

CARHOPPING

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. NOT OVERLY BUSY HIGHWAY--DAY

Open on a two-lane highway with sparsely wooded surroundings.
Carhopping:

INT. SMALL CAR - DAY

SKINNY GUY (20) cries, tear-less, and talks to himself.

SKINNY GUY

What do you mean doc? She's a
vegetable? How can I keep loving
her if she'll never walk or talk
again? Tell me that, doc.

He stops the act and glances at the scrip on the seat beside
him. A pick up truck zooms past him.

INT. PICK-UP TRUCK - DAY

A HEAVY MAN (30) drives, looks crazy and is swearing.

HEAVY MAN

Move it asshole! Fuck! Nobody knows
how to drive!

In the back seat is a WOMAN (25) in pain. She's in labor.
Ahead of the pick-up truck is a sporty car. Carhop to find...

INT. SPORTY CAR - DAY

A LADY (35) drives, she wears a skirt and fancy hat and
appears to be touching herself while two small kids sit
oblivious in the back seat. She takes her hand away from
crotch area and we see the cardboard from a tampon. She wraps
it in a napkin, sticks it in her purse and adjusts her skirt.
She smiles at GIRL TWO (14) in a Sport Utility Vehicle as it
passes. Travel with her attention to see...

INT. SPORT UTILITY VEHICLE - DAY

A messy FAMILY of six, DAD (50), MOM (50) BOY ONE (20) BOY
TWO (18) GIRL ONE (16) GIRL TWO (14) in a sing-along. All but
the Dad sings:

FAMILY

Happy birthday to you!! Happy
 birthday to you!! Happy birthday
 dad, happy birthday to you!

Everyone claps and Dad shakes his head.

EXT. HIGHWAY-DAY

HITCHHIKER (40) white skinned, sun worn, wearing tattered jeans, a t-shirt underneath a worn coat, and a baseball cap, walks in a relaxed manner on the side of the road. His unkempt appearance is endearing rather than offensive. He looks like freedom. A large worn backpack rests on his back. As he makes his way forward he's also watching the cars drive by with a look of interest on his friendly face. He doesn't stick out his thumb.

HITCHHIKER (V.O.)

I heard a story once. About some Asian pilgrim who decided to take a journey, searching for enlightenment in some far off land. One night he was sleepn' in a cave, woke up thirsty and drank water from what he figured was a stone. Come mornin' he realized it was actually a skull. Cave water had dripped into this skull and he drank from it. Freakin' out about drinking from a skull he headed on his way thinking a lot about what happened. After a bit o' thinkin' he came to realize there was nothin' truly disgusting about the water or the skull, it was all in his head. See, the water was jus' fine for him when he thought he was drinkin' it from a stone. It only bothered him once he started thinkin' about the skull and what it was. A perception, easily changed. Enlightened the pilgrim headed for home.

The Hitchhiker sees a dead possum on the side of the road. The vultures have already surrounded it and looked up at him warily. Only one of them flies off while the other ugly birds just keep staring and moving around their meal. He pulls a dirty RED RAG out of his back pocket and holds it over his nose. He looks for a moment at the road kill and then walks delicately around it.

He's not bothered by the carcass and death and life nourished by it, but he's not entirely unmoved either. He appears respectful.

HITCHHIKER (V.O.)

There ain't no way for me to know if the story's true or not, but that don't really matter. It changed my life; it's real for me. After I heard it I headed out of town, lookin' for my destiny. And like that Asian guy I was surprised to find it when and where I did. These roads have got so many stories to tell. Fistfuls of lives going this way and that, for this reason or another. I learn 'em. It don't matter how much of the story I get right 'cause I can make parts up real good on my own. I meet people, see things in one of them cars—a strange smile or an animated conversation—and I can't get it outta my head unless I do something with it. So I fill it in and give it forward motion, maybe some kind of answer. Once I've imagined it, for me it's real; a memory.

The Hitchhiker has appeared somewhat lost in thought, but now he looks up and out at the cars as they pass. Often offering a smile and nod to travelers, a nod that is most often ignored.

HITCHHIKER (V.O.)(CONT'D)

I see things, I learn things, I feel things from the stories. The way I see it that's what life's all about, feeling. The stories might not all be exactly true stories of the people in the cars and trucks, but anyone's story comes down to the same truths at the end of the day. Love, fear, excitement, craving, loneliness. This is what every story or life boils down to... it's just a question of whether or not we choose to enjoy it. Move it forward. Whether or not we choose to own it. That's the way I see it.

A Lexus zooms by and a man, DEREK, sticks his head out whooping and hollering with obvious joy.

He sees the Hitchhiker and pumps a celebratory fist at him. The Hitchhiker smiles and pumps back, then he stops walking and just watches.

INT. LEXUS IN MOTION--DAY

DEREK (35) is alone in the car, bouncing to the beat of LOUD MUSIC. He's a handsome black man with soft features. Derek hollers excitedly again and is singing along, it looks like at any minute he may burst with emotion.

The car is well kept and looks new. There is a briefcase on the seat, a jacket, and sunglasses. An old worn picture of an elderly black woman with a sad smile holding a small skinny kid who's smiling huge, but looking out of the sides of his eyes at his hand in a strange way, is taped to the rearview mirror. The CELL PHONE RINGS and Derek answers.

DEREK
(into phone)
You got my message? Hold on a sec.

Derek yells out the window whooping and hollering. His happiness is infectious.

DEREK (CONT'D)
Shit, shit, shit, shit!
Whooooohooooo!!

Derek turns the music down.

DEREK (CONT'D)
(into the phone)
Ya man, I can't believe it. I don't even ever buy the God Damn things! I'm just glad I bothered to check it. Naw, somebody else got the numbers too, but I think I can handle sharing thirty-six million dollars. Man, I just keep thinking about my brother, and Jamie. I gotta go. I need to turn up my tunes and scream some of this shit out of me! Ya man, later.

He throws the phone on the passenger seat and turns up Jason Derulo on the sound system. He grooves and drives for a moment, and then the song ends. He watches the freeway and begins to look reflective.

FLASHBACK

EXT. PUBLIC PLAYGROUND-NIGHT

DEREK sits on a swing in a playground with a girl, JAMIE. They're in their early twenties, she's white and attractive, both bubbly and sexy. They look comfortable and happy as they eat egg rolls.

JAMIE

Man, I needed this.

DEREK

You needed me? Or were you referring to the egg rolls and study break?

JAMIE

Both. I kind of get a high from studying, which makes me a little bit dizzy-you know, I don't handle my study high well-and then I get the munchies. Which, obviously, only the egg rolls your bring me can satisfy.

DEREK

(laughing)

Way to sidestep and distract me while you cleverly avoid my real question.

JAMIE

What real question?

DEREK

My attempt to get you to say you needed ME. You're going to make a good lawyer.

JAMIE

I'd also make a pretty sexy witness.

DEREK

Witness me agreeing that yes, you damn well would.

JAMIE

(bubbly)

We are learning some pretty useful skills, huh? I can't help but get a high off this stuff! I stepped into law school thinking it'd be cool to be a lawyer, because I'd feel smart and important. I didn't know it would be fun too!

DEREK

Fun? You might be higher than we first thought. We're going to have to have an intervention.

JAMIE

Fair enough. I won't study on an empty stomach next time.

Jamie takes an exaggerated bite out of her egg roll.

DEREK

I knew you'd need the food. Besides, I couldn't study. My mind was on you. Something I've been wanting to talk about.

JAMIE

Ahhhhh..... So you had an ulterior motive for getting me out of the apartment. It wasn't all "Jamie needs a break and egg rolls, let me grab my white horse and hero up!"

They laugh. It gets quiet for a few moments as the mood shifts just a little.

DEREK

You know what I want to talk about.

JAMIE

So, talk about it. Or are you going to wait for me to start talking about what I know you want to talk about?

DEREK

You could.

JAMIE

(playfully)
So could you.

Derek sighs, smiles.

DEREK

Okay, fine. Jamie, tell me again why you won't marry me. You love me, I love you. And you love Trent. Until you came along I was the only person left on this earth who loved my brother. Let's just do it. Be a family.

JAMIE

Look Derek, I do love you. You're a whole bunch of things I like in a man. And you really turn me on, but I'm not planning on getting married, to anyone.

Jamie jumps off the swing and does a cartwheel, then returns to her spot and speaks to Derek playfully.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

Besides, you said yourself if your mother were alive she never would have approved of me.

DEREK

Definitely not, you're entirely too happy.

JAMIE

(pouring on cute & sexy)
Oh come now, could I not have charmed her? Am I not infectious?

DEREK

You are indeed. Mom, however, had her happiness vaccination. She believed strongly in suffering, especially after Trent was born.

JAMIE

How is Trent? I'm sorry I couldn't come visit him last weekend. Did he miss me?

DEREK

How could he not? He's autistic, not stupid.

Derek leans back in his swing and looks up at the evening sky.

DEREK (CONT'D)

You know, when Trent and I we were kids he used to follow me around.

(MORE)

DEREK (CONT'D)

Hang out in a corner of whatever room I was in. He'd rock back and forth like he does---

Derek rocks his head back and forth, and Jamie does the same.

DEREK (CONT'D)

--and look like he was totally out there in some other world, but if I moved to another room there he'd stop and follow me. I liked it. It felt like we were playing.

JAMIE

It's fun to wonder about him. Why he does the things he does so differently. You know what I mean? How much of it is Trent actually physically feeling things differently than we do, and how much of it is him doing things different on purpose.

DEREK

Yeah, I get it. Obviously he has reasons for the stuff he does, but what are they?

JAMIE

Sometimes when I can't sleep I'll rock a little in my bed and immediately think of him. I don't usually bang my head on the floor, but sometimes it's tempting.

They laugh and a comfortable silence of about thirty seconds follows. In the silence they see an ELDERLY COUPLE (60) climb into a car that's parked on the street near the park. The couple looks comfortable and happy. Jamie reaches over and rubs Derek's arm.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

(softly serious)

I just love too many people to pick one, till death do us part. Loving so many people makes me feel alive.

DEREK

(sighs)

So I won't wait on you to change your mind, promise. But in the meantime we'll get together very often and feel alive.

JAMIE

Oh yes.

Jamie gets off her swing and mounts Derek on his. They kiss.

DEREK

But not at your apartment. Your roommate's cat creeps me out.

JAMIE

(Laughing)

Me too! I used to love cats, but hers is so angry. I hope I can remember not to judge every other cat I meet based on living with this one frustrated-and-taking-it-out-on-the-world feline.

They laugh big. The tension is completely gone and it makes the joke seem funnier.

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. LEXUS IN MOTION--DAY

DEREK is on the phone, already in the midst of a conversation with his brother's living facility.

DEREK

(into phone)

I don't care how much it costs...actually never mind, I'll do it myself. Just tell him his brother's coming to see him. Friday, tell him I'll be there Friday. I know he won't respond, just please tell him anyway. Thanks.

Derek hangs up the phone and pulls the winning lottery ticket out of the briefcase, looks from it to the phone, and puts the ticket in the glove compartment. He looks tired now, though still happy. With a little apprehension he picks up the phone and hits a few buttons.

DEREK (CONT'D)

(into the phone)

Hey Jamie, it's me. I need to see you, tomorrow if I can. I'm moving babe. I don't expect you to come with me but a goodbye kiss would be appreciated.

(MORE)

DEREK (CONT'D)

You remember that place I was telling you about, in Massachusetts? Where they have that program that will help me connect with my brother? Well, I'm going. I'm picking him up Friday and moving north. Look, I love you. Call me.

Derek hangs up.

FLASHBACK

INT. BEDROOM OF AN UPSCALE APARTMENT-NIGHT

JAMIE and DEREK are naked in the sheets. There is a silliness that surrounds them, and it's evident they've been having sex.

JAMIE

I don't get you. We've only been practicing law for a few years and already you're burnt out. I love the job! I still get a high from it all! Not to mention I look sexy in a court room.

DEREK

You'd look sexy in a Santa suit.

JAMIE

You're just saying that cause you kinda like me.

DEREK

And because you'd look sexy in a Santa suit. Anyway, I never expected to like the job, I just knew I could do it well and make enough money to keep Trent in a decent place.

JAMIE

(flirty, sexy)
There are plenty of things you can do well...

DEREK

I try, babe. But you know, I forgot I'd be working too hard to ever see my brother.

JAMIE

I don't make you work too hard,
though you work smart, and I like
the hard.

DEREK

Watch out Jamie. I'll ask you "the
question" again.

Jamie rubs his arm.

JAMIE

I wish I had some advice.

DEREK

Marry me, pay the bills and I'll
keep Trent home and play Mr. Mom.

JAMIE

I'm sorry.

DEREK

You were right you know.

JAMIE

(playful again)
Aren't I always? What particular
right thing are you referring to?

DEREK

I've been waiting for you. I
thought I wasn't, I really did, but
I was.

JAMIE

Derek, I know what I want but so do
you. Just do it. Open up to other
women, find one that wants a family
and loves Trent as much as you do.
Then, make him an uncle.

DEREK

I love you.

JAMIE

I love you too. But you're not
happy. You haven't been happy for a
couple of years now.

DEREK

What are you talking about? I'm
happy. I'm as happy as the next
guy.

JAMIE

Okay, but "the next guy" isn't happy either.

DEREK

Fine, I'm a little happier than "the next guy".

JAMIE

No you're not. The more into my career I get, the more excited I am. I get to navigate a sexy world full of loopholes and insider concepts, stuff that you can almost always manipulate to go your way, to win. It blurs the lines of right and wrong...

DEREK

Tell me about it. It's scary. I can't find my footing.

Jamie sits higher up in the bed, wrapping the sheet around herself a little tighter. She's excited, bubbly and sexy again.

JAMIE

But that's just it, it's not scary at all to me. It makes so much sense. All my life I felt like I was different or incongruent or something...

DEREK

Like how you're always happy but listen to music about pain or suicide, or even that one about the woman in the wall??

JAMIE

I told you, life has to have all the feelings. I get the intense ones from music so I don't have to feel them in real life.

