

A FATHER'S LOVE

By

Angela Camon

FADE IN:

EXT. PARK - DAY

A park bench. Birds alight on it. Children and their parents, hand in hand, stroll down a path nearby.

Sitting on the bench, an UNIDENTIFIED PERSON writes in a journal.

UNIDENTIFIED PERSON (V.O.)

A Father's love. It means more to his daughter than any love on earth. This is my story and my father's story.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

A beautiful church. People dressed nicely walk up the steps.

REBECCA MILLS, 18, a faithful Christian who wants a good man to take care of her, walks up the steps on the arm of FRANK SIMMONS, 18, kind, the man of her dreams and a dreamer, who wears a cheap suit.

Rebecca's relatives GRANDMA MATTIE, 50's, Rebecca's mother, TRELLE, 19, Rebecca's sister, and MS. BERTHA, 40's, Rebecca's aunt, follow. Grandma Mattie turns to Ms. Bertha and Trella.

GRANDMA MATTIE

Ain't gonna be long till those two tie the knot.

MS. BERTHA

Such a fine boy and a good Christian too.

TRELLE

I wonder how long Rebecca can wait until he makes something of himself.

GRANDMA MATTIE

He'll pull himself up by the bootstraps, I know.

Grandma Mattie smiles at Trella and Ms. Bertha.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Rebecca, Frank and the congregation sing HOW GREAT THOU ART.
Rebecca squeezes Frank's hand.

LATER

The service ends. The congregation leaves. Rebecca sits down
with Frank.

REBECCA

I love you, Frank. When we get
married, I want lots of kids.

FRANK

Me too. I'd love to have a daughter
just like you. I'd spoil her and
make her feel like a princess.

REBECCA

Frank, um, we've been going out for
over a year. We even did--you know--
and we shouldn't have.

FRANK

I know. It was a mistake.

REBECCA

When are we getting married?

FRANK.

I have to work on my writing first.
It could take years. I don't want
to marry you unless I can take care
of us.

REBECCA

So it could be years?

Frank nods.

REBECCA

I see.

FRANK

You're still coming to the prom
with me, aren't you, Rebecca?

Rebecca nods.

REBECCA
Of course I am, Frank.

Rebecca hugs Frank.

EXT. COMMUNITY CENTRE - NIGHT

The community center is decorated for the prom. Students arrive in limousines. Frank and Rebecca arrive in a beat up Chevy.

EXT. FRANK'S CAR - NIGHT

Frank holds the door open for Rebecca. She gets out in a purple silk dress with silver shoes and purse. Frank holds out his hand and Rebecca takes it.

FRANK
Wow!

Rebecca tries to smile, but worry shows on her face.

Rebecca and Frank walk into the centre.

EXT. LIMOUSINE - NIGHT

A limousine pulls up. Out steps MICHAEL ALEXANDER, 18, a hot-tempered, stubborn man, who wears an expensive tux and a gold watch.

INT. COMMUNITY CENTRE - BALLROOM - NIGHT

A slow dance plays. Frank and Rebecca dance. They stare into each other's eyes, in love. They dance cheek to cheek.

The music changes. Michael cuts in.

MICHAEL
Hope you don't mind.

REBECCA
Michael.

FRANK
Only one dance.

Frank leaves. Michael dances with Rebecca.

REBECCA

I thought you weren't going to come, since I accepted Frank's invitation.

MICHAEL

I'm here for you, baby. Whenever things go south with Frank, I'll be here.

REBECCA

What makes you think they'd go south?

MICHAEL

Because I'm here.

Rebecca ponders.

EXT. COMMUNITY CENTRE - NIGHT

Rebecca walks outside alone, pondering her choices.

Michael arrives.

REBECCA

Didn't know you'd be following me.

MICHAEL

Can't get you outta my mind, Rebecca. There's something about you I can't resist.

REBECCA

Maybe it's my love for Jesus.

MICHAEL

Maybe it is, and maybe it's just you.

ANOTHER AREA

Michael turns to Rebecca.

MICHAEL

Is Frank treating you well?

REBECCA

Of course. Why wouldn't he be?

MICHAEL

You both look like there's something wrong.

REBECCA

We love each other all right. Couples go through trials.

MICHAEL

Maybe the trial is you want to get married, he doesn't.

REBECCA

How would you know?

MICHAEL

I can tell when you're happy and when you're sad. Frank just seems like he's in his own little fantasy world.

REBECCA

I am happy. And don't badmouth him.

MICHAEL

I'm not, Baby. I want to marry you. I love you more than anyone could. I can take care of you. I got my dad's accounting business and I'm making a whole lot more than a writer makes.

REBECCA

Frank is trying.

MICHAEL

Not hard enough. You want a husband and children.

REBECCA

And I'll have that with Frank. I just have to wait a little longer.

MICHAEL

How long you gonna wait?

Rebecca ponders, doesn't know what to say.

MICHAEL

Let me know.

Rebecca half-smiles at Michael. Michael smiles back.

INT. GRANDMA MATTIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Rebecca looks in the mirror, puts her hand on her stomach. Grandma Mattie calls out.

GRANDMA MATTIE (O.S.)
Breakfast is ready, child!

KITCHEN

Rebecca sits down with Grandma Mattie and Trella. Rebecca picks at her food.

GRANDMA MATTIE
What is it, Rebecca? You ain't touched your food. Did everything go all right with you and Frank last night?

TRELLA
Speak up, Rebecca. If something ain't right, let us know, and we'll help you.

REBECCA
Frank doesn't want to marry me unless he first makes a go of his writing. It could take years.

GRANDMA MATTIE
You gonna wait that long?

Rebecca shakes her head.

REBECCA
Michael wants to marry me. He says he loves me and can take care of me.

GRANDMA MATTIE
Sounds like a good man.

TRELLA
Wait a minute. Is Michael a Christian? And do you love him?

REBECCA
No, he's not a Christian. And I'm not sure if I love him. I could love him.

GRANDMA MATTIE

Sounds like there's too many things that don't click. Maybe wait till Frank asks you.

REBECCA

I don't want you to tell anyone this, and certainly not Aunt Gertrude the gossip. I'm pregnant with Frank's child.

The ladies GASP.

REBECCA

I don't want to be a single mother. I've got to marry Michael. I can learn to love him.

TRELLA

He isn't a Christian. How are two unequally yoked people going to get along?

REBECCA

Maybe one day he'll become a Christian.

GRANDMA MATTIE

I see. You don't want to be alone with a child and raise it by yourself without a father.

REBECCA

Frank does not want to get married, Mama. He even said he can't support a family.

TRELLA

But you owe it to him to tell him he's the father of your child.

GRAND MATTIE

Rebecca, your sister's right. You've got to tell Frank about the child.

Rebecca looks at both women.

INT. FRANK'S HOUSE - OFFICE - DAY

Frank writes but crumples up all the papers and throws them in the wastepaper basket. He SIGHS in frustration.

The doorbell RINGS O.S.

Frank's mother, MRS. SIMMONS, 40's, enters.

MRS. SIMMONS
Frank, it's Rebecca. Frank?

Frank glumly gets up from his seat.

FRONT DOOR

Frank sees Rebecca at the open front door.

FRANK
Hey, Baby.

Frank hugs Rebecca, but still has a glum look on his face.

REBECCA
I need to talk to you alone.

EXT. FRANK'S HOUSE - SWING - DAY

Rebecca and Frank sit.

REBECCA
You said you weren't ready for
marriage, right?

FRANK
No, Rebecca, I'm not. Not the way
things are going.

REBECCA
If I said I'm pregnant with your
child, would you be ready?

FRANK
Wow! Uh--um--wow, Rebecca.

Frank gets up. Rebecca gets up.

FRANK
You know I love you and I always
will, and if you want me to, I'll
be there for our child, but I can't
do marriage now. I just can't.

REBECCA
Why? You said you wanted a big
family, a daughter you could love--

FRANK

My writing's not going well. I have to go to college to learn it. It's going to take up all of my time.

REBECCA

All you care about is writing!

FRANK

It's who I am, Rebecca. Doesn't mean I don't love you.

REBECCA

I think it means you only want me around if it doesn't interfere with your writing. That's not love.

FRANK

I do love you. It's just something a man's gotta do to prove himself.

REBECCA

I don't believe you know what love is. I'm glad I found this out now, so I didn't make the biggest mistake of my life.

Frank tries to hug Rebecca.

FRANK

Rebecca, I'll come and see you and the baby.

REBECCA

Let me go, Frank. I don't want any part of you.

Rebecca runs off.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Michael and Rebecca get married in a lavish wedding. Grandma Mattie, Ms. Bertha, and Trella look on, pleased. The PREACHER turns to Michael.

PREACHER

Michael, do you take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife, to love and to cherish, in sickness and in health, forsaking all others, as long as you both shall live?

MICHAEL

I do.

PREACHER

Rebecca, do you take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife, to love and to cherish, in sickness and in health, forsaking all others, as long as you both shall live?

Rebecca GULPS.

REBECCA

I do.

PREACHER

I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss the bride.

Michael kisses Rebecca.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

The relatives throw confetti as Michael and Rebecca walk down the church steps. Frank watches from a distance, a tear in his eye, and leaves.

Rebecca looks after him.

INT. ALEXANDER HOME - DAYS LATER

Rebecca turns to Michael.

REBECCA

Guess what? I'm pregnant!

MICHAEL

Oh, baby!

Michael hugs Rebecca, raises her in his arms, and kisses her.

INT. HOSPITAL - DELIVERY ROOM - DAY

Rebecca has her baby, Michael by her side.

REBECCA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER

Michael sits next to Rebecca, in bed. DR. STEVEN, 50's, kind, enters, concerned.

DR. STEVEN

Mr. and Mrs. Alexander, I have some news for you. Your daughter has Turner's Syndrome.

MICHAEL

What does that mean?

DR. STEVEN

She has no ovaries. She'll never have children. And she'll be short and short-limbed.

MICHAEL

Man, I can't believe this!

REBECCA

Michael. Thank you, Dr. Steven. We plan to love her just the same.

Michael looks angry.

NURSERY - LATER

Michael enters. NURSE JUDY, 30's, kind, strokes STACEY'S, Michael's and Rebecca's daughter's, hair.

NURSE JUDY

What a beautiful baby! She has a head full of hair. Isn't she beautiful?

MICHAEL

I guess she looks alright.

NURSE JUDY

She looks just like you. I know you're proud.

MICHAEL

She doesn't look a thing like me. She doesn't have my eyes, my nose or my ears.

NURSE JUDY

Do you see how beautiful her hair is?

MICHAEL

What's so special about hair?

NURSE JUDY

(apologetic)

I was just admiring how beautiful her hair is, that's all. I didn't mean to offend you.

MICHAEL

You're raving about how beautiful her hair is, but did you see her short arms and her slanted eyes?

NURSE JUDY

Mr. Alexander, all I see is a perfect little angel.

MICHAEL

Perfect? She's far from being perfect. She'll be the most embarrassing thing to me.

Nurse Judy turns to tuck Stacey snugly in her covers. Stacey makes a whimpering sound. Nurse Judy talks to Stacey.

NURSE JUDY

That's right sweetie, you know you're special, don't you?

Nurse Judy turns to Michael.

NURSE JUDY (CONT'D)

Mr. Alexander, you'll have to look past what you see on the outside and look at the inside. There's something special about this baby. She's going to do great things. You might not be glad that she's born now, but one day you will be glad.

MICHAEL

Yeah you think so! Well I don't.

REBECCA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER

Michael turns to Rebecca.

MICHAEL

I want a paternity test.

REBECCA

What?

MICHAEL

I want a paternity test. I want proof that this is my daughter.

REBECCA

I can't believe you would say that. You married me because I'm a faithful Christian woman.

MICHAEL

Something tells me there's something wrong here, and I'm going to find out what.

DIAGNOSTIC WAITING ROOM - LATER

Michael and Rebecca wait. A DOCTOR enters with test results.

DOCTOR

Mr. Alexander, I regret to inform you that this is not your biological daughter.

MICHAEL

See, I knew it! You tricked me! This is Frank's kid! What kind of a Christian woman are you anyway? Is this what they all do?

REBECCA

Baby, listen to me, please. I was scared. I had no one, but you. I--I love you, Michael.

MICHAEL

You only married me because you didn't want an illegitimate kid. It would make you look so bad in front of your upstanding Christian family. I've had it.

Michael turns to leave.

REBECCA

Michael, I'm sorry. Maybe that's how it was at first. But not now. We have a family. I love you.

MICHAEL

You're just saying that. Frank wouldn't marry you, so I was the second choice. I always will be the second choice.

REBECCA

When Frank didn't want to marry me,
I moved forward. I didn't look
back. We made a new life together.
I love you more than I ever loved
Frank. You've got to believe me,
Michael.

MICHAEL

I don't know what I believe.

Michael walks out. Rebecca follows.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Michael lies down, pondering. Rebecca enters with Stacey.
Michael gets up, looks at the happy mother and daughter.

MICHAEL

All right. I love you, Rebecca. And
because I love you, I'll stay. But
that child, I'm not gonna love it.
I'll take care of it financially,
but that's all.

REBECCA

All right, Michael. But I pray one
day you'll love our daughter.

Michael looks at Stacey, who smiles.

LATER

Stacey lies in her crib, crying uncontrollably. Michael is
extremely annoyed with her. Rebecca holds Stacey.

MICHAEL

Shut that baby up.

REBECCA

I'm doing the best I can.

Rebecca rocks Stacey.

MICHAEL

Can't you figure out what's the
matter with her? You are her
mother.

REBECCA
(stressed)
I am doing the best I can, Michael.

Rebecca has the baby across her shoulder, pats the baby on her back.

MICHAEL
Try harder. I get so tired of hearing her crying all the time.

REBECCA
(sympathetic)
Michael, why don't you come and hold her?

MICHAEL
(annoyed)
Rebecca, don't start that again.

REBECCA
But you haven't held her since she was born.

Michael jumps out of his recliner. Rebecca extends the baby out to Michael. Michael grabs the baby and holds her for a few brief seconds and then hands her quickly back to Rebecca.

MICHAEL
Ok! There, I held her! Now are you satisfied?

REBECCA
Michael, you held her all of ten seconds. That's the only time that you've held her. Don't you want to bond with your daughter?

MICHAEL
Don't start with that bonding stuff. I told you in the beginning that I don't want any part of her life.

REBECCA
But why, Michael? You're missing out being a part of your daughter's life.

MICHAEL
My daughter? Hmph.

REBECCA

Yes, you are her legal guardian,
Michael.

MICHAEL

You're lucky I stayed.

Baby Stacey is asleep. Rebecca lays her down in the crib.

