

HOLDING ONTO RAIN

Inspired by true events

FADE IN:

EXT. MERRY-GO-ROUND - DAY

Almost a scene from Twilight Zone, just after dawn, a parking lot carnival is eerily quiet.

LINDA (V.O.)  
Sometimes I think trying to hold  
onto my sanity is like holding onto  
rain. It just keeps slipping  
through my fingers.

INT. CAROUSEL - DAY

AUGUST 1982 - A QUIET GROAN is heard. An eye slowly flutters open through a veil of long blonde hair.

LINDA (V.O.)  
There are times I wish I didn't  
exist. I wish I could be someone  
else. Live someone else's life. Not  
mine.

The eye moves, focusing on a sneaker with a drop of red on the toe. A dirty, blood splattered hand with broken fingernails reaches toward the sneaker, quickly pulling back as a second groan escapes.

The blonde, naked, rolls carefully to her side. She sits, dazed, bloodied strands of hair sticking to her face. She brushes a clump of matted hair from her face. A key falls, leaving its imprint behind. Raising a shaky hand to her cheek, she feels the imprint and swelling bruise.

Her eyes move, taking in her surroundings. She sees another sneaker. This one attached to her foot. She reaches for the loose sneaker again. Grabbing it, she quickly pulls her arm back in pain.

As she lifts her foot to put the shoe on, she sees something red in her lap. She looks down, noticing claw marks on her breasts. Her eyes follow the length of her body, resting on the pool of blood between her legs.

LINDA (V.O.)  
But then I think, maybe I should  
have just killed my husband when I  
had the chance. Life behind bars  
would have been so much easier.

EXT. CONNECTICUT TURNPIKE - DAY

JUNE 1973: Aerial view of multiple cars on the freeway. A blue Mustang Cobra with flames down its side closes in on a Cougar XR7 Eliminator rag-top. The Mustang slides ahead of the Cougar. The Cougar smoothly moves in front of the Mustang. They play leap frog for another bout or two. The frogging gets a little faster, more dangerous as they squeeze in and out of traffic. They are all out racing now.

A SIREN goes off. Red and blue lights flash as a State Trooper pulls out from behind a billboard. The sirens don't slow down either car. The Cougar making a last minute decision pulls off an exit. The trooper chases the Mustang, pulling it over on the overpass of the same exit.

The Cougar stops within sight of the overpass watching the encounter.

EXT. UNDER THE OVERPASS - DAY

The Mustang pulls up beside the Cougar. Seventeen year old PAOLO VISCOSE - a stereotypical East Coast Italian, with a New York accent gets out. Seventeen year old LINDA MCPHERSON - tall, curvy, long blonde hair gets out of the Cougar.

LINDA

A car's only as good as it's driver  
you know.

PAOLO

You saying I don't know how to  
drive my car?

LINDA

I'm not the one who got the ticket.

PAOLO

Well smart ass. What's your name?

LINDA

Linda.

Paolo tugs at a long strand of Linda's hair.

PAOLO

Yeah? So, Linda. Wanna get  
something to eat.

LINDA

Sure. But I'm driving.

Paolo looks pissed. She smiles. He melts, smiling back.

INT. RUN DOWN BEDROOM - DAY

AUGUST 1973: A single, rather creepy face of Christ comes into view. GRUNTING NOISES are heard, as the rest of the plastic crucifix is revealed, hanging above Paolo's bed. A KNOCK has Paolo's hand clamp over Linda's mouth.

PAOLO

Don't say a word. Not a fucking word. Capisce?

Frightened, Linda nods with her eyes. OLGA VISCOSE, Paolo's mother, is on the other side of the door.

OLGA (V.O.)

Pallie?

PAOLO

Ma. I'm busy in here.

OLGA (V.O.)

Paolo. What the hell you got the door locked for?

PAOLO

I'm choking the bishop Ma. What the fuck you think?

A SOB escapes Linda.

OLGA (V.O.)

Paolo Salvatore Viscose!

Paolo punches the wall, rolls off Linda. She tugs at the sheets, covers herself.

PAOLO

Aw. Ba Fungu Ma. Now I ain't in the mood no more. Leave us the fuck alone will ya?

OLGA (V.O.)

Fuck you too Pal. That ain't no way to talk to your mother.

PAOLO

(handing Linda her pants)  
Get dressed.

Linda takes the pants.

INT. MUSTANG COBRA - DAY

Paolo fondles Linda's breast. She winces.

PAOLO

Come on, Linda. Don't be such a cry baby. Huh? I mean I know it was your first time and all, but it couldn't a hurt that much. Babe?

With an exasperated sigh, he reaches beyond her, opening the car door.

PAOLO (CONT'D)

Someday you'll like it. I know you will. So, I'll call you later?

He attempts a kiss. She vomits on the floor of his beloved Mustang.

PAOLO (CONT'D)

What are you fucking nuts?

EXT. AFFLUENT CONNECTICUT STREET - DAY

Linda barely steps out of the car when the Mustang pulls away from the curb. With slumped shoulders, Linda turns to a nicely landscaped, ranch style home. Linda runs into the arms of an African American woman dressed in a maid's uniform.

EXT. VICTORIAN HOUSE - DAY

DECEMBER 1979: "THE PULASKI CLUB" sign hangs by the side door entrance of an old victorian with a wraparound veranda. Adjacent to the house is a large graveled parking lot congested with cars. A River runs behind the house. Various men go in and out the side door. Dregs of a previous snowstorm remain.

Linda, steps onto a bus with her two small children, ANYA, five and LUCA, three, bundled in adult-sized sweaters. Their feet are covered by adult-sized socks over their shoes

EXT. DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

Stopped at a local cinder-block front department store, Linda and the kids get out of the bus.

INT. DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

With the kids in a shopping cart, Linda pushes them past random places, putting clothing in the cart. Pushing cart and all into a dressing room stall, she pulls price tags off coats, dressing the kids in them.

EXT. DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

About to board a bus, a SECURITY GUARD grabs Linda's arm.

SECURITY GUARD

Excuse me, ma'am.

He pulls her away from the bus as its doors close.

LINDA

My bus.

SECURITY GUARD

If you'll step back inside.

INT. SMALL ROOM - DAY

Room has wall-to-wall security screens. One screen shows a shot of Linda entering the dressing room with kids in the old sweaters. Another screen shows them walking out of the dressing room with new coats. Through the glass partition Linda notices a police officer. He speaks with the security guards, looking toward her. The officer nods at the security guard. They enter the small room.

SECURITY GUARD

This is Sergeant Boccuzzi with the Stamford Police Department.

ART BOCCUZZI - Stamford Police Sergeant. Mid-fifties, soft spoken, glances at the incident report.

SERGEANT BOCCUZZI

Give us a minute, Joe?

SECURITY GUARD

Let me know when you're done.

SERGEANT BOCCUZZI

(Closing the door)

Which one of the Viscose's are you married to?

LINDA  
 (Surprised)  
 Paolo.

SERGEANT BOCCUZZI  
 (He thinks for a minute)  
 Paolo? Salli's son? Oh, Cheese and  
 crackers.

Linda nods. Art sucks in air. Rubbing his face, he signals  
 for the guard to come back.

SERGEANT BOCCUZZI (CONT'D)  
 Let her go.

LINDA/SECURITY GUARD  
 What?

Boccuzzi opens his wallet plopping down bills.

SERGEANT BOCCUZZI  
 I'll take care of whatever she  
 owes.  
 (He turns to Linda)  
 But I don't want to see you in here  
 again, got that?

Linda nods. She and Boccuzzi dress the kids in the clothes he  
 paid for.

SERGEANT BOCCUZZI (CONT'D)  
 Come on. I'll give you a ride home.

INT. POLICE CAR - DAY

Linda sits next to Boccuzzi while the kids sit in the back.

SERGEANT BOCCUZZI  
 You're too young to be married with  
 kids.

LINDA  
 I didn't really have a choice.

SERGEANT BOCCUZZI  
 Why? Were you pregnant?

LINDA  
 Yes, but that's not why I married  
 him.

SERGEANT BOCCUZZI  
 Why then? Didn't you know about his  
 temper?

LINDA  
 I knew, but his father said if I  
 didn't, he'd kill my family.

As they near the house, Linda starts to panic.

LINDA (CONT'D)  
 Drop us off here? If Paolo sees me  
 with you, he'll kill me.

Art stops the car. Getting out, he walks around, and opens  
 the door. Taking Linda's hand, helps her from the car.

SERGEANT BOCCUZZI  
 (holding Linda's hand)  
 Good luck, honey.

As he drives away, she stuffs the one-hundred-dollar bill he  
 slipped into her palm into her pocket. Straightening, she  
 takes the kids by the hands, as she walks toward the house.

EXT. VICTORIAN HOUSE - DAY

Linda pushes the kids behind her as Paolo, pissed, barges out  
 of the Pulaski Club. He barely stops walking, before he  
 punches her in the stomach. She doubles over.

PAOLO  
 I thought I told you to stay put.  
 Where the hell have you been?

LINDA  
 (Breathless)  
 The kids needed coats.

PAOLO  
 You spent my money on coats after I  
 told you not to?

A small crowd gathers around them. It starts to snow.

LINDA  
 My folks sent that money to buy the  
 coats you wouldn't.

He punches her in the mouth. She grabs her jaw spitting out  
 blood. The kids start crying.

PAOLO  
(Ignoring Anya)  
You don't got no money. You ain't  
ever going to have no money.  
Anything you got comes to me.  
Capisce?

She nods fearfully.

PAOLO (CONT'D)  
Now get the hell upstairs and make  
me dinner. I'm hungry.

Walking past the crowd, Linda leads the kids into the house.

PAOLO (CONT'D)  
(Punching his own fist)  
You gotta show 'em who's boss. Keep  
'em in line every now and then.

He walks back to the bar with his entourage following.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Shaking, inspecting her bloodied mouth, she spits out a  
tooth. Wiping the blood from her face the look of pain is  
replaced with hatred.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Taking a drawer out of a built-in wardrobe, Linda reaches  
into the empty drawer space pulling out a paper bag. Hearing  
HEAVY FOOTSTEPS, she quickly puts the bag into the drawer,  
grabs a shirt closing the drawer just as Paolo enters.

PAOLO  
Where's my dinner?

LINDA  
I had to change. You got blood all  
over my clothes.

PAOLO  
No. You got blood all over your  
clothes. Now where's my dinner? I  
don't got all night. The club ain't  
gonna tend bar by itself.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

With eyes closed, Linda throws a dart at a map taped to the wall. She retrieves the dart, tapping the whole it left.

LINDA  
Huntington Beach. Guess that's  
about as far away from Connecticut  
as we can get.

INT. CHILDREN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Linda tucks the map under Anya's mattress. Kisses the sleeping children.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

FEBRUARY 1980: Clock reads eleven. Linda tossing in bed.

CUT TO:

A LITTLE WHILE LATER:

Clock reads twelve-forty-five. Linda heads to the bathroom.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Flames from candles on the counter illuminate the room. With her head back, and eyes closed, Linda relaxes in the tub.

A hand reaches out, pushing her below the surface of the water. She thrashes wildly, gulping down water as she tries to scream. She pushes with all her might as survival instincts kick in. In one swift move she rises from the water, hurls herself from the tub, knocking Paolo off his feet. He smacks his head on the freestanding radiator. Dazed, he shakes it off, angry as hell.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

With a fistful of hair, Paolo, drunk, drags her naked, down the hallway, while she struggles to get away.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Opening the door, he thrusts her through.

EXT. THIRD FLOOR PORCH - NIGHT

In piled high snow, shivering uncontrollably, Linda tries pushing her away back in the house. Staggering to keep himself upright, Paolo blocks her way.

PAOLO  
(Shouting)  
Look at her. Look at this cheating,  
lying bitch I married.

EXT. NEIGHBORING HOUSES - NIGHT

Lights go on in surrounding houses. Curtains part in the windows.

PAOLO (O.S.)  
She's a whore. She's a fucking  
whore.

EXT. THIRD FLOOR PORCH - NIGHT

Paolo back-hands Linda. She stumbles backwards into the railing. Flower pots balancing on the ledge fall off. Paolo uses that moment to close and lock the door. Linda tries opening the door. When it doesn't open, she shoulders it. It doesn't budge. She turns to the neighbors for help.

LINDA  
Help me, please! Somebody help me!

EXT. NEIGHBORING HOUSES - NIGHT

One by one, neighboring curtains close. Lights go out. She bangs on the door again.

EXT. STAIRS - NIGHT

Giving up, shivering wildly, Linda makes her way down the stairs rubbing her arms for warmth.

EXT. BACK YARD - NIGHT

Brushing snow from the frozen cellar doors, she tries opening them. They don't budge.

LINDA  
Shit! Shit, shit, shit!

Shaking uncontrollably, she kicks the doors. The ice cracks. She opens them and enters.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

Pulling a string, the light illuminates frozen cob webs, mounds of unknown objects, and boxes covered in dirt. Prying open the boxes, she tosses the contents everywhere. The last box emptied, she sits on a mound holding back tears.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Get a grip, Linda Jean. Get a grip.

Spotting a painter's tarp covered in dirt and rat feces, she wraps herself in it. Grabbing a shovel, she goes back outside.

EXT. VICTORIAN HOUSE - NIGHT

Leaning the shovel against the wall, Linda rummages through the snow and dirt where the flower pot fell. Finding a key, she climbs the stairs. Quietly opening the door, she enters.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tiptoeing into the bedroom, Paolo is passed out the bed, lying in his own urine. Quietly stepping past him, she dresses.

INT. CHILDREN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Opening the closet door, she finds the kids sleeping on the floor, wrapped in each others arms.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Taking the paper bag from the drawer, she opens it, pulling out a gun. Standing over Paolo, she jumps at the COCKING OF THE FIRING PIN. Paolo doesn't stir. She puts the gun to his head. Hearing a NOISE behind her, she swings around, aiming the gun. Falling to her knees, she muffles a scream.

Anya rubs the sleep out of her eyes, as Linda gathers her daughter in her arms relieved she didn't shoot her.

INT. CHILDREN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Linda sits on the bed next to Anya.

LINDA

I need you to do something for me,  
sweetie.

ANYA

Sure, Mommy.

LINDA

I want you to put your coat on and  
help Luca with his. Stay in here  
until I come get you. Okay?

ANYA

Okay, Mommy.

LINDA

That's my girl. Quick like a bunny  
now.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Noticing keys lying loosely in Paolo's open hand, Linda takes them. He moves. She freezes. He doesn't wake. She leaves the room. Moments later, she comes back carrying trash bags. She fills two of them with clothes. With gun and trash bags in hand, she leaves the room.

EXT. VICTORIAN HOUSE - NIGHT

The Mustang and a smaller, seventies-type car sit snow-bound. Grabbing the shovel, Linda digs out the small car. Opening the trunk, she tosses the bags in. Turning on the engine, she leaves it running, as she enters the Pulaski Club.

INT. PULASKI CLUB - NIGHT

Laying the gun on the counter, she opens the cash register, emptying it into her pockets. One by one, she dumps cigarette cartons onto the counter. Emptying one of them, rolls of money fall out. Putting the money back in the carton, she tucks it into her coat leaving the other packs as they lay.

Taking the cord from the phone behind the bar, she grabs a knife. Cutting the cord to the pay phone, she leaves the knife, picks up the gun, and walks out, locking the door behind her. Tossing the phone cord in the back of the car she lays the gun on the bumper. Taking two keys off the ring, she puts one in her pocket. Picking up the gun, she looks at the Cobra. Kissing the second key, she tosses it and the gun into the river.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Linda stuffs the cord from the wall phone into her pocket.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

She carefully lays the remaining keys next to Paolo's hand.

INT. CHILDREN'S ROOM - NIGHT

The kids, sitting on the bed, toys in hand stand excitedly when Linda walks in.

LINDA

Ssshhh. Come on. Let's go on an  
adventure.

Carrying Luca, Linda takes Anya's hand. They tiptoe through the bedroom.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Groaning, Paolo turns on his side as Linda sneaks past.

EXT. VICTORIAN HOUSE - NIGHT

With the kids in the back seat, Linda gets in the car.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

As she backs out, A LOUD BANG stops Linda. Seeing Paolo in the rear view mirror, she reaches over, locking the kids' doors, then locking hers.

EXT. CAR - NIGHT

Paolo pries on the door.

PAOLO

Open the door, Linda!

Paolo hangs onto the door handle sliding as Linda backs up.

PAOLO (CONT'D)

Open the fucking door!

Slipping to the front of the car, he slams his fists on the hood. The kids scream.

PAOLO (CONT'D)  
 Where the fuck you think you're  
 taking my kids?

At the side of the car now, Paolo bangs on the window. Linda fishtails away. Paolo loses his grip. Straightening the car, she drives away.

PAOLO (CONT'D)  
 I'm coming after you, Linda! I will  
 find you, and fucking kill you!

Taking the keys from his pocket, discovering his car key missing, he punches the car.

INT. PULASKI CLUB - NIGHT

He throws the phone with the missing cord across the room.

PAOLO (CONT'D)  
 Fuck!

He slams the pay phone receiver repeatedly when he sees the cut cord.

PAOLO (CONT'D)  
 Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!

EXT. CONNECTICUT TURNPIKE- NIGHT

Linda's car passes a sign reading "New York - Eight Miles"

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Paolo paces in front of his mother OLGA.

PAOLO  
 She took it all. The money. Kids.  
 Everything.

OLGA  
 What are you gonna do Pallie? She's  
 long gone by now.

PAOLO  
 I don't care if she's hiding under  
 a fuckin' rock. When I find her,  
 she's dead.

EXT. REST AREA OUTSIDE OF LIVINGSTON, TENNESSEE - NIGHT

As Linda and the kids come out of the rest room, a man comes out of the shadows. Linda jumps, shoving the kids behind her. He shivers in the cold.

REST STOP STRANGER

Excuse me. Think you could spare something to eat.

LINDA

I'm sorry. I don't...

REST STOP STRANGER

I haven't eaten in a couple days.

LINDA

All I have is peanut butter and jelly.

REST STOP STRANGER

That's okay. I haven't had that since I was a kid.

A COYOTE howls in the background. Linda shivers now.

REST STOP STRANGER (CONT'D)

Ya know if you get some of that Vapo rub stuff and rub some on your ankles, your elbows, it keeps away the unwanteds.

LINDA

Unwanted?

REST STOP STRANGER

Bugs especially, but coyotes, mountain lions? They don't like it.

LINDA

(a little confused)

Okay.

Linda nervously ushers the kids into the car. Taking a sandwich from a bag, she hands it to the stranger.

LINDA (CONT'D)

I have to get going now.

