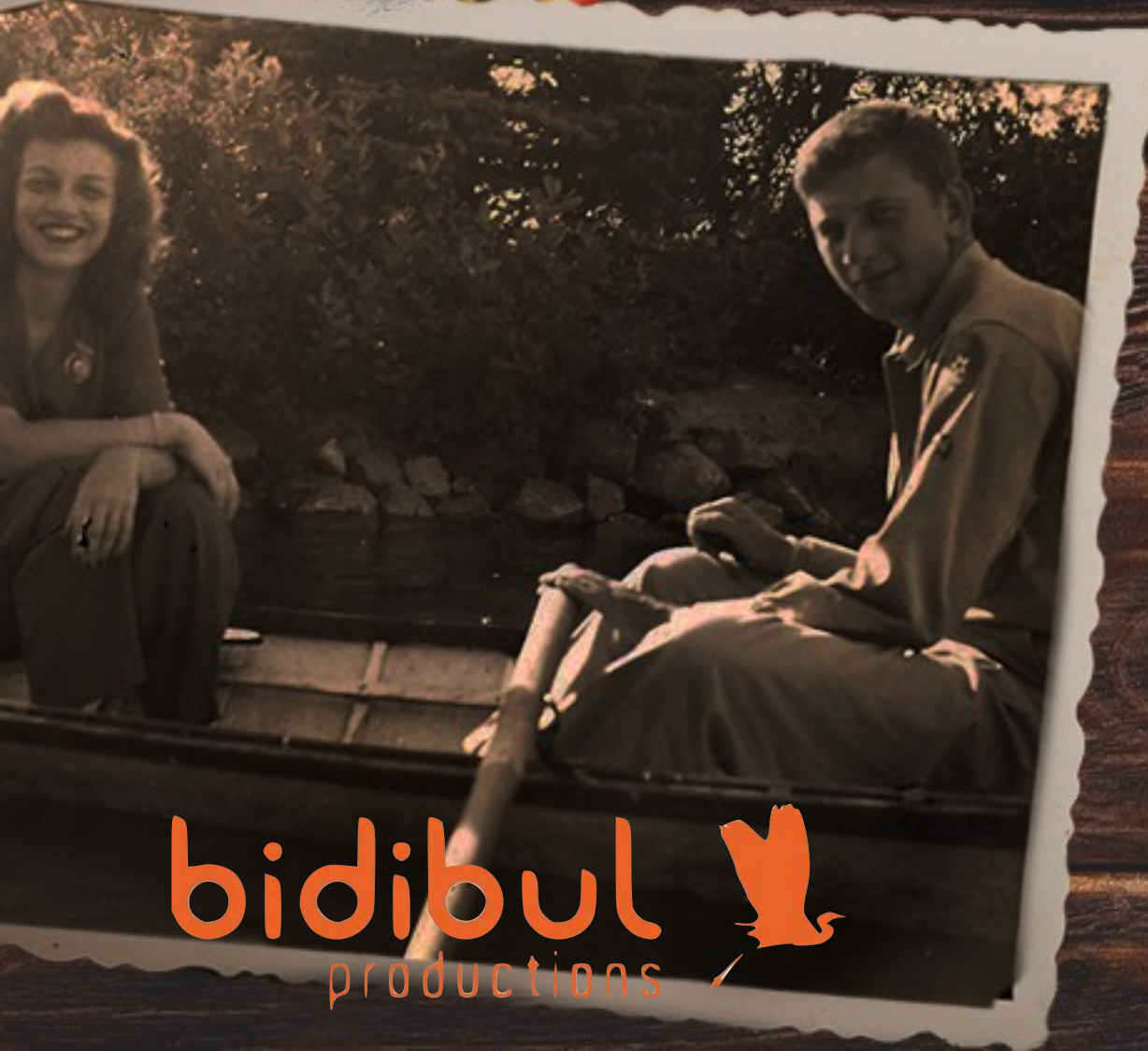




John MAZOUZ

MR. BLAKE
AT YOUR SERVICE!

Complètement
cramé!



france.tv distribution



ABOUT

Mr. BLAKE AT YOUR SERVICE!
(COMPLÈTEMENT CRAMÉ !)

DIRECTOR

Gilles Legardinier

SCREENPLAY

Gilles Legardinier & Christel Henon

Based on a best-selling novel by Gilles Legardinier “Complètement Cramé !” translated into 17 languages

CAST

JOHN MALKOVICH

FANNY ARDANT

EMILIE DEQUENNE

PRODUCERS

Bidibul Productions (Luxembourg)

Superprod (France)

SHOOTING

February-March 2022

GENRE

Comedy, Feel good movie

ABOUT THE WRITER



Gilles Legardinier

Writer

Almost 6.5 million books sold
in France, Switzerland, Belgium and Canada

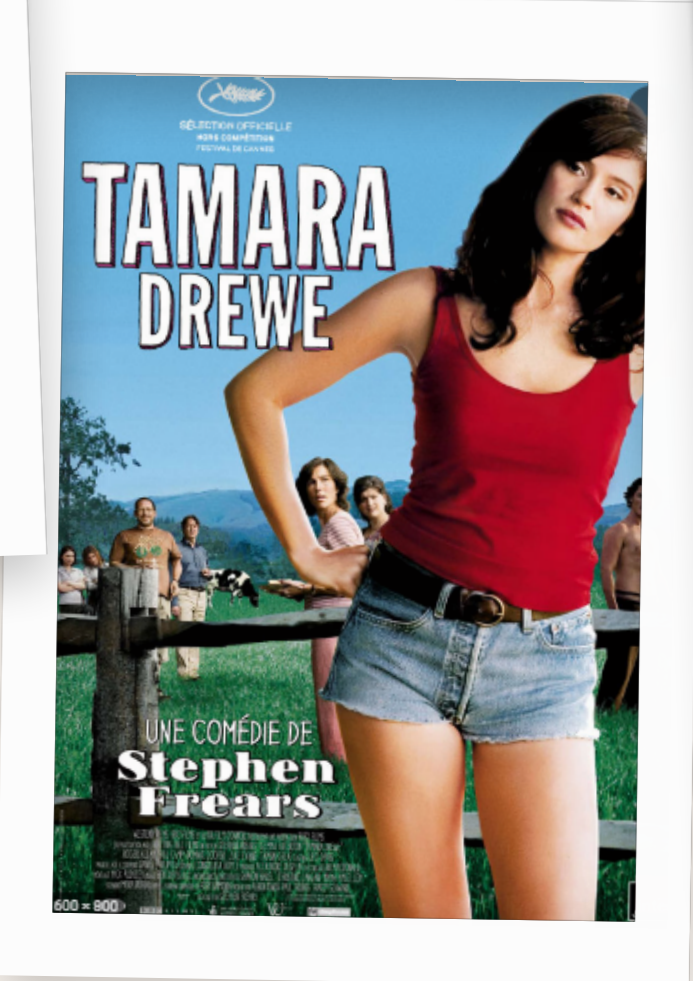
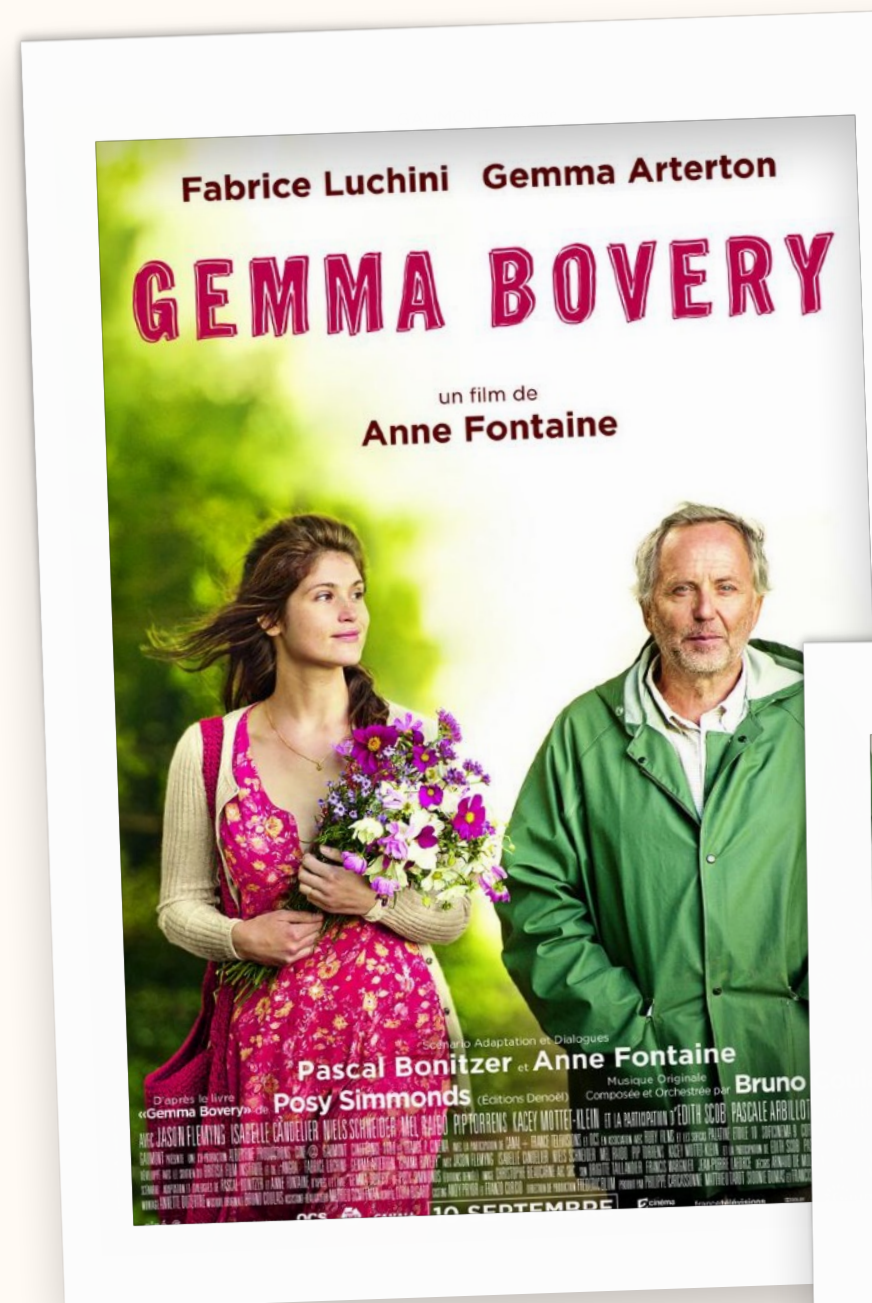


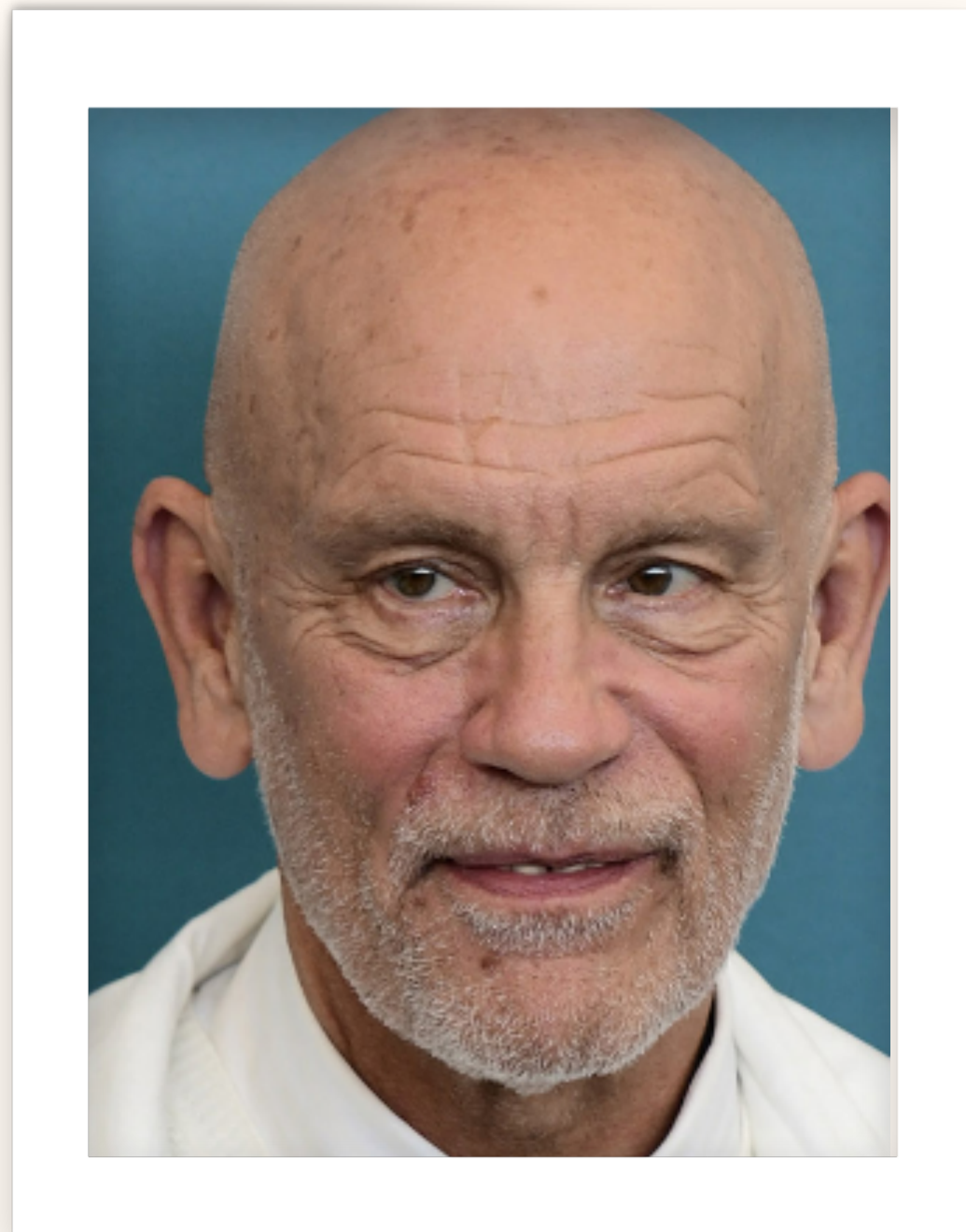
Gilles Legardinier is one of France's most read authors; he's also a screenwriter, a producer and a director. In everything he does, he has always strived to create emotions people can relate to and share.

Having worked on many movie sets internationally, he now devotes his time to writing novels (all of which are best-sellers) and to helping big film studios with their communication needs as well as acting as a script consultant. At home in an array of literary genres, he has made his mark in, among others, the world of thrillers, thanks to *L'Exil des Anges* (Prix SNCF award for crime thrillers in 2010) and *Nous étions les hommes* (2011); in the area of comedy, he has enjoyed huge success in France and abroad, with *Demain j'arrête!* (best-selling French novel in 2011), *Complètement cramé!* (2012), *Et soudain tout change* (2013), *Ça peut pas rater!* (2014) and *Quelqu'un pour qui trembler* (2015). A blend of adventure, historical thriller and comedy, *Le premier miracle* (2017) was a new phase in his career. This was followed by another comedy, *Une fois dans ma vie* (2018).

Gilles Legardinier also teamed up with actress Mimie Mathy to pen a delightful essay titled *Vaut-il mieux être toute petite ou abandonné à la naissance?* (2017). He has also written a sentimental comedy, *Comme une ombre*, with his wife Pascale (2018).

NEWCOMES



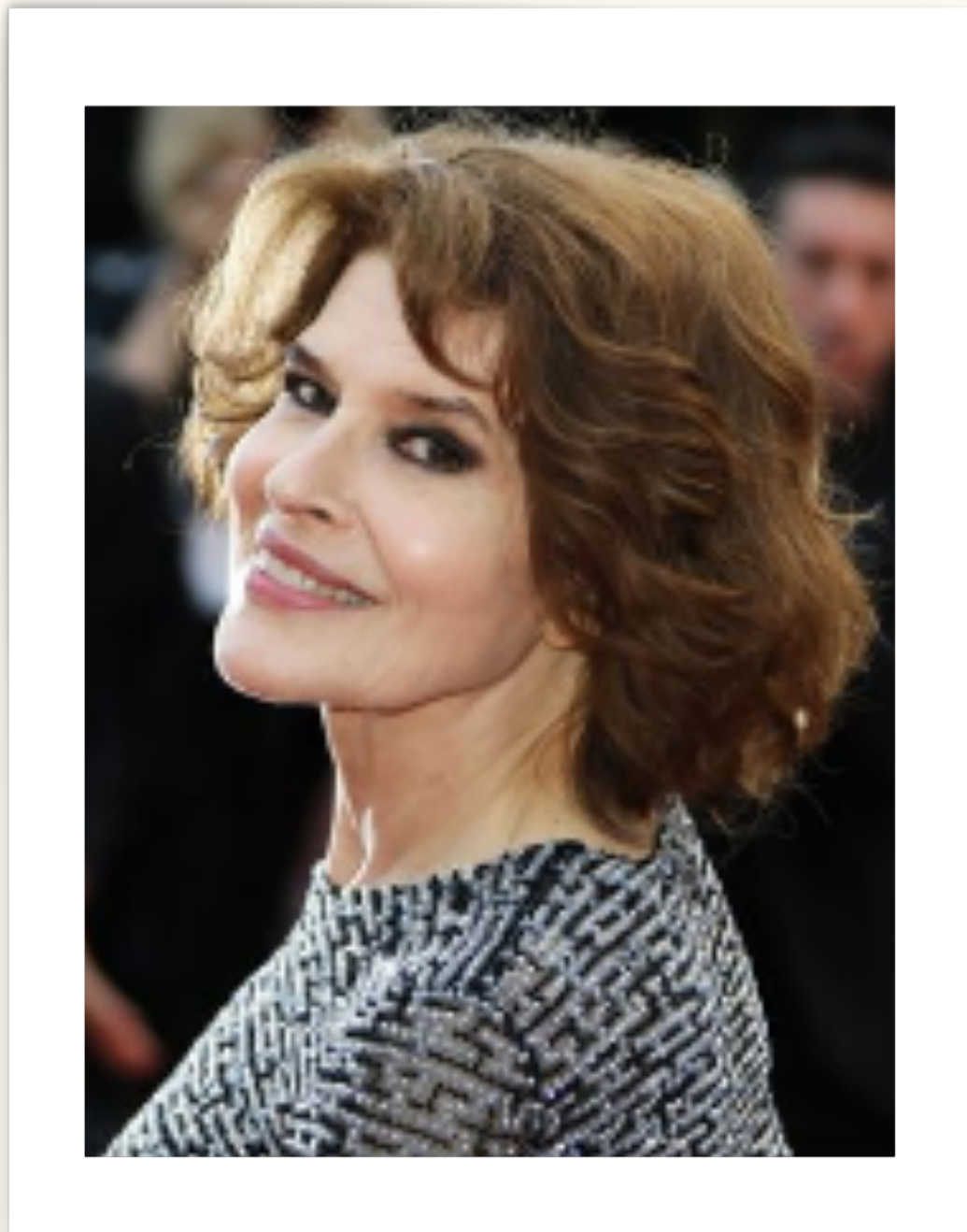


CONFIRMED

John Malkovich as *Andrew Blake*

Famous British businessman Andrew Blake has built his offbeat life and business on human values. This sexagenarian is honest, willingly witty, circumspect and determined, with the signature British humor and stiff upper lip. Ever since he lost his wife Diane and his daughter Sarah moved to the other side of the world, he has lost all will to live. Instead, he simply wants to retreat into the memory of his happy past. But this pilgrimage to the manor takes him on a whole different path.

