EXT. AKRON'S CANAL PARK - DAY

RICK STEVENS, thirty-six, is Middle America personified. He blends in at the crowded ballpark. Blue jeans, work boots, a ball cap and leather jacket complete his attire. He snacks on a bag of popcorn. The CRACK of the bat and the CROWD is on their feet. A BALL PLAYER slides safely into second with a double. JOHN SILVERSTEIN, thirty-three, business clad, talks on his cell phone. Calm and collected he appears unaffected by the cheering crowd. The sits with the crowd.

RICK
Helluva talent, that kid.

John flashes a quick grin, never missing a beat in his phone call.

RICK
Probably be in the bigs in another year.

John nods, smiles and turns away from Rick to continue uninterrupted.

CUT TO:

INT. MELANIE'S HOUSE

MELANIE SIMMERS, twenty-four, scurries around a sparse, but neatly adorned house getting dressed.

MELANIE
Zach? Are you ready? Mommy, can't be late again.

CUT TO:

INT. MELANIE'S HOUSE - ZACH'S BEDROOM

ZACH SIMMERS, six, sits on his bed in pajamas.
ZACH
I'm ready.

Melanie ENTERS.

MELANIE
Come on baby. Don't do this to mommy. Not today.

ZACH
I don't want to go. Melanie hastily dresses her son.

MELANIE
Zach, do you want mommy to get fired?

ZACH
Yes.

MELANIE
If I get fired we won't have the money to go to Six Flags. Zach quickly dresses himself.

CUT TO:

EXT. AKRON'S CANAL PARK - DAY

John still talks on his cell.

RICK
Must be something to have that kind of talent. He's just a kid, nineteen, twenty tops, and if he stays healthy and he stays focused, the world is his oyster. Guys like you and me, we squandered those opportunities long ago.

John ends his call and turns back to Rick.

JOHN
You.

RICK
Huh?

JOHN
Guys like you...

RICK
And me...

JOHN
... squandered opportunities. I, on the other hand, knew where I was going. I had that kind of drive, I just never had the talent.

RICK
You knew where you were going?

JOHN
Absolutely.

RICK
At nineteen?

JOHN
Without question.

RICK
The only thing I knew for certain was that I would run to the corner store every day for beer.

CUT TO:

EXT. DAIRY MART - DAY

Melanie pulls into a parking space and turns the car off.

MEGAN
Lock your door. I'll be right back.
Melanie opens her door.

ZACH
Mom?

Melanie pops her head back in the car.

MELANIE
What?

ZACH
I'm not thirteen. It's against the law to leave me alone in a car
until I'm thirteen.

**MELANIE**

Come on.

Zach EXITS.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. AKRON'S CANAL PARK - DAY**

John's phone RINGS. He ignores the call.

**JOHN**

I had priorities. I understood what it meant to have an attention span.

---

**RICK**

You could focus?

**JOHN**

I was the King of Focus.

**RICK**

The Duke of Diligence?

**JOHN**

The Count of Concentration.

Rick is still looking at John when he hears the CRACK of the bat.

**RICK**

Duck.

**JOHN**

Huh?

Rick ducks. John appears perplexed. John's POV: A foul ball is screaming in his direction. Too late: The ball strikes John in the face knocking him out of his seat. Rick recovers and continues to snack on his popcorn.

**RICK**

The Polestar Prince.

**CUT TO:**
INT. DAIRY MART

Melanie carries a soda and a bag of chips. Zach stands at the cooler looking through the glass.

MELANIE
Did you decide?

ZACH
I want Coke.

MELANIE
Get one.

ZACH
No, Pepsi.
   (A beat)
No, Seven-Up. Maybe root beer.

MELANIE
Make up your mind already.

5.

ZACH
So many choices. A glance to her watch.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET - AKRON OHIO - DAY

The game is over. Rick and John stand at the front gate. The exiting CROWD flows around them. John holds an ice pack to the side of his face.

JOHN
I'm just saying grow up. You can't keep drifting.

RICK
I thought I did grow up...

JOHN
When you got married?

RICK
Yeah...

JOHN
You matured a little.
It's a process.

No Bueller, it's a decision. One you need to make. You can't keep running without direction. If you don't know where you're going you'll never get what you want.

CUT TO:

INT. DAIRY MART

Melanie and Zach stand at the counter. The CLERK rings them out. Zach grabs the bottle from the counter.

ZACH
I want Sobe.

Melanie snatches the bottle back.

MELANIE
Too bad.

An impatient LINE OF CUSTOMERS waits.

ZACH
I don't want Coke. I want Sobe.

Melanie puts the bottle back on the counter.

MELANIE
(To clerk.)
We'll take the soda.

Zach stomps his feet.

CLERK
Two dollars and...

MELANIE
Hold on a minute. Please?

CUSTOMER
Come on lady.

A beat as Zach and Melanie exchange glares.
MELANIE
Get your Sobe.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET - AKRON OHIO - DAY

The crowd has waned.

RICK
I thought I got direction...

JOHN
When Cindy had kids?
RICK
Yeah...

JOHN
They gave you purpose. But purpose, my friend, is not direction.

RICK
East.

JOHN
Huh?

RICK
My direction is east. I parked in the deck.

JOHN
I'm right around the...

RICK
Corner?

JOHN
Yeah.

RICK
We're always going in different directions.

JOHN
Mine are much more productive.

RICK
And much less adventurous.
JOHN
Well, I'm gonna...

RICK
Go?

JOHN
Yeah.

RICK
Then go.

JOHN
That's what I'm going to do. Responsibility calls.
John turns and heads south. Rick takes a bite of popcorn, looks to the sky for a moment, grins, and heads off Northeast.

CUT TO:

INT. MELANIE'S CAR - DAY

Zach takes a long swig of Sobe.

ZACH
Sobe sucks. I want Coke.

CUT TO:

8.

EXT. MAIN STREET - AKRON OHIO - DAY

John jogs up behind Rick.

JOHN
You want to...

RICK
Get a beer?

JOHN
Yeah.

RICK
Can't.

JOHN
Can't?
RICK
Gotta get home.

JOHN
Why?

RICK
Family, my man. Take time off for a ballgame ya should probably tend to the family too. You should try it sometime.

JOHN
In the grand scheme of things family is a liability, not an asset. Rick continues on.

JOHN
(Calling out.)
Do you even know what you're doing or where you're going?

RICK
(Yelling over his shoulder.)
East.

JOHN
East leads nowhere, my friend. You should be heading south. The bar is south. East takes you places you don't want to go.

9.

Rick reaches the corner and darts across the street.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR DEALERSHIP

Melanie stands in front of her BOSS (20's).

BOSS
You're late.

MELANIE
I know, but...
BOSS
No buts. You're late.

MELANIE
But...

BOSS
It's the third time this week Mel. You put me in a rough spot here. My boss wants me to let you go. His boss wants me to let you go. I gotta let you go.

MELANIE
But...

BOSS
If a person isn't responsible enough to be prompt to their job, they're not responsible enough to work for me.

MELANIE
But...

BOSS
You're fired Mel. Just get your things and go.

A beat as Melanie turns to leave.

BOSS
We still on for dinner?

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE CRUISER - DAY

TWO OFFICERS parked on Main watch Rick cross the street.

10.

OFFICER ONE
Is that...?

OFFICER TWO
You think...?

OFFICER ONE
Naw...
Officer's POV: A WANTED POSTER of Rick Stevens.

OFFICER TWO
Can't tell from here...

OFFICER ONE
Too far away. Let's roost him.
OFFICER TWO
Call it in.

CUT TO:

EXT. AKRON'S BUCHTEL AVE - DAY

Rick walks East on Buchtel as Police cruiser creeps behind.

INT. POLICE CRUISER - DAY

Officer's POV: Slowly driving past, the officers recognize Rick.

OFFICER TWO
It's him... get him, get him, get him. They curb the car in front of Rick.

EXT. AKRON'S BUCHTEL AVE - DAY

Rick appears dumbfounded as the officers exit the cruiser with guns drawn. Officer One remains stationary. Officer Two circles behind Rick.

OFFICER ONE
Get em up. Up I said... up.

RICK
Huh?

OFFICER TWO
Get `em where we can see `em slimeball.

Rick raises his hands, dropping his popcorn.

11.

OFFICER ONE
Oh, we got ourselves a litterbug here.
RICK

What?

Placing his pistol back in his holster Officer Two grabs Rick by the collar and throws him against the cruiser. Officer One remains drawn on Rick. His hands shake with nervous anticipation.

RICK

What's going...

OFFICER ONE

Shaddup!

Officer Two cuffs Rick. Leaning in, he speaks in Rick's ear.

OFFICER TWO

You know your rights, cretin, but just in case you don't...

RICK

What the hell? Officer Two spins Rick to face him.

OFFICER TWO

You have the right to shut the hell up. Do you understand this right?

RICK

Yes.

Officer One appears very eager to discharge his weapon.

OFFICER ONE

Shut him the hell up, Jimmy.

OFFICER TWO

If you don't shut the hell up my partner might exercise his right to shoot you. Do you understand?

'Yes' begins to form on Rick's lips. A quick glance at Officer One and he decides to nod.

OFFICER ONE

He's looking at me funny, Jimmy.
OFFICER TWO
You have the right not to look at my partner in any way that might be construed as ‘funny' which could result in harm to your person. Do you understand this right?

Rick nods again.

OFFICER ONE
He twitching?

OFFICER TWO
Really? I don't think he is. Are you twitching boy?

RICK
No Sir.

OFFICER ONE
Look at him, he's twitching. Nothing pisses me off more than twitching and talking. If he doesn't stop I'm gonna waste him.

OFFICER TWO
You have the right not to twitch or shiver or make any other odd movements that might encourage my partner to discharge his weapon, do you understand?

CUT TO:

INT. CAR DEALERSHIP
Melanie grabs her stuff.

BOSS
You never answered about tonight.

MELANIE
You're making a huge mistake.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUCHTEL AVE. - DAY
An unmarked car pulls on scene. The door opens. Low in on walking feet and pan up to reveal DETECTIVE JOHNSON, (50's), a gruff man in tweed.
DETECTIVE JOHNSON
What do we got here boys?

OFFICER TWO
It's him. We got him.

OFFICER ONE
He's a twitcher... a twitcher and a talker. Boy, I tell you, if he'd twitched one more time I would've deposited large amounts of hot lead in his ass.

DETECTIVE JOHNSON
I'll take it from here boys.

OFFICER TWO
Report too?

DETECTIVE JOHNSON
No, that's your job.

OFFICER ONE
If we have to write the report I say I get to shoot him.

DETECTIVE JOHNSON
No one's getting shot today, Bobby.

OFFICER ONE
Can't I just wing him or something?

