TWEAKED

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EXT. SCHOOLYARD - SANTA MONICA - DAY

Kids and parents hustle and struggle to remove backpacks and cue up for kindergarten. VANESSA, 30, splits her attention between her son SAM, 5, and another mother CLARISSA, 40, who in turn struggles with her SON.

VANESSA
They're the same thing.

CLARISSA
I don't think so.

VANESSA
I'm pretty sure it is.

CLARISSA
No. Maybe.
(turns to another MOM)
Are nits and lice the same thing?

MOM
Yes.

VANESSA
Anyway, there was only one case in the whole kindergarten.

CLARISSA
Who?

VANESSA
I don't know. The nurse said there was only one.

CLARISSA
In our class?

A tattooed MAN, 35, walks his SON nearby as he painstakingly removes the yoke of his backpack.

VANESSA
I don't know.

CLARISSA
Did you sign up for snack yet?

VANESSA
Of course.

CLARISSA
Don't bring goldfish. They hate goldfish.

VANESSA
The kids?

The tattooed dad's son is now having a conversation with her son Sam. This splits Vanessa's focus as she speaks with Clarissa and exchanges awkward looks with the man several feet away.

CLARISSA
Not the kids. It's like crack to the kids. To the school. They hate it. I know because Mrs. Mondrian threw me this crazy 'tude like "Oh. Thank you so much." You'd think I brought something with nuts in it. Oh, shoot, I have to sign up for the party book. Did you sign up for the party book?

Vanessa is preoccupied with Sam playing with the axe murderer's son.

VANESSA
No. Were we supposed to? I didn't see the sign up.

CLARISSA
There is no sign up yet. You should tell Mrs. Mondrian now before they post the sign up. Last year I got stuck hosting at Scribble Press. Come in. We should sign up now.

Now the dude is looking straight at her. He's got a watch cap, facial hair and full sleeves. And clogs?

VANESSA
Sign up for me.

CLARISSA
It doesn't work like that.

VANESSA
I'll be in in a minute.

CLARISSA
(notices)
Sam's hitting it off with the axe murderer's kid.

VANESSA
Just go in.

CLARISSA
He’s new. He’s an outsider.

VANESSA
School’s only been in a week.

CLARISSA
He’s an interloper. No one has anything on him. His son is named Cisco. He sits on Apple.

VANESSA
Apple?

CLARISSA
There are letters on the rug. Starting at the teacher. He started on Xylophone. She moved him all the way up to apple. He’s a bad seed.

VANESSA
Stop.

CLARISSA
He’s gonna want a play date.

VANESSA
So?

CLARISSA
Not the good kind. The single kind.

VANESSA
What?

CLARISSA
He’s single.

VANESSA
So am I.

CLARISSA
He usually sends the nanny. He came today because he’s horny.

VANESSA
Go inside.

CLARISSA
I warned you about yoga pants.

VANESSA
Go.

CLARISSA
Apple.

Clarissa leaves with her son. The two parents then drift together as they do when the kids are engaged.

RODNEY
Rod.

VANESSA
Vanessa.

RODNEY
That’s Cisco.

VANESSA
The cowboy?

RODNEY
The saint.

VANESSA
Saint Cisco?

RODNEY
San Francisco de Assisi.

VANESSA
Are you religious?

RODNEY
We lived near the Mission, in San Francisco, when he was born.

VANESSA
You and your wife?

RODNEY
Kind of. What’s your son’s name?

VANESSA
This is Sam. Sam say hello to Cisco’s dad.

SAM
(to mom)
Can we have a play date?

RODNEY
Sure.

VANESSA
We’ll see.

Bell rings. Last call.

MRS. MONDRIAN
Okay, everyone. Time to punch in. Does everyone have their time cards?

The kids all hold up time cards. Actual factory worker type time cards. Tears are shed as last hugs are collected. As if crossing the River Styx.

RODNEY
Take your time card, buddy.

VANESSA
Now don't be sad. Mommy will be here to pick you up. Mommy's always come back.

Sam and Cisco dart in together abruptly.

RODNEY
All right, then.

VANESSA
(calling in)
Where's my kiss?

RODNEY
I guess they're getting comfortable here.

VANESSA
That sucks.

RODNEY
You should be happy. You're doing your job.

VANESSA
He's usually so clingy.

RODNEY
This is good. The play date thing.

VANESSA
Yes...

RODNEY
Today?

VANESSA
Working.

RODNEY
I can pick them both up and then you could pick up Sam from my place.

VANESSA
I don’t know.

