

the nursery



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SUMMARY

A couple, somewhat offish with one another and in a pedestrian relationship, is having trouble bearing children. A company offers them the opportunity to have an avatar child in a computer program, using their own DNA.

Each day they enter the virtual reality where the baby grows and take care of it as if it were a real one. This reality is only a small white nursery. The couple is so happy they are having much difficulty separating from the baby. The program has them entering the virtual reality for a daily maximum of six hours as its basic rule. Soon enough they find themselves breaking the rule and staying more hours with the baby. They only exit the virtual reality to put feeding tubes on.

Their condition deteriorates with each passing day. They lose their jobs. They are experiencing a mental collapse. Neither wants to leave the baby behind to exit the virtual reality and apply the feeding tubes. They completely lose their grip on reality and come to be effectively trapped inside the white nursery. They become slowly and harrowingly debilitated.

Characters: Dimitri, Nadia

Scenery: living room (reality), nursery (virtual reality)

Scene 1

Sometime in the near future, Dimitri is working in front of a semi-transparent computer screen sat in a minimally decorated living room full of vases. He wears black plastic gloves and black glasses rest upon his nose. The computer is book-sized. Nadia enters. She looks at Dimitri, lays her things and sits in the living room to use her mobile phone. Dimitri takes off his glasses, pulls two small plugs out of his ears, stands up and sees Nadia.

Dimitri: Oh, you 're here!

Nadia: I didn't want to interrupt you.

Dimitri: I lost track of time, it's been quite hectic at work.

Nadia: I picked up your shirts from the laundry.

Dimitri: Did you have a good look at them? Is the stain gone?

Nadia: No, I didn't. Please check them out yourself.

Dimitri: They don't do a good job all of the time, if you 're not careful they can return it uncleaned.

Nadia: Hmm.

Dimitri: Are you working?

Nadia: No, I'm looking at something.

Dimitri: What's absorbed you so much?

Nadia: The results are out.

Dimitri: Oh, and?

Nadia: They 're not good.

Dimitri approaches her and sits on the couch beside her.

Dimitri: More specifically?

Nadia: We have a high percentage of incompatibility.

Dimitri: How high?

Nadia: 99.9%.

Dimitri: Impossible. That's way too much.

Nadia: Certainly. There was no point in trying all this time.

Dimitri: Inconceivable.

Nadia: It is the highest they have ever seen at the lab.

Dimitri: A very high percentage indeed.

Nadia: Our organs are completely incompatible.

Dimitri: So?

Nadia: Any effort will be fruitless.

Dimitri: Are you sure?

Nadia: Yes.

Dimitri: Could it be there was a mistake?

Nadia: No, they have examined it thoroughly.

Dimitri: Is the lab reliable?

Nadia: Very much so, there is no chance of error. They are established professionals.

Dimitri: Just saying.

Nadia: No, we have to accept it and move on.

Dimitri: May I see?

Nadia hands Dimitri her phone and he reads the results.

Dimitri: Yeah, there 's no use in trying any more.

Nadia: We have to decide another way.

Dimitri: I can't believe it.

Nadia: Adoption perhaps?

Dimitri: I don't know. I can't go through the same discussion again.

Nadia: Sooner or later, though, we have to make a decision.

Dimitri: I don't want an unrelated child.

Nadia: How can you be sure?

Dimitri: I want a child with our genes, to look like us, both in character and appearance.

Nadia: Me too.

Dimitri stares at the computer screen.

Dimitri: Maybe there is something we could try.

Nadia: What's that?

Dimitri: The colleagues at GB are working on a new program. They take an interested couple's DNA and create a baby.

Nadia: Like a test-tube baby?

Dimitri: No.

Nadia: What then?

Dimitri: The baby grows in a virtual environment.

Nadia: You 're surely joking.

Dimitri: No, it sounds weird but it's not.

Nadia: We have a serious problem. You can't be handling it like this.

Dimitri: I saw it, it looks like a real one.

Nadia: What did you see?

Dimitri: A baby. In its cradle. It was beautiful.

Nadia: It wasn't real.

Dimitri: It was so alive. The sensors are so powerful you can barely tell the difference.

Nadia: Look here, I don't want to buy a game, I want a child.

Dimitri: It's not a game, it's meant for parenting education.

Nadia: Leave it there.

Dimitri: What I'm saying is let's see what it's like to have a baby and then we decide what to do.

Nadia: Why not having a doll as a baby?

Dimitri: It isn't like you to be ironic.

Nadia: Like those we feed and put clothes on —

Dimitri: Stop it.

Nadia: Why? What's the difference with what you 're saying?

Dimitri: OK, we'd better end the discussion.

