

SOMETHING ABOUT THE ANIMALS

written by

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detective, crime, drama

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INT. ROOM - DAY

The dictaphone sits on the table, set to recording mode. The quiet hiss of tape fills the space.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Well, you can start. Please...

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

Do you believe in fate?

(beat)

I do now.

INT. IN THE CAR (MOVING) - EVENING - IN RUSSIAN

Nice, France. The lights of the evening city pass behind the car's windshield.

In the reflection of the makeup mirror, we see a WOMAN'S LIPS. It is...

MARIA, 21, a tanned, petite, sexy blonde. She applies lipstick while looking in the mirror. Next to her is VLADIMIR, 35, an average-looking man with a nice-guy vibe, who drives the car, stealing glances at Maria.

VLADIMIR

Let's go to the movies instead.

MARIA

(continues looking into
the mirror)

We've been to the movies many
times. It's okay to try something
new.

She puts her lipstick and makeup mirror into her little purse.

MARIA

How do I look?

VLADIMIR

Beautiful.

She smacks her lips (blowing a kiss).

Vladimir smiles and returns his gaze to the road.

INT. EXHIBITION. HALL - EVENING - IN RUSSIAN

It's a large white hall with paintings hanging on the walls and various sculptures scattered throughout. Sophisticatedly dressed people admire the artwork. "Royal March of the Lion" by Saint-Saëns starts playing off-screen.

Maria and Vladimir enter the crowded hall. A waiter appears beside them with a tray holding two glasses of champagne. They take the glasses, the waiter bows, and then leaves.

VLADIMIR

Well, they don't have champagne in movie theaters, though.

They clink their glasses.

INT. EXHIBITION. HALL - BEGINNING TITLES - EVENING

The screen displays a deer head, then the camera slowly pulls back, revealing a white zoomorph. He stands with arms and legs spread, resembling a Vitruvian Man. Metal bars form a cube and sphere around him, with the cube wrapped in bacon slices. The movie title appears: "SOMETHING ABOUT THE ANIMALS."

Vladimir looks around...

A MAN dressed in a suit kneels with his head on a stump, his necktie touching the floor. A woman holds a huge axe over his head...

Vladimir frowns as he observes them.

A BIG CANVAS is filled with blue, green, and yellow paints. A naked man smears paints over the canvas with his body. Maria and Vladimir pass by...

Maria looks at the naked man while Vladimir sips his champagne.

An AFRICAN GIRL, dark as coal, wears a bright red dress while sitting on the floor. She is covered by a pile of white skeletons that move with her breathing...

Maria and Vladimir stand before her with serious faces.

THE EYES of the African girl shine through the ribs of the skeletons.

TWO KISSING ASIAN GIRLS, dressed in army uniforms, stand still, their hands resting on their rifles...

TWO KISSING FEMALE MOUTHS, tongues tickling each other.

Maria smiles while looking at the "soldiers."

Meanwhile, Vladimir walks among the people, noticing something...

A COUPLE OF NAKED BLOND YOUNG PEOPLE, a boy and a girl, face each other holding an ice cube between their chests.

Vladimir shakes his head and drinks champagne. Then...

We see the big white hall from above, flooded with people.

A strange figure near the far wall catches the camera's attention. It zooms in, revealing Mother Mary in baggy clothes, holding a little lamb and feeding it with her breast. "Royal March of the Lion" fades out.

INT. EXHIBITION. HALL - EVENING

Maria stands next to a big purple pyramid, examining it while sipping champagne. In the background, out of focus, stands a black man. He spots Maria and walks over to her. Now clear in view, he is PAUL, a tall, athletic Senegalese man in his mid-30s, with a tricky demeanor.

PAUL
Do you like it?

MARIA
Yeah, not bad.

PAUL
How much would you pay for this?

MARIA
One thousand euros.

PAUL
Cool. I wouldn't take it for free.

MARIA
(smiles)
It's hard to be liked by you.

PAUL
Well, I just have taste. Come, I'll show you real art. If you don't mind.

INT. EXHIBITION. HALL - EVENING

Puzzled, Vladimir examines something in front of him...

It's a naked black woman on a white stand, motionless, holding a spear. Her body is covered with white tribal ornaments in an African style, with her breasts stretched down to her waist.

Maria and Paul approach Vladimir:

MARIA

Honey, this is Paul. And this is my husband, Vladimir.

VLADIMIR

Good evening.

PAUL

Nice to meet you, monsieur. I'm Paul Sambu.

(extends his hand)

VLADIMIR

Vladimir Rostov.

(shakes his hand)

MARIA

Paul is an artist too. He has amazing paintings. I fell in love with his fruits.

PAUL

Your wife likes my work so much. I'll give it to her.

MARIA

Really? No way!

PAUL

Yep, take it. I cherish true excitement. To me, it's the biggest achievement.

MARIA

(to Vladimir in Russian)

Did you hear that? He's giving me his painting.

PAUL

Don't worry, monsieur. There's nothing outrageous in it. It's just two oranges and a banana. You can display it at home with no shame.

VLADIMIR

Cool.

MARIA

Thanks a lot, monsieur Sambu. It's
a huge privilege.

PAUL

You're welcome.

A beat. Vladimir looks at the black woman with a spear.

PAUL

Do you like the Amazon?
(nods at the lady)

VLADIMIR

Huh? Oh yeah. Very impressive.

The black Amazon stares proudly into the distance, flashing
her bare, stretched breasts.

PAUL

Agreed. It's powerful.

INT. EXHIBITION. HALL - PERFORMANCE - EVENING

The bald white man's head lets out a heartrending scream! He
stands in a puddle of "blood," absolutely naked, with a few
feathers stuck to his body. Behind him looms a giant chicken
with a slit belly, from which the "blood" pours out. The man
screams, grimaces, and twitches in convulsions.

LOUIS, 60, a typical bourgeois and playboy, stands next to
this performance.

LOUIS

Ladies and gentlemen, please
welcome "The Birth of a Human."

PEOPLE watch the performance, including Maria, Vladimir, and
Paul.

LOUIS

We come into this world in pain.
And we shall leave it in pain as
well.

The naked man falls into the "blood," twitching and roaring.
Somebody yells, "Bravo!" The journalists surround him,
frantically shooting their cameras. Photo flashes fill the
air.

INT. EXHIBITION. HALL - EVENING

Louis and JACQUES, 35, are talking amiably. Jacques, a good-looking guy with long black hair, seems uncomfortable being in a place like this. Louis speaks to the side:

LOUIS
(happily)
Paul!

Paul, Maria, and Vladimir walk over to Louis. Paul and Louis hug like old friends. Maria notices handsome Jacques.

LOUIS
What a surprise. Louis didn't expect to see you here. Oh, you're not alone.

PAUL
Yes, they are a married couple, Maria and Vladimir. And they're bold enough to take a risk to dive into the world of modern art. And this is Louis, the patriarch of all this bacchanalia.

LOUIS
Oh, you flatter Louis, Paul. And as for you, thank you for joining our humble party. Louis is delighted to see you here.

Vladimir nods, while Maria keeps looking at Jacques.

LOUIS
So, what do you think about this bacchanalia?

VLADIMIR
Impressive.

LOUIS
(to Maria)
Did you like "The Birth of a Human"?

MARIA
It's funny.

LOUIS
Yes, art is diverse. Paul is a traditionalist, conservative. He mocks the new forms.

PAUL
Your new forms are pieces of shit.

LOUIS
(tragically)
Oh, Gods, punish him!

Paul smiles. Maria continues to gaze at Jacques.

LOUIS
(noticing her stare)
Oh, yes, it's Jacques, our good
friend.

Jacques nods.

INT. EXHIBITION. HALL - EVENING

Louis speaks passionately to Vladimir - we can't hear him.
Vladimir listens, smiling politely, while scanning the crowd
for Maria.

EXT. VERANDA - EVENING

A vast veranda beneath the open sky, a quiet retreat from the
art enthusiasts. Maria stands alone at the railing, relishing
the fresh air. Jacques approaches her.

JACQUES
Good evening.

She turns to face him.

MARIA
Hi.

JACQUES
I'm Jacques.

MARIA
Marie.

JACQUES
Are you from Russia?

MARIA
Yes. My husband and I recently
relocated here.

JACQUES
Do you like Nice?

MARIA
Too many tourists.
(beat)
You don't seem like a local.

JACQUES
Yeah, these people freak me out.

MARIA
So, what brings you here?

JACQUES
Business. I'm here to make new
friends and contacts.

MARIA
How's that going? Made any yet?

JACQUES
I believe so.

Maria smiles.

JACQUES
And what about you? What brings you
here?

MARIA
What do you mean?

JACQUES
There's something driving you here.
It wasn't just a love for art.

MARIA
Interesting. And what might that
be?

JACQUES
You're driven by some force. You're
a thrill-seeker.

MARIA
(smiling, almost laughing)
What? Why would you think that?

JACQUES
I can sense it.

They lock eyes.

MARIA
We barely know each other, and you
already sense something?

ASIDE - Paul rushes past the veranda, spotting Jacques.

PAUL
Hey Jacques! There you are. I've
been looking for you...

He hurries over and whispers something in Jacques' ear.

Maria watches them, intrigued - hmm secrets?

JACQUES
So, what does he want?

Paul whispers in his ear again.

JACQUES
Got it.

PAUL
(to Maria)
Sorry, mademoiselle. We have to
leave you. Come on, Jacques.

He winks at Maria and dashes away.

JACQUES
Well, it was a pleasure to meet
you, Marie. I hope we'll meet
again.

MARIA
Likewise.

Jacques departs.

EXT. MARIA AND VLADIMIR'S HOUSE - NIGHT

We see the façade of Maria and Vladimir's house (MV house
henceforth).

MARIA (O.S.)
(in Russian)
Did you like the exhibition?

INT. MV HOUSE. NEAR THE DOOR - NIGHT - IN RUSSIAN

Maria takes off her shoes, while Vladimir removes his jacket.

VLADIMIR
Don't know. I don't dig this type
of art.

MARIA

Come on?! I saw how you stared at that girl.

VLADIMIR

What? What girl?

MARIA

Amazon.

He smiles and then frowns.

MARIA

Yeah, yeah, don't lie to me. You liked her.

VLADIMIR

I didn't stare.

MARIA

Sure. He's saying he doesn't dig it.

He kisses her on her lips.

VLADIMIR

You are my only Amazon, baby.

INT. MV HOUSE. BEDROOM - NIGHT - IN RUSSIAN

Maria sits on the bed with a laptop, looking at the screen and eating an apple. She wears glasses. Vladimir lies on the right side with his back to Maria, reading a book.

VLADIMIR

Okay, enough. Sweet dreams.

MARIA

Uh-huh.

He puts down his book and turns off the light. The dark room is now illuminated by the laptop screen. Maria bites the apple loudly and continues to look at the screen. There's an awkward pause.

VLADIMIR

Masha, I have to wake up early tomorrow, you know.

MARIA

Sorry.

She closes the laptop. Black screen.

EXT. NEAR MV HOUSE - DAY

The snow-white Porsche convertible pulls up by the house. Paul sits in the car.

Maria steps out of the house and walks over to Paul, smiling and waving at him. He returns the smile.

She gets into the car and kisses Paul on the lips!

MARIA

Bonjour.

PAUL

Bonjour. Will your husband be late as always?

MARIA

Oui.

PAUL

I have a suggestion. Let's go to my farm? Ride my horses like before, you know?

MARIA

Yay!

INT. VLADIMIR'S OFFICE - DAY

Vladimir is in his spacious office, surrounded by people. He holds his cell phone to his ear amidst the commotion and rustling of papers. A sour expression crosses his face as he puts the cell phone away.

INT. BARN - DAY

Meanwhile, Paul and Maria passionately kiss in the barn. Paul removes his shirt and presses her against his athletic body, then pushes her away to the haystack.

Maria settles onto the hay with her legs spread. Paul takes off his belt, his gaze fixed on her...

INT. MV HOUSE. KITCHEN - NIGHT - IN RUSSIAN

Vladimir sits at the table, clearly in a bad mood, with Maria beside him.

VLADIMIR

How many times have I told you:
"Always keep your phone at hand!"
How many?! Why don't you ever
listen to me? I was going crazy
today.

MARIA

I'm sorry, honey. I forgot to take
it out of my purse. It won't happen
again.

VLADIMIR

"Won't happen." You should always
have your phone accessible. What if
I need to call you urgently? What
if you're in trouble?!

MARIA

Okay, okay, I understand. It was
the last time.

She opens the fridge and takes out the ice cream.

VLADIMIR

"The last time."

She places the ice cream in front of him, then hugs him from
behind.

MARIA

Don't be mad at me, okay? Try some
ice cream. It's your favorite.

She scoops up some ice cream with a small spoon and brings it
to his lips.

MARIA

Open your mouth.

VLADIMIR

I just worry about you.

MARIA

Come on, open up...

He opens his mouth reluctantly, and she feeds him a spoonful.

MARIA

That's right! Good boy.
(laughs)

He smiles.

MARIA
One more. Come on.

She repeats the trick.

MARIA
There we go.

Vladimir savors the ice cream in his mouth.

MARIA
My boy isn't angry anymore, is he?
He's not mad at his girl?

He shakes his head negatively.

MARIA
Perfect!

She laughs and kisses him on the lips.

INT. PAUL'S STUDIO. UPPER FLOOR - DAY

Paul sits on the bed with a basin at his feet, washing the brushes. Maria lies behind him, her feet massaging his broad back.

MARIA
What are you drawing now?

PAUL
Can't tell.

MARIA
Why? Is it a secret?

PAUL
It's a present.

MARIA
A present? For whom?
(beat)
Come on, tell me! Is it for me?

PAUL
(smiles)
Maybe.

MARIA
Oh, Paul...

She hugs his shoulders and kisses his neck.

MARIA

Can I have just one peek, at least?

PAUL

No, it's not time yet.

Paul turns to face Maria and kisses her passionately. They lose themselves in the soft white waves of the bedsheet.

PAUL'S MUSCULAR TORSO. Maria kisses his chest, abs, and moves lower...

INT. MV HOUSE. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Vladimir lies next to the sleeping Maria, holding her close as he ponders something.

EXT. ALLEYWAY NEAR PAUL'S STUDIO - DAY

Maria steps out of a taxi and walks along the dark alleyway beside the old buildings, her stilettos clattering on the cobblestone pavement. As she approaches the door on the right, she reaches into her purse for her keys, but...

She inserts the key into the keyhole, and the door immediately swings open inward...

Maria raises her eyebrows in surprise.

INT. PAUL'S STUDIO. GROUND FLOOR - DAY

It's a spacious living room, filled with various furniture lacking any particular taste or style. It seems the resident prioritizes comfort over design. Stairs leading to the upper floor are visible on the left. Maria looks around the room, noticing the silence. She heads towards the stairs.