RODNEY
I’m right around the corner. Covered pool.

VANESSA
I...

RODNEY
I get it. Once we get to know each other a little better.

VANESSA
(relieved)
Thank you.

RODNEY
What are you doing for dinner tonight?

VANESSA
Um...

RODNEY
To get to know each other.

VANESSA
For the kids?

RODNEY
For the kids. Not a date.

VANESSA
I don’t...

RODNEY
Come to Marrow. Seven.

VANESSA
Marrow? You can get us into Marrow?

RODNEY
Not a problem. Can you get a sitter?

VANESSA
For Marrow I would chain him to a standpipe.

RODNEY
Seven it is then.

They drift apart, as they are now the last parents on the yard. She turns back.

VANESSA
You know I was kidding about...

RODNEY
I figured as much.

VANESSA
I'm a good mom, really.

Further apart...

RODNEY
I can see.

VANESSA
A great mom.

EXT. MARROW RESTAURANT - ABBOTT KINNEY, VENICE - NIGHT

Establishing of a posh hatchling eatery with a buzz of activity choking the door. Clearly someone has sunk significant coin into this architectural re-imagination. It is the trendy joint on the trendy block on the trendy street in the trendy hood. Vanessa, however, is not trendy and her Miata is not trendy either. She valets it nonetheless. She enters, questioning her choice of jeans and blouse as she passes the younger and hipper and hotter.

INT. MARROW RESTAURANT - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

She scowls at her watch. The bar crowd impinges upon the maitre d' stand.

VANESSA
I'm a little late. I'm meeting someone here.

MAITRE D'
Last name?

VANESSA
Oh, uh? Not sure. Rod?

MAITRE D'
Rodney Carnero?

VANESSA
Carnero? Really?

MAITRE D'
(menu in hand)
Follow me.

They serpentine through a ferociously crowded dining room. Vanessa is seated alone at a two top.

VANESSA
Am I the first to arrive?

The maitre d' is swept up with a smile as she is harassed by impatient customers who are waiting to be seated. A BUSBOY removes a setting from her table, leaving only hers. She protests to no avail...

VANESSA (CONT'D)
Wait... There are two of us...

She is left alone. She tries to catch the attention of passing staff. Awkwardly alone.

VANESSA (CONT'D)
Can I have a menu..?

The vibe is so charged and everyone is so engaged with one another and she is so isolated. She checks her emails. No texts. She calls Clarissa who answers.

CLARISSA
(phone)
What's wrong?

VANESSA
(phone)
Nothing. Why--

CROSS CUT WITH:

<u>INT. CLARISSA'S HOUSE - SANTA MONICA - NIGHT</u>

Clarissa is sitting and sorting coins with her youngest son in a done to death mini-mansion.

CLARISSA
Because you never call me at night.

VANESSA
I call you all the time.

CLARISSA
Never after seven. I'm timing Zane's sorting. Can this wait?

VANESSA
Are you serious.

CLARISSA
I'm dead serious. They have exactly twenty minutes per child per screening and he will either need to sort or count to thirty or draw the family.
(she holds up a stick figure drawing to her son)
Mommy has ears. See? EARS.

VANESSA
Our school is great. Why--

CLARISSA
For you, it's great. For my husband... can I call you back?

VANESSA
It's fine. I'll fill you in tomorrow.

CLARISSA
Wait. Where are you?

VANESSA
Marrow.

CLARISSA
How the hell did you get into Marrow?

VANESSA
Rod did.

CLARISSA
Rod?

VANESSA
Rodney. From--

CLARISSA
The tattooed axe murderer? Please tell me you aren't on a date with Rodney.

VANESSA
I'm not. We're prepping for a play date.

CLARISSA
I told you!

VANESSA
It's not like that. Besides, I think he stood me up.

CLARISSA
I don't think so.

VANESSA
Yes. I'm a half hour late and he's not even here and the busboy set the table for one.

CLARISSA
That bastard.

VANESSA
Should I leave?

CLARISSA
Right now. I can't believe you're still there. Go. Bye.

VANESSA
Bye.

Vanessa fidgets. Checks for texts, IMs, BBMs, emails. Nothing. She holds up her valet ticket to an ignoring passing waitroid.

VANESSA (CONT'D)
Can I get validated? Can someone please validate me?

A runner lays an appetizer before her.

VANESSA (CONT'D)
I didn't order this. Excuse me--

He's gone.

