

"Elle"

Written by David Birke

Based on the novel «Oh...» by Philippe Djian

1 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - HALLWAY -- DAY 1

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.

2 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER 2

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.

3 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - UPSTAIRS BATHROOM -- DAY 3

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

4 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - UPSTAIRS BATHROOM -- MOMENTS LATER 4

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.

5 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- BEDROOM -- DAY 5

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?"

6 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - ENTRYWAY -- DAY

6

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.

7 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- DEN -- LATER

7

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.

8 EXT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT 8

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

9 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - GARAGE -- NIGHT 9

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

10 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT 10

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.

11 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM -- LATER THAT NIGHT 11

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

12 INT. OFFICES OF A-V SOFTWARE -- DAY 12

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...

13 INT. A-V SOFTWARE - CONFERENCE ROOM -- DAY 13

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)

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

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.

14 INT. AV OFFICES - OUTER OFFICE -- DAY

14

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.

15 INT. A DOCTOR'S OFFICE -- DAY

15

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

16

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

17

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.

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.

19 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

19

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.

20 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- LATER THAT NIGHT 20

Michelle sits on her stairs, absently stroking Marty the cat,
staring at the entry hall where the rape took place.

21 FLASHBACK TO- INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- DAY 21

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.

22 BACK TO- INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT 22

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.

23 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - STUDY -- NIGHT 23

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.

24 INT. GUN SHOP -- DAY 24

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.

25 INT. GUN SHOP -- MOMENTS LATER 25

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

26 EXT. STREET -- DUSK 26

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.

27 INT. RESTAURANT -- DUSK 27

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.

29

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.

30

EXT. MCDONALD'S -- DAY

30

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.

31 INT. EMPTY APARTMENT -- DAY

31

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 book case. 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
(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)

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

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

32

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 Anguoulême 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

33

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

34 INT. MICHELLE'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

34

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.

35 INT. OUTER OFFICES - CONTINUOUS 35

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.

36 EXT. QUAI BESIDE THE SEINE -- DAY 36

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

No. Nothing really. Just looks from people on the street. The usual.

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

37

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

38

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.

39 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER 39

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.

40 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- LATER 40

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 41

Michelle grinds up sleeping pills and mixes them in a cup with some Chia seeds.

42 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - DEN -- NIGHT 42

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.

43 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - PANTRY -- MOMENTS LATER 43

Michelle carefully places the dead bird in a shoe box.

44 EXT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT 44

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.

45 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS 45

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.

46 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER 46

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.

47 EXT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER 47

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.

48 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT 48

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 jealousy 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.

49 EXT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

49

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.

50 INT. MICHELLE'S OFFICE -- DAY

50

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?

51 INTERCUT - INT. VINCENT APARTMENT/MICHELLE'S OFFICE -- DAY 51

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..

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.

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 photo-shopped 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?

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.

52 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,
 H  l  ne Zacharian.

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

53 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, H  l  ne, 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 H  l  ne, extending her arm for a handshake in an aggressive way that almost seems like an attack.

MICHELLE
H  l  ne?

H  L  NE
Yes.

Smiling uncertainly, she takes Michelle's hand.

MICHELLE
I'm Richard's ex. Michelle.

H  L  NE
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...

H  L  NE
For what?

MICHELLE
Your car window. I feel terrible...

H  L  NE
No, no- please. Richard explained it to me.

MICHELLE
Really? What was his explanation?

H  L  NE
(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. H  l  ne seems to pick up on the effort, making her a little uncomfortable.

H  L  NE
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.

54 INT. A-V OFFICES -- DAY 54

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.

55 INT. MICHELLE'S OFFICE -- DAY 55

Michelle's secretary sticks her head in.

SECRETARY

Vincent called. He was calling from Port Royal.

MICHELLE

The hospital?

56 INT. HOSPITAL -- DAY 56

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.

57

INT. HOSPITAL - VENDING MACHINES -- MOMENTS LATER

57

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!

58 INT. HOSPITAL - MATERNITY WARD -- DAY 58

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.

59 INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- DAY 59

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.

60 EXT. HOSPITAL -- NIGHT

60

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.

61 INT. MICHELLE'S CAR -- NIGHT

61

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.