INT. LIVINGROOM - DAY

Michael sits in his recliner.

Rebecca clears papers off the coffee table.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I know you don't want to hear this.
But with the disability that she
has she's going to always have to
depend on somebody to take care of
her. And just so you know, that
somebody is not going to be me.

REBECCA

Michael, a lot of people work past
their disabilities and do great
things. Turner's Syndrome is not a
disabling disease. She'll be all
right.

MICHAEL

What is she going to do that's so
great?

Rebecca is silent.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

That's exactly what I thought. You
don't know.

REBECCA

I may not know that, but I do know
that she is your daughter and that
you should love her and support
her.

MICHAEL

What's love got to do with this?
With all these medical problems,
she's costing me money.

REBECCA

Michael, don't question God. Our daughter is a gift from God.

MICHAEL

Well, she's a gift that I can do without. I didn't ask for her and I don't want her.

Michael reads the paper.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY - FIVE YEARS LATER

Michael gets his suitcase ready for work. The dog, Max, enters and playfully jumps up at Michael. He pets Max and hugs him.

MICHAEL

I love you, my baby.

Stacey, now 5, walks in the room.

STACEY

Daddy, can you take me to the park?

MICHAEL

No.

STACEY

(inquisitive)

Why not?

Michael closes his suitcase.

MICHAEL

Because I have to work.

STACEY

Why do you have to go to work?

MICHAEL

I have to make money.

STACEY

But Tory's daddy always takes her to the park.

MICHAEL

Well that's good for Tory's dad. I don't have time.

STACEY
(fidgety)
Well how much money do you make on
your job?

MICHAEL
(impatient)
What's with all these questions?

Stacey bounces up and down.

STACEY
I just need to know. Will you
please tell me?

MICHAEL
If I tell you, will you stop
bothering me?

STACEY
(insisting)
Yes.

MICHAEL
I get paid \$40.00 an hour. Now go
on and get out of here so I can
finish getting ready for work.

Stacey rushes out.

INT. STACEY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Stacey gets her piggy bank.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Stacey enters with her piggy bank, hands it to Michael.

STACEY
I have forty dollars exactly. Now
you don't have to go to work today
and you can take me to the park.

Michael looks miffed.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Michael storms in. Rebecca bakes a cake.

MICHAEL

You put her up to that, didn't you?

REBECCA

(puzzled)

I don't know what you're talking about.

MICHAEL

That girl of yours keeps asking me to take her to the park.

Rebecca looks out of the kitchen window and sees a father walking down the street holding his daughter's hand.

REBECCA

She just wants to spend some time with you, Michael. She sees some of the other children at the park with their dads and she wants you to take her.

MICHAEL

Well I am not like other dads. Maybe they don't have to work, but I do.

REBECCA

I am sure that the other dads have to work too. But they manage to find time to spend with their children.

MICHAEL

Well I don't have time. It's because of her that I have to work so much anyway.

REBECCA

You have to make time, Michael.

MICHAEL

Why don't you take her?

REBECCA

I do take her from time to time. But Michael, she needs you. Every little girl needs her daddy.

Michael walks off.

INT. STACEY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rebecca tucks Stacey in bed.

STACEY
Mommy, why doesn't Daddy love me?

REBECCA
He does love you. He's just--well--
busy with his work.

STACEY
But I wanted him to take me to the
park.

REBECCA
He will sometime soon. Now, let me
read to you about God's love.

Rebecca opens the bible and reads.

REBECCA
For God so loved the world that He
sent His only begotten Son, that
whoever believes in Him will not
perish but have everlasting life.
John 3:16.

STACEY
God doesn't love me.

REBECCA
Yes, He does. You are the apple of
God's eye.

STACEY
Really, Mommy?

Rebecca hugs Stacey.

REBECCA
Really.

Stacey smiles at Rebecca.

STACEY
And Daddy will take me to the park
soon?

REBECCA
Yes Stacey.

Stacey hugs Rebecca.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Michael sits at the table, calculating income. He GASPS.

MICHAEL

Shoot!

Stacey enters with her baseball glove and ball.

STACEY

Daddy, I know how you like
baseball. Take me to the park?

MICHAEL

Get outta here, kid. I'm
calculating this month's budget.
Seems we're a little short. Going
to have to cut back.

STACEY

That's okay, Daddy. I won't ask for
much, just let's go.

Stacey tugs at Michael's sleeve. Michael pushes her off.

MICHAEL

Get out, now. I'm not taking you.
How many times do I have to tell
you?

Stacey is almost in tears.

The doorbell RINGS. Stacey walks toward the

FRONT ENTRANCE

Grandma Mattie enters with a pie and a gift for Stacey. She
notices tears flowing down Stacey's cheeks.

GRANDMA MATTIE

What's with all the bawling, child?

Stacey hugs Grandma Mattie's leg.

STACEY

Daddy won't take me to the park.

GRANDMA MATTIE

Your daddy's real busy. I'll take
you.

Stacey perks up.

STACEY

Great!

Rebecca enters. Grandma Mattie hands her the pie.

REBECCA

Stacey, you've been crying.

STACEY

I'm okay now. Grandma Mattie and I are going to the park.

REBECCA

All right. Be back for supper.

Grandma Mattie and Stacey leave.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Grandma Mattie and Stacey play catch.

LATER

Grandma Mattie and Stacey sit on a bench.

STACEY

Daddy won't take me anywhere.

Grandma Mattie hands Stacey the gift. It is a journal.

GRANDMA MATTIE

When I was a little girl, I used to write in a journal. It made me feel better.

STACEY

Was your daddy like mine?

GRANDMA MATTIE

He deserted us. At least your daddy stayed.

Stacey takes the journal, ponders.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY - 11 YEARS LATER

Michael sits at the table while Rebecca serves dinner.

Stacey, now 16, enters waving her report card.

STACEY

I got an A! An A in English! I'm going to be a writer yet!

Rebecca looks at the report card, hugs Stacey.

REBECCA

That is wonderful, Stacey, just wonderful!

Michael snatches the report card.

MICHAEL

You have two D's on this progress report.

Michael raises his voice.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

What's the matter with you?

STACEY

What do you mean?

MICHAEL

Why can't you do good in school like other kids?

STACEY

I am doing the best that I can.

MICHAEL

Well your best is not good enough. You want to embarrass me? You're just a troublemaker.

STACEY

(stuttering)

Daddy, I will try harder.

Michael grabs Stacey's journal notebook out of her hand.

MICHAEL

If you spent more time studying instead of writing in this stupid book, maybe you'd do better in school.

Stacey CRIES.

STACEY

Give me my book back, please daddy. I got an A in English.

MICHAEL

You're wasting your time.

STACEY

Daddy I am not wasting my time. One day I'm going to publish my own book. One day my books are going to be on the shelves in the libraries and all the major bookstores and people will read what I've written.

MICHAEL

Do you honestly believe that someone will want to read that junk? Your mom fills your head with that nonsense, but I keep it real. You will never be able to write a book and have it published. It takes money and talent. You don't have either.

REBECCA

Michael, that was uncalled for. Stacey is trying her hardest to please you. Apologize to her.

MICHAEL

Don't you always defend her. We both have first-hand experience about what happens to writers. Remember Frank?

REBECCA

What has Frank got to do with this?

MICHAEL

I think you know.

Michael storms off. Stacey turns to Rebecca.

STACEY

Who is Frank?

REBECCA

Someone we knew, who was a great writer.

STACEY

Did he succeed?

REBECCA

Yes, he did, Stacey. Now pay no mind to your father.

(MORE)

REBECCA(cont'd)

He doesn't understand, but one day he will. You are the apple of God's eye, remember?

Rebecca puts her arm around Stacey's shoulder. Stacey takes it off.

STACEY

I don't believe in that stuff. I know you like to pray and Grandma Mattie does, but God doesn't hear my prayers, or else I'd never have a father like my father.

REBECCA

We have to keep praying for him.

STACEY

What good does it do? Nothing. That proves my point. There's no God.

REBECCA

Don't ever say that, Stacey. God has brought us this far, God will be with us through anything.

Stacey ponders.

INT. WEST BOW HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY

Stacey and her friends are in their homeroom class. MRS. BRIDGEWALL, 50, school principal, comes on the PA system to make morning announcements.

Mrs. Bridgewall clears her throat.

MRS. BRIDGEWALL (O.S.)

(excited)

The annual father/daughter dance will be held here at our school. Tickets are \$5.00. You may pick up a flyer and your tickets from your homeroom teacher.

MRS. CAMPBELL, 50's, kind, the teacher, hands the flyers out.

MRS. CAMPBELL

Ask your dad, then buy the tickets from me.

Stacey takes the flyer, looks at it, unsure.

HALLWAY

Stacey and her friend, CARL ROGERS, 16, secretly in love with Stacey, walk.

CARL
You going to ask your dad?

STACEY
He'll never go.

CARL
You might be surprised. At least try, okay?

Stacey nods.

INT. ALEXANDER HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Stacey turns to Rebecca.

STACEY
(excited)
Mom, the Father/Daughter dance is going to be at our school this year. It only costs \$5.00. Everyone's going. All the girls will laugh at me if I don't get my dad to go.

REBECCA
Well, since it is a father/daughter dance, you should be talking to your daddy, shouldn't you?

STACEY
Do you think he'd really go?

REBECCA
Just try, Stacey.

FAMILY ROOM

Michael is glued to the TV. Stacey approaches Michael. Rebecca overhears.

STACEY
(nervous, stuttering)
Dad, I got this at school today.

MICHAEL
Well, what is it?

Stacey hands him the flyer.

STACEY
 It's a flyer about the
 Father/Daughter dance at my school.
 It only cost \$5.00. Can we go?

Michael takes the flyer, balls it up, and throws it on the floor.

Michael stares at the TV screen.

MICHAEL
 I don't have time for no mess like
 a father/daughter dance. I have
 better things to do with my time
 and money.

STACEY
 I can wear one of my old dresses
 that I have already have. Mrs. Mary
 can do my hair at her house.

Stacey grabs the remote and turns the television off.

STACEY (CONT'D)
 Daddy, please, I want to dress up
 and be beautiful just like the
 other girls.

Michael jumps out of his seat.

MICHAEL
 Beautiful! Did you say beautiful?
 You actually think that you could
 ever be beautiful? You think that
 if Mrs. Mary put a few curls in
 your hair that you'll be beautiful?

Michael LAUGHS.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
 Honey, Mrs. Mary can't work
 miracles and that is what it will
 take to make you beautiful.

REBECCA
 Michael, that's enough! She just
 wants you to go to the dance like
 any daughter would want a father to
 do. There's no reason to put her
 down for it. She loves you, that's
 why she's asking. Have a heart.

Stacey CRIES and stares at Michael.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Now go on and get out of here and
leave me alone.

Stacey runs away. Rebecca follows.

INT. FRONT ENTRANCE - DAY

Stacey gets her purse, opens the door. Rebecca turns to her.

REBECCA

Where are you going?

STACEY

Grandma Mattie's. Maybe I'll get
more people on my side there.

REBECCA

I am on your side.

STACEY

I don't think so. You let him call
me down.

REBECCA

I defended you, Stacey, as best I
could.

STACEY

You should have just left him long
ago. I'm leaving.

REBECCA

Promise me you won't run away. I
love you. I don't know what I'd do
without my baby girl.

Stacey runs out the front door. Rebecca looks after her.

INT. GRANDMA MATTIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Stacey enters, turns to Grandma Mattie.

Stacey CRIES.

GRANDMA MATTIE

Stacey? What's the matter, child?
Is everything okay?

STACEY

Grandma Mattie, why doesn't my daddy love me? What did I do wrong for him not to love me?

GRANDMA MATTIE

Don't think for one minute that you have done anything wrong.

STACEY

All I ever wanted was for him to love me.

GRANDMA MATTIE

Baby, people show their love in different ways. I know that you may think differently, but in his own way I believe your daddy loves you.

STACEY

He sure has a funny way of showing it. He won't even take me to the Father/Daughter dance.

GRAND MATTIE

That's not right of him to do that, Stacey, but hang on. One day he's going to see the light.

STACEY

The way he treats me, he might as well be a stranger.

GRANDMA MATTIE

Don't you dare that say. You don't think like that.

STACEY

But Grandma.

GRANDMA MATTIE

Now no matter what he does or does not do, he is still your daddy. You have to show him respect. Pray to the Lord about it. He knows how to work it out.

STACEY

Grandma Mattie, I don't know if prayer will help my daddy.

GRANDMA MATTIE

Baby, it might be impossible with you and me, but with God all things are possible. You just keep believing and praying. God will work it out.

Stacey calms down.

INT. SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY

MELANIE, 16, REGINA, 16, and STEPHANIE, 16, talk about the dance.

MELANIE

(very proper voice)

Father and I are going to the Unique Boutique on Madison Avenue to select what we're going to wear for the dance.

REGINA

My mother's going to order me a dress from Spencer's catalogue.

STEPHANIE

Last year my grandmother bought me a dress for \$500.00. I was the coolest chick on the dance floor.

They all LAUGH.

Stacey is seated in the next row from where they are standing. They turn to Stacey.

MELANIE

Stacey where are you going to get your dress?

STEPHANIE

(snickers)

I hear there's a Good Will store on Park Avenue.

REGINA

(sarcastic)

One of the requirements for the Father/Daughter dance is to actually have a father. We all know that most of her kind don't have their fathers in their lives. They are either locked up in prison or strung out on drugs.

Stacey gives all three girls a mean look. Mrs. Campbell enters.

MRS. CAMPBELL
Take your seats now, class.

The students sit down.

MRS. CAMPBELL
As you know I am the coordinator for the Father/Daughter dance this year. This year I want to do a special project, so I need each girl to bring me a picture from home of you and your dad.

The girls start mumbling among themselves about what picture they will bring.

MRS. CAMPBELL (CONT'D)
Now by a show of hands, who is planning to attend the dance and who can bring a picture by Friday?

Every girl raises her hand except Stacey. Mrs. Campbell counts the hands.

MRS. CAMPBELL (CONT'D)
Okay that's 1, 2, 3, 4, 5,6.....10. Stacey, why didn't you raise your hand?

Stacey looks at Melanie, Regina, and Stephanie.

STACEY
I'm not coming and I don't have a picture of me and my daddy.

Regina, Melanie and Stephanie LAUGH.

STEPHANIE
The only picture that she has is his mug shot.

The class LAUGHS. Stacey gets out of her seat and pushes Stephanie on the ground.

MRS. CAMPBELL
All right girls, that's enough. I will not tolerate this kind of behavior in my class.
(MORE)

MRS. CAMPBELL(cont'd)

Stephanie, I would like you to stay after school every day this week to take an anti-bullying class. Stacey, you shouldn't have pushed Stephanie.