REST STOP STRANGER

I hope you like frogs, too. I know they're noisy, but frogs are your friends.

(MORE)

## REST STOP STRANGER (CONT'D)

If you hear them, you know you're okay. Means there aren't any unwantededs in the area.

Linda listens for a moment. Not hearing frogs, she quickly gets into the car.

LINDA

Um. Good luck then.

INT. CAR - DAY

Rolling up the window, Linda locks the door. Glancing in the rear view mirror, her eyes open wide.

EXT. REST AREA TREE - DAY

A coyote with an arrow through its throat hangs from a nearby tree.

INT. CAR - DAY

Linda jumps at the knock on the window.

EXT/INT. - CAR - DAY

REST STOP STRANGER

Remember, if you don't hear frogs, don't get out of your car.

He gestures slicing a throat.

EXT. CAR - DAY

Linda floors the car. Without looking she merges on the freeway causing a big rig to swerve.

INT. ARKANSAS KITCHEN - DAY

FRED WILLIAMS - Tall, potbellied man in his late sixties, thick Southern accent, pulls his wife ETHEL WILLIAMS - Large, buxom woman in her late sixties, thick Southern accent, into a bear hug, kissing her forehead.

FRED

What say I take my lovely bride out to dinner.

ETHEL

And where might you be hidin' this  
lovely *bride* of yours?

FRED

In plain sight darlin'. In plain  
sight.

Fred dips her backwards, planting a big one on her cheek.

EXT. ARKANSAS HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Sign reads "Arkansas, Eighty-two Miles". Snow starts as Linda drives down the highway.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Anya, wrapped in a blanket, lies on the floor. Luca sleeps beside Linda on the seat. The wipers barely keep the heavy snow off the windshield. Sleepy, Linda nods off.

EXT. CAR - NIGHT

The car swerves, veering to the side of the road.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Jolted awake, Linda straightens the wheel in time to see a large dark shadow in the middle of the road. Linda lays her hand on the horn. The shadow doesn't move. Luca rouses to the sound of the horn.

EXT. CAR - NIGHT

The brake lights go on, the car spins off the road.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Luca is tossed around as Linda tries righting the car.

EXT. CAR - NIGHT

The car hits the center railing, flips over the median, landing on its wheels. Heading in the opposite direction, the car comes to a stop in a shallow ditch.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Disoriented, Linda sits up, catching her breath. Anya sits up rubbing her eyes having slept through the accident. Luca bounces in the seat grinning, clapping his hands.

LUCA  
Again, Mommy. Again.

LINDA  
(Gathers the kids tightly  
in her arms)  
No again, baby. No again. Okay. You  
guys wait here. Mommy has to check  
out the damage.

EXT. CAR - NIGHT

As Linda walks around the car, another car pulls up. Fred and Ethel get out. Fred sets out flares. Ethel turns on a flashlight as she walks to Linda.

ETHEL  
Are you hurt, Honey?

LINDA  
No. A little shaken but not hurt.

ETHEL  
Well a course you're shook up. You  
just did a tumbleweed, darling.

LINDA  
A tumbleweed?

ETHEL  
When your car spins round like  
yours did.

LINDA  
Will it drive? I need to get back  
on the road. I've got a long way to  
go.

ETHEL  
Not tonight you're not. One run in  
with an elk per night is all we  
allow.

LINDA  
Is that what that was?

ANYA  
Mommy. I'm cold.

ETHEL  
I'll bet you are, cutie. Come on.  
Let's sit in Auntie Ethel's car  
where it's nice and warm.

Ethel puts the kids in the car while Fred walks up to Linda.

FRED  
Well, little lady. You had angels  
watching you tonight. The way you  
were spinning and turning, I  
thought you'd be dead for sure.

LINDA  
I thought we'd be dead too.

FRED  
Car's going to live too. I don't  
think I've seen a car spin like  
that, without major damage. Truth  
be told, you'll be able to drive it  
out of here in no time.

ETHEL  
You and your children need to  
settle down for the night in a nice  
warm bed, not the front of a piss  
ant car like that, and I don't want  
to hear a word about it. We'll see  
to the car won't we, Fred?

FRED  
You bet, Ethel!

ETHEL  
(holding up a hand)  
Don't say a solitary word. We've  
heard all the Fred and Ethel jokes  
there ever was, and if it weren't  
for the fact I love this old coot,  
I would have divorced him long ago  
because I can't stand our names.

LINDA  
I wasn't going to say anything.

ETHEL  
You'd be the first not to, but  
let's get you to a nice comfy  
feather bed.

(MORE)

ETHEL (CONT'D)

You can tell us in the morning why  
you're out here all alone with two  
kids and nary a husband in sight.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Linda slowly opens her eyes. Finding the beds empty, she  
races out dressed in only boxers and a T-shirt.

INT. HALLWAY/STAIRWELL - DAY

LINDA

Anya! Luca!

INT. ARKANSAS KITCHEN - DAY

Storming into the kitchen, she finds the children happily  
filling their bellies.

ANYA/LUCA

Mamma!

ANYA

Auntie Ethel made us cinnamon  
rolls, and bacon, and eggs. And  
look, Mommy! There's even orange  
juice that she got from a real  
orange.

LINDA

Is that where orange juice comes  
from? I didn't know that!

ETHEL

We may not be fancy around here,  
but if you're going to eat at this  
table, you'll have the decency to  
dress, please.

LINDA

Yes, ma'am.

INT. ARKANSAS KITCHEN - DAY

Fully clothed with damp hair, Linda sits in front of the  
feast.

LINDA

You didn't have to go to so much  
trouble for us, but I do thank you.

ETHEL

This isn't any trouble. Honey, I cook like this everyday.

FRED

(Entering the room)  
Come on, Missy, eat up. We've got to get going.

LINDA

Get going?

FRED

Everybody within two hundred miles goes to church on Sunday. Even the drunks. Your car won't be ready til after service, so let's go.

He walks out the door.

ETHEL

That's my Fred! He must like you. He's not usually this friendly.

INT. OLD-FASHIONED DINER - DAY

In a booth near a large picture window, Fred accepts a cup of coffee from the waitress as they finish their meal. Fred takes a sip before turning his attention to Linda.

FRED

Being a retired police chief, I still think like a cop. I like to know who's staying under my roof. When they towed the car, I had the license plate run.

Linda drops the piece of bacon she was about to eat.

FRED (CONT'D)

I found out a few things about you, young lady.

Before Linda can speak, Fred holds up a hand.

FRED (CONT'D)

I never could abide by thievery. Takin all that money was wrong, but talking with Art Boccuzzi, I understand why you thought stealing was the only way out.

(MORE)

FRED (CONT'D)

I'd like to see you set things right, but more's the point, I'd like to see you and your kids safe.

ETHEL

Fred and I talked it over. If you want to go on your way, well, we won't stop you. But if you want to stay with us, let us help you, you're welcome to.

FRED

We have a little space over the barn. We could fix up a real nice little home for you and your kids. We're getting up there in years and could use a little help around the house. Maybe earn a little spending money. Take a class or two at our local college.

LINDA

You don't know me.

ETHEL

We know you've had a rough life.

LINDA

Knowing everything I've done, you still want to help?

FRED

I live in a glass house, darling. We all do. If someone was to cast a stone at me, my walls would shatter. I did stupid things when I was your age, and for a lot less reason than what you have over there. (Points to the kids.)

LINDA

Why would you do this for a total stranger?

FRED

Ethel and I were never blessed with children. But if we had a daughter who was in trouble, we'd hope that God'd see fit to put someone in her life that could help her in her time of need.

Linda looks at Fred and Ethel. Before she has a chance to react, Luca bounces in his seat, pointing out the window.

LUCA  
Mamma, look! Daddy's car!

Glancing out the window, a blue Mustang with flames on the side drives past. In one swift move, Fred is out the door, while Linda and Ethel grab the kids.

EXT. REPAIR SHOP - DAY

A huge dent on the roof, a missing fender, smashed in rear door, doesn't stop Linda from putting the kids in the car. A clear thick sheet of plastic is duct taped where the window once was. Turning in time to see a patrol car pull up, Linda watches as Fred gets out.

LINDA  
Did you find him?

FRED  
Wasn't his car. I know you're scared and your first instinct is to run, but you don't have to.

LINDA  
Yes, I do. This time it wasn't him, but the next time it might be. I thank you for all you've done, all you've offered, but I have to go. He can't find us.

FRED  
So what if he does? Listen to me now. You can stay and face him.

ETHEL  
Things are different here than where you're from.

LINDA  
Really? Are there laws in Arkansas that will put him in jail if he breaks my jaw again?

FRED  
No. I'm sorry to say there isn't.

LINDA  
There's no difference then. If Paolo finds us, he'll kill me. Not you or anybody else will be able to stop him. I don't want to give him that chance.

With a sigh, Fred hands her an envelope.

FRED

There's one thousand dollars in there, and our phone number. If you ever need help, you pick up that phone. And keep your money in something better than a cigarette carton.

Linda kisses Fred's cheek, then Ethel's before driving away.

EXT. LARGE REST AREA SOMEWHERE IN OKLAHOMA - NIGHT

The car is parked away from the street lamps.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Linda empties a small bag. Taking the money from the cigarette carton, she counts out two, hundred dollar bills tucking them into a book. She puts the phone number and the rest of the money into a bag, before hiding it under the seat.

EXT. TEXAS FREEWAY - DAY

Road sign reads 'Cadillac Ranch, next exit.'

LINDA

Hey guys. I think it's time we had a little fun tomorrow. Don't you?

The kids cheer gleefully.

BEGIN USA ADVENTURE MONTAGE(HAPPY MUSIC OVER)

The kids run in between the cars at The Cadillac Ranch in Amarillo, Texas. Linda nervously watching for Paolo.

The three of them lay spread eagle at Four Corners in Shiprock, New Mexico. Linda still watching for Paolo.

Linda stands in the doorway of an old fashioned town with Luca in her arms and Anya on her shoulders. They are watching a gunfight on the streets of the Living Ghost Town in Oatman, Arizona.

EXT. CALIFORNIA BEACH PARKING LOT - DAY

The kids bolt towards the beach squealing with delight.

## THE BEACH

The three of them laughing, racing the waves; Chasing sandpipers; Making sand castles; burying each other's feet in the sand.

## THE PIER

Having a gay time inspecting a fisherman's catch; feeding the gulls, watching a trio on unicycles; eating ice cream.

END USA ADVENTURE MONTAGE.

## EXT. HUNTINGTON BEACH PARKING LOT - DAY

As they near the car, Linda drops her cone, taking off at a run. The kids, puzzled run after her.

LINDA

No! No, no, no, no, no!

## EXT. CAR - DAY

The plastic sheet, torn, hangs from the window.

## INT/EXT. - CAR - DAY

Frantic, Linda searches for her money, finding only what she hid in the book.

LINDA

This can't be happening.

## EXT. CAR - NIGHT

The lights from the pier shine through the windshield. The kids are huddled together, asleep in the back seat. Leaning into the car, Linda pulls the blanket up around them. She closes the door. Sitting on the hood, looking out at the ocean, quietly sobs.

## INT. WELFARE OFFICE - DAY

ONE WEEK LATER: Linda and the kids sit in front of a CASE MANAGER sitting behind a desk piled with papers.

CASE MANAGER

Where is the information on your husband?

LINDA  
My ex-husband. We're divorced.

CASE MANAGER  
You're divorced? Your paper work says you lived in Connecticut up until a few weeks ago. How could you have been divorced so quickly?

LINDA  
About a year ago, my husband thought we could collect welfare if we were divorced. So we did.

CASE MANAGER  
And did you?

LINDA  
Collect welfare? No. We were still living together so we weren't eligible.

CASE MANAGER  
(eying Linda with doubt)  
We still need to contact him.

LINDA  
He'll find me if you contact him.

CASE MANAGER  
That would be a problem because?

LINDA  
He beats me all the time.

CASE MANAGER  
Well, no marriage is perfect, my dear.

LINDA  
(Standing, knocks over her chair.)  
Marriage shouldn't give you broken bones either! I'll see him in hell before I let him know where we are.

She storms out of the office. Heads pop out of cubicles watching her as she storms past.

INT. HUNTINGTON BEACH RESTROOM - DAY

Linda locks the door to a public restroom. She washes Anya's hair in the sink while Luca plays in the corner. Pushing the button for the electric hand drier, she finds it broken.

LINDA

Great. Now how do we dry your hair?

Pulling off her shirt, she dries Anya's hair.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Okay, buddy boy. It's your turn.

She picks up Luca, balances him on her knee while she washes his hair. There is a BANGING on the door

LINDA (CONT'D)

I'll be done in a minute.

Done with Luca's hair, she wrings the water from her shirt putting it back on. She unlocks the door, finding a disgruntled janitor waiting with arms crossed.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Sorry. They had a food fight.

She hurries them back to their car.

EXT. HUNTINGTON BEACH PARKING LOT - DAY

Two police cars park behind Linda. Two officers and a woman stand outside Linda's car.

HB OFFICER ONE

(knocks on the window)

Miss. Miss

Linda rolls the window down.

HB OFFICER ONE (CONT'D)

License, please.

LINDA

Did I do something wrong?

She hands him her license.

HB OFFICER ONE

Step out of the car, Miss.

LINDA

My kids are asleep.

HB OFFICER ONE  
Step out of the car, please.

She does so.

HB OFFICER ONE (CONT'D)  
You've been sleeping in your car  
for a few days now.

LINDA  
My car was broken into. My money  
got stolen. We had nowhere to go.

MRS. PARKER approaches Linda. She pulls out an ID card.

MRS. PARKER  
Ma'am. I am Mrs. Parker from the  
California Department of Children's  
Services. Did you know it's illegal  
to sleep in your car in the  
province of Los Angeles?

The officer opens the back door of Linda's car. Reaching in,  
he picks up a sleeping Luca. The second officer stops Linda  
as she reaches for her kids. Screaming, they begin to  
struggle.

LINDA  
What are you doing? Leave them  
alone.

LUCA  
Mommy! Mommy!

ANYA  
Leave my brother alone!

LINDA  
(struggling to get away)  
Luca! Anya!

MRS. PARKER  
Sleeping in your car is child  
endangerment. We're taking your  
children into custody where they  
will be properly cared for.

The officer restrains Linda as she fights to get to the kids.

HB OFFICER TWO  
Settle down, Ms. McPherson.

LINDA  
You're taking my children!

He continues to restrain her. The kids kick and scream as they are forced into the car.

ANYA  
Don't let them take us, Mommy!

LINDA  
Let them go!

MRS. PARKER  
I'm sorry Ms. McPherson. I can't do that.

She gets in her car, closing the door on Linda. Both officers restrain Linda as she fights to get to her children.

EXT. DCS VEHICLE. DAY

The frightened children climbing on the rear deck of the car, struggle to get to Linda through the window.

EXT. HUNTINGTON BEACH PARKING LOT - DAY

As the car drives away, Linda drops to her knees.

LINDA  
My babies! I want my babies.

HB OFFICER ONE  
You might want to get it together  
if you want your kids back.

He walks away, leaving Linda, sobbing in the middle of the parking lot.

INT. PULASKI CLUB - NIGHT

Paolo stands at the bar. He downs a shot, adding the glass to several empty before him. The BARTENDER reaches for the half empty bottle of Rock n Rye. Without looking up, Paolo grabs the bartender's wrist. The bartender leaves the bottle.

BARTENDER  
I'm cutting you off Pallie.

Paolo glances up from his empty glass.

PAOLO  
You wanna cut me off?

BARTENDER

You're drunk off your ass Pallie.

PAOLO

I see how you are. Six weeks ago,  
my wife disappears with my kids,  
and you're gonna cut me off? We'll  
see about that.

Paolo throws a shot glass at the bartender.

BARTENDER

Pallie. Knock it off.

PAOLO

Oh I'll knock it off all right.

He swipes his hand across the bar, knocking everything within reach onto the floor. He upturns a nearby table, breaks a chair, using the piece still in his hand to destroy the rest of the bar. He drops the broken chair, casually puts on his coat. Putting his fist through the glass window on the door, he doesn't flinch as a three inch gash gushes blood. Flipping everyone off with his bloody hand, Paolo walks out the door.

INT. WOMAN'S CLOTHING STORE - DAY

Linda, at the counter looks a little worse for wear. WOMAN behind the counter looks Linda up and down.

WOMAN

I don't think you're quite the  
right fit for this position dear.  
So sorry.

INT. TRUCK STOP - DAY

Linda at the counter. MAN behind the counter smiles, shaking his head no.

MAN

I wish I could say yes, Miss, but  
we just laid a few people off. I  
sure wish you luck.

LINDA

That's okay. You've given me the  
nicest 'no' all day.

EXT. CAR - NIGHT

The car is parked in a small dark nook somewhere along the coast, with the only light coming from the stars.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Linda sleeping on the flattened passenger seat, pops up when the car begins to rock violently. A MAN at the front of the car rocks the car back and forth.

MAN 2  
This is my place!

EXT. CAR - NIGHT

A SECOND MAN at the back of the car, wields a knife, using it to bang on the back window.

MAN 3  
Get out! Now or...  
(Flashes the knife at  
Linda)

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Linda leaps over the console into the drivers seat. Nervously fumbling with the keys, finally starts the car and peels out.

EXT. SOUP KITCHEN - DAY

Linda and one other woman, wait in a long line for a meal. Two people away from the door, a VOLUNTEER steps out.

VOLUNTEER  
Sorry, folks. We're out of food.

The other woman cusses, as others brandish fists.

EXT. RESTAURANT SEATING - DAY

Searching through a trash can, Linda finds a half-eaten sandwich. Brushing off coffee grounds, she gags as she bites into it, but eats it anyway.

EXT. REST AREA. - NIGHT

Rain comes down in buckets.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Linda, cocooned in her blankets, wakes at the howling wind.

EXT. REST AREA. - NIGHT

Opening the car door, Linda runs to the restroom.

INT. REST STOP BATHROOM - NIGHT

The first toilet is clogged with paper and poop. Remains of vomit around the rim of the second. The last stall, still dirty, is the cleanest. After using the toilet, she uses a wad of toilet paper to wipe soot from the mirror.

Two women enter, laughing and having a good time. Seeing Linda, they instantly go silent. The older woman steers the YOUNGER WOMAN away from her. They walk back out.

YOUNGER WOMAN (O.S.)  
Did you see that, mom? How  
pathetic.

Disheartened, Linda sighing at her reflection.

EXT. REST AREA. - DAY

At the information booth, Linda accepts the free cup of coffee and two cookies. She eats one, pocketing the other. She holds the cup to warm her hands before drinking it.

LINDA  
What happened to sunny California?

