

DIVINE FOOD

by Linda Manning

original music and lyrics  
by Marc Campbell

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"I wanted him to show me how to let go  
and grab life but he didn't have it in  
him either... I would have to find my  
abandon and dedication myself."

Paula Fox

"The sexual frankness and sense of female gaze in this script is a really strong and refreshing element. The setting is very well-used; the specificity of geography and location gives a sense of authenticity, and the characters always feel like actual New Yorkers. It's a strong and admirable choice to allow these characters to be fundamentally flawed."

The Black List

"*Divine Food* is a taunt and erotic drama about Helen, a train-wreck of a person, grasping for a better life by sleeping with the local butcher. Helen is a great character. Damaged, lonely, and striving to feel anything after her life doesn't feel fulfilling. She's definitely an antihero because we're certainly not rooting for her to cheat on Paul but we empathize with her choices and that's because the screenwriter puts so much time and attention into crafting her. She'll definitely be attractive for actresses who want a strong female with a wide range of emotions."

The Black List

FADE IN:

INT. HELEN AND PAUL'S APARTMENT - CLOSET - DAY

HELEN, 41 year old, sharp-edged beauty, huddles in the dark corner of a closet holding her two young daughters.

Eight year old CAROLINE, piercing eyes, peers through the crack of light coming in the door. Five year old LUCY squirms.

PAUL (O.C.)  
Helen ... girls!

A squeal from the little girls.

HELEN  
Shhhhhhh.

Footsteps get louder -- coming toward them. Helen covers her head with her arms and holds tight.

PAUL (O.C.)  
Come on out.

INT. HELEN AND PAUL'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Paul abruptly swings open the closet door. THE GIRLS EXPLODE OUT OF THE CLOSET like a Jack-in-the-box laughing and tackling him. Helen doesn't move.

PAUL, mid-forties, is tall, handsome, wirey, and tense.

PAUL  
Very funny. Okay. Okay. Get off me now.

CAROLINE  
You didn't know where we were.

LUCY  
We've been in there forever Daddy waiting for you.

PAUL  
I've got to go to work. Come on. Let me go. Girls, go play.

Caroline and Lucy run out of the bedroom.

(CONTINUED)

Paul bends over to grab his shoes. Helen LURCHES OUT OF THE CLOSET AND PUSHES HIM BACK ONTO THE BED. She lands on top of him with all her weight.

PAUL  
That hurts!

Helen holds down his arms and legs searching his face. Paul pushes against her.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
I have to get to work.

Helen tries to hold him down. He shoves her across the bed.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
What is wrong with you?!

Paul picks up his shoes, shoves his wallet, keys, and phone into his pockets, and storms out of the bedroom.

PAUL (O.C.)  
Bye girls.

LUCY (O.C.)  
Bye Daddy.

CAROLINE (O.C.)  
Bye.

PAUL (O.C.)  
See you tonight.

The front door opens and closes.

Helen lies on her back, breathing heavily, staring up at the ceiling.

INT. HELEN AND PAUL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Helen drifts through the living room.

Their cramped two bedroom apartment is modestly furnished - lots of overflowing book shelves and children's artwork.

An old upright piano sits in the corner of the living room. A blank piece of sheet music sits on top of the piano next to a framed photo of a young Helen singing and playing the piano.

Underneath the piano is a full box of Helen's dusty CDs, a homemade cover design with her photograph and the title "Helen Charles, Rough Night".

INT. HELEN AND PAUL'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Helen pours another cup of coffee and sits.

She eyeballs the open dishwasher which needs to be emptied.

She stares at the desk piled with papers that need her attention.

She considers the heap of dirty laundry in the hallway.

INT. HELEN AND PAUL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Helen strolls back into the living room, crawls onto the floor, and scoops her daughters into her lap. They settle into their mother's body without taking their eyes off the TV. Helen holds them close and closes her eyes.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Helen and the girls leave their pre-war building in the northern most section of Manhattan. They walk down the crowded street passing ninety-nine cent stores, bodegas, and fast food chains.

HELEN

Where's the car?

CAROLINE

One hundred ninety-sixth street,  
Mom.