PATRICK
 (smiles)
 Good to know.

62 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

62

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.

63 INT. A-V OFFICES -- DAY 63

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.

64 INT. AV OFFICES - OUTER OFFICES - LATER 64

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.

65 INT. AV OFFICES - TECH OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER 65

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?

66 INT. FIRING RANGE -- DAY

66

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.

67 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- TWILIGHT 67

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.

68 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - ATTIC -- TWILIGHT 68

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.

69 EXT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- TWILIGHT 69

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...

70 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

70

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.

71 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM -- LATER

71

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 H  l  ne.

H  L  NE

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 H  l  ne 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 H  l  ne, 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, H el ene, Patrick, Rebecca...

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

RAFE

Rafe.

She nods, smiling, then focuses on H el ene.

MICHELLE

God bless us one and all.

Everyone toasts. They go back to eating. H el ene 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.

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 H el ene.

MICHELLE

Richard is, first and foremost, a
theorist.

H el ene'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.

H EL ENE

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.

73 EXT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - LATER

73

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...

74 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

74

...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.

75

INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS

75

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.

76 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

76

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.

77

INT. AMBULANCE -- NIGHT

77

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.

78 INT. HOSPITAL -- DAY

78

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.

79

INT. ANNA'S HOUSE - BEDROOM -- NIGHT

79

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 H el ene?

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.

80 INT. ANNA'S BEDROOM -- MORNING

80

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.

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.

82 EXT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- TWILIGHT 82

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.

83 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS 83

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

84 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS 84

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.

85 EXT. COUNTRYSIDE -- DAY 85

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.

86 EXT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT 86

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...

87 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT 87

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.

88 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - ENTRYWAY -- NIGHT 88

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 shutter 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.

89 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALL/BEDROOM

89

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.

90 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - ATTIC -- NIGHT

90

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.

91 INT. AV OFFICES -- DAY

91

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?

92 INT. AV OFFICES - TECH ROOM -- DAY

92

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.

93 INT. ANNA'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

93

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.

94 INT. MICHELLE'S OFFICE -- NIGHT 94

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.

95 INT. AV OFFICES - TECH ROOM -- CONTINUOUS 95

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.

96 EXT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- TWILIGHT 96

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.

97 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT 97

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.

98 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - LATER 98

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.

99 EXT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- MORNING 99

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.

100 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- EVENING 100

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

101 INT. ANNA AND ROBERT'S HOUSE -- NIGHT 101

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.

MICHELLE

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 Vieve 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.

102 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

102

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 103

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 104

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 105

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.

106 INT. PRISON - MORGUE -- DAY 106

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.

107 INT. PRISON - MORGUE -- MOMENTS LATER 107

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.

108 EXT. ROAD -- DAY 108

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...

109 EXT. ROAD -- DAY 109

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

110 INT. CAR -- DAY 110

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 111

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 112

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.

113 EXT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT 113

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

114 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT 114

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.

115 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - DEN -- MOMENTS LATER 115

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.

116 EXT. MICHELLE'S MOTHER'S APARTMENT -- DAY 116

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.

117 INT. MICHELLE'S MOTHER'S APARTMENT -- DAY 117

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.

118 EXT. MICHELLE'S MOTHER'S APARTMENT -- DAY 118

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.

119 INT. HOTEL ROOM -- DAY 119

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.

120 INT. HOTEL ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER 120

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.

121 INT. HOTEL ROOM - BATHROOM -- LATER 121

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 122

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 123

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 124

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 125

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.

126 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- TWILIGHT

126

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 plumbng 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.

127 INT. NATURALIA -- EVENING

127

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.

128 INT. PATRICK'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

128

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.

129 INT. PATRICK'S HOUSE - DEN -- LATER

129

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?

A challenge. A dare.

MICHELLE
Yes.

130 INT. PATRICK'S HOUSE - HALL -- MOMENTS LATER 130

Michelle follows Patrick to the basement doorway. He opens it, stands aside for her to go 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 131

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.

132 INT. PATRICK'S HOUSE - DEN - A SHORT TIME LATER 132

Michelle lays a gentle hand on Vincent's shoulder, waking him. Michelle helps the groggy young man up. Patrick pitches in too.

