

# CAMINO REAL

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## Monica Porter Comes Back

*Nine years of silence. One small film.  
The actress on her own terms.*

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Above · Porter at her home on the North Shore of Massachusetts, where she has lived since 2018. "This is enough," she says of the life she built during her years away from acting. "If the rest of it comes, fine. But this is enough." NO REAL

# She Came Back.

*After nine years away, Monica Porter is acting again. She is not particularly interested in explaining why.*

— BY HELENA MARSH · Photographs by Sarah Lamb

THE HOUSE is older than it looks. It sits at the end of a road that runs out at the water, and on the afternoon I arrive, the late light is doing the thing late light does in coastal Massachusetts in May — slowing down, holding still, turning the grass the wrong shade of gold. Monica Porter answers the door in a sage knit sweater she has clearly owned for years. There is a coffee mug in her hand. She offers me one with the same hand, which means I have to wait while she goes to make it.

In the kitchen, she opens a tin of cookies that her business partner sent over and apologizes for the dust on the lid. The cookies are from Half Moon, the bakery she co-founded in 2019 with her best friend, a small independent shop on the North Shore that has since grown to a dozen

storefronts. Monica is the silent partner. She does not appear in the marketing. She has been instrumental in every major decision the company has made, and almost no one outside the bakery knows it.

This is, in some ways, the most accurate fact about Monica Porter that anyone has published in the last decade. She has been doing serious work this entire time. The work was simply not the kind of work people associate with her name.

You probably remember her name. Or you remember 2012. *Disciple* came out in March of that year — a small, unsettling psychological thriller about a woman whose stalker turns out to be the same therapist she has been confiding in for years. Critics treated Porter's performance as a revelation.

*Off the Menu* came out three months later — a romantic comedy about a Boston caterer with a string of admirers and one impossible client. The film was a commercial success. Porter, then twenty-five, had a year that doesn't happen anymore. By the end of 2012, she was, by several reasonable measures, the most in-demand actress in Hollywood.

She had been working since she was twenty-one. Her origin story is the kind that no longer feels true: a small-town New England girl, no industry connections, walked into an open casting call and walked out with the part. The story is true. She has been retelling it on talk shows for years. By 2026 she is bored of telling it, and she will redirect when I bring it up. "Other people's stories are more interesting," she says.

The five years after 2012 went the way those years tend to go for actresses to whom 2012 has just happened. There were successes. There were the inevitable disappointments — the studio films that didn't open, the prestige projects that landed wrong with critics, the years in which she was not

nominated for things she should have been nominated for. By 2017, she had stepped away.

She did not announce it. She did not give a farewell interview. She did not post a statement. She simply stopped accepting offers, and after a while the offers slowed, and after a longer while they stopped altogether. The trade publications speculated. She did not engage. By 2019, the speculation had ended too.

When I ask why she left, she answers carefully, the way someone answers a question they have already answered to themselves a hundred times.

"It was a few things at once," she says. "I had a project that broke something in me. I had people in my life — professionally — who didn't have my best interests at heart, and who I think were taking advantage. I left my management because of that." She pauses. "And my mother died that year."

She does not elaborate on her mother. She does not need to. The kitchen we are sitting in faces a window that looks out toward the garden, and her gaze settles there for a second before returning to me.



ABOVE · "This is enough," Porter says of the life she built during her years away. "If the rest of it comes, fine. But this is enough."



ABOVE · "I just wanted to look at my life and figure out what I wanted to be proud of," Porter says of the years away. "I had spent five years being told what I wanted, and I had stopped being able to tell the difference between that and what I actually wanted."

"I just wanted to look at my life and figure out what I wanted to be proud of," she says. "I had spent five years being told what I wanted, and I had stopped being able to tell the difference between that and what I actually wanted. I needed to find out."

What she found, she has been remarkably consistent about not saying. She has given a small handful of interviews in the years since — careful ones, with names not named — and what emerges from them is the outline of a life that, by any reasonable definition, has been complete without acting.

She moved into the house we are sitting in. She started seeing a therapist she still sees today. She began a daily meditation practice. She invested in her best friend's bakery and, two years later, agreed to become a partner. She took a long time, by her own account, to learn how to do nothing — to sit in

a room without the immediate compulsion to be useful in it. She read. She gardened. She traveled occasionally. She fell in love with a partner she has now been with for the better part of a decade, a visual artist whose practice has nothing to do with her former career and who has never asked her to return to it.

She did not act. She did not take voiceover work. She did not do off-Broadway. She did not do a small indie short that almost no one saw. She did not return to the craft in any capacity — not even quietly — for nine years.

And then, this past winter, *Mother's Little Helpers* came across her partner's desk. Specifically: across the desk of a friend of her partner's, a writer-director named Dustin Ross who had been quietly assembling a project nobody in the industry had heard of.

MOTHER'S LITTLE Helpers is a single-sequence film set in 1962, owing its visual language to Douglas Sirk and its comedic register to John Waters. Its protagonist, Beverly Beaumont, is the most envied housewife on her block — and the secret to her perfect life is that she is, very quietly, drugging her family. *Mother's Little Helpers* Director Dustin Ross had a short list of three actresses for the part. Porter was at the top of it. Ross, reached for comment, was direct about the casting. "I'd been told she was difficult, that she'd left the industry, that nobody could reach her," he says. "I sent the script through a friend of her partner. She called me the next morning. She came to set on day one with the part already finished — she'd just been waiting for someone to roll the camera. The hardest part of the job was not getting in her way."

"It hit four or five things at once," Porter says of her own decision. "It was funny — actually funny, not industry-funny. It had a weird, dark psychological seam that reminded me of *Disciple*. And it was contained. It wasn't asking me to commit to twelve months and a press tour. It was asking me to come do one thing, do it well, and go home."

Monica acknowledges the problematic nature of Beverly. "The character is also genuinely complicated. Beverly is doing something monstrous. But she's making the wrong tools work. There's something feminist about that, in a queasy way. I wanted to spend time with her." ♦



ABOVE Porter as Beverly Beaumont in *Mother's Little Helpers*. "She's doing something monstrous," Porter says. "But she's also doing it because the only tools she has been given to keep her family functioning are wrong tools."



*"She has always  
been the most precise  
actress in any room  
she walks into."*

— DUSTIN ROSS, DIRECTOR, *Mother's Little Helpers*

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*Monica Porter stars as Beverly Beaumont in Mother's Little Helpers, directed by Dustin Ross. The film is now in distribution.*