INT. PAUL'S STUDIO. UPPER FLOOR - DAY

Maria enters the studio itself. It's the same size room as the ground floor but filled with numerous canvases. A large double bed sits to the right, and to the left, a tiny bar counter with a mini-fridge. Maria walks through the studio, passing several canvases and the bed. Ahead, she encounters a life-sized fake white elephant that covers a significant portion of the room. The eerie silence begins to unsettle Maria.

MARIA

Paul? Are you here?

She turns the elephant, looks around, and freezes...

Jacques and ANTON, 30, stare at Maria, looking confused. The left side of the white elephant is stained with blood, next to it lies Paul. He sits against the wall in a pool of blood, positioned between Jacques and Anton. Paul's abdomen is a bloody mess, with his eyes and mouth wide open. He's dead.

Maria stares at Jacques...

Jacques frowns as he recognizes her...

She shifts her gaze to Anton...

He slowly approaches Maria, resembling someone about to catch a chicken...

Maria backs off slowly, but as she does, she accidentally bumps into a canvas with her shoulder...

Anton lunges towards her like a tiger!

Maria knocks the canvas down and flees...

Anton stumbles over the canvas and falls awkwardly.

INT. PAUL'S STUDIO. GROUND FLOOR - DAY

Maria rushes downstairs and heads for the door, with Anton in pursuit.

EXT. ALLEYWAY NEAR PAUL'S STUDIO - DAY

Maria steps out into the alleyway, but Anton catches her from behind, covering her mouth with his hand. She struggles to break free. Then...

She stabs Anton's foot with her stiletto heel, freeing herself, and kicks his groin. Anton lets out a muffled scream as he twists and falls to the ground.

Maria runs, kicking off her shoes as she flees.

Anton struggles to get up, grimacing in pain, and limps after her.

ANTON

Bitch.

EXT. STREET YARD - DAY

Maria hides behind a dumpster, breathing heavily.

ANTON appears around the corner of the building. He hobbles into the street yard and pauses, scanning the area...

ANTON'S POV - the dumpster, large enough to conceal someone inside.

He retrieves a gun from his jacket and approaches the dumpster, but then a voice blares from a loudspeaker. Anton looks aside.

A group of tourists emerges from a nearby building, guided by a woman with the loudspeaker.

ANTON

Shit!

He quickly hides his gun as the tourists flood into the street yard, oblivious to him.

Anton casts one final menacing glance at the dumpster and departs.

INT. OLD ENTRANCE - DAY

Meanwhile, Maria stands near the wall in the dark, dilapidated entrance. Consciousness returns to her, and she looks around, disoriented.

The sunlight filters in from somewhere deep within the old building - it must be the exit.

She pushes off from the wall and runs toward the light.

EXT. TAXI - DAY

A fat Italian taxi driver with a mustache dozes off at the wheel. The back door opens, and Maria jumps into the car, slamming the door shut.

MARIA

(in Russian)

Go!

The driver startles awake and looks at her with surprise.

MARIA

(in French)

Go!

He lazily starts the car.

EXT. ALLEYWAY NEAR PAUL'S STUDIO - DAY

Anton walks wearily down the dark alleyway.

ANTON
I lost her.

Jacques leans against the brick wall, smoking a cigarette. He glances at Anton and spits and walks away, leaving Anton behind.

INT. PAUL'S STUDIO. UPPER FLOOR - MORNING

A pale, lifeless face of Paul with open eyes and mouth appears on the screen, followed by a photo flash...

The upper floor is bustling with cops. FRANCOIS, a tough detective in his 50s, stands beside the dead body. THIBAUT, a nerdy-looking guy in his mid-20s, turns to Francois.

THIBAUT
Five stab wounds, all to the gut.
This guy suffered before he died.

FRANCOIS
Have you checked the cameras?

THIBAUT
There are no cameras around,
monsieur.

FRANCOIS
Did his neighbors hear anything?

THIBAUT
No neighbors. He lived alone in
this building. His body was found
by a delivery guy.
(glancing around)
It's like a gallery in here. Damn,
who could do this to him?

FRANCOIS
Looks like someone settled a score.

THIBAUT
We're taking fingerprints from the
door.

FRANCOIS

The murderer must have worn gloves
for sure.

THIBAUT

Do you think it was a professional?
Or maybe just an upset customer?

FRANCOIS

Or both.

THIBAUT

Yeah, those art people can be real
creeps.

Francois opens Paul's wallet, revealing a few hundred euros, credit cards, a driver's license, and a business card from the "POSEIDON" company.

Francois furrows his brow thoughtfully. Then, he scans the studio and notices something...

A canvas covered with white fabric. The corner of the fabric is moved aside, revealing part of the painting. It appears that Paul didn't want to show it.

Francois approaches the canvas, removes the fabric, and reveals a portrait of Maria with bare breasts. Thibaut whistles, and the whole group of cops stares at the painting.

THIBAUT

Well, this guy had talent.

EXT. ALLEYWAY NEAR PAUL'S STUDIO - MORNING

Francois watches as medics carry Paul's body out in a black bag.

THIBAUT (O.S.)

Look, monsieur.

Thibaut appears beside him, holding a plastic package with a gun inside.

THIBAUT

It fell out of his belt when we
lifted him.

Francois furrows his brow as he looks at the gun in the package.

EXT. ALLEYWAY NEAR PAUL'S STUDIO - MORNING

Francois walks down the alleyway, scanning the windows of local buildings, when suddenly he stumbles over something...

A woman's stiletto shoe lying on the cobblestone pavement.

Frowning, Francois retrieves a latex glove, puts it on, and picks up the shoe. He examines it carefully.

EXT. PORT - DAY

The panorama of the port comes into view...

A HUGE CARGO SHIP docked at the pier. Cranes lower cargo containers onto the dock below, where workers bustle about.

A CONTAINER flies through the blue sky.

A SHORT WORKER, wearing a hard hat, shields his eyes from the sunlight as he watches the passing container.

THE WORKERS' HANDS remove the lock from the container, and the rusty metal doors swing open, releasing a cloud of icy vapor.

THE WORKERS unload colored boxes from the container and stack them neatly on top of each other.

INT. PORT. DEPOSITORY - DAY

A blue box is placed on the table. Hands in gloves open it - revealing fish sprinkled with ice...

Four men in suits stand next to the table: MIGUEL, 40, CLOUDE, 40, Anton, and Jacques - who is closest to the box. Jacques looks at the fish briefly, then takes one, smelling it. He then retrieves a large dagger from his jacket.

The dagger cuts open the fish belly, revealing a tightly packed white package. Jacques removes the package and pierces it with the dagger tip, causing a small burst of white powder to hit his thumb.

He inhales the powder loudly, sniffing, closing his eyes, and opening his mouth.

MIGUEL

So?

A beat.

JACQUES

It's fine. Pack it up as it was and call Zurga. Tell him the batch is ready.

Miguel nods and leaves with Cloude. Jacques dusts off his hands.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

The police have found the body.

Jacques turns towards the voice...

Louis, dressed in a Hawaiian shirt, white pants, and a baseball hat, sits in a folding chair. His two giant bodyguards, dressed identically, flank him.

LOUIS

Yep, you made quite a mess. Killing Paul wasn't necessary.

JACQUES

He was rowdy.

LOUIS

Did you explain the new rules to him, or did you just bump him off right away? Louis knows you, Jacques. You're a tough guy.

JACQUES

I told him what you said. He refused. You said if he didn't agree, we should take stronger action. He resisted, so I had no choice. Anton can confirm that.

Anton lowers his eyes.

LOUIS

Louis appreciates your sense of duty.

He stands up from the folding chair and walks up to Jacques.

LOUIS

Did anyone see you?

JACQUES

It's all clear. Smooth as fuck.

LOUIS

Louis needs to have faith in you again, Jacques. But Louis is worried that if the cops catch wind of your involvement, Louis will have to take action, you understand? Louis doesn't want to lose his fish.

(beat)

Poor Jacques. By the way, Francois is now handling this case.

Jacques looks sullenly at Louis.

INT. POLICE STATION. EXAMINATION DEPARTMENT - DAY

Thibaut sits at the computer, staring at the monitor and sipping coffee. Francois approaches him.

FRANCOIS

So, how's it going? Any progress?

THIBAUT

Not much. We've spoken to some of his friends. They said that days before he was killed, he was dating a Russian girl named Marie.

FRANCOIS

Marie. Hmm... the last name?

THIBAUT

They don't know.

FRANCOIS

What about the gun?

THIBAUT

The gun is completely stained. It seems to have had more than one owner. It was handed over for a thorough examination.

FRANCOIS

And the shoes?

THIBAUT

There are good fingerprints on them, but they're not in our database. Do you think these shoes make sense?

FRANCOIS

Yeah, that woman probably was running away from the murderer when she lost them.

THIBAUT

What if she just ran by?

FRANCOIS

I'd expect her to wear more suitable shoes for sprinting.

THIBAUT

What if she's the murderer?

FRANCOIS

Maybe. However, we must find out who this woman is.

THIBAUT

But how? This is turning into a cold case, monsieur.

FRANCOIS

(thinks)

Send the fingerprints from the shoes to the Russian embassy.

THIBAUT

Hmm, do you think it was that Russian girl?

FRANCOIS

Who knows? We have to check anyway.

THIBAUT

Russians don't usually share their information.

FRANCOIS

You should try to make friends with them.

Puzzled, Thibaut scratches his forehead.

FRANCOIS

Thibaut, we don't have time to waste on this case. We have a lot of other problems to deal with. The mayor twists our chief's balls since the last terrorist attack, and now we have this homicide. Let's just find this Cinderella?

THIBAUT
Okay, but it will take some time.

FRANCOIS
Do it as quickly as you can.

Thibaut starts typing as Francois ponders deeply.

INT. JACQUES' APARTMENT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

VIEW FROM ABOVE - Jacques lies on a bed, gazing at the ceiling and smoking weed. Two black women's hands rest on his chest.

It is GENEVA, 27, a naked black woman with an afro, sitting on Jacques' hips and caressing his body.

She leans in and kisses him on the lips. Jacques exhales a puff of smoke into her mouth.

VIEW FROM ABOVE - Geneva lies beside him, Jacques still stares at the ceiling, seemingly ignoring her presence. He takes another puff.

INT. POLICE STATION. FRANCOIS' OFFICE - NIGHT

Thibaut bursts into the office.

THIBAUT
We've got a response from the
embassy!

Francois looks up from his papers at him.

INT. POLICE STATION. EXAMINATION DEPARTMENT - NIGHT

The computer monitor displays a photo of Maria, with her dossier visible on the screen.

THIBAUT (O.S.)
Maria Rostova, twenty-one years
old, Russian citizen. She moved to
Nice with her husband six months
ago. His name is Vladimir. He has
French citizenship and works in a
company with an odd name. Here's
the address where they live.

Thibaut and Francois stare at the monitor. Francois gazes at her face, as if remembering something.

THIBAUT
That's the girl, right? Marie.

FRANCOIS
Print it.

The sheet with Maria's photo comes out of the printer. Francois takes the sheet and looks at her face again.

THIBAUT
What a keen eye you have, monsieur!

EXT. ALLEYWAY NEAR PAUL'S STUDIO - NIGHT

The façade of the building is covered by yellow "POLICE" ribbons. Francois approaches the door.

His hands insert the key into the lock. Then...

He enters the building without tearing down the yellow ribbons.

INT. PAUL'S STUDIO. UPPER FLOOR - NIGHT

Francois walks into the dark studio. He turns on the light and then approaches the painting. He removes the white fabric and takes the printed sheet out of his pocket. He looks at it, then at the painting, and then back at the sheet. He slightly smiles - yes, this is the same girl.

We see Maria's portrait. The camera slowly closes in on her face.

INT. MV HOUSE. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Vladimir, dressed in a suit, sips his coffee while watching a stupid cartoon for kids on the big LCD TV screen.

Maria, wearing a bathrobe, sits on the couch, reading a magazine. The doorbell rings.

VLADIMIR
(in Russian)
Hmm, who could that be?

INT. MV HOUSE. NEAR THE DOOR - MORNING

Vladimir opens the door - it's Francois.

FRANCOIS
Good morning. Are you Monsieur
Rostov?

VLADIMIR
Yes, that's me.

FRANCOIS
I'm Detective Francois Eggert from
the Nice police. I'd like to speak
with you and your wife, Maria. Is
she here?

VLADIMIR
Humm, yeah, but what's the matter?

FRANCOIS
I'm investigating a murder. Can I
come in?

VLADIMIR
Murder?! Oh, yes, sure.

He lets him in.

FRANCOIS
Merci.

INT. MV HOUSE. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Vladimir and Francois enter the living room. Maria flips the
magazine pages on the couch.

VLADIMIR
(in Russian)
Masha, it's a policeman. He wants
to talk to you.

She stops flipping and meets Francois with anxious eyes.

FRANCOIS
Good morning, mademoiselle.

She nods.

FRANCOIS
I'm Francois Eggert from the Nice
police. I have a few questions for
you. Do you speak French?

VLADIMIR
Yes, she's pretty good.

Francois smiles.

MARIA

Yes, I can speak.

FRANCOIS

Good. Yesterday, we found the body of Paul Sambu at his art studio. He was brutally killed. We have information that you may have known him.

VLADIMIR

Wait. What was his name again?

FRANCOIS

Paul Sambu.

VLADIMIR

No way! Marie, it's that guy, the artist. We just met him a few days ago at the exhibition.

Maria looks at the floor.

FRANCOIS

So, you knew him.

VLADIMIR

Well, yeah.

FRANCOIS

Tell me, where were you on the afternoon and evening of the twentieth, Tuesday?

VLADIMIR

I was working in my office all day. I came back home late at night.

FRANCOIS

Can anybody confirm that?

VLADIMIR

Yes, anyone, my wife can confirm. I work in a trading company and always stay late. Please, visit us and ask my colleagues if you want to.

FRANCOIS

(to Maria)

And you?

MARIA
I was at home.

FRANCOIS
Here?

MARIA
Yes.

FRANCOIS
Can anybody confirm?

VLADIMIR
Excuse me, Francois, right? What's
the matter? Do you suspect us of
something?

FRANCOIS
Oh no, monsieur. It's just a
formality. Tell me, were you
friends with Paul?

VLADIMIR
No, we just met once.

FRANCOIS
Once? At the exhibition?

VLADIMIR
Yeah, and we never saw him again.

FRANCOIS
(to Maria)
So, you met him once too?

Maria nods, continuing to gaze at the floor. A beat.

VLADIMIR
Gosh, who could kill this guy?

FRANCOIS
I will find out.

VLADIMIR
Sorry, monsieur, but I'm late for
work. If you have no more questions
for me...

FRANCOIS
Sure, I won't keep you. But I'll
talk to your wife, if you don't
mind.

VLADIMIR
Yeah, no problem.
(to Maria in Russian)
Bye, Masha. See you tonight.

He kisses her head and leaves. Maria and Francois remain alone. A beat.

FRANCOIS
May I sit?

She nods. He sits in the chair opposite her.

FRANCOIS
So, where were you on the day when Paul was killed? I need a precise answer.

MARIA
Yes, I was at his studio that day. We had a meeting.

