

"Limerence"

by

Richard Hobley

FADE IN:

INT. DISABLED TOILET - COLLEGE - DAY

A small, functional room.

STEPHANIE sits on the lone toilet, her skirt raised up. Still wearing her underwear.

She's in her mid 40's. Still beautiful, but doesn't know it. Wrinkles and a few extra pounds are clearly enough to taint her self image.

Her face is completely blank. Creepily so.

Her hand moves across her inner thigh.

Blood slowly begins to dribble down her leg, splashing into the toilet. Red drops contaminating it.

As she moves her hand away, she reveals a dozen scars - some fresh, some months old - covering her inner thigh.

There's a razor blade in her hand. She presses it softly against her skin again.

CLICK!

The door pushes open.

Stephanie jerks upwards, accidentally slicing her leg with the blade.

She winces.

Stood in the doorway, staring back at her, is ALEX. He's in his late 20's. Trendy. Handsome.

He stares, eyes wide, at Stephanie. Frozen in the doorway. He doesn't apologize. Doesn't hurry out. He just stares.

Eyes focussed on her legs. The blood leaking across her skin. The open wound.

He looks up, his eyes locking with hers for a strange, almost intimate, moment.

Stephanie finally breaks away, shooting up to her knees, wobbling her dress back down her legs to cover herself.

Flustered. Cheeks red.

STEPHANIE

I --

ALEX

Sorry.

Alex pulls the door shut, vanishing beyond it.

Stephanie sits herself back down.

Takes a deep breath, breathing in through her nose. Holds it. Then exhales out of her mouth.

Does it again. She's clearly been practicing this.

She reaches over for a tissue, dabbing her blood smeared leg.

INT. CORRIDOR - COLLEGE - DAY

Holding herself awkwardly, books held tightly against her chest, Stephanie hurries down a corridor. Passing dozens of STUDENTS. All smiling, laughing together.

Nobody notices her. Nobody even glances at her.

INT. LECTURE ROOM - COLLEGE - DAY

Tiered blue chairs sit before a small stage with a large computer screen hanging above it. A podium to the right.

Two dozen students are planted carelessly around the room. Chatting and messing about with their laptops and phones.

The door creaks open. All eyes turn to it.

STEPHANIE stumbles in, dropping her books.

Restrained laughter from the class.

She scoops them up quickly, blushing.

STEPHANIE
Sorry. Sorry I'm late. The
traffic --

She plants herself in front of the podium. Clicks a laptop, bringing the desktop into life on the screen behind her.

Looks up for the first time. The students don't even care that she's arrived. Barely even acknowledge it.

All eyes back on their phones. Each other. Anything but her.

Except for one, older student. From the look on her face, somebody she clearly didn't expect to see here.

ALEX.

Their eyes meet.

She stares back at him, shocked. What is he doing here?

The corner of his lips rise into a handsome smirk. Is that flirtatious? Or is he mocking her?

Eventually she snaps herself out of it.

Blinks awkwardly a few times, trying to focus.

STEPHANIE

I -- er -- right -- okay. So last week we were exploring the ideas of metaphysical solipsism, right? Who wants to recap on what we went through?

Blank faces stare back at her.

She can't help but look over at Alex again.

EXT. CAR PARK - DAY

CRACK.

Stephanie's car door whacks right into a concrete pillar.

STEPHANIE

Shit.

She closes the door, surveying it. It's a little scratched. Dented. But could be worse.

She takes deep, calming breaths again.

INT. CAR - DAY

The hum of an impatient engine.

Stephanie watches as rows of children rush out from the nearby school.

The backdoor swings open.

A young boy, TOMMY, clunks his bag into an empty seat, before pulling the door shut behind him.

STEPHANIE

Safety belt?

Tommy tugs the belt over his shoulder, strapping himself in.

STEPHANIE

How was your day, Tommy?

As she turns to face him, he's already pulling out his Nintendo DS. Irritating computer-game music blares out of the console as he begins tapping buttons.

STEPHANIE

Tommy?

Stephanie waits a second for his answer. When she realizes that it's not going to come, she drives away in silence.

INT. STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The house is clean. Perfect.

INT. KITCHEN - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Stephanie sits at the table, scribbling on a student paper.

Three empty plates, neatly arranged with cutlery and glasses, wait before her.

Saucepans softly bubble on the hobs.

She looks over at the clock. It's just gone 7pm.

RING. RING.

She neatly places her pen next to the paper.

Heads into the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

She picks up the phone.

STEPHANIE

George?

She walks back into the kitchen with the phone.

INT. KITCHEN - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

GEORGE

(on the phone)

I'm going to be a little late home tonight.

Stephanie's about to protest, when--

GEORGE

(on the phone)

I'm sorry, Steph. I tried to -- to figure something out. But we're just too swamped.

STEPHANIE
When do you expect to be back?

GEORGE
(on the phone)
I'm not sure. Late. I wouldn't
wait up.

An uncomfortable silence.

GEORGE
(on the phone)
You didn't cook anything up, did
you? You know I told you not to.

STEPHANIE
No. It's okay. I'll see you
tonight.

GEORGE
I'm sorry. I'll try to get home
as soon as I can.

STEPHANIE
I--

But he's already gone.

STEPHANIE (CONT'D)
I love you.

She puts the phone down on the table.

Turns off the oven hobs.

Begins arranging the food onto two of the plates.

Leaves the leftover food to simmer in the saucepans on top
of the oven.

STEPHANIE
Tommy! Dinner's ready!

She opens up the fridge, pulling out a carton of orange
juice. Pours it into two cups.

Sits herself down before her meal. Impatiently waiting for
Tommy.

STEPHANIE
Tommy! Dinner!

TOMMY (O.S.)
Okay, okay, okay.

He saunters into the room.

TOMMY
Where's dad?

STEPHANIE
He's -- he has to work late
tonight. But that's okay, right?
We can--

Tommy lifts up his plate and fork, hurriedly taking them
away with him into the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

He flicks the TV on, sitting himself on the floor before
it. Digging into his food.

Stephanie stands in the doorway.

STEPHANIE
We eat at the table, Tommy.

TOMMY
Dad's not eating at the table.

STEPHANIE
Dad's not here.

TOMMY
Then we don't need to eat at the
table.

She opens her mouth, about to speak, to contest him... but
stops herself.

INT. KITCHEN - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

She sits back down before her food.

The sound of the TV trails in through the doorway.

Her expression completely blank, she lifts her fork, and
begins to eat.

Alone.

One slow mouthful after another.

INT. BATHROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Water pours down across Stephanie's body as she stands in
the shower.

Running down her face.

Her eyes close as her finger traces along the fresh cuts on her inner thigh.

She moves her hand higher, holding it between her legs.

Begins to touch herself.

INT. BEDROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Stephanie lies in the darkness on one side of the bed. Wide awake.

The sound of a door opening on the floor below. Footsteps heading up the stairs.

She looks at the digital clock. 1am.

The door slithers open, and GEORGE slides in, removing his suit and tie.

He throws them carelessly onto the floor.

Pulls off his trousers. And slides into the bed beside her.

GEORGE
Are you awake?

Stephanie stays perfectly still, facing away from him.

George settles down on the opposite side of the bed. A wide gap between them.

GEORGE
Steph? You asleep?

She takes a deep breath, puts on her best smile, and turns to face him.

INT. STEPHANIE'S OFFICE - COLLEGE - DAY

Stephanie sits in her small, efficient office. Again, everything is neat and ordered. An anal sense of structure.

KNOCK. KNOCK.

STEPHANIE
Come in.

Stephanie blushes instantly as the door opens to reveal Alex.

STEPHANIE
I -- how can I help you?

ALEX
I just wanted to introduce
myself. You know, properly.

Stephanie stares at him, wide eyed.

ALEX (CONT'D)
I just joined your class. The
history of philosophy unit.

STEPHANIE
Right. Yes. Of course you did.

He smiles.

She fidgets awkwardly.

Alex doesn't seem too bothered by the sudden silence. He
smiles again. A wide, beautiful smile.

His eyes lower down to her legs.

Stephanie can't help but notice. She shuffles her dress
further down, concealing herself.

STEPHANIE
Nobody mentioned anything to me
about a new student.

Alex walks into the room. Lifts up a photo frame, showing
George and Stephanie, happy together.

Watches her shift uncomfortably as he puts it back down in
the wrong place.

ALEX
Oh, I'm not new. Seems like I've
been hanging around this place
forever, you know? I just, I
don't know, felt like a change.
My units were pretty shit, so I
transferred. Your class seemed
more... *interesting*.

Another uncomfortable pause.

ALEX (CONT'D)
I -- I know I'm a bit late to
join. I hope you don't mind? I
haven't missed too much, have I?

Unable to ignore it, Stephanie stands, lifting up the photo
frame, putting it back in its proper place.

STEPHANIE
We -- we're a few weeks into the
module. You've missed a lot,
actually.

ALEX
Maybe you could forward me the
readings? -- Here.

He writes down his e-mail address on a piece of paper and
passes it to her.

She reads the address:

STEPHANIE
Alex Marshall?

ALEX
Stephanie Parker.

Alex continues to stare at her. Again, she fidgets,
blushing red.

ALEX
So, I should go. I'll see you
this afternoon though, right?

STEPHANIE
What?

ALEX
In the lecture? On--

STEPHANIE
Oh. Of course. Yes.

Alex turns away, opening the door.

INT. DISABLED TOILET - COLLEGE - DAY

Stephanie stands before the sink, staring at her haggard
reflection.

Tracing the lines under her eyes. Looking at the damage age
has done to her face. Her body.

She takes a deep breath, and begins applying mascara.

INT. DEAN'S OFFICE - COLLEGE - DAY

The DEAN, a smarmy looking man in an expensive suit, sits
at a desk, typing on his desktop PC.

The office is covered with plaques and various awards that
the Dean and the college have won.

KNOCK. KNOCK.

DEAN
Come in.

Stephanie opens the door, peering in awkwardly.

STEPHANIE
You wanted to see me?

DEAN
Yes.

His face is cold.

DEAN (CONT'D)
Take a seat.

Stephanie warily sits down.

The Dean looks up at her, giving her a forced, sympathetic smile.

INT. DISABLED TOILET - COLLEGE - DAY

Stephanie sits on the toilet, with dried black tears staining her cheeks. Her face is cold. Controlled.

She looks over at the door. She hasn't locked it, again. Stares at the handle, half expecting somebody to enter.

But they don't.

INT. CORRIDOR - COLLEGE - DAY

Having mostly cleaned up her cheeks, Stephanie slowly makes her way towards her lecture room.

She looks down at her watch. She's late... again.

Flustered, she jostles her books, trying to reach for the door handle, when--

ALEX
Hey.

She turns to see Alex, standing behind her.

ALEX
Looks like I'm not the only one
who's running late, huh?

Stephanie stares back at him with her sad, rubbed-red eyes.

ALEX
Are you alright? Do you need some
help?

Stephanie doesn't quite know how to answer him - slightly startled by the question. Why would he care?

ALEX (CONT'D)
With the door? Do you want some help?

STEPHANIE
Oh. Yeh. If you don't mind.

ALEX
Not at all.

He reaches past her, brushing his arm across her shoulder, grabbing the door handle.

He holds his hand on the door, lowering the handle slightly.

ALEX
Oh, hey, you've got something--

He raises a hand up to her cheek, gently rubbing away a tiny black smudge. Fingers pressing against her soft skin.

After the mark is removed, his fingers hold on her cheek for a second too long, before he grins, and tugs open the door.

Stephanie stands, rooted to the spot.

ALEX
Are you going in?

She rapidly blinks back into reality, and hurries into the classroom.

Watches Alex as he strolls up the steps, planting himself at the back of the room again.

He looks up to see her staring at him.

A wide, flawless smile on his face.

INT. CAR - DAY

Stephanie sits in her car listening to the weather as her son plays on his handheld console.

INT. KITCHEN - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

In silence, Stephanie organizes the table attentively. Everything in its perfect, precise place.

She adjusts the cutlery, ensuring the knives, forks and spoons are faultlessly lined up with one another.

LATER

The sound of knives scraping over china.

Stephanie sits opposite her husband, GEORGE. He's of a similar age to her, but he could be ten years younger. Chiselled and handsome, with a tie hanging loose around his neck. A real movie star face.

Tommy sits between them, stuffing food into his mouth. Pushing the vegetables out of the way.

STEPHANIE
Eat your veg, Tommy.

Tommy continues to push them about aimlessly.

Stephanie doesn't bother to try and instruct him again.

The three of them eat in silence.

Stephanie looks across at her husband and son. Both of them have their eyes lowered, focussed on their food. Seemingly content to sit in silence.

She forces a hollow smile as she attempts to instigate a conversation.

STEPHANIE
So how was school today?

TOMMY
Yeh, alright.

STEPHANIE
Any good lessons?

TOMMY
Not really.

STEPHANIE
Well... did anything interesting happen then?

Tommy lets out an exaggerated exhalation.

TOMMY
Why?

GEORGE
Tommy!
(beat)
What do you mean 'why'? Your mother's just asking how your day was.

TOMMY
It's school. How could anything
interesting happen?

They fall silent again. This time Stephanie doesn't bother to talk.

She sips from her glass of wine.

LATER

George wipes away some of the dirt from the plates in the sink as Stephanie fills the dishwasher.

STEPHANIE
Have I upset you?

George pauses.

GEORGE
No. Why would you have upset me?

Stephanie shrugs: no reason.

George flicks his hands, flinging the water from his skin, and turns to his wife.

GEORGE
To be honest, I thought you were
pissed at me. You know, for all
the overtime I've had to do.

Stephanie forces a smile.

She steps towards her husband, placing a reserved hand on his side. Hesitantly moves her lips towards his.

Her lips softly touch his skin, waiting for him to kiss her back. But he doesn't.

He seems distracted. Disinterested. But she tries to encourage him anyway, running her hands across his back.

GEORGE
I -- feel disgusting. Really need
a shower, I think.

George pulls away, quickly moving across the room, and out of the door.

Stephanie takes a deep breath.

Stands rooted to the spot. Staring blankly forward at the wall. A statue. A lonely statue.

VMMM. VMMM.

She jumps as something vibrates behind her.
She scans around the room.
The noise is coming from George's jacket.
She pats down the pockets, until she finds his cell phone.
Flips it open to see: '1 New Message'.
She looks over at the open door.
Debates what to do for a second.
Clicks 'open' on the message, to see:

Claire

You were amazing last night. You're the best ;) Xx

She stares down at the phone.
Sees George through the doorway, heading back towards her.
In the spur of the moment, she pockets his phone.
George enters, smiling as he scoops up his jacket.
Stephanie stares at him, with a blank, emotionless face.

INT. BEDROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Stephanie sits in bed reading.
Tommy runs into the doorway, leaping up into George's arms.
George playfully spins him around in the air.

GEORGE

Come on, kiddo. Time for you to
get to bed.

Stephanie lowers her book, watching as Tommy squeezes his
father tight.

George lowers him down.

GEORGE

Don't let the bed bugs bite.

George pretends to bite him as he laughs, running out into
the hallway.

STEPHANIE

Night, Tommy!

But he's already gone.

TOMMY (O.S.)
Night, mom.

She looks over at George.

STEPHANIE
He adores you. I don't think he
even sees me.

GEORGE
Don't be so hard on yourself. He
doesn't mean anything by it.

STEPHANIE
Everybody adores you.

GEORGE
Oh, yeh. Definitely. Did you know
I have to pay for my own personal
security guards just to keep the
crazed *adorees* at bay these days?

He grins as he begins searching through the pockets of his
clothes.

GEORGE
Have you seen my cell phone
anywhere? I could have sworn it
was in my jacket?

STEPHANIE
Did you check in the kitchen?

GEORGE
I'm gonna call it. One sec.

As he heads out of the room, Stephanie rummages through her
bag, pulling out his phone. Quickly turns it off.

George enters with the landline phone pressed to his ear.

STEPHANIE
Any luck?

GEORGE
Straight to answer machine. I
must have left it at work. But I
could have sworn--

He thinks on it for a moment.

GEORGE
Can you set an alarm for me? I'll
have a proper look in the
morning.

Stephanie nods.

George tucks himself into the bed beside her.

Without saying anything in particular, George switches the light off.

Darkness.

MORNING

Stephanie wakes as the sun slithers through the curtains.

She stretches out, yawning.

Looks over at the bedside cabinet, where a steaming cup of coffee sits, waiting for her. Can't help but let out a slight, sad smile.

INT. CAR - DAY

Stephanie sits in her car, fidgeting awkwardly.

She looks down at George's phone in her hand.

She's typed out a message to Claire. She reads it in a mumble:

STEPHANIE
Hey Claire. Do you fancy brunch
today? At...

She looks up at the cafe on the road in front of her. The 'Sunshine Cafe'. Types the name into the phone. Looks at the time. It's 11am.

STEPHANIE
Around 11.30am?

Hits send.

She stares at the phone. What is she doing?

Pulls out a packet of cigarettes. Lights one, inhaling with shaky hands.

VMMMM. VMMMM.

She looks down at the phone: 1 new message.

STEPHANIE
Shit. Fuck. Right.

INT. SUNSHINE CAFE - DAY

Stephanie sits in a small booth in the cafe, sipping a lukewarm coffee.

Watching every woman that enters. Every single time thinking: is that her?

She pulls the phone out. Opens up the text to read it again:

Claire

Er, bit last minute. But sure. I could murder a cheese burger. See ya soon. X

She taps her fingers impatiently on the desk.

Surveying everyone around her. Business types eating breakfast. She looks over a few different women. Is that her? Is that her?

The door jingles. She looks up to see... a young, beautiful woman. Blonde hair. Stick thin body. Gorgeous, flawless face.

Her heart stops. She knows it's going to be her.

The woman walks right past her, sitting down at a table by the window.

Stephanie looks down at the phone.

Enters: **"I'm gonna be 5 minutes late. Sorry"**. And sends.

She stares at the woman, hoping to God that it's not her.

But seconds later, the woman removes her phone.

That confirms it. This is CLAIRE, the woman George is having an affair with...

Stephanie motions as if she's going to go over to her and talk to her. Confront her. But she doesn't.

A single, stern tear rolls down her cheek as she blinks.

Her already cold body, her expressions, somehow seem even number. Almost limp. Watching this gorgeous woman, smiling and laughing as she orders a drink from the waiter.

EXT. CAFE - DAY

Broken and deflated, Stephanie walks back towards her car.

The phone vibrates.

But she doesn't answer it.

She lets it fall from her hand, down onto the path.

INT. LECTURE ROOM - COLLEGE - DAY

Flustered, Stephanie bursts through the door.

Everybody freezes, turning to face her.

Another TEACHER is stood on the stage, taking the class.

Stephanie looks down at her watch. She's practically missed the lecture.

A few grins from the students. Alex isn't among them - isn't even there.

INT. DEAN'S OFFICE - COLLEGE - DAY

DEAN

A family emergency?

STEPHANIE

Yes.

DEAN

This is getting beyond ridiculous, Steph. It's, what, the fifth time this semester? You used to be -- I mean, I need to know that you're committed. For -- for your students. I can't have a teacher who comes and goes as she pleases. We spoke about this yester--

STEPHANIE

I know. I'm sorry. I just -- it was last minute. I -- I had to take Tommy to the hospital.

The Dean's face softens.

DEAN

Oh. Is he alright?

Stephanie lowers her eyes.

STEPHANIE

He's fine. He -- slipped. Broke his arm. You know what boys are like.

DEAN

Well -- you should have called. Told somebody.

INT. STEPHANIE'S OFFICE - COLLEGE - DAY

Stephanie sits at her desk, flicking through pictures of her and George. Showing an almost unrecognizable, young, happy couple.

KNOCK. KNOCK.

The door creaks open.

Alex peers inside.

ALEX

Hey.

Stephanie quickly shuts her laptop.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Can I come in?

She stares back at him. What does he want? Why is he here?

STEPHANIE

I -- it's not a good--

But he comes in anyway.

ALEX

I wanted to see if you were okay.
You looked a bit flustered
earlier.

He smiles.

STEPHANIE

You -- why?

ALEX

Why what?

STEPHANIE

Why would you care if I'm okay?

Alex moves across the room, examining her stuff.

He moves a pot of pencils on the desk. She instantly moves it back into its rightful place.

Alex looks over at her. His eyes flicker down to her legs.

STEPHANIE

Look, whatever you think you saw
it -- it's not that.

ALEX

What do I think I saw?

STEPHANIE
I don't know. But it wasn't that.

ALEX
But you don't know what I was thinking.

STEPHANIE
Look, I'm not in the mood for--
Alex reaches out, grabbing her hand in his.

ALEX
Ask me what I was thinking.
He hovers before her, staring into her eyes. She stares back... heart beating out of her chest. Almost trancelike.

STEPHANIE
What -- what were you thinking?

ALEX
I was thinking... that you wanted somebody to see you.
Stephanie snaps her hand away.

STEPHANIE
Excuse me?

ALEX
You didn't lock the door. It's a simple flick.
He mimes turning the lock.

STEPHANIE
I -- I guess it slipped my -- look, I don't have to justify myself -- I --

ALEX
You didn't lock it because you wanted somebody to see you. You can lie and tell yourself something else if it makes you feel better about it.
Stephanie stares back at him, unsure how to respond.

ALEX
I guess -- I wanted you to know, even if nobody else does... *I see you.*
He turns and walks away.

INT. KITCHEN - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Stephanie, George and Tommy sit around the table, eating dinner from their perfectly laid out table.

GEORGE

He's got some nerve, answering my phone like that.

Stephanie stares down at her plate. On the verge of snapping.

Taking steady breaths, listening to George talking. To the sound of Tommy's fork scraping against his plate as he pushes his vegetables aside.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

I mean, it's a bad enough that he finds the phone and doesn't call 'home' or 'mom' or whatever. But answering my damn calls? Like, what if it had been somebody else trying to call me? Somebody from work. A client. What would he have said?

Tommy's fork scraping...

GEORGE (CONT'D)

And the bloody thing wasn't even insured, so now I've gotta fork out a couple of hundred dollars for a new smartphone. It's not like I can buy one of those cheap things - I need it for work. E-mails. And all of my contacts? Gone.

Scraping...

GEORGE (CONT'D)

I bet he ran up a massive bill before I cancelled the damn contract. I just can't believe it. And do you know what he said when he answered? Do you know?

Stephanie shakes her head, pretending to look concerned/interested as George glances at her.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

'You had your chance'. As if -- as if I'd been a bad father to the bloody phone, or something. And he'd caringly taken it in. I mean, God, what the hell is wrong with people these days? Like -- what did I do to deserve this?

Stephanie laughs.

GEORGE

What?

STEPHANIE

What did you do to deserve it?
Really? You actually want to ask
that?

Tommy looks up, surprised to hear the fight in Stephanie's voice.

GEORGE

What--

STEPHANIE

Try fucking another woman. That
seem like something you'd do? Or
is that not bad enough to have
your phone stolen?

She bursts up from her chair.

STEPHANIE

You absolute bastard. You have
the nerve to sit there and act
like it's okay for you to not
even look at me. Make me feel so
small, and petty and stupid for
just wanting you to actually look
at me. Feel like I still meant
something to you. And all the
while you've been out, sticking
your dick in some young girl,
pretending to be at work? Just
because she has bigger tits? A
prettier smile? What? WHAT?!

George's jaw hangs low. Completely speechless, until--

VHHHHHOOOOOM.

And suddenly, we cut back to see Stephanie, still sat in her seat. It was all in her head.

GEORGE

What?

Stephanie looks up at his handsome face. Gives him a smile.

STEPHANIE

Oh. Nothing. I -- I'm sorry your
phone was stolen. You're right.
You don't deserve that.

She looks back down at her food as she continues to eat.

INT. BEDROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Stephanie lies in the bed alone, listening to George's muffled voice as he talks on the phone somewhere in the house below her.

MORNING

Come morning, Stephanie wakes to an empty bed. She spins around to see a cup of coffee, waiting for her again.

EXT. CAR PARK - DAY

SMACK.

STEPHANIE
Oh, for fucksa--

Her car door smacks into the same pillar as before.

This time, it scratches off the paint and leaves a large dent.

INT. LECTURE ROOM - COLLEGE - DAY

Stephanie stands on the stage before her class of students, doing her best to lecture them, but lacking any real drive. Passion.

INT. DISABLED TOILET - COLLEGE - DAY

Stephanie plants herself down on the toilet.

Pulls her dress up, tracing her finger along the cuts on the inside of her leg.

Stroking the raised scars. The old scars. The fresh scars.

She moves her hand towards her thigh, clutching the razor blade between her fingertips.

CLICK.

She freezes as the door handle turns down.

She should move away. Should hide herself. Conceal the blade.

But she just sits there.

The door slowly starts to open.

And ALEX slides inside.

He steps in, shutting the door behind him.

Stephanie watches as he his hand flicks the lock on the door.

ALEX
See. It's really not that
difficult.

He beams a gorgeous smile at her.

STEPHANIE
What -- what are you doing?

He shrugs.

ALEX
I don't know. What about you?

STEPHANIE
I -- I don't know.

She follows his eyes down to the blade in her hand. To her exposed inner thighs.

She swallows uncomfortably, standing up and pulling down her dress.

STEPHANIE
I have to go. I--

She storms towards the door, reaching for the lock.

But Alex's hand shoots out, grabbing her wrist, stopping her. A firm grip. Fingers pressing into her wrist. Almost threatening.

STEPHANIE
What--

Without saying a word, holding his hand around her wrist, Alex slowly walks her back towards the toilet.

For whatever reason, with her eyes locked onto his, Stephanie moves with him.

He sits her down, releasing her from his grip.

Kneels down before her.

He raises his head, locking his eyes onto hers.

Doesn't look away, not even for a second, as his hands move across her knees, gently sliding her dress up her legs.

Stephanie just sits, in total silence, watching this beautiful, young guy in front of her.

He reaches out, taking her hand in his. Pries the razor blade from her fingers as his other hand strokes along her inner thigh, moving higher and higher.

Stephanie closes her eyes. Her cheeks flushing red. Breathing heavily through her nose.

Alex's fingers gently tracing along her skin, tempting her.

His other hand moves in, holding the razor blade.

Stephanie's completely caught up in the moment. Cheeks getting redder and redder.

She bites her lip as Alex hovers the blade over her skin. Gently presses the tip into her flesh, just beneath her scars.

She lets out a sudden, sharp breath - almost orgasmic - as he drags the blade across her skin. Blood drips out from the wound. Across his fingers. Down into the toilet bowl.

He withdraws his hand, still staring into her eyes.

Raises it to his mouth, gently pressing the bloody finger against his tongue.

And then he stands, moving over to the door.

Without looking back, he unlocks it, and leaves the bathroom.

She lets out a deep breath. Her cheeks painted pink. Her lip practically trembling.

Looks down at her leg. At the line of blood, slowly dripping into the toilet bowl.

INT. STEPHANIE'S OFFICE - COLLEGE - DAY

Stephanie scurries into her office. Slams the door shut behind her.

Her cheeks are still sweaty and red. Her breathing hot and heavy.

She leans back against the door.

Lowers her hand, raising up her skirt to look at the fresh, bloody wound.

Moves her hand up, sliding it into her panties.

Breathing heavily as she starts to masturbate, pressed against the door.

FLASH INSERT: Alex's eyes, staring up at hers.

Rubbing harder. Faster.

FLASH INSERT: The blade lowering towards her skin.

Clenching her eyes shut. The door rattling ever so slightly from her vigorous movements.

FLASH INSERT: The sharp edge piercing her skin.

Getting more intense.

FLASH INSERT: The blood, dripping down her leg.

Until she comes, dropping down onto the floor, resting back against the door.

A slight smile creeps out of the corner of her lips - breaking free from her cold exterior - as she takes deep, relaxing breaths.

In. Out. In. Out.

Trying to calm herself down.

EXT. CAR PARK - DAY

Still a little flustered, Stephanie walks through the car park, over to her usual space.

Pulls out her key to unlock her car.

But... her car isn't there. It's VANISHED!

She looks around: could she have parked it somewhere else?

Moves through the lines of cars, searching for it.

But no. It's nowhere to be seen.

She pulls out her cell phone. Types in 911.

Hesitates.

She deletes the numbers, instead scrolling through her contacts until she finds George's cell. Dials it.

It rings through a few times, before--

STEPHANIE

George? It's Steph. I -- yes, I know you're busy. I just -- I know -- I do know that -- George! -- I need you to pick up Tommy from school -- I -- my car broke down. So I -- I know you're not -- I know -- just -- George, please! You have to pick him up!

She hangs up the phone.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Stephanie walks beneath the orange glow of the street lights.

Hurriedly smokes a cigarette. Tosses it aside as she finishes it.

Immediately pulls another out of her packet. Lights it.

INT. HALLWAY - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Stephanie unlocks the door, closing it quietly behind her.

She tries to smell her breath against her hand. Definitely smells of cigarettes.

INT. LIVING ROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

George and Tommy sit watching television as Stephanie hovers by the door.

She guiltily looks over at her husband.

STEPHANIE

Hey. I -- I think I'm gonna take
a shower. Been a long day.

George nods.

GEORGE

So what was up with the car?

STEPHANIE

Oh -- I don't know. I'll sort it
out tomorrow.

She hovers for a moment, waiting for something more from George. Some acknowledgement from Tommy.

But neither of them say anything else, caught up in some nature documentary on the TV. Watching as a lion tracks down a zebra. Pouncing on it. Blood dripping down the zebra's body as the lion's claws hack away at its meal.

INT. BATHROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Stephanie stands in the shower, washing her body with soap. Wiping across the scars on her leg, cleaning the dried line of blood off of her new wound.

Silently crying. Holding her spare hand against her mouth. Practically biting her fist to keep silent.

FLASH INSERT: Alex's hand, moving the razor blade across her leg.

She jumps, dropping the soap.

Shakes her head. Slaps her hand against her cheek.

FLASH INSERT: The blade pressing against her skin.

She staggers slightly. Breathing deep, hard breaths.

But stops herself. Slaps herself across the face again. This time hard enough for the sound to echo through the bathroom. For a red print to appear on her cheek.

She reaches forward, grabbing the shower nozzle.

Turns the heat all the way down so freezing water cascades across her skin.

She jumps from the shock, but forces herself to stay in it. To feel the cold. To distract herself.

INT. BEDROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

George sits up in bed, working on his laptop.

He looks up as Stephanie enters the room, dressed in a towel.

Gives her a smile, turning back to his computer screen.

She drops the towel, standing naked across the room from him. Her scars in plain sight.

If George just looked up... looked at her naked body... he would see them. See the map of scars across her thigh - old and new.

But he doesn't. Of course he doesn't.

So she moves towards the bed, passing a full length mirror.

Pauses, studying her body. The extra rolls of fat hanging off of her stomach. The slightly wrinkled bags under her arms.

Glances back over at George.

Hurriedly pulls a dressing gown around her body, sliding silently into bed.

LATER

Stephanie lies awake in the darkness. Wide, white orbs.
She shuffles around, turning to face George.

STEPHANIE

George?

He yawns half a response.

STEPHANIE (CONT'D)

Do you -- I mean, are you still
attracted to me?

George spins around.

GEORGE

Why would you ask that?

STEPHANIE

I'd understand if you weren't.
You're so...

Beautiful. Handsome. Perfect.

STEPHANIE (CONT'D)

And I'm so...

Fat. Ugly. Disgusting.

George reaches his hand across, tenderly stroking her
cheek.

GEORGE

Are you annoyed I didn't come
pick you up after Tommy?

Stephanie forces a smile.

STEPHANIE

You got me.

GEORGE

Because I tried to call. But you
didn't answer your cell. I
assumed you were just gonna get a
lift, or something.

STEPHANIE

I guess I must have felt like
walking.

An uncomfortable silence.

A car drives past, its headlights flashing through the
curtains.

GEORGE
Why, are you not attracted to me
anymore?

STEPHANIE
I...

But she doesn't let herself answer. He doesn't deserve an answer.

GEORGE
I know we haven't exactly been
close lately. I'm not stupid.
It's just, I mean, there's a lot
we need to talk about. A lot of
distance we need to...

He pauses, deliberating his next words. Is he going to say it? Admit he's having an affair?

GEORGE (CONT'D)
But, not now. When we're more
awake, okay? In the morning, or
something.

STEPHANIE
Or something.

He reaches over, taking her hand.

GEORGE
Things will get better though.
We'll be okay, you know that? I
love you.

But Stephanie slides her hand out of his. Turns away from him.

MORNING

Stephanie sits on the side of the bed, sipping her cup of coffee.

INT. CAR PARK - MORNING

As Stephanie walks through the car park, on her way to her office, she sees something in her peripherals.

Freezes.

It's HER CAR, across the car park. No. She must be seeing it wrong...

She rushes over to it. What the hell? How did she not see it yesterday?

Pulls the door handle, but it's still locked.

Quickly rummages through her bag, finding the key.

Double checks the licence plate. Definitely her car.

Unlocks the door.

She moves around the vehicle, surveying it.

Stops by the other door. The scratch she had dented into the door has VANISHED. It looks perfect. Brand new. Completely repaired, somehow overnight.

She stares in disbelief.

INT. DISABLED TOILET - COLLEGE - DAY

Stephanie plants herself down on the toilet.

Raises up her skirt, examining her scars.

Tracing her finger along the fresh cut that Alex gave her.

INT. STAFF ROOMS - COLLEGE - DAY

Stephanie stands by a coffee machine, brewing herself a cup as the Dean walks past. He taps his watch.

DEAN

Five minutes ago, Steph.

Stephanie spins to see the clock. Five past nine.

STEPHANIE

Fuck.

Panicked, she knocks over her coffee, spilling it out across the table. Brown liquid dripping down across the floor.

She reaches out, grabbing some tissue. Tries to hastily soak it up. Wipe it away.

The Dean just stands there, watching her. Doesn't leave, but doesn't help her either.

As she bends down to wipe away the coffee on the floor, her dress rises up, revealing her fresh cut from yesterday. Alex's incision must have been slightly lower than her usual cuts.

The Dean notices it. Looks at her awkwardly.

DEAN

I -- is that -- how did you...

Stephanie looks up at him. Traces his eyes down to her exposed cut. Panics, quickly pulling down her dress.

STEPHANIE
I fell. Yesterday. Playing with Tommy.

DEAN
You -- I thought you said Tommy broke his arm?

STEPHANIE
He did. He--

DEAN
What were you playing to get that sort of cut then? I mean, that looks quite...

Stephanie's eyes flutter away as he stares threateningly into them.

STEPHANIE
I -- I'm going to be late.

He watches her sceptically as she rushes out of the room, down the corridor.

INT. HALLWAY - COLLEGE - DAY

The Dean stands by a doorway, watching Stephanie as she talks to the class. Holding her arms close to her body. Uncomfortably flexing her fingers. He can see that she's trying but... it's not good enough.

He sighs as he turns to walk away.

BANG!

Walking straight into ALEX. Bodies colliding.

Alex places his hand against the Dean's side to steady himself.

ALEX
Sorry.

And continues past him, into the lecture room.

The Dean watches as Stephanie looks up to see Alex, slipping into the room, holding a cell phone in his hands.

And the Dean, staring back at her.

She quickly turns back to her class, trying to inject more life into her lecture.

INT. LECTURE ROOM - COLLEGE - DAY

Stephanie packs up her things as the class filters out of the room.

When she looks up, Alex is the only person in the room.

Her eyes fall away as he smiles at her.

ALEX

You don't really believe that solipsist bullshit, do you? That we're all just products of somebody's - of your - subconscious?

STEPHANIE

What do you think?

ALEX

I think you'd have to have a pretty fucked up mind to create *this* world.

She smiles. The dimples flexing in her cheeks.

ALEX

You should smile more often.

Again, her eyes fall to the floor.

STEPHANIE

I -- about the other day...

ALEX

I'm sorry. I don't know what came over me. You're just so... so *fucking beautiful*.

Stephanie's eyes flicker up to his.

STEPHANIE

That's not true.

ALEX

It is true.

Alex hoists his bag over his shoulders. Moves towards her.

ALEX

I can see the way you hold yourself. The repulsion you feel towards yourself. The emptiness behind your eyes. But that's not who you are.

Alex takes her hand in his. Runs his finger across her palm. The tips of his nails gently tracing the creases in her skin.

The fine hairs on her arm rise up as his fingers move across her wrist.

Suddenly, she pulls her hand away. Looks up at Alex.

STEPHANIE

I -- my husband's having an affair.

She takes a deep breath. So relieved to finally say it.

STEPHANIE (CONT'D)

And he -- I've been -- with my legs -- for months. And he hasn't even glanced that way. He... but you...

(beat)

I wanted to say that I'm not like that. I don't just do that sort of thing.

ALEX

What sort of thing?

A wide smile on Alex's face.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Let a student lick your blood off of his fingertip? That sort of thing?

Stephanie's eyes fall to the ground as her cheeks flush red.

ALEX

You're so cute when you're embarrassed.

She takes a deep breath. Holds her eyes shut, trying to think about something else. To distract herself.

Reaches over, grabbing her books off of the desk.

STEPHANIE

I have to go. I'm sorry.

INT. CORRIDOR - COLLEGE - DAY

Stephanie hurries down the corridor, clinging to her books.

INT. STAFF ROOMS - COLLEGE - DAY

Stephanie walks through the staff rooms, passing the various teachers drinking coffee together.

TEACHER#1
Oh, hey, Steph?

Stephanie spins.

TEACHER#1 (CONT'D)
The dean wanted to see you.

STEPHANIE
Right now?

TEACHER#1
That's what he said.

INT. STEPHANIE'S OFFICE - COLLEGE - DAY

Stephanie drops her books out of her hands, letting them crack against the floor.

Leans back against the door, rubbing her hands across her face.

Takes deep, calming breaths. In, out. In, out. Eyes closed. Focussed on her breathing.

Rummages through her bag, pulling out some lipstick.

Moves in front of the mirror, hurriedly applying it.

INT. DEAN'S OFFICE - COLLEGE - DAY

Stephanie sits opposite the Dean.

DEAN
You're not leaving me with much of a choice here, Steph.

STEPHANIE
I'm sorry.

DEAN
So which is it?

STEPHANIE
I -- I wasn't. Both are--

DEAN
Come on, Steph. Just tell me what's going on. It's obvious you're not okay. You can talk to me about--

STEPHANIE

The arm. I was lying about
Tommy's arm.

The Dean sighs.

DEAN

Fine. Then I'm going to have to
suspend you.

STEPHANIE

What?

DEAN

You're always late to your
lessons. And you're hardly there
even when you do show up. Do you
even know how many students have
dropped out of your module this
semester?

STEPHANIE

I--

DEAN

I'm sorry, Steph. But if you're
not willing to talk to me--

STEPHANIE

I'm fine. There's nothing to talk
to you about.

DEAN

Then I don't have a choice.

STEPHANIE

But I need to be here. I need
this. And who will -- my
classes...

DEAN

We've got plenty of temps who can
take over your lessons. It's not
a problem.

INT. STEPHANIE'S OFFICE - COLLEGE - DAY

Cheeks flooded with black mascara, Stephanie storms into
the room.

She lashes out, sliding her arms across her desk,
scattering her organized items over the floor.

Falls back into her chair, sobbing into her hands.

RING. RING.

She looks down to see her cell phone ringing. George.
Swallows hard, clearing her throat. Steeling herself.

STEPHANIE
George? I... I'm glad you called.
I really need you -- you want --
no, it's fine -- yeh, it's fixed.
Was just playing up.

As she talks to George, she looks down at the items across the floor. Sees the note with Alex's e-mail address on it.

STEPHANIE
Late? -- no, that's -- fine. I'll
see you later -- yeh, it's been
okay -- no, nothing interesting,
really.

INT. CAR - DAY

Her cheeks still stained with mascara, Stephanie sits in her car outside the school.

Tommy tugs open the door.

Stephanie doesn't say a word, quickly turning on the engine and driving away.

Tommy looks up. She hasn't even asked him to put his belt on.

He pauses, waiting for her to tell him off.

Sees her reflection in the rearview mirror. The tear streaks down her face.

When she doesn't say anything, he tugs his belt over his chest, clicking himself in.

INT. KITCHEN - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Stephanie sits on a chair, facing the oven.

Her blank face staring at the orange light as a meal cooks itself within it.

Watching as the food gets blacker and blacker, burning in the oven.

Sizzling inside. Bubbles popping off of the charring meat.

But Stephanie just sits there, motionless.

Tommy emerges in the doorway.

TOMMY

Mom?

Stephanie watches as smoke fills the oven, clouding her view. Doesn't even blink.

TOMMY

Mom?

A slight smile on her jaded, blank face.

TOMMY

Mom?

Stephanie spins.

STEPHANIE

WHAT?

Tommy takes a step back, startled.

TOMMY

The -- the food's burning.