Then, from across the room, the kitchen doors swing open and out comes Rodney in his chef whites. A smatter of applause grows as he graciously smiles at adoring tables. His attention is vied for, but he remains focussed on his guest seated alone across the floor. She is relieved and perhaps impressed. He arrives at her table.

VANESSA (CONT'D)
I thought we were eating together.

RODNEY
I never said that.

VANESSA
So you're the chef?

RODNEY
I am.

VANESSA
Can I look at a menu?

RODNEY
No.

VANESSA
Is that the new trendy thing? No menus?

RODNEY
No. There are menus. I'll throw something together for you. Did you try the oxtail?

VANESSA
Is that what this is? I don't usually eat red meat.

RODNEY
Please.

She pops a sopa in her mouth. It's really fucking good.

VANESSA
Oh my god...

RODNEY
You like?

She nods fast enough to churn butter.

RODNEY (CONT'D)
Good. Sit tight.

He heads back to kitchen. She interrupts.

VANESSA
Wait...

RODNEY
(looks)

VANESSA
Aren't you going to sit?

RODNEY
I'm working. Relax. I think I know what you'll like.

He goes. She settles. Somewhat pleased. Especially once the food MONTAGE begins:

Plate after plate of culinary perfection. Simple, wholesome plates of well executed food crescendoing in a dessert hand delivered by the maestro.

VANESSA
No. Please.

RODNEY
It's a Baked Alaska.

VANESSA
I can't.

RODNEY
I know. Seems cheesy. Try it.

VANESSA
I'm so full. That was amazing.

RODNEY
You gotta eat it fast while the ice cream is firm and the merengue is hot.

VANESSA
I'll split it.

RODNEY
Vanessa...

VANESSA
Take it back, then.

RODNEY
(sitting with spoon)
Fine.

VANESSA
You know how amazing that was, don't you?

RODNEY
I'm a good cook.

VANESSA
I've been reading all about this place. And you're the hot young chef.

RODNEY
I don't know about young.

VANESSA
You're good. Everyone says it, but, and I'm no foodie, I can even tell it's awesome.

RODNEY
Look. I'm doing the same thing I did in the Mission. Some shakers pulled together some money and a space. It's all smoke and mirrors and spin. I'm just happy I got a shot at my own joint.

VANESSA
It's the hottest spot in town.

RODNEY
This week. No. I'm very grateful. I am.

VANESSA
What's that on your arm? Chives?

RODNEY
(interpreting ink)
I got chives, a spoon, garlic...

VANESSA
What did you mean by "kind of?"

RODNEY
What?

VANESSA
When I asked if you were married, you said "kind of." How can you be kind of married. That's like being kind of pregnant.

RODNEY
You asked if Cisco's mom was my wife and I said "kind of."

VANESSA
Same thing.

RODNEY
Not really. When she passed away we were engaged. So, technically...

VANESSA
I'm so sorry. I...

RODNEY
It was five years ago.

VANESSA
Can I ask... Was it childbirth?

RODNEY
An infection from the... whatever.

VANESSA
That is so awful.

RODNEY
Yeah. And it's been me and Cisco ever since. And lots and lots of nannies. Long hours.

VANESSA
I can imagine.

RODNEY
It's rough. The sad part is, he's used to it.

VANESSA
Kids are really resilient.

RODNEY
Yeah. Well, I'm so happy you liked it.

VANESSA
I'm really sorry.

RODNEY
For what?

VANESSA
For being so weird. I just...

RODNEY
There's one thing worse than sleeping where you eat and that's sleeping where your kid eats.

VANESSA
I know, right.

RODNEY
Being single at our age is tricky enough. You throw in the kid...

VANESSA
It’s impossible.

RODNEY
I mean, when do you introduce...

VANESSA
It’s so messed up for the kid. I feel like I’m just stacking up the therapy bills for him...

RODNEY
They should have trust funds for shrinks for kids of single parents.

VANESSA
It’s so awful.

A COOK delivers a brown bag to the table.

RODNEY
Thanks Xavier. This is Vanessa. Vanessa, this is Xavier, my fry cook.

XAVIER
Mucho gusto.

VANESSA
Gracias. Did you bring him with you?

RODNEY
Of course. These are the guys who do all the cooking. I just sprinkle parsley on the plates.

VANESSA
What is this?

RODNEY
Some mini-burgers and fries for Sam.

VANESSA
Oh. Thank you. He’ll be thrilled. I didn’t know this was that kind of place.

RODNEY
It’s not. I threw it together cause Cisco said its Sam’s favorite.

VANESSA
He found all that out in one day? Why does it smell so good?