FRANCOIS
A meeting? What for?

MARIA
Just... a meeting.

FRANCOIS
A date?

MARIA
Yes.

FRANCOIS
Paul was your lover?

She lowers her eyes.

FRANCOIS
Is that why you didn't want to talk in front of your husband?

MARIA
Yes.

FRANCOIS
How long had you been dating Paul?

MARIA
Two months, I guess.

FRANCOIS
And how often did you meet?

MARIA

Almost every day.

FRANCOIS

Hmm. What time did you arrive at his house?

MARIA

Around four PM. I went upstairs, as usual, and saw Paul. He was covered in blood. I got scared and ran away.

FRANCOIS

Why didn't you call the police?

MARIA

I was scared. I didn't want anybody to know I was there.

FRANCOIS

So you hid the crime?

MARIA

No. I didn't hide anything. I just didn't want my husband to know about me and Paul.

FRANCOIS

I understand. But why, or rather, from whom were you running away in such a panic that you even lost your shoes?

She closes her eyes shyly like a caught kid.

FRANCOIS

Yep, I found them. So, was it merely the sight of blood and fear of being caught for infidelity that provoked your escape?

MARIA

Yes, exactly.

FRANCOIS

But why did you turn right, to the back alley, where I found your shoes? You should have run left, where you came from. No, something forced you to go right.

A beat.

FRANCOIS

Maria, I could charge you with murder right now. So it's in your best interest to tell me the truth. Tell me, did you see the murderer?

A beat.

MARIA

No. When I arrived, Paul was already dead.

FRANCOIS

I have to take your fingerprints.

MARIA

Are you going to arrest me?

FRANCOIS

Not for now. But you'll receive a recognizance. Are you busy?

MARIA

No.

FRANCOIS

Well, may I invite you to the police station?

MARIA

Okay. But I need to change.

She gets off the couch and leaves. Francois remains alone in his thoughts.

INT. POLICE STATION. EXAMINATION DEPARTMENT - DAY

Maria sits at the table with her left hand pressed onto the white sheet. Francois stands next to her. Maria lifts her hand from the sheet - the palm is black with ink, leaving a visible palm print.

FRANCOIS

We have old fashioned methods, sorry.

He then moves to Maria's feet, holding a roller with black paint.

FRANCOIS

Now, your foot, please.

Maria takes off her ballet flat from her left foot and extends her leg to Francois. He gently takes her ankle with two fingers.

FRANCOIS

This might tickle a bit.

He runs the roller over the sole of her foot.

FRANCOIS

Tell me, did anyone threaten Paul?

MARIA

No, I don't know. I didn't hear anything like that. Paul never shared his problems with me. But he could talk for hours about art and horses. He loved to ride.

Francois places her foot on a white sheet lying on the floor.

FRANCOIS

Horses are charming creatures,
aren't they?

He lifts her foot, takes a sheet with a black print, and sits down at the table.

FRANCOIS

Did your husband suspect that you
were cheating on him?

MARIA

No, he had no idea. Please don't
tell him anything. He loves me very
much. I don't want to hurt him.

FRANCOIS

Mademoiselle, with all due respect,
I'm conducting an investigation, so
sooner or later all secrets will be
revealed.

MARIA

Yes, I know. But let him hear it
from me. It wouldn't be nice if he
found out from someone else.

FRANCOIS

Wouldn't be nice?

MARIA

I know what you think of me.

FRANCOIS

Oh, come on! It's none of my business. My job is to catch the murderer.

MARIA

So I can count on you?

FRANCOIS

Yes, but you should tell him everything as soon as possible.

MARIA

I will. Thank you, Monsieur Eggert.

FRANCOIS

But that's all I can promise you. As for your shoes, I won't give them back to you. Don't even ask. I'm gonna wear them myself!

MARIA

(confused)

Okay.

FRANCOIS

I'm joking. They are evidence.

An awkward beat. Francois coughs.

FRANCOIS

May I ask you a personal question?

MARIA

Yes.

FRANCOIS

Did you love Paul?

MARIA

I don't know. Probably it was just an affair.

FRANCOIS

Did he love you?

MARIA

He thought he loved me. He liked to think that. But in fact, I was just one of Paul's girls.

FRANCOIS

Were you jealous of him?

MARIA

No, never.

FRANCOIS

Were you planning to break up?

MARIA

(shrugs)

It was bound to happen one day.

It's sad that it happened this way.

Francois nods. Maria looks at her black palm.

FRANCOIS

Oh, yeah, the sink is over there.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

The nightclub building looms large, with crowds gathered at the entrance. Several expensive cars are parked nearby. Dull thumps of electronic music emanate from within.

INT. NIGHTCLUB. DANCE FLOOR - NIGHT

The dance floor pulsates with loud music and neon lights, casting the hall in a dark, flickering ambiance. People of various ethnicities dance energetically across the floor.

INT. NIGHTCLUB. VIP ROOM - NIGHT

Six people occupy a cozy room filled with clouds of cigarette smoke: Claude, Miguel, Anton, Jacques, and two girls. Miguel and Anton embrace the girls while a half-naked stripper dances atop a table.

Jacques sprawls across the couch, his gaze fixed on the stripper with half-closed eyes, he's clearly drunk.

Claude snorts cocaine through a rolled-up bill, rubbing his nose afterwards.

CLAUDE

Shit. It's getting worse and worse.

MIGUEL

At least we have this.

CLAUDE

And this fishy stink. Hate it.

MIGUEL

Stop whining, man. It's okay shit.

CLAUDE

Times are shitty. It used to be better, even the pharaohs were hooked. And now? Fucking mayhem! Those fucking cops will pick us off one by one!

MIGUEL

What are you talking about?

CLAUDE

About the fact that they gutted Paulie! Only they could've done that.

Miguel furrows his brows, pondering his response.

ANTON

Ladies, go freshen up, please.

The three girls exit the VIP room.

MIGUEL

Cut that bullshit! The police wouldn't off him.

He dips his finger into the cocaine on the table and rubs it onto his gums.

CLAUDE

Yeah. I know those bastards. They can do a lotta nasty shit. God damn it, why wouldn't Louis just cut them in again?! Why the fucking hell did he stop sharing with them?!

MIGUEL

Come on, Claude. Slow down.

CLAUDE

What? Wasn't it because of his blunders that we're paying with our blood?

ANTON

Boss isn't involved. Paul had beef with many.

MIGUEL

True. Maybe one of his bitches
stabbed him out of jealousy. That
creep fucked everything that moved.

Jacques suddenly perks up and glares at Miguel.

CLAUDE

Yeah, he fucked all Europe.

JACQUES

(mumbling)

That blonde. I recognize her.

Anton reacts, grabbing Jacques by the elbow.

ANTON

Jacques, let's get some air. You
need it.

He leads Jacques away from the table.

JACQUES

Yeah, I know... I know her.

ANTON

Come on, Jacques. That's enough.

Anton escorts Jacques out of the room. Miguel lights a
cigarette. There's a pause.

CLAUDE

Do you know who else was happy to
finish Paul?

MIGUEL

I do. So what?

CLAUDE

Now Jacques is the main guy in the
'kitchen'. Louis's lil bitch. The
shit is clear as toddler piss.
Jacques is a smart kid. He's not
afraid of dirty work. He has
connections with the Pharaohs. I
fuckin' bet, the cops won't touch
him! You'll see, he's gonna be a
big shot soon. As for Paul, he just
fucked chicks, and fucked with
Louis too much, ya know what I
mean? Paulie was too independent
for Louis. He got too big for his
boots. So they cut him down. Got
it?

MIGUEL

Got it. Jacques is the man, and we're with him.

CLAUDE

For now, maybe. Listen, we need to ditch this shit. Or we'll end up like Paul.

MIGUEL

Don't you trust Jacques?

CLAUDE

I only trust myself.

Miguel takes a match out of the box and tosses it at Claude. Claude retaliates by throwing a handful of cocaine at Miguel. In response, Miguel throws a handful of matches. Claude then grabs the nearest glass and splashes it at Miguel. The men laugh and continue to throw things at each other, resembling naughty monkeys.

EXT. BEHIND THE NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Jacques is vomiting, his hair hiding his face. Anton stands beside him, smoking a cigarette.

ANTON

I'm so sick of these idiots. When will we get rid of them? I'm itching.

The sound of vomiting continues. Anton flicks his cigarette butt away and approaches Jacques.

ANTON

How are you feeling? Better?

Jacques straightens up.

JACQUES

She knows me.

ANTON

Come on. If she wanted to tell the Pharaohs, we would have been tied up by now. That bitch is scared as hell and won't talk. And as for you, keep your mouth shut, understand? I see you want to talk.

JACQUES
I've met her before. I know her.
Her name is Marie. She recognized
me too. I knew it immediately.

ANTON
What? Why didn't you tell me
earlier?

JACQUES
She could call the police at any
time.

Anton grabs Jacques by the head.

ANTON
(raises his voice)
Why the hell didn't you tell me?

JACQUES
(laughs)
I'm on her hook. Like a fish.

ANTON
We're leaving town right now.

He starts to fuss nervously.

JACQUES
Wait. She won't talk. She needs
something from me. And I think I
know what.

ANTON
Do you know where she lives? I'll
kill her.

JACQUES
No, don't. She's my angel.

ANTON
You've lost your mind.

JACQUES
(laughs)
It's okay, brother. We'll make it
through, right?

He leans on Anton's shoulder.

ANTON

Let's just finish our job. I want things to be like they were before, like in our childhood - just you and me.

JACQUES

Yeah. It will be that way. Just you and me.

(vomiting again)

INT. FRANCOIS' APARTMENT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Francois lies on the bed, looking away. A gray cat sits on his chest...

Maria's portrait stands against the wall.

He looks at the portrait, patting the purring cat.

INT. MV HOUSE. KITCHEN - MORNING - IN RUSSIAN

Two toasts pop up from the toaster...

Maria is drinking coffee at the table. The TV is blaring somewhere in the living room.

Vladimir jumps out of the living room as if stung, wearing only his underpants.

VLADIMIR

Where are my trousers? Why the hell didn't you wake me up? I'm late.

MARIA

You have the day off today.

He freezes, remembering something.

VLADIMIR

Oh, right, I forgot. Sorry.

He grins and walks up to Maria.

MARIA

I'll make you some coffee.

VLADIMIR

Yeah.

He plops down in a chair near the table. She pours coffee and puts a cup in front of him. He takes a sip.

Maria sits down opposite.

VLADIMIR

Have you heard the forecast? Will it rain soon? This heat is killing me.

(yawns)

Oh yeah, by the way, what did that cop want from you?

MARIA

Nothing. I gave my statement and was released on my own recognizance.

A beat.

VLADIMIR

What?

MARIA

(sips coffee)

I gave my statement and was released on my own recognizance.

VLADIMIR

What recognizance? What statement? What are you talking about?

MARIA

I'm a witness to a murder. Look, I didn't want to tell you, but... I was at Paul's the day he was killed. We had a date... we were supposed to fuck.

He looks stupidly at her.

MARIA

Yes, I fucked with Paul. He was my lover. We fucked every day. When you left for work, I went to him. Each time we met, he took me in his arms and carried me to bed. And we fucked... passionately. He fucked my ass and my mouth. I sucked his cock, took it deep until I vomited, and he cum on my face. One day, Paul took me to his farm. We rode horses, and then he asked me to suck on a horse... and I did. It was fun. I loved it. I enjoyed our dates.

(MORE)

MARIA (CONT'D)

That day, I wanted Paul to fuck me again, but when I arrived at his place, I found him dead. My lover was murdered. That's why the detective came to us yesterday. He wanted to talk to me, and I gave him my statement. I'm tired of hiding from you, Vladimir. It's time to sort things out. I've had enough. Drink your coffee; it's getting cold.

She gets up from the table and leaves. Vladimir remains stunned.

EXT. PORT - DAY

A panorama of the port reveals numerous containers stacked in different colors.

Francois's car halts near the containers. In the distance, the huge blue inscription "POSEIDON" is visible atop a building.

IN THE CAR - Francois sits at the wheel, lost in thought.

INT. PORT. OFFICE - DAY

A small office of a commercial company with the door wide open. Three individuals are engaged in a heated discussion around a table at the center - two workers and Jacques.

Francois knocks on the door frame. Jacques briefly looks confused upon seeing Francois, then regains his composure.

JACQUES

(to workers)

Let's continue this discussion later.

He hurriedly collects the papers from the table and dismisses the workers.

Francois steps aside to make way for them. Jacques approaches him.

JACQUES

Hey, partner. Good to see you.
(hugs him)

FRANCOIS

Hi. Do you have a moment?

JACQUES

Yes, of course. Come on in.

Francois enters the office. Jacques heads to the cooler to pour some water.

JACQUES

As you can see, I'm still here. I planned to leave about a year ago but couldn't shake it off. One thing led to another, you know? Plus, dealing with customs has been a nightmare. "It's not this, it's not that!" Total chaos.

FRANCOIS

You shouldn't have left the police.

He takes a seat at the table.

JACQUES

Hell no. I don't regret it. Those days seem like a bad dream.

FRANCOIS

I'm resigning next week.

JACQUES

A good decision. Any plans for civilian life?

FRANCOIS

Traveling. I want to see the world.

Jacques hands him a glass of water.

JACQUES

Here you go.

Francois accepts the glass and drinks it in big gulps. Jacques watches him.

FRANCOIS

(after finishing the water)

I'm here on business.

JACQUES

Paul?

FRANCOIS

Yes. I found a business card from this company in his wallet. I knew you worked here too. Tell me about him.

JACQUES

I feel sorry for him. Paul was a great guy. Very talented. He had a passion for drawing, especially landscapes.

FRANCOIS

Were you close?

JACQUES

More like partners. Now, after his murder, everything has fallen on my shoulders. I'm doing the work of two.

FRANCOIS

You're in charge here now.

JACQUES

Well, just a supervisor.

FRANCOIS

Where were you on the evening of the twentieth?

JACQUES

At home.

FRANCOIS

Can anyone confirm that?

JACQUES

Geneva.

FRANCOIS

Who's Geneva?

JACQUES

My girlfriend. We spent the entire night together.

FRANCOIS

Anyone else?

JACQUES

No. Are you interrogating me?

FRANCOIS

Just asking.

JACQUES

Do you really think I killed my buddy to take his place and be stuck in this shithole for even longer? Do you really think I'm capable of murder?

Francois rubs the bridge of his nose.

JACQUES

You know so little about me, partner. Do you have any other suspects besides me?

FRANCOIS

No, but I have a witness.

JACQUES

A witness?

FRANCOIS

Yes, a girl. She was at the crime scene. She saw the murderer.

JACQUES

And she didn't say anything?

FRANCOIS

No. She's remaining silent.

JACQUES

Why?

FRANCOIS

That's the mystery. She's a very strange girl.

JACQUES

Maybe she didn't see anyone?

FRANCOIS

She definitely saw something.
(rubs the bridge of his nose)

JACQUES

Are you still struggling with insomnia?

FRANCOIS

I haven't slept in ages.