STACEY

She shouldn't have said what she said.

MRS. CAMPBELL

Instead of sending you to the office, I am going to handle this myself. You will serve on set up and the clean up committee at the dance.

Stacey sits in her desk. MARCUS, 15, a tall black male with an evil streak, leans up in his desk.

MARCUS

What's the matter, your pops is not going to take you to the dance?

Stacey rolls her eyes at Marcus. Mrs. Campbell starts class.

MRS. CAMPBELL

Today we will begin class with our writing assignment. You are to write in your journal notebooks on the topic "If I could have anything in the world, it would be". You may begin.

Some of the students write while others ponder what to write. Stacey is one of the students who writes.

LATER

Mrs. Campbell turns to the class.

MRS. CAMPBELL (CONT'D)

Who will volunteer to go first?

There is complete silence.

MRS. CAMPBELL (CONT'D)

(sarcastic)

Now don't you all volunteer at one time.

There is still complete silence.

MRS. CAMPBELL (CONT'D)
 Okay. Stacey why don't you go
 first?

STACEY
 (sweaty hands, knees
 knocking, voice shaking)
 If I could be....I mean if I could
 have.

Stacey swallows and takes a deep breath.

STACEY (CONT'D)
 If I could have anything in the
 world it would be a father who
 would love me. He would be proud of
 me and would spend time with me. He
 would listen to me and would think
 that I was special and beautiful.
 Everyday I would feel his love
 unconditionally. With my daddy's
 love and support, I would
 accomplishment all of my dreams.

Marcus whispers in Stacey's ear.

MARCUS
 Your daddy don't love you and you
 can't make him.

MRS. CAMPBELL
 (sympathetic)
 Marcus, enough!

Mrs. Campbell puts her arm on Stacey's shoulder.

MRS. CAMPBELL
 Sweetheart, that was beautiful. I
 think you should enter the FS
 Publishing writing competition.

Marcus whispers in Stacey's ear.

MARCUS
 Don't nobody want to be seen with a
 fat pig, not even your daddy.

STACEY
 Shut up!

Marcus LAUGHS to himself. Carl sits across from him.

CARL

Come on man! Give Stacey a break.

MARCUS

What, are you taking up for her now? I didn't know that porky pig is your girlfriend.

CARL

Man, I am just saying don't give her a hard time.

MARCUS

Hey man I hear you. I was just joking with her. But if you do like her, you better be careful because if she gets too hungry she just might try to eat you.

MRS. CAMPBELL

Marcus, go to the principal's office--now!

Marcus gets up and leaves the room. Mrs. Campbell turns to the class with forms.

MRS. CAMPBELL

Now these are your permission forms to enter the writing competition. You'll need your mom and dad to sign.

STACEY

Why do we need permission?

MRS. CAMPBELL

Some parents don't want their children doing extra-curricular things because it takes up a lot of time that could be spent on homework. I want to make sure they approve.

Stacey takes a form, gulps in fear.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Rebecca peels potatoes. Stacey enters with the permission form.

STACEY

Mom, will you give me permission to enter the writing competition? It'll take extra time to do it.

REBECCA

Sure I will. You can handle it. But your dad has the final say. He's working in his study.

STUDY

Michael calculates income and expenses, looks frustrated.

STACEY

Sorry to bother you, Daddy.

Michael doesn't look up.

MICHAEL

What is it now?

STACEY

I need permission to enter the writing competition.

MICHAEL

No way. You have to concentrate on your school work. I don't want my daughter to flunk out for a silly writing competition.

STACEY

But it's my passion, like numbers are your passion.

Michael looks up.

STACEY

Please, daddy, I promise I'll win. I'll make you proud of me. I'll stand in front of the whole school at graduation and recite my winning essay.

MICHAEL

Mmm. Well, you sure you gonna do it? I don't want nothing to do with a loser.

STACEY

I'm sure, Daddy. I'll win.

MICHAEL
Better win, or else I won't want to
see your face again.

STACEY
Thanks Daddy!

Stacey tries to hug Michael, but Michael turns away.

INT. STACEY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Stacey writes.

STACEY (V.O.)
With my daddy's love and support, I
can accomplish all my dreams.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Alone, Mrs. Campbell reads Stacey's entry.

MRS. CAMPBELL (V.O.)
His love for me would help me
overcome the toughest obstacles,
conquer my worst fears, and climb
to the pinnacle of success. Because
my daddy loves me, I can do
anything.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY - LATER

Stacey and the rest of the students are seated. Mrs. Campbell
hands them back their competition entries. She hands Stacey's
paper to her.

MRS. CAMPBELL
Good job, Stacey.

Stacey looks at her paper.

INSERT PAPER: AT THE TOP OF THE PAPER IS A B GRADE.

BACK TO SCENE

Stacey looks glum.

Mrs. Campbell turns to the students.

MRS. CAMPBELL
 Now this is just the first round.
 We have two more rounds to go. The
 person who gets the highest total
 overall score wins.

Marcus turns to Stacey, reads her grade.

MARCUS
 B! Ha ha. I got a B+.

STACEY
 No way.

MARCUS
 Yep. I`m a better writer than you,
 fatty.

HALLWAY

Carl turns to Stacey.

CARL
 Stacey, you did great.

STACEY
 My father`s going to kill me.

CARL
 If he puts you down, come to me.
 I`m your friend.

Stacey looks glum at Carl.

EXT. ALEXANDER HOME - BACKYARD - DAY

Michael sits at a table with a beer. Stacey approaches
 Michael, hands him her competition paper.

STACEY
 Dad, here`s what I got on the first
 round of the competition.

Michael looks at the paper, rage rising inside him.

MICHAEL
 Are you kidding me--a B? You`re a
 stupid loser! I said the only way
 I`d let you enter is if you win
 this competition!

STACEY

But this is only the first round.
I've got two more rounds.

MICHAEL

You ain't gonna get no more rounds.
That's the end of it. You're going
to concentrate on your schoolwork
from now on, got it?

Rebecca enters, overhears.

STACEY

But this is what I want to do.

MICHAEL

A writer? I had friends who were
writers. They're living in the
slums right now. No money, no
family, no hope. You wanna be that
way? I don't think so. Now go to
your room and do your homework.

Stacey walks away glumly. Rebecca approaches Michael.

REBECCA

You shouldn't have been so hard. If
this is what the girl wants to do,
let her. There's only two more
rounds left. What can it hurt?

MICHAEL

She's not gonna embarrass me.

REBECCA

So I guess you won't allow her the
chance to be happy.

MICHAEL

Happiness is found in making enough
money to support yourself and your
family.

REBECCA

But she's just a kid. This is an
important phase of her life. She
needs to express herself. Try to be
more understanding.

MICHAEL

I was. I gave her the chance. She
blew it. It's over.

Michael leaves, leaving Rebecca standing there looking sad.

INT. WEST BOW HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY

The school bell rings. Mrs. Campbell passes out a sheet of paper to each student.

MRS. CAMPBELL

This is a handout with the instructions for your next assignment. This is very important part of your grade, so take it seriously.

All the students look at their papers.

MARCUS

What? An interview. Who do you expect me to interview, Mrs. Campbell?

MRS. CAMPBELL

I am leaving that up to you, Marcus. Your assignment is to interview a successful entrepreneur in our community. Find out how they became successful. Why they decided to go into the business that they are in.

MARCUS

Sounds like a lot of work.

MRS. CAMPBELL

Be prepared to make an oral presentation.

The whole class SIGHS. Stacey turns to Carl.

STACEY

I don't want to do an interview.

CARL

Come on, Stacey. Just because you didn't win round 1 doesn't mean you should give up totally. Think of someone whose job you admire. Then you'll be glad to interview him.

Stacey ponders.

INT. GRANDMA MATTIE`S HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - DAY

Grandma Mattie greets Stacey and Rebecca with a big smile on her face.

GRANDMA MATTIE
Come on in here, so good to see you
all.

REBECCA
Hey mama how have you been? You got
it smelling good in here as always.

STACEY
(smiling)
Hey Grandma Mattie.

Grandma Mattie kisses Stacey.

GRANDMA MATTIE
Hey baby.

The doorbell RINGS. Other family members and people from the neighborhood come including Ms. Bertha, and Grandma Mattie's daughter, Trella.

GRANDMA MATTIE (CONT'D)
You all come in and have a seat.

MS. BERTHA
(southern old fashioned
dialect)
Lawd Mattie. You cooked for an
army. I sure hope you cooked some
of those good ole collard greens.

GRANDMA MATTIE
You know I got some collards and
mustards too.

Ms. Bertha CHUCKLES.

MS. BERTHA
I can't hardly wait to eat them.

GRANDMA MATTIE
We will be eating after a while,
just hold on.

LIVING ROOM

Everybody sits in the living room. Grandma Mattie pulls Stacey to one side to talk to her.

GRANDMA MATTIE (CONT'D)
I want to talk to you. Now I heard
about what happened with the
writing competition. Your dad
didn't let you go on.

Grandma Mattie hugs Stacey.

GRANDMA MATTIE (CONT'D)
You are special in the eyesight of
God and that's all that matters.
Don't you worry about what he says
about you. One day God is going to
use you in a mighty special way.

Stacey smiles at Grandma Mattie.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Trella, Rebecca's sister, turns to Rebecca. Stacey stands
behind the door eavesdropping on their conversation.

TRELLA
Hey sis! Guess who I saw the other
day?

REBECCA
Who?

TRELLA
Your old squeeze, Frank Simmons.

REBECCA
Oh really.

TRELLA
Yes girl and he is looking fine as
ever with those tight abs. I know
that you hate you let that get
away.

REBECCA
Trella, don't you start nothing
now.

TRELLA
I don't mean to start no trouble
girl. I am just saying Bro. Frank
is looking good and he is doing
good for himself too.

REBECCA

Yes, I heard he owns a publishing company.

TRELLA

Well for what I hear he owns several publishing companies.

REBECCA

He always wanted to be his own boss so he could be the one who calls the shots.

TRELLA

Remember how he used to say that if you two ever got married that you all would have a house full of children? He loves children.

REBECCA

Yes I remember him saying that. He loved children and children loved him. He's a good man. Most men would talk about having sons, but he always talked about how he wanted to have a daughter.

TRELLA

Yeah, he always talked about how he would treat his daughter like a princess. She would be the apple of his eye. He was crazy about you too. He would do anything in the world for you.

REBECCA

I had him wrapped around my little finger. Until I pushed him to get married.

TRELLA

He wasn't established yet.

REBECCA

But I had to get married.

TRELLA

I know you did, child. He sure is a lot different than Michael.

REBECCA

Don't start that Trella.

TRELLA

Rebecca, you are a beautiful and smart woman. But he acts like he doesn't appreciate you. He's blessed to have you and his Stacey, but he's too selfish to realize it. It's always all about him.

REBECCA

Wait a minute. That's my husband you're talking about.

TRELLA

I know. I am sorry, girl. But you know for yourself that the things that he does is just not right. Why isn't he taking Stacey to the Father/Daughter dance? I bet Frank would take her.

REBECCA

That's enough now. Frank is not her daddy, Michael is. Listen, I know that you mean well, but Michael is not all that bad. He'll come around. Just keeping praying for him.

ON STACEY

Stacey gets her cell phone and looks up Mr. Frank Simmons' address.

INSERT: CELL PHONE SCREEN. FRANK, OWNER OF FS PUBLISHING CORPORATION.

Stacey gasps.

STACEY

Wow!

EXT. FS PUBLISHING CORPORATION - DAY

Stacey walks up to the high office tower. A doorman opens the office door for her.

STACEY

Thank you.

The doorman nods.

INT. FS PUBLISHING CORPORATION - LOBBY - DAY

Stacey approaches the security desk. The GUARD sits at the desk.

GUARD
Is there something I can help you with?

STACEY
I'm looking for a man by the name of Frank Simmons.

GUARD
Mr. Simmons is awfully busy. Can I help you with something? Do you want to submit a manuscript?

STACEY
No sir! I didn't come to do that. I just need to talk to Mr. Frank Simmons.

GUARD
Well alright then. Let me go and see if he is in his office. What is your name?

STACEY
My name is Stacey. Stacey Alexander.

GUARD
Okay. Ms. Stacey Alexander, you wait right here.

The Guard gets on the intercom.

INTERCUT: FRANK/GUARD

GUARD
Mr. Simmons, there's someone here to see you.

FRANK
I'm busy. Who is it?

GUARD
Stacey Alexander. She's about 16 years old.

FRANK
Send her in.

BACK TO SCENE

The Guard turns to Stacey.

GUARD
He will see you now. 4th floor.

STACEY
Great!

Stacey runs toward the elevator.

INT. FRANK'S OFFICE - DAY

Frank works at his desk. Stacey enters.

STACEY
(voice shakes)
Hello sir.

Frank reaches to shake her hand.

FRANK
I heard that you wanted to talk to
me. What can I do for you?

STACEY
I have an assignment to interview a
successful business person, and I
chose you.

FRANK
That's mighty nice of you. But I am
curious, why did you choose me? Do
you know me?

STACEY
No sir, I don't know you. But my
Aunt Trella and my mom do.

FRANK
Your mom? Who exactly is your mom?

STACEY
Rebecca Alexander. She used to be
Rebecca Mills.

Frank smiles.

FRANK
You are Rebecca Mill's daughter?

STACEY
Yes sir.

Frank gulps, stares at Stacey, realizes he has his own daughter in front of him. He regains his composure.

FRANK
So how is your mom doing? I haven't seen her in years. She was always a fine woman.

Frank looks embarrassed.

FRANK (CONT'D)
I mean fine as in a good woman.

Stacey LAUGHS.

STACEY
My mom's doing fine. Can I do the interview with you?

FRANK
Sure! Sure! I will be honored to spend some time with you.

STACEY
Thank you and I promise not to take too much of your time.

FRANK
Not a problem at all. Fire away with the questions.

STACEY
Okay, how long have you been in business? What made you decide to go into business for yourself? Do you make a lot of money? Do you like children?

Frank sighs.

FRANK
Wait! Hold on a minute. You're asking me too many questions at one time. Now I've been in business for 12 years. I took over this business when Mr. Thomas decided he wanted to sell it.

(MORE)

FRANK(cont'd)

It was a good opportunity so I took advantage of it.

Frank catches his breath.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Now it depends on what you call a lot of money, but I guess I do pretty good for myself. And yes, I do like children. Whew!

Stacey smiles. She continues with the questions.

STACEY

Have you ever had a first love? Do you ever wish that you had a daughter?

FRANK

Come on now, these questions seem a little on the personal side. I thought you were supposed to ask questions about my business.

STACEY

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to get too personal.

