

DRAG ME TO HELL

by
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INT. BEDROOM - BEFORE DAWN

22 year old Stephanie Browne is jarred from a peaceful sleep as the alarm clock BUZZES. She hits the snooze button and plops back down onto the pillow. After a few seconds of pure sleeping bliss, she wills herself up.

She moves through her Ikea furnished bedroom, past a "Hang in there, baby" poster and into the bathroom.

INT. BATHROOM - A MOMENT LATER

Stephanie turns on the shower. While waiting for the water to heat up, she looks into the mirror and with exaggerated pronunciation, recites:

STEPHANIE

There is no friction, with proper diction. Good sounds abound, when the mouth is round.

She catches herself on the last word, a hint of "Missouri twang" slipping through.

STEPHANIE

Round.

Yawn. She slips off her nightgown and lumbers into the steaming shower.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

She opens the refrigerator: A half grapefruit sits next to an inviting slice of chocolate cake. She's tempted, but chooses the grapefruit.

EXT. VENTURA BOULEVARD PARKING STRUCTURE - MORNING

A sunny Southern California day. Commuters speed by. Stephanie's FORD FOCUS pulls into the PARKING STRUCTURE, across the street from the BANK OF CALIFORNIA. She steps from the car, smartly dressed for work and walks briskly toward the intersection. The traffic signal changes to "Don't Walk". A BUSINESS MAN next to her, sprints across the street. Stephanie almost follows but decides to obey the sign. She looks down to see a little KITTEN. It rubs against her ankles and PURRS.

STEPHANIE

Well, you're a little cutie.

A car's HORN blares, spooking the kitten. It darts into the intersection and freezes at the sight of an oncoming VAN.

Stephanie races into the intersection, snatches up the kitten and places it safely down on the other side of the street.

STEPHANIE

Hey! Slow down!

The Van roars past. She pets the Kitten. It PURRS and licks Stephanie's face. She sets it down.

STEPHANIE

Go on home. Shoo now!

She heads for the Bank. The kitten follows. She turns back, frowning.

STEPHANIE

Shoo!

INT. BANK OF CALIFORNIA - DAY

Stephanie sits at her desk, across from a young MEXICAN COUPLE. She studies their mortgage application.

MEXICAN MAN

We keep getting the same thing. Because I'm not employed by an American company, they won't take my application until they get my solvency statement. And the Mexican Treasury Department says that's going to take at least four more weeks.

MEXICAN WOMAN

And the house will be gone by then.

STEPHANIE

It says here your employed by Pemex?

MEXICAN

That's right.

STEPHANIE

Isn't Pemex a subsidiary of Union Oil?

MEXICAN MAN

Yes. So?

STEPHANIE

So technically, your employer is an American company. I think we can make this work. I'll call you this afternoon and let you know.

The happy couple shake Stephanie's hand and exit. ELLEN, Stephanie's pretty, twenty two year old, roommate, flops down into the seat across from her.

ELLEN

I need clarification on the shoe issue.

STEPHANIE

Okay...

ELLEN

First of all-- you know you've got the only perfect pair of black dress shoes in L.A. So was that a definite, irrevocable, "no way" or just a rather not at this time, "no way"?

STEPHANIE

It's an absolutely, positively, forget about the shoes already, "no way". They're my only good pair and I need them in good shape for tomorrow.

ELLEN

What's up?

STEPHANIE

Dinner with Ray's parents.

Ellen picks up a desktop photo: A shot of Stephanie and her handsome boyfriend, Ray, locked in an embrace, standing in the spray of a waterfall.

ELLEN

Ray's got a nice butt. Really tight and--

Stephanie takes back her photo.

STEPHANIE

--I know. Thanks.

ELLEN

He's a keeper. But I told you about his mom, she's another story. I used to waitress at her country club, and with her, it's all about what private school you went to and who you know. You still up for that promotion? That would help.

Stephanie looks longingly to...

THE VACANT OFFICE

of the former Assistant Manager. The large oak desk. The executive chair. Waiting to be filled.

Stephanie turns back, pushing the thought away.

STEPHANIE

I'm not putting on a show. She'll either accept me for who I am or not.

ELLEN

Are you reading self help books again?

The Kitten peers out through Stephanie's partially opened desk drawer.

ELLEN

Hello there!

Ellen reaches for the Kitty but Stephanie waves her off.

STEPHANIE

--Shhh! I can't let my boss see him.

Stephanie glances to her manager, MR. JACKS, a heavysset man sitting behind a large desk.

ELLEN

What about the shoes?

STEPHANIE

I told you. No. Now beat it.

Mr. Jacks sneezes, rubs his nose. He looks suspiciously about the bank for the source of his allergy.

STEPHANIE

Uh Oh. You better bring the kitty home for me.

ELLEN

Sure. If I can take the shoes.

STEPHANIE

I told you, no.

Mr. Jacks sneezes again, his eyes water. He turns to his SECRETARY.

MR. JACKS

Has someone brought a damned animal into my bank?!

Mr. Jacks looks about the Bank, his twitching nose leading him toward Stephanie's desk.

STEPHANIE

Okay, fine! Take the shoes!

Hidden from Mr. Jack's view, Ellen quickly scoops up the Kitten and places it into her purse.

As Mr. Jacks arrives at Stephanie's desk, he overhears:

ELLEN

Just don't expect me to take care of it.

This catches Mr. Jack's attention. He turns to the ladies, wondering what they're talking about. Stephanie takes Ellen's hand and vigorously shakes it goodbye.

STEPHANIE

Of course not. I'll take care of everything. And thanks for choosing Bank of California.

Ellen plays along.

ELLEN

Okay. Then I'll see you later. I mean-- whenever the next time I'm in the bank. You know-- for a loan. Or--

STEPHANIE

Goodbye.

As Ellen passes, Mr. Jacks sneezes again, harder.

MR. JACKS

Someone has definitely brought an animal in here.

He eyes Ellen suspiciously as she exits.

STEPHANIE

I don't see any cats. Or any animals.

MR. JACKS

Hope to hell, not.

STEPHANIE

By the way, I put the paperwork for the Mcpherson loan on your desk.

MR. JACKS

Mcpherson?

STEPHANIE

That big corporate loan I've been trying to set up? It's just preliminary but--

MR. JACKS

Oh, right. I'll look it over when I get the chance.

STEPHANIE

Mr. Jacks, I was wondering if you had made any decision regarding the Assistant Manager's position yet?

MR. JACKS

I'm still deciding. Right now it's between Stu and yourself.

STEPHANIE
Stu? The trainee?

Stephanie turns to see Stu, the balding loan officer who sits at his desk, watching, trying to figure out what Jacks is saying to her.

MR. JACKS
I know he's new but he's also quite aggressive and we like that. Don't get me wrong, you're well liked here, but we're also looking for someone who's not afraid to crunch the numbers and make the tough decisions.

STEPHANIE
Mr. Jacks, I feel that I'm perfectly capable of--

MR. JACKS
--I'll let you know as soon as I decide. In the meantime, take him through our loan qualifying procedures... just in case.

STEPHANIE
Oh. Okay.

MR JACKS
And would you mind taking your lunch now?

STEPHANIE
Sure.

MR. JACKS
And on your way back, maybe you could bring me a turkey club?

Stu overhears them as he passes by.

STU
Turkey club. Excellent choice, J.J.

Then to Stephanie:

STU
Mind picking one up for me?

STEPHANIE

No problem.

Jacks heads back toward his desk. Stephanie grabs her purse and keys and as she heads out, Stu calls after her:

STU

On toasted rye! And spicy mustard!

Stephanie doesn't like fetching lunch for the trainee but hides her displeasure.

STEPHANIE

Sure.

EXT. UCLA - WESTWOOD CAMPUS - DAY

Stephanie enters the Ivy-covered red bricked Department of Psychology Building.

INT. UCLA LECTURE HALL - DAY

RAY DALTON, a handsome twenty-nine year old man is lecturing before a class of UCLA students. They listen attentively.

RAY

The conscious mind abhors uncertainty. It seeks a pattern or reason for everything. When we can't find that pattern or reason, we sometimes ascribe it's cause to the world of the supernatural. The spiritual world is created by the human mind to conveniently explain everything we can't. So when does a belief in the supernatural cross into the field of abnormal behavior? Where do you, the Psychologist, come in? When these beliefs negatively affect our patients activities of daily living. Their jobs, their friends, their sense of well being--

The class bell RINGS.

RAY

Tomorrow we'll be covering the clinical manifestations of psychosis. You'll find it all referenced in the text.

The students pack up their books. Ray smiles as he sees Stephanie enter the lecture hall, holding a bag of deli food.

INT. RAY'S UNIVERSITY OFFICE - LATER

Stephanie eats a salad as she goes over a financial statement of the Mcpherson Corporation.

Ray grades papers.

RAY

How're things at the bank? How's that new position looking?

STEPHANIE

I don't know.

RAY

Really? You sounded so sure.

STEPHANIE

Well, now there's this new guy... they're considering him too.

Ray sees how bummed out she is. He moves close, taking her in his arms.

RAY

That job needs somebody with your experience. They know that.

Stephanie nods.

STEPHANIE

Oh, I've got something for you.

She rummages through her purse and hands Ray an envelope. He removes a coin. An old nickle.

RAY

A 1925 Indian head! Hey, good find. Where'd you get it?

STEPHANIE

One of the tellers found it for me.

Ray puts the coin back into the envelope and tucks it into his pocket.

RAY

Thanks.

STEPHANIE

I'd better get back to work.

She quickly gathers her things. Ray returns to grading his student's exams. The telephone RINGS. Ray hits the speakerphone.

RAY

Doctor Dalton.

It's the voice of an older woman, TRUDY.

TRUDY ON SPEAKERPHONE

Hello dear.

RAY

Hi Mom, can you hold on a sec?

He turns from the phone, whispering to Stephanie:

RAY

I'll call you tonight.

She kisses Ray and exits.

INT. HALL OUTSIDE RAY'S OFFICE - DAY

Stephanie stops at the water fountain for a drink.

RAY'S VOICE

Nothing much. Just had lunch with Stephanie. And trying to get these midterms graded--

She halts as she hears her name mentioned on Ray's speakerphone. She moves closer to Ray's office to eavesdrop:

TRUDY'S VOICE

--Stephanie? The one from the farm?

RAY'S VOICE

You know who she is. She's coming over for dinner tomorrow night to meet you and dad.

TRUDY'S VOICE

Ray, I'm sure she's sweet, but she doesn't sound...

RAY'S VOICE

What?

TRUDY'S VOICE

I mean she's just a teller at some bank right? Raymond there's a reason that your father and I raised you in a certain way. We have expectations.

RAY'S VOICE

Please, mom, not this again--

TRUDY'S VOICE

I heard that Julie Kulick is looking for someone to play tennis with. You know she graduated Yale law with honors. I'm told she's quite a successful attorney now. I gave you her number but her mother says you never called.

RAY'S VOICE

Because I'm with Stephanie. I'm not looking for anybody else.

TRUDY'S VOICE

Would it kill you to--

RAY'S VOICE

--Mom. I have to go. See you tomorrow night. Okay? Bye.

A downhearted Stephanie quietly exits.

INT. BANK OF CALIFORNIA - BREAK ROOM - DAY

As Stephanie pours herself a cup of coffee, Stu and Mr. Jacks take the first bites of their sandwiches. Stu makes a face. He inspects the sandwich, shakes his head.

STU

(quietly to Mr. Jacks)
She messed up my order.

Stephanie heard that.

STEPHANIE
No I didn't, Stu.

STU
Steph, I said "no mayo".

STEPHANIE
You never said that.

Stu rolls his eyes to Mr. Jacks.

Stephanie caught Stu's look, but what can she do? She exits.

INT. BANK OF CALIFORNIA - LATER

Stephanie sits at her desk, entering data into her computer. She glances across the bank to see Stu and Mr. Jacks emerging from the break room. Stu is about to return to his desk when he remembers something: he's got two tickets to a Dodger game that he can't use. Mr. Jacks happily accepts the tickets.

Stephanie looks to the vacant office of the Assistant Manager. She can feel her promotion slipping away.

SCRATCH... SCRATCH...

Stephanie looks to the source of the sound....

A withered hand. An involuntary tremor causes it's yellowed fingernails to SCRATCH across the surface of Stephanie's desk...

SCRATCH... SCRATCH...

