

(A man, **Daniel**, paces in a room. It appears to be a cellar that has been set up with a few chairs, reasonably clean for a cellar, but with dark, shadowy spaces around the edges. After a moment, **Genevieve** enters, looking harried.)

DANIEL

Oh, great. Great. That's great. Anytime this fucking...century will do, Genevieve.

GENEVIEVE

I'm sorry. I've never been up here before. Well, Greenwich once, but not...wherever the hell we are now.

DANIEL

Exactly. Dirt roads, Genevieve. You had me driving on *dirt roads*. All cows and...forests and shit. It's like *Deliverance* country...

GENEVIEVE

Jesus, we're in *Connecticut*.

DANIEL

It makes me *nervous*, all right? I don't like it. And then you have to pick today of all days to waltz in an hour late...

GENEVIEVE

I got here twenty minutes ago! Those...people didn't want to let me come down here.

DANIEL

Why not?

GENEVIEVE

It might interfere with the communication. I told him I'd been with you for eight years and never interfered once, but they still wanted me to wait in the driveway. The *driveway*, can you believe it? If it hadn't started to rain...

DANIEL

It's raining now? Great. Perfect. Now we get the fucking Addams Family in the *rain*. And we have to do this in the *basement*? I mean, can you smell the *mold* down here? My sinuses are having a mutiny.

GENEVIEVE

I'm sorry.

DANIEL

Oh, shut up with your sorry. Don't forget whose idea this was, coming out here. I'm happy in the studio; I'm happy in the office. But this—

(He gestures helplessly around him)

I don't know if I can... I'm not happy! Goddamnit, judgment calls, Genevieve—that's what I pay you for! And there's a good reason I said no house calls!

GENEVIEVE

Well, there's a good reason you said yes to this one. *Triple* the fee, Daniel.

DANIEL

Trip...I thought it was double.

GENEVIEVE

Not anymore. The guy with the beard just told me. They're making it triple. And they're paying *all* expenses.

DANIEL

Huh?

GENEVIEVE

Yes! He just told me.

DANIEL

Really. Well,...shit. So where'd I have lunch today?

GENEVIEVE

I made some calls, and the most expensive restaurant in Bridgeport is La Prima Gala. I have you down there for \$125.00.

DANIEL

Good girl.

GENEVIEVE

And we'll both be staying overnight in the Bridgeport Hilton on the way back. \$580.00 for two suites. Dinner at Prima Gala first, of course, and breakfast at the hotel. I'm estimating we'll be able to say...close to a thousand. Plus \$8600.00 for the fee. Almost \$10,000.00 for an hour's work and two hours drive. So. Is that enough to soothe the savage beast?

DANIEL

(Nodding, impressed)

Consider me soothed. Hey. I'm sorry. You done good. *(He kisses her on top of her head)* It's just...I'd like to just get this done and get the fuck out of here. What'd you Google on these assholes?

(Slight pause)

GENEVIEVE

I was hoping you wouldn't ask.

DANIEL

No.

GENEVIEVE

I tried, but...

DANIEL

Don't do this to me, Genevieve.

GENEVIEVE

Look, it's really weird. It's like these people live completely off the grid. There's just nothing out there on them...

DANIEL

No. Do not tell me you left me out here in East Anal Intercourse, Connecticut completely fucking blind! Do not tell me that!

GENEVIEVE

It's not *completely*. I got a couple of things.

(He stares at her in disbelief for a moment, then gestures for her to continue..)

Well, the daughter: Kristen Zelthausen. I got a couple hits on her. She's an actress, sort of. Got a review of her here in some experimental, off-off-Broadway thing.

(Shows him a newspaper clipping.)

There she is, on the left.

DANIEL

Do I...? She looks a little...familiar. Would I have seen her in something?

GENEVIEVE

Do you *go* to the theatre?

DANIEL

No.

GENEVIEVE

Well, that answers that. You weren't missing much with this one, apparently. I've never read a review this nasty. Listen: "Kristen Zelthausen spends act one moping about the stage like a basset hound on Quaaludes, and when she finally attempts emotional

histrionics late in act two, you'll dearly miss the Kristin Zelthausen of act one..." Brutal. Of course, we're assuming it's the same Kristen Zelthausen...

DANIEL

Are *you* on Quaaludes? Of course it's the same *Kristen Zelthausen!* What else?

GENEVIEVE

Umm, she tried starting her own catering service, it looks like—in Manhattan. It went bankrupt. A little article here in...

DANIEL

Huh. Okay, okay, financial hardship, bad luck. Good. I can work with that. What else?

GENEVIEVE

Just one more thing, but it's really weird...

DANIEL

Will you stop saying that? Like this place isn't weird enough?

GENEVIEVE

I found this police widow's chat-room, if you can believe it.

