

Coma Dreams

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FADE IN:

EXT. DARK WOODS, A RAIN-SOAKED TRAIL - NIGHT

Running shoes pound the trail in pouring rain. They run hard, avoiding the worms and snails inching across the path.

CLARE (VO)

Earthworms and snails come out in the rain. The only time, with reasonable certainty, they can travel safely while the birds seek cover.

Still it's a gamble that they'll be caught short when the rain stops. Easy prey then for the birds or worse, slow death in the sun.

CLARE, 37, pleasant looking, gasps for air with hands on her knees. Gaining her breath she steps back to the sickening crunch of a snail shell underfoot.

She looks to her foot, shocked, and slowly lifts her shoe. A snail writhes in agony, bereft of protection. Clare covers her eyes, distraught.

CLARE (VO)

You wish you could step back in time a moment and prevent the catastrophe.

If we could, I guess, there'd be nothing to cry over.

She backs up, step by step, eyes fixed to the snail's agony.

CLARE (VO)

It was that day, with a tiny death on my mind, that I sought help.

Through the rain, Clare looks to a 3rd story office window and DR. ELIOTT SHERKOVITZ, mid-40's, gazing out.

INT. ELIOTT'S OFFICE - DAY

Elliott turns from the window to address a WOMAN lying on a patient couch.

ELIOTT

These feelings of suicide coincide
with your depression.

INT. THE BOTTOM OF THE STAIRS LEADING TO ELIOTT'S OFFICE - DAY

Clare, in wet jogging clothes, puts a foot to the stairs.

BACK TO ELIOTT'S OFFICE

Eliott hands his patient a prescription and escorts her to the
top of the stairs.

TOP OF THE STAIRS

Eliott notices Clare looking up, to ascend.

TO ELIOTT'S DESK

Eliott sips water and tosses his head back, eyes closed, to
swallow a pill. He opens his eyes to see Clare lying on his
patient couch.

He shuts his desk drawer, a medicine vial visible. He glances
about the room to check his bearings.

A loud thump, a bird, hits the office window, startling Eliott.

CLARE

The rain has stopped. I must be going.

He steps to the window peering out and down to the street.

CLARE

The reflection confuses them. They
fly headlong into what appears to be
clear sky.

Only to crash into this invisible wall.
Often the impact snaps their tiny necks.

Finding nothing on the street, he turns, confused.

ELIOTT

How long have you been lying there?

CLARE

I don't keep track. Shorter for you
than for me, though.

He returns to his chair.

ELIOTT

Are you a patient of mine?

CLARE

I'm here to see about that.

ELIOTT

And again, why must you leave?

CLARE

I only come out in the rain.

EXT. THE PARK JOGGING TRAIL - DAY

Clare walks to where the snail lies, motionless. Within the shell fragments come movement and a butterfly emerges from the remains. It takes wing and floats off in the sunny breeze.

CLARE (VO)

I took that as a positive sign, but
signs are hard to read.

Clare watches its flight which takes her gaze to Elliott
staring directly at her from his office window.

INT. ELIOTT'S OFFICE - DAY

Elliott stares onto the park jogging trail directly across from
his office. He sees only the park, not Clare nor the butterfly.

He opens the window and notes a feather stuck in the sill. He
drops it, watching it spiral to the ground.

AT HIS DESK

Elliott rummages through patient files.

ELIOTT

(shouting, nicely)

Shelly, do you have a new patient
file out there?

SHELLY, late 20's, plump, peeks into his office.

SHELLY

No one new since Wednesday.

He searches, perplexed, then looks to the window.

ELIOTT

A woman, earlier today?

SHELLY

All existing patients.

He opens his drawer and contemplates the vial of pills.

ELIOTT

No matter.

INT. CREBS PSYCHIATRIC HOSP. FOR THE CRIMINALLY INSANE - DAY

Elliott sits in a stark room facing a female PATIENT, 50's. She twirls her unkempt hair. Two GUARDS stand in the corners.

Elliott rubs his forehead.

ELIOTT

Anything to say today?

The woman stares, eyes vacant, twirling her hair. Elliott motions for the guards to dismiss her.

He sits back exhaling. He notes that both guards are gone, then sneaks a pill, eyes closed.