The hand belongs to MRS. SYLVIA GANUSH, the aged woman who sits across from Stephanie. She wears a formal dress and hat from another era. The outfit is threadbare in spots but great care has been taken to maintain it.

MRS. GANUSH
(Hungarian accent)
Will you help me?

STEPHANIE
Of course. What can I do for you?

Mrs. Ganush coughs up phlegm and spits it into a linen handkerchief, which she tucks back into her purse. She hands Stephanie a bunch of crumpled papers. Stephanie reviews them.

STEPHANIE
Mrs. "Ganush"?

The old woman nods.

STEPHANIE
This is a delinquency notice... it says that the payment on your loan was due a number of months ago. And this other document... is a court order for repossession. The bank is informing you of their intent to repossess your property at 325 Brandon street, tomorrow.

MRS. GANUSH
The trucks are there now. The men are packing all my things. Private things. Please, make them stop. This is my home for twenty years. And I make every payment until the sickness took my eye.

Mrs. Ganush turns her head to reveal a milky white eye. Stephanie hides her revulsion.

STEPHANIE
Well... do you have the payment with you now?

MRS. GANUSH
I hope to get it soon. I just need a little more time.

STEPHANIE
I don't think my manager is going to extend you anymore credit. I'd like to help but...

MRS. GANUSH
Please. Won't you try?

STEPHANIE
Okay. Wait here.

Stephanie stands and moves off. The Old Woman picks through a bowl of hard candies on Stephanie's desk.

Stephanie stands before Mr. Jacks. He acknowledges her without looking up from his work.

MR. JACKS

What's up?

STEPHANIE

I've got an elderly woman asking for an extension on her mortgage payment. They're in the process of repossessing her home. She's on a fixed income and she's had some medical problems. I was wondering if we could give her a break.

Stephanie hands Mr. Jacks the loan file. He puts on his bifocals, studies it.

Stephanie glances over her shoulder.

STEPHANIE'S P.O.V. - HER DESK

Mrs. Ganush looks around to make sure no one's watching, then tips the bowl of hard candies into her purse. She reaches into her mouth and removes a set of stained dentures that she wraps in her linen handkerchief.

She places a piece of hard candy into her mouth and gums it with a wet SUCKING sound. The Old Woman's one good eye, wanders about in ecstasy as she sucks on the sugary treat.

MR. JACKS

Apparently, we've already granted her two extensions. And you know on this type of foreclosure, the bank makes a sizable amount in fees.

He hands her back the file.

STEPHANIE

It would mean I'd have to throw her out of her house.

MR. JACKS

Tough decision. Your call.

He leans back in his overstuffed leather chair and studies her. Stephanie glances to the vacant office of the Assistant Manager. The large oak desk. The thick carpet.

She sees a calculating Stu Rubin eyeing her from his workstation.

STEPHANIE
I'll take care of it.

Stephanie returns to her desk.

STEPHANIE
Mrs. Ganush, another extension on
the loan is out of the question.

MRS. GANUSH
What?

STEPHANIE
I'm sorry.

MRS. GANUSH
No. Please, it's my home... I'm
begging you.

STEPHANIE
I tried to talk my boss into it but
he just wouldn't approve.

MRS. GANUSH
But where will I live?

Stephanie leafs through the loan documents. She finds a name.

STEPHANIE
Mrs. Ganush, you've given your
granddaughter as a reference... It
says here, she lives nearby...
Wouldn't you be better off living
with her?

MRS. GANUSH
I would not burden her.

STEPHANIE
Okay well, there's several fine
"assisted living" facilities for
the elderly.

MRS. GANUSH
A nursing home? No. I will never
live in one of those places!

STEPHANIE
Well, of course, that's your
choice.

MRS. GANUSH

It's yours.

STEPHANIE

I'm sorry there's nothing I can do.

Mrs. Ganush begins to sob.

MRS. GANUSH

I am proud woman, Miss Brown, and never have I begged for anything. But I will beg for you now. This one time. I humble myself before you.

STEPHANIE

That isn't necessary, please. Let's not make this personal. It's just the bank's policy. I'm really sorry Mrs. Ganush.

Stephanie takes the loan documents and places them neatly into a manila folder. She glances up but Mrs. Ganush is gone. Stephanie turns in her chair and is startled to see the old woman, kneeling before her. She clutches Stephanie's leg with her gnarled hands.

MRS. GANUSH

Have mercy on me.

Stephanie stands, tries to pull free, but the old woman will not release her leg.

STEPHANIE

Please, let go.

Customers turn to look. Mr. Jacks glances up from his desk.

MR. JACKS

What the hell?

MRS. GANUSH

I, Sylvia Ganush, beg. On my mother's grave, I beg you.

STEPHANIE

Please, take your hands off me.

But the old woman only clutches tighter.

STEPHANIE
I'm calling security.

She picks up the phone and presses a button.

STEPHANIE
(into the phone)
Could you please come over?

Mrs. Ganush finally releases her grip and bows her head in humiliation.

MRS. GANUSH
You shame me.

She composes herself. Then, slowly stands, puffing up her chest. Mustering her damaged pride.

MRS. GANUSH
I begged you...

Her one good eye fixes it's hardened gaze upon Stephanie.

MRS. GANUSH
...and you shame me.

Mrs. Ganush suddenly grasps Stephanie's arm. Stephanie tries to pull away but the old lady's grip is strong. Mrs. Ganush reaches out to pluck the charm bracelet from Stephanie's wrist-- but the Security Guard intervenes.

SECURITY GUARD
I think your business here is
finished, ma'am.

The Guard escorts Mrs. Ganush from the bank. Through the bank's window, Stephanie watches the Guard lead Mrs. Ganush to a old, Chevy Cavalier on the street.

Stephanie composes herself and when she again looks up, the old woman's car is gone.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BANK - LATER

The bank is closing. Stephanie is finishing some paper work when Mr. Jacks stops by her desk.

MR. JACKS

That was one nutty old lady. You okay?

Stephanie nods.

MR. JACKS

You handled that just right. And by the way, as far as the Assistant Manager's position... You're at the top of the list.

STEPHANIE

Thanks.

Mr. Jacks nods, heads for home. Stephanie loads a pile of contracts, a ruler and a desk stapler into a cardboard box and exits the bank. The Security guard locks up behind her.

EXT. BANK OF CALIFORNIA - PARKING STRUCTURE - DAY

Stephanie waves as the last of her co-workers drive off. It's then that she notices the battered Chevy Caviler. It's parked in the structure.

Stephanie looks closer. There's no one behind the wheel. She nervously glances about. No sign of Mrs. Ganush. Stephanie makes her way toward the safety of her car.

Her FOOTSTEPS echo in the deserted structure, more loudly than she would like.

She arrives at her car and quickly gets inside, locking the doors behind her. She places the box of contracts on the seat next to her. As she starts the engine, she notices a strange sight: Something moving, skimming along the surface of the lot.

It's Mrs. Ganush's linen handkerchief.

It whisks about like a ghost, swirling closer and closer. Stephanie watches transfixed, as it flies right toward her car. It dips beneath her hood and is gone. It suddenly sweeps up into view, fluttering up, over her windshield, and is carried off by the wind.

Stephanie breathes a sigh of relief just as two wrinkled hands come up around her face! Mrs Ganush sits up in the back seat of her car! SHRIEKING with rage at Stephanie!

MRS. GANUSH

(In Hungarian)

You bitch! I pluck out your fucking eyes!

Mrs. Ganush's razor sharp fingernails lash out towards Stephanie's eyes. But Stephanie grabs the old woman's wrists, halting her.

The withered hands drop down to wrap around Stephanie's throat. Stephanie fights for breath as she frantically searches for a weapon. Her hand finds the box on the seat next to her. She grabs a handful of colored push pins and jams them into the old woman's arm. Mrs. Ganush releases her grip. Stephanie has time for only a single gulp of air before Mrs. Ganush grabs two fistfuls of Stephanie's hair! The old woman yanks upon it. Stephanie's head is pulled back, over the edge of the seat. Ganush braces her feet against the back of the front seat to pull even harder... Stephanie's neck is now bent so far back it's about to snap!

Stephanie's hand finds the stapler, trips the release. It springs open. She swings it back over her shoulder!

Ka-Thunk! Ka-Thunk! Ka-Thunk!

With each blow, she delivers a staple into Mrs. Ganush's forehead.

Ka-Thunk! A lucky shot-- the old lady's white eye is stapled shut.

The old woman HOWLS, but her grip on Stephanie's hair only tightens.

Stephanie, about to black out, throws the car into gear and hits the gas. As the car accelerates, Stephanie fastens her shoulder harness with the last of her strength.

The old woman's stapled eyelid POPS open just in time for her to see... an oncoming concrete column.

Stephanie's car slams into it. Stephanie is held fast by her shoulder harness.

But Mrs. Ganush's body hurtles forward over the front seat, impacting against the dashboard with tremendous force.

Close shot of the old woman's head slamming into the dash. In a spray of broken teeth, her dentures eject from her mouth.

Both women are dazed from the impact. Stephanie regains her wits first. She reaches across Mrs. Ganush and opens the passenger door.

Mrs. Ganush stirs, but before she can come to, Stephanie's foot shoves her out. The old woman hits the ground hard but she sits up suddenly with a SNARL and starts to climb back in. Stephanie shifts the car into reverse. The opened passenger door knocks Mrs. Ganush back down to the pavement.

The car's rear bumper slams into a concrete column. Stephanie is dazed.

Mrs. Ganush crawls to her feet and begins limping toward the car.

Stephanie tries to focus. A blurred image in the rear view mirror: Mrs. Ganush running closer, SHRIEKING with old world rage!

The Old Woman reaches for the opened passenger door but Stephanie closes it and locks it just in time! Mrs. Ganush furiously pulls on the door handle to no avail.

STEPHANIE

I beat you, you old bitch! Next time take your Geretol!

The old woman bends down, beneath Stephanie's view. Stephanie looks about. Where'd she go?

The old woman pops up into view, raising a chunk of concrete and... CRASH! Stephanie SCREAMS as the window shatters.

The old woman's head juts into the car! She clamps her toothless maw down upon Stephanie's chin. Suckling it, gumming. The old woman's good eye rolls about in ecstasy. Stephanie SHRIEKS as she pushes the slobbering head away. Strands of spittle form a bridge from the old woman's mouth to Stephanie's jaw.

The old woman's wrinkled hands grope about the front seat. She finds her dentures, now damaged from the fight. She GRUNTS as she jams them back into her mouth. She comes at Stephanie, mouth wide open and SHRIEKING!

Stephanie grabs the wooden ruler from her cardboard box and shoves it down the old lady's throat. Mrs. Ganush gags, trying to retch up the ruler.

Then Stephanie is suddenly screaming herself, as the Old Woman has grabbed her legs and is dragging her from the car.

Stephanie hits the pavement. She shields her face with her hands, waiting, but the blow never comes. The old woman standing above her, WHEEZING.

MRS. GANUSH

You shamed me.

The Old Woman reaches down. Stephanie flinches. Mrs. Ganush's gnarled hand plucks a thin brass button from the sleeve of Stephanie's coat. She waves the button through the air, and breathes out a single word:

MRS. GANUSH

Lamia...

Clouds move past the setting Sun. A shadow falls over Stephanie. A cold wind makes her shiver.

STEPHANIE

What--? What are you doing?

Stephanie sits up, reaching for her button. But the old woman moves it out of reach.

MRS. GANUSH

You want it?

Stephanie snatches the button back. Mrs. Ganush smiles cryptically as Stephanie stuffs the button into her coat pocket.

MRS. GANUSH

Soon it will be you, who comes begging to me. It begins tonight when you hear the cry.

STEPHANIE

What cry?

MRS. GANUSH

The Lamia. It's coming for you.

A large black, BUZZING fly lands on Stephanie's face. She swats it away. Her vision blurs and she grows dizzy. She leans against the car for support. When she finally looks up, Mrs. Ganush is gone.

INT. POLICE STATION - SARGENT'S DESK - NIGHT

Stephanie and Ray have just finished filing a report with OFFICER NAIMARK.

RAY

What about a restraining order?

OFFICER NAIMARK

Well that's usually only something we do if there's a pattern of harassment. But like I said, we'll file a report and keep it on record in case you do have a continuing problem. But once we send an officer around to have a word with her, I don't think she'll be bothering you again.

STEPHANIE

Thank you, you've been very helpful.

EXT. VENTURA BLVD - LATER THAT NIGHT

Stephanie and Ray eat ice cream cones as they walk past the shops.

