

HOPSCOTCH

HOPSCOTCH – STEP OUTLINE

Scene 1 – The Dollhouse

A child's hand smooths the covers of a miniature bed with the tip of her finger. The delicate hand organizes modern furniture in a classically-structured dollhouse; sweeping the floors, showering a small, brown-haired doll beneath a plastic showerhead, and pouring the doll a tiny cup of coffee. We see the child's actions through extreme close-ups of each active body part—a knuckle, an elbow, a fingernail—arranging the miniature dining room in the fashion of a dinner party. The setting is so monotonous, it's intriguing: each doll is placed carefully in its seat across from a matching partner, the plastic food is organized methodically on the table, and peeking in from outside the dollhouse's windows are crayon-drawn clouds, creating a façade of good weather for the party's attendees. There is not a hint of chaos to be found.

Her small palm caresses the hair of a male doll, faceless, camera always placed on the back of its plastic neck. She pulls out an empty chair from the miniature dining table and tries to place the doll in the seat, but its limbs are too large for the scene, and no matter how she twists his body, he simply doesn't fit. "The house is too small," the child's voice murmurs as the small hand places the doll outside of the house, just to the side. There it stays as she continues to giggle with the other dolls at the party.

Focus on the doll, face down, as a motherly voice calls out the name "Josephine" through the hall. The child's hand disappears, but the house and the doll stay where they are.

Scene 2 – Morning

An older, yet equally delicate hand smooths the cover over a life-sized bed. The hand has the feminine and refined characteristics of a woman in her late 20s. We watch its fluid movements in the same close-up style as the previous scene, yet while we see some detail on the new hand—a ring, some soft veins—the image itself seems hazy, fragmented, and foggy. The feminine elbow helps lift a coffee table to sweep beneath it; shoulders drown in shower water beneath dripping brown hair; knuckles help grip the handle of a coffee pot as it pours steaming coffee into a mug next to a sun-drenched window. The pot is placed back in the machine as the coffee, center of the frame, steams up and into the camera lens, fogging the glass, before the cup is removed from the frame, allowing the lens to clear a little.

Scene 3 – Hopscotch

Toe-nail-painted feet play with Jasmine vines intertwined with a flowery metal rail design on a balcony. Sun rays bathe the toes and ankles that brush against the white budding petals. Cigarette smoke rises through the air in the forefront, the tip of the burning cigarette peeping into the bottom part of the frame where manicured fingers clutch the orange filter. Everything is still a

haze, but a sunlit one. Parisian rooftops in the background form a rugged horizon between sky and city.

A child's wild giggle can be heard from beyond the window. Over a bronze shoulder that faces out the window, we see two children playing hopscotch. A little blonde girl draws boxes on the sidewalk with chalk and inserts a number in each square. Next to the two children, a smaller girl in a blue dress crouches next to the small white dog of a passerby. She eyes the dog and smiles, putting out a tiny hand. The dog watches her, retreats, murmurs, and releases a lick into her palm. The girl laughs as the two children next to her hop from box to box, shouting numbers.

The older hopping girl reaches the first box marked with a large, chalky "1" and from it draws two little squiggly lines parallel to one another. "A petit chemin," she says, tilting her head, and marks the other end of the road she's drawn with another number "1." "First, you have to get from 1 to 1," she instructs the small boy beside her. The small girl in blue next to them holds her dress up to her chin, smiling, walking around the dog, looking back at her parents. "Don't hold your dress like that," they say. She looks back at them innocently, drops the dress and crouches once more, looking into the dog's eyes, her hand extended. "The boxes are too small," the hopscotch girl shouts with a laugh at the exact moment the little crouching girl squints through the sunlight and looks up through the window directly at US.

A beep, *beep, beep* sounds from off screen.

"Darling, can you remove the wash?" echoes a voice from the kitchen.

The cigarette butt sizzles as it's smashed into itself in the ashtray.

"Be there in a moment," responds our own familiar voice.

SCENE 4 – Unhappiness

Over the familiar shoulder we see the Other sitting across the dining table, staring down into a computer, chin visible, but the curves of the jaw lacking sharpness.

"Don't forget the foie gras for tonight," the jaw says, "and when you're cooking please be careful not to leave the stove on. You know I worry about fire." "Don't worry, sweetheart," replies a feminine, docile voice. An open notebook rests on the table underneath a hand gripping a pen between two fingers. It taps the page in thought.

"What are you working on?" asks the Other.

"My writing," says the feminine voice.

"About what?" asks the Other, passively, never looking away from the computer screen.

The feminine voice begins to read from a block of writing on the page, slowly. As she reads, we follow the writing on the notebook, her hand tapping at the page in the corner of the frame, the Other a hazy figure in the background. The paragraph she reads aloud is the scene description from Scene 3:

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The following sentences are added at the end:

“We call it a moment, but it felt so long. And they never knew it was beautiful. They just knew that the boxes they drew were too small for their feet.”