FRANK

Okay it's my turn now. Do you like school? Do you make all A's? Do you like going to the mall? What kind of things do you like to do in your free time?

STACEY

Sometimes! No! Of course! And I love to write.

FRANK

Wow! You are good! Tell me what do you like to write about?

STACEY

I like to write about everything. I keep a journal and I write about whatever is on my mind. One day I want to write my very own book.

FRANK

Wow! Writing your own book! I'm impressed! That sounds great!

STACEY

My dad doesn't think so.

FRANK

Why wouldn't your dad think that would be a good idea?

STACEY

My dad said that I'm not smart enough and that it takes special people to write a book.

FRANK

He's right!

Stacey looks puzzled.

FRANK (CONT'D)

It takes special people to write books. You are a special person. You remind me of my successful writers.

STACEY

Thank you, Mr. Simmons.

FRANK

I believe that you can do anything you set your mind too.

STACEY

You sure do sound a lot different than my dad.

FRANK

I think you're a very special and bright young lady who has a very promising future.

STACEY

Now that really doesn't sound like my dad. He thinks I don't have a bright future.

FRANK

I'm sure he believes in you.

STACEY

He never wants to spend time with me. We don't have any special father/daughter memories. The last thing that my dad wants to do is create a special memory with me.

FRANK

That's unfortunate because he's missing out on getting to know a beautiful young lady. It's hard to believe any father in his right mind would not love to have a daughter like you.

Stacey smiles from ear to ear.

STACEY

Thank you, Mr. Simmons.

FRANK

No need to thank me. Just look at that smile.

Stacey blushes.

STACEY

Well I guess I've taken up enough of your time. Thanks for the interview.

Stacey walks toward the door.

FRANK

Hey not so fast. As you can see I could use some help around here. How would you like to come by here tomorrow and help me out?

STACEY

I would love that.

FRANK

Maybe you can organize some of this paperwork.

Frank picks up the papers on his desk and throws them in a bin.

STACEY

Sure I would love that!

FRANK

I'll pay you, and I'll read your first manuscript and consider it for publication.

STACEY

Wow!

They both smile at each other.

INT. FRANK OFFICE - DAY

Stacey organizes papers in the office. Frank enters.

FRANK

Wow! I can finally see my desk. I
am impressed!

Stacey has a sad look on her face.

FRANK (CONT'D)

What's the matter, Stacey?

STACEY

Nothing.

FRANK

Come on, Stacey, there has to be
something wrong.

STACEY

We're having a father/daughter
dance at school and my friends are
going. I really want to go, but I
don't have anyone to take me.

FRANK

Your dad's not going to take you?

STACEY

He says he can't afford it, but I
think that he's too embarrassed to
be seen with me.

FRANK

I'm sure that's not the case. He's
probably just tied up with
something.

STACEY

You're acting like my mom now.
She's always taking up for my dad.
The truth is he's not taking me
because he doesn't want to.

FRANK

I see.

STACEY

And to make things worse, I got in trouble in Mrs. Campbell's class and she said that I had to come and work on the set up and cleaning committee as my punishment.

FRANK

Maybe it won't be so bad.

STACEY

I don't see what good can come out of this.

FRANK

God has a way of working things for the good, for those who love Him.

STACEY

I've gotta go. See you, Mr. Simmons.

Stacey leaves.

RECEPTION AREA

Frank turns to his Receptionist.

FRANK

Hold my calls for the rest of the day.

The Receptionist nods.

Frank leaves.

INT. ALEXANDER HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Rebecca looks in the mirror, puts on lipstick, SIGHS.

REBECCA

You're getting old, girl.

Frank enters. Rebecca turns around. They stare at each other, the past flashing through their minds for one brief moment, but then reality sets in.

FRANK

Rebecca.

REBECCA

Frank, what brings you here?

FRANK

Your daughter came to interview me for a school project.

REBECCA

How'd she find out about you?

FRANK

I don't know, but she wants someone to take her to the father-daughter dance.

REBECCA

Oh, that. She doesn't need to go to that.

FRANK

Why doesn't Michael take her?

REBECCA

He's got a business trip that evening.

FRANK

Oh--I'd like to ask to take her.

REBECCA

You? You don't want to do that.

FRANK

Why not? She's a wonderful girl.

REBECCA

Michael wouldn't like it. She's his daughter.

FRANK

She's begging me to take her. She's a good kid. It's only this one time. It would mean so much to her.

REBECCA

I know it would, but you don't know her father. He'd kill me.

FRANK

No one has to know.

REBECCA

All right, Frank, but please don't tell Michael.

FRANK
Promise. Thank you Rebecca.

Frank turns toward the door.

REBECCA
Nice to see you again, Frank.

Frank pauses, then leaves.

Rebecca props herself against the sink.

POV REBECCA

Through the window, Rebecca watches Frank get in his car and drive away.

INT. BALLROOM - NIGHT

Stacey puts plates on the tables in the ballroom at the Father/Daughter dance. Frank enters.

STACEY
(surprised)
Hey Mr. Simmons, what are you doing here?

FRANK
I`m here for the father/daughter dance. Will you please be my escort?

Frank hands a garment bag to Stacey, flabbergasted.

STACEY
What do you mean?

FRANK (CONT'D)
Just what I said. I`m taking you to the dance. Now go try this on. The lady at Unique Boutique Fashion Shop helped me pick this out. I hope you like it.

Stacey goes away to try on the dress.

LATER

Stacey enters the ballroom with a beautiful orange sequin dress with rhinestones, and gold shoes.

FRANK (CONT'D)
 Absolutely beautiful. You look just
 like a princess.

Stacey smiles from ear to ear.

STACEY
 I feel like a princess.

The PHOTOGRAPHER walks up.

PHOTOGRAPHER
 Excuse me sir, may I take a picture
 of you and your daughter?

FRANK
 Sure!

The Photographer takes a picture of them. Stacey turns to Frank.

STACEY
 Not that I mind, but why didn't you
 tell him I'm not your daughter?

FRANK
 Do you think I'm going to disown
 the most beautiful young lady at
 this dance? May I have this dance?

Stacey smiles and holds her hand out. Frank grabs her hand. They slow dance together. The Photographer takes more pictures of the two of them.

STACEY
 I really want to thank you, Mr.
 Simmons. You didn't have to do this
 for me.

FRANK
 It's my honor, Stacey.

Frank and Stacey resume dancing.

EXT. ALEXANDER HOME - FRONT ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Frank walks Stacey to the entrance. Stacey holds a bouquet of flowers.

STACEY
 Thanks for taking me, Mr. Simmons.
 And thanks for the flowers.

FRANK

The pleasure's all mine, Stacey.

Rebecca awaits at the doorstep.

REBECCA

Stacey, get in here now. Your father just went to bed and I don't want to wake him. He was asking where you were, and I had to tell him you slept over at Tory's house. He wasn't too pleased, but I told him you'd do extra chores tomorrow to make up for it.

STACEY

Thanks Mom.

FRANK

I best be on my way.

STACEY

Maybe I'll see you again one day, Mr. Simmons.

Frank looks at Rebecca, who looks worried.

FRANK

You have a good night, Stacey.

Frank gets in his car and leaves.

Stacey and Rebecca walk in the house.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - DAY

The telephone rings. Michael sits in a recliner reading the paper. Rebecca answers the phone.

REBECCA

Hello? Oh, hi Trella.

(pause)

Oh, no! I'll be there right away.

Rebecca hangs up the phone and turns to Michael.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

Mama is in the hospital. The doctors think she's had a stroke.

MICHAEL

That's too bad.

REBECCA
The doctors say that it doesn't
look good.

MICHAEL
That's too bad.

REBECCA
Is that all you have to say?

MICHAEL
What more do you want? I said
"that's too bad."

REBECCA
Well can you at least pray with me?

MICHAEL
I don't pray for anyone. Why start
now?

REBECCA
You might not have prayed for her,
but she sure has prayed for you.

Stacey enters the room.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
Grandma Mattie had a stroke.

STACEY
Is she okay?

REBECCA
The doctors say that it doesn't
look good.

Stacey bursts out into tears.

STACEY
Oh mama what are we going to do? We
can't make it without Grandma
Mattie.

Rebecca grabs Stacey.

REBECCA
Don't even think about losing her.
Now we are going to do what we
always do... pray. God is the only
one who can help any of us.

Rebecca grabs her coat and purse and walks toward the door.
Michael jumps up.

MICHAEL

Where do you think you are going?

REBECCA

I`m going to take care of my mama.

MICHAEL

What about me?

REBECCA

What about you?

MICHAEL

I need you to take care of me
first. I`ve been working all day
and I need my supper.

REBECCA

Michael, mama needs me.

MICHAEL

I need you too. You know that I
haven`t been feeling well lately
either.

Michael fakes coughing.

REBECCA

I need to be there with my mama,
now.

MICHAEL

Why are you always the one that
your family calls when something
goes wrong? You are not God!

REBECCA

My family needs me.

MICHAEL

You don`t have to be at the
hospital. That`s what the doctors
are for. The last time I checked
you were not a doctor.

REBECCA

(stern voice)

I need to go and see about my mama.

MICHAEL

You are a church going woman. You should be able to pray from anywhere.

REBECCA

Michael, don't make this hard for me. It's already hard enough.

MICHAEL

(sarcastic)

I thought you said that it doesn't matter where you are when you pray, that God can still hear you.

REBECCA

He can Michael!

MICHAEL

Well why do you need to go to the hospital? Just say a prayer from home.

Michael bursts out into a high pitched sarcastic laugh.

STACEY

Daddy, we need to go and check on Grandma Mattie. Please let us go.

MICHAEL

Your mama can go but you stay here and fix me something to eat.

STACEY

Daddy, please don't make me stay. I want to see Grandma Mattie too. What if something happens to her and I'm not there? She needs me.

Michael looks adamant.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Stacey prepares Michael's food. Michael snaps his fingers.

MICHAEL

What's taking you so long? Hurry up and bring me my food.

Stacey brings him a bowl of soup and crackers. Michael tastes the soup, then spits it out.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

What's the matter with you? This food is too salty. You did this on purpose. You're trying to kill me; you know that I can't have salt.

Stacey walks off smiling.

INT. HOSPITAL - GRANDMA MATTIE'S ROOM - DAY

Rebecca enters. Trella, Ms. Bertha, and other friends surround Grandma Mattie. Grandma Mattie is hooked up to the breathing machine. Tubes are in her nose and mouth.

REBECCA

Lord, look at my poor mama. Please have mercy on her.

DR. RICHARDSON, 50's, walks in.

DR. RICHARDSON

I need to talk to you about your mama.

WAITING ROOM

Dr. Richardson turns to Rebecca, Trella and Ms. Bertha.

DR. RICHARDSON (CONT'D)

We're doing all we can do to help your mama. But I have to be honest, there is too much swelling around her brain.

REBECCA

Thank you Dr. Richardson, but we are going to keep praying. God is in control and he has the final say.

GRANDMA MATTIE'S ROOM

Rebecca, Trella, Ms. Bertha and Ms. Gertrude surround Grandma Mattie's bed and CRY.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

We're not going to handle this situation this way. Now get yourselves together. Stop your crying; it's praying time.

They all join hands together. Rebecca leads them in prayer.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

Heavenly Father, we come to you in the humblest way we know how. We come thanking you for your goodness. We are calling on you, Jehovah Rapha, our healer. We ask that you let your will be done in mama's life. Let your will be done.

Tears flow down the women's faces.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Grandma Mattie is in her casket in the front of the church. There are not many people seated in the church. Stacey and Rebecca enter.

STACEY

Mama, why are there so many empty seats? Where are all the people?

REBECCA

I don't know, honey.

STACEY

I remember how when Grandma Mattie threw a dinner, everyone would show up to eat. And when she'd donate food and clothing to the shelter, everyone would line up to get some.

The family sits together. Stacey looks at the flowers.

STACEY

Look at all the flowers. I bet there are twice as many flowers as there are people.

REBECCA

At least they sent flowers.

STACEY

I guess the flowers are from the people who didn't think enough of her to come and pay their respects.

Stacey turns around and looks at all the empty seats.

STACEY (CONT'D)

After all that she did for other people, this is all the respect she gets.

(MORE)

STACEY(cont'd)

I bet half the people here just came to be spectators and get a good meal.

Stacey overhears MS. GERTRUDE, 50's, the gossip, talking to another lady at the funeral.

MS. GERTRUDE

They sure did a good job on her. She looks just like herself.

STACEY

Well who is she supposed to look like?

The funeral service begins.

ALTAR

Rev. Smith speaks.

REV. SMITH

We are here to celebrate the life and legacy of Mattie Mills. She showed love to everyone she met. She didn't mind giving. If you needed it and she had it, she would give it to you. That was the kind of person she was. She was a true Christian.

AUDIENCE

Stacey looks at the empty seats and all the flowers. She turns to her mom.

STACEY

If this is what Christian love looks like, I don't want any part of being a Christian.

Stacey looks angry.

EXT. BURIAL SITE - DAY

Stacey sees her UNCLE JIM, 40's, a philandering drunk who attempts to be upstanding, smiling at her. He approaches her. Uncle Jim pretends to be sympathetic.

UNCLE JIM

I know how close you were to your grandma. I know that you're sad about losing her. I'm here to help you work through this.

STACEY

I don't know if I'll ever get past this.

UNCLE JIM

It's going to be hard, but you can make it. But not alone. That's why I'm here.

He reaches out and puts his arm around her shoulder.

UNCLE JIM

I see your daddy isn't even here to comfort you. That's why I'm here.

Stacey looks surprised.

UNCLE JIM

If there's anything you need, just let me know and your Uncle Jim is going to get it for you.

Uncle Jim pats Stacey's shoulder. Stacey is comforted.

INT. BASKETBALL COURT - EVENING

Stacey, Uncle Jim and Aunt Trella watch the basketball game.

UNCLE JIM (CONT'D)

Your daddy ever brought you to a basketball game?

STACEY

No sir!

UNCLE JIM

That's a shame. But you see what I did for you? I brought you to a basketball game. Don't you forget that.

STACEY

Yes sir!

UNCLE JIM

What's with the no sir and yes sir. You don't have to say that. You're making me feel old.

STACEY

Okay sir, sorry sir.

They both LAUGH.

UNCLE JIM

Seriously, just relax. We`re going to have a lot of fun together. We`ll do things that a father should do with his daughter. You`ll like that, won`t you?

STACEY

Sure I will!

UNCLE JIM

Remember I told you that if there`s anything you need, I`ll get it for you. You take care of me and I`ll take care of you.

Trella cuts in.

TRELLA

All right Jimmy, leave the girl alone and let her enjoy the game.

Uncle Jim puts his arm around Trella, kisses her cheek.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Stacey, Uncle Jim and Trella sit at a table. Uncle Jim turns to Stacey.