Derek gives her a disbelieving look.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

It doesn't have to make sense to you, doll, it makes sense to me.
(MORE)

JAMIE (CONT'D)

What I was saying is I've always thought things were right that other people thought were wrong, and I find things fun that other people find boring... and now I see that it's good. That I'm different, but I'm not wrong.

DEREK

Wow, you get all that from listening to people complain about their ex-husband's affairs, and how they had to live with the pain and suffering of a cranky mother-in-law?

JAMIE

Believe it or not, yup! It's not so much the people and their stories as the fun I have finding ways to make the law benefit them but still, yup.

DEREK

Kinda like listening to your dark music to feel those feelings you don't want to have in real life.

JAMIE

Huh, I never thought about it like that but, ya! Those crazy clients are my "Lady in the Wall".

DEREK

Well, I think I'm doing something wrong. Work feels like, well, work!

JAMIE

But that's what I'm saying. You're not doing something wrong, but you're not happy. The deeper you get into your career the harder it is for you to like your life. I see it on you, I hear it when you talk about your day. You're not happy.

DEREK

I'm happy sometimes. I'm happy when I'm with you. I'm happy when I'm with Trent. I'm happy when I think I see your old roommate angry cat, and then I realize that it's actually *not* your old roommate's angry cat.

Jamie and Derek share a laugh and then snuggle back in the sheet.

JAMIE

Do you want to know my secret to happiness? Only two hundred dollars, assuming I can keep it under an hour.

DEREK

Lawyers! Wait, let me get a pen.

JAMIE

Ha, ha. Really. Let me see if I can explain it. I'm who I enjoy being. All of the time. The way I see it if all of my choices, everything I do, comes from a place of total acceptance for myself I'm bound to be happy. I'm the only one who can choose happiness for me, it won't come from somewhere else.

Jamie looks directly at Derek.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

Or *someone* else. Same goes for you doll. We have to live inside ourselves twenty-four seven, so we might as well be comfy.

DEREK

I think I can remember that.

JAMIE

Oh, ya, and I have sex with black guys.

DEREK

I know I can remember that!

Derek and Jamie dive under the covers.

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. LEXUS IN MOTION--DAY

DEREK has a sexy smile of remembrance, and then looks once again toward his cell phone. He just shakes his head knowing she'll call and that he'll see her, but also knowing it'll probably be for the last time, and that's okay.

Derek's eyes look for a moment to the heavens, and lands on the picture in the rearview mirror.

DEREK

Mom, I love you. I know why you wanted to keep me and Trent distant. I get why you wanted me to move on and work hard to be what you imagined would make me feel like a successful man. I get it. But, mom, I'm not happy. I don't want to work my ass off and pay people to baby-sit Trent. I want to be with him. And, I want to be happy.

Derek holds his hand up in a "stop" motion and laughs.

DEREK (CONT'D)

I know, I know, people aren't supposed to be happy, they're supposed to work hard and do the right thing. But you might have been wrong, mom. I think doing the right thing is being happy. Or as Jamie puts it, being who we're happy being.

Derek rubs his head and sighs.

DEREK (CONT'D)

I know I don't know the best way to take care of Trent, and his meltdowns can be dangerous, but I'm strong and I love him. I can learn the rest. I'm going to learn the rest. Who I like being is his brother. From where you are, mom, I know you'd agree, I'm doing the right thing.

Derek looks around, suddenly aware that he's been talking out loud to his deceased mom. He shakes his head and talks under his breath.

DEREK (CONT'D)

Oh, Lord! I'm crazier than that Hitchhiker I passed a few miles back. Well... I'm rich now, might as well be eccentric.

Derek pulls a CD out of its case, puts it on and sings real loud to *If I had a Million Dollars* by The Barenaked Ladies.

EXT. NOT OVERLY BUSY HIGHWAY--DAY

The HITCHHIKER is still staring after the long gone Lexus. His look of reflection is slightly troubled and he removes his backpack to pull out a half eaten bag of chips.

HITCHHIKER (V.O.)

I know that guy. He's one of them types that wasn't movin' forward. He was circling and things were gettin' dark, probably 'cause he thought he wanted somebody to move with him. It's crazy making. I've been there, and I get there again from time to time.

The Hitchhiker sits down on his backpack and pops a chip from the bag in his mouth. Then he crumbles a few chips in his fingers and sprinkles them on the ground for a line of army ants he sees marching by his worn boots. He watches them pick up the gift of food he's offered while munching on another chip himself.

HITCHHIKER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I met a beauty of a Labrador one time. We travelled together for some days and we loved it. We got to be different parts of ourselves for a time. She made me feel different and it was nice. Then I was sleeping in my sack with her on my feet one night, but when I woke she was gone. Guess she had other plans but I didn't want her to be gone. So I went looking for her, like she'd done me wrong or maybe needed me... I donno.

The Hitchhiker stands and stretches, dumps the last bit of chip crumbs from his bag onto the ground for the hard working ants and sticks the empty bag in a side pocket of his backpack where we see he's collected a few other trash items. He puts his pack on and heads forward again.

HITCHHIKER (CONT'D)

I forgot who I was supposed to be for a time. I even started wishing I'd never met her but that was wrong. We were great together, it was just time for something different. Maybe I'm crazy, but I know that guy.

(MORE)

HITCHHIKER (CONT'D)

He's going to something different.
He's goin' forward.

FORWARD/FUTURE

EXT. SMALL RUSTIC HOME-DAY

A small home, not hidden away in the woods but surrounded by trees so that it has the feeling of privacy. The yard is well kept without looking manicured, and there is a small porch with three porch swings crowded on it. One slowly rocks in the breeze.

INT. LIVING ROOM-DAY

DEREK is sitting on a small soft couch with a coffee, reading a novel. There is MUSIC playing softly on the stereo and a cat crawls lazily up on Derek's lap. ALICE (30), a small white woman with quiet sweetness enters the room, wearing jogging pants and a t-shirt. She's wearing a goodly number of colorful elastic bands on her wrist and her long hair is in a fun ponytail, high on her head and over to the side.

ALICE

Well, Trent is going pee and then he's going to walk me to the door.

DEREK

Is it two o'clock already?

ALICE

Two fifteen, actually. But Trent and I were working on language and I really wanted to wait for him to say "pretty" after I put my hair up. So, I'm leaving a little late.

DEREK

He finally said it?

Derek puts his book down and lifts the cat off of his lap, placing him on the floor.

ALICE

Nope. But a girl can only wait so long.

DEREK

(smiling)
I see.

Alice pulls out her ponytail, and then puts it back up in a different style ponytail.

ALICE

You realize, Derek, that I'm responsible for teaching your brother a bit about ladies? I've got to strike a healthy balance between waiting for him and not waiting. There's a lot of pressure on me to give him a good idea of what to expect in a relationship!

DEREK

Such responsibility, Alice! My brother and all of his future ladies are forever in your debt.

ALICE

Yes, that's true. It will cost many cheesecakes.

DEREK

A promise. Hey, thanks for staying a little long but won't you be late for your gig at the library?

ALICE

My gig? Dude, I volunteered to read "The Billy Goats Gruff" to a bunch of toddlers. I think you're overstating it a tad.

DEREK

Hey, now, you do all the voices when you read to those kids. Trent and I have been there, remember? You've got some serious talent! I fully expect you to remember us when you're a famous children's book reader at the big libraries in all the important cities.

ALICE

My dear friend, I believe your dreams for me are bigger than my own. I merely hope to make a small town child giggle when I pull my beard and make goat sounds. That's enough for little ol' me.

DEREK

That's good. With all of the work you're doing teaching Trent about ladies, leaving him for bigger and better things is a lesson I don't think he needs.

ALICE

Perhaps if I leave, Trent will feel motivated to find a new lady. And tell *her* she's pretty.

DEREK

Or he'll spend six months after your departure circuiting the porch swings and stimming.

ALICE

Okay, I'll give you one point for knowing your brother. And for realism. But I get five points for believing in miracles and possibilities. So, ha!

Both Derek and Alice are a little bit flustered and excited around each other. The attraction is obvious, but so is the newness of it.

TRENT (25) walks in with a scented candle in his hand. He's strikingly handsome with dark black skin. His pants are on backwards and he slaps his thigh constantly as he walks. This is his autistic stim, a rhythmic slapping of his thigh, and neither Derek nor Alice pay attention to it.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Hey Trent! Ready to walk me out? Oh look, is that candle you're holding for me?

Trent offers a sporadic laugh, slaps his thigh a little faster, and then hands the candle to Derek. He doesn't look directly at Derek but rather at Alice's hair as he hands it over. There is a playfulness about him, and his joke is well received.

DEREK

Thanks, bro. Are you telling Alice that she shouldn't be so presumptive?

Trent shakes his head "no" violently.

ALICE

Hmmmm...are you telling your brother that he stinks, and that he should light a candle to freshen up the room?

Trent laughs and jumps up and down clapping. Both Derek and Alice offer a giggle.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Alright enough of this sibling rivalry. Trent, please walk me to the door.

Derek and Alice give each other a hug. He tugs at her ponytail and whispers to her.

DEREK

(whispering)
Pretty.

Alice blushes a little but never stops smiling. She and Trent walk out of the room together as Derek watches out the living room window.

END OF FUTURE

INT. LEXUS IN MOTION--DAY

DEREK is still singing to himself and smiling, but his smile is soft and the excitement already died down. He looks, simply, happy

The Lexus zooms past a car on the side of the road, the camera stops on it.

It's an Oldsmobile, old and rusted.

EXT. SIDE OF HIGHWAY--DAY

A young woman, CARRIE (25) pretty but not beautiful, is standing beside her old and battered Oldsmobile, nervous of the traffic while two young boys (TORY is six and TRYN is four years old) pee on the side of the road.

CARRIE

Hurry up boys. This is dangerous.

TRYN

Tory peed on my shoe.

TORY

The wind did it!

TRYN

The wind can't pee on my shoe, it's not even raining.

TORY

(lecturing, a bit annoyed)
The wind didn't pee on your shoe stupid, the wind made my pee go on your shoe.

TRYN

Oh. Mom, I'm hungry.

MOM

Well, we aren't going to stop to eat until we need gas and we aren't going to need gas for about an hour. Have another apple.

TORY

I'm sick of apples. I'm hungry for real food. Like McDonalds.

CARRIE

(with forced patience)
Just get in the car and we can talk about it while we drive to the next gas station. Actually, I'm going to pee before I feed your brother.
(Mom squats and talks) Hey, Tory, can you pass me a napkin hun.
Thanks.

Carrie then takes a baby, TADEN, only a few months old, out of a car seat and sits in the back door of the car to breastfeed. She smiles lovingly at the baby and then looks back up at her older boys who are climbing back into the car through the front seat.

CARRIE (CONT'D)

Anyway guys, I told you this was going to be an adventure. You're supposed to get hungry on an adventure. Otherwise it's just a trip.

TORY

Taden doesn't have to get hungry. You feed him all the time.

CARRIE

Very funny. Do you want some booby milk? I've got plenty, here!

She squirts her oldest son with breast milk and then continues to feed the baby.

TORY

(straight faced)
Mom, that's gross.

TRYN

(laughing and pointing)
Do it again, do it again!!

MOM

No way, the rest is for Taden.

The boys, who are all darker skinned than their pale mom, being part Arab, start playing amongst themselves in the car while Carrie feeds and hums. She looks around at the grass moving in the breeze, smiling. She puts the baby back in his car seat and drives.

CARRIE

I hope you guys stay awake until we get gas. About an hour. I know, I'll play your Spiderman tape.

Music comes on and the two older boys start singing and shooting spider webs.

Looking around we see there's food on the floor, socks and shoes and broken toys everywhere. A plastic bag with snacks is on the passenger seat.

Carrie looks in the rearview mirror at the boys and smiles.

FLASHBACK

INT. A MESSY SMALL HOME OFFICE-DAY

CARRIE is at the computer, barefoot and dressed in earth toned clothes. The two older boys (TORY AND TRYN) run to the door by Carrie and are about to run outside.

CARRIE

Hold on boys! Gotta stop at snuggle city first.

The boys groan and head toward their mom.

TORY

Mom... snuggle city's not real.

TRYN

If we stop in snuggle city, can we have a popsicle?

Carrie smiles and gives the boys huge hugs and kisses on their heads.

CARRIE

You can have a popsicle after lunch. Promise.

Tory and Tryn look at each other and smile. Tryn even licks his lips. They run outside with wild excitement.

CARRIE (CONT'D)

Shut the door, boys!

It SLAMS shut as Carrie's typing with baby TADEN in a bouncy chair on the floor at her feet. There are manuscripts, notes, Freelance Writing for Dummies, Magazines... giving us the understanding that Carrie is a writer of sorts.

Carrie reads words off of her computer screen.

CARRIE (CONT'D)

(aloud)

"Freedom encourages organic thought, which is scary to those who wish to create a society that's safe, controlled and tidy. Freedom isn't safe, being alive isn't safe, but freedom is necessary for being truly alive..." HMMMMM...(looking down at the baby) Is that too cheesy, Taden?

The baby fusses and she picks him up.

CARRIE (CONT'D)

Alright, it's too cheesy. I'll tweak it.

Mom begins to breast feed Taden while typing with one hand.

CARRIE (CONT'D)

Okay, mommy cares about this one too much. Let's take a break and work on that silly "Don't do these seven things with your lipstick" article.

(MORE)

CARRIE (CONT'D)

At least I'm getting paid for that one. (under her breath) Sort of.

With the baby still breast feeding she gets up to refill her coffee, looks out the windows and does not see the kids.

EXT. SMALL TRAILER-DAY

CARRIE goes outside. She lives in a small trailer surrounded by land. She's holding her baby and calling out.

CARRIE

Tory! Tryn!

She gets no response and picks up a TOY SWORD that has a shoe lace tied to it, absent mindedly throws it over her shoulder. Carrie begins to panic as she calls and looks around in circles, wondering where to search first.

CARRIE (CONT'D)

Tory! Tryn! Boys!!

Carrie starts running one way, then another, calling the boys while trying to keep the baby from feeling her fear. Carrie is still barefoot.

CARRIE (CONT'D)

(trying to sound upbeat)
Tory! Come and have a popsicle!
Tryn, you too!!!