RODNEY
Truffle oil. Sorry. I couldn’t help myself. In case you dipped into the bag on the ride home.

VANESSA
He won’t get any of them.

RODNEY
I’ll never tell.

VANESSA
Listen. The play date...

RODNEY
However you want...

VANESSA
Tomorrow?

RODNEY
Sure. I’ll pick them up.

VANESSA
You on the phone sheet?

RODNEY
Yes.

VANESSA
I’ll be by at four.

RODNEY
Excellent.

He scampers off and is absorbed into a cement mixer of intrusive sycophants. Vanessa smiles to herself.

VANESSA
Thank you.

<u>EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - SANTA MONICA - NIGHT</u>

Establishing shot of six unit Spanish.

INT. VANESSA'S APARTMENT - SANTA MONICA - NIGHT

Vanessa tiptoes in with her shoes off. The NANNY is asleep on the couch. She wakes up as Vanessa approaches, startled.

VANESSA
Shhh. It's okay, Lupe. It's me.

LUPE
I wasn't sleeping.

VANESSA
It's okay if you were.

LUPE
I was resting my eyes.

VANESSA
Lupe. It's okay to sleep.

LUPE
I wasn't sleeping.

VANESSA
Is Sam sleeping?

LUPE
Yes. I let him have one hour of screen time.

VANESSA
(whispers, approaching Sam's door)
Did you log it?

LUPE
(whispers)
Yes. On the board.

Vanessa quietly opens the bedroom door expecting to find her sleeping child. Instead, she sees...

INT. SAM'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sam awake on his mother's laptop. She gets miffed.

VANESSA
What the hell is going on here? Do you know what time it is? You better not have downloaded any apps-

VOICE
(o.c.)
Vanessa! You did not just say the "H" word in front of our son.

She turns the screen to see that her son has been skyping with his father, her divorced husband NEIL.

VANESSA
You scared the hell out of me.

NEIL
Again with the "H" word.

VANESSA
There is no "H" word.

NEIL
Our therapist would say otherwise.

VANESSA
Your therapist.

NEIL
No. Ours. If you don't think of him as our therapist then our separation therapy will have zero effectiveness.

VANESSA
Fine. Then let's cancel.

NEIL
Nice try. And put me in breach of our terms of divorce.

VANESSA
I never asked for separation therapy. You did.

NEIL
Not in front of Sam.

VANESSA
And why is Sam up? He should've been asleep an hour ago. He has school in the morning.

LUPE
I put him to sleep.

VANESSA
I know you did Lupe. How insensitive of you to call so late.

NEIL
I didn't call.

SAM
I called.

VANESSA
Oh.

LUPE
He was sleeping.

VANESSA
I know Lupe. How did you learn to skype?

SAM
Dad taught me.

LUPE
I was just resting.

VANESSA
Oh. I see how this works. You teach him how to skype and your hands are scot free. Do you really want a five year old online? With all that crap on the internet.

NEIL
You're the one using the "C" word.

VANESSA
Crap is not the "C" word.

NEIL
And you think it's healthy for Sam to see his mother going out on dates? Do you have any idea what emotional issues are now green shoots?

VANESSA
I was not on a date. Lupe, can you please take Sam out of here.

SAM
But this is my room!

VANESSA
There are miniburgers for him in the kitchen.

SAM
Miniburgers!?!

He runs out.

NEIL
Do you think it’s healthy that you feed him fast food at Nine at night? Is that parenting?

VANESSA
It happens to be Niman Ranch grass fed Wagyu beef! That cow had a better childhood than I did.

NEIL
I thought our family didn’t eat red meat.

VANESSA
Now it’s our family?

NEIL
Such hostility. This is why we need separation therapy.

VANESSA
And what makes you think I was on a date?

NEIL
Sam told me you were on a date with his best friend’s father.

VANESSA
Best friend? That’s ridiculous. They just met.

NEIL
So you admit it!

VANESSA
I was prepping for a play date. And so what if I was?

NEIL
With a parent from the community? What kind of a bottom feeder is he?

VANESSA
Excuse me?

NEIL
I didn’t mean to imply you were...

VANESSA
So, let me get this straight. You can bang every cougar in Malibu and, might I add, introduce our son to them, but if I go out one night to dinner then I'm a whore?

He doesn't respond.

VANESSA (CONT'D)
Is that it?

He just stares at her. He says nothing. He just stares.

VANESSA (CONT'D)
(on the verge of tears)
I can not believe you. That that's what you think of me. We used to love each other. Or still love each other. Do we still love each other?

