"Elle"

Written by David Birke
Based on the novel «Oh...» by Philippe Djian
INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - HALLWAY -- DAY

The eyes of MARTY, a cat, indifferently observe some rather noisy struggle. Male GRUNTS. A woman’s SMOTHERED SCREAMS. The SHATTERING of glass. After a few moments, the cat gets bored and wanders away.

Looking down a tastefully decorated hallway, a MALE FIGURE rises into view. He cleans his genital area with a scrap of fabric - torn panties, though from this ANGLE, it’s hard to make that out clearly. He drops the cloth contemptuously on the floor and walks toward us. He straightens the black ski-mask he wears over his face as he clears the frame... PUSHING DOWN the hall, discover MICHELLE LEBLANC lying on the floor. Face down, skirt hiked up above her waist. There’s a little blood, on her legs and on the rug.

At first, it seems she might be dead, but she’s just in shock. Her limbs begin to move, slowly, clumsily. As if her brain were having trouble communicating with the rest of her.

She stands. Her breasts are exposed where her bra has been pulled up. Her torn dress exposes an old cesarian scar. She pulls her bra down, holds her dress closed. She notes a fallen but unbroken vase on the carpet. She returns it to its proper place on an end-table.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Michelle sweeps up a broken crystal ash tray with a broom and dust-pan. Her movements very deliberate, as if she were on auto-pilot.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - UPSTAIRS BATHROOM -- DAY

Michelle peels herself out of her ruined dress. She shoves it very deliberately into a waste-basket.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - UPSTAIRS BATHROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

In the tub, Michelle takes an inventory of injuries. A few bruises and minor abrasions. She sees a curlicue of blood floating in the soapy water. She erases it with her hand.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- BEDROOM -- DAY

Wearing a bathrobe, hair still wet, Michelle sits on her bed, phone in one hand, a Sushi take-out menu in the other.
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MICHELLE (INTO PHONE)
...Yes, I’d like two pieces of the Hamachi, as well... and what exactly is the “Holiday Roll?”

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE – ENTRYWAY -- DAY

Michelle opens her front door and lets in her 19-year-old son, VINCENT, a bear of a young man with scrappy facial hair, a back-pack on his shoulder. She greets him with a brief hug

VINCENT
I know I’m late. They kept me at work a fucking extra hour.
(walking on with her, he sees something’s amiss)
Are you ok? You look like you got a black eye starting.

MICHELLE
I fell off my bike.

VINCENT
That bike?

The young man nods to a brand new-looking bike they’re passing leaned against the entryway wall.

VINCENT (CONT’D)
It doesn’t look like you’ve been riding it at all.

MICHELLE
(gestures to her face)
And you see why.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- DEN -- LATER

They’re sitting at the coffee table eating Sushi. Vincent uses the chopsticks in conjunction with his fingers. Michelle isn’t eating at the moment, she’s watching his Iphone. (We glimpse a Youtube snippet, a child at Sea World.) Vincent watches his mother, expecting a big laugh. But as the video ends, Michelle looks merely confused.

MICHELLE
So, the kid was scared of the penguin?

VINCENT
The music’s what makes it so great.
MICHELLE
It’s arguably cruelty to animals.

VINCENT
Nah- you think?
(takes back his phone)
Sorry I was late. We’re short-handed at work.

MICHELLE
You’ve managed to avoid mentioning what this job actually is.

VINCENT
It’s entry level, I told you. But there’s a path to management. I’m, like, an assistant manager.

MICHELLE
Is this a MacDonald’s or something?

VINCENT
(amazed she guessed)
But it’s a management position. Like I said... I brought you a present.

Quickly changing the subject, Vincent hops up, pulls a gold gift box from his back-pack with great pride.

VINCENT (CONT’D)
It’s from Josie, really. It was all her idea.

Michelle smiles thinly. She opens the box. Inside, a FRAMED PHOTO. Vincent is stiffly posed before a cheesy back-drop, beside a massively pregnant girl (JOSIE).

MICHELLE
You look quite handsome.

VINCENT
We're going to go back and take another picture after the baby's born. You can put 'em side by side. It'll be like a before and after.

He moves a candle stick on the mantle to the side to make room for the photo.

VINCENT (CONT’D)
Josie's got all kinds of ideas about interior decorating. Of course, she's never had her own place to decorate. Till now.
Michelle lowers her head, knowing where this is going.

VINCENT (CONT’D)
She'll be able to try her hand a little bit, I guess, now that we're getting our own place.

She watches him sit back down, going back to eating Sushi, using the chopsticks in conjunction with his fingers.

MICHELLE
How much are you going to need for this new apartment?

VINCENT
I didn't ask you for money.

MICHELLE
Did I jump the gun?

VINCENT
I was going to ask you to co-sign the lease but I wasn't going to ask you for money, necessarily.

MICHELLE
Are any of Josie’s other paramours moving in with you too?

VINCENT
No.

(realizing that came off like an answer respecting the question...)

No! Why would you say something like that?

Vincent spills some Wasabi on his lap. Michelle gets up to get him another napkin.

MICHELLE
You don't know anything about this manifestly dysfunctional girl. Except that she was raised by unwashed idiots in a commune.

VINCENT
It was an Arts collective.

In passing, Michelle moves the candlestick back in front of the photo.
MICHELLE (CONT’D)
I suppose it’s progress she now suddenly wants the most bourgeois life imaginable— you’ve really never wondered about this? Why she glommed onto you? What she’s after?

VINCENT
(cleaning himself up)
What could she be “after”? I don’t have money.

MICHELLE
I do.

VINCENT
You know I can’t listen to this. You’re insulting my family.

MICHELLE
(hands him napkin)
Your father sets his jaw just like that when he’s laying down the law. It doesn’t work for you yet. Give it some time.

VINCENT
(hurt, embarrassed)
I don’t know what’s with you today.

She looks at him, thinking about telling him. Then:

MICHELLE
I’ll give you three months rent. On condition I look at the place first.

VINCENT
I didn’t want to pressure you. If you really don’t feel...

MICHELLE
You won. When you strike oil, stop drilling.

Vincent smiles, goes back to eating sushi, ditching the chopsticks. Michelle watches him with a slight smile.
EXT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Michelle waves goodbye to Vincent as he drives away. Far down the street, a few Xmas lights twinkle.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - GARAGE -- NIGHT

Michelle rummages through a tool box until she finds a HAMMER.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Michelle makes a sweep of the house, holding the hammer. She concernedly checks the pantry door. It’s slightly warped so it takes an extra shove to close it all the way.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - BEDROOM -- LATER THAT NIGHT

Michelle is asleep in the light of her TV, the hammer on the pillow next to her.

INT. OFFICES OF A-V SOFTWARE -- DAY

Immaculately dressed for power, Michelle strides past cubicles filled with busy employees, side by side with ANNA, her Co-CEO, a well-put together woman her own age.

ANNA
Have you seen this apartment
Vincent picked out?

MICHELLE
Six months ago he was dealing weed
and getting into imbecilic fights,
now he's a family man?

ANNA
That bitch JOSIE is a menace. He
just doesn't see it...

INT. A-V SOFTWARE - CONFERENCE ROOM -- DAY

The group is watching a highly polished GAME DEMO projected at the front of the room, software engineer PHILLIP KWAN acting as "the player." On the screen: a Lovecraftian creatures's tentacle penetrates the skull of a helplessly writhing woman. She stops struggling as her eyes turn black.
MICHELLE
Phillip, weren't we going to dial back the orgasmic convulsions, though?

ANNA
These guys never heard of subtext. Michelle smiles. There are some murmurs from others at the table.

PHILLIP
(defensive)
There was forty-five seconds of animation on that originally.

KURT
Are we not going to address the white elephant in the room?

KURT, a German-born game designer with long hair and many tattoos, now stands and takes the floor.

KURT (CONT’D)
We get one shot at Activision but the wonkiness of the controls make this critical demonstration tool almost unplayable. It doesn't matter how intricately rendered the environments of Thule are, if the player's throwing his controller through the fucking screen!

MICHELLE
It seems to me you're dodging the issue by blaming known glitches.

KURT
I'm confronting the issue head-on. The issue is you come from the world of publishing and literary fiction and that's a singularly inappropriate background for evaluating playability. Everyone in the room looks a little shocked he said this. Michelle takes it in stride.

MICHELLE
It may well be that Anna and I should have founded a different sort of company.

(MORE)
It may be, as you suspect, that Kronos was a hit solely because of your innovations and we're bitches who got lucky - but the fact is I am the boss and we're six months behind here.

(to all as Kurt seethes)

We all know the goal: when the player guts an Orc, he has to feel hot blood pouring over his hands. Kevin, a cherubic, red-haired young man, turns to Michelle.

KEVIN
I love you.

Everybody laughs. Even Michelle smiles.

INT. AV OFFICES - OUTER OFFICE -- DAY

Michelle and Anna walk together toward the elevators.

MICHELLE
Sometimes, I think Kurt hates me.

ANNA
He does hate you. They all hate you. Except Kevin- who really does love you, even though he tries to pass it off as a joke... This isn’t a shock? You knew all this, right?

Michelle shrugs. They share a little laugh.

INT. A DOCTOR’S OFFICE -- DAY

A nurse draws blood. Michelle wears a lime-green gown. She turns to the young doctor making notes in her chart nearby.

MICHELLE
Does she know I want a full STD panel?

DOCTOR
Yes, she does.

(smiles, briefly)
If you’re concerned about a recent exposure, I can prescribe a PEP.
MICHELLE
I googled those. They have nasty side effects and I can’t miss any work. So, I guess I’ll just have to roll the dice.

The Doctor disapproves but Michelle starts getting dressed.

INT. A CAFE -- DAY

Michelle looks over creature design sketches. Her phone RINGS. She answers. A MALE VOICE (ROBERT) on the other end-

MAN (O.S.)
My evening just cleared up.

MICHELLE (INTO PHONE)
It’s not good for me... Actually, I’m having Female Difficulties.

MAN (O.S.)
I’ll wear a condom.

MICHELLE (INTO PHONE)
I appreciate your willingness to sacrifice but tonight’s not good.

As Michelle returns to her drawings, another cafe patron, a big, grey-haired WOMAN keeps throwing funny looks Michelle's way. Angry looks. Now the woman rises from her table with her tray and, on her way out, makes a detour over to Michelle's table. She proceeds to deliberately spill the contents of her tray - half-eaten food and paper products - right into Michelle's lap. Michelle strangely, takes it completely in stride. She doesn't even act all that surprised.

The woman, glaring at Michelle, sets her tray down and walks out. Michelle dabs a napkin in water, scrubs her blouse.

INT. MICHELLE’S MOTHER’S APARTMENT -- DAY

Michelle lets herself in. She's surprised to discover her mother, IRENE, having coffee in the breakfast nook with a gigolo-esque guy in early middle age (RAFE). The man wears a dress shirt and boxer shorts.

Michelle sighs heavily and shakes her head. Her mother, a woman in her late 70s with layers of plastic surgery, shows mild annoyance.
IRENE
If you’re going to come in without
knocking, you’re going to be
treated to gruesome sights like me
having coffee with a friend.

RAFE
But I did wish I had pants on.

The gigolo excuses himself, smiling. Michelle glares at him.

MICHELLE
How much do you pay them? So
demeaning.

IRENE
I have nothing to be ashamed of.
This is my life. My sex life...
You’re just a little bitch.

MICHELLE
All I’m saying is you’re on a fixed
income. You should be more
economical. Do you really need a
young stud at your age?

IRENE
Did you eat? I made spaghetti.

MICHELLE
I’ll take some coffee.

Irene goes to get it as Michelle sits down at the table.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
Did you have more work done?

IRENE
You’re just going to keep going?

MICHELLE
I’m sorry.

Irene brings over the coffee.

IRENE
A little Botox.

MICHELLE
It’s your business.
(sips her coffee)
Very good.
IRENE
You act surprised.

Rafe comes back in, fully dressed.

RAFE
Well, that’s better. Michelle, I hope we get a chance to meet properly soon. I have to take off.

IRENE
Not yet, you’re not.

She slinks over to him sexy for a lovers’ goodbye kiss. Michelle, openly disgusted, has to look away.

MICHELLE
Did my mother tell you she’s HIV positive?

IRENE
I already warned him you were going to try that one.

Michelle shrugs. Rafe smiles at her.

RAFE
Nice meeting you.

He takes off. Irene returns to the table.

IRENE
I’m going to ask you a question. I want you to think before you answer. What would you say if I remarried? Think about it.

MICHELLE
It’s simple- I’d kill you. No need to think about it.

Irene shakes her head, lights a cigarette.

IRENE
You’ve always wanted some sanitized version of life, Michelle.

MICHELLE
I would kill you. You asked. I told you.

IRENE
You’re so selfish, Michelle. It’s frightening.
MICHELLE
I know. Here’s the check for your mortgage payment by the way.

Michelle takes a check from her purse, hands it over.

IRENE
You never give anything truly of yourself. Like with your father. How much effort would it take...?

MICHELLE
Don’t.

IRENE
He’s an old man, Michelle.

MICHELLE
Well, he’s still breathing, so not old enough, apparently.

IRENE
There’s are some connections that can never be broken...

MICHELLE
I walk through the door here...

IRENE
...Never! No matter what.

MICHELLE
...and it’s one horror after another.

IRENE
He’s having another parole hearing next week...

MICHELLE
Enough. OK?

Irene looks hurt. Michelle sips her coffee, notices something by her chair. She holds it up.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
Your stud forgot his hernia belt.

EXT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- DUSK

Getting groceries out of her car, Michelle is politely accosted by her neighbor REBECCA, a very pretty, large-bosomed woman in her mid-30s. Conservatively dressed, perky.
REBECCA
Michelle, glad I caught you. I'm putting these on everybody's door.
(presses a Flyer in Michelle's hand)
It's about the neighborhood council's new trash-separation policy.

MICHELLE
Oh, thank you.

Rebecca's handsome husband, PATRICK - a man with the look of a high school quarterback just starting to go to seed - is wrestling a large Xmas creche out of his car's hatch-back.

REBECCA
They're levying a pretty steep fine now if recycleables aren't properly sorted and we're having a block meeting Wednesday to organize our opposition.

MICHELLE
But you're on the council, aren't you?

PATRICK
I've tried to point that out to her that it's hard to be "we" and "they" at the same time.

MICHELLE
It's an interesting position anyway.

REBECCA
That's how I like to look at it.

Michelle smiles politely and finds herself sharing an amused little look with the man carrying the creche. She gives Rebecca another smile and tosses the flyer in the car before she shuts the door.

INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Michelle comes in. A LOCKSMITH works on the front door.

LOCKSMITH
This is the last one. Your new set of keys is there on the table.
MICHELLE
Great. Thank you... Did you notice the side door doesn’t close properly?

LOCKSMITH
The wood’s warped. Might be possible to shim under the hinge plates, fix it that way.

MICHELLE
Oh?

LOCKSMITH
I don’t do that. I just do locks.

Michelle nods. Of course.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- LATER THAT NIGHT
Michelle sits on her stairs, absently stroking Marty the cat, staring at the entry hall where the rape took place.

FLASHBACK TO- INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- DAY
Michelle is walking through the living room with a cup of coffee. She hears the cat loudly WHINING. She follows the sound and sees that the pantry door is standing slightly ajar. Michelle puts down her coffee and goes out onto the side patio to retrieve the cat. Marty jumps into her arms.

MICHELLE
How’d you get out there, numbskull?

Michelle tries to close the door but finds she’s having trouble. The weather-warped door won’t close properly. She’s in the middle of her third attempt when the door suddenly bursts inward, knocking her back, making her drop the cat.

A MASKED INTRUDER now steps into the house. Eyeing her, flings the door closed behind him.

For a moment, Michelle is frozen by terror. Then the Intruder takes a step toward her and she redisCOVERs her legs. She runs but the Intruder catches up to her in the hall. She’s no physical match for the much bigger man and, soon, all she can do is keep screaming as the Intruder takes her, Marty watching on, an indifferent witness.
Michelle closes her eyes, opens them. Like a ritual purging. She holds up the cat, makes him look at her.

MICHELLE
If you couldn’t claw his eyes out, you could’ve at least scratched him. I’m just saying.

Michelle is looking at a preliminary animation on her laptop. More Lovecraftian monsters. She gets a TEXT MESSAGE. She looks at her phone. Unknown caller. Just as she’s about to retrieve the message, her phone dies. She curses to herself as she has to get up and plug in her charger. It takes a moment for the phone to reboot. When it does, she finds an ominous message staring at her: “You were tight for a woman your age.”

Michelle feels ice water down her spine. She moves to the window, looks out. A few more Xmas lights twinkle in the street but nothing stirs.

Michelle talks with an orange-vested SALES ASSOCIATE in front of a case filled with PEPPER SPRAYS. She’s handling one.

MICHELLE
So this is the most powerful?

SALES ASSOCIATE
With pepper sprays power can be measured in terms of potency and in terms of distance...

MICHELLE
I want both.

On her way to the checkout counter, Michelle passes a display of HATCHETS. She tosses one of those in her basket too.
EXT. STREET -- DUSK

Michelle can’t find a parking space. She attempts a parallel parking job anyway, backing in hard. Her rear bumper makes an audible CRUNCH. She keeps going anyway, forcibly moving the other car to make room for hers.

INT. RESTAURANT -- DUSK

Entering, Michelle finds RICHARD, her ex, a ruggedly handsome man around fifty, already here. They kiss.

RICHARD
You want to sit outside? We can sit down right now.

MICHELLE
Fine with me.

Richard motions to the HOSTESS. She nods back to him. Richard and Michelle follow her through the restaurant.

RICHARD
So you told Vincent you’d front him the rent on that place?

MICHELLE
I said I’d help for a while.

RICHARD
Well, I hope you’re not expecting me to pitch in. I’m fucking broke.

MICHELLE
I was the one who made the promise.

They arrive at a table. The Hostess sets out menus.

RICHARD
I don’t know what possessed you. They should struggle a while. It’d be good for him.

MICHELLE
His psychotic won’t tolerate any struggling.

RICHARD
She is a psycho. I will add, though, that kind of girl is often very good in bed.

The Hostess smiles to herself as she opens napkins for them.
MICHELLE
What does that mean anyway? “Good in bed.” I’ve never known.

The Hostess splits. Michelle sits down.

RICHARD
Did you get a chance to read my proposal yet?

Michelle seems distracted as she settles in at the table.

MICHELLE
Richard, would you say I was tight for a woman my age?

Richard’s taken aback by the question. Before he can answer, they’re joined by Anna and her husband, ROBERT.

ROBERT
What up, loser?

RICHARD
(amid the hugs, kisses)
You’re just in time to hear Michelle avoid telling me what she thought of the game idea I pitched to her.

MICHELLE
No – it was very interesting.

ROBERT
(to Bus Boy)
Four glasses of champagne… no, a bottle.

Anna sits next to Michelle. She can tell there’s something wrong. She mouths “are you ok?” Michelle half-smiles, distantly.

RICHARD
It is interesting. It’s set in a time when dogs have been wiped out by a virus, so people have robotic canines as pets. You play as the Spartacus of the robot-dog world.
Bob fakes being impressed. Michelle makes a sound as if she were going to speak but then clams up. All look at her.

MICHELLE
I was trying to... I was going to try to find a way to segue into this organically but there really is no graceful way so I’m just going to dump it on the table... I was assaulted a couple of days ago. In my home. I guess I was raped.

ANNA
Oh my god.

RICHARD
Raped?

ANNA
Oh my God.

ROBERT
Seriously?

RICHARD
A couple of days ago?

MICHELLE
Thursday. Night.

RICHARD
You don’t say anything?

ANNA
Oh my God.

MICHELLE
I really haven’t known what to say... What is there to say? I feel stupid now for bringing it up.

RICHARD
Are you insane?

The Waiter finally comes over.

WAITER
Have we had time to look at the menu?

Robert looks at his menu, as if they were actually going to do that now, but then he reads the table. To the waiter-
ROBERT
Give us a minute, huh?

The Waiter reads the table too and quickly withdraws.

ROBERT (CONT’D)
We’re talking about a real rape here?

ANNA
A real rape?

ROBERT
She knows what I meant.

ANNA
I don’t think you do.

ROBERT
Don’t get political now. Your closest friend was just raped! Apparently... You were? For real?

MICHELLE
It was real. He wore a mask and everything.

RICHARD
Jesus Christ. You’re telling us this now?

MICHELLE
I’m telling you now.

No one knows what to say. A moment of silence.

ANNA
Are you alright? You have to get a medical exam...

MICHELLE
I took care of all that. I got a full blood panel.

RICHARD
What have the cops told you? (off her look) You haven’t reported this?

ANNA
Michelle, you have to report this to the police. Immediately.
MICHELLE
Why?

ANNA
Why?!

MICHELLE
It’s over. It doesn’t need to be talked about anymore. It doesn’t need to be commemorated in any way... Let’s order something. Anything.

EXT. RESTAURANT -- NIGHT

A grim Richard walks out with Michelle. They exchange solemn waves with Anna and Robert going off the other way.

RICHARD
Where’s your car?

She nods the way. They walk in silence a moment.

RICHARD (CONT’D)
If you’re reluctant to go to the police because...

MICHELLE
Of course I’m reluctant to go to the police because. I’m never dealing with police, ever again. That was my vow.

This seems to make sense to him for some reason.

RICHARD
I’m going to get you a gun.

MICHELLE
I don’t believe in guns.
(cutting him off)
Richard, I should tell you I shared your proposal with our financiers. They weren’t interested.

RICHARD
I don’t want to talk about that now.

MICHELLE
Alright.

She opens her car door with her key.
RICHARD
But I guess now I might as well ask what you thought of it.

MICHELLE
Don’t take it hard. It doesn’t have anything to do with the quality of your work. It’s a business that’s very tied into a particular demographic.

RICHARD
A demographic that doesn’t care if something’s good?

MICHELLE
Pretty much.

RICHARD
You don’t have to shield me. Really, what did you think of it?

MICHELLE
I think you should finish your novel. You’re a real writer.

RICHARD
A penniless, real writer.

He stops, noticing her color paint on his front bumper.

MICHELLE
Looks like somebody dented your fender.

RICHARD
(smiling)
If I get my hands on the punk...

Michelle gives him a smile and kiss, gets in her car.

EXT. MCDONALD’S -- DAY

Michelle pulls up. Vincent emerges from the interior in his McDonald's uniform, carrying a McFlurry – which he hands to his mother as he climbs in.

VINCENT
On the house. I made it myself.

He seems proud of that. Michelle smiles thanks.
A man in an impeccable suit opens the door for Michèle and Vincent.

**MAN**
Mrs. Leblanc, yes? I am the apartment manager. Please come in.

They follow him to the main room where an extremely pregnant woman, Josie, is measuring a corner with a tape measure.

**JOSIE**
Hello Michèle! Vin, could you hold this for a moment?

Vincent takes the end of the tape measure, Josie stretches it out.

**JOSIE (CONT’D)**
The bookcase is 150 centimeters... so... there... like that. Can you stand there, so I can see?

She positions Vincent so that he’s a stand-in for the bookcase. He’s contientously very still as she extends his arm.

**VINCENT**
Right here?

**JOSIE**
Don’t just act like the bookcase. Be the bookcase.

She measures down from his extended arm to the floor.

**MICHELLE**
(smiling)
Vincent is quite the actor. When he was 12 he was a model for “Kronos”, our first game.

**JOSIE**
Ah...! And I’m sure you were great!

She kisses him furtively and then again intensively. Vincent - in the presence of his mother - feels akward. He makes a grand gesture towards the room.

**VINCENT**
Nice, huh?

**MICHELLE**
A little too nice, don't you think?
Vincent demeanor goes gloomy instantly. Josie continues with her measuring tape.

**JOSIE (TO VINCENT)**
There's room for a 50 inch here....
Did you ask her?

Michelle looks to Vincent. Ask me what?

**VINCENT**
You know how you were going to buy us a microwave? We were hoping maybe you could save your money on that and give us a tv as the housewarming present instead.

**MICHELLE**
Don't you need an oven more than a new TV?

**JOSIE**
(pausing to precisely write down measurements)
The unit comes with a microwave, a refrigerator, everything.

**MICHELLE**
It does? Is this the same apartment you told me about?

Vincent looks ashamed. The manager speaks up-

**APARTMENT MANAGER**
No, it's not. This is one of our elite units. This is 250 euros a month more.

**JOSIE**
(going back to measuring)
The other one there was ridiculous. There was nowhere to put a crib, even. It was preposterous

**MICHELLE**
A little uncomfortable, maybe.

**JOSIE**
Yeah. Uncomfortable.

**MICHELLE**
You do realize having a child is all about suffering?
(MORE)
Josie meets Michelle's gaze flatly.

JOSIE
If you don't want to help us, don't help us. Nobody's holding a gun to your head.

MICHELLE
If I don't help you, how are you going to live?

JOSIE
That's our problem.

MICHELLE
No- no, you see, you don't get to do that. You don't get to act fiercely independent while taking my money.

JOSIE
None of this shit was my idea.
(to Vincent)
I know you want to show off and make all these big, nice things happen but, Jesus, at some point you have to deliver, right? A little? Something? Once? It's always total bullshit. Whatever way things are going to be is never the way they are!

She chokes up, throws down the tape measure and stalks away. Fuming impotently, Vincent hits the wall.

APARTMENT MANAGER
Hey, hey, hey!

Vincent instantly turns from raging bear to shamed child.

MICHELLE
This is impossible. You realize that? She's a lunatic and you're...

VINCENT
What? What am I?... It's like you don't see I've changed.
MICHELLE

(softening)
I'll cosign like I said I would but you're going to be responsible, every month, for the difference in rent between this apartment and the one we'd talked about.

VINCENT

Absolutely. There's no problem. I'm ready for this.

Michelle knows better but she nods. Vincent immediately goes to Josie who's crying in the next room. He approaches her gingerly.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

It’s ok. It’s done. Everything’s going to be just how you want it...

JOSIE

(his hands on her belly)
How I want it? It’s not for me! Do you not understand anything? It’s not about me.

Vincent looks frustrated. He can’t do anything right. Josie sees his anguish, instantly relents. She hushes him, takes him in her arms. Michelle - on her way out - watches through the doorway as Josie strokes Vincent’s head maternally. Michelle looks fascinated.

INT. A-V OFFICES -- DAY

Michelle watches a group of kids shooting zombies. Some kind of beta-testing focus group. As she moves on, she sees Robert coming down the corridor toward her.

MICHELLE

You missed Anna. She’s in Angoulême today.

Robert smiles. Michelle sighs internally, seeing his smile.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)

But you knew that.

Michelle continues into her office. He follows her in, closes the door behind them. Michelle settles in behind her desk.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)

You know I went through a very traumatic experience days ago.
ROBERT
You gave the impression you wanted to go on like nothing happened...
If I’m being insensitive, I’m sorry, but that’s my thing, right?

MICHELLE
I appreciate you staying in character.

ROBERT
(comes closer)
And, you know, a big part of my role is being unpredictable. Don’t scream.

He unzips his pants, whips it out. Michelle sighs.

ROBERT (CONT’D)
I know you’re a wilting flower but you can still touch it... Can’t you?

She looks up at him. Sees he’s not going to be dissuaded.

MICHELLE
Hold on.

She reaches over and grabs her waste-basket. Positions it to catch his wayward sperm.

INT. A-V OFFICES -- NIGHT

The entire suite is dark and silent. The only light is the one in Michelle’s office.

INT. MICHELLE’S OFFICE -- NIGHT

Michelle is going over an intimidatingly numbers-heavy tech review with a yellow highlighter. The only sound is the hum of the heating system. Until her phone DINGS.

A text message. She glances at the clock. 2:30 AM. She looks at her phone. “Unknown Caller.” She looks at the message:

That cream blouse is lovely. my cum stains will hardly show. See you soon.

Michelle whips toward the window behind her. Nothing out there but the dark glass of another office building. A thought chills her and she looks at her door. Her unlocked door.
She crosses to it, hesitates, then pulls the door open, as if expecting to surprise someone on the other side.

INT. OUTER OFFICES - CONTINUOUS

Michelle emerges slowly. She has a look around the dark, silent suite of offices. She seems to be alone... but, at the end of a row of cubicles, she sees a light spilling from a half-open door marked “studio.” She quietly sneaks up on that doorway. Peering in, she sees Kurt, in the light of a single lamp, posing a featureless doll and taking pictures.

A figure study of some sort. He doesn’t seem to notice Michelle. She decides not to announce herself and withdraws.

EXT. QUAI BESIDE THE SEINE -- DAY

Michelle and Irene rise from finishing their meal at one of the little restaurants.

MICHELLE
I was going to ask- have you experienced any incidents recently?

IRENE
Incidents?

MICHELLE
You know what I mean.

IRENE
A man threw a slice of pizza at me from his car. It missed. Also, I felt a couple of eyes on me in the market, perhaps. But I always feel that.

MICHELLE
I just wonder if isn’t starting again. A new cycle.

IRENE
You don’t know? Tru Tv just made a new “special documentary” about your father. They’re repeating it all hours, every day. That’s why it’s fresh on people’s minds.

MICHELLE
(reeling)
I didn’t know. I don’t watch TV.
IRENE
Has something happened to you?

MICHELLE

IRENE
It’s because of his parole hearing. That’s their excuse for dredging the whole thing up again. Your father’s going before the panel in two days...

MICHELLE
You don’t miss a beat.

IRENE
I want you to come with me.

MICHELLE
They will never let him out. Thank God. This parole hearing is nothing but a kabuki exercise just like you asking me to go with you when you know I’d rather claw my own eyes out.

IRENE
How long are you going to hang onto this hatred?

MICHELLE
I will never see him again. Not in this world or... well, there is no other world, so I’ll just leave it at that.

IRENE
There isn’t much time left, Michelle. He’s ill. Look...
(pulling a PHOTO from her purse, like a weapon)
Just look. Are you afraid to look at your own father?

Michelle looks, defiantly. The photo is of an ordinary man, bald, thin, a bit stooped. Wearing an orange prison jumpsuit.

MICHELLE
There. Put it away now.
IRENE
You’re not like all the others,
Michelle, people who only know the
monster from TV. You know the man.
He’s just a man.

MICHELLE
And he’s a monster. You think
there’s a contradiction there?
Look, I’m done. I’ll see you later.

Michelle walks off.

IRENE
Just be careful. Some people aren’t
content with throwing rude things
from passing cars.

Michelle keeps walking. By the time she reaches the street
where her car is parked, Michelle’s already looking around, a
little paranoid. She clocks the faces of her fellow
pedestrians wondering which ones might mean her harm.

37 INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- DAY

Marty the Cat CRIES pitifully.

MICHELLE (O.S.)
How’d you get out there, numbskull?

Michelle opens the pantry door, scoops her cat in her arms.

As she turns, the Intruder is there in front of her. He grabs
her. Just as we’ve seen before... but what we haven’t seen
before: she gets her hands on the iron on the table next to
her. Screaming, she clobbers him. The Intruder lets go of
her, grabbing his head in pain. That’s his fatal mistake.
Michelle hits him again. His blood sprays across the wall...
Michelle, an animal now, falls on the Intruder, bringing the
iron down. Over and over, screaming...

38 CUT TO- INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - STUDY -- DAY

Michelle smiles to herself, weakly. She turns back to the
work on the desk in front of her. Rotted faces - concept
drawings of zombies. She considers a moment then circles the
zombie on the left.

A loud THWACK startles her. Makes the pen jump in her hand.

Michelle grabs the hatchet - which, apparently, she keeps
near her at all times - and goes to check out the sound.
Her heart skips a beat when she discovers a CRACK in her side sliding glass door.

She ducks back behind the wall, peeks out cautiously... and now sees the injured BIRD that collided into the glass twitching on the patio. Thoroughly creeped-out, Michelle puts down her hatchet and fetches a broom. She opens the sliding door, flicks the dying bird onto the grass, then quickly shuts it again as if afraid it were going to try to get in.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER

Michelle lights a cigarette. A moment later, she’s drawn back to the sliding glass door. To her horror, she sees that the bird is still alive and about to be devoured by Marty who is sadistically toying with it. Michelle rushes out with the broom to shoo the cat away.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- LATER

Michelle holds the bird, swaddled in a towel, as she talks on the phone with a VET.

MICHELLE (INTO PHONE)
I understand you can’t make a prognosis over the phone. I was just exploring whether, in fact, treating birds was something that was possible.

VET (O.S.)
We’re talking about a wild bird?

