best defense is a good offense.

BLOND WOMAN
Lost again?

CHARLES

You wouldn't understand.

BLOND WOMAN

Oh I think I do.

CHARLES

I'm just waiting for a friend.

BLOND WOMAN

She's no friend of yours so why don't you run along?

CHARLES

I need to see her. It's none of your business.

BLOND WOMAN

You have no fucking idea what you're dealing with. Give the poor woman a break.

Yeah, why don't I? I step on my cigarette and kick it into the gutter. I walk off.

CHARLES

Fuck Charles, what are you doing?

INT. MORCON - DAY

Finally back at work. I walk past the glass partition separating me from Walter's office. He's pacing the room and jawing on his headset. Sees me. Turns away.

INT. CHARLES'S OFFICE - DAY

I'm at my desk. Monitors flash advertising. I check MY PHONE LIST. Twenty one calls with empty boxes beside them.

Gill sticks his head in.

GILL

You okay?

CHARLES

Yeah. What's Mercer saying?

GILL

He's furious, but Andresson's gonna reschedule.

CHARLES

Good. We're gonna be fine. It's almost better this way. Now we can tell him about the focus groups.

GILL

Walter's telling him right now.

CHARLES

Walter doesn't know how to sell it. Let me take care of it.

GILL

How can I? You disappeared. What was I supposed to do?

He's right. Shit.

EXT. LIBRARY - DAY

I pace, keep my face half in my coat collar. Blow some smoke past my nose, scan the crowd.

Suddenly I see

THE WOMAN

Come down the steps and get into a cab.

I dash to the curb. There's a cab but two old ladies ahead of me want it. Fuck 'em. I cut in front.

CHARLES

Excuse me girls.

OLD LADIES (TOGETHER)

Hey! Asshole.

And by now I'm an old pro at following her and I do just that, all the way to

EXT. LEXINGTON AVE - LOWER 60'S - DAY

I follow her to an office building and inside.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

I see her enter an office. A LAW OFFICE with five ungainly names strung together on the door.

I step up late, but see through the inter-office door window into
A CONFERENCE ROOM.

She sits next to a PROFESSIONAL-LOOKING WOMAN in a power suit and
opposite an attractive and WASPY-LOOKING COUPLE.

HER HANDS are in her lap, again just out of view.

The power-suit woman opens an ENVELOPE and shows 8x10 PHOTOS of
THAT TWO-YEAR-OLD GIRL

I think is her daughter to the couple who are pleased and show it.
The woman I've followed is clearly uncomfortable with this and is
offered a Kleenex by the power suit.

I can't get away with standing here much longer so I leave.

EXT. LEXINGTON AVE - UPPER 60'S - DAY

Waiting for her. Pacing. Leaning against walls, mailboxes,
lampposts. Watching.

Finally I see her exit the building. She walks to the curb, raises
her hand, gets into a cab. I can't find one in range. All I can do
is watch her drive off.

INT. LOWER EAST SIDE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

SY'S PHOTOS are on display for a party of friends who have taken over
the place for the show. He's tied up with others, so I view the show
on my own.

On a frosted rectangle of glass are painted the words:

s y b l a c k F O O T F E T I S H

Scanning the room I see all the photos are of FEET. Then of course I
realize they are all DEAD FEET. Strikingly captured, black & white,
dead, pre-Coroner feet. Women feet and men feet and old feet and
young feet. Bloody feet and black feet and white feet and feet
missing toes and feet wearing bloody shoes and broken feet and feet
with bullet holes. And even a tiny, sad pair of baby's feet. Feet.
d e a d f e e t.

Sy spots me. Knows why I'm really here. Comes over. Slips me an
SID evidence cold pack with the finger inside. Keeps his voice down a
little.

SY BLACK

It's the middle finger on the left hand.
She's not on file anywhere, but she's probably
in her late twenties-

CHARLES

I know. I saw her.

SY BLACK

You what? How'd you know it was her? Did you
see her hands?

CHARLES

No, just her face. I remember her face.

SY BLACK

That's impossible. Nobody remembers their
rides. Hell that's the only good thing about
them.

CHARLES

I remember. I can't get her out of my head.

SY BLACK

No. It doesn't happen that way.

CHARLES

Sy I'm telling you, it was her, I'm sure of
it. And I figure if I could just remember
where we met, what happened, maybe-

SY BLACK

What? You could ask her out? 'Gee, you don't
know me, but we fucked the other night and I
thought it might be nice if we met. Sorry
about your finger.' Trust me man, whatever
happened between you two... it wasn't real.

CHARLES

This was real.

My disappointment is obvious in my body language.

SY BLACK

What did Bakunin say? Did you see him?

CHARLES

I saw him. "A genius," right?

Sarcasm drips from my tongue.

SY BLACK

Yeah, he is. The guy was on the shortlist for the Nobel.

CHARLES

Maybe there's a reason he didn't win.

SY BLACK

He didn't win because they smeared him, they totally destroyed him.

CHARLES

Who destroyed him?

SY BLACK

I have no idea. The government - somebody. They wanted to keep it secret but he thought the public should know and he wouldn't keep his mouth shut. So they crushed him. Accused him of all kinds of shit, sleeping with little boys, the whole thing.

CHARLES

Was he sleeping with little boys?

SY BLACK

Fuck if I know. But that's got nothing to do with whether he's telling the truth or not.

We're interrupted by

A MAN - KYLE WHITEFORD

Very clean. Very well-dressed. Very white smile.

KYLE

Who's sleeping with little boys?

SY BLACK

Who isn't?

Kyle laughs.

SY BLACK (cont'd)

Kyle, this is Charles Roth. He gave me my first camera ten years ago. I owe him some of my success.

KYLE

Kyle Whiteford. The Whiteford Gallery.

I've heard of it.

KYLE (cont'd)

Are you a photographer, Mister Roth?

CHARLES

Marketing. Moroon.

KYLE

That's a good firm. I know Gill from Columbia. Let's talk later - I want to hear more about these little boys.

Kyle didn't mind hitting on me. He didn't mind hitting on anyone. He may have kept talking. But my attention moved to

A GIRL

sipping a drink with others across the room. The back of her dress inappropriately plunged so far, the top of her ass and the tightly packed Y-shaped crack peaked out the top. Maybe she's a dancer.

She turns and looks right at me.

EXT. LOWER EAST SIDE RESTAURANT - LATER

I push my way to a spot by the window and light a cigarette. Across the way I see Kyle and Sy hugging. Kyle kisses Sy on the lips and cheek and looks past Sy's shoulder to ME. He smiles and waves.

I nod and blow a blue cloud of smoke that seems to envelope the entire night, and the next thing I know...

THE GIRL WITH THE ASS

is standing next to me holding two drinks.

GIRL

Do you want one?

CHARLES

Thanks, I'm not drinking tonight.

GIRL

Really? Why not?

CHARLES

For good reason. What's your name?

She smiles. Tells me. But I don't hear... because the NEON behind me is going haywire, BUZZING. The noise in this place has become deafening. The hairs on the back of my neck rise - what the fuck is happening?

Out the window A DOG on a leash is going berserk, foaming, barking... at me. I wipe my nose - a dark red stripe on my hand. Oh no... a sharp CRACK splits the air and the next thing I know

MY HANDS ARE AROUND SOME GUY'S THROAT.

THE SUBJECTIVE POINT OF VIEW - DISTORTED, OVERSATURATED.

THE GUY tries to fight back but I'm stronger. He turns bright red, digs his nails into my arms... But I don't let go.

I'M RUNNING, STUMBLING UP SOME STAIRS. OUT THROUGH A GLASS DOOR.

I'M WALKING... carefully because I'm standing on A CABLE SUPPORTING THE ROADWAY OF THE MANHATTAN BRIDGE. Sloping up, up into the night.

I'M EATING... like a dog. Gulping food. Getting my tongue on it. I don't even swallow. I just want to taste it. Food is good.

WET GRASS glistening in the night. My face in it. Something happening to me somewhere down below.

A NOSE NUZZLES MY NECK, warm breath in my ear. I can't see who it is - THE GIRL WITH THE ASS?

AND THE ROUND CURVE OF HER ASS, now without the dress.

DARK, SHAPES MOVING - sounds of lovemaking, shuddering, gasping, throbbing.

IN A DARK ROOM - SHE sits on the end of the bed with her back to me. Slips on a bathrobe, stands, leaves.

OVERHEAD - ON CHARLES

lying in bed. EYES pop open.

I sit up and see I'm

INT. LOFT - BEDROOM AREA - DAY

My jaw is sore. I rub it.

I look around. My memory scans the files. Nothing. I'm nowhere I've ever known before. This is not my bed. Those are not my walls.

FEAR slips into my heart like a warm ice pick. Christ, how many days have gone by this time?

CHARLES

Where the fuck am I?

I get out of bed. I'm naked - and sore. My clothes lie across a leopard print chaise. I slip on my pants. Then take a walk through the loft.

Nice. Very nice. Large pieces of art in larger spaces. It's a comfortable museum. But there's no one here. It's quiet but for the Muffled Manhattan Din.

I HEAR SOMETHING in the next room. A SHOWER RUNNING. My heart pounds.

I WALK SLOWLY around the corner. Step down a short hallway to find the BATHROOM DOOR OPEN.

I go in, slowly... I SEE A WOMAN SHOWERING THROUGH THE OPAQUE SHOWER DOOR.

Then the water shuts off. Should I stay? Go? I Grab a nearby towel and try to act casual, cool.

CHARLES (cont'd)

You know you could have at least put some coffee on.

And she steps from the shower. But it's not she, it's

KYLE WHITEFORD

I didn't know you drank coffee. Good morning.

INT. LOFT - BEDROOM AREA - DAWN

I throw my clothes on and head for the door.

KYLE

Wait...

CHARLES

I'm just... this is not my...

I blurt words sideways from my mouth, not knowing or caring if I'm insulting him.

INT. CHARLES'S BATHROOM - DAY

I am in the shower. Brushing my teeth and tongue.

And suddenly I lose control of my body and dignity and slide to the base of the shower where I utterly break down and weep like a baby.

CHARLES

Fucking help me...

INT. CHARLES'S BEDROOM - DAY

Dripping wet, at my bureau, digging for A BUSINESS CARD. I find it.

EXT. COLUMBUS CENTER - DAY

An tall, faceless medical building in a desolate part of upper Manhattan.

INT. COLUMBUS CENTER - DAY

I exit an elevator and try to figure out which way to go.

I wander down a hall that stinks of industrial cleaning fluid. It seems like every other fluorescent bulb is out. I turn corner after corner with no end in sight.

I spot an OPEN DOOR. Stick my head in and see

A ROOM

Empty except for a gurney. On the gurney is A MAN, STRAPPED DOWN, a tube taped to his face that disappears down his throat. He struggles against the straps to no avail.

Suddenly A DOCTOR appears in front of me and unceremoniously shuts the door in my face.

I continue down the hall and cautiously try another door.

INT. RECEPTION AREA - MOMENTS LATER

Chairs and magazines, just like a doctor's office. I peer through a small window in the wall and see what must be the RECEPTIONIST.

CHARLES

Charles Roth to see Dr. White.

Without looking up she says

RECEPTIONIST

Through that door.