He stares. Speechless.

VANESSA (CONT'D)
Don't do this to me! It's not going to work! You can't just--

The phone rings. She answers.

VANESSA (CONT'D)
Hold on.
(collecting herself, into phone)
Hello?

NEIL
Hi. Sorry. Skype froze. You were saying something about Malibu.

She realizes she was yelling at a frozen image on a screen, still staring in silent judgement, an anomaly of technology.

VANESSA
Nothing. I'm tired. Good night.

Vanessa is crestfallen. She exits Sam's room. Sam is at the table eating miniburgers and watching Wow Wow Wubsy on TV as Lupe sleeps on the couch.

INT. MARROW RESTAURANT - NIGHT

It's after closing. Music is playing loud. The BARTENDER pours Patron shots for the kitchen crew. Rod is stripped down to an A shirt sipping Bordeaux.

LAVINGTON, his line cook with teardrop tattoos, gold fronts and thick, God-given dreads drinks a Red Stripe.

LAVINGTON
He’s coming.

RODNEY
Not yet.

A thick Samoan mountain of a man with a carving knife tattooed on his forearm among the idolatrous fishing totems slaps him with his ham hock of a hand.

PUA
Tomorrow, brah.

RODNEY
We just opened. He usually waits.

PUA
I been your sous chef how many years?

RODNEY
Six.

PUA
How many kitchen?

RODNEY
Eight.

PUA
I ever been wrong?

RODNEY
I don’t remember.

PUA
I NEVER been wrong brah.
(drains a pint)
Never brah.

RODNEY
Get the book.

Xavier brings him the reservation book.

XAVIER
Reservation for one. Nine thirty.

LAVINGTON
When we’re in the weeds. Sneaky.

PUA
What's the name brah?

XAVIER
"August."

RODNEY
See. It's not him.

PUA
I think it is.

RODNEY
Whenever he reviews he uses a famous chef's name. It's like a game to this prick. Right?

PUA
Maybe he knows you're catching on.

RODNEY
No. His ego's too big to change it up.

LAVINGTON
It IS him!

RODNEY
Didn't you hear what I said?

LAVINGTON
Auguste Escoffier!

XAVIER
"August." Sneaky bastard.

PUA
(big smack)
I told you brah!

RODNEY
Bring me the menu.

PUA
Menu set, brah. And it's a fire breathing dragon.

LAVINGTON
We're going to knock him on his ass. Like you're little lady.

PUA
She like the food?

LAVINGTON
Of course she liked the food.

PUA
Did she?

XAVIER
She was embarrassed to lick the plate, but I'll bet she got her head stuck in a bag of truffle fries in the car home.

RODNEY
She liked it.

PUA
You falling in love, Brah?

LAVINGTON
He already has his mistress.

He gestures around him to the restaurant.

RODNEY
She's my kid's friend's mom.

LAVINGTON
(laughs)
Yeah.

XAVIER
Make him his brother.

LAVINGTON
For a night.

All laugh. Not Rodney.

PUA
He's falling in love.

RODNEY
(to bar)
Cut them off. They're speaking disrespectfully to their Chef.

ALL
(half in fun, with military flair)
Sorry, Chef...

RODNEY
And clean the walk in.

ALL
(damn)
Again... We did it yesterday...

RODNEY
And you'll do it again tomorrow.

ALL
Yes, Chef...

INT. ROOM - DAY

Close up of Vanessa. She appears to be naked. She scowls and winces and holds her breath as a noxious cloud engulfs her.

We reveal that she is being painted like a van in a spray tanning booth. A bronze female SPRAYER cracks gum and offers advice.

SPRAYER
The color is going to deepen as it sets in. Don't shower for as long as you can.

VANESSA
How long is that?

SPRAYER
That's up to you. At least like over night. This pigment is actually made from walnuts so it's not like chemicals. It's actually like good for your skin.

VANESSA
(coughs like a stevedore)
How is it for your lungs.

SPRAYER
I told you not to breathe.

VANESSA
That was fifteen minutes ago.

SPRAYER
It's made from walnuts, so its probably okay. It's like natural.

VANESSA
So is hemlock.

SPRAYER
What's that?

VANESSA
A poison.

SPRAYER
No. This is all natural.

EXT. REALLY NICE HOUSE - SANTA MONICA - DAY

Vanessa walks up to a door, checking the address on her blackberry. It's really nice. Five bedrooms. Less than ten years old.

She rings the bell. A hot Brazilian answers the door in designer jeans and a tank top.

ESTEFANI
You must be Sam's mom.