MICHELLE (INTO PHONE)
Yes. An ordinary brown bird.

VET (O.S.)
Like a sparrow?

MICHELLE (INTO PHONE)
Sparrows are pretty, aren’t they?

VET (O.S.)
Well, that’s subjective.

MICHELLE (INTO PHONE)
Is it?

VET (O.S.)
Honestly, ma’am, I wouldn’t even know how to intubate a sparrow- or whatever it is.
Michelle mms. She looks at the bird, very still in her arms, but breathing rhythmically.

MICHELLE (INTO PHONE)
Do sleeping pills work on birds?

41 INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - KITCHEN -- EVENING
Michelle grinds up sleeping pills and mixes them in a cup with some Chia seeds.

42 INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - DEN -- NIGHT
Michelle watches TV. The bird, in its towel-swaddling, rests in her lap. She absently strokes its head with her thumb. As she scrolls through channels, something on her cable guide catches her off-guard. Bloodline: the Legave Street Murders. Michelle’s remote hand stays tensely suspended in mid-air a moment before she presses “OK”.

A TV documentary: faded footage of an improbably long line of body bags on a suburban sidewalk, what looks like a swastika scrawled in blood on a door.

NARRATOR (O.S.)
...little knowing the horror that unfolded, or the questions that they would be left to answer...

Michelle braces for the next image: a SLOW ZOOM-IN on an old photo of a nondescript, balding man with his arm around a woman—who is clearly a younger version of Michelle’s mother.

NARRATOR (CONT’D)
What would drive George Leblanc, successful entrepreneur, alderman at his local church, loving husband and father, to commit such horrific and senseless acts...

The zoom PANS DOWN to the CHILD in Irene’s lap. 10-YEAR-OLD MICHELLE.

NARRATOR (CONT’D)
A single night of madness that would forever haunt those closest to him....

They cut to a much more recent Michelle — recognizable as herself but less fashionable — being attacked by PHOTOGRAPHERS in a parking lot.
REPORTER (ON TV)

Have you talked to your father?

She strikes the cameraman.

NARRATOR (O.S.)

Decades of court proceedings and psychiatric interviews have shed but dim light on the events...

Michelle dials down the volume but keeps the picture on as the image DISSOLVES to another photo of herself as a child. In it, she’s standing in front of a suburban house, lit by the flash of a news camera, looking lost, covered in ash like a Dickensian chimney-sweep.

As the documentary cuts to footage of some kind of memorial—children tying red ribbons to the mail boxes of houses—Michelle finally turns it off. When she looks down, she sees that the bird in her lap is dead.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE – PANTRY -- MOMENTS LATER

Michelle carefully places the dead bird in a shoe box.

EXT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Michelle takes the shoe box out to the trash cans. There are more Xmas lights now, filling the street with gaudy color. As she closes the lid of the can, from across the street--

PATRICK

We have to stop meeting like this.

Patrick is dragging his own trash can out to the curb. Michelle, not wanting to get dragged into a corny running joke with the neighbor, gives a polite chuckle. Waves.

Heading back into the house, Michelle notices a CAR gliding down this quiet street. It’s unfamiliar to her, from the way she watches it pass. Just before Michelle reaches her front door, she sees the strange car very suspiciously turn off its lights and make a U-turn. Before parking in the dark across the street.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Michelle locks and bolts the door behind her. She hurries to the living room window. Whoever is in the car is just sitting there in the dark.
INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Michelle sits with her hatchet and her pepper spray, as if waiting for a showdown. Nothing happens and nothing continues to happen. She can’t take it anymore. She goes to the window.

That suspicious car is still there. A cigarette’s glow wax and wanes behind the steering wheel.

EXT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER

Michelle comes out the side door with a flashlight (not turned on) and the pepper spray. She hugs the side of the house, moving like a spy. She darts to the cover of a tree and, from there, across the street. Keeping to the shadows, bent low, she sneaks up on the stranger’s vehicle.

She hesitates one second, then rises up and charges. She breaks the driver’s side window with the flashlight and sprays directly into the face of the Mystery Man.

The car door opens and the occupant tumbles out, coughing and gagging. Michelle now turns on the flashlight and illuminates Richard, moaning on the asphalt of the street.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Michelle has Richard bent over the sink as she runs water to rinse his eyes of the pepper spray.

MICHELLE
What were you thinking?

RICHARD
I was worried about you! What do you think? ...Jesus!

MICHELLE
Don’t rub them.

She turns off the water, daubs his eyes with a rag.

RICHARD
You tell me you were raped and you didn’t go to the police? Of course I’m going to... My God, Jesus, you really did a number on me...

MICHELLE
I’m sorry... Here, let me put some of this on.
She puts Vaseline on the rag, starts applying it to his eyes.

**RICHARD**
Is that gonna help? Do you know what you’re doing?

**MICHELLE**
It’s on the pepper spray label. It says to do this in case of contact with eyes...

**RICHARD**
You know I’ve always had a morbid fear of going blind!

**MICHELLE**
You’re fine. I didn’t recognize the car! Whose car is that anyway?

**RICHARD**
(hesitant)
It’s a friend’s.

**MICHELLE**
(stops nursing, wary)
A friend’s.

Even blinded, Richard sees there’s no avoiding it—

**RICHARD**
Her name’s Hélène.

**MICHELLE**
Hélène?

**RICHARD**
I had to borrow her car. Mine’s in the shop. Somebody dented the bumper.

**MICHELLE**
That dent was barely visible.

That comes out somehow resounding with despair.

**RICHARD**
She’s a friend, Michelle.

**MICHELLE**
You don’t have to spare my feelings.

**RICHARD**
I’m not... Why would I? Why would I even have to justify anything?
MICHELLE
You don’t.

RICHARD
Ok. So, I’m not.

Michelle wrings out the rag.

MICHELLE
Is she a student?

RICHARD
A grad student.

MICHELLE
I guess it was inevitable.

RICHARD
She’s not my student. She’s a teaching assistant in a Virginia Woolf seminar. The Critical Studies department, a different department.

MICHELLE
But she read your book, didn’t she?

RICHARD
Yes, she has. And she did tell me how deeply it affected her and I did melt inside. OK? It all went down just like you’re picturing it.

MICHELLE
It is a little amusing, actually—the way I picture it.

RICHARD
This jealously is insane...

MICHELLE
I’m just concerned. Richard, this is what I’ve dreaded. I never worried about the ones with big tits. The ones who read Virginia Woolf will chew you up and spit you out.

RICHARD
Michelle, you’re the dangerous one.

He gestures to his eyes. Michelle smiles, despite herself.
EXT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Michelle sends a still-partially blinded Richard home in a TAXI. As soon as he’s gone, she makes a bee-line for Hélène’s car, opening it via the broken window. Searching it like it was a crime scene filled with potential clues, Michelle is increasingly disheartened to find a young woman’s things, including a graded Final Exam. But what really twists the knife is when Michelle finds the girl’s bejewelled Iphone under the seat. The screen-shot is a “selfie” taken by a pretty young woman. In it, Richard is nuzzling with her. They look like a real couple. Unself-consciously in love.

Michelle methodically puts everything back the way she found it, keeping her emotions in check as best she can.

INT. MICHELLE’S OFFICE -- DAY

Phone to her ear, Michelle watches Kevin and another techie wrestle a 7-foot-tall DEMON through the studio door.

MICHELLE (INTO PHONE)
Did you know about her?

INTERCUT - INT. VINCENT APARTMENT/MICHELLE’S OFFICE -- DAY

Vincent lays on the couch, eating Fritos and watching TV - with Josie in the b.g. moving boxes around.

VINCENT (INTO PHONE)
I told you, I met her.

MICHELLE (INTO PHONE)
You didn’t think to mention it?

VINCENT (INTO PHONE)
I don’t know. I...
(as Josie lifts heavy box)
Don’t lift that. I’ll move those.

JOSIE
When?

MICHELLE
Can you focus for me a second?
What’s she like?

VINCENT
She’s okay. She teaches Yoga...
Bikram Yoga I think..
MICHÈLE
Where?

Michelle turns to her computer and googles “Bikram Yoga”.

Josie approaches Vincent, puts her hands on the ottoman.

JOSIE
Take your feet off, please.

VINCENT
Why?

JOSIE
I told Eric he could have it.

MICHÈLE
Eric? Who is this ‘Eric’..?

VINCENT
(to Michèle)
At the centre du Marais
(to Josie)
He doesn’t need it right this second, does he?

Michelle types ‘centre du Marais’ as she does, a new EMAIL appears on her screen. Mildly annoyed, she clicks on it. Instantly, an attachment opens, like a virus: an animated gif showing a photoshopped likeness of herself being anally taken by the tentacled Lovecraftian creature from the video game we glimpsed before.

MICHÈLE
(à Vincent)
I’ll talk to you later.

VINCENT (OFF)
(to Josie)
Where are you going now?
(to Michèle)
Ok, bye.

But Michèle has already hung up. Michelle becomes even more disturbed as she sees the “cc” list. Dozens of names.

She hasn’t even finished scrolling through them when Anna bursts in, closing the door behind her.

ANNA
You’ve seen it?

MICHÈLE
Everybody in the office got this?
ANNA
I don’t know.

Michelle gets up and peeks out through the blinds at the front of her office. She sees all the employees huddled around their computers in groups of two, three or more. Some cover their mouths in shock. Many are laughing. When they look over at Michelle’s office and see her peering out, they react like kids who’ve been busted. She closes her blinds.

MICHELLE
This isn’t the first thing he’s sent me.

ANNA
Who? ...You think this was sent by the man who attacked you?

MICHELLE
Yes.

ANNA
Michelle, do you think it’s possible... the person who attacked you... I mean, it looks like that email came from an internal source.

MICHELLE
Maybe it did.

ANNA
You have to go to the police. Now. Yesterday.

MICHELLE
No police. I’ve had a lifetime’s worth of police. They don’t help. They do anything but help.

ANNA
This is different, Michelle. You’re the victim...

MICHELLE
I was the victim then!

ANNA
I know. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean...

MICHELLE
I’ve worked too hard to put that all behind me. I’ve built this life... I’m not going to bring police into it...

(MORE)
police, reporters. Bloggers. I will not allow this cretin to bring that tidal wave of shit back into my life.

ANNA
But there’s a psychotic out there.

MICHELLE
I have experience dealing with psychotics. I’m a pro.

She smiles. Anna sees Michelle’s point there.

INT. AV OFFICES - TECH ROOM -- DAY
Kevin uncomfortably watches the pornographic animation with Michelle herself standing over him. Meanwhile, she distractedly looks at her Iphone.

KEVIN
It’s not necessarily an “inside job.” When our server was hacked in June, somebody ripped the Cthulu template off our main frame. So these images are floating around out there.

MICHELLE
But that still requires my secret admirer to be someone highly tech savvy... a former employee, maybe?

Kevin shrugs. Michelle hmms. We see what she’s distractedly looking at on her Iphone: the Bikram Yoga web site. Headshots of the instructors. The cheery face of her nemesis, Hélène Zacharian.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
One more question.
(shows him phone)
Do you think she’s pretty?

INT. A YOGA STUDIO -- DAY
Michelle’s immediately uncomfortable in the coat she’s wearing. It’s a “hot” yoga session. Elderly bodies, masses of wrinkles covered with sweat. Against that, Hélène, a youthful contortionist, looks like an erotic earth goddess.

Michelle waits, sweltering, until the class has broken up and the old people are rolling up their mats.
Then she puts on the biggest smile she can muster and crosses the room to Hélène, extending her arm for a handshake in an aggressive way that almost seems like an attack.

MICHELLE
Hélène?

HÉLÈNE
Yes.

Smiling uncertainly, she takes Michelle’s hand.

MICHELLE
I’m Richard’s ex. Michelle.

HÉLÈNE
Oh, oh, oh... nice to meet you.

MICHELLE
Hope it’s ok barging in on you like this. I just wanted to apologize to you. Face to face...

HÉLÈNE
For what?

MICHELLE
Your car window. I feel terrible...

HÉLÈNE
No, no- please. Richard explained it to me.

MICHELLE
Really? What was his explanation?

HÉLÈNE
(a beat, confused)
It was an accident.

MICHELLE
It was. It was an accident...
Anyway, it was a great excuse to finally meet you.

Michelle gins up her bubbly friendliness again. Hélène seems to pick up on the effort, making her a little uncomfortable.

HÉLÈNE
No, no, it’s fine. This is great.
It’s great to finally meet you. I was thinking... I was hoping...
MICHELLE
At least, Richard won’t have to introduce us now. We got the awkwardness out of the way.

HÉLÈNE
Was there awkwardness?

MICHELLE
Well...

HÉLÈNE
I mean, of course, I’m sure there would be... I guess there is... was.

MICHELLE
But we’ve survived it.

Hélène smiles. Another awkward beat.

HÉLÈNE
We should get together some time.

MICHELLE
We should... In fact, I’m having a Christmas party next week. You should come. You have to come.

HÉLÈNE
(smiling)
If I have to.

MICHELLE
I’ll call Richard and give him all the details... Anyway, I should let you get back...

HÉLÈNE
Well, very nice to meet you.
(seeing Michelle, sweating, almost faint)
Would you like some water?

MICHELLE
I’m fine, thanks. Very nice to meet you.

Michelle gets out of there as fast as she can.
As soon as Michelle steps off the elevator, she notes the changed atmosphere in the office. Her co-workers seem to look away quickly whenever she looks at them.

Michelle’s secretary sticks her head in.

SECRETARY
Vincent called. He was calling from Port Royal.

MICHELLE
The hospital?

Michelle anxiously moves down the corridor, looking in rooms she passes, getting little glimpses of mortality.

Vincent meets his mother out in the hall. A nervous wreck, he’s still wearing his McDonald’s uniform. A very tall, dark-skinned young man wearing a McDonald’s uniform stands by. Inside the room, Josie starts screaming at a NURSE.

JOSIE (OFF)
Don’t tell me what the doctor told me, bitch! I know what the doctor told me!

VINCENT
She had blood in her underwear so we came to the emergency room. They just did an ultra-sound. They say she had a... a placenta...

The other kid in the McDonald’s uniform speaks up-

MCDONALD’S KID
Placental abruption.

VINCENT
They say everything’s ok but they’re going to induce labor... This is Omar.

MICHELLE
Hello.

McDonald’s kid nods back. Richard arrives.
VINCENT

Dad!

RICHARD

No news?

Vincent anxiously shakes his head. Father and son embrace.

INT. HOSPITAL - VENDING MACHINES -- MOMENTS LATER

Michelle inserts a dollar in a coffee machine. The bill is noisily rejected.

RICHARD

Suddenly we’re having a Christmas party?

MICHELLE

I thought we should meet. She’s lovely, by the way.

Richard doesn’t believe this for a second. Michelle finishes smoothing out her bill, inserts it again. Again, rejection.

RICHARD

The whole thing sounds like one of your little traps.

MICHELLE

I’ve got bigger things to worry than plotting diabolical Christmas dinners... By the way, is there anything she won’t eat? Any allergies? Marty’s shedding like crazy.

Richard’s skeptical. The machine makes its irritating SOUND as it keeps rejecting the bill. He takes out his wallet.

RICHARD

I never said a word when you went with that violinist.

MICHELLE

You know the difference! He was married. With three kids. He had all the requisite qualities. But her... She’s a young, single woman of child-bearing age. You broke the rules.
Richard puts his own bill in machine. It’s accepted.

RICHARD
If we had an agreement like that, you should’ve told me. It’s not my fault...

MICHELLE
It is your fault. We should still be together. It is your fault.

RICHARD
You left me, Michelle.

MICHELLE
You hit me.

The words chill the air between them. She takes her coffee.

RICHARD
If there’s one thing in my life I could take back...

Vincent finds them, excited...

VINCENT
It’s here!

INT. HOSPITAL - MATERNITY WARD -- DAY

Michelle, Richard, and Omar look at the brand new, lightly dark-skinned BABY, being held up by the Nurse on the other side of the glass. Reverent silence till-

MICHELLE
There’s going to have to be a DNA test.

The others look askance at Michelle. She doesn’t notice, or at least acts like she doesn’t.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- DAY

Vincent slips an ice cube between the pale lips of Josie who offers a wan smile and chews.

JOSIE
Are they bringing him in?

VINCENT
Right now.
She gets suddenly emotional. Tears in her eyes.

JOSIE
Everything’s going to be good for
him. I’m going to be good for him.

VINCENT
What are you talking about? You’re
perfect.

That makes her start to out and out cry. The mid-wife rolls
in the baby in an incubator. Josie brightens immediately.

Vincent spontaneously gives his father a big hug. He then
turns to Michelle and starts to hug her too but then holds
back as if remembering not to, just giving her a smile
instead.

Michelle watches as the baby is handed to Josie who seems a
little disconcerted as it starts crying.

VINCENT (CONT’D)
Guess he’s hungry.

Josie looks around at everyone in the room, seeming
uncharacteristically shy.

VINCENT (CONT’D)
We’ll give you a minute.

Josie looks at Michelle. Her expression turns resolute,
defiant.

JOSIE
No. It’s alright.

Josie bears a breast and we now see what she was abashed
about: a crude and truly ugly tattoo, a banner over a faded
heart with the name ‘ERIC’. Josie doesn’t avert her eyes from
Michelle, silently communicating she knows it’s a legacy of
past stupidity and daring Michelle to say anything about it.

EXT. HOSPITAL -- NIGHT

Michelle smokes a cigarette by the breezeway. The Nurse is
out here too. Michelle trades smiles with her.

MICHELLE
I had him here in this same
hospital– my son.

NURSE
That’s amazing.
MICHELLE
Not really. But what is a little amazing, I guess, is that my friend Anna... you met her?

NURSE
I did.

MICHELLE
She had her baby here the same night. This is where we met. Her child was still-born. She asked if she could breast-feed my baby.

NURSE
Oh my.

MICHELLE
I said "go ahead." I wonder about that - they've always been exceptionally close, Anna and my son. I wonder if some kind of imprinting took place. Like with ducks. On the other hand, myself-sometimes, I look at Vincent, this inconsequential lout I squeezed out of my own body and realize I don’t know him at all.

Michelle notices the tall, turbaned McDonald’s kid exiting the hospital. He throws Michelle a cheerful wave in passing. Michelle directs the Nurse’s attention to him with a nod.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
He’s got a bounce in his step. You’re something of an expert- does he have the air of a new father?

The nurse isn’t sure what Michelle is implying, so she just smiles.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
See? I don’t know anything I should know. Like telling Anna “go ahead,” all those years ago - was that what a normal woman would have done? There are just some things I never learned.

INT. MICHELLE’S CAR -- NIGHT

Almost every house on her street has its colorful Xmas lights up now. Approaching her driveway, Michelle stops, seeing a PRIVATE SECURITY CAR in the middle of the street.
THE SECURITY GUARD talks to Patrick and Rebecca from behind the wheel of his car.

Michelle leans out her window to see what’s going on. Rebecca comes over to her.

REBECCA
Patrick should walk you inside your house, Michelle. There’s a prowler out here. Patrick tussled with him.

MICHELLE
A “prowler”?

Patrick waves goodybe to the security guard, joins the women.

PATRICK
They’re going to dispatch three patrol cars to search for this asshole.

MICHELLE
You fought with him?

PATRICK
No. I did not. I caught him in my bushes. He was crouched down, watching your house. I approached him and he just took off.

Michelle looks down the street with a weird anticipation.

MICHELLE
Did you see his face?

PATRICK
No. I think he was wearing a mask. Like a ski mask. Like a stalker on a TV show. He just took off.

REBECCA
Pat, you should go in with her.

Patrick nods in agreement. Michelle, shaking her head, parks her car. Patrick rejoins her as she gets out.

MICHELLE
I’m sure it’s not necessary.

Patrick waves dismissively. No bother. They head in.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
I have pepper spray.
Michelle comes in, cautiously, turns on the light. Everything seems in order. Michelle takes off her coat and waits, while he has a look around.

PATRICK
Everything seems to be ok.

MICHELLE
Well, thank you. I appreciate it.

PATRICK
Please. I didn’t do shit- pardon my French.

(shakes his head in frustration; looks out at street, wistful)
I almost had him. He just took off so fast... In school, I could do a mile in six-fifty.

Michelle smiles sympathetically at her would-be knight errant.

MICHELLE
The other way to think of it is his speed was a testament to how scared he was of you.

PATRICK
Thank you for salvaging my pride.

MICHELLE
Anytime.

For just a moment, something passes between them as they smile at each other. A warmth, maybe something more. Then Patrick goes right back to helpful neighbor mode.

PATRICK
Well, if you see anything, hear anything, just give a holler.

Michelle nods appreciatively. He nods back, ready to leave.

MICHELLE
I’m a grandmother.

She has no idea why she said that. He’s slightly taken aback.
PATRICK
Oh? ...Congratulations.

She shrugs as if to say “it was nothing.” He smiles, a little awkwardly and withdraws. Left alone, Michelle mutters at herself as she closes the door.

INT. A-V OFFICES -- DAY

Michelle’s spreading jam on toast in the office’s little kitchen. Kurt comes in wearing a black ski sweater. He nods politely to her, pours himself some coffee. She watches him, suspicion creeping up on her. He looks up, catching the way she’s looking at him. Smiles as if it pleased him.

KURT
Yes?

MICHELLE
I like your sweater. Do you ski?

KURT
I do. I’ll take you some time if you like.

Michelle is taken aback, no idea where he’s coming from. She betrays a bit of discomfort as he leaves her, smiling.

INT. AV OFFICES - OUTER OFFICES - LATER

Michelle watches Kurt through the glass window in the studio door. Watching the way he handles a MODEL in demonic make-up under the studio lights. Watching his rough hands on her.

INT. AV OFFICES - TECH OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Michelle approaches Kevin at his desk.

MICHELLE
Kevin, you target shoot, right?

KEVIN
Yes.

MICHELLE
The point is you own guns?

KEVIN
A couple.
MICHELLE
Can you teach me?

INT. FIRING RANGE -- DAY

Michelle holds a .38 in her hands like dirty harry, taking aim at a silhouette target.

MICHELLE
Now I don’t pull, I squeeze, right? I saw that in a few different movies.

KEVIN
You just pull the trigger.

Michelle pulls the trigger. Hits the silhouette in the leg.

MICHELLE
In a real situation, that would do.

KEVIN
In a real situation, he’d probably be moving faster.

MICHELLE
True.

KEVIN
Try the .44.

Kevin hands her another gun.

MICHELLE
Kevin, I also wanted to talk to you because I’ve got an off-the-books assignment for you.

KEVIN
A black op?

MICHELLE
I want to find out who created the animation in that email. You know the one I’m talking about.

Kevin, looking a little embarrassed, nods.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
To do that, I need you to hack into the home computers of everyone in this office. All the men, anyway. Well, all the males.
KEVIN
Michelle... I want to help but that’s a for-real major violation.

MICHELLE
Trust me, it’s only a metaphorical violation.
(hits target in the head)
But I do appreciate how you might feel about it. That’s why I’m offering you ten thousand dollars, off the books. This would be just between us. Our thing.

Kevin likes the sound of that. As she knew he would.

KEVIN
You know, you go through people’s things, people are going to have some embarrassing stuff.

MICHELLE
Understood. My gaze is completely non-judgemental.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- TWILIGHT
Michelle stands at her window. Looking at: Patrick, wearing a “wife beater”, stringing Xmas lights around Joseph, Mary and Infant Jesus in his lawn creche. She moves to another window. This angle, too, is obscured by a tree.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - ATTIC -- TWILIGHT
Michelle has binoculars to her eyes. She’s curled up in a narrow space, watching Patrick at work. With her free hand, she touches herself, more and more vigorously. As, with a barely audible whimper, she finishes, the Xmas lights start to blink on below.
She breathes a moment, then rips open a “Handi-Wipe” and cleans her fingers.

EXT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- TWILIGHT
Rebecca places a ceramic sheep to the creche. Patrick sees they’ve run out of lights.

PATRICK
Think we got enough illumination here?
REBECCA
(disappointed, insistent)
The Infant’s head has to light up.

Patrick smiles. Of course. As he disappears into the backyard, Rebecca looks up and sees Michelle coming toward her. Michelle musters her best friendly-neighbor smile.

MICHELLE
Hey, Rebecca.

Rebecca shows her how a friendly neighbor smile’s done.

REBECCA
Hey.

MICHELLE
This is beautiful.

REBECCA
I love this scene. This is where it all started.

MICHELLE
It is... I know this is kind of rudely last minute but I’m having a little Christmas get-together tomorrow night...

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- NIGHT

CLOSE ON: Michelle’s fingers insert wooden toothpicks into bacon-wrapped shrimp to the tune of baroque 70s glam rock.

MICHELLE
It would be theoretically possible to serve Richard’s lady love one of these with a toothpick embedded deep inside.

Anna helping out in the kitchen, smiles.

ANNA
You could just poison her.

MICHELLE
She’d see it coming. I’m sure she’s already got me pegged as some kind of Medea figure.

ANNA
She’s not a classics major
In the adjacent living room, Richard and Robert heatedly debate Michelle’s vinyl collection. Richard shouts to the women in the kitchen, waving an LP like a battle flag.

**RICHARD**
*For Your Pleasure, red vinyl! ...Hey!*

There’s a loud GLEEEECH of a needle lifting as Robert commandeers the turntable, over Richard’s protest.

**MICHELLE**
They should just take their cocks out and measure.

**ANNA**
The way Robert loves to relive his youth, it should worry me – we know where that leads, don’t we?

Michelle smiles again but this one’s a bit tense. Anna sees Vincent coming up the walk as Josie, the new baby (screaming) in her arms, goes back to close the car door. Vincent enters the kitchen, carrying a homemade pie.

**VINCENT**
I’m gonna pop this in the fridge. Josie made it. It’s apple. She used a recipe but she added blueberries to it. The recipe didn’t have blueberries, she just added that.

Josie, carrying the screaming baby, snaps at Vincent from the living room.

**JOSIE**
What are you thinking?! You left the car door wide open!

**VINCENT**
Well, is it closed now?

Josie stalks out of sight, shaking her head wearily. The things she puts up with.

**ANNA**
I swear I’m this close to calling social services on that bitch.

Follow Vincent as he tracks Josie down in the living room. Before he can apologize, she shoves the baby in his arms.

**JOSIE**
He smells horrible.
Josie leaves Vincent to start rummaging through a large diaper bag for the necessary materials. The baby’s screaming is as loud as the Iggy Pop Robert’s put on.

RICHARD
You’re trying to make my grandson deaf with that shit?

IRENE (O.S.)
Hello, all!

Michelle’s mother is making her entrance, like a grand dame, squired by her paramour, Rafe who wears a sports jacket over a shirt open to show off gold chains. The 75-year-old wears a short, black skirt and inches of almost Baby Jane make-up.

This is what greets Michelle as she enters the living room, holding a plate, Anna at her side.

MICHELLE
Promise you’ll kill me. If I ever...

Anna smiles. Irene sees her daughter, comes her way.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
At the very first sign, kill me.

Michelle exchanges kisses with her mother.

RAFE
Sorry we're late. But I wanted to find something special. This is a decent cabernet...

The DOORBELL rings. As Rafe expounds on his wine selection, Michelle crosses down the entry hall to open the front door. Bob finally turns down music to watch Michelle greet Patrick and his wife Rebecca. She's holding a trivia board game.

REBECCA
Scrabble!

Michelle embraces her warmly. Patrick gives Michelle a brotherly kiss on the cheek.

PATRICK
No more excitement the last couple of days?

MICHELLE
No. It seems the block’s been fairly bogeyman free.

(re: a curious Robert wandering over)

(MORE)
Anyway, we’re all safe tonight.
Robert here has a black belt.

She places a hand on Robert’s arm as she moves on, leaving Robert with Patrick and his wife.

PATRICK
I just got my red belt in March. I was doing Tai Kwan Do for years but I switched to Shokatan...

ROBERT
I’ve never done karate. She was making a joke.

PATRICK
Oh. Very funny.

Robert gives a fake smile, then he moves off, continuing to follow Michelle. He catches up with her....

ROBERT
You can’t avoid me all night.

MICHELLE
I disagree.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - DINING ROOM -- LATER

Michelle places a shrimp appetizer in front of empty chair. Anna and she are still putting the last plates on the table. Pleasant conversation as everybody takes their seats...

JOSIE
We finally put in the new carpeting but there’s just no end to it!

Rebecca mms sympathetically. Patrick comes over to Michelle.

PATRICK
Thanks for having us. We don’t get out much, I have to admit.

The doorbell RINGS. Richard is up like a shot. Michelle watches Richard pass out of sight, almost apprehensively.

PATRICK (CONT’D)
It’s kind of unfortunate for Rebecca. She’s a very social person. And I guess I’m not.
MICHELLE
Well, I’m glad she dragged you over here tonight.

PATRICK
It’s no hardship.

Patrick surprises Michelle slightly by giving her wrist a little squeeze. Michelle smiles – but only briefly as she now sees Richard returning with his arm around Hélène.

HÉLÈNE
So sorry I couldn’t get here earlier. I couldn’t get off work.

MICHELLE
We’re just sitting down.

Michelle gives her a kiss. Anna watches Michelle’s reaction as Hélène sits down beside Richard. Amid the rumble of good cheer, people dig in. Rebecca, smiling, speaks up–

REBECCA
I’ll say grace, if everybody likes.

People look a little taken aback by her cheery offer. Michelle shoots a furtive, sidelong glance over at Patrick and sees his smile tighten ever-so-slightly with embarrassment.

MICHELLE
Please.

Rebecca, Patrick and Michelle’s mother close their eyes and folds her hands. Rafe, seeing Irene doing it, follows suit. Everybody else, slightly uncomfortably, just tries to sit there respectfully.

REBECCA
Jesus Christ, bless this food to our use, and us to thy service. Fill our hearts with grateful praise. Amen.

IRENE
Amen.

ROBERT
(too loud)
Amen!

Anna gives Robert a chastising look. People start eating. Wine is being passed around. Michelle keeps looking over at Richard and Hélène, leaning together, whispering conspiratorially.
ANNA
So, Patrick, what do you do?

PATRICK
Well, I work in banking but I plead the fifth.

ANNA
Oh, why’s that?

PATRICK
Oh, I was just joking but, you know, not a very popular profession at the moment.

ROBERT
(eyes on Michelle)
Or ever, really.

PATRICK
Or ever.

Rebecca looks mildly scandalized as Josie casually begins to breast-feed her baby at the table. Michelle raises her glass.

MICHELLE
A toast to all of us and especially the newcomers to our table, Hélène, Patrick, Rebecca...

She looks at Rafe, as if blanking on his name (playfully).

RAFE
Rafe.

She nods, smiling, then focuses on Hélène.

MICHELLE
God bless us one and all.

Everyone toasts. They go back to eating. Hélène takes a bite of appetizer. She winces. Spits something into her palm. It takes her a moment to process what she’s looking at: a little piece of wood. She looks over at Michelle. Wondering. Michelle does not look her way.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE – DINING ROOM -- LATER

Vincent paces with the baby and Anna and Michelle take dirty plates away as Richard, on a roll, holds court...
RICHARD
Originality, singularity – they use to be valued, now they’re a liability...

Michelle leans over- confidentially – to Hélène.

MICHELLE
Richard is, first and foremost, a theorist.

Hélène’s not sure what that means. It sounds like a dig.

RICHARD
And I’m not talking about novelty- we’ve got novelty coming out of our ass...

ANNA
That’s a delightful image for the dinner table.

Michelle settles back down in her chair. Slightly buzzed, she looks over at Patrick who sits there swirling his wine glass, looking bored. A mischievous smile appears on her face.

HÉLÈNE
I tell Richard- he’s so negative. He’s too young to be a curmudgeon.

Under the table, Michelle lets her knee graze Patrick’s. He reacts with surprise, then looks away. Pretending nothing happened. Vincent hands the baby back to Josie, goes into the kitchen. Michelle escalates the game of “footsie”, slipping off her shoe, running a foot up the length of his leg. Patrick smiles uncertainly. Robert observes this, looks at Michelle, sees her smiling to herself... Michelle’s foot is just at Patrick’s groin as Irene stands...

IRENE
I guess this is as good a time as any. I have an announcement. Cue the drum-roll... Rafe and I are engaged to be married.

Rebecca cheers. Everyone else reacts with more polite clapping. Except Michelle who bursts out laughing.

MICHELLE
I’m sorry... excuse me but how do you manage to be so ludicrous?
Her mother’s face wrinkles up but she doesn’t answer. A pall falls over the table - broken only by Vincent returning from the kitchen with pie.