Dangerous Liaisons
Red
In the line of fire
Space force
Burn after reading
Being John Malkovich

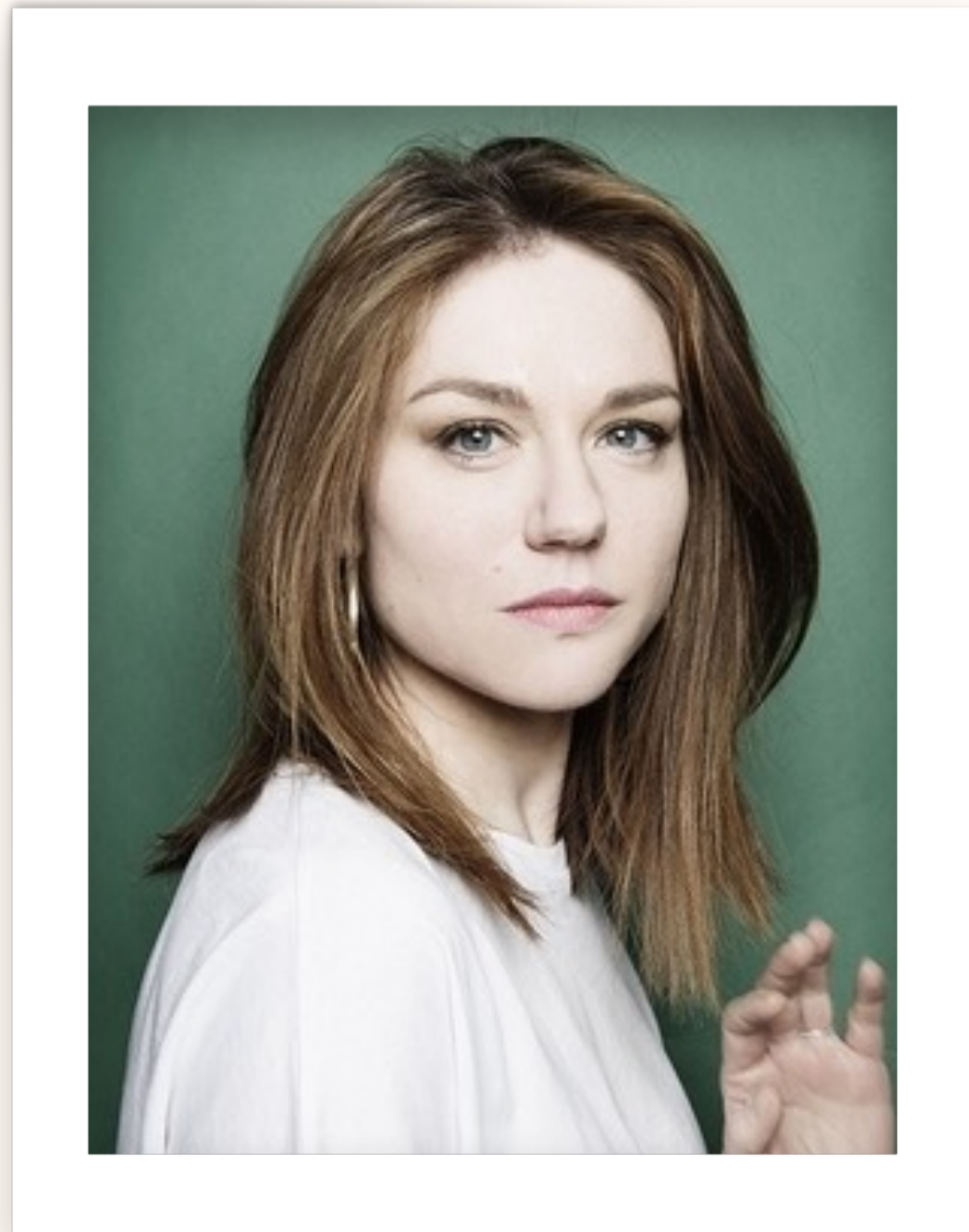


CONFIRMED

Fanny Ardant as *Nathalie Beauvillier*

Owner of the manor that bears her name, Nathalie Beauvillier misses her late husband excruciatingly. This mysterious and charismatic woman is trying to keep up with the times in order to hold onto the estate. Apparently aloof at first sight, she is extremely sensitive and generous deep down. Her pride and fears prevent her from asking for help but she certainly appreciates the kindness she receives from her larger than life employees.

8 women
La Belle Epoque
Lola Pater
La Grande Bellezza
Bright Days Ahead



CONFIRMED

Emilie Dequenne as *Odile*

Odile is a very strong-willed but undeniably charming woman. She's an excellent cook but her promising career mysteriously took an unexpected turn. Unfailingly loyal to Mrs. Beauvillier, she sees the manor as her refuge; which is why she doesn't take kindly to new arrivals. This very bossy head of the kitchen and owner of Mephisto the cat unexpectedly turns out to be a very discerning ally.

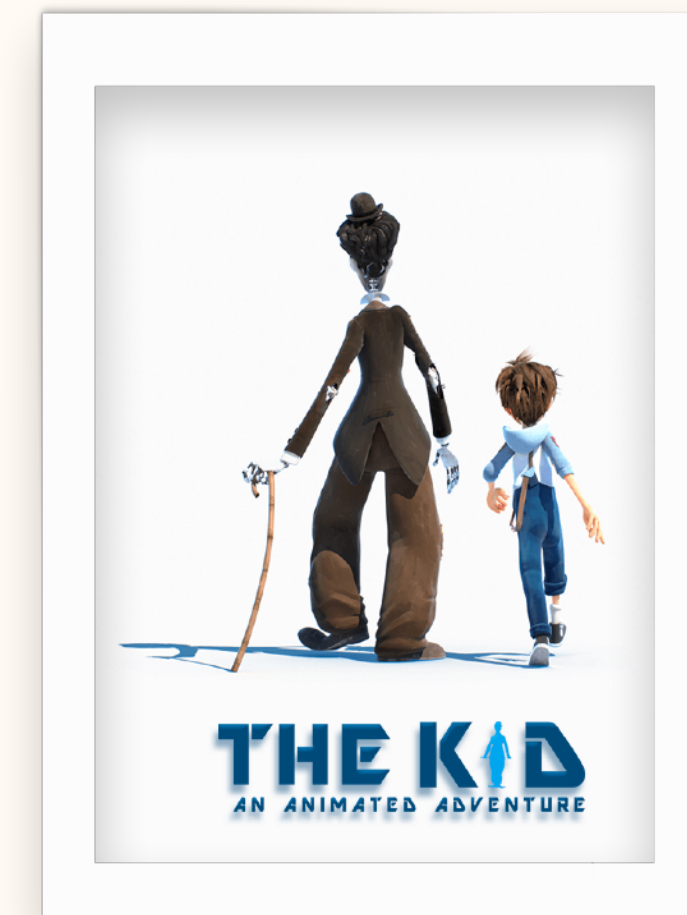
Love Affair(s)
See you up there
Our Children
This is our land
Rosetta

PRODUCTIONS



bidibul productions 

SUPERPROD
FILMS



COMPLÈTEMENT CRAMÉ !

from Gilles Legardinier's best-selling novel

Script by
Gilles Legardinier and Christel Henon

Adaptation and dialogue by
Gilles Legardinier and Christel Henon

1 INT EVENING - PALACE RECEPTION ROOM - LONDON

In the large reception room of a London palace, a crooner (Michael Bubl , *For Once In My Life*) is singing with an orchestra in front of an audience of guests in evening dress.

2 INT EVENING - PALACE LOBBY - LONDON

RICHARD WARD is on his phone in the lobby of the palace. He leaves a voicemail.

WARD

Andrew! Pick up, please... I've left you ten messages already!

3 INT EVENING - BLAKE'S APARTMENT - LONDON

We make out **ANDREW BLAKE**'s profile in the half-light of a plush London apartment. He is watching a holiday video on a computer screen. His phone vibrates next to him, but he takes no notice.

In the video, we see a very young woman standing outside a mansion. She is wearing a summer dress and playing with her large hat. Her laughter seems to merge with unintelligible snippets of conversation. We see a younger Blake appear on screen, cavorting back to her after setting up the camera. They look blissfully happy.

4 INT EVENING - BLAKE'S APARTMENT - LONDON

Blake's phone vibrates again. He takes the call this time, hands-free while he grabs his glass of whisky.

5 INT EVENING - PALACE LOBBY / BLAKE'S APARTMENT - LONDON

Under pressure, Ward refrains from swearing.

WARD

Jeez, there you are at last... I've been calling you for an hour!

BLAKE

Hi, Richard.

WARD
Everybody's waiting for you! What's going on?
Where are you?

BLAKE
Home. I'm just not coming. You know I'm not into
ceremonies.

WARD
But this is not just any old ceremony, it's YOUR
ceremony!

6 INT EVENING - PALACE RECEPTION ROOM - LONDON

As the audience claps, the music stops and a young host takes
the floor.

HOST
Dear friends, the moment we have all been waiting
for has come. The man we are gathered here to
celebrate deserves so much more than the
prestigious award he is about to receive. His
career is as remarkable as his character. You have
all heard of him, even if many of you have never
met him because he does not attend our weekend
events...

Laughter erupts in the room.

7 INT EVENING - PALACE LOBBY / BLAKE'S APARTMENT - LONDON

WARD
Do you even realise what I had to do to get you
that award?

BLAKE
What you do with your body is none of my business.

We hear the distant voice of the host from the lobby.

8 INT EVENING - PALACE RECEPTION ROOM - LONDON

The audience is listening intently.

HOST
He has successfully achieved the highest level of
industrial innovation while upholding humane work

ethics. Several of his staff are here with us tonight.

Applause.

9 INT EVENING - PALACE LOBBY / BLAKE'S APARTMENT - LONDON

Ward is seething.

WARD

Do you realise the situation you're putting me in?

Blake stands up. He speaks in a calm voice.

BLAKE

You've put yourself in it, big boy. Look, I know you mean well, but I couldn't care less about plastic trophies and you know it. What am I gonna get out of it, huh? A colonoscopy?

WARD(threatening)

You serious? You're not coming?

BLAKE

Thank everyone for me, but nah, I'm not setting foot in there.

WARD

I swear to you that if--

BLAKE(interrupts him)

I love it when you threaten me. What are you gonna do, huh? Thrash me at golf? I don't give a damn. Make me eat another one of your wife's culinary delights? I'm immune to them by now.

WARD

You won't get away with this.

Blake goes to a window, gazes absentmindedly at the city outside.

BLAKE

If that's any consolation to you, life's not letting me get away with anything, my friend.

He hangs up. Ward stares blankly at his phone. Thunderous applause resounds in the distance as the host announces:

HOST(off)

Please give a warm welcome to Mr Andrew Blake!

On Ward, at a loss.

10 INT DAY - BLAKE'S APARTMENT - OPENING CREDITS

The song *Talk You Down* by The Script starts to play. High-angle shot of a suitcase, into which Blake is packing his things. Superimposed credits.

On Blake, folding his clothes into a neat pile in the suitcase. He goes to pack a pair of swim trunks, changes his mind, picks up a framed photograph of a mansion in front of which are standing the two young people we saw in the video earlier.

He also packs a flask of whisky and an old stuffed kangaroo toy. He adds a few more things that give us some insight into his character. He hesitates a moment, then replaces the whisky with a book.

11 EXT DAY - LONDON STREET

The music plays on. Blake comes out of his apartment, glances back at the windows one last time.

A beeping horn startles him. He turns around to see Ward at the wheel of his car, waving at him. Ward pulls over and gets out.

WARD

Are you going on a trip?

BLAKE

Not exactly.

WARD

You weren't even gonna say goodbye?

BLAKE

I've already said goodbye. And you know where I'm going anyway.

WARD

Jeez, you're as stubborn as a mule...

Will you at least let me take you to the station?

Blake agrees, moved.

12 INT DAY - WARD'S CAR

Ward is driving through London. In the passenger seat, Blake watches the streets whiz by.

WARD

Andrew, I'm worried about you. You know how I feel about your plan. Going there might do you more harm than good.

BLAKE

I can't stay here, and I have nowhere else to go. Diane is gone, Sarah is on the other side of the world, I can't make sense of it all anymore...

WARD

You're still grieving. I cannot imagine how hard it must be for you without Diane. You were such a great couple. But please be careful. Melissa had a look, she couldn't find anything about guest rooms. She couldn't even get a phone number to give them a call. This mansion you want to go to... There's nothing clear about it.

BLAKE

I'll see when I get there.

WARD

Why don't you go visit Sarah in Australia instead?

BLAKE

I don't want to show up out of the blue and be a burden, she has her own life now. The only thing I want is to be back where it all began.

WARD

Listen, I'm sorry if it sounds harsh, but you going there won't bring Diane back. The living should let the ghosts lie.

BLAKE
What am I running after, then?

Ward stops at a traffic light and turns to his friend.

WARD
What about me? Who will I have lunch with at the club now?

Blake smiles sadly.

BLAKE
I'm gonna miss you, too.

WARD
So that's it, you've made up your mind? Go then, if that's what you really want. But please keep your wits about you over there. Don't forget, the French give suppositories to children.

13 EXT EVENING - FOREST ROAD

After a few shots of him travelling, Blake is in France. The day is waning by the time a taxi drops him off at the gate of the Beauvillier estate, in the middle of a forest. The taxi drives away, leaving Blake standing there with his suitcase, looking lost.

The time-worn gate looks impressive. Blake tries the intercom. It's out of order. Peering through the bars, he leans on the gate and realises it's not locked. He hesitates, and decides to push the gate open.

14 EXT EVENING - BEAUVILLIER ESTATE - PARK

Blake walks along a forest path with caution. The vast estate looks poorly maintained. Blake peers around as if looking for something familiar.

A bend in the path reveals the main building, a stately mansion complete with classical-looking fireplaces and pointed roofs. Blake stops dead in his tracks, overwhelmed by resurfacing memories.

15 EXT EVENING - BEAUVILLIER ESTATE

Night is falling. Blake walks up the front steps and pulls the bell chain. The jingling noise echoes in the surrounding woods. A raven croaks.

ODILE speaks through the door.

ODILE
It's late! What do you want?

BLAKE
Hi, I'd like to rent a room. I couldn't make a reservation because there was no--

Odile, a middle-aged woman, opens the door wide. Blake is caught off-guard.

ODILE
A room?

BLAKE
Yes, I saw an ad... but... er... well...

He stammers. Odile hears his accent and eyes him with suspicion.

ODILE
You mean the ad for a job in exchange for a room?

Blake is confused.

BLAKE (hesitating)
Yes, yes, I'd like to get a room...

ODILE (ironic)
And here you are, showing up at all hours, hoping to get the job...

BLAKE
I've come a long way. May I come in, please?

ODILE
You might as well, now you're here. I don't know what we're gonna do with you though. (points him in a direction). Go around that way to the staff entrance at the back. Through the pantry.

She slams the door in his face before he can say anything. Andrew is stunned. As the rain begins to fall, he takes a step back to look at the huge building. Then he goes around to the back, holding his suitcase over his head for shelter.

16 INT NIGHT - BEAUVILLIER ESTATE

Odile rushes up a magnificent staircase to the first floor, yelling:

ODILE
Madame! Madame!

She storms into the anteroom of **NATHALIE BEAUVILLIER**, who gets up from her desk, alerted by the commotion, but looking calm and elegant as always.

NATHALIE
What on earth are you shouting for? I hate it when you do that.

ODILE
Didn't you hear the bell?

NATHALIE
So what if I did? You weren't expecting me to open the door myself, now, were you? Perhaps you'd like me to fix you a cup of chamomile tea, while we're at it?

ODILE
No, it's my job of course, but there's a man downstairs. He said something about a room. I think he's English. (suspicious) Did you advertise the guest rooms online again?

NATHALIE (annoyed)
No, I didn't. You told me not to, remember? You said it would give you too much work. I do wonder who runs this house at times...

ODILE
If he didn't come for your ad, then he must be here for mine...

NATHALIE (offended)
What? How dare you put up an ad when you won't let me do the same!

ODILE
It wasn't really an ad, well, it was only on a small website, just in case...

NATHALIE (angry)
So you won't have guest rooms in here even though I badly need the income, and yet you look to hire a domestic worker knowing full well we can't afford one?