VANESSA
Vanessa...
(confused)
And you are?

ESTEFANI
Estefani. Please. Come in.

I/E. RODNEY'S HOUSE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The house is really nice. A woman's touch? Estefani leads her to the back yard where the two boys are jumping on a trampoline that's actually dug into a pit in the yard.

VANESSA
Wow.
(then)
Sam. Mommy's here. I'm here to pick you up.

SAM
No!

ESTEFANI
He is so sweet. Handsome boy.

VANESSA
Come on Sam.

SAM
No!

VANESSA
Is Rod home?

Rodney walks up, drying off. He was clearly working out.

RODNEY
Yeah, I'm here. Sorry, I work out when I'm nervous.

ESTEFANI
Who wants lemonade?

The boys cheer. Estefani goes inside.

VANESSA
I didn't know... She's very nice. And beautiful...

RODNEY
She's the nanny.

VANESSA
Oh.

RODNEY
Yeah.

VANESSA
That's so funny. Men and women are so different in how they pick nannies.

RODNEY
Cisco loves her.

VANESSA
I'll bet.

RODNEY
How was the beach?

VANESSA
The beach?

RODNEY
Sorry. I thought... You look like you spent the day at the beach.

VANESSA
Awesome. The beach was awesome.

RODNEY
Sam was a dream. He has such a strong command of his words. He is so expressive. And great empathy. Cisco got a splinter and Sam rubbed his hair while I took it out.

VANESSA
Really?

RODNEY
Great kid.

VANESSA
Cisco...
(awkward)
I'm sorry. I really don't know Cisco yet.

RODNEY
How could you? We just moved here.

VANESSA
It's a great neighborhood. Great school. I volunteered last week for snacks. It's a really good class. The parents are all really on top of it. I mean, one kid had head lice, but--

RODNEY
That was Cisco.

VANESSA
(ugh)
Oh. Sorry. I mean, they say lice don't like dirty hair, so... God. Wow. I totally just--

RODNEY
Don't worry about it.

VANESSA
I can get you some tea tree shampoo. I mean, not that you couldn't...

RODNEY
It's fine. And, don't worry. I brought in the hazmat squad. He's clean.

VANESSA
I'm sure he is.

RODNEY
Would you like to stay for dinner?

VANESSA
Thank you. We really have to...

RODNEY
We eat early here. I was going to whip up something quick for the kids before work.

VANESSA
We really have to go. Thank you, though.

RODNEY
Next time.

VANESSA
Next time.
(to Sam)
Time to go, Sam.

SAM
NO!

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - RODNEY'S HOUSE - DAY

They are all sitting around the table. Vanessa is wolfing down a bowl of pasta.

VANESSA
This is amazing. What is this?

RODNEY
Butter noodles. I make it for the kids.

VANESSA
What's in it?

RODNEY
Noodles. Butter. Salt.

VANESSA
Really?

RODNEY
That's it.

VANESSA
It doesn't taste like this when I make it. Why were you nervous?

RODNEY
Do I seem nervous?

VANESSA
No. You said you work out when you're nervous.

RODNEY
We have a critic coming in tonight. We think.

VANESSA
What do you mean you think?

RODNEY
The big ones always surprise you.

VANESSA
I wouldn't worry about it. You have the hottest place in town.

RODNEY
It's still a big deal. For a chef it's make or break.

VANESSA
Have you ever been reviewed before?

RODNEY
Not here, but lots of times.

VANESSA
And?

RODNEY
Positive, usually... All but last time.

VANESSA
So? What are you worried about?

He pulls a clipping out of his wallet.

CISCO
Not again...

RODNEY
(reads)
"The food was both confusing and predictable which, though seemingly an oxymoron, is the only way to describe the soulless repast set before me."

VANESSA
That's a lot of SAT words, right there.

RODNEY
And this is the first time it's MY place. People have a lot of money invested. Their money. It's nerve-racking.

VANESSA
Just cook this.

They share a smile as the kids lick their bowls.

RODNEY
Please come.

VANESSA
Tonight?

RODNEY
Please? Bring a friend. I'll pretend I'm cooking for you.

VANESSA
I don't know...

RODNEY
It's fun to cook for you. You're so skinny.

VANESSA
Ding ding ding. We have a winner.

EXT. MARROW RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Establishing shot of the Friday night crowd bursting the seams. PAPARAZZI flashes give the exterior and patrons an eerie James Whale electricity.

