# HOFFMAN

Written by

Harriet Barbir

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INT. HOUSE - DAY

Michael(11), scruffy t-shirt, bed-head hair. sits on the floor of his bare bedroom staring at all that remains: his drawings on the wall of superheroes. He gets up and rips them off.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

His Mother packs a last removal box into the car. She looks over at her bedraggled little boy and sighs a weary sigh, and closes the boot.

By the gate is a bin bag overflowing with a man's clothes.

Michael grabs it.

#### MOTHER

Leave those.

He is reluctant to abandon them.

It's been 18 months. He's not coming back.

Michael nods to greet a couple of young girls who blank him. Walking on they whisper and giggle obviously about him.

INT. APARTMENT BLOCK. STAIRWELL DAY - DAY

### MOTHER

#### (O.S.) Michael. Hurry up.

Michael looks up at several flights Of stairs, as if it is Everest. He appears weighed down by more than the heavy bags. One bag drops. Pots and pans scatter down the stairs.

A gruff voice sounds out.

### HOFFMAN (O.S.) Hey, keep the noise down.

Hoffman (athletic, well groomed , 40s) opens the door to his flat like a panther ready to pounce. His demeanor relaxes when he sees it is only a boy, who cowers as he tries to retrieve the spilt utensils.

> HOFFMAN (CONT'D) Need a hand there, Champ?

#### MICHAEL

I can manage.

#### HOFFMAN 'Course you can.

Hoffman watches the puny, determined kid struggle with the heavy load as he scales "Everest"

Michael climbs, weary, but then, all of a sudden, he seems to be flying because,

Hoffman has him in his arms and carries Michael and the heavy bags effortlessly to the top of the stairs.

Michael beams from ear to ear until,

His mother stands arms folded.

MOTHER What you think you're playing at?

MICHAEL

Nothing.

HOFFMAN Looked like he needed a little help.

MOTHER We don't need any help.

She ushers Michael inside, closes the door and its multiple bolts tight.

INT. MICHAEL'S BEDROOM - LATER

Michael examines his arm muscles, finds them lacking compared to Hoffman. He begins to do press-ups.

INT. APARTMENT BLOCK. STAIRWELL - EARLY THE NEXT DAY

They are rushing to school. As Michael and his Mother pass by Hoffman's flat, the door opens.

A pretty woman exits. The boy finds her pretty too. Mother sizes her up, slut.

The woman kisses Hoffman on the cheek.

PRETTY WOMAN Thank you. Last night was more fun than I dared to expect. Call me.

HOFFMAN Sure. Bye. (To boy and mother) Good Morning.

His mother hurries Michael on but as they reach the front door Michael steals a look back at the woman.

#### MICHAEL

Morning.

INT. STREET - AFTERNOON

The same two girls pass by, heads together chatting. Michael smiles at them. They ignore him.

INT. APARTMENT BLOCK. STAIRWELL - MOMENTS LATER

Another pretty lady knocks the door of Hoffman's flat. Michael lingers down the stairs, watching. She has a bag of groceries, wine. The door opens.

> HOFFMAN Oh, hello, Darlin'.

PRETTY WOMAN 2 I thought I would cook us a special dinner.

Hoffman kisses her cheek as she enters.

INT. MICHAEL'S FLAT.KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Michael's mother sits at The table bent over a few red letter bills, deep in thought.

MICHAEL Mum? Can I ask you a question?

#### MOTHER (Not listening) Hmm...

Michael waits but, getting no attention, saunters off.

#### INT. MICHAEL'S BEDROOM - LATER

Piano music wafts up from Hoffman's flat, a soft, haunting melancholy tune.

Michael goes to the piano and begins to practice. It has been a while but as the notes start to flow a little better his mother cranes her neck round the door.

She is not sure what's gotten into him but she likes it.

EXT. BOY'S BEDROOM - THE NEXT DAY

Mother, grabs her bag, and his lunchbox. She rolls her eyes as she checks the time. She knocks the door to his bedroom.

MOTHER Come on, we're late!

Michael exits, his hairstyle parted neatly to the side, just like Hoffman's; clothes, neat. His mother stares, speechless.