DETECTIVE JOHNSON
Jimmy; get him out of here.

Officer Two moves to his unwilling partner and helps him place his weapon in his holster. Officer One's hand is still clenched to his gun as Officer Two drags him around the car and forces him into the cruiser.

CUT TO:

INT. MELANIE'S CAR - DAY

Melanie drives.

MELANIE
Tell me I'm not responsible... asshole. I have a kid. He has a goldfish. I have my dignity.
MELANIE (cont'd)
He has a brown ring on his collar.
He's nothing more than a turd with feet.

CUT TO:

INT. UNMARKED CAR - DAY

Rick is restless in the back seat. Johnson glances in the rear view mirror.

DETECTIVE JOHNSON
You don't want to piss Bobby off.
He's a little unstable.

RICK
A little? He represents your force?

DETECTIVE JOHNSON
Affirmative action. We have to hire our fair share of disabled --- Quota thing.

RICK
His psychosis doesn't appear disabling.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE - DAY

MRS. NELSON, (60's), prepares a snack.

MELANIE
Where's Zach?

MRS. NELSON
Fired again?

MELANIE
I don't want to talk about it.

MRS. NELSON
The first thing I learned when I retired was that time management is an asset.

CUT TO:
INT. AKRON POLICE DEPARTMENT - LINE UP ROOM

FIVE diverse MEN, including Rick, stand against the wall. On the other side of the mirror Detective Johnson sits with THE LADY IN BLACK (30's). A black veil streams from her hat covering her eyes, circa 1930's.

DETECTIVE JOHNSON
Take your time, Ma'am. We need you to be certain.

LADY IN BLACK
Can I see their profiles?

Detective Johnson keys a microphone.

DETECTIVE JOHNSON
Turn to your left. The men follow their instruction.

LADY IN BLACK
I just... I just don't know...

DETECTIVE JOHNSON
Back to front.

Three men turn to face forward. The other two turn to face the wall.

DETECTIVE JOHNSON
All of you face forward. The two turn forward.

LADY IN BLACK
Number three...

DETECTIVE JOHNSON
Are you sure?

LADY IN BLACK
Could you have him step forward?

The Detective keys his microphone again.

DETECTIVE JOHNSON
Number three take two steps forward.

Rick steps forward and the lights dim on the other four. Caught in the spotlight, Rick squints from the brightness.
The lady in black shifts in her seat. A long beat.

16.

**LADY IN BLACK**

That's him.

**DETECTIVE JOHNSON**

You're positive?

**LADY IN BLACK**

I'm positive. That's the man that needs to be in custody.

The detective keys his microphone once again.

**DETECTIVE JOHNSON**

Okay number three step back. Rick does as he's told.

**DETECTIVE JOHNSON**

Turn to your right --- all of you...

The group follows the detective's instruction.

**DETECTIVE JOHNSON**

...and exit.

One by one the men filter through the door. Rick EXITS.

**Dissolve To:**

**Int. Theater - Continuous**

Rick ENTERS on stage. The entire theater is cast in shades of gray. The stage is barren. There is no audience. He looks around for a moment and as he reaches center stage is once again flooded with the spotlight. Rick uses his arm to shade his eyes. SFX: A SOFT DIN OF VOICES. Looking stage left Rick realizes TWELVE JURORS have appeared in their box. A small AUDIENCE has congregated. SFX: THE DIN SWELLS TO A QUIET CHAOS. A RAPPING of a gavel and Rick's attention swings to a white haired JUDGE (70's).

**JUDGE**

Order in the court.
The noise level wanes, but not completely. Another RAP of the gavel.

**JUDGE**
Order in the court, I say.

Focused on the Judge, Rick doesn't notice THE PROSECUTOR approaching from stage right.

Carrying a folding chair in one hand, notes and manila folders in the other, he sets the chair behind Rick.

**PROSECUTOR**
Have a seat.

**JUDGE**
Do you know why you're here today, Mr. Stevens?

**RICK**
Why am I here?

**JUDGE**
Are you being rhetorical?

**RICK**
Are you asking me?

**JUDGE**
You stand here today an accused man.

**RICK**
Accused? Accused of what?

**JUDGE**
You have been placed in custody of your children.

**RICK**
Huh?

**PROSECUTOR**
Your children, Mr. Stevens. You do realize you have children, don't you?

**RICK**
Yes, but...

**PROSECUTOR**
But nothing Mr. Stevens, either you have children or you don't.

**RICK**
I do.

**PROSECUTOR**
So, you accept responsibility for bringing young life into the world?

**RICK**
I guess...

18.

**PROSECUTOR**
There's no guessing, Mr. Stevens, either you're responsible for siring offspring or you aren't.

**RICK**
I am, but I'm not sure it was responsible.

**PROSECUTOR**
A crime of passion, Mr. Stevens? How convenient.
(A beat)
And you accept the consequences of said actions?

**RICK**
Why am I here?

**PROSECUTOR**
Why are you here, Mr. Stevens? Why are you here? I'll tell you why you're here. Are you familiar with Ms. Cynthia Stevens?

**RICK**
Yeah, she's my wife.

**PROSECUTOR**
Was your wife, Sir. Was your wife. She recently filed for divorce. Were you aware of that?
RICK
No, no I wasn't.

PROSECUTOR
Well, she did. She also named you as her coconspirator in the act of having children. Were you aware of that, Mr. Stevens?

RICK
Again, no.

PROSECUTOR
Mr. Stevens, you just told the court that you aware you had children. You have also admitted that Ms. Cynthia Stevens was, in fact, your wife.

(MORE)

19.

PROSECUTOR (cont'd)
On top of that you told this court that you accepted the responsibility of having said children, did you not?

RICK
Yes, but...

PROSECUTOR
Then why, Mr. Stevens, do you continue to deny culpability in this situation?

Rick realizes the audience has swelled to nearly a full house. Beads of sweat form on his brow.

JUDGE
Answer the question.

AUDIENCE
Answer the question.

Like a trapped animal, Rick looks for his escape.

PROSECUTOR
The question, Mr. Stevens.

RICK
How can you be sure it was me?

The audience hisses. The Judge RAPS his gavel.

**PROSECUTOR**
She picked you out of a lineup, Sir. What more do you need?

**RICK**
Time.

**PROSECUTOR**
Time is not an option, Mr. Stevens. Time --- is not --- an option.

A look of sad resignation crosses Rick's face.

**PROSECUTOR**
You don't deny being married to Ms. Stevens, nor do you deny the act of procreation. You seem to understand that your actions bear consequence. You seem to understand that with parenthood, came responsibility.

**(MOR E)**

PROSECUTOR (cont'd)
It seems to me, as it should to anyone with the capacity for simple deduction that you, Mr. Stevens, did willingly and knowingly enter into the commitments of parenthood fully aware of the potential pratfalls. Did you not?

**RICK**
Yes, yes I did.

**PROSECUTOR**
It's time to pay the piper, Mr. Stevens.

(To the Judge)
It is the recommendation of the State that Richard C. Stevens been sentenced to the fullest capacity allowed by law.

**RICK**
What about Cindy?

**PROSECUTOR**
Excuse me?

**RICK**
My ex, Cindy, what about her responsibilities to the children?

The Prosecutor moves to Rick and whispers in his ear.

**PROSECUTOR**
She cut a deal, Rick. You were the one we wanted. You were the one we got. She took the plea. Sure, it costs her financially. But what is freedom worth?

A CLAMOR begins to rise from the crowd as they talk among themselves. The RAP of the gavel.

**JUDGE**
I see no reason to extend this any further. Mr. Stevens you have been found competent by the State and by this Court. You are completely cognizant of your surroundings, and you leave me no choice. This court finds you guilty as charged.

**RICK**
Guilty of what?

**JUDGE**
You are hereby remanded to custody of your children for no less than a lifetime. This Court is adjourned.

A GASP in the audience mixed with CHEERS. Rick appears dumbfounded. A BAILIFF approaches Rick and begins to lead him off stage. Rick scuffles and struggles. The Judge stands and begins to collect his files.

**RICK**
I can't do this alone. Don't make me do this alone. I'll never make it...

**JUDGE**
If you can't do the time, Mr. Stevens, then don't do the crime.
CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Mrs. Nelson ENTERS the kitchen carrying a book. She hands the book to Melanie.

MELANIE
Highly Effective Strategies of Time Management for the Single Parent?

MRS. NELSON
Learn it. Live it.

MELANIE
It was written by a man... a married man.

MRS. NELSON
Lots of single parents are married.

CUT TO:

INT. SUMMIT COUNTY JAIL - CELL

Rick sits alone, his head hung low. A JAILER, (40's) approaches leading THREE YOUNG CHILDREN to the cell. KRIS, (8), is followed by PHILLIP, (6), and NICHOLAS, (4). The door swings open. The children run to their father.

KRIS
Daddy!

RICK
Hi guys.

PHILLIP
I love you daddy.

RICK
I love you too, Phillip.

NICHOLAS
I love you more.
RICK
I love you more.

NICHOLAS
I love YOU more.

KRIS
Daddy, how come you're in jail?

PHILLIP
Is this where we live?

KRIS
When can we see mommy?

RICK
Come here guys. I want to talk to you. The boys gather round.

PHILLIP
What's wrong Daddy?

RICK
I don't know when we're going to see your mom again.

KRIS
Is she okay?

RICK
She's kind of mad at daddy.

NICHOLAS
Mommy mad at me too?

RICK
No, baby, not at all. Your mom needs time to work through some things. So, for awhile, it's just going to be us...

KRIS
What's she need time for?

RICK
To figure out who she is, where she's going, what she wants.

NICHOLAS
I miss mommy.

RICK
She misses you too, baby. And this isn't permanent... we're going to fight this... we're going to appeal. We'll take it to the Supreme Court if we have to.

KRIS
You don't want us either?

RICK
Of course I want you. I just don't think I should have to do this alone.

The jailer still lingers in the doorway, leaning against the bars.

JAILER
I feel for you, I really do, but I've seen your kind before. You're a lifer. Whether it's fair or not. Whether justice was served. It doesn't matter. You're here for the duration.

The boys cling to their father. The CLANK of the door being closed. The Jailer WHISTLES a sad spiritual as he walks away.

CUT TO:

INT. MELANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Melanie sits on her couch and cries. Zach ENTERS.

ZACH
What's wrong mommy?

MELANIE
Nothing.

24.

ZACH
Why are you crying? Did I do something wrong?

MELANIE
Nothing at all baby.
(Pulling a book from an end table)
Tell me a story?

The camera pulls back to reveal that the room is really a well furnished cell.

Once upon a time, a very long time ago...