INT. GAS STATION BATHROOM - DAY

Linda locks the door, strips down, cringing at the sight of her greying undergarments. She turns the water on, discovering the hot water doesn't work. Pulling a bar of soap from her backpack, she washes her socks in the sink. Using one of the socks as a washcloth she cleans up. Linda sucks in her breath as she washes her hair in the cold water.

Now cleaned up, she winces at her reflection then walks out.

INT. THE PINK CAFE - DAY

Fifties style diner with faded pink walls, grey and white checkerboard floors. Worn red counter seats and booths.

JENNY GREENE - Thin, with the raspy voice of one who smoked, and partied hard all her life.

CLARISSA BOOTHE - A voluptuous red headed Pink Cafe regular.

MILLIE JACKSON - Short chubby, perky, brown-haired girl, late teens. Thick southern accent.

CLARISSA  
My usual poached eggs, Millie.

MILLIE  
Sure thing, Miss Clarissa.

Linda walks in cleaner, but still a bit unkempt. She counts coins as Jenny walks up to her.

JENNY  
What can I do ya for?

LINDA  
What can I get for eighty-nine cents?

JENNY  
Let me see.

Jenny walks away. Linda sits at the counter.

MILLIE (O.S.)  
No poached eggs today Miss Clarissa.

CLARISSA (O.S.)  
Is Charlie drunk again?

MILLIE (O.S.)  
No, ma'am. He quit.

Linda turns around watching Millie and Clarissa.

CLARISSA  
What? Why?

MILLIE  
Somebody sent his eggs back.

CLARISSA  
(With a belly laugh)  
So now what are you going to do?

MILLIE  
I guess we'll have to find us a new cook.

Jenny returns with a meatloaf dinner and a glass of milk. Linda turns back around, pushing the coins toward Jenny.

JENNY

You keep your money, honey. Have yourself a good meal, and a good cry on the house.

LINDA

This is much more than eighty-nine cents worth.

JENNY

Nonsense. Now, what else can I do for you?

LINDA

I couldn't help but overhear. I do a pretty good poached egg.

CLARISSA

You should try her out, Jenny. You know how I love my poached eggs.

JENNY

I should know. You've been ordering the same thing for nigh on to six years now.

CUT TO:

A LITTLE WHILE LATER

Clarissa looks at the eggs millie put before her. Millie, Jenny and Linda all stare as she takes her first bite. With closed eyes and brows furrowed, she swallows. Opening her eyes, she looks at Linda, then Jenny.

CLARISSA

You're not good at poached eggs.

Linda looks disheartened.

CLARISSA (CONT'D)

You're awesome. These eggs are perfect.

They all smile. Clarissa goes back to eating.

INT. PINK CAFE BACK ROOM. - DAY

The room looks as worse for the wear as Linda does.

JENNY

Can't pay much. Seventy-five dollars a week, plus room and board. Needs some fixing, but I'll help with that some. We need someone who can start right away.

LINDA

I can start right now. I'll take the job, and the room if you're still offering.

JENNY

I'm offering. It isn't anybody that can please Miss Clarissa the way you just did.

INT. PINK CAFE BACK ROOM. - DAY - THREE MONTHS LATER

Linda and the room are much improved. Walking to a shelf, she takes down a large pickle jar half full with coins, she opens it, drops in several coins and a couple of bills. Placing it back on the shelf, she turns to Millie and Jenny.

MILLIE

How much have you saved so far?

LINDA

Not enough. Tips are scarce.

MILLIE

I'll say. I think I only made forty-two dollars last week. When do you see your case worker?

LINDA

Day after tomorrow. It's been almost two months since I've seen the kids. I don't want them to forget me.

JENNY

That'd never happen honey. You're unforgettable.

Linda smiles.

INT. DCS CORPORATE OFFICE - DAY

Linda's case worker, sits behind a desk with an open file in front of her. Linda and Jenny sit across from her.

DCS OFFICIAL

I understand you left your husband,  
but it was foolish without a plan.

LINDA

Getting as far away from my ex-  
husband as I could was my plan.

DCS OFFICIAL

Be that as it may, sleeping in your  
vehicle was very dangerous. But,  
we've taken into consideration that  
you were looking out for the safety  
of your children. There will be no  
charges brought against you.

Linda releases the breath she had been holding.

JENNY

I told you everything'd be okay?

DCS OFFICIAL

However... It is the determination  
of this office that your children  
be wards of the state of California  
for no less than six months.

LINDA

You said you weren't going to press  
charges.

DCS OFFICIAL

And we are not. You must, however,  
prove stability. Weekly supervised  
visitations have been approved at  
their prospective homes.

LINDA

Homes? They're not together?

DCS OFFICIAL

No. We thought it best if they were  
separated.

LINDA

Why?

DCS OFFICIAL

The children need to adjust to  
their lives without you,  
separately. Back to the point.

(MORE)

DCS OFFICIAL (CONT'D)

When you have a job, a suitable home that is not in the back of a restaurant, we will consider revision. Now ladies. I have other business to conduct.

EXT. RANCH STYLE HOUSE - ANAHEIM, CALIFORNIA - DAY

Anya watches out the window. HELEN PORTER - Mid-sixties, stands behind her. When Linda's car pulls up, the front door opens with Anya bounding down the steps.

ANYA

(Jumping into Linda's arms)

Mommy!

LINDA

(She holds on tightly.)

Hi, baby.

Putting Anya down, Linda extends her hand. Helen takes it.

LINDA (CONT'D)

I'm sure you've guessed who I am.

HELEN

I've heard a lot about you. Your daughter is quite the talker.

ANYA

(tugging on Linda)

Come see my room. It's all my own. I never had a room by myself before.

HELEN

Go ahead. Have some fun.

Linda smiles, letting Anya lead the way.

INT. ANYA'S BEDROOM - DAY

ANYA

Look, mommy. I have my own bed, my own dresser and even my own dolls. This one's Strawberry Shortcake. She's my favorite.

The two of them sit on the floor playing with various dolls. A KNOCK ON THE DOOR. Helen enters the room carrying a tray with milk and cookies. She places the tray on a small table.

HELEN

I thought you ladies might like  
some refreshments.

LINDA

That's very nice of you.

Helen smiles, closing the door behind her as she leaves.

EXT. RANCH STYLE HOUSE - DAY

Helen stands to the side while Linda squats in front of Anya.

LINDA

I wish I could stay longer sweetie,  
but I can't. I'll be back next week  
okay?

ANYA

Okay, Mommy. Bye.

Anya runs back into the house leaving Linda alone, saddened  
there was not more of a goodbye.

HELEN

She talks about you all the time,  
and can't wait to be home with you.  
In the meantime, be patient. She'll  
come around.

EXT. CONNECTICUT LIQUOR STORE - DAY

Paolo staggers out of the store carrying a bottle. Getting in  
his car, he takes a swig from the bottle he just bought. He  
drives away, swerving. Moments later, he hits a parked car.  
The driver, gets out shaking a fist after Paolo.

DRIVER

Hey!

Paolo ignores her, flipping her off as he drives away.

EXT. ANOTHER CONNECTICUT STREET - DAY

Paolo swerves even more, hitting another parked car, running  
a red light, finally coming to a stop by hitting a police  
car. Paolo staggers out of the car.

POLICE OFFICER

Pallie?

Paolo recognizes the cop, smiles drunkenly, then vomits on the officers shoes.

INT. JAIL CELL - DAY

The same officer bangs on the cell bars.

POLICE OFFICER  
Paolo. Get your ass up.

Hungover, pissed, he flips off the officer as he turns his back on him.

POLICE OFFICER (CONT'D)  
Pallie. What the fuck happened to you?

Paolo turns back, eyeing the officer.

PAOLO  
Tony?

POLICE OFFICER  
Yeah it's Tony.

PAOLO  
Who'd I puke on last night?

POLICE OFFICER  
Me, you asshole. Now what the hell's going on with you?

PAOLO  
You don't know?

POLICE OFFICER  
Know what? Pallie, if you need help, all you gotta do is ask.

PAOLO  
Yeah? Let's talk then.

EXT. ANAHEIM COLONIAL - ANAHEIM, CALIFORNIA - DAY

Linda knocks, No answer. Knocking a second time. CHARITY HOLDEN - Mid forties, dark hair done up in a bun, answers the door. With glasses half perched on her nose, she looks at Linda with a frown.

LINDA  
(Extending her hand)  
Hi. I'm Luca's mom.

CHARITY

I know who you are. You're early.  
Visitation is from one until two.  
It's twelve-fifty-five.

Charity closes the door in Linda's face. Linda stands there dumbfounded.

FIVE MINUTES LATER:

Charity opens the door when Linda knocks again.

CHARITY

You want to see your son, you'll be  
on time. Next time, not a minute  
before or after one.

She turns away leaving the door open.

INT. ANAHEIM HOME - DAY

CHARITY

Luca. Your mother is here.

RUNNING FOOTSTEPS (O.S.)

CHARITY (CONT'D)

Young man! What have I said about  
running in the house?

Luca comes slowly around the corner with a shaved head.

LINDA

What have you done?

Not waiting for an answer, Linda picks him up, swinging him around so his back is facing Charity. Her eyes about burn a hole in Charity.

CHARITY

We've never had lice. Never intend  
to. Every boy that comes through  
those doors gets his head shaved.

LINDA

Luca has never had lice in his  
life.

CHARITY

Well I wouldn't know that until his  
head was clean shaven, now would I?

LINDA

You could have looked, or asked me.

CHARITY

No need to ask what to do in my own home. You have fifty-two minutes left of your visit. Do you really want to spend them arguing with me?

LUCA

Do you want to see my room, Mommy?

CHARITY

No. This is supervised visitation. Until I hear otherwise, you will sit at the table and talk.

LINDA

Which way is the table, Sweetie?

With tears in Luca's eyes, Linda walks through a hallway.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Finding the dining room, Linda sits with Luca on her lap. He cries himself to sleep in his mother's arms.

CHARITY

You're just babying him like that, you know.

LINDA

I don't care.

She turns her back on Charity. Rocking Luca on her lap, she softly sings the lullaby from DUMBO.

LINDA (CONT'D)

BABY MINE, DON'T YOU CRY  
BABY MINE, DRY YOUR EYES  
REST YOUR HEAD CLOSE TO MY HEART  
NEVER TO PART, BABY OF MINE.

(Continuing in a whisper)

I will get you away as soon as I can, baby. I promise.

CHARITY

(Looking at her watch)  
It's time.

Linda nods. Luca's arms go around her neck as she stands.

LUCA  
I go home with you, Mommy?

LINDA  
Oh, baby. I wish you could.

Linda carries Luca down the hallway.

LUCA  
(He begins to cry.)  
Did I be bad, mommy?

LINDA  
No. You weren't bad.

LUCA  
If I didn't be bad why can't I come  
with you?

LINDA  
(Hugging him tightly)  
I promise, Luca. You will come home  
with me soon.

EXT. ANAHEIM COLONIAL - DAY

The three of them stand at the open front door.

CHARITY  
You're just making this worse for  
him. Now let me have him.

Charity tries pulling Luca's fingers from Linda's neck.

LUCA  
No! No!

CHARITY  
Young man!

Getting a bit rough, Linda slaps Charity's hand away.

LINDA  
He's just a little boy. Let me have  
a moment without you hovering!

CHARITY  
Since it takes you a full twenty  
for salutations, next time you will  
only get forty minutes to visit.

Linda stares at her for a moment. Turning away from Charity  
Linda hugs Luca tightly, kissing his tears.

LINDA  
 (Whispering in his ear)  
 I promise, baby. I will bring you  
 home soon.

Linda reluctantly gives him to Charity.

LUCA  
 Mommy! Mommy!

He holds onto the door frame with all of his might,  
 struggling to get away.

LUCA (CONT'D)  
 Mommy!

Prying Luca's fingers away, Charity slams the door.

LUCA (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 I be good mommy! I be good!

LINDA  
 (She rests her head on the  
 closed door)  
 I'm sorry, baby. I'm so sorry!

Linda leans against the door, sobbing quietly.

INT. PINK CAFE BACK ROOM. - NIGHT

Linda lies on her bed, her arm covering her eyes.

FANTASY WIZARD OF OZ TYPE DREAM

Linda, still on her bed, is sucked into a twister. Charity  
 rides a broomstick holding Luca by his collar. With each  
 twist of the cyclone, Luca is carried further and further  
 away. The bed falls into an abandoned amusement park. Linda  
 taps red sneakers three times.

LINDA  
 There's no place like home. There's  
 no place like home. There's no  
 place...Wait. I haven't got a home.

INT/EXT. AMUSEMENT PARK. - DAY

The dream takes Linda through wonky staircases, moving  
 floors, a hall of mirrors that continually changes her  
 appearance to a lamb, a rabbit, then a mouse.

As she approaches the exit, waiting far off in the distance is a sparkling blue wolf, suggestively bidding her to come to him.

The sunlight catches a glint in his steel blue eyes. As she approaches him, she discovers he is a merely a man in a cowboy hat wearing sapphire blue cowboy boots. This cowboy is now holding Luca.

Only a few feet from the man, he changes to the wolf holding Luca away from her. As she reaches for her son, the wolf disappears with Luca in a puff of blue smoke.

INT. PINK CAFE BACK ROOM. - DAY

Linda wakes covered in sweat.

INT. PINK CAFE KITCHEN. NIGHT

SUPERIMPOSED: Linda sitting at an empty booth writing a letter superimposed with Fred and Ethel sitting at their kitchen table, reading the letter.

LINDA (V.O.)

Dear Fred and Ethel. I'm sorry to say I've misplaced your phone number or I'd have called long ago. It's been months since I've been there, but I remember your address so I guess letters will have to do. I think of you often. The kindness you showed to a stranger has carried me through the search for a new home far away from Paolo.

Fred pours himself a cup of coffee and tops off Ethel's.

LINDA (V.O.)

It took a while, but I finally got myself a job doing what I love. Anya and Luca have settled in their new home just fine. They each have their own room. Anya's is decorated to fit a princess, and Luca's has a cowboy theme going. You should like that.

Fred and Ethel walk their property hand in hand, a dog by their side.

LINDA (V.O.)  
I hope to see you again soon.  
Perhaps with my first vacation.  
Maybe next Spring. Until then, I  
remember you fondly, and will write  
as often as I can. Linda.

INT. PINK CAFE KITCHEN. NIGHT

Linda puts her letter in an envelope as Millie enters.

LINDA  
I got my way Millie.

MILLIE  
What do you mean?

LINDA  
They moved Luca to the Porters with  
Anya. They're on vacation, so I  
can't see them for two weeks but  
when they come back I'll be able to  
see them both at the same time.

MILLIE  
Yay! Let's celebrate.

LINDA  
I'll celebrate when my kids are  
with me.

MILLIE  
Well then let's just go out and  
have fun. We'll get in the car and  
just go. There has to be a million  
things to do in LA.

EXT. I-5 NEAR LOS ANGELES - DAY

Stuck in the heavy Los Angeles traffic, a big rig inches it's  
way alongside of them.

INT. CAR - DAY

Millie flirts with the driver of the big rig.

LINDA  
Who are you talking to?

MILLIE

I don't know. Some trucker. He was showing me his cowboy hat, so I showed him mine.

LINDA

Be careful. He could be some crazy serial killer or something.

MILLIE

What does he kill someone at every truck stop or something?

LINDA

You never know.

Millie rolls her eyes, turning her attention back to the trucker.

EXT. TRUCK STOP NEAR LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

Linda pumps gas while Millie watches truckers come and go, almost all wearing cowboy hats. Two TRUCKERS approach them.

TRUCKER 1

Ladies. How's it going?

MILLIE

Good thanks. You?

LINDA

Millie.

MILLIE

What, Linda? We're just talking.

TRUCKER 1

Yeah, Linda. We're just talking.

The man brushes Millie's hair aside.

LINDA

We're fine thanks, and would like to go about our business.

TRUCKER 2

Don't get bent out a shape. We're just looking for a little fun, that's all.

He leans in for a kiss. Linda pushes him away.

LINDA

Come on Millie. Let's go.

TRUCKER 2

What's your hurry? Don't like fun?

Two men climb down from the cab of a parked truck. They approach the gas pumps.

DAVE DOWNING - Mid-twenties, tall, slender man with dark hair and a full beard, wearing a well-worn leather cowboy hat and boots. Thick southern accent.

CARL JONES - Early thirties, short, stout fellow with wavy hair, in sneakers, jeans and a sweatshirt.

DAVE

(Taking his hat off, he  
brushes back his hair)

Boy howdy. If you two ain't a sight  
for sore eyes. I thought we was too  
late.

He puts his arm around Linda's shoulder, turning to the other truckers.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Hope our gals weren't causing too  
much trouble for y'all. They get a  
little feisty when we're late.

He turns to the Linda, kisses her cheek.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Sorry I'm late, darlin'. Here. Let  
me finish that for you.

He takes the gas hose and finishes pumping the gas. The other truckers walk away.

LINDA

Thank you for coming to our rescue.

DAVE

Wouldn't a had it otherwise. I  
don't take to women being  
manhandled like that.

He extends a hand.

DAVE (CONT'D)

I'm Dave by the way. This here's my  
partner Carl.

MILLIE

I'm Millie. This is Linda.

DAVE

Linda. Pretty name for a pretty lady. How about a cup a coffee?

LINDA

I don't know.

DAVE

Just thought you could use a drink right now, and coffee's the strongest thing they got here.

Linda smiles. Dave extends his elbow. Linda hesitates, but takes the arm. They walk toward the restaurant.

CARL

Looks like it's you and me, Millie.

INT. TRUCK STOP DINER - NIGHT

Food is half eaten. All are laughing.

DAVE

Hey. Ya'll ever been inside an eighteen-wheeler?

LINDA

I know I haven't.

DAVE

Well, come on. Let's go.

EXT. COUNTRY DINER - NIGHT

Leaving the diner, Carl and Millie run ahead. Linda and Dave saunter along.

DAVE

So. You from around here?

LINDA

No. Not really. I'm from Connecticut.

DAVE

Well, I'll be dipped. I got me a real live Yankee. I'm not from around here, neither.

LINDA  
Really? I would have never known.

EXT. EIGHTEEN WHEELER - NIGHT

Millie pops her head out of the truck.

MILLIE  
Hey, girl. You've got to see this.  
Get up here.

INT. EIGHTEEN WHEELER - NIGHT

Millie disappears. Carl's head pops out from behind a curtain in back of the cab. Millie's head pops out beside his.

MILLIE  
There's a bed back here.

LINDA  
Millie. Can I talk to you for a  
minute?

Millie climbs out of the cab.

MILLIE  
What's wrong?

LINDA  
We don't know these men.

MILLIE  
So?

LINDA  
So, it's obvious Carl likes you.