RAY

I just thank God you're okay. You are okay, right?

STEPHANIE

I'm fine.

Ray waits, sensing that there's more to it.

RAY

Your fine, but...

STEPHANIE

I-- It's just that I could have gotten her another extension. But I didn't.

RAY

Look. You said the bank had already granted her two extensions.

(MORE)

RAY (cont'd)

When you don't pay your mortgage
you lose your house, what did she
expect?

STEPHANIE

I guess.

A breeze. She shivers. He wraps his arms around her
protectively and after a moment, they walk on. Stephanie
watches wistfully as a YOUNG COUPLE coo over their BABY.

Behind the couple, Stephanie notices a neon sign in a
storefront window. It reads: PSYCHIC.

STEPHANIE

Let's get our fortune's read!

RAY

You're kidding right?

She cajoles a protesting Ray through the front door of the
establishment.

INT. STOREFRONT - NIGHT

A tiny waiting room. A poster on the wall indicating the
energy meridians of the human body.

RAY

I just hope to God none of my
students see me here. Five bucks
says he's wearing a turban.

A beaded curtain parts, revealing...

Rham Jas, a small, dark skinned, fifty year old Indian man.
He wears a plain black suit and a white turban. His
inquisitive eyes evaluate the couple.

RHAM JAS

I am Rham Jas. Seer.

STEPHANIE

How do you do? I'm Stephanie Brown
and this is Ray...

RAY

But you probably already knew that.
Just kidding.

Rham Jas gives Ray a tight smile.

RHAM JAS
How can I help you?

STEPHANIE
We'd like to have our fortunes
read. Can you do that? Read the
future?

RHAM JAS
I have the ability to see certain
energies... Sometimes these
energies are a foretoken of things
to come. Sometimes not. Sixty
dollars, please.

RAY
Sixty dollars? Isn't that a little
steep for this kind of thing?

RHAM JAS
Then go. There are many who would
claim to be seers. But they are
not. Although you would pay them
little... you would receive
nothing. If you are not serious,
go.

Rham Jas turns to depart through the beaded curtain.

STEPHANIE
Wait.

She removes some bills from her purse but Ray waves her off,
handing Rham Jas a credit card.

RHAM JAS
Platinum card. Very good.

He swipes Ray's card through the credit card machine.

INT Rham Jas'S BACK ROOM - NIGHT

A sparsely furnished, dimly lit room. The walls are lined
with old books. Rham Jas stands before Stephanie and Ray, who
sit at a card table. Stephanie giggles with excitement.

STEPHANIE
Sorry.

Rham Jas smiles back.

RHAM JAS

That's quite all right. So, you wish to know something of your destiny. Very good. We shall see what the fates have in store.

Rham Jas crosses to the window and closes the curtains.

RAY

Freud said destiny was not an act of fate but rather something created by our subconscious to control our conscious choices.

RHAM JAS

That is true. But... "We should not pretend to understand the world only by intellect."

RAY

Carl Jung...

RHAM JAS

Yes. From his treatise "Psychological types".

Ray studies this strange man as he strikes a match and lights a candle. There's more to him than meets the eye. Ray brushes it off.

RAY

Jung-- the New Agers' favorite psychologist.

RHAM JAS

Because he wasn't afraid to bring God into the equation.

Rham Jas takes a seat at the table, across from Stephanie.

RHAM JAS

Your hand, please.

Stephanie extends her hand to Rham Jas. He closes his eyes and concentrates. Stephanie smiles excitedly to Ray, who raises a skeptical eyebrow.

RHAM JAS

You work with money.

STEPHANIE

That's right!

RHAM JAS

But... you've lost something.

STEPHANIE

No. I don't think so.

RHAM JAS

No. No, you're right. Something's been taken from you.

STEPHANIE

No, I-

Rham Jas grabs her arm and turns it, revealing the threads that once held the button on her coat sleeve.

RHAM JAS

A button.

STEPHANIE

Well, yes! Some Old Woman...

RAY

Well anyone can see she lost a button. So what?

STEPHANIE

But Ray, it was very strange. At the bank today. The old woman... the one I told you about... she plucked the button right from my sleeve.

RAY

Why would she do that?

RHAM JAS

If you would please, both be quiet.

Rham Jas concentrates, his eyelids flutter. Stephanie appears uneasy. The flame of the candle begins to flicker as a breeze sweeps through the room. The wind chimes TINKLE. Ray pulls his collar closed against the sudden chill in the air. Rham Jas's back stiffens.

He releases Stephanie's hand and stands. He moves away from the table, uncomfortable. With a handkerchief, he dabs perspiration from his brow.

RHAM JAS
I think that is enough for now.

STEPHANIE
Wait. You saw something. What?

RHAM JAS
I'm sorry. I'm tired and I see it's become quite late. Of course I will refund your money.

STEPHANIE
Tell me. Please.

Rham Jas hesitates, then...

RHAM JAS
A bad spirit has come upon you.

STEPHANIE
How?

RHAM JAS
Did you blaspheme the dead while visiting a grave site?

STEPHANIE
No.

RHAM JAS
Do you play with Ouija board or confer with those who practice the black arts?

RAY
What is this?!

STEPHANIE
No. No, I didn't.

RHAM JAS
Then perhaps someone has cursed you.

STEPHANIE
Who?

Rham Jas turns her wrist, exposing the loose threads on her coat sleeve.

CLOSE ON THE THREADS

where the brass button once was.

EXT. HILLS OF SILVER LAKE - NIGHT

Ray and Stephanie cruise along the dark, winding hills. Ray looks over at Stephanie.

STEPHANIE

How did he know all that?

RAY

Know what? That you lost a button?! He makes some good guesses, stirs you up, leaving you with a lot of questions. And conveniently, his business card. C'mon, he's a scam artist.

STEPHANIE

He didn't want the money. He tried to give the money back.

RAY

In the end, he took it, didn't he?

STEPHANIE

I guess so.

EXT. STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ray and Stephanie step from the car. They open a rusting iron gate, and walk up the hilly path to Stephanie's slightly funky Silver Lake rental house.

INT. STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - FOYER - NIGHT

Ray and Stephanie step inside. The kitten PURRS around Stephanie's feet. Ray picks it up.

RAY

So this is him. Got a name?

STEPHANIE

Uh... just "Kitty" so far.

She takes the cat from Ray, cuddles it.

RAY

Sure you don't want me to spend the night?

STEPHANIE

Don't tempt me. I've got to prep a presentation for the morning.

RAY

Okay.

Ray kisses her, opens the front door and exits. He calls back to her from his car:

RAY

Remember, dinner at my folk's house, tomorrow night. We're supposed to bring desert. I could pick something up?

STEPHANIE

No. I'm planning on baking my special cake.

RAY

Sounds good. Try not to stay up too late.

Ray waves and steps into his car. Stephanie watches him drive off.

INT. STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Stephanie sits at the kitchen table in her flannel pajamas, entering financial data into her laptop. An episode of "Desperate Housewives" plays in the background on TV. A baking timer CHIMES. Stephanie removes a beautifully browned cake from the oven and sets it on the counter to cool. Her roommate, ELLEN, comes down the stairs, snuggling the kitten.

STEPHANIE

Isn't he adorable?

ELLEN

Let's hope the landlord thinks so.

She sets down the kitten and picks up her overnight bag.

ELLEN

What about you? You going to be okay? You know, I don't have to go out tonight.

STEPHANIE

No, I'm fine. Have a good time.

ELLEN

Do I look great? Be honest.

STEPHANIE

You look great.

Ellen smiles, grabs her car keys and heads for the door.

STEPHANIE

But... Isn't that Marci's dress?

ELLEN

Yeah. And if she calls, tell her not to go bi-polar on me, I'll get it back to her by tomorrow. Or the next day. Bye!

Ellen exits.

Stephanie places butter into a mixer for the cake frosting. Through the kitchen window we can see Ellen walking down the path, toward the street. She steps through the iron gate, latching it closed behind her.

EXT. STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ellen's car pulls away. The wind kicks up, whisking leaves about, as though something were moving up the path and toward the front gate of the house.

INT. STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

An unsettling SHRIEK! What the hell was that? Stephanie sets down the measuring cup.

She moves to the front door. Locks it.

She looks out the kitchen window. The iron gate is now open. It SHRIEKS as it swings back and forth in the wind.

Suddenly, the latch gives way and the windows swing open! Wind sweeps through the kitchen, whipping dead leaves about.

The hanging pans bang together! KLANG! KLANG!

Stephanie forces the windows closed.

The wind dies. The room grows eerily quiet.

A car passes in the street below. It's headlights sweep across the house. The headlight beams throw moving shadows on the wall. Stephanie notices that one particular shadow is darker than the others. It becomes the silhouette of Mrs. Ganush, but there's no one in the room with her.

The car passes and the shadows vanish.

Sensing something, the Kitten arches it's back. Now Stephanie feels it. A presence. The light bulb begins to sputter.

She holds her breath, listens.

The floorboards CREAK. Something is walking towards her. She spins around, but there's nothing there. The SOUND of footsteps drawing closer.

She backs against the wall, trembling.

Suddenly Stephanie's face is struck by an invisible hand! She cries out. Her mouth is bleeding.

She runs for the door. She's almost there. Her hand reaches for the knob, when something unseen picks her up. She SCREAMS as she is thrown against the wall. She falls to the floor. Lifting her head, she catches her own reflection in the window:

In the reflection, as the light bulb flickers, we see a flash of ghostly hands that grope at her body. They reach up through the floor, and clutch at her legs, buttocks and breasts.

STEPHANIE

Get off me! Get off!

The phantom hands vanish. Stephanie looks about, eyes wild.

INT. RAY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Stephanie is wearing Ray's overcoat atop her pajamas. She nervously paces the room. Ray hurries in, handing her a pack of frozen peas that she presses against her bloody lip.

RAY

So she came to your house? This is crazy. I'm calling that police officer.

He begins to dial but Stephanie stops him.

STEPHANIE

Ray, you're not listening. It wasn't her. It was something that she sicked on me...

RAY

I don't understand.

STEPHANIE

I didn't tell you the whole story. That old woman... after she knocked me down, and pulled the button from my coat, she told me that...

RAY

What?

STEPHANIE

She said that something was coming for me... and it did.

Ray stares at her with concern.

INT. RAY'S HOUSE - LATER

DOCTOR RANGIVERTZ, wearing jeans and a UCLA basketball sweatshirt, concludes his interview with Stephanie. He carries a small black medical bag as he steps from the living room to speak with Ray.

DOCTOR RANGAVERTZ

Ray, you were right to call me. Never a good idea to be personally involved with your patient.

RAY

What do you think?

DOCTOR RANGAVERTZ
Medically, she's fine. She's just very distraught. She's displaying some paranoia and a sense of panic. Classic symptoms of a post traumatic stress disorder. Probably a result of being assaulted by that old woman.

Doctor Rangavertz scribbles out a prescription and hands it to Ray.

RAY
How worried should I be?

DOCTOR RANGAVERTZ
We'll have to wait and see.

INT. RAY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Stephanie lays peacefully in bed, almost asleep. A bottle of sedatives on the bedside table. Ray pulls up the blanket around her exposed shoulder. Stephanie sighs, turns to him.

RAY
How you doing?

STEPHANIE
Better now. At the time it just seemed so real. I'm so embarrassed.

RAY
Don't be, you had a terrible day and you got a little wiggled out. It happens.

STEPHANIE
So, what now, Doc?

RAY
I was gonna surprise you, but what the hell. I've been planning a little trip for us this week end. Saturday morning we're taking a train to Santa Barbara.

STEPHANIE
Really?

RAY

My family owns a cabin up there. In the hills. Overlooking this little river. We'll light a fire, drink some champagne and screw our brains out.

STEPHANIE

You sure know how to talk to a girl.

RAY

It's a chance to just be together. Undisturbed. There's a lot of stuff I want to talk to you about but it never seems to be the right time.

STEPHANIE

Sounds nice.

She draws in a deep breath and for the first time that evening, she looks at peace. Ray watches her as she closes her eyes and drifts off to sleep.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. RAY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Tweeting birds and filtered sunlight streaming in through the window, awaken Stephanie. She stretches and looks to the empty pillow next to her. Ray is gone.

She tries to fall back asleep, but the sound of a dripping faucet keeps her awake. Frustrated, she gets out of bed and steps into the bathroom.

WITHERED HANDS clamp around Stephanie's throat, violently SHAKING her!