INT. HELEN'S CAR - DAY - TRAVELING

Helen drives her ten year old beat up Japanese sedan through the city streets of upper Manhattan, heading south. Air conditioning and 1970's rock and roll blast out of the dashboard.

The kids start to fight in the back seat. Helen turns up the radio.

EXT. DIVINE FOOD PARKING LOT - DAY

Helen parks the car in a fenced-in urban parking lot next to a gourmet grocery store, Divine Food. As she and the girls cross the lot the oppressive heat and humidity are palpable on the faces of the people they pass.

INT. DIVINE FOOD - DAY

The store is cool and full of sumptuous, abundant displays of fresh produce, cheeses, prepared foods, etc.

Caroline plays at the end of the grocery cart like it is a skateboard. Although she is too big for it, Helen puts Lucy into the small seat in the front of the cart.

CAROLINE  
I'll get apples.

LUCY  
Can I help Mama?

HELEN  
Sure. Hold the bag.

Helen drops some oranges into a bag.

LUCY  
Banana, banana, banana ...

HELEN  
Okay.

Helen puts some lettuce into a plastic bag. Caroline returns with a bag of apples.

LUCY  
Banana, banana, banana, banana ...

HELEN  
Lucy. Stop. I've got it.

She grabs a bunch of bananas, tears one off, peels it and thrusts it at Lucy who takes a big bite and smiles. Helen kisses her on the nose.

PRODUCE MAN  
(recognizing Helen)  
Hello.

HELEN  
Hi. How are you?

CAROLINE  
What are we having for dinner?

HELEN  
What do you want?

(CONTINUED)

LUCY  
What does Z, U, C, C, . . .

CAROLINE  
Zucchini.

HELEN  
Do you want that?

CAROLINE  
No!

Helen stops in front of a display of prepared food. ARTIE, a black man in his 60's, serves the food.

HELEN  
Hi Artie.

ARTIE  
How are you girls? Hello miss.

CAROLINE  
Hi.

ARTIE  
What do you need?

HELEN  
How about some chicken wings, a large tray. How's that for dinner?

CAROLINE  
Great.

ARTIE  
Too hot out there to cook!

CAROLINE  
Can we go to the sprinkler park later?

ARTIE  
That sounds right.

HELEN  
We'll see.

ARTIE  
Here you go.

HELEN  
Thanks.

They walk by a case full of fancy cakes, tarts and pies.

(CONTINUED)

CAROLINE

Can we get a chocolate mouse cake?

HELEN

It's mousse.

CAROLINE

No, it's in the shape of a mouse.

LUCY

Please, Mommy, this time. Please!!

HELEN

No. They are too expensive. We can make our own.

CAROLINE

You say that and you never make any.

Helen stops the cart at the meat counter and stares into the glass case.

It contains every choice imaginable, beautifully displayed -- sausages, pork chops, steaks, stuffed chicken breasts, lamb, ribs, large roasts, etc.

FRANK (O.C.)

What'd you tell him?

NICK (O.C.)

I told him to . . .

The men are ABRUPTLY SILENT.

Helen looks up. NICK'S eyes are locked on her as his knife hovers over the raw meat he was cutting.

Helen stares back. He is unexpected - long hair pulled back in a ponytail, earrings, tattoos, hot, and in his early forties.

Caroline and Lucy watch their mother staring at Nick.

FRANK, 55, the supervisor, amused, waits for Nick to speak. Nick doesn't.

FRANK

Can I help you?

Helen finally breaks the stare.

(CONTINUED)

HELEN

Yes. Let's see. What do you girls think we should get?

CAROLINE

Hot dogs.

HELEN

Thanks for remembering, Caroline. Will you get them? Right over there.

Caroline slowly moves toward the packages of hot dogs, watching her mom over her shoulder.

LUCY

Meatballs.

HELEN

Yes, one pound of the ground beef, and one pound of the Italian sausage, please.

FRANK

Hot or sweet?

HELEN

Hot.

She waits for Frank to get the meat, watching and not watching Nick, who is still watching her.

FRANK

Here you go.

HELEN

Thank you.

She takes the packages from Frank, and pushes her cart down the aisle. Helen tries not to look back at Nick, but then does. He's still looking at her.

FRANK

Do I have to put you in back again?

