

TWEAKED

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9/15/11

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:

INT. CLARISSA'S HOUSE - SANTA MONICA - NIGHT

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.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - SANTA MONICA - NIGHT

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 damndest 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. Xanax.

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:

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

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.