MRS GANUSH

You shamed me!

MATCH CUT to:

Ray SHAKING her!

RAY

Steph! Wake Up!

She awakens in her bed, SCREAMING!

STEPHANIE

Oh my God! Oh God!

RAY

It was just a dream. It's okay.

She gets control. Ray smooths out the tangled hair from her sweaty face. He looks deeply into her eyes, afraid of what's happening to her. The phone in the next room, RINGS. Ray looks over, decides to ignore it. It keeps RINGING.

STEPHANIE

Go ahead.

RAY

I'll be right back.

He steps into the next room and we hear him answer the phone. Stephanie sighs and lays back down... next to Mrs. Ganush! The Old Woman is covered in a swarm of BLACK FLIES! Stephanie SHRIEKS!

The Old Woman opens her maw, exposing sharp broken teeth. She lunges for Stephanie!

Stephanie grabs the old woman by her hair, halting the chomping teeth inches from her face. She tries to push Mrs. Ganush away.

But the Old Woman's yellowed teeth SNAP and press ever closer.

The muscles in Stephanie's arms are trembling. She is weakening. Mrs. Ganush closes in, about to clamp her teeth down upon Stephanie's face when--

Stephanie suddenly awakens with a GASP. It was all a dream within a dream.

She bolts up out of bed. Takes her bearings. She's alone in Ray's bedroom. She checks the bathroom. Under the bed. All normal.

Ray enters.

RAY

You okay?

STEPHANIE

No. No-- Oh my God. I had some dreams. Awful.

RAY

Want to tell me about them?

STEPHANIE

The old lady. She was here... I couldn't wake up.

Stephanie shakes her head. She can't finish.

Ray pulls back the drapes. Sunlight pours into the room. Stephanie tries to put the dream out of her mind. Ray sits next to her, strokes her hair.

RAY

Doctor Rangervertz said you could stop by his office during your lunch hour.

Stephanie nods.

EXT. BANK OF CALIFORNIA - MORNING

Ray's car stops in front of the Bank.

INT. RAY'S CAR

Stephanie looks across the street to the parking structure. Her car is there. The window has been replaced.

RAY

I had them replace the window last night. Still needs some body work.

STEPHANIE

Thank you, Ray.

She closes her eyes and takes a deep breath.

RAY

We've got to be prepared that it might take some time for you to get over this.

She nods.

INT. BANK OF CALIFORNIA - DAY

Stephanie enters the bank. She guilty glances to the clock. It's 9:40. She's late. She tries to be discreet as she moves to her desk, hoping Mr. Jacks won't notice. She's almost there when Stu Rubin "accidentally" knocks a note book off his desk.

Mr. Jacks glances up and notes Stephanie's tardiness.

Stu approaches Stephanie's desk.

STU RUBIN

Hi Steph. Just getting here?

STEPHANIE

What are you, the hall monitor?

STU RUBIN

Ha ha! You're funny, Steph.

STEPHANIE

What do you want?

STU RUBIN

I need you to finish teaching me the loan procedures.

STEPHANIE

I've got a lot on my mind. Let's do it tomorrow.

STU RUBIN

Sure. I'll just tell Mr. Jacks that you don't have the time right now. Maybe he can show me.

She glances up. Mr. Jacks is still watching her.

STEPHANIE

No, no, that's all right. I'll do it. Where were we?

STU RUBIN

We were going over the asset-based lending guidelines.

STEPHANIE

Right. Okay. Let's say your client is a company that can't get traditional bank financing but needs a secured loan. We offer--

SCRATCH... SCRATCH...

Stephanie looks around for the source of the sound, but can't find it.

STU

Yeah?

STEPHANIE

...uh, we offer several types of asset-based lending which consist of revolving lines of credit and term loans secured by accounts receivables, their inventory, machinery--

SCRATCH... SCRATCH....

Stephanie sees...

That Stu's hand has been replaced by MRS. GANUSH'S... it's yellowed fingernails SCRATCH across her desk. She looks again and Stu's hand has returned to normal.

STU

---and?

STEPHANIE

(in her full Missouri twang)
--And get your filthy pig knuckle off my desk!

Stu is taken aback by Stephanie's outburst. He retreats to his desk in confusion.

Stephanie sits, rattled. A drop of blood falls onto a piece of paper on her desk. The blood is trickling from her nose. Stephanie grabs a tissue to halt the bleeding. She looks down to see a large black fly land upon the drop of blood. She gasps and stands, her mind racing. She knows what she must do. She finds Mrs. Ganush's loan documents. She stuffs them into a folder, grabs her purse and bolts for the exit.

Mr. Jacks engaged with a customer, calls after her:

MR. JACKS

Stephanie? Where are you going?

She moves quickly out the door, pretending not to hear him.

Stu watches Stephanie go and gets up from his desk. She's left some files behind. He snoops around his desk. He notices a folder marked CONFIDENTIAL. It's the McPherson loan file. Interesting. He picks it up.

EXT. MRS. GANUSH'S HOUSE - DAY

An old, wood bungalow that has seen better days. A MOVING TRUCK in the driveway.

Stephanie's car pulls up. She steps out, carrying Mrs. Ganush's loan documents.

She passes the MOVING MEN who load the last of Mrs. Ganush's things.

She arrives at the opened front door, gathers her courage and KNOCKS. No answer. She calls out:

STEPHANIE
Mrs. Ganush?

No answer. She steps inside.

INT. MRS GANUSH'S FOYER - DAY

It's dark and musty here. The place is barren but for some flattened cardboard boxes. Stephanie tries the light switch. No Power.

STEPHANIE
Mrs. Ganush?

She moves forward into the living room.

INT. MRS. GANUSH'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Its too dark to see much of anything. Stephanie stumbles over something left on the floor. A voice:

MRS. GANUSH
I knew you'd come.

Stephanie almost jumps out of her skin. As her eyes adjust she sees Mrs. Ganush sitting on a crate in the corner of the room. Her arthritic hands clutching a yellowed photograph.

STEPHANIE

Hi. I'm here because I think I can help you. I can get your house back for you.

MRS. GANUSH

It's so empty now.

STEPHANIE

I can arrange for all your furniture to be brought back. Would that be okay?

Mrs Ganush does not look up from the photograph.

STEPHANIE

So... on behalf of the bank I just want to resolve this to your satisfaction. This whole thing got personal and there was really no reason for that. The bank made a mistake and I can fix it for you and in return I'd like you to cancel or call off, whatever you... you know-- that thing you did to me. Okay? No hard feelings. So...

STEPHANIE

My mother was a proud woman. Dignity. That's what she had.

Stephanie nods. Waits an appropriate moment, then: places the document gently down on the floor next to Mrs. Ganush.

STEPHANIE

All you need to do is sign here...

Stephanie offers her a pen.

STEPHANIE

...and I'll take care of the rest.

Mrs. Ganush's hard eyes find Stephanie's. They bore in.

MRS. GANUSH

No.

STEPHANIE

No? But... I'm saying I'll make things right. Just sign this and you can keep the house. Isn't that what you wanted?

MRS. GANUSH

It was what I wanted before you shamed me. Now I want to see you suffer.

STEPHANIE

Please! I've suffered enough!

MRS GANUSH

Not yet!

Mrs. Ganush suddenly erupts in a broken toothed CACKLE.

STEPHANIE

You're insane! Just... just a crazy old woman! I don't even know why I came here!

MRS. GANUSH

You know why.

Terrified, Stephanie runs from the place.

EXT. MRS. GANUSH'S HOUSE - DAY

The Old Woman's CACKLING can still be heard as Stephanie hurries to her car and drives off.

EXT. SEVEN ELEVEN PARKING LOT - LATER

Stephanie sits in her parked car.

INT. STEPHANIE'S CAR

Stephanie is eating from a package of DOUBLE STUFF OREOS, joylessly jamming one after another into her mouth. Her eyes dart about: Who could help her? Then she remembers something. She sets down the cookies and rummages through her purse. She finds the business card of Rham Jas. She starts the car and drives off.

EXT. INTERSECTION - DAY

Stephanie halts at a red light. Out of the corner of her eye she sees something odd.

STEPHANIE'S POV - ON THE STREET

Stu Rubin walking with two well dressed executives.

STEPHANIE

Stu?

The men warmly escort into the First National Bank.

STEPHANIE

What's he doing at First National?

The car behind her HONKS! She drives on.

EXT. RHAM JAS' STOREFRONT - DAY

Stephanie's car is parked in the street.

INT. STOREFRONT - DAY

Stephanie stands before a counter facing Rham Jas. He swipes her credit card through the machine.

She signs the receipt. He motions for her to follow him through the beaded curtain.

INT. BACK ROOM OF RHAM JAS'S STOREFRONT - DAY

On a plain wooden table a samovar brews a musty tea. Rham Jas is reading from an ancient text. He looks up from the book, solemn.

RHAM JAS

What did it sound like.

STEPHANIE

Like... shrieking. It was awful.

He nods. Closes the book.

RHAM JAS

That would be the Lamia. The "Black Goat".

STEPHANIE

Lamia. Right. That's the word the old woman used.

RHAM JAS

It is a nasty spirit. A taker of souls. A creature of misfortune for you and those around you. It is often summoned by the Gypsies for their dour deeds. On the third day the Lamia comes for the owner of the accursed object.

STEPHANIE

Accursed object? What object?

RHAM JAS

Something that the old woman took from you, cursed, then gave back.

Now it dawns on Stephanie. She looks to the threads on her coat.

STEPHANIE

The button...

Stephanie's hand slowly emerges from her coat pocket. The thin brass button in her palm.

STEPHANIE

...this?

She holds the button up for him to inspect. But it's presence makes him uneasy. He wags his finger back and forth. She lowers it.

STEPHANIE

What if I just burn the thing?

RHAM JAS

No matter what condition the button is in, you would still be the owner. The Lamia would still come to take you.

STEPHANIE

Take me where?

Rham Jas gives her a sad smile and closes the text. She knows where. Stymied, she tucks the button back into her coat pocket.

STEPHANIE

There's got to be something I can do.

RHAM JAS

Yes. There are many ways to appease a spirit. The simplest is a blood offering. An animal sacrifice. A small creature would do. You could sacrifice a chicken. It's all in here...

Rham Jas produces a modern book on animal sacrifice which he sets before her.

STEPHANIE

No way. I'm a vegetarian. I'm a member of PETA, for Christ's sake. I don't go around killing animals.

RHAM JAS

You will be surprised what you will be willing to do when the Lamia comes for you.

She considers his words, looks down to the book.

CLOSE ON A DIAGRAM OF AN ANIMAL SACRIFICE - A creature's heart being cut from it's body.

CAMERA pulls back to reveal that Stephanie now sits at her kitchen table, reading the book. We see other diagrams: The heart being placed into a skillet over an open fire. The burial of the smoking heart. Stephanie's kitten PURRS, as it rubs against her leg.

Stephanie closes the book, shutting out the disturbing images.

She hears the SHRIEK of the rusty gate outside. She moves to the window and peers out. The rusting iron gate is open.

Stephanie senses a change in the room... Shadows shift and grow deeper. The air is suddenly oppressive. Something is coming.

She moves to the front door and puts her ear to it. Quiet.
But then--

SCRATCH... SCRATCH...

She runs upstairs into her bedroom and locks the door.

INT. STEPHANIE'S BEDROOM

She can hear the sound of the SCRATCHING, even here.

She rushes to the phone picks it up: No dial tone, only high pitched static, the sounds of the Lamia buried within.

She sets the phone down.

For a moment all is quiet. Should she go back down? Then she hears a tiny SQUEAKING. The knob on the front door, turning. Then the CLICK of the lock, followed by the CREAKING of rusty hinges as the front door swings open. She calls through her bedroom door.

STEPHANIE

Ellen?!

But it's not Ellen.

Stephanie puts her ear to the door. The sound of an animal's hooves on wood. Something is climbing the stairs. It stops outside her bedroom door.

Stephanie holds her breath, listening.

She sees a shadow beneath the crack in the door.

STEPHANIE

I know that you're there!

The window behind her explodes into the room with a deafening ROAR!

She ducks for cover. Another window is blown inward and the glass sent her way. She SCREAMS and runs toward the bathroom door. It SLAMS shut in her face!

BOOM! Another window is SHATTERED by the angry, unseen thing. The force knocks her to the bed. The blankets are torn from the mattress, throwing Stephanie to the floor. The bedsheets whisk around the room, flapping and twisting about like drunken ghosts.

