

Victorine Meurent

Written By

Michael Lopez

"I would kiss you, had I the courage."
Edouard Manet

FADE IN:

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Morning sunshine barrels through large plexiglass windows and lights up a hip coffee shop.

MICHAEL (20s)--nice hair and a threadbare wool blazer--sits on a stool across from JASON (30s)--tall, handsome, and likable.

They are separated by a copper countertop. Jason wipes down an espresso cup on the barista side.

At the end of the counter, SAVANNAH (20s), sits wearing jogging attire. Her blonde hair is up in a bun that rests next to her large over-the-ear headphones. She scribbles in a notebook.

Jason is staring at her.

JASON

I'm not saying people won't get it,
but you don't have to use *her*.

MICHAEL

No, you're not listening to me.

Michael snaps, and Jason looks over at him.

JASON

She's not an actress, she's a
stripper.

MICHAEL

That's the point. The point is for
it to *feel* real. And she's not just
a stripper, okay? She's a human
being.

(Beat)

She just also happens to be a
stripper.

(Beat)

And, by the way, strippers also
happen to be very good actresses,
mind you.

CUT TO:

INT. BELLA'S HOUSE - DAY

BELLA (20s), wearing just a tank top and underwear, is in bed reading with her cat. She checks the time.

HALLWAY

She walks from her bedroom to the kitchen.

KITCHEN

While smoking a cigarette, she grabs a bag of coffee. She opens it, tries to pour out the contents, and realizes there are none. She mouths "*fuck!*" quietly.

CUT TO:

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Jason and Michael sit upright under large pieces of art. The bright sunshine overexposes the scene.

JASON

Okay, sure, you're right, but here's the thing... You can tell in the film you did that she's not a real actress. There's some natural talent there, but you'd have to nurture it. Why waste time--

MICHAEL

She's not a real actress but she's got the look I'm going for--

JASON

Dude, we live in Los Angeles, I can find an actress with her look who's 10X better just by...

Jason turns to Savannah.

JASON (CONT'D)

Hey!

She doesn't hear him. He waves his arms and she turns. She removes her headphones.

JASON (CONT'D)

Are you an actress?

SAVANNAH

No, I'm an engineer...

JASON

Oh.

(Beat)

You wanna be in a movie?

SAVANNAH

Huh?

JASON
Nothing, sorry.

He turns back to Michael.

MICHAEL
Good job.
(Beat)
Look, I get what you're saying, but
it's not about that--

JASON
I know it's not! You're in love
with her.

MICHAEL
No, I'm not...it's just a... a
coffee shop crush.

JASON
Coffee shop obsession.

MICHAEL
Mild-to-medium, regular obsession.

JASON
Medium-to-severe obsession, AKA in
love.

MICHAEL
No, you can't be in love with
someone you don't know.

JASON
(Rolls eyes)
Does she even want to do it?

MICHAEL
I think so. She told me she wanted
to do more acting after we wrapped
the last shoot but she hasn't
responded to my voice memo.

JASON
Voice memo?

MICHAEL
Yeah, I sent her a voice memo.

JASON
What the fuck do you mean you sent
her a voice memo?

MICHAEL

Like, I recorded a voice memo and I
texted it to her. It was too much
information to type out.

CUT TO:

INT. BELLA'S HOUSE, BATHROOM - DAY

Bella stares at herself in the mirror. Her phone is on the
sink, and Michael's voice memo plays in the background. She
adjusts her breasts and inspects her face as she listens.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

...yeah so I was just wondering if
you wanted to meet up sometime and
talk about it. I know we didn't
really get a chance to connect
after the last shoot, so I just
wanna see where you're at with the
whole acting thing, if it's
something you still want to do, and
if you're open to doing another
film...

She realizes she has a giant zit on her face.

CUT TO:

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Jason sits up and starts to wipe down the counter.

JASON

You're an interesting guy, you know
that?

MICHAEL

It's probably my best quality.

JASON

Well you probably should have just
called her--who the fuck sends
memos?

MICHAEL

IT'S AN EFFICIENT WAY TO GET ALL
THE INFORMATION ACROSS IN AN EASY,
ACCESSIBLE MANNER, JASON!!!