VINCENT
Hope everybody’s ok with blueberries. Josie put a ton in this. They’re not even in the official recipe.

Everybody murmurs compliments, making a big deal over the pie to cover up the awkwardness. Josie basks in it.

JOSIE
It was an experiment.

EXT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - LATER
Michelle smokes a cigarette out on the patio. In the b.g., the guests migrate from the dining table to the living room. Rebecca approaches from inside to speak to Michelle-

REBECCA
It’s almost midnight. Do you mind if I put on the mass?

MICHELLE
By all means.

Michelle sees Richard and Hélène, coats in hand, getting ready to go. She quickly puts out her cigarette...

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS
...and comes back inside to see Richard and Hélène off.

MICHELLE
Taking off already?

HÉLÈNE
It’s my fault. I have family obligations.

RICHARD
This was wonderful, though, Michelle. Really. Next time’s our turn. You’ll come to us.

MICHELLE
That’ll be wonderful, but there’s no reason to rush it.
HÉLÈNE
Let us handle it, Richard. We’ll have lunch together first, Michelle and I. Just the two of us. Take things one step at a time.

MICHELLE
(sincerely impressed)
I agree.

RICHARD
Well, great.

Michelle takes Hélène’s hand. To Richard-

MICHELLE
Drive safe.

It sounds like: “I love you.” Filled with pining and regret. Richard kisses her and he and Hélène head out the door. So as not to watch them go, Michelle heads to the kitchen.

Robert, sulking, has switched to Scotch. He follows her.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS

Robert corners Michelle out of sight of the doorway.

ROBERT
Your idiotic flirting with the banker - was that for my benefit?

MICHELLE
Are you going to make a scene in my home, Robert? Is this the kind of thing I can expect now?

ROBERT
(seething)
We can talk later.

He turns to return to the party. She stops him.

MICHELLE
Hold on... Your prop.

She hands him a cup of coffee to take with him.
Michelle returns with more coffee. Rebecca and her mother are watching a broadcast of the Midnight Mass, live from the Vatican. Chanting voices fill the room (continuously, in the background during the rest of the scene). The others are playing the Trivia Madness. Patrick sips cognac alone. Michelle sits down next to him. Looks at the mass on the TV.

MICHELLE
Close the book, ring the bell, blow out the candle.

PATRICK
What’s that?

MICHELLE
What kind of Catholic are you? You never heard the rite of excommunication?

PATRICK
Have you?

MICHELLE
From time to time.

She smiles, like a mischievous child plotting something.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
My father always made the sign of the cross on my forehead before I went out the door to go to school. Actually, he did it to all the kids on our block. Some parents finally asked him to stop.

PATRICK
I guess I can see why.

MICHELLE
My father apparently took it as a grave sleight. That night, he made the rounds. Door to door, every house on our block with a shotgun, a tenderizing mallet and a pair of kitchen knives.

PATRICK
(uncomfortable)
I heard about that.
MICHELLE
You’ve heard about the twenty-seven people. You may not know about the pets. They get short shrift. Six dogs, a couple of cats. He spared a hamster for some obscure reason. You can’t make this shit up.

Michelle chuckles. Patrick doesn’t know how to react.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
I was doing my homework, when he walked back in with blood all over him. My mom was at work – she was a nurse in those days. Can you imagine?

PATRICK
We don’t have to talk about this, Michelle

MICHELLE
I don’t mind. It’s cathartic.
(smiles wryly at that)
When my father decided he wanted to burn everything in the house, I helped him put things in the fire. We were pulling down drapes, tearing up carpeting. Throwing it all in. It was exciting. You get caught up in a project like that. We were just starting to burn our clothes when the police finally moved in. Somebody snapped a photo of me. I was half-naked, slimed with ash from the fire. That photo, more than anything, really cemented in people’s minds that I was my psycho father’s psycho little helper.

Patrick seems equally appalled and fascinated by Michelle’s tale. She amused by his reaction.

PATRICK
Wow.

MICHELLE
Yeah, huh?

Michelle, smiling, gets up and walks away, leaving him to stew in it, to the sounds of the televised mass... and runs into Irene coming the other way, a little wobbly.
IRENE
Are you aware how brutal you were to me at dinner?

MICHELLE
Yes, I am. And that was just the beginning.

IRENE
You become so cruel when confronted with something you find unpleasant. I’ve apparently become one of those unpleasant things.

MICHELLE
Neither one of us is drunk enough yet for this conversation.

Irene gives Michelle a dismissive snort and walks on. Two seconds later, Michelle hears a CRASH and turns. A coffee table’s upended, bottles on the floor. Everyone getting up, concerned.

And her mother on the floor.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
Jesus...?

She’s about to start yelling outrage at her mother’s latest stunt but she sees the faces around her, sees it’s for real.

INT. AMBULANCE -- NIGHT

Michelle rides in the back with her mother and a PARAMEDIC. She can’t look at her mother like this, so she looks everywhere else. But then she hears her mother trying to say something from under her oxygen mask.

MICHELLE
You shouldn’t try to talk. Just concentrate on breathing...

Her mother insists on speaking. Michelle leans in close. Her mother’s voice is hoarse, very faint, but clear-

IRENE
Go see him.

Michelle looks chilled by the words. As if this were some kind of curse cast upon her.
Michelle stands anxiously in the waiting area with Vincent, Robert and Anna. The DOCTOR comes out to talk to her.

DOCTOR
She’s had a major stroke. We alleviated the pressure on her brain but remains unresponsive.

ANNA
Unresponsive... meaning?

DOCTOR
She is comatose.

MICHELLE
How long?

DOCTOR
There’s no telling. She’s stable right now. Her blood serum is...

MICHELLE
This is real?

DOCTOR
(as if he didn't hear)
Excuse me?

MICHELLE
There’s no way she’s faking or playing it up or anything? You’re medically certain this is for real?

The doctor looks at her a moment, surprised by the question.

DOCTOR
I’m sorry, no. I have to tell you there’s a high likelihood your mother will not wake up again.

Michelle reels.

DOCTOR (CONT’D)
But as I say she’s stable. I suggest you get some rest. There’s nothing you can do here right now.

Michelle nods distantly. Anna puts her arm around her. The Doctor takes his leave. Robert stands there looking useless.
ANNA
You should come home with us. At least for a shower.

Michelle looks at her, not quite able to respond.

INT. ANNA’S HOUSE - BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Robert and Anna help Michelle in. Michelle is moving like a zombie. Anna looks back over her shoulder at Robert.

ANNA
Would you mind sleeping in the guest room?

He decides at the last second not to protest. He leaves them alone. Anna helps Michelle off with her coat.

MICHELLE
Did you see Richard with Hélène?

ANNA
I did. Lie down.

MICHELLE
(nods, sits on the bed)
He was running through his little routines. And she seemed amused by them all.

ANNA
You know you’ll wind up being good friends.

MICHELLE
Oh, no doubt. I’ll start going over there for supper, just the three of us. I see myself ringing a doorbell, holding a box of macaroons and I shudder.

Anna smiles. She gets Michelle to lie back. Michelle winds up pulling her onto the bed with her.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
I can’t begrudge him happiness now. Richard was there for me through a the darkest days. And they got dark. We couldn’t go out in public. But Richard was like a knight for me....My mother never had that. She always had to face it alone.
ANNA
It’s good you realize that.

MICHELLE
It doesn’t excuse anything. Any of her ridiculous... But she did have it hard. Once in a market an old man threw a raw steak at her. A good piece of meat. He paid for it just to fling it at her. In the middle of a recession.

ANNA
That old bastard’s probably dead now, if he ate a lot of meat, I say congestive heart failure in 2003.

Michelle smiles as Anna holds her. Brushes hair her out of her face. They fall into incredibly intimate silence. Anna nuzzles her nose, like an eskimo.

ANNA (CONT’D)
Do you remember the time in Cassis? We tried...

MICHELLE
(remembers, smiling)
We couldn’t get through it without laughing.

Anna smiles. They leave it at that.

INT. ANNA’S BEDROOM -- MORNING

Michelle wakes up, feeling something strange. It takes her a moment to recognize that Robert’s hand is up her nightshirt. She kicks away from him.

MICHELLE
What are you doing?!

ROBERT
Anna’s gone to the office.

He says that as if it explained everything. Michelle gets up.

ROBERT (CONT’D)
I was just trying to make you feel better.
MICHELLE
(earnestly sizing him up)
I wonder if your stupidity was what
attracted me to you in the first
place.

ROBERT
I’m sorry if I misjudged.

MICHELLE
Look, I can’t do this anymore. We
have to stop.

ROBERT
Right.

MICHELLE
You were a great partner and we’ll
still be friends...

ROBERT
You’re serious?!

MICHELLE
This whole ridiculous situation was
getting too much to bear... you don’t
feel that all? The humiliating
absurdity of it all?

ROBERT
Uh, no.

She strips off the nightshirt. He takes this as a provocation
and tries to again put his hand down her panties. She removes
his hand, starts collecting her clothes. He stands there,
dumbstruck, seeing she really means it.

ROBERT (CONT’D)
Your breasts have gotten bigger.

MICHELLE
No, I don’t think so. Not that I’m
aware of.

ROBERT
No doubt about it.

She slips on a sweater. Looks for her shoes. He finds her
left one, withholds it from her.

ROBERT (CONT’D)
Tell me you don’t want me anymore
and that’ll be the end of it.
MICHELLE
It’s not as simple as that, but all right, I’m telling you: I don’t want this anymore, this situation, the lies.

ROBERT
You dodged my question.

MICHELLE
Sorry. I no longer want to fuck you. Was that the question?

She takes her shoe. He looks like a child denied a treat.

ROBERT
This is pretty sudden, Michelle. I think we should take it in stages.

MICHELLE
No. It’s like quitting smoking. Cold turkey’s the only way to do it.

ROBERT
You never quit smoking.

MICHELLE
Well, there’s your solace— maybe I’ll weaken down the line.

ROBERT
No, you won’t. This is a Michelle decision. As absolute as it is arbitrary.

Michelle starts out. He steps in front of her.

ROBERT (CONT’D)
You can’t do this. You can’t just unilaterally do this.

MICHELLE
Move, Robert.

Michelle moves past him, but she looks back over her shoulder. Unsure what he might do.

81

INT. HOSPITAL -- DAY

Michelle sits at her mother’s bedside, eating a salad out of a clear plastic container with a plastic fork. Her mother has tubes coming out of her everywhere.
MICHELLE
I won’t see him, you know? I don’t believe in the superstition of death-bed requests. If you imagine you can manipulate me with this hideous stunt... Ever since you decided the laws of God and Man no longer applied to you and started acting out like a spoiled teenager, you never gave a shit what I thought. What your behavior did to me. This aneurysm thing stands out only for its disgusting... treachery. This salad is awful. They just dumped in a can of olives.
(stares out window)
You can’t stay mad at me, you know.

Michelle notices that the TV suspended from the wall is on the fritz. She drags her chair over to stand on it while she tries to adjust it.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
Of course, BFM-TV is the one station that comes in.

She keeps switching back and forth through channels. She registers only vaguely, at first, the whole TEAM of doctors and nurses rushing into the room and gathering around her mother’s bed. When she sees them, she fills with fear.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
What’s going on?

They don’t answer. Too busy swarming around Irene, taking urgent measurements. Michelle is terrified now.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
I thought I heard a different beep. Was that the sound?

Her voice comes out weak, a little girl’s squeak. They don’t hear her. Finally, one of the nurses sees her.

NURSE
Miss, you have to go outside.

The Nurse gently but firmly pushes her toward the door. Helpless, lost, Michelle finds herself standing out in the hall, looking in.
EXT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- TWILIGHT

Michelle gets out of car, sluggish, like a sleepwalker. She stops as she sees the LIGHT is on in her upstairs bedroom.

The curtains there billow spookily.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Michelle comes in, warily. Marty the cat leaps into her arms. She takes him with her as she heads upstairs.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Michelle enters cautiously. She discovers the covers have been ripped off her bed and a NOTE - written in red lipstick - left atop the crumpled sheets.

She reads: sorry, I couldn’t wait.

She then notices the cum sprayed all over the violet colored sheet. Michelle sets Marty down and starts stripping the bedding like it was just another chore.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE -- DAY

Dressed as if for a cocktail party, Michelle leads a somewhat clumsy parade up a steep grassy hill. Richard, Anna, Robert, Vincent, Josie and Rafe are all respectfully attired too, though Rafe looks like he was hanging out poolside. Vincent carries a cardboard box that looks like it might contain Chinese takeout. The baby's screaming in Josie's arms.

MICHELLE
I'm looking for a spot that might have some significance. But it's not like there's going to be a sign that says, "dispose of mother here."

RICHARD
We had a picnic over there once--that hollow over there.

MICHELLE
I remember. Her chicken salad gave me horrific gas. I don't want to immortalize that.
Behind them, an eruption: The new mother is suddenly crying loudly, carrying on— and obviously not for Michelle’s mother.

JOSIE
Just leave me alone. You can’t fucking fix everything...

VINCENT
Josie...

JOSIE
Leave me alone!

She storms off with the baby, down the hill. Everyone looks mortified. Vincent plays it off like a big joke.

VINCENT
She wanted to say something. About grandma. But then she realized she didn’t really have anything to say and she got upset over that and then... It's post-partum... you know. I just hope my boy doesn't take after her in the temperament department.

MICHELLE
Vincent, he’s a lovely child but he’s not your boy. Don't lose sight of that.

Vincent doesn’t really hear her. He holds up a pacifier.

VINCENT
Here it is. After all that!

MICHELLE
Did you hear me, Vincent?

VINCENT
Yeah, sure, but... what?

MICHELLE
The boy is not really yours, Vincent. That’s what I’m telling you. Look at him. His skin is two tones darker than you or Josie’s. You must see that.

VINCENT
(getting angry now)
Whose is he, if he’s not mine?
MICHELLE
He’s his father’s, I guess. And you’re not his father, Vincent. I’m sorry but you’re being made a fool of.

Vincent raises his hand as if he were going to hit Michelle. She waits for it. Almost daring him to hit her. He wavers as Anna comes into the room to see what’s up.

ANNA
Vincent?!

He looks at his mother, stammering, unable to find words...

VINCENT
I... just... You’re a cunt.

Fighting tears, Vincent hands Michelle the box and stalks off. Anna shoots Michelle a more confused than accusing look and goes off after him, down the hill. Michelle looks around.

MICHELLE
This is as good as anywhere, I guess. The wind’s blowing out.

Richard shrugs. Michelle opens the box and dumps the ashes. Which land largely in a clump at her feet. Looks like that’s it. She reluctantly accepts a clasp of hands from Rafe.

Rafe approaches. She reluctantly accepts a clasp of hands.

RAFE
Michelle, I just wanted to say again I’m so sorry, Michelle. If you need anything...

MICHELLE
I’m fine. Are you planning on going back to my mother’s apartment?

RAFE
(taken aback by question)
Where else would I go?

She looks at him. Decides to let that opening pass.

MICHELLE
Just don’t burn the place down. Apart from that, we’ll see.

Rafe acts like that was all he could hope for. Michelle endures a kiss on the cheek.
Robert nods stiffly and heads down with Rafe. Richard lingers as Michelle stands there on the hill, watching the wind slowly erode the mound of ashes.

**EXT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- NIGHT**

A wind gathers strength. Tree branches sway. Xmas lights slip loose of their moorings. Michelle’s house is dark, only one light on the second floor. A loose shutter up there creaks loudly, back and forth...

**INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- NIGHT**

The CREAKING can be heard in Michelle’s bedroom as she, wearing a night-shirt, examining storyboards. A zombie soldier extends a tentacle-like arm toward the viewer. The caption: “It’s just you and me now.”

Michelle jumps as the steady creaking becomes a BANG – the wind slamming the shutter against the side of the house.

At the same time: The doorbell RINGS downstairs. Michelle finds this curious.

**INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - ENTRYWAY -- NIGHT**

Michelle opens the door in her knee-length night shirt and finds Patrick on her stoop.

**PATRICK**

I didn’t want to disturb you but I just got home and saw all your shutters are open. The weather’s turning fast. Half your windows are gonna get blown out.

**MICHELLE**

That wouldn’t be good.

**PATRICK**

I know it probably sounds like I’m being chicken little or something but it’ll amaze you what the winds can do up here.

**MICHELLE**

No, I’ve seen it. You should’ve been here in ’99. It was like the end of the world.
PATRICK
I believe it. You’re probably going to need a hand.

MICHELLE
Yes, probably. Thank you.

Michelle lets him in. Shuts the door behind him.

PATRICK
Your mother’s funeral was today?

MICHELLE
There was no service. We just...

She trails off. He nods.

PATRICK
I’m very sorry, Michelle.

She nods thanks. He’s already at the first window, brimming with authority, pulling it open and grabbing the shudder pinned against the outside wall. He now engages in a battle with the elements to pull the window closed. Dead leaves start to blow in. Michelle gives a hand. An icy wind whipping them, Patrick handles the window while she reaches out and pull in the shutter. Finally, it slams shut.

Michelle smiles, shivers a residual shiver from the cold. He reaches out and rubs her arms through the thin flannel of her pajamas. The innocent gesture takes her aback, slightly.

MICHELLE
I never counted but I think there’s something like twenty windows in this house.

PATRICK
The wind’s from the west. We’ll do that side.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE – UPSTAIRS HALL/BEDROOM

Michelle follows Patrick down the hall. He stops in the doorway of her bedroom. He gives her a questioning look. She nods—go ahead. The bed is a unmade. Her underwear is slung over a chair.

MICHELLE
I wasn’t expecting anyone.

He smiles. He pauses, seeing one of Michelle’s storyboards on the bed. It’s a stylized vintage airplane in flames.
PATRICK
That looks like a ’43 Grumman
Wildcat.

MICHELLE
I wouldn’t know.

PATRICK
I’ve always thought about
rebuilding a vintage aircraft like
that. Taking it to Paris.

MICHELLE
You fly?

PATRICK
No. But you got to have a dream,
right?

They share a little laugh. They’re very close, only inches
between them, the window starts MOANING and CRACKLING in the
wind, breaking the spell of the moment.

They go into their routine again. These shutters are more
difficult. When the shutter finally comes free of the wall,
it closes so forcefully, they both stumble backward onto the
bed, beside each other. They lie there like that a moment. An
electric current passes between them... but Patrick,
remaining in helpful neighbor mode, gets up and goes to
secure the shutter.

PATRICK (CONT’D)
Almost done.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - ATTIC -- NIGHT
Michelle leads Patrick up the narrow staircase, in forced
proximity. She flips the light switch. The bulb BLOWS OUT.

MICHELLE
Shit.

They go in anyway. They have to maneuver in near total
darkness through the low-ceilinged space. The wood beams
creak like the end of the world. Patrick pull the window open
- the one she watched him through - and starts wrestling with
a shutter. It gets away from him. Michelle ducks under
Patrick’s outstretched arms to lend a hand. Now his arms are
around her. Leaning way out the window in freezing wind, she
rubes her butt against him. Patrick stays focused on his
mission. She practically rolls her eyes in frustration. What
is it going to take?
When they get the shutter closed finally, they stay there a moment, still. His arms stay around her. She waits. His hand lowers her panties, slowly exposing her bottom. She feels what his moving hand is doing. She moans in pleasure, spreading her legs and bracing herself against a beam.

She twists her head around for a kiss but Patrick leaps backward, pulling away from her.

PATRICK
I’m sorry.

Patrick hurries away, leaving her there. She hears his FOOTSTEPS pounding down the stairs. She stands there a moment, feeling shame and, more than that, frustration.

MICHELLE
Idiot!

She hits a wooden beam with the flat of her hand.

INT. AV OFFICES -- DAY

Michelle moves through the office like a locomotive of restless energy. She sees Kurt, makes a detour to him.

MICHELLE
The “Summoning” cut-scene needs to come later.
(cutting him off)
We don’t have time to argue. The player needs to encounter Kira in her repressed, schoolteacher persona before her Dark Rebirth, otherwise there’s nothing titillating about her transformation.

Kurt clearly wants to debate but Michelle moves on. She’s waved over by Kevin in the doorway of the “Tech” room which is watched over by an imposing rubber ROBOT SENTRY.

KEVIN
Got a minute?

INT. AV OFFICES - TECH ROOM -- DAY

Michelle sits beside Kevin at his computer.

KEVIN
I found this on Kurt’s private server. It looks like he’s into crushing.
MICHELLE
What’s “crushing?”

KEVIN
What it sounds like. As you see...

MICHELLE
(reading off screen)
“Sammantha gardens?”

A video plays: an overly made-up woman, wielding a watering can in an evening gown keeps “accidentally” stepping on bugs, wrangled at her feet.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
It’s disturbing. Not exactly a smoking gun, though.

KEVIN
I guess not.

Michelle looks at Kevin. She’s struck by something. Something in the way he looks at her.

MICHELLE
Good work. Keep on it.

INT. ANNA’S OFFICE – MOMENTS LATER

Anna looks up. Michelle enters, moving swiftly.

MICHELLE
I’d like a consultation.

Michelle goes straight to Anna’s Mac, calls up that pornographic animation. Anna looks confused by this.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
The creature sodomizing me... doesn’t he look like Kevin, a little?

She brings up an employee portrait of Kevin for comparison.

ANNA
A little around the eyes... Yes.

Michelle nods, feeling a surge of vindication.
INT. MICHELLE’S OFFICE -- NIGHT

Most of the lights in the suite are off. Michelle sits at her desk, antsy, fiddling with an e-cigarette as she watches a MAINTENANCE GUY empty a trash can. When he moves off, the last lights go out.

INT. AV OFFICES - TECH ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Michelle leaves the lights off as she crosses directly to Kevin’s work station. She moves collectible action figurines out of the way so she can access his keyboard. She pushes a master power button and immediately a LOUD HUM comes out of his speakers.

She quickly turns the volume down. Looks around to make sure no one’s been drawn by the sound. She hears nothing.

The laptop takes forever to boot up. When it finally does, Michelle enters a password. Another screen comes up. She clicks on a list of files. Scanning them, one name immediately jumps out at her: Ash.girl.mvk.

Michelle hesitates almost fearfully before she clicks on it.

The news photo of her as a child is the first that comes up but there others, some we saw in that TV broadcast. There are several photos of her father too. One where he’s posed with a gun. Another click and she sees the original sketch version of that animation of her being raped by the creature.

The LIGHTS COME ON. Michelle starts like a cat burglar caught in the act. It’s Kevin in the door.

KEVIN
Oh, I didn’t know it was you.

She holds her breath as he comes toward her. He sees what she’s looking at.

KEVIN (CONT’D)
You’re probably mad.

MICHELLE
At this moment, I’m mostly curious.

KEVIN
I guess I have to tell you.

MICHELLE
Yes, you do.
KEVIN
I was never going to show it to anyone. Phillip Kwan ripped the animation off my computer, converted it to an .MVK and sent it to everyone in the office.

MICHELLE
But you created it?

KEVIN
Yes.

MICHELLE
Why?

KEVIN
(devastated)
Personal amusement... It started out as an idea for a game that incorporated true crime footage... then it got weird. But nobody would have seen it if it wasn’t for fucking Phillip Kwan- who deserves to be fired, if I’m getting fired.

Michelle looks at Kevin. Sizing him up.

MICHELLE
Take out your penis.

He thinks she’s joking.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
Show me your penis and I might nor fire you.

He’s abashed but he sees no choice. He unzips. Displays.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
I thought you were Jewish.

KEVIN
Well no.

MICHELLE
Put it away. The man I’m looking for doesn’t have a foreskin.

Kevin is confused but happily puts his penis away.

KEVIN
Am I fired?
MICHELLE
I want every bit of this destroyed and you’re going to sign a non-disclosure agreement that I’ll draft for you. Then we’ll see.

EXT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- TWILIGHT

Michelle gets out of her car. She’s surprised to see a PACKAGE on her porch. She approaches it as if it were something ominous but shows relief as she looks at the label.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Michelle uses scissors to open the package. She pulls out an INFANT CAR SEAT. Rests it on the table. Looks at it with a certain melancholy, thinking of Vincent and his baby.

She suddenly becomes aware she’s not alone...

She’s just turning around when a GLOVED HAND closes over her mouth. The Intruder, wearing the same ski mask, throws her to the ground. On her way down, she tips the table, sending all kinds of things clattering. The scissors fall open on the floor. The lamp winds up on its side, casting a weird, noirish light over the struggle now taking place...

Michelle tries to twist around to see her attacker. He hits her right in the jaw, climbs on top of her. He tears her blouse, her bra. She screams to raise the dead. He’s working on getting his pants down as Michelle’s desperately reaching hand brings a bookcase down on both of them.

The Intruder gets the worst of it. Michelle scrambles free but she doesn’t get far. He grabs her ankle, reels her in. He lifts her skirt. Tears her panties. Michelle kicks at him, blindly. He starts slapping her hard about the face as if punishing her for making this hard for him.

Michelle’s hand closes around the open scissors. She brings them up, just as the Intruder’s hand is coming down. The hand abruptly stops in mid-air – pierced clean through by one of the scissors’ blades. Now it’s his turn to scream.

Michelle seizes the moment to grip her attacker’s mask by the eyeholes and yank it off his face.

Patrick’s eyes are filled with tears of pain. Michelle raises up on her haunches, levelling the bloodied scissors at him.

MICHELLE
Get out of my house!
Patrick backs away in panic, holding his injured hand.

MICHHELLE (CONT’D)
Out! Get out!

Patrick looks, for just a second as if he wanted to say something. Instead, he just bolts for the door. Quaking, Michelle takes a moment to compose herself.

She moves to the window just in time to witness Patrick, running back across the icy street toward his house, slipping and taking a nasty fall. Michelle feels an absurd momentary reflex to go see if he’s okay.

INT. MICHHELLE’S HOUSE - LATER

Michelle walks through the room, cleaning up the debris of the struggle. Her legs suddenly seem to go wobbly and she sinks to the floor. She sits there.

EXT. MICHHELLE’S HOUSE -- MORNING

Michelle comes out to retrieve her newspaper from the driveway. She stops, seeing Patrick, like any suburban neighbor, comes out of his house with a thermos of coffee. She notes his bandaged hand. He sees her. They briefly exchange looks but there is otherwise no acknowledgement of what’s passed between them as he gets in his car and drives away.

INT. MICHHELLE’S HOUSE -- EVENING

Michelle puts on make-up to cover her bruises. Checks herself out in the mirror. Deems the results adequate.

INT. ANNA AND ROBERT’S HOUSE -- NIGHT

New Year’s Eve decor, noisemakers.

RICHARD
“May the New Year bring you the courage to break all your resolutions early!”

Michelle is there with him, Hélène, Anna and Robert. She smiles along with the laughter around her. Anna hands her a drink.

MICHHELLE
Have you talked to Vincent?
ANNA
Last week. He was in tears about how they didn’t have money for groceries.

MICHELLE
(realizing)
You’re loaning them money?

ANNA
A little. Nothing.

MICHELLE
You shouldn’t do that, Anna.

ANNA
I know. I just wish I had it in me to slap him across the face and talk some sense into him. But that’s not my role. I’m the eccentric auntie.

MICHELLE
Myself, I have no problem being candid. I never hid from him what having him cost me. But I think, you know, along the way, I might have neglected to mention the love. The ridiculous love I felt for him... Still feel, I guess. Time puts a gauze over everything. Thank God. Otherwise, life would be impossible.

The ball in Times Square is getting ready to drop. Robert puts one arm around Michelle, the other around Anna. He’s been drinking heavily. He leans over to Michelle, whispers-

ROBERT
I didn’t invite your new friend Patrick. Hope you’ll forgive me.

MICHELLE
For that, yes.

The countdown begins: “Ten... nine... “. Michelle puts on a smile as cheers go up at midnight. And now the obligatory kisses are oddly charged: Michelle has to witness Richard and Hélène’s kiss, then give Hélène a kiss herself. Michelle and Richard’s kiss is tentative, filled with sad longing, on her side anyway. When Robert kisses Michelle, he tries to slip in a little something extra. And when Michelle kisses Anna, there’s a touch of Judas in it.
Auld lang syne is still going as Michelle takes out a cigarette and wanders off toward the patio. She doesn’t get far before Robert catches up with her.

ROBERT
If you go out now, you’re going to miss my big announcement.

MICHELLE
What are you doing?

ROBERT
I’ve been thinking about it and you’re right— it might be better for everyone if we were just adult and honest about everything. Let’s start the new year with a clean slate.

MICHELLE
Fine... do it. You’re pathetic.

ROBERT
Take that back.

Michelle shakes her head, almost laughing.

ROBERT (CONT’D)
“You’re pathetic” Take it back, right now, or I’m going to do it.

MICHELLE
I take it back. You’re not pathetic at all.

He reddens. She stares him down.

ROBERT
You can’t just cut me off like I was some jerk-off and think there won’t be consequences.

MICHELLE
Are you for real? Blackmail?

ROBERT
You’re the one changing the terms, Michelle. I just want things to stay like they are.

MICHELLE
You are a fucking asshole. And I really mean that.
ROBERT
I’m ok with being an asshole.
That’s acceptable... Wednesday.
Just see me Wednesday. I just want
 to see you one more time.

Michelle looks around, chilled by his pathetic extortion. She
looks over at Anna.

ROBERT (CONT’D)
I’ll get a room at the Park Hyatt.
You used to like that. I’ll bring
the Vueve Clicquot...

MICHELLE
Alright. Wednesday.

ROBERT
Don’t look like that. I want to
remind you fucking me was not
always the chore you make it out to
be lately.

She glares at him and gives him her back. He calls after her-

ROBERT (CONT’D)
You can’t rewrite history.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- NIGHT

The light of a TV flickers in the den. Michelle blankly
watches the news, still in her party dress.

Michelle blankly watches the news, still in her party dress.
Michelle sits up a little straighter as a still photo of her
father appears behind the TV Anchor’s shoulder.

TV ANCHOR
Parole was again denied for mass
murderer George Leblanc...

MICHELLE
Fuck you.

Michelle mutes the sound. The image cuts to a close-up of her
father sitting sullenly, alone at his parole hearing.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
(trying different
intonations)
Fuck you. Fuck you. Fuck you.
She turns off the TV. Gets up, moves to window. Looks across at Patrick’s house. The light of a TV flickers there too.

103 INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - STUDY - MOMENTS LATER

Michelle is on the phone. Her laptop open to the website of the GRATERFORD STATE PENITENTIARY.

MICHELLE (INTO PHONE)
Your website mentions visitors allowing two hours for admittance ...is it better late in the day?

PRISON OFFICIAL
No, ma’am. All visitors for the day have to check in by 8:30 AM.

MICHELLE
So, it’s a mob scene?

PRISON OFFICIAL
It gets pretty crowded.

MICHELLE
Are there any days of the week that are better than others?

104 EXT. PRISON -- DAY

It’s snowing as Michelle drives up to the GRATERFORD STATE PENITENTIARY. Leftover Xmas decoration on the gate look odd against this grim institutional backdrop.

105 INT. PRISON -- DAY

More odd bits of Xmas kitsch “liven up” the visitor-processing area too. Michelle signs in. Before she even finds an empty orange plastic chair to sit in, a very solicitous Asst. Warden comes out to meet her.

ASST. WARDEN
Miss Leblanc? I’m Brent Jaffries, the assistant Warden. Can I get you anything? A cup of coffee?

MICHELLE
No. Thank you.

ASST. WARDEN
We can talk in my office, if you don’t mind? It’s just here...
He gestures the way. Michelle nods, follows.

MICHELLE
You should know I’m here just to spit in my father’s face. And I can’t promise I’m only speaking metaphorically.

ASST. WARDEN
People have all kinds of reasons.

MICHELLE
I’m here because I’ve given that bastard too much power over me. Shunning him, fearing him. All that wasted energy...

ASST. WARDEN
Miss Leblanc, your father is dead.

Michelle stops walking. She can’t believe it.

ASST. WARDEN (CONT’D)
Shortly before eight AM this morning, your father was found deceased in his cell.

MICHELLE
How...?

ASST. WARDEN
The incident is in the earliest stages of being investigated but it seems he was able to fashion a noose from his bedding and hanged himself.

MICHELLE
When...? When did this happen?

ASST. WARDEN
We only know it must have been between 10 PM and the early morning hours.

MICHELLE
Do you happen to know what time my father was notified that I was coming to see him?

ASST. WARDEN (hesitant)
That would have been just before ten.
Michelle nods again, slowly.