INT. OFFICE - LATER

I sit across from DOCTOR WHITE. I'd say the good doctor is around forty-five or so.

WHITE
 HALoperidol, yes. It's a spinal syringe. You get a local, the shot, and you're good to go in twenty minutes. You feel a little off-balance for a few hours; like something's pushing you and you're tipping forward off your toes.

CHARLES
 What's it really doing? How does it work?

WHITE
 It isolates the abnormal gene responsible for what I believe to be a preon degenerative of the brain. A self-replicating, rogue protein which parasitizes healthy brain cells.

CHARLES
 Parasites. Like leaches. Like something is riding you.

He looks at me for an instant, then releases a short, flat laugh.

WHITE
 Ha, yes. Perhaps on a cellular level. More like a chemical disorder to us. The injections alleviate hallucinations and prevent internal voices within three days for thirty out of forty patients so far.

CHARLES
 What happened to the other ten?

WHITE
 They went the other way.

Oh. He pushes some papers across the table.

WHITE (cont'd)
 You'll want to look these over. First two treatments are a day apart and paid in advance.

INT. COLUMBUS CLINIC - DAY

I'm in a gown with my ass open to the back, holding my urine specimen in a cup, when

On my way back to my little exam room I PASS AN OPEN DOOR, inside a curtain and beyond the curtain I SEE A FACE AND IT IS HERS.

She lies on the table face down, naked and vulnerable. A sheet covering half her butt. No one else around. So I watch.

DOCTOR WHITE

Reaches up and pulls down an odd contraption like one of those mechanical dental light fixtures. But instead of a light, this thing has two contoured metal rails and

TWO CURVED NEEDLES

with a vial of some faded yellow liquid feeding both of them. Doctor White brings the needles down on the armature, lines it up along her spine and pins her to the table with metal rings. Then the two needles arch forward like a slow motion cobra bite and both points push into her, cold and firm along a vertebra.

SHE OPENS HER EYES with a wince and she looks right at me and I at her and she squints on the pain and I see

FLASHED MEMORY of her in my bed twisting in orgasm then back to here and

HER TOES CURL and her calves flex and her fists grip the paper sheet beneath her and...

THE VIALS DRAIN... the Needles release and it's over.

One last glance at each other, and I leave.

INT. WHITE'S OFFICE - DAY

I'm in my street clothes by the time he returns from his duties.

WHITE

Is everything all right, Mister Roth?

CHARLES

Yeah. I think I'm gonna take a rain check.

WHITE

I need you to sit in here for a moment.

He indicates a small examination room.

CHARLES

That's okay, I should get going.

WHITE

I can't let you just leave. We're not allowed to - it's procedure. Sit down and someone will be back in a moment.

INT. EXAMINATION ROOM - LATER

The room like an isolation chamber. No magazines, no pictures on the wall, just a table and a locked cabinet. I sit on a hard plastic chair. Waiting.

I stand and go to the door. Open it. Look out. Down the hall I see

HER

Walking away from me. Now fully dressed, she opens the door to the reception area and goes out.

Fuck the doctors - I go after her.

INT. RECEPTION AREA - MOMENTS LATER

I come through the door, look around, but she's gone. No, wait a second, she's sitting on a low couch behind me.

I stand there awkwardly for half a second, then sit down. Pick up a magazine.

She glances up, sees me. Looks away. She's sipping an orange liquid from a paper cup - with her right hand. HER LEFT IS TUCKED TO HER SIDE, OUT OF SIGHT.

Come on stupid, say something.

CHARLES

I didn't mean to intrude back there. I'm sorry. I'd never seen the treatment before.

She appraises me in a distant way. Says nothing.

CHARLES (cont'd)

Does it work?

HER

For a few days.

CHARLES

Really. I thought it lasted longer.

HER

Your body gets used to it.

She looks away.

CHARLES
So you buy it - you don't think the doctors
are just experimenting on us or trying to
anesthetize us or something.

She looks me straight in the eye and says

HER
I want to be anesthetized.

CHARLES
Yeah... Unless there's some way to really beat
it-

HER
There isn't.

End of conversation. She's done talking but I'm not - I can't be.

CHARLES
You know, I have the strangest feeling that I
know you from somewhere. But I can't figure
out where.

She barely acknowledges this.

CHARLES (cont'd)
I'm Charles Roth. What's your name?

HER
(reluctantly)
Katherine.

CHARLES
Katherine. Do I look at all familiar to you?

Without looking at me she says:

KATHERINE
You know, I was nervous the first time I came
here too. You definitely need to talk to
someone about it. Just not me. Okay?

CHARLES
Okay.

I still haven't seen HER LEFT HAND. So:

CHARLES (cont'd)
What happened to your hand?

KATHERINE

What?

CHARLES

Your hand.

She lifts HER LEFT HAND and IT IS PERFECT - EACH FINGER PRESENT AND ACCOUNTED FOR.

I sputter, unable to cover my confusion.

CHARLES (cont'd)

I'm sorry, I thought...

She looks at me like I'm a child molester.

CHARLES (cont'd)

Excuse me.

I stand and walk directly to the door. The receptionist calls after me but I'm gone.

INT. CHARLES'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

I open the refrigerator and see

THE COLD PACK CONTAINING THE FINGER

Sitting on the shelf between beer and eggs.

I just look at it, shrivelled and grey, surrounded by a puddle of brown liquid. And suddenly I

FLASHBACK TO

HER BODY twisting in my bed.

CLOSE ON THE DRAWING in progress - a few lines so far but impossible to tell what it's going to be.

THE HAND WITH PAINTED NAILS grips the ANTIQUE PEN. A flash of the silver nib as it stabs down INTO MY BACK.

BACK TO THE KITCHEN

My body shudders as I'm jolted from my reverie.

EXT. BAKUNIN'S BUILDING - DAY

I climb that stone stoop again. Knock on the door.

A pause. The door opens. Bakunin is there. Looks me over.

BAKUNIN

So you tried the shots. Couldn't go through with it.

I nod, a bit surprised that he's guessed it.

BAKUNIN (cont'd)

Come inside.

I hesitate, suddenly think twice about being here. He smiles.

BAKUNIN (cont'd)

Don't worry, I won't make you dig today.

INT. BAKUNIN'S HOUSE - DAY

Bakunin's is a simple home. A bit cluttered. Things in boxes. Like he's been moving in for three years.

We sit on opposing couches, a low table with tea pot and cups separates us.

CHARLES

Let's suppose for a second that you're right, that it's all buried inside me somehow. What do I do? How do I make it stop?

BAKUNIN

I wish I could tell you.

Not the right answer.

CHARLES

I thought you were the expert.

BAKUNIN

I am, as much as anyone is. But I can't make it go away.

CHARLES

Then why the hell am I here?

BAKUNIN

I don't know. You tell me.

So I tell him, more than I've told anyone.

CHARLES

Well... There's this woman and... I've been following her around trying to see if she's missing a finger. I have the finger at home... it's insane.

He cleans his glasses a moment, then says

BAKUNIN

Is it her finger?

CHARLES

No.

BAKUNIN

So who is she?

CHARLES

I don't know. I just remember her from the ride.

BAKUNIN

I doubt that very much.

CHARLES

It's definitely her - I can't stop thinking about her.

BAKUNIN

What exactly do you remember?

CHARLES

Just pieces of it. Where we met. The touch of her fingers, the taste of her hair. She was trying to show me something or tell me something - I don't know what.

He's uncharacteristically interested.

BAKUNIN

And you've seen her since then?

CHARLES

Yes.

BAKUNIN

What did she say?

CHARLES

She didn't remember me.

Bakunin leans forward - intense, emphatic.

BAKUNIN
Can you find her again?

CHARLES
Yeah. I know where she lives.

BAKUNIN
Then go to her, talk to her, and causing as little offense as possible, see what she has to offer.

CHARLES
What about the finger?

BAKUNIN
This is about more than a finger Charles. If you really remember, if it's true, then something happened between the two of you, something that may help you.

I shake my head, I don't get it.

BAKUNIN (cont'd)
You need something from her.

CHARLES
But what?

BAKUNIN
I have no idea. You can only answer that yourself.

EXT. RIVERSIDE DRIVE - DAY

I'm walking along the edge of the park. Half-a-block ahead is Katherine pushing a stroller. HER DAUGHTER walks next to her, trying to hit every puddle in Manhattan.

They reach the entrance to a playground. Parked nearby is A TOWN CAR. The door opens and THAT WASPY-LOOKING COUPLE gets out and greets Katherine. I hang back and watch as

KATHERINE kneels to talk with her daughter as the couple looks on. It's clear she's explaining something to the girl. Then Katherine stands, leads her to the couple. The wife offers the girl a stuffed monkey. The husband stands back a bit, a stuffed dog in reserve.

But the monkey seems to work, engaging the girl's attention. So KATHERINE TURNS abruptly and walks away.

The wife takes the little girl by the hand and leads her to the playground.

Katherine keeps going, never looking back, and I FOLLOW HER.

EXT. BROADWAY AND 83RD - NEWSSTAND - DAY

KATHERINE fidgets with a newspaper. Checking her watch.

EXT. AMSTERDAM AVE - DAY

Katherine walking...sighing...biting her lip. Riddled with anxiety.
Steps inside

EXT. A CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY

and buys a pack of Camel Lights, rips into them and fires up.

EXT. CAFE LALO - DAY

She sits on the bench outside smoking her brains out. Sipping her coffee. Checking her watch. Tossing her paper in the trash.

EXT. BROADWAY AND 82ND - BARNES AND NOBLE - DAY

KATHERINE paces back and forth looking at book covers in the window display. Digs HER LAST CIGARETTE FROM THE PACK and fires it up. Mumbles something to herself, wipes a tear from her cheek.

EXT. 82ND STREET - DAY

KATHERINE walking fast toward RIVERSIDE DRIVE, crosses the street and I follow her.

EXT. THE PLAYGROUND - DAY

Kids swarm the slides and swings. Just beyond the jungle gym we both see

HER DAUGHTER

Insecure. Out of place. A bit confused. The monkey has long since ceased to be a distraction.

I STAY BEHIND A CAR and get a good angle to see

KATHERINE hold her hand to her mouth. Whatever this is is agony for her, but FINALLY

THE HUSBAND

Checks his watch and visiting time is over. They head back toward the town car.

KATHERINE straightens up, trying to act casual, as HER DAUGHTER runs to her and hugs her. They all chat a bit. Katherine shakes hands with them. Turns down the offer for a lift, and as the town car glides away from the curb...

Katherine and her daughter head home.

And being half man, half dumbbell, I figure this is a good time to act like bumping into her.

I start to cross the street to her... then hold up to let a TRUCK go by. It roars past me, its red side panel obscuring my field of view, the Doppler cry of its engine seeming to envelop my entire head and

I FLASH TO

THE ANTIQUE PEN... STABBING DOWN HARD INTO MY BACK...

I LASH OUT IN A RAGE

I COVER MY MOUTH as I'M KICKED AND PUNCHED IN THE HEAD

BLOOD SPRAYS ACROSS THE WALL

And I snap back to

EXT. RIVERSIDE DRIVE

I stumble forward, catch myself, shake the flashback from my head. I'M STANDING IN THE MIDDLE OF THE STREET.

