

A PAIR OF GOOD LIARS

BY

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FADE IN:

INT. ROMANIA - BUCHAREST - CLASSROOM - DAY

SUPER: "ROMANIA, BUCHAREST, DEC 2005"

The classroom is beautifully decorated with framed posters of America. MARIA, early 30s, sits at the schoolmaster's desk and draws a dress on a sheet of paper.

Lots of objects are positioned one behind the other on the teacher's desk.

The bell rings. The PUPILS, 7-8 years old, jostle noisily to their places. Maria looks at them reluctantly and sighs.

MARIA

For today's English class, you're learning the word 'behind'. Look at the objects on the desk and make up sentences on the notebook. When you finish, you copy the math exercises from the blackboard, and solve them. I don't wanna hear any sound!

She continues her drawing. The sketch she works on is half done, and looks like a piece of art which needs much time to be finished.

EXT. PRETZEL SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Maria fidgets by the window of a pretzel shop. She checks her watch and sighs.

A GRUBBY GIPSY GIRL, 5, stands in front of her, and begs.

GIPSY GIRL

Gimme some change. Gimme a coin.

Maria ignores her. The SALESGIRL hands Maria two pretzels and the change. Maria picks up the coins off the counter.

GIPSY GIRL (CONT'D)

Gimme, or I'm fuckin' spitting you!

Maria gapes afraid. She hands the Gypsy girl two coins.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Maria rushes across a CROWDED sidewalk, gobbling a pretzel.

As she checks her watch every five seconds, her foot carelessly stamps into a small, but deep puddle.

Water and mud sloshes out and blotch her boots, legs and overcoat. Maria hisses with pain and anger.

A TAXI DRIVER parked just on the sidewalk, notices.

TAXI DRIVER

Hell with the Romanian government!
They'd never mend these friggin'
damned roads.

Maria sighs in agreement, grabs a few wet wipes out of her bag and cleanses her clothes and boots. As she runs her hand over a boot, she realizes that the heel is broken.

MARIA

Wonderful.

EXT. CROSSWALK - CONTINUOUS

Wobbling, Maria stops in front of a crosswalk. The CARS run past her. She puts her foot on the crosswalk. The DRIVERS don't care. She takes a few steps. So what?

She suddenly stops in the middle of the crosswalk.

MARIA

STOP!!!

Several squeaking of breaks make the train of cars stop abruptly and bump into each other.

MARIA (CONT'D)

There! Someone had to knock the
nonsense out of you!

INT. AMERICAN EMBASSY - WAITING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Maria analyzes thoughtfully some dresses in a fashion magazine. She checks her watch and frowns: and why did I hurry? She is suddenly interrupted by a WOMAN'S VOICE.

ASSISTANT

Maria Popescu!

Maria startles, stands suddenly and drops the magazine. She quickly picks it up and puts it back.

MARIA

Here!

ASSISTANT

Follow me, please!

Maria inhales, but doesn't exhale.

INT. AMERICAN EMBASSY - OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The assistant shows Maria in. Maria exhales.

Two American representatives, MRS. WRIGHT and MR. MOORE, and a Romanian clerk, MR. MUTU, sit at a desk. Mrs. Wright flips through the pages of a file. There's no chair for Maria.

MRS. WRIGHT
Excited about America?

MARIA
Oh, mad about America.

Mr. Moore lifts his eyebrows. Mrs. Wright makes a discontent face. Mr. Mutu gives an illuded sigh. Maria looks confused.

MR. MOORE
It's a tourist visa, right?

MARIA
Right.

MR. MOORE
How long are you going to stay?

Maria regains her cheerfulness.

MARIA
America. The land of opportunities.
The land of my dreams. The land of
everyone's dreams. I'll stay as
long as po-ssib...

The Americans almost scowl. Maria now realizes the slip.

MARIA (CONT'D)
Well, three weeks. At the most. I
mean I'm just visiting. I'm...

MRS. WRIGHT
You live on rent, you don't own a
house, you don't have a business or
a well-paid job...

MARIA
But I have two underage children
who I leave in Romania.

MR. MOORE
Not enough of a pledge. Many
mothers abandon their children.

MARIA
I can't believe you said that. I'd
never abandon my children.

Mrs. Wright closes the file and passes it to Mr. Mutu.

MRS. WRIGHT
We'll call back.

MARIA
(hopeful)
Yeah.

Maria stares at them.

MRS. WRIGHT
That's all.

MARIA
That's all. You'll call back.

MRS. WRIGHT
We'll call back.

EXT. BUCHAREST - MARKET - DAY

It snows. Maria and BIANCA, 8, move along the CROWDED market.

BIANCA
We have the classroom Christmas festivity on Monday.

MARIA
I know, sweetie. Remember the true story about Santa?

BIANCA
There's no Santa Claus. Parents buy gifts for their children and pretend they're from Santa.

MARIA
Good girl. Only that this Christmas mommy's totally broken.

BIANCA
Which means?

Maria squats in front of her.

MARIA
I've got an idea. We'll pick some of your old toys and wrap them and make a gift.

BIANCA
We'll pretend that Santa pretended that he had brought me a present.

MARIA
Kind of.

BIANCA

The children will laugh at me.

MARIA

Nobody'll know what we have there.
I promise you'll have the most
beautiful wrapper.

BIANCA

Very sad.

INT. NEW YORK - STEVEN CLARK FASHION BUILDING - DAY

A bunch of WORKERS move boxes of clothes from one room to another. OTHERS unpack them and put them on hangers.

CLIFF, 40s, rushes through them and heads to his office, holding the cell phone at the ear, and two different belts in one hand.

INT. NEW YORK - STEVEN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - SAME

The cell phone rings and STEVEN, 40s, athletic, opens his eyes sluggishly, and reaches tardily for the phone.

INTERCUT - TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

STEVEN

Hello.

CLIFF

The leather belts are not as we expected, and the silver-buckled are too expensive. Which ones do we pick?

STEVEN

Yes.

Cliff kicks open the door of his office and bursts enter.

CLIFF

It's not a yes or no question, damn it, Steven.

Cliff tosses the belts on the desk and glances at his watch.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

You're still in bed at this hour?

STEVEN

Is that you, Cliff?

CLIFF

No, it's my holy ghost. Which belt?

STEVEN

Whichever.

Cliff hangs up and sighs.

CLIFF

He never knows, he never cares.

(looks at his ASSISTANT)

I wonder what would happen to this business if I'd vacate.

INT. STEVEN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The phone rings again. Steven sits up and looks at the unknown number.

STEVEN

Hello?

CLAUDIA STEMATE (V.O.)

Hello! This is Claudia Stemate here. Do I have the pleasure to talk to Mr. Steven Clark?

Steven reaches for an apple on the bedside table.

STEVEN

Yes, madam.

CLAUDIA STEMATE (V.O.)

I'm calling you from the Minister of Environment in Romania...

Steven takes a bite and looks confused.

CLAUDIA STEMATE (V.O.)

...to inform you that your application in ecological programs for foreign investors has been approved.

STEVEN

(confused)

Okay?

CLAUDIA STEMATE (V.O.)

You may startup your business any time you'd like.

STEVEN

My application... Oh, I have it! I have it! Er, well, okay, thanks.

The WOMAN in bed next to him, 25, smacks her lips, stretches and opens her eyes slowly.

JESSICA
How many businesses that you don't
care about do you own?

Steven begins to get dressed.

STEVEN
Oh, this is my father's idea. He
lives in Romania and wants to
convince me to move there too.

JESSICA
Romania? That's Africa?

STEVEN
Eastern Europe.

JESSICA
And will you?

Steven snorts.

INT. BUCHAREST - MARIA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

SUPER: "JANUARY 2006"

Maria's small house is adorned with posters of America as
well as the classroom.

Maria wipes off the dust and speaks on the phone.

MARIA
Hello! My name is Maria Popescu.
I'd like to know if you're
interested in my fashion sketches.

SOPHIE, 2, reaches her hands to a glass of milk on the table.

PAUL (V.O.)
Did you send a CV?

MARIA
Yes, of course.

Sophie takes the glass and spills half of it on her blouse.

PAUL (V.O.)
One moment, please. I'll check out.

SOPHIE
I'm wet.

Maria sighs, leaves the duster on the shelf she cleans, and
rushes to Sophie.

PAUL (V.O.)
So you currently live in Romania?

MARIA

Yes.

SOPHIE

(cries)

I'm wet.

MARIA

I'll take it off, honey.

PAUL (V.O.)

Excuse me?

MARIA

Oh, no, nothing.

PAUL (V.O.)

I'm sorry, but it's a must to have the home address in New York.

MARIA

I'm very willing to move there anytime. This is not a hindrance for me. Actually...

PAUL (V.O.)

I see, Mrs. Popescu, only that we really need an interview before hire. So as soon as you're here, let us know.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

Maria rushes toward the entrance and speaks on the phone.

MARIA

I've recently sent a CV along with my fashion sketches. I'd like to know if my work fits to your needs.

JENNIFER (V.O.)

We like your sketches, only that we need to hire right now, and since you don't have the visa yet...

INT. MARIA'S HOUSE - LIVING - DAY

Maria speaks on the phone while hanging laundry.

KIMBERLY (V.O.)

We're sorry we can't take you into consideration as long as you don't live in New York.

INT. MARIA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Maria holds the phone between shoulder and ear, and dries dishes with a kitchen cloth.

DANIELLE (V.O.)

The process of employment in our company requires a face to face interview as a first step.

INT. MARIA'S HOUSE - LIVING - DAY

Bianca and Sophie jump noisily on the bed, next door. Maria covers one ear to be able to hear the phone conversation.

MARIA

Excuse me, can you speak louder?

DIANE (V.O.)

We need a designer for bags and belts, not dresses and shoes. I'm sorry. Good luck!

EXT. CLOTHES SHOP - DAY

Maria runs her fingers over a beautiful expensive skirt.

SHEILA (V.O.)

Oh it's not that we didn't like your sketches, actually they're very beautiful, only that I didn't have time to reply this week. Will you come to an interview tomorrow or these days?

MARIA

(mostly to herself)
I'm afraid I can't.

SHEILA (V.O.)

Oh, but... oh Jesus, I'm just looking over your resume. You live in... Europe?

Maria stares nowhere, resigned.

INT. MARIA'S HOUSE - LIVING - NIGHT

Maria peeps into the children's bedroom through the half-closed door: they sleep. She closes the door slowly.

She picks up the toys reluctantly. She looks discouraged at the huge amount of mess around: banana skins, pieces of cookies, clothes and toys, paper and pencils spread wherever.

She stands, heads to the bookshelf, and searches for a particular sheet of paper in a file of sketches.

CONTINUOUS

Maria continues to draw the masterpiece on which she worked in the classroom.

She lingers a few moments, then makes a few corrections with the rubber. Adds more lines, erases them, adds others, continues to outline it. Then suddenly stops and sighs.

INT. MARIA'S HOUSE - DAY

Maria places a vase of flowers on the kitchen table. She eyes the house: everything is totally clean. Almost. A little smudge on the carpet. Remove it, quickly!

The two children, nicely dressed, sit on the sofa and watch TV silently. Sophie climbs down and goes to the table. She reaches her hands to a glass of water.

MARIA

Don't touch anything!

Sophie pouts and tries hard to stifle a whine. The doorbell RINGS. Sophie almost perks up. Maria takes a deep breath, heads to the door and opens it. GABRIELA, 45, stands smiling.

GABRIELA

Hello! Are you expecting a baby-sitter?

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Maria is dressed with an overcoat. She puts on her gloves, scarf and boots.

MARIA

I'll be back in... four-five hours.

Gabriela holds Sophie in her arms.

GABRIELA

No worries, we'll get along.

INT. STEVEN CLARK FASHION BUILDING - STEVEN'S OFFICE - SAME

Steven looks nostalgically over a photo with SUSAN, 40, on Facebook. He clicks another photo: Susan and her two SONS, 1 and 6 years old. He smiles sadly and clicks 'like'.

The next photo makes him shot a stern look: Susan, her children and her HUSBAND. He sighs and closes the laptop.

He grabs a magazine whose cover headline reads "Europe - The Travel Magazine", places his feet on the desk, a pen in mouth, and interestedly thumbs through the magazine.

There's a knock on the door. He flinches, then hastily, though silently, takes his feet off the desk.

He desperately searches with his eyes a place where to hide the magazine, and panics as he can't find one. He finally shoves it beneath a stack of papers.

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

CLIFF

Steve, you there?

STEVEN (O.S.)

Yes.

Cliff looks incredulous.

CLIFF

May I come in?

STEVEN (O.S.)

Yes.

STEVEN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Cliff opens the door slowly, as well as his mouth, and looks in and across the room with a suspicious face.

Steven keeps his eyes down, and feigns engrossed with a file of fashion sketches. Cliff shuts the door while keeps an eye on Steven. Steven observes the sketches and nods satisfied.

Cliff looks distrustful, and slowly approaches Steven's desk, hands in pockets. Steven turns the page. Cliff smiles confused. Steven lifts his eyebrows and gives a thumb up.

Cliff flutters his eyelashes, keeping the same smile on his face. Steven puckers his lips.

Cliff scratches his neck with one finger, arching his eyebrows in complaint, and smacking his lips. Steven sighs and reluctantly shuts the file.

STEVEN

I need a break.

CLIFF

You need a break.

Cliff shoves himself on the chair in front of Steven's desk.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

Many people would like to have your money, Steve.

Steven leans his back against his armchair, hands crossed at the nape. Cliff reaches his hand to a pencil on Steven's desk and fiddles with it.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

When we got into this, we both agreed to pull together.

STEVEN

When we got into this, we both agreed that I'm with the money, you're with the brain.

Steven unfolds his hands and gestures.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

You know that I like clothes, I like being in trend with what I wear, but I'm just not interested in how it's made. Is that such a bad thing?

Cliff waits a few seconds.

CLIFF

On my part, I feel great that I make all the decisions, that everything goes the way I want, but as you don't care about anything, mostly about what I do with the money, I just...

STEVEN

Cliff! We've known each other since childhood. C'mon! You know that my biggest principle about a good relationship is trust. And, now, seriously, as long as my money multiplies, why would I distrust you? You do a great job. And you know I did it for you.

CLIFF

I know, Steve, and I'm very grateful. I just hoped that getting involved into this, would make you become fond of it, y'know?

STEVEN

I know.

CLIFF

But... I give in. I understand that this useless effort makes you feel uncomfortable.

STEVEN

I'm going to Europe to visit my friends and family.

CLIFF

You'll be away long?

STEVEN

I don't have any plans.

INT. MARIA'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Maria bursts into the house gasping hard. She looks splendid. Her new hairstyle and make up outline her gorgeousness. Gabriela shows up in the kitchen's doorway.

MARIA

Is he here?

GABRIELA

No one's here other than us.

MARIA

Where's my new blouse?

Gabriela hisses scared. She runs to the bedroom. Maria looks around discontent: the house doesn't look as clean as she left it. Gabriela returns with a white blouse in her hands.

GABRIELA

You mean this blouse?

Maria looks at it terrified.

MARIA

What happened to it?

GABRIELA

Bianca blotched it with tomato sauce. I'm so sorry.

LIVING - CONTINUOUS

Maria tries to cleanse the blouse, but she makes it worse. Bianca shows up with a glass of strawberry juice in one hand.

BIANCA

It was Sophie who did it.

Gabriela shakes her head. Maria flings the blouse, Gabriela catches it unawares, Maria approaches Bianca, hands on hips.

MARIA

Why are you lying? Mm? Can't I really have this house clean for at least one day?

Bianca sobs.

MARIA (CONT'D)

And don't ever lie again. I can't stand the lie.

(gives her a good shake)

Do you hear me?

Juice sloshes out of the glass and stains both Bianca and Maria, and the carpet. Maria grabs the glass, makes an exasperating irritated face and roars.

BIANCA

My Christmas present was a lie. I so much wished for a Dalmatian puppy.

Maria sighs. Bianca releases herself from Maria's hands and runs to the bathroom crying.

Sophie shows up, wearing a comic face, her mouth, hands and dress wholly dirty of chocolate.

Maria gapes dejected. Sophie looks at her hands and grins.

SOPHIE

Sophie wants Dalmatian puppy, too.

CONTINUOUS

Gabriela is gone. The house looks clean again. Bianca and Sophie wear other clothes. The blotch on Maria's blouse is completely covered by a blue silk brooch.

They all sit on the sofa. Maria holds Sophie in her lap and brushes her hair while sings.

MARIA

*London bridge is falling down,
falling down, falling down...*

With a nimble movement, Sophie pulls out a pin in Maria's head, and a good lock of hair rolls down.

MARIA (CONT'D)

No, Sophie! For crying out loud.

Maria stands angrily, places Sophie on the sofa and scurries to the mirror. She works clumsily her hair muttering.

MARIA (CONT'D)
I'm always so lucky. The devil take
it, friggin' shit!

A car engine growls at the gate, followed by two short honks.
Maria startles. The two girls scoot to the door noisily.

BIANCA/SOPHIE
Daddy, daddy!

While Maria tries hard to fasten her hair back, she
accidentally causes another lock of hair to unfold, and
everything falls apart. She almost cries. The door opens.

EXT. MARIA'S HOUSE - YARD - CONTINUOUS

When he wants to enter, ANDREI, 30s, a nice man, is noisily
assaulted by the two girls who push him outside: Sophie
throws herself into his arms, and Bianca climbs his spine.

Maria shows up in the doorway, hair fastened randomly. Andrei
tries to make eye contact with her, but is clenched by the
four little hands which cover his eyes and mouth.