DANIEL

Wow. Cool.

GENEVIEVE

And this one woman keeps talking about her husband never being the same after investigating the Zelthausen suicide. The Zelthausen suicide, the Zelthausen suicide—she keeps saying it, but I can't find anything anywhere about a Zelthausen suicide. Apparently, the cop ended up killing *himself*...

DANIEL

Don't worry about the cop. I don't care about the cop. It's the Zelthausen suicide—that's it. That's the contact! But who the fuck is it? Are you *sure* you looked everywhere?

(She glares at him, says nothing. He rubs his face in exasperation.)

Okay. Did anybody in the family let anything slip when you walked in? Or when you talked on the phone? Do we have a pronoun? Please, God, let there be a fucking pronoun!

GENEVIEVE

No pronouns.

DANIEL

Are you sure?

GENEVIEVE

You know, you are one question like that away from me turning right on my heel and leaving you here all by yourself. One question. Do you know that?

DANIEL

I know, I know. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. It's just... Wait. Do you hear something? Somebody's coming. Do the intro.

GENEVIEVE

What? Oh, Jesus.

DANIEL

Quick!

(She rolls her eyes, then takes the stance of an infomercial hostess. She speaks quickly, mechanically, and he prepares himself as if awaiting an entrance to a television studio.)

GENEVIEVE

“Tonight, we welcome all those gathered. All people gathered together in this television studio, all people gathered together around their television sets, and especially, all those beings gathered on that other plane: a plane as distant as Venus and as close as the air around you. The place we call...*The Other Side of the Dark*. Music, music. Our host tonight is a man who realized from a young age that he had the shocking, uncanny ability to communicate with the dead. Choosing to share his amazing gift with others, this man has made it his life's work to reconcile the living and the deceased, to bring messages of comfort to the grieving and hope to the despairing. Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming Daniel...Dark...North!”

(The door swings open, just as she finishes, and Zelthausen, a commanding, brooding man of indeterminate age, enters. Daniel responds as if he'd just strolled in to rapturous applause. His body loosens and seems lighter. He extends a hand to Zelthausen, his smile wide and sympathetic.)

DANIEL

Mr. Zelthausen. Welcome.

(He falters, realizing that it is, in fact, Zelthausen's own house. Zelthausen raises an eyebrow and smiles.)

ZELTHAUSEN

Thank you.

(Pause. They all look at each other.)

DANIEL

You've met my assistant: Genevieve Bellasai.

ZELTHAUSEN

Yes. She said you needed a moment. To...convene. Has the time been sufficient?

DANIEL

Yes, indeed. Sometimes, when in a new place, I find I need a few moments to meditate. To open myself to the particular energy patterns that place might produce.

ZELTHAUSEN

(With a knowing smile)

Of course. Allow me to summon the rest of the family. They are eager to watch this. Excuse me.

(He exits.)

DANIEL

I don't like this. I do not fucking like this! Did you see the look he gave me? That condescending smile? What was that all about? I mean, we are talking believers here, right? You didn't set me up with a bunch of fucking...skeptics?

GENEVIEVE

Well, I *assume* they're believers, Daniel, or they wouldn't be paying triple for it.

DANIEL

And who talks like that: "Allow me to summon..." I hate rich people.

GENEVIEVE

You *are* rich people.

DANIEL

(Hyperventilating)

Oh, God.

GENEVIEVE

(Taking his hand)

Hey. Think of this as an opportunity.

DANIEL

What?

GENEVIEVE

You didn't always have the internet. And you did just fine...

(He pulls his hands away in disgust)

DANIEL

We are not having this conversation.

GENEVIEVE

You were happier then—do you realize that? Back when *you* were a believer. When you believed in your *real* ability...

DANIEL

Horseshit.

GENEVIEVE

It isn't horseshit! You *have* real ability.

DANIEL

Horse. Shit. Deluded, juvenile horseshit. I do what works now. What I can rely on. And that's the last time I tell you that. That's the last time I listen to some half-assed morality lecture from my assistant.

GENEVIEVE

All right. I just thought...

DANIEL

Well, don't. Just...make yourself useful.

(He begins to look around.)

GENEVIEVE

What do you mean?

DANIEL

It's a basement. They *keep* shit down here. There's got to be something. Like over here.

(He finds a box with various bits of rubbish in it. Perhaps some papers. He leafs through.)

Crap. Crap. And crap. And...what do we have here?

(It's a framed photo.)

Picture. Woman. Hmm. Not bad. I don't remember seeing her up there. You?

GENEVIEVE

No.

DANIEL

Let's see. Brown hair, it looks like. Going gray. Fucking black-and-white. Can't tell the eye color.

(He continues to stare at the photo.)

GENEVIEVE

What are you doing? We should keep...

DANIEL

There's something...

