

# ♣ Ghost on Fire

.....MICHAEL WELLER

CHARACTERS: MICHELLE-MARIE (20's), JULIA (30's)

SETTING: JULIA's living room. New York City, the present.

JULIA and her husband, Dan, worked together in college days making films. A third member of their team, Neil, is dying of a brain tumor. Neil, who makes crass commercial films, urges JULIA's husband, Dan, to go off on the road with him and find a story for his last chance at making an artistic film. As the scene opens, Neil's wife, MICHELLE-MARIE, expresses her concerns about her dying husband to JULIA.

MICHELLE-MARIE: I don't believe they're doing this. What happens if Neil needs attention when they're miles from a doctor?

JULIA: I know.

MICHELLE-MARIE: You want them to go, don't you?

JULIA: What I want right now doesn't really matter.

MICHELLE-MARIE: Look, I know you think I'm a little, what, like ignorant or uneducated or something, not quite in your league? Well, fine, but I am his wife, and I don't want him running off to the drop-end of nowhere. It's suicide, Julia, and suicide is a sin in my religion. *(Takes pills out)*

JULIA: Want some water for those?

MICHELLE-MARIE: See that — like I couldn't get myself a glass of water if I wanted one. I was a waitress, you know; I served the public.

JULIA: This isn't easy for you, I know that. But it's not easy for me, either.

MICHELLE-MARIE *(Beat)*: So it's true, then. You still love him.

JULIA: Neil? Are you serious?

MICHELLE-MARIE: It's cool. I'm not the jealous type. We could be friends, you know.

JULIA: What nonsense has Neil been feeding you?

MICHELLE-MARIE: For your information, Julia, Neil is not the first college guy I's ever with, not by a long, long shot. I am very familiar with the college situation including the Big Man On Campus, in't that what you call it, B.M.O.C.? So, okay, Danny's suddenly the Bit Man Hotshot Film Director and Neils' just li'l

ol' Number Two. Hell, I'd 'a probably dumped Neil for someone like him too; it's human nature.

JULIA: I hate to burst your bubble, Michelle, but none of us was ever an "item" in school. We made films together. We were a team.

MICHELLE-MARIE: Neil said you were in love with him.

JULIA: Love! We had one date, all of which we spent talking about Danny.

MICHELLE-MARIE (*Beat*): He is so full of shit, isn't he? Why does he always have to go and tell stories like that, it's so darn juvenile.

JULIA (*Beat*): Danny back then . . . he was blessed. Like he couldn't get over just being in the world. It was so infectious. Me . . . I was the assistant. The idea he'd ever take me seriously . . . in that way. In any way. Except Neil, he knew all along, 'cause it was him, after school I mean, when the two of them moved to L.A., he was the one who called. Danny was feeling down and Neil thought maybe I could cheer him up if I flew out. I thought he was nuts. But of course I went. And Danny . . . he just lit up. Amazing. 'Cause of me. And for a while, it was so good. Was was was. Jesus, listen to me — sounds like a funeral oration.

MICHELLE-MARIE: Neil loves my breasts.

JULIA: Pardon me?

MICHELLE-MARIE: "Super-titties", he calls 'em. You gotta admit, they ain't bad for three kids. I nursed 'em all, you know.

JULIA: They'll thank you one day, I'm sure.

MICHELLE-MARIE: Boy is it nice to have a regular old conversation with someone. That's what I miss here. Friends. Just drop on by for a jaw, a cup of coffee, like in the commercials. What's the one — "Here's to good friends, tonight . . ." — no, wait, that's beer; what's the coffee one? I love the commercials. They put an awful lot of thought into some of them.

JULIA (*Coffee cup*): Help yourself. Only moments ago that cup was held between the lips of Brad Starkey himself.

MICHELLE-MARIE: I love the kind of humor you have. (*Moves to JULIA*) The three of you are really close, aren't you. That must be nice.

JULIA: Feeling better?

MICHELLE-MARIE: I want him home with me, Julia. Isn't that normal? I'm awake all night thinking and thinking what's the right thing to do. I wish there was a switch to turn your damn brain off.

JULIA: In the end, I think it has to be up to Neil how he chooses to live the time he has left.

MICHELLE-MARIE: It's up to God, Julia, that's the only one it's up to, and I'm not about to let Neil commit the worst sin of his life and get sent straight to hell for it. Please help me. Just swear how he asked Dan for poison. It's the truth, so you won't be giving false testimony. The lawyer told me contemplated suicide is grounds to have him declared mentally incompetent, and then he'd have to come home in my custody. You just keep 'em busy when they get back and I'll call the police —

JULIA: Isn't that going a little far?

MICHELLE-MARIE: What all else can I do? He's the only good thing ever happened in my life. Just tell me how to get him back.

JULIA: You poor kid.

(MICHELLE-MARIE *leans helpless against* JULIA)

MICHELLE-MARIE: He can't stand to be near me anymore. I try to be nice as pie but it only makes him angrier. If I'm not what he wanted, why didn't he just go away after the first night like the rest of 'em? What kind of perfume is that you're wearing?

JULIA (*Beat*): Givenchy.

MICHELLE-MARIE: It's nice. You have such beautiful hands. May I do one little thing, Julia. (*Kisses her hand*) Do you mind?

JULIA (*Rising*): I'll put on some fresh coffee.

(MICHELLE-MARIE *holds her tight and kisses her on the lips*)

Stop it, Michelle, what's the matter with you?

MICHELLE-MARIE: I can be wild too, see? You three aren't the only ones. Doesn't that qualify me for membership in this little deal y'all got going here?

JULIA: You're crazy!

MICHELLE-MARIE: And you're full of shit, all of you. The way Neil carried on, I thought I'd be meeting Jesus on the Throne of Glory. What's Danny got that Neil hasn't got — look at this place, you don't even own a dishwasher.

JULIA (*Furious*): Neil is nothing without my husband. He's a server and that's all he'll ever be because he doesn't know how to rise above the people around him. I'm sorry, Michelle, but you asked for this!

MICHELLE-MARIE: God help me if I ever have to die among people like you.