Carrie loses her composure and cries out fearfully.

CARRIE (CONT'D)

Boys! Please!

Finally she gets in her car, the keys are in it, putting Taden in his car seat she heads down the road practically in tears.

EXT. GRAVEL RURAL ROAD WHERE IT MEETS A HIGHWAY-DAY

CARRIE reaches the end of her gravel road where it meets the highway and there is a RED FACED MAN standing by a truck. She flies desperately and gratefully out of her car.

RED FACED MAN

These your kids, miss?

CARRIE

Yes, yes, thank you.

Carrie's holding the boys and shaking, the BABY IS CRYING in the car.

RED FACED MAN
(acting superior)
Do you have a husband, miss?

CARRIE
(confused)
No, we live out here alone.

RED FACED MAN
You need help ma'am. It's not safe here. These kids shouldn't be here.

CARRIE
I know, I....

RED FACED MAN
(interrupting)
How'd it happen? You too busy to watch your own kids?

CARRIE
I was just feeding the baby and noticed it got quiet. We have twenty-two acres of land out here and I didn't know where to look first. Anyway, thank you. I need to take these guys home and talk about this. Thank-you so much.

Mom sees the Red Face Man stare disapprovingly as she puts the kids and herself into the car. The car turns around and heads back to the trailer.

INT. OLDSMOBILE IN MOTION-DAY

The boys (TORY, TRYN and TADEN) are quiet, surrounded by broken toys and mess, and Carrie doesn't even look at them, busy feeling judged and nervous. Finally her oldest son, Tory, speaks up.

TORY
We just wanted to go to Dairy Queen.

CARRIE
(sternly)
Don't talk to me right now.
(MORE)

CARRIE (CONT'D)

I'm very upset. Just be quiet and let me think.

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. OLDSMOBILE IN MOTION-DAY

CARRIE looks at the gas gauge, it's about time for some gas.

CARRIE

Okay boys, start watching for McDonalds signs.

TORY & TRYN

Yea!!

CARRIE

It has to have a playland though or we aren't going. I'm not asking you guys to sit nice in a restaurant when we've already been in the car for eight hours.

TRYN

What if we see a Burger King?

TORY

Or a Taco Bell, we never get to go to Taco Bell.

CARRIE

That's because Taco Bell never has a playland. If we were going to go somewhere without a playland we'd go to The Olive Garden.

TRYN

Do we need gas?

CARRIE

Yeah, but it's no big hurry.

TORY

Why does grandma live so far away?

CARRIE

Because she got married and her husband lives far away.

TORY

But I already played with all my toys. Can we buy new toys at the gas station?

CARRIE

You don't need toys, Tory. Play with your imagination. Look out your window and pretend you're an explorer...

TORY

I imagine better with new toys.

CARRIE

Well we don't have enough money to buy new toys at the gas station.

TORY

Then how do you have enough money to get gas?

CARRIE

Grandma sent me some money to get gas, not toys.

TRYN

But do we have enough money to eat at McDonalds?

CARRIE

Yes Tryn, we have enough money to eat at McDonalds. Please stop talking and look out the window for a McDonalds sign.

TRYN

(proud)

I can talk when I'm looking out the window.

CARRIE

(distracted and distant)

Oh. Good for you honey.

Carrie turns on the radio just as the baby starts to CRY. Carrie reaches back and puts her finger in his mouth.

CARRIE (CONT'D)

(to the baby)

Just a little bit longer, Taden. I love you snuggle bug.

Tory and Tryn start fighting.

TRYN

You're never fair to me!

TORY

Well, the Red Power Ranger is the strongest and I'm stronger than you.

TRYN

But I'm always the Green Ranger! I don't want to be the Green Ranger!

Carrie ignores the fighting and watches the road.

FLASHBACK

INT. LIVING ROOM THAT'S COMFORTABLE BUT MESSY-DAY

CARRIE is standing at the door saying goodbye to a very UGLY WOMAN and watches tensely out the window as she drives away in her Taurus. When the car is out of sight, Carrie sits on her couch, moving a large plastic Ninja Turtle out of the way. She's pale and nervous as she watches the boys TORY and TRYN play. TADEN is sitting in a jumping seat beside the couch.

TORY

Tryn, you Can't be the red Power Ranger. I'm the red Power Ranger, you can be the green one.

TRYN

That's not fair! You always get to be the red Ranger! I'm never the red Ranger!

TORY

(matter of fact)
I'm older so I'm the red Ranger. The red Ranger is the boss, so I have to be him.

TRYN

(full of righteous anger)
You don't do anything fair! You can't be the red Ranger because he's fair! You're too stupid and mean to be the red Ranger!

TORY

Then I'm not playing with you.

Tory pushes Tryn and starts to walk away. Tryn picks up a spoon that was on the ground and throws it at his brother.

It hits Tory hard in the middle of the back and he starts CRYING. Then he turns around and chases Tryn while Tryn cries for his mom.

Carrie suddenly wakes out of her funk and jumps up screaming.

CARRIE

Stop it! Stop it RIGHT NOW! Get your butts over here and sit down!

TRYN

No! You never get mad at Tory when he's mean to me! You always let him be the Red Ranger!

TORY

You hit me with a spoon, so I get to punch you twice. (he's still crying)

CARRIE

Just stop being little shits and sit down!

The boys are still angry but have never heard mom talk and scream like this before, so they quiet down, though they don't sit like she asked. Before she loses control completely mom takes a deep breath and we see tears.

CARRIE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, just stop fighting and come with me. Come on, I have an idea.

Carrie rounds up the kids and brings them into her bedroom, closing all the doors behind her.

INT. CARRIE'S BEDROOM-DAY

The room is fairly small with an unmade bed and clean clothes folded sitting on top of an old dresser. There are toys, old worn books and papers with hastily written notes throughout the room. A huge popcorn bowl is sitting on the floor where a pallet of blankets has been set up picnic style, a television sits on an upside down milk crate in front of it.

CARRIE settles TORY and TRYN on the blanket, and places TADEN in a bouncy chair close to his brothers.

CARRIE

You'll love this! This is a movie I loved as a kid!
(MORE)

CARRIE (CONT'D)

The forest is dying because men are cutting down the trees and there's a man who gets shrunk... well you'll see!

TORY

Is it at least funny?

CARRIE

Oh, ya! The bat is really funny!
And there's funny songs too!

Carrie looks at her boys and winks.

CARRIE (CONT'D)

But, guess where we have to stop first?

Tory isn't playful, but Tryn jumps up happily.

TRYN

Snuggle city!

Carrie hugs all three of her boys and puts the movie on. She stands back against the door and starts to cry. She then reaches for the cordless phone and begins to dial.

CARRIE

(into phone)

Mom, hi. So, A Child Protective Services worker was just here, because of that day when Tory and Tryn walked to the highway. They think I'm a negligent mom. I'm so scared. I don't know what they're going to do, they said investigate. She said they can show up unannounced any time.

Carrie sits down on the floor leaning against the closed door. She's picking at her toes and wiping away tears.

CARRIE (CONT'D)

(into phone)

I know mom, and thanks, but I don't know. I mean, I was busy writing. I don't think I let them be outside very long, but obviously I did. I mean, they got to the highway! That's far! So many things could have happened, all because I was hiding in some story. That man that found them... he could have done worse than call CPS. I'm so afraid.

(MORE)

CARRIE (CONT'D)

I love my boys, but I'm scared
that's not enough.

TORY

Mom, I need to go to the restroom.

CARRIE

(to Tory)
Just a minute.
(into the phone)
The lady was so nice, you know,
that fake nice. I can't stand that!

TORY

(whining now)
Mom, I have to use the restroom!

CARRIE

Okay, but just go straight there
and come straight back.

Carrie stands up and opens the door for Tory and continuously watches all the children. Having her children out of the bedroom feels like being exposed.

CARRIE (CONT'D)

(into phone)
I can't just come there, that would
be running away and I'm sure that
wouldn't look good. Ya, I see, I
could try that. I see what you're
saying, it looks like I'm being
responsible and going where I can
get help. Are you sure you don't
mind?

Tory comes back in and Carrie immediately closes the door.

CARRIE (CONT'D)

Thank you, mom. I feel way better.
Okay, I'll call you back when the
kids are sleeping. I love you too,
bye.

Carrie hangs up the phone and gets up to turn off the movie. The boys whine a bit about the movie being turned off before it's over but they are also curious. The last few days have been strange and they don't feel exactly comfortable.

CARRIE (CONT'D)

Boys, here's what's happening. That
woman who was here doesn't think
I'm a very good mom because I let
you guys go to the highway.

TRYN

Tory took me to the highway, you didn't mommy.

CARRIE

I know honey, but I should have made sure Tory didn't take you to the highway.

TORY

But you were working on your computer. I just was going to go to Dairy Queen.

CARRIE

But my job is to make sure you don't try to go to Dairy Queen without a grown-up.

TRYN

I thought your job was working on the computer.

CARRIE

Just listen. That lady can take you guys away from me if she doesn't think I'm a good enough mom, so here's my plan. Number one, you boys will never go anywhere without talking to me first. Never. Number two, we're going to visit grandma for a while.

TORY & TRYN

Yea! Grandma, grandma!

TORY

I thought grandma lived really far away.

CARRIE

She does, so we are going to go on a big adventure. We'll pack over the next couple of days and leave next week. Does that sound like fun?

TORY

What about school?

CARRIE

You guys can go to a school by grandma's for a while. School's almost on holiday anyway.

(MORE)

CARRIE (CONT'D)

We can try to find our own house up there and live by grandma if you like it. It could be really fun.

TORY

Can we watch the rest of our movie now?

CARRIE

Yup! And then we'll pack.

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. OLDSMOBILE IN MOTION-DAY

CARRIE is driving and biting her nails while TORY and TRYN squirm around in the back seat. TADEN is fast asleep in his car seat.

TRYN

(with desperation)
Mom, I have to go poo really badly!

CARRIE

Keep watching for a playland.

TORY

You aren't supposed to say you have to poo, you're supposed to say you have to use the restroom.

TRYN

I have to use the restroom and go poo really badly!

CARRIE

I'm going as fast as I can. I see an exit coming up and I know it has a gas station. We can stop there and ask where the closest playland is and you can go poo at the restroom.

Tory is watching out the window looking anxiously for a playland when he sees a small pick-up truck pulling onto the highway from the side of the road, leaving our HITCHHIKER behind. The Hitchhiker and Tory make eye contact and both smile and wave.

EXT. HIGHWAY-DAY

The HITCHHIKER is putting his backpack on as the pick-up he's just climbed out of drives away.

HITCHHIKER (V.O.)

It hurts me sometimes, when I see kids. I get to rememberin'. I never really was a kid, I was some kind of crazy. That's what they told me. Because I lived in my head and barely talked. I guess being that I was different than the other kids I was sorta crazy, it I wasn't bad. I liked it, till they told me I wasn't supposed to. I know a lot of the kids I meet on these here roads feel the same as I did. I hope they move forward like I did. They don't gotta live without a home, they just gotta find one that fits them.

The Hitchhiker pulls his cap off and scratches his head. He smiles a little to himself as he puts the cap back on.

HITCHHIKER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Sometimes maybe they'll have a family that moves forward with them. Yeah, that can be kinda nice too.

FLASHBACK

INT. SMALL TRAILER HOUSE BEDROOM-DAY

A SMALL BOY (8) sits cross legged on the floor, sandy blond hair and freckled. He's staring quietly at a long line of matchbox cars, reaching out to adjust a RED TOY CAR, perfecting the line. He hears a tap on his window and looks up. There is a small Mexican girl with pigtails, MYRA, (6) smiling at him. Small Boy stands up and opens the window, happy to see her and smiling. This is The Hitchhiker as a boy, and his comfortable quiet nature was apparent even then.

MYRA

Is your granddad here?

Small Boy shakes his head no, and moves out of the way so that Myra can climb in the window.

MYRA (CONT'D)

Are ya playing with cars again? I want to play with cars too.

Myra and Small Boy sit down on the dingy floor to play with the cars. Together they turn the straight line into a circle of cars.

MYRA (CONT'D)

I knew your granddad wasn't here
'cause I saw him leave a little
while ago. He was with my brother.
I just asked if he was here to be
nice.

Small Boy gives her a nice smile and a shrug.

MYRA (CONT'D)

My mommy told my brother to get her
a new dress. I think my mommy looks
pretty when she wears a new dress.
But my daddy never tells her she
does. Well, that's what mommy says
anyway. And when I tell her she
looks pretty she says thank-you,
but then just says daddy should
tell her. How come she doesn't care
about it when I tell her?

Myra looks up at Small Boy expectantly. He's looking at her with a soft smile. Then he gets up and heads to his bed, pulling a picture from under his pillow. He looks at it and there is a lovely BLONDE WOMAN wearing a bright red summer dress, holding a BABY.

Small Boy hands the photo to Myra.

MYRA (CONT'D)

Oooohhhh... is this your mommy?
She's so pretty! I love her dress!
I bet my mommy would look pretty in
this kind of dress!

Small Boy smiles and nods.

MYRA (CONT'D)

Even my daddy would tell her she
looks pretty in that dress.

Myra hands the picture back to Small Boy, and he tucks it back under his pillow. They sit in silence perfecting the circle of cars for a minute.

MYRA (CONT'D)

(under her breath)
Maybe I would look pretty in a new
dress.

Myra keeps her eyes on the cars and shifts a little in her spot. She adjusts the clothes she's wearing, a pretty top and embroidered jeans.

MYRA (CONT'D)

My mommy says I'm pretty. Maybe I would look pretty in a new red dress.

Myra is still looking down as Small Boy gets up slowly and walks closer to her. He sits down beside her so that their knees are touching and he gives a little cough. Myra looks up at him and he leans toward her for a small kiss. Myra smiles and giggles and beams.

MYRA (CONT'D)

You know that we are in love now, right? So you think I'm pretty! You think I'm pretty!

Small Boy nods and moves back to his side of the car circle where he was originally sitting.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Myra! Where are you? Myra, come and eat your lunch!

Myra jumps up and heads to the window. Small Boy gets up and watches her climb out, smiling softly. Once Myra is outside she turns around and faces Small Boy.

MYRA

I'm going home to eat my lunch. Do you have food today?

Small Boy nods and pulls a meal replacement bar out of his pocket, showing it to her as proof. Myra nods approval.

MYRA (CONT'D)

Okay, I'll see you later!! Maybe your granddad and my brother will come back with a new dress for mommy and me!

Myra waves and skips away. Small Boy sits back down cross legged in-front of his circle of cars. After a moment he starts lining them up again.

END OF FLASHBACK

EXT. NOT OVERLY BUSY HIGHWAY--DAY

THE HITCHHIKER is walking forward, stick in his hand, pretending it's a conductor's stick, conducting an invisible orchestra. He smiles to himself and tosses the stick into the grass beside him.

HITCHHIKER (V.O.)

Not everybody called me crazy when I was a kid. And that was a good thing. There were folks that cared about me. I never forgot that.

The Hitchhiker stares ahead again, thoughtful.

INT. OLDSMOBILE IN MOTION-DAY

TORY and TRYN are looking out the back window of the Oldsmobile now, and then Tory turns forward to talk to CARRIE who's still driving.

TORY

Why did that truck just leave that man on the road and drive away? Do you think he's in trouble?

CARRIE

No sweetie, he's hitchhiking. That means he's trying to get strangers to drive him somewhere.

TRYN

Let's give him a ride to the playland, mom. Maybe he's looking for a playland like us.

TORY

He's too old for a playland, Tryn. He's too dirty too. And he looks really ugly.

TRYN

The way I see it, he needs a playland. Then he won't look so old and ugly.

CARRIE

That's the way you see it is it? Well it's not safe to pick up strangers anyway guys.

(MORE)

CARRIE (CONT'D)

You never know if they're going to be nice or not.

FORWARD/FUTURE

EXT. LAKE BEACH--DAY

CARRIE and LAURA (50) sit close to each other on a blanket. Laura is a thin woman with a peace sign nose ring and a natural look. Neither of the women wear makeup and both have bare feet. They watch a boat out on the lake while occupying a small piece of sand, a tiny bit of beach. TADEN is sitting by Carries feet playing with a teether and slobbering on her toes. Both Carrie and Laura are serene and content.

CARRIE

How is it that your husband and my sons love fishing so much? Basically it's sitting around and doing nothing.

LAURA

Beats me, Carrie. You sure as hell couldn't pay those boys to sit around and do nothing at the house. But get them out here, out on the lake with Tom, and they are quiet and still. It's bloody perplexing!

CARRIE

Yup. But I reeeaaaally like it!

Both ladies laugh.

CARRIE (CONT'D)

Mom, I can't tell you how grateful I am to you. You and Tom. Who'd have though that having Children's Protective Services try and take my kids would be such a gift to me as a mom?

LAURA

Maybe that's often how it works. Maybe the jerks are onto something?

CARRIE

I don't know. There's something overwhelming about knowing that people with the power to take your kids are watching. It makes it harder to be a good mom.

LAURA

Of course it bloody would! Wondering what they even consider "good parenting" instead of focussing on your own parenting style.

CARRIE

Yeah, and it's so confusing. I mean, one minute I think I should yell so that I look like I'm all about tough love, and another minute I'm patient and coaxing and syrupy sweet so that I look like I'm never mean. In all the "so I look like" the kids and I get totally lost.

LAURA

That sounds damned exhausting.

MOM

It is. And it's not just CPS I was worried about either. It was everyone. Everyone was a potential phone call away from having my kids taken away. I got afraid to go anywhere.

LAURA

Well, I think you're a gorgeous and amazing mom. So screw them.

CARRIE

Would you be willing to put that in writing so I can send it to that fake nice lady who wanted to take my boys? Although, you might be considered biased.

LAURA

Of course I'm bloody biased! But, I'm also right. When you were little all you ever talked about was being a mom. Well, that and Michael Jackson. Oh, and Nancy Drew mysteries.

CARRIE

Oh ya! I forgot all about my Nancy Drew phase! I wonder if my boys will like reading the way I did?

LAURA

Just steer clear of any stories with Power Rangers. A full blown war would break out over who gets to be which one.

Mom and daughter laugh and Laura reaches down to pat baby's bottom. She sees an ant crawling on his leg and wipes it off, then looks around to see if there are any more pests.

CARRIE

Being here with you, seeing my boys be loved by people other than me, getting a break while they go fishing with your husband. Thank-you mom.

LAURA

Carrie, You don't have to thank me. I would never have seen this side of Tom if it weren't for you and the boys.

MOM

I like him. He's good for you.

LAURA

When I first told him you were coming I had my doubts. He's so quiet and kids are loud. Not that I mind sweetie, but I wasn't sure about him. But, his exact words were, "Laura, I love you but you are bloody boring. Having some boys around here would be a nice change."

CARRIE

I'm pretty sure "bloody boring" is you, not him.

LAURA

Well, he said "it's getting dull" or something bloody boring sounding like that.

They giggle. Laura turns and looks directly at Carrie.

LAURA (CONT'D)

He was right. You are a nice change. While you've been here I've watched you blossom as well.

CARRIE

I don't know about blossoming. That sounds kind of cheesy.

LAURA

Fine, I've watched you bloody blossom. You know what I mean. Get comfortable.

CARRIE

I have felt more like myself. My writing's going slow, but now it feels like that's a good thing rather than me being a failure.

LAURA

Well, that's a good thing.

CARRIE

When I play with my kids it feels like I'm making an active choice to be a mom, rather than like I'm making an active choice not to be a writer. Does that make sense?

LAURA

Plenty of sense. Like those articles you write. If there wasn't going to be someone to read them you'd just be avoiding life. But because you know there's going to be a reader to read them you feel like an active part of something.

CARRIE

That's true. I sometimes imagine the reader, it helps me do my best to get my point across.

LAURA

Well, being here with me, you feel your choices different. You know, because you sort of have an audience. I don't know how to explain it. Hell, you're the writer, not me!

Carrie picks Taden up off of the blanket and stands up. Looking out at the water she smiles. We hear CHILDREN'S VOICES come in from out on the lake.

CARRIE

Oh, mom, that makes so much sense. I wish I understood that before. I could have let my own children and myself be enough of an audience.

LAURA

Hey now! I'm glad you're here. I'm a mom too, and a damn grandma! I like doing a bit of parenting now and then.

Carrie looks back and smiles deviously at Laura.

CARRIE

I'll be sure to sneak out of the house in the middle of the night to go drinking with my friends.

LAURA

Don't you dare! Where do you think this classy streak of grey hair came from? Let's leave it at classy please.

The women laugh.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Plus, Dr. Hook isn't around anymore. You know my idea of parenting was dragging you with me while I followed my favorite bands, especially them, around.

CARRIE

(laughing)

I might have been the only kid in elementary school asking to go to a Freaker's Ball!

LAURA

Yeah, well, your mom WAS the real life Gertrude the Groupie.

They laugh and start singing Gertrude the Groupie:

CARRIE & LAURA

"Roland the roadie, loves Gertrude the Groupie, and Gertrude the Groupie loves groups!"

Carrie and Laura laugh, and Taden giggles in mom's arms.

CARRIE

I'm glad that I'm here to, I guess
it's okay that I needed your
parenting again.

LAURA

So my "you have a new audience"
thing was useful advice? It helped?
I'm a good mom?

CARRIE

Are you getting worried about CPS
taking me away from you?

LAURA

I'd like to see those bloody
assholes try! Seriously though, I
made sense?

Carrie looks back out at the lake and kisses Taden on the top
of the head.

CARRIE

Oh, ya, it made my favorite kind of
sense.

END OF FUTURE

INT. OLDSMOBILE IN MOTION-DAY

CARRIE combs her hair with her fingers as the boys watch out
the window for a Playland. She yawns and reaches for a
toothbrush she keeps in her purse and begins brushing her
teeth to stay awake.

A transport TRUCK DRIVER honks his horn and as he passes her
from his position in the slow lane, he attempts to get her
attention for a little travel and flirt session. Carrie
pretends not to notice and slows the car down so she can get
behind him and exit the highway.

INT. TRANSPORT TRUCK IN MOTION-DAY

The TRUCK DRIVER (45) laughs kindheartedly. Flirting on the
road is a popular pastime, but he's not offended when another
traveler doesn't want to play. He sings "King of the Road" to
himself, then turns up the volume on his voice for his
passenger. Beside him is THE HITCHHIKER, quiet and
reflective. His backpack is on the floorboard at his feet and
he's tapping his foot to the song.

HITCHHIKER (V.O.)

Sometimes I don't know who's telling the stories. Is it me? Is it this highway? And when I get in a car or truck I sometimes hear their story and mix it in with my own. You know, I used to have my own story. Once upon a time.

The Hitchhiker looks out the window, tapping the glass to the tune of the Truck Driver's song.

HITCHHIKER (V.O.)

I used to have my own story. But now I jus' use parts of mine to fill in the ones on these roads. Does that make me crazy? I don't think so. I feel and hope and love, jus' like anyone. Maybe what I love ain't always real, but the feeling is. What is a life anyway? An ever evolving story. Or a collection of 'em. Once, miles ago, I worried about thinkin' too much. But I've seen enough of the world to figure there's nothin else I ought to be doing. Not me anyhow. Oh I'm sure I could find some kinda doctor somewhere that would give me some kinda drug for who I am. But I share my stories sometimes, in my own way. I think that might make me sort of useful. Maybe I am crazy, but I don't think so.

The Truck Driver takes a sip of a huge coffee. He puts it down and offers a bottle of water from a cooler behind him to the Hitchhiker, who accepts it with a smile.

TRUCK DRIVER

You're not a big talker, are ya?

The Hitchhiker shakes his head no, but continues to smile. His silence is comforting rather than awkward. It encourages his companion to do the talking.

TRUCK DRIVER (CONT'D)

Talking's overrated anyways. I never knew nobody who got anything worthwhile done by talking.

The Truck Driver takes a handful of sunflower seeds out of a bag sitting between him and the Hitchhiker. He offers a handful to his passenger who, once again, accepts wordlessly but graciously.

TRUCK DRIVER (CONT'D)

You know who does a shit load of talking? Politicians. They talk and talk and talk, seems like they're so busy talking they don't got time for doing. And then there's political pundits, talking's all they're good for! A whole world of folks making too much money, taking and fighting and doing nothing. Am I right?

The Truck Driver looks over to the Hitchhiker who looks genuinely interested. So he continues.

TRUCK DRIVER (CONT'D)

Now me, I get busy doing. Hauling my load across the country, and if this rig breaks down I get my ass under the hood and fix it. With my hands and my tools back there. I don't talk about the problem, I fix it. Simple.

The Truck Driver opens his window up to spit out a mouthful of shells. The Hitchhiker has quietly been collecting his in his hand. He looks at the Truck Driver expectantly, urging him with his attentiveness to continue.

TRUCK DRIVER (CONT'D)

Same goes with everything else. When I'm hungry, I eat. I don't talk about it, I fix it. And when my kid gives me a hard time--I got a seventeen year old boy running around the city with an attitude as big as this countryside--I get him out there with me under the hood of his car and we work with our hands. Or I get a load of lumber and we build us a gazebo in the yard. We fix stuff, build stuff, and he gets to see what it is to build and fix. It's not talking and fighting about it, it's getting your hands dirty and your back sweaty and doing the work.

The Truck Driver looks reflective for a moment and then over at the Hitchhiker who's smiling and nodding with understanding.

TRUCK DRIVER (CONT'D)

He's a good kid. He'll be alright. Of course, none of my fixing or building worked when I tried to keep his mom happy. Hell, we can't make 'em all work. Sometimes we go from start to finish with a thing, and other times we just learn from whatever little we do. Some starts aren't meant to be taken all the way to the finish, they're there to give you the tools for the next job. The one you hope you'll finish I guess. That's the way I see it anyways.

The Truck Driver looks over at the Hitchhiker, and then suddenly bursts out laughing. He laughs so hard he's almost in tears.

TRUCK DRIVER (CONT'D)

(laughing)

You're sitting there all quiet... and I can't stop talking... about how... talking doesn't do any good!

Both the Truck Driver and the Hitchhiker get a good laugh out of that bit.

HITCHHIKER (V.O.)

I used to stay in a town. A place with people. The people were good people. Some were better to me than others, but they were all mostly decent. It was alright at first, and I even kept seeing their stories. I'd walk down the street and see the houses and imagine why people were in them, how they got there and what they were fighting for or headed toward.

The men eat sunflower seeds.

HITCHHIKER (V.O.)(CONT'D)

You know, every story needs some kind of conflict to be interestin' or enlightening.

(MORE)

HITCHHIKER (V.O.)(CONT'D)

It doesn't need bad guys in black coats or nothin' but it needs challenges and forward motion. Like I said, it was alright at first, but I couldn't keep it up. I couldn't move forward when I was staying in one place. My stories got real dark and scary. They kept circling and getting dark and I didn't feel free. I got lost.

We are listening to the Hitchhiker's thoughts while watching him and then watching the lines on the highway--repetitive, the same--and then we are watching the Hitchhiker again.

FLASHBACK

EXT. STREET CORNER IN A CITY-DAY

SEVERAL LATINO MEN are standing on a street corner, as GRANDDAD (65) and SMALL BOY approach them. Granddad is fit and dressed in jeans and leather jacket. FRANKIE is a handsome young Mexican man who points toward GRANDDAD looking surprised.

FRANKIE

What's the kid doing here?

GRANDDAD

I just got sick of leaving him alone, okay. The kid's weird enough as it is. I don't think leaving him sitting around the house all the time is helping.

FRANKIE

(to Granddad)
No shit?
(to Small Boy)
Hey kid, what's up?

Small Boy gives him a nod, but he looks a little bit nervous.

GRANDDAD

(to Small Boy)
Just hang back here. I've gotta do a bit of business with these guys and then I'll take you on my errands. Be right back.

Granddad heads over to the group of men. He's way older than any of them, and he's the only white guy, so he stands out as different.