Nadia: We have to have a serious discussion at some point.

Dimitri: Have you eaten?

Dimitri moves towards the kitchen.

Nadia: I'm not hungry.

Dimitri: Carrot soup?

Nadia: I'm going to lie down.

Dimitri: Very well.

Scene 2

Dimitri and Nadia are inside a nursery. The walls are white and empty. In one corner, a drawer has been placed. On top of the drawer, there is a changing pad and many small frames with mounted pictures of Dimitri and Nadia. A white cradle lies at the center of the room. A baby is sleeping in the cradle. Dimitri clumsily holds Nadia's eyes closed with his hands.

Dimitri: Are you ready?

Nadia: Yes.

Dimitri: One, two, three, open your eyes!

Nadia: Just a moment, to... where are we?

Dimitri: Inside.

Nadia: The program?

Dimitri: Yes.

Nadia: I can't see it.

Dimitri: You can't?

Nadia: Yes, I can see it, I mean that I can't see the difference, it's very... it looks real.

Dimitri: Yes, it's very advanced technologically.

Nadia: You look a bit different.

Dimitri: I asked to be a little lighter.

Nadia: Yes, you look that way.

She puts her legs up and lets out a giggle.

Nadia: Unbelievable.

Dimitri: Come, let's see the baby.

Dimitri takes the baby in his arms. Its crying is barely audible. Nadia touches the walls in an astonished fashion. She goes towards the cradle and touches it. She looks at the baby.

Dimitri: *(to the baby)* There, calm down now.

Nadia: It's lovely.

Dimitri: It's ours.

Nadia: It's beautiful. Give it to me, please.

Dimitri hands it over to her with utmost care.

Dimitri: Be careful how you hold it.

Nadia: Why, what can happen to it?

Dimitri: Whatever would happen to a real one.

Nadia: And we can't bring it back?

Dimitri: No, whatever happens will stay with it. We'll have to start all over.

Nadia: Is it a boy?

Dimitri: Yes, you 'd better hold it from here.

Nadia: Did you pick the gender?

Dimitri: No, I left it at random.

Nadia: You always wanted a boy.

Dimitri: The program decided on that.

Nadia: Couldn't we make the choice?

Dimitri: You didn't even want to hear about the whole thing.

Nadia: You know I wanted a girl.

Dimitri: Do you want us to shut it down?

Nadia: No, it's OK. He's so peaceful.

Dimitri: That, he is.

Nadia: And so real. His skin, his little fingers, his rompers.

Dimitri: His hair, huh? Fantastic work.

Nadia: May I kiss him?

Dimitri: Of course, why ask?

Nadia: I don't know...

Dimitri: What?

Nadia: Maybe I'm afraid he's gonna feel fake? He looks so real.

Dimitri: Kiss him, we 'll see.

Nadia kisses the baby once and then starts to kiss it everywhere.

Nadia: Unbelievable.

Dimitri: And if you put your finger in his hand, he grabs it.

Nadia: Oh.

Dimitri: What?

Nadia: He's strong.

Dimitri: Yes, he is in good health. No problems at all. All medical exams have been conducted and any serious hereditary diseases were eliminated from his DNA.

Nadia: Thankfully.

Dimitri: As for non-permanent diseases, such as fevers, chickenpox and so on, there is a chart on the wall to keep us informed on all the organ functions. It always has a blood test and other information.

Nadia: How about medicine?

Dimitri: The drawers are fully stocked.

Nadia: *(to the baby)* So nothing will happen to you.

Nadia kisses his palm and he scratches her.

Nadia: Ouch.

Dimitri: What the matter this time?

Nadia: He scratched me.

Dimitri: It's surely your idea.

Blood starts running from her lips.

Nadia: What's this?

Dimitri: Oh, just a little blood. He did scratch you after all.

Nadia: How did he scratch me? It's a fake infant.

Dimitri: Yes, his little nails grow however, it's nothing to worry about.

Nadia: And I bleed for real?

Dimitri: Not outside, but inside here, yes, you will bleed and feel pain.

Nadia strokes Dimitri.

Nadia: Can you feel this?

Dimitri: Yes, absolutely.

Nadia: Go on, you stroke me now.

Dimitri strokes her.

Nadia: It's incredible. If you stop thinking about it for a minute, it feels so real.

Dimitri: He's beautiful.

Nadia stares at the baby.

Nadia: It is almost hypnotizing the way he looks at me in the eyes.

Dimitri: Hmm.

Nadia: This room gives me a strange feeling.

Dimitri: It's because you haven't got used to it.

Nadia: It's a bit claustrophobic.

Dimitri: Yeah, there are no windows.