KATHERINE stands on the curb looking at me, curious, suspicious. I manage a smile, take a step toward her and

A HORN BLOWS... as I step in front of AN ONGCOMING CAR. It swerves, I jump back... but the SIDE MIRROR CLIPS MY ARM and I GO DOWN...

Take the asphalt impact with my back and then MY HEAD WITH A CRACK.

BLACK

FADE IN:

INT. KATHERINE'S APARTMENT - DAY

I OPEN MY EYES to see - A CAMERA

Mounted on the wall focussed on me.

I GASP FOR AIR and panic, then feel a hand on my shoulder, gently holding me down. It's

KATHERINE - UPSIDE DOWN

Standing over me.

KATHERINE

You're okay, it's alright.

I glance around. Her apartment seems somehow strange, somehow empty. There's very few pieces of furniture and those seem to be bolted to the floor and padded. Every surface is bare, no objects anywhere. On the other side of the room I see another camera - and glimpse a third out in the hall. What is this place - and who is this woman?

CHARLES

What happened?

Her response is abrupt, cold.

KATHERINE

You were hit by a car. The paramedics said you'll be fine if you just take it slow for a while. They carried you up here.

CHARLES

Where are they?

KATHERINE

They left.

A thick bandage wraps my arm. I move my fingers. It hurts but they work.

KATHERINE (cont'd)

Why were you following me?

I could lie and say I wasn't but...

CHARLES

I'm sorry. I shouldn't have.

KATHERINE

You have to stop. I have you on videotape now, I know who you are, I know where you live. If anything happens to me the police will come right to you.

CHARLES

Hold on a second - I just wanted to talk to you.

The PHONE RINGS. She quickly picks it up.

KATHERINE

(into the phone)

Yes, everything's okay, I'm fine ... He just woke up ... No, you don't have to come up, just call me back in five minutes.

She hangs up.

CHARLES

I'm telling you, I just wanted to talk. And, well... I hope you got the license plate of that car.

I smile. She doesn't... but she does seem to soften a bit.

KATHERINE

You think you know me from somewhere - that's what you said at the clinic.

CHARLES

Yes. I know it sounds strange.

KATHERINE

It does.

CHARLES

I think we met once before.

KATHERINE

I'd remember.

CHARLES

What do you do?

KATHERINE

Work at the library.

CHARLES

Oh. I thought you were an artist for some reason.

She's surprised by this.

KATHERINE

I am - I mean, I used to be but I'm not anymore.

CHARLES

Do you draw?

KATHERINE

I did. And painted. Why? Do you?

CHARLES

No. A little photography, but no.

KATHERINE

Maybe you saw me at an opening, but it's been years.

CHARLES

Do you have any drawings here? If I saw one maybe I'd remember.

KATHERINE

They're all packed away in the basement.

HER DAUGHTER calls from the other room.

DAUGHTER (O.S.)

Mommy!

KATHERINE

Listen, I have to feed her and...

I get the hint.

CHARLES

I'll get going.

She takes MY DRIVER'S LICENSE from her pocket and hands it to me.

KATHERINE

I'm sorry, I just have to be careful. Someone's been following me and... then you were too.

CHARLES

I understand. But you don't have to worry about me.

She turns and I follow her to the front door.

There's a CALENDAR on it telling me very clearly TODAY IS THE 21st.

She opens the door for me. I notice she has THE NUMBER 21 WRITTEN ON HER PALM. It's the date.

I step through the door.

KATHERINE

Don't forget to put some more ice on that when you get home.

CHARLES

I will. You know, I'd still like to see those drawings of yours. What would you say to having a cup of coffee with me sometime?

She looks at me like I must be joking.

KATHERINE

I suppose you want me to bring my drawings too.

CHARLES

Yeah. How about tomorrow? After work?

She sighs, shakes her head... but surrenders a bit.

KATHERINE

Alright. I'll meet you at Cafe Lalo. You know where that is?

CHARLES

I do.

She starts to close the door.

CHARLES (cont'd)

And Katherine...

She looks back out.

CHARLES (cont'd)

Thanks for taking care of me.

She nods and shuts the door in my face.

INT. FLATIRON BUILDING - MORCON - DAY

I walk to my office, past JEANIE, my assistant, working hard at her desk.

JEANIE

Howdy stranger. Mercer wants to see you right away.

I stop and turn around.

INT. MORCON - OUTSIDE MERCER'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Mercer sweeps out of his office followed by two assistants. Sees me.

MERCER

Charles.

He keeps moving and I walk with him.

CHARLES

You wanted to see me.

MERCER

I'm giving the account to Walter. He's going to lead it from now on.

CHARLES

Why? He'll blow it for you.

MERCER

At the moment he's the only one holding it together.

So I lie and I'm a good liar - I give it all I've got.

CHARLES

Look, I'm sorry for being out of the office so much but I've been working on something, doing some field research, and I've found these kids and they're like the Rosetta stone of marketing, telling me incredible things, stuff that'll make the whole campaign click, bring it to a whole other level. I should've told you before but let's sit down now and I'll give you everything I have because I don't want to see us lose this account, I don't want to see all that work go down the drain. Let me finish what I started and I guarantee you'll be happy.

Mercer looks at me dispassionately, thinking about it for a moment. Then he says

MERCER

No.

And walks away. Fuck!

Gill is standing nearby, he's heard everything. I slump against the wall.

GILL

Just get back to work and let him calm down for a few days. And if I were you, I'd get my ass to rehab a.s.a.p.

CHARLES

It's not a rehab kind of thing.

GILL

Well what kind of thing is it?

CHARLES

It's hard to explain - it's too bizarre.

GILL

Try me.

I sigh and grope for an explanation.

CHARLES

I'm, um, having blackouts... Losing two or three days at a time, doing weird stuff, stuff I've never done before. It's like something's inside my brain, controlling me, putting ideas in my head...

GILL

And that's bizarre? What the hell do you think we do for a living?

I manage a small laugh.

CHARLES

Right.

GILL

Really Charles, it just means you need to be in rehab.

I shake my head. He doesn't know.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Waiting at the corner for the light to change. In front of me A WELL-DRESSED MAN drops his glove. I pick it up for him, and see HIS NOSE IS BLEEDING.

His slack face stares across the street at A FLOWER SHOP with bright blooms. He smiles, reaches for them, STEPS ONE FOOT OFF THE CURB as TRAFFIC WHOOSHES by.

I gently grab the skirt of his trench coat and HOLD HIM BACK.

THE LIGHT CHANGES - we walk and I follow him safely to the flowers where he smells them, bloodying some Mums with his nose. I stick his glove in his pocket and leave. Ridden - he must be.

EXT. CAFE LALO - DAY

I'm sitting on the bench outside, holding a small basket of STRAWBERRIES, waiting for her.

And here she comes... pushing a stroller with her daughter.

KATHERINE

Hi. Listen, we're gonna have to do it another time. My sitter cancelled and I have to get her home now. I'm sorry - I would've called you but I didn't have your number.

CHARLES

That's all right. Can I walk with you?

KATHERINE

Uh, yeah, okay.

CHARLES

I got you these.

I hand her the strawberries.

KATHERINE

Thank you. I love strawberries. You didn't poison them or anything, did you?

I laugh.

CHARLES

Here, I'll eat one myself.

I do. And live.

CHARLES (cont'd)

See.

She reluctantly tries one.

KATHERINE

Mmm... they're good.

We walk in silence for a moment.

CHARLES

Can I ask you a question?

KATHERINE

I suppose so...

CHARLES

You were ridden recently, weren't you.

KATHERINE

A few weeks ago. Why?

CHARLES

What was it like?

KATHERINE

Like the other times. Horrible, catastrophic.

CHARLES

What happened?

KATHERINE

I don't know.

CHARLES

Do you remember any of it?

KATHERINE

Of course not.

CHARLES

I remember parts of mine. A few weeks ago too. Something happened, something good.

KATHERINE

I doubt it. I've been ridden nine times since she was born and none of them ever led to anything good.

CHARLES

Not even one?

KATHERINE

No.

CHARLES

Maybe there was and you just don't remember.

KATHERINE

We'll never know will we? Fact is, it's not where it takes you, it's where it leaves you that matters.

What can I say to this woman? Her daughter beats me to it..

DAUGHTER

Carry me.

She's out of the stroller and clinging to her mother's leg.

KATHERINE

Honey, sit in the stroller, you're too heavy
for mommy to carry all the way.

Her daughter TURNS TO ME, reaches out her arms.

DAUGHTER

Carry me.

I shrug and pick her up.

Katherine, stutters something similar to words, unsure about this.

CHARLES

Okay?

Katherine reluctantly nods. The little girl is right at home,
nestled between my hip and shoulder.

CHARLES (cont'd)

What's your name?

Her mother answers for her.

KATHERINE

Mary Pat.

CHARLES

Can't be easy raising her alone.

KATHERINE

That's the only way I know.

She's tired and I'm pushing it but I have to.

CHARLES

Was that her father in the park the other day?

KATHERINE

No.

CHARLES

Oh. Where's her father?

KATHERINE

You ask very personal questions.

CHARLES

Yeah. Sorry.

KATHERINE

That's her father right there.

She indicates a DOORMAN standing in front of a building. He's a half-decent looking guy but...

CHARLES

Who, the doorman?

KATHERINE

Yeah.

What?

KATHERINE (cont'd)

I don't know who he is or what city he did me in, but it's him. Or maybe it's that delivery boy there. Or his friend. Or some bum in the subway. Or my neighbor or that guy right there or that bus driver...

She continues in an even, dead tone.

KATHERINE (cont'd)

Could be any of them. All I know is I was ridden two-and-a-half years ago and the next thing I knew I was pregnant.

My head is spinning.

CHARLES

Jesus, I'm sorry...

KATHERINE

Yeah, me too. Listen - I don't know what you want from me, but my life is mine. I don't need anyone else in it, I don't want anyone else to worry about.

CHARLES

Right.

KATHERINE

I don't want to go on dates, I don't need a relationship to feel better... I don't need this.

CHARLES

Got it.

We arrive at her place and Katherine takes Mary Pat from my shoulder.

CHARLES (cont'd)
I guess I should get going now.

KATHERINE
I guess you should.

INT. CHARLES'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

I aimlessly move around the apartment. Nothing interests me, everything seems foreign, a relic from a previous life.

I involuntarily find myself in front of the refrigerator. I open the door, see:

THE COLD PACK CONTAINING THE FINGER

Just laying there on the shelf.

I pick it up, look closely at the shriveled finger inside floating in the brown water.

I should get rid of this thing. I close the refrigerator door, take it to the garbage...

I HEAR A SOUND BY THE FRONT DOOR. What was that? I move in that direction, STILL HOLDING THE COLD PACK.

I see that THE FRONT DOOR IS OPEN. Did I not close it all the way? I step to it and SUDDENLY SEE SOMEONE COMING IN.

I SHOVE THE COLD PACK INTO MY PANT'S POCKET and see that the someone is

GILL

Coming through the door holding a key.

CHARLES
Gill?! What are you doing?

He's calm, serious.

GILL
Good, you're home.

CHARLES
Yeah, I'm home. What the fuck are you doing here? Where'd you get my key-

DIANA walks in behind him. And then SOME GUY I don't recognize.