Jason laughs, then sighs.

JASON
Listen, is there anything you're
not telling me?

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Quick CLOSEUP of Bella and Michael in bed having sex.

MICHAEL
Tell me you love me.

BELLA
What?

MICHAEL
It's the only way I can finish.

CUT TO:

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

CLOSEUP on Michael staring blankly at Jason.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
What? No, of course not.

JASON
Then hear me out, okay?
(Beat)
You're bargaining. You have a lot
at stake here, and all I'm trying
to doo--

MICHAEL
Bargaining for what, and with who?
Why would I bargain with you?

JASON
Exactly! You're bargaining with
yourself.

Jason puts his arm on Michael's shoulder.

JASON (CONT'D)
You made a short film about an
infatuation you had with someone,
and somehow the universe allowed
you to put them in it, and somehow
it was good, and somehow--because
it was good--someone trusts you
with a million dollars to make
another one. Count your blessings,
and leave it at that.

MICHAEL
Okay, yeah, fine.
(Beat)
But you'll be in it, right?

Michael gets up to leave.

JASON
Of course I'll be in it--thought
you'd never ask. Just go ahead and,
you know, send me a memo.

Michael heads towards the door.

MICHAEL
I will.
(Points to Savannah)
You should ask her out I think she
liked you.

As he walks out we notice PAUL (30s), a hipster wearing a fresh-pressed blue suit, sitting in a corner. He's tuning a guitar.

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Michael exits the coffee shop and walks quickly down the streets of Boyle Heights.

CUT TO:

EXT. BELLA'S HOUSE - DAY

Bella exits her house. She's smoking.

EXT. BELLA'S UBER - DAY

Bella gets into the back of an Uber.

INT. BELLA'S UBER - DAY

Bella sits in the back seat as a montage of her cruising through Boyle Heights is shown.

CUT TO:

INT. MICHAEL'S CAR - DAY

Michael drives as a montage of him driving towards a park is shown.

CUT TO:

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

Bella's Uber stops. She gets out.

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

She walks up to the same coffee shop Michael just left.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

She walks in and grabs a bag of beans. Jason smirks.

JASON

The regular?

She nods then turns to look at Paul (the hipster with the guitar) in the corner. They make eye contact. She smiles, and he returns the look, then...

Paul puts his index finger up to his lips and whispers a "shhh."

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Bella walks back out onto the street. She sips her drink, then lights a cigarette.

CUT TO:

EXT. ECHO PARK LAKE - DAY

The geyser fountain at the heart of Echo Park Lake pumps water high above laughing picnickers, joggers that glide over the pavement, and dogs who pant alongside the geese that are scattered about. Michael sits next to his friend, KEITH (30s).

KEITH

Aight, bro, so lemme get this straight...

(MORE)

KEITH (CONT'D)

You wrote a story about a girl you liked at a coffee shop, then actually put that girl in the movie, now some real heads with some real cash wanna make a *real* movie and you tryna put her stripper ass in this one, too?

MICHAEL

Yes, and why is everyone so obsessed with her being a stripper? She's just a person, what she does has nothing to do with this--

KEITH

Don't do all that.

MICHAEL

What?

KEITH

All that fake feminist stuff. You know you ain't shit. Stop that.

MICHAEL

That's not what this is--

KEITH

Nah man, you wanna come to me talking real, talk real to me. This ain't even about her and whatever issues she got, man. This about you, bro, and you can't even see it.

MICHAEL

Okay, look, I understand what you're saying: There is a certain type of person that is drawn to sex work--

KEITH

And you drawn to those people!

MICHAEL

Historically, yes. But you can't hold that against someone.

(Beat)

We've all got... stuff.

KEITH

Stuff?

MICHAEL

Yeah, stuff--like head stuff, stuff wrong with us.

KEITH

I ain't got no stuff, man.

MICHAEL

That's your stuff!

KEITH

I told you I ain't got no stuff, man.

MICHAEL

Yeah, but trying to convince me you don't have stuff is your stuff!

KEITH

I ain't got no stuff, you know why? Because I'm a R.A.N., who's focused on R.N.S. You know what that means?