Nadia: That might be it.

Dimitri: Do you want to give him to me for a while?

Nadia: Hmm, what?

Dimitri: Will you give him to me?

Nadia: Yes, there you go.

Nadia hands the baby to Dimitri and gazes around at the little frames.

Nadia: Look, even the frames have our pictures on them.

Dimitri: Yes, it's very clever.

Nadia: But it's not us really.

Dimitri: Look, he's smiling.

Nadia clings on to the baby and Dimitri.

Dimitri: He has taken somewhat after you.

Nadia: Yeah?

Dimitri: Yes, don't you see? The eyes and eyebrows.

Nadia: I can't see it.

Dimitri: Are you ready for all this?

Nadia: Well, since we started it.

Dimitri: It takes effort, it's not simple.

Nadia: Let's try it, we have nothing to lose.

Dimitri: Feeding, putting to bed, changing the diapers.

Nadia: Yes.

Dimitri: I knew you would like it.

Nadia smiles. Dimitri takes her in his arms. The lights dim.

Scene 3

Nadia is in the nursery. She has the baby upon the changing pad and changes its diaper. Her movements are swift and accurate. Dimitri appears and looks at them.

Dimitri: Has he eaten?

Nadia: When did you come in?

Dimitri: Just now. I became lost gazing at you two.

Nadia: I didn't hear you. I will feed him now.

Dimitri: Wait, let me tighten this some more.

Nadia: Could you button them both?

Dimitri: Of course.

Nadia sits down in an armchair, which has been added in the room, and opens her blouse. She attaches the baby to her breast with aplomb and it starts to feed.

Nadia: Good.

Dimitri: Is the armchair comfy?

Nadia: Very much so. Thank you, it was a nice present.

Dimitri: We may still need another thing or two to buy.

Nadia, Yes, it still needs something, something for you to sit on.

Dimitri stands over her.

Dimitri: What time did you enter?

Nadia: It's been quite some time, it's going to ring anytime for me to exit.

Dimitri: You didn't go to work?

Nadia: No, I asked for the day off. Luckily, they gave it to me straight away.

Dimitri: Really?

Nadia: I never skip work anyway.

Dimitri: Do you think I could ask too?

Nadia: You can see him in the afternoon. I'll stay with him in the mornings.

Dimitri: Yes.

Nadia: Ouch!

Dimitri: Does it hurt?

Nadia: Yeah, a lot.

Dimitri: What are these marks?

Nadia: The skin is breaking.

Dimitri: Is this normal?

Nadia: They told me it's quite common. They reassured me that it will get better in time.

Dimitri: Do you want to leave it for a while? You don't have to feed him.

Nadia: No, it hurts me, but... I don't mind.

Dimitri: We could feed him with formula milk.

Nadia: No... it's addictive. It's as if I'm bonding with him, like I understand him better. I want to feed him all the time.

Dimitri: What if it continues hurting?

Nadia: Ouch, then we 'll see.

Dimitri: OK, do as you wish.

Nadia gets up and puts the baby in the cradle. They both stand looking at it.

Nadia: I bought some memories.

Dimitri: What memories?

Nadia: From the pregnancy. It's short videos with us during pregnancy.

Dimitri: Is there such a thing?

Nadia: Yes, they 're quite a feat, I saw samples. I got some from the final month.

Dimitri: Alright, we 'll see them later.

Nadia: He 's ready, half asleep.

A siren-like sound is heard together with a voice over a speaker.

Voice: You have exceeded your daily time limit, Nadia, for your own safety please disconnect.

Nadia: How did time flow by?

Dimitri: You have to get out.

Nadia: But I wanted to stay for a little longer.

Dimitri: Come on, go, I'll put him to sleep.

Nadia: Don't take too long, I'll make us something to eat and we can watch the videos.

Dimitri: Yes, yes, I'm coming.

Nadia disappears.

Dimitri: Alone at last.

Dimitri picks the baby up in an embrace and sits in the chair. He starts talking while caressing its little hand.

Dimitri: Why are you looking at me like this? Quizzically? Like you don't know who I am? Can't you smell me?

The baby starts grizzling as if it is about to cry. Dimitri gets up and walks up and down to soothe it.

Dimitri: No, no, shhh. Be a good boy. Be quiet. Don't get grouchy and cranky. No one will want you close... What do you want to do? Do you want me to tell you a fairytale? Ah, now you stopped. What fairytale do you want to hear? You want one with a prince? Yes?

Dimitri sits down again holding the baby in his arms.