NICK

What?

FRANK

What! Help the customers, don't stare at them.

(CONTINUED)

NICK  
She wasn't just a customer.

INT. HELEN'S CAR - DAY

Helen pulls into a parking spot in front of her apartment building.

HELEN  
Halle-fucking-lujah.

CAROLINE  
What?

HELEN  
Nothing. Sorry.

EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF HELEN'S BUILDING - DAY

Helen and Caroline take load after load of bags from the car into their lobby, as Lucy holds all the doors.

INT. HELEN AND PAUL'S APARTMENT BUILDING - ELEVATOR - DAY

Helen and the girls squeeze into the tiny hot elevator loaded with groceries as it slowly moves up.

The door opens at their floor and Lucy holds the elevator door as Helen and Caroline take load after load of grocery bags out of the elevator.

INT. HELEN AND PAUL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Helen opens the apartment door, the kids kick off their shoes, run in and turn on the TV and air conditioner. Helen loads all the bags into the kitchen.

INT. HELEN AND PAUL'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Helen, a million miles away, sits next to the bathtub while Caroline and Lucy play in their bubble bath. Lucy splashes the water hard at her mother. Helen, startled back to the present, splashes Lucy back.

Paul opens the bathroom door. He looks warily at Helen, and then lights up at the sight of his children.

The girls bolt out of the tub scattering water, bubbles and bath toys all over their mother.

(CONTINUED)

CAROLINE  
Daddy, Daddy . . .

LUCY  
Daddy, Daddy, Daddy . . .

INT. HELEN AND PAUL'S APARTMENT- CAROLINE AND LUCY'S BEDROOM  
- NIGHT

Paul tucks the girls into bed.

PAUL  
Good night.

LUCY  
Don't let bed bugs bite.

CAROLINE  
Good night, Daddy. Tell Mommy to  
come in.

INT. HELEN AND PAUL'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Paul begins cleaning up the dinner dishes.

A FORCEFUL, CHAOTIC PIECE OF MUSIC BRIEFLY EXPLODES from the  
piano, and stops.

INT. HELEN AND PAUL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT -  
CONTINUOUS

Paul peers into the living room. Helen sits at the piano  
with her hands resting on the keys.

PAUL  
They're waiting for you.

INT. HELEN AND PAUL'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Paul lies in bed reading a book.

Helen takes off all her clothes, throws them over a chair,  
and gets into bed naked.

PAUL  
What's going on? You haven't played  
the piano in ...

(CONTINUED)

HELEN

I don't know.

PAUL

My job's ending in a month.

HELEN

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

PAUL

They are going to hire somebody who has an actual business degree.

HELEN

So the fact that you've been doing the job for a year doesn't matter?!

PAUL

Nope. We knew this might be coming.

HELEN

(sudden explosion of enthusiasm)

You could finish your novel, Paul. You could really do it now.

PAUL

Why the hell are you bringing that up?

HELEN

Because it makes sense.

PAUL

I don't want to finish the novel. I want to make some money for a change.

Paul turns out his light and rolls over. She moves toward him, strokes his back, and wraps her arm him.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Are you kidding me?

Helen moves away and stares at the ceiling.

She gets out of bed.

INT. HELEN AND PAUL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Helen sits alone at the piano watching TV. Lucy sneaks in.

LUCY  
Mommy, I can't sleep.

HELEN  
It's late. Go back to bed.

LUCY  
I don't want to go to  
kind-er-garden.

Helen holds Lucy close. Lucy feels smothered and wriggles out of her mother's grasp.

HELEN  
Lucy, you remember how much  
Caroline loved it. You'd sit in her  
school room in the morning when we  
dropped her off and you always  
wanted to stay.

LUCY  
No.

HELEN  
You are too little to remember, but  
I do.

LUCY  
Cartoons help me sleep.

HELEN  
Movies help me sleep.

LUCY  
Can we watch a cartoon?

HELEN  
No.

LUCY  
Can I sleep in your bed?

INT. HELEN AND PAUL'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Helen tucks Lucy into bed next to sleeping Paul.

(CONTINUED)

HELEN

Now climb in there very quietly and go to sleep.

LUCY

Do you like that man at the store?

HELEN

What?