(Suddenly, he turns the photo over and pries the back off the frame. In side is a folded piece of paper. They stare at it for a moment, then Daniel hurriedly unfolds it.)

GENEVIEVE

What is it?

DANIEL

I don't know. A poem?

(She takes it from him.)

GENEVIEVE

Joys.

There will be no more joys.

We wandered among them, our joys.

A lover's touch. Warm shawl in autumn.

We wandered among them, they loomed around us, sun-streaked mountains.

No more.

Remember them.

Smell of coffee. Lover's touch. Child's smile.

No more, our joys.

Just flat, dead things.

Paper ornaments

Tacked against His grinning wall of

Blackness.

DANIEL

What the fuck? Did she write this? And this pronoun: "His." But with a capital H—like...like He's God or something.

GENEVIEVE

(Staring at him.)

How did you know to look back there. Behind that photo?

DANIEL

I don't know. It just... Oh, shut up.

*(A noise from offstage. Daniel sticks the picture frame back in the box and Genevieve shoves the paper into her pocket, just as the family streams in. Zelthausen is followed by **Kristin**—a feral-looking girl wearing too much eye make-up—**Neal**—a pale but otherwise handsome young man—**Margaret**—a dowdy woman of indeterminate age—and, finally, **Taylor**—a smartly-dressed, attractive young woman. Daniel struggles to regain his composure.)*

ZELTHAUSEN

Mr. North—or is it Mr. Dark North?

DANIEL

It's Daniel. Daniel will be fine.

ZELTHAUSEN

Yes. Informality. And why not? My name is Arthur Zelthausen. These are my children: Neal, Kristin and Taylor. And my sister, Margaret.

DANIEL

(Solemnly)

I'm delighted to meet you. And honored to be asked to help you.

Will your wife be joining us?

(The family, in the process of taking their places around the room, all freeze. Pause.)

ZELTHAUSEN

No. She won't be.

(They slowly take seats. Taylor remains a little aloof from the rest. Pause.)

So.

DANIEL

So, okay, Mr. Zelthausen, let me just say at the outset that I understand the pain you must all be going through.

ZELTHAUSEN

Do you?

DANIEL

Well, I mean that it's natural, of course, to feel grief when a loved one passes over, and entirely natural that you should wish to make contact with that person, to be reassured about their continued presence in your lives. And I have to tell you, ninety percent of the time it *is* reassuring. The messages are messages of continued love and support. You have no idea how much the deceased is continuing to influence your earthly existence.

NEAL

Or maybe we do.

KRISTIN

What happens the other ten percent of the time?

(Daniel is a little thrown.)

DANIEL

Uh, well, in my experience, actually, it's more like 100 percent. The other cases are hearsay, and I really don't like giving them credence by repeating them. Based on everything *I* know, your experience should be a loving, positive one. Though, of course, I don't like to predict what's going to happen...

TAYLOR

Heaven forbid.

(Slight pause.)

DANIEL

Maybe it's time to commence with...the communication, if you're ready. I'm assuming this is a relative?

TAYLOR

Isn't that for you to tell us?

(Slight pause.)

DANIEL

Of course. And I will.

KRISTIN

Shut up, Taylor. Let's give him a chance.

TAYLOR

Screw that. Look at him. He's sweating. Doesn't have his cue cards, or whatever he uses....

ZELTHAUSEN

Taylor. This is appalling rudeness. It will stop.

KRISTIN

(To Daniel)

Go ahead. Don't mind her. For being the smart one, she's wrong a lot.

(He begins his process of seeing and talking to the dead. His voice and his physicality changes in some way—how is up to the actor—but he should remain lucid and grounded in the reality of the room. No melodramatic, gypsy fortune-telling stuff.)

DANIEL

I'm already seeing... There's a woman. She's waving something at me. Something she keeps pointing to. She's saying...something... "Go on?" "Keep on?" I can't quite make it out, but she's insistent. What *is* that in her hand? I can't quite... It's paper... a magazine. No, like a *small* magazine...some yellow writing on the front. What is it? "Play...something" "Play ball?" Does this mean anything to any of you?

(The family stares blankly. Zelthausen gives him a bland smile.)

No, wait—she's pushing it closer. It's... "Playbill." It's...it's Playbill. It's a program. From a Broadway show.

(Everyone looks at Kristin. She puts her head in her hands.)

TAYLOR

But when I'm right, I'm *really* right.

DANIEL

(Desperately trying to get them back.)

Yes, that's exactly what it is. It's important to her. So important. She's making a gesture...she's pointing to this half of the room.

(He indicates Kristin's side of the room.)

"Keep going," or something like that. Keep going...to plays? No, no, she's getting frustrated—that's not quite it. Help me out here. Does this mean anything to any of you?