UNCLE JIM

Baby, what do you want to eat?

Trella responds.

TRELLA

How about a chicken salad?

UNCLE JIM

I was talking to Stacey. What do you want to eat?

Trella looks shocked.

STACEY

It doesn`t matter.

TRELLA

It doesn`t matter. You young people get me with that "it doesn`t matter". Can`t you give a simple answer?

Stacey LAUGHS.

UNCLE JIM
How about a burger? I'm sure Stacey
would love a burger. Right Stacey?

STACEY
I guess so.

UNCLE JIM
See, I know my baby girl.

Trella looks at her husband, but she does not say anything.

INT. ALEXANDER HOME - FRONT ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Uncle Jim and Stacey enter. Rebecca greets them.

UNCLE JIM
Well, Rebecca I brought your baby
home to you safe and sound.

REBECCA
Thank you so much. I appreciate you
and Trella spending time with her.

UNCLE JIM
Not a problem at all. Oh, I just
remembered Trella wanted me to ask
if Stacey could babysit for us next
Wednesday.

REBECCA
You know I don't mind. It'll give
her something to do. Maybe it'll
keep her mind off everything that's
been going on lately.

UNCLE JIM
I'll let Trella know.

Uncle Jim smiles at Stacey.

UNCLE JIM (CONT'D)
Stacey, I hope you enjoyed tonight.
We'll see you next Wednesday.

Stacey smiles at Uncle Jim.

STACEY
Thanks Uncle Jim.

Uncle Jim puts his hand on Stacey's shoulder.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Mrs. Campbell hands back the interview papers to the students, including Stacey.

Stacey looks at her paper.

INSERT PAPER: AN A+ IS WRITTEN AT THE TOP.

Stacey shows it to Carl.

CARL
Great job, Stacey!

Marcus swipes the paper.

MARCUS
A+! You gonna give her an A+? I
only got a B+. This ain't fair,
Mrs. Campbell.

MRS. CAMPBELL
Stacey did a wonderful job.

Mrs. Campbell hands out the round 2 competition papers.

MRS. CAMPBELL
Now raise your hand those who
entered the writing competition.
This is round 2.

Stacey hesitates. Carl nudges her.

CARL
You entered. Put up your hand.

Stacey hesitates.

STACEY
But my daddy said no. He said I
wasn't good enough.

CARL
Don't listen to him. You can do it,
Stacey.

Stacey puts up her hand. Mrs. Campbell hands her the paper.

INT. STACEY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Stacey looks at her paper, writes.

STACEY (V.O.)

When people close to you die, it makes you see that time is limited. Finding love is even more important. Some people are not meant to have fathers who love them. Some people have to find the love they need out in the world, in other people. Friends, family, even strangers, can fill the emptiness in a person`s heart.

INT. UNCLE JIM'S CAR - DAY

Jim and Stacey ride in his car.

UNCLE JIM

You look so beautiful today.

STACEY

Thank you.

UNCLE JIM

That blouse looks so good on you. Where did you get it?

STACEY

(nervous)

I can't remember.

UNCLE JIM

I like how your clothes fit on you. I really like to see you in jeans.

STACEY

Why are you saying this to me?

Uncle Jim smiles.

UNCLE JIM

I`m just giving you a compliment. See, that`s the problem. You`re not used to a man giving you a compliment. That`s why you have me.

Uncle Jim LAUGHS.

INT. UNCLE JIM'S HOUSE- DAY

Trella greets Jim and Stacey at the door.

TRELLA

Hey baby.

UNCLE JIM

Hey baby.

TRELLA

Hey Stacey, how are you doing?

STACEY

(hesitant)

I'm fine, I guess, Aunt Trella.

TRELLA

You guess? Your uncle Jim hasn't been aggravating you, has he? Pay no mind to him, Stacey. He likes to tease, but he means nothing by it.

Stacey looks at Uncle Jim. Trella turns to her husband and gives him a hug.

TRELLA (CONT'D)

You have been behaving yourself, haven't you?

Uncle Jim and Trella LAUGH.

TRELLA (CONT'D)

Stacey, there's plenty of food in the refrigerator. Just help yourself.

STACEY

Yes, ma'am.

TRELLA

Jim, what time do you have to be at your meeting?

UNCLE JIM

I'm going to get ready and head out. I won't be around here long.

Jim grabs Trella and starts to caress her.

UNCLE JIM (CONT'D)

I will see you later on tonight, baby.

Trella leaves. Jim looks out the window as she drives off.

UNCLE JIM (CONT'D)

Come here, Stacey.

STACEY
What do you want, Uncle Jim?

UNCLE JIM
Just relax, I just want to talk to you.

STACEY
We don't have anything to talk about.

UNCLE JIM
We have plenty to talk about.

He grabs her hand.

UNCLE JIM (CONT'D)
Now you are going to act right, aren't you?

STACEY
What do you mean act right? Take me home. I want to go home.

UNCLE JIM
You ain't going nowhere. Come on in here.

Uncle Jim grabs Stacey and drags her to the...

BEDROOM

Uncle Jim holds Stacey to his chest.

STACEY
Uncle Jim! No! Please no!

UNCLE JIM
Come on now, act right.

STACEY
Uncle Jim, please don't do this to me. Why are you doing this?

UNCLE JIM
You owe me. All my money I spent on you taking you to the basketball games and out to dinner. You thought that I was spending time with you for nothing?

Stacey CRIES.

STACEY

Uncle Jim, please! I thought you cared about me.

UNCLE JIM

Hush your mouth, girl. Don't you want to see how it feels to be loved? Your daddy ain't never showed you no love.

STACEY

No!

Uncle Jim grabs Stacey, throws her on the bed. Stacey scratches Uncle Jim's face.

Just then, Jim and Trella's son, EMORY, 4, comes into the room.

EMORY

Daddy, what are you doing?

UNCLE JIM

Get out of here.

Stacey pushes Uncle Jim off her onto the floor. Stacey runs out the door and down the...

HALLWAY

Stacey runs toward the...

FRONT DOOR

Stacey runs out the door and onto the...

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Stacey runs as fast as she can, until she gets to a...

EXT. CONVENIENCE STORE - NIGHT

Stacey runs inside. The CLERK looks at her.

CLERK

What's happened, child?

STACEY

I was almost raped. I need to call my mom.

The Clerk hands Stacey the phone. Shaking, Stacey calls Rebecca.

INTERCUT: STACEY/REBECCA

STACEY

Mom, mom!

REBECCA

Hold on, baby. What`s wrong?

STACEY

Uncle Jim, Uncle Jim, he tried to rape me...

Stacey CRIES.

REBECCA

(worried tone)

Oh my God! Stacey please tell me it's not so.

Stacey continues to CRY.

INT. MICHAEL`S CAR - NIGHT

Michael drives, turns to Rebecca.

MICHAEL

I don't believe her. She's just making all this up.

REBECCA

I believe her. She wouldn't lie about something like this.

MICHAEL

You know how she`s always doing things trying to get attention.

REBECCA

Not something like this. I've heard rumors already about Jim. I should never have let her go!

MICHAEL

This is all in her mind. I'm only going with you because you're freaked out and I don't want you to go crazy like her.

Rebecca CRIES.

EXT. CONVENIENCE STORE - NIGHT

Michael and Rebecca meet Stacey. Rebecca hugs Stacey.

REBECCA

We're not going to let Uncle Jim hurt you anymore, baby. He's not getting away with this. Now you come home with us, where you'll be safe.

INT. CAR - DAY

Stacey gets in the car beside Rebecca. Rebecca turns to Michael.

REBECCA

We should call the police.

MICHAEL

First I want to hear what Jim has to say about this.

STACEY

I don't want to go back there tonight.

MICHAEL

You're going.

Michael puts the car in drive.

INT. UNCLE JIM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Michael and Stacey stand behind Rebecca. Rebecca confronts Jim and Trella.

REBECCA

Trella, I need to talk to you about Jim.

TRELLA

About what? What's going on?

Jim gives Stacey a dirty look.

JIM

Yeah, what's going on?

REBECCA

I don't know how to put this any other way, so I'm just going to come right out with it.

Rebecca takes a deep breath.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

Stacey said that Jim tried to have sex with her.

TRELLA

What? Jim, is this true?

JIM

Baby, come on now, you know me better than that.

TRELLA

Is it true?

JIM

Baby, you know I wouldn't do anything like that.

TRELLA

How could you?

JIM

Baby, are you going to believe her over me? I didn't try her. She wanted me.

REBECCA

I don't believe you.

JIM

See, Rebecca you are too blind to see how love hungry your daughter really is. You know she'll do anything for love.

TRELLA

Jim, you still haven't answered me. Did you do it?

JIM

Baby, I already told you that I didn't do it. You have to believe me. Stacey is just insecure.

Jim grabs Trella and hugs her.

JIM (CONT'D)
Trella, this never happened. I
promise you.

Stacey SCREAMS.

STACEY
He's lying!

TRELLA
I don't know what to believe.

JIM
It was all on her, baby. She's just
mad at me because I told her that I
couldn't take her father's place. I
was just trying to be nice to her
and do some things that her father
should have been doing with her.
She just took it the wrong way.

Trella CRIES.

TRELLA
Jim, I want to believe you, but I
just don't know.

Stacey looks at Trella CRYING.

STACEY
Aunt Trella, I would never do
anything to hurt you. Please
believe me.

Stacey looks at Rebecca.

STACEY (CONT'D)
I knew I should have never said
anything. I knew this would be bad.
I should have kept it to myself.

JIM
That's right, you should have kept
everything to yourself.

Trella SCREAMS at Jim.

TRELLA
What do you mean she should have
kept it to herself?

JIM
Baby, you know what I mean. She
should have not told everyone how
she tried to come on to me.

TRELLA
I believe you, Jim.

Michael turns to Stacey.

MICHAEL
Let's go. Don't ever do something
like this again or I'll disown you,
got it?

Stacey CRIES.

Emory enters.

EMORY
Stacey, why you crying?

STACEY
Because Uncle Jim hurt me.

EMORY
Daddy, you shouldn't have hurt
Stacey on the bed.

Trella turns to Jim in disgust.

TRELLA
Get out! Get out!

JIM
Trella, you don't mean that. You
know that you need me.

TRELLA
I said get out! I want you out now!

Trella throws the pillows off the sofa, glasses, vases off of
the table, and books off the shelves at Jim. She continues to
YELL at Jim.

TRELLA (CONT'D)
Get out! I don't want you here. I
trusted you. How could you do this?

Jim whispers to Stacey.

JIM

You are going to regret this day
for the rest of your life.

The Police arrive.

REBECCA

No, Jim, you are going to regret
this day for the rest of your life.

The Police enter.

Michael is flabbergasted.

MICHAEL

The testimony of a four-year-old
witness is not going to hold up in
court.

Stacey shows the Police and Michael her hands, with Uncle
Jim`s skin still under her nails.

STACEY

I scratched his face. I bet you his
DNA is still under my fingernails.

Michael is silent.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Rebecca cuts coupons out of the newspaper. Stacey sweeps the
floor with a broom. Michael is on the computer. He sees a
disturbing picture.

MICHAEL

What is this?

REBECCA

What is what?

MICHAEL

You have done some crazy and low
down things before, but this is low
even for you.

REBECCA

Are you going to tell me what
you`re talking about or are you
just going to keep pointing at the
computer?

MICHAEL

Come look at this.

Rebecca and Stacey walk to the computer.

ON COMPUTER SCREEN

There is a picture of Stacey and Frank Simmons at the dance.

BACK TO SCENE

MICHAEL

A picture of your daughter. You let your daughter go to the father/dance with another man.

REBECCA

I didn't know that she went to the dance. I had nothing to do with this.

MICHAEL

You let your daughter go to the dance with Frank Simmons, of all people.

REBECCA

Michael, I am telling you I didn't know anything about this.

MICHAEL

You never used to lie to me before. Why are you starting now? You got something going with Frank?

REBECCA

I let her go. You wouldn't take her. She wanted to go so badly. Frank offered to take her.

Michael turns on Stacey.

MICHAEL

Just look at you. You disgust me.

STACEY

Daddy, I didn't mean to hurt you. I wasn't thinking. You know no one can ever take your place.

MICHAEL

I am the man of this house and I can't get any respect. This is it. I'm not taking this treatment anymore. I'm out of here.

STACEY

Daddy, please don't leave. I'm sorry. I didn't know how bad this would hurt you. I just wasn't thinking.

MICHAEL

Maybe you will think when I move out.

Michael, angry, leaves the room.

EXT. ALEXANDER HOME - IN FRONT OF CAR - DAY

Michael puts his suitcase in the trunk of the car. Rebecca and Stacey look on.

STACEY

Daddy, don't leave. I'll be good from now on. Please daddy.

REBECCA

Michael, I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

MICHAEL

Maybe you can tell that to Frank.

Michael gets in the car, drives away, leaving Rebecca and Stacey in tears.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Mrs. Campbell sits at the front of the class. Students work on an assignment. Marcus nudges Stacey.

MARCUS

Heard your old man left. Couldn't stand you anymore, could he?

Stacey CRIES. Carl notices, turns to Marcus.

CARL

You, outside! We're going to settle this once and for all.

MARCUS

I'm up for it, you toothpick. Let's go.

Mrs. Campbell gets up.

MRS. CAMPBELL
 There will be no fighting in this
 school. Now both of you, sit down--
 now!

Marcus and Carl sit down. Stacey continues to CRY.

MRS. CAMPBELL
 Stacey, don't worry. God loves you.

MARCUS
 You ain't supposed to mention God
 in class!

MRS. CAMPBELL
 You don't tell I mentioned God, and
 I won't tell you were bullying
 Stacey.

Mrs. Campbell gets papers off her desk, hands them out.

MRS. CAMPBELL
 These are the results of round 2 of
 the writing competition.

Mrs. Campbell hands Stacey her paper.

Stacey looks at it.

INSERT PAPER: B-. DON'T GIVE UP.

BACK TO SCENE

Stacey looks more depressed than she`s ever looked, like she
 is at the end of her rope.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

Stacey sits on the school steps. Marcus approaches.

MARCUS
 What`re you doing here, Stacey?

STACEY
 Thinking.

MARCUS
 Bout your old man leaving? My old
 man left long ago for prison.

STACEY
I guess that`s why you act like you
do.

MARCUS
Hey, I do great in school, I can
deal with it. You know how?

Marcus pulls out a cigarette pack.

MARCUS
This. Try one.

STACEY
Mom said not to do that.

MARCUS
Your mommy doesn`t know what you
need, otherwise you wouldn`t be in
this mess. This stuff`ll make you
feel smooth.