She tries to run but they tangle around her legs and yank her into the air, suspending her upside down, taking her on a wild and harrowing ride about the room.

Abruptly all the madness halts: She drops to the floor. The bedsheet wafts to the ground beside her. Whatever it was, it's gone. It's quiet now. A terrified Stephanie sits, shaking, in the wreckage of her room.

INT. STEPHANIE'S KITCHEN - LATER

With a trembling hand, she jams a ZAGNUT BAR into her mouth, and drops the wrapper onto a pile of others on the floor. She chases it with a double shot of Maker's Mark Whiskey. She removes a knife from the butcher block and hefts it's weight. She sings out, in a sweet but trembling voice.

STEPHANIE

Here kitty-kitty... Here, kitty-kitty-kitty...

She moves closer until her face fills the screen.

EXT. STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - DAY

The distant SCREAM of the kitten is heard. We hear it again and again until it is finally silenced.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Stephanie having been sick, emerges from the bathroom, wiping her mouth.

INT. STEPHANIE'S KITCHEN - DAY

Stephanie throws something small and bloody inside the microwave oven and turns it on.

STEPHANIE'S BACKYARD GARDEN - AFTERNOON

She buries the heart in a corner of her garden.

She turns on the garden hose, washing the cat's blood from the knife.

ELLEN'S VOICE

Steph?

Stephanie quickly tosses the knife into the bushes. Ellen appears.

ELLEN

Didn't you hear me calling? I was looking all over for you. Are you power eating Clark bars again? 'Cause there's about ten thousand wrappers all over the-- Oh my God, is that blood?!

Stephanie glances guiltily to the corner of the garden. But no blood shows.

STEPHANIE

No. Why would there be blood?

ELLEN

Right there, on your sleeve.

Stephanie glances at the red spot on her sleeve.

STEPHANIE

That's just tomato juice. I was inside making a salad and... I cut a tomato and I must have gotten it on my sleeve.

Ellen gives her roommate a worried look.

ELLEN

Look, Steph, we're friends so if something's wrong...

STEPHANIE

I had some problems. A situation. But I think everything is going to be good now.

Ellen isn't so sure.

INT. STEPHANIE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Stephanie closes her bedroom door so Ellen can't see the damage. Stephanie cleans up the place. As she picks up some of her things, she comes across an old photograph.

CLOSER: It's a photo of 16 year old Stephanie. She was obese. Her belly unflatteringly protrudes from beneath a "4-H" tee shirt. She stands before some barnyard animals, a bucket of feed in her hand.

Stephanie looks distastefully down at her former self. She tears up the photo and dumps it in the waste basket.

INT. KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

The music grows lighter as Stephanie models a couple of dresses in front of Ellen, who's helping decide on the evening's wardrobe.

ELLEN

Go with the short skirt.

STEPHANIE

What about this one?

She hold up a longer, more formal dress.

ELLEN

Uh uh. That one's saying "I'm trying to impress you with my conservative taste."

STEPHANIE

But that's what I want it to say.

Ellen shakes her head, no. Stephanie takes a last look in the mirror, decides to go with the short skirt.

STEPHANIE

Okay. This is it.

ELLEN

Tell me again... the exact words he used.

STEPHANIE

Just that this little cabin would be a great place for us to really connect and that there was something he'd been meaning to talk about with me.

ELLEN

Oh my god, you are so engaged!

Ellen's smile fades. She shakes her head despondently.

STEPHANIE

What's wrong?

ELLEN

I just know that Rob's never going to ask me.

STEPHANIE

But I thought you said that relationship was only physical.

ELLEN

Oh, I'd never marry a guy like that... but I'd still like him to ask me.

STEPHANIE

Huh.

EXT. NICHOLAS CANYON - DUSK

Stephanie's car pulling up in front of Ray's hillside house. The convertible top is down and Stephanie looks radiant in the golden sunlight.

RAY'S VOICE

Let's get a look at that dress.

She steps from the car and models the dress.

STEPHANIE

You like?

RAY

I like.

INT. STEPHANIE'S CAR - DUSK

RAY AND STEPHANIE

drive through the streets of Bel Air, Stephanie at the wheel. She tunes in a rock station and turns it up loud. She smiles at Ray and takes his hand.

She hits the gas and her Ford Focus opens up, accelerating down a long, tree lined street, the wind blowing through their hair.

EXT. DALTON HOUSE - DUSK

Stephanie and Ray approach the front door. Stephanie carries her home made cake. They ring the bell. Stephanie suddenly seems apprehensive.

RAY
Something wrong?

STEPHANIE
It's just that I'm not some ivy
leaguer with an impressive resume.
I have a feeling that's what your
folks really want.

RAY
Maybe. But in the end, it's about
what you and I want.

STEPHANIE
Is that so?

Ray gives her a reassuring nod.

The front door opens revealing Ray's parents, GEORGE AND
TRUDY DALTON. Behind them we glimpse an exquisitely furnished
foyer.

TRUDY
Raymond!

She kisses her son.

RAY
Stephanie, this is my mother,
Trudy, and my Father, George.

Trudy glances at Stephanie's revealing cocktail dress with
thinly veiled disapproval. Stephanie self-consciously tugs it
lower.

TRUDY
How do you do?

GEORGE
Nice to meet you, Stephanie.

STEPHANIE
It's very nice to meet you, too.

GEORGE
Please, come in.

STEPHANIE
Thank you.

She steps inside.

INT. DALTON'S HOUSE

STEPHANIE

You have a lovely home.

GEORGE

Thanks. I'll get us something to drink.

As George exits, Stephanie presents her home made cake to Trudy.

STEPHANIE

I hope you don't mind. I baked something for you.

Trudy hesitates, then takes the cake from Stephanie.

TRUDY

It's lovely. Homemade.

STEPHANIE

It's a harvest cake.

TRUDY

Harvest cake? Is that some kind of cake you make on a... farm?

STEPHANIE

We used to, yeah, when you have a lot of extra duck eggs. Especially right before spring; that's when you get a real dense yolk. Makes for rich cake.

The mother forces a smile.

TRUDY

You must give me the recipe sometime.

STEPHANIE

Sure. It's easy. The real secret's in the milk. You want it unpasteurized.

TRUDY

Unclean... Uh... I mean
"unpasteurized"? Is that safe?

STEPHANIE

Uh huh. And you want that milk
still warm. Straight from the cow.

Trudy has to stifle her gag reflex. George returns and hands
Ray and Stephanie a cocktail.

TRUDY

Excuse me while I go find someplace
to put this.

As Trudy takes away the cake, a cat rounds the corner. It
HISSES at Stephanie. She takes a step back.

GEORGE

Never could understand that damned
animal. Hate cats.

Trudy returns from the kitchen.

TRUDY

That's strange. Hecuba's usually
very sweet.

STEPHANIE

That's okay. I had a cat. I
understand.

RAY

What do you mean "had a cat"? What
happened to him?

STEPHANIE

How would I know what happened?
Probably nothing. You know how cats
are. They come and they go.

Ray nods slowly. About to say something but let's it go.

INT. DALTON HOUSE - DINNING ROOM - LATER

Stephanie, Ray, George and Trudy are finishing dinner.

GEORGE
Still keeping up with your coin
collection, Ray?

RAY
I try to. In fact Stephanie just
found me a 1925 Indian Head nickel
at her bank.

GEORGE
Really? So, how long have you been
working there, Stephanie?

STEPHANIE
Almost two years now.

TRUDY
The job of a bank teller must be so
difficult. I'd think with all the
counting and the repetition, it'd
become so tedious.

STEPHANIE
Yes, you're right. But I'm not a
teller.

TRUDY
Oh?

RAY
Stephanie's a loan officer in
charge of small business and home
loans. And she's on a fast track
for a promotion. Right, Steph?

STEPHANIE
I'd like to think so... actually,
it depends. If I could close this
big account that I'm working on, it
would really help.

GEORGE
Must be a very important loan.

STEPHANIE
It would be the biggest that my
branch has ever handled.

GEORGE
How'd it come to you?

STEPHANIE

Well, I was reading the Wall Street Journal and found this innovative medical supply company that was interested in expanding but didn't have the liquidity. I met with their CFO and presented a formula for restructuring some of their long term debt. It created an environment where I was able to offer them a rather attractive loan package.

GEORGE

You sure sound like you've got a lot going for you, Stephanie.

TRUDY

Your mother must be very proud.

STEPHANIE

I suppose. I don't see her much.

TRUDY

Why is that?

STEPHANIE

Well, ever since my dad died she doesn't talk much. She mostly stays on the farm and... keeps to herself. Because...

There is an awkward silence.

TRUDY

Does your mother have a drinking problem?

RAY

Cut her some slack, mom, she--

STEPHANIE

Yes. I'm afraid she does.

TRUDY

I'm sorry. It's nothing to be ashamed of. And I find your honesty refreshing.

STEPHANIE

Thank you.

TRUDY

You've got back bone. Not like that other girl Ray brought by... What was her name? Alicia? She was dreadful. So ill-mannered. And no ambition.

RAY

Mom-

TRUDY

(stage whisper to
Stephanie)

He found her through the internet.

RAY

Mom, please.

TRUDY

Stephanie, am I being too tough on Ray?

Stephanie, happy to be taken into the family circle, winks at Ray.

STEPHANIE

No. Not at all. That's what mom's are for.

TRUDY

Thank you, Stephanie. Maybe I will try that Harvest cake of yours, after all.

Trudy cuts herself a piece. Stephanie tastes the cake and emits a tiny cough.

STEPHANIE

Excuse me.

She clears her throat. But the cough returns, grows larger.

STEPHANIE

Just a little tickle in my--

She stands and takes a few steps away from the table. Ray looks on concerned.

RAY

Are you okay?

She waves him off, clearing her throat. Tries to smile demurely, but erupts with a harsh cough. She's choking on something and is trying to bring it up from deep within her throat. With all her might she emits a BARK and a large black fly buzzes out of her mouth.

TRUDY
Oh! OH MY GOD!

The fly lazily BUZZES across the table, slowly circling Trudy's head.

Trudy spits out a mouthful of harvest cake into her napkin.

George lowers his fork and pushes away his plate of unclean farm cake.

Ray is baffled, too stunned to speak.

Stephanie's gaze shifts to the kitchen door. From The other side, she hears the sound of a hoofs.

Ray tries to cover for Stephanie:

RAY
I'm so sorry, Stephanie. I don't know how that fly got into your--

STEPHANIE
--Wait. What's that sound?

TRUDY
What sound--?

STEPHANIE
SHHH! Listen!

Trudy listens along with the others. They can't hear anything. But Stephanie hears the FOOTSTEPS drawing closer.

TRUDY
I'm sorry, I can't hear anything.

STEPHANIE
(mutters under her breath)
Must be deafer than a post!

But Trudy heard that and takes offense. But before she can say anything, a SHADOW appears at the base of the door. Stephanie stands and shouts at it:

STEPHANIE

Leave me alone! Just leave me the
fuck alone!

Stephanie grabs her dinner plate and hurls it just past Trudy's head. It shatters against the base of the door, spraying everyone with bits of broken china and fish. The shadow and FOOTSTEPS are gone.

Ray rushes to her side.

RAY

Steph, it's okay! There's nothing
there.

She looks about. George and Trudy regard Stephanie as if she were mad.

STEPHANIE

I... I think I'd better go.

TRUDY

I think that's best, dear.

She heads for the door. Ray starts to go after her but his mother stops him.

TRUDY

Let her go, Ray. She's a sick girl.

RAY

She needs me.

Trudy grabs Ray's arm.

TRUDY

I'm telling you not to go after
her.

Ray gently pulls free of his mother's grasp and chases after Stephanie.

EXT. DALTON HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Ray rushes outside stopping Stephanie as she is about to get into her car.

RAY

What did you see in there?

STEPHANIE

You don't want to know.

Ray pulls her close.

RAY

Tell me!

STEPHANIE

The thing that's coming for me.
What the old woman sent.

RAY

Listen to me. What you're going
through right now-- It's like the
doctor said, it's a stress reaction
and --

STEPHANIE

No. I wanted to believe that-- but
it's real, Ray. You just don't want
to open your eyes to it because it
threatens you. Because if I'm right
and there is something out there,
then you'd have to throw out
everything you teach. And where'd
that leave you? Like a plow without
a mule.

Ray just stares at her. A long moment passes as he wonders if
maybe she isn't right.

STEPHANIE

Unless you're willing to take a
chance and believe in me, I can't
be with you any more.