ANDREI
Okay, okay, little elves! Wouldn't
you like to see grandma?

BIANCA/SOPHIE
Grandma, grandma!

ANDREI
She's in the car. Run to her!

The girls suddenly release him and scurry toward the gate.

Now it's only the two of them. Not a comfortable moment.
Andrei shoves his hands into his pockets and gazes at her.

MARIA
They missed you.

ANDREI
Yeah. I missed them too.

Another silent awkward moment. Maria glances in the house.

MARIA
I thought you'd stay a few hours
with us, so that we all spend a
little time together. For the
children, of course.

ANDREI
I wished, but mom insisted to come
with me.

Maria makes a face and points to a big bag next to her feet.

MARIA
Their luggage.

Andrei approaches and bends down to pick the bag. When he stands, Maria curls his neck with her hands.

He kisses her cheek. They look into each other's eyes. Maria tears. He holds her and sighs. She wipes away her tears.

MARIA (CONT'D)
I wish you had been more protective
with me when your mother...

ANDREI
(gentle)
Let's not start again on that.
What's the use?

Maria looks hurt. She releases him slowly from her arms.

ANDREI (CONT'D)
I'll bring them back on Tuesday
night. I'll take care of them.

INT. MARIA'S HOUSE - LIVING - CONTINUOUS

Maria shoves herself on the armchair, with a photo album in her hands.

She flips through it nostalgically: their wedding, their honey moon, the first pregnancy, funny pictures with the whole family on different holidays.

Her eyes tear. She sobs and keeps turning page after page. The phone interrupts her reverie. She picks up.

MARIA
Hello?

LAURENTIU DIMA (V.O.)
Hello. This is Laurentiu Dima from
the American Embassy. Mrs. Popescu?

Maria looks hopeful and afraid at the same time.

MARIA
Yes?

LAURENTIU DIMA (V.O.)
Your application for the tourist
visa was, unfortunately, rejected.
I'm sorry. You could try again...

Maria hangs up and gapes completely dejected. Then she suddenly looks revengeful.

CONTINUOUS

Pen in hand, a sheet of paper on the desk, Maria sits in front of the computer and navigates on the Internet. She puts down addresses. The locations seem to be Western European.

Maria emails resumes. Before she makes an upload, she replaces the home address with a fictive one. She lives everywhere in Western Europe.

She yawns. She checks her watch and looks amazed: 4.30 A.M. She shoves herself on the sofa and falls asleep.

INT. SPAIN - PERSPECTIVE AGENCY OF EMPLOYMENT - OFFICE - DAY
JOSE ORTEGA, 20s, dials a phone number.

INT. MARIA'S HOUSE - LIVING - SAME

The clock shows 2.00 P.M. The sunbeams caress Maria's face. The phone rings.

She wakes up suddenly and reaches for the phone. Where did she misplace it? She looks around bewildered. She simply can't find it.

It keeps ringing. She tosses the pillow, the blanket, a towel and a bunch of clothes. Where the hell is it? It stops ringing. She exhales angrily.

The phone rings again. She searches more energetically. She listens and searches, listens and searches. Uh-huh, there you are: in the fridge.

INTERCUT - TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

MARIA

Hello?

JOSE ORTEGA

Hello. This is Jose Ortega from The Perspective Agency of Employment in Madrid. Mrs. Maria Popescu?

MARIA

Yes.

JOSE ORTEGA

Do you live in Spain? Because this phone number looks foreign.

MARIA

Oh, I live in Spain, of course, I'm travelling in... Europe... for a few... days only.

Maria makes a worried face. Jose looks a little confused.

JOSE ORTEGA

Problem is we've got a client who's very interested in your resume.

Maria covers her mouth with one hand.

JOSE ORTEGA (CONT'D)

Actually they're so impressed with your sketches, they don't even need an interview. They offer 4000 euros a month. Are you interested?

Maria flutters her eyelashes open-mouthed.

BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Maria opens her wardrobe and eyes her clothes.

MARIA

I'm done with teaching.

She hops and dances crazily, singing and humming her own-invented song "I'm done with teaching!"

Then stops suddenly, puts a scarf around her neck and struts to the mirror.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Hi, I'm Maria Popescu, fashion designer. I work for a famous company in Madrid.

She changes her clothes for several times, and goes to the mirror and does the same thing.

The phone rings. With slow fancy movements, she picks it from the table with her long-gloved hand.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Hello? Oh, I'm sorry, I just signed a precontract. You know, first come, first served.

LIVING - CONTINUOUS

Maria sits on the sofa, with a notebook and a pen in her hands, and makes calculations.

MARIA

1000 euros for the rent. A large modern apartment with two baths. 500 for the baby-sitter.

She crosses out the last thing.

MARIA (CONT'D)

No, 800. I'll have a full time baby-sitter. 1000 for food and bills...

The phone rings. She looks upset for being interrupted.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Hello. I'm no longer vacant. I already signed a precontract. No, no, thank you. Okay, good bye!

She makes a wondering face. Then she dials a number. It rings for several times. She leaves a vocal message.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Hi, sissy! I need you to borrow me about 3000 euros. I got a job as a fashion designer in Spain and I have to arrange my departure in three days. They pay me a big wage. Please call me soon. Thanks.

INT. MARIA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

The children play in the bedroom. Arms crossed, Andrei looks silently at Maria who prepares sandwiches.

ANDREI

I don't agree on leaving the children with a baby-sitter.

MARIA

Neither do I. But I take comfort in the thought that it's only for one month. After I cash my first paycheck, I'll take them with me.

ANDREI

My mother can look after them...

MARIA

Your mother can't do that without being mean with me. I don't need anyone's help.

He stares at her with discontentment.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Probably this is the price an ex-husband pays for deserting his wife in favor of his mother.

ANDREI

When are you leaving?

MARIA

Tomorrow. I bought the plane ticket. You should have come yesterday, as I told you.

INT. MARIA'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Maria finishes singing "Hush, little baby" song.

MARIA

And if that horse and cart fall down, you'll still be the sweetest little children in town.

The children sleep. She gazes at them. She strokes their heads. She touches the teddy-bears they hold in their arms. She kisses the girls' foreheads.

She looks distressed, and begins to sob. She covers her mouth with her hand to stifle her cry.

INT. MADRID - HOTEL - NIGHT

SUPER: "MADRID, JANUARY 10, 2005"

Maria makes herself at home in her comfy five star hotel room. She unpacks her luggage and touches excited every piece of new clothes which still wear tags.

Then she takes out a towel and goes to the bathroom.

INT. THE PERSPECTIVE AGENCY OF EMPLOYMENT - OFFICE - DAY

Maria sits on a chair. In front of her, MIGUEL RODRIGUEZ, 45, sits at his desk skimming her resume.

MIGUEL

Oh, Maria Popescu. Welcome to Madrid! Spain needs you.

Maria smiles looking flattered.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

English teachers are in great demand here.

MARIA

(chuckles, a bit confused)
Just as fashion designers, I guess.

Miguel laughs without understanding.

MIGUEL

We've got something very nice for you, and you only have to cross the street and reach the school, that close to your home is. 1600 euros a month for the first year...

MARIA

(overlapping)

What school? I'm here for a fashion designer job. Design, my second degree. I signed a precontract.

She hands him the precontract. Miguel looks baffled at it.

MIGUEL

Jesus Christ! Who contacted you?

MARIA

I think his name is Jose Ortega?

MIGUEL

Ah, these interns! It's a big misunderstanding, I'm afraid. Let me check out, though.

Maria gapes shocked. Miguel taps some keys on his computer and checks the database.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

So we've got here a Maria Popescu, fashion designer, Romanian.

MARIA

That's me.

MIGUEL

The job has already been assigned.

MARIA

Right, the precontract, that's it, there's no misunderstanding.

Miguel looks at her precontract, then back at the computer, then at Maria, and frowns.

MIGUEL

Are you 43?

MARIA

Usually I'm told that I look younger than 32.

MIGUEL

I'm very embarrassed, but we're expecting another Maria Popescu for this job, who lives in Torrejon, is 43, and has worked as a fashion designer for 15 years.

MARIA

This is unacceptable. I can't believe this!

Miguel sighs and shows a sincere sorry face.

MIGUEL

Wouldn't you like the teaching job? I promise you won't be mistaken for somebody else. We can sign the *contract* right now.

Maria stands.

MARIA

You're lucky you're a cute guy. Otherwise I'd ruthlessly slap you.

She grabs a lollipop off his desk, turns around and stomps toward the door.

INT. MADRID - MALL - CONTINUOUS

With the blue lollipop in her mouth, and wearing a disastrous face, Maria steps on the escalator stairs which go upward. She wipes away a tear.

In front of her, VLADIMIR, 30s, dressed in motorcyclist outfit, accompanied by an oomph GIRL, 20s, equally dressed, looks back for a second.

Aware that he saw something cool, he looks back again and keeps his eyes on Maria. Their eyes meet. He winks. Maria notices the girl next to him and scowls at him.

Looking at Maria, he squeezes the girl's ass and kisses her neck. Maria takes the lollipop out of her mouth and stares.

He licks the girl's earlobe while squints at Maria. Maria sticks her blue tongue out and makes a face. Making no face, he sticks his tongue out and funnily stays like that.

Maria shows him the middle finger and shoves the lollipop back into her mouth. He licks his middle finger. Maria shows him a defiant face, and looks somewhere else.

EXT. MADRID - SHOES SHOP - DAY

With a suitcase in her hand, Maria walks past a shoes shop. She stops, makes a few steps backwards and stares impressed at a pair of high-heeled shoes in the shop window.

Maria gazes at the shoes and imagines how they were created. With her finger, she traces imaginary lines on an imaginary sheet of paper, across the heel, the sole, the ribbon etc.

From inside, the SALESWOMAN gapes baffled at Maria.

INT. JEWELRY SHOP - CONTINUOUS

A woman's hand touches by turns some hand-made earrings, bracelets and necklaces which are spread over a desk. The LADY analyzes them attentively and tests them for strength.

LADY

They are very beautiful. The design is absolutely lovely and novel. My concern is that the quality of the materials is poor.

While she speaks, a bracelet bursts open into her hands and the beads spread across the table and floor. Maria looks embarrassed and baffled.

LADY (CONT'D)

I really can't afford to disappoint my clients. They know me for good. I always use strong accessories, like silver pins and locks. I'm sorry. I can't buy them.

INT. CALL SHOP - NIGHT

Maria speaks on the phone.

MARIA

800 euros. That's all I have. I can't, I have to at least make up for 3000, to pay for my debts. No, Andrei, thanks, I shoved myself into this, I'll draw myself out without anyone's help.

(sobs)

Have you been to the girls?

(cries)

Are they all right?

INT. THE PERSPECTIVE AGENCY OF EMPLOYMENT - HALLWAY - DAY

Maria waits in the hallway. Other IMMIGRANT WOMEN wait too.

ADRIANA

I hope they'll give me the secretary job.

CORINA

What are you talking about? We're slaves here. All we can get is baby-sitting or housekeeping. How long have you been here?

ADRIANA

One week.

CORINA

(snorts)

You either get used, or return to Romania. There're lots of secretary jobs there.

MARCELA

Lots and badly paid.

CORINA

Eh-eh, then choose: housekeeper in Spain or secretary *in Ro-ma-ni-a*.

Maria stares out of the window, ignoring their boring talk. An office door opens and she stands.

OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Maria sits on that chair again. Miguel is at his desk.

MARIA

I'll accept the teaching job.

MIGUEL

(regretfully)

It's no longer vacant, but we'll find something soon, I promise. Like in a week or so. Agreed?

MARIA

(sighs)

Agreed!

MIGUEL

Please fill in this form.

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Maria exits holding a copy of the form in one hand. Corina inquisitively squints at her.

CORINA

So baby-sitter or housekeeper?

Maria waves the form before Corina's eyes.

MARIA
(reluctant)
Teacher.

As soon as Maria exits, Corina scowls with envy.

CORINA
Bitch!

INT. COSLADA - BLOCK OF FLATS - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Maria walks across the dimly-lightened hallway of a block, and pushes the handle of her luggage. She finally finds the number: 36. She rings the doorbell and waits.

The door yanks open and she gets a fright. WOMEN and MEN voices talk and laugh noisily inside.

In the background, there are all kinds of sounds that make the atmosphere even more inhospitable: FISH FRYING, SHOWER RUNNING, BURPS, BABIES CRYING, GLASS BREAKING.

GIGI, a bulky churl man, 45, stands in the doorway and eyes Maria from top to bottom. And though he releases a long noisy fart, he doesn't seem to find it rude or shameful.

GIGI
What do you want?

MARIA
I think I mistook the address.

Gigi looks at the scrap of paper she holds in her hand, and which reads "Avenida de Viena, 1G, no 36, Coslada."

GIGI
No, you didn't.

A brutal MAN's VOICE, 35, bellows from inside.

VICTOR (O.S.)
The fuck did you do with my socks?

Victor suddenly shows up next to Gigi, cigar in mouth, and a bottle of beer in his hand.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
You're a fuckin' bad room-mate, you know? Why the hell don't you put my socks back in my closet after you wear them? Huh?
(to Maria)
Gigi's asshole like that. He thinks he owns everything.

GIGI

(to Maria)

And he's such a misspender. All the tenants who live here agreed to flush the water at the toilet whenever we crap, not when we pee, for saving of costs, but this cabbage always forgets.

STANA, 30s, holding a crying BABY in her arms shows up, smiling and scolding the two men.

STANA

Hey, you wranglers, calm down, poor woman, must have freaked out.

(extends her hand)

I'm Stana.

Maria reluctantly extends her hand.

STANA (CONT'D)

You must be Maria. Searching for a room to rent, right? Come in!

(loud, to the two men)

She's Romanian, our kind.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Maria crouches on a bench, sandwich in hand, the luggage next to her. She chews and swallows reluctantly. A good string of tear rolls down over her cheek. She removes it slowly.

A nice FAMILY walks past her. Maria gazes at them. THE HUSBAND holds his arm around his WIFE's waist, and the TWO CHILDREN play a run about game while moving away.

Maria cries. A WOMAN's HAND touches her shoulder gently.

FLORENTINA (O.S.)

They kicked you out?

Maria lifts her head. Her eyes meet the kind faces of VASILE, 35, and FLORENTINA, 30s. Florentina, kneels by her side.

FLORENTINA (CONT'D)

(even more caring)

They fired you? You've been late on rent? What happened?

MARIA

A bit of each, I'd say.

VASILE

(sighs)

Such is life in Spain.

FLORENTINA

Look, our home is not by far a palace, but we do have a spare room where you could lodge tonight.

INT. VASILE AND FLORENTINA'S FLAT - NIGHT

Their home is not big or plush, but at least clean and cosy.

Maria exits from her room with a towel, pyjamas and a toilet case in her hands, heading toward the bathroom.

MARIA

Er, should I flush the water?

FLORENTINA

Oh, you don't know how it's working? Let me show you. It's very simple. You just...

MARIA

Oh, no. I mean after I pee...

FLORENTINA

You do flush, of course. Don't feel embarrassed if you forget. In Romania we lived at the country, too. Toilet in the garden. When I first came here, I needed a few days to get used to flushing.

Maria resigns and lets her speak.

MARIA

Ok, thank you so much for everything. You're so nice with me.

FLORENTINA

I'm very happy you feel good. If you need anything, just say. Ok?

Florentina clutches the door handle of their bedroom.

MARIA

Er, Flori, I was wondering: what do you do here?

FLORENTINA

We do what you do, what all Romanians do: I'm housekeeper, Vasile's laborer in constructions.

MARIA

Yeah. Right. Okay, I'm going to take a shower, we'll talk tomorrow.

INT. MARIA'S ROOM - DAY

The room is about 12 metres square, a bed and a wardrobe. Maria sits on the bed reading the classifieds. The phone rings. It's Miguel Rodriguez. Maria picks up.

MARIA

Hello.

MIGUEL (V.O.)

Hi, Maria. I've got great news, but we need to talk face to face.

INT. MIGUEL'S OFFICE - DAY

Maria sits on the chair in front of Miguel's desk.

MIGUEL

Giving tuition to a ten-year-old. Six hours a day, from Monday to Thursday afternoon. You're supposed to do any kinds of activities with him, but all in English.

MARIA

Why don't they hire a speaking-English baby-sitter?

MIGUEL

It's not what you think. They do have a nanny who looks after him. They also want an English *teacher*. A native *British*-speaking teacher.

Maria gapes.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

You can do that.

MARIA

Do what? Pretend? That I'm *British*?

Miguel nods. Maria stares at him expressionless. He waits anxious. A few more silent motionless seconds.

MARIA (CONT'D)

No!

(stands to leave)

You know, that's very humiliating. However, um, thank you.

Miguel shoves his hands in his pockets and gazes at her sadly as she stomps toward the door.

MIGUEL

They offer 2500 euros a month.

Maria stops. Her eyes stare at a fix point.

EXT. CARLOS AND FLAVIA'S HOUSE - DAY

A large magnificent mansion, surrounded by a huge yard and garden, shines in the mild beams of a sunny January day.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

FLAVIA, 35, a lovely woman, places some plates and glasses in the dishwasher and turns it on. The doorbell rings.

AT THE DOOR - CONTINUOUS

Flavia opens the door. Maria stands in front of her.

MARIA

Hi! I'm Amber.

FLAVIA

Hi! I'm Flavia. Welcome, Amber! We were expecting you. Come in!

ALVARO'S OFFICE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Flavia opens the door of a large office room. ALVARO, 10, handsome, wearing cool clothes, sits at a desk and reads. His eyes look up as the two women walk in.