Dimitri: What tale shall I tell you? Once upon a time, in a magic kingdom, there was a brave King and a beautiful Queen. The royal couple was righteous and the kingdom very prosperous. However they tried, though, they could not have what they desired most of all. A child. By some miracle, a child was born. It was a handsome and healthy boy. But the bad witch, out of her jealousy, cast a horrible spell on the prince. If he ever did get pricked by a thorn, the wound would swell so much that he would die from it... Have you already fallen asleep? Let me put you in the cradle.

Dimitri gets up and places him in the cradle. He kisses his own finger and then touches the baby's forehead with it.

Dimitri: Goodnight and sweet dreams, don't you worry, dad will never let you out of his sight.

Scene 4

Nadia is sat on a comfy chair in front of the computer. She is wearing a black band around her head resembling a hair ribbon, dark goggles, gloves and earplugs. A large black object rests on her breast looking like a breast pump. The lights are dimmed and the place is untidy. Dimitri enters the house and sees Nadia moving about as if cuddling the baby and kissing it.

Nadia: And one day... after you eat all your food, you will grow to be very tall, taller than your dad, and I will take you for a walk and stand proudly alongside you.

Dimitri puts on the black band, the goggles and the earplugs, and connects. For the whole duration, their bodies are slumped in their seats. They are barely moving.

Dimitri: What are you saying to him?

Nadia: You startled me. Don't enter so quietly.

Dimitri: But what are you saying to him? Why do you speak to him about walks?

Nadia: What's come over you? What do you want me to tell him?

Dimitri: I'm not sure. Not about walks though, or anything outside of this place.

Nadia: That doesn't leave very much then.

Dimitri: How can you lie to him so effortlessly?

Nadia: I must be telling him something. I spend so many hours in his company. Look how happy he looks.

Dimitri: I don't know. I don't like us lying to him.

Nadia: Neither do I, but he's still young.

Dimitri moves his hand to feel the air.

Dimitri: What's that smell?

Nadia: I changed his cream, he had developed rashes on his shin. There, do you see them?

Dimitri: Yes. Do you think it's the cream?

Nadia: I put only cream on him. I changed it now and the next few days will tell us if it was caused by this.

Dimitri: Do you think it could be something more serious?

Nadia: I doubt it. It's common for babies to develop various stuff on their skin.

Dimitri: What else could it be?

Nadia: I don't know.

Dimitri: Could it be the milk? Something you ate?

Nadia: Nah, it's quite natural.

A loud siren-like sound is heard and soon after a voice blasting out of a speaker.

Nadia: No, not this sound again, I can't stand it any more.

Voice: You have exceeded your daily time limit; for your safety, Nadia, please disconnect.

Nadia: No, I won't exit, I will stay with my child.

Dimitri: What's the matter with you now?

Nadia: I don't want to leave you both alone.

Dimitri: I will stay for half an hour myself and then come out.

Nadia: I want to be the one putting him to sleep.

Dimitri: Get a hold of yourself, Nadia, and go out.

Nadia: I'm not going out.

Dimitri: They will block us somehow and it may be days before we see him again.

Nadia: Can't we change this? Make it eight hours, I want to rejoice in him a little longer. *(towards the ceiling)* Excuse me, are you listening?

Dimitri: No one is listening, it's not a real-time game. And this is the most basic rule. Up to six hours at the most. Longer is not allowed. We signed this in the contract.

Nadia: I'm not going out. No matter what you say to me.

Dimitri: OK, you might as well stay here and risk everything.

Nadia: But you said it yourself, it's not a real-time game.

Dimitri: Maybe not, but it's very easy for them to check the hours spent.

Nadia: I will tell them that I lost track of time.

Dimitri: Do as you wish.

Nadia: *(to the baby)* Don't you worry a thing, I won't be leaving you.

Dimitri: At least give him to me a tad.

Nadia: In a little while.

Dimitri: Not in a while, right now. You are holding him tight all the time.

Nadia: You 're exaggerating.

Dimitri: It's sick what you 're doing, it's not normal.

Nadia: It's you who is not acting normal.

Dimitri: You will cause him a problem holding him tight like that all day long.

Nadia: It's not all day long, just a few hours, I'm trying to make up for the rest.

The telephone is ringing in the house.

Dimitri: The phone is ringing.

Nadia: Pick it up.

Dimitri: We agreed that we wouldn't answer phones in here.

Nadia: Then go out.

Dimitri: Come on, you go, you already stayed beyond the time limit. It's unfair of you
to expect me to exit.

Nadia: Alright. I'm going.

Nadia moves as if giving the baby to Dimitri. She takes out the goggles, the ribbon and the earplugs. She gets up but misses the call. She returns and sits in front of the screen again. She watches Dimitri with the baby and reconnects.

