

Tracking Dylan

INT. CLUB CHARLES – NIGHT

A gigantic paper mache dragon spewing flames is suspended from the ceiling in a cloud of cigarette smoke several feet above a sea of heads.

An art deco jukebox blares alternative rock for an artsy Saturday night CROWD.

MICHELE, a pretty, fresh-faced 26 year old, sits at a bar lined with ponytailed MEN in black leather jackets and hip/mod WOMEN with kohl-lined eyes. Nervously, she sips at a glass of wine as her simple, backless sundress attracts stares of interest.

Her gaze, however, is focused on DYLAN, mid 30's, a rangy artist with broad shoulders, long hair, and nerdy-looking glasses. Sketching absorbedly, he is seated beside her and oblivious of her presence.

In the long mirror behind the bar, she tries to catch a glimpse of his razor stubbled face, as he draws.

Finally, Michele takes a slow, deep breath and turns to Dylan.

MICHELE

Can I see?

Dylan swivels toward her, nervously stroking his goatee-ish whiskers. He is attractive in a craggy sort of way. He holds up the sketch, a detailed replica of the dragon hanging above their heads. Except his dragon is puffing away on a cigarette.

MICHELE

(laughs)

Trying to quit, huh?

Smiling sheepishly, Dylan pulls out a silver cigarette case. He snaps open the case, tosses a cigarette up into the air, and catches it between his lips.

DYLAN

Nope. I love to smoke. With a passion.

She picks up the cigarette case, examining his brand of cigarettes.

MICHELE

Gitanes. French, right?

He nods.

DYLAN

I'm addicted to them. Which is a pain. Because they're hard to come by.

MICHELE

I don't think I've seen you in here before.

DYLAN

That's because I'm a very busy man.

MICHELE

Doing what? Flying to France to buy fancy cigarettes?

DYLAN

Occasionally.

Dylan's eyes hidden behind his glasses give him an introverted appearance. He doesn't look like an easy person to get to know.

MICHELE

Let me guess, you're a heavy metal drummer, spoiled rotten with groupies, champagne, and caviar?

DYLAN

Yeah. Me and Axl Rose, we just get up every day, have our bowl of Lithium for breakfast, smoke fancy cigarettes, and rock out.

MICHELE

Sounds like a great life.

DYLAN

No, seriously I'm an artist, a painter. I teach over at MICA.

MICHELE

That's cool.

DYLAN

What about you?

MICHELE

Guess.

Dylan studies her face.

DYLAN

A school teacher?

MICHELE

(amused)

You say that like I wear a bonnet and teach in a one room schoolhouse.

DYLAN

Well don't you, Miss Caroline?

MICHELE

I'm a writer, for your information.

DYLAN

(inhaling her fragrance)

You even smell sweet, like a crisp apple on a Fall day.

MICHELE

That's my appletini.

He draws closer. His warm lips skim her bare neck, as he basks in the scent of her. A little unnerved, she rolls her eyes at him.

MICHELE

If you're going to keep sniffing me, you should probably introduce yourself.

DYLAN

Okay. Hi. I'm Dylan.

MICHELE

I'm Michele.

Freshly showered, with her wet hair twirled in a towel, Michele ransacks her mother's closet. Clad in a slip, she flips from one dress to another.

MICHELE

Too flowery

(flip)

Too gawdy.

(flip)

Too prim.

(flip)

Too many bows.

(flip)

MOM!! I NEED SOME HELP!!

LINDA emerges from a bathroom, manically brushing her teeth. She has cold cream slathered all over her face and wears a Baltimore City police uniform minus the tie and with the shirt unbuttoned halfway. At 44, she is starting to thicken a bit around the middle, but she is still pert and fit.

LINDA

I said you could borrow a dress. I didn't say
I was gonna pick it out for you.

Michele gestures despairingly at her mother's closet.

MICHELE

But Dylan's gonna pick me up in half an hour!
And I can't wear any of this frou-frou crap!

LINDA

Well my date's gonna be here in *fifteen minutes!*

MICHELE

What are *you* wearing?

Linda yanks a dress up off the bed. A simple sexy black number.

MICHELE

Damn, Mom! That's perfect! Don't you have
anything else like that?

An exasperated sigh from Linda who tosses her the black dress.

MICHELE

I love you!

Michele struggles into the dress, as Linda scampers back into the bathroom to rinse her mouth and face.

Flinging the towel on her head to the floor, Michele snatches up a blow-drier, turns it on HIGH. A hurricane of hot air rips through her hair.

MICHELE

MOM, I NEED SOME PANTYHOSE!

Linda returns, minus the cold cream. She yanks open a drawer, tosses a balled up pair of nylons to Michele, then heads back to the bathroom. But-

MICHELE

Heels, too. Please!

Glaring at her, Linda marches to a closet to find a pair. She hands over some black pumps.

MICHELE

Thanks, Mom!

Next Linda pulls down a red shoebox and sets it on the bed.

LINDA

And I want you to take this with you, too.

Excitedly, Michele flips the lid off. Her eager fingers forage through tissue paper, but recoil just as quickly when they meet the cold hard steel of a small handgun.

MICHELE

Jesus Christ, Mom. I'm going on a date.
Not to Bosnia.

Linda loads the gun with bullets.

LINDA

Well it's a first date. You don't know anything
about this guy. You met him in a bar.

MICHELE

He's an artist, not a serial killer.

Undeterred, Linda packs the loaded gun into Michele's purse.

LINDA

This is 1990. Date rape drugs. Sickos and psychos
in preppie clothing. I put the latch on safety.

But Michele returns the gun to its red box.

MICHELE

Nothing's going to happen to me tonight.
Except dinner and some polite conversation.

Just as adamantly, Linda picks up the red box and anchors it in Michele's hands.

LINDA

I meant to give this to you weeks ago. A young lady
living by herself shouldn't be without one. The sick
things I see every day, you don't wanna know about it...

MICHELE

Okay, you win. I'll keep it at my apartment
if it'll make you feel better.

Michele hugs her mother.

LINDA

Have a good time tonight, honey.

MICHELE

(with ironic humor)

I will, Mom.

INT. RESTAURANT – NIGHT

Dylan and Michele are seated in a fancy Afghanistani dining room. WAITERS, dark-skinned and sleek, glide over wooden floors burnished to a shine. Above the din of eating and whispering, some foreign music plays.

Sumptuous heaps of lamb served over brown rice with slivers of sweet carrots steam on identical white plates. Dylan and Michele eat with relish.

MICHELE

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I've never eaten Afghanistani food before.

DYLAN

You've never eaten lamb?

MICHELE

(shaking her head)

Frozen foods were a big part of my childhood. Growing up with my mom was sort of like hurtling through outer space on a Nasa rocket. Hurry to Day Care. Hurry to school. Hurry to work.

DYLAN

(amused)

What does your mom do?

MICHELE

She's a cop.

DYLAN

(impressed)

Really.

(pours them more wine)

What about your father?

MICHELE

He walked out on us when I was five.

DYLAN

Why?

MICHELE

My mom said he just couldn't handle the responsibility.

DYLAN

Do you remember him?

MICHELE

He was a poet. A handsome cad. Dirt poor. Drank way too much. But he was funny. At bedtime, he'd write limericks for me, and we'd laugh ourselves silly.

DYLAN

Sounds like you really loved him.

MICHELE

I did. I always hoped he'd come back. But that didn't happen.

DYLAN

That must have been hard.

MICHELE

Me and my mom got through it together.
What about you? What are your parents like?

DYLAN

I was adopted.

MICHELE

Do you know anything about your real parents?

Dylan shakes his head.

DYLAN

As far as I'm concerned, my adopted parents are my real parents.

MICHELE

Do they live in Baltimore?

DYLAN

About two miles from my studio downtown.

MICHELE

What kind of painting do you do?

DYLAN

Mostly abstract. Some expressionist stuff.

MICHELE

Nothing realistic?

DYLAN

What would be the point?

MICHELE

Okay then.

She glances out a side window.

MICHELE

Hey. It's snowing!

Dylan looks, too. Huge, beautiful flakes tumble with soothing monotony past their curtained window.

DYLAN

Snow in April. Baltimore weather is unbelievable.

A smiling Dylan and Michele watch the lazy snow flutter and fall, their eyes as wide as children's.

EXT. ROWHOUSE – NIGHT

Dylan and Michele stand facing each other on the cement stoop of Michele's apartment. It's still snowing. Their breaths come in smoky white puffs.

MICHELE

Do I still smell like an apple?

DYLAN

Yes, you do.

He leans forward then, gracefully lowers his head, and kisses her. Several soft, sweet kisses. Then he pulls deliberately back, to leave her wanting more.

DYLAN

So when am I going to see you again?

INT. GILMAN HALL/ JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY – DAY

In room 223, a bearded PROFESSOR DANIELS, already tenured at age 45 and with numerous bestsellers under his belt, struts to the head of his class of WRITING STUDENTS.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

If you aren't submitting your stories for

PROFESSOR DANIELS (cont)

publication, I want you to begin doing so. Get used to rejection.

He hauls up a briefcase, opens it, releasing a deluge of form rejection slips.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

314 rejection slips. All mine. All before I received my first acceptance letter from the Paris Review.

Some nervous laughter.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

Anyone who hasn't published a story by the end of the semester cannot earn an A in this class.

Simultaneous groans, as Michele's hand shoots up.

MICHELE

Excuse me, Professor Daniels. But I don't think the emphasis here should shift from learning to write quality prose, which takes time, to rushing to publish whatever we have laying around, chasing a grade.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

Have you published a story yet, Miss Braddock?

MICHELE

(red-faced)

No, sir.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

Get busy then. Because this is my classroom. And I run it the way I please.

EXT. JOHNS HOPKINS CAMPUS – DAY

Arms loaded with textbooks, Michele hurries past a group of DEMONSTRATING STUDENTS. Some of their cardboard signs declare: PROSECUTE CONTRA KILLERS IN HONDURAS! CIA: WE WANT THE TRUTH!, PUT REAGAN ON TRIAL!, and JAIL OLLIE NORTH!

Several of the demonstrators are DARK-SKINNED STUDENTS FROM HONDURAS. OTHERS are concerned AMERICAN YOUTH.

STUDENTS
(chanting)
PROSECUTE CONTRA KILLERS! JAIL OLIVER NORTH!

A handsome and earnest young man, FRANSISCO, born 25 years ago in Honduras, plants himself in Michele's path. He speaks with a slight accent.

FRANSISCO
Excuse me, Miss. Are you aware that President Reagan and the CIA are responsible for backing death squads in Honduras who have killed hundreds of innocent men, women, and children?

MICHELE
No. But I'm in a hurry right now, so-

He thrusts a flier in her face.

FRANSISCO
You must read this.

An annoyed Michele takes the flier, stuffs it into her pocket, and strides off.

Francisco tosses her a disgusted look. But then determinedly he accosts another PASSING STUDENT.

INT. MICHELE'S APARTMENT – DAY

Michele drops her books on her messy bed. Seeing the blinking red dot on her answering machine, she dashes to answer it and presses play.

LINDA'S VOICE
Hi, it's just Mom. I'm calling to see if that bum Dylan called you yet. But if not, don't worry, there are plenty of other fishies in the sea...

Michele waits expectantly for the next message.

DYLAN'S VOICE

Sorry it's taken me a week to get back to you, Michele. I've been slaving over some paintings, and I got sort of engrossed...If you'd be interested in getting together on Friday night, give me a call at 234-0987.

MICHELE

Yes!

INT. BOWLING ALLEY – NIGHT

A ten pin bowling ball roars down the center of a bowling lane, then veers off left, sliding into the gutter.

Mutely, tongue in cheek, Dylan stands glaring at all of his ten pins, still defiantly standing.

Michele pats him sympathetically on his back. Then, with perfect execution, she releases her ball, sending it flying sideways, a curve ball that swings back around, smashing the pins dead center, and leaving just an empty space.

MICHELE

Strike one!

Groaning, Dylan records her score. Glumly he watches as the pins are reset.

DYLAN

Where did you learn to bowl like that?

Michele aims her ball.

MICHELE

My mom plays on a league. She used to drag me every Tuesday and Thursday nights when I was a kid.

As the pins explode apart again, she whirls around with an enormous grin.

MICHELE

Strike two!

DYLAN

Goddamn.

INT. DYLAN'S CAR – NIGHT

In the front seat, Dylan and Michele drown in each other's kisses. Their eager hands rake through each other's hair, clutch shoulders, roam down backs, and squeeze thighs.

They neck, twist, and roll with sheer abandon, until Dylan slips off the vinyl seat of his restored 1950's Mercury with tailfins (as roomy as a boat) onto the floor. A tangle of long arms and legs, he smirks up at Michele like a teenager with his glasses askew.

Laughing, she helps haul him back up.

INT. HOPKINS BOOKSTORE – DAY

Wearing a Hopkin's t-shirt with her name printed on a plastic nametag, Michele rings up several textbooks for an OBESE STUDENT.

MICHELE

Eighty-two dollars and seventy-five cents.

The obese student pays, then lumbers off, revealing Dylan next in line.

DYLAN

Pack a smokes, please.

MICHELE

I'm sorry, sir. We don't carry Gitanes here.

DYLAN

Why not?

MICHELE

(shrugging)

You'll have to take it up with the Surgeon General.

DYLAN

Then how about a kiss to ease my cravings?

Heedless of some watching students, Michele locks lips with Dylan in a juicy and sensual display.

DYLAN
How much for that?

MICHELE
For you, no charge.

DYLAN
See you tonight then.

MICHELE
(charmed)
Okay. Bye.

The next student, a GEEKY YOUNG MAN, steps up in line.

GEEK
Pack a smokes, please.

INT. DYLAN'S LIVINGROOM - NIGHT

On a TV screen, Charlie Chaplin is trapped in a giant machine between some enormous cogs and sprockets. He tries squirming an inch forward, but he can't move. He tries scooting backwards, but he remains lodged. He wriggles with a silent grimace.

Simultaneously, a woman's faint moans of pleasure echo throughout the room.

The camera pans to reveal Michele sprawled on a nearby sofa with Dylan nestled on top of her. The buttons of her blouse are open to her navel, revealing the pale globes of her lovely breasts.

With an ice cube, Dylan traces first one nipple and then the other, as she arches her back with delirium.

Then he brings the ice to her kiss swollen lips, tracing their outline. She nibbles and sucks at the melting ice and at his fingertips. Passionately, he mashes his lips against hers.

His hand cruises down her bare stomach, eager fingers yanking at the buttons of her jeans. But her hand closes over his, gently pushing it away.

MICHELE
Slow down, okay.

Dylan stops. His eyes search her face. He sees that she is serious. A soft exhale of disappointment deflates his body.

DYLAN

Okay.

(sitting up)

I'm going to walk out on the porch and get some fresh air.

