

The River Is Her Home

By Michael Cornetto

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FADE IN:

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT, TWO YEARS AGO

A fist pounds on a cheap rickety table. FATHER(38) turns his furious twisted face toward the ceiling. The muscles on his neck stand out against his denim collar.

MOTHER(38) sits across the table from him, grief-stricken. A stain on the front of her terra-cotta house dress grows as tears continue to drip from her chin.

SON(18) stands in the front doorway, his hand wrapped around the edge of the open door, a small gold ring with a unique spiral signet on his finger.

He casts one last angry cold look over his shoulder and then he exits, slamming the door behind him.

Father launches from his chair. The table screeches against the floor as he uses it to propel himself in his heated rush toward the door.

He yanks open the door. Outside Son walks away, down the front walk, past a leafy tree, toward a beat-up blue Chevy.

Father opens his mouth, about to yell. Then Son veers to the right.

And Father sees her.

WOMAN(20) stands near the passenger door of the car.

She wears no shoes.

Her shapely legs extend right up to the bottom of her extremely short cut-offs, a flimsy strip of washed-out denim that tightly encases her hips and barely hides her prize.

Her bare slender waist curves heaven-ward to meet her breasts which rock gently within a loose white halter, like comforting clouds rolling over the ground.

Her long blonde hair laps gently against one shoulder, against her chin. Her lips invite a kiss.

Then a corner of her mouth turns up but her large sparkling green eyes complete her smile.

She watches him.

Father steps back, afraid, breathing quickly, breathing heavily.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - SUNSET, PRESENT

In an apprehensive trance, Father stares out from the driver side window of a dirty Ford pickup. Two parallel healing scratches mar his rugged face.

He snaps out of his daze and opens the cab door. He takes a deep noisy breath, then exhales cold white smoke before exiting.

Something hides beneath the front of his dark green down jacket; it bulges. The bulge drops toward his waist.

He races to catch it before it slips out, before it's exposed. He succeeds.

Adjusting the bulge, he pulls it up toward his heart. He holds one arm over it to keep it firmly in place, to cradle it, to protect it as he walks toward an

UNPAVED DRIVEWAY

The bare trees on either side of the driveway seem eagerly to anticipate their first coat of snow. The fluorescent sunset colours their mood.

Father's treaded work boots gnaw at the gravel making a loud sound. He anxiously looks down at his feet.

And he slows. He walks gently, quietly.

Then he stops.

Up ahead is the river, her home. A copse of trees obscures her houseboat. Its panelled sides blend into the naked forest as if they were a part of the woodlands.

INT. HOUSEBOAT - DAY, ONE WEEK AGO

Splinters fly from the doorjamb as the wooden front door smashes open then slams against the houseboat's wall causing it to shudder.

A treaded work boot disappears outside the open entrance.

The Woman stands backlit before a rounded rectangular window. Her intense eyes glow against her silhouette.

They watch the doorway.

Father enters, huffing and puffing with anger.

Her green eyes ensnare him, sad, seductive, sparkling like the ripples on a green sea at dawn.

He turns away, but looks askance. He is lustful. He is frightened. He is hurt and he tries to remain angry, but he calms. He calms.

She glides toward him, into the light. She lifts her hand and her fingertips hover over her heart.

EXT. UNPAVED DRIVEWAY - SUNSET, PRESENT

A loud bang. A gunshot?

Father crouches. A flock of birds squawk as they fly from the trees.

Staying low, Father scuttles toward the side of the driveway, toward the

COPSE OF TREES

Their empty limbs do little to hide him. He takes cover behind a trunk.

Breathing quickly, shallowly, Father scans the area but sees no one. He has a clear view of the houseboat which he eyes with disgust.

No longer filtered through its surroundings, the houseboat is an eyesore, a floating trailer with decrepit wooden panels instead of aluminium sides. Its rounded rectangular windows watch him like a pair of eyes.

He stares in one of its eyes. Dark, empty, there is nothing inside.

The bulge in his jacket has dropped a bit. He adjusts it.

An aging ramp leads up to the houseboats entrance. At its end a wooden door, slightly ajar, a small bite eaten from its jamb.

INT. HOUSEBOAT - DAY, ONE WEEK AGO

She reaches out and gently touches Father's shivering shoulder.

He whirls around and with full momentum backhands Woman across her face. She is knocked to the ground.

With renewed rage he stalks her.

Holding the side of her face, she scoots backwards. She looks frightened, hurt, confused, weak.