APARTMENT BLOCK. STAIRWELL - - MOMENTS LATER

Again, as they pass Hoffman's flat, the door opens and pretty woman 2 exits followed by Hoffman.

Hoffman looks like he hasn't slept, and, though he unintentionally blocks her path on the stairwell, Michael's Mother takes umbrage and pushes past.

> MOTHER Excuse me. Some of us have work to go to.

Hoffman looks grieved, but composes himself, smiling broadly at the Pretty woman.

HOFFMAN Thanks, Hun.

PRETTY WOMAN 2 No worries.

INT. APARTMENT BLOCK. STAIRWELL - AFTERNOON

Michael is about to enter as Hoffman, wearing running gear, is about to exit.

Michael stands there silent, with the door open maybe for a second or two too long. Hoffman notices his hair, grins.

HOFFMAN You okay, champ?

Michael nods.

HOFFMAN (CONT'D) Your mother in better form?

Michael nods.

MICHAEL She worries about things.

## HOFFMAN

Yeah.

Looks obvious to Hoffman that the boy has some worries too.

HOFFMAN (CONT'D) You want to come for a run?

Michael shrugs.

EXT. THE GREAT OUTDOORS/ BEACH - LATER

Hoffman and Michael run, the boy trailing. They finish their run, both exhausted but exhilarated. Hoffman shares s bottle of water.

MICHAEL Can I ask you a question?

HOFFMAN

Sure.

MICHAEL How do I get people to like me?

HOFFMAN

People?

MICHAEL

Girls.

HOFFMAN What makes you think they don't?

The boy shrugs.

MICHAEL They ignore me. HOFFMAN That's exactly what girls do when they DO like you. Just be yourself.

Hoffman ruffles Michael's carefully combed hair, bringing it back to its messier norm.

Michael is still not satisfied.

MICHAEL My dad, my dad never visits.

HOFFMAN Maybe he can't. I am sure he must love you.

Michael shrugs.

MICHAEL Maybe. Maybe he just loves heroin more.

HOFFMAN I think you are wrong. I think, if it keeps him from seeing you, he must hate it.

MICHAEL

Really?

HOFFMAN

Really.

This time Michael runs ahead of Hoffman, like he's flying, like no one can ever catch him.

INT. MICHAEL'S FLAT.KITCHEN - LATER

Mother looks up from cooking on hearing the door open. She wipes her hands. Michael enters.

MOTHER I was worried. Where were you?

MICHAEL

Nowhere.

MOTHER Who were you with?

MICHAEL

No one.

She glances out the window and sees Hoffman take delivery of cases of beer and wine.

MOTHER I see. Well, eat up. Make sure you do your homework. You don't want to end up like some waster.

### INT. BOY'S BEDROOM- NIGHT

Noise filters in from a party going on at Hoffman's but Michael is fast asleep as his mother peeks in at him.

She picks up a paper From the floor. It is a drawing of Hoffman, looking larger than life, a superhero.

INT. MOTHER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mother tosses and turns then lies staring at the ceiling.

INT. APARTMENT BLOCK. STAIRWELL - LATER

It's pretty late, the party over. Mother slips a note under the door of Hoffman's flat.

Her footsteps still echo on the stairs as Hoffman opens the door, looking stone cold sober, note in hand.

INT. APARTMENT BLOCK. STAIRWELL - MORNING

Another school day. As Michael and mother pass Hoffman comes up the stairs in from a run. They squeeze awkwardly past on the stairs.

Michael is happy to see him.

## MICHAEL Morning Mr Hoffman.

Hoffman ignores him, walks inside. Michael finds it odd.

INT. APARTMENT BLOCK. STAIRWELL - AFTERNOON

Back From school, Michael lingers as he passes by Hoffman's flat. He can hear piano music.

He knocks the door. No answer.

INT. APARTMENT BLOCK. STAIRWELL - THE NEXT DAY

School again, passing the door Michael stares, hoping for him to materialize but there is no sign of Hoffman.

INT. APARTMENT BLOCK. STAIRWELL - AFTERNOON

Its very quiet by Hoffman's. Michael listens with his ear to the door, then runs quickly up stairs.