JACQUES
How's Louise? Is she feeling better?

FRANCOIS
Yes, she's improving.

JACQUES
Do you think you made the right decision?

FRANCOIS
(gets up from the table)
Alright, I won't keep you any longer. Call me if you remember anything.

JACQUES
Sure.

FRANCOIS
Good luck with customs.

He heads to the door, then turns around:

FRANCOIS
You shouldn't have left the police anyway.

He exits. Jacques clenches the plastic cup in his hand and tosses it into the bin.

INT. MV HOUSE. NEAR THE DOOR - NIGHT - IN RUSSIAN

Maria looks in the mirror and applies lipstick. Vladimir stands against the wall beside her.

VLADIMIR
Where are you going?

MARIA
I need to have some fun.

VLADIMIR
How's your recognizance?

MARIA
Don't worry. I won't stray too far.

She finishes her lips, turns to Vladimir, and strikes a pose. She's wearing a black leather jacket, a tight red dress underneath, and black stockings. She also has stilettos on her feet.

MARIA

Well?

VLADIMIR

Beautiful.

A beat. She nods and takes her purse.

MARIA

I'll be back in the morning. Good night.

She walks to the door.

INT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

A dark dance hall with a loud electronic beat. People dance around Maria as she navigates through the crowd.

She walks up to the bar and sits on a spinning stool. The BARTENDER looks at Maria from under his brows.

BARTENDER

Any drink?

MARIA

Vodka.

The bartender deftly pulls out a bottle from under the counter and pours a shot.

MARIA

Merci.

She drinks the shot.

People continue dancing to the monotonous beat.

ALBERT, a young guy, sits down next to Maria.

ALBERT

Hello, beauty queen. What's your name?

She coldly looks at him.

MARIA

Marie.

ALBERT

Nice to meet you, Marie. I'm Albert. Do you wanna dance?

MARIA
Buy me some vodka.

ALBERT
No problem.

ALBERT
(to bartender)
Hey, two vodkas.

The bartender takes a bottle of vodka.

ALBERT
Are you single here?

The bartender puts two shots in front of Maria and Albert. Maria drinks hers in one gulp. Albert smiles at her and drinks his shot too. On the left side, ROBERT, a cute boy, sits down beside Maria.

ROBERT
Wow! What's up, baby? How is it?

ALBERT
Hey, get out of here! She's with me!

ROBERT
What?! Who are you, prick? I'm not talking to you!

ALBERT
Come here, asshole!

Albert and Robert jump up from their seats and start fighting.

The bartender pierces them with his eyes.

Maria drinks a shot, then turns on her stool to the fighting men.

MARIA
Hey, boys. I have enough for everyone.

Albert and Robert stop the fight and look at her.

She spreads her hips, demonstrating the absence of panties.

Albert and Robert approach her as if hypnotized. Maria kisses Albert on the lips, then Robert. They take her by the hands and lead her to the dance floor.

INT. NIGHTCLUB. VIP ROOM - NIGHT

The VIP room is packed with people. The clouds of cigarette smoke envelop the whole room, creating an atmosphere of a drunken den. Among the people are Geneva and Jacques - they are both drunk. He hugs her, and they laugh. The rest of the gang is with them too: Claude, Michel, and Anton - all with women.

INT. NIGHTCLUB. DANCE FLOOR - NIGHT

Maria dances with Albert, with her arms around his neck, then turns away from him and falls into Robert's arms. They kiss. Then she backs into Albert's arms, and he kisses her on the lips.

Onlookers observe the crazy trio.

Robert takes Maria's hand and presses her to himself. He kisses her neck. Albert snuggles up to her from behind and touches her hips. Maria laughs from the tickling.

People are excited about what's going to happen next.

INT. NIGHTCLUB. VIP ROOM - NIGHT

Jacques, staggering out of the VIP room, walks to the stairs of the loggia. He takes a cigarette out of the pack, sticks it into his mouth, and lights up.

INT. NIGHTCLUB. DANCE FLOOR - NIGHT

Maria is trapped between Albert and Robert's bodies, but suddenly she breaks free and catches a THIRD MAN out of the darkness of the club. He looks older, with receding hair. Maria kisses him on the lips.

VIEW FROM ABOVE - people gathered around Maria, Albert, Robert, and the Third man.

Jacques pushes through the crowd...

Maria's body is being groped by the hands of the Third man. He stands behind her and caresses her curves. Albert kisses Maria on her lips. Robert reaches under her skirt.

People are cheering!

Jacques emerges from the crowd. He sees the show and recognizes her!

Maria's face with the Third man's hand on. She sucks on his thumb.

Jacques walks out of the crowd and, as if being spellbound, comes to her.

She kisses Robert again, now Albert, but no! Jacques pushes Albert away and takes Maria in his arms. Maria and Jacques merge in a kiss. Then she pulls off from Jacques' lips, looks at him with drunken eyes.

MARIA'S POV - Jacques' face with piercing eyes to the bone. Another second and Maria recognizes Jacques! The horror is in her eyes...

Jacques grabs her in his arms, and they kiss again. He puts his arm around Maria's shoulders and takes her away from the dance floor.

INT. NIGHTCLUB. RESTROOM - NIGHT

The restroom is illuminated with neon. It's empty. The muffled sounds of music fill the air. Jacques leans Maria against the wall violently, grabbing her face.

JACQUES

What the fuck are you doing?! Do you wanna play games?! Huh?! Do you wanna play with me?!

She moans.

JACQUES

You love adventures? You like playing with fire, bitch?! Do you wanna fuck a murderer?!

MARIA

(moans)
Yes, I do.

Jacques grabs Maria by her crotch.

JACQUES

Oh yes! You haven't fucked a murderer yet! Dirty whore!

She moans.

JACQUES
Did you think I'd be scared? You
thought you grabbed my balls,
didn't you? No, you haven't grabbed
my balls yet.

He puts her hand on his crotch and squeezes it.

JACQUES
That's right! Now you've grabbed my
balls!

She moans. Jacques stares intently into her face, squeezing
her cheeks with his fingers.

JACQUES
Paul treated you like this, didn't
he? Do you like it?

He slaps Maria on the cheek.

MARIA
(moans)
Yes.

JACQUES
Whore!

He unbuttons his trousers, then lowers Maria down quickly...

JACQUES
Come on! You want it!

INT. NIGHTCLUB. AT THE VIP ROOM - NIGHT

Anton is leaning against the railing, smoking, looking down
at the dance floor.

JACQUES (O.S.)
Hey, Anton, look what I got!

Anton turns around and freezes...

Jacques leads a drunken Maria by the hand.

JACQUES
This is Marie. You must remember
her.

ANTON
Yeah. This bitch kicked me in the
balls.

JACQUES
(laughs)
You don't use them anyway.
(to Maria)
This is Anton. My little brother.

He leads Maria to the VIP room.

ANTON
I hope you know what you're doing.

INT. NIGHTCLUB. VIP ROOM - NIGHT

Jacques and Maria enter the room. Claude greets Jacques happily.

CLAUDE
There you are! Where have you been?
I was about to call the police.

Laughter fills the room. Jacques sits down on the sofa next to Geneva. Maria sits down next to Jacques. Geneva looks jealously at Maria.

GENEVA
Who is this?

JACQUES
Just a whore. Relax.

GENEVA
Too many whores in a week.

Jacques lights a cigarette.

JACQUES
Oh, come on. How can you be jealous
of a whore? You're my beloved
woman, and this is just a whore.
Filthy bitch.

Maria looks around the room, very drunk:

MARIA'S POV - a drunken drug den of bandits and whores blurs into a murky haze.

Jacques snaps his fingers in front of her nose:

JACQUES
Hey, are you with us? Here, take a
sniff.

He hands her a rolled-up bill. She frowns, not understanding what is wanted of her.

JACQUES

Come on!

He roughly bends her head towards the table, where three lines of white powder have already been scattered. He then puts a rolled-up bill to her nose:

JACQUES

Smell it. Sharply!

Maria sniffs the white line, and immediately jumps up with an expression of amazement and fright! Jacques laughs.

Geneva is calmly smoking, carefully studying Jacques' new girlfriend...

Maria leans back on the sofa, throws her head back. Her wide-open eyes stare at the ceiling. Black screen.

INT. JACQUES' APARTMENT. BEDROOM - DAY

Maria and Jacques are sleeping together on the bed. Their naked bodies are covered with a white bedsheet. She wakes up, looks around, trying to remember where she is. She rises from the bed and looks at Jacques. Then she picks up her little purse and takes out her phone.

On the phone screen: "24 missed calls from Vladimir."

She moans, rubs her face, and gets out of bed. Jacques sleeps with his mouth open.

INT. JACQUES' APARTMENT. BALCONY - DAY

Geneva is sitting in a chair, smoking. She's wearing a white bathrobe. Kids are making noise somewhere down on the street. Maria, dressed in a T-shirt, crosses over, gets to the balcony, and sits down next to Geneva. A beat.

GENEVA

My name's Geneva.

MARIA

Marie.

Geneva throws out a cigarette butt.

GENEVA

Tea? Coffee?

MARIA

Coffee.

Geneva leaves.

INT. JACQUES' APARTMENT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Jacques comes out of the bedroom, squinting from the bright sunlight. He's in his underpants. Now we see the interior - it's a large, spacious apartment, expensive but sparsely furnished; there's nothing cozy about it.

JACQUES' POV - Maria and Geneva are sitting on the balcony. They're talking.

He walks to them.

INT. JACQUES' APARTMENT. BALCONY - DAY

Maria and Geneva drink coffee.

MARIA

No, when I worked as a party entertainer at the hotel, I had enough of playing with kids. So I'm not even thinking about it yet. Jacques enters. Geneva sees him:

GENEVA

And Jacques still doesn't dare to have a child.

He plops down in the chair to Maria's left.

GENEVA

Though I suspect he has children. But for some reason, he doesn't want to have a child from me. Am I right, Jacques?

Maria looks at Jacques, confused. He takes a cigarette out of the pack, puts it in his mouth, and lights it.

GENEVA

He knows I'm right.

A beat. Jacques looks at Maria:

JACQUES

Are you alright?

She looks down. A beat.

JACQUES
I'll take you home.

Maria covers her face with her hands and starts to cry. Jacques takes a puff. Maria sobs harder and harder. He puts down his cigarette, sits down next to her, and puts his head on her lap.

Geneva looks at Jacques, lost in her own thoughts.

INT. IN THE CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Jacques and Maria are in the car. Jacques is driving while Maria looks out the window.

JACQUES
Sorry about last night.

Maria remains silent for a beat.

JACQUES
I didn't kill Paul.

She turns to him:

MARIA
What?

JACQUES
I didn't kill him. I'll tell you what happened.

EXT. STREET - DAY

The car moves along the street. Jacques and Anton are inside, with Jacques driving.

JACQUES (V.O.)
That day, Anton and I were supposed to meet Paul in his studio. I had to inform him about the boss's decision and offer him new conditions.

INT. IN THE CAR - DAY

Anton puts on his black leather gloves.

ANTON
What if he refuses?

Jacques loads the magazine into the gun.

JACQUES
He won't.

EXT. ALLEYWAY NEAR PAUL'S STUDIO - DAY

Jacques and Anton stop at the door of Paul's studio. Jacques rings the bell. After a beat, he rings again, then once more.

ANTON
Where the hell is he? Louis said he
should be at his place by now.

Jacques knocks on the door, but... the door swings open inwards.

ANTON
Oh la la.

They exchange glances.

INT. PAUL'S STUDIO. GROUND FLOOR - DAY

They enter the living room on the ground floor. Anton closes the door carefully behind himself.

JACQUES
(loudly)
Paul? It's me, Jacques! Are you
here?

ANTON
Too quiet for him.

INT. PAUL'S STUDIO. UPPER FLOOR - DAY

They walk among the canvases, looking around.

JACQUES
Paul?

Jacques turns the elephant, and freezes...

Dead Paul with a bloody stomach sits in a puddle of blood against the wall. His eyes and mouth are open.

JACQUES
Oh shit.

Anton comes to Jacques and also sees the body.

ANTON
Fuck! Is he dead?

JACQUES
I think so.

They slowly approach the body, trying not to step in the blood on the floor.

JACQUES
Watch your step.

Jacques examines Paul.

JACQUES
They slashed his entire gut.

ANTON
(whispers)
It's a setup. It's a setup, man.

JACQUES
Wait, we need to think.

ANTON
(intensely whispers)
Shit, we need to get out of here.

He begins to fuss anxiously.

MARIA (O.S.)
Paul? Are you here?

Jacques and Anton freeze, looking at each other in fright.

Maria peers out from behind the elephant...

JACQUES (V.O.)
And then you showed up. You recognized me. I could see it in your eyes.

Jacques looks at Maria in fright.

INT. IN THE CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Jacques is driving.

JACQUES
Well, you know the rest of the story. Anton rushed after you, and you ran away. So, that's how it happened.

MARIA
(in Russian)
Oh god.

INT. IN THE CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Jacques and Anton are in the car. Jacques is driving. Anton hits the dashboard with his fist:

ANTON
Fuck! Fuck! Fuck! We're in deep
shit! We're in deep fucking shit!
Louis will chop our ass into canned
food!

Jacques slams on the brakes! The car abruptly stops.

JACQUES
So, listen carefully. Louis won't
know anything. We just did our job
as we were told, okay?

Anton grabs his head.

JACQUES
Yes. The situation got ugly, and we
had to finish him - that's what
happened. Got it?

ANTON
It's a setup. I swear to God, it's
a fucking setup!

JACQUES
Hey, Louis would better kill us
than screw us like that. Why would
he do that if I turn him in?!

ANTON
Whatever.

JACQUES
That's it. Let's not mention Louis
again. Fuck him. So, we're good,
right?

ANTON
Yes, yes.

JACQUES
Great.

He pushes on the gas, and the car moves.

ANTON

That whore. What the fuck was she doing there?!

JACQUES

She won't snitch.

ANTON

Are you damn sure?! Damn, we have to quit this shit, man. That's enough.

Jacques spins the wheel, looking menacingly at the road.

EXT. NEAR MV HOUSE - DAY

Jacques's car is parked in front of the house.

IN THE CAR - Jacques and Maria sit in silence for a while.

MARIA

If you didn't kill him, then who did?

JACQUES

I don't know. I'm not sure.

(beat)

Did you love him?

MARIA

No.

JACQUES

Why didn't you tell the police?

MARIA

Don't know.

JACQUES

I knew you wouldn't turn me in. There's a connection between us. We attract each other. Can't you feel that?

She opens the door, wants to leave. Jacques catches her arm.

JACQUES

Wait! Do you believe me?

MARIA

Don't know.

JACQUES
I love you. Could you love me too?

MARIA
I don't love anyone.

JACQUES
You'd like me to stay a murderer,
wouldn't you? Do you like me that
way better?! Does it turn you on?!

She pulls her arm out of Jacques' hand, and jumps out of the car, slams the door.

JACQUES
Fuck.