He gives her a quick peck on the cheek, then strides out the front door with his pack of Gitanes.

A flushed and disheveled Michele starts refastening the buttons on her blouse.

INT. LINDA'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Michele and Linda share a Sunday breakfast: stacks of pancakes, link sausages, eggs, orange juice, etc...Linda has on her reading glasses, scanning the front page of the Baltimore Sun.

MICHELE

I miss Sunday breakfasts with you.

LINDA

It was your idea to move out.

MICHELE

So how are things with what's-his-name?
The doctor?

LINDA

Doctor Mitchell.

MICHELE

Yeah.

LINDA

Things were rolling right along until we slept together.

MICHELE

What's the problem?

Linda holds up a small sausage.

LINDA

He's got a pecker no bigger than this sausage.

Flabbergasted, Michele's mouth drops open.

LINDA

And what he does have, he doesn't know what to do with it.

Cracking up laughing, Michele sprays food across the table.

MICHELE

God, Mom!

Linda hands her a napkin.

LINDA

(also laughing)

You got food on my glasses.

She wipes at one lense with another napkin.

MICHELE

Have some mercy on the poor guy.

LINDA

At my age, I want a man who knows what he's doing. I've had enough bumblers and fumlbers to last me a lifetime.

(sipping coffee)

So how's things with Dylan?

MICHELE

You mean have I slept with him yet?

LINDA

Have you?

MICHELE

No.

LINDA
But you're going to?

MICHELE
Probably.

LINDA
You're still on the pill, right?

MICHELE
Yeah.

LINDA
Good.
(donning her glasses)
So how is he?

MICHELE
Fine.

Linda gives her daughter a look from under her glasses.

LINDA
No, I mean, how *is* he?

A blushing Michele grins, nodding enthusiastically.

MICHELE
Definitely not a bumbler.

INT. GILMAN HALL/ROOM 223 – DAY

Professor Daniels straddles the edge of his desk, swinging one leg gleefully. He holds up a slip of paper in his hand and beams down at it.

PROFESSOR DANIELS
Some good news today. One of your classmates has had a short story selected for publication in The Georgia Review.

The class peers curiously around at each other, wondering who it is.

PROFESSOR DANIELS
Abraham Taylor, please stand up.

The geek from the bookstore shuffles to his feet. He's a little embarrassed to be singled out, but proud.

PROFESSOR DANIELS
Congratulations, Abraham. Well done.

Professor Daniels gives him a hand, and the class joins in. Then Professor Daniels strolls nonchalantly over to Michele's seat.

PROFESSOR DANIELS
Any luck yet, Miss Braddock?

MICHELE
No, sir.

PROFESSOR DANIELS
Better get moving then. You've only got eight weeks left.

As Professor Daniels passes by, Michele grits her teeth.

EXT. HOPKINS CAMPUS – DAY

Michele strides towards the bookstore. But she sees the same group of demonstrating students from before up ahead. So she pivots on her heels, changing direction and colliding right into Francisco who thrusts another flier at her.

FRANCISCO
Meeting tonight. We'll be discussing the United States' political role in Central America.

Patiently he waits for her to take the flier. But she doesn't.

MICHELE
No thanks. Not interested.

She tries to walk around him, but he blocks her path.

FRANCISCO

It's exactly that kind of apathetic mentality
that fosters genocide and-

MICHELE

(equally in his face)

Look, I've had a really shitty day. And I'm late
for work. So just bug off.

She stalks away, as he glares after her.

FRANCISCO

Well I'm sorry to hear that! But you don't have
to be such a bitch about it!

INT. BEDROOM – EVENING

In the center of her bed, Michele sits, deluged with pages of her stories that she is stapling together.

When the phone shrills, she yanks it up, answering with a gruff tone.

MICHELE

Hello...oh, hey, Dylan....Sorry. I'm just really stressed
out right now. If I don't publish a story in the next eight
weeks, I'm gonna get a B in my writing class. And I know
that globally this has little significance. But my writing
professor is such an asshole and-

(pause)

Yes, I could definitely use some help.

INT. SAME BEDROOM – AN HOUR LATER

Stacks of yellow envelopes and stories cover Michele's floor. In the midst of this chaos, Dylan and Michele sit with a mostly drunk six pack of Amstel Light. They stuff more stories into envelopes, lick stamps, and fasten clasps.

DYLAN

Next time get the stick-on stamps.

MICHELE

Right.

He picks up a story.

DYLAN

What's this one about?

MICHELE

It's about a little boy whose parents are heroin addicts.

DYLAN

Is it based on something real?

Gently he twines his fingers through her hair and massages her neck.

MICHELE

In the Summertime, I sit outside on my front stoop at night. And you'd be surprised the stories you see happening all around you.

He nibbles at her ear, darting his wet tongue into the crevices.

DYLAN

Sounds fascinating.

MICHELE

(enjoying it)

You're not even listening to me.

DYLAN

Yes, I am.

(drowns her mouth in hot kisses)

you said-

(more kisses)

something about-

(more kisses)

sitting outside-

(more kisses)

on a stoop-

(more kisses)

in the Summer-

Suddenly Dylan stops kissing her.

DYLAN

Let's take a break.

MICHELE

A little siesta?

DYLAN

Yeah. I'm beat.

Dylan flips off the light, and they crawl into bed together. It is not yet dark outside. From an open window, a beautiful lavender twilight bathes the room. Dylan and Michele lay side by side, facing each other. Michele closes her eyes, relaxing. But Dylan has other ideas. Soft as a feather, his hand grazes her back, hovering just fractions above her spaghetti-strap shirt. He works his way down, lingering on the small of her back, before venturing lower.

When his hand glides over her shorts clad ass, his fingertips flutter slightly, teasing her with his expert touch. As his warm fingers caress the smooth skin at the tops of her thighs, she smiles, moaning faintly with pleasure. But when his fingers glide beneath the hem of her shorts, brazenly caressing her ass, she opens her eyes to find him staring intensely at her. They lock eyes, and she laughs, clearly enjoying this seduction.

Then, in one swift movement, he rolls on top of her, pressing the full weight of his body along the length of hers. Ardently, he kisses her neck, while simultaneously unhooking her bra and reaching around to scoop up her soft breast. Like hot candle wax, their bodies melt together.

INT. LINDA'S KITCHEN – DAY/ONE MONTH LATER

With a cardboard box full of returned stories, Michele pushes through a back screen door. She plops her box in a chair.

LINDA

Is that it?

MICHELE

I've got another box outside.

She exits, returning with the second box.

LINDA

There's gotta be a winner in here somewhere.

MICHELE

Rejections go in one pile, try-us-agains in a second,
and acceptance letters in a third.

They begin opening envelopes and stacking rejection slips in the first pile.

INT. KITCHEN – ONE HOUR LATER

A glum Michele stares at a rejection pile two inches thick. The second pile contains a few encouraging letters. And the acceptance pile is empty.

LINDA

Four try-us-agains. That's encouraging.

MICHELE

(inconsolable)

I'm gonna get a B in my writing class.

INT. MICHELE'S BEDROOM – NIGHT

In bed, a sleeping Michele snuggles against Dylan with an arm draped across his sexy, well-toned chest.

But Dylan's eyes are wide open. He stares up at the ceiling. Then carefully he slides Michele's arm off him. He sits up, groping for his pants.

MICHELE

(groggy)

Where are you going?

DYLAN

To my studio. I feel like painting.

Michele glances at the clock.

MICHELE

At three in the morning?

DYLAN

Yeah.

MICHELE

Call me tomorrow.

DYLAN

Okay.

As he heads out, a ruffled Michele stares curiously after him.

INT. KITCHEN – AFTERNOON

Michele and Linda build tomato sandwiches, thick slices of garden ripe tomatoes on white bread slathered with mayonnaise and doused with black pepper. There is also a plate full of freshly sliced cantaloupe, a cucumber salad, and a pitcher of lemonade on the table.

In an open window, a fan whirs faintly, drawing in some gusts of Summer air. A radio plays some country tunes, and outside in the sunlight, a NEIGHBOR LADY pins laundry to a clothesline.

LINDA

Nothing beats a tomato sandwich in the Summer.

But Michele is lost in thought. She ruminates, absently stirring a jar of Hellman's with a butter knife.

LINDA

You're gonna churn that into butter if you're not careful.

Self-consciously, Michele stops churning.

MICHELE

Dylan knows my classes ended a week ago. I don't understand what's going on with him.

LINDA

Did you guys have an argument or something?

MICHELE

No. All of a sudden he just hasn't called me for six days.

LINDA

Maybe he's painting like he said. Artists can be temperamental like that.

MICHELE

Should I stop by his studio?

LINDA

Don't chase him, honey.

MICHELE

But I miss him.

LINDA

Let him call you.

Dismally, Michele picks up a nearby paper and flips to the Classified section.

MICHELE

Want to go yard sale shopping today?

LINDA

Sounds good.

INT. MICHELE'S BEDROOM – AFTERNOON

Typing absorbedly, Michele sits at her desk. A stack of fiction writing books sits nearby. Outside some crickets chirp.

When the phone rings, she lets the machine pick up.

DYLAN'S VOICE

Hi, Michele...it's Dylan.

(she freezes)

I realize you're probably upset with me for not calling you in ten days...But I'd like to talk to you.

(pause)

DYLAN'S VOICE CONT.

If you're home, please pick up.
(she doesn't move)
Okay then...I'll try back later.

INT. MICHELE'S BEDROOM/DYLAN'S STUDIO- INTERCUT- NIGHT

Under a cotton sheet, Michele lays awake, as a fan whirs softly in her window.

When the phone shrills, she still refuses to pick it up. But on the fifth ring, she changes her mind, jumps up, and answers it.

MICHELE
(in a small voice)
Hello.

DYLAN
Michele?

Nervously Dylan taps a paint can with a painting knife. Dark circles ring his eyes. He hasn't shaved for a week. And splotches of paint dapple his face, hands, even his glasses.

DYLAN
I'm really sorry I disappeared like that.
(no reply)
Please talk to me, Michele.

MICHELE
If you have a problem we can talk about it.
What is it? Drugs?

With the blade of his painting knife, Dylan cuts a thin line between his thumb and forefinger, drawing several drops of blood. His expression is conflicted, pained.

DYLAN
I don't do drugs.

MICHELE
Are you upset with me about something?

DYLAN
No.

MICHELE

Then what?

DYLAN

This is going to sound really lame...But I just needed some space.

With relief, Michele exhales.

MICHELE

Let's just try and communicate a little better next time, okay?

DYLAN

Okay.

(dabs at his cut with a clean paint cloth)

Can I make you dinner tonight?

MICHELE

That would be a start.

EXT. LINDA'S BACKYARD – DAY

In a sleek black bathing suit, Linda lounges on a beach chair. Her body is slathered with baby oil. Tulips and roses bloom along the edge of a nearby fence. Some plastic skunks, chipmunks, and flamingoes adorn her small garden.

A harried Michele approaches through a back gate.

MICHELE

Mom, we're leaving for Ocean City. So I just wanted to say goodbye.

LINDA

Where's Houdini?

MICHELE

Double parked out front.

LINDA

I want to meet him.

MICHELE

He's shy, Mom. I'll introduce you when we get back.

LINDA

I have something for you.

She hands Michele a camera.

LINDA

Take me some pictures.

MICHELE

Thanks. Mom. I'll call you when we get there.

She gives her mother a hug and kiss goodbye.

EXT. OCEAN CITY – NIGHT

A sunburned Michele and Dylan hover in a seat at the top of a ferris wheel. Below them, red and orange and yellow lights sparkle from carnival rides and game booths. Crowds with candy apples and cotton candy mill from rides to lighted arcades.

Michele and Dylan bask in each other's arms.

MICHELE

Did you miss me?

DYLAN

Very much.

EXT. HAUNTED HOUSE – CONTINUOUS

Stuffed into their seat, Dylan and Michele are catapulted into a dark tunnel. The car rumbles along, passing ghouls dripping blood, spider webs, mummies, ax murderers with hatchets, tombstones, and the like.

But halfway through, it's just total darkness and an eerie fog.

MICHELE

Hey. Where'd everything go?

DYLAN

Maybe that's it.

The pitch black emptiness is more scary than the ghouls were. Dylan and Michele's white-knuckled hands clutch the bar across their laps. But they are catapulted deeper into the dark. They can't see an inch in front of their faces.

MICHELE

Then why aren't they letting us out?

DYLAN

I don't know.

More pitch black, that sets their nerves on edge. Then in an instant, something drops from the ceiling. It is a skeleton, whose bony fingers graze Michele's shoulder. They both recoil, shrieking with real fear. And then the car is shoved out into the blazing lights of the carnival.

MICHELE

(laughing)

That scared the shit out of me!

DYLAN

Let's get out of here.

They scramble out of their car, relieved to be free.

INT. HOTEL - NIGHT

Naked and sweaty, Michele straddles Dylan, moving rhythmically. Above them, a tacky framed painting of a dolphin glints in the moonlight, which shines in through some partially opened drapes. However, a distant Dylan stares up at the ceiling.

MICHELE

Tired?

DYLAN

(still not looking at her)

Yeah. All those rides.

EXT. LINDA'S BACKYARD - AFTERNOON

At a newspaper covered picnic table, Michele and Linda share a dozen hard-shell crabs.

They suck greedily at the claws, washing down the Old Bay with bottles of beer.

MICHELE

I've had it with Dylan.

She pounds a fat crab claw with her wooden mallet.

MICHELE

Ocean City was great. But I'm sick of his disappearing acts.

LINDA

How long this time?

MICHELE

Nine days.

(swilling her beer)

I'm going to his studio tomorrow and have it out with him.

LINDA

Maybe you should just break up with him?

MICHELE

I'm going to talk to him first.

INT. DYLAN'S STUDIO – DAY

With a brush, Dylan strokes paint onto a huge canvas. He is totally engrossed. So Michele just hovers quietly at a back door. His place is a converted warehouse.

Michele's eyes scan the big dank room with its stacks of canvases and easels everywhere. Brushes of all shapes and sizes and hundreds of messy paint tubes cover a long wooden table. Crumpled cloth rags litter the floor. And a half dozen cats roam the place.

With precision, Dylan works at removing some paint with his painting knife now.

MICHELE

Hey, Dylan.

The knife nearly flies out of his hand.

DYLAN
Goddamn, Michele.

MICHELE
Sorry.

With fierce concentration, he returns to work on his canvas.

MICHELE
I didn't know you liked cats.

DYLAN
Yeah. Cats are cool.
(still working)
What's on your mind?

MICHELE
I had a dream about you last night.

DYLAN
Really?

MICHELE
Yeah. I saw your face. But you had this tired, suffering
expression. And then you started to speak to me. Only
there were two voices, both going at once.
(she has his full attention now)
You spoke urgently. But the two voices were so
intertwined, I couldn't make out the message.
(pause)
Are you okay?

DYLAN
Yeah...I'm fine.

MICHELE
Are you sure?

DYLAN
I guess I do have something to tell you.

MICHELE

What?

DYLAN

I'm moving to Chicago.

MICHELE

(stunned)

When?

DYLAN

The end of this week.

MICHELE

Why?

DYLAN

I feel suffocated in Baltimore.

Michele steps around to see Dylan's painting:

A man, his features smudged to obscurity, lies beneath the weight of an enormous pigeon. The man's head is twisted to one side and clasped tightly between a strong beak. Glimpses of stark white, the smooth curves of several eggs, can be seen nestled in the dip of the man's back.

MICHELE

Is that you?

DYLAN

I don't know.

Absorbedly, he continues to paint.

MICHELE

I'm going to leave so you can work.

DYLAN

I'll call you tonight.

So a tight-lipped Michele straggles out.

EXT. PENN STATION – DAY

Waiting for the Chicago bound train, Dylan and Michele stand quietly. A suitcase and knapsack rest at Dylan's feet, as he puffs away on a Gitanes. Humidity waves upward from the hot concrete sidewalk. Beads of sweat dapple their strained faces.

When a whistle blows shrilly, PASSENGERS start collecting their luggage.

DYLAN

I'll write you as soon as I settle in.

He gives her a stiff hug, as the train roars in, belching smoke and breaking to a halt. Dylan tosses his cigarette butt down onto the tracks.

MICHELE

Good luck, Dylan.

DYLAN

Goodbye.

Without looking back, he boards the train. And glumly, she watches it, exhaling puffs of steam, pull away.

INT. BATHROOM – CONTINUOUS

In a graffitied stall, Michele erupts into tears.

EXT. ROWHOUSE – DAY

A MAILMAN stuffs envelopes into Michele's mailbox.

Seconds later, a nightgowned Michele pokes her head out the door and eagerly scoops up her mail.

INT. LIVINGROOM – CONTINUOUS

Michele flips through her mail: a gas and electric bill, a telephone bill, and a booklet of discount coupons. With disgust, she flings the stack onto her coffee table. Then she slumps on the sofa.

When the phone rings, her machine picks up.

LINDA'S VOICE

Michele, it's Mom. Don't forget you have your annual exam scheduled at Planned Parenthood today. Call me later. Love you. Bye.

Michele just stares into space.

INT. PLANNED PARENTHOOD/EXAM ROOM – DAY

In a paper gown, Michele sits on an examining table, waiting for her doctor to return.

DOCTOR MALLOY, a feminist red-head, strides in with Michele's charts.

DOCTOR MALLOY

All your tests came back okay, except the one for chlamydia.

MICHELE

But how can that be? I'm not having any symptoms.

DOCTOR MALLOY

Chlamydia can be symptom-less in many women. That's why we test you for it every year. You're going to have to take antibiotics for a week.

Morosely, Michele stares at a yellow happy face pin fastened to the doctor's labcoat.

MICHELE

This is just what I need.

DOCTOR MALLOY

While you're here, you might want to get an AIDS test.

MICHELE

(rattled)

What for? AIDS?

DOCTOR MALLOY

Don't panic. We routinely counsel anyone treated for a sexually transmitted disease to get an AIDS test. 99 times out of 100 everything turns out fine.

MICHELE

When would I get the results?

DOCTOR MALLOY

(preparing the needle)

Tomorrow.

INT. KITCHEN – NIGHT

On her hands and knees, with a bucket of soapy water and a sponge, Michele scrubs furiously at her tiles.

INT. LIVINGROOM – CONTINUOUS

With a wad of paper towels and a bottle of Windex, Michele rubs at her sooty windows until they gleam.

INT. BEDROOM – CONTINUOUS

Michele vacuums with a fury.

INT. LIVINGROOM – CONTINUOUS

An exhausted Michele sits on her sofa, sipping a beer, and staring out at her now immaculate apartment. But her expression is dead.

INT. PLANNED PARENTHOOD CONFERENCE ROOM- THE NEXT DAY

Rolling and unrolling her purse strap, waiting, Michele sits before Doctor Malloy's gray metal desk. A clear plastic cube is filled with photos of some red-haired children.

After several moments, Doctor Malloy enters, carrying a folder.

DOCTOR MALLOY

I haven't looked at your results yet. But in my
three years here, I've yet to see an HIV positive.
Other doctors, yes. Me, no.

The doctor hands Michele a sealed envelope and takes an identical envelope for herself.

DOCTOR MALLOY

Ready?

MICHELE

Yes.

They open the envelopes together. Simultaneously, their faces freeze up.

DOCTOR MALLOY

(tearing up)

Get tested again, Michele. It could be a false positive.

With mute astonishment, Michele gawks at the diagnosis.

INT. UNION MEMORIAL HOSPITAL – DAY

In a similar conference room, Michele waits at a similar gray metal desk. Only this one has a framed photo of an ORIENTAL FAMILY.

A somber DOCTOR SONG enters. He sits.

DOCTOR SONG

I'm sorry, Miss Braddock. It's another positive.

She's speechless.

DOCTOR SONG

Do you have any idea how you got it?

She is still too stunned to reply.

DOCTOR SONG

Any IV drug use?

(she shakes her head)

Blood transfusions?

DOCTOR SONG (CONT)
(again she shakes her head)
Unprotected sex?

A small nod from her.

MICHELE
Oh my God. How could I be so STUPID?
How could I be so DUMB?

DOCTOR SONG
Was it one person or more than one?

MICHELE
Just one. Because I trusted him.

DOCTOR SONG
Are you still dating this person?

MICHELE
He's gone.

DOCTOR SONG
Is there any way for you to get in touch with him?

MICHELE
I don't know.

DOCTOR SONG
Would you like to speak to a counselor?

She doesn't answer, just picks up her purse, and heads out.

DOCTOR SONG
Miss Braddock, wait, please.

He hands her a card.

DOCTOR SONG
Call me if you change your mind about counseling.
I can connect you with a really good support group.

But she just walks out.

EXT. BACK ALLEY – CONTINUOUS

Walking to her car, Michele navigates through a trash-littered alley. But when she sees a bunch of hungry cats rooting through trashcans, she stops in her tracks. The cats slither through the garbage. Their marble-colored eyes flash at her. Their pink tongues devour some rotting fishheads, buzzing with flies. For a moment, she stares back at the ravenous creatures. And then she heads the other way.

INT. MARYLAND INSTITUTE OF ART – AFTERNOON

A wan Michele sits before yet another desk. With puzzlement, the DEAN of the school gapes across at her.

DEAN

We employ over a hundred teachers here. I don't know them all by name, let alone where one of them might have moved to after resigning.

MICHELE

Dylan Abbot. I tried to call him, but his phone number's been changed. And I need to find him. It's urgent.

DEAN

What are you, an ex-girlfriend or something?
 (a small nod from Michele)
 Did you ever stop to think that if he didn't tell you where exactly he was going in Chicago that maybe he didn't want you to know?

With her face set, a grim Michele stalks out.

INT. ART DEPARTMENT – CONTINUOUS

Determined, Michele follows around an ART TEACHER in African garb, who sets out supplies for an upcoming class.

MICHELE

Dylan Abbot. A.B.B.O.T. He worked here for two years.

ART TEACHER

A tall guy? With long hair?

MICHELE

Yes! He taught Abstract Painting.

ART TEACHER

I think he moved to Chicago...For a teaching job.

MICHELE

That's him! Do you know where in Chicago? What school?

Suspiciously now, the teacher stares Michele up and down.

MICHELE

Look I'm not crazy. I just need to talk to him.

ART TEACHER

He might have said the Chicago Art Institute.

MICHELE

Thank you!

She rushes out.

INT. MICHELE'S BEDROOM – NIGHT

With a "Guide to US Art Colleges" open to Chicago Art Institute in her lap, Michele clutches the phone to her ear.

MICHELE

Dylan Abbot. Yes.

(pause)

Are you sure he's not teaching maybe next semester?

(pause)

Well thanks for your help anyway.

Dismally she hangs up. Then she flips through a phone book to the listings for ABBOTs. There are hundreds. At her wit's end, she starts with the first one, ABBOT, ALEXANDER.

MICHELE

Hello, may I speak with Dylan Abbot, please?

(pause)

You don't have maybe a nephew or a grandson named Dylan?

(pause)

Sorry. Wrong number then.

The phone rings in her hand, and she almost jumps out of her skin.

MICHELE

Hello.

(her face crumples with raw emotion)

Mom, I'm sorry but I can't talk to you right now.

A few tears start to flow, but she forces her voice to sound normal and not break.

MICHELE

No, I'm fine. I'll call you later. I promise.

I love you, too. Bye.

But as soon as she hangs up the phone, she releases some wailing sobs into her pillow.

INT. BEDROOM – HOURS LATER

Still entrenched in her phone book, an exhausted and bleary-eyed Michele dials ABBOT, WAYNE.

MICHELE

Dylan Abbot, please.

(suddenly alert)

Yes, sir. I'm Michele, a friend of Dylan's. Is this his father?

(foraging for a pen)

Yes, sir, Dylan sent me a letter from Chicago a couple days ago. And I wanted to write him back. But I lost the envelope. Would you happen to have his new address?

(scribbling)

Thank you, sir!

In a flurry, she grabs a change of clothes, stuffs them into a knapsack, and dashes out.

But a moment later, she returns, grabs the red shoebox down from her closet, and

clutching it, heads back out.

INT. GEO STORM CAR- NIGHT

Michele slings her bookbag into the backseat, already cluttered with textbooks and fast food wrappers.

She keeps the red shoebox in the passenger seat, buckles up, and tears off.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Pushing 70mph, Michele sails through the night.

On the radio, Chris Isaac croons, "Wicked Game".

EXT. - GAS STATION - MORNING

A pale morning light washes over some deserted-looking gas pumps. Exhausted, Michele rolls down her window.

MICHELE
Hello? Anybody here?

Soon a MEXICAN ATTENDANT straggles over from a bullet-proof, glass-encased minimart.

MICHELE
Fill her up, please.

As the attendant pumps gas, Michele walks inside the tiny store.

INT. MINI-MART - CONTINUOUS

Michele pours a cup of coffee, grabs a bottle of water and a map, then pays at the register.

MICHELE
Some No Doze, too please.

EXT. – HIGHWAY – CONTINUOUS

Flying, Michele's car looks like a toy, beneath the endless, star-studded, ink-black sky.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

A ragged Michele zooms past a green sign declaring: WELCOME TO ILLINOIS.

EXT. – HIGHWAY – AFTERNOON

Seeing a speed sign posted at 40mph, Michele slows down. Then suddenly an explosion of some kind skids her car out of control.

Panicked, she manages to steer into the skid and maneuver her car to the shoulder.

MICHELE

Shit shit shit!!!

Shakily, she emerges from the smoking vehicle to find her right tire is blown out. With disbelief, she glares at it.

EXT. HIGHWAY – CONTINUOUS

With her doors locked, Michele huddles inside her car. The hood is up, and a white t-shirt tied to her side mirror flaps in the wind, as unconcerned vehicles whiz by.

Finally a STATE TROOPER pulls in behind her. As he emerges, Michele rolls down her window.

MICHELE

Hi.

TROOPER

Got a blow out, huh?

MICHELE

Yes, sir.

TROOPER

I'll call you a tow truck. There's a gas station about three miles from here. I can give you a lift.

MICHELE

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Thank you so much.

TROOPER

Grab your purse and stuff.

While he radios for a tow-truck, Michele gathers up her bookbag, map, and bottled water.

When the trooper reaches inside her passenger window and picks up the red shoe-box, Michele freezes.

TROOPER

Hey you forgot something.

(hefting it)

Wow. This is heavy. What is this?

MICHELE

Shoes.

TROOPER

What kind of shoes are this heavy?

MICHELE

Dancing...shoes.

TROOPER

Yeah. But what *kind*?

Michele sweats as the trooper eyes the box closer.

MICHELE

Flamenco...they're my grandmother's flamenco shoes...

But be careful...they're real old...they got those
real heavy metal tipped soles...

Satisfied now, he allows Michele to reclaim her box.

TROOPER

Oh...flamenco. Now that's some red hot stuff.

MICHELE

Yes, sir. My granny was a firecracker.

Breathing a sigh of relief, Michele climbs inside the trooper's car, holding her red box snugly.

INT. CAR SHOP – NIGHT

A REDNECK GUY in grease-stained overalls hands Michele a cup of instant coffee.

MICHELE

Thanks.

REDNECK

We ain't got no mechanic on duty right now, Miss.

MICHELE

Can't YOU fix it? I just need a new tire.

REDNECK

No, ma'am, I just do the grunt work. Banging out dents mostly. I ain't even got a key to the tire rack.

MICHELE

Can't you call in a mechanic and tell him it's an emergency?

REDNECK

I could. But at this late hour it's gonna cost you.

Michele hands over her Mastercard.

EXT. GAS STATION - CONTINUOUS

Sitting in her fixed car, Michele signs her credit card receipt for a HIP-HOP MECHANIC.

MICHELE

Thanks for getting out of bed in the middle of the night.

MECHANIC

Me and my boys were up jamming anyhow. Plus I got me a baby on the way, so you know, I aint gonna turn down time and a half.

Seeing a hefty tip, Michele penned in, the mechanic grins from ear to ear.

MECHANIC

Well thank you, pretty lady.

He waves goodbye, as she pulls off.

EXT. MARIGOLD INN – MORNING

Michele pulls up into the parking lot of a small, red-brick hotel. Shoving her red shoebox under one arm, she heads inside.

INT. FRONT DESK – CONTINUOUS

The FRONT DESK CLERK, a very polished European young lady in her early twenties, eyes a frazzled and disheveled Michele with concern.

CLERK

May I help you?

MICHELE

I'm here to visit a guest. Dylan Abbot.
A.B.B.O.T.

CLERK

Is he expecting you?

MICHELE

No...It's a surprise.

The clerk checks her records.

CLERK

I'm sorry. Dylan Abbot checked out about
an hour ago.

MICHELE

(guttled)

Are you sure?

With a trembly hand, a distraught Michele pushes some lank hair out of her face.

CLERK

Yes. I have his signature right here.

MICHELE

Did he mention where he might be headed?

CLERK

No. He just paid and left.

Michele exhales with despair. She fights tears.

CLERK

Are you okay?

MICHELE

No. I'm very tired.

CLERK

Would you like to rent a room to rest?

MICHELE

Have the maids cleaned Dylan's room yet?

CLERK

No, ma'am. Like I said, he just checked out.

MICHELE

I'll take his room then.

CLERK

I'm sorry. I can't give you a room that's not been properly cleaned.

MICHELE

Please, it's very important that I find him-

CLERK

I can't. Health department regulations-

MICHELE

I'm begging you-
(reads her nametag)

MICHELE (CONT)

Claire...It's a very serious medical issue that I need to discuss with him. A matter of life and death. I've been driving non-stop for days to find him. And maybe he left some clue in that room...about where he's going...something... anything...Please, Claire.

Pitying her, the clerk finally relents, handing over a set of keys.

CLERK

Okay. Room 24. But you can't tell anybody.

MICHELE

I won't. I promise.

INT. ROOM 24 - CONTINUOUS

Trance-like, Michele enters the room and sets her stuff down on an unmade bed.

On a nightstand, an ashtray overflows with cigarette butts. There is a crumpled Gitanes pack and some toppled Stoli and Bacardi miniatures, drained.

An open closet contains only some identical hangers.

Michele opens dresser drawers, all empty, except for one uncracked Gideon's Bible.

Overturning a small trashcan, she finds several balled up Kleenex and a crushed slip of paper, which she quickly peruses to find a useless receipt for toothpaste and deodorant.

Next she peers under the bed and still she finds nothing.

Slowly her hand reaches out to touch the indented pillow where Dylan rested his head, but her fingers stop just short.

She backs away from the bed, slumps in a chair. The window above her head changes from pale blue to twilight, as she stares into space.

Finally, zombie-like, she shuffles over to where the red shoebox sits on the dresser. She flips the lid off and picks up the gun. She walks to a mirror. She holds the gun up to her head. Tears fill her eyes. But when she hears a firm rap at the door, she quickly returns the gun and pushes the closed red box aside.

Cracking the door, Michele finds a grinning Claire who holds a tray with a pot of tea and some sweet rolls.

CLAIRE

Hi! I thought you might like some chamomile tea.
It's very relaxing.

MICHELE

Thank you, Claire..... But I don't think
I can sleep in this room now.

CLAIRE

Would you like a new one?

INT. NEW ROOM – CONTINUOUS

Claire and Michele share the tea.

MICHELE

You're actually the first person I've told.

CLAIRE

Really. Wow. This Dylan guy should be arrested.

MICHELE

My mom is like my best friend, Claire. I mean, how
can I tell her something like this?

CLAIRE

You have to tell her, Michele.

MICHELE

You don't know my mother. She freaks out if I
get a sore throat. How am I going to tell her she's
probably going to outlive me? How am I going tell
her that her only daughter's never going to give her
grandkids?

CLAIRE

You can't work through all this by yourself.

MICHELE

I can't put her through any more pain. I just can't.

INT. NEW ROOM – NIGHT

An exhausted Michele curls up into a comfortable bed, sleeping soundly for the first time in days.

EXT. MARIGOLD INN – MORNING

Claire walks Michele to her car. There is silence, as these two strangers whose lives have intersected at such a crucial crossroads for one of them, contemplate their goodbyes.

CLAIRE

(rote, like a commercial)

Well thanks for choosing the Marigold Inn.
The Friendly Face People.

That breaks the ice, and they share a hearty laugh and a sincere hug.

MICHELE

Thanks for everything, Claire. You're the best.

INT. HOPKIN'S REGISTRATION – DAY

A flock of STUDENTS queue to sign up for classes. At the head of the line, Michele looks rested now, as healthy as everyone else.

MICHELE

Who's teaching Creative Writing II this semester?

REGISTRATION LADY

Marcus Daniels.

MICHELE

(rolling her eyes)

Oh God.

REGISTRATION LADY

You can drop it if you want. But that class won't be offered again until next year.

MICHELE

Then sign me up. I can't wait.

EXT. CHARLES STREET – DAY

At an ATM machine, Michele waits with a few other BANK PATRONS, as a dainty OLD LADY, eighty at least, slowly selects buttons. Carrying a straw basket, the lady wears crisp white gloves and an elegant scarf. She must have been a pistol in her 1940's heyday.

OLD LADY

My apologies. These old fingers are a little slow.

MICHELE

Don't worry. Take your time.

Just as the cash is dispensed, a masked GANGSTER TEEN, skids over on his bike, jabs a gun in the back of the old lady's neck, snatching her money.

GANGSTER TEEN

Keep it coming, Granny. I know you got fat pockets.

Stunned, everybody watches as the old lady's fingers grope the computer keys. But the money slot remains empty.

MICHELE

Two hundred dollars is the limit.

GANGSTER TEEN

You next then! Hurry up!

But something snaps in Michele.

MICHELE

I'm just a student. I bust my ass for every penny. So why should I give it to you?

The teen jams his gun into her cheek now.

GANGSTER TEEN

You wanna bite a bullet, bitch?

MICHELE

Do what you got to do.

With stormy eyes, the teen swaggers over to the next person in line, a dark-skinned youth, a familiar face, Francisco.

GANGSTER TEEN

You next, towel-head. Your daddy's probably sittin on a oil well.

But a dignified Francisco holds his ground.

FRANCISCO

Towel heads are Arabs from the Middle East. I'm from Honduras which is in Central America.

GANGSTER TEEN

I ain't here for no fucking history lesson, yo. Get me some Benjamins!

FRANCISCO

I'm a student, too. I grew up on a chicken farm. So sorry, I don't have anything for you.

Beyond frustrated, the teen shoves Francisco.

GANGSTER TEEN

I ain't got time for this bullshit!

Sensing more mutiny, the teen tears off on his bike, down an alley, and away.

MICHELE

(to old lady)

Are you okay, Ma'am?

OLD LADY

I'm just glad he didn't hurt anyone.

MICHELE

Should we call the police?

FRANCISCO

Nobody saw his face.

EXT. CHARLES STREET – CONTINUOUS

Francisco follows Michele down the street.

FRANCISCO

Hey, wait!

He pulls up alongside her.

FRANCISCO

I really respect what you did back there. That took some nerve.

(no response)

(he gets a better look at her)

Hey, don't you go to Hopkins?

Suddenly they recognize each other from the flier incident.

FRANCISCO

Don't worry. I'm not going to make you take another flier or anything.

MICHELE

That's good.

FRANCISCO

My name's Francisco. What's yours?

MICHELE

Michele.

FRANCISCO

Where are you headed, Michele? Can I buy you a cup of coffee?

MICHELE

Sorry. But I've got plans.

FRANCISCO

Then can I buy you dinner later?

MICHELE

(amused by his persistence)

I don't think so.

FRANCISCO

Why not?

MICHELE

Because I want to focus on my studies, no distractions.

FRANCISCO

Come on. I just want to eat with you.

MICHELE

Sorry.

FRANCISCO

What's your major?

MICHELE

Creative Writing.

FRANCISCO

I've always admired writers. It takes a lot of courage to expose yourself like that.

MICHELE

Goodbye, Francisco.

Good naturedly, she waves to him, as they part ways.

INT. HOPKINS REGISTRATION – DAY

Francisco stands at the desk of another dark-skinned young man, REYNALDO, who sits before a computer.

REYNALDO

What's her name?

FRANCISCO

Michele Braddock.

REYNALDO

Major?

FRANCISCO

Creative writing.

REYNALDO

She's signed up for Creative Writing 203 with Marcus Daniels.

FRANCISCO

Then sign me up, too.

REYNALDO

I can't. There are prerequisites for that class.

FRANCISCO

Come on, Reynaldo, buddy, I'd do it for you.

INT. LINDA'S KITCHEN – EVENING

With a towel draped about her shoulders, Linda sits, as Michele rolls her hair into permanent rods. She squirts solution onto each bunch of hair.

MICHELE

God this stuff stinks.

Linda reads the permanent box.

LINDA

Are you sure you know what you're doing?
I don't wanna look like a poodle-head.

MICHELE

I'm only going to leave the rods in for half the time.
That way you should get nice waves.

The phone rings, and Michele picks up.

MICHELE

Hello.

MICHELE (CONT)

(strained)

Okay. I'll pick them up tomorrow. Thanks.

LINDA

Pick up what?

MICHELE

The pictures from Ocean City.

LINDA

Has that bum even called you yet?

MICHELE

No.

LINDA

I'd throw those pictures right in the garbage.

INT. MICHELE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ocean City photos cover the bed. In one, a radiant Michele clutches a stuffed animal Dylan won for her. In another, they sit smiling on a boardwalk bench, with their arms draped about each other, two love-birds.

Tears trickle down Michele's face, as her fingertips trace the photos.

INT. KITCHEN – CONTINUOUS

With a phone book open to PRIVATE INVESTIGATORS, Michele explains her predicament to DETECTIVE CALLAHAN.

MICHELE

Yes, I do have a picture of Dylan. But I don't have his social security number. I could try and get it from his father.

(pause)

Just one more question, Detective Callahan. Do you take Mastercard?

INT. HOPKINS CLASSROOM – DAY

A full CLASS waits for Professor Daniels to make his entrance. Someone sitting behind Michele taps her shoulder. She turns to find a smiling Francisco.

FRANCISCO

Hi, Michele.

MICHELE

Hey, what are you doing here?

Francisco shrugs.

FRANCISCO

I thought I'd give writing a try.

MICHELE

You know you need to take Creative Writing One and Two before you can take this course?

FRANCISCO

I'm not worried about that.

With his briefcase, Professor Daniels strides in.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

Good afternoon, Class.

(flips open an attendance log)

For my records, if anybody here has published a short story this year, please raise your hand.

Not one single hand goes up.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

Hello, Michele.

He tosses her a smirk, and she nods tersely back.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

As all my former students know, you can't earn an A in my class unless you publish a story before this class ends. No exceptions.

Some sour faces and groans.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

For your first assignment, I want a two to three page paper describing the single most important minute of your life. Be specific, with concrete details. I want strong active verbs, a central metaphor, a smattering of similes, and absolutely no adverbs. Any questions?

A student's hand shoots up.

STUDENT

Is it too late to withdraw from this class?

INT. MICHELE'S KITCHEN – EVENING

A nervous Michele clears her throat before dialing Dylan's father.

MICHELE

Hi, Mr Abbot. This is Michele again, Dylan's friend. I spoke to you last week...um...Have you heard from Dylan since he left the Marigold Inn?

DYLAN'S FATHER (V.O.)

No. He can be a difficult man to reach sometimes.

MICHELE

Sir, you wouldn't happen to have his social security number by any chance?

DYLAN'S FATHER (V.O.)

(suspicious now)

What for?

MICHELE

I just need to find him...It's very important.

DYLAN'S FATHER (V.O.)

You're not pregnant, are you?

MICHELE

No!....no, sir...Maybe Mrs Abbot could help me?

DYLAN'S FATHER (V.O.)

Mrs Abbot is *dead*....she has been for 19 years.

(growing angry)

Now *who* is this?

MICHELE

(flummoxed)

I'm sorry, sir. I won't bother you again.

Quickly she hangs up.

EXT. HOPKINS – DAY

Under a shady tree, at the edge of a grassy, sun-lit field, Michele sits writing. Many other shorts clad STUDENTS sprawl with blankets and books. Some toss a Frisbee around.

When the Frisbee sails straight for Michele's head, a student, running backwards, leaps into the air to make the catch. Sensing the impending collision, Michele snaps her head up.

MICHELE

Hey!

The guy diverts the Frisbee, but lands right in Michele's lap. It is Francisco.

FRANCISCO

Sorry!

He brushes some grass and twigs off a flustered Michele.

FRANCISCO

Are you okay?

MICHELE

I think so.

He tosses the Frisbee back.

FRANCISCO

Working on your paper for Professor Daniel's, huh?

MICHELE

Yeah.

FRANCISCO

How's it coming?

Michele just shrugs.

FRANCISCO

Come and toss the Frisbee with us. Give yourself a break.

MICHELE

No, thanks.

FRANCISCO

You want me to bug off?

A smirk from Michele.

FRANCISCO

Okay then. Maybe next time. See you in class.

Wistfully, Michele watches as he heads happily back to his friends.

INT. HOPKINS CLASSROOM – DAY

With a stack of papers in his hands, a grim Professor Daniels surveys his class.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

I was not pleased with the quality of last week's assignment. Only one person received an A. Everybody else got a C or worse.

The class fidgets under the professor's intense gaze. Some students eyes drop to the floor.

Professor Daniels prowls the rows of seats until he reaches Francisco's.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

Francisco, would you please read your paper aloud to the class?

A very surprised Francisco stares down at a huge A circled at the top of his paper. An

equally shocked Michele glances over at him.

FRANCISCO
(uncomfortable)
Sir, if you don't mind, I'd rather not.

PROFESSOR DANIELS
(softer than we have seen him)
It's a very moving piece. Why not share it?

FRANCISCO
(flustered)
I just.... I can't.

PROFESSOR DANIELS
Would you mind if I read it to the class then?

FRANCISCO
I don't care. I need to go to the bathroom.

Francisco strides out. At the head of the class, Professor Daniels reads his paper.

PROFESSOR DANIELS
It was during the wet season, out in the marshy garden, beneath a tombstone-colored sky, where I last saw my parents alive. The minute caught them down on their hands and knees, elbow deep in thick mud, searching for my mother's wedding ring, a slim band of gold, she lost while planting tomato seeds.

I was 21, freshly showered, on my way to a friend's house to meet some girls. "Papa-" I said. "I need some money-"

His elegant doctor's fingers, long and tapered, groped the rich soil. He had changed his good pants and shirt from the hospital for jeans and a t-shirt. With concentration, his deft fingers plowed the earth, intent, like a surgeon's fingers probing a man's moist insides for the hard weight of a bullet. "Take the money out of my wallet-" he said.

I dug inside his pant's pocket, felt the hard muscle of his thigh. My father was a fanatical jogger, five miles a day,

PROFESSOR DANIELS (CONT)

which earned him the body of a man decades younger. I tugged the wallet free, flipped it open, and palmed several bills.

But my mother was annoyed with me. "Why don't you help us?" she pleaded. Her long shiny black hair was hidden under a kerchief, and her cheeks were pink with exertion. Yet the dirt and sweat streaking her face could not hide her fragile beauty. At her full height, she barely reached my chin, and she weighed not much more than a child.

"Mama, you'll find it-" I placated her, heading off to my party. "If the ring doesn't turn up, I'll look for it myself when I get back-"

Her fingers raked the soil, clawed with futility.

Not long after I left, a half dozen grungy, machine gun toting strangers swept through our home. Contras who suspected my father supported the Sandinista regime. Their filthy hands toppled vases, smashed windows, set fire to curtains. Neighbors who saw my parents dragged out into the street and forced into a truck did nothing, fearing a similar fate. The date was July 21, 1986.

I have dreams of my parents slim fingers pushing up through the wet dirt in their garden, pale shoots which grow into hands, then mud-caked arms, flailing to be free. And finally the bulbs of their heads birth through the soil, this country's grisly vegetation. Their dirt crusted eyes cry out for vengeance.