INT. APARTMENT BLOCK. STAIRWELL. LATER THAT AFTERNOON -

Michael dressed for a run knocks the door. No answer.

INT. MICHAEL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mother pops her head round e door.

### MOTHER

You okay?

Michael just shrugs. She sees he is holding his drawing of Hoffman as a superhero.

INT. APARTMENT BLOCK. STAIRWELL - MORNING

As they pass Hoffman's door, Michael kneels, pretends to tie his laces. His mother goes ahead. He slips the drawing of Hoffman under the door. It swings ajar, allowing Michael a glimpse of Hoffman, holding a syringe. Hoffman sees Michael's reaction, appalled.

Michael crumples the drawing, tosses it aside, running after his mother.

### HOFFMAN

Michael!

But Michael is long gone. Hoffman picks up the discarded drawing. Flattens it out to see the crumpled superhero.

INT. APARTMENT BLOCK. STAIRWELL - NEXT DAY

Michael races down the stairs passing Hoffman's door without a second glance. His mother walks slowly after him.

Hoffman opens the door, as if he has been waiting but Michael is already gone.

EXT. STREET - SOME WEEKS LATER - AFTERNOON

Michael walks along, deep in thought. Something up ahead catches his eye.

EXT. PUB - AFTERNOON

Hoffman is leaving the pub, unsteady, a little drunk. His hair is longer now, he hasn't shaved in a while.

As he exits he trips on a step, stumbling into some railings. He slumps to the ground.

The two girls are outside the shop next door. Michael rushes over to him. Hoffman tries to brush him away.

HOFFMAN Leave me.

#### MICHAEL

Come on.

Michael tries to help him up.

HOFFMAN Go home to your mother.

GIRL

Poor guy.

MICHAEL (To girl) What do you mean.

GIRL

His wife.

MICHAEL

His wife?

GIRL

Yeah, Cancer. My mum's a nurse. Told me his wife wanted "to live until she died" so he and her friends looked after his wife, did everything for her, right up until they took her to hospital a few weeks ago. She died this morning.

MICHAEL

Mr. Hoffman.

GIRLS You know him?

## MICHAEL

I know him.

Michael helps him up.

INT. MICHAEL'S FLAT.KITCHEN - LATER

The mother sees Michael helping Hoffman out of a taxi and turns up her nose as if already smelling The stench of stale Beer from here.

INT. APARTMENT BLOCK. STAIRWELL - MOMENTS LATER

She confronts them outside Hoffman's flat.

MOTHER (To son) You. in.

#### MICHAEL

But mum...

Hoffman staggers inside. She follows him just to the hallway. Michael listens, hidden from view.

#### MOTHER

Look at you. My son doesn't need to be around the likes of you. I asked you to stay away from him.

Michael now understands Hoffman's absence.

#### MICHAEL

Mum.

But his mother is mid rant

MOTHER He's young, impressionable. He doesn't need some drunk, womanising, lazy, can't-be-asked-to -work, living off The state Wannabe musician, loser as a role model.

Someone rings the front bell. Michael buzzes it open.

A few seconds later a pretty woman in a nurse's uniform comes to the door.

# NURSE

Mr Hoffman?

The mother looks her up and down, Disgusted.

MOTHER Don't tell me. His birthday is it?

#### MICHAEL

Mum!

The nurse is confused.

## NURSE

I'm sorry.

NURSE (CONT'D) Look, I don't know who you are. I just came to check on Mr. Hoffman, see how he is coping.

Hoffman begins to sob.

The mother is not sure how to react. Her son shows her how. He rushes over and hugs Hoffman, tight.

INT. APARTMENT BLOCK. STAIRWELL - DAYS LATER

A black bow hangs on Hoffman's door.

Michael and his mother are suitably dressed in black. She knocks the door.

Hoffman exits, weary, just bearing up under the strain.

His step on the stairs falters.

MICHAEL Need a hand there, Champ.

## HOFFMAN

I can manage.

Michael rests Hoffman's arm over his shoulder to lessen his burden.

#### MICHAEL 'Course you can.

His mother looks proudly at her boy, already seeing the fine man Michael will grow to be.

FADE OUT.