EXT. CREBS, PATIENT ADMITTANCE ENTRANCE - DAY

A police prisoner transport vehicle stands parked. TWO SERIOUS POLICE OFFICERS give transfer paperwork to TWO HOSPITAL GUARDS.

POLICE OFFICER #1

Under no circumstance is he to be left unshackled with anyone.

Two guards minimum must be present whenever he's out of isolation

HOSPITAL GUARD #1

What do we have here?

Police officer #2 opens the vehicle door for VAL'DER, 40, 6'2''. Eyes, hair and persona are dark, straight from Hades.

He's shackled at the wrists and ankles. He wears an electric shock neck collar. He's all tattooed up.

Guard #2 reaches to assist Val'der who lunges at him, placing his shackled arms over the guard's head, choking him, almost snapping his neck as they both fall to the ground.

Officer #2 remotely activates the shock collar, immobilizing Val'der. The other officer and guard rush to assist guard #2.

POLICE OFFICER #1

This is what you have.

Guard #2 rolls on the ground clutching his neck and coughing. Val'der twitches, then regains normal mobility. He addresses officer #2.

VAL'DER

You can't hide your daughter from me. I'll have her little pussy.

Officer #2 re-activates the shock collar, his face a snarl. He presses his heel to Val'der's neck. Officer #1 intercedes.

POLICE OFFICER #1

Stand down, Frank. It's just talk.

Val'der smiles at the reaction he caused in the officer.

VAL'DER

I'll put my face between her tender thighs. I'll think of you when I snap her neck.

Officer #1 hands the keys and collar remote to the guards.

POLICE OFFICER #1

Do not underestimate this animal. There is nothing human about him.

ELIOTT

I always give her roses.

INT. MAYFAIR SANITARIUM, HELEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

HELEN, 42, sits in front of a mirror repeatedly combing her hair, her eyes distant and vacant. A wedding photo of her and Elliott sits beside her.

Elliott stands at the door holding the gardenias, observing her. She hasn't noticed him. Catching the scent of the gardenias, she turns to him, her face expressionless, eyeing the flowers.

Elliott places the flowers in a vase and kisses her forehead, but she doesn't respond, as she continues to comb her hair.

INT. MAYFAIR SANITARIUM, OUTSIDE HELEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Elliott consults with a HELEN'S DOCTOR.

ELIOTT

Any change?

The doctor shakes his head. Elliott notes it, somber.

INT. ELIOTT'S HOME - NIGHT

Elliott eats a frozen meal alone at the table, in the dark.

INT. ELIOTT'S OFFICE - DAY

Elliott shuffles files at his desk while Clare sits across. A shaft of bright sunlight filters prominently across the floor.

ELIOTT

I've misplaced you. Your name again?

She smiles, amused.

CLARE

Call me Clare.

Elliott stops looking for her file and focuses on Clare.

ELIOTT

No matter. What is—?

CLARE

My problem?

The sunlight dims, replaced by the patter of rain on the glass.

CLARE

I must go.

He notes the rain and offers her his umbrella.

ELIOTT

Do you have an umbrella?

CLARE

I've never felt the need.

AT HIS WINDOW - MOMENTS LATER

Elliott gazes onto a dry, bright sunny day, no clouds in sight.

ELIOTT

(via speakerphone)

Shelly, I'm stepping out for lunch.

EXT. THE PARK ACROSS FROM ELIOTT'S OFFICE - DAY

Clare sits on a bench gazing at two swans in the pond. She notes a figure walking her way.

THEN

The figure, Elliott, deep in thought passes by.

CLARE

Good afternoon, Elliott.

He stops to look back and study her face.

ELIOTT

Do I know you?

CLARE

We've not met here yet.

(noting the swans)

Aren't they beautiful?

ELIOTT

Yes, very much so.

Clare offers him a sandwich.

CLARE

Lunch?

He pauses to consider her offer. A drizzle begins, then rain. Soaked, they eat sandwiches, unconcerned by the rain.

INT. ELIOTT'S OFFICE - DAY

Eliott works at his desk.

ELIOTT

(on speakerphone)

Shelly, do I have time to step out
for a bite?

Shelly peeks inside munching pizza, puzzled.

SHELLY

You just came back from lunch.

He reaches to his stomach, then eyes her pizza.

ELIOTT

An extra piece, then?

MALCOLM, late 60's, old money, barges in with the pizza box. He closes the door in Shelly's face and settles across from Eliott. He starts on a piece and shoves one to Eliott.