Suddenly the door opens again, and Maria jumps into the car. She bites into his mouth. They kiss passionately. Then she unbuttons his trousers, lowers her head down...

Jacques opens his mouth wide, breathing heavily. Maria's doing her thing. Then she raises her head:

MARIA
Get out of the car.

EXT. NEAR MV HOUSE - DAY

Jacques and Maria get out of the car. They approach the hood, merge again in a kiss. She lies down on the hood, spreads her legs apart...

A VIEW FROM AFAR - Jacques bangs Maria on the hood in the middle of a residential street.

He kisses her. Both are moaning. The climax! Maria pushes Jacques away from her, jumps off the hood, and leaves.

Jacques looks after her, breathing heavily, and zips up his trousers:

JACQUES
You'll be back! This is fate!

INT. MENTAL WARD - DAY

A modest, spacious ward. Neatly made bed. LOUISE, 16, a very thin girl, looks younger than her age sits at the window and looks out of it listlessly. Francois is next to her, in the chair. There is a bouquet of snow-white peonies on the table.

FRANCOIS
How did you sleep last night? Are
you feeling better?

She's silent.

FRANCOIS
Doctor Phillip has reduced the
dose. You're on the mend.
(long beat)
I decided to resign.

He gets up from his chair and walks over to Louise.

FRANCOIS
Do you know what it means? It means
that I'll be visiting you more
often.

He pats Louise's shoulders. She doesn't react.

FRANCOIS
I brought you peonies. Your
favorites. Over there, on the
table. Your mom is worried about
you too. She asked me to tell...

His phone rings. Francois takes his phone out of his pocket,
looks at the screen, and receives the call:

FRANCOIS
Yes?
(listens)
So urgent? Okay, I'm coming.

He puts his phone in his pocket, then kisses Louise on the
head.

FRANCOIS
Sorry. Job.

He leaves. Louise looks out of the window not moving.

EXT. POLICE STATION - DAY

The building of the police station.

FRANCOIS (O.S.)
So what you got, speak.

INT. POLICE STATION. EXAMINATION DEPARTMENT - DAY

Thibaut holds a bundle of papers with the air of a man with the greatest secret:

THIBAUT

Maria Rostova's prints matched the prints on the shoes. There's no doubt the shoes belong to her.

FRANCOIS

No news here.

THIBAUT

But the gun... it's the most interesting part. The prints on the handle and the slide barrel belong to Paul, but the prints on the magazine... any idea?

FRANCOIS

Come on, Thibaut.

THIBAUT

The prints on the magazine belong to Vladimir!

Francois raises his eyebrows in surprise.

THIBAUT

Yes, yes, it's him. The experts came today with a report that the gun fingerprints belong to two people. The first one was absolutely clean, with no record, it's Paul. But the second, the guy who touched the magazine, is Vladimir. Five years ago he was arrested in Paris for DUI. Voilà!

FRANCOIS

(thoughtfully)

And? So what?

THIBAUT

Hmm, Paul had a gun with Vladimir's fingerprints on it. It's a clue, damn it!

FRANCOIS

A clue to what? Paul was stabbed, not shot, as you may know.

THIBAUT

Well, yes, but the prints... I mean, this gun has been in the hands of both. But how? Some kind of mystery. Vladimir didn't know that his wife was cheating on him? I mean, for sure?

Francois starts to laugh. Thibaut doesn't catch what's funny.

THIBAUT

We need to interrogate him.

FRANCOIS

(stops laughing)

We need to search their house. Where is the chief now?

THIBAUT

In his office.

FRANCOIS

Gather the guys, and I'll go to the chief for a warrant.

THIBAUT

Right, monsieur!

Thibaut rushes out.

INT. MV HOUSE. BATHROOM - DAY

Maria rests in a soapy bath. Something heavy weighs on her mind. The doorbell rings. She frowns - who could it be now? The doorbell rings again.

EXT. AT THE MV HOUSE'S DOOR - DAY

Francois and Thibaut are standing at the door. The door opens - Maria shows up in front of them, dressed in a white bathrobe and with wet hair. There's a whole gang of cops behind Francois and Thibaut. Francois is holding a search warrant:

FRANCOIS

Maria Rostova? Detective Francois Eggert. I have a warrant to search your house. Please let us in.

MARIA

What?

FRANCOIS
(to cops)
Come in.

A group of policemen rushes into the house. Maria barely dodges...

MARIA
Wait!

INT. MV HOUSE. LIVING ROOM - DAY

The cops spread out all over the house. Francois walks in after them. Maria follows him:

MARIA
What the hell is going on here?

FRANCOIS
We got new evidence.

MARIA
Evidence? What evidence?

COP'S HANDS open a drawer in the kitchen - there are knives and forks.

COP'S HANDS open the first drawer in the bedside table, throwing things out.

COP'S HANDS open the second drawer in the bedside table - there's a pink vibrator.

A cop opens the wardrobe, throwing the clothes out. Maria watches the mess unfold.

Thibaut, with a laptop in his hands:

THIBAUT
(to Maria)
What's the password?

FRANCOIS
(to Maria)
You have the right to remain silent.

MARIA
(in Russian)
Fuck.

Meanwhile two cops raid the couch. Pillows go to the floor.

FRANCOIS

Do you have a lawyer? It's time to call one.

Maria looks at Francois in fright.

A cop lifts the couch's flap, and COP #1 reaches under the couch with a flashlight...

UNDER THE COUCH POV - The sweaty face of Cop #1 peers under the couch. A big knife lies on the floor. The flashlight focuses on it. Cop #1 reaches for the knife.

Cop #1 holds a large knife with dried blood in his latex-gloved hand:

COP #1

Monsieur Eggert!

Francois approaches him, with Maria nearby.

COP #1

Look. Found it under the couch.

MARIA

(in Russian)

Oh God!

She grabs her face. Thibaut appears next to them, whistling.

THIBAUT

Looks like that's the one.

Francois puts on a latex glove and carefully takes the knife with two fingers, frowning.

MARIA

How did it get in here?

FRANCOIS

Maria, I have bad news for you. You and your husband are arrested for murder.

MARIA

What?!

FRANCOIS

Where is Vladimir?

MARIA

At his job.

FRANCOIS

Good. We're going for him. And you have to follow with us. You're under arrest.

MARIA

Are you kidding?

FRANCOIS

No.

MARIA

What a freak show. I didn't kill anyone!

FRANCOIS

Please, put some clothes on. I don't want to bring you to the Police station almost naked.

INT. VLADIMIR'S OFFICE. LOBBY - DAY

Two cops escort Vladimir, who is handcuffed, through the lobby of the office. Francois follows them. The people around pass them with scared and curious looks.

VLADIMIR

(awkwardly laughing)

Wait. It's a mistake. Really. You have to listen...

FRANCOIS

Anything you say can be used against you.

VLADIMIR

No, I can explain...

INT. POLICE STATION. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Bare gray walls. A table sits in the center of the room. Francois and Thibaut are seated at the table, while Vladimir is opposite them, handcuffed.

FRANCOIS

So, you wanted to confess to something?

VLADIMIR

Yes, I can explain everything.

THIBAUT

Aren't you afraid you might
incriminate yourself?

VLADIMIR

No, I'm not. I have nothing to
fear. I'm not guilty.

FRANCOIS

Good start. So, we'll listen to
you.

VLADIMIR

Please, tell me, how's Masha? I
mean Maria. Is she okay? Where is
she?

THIBAUT

She's here at the station.

FRANCOIS

She's fine. Don't worry. Speak, or
it might be better to wait for your
lawyer.

VLADIMIR

No, I'll tell you the truth. The
time has come. I knew that Masha
was cheating on me with Paul. She
told me, but I also knew it myself.
You'd have to be completely blind
not to see it. Their affair lasted
for a few months. She didn't even
know that I knew about them. Can
you imagine? She was so sure of my
ignorance that she introduced me to
her lover! Apparently, she thought
I was a complete idiot... Well,
perhaps I am. Yes, I shared her
with him. I kept putting up with
it, and I hated myself. But
eventually, I had enough. I wanted
to end this mess. I decided to kill
Paul, and then myself.

Francois and Thibaut exchange looks.

EXT. DARK DEAD END - DAY

Vladimir and Claude stand in the dark, lonely place - a
brick-walled dead end. Claude shows him the gun and,
presumably, explains how to use it. Vladimir stares blankly
at the gun.

VLADIMIR (V.O.)
I bought a gun from some guy. I was
so hyped to do it.

EXT. IN THE CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT

Vladimir drives the car.

VLADIMIR (V.O.)
That night, after work, instead of
going home, I went to Paul Sambu.

EXT. IN THE CAR. NEAR PAUL'S STUDIO - DAY

Vladimir sits in the car, glaring angrily off to the side...

VLADIMIR (V.O.)
I knew where he was having fun with
my wife because I followed her
once...

VLADIMIR'S POV - Paul and Maria stand in an alley near the
studio's door. They hug and coo like lovebirds.

VLADIMIR (V.O.)
Oh God. At that moment, I was ready
to kill him with my bare hands...

Vladimir watches them.

VLADIMIR (V.O.)
Why didn't I do it then? Well,
maybe because I'm a pussy.

VLADIMIR'S POV - Paul and Maria enter the studio.

EXT. IN THE CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT

Vladimir is driving.

VLADIMIR (V.O.)
But that night, I knew I would do
it.

EXT. ALLEYWAY NEAR PAUL'S STUDIO - NIGHT

Vladimir approaches the door and rings the bell. After a
beat:

PAUL
(through the door)
Who's there?

VLADIMIR
Hi. I'm here from Marie. She sent
me to see you.

The door opens slightly. Paul appears in the gap.

PAUL
Is she okay?

VLADIMIR
Yes, she's fine. She asked me to
give you something. Can I come in?

Paul closes the door momentarily, then removes the latch and
reopens it.

PAUL
Come on in.

INT. PAUL'S STUDIO. GROUND FLOOR - NIGHT

The entire floor is bathed in dim light. Classical music
plays softly upstairs. Vladimir enters the living room.

PAUL
Are you a friend of hers? Your face
looks familiar. Have we met before?

VLADIMIR
Yes, I'm Vladimir, her husband.

Paul smiles slyly.

PAUL
Ah, yeah, of course. I remember
now. She introduced us at the
exhibition. So, how can I assist
you, monsieur? Are you pleased with
my painting?

VLADIMIR
Let's just cut this... I know all
about you and her. I'm not here to
create a scene, just to have a
conversation like adults.

PAUL

A conversation? Well, it's a bit late for that, but alright, I'll oblige.

VLADIMIR

Am I taking up too much of your time?

PAUL

No, not at all. Let's talk. Would you like a drink?

VLADIMIR

Yes, vodka if you have any.

PAUL

Sure. Follow me.

INT. PAUL'S STUDIO. UPPER FLOOR - NIGHT

The same dim light fills the upper floor as on the ground floor. The canvases are present, with one canvas illuminated by a bright light where Paul is working. Classical music plays softly.

Paul goes to the mini-fridge against the wall.

PAUL

So, what do you want to talk about, monsieur? You said Maria sent you here?

Vladimir stares at the white fake elephant standing in the twilight of the room.

VLADIMIR

No, I came on my own.

PAUL

Hmm, you're a brave man.

Paul takes a bottle of vodka from the mini-fridge, moves to the counter, and pours vodka into shots.

PAUL

'Stolichnaya.'

Vladimir steps up to the bar counter, drinks his shot in one gulp. Paul smiles and drinks his shot too.

PAUL

You white folks can drink. But we blacks sour after one shot. I'm the rare exception. I don't get drunk at all.

VLADIMIR

Do you love Maria? Tell me honestly.

PAUL

Honestly? No. But it's fun to fuck her. She has a gorgeous body. She does such things during sex, oh save me Allah! Sometimes she gets carried away and goes into a wild frenzy mode. Oh, what am I telling you, you know it yourself.

Vladimir looks at him stunned. Paul pours two more shots.

PAUL

Sorry for being cynical, but you asked for an honest answer. Drink.

Both men drink.

VLADIMIR

(squinting from vodka)
I wanna see... I wanna see...

PAUL

Excuse me?

VLADIMIR

I wanna see you with her.

PAUL

What do you mean?

VLADIMIR

You know what I mean.

PAUL

Do you want to watch me fuck your wife?

VLADIMIR

Yes.

PAUL

Oh yeah, I know, some whites like to watch their wives fuck with negroes. It's sort of a kink, right? Am I your kink, monsieur Rostov?

VLADIMIR

Sorry, I didn't mean to insult you.

PAUL

That's okay. Well, I think we can arrange it, for a certain price.

VLADIMIR

How much?

PAUL

Come on! I'm kidding. It's absolutely free.
(laughs evilly - a true Mephisto)
So that's what you are, monsieur Rostov. I like you.

He pours another two shots.

PAUL

Would you prefer it secretly or...

VLADIMIR

(interrupts)
Secretly. She can't know I'm watching.

Paul smiles.

VLADIMIR

So when can I see you together?

PAUL

I fuck her every weekday and Saturday. Sunday is your day off, so she spends her time with you. So pick any of those days and come. By the way, she was here today too. I drove her home three hours ago. Just for your information.

VLADIMIR

Don't tell her I was here.

PAUL
I'm dead silent.
(laughs)
Really, why should we fight when we
can settle everything in a
civilized way? With no drama and
stuff. After all, we're all just
animals and we have to satisfy our
animal instincts. I'm fucking your
wife, you're watching it. So
everybody's happy.
(winks)
I'll do my best for you, monsieur
Rostov.

Vladimir drinks a shot, his face displaying a mixture of
emotions.

INT. PAUL'S STUDIO. GROUND FLOOR - NIGHT

Paul and Vladimir slowly approach the door.

PAUL
Life is beautiful, my friend. Look
for your advantages in everything,
and never be upset.

He holds out his hand to Vladimir.

PAUL
You Russians have a wonderful
tradition of shaking hands when you
meet each other and when you part.
I really like it.

Vladimir looks at his hand and hesitantly shakes it.

VLADIMIR
Bye.

PAUL
Goodbye.

Vladimir leaves. Paul closes the door behind him, shakes his
head, then bursts out laughing.

PAUL
Crazy Russians!

He goes to the stairs. But suddenly, three loud thuds on the
door! Paul stops, surprised. Another three thuds. He goes
back to his door, opens it, and Vladimir stumbles in.

PAUL
Have you forgotten something,
monsieur?

Vladimir shivers feverishly, turns to face Paul, and reaches into his jacket with his hand.

VLADIMIR
(in Russian)
I'll kill you... I'll kill you...

PAUL
Monsieur?

Vladimir pulls out a gun and points it at Paul.

PAUL
Wow! That's too much. Really, why
are you doing this? I thought we're
good.

He puts his hands up and takes a step back.

VLADIMIR
(in Russian)
I'll kill you... I'll kill you...

PAUL
Easy, man. Take a deep breath.

Vladimir makes a tearful face. His hand is shaking.

VLADIMIR
(in Russian)
I'll kill you.

PAUL
Easy. Easy.