Scene 5

Nadia is holding the baby in her arms again and is clipping his nails. Dimitri appears.

Dimitri: What are you doing?

Nadia: I 'm clipping his nails, they have grown and they scratch.

Dimitri: Where did you find this?

Nadia: In the drawer, they are specially designed for babies.

Dimitri: You are handling everything, huh? Did you learn a thing or two?

Nadia: Yes, everything is going fine. I took some extra time off from work to keep up—

Dimitri: More leave? It's been quite a few days now you have been absent. Have you exited at all?

Nadia: I have.

Dimitri: Don't lie to me, you haven't one little bit. You haven't cleaned yourself for days and your hair is completely unwashed. You stink.

Nadia: Stop talking, I 'll make a mistake. I don't need to wash my hair, I don't stink in here.

Dimitri: The house is a mess.

Nadia: Tidy it up, then.

Dimitri: Alright, bring him to me, I 'll clip his nails and you go tidy up.

Nadia: No, I won't, you don't know how to do it.

Dimitri: I 'll learn, hand me the scissors.

Nadia: No, no, it's dangerous.

Dimitri: Since it's a specially designed pair of scissors, what can go wrong?

Nadia: He 'll hurt.

Nadia holds the baby close to her and looks at Dimitri.in defiance. Dimitri comes towards her and forcefully tries to pull the pair of scissors from her hands risking injury to both. Dimitri is left looking at it closely.

Dimitri: This isn't for babies. It's a common pair of scissors.

Nadia: What?

Dimitri: Don't you see? It's common scissors.

Nadia looks at him in horror.

Nadia: Huh?

Dimitri: Do you realize how easy it is to wound him with this?

Nadia: No way, I wasn't holding this, you must have done something.

Dimitri: ...how easy it is to make my child bleed?

Nadia: That's out of the question.

Dimitri: You see the tip? How pointy it is?

Nadia: Hmm. I didn't mean to.

Dimitri: You put him in danger.

Nadia: I didn't mean to cause him any harm.

Dimitri: You realize now that you have to sleep.

Nadia: Yes, perhaps I'm a bit tired.

Dimitri: You need a rest, go out. I'll keep an eye on him... Come, get up.

Nadia: I'll exit for a while.

Dimitri: Have a rest and come back.

Nadia struggles to loosen her firm grasp on the baby and puts it in the cradle.

Nadia: *(to the baby)* Sleep tight my darling.

Nadia exits.

Dimitri: Finally. She's gone. Some time for me to see you as well. Dadddy's here. He's close by every day even if you don't see him. He sees you... You 're so calm. Do you want to sleep? Do you want us to tell the fairytale? Yes? Did you like it?

Dimitri takes the baby in an embrace and sits in the armchair.

Dimitri: Once upon a time, in a magic kingdom, there was a brave King and a beautiful Queen who had a son. The son was beautiful and strong, but before he was even born a bad witch cast a horrible spell on him. If he ever got pricked by a thorn, the wound would swell and the pain would become so

unbearable he would die from it. So the King issued an order for all the kingdom's plants to be cut off and confined him inside a white kingdom devoid of plants to be even more safe. The boy grew and came to be full of energy. He was curious and wanted out of the kingdom's boundaries. So one day, when his parents were away from the palace, he disobeyed the king's orders and ventured out. He took his white horse and galloped to the neighbouring kingdom. As he was wandering, enchanted by the new kingdom, he gazed upon something for the first time in his life. A crimson rose bush. "What can be wrong with something so beautiful", he wondered and approached it. The scent made him come even closer and stick his head among the red rose petals. The thorns immediately pricked his skin and the more he tried to take them out the more they grew and went deeper. The rose plant grew inside his stomach, his hands and legs. It blossomed around his skin and inflicted him with wounds. His blood was running red. His breathing soon stopped. He died in anguish, all by himself.

Scene 6

The house is in complete disarray, filthy and untidy. All around the computer, food leftovers and rubbish lie about. Dimitri and Nadia are logged in. They have tubes attached to their arms, hooked up to drip-feeds hanging from two poles. From the body position, Dimitri looks to be holding the baby in his arms.

Dimitri: Hah, his eyes are bugged out again.

Nadia: Don't laugh, you 'll traumatize him.

Dimitri: But it's a lark.

Nadia: *(to the baby)* Why do you bug out your eyes?

Dimitri: He needs to be put to sleep.

Nadia: Give him to me for a bit and we'll put him afterwards.

Dimitri: He's grumpy.

Nadia: Yes, I'm going to feed him so he falls asleep.

Dimitri: He'll burst, he has been feeding the whole day.

Nadia: It's good for his strength.

Dimitri: His or yours?