She steps into the car and drives off. Ray watches her tail
lights, as they vanish into the night.

EXT. ECHO PARK HOUSE - LATER THAT NIGHT

An older home with bars on the front windows. Stephanie
knocks at the front door.

She turns toward a distant sound: A chilling, high-pitched
SQUEAL. Was it just a bus's air brakes... or something more?

When Stephanie turns back, the door has been opened a crack.
An EYE peers out at her.

VOICE OF THE EYE

What is it?

STEPHANIE

Hi. Yes. I came to see Sylvia Ganush. Is she here?

The door opens wider, revealing a sexy twenty-four year old Gypsy girl. ILENKA GANUSH. Bottle of beer in her hand, long black hair, earrings and a snake tattoo on her neck. She wears a low cut shirt and tight shorts.

EASTERN EUROPEAN HIP HOP and LAUGHTER are heard from within the house.

ILENKA

I'm Ilenka, Sylvia's granddaughter. Who are you?

STEPHANIE

Stephanie Brown. I'm... sort of... a friend of hers. Actually, I've been trying to help her with a loan that-

ILENKA

Wait. I know who you are. Grandma told me you'd come. You're the woman from the bank. The one who took her house.

STEPHANIE

It was really the bank that took the house. I just work there. In fact, I tried to help your grandma get the house back, but my boss wouldn't let me.

Ilenka knows she's lying. Stephanie knows that she knows.

ILENKA

That's not what happened, is it? Are you going to stand here on my porch and lie to my face?

STEPHANIE

...no.

ILENKA

You used to be a real fat girl, didn't you?

STEPHANIE

Yes.

ILENKA

I can tell. You know, you caused my grandma a lot of pain. That house was her pride. When you took that from her, she had nothing left. You're not welcome here.

She starts to close the door. Stephanie halts her. Desperate now, no where else to turn.

STEPHANIE

Okay! I did it. It was me who denied her the loan. I was trying to get ahead at work and I shouldn't have done it. It was wrong.

ILENKA

Damn straight it was wrong.

STEPHANIE

And I'm ashamed about it. And I'm going to get down on my hands and knees and beg her to forgive me. She said that I hadn't suffered enough. But now I think she'll see that I have and then maybe she'll let me...

ILENKA

...make everything all right for her, is that it?

STEPHANIE

Yes.

Ilenka gives a bitter, cryptic smile. She motions for Stephanie to follow. They enter a room filled with young Gypsies drinking, smoking and talking loudly in a Slavic tongue.

A WOMAN WITH A CANE shouts as she throws a pair of dice. A Hungarian man with a long, braided ponytail, curses his bad luck as he pays cash to the woman.

STEPHANIE

Where is she?

Ilenka gestures to an area beyond the party goers. Stephanie pushes her way through the crowd. She stumbles and falls atop the Corpse of Mrs. Ganush!

As per the custom of the Gypsy wake, there is no coffin, just her dead body that rests atop a coffee table.

Stephanie has landed atop the corpse! The leg of the coffee table breaks under the weight of the two women. Stephanie tumbles to the ground, the corpse landing atop her. The crowd of mourners GASP.

The dead woman's opened mouth bobs up and down upon Stephanie's chin, as through it were once again suckling it. Stephanie shoves the corpse off of her and backs away in revulsion.

ILENKA

Still going to make everything all right?

The mourners replace the corpse atop the coffee table.

Ilenka addresses the crowd in Hungarian. She tells them that it was this white trash farm girl that threw her grandmother from her home and that she now bears the curse of Lamia.

A mother shields her daughter's eyes from the sight of Stephanie, the cursed one, then hurriedly kisses her crucifix. A man spits at her feet then walks off.

STEPHANIE

No, please-- I needed her to take this thing off me.

ILENKA

It will never come off.

STEPHANIE

You know about it? Then, please help me. I'm begging you.

ILENKA

She said you'd come begging. I only wish she could have lived to see it.

The blood drains from Stephanie's face.

ILENKA
 ...maybe she can...

Stephanie glances down to the corpse. It's head is now facing her. It's dead eyes, OPEN!

INT. RHAM JAS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Stephanie puts her foot through RHAM Jas' TV set. Shattering the tube, commanding his attention.

STEPHANIE
 Fuck that! I paid you a hundred and seventy nine dollars for that book!

RHAM JAS
 It was a limited printing! Please control yourself!

STEPHANIE
 I did what you said- that blood offering... I killed that little kitty deader than Hogan's goat. Lotta good that did me.

RHAM JAS
 We are dealing with elusive and powerful forces. There are no guarantees.

She wants to shout, but instead, closes her eyes and sits.

STEPHANIE
 Just tell me what to do.

Rham Jas considers. A dark look crosses his face. Stephanie tries to read his expression.

CLOSE ON STEPHANIE'S MASTERCARD

It's run through the carbon paper. Rham Jas hand her a receipt. She signs it. He sits.

RHAM JAS
 We must somehow dissuade the spirit from taking your soul.

STEPHANIE
 How?

RHAM JAS

A seance. And it should be soon.
For tomorrow will be the third
night...

STEPHANIE

Have you done this before?

RHAM JAS

No. But I know someone. I can
arrange what is necessary, but you
must understand that everyone
involved in this would be taking a
great risk with their lives.

STEPHANIE

What would you need from me?

Rham Jas thinks for a moment, weighing the dangers. He pulls
out a pipe and packs it with tobacco. He tamps it down and
lights up.

RHAM JAS

Twenty thousand dollars. Cash. By
tomorrow.

INT. STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Stephanie is hastily piling all her valuables atop her bed:
sporting equipment, TV, VCR/DVD COMBO, CD player, IPOD, Etc.

Ellen enters, rattled.

ELLEN

I need to talk to you.

STEPHANIE

Ellen. I'm sorry. This a bad time
right now. I got a little emergency
and... say you got any cash I can
borrow?

She starts stuffing the valuables into a large duffel bag.

ELLEN

No, I don't. But Steph I--

STEPHANIE

--what about your credit cards?
What's your cash advance limit?
(MORE)

STEPHANIE (cont'd)
I'll pay you back. You know I'm
good for it.

ELLEN
Steph, we need to talk about the
cat.

STEPHANIE
Where has that little rascal been?
He's always running off, have you
noticed that?

ELLEN
Stephanie. I was in the back yard
and I saw where the ground was dug
up. I started digging and... You
buried that little kitty in our
backyard. What happened?

STEPHANIE
I didn't want to tell you. It fell
out the window and died. It's sad,
but--

ELLEN
I found the bloody knife in the
bushes.

STEPHANIE
What are you, a cat detective?

ELLEN
Steph? I'm going to tell you this
as your friend. There is something
seriously wrong with you.

Stephanie looks up from her frantic panting.

STEPHANIE
Uh... Duh!

ELLEN
I'm moving out. I can't live like
this.

STEPHANIE
Fine.

Ellen exits. Stephanie angrily calls after her:

STEPHANIE

An' don't let the barn door hit you
on your ass on yer way out!

INT. STORE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Stephanie is speaking into a pay phone.

STEPHANIE

I can't get the twenty thousand.
You're gonna have to help me with
what I've got.

RHAM JAS' VOICE

What do you have?

She covers the mouthpiece, speaking to someone off camera.

STEPHANIE

How much?!

CAMERA PULLS BACK to reveal that we are in a PAWN SHOP. Men haggle loudly in Arabic over the price of a gold chain. The PAWN BROKER stands before all of Stephanie's worldly belongings: A toaster oven, computer, racing bike, stereo, microwave oven, necklaces, jewelry...

PAWN BROKER

Thirty-eight hundred for
everything.

STEPHANIE

Including my jewelry?

PAWN BROKER

Including.

Stephanie curses under her breath, checks the balance on her checkbook, does the math, speaks into the phone;

STEPHANIE

Six thousand.

RHAM JAS

I'm sorry. Not possible.

STEPHANIE

Look, I'll give you six now and--

RHAM JAS

No. There will be others involved
and I cannot ask them to accept
such a risk for less. Good night.

He hangs up. The line goes dead. She tries to throw the phone
but it's attached with a short metal cord. She turns to the
Pawn Broker.

STEPHANIE

I'll take it!

Stephanie thinks about how she'll get the extra cash. She
hesitantly dials a number on the pay phone. It rings and
rings as she glances to a picture buried deep in her wallet:

A photo of...

The younger, obese Stephanie and her stern looking Mother.
Both stand before a bleak snow covered, mid-western farm.

STEPHANIE

Mom? Hi, it's me. Did you get the
Christmas card? Yeah, I guess it
has been a while. Listen, I'm in
kind of a fix, here. I've been
pretty sick and I need to borrow
some money for an operation. I need
fourteen thousand dollars right
away. Now I know you still have
that pension fund at the credit
Union so-- yeah, but... okay. Okay,
it's just that--- I understand.
Okay, mom. Bye.

The line goes dead. She slumps down against the pay phone.

CLOSE SHOT - STEPHANIE

She pouts her lips in the mirror, carefully applying
lipstick. Looking good.

PULL BACK

To reveal we are in the employee bathroom at the bank. She
fixes her hair so it's just right. She straightens out a tiny
wrinkle in her business suit, smiles her best upbeat smile
and exits the bathroom.

INT. BANK OF CALIFORNIA- DAY

Stephanie approaches Mr. Jacks.

STEPHANIE

Mr. Jacks, this is kind of awkward for me... I know it's not official yet, but I was wondering if I could get a copy of the employment contract for the new position you offered me?

MR. JACKS

The assistant manager's position?

STEPHANIE

Yes. See, one of my family members is having a little emergency which requires me to get them an immediate loan--

MR. JACKS

--Stephanie... There's a problem. The McPherson deal was cancelled last night.

STEPHANIE

What?!

MR. JACKS

Yeah, right after I informed the main branch that we had this big loan pending, I find out that they just made their deal over at First National. I got a call in to see what exactly happened but right now this doesn't look too good for you or me. So this assistant manager promotion has been delayed. In fact, I think that with everything that's been happening, I'm gonna have to give that job to Stu.

Stephanie is devastated.

STEPHANIE

Stu. I see.

Mr. Jacks sees tears begin to well up in her eyes.

MR. JACKS

I'm sorry. Look. If you've got family problems. Maybe you should take the day off and sort them out.

Stephanie nods and exits the bank.

INT. STEPHANIE'S KITCHEN - DAY

CLOSE SHOT - THE WALL CLOCK

As it TICKS away the seconds.

CLOSE SHOT - THE Inadequate PILE OF CASH

That sits atop Stephanie's Kitchen table.

CLOSE SHOT - A DESPONDENT STEPHANIE

stares down at the cash. Her mouth mechanically opens to accept a large serving spoon of Rocky Road ice cream which she eats directly from the one gallon tub.

The door bell rings. A moment later Ray walks in. Stephanie stands, surprised.

RAY.

I paid Rham Jas

STEPHAINE

But I thought you didn't believe...

RAY

I don't. But you do. I know this is important for you.

She embraces him.

EXT. PASADENA HOUSE - DUSK

An old Pasadena home sits alone atop a hill. Ray's car drives up, parks.

STEPHANIE

Are you coming in?

RAY

I wanted to but Rham Jas said non believers weren't welcome. I still don't like this.

STEPHANIE

I know how crazy this must seem. But it will all be over after this I swear to you.

He nods. She kisses him.

STEPHANIE

I'll call you when it's done.

RAY

I'll be waiting.

STEPHANIE

We'll laugh about it on the train, tomorrow.

RAY

Yeah.

Stephanie steps from the car. Ray drives off. She turns to face the old house.

INT. OLD PASADENA HOUSE - STUDY - DUSK

Milos, a thirty year old, Hungarian Man, leads Stephanie into a large room with tall, teak bookshelves and Indian tapestries that adorn the walls. Rham Jas is seated in a wicker chair, speaking with someone obscured by shadows...

RHAM JAS

Miss Brown. Allow me the pleasure of an introduction...

A woman rises from the shadows.

RHAM JAS

...Shaun San Dena

The eighty year old woman smiles a toothless smile to Stephanie.

RHAM JAS

Shaun San Dena is an experienced medium. Furthermore, she has a personal knowledge of the Lamia.

SHAUN SAN DENA

I first encountered this spirit forty years ago in a small village outside of Bucharest.

STEPHANIE

And...?

SHUAN SAN DENA

I lost a young boy's soul to the beast.