MILLIE  
Again, so?

LINDA  
Millie. You're only sixteen.

MILLIE  
Stop acting like my mamma. I'm  
gonna have me some fun.

She climbs back into the cab.

DAVE

Hey. We gotta go drop this load in San Francisco in the morning. Ya'll wanna come?

LINDA

Overnight?

DAVE

You betcha.

MILLIE

I'm going.

Linda gives her a dirty look.

LINDA

Where would we sleep?

DAVE

(He smiles a charming,  
devilish smile.)  
One wide, two deep.

INT. PINK CAFE KITCHEN. - NIGHT

Linda scrubs the grill.

JENNY

Girl. You are going to scrub steel off that grill. Now leave it be and quit for the day.

LINDA

I will. I just wanted to...

JENNY

So help me if I have to kick your butt out of here I will.

LINDA

All right. All right. I'm going.

Linda walks to her room.

INT. PINK CAFE BACK ROOM. - NIGHT

Linda steps into the room. A single rose on the pillow, candles everywhere, soft mellow music plays in the back ground. Dave wraps his arms around her from behind.

LINDA  
I'm covered in grease.

DAVE  
Don't matter to me. You could be  
covered in tar and feathers and I'd  
still think you were beautiful.

He swings her around, slowly dancing her to the bathroom.

INT. PINK CAFE BATHROOM - NIGHT

Still dancing, he reaches in, turning on the shower. He  
dances her into the water fully clothed. As the water streams  
down them, she wraps her arms around his neck. He lifts her  
off her feet.

INT. PINK CAFE BACK ROOM. - NIGHT

A jar, half filled with money, sits next to a full one on the  
night stand. Still damp, Dave and Linda are in bed.

LINDA  
You know, I only went with you guys  
to protect Millie.

DAVE  
Figured that. Glad she needed  
protecting.

They snuggle a little closer.

DAVE (CONT'D)  
So when do I get to meet your kids?

LINDA  
I get them all day on Saturday.

DAVE  
Good. Let's have some fun.

She smiles.

DAVE (CONT'D)  
There it is.

LINDA  
There what is?

DAVE

That smile. Your face lights up when you talk about your kids you know. I'm thinking maybe I should be jealous.

EXT. THE PARKER HOME - DAY

Linda and Dave on the front porch. Dave holds a small bouquet of flowers. The door opens.

HELEN

Right on time. You must be Dave. Come in. Come in.

INT. HELEN'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Linda and Dave sit on the couch.

HELEN

They'd been asking for the past two days when you're coming. I'm surprised they didn't hear you.

The kids make lots of noise running toward the living room.

HELEN (CONT'D)

I spoke too soon. Here come the troops.

LUCA

Mommy!

He jumps into Linda's arms as Anya follows right behind him.

LINDA

You guys. Look at you. I think you've grown three inches in two weeks.

LUCA

I'm getting bigger huh mommy?

LINDA

Too big, little man. I want you to meet Mommy's new friend, Dave.

Anya and Luca both look a little gun shy. Dave stands, extending his hand to Luca.

DAVE

Young man. Thank you for sharing  
your momma with me.

Dave turns, bowing to Anya. She giggles as he hands her a bouquet of flowers.

ANYA

For me?

DAVE

Yes ma'am. Pretty flowers for a  
pretty girl.

ANYA

(Turning to Helen)  
Grandma! I got flowers.

Linda looking a little hurt, smiles anyway.

HELEN

I see. How about if I put them in a  
vase in your room?

Taking the flowers, she leaves the room.

LUCA

What did you bring me?

LINDA

Luca. That's not polite.

DAVE

Now hang on now. Boy's got a right  
to ask. In fact, I did bring you  
something.

Pulling a cowboy hat from beside the couch, he places it on Luca's head. It falls down over his eyes, but Luca grins like a Cheshire cat anyway.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Well come on you two. We got a lot  
to do today.

Helen walks back in as Dave walks out with the kids.

HELEN

You have fun now. See you tonight.

BEGIN AMUSEMENT MONTAGE. (HAPPY MUSIC OVER)

Linda, Dave and the kids ride several rides: have a French fry fight; pose with park characters. As fireworks begin, Dave carries a sleeping Luca while Linda carries Anya who is losing the battle of staying awake.

END AMUSEMENT PARK MONTAGE

EXT. AMUSEMENT PARK - DAY

LINDA

Thank you. The kids needed this. So did I.

DAVE

I had fun. You have great kids.

LINDA

I do. Don't I?

DAVE

They seem to be doing pretty good with Helen.

LINDA

(A little down)  
Yeah. I guess so.

DAVE

You don't sound too happy about that.

LINDA

No. I'm glad for them. It's just that...

DAVE

Just what darlin?

LINDA

They can give my kids everything I can't.

DAVE

It's all just things honey. You may not be able to give them every toy they've ever wanted but you can give them something the Parker's can't.

LINDA

What?

DAVE

The kind of love only a mother like  
you can give.

He kisses her forehead.

INT. PINK CAFE KITCHEN. DAY

Linda, Millie and Jenny are in a group hug.

LINDA

I'm don't know what I'm going to do  
without you.

JENNY

Shoot girl. It's not like we'll  
never see each other again. I mean  
you work here.

LINDA

I know, but this was my first real  
home. It wouldn't have been that  
without you two.

MILLIE

Where is it you're moving again?

LINDA

Reseda. We're just renting a couple  
of rooms, from a couple of really  
nice guys looking for roommates.  
We'd better get going. See you guys  
Monday.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Linda pulls back a room dividing curtain to reveal a twin bed  
with a superheroes bedspread, framed comic book pages on the  
wall, and a small trunk filled with toys.

On the other side of the curtain a Hollie Hobbie doll lays on  
another twin bed. Beside the bed is a child's vanity,  
complete with silver brush and tiara. Dave puts his arm  
around her shoulder. She leans in.

DAVE

They're gonna love it.

INT. DCS CORPORATE OFFICE - DAY

DCS official sits behind her now neat desk. She waves Linda and Dave into the room.

DCS OFFICIAL  
Come in. Have a seat.

They sit. The official reads a file, then closes it.

DCS OFFICIAL (CONT'D)  
I'm glad to see you're making progress, Ms. McPherson. But, in speaking with your case worker, we both felt it best to extend the judgement another six months.

LINDA  
What?

DCS OFFICIAL  
We think Luca and Anya should stay where they are a while longer.

LINDA  
I don't understand. You just said I was making progress.

DCS OFFICIAL  
You are, but not the type of progress we hoped to see after all this time.

LINDA  
Why are you doing this to me?

DCS OFFICIAL  
I understand your disappointment, but...

LINDA  
No you don't! I want my children back. I need them. They need me.

DCS OFFICIAL  
What you just said is exactly why we feel you need more time to settle in. I quote..."Why are you doing this to *me*? I need them." Your first thought was you, not your children. You've taken time to find a boyfriend, but not to find a better job.

DAVE

She didn't exactly go looking for me. We kind of found each other.

DCS OFFICIAL

Yes. I heard about the way you found each other. Going off with someone you didn't know was putting yourself at risk. That is not the kind of behavior that indicates a well-adjusted mother.

LINDA

I've done everything you've asked. I never missed a visitation. Not one! I have a job. Found a home and you tell me they can't live there.

DCS OFFICIAL

You're sharing that home with homosexuals. Do you really want to expose them to such immoral behavior?

LINDA

You think an environment of violence and drunkenness better than that of two people who love each other? That doesn't make sense to me.

DCS OFFICIAL

We will reevaluate your situation after the holidays.

DAVE

Let's go.

He all but drags Linda out of the office.

EXT. DCS CORPORATE OFFICE - DAY

Linda and Dave stand on the steps of the DCS building.

LINDA

Why did you do that? We weren't finished.

DAVE

As far as she was concerned you were.

(MORE)

DAVE (CONT'D)

Look, Linda, I know you're upset,  
but yelling at her weren't getting  
you anywhere. Come on. Let's get  
out of here.

LINDA

Where are we going?

DAVE

Virginia.

INT. CONNECTICUT WAREHOUSE - DAY

Paolo, on a fork lift, picks up pallets of boxes. The  
foreman, talks to the same officer that Paolo vomited on  
while drunk. He points to PAOLO.

POLICE OFFICER

Paolo.

Paolo smiles, steps off the fork lift, extending his hand.

PAOLO

Hey Tony. What are you doing here?

POLICE OFFICER

I may have a lead on your kids.

PAOLO

Yeah?

POLICE OFFICER

They're in Anaheim, California.

Paolo smiles.

PAOLO

Well. California, here I come.

EXT. RANCH STYLE HOUSE - ANAHEIM, CALIFORNIA - DAY

Linda and Dave stand on the patio. Dave knocks on the door.

DAVE

Don't look so guilty or Helen's  
gonna know somethin's up.

Helen opens the door smiling.

INT. CAR - DAY

Linda and Dave drive away as Helen waves.

LINDA

It's not too late. We can go to the beach or something then bring them home.

DAVE

They are going home. To my home back in Virginia.

ANYA

Where's ver-ging-ya?

DAVE

Virginia. It's a pretty far piece from here, but it's one of the purdiest sights you'll ever lay eyes on. Now sit back there honey. Play with one a those travel games we bought for ya.

Anya sits back, plays a game next to her sleeping brother.

EXT. INTERSTATE 40 - DAY

Street sign reads KINGMAN, ARIZONA 63 MILES

EXT. KINGMAN CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY

Dave stands beside the car.

DAVE

I'll be right back.

INT. CAR - DAY

Luca and Anya play with toys in the back seat.

CUT TO:

A LITTLE WHILE LATER

Dave gets in the car.

DAVE  
Told you I wouldn't be too long.  
(He tosses the kids chips)  
Thought y'all might be hungry.

LUCA  
Are we in Ginya now?

DAVE  
Ver-ginia. Soon Kiddo. Soon.  
(Sings)  
ON THE ROAD AGAIN

EXT. INTERSTATE 40 - DAY

Street sign reads AMARILLO, TEXAS 44 MILES.

EXT. CHURCH PARKING LOT - DAY

Dave leans into an open window.

DAVE  
I'll be right out.

INT. CAR - DAY

The kids sleep while Linda stares out the window. Dave gets back into the car.

DAVE  
(Singing)  
ON THE ROAD AGAIN.

EXT. LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS TRUCK STOP - NIGHT

DAVE  
Let's stop here, get cleaned up,  
something to eat, maybe let the  
kids play a game or two. We should  
be at my sisters by tomorrow night.

INT. TRUCK STOP - NIGHT

Dave enters the arcade, looking nervous. Finding Linda and the kids, he picks up Luca.

DAVE  
Everybody in the car. Let's go.

LUCA  
I wanna play again.

Heading for the door, Dave carries Luca, hiding behind him. Confused, Linda and Anya follow.

DAVE  
Blue Ridge Mountains call for snow tonight. I want to get over 'em before it does, or we may not get to Frannie's.

EXT. WOODFORD, VIRGINIA RUN-DOWN VICTORIAN STYLE HOUSE - DAY

FRAN BARKER - Dave's sister. Early twenties with a deep southern accent, comes out of the house as the car pulls up.

FRAN  
David Jackson Downing, where the hell you been, and why are you here?

DAVE  
Well, hey to you too, baby sister.

FRAN  
Don't you give me none a that baby sister bull shit. No Sir! You don't call, write, not a G.D. thing. Then all the sudden you show up outta the blue with two kids, a woman, and baby on the way? You want something. That's all I can figure.

LINDA  
(Almost to herself, but out loud)  
You didn't tell your sister we were coming?

DAVE  
(Ignoring Linda)  
Well shoot, Fran. It's *because* I haven't been here in a while I'm home. Figured it was about time.  
(He swings her around)  
Besides. I know you miss your big brother when I'm not around.

FRAN  
Get off me, you crazy fool. Well, you're here. Might as well come in.

Taking Linda by the hand, she leads her in the house.

INT. VIRGINIA KITCHEN - DAY

Sparse kitchen. No stove, just an electric skillet sitting on a counter. Very small fridge. No cabinets.

FRAN

So, Linda. What is it you see in this ole fool anyway?

LINDA

He's charming, kind, caring.

FRAN

Boy howdy. He's got you fooled don't he? You look tuckered. Let's get you settled so you can rest.

INT. VIRGINIA KITCHEN - NIGHT

Fran and Dave drinking coffee at the table.

FRAN

There's warrants out for you.

DAVE

I know. Thought about that before we came. But we're in a bit of a bind here, and well. Family always helps family.

FRAN

What kind of bind?

DAVE

The kids were in foster care. We kind a kidnapped them.

FRAN

Hell's fire Dave. I work for the Sheriff's department. Why'd you go telling me that?

DAVE

Shoot, Fran. It's *because* you work for the Sheriffs department I brought them here.

FRAN

What the hell you talking about?

DAVE

Her ex is a real son-of-a-bitch. Used to beat on her every day near abouts. She ran away with the kids to keep em safe. Trouble was, keeping em safe came with a price. When she left him, she stole a bunch a money to get clear to the other side a the country. It weren't enough though. They ended up in foster care cuz she was sleeping in her car.

FRAN

That prissy little thing did all that?

DAVE

She ain't no prissy little thing. No sir-ee. Was her idea to come here in the first place. She figured her ex'd find them soon enough in foster care so we took the kids for a visit and never brought them back. Thought maybe you could help us figure out a way to get around the law and such.

FRAN

There is no 'and such' about it. There's not a G.D. thing I can do about kidnapping. You know I'll lose my job if they find you here. Maybe even arrest me for harboring a criminal.

DAVE

I didn't think a that, Frannie. I'll take care of it.

FRAN

How? It's bad enough you came back. Now you gone and fell for a kidnappin' Yankee, and God knows what else? You probably stole from every store between California and here.

Dave shrugs.

FRAN (CONT'D)

Lord a mighty. You did, didn't you?

DAVE

How else was I gonna get us here?

FRAN

You set this right David Jackson or so help me you won't never see the sun shine again. I'll see to that myself.

EXT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Linda and Dave are sleeping. Fran sneaks in.

FRAN

(Whispering)

Linda. Linda, get up.

LINDA

(Sleepily)

What's wrong?

FRAN

Just get dressed.

INT. VIRGINIA KITCHEN - NIGHT

A solitary light bulb gives the room an eerie quality.

LINDA

Fran?

FRAN

Get your coat. We got somewhere we got to be.

INT. FRAN'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Driving through a dark country road.

LINDA

Fran. Where are we going?

FRAN

To steal a Christmas tree.

LINDA

Wait. Don't you work for the Sheriff's department?

FRAN

Sure do. Yeee Hawww.

EXT. FRAN'S TRUCK - NIGHT

The truck swerves all over the road as Fran guns it.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Fran carries an axe. Linda, following behind, holding a flashlight that is pointing everywhere but on the path.

LINDA

Haven't you ever thought of buying  
a tree from a lot like everyone  
else in the world?

FRAN

There ain't no fun in that. Now  
looky here. Ain't that just the  
purdies tree you ever seen? Can't  
buy that in some citified lot.

She raises the axe.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Fran, sitting next to Linda on a couch, admires the tree.

FRAN

You done good for a Yankee.

LINDA

Thanks, I guess.

FRAN

Next time I commit armed robbery I  
know at least one Yank I can count  
on.

LINDA

Armed robbery?

FRAN

Shit yeah. You didn't think I'd go  
out in the woods without a gun, did  
you? There's bears out there.

Linda's eyebrows disappear into her bangs.

INT. DCS CORPORATE OFFICE - DAY

Paolo sits before the DCS official's desk.

DCS OFFICIAL

Linda described you as a monster,  
Mr. Viscose. You don't seem  
anything like that.

PAOLO

(fake laugh)

Did she really? How funny. I've  
been looking for my kids for a long  
time now. I'm glad the search is  
almost over. Where did you say they  
were?

DCS OFFICIAL

I don't believe I said where they  
were. But legally, I'm not allowed  
to divulge a client's whereabouts.

Paolo smiles. He gently pats her hand. She smiles.

PAOLO

Lady, I don't give a fuck about  
legally.

The official's smile disappears as Paolo squeezes her hand.

DCS OFFICIAL

Mr. Viscose. You're hurting my  
hand.

PAOLO

I'll do more than hurt it if you  
don't tell me where they are.

DCS OFFICIAL

I can't.

PAOLO

Tell me where they are.

DCS OFFICIAL

(in pain)

I can't. I really can't. She took  
them and never came back.

He let's go of her hand.

PAOLO

That fucking cunt.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Linda rolls over sleepily, resting her hand on her swollen belly.

LINDA

Two weeks late. Don't you want to come out and meet your mother?

INT. VIRGINIA KITCHEN - DAY

Linda opens the fridge spotting a note taped to the milk jug.

INSERT NOTE:

"GOT A CALL FROM A TRUCKING COMPANY. GOTTA GO TO MISSOURI IF I WANT THE JOB. BE BACK WHEN I CAN."

LINDA

Are you serious? You choose now to finally get a job?

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

FRAN

Now why the hell would you go running off to find that no good son-of-a-bitch?

LINDA

He's my husband Fran.

FRAN

I know, and I'm the sorrier for it. You're a fool to go after him. You know that don't you?

LINDA

I know. But I have to.

FRAN

Yeah. I know you do. I'd probably do the same thing if it was my old man. Well. I just gotta say one more thing before you leave.

LINDA

What's that?

FRAN

For a kidnapping Yankee, you're okay.

They hug. Linda walks away.

INT. CAR RENTAL OFFICE - DAY

RENTAL CLERK is filling out paperwork.

RENTAL CLERK  
How long will you need the car,  
Mrs. Downing?

LINDA  
Two, three days maybe.

RENTAL CLERK  
Alright then. That will be thirty  
dollars for the car rental and  
fifty for the deposit.

Money and keys exchange. She looks at her empty wallet.

LINDA  
Does it have gas?

RENTAL CLERK  
A full tank.

LINDA  
Thank you.

INT. RENTAL CAR - DAY

Parked on the side of the road, Linda reads a map while the kids play in the back seat.

LINDA  
It didn't look that far on the map.

EXT. TRUCKING COMPANY - SPRINGFIELD, MISSOURI - DAY

Large lot with several trucks, some without attached trailers. Linda and Dave stand outside the rental car.

DAVE  
I didn't mean to make you worry,  
but I had to get here quick or they  
wouldn't a held the job for me. You  
know we need the money.

LINDA

I have to call the rental place. I told them two to three days tops. It's already been three.

DAVE

I'll do it. You stay here and rest some. I gotta fill out more paperwork. I'll be back in a bit.

INT. RENTAL CAR - DAY

Linda and the kids are napping. A KNOCK on the window wakes Linda. A SPRINGFIELD OFFICER stands by the door. Terrified, Linda rolls the window down.