Odile is panicking.

ODILE
It won't cost you a thing, trust me. And we could use this extra help to open your guest rooms for business. Stay in your room, I'll look after everything.

NATHALIE
I had no intention of leaving my room anyway.

Odile vanishes like she came, in a hurry.

17 INT EVENING - KITCHEN

Drenched from the rain, Blake steps into the gorgeous French-style kitchen with its suspended copper pans and imposing gas stove, next to which a magnificent angora cat is lying, nonchalant, gazing at him with disdain. Odile arrives at that moment and comes face to face with Blake.

ODILE
You stop right there!

Blake freezes, confused, one foot raised mid-air.

ODILE
This is my territory. No one sets foot in here without my say-so.

BLAKE
I'm sorry, I just wanted to shelter myself from the rain.

ODILE

All right. But don't do it again. What's your name?

BLAKE

Blake. Andrew Blake.

ODILE

I'm Odile. You can call me madame Odile. It's getting late, I'll show you to your room. We'll talk in the morning. If you work hard, we'll get along.

BLAKE

Understood, madame Odile.

Andrew follows Odile to his room. He realises she is not going to help him with his suitcase. He casts a disappointed glance at the cat.

18 INT NIGHT - TOP FLOOR

A narrow corridor runs along the lengthy attic.

ODILE

It's quiet up here, and you'll have a nice view of the park.

BLAKE (remembering)

Oh yes, the park, it's beautiful.

Odile pushes the door of a tiny, dilapidated attic room. She lets Blake in while she stands on the doorstep.

ODILE

Welcome to your kingdom.

He is a little taken aback by the room.

BLAKE

That's my room?

ODILE

It is. I wasn't going to let you sleep in the stables now, was I? We're not in a Dickens tale here, more like Victor Hugo I'd say. We're good to strangers.

Blake gives her a perplexed look.

ODILE

Tomorrow's your first day, so I'll go easy on you. I'll be expecting you downstairs in the morning, 6:30 sharp.

BLAKE

In guest houses back home, people can--

ODILE (interrupts him)

Are you a night owl or an early bird?

BLAKE

Excuse me?

ODILE

Do you shower in the evening or the morning? We'd better get our timing right or one of us will get a blast of freezing cold water. The plumbing needs a look at on this floor. So?

BLAKE (confused)

Early bird.

ODILE

Good. I'm a night owl myself. Goodnight then.

She closes the door abruptly. Then opens it again.

ODILE

By the way, welcome to the Beauvillier estate.

19 INT EVENING - BLAKE'S ROOM

Alone all of a sudden, Blake lets out a sigh. He takes in the bedding that has seen better days, and cranes his neck upward to try and catch a glimpse of the park through the bull's-eye window. Although he is tall, he only gets to see the treetops in the moonlight.

BLAKE (mimics Odile)

"You'll have a nice view of the park"...

He checks his phone -- no signal.

Turns around and hits his head on a beam.

Resigned, he opens his suitcase. Everything about the place feels cramped, narrow. He somehow manages to squeeze Diane's framed portrait next to the stuffed toy on the tiny bedside table. He looks around. Then, exhausted, he undresses and goes into the old-fashioned bathroom. He comes back into the room and lies down, eyes wide open, alone and lost. The tap is dripping.

20 INT DAY - BLAKE'S ROOM

Somebody's pounding on the door. Blake opens his eyes as Odile walks in. She looks disgruntled.

ODILE
Still in bed? You're late.

Blake sits up at once.

BLAKE
You can't just walk into people's rooms like that.
What if I slept naked?

ODILE
I suppose you'd have caught a cold. Late on your first day. You're off to a bad start.

Blake straightens up again, dishevelled and strung up.

BLAKE
What a lovely, warm welcome! I came here to rest!
You didn't even offer me a piece of stale bread
for dinner last night, zilch. It certainly is some
Zola!

ODILE (taken aback)
You came here to rest?!

He looks at his watch.

BLAKE
Since when do we prevent people from sleeping in
guest houses?

ODILE
Guest houses?

Blake makes an ironic sweeping gesture to indicate the room around him.

BLAKE

Look at this place! How ritzy! My kingdom, huh? You've some nerve saying that to me, a Briton!

Odile's face drops.

ODILE

I see, it's a terrible misunderstanding. I'm sorry. We don't rent out guest rooms here, at least not yet. I thought you came for the job.

BLAKE

What job?

ODILE

I put an ad for a household help, in exchange for room and board to begin with.

Both calm down.

ODILE

I guess you'll be leaving us then. Don't worry, we won't charge you for the night, but you can't stay here.

Blake turns pale.

BLAKE (determined)

I must stay.

ODILE

There's plenty of guest houses around here. Some are very nice and modern... If you want, I'll help you find one.

BLAKE

I want to stay here...

He pauses. Odile goes on.

ODILE

True, you didn't look that young, but you seemed quite personable. You could easily pass for a classy English butler. Anyway...

I'll let you pack your things. Sorry again for the misunderstanding...

Blake stands up.

BLAKE

Please, let me stay here for a while. I need it. I'll pay for it.

ODILE

It's not about money. We're not legally allowed to have you here. There's a lot of paperwork and regulations to navigate first... Welcome to France!

BLAKE

I'm begging you. Please let me stay.

He rummages through his suitcase and hands Odile the picture of the two young people in front of the mansion.

BLAKE

I met the love of my life here. We were young. She was on holidays in this house, and I had been hired as her English teacher for the summer. It was love at first sight. We spent more than forty blissful years together...

She passed away four months ago. We had promised each other we'd come back here someday. My life ended when she died, so I decided to come back here on my own...

Moved, Odile looks at the photo, then at Blake.

ODILE

I'm truly sorry for your loss.

BLAKE

Please let me stay. I'd do anything to live here again.

Odile looks Blake in the eye.

ODILE

Maybe we can work something out...

21 INT DAY - NATHALIE'S STUDY

Blake and Odile are standing outside madame Beauvillier's study.

ODILE (whispering)
Like we said, you let me do the talking...

BLAKE
Sure, whatever, as long as I can stay here, I'm up for any solution. Thank you.

Odile adjusts Blake's bow tie.

BLAKE
Are you sure this is necessary? No one really wears them anymore, even back home...

ODILE
Trust me.

She knocks on the door.

NATHALIE (off)
Come in!

Odile pushes the door open.

ODILE
Good morning, Madame. Let me introduce you to Mr Blake, who is here for a trial period in exchange for bed and board.

Blake is impressed by Madame's natural poise. She too seems to take in his confident demeanour.

She gets up and proffers her hand. Not sure if he's supposed to shake or kiss it, he ends up doing a clumsy mix of both.

ODILE
Mr Blake is English. He has excellent references.

NATHALIE
I have no doubt about it. We will certainly need to rent a lot of guest rooms to afford such a butler. Does he speak our language?

BLAKE
My wife was French, I get by.

Fearing he might say too much, Odile jumps in.

ODILE
I'll show him around and walk him through his duties.

NATHALIE
Great.

She turns to Blake.

NATHALIE
It's an old house, Mr Blake. And I sometimes feel that way too. I don't know why you applied for the job Odile posted, but I must warn you that we don't need someone who lacks the courage to get things done.

22 INT DAY - GROUND FLOOR CORRIDORS

ODILE
See, it worked. But that means you'll have to play along with it.

BLAKE
I'll do my best. I don't mind playing butler.

ODILE
Come this way. We have a lot to go over.

She takes Andrew on a brisk tour of the house, describing each room in a toneless voice like a wearied museum guide. Blake struggles to take it all in but doesn't dare interrupt her.

ODILE (OFF/IN)
I'm the one who cooks Madame's meals. You can bring them up to her, but her personal care is my duty. On the ground floor, the main living room and the parlour are to the right, the storerooms and laundry room are to the left. Manon comes here every day to clean and do the laundry. In case you need them, she keeps her cleaning things in here. The boiler, wines, spirits, jams, pickles, and preserves are in the cellar. I never go down there.

She opens and shuts the doors before he had time to look inside or ask a question.

ODILE

Madame mostly entertains her guests in the parlour. Well, at least she used to. Nobody comes here anymore. Dinner parties are normally held in the main living room, but she no longer organises these either.

Blake understands that the glory days of the estate are over. But although it hasn't been refurbished in years, he doesn't recognise anything about the house where he first met Diane. It's as if he were visiting a gallery or a cathedral.

BLAKE

Everything's changed so much since I was last here...

ODILE

I couldn't say, I wasn't even born then. From what I understood, the Beauvilliers bought the estate about 30 years ago. I guess that's the last time any work was done here.

Blake puts his hand on the newel finial of the grand staircase.

BLAKE

This one was already there. I remember.

He caresses the wood as he would a beloved pet. Odile is already leading him upstairs.

ODILE

Madame's apartments are this way, as you already know. Don't go anywhere near them unless you have a good reason. And there, on the other side, are the future guest rooms -- if all goes well.

They go up another level through a maze of staircases and corridors. Blake has lost his bearings by now. Odile talks nonstop.

23 INT DAY - KITCHEN

The next day, Blake hurtles into the kitchen while buttoning up his shirt. Odile is busy preparing Madame's breakfast tray. He stops at the doorway, waiting for her to invite him in. Odile looks up at him after a while, surprised.

ODILE

What are you doing standing there?

BLAKE

I'm waiting for your permission to come in.

She rolls her eyes.

ODILE

Pass me the teapot, will you? It's over there by the window. Did you sleep well?

BLAKE

Dunno -- it was kind of like a trip down memory lane. As for the shower, it was more like going back to prehistoric times.

Picking up the teapot, Blake glances at the vast park stretching out back around a clearing. He hands the pot to Odile and bends over to pet the cat curled up next to the stove.

ODILE

Don't pet him! He hates it. He's wild. I'm the only one he tolerates. Isn't that right, Mephisto? Here, why don't you iron the newspaper while I finish fixing breakfast?

BLAKE

Iron the newspaper? Is that some local phrase?

ODILE (ironic)

Yep, it means ironing the newspaper to dry out the ink so it won't stain your fingers while reading it. Don't you do that in mansions back in England?

BLAKE

Probably, but I don't live in a mansion...

She hands him the newspaper.

ODILE

Go to the laundry room. Use the iron with the blue handle. The other one is for ironing clothes.

Andrew walks out.

24 INT DAY - KITCHEN

Mephisto stretches out. Odile arranges a small bouquet of flowers on the breakfast tray. She looks at the clock and wonders what's keeping Blake.

25 INT DAY - CORRIDOR

Odile peers into the corridor and smells something that worries her.

ODILE

Something's burning!

She rushes to the laundry room.

26 INT DAY - LAUNDRY ROOM

Odile walks in to find Blake trying to put out the fire he started by ironing the newspaper. She rushes to help him.

BLAKE (cheerful)

Fuel prices are flaring up!

ODILE

And you find this funny? You're the one who's fried! You're gonna have to get your act together if you want to stay...

27 INT DAY - FIRST FLOOR / MADAME'S APARTMENTS

Blake brings up a tray complete with a full breakfast, the day's mail, and a newspaper. Holding the tray with both hands, he knocks gently on the door with his forehead, not knowing what else to do. The door is unlocked. It comes open. The anteroom/study is empty.

BLAKE

Madame Beauvillier?

No answer. He looks into in the adjoining room. Empty. The bathroom door is ajar but he doesn't dare to look in. He stands straight, and coughs to indicate he's here

The bathroom door opens. Nathalie appears and looks up at him.

NATHALIE

I won't be too hard on you because it's your first day, but I don't like having to wait.

BLAKE

My apologies, Madame, I was delayed by a technical problem with the newspaper.

Nathalie opens the paper and sees the burnt pages. Ashes fly everywhere. She remains perfectly calm.

NATHALIE

What kind of butler are you, Mr Blake?

BLAKE

Determined to do my job as well as I can so you will keep me, even if ironing the newspaper is not my forte...

Nathalie smiles. She reaches for the mail.

NATHALIE

Pour me a cup of tea, please.

While he does so, she proceeds to open the letters with a paper knife so large it resembles a sword. Blake keeps an eye out for her sweeping gestures, just in case. She discreetly shoves a letter deep into a drawer without opening it, reads the advertising mail carefully, and hands Blake a few letters promising fabulous wealth.

NATHALIE

Since I am fortunate to have you in my service for the moment, please respond to these letters today or we will lose the bonus gifts.

BLAKE

Do you really take these letters seriously? If I may...

NATHALIE

No, you may not. (a beat)

Do you know why you're here, Mr Blake?

BLAKE

I'm here for a trial period...

NATHALIE

Correct. Odile must have mentioned that I plan to run a guest house. It has become a necessity, actually.

BLAKE

I understand.

NATHALIE

Odile, whom I wholly trust, is convinced that we need someone to help us in our pursuit. Now, we must decide if you can be that someone.

Blake, uneasy, remains silent. Nathalie points at the junk mail.

NATHALIE

In the meantime, I will not let pass an opportunity to win the jackpot. This house needs a new lease of life, it needs to rise from its ashes. Would I be a fool to believe in luck, Mr Blake?

BLAKE

No, of course not, Madame.

NATHALIE

Never lose hope, even when all hope seems lost to you.

Blake is stirred by these words, and by the dignity of this woman who keeps fighting as much as she can.

28 EXT DAY - BACK OF THE MANSION

Blake is standing in the very spot where the picture of him and Diane was taken years ago. He looks around, smells the air, takes deep breaths. The gentle wind rustling the trees, the building are still the same, but the laughter is gone. Diane is gone. Odile materialises next to him.

ODILE
Penny for your thoughts?

Blake jumps.

BLAKE
We were standing right here when the picture was taken. That's where (pointing in a direction) I saw her for the first time. There was a table, she was playing cards with a friend. She was losing. I can still hear her laughter.

ODILE
Nostalgia hurts, doesn't it?

BLAKE
Only while you're awake, otherwise it's a dream.

ODILE
I have a cure for the blues.

BLAKE
Really?

She hands him some cotton buds. Blake looks surprised.

BLAKE
Does cleaning your ears dispel the blues?

ODILE
I don't know about your ears. What I do know is that the clocks need a good scrubbing. Madame keeps asking me for a detailed report of how you spend your time here. I guess you should start taking your trial period seriously...

29 INT DAY - DINING ROOM

Blake is perched on a stepladder in the living room, grumbling, cleaning the dial of a clock with a cotton bud. The clock startles him as it strikes 2pm.

Barely regaining composure from the chime, he jumps again when he hears a sharp whistle blow coming from the main hall. Intrigued, he rushes to see what it's all about.

30 INT DAY - MAIN HALL

Blake finds Odile standing ramrod straight in the hall, her silhouette against the landing window light, ominous like a bloodthirsty Transylvanian count.

BLAKE
What on Earth was the whistle for?

ODILE
To introduce you to Manon. She never hears me when I call her. So I blow the whistle.

Blake turns around and sees **MANON**, a pretty young woman in her twenties. She is carrying a laundry basket. She removes her headphones.

MANON(to Odile)
What can I do for you?

Odile shows Blake.

ODILE
Our new "colleague". Mr Blake will be working with us for a while.

Blake greets her in a gentlemanly way.

MANON
Wow, classy, so British.

BLAKE(satisfied)
Well, I am British.

The girl blushes and responds with a clumsy curtsy. Odile rolls her eyes.

ODILE
Looks like we've got our work cut out...

31 INT DAY - KITCHEN

Blake is sitting at the table, replying to the mail, grumbling.

The cat meows at the door. Odile lets him in.

BLAKE

... "Your chance to win 100,000 euros!"
"Congratulations! You have the lucky number!"
"Your life is about to change!" How can Madame fall
for any of this?

Odile remains silent, her head buried in a recipe book.

BLAKE

Everybody knows this junk is fake.

Blake looks at the cat peacefully asleep by the stove.

BLAKE

Hey, cat, what do you think?

He mimics the cat's voice:

BLAKE

Meow!

Odile turns around and looks at her cat, startled, then
realises it was Blake who meowed.

ODILE

Don't you make fun of my cat, or Madame. She's a
good woman.

BLAKE

I'm not making fun.

ODILE

I find this junk mail ridiculous too, but who are
we to judge her? She's doing her best to keep the
estate afloat. It hasn't been easy for her since
Monsieur died. You of all people should be able
to understand that...

Blake takes it in.

BLAKE

Did she lose her husband recently?

ODILE

Yes, Monsieur passed away three years ago, and
she's been struggling to make ends meet since...

Blake feels sympathetic. Odile opens a cupboard and reaches for a bottle that she sets on the table.

BLAKE

A drink? Now you're talking. That's what I like about France... Let's drink to your future guest rooms!

ODILE

Drink that and you'll die. I made this myself to unclog the second-floor sinks. Cheers...

Blake's face falls.

32 INT NIGHT - BLAKE'S ROOM

Exhausted and disappointed, Blake sits on his bed and looks up at the bull's-eye as if it were a small window in a cell. He takes the stuffed toy and strokes it. Then he turns to his wife's portrait and whispers:

BLAKE

You must be having a good laugh watching me from up there. I don't recognise anything about the place. Except earlier, in the park, but I didn't get to enjoy it much. They're all a bit weird round here. Maybe they're as lost as I am... I wish you were here with me.

He kisses the picture, then grabs his phone. No signal. Glancing out the window: an idea forms in his mind. He gets dressed and tiptoes out of his room.

33 EXT NIGHT - PARK

Night has fallen on the estate. Blake waves at the cat to remain silent as he quietly closes the back door to the kitchen.

He walks randomly through the park, staring at his cell phone, looking for a signal. He looks like a zombie with his face lit by the screen's pale glow.

34 EXT NIGHT - HILL - TREE

He picks up a weak signal at the top of a hill. The higher he holds his phone, the more bars he gets. He spots a tree and starts to climb it.

He struggles upwards, relieved to see the signal bars reappear on his phone. He settles himself on a large branch and calls Ward. Goes through to voicemail after several rings.

WARD (off)

You've reached Richard Ward's voicemail. Please leave a message after the tone.