Easy prey.

He roars. And then he lunges at her, ready to crush her in his brawny arms.

She hops up and over them, evading his embrace. She darts toward the open door.

He grabs her wrist and she struggles to free herself. She pulls away from him, toward the door.

Her face hidden from his, she chances a smile.

Then he tugs her backwards, spins her around, and pins her against the panelled wall. His body presses against hers, his face nearly touches hers.

Fear in her eyes now. Anger in his.

A snarl on his lips. A kiss on hers.

He takes the kiss, pressing his lips urgently, firmly, deliberately and passionately against hers. She hungrily relinquishes it.

EXT. COPSE OF TREES - SUNSET, PRESENT

A child crying. A splash.

Father's head snaps toward the source, toward the edge of the houseboat where it meets the river.

Woman rises from the water as naked as the trees. She faces the opposite shore. Water rivulets run down her back like glistening multi-coloured strings, reflecting the sunset hues.

He stands, awed.

Then she sings. Her voice an unearthly tone, rich beyond the need of harmony. He rocks intoxicated by the beauty of her untranslatable song.

He steps toward her. The leaves beneath his foot crunch.

The song stops.

She is no longer in the river.

He looks to his right, nothing.

He looks to his left and she is there, her eyes yellow with fury.

He starts.

She hisses, then spits in his eyes. He wipes away the spittle. But when he looks at her, she is a blurry outline.

Alarmed, he frantically wipes at his eyes.

Her blurry outline fades to darkness.

INT. HOUSEBOAT - DAY, ONE WEEK AGO

Father fucks her against the panelled wall of the houseboat. Each angry thrust causes the walls to shake and the windows to rattle.

Pinned against the wall Woman seems to defy gravity. Her legs and arms wrapped around him. Throaty moans come from deep within her, matching his grunts one to one.

INT. HOUSEBOAT - NIGHT, PRESENT

Father sits on a kitchen chair while Woman gently wipes his eyes with a washcloth. He opens them.

As he focuses, her lips quiver. She bites her lip. Compassion radiates from her eyes.

He opens his mouth to speak, but she touches it with a solitary finger and he closes it.

Her face near his, they kiss. Gently, then with passion, then feverishly.

Urgently he pulls her closer. She straddles his lap.

One by one the snaps of his down jacket pop apart as she yanks them open.

He pushes her away. He gathers his jacket together with one hand and uses the other to protect the bulge.

She glances down at the bulge, confused, then angry, then she smiles.

His worried eyes watch her.

She pounces and tears at his jacket. He resists, but she manages to unsnap him.

Exposed, his protective arm cradles a rectangular gift wrapped in brown paper with a cross of glittering green ribbons.

She eyes the gift with surprise and delight. Then she snatches it from its cradle like a hungry wolf would food.

He grabs for the gift but his hands grasp air.

She is too fast.

Already across the room, near the bed, she toys with the sparkly ribbons. They match her eyes.

He bolts from the chair and tackles her, knocking her onto the bed, knocking the gift from her hands. It falls to the floor.

He lies on top of her, lost in her. He kisses her gently.

Then he jerks away, holding his lip. On his fingers, blood, the colour of his anger.

She laughs.

He headbutts her.

Now she looks hurt and afraid.

He forces his lips against hers. This time she kisses him back.

INT. HOUSEBOAT - LATER

Except for a rounded rectangle of cold clear moonlight on the floor, it is dark.

Father lies in bed naked, alone, a healing stitched wound on his exposed shoulder.

He opens his eyes.

He looks, but Woman isn't next to him.

He finds his boxers on the floor, then pulls them on.

A glint catches his attention as he turns on a small lamp on the bed stand.

A familiar gold spiral signet ring sits near the lamp.

His eyes cloud with sorrow.

He stares at the ring in the open palm of his hand. A tear slides down his cheek.

INT. HOUSEBOAT - DAY, ONE WEEK AGO

Walls shake and windows rattle as Father pounds his body against Woman. Both bathed in sweat, their faces show an intense expression of almost painful pleasure.

A yell of a groan escapes Father's lips.

Then Woman screams, horrified. She pushes him away. But he grabs her by her neck, holding her against the wall he thrusts against her again.

And again.

Her wide eyes focused over his shoulder. She pulls at the hand around her throat, tries to speak, to scream, but only squeaks.

And again.

Her eyes grow even wider as a hunting knife plunges into Father's shoulder.