DIANA

We're sorry to surprise you like this, it just seemed the best way to do it.

GILL

Buddy, you need help and we're here to help you. This is Craig Pivnik...

He indicates the guy I don't recognize.

GILL (cont'd)

He's a psychologist and an expert in getting people off drugs and alcohol.

DIANA

He's got a great track record, Charlie. You should talk to him.

My God, it's a full fledged intervention. If only they knew.

CRAIG PIVNIK

Look, no one wants to be told they have a problem, it's insulting. But really you should be feeling relief more than anything.

I try to play along.

CHARLES

I am. You guys are incredible.

GILL

You can either meet with him here in New York or he can take you somewhere else for a few days. But you have to do something.

CRAIG PIVNIK

You agree with that?

I nod my head.

CRAIG PIVNIK (cont'd)

Then let's go to my office and get started. There's a car waiting downstairs, so grab whatever you need and let's go.

CHARLES

What?

CRAIG PIVNIK

Yeah, right now. No waiting, no thinking - it's important that we jump right into it.

CHARLES
I can't right now.

GILL
Don't worry, Mercer knows - he's behind us one hundred percent.

CHARLES
Yeah, but this is not what you think.

DIANA
Come on Charles, just do it.

CHARLES
I haven't had a drink in two weeks...

CRAIG PIVNIK
That's a great start. But now we have to finish it.

Diana is staring at my pants. I look down and see the top of the cold pack sticking out of my pocket and A WET STAIN extending from there to my knees. THE PACK MUST BE LEAKING.

CHARLES
Oh shit.

And now everyone is looking.

GILL
Are you all right?

DIANA
What's in that plastic bag?

CHARLES
I gotta clean up.

I turn to the bathroom. Craig Pivnik blocks my way.

CRAIG PIVNIK
No more drugs, Charles. Just hand it over.

CHARLES
It's not drugs-

GILL
We don't care, just be straight with us.

CHARLES
Let me just-

From behind me Diana GRABS THE COLD PACK AND PULLS IT FROM MY POCKET.

CHARLES (cont'd)

Give me that!

She turns away and looks at it closely... SCREAMS and drops the thing.

GILL

What is it?

He picks it up.

GILL (cont'd)

Uoh! It's a finger!

CRAIG

What?!

GILL

Charles - what the fuck?!

DIANA

Why do you have a finger?

CHARLES

I don't know, that's the problem.

GILL

Where did you get it?

CHARLES

I found it.

GILL

Where?

CHARLES

Here.

DIANA

Craig, what do we do?

He's not happy with this turn of events.

CRAIG PIVNIK

This is way outside my area of expertise.

And while they talk I shuffle toward the door... then bolt from the room. They shout after me but I'm gone.

INT. CHARLES'S APARTMENT BUILDING - STAIRWELL

Running down stairs like an insane person.

EXT. CHARLES'S APARTMENT BUILDING

Burst out the front of the building. See the town car that's waiting for Craig Pivnik and me. Think twice about it and then dash away down the street.

EXT. BRYANT PARK - DAY

Bakunin sits on a bench laughing, a big bear of a belly laugh. I've just finished telling him what happened and he thinks it's hilarious.

BAKUNIN

You see, they're just possessed in their own way. Unfortunately for you, their charity is misplaced.

I sit next to him, my pants stained, my life in tatters. Bakunin looks me over.

BAKUNIN (cont'd)

She doesn't remember you.

CHARLES

No, and there's no way I can tell her. She doesn't want to hear that we fucked our brains out on some ride.

BAKUNIN

What does she want to hear? What does she need?

CHARLES

I don't know but I don't want to get involved with this woman. I don't want to screw up her life more than it already is. There has to be another way.

BAKUNIN

There is no other way.

CHARLES

Then forget it, forget the whole fucking thing.

BAKUNIN

What do you see?

He gestures to the LIBRARY at the other side of the park.

CHARLES

The library.

BAKUNIN

Look again.

What does he want to hear? Wait a minute. What the hell...

CHARLES

I never noticed them before.

Forty feet up, framed into the facade of the Library building, between the great arched windows of the main reading room are

EIGHT CLASSICALLY DETAILED DOORS.

No balconies or railings for safety. Not even a step or a ledge beyond them. They just open to thin air.

CHARLES (cont'd)

I've passed them a hundred times. What the hell are they for?

BAKUNIN

They're in the blueprints. But no one knows why.

CHARLES

There's gotta be some reason.

BAKUNIN

You're right. They don't appear to function but they must have some purpose. The same goes for you - there's a reason you're being ridden.

I sigh. I can't keep at this.

CHARLES

Look - I don't want to hurt her.

BAKUNIN

How would you hurt her?

CHARLES

I wouldn't.

BAKUNIN

What are you afraid of doing to her?

CHARLES

Nothing. I meant everyone gets hurt-

BAKUNIN

Have you hurt other girlfriends?

CHARLES

No.

BAKUNIN

Have you hit them?

CHARLES

No. And anyway, this is never going to get that far.

BAKUNIN

It's never going to get anywhere because you're afraid.

CHARLES

I should be afraid.

BAKUNIN

We should all be afraid.

CHARLES

Of what?

BAKUNIN

Come on Charles - of everything. Of who we really are. Primitive beasts, each one of us, capable of anything under the right circumstances. It's no wonder we keep it locked away. It's too horrible and we're afraid.

I try to understand this man, this voice, this logic.

BAKUNIN (cont'd)

And that's what they ride in us. But once you learn to fear those things less, there'll be less for them to ride. It's as simple as that.

CHARLES

I just want my life to be normal again.

He puts a hand on my shoulder and assures me

BAKUNIN

Normal is over.

EXT. NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY - DAY

I head up the steps between the lions.

INT. NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY - GREAT HALL - LATER

I speak to a SECURITY GUARD who points to a staircase.

INT. NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY - PRINTS DEPARTMENT - DAY

A dark, wood-panelled room. A few researchers work at long tables. I wander in and look at a drawing displayed in a glass case.

CLOSE ON THE DRAWING

By Hieronymus Bosch. A panorama of DEMONS AND FANTASTIC CREATURES. Birds swallow horses, devils skewer men, fire scorches the land. Hell on earth.

KATHERINE'S VOICE

What are you doing here?

I turn and see Katherine standing behind me. She seems more curious than angry.

CHARLES

Looking at art. What do you do here?

KATHERINE

Mostly organize and catalogue the collection. Charles, you can't just drop in on me like this.

CHARLES

I just thought you might be getting off soon and... I'd still like to buy you that cup of coffee.

She shakes her head, doesn't believe me.

CHARLES (cont'd)

It's just coffee, I promise. Then we both go back to our respective downward spiralling depressions.

She cracks a smile, in spite of herself.

CHARLES (cont'd)

What do you say?

EXT. NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY - DAY

Katherine and I walk down the broad steps together.

CHARLES
Why did you stop?

KATHERINE
Stop what?

CHARLES
Painting, drawing. Seems like this is your world.

KATHERINE
It used to be. I was a good painter. I had a gallery, I was selling out shows, it was great. But once I was ridden I couldn't do it anymore. Nothing would come. Or if it did, I'd draw something that would frighten me - some image, something horrible. I couldn't control it...

She trails off, stops in her tracks. Then turns and walks quickly to the curb. She seems agitated.

KATHERINE (cont'd)
Let's get a cab.

CHARLES
Okay. Or do you want to just go down the block-

KATHERINE
You have to get me out of here. Now.

CHARLES
Why? What's going on?

She bolts into the street, almost gets hit, flags down a taxi. Scrambles inside. Just before I climb in after her, I glance around... and see a familiar face:

THE BLOND WOMAN

Standing twenty yards away, watching us. What the hell...

I climb into the taxi and it pulls away.

INT. TAXI - DAY

We sit at opposite ends of the backseat.

CHARLES
What was that all about?

KATHERINE

Nothing.

CHARLES

Who was that blond woman?

KATHERINE

I don't know.

CHARLES

She said she was your friend, she said she was trying to protect you.

KATHERINE

You've spoken to her? When?

CHARLES

Outside your apartment building. Two weeks ago.

KATHERINE

She's not my friend - far from it. She follows me around, waiting for me to be ridden.

CHARLES

Why?

KATHERINE

Because then she has complete control of me, she can do anything... She's not the only one either. I thought you were one of them at first.

I notice THE NUMBER 27 written on Katherine's palm.

Suddenly, the cab swerves violently to the right, bouncing us around.

CHARLES

Easy there, buddy.

The DRIVER is talking - not on a cell phone, not for any normal reason - just babbling to himself. I lean forward, take a look. His eyes are heavily lidded; he mutters in Russian. He's fucked up in some serious way.

I look up and out the windshield. It frames the on-coming world like a TV - except it's all real.

We hurtle toward AN INTERSECTION, a red light, we're not stopping... pedestrians scatter as we go right through it.

CHARLES (cont'd)
Jesus Christ! Pull over!

He doesn't respond.

CHARLES (cont'd)
Wake up buddy! WAKE UP!

I shout. No luck. I reach through the opening of the plexiglass partition and grab his shoulder, shake it. Nothing.

I try to SQUEEZE THROUGH THE OPENING - not really big enough for me - in fact made to keep people from climbing up front. Stretch my arm for the gear shift on the steering column. Get it. HE REACTS, THROWS AN ELBOW, catches me in the face. I retreat.

I turn to Katherine who looks pretty calm under the circumstances and say

CHARLES (cont'd)
I think we should put on our seat belts.

We do. Just as the cab clips something and keeps going.

CHARLES (cont'd)
SNAP OUT OF IT! HEY!

KATHERINE
He's not gonna snap out of it. He's ridden.

I see a situation developing up ahead.

CHARLES
Hold on...

We watch through the windshield as the taxi drifts toward A LINE OF PARKED CARS and

SIDESWIPES THEM one after the other. All the way down the line - a whole block of parked cars.

The sideview mirror SNAPS OFF, the passenger window SHATTERS, then MY WINDOW.

CHARLES (cont'd)
Get down!

And I lie on top of her which is a good idea because debris is flying everywhere - seems like the whole right side of the car is disintegrating.

And still we race onward bumping over who-knows-what.

I squint upward - the ceiling of the cab and the tops of buildings flying by outside.

WE GRIP EACH OTHER TIGHTLY. I feel the warmth of her breath, the softness of her skin, the curve of her body through her coat.

SHE LOOKS INTO MY EYES, not afraid, strangely calm, more bemused than anything else.

SHE SMILES and we

CRASH into something solid. We're thrown against the back of the front seat and dumped on the floor. The car spins, hits something else and stops.

EXT. TAXI - MOMENTS LATER

We climb out, alive, basically unscathed. See that we've hit another car and then a lamppost. Fortunately no people.

I check THE DRIVER. His head is bleeding but now he's laughing hysterically. I leave him there, in his own world, and return to Katherine.

She's lit a cigarette, like she's having some kind of post-coital smoke.

CHARLES

You sure you're alright?

KATHERINE

I'm fine. I've always wanted to sideswipe a line of cars.

CHARLES

Well now you've done it. Do you think it's too early for a drink?

KATHERINE

No. Definitely not.