FLAVIA

Alvaro, this is Amber, your British teacher.

ALVARO

Wow. I expected you to be an old and fat woman. Sassy will find you delightful.

Flavia shots him a scolding look. Maria smiles surprised, almost bursts into laughter.

MARIA

Who's Sassy?

FLAVIA

Alvaro, porfavor, behave yourself!

ALVARO

C'mon, mom, don't be jealous. You know I love you and I find you the most beautiful woman in the world.

Flavia nods unsatisfied. Maria looks even more surprised.

ALVARO (CONT'D)

(to Maria)

I must get used to the idea that my wife should be uglier than my mom.

Maria smiles speechless.

INT. VASILE AND FLORENTINA'S FLAT - LIVING - NIGHT

Maria sits on the sofa and screens the room thoughtfully. Vasile and Florentina loom in, dressed in overcoats and ready to go outside.

FLORENTINA

Are you sure you don't wanna come with us?

Ignoring her question, Maria continues her thoughts aloud.

MARIA

How much do you pay for the rent?

FLORENTINA

600.

MARIA

I was thinking, now that I got a job, can I stay with you? How much is my room? Do you like me as a flat mate?

FLORENTINA

Of course, we'd be happy for you to stay with us. And we really needed to rent that room. It's 250 euro.

MARIA

Perfect! I'll take it!

There's a knock on the door. Florentina flinches. Vasile heads to the door.

FLORENTINA

I forgot to do something.

Florentina rushes to the kitchen. Maria frowns as the door yanks open and two male voices say hello noisily.

VASILE (O.S.)

Holla!

VLADIMIR (O.S.)

Holla, chicos, how are you doing?

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

VASILE

Hombre, you lost weight.

VLADIMIR

Man, I didn't. Do you still have the fridge in the living? I'm dying with thirst.

VASILE

Yes, dude. And there's non-alcoholic beverage for my crazy-about-driving friend.

LIVING - CONTINUOUS

Vladimir bounces into the living. Vasile seems to walk toward the bedroom.

VLADIMIR

You mean crazy about riding.

Maria squats by the sofa. There are a few photos of her daughters spread on the sofa. She has a stack in one hand, and just places another photo next to the others.

Vladimir yanks open the fridge and his eyes notice Maria.

VLADIMIR (CONT'D)

Who's this baby?

MARIA

Pardon?

Maria looks surprised as she identifies who he is. He also widens his eyes in recognition and takes out a can of beer, with gentler movements: there's a lady there.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Oh, look who's here: Mr. Cheater.

Vladimir drinks a few mouths.

VLADIMIR

That's not true. I just wanted to cheer you up. And I don't have a girl friend.

(surprised)

How long have you lived here?

MARIA

Cheer me up?

Vladimir takes a few more gulps.

VLADIMIR

Are you single?

MARIA

How straight you are!

(points to the photos)

This is what you call single? I
have two children to raise and...

Vladimir empties the can and throws it at the trash.

VLADIMIR

And a wound to heal.

Maria stares at him appalled and sits up on the floor.
Vladimir approaches and squats next to her.

VLADIMIR (CONT'D)

I know it's devastating, but don't
let this bleakness shadow your
youth and happiness.

MARIA

What bleakness? What do you know
about me? I'm happy.

VLADIMIR

My sister. Her husband left her.
She has three children. Terribly
depressed.

MARIA

(softened)

How do you know my husband left me?

VLADIMIR

I guessed. Hiding your suffering
doesn't make you stronger. Let it
consume naturally. You need to cry,
and to laugh. You've got a shoulder
here. I'm Vladimir.

Vasile and Florentina stomp across the hallway.

VASILE (O.S.)

Shall we go?

Vladimir stands.

VLADIMIR

Pleased to meet you.

(winks his eye)

I like your legs.

Maria tries not to smile, and gives him a cold look instead.

MARIA

Where are you from? How long have you been here?

VLADIMIR

Bulgaria. 10 years.

FLORENTINA (O.S.)

C'mon, Vlad, let's go! Don't tease Maria, she's a good girl!

VLADIMIR

Okay, Maria, see you.

MARIA

Bye!

EXT. CARLOS AND FLAVIA'S HOUSE - DAY

Maria rings the doorbell and waits. The door opens: Steven and Alvaro stand in front of her. Steven holds his arm around Alvaro's shoulders and smiles.

Maria and Steven make eye contact for a few seconds and look charmed by each other.

MARIA

Holla!

ALVARO/STEVEN

Holla!

Steven and Alvaro move aside and make room for her to enter. She walks in and takes off her boots.

ALVARO

This is Sassy.

MARIA

Oh, I didn't know 'sassy' means 'daddy' in Spanish.

Steven and Alvaro laugh.

ALVARO

Steven, my daddy? I wish. He'd regale me a harem on my coming of age party.

Steven rubs a hand over his chin and looks at Maria, laughing a little embarrassed. Maria smiles in understanding.

STEVEN

This kid's a handful. I'm warning you not to reveal yourself too much in front of him.

Maria's face turns gradually into mystification: Jesus, his accent is too much like an American's. What the hell?

STEVEN (CONT'D)

But what am I saying here? He makes guesses. And usually's not wrong.

Maria stares open-mouthed. Steven tickles Alvaro dearly.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

This little curious goblin should become a detective.

Maria gapes. There are a few seconds of silence.

MARIA

(precipitant)

Bamos a tu oficina, Alvaro!

Maria turns around and rushes to Alvaro's office. Steven looks confused. Alvaro looks content at Steven.

ALVARO

You freaked her out, dude!

Steven gives Alvaro a disapproving look and spurs him with his hand to follow Maria. Alvaro obeys him and gets away.

STEVEN

These stiff Brits!

ALVARO'S OFFICE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Maria blows into Alvaro's office. Alvaro follows her. There are two chairs at the desk. Maria grabs one of them. Her face means: 'I'm a tough teacher'.

She points to the other chair. Alvaro sits slowly and rakishly. Steven shows up in the door way.

STEVEN

I didn't mean to...

MARIA

(hacked British accent)

I'm sorry. We're very busy. Please close the door. Thanks.

Steven smiles confused about everything. He makes a gesture with his hands meaning obedience, and withdraws, closing the door slowly.

ALVARO

You fell in love, huh?

MARIA

You're not allowed to tell me such things. And you never will from now on, or I'll tell on your mother.

Alvaro makes a careless face.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Or on your father.

Alvaro looks afraid of the last news and suddenly repositions himself properly on his chair.

ALVARO

Okay?

MARIA

Good. And now, just letting you know, I don't care at all about your... Australian friend.

ALVARO

American.

MARIA

(to herself, worried)
I thought so.

ALVARO

(inquisitive)
What?

MARIA

Shut up!

INT. VASILE AND FLORENTINA'S FLAT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Maria stands in front of the mirror and 'practices' the British accent and intonation.

MARIA

Bottle. No, it's: bottle. Can. I can. I can't. Would you like some tea? Can I have a glass of water? Nothing. Nobody. Sidewalk. Oh my God, no, the Brits use 'pavement'. And, er, 'elevator' instead of 'lift'. Or vice versa? 'Underground' for 'subway' if I remember well. Oh, I never paid attention to these differences.

LIVING - CONTINUOUS

Maria gets out of the bathroom, enters the living, gives an exhausted sigh and takes a can of coke out of the fridge.

MARIA

I'm in big, big, big trouble.

She opens the can and takes a sip. Florentina chops and eats sun-flower seeds while watching TV.

FLORENTINA

C'mon, don't worry so much about that. He won't stay long, he's just on holiday.

MARIA

Jesus Christ! If he figures that I'm not British, not only that I lose my *well-paid* job, but I make a fool out of myself with this shit.

The door kicks open and a noisy atmosphere seeps in.

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Vasile, Vladimir and MIHAI labor to shove a fridge in.

VASILE

You Vlad, move your ass to the left, so I can push this damned corner inside.

MIHAI

Shit, we need one more biceps here.

Maria and Florentina show up. Maria gapes.

VLADIMIR

Hi, Maria!

Maria waves her hand. The door of the fridge opens and she notices that it's dirty inside. She frowns: an used fridge?

VASILE

C'mon, man, we can do it. Just lift it, Mihai, and we push.

Maria also notices rust and spots on the door.

VLADIMIR

Take left, and we push the damned bottom of it. We're good at pushing, we're men, eh? Push, push
(imitates a woman while having sex)
Yeah, yeah.

They all laugh noisily. Maria and Florentina laugh too. Vasile orders firmly.

VASILE
Ok, so left and push!

They all execute.

VASILE (CONT'D)
Push!

VLADIMIR
(plays the woman)
Yeah!

VASILE
Push!

VLADIMIR
Yeah!

VASILE
PUSH!

They shove the fridge into the hallway.

VLADIMIR
('climaxes')
YEAH! OH, AH!

Maria and Florentina laugh heartily.

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The fridge stands imposingly in a nook in the kitchen. They all sit around the table with glasses in their hands. Vasile stands and raises his glass. The others do the same.

VASILE
(solemn)
To the fridge!

The others laugh, clink the glasses, and sit down.

MARIA
So it's a second-hand fridge?

VLADIMIR
It's a street fridge. Poor him,
abandoned. We took pity.

They all laugh.

MARIA
You took it from the street? Jesus,
has anybody seen you?

FLORENTINA
I'm so happy it fits perfectly in
that nook.
(MORE)

FLORENTINA (CONT'D)

I hated having a fridge in the living room. And it looks better than the other one.

Maria looks astounded. Vladimir bends to her.

VLADIMIR

Welcome to Spain!

INT. CARLOS AND FLAVIA'S HOUSE - YARD - DAY

Maria is in front of the gate, ready to open it. The noise made by Alvaro and Steven's voices stops her. She panics.

Steven and Alvaro play with Alvaro's DOGS, two adult Golden Retrievers, a male, YOCCO, and a female, ROSY. Steven throws away a toy which looks like a twig.

STEVEN

Fetch!

The dogs race jumbling to it. Yocco reaches the first. He grabs the toy with his teeth and races back to Steven. Rosy struts behind him. Maria peeps through the hedge fence.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

(strokes Yocco)

Good boy. Smart boy.

Rosy jostles. Steven strokes her too.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

Okay, okay, good girl. Just foil your husband somehow. Trip him, push him, hijack him. Or just blackmail him.

Maria laughs.

ALVARO

I bet Yocco will win again.

STEVEN

I bet Rosy will.

Maria inspects Steven's profile: an alpha man.

ALVARO

500 dollars.

STEVEN

500? That much you have in your piggy-bank?

ALVARO

That much I will have.

Rosy growls.

STEVEN

Alvaro, never underestimate a female's capacity.

Maria smiles. Alvaro flings the toy. Yocco looks at him ready to scoot away. Rosy still lays down, not being aware of what happens around.

ALVARO

Fetch!

Yocco sprints like an arrow. Rosy perks her ears. After several seconds, she suddenly stands and runs away.

Yocco doesn't seem to find the toy. He sniffs his nose alongside the grass.

ALVARO (CONT'D)

C'mon, Yocco!

Rosy catches up with him. She looks up and begins to bark: the toy is stuck high in a net of tendrils and some other plants. Rosy fidgets back and forth, barking and squealing.

Yocco notices the toy too. He throws himself over the net and barks angrily. Rosy looks back at Steven and barks in help.

STEVEN

C'mon, Rosy, you can do it! You're a smart and strong girl!

Maria turns both thumbs up while her lips murmur 'Yes, Rosy'.

Rosy squeals pitifully while Yocco lashes himself against the net of plants. The toy finally falls down. Yocco grabs it in no time and sprints back.

Rosy pouts. She looks very disappointed. She gives a few sad barks, then sits and lays her muzzle on her paws.

Steven smiles sadly. Maria stares doleful. Alvaro waits anxiously for Yocco who seems to suddenly reduce his speed. Yocco stops, turns around and looks at Rosy, toy in mouth.

ALVARO

Yocco, boy, here! Yocco!

CONTINUOUS

Yocco is next to Rosy and lets the toy fall out of his mouth by her side. He puts his paw around her neck and squeals in sorrow. She bites his ear slowly and squeals too.

Steven narrows his eyes and smiles open-mouthed at the incredible scene. Maria tears.

ALVARO
These are my dogs!

The two dogs return together, both of them holding a corner of the toy. Steven and Alvaro reward them with hugs.

STEVEN
(checks his watch)
Gotta go. I'll be back at 6.00.
We'll have some more fun after you
finish your British classes.

Alvaro makes a discontent face. Steven waves him away in the house, and heads to the garage.

ALVARO'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Maria sits on her chair and gazes at Alvaro who sits on his chair and looks into a book.

ALVARO
I know all these things.

MARIA
Ok, then turn the page.

Alvaro turns the page.

ALVARO
Wow, we're learning about jobs?

MARIA
Yes. What job titles do you know in
English?

ALVARO
Er, 'teacher' and, er, 'detective'?

MARIA
What does your father do?

ALVARO
Oh, and that: pilot.

MARIA
He's a pilot? He flies planes? Wow.
And your mother?

ALVARO
She's a fashion designer.

MARIA
Great?

ALVARO'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Maria and Alvaro squat on their hams, to a certain distance from each other. Maria holds a small ball in her hands.

MARIA

Ok, last game, and then I have to go. The rule is: I throw the ball to you, you throw it back, no pauses. The one who knocks off the speed or drops the ball, loses. So focus, or you'll have to make as many English compositions as many times you lose.

ALVARO

And if you lose?

MARIA

Well, you think of something.

ALVARO

I've thought.

Maria waits for his reply.

ALVARO (CONT'D)

You know, I hate my bulky lunch. Mom's weird like that. I think she misses dad, and force-feeds me for him. You'll eat lunch in my place.

MARIA

No way! Think of something else.

HALLWAY/YARD - CONTINUOUS

Maria peeps around while rushes quickly to the door. The BABY-SITTER makes some NOISE in the kitchen with the dishes.

Steven drives his MERCEDES into the basement garage.

Maria quickly puts on her overcoat and boots. She clicks the door open and peeps in the yard. Clear, run!

Steven plays the remote and the door of the garage closes.

Maria scoots to the gate and disappears behind it.

Steven gets in the house from the garage. Alvaro plays computer games in the living room. Steven fiddles with the car keys.

STEVEN

Amber's gone? She left earlier?

Alvaro rejoices to see him, and runs to him happily.

ALVARO

And you arrived earlier. You promised to take me at bowling.

STEVEN

After you do your homework.

ALVARO

You'll have to help me with my English compositions.

STEVEN

Have you been a good boy?

ALVARO

She kissed me before she left.

STEVEN

Did she?

ALVARO

You wish you were me, huh?

Steven smiles in disagreement.

ALVARO (CONT'D)

C'mon, you like her, I can tell.

STEVEN

Okay, she's cute, if you insist. But let's just say... she's not my type of girls?

INT. VASILE AND FLORENTINA'S FLAT - MARIA'S ROOM - DAY

Maria holds a stack of fashion magazines in her hands and searches with her eyes a place where to put them: there's no shelf. She gives up and tosses them on the floor.

Then she glues a few posters of America on the walls. As she spreads the stick across the back of one poster, she runs out of paste.

FLORENTINA'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Florentina rummages in a bag of clothes. There's a knock on the door.

FLORENTINA

Come in!

Maria gets in and stares at Florentina who seems to separate the 'good' clothes from the 'bad' ones.

MARIA

Do you have some glue?

Florentina seems very engrossed with what she does.

FLORENTINA

Huh?

Florentina takes out another blouse, unfolds it, makes a face and throws it in the 'bad clothes' bag. Maria stares.

Florentina grabs a skirt, likes it, stands, wraps it around her waist, and looks into the mirror satisfied.

MARIA

Cleaning up the wardrobe?

FLORENTINA

Adding up to wardrobe. Wow, look at this shirt! It's adorable, but it's surely too tight for me. It certainly fits you.

Maria smiles baffled.

FLORENTINA (CONT'D)

You wash it and is like new. Remember those second-hand tatters shops in Romania? Well, these are second-hand free clothes.

MARIA

Um, do you have some glue?

Vasile bursts in the room holding two full bags in each hand.

VASILE

Look, honey, four more. I found them near the bus stop. It was a lady with fur coat and BMW that placed them there. You might find some brand stuff here.

Vasile places the bags by her feet. Florentina takes out a gorgeous dress and stares at it with excitement. Maria's eyes agree with Florentina.

VASILE (CONT'D)

That's Maria's style.

FLORENTINA

Will you try it on?

MARIA

No, thanks.

The doorbell rings. As Vasile is busy with helping Florentina pack and unpack the clothes, Maria heads to the door.

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

She opens it and there's Vladimir, dressed in casual nice outfit: jeans and a tight blouse that emphasizes his muscles. He holds a package of cakes in one hand and a trunk of beverage in the other.

VLADIMIR

We didn't celebrate your arrival.

LIVING - CONTINUOUS

Vasile, Florentina, Vladimir and Maria sit around a table. They talk, laugh and eat cakes.

MARIA

I'm so terrified to speak in front of him. My British accent sucks.

FLORENTINA

Then don't. Just avoid him, that's the best solution.

VASILE

It's not, honey. I mean, when he's asking her a question like: 'What time is it?' she should twist on her toes and scurry away?

MARIA

I really don't want him to find me wild or rude or conceited.

Vladimir tut-tuts ironical.

VLADIMIR

I've got an idea.

Maria looks at him inquiring.

VLADIMIR (CONT'D)

Scream and drink cold water to hoarsen.