But he also fits in, and everyone looks comfortable with him. They seem to be looking up to him. Small Boy watches in silence and catches a couple of the words here and there.

FRANKIE
...rich bastards....

MEXICAN MAN
(pointing at Small Boy)
Does he even know what happened to his mom? What you did for him?

Granddad shakes his head, shutting him up.

GRANDDAD
...new neighborhood..

The meeting breaks up and everyone heads in different directions, Granddad walking toward Small Boy.

Frankie is walking off with a couple of other guys but turns back to holler at Small Boy.

FRANKIE
Hey, kid! Tell my sister I'll be home in time for supper!

Small Boy nods and smiles, waving goodbye to Frankie. Granddad tousles the hair on his head.

GRANDDAD
Come on. Let's get to work.

EXT. STREET LINED WITH CARS IN AN UPSCALE NEIGHBORHOOD

The weather is cool and SMALL BOY and GRANDDAD are walking with their hands in their pockets. Small Boy is wearing a backpack that's almost full.

GRANDDAD
Is the bag heavy?

Small Boy shakes his head no, although he looks overburdened.

GRANDDAD (CONT'D)
Just one more car and we'll head home. I think that one up ahead with the headlights left on will be perfect. Batteries gonna be dead soon, so they'll have bigger fish to fry.

Granddad and Small Boy head over to a silver Acura with the headlights left on. As they get closer they see that it's actually running, and Granddad smiles.

GRANDDAD (CONT'D)

Like stealing candy from a baby.
But instead we're stealing crap
people can live without from
pompous assholes.

Small Boy and Granddad reach the car and while Granddad opens the door and pops the trunk, Small Boy looks around for people. Granddad pockets an iPod that was sitting on the passenger seat, closes the door and walks quickly to the back of the car where he lifts the trunk and peeks for anything worthwhile. Grabbing a pair of expensive runners he closes the trunk and motions for Small Boy to walk ahead of him. As they walk away he tucks the shoes into the Backpack which is overstuffed and won't close.

They keep walking in silence, quickly but not running or afraid. They seem to be in the clear when a BUSINESS MAN (60) dressed in a suit and tie steps out of an overly fancy house that Granddad and Small Boy are walking by. Business Man stops short and drops his briefcase. Granddad stops walking and just stares him down.

BUSINESS MAN

It's you! Mother Fucker, it's you!

Granddad stands there staring, with an angry grin. Small boy reaches up and grabs his hand, which pulls him out of his own feelings and reminds him that he's got the boy with him. Reluctantly he looks away from the Business Man and takes Small Boy hurriedly away. Business Man stands on his stoop, angry but afraid, and yells at them.

BUSINESS MAN (CONT'D)

You God damned Mother Fucker! I
know it was you! You might have
fooled those blind bastards in the
court but I'm no fool! You did it!
You killed my boy, and for what??
Your slutty whore daughter?! Fuck,
fuck, fuck!

Granddad stops for a minute and looks down at Small Boy. Small Boy looks frightened and Granddad is shaking with anger. But he takes the backpack from his grandson and puts it on his own back, and then lifts up Small Boy in his arms. They continue to walk away, quickly.

The sound of Business Man's crying and random swears follows them down the cold street.

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. TRANSPORT TRUCK IN MOTION-DAY

THE HITCHHIKER eats sunflower seeds and sips his bottled water. The TRUCK DRIVER searches through CDs he has littered around the interior of his cab when he finds one that makes him light up. He holds up the case to show the Hitchhiker, it's a Best Of Dr. Hook Cd, and the Hitchhiker nods approval. The Truck Driver sticks it in the CD player and they listen to CARRY ME CARRIE.

HITCHHIKER (V.O.)

My stories got dark and violent.
Violence is okay, it's part of
life, but out of violence somthin'
should grow. Somethin' beautiful
and strong. But when I wasn't
moving they circled darker. There
was only crazy left.

The TRUCK DRIVER picks up his huge coffee again to take a sip and is suddenly cut off by a large pickup truck on real big high tires, almost as high as the transport itself.

Some of the coffee spills on the Truck Driver's crotch and as he swears and wipes at it with napkins, the Hitchhiker looks into the pickup and sees a young girl, AMBER, staring out her window with a vacant look. Our attention follows the Hitchhiker into the pickup.

INT. DUALY PICK-UP TRUCK IN MOTION-LATE DAY

A clean, well dressed COWBOY (45) drives the truck. Lettering on the side reads "Kirk's Construction". AMBER (12) sits beside him, staring tensely out the window. Cowboy is on the phone, COUNTRY MUSIC is playing softly. Amber is dressed in a track suit and her legs are pressed tightly together, she leans on the door as though she would like to jump out. Hand sanitizer sits in the cup holder and a gym bag rests by the girl's feet. Cowboy flicks open the glove compartment to put away a CD, chewing tobacco and a gun are visible. Cowboy leaves the glove compartment open while Amber purposely looks away.

COWBOY

(into the phone)

Yeah, she's doing real good. Do you need me to pick up dinner? She's probably hungry, and I know I am! Okay, cool. Hey, I don't mind doing it, you're usually the one who gets stuck with the running around. See you in about twenty minutes. Bye.

Cowboy looks at the girl. She doesn't look at him.

COWBOY (CONT'D)

Your mom is real proud of you, Amber. Me too. Damn it, the whole town is. Won't be surprised to see you win a gold in the Olympics! It's too bad you're always so tense at the end of practice.

Somehow the girl tenses more.

AMBER

(quiet, like the wind's
knocked out of her)

I'm not tense.

COWBOY

(laughing)

What's that? Not tense!

He reaches over and tries to shake her leg which hardly moves.

COWBOY (CONT'D)

You call that not tense?
(he turns the music up)
Come here, Amber. Let me help you relax.

Amber doesn't move.

COWBOY (CONT'D)

It makes me feel good to help you relax. Come here, let me do this for you.

Amber closes her eyes and slides toward Cowboy, her back toward him.

COWBOY (CONT'D)

A little closer, that's better.

Amber's back is to Cowboy, he reaches his arm around her waist and into her track pants. We pan up from his hand to her face; she's not crying, just staring. Only her jaw moves as she grinds her teeth.

COWBOY (CONT'D)

That's it, relax. That feels good doesn't it? I love doing this for you. You are so special you need this. Relax.

Amber disappears into herself.

FLASHBACK

INT. FANCY BATHROOM IN A PRIVATE HOME-EVENING

AMBER is crying, fully dressed and sitting in an empty tub with the curtain closed. She hits her leg and pinches her thighs. She gets up and walks to the sink, rinsing her face and taking great pains not to see herself in the mirror.

A scorpion crawls along the bathroom floor toward Amber's stockinged feet. Amber looks down, sees the arachnid and watches it for a moment. Then she takes a pair of manicure scissors, bends down and stabs the scorpion. After watching it struggle and die she flushes it and replaces the scissors.

Amber unlocks the bathroom door and heads out to the hallway.

INT. HALLWAY IN AMBER'S HOME-EVENING

AMBER walks slowing toward the sound of FAMILY CHATTER and DISHES CLATTERING in the next room. She's no longer crying but standing there hugging herself.

MOTHER (O.S.)

Amber, baby, hurry up. Supper's going to get cold.

HANNAH (O.S.)

Stay in there Amber! Mom made collard greens, save yourself!

Amber takes a breath and steps into the dining room.

INT. FANCY DINING ROOM IN AMBER'S HOME-EVENING

HANNAH (15) is sitting at the large heavy wood dining table, a pretty teen with perfectly falling dark hair.

The table is fully set as MOTHER (40), a perfectly put together woman, finishes placing items on plates and COWBOY sits comfortably at the head of the table. Everyone is well put together and perfectly pressed. The atmosphere is one of southern charm and affluence. Hannah holds up a fork with collard greens.

HANNAH

Told ya, collard greens.

MOTHER

Yes, well, a Mother's got to do what a mother's got to do. You okay, Amber?

AMBER

(with forced smile)

Yeah, I'm fine. It was a rough practice.

COWBOY

You should have seen how tense she was when I picked her up. She relaxed a little on the drive home, hey hun.

Cowboy looks over at Amber. Amber nods, avoids his look and sits down. Mother sits down at her place on the end of the table. She looks awkwardly at Amber and for a moment she looks worried. The moment passes and she perks up, smiling a fake smile, she looks over at her husband.

MOTHER

I'm just so glad you could pick her up. I had no idea my class was going to run so late.

COWBOY

Anytime. It was fun.

HANNAH

I don't know why you take a ceramics class anyway, Mother. I mean, that's something we do in high school and it's useless.

MOTHER

(holding up salad plate)
You call this pretty plate useless?

HANNAH

The plate's not useless, Mother. Making it yourself is useless. You can just buy it at the store.

MOTHER

It's not the same. Making it myself
I can design it however I want. I
can make it pretty and feel pride
in the finished product.

Cowboy is listening to the conversation while smirking. He gets a kick out of the banter, and feels as though anything the girls do is less important than the work he himself does.

HANNAH

So make me a mug with Vin Diesel's
face on it. Wait, no, his arms!
They're so sexy! That wouldn't be
useless!

Mother rolls her eyes and both Hannah and Amber laugh. Amber's starting to look a little bit more comfortable.

MOTHER

(under her breath)
Vin Diesel Mug. That's not pretty.

AMBER

Vin Diesel isn't hot. He has a
funny profile. Besides, he's kind
of old.

HANNAH

Well, I like real men. Not boys
like Zac Efron or Peta or whoever
it is you're into these days.

MOTHER

Amber's only twelve, she's not into
boys yet, Hannah. No need to rush
her either.

HANNAH

She'll be thirteen next month,
Mother.

MOTHER

Don't remind me. I'm getting so
old.

HANNAH

(baiting her mother)
You know, Mother, Amber's pretty.
I'm sure the boys are into her.

MOTHER

Well, that's why your dad and I
carry guns.

(MORE)

MOTHER (CONT'D)

We'll keep those boys away while Amber makes something special of herself. We've worked hard getting her where she is for too long to let some boy ruin it for us.

Hannah and Amber look at each other and shake their heads.

HANNAH

Yes, Mother, it's been so much work for *all* of you! Y'all deserve whatever prizes come your way.

COWBOY

Hey, don't sass your Mother.

HANNAH

(apologetic)
Yes, sir. Sorry sir.

COWBOY

You could have been even farther along than your sister if you hadn't quit. Quit tumbling, then quit cheering, then quit twirling, then quit track...

Hannah's mood shifts and Amber looks over at her sister sadly.

HANNAH

(quietly)
I just want to sing.

COWBOY

And I just want to eat my meal.

MOTHER

Yes, girls, that's enough. Let your father eat in peace.

The room is quiet as everyone feels the Cowboy's energy and waits for it to shift. He takes a big bite of his meat.

COWBOY

This is a damn fine steak woman! I was hungry.

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. DUALY PICK-UP TRUCK IN MOTION-LATE DAY

COWBOY is still touching AMBER as he drives along the highway. His truck is so high up that there's no real fear of folks seeing in, and Cowboy enjoys the power of knowing they can't see. Amber looks distant, only her jaw motion proving the tension and fear.

COWBOY

Now you're relaxing. Pass me that baggy. See how good it makes me feel to help you out like this. Look, Amber, look at what it does, put the baggy on now and just hold real tight. That's it, doesn't this feel great, tighter. That's it. Thanks...

There's the SOUND OF PLASTIC MOVING and both Amber and Cowboy move around a bit. He loves it, she struggles to hold back tears.

The Cowboy throws the ziplock bag out the window and puts himself away. Then he uses the hand sanitizer. Amber scoots back by the window and looks outside again.

COWBOY (CONT'D)

You must feel so much better. Good thing you keep this between us. The way I see it we shouldn't have to keep it secret but I know no one would understand just how tense you get, how much you need me to do that. I know other people wouldn't get it, they'd call you names. All that crap people do. It's just backwards, this world, when a man can't even help out his daughter.

Cowboy relaxes and listens to music while Amber is silently crying.

FLASHBACK

INT. AMBER'S TIDY BEDROOM-NIGHT

AMBER lies on her bed, HANNAH sits on the floor doing her nails. They have an iPod playing in the docking system, a popular P!NK song is playing. The girls again are surrounded by comfortable southern affluence and charm.

Hannah is singing along to the song and her voice is powerful. The song ends.

HANNAH

I think I'll make a YouTube video of me singing that song.

AMBER

It'd probably go viral.

HANNAH

Could you imagine if, like, P!NK saw it and asked me to sing on her next album? Y'all would be believers then! That'd show dad and Mother! I'd be the one in the paper that day!

AMBER

I wish you were the one in the paper now.

HANNAH

Yeah, right. You always act like you don't like it but that's bull. If I was on the front page you'd be jealous. Admit it.

AMBER

No I wouldn't. I'm going to quit gymnastics anyway.

HANNAH

Ha! Like dad or Mother would even let you! Besides, you love it. You always have.

AMBER

Mom and dad let you quit. Anyway, I'm done. I'm quitting.

HANNAH

Your coach practically lives next door. How awkward will that be when you see her every day and she's shaking her head because you're a quitter?

AMBER

I like Miss Olena. She'll give me a hard time for a while, but she's got lots of other girls. She'll forget about me soon enough.

(MORE)

AMBER (CONT'D)

Anyway, I don't care. I'm just quitting.

HANNAH

I don't get it. You love gymnastics. You can't want to quit, it's gotta be something else. Like, a boy or something.

AMBER

(looking up at the ceiling)
No. It's too much work. I hate it.

HANNAH

I'm older than you and I know something else is bugging you. You don't even sleep anymore.

AMBER

Yes I do. How could I not sleep?

HANNAH

Don't lie to me little sister. I will never quit dreaming about Vin Diesel and you will never quit flipping and flying and tumbling through the air. What's really gong on?

AMBER

I hate dad.

HANNAH

Everyone hates their dad. Dads are assholes. What does that have to do with quitting?

AMBER

(quietly now)
I hate it when he picks me up. I hate it when he helps me relax.

Amber starts crying. Hannah stands up and looks at her sister for a full ten seconds. She's confused and scared. She wants to help but now knows it might be too serious.

