

The Little Room Above (Excerpt)

By

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FADE IN:

INT. CAMPBELL FAMILY BASEMENT

Finished but shabby, cluttered. No windows, lots of shadows.

STEVEN CAMPBELL, mature for age ten, crosses the dim expanse. A cute stuffed bear in a clown hat dangles from one hand.

From above, his parents' indistinct yelling reverberates.

Steven's destination is a mass of sheets and blankets draped over a couch, a recliner, an end-table. A piece of paper haphazardly taped to the outside reads "CARA'S LITTLE ROOM".

Steven drops to a crawl, slides through a break in the sheets.

INT. LITTLE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

CARA, age six, sits comfy amid an explosion of stuffed animals and assorted toys -- tea set, play stove, mirror, hairbrush, telephone.

YOUNG STEVEN

Here's your bear.

She plucks the bear from Steven, places him in a position of prominence.

CARA

Hello Bartholomule, would you like a grilled cheese?

YOUNG STEVEN

BartholOMEW, not MULE. He's not a donkey.

CARA

Of course not. He's a bear, aren't you Bartholomule?

She cooks an imaginary grilled cheese. Steven listens to the silence from above -- a lull in the fight.

CARA

Here you are, Bartholomule.

She "serves" the grilled cheese.

STEVEN'S MOM (O.S.)
Oh fuck you!

Cara pretends she doesn't hear.

YOUNG STEVEN
Hey, make me one.

CARA
Steven, they're only for the
animals.
(stage whisper)
They're not real.

Steven tries to clasp her hand. Cara won't look at him,
clings to her make-believe.

CARA
I need to cook, Bartholmule's very
hungry --

A horrifying scream erupts upstairs. Just one.

The kids freeze, all pretend gone.

CARA
Steven --

YOUNG STEVEN
Stay here.

CARA
No, no no . . .

She scurries to him, knocking animals aside. He grabs her
by both arms.

YOUNG STEVEN
Stay here! I'll come back.

She's terrified. Steven casts about, hands her the toy
phone.

YOUNG STEVEN
Here, you can talk to me with this.

CARA
That's stupid! I'm not a baby --

YOUNG STEVEN
Cara, just do it.

The little girl pouts but cradles the phone.

Steven cautiously lifts the sheet.

INT. CAMPBELL FAMILY BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Steven slips from the Little Room, creeps toward the basement stairs.

Foreboding silence from above.

He glances back. The hand mirror juts out from under the sheets -- Cara's worried face in it, trying to keep watch.

He motions at her. Reluctantly, the mirror withdraws.

Steven continues to the foot of the stairs. They loom before him.

INT. CAMPBELL FAMILY KITCHEN - NIGHT

Steven, standing in the basement doorway. Grimy gas range, an array of dirty dishes, myriad beer bottles across the kitchen counters.

Steven eases the basement door shut.

A telephone hangs by the doorway to the living room. Above, the phone, a stuttered spray of blood on the wall. A lot more on the floor.

Shaking, Steven closes in on the phone --

Something in the living room lurches past the doorway!

YOUNG STEVEN

Mom?

INT. CAMPBELL FAMILY LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

STEVEN'S MOM is rooted in place, her back to him. Wheezing.

Stevens enters the room, approaches tentatively ...

YOUNG STEVEN

Mom? Mom, what's wrong--

Still wheezing, she turns toward his voice ...

He takes in her glazed eyes. Her blood-soaked shirt. The broken beer bottle lodged in her neck ...

She shuffles a few feet away from him.

Collapses in a second-hand recliner.

Dies sitting up.

Steven compulsively bites at his hand. Still, he draws nearer.

YOUNG STEVEN
Mom? Mom? Mom?

Her open eyes, taking in nothing.

Stressed beyond his limits, Steven spins around only to smash into his DAD -- a big man, drunk, peering in disbelief at his dead wife.

STEVEN'S DAD
She ... we need a doctor. This
don't look like what happened.

YOUNG STEVEN
Okay. Okay.

He starts toward the phone, but his father's bloody hand stops him, hard.