BLAKE

Richard, it's me... you were right. Being back here feels weird. I don't recognise anything about the place, and I miss Diane so bad. Tell Melissa she was right too, they don't rent rooms. The things they're making me do just so I can stay here... Earlier I had to unclog two sinks with a chemical mass destruction liquid. Oh, you can laugh at me, I deserve it. I guess we're even now. I got a room smaller than your golf clubs cupboard. The owner's struggling to make ends meet. How odd, she doing her damndest in memory of a dead man, and me on my sad pilgrimage...

The message is cut short -- voicemail full.

Perched atop his tree, Blake is flustered. He looks at the mansion through the branches.

He carefully makes his way back down the tree. His phone slips out of his grasp and falls on the dead leaves.

35 EXT NIGHT - PARK

Blake crawls on all fours through the brambles to look for his phone. He suddenly finds himself facing the barrel of a shotgun. **PHILIPPE MAGNIER** is aiming at him.

MAGNIER

I'm warning you, ass face: make a move and I'll blow your head off, cut you up into little chunks and feed you to my dog.

Blake is stunned.

BLAKE

Ass face? Sorry, I don't understand.

MAGNIER

Yea, right, dumbass. Don't pretend you don't know what I'm talking about. I'm done with you lot sneaking in here and stealing my tools! So instead of calling to warn your buddies with your barbarian accent, you tell them to stay away from here, got it?

BLAKE

I was just looking for signal. I'm on trial period as a butler. My name is Andrew Blake.

MAGNIER

Yeah right, and I'm the goddamn tooth fairy.

BLAKE

Look, you're mistaken, I'm from England... My accent isn't barbarian...

MAGNIER

Don't you bloody move or I'll shoot a Channel Tunnel through your head. Is that clear?

Still aiming at him, Magnier studies Blake in more detail.

MAGNIER

Man, did the gypsies push back the retirement age too?

Infuriated, Blake gets up in a flash.

BLAKE

I'm not a filthy and you're not the tooth fairy!

Scene viewed from a distance. Blake tries to run away. A gunshot rips through the night, followed by a ridiculous scream, and another gunshot.

36 INT NIGHT - MAGNIER'S HOUSE

Magnier invites Blake into his house. The place is a mess, like an old bachelor's pad. A golden retriever named Youpla follows them around, wagging his tail.

BLAKE

You could have killed me...

MAGNIER

I suppose I could have, if you hadn't run away like a rabbit. I'm so sorry, Mr Brake. But why on earth did you climb up a tree to make a phone call! Is that why you paint your phone booths red in your country? So you can tell the difference?

Magnier grabs an unlabelled bottle, similar to the one Odile took out earlier. Blake eyes him suspiciously as he pours the liquid into two small glasses.

MAGNIER

Let's have a drink and start again on the right foot! I would have given you a proper welcome if I'd known. But I'm always the last to know what goes on round here.

He raises his glass. Blake doesn't touch his.

BLAKE

You're trying to kill me again. That stuff is for unclogging sinks.

MAGNIER

Granted, it's no nectar, but it does the job. I distil it myself.

He downs his glass in one gulp. Blake follows suit, pleasantly surprised by the beverage.

BLAKE

It does the job all right.

Magnier refills their glasses.

MAGNIER

You know, Mr Steak, I'm glad I'm not the only male in the house anymore. I felt a bit lonely. I must say, the ladies are quite special...

BLAKE

Blake, my name is Blake. (standing up) Thanks for the drink. I've got to get going.

MAGNIER

You can't just go like that. I shot at you, didn't I, we're no strangers anymore. Come on, one last shot...

BLAKE

Not from a gun, I hope?

MAGNIER

I promise! Just a welcome drink!

He fills their glasses again.

37 EXT NIGHT - PARK - GARAGE

On his way back to the mansion, Blake glimpses a glow inside the garage. He hides in a corner and looks out. There must be someone in there with a flashlight.

He approaches the garage, quietly opens the door, and listens out. No light, no movement.

BLAKE

I'm warning you, if you're a filthy, I know someone with a big gun who's tired of having his tools stolen.

He thinks he hears sobbing. A woman. He advances into the dark shed.

BLAKE

Hello? Anyone in there?

The sobbing stops at once. Just as Blake grabs an iron bar, the beam of a flashlight reveals Manon.

38 INT NIGHT - GARAGE

BLAKE

Manon? What are you doing out here, in the middle of the night?

He takes in her makeshift bed in a corner.

MANON (holding back her tears)

Nothing at all.

BLAKE

What do you mean, nothing at all? Do Odile and Madame know...

MANON (interrupts him)

This is none of your business.

The young woman starts crying again. Blake approaches her.

BLAKE

I'm sorry, Manon, but I can't just leave you here like that. Tell me what's wrong.

Manon remains silent.

BLAKE

You know, I have a daughter, she's a little older than you. And if someone were to find her in distress like you are now, I hope they would help her...

MANON

Help me? And you? What are you doing here at this hour?

BLAKE

I was at Magnier's. He shot at me because I climbed up a tree to make a phone call. So we ended up having a drink together.

The girl shoots him a perplexed look.

BLAKE

Tell me what it is. I should be able to understand.

MANON

Have you ever been pregnant?

BLAKE

Not recently, I must admit. But it's great news you are!

MANON

Except Justin left me.

BLAKE

I guess he's the father? Why did he do that?

MANON

Because he's a bastard, that's why! He says I got pregnant on purpose. That I want to tie him down. It's not true! Anyway, in my family, we're cursed when it comes to men. When she found out about my pregnancy, my mom kicked me out, so I sleep here. I'm going to fail my schoolteacher exam again...

BLAKE

Right, let's look at the problems one by one, shall we... I remember how I felt when my wife announced that I was going to be a father. I completely panicked! Believe me, I even seriously thought about running away. Maybe your Justin got scared, too.

Staring at Blake, Manon wipes away her tears.

MANON

Do you think he'll come back?

Blake hands her a tissue.

BLAKE

I don't know him, but I know that men are not always as confident as they pretend.

Blake goes on, pensive.

BLAKE

I'm sure he's thinking of you and your child, even from a distance.

Manon smiles faintly.

BLAKE (looks around)

You can't stay here, especially in your condition. The place looks almost as bad as my room.

MANON

I've got nowhere else to go.

Her words resonate with Blake.

BLAKE

I know exactly what you mean...

MANON

Please, don't say anything to Madame or Odile.

Blake brings a finger to his lips.

BLAKE

I won't. Do you want me to stay here with you?

MANON

They'll wonder where you are...

39 INT NIGHT - STAIRCASE

Blake tiptoes up the slightly creaking stairs.

As he reaches Madame's floor, he thinks he can hear faint conversation noises, like a couple talking, maybe even over background music. Intrigued, he listens more carefully but can't make out what's being said. He walks on to his room.

40 INT DAY - QUICK-PACED MONTAGE - VARIOUS SETTINGS

Blake wakes up / hits his head against the beam / shouts under the cold shower / rushes down the corridors, lost / tiptoes past Madame's apartments...

41 EXT DAY - PARK

Blake is sitting on the kitchen stoop, in the sunshine, holding a steaming mug of tea. The cat meows to get in.

BLAKE

But you've only just asked to be let out. Make up your mind!

The cat seems to understand him. Blake looks at the door, then speaks to the cat.

BLAKE

A cat flap would be a good idea, don't you think?

Manon appears at the corner of the mansion, carrying a basket of wet laundry to the clothesline. Blake gets to his feet and joins her. She takes off her headphones.

BLAKE
Did you sleep well?

MANON
You really wanna know? I hope you didn't say anything.

BLAKE
I may not be much good anymore, but you can trust me when I give my word...

He tries to help her hang a sheet out to dry, but he is clumsy and gets in her way more than anything else.

MANON
I'm sorry about yesterday. About boring you with my story. My mother says I talk too much.

BLAKE
Don't apologize. Life can be tough at times, and talking about it can help, even to a stranger.

MANON
It did help, actually. Thank you.

Nathalie watches the scene from an upstairs window. Blake gets tangled up in the laundry.

MANON (amused)
No offense, but I'd rather do this by myself.

Blake puts his hands up in the air and takes a step back. Manon smiles at him. Out of the corner of his eye, he sees Magnier drop a crate full of groceries outside the kitchen door and waves at him. Magnier waves back. Odile opens the door to get the groceries and shoots Magnier a dark look. He scurries off like a thief.

BLAKE (to Manon)
My goodness, she doesn't seem to like him very much.

MANON
Who, Magnier? They avoid each other as much as they can. (hangs the last towel and checks her watch)
Gotta go!

She turns around to him as she walks away.

MANON
Thanks for your help!

Blake waves at her. She disappears around the corner of the mansion.

42 INT DAY - KITCHEN

Blake walks into the empty kitchen. The cat follows him in. it's lunchtime but the table hasn't been set.

BLAKE(to the cat)
Where do you think she's put my lunch? I'm starving.

Blake opens the fridge and finds a plate full of food. He takes it, finds a knife and fork, and settles down at the table. He tucks in and opens his eyes wide in delight. Odile arrives, in a hurry as always.

BLAKE
Thanks for the food, it's delicious.

ODILE
I haven't prepared anything for you yet. It's too early.

She turns around to see Blake polishing off the plate.

ODILE(stunned and outraged)
You stole my cat's food! (to the cat) Don't worry, baby, Mummy's going to fix you another one.

BLAKE
The terrine was really delicious. Mummy is a wonderful cook. I could eat another right now.

ODILE
You have some nerve...

Incensed, she disappears into a closet and comes back out holding a big stick.

BLAKE
You're not gonna hit me, are you?!

Blake swallows the last bite and runs off.
Amused by his childish antics, Odile mellows out. She takes out the second part of the stick: a feather duster.

ODILE

Go ahead and run, but you won't get away from dusting off the corridor ceilings!

Wary, Blake pokes his head in the kitchen door again.

BLAKE

Hang on! I hope you're not taking advantage of the situation to turn me into your slave? Are you going to take away my passport too?

ODILE

What are you on about? Oh, and don't forget to prepare the parlour, Madame's friend is due to arrive at 3 pm.

BLAKE

I thought she wasn't seeing anyone anymore?

ODILE

I guess she can't wait to show off her new toy.

BLAKE

What new toy?

ODILE

You!

She hands him the duster.

43 INT DAY - KITCHEN

Alone and clearly amused, Blake practices his English butler part: he carries a tray with one hand, standing upright, his other arm behind his back. He tries different ways of bowing. Odile bursts in.

ODILE

Madame's guest has arrived! Let the show begin!

She checks his appearance, adjusts his bow tie, sets the teapot on his tray, makes sure nothing's missing and sends him off on his way.

44 INT DAY - PARLOUR

Blake walks in as he would on a stage, fully engaged in his role. He places the tray on the coffee table and bows respectfully to the woman sitting opposite Nathalie.

MADAME BERLINER, unlike her "great friend", is affected and haughty, and wears flashy jewellery. She pays no attention to Blake, who takes great care to pour the tea as perfectly as possible. Madame Beauvillier is discreetly amused by his attitude.

MADAME BERLINER

... I just ordered two mag-ni-fi-cent dresses! But I have so many dinners to attend that I shall have to order more quite soon.

Blake notices Nathalie's forced smile.

BLAKE (putting on his best accent)
May I go, Madame?

Madame Berliner seems to notice his presence for the first time.

MADAME BERLINER

An English butler? I hope the exchange rate works in your favour, my dear...

Clearly embarrassed, Nathalie smiles awkwardly.

BLAKE (to madame Berliner)

Contrary to what some may think, dear Madame, English butlers are quite a bargain, especially past 50. They're at half price.

Nathalie smiles faintly as madame Berliner gives Blake a perplexed look. He bows to Nathalie and leaves the room.

BLAKE

If Madame wishes anything, I am at her service.

45 INT DAY - KITCHEN

In the kitchen, Blake wipes the last piece of the tea set that Odile has just rinsed. He's quite annoyed.

BLAKE

How can Madame be friends with this woman?

Odile shoots Blake a reproving look.

BLAKE

I'm not judging here. It's just an observation.
Quite an obvious one, actually.

Odile can't help but nod in assent.

ODILE

I shouldn't be saying this, but I don't like her
at all.

BLAKE

Why is Madame still seeing her?

ODILE

If she stops seeing madame Berliner, she will be
truly alone.

BLAKE

But I think I heard voices coming from Madame's
apartments last night. Is there "someone" in her
life?

Shocked, Odile turns to him.

ODILE

Madame never got over her husband's death. What
kind of an indiscretion is that anyway!

BLAKE

I shouldn't be asking, right? (ironic) Because I'm
still on trial period?

ODILE

It still wouldn't be any of your business if you
were a guest...

BLAKE

Well, forgive me, but I find it hard to remain
indifferent to that kind of situation.

Odile seems to appreciate his outspokenness. They finish
tidying up the kitchen as if nothing had happened. Blake hangs

his tea towel by the stove and strokes the cat, always curled up in a different spot.

BLAKE

I'm heading down to help Mr Magnier repair the gate intercom. Might as well make myself useful.

ODILE

Do as you like. Just don't bring him in here.

BLAKE

He seems like a nice guy, though.

In lieu of an answer, Odile mutters under her breath on her way out.

46 EXT DAY - PARK

Blake is heading down a park alley, fully taking in the charm of the estate for the first time. He lingers, hoping to find a trace of his first summer with Diane.

He walks past what looks like a rose garden and decides to enter it. He makes his way along the flowery alleys. They are well kept, unlike the rest of the park. He takes a turn and comes across two tombs, one in the name of "François Beauvillier", the other unmarked.

47 INT EVENING - MAGNIER'S HOUSE

Magnier opens the door. He seems embarrassed to see Blake showing up unannounced.

MAGNIER

Mr Cake! I wasn't expecting you...

BLAKE

I'm only stopping by about the gate intercom. I thought I could have a look at it with you.

Magnier is lost for words, he keeps shifting around as if trying to keep Blake out.

MAGNIER

The intercom? Why not? It's quite an easy job.

He tells Youpla, who won't stop barking at a closed door, to be quiet.

MAGNIER
Down, Youpla, down!

BLAKE
Let me know what day suits you to have a look at it.

MAGNIER
Will do!

The dog jumps at the handle and opens the door, revealing a teenage boy. Uneasy, Magnier tries to justify himself.

MAGNIER
This is Yanis. He lives in the council estate on the other side of the forest. (a beat) He helps me with the groceries. I first met him at the supermarket, when he got caught sneaking a video game under his shirt.

YANIS
I was gonna pay for it, I swear!

MAGNIER
Stop lying!

YANIS
I'm not lying!

MAGNIER
Anyway, I got him out of a tricky situation. He's been coming here to play with Youpla since. He also gives me a hand from time to time...

YANIS
You're the liar! You said I'd only have to help you with the groceries once. But then you said you'd tell my mother if I refused to do it again.

MAGNIER (threatening)
What are you--

BLAKE
Shouldn't he be in school?

YANIS

What's the point, they don't teach anything about real life, except paying taxes and obeying like a sheep.

Blake and Magnier stare at each other.

MAGNIER

Listen, I'd appreciate it if you didn't mention the kid to Odile. She thinks badly enough of me as it is.

BLAKE

As you wish. Let me know, about the intercom.

As the two men say goodbye, Blake thinks of something.

BLAKE

Mr Magnier?

MAGNIER (worried)

Yes?

BLAKE

You wouldn't happen to have a spare bedside lamp, by any chance? I like to read at night, but I don't have any. I don't want to ask Odile, she has enough on her plate already.

MAGNIER

Of course, I understand. Wait here...

Magnier hurries back inside. We hear him rummaging through a closet in his room. He reappears carrying a small lamp on a stand.

MAGNIER

That's all I have.

BLAKE

It's perfect.

48 INT DAY - LAUNDRY ROOM

Blake arrives at the laundry room reading the newspaper he is about to iron. He walks in to find Manon ironing, with her back to him. She doesn't turn around to greet him.

BLAKE
Hello Manon. How are you this morning?

No answer.

BLAKE (whispering)
I've got a lamp and two blankets for your little
"nest".

She sniffs in lieu of an answer. Blake walks around to face her. She's been crying.

BLAKE
What's wrong? Have you heard from Justin?

Someone blows a whistle down the corridor. In a panic, Manon hastily wipes her face.

MANON
She'll see my red eyes and think I'm a drug addict.

BLAKE
You should tell her the truth...

Blake can barely finish his sentence before Odile suddenly opens the door and finds the two of them looking guilty.

ODILE
What the hell are you doing in there? Didn't you hear me blow the whistle?

Blake and Manon exchange a sheepish look. Blake improvises.

BLAKE
Manon just lost her aunt. She was very ill. They were very close...

A flash of surprise crosses Manon's face, soon replaced by one of fake sadness.

ODILE (to Manon)
I'm sorry for your loss. You never mentioned your aunt...

Blake jumps in.

BLAKE

They hadn't been seeing each other much lately, because of the distance, but her aunt delivered her when she was born and raised her when her mother fell ill.

ODILE

Your aunt was a midwife?

BLAKE

No, a dentist...

Manon gives Blake a startled look.

ODILE

Let the poor girl answer! Go Hoover the stairs.

Blake leans towards her.

BLAKE

When will my trial period end? I'm tired of chasing snowflakes...

ODILE

You don't chase snowflakes with a Hoover but dust balls. Go on, hop it!

BLAKE

You want me to chase the dust balls or hop on them?

He gives Manon a wink on his way out.

49 INT DAY - KITCHEN

Odile walks into the kitchen to find Blake on all fours by the gas stove.

ODILE

What are you up to this time? Trying to brood my cat?

BLAKE

I'm taking the cat's temperature.

ODILE

What the hell is wrong with you? Leave him alone!

Blake lays a thermometer next to the cat and gets back to his feet.

BLAKE

Don't worry, he's fine. I'm only checking a technicality. This animal is behaving in a strange way...

ODILE

He's not the only one...

BLAKE

What do you mean?