INT. SUMMIT COUNTY JAIL - CELL

Kids and toys are strewn across the floor. Rick wears a heavy shade of facial growth. He reads The Genealogy of Morals. The Jailer stands at the cell door.

Get yourself cleaned up.

Huh?

You have visitors... in the courtyard.

Shaved and wearing sunglasses, Rick approaches his parents. He reaches his FATHER, (60's), first.

Quite the pickle you've got yourself in.

So it seems.

Rick's MOTHER gives him a big hug.

She was no good for you. I knew it
from the start.

RICK
Mom, don't... okay?

MOTHER
Just saying...

RICK
I know, but what's done is done.

The children notice their grandparents and run to greet them.
They tackle their grandfather's legs.

FATHER
There's my boys.

BOYS IN UNISON
Grandpa. Rick and his mother sit at a picnic table while the boys play with their grandfather.

MOTHER
You're dad and I are here for you.

RICK
I know mom.

MOTHER
Are you eating?

RICK
Yeah, I guess.

MOTHER
Do you need anything? Food? Money?

RICK
Watch the kids one night? I could use some time to myself.

MOTHER
Um... Yeah... okay... I suppose that would be all right... we'd have to ask your father, but I don't see why that would be a problem.
(a beat)
Other than that everything's okay?
RICK
We're okay...

MOTHER
Because it doesn't have to be like this. Mary Ryan, a friend of mine, her son had the same thing happen to him. Wife just up and left with no warning at all. He didn't waste a day. No sir, he was up and at 'em almost instantly. You can leave here, you know? Mary Ryan's son did.

RICK
I like it here, mom.

MOTHER
What's to like? It's dingy and filthy. It's no place to raise children.

RICK
It's home and it's stable. The one thing the boys need right now is stability.

MOTHER
You can't keep hiding forever.

RICK
It's been five days, mom. I'm not hiding. I just need time to adjust.

MOTHER
Mary Ryan's son thinks you're hiding.

RICK
Do I know this guy?

Rick's mother slides a business card across the picnic table.

MOTHER
No, but I think you should. I hate that woman. How can a mother abandon her kids? How could she do this to my babies?

Rick looks to a blue sky.
DISSOLVE TO:

27.

EXT. FAIR - DAY

CU. on a wad of blue cotton candy. Pull back to reveal Cindy and her new beau, SCOTT, (30's) and leather clad. Danger personified. Cindy walks, focused on her cotton candy. She doesn't realize that Scott has stopped to watch a HOTTE walk past. The two exchange a flirtatious glance.

CINDY
Scott? Scott?

SCOTT
(Catching up)
Yeah baby?

MOTHER (VO)
I hope she's living in hell too.

CUT TO:

INT. MELANIE'S HOUSE

Melanie looks through the want ads. Some jobs are already circled.

ZACH
What ya doing?

MELANIE
Looking for a job.

ZACH
I know what you could do.

MELANIE
What's that?

ZACH
You could stay home with me.

MELANIE
What do you pay?

Zach reaches deep in his pocket and pulls out a few coins. He
counts them.

ZACH
Sixty-five cents.

MELANIE
A day?

ZACH
A week.

MELANIE
You can afford that?

ZACH
If it keeps my mommy home with me.

CUT TO:

INT. FRANK RYAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Rick sits across the desk from FRANK RYAN, (40): An uncouth Italian man who seems content to stuff his face with a submarine sandwich and speak through his mastication.

FRANK
So, needless to say, I understand your situation. My old lady, she took off and left me with the kids five years ago. That bitch. But I'm not bitter or anything. I found me a good day care and moved on with my life. You should too.

RICK
It's hard...

FRANK
Of course it's hard, sometimes feels like you're in prison, but you gotta be a man... stand up for yourself... provide for your family.

RICK
And you can help?

FRANK
Me? I'll put ya to work. Some long hours, but it all pays off. Keeps
you off the welfare system if ya know what I mean.

    RICK
    Yeah.

    FRANK
    I'd rather pay you than pay the government to pay you. You can start Monday.

Rick stands to leave.

    FRANK
    Here's the number to the day-care. Tell them you know me, they'll cut you a break.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - EARLY MORNING

The clock reads 5:45 when Rick pulls into the day-care parking lot.

CUT TO:

INT. DAY-CARE

Rick and the boys follow MS. HEATH on the guided tour.

    MS. HEATH
    And when school starts we have a bus service that will take the two oldest to and from school. We have story hour at Eleven, lunch at noon, and nap time at Twelve-thirty. Rest assured our programs are designed to be nurturing, caring environments that provide the parental guidance your children need in those hours you can't be with them. So, are there any questions?

    RICK
    No, you seemed to cover everything. Ms. Heath bends down to the kid's level.
MS. HEATH
You're going to like it here.

The kids grab Rick's leg. Nicholas cries.

KRIS AND PHILLIP
No, daddy, don't leave us here.

Ms. Heath looks up to Rick.

MS. HEATH
(Reassuringly)
They'll be just fine.

INT. BUILDING - DAY
Rick pushes a broom as the clock unwinds.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE
Melanie sits in front of her FIRST INTERVIEWER.

FIRST INTERVIEWER
I'm sorry. It would be really nice to have you on board, but you're just a little too qualified.

CUT TO:

INT. DAY-CARE
The children are into everything. There appears to be absolutely no rules.

INT. BREAK ROOM
Rick eats his lunch.

CUT TO:

INT. DAY-CARE REST ROOM
The children are engaged in a food fight.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE
Melanie sits in front of her SECOND INTERVIEWER.

SECOND INTERVIEWER
Too Qualified.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT
Rick fumbles with his keys as he unlocks his car door.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE
Melanie sits in front of the THIRD INTERVIEWER.

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THIRD INTERVIEWER
Over qualified.

CUT TO:

INT. DAY-CARE
The children run around in their underwear, Nicholas in diapers, as the PROVIDER launders their clothes.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE
Melanie sits in front of the FOURTH INTERVIEWER.

FOURTH INTERVIEWER
You're just not qualified.

CUT TO:

EXT. DAY-CARE PARKING LOT - NIGHT
The clock reads 7:55 as Rick shuts off his car and opens the door.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE
Melanie sits in front of the FIFTH INTERVIEWER.
FIFTH INTERVIEWER
I don't think I've seen such a perfect candidate.

INT. DAY-CARE REST ROOM
The provider is hurriedly scrubbing the children's faces and hands.

EXT. DAY-CARE - NIGHT
TRACKING BESIDE, Rick reaches the door and opens it.

INT. OFFICE
Melanie leans forward in her seat.

MELANIE
Really?

INT. DAY-CARE REST ROOM
The children are crying.

PROVIDER
You are bad, bad children.

INT. DAY-CARE HALLWAY
Rick approaches the room. STEDICAM on Rick's face

INT. OFFICE
CU. on Fifth Interviewer.

FIFTH INTERVIEWER
Education level. Work experience.
You really fit the billet.
INT. DAY-CARE ROOM

As Rick ENTERS the children run to him.

RICK
So, did everything go okay?

PROVIDER
They were angels.

RICK
Did you have fun boys?

The boys look to the provider who has a nasty scowl on her face.

BOYS IN UNISON

We love it.

EXT. DAY-CARE PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Rick loads the kids into the car.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

The boys GIGGLE as they rough house in the back seat.

RICK
Get those seat belts on. The kids reluctantly comply.

RICK
So, how was your day?

BOYS IN UNISON

We're hungry.

RICK
Didn't they feed you? They said they would feed you. The brochure said meals provided.
KRIS
We didn't eat nuffin.

PHILLIP
Daddy, I'm hungry.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE

CU. on Melanie. She appears relieved.

FIFTH INTERVIEWER
Unfortunately we filled the position earlier today. WHIP PAN to cell doors slamming closed.

CUT TO:

EXT. FAST FOOD RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Rick pulls through the drive-thru, takes his order from a smiling EMPLOYEE, and doles out the grub the as he drives off.

34.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

The kids aren't interested in eating. French-fries are flying everywhere.

CUT TO:

INT. FRANK RYAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Rick stands in a doorway. Frank fingers through a file cabinet.

FRANK
So, how was your first week?

RICK
Thirteen hours a day doesn't leave me much time for my kids, But a job's a job, right?

FRANK
Now you're talking.
Frank finds Rick's check and smiles as he hands him his laurels.

**RICK**
Two hundred and fifty bucks?

**FRANK**
Pretty good, huh?

**RICK**
Two-hundred-and-fifty-bucks?

**FRANK**
Don't spend it all in one place.

**RICK**
I give you sixty-five hours of my time and you give me two hundred fifty bucks?

**FRANK**
It's the American way. This country was founded on low paying, back breaking, long hour jobs. Why, work like this makes you a bona fide patriot. Ya gotta love it.

35.

**RICK**
(Mumbling as he EXITS)
What's not to love?

CUT TO:

INT. DAY-CARE - NIGHT

Ready to leave, the boys goof in the hallway. In the office Rick waits patiently as Ms. Heath tallies up the weekly totals.

**MS. HEATH**
That will be two hundred seventy-five dollars and thirty-six cents.

**RICK**
I'm a little short.

Rick takes the money from his pocket and hands it to Ms. Heath.
MS. HEATH
We take checks too.

RICK
Checks?

MS. HEATH
Those things you use when you don't have money.

RICK
I'm sorry, I'm clueless. My wife handled the checks.

MS. HEATH
Ah.

RICK
Does it help that I know Frank Ryan? He told me to mention his name.

MS. HEATH
You know Frank?

RICK
I work for him.

Ms. Heath looks back to her books.

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MS. HEATH
That changes everything.

RICK
Great.

MS. HEATH
Two hundred ninety-five dollars and thirty-six cents.

RICK
Huh?

MS. HEATH
Frank owes me money and one way or another, I will collect.

RICK
So, I'm forty-five dollars short...
MS. HEATH
And thirty-six cents. Don't worry about it. It's your first week. You didn't know, so, we'll let it ride and just add it to next week's balance. A beat as Rick turns to leave.

MS. HEATH
You know there is a way you could save quite a bit of money.

RICK
Really?

MS. HEATH
Potty train the toddler.
Ms. Heath pulls some literature from her desk drawer.

RICK
Potty train? Nicky?

MS. HEATH
(Handing Rick the pamphlet)
The toddler.

CUT TO:

INT. MELANIE'S HOUSE
Melanie sits at a computer.

ZACH
Mommy?

MELANIE
Yes, baby?

ZACH
When are we going to have a normal life.

MELANIE
We do have a normal life... for us.

ZACH
I mean when are we going to be like
other people?
She pulls a flyer from the printer. CU. on flyer: BABY SITTING

INT. SUMMIT COUNTY JAIL CELL

Rick and Nicholas sit on the cot. Rick reads to himself. Nicholas looks at the pictures.