MICHAEL

No.

KEITH

I'm a real ass nigga, only focused on real nigga shit.

MICHAEL

That's not even applicable or helpful to me in anyway, Keith.

Keith laughs.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Seriously. You're the only one laughing at that joke. I can't even partake in that humor with you.

KEITH

Hold on, let me tell you something, bro, you running around here tryna make yo 'lil movie and use it as an excuse to play out some sort of fantasy you got--

MICHAEL

ALL MOVIES ARE A FORM OF FANTASY, KEITH, THAT'S WHY THE BEST ONES ARE BASED ON REAL FANTASIES!!!

KEITH

Shhhh, listen to me, okay? You own a cape?

MICHAEL

A cape? What? No I don't own a cape.

KEITH

Then stop tryna be this chick's muthafuckin' hero and go on and make a movie.

(Laughing)

Idiot.

MICHAEL

Okay, but you'll talk to your cousin about being in it?

KEITH

Yes, man, I'll talk to her. But don't be on that bullshit, bro, she don't be fuckin' with dudes who be sending voice memos.

Michael puts his hands over his face.

KEITH (CONT'D)

(Laughing)

'Ol transistor radio ass. This nigga sent her a chirp.

(Laughing)

Walkie talkie ass.

(Laughing)

Send her a pen pal letter while you're at it.

CUT TO:

INT. BOOK SHOP - DAY

Bella scans shelves at a book store.

INT. TARGET - DAY

Bella peruses the makeup section. She looks in the mirror. She notices the zit again.

She grabs a few skincare products.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - DAY

Bella sits in a movie theater watching a movie alone. There's a white paste over her zit.

CUT TO:

INT. PERSONAL MOVIE THEATER - DAY

Michael sits in a personal movie theater with RICH (40s), an executive. The screen shows the last shot of a black and white movie with Bella in it. Lights come on.

MICHAEL

So what do you think?

Rich turns to him.

RICH

She really a stripper?

CUT TO:

EXT. STRIP CLUB - DAY

Neon lights hang on a barren building on the outskirts of the city.

Bella walks towards the entrance, when...

She sees Michael waiting for her; she's surprised, and slightly startled, to see him.

MICHAEL

Hey, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to pop up on you like this I just...

(Beat)

I sent you a message and I just wanted to know if you got it and...

Bella looks at him, with pity almost. She's going to speak when MAC (30s), a bouncer with tattoos and gold teeth, comes up to them.

MAC

Nuh uh, aye, you wanna talk? You pay the entrance fee, come inside, and throw some bills, feel me?

MICHAEL

Yeah, look, no it's okay we know each other--

He touches Mac's shoulder. Mac's reaction says, "bad idea."

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
(Removing his hand)
Sorry.

MAC
You leave that personal shit at home, aight? You send a text, a snap, a voice memo, whatever--when you out here at my spot, you gotta pay, nah mean?

MICHAEL
Yeah, yeah, sure I... I got it.

MAC
(To Bella)
Aight, c'mon girl.

Mac walks. Bella lingers, looks at Michael, then quickly leans in to give him a kiss on the cheek.

Bella pulls away, and Michael goes to speak, but she brings her index finger up to her lips and whispers a "shhhh" before running off.

INT. MICHAEL'S CAR - DAY

Michael drives, looks pensive.

MUSIC CUE: Fast-paced guitar strums are heard.

CUT TO:

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Jason flirts with Savannah from over the counter.

INT. MAKEUP ROOM - DAY

Bella applies her makeup in a dark makeup room.

EXT. STRIP CLUB - DAY

Keith's car pulls up to the strip club. He exits, walks to the entrance of the club, and enters.

INT. STRIP CLUB - DAY

Keith sits in a chair. It's dark, but we can make out a figure in front of him wearing the same dress Bella is wearing.

He pulls out a wad of cash.

EXT. PARK BENCH - DAY

Paul sits at a bench with ANNA ELIZA (20s), a hippy with lips that look locked in a permanent smile. He's singing ACE while strumming the guitar. She admires him.

CUT TO:

INT. MICHAEL'S CAR - DAY

Michael pulls up to a curb next to the park bench.