INT. MARROW RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Vanessa and Clarissa sit in the most self-conscious posture possible. Vanessa is dressed to kill in a low cut spaghetti strap dress showing off her deep walnut tan. Their eyes dart around like Dobermans in a bird house.

CLARISSA
I swear to God. Look.

VANESSA
It's not her.

CLARISSA
It's Lindsay Lohan. She lives in Venice. It's her.

VANESSA
(looks down)
Damn it.

She pulls up her forearm and there is a brown IMPRINT left on the white tablecloth.

VANESSA (CONT'D)
Clarissa.

CLARISSA
(looks around)
Who?

VANESSA
My spray tan is coming off.

CLARISSA
You didn't shower?

VANESSA
They said not to.

CLARISSA
Who? The rocket scientists that work there.

VANESSA
You sent me.

CLARISSA
Baby. You gotta shower before you go out. God forbid you get lucky. The wet spot would look like the Shroud of Turin.

Waitress approaches.

CLARISSA (CONT'D)
Hi. We didn't get menus.

WAITRESS
You're guests of Chef Carnero. He will be--

VANESSA
I'll explain.

WAITRESS
Chef suggests the 2005 Silver Oak Cabernet. Is that suitable?

CLARISSA
Send over the Sommelier.

VANESSA
She’s kidding. Whatever Chef suggests.

CROSS CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - MARROW RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Rodney is nervous as hell. His face is pressed against the porthole window in the swinging door to the dining room. The kitchen is a battleship engine room and everyone is shoveling coal in the haze of smoke and steam. The din as relentless as chirping cicadas barks above the clanging pots and sizzling pans as the Brigade de cuisine bark out in call and response cadence.

RODNEY
They’re here. Someone else expedite.

LAVINGTON
The reviewer from *Manger*?

Rodney jumps behind the line.

RODNEY
No. Vanessa.

PUA
Told you he was in love, brah.

RODNEY
Fire two scallops!

LAVINGTON
Firing two scallops!

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - MARROW RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Vanessa and Clarissa have loosened up a bit, thanks to...

CLARISSA
This wine is amazing.

VANESSA
Wait til you taste the food.

CLARISSA
Is this guy even a possibility? I mean, the nanny would have to go. That’s a given.

The Waitress brings the first course.

WAITRESS
These are fresh bay scallops, lightly braised in a sea bream infusion--
(see someone enter)
Excuse me.

She rushes off.

CLARISSA
Well, that was rude.

VANESSA
He must be here.

CLARISSA
Who? Is it Downey? I told you I saw Robert Downey.

VANESSA
The food critic.

CLARISSA
So? This is delicious. As long as he doesn't think a rat cooked it...

Vanessa scans and sees "Mr. August" sitting alone looking over the carte du jour.

CROSS CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - MARROW RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

The waitress busts in.

WAITRESS
Mr. August has just been seated.

PUA
You going to go out there and greet him.

RODNEY
Like hell.

PUA
They always like when you go out there, Brah.

RODNEY
I wouldn't give him the satisfaction. Eat the food...
(MORE)

RODNEY (CONT'D)
(working a sauce pan like a .50 cal)
You like it? Great. You hate it? Great. Bring this out to the ladies on table eleven.

He plates. Waitress runs out with it.

INT. DINING ROOM - MARROW RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A WAITER attends to “Mr. August.” He’s a dour fellow as one might imagine. Not much for eye contact.

WAITER
Might I suggest the--

MR. AUGUST
I’ll have the watermelon salad and the lamb.

WAITER
How would you like that cooked?

MR. AUGUST
(eye contact, at last)
Properly.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - MARROW RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Waiter bangs through the door.

WAITER
We got a real winner!

INT. DINING ROOM - MARROW RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The women are eating, savoring every bite.

CLARISSA
Is this unreal?

VANESSA
What a poo face. What’s his problem?

CLARISSA
(drains her glass)
You want me to sew this up? I’m gonna tell him that the food is awesome and he better write as much.

Clarissa rises and heads over to Mr. August. Vanessa grabs her arm to stop her.

VANESSA
Not cool. You're going to ruin it for Rodney.

CLARISSA
Oh, now Rodney's your new best buddy.

VANESSA
Are you jealous?

CLARISSA
Why shouldn't I be?

VANESSA
Because you and I met three weeks ago in orientation.

CLARISSA
Fine! We didn't have special bond. And my son came home crying because now your son won't talk to him. His kid sits on APPLE! Let go of me.

Clarissa pulls her arm free, revealing rusty finger marks left on her wrist.

CLARISSA (CONT'D)
Look what you did!