NICHOLAS
Big boy go potty.

RICK
Are you a big boy?

NICHOLAS
Huge-mong-gus.

CUT TO:

INT. GROCERY STORE

Rick and the boys are in the baby isle. Rick picks up a pack of Pull-Ups studies it for a moment and throws it in the cart. On a community bulletin board he sees a flyer for baby sitting. He pulls the flyer, folds it and stuffs it in his pocket.

CUT TO:

INT. SUMMIT COUNTY JAIL CELL - LATER

Rick sets Nicholas on the potty.

RICK
Big boys go potty on the potty, Nicholas. Nicholas go potty on the potty?

Nicky shakes his head no.

RICK
You're brothers go potty on the potty. Daddy goes potty on the potty. Nicholas go potty on the potty?

Nicky shakes his head again no again.
RICK (CONT’D)
Daddy will buy Nicky a toy from the store.

NICHOLAS
Okay.

RICK
If Nicky goes potty on the potty.

Nicky shakes his head no and begins to cry.

NICHOLAS
I want a toy!

CUT TO:

INT. WALMART

Rick and the boys are in the toy isle. Nicholas has a huge grin on his face and a big toy in his hand. Rick takes the toy and tosses it in the cart.

CUT TO:

INT. SUMMIT COUNTY JAIL CELL

Nicky stands in front of his father.

NICHOLAS
I have to go potty?

Rick sits up abruptly.

RICK
Really?

NICHOLAS
All done.

CUT TO:

INT. DAY-CARE - NIGHT

Rick is in Ms. Heath's office again.

MS. HEATH
How's the potty training coming?
RICK
I think we're making progress.

MS. HEATH
Three hundred forty and...

RICK
Seventy-two cents. Here's two-fifty.

MS. HEATH
You're still short.

RICK
I know and I'm working on that.

MS. HEATH
May I remind you that we're not a charity? If you need credit go to a bank. I run a reputable business and I need the balance by next Wednesday, or maybe you should consider other arrangements.

Phillip runs into the office crying. Blood streams down his head. Kris follows close behind.

KRIS
I didn't do it.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM

Rick, Kris and Nicky sit patiently. Rick's Mother and Father BURST through the doors.

MOTHER
What happened? Where is he? Is he going to be okay?

RICK
He's going to be fine. They're working on him now. From what they told me it's just a few stitches.

FATHER
Boys will be boys. A NURSE peeks out.
NURSE
Mr. Stevens can you come back? The doctor could use your help in calming the child down.

RICK
Mom?

MOTHER
Just go. I'll watch these two.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL SUTURE ROOM

Phillip is in a halo. The DOCTOR appears perplexed as he stands near the child. Rick ENTERS.

DOCTOR
Thank God.

RICK
How can I help?

DOCTOR
Well, I need to give him a local so that I can sew the laceration, but he's not cooperating. Maybe hold his hand and distract him?

Rick moves to Phillip.

RICK
Hi little buddy.

PHILLIP
Hi Daddy.

RICK
I need you to be a good boy, okay?

PHILLIP
Okay daddy.

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RICK
So, did you have fun today.

PHILLIP
Uh huh.
RICK
Did you play with all your friends?

PHILLIP
Uh huh.

The doc injects the child.

PHILLIP
That fuckin' hurts!
RICK
Phillip!

PHILLIP
But daddy, it does.

RICK
That's a big people word. You're a little people, and little people don't use big people words.

PHILLIP
Okay.

RICK
(To Doctor)
I'm sorry.

The doctor offers a smug smile and begins to sew the cut.

PHILLIP
Do that again and my daddy's going to kick your ass.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL EMERGENCY AREA

Phillip runs down the hall with a huge butterfly bandage on his head. He stops to chat with all the NURSES. Rick walks a few steps behind carrying his coat. The doctor hurries to catch up with Rick.

RICK
Look I'm really sorry.
Can I ask you something?

Rick shifts uncomfortably.

RICK
Sure, I guess.

DOCTOR
My son's a wuss. He cries over hangnails. My wife and I have tried everything to toughen him up, but nothing works. I was wondering if our kids could play together. Maybe some of Phillip's "boy" would rub off on Junior.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM

Rick stands at the counter. The boys rough house with their grandparents in the background.

RICK
Insurance?

RECEPTIONIST
Yeah, Insurance. That thing that covers medical emergencies?

RICK
I don't think I have any.

RECEPTIONIST
Everybody has insurance.

RICK
I don't think I do.

RECEPTIONIST
Okay.

The receptionist slides a bill across the desk. From Rick's POV: the bill he holds shows a balance due of $637.50

RICK
Can I run a tab?
RECEPTIONIST
You don't have a check?

CUT TO:

EXT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Rick walks with his mother. The boys and their Grandfather are a few steps ahead.

RICK
I'm not even responsible for myself. How am I suppose to raise three kids?

MOTHER
It can be done.

RICK
I don't see how.

MOTHER
Find a way. Everything happens for a reason. God doesn't abandon his children, and neither will you.

RICK
God doesn't pay day-care.

MOTHER
There are other things out there... less expensive ways.

RICK
Could you watch them?

MOTHER
Oh... uh... well... I don't think your father is willing to do that. We raised our kids, Rick.

RICK
How 'bout tonight, so I can catch a breath?

MOTHER
What? My watching them while you were in there with Phillip wasn't enough? Make me feel guilty.

RICK
I'll just ask God to watch them. He never abandons his children.

Rick's mom reaches in her purse and pulls some bills from her wallet.

**MOTHER**
Take this.

**RICK**
I don't want your money mom.

**MOTHER**
Take the money.

As Rick puts the money in his pocket he finds the flyer.

**CUT TO:**

**INT. SUMMIT COUNTY JAIL CELL**
Nicky sits on the potty.

**NICHOLAS**
I can't do it Daddy.

**RICK**
You can do it.

**NICHOLAS**
I can't do it.

**RICK**
Would you do it for a nickel?

**NICHOLAS**
I can't do it.

Rick lifts the child from the toilet.

**RICK**
Watch daddy.

Rick stands in front of the toilet and relieves himself. Nicholas watches by his side. He finishes and zips himself up.

**RICK**
Daddy go potty in the potty.

**NICHOLAS**
Daddy?

**RICK**
Yes, Nicky?

I peed.

Rick's POV: A puddle on the floor. A RAP on the cell door. Rick turns around to find MELANIE (24) looking in.

**RICK**
Hi.

**MELANIE**
I'm Melanie... The baby-sitter...

**RICK**
Oh, right, I'm glad you could...

**NICHOLAS**
My daddy has a big pee-pee.

**RICK**
I was just demonstrating the art of...

**MELANIE**
It's okay. I saw.

**RICK**
(Mumbling)
Great.

Melanie ENTERS the cell followed by Zach.

**RICK**
You have a kid.

**MELANIE**
So do you.

**RICK**
Not criticizing, just surprised. I don't believe anyone at their old
day-care had kids. If they did they kept them in a closet and only brought them out on special occasions. Christmas, Easter, an occasional birthday, and maybe when they had friends over for dinner, but only as a status symbol. It was like they'd say, "Here's the white picket fence. Here's the SUV. Here's the dog. Oh yes, here's the 2.5 children. Kids you can get back in the closet now."

46.

**MELANIE**
You'd could make a fortune with a Renta-Kid business.

**RICK**
That has potential.

**MELANIE**
I've often thought of renting mine. Why pay for a baby-sitter when thousands of people would pay good money to set your kid on the mantle for a few hours?

**RICK**
So, what's his name?

**ZACH**
I'm Zach.

Rick drops to a knee and extends his hand.

**RICK**
Hello Zach. I'm Rick.

**ZACH**
You're old.

**RICK**
You got me there. I am old.

**ZACH**
How old?

**RICK**
Older than dirt. When I was a kid
we didn't have dirt. We had rocks and we had hammers. If we wanted dirt we banged a few rocks with really big hammers, and then we had dirt.

**MELANIE**
Worked the chain gangs?

**ZACH**
You're too old for my mom.

Kris and Phillip who have been sitting in the corner realize they have visitors and spring to greet them.

**RICK**
This is Kristian. This is Phillip, and the little guy from the potty, is Nicholas. Guys, this is Zach and...

**MELANIE**
Mel.

**RICK**
Mel.

The four boys run OS to play.

**MELANIE**
Beautiful kids.

**RICK**
Thanks. So's your's.

**MELANIE**
Ever try Cheerios?

**RICK**
Huh?

**MELANIE**
For potty training. Give him something to aim at. Drop a Cheerio or two in the toilet and let him pee away.

**RICK**
I'll have to try that. So, any
questions about the job? Melanie moves towards the boys.

MELANIE
I'm going to go talk to them for a little bit. I'll let you know.

Melanie crouches to the boy's level. They appear to take a real shine to her. Nicholas hands her a book, and the four of them move to the cell cot. The boys gather round.

ZACH
My mom tells great stories.

KRIS
We don't have a mom.

ZACH
That's okay, I don't have a dad.

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MELANIE
Once upon a time...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME
The cot morphs into a sofa. The dingy cell morphs into a well-lit room. Rick watches from a doorway.

MELANIE
The end...

BOYS IN UNISON
Read it again. Read it again. Read it again.

MELANIE
I'm gonna talk to your dad.

BOYS IN UNISON
Please.

MELANIE
We'll read another one in a little bit.
RICK
You have a real knack there.

MELANIE
Not a knack really. It's just about finding hope in places there should be none.

RICK
Whatever it is, I've never seen them take to a woman like that. Melanie smiles.

RICK
You want the job?

MELANIE
I'd like that.

CUT TO:

INT. BUILDING - DAY

Rick is pushing his broom when a gorgeous blond WOMAN walks past. They exchange long flirtatious looks.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

Melanie is fixing the boys sandwiches.

CUT TO:

INT. BUILDING LUNCH ROOM DAY

Rick and the woman sit eating lunch.

WOMAN
You're really funny... and kinda cute.

RICK
Maybe we should...

WOMAN
Go out sometime? I'd like that. When?
RICK
I don't know... maybe...

WOMAN
Tonight?

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME
Melanie on the phone.

MELANIE
No problem.

The boys run to her as she hangs up.

KRIS
Who was that?

MELANIE
That was your daddy.

PHILLIP
I love daddy.

50.

KRIS
Is he coming home?

MELANIE
No, he's going to be late. He has a date.

They all snicker.

MELANIE
So, I guess you have to deal with me a little while longer.

BOYS IN UNISON
Yeah!
Melanie chases them in circles. They fall in a pile and wrestle.

CUT TO:

INT. LUIGIS - NIGHT
Rick picks at his food. The woman has barely touched her plate.