LINDA

Officer?

SPRINGFIELD OFFICER

Step out of the car, Miss.

LINDA

What's the matter?

SPRINGFIELD OFFICER

(Hand on his gun)

Just step out of the car with your hands up.

Linda gets out, raising her hands. The officer, noticing her belly, lowers his gun.

SPRINGFIELD OFFICER (CONT'D)

Turn around, Miss. Put your hands behind your back.

LINDA

I know I never should have taken them to begin with but I'm their mother. They need me.

SPRINGFIELD OFFICER

Ma'am. You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you.

LUCA

(Rubbing his eyes)

Mommy?

LINDA

It's alright, honey. Mommy's okay.

Dave walks up, dropping the sodas he brought for all.

DAVE  
What's going on?

LINDA  
I don't know. I'm being arrested.

DAVE  
What for?

SPRINGFIELD OFFICER  
Grand theft auto.

INT. JAIL CELL - NIGHT

Linda lies on a metal cot, eyes red from crying. A JUDGE carrying a manila folder walks to the cell door, looking at the contents of the folder.

JUDGE  
(Tucking the folder under  
his arm.)  
Because I don't want this child  
born in my holding cell, and you  
had the location of the trucking  
company you were picked up at the  
location listed on the rental  
agreement. I am releasing you on  
your own recognizance.

He walks away. Linda stares after him as the jailer unlocks the door.

EXT. SPRINGFIELD COURTHOUSE - DAY

Dave and the children wait for Linda. She hugs the kids.

LINDA  
Oh my God, Dave. I was so scared. I  
thought for sure they were  
arresting me for taking the kids.  
When the judge came to my cell and  
said I could go... well I thought I  
was dreaming.

DAVE  
Believe me, honey, I'm just as  
surprised as you are.

As they walk away, Dave looks pissed.

## INT. MOBILE HOME BEDROOM - NIGHT

The walls are filthy. Window frames moldy. Floors don't look like they have been washed in years.

DAVE

I know it's not much, but it's cheap.

LINDA

I don't want the baby born in the back seat of a car so this will have to do. I'll clean in the morning. Let's get to sleep. Tomorrow, we'll make it work.

## INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Three o'clock. Linda wakes with a questioning look on her face. She rubs her stomach. Confused, she pushes the sheets off. She gives a yelp struggling to get out of bed with her big belly. When she stands, roaches fall from her clothing. Dave pops up. Roaches fall off him.

DAVE

That ain't good.

## INT. MOBILE HOME - DAY

Linda, holding a paintbrush, stands in the middle of the now clean mobile home. Dave enters the room, takes the brush from her.

DAVE

Now, honey. I told you I'd finish that.

LINDA

I know. I've been feeling so helpless lately I just needed to do something. Maybe you could do that last little bit by the ceiling. I couldn't quite reach it.

DAVE

You got it.

LINDA

I could use a little time away from the paint fumes though. Let's take a little ride or something and finish this later.

DAVE

Let's do it. Where'd you like to go?

EXT. SPRINGFIELD PETTING ZOO - DAY

Anya and Luca have a blast petting various animals. Linda feeds the goats food pellets from a small cup. When the cup empties, one of the goats turns its back on her and kicks her in the stomach. She winces.

LINDA

Hey! You ungrateful little shit.

Rubbing her stomach, she joins the kids, petting a donkey.

LUCA

Can we bring him home, mommy?

LINDA

Sure. We'll let him sleep with you. How about that?

LUCA

Really?

LINDA

(chuckles)

No, goofball. We can't bring home a donkey no matter how cute he is. I'm getting hungry. Anybody want an ice cream?

ANYA/LUCA

Yeah.

LINDA

Okay. Let's go find dad.

CUT TO:

A LITTLE WHILE LATER

The four of them walk the zoo eating ice cream. Linda is looking a little pale.

LINDA

Okay guys. It's time to go.

DAVE

You okay, honey?

LINDA

Yeah. A bit tired is all. I think I overdid it a little.

DAVE

Well come on then. Let's go.

INT. MOBILE HOME LIVING ROOM - DAY

Dave steps off the ladder, paintbrush in hand. Linda smiles.

LINDA

Now it looks like home.

Linda suddenly has a surprised look on her face.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Dave. I think my water just broke.

DAVE

What? Are you sure? I need to boil water.

Frantic, Dave runs to the kitchen. SOUND OF WATER.

DAVE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Where's the towels? We got to get a shoelace.

LINDA

No need to panic. I've done this before, remember.

Dave comes back in, sees Linda standing in a pool of blood.

DAVE

Ah. Linda. That's not water. That's blood.

INT. AMBULANCE - DAY

TWO PARAMEDICS work on Linda as SIRENS blare. One hooks up an IV as the other attaches a blood pressure cuff.

PARAMEDIC ONE

(talking into a radio)

Twenty-six year old pregnant female. Unconscious upon arrival. Massive vaginal blood loss. No signs of dilation. Husband states patient was kicked in the abdomen by a goat earlier in the day.

PARAMEDIC TWO

Blood pressure, ninety over sixty-four. Respiration, thirty-one. Pulse rate, one-twenty-two.

PARAMEDIC ONE

(squeezing Linda's  
forefinger)

Cap refill five. Skin, cold and clammy. Saline administered. Towel in place to contain bleeding. Inbound to your facility. ETA twelve minutes.

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM - DAY

An INTERN talks to Dave.

INTERN

Your wife has a condition called Placenta Praevia which has caused hypovolemic shock.

DAVE

I'm a country boy, Doc. I don't speak doctor.

INTERN

The placenta has ruptured, causing the extreme blood loss. With the baby breech...

DAVE

Wait. What the hell you talking about?

INTERN

The goat kicking your wife did not help, but the baby is trying to come out feet first. When your wife went into labor, the baby's feet more than likely ruptured the placenta, which was lying low in the womb.

INTERN (CONT'D)

We're doing everything we can to save your wife and baby.

Dave runs a hand through his hair.

DAVE

That ain't good.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Linda sleeps with the newborn in a hospital bassinet next to her. Dave walks in.

LINDA

Hey, daddy. Meet your new son.  
Joshua David. You want to hold him?

DAVE

Hell no. I might break him.

LINDA

(laughing)  
You won't break him.

DAVE

That's okay. I'll wait til he says  
"up, daddy" before I hold him. When  
do you get to leave?

LINDA

Later this afternoon.

DAVE

So soon? I thought women stayed in  
hospitals for a week or something  
after having a kid.

LINDA

This is nineteen-eighty-one. We get  
to go home right away. Bring the  
kids when you come, will you?

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Dave walks in. Linda is in a wheelchair holding the baby.

DAVE

Hey, beautiful. How's my family  
doing today?

LINDA

Ready to go home and start our new  
lives together.

DAVE

I hear that. Let's go, then.

With the nurse pushing Linda and the baby, they leave.

EXT. HOSPITAL ENTRANCE - DAY

An old van is parked in front with the kids inside.

LINDA  
Who does this belong too?

DAVE  
Us. Figured we were gonna need something to get around in.

LINDA  
Wow. Where did you get the money?

DAVE  
A little wheelin' and dealin'.

Linda gets in the van.

INT. VAN - DAY

The kids (Anya now seven, and Luca now five) are jumping around, excited to meet their new brother. Dave starts driving.

LUCA  
He sure has lots of hair.

LINDA  
He sure does.

ANYA  
How come he's not a girl. I already have a brother. I wanted a sister.

Dave drives past the mobile home park.

LINDA  
Where are we going?

DAVE  
What with you being arrested and all, thought we'd go somewhere else. Get a fresh start.

LINDA  
This could be our fresh start.

DAVE  
We'll get a new start somewhere nobody knows us. Anyways, I already told the landlord we weren't coming back.

LINDA

I just had a baby. This morning.  
Why would you do that? And without  
talking to me first.

Ignoring her, Dave keeps driving.

LINDA (CONT'D)

What's going on?

DAVE

How did you think we were gonna  
live? You show up outta nowhere and  
blew my chance of getting that job.  
I had to do something. The cash  
register was open. I took a chance.

EXT. COLORADO CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Linda and Dave sit at a picnic table near an open fire. The  
tent flap is open, with the kids inside asleep. Linda has the  
baby in a car seat on the table.

LINDA

So you're telling me that with  
every stop we made on the way to  
Virginia you were stealing  
something?

DAVE

Well, not every stop. Sometimes  
we'd stop at a church. I'd tell the  
preacher we was going to a funeral.

She just stares at him for a moment.

LINDA

And at the truck stop when we left  
in such a hurry?

DAVE

Some guy's using the john. Leaves  
his wallet on the counter. I mean  
what kind of idiot does that? It  
was asking to be took.

Linda looks at Dave with disbelief.

LINDA

We had a home with Fran. We could  
have gone on welfare while you were  
looking for a job.

(MORE)

LINDA (CONT'D)

I'm sure there are hundreds of trucking companies that would hire you.

DAVE

There was one, remember?

LINDA

Don't blame this on me. All I wanted was for our family to be together. I should have known when you left in the middle of the night that wasn't what you wanted.

DAVE

You ain't no saint, you know. You'd a done the same thing if you had to.

LINDA

I had to, and I didn't. Remember?

DAVE

I remember that's how you lost your kids in the first place.

LINDA

And I will not lose them again. Not even for you. You put all of us at risk, and don't say you didn't.

DAVE

(waving her off)  
I'm going to bed.

He crawls into the tent, leaving Linda at the picnic table. She gets up, walks to a small box, taking out paper and pen.

LINDA

Dear Fred and Ethel. I'm married now and have a new baby boy. Of course with any marriage there are problems, but nothing we can't solve. He treats me differently than Paolo. The kids love their new home in Virginia.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Fred and Ethel sit near a fireplace. Ethel reads Linda's letter out loud.

ETHEL

The kids love their new home in Virginia.

FRED

(Picking up the envelope)  
Virginia? The post mark says Colorado.

ETHEL

Says she'll write soon.

FRED

Something isn't right, Ethel.

ETHEL

I know. I wish I knew what. I worry about that girl.

FRED

I do too.

ETHEL

I just hope she doesn't do anything to help that Paolo character find her.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Paolo sits at the table holding up a newspaper. A picture of Linda and the kids on the front page with the headline: HAPPY HOME TORN APART.

PAOLO

(reading the article  
outloud)

Mr. Viscose states, "I don't understand why she would do this. I thought we were happily married, then she goes and takes my kids to God knows where. I worry about their safety. I won't rest til I find them."

Paolo lays the paper on the table and grins.

PAOLO (CONT'D)

I will find you, you fucking bitch.  
right.

EXT. TEXAS CAMPGROUND - NIGHT

Linda sits by a campfire watching the family in the site next to hers. The mother puts the kids to sleep in their tent. Emerging, she kisses her husband before cuddling by the fire.

Linda looks at her own kids, sleeping with Josh lying between them. She turns to Dave.

DAVE

I know of a way to make some money.

LINDA

How's that?

DAVE

It could make us a lot of money if we do it right.

LINDA

What are you talking about?

DAVE

You know I love it when you go down on me don't you?

LINDA

Now? No.

DAVE

No. No. Not now. I was just thinkin'. There's a lot a lonely truckers out there. I could watch the kids while you. Well. You know.

Linda glares at Dave.

LINDA

A commercial beaver, Dave? You want me to be a hooker on top of a thief?

DAVE

Now before you get all bent outta shape, hear me out. We could make a couple hundred dollars a night.

LINDA

I'd be the one taking all the risks so how would this be a 'We?'

DAVE

I never would have put you at risk. You know that.

LINDA

No. I don't know that. You've put us at risk every step of the way. I already wonder if every cop that's behind us is going to arrest us. Now you want to add prostitution to the list? I can't even believe you thought I'd go along with you. You straighten up and do what's right, or we're done.

EXT. PARK IN TAMPA, FLORIDA - DAY

Anya and Luca play on the slides while Linda pushes Josh in a toddler swing. Dave walks up.

DAVE

I got us a job and a place to stay.

LINDA

Don't toy with me, Dave. We need a home without wheels or a tent flap.

DAVE

I know it. We got it now. I swear.

LINDA

What's the job?

DAVE

This bar needs a weekday keep. It only serves beer. No hard liquor. Mostly laborers wantin' somethin' cold after a hard day.

LINDA

What does it pay?

DAVE

More than I ever made. One-hundred twenty-five a week plus a one bedroom apartment. I seen it. Not bad really. You won't have to clean it up to set foot in it neither.

INT. FLORIDA KITCHEN - DAY

Linda is happily drying dishes. (O.S.) The kids LAUGHTER, then a SCREAM. Towel in hand, Linda runs to the living room.

INT. FLORIDA LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sparsely furnished room with an open sofa bed and chair. Luca (now 5), stares at Josh lying on the floor, crying and bleeding. Anya (now 7), crying, stands over him. Linda picks up Josh pressing the towel to his head.

LINDA

Anya. Tell Dave to call 911.

Anya runs out of the room. Linda sits on the bed rocking Josh.

LINDA (CONT'D)

What happened?

5 YEAR OLD LUCA

We were playing. Anya was tossing Josh on the bed, like you do sometimes to make him laugh. He fell and hit his head.

Dave and Anya enter.

DAVE

What happened?

LINDA

Did you call the ambulance?

DAVE

Anya comes running in like a bat outta hell screaming Josh is hurt. A course I called.

SIRENS (O.S.)

INT. FLORIDA HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOM - DAY

Linda, with blood on her shirt, stands next to an empty hospital crib with Dave standing beside her. The kids color at a nearby table. TWO POLICE OFFICERS enter.

FLORIDA OFFICER ONE

Mr. and Mrs. Downing. May we talk to you privately please?

Linda and Dave follow the officers into the hallway.

FLORIDA OFFICER TWO

Can you tell us how Joshua got hurt?

LINDA

The kids were playing with him.  
They went to toss him on the bed  
and missed. He hit his head on the  
corner of the bed frame.

FLORIDA OFFICER TWO

We'd like to talk to your children.

LINDA

Of course.

FLORIDA OFFICER ONE

We also need your identifications  
please.

DAVE

For what?

FLORIDA OFFICER ONE

In the state of Florida, all  
pediatric injuries are assumed  
abuse until proven otherwise.

LINDA

They were playing. Josh wasn't hurt  
intentionally.

Officer One goes back into the room. The other officer walks  
away talking on a police radio, leaving Linda and Dave alone.  
Linda slumps into a chair praying.

DAVE

So help me, when we get home I'm  
gonna tan their hides.

LINDA

No you're not. It wasn't their  
fault. They were playing that's  
all.

DAVE

Look where their playing got us.

Linda is about to respond when a DOCTOR walks up to them.

DOCTOR

Mr. and Mrs. Downing. Let's go sit  
over here.

DAVE

Just say it, Doc.

DOCTOR

I wish I had better news. Your son has a badly fractured skull with cerebrospinal fluid seepage.

The two officers return.

FLORIDA OFFICER TWO

Mr. Downing, if you would follow my partner here.

DAVE

What's going on?

FLORIDA OFFICER ONE

(Ignoring Dave)

Mrs. Downing, step over here, please.

Officer Two escorts Dave back into the room.

LINDA

The doctor was just giving us an update on our son.

DOCTOR

I was just telling Mrs. Downing that her son's head is badly fractured. I'm sorry Mrs. Downing. In all likelihood, your son will not survive the night.

LINDA

But he didn't fall that far. How can that be?

As Linda is about to collapse, the doctor leads her to a chair.

FLORIDA OFFICER ONE

Mrs. Downing. I understand this is an upsetting time for you, but there is a matter that cannot wait.

The doctor quietly slips away.

FLORIDA OFFICER ONE (CONT'D)

You have an outstanding Fugitive from Justice warrant. I have to take you into custody.

LINDA

What? Fugitive from what?

FLORIDA OFFICER ONE  
Grand Theft Auto.

LINDA  
There has to be a mistake. The  
judge said I was free to go.

FLORIDA OFFICER ONE  
'Free to go' does not mean you  
don't show up for your court date.

LINDA  
I wasn't told about a court date.

FLORIDA OFFICER ONE  
Documents were mailed to your home  
on April fifth, 1981.

LINDA  
(glaring toward Dave)  
We never went back to that home.

FLORIDA OFFICER ONE  
The warrant was issued May 6th..

The officer takes the handcuffs from his belt.

LINDA  
Let me hold my baby one last time.

FLORIDA OFFICER ONE  
I'm sorry ma'am. I can't allow  
that.

LINDA  
But he's dying. He can't die alone.

FLORIDA OFFICER ONE  
Ma'am. You need to come with me.

INT. RICHMOND, VIRGINIA WOMEN'S CORRECTIONAL FACILITY - DAY

NINETEEN DAYS LATER: The jail cell has four, six-bed rows,  
each head to head. Several inmates sit at picnic-type tables  
playing cards, watching television or reading. Linda sleeps  
in one of the beds. TWO INMATES look at Linda.

INMATE ONE  
That one doesn't look good. She's  
been asleep for days.

INMATE TWO

I don't know what she's in for, but  
she is greener than the grass  
outside. Ten to one she's pure.

INMATE ONE

I think we need to call the C/O. I  
don't think she's eaten more than a  
bite or two since she's been here.

Inmate One goes to the bars.

INMATE ONE (CONT'D)

Sharon! Sharon, we got trouble  
here.

A uniformed CORRECTIONS OFFICER walks up to the bars.

CORRECTIONS OFFICER

What are you vexing about, chickie?

INMATE ONE

I think we got a sick one here,  
Sharon. She's real bad off.

CORRECTIONS OFFICER

What's wrong with her?

The corrections officer enters the cell, locking it behind  
her. Linda rolls away as the officer checks her pulse.

INMATE ONE

See what I mean? She don't talk.  
She don't barely eat. She gets up  
long enough to pee, lays right back  
down.

INMATE TWO

She talks some. In her sleep. Just  
a bunch of names. Anya, Josh, and  
some other name. I think it's Nick  
or something.

The corrections officer slaps Linda's cheek.

CORRECTIONS OFFICER

Come on. Wake up now.

LINDA

(Groaning)  
Let me die.

INMATE ONE

I'm telling you, she needs a croaker in here or she's going to be doing the Dutch.

INMATE TWO

Shit. You never gonna get a croaker in here on Saturday. They're all out playing golf.

CORRECTIONS OFFICER

Nobody's going to off themselves on my watch. I'll get a doctor if I have to drag him out of the sand trap myself. Now help me get her to the infirmary.