Weeks after their disappearances, my mother's wedding ring turned up in the garden. I wear it now on a chain around my neck, hoping one day to return it to her.

Leaving them in the garden that day, a selfish youth, my life was spared. And yet, looking back, I would rather have stayed. If only to have earned another precious minute in their presence.

The rapt class is quiet.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

Your job as a writer is to illicit emotion from your

PROFESSOR DANIELS (CONT)
readers, which is exactly what Francisco has
achieved here.

(checking his watch)
Class is dismissed. Except for you, Michele.

As students bustle out, Professor Daniels approaches Michele.

PROFESSOR DANIELS
Why didn't I get a paper from you?

MICHELE
I wrote one. But I'm not ready to share it.

PROFESSOR DANIELS
Why not?

MICHELE
It's too....personal.

PROFESSOR DANIELS
I doubt it could be any more personal than the
piece I just read. Writers need the guts to expose
themselves.

MICHELE
I'm sorry.

PROFESSOR DANIELS
Do you have the assignment with you?

MICHELE
No, sir.

PROFESSOR DANIELS
Well get it on my desk by nine o'clock tomorrow
morning.

MICHELE
I can't, sir.

PROFESSOR DANIELS
You're forcing me to give you a zero for the

PROFESSOR DANIELS (CONT)

assignment.

MICHELE

I know. It's okay.

Michele shuffles out, as a confounded Professor Daniels stares after her.

INT. MEN'S BATHROOM – CONTINUOUS

Curiously, Michele inches open the door, peeking in. Nobody is at the urinals, so she ventures inside.

MICHELE

Francisco?

FRANCISCO

(in a stall)

Michele?

MICHELE

Are you okay?

FRANCISCO

You probably shouldn't be in here.

A toilet flushes, then he comes out and washes his hands. If he shed any tears, they're gone now.

MICHELE

I'm sorry about your parents.

FRANCISCO

They're probably dead. I've accepted that.

MICHELE

Can I buy you a cup of coffee?

FRANCISCO

No thanks. But I could really use a beer.

INT. P.J.S PUB - NIGHT

The pub is full of NOISY COLLEGE STUDENTS, swilling beer, scarfing tacos and buffalo wings at small tables with vinyl red and white checkered tablecloths.

Michele and Francisco's table is cluttered with numerous empty beer mugs.

MICHELE

I'm sorry I blew you off that day with the fliers.

FRANCISCO

It's okay. You didn't know.

MICHELE

So what do you guys do in your meetings?

FRANCISCO

Because of our protests and media coverage, the US government is paying to have suspected burial sites in Honduras dug up and the bodies identified by experts. Plus they're putting a lot of the Contras on trial. But let's talk about something else.

MICHELE

Okay.

FRANCISCO

For instance, I'm curious about your paper. What did you write about?

MICHELE

(caught off guard)

I...well....nothing...

FRANCISCO

Nothing?

MICHELE

I didn't turn in a paper.

FRANCISCO

But you wrote one. I saw you, remember?

MICHELE

Yeah....but I wasn't happy with it....so I trashed it...

FRANCISCO

But you turned in something, right?

MICHELE

No.

(starts to laugh)

I got a zero.

FRANSISCO

You got a zero?

MICHELE

Yeah.

They are both tipsy and can't stop laughing.

FRANCISCO

But before you threw it away, what was it about?

MICHELE

Nothing.

They rock with more laughter.

INT. MICHELE'S BEDROOM – CONTINUOUS

A drunk Michele stumbles over to her bed and flops into it. She throws one leg over the side and plants one on the floor to keep the room from spinning. But it doesn't work. So she sits back up, sees the blinking light on her answering machine, reaches over and presses PLAY.

LINDA'S VOICE

It's your dear old Mom. Let's grab some dinner tonight and catch up. I know you're busy, but I miss you. So call me, honey.

A second message plays.

DETECTIVE CALLAHAN'S VOICE

Detective Callahan calling. Don't forget your appointment tomorrow at two, Ms Braddock I'll see you then.

A third message.

FRANCISCO'S VOICE

Hey, Michele.....please don't be mad at me...I got your number from my friend Reynaldo...I'm a little drunk...

Wide-eyed, Michele listens intently.

FRANCISCO'S VOICE

....um....I wanted to invite you to my place for dinner tomorrow night....I'm a pretty good cook...I meant to ask you at the pub.....but I sort of lost my nerve...Anyway... I hope you'll come...So buenos Noches...Sleep with angels...

A genuine smile spreads across Michele's face.

INT. DETECTIVE AGENCY - DAY

DETECTIVE CALLAHAN pores over some paper work. With his partially balding head and wire-framed glasses, he looks more like an accountant, then a hard-boiled investigator. He is mild mannered and genial.

DETECTIVE CHAMBERS

So the Marigold Inn in Chicago is Dylan's last known address?

MICHELE

Yes.

DETECTIVE CHAMBERS

Did you get his social security number?

MICHELE

No. His father refused to give it to me.

DETECTIVE CHAMBERS

Well don't worry. As long as he's currently employed, we should be able to track it down.

MICHELE

What if he's not working? He's an artist. So it's possible he's just holed up in a warehouse painting somewhere. Or he could be working under the table.

DETECTIVE CALLAHAN

If he's not working, it's going to be a heck of a lot harder to find him.

He reaches into his desk drawer for a granola bar and munches thoughtfully, swigging sips from a bottle of V-8 juice. He offers her a granola bar.

DETECTIVE CALLAHAN

Hungry?

MICHELE

No thanks.

(pause)

Don't you want to know why I'm looking for him?

DETECTIVE CALLAHAN

You seem like a pretty sensible young lady to me. I'm sure you have your reasons.

MICHELE

How often do you find the people you're looking for?

DETECTIVE CALLAHAN

About 75% of the time.

MICHELE

If you don't find him, do I still have to pay?

DETECTIVE CALLAHAN

You do. But not as much.

MICHELE

I've only got about 200\$ left on my Mastercard. Will that cover it?

DETECTIVE CALLAHAN

I'm sure we can work out a payment plan that suits your budget.

He hands her some forms.

DETECTIVE CALLAHAN

Just fill these out.... all right?

MICHELE

Thank you.

INT. LINDA'S KITCHEN - DAY

As Linda washes dishes, Michele straggles in the back door.

LINDA

Thanks for calling me back last night.

Michele plops into a chair.

MICHELE

Sorry. I had a hangover.

LINDA

You need to put this whole Dylan mess behind you. I know it hurts, but you've got to move on.

MICHELE

I'm trying.

LINDA

How? How are you trying? By hiding in your apartment and getting drunk?

MICHELE

I got drunk with a friend.

LINDA

Good. You need to get out and have some fun.

Joining Michele at the table, Linda sticks a pint of Hagaan Daaz ice cream and a spoon into her daughter's hand. They pass the ice cream back and forth, savoring the treat.

MICHELE

He wants me to come over to his apartment for dinner tonight.

LINDA

(perks up)

Oh, this friend's a guy?

MICHELE

Yeah.

LINDA

So where'd you meet this one?

MICHELE

He's in my writing class.

LINDA

Sounds more promising than a bar. What's his name?

MICHELE

Francisco.

LINDA

Spanish?

MICHELE

He's from Honduras.

LINDA

Ohhhh...a Latin lover....Is he sexy?

MICHELE

God, mom, I just want to be friends with him.

LINDA

I understand that....But is he sexy?

MICHELE

Yeah....I guess he's pretty sexy...But another relationship

MICHELE (CONT)
is the last thing I need right now.

LINDA
Honey, you don't have to rush into anything... Just
go and eat and talk. You're only young once.

EXT. FRANCISCO'S APARTMENT - EVENING

In a pretty Spring dress, Michele hovers at a door, one of numerous identical doors in a long clean carpeted hallway. She bites her lip and knocks.

With shower damp hair, a smiling Francisco opens the door. In a linen shirt and slacks, he resembles an exotic young prince.

FRANCISCO
Hello. Please come in.

MICHELE
Something smells really good.

Inside a table is set with wine glasses and fresh flowers.

FRANCISCO
I made food from my country. I hope you like it.

He pours her a glass of wine.

FRANCISCO
Cabernet?

MICHELE
Yes. Thank you.

He joins her at the table, lifts the lid from a steaming pot.

MICHELE
So what's in this dish?

FRANCISCO
(serving her)
Chicken, beef, pork, shrimp, rice, and a bunch of

FRANCISCO (CONT)

different spices. My mother used to make this for my father. It was his favorite.

MICHELE

It sounds great.

She tries a bite. Within seconds, tears well up in her eyes, and she coughs and sputters.

MICHELE

Spicy.

Francisco tries a big bite and has no trouble swallowing it. So Michele tries again. But she hacks even harder.

MICHELE

Hot!

Quickly he pours her a glass of water, and she chugs it down. She fans her tongue.

FRANCISCO

I'm so sorry! In Honduras, we grow up eating chili peppers like candy.

MICHELE

I can usually handle spicy...but that is way out of my league.

FRANCISCO

I can broil you a steak and a baked potato in like five minutes.

MICHELE

No, you don't have to do that. I'll just eat some bread and salad you have here.

FRANCISCO

Is that going to fill you up?

MICHELE

Yes. It's perfect.

FRANCISCO

Are you sure?

MICHELE

I'm sure.

INT. FRANCISCO'S LIVINGROOM – CONTINUOUS

On a small sofa, Michele and Francisco sit with a photo album open, across their laps.

The first picture is of a chubby, dark-skinned baby with a shock of black hair and enormous brown eyes.

FRANCISCO

(laughs)

Me.

The next is of a radiant BRIDE AND GROOM, cutting the first slice of an elaborate wedding cake together.

FRANCISCO

My parents.

Next is a kitchen table surrounded by numerous CHILDREN, all wearing paper birthday hats. A round cake holds five glowing candles. Francisco, the birthday boy, sits in his mom's lap, and they smile magnificently for the camera.

FRANCISCO

My fifth birthday. I got a little guitar.

MICHELE

You play?

FRANCISCO

Yes. Should I play something for you?

MICHELE

Sure.

Momentarily he exits, returns with a beautiful old guitar. It is the color of melted candle wax, and the wood seems to glow from within. He strums a soft ballad, complex, and sensual. When he stops, Michele claps for him.

MICHELE

That was amazing. Wow, your guitar, every note

MICHELE (CONT)

sounded so pure, so perfect. Was it made in Honduras?

FRANCISCO

No. It belonged to my grandfather who purchased it on a trip to America. It's a Martin, crafted by the Martin brothers in 1946. He treasured this guitar, and when he died, he passed it down to me.

MICHELE

Play something else!

FRANCISCO

No. You try.

He hands it over to her.

MICHELE

Francisco, I can't play a thing.

FRANCISCO

Anybody can play. You just learn a couple chords, and the music flows.

She strums.

MICHELE

I doubt it's that easy.

FRANCISCO

G is the most used chord. Followed by D and A. Here, I'll show you.

He places her fingers on the fret board for her, guiding her to form a G chord.

FRANCISCO

That's G. Now strum.

She does, and it sounds good. She's delighted.

FRANCISCO

See. Told you it was easy. In a week, you'll be

FRANCISCO (CONT)
a three chord rock star.

MICHELE
(excited)
Show me some more.

INT. ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

Michele and Francisco stand six inches apart. But there is a thick undercurrent of sexual tension between them, as the small elevator slowly descends.

When the door finally wooshes open, Michele hurries out first.

INT. LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

An earnest Francisco grasps Michele's hand, slowing her down some.

FRANCISCO
Hey, Michele, do you have a boyfriend or anything?

MICHELE
No. And I'm not looking for one right now, Francisco.
The timing is all wrong for me. So I just want us to be
friends, is that cool?

He looks hurt for a few seconds, then quickly recovers.

FRANCISCO
Okay. I understand.

MICHELE
But thank you so much for dinner.

FRANCISCO
You're welcome. It was my pleasure.

He leans in for a hug, and she embraces him warmly, but briefly.

MICHELE
See you in class.

FRANCISCO

Yes. Goodnight. See you in class.

INT. MICHELE'S BEDROOM – NIGHT

Still in her dress, Michele lays in bed. With her fingertips, she traces the outline of her lips.

INT. LINDA'S LIVINGROOM - AFTERNOON

Michele and Linda lounge around. The Antique Road Show is on. Linda knits, and Michele huddles under a blanket.

LINDA

Honey, are you cold? I can turn up the heat.

MICHELE

No. I'm just getting a cold I think.

LINDA

Let me get you some Echinacea.

MICHELE

(surly)

No, I said I'm fine, Mom.

LINDA

All right, Grouch.

Quietly they watch as a guitar is appraised on the show. The guitar looks remarkably similar to Francisco's. With interest, Michele watches.

ANTIQUA DEALER (on TV)

This stunning guitar, a 1946 Martin is a rare find. Because it was the last year the brothers made guitars. This one would fetch an estimated 20,000 dollars from collectors.

MICHELE

(sitting up)

Oh my God....Francisco's got a 1946 Martin guitar!

LINDA

Are you sure? Maybe it just looks like one.

MICHELE

No. I'm pretty sure he said it was a 1946 Martin.
I wonder if he knows...

EXT. HOPKINS CAMPUS- DAY

In the pouring rain, Michele bustles across a grassy field. She hefts a full bookbag and a dinky umbrella which is no match for the downpour.

Wearing running shorts and a tank top, which are plastered to his well-toned physique, Francisco jogs up behind her. He carries no umbrella and doesn't seem to care that he is sopping wet, his handsome face dripping rivulets of water. He slows his pace to match Michele's stride.

FRANCISCO

Hey, Michele, got a story for me to read yet?

MICHELE

In my bookbag.

She turns so that he can access her backpack.

MICHELE

The yellow envelope.

He tugs out a yellow envelope.

FRANCISCO

I'll read it tonight. Why don't you meet me at
PJ's later for drinks and we'll discuss it?

MICHELE

Okay, but I got a question for you. Did you say that
your guitar was a 1946 Martin?

FRANCISCO

That's right. My grandfather bought it in 1946.

MICHELE

Did you know that guitar's worth 20,000 dollars?
I saw it on the Antique Road Show yesterday.

FRANCISCO

Yeah, I know.

MICHELE

And you let ME play it?

FRANCISCO

Why not? Music was meant to be shared.

Grinning, he gives her a wave goodbye, then resumes his jog. She watches him stride away. Her eyes linger on his strong and graceful body.

INT. P.J.S PUB – NIGHT

With a brew and Michele's yellow envelope, Francisco sits at a table.

When Michele arrives, she joins him. But she flinches at his serious expression.

MICHELE

You didn't like my story.

FRANCISCO

I thought you told me you didn't have a boyfriend?

MICHELE

(confused)

I don't.