YOUNG STEVEN
Oaah. Dad --

STEVEN'S DAD
Sorry, here, we'll take her. We'll
help her ourselves.

YOUNG STEVEN
Dad no, we need -

STEVEN'S DAD
C'mon buddy, she needs you.

He pulls Steven back to the chair, behind the body.

STEVEN'S DAD
Hold her head.

Steven unwillingly cradles her skull. His dad takes hold of her shoulders.

Neither of them are clear what to do.

Her head slips forward, crunching the bottle. Steven shudders back as fresh blood wells up.

STEVEN'S DAD
Stevie c'mon, they, they can fix
that...

He yanks Steven, almost on top of the body.

STEVEN'S DAD

Hold. Her.

Steven tries to sprint past him. His dad swipes at him, propelling him into a plant stand. Planters tumble, dirt spills.

STEVEN'S DAD

Stevie, I didn't mean that ...

Steven scurries to --

INT. CAMPBELL FAMILY KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

-- the phone, lifts the receiver. His, dad, right on top of him, rips the phone out of his hand. The cord tears in half.

Steven retreats to the sink, grabs a bread knife.

STEVEN'S DAD

Goddamnit, now calm down --

He reaches out. Steven slashes him in the arm!

STEVEN'S DAD

Ouhh! I -- owww, hold on a min--

He reaches again. Steven stabs his arm again.

STEVEN'S DAD

AHHH! Stop it!

He sweeps his hurt arm across the counters. Bottles splash and shatter against the walls, the basement door. Steve shields his face from flying glass --

His dad swoops in, slamming the boy against the sink cabinetry.

The knife clatters to the floor as the cabinet door breaks, spilling out cleaning products.

Steven grabs for the knife. His father throws him! He bounces off the gas range, the collision igniting a burner.

His dad stalks toward him. Steven scrambles on the ground, grabs a can of bug spray off the floor and let's loose --

The mist passes through the blue flame on the range and swallows his dad's arm in flame!

Screaming, his dad spins. Flames fan across the alcohol-soaked counters ...

Bottles explode ...

A flaming shard ignites the basement door!

His dad, still burning, bolts into the living room.

The whole kitchen's in flames.

Steven fights his way to the basement door . . . but it's already engulfed.

YOUNG STEVEN
Cara! Cara!

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

MONTAGE as CREDIT ROLLS. Each image gradually swells with detail before fading into the next with the rustle of a page:

A living brain, rich with blood, being operated on ...

A Renaissance-style sketch of brain anatomy ...

The ghostly-blue films of a cranial MRI ...

A dated microscope slide of a cancerous neuron ...

A fossilized human skull with a chiseled hole in it ...

An antique photo of a dank cell with a primitive operating table and bloody sheets ... END CREDITS

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

STEVEN, now in his mid-20's, head closely shaven. He is seated at a study cubicle, lost in a thick book.

Closes the book, traces the title with his finger. Ironic smile, like a mask. The cover reads "AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF BRAIN CANCERS AND TUMORS."

INT. LIBRARY A-V DEPT. - LATER

Steven strolls through flip-rows of compact discs, occasionally adding to the stack in his hand. Around him, gentle library chatter.

An uncertain flicker in his eyes. He hesitates.

It's getting worse.

INT. LIBRARY AISLES - FEW SECONDS LATER

Steven, trying to be discreet as he skims past other patrons. CDs still in one hand, the other pressing against his temple.

INT. LIBRARY BATHROOM - FEW SECONDS LATER

All pretense gone, Steven toss the CDs on the sink and runs to a stall --

Nausea ...

Gagging ...

Blinding pain ...

INT. LIBRARY BATHROOM - A WHILE LATER

Steven, at the sink. Breathing growing less ragged.

He splashes water over his face. Eyes himself in the mirror.

STEVEN

Okay. Fine. You're fine --

He violently dry-heaves in the sink.

Strained lines of saliva from his lips to the basin.

STEVEN

Lovely.

He spits. Turns on the water to wash it down --

An ominous thump overhead.

Steven glances up. Scraping now, something heavy being drug ...