ZELTHAUSEN

How about that, Kristin? It seems your mother would like you to continue your theatre career.

KRISTIN

Yeah, how about that? Could you tell her to fuck herself?

DANIEL

Kristin! Respect for the dead, please! Whatever relationship you may have had in life, she loves you and cares for you now. She's trying to tell you something very important.

KRISTIN

Tell her it's a business made of nothing but whores. And I'm not a whore. Whatever you might think. *Daniel.*

DANIEL

I...really don't know what you mean by... Wait! Now she's pointing to...an apron? Wha...? An apron and a...cooking sheet of some kind. She's shaking her head...

KRISTIN

Oh, Jesus Fucking Christ.

DANIEL

She has a...spatula. And she's throwing it in the trash...

TAYLOR

The prosecution rests.

NEAL

He's not even trying. He's not even trying.

DANIEL

And there's...medicine? In her hand. In a bottle. Pills—does this mean anything to you? Pills. She's making a face...her expression says she's sorry. Sorry to have left you. A mistake. I'm getting the sense of a mistake made.

NEAL

Make him shut up.

ZELTHAUSEN

Neal.

(Neal is defiant, but whatever look is in his father's eyes crows him.)

Blunt. I've raised astonishingly blunt children, Mr. North. I'm not sure how that happened. But they are impatient. And to be honest, they—and I—have little use for this particular “communication.” My wife had a hard life, and we are perhaps more comfortable with the idea of her being allowed to rest.

DANIEL

(fighting down panic)

But...that's who's there. I have no control over who appears. I'm sorry if it's not...

ZELTHAUSEN

Mr. North. A little bluntness of my own. The hour demands it, I think. I have no idea how you managed to discover the suicide of my wife. And I have to commend you on the guesswork regarding the pills. That is exactly the neat, tidy method one would suspect a patrician housewife of using.

DANIEL

I don't know what you...

ZELTHAUSEN

However, my wife's suicide was *not* quite that tidy. She used a steak knife, which she somehow managed to drive deep into her own *eyeball*.

(Genevieve shrieks and staggers back against a wall. The family looks at her dispassionately.)

I believe you promised not to be a distraction, young lady. My wife was...sensitive. She was...

KRISTIN

She was a whack job.

NEAL

(Fiercely.)

She was a *poet*!

KRISTIN

Is there a difference?

ZELTHAUSEN

(Indicating the house)

Our country getaway. We thought the air here would do her good. First of many mistakes.

GENEVIEVE

(Recovering)

Daniel. Let's walk. We don't have to take this bullshit. Mr. North has proven his credibility night after night in front of national television audiences, and for him to be treated like...some kind of...common charlatan is absolutely...

ZELTHAUSEN

Mr. North is a *television psychic*—his credibility will never be above scrutiny.

TAYLOR

You got that right.

ZELTHAUSEN

In fact, all it would take is one or two well-placed accounts of this farce my family is being forced to witness and Mr. North would find himself devoting every hour of every day to keeping his house of cards intact. And he knows it.

GENEVIEVE

Walk, Daniel. Let them keep their money.

(Taking out her cell-phone)

And screw his threats. Your lawyers are on speed-dial right here, and hmm, let's see— threats and harassment from rich people. I can hear them salivating from here.

ZELTHAUSEN

There isn't a cell tower within twenty-five miles of here, Ms. Bellasai, though you're welcome to try. And, in any case, he won't need to sue us to get our money. Margaret.

(Margaret reaches into her bag and withdraws a stack of bills which she places on the floor)

Twenty-thousand dollars.

DANIEL

Twenty...

ZELTHAUSEN

...-thousand dollars. Yes. It's yours. And my word I make no trouble for you, whether you succeed or no. All I'm asking for is an honest attempt. An *honest* attempt.

(Daniel, still shaken, considers.)

GENEVIEVE

Are you willing to put all this in writing?

ZELTHAUSEN

Margaret.

(Margaret reaches into the satchel and comes up with a sheet of paper)

MARGARET

It's already s-s-s-s-signed.

(Genevieve grabs it and peruses, then nods at Daniel. Everyone watches him intently, especially Taylor.)

DANIEL

All right.

TAYLOR

No. Absolutely not.

(Zelthausen snaps his head in her direction. She seems to be in the middle of some great internal struggle.)

What more do you need? He was tested—he failed.

KRISTIN

Shut. Up.

TAYLOR

What, you're just going to let Daddy hand this guy twenty-thousand dollars? He's a phony—*get it?* A complete phony.

KRISTIN

No. He isn't. He just *thinks* he is.

ZELTHAUSEN

I'm inclined to agree with Kristin.

TAYLOR

What?! What does that even mean? He's a phony or he isn't!

DANIEL

I'm right here, guys...

ZELTHAUSEN

Taylor. I'm losing patience.