Marcus gives the package to Stacey. Stacey takes it. Marcus
leaves. Stacey looks at the package, opens it, pulls out a
cigarette.

INT. STACEY`S BEDROOM - DAY

Stacey lies on the bed. She throws her stuffed animals
around. Rebecca enters.

REBECCA
Stacey, we need to talk. I need to
know what`s going on with you.

STACEY
What do you mean?

REBECCA
You`re just not acting like
yourself. All you do is stay in
this room.

STACEY
You know that I like to stay in my
room to write.

REBECCA
Writing is one thing, but I think
there`s more to it than that.

STACEY
I`m fine mama.

REBECCA

No you are not.

Rebecca grabs Stacey's chin and pushes her head up.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

Why are you eyes so red?

STACEY

I don't know. I'm just tired I guess.

REBECCA

I noticed the other day that your clothes smelled like smoke. Have you been smoking?

STACEY

Mama, you know me better than that.

REBECCA

Have you been smoking?

STACEY

No mama.

Rebecca reaches out to hug Stacey. Stacey pushes her away.

REBECCA

Honey, I'm here for you. But you have to talk to me about what's going on.

STACEY

What's there to talk about? What's done is done.

REBECCA

Don't look at it like that. I know you're hurt about everything that's happened, but we can work through this together. I love you, Stacey. You can tell me anything.

STACEY

We both have hurt we have to work through. But don't worry about me. You work through your hurt your way and I'll work through mine, my way.

Stacey gets back to writing.

INT. STACEY`S ROOM - DAY

Rebecca gets dirty laundry out of Stacey's room. A pack of cigarettes falls out of her jeans pocket. Stacey enters.

REBECCA
You lied to me.

STACEY
Whatever happened to hello, how was your day?

REBECCA
You said you were not smoking.

STACEY
So what? A little cigarette here and there isn't going to hurt anything.

REBECCA
Stacey, what happened to you? You've changed so much. Smoking, this is not like you. What drove you to this?

STACEY
Daddy. I'm his daughter, but he sure doesn't act like. He treats me like trash. He always has and he always will.

REBECCA
I know you're hurting, but this is not how to handle it.

STACEY
This is my way.

REBECCA
You have to pray for him. He has his ways, but deep down inside, I believe he loves you.

STACEY
Mama, have you ever heard him tell me he loves me?

Rebecca is silent.

STACEY (CONT'D)
Exactly!

REBECCA

Stacey, pray for your daddy. Just like I do.

STACEY

I'm not as strong as you are. Praying for daddy is a wasted prayer. He'll never change.

REBECCA

God can change anybody.

Rebecca hugs Stacey.

INT. SCHOOL LUNCHROOM - DAY

Stacey enters the lunchroom and sits alone. Carl walks to her table, sits down.

CARL

Hey Stacey, I just want to let you know I'm here for you.

STACEY

Thanks Carl.

Carl is about to say something, but Marcus approaches and sits next to Stacey.

MARCUS

Hey girl, how have you been?

STACEY

Good. I guess.

MARCUS

Well, you are looking mighty good. I've been checking you out. You look real good.

STACEY

I thought you hated me, but thanks.

MARCUS

How about you and me going out sometime?

STACEY

I don't know about that. My mama has been tripping lately. She might not want me to go out with you.

MARCUS

Your mama. You sound like you`re in kindergarten. You can't be worried about what your mama thinks if you want to hang out with me.

Marcus writes down his address and gives it to her.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

This is my address. Stop by around 7:00. I'll be looking for you.

Stacey smiles.

STACEY

Okay. Maybe I will see you later.

Marcus walks off. Carl turns to Stacey.

CARL

What is that all about?

STACEY

I got asked out, finally.

Carl snatches the paper from Stacey`s hand.

CARL

You know Mrs. Rebecca is not going to let you go to a party, especially not to Marcus's party.

Stacey grabs the paper back.

CARL (CONT'D)

(jealous)

I don't think you should go. You don't need to hang with Marcus. I heard he's part of some gang. I can't be sure which one, but I know he's trouble.

STACEY

Do I detect a little bit of jealousy?

CARL

Stacey, I am telling you that he is not good for you.

STACEY

Come on Carl. Lighten up. It's just one party.

CARL

I just don't want you to ruin your reputation, or get hurt.

STACEY

Do me a favor and stop worrying about me.

CARL

Fine. Do what you want.

Carl leaves. Stacey looks at the paper.

EXT. MARCUS'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Stacey is dressed up with black silky shirt and greyish black trouser pants. She rings the doorbell. Marcus opens it.

MARCUS

Hey girl, I'm glad you decided to come. We're going to have a lot of fun.

Stacey walks inside.

INT. MARCUS'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A party with lots of young people. Stacey turns to Marcus.

STACEY

Thanks for inviting me.

MARCUS

Oh, sure thing baby. Let me introduce you to everybody.

Marcus turns to his friends.

MARCUS

Hey everyone, this is my new chick, Stacey.

EVERYONE

Hi Stacey!

STACEY

Hey, how are you all doing?

They look her up and down and smile at Marcus. Stacey gets nervous.

MARCUS
You look tense. Loosen up girl.

KITCHEN

Marcus walks to the refrigerator. Stacey follows.

STACEY
I am a little nervous.

MARCUS
I know what you need.

He hands her a cold beer.

STACEY
(surprised)
What is this?

MARCUS
What do you mean what is this?

He laughs as he jumps up and down.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Oh! Not enough buzz for you. I hear you. You want something that`s a little more potent. I got just what you need.

STACEY
No, I mean. I don`t want...

MARCUS
I like you. I think I could fall in love with a girl like you.

Stacey smiles. He hands her a mixed drink. She drinks it. Stacey COUGHS and CHOKES.

STACEY
What`s this?

MARCUS
Don`t worry about it, baby. I`ll take good care of you. Now take another sip.

Stacey takes another sip, does the same thing.

STACEY
I think that`s enough.

Marcus LAUGHS.

MARCUS
Alright then. Let's go upstairs so
we can spend some time alone.

STACEY
Why do we have to go upstairs?

Stacey starts to feel a little woozy.

MARCUS
Stop asking so many questions,
girl. I just want to get to know
you better, that's all. I think you
can be the only girl for me.

STACEY
I don't want to go upstairs.

MARCUS
Let's go out on the porch then.

Stacey nods.

EXT. PORCH - NIGHT

Marcus turns to Stacey.

MARCUS
Nice night, baby.

STACEY
Sure is. I need someone in my life.

Two Goons walk up the steps, grab hold of Stacey. They gag her mouth with tape.

EXT. TRUCK - NIGHT

The Goons put Stacey in back in a cage.

INT. TRUCK - NIGHT

Stacey kicks and tries to scream.

EXT. TRUCK - NIGHT

Marcus walks up to the window.

MARCUS

Don't worry, baby. Daddy`s going to send you on a long ride to Thailand. You'll have lots of Daddys to love you then.

INT. TRUCK - NIGHT

Stacey tries to pull the ropes off her but cannot.

She CRIES. The truck moves off.

Stacey manages to get the ropes off her feet.

EXT. DOCK - NIGHT

The truck stops at a deserted dock, in front of a rusty tramp steamer.

INT. TRUCK - NIGHT

Stacey looks out the window at the ship. She looks horrified.

The two Goons open the truck door and try to pull Stacey out. She kicks them both with all her might. They go down.

EXT. DOCK - NIGHT

Stacey runs away. The Goons chase her. Stacey runs into a...

INT. DINGY BAR - NIGHT

She looks around at all the customers, mostly drunk. Then she sees Frank in a corner, talking to a customer. He hands the customer a bible.

Frank looks up, recognizes Stacey.

FRANK

Stacey!

Frank unties Stacey's hands and takes the tape off her mouth.

The Goons enter, see Frank, then leave.

FRANK

Tell me what happened.

STACEY
I went to Marcus`s house. He's part
of a sex trafficking ring. He tried
to sell me!

Frank hugs Stacey.

FRANK
No one`s ever going to hurt you,
Stacey.

Stacey CRIES in Frank`s arms.

EXT. MARCUS`S HOUSE - NIGHT

The Police arrive, arrest Marcus and the Goons.

INT. FRANK`S CAR - NIGHT

Frank, at the wheel, Rebecca, and Stacey watch the arrest.

FRANK
Stacey, do you feel safe enough to
go home?

STACEY
Can we stay with you, Mr. Simmons?

FRANK
For one night.

Frank looks at Rebecca.

INT. FRANK`S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rebecca tucks Stacey in bed.

STACEY
I'm so sorry, Mom. You told me not
to go with Marcus, and I should
have listened.

REBECCA
It's all forgiven. You're safe now,
my child.

LIVINGROOM

Frank sits next to Rebecca.

REBECCA

Frank, you're such a good friend to Stacey, almost like a--

FRANK

Father?

Rebecca nods.

FRANK

I've been thinking. Rebecca, I really missed out. Stacey is a wonderful and talented girl. I'm sorry I didn't marry you when I should have.

REBECCA

I'm sorry I pushed you away. I didn't want to be alone, or my baby alone.

FRANK

I don't know where my head was. I am to blame for all this trouble you and Stacey are in.

REBECCA

I am too. I kept trying to defend Michael. I wanted it to work out so badly, I'd say and do anything, at the expense of Stacey's wellbeing.

Rebecca CRIES. Frank puts his arm around her.

REBECCA

I've been thinking, Frank. Michael and I aren't getting back together.

FRANK

You are married to Michael. Marriage is sacred. No one should come between a husband and wife.

REBECCA

But we love each other, Frank.

FRANK

Rebecca, it's too late. We can't go back.

REBECCA

What do you expect me to do, raise Stacey with no father?

FRANK

I know you're a praying woman,
Rebecca. Keep praying for Michael,
that God will work in his heart.

Rebecca looks sad at Frank.

REBECCA

I`ve been praying for what seems
like an eternity. Let`s just face
it, some people will never change
no matter how much you pray for
them. Some people are just headed
for hell, and no matter what you
do, you can't stop them.

FRANK

I know, Rebecca, but God can stop
them, can't He? Or is He too small
to do that?

Rebecca shakes her head.

FRANK

Be encouraged. God hears your
prayers.

Rebecca nods.

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

Stacey turns to Carl.

STACEY

I wish I had listened to you. You
were trying to warn me about Marcus
It's my fault.

CARL

It's not your fault. Don't say
that. They should not have done
what they did. Come here.

Carl hugs Stacey.

CLASSROOM

Mrs. Campbell hands the third round writing assignments to
the students, including Stacey.

MRS. CAMPBELL
This third round is the most
important. This score will be
weighted 50%.

Stacey looks at her paper. A tear rolls down her cheek. Carl notices.

CARL
Hey, Stacey, it's okay.

STACEY
It's not. I try to write, but
nothing comes. I can't do it. My
dad's right. I'm a loser.

Stacey wipes a tear from her eye.

CARL
No, you're not. You're a good
friend to me. And I really like
you.

STACEY
I don't deserve you, Carl. My dad
was right.

The school bell RINGS.

Stacey runs out into the...

HALLWAY

Stacey runs down the hall and...

STACEY
My dad was right.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

...out of the school.

STACEY
My dad was right.

INT. ALEXANDER HOME - BATHROOM - DAY

Stacey rumbles through the medicine cabinet.

She finds the sleeping pills.

BEDROOM

Stacey writes a suicide note. She continues to talk to herself.

STACEY

No more pain. No more pain.

She takes a handful of pills. She passes out.

INT. LIVINGROOM - DAY

The doorbell RINGS. Rebecca opens the door. It is Carl.

REBECCA

Carl?

CARL

Hello, Mrs. Alexander, I`m worried about Stacey. She was really depressed when she left school today.

REBECCA

She`s probably in her room. I`ll get her for you.

STAIRCASE

Rebecca walks the staircase and calls for Stacey upstairs.

REBECCA

Stacey! Stacey! You have company.

There is silence.

REBECCA (CONT`D)

Stacey! Stacey! Carl`s here.

Stacey does not answer.

REBECCA (CONT`D)

That child must have those headphones on again.

Rebecca walks upstairs to Stacey`s room.

REBECCA (CONT`D)

I am too old to be climbing up these stairs.

OUTSIDE STACEY`S BEDROOM

Rebecca knocks on the door.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

Stacey!

There is silence.

STACEY`S BEDROOM

Rebecca opens Stacey's door. She sees her lying on the floor.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

(hysterical)

Oh my God! Carl come here!

Carl arrives.

Rebecca tries to wake Stacey up.

REBECCA

Stacey, wake up baby.

Carl sees a note on Stacey's desk.

CARL

Here's a note, Mrs. Alexander.

Rebecca reads the note.

REBECCA

Oh Lord! Call 911!

Carl calls 911. Stacey lies curled in a fetal ball, not responding to them.

INT. HOSPITAL - ER - DAY

Stacey lies on a hospital bed. Dr. Richardson and his nurses pump Stacey's stomach.

WAITING ROOM

Rebecca paces back and forth, prays to God.

REBECCA

Jesus, save my baby! Please Jesus,
please!

She dials Michael.

INTERCUT: REBECCA/MICHAEL

REBECCA

Your daughter`s at the hospital.
She overdosed.

MICHAEL

What am I supposed to do about it?
She has you there. She doesn't need
me.

REBECCA

She needs you, Michael. God, please
let Michael come to see his own
daughter.

MICHAEL

She's not my daughter and you know
it. Call Frank.

Michael hangs up. Rebecca dials Frank's number, then pushes
the off button.

Dr. Richardson arrives.

DR. RICHARDSON

Mrs. Alexander, your daughter's
going to make it. She is truly
blessed.

REBECCA

Thank God! Thank you Dr.
Richardson.

DR. RICHARDSON

What do you think would drive your
daughter to do something like this?

REBECCA

I don't really know.

DR. RICHARDSON

You haven't noticed any changes in
her behavior lately?

REBECCA

She's had a few challenges, but I
didn't realize it bothered her this
much.

DR. RICHARDSON

How is your relationship with your
daughter? Is she able to talk to
you about problems she's having?
Why didn't she come to you?

REBECCA

I don't know what you're getting at, but my daughter and I have a good relationship.

DR. RICHARDSON

What about her relationship with her dad? Does she have a good relationship with her dad?

Rebecca hesitates briefly.

REBECCA

They have some issues, but he loves her in his own way.

DR. RICHARDSON

What kind of issues? What do you mean by he loves her in his own way. What way is that?

REBECCA

He just had a hard time accepting her at first, but things are getting better.

DR. RICHARDSON

I don't know what's going on between your husband and your daughter. It seems to me you're making excuses for your husband. If you do, you're just as guilty as he is.

REBECCA

We are not to blame for what Stacey did.