WOMAN
You're a single father? That's wonderful. So many men refuse to accept any responsibility for their kids. So, how many do you have?

RICK
Um... three.

WOMAN
That's amazing. I'm sure they're just angels.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

The boys jump on a bed.

CUT TO:

INT. LUIGIS - NIGHT

Rick appears completely devoid of the conversation.

WOMAN
My sister has three. She said when the second one was born it doubled the work. She didn't realize the third would double the work load would again. And to think you do it all by yourself.

RICK
Um... kinda.

WOMAN
You're a terrific man. Did I tell you I love kids? They love me. It just comes so instinctively even though I've never had kids myself. I get lots of practice with my nephews though. So, when can I meet your boys?

CUT TO:
INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME - RICK'S DAYDREAM

Kris stands with arms crossed and scowling. His posse of brothers does the same. Kris POV: Looking up at the Woman crouching down to him and smiling.

**KRIS**

You're not my mom.

**PHILLIP AND NICKY**

Yeah!

CUT TO:

INT. LUIGIS - NIGHT

Rick motions for the check.

**RICK**

You can't.

CUT TO:

EXT. LUIGIS - NIGHT

Rick flees on foot. The Woman gives chase.

CUT TO:

52.

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

Melanie tucks the boys into bed.

CUT TO:

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Rick sits with WOMAN 2.

**WOMAN 2**

A guy like you is so hard to find. I think I love you and I think you need to love me too.

CUT TO:

EXT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Rick jumps into his car, locking the doors behind him. Woman
tugs at the door handle as he drives away.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

Melanie pours two glasses of wine.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOMAN 3'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Rick and WOMAN 3 are engaged in a deep kiss. They fumble through the door.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

Melanie lights a candle on a table set for two.

CUT TO:

INT. WOMAN 3'S HOUSE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rick and woman 3 tear off each other's clothes.

CUT TO:

53.

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

Melanie finishes eating alone and blows out the candle.

CUT TO:

INT. WOMAN 3'S HOUSE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Woman 3 rests her head on Rick's shoulder.

RICK

That was incredible.

WOMAN 3

Yeah.

RICK

I know I haven't known you very long, but I there's something I need to say...
EXT. WOMAN 3'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The woman, wrapped in sheets, runs down the street. Rick gets to the door and catches himself in the jamb.

RICK
(Calling out)
Was it something I said?

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

Melanie washes the dishes.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Rick drives home in silence.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

Melanie's asleep on the sofa. Rick kneels beside her. He lightly runs his fingers through her hair stirring her slumber.

54.

MELANIE
Did you have a good time?

RICK
Yeah, it was good... kinda okay... pretty much sucked.

MELANIE
What happened?

RICK
Why can't I find a woman like you?

MELANIE
You're trying too hard.

RICK
I feel bad for the boys. They don't have a "mom". She'll always be their mother, but she'll never be their mom.

**MELANIE**

Quit trying so hard. You're forcing issues that can't be forced. Relax. Everything happens when and how it's suppose to. It's about spirit and finding the will to love again, for you and the boys.

Melanie sits up and puts on her shoes.

**RICK**

You want to stay and...

**MELANIE**

I'm going to get...

**RICK**

Going?

**MELANIE**

Yeah.

**RICK**

You sure?

**MELANIE**

Positive.

A beat as they study each other's eyes.

55.

**NICHOLAS (OS)**

Daddy, I have to potty.

**MELANIE**

I'll see you tomorrow.

**RICK**

Ok.

Melanie EXITS. Rick turns to tend to Nicky. He stops for a moment then heads to the kitchen for a handful of Cheerios.

**CUT TO:**
INT. BATH ROOM
Rick is on his hands and knees wiping the floor around the toilet.

NICHOLAS
Nicky almost do'd it.

RICK
Almost, baby boy. Almost.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET - AKRON OHIO - DAY
Rick walks against the flow of the CROWD. As if in a dream, everywhere he looks he sees Melanie. Every woman has her face.

CUT TO:

INT. NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT
The lights STROBE in rhythm to the music. Rick sits with John and his wife CARRIE SILVERSTEIN.

CARRIE
Finally had to grow up?

RICK
Yeah, I...

JOHN
You've got direction.

RICK
I suppose. I don't know if you'd call it direction, but there's a definite sense of purpose.

CARRIE
Good for you.

RICK
Yeah, but is it good for the kids?

JOHN
Do the kids have direction?
CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME - RICK'S DAYDREAM

Kris is in pushup position. Rick is dressed as a Gunnery Sargent.

RICK
Only two kinds of people make it in this world, boy; Those that are smart and those that are strong. If you don't want to be smart and do your homework then you can be strong and do pushups.

CUT TO:

INT. NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

Rick stirs to reality.

RICK
I'm probably not as demanding of them as I should be.

JOHN
You have to instill a sense of direction at a very early age.

CUT TO:

INT. RICK'S PARENT'S HOME - RICK'S DAYDREAM

The entire family sits eating dinner. Rick's Mother looks to Phillip.

MOTHER
So, Phillip what do you want to be when you grow up?

Phillip studies Rick for a moment. Rick nods an approval.

PHILLIP
Daddy says I can do three things when I grow up.

MOTHER
And what are those? Phillip takes a deep breath.
PHILLIP
I can go to college and move the hell out of his house. I can join the military and move the hell out of his house, or I can get a job and...

RICK
... move the hell out of my house.

MOTHER
Rick!

CUT TO:

INT. NIGHT CLUB

Rick shakes his head.

RICK
Ya gotta let them be what they're going to be.

JOHN
No, you have to mold them early. If you don't mold them they'll grow up to be Democrats.

RICK
And you do this with your kids?

JOHN
That's not the point, is it, Carrie?

CARRIE
I think Rick is doing a wonderful job.

RICK
It's a struggle, going at it alone, but...

Carrie stands.

CARRIE
Excuse me, gentleman, I need to powder my nose.
Carrie walks off.

JOHN
I can't believe you.

RICK
What?

JOHN
Whining about being single. Married men would kill to be in your situation!

RICK
I'm just saying it's hard.

JOHN
You have your sons to raise without feminine interference. Do you understand the significance of your situation? Do you understand the power in your circumstance?

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

Rick and the boys play baseball with an empty wrapping paper roll and a dirty sock.

CUT TO:

INT. NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

Rick takes a swig of his beer.

JOHN
Men, all over the world, would kill for that kind of power.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

Rick and the boys head out the door with fishing poles in tow.

CUT TO:

59.
INT. NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

John isn't letting this soapbox go.

JOHN
You have the kids and she pays child support... and you sit here and whine about things being hard? Give me a break.

RICK
It does have its advantages, I suppose.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

Rick and the boys sit in front of the TV watching football. Rick has a beer in his hand. The boys drink root beer from beer mugs.

CUT TO:

INT. NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

John realizes the beer bottles are empty.

JOHN
Another?

RICK
Uh...

JOHN
On me.

RICK
Sure.

John heads to the bar. Carrie approaches the table.

RICK
He went to grab a couple beers.

CARRIE
You know Rick, someday some girl is going to realize what a good man you are.

RICK
Carrie, I don't even have the funds to buy my own beer.
CARRIE
Love isn't about money. Love is about truth and selflessness and discovering who you are and who'll be. Someday, someone will find you.

CUT TO:
INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME - NIGHT
Melanie talks on the phone. Rick pulls her from her seat.

MELANIE
I'll call you back.

Melanie fumbles the phone.
A beat as they look into each other's eyes.

MELANIE
What?

Rick pulls her in for a kiss.

MELANIE
What was that for?

RICK
For finding me.

CUT TO:
INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME - RICK'S BEDROOM - MORNING
Rick and Melanie sleep in each other's arms. Nicholas stands at the bed.

NICHOLAS
Have to potty, daddy.

Rick stirs.

RICK
Go potty, buddy.

CUT TO:
INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME - BATH ROOM
Nicholas holds the box of Cheerios.

CUT TO:

61.

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME - RICK'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Rick sits straight up to the sound of Nicky's CRY and RUNNING WATER.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME - BATH ROOM

An empty box of Cheerios on the floor and Nicky ankle deep in water.

CUT TO:

INT. FRANK RYAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Frank sits at his desk.

RICK
I thank you for everything, but it's time to move on.

FRANK
Where are you going? What will you do?

RICK
I don't know, Frank, but I'm worth more than this.

Rick places his paycheck on Frank's desk and EXITS into the hall. The corridors ECHO as Rick walks away.

FRANK (OS)
You'll never make it without me!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. OFFICE BUILDING

Rick is strutting his way into a new job. He's dressed well.

CUT TO:
INT. OFFICE BUILDING - CUBICLE

Rick sits at his new desk arranging a few personal. He leans far back in his chair and clasps his hands behind his head.

CUT TO:

62.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Melanie, Rick and the boys fly a kite on a summer's day.

CUT TO:

INT. PIZZA JOINT

Melanie, Rick and the boys are eating pizza. Tears stream down Phillip's face.

RICK
Phillip, what's wrong?

PHILLIP
Well, I wanted that piece and Kris took that piece, and I really, really wanted that piece.

MELANIE
What's so important about that piece?

KRIS
It's bigger.

Zach grabs the pizza and stuffs it in his mouth. Phillip wails louder. Kris reaches for a pitcher of soda. A tussle ensues.

RICK
Easy on the drinks guys.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

Arriving home Rick grabs an envelope that is taped to the door. Kris bolts through the door and heads to the bathroom. Phillip is crying again.
**MELANIE**

What's wrong, Phillip?

Rick opens the envelope and pulls out a note.

**PHILLIP**

I gotta pee and Kris...

**RICK**

We're not going to fight over the bathroom.

(Calling out)

(MORE)

**63.**

**RICK (cont'd)**

Kris, your brother has to go too.

Share!

Kris mopes back into the room. Phillip sticks his tongue out at Kris. The boys EXIT.

**MELANIE**

What's that?

Rick looks up from his reading.

**RICK**

Huh? Oh, this? Nothing!

Rick balls the note and sticks it in his coat pocket.

**INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME - BATH ROOM**

Phillip and Kris stand side by side over the toilet. A beat as Phillip looks at his brother.

**PHILLIP**

This time mine's bigger.

Kris begins to cry.

**INT. COZY CAFE - DAY**

STEDICAM on face as Rick ENTERS. Rick's POV: Cindy sits at a table in the back. CU. on Rick as he approaches the table.
CINDY (OS)
I'm really glad you could make it.

Dissolve To:

INT. SUMMIT COUNTY JAIL

Rick seats himself at the visitor's window. Can't really discern who sits on which side. He picks up the phone.

RICK
I took off work to be here.

CINDY
Thank you.