HANNAH

(sounding angry)
What are you talking about?

AMBER

He's always touching me...

HANNAH

Of course he touches you, he's your dad. You had better get more sleep Amber and stop trying to get all this attention. Isn't it enough the whole town know who you are? Just think about that and stop crying like a little baby. I'm going to my room.

Hannah storms out and Amber tries to stop crying.

INT. HALLWAY IN AMBER'S HOME-NIGHT

HANNA'S back to us, she stands quietly in the hallway, facing her room. Her head is down, she looks deflated. Hesitantly she begins to turn back, but changes her mind. Hannah lifts her head up and walks away from her sister's room and heads to her own.

INT. AMBER'S TIDY BEDROOM-NIGHT

AMBER has stopped crying and stares at her door, where her sister has recently walked out. After a moment she picks up her backpack and takes it to her desk to work on homework.

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. DUALY PICK-UP TRUCK IN MOTION-LATE DAY

AMBER looks at her dad, COWBOY. He's singing to the CD and smiles at her. She gives a weak smile back.

COWBOY

Did you see that transport truck?
About a mile back?

AMBER

I thinks so. Sure.

COWBOY

What's that?

AMBER

Yes sir. I saw it.

COWBOY

Before I started in construction I thought about driving a truck. A friend of mine was doing it.

INT. TRANSPORT TRUCK IN MOTION-LATE DAY

The TRUCK DRIVER and the HITCHHIKER are still riding in comfortable silence, like old friends.

TRUCK DRIVER

This is gonna sound nuts, but I gotta say it. You're good company.

The Hitchhiker smiles big and nods a thank you.

TRUCK DRIVER (CONT'D)

You haven't said a word, but I've been sitting here thinking about shit different. Like, my kid? He's always hounding me about wantin' to take pictures. As a damned living. I won't listen, he's just thinking like a stupid kid-talking crap. But you got me thinking different. Like maybe doing things with your hands, fixin' stuff and building stuff, is only one way to make things. Like maybe takin' pictures can be like building a gazebo. It gives people a place to think...

The Hitchhiker is nodding and almost beaming.

TRUCK DRIVER (CONT'D)

I mean, you got me thinkin' different and you haven't said a damned word! Maybe pictures is like that. They don't do too much talking, but they make you think different. I dunno.

The Truck Driver looks thoughtful and falls into comfortable silence again.

HITCHHIKER (V.O.)

When I was traveling with that beautiful Labrador I realized that sometimes focusing on a new friend can move my story forward. It ain't always about goin' somewhere else, but can be about doin' something different. I thought about things when I was with her that moved my mind forward in new ways. Nice ways. I liked it. It was good.

INT. DUALY PICK-UP TRUCK IN MOTION-LATE DAY

AMBER and COWBOY look more comfortable now.

AMBER

Why didn't you? Why didn't you drive a truck like your friend?

COWBOY

Ahhh, he was gone too much, my friend, and his girlfriend was always stepping out on him. I figured it'd be safer to work close to home.

Amber nods and looks out the window for a moment.

AMBER

You'd probably pick up a lot of hitchhikers if you were a truck driver. My friend's dad told me one time he liked the pie at the truck stops and the people he picked up hitchhiking. He's a truck driver.

COWBOY

I'm sure he likes the pie at the truck stops. Most of those truckers do!

Cowboy laughs to himself, appreciating his own joke and assuming his daughter doesn't get it. Amber just ignores him and continues to stare out the window.

Quietly she even begins to sing to herself.

FORWARD/FUTURE

INT. TUMBLING GYM-NIGHT

There are floor mats everywhere and TEENAGE GIRLS gathering gym bags as they head toward the locker room. Talk is quiet and OLENA (30) the coach, is putting equipment away. Olena is athletic with smooth incredibly dark skin. She has a look of sharp awareness, but is also tired.

AMBER stays back while the girls head out of the room and she slowly walks up to her coach. She looks a little bit nervous.

AMBER

Um, coach? M'am?

OLENA

Yes?

AMBER

I was hoping I could ask you for a job.

OLENA

(stopping to look at Amber)

Well, don't hope. Ask. What kind of job are you talking about?

AMBER

I could clean up the place after our sessions. You know, so that you could do office work or whatever. You're always saying that there's not enough time for everything you need to do.

OLENA

Yeah, well, there's not enough time but there's not enough money either, girl. Go home and ask your parents for extra work.

Olena turns away from Amber and gets busy moving a spring board. Amber picks up a mini trampoline as she follows her instructor.

AMBER

Well, that's just it. I don't want to get paid. I just want to learn about owning a gym.

OLENA

Owning a gym is nothing like competing, Amber.

AMBER

I've never wanted to become a gold medalist, but I've always thought it would be cool to coach a team, and to own my own gym.

OLENA

You're only twelve! Trust me, don't rush it.

AMBER

I'm thirteen now, ma'am.

OLENA

Still, don't rush it. You've got plenty of time to worry about grown up problems like running a business. Trust me, girl, take advantage of being young and avoid the stress.

AMBER

I can't. Sometimes stress happens no matter what. Sometimes you have to figure out being grown up anyway.

OLENA

Are you in some kind of trouble, Amber?

AMBER

No, I just mean, ummm, I get stressed when I don't know what my future will be. I really want to learn about running a gym.

Olena takes a moment but doesn't look at Amber.

OLENA

How long would you want to stay? I'm not sure you could learn much just by tidying up. You'd have to help me in the office for that.

AMBER

(overly quickly)
Yes ma'am. Ummm...that would be really helpful. I'd like that. I can stay as long as you need. My parents won't mind. You know,
(she takes a breath)
Because you could just take me home when you close up since I live pretty close to you.

Olena stops what she's doing and looks straight at Amber. She sees both desperation and determination on the girl. She's about to speak when she changes her mind. Instead, Olena motions the girl to follow her and, after Amber grabs her gym bag, they head into the office.

INT. LITTERED OFFICE-NIGHT

AMBER drops her gym bag on the office floor. OLENA walks over to her desk and pulls out a flyer.

She hands it to Amber then reaches for one of the trophies on a shelf and plays with it absentmindedly.

OLENA

Do you think you could make flyers for me? Like that one?

AMBER

Exactly like this one?

OLENA

Not exactly, this is an old one. And I'll let you design them how you want as long as you get all of the information we need on them. There are some out of town competitions coming up as well as a few fun ones here at the studio. Parent permission slips are done, but I want to advertise here in our community as well.

AMBER

You mean try and get an audience that's not just family and family friends?

OLENA

You got it girl! I want them to know how much you ladies do, and how well you do it.

AMBER

Oh, I'd love to! Actually I'm pretty good at this stuff. Last year I made Hannah a fake wedding invitation to her fake wedding with Vin Diesel. It was her favorite birthday present, and I did a really good job! I didn't now I could do it. I thought it was going to look silly but there it was, looking all professional!

Olena smiles at Amber. Amber is looking much more comfortable in her skin, much more her own age and quite excited now.

OLENA

Well, hun, I like the idea. But I would also like to pay you. At least something.

AMBER

Are you charging people to come to the performance?

OLENA

A little.

AMBER

Maybe you could give me a small percentage of what you make at the door. You know, like giving me incentive to create such amazing flyers that people would be fools if they don't come to our event.

OLENA

Amber, girl, that is an excellent idea. I think you just might have a knack for this business thing.

AMBER

I hope so.

OLENA

(serious)
But if you start to slack off on your floor work, the deal's off. Okay?

AMBER

(sighing)
Sure. Yes ma'am. That's fine.

Olena considers saying more. She looks concerned but then shrugs. Amber seems to be solving a problem, so she lets her do it her own way. Amber picks up her gym bag.

AMBER (CONT'D)

Can I start this Wednesday?

OLENA

You're sure your parents won't mind? You'll get home kind of late.

AMBER

Oh, they won't mind. My mom sometimes has a hard time getting here to pick me up anyway. They'll be grateful.

OLENA

Well, have them call me if they have questions. Okay?

AMBER

Yes ma'am. I will.

Amber's phone buzzes in her bag. She pulls it out and looks at it.

AMBER (CONT'D)

That's my mom, she's waiting for me outside. So, I'll work Wednesday after practice?

OLENA

Okay girl. I'll be sure to make a place for you to work on my desk. In the meantime, think about those flyers.

Amber smiles and waves goodbye to her coach as she heads out of the office.

END OF FUTURE

INT. DUALY PICK-UP TRUCK IN MOTION-LATE DAY

AMBER sings quietly to herself as she picks her phone up out of her gym bag. She looks at it and sees nothing of interest so she puts it on her lap. Then she turns to look out the window and sees a teenage girl, JADE, in the Ford Expedition staring out her window. They share a moment.

INT. FORD EXPEDITION IN MOTION--LATE DAY

An attractive family. MARK (50), the dad, drives, wearing a crisp t-shirt and jeans, an "outing with the family" outfit. Similarly SHELLY (50), the mom, sits in the passenger seat wearing a tank top and jogging shorts. A teenage girl, JADE (16), slouches as she stares out of the window, with headphones on and a journal (or diary) on her lap. She's a mature looking sixteen, dressed in dark clothes. Her brother, ZACH (13) plays a game on his phone. He's tiny and thin, with thick glasses. He's a contrasting mix of nerdy and fantastically hip. The entire family looks different from each other, though they are all Caucasian. There's evidence of fast food littered about but it's apparent that the vehicle is generally well kept.

SHELLY

Jade, what are you staring at?

JADE

The girl in that truck looked sad.

Shelly looks toward the truck and feigns interest.

SHELLY

Really?

MARK

She's probably just bored.

JADE

I guess.

Jade stares out the window a few more minutes and then turns back to her diary. She appears to be using it as a sketch pad. She turns up the music on her phone and starts doodling.

MARK

(to his wife)

Bill said the place looks real good. He stopped by last week when I told him we'd make be making our trip early this year. He said Mother Nature's been working her charm over the place, said it looks better than it has in years.

Shelly twirls her hair absently with her finger. As she gets excited she twirls faster.

SHELLY

I love Mother Nature! Of course, she can be a pain in the butt when I have to wrestle her in my garden, and that year when we got to the cabin and a tree root had gotten into the sewer pipes...she was laughing at us then I'm sure!

MARK

(lighthearted)

That was pretty nasty. But Mother Nature's beauty also lies in her ability to humble us.

Shelly and the kids exchange eye rolls and smiles.

MARK (CONT'D)

Oh, ya, Bill also told me to be sure we lock our car doors. Apparently some people have been "carhopping" in the area.

Shelly drops the hair she's been twisting and looks worried.

SHELLY

What's carhopping? And why does it mean we have to lock our doors?

MARK

(to Zach and Jade)
Go ahead, tell your mother what carhopping is you guys.

Jade and Zach exchange knowing glances. Then they both turn toward their dad and put on overly comical innocent faces.

JADE

Carhopping, daddy?? What on earth is carhopping?

ZACH

It sounds like something only hooligans and sinners would engage in!

JADE

Sinners and hooligans?! Quickly, let's pray for them now.

ZACH

Yeah, that way they'll see the error of their ways, and we won't have the inconvenience of having to lock our doors.

MARK

(serious in a kind way)
Very funny. Obviously you know what it is so tell me honestly. Have either of you ever been carhopping? Peer pressure can be pretty serious at your age, I remember. You can tell me honestly and we'll talk about it.

Shelly begins to twirl her hair again, nervously.

SHELLY

What is this carhopping?

ZACH

It's when people break into cars and steal stuff. That's all. And no, dad, I've never been carhopping.

MARK

What do you mean "that's all"?
Zach, stealing from others is very
serious. It's a sin for good
reason.

SHELLY

Oh goodness! I would hate for that
to happen to us!

JADE

(under her breath)
Unlike all the other people who
love it.

SHELLY

Our things aren't worth anything
real in the hands of other people.
It's just money and stuff to them.
But they're our lives and stories,
they're our memories...

JADE

Some people would see it the
opposite way. Our stuff is just
stuff to us, but money to buy food
or pay bills to them.

MARK

Well, I bet most of these
carhopping kids aren't buying food.

JADE

(under her breath)
Unless they have the munchies...

SHELLY

Jade, have any of your friends
talked about this carhopping?

JADE

Honestly, I don't know anybody who
does it. But I do know one guy who
bought a laptop real cheap because
the guy he got it from stole it out
of a car. That's why I've heard of
it.

SHELLY

See! Laptops usually have pictures
and videos on them, personal stuff!
I'd just cry if we lost our laptop!

Everyone in the car becomes quiet for a few moments. We can see them looking at their stuff differently, possibly thinking about losing their things.

MARK

Well, Bill said it wasn't a huge problem anyway. Just something to be aware of. Oh, ya, he wants to have coffee with us on Saturday. I said it would be great to see him. Hope you don't mind.

SHELLY

(smiling now)

Bill's a good guy. I don't understand at all how he's gone so many years alone and still seems so, I don't now, content.

MARK

He claims to like being alone. Sounds lonely to me.

Mark reaches over to touch Shelly's knee, Zach in the backseat pretends to gag and Mark and Shelly get more affectionate. Jade is now writing in her diary. She looks up at her parents then down at their clasped hands. She looks back down at her diary and pretends to write.

JADE

(with mock seriousness)

My mom and dad are gross. They think they are the perfect example of marriage and love for their children, but really they just make us sick. I have therefore decided to become a nun.

ZACH

Good one, Jade. However if sexy Jack and his family are up at the cabins I'm sure you will be sinning before you get out of the car.

SHELLY

Zach! Act your age! You are nowhere near old enough to have said what you just said.

ZACH

Mom, I'm thirteen.

SHELLY

Exactly.

MARK
He *is* thirteen.

Shelly gives Mark a little love tap. Jade rolls her eyes and goes back to her diary. She begins to write for real.

FLASHBACK

INT. TWO DOOR MONTE CARLO PARKED-NIGHT

JADE is in the car with one other girl, RAVEN (18), and two boys, SEAN (17) and DAVE (17). Raven, an exotic girl with a fair amount of weight that looks good on her, is dressed in flowing colorful clothes. She wears tons of jewelry. Jade is dressed in dark clothes. Jade and Dave sit in the back seat while Raven and Sean hang out in the front, Sean in the driver's seat. They laugh, smoke cigarettes, and pass vodka around to add to their orange juice. The radio is on rather quietly playing ROCK MUSIC.