DR. RICHARDSON

You might not be all of the reason that she tried to take her life, but you are part of the reason.

Rebecca gets angry.

REBECCA

I have done nothing but loved my daughter.

DR. RICHARDSON

I would suggest that you and your family seek some family counseling.

REBECCA
My husband will never go for that.

DR. RICHARDSON
Let's hope that he does, for your
daughter's sake.

Rebecca looks worried.

INT. ALEXANDER HOME - FRONT ENTRANCE - DAY

Rebecca opens the door. MRS. JONES, 30`s, counselor from Bay
Chip Center, stands at the door.

MRS. JONES
Hello, my name is Mrs. Jones. I am
one of the counselors at Bay Chip
Center. Are you Mrs. Alexander?

REBECCA
Yes, I am Mrs. Alexander. Come
right on in. I wasn't expecting you
this soon.

Mrs. Jones enters.

MRS. JONES
Thank you ma'am. Dr. Richardson
wanted me contact you as soon as
possible. I know that you had some
concerns about your husband not
coming to the center, so that's why
I'm here.

REBECCA
Oh I see.

MRS. JONES
Our sessions are usually conducted
at the center, but in special
cases, we make home visits.

REBECCA
I appreciate it, but my husband has
moved out.

MRS. JONES
I see.

Rebecca wrings her hands.

Mrs. Jones sits down on the couch. Rebecca sits in a chair.

REBECCA

Michael moved out about a month ago. It's a long story.

MRS. JONES

Mrs. Alexander, with all due respect, what do you think about Stacey? She's the one who attempted suicide.

Rebecca is silent. Mrs. Jones searches through her briefcase.

MRS. JONES (CONT'D)

Now is Stacey here?

REBECCA

She's out with Carl, one of her good friends. She should be home soon.

Rebecca looks nervous.

EXT. CARL'S CAR - DAY

Carl drives up. He and Stacey get out of the car.

STACEY

Thanks Carl, I had a good time.

CARL

Me too. We should go out again soon. Maybe you can teach me how to bowl.

STACEY

I would like that, but I don't know if there is any hope of you learning to bowl.

They both LAUGH.

Carl hugs Stacey, waves goodbye. Stacey waves goodbye.

INT. ALEXANDER HOUSE - BACK DOOR - DAY

Stacey enters. Rebecca greets her at the door.

REBECCA

Stacey, come into the family room.
Somebody's here to see you.

FAMILY ROOM

Rebecca turns to Mrs. Jones. Stacey looks scared.

STACEY

Who is it? I really want to go to
my room.

REBECCA

It will only take a few minutes.

Mrs. Jones stands up and reaches to shake Stacey's hand.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

Stacey, this is Mrs. Jones from Bay
Chip Center.

Stacey won't shake Mrs. Jones' hand.

STACEY

Bay Chip Center? That's a center
for crazy people. You all think I'm
crazy now.

MRS. JONES

Not at all. But I am concerned with
your emotional state. I'm here to
help.

STACEY

I don't need help. I'm just fine.

MRS. JONES

I just want to talk to you, get to
know you better. Can we do that?

STACEY

(harsh)

Yeah I guess.

REBECCA

Stacey, there is no need to be
disrespectful.

Rebecca turns to Mrs. Jones.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

I taught her better than that.

MRS. JONES
Mrs. Alexander, it is fine. She`s
angry.

Stacey sits down. Mrs. Jones turns to Stacey.

MRS. JONES (CONT'D)
Can you tell me why you`re so
angry?

STACEY
With everything that`s happened to
me, why shouldn`t I be angry?

MRS. JONES
What happened?

STACEY
Everything.

Stacey CRIES. Mrs. Jones hands her a tissue.

MRS. JONES
Everything like what? Be specific.

STACEY
My whole life changed when my
Grandma Mattie died. My uncle Jim
tried to rape me. He said that he
would do all the things for me that
my dad never did.

MRS. JONES
That`s a lot to handle isn`t it?

STACEY
Yes ma`am. Then a boy I thought
liked me tried to sell me to sex
traffickers.

MRS. JONES
Is that why you tried to hurt
yourself?

STACEY
I guess so. I really didn`t want to
hurt myself. I just had so much
pain that I didn`t know what to do.

MRS. JONES
I see. But you do know that hurting
yourself is never the answer.

STACEY

Yes ma'am I do. But do you know the worst part about everything that I was going through?

MRS. JONES

What was the worst part?

STACEY

My daddy acted like he didn't even care.

Mrs. Jones looks shocked.

MRS. JONES

Why do you think that is?

STACEY

My daddy doesn't love me. He never has and he never will. I guess in my mind if he would have said that everything was going to be alright, then it would be alright. Maybe I could have handled what I was going through, if he had comforted me. But he didn't.

MRS. JONES

What makes you think that your daddy doesn't love you?

STACEY

He never told me.

MRS. JONES

You are 16 years old and you have never heard your daddy tell you he loves you.

Mrs. Jones looks at Rebecca in disbelief. Rebecca holds her head down.

MRS. JONES (CONT'D)

Mrs. Alexander, did you hear what your daughter just said?

Mrs. Jones turns back to Stacey.

MRS. JONES (CONT'D)

Stacey, is this where all your problems stem from; your daddy not loving you?

Stacey is about to reply. Michael enters.

REBECCA

Michael.

MICHAEL

I just remembered you owe me \$200 bucks for the TV I let you keep. Thought you were gonna get away with it? Uh uh, I'm not stupid.

Michael looks at Mrs. Jones.

MICHAEL

What's going on? Who is this?

Mrs. Jones stands up. She reaches out to shake Michael's hand.

MRS. JONES

Hello Michael, may I call you Michael? I'm Christie Jones from the Bay Chip Center.

MICHAEL

Wait a minute! That's the place for crazy folks, isn't it?

MRS. JONES

If I may, I would like to take a few moments of your time. I want to talk to you about your daughter.

MICHAEL

(excited)

I knew it! I've been saying it all along. I knew something was wrong with her. I finally got somebody to prove what I've been saying all along.

Michael pulls up a chair and sits down.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Yes, I will sit down. Gladly, so you can prove that she's crazy.

MRS. JONES

Mr. Alexander, that is not why I am here. But it is interesting to me why you would call your daughter crazy.

MICHAEL

I call her crazy because she is crazy. She's always in her room cooped up like a hermit. She's not smart. She's not outgoing at all. Look at her; look at how she looks. Do I need to go on?

MRS. JONES

Have you ever checked to see what she is doing in her room? Do you ever volunteer to help her with her school work?

MICHAEL

This is not about me.

MRS. JONES

You are absolutely right. You have a beautiful daughter, Mr. Alexander. Do you have any idea why she tried to hurt herself?

MICHAEL

I told you already: she's crazy.

MRS. JONES

Mr. Alexander, this is a cry for help. Your daughter needs your attention. She is longing for your love and acceptance of her. She needs you there for the good times and for the bad times.

Michael gets fidgety and starts squirming in his seat.

MRS. JONES (CONT'D)

Did you know that Stacey has so much pain in her heart that she just didn't know how to handle what she was feeling?

Michael gets impatient.

MRS. JONES (CONT'D)

Do you know where all this pain is coming from?

MICHAEL

Nope!

MRS. JONES

It came from you being an emotionally absent father.

MICHAEL

You wait one minute, you are not going to come in my house and attack me like this.

MRS. JONES

I am not attacking you. But let's keep it real. Some of the things that she does is a direct reflection of the way you have treated her. Your daughter was willing to end her life partly because of you. How does that make you feel?

Michael jumps up out of his seat.

MICHAEL

She has the problem! Not me! Now maybe you should consider that she should be committed.

Stacey CRIES.

REBECCA

How dare you say that about her! Last time, you left on your own, but now, I'm kicking you out! Get out!

Michael leaves hurriedly.

Rebecca hugs Stacey.

STACEY

I don't want him here, either, mom. I don't want to see his face again.

Rebecca holds Stacey.

REBECCA

That's how I feel too, baby. I'm tired of lying to myself and lying to you about him. He's never gonna change.

Rebecca looks at the door where Michael just left.

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

Stacey walks down the hall. Everybody stares at her. Ms. Bertha, Stacey's aunt and the librarian, turns to Stacey.

MS. BERTHA

Come in here baby. I want to talk to you.

LIBRARY

Stacey sits down next to Ms. Bertha.

MS. BERTHA (CONT'D)

I heard about what happened the other night.

STACEY

Yes ma'am.

Ms. Bertha grabs her chin and pushes her head up.

MS. BERTHA (CONT'D)

What's this about you trying to kill yourself?

STACEY

It's true.

MS. BERTHA

I know you've been through a lot, but there is nothing so bad that you need to try to end your life.

STACEY

Yes ma'am.

MS. BERTHA

Life is precious honey. It's a gift from God. You have to treasure it.

STACEY

Yes ma'am.

MS. BERTHA

I know you miss your Grandma Mattie too.

STACEY

Yes ma'am I do.

MS. BERTHA

I can't take her place, but I'm here for you. Just like I was here for my son. God bless his soul.

STACEY

Where is your son now?

MS. BERTHA

He got killed.

STACEY

How did he get killed?

MS. BERTHA

It was Mr. J. W. Smith who killed him. But it was those boys who live across town's fault.

(cries)

They set my baby up! Those boys took my baby down to old man J.W.'s store and they dared him to steal something.

STACEY

Did he steal?

MS. BERTHA

He picked up a candy bar and put it in his pocket. As soon as he did, they told old man J.W. Smith. My baby didn't know what was going on.

STACEY

I am so sorry Ms. Bertha.

Stacey hugs Ms. Bertha. Ms. Bertha shakes and CRIES.

MS. BERTHA

My baby got scared and tried to run. Old man J. W. was angry. He got his gun and started shooting.

Tears rolled down Stacey's face. Ms. Bertha rocks back and forth.

MS. BERTHA (CONT'D)

J. W. is a free man but my baby is 6 feet under. Everyday I have to look in his face and those boys' face too. They just turn their heads. They have never said sorry or anything. But I forgive them.

STACEY

How can you forgive somebody who did something like that? They killed your only son.

Ms. Bertha wipes her eyes.

MS. BERTHA

I get angry sometime because it just ain't right what they did. I tried to talk to those boys even before they did what they did. I even invited them to church. But they just laughed in my face.

STACEY

But what makes you want to forgive them?

MS. BERTHA

It is not that I want too, but I have too. God loves us and he forgives us for the things that we do that are not pleasing in his sight.

STACEY

That's got to be hard to do.

MS. BERTHA

Nobody ever said it was easy. But the bible says if we don't forgive others for the wrong they've done, then God won't forgive us for our wrong.

STACEY

Too many people have hurt me for me to forgive. I just can't forgive them.

MS. BERTHA

Yes, you can. Just ask God to help you. He'll help you to forgive.

STACEY

I can't forgive my daddy.

MS. BERTHA

You can with God's help. But you first have to want to forgive him.

(MORE)

MS. BERTHA(cont'd)

As long as you think about all the things he`s done, you will never make up your mind to forgive him.

Stacey ponders.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Stacey comes in carrying a bible. Rebecca peels apples.

STACEY

(excited)

Mama, today Ms. Bertha taught me about God's love. She said I'm fearfully and wonderfully made, the apple of God's eye. She read John 3:16. For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten son that whosoever shall believe in his heart, shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

REBECCA

That's good Stacey. I'm glad that you're learning so much. I've read those verses to you countless times and they never sunk in, until now.

STACEY

I needed to hear it one more time. I need to forgive Daddy.

REBECCA

Oh really?

STACEY

She told me about how she forgave the boys that caused her son to be killed. Even though they never apologized to her, she still forgave them.

REBECCA

That's the way God wants all of us to be.

STACEY

I'm going to see Daddy. Will you come with me?

REBECCA

Not now. I've--I've got to prepare a meal for Mrs. Thomas at church.

(MORE)

REBECCA(cont'd)

She's a shut in. I can't let her down.

Stacey leaves.

INT. MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Michael watches television. Stacey enters.

STACEY

Daddy, I learned about the bible from Ms. Bertha.

MICHAEL

That's good for you. It's about time you learn something.

STACEY

I learned that Jesus loves me.

MICHAEL

Jesus does not love you. Jesus don't waste his time with people like you.

STACEY

Jesus loves everybody. He loves young, old, black, white. He even loves you, daddy.

MICHAEL

I don't want to hear anymore about this Jesus stuff. Now go on and get out of here.

Stacey starts to leave, but then she turns around and continues to talk to Michael.

STACEY

Ms. Bertha said He'll forgive you for all of your sins.

MICHAEL

I don't need no one to forgive me for nothing. I've done nothing wrong.

STACEY

Ms. Bertha said we've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Michael YELLS.

MICHAEL

Ms. Bertha said! Ms. Bertha said! I don't want to hear another word about what Ms. Bertha said.

STACEY

Daddy, Ms. Bertha knows the bible. She can teach you too.

MICHAEL

I don't want that old bat teaching me anything.

STACEY

Don't call her that, daddy.

MICHAEL

For the last time I don't need or want to hear about this Jesus you and Ms. Bertha keep talking about. He don't want any part of me and I don't want any part of him.

STACEY

But Ms. Bertha says Jesus wants to be a part of all our lives.

MICHAEL

If you say Ms. Bertha one more time...

STACEY

Okay, but will you at least go to church with us this Sunday? We're going to Ms. Bertha's church.

MICHAEL

I wouldn't step foot in that church.

Michael continues to watch the TV.

INT. MS. BERTHA'S CHURCH - DAY

Ms. Bertha turns to Stacey.

MS. BERTHA

Stacey, I'm glad that you came. Are your mom and dad here?

STACEY

My mom is but my dad isn't.

MS. BERTHA

Oh that's all right baby. He'll be here soon enough.

Stacey and Rebecca sit with Ms. Bertha in the front row. The church service begins.

REV. SMITH

Praise God from who all blessings flow. How many people know that the Lord is good. Before I begin my message today, I want you to go and hug somebody and tell them that you love them.

The people in the congregation hug one another.

REV. SMITH (CONT'D)

My sisters and I brothers, I want to talk to you about God's love. There is somebody here who has been looking for love in all the wrong places. In this journey called life, you made some mistakes along the way trying to find love. But I want you to know that real love is found in Jesus. God sent his son Jesus to die for us all because he loves us.

Rev. Smith extends the invitation to the congregation to accept Jesus as their Savior.

REV. SMITH (CONT'D)

If you have a desire to give Jesus your heart, I invite you to come to the altar.

Stacey walks up to the altar. The people around the altar close their eyes and hold their heads down.

REV. SMITH (CONT'D)

I want you to close your eyes and repeat after me. Lord, I confess that I am a sinner. I ask that you come into my heart and please forgive me of my sins. I believe that Jesus died on the cross and rose again on the third day.