KRISTEN

No shit. We have to try! I mean, Jesus fucking Christ, Taylor! Can you really stand there and tell us we don't have to *try*?

(Pause)

TAYLOR

I...don't know.

NEAL

You *have* to know.

ZELTHAUSEN

Yes. We all have to know. Or we have no chance.

(He stares at her until she gives some kind of gesture of weary assent. He turns to Daniel, who has been watching the exchange with intense interest.)

I am sorry. Let's try again. You spoke of...meditating. Opening yourself to energy patterns.

DANIEL

Yes, something like that.

ZELTHAUSEN

We believe there are...strong ones here. Please open yourself to them.

(Daniel nods, and after a moment begins to go back into his standard medium demeanor.)

DANIEL

Okay. There is someone here. Yes. I'm seeing someone...a man.

(They [the family] look at each other, expressions intense.)

NEAL

A man?

DANIEL

Yes. Yes, it's a man.

NEAL

What does he look like?

DANIEL

He's...his features are...vague.

TAYLOR

That's convenient.

DANIEL

He's...smiling. His arms are out he's reaching to you. The whole family, one after another. It's a message of...forgiveness. The air is so full...of...

ZELTHAUSEN

Stop it.

(Daniel starts.)

Taylor's right, I'm afraid. Neal. Take this...impostor back to his car, and make sure the contract doesn't leave with him.

NEAL

Shit. All right.

KRISTIN

Wait, Daddy...

ZELTHAUSEN

Get him out of my sight!

(Neal moves toward Daniel and Genevieve. They back toward the door.)

DANIEL

"There will be no more joys."

(Everyone freezes.)

NEAL

What did you say?

DANIEL

"Sun-streaked mountains, our joys.
But no more.
Just flat...paper things.
Hung against His grinning wall of blackness."

ZELTHAUSEN

Is that one of hers?

NEAL

Yes. I remember it.

TAYLOR

How do you know that poem?

DANIEL

I can...hear it. A woman's voice...

(Pause. Zelthausen waves Neal away.)

TAYLOR

It's some kind of trick!

ZELTHAUSEN

We're going to try this again. This poem: it just...*came* to you?

DANIEL

Yes.

ZELTHAUSEN

Yes. Perhaps it is not so much a matter of *making* contact as...allowing whoever—or whatever—is here to make contact with *you*. That's the way we believe it works. In this particular instance. Let's try again.

DANIEL

(Taking a deep breath)

All right.

(He stands a little awkwardly for a moment, unsure of what to do. The family joins hands—Taylor only reluctantly, after glares from some of the others—and closes their eyes, their concentration so deep that the air begins to feel thick with it.)

MARGARET

L-l-let it c-come to you.

(The concentration grows even thicker. Perhaps a sound effect.)

Yes. Th-that's it.

(Daniel seems to see something. He grows increasingly uncomfortable, then seems to retch or convulse in some way. He cries out.)

GENEVIEVE

Daniel!

MARGARET

(Grabbing Taylor by the arm)

It's h-h-happening. You see?

ZELTHAUSEN

What is it? What is it, Mr. North? What did you see?

DANIEL

It... It was really weird. I don't know—the light changed.

ZELTHAUSEN

Yes?

DANIEL

It got dark in here, it started to, but it wasn't... a *normal* dark. It was like things got...brown. And yellow. Sort of. I can't describe it.

ZELTHAUSEN

You're doing fine, my friend.

DANIEL

And it was...thick. I could...feel it, almost. Taste it.

ZELTHAUSEN

Yes. Good, good. What else? What else did you see?

DANIEL

I...don't know.

ZELTHAUSEN

(Rubbing his temples in frustration.)

Mr. North...

DANIEL

All right! I saw... It was like...spider webs.

ZELTHAUSEN

(Leaning forward, intrigued)

Spider webs. Go on.

DANIEL

They were *like* spider webs. Attached to all of you. But they weren't really spider webs—they were...thicker, like...like... Almost like...umbilical cords. They were so... disgusting. I thought I was going to puke. And I couldn't really tell for sure, but they seemed to all...connect.

(He points to Zelthausen)

ZELTHAUSEN

They connected...to me?

DANIEL

No. Right behind you. Behind your right shoulder...a shadow. Or a big...hole. I think they all...went in to it.

(Pause. The family—except for Taylor and Neal—looks at each other, perhaps caught between utter revulsion and triumphant vindication. Neal scoffs.)

TAYLOR

See? More bullshit.

NEAL

She's right. I should strangle him right now!

ZELTHAUSEN

No! Not bullshit!

KRISTIN

(To Neal and Taylor)

It's metaphor, you dumb fucks! Ever heard of it? Don't you realize what this means? We're not crazy! It's true, it's all been true all along!