INT. BAR - DAY

A seedy joint, not too many people here at this time of day, but perfect for us at the moment. We've finished our first drink and are having a second.

KATHERINE

So where's your girlfriend?

CHARLES
I haven't had a girlfriend in a long time.

KATHERINE
Really? How long?

CHARLES
About six years.

She almost chokes on her drink.

KATHERINE
You haven't been with a woman in six years?

CHARLES
I've been with dozens of women, just no one
I'd call a girlfriend.

KATHERINE
That's almost as bad. What happened with that
last one? What'd she do to you?

CHARLES
Let's just say it was a volatile relationship.

And she says this playfully:

KATHERINE
Does that mean you hit each other?

CHARLES
No. It just means it didn't work out.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

It's getting dark. We're walking home - there's no way we're taking
a cab. She has her arm through mine and it feels good.

CHARLES
Your parents still upstate?

KATHERINE
Yeah. They're currently dead, but both are
there.

I laugh then catch myself

CHARLES
Sorry.

KATHERINE
That's okay. It's been a long time.

She thinks about it for a moment.

KATHERINE (cont'd)
Sometimes I think I'd like to move back there.
Get out of the city.

CHARLES
You think it'd make any difference?

KATHERINE
I don't know. It'd just be... less
complicated. We had a farm in Kinderhook when
I was a kid and I always thought it'd be nice
to live in a place like that again.

She sort of stares off for a second, longing.

KATHERINE (cont'd)
We fed the horses, worked in the garden, swam
in the pond...

CHARLES
Sounds like a nice life.

KATHERINE
I'd settle for one weekend at this point.

I think about that for a moment, then steer her toward the cross
walk.

KATHERINE (cont'd)
What are you doing?

CHARLES
Just come with me.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - LATER

We come to a spot on the path - the EXACT place where we walked
together... ridden. And I walk it with her now... EXACTLY.

I STAND OPPOSITE HER across the joggers path EXACTLY.

A FLASH MEMORY OF HER STANDING THERE - superimposed over where she
stands now. EACH REALITY wavering in and out across the other.
Everything EXACT...

I blink and snap out of it.

...But she doesn't remember a thing.

EXT. NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY - NIGHT

Walking down Fifth Avenue. Approaching the steps, the Lions.

KATHERINE

This is what you wanted to show me? I gotta' tell ya, I see it every day.

CHARLES

Just come with me.

I FLASH on the past and IMAGES FLICKER in my mind:

KATHERINE AND CHARLES meeting on the steps. Slowly coming together under the North Lion, embracing. Walking down the steps.

Again, the TWO REALITIES PLAY OVER EACH OTHER, like parallel universes converging - the past and the present in phase with each other.

I walk her to the EXACT place we met and watch her closely as I re-enact the images in my mind. I hold her. Walk her down the steps.

KATHERINE

What are you doing?

I persist. She wipes her nose. Shivers. Looks at me. I hug her closer as we walk toward the XXX's in that fire lane.

CHARLES

How do you feel?

KATHERINE

A little odd really.

She wipes her nose again. I look for blood. I stop us. Look into her face and tell her to

CHARLES

Remember me.

KATHERINE

What?

CHARLES

You don't remember.

KATHERINE

What is this?

I hear A BUZZING IN THE AIR. DOGS BARKING IN THE DISTANCE. A rising cacophony.

CHARLES

Oh no...

KATHERINE

Are you alright?

It's coming now, there's nothing I can do. I lean in and pull her lovely face to mine and say

CHARLES

Katherine, I'm trying to tell you we've already met. A few weeks ago...

It's too late. I feel every hair on my skin rise as a cloud crosses the sun like a total eclipse...

KATHERINE

Charles?

I COUGH, STUMBLE... A SHARP CRACK SPLITS THE AIR and all at once

I'M PISSING.

AND THE POINT OF VIEW IS WARPED, DISTORTED... RIDDEN.

I'M PISSING A GOOD, LONG, STEADY STREAM and man it feels good - especially since

I'M STANDING IN MERCER'S OFFICE, on his desk actually. Don't ask me how I got in here but now his papers, computer, family pictures are completely soaked... and there's HIS ASSISTANT yelling at me and so...

I BURST INTO THE CONFERENCE ROOM... Gill, Mercer, Walter there. Rip the laptop from Walter's hands, frisbee it into a monitor which explodes...

I'M SWINGING, PUNCHING and I must've hit something because my hand hurts and someone's lying on the ground and then...

A SUBWAY TUNNEL CEILING blurs past me at light speed. At least it seems that way when you're SUBWAY SURFING ON YOUR BACK ATOP THE UPTOWN 1 TRAIN. Burst out into the clear at 122nd Street, the SOUND ECHOING like a roaring lion, and...

WATER. EVERYWHERE. I'm in it, under it... Swimming, sinking... Bubbles, gagging... Break the surface... Crawl up the bank of the EAST RIVER... lie down, comfortable rocks... Hear a voice say something like

GANGSTER

Look at this dumb motherfucker, man. Hey motherfucker, you wanna' suck my dick?

I laugh. I can't help it, I feel good. You would too. YOU WOULD TOO.

GANGSTER (cont'd)

What you motherfuckin' laughing at, motherfucker?

Oh boy. BAM! A boot right in the head. A warm, red, salty, spittle spot dappled by cool rain. Well, I don't have to tell you, they took my shit and left...

So I'M PUNCHING YOU

right in the face. You've been watching me this whole time and not doing anything about it. So BAM! Right in face. I'm punching... punching... punching... my arm is tired and as

I FADE BACK TO CONSCIOUSNESS... I realize he's just some innocent guy and

I AM STUNNED and horrified. I've pummelled him. Not too bad in the face. But his ear is messed up. My fists are a bit torn and sore.

HE IS TERRIFIED. I help him to his feet and sling his arm around my shoulders to help him walk.

CHARLES

What's your name?

He mumbles something that sounds like

CHARLES (cont'd)

Victor? Okay Victor, I need you to walk with me. Come on.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

I wait in the waiting room.

THE NURSE

greet's me. My words lisp past my split lip.

CHARLES

Is he okay?

NURSE

He'll be fine. He's lucky you found him.

CHARLES

Yeah, I'm a regular guardian fucking angel.
Make sure you bill me for everything.

NURSE

That's not really how we -

CHARLES

Every fucking thing.

I toss my credit card on the counter.

EXT. STREET - DAY

I RUN IN WET SOCKS on wet sidewalks. Turn the corner on to MY STREET.
Slow down, panting.

Reach the front of MY BUILDING where I see

KATHERINE

Sitting on the front steps. She sees me, tries to control her shock
at my appearance.

CHARLES

How long have you been here?

KATHERINE

Only about an hour today. I was about to
leave.

CHARLES

I'm glad you didn't.

I take her left hand and slowly roll it over.

THE NUMBER WRITTEN INSIDE IT: 30

My heart drops into my gut. I've just lost three days. I slump
against her.

KATHERINE

This is why it's hopeless, Charles. This is
why it can't work.

CHARLES

No. This is why we have to stick together.
We have to watch out for each other, protect
each other. It's the only way.

KATHERINE

How can we? You ran off so quickly, I couldn't find you. You were alone - I was alone.

CHARLES

But you're here now, that's what's important.

She shakes her head.

KATHERINE

I don't know, Charles... Why me? Why me and an instant dysfunctional family, when there's a whole city of perfectly functional women out there without kids.

CHARLES

First of all, there are no perfectly functional women left anywhere in the world.

She smiles.

CHARLES (cont'd)

And second, I don't want a functional woman. I want you.

I see it. A glimmer, a spark in her eyes. I take her hand.

KATHERINE

You don't want me. My life is so...

CHARLES

Come on. It's getting better.

She laughs, but it's a warm, affectionate laugh.

KATHERINE

You're such an optimist, Charles.

I just realized...

CHARLES

Yeah, I guess I am.

WE KISS. First time familiar. This is someone I love. Then she pulls back and I see blood on her lips from my mouth. She wipes a taste of it from her lip and tongue and sees it on her finger.

KATHERINE

Come on, let's get you inside.

INT. CHARLES'S BATHROOM - DAY

I watch her in the mirror as she finishes dabbing a cut in my cheek with some cotton. Tends to other scratches. Our eyes meet. Silent thank you.

KATHERINE

There.

INT. CHARLES'S BATHROOM - LATER

I'm getting dressed. I check my wounds in the mirror. I'm better now. From the other room I hear her say

KATHERINE (O.S.)

Charles. Look at all this stuff. You must've had some rich girlfriends.

I glance out the bathroom door, see that she's perusing that box filled with miscellanea and WINONA'S JEWELRY GIFTS.

CHARLES

No, I roll old ladies for their jewelry. Actually, just my neighbor. She gave me all of it - one for Christmas, one for my birthday for six years.

I step back into the bathroom and check a bandage that's pulled free from my chin.

KATHERINE

You should put it in a safe deposit box. Have you had it appraised?

CHARLES

That's costume jewelry. She was in the theater.

KATHERINE

No, it's real - it could be worth a fortune. And this pen - I have one just like it.

She picks up the ANTIQUE PEN.

KATHERINE (cont'd)

My father collected them. It's extremely rare. They only made a couple of these...

She stops, looks at it closer.

ME IN THE BATHROOM

I stand there frozen, listening to the silence, not sure what to say.

IN THE MIRROR, I see her walk quickly past.

I hear the front door open... and I tear after her.

EXT. CHARLES'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

I catch up to her as she opens a cab door. I take her arm.

CHARLES

Katherine-

KATHERINE

That's my pen. I was here before, wasn't I.

CHARLES

I've been trying to tell you.

KATHERINE

You fucking used me. I was ridden and you took me to your house - and we sure as hell had sex that time. I know we did.

CHARLES

I was ridden too.

KATHERINE

You're just like that blond woman, you follow me around... You used me and you dumped me in a fucking bowling alley.

She hits me. I defend myself. No one pays any attention.

CHARLES

We were both ridden. That's why I came looking for you at the Library. I remembered you, I remembered where we met-

KATHERINE

You lied to me. I trusted you and you fucking lied.

She kicks me hard.

CHARLES

How could I tell you? I didn't want to lose you. Come back inside, we can figure this out.

KATHERINE
 Fuck you. There's nothing to figure out.
 Nothing.

CHARLES
 Something happened between us, something good,
 I'm telling you-

She turns to face me.

KATHERINE
 No. I've had something good in my life, I
 know what that feels like. I had a boyfriend
 who loved me, I had a successful career, I was
 happy. But then I was ridden and got pregnant
 and it all fell apart. That ride ruined my
 life - I lost everything.

CHARLES
 That's not true, you have Mary Pat.

KATHERINE
 Yeah, and you know what? Now all I can think
 about is that one day I'll wake up from a ride
 and find out I killed her. I'm sure the
 Passengers would love to go on that ride and
 sooner or later they will.

She pushes me away.

KATHERINE (cont'd)
 So no matter how sweet you think things can
 be, all that's waiting for any of us are rides
 and mindless fucking until you jump off a
 building or I kill my own daughter.

She turns and climbs into the cab. She's leaving. For good, stupid.
 Do something. And all I can come up with is

CHARLES
 Katherine...