INT. PRISON - MORGUE -- DAY

Michelle is led through a chilly storage room by the Asst. Warden and an ATTENDENT in blue surgical cover-alls.

ASST. WARDEN
Your mother made arrangements for your father to be cremated and installed in a vault next to one she’d selected for herself.

MICHELLE
She’s not there. She’s on my kitchen counter.

The Asst. Warden has no response. They arrive at a gurney with a human-shaped lump under a sheet.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
I had a list of things I was going to say. Nine bullet points.

The Attendant looks to her. She nods she’s ready. He pulls back the sheet. Her father looks like a peaceful old man except for the lurid laceration around his throat. She studies him.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
He’d rather die than face me... I killed him by coming here.

INT. PRISON - MORGUE -- MOMENTS LATER

Michelle stands in the same place as the Attendant ferries the coffin away on a forklift. She signs a form the Asst. Warden hands her on a clipboard. The forklift has trouble making a turn. The cavernous space is filled with the BEEP-BEEP-BEEP of the lift backing up.

EXT. ROAD -- DAY

Driving back home in a blizzard, Michelle fiddles with the radio. Michelle’s phone RINGS. She doesn’t recognize the number displayed on the dash. She answers, hands-free.

MICHELLE
Yes?
REPORTER (O.S.)
Ms. Leblanc?

Michelle immediately regrets answering.

MICHELLE
Who is this?

REPORTER (O.S.)
My name’s Emilie Fontaine. I’m with the Parisien. I just wanted to ask if you had anything you wanted to say about your father’s passing...

MICHELLE
How did you get this number?

REPORTER (O.S.)
I realize this is an awkward time but I just wanted to give you the opportunity to go on record with your thoughts, feelings...?

MICHELLE
My thoughts and feelings...?

Michelle is distracted as, obscured by falling snow, a DEER darts across the highway. She cranks the wheel. The car goes into a SKID...

EXT. ROAD -- DAY

Michelle’s car CRASHES into a ditch. Winds up on its side.

INT. CAR -- DAY

Michelle sits stock-still, in shock, held into her seat against gravity by her seat belt. She only distantly registers that the reporter on the phone is still talking...

REPORTER (O.S.)
Anger, grief... relief, perhaps?

Michelle presses a button on the steering wheel to hang up. She reaches over with a trembling hand and turns off the radio. She’s distantly alarmed to see blood. She investigates and sees her leg is banged up pretty nicely by the buckled dashboard. She shakily presses a number on her phone.

ANNA (O.S.)
This is Anna. Please leave a...
Voice-mail. Michelle hangs up. She scrolls down to the next name on her phone’s contacts list. Richard. It rings. Rings some more. She hangs up. Looking around, something catches her eye. A yellow scrap of paper in the well of the passenger seat. The flyer regarding the new trash can policy on her block. She painfully stretches to pick it up.

There’s a black shoe-print on the flyer but Patrick’s phone number is still legible.

111 EXT. ROAD -- LATER

Rebecca’s car, a Honda Station wagon with a “St. Jude Pray & Protect Us” bumper sticker pulls up next to the wreck. Dutiful neighbor, Patrick gets out, bundled up, and goes to the frosted driver’s side window. Michelle rolls it down.

PATRICK
How are you feeling?

MICHELLE
How am I feeling?

PATRICK
Any symptoms? Dizziness...?

MICHELLE
(realizing what he meant)
Oh, no, I’m fine. I think... Except my leg.

Patrick leans in, evaluates the situation. He reaches in. She tenses a little as he puts his arm around her shoulder.

PATRICK
You can take off the seat belt now.

She does. He holds her. Starts to laboriously lift her out the window, ginger with his bandaged hand.

112 INT. PATRICK’S CAR -- TWILIGHT

Michelle’s in the passenger seat. Awkward silence, until—

PATRICK
You should probably go to the E.R.

MICHELLE
I don’t want any entanglements right now. I just want to go home. I’ll see my own doctor.
PATRICK
It’s your call.

EXT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Patrick gets out, comes around to help Michelle. She hesitates just a second, then lets him.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Patrick helps her onto the sofa.

PATRICK
You should let me look at it.

She just looks at him.

PATRICK (CONT’D)
I played soccer in high school.

MICHELLE
That’s the least surprising thing I’ve ever heard.

PATRICK
I mean, I know a bit about leg injuries. Senior year I tore up my ACL. Spent a year with Orthopedic surgeons.

Michelle assents with a little nod. Patrick bends down to look at her leg. He lifts her skirt. It sticks in places where blood has dried but he’s gentle.

PATRICK (CONT’D)
We better clean this, pronto.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - DEN -- MOMENTS LATER

Patrick tend to her bare, injured leg. Gently swabbing her lacerations with disinfectant.

PATRICK
Looks to me like maybe a hairline fracture. You need real treatment.

He starts wrapping her leg with an ace bandage. Michelle studies him. She leans forward. He looks up.

MICHELLE
Why did you do it?
PATRICK
It was necessary.

He says this matter-of-factly and finishes with the bandage, all business. He then takes his leave without another word.

EXT. MICHELLE’S MOTHER’S APARTMENT -- DAY

Fresh snow everywhere. Limping on a temporary cane, wearing a bulky knee brace and carrying an empty cardboard box, Michelle tackles the steep front steps.

INT. MICHELLE’S MOTHER’S APARTMENT -- DAY

Michelle limps in. Not wanting to spend a second longer here than she has to, Michelle goes straight to a particular cabinet. She puts the box on the floor and starts putting things in it, mostly old pictures.

Rafe comes out of the back, hair mussed, wearing boxer shorts and an inside-out white T-shirt. Shaking his head, upset.

RAFE
Oh no, Michelle. You can’t do this.

MICHELLE
What can’t I do?

RAFE
This. Just showing up, letting yourself in without ringing the bell.

MICHELLE
You know I have a key, Rafe. Why would I need to ring the bell? You don’t have to trouble yourself, I’m only here a minute.

RAFE
It’s not about how long you stay, Michelle.

MICHELLE
Don’t be unpleasant.

RAFE
No - I’m sorry, no. You have to go, right now.

MICHELLE
You realize I own this place, right?
RAFE
That may be but your mother invited
me to stay here and while I’m here...

A completely naked BRUNETTE in her thirties emerges from
behind Rafe. Rafe looks like a busted teenager. Michelle
smiles. He gestures to the woman to go back where she was.

MICHELLE
Anyway, I’m selling it. That’s what
I’m doing here.

Michelle reaches into her purse and produces a “FOR SALE”
sticker. Rafe seethes impotently as Michelle hobbles over to
the window looking out onto the street.

RAFE
I saw on the news your father died.
One less evil fucker in the world.

Michelle carefully affixes the sticker to the window.

MICHELLE
You should start packing your bags.

Rafe snorts. Michelle collects her box from the floor— a
difficult procedure, juggling the cane at the same time.

RAFE
I’ve seen all the shows on TV.
About you and your dad, when you
killed all those people.

When she drops one of the photos, Rafe laughs so she can hear
it. Michelle ignores him, retrieves the photo with as much
dignity as she can.

RAFE (CONT’D)
I’ve seen all the old news photos.
All the bodies.

OR PERHAPS
I saw all these dead bodies, also
children...

Michelle has trouble with the door knob, juggling the cane
and the box tucked under her arm.

RAFE
Anyway, the sick bastard’s dead
now. At least, I fucked his wife.

Michelle makes it out the door without looking back.
EXT. MICHELLE’S MOTHER’S APARTMENT -- DAY

The steps are even more difficult coming down. Michelle’s phone RINGS. She stops, juggles the box in order to answer.

ROBERT (O.S.)
Anna’s just got called away by the London thing and I have a free afternoon.

MICHELLE (INTO PHONE)
We said Wednesday.

ROBERT (O.S.)
But this is better. I can get a room at the Lanai. They’ve got the muffins you like...

MICHELLE (INTO PHONE)
Robert, I was going to call – I fractured my knee. My leg’s in a temporary brace. I can barely walk.

ROBERT (O.S.)
What difference does it make, you can’t walk? We’re not going skiing. His implacable logic leaves her speechless.

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- DAY

Robert gets the door for Michelle. She hobbles in.

MICHELLE
Just don’t expect anything complicated out of me.

ROBERT
Here... let me take that...

Robert takes the cane, looks around, puts it down on a chair.

ROBERT (CONT’D)
You want to have a glass of wine?

She looks at him. He nuzzles her gently.
MICHELLE
I’ve lost the last shred of respect
I had for you. Does that not bother
you at all?

Robert looks hurt— for half a second — then he smiles.

ROBERT
Relax.

He kisses her.

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

They’re pounding away on the bed. Or, rather, he is. Michelle lies beneath him in her braced leg, as silent and still as a corpse. Deliberately, ostentatiously frozen. Robert flips her over with some clumsiness — her body responding to his ministrations exactly like a lifeless dummy.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - BATHROOM -- LATER

Michelle scrubs with scented body wash as Robert, also nude, combs his hair and admires himself in the mirror.

ROBERT
You were incredible.

Michelle looks at him. Is he joking?

ROBERT (CONT’D)
I experienced some sensations I never felt before. Where’d you get the idea of playing dead?

Michelle starts getting dressed.

MICHELLE
Anyway, you see I’m good as my word. You got what you wanted.

ROBERT
I sure did... thank you.

MICHELLE
So, we can remain friends.

He nods, smiling. Michelle heads out, buttoning her blouse. At the door, she feels it’s prudent to stop and turn back.
MICHELLE (CONT'D)
And “friends” means we’re not fucking anymore.

He nods. That’s clear. Now she can continue out.

122 INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- DAY

Michelle enters with the cardboard box of her mother’s things. She immediately senses something’s askew.

MICHELLE
Marty?

She puts down the box and hobbles around, looking for him.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
Marty!

She sees the pantry door ajar.

123 EXT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- DAY

Looking for Marty outside, Michelle soon finds him. Frozen to death. Looking like a Snow-Cat molded by a child’s mittens.

124 INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- DAY

Michelle brushes ice crystals out of the dead cat’s fur in front of her fireplace until the futility of her actions can’t be denied anymore.

125 EXT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- TWILIGHT

Bundled up, Michelle sits on her porch, holding the dead cat wrapped in a cloth. She stares at the Xmas tree standing among the garbage cans across the street. AN ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICER pulls up in a van. She reluctantly hands him over.

ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICER
Sorry for your loss.

He starts to leave.

MICHELLE
Aren’t there... aren’t there any forms to fill out?

ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICER
No, ma’am.
Michelle looks quietly devastated by that answer as the man departs with Marty’s body.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- TWILIGHT

Michelle wearily heads upstairs. As she passes the guest bedroom, she does a double-take. There’s a MALE FORM, fully clothed, lying on top of the covers. It takes her a moment to realize who it is.

MICHELLE

Vincent?

The young man wakes, groggily.

VINCENT

Mom... hey?

MICHELLE

What are you doing? How long have you been here?

VINCENT

Huh? ...Um, a while I guess. Josie kicked me out.

MICHELLE

(with mixed feelings)

What happened?

VINCENT

I don’t know.

MICHELLE

You must know. She must have had a reason, however demented.

VINCENT

She had a reason. I lost my job.

MICHELLE

Lost...?

VINCENT

I resigned.

MICHELLE

You resigned?

VINCENT

I had to. My car broke down.
MICHELLE
You resigned from McDonald’s because your car broke down?

A sound startles and chills Michelle. A BABY’S CRYING.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
You brought the baby here?!!

Michelle now discovers the baby hidden behind pillows placed to keep him from rolling off the bed.

VINCENT
I had to!

MICHELLE
Why did you have to?

Vincent picks up the baby.

VINCENT
She was talking about going back to America and taking Lucien with her. I could tell she meant it!

Michelle shakes her head, taking it all in, as Vincent clumsily shoves a bottle in the baby’s mouth.

MICHELLE
I can’t believe I’m saying this but can’t you see Josie had a right to be angry? You have responsibilities—including a new apartment—and you quit your job?

VINCENT
You say it just like her. Like it was just despicable. It was maybe stupid but it wasn’t despicable.

Michelle looks struck by that. She softens.

MICHELLE
Vincent, you have to take him back, right now. You’re not married. This could be considered kidnapping.

VINCENT
Kidnapping? He’s my son!
(off her look)
HE’S MY SON!
MICHELLE
Alright...

VINCENT
Not “alright”...

There’s a FURIOUS KNOCKING downstairs.

MICHELLE
(sarcastically)
Who could that be?

She turns and heads down the stairs. She opens the front door and Josie bursts in, moving right past Michelle.

JOSIE
Where is he?

Vincent appears on the stairs. Michelle watches anxiously as Josie goes up the stairs toward him, tearing into him...

JOSIE (CONT’D)
Where’s my baby?
(not giving him a chance to answer)
Where’s my baby?!? Is he alright?
What did you do to him?

VINCENT
(confused)
What did I do to her?

JOSIE
I wouldn’t trust you to take care of a hamster! Fucking idiot.
Where’s my baby?!! Give him to me right fucking now! Now!

The baby’s cry alerts her to his location. She passes Vincent on the stairs. He grabs her wrist. Josie wheels on him.

JOSIE (CONT’D)
Get your hand off me. Get your hand off me, Get your hand off me...

MICHELLE
Vincent! Let her go.

He doesn’t immediately. A moment of unbearable suspense: Vincent looks ready to hit her... before he finally does let her go. She charges upstairs. He starts to go after her.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
Let her go.
Vincent looks at his mother like a helpless child. The baby’s CRYING stops. A moment later, Josie reappears, coming down the stairs, bouncing the baby in her arms.

VINCENT
Josie...

MICHELLE
Vincent, be quiet.

Josie walks right past him, to the front door. She stops.

JOSIE
I had to take the RER here.

Vincent starts plumbing his pockets. He’s not finding any change. Michelle crosses to her purse, takes out a twenty. She brings it to Josie, who glares at Vincent one last time and exits. Vincent’s eyes fill with tears. He tries to hide it. Michelle goes to him. Looking at him, something occurs to her.

MICHELLE
It was always about the baby, wasn’t it? He’s what you were in it for.

Vincent looks up, like his guilty secret had been found out.

VINCENT
I could be a good father, I know it.

Michelle touches his arm, tentative but tender.

MICHELLE
I’ll make mostaccioli for dinner.

INT. NATURALIA -- EVENING

Michelle browses. Vincent approaches with a bag of chips.

MICHELLE
Those are so full of salt.

Vincent looks disappointed, goes to put them back. Michelle pushes the cart around a corner. Just as she’s selecting a tomato sauce, she hears Vincent talking to someone in the aisle just vacated. She backs up to look. It’s Patrick. Vincent’s talking with him, like they were old friends. Seeing Michelle, Patrick’s smile tenses up a little.

PATRICK
Michelle, hey. How’s your knee?
MICHELLE
How’s your hand?

He glances self-consciously at the bandage on his hand. More uncomfortable now. He shrugs, not knowing what to say.

VINCENT
We were just talking about whether it matters if a chocolate chip cookie comes from Lithuania. I say it does.

PATRICK
I’m skeptical, I guess.

MICHELLE
I’m withholding judgement.

Michelle moves down the aisle, stopping right in front of Patrick. He wonders what she’s going to say. She reaches past him to take down a can of sauce. This makes him smile. Feeling more confident now-

PATRICK
Vincent says you guys haven’t eaten... Rebecca took off on a road trip with her parents and left me with like a metric ton of Lasagna I’ll never eat by myself.

(gestures with wine)
I was getting this to go with it.

VINCENT
Sounds good to me.

Michelle looks at Vincent, back at Patrick. She smiles. Sure.

INT. PATRICK’S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Michelle, Patrick and Vincent sit around a table, eating pasta. The wine is flowing.

MICHELLE
Where did Rebecca and her parents go?

PATRICK
They went to see the Pope in Santiago de Compostella. They’re driving. Insane if you ask me.

MICHELLE
The Le Quesnoy Family.
VINCENT
The Pope’s going to give mass at
the cathedral. I have a hard time
imagining him barefoot. It’s so
weird to think he’s, like, a real
person, with feet.

Patrick and Michelle both chuckle. Vincent grins big, the
wine already having an effect. He reaches for the bottle.

MICHELLE
Careful there, sport.

Vincent gives an “aw, mom” look, fills his glass.

INT. PATRICK’S HOUSE - DEN -- LATER

Patrick brings in coffee. Vincent’s stretched out asleep on
the sofa.

PATRICK
He’s out.

MICHELLE
His eyes were bigger than his
liver.

Patrick smiles, sits down. Michelle takes off her shoes. He
watches her flex her bare feet.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
The floor’s warm.

PATRICK
It’s a wood boiler. I installed it
myself.

MICHELLE
Sounds like a job.

PATRICK
It was. It holds fifty liters.
Works by inverted flame combustion.

MICHELLE
Inverted flame combustion? That
sounds like a made-up thing.

PATRICK
Finally, something you don’t know.

She grins. He watches her. She sees the way he’s watching.
Finally, as if it were some wild gambit, he adds-
PATRICK (CONT’D)
It’s in the basement.

MICHELLE
Of course it is.

PATRICK
Would you like to see it?


MICHELLE
Yes.

130
INT. PATRICK’S HOUSE - HALL -- MOMENTS LATER
Michelle follows Patrick to the basement doorway. He opens it, stands aside for her to down first. She hesitates. The wood boiler ROARS down there. The steps leading down are lit only by the flicker of its hellish firelight. Michelle looks at him and takes the first step down.

131
INT. PATRICK’S HOUSE - BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS
Michelle separates from and Patrick as they reach the bottom.

PATRICK
It’s loud but you can’t hear anything with the door closed.

She nods, understanding all the implications of that. She stares into the flames beyond the furnace’s grate.

MICHELLE
(to herself)
It’s just you and me now.

PATRICK
What?

She shakes her head. Turns to him. He grabs her wrist.

MICHELLE
No!

He doesn’t listen. He shoves her against the wall, hard, sticking his knee between her legs. She backs him off with a pelvic thrust.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
Vincent’s upstairs.
PATRICK
Yes, Vincent’s upstairs.

Patrick grabs her again, by the hair. She yowls. He shoves her to the floor, toppling a laundry basket. She slaps at him frantically as he climbs on top of her. She squirms and punches but he holds her down, rubbing himself against her. Suddenly, Michelle stops fighting. Plays dead. Patrick now inexplicably stops too. He climbs off her, looking by turns, frustrated, embarrassed, pouty. Michelle look at him.

PATRICK (CONT’D)
It doesn’t work like that. For me.
It has to be... like before.

She just looks at him. Patrick gets up to leave... But before he makes it to the stairs, Michelle suddenly attacks him. Pummeling him, as if spending all her frustration and rage on him. He turns around. She whacks him across the face. Now it’s on again. He shoves her down, banging the back of her head on the floor. As she continues to viciously, futilely fight back, he tears her bra and panties in the manner he’s done before and slips inside her.

It’s over pretty quickly. He rolls off, panting. Satisfied.

Michelle’s whole body convulses. Impossible to tell if its pleasure or sickness. A scream builds inside her, then explodes. She screams and screams. Harrowing howls of pain and primal release. The screams freak out Patrick a little. When the screams subsides, they turn into simple, purging tears. Patrick looks around uncomfortably. He reaches out to comfort her but his hand stops halfway there and retreats.

INT. PATRICK’S HOUSE - DEN - A SHORT TIME LATER

Michelle lays a gentle hand on Vincent’s shoulder, waking him. Michelle helps the groggy young man up. Patrick pitches in too.

EXT. PATRICK’S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Patrick sees them out. Michelle gives him a smile.

MICHELLE
Thank you for dinner.

PATRICK
Anytime.

Michelle nods to him and helps a wobbly Vincent back across the street. Patrick watches them the whole way.
Michelle sits by a fire, looking at photos from the cardboard box of things she collected from her mother’s. Vincent emerges from the guest room, a bit hungover.

VINCENT
What are you looking at?

MICHELLE
Pictures. From when I was a kid... want to see?

From the look on Vincent’s face, it’s clear this is an unprecedented offer.

VINCENT
Sure

Vincent tosses a fresh log in the fireplace and sits down next to her. Michelle holds a photo of herself as a child holding a watering can in a garden.

MICHELLE
That was in Nantes. We lived there till I was five. I loved that little red rain coat.

VINCENT
Is that granny?!

MICHELLE
I know. She looked like Amanda Lear.

She looks at another photo like that, or two, some in black and white then comes upon one with her father in it. He holds her hand while she rides a merry-go-round. Vincent looks at Michelle to see her reaction. She doesn’t betray much.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
There was a little carnival down the street from our house on Pommeraye street. The carousel always gave me a stomach ache but I loved it.

She keeps flipping through the photos. It’s just like a mother and son looking at family photos.

VINCENT
I didn’t know you took ballet.
MICHELLE (re: her ballet position)
I’d die if I tried that now.

EXT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- NEAR DAWN
Michelle finishes digging a hole. She dumps in the contents of the box, the photos, everything. Douses it all with lighter fluid, strikes the match to start the little bonfire. She looks content, watching it burn.

INT. A BOUTIQUE -- DAY
Michelle emerges from a changing room with a very pricey dress. As she brings it up to a counter, she grabs a cheap bra and a package of panties, a bundle of three. She lays her purchase on the counter before the SALESGIRL – who looks politely askance.

SALESGIRL
Did you did notice we have the lace cotton Lejaby briefs on sale?

MICHELLE
These are three for five dollars. Can’t beat that.

The Salesgirl shrugs, rings her up.

INT. A-V OFFICES -- DAY
On screen: a winged, vampiric female creature emerges from a black chrysalis, screaming. The clip ends. Lights come on.

A small group gathered in front of the monitor applauds. Some high fives. Michelle finds Kurt and holds out her hand.

MICHELLE
Well done.

Kurt looks a little reluctant to accept her praise but he smiles and shakes her hand. As the group breaks up, Michelle approaches Anna – who seems preoccupied.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
I had an idea about Vincent. We could give him the job organizing the wrap party.

ANNA
That is a good idea.
MICHELLE
I know in the past I always shot
down the idea of throwing Vincent
make-work but now...

Anna closes the conference room door. This worries Michelle.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
What is it?

ANNA
Robert’s fucking someone.

MICHELLE
(completely cool)
You know that?

ANNA
I imagine I always knew abstractly.

MICHELLE
And now..?

ANNA
I smelled it. That sort of fruity
body wash they use in hotels that
are trying to be classy. When
Robert travels, he usually stays in
Motel sixes.

MICHELLE
That’s all.

ANNA
Then I smelled his underwear. I
waited anxiously all day for him to
take off his jockey shorts and when
he finally did, I pounced on them.
Sniffing. I was ashamed even before
I did it.

Michelle looks at her friend with great understanding.

MICHELLE
Shame is too weak an emotion to
prevent anything. Anything at all.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- EVENING

Michelle is in her new, cheap underwear, getting dressed for
the party. She sees that the length of a blue dress fails to
hide the bruises on her thighs, so she goes with a red one.
PARTY MUSIC drifts from further in. An arriving Patrick, looking like he stepped out of a Sears catalogue, hands his coat to a girl at the improvised garderobe. He bumps into Richard who’s doing the same thing.

RICHARD
Hello. You’re becoming a fixture at these things.

PATRICK
Looks like it.

RICHARD
Your wife...?

PATRICK
She couldn’t make it.

RICHARD
(knowingly)
Ah.

PATRICK
Ah?

Richard shakes his head. Never mind.

RICHARD
We should have come together. We could’ve carpooled.

Heading in, they are met by Vincent, a little stiff in a too-tight suit but overflowing with bonhomie.

VINCENT
Pretty classy spread, huh? Did you see the candy dishes by the entrance? (noting Patrick)
Hey, how are you doing?

Vincent shakes Patrick’s hand, motions for them to follow.

VINCENT (CONT’D)
Right this way, monsieurs.

PATRICK
Are you the maitre d’ tonight?

VINCENT
My mother gave me the job of pretty much organizing the whole party.
RICHARD
I did notice the candy dishes.
That’s a nice touch.

VINCENT
That was my idea!

Michelle, making the rounds, trades smiles with Anna who sits at a table with Kurt and Robert. She then sees Vincent leading in Richard and Patrick past tables where people are eating buffet-style and CONSOLES set up everywhere on which guests can play the demo level of “Nocturnus”.

As Michelle goes to meet them, Robert follows her with his eyes, ignoring whatever Anna’s saying to him. He glares and pounds Scotch, watching Michelle greet Patrick with a kiss.

Michelle hugs Richard, then nods to one of the game consoles.

MICHELLE
Want to give it a try?

PATRICK
I’m not really a game person.

MICHELLE
No?

Patrick looks a tad uncomfortable. Richard jumps at the chance to play.

VINCENT
There’s no wine on the table!

Vincent hastens to correct this. Patrick takes a seat at the table, across from Robert, not picking up on the vibes of jealousy coming off the other man.

At the bar, Vincent accosts the RED-VEST BARTENDER.

VINCENT (CONT’D)
A bottle of red.

BARTENDER
I was told to pour everything in glasses.

VINCENT
I want a bottle.

BARTENDER
I don’t know if I can do that.
VINCENT

What?

BARTENDER
I was given very specific instructions.

VINCENT
I need a bottle.

BARTENDER
I’m sorry.

VINCENT
I’m supposed to be in charge of this thing!

At the table, Michelle walks Richard through the game.

MICHELLE
Press X and up at the same the same time... very fast... faster.

He’s not fast enough. He dies. He curses as he re-spawns.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
Where’s Hélène? I think we’re past that, aren’t we?

RICHARD
I’m not sparing your feelings. She’s not with me because that’s over.

MICHELLE
(sincerely concerned)
What happened?

He dies again in the game. This time he stops playing.

RICHARD
We were laying in bed and I asked her which of my books was her favorite.

MICHELLE
Richard, why?

RICHARD
She said “Scent of Poplar.”

Michelle draws a blank. Richard smiles grimly.
“Scent of Poplar” is a novel written by Robert Casamayou.

MICHIELE
I didn’t even know there was another Jansen.

RICHARD
Apparently, he’s pretty good.

MICHIELLE
(with sympathy)
Richard.

RICHARD
Poor Richard.

They share smiles and walk away from the console. Michelle places a hand on Kevin’s shoulder in passing. He stiffens as if he were under arrest.

MICHIELLE
You should circulate.

KEVIN
I will!

He breathes again as Michelle smiles and moves on, bringing Richard to their table. As she takes the seat next to him, Patrick is looking toward the bar where Vincent seems to be having heated words with the bartender.

MICHIELLE
He’s a project in the early stages of development.

Anna is proposing a toast...

ANNA
It looks like somehow, despite all our determined efforts, we have a success on our hands. There’s no explanation for it, except for the talent, brilliance and extreme dedication of everyone in this room. So all I can say is thank you... and, I guess, cheers.
Everybody drinks. Then people look at Michelle, excepting her to say something. Someone from the techies’ table shouts “speech.” Michelle rises with her glass.

MICHELLE

Ditto.

Laughter, drinking. Sitting back down, Michelle observes the body language of Anna with Robert: He’s holding court across the table, she’s trying not to be amused but he whispers in her ear and gets a smile out of her. The sight disturbs Michelle.

Vincent circles the table, juggling a tray of glasses of red wine, placing them in front of people, like a clumsy waiter.

INT. AV OFFICES -- LATER

People are dancing now. The music is LOUD. Patrick looks mortified by the idea of but he lets Michelle drag him out of his chair. He takes her in his arms and attempting to move to the music, but he dances as if he were constipated.

MICHELLE

It’s ok. It’s alright.

Patrick tries to loosen up his posture. Resting against her dance partner, Michelle sees Robert watching them. Seething. Like a pouting baby, Robert stalks over to one of the consoles and picks up a game controller.

Michelle looks the other way and sees Anna dutifully, joylessly playing hostess. To Patrick—

MICHELLE (CONT’D)

Excuse me.

Michelle goes over to Anna. Anna looks up, cheerfully. Michelle doesn’t give her a chance to say anything.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)

It’s me. I’m the one Robert’s been fucking. I ended it but it happened.

Anna remains hard to read. There are no fireworks.

ANNA

How long?

MICHELLE

Half a year... Eight months.

Anna has tears in her eyes. She nods.
ANNA
Oh? That’s great. I really didn’t
have a clue.

MICHELLE
I know.

Anna finds she has nothing to say. Before she can cry or do
anything embarrassing, she walks away. Michelle feels a
tremor. She looks toward Patrick. He motions: “let’s get out
of here.” She raises a finger: “one moment,” then walks in
the opposite direction.

She passes Robert sitting there with the game controller in
his hands. He witnessed Anna walking away upset.

ROBERT
What did you do?

MICHELLE
I stopped lying.

Michelle keeps going. She tracks down Vincent who is smoking
by a window with his tie loosened, looking down. She hands
Vincent her car keys. He doesn’t understand.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
You can have the car. Patrick’s
giving me a ride home.

VINCENT
People are leaving already?

MICHELLE
Vincent, everything’s gone
beautifully. You can relax now. Go
talk to Kevin, he’ll show you a
demo of the new Western game he’s
working on.

VINCENT
Is that cool?

Michelle nods. Of course.

142 INT. PATRICK’S CAR -- NIGHT

Michelle and Patrick drive in ominous silence. Michelle looks
over at him, looks away. He seems to sense her glance and
looks at her. More silence. Finally, ahead, Michelle sees her
house come into view.
MICHELLE  
It’s sick.

Patrick looks at her, not sure he heard her right.

PATRICK  
What?

MICHELLE  
It’s sick and wrong - what’s gone on between us. It’s diseased.

Patrick looks very uncomfortable with this conversation.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)  
I was in some kind of weird denial or... I don’t know what. But I’m seeing clearly now.

PATRICK  
What are you seeing?

MICHELLE  
You can’t possibly expect to get away with what you’ve done. Can you?

Patrick looks at her. Sizing her up.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)  
I’m going to do what I should have done the first day.

PATRICK  
What do you mean?

MICHELLE  
It’s not just me I have to think about. It’s your wife... Other women, possibly. God knows...

PATRICK  
What do you mean, exactly?

MICHELLE  
How many others are there? That you’ve done the same thing too?

The working of his jaw is the only sign of whatever’s going on inside Patrick.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)  
I’m going to the police. I won’t spare myself. I’m going to tell them everything.
He stops the car, right in the middle of the street. He looks at her, working his jaw. She looks him in the eyes, then she hits her door and gets out.

EXT. STREET -- NIGHT

Michelle walks toward her house, in the middle of the street, lit by the headlights of his loudly idling car. As if daring him to run her over. Only when she reaches her front walk does Michelle turn back, toward those sinister headlights.

She gives him a look. A silent: "well...?"

Patrick kills his motor. Now Michelle proceeds inside.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Michelle leaves the door unlocked behind her. She walks to the middle of the room, lets her jacket drop to the floor and stands there, waiting for him.

She watches the front door, excitement edging into impatience.

Patrick, however, appears out of the back hallway. Wearing his black ski-mask.

For a moment, they just stand there like that. Looking.

Then Michelle breaks for the door and Patrick rushes to intercept her. She shoves an ottoman at him. It hits his legs but only slows him down by a couple of seconds. Patrick grabs her before she gets to the door. Grabs her by the arm, twists her around and thumps her good, right in the face, sending her sprawling to the floor.

Michelle starts screaming—loudly—as Patrick falls on her, tearing at her clothes. He fumbles with his zipper. For a second, he has trouble. She sees this and, for just that moment, stops fighting back. Like a time-out. But a moment later, they’re back at it.

She fights back, tooth and nail. She sinks her teeth into the flesh above his wrist. He howls and hits her again. He rips away her cheap panties with one good yank.

She screams louder and louder as Patrick slides in between her legs... only stopping abruptly as she sees Vincent standing behind Patrick.

Patrick’s skull makes a loud CRACK as Vincent bludgeons him with a fireplace log. Before she can say boo.
Michelle kicks free of Patrick’s body as it collapses on top of her. BLOOD oozes through the ski mask like cream through a sieve. Vincent gawks in horror as Patrick, in dying, spasms. Pulling the tatters of her dress around her, Michelle’s first and only thought is to hurry Vincent out of the room, to shield him from the horror.

VINCENT
He’s... Is he...?

MICHELLE
It’s alright. You’re ok. I’m alright, everything’s alright.

Mother and son are both horrified as the masked figure now rises, slowly pulling himself to his feet. Michelle positions herself defensively in front of Vincent.