133 EXT. PATRICK'S HOUSE -- NIGHT 133

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.

134 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- LATE NIGHT

134

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.

135 EXT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- NEAR DAWN 135

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.

136 INT. A BOUTIQUE -- DAY 136

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.

137 INT. A-V OFFICES -- DAY 137

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.

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.

139 INT. A-V OFFICES -- NIGHT

139

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 carpoled.

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.

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.

140 INT. AV OFFICES - TABLE -- LATER

140

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.

141 INT. AV OFFICES -- LATER

141

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

142

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.

143 EXT. STREET -- NIGHT 143

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.

144 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS 144

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.

145 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM -- LATER

145

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

146

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

147

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.

148 EXT. CEMETERY -- DAY

148

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)

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

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?"

6 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - ENTRYWAY -- DAY

6

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.

7 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- DEN -- LATER

7

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 MacDonal'd'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.

8 EXT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT 8

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

9 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - GARAGE -- NIGHT 9

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

10 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT 10

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.

11 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM -- LATER THAT NIGHT 11

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

12 INT. OFFICES OF A-V SOFTWARE -- DAY 12

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...

13 INT. A-V SOFTWARE - CONFERENCE ROOM -- DAY 13

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)

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

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.

14 INT. AV OFFICES - OUTER OFFICE -- DAY 14

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.

15 INT. A DOCTOR'S OFFICE -- DAY 15

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

16

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

17

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.

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.

19

INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

19

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.

20 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- LATER THAT NIGHT 20

Michelle sits on her stairs, absently stroking Marty the cat, staring at the entry hall where the rape took place.

21 FLASHBACK TO- INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- DAY 21

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.

22 BACK TO- INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT 22

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.

23 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - STUDY -- NIGHT 23

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.

24 INT. GUN SHOP -- DAY 24

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.

25 INT. GUN SHOP -- MOMENTS LATER 25

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

26 EXT. STREET -- DUSK

26

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.

27 INT. RESTAURANT -- DUSK

27

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.

29

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.

30

EXT. MCDONALD'S -- DAY

30

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.

31 INT. EMPTY APARTMENT -- DAY

31

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 book case. 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
(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)

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

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

32

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 Anguoulême 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 33

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

34 INT. MICHELLE'S OFFICE -- NIGHT 34

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.

35 INT. OUTER OFFICES - CONTINUOUS 35

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.

36 EXT. QUAI BESIDE THE SEINE -- DAY 36

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

No. Nothing really. Just looks from people on the street. The usual.

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 37

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 38

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.

39 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER 39

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.

40 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- LATER 40

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 41

Michelle grinds up sleeping pills and mixes them in a cup with some Chia seeds.

42 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - DEN -- NIGHT 42

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.

43 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - PANTRY -- MOMENTS LATER 43

Michelle carefully places the dead bird in a shoe box.

44 EXT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT 44

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.

45 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS 45

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.

46 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER 46

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.

47 EXT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER 47

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.

48 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT 48

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 H  l  ne.

MICHELLE
H  l  ne?

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 jealousy 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.

49 EXT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

49

Michelle sends a still-partially blinded Richard home in a TAXI. As soon as he's gone, she makes a bee-line for H  l  ne'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.

50 INT. MICHELLE'S OFFICE -- DAY

50

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?

51 INTERCUT - INT. VINCENT APARTMENT/MICHELLE'S OFFICE -- DAY 51

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..

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.

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 photo-shopped 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?

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.

52 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?

53 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 H  l  ne, extending her arm for a handshake in an aggressive way that almost seems like an attack.

MICHELLE

H  l  ne?

H  L  NE

Yes.

Smiling uncertainly, she takes Michelle's hand.

MICHELLE

I'm Richard's ex. Michelle.

H  L  NE

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...

H  L  NE

For what?

MICHELLE

Your car window. I feel terrible...

H  L  NE

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

MICHELLE

Really? What was his explanation?

H  L  NE

(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. H  l  ne seems to pick up on the effort, making her a little uncomfortable.

H  L  NE

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.

54 INT. A-V OFFICES -- DAY 54

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.

55 INT. MICHELLE'S OFFICE -- DAY 55

Michelle's secretary sticks her head in.