GENEVIEVE

What's been true? Metaphor for what? Will someone please tell us what's going on?

ZELTHAUSEN

Very well done, Mr. North!

KRISTEN

Daddy, he's really with us. It means he's really with us.

ZELTHAUSEN

Yes. I think it really does.

DANIEL

(Aside to Genevieve)

I saw something. I really *saw* something.

GENEVIEVE

Daniel, I don't like this. Please. I don't like this.

DANIEL

But this is what you wanted. Isn't it? I really saw something. Really felt it.

ZELTHAUSEN

Margaret. The box, please. I think he's ready for the box.

(Daniel turns)

DANIEL

The...

ZELTHAUSEN

The box.

(Margaret brings over a wooden box and places it next to Daniel.)

Go ahead. Reach inside.

(Taylor, agitated, forces herself to remain silent.)

GENEVIEVE

Don't. Don't do it.

DANIEL

Shut up, Genevieve.

(Without ever taking his eyes off of Zelthausen, he reaches in and rummages around, finally coming out with a bone. It is fairly long—a leg bone? Is it human?)

What the fuck? What's this supposed to be?

ZELTHAUSEN

Perhaps you can tell me?

DANIEL

Is it...? This isn't human. Tell me this isn't human.

ZELTHAUSEN

I believe I just asked you to tell me.

(Daniel drops the bone in disgust.)

DANIEL

That's...you're thinking of a clairvoyant. A clairvoyant can touch an object and see things about its owner. That's not what I do.

ZELTHAUSEN

You underestimate yourself, I think. We've found that with the right object, touch can be...very effective. In this particular instance.

DANIEL

It's not the way I work.

KRISTIN

Oh, I've seen the way you *work*.

DANIEL

What is her problem? Does she have some kind of problem with me?

TAYLOR

Daddy, let's just talk about this. It's moving too fast...

KRISTIN

(To Taylor)

I knew it! Now your true colors come out! You're a coward, that's all!

ZELTHAUSEN

There are too many women in this room! We will have silence, or I promise you Neal will begin *removing* them!

(Slight pause.)

Pick it up. Now.

GENEVIEVE

Fuck this. Let's get out of... Hey!

(Zelthausen makes a signal of some kind and Neal bulrushes her to the door.)

DANIEL

Get your fucking hands off her!

(He runs at Neal, who simply places a hand on Daniel's face and shoves him backwards. Daniel ends up in a sitting position on the floor. Neal exits with Genevieve and closes the door. We hear it lock.)

TAYLOR

Daddy. You can't leave her alone with him. This is Neal we're talking about...

ZELTHAUSEN

She'll be fine.

DANIEL

Where are you taking her?

ZELTHAUSEN

She'll be fine. Twenty-thousand dollars. And she'll be waiting in your car for you when you finish. All right? Now pick it up. Please.

(Daniel picks up the bone and holds it in his hands.)

MARGARET

N-Neal's n-not here. W-w-will it w-w-work w-without N-Neal?

ZELTHAUSEN

Let's find out.

(He closes his eyes. Slowly, the family joins hands again. Taylor is the last to do it, taking Kristin's hand only after getting a molten glare from her. They begin a song, perhaps a lullaby, in German. It is soft, chant-like, hypnotic. The following happens in a slow build: Daniel seems to grow increasingly shocked and appalled; he begins to have difficulty drawing a breath; he staggers, chokes, writhes, collapses, in the grip of some horrible fear; he is desperate to free the bone from his hand, but it seems to be glued to him. The family's concentration seems to intensify in concert with Daniel's agony. Finally, Taylor yanks her hand away, and then Daniel succeeds in throwing the bone to the floor.)

DANIEL

(Crying and gasping)

Wha... What...are you...doing to me? So weak. I'm so...weak...

ZELTHAUSEN

What did you see?

DANIEL

(Feebly)

Fuck you.

(Zelthausen reaches into the box, removes something and brandishes it. It is a wicked-looking scalpel. It glitters in the light.)

ZELTHAUSEN

I am so sorry, but I have *finished* repeating questions!

TAYLOR

But Daddy, you wouldn't...

ZELTHAUSEN

Surely you've realized by now that there is *nothing* I would not do.

(Neal reenters, meticulously drying his hands on a towel)

TAYLOR

What did you do? Neal! What did you do?

ZELTHAUSEN

He put her in her car and instructed her to wait.

NEAL

(Still drying his hands)

I put her in her car and instructed her to wait. Did it work? Did he meet him?

ZELTHAUSEN

We're not sure.

MARGARET

(Stepping forward)

Did you? D-d-did you meet him?

ZELTHAUSEN

I would suggest answering the question. What did you see? What did you feel?

DANIEL

Where's Genevieve? What did you do to Genevieve?

KRISTIN

This is hopeless.

(With a sigh, Zelthausen rises, places the scalpel carefully on his chair-arm, and delivers a vicious kick to Daniel's stomach.)

ZELTHAUSEN

I'm sorry—you were about to describe something to us.

NEAL

Let me do one.

(He quickly steps up and kicks.)

TAYLOR

Stop it!

ZELTHAUSEN

Mr. North?

KRISTIN

Great, guys. Now he can't talk.

ZELTHAUSEN

Take your time, Mr. North.

(Pause)

DANIEL

It was...it was...like the worst nightmare I ever had, times fifty. I...couldn't breathe. I couldn't move. I was...just...caught there... Like a fly in a spider-web. But worse.

(He begins to sob.)

And...and there was somebody coming. Footsteps...on the stairs. Each footstep...was torture. Coming closer and closer. No! Whatever it is, I can't let it...I couldn't let it... Whatever I did...I couldn't let it come near me! Had to get away! Had to move! But...

MARGARET

It was him! He was ab-b-b-b-out to meet him!

KRISTIN

Yes! It was him!

DANIEL

WHO?! WHO, YOU PSYCHO MOTHERFUCKERS? WHO WHO WHO!!?

ZELTHAUSEN

(Pleasantly)

Why, Uncle Gustav, of course.

DANIEL

Uncle...

ZELTHAUSEN

Gustav. My mother's cousin. This was his house. He was raised here. Tortured here. Beaten like a dog here. Yes. His parents were...very Old Country. Some especially strict sect of Dutch-German fundamentalism. We know that minor infractions were punished by flogging—my mother saw the scars. Family legend has it that for more serious crimes, young Gustav was actually...buried alive. Yes. His mother would sing him a special kind of bedtime song, a lullaby, and then he was buried. For as long as forty-eight hours at a time. Just a metal tube to breathe through. Yes. Perhaps in this very cellar.

KRISTIN

That's ironic.

(Neal gives a short laugh. Zelthausen smiles.)

ZELTHAUSEN

She's referring to the fact that he's buried here right now.

(Daniel looks around wildly. Neal laughs.)

NEAL

He's looking for the breathing tube.

ZELTHAUSEN

No, Mr. North. Uncle Gustav is quite dead.

TAYLOR

He has been for almost thirty years.

DANIEL

Was that...was that his bone?

(Again, some laughter and/or smiles from most of the family.)

ZELTHAUSEN

Goodness, no. We were considerate enough to bring you along slowly. Believe me, you weren't ready to handle one of Uncle Gustav's personal possessions. No, that bone belonged to one of Uncle Gustav's *victims*.

DANIEL

Vic...?

NEAL

He was a killer.

ZELTHAUSEN

A prolific one. If he were alive today, and in a less scandal-averse family...

NEAL

He'd be a fucking celebrity. Bigger than Gacy; bigger than Dahmer.

TAYLOR

Oh, shut up!! "Bigger than Dahmer." Can you hear how moronic you sound?

ZELTHAUSEN

Taylor, please...

TAYLOR

No! That's not part of the deal. I don't have to sit here and listen to Mr. Looney-Tunes *admiring* Uncle Gustav.

ZELTHAUSEN

Fine. Neal, stop admiring Uncle Gustav. But your brother was making a point. (*To Daniel*) Like the gentlemen he mentions, Uncle Gustav had a taste for young men. He differed, though, in his patience and cautiousness. He ranged far and wide for his

victims, as distant as Florida, Ohio. Never two from the same place. And only a certain kind of young man—the ones who reminded him...of himself.

DANIEL

What did he...?

ZELTHAUSEN

Do with them? He mummified them. Entombed them alive. Plastic, concrete, even welded steel. He was quite an experimenter.

NEAL

Liked to keep them alive for weeks.

ZELTHAUSEN

Perhaps longer—while he...did whatever he wished. The lucky ones finally starved, or perhaps were able to *will* themselves to death. Of course, all of them died eventually.

(During this speech revulsion has driven Daniel away from Zelthausen and Neal. He has inched slowly toward one of the dark corners of the room.)

Yes. We believe there are the remains of between forty and fifty corpses in the crawl-space directly behind you.

(Daniel screams and lurches toward them, away from the crawlspace.)

DANIEL

Look... Please...

NEAL

I'm bored. Can we do this?

ZELTHAUSEN

Yes. Perhaps it's time. Mr. North...

TAYLOR

Wait!

(Neal starts toward her, but she looks to Zelthausen for support.)

I just want him to understand. Please. Read him the note, Neal.

(Zelthausen nods. Neal takes a much-used folded paper from his pocket.)

The suicide note.

NEAL

Mommy's last poem:

“At His touch
My soul
Falls
Into
A Hole
In the floor.
A plummet and jerk
Hanged-man
Into a gallows pit.