EXT. PARK BENCH - DAY

Michael gets out of the car and walks up to a stone surface overlooking the city. The sun is setting behind him.

He looks over and notices Paul strumming and singing.

Paul nods in Michael's direction, and Anna Eliza looks over. She smiles.

Michael stares intently at the two of them, then...

Anna Eliza stands up and skips towards Michael. She climbs up onto the stone surface and begins dancing.

Michael stares in bewilderment. She continues, almost mockingly, to dance. Her hands grab his wrists as she invites him to join her.

Not knowing what to do, Michael starts to dance to the beat with her as Paul sings in the background.

The sun sets as Anna Eliza swings, and Michael sways.

She turns around to move her back into him and he imagines for a moment that it's Bella, then...

Anna Eliza turns back around and we see her face again. The way she moves builds to a crescendo as Paul ends the song.

She smiles at Michael, turns away, and walks up to Paul who's standing. They lock arms and start to walk away.

Anna Eliza turns back to Michael, brings her index finger up to her lips, and whispers a "shhhh."

CUT TO:

EXT. MICHAEL'S HOUSE - DUSK

Michael pulls into the driveway of a large house. He exits the car, slams the door shut, and walks up to the porch.

The front door opens. He stops.

Standing in front of him in the doorway is CARYN (20s), a well-dressed black woman who glows. She's frowning and holding a two-year-old kid named KD (if not already obvious to the reader, this is Michael's family).

CARYN
Where you been?

Michael runs his hand over KD's hair and kisses him on the forehead.

MICHAEL
Working, babe, you know that.

He motions for them to go inside.

INT. MICHAEL'S HOUSE - DUSK

Caryn, holding KD, enters the house with Michael behind her.

CARYN
Let me set this boy down.

She exits the frame, and Michael walks over to a large window in a recreational room.

He stares out at a beautiful backyard. He brings his hands up to his head, runs them through his hair, and we see he's now wearing a wedding ring.

As he looks out at the yard, Caryn is seen behind him, across the room.

He senses her and turns. She has her arms crossed. He walks over to her and goes in for a kiss.

MICHAEL

I missed you.

She glares back at him.

CARYN

You just gon' leave me for that long without saying anything? And then you gon' come back and say you miss me? That's what you 'bout to do right now?

MICHAEL

I know, I know, look... It's just been crazy trying to get this thing made I...

(Beat)

I know it seems like I'm avoiding you but... I'm not. I know you're probably upset, and--

CARYN

Oh, you think?

MICHAEL

I'm sorry...

(Beat)

I'm sorry you feel that way; I'm sorry you feel like you don't matter, and sorry you feel like I've left you all alone.

He goes in for another kiss, but she stops him.

CARYN

You know that I know what you've been doing?

MICHAEL

What?

CARYN

Oh, you think I'm stupid? I know where you been. Out with that little...

(Angry beat)

That little girlfriend of yours, while I'm here taking care of your children--OUR children.

MICHAEL

Caryn, don't start with me...

CARYN

Don't start with you???

MICHAEL

Oh, you know what? You are so insecure. You always make up these stories in your mind where I'm out seeing other people--

CARYN

Oh yeah?

MICHAEL

Yeah, just because you feel this undeniable urge to see other people, you project all this bullshit onto me, and you want me to play into this narrative you've accepted as reality, even though it's quite obvious what's going on here.

CARYN

Tell me. Tell me what's going on here, then.

MICHAEL

You know what, I'm not doing this. You're crazy.

CARYN

I'm what?

MICHAEL

I said you're FUCKING CRAZY!!!

Caryn stares back at him with rage, then...

She SLAPS him hard across the face!!!

Michael puts his arms up in defense but she continuously slaps him while screaming.

He grabs her wrists to try and stop her, and an animalistic look washes over his face.

She wriggles out and continues to hit him, with balled fists now.

She works him into a corner of the room, then stops when she sees he won't fight back.

Michael looks up through terrified eyes, and Caryn leans in.

CARYN

Now, you spent all that time
talkin' tryna tell *me* how *I* feel,
when you know what you should have
done? Shut the fuck up and let me
speak for myself.

THE END