ODILE(ironic)

You sleep with a stuffed toy. At your age!

BLAKE

It's not just any old stuffed animal, it's Jerry. My daughter's cuddly toy when she was little. She used to bring him everywhere. Then, as she got older, she lost interest in him. It was normal of course, but I was upset by it. So I've kept him with me ever since. I take him everywhere. You can make fun of me if you want...

ODILE

I'm sorry, really. I didn't mean to...

Moved, Odile finds some excuse to leave the kitchen.

Blake strokes the cat and checks the thermometer. He laughs:

BLAKE

Mephisto, you're a genius! Your Mummy is in for a surprise...

50 EXT DAY - PARK

Blake makes his way through the trees, inspecting the trunks, checking his position in relation to the mansion. He is searching for the initials he and Diane carved during their first summer. Is there any trace of it left? He stops suddenly, as if rooted to the spot, staring at a piece of bark that we can't see. He looks distraught.

Madame Beauvillier watches him from an upstairs window.

51 INT DAY - KITCHEN

Odile is making food for her cat when Blake comes back from the park.

ODILE
Had a nice walk, Mr Blake?

BLAKE
It was a necessary walk, madame Odile.

He approaches her, observes her expert gestures.

ODILE (knowing look)
Don't just stand here like that or I'll find something for you to do...

BLAKE
Since you cured my blues with cotton buds, I'd rather not know how you're planning on curing my despair... Please, no, not the toilet brush!

She smiles broadly.

ODILE
You're crazy.

BLAKE
Is it worse than fried?

She laughs.

BLAKE (suddenly serious)
I've got two secrets to tell you.

Odile gives him a worried look.

BLAKE
The first one is about your cat. I've finally discovered why he sleeps in different spots near the stove.

ODILE
You noticed that too?

BLAKE

It's no coincidence. He always looks for the spots where he can be at exactly 22 °C. The temperature varies whether the door is open or closed, whether the stove is on or off. He changes spots accordingly until he finds the most comfortable distance. That is remarkable.

Odile gazes admiringly at her cat. Then she turns to Blake.

ODILE

And your other secret?

BLAKE

I lied to you.

ODILE (her face falls)

You weren't looking for a room. You're a health and safety officer. We're all going to jail.

BLAKE

It's not as bad as this, but it's a lot more serious. Manon didn't lose her aunt.

ODILE

Didn't she? Why was she crying then?

BLAKE

Because she's pregnant and her boyfriend left her. On top of that, her mother kicked her out, so she has no choice but to sleep in the garage...

Odile leans on the countertop for balance.

ODILE

If you have more secrets, please keep them for another day.

BLAKE

I don't.

ODILE

Why didn't Manon tell me? Am I scaring her?

BLAKE

Don't take it personally. She didn't tell me either, I found out by chance the other night on

my way back from Magnier's, who shot me because I was making a phone call in the tree.

ODILE
Have mercy... I've had enough of your stories.

BLAKE
That's no story -- it really happened.

ODILE
That makes it even worse.

Odile thinks.

ODILE
Poor Manon... (a beat) She can stay here, we've got plenty of rooms upstairs. I'll talk to Madame. I'm sure she'll agree to help her.

52 EXT DAY - ROSE GARDEN

Blake is taking a walk in the park. Youpla yaps in the rose garden, where Magnier is pruning the flower beds.

BLAKE (calling out to him)
They're gorgeous! My, you're an artist.

MAGNIER (surprised by the voice, and the words)
Thank you! Rose bushes need TLC to thrive. And they smell so good!

Blake joins him.

BLAKE
How many different varieties have you got here?

MAGNIER
Twelve. I've crossed some of them myself over the years. Smell the ones on your left.

Blake complies. Then he points to the graves on the other side of the hedge.

BLAKE
Did you know Monsieur Beauvillier?

MAGNIER

Oh yes, I did. I even saved his life. There was a car crash. I pulled a guy out of his car just before it went up in flames. It was him. That's how we met. I'd just been made redundant from my job as a carpenter. Because of the economy or something. Mr François hired me to help me. The best years of my life! (a beat, points to the mansion) The place was a temple of happiness back then, Madame was always happy. They would invite me for dinner at Easter and on New Year's Eve. I had found a second family. Unfortunately, things have changed a lot since Mr François died. (thinks) You know, Mr Steak, illness makes no difference between the good guys and the bad guys.

Blake points to the unmarked grave.

BLAKE

Why is this one nameless?

MAGNIER

Oh, I wouldn't know about that, Mr Cake. I don't even know if there's anyone in it.

BLAKE

I like you, Mr Magnier. I really do. But if you get my name wrong again, I'll make you eat your shears.

MAGNIER

I'm sorry, I'm no good with names. Why don't we call each other by our first names? I'm Philippe.

Blake outstretches his hand.

BLAKE

Andrew.

They shake hands.

53 INT DAY - NATHALIE'S APARTMENTS

Nathalie hands Blake the mail that needs responding to.

BLAKE

If you don't mind, I would like to talk to you about a few issues regarding this house.

NATHALIE

I'm listening.

BLAKE

Monsieur Magnier and I are planning to repair the gate intercom, and I would like to install a cat flap in the back door to make madame Odile's life easier. It won't cost a thing. What do you think?

NATHALIE

I think it's a great idea. Thank you for your penny-wise initiatives, Mr Blake.

Blake seems hesitant.

BLAKE

I don't mean to pry, but are you really that hard up?

NATHALIE

I would say that is none of your business.

BLAKE

But I could...

NATHALIE

Mr Blake, please, I need to deal with this myself. I'm sure an educated man like you understands that. I'm glad that you are here, and I know I'm not the only one to feel that way. But running an estate like this one is like running a small business, and I'm afraid you have no qualifications in this field. Please stick to your area of expertise.

Blake takes the blow.

54 INT DAY - KITCHEN

Walking back into the kitchen, Blake finds Odile on tiptoes trying to reach a huge casserole dish on top of a cupboard. He rushes to help her.

ODILE
Thank you!

BLAKE
You're welcome. Why do you keep the heavy utensils out of reach? You should switch with the skimmers at the bottom. It'll be easier to...

Odile glares at him.

ODILE
I see. You have an opinion on everything.

BLAKE
Don't be mad at me, I was only trying to spare your back...

ODILE
My back is fine, thank you.

BLAKE (low voice)
Sounds as if you and Madame don't want to be helped...

ODILE
Excuse me?

BLAKE
Forget it.

He turns to Mephisto and scoops him up into his arms. The cat doesn't try to run off.

BLAKE
You, on the other hand, like to be taken care of...

The cat is purring. Odile is seething.

BLAKE (to the cat)
You're a handsome little guy... a bit on the plump side, maybe...

ODILE (piqued)
He's got his winter coat on.

BLAKE(still to the cat)
You're fed like royalty, you should exercise a bit...

ODILE
Are you insinuating that the meals I cook for you are not as good as Mephisto's?

BLAKE
No, I'm not... I'm just saying...

Odile loses her temper.

ODILE
Mephisto is not fat, and if you don't like the food here, you can go eat somewhere else! We're considering running a guest house, not a restaurant! And leave my cat alone!

Blake sets the cat down. Odile opens the fridge, takes out a plate, and throws its contents into the bin.

ODILE
There, that way you won't get food poisoning. Why don't you make yourself a sandwich. The Brits invented it, after all.

BLAKE
Why are you doing this? I never said I didn't like your cooking... I'm sorry, I didn't mean to upset you. But the terrine you made for Mephisto was truly delicious. You should trust your intuition and cook the way you want to, for Mephisto and for all of us.

Odile remains silent but hears the compliment.

55 INT. DAY - HALL

Blake is holding a screwdriver, standing in front of the videophone in the hall. There's a beep. He pushes the answer button and Magnier's distorted face fills the screen.

BLAKE
Domaine de Beauvillier. How may I help you?

MAGNIER

Andrew, check the release button, please.

Blake complies. We hear a click.

MAGNIER

It works! Problem solved!

BLAKE

Good job, Philippe!

On the screen, Magnier looks embarrassed.

MAGNIER

Andrew... you must think I'm a bad person because I'm taking advantage of that kid.

BLAKE

Why are you telling me this now? This is an intercom, not a confessional.

Magnier is uneasy.

MAGNIER

Because I'm too ashamed to say it to your face.

BLAKE

This is between you and the kid. If you're ashamed about something, you should tell him, not me.

MAGNIER

I don't know how to. I live in a cabin in the woods. Look at me, Andrew, I'm a grumpy old man.

Magnier's face is distorted by the screen.

BLAKE

You look more like a frog from here.

MAGNIER

Seriously. Do you think you could help me?

56 INT EVENING - MAGNIER'S HOUSE

It's dark. Andrew and Philippe are sitting across from Yanis.

BLAKE
Philippe and I want to talk to you about something.
It's important.

YANIS
I won't work any harder. You're slavists! You can
tell my mother what happened, I don't care.

BLAKE (quiet)
You mean "slavers".

Thinking Blake and Magnier can't see him, Yanis feeds cake
to Youpla under the table.

BLAKE
We'd like to offer you a deal.

Yanis eyes them suspiciously.

BLAKE
What would you love to have? What would make you
really happy?

The kid's eyes light up. He thinks.

YANIS
A console and games. And something for my mum.

BLAKE
Right, here's the deal: we'll help you with
reading and math. If your grades improve, we'll
give you that console and games you want, and we'll
also get something for your mum.

YANIS
What's the catch? You going blind, you gonna gouge
my eyes out and have them grafted on your face?

BLAKE
We just want to help you. Why don't you trust us?

YANIS
Nobody does anything for nothing.

BLAKE
It's sad if you think that way. Give us a chance
to prove you otherwise. We'll help you, and if you

get better grades, the console and games are yours.

YANIS

And the gift for my mother.

Blake raises his hand for a high five. The kid hesitates at first, then smacks his palm against Blake's.

57 INT NIGHT - KITCHEN

Blake rubs his hands as he walks into the kitchen.

BLAKE

It's bloody freezing outside!

He hangs up his jacket and looks at Odile. She is busy with the oven.

ODILE

Dinner's almost ready! Set the table for the two of us, will you.

Blake opens a dresser and sees that Odile has reorganised everything. He doesn't comment on it. Delicious cooking aromas waft to his nose.

BLAKE

May I suggest something?

ODILE

Don't you dare mention Mephisto's weight again, or I won't feed you for a whole week.

BLAKE

Mephisto is an athlete.

ODILE

Hey, don't overdo it either. If this is about the dresser, just pretend you didn't see it...

BLAKE

I didn't see anything... but I did smell something. Mephisto's going to love it!

Odile glares at him. Then she relaxes when she realises that Blake is joking.

ODILE

Don't push it, or I'll give your share to Mephisto.
It would only be fair, come to think of it.

Blake revels in the aromas.

BLAKE

Is this really for us?

ODILE

Only if you behave.

BLAKE

Where did you learn to cook like this?

Odile remains silent as she serves the food on their plates.
They sit down at the table.

ODILE

I worked for 5 years in the brigade of the Relais
Dormeuil, a well-known restaurant in the region.

BLAKE

The brigade?

ODILE

Yes, that's what we call kitchen staff here.

Blake tastes the food.

BLAKE

Odile, it's not a dish, it's a masterpiece!

ODILE

Don't make fun of me...

BLAKE

I am not making fun of you! It's absolutely
delicious, and I know what I'm talking about --
I've been to quite a few fine restaurants in my
time. You are truly gifted!

He takes another bite, as if in heaven.

BLAKE

It's perfectly crispy on the outside and wonderfully soft on the inside. How do you do it?

ODILE

I trusted my intuition.

She looks at Mephisto. He is sitting in front of his cat flap, but she gets up anyway to open the door for him.

BLAKE

If you don't mind my asking, why are you working here instead of in that restaurant?

Odile hesitates.

ODILE

My motivation for working there wasn't my career, it was a man. I learned how to cook with him. For him... Then he was offered a better job as a chef in your country, in London. He wanted me to go with him, but I said no. I was scared. Scared that he wouldn't find me good enough anymore. (a beat) So he left, and I ended up here... (she turns away) You must think I'm pathetic.

BLAKE

Why, because you have a past, and regrets? Certainly not.

ODILE

Do you have regrets, Mr Blake?

BLAKE

Oh yes I do. But at my age, it's not the mistakes that you regret the most, it's the people. I miss so many people... Why do you only cook for Mephisto now?

ODILE

He doesn't judge me.

58 EXT DAY - MORNING - PARK

Magnier and Blake are playing chess in the park, wrapped up warm around a little garden table.

BLAKE

Philippe, may I ask you a personal question?

MAGNIER

If it's about the tidying of my cabin, I'd rather you didn't.

BLAKE

What's between you and Odile?

Magnier's mischievous eyes turn dark.

MAGNIER

Not much, really. To you, I can admit it. She lives alone, I live alone, so I tried to make us both happy... I must have been like a bull in a china shop. She's been avoiding me like the plague since.

Magnier pushes a pawn forward. Blake moves a knight.

MAGNIER

Ah! England's never been slow to send the cavalry. We paid a high price in Waterloo.

BLAKE

I'm not England, and I know I'm old but I didn't fight in Waterloo. Look, can we please avoid the usual clichés that divide our countries?

MAGNIER (bragging)

France shall not fear perfidious Albion.

BLAKE

Are you sure about that? Do you want to know how we see the French back home?

MAGNIER

Go ahead. I'm not afraid.

BLAKE

Frogs with berets and baguettes, always grumbling, always telling others what to do and eating snails on public holidays. But we must be mistaken since you don't look like a frog -- except on the intercom screen, that is.

MAGNIER

And you, do you wanna know how we see you?

BLAKE

Pray tell.

We hear a whistle in the distance.

MAGNIER

Stuck-up, snobbish, and deceitful.

BLAKE (bows deferentially)

Thank you, Philippe.

MAGNIER

You're welcome. Oh, and asexual too...

BLAKE

Asexual?

MAGNIER

They say that you only have to count an Englishman's children to know how many times he had sex.

BLAKE

Poor me, I only have one daughter! And what kind of animal would you say we are?

MAGNIER

To us, the Brits are animals in themselves!

Blake bursts out laughing.

BLAKE

My wife, who was French, kept all of this from me! Your beautiful country never ceases to amaze me. I've always been fascinated by the difference you make between "tu" and "vous". To think that your motto speaks of equality and fraternity. Whereas in our good old monarchy, we address a king the same way we address a child.

MAGNIER

Saying "vous" can be quite convenient. You can say "vous" to people you don't like much, and you still sound polite. And you say "tu" to the people you

like. It's like a little gift, a distinctive sign that seals a special bond between two people.

BLAKE

If you think I deserve this little gift, maybe we could switch to "tu"?

MAGNIER

Why not, dear Andrew...

Odile arrives, out of breath. Youpla greets her excitedly, brings her his stick, runs around her. Odile picks up the stick and throws it as far as possible.

ODILE

Didn't you hear me blow the whistle?

BLAKE

I thought I heard something of the kind, but I thought such bootcamp methods were for people who listen to music through headphones. And I'm on my break right now. You want me to call the Labor Inspectorate?

Magnier stifles a laughter. Odile softens.

ODILE

I'm sorry, I didn't realise. I need help moving a wardrobe in Manon's future room.

BLAKE

If it's for a good cause, I'm your man.

Odile walks away, satisfied, Blake in tow.

MAGNIER

You're taking French leave because you know I was going to win! You won't get away with this.

BLAKE

I didn't think a Frenchman could confuse gallantry with cowardice. Why don't you give us a hand instead?

59 INT DAY - BEDROOM - TOP FLOOR

Manon's future room is in the process of being refurbished. Odile walks in and sees Manon trying to move a wardrobe.

ODILE

No, you sit and rest!

Odile takes Manon to a big armchair in the corridor. Then she tries to push the heavy wardrobe into place. Standing in the doorway, Magnier doesn't dare to help her.

ODILE (half stuck behind the wardrobe)
Where's Mr Blake?

MAGNIER (shyly)
Gone to get some pillows and blankets.

Odile doesn't reply, least of all ask for his help. She somehow manages to move the piece of furniture by herself. The bed base needs moving too. Odile glances at the door again on the lookout for Blake, ignoring Magnier. Blake arrives, arms laden with bedding.

ODILE

There you are at last!

BLAKE (ironic)

I got a facial at the spa. Then I swam for hours.
It felt so good!

Manon laughs.

ODILE

Come here and help me move the bed instead of talking nonsense.

BLAKE (sizes up the bed)

Wow it's bulky, and my back hurts... Philippe here can help you...

He winks to Magnier. Manon catches on, and Odile has no choice but to team up with the very person she was trying to avoid. Magnier pushes the bed base so hard he almost moves it by himself.

ODILE (muttering)
Thank you...

Nathalie arrives. Manon gets up when she sees her. A respectful silence sets in.

NATHALIE
I came to make sure our little Manon was settling in.

She looks around the room, sizes up the plumpness of the pillows. She seems satisfied.

MANON
I don't know how to thank you, Madame.

NATHALIE
You don't have to thank me, it's only natural to help you.

Nathalie grabs the mattress and starts pulling it towards the bed. Everyone is surprised by her ease in doing so. Magnier and Odile rush over to help her, but the room is quite small.

MAGNIER
You should take a step back, madame Odile. We don't all fit in here...

ODILE
Say I'm fat, why don't you!

Magnier feels sheepish. Nathalie smiles discreetly as they arrange the bed.

60 INT EVENING - MAGNIER'S HOUSE

Yanis is sitting at Magnier's table, his exercise books all spread out around him, Youpla lying at his feet. He is doing math homework. Magnier and Blake are playing chess.

MAGNIER (forgetting about Yanis)
Do you think Odile is mad at me? I never said she was fat. I'm always putting my foot in it.

BLAKE
Are you still into her?

MAGNIER

Are we playing or talking? Chess is a serious game.

Blake mimics Magnier to make fun of him. Magnier moves a piece that threatens his opponent's king.

MAGNIER

Here, that's what you get for taking the piss.