Stephanie turns to face the oven.

STEPHANIE

Oh fuck.

She pulls open the oven door. Smoke pours into the room. Tommy and Stephanie splutter wildly as the fire alarm starts to whine above them.

A deafening, screeching sound.

INT. HALLWAY - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Stephanie stands by the door, watching as Tommy eats a slice of take-out pizza from a box.

She hears keys in the front door behind her.

Sees a shadowed figure through the glass.

Takes a step back as George enters.

GEORGE

Oh. Hey. What are you -- why does it smell like burnt toast?

STEPHANIE

Chicken.

GEORGE

What?

STEPHANIE
Burnt chicken. That's the smell.

GEORGE
Oh, right. So... dinner's out of the question, I'm guessing?

STEPHANIE
There's some pizza in the living room.

An awkward beat.

Stephanie takes a deep sniff. Looks into George's eyes.

STEPHANIE
You've been drinking.

GEORGE
I --

STEPHANIE
I can smell it on you.

GEORGE
I had some whiskey at work, yes. It was a long day.

STEPHANIE
At work.

GEORGE
Yes.

Stephanie turns her back on him, walking away.

INT. BEDROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Stephanie sits down on the bed with her laptop.

Pulls out the note with Alex's e-mail address on it. Opens up a new message on hotmail. Types in his address.

Writes out the word: 'Hey'.

But stops. What is she doing? What does she even want to say?

She raises up, moving over to the en-suite bathroom.

Pushes open the door to see... George, standing by the sink.

His arm vigorously moving up and down.

Masturbating.

He jumps when he sees her, quickly trying to hide himself. To conceal himself. Cheeks coloring red.

GEORGE

I --

She pulls the door shut. Eyes wide.

FLASH INSERT: Claire's beautiful, young face, smiling as she receives Stephanie's text in the cafe.

She drops down onto the bed.

Without typing another word, she sends the e-mail to Alex. Pulls her laptop shut.

LATER

George tucks himself into the bed on the opposite side to Stephanie.

GEORGE

I -- Tommy said you were acting kind of strange earlier. That you were just watching the food burn, or something? Is -- is there anything you want to talk about?

Like you having an affair? Like the fact that she just got fired? That you were masturbating into the sink instead of being intimate with her? That she self harms? That she might be having an affair too?

STEPHANIE

No.

She flicks the light on her lamp off.

MORNING

As Stephanie lies asleep, a hand places a cup of steaming coffee on the bedside cabinet next to her head.

INT. CAR - DAY

Stephanie watches as Tommy gets out of the car, rushing over to a group of friends. Lets out a deep breath.

What's she supposed to do now?

Starts the engine.

INT. HALLWAY - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Stephanie enters the silent house.

INT. KITCHEN - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Moves into the kitchen.

Taps her fingers nervously on the counter.

One, two. One, two.

INT. BEDROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Refreshes her e-mails on her laptop. No new messages.

Stares at the screen.

INT. BATHROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Stephanie stands before the mirror, staring at her aged, exhausted face.

Her wrinkles. Her slightly discolored teeth. The rolls of fat on her body.

SLAPS herself hard across the cheek.

INT. KITCHEN - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Stephanie makes herself a cup of coffee.

She's about to wash up the spoon. To put it back in its rightful place. But stops herself.

Throws it onto the counter with a half-smile. Coffee drips off of the steel.

INT. BEDROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Sipping her coffee, Stephanie refreshes her e-mails again.

ONE NEW MESSAGE: ALEX MARSHALL.

Her heart stops.

She lowers the cup of coffee.

Opens the e-mail, to read: **"Why didn't you show for class today?"**

She types back: **"Long story."**

Sips her coffee.

A moment later, Alex replies: **"Wanna talk about it? I'll be at the Sunshine Cafe in 30."**

Stephanie reads over the two lines. Again and again.

Types out a responses, turning him down. But deletes it.
Tries again but, again, she deletes it.

Falls back in her bed.

EXT. SUNSHINE CAFE - DAY

Hurriedly smoking a cigarette, Stephanie stands across the road from the cafe. Sucking in the tobacco.

Using her usual breathing techniques to try and stay calm.
Slowly in, then out. In, then out.

She lifts her cigarette, but it's just a cylinder of ash.

Her boot stamps it into the concrete.

INT. SUNSHINE CAFE - DAY

Stephanie and Alex sit in a small booth, across from one another.

Stephanie fidgets, watching every person who enters the cafe cautiously.

ALEX

Relax. You're just having brunch
with a student, right?

STEPHANIE

Ex-student. I got fired yesterday.
For -- for being late. And for
being shit.

ALEX

You're not shit.

Stephanie continues to warily watch everyone in the cafe.
Turns her face away, making sure nobody can see her, until
she's sure they're just a stranger.

Watching her, Alex stands from his chair, heading straight
for the door.

EXT. SUNSHINE CAFE - DAY

He exits the cafe, pausing to light a cigarette as he walks
away.

Holds back a smile as he hears Stephanie calling out:

STEPHANIE

Wait!

He turns to face her.

STEPHANIE (CONT'D)
Where are you going?

ALEX
You clearly don't want to be here
with me. It's fine. I'm not gonna--

STEPHANIE
No. I do. I really do. I just --
maybe we could go somewhere else?
Somewhere less public?

INT. HALLWAY - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Alex follows Stephanie into her house.

He leans over, examining a set of flowers in a vase on the
windowsill. Arranged perfectly. Flawlessly.

Pops his head into the living room. Everything's tidy - in
its rightful place.

Stephanie watches him as he moves into the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Runs his finger over the counter. Not a spec of dust.

Pulls open the fridge to see the insanely neat, organized
food within it.

Finally lifting the spoon she threw on the side earlier. The
only thing out of place in the whole house, it would seem.

He grins.

STEPHANIE
What's so funny?

ALEX
Huh? Nothing. It's just... exactly
how I imagined it.

STEPHANIE
What do you mean?

ALEX
You like control. I get it.

STEPHANIE
I -- it's just -- it's tidy.

ALEX

You can't control your life. Your job. Your husband. But you can control the house. Your possessions. Your food. Your pain. Trust me, I get it

Alex lifts the coffee spoon. Taps his finger against the small puddle of cold coffee on it. Provocatively raises his finger up to his mouth, pressing it against his tongue.

Her eyes quickly move off of him. She takes several long, calming breaths.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Your breathing too.

She half laughs, instantly stopping.

STEPHANIE

I -- I'm not really sure what I'm doing here.

Alex walks up to her, stopping right in front of her. His face so close to hers. Breath pouring across her skin.

Stephanie steps back.

STEPHANIE

I -- maybe you should go. I'm not sure if I--

Alex grabs her wrist as she moves to walk away. Fingers pressing firmly into her skin.

ALEX

Is that what you want? For me to go?

He stares straight into her eyes, with his wide, glistening gems.

Stephanie bites her lip.

STEPHANIE

No.

ALEX

So what do you want?

She moves back over to him.

STEPHANIE

Is this some sort of game? Like, a joke? It has to be.

Alex takes out a cigarette. Places it in his lips, lifting up his lighter.

STEPHANIE
You shouldn't--

But he lights it anyway.

ALEX
Why would you think that?

Her eyes on the cigarette.

STEPHANIE
Because you're so beautiful. You
could have any girl you wanted.

She awkwardly rubs her hand across her arm.

ALEX
Why is it so hard for you to
believe that I would want you?

STEPHANIE
Because... why would you? Why would
anybody?

Alex's lips edge into a smile.

He leans forward, kissing her, smoke seeping out of their
locked lips.

He places the cigarette down on the table. Starts to lift her
dress up. But she instinctively tries to stop him.

He pulls back. Stares her straight in the eyes.

And begins lifting her dress again.

Standing in her bra, she tries to conceal herself.

ALEX
You don't have to hide. Not in
front of me.

Reluctantly, she lowers her arms, revealing her podgy, naked
body.

Alex hovers before her temptingly. His lips running across
her chest. Her shoulders. But never touching her skin.

He pulls his own top off, slowly. Provocatively. Gradually
revealing his toned stomach. Tempting her.

Raising it over his chest until it reveals... several swollen
circles on his skin. Cigarette burns across his chest.

Stephanie's eyes widen. The wounds are fresh. Still red and
sore.

He lifts the cigarette from the table, and, before she can protest, he presses it into his skin. Burning through the top layer, until the cigarette goes out, leaving a small, scorched circle.

STEPHANIE

What the hell are you doing?

ALEX

There's one for each cut on your leg. That was for the one that I gave you.

Stephanie SLAPS him hard across the cheek.

STEPHANIE

But you -- how could you do that?
How could you--

Alex shushes her, gently pulling her against his body.

Wipes away the tears that leak from the corners of her eyes.

ALEX

It's okay. It's alright.
(beat)
I wanted you to see. To see how it makes me feel to see your cuts. I wanted you to know that I'm with you. I feel your pain too.

Stephanie stares at him, amazed. Not sure if this is incredibly sweet, romantic... or verging on psychotic.

He presses his lips against hers.

ALEX

I don't want you to cry. Ever. I'm sorry.

STEPHANIE

No. I -- I understand... I think.

ALEX

I know you do. Just like I understand you.

He starts to kiss her, spinning her around as they become more passionate, pushing her onto the kitchen table.

Her hands fumbling with his belt.

She gasps desperately as he enters her.

INT. BEDROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Alex sits alone in the bedroom.

The sound of running water from the en-suite bathroom.

He lifts a picture of Stephanie and George on their wedding day. Stares down at it with cold, dangerous eyes.

Knocks it over, into a trash bin.

Opens up one of her drawers. Lifts up a pair of her underwear. Moving it towards his face.

Eyes flickering shut as he inhales.

INT. BATHROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Stephanie stands in the shower, vigorously rubbing herself clean with soap.

She slaps herself hard across the cheek.

JUMPS, as she looks up to see Alex, standing in the doorway. How long has he been there?

She tries to cover herself, but she's completely revealed. Completely naked. Trapped in a small, glass box.

She pulls open the shower, quickly grabbing a towel. Tying it around her body.

They stare at each other in silence as water runs down Stephanie's face. Across the red hand print on her cheek.

ALEX

If you ever feel like you want to hurt yourself. Just stop. Just call me.

He reaches out, taking her hand in his.

WHAM! He forcibly slaps her hand across his cheek. She gasps as his face flares up, quickly retracting her arm.

ALEX

You're not alone anymore.

She stares back in shock. Again, not sure whether what he's saying is sweet, loving, caring... or sadomasochistic.

Alex raises his other hand, revealing Stephanie's cell phone.

ALEX

You have a message.

Stephanie grabs the phone, opening it up to see that it's from the Dean.

"Sorry, Steph. I was being a bit rash yesterday. I'd like you to come back to work. As soon as you can. We need you."

Stephanie half laughs.

ALEX
What is it?

STEPHANIE
The -- I got my job back.

A genuine smile fills her face.

Alex moves towards her, hugging her wet, naked body against his. She can't help but hug him back.

ALEX
That's fantastic.

INT. CAR - DAY

Stephanie sits in her car outside Tommy's school.

Fingers tapping anxiously against the driving wheel.

She watches Tommy as he walks towards the car with a group of friends.

Starts taking her usual long, calming breaths. But as she breathes in, she stops. Presses her hands against her puffed out cheeks, forcing out the air.

What's the point?

Tommy tugs open the door, falling into the seat.
Automatically does his belt up.

TOMMY
Hi, mom.

She turns to face him. Why's he being so friendly?

TOMMY
Are you feeling better?

STEPHANIE
Yes. Thank you.

She turns back to the driving wheel. Double takes, just to make sure it was her son who got in the car.

Tommy smiles.

INT. KITCHEN - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Stephanie and Tommy sit at the table eating as they hear George enter the house.

He moves into the kitchen.

GEORGE
Look what I got!

He passes Tommy his new phone. Tommy's eyes light up as he grabs the smart-phone.

TOMMY
Awesome! Can I get Angry Birds on it? Please? Please?

GEORGE
What's 'Angry Birds'?

TOMMY
The best thing ever. I think it's free.

GEORGE
You think?

George reaches a hand out. Tommy reluctantly gives him the phone back.

George sits himself down in one of the empty chairs.

Looks over at the practically finished plates of food on the table. Then over at the hobs.

GEORGE
You didn't make me any?

STEPHANIE
Didn't know when you'd be back.
You're always late these days.
Seems like you have a lot of *work* to do.

GEORGE
Oh. Well. That's okay. You just normally cook something up.

STEPHANIE
And you normally tell me not to.

An awkward silence.

Tommy lowers his fork.

TOMMY
You two are being weird.

Stephanie looks straight into George's eyes.

STEPHANIE
Are we?

TOMMY

Yes. Is it because you're getting a divorce?

George laughs.

GEORGE

What? No. Where did that come from?

But when he sees Stephanie's straight face, the comment suddenly seems less humorous.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Why would you ask that?

TOMMY

You're both being weird all the time. Jamie said his mom and dad were being weird all the time. Then they got divorced.

GEORGE

We're not going to get divorced.

INT. BEDROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The sound of running water from the bathroom.

George sits alone in the bedroom.

He sees Stephanie's phone, lying on the bedside counter.

Looks over at the bathroom door. Listens to the sounds of the shower.

Hesitantly, he grabs the phone, quickly opening up the messages.

He looks through her inbox, reading over her texts. Eyes narrowing.

He puts the phone back down on the bedside cabinet.

Notices the photo frame, sticking out of the bin.

Reaches down, lifting it up to see the wedding photo of him and Stephanie.

His face twinges with pain. He rolls his tongue around his mouth. Not sure what to do. But as he hears the shower cut off, he hastily lowers the photo back down, into the trash.

LATER

Stephanie finishes brushing her teeth in the bathroom.