The cab pulls away with her in it and something falls deep in my
 heart, through my stomach... right straight down to hell.

INT. CHARLES'S APARTMENT - DAY

I'm on the phone, listening to her answering machine.

KATHERINE'S VOICE (PHONE)
 ... please leave a message after the beep...

She's never going to pick up the phone for me.

INT. BAKUNIN'S HOUSE - DAY

Bakunin and I stand looking out his back window. There's a large hole in the yard next to a small beech tree.

BAKUNIN

You see, I found it.

CHARLES

Found what?

BAKUNIN

An old sewage pipe, next to that tree. It was so obvious but I never thought to look there. Nobody did.

What's he talking about?

BAKUNIN (cont'd)

None of us thought anything would be growing beneath the surface but of course we were wrong. The roots of that tree just wrapped themselves around the pipe and cracked it wide open.

I'm happy for him. As for me, I sigh and say

CHARLES

She's gone.

BAKUNIN

You're gone. She's somewhere.

CHARLES

She found out what happened.

BAKUNIN

The truth hurts.

CHARLES

If it wasn't for them we could just be together.

BAKUNIN

If it wasn't for them you never would have been together in the first place. Anyway, there's no "they". It's all you. It's not us versus them, it's us versus us. Don't you see?

CHARLES

Maybe, but-

I suddenly notice something - A SMALL DROP OF BLOOD in one of his nostrils. I recoil.

BAKUNIN

Shh. It's okay.

CHARLES

This is fucked up.

I move away from him.

BAKUNIN

(whispers)

Don't. Shh. This is the good part. You can't control them but if you're alert sometimes you can ride them where you want to go...

I move toward the door. He's extremely compassionate. His voice changes, like he's possessed but not evil.

The blood drips into his lips. I want to leave. He switches back to his own voice. Or his first one. The possession comes in waves.

BAKUNIN (cont'd)

You express how terrible the passengers are, and yet this is the first time in years that you're open to love.

He moves toward me. But his eyes miss mine. Like a blind man.

CHARLES

You're with them.

BAKUNIN

And they're with me. They're with all of us.

I move to the door. Lose my balance. My back against the wall. I slide toward the door, working my way around him. Blood drips.

EXT. STREET - DAY

I'm walking. The whole world is fucked up and I can't walk fast enough... and I walk right into that faceless medical building at

THE COLUMBUS CENTER

I should've come back a long time ago. And before you know it I'm

INT. DOCTOR WHITE'S OFFICE - DAY

On the table, face down and naked. Some shit is being done to my back with swabs and that HALO contraption.

Doctor White brings the TWO CURVED NEEDLES down on the armature, lines it up along my spine and it fits pretty snug and pins me to the table with metal rings. Then the two needles arch forward pushing into me, cold and firm. I grit my teeth and

I'M ONE HAPPY, ANGRY MOTHERFUCKER NOW.

EXT. COLUMBUS CLINIC - DAY

I tip forward. Hold myself along the wall. I vomit along the railing and sit down. But most people say it's worth it.

INT. CHARLES'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

These are the fragments that are left of me. I go to my dresser. Open the box, find

THE ANTIQUE PEN and THE SCRAP OF BURNED PAPER

The X's on the paper just visible below the scorched edge, the only part of the drawing that remains.

I toss them both into the trash.

The PHONE RINGS. I snatch it up.

CHARLES

Katherine?

SY BLACK (PHONE)

No, it's me, Sy.

CHARLES

What do you want, Sy.

SY BLACK (PHONE)

You still got that finger in the fridge?

CHARLES

Why?

SY BLACK (PHONE)

I think I found the owner.

CHARLES

What?

SY BLACK

There's someone over here missing the middle finger on her left hand. I just saw her.

CHARLES

There's probably more than one woman in New York missing her middle finger.

SY BLACK (PHONE)

Trust me man, if she's at this place it's no coincidence.

EXT. RED HOOK - NIGHT

Brick warehouses and fences topped with razor wire. Remote. No one around to complain. My taxi pulls up outside an old union hall, a raging scene inside.

INT. CLUB - MOMENTS LATER

I push my way inside. A decrepit, cavernous building.

SY BLACK

Waits for me just inside the door.

CHARLES

Is she still here?

SY BLACK

She was over there a few minutes ago.

He leads the way through the crowd. I notice that it's not a typical club - there's something decidedly strange taking place. Some in the crowd push and shove like they're on PCP. Others shout, sob, scream like banshees.

CHARLES

What is this place?

SY BLACK

Just a place... Sometimes people bring other people here who are ridden, throw the poor fuckers together and see what happens.

CHARLES

Is that what you do?

SY BLACK

No man, I take pictures, I'm Weege, I'm just checking it out.

We push on. To the other side of the dance floor. Then Sy stops, looks around.

SY BLACK (cont'd)

Shit. I don't know what happened to her. I just saw her...

I glance around too, not sure who I'm looking for... and then I see
THE BLOND WOMAN

Standing nearby. She turns and notices me. This woman gives me the creeps and I impulsively decide to tell her so.

CHARLES

Not you again. Who the hell are you?

BLOND WOMAN

I could ask you the same question.

CHARLES

No. I don't spend my life stalking these poor people.

BLOND WOMAN

Yet here you are.

Forget her. I turn back to Sy.

He's staring at me, his eyes wide.

SY BLACK

You know her?

CHARLES

Not really.

SY BLACK

That's her.

CHARLES

Who?

SY BLACK

The chick without the finger.

I spin around. She's already walked a short distance away. I push my way over to her, GRAB HER LEFT HAND, TWIST IT AROUND TO SEE...

IT'S MISSING THE MIDDLE FINGER.

Holy shit! It's her.

SHE PUNCHES ME IN THE FACE and I

FLASH TO

MY BEDROOM

I'm on top of Katherine, we're both naked.

I twist to look behind me - the BLOND WOMAN is there, her hair floating around her head like Medusa.

She raises her arm and BRINGS IT DOWN HARD, STABBING THE PEN IN MY BACK.

I LASH OUT IN A RAGE.

CLOSE ON MY FACE - clutching something tightly to my mouth.

MY EYES roll back in their sockets.

BLOOD BUBBLES from between my fingers

A HAND PULLS MY HAIR

A FOOT KICKS MY FACE

I let go of whatever I'm holding, roll away. BLOOD STAINS MY CHIN.

I SPIT SOMETHING FROM MY MOUTH -

THE FINGER

BACK TO THE CLUB

I almost collapse from the horror of the memory. I'm stunned, sickened. I can't get the image out of my head.

I see that the blond woman is walking away again. I catch up to her.

CHARLES

You were with us that night, you were there.

KATHERINE

It was a good one, man - a great one.

CHARLES

What happened?

She holds up her hand with the missing finger.

BLOND WOMAN
This happened - but it was worth it.

CHARLES
No, between Katherine and me. What did we do?

BLOND WOMAN
Nothing too bad. You went easy on her this time.

CHARLES
What do you mean?

BLOND WOMAN
I mean not like before.

I shake my head - what's she talking about?

CHARLES
Before?

BLOND WOMAN
You were with her once before.

CHARLES
When?

BLOND WOMAN
I don't know - two or three years ago. You were ridden.

That's fucked up.

CHARLES
And what happened then?

BLOND WOMAN
You don't want to know.

CHARLES
Yes I do. Tell me.

She gives a small, mirthless laugh.

BLOND WOMAN
Well, you beat the shit out of her.

CHARLES
That's bullshit.

BLOND WOMAN

It's not. I was there. You fucked her and hit her - my God, I would've given two fingers to see that again.

CHARLES

I was ridden. You must've forced me to do it.

BLOND WOMAN

I didn't force you, I didn't force anyone.

I shake my head, I don't want to hear it.

BLOND WOMAN (cont'd)

You don't see me forcing her right now, do you?

CHARLES

Why? Where is she?

BLOND WOMAN

Didn't you see her?

CHARLES

Is she here?

I wheel around, searching for her.

BLOND WOMAN

She's here all right.

I stop, put my finger to her chest.

CHARLES

You stay away from her. You hear me?

BLOND WOMAN

I can't.

CHARLES

Why not?

She looks at me with haunted, helpless eyes.

BLOND WOMAN

'Cause when she's ridden...

She shakes her head like I wouldn't understand.

CHARLES

What?

She shrugs, says it almost to herself.

BLOND WOMAN

It's like you get to see a little bit of God peeking through the cracks in her soul.

She looks up at me, eager for understanding.

BLOND WOMAN (cont'd)

You don't just give up something like that.

CHARLES

Stay away from her.

And then I tear away and frantically search the club. Shove people aside, try to look everywhere, at everyone...

EXT. CLUB - NIGHT

Bolt outside. A couple feverishly kissing. Two guys talking.

I look around the back of the building. Some guy puking. Beyond him, A SMALL CROWD.

They're grouped around a A WOMAN writhing on her back, her clothes ripped. A MASSIVE GUY straddles her, pawing her body. People cheer them on. THE WOMAN ON THE GROUND IS

KATHERINE

Holy shit. I yank the guy off her with strength I didn't know I had. I lean over her.

CHARLES

Katherine, it's me.

She's not there - ridden. In a demonic haze.

CHARLES (cont'd)

Katherine.

I pull her to a sitting position... and SHE PUNCHES me right in the mouth like a redneck. And before I know it, she's on me. Punching the living shit out of me.

I wrap my arms around her and hold her tightly. She rams her head into mine, stamps my feet, knees my groin... but I hold on. And after a moment, she calms down.

INT. KATHERINE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - LOBBY - NIGHT

I walk Katherine through THE lobby doors. She's quiet now, like a zombie awaiting instructions.

The DOORMAN eyes of warily. We look like hell and he keeps his distance.

DOORMAN
You all right there?

I nod and we get in the elevator.

INT. KATHERINE'S APARTMENT - LATER

The BABYSITTER opens the door for us. She's appalled by Katherine's condition.

BABYSITTER
Oh my God, what happened?

CHARLES
Let's get her into bed.

BABYSITTER
This is too much, I can't do this anymore.
I've been sitting here for three days, you know.

She leads the way to Katherine's bedroom.

BABYSITTER (cont'd)
I have children too and grandchildren, I have things to do in my life.

I put Katherine into bed.

CHARLES
Can you give us a minute.

She hesitates for a moment, then leaves the room. I kick the door shut with my foot, turn my back for one second and

BAM! Katherine's on me like a cat. A BURST of wild animal. She tears her clothes in the scuffle. Then a dead calm as I fight her off.

Katherine's eyes dilate. She touches herself. Her crotch. Her breasts. Smiles at the sensation. A guttural groan and she stops. Her eyes scan the room. She looks outside the window, then in a drawer for no apparent reason. As she looks around I grab a sharp letter opener that's laying on the desk. Hide it.

She follows me. Stops and stares at me. Through me. Then pushes up against me, nuzzling my neck, grabbing my crotch.

CHARLES (cont'd)

No.

I pull away. I've had her when I didn't know her. And now when I can have her I don't want her. I step back. She touches herself again. I push her down on the bed and she suddenly GOES LIMP. Thank Christ.

I take advantage of the break in the action and unplug an extension cord from the wall. Tie it around her ankle and to the bedpost.