He slowly approaches Vladimir. Suddenly, he grabs Vladimir by the hand, takes the gun, and hits him in the stomach with his knee! Vladimir groans and falls to the floor. Paul kicks him twice in the stomach, then points the gun at him.

PAUL
What the fuck are you doing,
moron?! Do you know who you're
pointing that shit at?! Huh?! So,
listen to me, you fucking pervert,
you take your ass now and get out
of here, quietly, like a mouse.
(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)

And I'll pretend that you never
broke into my house with a fucking
gun and never threatened me,
understand?!

Vladimir is lying on the floor, looking at Paul, scared.

PAUL

Did you fucking understand me?! I
can't hear you!

VLADIMIR

Yes, I did.

PAUL

Good. I'll keep your toy to myself
so you won't hurt anyone, moron.
Agreed? Don't you mind?

Vladimir keeps groaning.

PAUL

Can't hear you!

VLADIMIR

I don't mind.

PAUL

Great. Now get out of here! I'll
count to three. One...

Vladimir rises heavily from the floor.

PAUL

Two. Go!

Paul grabs Vladimir by the scruff of the neck with one hand,
opens the door with the other hand, and pushes him out.

OUTSIDE - Vladimir falls on the cobblestone pavement.

Paul shows up at the door with a gun in his hand.

PAUL

If I see you here again, I'll kill
you, got it?! Now go, and tell your
whore not to be late anymore!

He slams the door shut.

Vladimir is lying on the pavement, breathing heavily.

VLADIMIR (V.O.)

I was absolutely crushed. I've never felt more humiliated in my life than that night. If Paul hadn't taken my gun, I would've shot myself.

INT. MV HOUSE. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Vladimir lies down on the bed next to sleeping Maria. He hugs her and kisses her.

VLADIMIR (V.O.)

I knew that everything should be as it was. I would choose death over leaving Masha. I love her so much.

INT. POLICE STATION. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Francois and Thibaut listen to Vladimir. A beat.

THIBAUT

Yeah, what a story.

VLADIMIR

I didn't kill Paul Sambu. I wanted to kill him, but I couldn't. When you came to our house and told us that Paul had been killed, I was glad. Someone had the strength to finish what I just could start. I'm clean, and I'm ready to cooperate.

Thibaut gives a questioning look at Francois.

FRANCOIS

Interesting. But there is one thing - how can you explain the presence of the bloody knife in your house?

VLADIMIR

What knife?

FRANCOIS

The knife that we found under the couch in your house.

VLADIMIR

Don't know. I don't know about the knife.

FRANCOIS

Hmm but I do. I know that you
killed Paul. Yes, it was you.

Francois jumps up from his seat, takes a knife in a plastic bag from his coat, throws it on the table in front of Vladimir.

FRANCOIS

See? Do you recognize it? This is
your knife! Your victim's blood is
still on it. The examination showed
that it was Paul's blood.

Vladimir's piercing his eyes into the knife.

FRANCOIS

I'll tell you how it was. You found
out that your wife is cheating on
you, you found out who she was
cheating with, you even tracked her
down. Yes, that's true, but you
also killed her lover. You came to
Paul at that night and threatened
him with a gun. Paul took your gun
and kicked you out. But you came
back again, with this knife in your
hands. You crept up to Paul, and
stabbed him several times when he
didn't expect it. Then you came
back home as if nothing happened.
The next day, your wife found the
body. She was so scared so she ran
away. She had no idea that you
killed Paul. Nice job, monsieur
Rostov. I bet you're proud of
yourself.

VLADIMIR

No, I didn't kill him! I swear,
I've told you the truth!

FRANCOIS

The case is closed. Come on,
Thibaut.

He grabs Thibaut by the elbow, so he barely manages to grab the bag with the knife. They both leave.

INT. POLICE STATION. JAIL 1 - EVENING

A typical jail. Grey walls, grey floor. A metal bars door.

Maria is all alone in her confinement. Francois shows at the door, a paper sheet in his hand. Maria sees him...

A cop steps to Francois, inserts the key into the lock, opens the door. Francois beckons Maria with a nod.

She gets up from the bunk, leaves the jail:

MARIA

Am I free?

FRANCOIS

Yes.

MARIA

And Vladimir?

FRANCOIS

No.

MARIA

You want to charge him?

FRANCOIS

A gun with your husband's fingerprints was found in the victim's house. He was there the night Paul was killed. Your husband confessed himself. It's his statement...

(hands her the sheet)

She takes the paper sheet, reads it.

FRANCOIS

He knew you were dating Paul. He tracked down where he lives and killed him.

MARIA

(keeps reading)

No. It can't be true. I don't believe it.

FRANCOIS

Alas, it is. Your husband killed your lover.

MARIA

Can I see him? I wanna talk to him.

FRANCOIS

I'm afraid it's impossible.

MARIA

Please, Monsieur Eggert. Just one minute?

INT. POLICE STATION. JAIL 2 - EVENING - IN RUSSIAN

We see the jail, several prisoners are behind bars, Vladimir is among them. He sits at the bunk, lowering his head. Maria approaches the metallic bars:

MARIA

Vova, what have you done?!

Vladimir raises his head at her voice and rushes to the bars:

VLADIMIR

Masha!

She puts her hands on the bars, and Vladimir grabs them immediately.

MARIA

Why? Why did you write it?

VLADIMIR

It's all right, Masha. I'll withdraw my statement. They're fabricating a case against me, but they don't have any solid evidence. There are no prints on the knife. This is my chance. You just keep quiet, don't blab. And I won't betray you. Don't worry.
(kisses her hands)

MARIA

What are you talking about?

VLADIMIR

(in a loud whisper)
Masha, they didn't find your fingerprints on the knife. They seriously think I'm the killer. You were right to erase the prints.

She pulls her hands out of Vladimir's hands, takes a step back.

MARIA

Do you think I killed him?

VLADIMIR
Masha, listen. I'll get out of
here. We'll start all over again.
You made a mistake, we both did,
but you're not going to jail. I
won't let that happen.

She runs away.

VLADIMIR
(screaming)
Masha, wait! Masha!

INT. IN THE CAR - EVENING

Francois and Maria are sitting in the car.

FRANCOIS
I'm sorry about this.
(beat)
I'll take you home.

MARIA
I don't want to go home. I don't
have a home.

FRANCOIS
Where do you want to go? I'll take
you wherever you want.

MARIA
Take me to the garbage.

FRANCOIS
Well, I have a better idea.
(starts the engine)

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD AREA. NEAR FRANCOIS' HOME - EVENING

Francois and Maria get out of the car.

FRANCOIS
Here we are. I live here.

Maria looks around the neighborhood. It's a pretty quiet
residential area.

FRANCOIS
Come on, I'll show you something.
Don't worry, I won't harass you.

INT. FRANCOIS' APARTMENT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Francois and Maria are in the living room.

FRANCOIS
Sorry, I haven't cleaned here yet.
But you said you wanted the
garbage, so...

MARIA
(smiles)
No, it's very nice in here.

The grey cat jumps into Francois' arms.

FRANCOIS
It's Ludovicus. My best partner.

MARIA
He's cute.

FRANCOIS
Oh yeah. Follow me.

INT. FRANCOIS' APARTMENT. BEDROOM - EVENING

Francois comes into the bedroom, a cat in his arms. Maria follows him.

FRANCOIS
Here. I thought you might be
interested.

Maria's portrait is on the wall.

FRANCOIS
This is Paul's painting. He drew
your portrait. I should've given it
to you earlier, but I was busy.

Maria comes close to the painting.

MARIA
(in Russian)
Oh gosh.

FRANCOIS
A little defiant, as for me. But
overall, it's pretty good. What do
you think?

MARIA
Beautiful.

FRANCOIS
Take it. It's yours.

She stares intently at her portrait:

MARIA
No. It will remind me of him,
Vladimir, me, of everything that
happened. Keep it yourself or
better sell it.

She wipes her tears away.

INT. FRANCOIS' APARTMENT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

A dimly lit living room illuminated by the glow of the TV screen, broadcasting a football match. Francois and Maria sit on the couch, each holding a cup of coffee.

FRANCOIS
Do you like football?

MARIA
I'm afraid not.

FRANCOIS
It's the Champions League
semifinal.

He enthusiastically watches the match while Maria takes a sip from her cup.

MARIA
What will happen to him now?

FRANCOIS
Your husband?

MARIA
Yes.

FRANCOIS
He's a French citizen, so he will
be sentenced here.

MARIA
Gosh. I still can't believe it.

FRANCOIS
He loves you madly. He committed a
crime for you.

MARIA

I don't need such sacrifice. If he knew, he could've talked to me. And what now? What has he achieved?

FRANCOIS

We men can be quite impulsive sometimes.

The commentator screams loudly. Francois jumps on the couch.

FRANCOIS

Ahh. Almost scored!

Maria sips her coffee.

FRANCOIS

You have a very cute accent. Where did you learn to speak French so well?

MARIA

My mom is a French teacher. She taught me a little. Then I studied French at school. I learned to speak it at university. I studied at the French Literature faculty.

FRANCOIS

Hmm, nice. And how did you get to France?

MARIA

I got an exchange opportunity at Paris University. I met Vladimir there in Paris. I graduated, I mean, I quit and married him. Then we moved to Nice.

FRANCOIS

Why did you quit university?

MARIA

I'm not like my mother. I'm not a teacher. It's not my thing.

A beat. Francois focuses on the game.

MARIA

And you? Do you have a family?

FRANCOIS

Divorced. I live alone. Well, with Ludovicus.

MARIA

Any children?

FRANCOIS

Yes, a daughter. Louise. She's sixteen years old. She stayed with her mother, and I rarely see her.

MARIA

You must love her so much. Fathers adore their daughters, I know it by myself.

FRANCOIS

Yes. Louise is my only sunshine. I have a photo of her...
(feels his shirt pocket)
I think I left it in the car. I'll show you tomorrow.

MARIA

You said you rarely see her. Is that because of your ex-wife?

FRANCOIS

No, it's because of my work. You can see, it's murder, robbery, rape, murder again, and so on and on.

MARIA

You should spend the whole day with her. I'm sure she'll appreciate it. She loves you too.

FRANCOIS

Have you finished your coffee?

Maria looks at her cup.

MARIA

Yes.

FRANCOIS

May I?

MARIA

Sure.

Francois takes her cup and heads towards the kitchen.

MARIA

Can I stay here a little longer?
I'm scared to be alone.

FRANCOIS
 Sure. Will anybody be looking for
 you?

MARIA
 No, nobody.

LCD TV SCREEN - Ronaldo is getting ready for a free-kick.

INT. YACHT. CABIN - NIGHT

A luxurious yacht, exuding opulence! The spacious cabin boasts an expensive interior with a table at its center. On the sofa nearby, Louis sits surrounded by four top-model looking girls, flanked by two imposing bodyguards.

Jacques, Anton, Claude, and Miguel enter the cabin.

CLAUDE
 (looks around)
 Wow!

LOUIS
 Come on in, don't hesitate. We're
 waiting for you.

Jacques and Anton exchange glances.

MIGUEL
 (looks around)
 I've always wanted to get aboard
 your yacht, boss.

LOUIS
 Dreams are coming true, Miguel.
 Well, Louis wants to thank you for
 your faithful service, boys. Have a
 seat, and keep these lovely ladies
 company.

Claude settles onto the sofa and embraces the redhead girl. Jacques sits beside a long-legged brunette. Miguel engages with an Asian girl, while Anton dismisses the blonde - he's not in the mood - as if he ever is.

LOUIS
 (to bodyguards)
 Boys. Music.

THE BIG GUY leaves his post, and jazz begins to play softly.

LOUIS
 Magnificent.

Jacques, unresponsive to the caresses of his brunette companion, catches Louis' scrutinizing gaze while puffing on his cigar:

LOUIS

Well, Louis wants to congratulate you on another excellent batch. Our business is thriving, gentlemen. As you know, we recently lost a very valuable employee. It has knocked us down slightly, and we're feeling a bit unsettled now, but these are only temporary difficulties. Soon we will reach a completely new level, and this person will help us get there...

(points at Jacques)

Jacques looks incredulously at Louis.

LOUIS

Louis believes in Jacques. He's a very capable guy.

Claude loudly snorts cocaine from the table.

LOUIS

And now, Louis suggests we make a toast to our success. Let our fish float around the world and bring us joy and happiness.

Louis raises a glass of champagne, standing up. The other men follow suit, taking their glasses as the girls remain seated.

LOUIS

To our fish.
(drinks)

ALL: "To our fish." Miguel drinks. Claude drinks, casting a sidelong glance at Jacques. Anton takes a slight sip from his glass. Jacques hastily drains his glass in one gulp.

INT. YACHT. CABIN - NIGHT

Two imposing bodyguards stand in their motionless stance. The song "Nightclubbing" by Iggy Pop plays in the background...

Miguel and the asian girl kiss on the sofa...

Louis and Jacques are at the bar counter. Louis says something to Jacques, who listens with a frown on his face...

Anton lights a cigarette while his blonde fondles him...

Claude gets up from the sofa and walks to the bar.

CLAUDE
(mumbling)
Yeah, yeah, just a minute.

AT THE BAR - Claude retrieves a tiny vial with white powder from his pocket, opens it, and pours the powder into two glasses of champagne. Then he discreetly puts the empty vial back...

Louis and Jacques are still at the bar.

LOUIS
Think about this offer.

Claude approaches them.

CLAUDE
(to Jacques)
Hey buddy, why are you so down?

He hands Jacques one glass.

CLAUDE
Have fun. It's a wonderful hot night. I'm sure it'll get even hotter.

Jacques takes the glass. A brunette appears next to him and snuggles up to his shoulder.

LOUIS
Life is short. Enjoy the moment.

The brunette kisses Jacques on the neck.

BRUNETTE
Let's go to the stateroom.

She takes him by the hand. Jacques looks at Anton...

Anton barely nods. Claude places a glass of champagne in front of him. Anton gets up from the sofa and grabs the blonde by the elbow. She quickly picks up the glass of champagne and takes a sip...

Miguel and the asian girl are almost copulating.

CLAUDE
(to Miguel)
Can you, too, go somewhere?

Miguel continues kissing his girl.

MIGUEL
(keeps kissing the girl)
Fuck off.

Claude sits down opposite them.

Miguel breaks free from his girl for a second, snorts the cocaine line, then looks at Claude.

Claude winks at him...

Miguel nods and returns to the Asian.

Claude lights up a cigarette. The redhead girl puts her arms around his shoulders from behind...

Louis drops his finished cigar into a glass of wine.

INT. YACHT. JACQUES' STATEROOM - NIGHT

The brunette takes a glass of champagne from Jacques's hands and sets it on the little table. She kisses him on the lips, but he pulls away.

JACQUES
I need to go to the restroom. I'll
be right back.

BRUNETTE
The head.

JACQUES
Pardon?

BRUNETTE
On sea vessels, the restroom is
called the head.

He frowns slightly.

JACQUES
Wait here.

He leaves the stateroom.