INT. BOWLING GREEN VIRGINIA COURT HOUSE - DAY

FORTY FIVE DAYS LATER - Linda, pale, thin and almost lethargic, sits behind a table before a JUDGE. PROSECUTING and DEFENSE ATTORNEYS are on their feet.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

My client does not deny that she had the vehicle in question, but if it pleases the court...

The defending attorney presents a document to the bailiff, who in turn presents it to the judge. A copy is given to the Prosecuting Attorney.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY (CONT'D)

I submit to you evidence of no wrong doing on the part of my client.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

How is this evidence Your Honor?

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

If you will look at the signature of my client.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

It's as plain as the nose on my face.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Now, please look at the signature of the managing officer of the car rental establishment.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

There is no signature.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Exactly. Management neglected to sign the rental agreement, making this contract null and void.

EXT. BOWLING GREEN VIRGINIA COURT HOUSE - DAY

Linda talking on a pay phone.

LINDA

(Sobbing)

Fran. I didn't get to hold my baby before he died.

FRAN (O.S.)

Oh, honey. Didn't anybody tell you?

LINDA

Tell me what?

FRAN (O.S.)

Josh isn't dead.

Barely able to breathe, Linda slowly sinks to the ground, letting go of the phone as she quietly sobs.

FRAN (CONT'D) (O.S)

Linda? Linda, are you there?

Linda takes the receiver in hand.

LINDA

(Almost a whisper)

He's alive? My baby is alive?

FRAN (O.S.)

I thought Dave or the hospital would have told you. They must have known you were heartbroken.

LINDA

Sixty-three days I've been in jail, Fran. No one said anything.

FRAN (O.S.)

I am so sorry, Linda. I can't imagine what you've been going through all this time.

LINDA

Hell, Frannie. I've been going through hell. Luca and Anya? How are they? Where are they?

FRAN (O.S.)

Kids are good. They're with Dave, in Florida. Look. I gotta go, but I gotta say one more thing, and I'm gonna be frank about it. I hate talking ill about my own kin, but I told you once before, this man is no good for you.

LINDA

I know, Fran. I know.

EXT. TAMPA GREYHOUND STATION - DAY

Dave and the kids stand on the platform as a bus pulls up to the station. Linda barely steps off the bus before Luca and Anya all but knock her off her feet. She kneels down hugging them tightly.

LINDA

My babies. I will never let you out of my sight again. Never.

Dave hands Josh to her. She holds him tightly blinking back tears.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Let's go home. We need to talk.

DAVE

We got a bit of a problem there, darlin'.

INT. EMPTY CARNIVAL TRAILER - NIGHT

Tucked into sleeping bags, kids sleep in the back of an empty carnival trailer.

LINDA

Why would you think I would agree to this?

DAVE

Fran said we couldn't live with her.

LINDA

No. Fran said *you* couldn't live with her.

DAVE

You would a lived there without me?

LINDA

In a heartbeat.

DAVE

Linda, I don't know what else you want me to do, cuz nothing ever seems good enough for you. You wanted me to stop stealing and get a job. I got a job trucking. I lose it cuz you went to jail and I had nobody to watch the kids. What more do you want?

LINDA

What do I want? How about a normal life? We were not meant to live this kind of life. I want the kids to be able to go to school. I want a roof over our heads.

DAVE

You got a roof over your head.

LINDA

Four walls, Dave! With an actual door. A kitchen, running fucking water! A place to sit and have a family meal or relax at night without a million screaming people around, and, most definitely, not an empty carnival trailer five hundred miles away from a life we could have had.

DAVE

Look, Linda. I'm doing the best I can.

LINDA

Well your best isn't good enough anymore. I'm done.

Climbing into the trailer, she turns her back on Dave and their relationship.

EXT. CARNIVAL - DAY

ONE WEEK LATER, Linda and the kids watch the last of the rides packed in it's trailer. A CARNEY walks up to her.

CARNEY

Saw your husband leave last week.  
He coming back?

LINDA

No. Think you can give us a ride?

CARNEY

We'll make it work. Come on. Store  
your gear in the trailer.

EXT. CARNIVAL - DAY

ONE MONTH LATER: The carnival is in a new location. Linda sets up sleeping quarters in an empty trailer. A KNOCK.

CARNEY

You wanted to stay long enough to  
get back to Virginia. You been here  
six weeks now. Boss man says you  
can't stay.

LINDA

Tell the boss man, he was the one  
said we were headed to Virginia.  
We're now further away.

CARNEY

Yeah, well, that's not our problem.  
The boss says the carnival's no  
place for kids.

LINDA

Kids are what carnivals are all  
about.

CARNEY

Paying kids, not yours. He wants  
you gone this afternoon. Sorry.

LINDA

Me too. And tell the boss he's a  
sorry piece of shit.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

With kids in a shopping cart, Linda puts peanut butter, bread and carton of milk in the cart. She pushes all into bathroom.

INT. RESTROOM - DAY

Using her finger, Linda spreads peanut butter on the bread, handing the sandwiches to the kids. Scarfing down the sandwiches and milk, Linda tosses what hasn't been eaten in the trash.

LINDA

This is our secret, okay?

Picking up Josh, the four of them leave the store.

EXT. PARK BENCH - DAY

Sitting on a park bench, Anya points to a nearby billboard.

7 YEAR OLD ANYA

Look, Mommy. Is that our carnival?

LINDA

It's not, but maybe it can be.  
Let's go check it out.

EXT. VEGAS CARNIVAL - DAY

Linda talks to the TICKET TAKER. He signals them in.

INT. VEGAS CARNIVAL TENT - DAY

Linda and the kids wait near the entrance. The TICKET MAN talks to the CARNIVAL OWNER. The two men walk to her.

CARNIVAL OWNER

We're not a baby sitting service.

LINDA

The kids will not be a problem.

CARNIVAL OWNER

What kind of a job you looking for?

LINDA

I'll take anything. I may not be able to set up and tear down rides, but I know to run just about all of them.

CARNIVAL OWNER

You know this is just headquarters, We're on the road a lot.

LINDA

We're used to being on the road.

CARNIVAL OWNER

Where you gonna to sleep?

LINDA

We've been sleeping in empty trailers.

CARNIVAL OWNER

No Ma'am. I can't have that.

TICKET TAKER

We got that pop up we drag from place to place. Nobody uses it.

CARNIVAL OWNER

Set her up with it then. We don't have all day.

He turns to leave, then turns back.

CARNIVAL OWNER (CONT'D)

One more thing. Once you get set up, bring me the key to the midway.

LINDA

No one could bring it to you except in pieces.

CARNIVAL OWNER

Oh? Why's that?

LINDA

The key to the midway is the merry-go-round.

CARNIVAL OWNER

Guess you have worked one or two carnivals before then.

LINDA

Guess I have.

EXT. VEGAS CARNIVAL - NIGHT

Linda runs one of the kiddie rides, paying attention to each child as they board and disembark. Josh sleeping in a carriage beside her while Anya and Luca ride the ride.

INT. POP UP TENT - NIGHT

The kids sleep on one of the two beds. Linda is reading a book. A KNOCK on the tent frame. Linda pulls back the flap. A WOMAN holds a torn piece of cloth in one hand and a needle and thread in the other.

WOMAN

You by any chance know how to sew?

LINDA

I do. Come in.

A FEW MINUTES LATER

Linda hums while she sews.

WOMAN

You sound like music.

LINDA

Thank you.

WOMAN

You do a lot of things good.

LINDA

What do you mean?

WOMAN

You can run just about any ride. You're good with kids, specially your own. I seen you cook with Old Mackie in the mess tent, and he's a sonofabitch to get on with. You even cleaned up that old hound dog got hit by a car the other day. Anybody else would a let it die. Now you're sewing my pants. Anything you can't do?

LINDA

There's a lot I can't do.

WOMAN

Most folks round here don't take kindly to somebody who don't know when to quit.

LINDA

Have I done something to offend you?

WOMAN

Just sayin' is all.

LINDA

(Handing her the pants)  
Thanks for the warning.

EXT. VEGAS CARNIVAL - NIGHT

The carnival is noisy with laughter, rides and game hawkers. A tough-looking HEAD CARNEY and YOUNG WOMAN make their way to Linda's ride.

LINDA

Finally. The kids need to get to bed. It's after ten.

HEAD CARNEY

Boss man wants to see you. He's at the key.

LINDA

Now? Okay. Guess I'll bring the kids.

YOUNG WOMAN

I'll watch them.

LINDA

I don't leave my kids with strangers. Thanks though.

HEAD CARNEY

She's no stranger. She's the boss's daughter.

YOUNGER WOMAN

I'm n...

The carney nudges her.

HEAD CARNEY

Bring them if you want but they stay outside the key.

LINDA

I guess you could watch them on the carousel.

EXT. MERRY-GO-ROUND - NIGHT

With the ride running, Linda hops on, crosses over the middle. Getting off, she opens one of the mirrors, glancing back at her kids. They wave. She smiles, waving back.

INT. MERRY-GO-ROUND - NIGHT

The small room serves as the primary storage room, where tools, keys for other rides, etc. It also houses the mechanics of the merry-go-round. Five or six men watch Linda enter.

LINDA

I thought the boss was here.

HEAD CARNEY

He was. Not now.

LINDA

Guess I'll put my kids to bed.

A very large man steps in front of the door.

HEAD CARNEY

Stick around a bit.

LINDA

I really need to get to my kids.

HEAD CARNEY

Don't worry about your kids.  
Suzy'll take good care of them.

EXT. MERRY-GO-ROUND - NIGHT

The young woman, holding Josh, is on the ride with Linda's kids. She watches the center of the ride more than the kids.

INT. MERRY-GO-ROUND - NIGHT

Linda's face shows she knows she's in trouble.

LINDA

She's not the boss's daughter, is she?

HEAD CARNEY

Nope.

LINDA

(To the man by the door)

Let me pass.

HEAD CARNEY

Not til you learn a thing or two.

Linda tries pushing past the man barricading the door. He doesn't budge. Another man grabs her from behind. She struggles as he pins her arms behind her. The head carney punches her in the stomach. The man lets her go. She doubles over with the wind knocked out of her.

HEAD CARNEY (CONT'D)

You got to learn the way of things around here. You don't come in here showing up our women.

He tears her shirt open. Mortified, she tries covering her breasts as she turns away from him. He grabs her hair pulling her into him. He licks her neck as he pins her arms once more. Two other men approach. She kicks, knocking one of the men over. The other backhands her.

LINDA

Let me go.

HEAD CARNEY

You come here thinking you're better than us?

He shoves her away from him into the arms of the two men. She faces him defiantly.

LINDA

Let me go and I won't press charges.

HEAD CARNEY

You're working a carnival, bitch. Means you got something to hide, or you're pretty damned stupid. No cops gonna come to your rescue. Think you're good at everything? Let's find out how good you are?

He nods. Two men, each holding an arm, force Linda to her knees.

HEAD CARNEY (CONT'D)  
 (Unzipping his pants)  
 You bite me, your kids are gone.  
 Understand?

The man's face shows pure bliss as Linda GAGS (O.S.)

HEAD CARNEY (CONT'D)  
 (zipping his pants)  
 Not bad. But you could improve.  
 Joey. How about you give her  
 another lesson?

LINDA  
 (trying not to vomit)  
 I won't say anything to anyone.  
 Just let me take my kids and leave.

HEAD CARNEY  
 Sure. When we're done.

Another man walks toward Linda, unzipping his pants.

EXT. MERRY-GO-ROUND - NIGHT

Anya and Luca wave to someone as the ride circles the key.

INT. MERRY-GO-ROUND - NIGHT

The men holding Linda release her. Falling on her hands and knees, she retches.

HEAD CARNEY  
 Hey look at that. She likes it  
 doggie style.

The head carney grabs Linda's pants. She falls on her back kicking out. One man kicks her in the ribs, another in the head. Taking a fist-full of hair, the head carney yanks her to her feet as a door opens and SECURITY GUARD enters.

SECURITY GUARD  
 Hey. Boss wants to know...

Realizing what's going on, he backs out, closing the door behind him. The ride stops, along with the music.

LINDA  
 Help me! Please, help m...

The head carney lets go of her hair, with one arm around her throat, the other goes around her mouth.

HEAD CARNEY  
 You don't fucking listen, do you?  
 Don't make a sound. You do, your  
 kids disappear forever. You got it?

Terrified, Linda nods. The ride and music starts again.

EXT. MERRY-GO-ROUND - NIGHT

The kids wave to Dave who now holds Josh.

INT. MERRY-GO-ROUND - NIGHT

LINDA  
 Please.

HEAD CARNEY  
 Hear that, boys? She's begging.

With one hand, he clears the top of the tool table, shoves her face down over the top of the table pulling at her pants.

HEAD CARNEY (CONT'D)  
 Now you can scream.

Linda screams, her face contorted in pain.

EXT. MERRY-GO-ROUND - NIGHT

As the ride slows, Paolo hops on, taking a struggling Luca from the horse. Dave takes Anya's hand.

PAOLO  
 Thanks.

CUT TO:

HOURS LATER

INT. MERRY-GO-ROUND - NIGHT

With music stopped, SOUNDS OF THE CARNIVAL BEING TORN DOWN are heard.

A QUIET GROAN is heard. An eye slowly flutters open through a veil of long blonde hair. The eye moves, focusing on a sneaker with a drop of red on the toe. A dirty, blood splattered hand with broken fingernails reaches toward the sneaker, quickly pulling back as a second groan escapes.

Linda, naked, rolls carefully to her side. She sits, dazed, bloodied strands of hair sticking to her face. She brushes a clump of matted hair from her face. A key falls, leaving its imprint behind. Raising a shaky hand to her cheek, she feels the imprint and swelling bruise.

Her eyes move, taking in her surroundings. She sees another sneaker. This one attached to her foot. She reaches for the loose sneaker again. Grabbing it, she quickly pulls her arm back in pain.

As she lifts her foot to put the shoe on, she sees something red in her lap. She looks down, noticing claw marks on her breasts. Her eyes follow the length of her body, resting on the pool of blood between her legs. She turns and vomits.

EXT. MERRY-GO-ROUND - DAY

With one shoe in her hand, the other on her foot, Linda steps out of the merry-go-round dressed in her bloodied jeans and torn shirt. Not caring if the shirt is closed, with a limp, she slowly walks with her head raised high. Each person stops what they're doing, staring as she passes. Not able to meet her gaze, the security guard turns away. She makes her way to the head carney.

LINDA  
(Hoarsely)  
Where are my children?

He says nothing. Using his head, he signals to the tent. She stares at him. Spitting in his face, she walks away. Another man stops him from hitting Linda.

INT. POP UP TENT - DAY

Removing the torn shirt, the young woman watching a sleeping Josh, winces, seeing the bruises covering Linda's body. Once dressed, Linda kicks a rag doll. In pain, she picks it up.

LINDA  
Where are my kids?

YOUNG WOMAN  
Gone.

LINDA  
What do you mean gone?

The woman hands her a note. As she reads it, her eyes open wide.

PAOLO (O.S.)  
Thought I wouldn't find you after  
three years? You don't mess with a  
Viscose. Especially this one. Say  
thanks to Dave for me.

LINDA  
No. No!

Linda drops the note.

EXT. CARNIVAL GROUNDS - DAY

Still holding the rag doll, Linda bounds out of the tent painfully limping as fast as she can toward the parking lot. She looks in all directions spotting a van amongst the carnival trucks. Assuming it's Paolo, she runs after it. As she nears, the van pulls away.

LINDA  
Come back! Stop! Paolo. Stop!

Linda loses momentum as the van turns a corner. She stumbles and falls, clinging to the doll, wailing.

LINDA (CONT'D)  
Noooo!

EXT. CARNIVAL GROUNDS - DAY

Eyes red and swollen from crying, Linda limps quickly back to the tent. The young woman, standing at the entrance, watches.

EXT. POP-UP TENT - DAY

LINDA  
Get out.

The woman leaves. Linda climbs into the tent.

INT. POP UP TENT - DAY

Linda lies next to Josh. Holding him tightly, she sobs.

CUT TO:

A SHORT WHILE LATER:

Linda, naked, steps into a galvanized tub beside the bed. Pouring water over her head from a five-gallon bucket, she catches her breath from the cold. Stifling cries of pain, she washes away the blood.

EXT. POP UP TENT - DAY

Dressed, she struggles with the tub filled with red water, dumping it from the top step. Hanging a small mirror from the tent, she winces as she raises her arms. Using a small knife, she cuts her hair almost to the scalp. The reflection of the carnival owner appears. Without putting the knife down, she slowly turns to face him. He sucks in his breath at the swollen and bloodied face.

CARNIVAL OWNER

I knew you were trouble the moment  
I laid eyes on you.

Turning back to the mirror, she continues cutting her hair while watching his reflection.

CARNIVAL OWNER (CONT'D)

We're doing a gig in Reno. We'll be  
gone for ten days. I want you gone  
by the time we get back.

He holds money out to her. She glares at his reflection, but doesn't move. He places the money on the steps.

CARNIVAL OWNER (CONT'D)

That's two hundred dollars. It'll  
get you down the road a bit.

She remains silent. As he walks away, Josh starts to fuss. She picks up the money stuffing it in her back pocket as she enters the tent.

EXT. VEGAS TRUCK STOP - DAY

With Josh in a baby carrier, Linda talks to a group of truckers. She walks away with one of them.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

As they pull out of the truck stop, the TRUCKER signals to the bruises on her face.

TRUCKER 3

What happened?

LINDA  
I wasn't being careful.

TRUCKER 3  
Looks like you ran into a fist or something.

LINDA  
Or something.

EXT. BRICK TOWNHOUSE - CONNECTICUT - DAY

ONE WEEK LATER: Linda knocks on the door. Paolo answers.

PAOLO  
What the fuck do you want?

LINDA  
My children.

PAOLO  
You don't come near my kids.  
Capisce?

LINDA  
I'm their mother. You can't keep them away from me.

PAOLO  
I'm their father. You kept them away from me.

Paolo closes the door. Linda bangs on, and kicks the door.

LINDA  
Paolo! Open the door. I want my children!

Paolo returns, holding some kind of a document.

PAOLO  
How does it feel to want.

He thrusts the document in her hands.

PAOLO (CONT'D)  
Now get the fuck away from my house.

As he slams the door, Linda reads the court order giving Paolo full custody of Luca and Anya by reason of abandonment.

CLOSE SHOT OF A SECTION OF THE DOCUMENT:

"HEREBY MOVES THIS COURT TO ENTER AN ORDER AWARDING PERMANENT CUSTODY WITH NO VISITATION TO PAOLO VISCOSE."

LINDA

I will get them back, Paolo. Mark my word. I will get them back!

Turning away, Linda crumples the paper throwing it at the door.

EXT. NEW YORK TRUCK STOP - DAY

Different truck stop, different trucker.