Katherine has calmed down. I brush my hand on her face. She sighs in ecstasy at the simplest touch. I gently stroke her neck and shoulders until she sighs into submission. She fades. She sleeps.

INT. KATHERINE'S APARTMENT - LATER

I'm seeing the babysitter to the door.

BABYSITTER

You treat her right, you hear me?

CHARLES

I will, don't worry.

BABYSITTER

The best thing is to watch the video cameras, that's what I do, that's how I make sure.

CHARLES

Okay. Goodnight.

BABYSITTER

And don't wake up the baby.

INT. KATHERINE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

I check on Mary Pat. Sleeping soundly, oblivious to the chaos swirling around her. I'm about to leave when I suddenly notice that

EVERYTHING HAS BEEN PACKED UP.

All the toys, all the pictures, all the clothing. All packed in a tidy pile of boxes and duffle bags by the door. Besides the crib, THE ROOM IS BARE.

INT. KATHERINE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

I wander the apartment, snooping around. No other bags or boxes - everything as it should be.

I come to a desk. On it are papers, documents - for nobody's eyes but Katherine's. I look and see that they are

ADOPTION PAPERS

For the transfer of parental rights and guardianship from Katherine to some couple in Connecticut. Mary Pat's fate writ small in legalese. All signed and ready to proceed.

INT. KATHERINE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

I sit on the couch watching some inane program on TV. I look up and see the SURVEILLANCE CAMERAS watching me. They must've recorded me looking through her stuff. I don't care.

INT. KATHERINE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Mary Pat is awake and she and I sit on the floor doing an animal puzzle. She's enthusiastic but still hasn't mastered shapes.

I hear A CRASH FROM THE BEDROOM

Rush to her door and sees that KATHERINE is off the bed, in a daze, her ankle still tied to the extension cord.

KATHERINE

Oh godohgodohgod!

CHARLES

It's okay, it's okay. You're safe.

I go to her, untie the cord. She hyperventilates then strikes out before she knows who I am or where she is.

CHARLES (cont'd)

It's me. It's Charles. You're okay.

She steadies herself. Pulls back. Sees the extension cord.

CHARLES (cont'd)

So you wouldn't wander off.

KATHERINE

Where's Mary Pat?

CHARLES

She's here. She's okay. So are you.

She focusses on me for the first time.

KATHERINE
What are you doing here?

CHARLES
I brought you home.

She gets up and quickly leaves the room.

INT. KATHERINE'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Katherine goes to Mary Pat and holds her close. Mary Pat holds up a puzzle piece.

MARY PAT
Look, Mommy. Doggy.

KATHERINE
Oh a doggy. What does a doggy say?

MARY PAT
Woof, woof.

Her daughter's sweet obliviousness is almost too much for Katherine. She catches herself, about to cry.

Now she looks at me. She's cold, still angry from the other day.

KATHERINE
Thank you for taking care of her, but you should go now.

CHARLES
Katherine, I'm not trying to hurt you.

KATHERINE
You lied to me.

CHARLES
How could I tell you? I was hoping you'd somehow remember me... Because I remembered you.

She just looks at me, thinking it over.

CHARLES (cont'd)
That night we were together you drew something...

She visibly recoils.

KATHERINE
Don't even tell me.

CHARLES

It wasn't anything bad. It was beautiful - it was a beautiful drawing.

I see a crack in her armor. Despite her best efforts, she wants to believe this is true.

KATHERINE

Yeah? What was it?

CHARLES

I don't know, it's gone now. You were trying to show me something, tell me something. I was hoping you'd remember that too.

She takes a deep breath, lets her guard down a little. Looks away, examines HER OUT HANDS. Sighs.

CHARLES (cont'd)

You should see the other guy.

She checks out my fat lip and scratched face.

KATHERINE

You?

I nod.

KATHERINE (cont'd)

I'm sorry.

CHARLES

It's okay. Come on, let's get you cleaned up.

I put my arm around her and lead her toward the bathroom.

INT. KATHERINE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Katherine at the front door. She triple locks it. I notice I'm still on this side of all those locks.

I follow her to Mary Pat's room. She peeks in to check on the sleeping girl.

Then closes the door. Turns to me. Looks me in the eye. Whispers

KATHERINE

Do you want something to drink?

I smile.

CHARLES
What have you got?

INT. KATHERINE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Glitter from a million city lights sparkles through the sheer curtains.

Katherine is atop me, pulling my shirt open on my chest. I fumble with her pants and work them over her boyish hips as she rises to help. I push her back, she surrenders and we're together. None of that Passenger shit, this is the real thing.

Two junkies having each other clean. It's oddly beautiful. Comfortably imperfect.

A CAMERA

watching us. The red light blinks.

I press her knee down and straighten her leg on the bed and she falls open to me. I move, she counters, and we dance the slow lovers' dance. Gliding over each other like whales in water. Breathing each other's breath.

A TEAR trails off the tip of her nose as she lies on her side.

CHARLES
Tell me.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - FLASHBACK

It has rained. The air is heavy.

KATHERINE'S POV

She looks down at the blood on her hand that she's just wiped from her nose. Looks across the footpath to CHARLES... a shimmering apparition. She walks toward him. He becomes solid.

FLASH

They're walking, holding hands.

FLASH

INT. CHARLES'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

KATHERINE'S POV - Pen on the paper, just beginning the DRAWING.

CHARLES'S FACE - his eyes watching her, drinking her in.

FLASH - RETURN TO:

INT. KATHERINE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

KATHERINE
I remember you.

She smiles. I kiss the next tear.

INT. KATHERINE'S BEDROOM - DAWN

Milky blue light clouds the room. I hold her close to me, just breathing together.

CHARLES
I have to tell you, while I was here I saw the papers on your desk and, well...I hope you don't give up Mary Pat.

She looks at me, doesn't bite my head off - doesn't even seem that surprised to hear me say it.

CHARLES (cont'd)
It's none of my business I know but... I just hope you don't do it.

She speaks quietly, thoughtfully.

KATHERINE
I don't want to do it, I love her. But, really, how can I possibly keep her. Who knows when some voice will tell me to do something horrible.

CHARLES
We can take care of her together. We can watch out for each other - see if it makes any difference. For one weekend let's do it. Let's get on a train and find your farm upstate and spend the day looking at leaves and sitting on grass, breathing the air, and come back whenever we want or not at all.

She doesn't seem to hear me.

KATHERINE

She'll be safe with that couple. They're nice people. They'll take care of her, they'll protect her.

I nod my head. There's nothing more I can say.

INT. KATHERINE'S BEDROOM - DAY

I wake up in her room, in her bed. The place beside me is empty. She's already up, with Mary Pat probably.

INT. KATHERINE'S APARTMENT - LATER

I have my clothes on now. I amble down the hall toward the kitchen. Hear voices.

THE FRONT DOOR

Is open but no one is around. Just inside the door is A BOX and A DUFFLEBAG - the ones I saw in Mary Pat's room.

A DOORMAN

Appears from outside and takes them. He glances up at me and then quickly away. Discreet, I guess, or... what's going on here?

I turn and see KATHERINE coming down the hallway holding MARY PAT. Shit, it's happening now, SHE'S GIVING UP HER CHILD - and there's nothing I can do.

Katherine looks at me and then away, she can't meet my eyes. Moves toward the door. I stand there horrified, in shock. Finally say

CHARLES

Do you want me to come with you?

She shakes her head, no - still not looking at me. Then:

KATHERINE

Will you stay until I get back?

CHARLES

Of course.

She goes out the door. My God. I can't feel worse than her but I don't know how I could feel much worse.

I GO TO THE WINDOW

Push my face against the glass, look down to

THE STREET BELOW

The AWNING over the front door blocks most of the view, but I can see the back of A MINIVAN, it's rear hatch open. The doorman stands there awaiting further instructions.

I see THE NEW FATHER, the father-to-be, the one I saw in the playground that day. He rounds the back of the van and disappears beneath the awning. What misery is happening under there for Katherine? I try not to imagine it too fully.

And then it's done, or must be, because the doorman closes the back of the minivan and after a moment it drives away.

I move from the window and try to figure out what to do with myself as I await her return.

I HEAR THE ELEVATOR DOOR OPEN. Light steps approaching.

The door opens and Katherine enters. She wipes a tear from her face. She must be destroyed inside. I go to her. I want to say something to ease her pain, but what? I'm silent. Then

MARY PAT

Mommy...

And suddenly the whole scene changes. Mary Pat toddles through the door behind her. I see Katherine's tears are those of commitment and not of loss.

I wrap my arms around her.

INT. KATHERINE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

We collapse on the couch together, completely spent from this day.

Katherine looks over a train schedule.

KATHERINE

There's a train at 9:05 and one at 10 and another one at 12

CHARLES

Let's take the early one.

KATHERINE

You don't want to sleep in?

CHARLES

No, let's get up there.

I notice that SOMETHING IS BUZZING - the TV or a light fixture or something. It gets LOUDER and I realize it's nothing electrical. IT'S IN MY HEAD or outside it or everywhere. And somewhere in the building A DOG IS BARKING, out of control.

I LOOK AT KATHERINE. And she's looking at me, her eyes wide, more sad than afraid. She hears it, feels it too. And feels the dread. It's coming on again. I feel every hair on my skin rise and the light goes dim and there's nothing we can do and

WE just look into each other's eyes and I love her and...

NOTHING HAPPENS. It passes. She's not ridden and I'm not ridden. Can it be true? It is. We dodged the bullet somehow.

Katherine lets out a short laugh, amazed, relieved.

CUT TO:

INT. TOWN CAR - DAY

Heading down Park Avenue on a beautiful day. The window is open and a cool breeze blows through our hair. Sunlight angles in, bathing us in a warm glow. Mary Pat is laughing, gleeful. And so are we.

INT. GRAND CENTRAL STATION - DAY

Vaulted ceilings, painted deep blue, the constellations sparkle across them.

Down below, I walk with the bags. Katherine carries Mary Pat. We're going, we're doing it.

INT. TRAIN - LATER

I put the bags in a rack overhead while Katherine gets Mary Pat settled.

MARY PAT

I wanna toy, Mommy.

KATHERINE

I know honey, but you have to wait for your birthday...

Katherine unzips Mary Pat's coat and I see that the girl is wearing a dress with A CRISS-CROSS PATTERN on it, like a web of interconnected X's.

XXX - the pattern seems to shift and spread out toward me... and all at once

IMAGES RAM MY MIND

Or rather, one long image.

INT. CHARLES'S APARTMENT

THE SCRAP OF PAPER ON THE FLOOR - IT SEEMS TO IGNITE as if by magic. It curls, grows bigger, becomes a ball of fire on the floor, now RISES THROUGH THE AIR...

I'm seeing these images in REVERSE MOTION - THE PAPER IS UN-BURNING.

The paper held by the blond woman. The flame recedes, sucked into the match she holds. And now THE PAPER IS WHOLE.

She hands it back to KATHERINE who draws or rather un-draws a beautiful, simple, Matisse-ish LINE DRAWING OF MARY PAT.

KATHERINE'S VOICE
If only you could see her.

She un-draws the pattern of the dress - XXXXX - the dress she has on now. And then the drawing is gone, the page is blank.

AND I SNAP BACK TO THE TRAIN

Steady myself on the seat back. Blink my eyes. Katherine is watching me.

KATHERINE
Are you okay?

CHARLES
Yeah. When exactly is her birthday?

KATHERINE
Next Friday. October 16th.

I grab my shoulder bag and start for the door.

KATHERINE (cont'd)
Why? What's wrong?

CHARLES
Nothing. I'm just gonna get some water.

KATHERINE
Will you get me one too.

I nod and stumble out the door.

INT. GRAND CENTRAL STATION - PLATFORM - MOMENTS LATER

I hurry up the platform away from the train. Find a spot out of the flow of people. Pull out MY PALM PILOT, click through the screens.

CLOSE ON THE SCREEN

The HIGHLIGHTED dates January 12 - 15, 2002. The dates I figured I was ridden in my meeting with Dr. Deniker.

CHARLES
(to myself)
Plus nine months... October. October 16th...

I GASP.

The palm pilot slips out of my hand and hits the concrete floor with a crack.

INT. GRAND CENTRAL STATION - MEN'S ROOM - LATER

I'm bent over the sink, splashing water in my face.

Is Mary Pat my daughter? I sigh deeply, trying to somehow expel the knowledge.

CHARLES
No, no, no...

INT. GRAND CENTRAL STATION - PLATFORM - LATER

I walk slowly back down the platform. Approach the train... and stop. A short distance away is OUR TRAIN CAR

AND THROUGH THE WINDOW

I can see KATHERINE AND MARY PAT in the lighted interior. Sitting comfortably, happy, unaware of what revelation lurks just outside. It's me. I'm the one that beat her, I'm the one that got her pregnant, I'm the one that ruined her life.

I step toward the train and then stop again. My world is crumbling around me.

A CONDUCTOR yells "all aboard" somewhere down the platform.

I have to get on that train... but I just stand there.

Inside the car the PA announces

AUTOMATED VOICE
Stand clear of the closing doors.

I see Katherine looking around desperately, wondering where the hell I am.

I could just make it to the door from here... but I can't - I can't do it. I step back into the shadows.

Katherine gets up and goes for the door... but they close before she gets there. The train starts to move.

What have I done?

INT. GRAND CENTRAL STATION - DAY

I walk quickly across the main concourse, desperate to get as far away as possible.

INT. SUBWAY STATION - DAY

I sit slumped on a bench, despairing.

Across the tracks I notice A MAN rubbing his hands over his body, like he's wiping rain water from his clothes.

HE LOOKS TOWARD ME, then sort of goes limp as the UPTOWN 6 pulls between us. People on his side exit and enter and the train pulls away leaving

HIM ALONE standing there in a daze. Is that his nose bleeding? He walks toward me...

RIGHT OFF THE EDGE OF THE PLATFORM, crumbles painfully to the tracks. Gets up, limping. Something is broken or sprained but he keeps moving... toward me.

PEOPLE begin to notice, call to him to get the fuck off the tracks. He makes it to the center EXPRESS TRACK, hobbling slowly... and WE ALL HEAR THE EXPRESS COMING...

CHARLES
MOVE, goddammit!

THE TRAIN HORN WAILS as he lumbers, climbs and hauls his ass across the tracks... AND THE EXPRESS IS RUSHING IN and I don't want to see this... and he takes a step... and THE TRAIN ROARS BY HIM, missing him by a foot, the wind from it lofting the tails of his overcoat.

People settle. Some have turned away.

HIS NOSE BLEEDS. WATER DRIPS FROM SOMEWHERE ABOVE. He's wet and falls to his knees and starts to crawl. His HANDS ON THE RAIL, pulling himself forward.

CHARLES (cont'd)

NO!

CLOSE ON HIS WET COAT

AS IT DRAGS BENEATH HIM ACROSS THE THIRD RAIL and a loud CRACK! AND POP like small arms fire as the voltage SLAMS THROUGH HIM and he shakes and quivers and

OUR TRAIN RUMBLES IN, BLOCKING THE SCENE FROM OUR EYES.

INT. BAR - DAY

I'm in the shittiest hole in Manhattan. A wretched place with a handful of wretched people who drink in dark places during the day. And I am one of them. I'm drinking and spilling and weeping and ordering another and maybe this is a good way to kill myself.

EXT. HARDWARE STORE - NIGHT

After all the booze, it's all I can do to walk. I stagger down an aisle and grab A CROWBAR. I slip it under my coat.

EXT. BRYANT PARK - NIGHT

Walking toward the library. Just ahead I notice something in the bushes. I get closer and see

A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN

Dressed like she should be with the First Family at Lincoln Center. Her coat is open, her dress hiked up and

A HOMELESS MAN buries his face between her legs.

The woman's nose bleeds, her face changes from pleasure to blank stare and back again. Definitely ridden.

The homeless man stops, sees me, smiles ugly. I walk on.

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

I walk inside and quickly up the stairs. Pretty empty, really. Nobody reads anymore, even in New York.

THOSE EIGHT DOORS

Stand there all in a row. Challenging me.

I reach into my coat and pull out the CROW BAR and start in on one. BAM! I gouge thick wood chunks from around the big, bronze hasp. And BAM! BAM! BAM! Over and over and I know there are those who hear the echoes and I know they're after me now, and I go even harder and even faster. And I got a good prying hole dug and I lean on that bar with every ounce of angst I can pull from the center of the earth... and just as

TWO LIBRARY GUARDS

rush towards me, THE DOOR CRACKS OPEN and I push it all the way open and overlook Bryant Park. A cold wind blasts in from outside, and I drop the bar and raise my hands to the demons in heaven and scream

CHARLES

Come and get me! I'm right here! Right here waiting for ya'! Let's go for a ride!

And I TOPPLE FORWARD on my inebriated gyro, tumble out the door... just as A GUARD GRABS ME and YANKS ME BACK IN. They wrestle me to the ground and I don't fight back.

LIBRARY GUARD

What are you doing, man?

I just breathe - in and out, in and out. It's all I can do at this point.

INT. 17TH PRECINCT - DAY

A COP leads me down a corridor. In my hands I hold my belt and shoelaces, taken away from me so I don't hang myself.

I arrive at the front desk area. Glance around, see Bakunin is waiting there, waiting for me. He's taken care of everything.

He puts his hand on my shoulder and we walk out together.

EXT. STREET - DAY

On the sidewalk, A MAN furiously plays overturned plastic buckets like drums. He's lost in it, channelling it. Seems nuts or ridden - or both.

Bakunin looks him over.

BAKUNIN

It's going to be hell out here soon. I can feel it.

CHARLES

What's going on?

BAKUNIN

You think it's been bad lately, it's only going to get worse. Maybe two months from now, maybe two weeks, but it's going to explode, they're going to be everywhere. You should be ready - I recommend you go find her.

CHARLES

She doesn't need to see me. I'm everything she hates.

BAKUNIN

Charles, this is it, this is why you remembered her.

CHARLES

Why? So I could find out I beat her, that I ruined her life?

BAKUNIN

For two years you've been working your way back to your daughter. You can't ignore that.

CHARLES

Yeah I can. We're all fucked anyway. We can't beat this thing.

BAKUNIN

This thing is just you. And me. All of the past and all of the future. The Renaissance and the Holocaust. The laughter of children and of pedophiles. Ice cream and cyanide. Love and manipulation. All of it inside us... inside you.

CHARLES

I was doing okay before. If I get ridden once in a while, I can deal with it.

BAKUNIN

Charles, you need to tell her the truth.

CHARLES

I can't.

BAKUNIN

She needs to know.

I shake my head, I'm not going to do it.

He regards me a moment longer... and then his whole tone changes.

BAKUNIN (cont'd)

Well then - it's been a pleasure working with you, Charles. I wish you well.

I'm startled by his formality. He's cutting me loose. He extends his hand, I shake it, and he turns and walks away. Just like that.

EXT. STREET - DAY

I wander down the sidewalk, trying to ponder my next move or better yet, trying not.

I'm going to forget, act normal, get on with my life.

AT A NEWSSTAND

I grab a paper and a pack of smokes. Just like I always do. I hand the money to AN OLD PAKISTANI MAN behind the counter... but he doesn't take it - he doesn't even see me. He stares straight ahead, like he's in a trance, SOBBING quietly. Tears stream down his face. I wait for him to snap out it, then realize he's not going to. I put the paper back and walk on.

I come to the corner, join a GROUP OF PEDESTRIANS waiting for the light. I slowly notice they're all LOOKING UP. I follow their gaze

ACROSS THE STREET, TWELVE STORIES HIGH

A WOMAN stands on the ledge outside a prewar apartment building. In a nearby window, two people try to talk her down.

Instead, THE WOMAN begins undressing, casually, like she's standing in her own bathroom instead of 150 feet in the air. The discarded clothes flutter away.

I turn away. I can't watch this. An electronics store has a selection of TVs in the window showing sports, news, a soap opera. The images are like hieroglyphics to me, they add up to nothing. I know I'm going to turn back... and when I finally do I see

THE WOMAN

Deliberately lean out, spread her arms as wings, and topple soundlessly twelve stories to the sidewalk where the pedestrians scatter like a school of startled fish, then regroup around the mangled heap.

I tear myself away from the horror and walk in a daze to a cab that has just been vacated. I climb in.

INT. TAXI

Driving away. I sit in the back, stunned, catatonic. Stare at a rip in the vinyl seat in front of me. Bits of exposed foam and the sharp end of a spring sticking through...

I lean my head back, CLOSE MY EYES. Breath in and out. Maybe I can go to sleep. Just be still and I can sleep and forget everything...

MY EYES SNAP OPEN. I sit up, alert. Suddenly I know what I have to do.

CHARLES

Take a left here.

CAB DRIVER

You said you wanted to go downtown.

I did say that but

CHARLES

Take a left here anyway.

He snorts his annoyance and turns the wheel. Accelerates down the side street.

CUT TO:

INT. TAXI - DAY

I still look like shit but I'm calm now, steady. Leaning forward, looking ahead.

Trees outside the window beyond me. The park? No. In fact I'm not even in the city anymore.

EXT. KINDERHOOK, NY - SAME TIME

A winding country lane, overhung with old oaks and maples.

The taxi pulls into a gravel driveway and stops in front of a white clapboard farm house.

INT. TAXI

The driver turns to me and says

CAB DRIVER

That'll be three hundred and sixty five dollars.

I dump a pile of cash through the opening in the plexi partition and get out.

EXT. FARM HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

No sign of anyone. I walk around the side of the house.

A noise - THE LAUGH of a child.

I round the corner of the house and see MARY PAT playing in the grass.

I look at her with new eyes, seeing familiarities I never noticed before.

I step forward. She smiles at me, shy but definitely happy to see me.

KATHERINE sits on the porch. A large pad of paper in her lap - SHE'S DRAWING.

She looks up and sees me.

There's little one can say. All is forgiven and nothing at the same time.

She stands and comes down the wooden steps.

KATHERINE

I was hoping you might show up.

CHARLES

Here I am.

KATHERINE
Are you okay?

CHARLES
Never been better.

Maybe I'll tell her the truth and maybe I won't. But I'm going to fight for what I've found and what I want to hold on to.

I scoop up Mary Pat and walk to Katherine.

And I'm safe.

We all are.

For now.

THE END