JADE
Anybody got a light?

SEAN
Yeah, Jade, just grab it out of my underwear.

JADE
I'll know when I've found it. It'll be the biggest thing.

SEAN
Wanna check?

JADE
It'll be the only hard thing too.

The group laughs.

DAVE
Stop messing with my girl asshole.

JADE
I'm not anyone's girl, Dave.

RAVEN
She's not your girl, she's your woman. Wise, beautiful, mature...

SEAN
Ya, man, and look at her tits! That ain't no girl.

DAVE
Don't be looking at my girls tits,
man.

RAVEN
Ya, Sean, what's wrong with my
tits?

Sean reaches out to touch Raven's breasts.

SEAN
Well, I guess I had better explore
the merchandise. I'll give you a
full report in the morning.

JADE
Take it Raven, it's the only FULL
thing he can offer you.

SEAN
Better stop worrying that I'm
talking about your girls tits,
Dave, and concern yourself with how
often she's baiting me to show her
my dick.

DAVE
I think she's suggesting you don't
have one, fucker.

JADE
Feel Raven up all you want Sean,
you still can't compare our tits
cause you've never seen mine.

SEAN & DAVE
Contest!

RAVEN
(laughing)
You guys first!

SEAN
I don't want to embarrass my best
friend, come on.

DAVE
Ya, I could never compare to his
lighter.

The car fills with teenage flirty drunk laughter. *Cumbersome*
by Seven Mary Three comes on the radio.

JADE
 Oh man, I love this song!
 (turns up the radio)
 I've gotta dance!

Jade opens the door and jumps out of the car, Raven follows. The two guys sit on the hood of the car watching and calling out. Jade dances intense with her eyes shut while Raven is flowing and open, looking at the sky, almost spiritual.

DAVE
 Drinks and a fuckin' show man!

Jade and Raven start dancing provocatively with each other, and to the boys delight they share a french kiss. They break apart, laugh, and fall to the grass.

RAVEN
 Oh, darling! I'm sooooo drunk!

JADE
 (surprised and excited)
 Yeah.

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. FORD EXPEDITION IN MOTION--LATE DAY

ZACH grabs the diary from JADE'S lap.

ZACH
 What kind of brother would I be if
 I didn't try to steal your girly
 secrets?

JADE
 (grabbing the book)
 A living one.

ZACH
 You're lucky I don't really care.
 I'm sure your secrets are as boring
 as a soap opera.

JADE
 And when was the last time you saw
 a soap opera you idiot?

ZACH
 Never, they just sound boring.

SHELLY

They are. I'd be willing to bet that anything your sister writes in that journal would kick the heck out of a soap opera story line any day.

MARK

Zach, no kidding, you better never touch your sister's book. She's entitled to a little privacy.

SHELLY turns in her seat and looks lovingly at her daughter while twisting her hair.

SHELLY

As long as she always tells me everything.

Shelly drops her hair, reaches out and gives Jade a love rub on the knee.

JADE

Actually, mom, I believe the whole purpose of a journal is to vent about your overbearing, abusive, crazy, and totally embarrassing parents.

SHELLY

So you must be the only girl in history whose diary is completely fictional.

Mom and daughter pass a smile between them.

ZACH

(sounding annoyed)
There may be too much love in this family. The way I see it a boy can never become a real man surrounded by this much love.

SHELLY

(to Mark)
You're sure he's thirteen?

MARK

(to Shelly)
Well, he's adopted so we never can know for sure...
(to Zach)
(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

Zach, families are required to throw around this much love when on vacation. But only when on vacation.

Zach is trying to think of a witty comeback when he sees the HITCHHIKER up ahead. He sits on his backpack on the side of the road, writing in a notebook.

ZACH

I bet that guy doesn't have to listen to his family preach about love all day. He's a real free man. Open road, no bills to pay, no family to annoy...

JADE

A diary to write all about his soap opera life in.

As they drive by the Hitchhiker he looks up and salutes them. He continues to stare after the vehicle rather than go back to writing in his notebook.

ZACH

Okay, that's weird. What the heck do you think he's writing about anyway? The interesting life of a speed limit sign?

JADE

The stray dog whisperer?

ZACH

The color of road kill, day four.

JADE

The scent of a man who hasn't showered in one year. A scratch and sniff book!

Jade and Zach laugh and shrug. Jade turns around to look back and can barely see the Hitchhiker.

JADE (CONT'D)

Might be cool though. The freedom to think whatever you want and move as fast or slow as you want.

ZACH

I'm pretty sure I'd be too worried about my next meal to ever enjoy it. Freedom or not.

JADE

Of course, you'd think about food. I threw a pizza crust out the window a few miles back, there's your food.

MARK

Just because he's hitchhiking doesn't mean he's without responsibilities or family. He's probably trying to get home to them right now.

SHELLY

And like Zach said, he's got to figure out food for himself too. That's a big responsibility.

MARK

I imagine he's probably got a home he's just left or one he's going to. I highly doubt he feels free, he probably feels lost and scared.

JADE

Then we should have offered him a ride.

MARK

Sadly, now a days that's just not safe. I have to think of my responsibilities. You and your mom and your brother. I love all mankind, but my job is to take care of you.

SHELLY

I'm hoping you like your job, dear.

MARK

Taking care of my beautiful family is the most fulfilling job I could ever hope to have.

JADE

(cheeky)

Yuck. I'm listening to my music now.

Shelly sits up and drops the hair she's been twisting. She's suddenly remembered something.

SHELLY
 (excitedly)
 Not just yet. Listen to what I got.

She puts a CD in the CD player and turns up *The Preachers Son* (Dusty Springfield). The family sings real loud, obviously a family favorite. When they're done fooling around MARK groans and turns the music down.

MARK
 When did you get that?

SHELLY
 A couple of days ago. I thought it would be nice to have some new CDs for the drive, preachers son.

MARK
 Ha, ha.

SHELLY
 (turning to Jade)
 That was fun! You can go back to whatever you were up to.

JADE
 Thanks, let me know if you decide to make fun of anybody else.

She puts her headphones back on and looks down at her journal.

FLASHBACK

EXT. PARKING LOT OF A HIGH SCHOOL-DAY

JADE is at school, outside on the parking lot smoking with friends, including RAVEN, SEAN and DAVE.

RAVEN
 I love camping. It feels spiritual. But camping with you guys isn't exactly safe.

SEAN
 Babe, I'll be a perfect gentleman. And I'll protect you from the nasty gators.

JADE

Last time we camped there you said the gators were boring because they were just laying there like logs.

RAVEN

And you started throwing rocks at them.

DAVE

And they still just laid there! It was fuckin' hilarious! They were so gangster!

SEAN

If we bring a small dog I'll bet we can see some action.

RAVEN

That's not funny, asshole.

DAVE

(still laughing)

And when you went to take a piss in the grass, you nearly got bit by a copperhead! You screamed like a girl and Raven had to calm you down.

SEAN

Those things are deadly, man. And I was exposed!

RAVEN

How many of us will be going up there? Last year it was only seven of us.

SEAN

Not sure yet.

RAVEN

It'd be cool if we got a whole bunch, like fifteen or twenty of us. We could take over a whole section of the campground and not have to worry so much about noise complaints.

DAVE

Ya, last year the tight asses in the spots next to us were a pain.

SEAN

Too bad the gators didn't visit them.

JADE

You guys will have to go without me. That's the week we'll be up at the cabin.

DAVE

I don't see why you're not inviting your charming boyfriend.

JADE

(teasing)
I don't have one.

SEAN

She's embarrassed to have you around her family, dude. Maybe you could go as the family dog.

DAVE

Only if she promises to tie me up.

JADE

I dunno, Bill might be the one to do you doggie style.

DAVE

Who the hell is Bill?

Dave's jealous at the sound of another guy's name, but Jade doesn't catch on. She's not ever jealous when it comes to Dave.

JADE

He's the guy that lives up there and takes care of the cabins. I'm pretty sure he's gay. And even if you're not his type, tied up he might not be able to resist you. Woof, woof.

SEAN

Oh, man, you'd so be his type. You've got that feminine vibe...

Dave punches Sean in the arm.

DAVE

Don't even.

SEAN

Oooohhhh, and you're kinky! Bet you'd like to be tied up for Bill!

RAVEN

(to Jade)

Are your parents cool with this guy? I mean, I know they're really Christian and all.

JADE

I don't think they even have a clue.

SEAN

Being Christian doesn't mean you gotta hate gays anyway. My cousin's gay and as Christian as they come too.

JADE

Well, don't introduce him to my parents. Zach made some remark about Bill maybe being gay one time and my mom looked like she'd faint.

(twisting her hair and
mocking her mom)

Oh no, Zach, that would be so sad. Being gay happens when a person has been molested as a child and they're afraid to love naturally. It's not exactly their fault, I accept all people of course, but it's sad and a sin. If they're strong they can change.

RAVEN

Darling, you do a pretty good impression of your mom. But you'd have to lose the cigarette.

SEAN

That's fucked up man. Although my cousin's pretty good lookin'. He might have been molested.

Jade and Raven laugh nervously a bit. Sean and Dave have finished their smokes and toss them on the ground.

DAVE

Did you ever see that YouTube video of the kid coming out to his mom and she starts crying and speaking in tongues?

SEAN

Who the fuck would put that on
YouTube?

DAVE

The guy did. He knew his mom would
freak out so he taped the whole
thing. It's hilarious!

Dave pulls his phone out and looks up the video to show Sean.
Jade turns to talk a little more privately to Raven.

JADE

My dad heard my mom telling Zach
about gays being molested and he
came in all high and mighty to
offer one of his "I'm not a
preacher but my dad was" sermons.

RAVEN

Ooohhhh... enlighten me. What does
the preacher's son have to say
about homosexuality? What spiritual
words of wisdom did he impart?

JADE

According to him being gay means
you were either molested or haven't
finished growing up. It's a phase
some guys go through and if they
stay there its because they aren't
finished maturing or some shit.

RAVEN

(sexy, flirty)
What about women?

JADE

When I mentioned lesbians my mom
actually looked mad. She said they
just did it to get the attention of
men.

RAVEN

Lesbians don't exactly bend over
backwards for the attention of men.

SEAN

(putting his phone back in
his pocket)
Who's gonna bend over backwards?
I'm game!

JADE
You're a pig, actually.

DAVE
That's a kind of game.

RAVEN
Shit, it's getting late. I'm going
to run to the restroom before
class.

DAVE
Good for you.

JADE
Wait for me, I'll come with you.

Jade takes one last pull on her cigarette and tosses it to
the ground.

DAVE
Man, girls and toilets.

SEAN
Ya, we're always pulling our dicks
out for them.

DAVE
(laughing)
So that they can swallow whatever
flows out!

INT. HIGH SCHOOL RESTROOM-DAY

JADE and RAVEN head into the restroom and look around to make
sure it's empty. It is. They are giggly and excited, two
girls with a secret. Going into the same stall together they
start necking.

RAVEN
Can I touch your breasts?

JADE
Yes.

Jade and Raven explore each other for a while.

RAVEN
Can you sleep over at my place
tonight, darling?

JADE
 (hopefully)
 Are you sure?

RAVEN
 Are you sure?

JADE
 (looking in Raven's eyes)
 Yes, I can sleep over at your house
 tonight.

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. FORD EXPEDITION IN MOTION--LATE DAY

JADE closes her journal and sticks it in the backpack at her feet. She looks over at ZACH who's watching an episode of Family Guy on his phone and she scoots over to watch, she laughs.

JADE
 I love this episode.

EXT. NOT OVERLY BUSY HIGHWAY-DUSK

The HITCHHIKER is putting his notebook back into his tattered backpack. He takes the RED RAG out of his back pocket and wipes off his neck and forehead. He heads forward again.

HITCHHIKER (V.O.)
 I rode one time with a clown. The guy was completely dressed head to toe in his clown suit and was goin' from one kids party to some school thing. He tol' me that he'd lived his whole life in the same house in the same town. His whole life. He'd never left it, not even for a trip or anythin'. Well, I got to thinking his mind must be crawling crazy with dark stories, cause that's how I'd be. Then I heard myself think and had to laugh. Here was a *clown*, living a life he loved so much he'd never wanted to leave it, and I'm assumin' it's gotta be bad. Moving a story or life forward ain't always about *moving*.
 (MORE)

HITCHHIKER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

It's about knowing who you are and wearin' it proudly. Even if it's a red clown nose and polka dot shoes.

FLASHBACK

EXT. RUNDOWN TRAILER HOUSE IN TRAILER PARK-EVENING

SMALL BOY sits on cement stairs. Two cop cars with the lights flashing, and three police officers are standing around, they have GRANDDAD in cuffs. One of the officers, a POLICE WOMAN, leans toward Small Boy.

POLICE WOMAN

We've got a real nice lady coming to pick you up, okay?

GRANDDAD

(to police woman)

He don't talk much.

(to Small Boy)

It's gonna be okay, boy. They've got real nice families who like to take care of quiet kids like you. You'll see. It'll be better, you'll be happier and taken care of. I kinda screwed this whole thing up.

Small Boy looks up at Granddad, afraid but not crying. The Police Woman tries to touch his arm but he pushes her away and jumps up to hug his Granddad.

GRANDDAD (CONT'D)

Listen, here, I didn't do nothin' wrong, okay? But I did something illegal, they ain't always the same. You gotta remember that. Okay?

Small Boy is still hugging his Granddad and slowly looks up at him.

GRANDDAD (CONT'D)

Okay, boy?

Small Boy nods his head and sits back down on the cement steps. At that moment a car pulls up and a small frumpy lady jumps out, she's pretty but disheveled. ADRIENNE (25) is Native American.

Adrienne is clumsily putting her jacket on when MYRA comes running out of the trailer house beside them, and heads straight to Small Boy.

MYRA

What's happening? Why are the police taking your granddad?

Small Boy shrugs while the police guide Granddad into the back of the cruiser. Adrienne comes up to the kids and sits down on the cement stairs beside them.