Nadia: You sound like you 're jealous sometimes.

Dimitri: I'll do fine giving him the bottle very soon.

Nadia: I will be breastfeeding him for some time, it's healthier.

Dimitri: Breastfeeding won't be enough before long. He needs other nutrients to fully grow.

Nadia: In the meanwhile, though, this is sufficient for him.

Dimitri: He doesn't want anymore, can't you see?

Nadia: When he doesn't want more, he just nibbles.

Dimitri: Barely.

Nadia: He likes it.

Dimitri: You are the one that likes it.

Nadia: Dimitri, come and take a look at something.

Dimitri: What is it?

Nadia: Something in his armpit.

Dimitri: Where?

Nadia: There it is, do you see how it looks when it closes?

Dimitri: I can't see anything.

Nadia: Look closer.

Dimitri: Ah, yes. There is a little gap. Does the same happen under his other armpit?

Nadia: Yes it does, that's odd.

Dimitri: No, it's fine. Yours also look the same. It's a matter of graphics. Where there is a fold, there is a fractional error of 0.0001%. A small gap appears in the flexures.

Nadia: It still looks bad.

Dimitri: It's hardly visible. Miniscule.

Nadia: It's visible to me.

Dimitri: Well, we can't do anything about it. It may be eliminated in a few years.

Nadia: I'll put clothes on him so I don't see it.

Dimitri: It's more discernible with clothes on.

Nadia: Gosh, you're right.

Dimitri: Where there are flexures, there is a very slight error. You can't change that.

Nadia: How didn't I notice it before?

Dimitri: But it's on the inside, how could you see it?

Nadia: It's creepy. Where there are flexures, an error occurs.

Dimitri: One can hardly tell. Although I knew of it beforehand, I didn't even take notice.

Nadia: You think so, huh?

Dimitri: Yes, don't worry. It's just that you've been occupied with him all day.

The telephone starts ringing.

Nadia: Oh my, can you get it?

Dimitri: Me again?

Nadia: Oh, come on! After that, I will change the tubes.

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Dimitri hands the baby to Nadia and disconnects. He tries to get up but is feeling very sore. He moves at a slow pace and picks up the phone.

Dimitri: Hello? Yes, it is him. You must be making a mistake... Oh sorry, I didn't understand... Yes, I took until today. No, there must surely be a mistake. No, I have until the 15th... It can't be...

Dimitri makes a motion to look at his watch but he's not wearing one.

Dimitri: Are you sure? For God's sake, why would I be joking? It's just that, I'm sorry, I kind of lost track of time. Yes, I'm programming all day long. Look, is there any chance I could get a few days more? I have a serious problem and it's impossible for me to come. Yes, not me... my son, do you see? He's ill. He is still a baby and I can't leave him.... If I could have a few more days, it would be wonderful. Thank you very much for your understanding. Yes, yes, please look into it, I'm holding...

Dimitri puts the phone down while he stares at the computer screen somewhat lost. A female voice is audible over the phone but he can't hear it, he's completely absorbed. After a while, the telephone rings again. Dimitri jerks up as if woken from a dream.

Dimitri: Hello, can you hear me now? Something must be wrong with the phone. Hmm... I'm aware that I am not entitled to anymore leave of absence, but it's a matter of urgency. I told you that my son... How can Mr. Charalambopoulos know if I have a child? Yes, I do have a son, he's an infant and I can't leave him... The only help I'm asking for is that you to give me a bit of time to spend with him, can you do that?. That's all I'm asking, to give me some time to be with him. I just want to be with him... But you don't understand... It's impossible for me to come down there... No, not even for a short time, I've been trying all this time to explain it to you but you don't understand... If I come down there it will only make me want to curl my fingers around your neck and tighten them hard until I cut the air, all the air passing down your throat. I will then stick your head inside the bin you keep beside your desk... Hello?... Yes, yes I'm holding... with great pleasure... Ah, this is indeed the best solution!

Dimitri sits in front of the computer and reconnects.

Nadia: Who was it?

Dimitri: From work.

Nadia: What did they want?

Dimitri: Nothing.

Nadia: Will you go tomorrow?

Dimitri: Nah.

Scene 7

Dimitri is sitting in the chair, while Nadia is sitting on top of him holding the baby. They have both started to weaken.

Nadia: Am I hurting you?

Dimitri: Huh?

Nadia: Did you fall asleep?

Dimitri: Yeah, I dozed off a bit.

Nadia: Why don't you go inside to rest?

Dimitri: I like it here.

Nadia: I'm not hurting you?

Dimitri: No, I'm probably numb and I don't feel your weight that much.

Nadia: If I hurt you, you tell me.