FRANCISCO

I think maybe I picked the wrong envelope.

He empties it for her, and all of the Ocean City pictures of Dylan and Michele tumble out.

MICHELE

Dylan's an ex-boyfriend. Shit. What else was in there?

She shuffles through the contract for the Callahan Detective Agency.

MICHELE

Did you look at all this?

FRANCISCO

The stuff just fell out. And I was curious.

A WAITRESS approaches.

WAITRESS

(to Michele)

Can I get you a drink?

MICHELE

A pitcher of the strongest beer you got on tap.

FRANCISCO

We don't have to talk about it, Michele.

MICHELE

Dylan and I broke up months ago. I hired a detective to find him because...well...it's complicated.

FRANCISCO

Enough said. Let's just enjoy our beers and relax, okay?

MICHELE

(relieved)

Sounds good to me.

INT. MICHELE'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

A listless Michele stares into a mirror at her reflection. Faint dark half-circles ring her eyes, and her cheekbones jut sharply beneath her pale skin. She has developed a small, but persistent cough.

She steps onto a scale. It reads 112 pounds. She fiddles with the knob, but it remains 112. She pulls at the waistband of her jeans, gathering up an excess couple of inches.

MICHELE

Damn it.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Kicking off her shoes, Michele reaches over and plays her single message.

DOCTOR PING'S VOICE

Hello, Michele. This is Doctor Ping. I'm just calling to remind you that our support group is still available to you. The number is 256-8756.

INT. HOPKINS LIBRARY - DAY

A furtive Michele peruses a shelf full of books about AIDS. But just as she reaches for one, she feels a tug to the back of her hair. Startled, she spins around to see Francisco's happy face.

FRANCISCO

Hey, what's up?

MICHELE

Oh, hi. Just doing some research.

FRANCISCO

Me, too.

His arms are loaded with textbooks. So she sidles away from the AIDS books and picks up a few random texts.

FRANCISCO

Have you ever heard of a band called Poncho Sanchez?

MICHELE

No.

FRANCISCO

It's Latin jazz. They're world renowned and playing at Club Midnite Saturday night. Would you like to go with me?

MICHELE

I don't know.

FRANCISCO

Just as friends.

MICHELE

I haven't even finished my paper for Professor Daniels yet.

FRANCISCO

Me neither. But it's five days away. So you might feel differently by then. Let me know okay?

MICHELE

Okay.

FRANCISCO

Is Detective Callahan having any luck finding your ex's social security number?

MICHELE

Not yet.

FRANCISCO

Did Dylan ever take any classes at Hopkins?

MICHELE

I'm not sure. All I know is he graduated from the Maryland Institute of Art.

FRANCISCO

Sounds like a job for my buddy Reynaldo.

INT. REGISTRAR'S OFFICE – CONTINUOUS

Intently Michele and Francisco watch as Reynaldo taps computer keys.

REYNALDO

Full name?

MICHELE

Abbot. A.B.B.O.T, Dylan, D.Y.L.A.N.

A list of Abbots pops up. Reynaldo scans backwards and forwards, as Michele and

Francisco lean over his shoulder. But Dylan's name is not there.

REYNALDO

Sorry, guys. No Dylan Abbot.

MICHELE

Thanks for looking anyway, Reynaldo.

REYNALDO

Yeah, thanks, buddy.

INT. LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

Alone, Michele sits in a secluded corner with a stack of books on AIDS. She devours the pages, taking notes.

INT. UNION MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - DAY

A skittish Michele stands outside a gray door which is partially cracked open. Intently she listens.

SPEAKER (V.O.)

If you want to live *positively* then live in the *present*. Yesterday is only a memory, and tomorrow is only a dream. Today- right now- is real. Why worry about the future, about things that might or might not happen? Don't let fear rob you of your life, of RIGHT NOW.

With a deep breath, Michele pushes open the door and walks inside.

INT. ROOM 52 - CONTINUOUS

A sea of vastly different FACES turn to stare at Michele. There is a BLACK MAN WITH DREADLOCKS, A MIDDLE-AGED HOUSEWIFE, A PROFESSIONAL MAN IN A SUIT, A REDNECK TEENAGED BOY, ETC...Everybody is seated in metal folding chairs, arranged in a circle.

The speaker is MARY ANN, a thick, pleasant-faced black woman.

MARY ANN

Hello. May I help you?

MICHELE

I'm...uh....I'm a patient of Dr Ping's...

MARY ANN

Please have a seat then. Join us.

Michele finds an empty chair.

MARY ANN

What's your name, sweetheart?

MICHELE

Michele.

GROUP

(as one)

Hello, Michele.

INT. MICHELE'S KITCHEN - EVENING

The table is loaded with grocery bags, brimming with fresh fruits and vegetables. A book, *MACROBIOTIC BASICS*, pokes out of one bag.

Cleaning out her refrigerator, Michele tosses junk food into the trash: bacon, some cake, the remnants of a pizza, left over Chinese, etc...

Grudgingly she also gets rid of a six-pack of Corona beer. Then she starts on cabinets, flinging out potato chips and Doritos.

When her doorbell jangles, she heads off to answer it.

INT. LIVINGROOM - CONTINUOUS

Michele opens the door to find Francisco standing there.

FRANCISCO

I hope you don't mind me stopping by. I have something for you.

He hands her a folded up slip of paper.

MICHELE

What's this?

FRANCISCO

It's Dylan's social security number.

MICHELE

Oh my God. Where did you get this?

FRANCISCO

Reynaldo got it for me from his cousin who works in admissions at the Maryland Institute.

MICHELE

Thank you. Come in. Have a seat.

Francisco sits on the sofa.

MICHELE

Can I get you a beer?

FRANCISCO

Sure.

MICHELE

Wait here. I'll be right back.

While she's gone, he surveys numerous photos of Michele with her Mom which are displayed on the mantel. But there is only one photo of Michele with her father. She is three years old and sitting up on his shoulders, piggy-back style. Her father is a handsome guy, and they both smile brilliantly, as if they couldn't be happier.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Rolling her eyes, Michele rescues a beer from the trash. Quickly she rinses it at the sink.

FRANCISCO (V.O.)

I could go for a snack, too, if you have anything just laying around.

So, grimacing, she retrieves the Doritos from the trash, too, emptying them into a clean

bowl.

INT. LIVINGROOM - CONTINUOUS

When Michele returns, Francisco sits quickly back down. She passes him the beer and Doritos.

FRANCISCO

Thank you.

Quizzically he eyes her glass of orange juice.

FRANCISCO

Orange juice?

MICHELE

Yeah. I'm on a health food kick.

FRANCISCO

Does this health kick include exercise?

MICHELE

(unsure)

Yeah, I guess.

FRANCISCO

(brightly)

Then you'll come dancing with me Saturday night?

MICHELE

You don't give up, do you?

FRANCISCO

Nope. Not really.

INT. ROOM 52 - DAY

Listening intently, Michele sits in the circle of HIV positive patients.

MARY ANN

I've been HIV positive for six years, but I've developed no AIDS symptoms. I wish I could tell you all to expect the same. But every person's immune system reacts differently to the virus. You might have 20 years to live, or you might have two.

(writing some words on a blackboard)

ATTITUDE. How you deal with the time you have left is the most important factor in determining your longevity. OPTIMISM is paramount. So is INVOLVEMENT. Get out of bed. Get out of the house. Get engaged in some activity that is important to you.

The black man with dreadlocks raises his hand.

MARY ANN

Question, Omar?

OMAR

No. I just wanted to thank the group for encouraging me last week to share my HIV positive status with my father. Telling that man the truth was harder for me than dying ever could be.

Some nods of recognition.

OMAR

You see my Pops is a Baptist preacher. I thought he'd see HIV as a curse for my wicked lifestyle. But instead he offered to help pay for my treatments.

(chokes up)

He even asked me if I wanted to move back home with him and my Mom.

MARY ANN

Congratulations, Omar. Telling our loved ones can seem daunting at first. But you must find the courage. It's too much stress to go it alone. And we know stress weakens the immune system more than any other factor.

The redneck boy raises his hand.

TOMMY

I got a question. But I'm sorta embarrassed to ask.

MARY ANN

We're all friends here, Tommy. You don't have to be embarrassed.

TOMMY

Well I was chilling with some friends at this bar. We was tossing back some brews, shooting some pool. And I met this girl...Amy....real pretty girl...and....um...

(getting more nervous)

We ended up in her car making out...just kissing, you know... But she can't get nothing just from kissing me, right?

MARY ANN

Saliva kills the AIDS virus. So no you can't get HIV from just kissing.

TOMMY

She wanted to have sex. I said no, but it wasn't easy.

Some chuckles around the room.

TOMMY

I mean, I haven't had sex in six months. What am I supposed to do, turn into a monk or something?

MARY ANN

Personally I wouldn't have sex with another person unless he or she knew that I was HIV positive.

TOMMY

What if I used a rubber and didn't tell her?

MARY ANN

And what if the condom broke?

TOMMY

But if I tell her, she's gonna dump me.

MARY ANN

Get to know her well enough so that you can trust her.

MARY ANN (CONT)

There's more to a relationship than just sex.

OMAR

(chuckling)

There's always the old knuckle shuffle on the piss pump.

MARY ANN

Good point, Omar. Masturbation is a safe alternative.

(turning to Michele)

So how is our newest member feeling?

MICHELE

Fine.

Some groans and heads shaking.

MARY ANN

Class, tell Michele what "fine" means in this room.

GROUP

Fucked up. Insecure. Needy. And Emotional.

INT. CLUB MIDNITE - NIGHT

YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN crowd a dark, warehouse-sized room. A FLOCK OF ARDENT FANS rim the stage. But Michele and Francisco hang back. Michele wears a sexy red dress, and Francisco's broad shoulders are encased in a dark blazer, paired charmingly with a crisp white t-shirt and jeans.

The band, PONCHO SANCHEZ, rocks the house with their infectious Latin rhythms. There are numerous guitars, horns, drums, saxophones, etc...Plus several band members shake pottery-shaped cloth sacks swathed in wooden beads which clickety-clack, clickety-clack incessantly, adding to the non-stop passionate beat.

A throng of sweaty DANCERS stomp and twirl ecstatically before the stage.

FRANCISCO

Would you like to dance?

MICHELE

I'm not a very good dancer.

FRANCISCO
I'm not worried about that.

MICHELE
No, really. I'm terrible.

FRANCISCO
Wait here. I'll be right back.

Moments later, he returns with two frothy, green drinks. He puts one in Michele's hand.

MICHELE
What's this?

FRANCISCO
Margarita. Guaranteed to improve your dancing.

She takes a swallow.

MICHELE
Damn, that's good.

After she takes another good belt, he nudges her toward the dancing mass at the front of the stage. They push into the middle of the whirling bodies.

Francisco moves with ease, relaxed and sensual. But Michele, though trying, is stiff as a board.

FRANCISCO
What are you thinking about right now?

MICHELE
About how bad I suck at dancing.

FRANCISCO
Don't *think*. Just *feel* the music. Feel the vibration of the floor flowing into your feet. Then let your body do what it wants to do.

He pulls her closer. With his hand at her waist, he guides her body where he wants it. And she follows instinctively.

FRANCISCO

That's it. That's perfect.

Still grasping her hand, he holds his arm up so that she can spin underneath. But she spins the wrong way. They crack up laughing.

FRANCISCO

The other way.

MICHELE

I think I'm going to need another margarita.

INT. CLUB MIDNITE - AN HOUR LATER

At their full power, Poncho Sanchez plays with abandon. The crowd dances in a frenzy. Sweat pours down elated faces.

Francisco and Michele dance up a storm now, too. Michele is no longer self conscious. She twirls and stomps and claps with glee.

EXT. CLUB MIDNITE - NIGHT

Spent and happy couples pour out of the club into the cool night air.

Francisco has his arm around Michele. They are both drunk, but delighted with their evening.

FRANCISCO

Let's take a cab. I don't think I should drive,
okay?

MICHELE

Good idea.

INT. FRANCISCO'S HALLWAY – CONTINUOUS

Michele and Francisco stumble inside.

MICHELE
(bemused)
This isn't my apartment.

FRANCISCO
No. It's mine. But you can crash here.

MICHELE
(suddenly alert)
I'll sleep on the sofa.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

In t-shirts and boxer shorts, Michele and Francisco share Francisco's large futon. Softly he strums his guitar.

MICHELE
(eyes closed)
I hope I didn't make you look too bad tonight.

FRANCISCO
You did great.

When he sets his guitar aside, her eyes flicker open.

MICHELE
Hey, no more music?

FRANCISCO
I have to get up real early. But you can sleep as late as you want.

MICHELE
What do you have to do on a Sunday?

FRANCISCO
We're planning another meeting to discuss some new developments in Honduras. And somebody has to hand out those fliers.

MICHELE
What's happening in Honduras?

FRANCISCO

Some high-ups in the military are being tried for torturing and killing thousands of civilians over the past five years. We want to make sure these guys spend the rest of their lives in prison.

MICHELE

Get me up, too, then. I'll help you.

FRANCISCO

(touched)

You don't have to do that.

MICHELE

I really want to.

FRANCISCO

Okay.

He reaches past her to set the clock.

FRANCISCO

Michele, can I ask you a sort of personal question?

Warily, Michele shrugs.

FRANCISCO

Are you still in love with your ex-boyfriend?

MICHELE

No....But I don't really want to talk about that.

She turns away from him, rolls onto her side, and closes her eyes.

FRANCISCO

You can trust me, Michele. I just want you to know that.

Her eyes remain closed. So he closes his eyes, too, and they drift off to sleep.

EXT. HOPKINS CAMPUS - DAY

Arms loaded with fliers, Michele and Francisco approach other HOPKINS STUDENTS.

MICHELE

(to a passing jock)

Excuse me, are you aware that President Reagan and the CIA are responsible for backing death squads in Honduras who have killed hundreds of innocent men, women, and children?

JOCK

Well....no...

She thrusts a flier in his hand.

MICHELE

We're having a meeting tomorrow night at six o'clock. Will you come?

JOCK

Maybe....if I have the time.

MICHELE

For something this important, you have to make the time. And tell all your friends.

As he ambles away, the jock reads the flier.

With a big smile, Michele turns to a watching Francisco, who grins right back. And they continue distributing fliers.

EXT. HOPKINS PAY PHONE – DAY

Michele dials a number.

MICHELE

Detective Callahan, it's Michele Braddock. Did you run Dylan's social security number yet?

(disheartened)

Isn't there something we can do besides wait

MICHELE (CONT)
around for him to get a job?
(pause)
Okay then. Just keep me informed.

INT. MICHELE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Michele staples pages of her new finished story. In bold letters, it is titled, "Tracking Dylan".

On a clean yellow envelope, she scrawls Francisco's name. At the top of the story, she writes, "The woman in this story is me" and slides it into the envelope.