INT. YACHT. ANTON'S STATEROOM - NIGHT

The blonde sits on the bed, holding her stomach in pain.

BLONDE
(groans)
I feel bad. My stomach hurts.

Anton stands at the door, peeking out through the gap.

ANTON
Stay here. I'll get you some pills.

BLONDE
(groans)
Okay.

He leaves.

EXT. YACHT. DECK - NIGHT

Anton walks cautiously along the deck...

Jacques stands on the edge of the deck near the handrails, seeing Anton.

JACQUES
Clear?

ANTON
Yes.

JACQUES
Now.

Jacques climbs over the handrails and jumps into the water. Anton follows him.

INT. YACHT. ANTON'S STATEROOM - NIGHT

Meanwhile, the blonde lies on the bed, white foam coming out of her mouth, her eyes rolled up. She wheezes.

INT. YACHT. JACQUES' STATEROOM - NIGHT

The brunette fans herself with her hands, blowing on her bangs - it's hot in here. Then she goes to the window and opens it...

OUTSIDE - She looks out of the window, her hair blowing in the wind.

EXT. AT THE PIER - NIGHT

Jacques and Anton swim up to the pier. Jacques climbs onto the wooden pier, takes out the large radio remote from behind the pylon, and extends the antenna. Anton remains in the water.

EXT. YACHT. WINDOW - NIGHT

The brunette spots Jacques and Anton in the distance:

BRUNETTE
(shouting and waving)
Hey, boys!

EXT. AT THE PIER - NIGHT

Jacques and Anton turn in fright at her shouts...

THE YACHT - the brunette waves happily at them from the window:

BRUNETTE
(shouting)
I wanna swim too!

Anton throws a frantic look at Jacques:

ANTON
Push it! Now!

Jacques is frozen. He looks at the brunette, clutching the remote to his chest.

BRUNETTE (O.S.)
Boys! I'm coming to ya!

ANTON
Shit!

He snatches the remote from Jacques's hands and pushes the button...

BOOM! The snow-white yacht explodes! The entire deck is engulfed in a bright, merciless flame!

Jacques and Anton gaze at the burning yacht. Their faces are illuminated by the fire. Anton climbs onto the pier and pats Jacques on the head:

ANTON
It's over. We are free.

Jacques looks at the flames. The sounds of police sirens are heard...

The yacht, engulfed in fire, drifts on the water.

INT. FRANCOIS' APARTMENT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Maria is sleeping on the couch. Francois covers her with a blanket.

EXT. HARBOUR - MORNING

A large burnt yacht drifts on the water, abundantly filled with foam from a nearby vessel. Gray smoke covers the scene.

EXT. AT THE PIER - MORNING

Numerous cops and onlookers gather. The area is buzzing with activity. Francois walks along the pier and stops at COP #2, who is standing next to a police car.

FRANCOIS
How many bodies?

COP #2
Eight, I believe.

ASIDE - cops are placing three black bags in a row containing the remains of the yacht's passengers.

THIBAUT (O.S.)
These three are intact, relatively.
The rest are in trash bags.

Francois turns to the sleepy Thibaut.

THIBAUT
I envy you, Detective. You're going
to leave all this behind soon.
(yawns)

A beat. Francois wears a heavy frown.

THIBAUT
Can I ask you a question, monsieur?

FRANCOIS
Yes.

THIBAUT

How could Vlad get inside the studio if Paul closed the door after he kicked him out?

FRANCOIS

Maria had a key to the studio. Paul gave it to her. The murderer simply opened the door, entered, and committed the crime. He returned the key afterward, so she never realized it was missing.

THIBAUT

But why did he bring the knife back home?

FRANCOIS

He wants to frame his wife for the murder. He will retract his confession.

THIBAUT

Oh, damn. So she never ran away from anyone?

INT. FRANCOIS' APARTMENT. KITCHEN - DAY

The grey cat eats from a bowl while the kettle boils...

A NOTE on the table reads: "Please feel at home. I'll be back soon. Wait for me. Francois."

Maria stands brooding at the stove with a steaming kettle.

INT. FRANCOIS' APARTMENT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Maria checks the books on the shelf in a big cabinet.

On the bookshelf, we see: Marquis de Sade's "Justine", F. Dostoevsky's "The Idiot", G. Flaubert's "Madame Bovary", and Francois Rabelais' "Gargantua and Pantagruel". Her hand takes "Madame Bovary".

Maria opens the book, looks at the text, frowns. She closes the book, and wants to put it back, but...

The gap between Dostoevsky and Rabelais reveals a photo album behind the books.

Maria looks curiously through the gap between the books. She pulls out a photo album, flipping through it.

We see Maria's hands with the album: there are many different photos from Francois's life. She keeps flipping the pages.

Suddenly, we see a photo of Francois with Jacques! The men are dressed in police uniform, smiling happily.

Maria looks at the photo, frowns, and flips on...

A FEW MORE PHOTOS of Francois and Jacques being on service.

MARIA is flipping the pages, but suddenly she drops the album with a scream and jumps away from it...

THE ALBUM ON THE FLOOR reveals a photo of Francois, Louise, and a tall black man together like a happy family. The black man's face is scratched out.

Focus shifts to the right hand of the black man - the bracelet on his wrist.

EXT. IN THE CAR (MOVING) - DAY

MARIA'S POV - Paul drives his Porsche and smiles at Maria. On his right wrist is the same bracelet.

INT. FRANCOIS' APARTMENT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Maria looks down at the album lying on the floor.

FRANCOIS (O.S.)
I've already forgotten about this album.

Maria shudders and turns around...

Francois is standing near the door, looking intently at her. A beat.

FRANCOIS
Paul was an art teacher of my daughter. She went to his studio to paint. That's where I met him for the first time.

MARIA
(in Russian)
Oh my god.

FRANCOIS
Sit down, please.

Maria sits down on the couch. Francois steps to the album, looks down at the "family" photo.

FRANCOIS
I used to like this photo.

THE "FAMILY" PHOTO in the open album on the floor...

Francois sits down in the armchair next to Maria.

FRANCOIS
After the divorce, my ex-wife took Louise away, and I was left alone. I was depressed. I had no one to talk to, except for those days when I saw my daughter. But I couldn't tell her what was on my heart.

INT. PAUL'S STUDIO. UPPER FLOOR - DAY

Louise introduces Francois to Paul. She says something cheerfully (we can't hear her)

FRANCOIS (V.O.)
One day, Louise brought me to his studio. She wanted me to meet her teacher, and I... I was gone.

Francois and Paul look into each other's eyes.

FRANCOIS (V.O.)
Paul felt that. He understood right away. And we started dating.

Paul smiles slyly at him.

INT. PAUL'S STUDIO. UPPER FLOOR - DAY

Louise ascends the stairs (the camera is behind her).

FRANCOIS (V.O.)
I remember the day when Louise caught us. It was ugly.

She enters the studio (the camera is still behind her), turns right, and sees...

LOUISE'S POV - naked Francois and Paul are lying in bed together. They notice her...

She looks at them and runs away.

FRANCOIS
 (frightened)
 Louise? I... wait!

INT. FRANCOIS' APARTMENT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Francois stares ahead.

FRANCOIS
 She didn't know how to take it. It was hard for her. But also, she could see that I was getting better. I finally came out, and I could be myself. My daughter accepted me. But then, the disaster happened...

INT. FRANCOIS' APARTMENT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Francois is sleeping in bed. His cell phone rings. He squints half-sleepily and answers the call. He listens for a while...

FRANCOIS (V.O.)
 Once her mother called me and told me that Louise was raped.

...then his facial expression changes.

INT. HOSPITAL WARD - NIGHT

Francois bursts into the ward:

FRANCOIS
 Louise!

Louise is sitting on the bed with her arms around her knees. There are thin red scratches on her legs. Next to her is Francois' EX-WIFE, a tall skinny woman, an older, not pretty version of Louise.

FRANCOIS
 Oh, my God!

He rushes to Louise...

FRANCOIS
 Who?! Who did this?!

His eyes quickly examine her body...

We see Louise's pale legs with thin scratches.

FRANCOIS
Who did this to you?!

EX-WIFE
She can't speak now. Leave her
alone.

Louise, with a tear-stained face, looks away distantly.

FRANCOIS (V.O.)
But Louise told me after all.

INT. HOSPITAL WARD - DAY

Louise is on the bed, Francois is next to her. She whispers something into his ear. A helpless expression on his face.

FRANCOIS (V.O.)
She named her offender's name -
Paul. It was him. He raped her and
forced her to keep silent with
threats. I was shocked.

INT. IN THE CAR - DAY

An angry Francois is yelling wildly and hitting the wheel with his hands.

INT. FRANCOIS' APARTMENT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Francois is still staring ahead:

FRANCOIS
Despite the fact that she was able
to talk again, she didn't feel
better. So I insisted that Louise
must be placed in an asylum, for
her sake. As for me, I started
planning how to take revenge on
Paul. Yes, the lawsuit is not
enough for him. I had no right to
let him get away with that.

MARIA
It was you.

INT. PAUL'S STUDIO. UPPER FLOOR - NIGHT

A dim light. Paul is painting Maria's portrait. The palette and the brush are in his hands.

We hear something from the Rigoletto opera playing. The doorbell rings downstairs.

PAUL

Shit. Who the hell is this again?

He puts down his brush and palette, then covers the canvas with a white fabric and leaves.

INT. PAUL'S STUDIO. GROUND FLOOR - NIGHT

Paul goes to the door, standing a little to the side of it, holding the gun behind his back - he's ready for any tricks:

PAUL

Who's there?

A beat.

MALE VOICE

(outside the door)

It's me.

Paul opens the door - it's Francois.

OUTSIDE - Paul looks at him in surprise:

PAUL

Francois?

FRANCOIS

Can I come in?

PAUL

Yeah, sure.

Francois enters the living room. Paul hides the gun behind his back.

PAUL

I wasn't expecting you. Something's wrong?

FRANCOIS

I missed you.

INT. PAUL'S STUDIO. UPPER FLOOR - NIGHT

Paul and Francois enter the studio.

PAUL

I thought it was over. You don't answer my calls anymore.

FRANCOIS

I needed time. I hope you're glad to see me.

PAUL

Of course. It's just a little strange that you thought of me.

FRANCOIS

Spare me your whining, please. I just want your black ass.

PAUL

(smiles)

That's my boy.

FRANCOIS

(looks around)

Are you alone?

PAUL

Yes. Can you believe some moron came to me tonight? He made a scandal. I kicked him out. But he managed to spoil my mood anyway. I hope you'll make me feel good again.

He gropes Francois' face in his hands, but Francois steps aside.

PAUL

No, something's definitely wrong. Do you have work problems?

FRANCOIS

I always have work problems, you know.

PAUL

Okay, you can pour yourself a drink at the bar, and I'll take a shower.

He wants to leave.

FRANCOIS

Paul.

PAUL

Yes?

FRANCOIS

I heard you're dating a girl.

PAUL

Yep. What was I supposed to do? You left me. Don't be mad. I have nothing serious with her. I'll leave her tomorrow, and we'll start all over again.

Paul comes close to Francois, puts his arms on his shoulders. He looks at his face, smiling:

PAUL

Your stubble suits you well.
(runs his finger along his cheek)

I know what's on your mind. You're thinking - how the hell did I end up with this mean motherfucker? Do I really have to cover his ass forever?

Paul keeps watching his face:

PAUL

Sorry, it's not good to talk about this now.

FRANCOIS' RIGHT HAND. The hunting knife is protruding from his sleeve...

Francois leans into Paul's right ear and whispers:

FRANCOIS

This is for Louise.

Paul frowns.

Francois stabs Paul's stomach...

Paul opens his mouth and eyes wide. He makes a strangled wheeze...

THE BLOOD pours onto the floor...

Paul staggers away from Francois, looks at his bloody hand, then at his stomach. He can't believe that he's dying.

Francois walks up to Paul and stabs him in the stomach again! Then again! Once more! And again! Paul backs away to the elephant. He leans on it for a second, smearing it with his blood, then falls near the wall.

FRANCOIS
For my Louise.

Paul is bleeding. Convulsions shake his body. A beat.

Francois watches dying Paul with crazed eyes, not moving.

Suddenly Rigoletto's aria "Cortigiani, vil razza dannata" plays loudly. Francois flinches at the first sounds and comes back to his senses. He looks at his bloody knife. Then he looks at the floor, sees that he's standing in a puddle of blood. He takes off his shoes and socks. He wipes the bloody footprints with his socks, and walks away, clutching his shoes to his chest.

PAUL'S SWEATY FACE. His eyes and mouth are open. He's wheezing faintly.

EXT. ALLEYWAY NEAR PAUL'S STUDIO - NIGHT

Francois exits the studio. He glances around and runs barefoot down the alley, clutching his shoes in his hands.

INT. FRANCOIS' APARTMENT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Francois shakes his head, regains his composure, and looks at Maria:

FRANCOIS
And the next day, you found his body. Then I got information on you and your husband. It was quite surprising when he told me that he'd been at Paul's studio that night before I arrived.

MARIA
How did you plant the knife?

INT. MV HOUSE. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Francois is sitting in a chair. Maria is seated opposite him on the couch.

FRANCOIS
Well, may I invite you to the police station?

MARIA
Okay. But I need to change.

She gets off the couch and leaves.

FRANCOIS' POV - Maria enters the bedroom and closes the door. Francois quickly looks around the living room, then takes out a leather glove from his pocket, puts it on, and retrieves a bloody knife from his jacket. He throws it under the couch.

FRANCOIS (V.O.)
That's it. That's simple.

INT. MV HOUSE. NEAR THE DOOR - MORNING

Francois watches his reflection in the mirror on the wall, probably checking if it's time to shave.

MARIA (O.S.)
I'm ready.

Maria approaches him, dressed in a light dress. He smiles sweetly at her, opens the door for her, and lets her leave the house first.

FRANCOIS (V.O.)
Honestly, anyone in this city could have killed Paul, but your husband got himself caught. He left the gun at Paul's with his fingerprints. So I didn't miss my chance.

INT. FRANCOIS' APARTMENT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Scared, Maria looks at Francois:

MARIA
And what are you going to do to me?

FRANCOIS
Nothing. You're going back to Russia and forgetting everything. Your husband is going to jail. You didn't love him anyway, so you don't care. Don't worry about the trial and evidence - those are my problems.

MARIA
(in Russian)
Oh God.

FRANCOIS

I'm really sorry that I killed your man. But Paul deserved to pay.

(beat)

Come on, we need to get to the airport.

MARIA

What?

FRANCOIS

You have to leave France today. I got you a ticket and passport in a different name.

Maria can't believe her ears.

FRANCOIS

The yacht exploded this morning. There are a few women dead. The bodies are now being identified. Maria Rostova will be one of them. Of course, you'll never be able to return to France again. I'm sorry, but it's the only way. Hurry up, you have a flight soon.

EXT. IN THE CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Francois and Maria are in the car.

FRANCOIS

Tell me, who were you running away from when you found Paul?

MARIA

From nobody.