Dimitri: Look at him sleeping.

Nadia: Yes, he's mesmerizing.

Dimitri: Do you think he rests this way?

Nadia: Why not?

Dimitri: Wouldn't it be better if he lay in his bed?

Nadia: It's nice that he's sleeping in an embrace.

Dimitri: Uncomfortable, though.

Nadia: But he's just a baby. Look at him, his little body looks like dough.

Dimitri: I've started to feel a bit dizzy.

Nadia: Let me get up.

Nadia gets up with great difficulty, exercising extreme caution for the baby. She squats down on the floor.

Dimitri: Maybe I should eat something.

Nadia: Yes, I should eat something too.

Dimitri: I'll go inside to prepare some food.

Nadia: Do we have any food?

Dimitri: I'll find something.

Nadia: Cook some meat.

Dimitri: Yes, you must eat meat to keep you going.

Nadia: It 's good for the child.

Dimitri: Yeah, meat is nutritious.

Nadia: I 'm craving for meat, as if I 'm pregnant.

Dimitri: I'll cook it for you well-done.

Nadia: I want it rare.

Dimitri: Why rare?

Nadia: I don't know, I just want it that way.

Dimitri: It 's not good to eat your meat underdone while you are breastfeeding.

Nadia: I don't mind, the meat we are buying is good. Come to think of it, I'd rather have it blue, yes I prefer blue.

Dimitri: But you always have it well-done.

Nadia: Well, this time I want it underdone.

Dimitri: Has he eaten?

Nadia: He has. He eats well. Eats, sleeps, eats, sleeps.

Dimitri: Good, everything is going well then.

Nadia: We are doing fine. Ooh, he 's waking up.

Nadia rocks the baby gently, lulling it to sleep. Dimitri watches them with a smile plastered on his face.

Dimitri: Give him to me for a bit.

Nadia: Yes, in a little while.

Dimitri: He 's so peaceful, he almost lulls me to sleep when I hold him.

Nadia: Yeah, it's as if he has magic powers, he soothes me.

Dimitri: Now that you mention it, yes, he soothes me very much.

Nadia: Like I don't have a care in the world, just him.

Dimitri: Nothing else.

Nadia: Will you go and prepare some food?

Dimitri: Yes, I forgot.

Dimitri gets up by putting great effort. He walks towards the room's door and tries to open it.

Dimitri: Did you lock?

Nadia: What's wrong?

Dimitri: It won't open.

Nadia: I don't remember locking it. Give it another try.

Dimitri puts all his weight, but he is too feeble. He pulls the handle, kicks the door, falls on it, but to no avail.

Dimitri: How did this happen?

Nadia: I don't know, who came in last?

Dimitri: I can't remember.

Nadia: You must have, perhaps you shut it forcefully?

Dimitri: What if I did? Is it stuck?

Nadia: Are you sure you didn't lock it?

Dimitri: In any case, I don't have a key.

Nadia: Neither do I, and I don't remember this door having a key. Let me try myself.

Nadia is holding the baby in her arms as she tries to open the door. She too is very feeble.

Dimitri: Nothing, it won't move at all.

Nadia: Gosh, I 'm out of breath.

Dimitri: We are locked inside.

Nadia: What now? What do we do if something happens to him?

Dimitri: Let me sit down for a while, the effort has left me giddy.

Nadia: Yes, have a seat.

Dimitri: Phew, I got tired. It must be from the drowsiness.

Nadia: Sit over there and have a rest.

Dimitri: I 'm shattered.

Nadia: Your energy is running low these days.

Dimitri: Will you give him to me for a bit? He relaxes me.

Nadia: Yes, in a while.

Dimitri: Did you see how his eyes have changed? I think he bears a resemblance to me now. Hmm, he does look more like me.

Nadia: You see what you want to see.

Nadia sits on the floor again holding the baby in her arms.

Dimitri: No, there you go, this eyebrow runs in the family, its pattern no less. You'll look just like me when you grow up.

Nadia: He looks like me.

Dimitri: Nah, he has changed.

Nadia: Anyway, he has my gaze.

Dimitri: No, no, he doesn't resemble you anymore. The eyebrows are thicker.

Nadia: His eyebrows haven't changed.

Dimitri: You can't see it, because you spend your whole day looking at him.

Nadia: Alright, alright, I'm getting tired of this.

They both stay transfixed on him, only their heavy breathing audible, as though they were running.

Nadia: I'm hungry. Will you go and cook?

Dimitri: Yes, I forgot.

Dimitri, exactly like before, gets up by putting great effort. He walks towards the room's door and tries to open it.

Dimitri: Did you lock?

Nadia: What's wrong?