That looks a great idea to Maria.

EXT. PARKING - CONTINUOUS

Maria looks gripped by a crazy euphoric state. She holds Vladimir tight by his arm, laughs and hops like a child.

Vladimir unlocks his car, a Phaeton. Maria stares dumbstruck and lets go off his arm. He heads to the driver's door.

MARIA

This is your car?

VLADIMIR

This is my car. Wanna drive?

MARIA

Wow. May I?

He tosses the keys, she catches them.

INT. CAR - DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

Maria drives. They run past a group of GIRLS. Vladimir sticks his head out of the window and whistles rudely. Maria laughs.

MARIA

I don't think I can scream on command, I mean scream that long and loud? I really need a good reason to do that.

ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Maria drives eating cornet ice cream.

VLADIMIR

Drive close to the border and slow down. Closer, closer.

Maria does so.

MARIA

Why?

On the sidewalk, a WOMAN with a huge ass, struts ahead.

VLADIMIR

I want to...

He squeezes the woman's ass and winces.

VLADIMIR (CONT'D)

Bah! Plastic.

The woman freaks out and screams. Maria laughs heartily.

MARIA

You're crazy? You've got a problem with squeezing asses.

Vladimir positions himself in a rakish manner, his hand over Maria's chair, chewing gum and staring at her. Maria slows down again, then steps on the break.

VLADIMIR

Hey, what was that?

MARIA

I was giving you an ass to touch,
you're not nimble.

VLADIMIR

I was busy with your eyes.

MARIA

Busy with my eyes...

There is a moment of silence. She shivers, pushes a button
and the window closes.

VLADIMIR

You're in love with him, huh?

Maria drives silently and unnecessarily uses the clutch.
Vladimir chuckles.

VLADIMIR (CONT'D)

You, women, are so knucklehead.
Giv'em an American and they pee
their pants only to hear of him.
We, Bulgarians, are flaccid dicks,
or what? Then Romanian women aren't
otherwise to Americans, be sure.
You strive to rise above your
pettiness, and those fuckers don't
give a damn on you.

Pissed off, Maria sticks the ice cream in his face and
laughs. Vladimir shrieks. He wipes his face with a tissue.

MARIA

I don't care about him. Okay? I'm
hard to fall in love!

VLADIMIR

How many times did you test that? I
bet that besides your ex-husband,
you're a virgin.

MARIA

And I'm proud of that.

VLADIMIR

At least is he black? I mean, I'm
retracting my words if you're
wrestling for a 'big thing' here.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Typical woman chaser: sex is all
that holds your mind.

VLADIMIR

Oh, lemme guess: it's wisdom and
kindness that attracts you to him.

Maria looks a little angry.

VLADIMIR (CONT'D)
He's special, he's different.

MARIA
Are you listening to what I'm
saying? I'm not attracted to him.

VLADIMIR
How do you know he doesn't sleep
with Mein Kampf under his pillow?

MARIA
Sorry, an American would never
start a racist war.

VLADIMIR
Yeah... Americans are better at
decimating their own race. They say
that Bush paid Bin Laden to blow up
the twin towers.

MARIA
Why are you so fierce against them?

VLADIMIR
They think they can take
everything.

MARIA
They can. Good for them! Smart
nation.
(sings)
The winner takes it all.

VLADIMIR
Fuck your Americans!

MARIA
You're envious of them, actually.
And spiteful that you never went
further than Europe. Don't we all
dream about this? You longed for
going to America, from where you
can take everything, and ended up
in Spain, where you are taken
everything.

VLADIMIR
Fuck Americans.

MARIA
Shut the hell up! You really make
me crazy with that!

VLADIMIR

I have everything I want here. Fuck
Americans!

Maria steps on the break abruptly. She unbuckles her seat
belt, yanks the door open and bursts out.

He moves in her place, closes the door, grabs the wheel and
drives at slowest speed. Maria walks by the car. They climb
up a hillside.

VLADIMIR (CONT'D)

I stick my crummy cock into their
special and high-quality throat.
Fuck their mothers and sisters at
once...

Maria covers her ears and screams. Vladimir looks around
'ashamed'. Though they moved away from civilization, and are
almost on the top of the hill, there are still people here
and there in the street.

VLADIMIR (CONT'D)

Hey, wait, we're not there yet.

Maria screams louder and louder.

EXT. TOP OF THE HILL - NIGHT

Vladimir and Maria sit on rocks. Maria holds a bag of lumps
of ice in her hands. She shoves one lump in her mouth.

VLADIMIR

I'm not mad about Americans, at
least not as mad as you are, but I
don't hate them either. I just
wanted to give you a good reason to
scream. That's why friends are.

MARIA

Thanks. Never do that again,
though.

He smiles: her hoarsen voice makes her even sweeter.

MARIA (CONT'D)

What?

VLADIMIR

Your lips are so sexy. I'd bite
them a little.

Maria stares expressionless.

VLADIMIR (CONT'D)

You really find me that repugnant?

MARIA

There's something I should confess.

VLADIMIR

Yeah. You struggle to dislike me, but you'd toss me onto the bed and have wild sex with me. Admit!

MARIA

I admit that... I don't have a driving license.

VLADIMIR

You're completely nuts, girl! My grandma should see you and convince herself that there's someone crazier than me on earth.

INT. CARLOS AND FLAVIA'S HOUSE - ALVARO'S OFFICE - DAY

Maria and Alvaro sit at his desk. Maria writes something on a scrap of paper and hands it to Alvaro. He reads.

ALVARO

"Because I'm hoarse, the following days we'll only write. Compositions and grammar exercises."

(whines)

No! Please, let's do something funny. Like cooking.

Maria looks distrustful: why would you like cooking?

ALVARO (CONT'D)

We'll write recipes for each other and make food and have fun. In English, of course.

Maria thinks a little. She writes down: "All right". Alvaro reads and rejoices. He kisses her cheek and hops.

ALVARO (CONT'D)

Thanks! Thanks! Steven was right when he said that you're cute.

MARIA

Did he say that?

ALVARO

(imitates her voice)
He did.

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Maria and Alvaro lay comfortably on a sofa. Each of them has a clipboard and sheets of paper attached to it. Alvaro writes. Maria draws dresses.

ALVARO

(giggles)
I'll make you a recipe that will strike you speechless.

MARIA

Don't be too demanding, I'm the worst cook in the world. And where's your nanny?

ALVARO

Steven's my nanny for the following ten days.

Maria gapes.

ALVARO (CONT'D)

He promised mom to look properly after me. So Dana will enjoy a few days off. It was Steven's wish.

MARIA

And your mom... where's your mom? I mean she's away for ten days?

ALVARO

Oh, no, she's at her office, she's home every evening.

The door that connects the guests room with the garage opens, and Maria flinches.

ALVARO (CONT'D)

The nanny arrived home.

Maria hisses and repositions herself properly on the sofa. Steven shows up in the kitchen's door way, bags of purchase in his hands, and looks surprised.

STEVEN

Hi! Are you...?

Maria looks embarrassed. Steven places the bags on the table.

ALVARO

Cooking!

STEVEN

That's awesome! I really needed some help. I mean
(looks at Maria)
advised help.

Maria looks puzzled.

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Maria mixes ingredients in a bowl. Steven mixes the same things in another bowl. Alvaro clocks them. Steven seems to move faster and better.

Maria is clumsy. Steven notices that and smiles. She can't keep up with him. She looks at the recipe and it says that she must add sugar. Steven did that long ago.

He slows down to wait for her, pretending he needs to mix the ingredients well. She adds more eggs than necessary, hisses and makes a regretful face.

He shows her the butter. Oh, she almost forgot to add it! Steven peeps at her: unfortunately she's very sweet and beautiful.

Steven opens drawer after drawer and can't find what he needs. Maria has a wooden spoon in her hand. Steven notices. Maria grabs a pack of flour and drops the spoon on the floor.

Steven picks it up, washes it and uses it. Maria smiles pouted. She squints at Steven and notices that his face is dirty of jam, here and there.

She soaks her hands in water, then rubs his face slowly. He smiles. Then she takes flour and throws it on his face. Steven turns Santa. Maria and Alvaro laugh.

Steven and Maria are ready at the same time. Both mixtures look good and yummy. They lay delightfully on pans. Maria shoves them into the oven to bake.

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The cakes are ready. Maria draws them out of the oven. They all look baffled at them: Steven's cake is raised and well-baked, Maria's is only baked.

STEVEN

(points to his cake)
That's Maria's.

ALVARO

That's yours.
(to Maria)
You forgot to add the baking powder. You're disqualified.

MARIA

(smiles)
I'm bad at cooking.

ALVARO

I'd say you're just in love.

Maria gives a careless smile. Steven smiles, snorts and ruffles Alvaro's hair.

ALVARO (CONT'D)

That's the easiest recipe. Anybody's able to make this cake. I myself did it with mom for several times, and never screwed it up. But we forgive you, 'cause you're a cute girl, eh? Right, Steven?

STEVEN

Er, we forgive her, of course.

MARIA

Alvaro, are you a Jew?

ALVARO

(proud)

Yes.

Maria looks touched. Then she looks at Steven for confirmation. Steven nods.

MARIA

(to Alvaro)

Well, that explains your smartness and, well, sweetness, and even handsomeness.

ALVARO

Perfectly true.

Maria and Steven laugh.

STEVEN

(to Alvaro)

A little modesty wouldn't hurt.

ALVARO

(to Maria)

Ha! Sweet and handsome, huh? Steven's a Jew, too.

Maria smiles embarrassed.

STEVEN

Er, what did we say we'd do next?

INT. VASILE AND FLORENTINA'S FLAT - LIVING - NIGHT

Maria and Florentina watch TV. The entrance door opens and Vasile makes some noise while toiling to bring in stuff.

Maria and Florentina look toward the door, waiting.

FLORENTINA
(laughs)
What's he doing?

Maria laughs too: it's obvious what he's doing. Vasile stomps the floor and bursts in the living gasping.

VASILE
Where should I put these?

He points to a thick good mattress and a nice shelf.

FLORENTINA
You found a mattress like that?

MARIA
And a shelf like that?

FLORENTINA
You need a shelf?

MARIA
I do.

VASILE
Take it.

EXT. PARK - DAY

MONTAGE - STEVEN, MARIA AND ALVARO HAVE FUN TOGETHER

Steven, Maria and Alvaro walk the dogs.

They take turns to play badminton, while the one out holds the dog's leashes. It's Maria's and Alvaro's turn to play. Steven gazes at Maria and wears that look again: I'm afraid of her sweetness.

Steven buys packs of popcorn and gives them to Maria and Alvaro.

They take photos of them next to some funny statue-people.

They sit on a bench and drink hot tea.

END OF MONTAGE

EXT. PARK - CONTINUOUS

Steven and Maria sit on the bench, small cartons of tea in hands, while Alvaro plays with the dogs.

STEVEN

Your hoarse voice makes your accent sound a little... Scottish?

MARIA

Er, Swedish. The truth is that I'm half British, half Swedish.

STEVEN

Oh, really?

MARIA

Um, yeah. My mother's British, my father's Swedish. I spent most of my childhood in Sweden, then attended college in the UK.

She looks around for an escape, afraid and awkward, and even regretfully. Yocco suddenly jumps on Steven. Steven strokes him. Then takes a ball out of his pocket and throws it.

Yocco runs to fetch it. Quickly comes back with it. Steven throws it again. Maria gazes at Alvaro who plays with Rosy.

FLASHBACK - MARIA'S DAUGHTERS

Maria looks at Alvaro and sees her daughters. She imagines them playing with Alvaro's dogs, running a race, flying a kite, playing hide and seek.

She remembers scolding them for little things, such as: Sophie reaching her hands for a glass of water, or Bianca grunting about the Christmas present. She sighs sorrowfully.

END OF FLASHBACK

CONTINUOUS

STEVEN

Do you have children?

Maria thinks a few seconds.

MARIA

Er, no. Do you?

STEVEN

Um, yes. Two sons.

MARIA

Uh-huh.

STEVEN

You live in London?

Maria nods. She clears her voice and points to her neck.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

Oh, I'm sorry. Your throat. Okay.
Um, we'll talk some other day.
These days we just cook and walk in
the park. You already forced your
larynx too much.

Maria looks relieved.

INT. MARIA'S ROOM - DAY

Maria draws. Vasile and Florentina seem to move the furniture, to drive nails into the walls, and to change the dishes' place. The noise made by them disturbs Maria.

She finishes drawing a beautiful pair of shoes. She takes another sheet of paper, and works on it. It's the old unfinished drawing, to which she toiled in the classroom.

The paper looks crumpled and dirty. She stops and gazes at it nostalgically and sadly.

FLASHBACK - MARIA SCOLDS SOPHIE

Maria speaks on the phone while mixing food in a pot on the cooker. Sophie reaches her hands on the table and grabs Maria's unfinished drawing.

She innocently plays with it. She drops it on the wet floor. Then she picks it up, puckers it and bites it with her teeth.

The paper is suddenly jerked out of her mouth by Maria's hand. Sophie looks scared.

MARIA

What are you doing? You wicked
child! This is not a toy! This is
my masterpiece to which I've been
laboring for weeks!

Sophie cries frightened.

END OF FLASHBACK

CONTINUOUS

Maria looks upset with herself. She weeps. Louder and louder.

She looks angry. She suddenly crumples the 'masterpiece', tears it into pieces and throws it at the waste bin.

She does the same with all her sketches, while cries and apologizes. Her voice is less hoarsen.

MARIA

I'm so sorry, Sophie, my dear girl!
The sweetest child on earth. I'm so
sorry! Can you forgive mommy?
Please, forgive mommy. Please,
Sophie, sweetness! I beg you!

Vasile and Florentina's clatter doesn't fit to her feelings.

EXT. SIDEWALK - CONTINUOUS

Maria bursts out of the block, looking distressed. Her eyes
tear. She rushes across the sidewalk.

CROSSWALK - CONTINUOUS

The traffic lights are red. Maria crosses carelessly. The
CARS blare. One CAR eludes her by inches. Other TWO CARS bump
into each other as they try to avoid her.

PARK - CONTINUOUS

Maria sits on an isolated bench in a park and cries. She
yells. She beats her head with her fists.

MARIA

What am I doing here? Why am I
here? Why, God? Why?

CROSSWALK - CONTINUOUS

It drizzles. Steven drives his car while speaks on the phone
and changes the CD.

Maria stops dejected in front of the crosswalk. Steven's car
stops immediately. Maria looks surprised that she's given the
right of way so quickly.

She crosses. Steven only now notices that this is Maria. He
also notices that she cries. Maria speaks on the phone.

MARIA

Andrei, please take the children at
your place. Today. Oh, no, nothing,
I just want them to be safe.

Maria is on the other side of the road. Steven follows her
with his eyes while looks for a roundabout to turn the car.

He aims at one, but it's too far, so he nimbly cuts through
the cars and sprints back toward Maria.

MOMENTS LATER

Steven drives by Maria's side. She has no umbrella.

STEVEN

Amber!

MARIA

(surprised)

Steven?

She tries to pose all right.

STEVEN

Let me take you home, please!

Maria hesitates. The cars behind blare.

MARIA

Er, okay.

INT. CAR - DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

A love song plays in the car. Steven drives. Maria sits quiet on her chair.

MARIA

Er, I travel by tube, so I might be wrong, but I think this is not the right way to my home.

STEVEN

It's not.

MARIA

Where are you taking me?

STEVEN

Please, trust me.

Maria looks soothed and charmed. She gives a comforting sigh.

Steven drives, and from time to time peeps at her with sympathy. Maria looks out of the window silent.

There is a sign on the right side of the road which reads: "Toledo, 80 km." Steven takes that way.

EXT. THE CITY OF TOLEDO - CONTINUOUS

It's cloudy, but doesn't rain. Steven and Maria climb up some old stairs. They reach the top of an ancient castle. The sight is amazing.

Maria looks overwhelmed around and down the hill: the landscape emphasizes the whole city of Toledo.

MARIA

Wow! That's marvelous!

Steven brushes a lock of Maria's hair behind her ear.

STEVEN

There! It was narrowing your sight.

Maria looks charmed by his touch and smiles a little ashamed.

MARIA

We need a tour guide. Do you know anything about this city?

STEVEN

It speaks from itself. I think this place has seen the most sincere kisses ever. Don't you think?

Maria smiles staring at the view. Then she peeps at Steven.

MARIA

It's like I'm in the safety of the heaven here, and watch carelessly the wretched humankind.

Steven smiles.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Thanks for this landscape.

Maria kisses him on the cheek.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Not that you lack kisses.

Steven smiles and kisses her on the cheek, too.

STEVEN

Maybe you do lack.

They gaze at each other.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

Can I ask a favour of you?

MARIA

Ask.

STEVEN

Join me for the following three-four hours. Wherever I go.

Maria smiles surprised and touched.

MARIA

Can I ask a favor in return?

STEVEN

Of course.

MARIA

Don't ask me questions about myself.

STEVEN

Got it. I don't feel like adding more gloom to your mood.

MARIA

Thanks.

CONTINUOUS

They climb down the stairs. Maria gasps and descends with difficulty the narrow staired-path. Steven offers her his hand. She takes it.

ANCIENT STREET - CONTINUOUS

They amble across an ancient street of Toledo, embedded with snowdrops on both sides, and old beautiful buildings.

MARIA

I'm trying to work out what you do, but I can't tell.

STEVEN

Oh, I'm a careless man in his mid-life crisis, who still doesn't know what job fits him best.

MARIA

An unemployed with lots of money.