TRUCKER 4

Where you heading?

LINDA

Anywhere away from here.

TRUCKER 4

I can take you as far as Flagstaff.

LINDA

Flagstaff works just fine.

EXT. FLAGSTAFF TRUCK STOP - NIGHT

Linda, looks up at the trucker before closing the door.

LINDA

Thanks for the ride.

TRUCKER 4

Happy to do it. Good luck to you now.

The trucker walks away, leaving Linda and Josh behind.

EXT. ARIZONA REST STOP - DAY

Josh sleeps in a battered stroller. Gently running her fingers over the wheels of a toy truck, Linda blinks back tears. She takes Anya's dress out of a back pack, inhaling deeply. She slowly sinks to the ground holding the dress and truck close to her heart as silent tears fall.

LINDA

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

INT. ARKANSAS KITCHEN - DAY

Watering herbs on the windowsill, Ethel answers the RINGING PHONE.

SERGEANT BOCCUZZI  
Mrs. Williams?

ETHEL  
Yes?

SERGEANT BOCCUZZI  
This is Art Boccuzzi from the  
Stamford Police Department.

ETHEL  
Yes, Art. Hang on just a minute,  
would you please? I'd like to get  
Fred on the line.

SERGEANT BOCCUZZI  
Good idea.

Ethel places the phone counter and leaves the room. She returns a few minutes later with Fred. Both of them listen to Art.

FRED  
Art? Any news?

SERGEANT BOCCUZZI  
Not good for Linda I'm afraid.

FRED  
Is she hurt?

SERGEANT BOCCUZZI  
Honestly, I don't know. I called to  
tell you that Paolo Viscose has the  
kids.

ETHEL  
Oh those poor children.

SERGEANT BOCCUZZI  
No, no. He's changed a bit. Got  
involved in a drunken hit and run.  
He's been sober for more than a  
year now.

FRED  
Sober or not, how did she lose the  
kids to that son-of-a-bitch?

SERGEANT BOCCUZZI

He claims abandonment. I think there's more to it than that, but that's all I know.

FRED

Thanks for letting us know Art. You'll keep us in the loop on the kids?

SERGEANT BOCCUZZI

As much as I can. Yes Sir.

EXT. HOMELESS SHELTER - NIGHT

There is a long line outside the shelter. Linda looks worse for the wear as her filthy hands with dirt under her nails run through her straggly, greasy hair. Josh (now 2) clean and neat, sits in a stroller beside her. SHELTER VOLUNTEER steps out of the door.

SHELTER VOLUNTEER

Sorry, folks. We're full up. Maybe tomorrow.

HOMELESS MAN

Tomorrow my ass. That's what you always say.

SHELTER VOLUNTEER

Try to be here early.

HOMELESS MAN

I got here at four o'clock, man. How early do we need to be here to not have to sleep on concrete?

SHELTER VOLUNTEER

Three o'clock.

HOMELESS MAN

Smart ass. I ain't waitin' no six hours just to have a pillow.

He walks away in a huff.

LINDA

Excuse me, Sir.

SHELTER VOLUNTEER

I'm sorry, ma'am. We're out of beds.

LINDA

Can I maybe get some food for my baby?

SHELTER VOLUNTEER

Kitchen's closed.

MARY LOU, a homeless woman, crouches against the side of the building, her skin the same color of the brick. The antenna headband sitting on top of a red glitter cowboy hat is the only thing giving her away.

MARY LOU

Kid's gotta eat. Gotta eat. Gotta eat.

Both Linda and the volunteer jump at the sound of her voice.

SHELTER VOLUNTEER

I swear, Mary Lou. Someday you're going to sneak up on me and give me a heart attack.

MARY LOU

(Giving a loud cackle of a laugh)

Hot damn. That be a sight. Be a sight. Be a sight.

SHELTER VOLUNTEER

I can't let you come in, but if you'll wait just a minute, I'll see what I can do.

LINDA

Thank you. I'd appreciate that.

Walking to Mary Lou, Linda extends her hand. Mary Lou ignores it. Tilting her head towards Linda, she pushes the hair out of her face. The street light casts a glow on Mary Lou that reveals a severe scar on the side of her face. A large portion of her skull is missing. Linda doesn't turn away.

MARY LOU

(Cackles again)

You're not scared a Crazy Mary. Not scared. Not scared. Not scared.

Mary Lou takes one of Linda's fingers. Shakes it once, let's go and turns her head away.

MARY LOU (CONT'D)

Crazy lady. Crazy lady. Crazy lady.

The shelter door opens again. The volunteer comes out holding a paper bag.

SHELTER VOLUNTEER

Don't mind Mary Lou. She looks scary, but she's harmless enough.

LINDA

What happened to her?

SHELTER VOLUNTEER

She was a combat nurse in Vietnam. Some young kid tried to kill himself. He did, but Mary was a little too close to him. The bullet went through him, and took out part of her skull.

LINDA

Does she always repeat what she says like that?

SHELTER VOLUNTEER

Oh yeah. It's the old three on a match superstition. Mary kind of twisted that in her mind. She thinks if she says things three times over, the bad will stay away.

He hands Linda the bag of food.

SHELTER VOLUNTEER (CONT'D)

Sorry I couldn't do better than this.

LINDA

This is just fine. Thank you.

She sits beside Mary Lou. Opening the paper bag, she takes out two sandwiches. She gives one to Mary Lou.

MARY LOU

You crazy too? Crazy too? Crazy too?

LINDA

Sometimes I think so Mary Lou.

MARY LOU

(slapping her knee)  
Hot dog. Hot dog. Hot dog.

Rain starts. Picking up Josh, Linda heads under a building awning. Mary Lou sits there, hands and face raised to the sky.

MARY LOU (CONT'D)  
Shower time. Shower time. Shower  
time.

INT. CHURCH SANCTUARY - NIGHT

Linda and Josh sleep on a hard church pew.

INT. CHURCH SANCTUARY - DAY

A PRIEST kneels at the crucifix and after a moment of prayer, crosses himself. He gets up. Walking down the aisle, he finds Linda and Josh sleeping. He gently shakes Linda's shoulder.

PRIEST  
Miss. Miss.

Linda wakes up quickly, clutching Josh to her protectively.

PRIEST (CONT'D)  
I didn't mean to startle you, but  
you can't sleep here, Miss. There  
is a shelter down the street.

LINDA  
The shelter was full. I wanted to  
get my son out of the rain.

PRIEST  
I'm sorry, but you really can't  
stay.

Picking up Josh, she leaves.

EXT. CITY PARK - NIGHT

Fallen leaves crumble beneath Linda's feet as she walks through a park with Josh sleeping in a stroller. Linda walks through a cluster of bushes of a park. Looking both ways she carefully unzips her pants, squats behind a bush and PEES. She pulls up her pants quickly, turning to go back to the pathway. Mary Lou stands there.

MARY LOU  
Obscene Littering, cops say. Cops  
say. Cops say.

LINDA

What?

MARY LOU

Piss in a bush, you go to jail. Go to jail. Go to jail.

Mary Lou laughs skipping away. She comes back a moment later, signalling for Linda to follow.

MARY LOU (CONT'D)

C'mere. Mere. Mere.

Linda follows. They stop walking beside a graffiti covered wall. Linda watches as Mary Lou lifts the flap on a homemade lean-to with a tarp stretched over two shopping carts. Mary rummages through her belongings, tossing things helter-skelter. She turns, waving a set of keys at Linda.

MARY LOU (CONT'D)

For the samich. Samich. Samich.

Mary Lou hands Linda the keys, pointing to an old station wagon with curtains on all the windows but the front one. As Linda realizes that Mary Lou is giving her a car, the volunteer walks up.

SHELTER VOLUNTEER

Mary Lou. Are you bothering this lady?

LINDA

No. She's no bother at all.

Mary Lou walks away indignantly. She climbs into her shelter, closing the flap. She opens the flap again, sticks out her tongue before disappearing again.

LINDA (CONT'D)

She gave me keys to that old car. Can you give them to her please when she comes back out?

SHELTER VOLUNTEER

Keep them. She's been trying to pawn it off on someone for a while now. Guess you're the lucky winner.

LINDA

I can't take her car.

SHELTER VOLUNTEER

Well. If you want it, it's yours. Actually, we'd prefer someone take it anyway. We don't want her driving off.

LINDA

Why doesn't she sleep in it instead of on the ground?

SHELTER VOLUNTEER

Lots of homeless people feel cooped up with a roof over their heads. Mary's one of them.

LINDA

Why me though?

SHELTER VOLUNTEER

Mary believes that if someone gives you something, you should give something back. You gave her a sandwich when she was hungry.

LINDA

A car is worth so much more than a sandwich.

SHELTER VOLUNTEER

She doesn't see it that way. She sees that you did something nice for her now she wants to do something nice for you.

The volunteer takes the keys from Linda, opens the door and swipes at the seat, coughing at dust.

SHELTER VOLUNTEER (CONT'D)

It isn't a Caddy. It's a beat up old station wagon from New Mexico. Winter's coming and you're going to need some place to stay warm.

INT. VISCOSE LIVING ROOM - DAY

Paolo holds a birthday card in one hand and an envelope addressed to Anya in the other. Tossing the envelope on the coffee, he opens the card. A twenty dollar bill falls out. He picks up the money, putting it in his pocket. He reads the card aloud.

PAOLO

*"Happy, happy ninth birthday, baby girl. I miss you sweetheart. I love you with all my heart."*

Hearing Anya coming home from school, he quickly tucks the card in his pocket.

9 YEAR OLD ANYA

Did I get anything from Mommy?

PAOLO

Your mother's forgotten all about you, so stop dreaming.

Anya walks away, crestfallen.

INT. STATION WAGON - DAY

Josh, now three, is buckled in the front seat next to Linda. As she drives down the street, a scorpion comes crawling out of the heating vent. Linda does not notice it until it crawls right in front of her. She slams on the brakes.

EXT. INTERSTATE 40 ALANREED, TEXAS - DAY

Linda jumps out of the car. With Josh in her arms, she does the 'I hate bugs' dance. A STATE TROOPER stops.

STATE TROOPER

Everything alright ma'am?

LINDA

No everything's not alright!  
There's a huge thing in the car.

STATE TROOPER

A thing?

LINDA

A huge thing. It has claws, and a tail that swings around like this.  
(She air-draws the scorpion's tail)

The trooper raises his eyebrows, turns to the car, and carefully takes things out one at a time. Josh's blanket now in his hand has the scorpion hanging from it. He shakes it out. The scorpion falls to the ground, and the trooper stomps on it. Linda shivers holding Josh close.

LINDA (CONT'D)  
Are there any more in there?

STATE TROOPER  
I'm sure there are no more bugs  
like that in the car.

LINDA  
That is no bug. That is a death  
warrant. I'm not getting back in  
that until I know they're all  
gone.

Taking the troopers arm, she pushes him toward the car.

STATE TROOPER  
(Chuckles)  
All right ma'am. Calm down, and  
I'll take another look.

The trooper searches the car while Linda keeps her distance.

STATE TROOPER (CONT'D)  
All clear ma'am. You can be on your  
way now.

The trooper drives away. One by one, Linda begins putting her belongings back in the car. When she picks up Luca's Hulk back pack, a small piece of paper falls out. As she picks it up, she realizes what it is. She stuffs it in her pocket and quickly packs the rest of her things.

EXT. PHONE BOOTH - DAY

Linda pulls the paper out of her pocket, puts coins in the slot, closes her eyes, silently praying. The phone RINGS.

FRED (O.S.)  
Hello?

Linda, remains silent as tears begin to fall.

FRED (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Hello? (beat) He... Linda? Is that  
you?

Linda sobs.

FRED (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
We're here for you, honey. So you  
come on home now. Okay?

LINDA  
 (barely able to talk)  
 Okay.

INT. ARKANSAS KITCHEN - DAY

Fred, with his hand still on the receiver turns to Ethel who is standing just inches away.

ETHEL  
 Was it her?

Fred nods, wraps his arms around Ethel.

FRED  
 Our girl's comin' home, darlin.  
 She's coming home.

EXT. INTERSTATE 40 DEL CITY, OKLAHOMA - DAY

The car makes an EXPLOSIVE sound. Black smoke comes out of the tail pipe. The car pulls off to the side of the road. Linda gets out. Opening the hood, she coughs at the smoke coming out of the engine. She looks up with raised fists.

LINDA  
 Fuck you, God! Fuck you! You take  
 away my home, my children, and now  
 the only roof I have for the only  
 child you let me keep. What more do  
 you want from me?

Taking a deep sigh, she gathers herself together, pulls Josh's stroller out of the trunk and throws a few things in a backpack. She pushes Josh down the highway, sticking her thumb out at passing cars. An old van pulls over. Linda rushes up to it.

STRANGER  
 Where you headed?

LINDA  
 Arkansas.

STRANGER  
 I'm going through Little Rock.

LINDA  
 That'll do just fine. Thank you.

EXT. ARKANSAS GAS STATION - DAY

Linda, with Josh in his stroller, stands by an old van.

LINDA

Thanks for taking me all the way.

STRANGER

Aw. It wasn't that far out of the way. Good luck now.

He drives away.

EXT. FRED AND ETHEL'S HOUSE - DAY

Linda knocks on the door. No answer. She knocks again. Still no answer. Hearing music, she walks to the end of the driveway. Seeing the church steeple in the distance, she walks in that direction.

EXT. CHURCH PARKING LOT - DAY

Linda almost runs the last few steps.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Linda quietly steps inside the sanctuary. She smiles, seeing Fred singing with the choir. As she starts down the aisle, Fred spots her. He all but tramples over his fellow choir members. Ethel, sitting in a pew looks curiously at Fred's behavior, turns and sees Linda. Letting out a sob, she covers her mouth, stands, as she and Fred reach Linda almost at the same time. As they hug in the aisle, people all around cry with them.

INT. ARKANSAS KITCHEN - NIGHT

Looking a lot better than she was, Linda sits at the table with Fred and Ethel.

LINDA

Paolo has the kids.

ETHEL

We know sweetie.

LINDA

I don't know if they're okay. If they're hurt, even if they're alive. It's been more than a year.

FRED

I've kept in touch with Art Boccuzzi. The kids are doing just fine.

LINDA

I miss them so much.

ETHEL

I can't imagine.

FRED

Linda, I gotta ask. Are your parents still alive?

LINDA

Yes.

FRED

Then why aren't they helping you?

LINDA

My father is old school. He believes in 'you made your bed, now you lie in it.'

FRED

Didn't they know what Paolo was doing to you? What Dave put you through.

LINDA

They knew. They saw.

FRED

What do you mean they saw?

LINDA

My father flew out from San Francisco once, because he didn't believe me. He saw the broken jaw, the eyes swollen so much I could barely see.

FRED

And he didn't scoop you up right there and take you home with him?

LINDA

No. He just asked what I'd done to piss Paolo off.

ETHEL

Oh you poor darling girl.

Linda now at the window, looks out with her back to them.

LINDA

Sometimes I wish I didn't exist, or could be someone else. Live someone else's life. Not mine. Is that selfish?

FRED

It's not selfish, darlin'. It's human.

Linda takes a deep sigh as she blinks back tears.

LINDA

I watched as my frightened children were taken away by a man they didn't remember. They only knew him as the monster that sent us into the streets to begin with.

ETHEL

How long has it been since you've seen them?

LINDA

Almost a year. I talked to an attorney once, and he said there probably wasn't much I could do right then. He said no judge would give me the kids if I didn't have a home. I know he's right, but Paolo had that court order within forty-eight hours of getting the kids back. I never had a chance to defend myself.

ETHEL

You will, Linda. I'm sure of that.

LINDA

I knew when I watched that van disappear out of sight, my heart would never be the same. My life would never be the same, and it hasn't. I'm not the mother that kisses the owies away from Luca's cuts as he slides into home base. I'm not the mother that brushes Anya's hair every day.

Taking a deep breath, with a shaky voice Linda continues.

LINDA (CONT'D)

The tears never stop. I walk past a baseball cap, I cry. I walk past a pair of ballet slippers, I cry. I walk past their favorite foods, I cry.

She breaks down sobbing into her hands. Ethel hands Linda a box of tissues from the table next to her.

ETHEL

Linda, I know this is no consolation to what you're feeling right now, but Josh never left you.

LINDA

I know. And believe me, I cling to him. I take from him. I take the comfort I should be offering. My heart shattered as I watched the first loves of my life go from me forever, but the beat of Josh's heart? That tiny heart filled with love for me? He's all that keeps me from ending my life. I love him so much, but he's not enough to fill that crater in my heart. He isn't enough.

ETHEL

I believe with all my heart that someday, you will have your kids back. But more than that, Linda, I believe YOU will be enough. And the little meek lamb that you are today, is going to turn into a lion, and you are going to roar.

FRED

(sniffing back tears)  
Enough of this sentimental stuff. We got to think about a job for you. Tell me Linda, what are you good at?

LINDA

I'm a pretty good story teller.

FRED

Well we know that to be true with all those cockamamy letters you wrote us. Don't give up on that, but that won't earn you money right away though. What else?

LINDA

I'm a pretty good cook.

ETHEL

Really? I'd sure love for someone else to feed this old coot once in a while.

LINDA

Well. How about tomorrow night?

ETHEL

Tomorrow will be just dandy.

EXT. ARKANSAS KITCHEN - NIGHT

Fred, sitting in front of an empty plate, leans back in his chair, rubs his extended belly.

ETHEL

That, darlin' was a masterpiece. What did you call this again?

LINDA

Mushroom risotto.

Ethel turns to Fred who is lost in thought.

ETHEL

Fred, what did... Oh oh. I see those wheels of yours turning.

Fred looks at Ethel, then Linda, then Ethel again. He stands, almost knocking over his chair.

FRED

I'll be back.

ETHEL

I know that look. We won't see him for a few days.

LINDA

Did I do something?

ETHEL

Oh, I'm you sure did. I wouldn't fret over it though. That was his 'I've got a scathingly brilliant idea' look. Not a 'You've pissed me off' look. He'll tell us what's on his mind when he's a mind to.

EXT. BARN - DAY

ONE WEEK LATER: Men, carry plywood, large crates on dollies and miscellaneous tools, in and out of the barn. Linda, carrying a tray of food, reads a KEEP OUT sign. She knocks.

FRED (O.S.)

Stay out.

LINDA

I've brought some lunch for you and your men.

FRED (O.S.)

Leave it on the stoop, please.

Linda sighs, leaves the tray on an old tree stump and walks away. Turning just before entering the house, she sees the tray is missing.

CUT TO:

TWO DAYS LATER:

Linda, Josh, (now 4), and Ethel finished with breakfast, relax at the table.