But Patrick doesn’t come toward them. He reaches up and pulls off his mask. Vincent is astonished to see who it is.

Patrick looks as if he were trying to frame a question as blood streams down one side of his face. He turns, looking for the door. He takes a half-step, then collapses. Almost a pratfall.

VINCENT
Is he dead?!

Patrick lies there, eyes open, blood spreading like a halo around his head, across the parquet floor. He is dead.

MICHELLE
It’s alright. It’s alright.

She puts her arms around her son. He holds onto her, sobbing.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM -- LATER

The home is a crime scene. AUTHORITIES surround the body, taking pictures, making notes. Michelle watches the activity from where she’s being questioned by a DETECTIVE.

DETECTIVE
What was your relationship with the deceased?

MICHELLE
He was my neighbor.

DETECTIVE
A neighbor...?
MICHELLE
A neighbor.

DETECTIVE
Like have a cup of coffee, borrow a lawnmower kind of neighbor?

MICHELLE
There was never any exchange of lawnmowers - but I get what you mean and, yes, generally, we were neighbors like that. Until, maybe, recently.

DETECTIVE
He had attended this party with you as a date?

MICHELLE
Yes.

DETECTIVE
You’re relationship had turned romantic?

Distracted, Michelle’s eyes are drawn to the crime scene.

MICHELLE
It was heading in that direction.

DETECTIVE
You returned together?

MICHELLE
I told him I wasn’t feeling well. That’s why we left the party. He dropped me off out front... I’m sorry.

She needs a moment. She watches all the police activity.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
I’ve been here before. There’s deja vu and then there’s this.

A destroyed Vincent slumps on the couch, surrounded by officers. One hands him a glass of water. He guzzles it. Vincent notices the way the cop is looking at him. He doesn’t recognize the look, at first.

COP
Don’t beat yourself up, son. The truth is you deserve a goddamn medal for what you did.
Vincent now recognizes the look: approval, admiration, even. That sinks in. Slowly, he smiles. Michelle watches Vincent from across the room.

MICHELLE
I went in, started to get undressed ...and he was there. This figure. Standing there. Wearing a mask.

DETECTIVE
And did you have any clue that it was your neighbor, Mr. Forrester?

Looking at Vincent, she knows what she has to do.

MICHELLE
Who could imagine such a thing?

146 INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- DAY
Michelle walks through the house. Everything’s been repainted. Where Patrick died, new carpeting. She opens a window to light a cigarette.

She sees MOVING VANS across the street.

147 EXT. MICHELLE HOUSE -- DAY
Michelle comes out of the house. Rebecca, wearing black, is there directing the movers. Her expression changes a little when she sees Michelle approaching. Uncertainty.

REBECCA
Michelle.

MICHELLE
You found a buyer?

REBECCA
I took a little bit of a hit but not bad. My realtor did a wonderful job - I can give you his name, if you like. If you ever...

MICHELLE
I’m not going anywhere.

Rebecca smiles, nods. A mover passes with a chair.

REBECCA
So much crap piles up.
Michelle smiles politely, briefly.

MICHELLE
I wanted you to know I’m very sorry for what you’ve been through.

REBECCA
I claim to have faith. What’s it for, if not to get through times like this... Patrick was a good man but he had a tortured soul.

Michelle nods again. She’s about to politely exit but Rebecca stops her, adding one more thing-

REBECCA (CONT’D)
I’m sincerely glad you were able to give him what he needed. For a while, anyway.

Michelle looks at Rebecca. The realization that this woman knows the truth of Patrick’s death chills her. Michelle nods to the vans.

MICHELLE
Good luck.

Rebecca nods back. Michelle leaves her.

EXT. CEMETERY -- DAY

Michelle puts flowers in front of her mother’s little vault built into an onyx wall. She pointedly ignores the unmarked vault next to it that contains her father. Vandals have already scrawled “monster” and “burn in hell” on that one.

Michelle turns and finds she’s not alone. Anna’s there.

ANNA
I heard you were here.

MICHELLE
Physically, anyway.

They stand silently side by side.

ANNA
We’re going ahead with Richard’s project?

MICHELLE
I’m going to let him fool around for a while...

(MORE)
I expected him to throw my charity back in my face but he didn’t. Something’s gone out of him.

ANNA
Robert showed up drunk at the office this morning. Security escorted him out... What did you see in him anyway?

MICHELLE
It was more about happenstance, opportunity... I just wanted to get laid.

ANNA
That’s no excuse. It was very shabby.

MICHELLE
It was that and worse.

ANNA
Vincent’s grown up. It’s just the two of us now. And I’m stuck with that mausoleum of a house... I’m going to sell it... I was thinking I could move in with you, for a while.

Michelle looks at Anna, unsure of the implication.

MICHELLE
Oh.

They look at each other. Anna impulsively kisses Michelle. Michelle kisses her back.

For two seconds. Then both women spontaneously burst out laughing.

END
MICHELLE (INTO PHONE)
...Yes, I’d like two pieces of the Hamachi, as well... and what exactly is the “Holiday Roll?”

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - ENTRYWAY -- DAY

Michelle opens her front door and lets in her 19-year-old son, VINCENT, a bear of a young man with scrappy facial hair, a back-pack on his shoulder. She greets him with a brief hug.

VINCENT
I know I’m late. They kept me at work a fucking extra hour.
(walking on with her, he sees something’s amiss)
Are you ok? You look like you got a black eye starting.

MICHELLE
I fell off my bike.

VINCENT
That bike?

The young man nods to a brand new-looking bike they’re passing leaned against the entryway wall.

VINCENT (CONT’D)
It doesn’t look like you’ve been riding it at all.

MICHELLE
(gestures to her face)
And you see why.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- DEN -- LATER

They’re sitting at the coffee table eating Sushi. Vincent uses the chopsticks in conjunction with his fingers. Michelle isn’t eating at the moment, she’s watching his Iphone. (We glimpse a Youtube snippet, a child at Sea World.) Vincent watches his mother, expecting a big laugh. But as the video ends, Michelle looks merely confused.

MICHELLE
So, the kid was scared of the penguin?

VINCENT
The music’s what makes it so great.
MICHELLE
It’s arguably cruelty to animals.

VINCENT
Nah- you think?
(takes back his phone)
Sorry I was late. We’re short-handed at work.

MICHELLE
You’ve managed to avoid mentioning what this job actually is.

VINCENT
It’s entry level, I told you. But there’s a path to management. I’m, like, an assistant manager.

MICHELLE
Is this a MacDonald’s or something?

VINCENT
(amazed she guessed)
But it’s a management position. Like I said... I brought you a present.

Quickly changing the subject, Vincent hops up, pulls a gold gift box from his back-pack with great pride.

VINCENT (CONT’D)
It’s from Josie, really. It was all her idea.

Michelle smiles thinly. She opens the box. Inside, a FRAMED PHOTO. Vincent is stiffly posed before a cheesy back-drop, beside a massively pregnant girl (JOSIE).

MICHELLE
You look quite handsome.

VINCENT
We’re going to go back and take another picture after the baby’s born. You can put ’em side by side. It’ll be like a before and after.

He moves a candle stick on the mantle to the side to make room for the photo.

VINCENT (CONT’D)
Josie’s got all kinds of ideas about interior decorating. Of course, she’s never had her own place to decorate. Till now.
Michelle lowers her head, knowing where this is going.

VINCENT (CONT’D)
She'll be able to try her hand a little bit, I guess, now that we're getting our own place.

She watches him sit back down, going back to eating Sushi, using the chopsticks in conjunction with his fingers.

MICHELLE
How much are you going to need for this new apartment?

VINCENT
I didn't ask you for money.

MICHELLE
Did I jump the gun?

VINCENT
I was going to ask you to co-sign the lease but I wasn't going to ask you for money, necessarily.

MICHELLE
Are any of Josie's other paramours moving in with you too?

VINCENT
No.
(realizing that came off like an answer respecting the question...)
No! Why would you say something like that?

Vincent spills some Wasabi on his lap. Michelle gets up to get him another napkin.

MICHELLE
You don't know anything about this manifestly dysfunctional girl. Except that she was raised by unwashed idiots in a commune.

VINCENT
It was an Arts collective.

In passing, Michelle moves the candlestick back in front of the photo.
MICHELLE
She didn’t see toilet paper until she was ten! By her own admission.

She returns to her chair, gives him the napkin.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
I suppose it’s progress she now suddenly wants the most bourgeois life imaginable- you’ve really never wondered about this? Why she glommed onto you? What she’s after?

VINCENT
(cleaning himself up)
What could she be “after”? I don’t have money.

MICHELLE
I do.

VINCENT
You know I can’t listen to this. You’re insulting my family.

MICHELLE
(hands him napkin)
Your father sets his jaw just like that when he’s laying down the law. It doesn’t work for you yet. Give it some time.

VINCENT
(hurt, embarrassed)
I don’t know what's with you today.

She looks at him, thinking about telling him. Then:

MICHELLE
I’ll give you three months rent. On condition I look at the place first.

VINCENT
I didn’t want to pressure you. If you really don’t feel...

MICHELLE
You won. When you strike oil, stop drilling.

Vincent smiles, goes back to eating sushi, ditching the chopsticks. Michelle watches him with a slight smile.
EXT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Michelle waves goodbye to Vincent as he drives away. Far down the street, a few Xmas lights twinkle.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - GARAGE -- NIGHT

Michelle rummages through a tool box until she finds a HAMMER.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Michelle makes a sweep of the house, holding the hammer. She concernedly checks the pantry door. It’s slightly warped so it takes an extra shove to close it all the way.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - BEDROOM -- LATER THAT NIGHT

Michelle is asleep in the light of her TV, the hammer on the pillow next to her.

INT. OFFICES OF A-V SOFTWARE -- DAY

Immaculately dressed for power, Michelle strides past cubicles filled with busy employees, side by side with ANNA, her Co-CEO, a well-put together woman her own age.

ANNA
Have you seen this apartment
Vincent picked out?

MICHELLE
Six months ago he was dealing weed and getting into imbecilic fights, now he's a family man?

ANNA
That bitch JOSIE is a menace. He just doesn't see it...

INT. A-V SOFTWARE - CONFERENCE ROOM -- DAY

The group is watching a highly polished GAME DEMO projected at the front of the room, software engineer PHILLIP KWAN acting as "the player." On the screen: a Lovecraftian creature’s tentacle penetrates the skull of a helplessly writhing woman. She stops struggling as her eyes turn black.
MICHELLE
Phillip, weren't we going to dial back the orgasmic convulsions, though?

ANNA
These guys never heard of subtext. Michelle smiles. There are some murmurs from others at the table.

PHILLIP
(defensive)
There was forty-five seconds of animation on that originally.

KURT
Are we not going to address the white elephant in the room?

KURT, a German-born game designer with long hair and many tattoos, now stands and takes the floor.

KURT (CONT’D)
We get one shot at Activision but the wonkiness of the controls make this critical demonstration tool almost unplayable. It doesn’t matter how intricately rendered the environments of Thule are, if the player's throwing his controller through the fucking screen!

MICHELLE
It seems to me you're dodging the issue by blaming known glitches.

KURT
I'm confronting the issue head-on. The issue is you come from the world of publishing and literary fiction and that's a singularly inappropriate background for evaluating playability. Everyone in the room looks a little shocked he said this. Michelle takes it in stride.

MICHELLE
It may well be that Anna and I should have founded a different sort of company.

(MORE)
It may be, as you suspect, that Kronos was a hit solely because of your innovations and we're bitches who got lucky - but the fact is I am the boss and we're six months behind here. (to all as Kurt seethes)

We all know the goal: when the player guts an Orc, he has to feel hot blood pouring over his hands. Kevin, a cherubic, red-haired young man, turns to Michelle.

KEVIN
I love you.

Everybody laughs. Even Michelle smiles.

INT. AV OFFICES - OUTER OFFICE -- DAY

Michelle and Anna walk together toward the elevators.

MICHELLE
Sometimes, I think Kurt hates me.

ANNA
He does hate you. They all hate you. Except Kevin- who really does love you, even though he tries to pass it off as a joke... This isn’t a shock? You knew all this, right?

Michelle shrugs. They share a little laugh.

INT. A DOCTOR’S OFFICE -- DAY

A NURSE draws blood. Michelle wears a lime-green gown. She turns to the young DOCTOR making notes in her chart nearby.

MICHELLE
Does she know I want a full STD panel?

DOCTOR
Yes, she does.

(smiles, briefly)
If you're concerned about a recent exposure, I can prescribe a PEP.
MICHELLE
I googled those. They have nasty side effects and I can’t miss any work. So, I guess I’ll just have to roll the dice.

The Doctor disapproves but Michelle starts getting dressed.

16

INT. A CAFE -- DAY

Michelle looks over creature design sketches. Her phone RINGS. She answers. A MALE VOICE (ROBERT) on the other end-

MAN (O.S.)
My evening just cleared up.

MICHELLE (INTO PHONE)
It’s not good for me... Actually, I’m having Female Difficulties.

MAN (O.S.)
I’ll wear a condom.

MICHELLE (INTO PHONE)
I appreciate your willingness to sacrifice but tonight’s not good.

As Michelle returns to her drawings, another cafe patron, a big, grey-haired WOMAN keeps throwing funny looks Michelle’s way. Angry looks. Now the woman rises from her table with her tray and, on her way out, makes a detour over to Michelle's table. She proceeds to deliberately spill the contents of her tray - half-eaten food and paper products - right into Michelle's lap. Michelle strangely, takes it completely in stride. She doesn't even act all that surprised.

The woman, glaring at Michelle, sets her tray down and walks out. Michelle dabs a napkin in water, scrubs her blouse.

17

INT. MICHELLE’S MOTHER’S APARTMENT -- DAY

Michelle lets herself in. She’s surprised to discover her mother, IRENE, having coffee in the breakfast nook with a gigolo-esque guy in early middle age (RAFE). The man wears a dress shirt and boxer shorts.

Michelle sighs heavily and shakes her head. Her mother, a woman in her late 70s with layers of plastic surgery, shows mild annoyance.
IRENE
If you’re going to come in without knocking, you’re going to be treated to gruesome sights like me having coffee with a friend.

RAFE
But I did wish I had pants on.

The gigolo excuses himself, smiling. Michelle glares at him.

MICHELLE
How much do you pay them? So demeaning.

IRENE
I have nothing to be ashamed of. This is my life. My sex life... You’re just a little bitch.

MICHELLE
All I’m saying is you’re on a fixed income. You should be more economical. Do you really need a young stud at your age?

IRENE
Did you eat? I made spaghetti.

MICHELLE
I’ll take some coffee.

Irene goes to get it as Michelle sits down at the table.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
Did you have more work done?

IRENE
You’re just going to keep going?

MICHELLE
I’m sorry.

Irene brings over the coffee.

IRENE
A little Botox.

MICHELLE
It’s your business. (sips her coffee)
Very good.
IRENE
You act surprised.

Rafe comes back in, fully dressed.

RAFE
Well, that’s better. Michelle, I hope we get a chance to meet properly soon. I have to take off.

IRENE
Not yet, you’re not.

She slinks over to him sexy for a lovers’ goodbye kiss. Michelle, openly disgusted, has to look away.

MICHELLE
Did my mother tell you she’s HIV positive?

IRENE
I already warned him you were going to try that one.

Michelle shrugs. Rafe smiles at her.

RAFE
Nice meeting you.

He takes off. Irene returns to the table.

IRENE
I’m going to ask you a question. I want you to think before you answer. What would you say if I remarried? Think about it.

MICHELLE
It’s simple- I’d kill you. No need to think about it.

Irene shakes her head, lights a cigarette.

IRENE
You’ve always wanted some sanitized version of life, Michelle.

MICHELLE
I would kill you. You asked. I told you.

IRENE
You’re so selfish, Michelle. It’s frightening.
MICHELLE
I know. Here’s the check for your mortgage payment by the way.

Michelle takes a check from her purse, hands it over.

IRENE
You never give anything truly of yourself. Like with your father. How much effort would it take...?

MICHELLE
Don’t.

IRENE
He’s an old man, Michelle.

MICHELLE
Well, he’s still breathing, so not old enough, apparently.

IRENE
There’s are some connections that can never be broken...

MICHELLE
I walk through the door here...

IRENE
...Never! No matter what.

MICHELLE
...and it’s one horror after another.

IRENE
He’s having another parole hearing next week...

MICHELLE
Enough. OK?

Irene looks hurt. Michelle sips her coffee, notices something by her chair. She holds it up.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
Your stud forgot his hernia belt.

EXT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- DUSK

Getting groceries out of her car, Michelle is politely accosted by her neighbor REBECCA, a very pretty, large-bosomed woman in her mid-30s. Conservatively dressed, perky.
REBECCA
Michelle, glad I caught you. I’m putting these on everybody’s door.
(presses a Flyer in Michelle’s hand)
It’s about the neighborhood council’s new trash-separation policy.

MICHELLE
Oh, thank you.

Rebecca’s handsome husband, PATRICK - a man with the look of a high school quarterback just starting to go to seed - is wrestling a large Xmas creche out of his car’s hatch-back.

REBECCA
They're levying a pretty steep fine now if recycleables aren’t properly sorted and we’re having a block meeting Wednesday to organize our opposition.

MICHELLE
But you're on the council, aren't you?

PATRICK
I've tried to point that out to her that it's hard to be "we" and "they" at the same time.

MICHELLE
It's an interesting position anyway.

REBECCA
That's how I like to look at it.

Michelle smiles politely and finds herself sharing an amused little look with the man carrying the creche. She gives Rebecca another smile and tosses the flyer in the car before she shuts the door.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Michelle comes in. A LOCKSMITH works on the front door.

LOCKSMITH
This is the last one. Your new set of keys is there on the table.
MICHELLE
Great. Thank you... Did you notice
the side door doesn’t close properly?

LOCKSMITH
The wood’s warped. Might be
possible to shim under the hinge
plates, fix it that way.

MICHELLE
Oh?

LOCKSMITH
I don’t do that. I just do locks.

Michelle nods. Of course.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- LATER THAT NIGHT

Michelle sits on her stairs, absently stroking Marty the cat,
staring at the entry hall where the rape took place.

FLASHBACK TO- INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- DAY

Michelle is walking through the living room with a cup of
coffee. She hears the cat loudly WHINING. She follows the
sound and sees that the pantry door is standing slightly
ajar. Michelle puts down her coffee and goes out onto the
side patio to retrieve the cat. Marty jumps into her arms.

MICHELLE
How’d you get out there, numbskull?

Michelle tries to close the door but finds she’s having
trouble. The weather-warped door won’t close properly. She’s
in the middle of her third attempt when the door suddenly
bursts inward, knocking her back, making her drop the cat.

A MASKED INTRUDER now steps into the house. Eyeing her,
flings the door closed behind him.

For a moment, Michelle is frozen by terror. Then the Intruder
takes a step toward her and she rediscovers her legs. She
runs but the Intruder catches up to her in the hall. She’s no
physical match for the much bigger man and, soon, all she can
do is keep screaming as the Intruder takes her, Marty
watching on, an indifferent witness.
Michelle closes her eyes, opens them. Like a ritual purging. She holds up the cat, makes him look at her.

MICHTELLE
If you couldn’t claw his eyes out, you could’ve at least scratched him. I’m just saying.

Michelle is looking at a preliminary animation on her laptop. More Lovecraftian monsters. She gets a TEXT MESSAGE.

She looks at her phone. Unknown caller.

Just as she’s about to retrieve the message, her phone dies. She curses to herself as she has to get up and plug in her charger. It takes a moment for the phone to reboot.

When it does, she finds an ominous message staring at her: “You were tight for a woman your age.”

Michelle feels ice water down her spine. She moves to the window, looks out. A few more Xmas lights twinkle in the street but nothing stirs.

Michelle talks with an orange-vested SALES ASSOCIATE in front of a case filled with PEPPER SPRAYS. She’s handling one.

MICHTELLE
So this is the most powerful?

SALES ASSOCIATE
With pepper sprays power can be measured in terms of potency and in terms of distance...

MICHTELLE
I want both.

On her way to the checkout counter, Michelle passes a display of HATCHETS. She tosses one of those in her basket too.
EXT. STREET -- DUSK

Michelle can’t find a parking space. She attempts a parallel parking job anyway, backing in hard. Her rear bumper makes an audible CRUNCH. She keeps going anyway, forcibly moving the other car to make room for hers.

INT. RESTAURANT -- DUSK

Entering, Michelle finds RICHARD, her ex, a ruggedly handsome man around fifty, already here. They kiss.

RICHARD
You want to sit outside? We can sit down right now.

MICHELLE
Fine with me.

Richard motions to the HOSTESS. She nods back to him. Richard and Michelle follow her through the restaurant.

RICHARD
So you told Vincent you’d front him the rent on that place?

MICHELLE
I said I’d help for a while.

RICHARD
Well, I hope you’re not expecting me to pitch in. I’m fucking broke.

MICHELLE
I was the one who made the promise.

They arrive at a table. The Hostess sets out menus.

RICHARD
I don’t know what possessed you. They should struggle a while. It’d be good for him.

MICHELLE
His psychotic won’t tolerate any struggling.

RICHARD
She is a psycho. I will add, though, that kind of girl is often very good in bed.

The Hostess smiles to herself as she opens napkins for them.
MICHELLE
What does that mean anyway? “Good in bed.” I’ve never known.

The Hostess splits. Michelle sits down.

RICHARD
Did you get a chance to read my proposal yet?

Michelle seems distracted as she settles in at the table.

MICHELLE
Richard, would you say I was tight for a woman my age?

Richard’s taken aback by the question. Before he can answer, they’re joined by Anna and her husband, ROBERT.

ROBERT
What up, loser?

28 INT. RESTAURANT -- DUSK 28

RICHARD
(amid the hugs, kisses)
You're just in time to hear
Michelle avoid telling me what she thought of the game idea I pitched to her.

MICHELLE
No - it was very interesting.

ROBERT
(to Bus Boy)
Four glasses of champagne... no, a bottle.

Anna sits next to Michelle. She can tell there’s something wrong. She mouths “are you ok?” Michelle half-smiles, distantly.

RICHARD
It is interesting. It's set in a time when dogs have been wiped out by a virus, so people have robotic canines as pets. You play as the Spartacus of the robot-dog world.
Bob fakes being impressed. Michelle makes a sound as if she were going to speak but then clams up. All look at her.

**MICHELLE**
I was trying to... I was going to try to find a way to segue into this organically but there really is no graceful way so I’m just going to dump it on the table... I was assaulted a couple of days ago. In my home. I guess I was raped.

**ANNA**
Oh my god.

**RICHARD**
Raped?

**ANNA**
Oh my God.

**ROBERT**
Seriously?

**RICHARD**
A couple of days ago?

**MICHELLE**
Thursday. Night.

**RICHARD**
You don’t say anything?

**ANNA**
Oh my God.

**MICHELLE**
I really haven’t known what to say... What is there to say? I feel stupid now for bringing it up.

**RICHARD**
Are you insane?

The Waiter finally comes over.

**WAITER**
Have we had time to look at the menu?

Robert looks at his menu, as if they were actually going to do that now, but then he reads the table. To the waiter-

ROBERT
Give us a minute, huh?

The Waiter reads the table too and quickly withdraws.

ROBERT (CONT’D)
We’re talking about a real rape here?

ANNA
A real rape?

ROBERT
She knows what I meant.

ANNA
I don’t think you do.

ROBERT
Don’t get political now. Your closest friend was just raped! Apparently... You were? For real?

MICHELLE
It was real. He wore a mask and everything.

RICHARD
Jesus Christ. You’re telling us this now?

MICHELLE
I’m telling you now.

No one knows what to say. A moment of silence.

ANNA
Are you alright? You have to get a medical exam...

MICHELLE
I took care of all that. I got a full blood panel.

RICHARD
What have the cops told you? (off her look)
You haven’t reported this?

ANNA
Michelle, you have to report this to the police. Immediately.
MICHELLE
Why?

ANNA
Why?!

MICHELLE
It’s over. It doesn’t need to be talked about anymore. It doesn’t need to be commemorated in any way... Let’s order something. Anything.

EXT. RESTAURANT -- NIGHT
29

A grim Richard walks out with Michelle. They exchange solemn waves with Anna and Robert going off the other way.

RICHARD
Where’s your car?

She nods the way. They walk in silence a moment.

RICHARD (CONT’D)
If you’re reluctant to go to the police because...

MICHELLE
Of course I’m reluctant to go to the police because. I’m never dealing with police, ever again. That was my vow.

This seems to make sense to him for some reason.

RICHARD
I’m going to get you a gun.

MICHELLE
I don’t believe in guns.
(cutting him off)
Richard, I should tell you I shared your proposal with our financiers. They weren’t interested.

RICHARD
I don’t want to talk about that now.

MICHELLE
Alright.

She opens her car door with her key.
RICHARD
But I guess now I might as well ask what you thought of it.

MICHELLE
Don’t take it hard. It doesn’t have anything to do with the quality of your work. It’s a business that’s very tied into a particular demographic.

RICHARD
A demographic that doesn’t care if something’s good?

MICHELLE
Pretty much.

RICHARD
You don’t have to shield me. Really, what did you think of it?

MICHELLE
I think you should finish your novel. You’re a real writer.

RICHARD
A penniless, real writer.

He stops, noticing her color paint on his front bumper.

MICHELLE
Looks like somebody dented your fender.

RICHARD
(smiling)
If I get my hands on the punk...

Michelle gives him a smile and kiss, gets in her car.

EXT. MCDONALD’S -- DAY

Michelle pulls up. Vincent emerges from the interior in his McDonald’s uniform, carrying a McFlurry – which he hands to his mother as he climbs in.

VINCENT
On the house. I made it myself.

He seems proud of that. Michelle smiles thanks.
A man in an impeccable suit opens the door for Michèle and Vincent.

**MAN**
Mrs. Leblanc, yes? I am the apartment manager. Please come in.

They follow him to the main room where an extremely pregnant woman, Josie, is measuring a corner with a tape measure.

**JOSIE**
Hello Michèle! Vin, could you hold this for a moment?

Vincent takes the end of the tape measure, Josie stretches it out.

**JOSIE (CONT’D)**
The bookcase is 150 centimeters... so... there... like that. Can you stand there, so I can see?

She positions Vincent so that he’s a stand-in for the bookcase. He’s contentiously very still as she extends his arm.

**VINCENT**
Right here?

**JOSIE**
Don’t just act like the bookcase. Be the bookcase.

She measures down from his extended arm to the floor.

**MICHELLE**
(smiling)
Vincent is quite the actor. When he was 12 he was a model for “Kronos”, our first game.

**JOSIE**
Ah...! And I’m sure you were great!

She kisses him furtively and then again intensively. Vincent - in the presence of his mother - feels awkward. He makes a grand gesture towards the room.

**VINCENT**
Nice, huh?

**MICHELLE**
A little too nice, don't you think?
Vincent demeanor goes gloomy instantly. Josie continues with her measuring tape.

JOSIE (TO VINCENT)  
There's room for a 50 inch here.... Did you ask her?

Michelle looks to Vincent. Ask me what?

VINCENT  
You know how you were going to buy us a microwave? We were hoping maybe you could save your money on that and give us a tv as the housewarming present instead.

MICHELLE  
Don't you need an oven more than a new TV?

JOSIE  
(pause to precisely write down measurements)  
The unit comes with a microwave, a refrigerator, everything.

MICHELLE  
It does? Is this the same apartment you told me about?

Vincent looks ashamed. The manager speaks up-

APARTMENT MANAGER  
No, it's not. This is one of our elite units. This is 250 euros a month more.

JOSIE  
(going back to measuring)  
The other one there was ridiculous. There was nowhere to put a crib, even. It was preposterous

MICHELLE  
A little uncomfortable, maybe.

JOSIE  
Yeah. Uncomfortable.

MICHELLE  
You do realize having a child is all about suffering?

(MORE)
When Vincent was born, it was three hours of torture before they gave up and cut him out of me. At that point, I would've gutted myself with the jagged end of a broken beer bottle to end the pain.

Josie meets Michelle's gaze flatly.

Josie
If you don't want to help us, don't help us. Nobody's holding a gun to your head.

Michelle
If I don't help you, how are you going to live?

Josie
That's our problem.

Michelle
No-no, you see, you don't get to do that. You don't get to act fiercely independent while taking my money.

Josie
None of this shit was my idea.
(to Vincent)
I know you want to show off and make all these big, nice things happen but, Jesus, at some point you have to deliver, right? A little? Something? Once? It's always total bullshit. Whatever way things are going to be is never the way they are!

She chokes up, throws down the tape measure and stalks away. Fuming impotently, Vincent hits the wall.

Apartment Manager
Hey, hey, hey!

Vincent instantly turns from raging bear to shamed child.

Michelle
This is impossible. You realize that? She's a lunatic and you're...

Vincent
What? What am I?... It's like you don't see I've changed.
MICHELLE

(softening)
I'll cosign like I said I would but you're going to be responsible, every month, for the difference in rent between this apartment and the one we'd talked about.

VINCENT
Absolutely. There's no problem. I'm ready for this.

Michelle knows better but she nods. Vincent immediately goes to Josie who's crying in the next room. He approaches her gingerly.

VINCENT (CONT'D)
It's ok. It's done. Everything's going to be just how you want it...

JOSIE
(her hands on her belly)
How I want it? It's not for me! Do you not understand anything? It's not about me.

Vincent looks frustrated. He can't do anything right. Josie sees his anguish, instantly relents. She hushes him, takes him in her arms. Michelle - on her way out - watches through the doorway as Josie strokes Vincent's head maternally. Michelle looks fascinated.

32
INT. A-V OFFICES -- DAY

Michelle watches a group of kids shooting zombies. Some kind of beta-testing focus group. As she moves on, she sees Robert coming down the corridor toward her.

MICHELLE
You missed Anna. She’s in Angoulême today.

Robert smiles. Michelle sighs internally, seeing his smile.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
But you knew that.

Michelle continues into her office. He follows her in, closes the door behind them. Michelle settles in behind her desk.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
You know I went through a very traumatic experience days ago.
ROBERT
You gave the impression you wanted
to go on like nothing happened...
If I’m being insensitive, I’m
sorry, but that’s my thing, right?

MICHELLE
I appreciate you staying in character.

ROBERT
(comes closer)
And, you know, a big part of my
role is being unpredictable. Don’t
scream.

He unzips his pants, whips it out. Michelle sighs.

ROBERT (CONT’D)
I know you’re a wilting flower but
you can still touch it... Can’t you?

She looks up at him. Sees he’s not going to be dissuaded.

MICHELLE
Hold on.

She reaches over and grabs her waste-basket. Positions it to
catch his wayward sperm.

33
INT. A-V OFFICES -- NIGHT

The entire suite is dark and silent. The only light is the
one in Michelle’s office.

34
INT. MICHELLE’S OFFICE -- NIGHT

Michelle is going over an intimidatingly numbers-heavy tech
review with a yellow highlighter. The only sound is the hum
of the heating system. Until her phone DINGS.

A text message. She glances at the clock. 2:30 AM. She looks
at her phone. “Unknown Caller.” She looks at the message:

That cream blouse is lovely. my cum stains will hardly show.
See you soon.

Michelle whips toward the window behind her. Nothing out
there but the dark glass of another office building. A
thought chills her and she looks at her door. Her unlocked
door.
She crosses to it, hesitates, then pulls the door open, as if expecting to surprise someone on the other side.

**INT. OUTER OFFICES – CONTINUOUS**

Michelle emerges slowly. She has a look around the dark, silent suite of offices. She seems to be alone... but, at the end of a row of cubicles, she sees a light spilling from a half-open door marked “studio.” She quietly sneaks up on that doorway. Peering in, she sees Kurt, in the light of a single lamp, posing a featureless doll and taking pictures.

A figure study of some sort. He doesn’t seem to notice Michelle. She decides not to announce herself and withdraws.

**EXT. QUAI BESIDE THE SEINE -- DAY**

Michelle and Irene rise from finishing their meal at one of the little restaurants.

**MICHELLE**
I was going to ask- have you experienced any incidents recently?

**IRENE**
Incidents?

**MICHELLE**
You know what I mean.

**IRENE**
A man threw a slice of pizza at me from his car. It missed. Also, I felt a couple of eyes on me in the market, perhaps. But I always feel that.

**MICHELLE**
I just wonder if isn’t starting again. A new cycle.

**IRENE**
You don’t know? TruTv just made a new “special documentary” about your father. They’re repeating it all hours, every day. That’s why it’s fresh on people’s minds.