YANIS

Shh, I'm trying to concentrate here!

BLAKE (whispering)

You'll soon find out if Odile is still mad at you... We're all having dinner tomorrow night at the mansion... (moves a piece) Check... mate.

Magnier turns pallid. Before he can say anything, Yanis chips in.

YANIS

Wanna know what happens to troublemakers who keep other students from doing their homework?

61 EXT NIGHT - MAGNIER'S PORCH

Blake and Magnier are standing under the canopy, hands in their pockets, watching the rain fall. Magnier is worried.

MAGNIER

I've been eating alone in my cabin for years, half-thawed stuff most of the time... I don't even stand a chance with Odile...

You'll see an old boar sitting with you at the dinner table tomorrow night.

BLAKE

What's a boar?

MAGNIER

A wild pig.

BLAKE

Great! I've never had dinner with a wild pig before.

Yanis joins them outside and gazes at the rain, hands in his pockets, just like the two men. Youpla sits next to them. Magnier changes the subject.

MAGNIER

Here, when the rain is pouring down like this, we say it's raining ropes.

BLAKE

Back in England, we say it's raining cats and dogs. You probably think it's ridiculous, and I agree with you on this one.

YANIS

The math teacher says it's raining like a pissing cow.

Blake and Magnier both turn to look at Yanis.

62 EXT NIGHT - BACK OF THE MANSION / KITCHEN

As he makes his way back to the mansion with vegetables from Philippe's garden, Blake catches sight of Odile's arm flailing around through the newly installed cat flap. She is trying to show Mephisto how to use it. Her hand is frantically jingling the bell of a cat toy. She shouts:

ODILE

Mephisto! Mephisto! Come on, time to come home. Come to your Mummy. Come on in through the magic door.

No sign of the cat. Blake has an idea. He walks stealthily along the wall and lays down his basket of vegetables. Odile's hand is still waving the cat toy around.

ODILE

Mephisto! If you come through the magic door, Mummy will make you yummy shrimps! Come on kitty cat! This way!

Blake suddenly grabs Odile's hand and shouts:

BLAKE (loudly)

Good evening, madame Odile! How have you been?

Odile lets out a scream as her arm retreats through the cat flap like a moray eel into its hole. We hear a muffled thud, then Odile's face appears behind the pane in the door, red with anger. She is rubbing her head. Blake gets back up, still laughing at his own prank. She opens the door, yelling:

ODILE

What the hell did you do that for!

Blake sees Mephisto curled up in the middle of the room, Behind Odile, his tail wrapped around his legs. Blake points to him.

ODILE

What?

BLAKE

Behind you.

She turns around. Her tone of voice changes completely the moment she sees her cat.

ODILE

There you are, baby!

BLAKE

He's a good cat... He came in all by himself through the magic door, good to know he still fits in...

Odile turns around and glares at Blake, charging at him.

ODILE

You...

Blake scurries off like a child.

63 EXT NIGHT - OUTSIDE THE MANSION

Blake glances around to make sure Odile didn't follow him. Reassured, he slows down, out of breath but still highly amused by his silly prank. He doesn't see Nathalie leaning against a baluster upstairs, watching him.

NATHALIE

How old are you now, Mr Blake?

Startled by the voice, he looks around and sees Nathalie.

NATHALIE

I mean in your head, of course.

BLAKE

Too old, as always, dear Madame. The real wrinkles are not on the face but in the head.

NATHALIE

I couldn't agree with you more. But please try not to kill Odile, I think she has a heart condition.

BLAKE

I will look after her, I promise. But first, I'll try to make it to my room without her catching me. Have a great evening, Madame.

NATHALIE

You too, Mr Blake.

He runs around the mansion like a naughty child.

64 INT DAY - MAGNIER'S HOUSE

Magnier is sitting at the table opposite a woman with long hair, whom we see from behind.

MAGNIER

It's not gonna work... you're scaring the hell out of me.

BLAKE

Use your imagination.

We discover Blake sitting opposite Magnier. He is wearing a wig, lipstick, and earrings.

MAGNIER

You don't like Odile one bit! You're like a tranny who stepped on a mine! Even Youpla looks more like her than you do!

BLAKE

Come on, let's start with the napkin...

Magnier unfolds his napkin and cranes his neck as he tries to tuck it into his collar.

BLAKE

Not like this. You gently take a corner and let gravity unfold the napkin.

MAGNIER

So, gravity is in charge of putting my napkin on?

BLAKE

Exactly. Then, you place it on your lap.

MAGNIER

That's not where I usually get food stains...

Magnier is tense.

BLAKE

Breathe, Philippe, and try to stay focused. Manon will be here any minute, you should at least know how to sit at the dinner table by then.

MAGNIER

Will she see you dressed like this?

BLAKE

So what?

MAGNIER

Poor kid! She's gonna miscarry right on my doorstep when she sees the state of you!

BLAKE

Once more, with your napkin.

MAGNIER

Grab a corner, let gravity do its job, place on lap.

BLAKE

That's better, but please try not to crane your neck like a psycho chicken.

MAGNIER

You should take a look at yourself.

BLAKE

All right, let's see how you hold your knife and fork.

MAGNIER

What about it?

BLAKE

First of all, don't rush to pick them up. It's not a race. Wait until everyone is served and ready to eat.

MAGNIER

Got it. I'll wait.

BLAKE

You can pick them up now.

Magnier picks up his fork and knife.

BLAKE

You look like you're about to stab someone...

MAGNIER(trying to look mean like a killer)

I stab my steak and every single pea to death.

BLAKE

Stop messing, we've got to get this right.

Blake stands up and places the cutlery in Magnier's hands. There's a knock on the door.

MAGNIER

Maybe I should get this, to spare Manon...

BLAKE

You sit tight.

Blake opens the door to Manon, who screams in surprise. She walks in, unable to take her eyes off Blake.

BLAKE

Thanks for coming.

MANON

I wouldn't miss it for the world.

BLAKE

Right, let's change the rules. I'll go sit in a corner. Forget I'm here.

MAGNIER

How could I, you're a sight for sore eyes.

BLAKE

I won't interfere unless you make a mistake.

Blake takes a broom and waves the stick at Magnier.

BLAKE

If you misbehave, I'll poke you.

Manon takes a seat. Blake lights a candle on the table.

MANON

How romantic!

MAGNIER

When do I get to push the meatball over to her with my nose?

BLAKE

Ready?

Magnier takes his napkin and holds his cutlery the right way. Satisfied, Blake encourages Magnier to continue and signals him to start the conversation.

MAGNIER

Do you like flowers?

MANON

I love them.

Blake looks at Magnier, who doesn't know what to say next. Manon tries to help him.

MANON

What country would you like to visit?

MAGNIER

I don't know. I think I'm scared of planes, and I get seasick. I suppose I should pick a country

where I can go by train. (to Blake) Is there a train to the Bahamas?

Blake rolls his eyes and pushes the broomstick into Philippe's side, who grimaces. Manon tries hard not to laugh. Magnier pours her a drink "à la Mexican", lifting the bottle high. Blake nudges at him again with the broomstick. Manon giggles.

MAGNIER (to Manon)
Have you ever been on a first date? Of course you have, you're so beautiful...

Manon blushes.

65 INT EVENING - KITCHEN

The cat licks his lips. Manon, Odile, Blake, and Magnier are sitting at the dinner table. The meal is drawing to an end. Magnier is all dressed up, looking like a kid in Sunday clothes. He wants to mop up the sauce on his plate but thinks better of it. Blake notices it and gives him an approving glance.

MAGNIER
It was delicious, madame Odile. I've never eaten anything so... palatable. (Clearly proud of his choice of words)

ODILE
I hear you are tutoring a young boy. That's really nice of you.

Magnier straightens up proudly. But he freezes when he sees madame Beauvillier standing on the doorstep. Blake and Magnier leap to their feet.

NATHALIE
I don't mean to interrupt. I heard a noise and came down to see what it was, that's all. I'm happy to see you're enjoying yourselves.

BLAKE
Why don't you join us for dessert?

He rushes to get another plate.

NATHALIE

That's very kind of you, but I won't be staying.

BLAKE

If I may say so, I think that...

Blake immediately regrets his words, but Nathalie teases him.

NATHALIE

You often say so, don't you...

MAGNIER

Please stay!

Without a word, Odile brings her a tart.

NATHALIE

All right then. I'll stay a moment.

She sits down. Everyone is silent. Blake hands his plate to Odile. She cuts the tartlet in half and gives one serving back to him.

NATHALIE

It's delicious, Odile.

She raises her glass for a toast.

NATHALIE

Thank you all for the joy you bring to this house.
(a beat) I want you to know that I am touched by your care and concern. I raise my glass to all of you.

BLAKE, ODILE, MAGNIER, MANON (all together)

To all of us!

They drink. Blake senses a sadness beneath Nathalie's enthusiasm. She finishes her tartlet, and is about to head back to her apartments.

NATHALIE

By the way, two people whom I want to impress are due to visit this week, on behalf of a major accommodation rental site. They're British like you, Mr Blake. They will help us advertise our future guest rooms.

At these words, Madame leaves the room. Magnier checks his watch -- it's getting late.

MAGNIER

It was a real feast, madame Odile. We'll clear the table and then I'll head back out to my shack.

ODILE

Leave it, I'll clean up. I like to do it my way.

MAGNIER (neatly folding his napkin as he stands up)
I'll bring you ceps for your confit next time.
Thanks again.

Odile watches him disappear into the night. His elegant clothes give him an itch that makes him walk like a child. Manon yawns. Odile and Blake send her off to bed. Then they start clearing up the table.

ODILE

I think they enjoyed my cooking.

BLAKE

Of course they did! Even Madame devoured her tartlet.

ODILE

I enjoyed making dinner for you all. Why don't we do it again?

66 INT DAY - HALL

The videophone beeps. Blake looks at the screen without moving. Odile joins him.

ODILE

Aren't you going to open the gate?

The screen shows madame Berliner waiting outside the gate in the pouring rain, drenched and furious. Odile smiles broadly, clearly enjoying the show. Nathalie observes the scene from upstairs.

ODILE

Are you gonna keep her waiting long?

BLAKE

Just long enough to see if her mascara is really waterproof. Can you tell Madame that her "great friend" has arrived?

ODILE

With pleasure.

As she makes for the stairs, Odile realises that Madame has witnessed the whole scene.

ODILE (embarrassed)

I was just on my way upstairs.

NATHALIE

I've had plenty of time to come down since the first beep...

Which she elegantly proceeds to do, adding:

NATHALIE (amused)

Are you just waiting until she is drenched or do you want her to get bronchitis?

BLAKE

Does Madame have a preference?

NATHALIE

Don't be cruel. Open the cage and let the hyena in. She's coming for my carcass...

Nathalie vanishes into the living room, leaving them speechless.

67 EXT DAY - FRONT STEPS OF THE MANSION

Blake rushes out onto the front steps with an umbrella to greet the dripping madame Berliner.

BLAKE

I'm terribly sorry, Madame.

MADAME BERLINER

I am drenched!

BLAKE

I can see that.

MADAME BERLINER

It was more convenient when the gate stayed open all the time.

BLAKE

The videophone still needs some adjustments.

Blake removes her wet coat with his fingertips, grimacing in disgust.

68 INT DAY - PARLOUR

Blake brings tea and cupcakes on a tray. Nathalie and madame Berliner are in the middle of a conversation.

MADAME BERLINER

You're being too kind to your maid. And her fling is like something out of a B movie...

Blake approaches madame Berliner.

BLAKE

Would you like some tea?

She nods haughtily without even looking at him. Blake pours the tea.

MADAME BERLINER

Your butler has indeed better manners than your cook. She is not at all graceful...

Blake can't believe she's talking about him as if he weren't in the room. But above all, he doesn't like what she said about Odile. He stares at her.

MADAME BERLINER

Why are you staring at me like that?

BLAKE (perfectly polite)

Madame is quite contemptuous. I thought French women were generous and elegant...

Madame Berliner is shocked. She looks at Nathalie, who sips her tea as if nothing had happened.

MADAME BERLINER

My friend, in my house, the servants know their place.

BLAKE

I'm not your friend. My friends don't think of love and kindness as a weakness. Manon and Odile happen to be remarkable women whom, unlike you, I hope to befriend.

MADAME BERLINER

How dare you? No one has ever spoken to me like that before! (to Nathalie) Aren't you going to say something?!

Nathalie gives her a sympathetic look.

NATHALIE

I'd rather not talk when he's like that. He scares me...

MADAME BERLINER

I have had enough of this. I've always tried my best to help this house, and this is what I get in return!

Madame Berliner gets up, furious and upset.

MADAME BERLINER (walking as far away from Blake as possible)

My coat, if it's not too much to ask.

Nathalie and Blake exchange a look.

69 INT NIGHT - CORRIDOR

Blake, who is feeling more and more at ease in the house, goes upstairs. Walking past Manon's room, he hears something like an outburst of anger. He knocks on the door.

BLAKE (through the door)

Good evening, it's Andrew. Is everything all right?

MANON

Sure.

BLAKE (through the door)
Still no word from Justin?

MANON
Nope. Maybe I'll never see him again.

Blake leans on the closed door.

BLAKE
Never again... you're too young to say things like that. Anything is possible at your age, everything is an adventure. Like when you found out you were going to be a mum...It should be a wonderful moment!

MANON
I ran to the bathroom to throw up.

They are still chatting through the door.

MANON
I've been waiting for weeks, Mr Blake. It's like my life is on hold.

BLAKE
What's a few weeks in a lifetime? Hold on, and keep a cool head.

MANON
Easier said than done! You talk like a book. But there's nothing I can do to change the course of things, even if I had all the courage in the world.

Blake thinks.

BLAKE
Write to him.

MANON (confused)
What?

BLAKE
Send him a letter, or a text...

Manon reflects on this. Blake sits on the floor by the door.

MANON
To tell him what?

BLAKE
What you're feeling. No more, no less. Tell him what he means to you. Tell him about the child you're carrying -- his child. Without anger, without reproach. I can help you, if you want...

Manon opens the door and finds Blake sitting on the floor. He looks up at her.

BLAKE
I can't guarantee it will work, but it's worth a shot.

70 INT NIGHT - MANON'S ROOM

Manon is sitting on her bed, ready to type a message on her phone. Blake walks to the window, turns around.

BLAKE
Do you get signal in here?

MANON
Not inside the house, but there's a spot near the garage that works. I don't know why. It's the only place with signal around here.

BLAKE
No it isn't. I know a tree where you can get signal too. If you show me the spot near the garage, I'll show you the tree.

Manon indicates her phone.

MANON (very timidly)
Shall we get started?

BLAKE
Yes of course, sorry!

He turns to the window and gazes at the park outside. He begins:

BLAKE
"Dear Justin..."--

MANON (interrupts him)
I prefer "My Justin"...

BLAKE
Whatever, it's your message after all. "My Justin"
it is then.

She types fast.

BLAKE
"It's been 22 days -- is that right? -- (Manon nods
without looking up from her screen) since we last
saw each other."

Blake pauses a moment, then resumes in a deeper voice:

BLAKE
"I miss you. I didn't get pregnant on purpose, but
now I'm expecting his child and I'm so happy..."

MANON
Your. "I'm expecting your child."

BLAKE
Sorry, yes, "your"... (he goes on) "This child is
coming sooner than planned, but I was hoping it
would make you happy still..."

Blake is lost in his thoughts.

MANON
Mr Blake?

BLAKE
Yes, er... Sorry. Where was I?

Manon reads out the last sentence.

MANON
I was hoping it would make you happy still...

BLAKE
That's it. (he goes on) "I'm not trying to tie you
down. I just want us to be happy together. I love
who you are. You bring out the best in me. If you
miss me as much as I miss you, please come back.
My life is pointless without you. I love you..."

Blake realises that Manon has stopped typing. She is looking at him, touched.

MANON

It's beautiful. I wouldn't have found the words, and yet that's exactly how I feel. How do you do it?

BLAKE

I told you, I wanted to run away when my wife told me she was pregnant. If I had, perhaps she'd have written me the same words as the ones you're about to send your Justin.

MANON

But you didn't run away. She didn't have to write to you.

Moved, Blake turns to the window.

BLAKE

Just like you, there is someone I should be writing to...

71 INT NIGHT - BLAKE'S ROOM

Back in his room, Blake sits on his bed. He takes his wife's portrait and holds it close to his chest. Then he puts it back on the nightstand, picks up Jerry the stuffed animal, reaches for his phone and scrolls through the pictures. The photo of his daughter with her husband and their baby in front of the Sydney Opera House moves him deeply.

72 INT DAY - KITCHEN

A casserole is simmering on the stove. Blake draws near, glances around to check Odile is not there.

BLAKE(to the cat)

If you talk, I'll pluck out your fur.

He lifts the lid, revels in the aromas, and decides to take a bite. He dips a spoon in the casserole as the cat looks on.

BLAKE (to the cat)
Fine, have it your way. We'll split it even, but
you keep mum.

Manon suddenly comes in through the backdoor. Blake drops the
spoon in the casserole and tries to act natural.

BLAKE
Manon? What were you doing out in the cold?

Manon is beaming.

MANON
I was in the garage. It worked, your idea worked!
Justin sent me a message!

She is literally dancing around the kitchen.

BLAKE
What does it say?

MANON
That he is sorry, he got scared, and he loves me!
You were right!

She twirls over to him and hugs him, planting a kiss on his
cheek.

MANON
You're a star. Your daughter's very lucky to have
you.

Manon breezes out like she came in, leaving Blake alone in
the echo of her last words.

73 INT DAY - MONSIEUR'S STUDY

Odile opens the shutters in Monsieur's study, then begins to
remove the sheets from the furniture. Seeing her through the
door ajar, Blake walks in to give her a hand.

BLAKE
I've been looking for you. (looks around) This
room is beautiful!

ODILE

It used to be Monsieur's study. It's remained closed since he disappeared. Madame would like to open it again, for when the rental site people come to visit. She says that when we open the guest rooms, we could turn it into a bar. Why were you looking for me?