VANESSA
She told me not to shower!

CLARISSA
So now it's my fault!?1

VANESSA
You're making a scene!

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - MARROW RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

Lavington, who is now expediting, peers through the porthole.

LAVINGTON
Chef. You better have a look.

RODNEY
He hates it?

LAVINGTON
He loves it. I think he ate the seeds.

RODNEY
So what's the problem?

LAVINGTON
The MILF table is about to get froggy.

RODNEY
What?

INT. DINING ROOM - MARROW RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The two women are making a scene. Well, really just Clarissa. She's drunk. Vanessa is trying for the save.

VANESSA
Listen to me. You are out of line. He's a single dad who is trying his damnedest to balance a family and a career which is hard as hell and you're about to ruin his dream.

Even Mr. August is now looking up at the commotion across the room as the lamb is set down before him.

CLARISSA
Well, he should've thought of that before he left his wife!

VANESSA
(soto)
He's a widow.

CLARISSA
(hits her hard)
-er.

VANESSA
What?

CLARISSA
(sitting)
A widow-ER. That is so sad. And he cooks so good.

VANESSA
But he's not sad. He's happy.

CLARISSA
(drunken reverie)
He looks at the donut. Not the hole...

VANESSA
And you're going to make him sad.

CLARISSA
(welling up)
I don't want to make him sad. I don't want to make anyone sad.

We hear applause as Rodney storms over to the table. The critic watches as he chews his lamb.

RODNEY
What the hell is going on here? Do you know that sitting at three o'clock is--

Clarissa jumps up and hugs him sobbing.

CLARISSA
The food is delicious.

RODNEY
(aback)
Thank you.

CLARISSA
I'm SUCH an asshole.

VANESSA
She's not supposed to drink. Xanex.

RODNEY
Can we pour her into a cab or something?

VANESSA
I'll bring her home. The food was amazing.

RODNEY
I cooked my ass off.

VANESSA
Did he like it?

RODNEY
I have no idea. You look amazing. Thank you for being here for me.

VANESSA
(hugs him, big kiss on cheek)
Thank you for asking me to.

He watches over his shoulder as she escorts her friend to the door.

MR. AUGUST
Ahem.

The critic waves the Chef to the table. We see the approach from Rodney's P.O.V. The kitchen crew watch through the portholes.

MR. AUGUST (CONT'D)
Chef Carnero, I am not, in fact, Mr. August as my reservation might suggest, but instead Richard Cypher, culinary critic for *Manger* magazine. Let me start by saying that I never give any indication of my review, positive or negative, until the magazine is published.

We cut to see that Rodney's chef whites now have two perfect impressions of Vanessa's bronze boobs transferred by the hug, moments ago, in her low-cut dress.

RODNEY
I understand.

MR. AUGUST
I will say, however, that I am pleased that you have finally gotten to express your passion in its truest form. Bravo, Chef.

He rises and leaves. The room is frozen.

DISSOLVE TO:

<u>I/E. BEDROOM - VANESSA'S APARTMENT - SANTA MONICA - NIGHT</u>

Vanessa wakes up from pebbles hitting her window. She rushes over to see Rodney down there, a story below, tossing them.

VANESSA
Cut it out. You'll wake the nanny.

RODNEY
I didn't know you had a live in.

VANESSA
I don't. She fell asleep baby sitting.

RODNEY
(holds up wine)
You left half a bottle. This is good stuff.

CUT TO:

EXT. FRONT STOOP - VANESSA'S APARTMENT - SANTA MONICA - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT

The two of them sip wine out of styrofoam cups.

VANESSA
So, it sounds like you're getting a good review.

RODNEY
You never know.

VANESSA
Well, my son likes your cooking. And he hates everything.

RODNEY
I think he likes his new friend.

VANESSA
Made the food taste better?

RODNEY
It happens.

VANESSA
I guess that explains why I like it too.

She leans back. It's getting intimate. He runs his fingers through her hair.

RODNEY
Vanessa?

VANESSA
(doe eyes)
Yes.

RODNEY
I don't know how to say this...

VANESSA
What?

He pulls out an LED key chain flashlight and shines it on her scalp behind her ear.

VANESSA (CONT'D)
No!

RODNEY
Sorry.

VANESSA
Oh no!

RODNEY
Lice only like clean hair.

VANESSA
I have to check Sam.
(running in)
Sam!

RODNEY
It can wait til morning.

VANESSA
No it can't. They lay eggs...

The door opens. It's the nanny with bed head.

LUPE
I was just resting my eyes.