She lowers herself into the bed beside George. Reaches for the light, when--

GEORGE

I -- is there anything you need to tell me?

STEPHANIE

What do you mean?

GEORGE

Anything that happened in the last couple of days?

STEPHANIE

I -- what do you mean?

Stephanie stares back at him. How does he know about Alex?

Her eyes scan the room - did she miss something? Did Alex leave something here?

GEORGE

Steph, I know you lost your job.

STEPHANIE

Oh. But I -- I got it back.

GEORGE

Why didn't you tell me?

STEPHANIE

I don't know. I guess I figured you wouldn't care.

GEORGE

Why would you think I wouldn't care?

STEPHANIE

Because you never care.

GEORGE

That's not true.

STEPHANIE

You only care when it-- how do you know about that?

George looks away guiltily.

Stephanie looks over to see her cell phone on the desk.

STEPHANIE

You read my messages?

GEORGE

You should have told me.

STEPHANIE
I can't believe you'd do that.

GEORGE
Well what do you expect, Steph? You
treat me like shit. What am I
supposed to think?

She laughs.

GEORGE
What?

STEPHANIE
Treat you like shit? Don't get me
started. I -- you're so ridiculous.
I actually can't believe -- I don't
even wanna talk to you right now.

She raises up from the bed.

As she moves across the room, her nightgown flicks up,
revealing her scarred leg.

George glimpses it for the briefest of seconds. His face
softens.

GEORGE
What -- what happened to your leg?

STEPHANIE
Oh, now you notice? A bit fucking
late, don't you think?

GEORGE
Steph--

Stephanie throws a jumper over her head. Grabs her bag.

GEORGE
What are you doing?

STEPHANIE
I'm having a cigarette.

GEORGE
I -- I didn't know you smoked?

STEPHANIE
Of course you didn't.

She slams the door as she storms out, leaving George alone in
the bed. Lost and confused.

EXT. STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Her eyes red and teary, Stephanie sits on the porch, smoking.

Several stubbed out cigarette ends lie discarded on the ground around her naked feet.

She looks up as she sees somebody walking down the road, past her house.

For the briefest of seconds, she thinks that it's Alex. But then they're gone, vanished into the night, before she can get a proper look.

INT. BEDROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Stephanie stretches as her eyes pry themselves open.

Looks over to see a cup of coffee, smoking on the cabinet beside her bed. Despite the fight, George has still made her her usual cup of coffee.

She smiles softly as she reaches over, taking a sip from it.

INT. CORRIDOR - COLLEGE - DAY

Holding her books close to her chest, Stephanie moves towards the Dean's office.

But as she gets there, the door is already open.

She glances inside to see POLICE OFFICERS searching through the Dean's belongings. Quickly diverts her eyes as they look up at her, moving down the corridor, out of sight.

INT. HALLWAY - COLLEGE - DAY

We watch through the window in the door as Stephanie lectures her class. Really trying to inject some life into herself as she moves across the stage.

Still awkward. Uncomfortable. But really putting in effort.

INT. LECTURE ROOM - COLLEGE - DAY

Stephanie looks up to see Alex in the crowd of students.

Shares a secret smile with him.

INT. STAFF ROOMS - COLLEGE - DAY

Stephanie stands by the coffee machine, pouring herself a drink.

Her ears perk up as she hears:

TEACHER#1

His wife found him like that,
apparently. Yesterday when she got
back from work. Had the kids with
her and everything.

TEACHER#2

God. That's horrible. Who do they
think it was?

TEACHER#1

No idea. Probably some student he
kicked out. Kids can be fucking
crazy these days. Knives. Guns.
Everything.

Stephanie moves over to them.

STEPHANIE

I -- are you talking about the
dean?

The teachers give her a look: how do you not know?

She fidgets uncomfortably.

STEPHANIE

You said his wife found him?

TEACHER#1

You seriously don't know?

TEACHER#2

Didn't you see all those police
officers?

Stephanie just stares back. No idea what they're talking
about.

TEACHER#1

He's dead, Stephanie.

STEPHANIE

He... what? How?

TEACHER#1

Somebody stabbed him in his living
room.

Stephanie drops her cup of coffee. It shatters on the ground,
splashing over the two teachers.

They scream out, moving away, as Stephanie grabs some tissue
to clean up the mess.

INT. DISABLED TOILET - COLLEGE - DAY

With shaking hands, Stephanie moves the razor blade towards her leg.

But just as the blade's about to touch her skin, she pauses.

Eyes rising up, staring at the door.

She quickly pulls her skirt up.

Tugs her cell phone out of her purse.

INT. LIFT - ALEX'S APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

Stephanie stands beside Alex in the lift in silence.

A stranger stands in front of them, by the door.

Alex reaches out, taking her hand in his.

Without turning to face him, without saying a word, she clenches her fingers around his. Her eyes falling shut.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT - DAY

It's small. A studio. Belongings packed away in cardboard boxes. Plain walls. Barely any furniture.

STEPHANIE

How long have you lived here?

Alex shrugs.

Stephanie traces her hand along a darkened patch of the wall where a picture frame clearly once hung.

STEPHANIE

You should put something here. A photograph.

ALEX

Photograph?

STEPHANIE

You know, of your family or whatever? Something that makes you happy.

ALEX

That wouldn't make me happy. Maybe a photograph of you though.

They share a smile.

STEPHANIE
Well it's, er, very *homely*.

ALEX
It's not much. But...

He drops himself down on the bed. Shrugs.

ALEX (CONT'D)
We can't all be lucky.

STEPHANIE
Lucky?

ALEX
Like your husband.

STEPHANIE
Mu husband's lucky?

ALEX
Well... yeh.

STEPHANIE
I don't see how.

ALEX
Really? I'd kill to have a life
like his. To have my own, huge
house. Cute kid. Fancy job. To have
you - a beautiful, wonderful wife.

STEPHANIE
... who's having an affair.

ALEX
He gave up on you first, remember?
He had his chance. I would never
have discarded you like that. I'd
have made sure you knew how
beautiful you are. Every day. Every
single day. I wouldn't have wasted
it. Let it rot.

Stephanie sits down on the bed beside him.

Runs her hand down his face.

STEPHANIE
You're such a beautiful human
being.

Alex cracks a wide, almost teary eyed, smile.

ALEX
You have no idea what it means to
hear that from you.

STEPHANIE

Why? You hardly even know me.

Alex's eyes fall away from hers.

He pulls out a cigarette. Lights it.

Takes a deep inhalation, falling back on the bed.

Stephanie lies down beside him, in his arms.

Holding the cigarette, he places it in her lips. She takes a long, hard inhalation. His fingers touching her mouth. Almost sensual.

STEPHANIE

I was going to -- earlier -- in the bathroom. But I didn't.

ALEX

Why?

STEPHANIE

I -- things just -- I felt overwhelmed. The dean, I -- did you hear that he died? Somebody stabbed him in his home. It's just so fucked up.

Alex passes her the cigarette. Blows smoke out into the air.

ALEX

I meant why didn't you hurt yourself.

STEPHANIE

Oh. I -- I'm not sure really.

Alex smiles at her. Stubs the cigarette out in an ash tray.

Leans in to passionately kiss her. Lips locked together. His hands moving across her body.

She breathes in as they move across her stomach. Sliding inside her panties, gently stroking her.

ALEX

You're so wet.

Stephanie looks away, embarrassed.

Alex can't help but laugh.

ALEX

Do you think about me when you touch yourself?

She looks over at him, straight into his eyes.

STEPHANIE

Yes.

ALEX

I think about you.

Stephanie hurriedly pulls off her underwear, unable to restrain herself, pulling Alex towards her.

But he stops her. Grabs her, forcing her to be on top of him.

ALEX

I want you to take control. I want this to be yours. Your new release.

Flushed and sweaty, completely caught up in the moment, Stephanie nods, moving on top of him.

Their bodies connecting as he enters her. Her hands pushing down on his chest. Fingers spread out around his scars.

He grabs one of her hands. Raises it to the side of his face.

ALEX

Do you know what would be really hot?

Holding his fingers against hers, he strokes her hand down his cheek. Over his lips.

STEPHANIE

What?

Alex exhales loudly as her body moves back and forth on top of his.

ALEX

You -- it's probably not--

STEPHANIE

Tell me.

ALEX

Well -- no. I shouldn't. Just something I thought--

She playfully hits him, her movements getting faster and faster on top of him.

STEPHANIE

Will you just tell me already?

He takes her hand in his again, pressing it against his cheek.

ALEX

I want you to hit me.

Her movements slow.

STEPHANIE

What?

ALEX

To hit me. I -- I know what you're thinking. But I think it would be good for you. The release. The control. The power. And it would be fucking hot. To be dominated by you.

STEPHANIE

I -- I'm not sure if--

ALEX

Please just try? It would be so stupidly sexy. If it doesn't feel good for you, you don't have to do it again.

Stephanie reluctantly nods. Begins to control her body more again, moving back and forth on top of him.

Awkwardly raises her arm. Stares down at his rosy face. His sweating chest. And laughs. Doesn't know what to do.

Alex laughs with her.

ALEX

Like this.

He takes her hand in his again. Pulls it back. And slaps it against his cheek.

ALEX

Now you try.

Cautiously, Stephanie slaps her hand against his cheek.

He gasps. Starts fucking her harder.

ALEX

Do it again.

His body pounding against hers. Really getting into it.

Alex closes his eyes to see-

INT. LIVING ROOM - FLASHBACK - DAY

The continuous sound of Alex and Stephanie fucking is all that we hear as we see a dreamy image of Alex as a YOUNG BOY, tears streaking down his swollen face.

Completely naked. Body covered in bruises and scratches.
Holding himself uncomfortably.

A woman stands before him, presumably his MOTHER - strikingly similar in appearance to Stephanie. Alarmingly so.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT - DAY

Stephanie's so turned on. So into Alex too - this gorgeous, young guy. Alex reaches his hand out, starting to stimulate her as she rides him.

Stephanie closes her eyes. Overcome with pleasure. So close to coming.

She SLAPS his cheek slightly harder. Alex beams a grin as their bodies move against each others.

ALEX

Harder.

Caught up in the moment, her body practically clenching, so close to orgasm, she WHACKS him across the side of the face.

Watching his wide smile as she does so. Slaps him again. And again.

Staring at his grinning face, his closed eyes, both so close to orgasm.

She pulls back her hand, just as-

INT. LIVING ROOM - FLASHBACK - DAY

Alex's mother pulls back her hand too, SMACKING him hard across the cheek, knocking him to the floor as we-

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT - DAY

Cut back to Stephanie hitting Alex one final time as she comes, raising her hand to her mouth, trying to stop herself from crying out.

Opening his eyes to watch her orgasm, Alex grabs his arms around her, coming with her.

Until their bodies fall apart.

She lies back on the bed taking deep, sharp breaths. So red. So sweaty.

Looks over at Alex's face - his cheek is inflamed. Swollen. Her hand printed in red on the side of it. A small trickle of blood leaking from his nose.

STEPHANIE

I -- I don't know what -- I'm so
sorry --

ALEX

Don't apologize.

LATER

Alex carefully moves his body, trying not to wake up
Stephanie.

He reaches for his phone on a counter by the bed.

Lifts it up, snapping a photograph of them both. Naked, their
bodies pressed together.

He turns it around to look at it. Wide smile on his face.

LATER

Completely dressed, Alex sits down beside Stephanie, placing
a steaming hot cup of COFFEE on the counter beside the bed.

He reaches for a bottle of cologne. Sprays it into the air
over her. Letting the smell sink into her hair. Her skin.

Grins before he gently shakes her naked body.

She smiles as she sees him. Stretches out her arms.

He passes her the coffee.

STEPHANIE

Thanks.

She yawns, moving into a seated position as she sips it.

Looks over at the window. It's dark outside.

STEPHANIE

Fuck.

She jumps out of the bed, grabbing her clothes. Quickly
straps her bra on. Tugs her dress over her shoulders.

ALEX

What?

STEPHANIE

Why didn't you wake me earlier?
It's--

She looks down at her phone. 9pm. Five missed calls.

STEPHANIE

Fuck.

She throws on the rest of her clothes, tugging them into place as quickly as possible.

ALEX

Stay.

STEPHANIE

I --

Stephanie taps her hand across her thigh as she pulls on her panties to feel something sticky. Alex's come running down her leg, across her scars, as she moves.

She grabs a tissue, wiping it away.

ALEX

He treats you like shit. Why should you go back to him?

Stephanie looks back at him, torn, just for a second. Maybe she should stay?

But no. She has to go.

STEPHANIE

I'm sorry.

She runs out of the door, slamming it shut behind her.

Alex stares down at the cup of coffee on the bedside cabinet.

Lunges for it, tossing it across the room.

Liquid pours out of it as it smashes into the wall, breaking into a thousand pieces.

He moves over to a mirror, examining his slightly swollen face with a wide grin.

INT. HALLWAY - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Stephanie quietly closes the door.

Hears the sound of the TV blaring from the living room.

Heads over to the stairs, trying not to make a sound when--

GEORGE (O.S.)

Steph?

She spins to see George, emerging in the hallway.

GEORGE
Jesus Christ, Steph! I was so
worried. You -- you didn't answer
your cell.

STEPHANIE
Sorry. It was on silent. You know
what it's like.

GEORGE
The school had to call me to pick
up Tommy! Where the hell were you?

STEPHANIE
I -- I needed some space.

GEORGE
And you couldn't call me? Tell me?
You can't just disappear like that!

STEPHANIE
The -- did you know the dean was
murdered? Stabbed in his living
room.

GEORGE
I -- oh my God. That's horrible.

He moves up onto the steps, pulling Stephanie into his chest.

Holding her tightly. Her hair next to his nose.

He inhales. Smells something on her. Something that doesn't
seem right.