MALCOLM

Working too hard again.

He slides an envelope across the desk.

MALCOLM

Saturday's party invitation. Have you
given thought to my offer?

Eliott pauses in mid-chew.

MALCOLM

My recommendation carries some weight,
but you'll still need to impress them.

(looking around the office)

At this point in your career you should
publish. Papers are nice tidbits, but
you need something substantial, a book.

After only a bite, Malcolm tosses his piece into the garbage.

MALCOLM

Your work at the prison hospital would
make an excellent case study.

Elliott notes the advice and looks toward the window.

MALCOLM

The selection committee will be there.

Elliott nods, absentmindedly pensive.

MALCOLM

Helen?

Elliott returns to focus.

ELIOTT

The same.

MALCOLM

A shame.

Malcolm rises to leave. He stops, forgetting something.

MALCOLM

Oh yes, my best to Helen.

He's gone before Elliott can say goodbye. Shelly retrieves her
pizza box, looking to the wasted piece in the garbage.

EXT. THE PARK - DAY

Clare sits on a bench gazing onto the pond as several crows
land on the water turning into swans that dive underwater to
feed. As some swans fly off they turn back to crows.

INT. CREBS, THE INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

The guards escort a PATIENT from the room. Elliott closes his eyes to relax. He opens them to find Clare sitting across.

CLARE

We don't have much time.

He rubs his temple, then is distracted by the click of the door as the guards escort in another WRETCHED LOOKING WOMAN. He reaches for the next file. Clare's chair is empty.

EXT. THE SPINNAKER ESTATE, BACKYARD POOL - DAY

MAGGIE, 37, an uncanny resemblance to Clare, lounges with a NEIGHBOR WOMAN watching their CHILDREN play in the pool.

Anxiety twists Maggie's face.

TIMOTHY, 5 yrs, swims like a fish staying underwater for long periods of time. Maggie tenses to stand.

MAGGIE

Timothy, keep your head above water.

CLARICE, 7 yrs, stands at the pool edge and reaches below the surface to grab Timothy's hair and yank him to the top.

CLARICE

Mum says not to stay under water.

Timothy wiggles free with a grin and dives right back. The neighbor consoles Maggie.

NEIGHBOR

There are specialists for this.

Maggie sighs and looks away.

INT. ELIOTT'S OFFICE - DAY

Alone, Elliott pops a pill followed by a gulp of water. For a split second the water in the glass appears to Elliott to be a raging flood that engulfs his body, submerging him.

Then, back to normal perspective he notes a rainbow butterfly cross his desk. He follows its flight to find Clare sitting

across from him. He frowns. He looks to his clothes, dry.

ELIOTT

Did we have an appointment?

CLARE

We need to try something tonight.

Elliott looks to the rain coating the window pane.

ELIOTT

I still don't know what I'm treating
you for.

(musing)

I'm not even sure you're real.

Clare follows his gaze to the window.

CLARE

Are you real?

He looks to her. She takes his dagger-like metal letter opener.

CLARE

Is this real?

He watches, waiting for her point. Before he can react, Clare plunges the letter opener deep into his chest.

CLARE

What about this, is it real?

Horrified, he looks to the oozing blood and hiss of air escaping his lungs, yet he's unharmed. He touches the blood.

CLARE

Nothing is real, certainly not reality.

(standing to leave)

I'll be dressed in white.

Shelly escorts in a MALE PATIENT.

Elliott sits at his desk, looking at his chest, expecting blood, but everything is normal as if nothing had occurred.

Shelly notes Elliott's confusion.

SHELLY

Doctor?

Elliott regains composure.

ELIOTT

I'm fine.

INT. MAYFAIR SANITARIUM, HELEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Dressed in a black tuxedo, Elliott sits contemplative in a sofa chair to watch Helen methodically file and buff her nails. A new vase of red roses sits beside her.

A NURSE enters taking in the situation.

NURSE

She spends all day, trying to look pretty for you.

ELIOTT

(wistful)

I know.

The nurse exits. Elliott stands to kiss Helen on the cheek. She turns to him, but her eyes belie no recognition.

ELIOTT

I love you, Dear.

Elliott leaves. The merest hint of a tear graces Helen's eye.