As the feminine voice finishes the last sentence the doorbell rings. The Other instantly stands up to open it and disappears from the frame, which quietly rests on the final unspoken lines of the page. They can be read clearly: “That’s what creates unhappiness—when you were in it, and you missed it.”

Hellos can be heard at the front door – one voice with a striking resemblance; calming. The two figures can be seen moving in the background, out of focus, while the writing on the notebook remains in focus. A hand suddenly emerges into frame and an uncanny **Voice**¹ echoes into our ears.

“Ca va, Josephine?”

Scene 5 – The Dinner Party

¹ Use Barthes reference from A Lover’s Discourse to describe Voice.

Outside the window, the sky we see seems to be drawn by a child's hand; fluffy clouds, a bubbly tree, and lines of sun ray are sloppily colored in crayon. The colorful backdrop, as hazy and unclear as everything we've seen so far, sways behind the window pane as guests file into the apartment with housewarming gifts. The Hand we've grown to know so well it could be our own shakes the hands of incoming guests, while lips pass from cheek to cheek. Babbled French streams in a muffled, distant place. The familiar Voice heard in the previous seen says hello among the voices of newcomers, and our hand grasps the back of the Voice's neck to pull his cheek in close for a warm *bisou*. The hairs on his neck tickle our fingers.

Moving around the house, we prepare for the dinner party, entertaining guests as we glide from room to room—placing food on the table, taking coats, checking the oven, opening wine. These movements are fluid, flawless, and polished; the image of such grace seems built into us, and such actions perform like a machine—intuitive, condensed, routine, and absent. In this manner of charming nothingness, we brings those around us together. We are the life of the party. The sound of friends laughing, clinking glasses, pulling out chairs can be heard accordingly as the camera follows us from task to task, greeting to greeting, in one extended take.

After instructing everyone to have a seat at the dining table, our hands place the main course at the center surrounded by delicate side dishes. “Eat up!” our eager voice shouts, as everyone begins to dig in and break bread. We move around the table and pull out the final chair for the mysterious Voice we've heard and seen only in pieces throughout the film. He sits, fitting like a puzzle piece to complete a picturesque dinner scene that we've somehow seen before.

In a sudden flash, he faces the camera with an alarmingly distinct and clear expression—an expression that is not only is sharp, but obvious and uncomplicated. “Thank you,” he says and turns back around to eat. The moment passes so naturally, so fleetingly, that we can't help but want to see it again—we want to behold the clarity we've been deprived of since the film has begun. The frame rests on the back of his head, waiting for him to turn once more, but he continues to face away, enjoying the party's activities. The camera pans down to our hand still on the back of his chair, but instead of the grown woman's ring-bearing hand we've become familiar with, a small child's hand has taken its place. It desperately holds on to the back of the chair, the ring now too big for the childlike finger.

The camera moves around the table, circling the attendees and the beautiful surrounding we've made for ourselves, and finally stops on a full body reveal of the woman we have identified with, standing motionless behind the chair. For the first time, she is in perfect focus and seen as a whole. The sounds of the table simmer down, and the attendees look at her. The Other asks from off screen, “Are you going to sit, darling?” A long pause. “I don't have a chair,” she responds.

As though a cataclysmal earthquake has struck, the drawings behind the windows drop, and the woman is suddenly pulled out of the spot she's standing in and is thrust down the stairs and out the building's door. The camera shakes violently as it tries to follow her, but her movements are

strangely rapid, disjointed, and uncontrollable—she is a human hurricane devastating the town in which she was raised. Thunder booms from the sky. A jumble of voices from the party grows louder as she abruptly arrives outside, dollhouse in hand, suspended beneath the tremendous spiraling cloud of a super cell storm. A sublime mix of light rains over her paralyzed body in slow motion, framing her in a beautiful cage of color.

Above her, the party's attendees gaze down at her from the balcony, the Other standing at the center. The camera pans down to the front entrance of the hausmannian building to reveal the man with the mysterious voice standing at the doorway of the building, watching the woman through monstrous droplets of rain. In front of him, two children play hopscotch in a seemingly alternate universe. The woman in the storm stands in the forefront, grasping the dollhouse tightly with a sublime expression of acceptance, tranquility, terror, and tragedy all at once.

She releases the dollhouse. The man at the door reaches out to the woman as the house falls to her feet and shatters on the concrete. As it explodes, sounds of the party and daily life burst into mayhem; laughing, breathing, screaming, walking, sex, sobs, clinks, car horns, wind storms, tick-tocks, and I love you's replay in a distorted and non-linear chaos of sound. The children playing hopscotch float mid-air, frozen above tiny squares of chalk. The man at the door stands motionless, his outstretched arm extending into the storm. Pieces of the house lay broken at the woman's feet, but her face remains suspended in a moment of content.

THE END.