GEORGE
You smell different.

STEPHANIE
Cigarettes, that's all.

GEORGE
No, you -- you smell like...

He pulls himself away from her. Tries to look her in the
eyes, but she won't meet his gaze.

GEORGE
Were you with somebody?

She half laughs. But George's look is stern. Serious.

STEPHANIE
Are you seriously asking me that?
After what I just told you?

George takes a step back, suddenly feeling guilty.

STEPHANIE (CONT'D)
My day's been bad enough already. I
don't need to take this shit from
you too.

She turns, marching up the stairs, out of sight.

INT. BATHROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Stephanie stands in the shower, with her hands against the wall.

Hot water pours down across her body.

Mascara runs down her cheeks.

She swings the water dial all the way down.

Bites her lip as freezing cold water smashes against her skin.

Pulling her arms around her body. Holding herself closely.

INT. BEDROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

George turns on the light to find Stephanie, lying on the bed. Staring up at the ceiling.

He sits down on the end of the bed.

GEORGE
I'm sorry. But -- you've been
acting so differently lately. I --
what am I supposed to think?

Stephanie remains silent.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Look, Steph, I know things are
rough at the moment. But we'll get
through this.

Stephanie snorts a laugh.

GEORGE
Just tell me what's going on.
Please. I -- I deserve to know.

Stephanie rolls over to face him.

STEPHANIE
You want to know what's going on
with me?

GEORGE
Yes.

STEPHANIE
Honestly?

GEORGE
Yes.

She pulls back the cover.

Slowly moves her hands to the bottom of her nightgown. Raises it up to reveal the scars across her thighs.

George gasps, something catching in his throat.

He reaches over, gently running his fingers over the scars.

Tears swelling in his eyes.

STEPHANIE
I didn't expect things to always be the same. But I -- it's like you just stopped seeing me. I don't want to do this anymore, George. I just feel so... so fucking alone with you.

George rests his head against her legs, his tears spilling across her cuts.

Stephanie starts to cry too.

GEORGE
I'm so sorry.

STEPHANIE
All I wanted was -- God, I don't know -- to feel something. Anything. For you to notice me. But you never did. You never even looked.

GEORGE
Steph I tried so hard. I spent so long trying to make you feel better. Always complimenting you. Saying how beautiful you were.

She snorts another laugh.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
And I wanted you so much. Don't think I didn't. I still do, but -- you always rejected me. Left me feeling so hurt. Like I was such an asshole for just wanting to hold you. Kiss you. Make love to you. I guess I just -- I just stopped trying. I didn't wanna feel rejected anymore.

Stephanie sits herself up, stroking George's hair.

STEPHANIE

How could somebody like you ever
feel rejected by me? I always
wanted you.

GEORGE

But then... why...

STEPHANIE

I just -- it just feels like a game
I'm playing. Trying to trick you
into liking me. And I don't wanna
play anymore. I never feel like I'm
enough, and I -- I just want to...
be. For once. I want to just feel
okay.

GEORGE

I'm so sorry you feel like that.
But I mean it when I say I love
you. As much as I ever did.

STEPHANIE

But -- then why did you...

GEORGE

Why did I what?

STEPHANIE

You didn't lose your phone. I read
your message. From Claire. Saying
you were amazing, or whatever. I --
I got so angry I just -- I threw it
away.

George sits himself up beside her.

STEPHANIE

Why did you do it George?

George can't help but laugh. Reaches out, taking Stephanie's
hand in his.

GEORGE

Steph, I didn't do anything.
Claire's my supervisor. I -- I've
been helping her out a lot lately.
She's new. Needed somebody to --

But Stephanie doesn't look convinced.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

I -- I'm not sleeping with her, if
that's what you thought? I haven't
ever -- I wouldn't --

Stephanie shakes her head, convinced he's lying.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
I'm serious. I -- look, honestly?
It did feel nice being shown
attention. You've been so cold
towards me. And she was so warm. It
just felt nice to feel that. To get
that from somebody. Anybody. Even
if it was just gratefulness for
helping her out.

(beat)
But nothing happened. It just
wouldn't. She -- she isn't you.

Stephanie stares back at him. At his teary, genuine eyes.

STEPHANIE
But... the alcohol?

GEORGE
It really was at work. Just me, in
my office. I -- look --

He moves over, opening up the bedside draw, revealing a half
empty bottle of whiskey.

Stephanie softens, finally believing him.

GEORGE
I know we haven't been good for a
while. It's like, so much shit has
happened between us. We've said so
many things we can't take back.
It's hard to just... be normal with
each other anymore. There's this
wall between us. And the longer we
leave it, the thicker it gets. But
I don't even know where to start
dismantling it. I know I love you
though. So much. I'm so sorry that
you thought -- that you've been...

He looks down at her scars.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
That I haven't been there for you.
But this, us, it can change. You
just have to try with me. Because
I've spent so long trying on my
own. I just can't take the
rejection anymore.

STEPHANIE
I never meant to reject you. It's
just -- it's me. I'm just a
horrible person.

George shakes his head.

GEORGE

It's my fault you still feel like
that after all these years. That I
couldn't stop you. But it's not
true. And acting like it is just...
just makes me feel like that too.
About myself. And then that just
makes everything worse.

Unable to hold it back any longer, Stephanie falls against
George, breaking down. Sobbing into his chest.

He cries with her, holding her tight.

GEORGE

But we'll be okay. You'll be okay.
I promise.

Her arms wrap around him as she tilts her head up to kiss
him.

MORNING

Stephanie wakes with a smile. She reaches over for George,
but he's already gone to work.

On his pillow is a note, stating: "We'll talk more tonight
:)".

She smiles, spinning over to pick up her morning coffee. But
he hasn't made one today. There's nothing there.

INT. LECTURE ROOM - COLLEGE - DAY

Alex sits at the back of the room, grinning at Stephanie as
she gives her lecture. Stephanie tries to avoid his eyes.
Avoid his smile.

A couple of students are talking amongst each other.

STEPHANIE

HEY! Zip it. Don't make me kick you
out of the class, alright?

The students stare back at her, jaws dropped. They nod,
slightly startled at her unusual, out of character strength.

INT. STEPHANIE'S OFFICE - COLLEGE - DAY

Stephanie sits at her desk, staring at photos of her and
George on her laptop.

KNOCK. KNOCK.

STEPHANIE

Come in.

The door creaks open to reveal Alex.

ALEX

Mrs. Parker... you wanted to see me?

He grins. That same, ridiculously handsome grin.

STEPHANIE

I--

She brushes his hand away as he reaches for her face.

ALEX

What? What's going on?

STEPHANIE

This... it -- it needs to stop. I can't do it anymore.

Alex steps back, horrified.

ALEX

But... what did I do?

His head shaking back and forth. Real distress on his face.

STEPHANIE

You didn't do anything. I mean, I'm married, Alex. You had to know this wouldn't last? Had to...

She reaches for his hand, but he SNAPS it away.

He throws his bag onto the floor. Tugs his t-shirt over his head. Stephanie tries to stop him. To pull his shirt back down.

But he pushes her away. Throws it to the floor, pointing at the scars on his chest.

He grabs her by the shoulders, shaking her.

ALEX

I did this for you! For you!

Stephanie struggles in his tense grip.

STEPHANIE

You're -- you're hurting me.

She pulls herself free from his arms. Shocked.

Teary eyed, Alex just stares at her.

STEPHANIE

I'd like you to leave now.

Alex grabs his bag.

Moves himself in front of her, his face right in front hers.
Harsh, threatening eyes.

Looks like he's going to say something. To shout something at her. But he doesn't.

He turns, storming out of the room, slamming the door shut.

Stephanie stares after him. The hairs standing up on her arms.

EXT. CAR PARK - DAY

Stephanie tugs open her car door, whacking it into the pillar again.

STEPHANIE

Shit.

She looks down at the scratched paint work. Thinks on it for a minute... she completely forgot. How did it get fixed before?

VMMM. VMMM.

Her cell phone buzzes.

She pulls it out, opening it up to see that she has '1 New Message' from Alex.

Flips it open to see: **"I'm sorry. Are you okay?"**

Stares down at the phone, anxiously tapping her fingers on the screen.

Doesn't reply.

INT. CAR - DAY

Tommy jumps into the backseat, pulling his seat belt across his shoulders. Strapping himself in without any cue.

Stephanie turns to face him.

STEPHANIE

Are -- are you really worried about me and your dad? Like you said?

Tommy shrugs. But it's clear from his eyes that he is.

STEPHANIE

We're just -- sometimes grown ups get sad. And they take it out on each other. They make silly decisions. But they don't mean it. Not really.

She smiles at her son. He smiles back.

VMMM. VMMM.

Her cellphone buzzes on the seat beside her. She glances over at it. Three missed calls. Four new messages. All from Alex.

She reaches over, turning it off.

INT. KITCHEN - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Food simmers on the hobs, as Stephanie fries meat in a saucepan.

Finishing off the cooking, she begins putting it out on the neatly arranged plates on the table.

Looks up to see George.

Without saying a word, George moves beside her, and begins to help dish out the meals onto the plates.

GEORGE

Tommy, dinner!

Tommy comes rushing into the room.

Jumps up onto one of the chairs as Stephanie and George take seats around the table.

Just as Tommy's about to dig into his meal:

STEPHANIE

Hey, do you guys feel like eating in the living room tonight? Watching some TV maybe?

Tommy's eyes light up.

TOMMY

Yes!

George and Stephanie share a warm smile.

INT. LIVING ROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

With their finished plates on the floor, the three of them sit watching TV.

Stephanie leans against George, resting her head on his shoulder.

Reaches for his hand, closing her fingers around his.

DING DONG.

GEORGE
Bit late for a cold call?

She goes to get up.

GEORGE
It's okay. I've got it.

Stephanie continues to watch the TV with Tommy as George walks out of the room.

Hears mumbled voices as he answers the door.

He pops back around the doorway.

GEORGE
Somebody for you.

Stephanie looks up at her husband.

STEPHANIE
Really? Who is it?

George shrugs.

GEORGE
Wouldn't say his name.

With a growing sense of dread, Stephanie rises from the sofa, moving out into the hallway.

INT. HALLWAY - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The door's half open, concealing the person beyond it.

She stares at a visible hand, holding a cigarette.

Swallows hard as she opens the door to see... Alex.

Alex beams a grin. Leans in to kiss her.

She quickly bats him away, moving out onto the porch, pulling the door shut behind her.

EXT. STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Alex inhales from his cigarette, blowing smoke out into the night sky.

Stephanie tries to keep her voice quiet as she speaks.

STEPHANIE
What the fuck are you doing here?

ALEX
You didn't return my calls.

STEPHANIE
So you came to my house?

ALEX
Well, what was I supposed to do?

Stephanie looks over at the living room window. The outline of George on the sofa.

STEPHANIE
You need to leave. Right now.

ALEX
So that's it, huh? You just fuck me
- fucking hit me - and throw me
away, like--

Stephanie shushes him, moving him away from the door.

STEPHANIE
It's not like that. I -- I was
wrong about George. He wasn't
having an aff--

ALEX
So? Who gives a shit. That doesn't
change how he's treated you. Made
you feel. That doesn't change what
we have.

STEPHANIE
Look, you need to leave.

Alex stares back at her coldly.

ALEX
Or. What?

Stephanie doesn't know what to say. How to respond to his violent glare.

STEPHANIE
It's done, Alex. I'm sorry.

ALEX
It's not done.

He gives her an off putting smile, smoke seeping out of his lips. Darkness behind his eyes.

Casually turns, walking away into the night.

INT. HALLWAY - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Her hands shaking, Stephanie drops back against the door as she shuts it behind her.

George emerges from the living room. Sees her ghostly white face.

GEORGE
Everything okay?

She nods unconvincingly.

GEORGE
Who was it?

STEPHANIE
A student.

GEORGE
Wanting what?

STEPHANIE
He -- I failed him. He wanted to see if I'd change his grade.

GEORGE
And?

STEPHANIE
And what?

GEORGE
Will you change it?

STEPHANIE
No.

INT. BEDROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The sound of running water from the en-suite. George in the shower.

Stephanie sits on the bed. Opens up her laptop. Her e-mails. To see she has one new message, from Alex Marshall. With an attachment.

Looks over at the bathroom door.

Clicks to open the message.

The page fills with a blank image. Slowly downloading an attached picture.

Gradually revealing... Alex and Stephanie's naked bodies entwined on his bed!!! The photo he took on his phone.

She gasps.

CLICK.

The bathroom door opens.

She slams the laptop shut, startled.

George stands naked in the doorway.

GEORGE
I was thinking... maybe you'd wanna
join me?

Stephanie just stares back at him, with wide, horrified eyes.

GEORGE
Sorry. Stupid idea. Too soon to--

STEPHANIE
No.

She rushes up from the bed, grabbing his hand.

STEPHANIE (CONT'D)
I -- I'd love too.

He smiles, leading her into the bathroom. She glances at the closed laptop as she pushes the door shut behind her.

INT. BATHROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Behind the water and steam, Stephanie and George stand in the shower together. It's slightly awkward, but they're clearly trying.

Washing each other tenderly.

INT. BEDROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Stephanie lies in bed, watching George as he gets dressed.

GEORGE
It'll just be a couple of hours.
Max. I'll be back before you're out
of bed!

Stephanie looks disheartened.

He moves over to her, kissing her on the forehead.

GEORGE
I'll make it up to you. Why don't
we go out for a meal later, huh?
All three of us. Somewhere nice.

STEPHANIE
It better be somewhere good.

George grins.

GEORGE
The best.

He laughs as he finishes putting on his tie.

Stephanie rolls back over in the bed. Her eyes falling shut.

LATER

DING, DONG.

Stephanie yawns awake.

DING, DONG.