INT. MALCOLM'S PARTY - NIGHT

Elliott mixes with the crowd. Across the room LIZ, 42, dressed in black, attractive, catches his eye. She lingers a moment, their eyes to each other before she slips away into the crowd.

EXT. THE PARTY, A WALK-OUT BALCONY - NIGHT

Alone, Elliott peers into the woods. Liz joins him.

LIZ

Nice night.

He nods and looks to her, then gazes back into woods. Liz eyes him with affection.

LIZ
How have you been?

ELIOTT
Well.

LIZ
And Helen?

ELIOTT
Unchanged.

Liz nods, thoughtful.

LIZ
I've made extensive use of your
technique. I'd love to compare notes.

You should consider publishing,
formally...

He looks to her, then looks back into the woods.

LIZ (OS)
... a book.

EXT. THE LOVELY WOODS, DARK AND DEEP - NIGHT

Elliott wanders among the trees, very dark. The damp earth
compresses beneath his feet, toads jump to avoid his step.

Clare comes from behind a tree, dressed all in white.

CLARE
You kept our promise.

Elliott turns startled.

CLARE
I thought you'd forget. Do you
realize what a breakthrough this is?

BACK TO THE BALCONY

Liz touches Elliott's hand, breaking his reverie. He glances to
her, momentarily disoriented.

LIZ
What do you see out there?

ELLIOTT
(peering back into the woods)
Nothing.

Liz slides a bit closer. He tenses.

LIZ
Don't make me a pariah.

He glances to her.

ELLIOTT
It's not you.

She pulls back.

LIZ
I just wish—

Malcolm barges in, drink in hand, tipsy.

MALCOLM
For Chrissakes I've been looking all
over for you. Important people to
meet. Board members.

ELLIOTT
I'll be right in.

Malcolm exits.

LIZ
He's retiring.

ELLIOTT
I know.

LIZ
His board seat will be open...

Peering back into the woods, Elliott nods. Liz hooks her elbow
in his, to be escorted.

LIZ

Let's go inside.

EXT. A HILLSIDE TRAIL - NIGHT

Clare jogs very hard up the hill in the rain, breathing heavy.

INT. THE OCEAN, A CAR PARKED WELL BACK FROM A BEACH - DAY

Maggie sits in a car reading while her family plays on the beach. The children build sand castles and fly a kite. She looks up occasionally from a book to the fun.

The driver side door opens and HENRY, 40, slides in.

MAGGIE

Everyone's having fun.

He nods looking at the children and then to Maggie.

HENRY

Perhaps it's not too late...

She looks to him with disappointment.

INT. ELIOTT'S OFFICE, RECEPTIONIST AREA - DAY

Elliott tops the stairs and heads absentmindedly to his office.

SHELLY

I tried to stop her, but she said
she knows you.

Elliott glances to Shelly, hand to his door knob.

INSIDE HIS OFFICE

Liz busies herself at his desk, a pile of files on top. She opens his desk drawer and notes the medicine vial.

Elliott enters. He pauses to view the situation.

LIZ

I've brought my notes. I'll organize
yours and we can start on an outline.

ELIOTT

For what?

LIZ

My organization, your brains.
We'll get you published.

How does this sound, Subliminal
Technique in Psychotherapy?

He steps toward his desk, she closes the desk drawer.

ELIOTT

I don't know.

He walks past the desk to the window, to gaze onto the park.

LIZ

The guilt is paralyzing you.

ELIOTT

And you?

LIZ

It wasn't our fault.

Eliott gazes, no response.

LIZ

Your daily work has become a routine.
You're suffering from classic depression.

ELIOTT

I'm a psychiatrist. We don't suffer,
we explore.

LIZ

Deny it if you wish.

She places her files in a file cabinet.

LIZ

I'll be in touch.

She departs, leaving Eliott to his thoughts...

INT. AN EXERCISE GYM, THE LAP POOL - DAY

Clare swims laps, stroking vigorously.

POOLSIDE

Elliott, in office attire, steps up to the edge unaware that Clare is swimming. He stares, drawn Siren-like to the water.

Movement appears below the surface. Graceful, mermaid-like creatures, undulating. He peers deeper, only catching glimpses.

He steps closer, his balance wavering, almost falling. Clare strokes closer and reaches to the side inches from his shoe.

She breaks the surface, surprised to see Elliott. He snaps out of his reverie and notices Clare.