SECRETARY

Vincent called. He was calling from Port Royal.

MICHELLE

The hospital?

56 INT. HOSPITAL -- DAY 56

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.

57

INT. HOSPITAL - VENDING MACHINES -- MOMENTS LATER

57

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!

58 INT. HOSPITAL - MATERNITY WARD -- DAY

58

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.

59 INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- DAY

59

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.

60

EXT. HOSPITAL -- NIGHT

60

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.

61

INT. MICHELLE'S CAR -- NIGHT

61

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 goodybye 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.

62 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

62

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.

63 INT. A-V OFFICES -- DAY 63

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.

64 INT. AV OFFICES - OUTER OFFICES - LATER 64

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.

65 INT. AV OFFICES - TECH OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER 65

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?

66 INT. FIRING RANGE -- DAY

66

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.

67 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- TWILIGHT 67
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.

68 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - ATTIC -- TWILIGHT 68
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.

69 EXT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- TWILIGHT 69
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...

70 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

70

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)

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.

71 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM -- LATER

71

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.

72

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

72

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.

73

EXT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - LATER

73

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 H el ene, coats in hand, getting ready to go. She quickly puts out her cigarette...

74

INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

74

...and comes back inside to see Richard and H el ene off.

MICHELLE

Taking off already?

H EL ENE

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.

75

INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS

75

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.

76

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

76

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.

77

INT. AMBULANCE -- NIGHT

77

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.

78 INT. HOSPITAL -- DAY

78

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.

79

INT. ANNA'S HOUSE - BEDROOM -- NIGHT

79

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 H el ene?

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.

80

INT. ANNA'S BEDROOM -- MORNING

80

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.

81 INT. HOSPITAL -- DAY

81

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)

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

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.

82

EXT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- TWILIGHT

82

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.

83 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS 83

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

84 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS 84

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.

85 EXT. COUNTRYSIDE -- DAY 85

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.

86 EXT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT 86

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...

87 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT 87

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.

88 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - ENTRYWAY -- NIGHT 88

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 shutter 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.

89

INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALL/BEDROOM

89

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.

90 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - ATTIC -- NIGHT

90

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.

91 INT. AV OFFICES -- DAY

91

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)

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

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?

92

INT. AV OFFICES - TECH ROOM -- DAY

92

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.

93 INT. ANNA'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER 93

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.

94 INT. MICHELLE'S OFFICE -- NIGHT 94

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.

95 INT. AV OFFICES - TECH ROOM -- CONTINUOUS 95

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 not
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.

96 EXT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- TWILIGHT

96

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.

97 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

97

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.

98 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - LATER

98

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.

99 EXT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- MORNING

99

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.

100 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

100

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.

101 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE - STUDY - MOMENTS LATER

101

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?

102 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.

103 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

104

Michelle is led through a chilly storage room by the Asst.
 Warden and an ATTENDANT 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 105

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 106

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 107

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

108 INT. CAR -- DAY 108

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 109

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 110

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 111

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

112 INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT 112

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 113

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.

114 EXT. MICHELLE'S MOTHER'S APARTMENT -- DAY 114

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 115

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.

116

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

116

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.

117 INT. HOTEL ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER 117

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.

118 INT. HOTEL ROOM - BATHROOM -- LATER 118

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 119

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 120

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 121

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 122

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.

123

INT. MICHELLE'S HOUSE -- TWILIGHT

123

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

124

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

126

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?

A challenge. A dare.

MICHELLE
Yes.

127 INT. PATRICK'S HOUSE - HALL -- MOMENTS LATER 127

Michelle follows Patrick to the basement doorway. He opens it, stands aside for her to go 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.

128 INT. PATRICK'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS 128

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 129

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 130

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.

131 INT. A-V OFFICES -- DAY

131

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 132

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 133

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 carpoled.

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.

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.

134 INT. AV OFFICES - TABLE -- LATER

134

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.

135 INT. AV OFFICES -- LATER

135

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

136

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

137

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

138

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

139

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

140

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.

141 EXT. MICHELLE HOUSE -- DAY

141

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.

142 EXT. CEMETERY -- DAY

142

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.

Oh. MICHELLE

END