FRANCOIS

Come on, it doesn't matter anymore. I'm just curious.

MARIA

We're not going to the airport, right?

A beat.

FRANCOIS

We have to go somewhere first.

Maria looks suspiciously at him.

EXT. PORT - DAY

A panorama of the commercial port.

Francois' car enters the industrial part of the port. There are a lot of colorful containers here. Then...

The car moves along a 'corridor' of containers.

EXT. IN THE CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Maria looks around.

OUTSIDE - The car stops near a large open container.

FRANCOIS (O.S.)
Here we are.

EXT. PORT. AT THE CONTAINER - DAY

Francois and Maria are standing near a large open container. She looks around.

MARIA
What's going on?

FRANCOIS
I want to show you something.
(nods at the container)

MARIA
What is it?

FRANCOIS
Come and see.

She backs away in fright.

MARIA
I won't.

FRANCOIS
Let's not complicate things.

He takes out a gun from his jacket and points it at her.

FRANCOIS
Sorry, I lied. You won't be going
back to Russia. Get in.

He waves the gun's barrel towards the container. She reluctantly goes inside.

INT. PORT. INSIDE THE CONTAINER - DAY

It's a big cargo container, rusty inside. It's pretty dark in here, with many boxes scattered around. Maria keeps moving deeper into the container. Francois holds her at gunpoint and walks after her. She turns around:

MARIA

What a bastard you are. You told me your shit yourself, and now you're gonna kill me?

Francois takes out a silencer, screws it onto the gun.

FRANCOIS

I really wanted to let you go, but the yacht incident gave me a better idea. Besides, I just poured my heart out. And now I feel relief. Looks like therapists are not lying.

(aims the gun at Maria
like he means it)

You have a talent for getting into trouble.

MARIA

I knew Louise. I've met her before.

FRANCOIS

What?

MARIA

I recognized her from the photo in your album. I knew her.

FRANCOIS

What are you talking about? How could you know her?

MARIA

We met at Monsieur Louis' club. It's a private club for special guests. Me, Louise, and Paul were there. I know where she got those scratches from.

FRANCOIS

Paul did it.

MARIA

No, not him. I'll tell you the truth about her.

FRANCOIS

(angrily)

What the fucking truth can you tell
me about my daughter, bitch?!

(pulls the gun's hammer
back)

It was Paul!

MARIA

She has a birthmark above her navel
and a mole on her right shoulder
blade.

(beat)

If you want to know who left those
scratches on her, then you should
listen to me. Or you can kill me
right now, but then you won't know
the truth.

Francois looks furious, piercing Maria with his eyes.

EXT. CASTLE. COURTYARD - NIGHT

The familiar snow-white Porsche with a black leather roof
drives into the courtyard of a huge castle.

IN THE CAR - Paul is driving, Maria is nearby. She's wearing
a black wig with long hair and straight bangs (it's hard to
tell that it's her at first sight).

PAUL

May the gates of Hell unfold.

OUTSIDE - Paul and Maria get out of the Porsche. Maria looks
at the castle...

A HUGE CASTLE. Electronic music is playing somewhere inside.

INT. CASTLE. HALL - NIGHT

Paul walks Maria by the hand through a crowd of half-naked
people. She looks around.

A NAKED GIRL is tied to a pole. A big man with a gray beard,
wearing a leather mask, whips her hard. The girl moans in
pain and pleasure.

Maria looks up...

Above, there are a few suspended male and female bodies. The
hooks are threaded directly into their skin.

MARIA
I like this place.

PAUL
Look, over there.
(nods to the side)

BISEXUAL ORGY. People are enjoying each other.

MARIA
Can we join too?

PAUL
Maybe later. There will be a
performance soon.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
There you are!

Louis, dressed all in leather, sweetly smiles. Louise is next to him, wearing a white dress and pigtails with bows.

LOUIS
You're almost late again, nasty
criminal.
(looks at Maria)
Don't be rude. Introduce Louis to
your lady.

PAUL
This is Maria, my muse.

LOUIS
Maria, may Louis have your hand,
please?

She gives her hand to him, and he kisses it.

LOUIS
This is Louis himself. The devil in
flesh.

MARIA
Nice to meet you.

LOUIS
It's very nice to meet you too.
(looks at Louise)
And this is Louise. A lovely,
charming child.

Louise holds out her hand to Maria and smiles affably.

LOUISE
 Good evening. Have you, like, come
 to see my performance?

Maria smiles and shakes her hand.

LOUIS
 (to Louise)
 Of course, honey. We're all here
 for you.

PAUL
 How are you doing', kid?

LOUISE
 (briskly)
 Super great!

LOUIS
 (laughs)
 Isn't it charming? "Super great".
 Come, come. It's time to take your
 seats.

The company leaves.

THE VIEW FROM ABOVE - a huge hall packed with naked and half-naked people. The atmosphere of bacchanalia.

INT. CASTLE. STONE HALLWAY - NIGHT

It's dark here. Torches are burning on the walls. Paul, Maria, Louis, and Louise are walking down the old stone hallway. Maria looks around, uncomfortable. Louise hugs Louis' shoulder, lost in her own rainbow world. They approach an old wooden door, with two guards in black suits next to it. The guards open the door.

LOUIS
 Almost there.

INT. CASTLE. BASEMENT - NIGHT

A large stone room with a round ceiling, likely a former torture chamber from centuries ago.

LOUIS
 (to Louise)
 Get ready.

LOUISE
 Yes, my master.

She bows and runs away.

LOUIS
Now, follow Louis.

He leads the way, with Maria and Paul following behind...

The spacious basement-like room comes into view. Office chairs are arranged in a semicircle in the center, forming a parterre. Sharp-dressed men sit on these chairs - they look different from the people upstairs. Spotlights illuminate the area, and two video cameras stand in the center, resembling a photo studio. Louis, Paul, and Maria approach the chairs.

LOUIS
Please, have a seat.

PAUL
Do you have strawberry ice cream?

LOUIS
Certainly. And what about you, young lady?

MARIA
No, thanks. Don't be bothered please.

LOUIS
Let Louis take care of you.

MARIA
Thank you, I'm fine.

LOUIS
Then enjoy the show.

He leaves.

MARIA
Why does he talk about himself in the third person?

PAUL
It's a long story.

A naked female waiter with a leather mask hands Paul a glass of ice cream.

PAUL
Merci.

INT. CASTLE. BASEMENT - NIGHT

Maria applies lipstick while seated in the office chair.
Louis clears her throat into the microphone.

PAUL

Showtime.

Louis stands holding a microphone, with a spotlight on him.

LOUIS

Ladies and gentlemen, Louis is delighted to welcome you here as his guests. You know how much Louis values our community, our so-called union of extravaganza lovers. And Louis is very happy that you come here every time. Tonight, Louis will give you another unforgettable exclusive that you won't see anywhere else, and of course, you won't be disappointed.

(to side)

Hey, Louise!

She rushes up to Louis, barefoot and wearing the same dress. She has bright red lipstick on her lips, smiling wide and strange.

LOUIS

Let me introduce Louise. This human-thing is ready to entertain you.

(grabs her cheeks)

You're ready, aren't you, bitch?

LOUISE

Yes, my master.

LOUIS

You'd better be.

He releases his grip and walks away. She remains alone in the spotlights.

LOUISE

Like, hello. My name is Louise.
Sorry, I'm a little shy, like...
(bows to audience)

Three guards in military uniforms step up to her with three black dogs on leashes, Great Danes. Louise pets the dogs and kneels down.

Maria watches her intently...

The dogs wag their tails, licking Louise's face. She laughs. Then...

PAUL watches Louise with the dogs, motionless. Maria spreads her legs and starts to masturbate while watching the "performance." We hear Louise's moans, shallow breathing, and the dogs' whining off-screen.

Suddenly, Paul grabs Maria's neck and whispers in her ear, then releases her. She slides off the chair, removes the black wig, revealing white hair. She crawls on all fours toward Louise (towards the camera). Maria sticks out her tongue like a dog...

Louis claps his hands aside...

Paul watches the "performance" completely amazed.

MARIA (V.O.)

That's how she got those scratches.

INT. PORT. INSIDE THE CONTAINER - DAY

Francois is stunned; the story has shaken him. He can barely hold onto his gun.

MARIA

She's been there many times. She loved doing that. I've never seen any girl happier than Louise in those moments. She enjoyed every second.

SUBLIMINAL AD (less than 1 sec.): Naked Louise and Maria face each other on all fours.

FRANCOIS

No, no way... but Paul? She told me.

Maria looks down to the side...

MARIA'S POV - a large monkey wrench rests on a box.

MARIA

Louise was jealous of daddy for Paul. She wanted to get rid of him. She knew you would kill him.

FRANCOIS

Shut up!

Suddenly, she strikes Francois' hand with the monkey wrench! He drops the gun. She strikes him again, on his head! Francois falls down. Maria picks up the gun and aims it at Francois. He slowly rises up, blood running down from a cut on his forehead.

FRANCOIS

Sluts... you're all fucking
sluts... be cursed you, bi...

Three silent bullets hit Francois in the chest. He falls down dead.

Maria stands with a gun in her hand. A thin stream of smoke comes out of the silencer...

Francois lies face down in a tiny puddle of blood.

EXT. PORT. BRIDGE - DAY

Maria walks along the handrails on the bridge. The warm breeze tousles her hair. She holds a gun in her hand. She looks down from the bridge, leaning on the handrails, then drops the gun into the water.

INT. JACQUES' APARTMENT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Geneva smokes a cigarette at the window. The doorbell rings.

She opens the door - it's Maria. Geneva walks back. Maria enters the living room.

GENEVA

He knew you would come.

MARIA

Where is he?

GENEVA

Bedroom.

INT. JACQUES' APARTMENT. BEDROOM - DAY

Maria enters the bedroom and freezes, terrified...

Jacques lies on the bed with his arms folded on his chest. There is a gunshot wound in his forehead. His long black hair is slightly wet.

MARIA
(in Russian)
Oh, my God!

GENEVA
I'm sorry, but I couldn't let him
go.

MARIA
(begins to cry)
Why?

GENEVA
He was planning to run away with
his brother. He wanted to take you
with him and dump me. It was the
only way to stop him.

Maria sits on the floor, sobbing.

GENEVA
I'm tired of sharing him with
others. You have to understand me.
(sits beside Maria, hugs
her)
You see, it was his fault. He
shouldn't have fallen in love with
you. He's mine, and only mine. Thus
it was and ever shall be.

DEAD JACQUES. We see his humble face with a hole in his
forehead. He resembles Jesus.

INT. JACQUES' APARTMENT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Geneva approaches the table and flicks the ash into the
ashtray. The revolver lies nearby.

Maria emerges from the bedroom.

GENEVA
You'd better go. I called the
police. They'll be here soon.

She walks up to Maria and hugs her.

GENEVA
Sorry, girl. I'm sorry I took him
away from you, but it's better this
way. For all of us.
(MORE)

GENEVA (CONT'D)
(kisses her on the
forehead)

Maria continues crying.

GENEVA
All right, that's enough. You have
to go.

EXT. OUTSIDE JACQUES' APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Maria exits the building and descends the stairs. Anton approaches her. He regards her suspiciously and passes by. Maria turns around as Anton enters the building.

INT. JACQUES' APARTMENT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Anton enters the living room, his expression tense as always.

ANTON
Jacques, hurry up.

Geneva stands aside, visibly startled - she had mistaken Anton for the police.

INT. JACQUES' APARTMENT. BEDROOM - DAY

Anton strides into the bedroom.

ANTON
Jacques? Everything's ready.
They're waiting for us.

A beat. His expression changes drastically.

ANTON
No. No. No!

He rushes to Jacques, gripping him by the head, overcome with sobs.

Geneva covers her face with her hands and leans against the wall, tears streaming down her face.

Anton continues to sob deeply, his anguish palpable.

INT. JACQUES' APARTMENT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Geneva collapses to the floor, she sobs...

Anton emerges from the bedroom, his eyes filled with fury as he glares at Geneva.

She slowly rises from the floor, realizing her fate is sealed.

Anton retrieves a gun and fires two shots at Geneva, and she collapses against the wall. At this moment two police officers burst into the room and apprehend Anton, pinning him to the ground. They handcuff him. Geneva's lifeless body lies nearby.

EXT. OUTSIDE JACQUES' APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Two police officers escort Anton out of the building, his hands restrained in handcuffs. They lead him to a waiting police car. As they move, Anton notices something ahead...

Maria stands across the street on the sidewalk, watching him intently...

Anton is getting put in the car. He stares at Maria through the glass of the door. The car leaves the screen frame.

INT. FRANCOIS' APARTMENT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Meanwhile, Ludovicus the cat washes his paw on the couch.

EXT. PORT. AT THE CONTAINER - DAY

Two workers stand at the container and argue, poking at papers. Then one of them gives up and leaves. The other worker closes the container...

Francois' body is devoured by a black shadow inside the container. The sound of the rusty metal door echoes.

The worker gives a thumbs-up to the crane operator somewhere up there.

EXT. PORT - DAY

The crane loads the container onto the large merchant vessel.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Maria walks slowly along the sidewalk in the pouring rain. Some people enjoy the long-awaited rain, but some are running, trying to hide.

MARIA (V.O.)
That's the end of the story.

INT. ROOM - DAY

We return to the room from the very first scene. The dictaphone is hissing. Next to it is an ashtray with smoking cigarette butts.

Maria is at the table in prison clothes, with handcuffs. Opposite her is the ATTORNEY, in his 50s, a neat-looking man. A beat.

ATTORNEY
The police found Francois' body. In Singapore.

MARIA
He followed me. He gathered information on anyone who knew Paul, including me. He knew I was cheating on Vladimir and wanted to frame him for murder.

ATTORNEY
So you're saying that Francois planned the whole thing in advance?

MARIA
Yes, I'm sure. Will they set my husband free now? He's innocent.

ATTORNEY
Well, I'll deliver your testimony to the prosecutor, don't worry.

MARIA
Merci.

ATTORNEY
And one more thing. Anton Duchamp claims that you killed his brother...

MARIA
(interrupts)
I didn't kill Jacques. I've told you.

ATTORNEY
Yes, but according to your words, you were in the wrong place at the wrong time, again. Twice.

MARIA

Yes. It's fate.

ATTORNEY

Hmm, that's strange. By the way, I have submitted your request for an abortion to the court. I hope they will approve your request soon.

Maria lowers her eyes. A beat.

MARIA

Yesterday I was talking to my father on the phone, and the connection was cut off accidentally. I cried all night, I was scared I'd never hear his voice again. Please tell him that I love him so much.

ATTORNEY

Sure. I'll deliver that to him.

Maria starts to cry. She's crying harder and harder:

MARIA

(in Russian)
Daddy... daddy...

THE DICTAPHONE is on the screen again.

ATTORNEY (O.S.)

Well, I think that's enough.

His finger pushes the 'stop' button. The screen sharply goes black.

The Paganini's sonata in E Minor, Op. 3, 6 starts to play off screen.

"FIN"

The credits.