STEPHANIE

That's reassuring.

SHAUN SAN DENA

I was an inexperienced seer then. I've learned much since that woeful day. I have waited these long years for a chance at redeeming myself. A chance to destroy the foul thing. Tonight my chance will come. But to summon it, I will need your help.

STEPHANIE

I'll do whatever it takes. And the sooner the better.

SHAUN SAN DENA

Our business must wait till darkness falls. Enough time for tea.

INT. GREAT ROOM - NIGHT

A ceiling twenty feet high, with massive windows covered by dark burgundy drapes. An ornate crystal chandelier hangs above a round table in the room's center. Stephanie, Rham Jas, Shaun San Dena and Milos, are finishing their tea.

SHAUN SAN DENA

My late husband, Sandor, was also a medium. He chose this site to build the house upon because he sensed certain energies that intersected here...

(MORE)

SHAUN SAN DENA (cont'd)

He knew I would sense his spirit in this place as I have sensed others. It was to be our way of being together after he died. In earlier times it was a sacred place to the Tuanteteck indians. And their stories told that the place was a burial ground of the "old ones" that inhabited the earth before them. Here, there is a particular alignment of energies. A confluence, that allows doorways to be opened. Through which, we might pass.

RHAM JAS

And through which, others might pass into our world.

Milos removes the tea.

SHAUN SAN DENA

It is time for us to begin.

Shaun San Dena turns out the electric lights, leaving only the tables' candlelight for illumination.

We hear the BLEATING of a goat. Stephanie startles. Milos reenters the room pulling a black goat along by a chain. The goat catches sight of Stephanie. It BLEATS in fear and attempts to run. But Milos holds it fast and tethers it to a post. He moves to the table and lifts a velvet cloth revealing a large cattle slaughtering blade.

SHAUN SAN DENA

Lord Jesus bless this knife and allow it to do your holy work.

She makes the sign of the cross. She pours a vial of holy water over the blade. She turns to Stephanie.

SHAUN SAN DENA

Once the spirit has entered me, place my hand upon the animal. Do you understand?

STEPHANIE

Yes.

SHAUN SAN DENA
I will force the spirit of the
Lamia into the goat. Milos, that's
when you strike.

Stephanie blanches but remains silent.

SHAUN SAN DENA
We must all be receptive.

Shaun San Dena begins to intone a Romanian Gypsy chant.
Stephanie leans close to speak quietly with Rham Jas.

STEPHANIE
What do I have to do?

RHAM JAS
You must allow the darkness in. You
must invite the dead to co-mingle
with your spirit.

STEPHANIE
I'm scared.

RHAM JAS
Yes. Now repeat these words... I
welcome the dead into my soul...

Rham Jas waits for Stephanie's response. She's shifts in her
seat uncomfortably.

STEPHANIE
I welcome the dead into my soul...

RHAM JAS
You must believe it!

Stephanie takes a deep breath and they begin the chant again.
This time, together.

RAM JAAS
I welcome the dead into my
soul...

STEPHANIE
I welcome the dead into my
soul...

Stephanie looks around the darkened room. Shadows from the
candles dance upon the walls.

SHAUN SAN DENA
I sense something here with us.

RHAM JAS
Yes.

The parlor's crystal chandeleir tinkles.

A tea cup and saucer tremble for a moment. Stephanie's eyes search the room.

SOMETHING UNSEEN

emits a wheezing breath...

We hear FOOTSTEPS as something walks on the ceiling above them.

A MAN'S LOUD LAUGHTER

echoes about the room.

SHAUN SAN DENA
It is not the Lamia. It is the spirit of some unsettled soul from years ago... The unsettled ones wait near the door.

THE PITCHER OF WATER

upon the table is drained. Then the water is spat out in a stream at Milos' face.

The MAN'S LAUGHTER again.

SHAUN SAN DENA
Be gone, foolish spirit!

There is a HOWLING OF WIND and the room is again quiet.

SHAUN SAN DENA
Show yourself Lamia. We invite you into our circle.

Quiet. Stephanie looks about. Nothing seems to be happening.

SHAUN SAN DENA
He's coming...

A faint sound.

SCRATCH SCRATCH.

The SCRATCHING OF FINGERNAILS on wood. A sound that Stephanie's heard before. It grows louder, more distorted.

SCRATCH SCRATCH!

Stephanie grips the table.

And just when the SCRATCHING SOUND is deafening... All becomes silent.

Stephanie holds her breath.

A wind whips up in the room sending papers whirling about, yet all the windows are closed.

Shaun San Dena's eyes roll up into her head. She emits a low and powerful MOAN. Her head slumps onto her shoulders. Then she straightens with a new vigor. Stephanie and Rham Jas watch as her lips move rapidly and a garbled sound comes out of her throat. She speaks in a strange and incomprehensible tongue.

RHAM JAS

Who now inhabits the body of Shaun
San Dena?

SHAUN SAN DENA

(demonic voice)

Lamia...

Rham Jas nods discreetly to Milos who quietly uncovers the slaughtering blade.

RHAM JAS

Lamia, what is it that you desire?

Shaun San Dena's chair abruptly spins about to face Stephanie. The mouth jerks opened and closed as if controlled by a bad puppeteer. Then, out of sync, the demonic voice is heard:

SHAUN SAN DENA

(demonic voice)

The soul of Stephanie Brown! We
will feast upon it, as she festers
in the grave!

STEPHANIE

It was my manager, Jim Jacks.
He was the one! He--

RHAM JAS

Silence! Lamia, please, surely we
can dissuade you from taking this
insignificant woman? Surely she's
not worthy of your greatness.

The possessed Shaun San Dena laughs.

SHAUN SAN DENA

(demonic voice)

No! I will enjoy watching her skin
blister and pop in hell's flame. I
come for her!

Stephanie quickly grabs Shaun San Dena's hand and places it
on the goat's head.

Shaun San Dena's eyes clear for a moment as she struggles to
regain control.

Now there are two spirits battling within her. She attempts
to force the spirit of the Lamia from her body and into the
goat. The Goat BLEATS and bucks wildly as the spirit is
transferred. Milos raises up the slaughtering blade.

SHAUN SAN DENA

(demonic voice)

No! You--

GOAT

(demonic voice)

--tricked me!

The possessed goat emits a terrible cry! The bone chilling
SHRIEK of Lamia! It's oval eye reflects the blade as it
descends toward it. The possessed Goat jerks aside and the
blade misses, slicing into the chair.

As Milos raises the blade for another blow, the goat bites
his hand. In that moment, the spirit of the Lamia is
transferred to him.

A possessed Milos SCREAMS and spins toward Stephanie, glaring
at her with black goat eyes. He SHOUTS at her in a gibberish
of tongues! His body jerks up into the air. He dances a jig
atop the table, now laughing uncontrollably.

Stephanie watches in horror.

RHAM JAS

Lamia! I command you to leave this--

A chair sails through the air and shatters across Rham Jas' back, knocking him to the ground.

Milos' body is hurled up against the chandelier, shattering it. Glass rains down upon Stephanie.

On the ceiling, Milos is spun about like a pin wheel.

Stephanie races for the door but a huge bureau lurches in front of her, blocking her path.

Rham Jas rouses a stunned Shaun San Dena.

RHAM JAS

You must banish the spirit!

Shaun San Dena places her hands on her eyes, then over her heart and chants an ancient Gypsy incantation up toward Milos.

Milos SHRIEKS. A white vapor streams from his body as the Lamia is torn from him.

MILOS

(in his normal voice)
Stop the chanting. I beg you!

But Shaun San Dena only chants louder. Milos SCREAMS grow more intense as his body spasms in pain. Stephanie grasps at Shaun San Dena.

STEPHANIE

For god's sake, stop the chanting,
it's killing him!

Rham Jas pushes her aside.

RHAM JAS

You must not stop!

A withered pair of hands reach down from above and clutch at Stephanie's face! It is Mrs. Ganush that now floats above her! Her long yellowed fingernails scratching at Stephanie's skin.

MILOS/MRS. GANUSH
Make her stop, you dirty pork
queen!

STEPHANIE
No! Get her off!

Mrs. Ganush grabs at Stephanie's head. Stephanie pulls away but it costs her a clump of hair that Mrs. Ganush rips from her head.

Mrs. Ganush opens her mouth... wide... wider still... she vomits out Stephanie's dead cat. It lands atop the table.

Stephanie screams uncontrollably.

Shaun San Dena, is trembling as her chanting comes to a climax.

Mrs. Ganush changes back to the possessed Milo. The last of the white vapor is torn from Milos body as the spirit of the Lamia leaves him. Milos falls to the floor and all is quiet.

An ashen faced Shaun San Dena halts her chant.

STEPHANIE
Is it gone?

Stephanie notices that the cat has vanished. Was it ever there?

Rham Jas kneels at Milos' side. He's starting to come around. Milos stands, shaken. The Lamia is gone.

Shaun San Dena grabs at her chest, struggles for breath. Stephanie rushes over to steady her.

STEPHANIE
Let me help you...

SHAUN SAN DENA
My heart.

Shaun San Dena collapses into Stephanie's arms. Rham Jas moves to assist her. They lower Shaun San Dena to the floor.

RHAM JAS
Milos, call an ambulance!

Milos rushes from the room to call for help... Rham Jas checks for a pulse.

RHAM JAS
She's not breathing.

Rham Jas attempts to administer CPR to no avail.

STEPHANIE
My God. My God...

He checks her pulse one last time. The CPR is finally halted. Rham Jas closes her eyes, then touches her forehead, praying:

RHAM JAS
Gata, gata, para gata... bodhi
suaha. Gone, gone, gone beyond.
Gone beyond the beyond. Hail the
goer.

EXT. PASADENA HOUSE - NIGHT - LATER

Stephanie and Rham Jas watch as PARAMEDICS load the covered body of Shaun San Dena into the ambulance. They close the doors and drive away.

STEPHANIE
It's sad.

RHAM JAS
Yes.

STEPHANIE
Strange how things work out. She
waited years for another chance to
overcome the lamia ...and finally
she did.

RHAM JAS
No. I'm afraid you misunderstand.

Rham Jas looks at her with pity.

STEPHANIE
What?

RHAM JAS
The Lamia can not be banished by a
medium. This was our lesson
tonight. I'm sorry.

STEPHANIE

But I saw her get rid of the thing...

RHAM JAS

No. You saw her drive the Lamia from the seance. That is all. It will be back.

STEPHANIE

But then, what am I supposed to do?

Rham Jas shrugs. He fishes in his pocket for his car keys.

RHAM JAS

Perhaps on this final evening, you should finish up the business of this world. For before the night is through, the Lamia will come for the owner of the accursed object.

STEPHANIE'S HAND

Slowly emerges from her coat pocket. She studies the thin brass button in her palm.

RHAM JAS

Unless, of course... you were no longer the owner.

STEPHANIE

No longer the owner? I don't understand.

Rham Jas reaches into his coat pocket and removes a blank envelope. He places the button within and seals it.

RHAM JAS

The Lamia comes for the owner of the accursed object. Just make a gift of it...

To demonstrate, he hands the envelope to Stephanie.

RHAM JAS

...and you've given away the curse.

STEPHANIE

Why didn't you tell me this before?!

RHAM JAS

Because we are speaking of murder.

Stephanie looks from the envelope containing the button to Rham Jas. She places the envelope carefully into the side pocket of her purse. Rham Jas tries to conceal the sadness and fear he feels for her.

RHAM JAS

Whatever you decide, you have until sunrise.

She nods goodbye as Ray's car pulls up. Ray opens the door for her and she gets in.

INT. RAY'S BMW - NIGHT

Ray and Stephanie drive through the quiet Pasadena neighborhood.

RAY

Is it over?

Stephanie, stares at her envelope, thinks about telling him, then...

STEPHANIE

Yes. It's all over.

Ray squeezes her hand. Appreciating the two of them now more than ever.

Stephanie SCREAMS as...

MRS. GANUSH appears in the headlights, standing on the road before them! Ray hits the breaks. The car SCREECHES to a halt!

Stephanie's purse with the envelope and some of Ray's papers fall to the floor.

RAY

Are you okay?

Stephanie nods, catching her breath.

RAY

That guy came out of nowhere.

Stephanie looks to the figure in the road. Mrs. Ganush is gone. In her place is an old man who mutters angrily at them and moves on.

EXT. STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT - LATER

RAY'S BMW pulls up and Stephanie gets out.

RAY

Are you`still okay about the Santa Barbara trip?