STEVEN

Inherited from his father.

Steven breaks a snowdrop and weaves it into Maria's hair.

MARIA

You're in danger of becoming too romantic.

STEVEN

Oh, am I? Nothing can be more dangerous.

Maria smiles a little confused.

INT. PETS SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Steven buys dogs food while Maria squats next to a glass kennel and gazes at a DALMATIAN PUPPY inside. She almost cries, remembering her daughters.

MARIA
Dalmatian puppy.

She looks up and Steven is in front of her, bags of dogs food in his arms. He stares at her with sympathy, but without understanding why she's sad.

He looks at the price. It reads: "700 euros."

EXT. MADRID - SKATING RINK - CONTINUOUS

Steven skates, Maria stands beyond the enclosure, arms on the fencing, and watches him. Steven finishes a round and stops in front of her.

MARIA
How do you know to do so many things? I should have beaten you at least at cooking.

STEVEN
C'mon, you can do it.

MARIA
I told you I can't.

STEVEN
You'll take a few painful tumbles in the beginning, but those will teach you.

MARIA
Nah! You'll have to help me, and hold me, and touch me, and none of us wants that.

STEVEN
(jestful)
I promise I won't fall in love.

MARIA
(as jestful)
I don't promise that.

Steven smiles, scurries away and takes another round, then stops in front of her again.

STEVEN
I'll tell you a secret if you join me on the rink.

CONTINUOUS

Hand in hand, Steven and Maria skate slowly.

MARIA
Tell me the secret.

STEVEN
The secret is, I can't believe I convinced you with that.

MARIA
What? That unbearable you are? So there's no secret?

STEVEN
I'm sorry.

MARIA
You play unfair, huh?

STEVEN
You believed me, huh?

Maria increases the speed. She catches Steven off guard and trips him. He falls. While Maria laughs, SOMEONE behind her bumps into her and she falls upon Steven.

Maria and Steven laugh so badly, they can't even move. Then Maria pins him against the ice floor as strong as she can.

STEVEN (CONT'D)
You think you can pin me?

MARIA
Never underestimate a female's capacity.

STEVEN
(smiles surprised)
Those are my words.

MARIA
Precisely. It won't be me the fooled one here. Tell me a secret or I'm biting you nose and ears.

Steven chuckles.

MARIA (CONT'D)
Painfully. I have very sharp teeth.

STEVEN
Okay.

MARIA
Must be something embarrassing.

STEVEN
Embarrassing. Um, I can't solve
second grade math problems?

Maria stares at him, then bursts into laughter.

MARIA
Finally something I can teach you.

EXT. HOT SPRINGS - CONTINUOUS

Steven stops his car by the white feet of a mountain. It's snow all around, while hot steams burst out of the springs. Maria looks amazed.

MARIA
Oh my God! I've never been to a
place like this. So that's why you
bought me the swimsuit.

CONTINUOUS

Wearing swimsuits, Maria and Steven descend in the spring. Steven splashes Maria with water. Maria splashes Steven.

Maria plunges into the water and swims. Steven follows her. They stop at the other side of the first spring.

MARIA
Thanks heaven you don't have to
teach me how to swim, huh?

Steven laughs. They lean their backs against the warm cliff and relax. Maria furtively reaches her hand, and grasps a fistful of snow.

MARIA (CONT'D)
This place is heavenly.

She throws the snow at Steven's face. Steven flinches.

STEVEN
You like to turn me into Santa
every time you get a chance, huh?

The next second Maria's face gets some snow.

MARIA
Sounds like you miss Santa too. He
didn't quite grant your wishes this
Christmas?

STEVEN
There's always the next Christmas.

MARIA

Yeah, I've had the same wish for eight years. What did you wish for?

STEVEN

Well, I've had the same wish for twelve years: forgive.

MARIA

Forgive?

STEVEN

And mostly forget. Obliviate.

Steven dives into the water and disappears under it. After a while, he resurfaces with a beautiful shiny pebble in his hand. He opens his palm to Maria.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

Maybe you'd like to keep a memory of this place.

Maria lingers her hand in his palm while she takes the pebble.

MARIA

May I feel a little wooed?

Steven takes her hand and kisses it.

STEVEN

I want you to feel good.

INT. MARIA'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Maria enters her room, closes the door, and leans her back against it.

MARIA

I fell in love.

INT. CARLOS AND FLAVIA'S HOUSE - ALVARO'S OFFICE - DAY

Maria walks in the office. A huge beautiful basket of snowdrops lays on the desk. She looks surprised and impressed. She searches for a note. There's one: "For Maria".

INT. VASILE AND FLORENTINA'S FLAT - CONTINUOUS

Maria gets in the flat with the basket of snowdrops. Vladimir and Vasile put on their coats. Maria looks very excited.

VASILE

Wow! You bought all the snowdrops you found at the florist's?

Maria takes one snowdrop and kisses it.

MARIA
Steven did.

VLADIMIR
I'm just happy I'm not a woman. I wouldn't be able to cope with delusions. All men want the same thing, trust me.

MARIA
You know what? I think Steven could teach you some classes about how to cheer up a woman, at least.

VLADIMIR
I was sure you'd fall in his trap.

INT. CARLOS AND FLAVIA'S HOUSE - ALVARO'S OFFICE - DAY

Maria sits on a large sofa. Alvaro's laptop is next to her. Alvaro is surrounded by lots of objects.

MARIA
Now put the cup on the shelf.

Alvaro executes bored.

MARIA (CONT'D)
Put the giraffe behind the rock.

Alvaro executes reluctantly.

MARIA (CONT'D)
Put the star under the...

She quickly taps some keys on the laptop. She looks up the Romanian word 'lupa'. Uh-huh: 'magnifying glass'.

MARIA (CONT'D)
Under the magnifying glass.

ALVARO
You looked up the word?

MARIA
What? No! Why would I need that? I just reminded I hadn't... logged out of my E-mail account.

ALVARO
What's England like?

MARIA
England is... cool.

ALVARO

Cool? Because of the rain?

MARIA

Um, I mean cool in the other sense of the word. England is, er, cool.

ALVARO

Is it true that the Welsh guards can stand firm without moving at all while you pinch them, and without laughing while you make faces at them? Dad didn't let me try that.

MARIA

(murmurs in witlessness)
Welsh guards?

She laughs to hide her ignorance about this.

MARIA (CONT'D)

No, it's not true.

ALVARO

Is there a Disney Land in England?

MARIA

(puzzled)
Of course there is. I mean, it's England.

ALVARO

(upset)
I thought so. Mom just didn't want to take me there when we visited London last summer. She said: "We're not in France here".

CONTINUOUS

In the door way, Steven gapes and smiles confused. Alvaro runs to Steven as he notices him.

ALVARO

Steven!

STEVEN

Hey, you little elf!
(to Maria)
You're upset with him? He misbehaved?

MARIA

Oh, no! He's all right. He's the best pupil I've ever had.

STEVEN
 (to Alvaro)
 There's something nice for you in
 the car.

Alvaro yells out with joy and scoots to the door.

STEVEN (CONT'D)
 I thought he had upset you and, er,
 that's why you were telling him...
 um... untrue things?

MARIA
 Oh, I just wanted to check his
 knowledge about England.

Steven smiles like he figured something's fishy here.

MARIA (CONT'D)
 Er, thanks for the snowdrops.
 They're lovely.

STEVEN
 My pleasure.

A few seconds of silence.

STEVEN (CONT'D)
 Um, there's a nice restaurant in
 Toledo, great Swedish food. I was
 thinking, maybe you'd like us to
 have dinner there tonight?

Maria responds quickly.

MARIA
 Sure.

INT. VASILE AND FLORENTINA'S FLAT - FLORENTINA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Maria searches excited into Florentina's wardrobe for a
 suitable dress. She flips her hands through the coat hangers.
 She draws out an elegant dress and stares at it satisfied.

MARIA
 Wow! This is gorgeous.

She inspects it for flaws. She checks the zipper.

FLORENTINA
 You like it? Oh, don't worry, it's
 almost new. I made it.

MARIA
 What do you mean you made it?

FLORENTINA

Yeah, years ago, when I was thinner. I don't know if I worn it two times.

CONTINUOUS

Maria looks at herself into the mirror while Florentina zips the dress for her. Maria looks gorgeous in it.

MARIA

Sounds like every woman wants to be a fashion designer.

Florentina chuckles.

MARIA (CONT'D)

But I'm very impressed with this, Flori, you're awesome.

Vasile enters the room with a bag of handbags and gives it to Florentina. She begins to rummage into it.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Vasile, there's a cute paper lamp near the dumpster, in front of the block. Will you bring it to me? I'm so embarrassed to do that.

Florentina bursts into laughter. Vasile follows her. And Maria follows Vasile.

VASILE

Sure.

They are interrupted by Vladimir who knocks on the opened door, looking surprised at their mirth. He measures Maria from top to bottom and looks charmed.

VLADIMIR

Cinderella's getting ready?

MARIA

Well, you know, Prince Charming who doesn't give a damn on Romanian women, just invited one to dinner.

VLADIMIR

So the princess revealed her real identity?

MARIA

She will. Tonight.

VLADIMIR

And then all dinners are mine.

Maria ignores him. She notices that the front side of the dress, just around the boobs area, is too large.

MARIA

Flori, do you have some cotton?

INT. CARLOS AND FLAVIA'S HOUSE - STEVEN'S ROOM - SAME

Dressed in a nice suit, Steven sits on an armchair, laptop on his lap, and taps some keys. The cell phone rings. He gapes surprised at the number: it's Susan. He hesitates to pick up.

STEVEN

Hello?

SUSAN (V.O.)

Hi, Steve! Um, how are you doing?

STEVEN

Er, Susan! Um, I'm... fine. I... didn't expect you to ever... er... How's life in Canada? I hear you delivered one more son.

SUSAN (V.O.)

Oh, being a mother is not as cool as being a wife. I'm in New York. I'd like to see you.

Steven gapes baffled.

SUSAN (V.O.)

(cries)

My husband wants a divorce. I want to give him the custody of the children. I'm so sorry I broke up with you. I miss you so much.

STEVEN

(cold)

I'm in Europe.

INT. VASILE AND FLORENTINA'S FLAT - FLORENTINA'S ROOM - SAME

Maria stuffs cotton in her bra, dress on her, men in room. Florentina helps her.

Vasile and Vladimir lay on the bed and watch something on the laptop. From time to time, Vladimir raises his eyes and looks at Maria.

VLADIMIR

And what will you do when he undresses you?

MARIA

At that time he'll be madly in love
with me and that won't matter to
him anymore.

Vladimir snorts. Then he stands and gazes at her.

FLORENTINA

Go, woman! Save us from poverty!

Vladimir looks disdainful.

MARIA

American is not synonym with rich,
Flori. And I'm in love with his
eyes, not with his pockets.

Vladimir confines Maria in a hug and kisses her neck, while
she struggles to release herself.

VLADIMIR

I really wish I were an American
right now. At least for half an
hour or so.

She slaps his hands.

MARIA

Wish yourself to be Steven, not
just an American. Let me off!

He squeezes her ass and releases her. Maria slaps his face.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Don't ever touch my butt again!

VLADIMIR

I'm happy I did it before the
American. I stomped my ground.

MARIA

You didn't stomp anything.

She checks her watch. 7.30 PM.

MARIA (CONT'D)

I'm going.

VLADIMIR

Half an hour earlier?

MARIA

I bet he's already down, waiting
for me.

EXT. IN FRONT OF THE BLOCK - CONTINUOUS

Maria stands shivering with cold. She checks her watch: 9.00. P.M. She looks angry.

INT. CARLOS AND FLAVIA'S HOUSE - LIVING - SAME

Steven glares at himself into the mirror, cell phone in hand: 2 missed calls from Maria. One more on the way.

He looks sad and sighs. He shoves the cell phone in his pocket. Flavia enters the house and takes off her coat.

FLAVIA

Are you dating anyone?

STEVEN

Oh, no, I just bought a new suit and didn't try it on.

FLAVIA

That looks great on you.

STEVEN

Thanks.

She takes off her scarf and boots.

FLAVIA

Alvaro?

STEVEN

We played until he fell asleep in my arms.

Flavia goes to the cupboard and draws out two glasses.

FLAVIA

Dear him! How's he with Amber?

She takes out a bottle of wine from the fridge.

FLAVIA (CONT'D)

Do they make progress? What do you think of her?

She pours wine in the glasses.

STEVEN

Oh, they're fine. She teaches him lots of... good things.

FLAVIA

That's great. Are you hungry?

Flavia suddenly looks immensely excited to notice CARLOS, 40s, stand smiling in the extension of the living, shaved and nicely dressed.

She runs to Carlos, hugs him and chokes him with kisses.

FLAVIA (CONT'D)

You were supposed to arrive on Wednesday.

CARLOS

The flight to Prague was canceled, so they sent me home earlier.

Carlos holds Flavia tight. Hands in pockets, Steven gazes at them nostalgically: guys, you two make up a great couple.

INT. MARIA'S ROOM - SAME

Maria bursts into her room and locks the door. She shoves herself onto the bed and gazes at the banners of America, and a new one of the Jewish star. She closes her eyes tight.

INT. CARLOS AND FLAVIA'S HOUSE - LIVING - DAY

Maria enters the house and everybody is in the living, sitting on comfy chairs, talking and watching TV. Maria takes off her boots and coat and approaches them shyly.

Carlos has his arm around Flavia's neck. Maria's eyes meet Steven's. Carlos stands.

CARLOS

Hi!

MARIA

Oh, good afternoon, Mr. Garcia.

ALVARO

Dad, this is Amber, my British teacher with Russian accent.

Steven casts Alvaro a meaningful glance: I told you not to say that aloud. Carlos laughs. Maria glowers at Steven. Alvaro make a face: oops, sorry for the slip, Steven.

CARLOS

Oh, I can never tell a British from an American, or an Australian. Or even from a Russian.

Carlos is the only person who laughs. Then follows an awkward moment of silence. Flavia stands.

FLAVIA

Amber, I need to talk to you.

MARIA

Sure.

FLAVIA

Um, in private.

FLAVIA'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Flavia holds a thin stack of sheets in her hands.

FLAVIA

I found these in Alvaro's office.

Maria petrifies. Flavia expects her to say something.

FLAVIA (CONT'D)

Are they yours?

MARIA

Yes.

FLAVIA

I mean, you drew them?

MARIA

Yes.

FLAVIA

I can't believe this! They are awesome. I need them.

Maria gapes.

FLAVIA (CONT'D)

You know, I always wanted to have something of my own, but never had the confidence that I can do that. And your sketches encourage me tremendously because they are something new and very cool for Spanish people.

MARIA

That's awesome. I'd be happy to get involved, if you'd like.

FLAVIA

Jesus, I can't believe this. You know what always held me back? That I was alone. I can't stand doing things by myself.

MARIA

Well, Flavia, I'm all about working in fashion. And I really think we'd pull well together.

INT. VASILE AND FLORENTINA'S FLAT - LIVING - DAY

Maria is nicely dressed. She looks into the mirror and applies make up. Vladimir sits on the sofa looking at her.

VLADIMIR

So you have two jobs now, huh?

MARIA

Kind of. Flavia needs a few weeks to quit her job. I teach in the afternoon and draw in the morning. I think it's a good start.

Florentina shows up with a plate of cookies. She places them on the coffee table.

FLORENTINA

Made by Maria.

Vladimir crunches cookies and grimaces. Maria turns faced Vladimir. She looks gorgeous. Vladimir makes a face. Florentina sits, takes a cookie and gives a thumb up.

VLADIMIR

Where's Maria?

Maria makes a face. He shakes his head. She brushes her hair behind her ear and Vladimir notices astounded that she wears earrings. He flutters his own earlobe with his point finger.

VLADIMIR (CONT'D)

The fuck did you do?

MARIA

It's none of your business. What do you know?

FLORENTINA

(delighted)

You punched your ears?

VLADIMIR

The more artificial, the less interesting. Trust me.

MARIA

Yeah, all men say the same, but...

Maria grabs a magazine on the table with a gorgeous woman on the cover, and waves it.

MARIA (CONT'D)

this is what you find in their bed.

VLADIMIR

Well, that if you look for a fuck
buddy, but if you look for a
husband...

MARIA

Sure. Don't give me that! The ideal
wife is a best mother, best cook
and best mistress, and the last one
involves some fake.

Vladimir crunches cookies.

VLADIMIR

You need to work a lot at the
cooking part, the rest is just
sublime.

MARIA

Eve was the only sublime woman. The
rest of us are copies of her,
printed and printed again and again
and again, until the original
curves faded away and tarnished
almost completely. That's what
'natural' is today!

Saying that, she finishes putting on her coat and boots,
makes a good-bye gesture with her hand, and heads to the
door. Vladimir stands and follows her.

VLADIMIR

If this unhorny cock makes you
suffer, he deals with my biceps.

MARIA

I don't like what you called him.

VLADIMIR

Just letting you know that you've
got here a horny beast to use for
revenge. Anytime.

MARIA

You'd better unhornatize yourself a
bit, you look like a bull. Sorry!

VLADIMIR

(bows his head)
Your always hot bull, my gorgeous
heifer.

MARIA

Well, I've never had a bigger fan.

INT. CARLOS AND FLAVIA'S HOUSE - LIVING - DAY

Steven looks impressed over Maria's fashion sketches. The entrance door opens and he quickly shoves the sheets in an opened drawer, then flumps it closed.

Maria enters the house and takes off her coat and boots. She notices Steven. He gapes charmed at her.

MARIA

Hi!