BLAKE

We have to choose the wines for this dinner. Can you take care of it?

ODILE

Go down to the cellar? Not a chance.

74 INT DAY - CELLAR

Standing outside the cellar door, Blake tries to reason with Odile.

BLAKE

Stop acting like a child. I'll go with you, but only you can pick the wines.

ODILE (shudders in horror)

No way, it's full of bugs.

BLAKE

Don't tell me a big girl like you is scared of little bugs! Come on, it'll be over before you know it.

She howls faintly as she reluctantly lets him drag her down the stairs.

BLAKE

Relax. Everything's going to be all right. Just tell me where we need to go. Keep your eyes closed if you want.

ODILE

The wine cellar is in the back, on the left.

He guides her by the shoulders. They eventually reach the bottle racks.

BLAKE
There it is.

Blake quickly removes a few impressive cobwebs.

BLAKE
Don't open your eyes just yet... now you can.
Choose the wine and we'll head straight back up.

Odile tentatively opens her eyes.

ODILE
I can tell they're in there somewhere, watching us. (she tries to focus on the bottles but can't help throwing anxious glances at every nook and cranny.)

BLAKE (teases her)
They're here, watching us. I saw a movie where they came from another planet...

ODILE
Stop making fun of me. (she points to a series of bottles) These will be perfect for the starters. Please take them. I can't bring myself to touch them.

BLAKE
I'll go get a cloth.

ODILE
Please, don't leave me alone here... take a few Saint-Émilion too, for the main course. Muscat for the aperitif and champagne for dessert.

Odile is already making her way back. But she suddenly freezes. A thread of spider web is clinging to her face. Retreating further away, she spots two shiny beads eyes staring at her from under a crate -- a mouse.

ODILE
Andrew, my legs are wobbly.

BLAKE
What do you mean?

She passes out. He just about manages to catch hold of her.

BLAKE
Okay, I get the idea...

75 INT DAY - CELLAR

Blake went to get Magnier to help him carry Odile back upstairs. Magnier is moved to see her lying on the ground, unconscious.

MAGNIER
Poor thing... she looks like Sleeping Beauty.

BLAKE
In her cobweb palace. How romantic. I hope the mice will help her prepare tonight's dinner, because time's running out. You grab the legs, I'll hold her shoulders.

The two men carry Odile.

MAGNIER
She's got nice legs...

BLAKE
See, you do like her.

MAGNIER
Shut up and get a move on instead of talking rubbish. My back hurts.

BLAKE
Think of it as saving a princess.

MAGNIER
Some princess that is. Here, we say heavy loads weigh as much as a dead donkey.

BLAKE
That's funny, where I come from we say heavy like a pregnant cow.

Odile mumbles.

ODILE
I can hear the both of you. Watch it...

76 INT/EXT EVENING - FRONT STEPS/HALL

Blake is standing on the front steps of the mansion to greet Madame's guests. A car pulls up in front of him. He opens the passenger door.

BLAKE
Good evening, Madame. Welcome to Beauvillier estate.

He recognises Melissa Ward.

BLAKE
Melissa?

MELISSA
Good evening, Andrew. I'm sorry I can't kiss you, we're not supposed to know each other. You're looking well.

Blake looks to the driver's seat. Richard Ward gets out of the car.

BLAKE
What are you doing here?

WARD
I'm accompanying my wife. She looks for holiday locations in France for a major travel website...

BLAKE
But--

WARD
You stopped calling altogether, and I couldn't get through to you. I thought maybe they gave you a suppository. Then madame Beauvillier said she'd just hired an English butler. Typical of you...

Blake is speechless. The dinner is going to be very long. Ward grabs a beautiful bouquet from the backseat.

WARD
You look well, old pal. It's good to see you. If I'd been told back then you'd be waiting on me at a dinner party someday, I never would have

believed it. It must be what they call the magic of life!

BLAKE

Do you realise the situation you're putting me in?

WARD

You've put yourself in it, big boy. That's why I'm thrilled to be here. Hey, shouldn't you be holding the door open for me here?

BLAKE

Richard, I...

WARD

Mr Ward. We are not from the same walk of life.

Blake ushers them in with great deference. He's not enjoying this at all.

WARD

Thank you, my good fellow. Here, take this "tip".

77 INT EVENING - HALL

Nathalie walks down the grand staircase dressed in a magnificent gown. Her natural elegance is making up for the jewellery she is not wearing. Blake observes her, Nathalie notices. She looks tired.

NATHALIE

Welcome everyone. I am so pleased to have you all here!

Melissa shakes her hand.

MELISSA

Melissa Ward. (turns around) Richard, my husband.

Ward bows to kiss her hand and proffers the bouquet.

WARD

Delighted to meet you.

NATHALIE

They're so beautiful! Mr Blake, could you please get a vase for the flowers. (turns to her guests)

I am so happy to meet you! Please come in, let me show you around. I hope my humble abode will be to your liking.

She starts to show them around.

78 INT EVENING - PARLOUR

Melissa and Nathalie are chatting while Richard Ward, sitting in an armchair, is being served another drink by Blake. Ward winks at him sarcastically. (they speak in hushed tones).

BLAKE
You bastard, keep this up and I swear I'll--

WARD
I love it when you threaten me. What are you going to do about it, huh? Beat me at chess? I couldn't care less. Leave me high and dry on a very important ceremony? You already did that.

BLAKE
You'll pay for this.

WARD
Tomorrow, if you want, but tonight, let me enjoy the show. (louder) Tell me, my good fellow, could I have some ice?

BLAKE
In Muscat, you ignorant monkey? (then louder)
Right away, sir...

Andrew nearly walks into the door on his way out. Ward sinks deeper into his chair, smiling blissfully.

79 INT EVENING - CORRIDOR - PANTRY/KITCHEN

Blake carries a tray back into the pantry. He is pallid.

BLAKE
I can't take it anymore.

ODILE
Why? What's wrong?

BLAKE
I'm not cut out for this job...

ODILE
Good then, cos' it's not your job. Come on, cheer up, your trial period's almost over. Please don't pack it in tonight, we still need you.

BLAKE
You're right.

Before he goes out with another tray, Blake turns around.

BLAKE
You know what, madame Odile? I think we're all on trial periods, it starts at birth and only ends when we die.

ODILE
We have better things to do right this minute than reflect on the meaning of life. And please drop the "madame". We call each other by our first names when we're from the same brigade.

80 INT EVENING - DINING ROOM

Nathalie and the Wards finish the main course; Nathalie has hardly eaten anything. Blake clears up while Ward discreetly mocks him.

MELISSA
That veal stir-fry was extraordinary.

NATHALIE
I'm blessed with a fantastic cook.

MELISSA
Do you also plan to offer table d'hôte meals when your guest rooms are operational?

NATHALIE
I haven't considered it, actually...

MELISSA
I'm sure your rooms will be a big hit in themselves. Your mansion is so beautiful.

NATHALIE

It could do with some refurbishment though.

MELISSA

Don't worry about that. People are looking for authenticity, ambiance, history. Otherwise they stay in these modern hotel chains that all look the same!

WARD

This place is so filled with memories. Even your butler knows that, am I right?

BLAKE (controlling himself)

You are absolutely right, sir.

81 EXT NIGHT - PARK/GATE

The Wards are parting from their host. Blake is posted at the park entrance to close the gate. Their car stops at his level, and Melissa and Richard get out. She gives their friend a warm hug.

MELISSA

What a night! It was so weird to see you play the part of the butler. But it suits you, I must say. After all, you've always taken care of us all. As for the guest rooms, I'm sure they'll be a success, the place is truly charming.

WARD (to his wife)

Get back in the car out of the cold. You'll catch your death with your top model low-cut dress.

Melissa slips back into the vehicle. Ward and his old friend hug.

WARD

I won't forget this evening anytime soon.

BLAKE

Neither will I. You've treated me like shit all night. Stop hugging me like that, if anyone sees us...

WARD

I'll plead love at first sight... (he steps back)
Listen, Andrew, maybe I was wrong. You did the
right thing coming here. I haven't seen you like
this in a long time...so alive.

BLAKE

I came here to reconcile the past, and now the
present feels quite good.

WARD

Are you going to keep playing butler?

BLAKE

I don't know. We'll see.

WARD

You're using the future tense, excellent. I won't
ask you when you're planning on coming back... but
watch out, I could decide to come here again!

He gets back in the car and waves through the window. Blake
watches them drive away.

82 INT DAY - ANTEROOM

Morning routine. Blake pours Madame's tea while she opens the
mail.

BLAKE

Is Madame pleased with last night's dinner?

NATHALIE

You've all been perfect.

BLAKE

I think existing on websites would be a real
boost.

NATHALIE

I agree. But it probably wouldn't be enough...

She shoves a letter in her drawer without opening it.

NATHALIE

No prize draw mail this morning?

BLAKE
None, Madame.

Madame looks thoughtfully at Blake for a moment.

NATHALIE
I'd like to take a walk in the park. Would you care to join me?

83 EXT DAY - PARK - ROSE GARDEN

Blake and Nathalie are walking side by side through the park in silence. They reach the rose garden. Madame hesitates, then walks in.

NATHALIE
I'd forgotten how beautiful this rose garden was.

They approach the tombs. Nathalie remains silent, lost in thought. Blake stands a few steps back.

NATHALIE
Do you fear death, Mr Blake?

BLAKE
No, not really. But I hate how it affects life.

NATHALIE
Death has taken people from you.

BLAKE
It has separated us.

NATHALIE
I hate life. It has separated me from my loved ones. Do you miss your wife?

BLAKE
Every second of every day.

NATHALIE
Did you ever cheat on her?

The question startles him, but does not shock him.

BLAKE
Not once.

NATHALIE

You seem to have very strong morals.

BLAKE

You're wrong. I'm only a man. I'm no better than anyone else, but I couldn't bring myself to hurt Diane.

NATHALIE

You may have noticed that this grave has no name.

BLAKE

I'm not asking any questions, Madame.

NATHALIE

It's a compromise, Mr Blake. For almost 20 years, my husband had a clandestine love affair. François was my everything, but I was only a part of his life. He wanted this woman to be buried here, in our estate. And I said yes -- on the condition that there was no mention of her name anywhere.

BLAKE

He chose to live with you...

NATHALIE

Would you have agreed to play second fiddle in your beloved's heart? (a beat) Him cheating on me was not the worst of it. I was heartbroken when I found out how much he loved her. A fling would have been tolerable, but I could never recover from their love affair. He married me out of reason, but his heart belonged to her.

Nathalie is shaking and slightly swaying. Blake draws near and offers her his arm. She leans on him with gratitude.

BLAKE

We should go home.

NATHALIE

Just a minute more, please. François was my joy and my sorrow. Yet, I still miss him. Sometimes I speak to him, but he doesn't answer. You must think I'm crazy... I was never afraid when he was by my side. I will probably never set foot in here again.

84 INT DAY - KITCHEN

Blake is having breakfast. Through the window, we see that the bad season is here. Odile walks in, back from Madame's apartments. She looks upset.

BLAKE
Something the matter?

Odile remains silent, busying herself at the sink.

BLAKE
Odile, I can tell you're upset, what's going on?

Odile stops what she is doing.

ODILE
I'm worried about Madame. Even before you arrived here, she wasn't her usual self, and her health seems to have deteriorated again in the last few weeks... I'm really worried about her.

BLAKE
I've noticed a certain sadness about her in the last few days.

ODILE
I don't know what to do, she won't even eat anymore.

Blake gets up and walks out.

85 INT DAY - NATHALIE'S APARTMENTS

Nathalie is looking at her bank statements, calculator in hand. Her jewels are displayed on her desk as for an inventory. There's a knock on the door.

NATHALIE
Yes?

Blake opens the door.

BLAKE
May I have a word with you?

NATHALIE
Later, Mr Blake.

BLAKE
Later won't make things better.

He walks in. Madame Beauvillier instantly tenses up and covers her jewellery with documents.

NATHALIE
I said later.

BLAKE
Allow me to insist. Odile and I are worried about you.

NATHALIE
Everyone is a bit under the weather in this season.

BLAKE
I don't think that's the reason. Are your financial problems that bad?

NATHALIE
It's none of your business.

BLAKE
I don't mean to interfere in your business...

NATHALIE
And yet that's exactly what you're doing.

BLAKE
I feel it is my duty. We can find solutions to the material issues, but you should really see a doctor. You must get help.

Clearly displeased, Nathalie puts her bank statements away in her drawer with abrupt gestures that betray her mounting irritation.

NATHALIE
I see. You're a financial expert AND a doctor?

Madame slams the drawer shut and gets up to go to her room.

NATHALIE

I'm asking you to please leave me alone. I do not wish to see you again today.

She slams the door on her way out. Blake goes to the door and lays his hand on the knob.

BLAKE

Madame, hear me out, please...

No answer. Blake opens the door. Madame Beauvillier is lying on her bed. She leaps to her feet, furious.

NATHALIE

How dare you walk in here like that?

BLAKE

You leave me no choice.

NATHALIE

I ordered you to leave.

BLAKE

I couldn't live with this on my conscience.

NATHALIE

It's not your conscience that pays your wages.

Furious, she glares at Blake. He takes a step into the room.

NATHALIE

I'll fire you on the spot if you get any closer.

Blake stops.

BLAKE

We'd have a lot to lose, you and I.

NATHALIE (exhausted)

Go now... please. Leave me alone.

He reluctantly obeys.

86 INT DAY - KITCHEN

Blake walks into the kitchen from the park. He is about to head into the corridor when Odile calls out to him.

ODILE

I'm sorry, but she still refuses to see you... I feel it's my fault.

Blake is really affected.

BLAKE

It's not your fault. I'm the one who opened her bedroom door. In fact, I owe a lot to you, and Madame. For the first time in years, I feel like I belong...

ODILE

She's having guests over. But she doesn't want you to go in there.

BLAKE

Who is here?

ODILE

She didn't say. Two men, in suits. Maybe bankers.

BLAKE

I won't interfere, I promise, but please let me go up to my room.

Odile hesitates to let him pass.

BLAKE

You're not thinking of pinning me to the ground in front of your cat, are you...

87 INT DAY - NATHALIE'S ANTEROOM

Blake opens the door to Nathalie's anteroom, walks in and opens the drawer where she hides her letters: bank statements, debit notes, letters from an estate agent's offering to buy the mansion. Chagrined, he finds her jewels encased in a velvet purse. Then he goes to inspect the rest of the room.

There's a mini stereo and headphones. He puts them on. *Should I Stay* by Gabrielle comes on. Someone had been in the middle of playing it. He closes his eyes, moved by the song. Suddenly, he feels a presence next to him. He turns around. Nathalie is standing on the threshold. He takes the headphones off in a hurry.

BLAKE (sheepish)
Forgive me, Madame...

They both stand still. With a look of sadness of her eyes, Nathalie scans the room. She breaks the silence.

NATHALIE
What song were you listening to?

BLAKE
I'm sorry, I...

NATHALIE
What song?

Blake plugs the headphones out of the stereo. Music fills the room.

NATHALIE
... François and I loved that song.

BLAKE
Diane and I were quite fond of it too.

He turns off the stereo as the song ends. Silence again.

BLAKE
I shouldn't have done that. I'm terribly sorry.

NATHALIE
Don't be. (a beat) Did you move out of your house when you lost your wife?

BLAKE
I thought about it, but then I stayed on. I wanted everything to remain as it had been.

NATHALIE
So did I. I held on for as long as I could... but I don't have a choice anymore.

BLAKE
Let me help you.

NATHALIE
Your kindness touches me, but you can't help me. No one can.

BLAKE

A woman whom I greatly admire once told me: "Never lose hope, even when all hope seems lost to you."

88 EXT DAY - FAÇADE OF THE MANSION

Winter has fallen over the estate.

MAGNIER

Stop fidgeting.

Blake is perched atop a big ladder, removing the leaves from a gutter with a rake.

BLAKE

All done.

MAGNIER

Come down now. be careful -- you look a bit under the weather this morning.

Blake starts to go down, pauses half-way.

BLAKE

You look very small from up here, like a leprechaun.

MAGNIER

Do you have a problem with leprechauns?

Blake resumes his descent. But he misses a rung a few meters from the ground and falls heavily.

Magnier rushes over to Blake, who is lying on his side, motionless. Blood is trickling from his temple. Philippe doesn't dare touch him.

MAGNIER

Andrew, please talk to me!

Blake mumbles something. Magnier kneels down closer.

MAGNIER

What are you saying?

BLAKE

I can't believe the last thing I'm gonna see before I die is your ass face. I think that's how you call it?

But Magnier is not laughing. Blake is getting weaker and weaker.

MAGNIER

Andrew, stay with me, please. Hold on.

BLAKE (struggling to form the words)

You tell my Sarah that I love her very much, and I'm sorry I couldn't do more for her.

MAGNIER

You'll tell her yourself. You've got to live!

Blake loses consciousness.

89 EXT DAY - OUTSIDE THE MANSION

Odile, Magnier, Nathalie, and Manon are with the paramedics who are tending to Blake.

NATHALIE (to a paramedic)

Is he going to be okay?

PARAMEDIC

It's too early to tell.

The ambulance is about to leave.

ODILE (to the paramedic)

Just one minute, please.

Odile rushes up the front steps of the mansion.

90 INT DAY - HOSPITAL

Blake is lying in a hospital bed, in a coma, surrounded by medical equipment. Sitting in a chair nearby, Magnier looks sombre. (song *Never Tear Us Apart* by Paloma Faith)

91 MONTAGE / VARIOUS SETTINGS (SONG CONTINUES)

Nathalie looks out her window into the distance. Odile, Magnier, and Manon are having dinner together. The atmosphere is gloomy. Mephisto rubs up against an empty chair. Yanis is doing his homework at Magnier's. Youpla is waiting outside the door. Nathalie is going over some documents, she grabs a pen and is about to sign.