RICK
So, what do you want?

64.

CINDY
I want to see your boys.

RICK
I don't think that's a good idea.

CINDY
I'm their mother.

RICK
You forfeited that obligation, remember?

CINDY
That's not fair!

RICK
You abandoned your kids!

CINDY
I did not. I left them in the care of their loving father. There's a difference.

RICK
Is there?

CINDY
I just want to see the boys.

RICK
You think they even know who you are?

CINDY
I'm their mother.

RICK
You keep saying that.

CINDY
I know things can never go back to the way they were before.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - RICK'S FLASHBACK

Rows of MEN are lined up outside the bedroom door. A MAN buttons his shirt and EXITS.

MAN
Next...

Cindy lies in bed smoking a cigarette.

CUT TO:

INT. SUMMIT COUNTY JAIL

Cindy appears impatient.

CINDY
Rick? Rick? Rick?

RICK
Huh?

CINDY
Let's keep the attorneys out of this and settle things like civil adults.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

Rick watches Melanie and the boys play NINTENDO.
RICK
Hi guys.

BOYS IN UNISON
Daddy! The boys run to their father. Melanie moves to Rick and gives him a kiss.

MELANIE
This is a surprise. Leave work to spend the day with us?

RICK
Come on guys. Someone is here to see you.

MELANIE
Rick?
(A beat)
Rick?

Rick leads the boys out the door. From Melanie's POV:
Looking out a window as Rick loads the boys into their mother's car.

CUT TO:
66.

EXT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME - DAY
Cindy closes the car door.

CINDY
Thank you.

RICK
Three hours.

CINDY
They'll be here.

Rick's POV: He watches Cindy back out and leave.

CUT TO:
INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME
Melanie packs her things.

RICK
Where are you going.

   MELANIE
Anywhere you're not.

   RICK
What about the boys? What about me?

   MELANIE
I'm all about second chances, but
not when I come in second place.

   RICK
What are you talking about?

   MELANIE
Why was she here? What was that?

   RICK
She's their mother.

   MELANIE
Mother? I've been more of a mother
than she ever was.

   RICK
She's their mother.

   MELANIE
Who willingly walked out of their
lives.

   RICK
She's their mother.

   MELANIE
You keep saying that.

   RICK
You think this is easy? You think
raising these boys is something I
want to do alone? Every day is like
a prison sentence. Every thing I
do, every decision I make is
directly affected by the boundaries
of my responsibility. I have three
children, but I have no me.
Everywhere I go people stare at
EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

Dressed as dirty paupers, Rick and the boys hold tin cups out to the PASSING BY.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

Rick continues.

RICK
They stare at me, and I know what they're thinking...

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

A PEDESTRIAN drops a coin in ricks coffer.

PEDESTRIAN
You poor, poor man. You poor, poor children. How unfortunate to only have your father. How terrible it must be not to know your mother.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

Melanie finishes packing her suitcase.

MELANIE
What about Zach? How noble of you to be the only single parent in the world. How stoic you are... so concerned with the best interests of your children. Too bad. Their best interest is walking out the door.

Melanie EXITs, SLAMMING the door behind her.
EXT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME - DUSK

Against a burning sky, Rick waits in the drive. Cindy arrives. Her hair is strewed. The boys pile out of the car and gather round their mommy. She kneels to their level.

KRIS
When can we see you again?

CINDY
Someday.

PHILLIP
Is someday tomorrow?

CINDY
Someday is someday, baby.

RICK
Give your Mom a hug, guys, then get in the house.

The boys hug their mom and then run to the door. A tear wells in Cindy's eye.

CINDY
I'm sorry.

RICK
For?

CINDY
I thought things had changed.

RICK
But?

CINDY
I am who I am, Rick. I'm not cut out to be a mommy.

69.

RICK
I could have told you that.

CINDY
I had to give it a shot. Rick turns
to walk away.

Rick's POV: Sees the boys looking out the door. Rick turns back around to Cindy.

RICK
At whose expense? Huh, Cindy? At whose expense? Who's going to dry their tears tomorrow when they realize your never coming back? Who's going to rock them to sleep at night when they ask why mommy doesn't love them?

CINDY
You are, and you wouldn't have it any other way.

A furious PULL BACK

CUT TO:

INT. SUMMIT COUNTY JAIL

ZOOM to Cindy standing in front of a door marked SOLITARY. She steps in. The door SLAMS behind her.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME - MORNING

Rick is donned in crisp business attire. He and the boys sit at the breakfast table.

PHILLIP
Is Mel coming today?

RICK
I don't know, buddy.

NICHOLAS
Daddy?

RICK
Yes Nicky?

NICHOLAS
I love Mel.
RICK
She loves you too.

The clock unwinds.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME - MID-DAY

Rick sits on the sofa his remote control in hand. Unkempt, he has a rough growth on his face.

KRIS (OS)
Daddy... Daddy... Dad!

RICK
(Yelling)
Don't you yell! If you have something to say, come here and tell me.

Kris ENTERS.

KRIS
Dad?

RICK
Yeah?

KRIS
Phillip's in the closet

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME - BED ROOM

Rick unlocks the closet door and lets Phillip out.

RICK
What were you doing in there?

PHILLIP
Being Daddy.

RICK
Who locked the door?

KRIS
Wasn't me...
PHILLIP

I did.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

Rick on the sofa. The boys gathered at his feet. He has a heavy growth of facial hair. He shirt is unbuttoned. His shoes have been discarded. He stares blankly forward. The boys lay sleeping at his feet. One by one PEOPLE show up and begin to remove the furnishings. An open door allows SERVICE PROVIDERS to ENTER and disconnect. First the gas, then the telephone. CLOSE UP on a running faucet that slows to a trickle, then a drip, then dry. Rick's Mother and Father ENTER. She sits by her unresponsive son. Father lingers at a distance.

MOTHER
Rick?... Rick?... Rick?

She stuffs a few dollars in his pocket as the CABLE GUY shows up. The reception on the TV turns to snow.

MOTHER
Take care of my babies.

Rick never acknowledges her. She kisses him on the forehead and LEAVES.

INT. RICK'S PARENT'S HOME - BEDROOM

Close in on a bed where Rick's parents lay.

FATHER
What are you giving him money for?

MOTHER
To help him through the hard times. He's a good father, just having a rough go.

FATHER
I've never met a good father that couldn't support his kids.

CUT TO:

72.
INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

A MAN ENTERS to repossess the TV. PEOPLE continue to ENTER the house taking Rick's belongings.

CUT TO:

INT. RICK'S PARENT'S HOME - BEDROOM

CU. on Rick's mom.

FATHER (OS)
You could watch the boys while he works.

MOTHER
I'm too old for that. The better side of life has passed me by. What if they fall? I don't hear like I used to. What if one of them was seriously hurt and I didn't hear their cry? I hate that the only thing I feel competent to do is give them money. I love my son and I love my grandbabies, but how would I live with myself if something happened to those children?

Slowly pulling up and away reveals another cell.

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

A REPRESENTATIVE from the electric company stands in front of Rick.

REPRESENTATIVE
Sir, you're 3 months behind on your electric bill.

Rick reaches in his pocket and pulls the funds his Mother has given him. The Rep. takes the cash.

REPRESENTATIVE (CONT'D)
It's a start, but not nearly enough.
The Rep. EXITS shutting off the lights behind him. The STRIKE of a match, and a candle is lit. In the flicker of the flame Rick has a look of desperation. He holds a gun. Rick's POV: Looking down on his sleeping children.

The HOWL of the wind and the candle is extinguished. A WAIL pierces the darkness and then a GUNSHOT.

CUT TO:

INT. SUMMIT COUNTY JAIL CELL - DAY

A BANG against the bars wakes Rick and the boys.

JAILER
I always knew you were a lifer.

CUT TO:

INT. ADOPTION AGENCY

Rick sits across the desk from an ADOPTION AGENT.

ADOPTION AGENT
Because of their age it may take awhile. We'll start them out in foster care, but eventually they'll all be placed in loving, nurturing environments.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROSS PARK - DAYDREAM

The boys are loaded in a wagon and pulled away from Rick by an unrecognizable COUPLE. A small, hand-painted, sign that hangs from the back of the wagon reads: BON VOYAGE. From Rick's POV: The boys move further and further away. Kris tries to christen the wagon with plastic bottled water. From the boy's POV: Their waving father fades in the distance.

CUT TO:

INT. ADOPTION AGENCY

Rick snaps back from his daydream.

RICK
They'll be together though, right?
ADOPTION AGENT
Mr. Stevens, I wish I could make that promise, but the odds of an adoptive family willing to take them all is astronomical.

Rick stands.

74.

RICK
Come on guys we're out of here.

ADOPTION AGENT
Mr. Stevens?

RICK
I'm sorry, I made a mistake.

CUT TO:

EXT. SUMMIT COUNTY JAIL - COURTYARD - DAY

Rick sits at the picnic table reading a book. The boys are off playing. Kris falls. He grabs his knee and cries. Rick drops his book and runs to the child. GUARDS on duty pay no attention. Rick reaches the child. The injury appears rather serious.

RICK
(Calling out.)
Can I get some help here.

His calls go unanswered.

A tear forms in his eyes. Months of frustration boil in his face. A CONVICT passing by kneels by Rick.

RICK
Can you help me?

CONVICT
Can you help him?

RICK
I don't know.

CONVICT
What does he need?
RICK
I don't know.

CONVICT
He needs a father, not a book reading baby-sitter.

RICK
(In a hushed rage)
I can't fucking do this.

CONVICT
Yes you can.

The convict runs his hand over the child's leg and everything appears healed.

CONVICT
Use your mind and your heart. It's different than it ever should have been... but different isn't wrong.

RICK
But I...

CONVICT
Use what you have. There is a vein of wealth inside you just waiting to be mined. Think differently than you have ever thought before. Worker harder than you ever thought you could. Love these children like they've never been loved before.

RICK
How?

CONVICT
The answer lies within. Quit worrying about how these misguided events have torn your life apart. Quit dwelling on all of your misgivings. Look around you. You're not alone. But you, and you alone, will make the difference.

CUT TO:
INT. SUMMIT COUNTY JAIL - HALL

Rick notices his cell door is unlocked. He steps into the corridor. Rick's POV: Walking past cells he sees people he knows. His mother and father appear very old. Melanie is at Mrs. Nelson's house. Zach clings to her leg. Carrie's angry. John talks away his phone.

FADE TO:

INT. WELFARE OFFICE

Rick and the boys wait for their caseworker. A pregnant WOMAN and her TWELVE CHILDREN sit a few seats away. Her face and clothes are as dirty as her children's. Rick looks at his watch, and then at her, and then back to his watch. He slips the watch off his wrist and hands it to her.