Dimitri: It won't open.

Nadia: I don't remember locking it. Give it another try.

Dimitri puts all his weight, but he is too feeble. He pulls the handle, kicks the door, falls on it, but to no avail.

Dimitri: How did this happen?

Nadia: I don't know, who came in last?

Dimitri: I can't remember.

Nadia: You must have, perhaps you shut it forcefully?

Dimitri: What if I did? Is it stuck?

Nadia: Are you sure you didn't lock it?

Dimitri: In any case, I don't have a key.

Nadia: Neither do I, and I don't remember this door having a key.

Scene 8

Dimitri is sleeping on the floor. Nadia with the baby is sitting in the chair. The baby is breastfeeding. Both of them can hardly speak, they seem completely debilitated.

Dimitri: I fell asleep again.

Nadia: You are tired.

Dimitri: Did you sleep?

Nadia: I feel a bit sleepy, but he is eating for quite some time now and I don't want to cut him short.

Dimitri: He has a healthy appetite.

Nadia: Indeed.

Dimitri: May I take him for a while?

Nadia: You are able to take him?

Dimitri: Yeah, sure.

Nadia: OK, in a little while.

Dimitri: I'll put him right here beside me.

Nadia: On the floor?

Dimitri: Yes, why? What can happen?

Nadia: He'll catch a cold.

Dimitri: Yes, you are right, it is cold.

Nadia: Isn't it odd that it's so cold?

Dimitri: Yes, I'm almost shivering.

Nadia: Me too, thank God you also say that it's cold. I thought I was getting a fever.

Dimitri: A fever?

Nadia: Yes.

Dimitri: Let me see.

Dimitri drags himself nearer, almost crawling on all fours.

Dimitri: Bend over, I can't reach you.

Nadia: I can't bend lower, I will crush him.

He kisses her forehead.

Dimitri: You are fine.

Nadia: Luckily.

Dimitri: Let me feel him too.

He kisses the baby on the forehead and cheeks. His mouth fills with blood. He looks at the baby.

Dimitri: What is that? What is that all around his mouth? What's wrong with him?

Nadia: It's blood.

Dimitri: All of this is blood?

Nadia: It's my blood. He's been sucking for a long time and I have run out of milk.

Dimitri: And you bleed?

Nadia: I'm not hurting, I don't feel it.

Dimitri: Why are you bleeding?

Nadia: I don't know, my milk must have dried up.

Dimitri: Stop breastfeeding him then.

Nadia: And leave him unfed?

Dimitri: Better if he stays unfed for a little while.

Nadia: You don't get it, I don't have any milk left, I won't be making anymore milk, it dried up.

Dimitri: Get him off there.

Nadia: No, I'll feed him blood, it still has some nutrients.

Dimitri: Are you sure?

Nadia: About what?

Dimitri: That it has nutritious...

Nadia: Yeah, I've heard about it. Somewhere...

Dimitri: I don't think this is good for him.

Nadia: What isn't?

Dimitri: Feeding on this.

Nadia: Why?

Dimitri: I'm not feeling well.

Nadia: Are you tired?

Dimitri: I'm feeling a discomfort.

Nadia: I feel exhausted too.

Dimitri: Do you want to lie down? Let him go for a while?

Nadia: No, I like sitting like this... Holding him closely... Embracing him tightly. Do you remember in the delivery room?

Dimitri: I feel drowsy again, like you gave me a sleeping pill.

Nadia: Well? Do you remember?

Dimitri: Are you talking to me?

Nadia: Yes, I 'm talking about the labor...

Dimitri: I will go to sleep, I can't hold it off anymore.

Nadia: ...how difficult the delivery was? I kept pushing and pushing, and nothing happened. *(to the baby)* You didn't want to let go of me. It's the same for me now. I don't want to let go of you again. I want to hold you tight... Labor wasn't easy. I went through a lot of pain, but the pain became tolerable as you kept peeking out your head. You are a wonder, my wonder. Once your little legs slipped out and I felt you sneak out of me, I became empty. I was left with a huge void. I am hollow without you. Unfilled. Lifeless. They cut us off. We were as one and they cut us off with that horrible pair of forceps. I can still hear the sound it made, like a nightmare. They cut off my life. The thread tying us together. The umbilical cord. I gave life to you and you to me. But you are not inside me anymore. They took you out. But you are mine. You will always be mine. Don't you forget that.

The baby is full of blood.

Nadia: You are so beautiful, you look like me. Your little eyes, your nose. I don't want to close my eyes, I want to keep looking at you... keep looking at you... I can't hold back anymore. I will close them for a just a moment. I 'll close my eyes... just for a moment.

THE END