LUCY

He thinks you're pretty.

HELEN

You think so?

LUCY

So do I.

HELEN

Shhh. Go to sleep.

INT. HELEN AND PAUL'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DAY

Helen and Caroline examine Helen's reflection in the mirror. She is wearing her old rock and roll clothes, leather pants, low cut shirt, dark eye make-up.

CAROLINE

You look funny.

HELEN

I used to look like this all the time.

CAROLINE

Can I wear some make-up?

HELEN

No.

CAROLINE

Why?

HELEN

Come here.

Helen puts pink lipstick on her.

HELEN (CONT'D)

How's that?

(CONTINUED)

She holds Caroline next to her and stares at their faces side by side in the mirror.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Do you think we look alike?

CAROLINE

Lucy peed on the floor.

HELEN

What?! Where? Why didn't you tell me?

CAROLINE

In the hallway. She tried to get to the bathroom, but ...

Helen runs off leaving Caroline stung.

EXT. FRONT OF URBAN PUBLIC SCHOOL - DAY

Helen, Caroline and Lucy all walk up to the school yard. It is a large black top with a high chain link fence around it. The school is a 1960's three story blond brick building in the middle of a busy city block.

Helen is still wearing her leather pants.

Caroline sees her friends and runs into the school yard without a good-bye. Helen anxiously watches her go.

Helen and Lucy slowly continue down the street to the front entrance of the school.

INT. KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOM - DAY

The classroom is large and inviting. Helen stands back watching Lucy hang up her jacket and backpack.

Lucy finds her name on a table and sits down to draw. Helen kneels down next to her.

HELEN

I love this room. It is so big. I think it is bigger than Caroline's kindergarten room.

LUCY

You can go now Mama.

(CONTINUED)

HELEN

What are you going to draw?

LUCY

A big sister and a little sister.

HELEN

Okay.

Helen stands up. The teacher comes over.

TEACHER

You can leave now, Mom. She seems just fine. We'll call if there are any problems.

HELEN

Okay.

She bends down to give Lucy a kiss.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Bye, sweetie.

LUCY

Bye.

Helen pulls herself out of the room.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY - CONTINUOUS

MINDY, uber-mom, a shiny, Mack Truck of a woman comes barreling down the hallway and stops dramatically.

MINDY

Look at you! Wow! You look hot! Leather pants for the first day of school? What's going on? You finally got a gig at 9:00 a.m. on Monday morning?

HELEN

No, I ...

MINDY

What size are those?

HELEN

A six.

(CONTINUED)

MINDY

You've got a size six ass, that's impressive.

Mindy's PTA minions, JENNIFER, clean and preppy, and DEB, grey roots and sweatpants, both with laser-beam stares, come marching down the hallway.

MINDY

You guys, come here, look at Helen's size six ass in those pants.

JENNIFER

Helen, cupcakes?

HELEN

OH FUCK!!

A TEACHER comes out of her classroom and glares at them.

MINDY

I've got it Ms. Schwartz. Helen, you can't say the "f" word in the kindergarten hallway.

JENNIFER

I'll fix it, Mindy. I'll run across to Lulu's and pick up a dozen. It won't be a problem.

HELEN

I can do it, Jennifer. It's my fault. I cannot believe I forgot.

MINDY

We'll handle it.

They all freeze, waiting for Mindy's direction.

MINDY (CONT'D)

(to Jennifer)

GO!

Jennifer races down the hallway.

DEB

It's okay, Helen, you must have spent a long time last night figuring out what you were going to wear today.

(CONTINUED)

MINDY

Deb, go finish setting up.

DEB

See ya, Joan Jett.

Deb walks away.

MINDY

She doesn't get it. We all can't be thinking about being a mother every second, some of us need to touch up our roots and pick out an outfit other than sweatpants, even when it is our kid's first day of kindergarten. Come on. Help us set up. You can put out the paper plates. I don't want you to get any icing on those pants.

HELEN

I have to go.

MINDY

You're going to miss the teacher's welcome breakfast? I need you on the Fall Funday committee.

HELEN

Sure.

Helen turns on her heel and practically runs down the hallway.