STEVEN

Hello!

Carlos shows up with two glasses and a bottle of wine.

CARLOS

Hey, good morning! Beautiful is Amber today, Steven, eh?

STEVEN

All women are beautiful when they wear make up.

Maria stares speechless and hurt. Carlos' mobile rings, so he picks up and goes away.

Maria heads to Alvaro's office, her face in misapprehension.

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Maria walks past the kitchen. Flavia notices her.

FLAVIA

Amber! Morning!

MARIA

Morning!

FLAVIA

Wow, you look splendid!

MARIA

All women look splendid when they wear make up.

Flavia chuckles.

FLAVIA

I took a day off. Come over here a little, I want to tell you something.

Maria walks in the kitchen. Flavia shoves halves of apples and oranges into an old juicer and turns it on. Maria looks incredulous at the old juicer.

MARIA

Old machines are the best.

FLAVIA

Oh, I've had this juicer for ten years. My husband brought it to me from the street when we weren't that rich.

Maria gapes astounded.

FLAVIA (CONT'D)

It's from him, I can't throw it.

Maria smiles.

FLAVIA (CONT'D)

Look, what I wanted to tell you is, I'd like you to focus more on the fashion work, and less on Alvaro, so maybe like one-two hours a day for teaching, and the rest for our business. What do you think?

MARIA

Of course, you're the boss here.

FLAVIA

Please, don't call me that. And until I quit my job, Steven will help you a little with what you need. He agreed.

Maria looks baffled.

FLAVIA (CONT'D)

Oh, he runs a fashion business in New York. He didn't tell you? And though he's hard to be determined to talk about clothes, he might give you some good advice.

ALVARO'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Alvaro writes. Maria stands next to a shelf and flips through a stack of books. A photo of Steven flies down on the floor.

Maria widens her eyes. She looks at Alvaro: his eyes are on the notebook. Maria picks up the photo.

She stares charmed at Steven. She touches his nose, his lips, his cheeks. She holds him to her chest. She kisses him.

Alvaro stares at her, an impish smile on his face. She looks puzzled at Alvaro. She tries a 'nothing happened' look.

MARIA

Er...

ALVARO

Eat my lunch and I keep the secret.

MARIA

Deal!

CONTINUOUS

Maria sits next to Alvaro and corrects his writing mistakes.

MARIA

What are his boys like? Do you have
a photo of them?

Alvaro frowns: his boys? He stares at her, expressionless,
for a few seconds, then suddenly jumps off his chair and
sprints out of the room. Maria gapes scared.

LIVING - CONTINUOUS

Alvaro scurries across the stairs toward the living. Steven
puts on his coat and shoes. Alvaro stops in front of him.

ALVARO

You lied to Amber that you have
children?

Steven thinks a few seconds.

STEVEN

No?

Alvaro slits his eyes: I know you did. He scurries back.

ALVARO'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Maria looks scared at Alvaro.

ALVARO

Sorry. Shrimps always sit heavy on
my stomach. I felt like retching,
and that's why I scurried away.

MARIA

Are you all right?

ALVARO

I'm all right. I retched.

He sits. Maria looks worried.

MARIA

Don't you need to...

ALVARO

No, no, I'm fine. Um, what were we talking about? Oh, his sons. If you think I'm naughty, you should see *them*. Their mother is right to complain, poor woman.

Maria's face undergoes the most disastrous mutilation ever.

INT. VASILE AND FLORENTINA'S FLAT - LIVING - NIGHT

Maria sits next to Florentina on the sofa.

FLORENTINA

He has a family and he's on holiday without them? Or, at least, without her? C'mon, that sounds very weird to me. They either don't get along, or they're divorced, or something.

MARIA

Then what happened to him, just suddenly? What the hell happened?

Maria hisses with pain.

FLORENTINA

What?

Maria takes out one earring and rubs her ear.

MARIA

The holes still ache.

INT. CARLOS AND FLAVIA'S HOUSE - ALVARO'S OFFICE - DAY

Maria stares spitefully at a framed photo on Alvaro's desk, of Steven holding his arm around a woman's neck, Susan, while Alvaro writes.

INT. CARLOS AND FLAVIA'S HOUSE - LIVING - DAY

Maria climbs down the stairs with a few sample pieces of fabric in her hands and enters the living.

Steven sits up on the floor and taps some keys on his laptop. Flavia shows her happiness about her new silver earrings.

FLAVIA

Look, Steve, aren't they just gorgeous?

Steven glances at the earrings and frowns. He looks back on his laptop.

STEVEN

Just a second, Amber. I'm coming right away.

FLAVIA

You don't like my earrings?

STEVEN

Had they had clasps. One barely finds a woman without punched ears.

Maria looks astounded.

FLAVIA

And what's so special about unpunched ears?

STEVEN

That they're rare. Natural is rare nowadays.

FLAVIA

Some men are weird like that. They don't like jewelry, they don't like clothes, they don't like going shopping with wife...

Saying the last words, Flavia goes away a bit irritated.

MARIA

Yeah, they don't show up at dinner and let you wait outside, in cold, for one hour, and then there's no explanation for that. Yeah, some men are weird like that.

Steven lifts up his head slowly, and shows a guilty and regretful smile. They stare at each other. Maria waits. And waits. And waits. She makes a wondering face and leaves.

FLAVIA'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Flavia's office is very large and full of fashion things and tools: fabrics, scissors, sewing machines, hangers etc.

Maria sits at a desk and draws a dress. Her cell phone rings.

VLADIMIR (V.O.)

Hey, oomph! Did he like your earrings?

MARIA

He didn't.

VLADIMIR (V.O.)

Now put them off! The holes will close by themselves in a few weeks. They're still fresh.

MARIA

I'm not going to put them off! This unhorny cock will learn to love me crazy as I am, and quirky and artificial and whatever. I'll turn myself into the most beautiful princess, I'll be more glamorous with every passing day, I'll piss him off with my charm until he pees his pants only to hear of me.

LIVING - CONTINUOUS

Steven sits up on the floor, laptop in his lap, and speaks on the phone.

STEVEN

Hey, Cliff, I've e-mailed you some fashion sketches. Look over them and tell me everything I should know about them. Quickly! And, er, find a few flaws.

FLAVIA'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Maria labours over a sketch that illustrates a shoe. Steven gets in with two cups of coffee. Maria lifts her eyes for a second, then continues her work.

Steven approaches and places one cup on the desk. Maria stops, looks at him and smiles in amazement.

MARIA

You're very weird, you know?

STEVEN

I know.

Maria looks confused, snorts and almost laughs. She crosses her arms and stares at him, smiling: I don't know what to think about you.

Steven sits next to her and takes a few sips. Then he places the cup on the desk and takes a stack of sketches.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

I think some of the sketches need more work.

Maria looks distrustful. He points to one dress on a sketch.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

To reflect the fabric. What fabric do you have here?

MARIA

Silk?

STEVEN

Well, I thought it's satin.

MARIA

Oh!

Steven runs his fingers over another sketch.

STEVEN

And these creases here, for instance, I'm not sure whether they are lace or embroidery.

MARIA

That's lace.

Steven makes a gesture which means: not suggestive enough.

He takes other sketches and shows her different things that need improvement. He points here and there and gives explanations. Maria strives to dislike his charm.

FLAVIA'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

There's a knock on the door.

STEVEN/MARIA

Come in!

WENDY, 30s, a beautiful British woman gets in. She wears long earrings, lots of make up, sexy clothes and a superior air.

WENDY

Hi, Steve! Hi, er, everybody.

Maria scowls as she hears Wendy's pure British accent.

STEVEN

Hey, Wendy, you arrived earlier.

WENDY

You clogged my box with messages.

Maria glares nowhere. Then squints a little at Steven.

STEVEN

Um, this is Amber.

WENDY

Hi!

Maria glowers. Steven stands.

STEVEN

I gotta go. We'll talk about that later... Or these days.

Maria nods with anger. Steven and Wendy get out of the room. Maria glares at the door. Then she dials Vladimir's number.

MARIA

Hey, gorgeous! I need you to show your muscles.

EXT. STREET - DAY

On her way home, Maria notices a pair of beautiful shoes next to the dumpster. She looks around: no one. She bends down and pretends fastening the laces of her boots.

She squints at the shoes: Jesus, I don't dare. She stands and goes on. She stops, turns back, quickly reaches her hands and grabs them.

INT. STEVEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Steven speaks on the phone.

STEVEN

Cliff, what the hell is a 'lapel'? Oh, that? And a hidden zipper? Stop laughing. That's simple for you, but not for me.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Maria walks across a sidewalk. Steven drives nearby. Maria notices his car. The next second, a X5 deviates from the way. Steven tries hard to avoid it.

The X5 bumps into Steven's car. Maria looks scared. Steven gets out of his car and inspects its body.

STEVEN

Oh, it's just a scratch.

The DRIVER of the X5, completely intoxicated, gets out too, and inspects his car: much less crumpled than Steven's.

DRIVER

Just a scratch? It's fuckin' screwed up, you fool! You American, huh? You talk tall, huh?

STEVEN

Excuse me?

Maria peeps worried.

DRIVER

There will be hell to pay, you
bastard! You car wrecker!

STEVEN

(patient)
You bumped into me, not me into
you. And I didn't ask for your car
insurance.

Maria looks charmed.

DRIVER

Fuck your mother, you son of a
bitch, you cock sucker!

The driver tries to kick Steven, but makes a bad shot and
falls down. He stands and slits the zipper of his trousers.
He pisses in Steven's direction, but makes a bad shot again.

STEVEN

Fuck you!

MARIA

I hope you fuck well.

INT. FLAVIA'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Maria holds one end of a measure tape, Vladimir holds the
other, and make measurements over a pattern.

Steven barges in. He looks upset. Maria turns faced Steven.
Steven notices Vladimir.

MARIA

Hi!

STEVEN

Hi!

MARIA

Angry?

STEVEN

Just had my rented car bruised. I
can't stand drunken people and kids
without a driving license at the
wheel. That's insane!

Maria bites her lips.

VLADIMIR

How about a sober grown up woman
without a driving license at the
wheel?

Maria glowers at Vladimir. Steven is too upset to understand.

STEVEN

What?

MARIA

Oh, nothing. Um, this is Vladimir,
my best friend. Bulgarian.

Vladimir looks flattered. He waves his hand to Steven who's still near the door.

STEVEN

Steven. Pleased to meet you.

MARIA

I remade some of the sketches. Will
you have a look?

STEVEN

Sure.

Maria searches for them among the clattered desk. She can't find them. Vladimir and Steven inspect each other.

MARIA

Oh, I showed them to Flavia and I
left them in the living.

STEVEN

I'll go to take them.

He scurries away. Maria looks at the clock and frightens.

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Maria bursts into the kitchen. She grabs Alvaro's plate of food and gobbles reluctantly. Alvaro suddenly shows up and looks distrustful.

Maria makes a gesture: I'm eating, don't you see?

ALVARO

If you throw the food again, I'll
give you away and I'll no longer
answer to your questions about him.

MARIA

Don't you see that I'm eating?

ALVARO

Just letting you know.

Alvaro storms away and Maria gives an irritated roar.

Steven makes some NOISE on the hallway. Maria hides the plate and swallows a mouthful of unchewed food. She strives to stifle a pushy choke. Steven stomps up the stairs.

Maria breathes relieved and unleashes her choke. She coughs for a few times until her eyes tear. She looks at the plate: c'mon, three-four more spoonfuls and I'm done.

She stuffs herself rushed, eyes on watch. She notices motion, and turns her head: Flavia stands in the kitchen's doorway, staring dumbstruck at Maria's full jaws.

Maria looks embarrassed and slowly places the plate, then the spoon on the table.

FLAVIA

Er, you're hungry?

MARIA

You're home earlier? I'm... I'm sorry. I felt sick when I woke up and... didn't feel like putting anything in my mouth.

FLAVIA

Oh, God! Don't worry! Eat! I'll prepare Alvaro another meal.

MARIA

Oh, this was Alvaro's food? I'm so sorry.

FLAVIA

No, please, don't bother. That's all right.

INT. CARLOS AND FLAVIA'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Carlos and Flavia lay on the bed, ready to sleep.

FLAVIA

Poor Amber, you should've seen her today in the kitchen: gobbling like a starving wolf.

CARLOS

Oh! How long did you hire her?

FLAVIA

Three weeks.

CARLOS

Give her half of the salary tomorrow. One can survive without clothes, but not without food.

FLAVIA
Yes, so I will do.

INT. DRIVING SCHOOL - DAY

A CLERK looks distrustful at Maria's identity card and gives it back to her.

CLERK
I'm sorry. We're not allowed to take students at the driving school unless they're citizens of Spain or, at least, residents.

INT. FLAVIA'S OFFICE - DAY

Florentina and Maria are alone in the office and work. Steven opens the door slowly. Florentina and Maria don't notice.

MARIA
Imagine his American-Jewish penis. A mighty circumcised penis. As grand as him. How cool must it be?

Maria licks her lips. Steven gapes.

FLORENTINA
You are crazy!

MARIA
Yeah, did you know that...

Florentina looks scared. She widens her eyes in dismay.

MARIA (CONT'D)
... a Jewish penis smells great? I know that from my sister. Really!

Florentina's eyes mean: look back! Maria looks back and Steven gives an astounded smile. Maria looks completely embarrassed and lost.

FLORENTINA
Er, Steven, would you like, er, to help us with... making some...

STEVEN
Um, no. I'm really very tired. I'd like to take a nap. Sorry.

He squints baffled at Maria and leaves.

MARIA
Shit!

CONTINUOUS

Maria and Florentina work and look annoyed at each other as they hear a woman's laughter in the living room.

Steven laughs too. The woman laughs louder and speaks British.

MARIA

That's Wendy.

Florentina is gone. Maria looks at the clock: 18.00 P.M. Wendy and Steven still talk and laugh noisily and annoyingly.

19.00 P.M. Maria works and looks angry: they still laugh.

19.30. Maria speaks on the phone while Wendy jollies Steven.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Oh, God, did you give her the medicine? Did you wrap her feet in vinegar? Encased her in a hot blanket?

ANDREI (V.O.)

I didn't. I can't do anything if you call me ten times in half an hour. Don't panic like that. She just has a bit of high temperature.

20.00 P.M. Maria almost finishes her last sketch. Wendy still laughs. Maria dials Andrei's number.

MARIA

How's Sophie?

ANDREI (V.O.)

Fine. Sleeping. Normal temperature.

INT. ALVARO'S OFFICE - DAY

Alvaro struggles to deal with some annoying sentences which he must say fluently and by heart. Maria glares at him.

ALVARO

Take a bake and break...

MARIA

Again.

ALVARO

I've already said it for ten times.

MARIA

And never correctly. It's "take a break and bake the cake."

ALVARO
Take a break and bake the cake.

MARIA
Good, next!

ALVARO
Peter Piper picked a peck of
pickled peppers.

MARIA
Next!

ALVARO
Six sick... Sick six... Sis...

MARIA
Six sick hicks nick six slick
bricks with picks and sticks.

ALVARO
Sis kick si... Amber, please, I'm
begging you: no more tongue
twisters! I entreat you!

MARIA
Okay, we'll have to make a deal.

ALVARO
Anything!

MARIA
I'll no longer eat your lunch,
first of all. And second, you'll
follow Steven and tell me who he's
meeting, what he's doing, where
he's going. And!

Maria makes a gesture with her fingers over her mouth which
means: zip your mouth. Alvaro nods solemnly.

ALVARO
Big deal!

INT. FLAVIA'S OFFICE - DAY

Vladimir stands naked in front of Maria who holds a tape
measure in her hands.

MARIA
Thank you so much for doing this
for me, Vlad. Are you embarrassed?

VLADIMIR
Honestly? No.

MARIA

Well, you have no reason. You have
a... handsome penis.

They hear footsteps on the stairs.

MARIA (CONT'D)

He's coming!

VLADIMIR

Spring to attention!

CONTINUOUS

Steven enters and freezes like a statue: Vladimir stands bare-
ass, backed the door, and Maria, er, kisses his dick?

Maria stands slowly and calm, and writes down numbers.

MARIA

That's all, Vlad, thanks. You can
dress.

Maria looks at Steven.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Next?

Steven tries a confused smile: what kind of game is this?

MARIA (CONT'D)

I'd like to make a line of
lingerie. But I have no idea what
to begin with. Well, I think
measuring is the first step.

Steven shoves his hands into his pockets and smiles: you're
mocking me, huh?

STEVEN

Good for you! Only that keep in
mind that there are also big sizes.

Maria strives not to laugh. Vladimir gives a thumb up.

INT. CARLOS AND FLAVIA'S HOUSE - FLAVIA'S OFFICE - DAY

Alvaro enters the office. Maria is busy with drawing.

ALVARO

Steven played tennis in the garage
with a guy, named Luis. Then he
took a shower, then drove... I
don't know where, then did
something on the laptop.

MARIA
 (bored)
 Ok, thanks.

Alvaro turns to leave.

MARIA (CONT'D)
 Alvaro! Is he really married?

ALVARO
 He isn't. And hasn't got children.

Maria looks distrustful.

EXT. CARLOS AND FLAVIA'S HOUSE - YARD - DAY

Maria enters the yard and looks more gorgeous than never. Steven feeds the dogs. He follows her with his eyes. He looks completely overwhelmed. However, his eyes express regret.

Maria waves her hand and smiles. He does the same. They stare at each other and look like the next second will run to each other and hug and kiss.

She makes a few steps toward him. He does the same. They gaze at each other for seconds. Because nothing more happens, Maria gives a sad smile and toddles indoors.