STEPHANIE

Yes, everything's fine.

RAY

Okay. Our train leaves tomorrow morning. Seven A.M. When do you want me to pick you up?

STEPHANIE

It's better if we meet at the station. There's something I've got to do on the way.

Stephanie suddenly clutches at her purse. The envelope is gone!

STEPHANIE

Wait! Where's my envelope?

RAY

What envelope?

She opens the car door and frantically rummages around the floor, through Ray's papers.

STEPHANIE

It's got to be here!

Then, Stephanie comes upon something under the seat. She smiles and stands. A white envelope held tightly in her hand.

STEPHANIE

Got it.

RAY
Tomorrow's gonna be a new start for
us. Don't be late.

They kiss and Ray drives off.

INT. DENNY'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A WALL CLOCK

The time is 1:30 A.M.

STEPHANIE

drinks coffee and stares at the white envelope that's tucked into the side pocket of her purse. She scans the patrons and considers giving it to each of them, then one by one, rejects the idea.

A WAITRESS

Comes by, removes a dirty dish and refills her coffee.

STEPHANIE
Banana Boat Sundae.

WAITRESS
Another one?

Stephanie nods absently. The Waitress exits.

THE WALL CLOCK

The time is now 2:15 A.M.

A WITHERED OLD MAN

sits alone at a table in a wheelchair. A portable oxygen cylinder, supplying him with air.

STEPHANIE

takes a deep breath, stands and walks to his table.

STEPHANIE
I wonder if you could help me out?

The Old Man looks up, sees her desperation.

OLD MAN

Yeah?

STEPHANIE

I just need you to hang on to this envelope for me. Just until tomorrow.

She extends the envelope to him. He hesitates.

OLD MAN

What's this all about?

STEPHANIE

Just take the envelope and I'll explain. Please.

The Old Man considers. He reaches for the envelope when an OLD WOMAN, his wife, hobbles toward the table. The Old Man helps her sit and puts away her cane. They turn to Stephanie who withdraws the envelope.

STEPHANIE

Never mind.

Stephanie returns to her seat, ashamed at what she almost did.

She returns the envelope to the purse pocket, racking her brains, trying to think of some way out of this. Her gaze lands upon a stack of newspapers on the next table. She grabs the paper and finds the OBITUARIES.

CLOSE ON THE NEWSPAPER:

MRS. GANUSH'S OBITUARY: A photo of the old woman. The location of the burial is listed: Oakwood Cemetary.

Stephanie rips the listing from the paper and rushes from the restaurant.

INT. RHAM JAS' HOUSE - BACK ROOM - NIGHT

Stephanie, lit by a barren light bulb, paces the room. Rham Jas in his pajamas, studies an old leather bound text.

STEPHANIE

Well? Is it possible?

He closes the book and gives it some thought.

RHAM JAS

There are Gypsy blessings that are bestowed upon the dead... And the Gypsies give gifts to their departed to curry favor with the deceased soul. Yes. I do believe you could give the curse to someone who has passed on... for truly, the soul never dies.

INT. STEPHANIE'S CAR - NIGHT

CLOSE ON STEPHANIE

As she drives we hear the voice over from the preceding scene:

RHAM JAS (V.O.)

...but you must make a formal gift of the cursed object to the deceased.

STEPHANIE (V.O.)

Formal gift... ?

Car headlights sweep over her grim face. She fingers the envelope, then glances to the seat next to her... a SHOVEL.

RHAM JAS (V.O.)

Give it to the corpse personally. Put it in their hand... their pocket...

STEPHANIE (V.O.)

Oh, I'll do better than that...

CAMERA moves in tight.

STEPHANIE

...I'll shove it down her goddamn throat.

She zips up her raincoat. SOMETHING flits past the window. Too quick to see. Then it reappears. It's Mrs. Ganush's hankie. It flies against Stephanie's windshield and gets caught on the wiper blade. Stephanie GASPS. It flaps in the wind, blocking her view. Stephanie hits the wiper button. The hankie is yanked back and forth across the windshield.

She turns up the wiper speed. No sooner is it knocked loose than it's whisked into the driver's side window. It slaps over Stephanie's eyes, plastered there by the wind! The car swerves.

Her car crashes into a tree.

LONG SHOT - CRASHED CAR

Stephanie pulls herself from the crash. She glances up to a flash of lightning. It illuminates:

The wrought iron gates of the OAKWOOD CEMETERY. A hill of tombstones beyond.

EXT. OAKWOOD CEMETERY - RAINY NIGHT

A light drizzle falls as Stephanie searches the graveyard for the burial place of Mrs. Ganush. She carries the shovel defensively, ready to swat at anything that might leap out at her.

She stops before a freshly dug grave. A temporary marker reads the name. "Sylvia Ganush".

She's scared now, not sure if she can really go through with it. A church bell TOLLS five times. There's no time to think about it. Stephanie looks around to make sure no one is watching, then starts to dig.

DISSOLVE TO:

LATER - It's raining harder. The hole Stephanie digs is now several feet deep.

CLUNK! The shovel has hit the buried coffin. The rain intensifies.

DISSOLVE TO:

LATER - Mud is pouring down the sides of the grave. In the bottom of the pit Stephanie has unearthed the simple pine casket. She jams the shovel blade between two boards and pries off the coffin's top and shoves it aside.

A lightning flash illuminates the corpse. Mrs. Ganush's white eye is open and staring at Stephanie.

Stephanie stows her fear and pulls the white envelope from her coat.

STEPHANIE

I'm giving it back to you.

She grabs Mrs. Ganush's hand and tries to get her clenched fist to open, but rigor morris has locked it shut. Stephanie pulls with all her might, causing...

MRS. GANUSH'S CORPSE

to lurch up and out of the coffin. Her dead arms, thrown forward from the momentum, wrap around Stephanie. Stephanie SCREAMS! The withered face leers! Stephanie pushes the corpse away from her and the lifeless body falls back into the mud.

STEPHANIE

You'll take it, all right...

She picks up the shovel and jams the blade into the old woman's mouth, wedging it between her teeth. She pries the jaw open. Mud and rivulets of water begin pouring down into the grave from all sides. The body of Mrs. Ganush is quickly being re-buried.

STEPHANIE

I, Stephanie Brown, do hereby make a formal gift of this button to you, Sylvia Ganush.

She jams the white envelope down the old woman's throat.

STEPHANIE

Choke on it, bitch.

She kicks the old woman's jaw. It SNAPS shut, trapping the envelope between her broken teeth.

Muddy water cascades down into the grave, flowing over Mrs. Ganush's face. It covers everything, except the jutting envelope and a single, staring white eye.

Stephanie tries to climb out but the walls are too slick.

She grabs at a clump of sod at the top of the hole but it tears away, unleashing an avalanche of mud that buries her up to her armpits.

THE HEAD OF MRS. GANUSH

Bobs up, through the mud. The Old Woman is grinning, with the envelope still jammed between her teeth.

LONG SHOT - THE GRAVE

Rivers of muddy water now pour in from every direction. It has become the drain hole of the cemetery.

THE INFLUX OF MUD

pushes the old woman corpse against Stephanie. Her grinning face is mashed against Stephanie's cheek. Stephanie's SCREAM is cut short as she and Mrs. Ganush disappear beneath the mud.

The only sound is the PITTER-PATTER of rain. CAMERA STARTS TO PULL AWAY when...

STEPHANIE'S HAND

rips up through the mud, grasping the tree root.

STEPHANIE'S HEAD

Breaks the surface of the mud, sucking in air. She claws her way out, then staggers away, through the pouring rain.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. STEPHANIE'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - PRE-DAWN

STEPHANIE steps from the shower, quickly towels her hair. She stops for a moment and studies herself in the mirror. She has survived. The phone RINGS in the bedroom; the machine picks up.

MR. JACKS' VOICE

Stephanie. It's Jim. Jim Jacks. Sorry I'm calling so early-- but Last night I found some troubling information about our friend Stu Rubin...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CITY STREET - PRE DAWN

A cleaned up Stephanie, her hair still wet from the shower, drives the empty morning streets. A smile slowly comes to her face as we hear the rest of Mr. Jack's message:

MR. JACKS' VOICE

Apparently he stole your file on the Mcpherson loan and then tried to broker his own deal at First Federal. I guess he thought we wouldn't find out. When I confronted him he broke down crying and well, we won't be seeing him around anymore.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - PARKING LOT - PRE DAWN

The Eastern sky is growing brighter. Stephanie's car pulls into the lot. She removes a week end bag from her trunk and walks briskly toward the station.

MR JACKS

(V.O.)

It looks like the loan's coming back to us. And I just wanted you to know that come Monday morning, that assistant manager's position will be waiting for you.

INT. TRAIN STATION - GRAND ENTRANCE - PRE DAWN

Stephanie is smiling as she enters the station.

A MRS. FIELDS REPRESENTATIVE

holds a platter of freshly baked cookies and offers free samples to passersby. One is offered to Stephanie.

She politely declines as she walks past with a bounce in her step.

INT. TRAIN STATION - CLOTHING BOUTIQUE

She stops at the window, admiring a coat on display.

She glances down at her own coat. Notes the missing button with distaste.

Inside, a SALESWOMAN is preparing to open the shop.

Stephanie taps on the window, shouts through the glass:

STEPHANIE

Hey! Good morning.

The Saleswoman opens the door a crack.

SALESWOMAN

I'm sorry, we're not open yet.

STEPHANIE

Please. I know what I want. That coat in the window.

The Saleswoman considers.

STEPHANIE

My boyfriend and I are taking a very special trip this morning.

Stephanie's smile is bright. Her joy is contagious. The Saleswoman relents and lets Stephanie in.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - TRAIN PLATFORM - DAWN

Moments before sunrise, the sky is streaked red.

Ray waits on the train platform, clutching two tickets and a small garment bag. Behind him, other Passengers arrive. From his pocket, he removes a velvet case. He opens it and peeks inside. A diamond ring. He stows it back in his pocket.

He looks for Stephanie.

Then, his face brightens as Stephanie emerges from the crowd, radiant in her new coat.

STEPHANIE

Ray!

Ray embraces her and grabs her luggage. A TRAIN WHISTLE sounds as the train approaches.

RAY

Is everything okay?

STEPHANIE

Great.

RAY

I'm so glad you're here. There's so much I've been meaning to tell you.

She takes his hand.

STEPHANIE

But let me say this first while I have it straight in my head. You never stopped believing in me. I'll try and live up to that.

They share an intimate moment. A romantic kiss. He breaks off and smiles.

RAY

Did I tell you, you look great?

STEPHANIE

Thanks.

Stephanie models her new coat.

STEPHANIE

You like it? It's brand new.

RAY

What'd you do with your old coat?

Just the mention of it, makes her face darken.

STEPHANIE

I got rid of it. I never want to see it again.

RAY

Too bad, 'cause I just found this.

Ray produces the envelope. And from it, withdraws... THE CURSED BUTTON!

CAMERA RACES INTO A HUGE CLOSE UP OF THE BUTTON with a terrible CLASHING of symbols!

Stephanie can't breathe.

RAY

Yeah, it was in my car. Hey, have you seen my Indian Head nickel? I put it in an envelope just like this one.

Stephanie stares at the button, shaking her head in disbelief. The RUMBLING of the approaching train builds on the sound track.

RAY
What? What is it?

She backs away in horror, but Ray follows her with the button still in his hand.

The RUMBLING grows louder. She's backing up toward the edge of the platform.

RAY
Stephanie. Stop!

Ray steps forward, still holding out the button. Stephanie SHRIEKS as she falls backwards, off the platform and onto the tracks.

In her last moment of life, she turns her head to see...

THE ONCOMING TRAIN

Racing at her!

Through the swirling smoke, the engine's mechanical face, resembles the goat like face of the demon Lamia.

It VOMITS STEAM as it angrily bares down upon her.

THE TRAIN WHISTLE SHRIEKS!

Stephanie recognizes the sound. It's a cry she's heard before. In every door creak... in every cold night wind... a haunting, soulless sound... the cry of Lamia.

Ray races to the edge of the platform. The two lover's eyes find each other one last time.

Stephanie SCREAMS as the Lamia swallows her and pulls her down into hell.

THE PEOPLE ON THE PLATFORM

Believe they have witnessed a train accident but Ray knows the truth. He looks to...

THE BUTTON

still in his hand.

CAMERA MOVES CLOSER ON RAY

A look of dread. Finally, he believes.

FADE TO BLACK.