INT. DIVINE FOOD - DAY

Helen pushes her cart up to the meat counter. Nick is not there. She turns her cart and HEADS FULL SPEED DOWN AN AISLE and almost slamming right into Nick.

He is crouched down stacking packages of meat on shelves.

Helen smiles nervously and then pushes the cart past him and parks it on the opposite side of the aisle, as she pretends to survey the chickens. Nick watches her.

Helen starts to speak to him and then sees him turn and check out a twenty-five year old beauty waiting at the meat counter. She quickly pushes her cart away.

INT. HELEN AND PAUL'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Helen throws the grocery bags on the floor. Breakfast dishes and kid's crap are everywhere.

INT. HELEN AND PAUL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Helen sits down at the piano. Her hands shaking, hover over the keys.

INT. HELEN AND PAUL'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Helen runs into the bedroom and furiously rips off the leather pants and her shirt. She stares at herself in the mirror. She strips off her bra and underwear. She stares at herself some more.

She runs her fingers in circles around her breasts, up and down her stomach, and between her legs. She masturbates fast bringing herself to an orgasm, never breaking her critical gaze at the mirror.

INT. FLYING SAUCER CLUB - NIGHT

Helen walks into a small crowded, noisy bar with a tiny stage at one end. Almost everyone else in the place is under 30 years old.

The soulful, raspy voice of a woman singing grabs her attention, and she is pulled into the room. VICKI, forty five, a little too much make up and a few extra pounds, is singing with a small band behind her.

Helen sits at the bar and orders a drink. Vicki sees her. The song ends. Vicki jumps off stage and heads straight for Helen. They embrace.

VICKI

Get your ass up on the stage right now.

HELEN

No!

VICKI

I swore next time you showed up here you were going to sing with me.

(CONTINUED)

HELEN

I haven't sung in public in ...

VICKI

Nine years. It's lonely up there.

HELEN

Your voice ... it's just ...  
perfect.

VICKI

After the show we are going to go  
through every number and you are  
going to tell me what you think.

HELEN

This place hasn't changed, it's a  
time warp, everyone in here is  
still twenty five so I must be.

VICKI

Spike likes it that way. Show me  
pictures of those girls.

HELEN

Later.

VICKI

When am I going to see them?!

HELEN

Vic, I'm sorry about Johnny. I'm  
sorry I haven't been around more  
...

VICKI

I know. I've got to get back up  
there.

HELEN

Please do.

INT. DIVINE FOOD - DAY

Helen, alone, wheels the grocery cart up to the meat  
counter.

Frank watches Nick nervously approach Helen.

NICK

What can I get ya?

(CONTINUED)

HELEN  
Four pork chops. Please

NICK  
Okay.

He hesitates a moment, and then grabs a styrofoam tray and starts stacking the meat into it.

HELEN  
It's cold back here.

NICK  
Yeah. Keeps the meat fresh.

HELEN  
Right.

Silence. He leisurely wraps the meat in plastic and weighs the package.

HELEN (CONT'D)  
(blurting something out)  
I went out the other night to hear  
some music.

NICK  
Where did you go?

HELEN  
This club called The Flying Saucer.

NICK  
I've been there.

HELEN  
Really?

NICK  
Yeah.

HELEN  
A friend of mine plays in a band,  
Vicki's Toys. They were great.

ANGRY CUSTOMER  
Could I get some help here?!

NICK  
(flash of intense anger)  
In a minute.

(CONTINUED)

HELEN

She has this voice ... it's not pretty, but it's ... something.

He hands her the meat. They lock eyes.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Thanks a lot.

NICK

You need anything else?

HELEN

No, thanks ...

NICK

Nice to see you.

HELEN

Take care.

Helen walks away grinning.

ANGRY CUSTOMER

Hey buddy? What? Do you gotta be a woman to get some help around here?

Nick looks at the man like he could break him in two. Frank comes out from the back glaring at Nick.

FRANK

What do you need pal?

ANGRY CUSTOMER

Are those steaks any good?

Nick takes off his apron.

FRANK

What are you doing?

NICK

Taking a shot.

INT. DIVINE FOOD - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Helen is leaning over her cart, and suddenly Nick is in front of her.

NICK

If you'd ever like to go out and listen to some music just let me know.