Steven breathes relieved. As soon as Maria closes the entrance door, he dials a number.

STEVEN
 Hello! This is Steven Clark here. I just made a reservation for a romantic dinner minutes ago. I'd like to cancel it. Thank you.

EXT. PIZZA RESTAURANT - TERRACE - NIGHT

Maria, Vladimir, Vasile and Florentina have a pizza outing.

FLORENTINA
 Maybe he has AIDS. Did you think of that?

VASILE
 Maybe he's impotent. Or suffers from premature ejaculation.

MARIA
 Maybe he doesn't like me, or he really is married.

VLADIMIR
 Or maybe he's just an asshole.

FLORENTINA

I wouldn't trust Alvaro too much.
He's a scatty kid.

MARIA

I don't know. I'd wait for Steven
naked in his bedroom, but I'm
afraid that the idiot would mock me
and, maybe, tell me that at least
his wife's hips are round and full.

VLADIMIR

(irritated)
He's not married.

MARIA

I begin to love your predictions.

VLADIMIR

Well, then listen on: the jerk is
madly in love with you, but not
ready to give up to his single
state. That's why he's mocking you.
He hopes to make you give him
reasons to dislike you, so he can
detach from you easily.

INT. FLAVIA'S OFFICE - DAY

Maria looks engrossed with marking lines on a piece of
fabric. Alvaro stands next to her.

ALVARO

Steven went to the swimming pool
this morning. I heard him speaking
on the phone with a guy, Cliff,
about your sketches. And I found
these balloons in his pockets.

Maria gapes. She squats next to him, takes the 'balloons',
and strokes his hair. She looks a little afraid.

MARIA

You're doing a great job. But don't
forget that professional detectives
are discreet, okay?

He nods.

ALVARO

I report only
(points to her)
to my boss.

INT. FLAVIA'S OFFICE - DAY/NIGHT

MONTAGE - MARIA AND HER FRIENDS MAKE CLOTHES

-- Steven helps Maria layout a beautiful outfit for women.

-- Maria and Flavia draw skirts and shoes. They show them to each other and talk about them.

-- Vladimir and Maria watch a professional fashion tutorial on YouTube. Steven gets in with a tray of cakes. He takes one and feeds Maria. He eats of the same cake.

-- Maria tries on an unfinished skirt. Steven gives a thumb down. Maria makes a face and smiles.

-- Steven bends over the rectangular table and marks lines on a fabric. Vladimir takes Maria in his arms and runs with her across the room. Steven glances at them. Maria struggles to escape, but seems to have fun. Steven looks jealous, but goes about his business.

-- Maria is alone, shearing fabric. The clock shows 10.00 P.M. She places the scissors on the table and yawns tired. Steven stands in the doorway and smirks.

-- Maria draws, Steven shows her the mistakes, Flavia marks lines with chalk and shears fabrics, Florentina quilts, Vasile and Vladimir hand tools.

-- Steven toils to fold a huge piece of white lace. He rolls it. Maria playfully unrolls it. Steven rolls it back, Maria unrolls it. Steven smiles, grabs the lace and throws it at Maria. Maria wraps herself with it, and looks like a bride.

-- Vladimir and Vasile layout lines on a big piece of fabric. They 'quarrel' over who should cut with the scissors. Maria inspects a finished dress. Flavia comes in with a tray of four cups of coffee.

-- Flavia, Maria and Steven talk over a small line of clothes set on hangers. They look happy with the results.

-- Maria is alone, at the desk. She draws a bride dress. The clock shows 12.00 P.M. She stretches one hand over the desk and lays her head on it. She falls asleep.

END OF MONTAGE

STEVEN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Steven lays in his bed and looks on the laptop at photos of him and Maria working and having fun. He gives a deep sigh.

INT. CARLOS AND FLAVIA'S HOUSE - FLAVIA'S OFFICE - DAY

The clock shows 6.00 A.M. Flavia opens the door slowly and stares at Maria who cleans the room.

FLAVIA

Oh my God! You... you slept here?

MARIA

Yeah. I'm exhausted. I need a little break. Just a little one.

FLAVIA

You'll go home and have a good rest. Like one week. I won't see you here sooner. Okay?

MARIA

Thanks, Flavia, you're very nice. But I only need one day.

FLAVIA

No way. You're a value. I need you fresh. One week. Adjudicated!

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Vladimir and Maria have dinner. Vladimir takes a card out of his wallet and hands it to her. Maria takes it and gapes surprised: a driving licence? My name on it?

MARIA

What the hell is this? You wanted to beat me at craziness?

VLADIMIR

Don't be afraid to use it, it's made by cops.

MARIA

Are you a hacker?

VLADIMIR

No, others are. I'm just a building contractor with a thick wallet.

MARIA

Thank you very much.

VLADIMIR

The Bulgarian is useful. See? An American could never disentangle you from such a trouble.

MARIA

An American can hardly replace a light bulb, he calls the wireman, let alone to provide fake papers.

INT. CARLOS AND FLAVIA'S HOUSE - LIVING - DAY

SUPER: "FIVE DAYS LATER, FEBRUARY 10"

There's no movement in the house. Steven sits on an armchair, laptop in his lap, and looks at the door every five seconds, hoping for it to open.

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

He shoves a bunch of laundry into the washing machine, closes the machine's door and turns the button to set the temperature. The button turns red.

He hesitates, then opens the door and takes the clothes out.

EXT. IN FRONT OF MARIA'S BLOCK - SAME

Maria and Florentina rummage in a dumpster. Peeping around, they look into all kinds of stuff: a roaster, some kettles, handbags, magazines, Christmas tinsel, a pocket mirror etc.

Those which look good and useful are shoved in a huge sack.

INT. CARLOS AND FLAVIA'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - SAME

Steven gets in the bedroom and takes a few more clean clothes from the wardrobe.

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Steven brings the clothes to the kitchen. He smudges them with ketchup and mustard, with jam and whatever he finds in the fridge and on the table.

BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Steven takes a shower and shaves himself.

EXT. IN FRONT OF MARIA'S BLOCK - CONTINUOUS

Maria stares at a pair of shoes.

MARIA

Jesus, I can't believe! Just look at these shoes! Why would one throw them at the garbage?

Florentina gives a look.

FLORENTINA

Oh, look, a ribbon is missing.

Maria makes a face, then glances around. She gapes suddenly.

MARIA

Shit! Shit!

FLORENTINA

What's wrong?

Florentina follows Maria's eyes: a Mercedes.

FLORENTINA (CONT'D)

Who's that?

MARIA

That's Steven. Oh my God! Hide! Down! Flori, I'm dead. Did he see me? Why is he here?

FLORENTINA

Ok, the plan is, you go ahead, and I'll play along with him until you're indoor. All right? Go!

With the huge sack in her hands, Maria stands and heads toward the other side of the road.

FLORENTINA (CONT'D)

Maria, leave the goddam sack here!

Maria looks scared, throws the bag at her and skulks home.

INT. VASILE AND FLORENTINA'S FLAT - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Maria closes the door behind her and gasps for her breath.

BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

She scurries to the bathroom and washes her hands, splashes water on her face, and applies cream on her hands.

She takes the lipstick, opens the cap and... there's a knock on the door. She throws the lipstick on the counter, composes herself and heads for the door.

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

She opens the door and pretends surprised.

MARIA

Hi!

STEVEN

Hi! Er, Flavia's washing machine is out of order and...

MARIA

Oh! Come in! You can use our washing machine, of course.

He enters. She closes the door.

STEVEN

I'm sorry I'm showing up offhandedly. I tried to call you. No reception.

MARIA

Oh, no problem. I was just... um, cleaning up... my wardrobe?

CONTINUOUS

Steven shoves his laundry into the washing machine. He closes the door and looks uncertain of how to use the buttons.

MARIA

Oh, let me help you.

Maria pours detergent and fabric conditioner and turns it on.

The washing machine starts grumbling. Steven and Maria stare at each other. He comes closer and takes her by the hand. Maria looks ravished. He kisses her.

MARIA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

They kiss and undress each other wildly.

MARIA

Please, let me take a shower. Five minutes, promise!

STEVEN

Okay.

CONTINUOUS

Steven and Maria lay in bed and hold each other, after sex.

INT. CARLOS AND FLAVIA'S HOUSE - LIVING - NIGHT

Alvaro sits on the floor and plays on his tablet. Steven gets out of his room. Alvaro squints at him. Flavia shouts from the kitchen.

FLAVIA (O.S)

Alvaro, brush your teeth and put on your pyjamas!

ALVARO

Right away, mom!

FLAVIA'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Steven rushes to Flavia's office. Alvaro skulks behind him. Steven enters the office. Alvaro peeps from the hallway: Steven places a small cute-paper note on Maria's desk.

The note reads: "So you're not afraid that you'll wait outside in the cold, I'll expect you right there: inside, warm, nice, welcoming, romantic - Calle Alcala, Restaurant Silk and Spice, 8.00 P.M., tonight. Love, Steven."

Steven heads for the door. Alvaro hides behind a bookcase. Steven exits, closes the door and climbs down the stairs.

INT. JEWELRY SHOP - DAY

Steven looks at a dozen of rings set on a plateau in front of him, and can't decide. He finally buys a diamond one.

Then he looks into some Jewish-star necklaces.

INT. CARLOS AND FLAVIA'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - SAME

As Maria enters the house, Flavia and Alvaro welcome her with joy. They hand her a present and hug her.

FLAVIA/ALVARO

Happy Birthday!

MARIA

Wow! How do you all know that it's my birthday? What a surprise! So that's why you called me 'at work' sooner. Okay. I'll go to buy some cakes and we'll celebrate.

FLAVIA

We already thought of that. We've got a huge cake in the fridge.

MARIA

Oh, God! However, I want to give my treat. Have you ever eaten Romanian food? I'll be back in no time.

She leaves.

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Alvaro and Steven play with blocks. Steven checks his watch.

STEVEN

Okay, I gotta go.

FLAVIA

Where are you going? Wouldn't you like to stay and celebrate with us? I think Amber would appreciate.

STEVEN

I have an appointment.

Steven gets out of the kitchen. Alvaro follows him.

LIVING - CONTINUOUS

Alvaro walks by Steven.

ALVARO

Appointment, meeting and date are synonyms?

STEVEN

Er, I think you make an appointment, you meet the person and have a date. Yes.

ALVARO

So you're having a date?

STEVEN

Yes. Tonight. Shush!

Flavia stands in the kitchen doorway, arms crossed.

FLAVIA

Aren't you tired of passenger lovers?

STEVEN

Hopefully this one will put an end to this.

FLAVIA

(distrustful)
So help you God!

INT. HAIR SALON - CONTINUOUS

The STYLIST cuts Steven's hair and shaves his beard.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME

Flavia pours wine in a glass and hands it to Vladimir.

FLAVIA

Vasile and Flori aren't coming?

VLADIMIR

They said they'd be here in an hour or two. Unfortunately, I can't stay long. I have a plane ticket to Bulgaria. Mom's been hospitalized and I must be there tonight.

FLAVIA

Oh, I'm so sorry.

Vladimir takes a few sips of wine.

VLADIMIR

So is life. Bad things happen when you expect less. Where's Alvaro?

FLAVIA

In his office.

Vladimir stands.

VLADIMIR

Excuse me a little.

FLAVIA

No problem.

LIVING - CONTINUOUS

Vladimir gets out of the kitchen and peeps while he rushes to Flavia's office.

FLAVIA'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

He skulks in. He draws out of his coat a small wrapped box and rushes to Maria's desk.

The NOISE of a door opening downstairs makes him look alarmed and hurry to place the box on the table. The box lands right on Steven's note. Vladimir lurks back and closes the door.

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Vladimir drinks his wine and places the glass on the table.

VLADIMIR

I have to go. My plane's flying in three hours. I'd have loved to clink glasses with Amber, but...

INT. CARLOS AND FLAVIA'S HOUSE - LIVING - CONTINUOUS

Vladimir is gone. Maria gets in the house gasping a little. She holds a big package of food in her hands.

Alvaro looks excited. He meets her with joy and tells her almost whispered.

ALVARO

Steven bought you a present.

MARIA

He did?

ALVARO

I surveilled him and he placed a box on your desk. At first I thought it was a card, but I've just been there, two minutes ago, and there's a box. It's from him.

MARIA

I'll go upstairs to see my present. As for you... you're dismissed.

She winks her eye.

MARIA (CONT'D)

You don't have to play the detective for me anymore. Thanks for your help.

ALVARO

(disappointed)

I loved playing the detective.

Alvaro looks sad that he gives some bad news.

ALVARO (CONT'D)

And, oh, Steven said he's having a romantic dinner tonight.

MARIA

Oh, yeah? Wow.

INT. STEVEN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Maria takes a stack of clean and nicely ironed and folded clothes out of a bag. Steven's clothes. She touches them tenderly, kisses and places them on his bed.

FLAVIA'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Maria is at her desk, holding Vladimir's box in her hands. She unfolds the wrapper and smiles excited.

She opens a cardboard box and there's another wooden box. She smiles. She takes it and opens the clasps slowly.

Suddenly, a rubber toy-fist bursts from within. The next second, as suddenly, the middle finger, which looks exactly like a penis, bursts out too. Maria gapes.

The penis-finger holds a note on top of it:

"Happy Birthday, Amber! You liked my special penis, huh? But don't forget: All that glitters is not gold. Don't tell me you're surprised about this. You know I'm a crazy prom trotter. And whether you like it or not, you're one of my numbers, I squeezed your cool butt."

Maria cries angrily and grabs the wooden box, the cardboard box and the wrapper (along with Steven's note) and throws them at the waste bin.

She heads for the door, but changes her mind. Stomps to the waste bin, folds the garbage bag altogether, and shoves the whole thing in her purse.

Maria scampers out of the office, tears dripping her face. She stomps for the entrance door.

FLAVIA

Amber, what happened?

MARIA

I've just received very bad news. I need to go home. I'm sorry.

INT. MARIA'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Maria strips the banners of America off the walls. She roars and cries.

INT. STEVEN'S BEDROOM - SAME

Steven gazes at the pack of clothes on his bed. He touches them and smiles delighted.

INT. MARIA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Maria crouches on her bed. Her eyes look swollen with cry. She looks at her cell phone: 10 missed calls from Steven. It rings again. She throws it away.

INT. SILK AND SPICE RESTAURANT - SAME

Steven sits at a table. The clock shows 10.30 P.M. There are two plates, two glasses and a bottle of wine on the table. The atmosphere in the select restaurant is very cosy and pleasant. He sighs and nods disappointed. He dials a number.

STEVEN

Hi, father. I'm coming to visit you. Yeah, I know I've promised that for two weeks. This time I'm really coming. I'll take the first flight to Romania tomorrow morning. Oh, no, from there I'll fly directly to New York. Okay, bye!

INT. CARLOS AND FLAVIA'S HOUSE - STEVEN'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Steven takes his necktie off. Flavia knocks and enters. She leans her shoulder against the opened door and crosses her arms. She looks a little upset.

FLAVIA

Amber left the house crying.

STEVEN

Yeah?

FLAVIA

She went into the office, went out, and said she had received some very bad news. I can't tell whether it's about Vladimir's mother, or about your present Alvaro's talking about. What did you buy her?

STEVEN

A ring.

FLAVIA

Now is not a right time to be disdainful. What did you give her?

STEVEN

Nothing. Just a note.

FLAVIA

Just a note? You know, I'm upset with you.

(MORE)

FLAVIA (CONT'D)

I figured that she was in love with you, but I hoped she'd realize you're not a family man.

Steven chuckles disdainful: I'm not a family man?

STEVEN

And what's wrong with Vladimir's mother?

FLAVIA

She's sick. Vladimir has taken the plane to Bulgaria this morning.

Steven snorts.

FLAVIA (CONT'D)

Jesus, his mother is sick. Vlad is her friend. Of course she's worried. She just cares about him.

STEVEN

Or she just wanted to retort it to me. How about that?

FLAVIA

I don't understand.

STEVEN

Neither do I.

Flavia shakes in confusion, and leaves the room.

INT. CARLOS AND FLAVIA'S HOUSE - FLAVIA'S OFFICE - DAY

Steven stands in the office doorway and gazes nostalgically inside. He looks sad.

LIVING - CONTINUOUS

He climbs down the stairs, takes his luggage, opens the door and leaves.

INT. AIRPORT - SAME

Maria looks excited among the CROWD of PEOPLE who exit through the airport doors.

Finally: Andrei, holds Sophie in his arms, and pulls a big suitcase. Bianca walks by his side and pushes to a smaller suitcase. Maria looks excited.

They walk through the doors and Maria swarms over them, hugs Bianca, kisses her tightly, then takes Sophie in her arms and chokes her with kisses. Andrei and Maria have a formal hug.

MARIA

I told you I'd take them with me
after I cash my first paycheck!

ANDREI

I'm happy. I'll take you home, then
return quickly. My flight back to
Bucharest is in five hours.

EXT. DANUBE DELTA - VILLAGE - STEVEN'S PARENTS HOUSE - SAME

Their house is big, beautiful and modern, but very rustic.
Steven's father, JOSEPH, welcomes him with joy and hugs him.

INT. VASILE AND FLORENTINA'S FLAT - LIVING - LATER

The girls play. Maria talks to Florentina.

MARIA

Steven left back to New York.

FLORENTINA

He's such a jerk. I can't believe
he did what he did.

MARIA

All men are like that? Or I'm the
unluckiest woman on earth?