92 INT DAY - HOSPITAL ROOM

In his hospital room, Blake opens his eyes. The first pair of eyes he meets belong to Jerry, the little stuffed animal on his bedside table.

MAGNIER(off)
Do you recognise me?

Then Blake sees Magnier sitting next to the bed.

BLAKE
You're the boar... or should I say the leprechaun.

MAGNIER
And you're a fool. I thought you were dead. Have you come to your senses this time?

BLAKE
I'm not sure. Ask me a question.

MAGNIER
What is madame Odile's favourite dish?

BLAKE(concentrates)
Roast duck breast with chanterelle mushrooms, but you wish she'd devour you instead...

MAGNIER
All right, that's enough. You're back. How are you feeling?

BLAKE
Like a man who came down to earth with a bang.

MAGNIER
The doctors say you'll be fine. Everybody came to see you, even Madame, but you were out of it.

BLAKE

How long was I in a maze?

MAGNIER

In a daze, not a maze. Almost two weeks. Here, this is from Yanis.

Magnier hands him an envelope. Blake opens it and pulls out a letter from the teenager:

YANIS (off)

"I hope you're alright. I thought you were dead just like Kevin's ferret. Get ready to pay for the console, the games, and the gift for my mum, because my teacher praised my work." (there is an arrow at the bottom of the page. Blake turns the page over and reads) "You were right, sometimes people do things to help other people without expecting anything in return."

Blake manages a smile.

BLAKE

Thank you, Philippe.

MAGNIER

What for?

BLAKE

For reminding me that I had every reason to live. (pensive) I wasn't scared of dying before.

MAGNIER

You ran off like a rabbit when I shot at you! People who are tired of living don't run so fast. (a beat) I'm glad you're back. The mansion is not the same without you.

93 INT/EXT DAY - MANSION

Magnier's old battered car comes through the gates and up the driveway. Odile, Nathalie, and Manon are standing impatiently on the front steps. Magnier is first to exit the car.

BLAKE

What a heart-warming welcome!

Magnier goes to help Blake.

MAGNIER
Take my arm.

BLAKE
If I had my wig and lipstick on, I might. But not like this, in front of everyone...

In the hall, Odile takes Blake's coat off with great care while Manon removes his scarf. Magnier is carrying his bag.

NATHALIE
Mr Blake. The mail is waiting to be opened. You're running late...

Blake looks at her and sees her mischievous grin. Odile hands him a pile of envelopes.

94 INT DAY - MADAME'S APARTMENTS

Nathalie and Blake are sitting on opposite sides of the desk. They cast sidelong glances at each other but neither dares to look the other straight in the eye. Blake hands her the letters one by one. He comes across yet another junk advert promising a road to riches.

BLAKE
You've won another million...

NATHALIE
Throw it in the bin.

Blake looks at her, surprised. She's smiling.

NATHALIE
I thought I'd never see you again.

BLAKE
Sometimes we should be cautious about what we think to be last times...

NATHALIE
Christmas will be here soon. I'd like it very much if we could celebrate it all together. What do you think?

BLAKE (ironic)
You're really asking me for my opinion?

NATHALIE
Don't push your luck...

95 INT DAY - KITCHEN

In the kitchen, Odile sadly picks up Mephisto's untouched bowl and empties it into the compost bin.

BLAKE
Mephisto didn't like your cooking?

ODILE
He's been missing for three days.

Blake senses her distress.

BLAKE
Don't worry, Philippe and I will go looking for him. We'll find him, I promise you.

ODILE
Thank you, Andrew. (a beat) But I have more bad news... Madame Berliner came back while you were in the hospital. She was wearing a ring that used to belong to Madame. She must have sold it to her. A beautiful emerald ring -- a gift from Monsieur Francois. I'm sure it was this very ring, I had cleaned it on several occasions. Poor Madame... It makes me mad.

BLAKE
How could that weasel do this to her?

ODILE
She waltzed in here, brazenly showing off the ring. Madame didn't let on, but it must have been really hard on her.

BLAKE
How dare she!

ODILE
Philippe was furious too.

Blake raises an eyebrow.

BLAKE
"Philippe...?"

ODILE (embarrassed)
What's the big deal? I call you Andrew, don't I! Stop making fun of me. I'm sad enough as it is, what with my cat missing, and Madame. Not to mention you. We all thought you were dead.

BLAKE
I've missed you a lot too, Odile, and not just for your cooking, believe me. I know it was you who brought Jerry to me. Thank you for that. Only you could have such a sweet attention.

He approaches Odile and kisses her on the forehead.

96 INT NIGHT - MADAME BERLINER'S HOUSE

Blake and Magnier, crouching, are picking the lock of a service door at the back of a house.

BLAKE
Put on your gloves and hood.

MAGNIER
Why do I get to wear the green one? I'm gonna look like a zombie, it sucks. I want the same colour as yours...

Motioning for him to shut up, Blake snatches Magnier's hood from his hands and throws him the black one. Happy, Magnier puts it on.

MAGNIER
There, much better. Now I look like a real commando.

Blake shrugs and puts on the green hood.

MAGNIER (low voice)
It's itchy. Dammit, must be your goddamn English nits.

Blake signals to him to keep quiet again. They open the door and tiptoe down a corridor. They hear a noise upstairs. It's their target. They go up.

MAGNIER

I'm warning you, if she's naked, I'll throw up.

Blake pulls out a plastic gun. Magnier opens his eyes wide. The target is humming in a room. Blake yanks the door open, brandishing his weapon.

Madame Berliner is standing in her bathrobe by her dressing-table. She shrieks horribly.

BLAKE (strong German accent)

Don't yell! This a holdup! Kein problem if you keep quiet... ve jewels! Schnell!

MADAME BERLINER (terrified)

I don't understand... You saying what?

BLAKE

Ve vant the jewels! Schnell or big trouble!

Madame Berliner points to a box on her dressing table. Blake hands his gun to Magnier so he can aim it at her. But Magnier doesn't want to. He can't stop scratching himself.

MAGNIER (strong Spanish accent)

Me no want el pistolero. Cold feet commando...

Blake insists. Magnier reluctantly takes the gun. Blake knocks over the jewellery box but can't find what he's looking for. He turns around and points at her accusingly:

BLAKE

You liar! Other jewels! Where are? Schnell!

MAGNIER

Pronto rapidissimo!

Completely panicked, Madame Berliner indicates her dresser.

MADAME BERLINER

Drawer uno. Promise you not hurt me.

Blake finds the little velvet purse he saw in Nathalie's study. He empties it on the bed and takes two rings, including the emerald one, three bracelets, and a magnificent necklace. Then he grabs the gun from Philippe's hands and approaches his victim.

BLAKE

If you telefonieren polizia, we come back and you big trouble. Kapish?

MADAME BERLINER

Si senör! Me say nothing, nada, nib, zilch. Cross my heart.

Blake plunges his hand into his inside pocket and pulls out a wad of bills, which he throws onto the bed. Magnier and madame Berliner are stunned.

MAGNIER

Why that senör?

BLAKE

Trust me, commando.

MAGNIER

Why dough to old bag?

BLAKE

Du keep quiet.

MAGNIER

You off your rocker.

BLAKE (to madame Berliner)

Das ist compensation. You never saw us. You speak, ich come back, und abyssal shit für you!

MADAME BERLINER

Ich understood. Never talk. Ever.

The pair disappear with the jewels under the amazed gaze of madame Berliner, who grabs the money on the bed as soon as they're gone.

97 EXT NIGHT - ROAD

The battered car stops suddenly on the side of the road. Magnier rushes out and throws up.

BLAKE
What's happening to you? She wasn't naked?

MAGNIER
I was scared, really scared. You're a nutcase!

BLAKE
Is it worse than "fried"?...

Magnier climbs back into his car. Blake is serious all of a sudden.

BLAKE
Philippe, I have something to tell you. I never was a butler. I lied.

MAGNIER
I knew it... You're a rogue spy. MI6 got rid of you. It had to fall on me, of all people. Just my luck!

BLAKE
I'm an entrepreneur back in England.

Magnier looks at him, unfazed.

MAGNIER
I don't care what you are. You could be an undercover Klingon for all I know, I'd still be your friend. Because we're buddies, right?

BLAKE
You bet we are.

98 INT NIGHT - STAIRWAY/CORRIDOR TOP FLOOR/STOREROOM

Blake heads back up to his room, yawning. He is exhausted. He hears strange noises, like squeaks. He sneaks into a storeroom at the far end of the corridor. There, between the piles of cardboard boxes and suitcases filled with old stuff, he finds Mephisto... with a litter of kittens! Blake goes to knock on Odile's door.

ODILE
What is it?

BLAKE
Andrew here. Sorry to disturb you at this hour,
but I've got something to tell you. About
Mephisto. Big news.

Odile opens the door.

ODILE
Enough with the teasing. Is he all right?

BLAKE
"He" is fine, "he" is a mum... Odile, you do know
the difference between boys and girls, don't you?
The bulk wasn't a winter coat after all...

Odile is flabbergasted. Blake takes her to her beloved cat
and newborn kittens. Scene of blissful joy, with Manon who
was also woken up by the commotion.

99 EXT DAY - PARK

Blake and Magnier are busy repairing the canopy in Magnier's
house. Odile runs over to them.

ODILE
I've been looking all over for you. There's a
couple of real estate agents with Madame, they're
collecting signed documents from her!

Blake looks at the other two.

BLAKE
To sell the estate?

ODILE
I think so.

BLAKE (to Magnier)
Come with me. Bring your gun.

100 EXT DAY - PARK - GATE

The two real estate agents are on their way out. The deal is done. They head back to their car parked by the gate, grinning at the thought of all the money they're about to make.

Blake and Magnier catch up with them. Philippe brandishes his gun.

BLAKE(calls out to them)
Just a moment, gentlemen!

AGENT 1
Are you the game wardens?

BLAKE
You're not leaving this place until you give me the documents madame Beauvillier signed.

The two men exchange a look, half-amused half-startled.

AGENT 2
Is that a menace?

BLAKE
It's a promise.

The older agent (Agent 1) starts to laugh. The other one looks a bit worried.

AGENT 1
I suggest you shut the fuck up and let us go. This deal is none of your concern.

Blake and the agent weigh each other up. Suddenly, Blake snatches the gun out of Magnier's hands and aims it at the agent. Magnier is stunned. The younger agent turns pale.

BLAKE
Give me the documents now, you anal orifice.

MAGNIER(to Blake)
Andrew, we say "asshole". "Anal orifice" is a bit too technical...

The estate agent stands perfectly still. Staring back at Blake, he whispers:

AGENT 1

Hey, redneck, you think you're in the Wild West or what?

With surprising speed, Blake cocks the gun and shoots at the car. The windows shatter, the doors are riddled with bullet holes. The firing rings out loud.

BLAKE

Looks like you got a hole in your dilly, cowboy. You think I wouldn't kill a guy like you, huh? Think again.

Blake cocks the gun again. The man looks suddenly scared.

MAGNIER

Andrew, you're all red in the face. You're not going to kill him, are you? Mind you, I know a place where we can bury the corpses.

The young agent panics and runs off, leaving his colleague to his fate. The other one is losing his confidence.

AGENT 1

Let's talk...

BLAKE

Are you trying to bribe me?

AGENT 1

How much do you want?

BLAKE

I want the signed sales agreement. And then you disappear.

MAGNIER

What he's trying to say is, you cough up the documents and get the hell out of here, dumbass.

AGENT 1

You guys are crazy! Shit, I'm not gonna die for a commission.

The man throws his satchel on the ground. Magnier picks it up and looks inside.

MAGNIER
Bingo! Here's the agreement.

BLAKE (to the agent)
Clear off, and never show your face round here again. Oh, and take your "very brave" colleague with you...

The estate agent skedaddles, abandoning his colleague in the woods, and jumps into his bullet-riddled car. As he starts the engine, he shouts:

AGENT 1
You're completely fried in the head!

Blake hands the gun back to Magnier.

BLAKE
Philippe, what does "fried in the head" mean?

101 INT EVENING - MAIN LIVING ROOM

Odile, Manon, Andrew, and Philippe are sitting in silence next to each other on the sofa, watching a Christmas tree flicker in the dark. Multicoloured light garlands cast a warm multicoloured glow on their faces.

Under the low branches, a kitten is trying to catch a bauble while two of its siblings play with a golden garland nearby.

Philippe gently releases a tiny kitten's claws from his sweater. Mephisto is curled up on Odile's lap, asleep.

MANON
If I ever met Santa Claus, I'd ask him for a room for the baby, a wedding with Justin, and also to be able to stay working here with you lot...

Odile looks around and says:

ODILE
As for me, I'd ask to be ten years younger, and I'd ask for courage too, but I don't think he's got that sort of thing in his bag...

PHILIPPE

I would ask for a last meal with my mother and father. We'd talk a lot. There's so much I'd like to tell them... and I'd ask for a night like this one with my wife and children, if I had any...

Moved, Odile looks at Philippe. Magnier senses her gaze on him and turns red. Blake remains silent. He knows the others are waiting to hear his wish. He hesitates, but before he can say anything, Nathalie appears at the living room door.

NATHALIE

What are you all doing in the dark?

PHILIPPE

Writing our list to Santa.

NATHALIE

There's so much to wish for. Who knows what we'll get this year? Have you all been good little boys and girls?

Despite her sadness, she smiles at them.

102 INT DAY - MADAME'S ANTEROOM

There's a knock on Madame's door.

NATHALIE

Yes?

Andrew's head pops in.

NATHALIE (surprised)

It's not teatime yet.

BLAKE

That's not why I'm here. Do you have a moment?

NATHALIE

Yes, of course.

He walks in. Nathalie notices he's dressed with care.

NATHALIE

Don't tell me you're resigning, please.

Blake hands her a gift.

BLAKE
Merry Christmas.

NATHALIE
You're quite an unpredictable man, Mr Blake.
Conventions, dates, ironing the newspapers... not
your thing. And now an early Christmas...

She takes the present.

NATHALIE
Thank you so much. What is it?

She opens the gift wrap and discovers a jewellery box.

NATHALIE
I just can't...

BLAKE
It's not what you think.

NATHALIE
Do you have any idea what I'm thinking of?

She lifts the lid to reveal the emerald ring. A quiver runs through her. Incredulous, she carefully picks up the ring and examines it.

NATHALIE
By what miracle...?

BLAKE
Miracles can't be explained. I'm sure an educated woman like you will understand... (a beat) Would you care to join me for a stroll in your park?

NATHALIE(ironic but already won over)
What should I expect, Mr Blake?

BLAKE
You have no idea what I'm thinking of right now.

103 EXT DAY - PARK

Blake and Nathalie are walking together.

NATHALIE
Where are we going?

BLAKE
I need to talk to you. This isn't easy for me.

NATHALIE
Should I be worried?

He takes her to the trees whose trunks he examined earlier, stops in front of an oak tree, and points to the scarred bark. It bears an old knife engraving, now illegible.

BLAKE
Do you believe in chance, Nathalie?

Nathalie looks at Blake, then at the engraving, then back at Blake.

NATHALIE
You're starting to scare me.

BLAKE
I hear that a lot lately... Do you know why I'm here, madame Beauvillier?

NATHALIE
For a trial period? And why aren't you calling me Nathalie anymore?

BLAKE
I lied to you, Nathalie. I came to your house because I was lost. This is where my wife Diane and I first met, when we were young. You didn't own the estate back then. I had been hired to give her English classes. She gave me so much more... One summer evening, we carved our initials right here. I tried to carve a heart shape around them with my pocketknife, but it ended up looking like a potato.

NATHALIE
I had a feeling you weren't a butler. At one stage, I even thought you'd fled your country because the police were after you.

BLAKE
That may very well happen here, in your country...

NATHALIE
Have you found what you were looking for when you first came here?

BLAKE
I have found much more than that.

NATHALIE
Are you going back home?

BLAKE
I don't know yet. I don't want to, but it's not only up to me. You, on the other hand, are staying put.

NATHALIE
What do you mean?

He pulls the sales agreement out of his jacket.

BLAKE
Here, you can light a fire with that. Your estate is no longer for sale. Being a butler is not my forte. But I'm really good when it comes to running a business... Please let me help you, I can afford it.

NATHALIE
How could you...?

BLAKE (defending himself like a child)
I only played cowboys. That's what adult-kids do, isn't it?

104 INT DAY - MAIN LIVING ROOM

Blake and Manon are setting up a large party table.

BLAKE
I don't know exactly who Madame has invited to the party, but I do know there will be many of us. And we'll get to meet "your" Justin at last!

Someone rings the intercom.

BLAKE (loudly)
Intercom! Philippe, can you take care of it?

ODILE (off, from the kitchen)
He's in the cellar, and I've got my hands in the dough. You go and get it!

Another beep. Blake puts down the plates he was carrying and heads for the door.

BLAKE
All right, coming. I'm still on my trial period after all...

105 EXT DAY - FRONT STEPS

Blake walks out on the front steps. A cab with tinted windows pulls up, and Richard Ward gets out.

WARD
Merry Christmas, old fellow!

Blake is surprised. Melissa Ward gets out of the cab too. Blake goes to give her a kiss.

BLAKE
Great to see you, you dark horses! Oh and by the way, Richard, I won't be serving you today.

WARD
What a shame. It was nice to have you obey me, for once!

They hug.

WARD
I brought you a present...

BLAKE
I hope it's not one of your awful modern paintings?

WARD
Not exactly. I bet you'll like this one...

He opens the back door of the car and a little four-year-old girl, **ALICE**, gets out, clutching a brand-new stuffed kangaroo.

Blake watches her in awe. Moments later, his daughter **SARAH** comes out of the car, her husband in tow.

BLAKE
Sarah?

The young woman hugs her father.

WARD
Merry Christmas, old buddy.

Nathalie appears on the front steps (she gives Melissa a kiss), followed by Odile, Manon, Magnier, and Yanis, all feeling emotional in their own way.

The camera pans out as the voices mingle, soon covered by panicked barking and meowing noises.

THE END (theatre end credits with song *Only Love Can Hurt Like This*,
by P. Faith)