**MICHELLE**
(reeling)
I didn’t know. I don’t watch TV.
IRENE
Has something happened to you?

MICHELLE

IRENE
It’s because of his parole hearing. That’s their excuse for dredging the whole thing up again. Your father’s going before the panel in two days...

MICHELLE
You don’t miss a beat.

IRENE
I want you to come with me.

MICHELLE
They will never let him out. Thank God. This parole hearing is nothing but a kabuki exercise just like you asking me to go with you when you know I’d rather claw my own eyes out.

IRENE
How long are you going to hang onto this hatred?

MICHELLE
I will never see him again. Not in this world or... well, there is no other world, so I’ll just leave it at that.

IRENE
There isn’t much time left, Michelle. He’s ill. Look...
   (pulling a PHOTO from her purse, like a weapon)
   Just look. Are you afraid to look at your own father?

Michelle looks, defiantly. The photo is of an ordinary man, bald, thin, a bit stooped. Wearing an orange prison jumpsuit.

MICHELLE
There. Put it away now.
IRENE
You’re not like all the others,
Michelle, people who only know the
monster from TV. You know the man.
He’s just a man.

MICHELLE
And he’s a monster. You think
there’s a contradiction there?
Look, I’m done. I’ll see you later.

Michelle walks off.

IRENE
Just be careful. Some people aren’t
content with throwing rude things
from passing cars.

Michelle keeps walking. By the time she reaches the street
where her car is parked, Michelle’s already looking around, a
little paranoid. She clocks the faces of her fellow
pedestrians wondering which ones might mean her harm.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- DAY

Marty the Cat CRIES pitifully.

MICHELLE (O.S.)
How’d you get out there, numbskull?

Michelle opens the pantry door, scoops her cat in her arms.

As she turns, the Intruder is there in front of her. He grabs
her. Just as we’ve seen before... but what we haven’t seen
before: she gets her hands on the iron on the table next to
her. Screaming, she clobbers him. The Intruder lets go of
her, grabbing his head in pain. That’s his fatal mistake.
Michelle hits him again. His blood sprays across the wall...
Michelle, an animal now, falls on the Intruder, bringing the
iron down. Over and over, screaming...

CUT TO- INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - STUDY -- DAY

Michelle smiles to herself, weakly. She turns back to the
work on the desk in front of her. Rotted faces - concept
drawings of zombies. She considers a moment then circles the
zombie on the left.

A loud THWACK startles her. Makes the pen jump in her hand.

Michelle grabs the hatchet - which, apparently, she keeps
near her at all times - and goes to check out the sound.
Her heart skips a beat when she discovers a CRACK in her side sliding glass door.

She ducks back behind the wall, peeks out cautiously... and now sees the injured BIRD that collided into the glass twitching on the patio. Thoroughly creeped-out, Michelle puts down her hatchet and fetches a broom. She opens the sliding door, flicks the dying bird onto the grass, then quickly shuts it again as if afraid it were going to try to get in.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER

Michelle lights a cigarette. A moment later, she’s drawn back to the sliding glass door. To her horror, she sees that the bird is still alive and about to be devoured by Marty who is sadistically toying with it. Michelle rushes out with the broom to shoo the cat away.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- LATER

Michelle holds the bird, swaddled in a towel, as she talks on the phone with a VET.

MICHELLE (INTO PHONE)
I understand you can’t make a prognosis over the phone. I was just exploring whether, in fact, treating birds was something that was possible.

VET (O.S.)
We’re talking about a wild bird?

MICHELLE (INTO PHONE)
Yes. An ordinary brown bird.

VET (O.S.)
Like a sparrow?

MICHELLE (INTO PHONE)
Sparrows are pretty, aren’t they?

VET (O.S.)
Well, that’s subjective.

MICHELLE (INTO PHONE)
Is it?

VET (O.S.)
Honestly, ma’am, I wouldn’t even know how to intubate a sparrow- or whatever it is.
Michelle mms. She looks at the bird, very still in her arms, but breathing rhythmically.

MICHELLE (INTO PHONE)
Do sleeping pills work on birds?

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - KITCHEN -- EVENING
Michelle grinds up sleeping pills and mixes them in a cup with some Chia seeds.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - DEN -- NIGHT
Michelle watches TV. The bird, in its towel-swaddling, rests in her lap. She absently strokes its head with her thumb. As she scrolls through channels, something on her cable guide catches her off-guard. Bloodline: the Legave Street Murders. Michelle’s remote hand stays tensely suspended in mid-air a moment before she presses “OK”.

A TV documentary: faded footage of an improbably long line of body bags on a suburban sidewalk, what looks like a swastika scrawled in blood on a door.

NARRATOR (O.S.)
...little knowing the horror that unfolded, or the questions that they would be left to answer...

Michelle braces for the next image: a SLOW ZOOM-IN on an old photo of a nondescript, balding man with his arm around a woman- who is clearly a younger version of Michelle’s mother.

NARRATOR (CONT’D)
What would drive George Leblanc, successful entrepreneur, alderman at his local church, loving husband and father, to commit such horrific and senseless acts...

The zoom PANS DOWN to the CHILD in Irene’s lap. 10-YEAR-OLD MICHELLE.

NARRATOR (CONT’D)
A single night of madness that would forever haunt those closest to him....

They cut to a much more recent Michelle - recognizable as herself but less fashionable - being attacked by PHOTOGRAPHERS in a parking lot...
REPORTER (ON TV)
Have you talked to your father?

She strikes the cameraman.

NARRATOR (O.S.)
Decades of court proceedings and psychiatric interviews have shed but dim light on the events...

Michelle dials down the volume but keeps the picture on as the image DISSOLVES to another photo of herself as a child. In it, she’s standing in front of a suburban house, lit by the flash of a news camera, looking lost, covered in ash like a Dickensian chimney-sweep.

As the documentary cuts to footage of some kind of memorial—children tying red ribbons to the mail boxes of houses—Michelle finally turns it off. When she looks down, she sees that the bird in her lap is dead.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - PANTRY -- MOMENTS LATER
Michelle carefully places the dead bird in a shoe box.

EXT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- NIGHT
Michelle takes the shoe box out to the trash cans. There are more Xmas lights now, filling the street with gaudy color. As she closes the lid of the can, from across the street—

PATRICK
We have to stop meeting like this.

Patrick is dragging his own trash can out to the curb. Michelle, not wanting to get dragged into a corny running joke with the neighbor, gives a polite chuckle. Waves.

Heading back into the house, Michelle notices a CAR gliding down this quiet street. It’s unfamiliar to her, from the way she watches it pass. Just before Michelle reaches her front door, she sees the strange car very suspiciously turn off its lights and make a U-turn. Before parking in the dark across the street.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS
Michelle locks and bolts the door behind her. She hurries to the living room window. Whoever is in the car is just sitting there in the dark.
INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Michelle sits with her hatchet and her pepper spray, as if waiting for a showdown. Nothing happens and nothing continues to happen. She can’t take it anymore. She goes to the window.

That suspicious car is still there. A cigarette’s glow waxes and wanes behind the steering wheel.

EXT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER

Michelle comes out the side door with a flashlight (not turned on) and the pepper spray. She hugs the side of the house, moving like a spy. She darts to the cover of a tree and, from there, across the street. Keeping to the shadows, bent low, she sneaks up on the stranger’s vehicle.

She hesitates one second, then rises up and charges. She breaks the driver’s side window with the flashlight and sprays directly into the face of the Mystery Man.

The car door opens and the occupant tumbles out, coughing and gagging. Michelle now turns on the flashlight and illuminates Richard, moaning on the asphalt of the street.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Michelle has Richard bent over the sink as she runs water to rinse his eyes of the pepper spray.

MICHELLE
What were you thinking?

RICHARD
I was worried about you! What do you think? ...Jesus!

MICHELLE
Don’t rub them.

She turns off the water, daubs his eyes with a rag.

RICHARD
You tell me you were raped and you didn’t go to the police? Of course I’m going to... My God, Jesus, you really did a number on me...

MICHELLE
I’m sorry... Here, let me put some of this on.
She puts Vaseline on the rag, starts applying it to his eyes.

RICHARD
Is that gonna help? Do you know what you’re doing?

MICHELLE
It’s on the pepper spray label. It says to do this in case of contact with eyes...

RICHARD
You know I’ve always had a morbid fear of going blind!

MICHELLE
You’re fine. I didn’t recognize the car! Whose car is that anyway?

RICHARD
(hesitant)
It’s a friend’s.

MICHELLE
(stops nursing, wary)
A friend’s.

Even blinded, Richard sees there’s no avoiding it—

RICHARD
Her name’s Hélène.

MICHELLE
Hélène?

RICHARD
I had to borrow her car. Mine’s in the shop. Somebody dented the bumper.

MICHELLE
That dent was barely visible.

That comes out somehow resounding with despair.

RICHARD
She’s a friend, Michelle.

MICHELLE
You don’t have to spare my feelings.

RICHARD
I’m not... Why would I? Why would I even have to justify anything?
MICHELLE
You don’t.

RICHARD
Ok. So, I’m not.

Michelle wrings out the rag.

MICHELLE
Is she a student?

RICHARD
A grad student.

MICHELLE
I guess it was inevitable.

RICHARD
She’s not my student. She’s a teaching assistant in a Virginia Woolf seminar. The Critical Studies department, a different department.

MICHELLE
But she read your book, didn’t she?

RICHARD
Yes, she has. And she did tell me how deeply it affected her and I did melt inside. OK? It all went down just like you’re picturing it.

MICHELLE
It is a little amusing, actually—the way I picture it.

RICHARD
This jealously is insane...

MICHELLE
I’m just concerned. Richard, this is what I’ve dreaded. I never worried about the ones with big tits. The ones who read Virginia Woolf will chew you up and spit you out.

RICHARD
Michelle, you’re the dangerous one.

He gestures to his eyes. Michelle smiles, despite herself.
Michelle sends a still-partially blinded Richard home in a TAXI. As soon as he’s gone, she makes a bee-line for Hélène’s car, opening it via the broken window. Searching it like it was a crime scene filled with potential clues, Michelle is increasingly disheartened to find a young woman’s things, including a graded Final Exam. But what really twists the knife is when Michelle finds the girl’s bejewelled Iphone under the seat. The screen-shot is a “selfie” taken by a pretty young woman. In it, Richard is nuzzling with her. They look like a real couple. Unself-consciously in love.

Michelle methodically puts everything back the way she found it, keeping her emotions in check as best she can.

Phone to her ear, Michelle watches Kevin and another techie wrestle a 7-foot-tall DEMON through the studio door.

MICHELLE (INTO PHONE)
Did you know about her?

VINCENT (INTO PHONE)
I told you, I met her.

MICHELLE (INTO PHONE)
You didn’t think to mention it?

VINCENT (INTO PHONE)
I don't know. I...
(as Josie lifts heavy box)
Don't lift that. I'll move those.

Josie

When?

MICHELLE
Can you focus for me a second? What’s she like?

VINCENT
She’s okay. She teaches Yoga...
Bikram Yoga I think..
MICHELLE
Where?

Michelle turns to her computer and googles “Bikram Yoga”.

Josie approaches Vincent, puts her hands on the ottoman.

JOSIE
Take your feet off, please.

VINCENT
Why?

JOSIE
I told Eric he could have it.

MICHELLÉ
Eric? Who is this ‘Eric’..?

VINCENT
(to Michèle)
At the centre du Marais
(to Josie)
He doesn’t need it right this second, does he?

Michelle types ‘centre du Marais’ as she does, a new EMAIL appears on her screen. Mildly annoyed, she clicks on it. Instantly, an attachment opens, like a virus: an animated gif showing a photo-shopped likeness of herself being anally taken by the tentacled Lovecraftian creature from the video game we glimpsed before.

MICHELLÉ
(à Vincent)
I’ll talk to you later.

VINCENT (OFF)
(to Josie)
Where are you going now?
(to Michèle)
Ok, bye.

But Michèle has already hung up. Michelle becomes even more disturbed as she sees the “cc” list. Dozens of names.

She hasn’t even finished scrolling through them when Anna bursts in, closing the door behind her.

ANNA
You’ve seen it?

MICHELLE
Everybody in the office got this?
ANNA
I don’t know.

Michelle gets up and peeks out through the blinds at the front of her office. She sees all the employees huddled around their computers in groups of two, three or more. Some cover their mouths in shock. Many are laughing. When they look over at Michelle’s office and see her peering out, they react like kids who’ve been busted. She closes her blinds.

MICHELLE
This isn’t the first thing he’s sent me.

ANNA
Who? ...You think this was sent by the man who attacked you?

MICHELLE
Yes.

ANNA
Michelle, do you think it’s possible... the person who attacked you... I mean, it looks like that email came from an internal source.

MICHELLE
Maybe it did.

ANNA
You have to go to the police. Now. Yesterday.

MICHELLE
No police. I’ve had a lifetime’s worth of police. They don’t help. They do anything but help.

ANNA
This is different, Michelle. You’re the victim...

MICHELLE
I was the victim then!

ANNA
I know. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean...

MICHELLE
I’ve worked too hard to put that all behind me. I’ve built this life... I’m not going to bring police into it...

(MORE)
MICHELLE (CONT’D)  
police, reporters. Bloggers. I will not allow this cretin to bring that tidal wave of shit back into my life.

ANNA  
But there’s a psychotic out there.

MICHELLE  
I have experience dealing with psychotics. I’m a pro.

She smiles. Anna sees Michelle’s point there.

INT. AV OFFICES - TECH ROOM -- DAY  
52  
Kevin uncomfortably watches the pornographic animation with Michelle herself standing over him. Meanwhile, she distractedly looks at her Iphone.

KEVIN  
It’s not necessarily an “inside job.” When our server was hacked in June, somebody ripped the Cthulu template off our main frame. So these images are floating around out there.

MICHELLE  
But that still requires my secret admirer to be someone highly tech savvy... a former employee, maybe?

Kevin shrugs. Michelle hmms. We see what she’s distractedly looking at on her Iphone: the Bikram Yoga web site. Head-shots of the instructors. The cheery face of her nemesis, Hélène Zacharian.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)  
One more question.  
(shows him phone)  
Do you think she’s pretty?

INT. A YOGA STUDIO -- DAY  
53  
Michelle’s immediately uncomfortable in the coat she’s wearing. It’s a “hot” yoga session. Elderly bodies, masses of wrinkles covered with sweat. Against that, Hélène, a youthful contortionist, looks like an erotic earth goddess.

Michelle waits, sweltering, until the class has broken up and the old people are rolling up their mats.
Then she puts on the biggest smile she can muster and crosses the room to Hélène, extending her arm for a handshake in an aggressive way that almost seems like an attack.

MICHELLE
Hélène?

HÉLÈNE
Yes.

Smiling uncertainly, she takes Michelle’s hand.

MICHELLE
I’m Richard’s ex. Michelle.

HÉLÈNE
Oh, oh, oh... nice to meet you.

MICHELLE
Hope it’s ok barging in on you like this. I just wanted to apologize to you. Face to face...

HÉLÈNE
For what?

MICHELLE
Your car window. I feel terrible...

HÉLÈNE
No, no- please. Richard explained it to me.

MICHELLE
Really? What was his explanation?

HÉLÈNE
(a beat, confused)
It was an accident.

MICHELLE
It was. It was an accident... Anyway, it was a great excuse to finally meet you.

Michelle gins up her bubbly friendliness again. Hélène seems to pick up on the effort, making her a little uncomfortable.

HÉLÈNE
No, no, it’s fine. This is great. It’s great to finally meet you. I was thinking... I was hoping...
MICHELLE
At least, Richard won’t have to introduce us now. We got the awkwardness out of the way.

HÉLÈNE
Was there awkwardness?

MICHELLE
Well...

HÉLÈNE
I mean, of course, I’m sure there would be... I guess there is... was.

MICHELLE
But we’ve survived it.

Hélène smiles. Another awkward beat.

HÉLÈNE
We should get together some time.

MICHELLE
We should... In fact, I’m having a Christmas party next week. You should come. You have to come.

HÉLÈNE
(smiling)
If I have to.

MICHELLE
I’ll call Richard and give him all the details... Anyway, I should let you get back...

HÉLÈNE
Well, very nice to meet you.
(seeing Michelle, sweating, almost faint)
Would you like some water?

MICHELLE
I’m fine, thanks. Very nice to meet you.

Michelle gets out of there as fast as she can.
As soon as Michelle steps off the elevator, she notes the changed atmosphere in the office. Her co-workers seem to look away quickly whenever she looks at them.

Michelle’s secretary sticks her head in.

SECRETARY
Vincent called. He was calling from Port Royal.

MICHELLE
The hospital?

Michelle anxiously moves down the corridor, looking in rooms she passes, getting little glimpses of mortality.

Vincent meets his mother out in the hall. A nervous wreck, he’s still wearing his McDonald’s uniform. A very tall, dark-skinned young man wearing a McDonald’s uniform stands by. Inside the room, Josie starts screaming at a NURSE.

JOSIE (OFF)
Don’t tell me what the doctor told me, bitch! I know what the doctor told me!

VINCENT
She had blood in her underwear so we came to the emergency room. They just did an ultra-sound. They say she had a... a placenta...

The other kid in the McDonald’s uniform speaks up-

MCDONALD’S KID
Placental abruption.

VINCENT
They say everything’s ok but they’re going to induce labor... This is Omar.

MICHELLE
Hello.

McDonald’s kid nods back. Richard arrives.
VINCENT
Dad!

RICHARD
No news?

Vincent anxiously shakes his head. Father and son embrace.

INT. HOSPITAL - VENDING MACHINES -- MOMENTS LATER

Michelle inserts a dollar in a coffee machine. The bill is noisily rejected.

RICHARD
Suddenly we’re having a Christmas party?

MICHELLE
I thought we should meet. She’s lovely, by the way.

Richard doesn’t believe this for a second. Michelle finishes smoothing out her bill, inserts it again. Again, rejection.

RICHARD
The whole thing sounds like one of your little traps.

MICHELLE
I’ve got bigger things to worry than plotting diabolical Christmas dinners... By the way, is there anything she won’t eat? Any allergies? Marty’s shedding like crazy.

Richard’s skeptical. The machine makes its irritating SOUND as it keeps rejecting the bill. He takes out his wallet.

RICHARD
I never said a word when you went with that violinist.

MICHELLE
You know the difference! He was married. With three kids. He had all the requisite qualities. But her... She’s a young, single woman of child-bearing age. You broke the rules.
Richard puts his own bill in machine. It’s accepted.

RICHARD
If we had an agreement like that, you should’ve told me. It’s not my fault...

MICHELLE
It is your fault. We should still be together. It is your fault.

RICHARD
You left me, Michelle.

MICHELLE
You hit me.
The words chill the air between them. She takes her coffee.

RICHARD
If there’s one thing in my life I could take back...

Vincent finds them, excited...

VINCENT
It’s here!

INT. HOSPITAL - MATERNITY WARD -- DAY

Michelle, Richard, and Omar look at the brand new, lightly dark-skinned BABY, being held up by the Nurse on the other side of the glass. Reverent silence till-

MICHELLE
There’s going to have to be a DNA test.

The others look askance at Michelle. She doesn’t notice, or at least acts like she doesn’t.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- DAY

Vincent slips an ice cube between the pale lips of Josie who offers a wan smile and chews.

JOSIE
Are they bringing him in?

VINCENT
Right now.
She gets suddenly emotional. Tears in her eyes.

JOSIE
Everything’s going to be good for him. I’m going to be good for him.

VINCENT
What are you talking about? You’re perfect.

That makes her start to out and out cry. The mid-wife rolls in the baby in an incubator. Josie brightens immediately.

Vincent spontaneously gives his father a big hug. He then turns to Michelle and starts to hug her too but then holds back as if remembering not to, just giving her a smile instead.

Michelle watches as the baby is handed to Josie who seems a little disconcerted as it starts crying.

VINCENT (CONT’D)
Guess he’s hungry.

Josie looks around at everyone in the room, seeming uncharacteristically shy.

VINCENT (CONT’D)
We’ll give you a minute.

Josie looks at Michelle. Her expression turns resolute, defiant.

JOSIE
No. It’s alright.

Josie bears a breast and we now see what she was abashed about: a crude and truly ugly tattoo, a banner over a faded heart with the name ‘ERIC’. Josie doesn’t avert her eyes from Michelle, silently communicating she knows it’s a legacy of past stupidity and daring Michelle to say anything about it.

EXT. HOSPITAL -- NIGHT

Michelle smokes a cigarette by the breezeway. The Nurse is out here too. Michelle trades smiles with her.

MICHELLE
I had him here in this same hospital—my son.

NURSE
That’s amazing.
MICHELLE
Not really. But what is a little amazing, I guess, is that my friend Anna... you met her?

NURSE
I did.

MICHELLE
She had her baby here the same night. This is where we met. Her child was still-born. She asked if she could breast-feed my baby.

NURSE
Oh my.

MICHELLE
I said "go ahead." I wonder about that - they’ve always been exceptionally close, Anna and my son. I wonder if some kind of imprinting took place. Like with ducks. On the other hand, myself-sometimes, I look at Vincent, this inconsequential lout I squeezed out of my own body and realize I don’t know him at all.

Michelle notices the tall, turbaned McDonald’s kid exiting the hospital. He throws Michelle a cheerful wave in passing. Michelle directs the Nurse’s attention to him with a nod.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
He’s got a bounce in his step.
You’re something of an expert- does he have the air of a new father?

The nurse isn’t sure what Michelle is implying, so she just smiles.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
See? I don’t know anything I should know. Like telling Anna “go ahead,” all those years ago - was that what a normal woman would have done? There are just some things I never learned.
THE SECURITY GUARD talks to Patrick and Rebecca from behind the wheel of his car.

Michelle leans out her window to see what’s going on. Rebecca comes over to her.

REBECCA
Patrick should walk you inside your house, Michelle. There’s a prowler out here. Patrick tussled with him.

MICHELLE
A “prowler”?

Patrick waves goodbye to the security guard, joins the women.

PATRICK
They’re going to dispatch three patrol cars to search for this asshole.

MICHELLE
You fought with him?

PATRICK
No. I did not. I caught him in my bushes. He was crouched down, watching your house. I approached him and he just took off.

Michelle looks down the street with a weird anticipation.

MICHELLE
Did you see his face?

PATRICK
No. I think he was wearing a mask. Like a ski mask. Like a stalker on a TV show. He just took off.

REBECCA
Pat, you should go in with her.

Patrick nods in agreement. Michelle, shaking her head, parks her car. Patrick rejoins her as she gets out.

MICHELLE
I’m sure it’s not necessary.

Patrick waves dismissively. No bother. They head in.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
I have pepper spray.
PATRICK
(smiles)
Good to know.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Michelle comes in, cautiously, turns on the light. Everything seems in order. Michelle takes off her coat and waits, while he has a look around.

PATRICK
Everything seems to be ok.

MICHELLE
Well, thank you. I appreciate it.

PATRICK
Please. I didn’t do shit- pardon my French.

(shakes his head in frustration; looks out at street, wistful)
I almost had him. He just took off so fast... In school, I could do a mile in six-fifty.

Michelle smiles sympathetically at her would-be knight errant.

MICHELLE
The other way to think of it is his speed was a testament to how scared he was of you.

PATRICK
Thank you for salvaging my pride.

MICHELLE
Anytime.

For just a moment, something passes between them as they smile at each other. A warmth, maybe something more. Then Patrick goes right back to helpful neighbor mode.

PATRICK
Well, if you see anything, hear anything, just give a holler.

Michelle nods appreciatively. He nods back, ready to leave.

MICHELLE
I’m a grandmother.

She has no idea why she said that. He’s slightly taken aback.
PATRICK
Oh? ...Congratulations.

She shrugs as if to say “it was nothing.” He smiles, a little awkwardly and withdraws. Left alone, Michelle mutters at herself as she closes the door.

INT. A-V OFFICES -- DAY

Michelle’s spreading jam on toast in the office’s little kitchen. Kurt comes in wearing a black ski sweater. He nods politely to her, pours himself some coffee. She watches him, suspicion creeping up on her. He looks up, catching the way she’s looking at him. Smiles as if it pleased him.

KURT
Yes?

MICHELLE
I like your sweater. Do you ski?

KURT
I do. I’ll take you some time if you like.

Michelle is taken aback, no idea where he’s coming from. She betrays a bit of discomfort as he leaves her, smiling.

INT. AV OFFICES - OUTER OFFICES - LATER

Michelle watches Kurt through the glass window in the studio door. Watching the way he handles a MODEL in demonic make-up under the studio lights. Watching his rough hands on her.

INT. AV OFFICES - TECH OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Michelle approaches Kevin at his desk.

MICHELLE
Kevin, you target shoot, right?

KEVIN
Yes.

MICHELLE
The point is you own guns?

KEVIN
A couple.
MICHELLE
Can you teach me?

INT. FIRING RANGE -- DAY

Michelle holds a .38 in her hands like dirty harry, taking aim at a silhouette target.

MICHELLE
Now I don’t pull, I squeeze, right? I saw that in a few different movies.

KEVIN
You just pull the trigger.

Michelle pulls the trigger. Hits the silhouette in the leg.

MICHELLE
In a real situation, that would do.

KEVIN
In a real situation, he’d probably be moving faster.

MICHELLE
True.

KEVIN
Try the .44.

Kevin hands her another gun.

MICHELLE
Kevin, I also wanted to talk to you because I’ve got an off-the-books assignment for you.

KEVIN
A black op?

MICHELLE
I want to find out who created the animation in that email. You know the one I’m talking about.

Kevin, looking a little embarrassed, nods.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
To do that, I need you to hack into the home computers of everyone in this office. All the men, anyway. Well, all the males.
KEVIN
Michelle... I want to help but that’s a for-real major violation.

MICHELLE
Trust me, it’s only a metaphorical violation.
(hits target in the head)
But I do appreciate how you might feel about it. That’s why I’m offering you ten thousand dollars, off the books. This would be just between us. Our thing.

Kevin likes the sound of that. As she knew he would.

KEVIN
You know, you go through people’s things, people are going to have some embarrassing stuff.

MICHELLE
Understood. My gaze is completely non-judgemental.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- TWILIGHT

Michelle stands at her window. Looking at: Patrick, wearing a “wife beater”, stringing Xmas lights around Joseph, Mary and Infant Jesus in his lawn creche. She moves to another window. This angle, too, is obscured by a tree.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - ATTIC -- TWILIGHT

Michelle has binoculars to her eyes. She’s curled up in a narrow space, watching Patrick at work. With her free hand, she touches herself, more and more vigorously. As, with a barely audible whimper, she finishes, the Xmas lights start to blink on below.

She breathes a moment, then rips open a “Handi-Wipe” and cleans her fingers.

EXT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- TWILIGHT

Rebecca places a ceramic sheep to the creche. Patrick sees they’ve run out of lights.

PATRICK
Think we got enough illumination here?
REBECCA
(disappointed, insistent)
The Infant’s head has to light up.

Patrick smiles. Of course. As he disappears into the backyard, Rebecca looks up and sees Michelle coming toward her. Michelle musters her best friendly-neighbor smile.

MICHELLE
Hey, Rebecca.

Rebecca shows her how a friendly neighbor smile’s done.

REBECCA
Hey.

MICHELLE
This is beautiful.

REBECCA
I love this scene. This is where it all started.

MICHELLE
It is... I know this is kind of rudely last minute but I’m having a little Christmas get-together tomorrow night...

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- NIGHT

CLOSE ON: Michelle’s fingers insert wooden toothpicks into bacon-wrapped shrimp to the tune of baroque 70s glam rock.

MICHELLE
It would be theoretically possible to serve Richard’s lady love one of these with a toothpick embedded deep inside.

Anna helping out in the kitchen, smiles.

ANNA
You could just poison her.

MICHELLE
She’d see it coming. I’m sure she’s already got me pegged as some kind of Medea figure.

ANNA
She’s not a classics major
In the adjacent living room, Richard and Robert heatedly debate Michelle’s vinyl collection. Richard shouts to the women in the kitchen, waving an LP like a battle flag.

RICHARD
For Your Pleasure, red vinyl! ...Hey!

There’s a loud GLEEECH of a needle lifting as Robert commandeers the turntable, over Richard’s protest.

MICHELLE
They should just take their cocks out and measure.

ANNA
The way Robert loves to relive his youth, it should worry me – we know where that leads, don’t we?

Michelle smiles again but this one’s a bit tense. Anna sees Vincent coming up the walk as Josie, the new baby (screaming) in her arms, goes back to close the car door. Vincent enters the kitchen, carrying a homemade pie.

VINCENT
I’m gonna pop this in the fridge. Josie made it. It’s apple. She used a recipe but she added blueberries to it. The recipe didn’t have blueberries, she just added that.

Josie, carrying the screaming baby, snaps at Vincent from the living room.

JOSIE
What are you thinking?! You left the car door wide open!

VINCENT
Well, is it closed now?

Josie stalks out of sight, shaking her head wearily. The things she puts up with.

ANNA
I swear I’m this close to calling social services on that bitch.

Follow Vincent as he tracks Josie down in the living room. Before he can apologize, she shoves the baby in his arms.

JOSIE
He smells horrible.
Josie leaves Vincent to start rummaging through a large diaper bag for the necessary materials. The baby’s screaming is as loud as the Iggy Pop Robert’s put on.

RICHARD
You’re trying to make my grandson deaf with that shit?

IRENE (O.S.)
Hello, all!

Michelle’s mother is making her entrance, like a grand dame, squired by her paramour, Rafe who wears a sports jacket over a shirt open to show off gold chains. The 75-year-old wears a short, black skirt and inches of almost Baby Jane make-up.

This is what greets Michelle as she enters the living room, holding a plate, Anna at her side.

MICHELLE
Promise you’ll kill me. If I ever...

Anna smiles. Irene sees her daughter, comes her way.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
At the very first sign, kill me.

Michelle exchanges kisses with her mother.

RAFE
Sorry we're late. But I wanted to find something special. This is a decent cabernet...

The DOORBELL rings. As Rafe expounds on his wine selection, Michelle crosses down the entry hall to open the front door. Bob finally turns down music to watch Michelle greet Patrick and his wife Rebecca. She’s holding a trivia board game.

REBECCA
Scrabble!

Michelle embraces her warmly. Patrick gives Michelle a brotherly kiss on the cheek.

PATRICK
No more excitement the last couple of days?

MICHELLE
No. It seems the block’s been fairly bogeyman free.
(re: a curious Robert wandering over)
(MORE)
MICHELLE (CONT'D)
Anyway, we’re all safe tonight.
Robert here has a black belt.

She places a hand on Robert’s arm as she moves on, leaving
Robert with Patrick and his wife.

PATRICK
I just got my red belt in March. I
was doing Tai Kwan Do for years but
I switched to Shokatan...

ROBERT
I’ve never done karate. She was
making a joke.

PATRICK
Oh. Very funny.

Robert gives a fake smile, then he moves off, continuing to
follow Michelle. He catches up with her....

ROBERT
You can’t avoid me all night.

MICHELLE
I disagree.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - DINING ROOM -- LATER

Michelle places a shrimp appetizer in front of empty chair.
Anna and she are still putting the last plates on the table.
Pleasant conversation as everybody takes their seats...

JOSIE
We finally put in the new carpeting
but there’s just no end to it!

Rebecca mms sympathetically. Patrick comes over to Michelle.

PATRICK
Thanks for having us. We don’t get
out much, I have to admit.

The doorbell RINGS. Richard is up like a shot. Michelle
watches Richard pass out of sight, almost apprehensively.

PATRICK (CONT’D)
It’s kind of unfortunate for
Rebecca. She’s a very social
person. And I guess I’m not.
MICHELLE
Well, I’m glad she dragged you over here tonight.

PATRICK
It’s no hardship.

Patrick surprises Michelle slightly by giving her wrist a little squeeze. Michelle smiles – but only briefly as she now sees Richard returning with his arm around Hélène.

HÉLÈNE
So sorry I couldn’t get here earlier. I couldn’t get off work.

MICHELLE
We’re just sitting down.

Michelle gives her a kiss. Anna watches Michelle’s reaction as Hélène sits down beside Richard. Amid the rumble of good cheer, people dig in. Rebecca, smiling, speaks up–

REBECCA
I’ll say grace, if everybody likes.

People look a little taken aback by her cheery offer. Michelle shoots a furtive, sidelong glance over at Patrick and sees his smile tighten ever-so-slightly with embarrassment.

MICHELLE
Please.