EXT FRANCISCO'S DOOR – CONTINUOUS

Clutching the envelope, Michele just stands, undecided. Then she musters her courage, slides the story under his door, and bolts away.

INT ROOM 52 - MORNING

Everyone's gaze is directed towards a sobbing Michele.

MARY ANN
What's happened, Michele?

MICHELE
I wrote a story about my ex-boyfriend giving me AIDS.

MARY ANN
Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living-" Writing about the things that happen to us in order to understand them better is a step forward.

MICHELE
But he's gone. He's disappeared.

MARY ANN
Who's gone?

MICHELE
Dylan. My ex. He left before I found out. God, I hate

MICHELE (CONT)

him so much!

MARY ANN

It's okay to be angry. But at some point, for your own benefit, you have to put that anger aside and move on.

MICHELE

(sobbing harder)

After Dylan left, I made friends with another guy, Francisco, From my writing class.

TOMMY

You like this guy, huh?

A small nod from Michele.

MICHELE

I just feel so contaminated. Like poison or something.

Nods of commiseration around the room.

MARY ANN

You're not poison, Michele. But you do have responsibilities. Have you discussed your situation with Francisco yet?

MICHELE

I put a copy of my story under his door with a note telling him it's about me.

(drained)

He's probably read it by now.

Reassuringly, Mary Ann puts her arm around Michele.

MARY ANN

Relax. The hard part is over.

MICHELE

No, it isn't. I still have to tell my mother.

EXT MICHELE'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Head lowered, Michele trudges down the sidewalk toward her place. She stares down at some colored leaves, Falls carpet.

On the stoop clasping the yellow envelope sits Francisco. When she sees him, she freezes. But he walks calmly over to her and embraces her.

At first, she is stiff. But then she relents, giving herself over to his tender arms. She can't stop her tears from rolling.

INT. GILMAN HALL - ROOM 223 DAY

Sitting on the edge of his desk with a stack of stories in his hands, Professor Daniels addresses the room.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

There's a lot of room for improvement in the stories you turned in last week.

(brightening)

But there are also a handful of stories which show enormous promise.

He starts handing back stories.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

George, lay off the adjectives. You're smothering your nouns to death.

(moves on)

Becky, a little too sentimental for my taste. But not bad.

(moves on)

Steven, dig a little deeper. Your writing comes off as too slick.

(moves on)

Francisco, powerful stuff. See me after class.

Finally he halts before Michele's desk. She holds her breath, waiting for the impending criticism. But he surprises her.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

Extraordinary work, Michele. Would you please read your story to the class?

She is speechless.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

Michele?

MICHELE

Sir, I don't feel so good. I think I need to use the bathroom.

She flees. And a concerned Francisco follows her.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

Now there's a match made in heaven.

Some warm laughs around the class.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

I guess I'll read for our shrinking violet then.

(he begins reading)

I met Dylan in a dim, crowded artsy bar on a Saturday night...

INT. LADIES BATHROOM -CONTINUOUS

A wary Francisco peers inside, opening the door a fraction.

FRANCISCO

Michele?

MICHELE

Francisco?

FRANCISCO

Are you alone?

MICHELE

Yeah. I think so.

So he ventures inside to find her at a sink splashing some water into her face.

MICHELE

Is he reading my story to the class?

FRANCISCO

Yep.

MICHELE

Great.

FRANCISCO

Nobody knows it you. And even if they figure it out, so what? The world is what it is. At a certain point we have to accept that.

MICHELE

I know. You're right.

There is a sharp rap on the door.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

Michele?

A surprised Michele and Francisco turn to stare at the door.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

Is the coast clear?

MICHELE

Yes, sir.

Professor Daniels strides inside.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

Oh good, you're both here.

Nonchalantly he leans against a sink.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

With your permission, I'd like to submit both of your stories to a friend of mine who's an editor at a top notch literary magazine in New York.

FRANCISCO

Sure.

MICHELE

Okay.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

Francisco, have you started writing a novel yet?

FRANCISCO

No, sir. I'm a little shocked that I've managed to write a decent story.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

I want you to switch your major to Creative Writing. And I expect a complete outline and the first couple chapters of a novel by the end of the year.

FRANCISCO

I'll give it some serious thought, sir.

SEVERAL FEMALE STUDENTS stroll in, but they stop short.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

We'll be through momentarily, ladies.

FEMALES

(exiting)

Okay.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

Francisco, I'd like to speak to Michele alone now.

FRANCISCO

I'll call you later, Michele.

With genuine concern, Professor Daniels gazes across at her. But she stares at the floor.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

I've got a gut feeling that your story is more than just good fiction.

A small nod from her. And Professor Daniels countenance sags.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

How are you managing?

A small shrug from Michele.

Professor Daniels scribbles some numbers on a slip of paper. He hands it to her.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

This is my phone number. I want you to call me if I can help you in any way. No bullshit, okay?

MICHELE

Thank you.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

That said, I expect the outline of a novel and the first couple chapters from you, too, before the years up.

Michele actually grins.

MICHELE

No problem, sir. And thank you.

They exit together to the curious stares of some waiting females.

INT HOSPITAL EXAMINING ROOM - DAY

In a paper robe, Michele sits up on a bed. She coughs sporadically, as Doctor Ping scribbles some notes in her chart.

DOCTOR PING

How long have you had this cough?

MICHELE

For a couple weeks.

DOCTOR PING

How are you feeling in general?

MICHELE

Okay.

DOCTOR PING

No fatigue, headache, body aches or night sweats?

MICHELE

Some fatigue and body aches.

DOCTOR PING

I'm going to be honest with you, Michele. Your T cell count has dropped dramatically.

MICHELE

But I've only had this damn virus for eight months!

DOCTOR PING

HIV hits some people a lot harder than others.

MICHELE

But I've been on a strict macrobiotic diet. And I've just about stopped drinking alcohol. What else can I do?

DOCTOR PING

Are you under a lot of stress?

MICHELE

I might be dead in a couple of years. What do you think?

DOCTOR PING

Is the support group helping any?

MICHELE

Some.

DOCTOR PING

I've heard from some of my patients that yoga or meditation helps. Even just taking long walks to de-stress. Whatever you can do to control your stress level, you need to do it.

MICHELE

All right. I'll try harder.

EXT. BASKIN ROBBINS - EVENING

Michele and Francisco sit outside on a bench enjoying ice cream cones. Some Fall leaves flutter by.

FRANCISCO

Tell your mother tonight. That's why you're so stressed. Because the most important person in your life still doesn't know.

MICHELE

It's not that easy.

FRANCISCO

With her being a cop, maybe she could help you find that asshole and put him in prison or something.

MICHELE

I'm more concerned about her going off the deep end and shooting him.

FRANCISCO

That doesn't sound like a bad idea to me.

MICHELE

I don't want my mother going to jail for my stupidity.

FRANCISCO

Just tell her, and get it over with.

MICHELE

I'm going to do it tonight.

FRANCISCO

Promise?

MICHELE

Yeah.

FRANCISCO

What about your father? Is he still in your life?

MICHELE

He's been gone for 20 years.

FRANCISCO

Why'd he leave his family?

MICHELE

Who knows? Maybe he didn't want the responsibility. Or maybe we cramped his style. I don't really want to talk about it.

FRANCISCO

I'm sorry, Michele. I didn't mean to bring up a sensitive subject.

MICHELE

Don't worry about it. It's ancient history.

But from her melancholy expression, it is clear that even after 20 years, the wound of abandonment is still fresh for her.

EXT. LINDA'S FRONT PORCH -NIGHT

Peering in a window, Michele sees her mother seated in a comfortable chair, watching "Seinfeld" on TV. Her feet are submerged in a foot bath, and she sips at a glass of wine. She laughs heartily at the show.

Michele drags herself to the front door. She lifts her knuckles to rap, but they just hang in the air. Finally, she just walks away.

INT. MICHELE'S BEDROOM – CONTINUOUS

Reading an AIDS book, Michele sets it aside to answer her ringing phone.

MICHELE

Hello.

(beat)

No, I chickened out.

(wincing)

Please don't be mad at me, Francisco. I'll try again tomorrow. I promise. Okay. Goodnight.

INT. MICHELE'S LIVINGROOM – AFTERNOON

In sweats and bedroom slippers, a miserable Michele burrows beneath a quilt on the sofa. Her cough has turned into the flu. A box of tissues and a glass of untouched orange juice sits on a nearby table.

Insistently, her doorbell begins to shrill. It won't let up. So grudgingly, Michele shuffles over to answer it. She flings it open to find Linda, bawling hysterically.

MICHELE

Mom, what's wrong?!

In her police uniform, Linda marches inside.

LINDA

How long were you gonna wait to tell me?

MICHELE

Tell you what?

LINDA

I had to hear it from a stranger.

MICHELE

Mom, what are you talking about?!

Linda just glares at her. And an anxious Michele begins pacing.

MICHELE

Who told you? Doctor Ping? Mary Ann?

LINDA

No....it was Franco....or Francis...I can't remember his goddamn name...

MICHELE

FRANCISCO?!

(Linda nods)

I'm going to kill him!

LINDA

For what, doing your dirty work? You leave that boy alone! He was very concerned about you.

Sobbing, Linda sinks into a chair.

LINDA

I can't believe it. I just can't believe it.

MICHELE

Mom, please don't turn my life into a TV drama.

LINDA

How can you say that to me? You're all I have left in this world, Michele. And when you're gone, I'll have nothing. No daughter. No grandchildren. Nothing!

MICHELE

Ok. I'm sorry I didn't tell you. But I didn't know HOW.

LINDA

I noticed you lost some weight....I thought maybe Dylan got you pregnant and you had an abortion...but not *this*. Do you know how you got it?

MICHELE

The Great Houdini.

LINDA

I'm gonna find that scumbag and kill him!

MICHELE

Calm down.

LINDA

CALM DOWN? CALM DOWN? Are you KIDDING me?

A fit of coughing overtakes Michele. She can't stop. So Linda rushes to her, rubbing her back until the coughing dies down.

LINDA

We're gonna fight this together, okay, baby?

MICHELE

(exhausted)

I'm so sorry, Mom.

EXT. FRANCISCO'S HALLWAY – CONTINUOUS

Michele bangs on Francisco's door.

After a moment, he answers it.

MICHELE

Are you crazy?! You told my fucking mother?!

But Francisco's face is a total blank. He just looks right through her with dead eyes.

MICHELE

You had NO right!

But it's as if she's talking to a brick wall.

MICHELE

What's wrong with you? Say something.

FRANCISCO

My aunt just called from Honduras. They found my parents' bodies.

MICHELE

Oh my God.

INT. FRANCISCO'S LIVINGROOM – CONTINUOUS

Michele sits on a sofa, alongside a grim Francisco.

FRANCISCO

It's been four years. I knew to expect this. But somehow...I hoped...God, I'm so stupid.

MICHELE

What can I do to help you?

FRANCISCO

Nothing.

MICHELE

Look at me.

With tears streaming now, he turns to look at her.

MICHELE

You're going to get through this. I promise you.

Tentatively, she embraces him. And he clings to her, heartbroken.

INT. HOPKINS HALLWAY - DAY

A woman Michele passes an excited Professor Daniels, who stops her.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

Hey, some good news, Michele. My editor friend from New York called to let me know he's publishing your story.

MICHELE

Oh. Okay.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

You don't seem too excited about it.

MICHELE

Have you heard about Francisco's parents?

PROFESSOR DANIELS

Yes. Francisco called to tell me he'll be out all week. It's a real tragedy. But don't let his loss overshadow your accomplishment. You should be very proud-

MICHELE

I'll try, sir.

She straggles off, not one iota happier. So he follows after her, clasping her arm.

PROFESSOR DANIELS

Hey, are you going to be okay?

Then she faints in his arms.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING AREA – CONTINUOUS

In her police uniform, Linda sits with a cup of coffee, as Francisco rolls in. He sees her uniform and hurries right over.

FRANCISCO

Excuse me, ma'am, you're Michele's mother, right? I talked to you on the phone.

LINDA

Yes, hi. You must be Francisco. I'm Linda.

Cordially they shake hands.

FRANCISCO

How is she?

LINDA

Stable. The doctor's seeing her right now.

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM – CONTINUOUS

Michele lays in a bed, with an IV hook up, as Doctor Ping listens to her chest through his stethoscope.

DOCTOR PING

It's pneumonia, Michele. You're going to need ten days of antibiotics. And has anybody discussed AZT treatments with you yet?

MICHELE

Yes. But it's way too expensive, and the side effects sound horrendous.

DOCTOR PING

AZT is the only thing that's going to raise your T cell count.

MICHELE

My mom's insurance dropped me when I turned 18. And she has a hard enough time paying for my tuition that my loans and grants don't cover. I can't put this on her, too.

DOCTOR PING

If it was me, I'd take a semester off and take the medication.

MICHELE

No. I need school right now. Just give me the antibiotics. And please don't say anything to my Mom about the AZT.

DOCTOR PING

Okay. But on the record, I'm counseling you against not taking it.

INT. WAITING ROOM – CONTINUOUS

Doctor Ping approaches Linda and Francisco, who rise together, eager for news of Michele's condition.

LINDA

Is my daughter okay?

DOCTOR PING

I'd like to see you both in my office please.

They follow him into a small conference room.

INT. LINDA'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Linda, Michele, and Francisco share Chinese take-out.

LINDA

So, Francisco, Michele tells me you're a talented writer.

MICHELE

(embarrassed)

Mom.

FRANCISCO

Well I owe it to her if I am.

Curiously, they both just look at him.

FRANCISCO

I only took the writing class because Michele was in it.

LINDA

(enamored)

Well isn't that something.

Francisco and Linda share a smile, while Michele blushes and fumbles with her chopsticks. When the phone rings, Michele jumps to answer it.

MICHELE

(listening intently)

Thank you so much. Yes, I'll stop by tomorrow and pick it up.

Heads down, eating, Francisco and Linda exchange a conspiratorial glance.

LINDA

Who was it?

MICHELE

Wow. That was Doctor Ping. He got some financial aid for me. So I can start taking this immune booster AZT he was recommending.

LINDA

That's great news, honey.

MICHELE

That drug is so expensive and new, hardly anybody can afford it.

FRANCISCO

Well good things happen to good people.

Francisco lifts his glass, and Linda joins him.

FRANCISCO

To Michele. A beautiful young lady, inside and out.
To a long and happy life.

Michele toasts with them.

FRANCISCO

And to Michele's first published story. The first of many, I'm sure.

LINDA

You published a story?!

MICHELE

Yeah.

Squealing with delight, Linda jumps up and hugs her daughter.

INT. MICHELE'S LIVINGROOM – NIGHT

In the dark, huddled together on the sofa, Michele and Francisco watch a horror movie. When she jumps at a scary part, he chuckles.