Looks around the room. Takes a minute to collect herself.

DING, DONG.

Swings the cover away, throwing a dressing gown over her arms.

Looks over to see a cup of coffee on the bedside table.

Feels it. Still warm.

Looks over at the clock. How is that possible? George left hours ago.

INT. HALLWAY - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Stephanie finishes tying her gown around her body, tugging open the door, just as the doorbell rings again.

Two POLICE OFFICERS are stood on the porch before her.

OFFICER#1
Mrs. Parker?

STEPHANIE
Yes.

OFFICER#2
Sorry it's so early.

STEPHANIE
It's -- it's okay. Is everything
alright.

OFFICER#1
Do you mind if we come in?

INT. LIVING ROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Stephanie places two cups of coffee in front of the officers.
Brings a third one in for herself, sitting down on a chair
across from them.

STEPHANIE
So how can I help you?

OFFICER#1
I'm assuming you know about what
happened to Mr. Clarkson? The dean
at--

STEPHANIE
Yes, of course. But... I -- I don't
understand what--

OFFICER#2
We just wanted to ask you a few
questions.

STEPHANIE
I -- I don't know if there's
anything I can--

OFFICER#1
Our phone records show that you
received a text message from Mr.
Clarkson on the 25th?

STEPHANIE
I -- yes.

They stare at her, waiting for her to elaborate.

STEPHANIE (CONT'D)
It was just -- he told me to come
back into work. He'd -- the day
before he'd suspended me. For being
late. For--

Her words fail her as she sees the suspicious glance the
officers share with one another.

STEPHANIE (CONT'D)
But I -- he was completely right
to. I wouldn't -- I would never --

OFFICER#1

It's okay. We're not accusing you of anything Mrs. Parker.

She lets out a deep breath.

OFFICER#2

Did you know that the incident with Mr. Clarkson took place on the 24th?

STEPHANIE

He...

OFFICER#2

So that message was sent to you from his cell phone after he had died.

STEPHANIE

But that -- that doesn't make any sense.

OFFICER#2

No, it doesn't.

OFFICER#1

Do you have any idea why somebody might have taken his phone? Why they would send you that?

STEPHANIE

I mean -- nobody even knew. I... I don't...

FLASH INSERT: Alex walking into her lecture, having just collided with the Dean, holding a cell phone in his hands.

STEPHANIE

I -- no, I -- can't think why anybody would do that.

INT. HALLWAY - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - DAY

One of the officer's passes Stephanie his card as she sees them off.

EXT. STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Stephanie sits on the porch, a cigarette smoking in her hands. Warily watching every person who walks past.

She puts it to her lips. Tries to inhale but it's gone out.

FLASH INSERT: Alex moving the blade towards her leg.

She shivers.

FLASH INSERT: Alex passing her her cell phone as she stands naked, by the shower. Did he send her that text message from the Dean's phone?

She shakes her head. What the hell has she gotten involved in?

Tries to spark her lighter.

FLASH INSERT: Her hand hitting Alex's cheek as she orgasms on top of him.

The flame finally catches. Orange fire trickles down the cigarette as she inhales.

FLASH INSERT: The picture of her and Alex downloading on her computer.

She takes a long inhalation from her cigarette.

FLASH INSERT: A hand placing a cup of coffee on the table beside her bed.

GEORGE (O.S.)

Steph?

She jumps, looking up to see George.

GEORGE

Sorry. Took a bit longer than I'd planned.

STEPHANIE

That's okay.

Stephanie hurriedly attempts to stub out her cigarette, but George takes it from her hand, sitting on the porch beside her.

He takes a drag, immediately spluttering a cough.

GEORGE

Never really did see the appeal.

He passes it back to Stephanie with a grin.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

All dressed up, George, Stephanie and Tommy sit around a small table in a crowded restaurant.

A fancy place. All blacks and blues.

They laugh together as they eat - Stephanie and George sipping from glasses of wine.

But there's something behind Stephanie's smile. A real, genuine fear. A wariness, as though she's half expecting Alex to suddenly appear.

Every concealed face a potential candidate.

INT. HALLWAY - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Laughter beyond the door.

Slightly tipsy, George and Stephanie unlock the door, stumbling into the hallway to see...

A smashed vase on the floor.

Flowers lying crumpled, trodden into the carpet.

A tipped over, splintered table.

Photo frames ripped off of the wall, shattered on the floor.

INT. LIVING ROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

George rushes into the living to see the same wanton destruction.

GEORGE
What the hell?!

The TV lies shattered on the ground. The screen cracked down the middle.

DVD boxes broken around it. Discs snapped in two.

The couch has been torn apart. Large knife marks dragged through the fabric. Huge fluffy scars.

INT. KITCHEN - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

George runs into the kitchen.

Half of the chairs are broken into wooden pieces. China plates and cups smashed across the floor.

The fridge tipped over, with milk and juice cartons cracked and crushed onto the kitchen tiles.

All of the cupboards open. Emptied.

Cutlery scattered around the room.

INT. BEDROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Stephanie rushes into the bedroom to see... it's been completely wrecked as well. All of her clothes, her underwear, lie shredded across the bed.

And on the walls, all over the room, the same picture of her and Alex, lying naked together.

Footsteps on the stairs.

Stephanie rushes to the wall, quickly ripping down the photographs. Tearing them off.

George appears in the doorway, just as she rips the final picture from the wall.

GEORGE
This wasn't a robbery.

STEPHANIE
No.

George moves into the room, heading for the bathroom.

INT. BATHROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Before Stephanie can say anything, he opens up the door to see...

No photographs.

She sighs in relief.

But written on the wall, in a dark red color, are the words:
"Take Control."

George taps his finger against the wet liquid.

GEORGE
Is that blood?

INT. HALLWAY - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Stephanie stands by the doorway, watching as George talks to two police officers.

OFFICER#3
... with no sign of forced entry.
Does anybody else have a key to the house?

GEORGE
No. Just me and Steph.

OFFICER#3
Is it possible the front door was
left unlocked? Open, even?

GEORGE
I -- no. It was definitely shut.

The Officer nods.

OFFICER#3
And there's nobody you can think of
that might have some sort of grudge
against you? A reason to do this.

George shakes his head.

GEORGE
No. No one.

Stephanie moves away from the door. Looks down at her phone,
expecting to see a message. To see something from Alex. A
threat. A boast. But there's nothing.

INT. VARIOUS - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

George moves around the house, taking photographs of
everything.

Tommy moves up beside him.

TOMMY
What are you doing, dad?

GEORGE
Taking photographs for the
insurance company. Before we clean
it all up.

Tommy yawns, rubbing his tired eyes.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
You should be in bed, little man.

TOMMY
I can't sleep.

GEORGE
No?

Tommy shakes his head.

GEORGE
You wanna stay in our room for the
night?

He gives Tommy a confident smile.

Tommy nods, slightly embarrassed.

INT. BEDROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

With all of the torn clothes moved off of the bed, George moves into the bed alongside Stephanie and Tommy.

Tommy reaches his little hand out, gripping Stephanie's.

MORNING

When Stephanie wakes up, Tommy and George have already vanished from the bed. She looks over at the bedside cabinet, but there's no cup of coffee there.

INT. LIVING ROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Stephanie enters the living room to see Tommy on his knees, using a dustpan and brush to sweep up broken items off of the floor.

He looks up at her with a smile.

INT. KITCHEN - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - DAY

George stands by the kettle, making a cup of coffee as Stephanie enters the room.

STEPHANIE

I see you've got Tommy doing all
the hard work!

He laughs.

GEORGE

You want a cup?

He shakes a packet of plastic cups at her.

Stephanie nods, taking a seat at the table on one of the only remaining chairs. Broken wooden legs lie stacked up in the corner of the room.

STEPHANIE

It's strange, but I was actually
sad there wasn't coffee this
morning. I didn't realize how much
I liked it. It sort of... makes me
feel safe. Secure.

GEORGE

What do you mean?

STEPHANIE

Even when you're mad at me. Or cold with me. Or we fight. It's always there when I wake up. I guess... it just helped me know that you really did care.

GEORGE

Steph, what are you talking about?

They stare at each other, confused.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

I never make you coffee in the morning. What are you...?

Stephanie quickly collects herself. Forces a smile.

STEPHANIE

Right. Nothing.

George stares back at her: what isn't she telling him?

INT. BATHROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Taking long, calming breaths, Stephanie sits on the toilet.

She reaches down, raising her skirt up. Moving the razor blade towards her inner thigh.

She holds it over her skin. Clenches her eyes shut.

Deep, steady breaths.

Presses the tip against her skin...

But doesn't do it. Moves the blade away instead.

EXT. STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Stephanie stands by the porch, smoking a cigarette.

She moves over to the trash bin. Flips open the lid, dropping the blade inside.

VMMM. VMMM.

Stephanie pulls out her cell phone.

1 new message... from Alex.

Opens it up to see: **"Meet me at the Sunshine Cafe, midday tomorrow."**

She quickly deletes the text.

INT. KITCHEN - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The three of them sit around the scratched up table, eating take-out Chinese on paper plates.

Tommy pushes aside the various vegetables in the meal.

STEPHANIE
Tommy, eat your veg.

Reluctantly, Tommy takes a forkful of vegetables, and sticks them in his mouth.

INT. BEDROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Stephanie moves restlessly in the bed, unable to sleep.

Looks over at her husband's peaceful, handsome face.

INT. CAR - DAY

Stephanie sits in her car, watching Tommy run into the school.

INT. LECTURE ROOM - COLLEGE - DAY

Stephanie stands before her students, giving them a lecture. Sweat building on her brow as she glances at the door, expecting Alex to show up at any minute.

But he doesn't.

INT. SCHOOL OFFICE - COLLEGE - DAY

A small, slightly plump woman, JUDY, sits behind a desk in the office. Dozens of filing cabinets stretch out behind her.

She looks up as Stephanie enters the room.

STEPHANIE
So?

JUDY
I don't know what to tell you,
Steph. It's not here.

STEPHANIE
What do you mean 'it's not here'?

JUDY
There is no Alex Marshall here. No
Marshall's at all, actually.

STEPHANIE

Excuse me?

Judy spins around her computer screen to reveal some sort of college database. The name 'Marshall' returns no matches.

JUDY

Not on your course. Not in the whole college. There is no student here by that name.

STEPHANIE

It -- if he's new, it might not have --

But Judy shakes her head.

JUDY

If he was new, I'd know about it.

STEPHANIE

Then he -- he must have lied about his name, right?

JUDY

I thought that too. But you said he transferred onto your course?

She nods.

JUDY (CONT'D)

But... there's no record of any student transferring onto your course this whole year. Let alone last week.

STEPHANIE

I -- maybe it hasn't processed --

But Judy doesn't look convinced.

INT. CORRIDOR - COLLEGE - DAY

Stephanie paces down the corridor. Pauses as she spots a couple of students from her class.

STEPHANIE

Hey! Have any of you seen Alex?
Alex Marshall?

STUDENT#1

Who?

STEPHANIE

The older guy who joined the class last week?

Blank faces stare back at her.

STEPHANIE
Seriously, none of you fucking
noticed him?

They stare back, surprised at her tense tone.

STUDENT#2
Oh, you mean the really gorgeous
guy, who's always late?

Stephanie gives a wide, relieved smile.

STEPHANIE
Yes! Him!

The group sniggers at her enthusiastic response.

STUDENT#3
Easy there, miss. Don't want people
to think you've been--

STEPHANIE
Have. You. Seen him?

They shake their heads uncomfortably.

EXT. SUNSHINE CAFE - DAY

Stephanie stands on a street corner, staring at the window of the Sunshine Cafe.

Taking quick, sharp inhalations from her cigarette.

Watching Alex as he sits at a table, right by the door, sipping from a coffee.

INT. SUNSHINE CAFE - DAY

Stephanie drops herself down on the seat opposite Alex.

Doesn't say a word, waiting for him to talk. To apologize.

But he just sits there, flicking the wooden stirrer in his cup of coffee. Staring down at his drink.

Stephanie reaches out, grabbing the stirrer.

Alex's hand shoots forward, grabbing her wrist. Raises his eyes to hers.

She snaps her wrist away.

STEPHANIE
Who the fuck are you?

ALEX
You know who I am. And I know you.
Better than anybody.

He reaches for her hand across the table.

She pushes him away, knocking over his coffee.

A few faces turn to look at them, forcing Stephanie to give them a fake smile and nod as if to say 'everything's fine here'.

STEPHANIE
How did you get into my house? How
long have you been...

Alex lowers his eyes. Doesn't reply.

STEPHANIE
What the fuck is going on? Are
you... are you stalking me?

Alex looks up, hurt.

ALEX
How could you possibly say that?

STEPHANIE
Then what are you doing? What do
you want from me?

Alex picks his stirrer up off of the table. Drops it into his cup.

ALEX
Have you ever just felt... *drawn* to
something? To somebody?

He meets Stephanie's eyes with his beautiful, piercing eyes.

ALEX (CONT'D)
I knew we were meant to be together
from the first time I saw you.

STEPHANIE
And when was the first time you saw
me?

ALEX
In -- in the bathroom, at--

STEPHANIE
You're lying. You're not even a
student, Alex. The coffee's been by
my bed for...

He lowers his eyes, seemingly ashamed.

ALEX

It wasn't supposed to happen this way. I had it all planned out. I --

She shakes her head in disbelief.

STEPHANIE

Why me? You could have had any girl in the world. Why did you come for me?

ALEX

Because we're soul mates, Stephanie. I can see it in, I don't know, like your aura or something.

STEPHANIE

What if I told you you were wrong?

ALEX

Then you'd be lying to yourself.

Stephanie can't help but laugh.

STEPHANIE

I'm going to give the police your address. They'll find you, and--

ALEX

So why are you telling me this? Why are you still trying to protect me?