Rebecca, Patrick and Michelle’s mother close their eyes and folds her hands. Rafe, seeing Irene doing it, follows suit. Everybody else, slightly uncomfortably, just tries to sit there respectfully.

REBECCA
Jesus Christ, bless this food to our use, and us to thy service.
Fill our hearts with grateful praise. Amen.

IRENE
Amen.

ROBERT
(too loud)
Amen!

Anna gives Robert a chastising look. People start eating. Wine is being passed around. Michelle keeps looking over at Richard and Hélène, leaning together, whispering conspiratorially.
ANNA
So, Patrick, what do you do?

PATRICK
Well, I work in banking but I plead the fifth.

ANNA
Oh, why’s that?

PATRICK
Oh, I was just joking but, you know, not a very popular profession at the moment.

ROBERT
(eyes on Michelle)
Or ever, really.

PATRICK
Or ever.

Rebecca looks mildly scandalized as Josie casually begins to breast-feed her baby at the table. Michelle raises her glass.

MICHELLE
A toast to all of us and especially the newcomers to our table, Hélène, Patrick, Rebecca...

She looks at Rafe, as if blanking on his name (playfully).

RAFE
Rafe.

She nods, smiling, then focuses on Hélène.

MICHELLE
God bless us one and all.

Everyone toasts. They go back to eating. Hélène takes a bite of appetizer. She winces. Spits something into her palm. It takes her a moment to process what she’s looking at: a little piece of wood. She looks over at Michelle. Wondering. Michelle does not look her way.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - DINING ROOM -- LATER

Vincent paces with the baby and Anna and Michelle take dirty plates away as Richard, on a roll, holds court...
RICHARD
Originality, singularity - they used to be valued, now they’re a liability...

Michelle leans over confidentially - to Hélène.

MICHELLE
Richard is, first and foremost, a theorist.

Hélène’s not sure what that means. It sounds like a dig.

RICHARD
And I’m not talking about novelty - we’ve got novelty coming out of our ass...

ANNA
That’s a delightful image for the dinner table.

Michelle settles back down in her chair. Slightly buzzed, she looks over at Patrick who sits there swirling his wine glass, looking bored. A mischievous smile appears on her face.

HÉLÈNE
I tell Richard - he’s so negative.
He’s too young to be a curmudgeon.

Under the table, Michelle lets her knee graze Patrick’s. He reacts with surprise, then looks away. Pretending nothing happened. Vincent hands the baby back to Josie, goes into the kitchen. Michelle escalates the game of “footsie”, slipping off her shoe, running a foot up the length of his leg. Patrick smiles uncertainly. Robert observes this, looks at Michelle, sees her smiling to herself... Michelle’s foot is just at Patrick’s groin as Irene stands...

IRENE
I guess this is as good a time as any. I have an announcement. Cue the drum-roll... Rafe and I are engaged to be married.

Rebecca cheers. Everyone else reacts with more polite clapping. Except Michelle who bursts out laughing.

MICHELLE
I’m sorry... excuse me but how do you manage to be so ludicrous?
Her mother’s face wrinkles up but she doesn’t answer. A pall falls over the table - broken only by Vincent returning from the kitchen with pie.

VINCENT
Hope everybody’s ok with blueberries. Josie put a ton in this. They’re not even in the official recipe.

Everybody murmurs compliments, making a big deal over the pie to cover up the awkwardness. Josie basks in it.

JOSIE
It was an experiment.

EXT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - LATER
Michelle smokes a cigarette out on the patio. In the b.g., the guests migrate from the dining table to the living room. Rebecca approaches from inside to speak to Michelle-

REBECCA
It’s almost midnight. Do you mind if I put on the mass?

MICHELLE
By all means.

Michelle sees Richard and Hélène, coats in hand, getting ready to go. She quickly puts out her cigarette...

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS
...and comes back inside to see Richard and Hélène off.

MICHELLE
Taking off already?

HÉLÈNE
It’s my fault. I have family obligations.

RICHARD
This was wonderful, though, Michelle. Really. Next time’s our turn. You’ll come to us.

MICHELLE
That’ll be wonderful, but there’s no reason to rush it.
HÉLÈNE
Let us handle it, Richard. We’ll have lunch together first, Michelle and I. Just the two of us. Take things one step at a time.

MICHELLE
(sincerely impressed)
I agree.

RICHARD
Well, great.

Michelle takes Hélène’s hand. To Richard-

MICHELLE
Drive safe.

It sounds like: “I love you.” Filled with pining and regret. Richard kisses her and he and Hélène head out the door. So as not to watch them go, Michelle heads to the kitchen.

Robert, sulking, has switched to Scotch. He follows her.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE – KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS

Robert corners Michelle out of sight of the doorway.

ROBERT
Your idiotic flirting with the banker – was that for my benefit?

MICHELLE
Are you going to make a scene in my home, Robert? Is this the kind of thing I can expect now?

ROBERT
(seething)
We can talk later.

He turns to return to the party. She stops him.

MICHELLE
Hold on... Your prop.

She hands him a cup of coffee to take with him.
Michelle returns with more coffee. Rebecca and her mother are watching a broadcast of the Midnight Mass, live from the Vatican. Chanting voices fill the room (continuously, in the background during the rest of the scene). The others are playing the Trivia Madness. Patrick sips cognac alone. Michelle sits down next to him. Looks at the mass on the TV.

MICHELLE
Close the book, ring the bell, blow out the candle.

PATRICK
What’s that?

MICHELLE
What kind of Catholic are you? You never heard the rite of excommunication?

PATRICK
Have you?

MICHELLE
From time to time.

She smiles, like a mischievous child plotting something.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
My father always made the sign of the cross on my forehead before I went out the door to go to school. Actually, he did it to all the kids on our block. Some parents finally asked him to stop.

PATRICK
I guess I can see why.

MICHELLE
My father apparently took it as a grave sleight. That night, he made the rounds. Door to door, every house on our block with a shotgun, a tenderizing mallet and a pair kitchen knives.

PATRICK
(uncomfortable)
I heard about that.
MICHELLE
You’ve heard about the twenty-seven people. You may not know about the pets. They get short shrift. Six dogs, a couple of cats. He spared a hamster for some obscure reason. You can’t make this shit up.

Michelle chuckles. Patrick doesn’t know how to react.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
I was doing my homework, when he walked back in with blood all over him. My mom was at work – she was a nurse in those days. Can you imagine?

PATRICK
We don’t have to talk about this, Michelle

MICHELLE
I don’t mind. It’s cathartic.
(smiles wryly at that)
When my father decided he wanted to burn everything in the house, I helped him put things in the fire. We were pulling down drapes, tearing up carpeting. Throwing it all in. It was exciting. You get caught up in a project like that. We were just starting to burn our clothes when the police finally moved in. Somebody snapped a photo of me. I was half-naked, slimed with ash from the fire. That photo, more than anything, really cemented in people’s minds that I was my psycho father’s psycho little helper.

Patrick seems equally appalled and fascinated by Michelle’s tale. She amused by his reaction.

PATRICK
Wow.

MICHELLE
Yeah, huh?

Michelle, smiling, gets up and walks away, leaving him to stew in it, to the sounds of the televised mass... and runs into Irene coming the other way, a little wobbly.
IRENE
Are you aware how brutal you were
to me at dinner?

MICHELLE
Yes, I am. And that was just the
beginning.

IRENE
You become so cruel when confronted
with something you find unpleasant.
I’ve apparently become one of those
unpleasant things.

MICHELLE
Neither one of us is drunk enough
yet for this conversation.

Irene gives Michelle a dismissive snort and walks on. Two
seconds later, Michelle hears a CRASH and turns. A coffee
table’s upended, bottles on the floor. Everyone getting up,
concerned.

And her mother on the floor.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
Jesus...?

She’s about to start yelling outrage at her mother’s latest
stunt but she sees the faces around her, sees it’s for real.

INT. AMBULANCE -- NIGHT

Michelle rides in the back with her mother and a PARAMEDIC.
She can’t look at her mother like this, so she looks
everywhere else. But then she hears her mother trying to say
something from under her oxygen mask.

MICHELLE
You shouldn't try to talk. Just
concentrate on breathing...

Her mother insists on speaking. Michelle leans in close. Her
mother’s voice is hoarse, very faint, but clear-

IRENE
Go see him.

Michelle looks chilled by the words. As if this were some
kind of curse cast upon her.
Michelle stands anxiously in the waiting area with Vincent, Robert and Anna. The DOCTOR comes out to talk to her.

**DOCTOR**
She’s had a major stroke. We alleviated the pressure on her brain but remains unresponsive.

**ANNA**
Unresponsive... meaning?

**DOCTOR**
She is comatose.

**MICHELLE**
How long?

**DOCTOR**
There’s no telling. She’s stable right now. Her blood serum is...

**MICHELLE**
This is real?

**DOCTOR**
(as if he didn’t hear)
Excuse me?

**MICHELLE**
There’s no way she’s faking or playing it up or anything? You’re medically certain this is for real?

The doctor looks at her a moment, surprised by the question.

**DOCTOR**
I’m sorry, no. I have to tell you there’s a high likelihood your mother will not wake up again.

Michelle reels.

**DOCTOR (CONT’D)**
But as I say she’s stable. I suggest you get some rest. There’s nothing you can do here right now.

Michelle nods distantly. Anna puts her arm around her. The Doctor takes his leave. Robert stands there looking useless.
ANNA
You should come home with us. At least for a shower.

Michelle looks at her, not quite able to respond.

INT. ANNA’S HOUSE – BEDROOM – NIGHT

Robert and Anna help Michelle in. Michelle is moving like a zombie. Anna looks back over her shoulder at Robert.

ANNA
Would you mind sleeping in the guest room?

He decides at the last second not to protest. He leaves them alone. Anna helps Michelle off with her coat.

MICHELLE
Did you see Richard with Hélène?

ANNA
I did. Lie down.

MICHELLE
(nods, sits on the bed)
He was running through his little routines. And she seemed amused by them all.

ANNA
You know you’ll wind up being good friends.

MICHELLE
Oh, no doubt. I’ll start going over there for supper, just the three of us. I see myself ringing a doorbell, holding a box of macaroons and I shudder.

Anna smiles. She gets Michelle to lie back. Michelle winds up pulling her onto the bed with her. Michelle smiles as Anna holds her. Brushes hair her out of her face. They fall into incredibly intimate silence. Anna nuzzles her nose, like an eskimo.

ANNA
Do you remember the time in Cassis? We tried...
MICHELLE
(remembers, smiling)
We couldn’t get through it without laughing.

Anna smiles. They leave it at that.

INT. ANNA’S BEDROOM -- MORNING

Michelle wakes up, feeling something strange. It takes her a moment to recognize that Robert’s hand is up her nightshirt. She kicks away from him.

MICHELLE
What are you doing?!

ROBERT
Anna’s gone to the office.

He says that as if it explained everything. Michelle gets up.

ROBERT (CONT’D)
I was just trying to make you feel better.

MICHELLE
(earnestly sizing him up)
I wonder if your stupidity was what attracted me to you in the first place.

ROBERT
I’m sorry if I misjudged.

MICHELLE
Look, I can’t do this anymore. We have to stop.

ROBERT
Right.

MICHELLE
You were a great partner and we’ll still be friends...

ROBERT
You’re serious?!

MICHELLE
This whole ridiculous situation was getting too much to bear... you don’t feel that all? The humiliating absurdity of it all?
ROBERT
Uh, no.

She strips off the nightshirt. He takes this as a provocation and tries to again put his hand down her panties. She removes his hand, starts collecting her clothes. He stands there, dumbstruck, seeing she really means it.

ROBERT (CONT’D)
Your breasts have gotten bigger.

MICHELLE
No, I don’t think so. Not that I’m aware of.

ROBERT
No doubt about it.

She slips on a sweater. Looks for her shoes. He finds her left one, withholds it from her.

ROBERT (CONT’D)
Tell me you don’t want me anymore and that’ll be the end of it.

MICHELLE
It’s not as simple as that, but all right, I’m telling you: I don’t want this anymore, this situation, the lies.

ROBERT
You dodged my question.

MICHELLE
Sorry. I no longer want to fuck you. Was that the question?

She takes her shoe. He looks like a child denied a treat.

INT. HOSPITAL -- DAY

Michelle sits at her mother’s bedside, eating a salad out of a clear plastic container with a plastic fork. Her mother has tubes coming out of her everywhere.

MICHELLE
I won’t see him, you know? I don’t believe in the superstition of death-bed requests. If you imagine you can manipulate me with this hideous stunt...

(MORE)
Ever since you decided the laws of God and Man no longer applied to you and started acting out like a spoiled teenager, you never gave a shit what I thought. What your behavior did to me. This aneurysm thing stands out only for its disgusting... treachery. This salad is awful. They just dumped in a can of olives.

(stares out window)
You can’t stay mad at me, you know.

Michelle notices that the TV suspended from the wall is on the fritz. She drags her chair over to stand on it while she tries to adjust it.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
Of course, BFM-TV is the one station that comes in.

She keeps switching back and forth through channels. She registers only vaguely, at first, the whole TEAM of doctors and nurses rushing into the room and gathering around her mother’s bed. When she sees them, she fills with fear.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
What’s going on?

They don’t answer. Too busy swarming around Irene, taking urgent measurements. Michelle is terrified now.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
I thought I heard a different beep. Was that the sound?

Her voice comes out weak, a little girl’s squeak. They don’t hear her. Finally, one of the nurses sees her.

NURSE
Miss, you have to go outside.

The Nurse gently but firmly pushes her toward the door. Helpless, lost, Michelle finds herself standing out in the hall, looking in.

Michelle gets out of car, sluggish, like a sleepwalker. She stops as she sees the LIGHT is on in her upstairs bedroom.

The curtains there billow spookily.
INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Michelle comes in, warily. Marty the cat leaps into her arms. She takes him with her as she heads upstairs.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Michelle enters cautiously. She discovers the covers have been ripped off her bed and a NOTE — written in red lipstick — left atop the crumpled sheets.

She reads: sorry, I couldn’t wait.

She then notices the cum sprayed all over the violet colored sheet. Michelle sets Marty down and starts stripping the bedding like it was just another chore.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE -- DAY

Dressed as if for a cocktail party, Michelle leads a somewhat clumsy parade up a steep grassy hill. Richard, Anna, Robert, Vincent, Josie and Rafe are all respectfully attired too, though Rafe looks like he was hanging out poolside. Vincent *carries a cardboard box that looks like it might contain Chinese takeout. The baby's screaming in Josie's arms.

MICHELLE
I'm looking for a spot that might have some significance. But it's not like there's going to be a sign that says, "dispose of mother here."

RICHARD
We had a picnic over there once— that hollow over there.

MICHELLE
I remember. Her chicken salad gave me horrific gas. I don't want to immortalize that.

Behind them, an eruption: The new mother is suddenly crying loudly, carrying on— and obviously not for Michelle’s mother.

Josie
Just leave me alone. You can’t fucking fix everything...
VINCENT
Josie...

JOSIE
Leave me alone!

She storms off with the baby, down the hill. Everyone looks mortified. Vincent plays it off like a big joke.

VINCENT
She wanted to say something. About grandma. But then she realized she didn’t really have anything to say and she got upset over that and then... It's post-partum... you know. I just hope my boy doesn't take after her in the temperament department.

MICHELLE
Vincent, he's a lovely child but he's not your boy. Don't lose sight of that.

Vincent doesn't really hear her. He holds up a pacifier.

VINCENT
Here it is. After all that!

MICHELLE
Did you hear me, Vincent?

VINCENT
Yeah, sure, but... what?

MICHELLE
The boy is not really yours, Vincent. That’s what I’m telling you. Look at him. His skin is two tones darker than you or Josie’s. You must see that.

VINCENT
(getting angry now)
Whose is he, if he’s not mine?

MICHELLE
He’s his father’s, I guess. And you’re not his father, Vincent. I’m sorry but you’re being made a fool of.
Vincent raises his hand as if he were going to hit Michelle. She waits for it. Almost daring him to hit her. He wavers as Anna comes into the room to see what’s up.

**ANNA**

Vincent?!

He looks at his mother, stammering, unable to find words...

**VINCENT**

I... just... You’re a cunt.

Fighting tears, Vincent hands Michelle the box and stalks off. Anna shoots Michelle a more confused than accusing look and goes off after him, down the hill. Michelle looks around.

**MICHELLE**

This is as good as anywhere, I guess. The wind’s blowing out.

Richard shrugs. Michelle opens the box and dumps the ashes. Which land largely in a clump at her feet. Looks like that’s it. She reluctantly accepts a clasp of hands from Rafe.

### EXT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- NIGHT

A wind gathers strength. Tree branches sway. Xmas lights slip loose of their moorings. Michelle’s house is dark, only one light on the second floor. A loose shutter up there creaks loudly, back and forth...

### INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- NIGHT

The CREAKING can be heard in Michelle’s bedroom as she, wearing a night-shirt, examining storyboards. A zombie soldier extends a tentacle-like arm toward the viewer. The caption: “It’s just you and me now.”

Michelle jumps as the steady creaking becomes a BANG - the wind slamming the shutter against the side of the house.

At the same time: The doorbell RINGS downstairs. Michelle finds this curious.

### INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - ENTRYWAY -- NIGHT

Michelle opens the door in her knee-length night shirt and finds Patrick on her stoop.
PATRICK
I didn’t want to disturb you but I just got home and saw all your shutters are open. The weather’s turning fast. Half your windows are gonna get blown out.

MICHELLE
That wouldn’t be good.

PATRICK
I know it probably sounds like I’m being chicken little or something but it’ll amaze you what the winds can do up here.

MICHELLE
No, I’ve seen it. You should’ve been here in ’99. It was like the end of the world.

PATRICK
I believe it. You’re probably going to need a hand.

MICHELLE
Yes, probably. Thank you.

Michelle lets him in. Shuts the door behind him.

PATRICK
Your mother’s funeral was today?

MICHELLE
There was no service. We just... She trails off. He nods.

PATRICK
I’m very sorry, Michelle.

She nods thanks. He’s already at the first window, brimming with authority, pulling it open and grabbing the shudder pinned against the outside wall. He now engages in a battle with the elements to pull the window closed. Dead leaves start to blow in. Michelle gives a hand. An icy wind whipping them, Patrick handles the window while she reaches out and pull in the shutter. Finally, it slams shut.

Michelle smiles, shivers a residual shiver from the cold. He reaches out and rubs her arms through the thin flannel of her pajamas. The innocent gesture takes her aback, slightly.
MICHELLE
I never counted but I think there’s something like twenty windows in this house.

PATRICK
The wind’s from the west. We’ll do that side.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE – UPSTAIRS HALL/BEDROOM
Michelle follows Patrick down the hall. He stops in the doorway of her bedroom. He gives her a questioning look. She nods—go ahead. The bed is a unmade. Her underwear is slung over a chair.

MICHELLE
I wasn’t expecting anyone.

He smiles. He pauses, seeing one of Michelle’s storyboards on the bed. It’s a stylized vintage airplane in flames.

PATRICK
That looks like a ‘43 Grumman Wildcat.

MICHELLE
I wouldn’t know.

PATRICK
I’ve always thought about rebuilding a vintage aircraft like that. Taking it to Paris.

MICHELLE
You fly?

PATRICK
No. But you got to have a dream, right?

They share a little laugh. They’re very close, only inches between them, the window starts MOANING and CRACKLING in the wind, breaking the spell of the moment.

They go into their routine again. These shutters are more difficult. When the shutter finally comes free of the wall, it closes so forcefully, they both stumble backward onto the bed, beside each other. They lie there like that a moment. An electric current passes between them... but Patrick, remaining in helpful neighbor mode, gets up and goes to secure the shutter.
Almost done.

Michelle leads Patrick up the narrow staircase, in forced proximity. She flips the light switch. The bulb BLOWS OUT.

MICHELLE
Shit.

They go in anyway. They have to maneuver in near total darkness through the low-ceilinged space. The wood beams creak like the end of the world. Patrick pull the window open - the one she watched him through - and starts wrestling with a shutter. It gets away from him. Michelle ducks under Patrick’s outstretched arms to lend a hand. Now his arms are around her. Leaning way out the window in freezing wind, she rubs her butt against him. Patrick stays focused on his mission. She practically rolls her eyes in frustration. What is it going to take?

When they get the shutter closed finally, they stay there a moment, still. His arms stay around her. She waits. His hand lowers her panties, slowly exposing her bottom. She feels what his moving hand is doing. She moans in pleasure, spreading her legs and bracing herself against a beam.

She twists her head around for a kiss but Patrick leaps backward, pulling away from her.

PATRICK
I’m sorry.

Patrick hurries away, leaving her there. She hears his FOOTSTEPS pounding down the stairs. She stands there a moment, feeling shame and, more than that, frustration.

MICHELLE
Idiot!

She hits a wooden beam with the flat of her hand.

Michelle moves through the office like a locomotive of restless energy. She sees Kurt, makes a detour to him.

MICHELLE
The “Summoning” cut-scene needs to come later.
(cutting him off)
(MORE)
We don’t have time to argue. The player needs to encounter Kira in her repressed, schoolteacher persona before her Dark Rebirth, otherwise there’s nothing titillating about her transformation.

Kurt clearly wants to debate but Michelle moves on. She’s waved over by Kevin in the doorway of the “Tech” room which is watched over by an imposing rubber ROBOT SENTRY.

KEVIN
Got a minute?

INT. AV OFFICES - TECH ROOM -- DAY
Michelle sits beside Kevin at his computer.

KEVIN
I found this on Kurt’s private server. It looks like he’s into crushing.

MICHELLE
What’s “crushing?”

KEVIN
What it sounds like. As you see...

MICHELLE
(reading off screen)
“Sammantha gardens?”

A video plays: an overly made-up woman, wielding a watering can in an evening gown keeps “accidentally” stepping on bugs, wrangled at her feet.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
It’s disturbing. Not exactly a smoking gun, though.

KEVIN
I guess not.

Michelle looks at Kevin. She’s struck by something. Something in the way he looks at her.

MICHELLE
Good work. Keep on it.
INT. ANNA’S OFFICE – MOMENTS LATER

Anna looks up. Michelle enters, moving swiftly.

MICHELLE
I’d like a consultation.

Michelle goes straight to Anna’s Mac, calls up that pornographic animation. Anna looks confused by this.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
The creature sodomizing me... doesn’t he look like Kevin, a little?

She brings up an employee portrait of Kevin for comparison.

ANNA
A little around the eyes... Yes.

Michelle nods, feeling a surge of vindication.

INT. MICHELLE’S OFFICE -- NIGHT

Most of the lights in the suite are off. Michelle sits at her desk, antsy, fiddling with an e-cigarette as she watches a MAINTENANCE GUY empty a trash can. When he moves off, the last lights go out.

INT. AV OFFICES – TECH ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Michelle leaves the lights off as she crosses directly to Kevin’s work station. She moves collectible action figurines out of the way so she can access his keyboard. She pushes a master power button and immediately a LOUD HUM comes out of his speakers.

She quickly turns the volume down. Looks around to make sure no one’s been drawn by the sound. She hears nothing.

The laptop takes forever to boot up. When it finally does, Michelle enters a password. Another screen comes up. She clicks on a list of files. Scanning them, one name immediately jumps out at her: Ash.girl.mvk.

Michelle hesitates almost fearfully before she clicks on it.

The news photo of her as a child is the first that comes up but there others, some we saw in that TV broadcast. There are several photos of her father too. One where he’s posed with a gun. Another click and she sees the original sketch version of that animation of her being raped by the creature.
The LIGHTS COME ON. Michelle starts like a cat burglar caught in the act. It’s Kevin in the door.

KEVIN
Oh, I didn’t know it was you.

She holds her breath as he comes toward her. He sees what she’s looking at.

KEVIN (CONT’D)
You’re probably mad.

MICHELLE
At this moment, I’m mostly curious.

KEVIN
I guess I have to tell you.

MICHELLE
Yes, you do.

KEVIN
I was never going to show it to anyone. Phillip Kwan ripped the animation off my computer, converted it to an .MVK and sent it to everyone in the office.

MICHELLE
But you created it?

KEVIN
Yes.

MICHELLE
Why?

KEVIN (devastated)
Personal amusement... It started out as an idea for a game that incorporated true crime footage... then it got weird. But nobody would have seen it if it wasn’t for fucking Phillip Kwan- who deserves to be fired, if I’m getting fired.

Michelle looks at Kevin. Sizing him up.

MICHELLE
Take out your penis.

He thinks she’s joking.
MICHELLE (CONT’D)
Show me your penis and I might nor
fire you.

He’s abashed but he sees no choice. He unzips. Displays.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
I thought you were Jewish.

KEVIN
Well no.

MICHELLE
Put it away. The man I’m looking
for doesn’t have a foreskin.

Kevin is confused but happily puts his penis away.

KEVIN
Am I fired?

MICHELLE
I want every bit of this destroyed
and you’re going to sign a non-
disclosure agreement that I’ll
draft for you. Then we’ll see.

EXT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- TWILIGHT

Michelle gets out of her car. She’s surprised to see a
PACKAGE on her porch. She approaches it as if it were
something ominous but shows relief as she looks at the label.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Michelle uses scissors to open the package. She pulls out an
INFANT CAR SEAT. Rests it on the table. Looks at it with a
certain melancholy, thinking of Vincent and his baby.

She suddenly becomes aware she’s not alone...

She’s just turning around when a GLOVED HAND closes over her
mouth. The Intruder, wearing the same ski mask, throws her to
the ground. On her way down, she tips the table, sending all
kinds of things clattering. The scissors fall open on the
floor. The lamp winds up on its side, casting a weird,
noirish light over the struggle now taking place...

Michelle tries to twist around to see her attacker. He hits
her right in the jaw, climbs on top of her. He tears her
blouse, her bra. She screams to raise the dead.
He’s working on getting his pants down as Michelle’s desperately reaching hand brings a bookcase down on both of them.

The Intruder gets the worst of it. Michelle scrambles free but she doesn’t get far. He grabs her ankle, reels her in. He lifts her skirt. Tears her panties. Michelle kicks at him, blindly. He starts slapping her hard about the face as if punishing her for making this hard for him.

Michelle’s hand closes around the open scissors. She brings them up, just as the Intruder’s hand is coming down. The hand abruptly stops in mid-air – pierced clean through by one of the scissors’ blades. Now it’s his turn to scream.

Michelle seizes the moment to grip her attacker’s mask by the eyeholes and yank it off his face.

Patrick’s eyes are filled with tears of pain. Michelle raises up on her haunches, levelling the bloodied scissors at him.

MICHELLE
Get out of my house!

Patrick backs away in panic, holding his injured hand.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
Out! Get out!

Patrick looks, for just a second as if he wanted to say something. Instead, he just bolts for the door. Quaking, Michelle takes a moment to compose herself.

She moves to the window just in time to witness Patrick, running back across the icy street toward his house, slipping and taking a nasty fall. Michelle feels an absurd momentary reflex to go see if he’s okay.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - LATER

Michelle walks through the room, cleaning up the debris of the struggle. Her legs suddenly seem to go wobbly and she sinks to the floor. She sits there.

EXT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- MORNING

Michelle comes out to retrieve her newspaper from the driveway. She stops, seeing Patrick, like any suburban neighbor, comes out of his house with a thermos of coffee. She notes his bandaged hand. He sees her.
They briefly exchange looks but there is otherwise no acknowledgement of what’s passed between them as he gets in his car and drives away.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- NIGHT

The light of a TV flickers in the den. Michelle blankly watches the news, still in her party dress.

Michelle blankly watches the news, still in her party dress. Michelle sits up a little straighter as a still photo of her father appears behind the TV Anchor’s shoulder.

TV ANCHOR
Parole was again denied for mass murderer George Leblanc...

MICHELLE
Fuck you.

Michelle mutes the sound. The image cuts to a close-up of her father sitting sullenly, alone at his parole hearing.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
(trying different intonations)
Fuck you. Fuck you. Fuck you.

She turns off the TV. Gets up, moves to window. Looks across at Patrick’s house. The light of a TV flickers there too.

INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - STUDY - MOMENTS LATER

Michelle is on the phone. Her laptop open to the website of the GRATERFORD STATE PENITENTIARY.

MICHELLE (INTO PHONE)
Your website mentions visitors allowing two hours for admittance...is it better late in the day?

PRISON OFFICIAL
No, ma’am. All visitors for the day have to check in by 8:30 AM.

MICHELLE
So, it’s a mob scene?

PRISON OFFICIAL
It gets pretty crowded.
MICHELLE
Are there any days of the week that are better than others?

EXT. PRISON -- DAY
102
It’s snowing as Michelle drives up to the GRATERFORD STATE PENITENTIARY. Leftover Xmas decoration on the gate look odd against this grim institutional backdrop.

INT. PRISON -- DAY
103
More odd bits of Xmas kitsch “liven up” the visitor-processing area too. Michelle signs in. Before she even finds an empty orange plastic chair to sit in, a very solicitous Asst. Warden comes out to meet her.

ASST. WARDEN
Miss Leblanc? I’m Brent Jaffries, the assistant Warden. Can I get you anything? A cup of coffee?

MICHELLE
No. Thank you.

ASST. WARDEN
We can talk in my office, if you don’t mind? It’s just here...

He gestures the way. Michelle nods, follows.

MICHELLE
You should know I’m here just to spit in my father’s face. And I can’t promise I’m only speaking metaphorically.

ASST. WARDEN
People have all kinds of reasons.

MICHELLE
I’m here because I’ve given that bastard too much power over me. Shunning him, fearing him. All that wasted energy...

ASST. WARDEN
Miss Leblanc, your father is dead.

Michelle stops walking. She can’t believe it.
ASST. WARDEN (CONT’D)
Shortly before eight AM this morning, your father was found deceased in his cell.

MICHELLE
How...?

ASST. WARDEN
The incident is in the earliest stages of being investigated but it seems he was able to fashion a noose from his bedding and hanged himself.

MICHELLE
When...? When did this happen?

ASST. WARDEN
We only know it must have been between 10 PM and the early morning hours.

MICHELLE
Do you happen to know what time my father was notified that I was coming to see him?

ASST. WARDEN
(hesitant)
That would have been just before ten.

Michelle nods again, slowly.

104 INT. PRISON - MORGUE -- DAY

Michelle is led through a chilly storage room by the Asst. Warden and an ATTENDENT in blue surgical cover-alls.

ASST. WARDEN
Your mother made arrangements for your father to be cremated and installed in a vault next to one she’d selected for herself.

MICHELLE
She’s not there. She’s on my kitchen counter.

The Asst. Warden has no response. They arrive at a gurney with a human-shaped lump under a sheet.
MICHELLE (CONT’D)
I had a list of things I was going to say. Nine bullet points.

The Attendant looks to her. She nods she’s ready. He pulls back the sheet. Her father looks like a peaceful old man except for the lurid laceration around his throat. She studies him.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
He’d rather die than face me... I killed him by coming here.

105 INT. PRISON - MORGUE -- MOMENTS LATER

Michelle stands in the same place as the Attendant ferries the coffin away on a forklift. She signs a form the Asst. Warden hands her on a clipboard. The forklift has trouble making a turn. The cavernous space is filled with the BEEP-BEEP-BEEP of the lift backing up.

106 EXT. ROAD -- DAY

Driving back home in a blizzard, Michelle fiddles with the radio. Michelle’s phone RINGS. She doesn’t recognize the number displayed on the dash. She answers, hands-free.

MICHELLE
Yes?

REPORTER (O.S.)
Ms. Leblanc?

Michelle immediately regrets answering.

MICHELLE
Who is this?

REPORTER (O.S.)
My name’s Emilie Fontaine. I’m with the Parisien. I just wanted to ask if you had anything you wanted to say about your father’s passing...

MICHELLE
How did you get this number?

REPORTER (O.S.)
I realize this is an awkward time but I just wanted to give you the opportunity to go on record with your thoughts, feelings...?
MICHELLE
My thoughts and feelings...?

Michelle is distracted as, obscured by falling snow, a DEER darts across the highway. She cranks the wheel. The car goes into a SKID...

107 EXT. ROAD -- DAY

Michelle’s car CRASHES into a ditch. Winds up on its side.

108 INT. CAR -- DAY

Michelle sits stock-still, in shock, held into her seat against gravity by her seat belt. She only distantly registers that the reporter on the phone is still talking...

REPORTER (O.S.)
Anger, grief... relief, perhaps?

Michelle presses a button on the steering wheel to hang up. She reaches over with a trembling hand and turns off the radio. She’s distantly alarmed to see blood. She investigates and sees her leg is banged up pretty nicely by the buckled dashboard. She shakily presses a number on her phone.