ADRIENNE

(to Small Boy)
Hey kiddo. Rough day?
(to Myra)
Hi cutie? What's your name?

MYRA

I'm Myra, I'm his best friend. But if they take his Granddad to the police place, I'll probably have to let him move away, right?

Adrienne looks at Small Boy, who looks at her expectantly. She she puts her arm around him and again, speaks to Myra.

ADRIENNE

You know, sweetie. I think you're right. At least for a little while. But you know, you can still be his best friend.

Myra's eyes grow wide and she leans in, conspiratorially.

MYRA

Really? How?

ADRIENNE

Well, lots of ways. He needs a friend who'll think about him, and wonder how he's doing. He needs somebody to pray for him. Do you think you can be that kind of best friend?

Myra looks disappointed. So does Small Boy.

MYRA

(unimpressed)
Sure. Whatever.

Small Boy gets up and Adrienne gets up with him. He's digging desperately in his pocket for something and then runs over to the police cruiser and knocks on the back door. Adrienne lets him while she pulls the Woman Officer to the side to whisper with her.

ADRIENNE

(whispering)

The old man seems to be cooperating.

POLICE WOMAN

(quietly)

Well, he's sure he did the right thing. His daughter gets raped and murdered, and he murders the guy he thinks did it. He's not angry enough anymore to fight with us 'cause he feels like he's got closure I guess.

One of the other officer's opens the door for Small Boy and he places a red matchbox car on his Granddad's lap. Then he leans in and hugs him again. Granddad kisses Small Boy on the top of the head but can't hug back because he's still handcuffed. Small Boy walks away. Back to Myra.

Adrienne walks over to the kids and together they watch both of the cruisers drive away. FRANKIE has stepped out of Myra's trailer house and is watching as well. He looks sad.

ADRIENNE

(to Small Boy)

Well, kiddo, we have to get going as well. Let's go in the house and gather some stuff for you. Say goodbye to Myra.

MYRA

I can help pack up some of his stuff.

ADRIENNE

No, sweetie, you have to go home to your family now.

Myra hugs Small Boy and he hugs her back. She runs off and her brother, Frankie, gives her a pat on the back as they start to head into their home. Suddenly, Small Boy has an idea and runs over to Myra's house before Frankie has disappeared.

FRANKIE

Hold up, Myra. Your friend has something for you!

Myra comes to the door and Small Boy takes her hand. He points to his house and brings her back with him. Leaving her standing with Adrienne he runs quickly back into his own home, and Adrienne looks slyly at her watch while Myra stands there playing with her hair. Small Boy comes back out with a picture in his hand. It is the picture of his mother in the red dress. He kisses Myra on the cheek and gives her the photo.

MYRA

(whispers)
I love you too.

She runs home to Frankie. Adrienne smiles and gets down to eye level with Small Boy.

ADRIENNE

You're a neat kid, you know that?

Small Boy shrugs. Adrienne stands back up and they head into his house to gather his things.

END OF FLASHBACK

EXT. NOT OVERLY BUSY HIGHWAY-DUSK

THE HITCHHIKER is walking now, looking forward. He pulls something out of his pocket, it's a red matchbox car. He pulls the red rag out of his back pocket and rubs the car clean.

HITCHHIKER (V.O.)

Movin' forward is what matters most in life I think. We bring our past with us of course, and it's good that we do I think. It fills us up and gives us answers. But we gotta be who we're meant to be, even if it makes folks uncomfortable. Like my Granddad said, a thing can be right even if it's not accepted.

The Hitchhiker puts the car back in his pocket and looks ahead. Into the future, where the Ford Expedition has headed.

FORWARD/FUTURE

INT. LARGE MODERN KITCHEN-EVENING

JADE and RAVEN sit at the counter while SHELLY chops vegetables. Shelly looks disturbed and Raven avoids looking in her direction.

But Jade stares with strong resolve and appears to be both exhausted and exhilarated at the same time. Raven and Jade are holding hands.

SHELLY

This isn't right. This doesn't make any sense.

JADE

It doesn't have to make sense to you mom, but it *is* right.

Shelly stops chopping vegetables and looks at her daughter. She begins twisting her hair almost violently.

SHELLY

But how do you know? I mean, lots of girls like each other and have close friendships. You two are probably just confused because you share a kind of friendship love. But that's not the same as romantic love, you'll see.

Shelly stops hair twisting and starts vegetable chopping again.

JADE

I know you and dad don't believe in this, I know you think it's wrong, and I've tried to pretend I think that too.

SHELLY

It is wrong.

JADE

But it's not wrong, it's love. When I'm with Raven I feel comfortable and strong. I want to be myself in ways I didn't know were me until I was this loved, this supported.

RAVEN

I really do care about...

Shelly looks intensely at Raven and holds her hand up to her. Raven looks hurt, Shelly looks hurt. No one is angry. Jade let's go of Raven's hand and rubs her back. The message is clear, Raven is there to support Jade, but Jade has to do all the talking.

SHELLY

(looking at Jade and
twisting her hair)

Why are you telling me this? Where is your father? Why don't you wait until this all passes, and just keep it to yourself until it passes. Why are you telling me this?

JADE

Mom, it's not passing. This is me. I love a girl romantically. I love *this* girl romantically. It's not a phase, and even if it was, it's true right now. It's real right now.

SHELLY

You're so young, Jade. You don't know. You could just keep it to yourself until it goes away.

JADE

I want you to know me, right now. I don't want to hide or feel afraid of who I am anymore. When I'm with Raven, I never feel afraid. When I'm with Zach, I never feel afraid. But when I'm with you or dad, and sometimes when I'm alone, I'm afraid.

SHELLY

You're afraid because you know it's wrong. Pray, Jade, ask for guidance. Have faith that it's just a phase. *That* will ease your fear.

JADE

Why? Ask for guidance, why? Because I'm in love?

SHELLY

It's not really that kind of love.

Raven is looking pained, Shelly is looking hurt, Jade is trying to keep it together.

JADE

It is, mom. And I'm afraid *because* I'm in love. The feelings are confusing. I'm happy when I'm with her and I'm nervous that she'll meet someone else and I'm nervous that I'll meet someone else...

SHELLY

See! You know you might meet someone else, because this is a phase. It isn't really you. Don't be afraid of that, you need a natural love...

JADE

I'm not afraid I'll meet a guy, mom, I'm afraid I'll meet another girl. I have all these feelings and questions about love and relationships, and I can't talk to you about them.

SHELLY

You can talk to me.

JADE

I'm afraid to talk to you. When I was little I could talk to you about anything, anything, but now I can't.

SHELLY

You can still talk to me, just...

JADE

No, not about this. And it's not because you won't listen, it's because you won't believe me. You won't *like* me.

Jade is close to tears but holding strong. Raven reaches over and rubs Jade's back, but she continues to stay silent.

Shelly is no longer chopping vegetables and merely stands there twisting her hair.

SHELLY

(quietly)

Where's your father? Why didn't you wait for your father?

JADE

You tell dad. I want you to tell dad. I think it's the best way for you to get comfortable with it.

SHELLY

Oh, I'm not telling your father this! No, no!

JADE

We need to talk about it, I need everyone to know.

SHELLY

Well, you tell your father. I don't think I can.

JADE

I think it might help you get used to the idea if you tell him.

Shelly stops twisting her hair and starts messing with dinner again.

JADE (CONT'D)

I don't expect you or dad to be happy about it, but I need you to know. And I'd like it if you'd try to at least accept me. I can't go on being afraid, I need to take the next step and be proactive. I love Raven, mom, and she loves me. A lot. And I want you to be able to know that.

Shelly looks at her daughter for a long moment. She is quiet and sullen. She doesn't look over at Raven, but she reaches out and touches her daughter's hand. She squeezes it and offers a faint smile that looks pained. Then Shelly walks out of the room, leaving vegetables on the counter and water boiling on the stove. Jade gets up and slowly begins to chop and cook.

Both Raven and Jade are quiet as they hear...

SHELLY

(crying)
Oh dear, oh dear... why, why?

Raven takes a deep breath.

RAVEN

That went well.

JADE

I guess it could have been worse. She could have taken the knife and chopped your tits off.

RAVEN

Jade, darling...

JADE

I'm sorry. That was my hurt talking. My family is so awesome, mostly...

RAVEN

Maybe we should have just kept it to ourselves. We know we love each other, why do we have to tell people? We don't need them to approve, as long as we approve. The universe knows and that's what matters.

JADE

No. We need to be able to be who we are no matter where we are. And besides, how will the world and people like my parents--who think they're so accepting but are so *not* accepting--ever learn to be okay with us if we are too scared to be okay with us?

RAVEN

We're not scared, we're just not pushing other people into a place where they have to see it.

JADE

Raven, that means we're scared. Scared that they'll judge us for making them uncomfortable. But we aren't doing anything to make them uncomfortable, we're just *being*.

The girls are quiet as Jade continues to cook.

JADE (CONT'D)

Thank-you for being here. I'm sorry about my mom.

RAVEN

Don't sweat it, darling. I think you were amazing. It was an honor to be here.

Jade looks up at Raven and relaxes a bit.

RAVEN (CONT'D)

Are you okay? Are you, I don't know, are you alright with everyone knowing?

Jade stops what she's doing and thinks honestly about it. She's quiet, and then she slowly nods.

JADE

Actually, I am. I am okay. My mom is unhappy and scared, my dad will probably be a bit mad, and definitely scared for my soul, but I'm not. I'm not scared.

RAVEN

It'll be uncomfortable around here for a while.

JADE

Oh Raven, I was already uncomfortable. But now I'm not scared. It's not great, it's not perfect, but I'm not scared. Man, it's good not to be scared!

Raven smiles at Jade and gets up from her stool at the counter. She walks around to embrace Jade, and then she helps her finish up making the meal.

END OF FUTURE

INT. FORD EXPEDITION IN MOTION--LATE DAY

MARK and SHELLY are talking comfortably in hushed tones while JADE and ZACH continue to watch Family Guy on his phone. Jade is sort of snuggling into her brother and he's comfortable with it.

EXT. HIGHWAY--LATE DAY

The freeway is beginning to get congested. A few of the cars slowing down are recognizable. The Lexus where DEREK smiles and picks out a CD to put in the player, the dually pick-up truck where COWBOY is singing and AMBER rolls her eyes. Then there's the transport truck again where the TRUCK DRIVER slows down and grumbles.

TRUCK DRIVER

Damned construction.

The Oldsmobile brings up the rear. CARRIE tries to open a package of mixed nuts while her oldest son, TORY, wakes up groggily, rubs his eyes and asks typically:

TORY
Are we there yet?

The HITCHHIKER does a funny jig, slowly approaching the traffic.

HITCHHIKER (V.O.)
Stories, stories, stories. Driving
up and down these highways -
heading anywhere for any reason.
When we imagine any truth, our own
or someone else's, we become a
creator. And that's just it. That's
our destiny. Or mine, as I've come
to know it. To be here. To feel, to
do what I'm doin'. I realized I
didn't have to go looking for my
destiny, hell, I can't miss it if I
tried cause my reason for being is
living life, creating worlds,
telling stories. That's the destiny
I discovered. The more stories I
live, the more feelings I
experience.

A cute little green Volkswagen Beetle approaches from behind him. A SEXY LADY (30) opens the passenger window and hollers at the Hitchhiker.

SEXY LADY
Hello!! Hello!!!

The Volkswagen pulls over just in front of the Hitchhiker. Sexy Lady, wearing a little black dress, has opened the passenger side window and leans over calling excitedly to the Hitchhiker. She's holds a book up and shows it to him as she calls out.

SEXY LADY (CONT'D)
Is this you? This is you, isn't it?
You write these books, don't you?

The Hitchhiker smiles and nods. The Sexy Lady pulls up her emergency brake as he continues to approach.

SEXY LADY (CONT'D)
I knew it! I knew it! I love all of
your stories but this one's my
favorite!

She jumps excitedly out of her car and runs (awkwardly in her high heels) in his direction holding *Ramona's Boys: From the popular Carhopping series*.

Without waiting for permission she hugs the Hitchhiker and he allows it, though he doesn't hug back. She pulls back and looks at him, they're both smiling.

SEXY LADY (CONT'D)

I've just gotta know. Are they true? You've gotta tell me. No, wait, don't tell me. Yeah, do! Are they true?

The Hitchhiker offers a mischievous grin and shrugs. Motioning with his hands he answers: a little bit, sort of, kind of.

SEXY LADY (CONT'D)

I knew it! I talked about your stories with a client of mine. He said there was no way they were true, but I insisted they were partly true. You know, a mix of who you meet and what you see and what you think?

The Sexy Lady looks questioningly at the Hitchhiker. He nods and she looks satisfied.

SEXY LADY (CONT'D)

Do you want a ride? I'd love it if you'd sign my book. I'm on my way to see a client-I'm a call girl-but we can chat along the way. Oh, oh, oh... maybe I'll become a story!

The Hitchhiker laughs and follows her to her car, climbing into the passenger seat.

INT. VOLKSWAGON BEETLE-EVENING

The Sexy Lady releases her emergency brake and puts the car into first gear. As our Hitchhiker turns to put his tattered backpack into the back seat of her cramped car he sees a few more of his books in the back, along with several other books, more high heeled shoes and sexy outfits kind of tossed back there. There's an empty spot on the floor behind the drivers seat and he fits his pack there.

EXT. SLIGHTLY CONGESTED HIGHWAY-EVENING

The Volkswagon Beetle merges into the traffic slowly and the Sexy Lady chats animatedly with the Hitchhiker, who's listening comfortably.

HITCHHIKER (V.O.)

I've got so many memories from so many of the people I've met on the road and all the lives I've been told, or imagined, or created. I might seem crazy, but I don't feel it. I feel complete and comfortable. Being enlightened I could turn around and go home, stay in a town again, but since it's in my mind I do most of my living I guess I am home. I guess I never really left. I've just gotten a little more comfortable.

Credits roll while we pull back and watch the traffic clear. Cars full of lives and stories continuing to travel the freeway.

FADE OUT.

THE END

(CONT'D)