EXT. ROMANIA, LAKE - DAY

Steven and his father walk across the surface of a frozen
lake. Steven takes shots from time to time.

JOSEPH

Winter is not a perfect time to
visit The Danube Delta.

STEVEN

It's more beautiful in summer time,
I agree.

JOSEPH

So you give up to the ecological
business in Romania?

STEVEN

I've got to consolidate my fashion
business in New York.

Joseph snorts in distrust.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

Yeah, in the meantime I became very
fond of clothes.

JOSEPH

Between the time from New York and
Romania? What did the Spanish did
to you? Washed your brain?

Steven sighs. He notices a bird. He fixes his camera on it.

STEVEN

What bird is that?

JOSEPH

That's a Romanian pelican.

EXT. YARD - NIGHT

Joseph's WIFE, a beautiful pleasant woman, looks very excited about cooking different sorts of Romanian food on a huge rustic bake stone in the yard.

There are a few PEOPLE gathered there. Some dance on traditional Romanian music, others sit at tables and drink.

There's also a BAND of six guys who play instruments like: accordion, dulcimer and violins.

Joseph looks very happy. Steven sits and drinks silent.

JOSEPH

C'mon, Steve, it's a party for the
prodigal son. Enjoy it! Stand up,
let's have a Romanian dance!

STEVEN

I like watching.

Joseph gazes at him: I know you have an affliction.

EXT. BACK OF THE YARD - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The joyful atmosphere resonates in the distance. Steven and Joseph are alone in the back of the yard, glasses of wine in hands, and sit on rustic chairs, woods cracking in the fire that burns in front of them.

STEVEN

And here's your dream come true:
retreat in a rustic exotic place
when retired. You're happy.

JOSEPH

Not if I don't have my children
with me. Which is *your* dream?
You've got here everything you'd
need...

STEVEN

Dad! I don't have a strong reason to move here permanently.

JOSEPH

Nothing is more beautiful than the oldest continent.

STEVEN

Yeah, I like Europe, but I'd move to Spain or to Sweden. Or maybe to England.

JOSEPH

Oh, I see, civilization. I love this wilderness, the scraggily grown corn, the virgin grass. Even prince Charles of England bought an estate here.

STEVEN

Father, I've met a Swedish woman in Spain.

JOSEPH

Uh-huh, the strong reason. But I'm pleasantly surprised. You never tell me about your women. She must be someone important.

STEVEN

I don't know.

JOSEPH

Why? She's not much on your taste?

STEVEN

She's fully on my taste, I'm afraid.

JOSEPH

Afraid... You know what they say: If you stung your fingers into a rose, doesn't make all the flowers with spikes.

STEVEN

That was long time ago.

JOSEPH

Still didn't change your present.

STEVEN

Do you know any curative?

JOSEPH

Maybe not entirely. I never wanted to tell you, but when your mother died, I really did nothing else but expected my own death everyday. Now what can I say? I'm so thankful I found Lavinia, this Romanian woman whose continual smile makes me want to live at least one more day. Do you feel like you love her?

STEVEN

I do. She's beyond any woman I've ever met. And way beyond Susan.

JOSEPH

Then what are you waiting for?

STEVEN

I don't know, a miracle. Maybe I'm waiting for her to propose.

JOSEPH

That's not my son! A woman likes her man to be strong as a tiger and gentle as a dove.

STEVEN

A tiger to tame.

JOSEPH

No, a tamed tiger. That's why we fail. We think they want to be our masters, but actually they so much love to be our prey. All they need is plenty of love, appreciation and protection. Offer them these three things and they surrender completely and definitively. They'd kiss our feet for that.

STEVEN

Kiss my feet? I don't need that.

JOSEPH

They do. That's a woman's biggest need: have a man whose feet to kiss.

INT. VASILE AND FLORENTINA'S FLAT - MARIA'S ROOM - DAY

Sophie and Bianca play noisily and messily in the living. Maria speaks on the phone.

MARIA

Oh, Flavia, thanks for the invitation.

(MORE)

MARIA (CONT'D)

It's so nice that your wedding anniversary is right on Valentine's Day. I'm not sure I'm coming, though. Okay, I'll try.

INT. CARLOS AND FLAVIA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Romantic music plays. The house is very nicely adorned for a wedding anniversary. Some Spanish and American COUPLES, and other SINGLE PERSONS, take part at the event.

Upstairs, a BABY-SITTER looks after their CHILDREN.

Maria enters. The sofas and armchairs are occupied. She sits on a love seat. Most of the couples dance.

Steven shows up in the living. He meets Maria's eyes. Maria transfixes. Steven approaches and sits next to her.

Maria looks completely overwhelmed by Steven's gorgeousness. The music stops and the dancing couples sit on the sofas. Steven takes a glass of champagne in his hand.

A bunch of GUESTS nearby talk and laugh. GREG, an American guy, seems to jolly them. Steven gazes at Maria. Maria feigns searching for something in her purse.

GREG

And this Romanian guy came at the pizza restaurant with beverage from home. 'Cause it's cheaper, he said.

Maria glares. The people who listen to Greg laugh. Steven looks at them and chuckles. Maria fumbles in her wallet.

BRUNO

Once I saw a Romanian, or a Ukrainian, I can't tell...

Steven turns his head to Bruno.

STEVEN

Eastern Europe people are exactly the same.

Steven looks at Maria and smiles, hoping to jolly her.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

Aren't they?

Maria glowers at him. Steven's smile fades suddenly.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

Amber, I know I owe you an explanation for...

MARIA

You don't owe me anything.

Maria stands and leaves while Steven follows her with his eyes. Maria heads for the door, but more guests burst in, so she rushes upstairs, to the children's room.

Steven places the glass on the table and as he looks down, he notices a card. He stares at it and realizes there's Maria's photo on it. He takes it: it's her identity card. He gapes.

UPSTAIRS - CHILDREN'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

There are about EIGHT CHILDREN upstairs playing and talking.

JUAN

There's no Disney Land in England.

ALVARO

Yes, there is.

JUAN

No, there isn't.

Maria comes in.

ALVARO

Amber, isn't it true that there is a Disney Land in England?

(to Juan)

Amber's from England.

MARIA

Er, they've been building one.

JUAN/ALVARO

See?

JUAN

But do you have castles in England?

Maria sits on the floor, next to them. Three more children come and sit up on the floor.

MARIA

I don't know, but we do have in Romania.

STEVEN (O.S.)

We do have, right.

He hands her back the identity card. Maria gapes a second, then looks a little careless. She snaps it from his hand. Steven sits next to her.

STEVEN (CONT'D)
 (to the children)
 The Bran Castle, you know,
 Dracula... The Pelesh Castle, The
 City of Neamt. And the Romanians
 are a Slavonic people...
 (looks at Maria)
 or Latin?

Maria gapes. Then she gets it together.

MARIA
 Does it matter? We're all exactly
 the same. A hotchpotch of third-
 class pathetic humans destined to
 be the experimental ground of the
 first-class. It's been like that
 since always. There must be some
 "less capable of feelings and
 goals" people to be taken advantage
 of. A first-class can never exist
 without this unbalance.

She stands and leaves. Then stops and turns around.

MARIA (CONT'D)
 And I bet money that ancient
 castles is all you know that's
 interesting about Romania.

Maria scurries to the door and climbs down the stairs. Steven
 follows her as quickly.

STEVEN
 How much money would you bet?

MARIA
 All my money.

Maria heads for the door. He follows her. She puts on her
 coat, he does the same. She puts on her shoes, he does the
 same. She exits, he exits.

YARD - CONTINUOUS

She heads for the gate, he follows her.

STEVEN
 I love sponge cakes. *Cozonac* right?
 And mostly stuffed cabbage with...
 that porridge of maize flour and
 water... don't tell me... oh, yes:
mamaliga! Yeah, *sarmale* and
mamaliguta.

Maria gapes: Jesus, I'm going to lose my money?

MARIA
 (ironical)
 Very impressive.

STEVEN
 And once I danced *tora*.

MARIA
Hora.

STEVEN
Hora.

IN THE STREET - CONTINUOUS

Maria stops in front of her rented car, a little relented.

STEVEN
 And the thing I loved most was
 rowing among the reeds and the
 willows of the Danube Delta.

MARIA
 You visited Romania.

STEVEN
 For a few times, yes. Actually my
 parents live there.

MARIA
 Your parents live there?

She leans against the car.

MARIA (CONT'D)
 I can't tell what you want from me.
 You're just very and very weird.
 And, well, a complete jerk. How was
 you able to do that? How?

STEVEN
 I know. I know. You need a man...
 who... a tiger man.

MARIA
 A tiger man. That's a nice way of
 saying 'you need a cock', huh? A
 plastic one. That never
 emasculates.

Steven looks confused.

MARIA (CONT'D)
 To keep a horny woman like me from
 throwing herself at a married man.

STEVEN

I'm not married.

MARIA

Of course you're not. You're just incredibly proud and self-confident.

STEVEN

I wouldn't call that a terrible deception in the past. And, well, I don't have children either. Time to tell the truth.

MARIA

You don't... Too bad.

STEVEN

I'm sorry, I don't know why I lied to you about... many things.

MARIA

You don't know?

About ten seconds pass with Maria waiting for him to say something. She exhales angrily.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Yeah. You comforted me, and I fell in love. I wanted to impress you, but because my real life was not cool, I sprinkled it with lies. But you... you'd never confess that.

She starts the engine.

STEVEN

Amber...

MARIA

My name is Maria. And I don't have a driving license.

She pushes the accelerator and sprints away. Steven gapes.

INT. VASILE AND FLORENTINA'S FLAT - LIVING - CONTINUOUS

Maria slams the door closed. She stops and gazes as the romantic atmosphere overwhelms her. The flat is charmingly decorated for Valentine's Day.

Florentina is elegantly dressed. Bianca and Sophie wear princess outfits. Maria tries a smile.

FLORENTINA

Let's have a little fun until Vasile arrives. Let the music play!

Florentina clicks a song on YouTube and traditional Romanian music for parties bursts out. She turns the volume up.

LIVING - CONTINUOUS

Maria takes off her dress. The music plays loud.

Sophie eats chocolate. She takes a glass of juice, spills it on her suit and begins to cry. Florentina makes a sign with her hand: I'll go to change her.

Florentina takes Sophie, shushes her and goes in her bedroom. Bianca hangs a drum at her neck and follows them, beating it.

Maria takes off her bra and now is only in knickers and shoes. She notices the purse in which she threw Vladimir's gift. She grabs it angrily.

FLORENTINA'S ROOM - SAME

Florentina labors over dressing Sophie. Sophie runs away naked, only diaper on her, and hides while Florentina chases her and unsuccessfully reaches her hands to catch her.

Bianca, on the other side, has her own reasons to catch Sophie: pour water in her diaper. Bianca laughs heartily when she manages to do so.

LIVING - SAME

Maria fumbles in the purse, unfolds the garbage bag and draws out the box. Along with it, Steven's note flies in the air and falls down.

She picks it up and frowns. She holds the note in the right hand, leans her left elbow against the table, props her head against the left hand, ass jutted out, and reads. She gapes.

INT. BLOCK'S CORRIDOR - MARIA'S FLAT - SAME

Steven holds a Dalmatian puppy and a huge bunch of tulips in his arms. He knocks on the door. There's big noise inside. He knocks louder. He tries the door handle: it's unlocked.

As he opens the door, the noise and music outflanks him, while his eyes fall directly on Maria's ass, naked body and high heels. He gapes, then withdraws bewildered.

LIVING - CONTINUOUS

The music stops at the same time with a firm knock on the door. Maria flinches.

LIVING/HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

With a bottle of water in her hands, Bianca chases Sophie and burst together in the living. Florentina goes to the bathroom. Sophie slips into a pair of Maria's shoes and clamps across the hallway.

MARIA

Silence, little imps! We angered
the neighbors with our noise.

Maria quickly covers herself with a towel she finds nearby and looks through the door sight. She freaks out.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Oh my God, it's Steven. Flori!

FLORENTINA

I'm on the toilet!

Maria flings her shoes out of her feet, runs back and forth with no direction, looking for clothes. The laundry basket is the closest source. Steven knocks again.

MARIA

Coming, coming!

Maria shoves her hands into the laundry basket and draws out whatever she finds.

Maria inhales and exhales, then opens the door slowly and relaxed, as if nothing happened.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Hi!

INT. BLOCK'S CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

The view inside is a picture. The two girls and their mother gape at Steven like three statues. Bianca stares, drums at her neck, sticks in one hand, bottle in the other.

Sophie gapes, hands, mouth and face dirty of chocolate, her oversized shoes making her look even more risible, one strap of the super-full diaper unfastened.

What happens next: the other strap of the diaper unfastens by itself, and the diaper falls down.

BIANCA/SOPHIE

Dalmatian puppy?

MARIA

You know everything about my
favorite flowers?

STEVEN
You're wearing my T-shirt?

Maria looks at her T-shirt and now realizes it's Steven's.

STEVEN (CONT'D)
And you're also a baby-sitter?

MARIA
I'm also a mother. Time to tell the truth.

STEVEN
Really? Sounds like we're a pair of pretty damned good liars.

They chuckle. Florentina shows up and gapes.

FLORENTINA
The children could sleep in our bedroom tonight.

LIVING - CONTINUOUS

Steven plays with Maria's girls and with the puppy. The children look very happy. Maria gazes at them.

CONTINUOUS

Maria wears elegant dress and shoes and gets into the living slowly and with the point finger on her mouth.

MARIA
Shush, they're finally sleeping.

Vasile and Florentina put on their coats.

VASILE
Guys, we're going downtown to watch the fireworks.

Steven and Maria smile embarrassed.

STEVEN
Thanks, guys. We owe you.

CONTINUOUS

Music plays muted. Steven and Maria dance.

MARIA
I'm going to kill Vladimir.

STEVEN
Don't kill him, he's a nice guy.

MARIA

I'm so sorry for what happened earlier.

STEVEN

I'm sorry for everything. Mostly for saying that Eastern Europe countries are exactly the same. Romania's capital is Bucharest, Ukraine's - Kiev, Slovenia's - Ljubljana... right?

Maria smiles and strokes his cheek.

MARIA

You'll beat me, but actually I myself think that Eastern Europe countries are exactly the same.

STEVEN

What?

MARIA

But I hate when Americans say that. It's like when someone calls himself 'stupid', but can't stand the others to agree on that.

STEVEN

You're a handful!

MARIA

Well, of course, I wouldn't mistake myself for a Hungarian, say, they're for me as exotic as Americans, but I find them all, I mean the rest of the Eastern Europe countries, exactly the same. Yeah, I know, I'm out of the ordinary.

STEVEN

Sounds like you found your mate.

Maria strokes his cheek.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

I love you.

MARIA

I love you.

They kiss. Then lean their foreheads against each other. He raises her chin and looks into her eyes.

STEVEN

You're so beautiful. Have I ever told you?

MARIA
Will you be my Valentine?

Steven takes a Jewish star necklace out of his pocket.

STEVEN
Will you go with me under the
chuppah?

Maria looks immensely touched. He puts it around her neck.

STEVEN (CONT'D)
Will you? Will you marry me?

MARIA
I've never been asked this
question, can you believe this?

STEVEN
I've never asked this question, can
you believe this?

They kiss while laugh.

STEVEN (CONT'D)
So will you marry me?

MARIA
Can you say that again?

Steven slides the ring on her finger.

STEVEN
Will you marry me?

MARIA
I will. I'll definitely marry you,
my alpha man.

Steven kisses her while talks to her.

STEVEN
Could you take the habit to lock
the door after you enter the house?
I don't want to kill an innocent
man who accidentally wished for my
wife's sexy legs and ass.

He touches her waist and ass. They kiss passionately. He
takes her in his arms and heads for Maria's bedroom.

INT. ROMANIA - STEVEN'S PARENTS HOUSE - DAY

It's a nice summer day. Steven's and Maria's friends and
families enjoy a beautiful meal in the yard, around a big
table. They have fun and laugh at Steven.

STEVEN
Water?

MARIA
Apa.

STEVEN
Apa. Water, apa. How's that in Spanish?

FLAVIA
Agua.

STEVEN
Agua. And Bulgarian?

VLADIMIR
Vodi.

STEVEN
So water is apa, agua, vodi.

They laugh.

INT. NEW YORK - STEVEN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Steven and Maria lay in bed and kiss, half-dressed.

MARIA
I've never thought I'd get to spend my honey moon in New York.

STEVEN
If you're happy, I'm happy.

STEVEN (CONT'D)
I have a new wish for this Christmas.

MARIA
Lemme hear it.

STEVEN
I'd like a little brother for my adorable daughters.

MARIA
There'd be no greater privilege than bearing a little American-Jew in my womb.

They kiss and undress each other. There's a knock on the door. They stop.

MARIA (CONT'D)
Who could be?

STEVEN
I don't know.

There's another knock. They quickly wrap their bodies with bath gowns. Steven heads for the door.

AT THE DOOR - CONTINUOUS

Steven opens the door. Cliff stands in front of him, two big suitcases next to him.

CLIFF
Hi!

STEVEN
Hi, Cliff!

CLIFF
I'd like to come in.

Maria approaches confused, curls Steven's arm with her arm.

STEVEN
Er...

Cliff grabs the handles of the luggage, cuts through them and gets into the room. Maria and Steven gape.

CLIFF
I spent nights to teach you fashion online. My wife kicked me out. You owe me.

STEVEN
Er, why don't you go to a hotel?

CLIFF
Because you have to pay for this?

Maria snorts half-amused.

STEVEN
(to Maria)
I told you: America has her own freaks.

FADE OUT.