ANNA (O.S.)
This is Anna. Please leave a...

Voice-mail. Michelle hangs up. She scrolls down to the next name on her phone’s contacts list. Richard. It rings. Rings some more. She hangs up. Looking around, something catches her eye. A yellow scrap of paper in the well of the passenger seat. The flyer regarding the new trash can policy on her block. She painfully stretches to pick it up.

There’s a black shoe-print on the flyer but Patrick’s phone number is still legible.

109 EXT. ROAD -- LATER

Rebecca’s car, a Honda Station wagon with a “St. Jude Pray & Protect Us” bumper sticker pulls up next to the wreck. Dutiful neighbor, Patrick gets out, bundled up, and goes to the frosted driver’s side window. Michelle rolls it down.

PATRICK
How are you feeling?

MICHELLE
How am I feeling?
PATRICK
Any symptoms? Dizziness...?

MICHELLE
(realizing what he meant)
Oh, no, I’m fine. I think... Except my leg.

Patrick leans in, evaluates the situation. He reaches in. She tenses a little as he puts his arm around her shoulder.

PATRICK
You can take off the seat belt now.

She does. He holds her. Starts to laboriously lift her out the window, ginger with his bandaged hand.

110 INT. PATRICK’S CAR -- TWILIGHT

Michelle’s in the passenger seat. Awkward silence, until—

PATRICK
You should probably go to the E.R.

MICHELLE
I don’t want any entanglements right now. I just want to go home. I’ll see my own doctor.

PATRICK
It’s your call.

111 EXT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Patrick gets out, comes around to help Michelle. She hesitates just a second, then lets him.

112 INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Patrick helps her onto the sofa.

PATRICK
You should let me look at it.

She just looks at him.

PATRICK (CONT’D)
I played soccer in high school.
MICHELLE
That’s the least surprising thing
I’ve ever heard.

PATRICK
I mean, I know a bit about leg
injuries. Senior year I tore up my
ACL. Spent a year with Orthopedic
surgeons.

Michelle assents with a little nod. Patrick bends down to
look at her leg. He lifts her skirt. It sticks in places
where blood has dried but he’s gentle.

PATRICK (CONT’D)
We better clean this, pronto.

113 INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - DEN -- MOMENTS LATER
Patrick tend to her bare, injured leg. Gently swabbing her
lacerations with disinfectant.

PATRICK
Looks to me like maybe a hairline

He starts wrapping her leg with an ace bandage. Michelle
studies him. She leans forward. He looks up.

MICHELLE
Why did you do it?

PATRICK
It was necessary.

He says this matter-of-factly and finishes with the bandage,
all business. He then takes his leave without another word.

114 EXT. MICHELLE’S MOTHER’S APARTMENT -- DAY
Fresh snow everywhere. Limping on a temporary cane, wearing a
bulky knee brace and carrying an empty cardboard box,
Michelle tackles the steep front steps.

115 INT. MICHELLE’S MOTHER’S APARTMENT -- DAY
Michelle limps in. Not wanting to spend a second longer here
than she has to, Michelle goes straight to a particular
cabinet. She puts the box on the floor and starts putting
things in it, mostly old pictures.
Rafe comes out of the back, hair mused, wearing boxer shorts and an inside-out white T-shirt. Shaking his head, upset.

RAFE
Oh no, Michelle. You can’t do this.

MICHELLE
What can’t I do?

RAFE
This. Just showing up, letting yourself in without ringing the bell.

MICHELLE
You know I have a key, Rafe. Why would I need to ring the bell? You don’t have to trouble yourself, I’m only here a minute.

RAFE
It’s not about how long you stay, Michelle.

MICHELLE
Don’t be unpleasant.

RAFE
No – I’m sorry, no. You have to go, right now.

MICHELLE
You realize I own this place, right?

RAFE
That may be but your mother invited me to stay here and while I’m here...

A completely naked BRUNETTE in her thirties emerges from behind Rafe. Rafe looks like a busted teenager. Michelle smiles. He gestures to the woman to go back where she was.

MICHELLE
Anyway, I’m selling it. That’s what I’m doing here.

Michelle reaches into her purse and produces a “FOR SALE” sticker. Rafe seethes impotently as Michelle hobbles over to the window looking out onto the street.

RAFE
I saw on the news your father died. One less evil fucker in the world.

Michelle carefully affixes the sticker to the window.
MICHELLE
You should start packing your bags.

Rafe snorts. Michelle collects her box from the floor—a
difficult procedure, juggling the cane at the same time.

RAFE
I’ve seen all the shows on TV.
About you and your dad, when you
killed all those people.

When she drops one of the photos, Rafe laughs so she can hear
it. Michelle ignores him, retrieves the photo with as much
dignity as she can.

RAFE (CONT’D)
I’ve seen all the old news photos.
All the bodies.

OR PERHAPS
I saw all these dead bodies, also
children...

Michelle has trouble with the door knob, juggling the cane
and the box tucked under her arm.

RAFE
Anyway, the sick bastard’s dead
now. At least, I fucked his wife.

Michelle makes it out the door without looking back.

116 EXT. MICHELLE’S MOTHER’S APARTMENT -- DAY

The steps are even more difficult coming down. Michelle’s
phone RINGS. She stops, juggles the box in order to answer.

ROBERT (O.S.)
Anna’s just got called away by the
London thing and I have a free
afternoon.

MICHELLE (INTO PHONE)
We said Wednesday.

ROBERT (O.S.)
But this is better. I can get a
room at the Lanai. They’ve got the
muffins you like...
MICHELLE (INTO PHONE)
Robert, I was going to call - I fractured my knee. My leg's in a temporary brace. I can barely walk.

ROBERT (O.S.)
What difference does it make, you can’t walk? We’re not going skiing.

His implacable logic leaves her speechless.

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

They’re pounding away on the bed. Or, rather, he is. Michelle lies beneath him in her braced leg, as silent and still as a corpse. Deliberately, ostentatiously frozen. Robert flips her over with some clumsiness - her body responding to his ministrations exactly like a lifeless dummy.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - BATHROOM -- LATER

Michelle scrubs with scented body wash as Robert, also nude, combs his hair and admires himself in the mirror.

ROBERT
You were incredible.

Michelle looks at him. Is he joking?

ROBERT (CONT’D)
I experienced some sensations I never felt before. Where’d you get the idea of playing dead?

Michelle starts getting dressed.

MICHELLE
Anyway, you see I’m good as my word. You got what you wanted.

ROBERT
I sure did... thank you.

MICHELLE
So, we can remain friends.

He nods, smiling. Michelle heads out, buttoning her blouse. At the door, she feels it’s prudent to stop and turn back.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
And “friends” means we’re not fucking anymore.
He nods. That’s clear. Now she can continue out.

119 INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- DAY
Michelle enters with the cardboard box of her mother’s things. She immediately senses something’s askew.

MICHELLE
Marty?

She puts down the box and hobbles around, looking for him.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
Marty!

She sees the pantry door ajar.

120 EXT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- DAY
Looking for Marty outside, Michelle soon finds him. Frozen to death. Looking like a Snow-Cat molded by a child’s mittens.

121 INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- DAY
Michelle brushes ice crystals out of the dead cat’s fur in front of her fireplace until the futility of her actions can’t be denied anymore.

122 EXT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- TWILIGHT
Bundled up, Michelle sits on her porch, holding the dead cat wrapped in a cloth. She stares at the Xmas tree standing among the garbage cans across the street. AN ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICER pulls up in a van. She reluctantly hands him over.

ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICER
Sorry for your loss.

He starts to leave.

MICHELLE
Aren’t there... aren’t there any forms to fill out?

ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICER
No, ma’am.

Michelle looks quietly devastated by that answer as the man departs with Marty’s body.
Michelle wearily heads upstairs. As she passes the guest bedroom, she does a double-take. There’s a MALE FORM, fully clothed, lying on top of the covers. It takes her a moment to realize who it is.

MICHELLE

Vincent?

The young man wakes, groggily.

VINCENT

Mom... hey?

MICHELLE

What are you doing? How long have you been here?

VINCENT

Huh? ...Um, a while I guess. Josie kicked me out.

MICHELLE

(with mixed feelings)

What happened?

VINCENT

I don’t know.

MICHELLE

You must know. She must have had a reason, however demented.

VINCENT

She had a reason. I lost my job.

MICHELLE

Lost...?

VINCENT

I resigned.

MICHELLE

You resigned?

VINCENT

I had to. My car broke down.

MICHELLE

You resigned from McDonald’s because your car broke down?
A sound startles and chills Michelle. A BABY’S CRYING.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
You brought the baby here?!!

Michelle now discovers the baby hidden behind pillows placed to keep him from rolling off the bed.

VINCENT
I had to!

MICHELLE
Why did you have to?

Vincent picks up the baby.

VINCENT
She was talking about going back to America and taking Lucien with her. I could tell she meant it!

Michelle shakes her head, taking it all in, as Vincent clumsily shoves a bottle in the baby’s mouth.

MICHELLE
I can’t believe I’m saying this but can’t you see Josie had a right to be angry? You have responsibilities— including a new apartment – and you quit your job?

VINCENT
You say it just like her. Like it was just despicable. It was maybe stupid but it wasn’t despicable.

Michelle looks struck by that. She softens.

MICHELLE
Vincent, you have to take him back, right now. You’re not married. This could be considered kidnapping.

VINCENT
Kidnapping? He’s my son! (off her look) HE’S MY SON!

MICHELLE
Alright...

VINCENT
Not “alright”...
There’s a FURIOUS KNOCKING downstairs.

MICHELLE
(sarcastically)
Who could that be?

She turns and heads down the stairs. She opens the front door and Josie bursts in, moving right past Michelle.

JOSIE
Where is he?

Vincent appears on the stairs. Michelle watches anxiously as Josie goes up the stairs toward him, tearing into him...

JOSIE (CONT’D)
Where’s my baby?
(not giving him a chance to answer)
Where’s my baby?!! Is he alright?
What did you do to him?

VINCENT
(confused)
What did I do to her?

JOSIE
I wouldn’t trust you to take care of a hamster! Fucking idiot.
Where’s my baby?!! Give him to me right fucking now! Now!

The baby’s cry alerts her to his location. She passes Vincent on the stairs. He grabs her wrist. Josie wheels on him.

JOSIE (CONT’D)
Get your hand off me. Get your hand off me, Get your hand off me...

MICHELLE
Vincent! Let her go.

He doesn’t immediately. A moment of unbearable suspense: Vincent looks ready to hit her... before he finally does let her go. She charges upstairs. He starts to go after her.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
Let her go.

Vincent looks at his mother like a helpless child. The baby’s CRYING stops. A moment later, Josie reappears, coming down the stairs, bouncing the baby in her arms.
VINCENT
Josie...

MICHELLE
Vincent, be quiet.

Josie walks right past him, to the front door. She stops.

JOSIE
I had to take the RER here.

Vincent starts plumbing his pockets. He’s not finding any change. Michelle crosses to her purse, takes out a twenty. She brings it to Josie, who glares at Vincent one last time and exits. Vincent’s eyes fill with tears. He tries to hide it. Michelle goes to him. Looking at him, something occurs to her.

MICHELLE
It was always about the baby, wasn’t it? He’s what you were in it for.

Vincent looks up, like his guilty secret had been found out.

VINCENT
I could be a good father, I know it.

Michelle touches his arm, tentative but tender.

MICHELLE
I’ll make mostaccioli for dinner.

124 INT. NATURALIA -- EVENING

Michelle browses. Vincent approaches with a bag of chips.

MICHELLE
Those are so full of salt.

Vincent looks disappointed, goes to put them back. Michelle pushes the cart around a corner. Just as she’s selecting a tomato sauce, she hears Vincent talking to someone in the aisle just vacated. She backs up to look. It’s Patrick. Vincent’s talking with him, like they were old friends. Seeing Michelle, Patrick’s smile tenses up a little.

PATRICK
Michelle, hey. How’s your knee?

MICHELLE
How’s your hand?
He glances self-consciously at the bandage on his hand. More uncomfortable now. He shrugs, not knowing what to say.

VINCENT
We were just talking about whether it matters if a chocolate chip cookie comes from Lithuania. I say it does.

PATRICK
I’m skeptical, I guess.

MICHELLE
I’m withholding judgement.

Michelle moves down the aisle, stopping right in front of Patrick. He wonders what she’s going to say. She reaches past him to take down a can of sauce. This makes him smile. Feeling more confident now-

PATRICK
Vincent says you guys haven’t eaten... Rebecca took off on a road trip with her parents and left me with like a metric ton of Lasagna I’ll never eat by myself. (gestures with wine) I was getting this to go with it.

VINCENT
Sounds good to me.

Michelle looks at Vincent, back at Patrick. She smiles. Sure.

125 INT. PATRICK’S HOUSE -- NIGHT 125

Michelle, Patrick and Vincent sit around a table, eating pasta. The wine is flowing.

MICHELLE
Where did Rebecca and her parents go?

PATRICK
They went to see the Pope in Santiago de Compostella. They’re driving. Insane if you ask me.

MICHELLE
The Le Quesnoy Family.
VINCENT
The Pope’s going to give mass at the cathedral. I have a hard time imagining him barefoot. It’s so weird to think he’s, like, a real person, with feet.

Patrick and Michelle both chuckle. Vincent grins big, the wine already having an effect. He reaches for the bottle.

MICHELLE
Careful there, sport.

Vincent gives an “aw, mom” look, fills his glass.

126 INT. PATRICK’S HOUSE - DEN -- LATER

Patrick brings in coffee. Vincent’s stretched out asleep on the sofa.

PATRICK
He’s out.

MICHELLE
His eyes were bigger than his liver.

Patrick smiles, sits down. Michelle takes off her shoes. He watches her flex her bare feet.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
The floor’s warm.

PATRICK
It’s a wood boiler. I installed it myself.

MICHELLE
Sounds like a job.

PATRICK
It was. It holds fifty liters. Works by inverted flame combustion.

MICHELLE
Inverted flame combustion? That sounds like a made-up thing.

PATRICK
Finally, something you don’t know.

She grins. He watches her. She sees the way he’s watching. Finally, as if it were some wild gambit, he adds-
PATRICK (CONT’D)
It’s in the basement.

MICHELLE
Of course it is.

PATRICK
Would you like to see it?


MICHELLE
Yes.

INT. PATRICK’S HOUSE - HALL -- MOMENTS LATER

Michelle follows Patrick to the basement doorway. He opens it, stands aside for her to down first. She hesitates. The wood boiler ROARS down there. The steps leading down are lit only by the flicker of its hellish firelight. Michelle looks at him and takes the first step down.

INT. PATRICK’S HOUSE - BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Michelle separates from and Patrick as they reach the bottom.

PATRICK
It’s loud but you can’t hear anything with the door closed.

She nods, understanding all the implications of that. She stares into the flames beyond the furnace’s grate.

MICHELLE
(to herself)
It’s just you and me now.

PATRICK
What?

She shakes her head. Turns to him. He grabs her wrist.

MICHELLE
No!

He doesn’t listen. He shoves her against the wall, hard, sticking his knee between her legs. She backs him off with a pelvic thrust.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
Vincent’s upstairs.
PATRICK
Yes, Vincent’s upstairs.

Patrick grabs her again, by the hair. She yowls. He shoves her to the floor, toppling a laundry basket. She slaps at him frantically as he climbs on top of her. She squirms and punches but he holds her down, rubbing himself against her. Suddenly, Michelle stops fighting. Plays dead. Patrick now inexplicably stops too. He climbs off her, looking by turns, frustrated, embarrassed, pouty. Michelle look at him.

PATRICK (CONT’D)
It doesn’t work like that. For me.
It has to be... like before.

She just looks at him. Patrick gets up to leave... But before he makes it to the stairs, Michelle suddenly attacks him. Pummeling him, as if spending all her frustration and rage on him. He turns around. She whacks him across the face. Now it’s on again. He shoves her down, banging the back of her head on the floor. As she continues to viciously, futilely fight back, he tears her bra and panties in the manner he’s done before and slips inside her.

It’s over pretty quickly. He rolls off, panting. Satisfied.

Michelle’s whole body convulses. Impossible to tell if its pleasure or sickness. A scream builds inside her, then explodes. She screams and screams. Harrowing howls of pain and primal release. The screams freak out Patrick a little. When the screams subsides, they turn into simple, purging tears. Patrick looks around uncomfortably. He reaches out to comfort her but his hand stops halfway there and retreats.

129 INT. PATRICK’S HOUSE - DEN - A SHORT TIME LATER

Michelle lays a gentle hand on Vincent’s shoulder, waking him. Michelle helps the groggy young man up. Patrick pitches in too.

130 EXT. PATRICK’S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Patrick sees them out. Michelle gives him a smile.

MICHELLE
Thank you for dinner.

PATRICK
Anytime.

Michelle nods to him and helps a wobbly Vincent back across the street. Patrick watches them the whole way.
INT. A-V OFFICES -- DAY

On screen: a winged, vampiric female creature emerges from a black chrysalis, screaming. The clip ends. Lights come on.

A small group gathered in front of the monitor applauds. Some high fives. Michelle finds Kurt and holds out her hand.

MICHELLE
Well done.

Kurt looks a little reluctant to accept her praise but he smiles and shakes her hand. As the group breaks up, Michelle approaches Anna - who seems preoccupied.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
I had an idea about Vincent. We could give him the job organizing the wrap party.

ANNA
That is a good idea.

MICHELLE
I know in the past I always shot down the idea of throwing Vincent make-work but now...

Anna closes the conference room door. This worries Michelle.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
What is it?

ANNA
Robert’s fucking someone.

MICHELLE
(completely cool)
You know that?

ANNA
I imagine I always knew abstractly.

MICHELLE
And now...?

ANNA
I smelled it. That sort of fruity body wash they use in hotels that are trying to be classy. When Robert travels, he usually stays in Motel sixes.
MICHELLE
That’s all.

ANNA
Then I smelled his underwear. I waited anxiously all day for him to take off his jockey shorts and when he finally did, I pounced on them. Sniffing. I was ashamed even before I did it.

Michelle looks at her friend with great understanding.

MICHELLE
Shame is too weak an emotion to prevent anything. Anything at all.

132 INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- EVENING
Michelle is in her new, cheap underwear, getting dressed for the party. She sees that the length of a blue dress fails to hide the bruises on her thighs, so she goes with a red one.

133 INT. A-V OFFICES -- NIGHT
PARTY MUSIC drifts from further in. An arriving Patrick, looking like he stepped out of a Sears catalogue, hands his coat to a girl at the improvised garderobe. He bumps into Richard who’s doing the same thing.

RICHARD
Hello. You’re becoming a fixture at these things.

PATRICK
Looks like it.

RICHARD
Your wife...?

PATRICK
She couldn’t make it.

RICHARD
(knowingly)
Ah.

PATRICK
Ah?

Richard shakes his head. Never mind.
RICHARD
We should have come together. We could’ve carpooled.

Heading in, they are met by Vincent, a little stiff in a too-tight suit but overflowing with bonhomie.

VINCENT
Pretty classy spread, huh? Did you see the candy dishes by the entrance? (noting Patrick)
Hey, how are you doing?

Vincent shakes Patrick’s hand, motions for them to follow.

VINCENT (CONT’D)
Right this way, monsieurs.

PATRICK
Are you the maitre d’ tonight?

VINCENT
My mother gave me the job of pretty much organizing the whole party.

RICHARD
I did notice the candy dishes. That’s a nice touch.

VINCENT
That was my idea!

Michelle, making the rounds, trades smiles with Anna who sits at a table with Kurt and Robert. She then sees Vincent leading in Richard and Patrick past tables where people are eating buffet-style and CONSOLES set up everywhere on which guests can play the demo level of “Nocturnus”.

As Michelle goes to meet them, Robert follows her with his eyes, ignoring whatever Anna’s saying to him. He glares and pounds Scotch, watching Michelle greet Patrick with a kiss.

Michelle hugs Richard, then nods to one of the game consoles.

MICHELLE
Want to give it a try?

PATRICK
I’m not really a game person.

MICHELLE
No?
Patrick looks a tad uncomfortable. Richard jumps at the chance to play.

VINCENT
There’s no wine on the table!

Vincent hastens to correct this. Patrick takes a seat at the table, across from Robert, not picking up on the vibes of jealousy coming off the other man.

At the bar, Vincent accosts the RED-VEST BARTENDER.

VINCENT (CONT’D)
A bottle of red.

BARTENDER
I was told to pour everything in glasses.

VINCENT
I want a bottle.

BARTENDER
I don’t know if I can do that.

VINCENT
What?

BARTENDER
I was given very specific instructions.

VINCENT
I need a bottle.

BARTENDER
I’m sorry.

VINCENT
I’m supposed to be in charge of this thing!

At the table, Michelle walks Richard through the game.

MICHELLE
Press X and up at the same time... very fast... faster.

He’s not fast enough. He dies. He curses as he re-spawns.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
Where’s Hélène? I think we’re past that, aren’t we?
RICHARD
I’m not sparing your feelings. She’s not with me because that’s over.

MICHELLE
(sincerely concerned)
What happened?

He dies again in the game. This time he stops playing.

RICHARD
We were laying in bed and I asked her which of my books was her favorite.

MICHELLE
Richard, why?

RICHARD
She said “Scent of Poplar.”

Michelle draws a blank. Richard smiles grimly.

RICHARD (CONT’D)
“Scent of Poplar” is a novel written by a Robert Casamayou.

MICHELLE
I didn’t even know there was another Jansen.

RICHARD
Apparently, he’s pretty good.

MICHELLE
(with sympathy)
Richard.

RICHARD
Poor Richard.

They share smiles and walk away from the console. Michelle places a hand on Kevin’s shoulder in passing. He stiffens as if he were under arrest.

MICHELLE
You should circulate.

KEVIN
I will!

He breathes again as Michelle smiles and moves on, bringing Richard to their table.
As she takes the seat next to him, Patrick is looking toward the bar where Vincent seems to be having heated words with the bartender.

MICHELLE
He’s a project in the early stages of development.

INT. AV OFFICES - TABLE -- LATER

Anna is proposing a toast...

ANNA
It looks like somehow, despite all our determined efforts, we have a success on our hands. There’s no explanation for it, except for the talent, brilliance and extreme dedication of everyone in this room. So all I can say is thank you... and, I guess, cheers.

Everybody drinks. Then people look at Michelle, excepting her to say something. Someone from the techies’ table shouts “speech.” Michelle rises with her glass.

MICHELLE
Ditto.

Laughter, drinking. Sitting back down, Michelle observes the body language of Anna with Robert: He’s holding court across the table, she’s trying not to be amused but he whispers in her ear and gets a smile out of her. The sight disturbs Michelle.

Vincent circles the table, juggling a tray of glasses of red wine, placing them in front of people, like a clumsy waiter.

INT. AV OFFICES -- LATER

People are dancing now. The music is LOUD. Patrick looks mortified by the idea of but he lets Michelle drag him out of his chair. He takes her in his arms and attempting to move to the music, but he dances as if he were constipated.

MICHELLE
It’s ok. It’s alright.

Patrick tries to loosen up his posture. Resting against her dance partner, Michelle sees Robert watching them. Seething. Like a pouting baby, Robert stalks over to one of the consoles and picks up a game controller.
Michelle looks the other way and sees Anna dutifully, joylessly playing hostess. To Patrick—

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
Excuse me.

Michelle goes over to Anna. Anna looks up, cheerfully. Michelle doesn’t give her a chance to say anything.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
It’s me. I’m the one Robert’s been fucking. I ended it but it happened.

Anna remains hard to read. There are no fireworks.

ANNA
How long?

MICHELLE
Half a year... Eight months.

Anna has tears in her eyes. She nods.

ANNA
Oh? That’s great. I really didn’t have a clue.

MICHELLE
I know.

Anna finds she has nothing to say. Before she can cry or do anything embarrassing, she walks away. Michelle feels a tremor. She looks toward Patrick. He motions: “let’s get out of here.” She raises a finger: “one moment,” then walks in the opposite direction.

She passes Robert sitting there with the game controller in his hands. He witnessed Anna walking away upset.

ROBERT
What did you do?

MICHELLE
I stopped lying.

Michelle keeps going. She tracks down Vincent who is smoking by a window with his tie loosened, looking down. She hands Vincent her car keys. He doesn’t understand.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
You can have the car. Patrick’s giving me a ride home.
VINCENT
People are leaving already?

MICHELLE
Vincent, everything’s gone beautifully. You can relax now. Go talk to Kevin, he’ll show you a demo of the new Western game he’s working on.

VINCENT
Is that cool?

Michelle nods. Of course.

136 INT. PATRICK’S CAR -- NIGHT

Michelle and Patrick drive in ominous silence. Michelle looks over at him, looks away. He seems to sense her glance and looks at her. More silence. Finally, ahead, Michelle sees her house come into view.

MICHELLE
It’s sick.

Patrick looks at her, not sure he heard her right.

PATRICK
What?

MICHELLE
It’s sick and wrong - what’s gone on between us. It’s diseased.

Patrick looks very uncomfortable with this conversation.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
I was in some kind of weird denial or... I don’t know what. But I’m seeing clearly now.

PATRICK
What are you seeing?

MICHELLE
You can’t possibly expect to get away with what you’ve done. Can you?

Patrick looks at her. Sizing her up.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
I’m going to do what I should have done the first day.
PATRICK
What do you mean?

MICHELLE
It’s not just me I have to think about. It’s your wife... Other women, possibly. God knows...

PATRICK
What do you mean, exactly?

MICHELLE
How many others are there? That you’ve done the same thing too?

The working of his jaw is the only sign of whatever’s going on inside Patrick.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
I’m going to the police. I won’t spare myself. I’m going to tell them everything.

He stops the car, right in the middle of the street. He looks at her, working his jaw. She looks him in the eyes, then she hits her door and gets out.

137 EXT. STREET -- NIGHT

Michelle walks toward her house, in the middle of the street, lit by the headlights of his loudly idling car. As if daring him to run her over. Only when she reaches her front walk does Michelle turn back, toward those sinister headlights.

She gives him a look. A silent: “well...?”

Patrick kills his motor. Now Michelle proceeds inside.

138 INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Michelle leaves the door unlocked behind her. She walks to the middle of the room, lets her jacket drop to the floor and stands there, waiting for him.

She watches the front door, excitement edging into impatience.

Patrick, however, appears out of the back hallway. Wearing his black ski-mask.

For a moment, they just stand there like that. Looking.
Then Michelle breaks for the door and Patrick rushes to intercept her. She shoves an ottoman at him. It hits his legs but only slows him down by a couple of seconds. Patrick grabs her before she gets to the door. Grabs her by the arm, twists her around and thumps her good, right in the face, sending her sprawling to the floor.

Michelle starts screaming—loudly—as Patrick falls on her, tearing at her clothes. He fumbles with his zipper. For a second, he has trouble. She sees this and, for just that moment, stops fighting back. Like a time-out. But a moment later, they’re back at it.

She fights back, tooth and nail. She sinks her teeth into the flesh above his wrist. He howls and hits her again. He rips away her cheap panties with one good yank.

She screams louder and louder as Patrick slides in between her legs...only stopping abruptly as she sees Vincent standing behind Patrick.

Patrick’s skull makes a loud CRACK as Vincent bludgeons him with a fireplace log. Before she can say boo.

Michelle kicks free of Patrick’s body as it collapses on top of her. BLOOD oozes through the ski mask like cream through a sieve. Vincent gawks in horror as Patrick, in dying, spasms. Pulling the tatters of her dress around her, Michelle’s first and only thought is to hurry Vincent out of the room, to shield him from the horror.

VINCENT
He’s... Is he...?

MICHELLE
It’s alright. You’re ok. I’m alright, everything’s alright.

Mother and son are both horrified as the masked figure now rises, slowly pulling himself to his feet. Michelle positions herself defensively in front of Vincent.

But Patrick doesn’t come toward them. He reaches up and pulls off his mask. Vincent is astonished to see who it is.

Patrick looks as if he we trying to frame a question as blood streams down one side of his face. He turns, looking for the door. He takes a half-step, then collapses. Almost a pratfall.

VINCENT
Is he dead?!

Patrick lies there, eyes open, blood spreading like a halo around his head, across the parquet floor. He is dead.
MICHELLE
It’s alright. It’s alright.

She puts her arms around her son. He holds onto her, sobbing.

139 INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM -- LATER

The home is a crime scene. AUTHORITIES surround the body, taking pictures, making notes. Michelle watches the activity from where she’s being questioned by a DETECTIVE.

DETECTIVE
What was your relationship with the deceased?

MICHELLE
He was my neighbor.

DETECTIVE
A neighbor...?

MICHELLE
A neighbor.

DETECTIVE
Like have a cup of coffee, borrow a lawnmower kind of neighbor?

MICHELLE
There was never any exchange of lawnmowers— but I get what you mean and, yes, generally, we were neighbors like that. Until, maybe, recently.

DETECTIVE
He had attended this party with you as a date?

MICHELLE
Yes.

DETECTIVE
You’re relationship had turned romantic?

Distracted, Michelle’s eyes are drawn to the crime scene.

MICHELLE
It was heading in that direction.

DETECTIVE
You returned together?
MICHELLE
I told him I wasn’t feeling well.
That’s why we left the party. He
dropped me off out front... I’m
sorry.

She needs a moment. She watches all the police activity.

MICHELLE (CONT’D)
I’ve been here before. There’s deja
vu and then there’s this.

A destroyed Vincent slumps on the couch, surrounded by
officers. One hands him a glass of water. He guzzles it.
Vincent notices the way the cop is looking at him. He doesn’t
recognize the look, at first.

COP
Don’t beat yourself up, son. The
truth is you deserve a goddamn
medal for what you did.

Vincent now recognizes the look: approval, admiration, even.
That sinks in. Slowly, he smiles. Michelle watches Vincent
from across the room.

MICHELLE
I went in, started to get undressed
...and he was there. This figure.
Standing there. Wearing a mask.

DETECTIVE
And did you have any clue that it
was your neighbor, Mr. Forrester?

Looking at Vincent, she knows what she has to do.

MICHELLE
Who could imagine such a thing?

140  INT. MICHELLE’S HOUSE -- DAY

Michelle walks through the house. Everything’s been
repainted. Where Patrick died, new carpeting. She opens a
window to light a cigarette.

She sees MOVING VANS across the street.
Michelle comes out of the house. Rebecca, wearing black, is there directing the movers. Her expression changes a little when she sees Michelle approaching. Uncertainty.

REBECCA
Michelle.

MICHELLE
You found a buyer?

REBECCA
I took a little bit of a hit but not bad. My realtor did a wonderful job - I can give you his name, if you like. If you ever...

MICHELLE
I’m not going anywhere.

Rebecca smiles, nods. A mover passes with a chair.

REBECCA
So much crap piles up.

Michelle smiles politely, briefly.

MICHELLE
I wanted you to know I’m very sorry for what you’ve been through.

REBECCA
I claim to have faith. What’s it for, if not to get through times like this... Patrick was a good man but he had a tortured soul.

Michelle nods again. She’s about to politely exit but Rebecca stops her, adding one more thing-

REBECCA (CONT’D)
I’m sincerely glad you were able to give him what he needed. For a while, anyway.

Michelle looks at Rebecca. The realization that this woman knows the truth of Patrick’s death chills her. Michelle nods to the vans.

MICHELLE
Good luck.

Rebecca nods back. Michelle leaves her.
Michelle puts flowers in front of her mother’s little vault built into an onyx wall. She pointedly ignores the unmarked vault next to it that contains her father. Vandals have already scrawled “monster” and “burn in hell” on that one.

Michelle turns and finds she’s not alone. Anna’s there.

**ANNA**
I heard you were here.

**MICHELLE**
Physically, anyway.

They stand silently side by side.

**ANNA**
We’re going ahead with Richard’s project?

**MICHELLE**
I’m going to let him fool around for a while... I expected him to throw my charity back in my face but he didn’t. Something’s gone out of him.

**ANNA**
Robert showed up drunk at the office this morning. Security escorted him out... What did you see in him anyway?

**MICHELLE**
It was more about happenstance, opportunity... I just wanted to get laid.

**ANNA**
That’s no excuse. It was very shabby.

**MICHELLE**
It was that and worse.

**ANNA**
Vincent’s grown up. It’s just the two of us now. And I’m stuck with that mausoleum of a house... I’m going to sell it... I was thinking I could move in with you, for a while.

Michelle looks at Anna, unsure of the implication.
MICHELLE

Oh.

END