ETHEL

Linda, You've got to stop cooking like this. I'm gonna get fat as our old sow. Whatever I just ate is pure heaven.

LINDA

(smiling)  
Caramel Strata.

Fred walks in, taking Linda by the hand, pulls her to her feet.

FRED

Come with me.

ETHEL

Here we go. Looks like those wheels have come to a complete stop.

EXT. BARN - DAY

Fred leads them to the barn, sliding the doors open.

INT. BARN - DAY

The barn has been converted into a small but organized commercial kitchen. Free standing shelves hold pots, pans, dishes and other chef sundries. Linda is in awe, rubbing her hands over the counters.

LINDA

What have you done?

FRED

Anybody who could cook like you, needs to do it for a living. You're gonna need wheels too, so come on outside.

EXT. BARN - DAY

As they step outside, a van comes around the corner. A man gets out, hands the keys to Fred who hands the keys to Linda.

FRED

It's not new, but it'll keep you going a good long while.

LINDA

This is too much. I could never repay you.

ETHEL

No need to pay it back. Pay it to someone else.

LINDA

What?

ETHEL

The good Lord has blessed us with more money than we could use in the short time we have left. It blesses us to do this for you. Someday, you'll be able to bless someone else with what God gives you. It may not be in the same way, but you'll know when the time is right to pay it forward, just like we did.

FRED

It isn't much, but it's a start. Now it's up to you to make it a success.

Linda smiles, swings Josh around, buckles him into the seat.

BEGIN COOKING MONTAGE

A calendar hangs on the wall with a few names and times written on weekends in June.

Linda shopping at a local store, squeezes, smells and tastes various fruits and vegetables, with Josh copy catting her. He makes a face at a fresh tomato. She shakes her head no three times before choosing the right cut of meat. Imitating his mom, Josh wags his finger at the butcher. She drinks a sample cup of coffee, shaking her head at Josh as he takes a cup.

The calendar, now in August has each weekend filled with dates and times. Linda is busy cooking while an assistant preps more food.

Fred beaming with pride, waves a newspaper in front of Linda.

The article reads "ONCE HOMELESS SINGLE MOM, TURNS HER GOOD COOKING INTO A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS."

Fred and Linda walk outside together and stand behind a shiny new van with THYME TRAVELER painted on the side. Fred points to the paper again and hugs Linda.

Linda and Josh, carrying boxes, enter their first home. It's a very large and empty room. Stepping from the room into the kitchen, Josh squeals with delight as he sits at the wheel of an old school bus which is now a kitchen. Linda walks through the kitchen to an attached, enclosed patio overlooking a lake. She smiles, finally placing her box on the floor.

END MONTAGE

EXT. BUS HOME - DAY

It is five years later and the home is fully, and beautifully furnished. Eight year old Josh helps Linda carry groceries. Placing the bags on the counter, Josh darts back out the door.

LINDA

(calling after him)

I wan't you home before dark young man.

EIGHT YEAR OLD JOSH (O.S.)

I know, Mom.

INT. BUS HOME - DAY

Linda enters the dining area carrying a bouquet of daisies. At a KNOCK, with flowers still in hand, she opens the door to a tall, beautiful young woman, with long blonde hair, and bright blue eyes. She holds a small box tied with ribbon in one hand and a backpack in the other.

LINDA  
Hi there, May I help...

Recognition sets in. She drops the vase, not caring that it shattered at her feet. She pulls the young woman into her.

LINDA (CONT'D)  
Oh my God. It's you. It's really you.

13 YEAR OLD ANYA  
Hi, Mommy.

Linda holding her at arms length, gently touches her face.

LINDA  
This has got to be a dream.

13 YEAR OLD ANYA  
A good one, I hope.

LINDA  
The best ever. Come in sweetheart.  
Come in.

INT. LINDA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Linda and Anya sit at the table holding mugs of hot chocolate.

LINDA  
What are you doing here?

13 YEAR OLD ANYA  
I ran away.

LINDA  
Did your dad...

13 YEAR OLD ANYA  
No mommy. He never hit me like he did you.

LINDA  
You remember that?

13 YEAR OLD ANYA  
Some of it I do. Yeah.

LINDA  
How did you find me?

Anya puts the box she has been holding the entire time on the table. Linda opens the box. She gently rummages through the letters in the box. Confused, she looks up.

13 YEAR OLD ANYA  
Daddy never gave them to us. I found them in the basement. He told us you forgot about us.

Dropping the letters back in the box, Linda covers her mouth trying to stifle a sob.

LINDA  
Oh my baby. I could never forget you. I love you. I always have.

13 YEAR OLD ANYA  
I know that mommy. I didn't. But I know it now.

The kitchen door bursts open. Josh comes running in. He stops in his tracks when he sees Anya.

8 YEAR OLD JOSH  
Who are you?

LINDA  
Josh. This is your sister Anya.

8 YEAR OLD JOSH  
No, really mom. Who is this?

13 YEAR OLD ANYA  
I'm really your sister.

8 YEAR OLD JOSH  
No kidding? I thought mom just made you up. Cool.

Josh goes to the fridge. Pulls out the milk, pouring himself a glass. He drinks half, leaving the glass and milk bottle on the counter.

13 YEAR OLD ANYA  
Brothers. You should have had a girl, mamma.

LINDA

Yes, well. God had other plans.

Linda gets up, drinks the glass of milk herself, puts the milk away.

LINDA (CONT'D)

How did you get here?

13 YEAR OLD ANYA

Cindy helped.

LINDA

Cindy?

13 YEAR OLD ANYA

Daddy's wife. She couldn't wait to get rid of me so she bought the plane ticket, and gave me money for the cab to get here.

LINDA

You cannot imagine how glad I am to see you. And as much as it pains me to say this, we should tell your dad you're here.

13 YEAR OLD ANYA

You're not going to make me go back are you? He doesn't love us. I know he doesn't.

LINDA

I won't make you go back, but your dad needs to know where you are.

13 YEAR OLD ANYA

But mamma.

LINDA

Honey, if your dad isn't reason enough, Luca is going to be worried. You need to at least call your brother.

13 YEAR OLD ANYA

Okay. I'll call Luca but you talk to daddy. Okay?

Linda takes a deep sigh, then nods.

LINDA

All right. I'll call him. What's the number?

13 YEAR OLD ANYA

Two-zero-three, five-five-five, zero-four-five-eight.

With hands shaking, Linda dials the number. It rings three times.

PAOLO (O.S.)

Yeah?

LINDA

(with a shaky breath)  
Paolo.

PAOLO (O.S.)

You did it to me again.

LINDA

What?

PAOLO (O.S.)

You kidnapped my kid.

LINDA

I never kidnapped anyone. Our daughter ran away to come here.

PAOLO

Bull fucking shit!

LINDA

I don't care if you believe me or not.

PAOLO (O.S.)

You fuckin' knew though.

LINDA

What does it matter? What matters is she's here and safe.

PAOLO (O.S.)

And how the hell did she get there?

LINDA

Ask your wife.

PAOLO (O.S.)

You fuckin' tellin' me Cindy knew?

Linda sucks in her breath realizing she ratted out Cindy.

LINDA

She was trying to get Anya here safely that's all. She meant well.

PAOLO (O.S.)

Cindy! You bought the fuckin' ticket?

There is mumbling off screen.

PAOLO (CONT'D)

She wants to be with you so bad, you can keep her. Don't think for a god damned minute you'll ever get your hands on my son again though.

LINDA

He's my...

The line goes dead. Linda holds the receiver longer than she needs too.

13 YEAR OLD ANYA

Mom? You okay?

LINDA

Cindy. What if he beats her?

13 YEAR OLD ANYA

He won't, Mom.

LINDA

What if he does? It'll be my fault.

Anya takes the phone from Linda, places it on the hook. Taking her hand, she apologetically looks at her mom.

13 YEAR OLD ANYA

He won't, Mom. He never hit Cindy. Only you.

LINDA

What?

13 YEAR OLD ANYA

He only beat you.

LINDA

Oh. Okay. I guess I don't know what to say to that. But good. Good. Um. Let's go see Fred and Ethel, shall we? They'll be thrilled to see you.

13 YEAR OLD ANYA

Who?

LINDA

Somebody you probably don't remember.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Fred reads a newspaper while Ethel yells at a computer.

ETHEL

I don't remember my password you stupid...

Linda walks in with Anya. Ethel turns without registering that Anya is with her.

ETHEL (CONT'D)

Linda, you're good with computers, could you... Who's this?

Fred looks up from his paper. He registers who it is.

FRED

Well I'll be a son of a sea biscuit.

He stands, walks to Anya, pulling her into a bear hug.

FRED (CONT'D)

You sure are a sight for these tired old eyes.

ETHEL

Oh it can't be. My Orange juice doll?

Anya smiles.

13 YEAR OLD ANYA

I remember you now. The only person who ever made it fresh for me.

Ethel opens her arms.

ETHEL

Well come give me some sugar, darlin'.

INT. ARKANSAS KITCHEN - NIGHT

Fred places a bowl of ice cream in front of Josh. He digs in, leaving a trail of chocolate sauce down his chin. Anya rolls her eyes. Linda chuckles.

13 YEAR OLD ANYA

Brothers.

ETHEL

Speaking of which, when are we going to see yours?

Linda's smile disappears.

13 YEAR OLD ANYA

Not for a while. Daddy's mad I'm here, and he told Mom she'd never see Luca again.

ETHEL

I'm sorry honey. I know how much you miss him.

13 YEAR OLD ANYA

Daddy'll give in sooner or later, Mom.

LINDA

What makes you say that?

13 YEAR OLD ANYA

He never really liked us anyway.

LINDA

What do you mean?

13 YEAR OLD ANYA

We're *your* kids mom. Ever since I found those letters, Daddy's been saying how awful we are because we're *your* kids and how much we're just like you.

FRED

That may be the way your daddy feels, but I've known your mom for five years now. There's a lot worse people you could be like. You mom's one of a kind. Tough lady, kind, generous. Most of all, a good mom.

INT. LINDA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Three years later. Linda is at the sink washing dishes. A wall phone RINGS.

LINDA

Josh. Can you get that please?

11 YEAR OLD JOSH (O.S.)

Why can't Anya get it?

LINDA

Because Anya isn't here.

11 YEAR OLD JOSH (O.S.)

She's never here.

Eleven-year-old Josh comes bounding in. In his stocking feet, he slides across the floor. Coming to a halt, grabs the phone.

11 YEAR OLD JOSH (CONT'D)

Hello?

PAOLO (O.S.)

I'm looking for Linda.

11 YEAR OLD JOSH

Yeah. Hang on. It's for you, mom.

LINDA

Who is it?

11 YEAR OLD JOSH

I don't know. Some guy.

LINDA

Josh. Do you not see that my hands are full of soap?

11 YEAR OLD JOSH

Yeah.

LINDA

Well, can you find out who it is please?

11 YEAR OLD JOSH

Who is this?

PAOLO (O.S.)

Ba-fung-gu. Tell her it's Paolo.

11 YEAR OLD JOSH  
Some guy named Paulo, or something  
like that.

Linda drops the dish into the sink. She turns white as a ghost, not noticing the dish has broken, cutting her hand.

11 YEAR OLD JOSH (CONT'D)  
Geez, mom. Don't yell at me next  
time I break something. You're  
bleeding by the way.

Josh drops the phone so it dangles from the cord. He goes sailing out just as he sailed in, leaving Linda staring at the phone. She wraps a nearby towel around her hand, then picks up the phone.

PAOLO (O.S.)  
Hello? Hey kid? Kid? You there?  
Linda? Jesus Christ.

LINDA  
(Almost in a whisper)  
What's wrong with Luca?

PAOLO (O.S.)  
What the fuck? You can't say hello.

LINDA  
You've kept my son from me for ten  
years. Why would the first words I  
say to you be cordial.

PAOLO (O.S.)  
You always was the hoity-toity  
bitch.

LINDA  
If you're just going to call me  
names, then I'm hanging up.

PAOLO (O.S.)  
Sounds like you grew some balls  
too. Look, Linda. I don't know what  
kind of hold you got on Luca, but I  
can't take him no more. I'm done  
with him.

LINDA  
What?

PAOLO (O.S.)  
Ten God-damned years, all he talks  
about is mom this. Mom that.  
(MORE)

PAOLO (O.S.) (CONT'D)

When am I gonna see mom? He never fucking gives up.

LINDA

He's okay then.

PAOLO (O.S.)

Why wouldn't he be? He's a pain in my ass, but he's good. He wants to see you, and I want him gone, so it's a win for everybody.

LINDA

You're giving my son back to me?

PAOLO (O.S.)

What, am I speaking fucking Greek?

LINDA

Don't mess with me, Paolo.

PAOLO (O.S.)

Jesus Christ. Can't you stop being a bitch for one God-damned minute? Do you want your fucking son or not?

INT. AIRPORT - DAY

Linda, Anya and Josh run to the gate of the plane that just arrived. The last person gets off. Doors close.

11 YEAR OLD JOSH

Where is he, Mom?

LINDA

I don't know honey.

16 YEAR OLD LUCA

Mom?

Linda freezes, hearing a man's voice from behind her. She turns, finding sixteen year old Luca. He is tall, handsome, looking like a young version of his father. She reaches for him, but pulls her hand back before touching him.

16 YEAR OLD LUCA (CONT'D)

I'm real, Mom. I'm here.

She lays her hand on his heart. The tears start to fall. She reaches up gently touching his face. Tears fill his eyes. He hugs her, lifts her off her feet, twirls her around.

LINDA

You're so handsome. I can't believe  
how tall you are.

Anya hugs her brother. Linda touches the faces of both of  
them now. She draws them into a big hug. All of them cry now.

17 YEAR OLD ANYA

Yes, Mamma. We're all here now.

11 YEAR OLD JOSH

Um. I'm here too, Mom.

Linda turns quickly to Josh, pulling him into the fold.

LINDA

Of course you are Josh. Of course  
you are.

11 YEAR OLD JOSH

I thought she was never gonna let  
go of you.

Luca laughs, picking up his little brother, tossing him over  
his shoulder.

16 YEAR OLD LUCA

It's good to see you again, little  
brother.

11 YEAR OLD JOSH

I never had a big brother before.  
How long do you get to stay?

16 YEAR OLD LUCA

I'm a permanent fixture, kiddo.

LINDA

Let's go home.

Luca grabs his mother once more, hugging her tightly.

16 YEAR OLD LUCA

I've been waiting a long time to  
hear those words.

LINDA

I've been waiting a long time to  
say them.

The four of them walk through the airport arm in arm.

INT. BOYS BEDROOM - NIGHT

Josh sleeps in the top bunk. Luca lies in bed awake. Linda tiptoes in. She smiles at Luca, tucks him in and bends to kiss him.

LINDA

It's so good to be able to tuck you  
in again.

A solitary tear escapes Luca.

LINDA (CONT'D)

What's the matter, sweetie.

15 YEAR OLD LUCA

You love me.

His tears are flowing now.

LINDA

Oh baby. Of course I do.

16 YEAR OLD LUCA

The whole time we were with daddy?  
He never said it. Not once.

LINDA

Your dad's a jerk.

16 YEAR OLD LUCA

Yeah. A big jerk.

LINDA

I love you sweetheart. I always  
have.

Linda caresses his face, wipes away his tears, and kisses his forehead.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Forever and always.

She stands and walks to the door. She shuts off the light.

15 YEAR OLD LUCA

Mom?

LINDA

Yes sweetie?

15 YEAR OLD LUCA

I love you too.

She smiles, blows him a kiss, closing the door behind her.

INT. HALLWAY/STAIRWELL - NIGHT

She leans against the closed door. The tears flow once more.

EXT. PAOLO'S HOME - DAY

A PROCESS SERVER knock's on the door. Paolo answers it.

PAOLO  
Can I help you?

PROCESS SERVER  
Paolo Viscose?

PAOLO  
Yeah.

The server hands him a large envelope.

PROCESS SERVER  
Have a nice day.

He walks away. Paolo tears open the envelope. He reads the document inside.

CLOSE SHOT OF A SECTION OF THE DOCUMENT:

"HEREBY MOVES THIS COURT TO ENTER AN ORDER AWARDING PERMANENT CUSTODY WITH NO VISITATION TO LINDA MCPHERSON."

PAOLO  
That bitch.

He crumples the paper and throws it.

INT. LINDA'S KITCHEN - DAY

CHRISTMAS DAY: A large uncooked turkey is on the counter. Linda is chopping vegetables.

16 YEAR OLD LUCA (O.S.)  
Mom? Can you come in here a minute?

LINDA  
Luca. If I don't get this turkey in the oven, we're not going to eat until New Years.

16 YEAR OLD LUCA (O.S.)  
It'll just take a minute, Mom.

Linda gives a frustrated sigh. Wiping her hands on a towel, she goes into the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

A large Christmas tree stands in a corner with unwrapped presents lain neatly underneath. The fireplace blazes as Luca moves the couch up against the wall. Luca stands with a Cheshire cat grin. Anya and Josh watch as Linda enters.

LINDA  
Well you guys have been busy.  
Thanks for cleaning up the mess.  
I'm going to go finish cooking.

11 YEAR OLD JOSH  
No. Not yet, Mom. Luca has another  
Christmas present for you.

LINDA  
You do?

16 YEAR OLD LUCA  
You told us at Thanksgiving that  
you and Josh have this tradition.  
Well we want to be part of the  
tradition too. One present under  
the tree has to be something that  
couldn't be bought.

LINDA  
Yes. It has to come from the heart.  
Anya said she was going to help  
more around the house. Josh said he  
was going to try to not make me mad  
for a week. I really like that one.

She winks at Josh who grins sheepishly.

16 YEAR OLD LUCA  
I want to give you mine now.

LINDA  
Okay, sweetie.

Luca nods at Anya. She turns on Linda's favorite song. Glenn Miller's MOONLIGHT SERENADE. Luca bows to his mother offering his hand to her.

16 YEAR OLD LUCA  
Mom. Can I have this dance?

She takes Luca's hand. He holds her lovingly. Linda rests her head on her son's shoulder, a solitary tear falls as they dance around the room. After a moment, Anya and Josh begin to dance as well.

FADE OUT:

NEWSREEL

As the end credits roll, a television interview with the real Linda from Portland, Oregon plays.

REPORTER  
What made you decide to walk from  
Canada to Mexico for the homeless?

THE REAL LINDA  
A long time ago, my three kids and  
I were homeless for more than five  
years. We slept on the ground, on  
church pews, even in empty carnival  
trailers. Sometimes, when we were  
lucky, we had a car. Things haven't  
changed that much when it comes to  
the homeless. I wanted to do what I  
could to be the difference.  
Besides, years ago, I promised  
someone who helped me, that I would  
pay it forward.