76.

RICK

It's not worth a lot, maybe a few hundred bucks, but it might keep you in soap for a year.

A CASEWORKER comes to Rick.

CASE WORKER

Mr. Stevens, I can see you now.

Rick and the Pregnant Woman lock eyes.

PREGNANT WOMAN

I ain't some charity case. I know what you think when you look at me. You think; Look at that poor, poor woman. Look at those poor, poor children. How unfortunate it must be that they only have a mother. How terrible it must be not to know their father.

CASE WORKER

Mr. Stevens?

RICK

I didn't mean it like that?
PREGNANT WOMAN
No one ever does.

CASE WORKER
Mr. Stevens?

Rick and the woman continue their stare.

CASE WORKER
Mr. Stevens? I can see you now.

RICK
I'm sorry, I'm going to have to reschedule.

CASE WORKER
Excuse me?

RICK
Responsibility calls.

CUT TO:

77.

INT. SUMMIT COUNTY JAIL CELL

Rick is reading from a large textbook and jotting in a notebook. He wears his glasses. His boys come to him. Taking a break from studying he lays his glasses on the table. The boys pile into his lap. Nicky holds a storybook.

NICHOLAS
Please daddy? Please? Rick opens the book so all can see.

RICK
Once upon a time...

The cell once again transforms into a small suburban house. One by one, things lost, are replaced.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

Rick is eating pizza and looking through the want ads. A few ads are already circled.

NICHOLAS
Daddy, I'm hungry.
Nicholas pulls his shirt up to reveal his stomach.

NICHOLAS
It's very, very empty.

Rick hands him what's left of his pizza. He takes a swig of beer.

PHILLIP
Daddy, I'm thirsty.
Rick takes a long look at his beer.

RICK
Get your coats on.

KRIS
We're leaving guys.

CUT TO:

INT. GROCERY STORE

Rick has a cart full of groceries at the check out line. An OLDER WOMAN stands behind him. The CLERK rings up a final total.

CLERK
Thirty-two hundred and fifty-six dollars.

Rick looks dumb founded.

OLDER WOMAN
Think it's bad now? Wait til they're teenagers.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

Rick loads boxes of cereal, Kool-Aid, Spaghetti-O's, loaves of bread and numerous other things into a trough. The boys dance in excitement.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET - AKRON OHIO - DAY
Rick and his mother walk along.

**RICK**
Mom, I have an idea, but I need your help.

Rick's mom reaches in her purse.

**RICK**
Put your checkbook away. What I need you can't buy.

**MOTHER**
What do you need.

**RICK**
For you to believe in me.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME - DAY**

Rick, his parents and the boys pound a sign into the front yard that reads: "MOW 'EM AND GROW 'EM LAWN CARE 555-1616"

**CUT TO:**

**INT. STORE**

Cindy is pushing a grocery cart when Melanie and her new BOYFRIEND pass. Melanie stops in her tracks, turns around and after a brief beat, approaches Cindy.

**MELANIE**
I know you.

**CINDY**
Excuse me?

**MELANIE**
Rick's ex-wife?

**CINDY**
And you are?

**MELANIE**
Can I ask you a question? What is
Phillip's favorite color?

CINDY
Huh?

MELANIE
Blue. His favorite color is blue.
How many teeth has Kris lost?

CINDY
I don't know. Why?

MELANIE
Four. Two on top and two on bottom. He got a quarter for the first one, fifty cents for the next two and he parlayed the last into an even dollar. Nicholas cries at night because he thinks the house is filled with ghosts. Kiss him once on the forehead, once on the cheek and sing The Cradle Will Rock and he'll sleep the whole night through. Kris' favorite subject is math. He loves to read and write, but he doesn't do so well in social studies. He knows how to ride a bike. Why? Because I taught him. Phillip wants to learn but he's always afraid he'll fall. Nicky just likes to Flintstone his tricycle. Phillip's favorite cartoon is Tunenami.

(MORE)

80.

MELANIE (cont'd)
He's afraid of the dark and cries himself to sleep at night saying his mommy doesn't love him.

CINDY
What's your point?

MELANIE
I'm more their mom than you'll ever be.

CINDY
So, why are you here with slick and not with "your" kids?
A beat.

MELANIE
Things change.

CINDY
Yeah... yeah they do. Now if you'll excuse me I need to find the asparagus.
(A beat)
I couldn't do it, ya know?

Melanie turns back around.

MELANIE
Do what?

CINDY
I always thought I wanted to be a parent, and I was really good at being pregnant, but I sucked as a mom. I know that now. I don't have what it takes.

MELANIE
I don't think I've ever felt as much pity for anyone as I do for you right now.

CINDY
Take care of my boys... all of them.

CUT TO:

81.

EXT. GORGE PARK - DAY

Rick and the boys stand by the river looking up a huge embankment. There appears to be no permanent trail. Looking up, scattered PEOPLE sit at different levels on the climb.

RICK
Well, guys, I guess this is it.

KRIS
We can do it daddy.

RICK
Yes we can.
Rick stretches out. The boys jog in place. Rick cracks his neck. The boys crack their knuckles. In SLOW MOTION they begin their ascent, running wildly up the incline. Rick falls flat on his face. The boys all trip over him, leaving them all in a pile. Rick bounces up and dusts himself off. The boys do the same and away they go.

CUT TO:

EXT. A LARGE ESTATE IN BATH - DAY

Rick and the boys are on their hands and knees with hand trimmers snipping away at the lawn.

CUT TO:

EXT. GORGE PARK - DAY

Rick carries the boys. Phillip is draped across his shoulder. Nicholas hangs around his neck. Kris clings to Rick's leg and is dragged with each step. They pass a weary CLIMBER who has taken a moment to catch his breath.

CLIMBER
You can do it.

RICK
Yes we can.

CUT TO:

EXT. A LARGE ESTATE IN BATH - DAY

Rick is using a push mower on this huge estate. Nicholas follows behind with a bubble mower.

CUT TO:

82.

EXT. GORGE PARK - DAY

The boys are dragging Rick up the hill.

CUT TO:

EXT. A LARGE ESTATE IN BATH - DAY
Rick and the boys are crowded onto the seat of a large commercial mower.

CUT TO:

EXT. GORGE PARK – DAY

The boys’ do a victory dance at the top of the hill, their arms extended far above their heads. Kris stops for a moment and then tugs at his father’s shirt. Rick tries to ignore the child but then stops mid-dance.

RICK
What is it, Kris?

Kris points up.

KRISS
Look daddy.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

Rick is looking through college literature, insurance applications, and YMCA programs.

CUT TO:

EXT. GORGE PARK – DAY

Rick holds a college pamphlet. Rick's POV: He looks at the pamphlet then up to see they aren't even close to the top. They have just reached a plateau along the way.

PHILLIP
We can do it.

RICK
(Through a weary voice.)
Yes we can.

CUT TO:

83.

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME – LIVING ROOM

Rick wears his painter's pants. The boys are armed with an
assortment of paintbrushes. Paint cans and ladders adorn the room.

CUT TO:

EXT. GORGE PARK - DAY

Rick and the boys continue their climb. The breaths are heavy, but they march steadily upward.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE CHAPEL - DAY

Rick and the boys, hand in hand, walk toward the church.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME - LIVING ROOM

Rick stands back and looks at one finished wall. Kris mimics his father, backing up to have a look for himself.

RICK

Kris!

Too late, Kris has tripped over a can of paint. As he sits on his butt a look of fear crosses his face, a tear forms in his eye. Rick takes his paintbrush and dots Kris on the nose.

KRS

Hey!

Phillip and Nicholas are quickly engaged in painting each other and a full-blown paint war ensues.

CUT TO:

INT. THE CHAPEL

A CHOIR of voices sings.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Melanie and her boyfriend sit in silence. A beat.

BOYFRIEND

What's wrong? What did I do?
MELANIE
Not you, it's me.

BOYFRIEND
What then?

Melanie looks her boyfriend square in the eyes, runs her hand down his cheek.

MELANIE
I'm sorry.

Melanie EXITS the car and runs down the street.

CUT TO:

EXT. GORGE PARK - DAY

Rick and the boys stop to rest. Kris throws a rock while Rick is looking away. Rick looks up to find Phillip picking up a stone.

RICK
Put the stone down.

PHILLIP
But...

RICK
No buts: Put the stone down.

Off Screen SFX: A huge thud and someone rolling down the hill.

RICK
I knew this was a hard climb, but...

A RESTING CLIMBER appears.

RESTING CLIMBER
Long way up.

RICK
Yeah.

RESTING CLIMBER
Long way down for that matter.
RICK

That too.

A beat.

85.

RICK

So, what's your point.

RESTING CLIMBER

No point, just an observation. Drink?

The climber holds out a canteen.

RICK

I'm okay.

RESTING CLIMBER

For the boys.

NICHOLAS

Daddy, I'm thirsty. Rick studies the climber for a moment.

RICK

Go ahead.

The climber hands the boys the canteen.

RESTING CLIMBER

You know, if you stop here, halfway between a long way up and a long way down you really haven't accomplished much, have you?

RICK

We're not stopping. We're just resting.

RESTING CLIMBER

That's what I said, fourteen years ago. Rick looks toward the top.

RICK

We can do this.

RESTING CLIMBER

Yes you can.
A reinvigorated Rick hops to his feet.

**RICK**
We can do this!

**BOYS IN UNISON**
Yes we can!

CUT TO:

86.

**INT. THEATER**

Rick is back on the stage. The audience is full.

**PROSECUTOR**
What is so important Mr. Stevens that you would burden this court with convening today?

**RICK**
I just needed clarification.

**PROSECUTOR**
On what, Mr. Stevens? On what?

**RICK**
I know if I have to, I can do this alone, but do I have to do this alone? A hushed MURMUR rises in the audience. The Judge RAPS his gavel on the bench.

**JUDGE**
Order in this court! A beat as things quiet down.

**JUDGE (CONT'D)**
Your inquiry, Mr. Stevens? Is it in the best interest of the children or in the best interest of you?

**RICK**
I don't know.

**PROSECUTOR**
He doesn't know. He just doesn't know.

**RICK**
I don't know.

JUDGE
Then this court sees no reason to amend the original verdict. The order stands.

RICK
But...

PROSECUTOR
Tell it to someone who cares, Mr. Stevens.

RICK
I have. I have laid my heart out on the line time and time again, only to walk away empty handed. This love, this caring, this sharing of life, it's a sentence and my heart has been condemned. It doesn't matter who I've told, what's in my heart is never quite enough. The people I have cared for most have shunned me in life and in love. Unanswered phone calls... Unnoticed displays of affection... A rose that withers on the doorstep... No matter what I do, it's never enough. Just once, just one fucking time, I want to be enough.