FRANCISCO

Take it easy. It's just a movie.

But he is happy for any excuse to be closer to her.

FRANCISCO

Michele, thank you for being here for me.

MICHELE

That's what friends are for.

Then, to her astonishment, he snaps off the TV and kisses her full on the mouth.

MICHELE

Hey! That wasn't a very good idea!

FRANCISCO

Why not?

MICHELE

Because pneumonia is contagious.

FRANCISCO

I'm not scared of some little germs, Michele. And
I'm not scared of any virus either.

He kisses her again. She is so befuddled, she doesn't resist. But when the kissing grows more passionate, she can't handle it and pushes him away.

MICHELE

Wait, Francisco....I'm scared for you.

The phone ringing is picked up by the machine. They both listen.

DETECTIVE CALLAHAN (V.O.)

Great news, Michele! I found Dylan. He's working at a
craft shop in Gettysurg, Pennsylvania. The address is
1433 Quarry Lane. Give me a call, and we'll rap everything up.

MICHELE

Oh my God.

She jumps up, but Francisco grabs her hand, pulling her back.

FRANCISCO

Wait. Please don't go, Michele.

MICHELE

You don't understand, Francisco. I have to go.

FRANCISCO

Why?

MICHELE

Because I deserve this chance to confront him.

FRANCISCO

But what's the point? You can't change anything
that's happened.

Michele doesn't know what to say.

FRANCISCO

If you're going expecting sympathy or an apology
from him, forget it, Michele. Because any guy who can

FRANCISCO (CONT)

do what he did to you doesn't have a heart.

MICHELE

I'm going.

FRANCISCO

He's not your father.

MICHELE

(instantly pissed)

What the fuck did you just say?

FRANCISCO

There's no rational reason for you to be going to see this guy. You want to chase him and catch him, because you couldn't bring back your own father. It's abandonment issues you're dealing with here, not love, Michele.

A furious Michele rushes past him into the bedroom. But he follows right behind her.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Michele slings clothes into an overnight bag, as a brooding Francisco watches.

FRANCISCO

You promised you'd go with me to my parents' funeral.

MICHELE

The funeral's two days from now. I can make it back in time.

FRANCISCO

Let me drive you to see Dylan then. You're in no shape to drive.

Michele packs her antibiotics and AZT meds.

MICHELE

No. I need to do this on my own.

FRANCISCO

I love you, Michele. Please don't go.

But Francisco's heartfelt admission barely registers with her, she is so full of adrenalin and hellbent on going.

MICHELE

I'll call you when I get back. I promise.

FRANCISCO

Just forget about it.

Heartbroken, he strides out, as she finishes packing.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

At 75 mph, in moderate traffic, Michele heads for Pennsylvania. She coughs sporadically.

EXT. HIGHWAY – CONTINUOUS

Michele passes a sign for GETTYSBURG, PA.

EXT. QUARRY LANE - CONTINUOUS

Michele cruises a small, darkened shopping center. She passes a Steak'n'Eggs, a CVS pharmacy, a Payless shoe store, a tobacco shop, and finally pulls up in front of The Thomlinson Craft shop.

She hops out to stretch her legs, walking over to the window of the craft shop. A sign reads: CLOSED. Peering inside, she can see some beautiful wooden frames, hand blown glass vases and ornaments, original paintings, and cases full of jewelry.

INT. DAYS INN MOTEL ROOM- CONTINUOUS

A ragged Michele tosses her bag to the floor. She swallows a handful of her antibiotics and the AZT meds with a bottle of water. Then fully dressed, she crawls into bed and falls instantly to sleep.

INT. DAYS INN MOTEL - EARLY MORNING

As a nearby clock ticks steadily, a now wide awake Michele stares up at the ceiling.

INT. DAYS INN MOTEL BATHROOM – CONTINUOUS

Freshly showered, Michele applies some make-up at a mirror. Then she brushes her hair.

EXT. THOMLINSON CRAFT SHOP – DAY

Double parked, Michele grips her steering wheel with white-knuckled fingers. She watches some customers walk in and out of the store where Dylan works. She strains to see if he's inside, but there is no sign of him yet.

Finally, she drags herself out of the car.

INT. CRAFT SHOP – CONTINUOUS

A small bell jingles as Michele ventures inside. She sees a SALESLADY in a jean jumper and a white turtleneck adorned with pumpkins standing at a glass jewelry counter, putting price tags on some homemade candles.

Michele scans the store for Dylan, but there is still no sign of him. She sees an open door in the back and walks toward it. It is a work room of some kind, with sawdust sprinkled all over the floor. Michele cranes her neck to see more.

SALESLADY

(approaching)

May I help you?

MICHELE

Hi....I was wondering if Dylan's working today?

SALESLADY

He quit three days ago. And now I'm stuck with a half dozen customers who want to know where their picture frames are.

MICHELE

Did he find another job?

SALESLADY

I don't know. He just up and left with no notice.
Are you waiting for a frame, too?

MICHELE

No....But is there any way you could give me his
current address? It's very important that I find him.

SALESLADY

I could give it to you. But it wouldn't do you any good.
I went there looking for him when he didn't show up
for work. And a neighbor told me he moved already.

With disbelief, Michele just shakes her head.

SALESLADY

He screwed you over, too, huh?

A dumb nod from Michele, who heads out, her eyes bright with tears.

EXT. CRAFT SHOP – CONTINUOUS

Michele takes some deep gulps of the cool morning air. Then a poster of W.C. Fields
chomping a cigar in the tobacco store window nearby catches her eye. Curiously, she
strolls over and peers inside where boxes of expensive cigars are displayed.

On impulse, she walks inside.

INT. TOBACCO STORE - CONTINUOUS

Michele approaches a beautiful wooden counter. Pipes of all shapes and sizes are displayed
in its glass case. Fragrant pouches of tobacco line several shelves.

On a stool, the OWNER sits, sucking on a pipe. The older man wears a crisp white dress shirt,
snazzy suspenders, and a small black bowtie.

MICHELE

Excuse me, sir, do you sell European cigarettes?

OWNER

Sure do, Miss. What kind would you like?

MICHELE

Gitanes, please.

From under a side counter, the owner produces a pack and rings her up on an antique cash register, the kind with price buttons like old-fashioned typewriter keys.

OWNER

Seven fifty, please.

Michele pays. Then she shows the man a picture of Dylan.

MICHELE

Have you seen this guy recently?

OWNER

Yeah. That's Dylan. He's a Gitanes man, too. He was just in here yesterday. You know Dylan?

Michele's breath quickens.

MICHELE

Yes, sir. I'm here to visit him from Baltimore. But I lost his address that I wrote down, so I come in here on a lark, hoping maybe he shopped here, and somebody could help me out.

OWNER

He just moved into that big old house down on Pine Street. It's about two miles down the road. The third house, the one with the porch swing and the hanging plants everywhere.

MICHELE

Thanks a lot, sir.

She hurries out.

EXT. PINE STREET/ DYLAN'S HOUSE – CONTINUOUS

A shaky Michele climbs several crumbling cement steps. Each step is adorned with a plaster

gargoyle. And some solemn cats lounge on the porch.

Bravely, Michele steps around the cats. She stands before the door and raps hard, several times. But there is no answer.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Parked not far from Dylan's house, Michele sits chewing her fingernails. Consciously, she takes slow, steady breaths.

With keen eyes, she stakes out Dylan's place.

The sky turns from pale blue, to a deeper blue, as twilight closes in. The cats' eyes gleam eerily.

EXT. DYLAN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

When a tall FIGURE rounds the corner at the end of the street, a weary Michele sits straight up. Even from a distance, she can see that it is Dylan. Immediately, she hunkers down, observing him stroll into his place. For several moments, she doesn't move.

Then she scrambles out of the car.

EXT. DYLAN'S PLACE – CONTINUOUS

She takes the steps two at a time. She turns the doorknob, and to her amazement it opens. She walks inside. The sparse livingroom contains some art supplies, but it is empty of occupants.

INT. - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Softly, Michele steps inside. She finds Dylan standing at the stove, boiling a pot of water for instant coffee. He looks exactly the same as when they dated. When he turns and sees her, his eyes widen a fraction from underneath his glasses, but otherwise he remains calm. Some cats slink around his feet.

DYLAN

Michele. What are you doing here?

MICHELE

I need to talk to you.

DYLAN

Okay.

(short awkward silence)

Coffee?

MICHELE

No.

At a formica-topped table, Dylan busies himself making coffee. He stirs sugar in with a metal teaspoon, and the clanking sound fills the kitchen.

DYLAN

So what's on your mind?

MICHELE

Why didn't you write to me?

With difficulty, Dylan takes a slow, deep breath.

DYLAN

It was over.

Michele's face hardens.

MICHELE

You lie so much.

DYLAN

Look, let's not dredge up the past.

MICHELE

How's your mother?

DYLAN

(rattled)

What?

MICHELE

Your *mother*. Back in Baltimore. How's she doing?

Dylan shoves his coffee away.

DYLAN

What are you trying to prove?

MICHELE

What kind of sick person are you?

DYLAN

This is ridiculous. Just say what you feel like you have to say, then get out.

MICHELE

Why are you zigzagging from Baltimore to Chicago to Pennsylvania?

DYLAN

I have my reasons.

MICHELE

Tell me. Then I'll leave.

A strained Dylan grips the back of a nearby chair.

DYLAN

I've been searching for my real parents.

A shocked Michele doesn't know what to say. It is excruciating for him to share this information with her.

DYLAN

I found my mother in Hanover, PA. She's a factory worker. She got pregnant at fifteen by my father, a much older guy, a marine. He disappeared after she told him she was pregnant.

MICHELE

Why did you tell me you had no interest in finding your real parents then?

DYLAN

I'm not the most open person in this world, Michele.

MICHELE

I know your adopted mother's dead. So you lied about that, too.

Dylan grits his teeth.

DYLAN

My adopted mother died of cancer when I was eleven. She was the good one, the one that really wanted a child. So my father was left with a kid he never wanted in the first place. It's not a pretty Hallmark story meant for sharing.

(choked up)

I want you to leave now.

But Michele stays rooted to her spot.

MICHELE

(softly)

So how did you get it? The virus?

A look of terror flashes across Dylan's face, but then quickly he deadens his expression.

DYLAN

Get the fuck out of my house.

In a fury, Michele explodes, picking up his coffee mug, the sugar bowl, a toaster, anything she can snatch to hurl at Dylan. He ducks, cowering, with his hands and arms blocking his face. And the cats scatter.

MICHELE

HOW COULD YOU DO IT!! HOW COULD YOU FUCKING DO IT!!!

DYLAN

Stop, Michele!

She flips the table, yanks a blender from the wall and smashes it to the floor. Next, she starts on canisters of sugar, salt, flour, and dried noodles, pummeling Dylan with them. The clanging is horrendous.

DYLAN

Stop, Michele! Or I'm going to call the cops!

Overcome with emotion, Michele is laughing and crying at the same time.

MICHELE

Really? You're going to call the cops on ME?!

A depressed and defeated Dylan won't look at her. From the floor, he just surveys his wrecked kitchen with dispassionate eyes.

MICHELE

I have pneumonia, you fuck! Because of YOU, I'm probably going to be dead in a couple of years! Doesn't that mean anything to you?

DYLAN

(softly)

What do you want me to do, Michele?

Flabbergasted by his lack of emotion or caring for her, she descends on him, kicking and punching him with all her might. And he just takes it. When she is spent, she stops, breathless and confused he's not fighting back.

DYLAN

Feel better?

MICHELE

What is wrong with you? How did you get this FUCKED UP?!

DYLAN

I don't know.

He buries his face in his hands, finally breaking down and sobbing. He curls up into a fetal ball in the corner. The kitchen is completely quiet, except for the sound of his sobs and her ragged breathing.

Then suddenly Dylan springs to his feet, grabs a kitchen knife, and slashes both his wrists, clean to the bone, deep cuts that gush blood.

DYLAN

You satisfied now?

MICHELE

Oh, fuck.

Terrified, she backs away from him, unsure if he's going to attack her next. But he just drops his knife, sinks to his knees, and hangs his head. His blood drains steadily to the floor.

MICHELE

Don't move, Dylan! I'm going to get help!

She races out.

EXT. DYLAN'S PLACE - CONTINUOUS

Flashing ambulance lights twirl and flicker, lighting up the block. A crowd watches PARAMEDICS, wearing plastic gloves, roll Dylan out on the stretcher. He is ashen, but conscious. He and Michele avoid looking at one another, as the paramedics load him into the ambulance.

PARAMEDIC

(to Michele)

Are you his girlfriend?

MICHELE

I was.

PARAMEDIC

You wanna ride to the hospital with him?

MICHELE

No. Will you just tell him that Michele went home?

PARAMEDIC

Will do.

The paramedics take Dylan away.

INT. DAYS INN MOTEL – CONTINUOUS

As fast as she can, Michele packs up her stuff and races out.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Michele's car eats up the highway. She is pushing 80mph to get home.

INT. MICHELE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Michele crams a handful of antibiotics and AZT into her mouth. Then whipping some dark-colored clothes out of her dresser and closet, she dresses in a flurry.

EXT. CEMETARY - CONTINUOUS

A flock of dark-skinned RELATIVES, dressed in black, surround a large hole dug into the ground. Two identical coffins lay side by side. An enlarged wedding photo of FRANCISCO'S PARENTS is on display. Some relatives toss roses down, as a stoic Francisco watches.

Quietly Michele hurries over and clasps Francisco's hand. And he doesn't resist. He embraces her, holding her tight. Then he takes off his necklace with his mother's ring on it and lowers it carefully onto her casket.

INT. FRANCISCO'S LIVINGROOM - CONTINUOUS

A spent Francisco and Michele huddle on the sofa together, listening to some rain pelting the windows.

MICHELE

I'm sorry I left you, Francisco.

FRANCISCO

It's okay. You did what you had to do.

MICHELE

Will you play your guitar? Maybe that'll cheer us up?

FRANCISCO

I can't, Michele. I sold it.

MICHELE

To pay for your parents funeral?

But he just shakes his head.

MICHELE

For what then?

He shrugs, gazing at her with eyes full of love and caring. And then it dawns on her.

MICHELE

Oh my God. You sold your guitar to buy my medicine?

A simple nod from him.

FRANCISCO

I just wanted you to get better.

MICHELE

I am getting better. Doctor Ping was right. My cough's gone. And I feel a lot stronger. The medicine's definitely helping. Thank you so much.

FRANCISCO

Good. Then it was worth it.

MICHELE

How did you get to be this.....amazing?

He just shrugs.

FRANCISCO

Are you through with chasing that jerk?

For her answer, Michele kisses him passionately, full on the lips. It is a long and lingering kiss, full of promise.