STEPHANIE

I don't--

ALEX

Because you love me.

Stephanie shakes her head. Tears swelling in her eyes.

ALEX

You do. I can see it. Feel it.

She stands from her chair.

STEPHANIE

You're insane.

ALEX

No. You're in denial.

She stares back in horror. Can he really be this deluded?

STEPHANIE

I don't ever want to see you again. Ever.

And walks out.

Alex stays perfectly still, tears forming in his eyes.
Leaking down his cheeks.
He raises his hand, wiping them away.

INT. CAR - DAY

Anxiously, Stephanie sits in her car, opposite the school.
Her cell phone rings wildly on the seat beside her. Messages.
Phone calls. But she ignores them all.
Then suddenly, it STOPS. Just as the children pour out of the
school gates.
An eerie silence in the car.
She taps her fingers on the wheel as she waits for Tommy to
emerge.
Kids run past her car, heading over to their parents.
Lingering in groups. Playing. Laughing. But she can't see
Tommy.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

She opens her door, stepping out, trying to get a better
view. Slightly on edge.
Then she sees him, by the door, talking to a MAN with his
back turned to her.
His clothes. His height. His hair... it's ALEX!
Panicked, she pushes through the bustle of kids and parents,
charging over to her son.

STEPHANIE
Tommy! Tommy!

Runs up to the Man, grabbing his shoulder.

STEPHANIE
Stay the fuck away from--

But as the Man turns, she sees that it's not Alex at all.
It's one of Tommy's teachers.

MAN
Mrs. Parker?

STEPHANIE
Oh. I'm sorry. I --
(beat)
Come on.

She grabs Tommy's hand, hurrying back to her car.

INT. CAR - DAY

Tommy sits in silence as his mother speeds down the road.

Cars BEEP furiously at her as she over takes them.

TOMMY
Mom you're -- you're going too
fast.

But Stephanie just keeps driving.

TOMMY
Mom? Please!

She takes a deep breath. Releases pressure on the pedal.

STEPHANIE
Sorry.

TOMMY
What's going on?

STEPHANIE
Nothing. I just want to get home.

INT. KITCHEN - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

With most of the room cleaned up, Stephanie, George and Tommy all sit around the table, eating.

George looks up at Stephanie. Her eyes are lowered. Focussed on her food. Her cheeks flushed red. Clearly worried.

INT. BEDROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

George lies down in the bed beside a silent Stephanie.

She's facing away from him, so he moves his body around hers, spooning her.

His arm wrapping around her body.

GEORGE
You have to talk to me. Tell me
what's going on.

STEPHANIE
I --

She moves her head, looking back into his wide, warm eyes. Where would she even begin?

GEORGE
Please. I want you to be able to
talk to me.

STEPHANIE
I want that too.

She turns her head, kissing him.

Reaches her arm around her body, her hands moving under the
covers.

GEORGE
What are you--

He gasps as she touches him, moving her body back against
his.

She shuffles his boxer shorts off.

Caught up in the moment, he pulls off her underwear.

She moves her body onto his.

His arm wrapped around her, still spooning her.

They move together under the covers, her head tilted back to
kiss his lips.

STEPHANIE
I love you, George. I really do.

GEORGE
I love you too.

MORNING

Stephanie yawns awake.

Sunlight slithers through the curtains.

She moves herself up - she's naked under the covers with
George. For the first time in God knows how long. She smiles.

Everything's going to be okay.

Looks over at the bedside cabinet.

Sitting beside her, in a china mug, is a steaming hot cup of
coffee.

She looks back at the bed. At George, fast asleep.

Slides her naked body out of the covers.

Passes the mirror, not even stopping to look at her aged,
naked reflection.

She pulls a dressing gown around her shoulders, tying it around her waist.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Slightly dazed, she moves out into the hallway. Pushes open Tommy's door.

STEPHANIE

Tommy?

But all she sees is a ruffled, empty bed.

BANG!

A loud thumping noise echoes from somewhere downstairs.

She runs down the stairs, jumping two at a time, almost falling over her drooping dressing gown.

INT. HALLWAY - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - DAY

STEPHANIE

Tommy?!

She swings her head around the kitchen door. Nobody.

A half boiled kettle, still leaking steam, sits on the counter.

She turns around to see... A RUBBER BALL rolling out of the living room door.

INT. LIVING ROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - DAY

STEPHANIE

Tommy?

She sees the sofa first. The TV.

ALEX (O.S.)

Morning, beautiful.

Speechless, she spins to see Alex, hovering behind Tommy.

He grins at her with his usual, beautiful smile.

STEPHANIE

What -- what are you doing --

She looks down at her son. Sees for the first time that Alex is holding a GUN underneath Tommy's throat. Finger around the trigger.

Tears stream down Tommy's silent face.

Stephanie gasps, desperate to do something.

She jerks forward.

Alex tightens his grip on Tommy - who begins to breathe in heavily as the cold metal of the weapon presses harder into his skin.

STEPHANIE

What are you doing, Alex?

ALEX

I can't let you lie to yourself like this. I can't let you just throw it away.

STEPHANIE

Please, Alex! Let my son go.

Alex shakes his head.

ALEX

Not until you promise.

STEPHANIE

Promise what?

ALEX

Promise that you'll leave with me.

STEPHANIE

Alex, please don't do this.

ALEX

Promise me.

Tommy starts to cry loudly as Alex's hand shakes by his throat. Finger tapping against the trigger.

STEPHANIE

Just let him go and we can--

ALEX

Don't you see? I'm doing this for you. Because I have to. Because you're refusing to see.

STEPHANIE

Please, just--

ALEX

PROMISE ME!!!

Tears fall down Stephanie's cheeks.

STEPHANIE

I promise, okay? Now let him go.

Alex sighs in relief, a wide smile across his sweaty face.
Pushes Tommy forward, out of harms way.
Stephanie grabs her son, hugging him tightly.

GEORGE (O.S.)
What the hell is--

George enters from the hallway.
Stares down at his family's horrified, crying faces.
Looks up to see Alex, nostrils flaring, fingers fidgeting around the gun.

GEORGE
You -- the student who -- what the hell is going on here?

Alex starts to laugh.
Raises the gun to George. George freezes, rooted to the spot.

ALEX
Me and Stephanie are leaving together. Isn't that right, Steph? Tell him! Tell him that we're leaving.

Stephanie looks over at her husband.
With tears splashing off her face, she nods.

STEPHANIE
Yes.

She stares into her husband's scared, crushed eyes.

ALEX
Because she loves me. Not you. You've discarded her. Left her to become lost, and scared, and alone.

George looks around the room, trying to see anything he can use as a weapon. Anything he can do.

ALEX
Have you seen what you've done? Have you seen the scars on her legs? A map of the pain you've caused her. You don't deserve her.
You had your chance.

GEORGE
You -- it was you who had my phone.

Alex grins.

ALEX
That's all you have to say, huh?
That's it?

Alex takes a step towards them.

George pushes his wife and son behind him.

STEPHANIE
Please just leave, Alex. You can
still get out of this. You can--

He bursts out laughing.

ALEX
Get out of this? Do you know what
I've done for you?

STEPHANIE
Yes.

ALEX
Bullshit!

STEPHANIE
I do, but... you didn't do it for
me, Alex. You didn't kill the dean
for me.

ALEX
Bullshit. You'd be dead if it
wasn't for me.

GEORGE
What?

ALEX
Did you even know how lost your
'wife' was? You in your castle,
with your perfect life. Just
watching it rot.

He turns to Stephanie.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Can you look me in the eyes and
tell me you'd still be here if you
hadn't met me, Stephanie?

Stephanie looks from Alex to George. Tries to say something,
to correct him, but nothing comes out.

George falls back against the wall. Too much to take in.

ALEX
What did it feel like being with
him last night?
(MORE)

ALEX (cont'd)
Were you as turned on as when I
touched you? As wet as when I
fucked you?

Stephanie looks lost as she stares at her husband's pained,
broken face.

Tears pouring down her cheeks.

STEPHANIE
I'm so sorry, George. I --

She swallows hard. Turns to Alex.

Takes a step towards him. He moves awkwardly, not sure how to
react.

She keeps her arms out before her, in full view. She's not
going to do anything.

She stops beside him.

Puts her hand around his, touching the gun.

STEPHANIE
I know you're hurting, Alex. I
know. But I -- I wasn't in a good
place. And you're right. You helped
bring me back. But I -- I can't be
with you. If you love me at all,
like you say, please just give me
the gun.

Alex looks from Stephanie to her husband. Her cowering son.

ALEX
LIAR!!!

He pulls his gun hand free, SMACKING Stephanie across the
face, back into the wall. Grabs Stephanie around the throat.

ALEX
I won't let you lie to yourself. To
ruin your life like this! You're
supposed to be with me. We're --
we're star crossed lovers. We're
Romeo and Juliet. I can prove it to
you. Show you. You just have to let
me. Have to come with me.

STEPHANIE
I can't, Alex.

ALEX
You promised.

STEPHANIE
Please.

ALEX
You're coming with me.

Alex cocks the gun as he raises it towards George.

Stephanie looks over at her husband. Tears in his eyes. Lost. Hurt. Crushed. Almost looks like he doesn't even care anymore. Like he'd happily die.

STEPHANIE
No, I -- I'll come.

Alex stares at her face. Decides she's being truthful.

The blank, lifeless expression she wears so well returns to her face as she walks forward, in front of Alex.

She leans down before her crying son. Kisses him on the forehead.

STEPHANIE
I love you.

Tommy looks lost. Confused. Not sure what's happening.

Stephanie moves past George, who's eyes turn to the ground.

Knowing she's lost him, she walks past him.

Alex beams a grin. He's won. But suddenly, George BURSTS forward, colliding with Alex.

GEORGE
Run, Steph!

The gun drops from Alex's hand as George punches him in the stomach.

But Alex is so much younger, so much stronger than him. He smacks George across the face a few times, cutting open his lip.

He reaches down for the gun, but George lunges at him, throwing him crashing into the wall.

GEORGE
Fucking go, Steph!

Alex's elbow beats down at George, knocking him to the ground. Boom. Boom. Boom.

Clutching Tommy's hand, Stephanie runs out of the room, into the hallway.

Alex swings his boot into George's stomach. Over, and over, and over. Until George is nothing but a coughing, spluttering mess.

Alex reaches down, picking up the gun.

Cocks it, pressing it against George's skull.

EXT. STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Stephanie crouches down before Tommy, her hands around his crying face.

STEPHANIE

Across the road. Knock on every house until somebody answers. Get them to call the police. Do you understand, Tommy?

TOMMY

But--

STEPHANIE

DO IT!

Tommy reluctantly runs off as she pushes him forwards, before rushing back into the house herself.

INT. LIVING ROOM - STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Breathing heavily through his bloodied nose, Alex stands over a crouching George, pushing the gun against his skull, fingers hovering over the trigger.

He looks up as, terrified, Stephanie enters.

STEPHANIE

Please, Alex.

Tensing. Ready to kill him.

Hands shaking...

ALEX

You'd die for her?

GEORGE

Yes.

ALEX

Even after what she did?

GEORGE

Yes.

Alex looks over at Stephanie. Raises the gun off of George, hitting it against the side of his pained head.

ALEX

You really want to stay with him?

Tears spilling down her cheeks, Stephanie nods.

ALEX
Open up your dressing gown.

Stephanie looks over at her husband.

ALEX
FUCKING DO IT!

She swallows uncomfortably. Shyly, slowly, undoes the gown, revealing her naked body.

Her scarred legs. Her rolls of fat. Her stretch lines. Her age. Her beauty.

She tries to conceal herself with her arms, but Alex moves forwards, grabbing them, batting them away from her body.

George's eyes on the gun in Alex's hand in front of him.

ALEX
I could make you happy. I could make you feel beautiful again. Like you deserve. You're so beautiful. So perfect. Do you really think he - he could make you feel that? Do you?

STEPHANIE
I --

She looks over at George's wide, frightened eyes.

George looks across at her body with a warm smile.

GEORGE
You are more beautiful than anything.

Alex's nostrils flare as he sees the teary smile on Stephanie's face.

STEPHANIE
I'm sorry. But... he's the only one that could make me feel that. Really feel that.

Alex shakes his head. Starts saying the word 'no', over and over again.

ALEX
No, no, no, no, no.

Pacing back and forth before them.

He hits the gun against the side of his head again.

STEPHANIE

Please, Alex. Just put the gun
down, and we can all--

His eyes and nose running, Alex spins. Presses the gun
against Stephanie's naked chest.

She stands frozen, staring back at him. Staring at her
wounded husband on the ground behind Alex.

ALEX

I -- I'm sorry for all of this. I
don't know what's -- but you -- you
just make me --

He wipes away his tears.

ALEX

I'm sorry.

And before anyone can do anything, he raises the gun to the
side of his face and...

BANG!!!

Red blood sprays out across the wall as his body slumps down
onto the ground between the two of them.

The sound of Stephanie screaming as George struggles to
comprehend what's just happened...

She falls onto her knees beside him, both staring at Alex's
bloody corpse in horror...

FADE TO:

INT. DISABLED TOILET - COLLEGE - DAY

Stephanie sits on the toilet.

As she finishes using it, she moves to pull her underwear up,
but stops. Looks down at her leg. At the scars across her
thigh. All old, healing.

For once, no fresh, inflamed cuts.

She traces her finger along the wound Alex made on her.

A soft smile escapes her lips.

Before she pulls up her panties, shuffling down her dress to
conceal the scars.

She moves in front of the mirror. Looking at her aged
reflection.

Her eyes full of something - but it's difficult to tell what.
Emptiness? Happiness?

Almost looking as if she's going to smile at her own
appearance for once.

But she doesn't.

She turns and walks away.

FADE OUT.

THE END.