And He touches me
So often now.”

TAYLOR

Daniel. May I call you Daniel?

(He nods)

We live with a cancer, Daniel. A cancer named Gustav. He touches us *all* so often now. Every day we can feel him at our shoulders, putting his cold hand on the backs of our necks. Torturing us, dragging us down...

DANIEL

What are you talking about?

TAYLOR

LOOK AT US! Can't you see it?

ZELTHAUSEN

The family spent most of its fortune covering up his crimes, but that's not good enough for him. He still wants his pounds of flesh. He follows us, Mr. North. He is always with us.

TAYLOR

What do you say on your show—"as close as the air around us?" That's where he is. Poisoning the air around us.

ZELTHAUSEN

And with him at our sides, ventures fail, careers and marriages wither and die...

TAYLOR

Nothing helps. I became a prosecutor, but...evidence disappeared, killers walked free on technicalities...

ZELTHAUSEN

Margaret turned to the church, but...

MARGARET

Jesus w-w-won't help m-m-m-m-me. He's sc-c-c-cared of Uncle G-Gustav.

TAYLOR

Kristin's life is nothing but misery and despair. And Neal. Neal is...

NEAL

Shut up about me!

ZELTHAUSEN

We are blood relatives. It gives him...access to us, we believe. But we are not psychic...

TAYLOR

That's right. Do you see, Daniel? Do you see?

(Comprehension has slowly dawned on Daniel during the preceding, and with there is a sudden ray of hope. Relief floods into him. He climbs to his feet, almost sobbing in happiness.)

DANIEL

Yes! Yes, I see. I see. You want me to...reach out to Uncle Gustav. To heal the rift between you. Of course! Of course. I'll do this for you. I can...talk to him for you. I promise you—I'll do everything in my power to bring peace to this...family...

(He falters, seeing the expression on their faces.)

You saw me on TV, right? Bringing peace to families? Right?

ZELTHAUSEN

Actually, inviting you was Kristin's idea. She knows you from...elsewhere.

KRISTIN

Eight years ago. Young and stupid, doing my usual, trying to get on a fucking stage somewhere—anywhere—on the island of Manhattan, and I saw you in the window of some bar on Wall Street. I figure, guy from the land of television, gotta be good for a connection. Couldn't hurt to flirt with him. Next thing I know you're pouring some concoction you're drinking down my throat—some shit with *Yukon Jack* and lime juice, if you can believe it—and *next* thing I know you're fucking me like a grunting hog in the Holiday Inn Express of Hoboken, New Jersey. Then you puked on the mattress. Yeah, I was young and stupid. I was also a virgin.

NEAL
(*Stands*)

I never knew that part.

KRISTIN

Ooh, tough guy. Protect me.

DANIEL

I'm sorry. I'm...trying to drink less.

KRISTIN

Why be sorry? It's not you. You're just another piece of the cancer. You're just another hunk of shit Gustav lobbed into my orbit. And anyway, I didn't tell you the best part. Middle of the night, I wake up and you're sitting up staring at me and you say... "They're stuck to you. The shadows are stuck to you. Like leeches." I tried to ask you what you meant, but you just fell back on the bed. You were talking in your sleep. But you knew. You really *saw* it. Saw *him*.

DANIEL

Wait a minute. Okay. So what you're saying—my God, it's wonderful. You... recognized my ability, my true ability. Even when I didn't want to. And really—*really*—what you've done here is to...*inspire* me. I've spent so much of my life helping others, and it took...this to help me. That's...amazing. I thank you. I thank you all. Genevieve thanks you. She's been telling me to use my true powers, my...essence, but it took you...wonderful people to...

ZELTHAUSEN

(*Putting a finger to his lips*)

Sssshhh. Such a handsome man. So blond. Like a young Gustav.

TAYLOR

Forgive me. I tried. I really did.

DANIEL

But I'm ready now. I promise. I'm ready to help you talk to him.

ZELTHAUSEN

We don't want you to help us talk to him.

(*The family is slowly, almost imperceptibly, beginning to form a semi-circle around him.*)

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, my friend. But we don't want to talk to him at all. We want...to *feed* him.

(They slowly join hands. Comprehension dawns once again and looks around him in despair. His eyes light on the scalpel, and he snatches it up.)

DANIEL

I'll kill you! I'll cut the shit out of you unless you let me out right now, I swear to God!

(Zelthausen regards him blandly, as the rest of the family lowers their heads in concentration.)

ZELTHAUSEN

That was Uncle Gustav's favorite scalpel.

(Zelthausen lowers his head and they begin chanting the German lullaby. Daniel makes one attempt to shake the scalpel free, then sinks toward the floor, mouth open in a silent scream. The lights slowly dim on him, but they linger on the row of bent heads. The lullaby drones on as the lights fade.)