PROSECUTOR
Your only condemnation is self-pity. You have people that care all around you, but you're too blind to see them. If you don't pull yourself together soon, my friend, they soon will all be gone.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARK - DAY

In B&W SLO-MO: Rick stands watching his sons play. The wind blows the leaves of a tree. The boys run further and further out until they are out of sight. Rick calls out to them. Slowly, across the field, three young adults return. Rick is
now an old man, hunched over and aged with wrinkles. The three young men walk beside their elderly father, supporting him with each step.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. MELANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT**

Rick is holding flowers. The boys have an assortment of "instruments" to add a serenade. The music is a mishmash of odd notes that could only be construed as music to a parent's ear. Melanie stands on the front porch, her arms crossed.

**MELANIE**

What do you want?

**RICK**

I'm a proud man, sometimes foolish.

**MELANIE**

Go on.

**RICK**

I have a long way to go before I could ever be the man you need me to be.

**MELANIE**

And?

**RICK**

And I got confused between what I should have done and what I thought was right.

**MELANIE**

Yes you did.

**RICK**

I put you on a pedestal and then I knocked you down. It wasn't fair.

**MELANIE**

Life's not fair Rick.

**RICK**

You were more a mother to my boys than they have ever known. You were more a woman to me than I have ever
deserved.

MELANIE
You're right.

RICK
You're not going to make this easy, are you?

MELANIE
Cut the bullshit, Rick.

Rick wraps his arms around Melanie and pulls her in for a hug.

RICK
(In Mel's ear)
I can live my life alone. I can raise my kids alone. I can walk this path alone. I'd much rather do it with you.

Grabbing him by the collar she's torn. Melanie shakes her head.

MELANIE
I can't.

She turns to go inside.

RICK
Can't?

MELANIE
(Turning back around.) I won't.

RICK
I shouldn't have come here.

MELANIE
No, you shouldn't have.

Rick turns to leave.

MELANIE
You just don't get it do you?

RICK
Get what?

MELANIE
You're here for you, you selfish prick.

CUT TO:

INT. MELANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT - DAYDREAM

Melanie lays in bed covering her ears.

MELANIE (VO)
Days go by when I lose me. There are nights when I lay in bed and I can hear Zach through the walls. He's crying out for me, and I lay there motionless, wishing I was anyone but me, anywhere but here, thinking that somewhere, sometime, there has to be room for me. But that someday never seems to come. You're dangerous. Loving you means I lose me. And I will never lose let that happen.

(MORE)

90.

MELANIE (VO) (cont'd)
So, don't come knocking on my door, asking for my heart, if you don't have room for me.

Melanie ENTERS the house closing the door behind her. Rick tosses the flowers on the porch, turns and walks away. The boys follow behind.

KRIS
I could have looked sad.

PHILLIP
I can look sad too.

KRIS
But I look sadder.

NICHOLAS
I sad.

Nicholas starts to cry.

CUT TO:
EXT. GORGE PARK - DAY

Rick falls flat on his face. He lays there motionless.

PHILLIP
Don't quit, daddy.

Rick pounds the ground, pulls himself up, dusts himself off and with a determined look starts back up the hill.

Kris
Daddy doesn't quit.

CUT TO:

INT. NIGHT CLUB

Rick and John sit at the bar.

John
You love her?

Rick
I think so... I don't know.

John
If you think you're in love you are.

91.

Rick
I suppose I am.

John
Does your heart skip a beat when she walks by?

Rick
She's my best friend... or was.

John
Does your heart skip a beat when she walks by?

Rick
Yes.

John
Do your palms sweat when you think about her?
RICK
Yes.

JOHN
Does she inspire you?

RICK
With music and poetry.

JOHN
And is there passion?

RICK
There's fire.

JOHN
And have you ever told her this?

RICK
She knows.

JOHN
Have you ever told her this?

RICK
No.

JOHN
Don't you think you should?

RICK
It only confuses things.

92.

JOHN
Loving your best friend confuses things? I can't think of a love more lucid. Rick stands to leave.

JOHN
You know I'll never forgive you for this, don't you? You had the power and the dream at your fingertips and you're giving it all away.

RICK
You didn't marry your best friend?

JOHN
No.
RICK
I thought you had things all planned out.

JOHN
Affairs of the heart and those of the mind are two different things.

RICK
It's not too late, you know?

With a shrug John drops to one knee in front of Rick.

RICK
Go Home, John. Go home and talk to your best friend the way you talk to me.

INT. PARENT'S HOUSE
Rick BURSTS through the front door. His mother appears aghast.

RICK
I need you to watch the boys.

MOTHER
But you're father...

Rick's Father ENTERS.

FATHER
Woman, enough.

MOTHER
But...

FATHER
No more excuses. It's time to live life and enjoy our grandkids.
(To Rick)
Go. The boys will be fine.

MOTHER
Can't we just give him money to pay for a baby-sitter?

Rick BOLTS out of the house.
CUT TO:

INT. RESTAURANT
Melanie is working as a waitress. She's pouring coffee when she sees Rick.

MELANIE
(To herself)
Oh shit.

CUSTOMER
Whoa!

The cup has nearly reached the brim.

MELANIE
Sorry.

CUSTOMER
Pay attention, would ya?

Rick reaches her.

MELANIE
What do you want?

RICK
To talk.

MELANIE
I'm working.

RICK
I know.

Melanie is at the next customer who early awaits a refill, but she doesn't pour.

MELANIE
So, where are the boys?

RICK
They're at my parents.

MELANIE
What? Not going to use them to try to persuade me with guilt?
RICK
Is that what you thought?

MELANIE
I have a son of my own. I know when people are using their kids.

CUSTOMER 2
Ma'am.

RICK
(To Customer 2)
Excuse us for a moment okay?

CUSTOMER 2
I'd just like some coffee.

Melanie walks off. Rick grabs a cup from a recently vacated table and sets it in front of the patron.

CUSTOMER 2
(Calling out.)
Excuse me, Miss?

RICK
What is your problem?

CUSTOMER 2
Cold.

RICK
What?

CUSTOMER 2
The coffee, it's cold.

Rick picks up the cup, pulls a lighter from his pocket and runs it several times under the mug.

RICK
(Setting the cup back down.)
Quit your bitching.

Rick moves to Melanie.

MELANIE
I can't believe you came here.
RICK
I can't believe you're a waitress.

MELANIE
Beats chasing around after snot
nosed brats all day.

RICK
I thought you liked my kids.

MELANIE
I was talking about you.
Melanie moves on. Rick gives chase. He catches her and spins
her around spilling coffee all over the floor.

RICK
I deserved that.

MELANIE
So, what do the kids need? A
babysitter? A surrogate mom?

RICK
This isn't about the kids.

MELANIE
Then what's it about?

RICK
It's about me, the selfish prick.

MELANIE
About you?

RICK
Hear me out, okay?

MELANIE
(Looking at her watch.)
You have 15 seconds.

RICK
Okay, okay.

MELANIE
Ten.

RICK
Melanie, there is a grace about you
that reminds me how clumsy I am.
There is an honesty about you that
reminds me how deceitful I can be.
There is a beauty in your eyes that
reminds me how ugly I've become.
There is a kindness in your voice
that contradicts my coarseness.
There is a glow around you that
illuminates my dullness. There is
spirit in you that challenges my
laziness, but most of all, there is
a woman in you, that sparks my
desire, a desire to be graceful and
honest and beautiful and kind. A
desire to be better than I am or
ever thought I could be.

MELANIE
Go on.

RICK
I think my ten seconds are up.

MELANIE
Who's counting?

CUSTOMER 2
Miss... My coffee?

Melanie sets the coffee on a nearby table.

MELANIE
Get it yourself.

RICK
I love you.

MELANIE
I don't think I heard you.

RICK
If I give you my heart will you
promise to treat it softly? Kiss it
when it hurts? Put it in a box and
know that it belongs to you?

MELANIE
That's not what you said.

RICK
I said I love you.
MELANIE
As brutal as that can be?

RICK
I love you. I love you, I love you, I love you.

MELANIE
I kind of like you too.

CUT TO:

EXT. GORGE PARK - DAY

Rick comes to another plateau and finds Melanie waiting for him.

MELANIE
I never thought you'd make it.

RICK
Been waiting long?

MELANIE
I never thought you'd find me.

RICK
I had to find me first. I hope you plan on walking, cause I'm not sure I can carry you.

MELANIE
So, how do we do this? The two begin the ascent together.

RICK
One step at a time?

MELANIE
Side by side?

RICK
Maybe you could carry me?

Rick jumps in Melanie's arms. They tumble to the ground under his weight.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME
Rick packs his things in boxes. A knock at the door and the room morphs back into the cell.

INT. SUMMIT COUNTY JAIL - CELL

Rick turns around to see the jailer standing at the door.

JAILER
Getting out of here, huh?

RICK
It's time to move on.

JAILER
If you leave don't ever come back.

RICK
Not even...

JAILER
Not even on a visit. You're a very ugly man. I'd hate to explain to the other guards why you'd come to visit me.

CUT TO:

INT. RICK'S PARENT'S HOME

Rick's Mom and the boys are playing.

KRIS
Grandma?

MOTHER
Yes, Kris?

KRIS
Grandma I love you.

PHILLIP
I love her more.

NICHOLAS
I love her the whole universe.

MOTHER
I love you all the whole universe
plus one.

CUT TO:

INT. THEATER

Rick and Melanie walk across the stage.

MELANIE
So, this is where it all happened.

RICK
It's funny, the tricks the mind can play on you... but the Judge, he sat right over there... and the jury sat right there... and the audience was filled with all these people who didn't really give a shit about me.

MELANIE
A bunch of innocent bystanders?

RICK
And they all sat passing judgement on me, not knowing the situation, just staring over their schoolmarm spectacles and pointing their crooked fingers.

MELANIE
All the world's a stage.

RICK
Always casting dispersions.

Rick walks off leaving Melanie at center stage. She looks around. The faint echo of a Judge's gavel can be heard in the distance.

JUDGE (OS)
Guilty as charged.

MELANIE
Did you hear that?

RICK
Hear what?
MELANIE
Nothing... nothing at all.

CUT TO:

INT. CANAL PARK - DAY

PAN reveals: Rick, Melanie, the boys, and John sit watching a ball game.

100.

JOHN
The secret of life, Melanie, is to always pay attention...

A pregnant Carrie returns to her seat carrying a box of hotdogs and drinks.

JOHN
... always be prepared for what's right around the corner. The CRACK of the bat.

RICK
Duck!

JOHN
Huh?

John's POV: A foul ball is screaming in his direction.

FADE TO BLACK.