CLARE

My God. Do you see what you've done?

He stares, questioning, unsure.

CLARE

You sought me out. Not just sought me,
but found me. No one has come this far.

Elliott is drawn to the movement in the water. Clare notes his anxiety and fascination.

CLARE

Come in.

He shakes his head.

ELIOTT

I can't swim.

CLARE

Everyone can. It's more frightening
outside than in.

ELIOTT

I don't know how to swim.
(peering into the water)
Are there others in the water?

CLARE

Take my hand.

He looks from the movement to Clare, his face contorting.

ELIOTT

I believe it's a trap.

CLARE

You've come this far. Touch the water.

Elliott steps back, but can't resist her pull. He dives. As he hits the surface, he turns into a dolphin.

Clare joins him as a dolphin also and they cavort underwater.

The pool morphs into the pond in the park, with the two swans in it. He floats on his back, gazing into the sun.

He hears someone calling 'Doctor, doctor'. The sun fades into,

INT. ELIOTT'S OFFICE - DAY

Elliott reclines in his chair. Shelly peers into his face.

SHELLY

Doctor, you've a patient waiting.

Elliott awakes with a start. He checks his watch.

ELIOTT

How long have I been here?

SHELLY

Ten minutes

ELIOTT

Alone?

Shelly raises her eyebrows with a smirk.

SHELLY

Do you see anyone else here?

ELIOTT

Send them in.

He looks to his fingers and rubs them together as if moist. With a puzzled look, he rubs his clothes, finding them dry.

INT. CREB'S, THE INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

Elliott reviews a file, frowning. TWO GUARDS enter struggling to bring in Val'der. TWO MORE GUARDS assist from behind.

They force the shackled Val'der into the interview chair and lock his hand shackles to the table.

Two guards leave, two stand in the corners. Elliott watches the entire event, impassive. He and Val'der eye each other.

ELIOTT

The only question I have is why
are you here?

VAL'DER

I'm a bad person.

ELIOTT

Yes, but clever enough to elude capture.
Why are you in a prison for the insane?

VAL'DER

(relishing the discussion)

Are you saying I don't belong in
prison or I'm not insane?

ELIOTT

Why are you here?

VAL'DER

I'm bored. I've found you psych
doctors more interesting.

I'm fed, got a place to sleep
and can go about my business.

ELIOTT

Which is?

VAL'DER

You tell me, Doc.

Elliott motions to the guards, indicating he's finished.

VAL'DER

That's it?

Eliott nods.

VAL'DER

You disappoint me. No probing questions.
No interest in my motivation, explore
my psychosis?

Eliott ignores Val'der as he busies himself with the next case.

VAL'DER

She's a lovely woman.

Eliott looks up at Val'der.

VAL'DER

Your wife.

ELIOTT

(lying)
I'm not married.

VAL'DER

Good try, Doc. Her name is Helen.

Eliott doesn't respond and disguises any reaction.

ELIOTT

We're done.

The guards lift Val'der to his feet. The other guards assist.

VAL'DER

Don't worry I'm not going to hurt
her. She's too old for me. Unless...
(pause)
you want me to give her your love.

Eliott motions for the guards to remove Val'der. Eliott sits
back, pensive. His cell phone rings.

MALE VOICE (VO)

You need to come immediately.

ELIOTT

What is it?

MALE VOICE (VO)

Convulsions or seizures. She's never had anything like this.

Elliott gathers his files and scurries out.

IN THE HALLYWAY

From the opposite end of the hall, Val'der looks back at him.

VAL'DER

I didn't hurt her... this time.

Elliott glances back. Val'der laughs maniacally.

INT. MAYFAIR SANITARIUM, HELEN'S ROOM - DAY

Helen is strapped to her bed to protect her from the body convulsions. Elliott walks in, sizing the situation. He steps beside Helen. A NURSE stands nearby.

ELIOTT

Remove these.

NURSE

She could harm herself.

His glare directs her to comply. He strokes Helen's forehead.

ELIOTT

Helen, I'm here.

Her body relaxes a bit, but her eyes remain agitated.

ELIOTT

Darling, I'm here. What is it?

Helen moves her lips, yet no sound emerges. Elliott moves closer. Helen's doctor enters.

Helen clutches the back of Elliott's neck to whisper in his ear.

HELEN

Dange-