The people around the altar, including Stacey, repeat after Rev. Smith.

INT. MICHAEL`S APARTMENT - DAY

Stacey enters. Michael is on a call.

STACEY
(excited)
Daddy! Daddy!

MICHAEL
What's the matter with you? Why are
you yelling?

STACEY
Guess what happened to me today?

Michael puts down the phone.

MICHAEL
I don't have time to play any
guessing games. If you're going to
tell me, then tell me or else you
can go on and leave me alone.

STACEY
I got saved today.

Michael LAUGHS sarcastically.

MICHAEL
Oh no, you're going to be acting
spooky like your mother does.

STACEY
I don't know everything about being
saved, but I don't think there's
anything spooky about it.

MICHAEL
Oh yeah, you just wait. You're
going to be acting spooky like your
mama does. She always wants to pray
about everything. Sometimes when
she prays she sounds like jibber
jabber.

Michael starts to play like he is speaking in different
languages.

STACEY
You shouldn't play with God.

MICHAEL

See what I mean. You take things too serious just like your mama does.

STACEY

This is serious daddy. Rev. Smith and Ms. Bertha said that accepting Jesus is the most important decision that a person can ever make. I'm glad I made my decision to love Jesus.

MICHAEL

Good for you. I already told you I don't need Jesus in my life. There is nothing you can say or do to change my mind. Your mama has been trying for years.

STACEY

You need Jesus because you're a sinner and you need forgiveness.

MICHAEL

Why you little brat! I don't need Him or you or anybody! Leave me alone!

Stacey leaves hurriedly.

INT. MICHAEL'S CAR - DAY

Michael talks on the phone.

INTERCUT: MICHAEL/REBECCA

MICHAEL

I'd appreciate it if you'd not put up that Jesus freak to coming over and telling me I need Jesus. I'm perfectly fine.

REBECCA

Suit yourself. Can't argue with a blockhead.

MICHAEL

Well, if I'm a blockhead, you're a tart.

REBECCA

Sticks and stones, Michael.

MICHAEL

You started it.

REBECCA

I shouldn't have stooped to your level. Stacey is concerned about you. That's why she came.

MICHAEL

And you're not concerned?

REBECCA

I've loved you for a long time, but it doesn't seem to work on you. I gave up.

MICHAEL

Maybe if you tried again, with Frank out of the picture.

REBECCA

Frank has never been in the picture. I've been faithful to you all along.

MICHAEL

Except at the beginning.

REBECCA

You're using my mistake to punish me and Stacey forever. You are so childish.

MICHAEL

Name calling.

REBECCA

People make mistakes, that's why there's forgiveness. That's why there's Jesus.

MICHAEL

I don't need a spook.

Michael looks up. A car hits him head on. The screen goes black.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Michael is in a bed, hooked up to tubes. Dr. Richardson stands over him.

DR. RICHARDSON

Michael, your test results came back. Your kidneys were damaged so badly in the crash that they no longer function.

MICHAEL

What?

DR. RICHARDSON

I am sorry, Michael.

MICHAEL

What are my treatment options?

DR. RICHARDSON

Your only options are dialysis or a kidney transplant.

MICHAEL

I don't want to be hooked up to no machine for the rest of my life, so I guess I'll just have a kidney transplant.

DR. RICHARDSON

It's not that simple. You will have to be placed on a waiting list. Michael, there are hundreds, if not thousands, in your same situation.

MICHAEL

What can I do? I just can't sit by and wait on some waiting list.

DR. RICHARDSON

There is always the possibility of having someone in your family donate a kidney to you.

MICHAEL

Okay.

DR. RICHARDSON

We will first have to test to see if the person has a compatible blood type to see if he or she is a match. Several other tests must be done to make sure that the person is healthy.

MICHAEL

I understand.

Michael looks worried.

LATER

Michael lies in bed, thinking. Rebecca and Stacey enter.

MICHAEL

Thought you gave up on me.

REBECCA

I have, but I still visit the sick
in the hospital.

STACEY

It`s our Christian duty to visit
the sick, right mama?

Rebecca nods.

MICHAEL

Dr. Richardson says I need a kidney
transplant or I'll die.

REBECCA

(hysterical)

What? A kidney transplant?

MICHAEL

(worried)

What am I going to do?

REBECCA

(confident)

Pray! All you can do is pray.

MICHAEL

I don't think God will answer my
prayer. Maybe you should pray. I
know he'll listen to your prayers.

Rebecca and Michael join hands together.

REBECCA

Lord, we come to you thanking you
for your goodness. Look, we know
that you are a healer and we know
that you answer prayer. Send us a
miracle right now in the name of
Jesus. Send us a kidney for
Michael.

Stacey interrupts.

STACEY
Daddy, I want to give you one of my
kidneys.

REBECCA
Are you sure?

STACEY
Yes ma'am.

REBECCA
Michael, did you hear that? Your
daughter wants to give you one of
her kidneys. God sure does answer
prayer.

MICHAEL
I don't know about that. We don't
know whether she's a match.

Michael looks up at Stacey, unsure of what to make of this.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Dr. Richardson turns to Michael and Stacey.

DR. RICHARDSON
Stacey, I'm pleased to say that you
are a match for Michael.

MICHAEL
Thank God!

Stacey smiles from ear to ear.

STACEY
Everything's going to be all right,
Daddy.

Michael sighs with relief.

INT. HOSPITAL - OPERATING ROOM - DAY

Stacey and Michael wait on gurneys in surgery.

STACEY
I love you, Daddy.

Michael doesn't know what to say.

MICHAEL
Nice of you to say that--

Nurse Judy enters.

NURSE JUDY
I need to start this IV on you, Mr.
Alexander.

LATER

Anesthesiologists give Michael and Stacey medications through
an IV drip.

RECOVERY ROOM - LATER

Michael arrives with Stacey.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
We made it through.

STACEY
(groggy)
We sure did.

Nurse Judy comes by to see Michael and Stacey.

NURSE JUDY
See Michael, I told you the day she
was born she was extra special and
she would do something great.

Nurse Judy leaves. Michael talks to Stacey.

MICHAEL
Tell me something. Why did you
volunteer to help me? You didn't
have too.

STACEY
I know I didn't have to, but it was
love that made me want to do it.

MICHAEL
What does love have to do with it?

STACEY
When you love someone you'll be
there for them and do whatever you
can to help them.

MICHAEL
I thought you said I was such a bad
father. How can you love me enough
to do something like this for me?

STACEY

It comes from having a relationship with God. I was longing for a relationship with you and I was so desperate for your love. But God has filled that empty spot in my heart with his love. It is because of God's love that I can find it in my heart to help you. God wants us to show love to one another even if that person has hurt us.

MICHAEL

God's love, huh?

Michael has a tear in his eye.

Stacey grabs for Michael's hand. For the first time, Michael takes it.

INT. MS. BERTHA'S CHURCH - DAY

Stacey and Rebecca arrive. The USHER greets them at the door.

USHER

Good morning! So glad to see you all. Hope you enjoy the service.

SANCTUARY

Stacey and Rebecca sit together. The choir sings. Stacey sings to herself.

STACEY

Don't give up on God, cause he won't give up on you.

ALTAR

Rev. Smith preaches.

REV. SMITH

The choir has really blessed our hearts this morning. That is such a true song. God will never give up on us. Just like God won't give up on us, we should not give up on our family and friends. We can't make our family and friends do anything, but God can. He can draw them in with his love. You just keep living the life before them.

Rev. Smith extends the invitation for prayer.

REV. SMITH

If you want to pray to Him up here,
come and offer your prayers.

Stacey walks to the altar, kneels down and prays.

STACEY

God please draw my daddy in with
your love. Help him realize that he
needs you.

Stacey bows her head.

INT. MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - LIVINGROOM - DAY

Michael flips through the channels on television.

INTERCUT: MICHAEL-TV SCREEN

Every channel that he changes to has something about God. He stays on one channel and listens to a preacher preach.

REV. SMITH

Oh magnify the Lord with me and let
us exalt his name together. God is
good and worthy to be praised. I
want you to know that God loves
you. My scripture text today is
found in the book of St. Luke
chapter 10. In this passage we find
that there are ten lepers. They
were in desperate need of a
miracle. They came to Jesus and
Jesus healed all ten lepers. But
only one came back to thank Him.
That is the way it is with some of
us. We don't take the time to thank
God for the things he does for us.
God has worked a miracle for some
of us and we have taken it for
granted as if God had to do it for
us.

Michael listens.

REV. SMITH (CONT'D)

There is someone watching via
television, I want to tell you that
God is waiting on you to thank him
for your miracle.

(MORE)

REV. SMITH(cont'd)

The greatest miracle that God can perform in your life is offering His son Jesus Christ as your Savior. My sister and my brother, why don't you accept Jesus in your life today? It does not matter what you have done in your life, God will forgive you and save you from your sins.

Michael gets dressed.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Michael arrives, sits at the back. Rebecca sits a few rows up from him.

At the same time as Stacey leaves the altar and goes back to her seat, she looks in the back and sees her daddy. Michael CRIES out.

MICHAEL

Lord save me. Lord save me.

Stacey and Rebecca run to Michael.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Stacey, I`m sorry for not loving you like I should have. Rebecca, I`m sorry for being such a foolish, stubborn idiot--

REBECCA

Okay, that's enough, we forgive you.

Stacey and Rebecca CRY along with Michael.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Thank you for loving me even when I didn't love you. Thank you for not giving up on me.

REV. SMITH

Now this is what church is all about.

MICHAEL

I want to give Jesus my heart. I want to be a real husband to my wife and a father to my child.

REV. SMITH
That's why we're here, Bro.
Michael.

Along with Stacey and Rebecca, Michael walks up to the altar and kneels, prays.

INT. ALEXANDER HOME - FRONT ENTRANCE - DAY

Stacey and Rebecca enter. Michael enters with his bag and suitcase, sets them down. He hugs Rebecca and Stacey.

INT. STACEY'S ROOM - DAY

Michael enters and turns to Stacey.

MICHAEL
I want to be the father you need. I can't make up for lost time, but I want to spend the rest of my life loving you and taking care of you.

STACEY
You can start by going to Ms. Bertha's house with me. Will you go with me?

MICHAEL
I will if you don't think she'll mind.

STACEY
She won't mind, in fact, she'll be glad you came.

Michael and Stacey leave.

INT. MS. BERTHA'S HOUSE - DAY

Ms. Bertha welcomes Michael and Stacey.

Ms. Bertha opens the bible. Michael and Stacey read with her.

INT. STADIUM - DAY

Stacey is dressed in her graduation gown and cap. She is in line with the other graduates.

AUDIENCE

Michael and Rebecca are seated in the audience.

PODIUM

The ceremony takes place.

MRS. BRIDGEWALL (CONT'D)
It is my honor to certify that
these candidates have completed all
of their academic requirements and
are entitled to receive their
diplomas.

Mrs. Bridgewall calls the names of the students to receive
their diplomas.

MRS. BRIDGEWALL (CONT'D)
David Adams.

INTERCUT: AUDIENCE/PODIUM

The audience APPLAUDS.

MRS. BRIDGEWALL (CONT'D)
Stacey Alexander.

The audience APPLAUDS. Michael stands up and CLAPS his hands
and SCREAMS.

MICHAEL
That's my daughter. My baby girl is
graduating.

Mrs. Bridgewall makes a special announcement.

MRS. BRIDGEWALL
As you know, our school hosted the
FS Publishing writing contest this
year. I would like to announce the
winners of the contest at this
time.

Some of the people in the audience talk among themselves
excitedly.

MRS. BRIDGEWALL (CONT'D)
Our third place winner is Haley
Stokes.

The audience CLAPS.

MRS. BRIDGEWALL (CONT'D)
Our second place winner is Tom
Davis.

The audience CLAPS.

MRS. BRIDGEWALL (CONT'D)
Our first place winner is Mary
Steward.

The audience CLAPS.

MRS. BRIDGEWALL (CONT'D)
Our overall winner is Stacey
Alexander. Stacey`s winning essay
is entitled, "A Father`s Love".
Stacey will receive \$50,000.00 and
a publishing contract with FS
Publishing Company, owned by Mr.
Frank Simmons.

Frank gets up and waves to the audience.

The audience APPLAUDS. Michael jumps out of his seat, CLAPS
and HOWLS. He jumps up and down with Rebecca.

MICHAEL
That`s my daughter!

MRS. BRIDGEWALL (CONT'D)
Now once everyone sits down, at
this time I would like to give
Stacey an opportunity to share with
you her entry in the contest.
Stacey, will you please step
forward?

Stacey steps up on the podium.

STACEY
Thank you Mrs. Bridgewall. Growing
up, I wanted what every little
girls wants: to be loved by her
mother and her daddy. A mother`s
love is important, but there is
something special about a father`s
love. As a little girl, I watched
as the other father`s played games
with their children or pushed them
in the swings at the park. I
couldn`t help but wonder, what`s
the matter with me? Why won`t my
daddy play with me; why won`t he
push me in the swing?

Tears roll down Michael`s face.

STACEY (CONT'D)

It`s no secret I didn`t have a good healthy relationship, but oh how I longed for one. I did all I could to shine in my daddy`s eyes. I was so desperate for the love and acceptance of my father, that in the pursuit of it, I made some bad choices. It might sound crazy or a little strange, but I am glad that I was on this journey seeking my father`s love because through this process, I found my REAL Father`s love; that is, the love of God. Yes, I needed my earthly father`s love, but more importantly, I needed my heavenly Father`s love. I want you to know that I accepted God`s only begotten Son, Jesus Christ in my life as my Saviour and now I know what it feels like to be loved. The most important thing I can tell the graduates as they embark on this journey of life, is that you need God`s love to hold you, to carry you, to lift you up, and to help you succeed. He will never leave you nor forsake you.

The audience CLAPS and gives Stacey a standing ovation.

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - GRADUATION NIGHT PARTY - NIGHT

The hall is decorated.

INSERT: BANNER: HAPPY GRADUATION, CLASS OF 20--

BACK TO SCENE

Stacey wears a pink sequin dress with rhinestones and sparkling crystal shoes. Stacey wraps her arm around Michael`s arm, as he escorts her in.

STACEY

Thanks for organizing the party,
Daddy.

MICHAEL

Anything for you, my princess. You
look beautiful.

STACEY

Thanks Daddy.

Carl appears, wearing a tuxedo. Michael turns to Carl.

MICHAEL

I get the first dance with my
daughter.

Michael and Stacey walk out on the dance floor and dance,
father and daughter at last.

LATER

Michael hands Stacey off to Carl. Carl and Stacey dance.

FADE OUT:

THE END