With a shout, Father drops to the ground.

A spiral signet flashes on the finger of the hand that pulls the hunting knife from Father's shoulder.

Guilt and anger mingle on Father's face as he stares up at Son. Father sees a laughing, gleeful child.

But a jealous, armed adult raises the knife once again.

Then Woman's spit washes Son's wild eyes. He drops the knife and it clatters on the floor.

Son wipes frantically at his eyes.

Alarmed, Woman rushes to the sink, draws water, grabs a washcloth.

Son falls to the ground.

Father sits up. Blood drips from his shoulder, he covers it tenderly with his hand.

He looks at Son, a peacefully sleeping child.

He looks at Woman, nude at the sink.

He leers at Woman, her backside sways in an enticing rhythm.

Then he glares at Son, an unrecognisable adult who lies prone on the floor. His gold ring flares like Father's anger.

A glance at the knife.

Woman turns, wet washcloth in her hand.

Full of confusion, she watches Father crouch over Son. Father's face contorted with fury, he lifts the knife catching an almost blinding glare. Woman squints.

The knife comes down in an arc, the blade racing across Son's throat like a skate across ice. Dark blood spurts rhythmically from the wound into a puddle on the floor.

Woman screams.

Father smirks at her, splotches of purplish crimson on his face, lust in his eyes. He growls.

She pleads wordlessly with Father. Thrusting the washcloth at him, a torrent of diamond-like droplets fall from her hand to the floor as her tense hand squeezes.

And Father is upon her. Kitchen chairs scatter as he tackles her, knocking her to the floor.

She struggles to escape. She scratches twin red parallel lines into the side of his face.

He captures her disobeying hands, pinning them against the floor over her head. He thrusts against her greedily, groaning, grunting.

She lays beneath him, passive. Her head to the side as she coldly watches the glistening rhythmic waves in the muddy blood puddle.

INT. HOUSEBOAT - NIGHT, PRESENT

With a high pitched clink the gold signet ring drops from Father's hand to the floor. It jingles as it rolls under the bed.

A tear splashes onto his empty outstretched palm.

Wiping his eyes, he kneels at the side of the bed like a child preparing for his nighttime prayer.

He looks underneath the bed. Across the wide expanse of shadow there is a golden glint.

He walks around the bed. The ring lies next to the rectangular brown gift. Its green cross of ribbons glitters like the sky on a dark night.

EXT. DEEP IN THE WOODS - NIGHT, ONE WEEK AGO

With the flat end of a spade, Father hammers a makeshift cross into the top of the fresh grave. Carved into the cross are the words:

BELOVED SON

He plants the spade in the ground and leans on it, exhausted, anguished, covered with mud. His tears clear trails through the brown mess on his cheeks.

Across the grave stands Woman.

Her expression is indifferent, yet intense. Her green eyes don't waver, don't blink.

Her long blonde hair looks alive as it blows in the wind.

The silhouetted trees behind her blot out the starry sky like cancerous roots about to devour heaven.

He cowers.

INT. HOUSEBOAT - NIGHT, PRESENT

With a sigh, Father lifts the gift and the ring from the floor.

He shakes his bowed head as he walks to one of the round rectangular windows. He slides open the window and shoves the gift toward it.

Quiet footsteps. He turns toward the source.

Woman stands at the open door, unclothed, unashamed, her hair dripping. Her mouth open.

The golden ring glints in his hand, shame on his face.

Angry, she is suddenly before him. She snatches the ring from his hand and holds it gently over her heart.

Then she slaps his face.

He doesn't flinch, taking it justly.

She grabs the gift.

But he holds it tightly.

She rips off the ribbon.

He pulls at the gift.

But she won't release it.

She tears the brown paper, a box underneath.

He twists it and turns it.

But her finger is inside the box, tugging at it, pulling it open.

He stops struggling, closes his eyes. His face brightens.
And then there is whiteness.

EXT. HOUSEBOAT - DAWN

The clear light of dawn burns white against the bare trees. Debris is scattered about randomly, looking almost natural in this setting.

A small aging ramp leads to an empty river. A shattered rounded rectangular window lies on the ground nearby.

There is a splash. Rings of ripples disturb the river's calm surface.

A small blonde haired CHILD(2) raises its head from the water. It toddles toward the shore and then it stops.

Its sparkling green eyes survey the scene. Anguished, it shouts an unearthly cry toward the heavens.

FADE OUT: