FADE IN:

CREDITS OVER PHOTOS IN AN ALBUM

The photos include a sepia-tone portrait of an Italian immigrant family... a b&w snapshot of ROBERTA, a nine-year-old girl playing violin in front of a refrigerator...

...Roberta and her dashing Italian father, hand-carving a wooden music stand... a b&w snapshot of Roberta in a communion dress... Roberta at 15, playing violin in front of the refrigerator, eyes on the music stand...

...a color photo of two cute blonde little boys building a sandcastle on a beach... a color photo of a groom in a naval uniform and his pretty bride, (Roberta at 25), her hand over his as they cut their wedding cake with a sword...

...a color photo of Roberta and her husband Greek dancing with another couple at an outdoor taverna. Roberta's and the other man's sexy wife are exchanging a slight smile...

HOLD ON THIS LAST PHOTO as we now see the ALBUM open on floor of a bedroom, as if it's been tossed. We are:
INT. GUASPARI HOUSEHOLD, ROME, N. Y. - BEDROOM - DAY

(1988)

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Wake up, Roberta!

We hear the sound of KNOCKING as the CAMERA PANS a small, darkened guest room. A few streaks of daylight filter through Venetian blinds.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Come on, Bert -- get out of bed!

The CAMERA finds a WOMAN lying face down on a twin bed, thick wavy hair sprawled across her shoulders.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Please, Bert -- you need to get out of that bed.

The KNOCKING continues, and she puts the pillow over the top of her head.

END CREDITS

INT. GUASPARI BEDROOM - DAY

The WOMAN -- ROBERTA GUASPARI-DEMETRAS (38) -- retrieves the photo album from the floor, looks at a photo and removes it. She's a beautiful woman with large, expressive eyes, but right now she looks like hell. She stares at the photo it's the two couples dancing. A quick glimpse of hurt face, then her jaw tightens and she rips the picture in half. There's muffled talking outside the door, and then two young boys' voices.

BOY'S VOICE (O.S.)
Can you come out now, Mommy? Please?
She puts the half with her and her husband on the dresser, then tears the woman off the other half and rips her pieces.

**BOY #2 (O.S.)**
Mommy, Nick broke my crayon!

**BOY #1 (O.S.)**
Well, Lexi hit me and he almost broke... he almost broke my ear!

O.S. arguing "I DID NOT!" "YES YOU DID!" "LIAR!" etc.

As if that one action siphoned all her energy, Roberta returns to bed, gets into fetal position, and stares at a point beyond the wall, ignoring the O.S. voices.

**WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)**
Hear that? Your boys need you.

**EXT. GUASPARI HOUSE - DOORWAY - DAY**

**ASSUNTA GUASPARI (58)**, Roberta's slender, tired Italian-American mother, stands in the doorway of a well-tended working-class home, addressing a young NAVAL OFFICER who holds a lengthy delivery inventory. It's a gray day with ominous storm clouds. Late 70's CARS are parked on the street.

**ASSUNTA**
But I have no room for this!

**OFFICER**
I'm sorry, M'am. We have orders to deliver these.

Assunta looks beyond the man, dismayed.

**HER POV**
Large wooden CRATES cover her front lawn, and TWO MOVERS plant down another. They hurry back to the TRUCK,
the next crate too quickly this time. It slips from hands, CRASHES to the ground and splinters open.

VIOLIN CASES spill out. The crate looks like it holds a lot more.

BACK TO SCENE

Instantly a second-story window is flung open, and sticks her head out, a hundred times more energized we've seen her so far.

ROBERTA
Watch it, you idiots! Be careful with those!

The men scramble to pick them up. Assunta looks at all the violins, then up at Roberta.

ASSUNTA
Why so many?

Roberta disappears inside and slams the window shut.

INT. GUASPARI LIVING ROOM - DAY

The living room is filled with boxes shipped from Greece, middle also climb in

labelled by the U.S. NAVY. And on the floor, in the middle of the boxes, are FIFTY VIOLIN CASES of various sizes, with Greek and U.S. NAVY labels. NICK (7) and LEXI (5) over the boxes as if they were giant blocks.

NICK (calling)
Mommy, which box has our toys?

INT. GUASPARI HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

ROBERTA'S on the phone, yelling at someone. She's still in the same ratty nightgown.

ROBERTA
Look, I know he's there, so quit lying to me!... Then check under Lana Holden -- Mrs. Lana Holden... Fine. Just tell Lieutenant Demetras that his wife called and --

ASSUNTA grabs the phone from her hand and hangs it up.

**ROBERTA**

Ma!

**ASSUNTA**

No. I want you to listen to me. You can't keep doing this to yourself -- or to the boys. They need their mother now. You're a beautiful, talented woman and you have your whole life ahead of you.

**ROBERTA**

If I'm so beautiful and talented, why did Charles leave me?

**ASSUNTA**

Because Charles is a big jerk.

(beat)

Now get dressed.

She exits, leaving Roberta to mull over her words.

**INT. GUASPARI KITCHEN - DAY**

Coffee is brewing and homemade cinnamon rolls are cooling on a rack. We recognize the kitchen from the home movie footage. As Assunta clears the boys' breakfast dishes from the table, Roberta enters. She's dressed, but hasn't put on makeup or done much with her hair. It's a start.

**ROBERTA**

You really think Charles is a jerk?

**ASSUNTA**

From the day you married him.

**ROBERTA**

Why didn't you say something?

**ASSUNTA**
Since when do you listen to me?

Roberta half-smiles, pours herself some coffee, then sits down at the table.

**ROBERTA**

(sighs, then)

What am I gonna do?

**ASSUNTA**

First, you eat breakfast. Second, you go out and get a job -- any job. Your boys, god-bless-em, are good eaters -- but I can't afford it.

**ROBERTA**

Mama, he's gonna get tired of her --

you'll see.

Assunta's face shows she's doubtful about this.

**ASSUNTA**

Well in the meantime, get a job.

**INT. DEPARTMENT STORE - GIFT WRAP COUNTER - ROME, N.Y.**

Roberta is behind the counter, meticulously wrapping a present with ribbons, bows and stickers. At one point she even unties a ribbon and redoes it because it's not perfect. She looks pretty, but she's dressed conservatively, like a navy housewife. There's only one other clerk wrapping gifts and a long line of impatient customers. A male SUPERVISOR appears behind Roberta.

**SUPERVISOR**

Just wrap. You're not Picasso.

He exits, and Roberta quickly tries to finish her task.

**MALE VOICE (O.S.)**

Picasso would probably put the bows on the back of the box.

Roberta looks up to find BRIAN TURNER (40), a handsome,
guy with longish hair and a beat-up leather jacket.

ROBERTA
Brian Turner?

BRIAN
Hello, Roberta.

ROBERTA
I thought you moved away.

BRIAN
I did. I'm in town for my Mom's birthday.

He holds out his hand. Roberta misunderstands the gesture and tries to shake his hand.

BRIAN
No -- that's her gift.

ROBERTA
(embarrassed)
Oh! Sorry.

Roberta hands him the gift she's been wrapping.

BRIAN
It looks very pretty.

ROBERTA
Thank you.
(beat)
I heard you had a book published. I didn't read it but...

BRIAN
That's O.K. My parents didn't read it either. It looks good on their coffee table, though.

Roberta smiles.

BRIAN
So what are you doing here? I thought you'd be in Carnegie Hall by now.

HOLD ON ROBERTA as she takes this in.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - ROME, N.Y. - DAY
Roberta sits opposite Brian. Her lunch is untouched.

**ROBERTA**
My college professors said it was too late -- I hadn't had enough training to be a concert violinist. So I got a teaching degree instead.

**BRIAN**
I'll bet you're a great teacher.

**ROBERTA**
I think I am. It's just that... (sighs)
See, every time I'd get started somewhere, Charles would be transferred... then I had my kids and took time off to raise them... and then when I decided to teach again, no one would hire me 'cause you can't count on a navy wife to stick around. I finally decided I'd start my own program -- Charles gave me the money and I bought fifty violins from this little Greek shop -- got started at a private school and then...

**BRIAN**
Your husband ran off with your best friend.

A beat.

**ROBERTA**
She wasn't my "best" friend. She was a friend. (beat)
Charles is the last person you'd think would cheat on me -- he never broke a rule... (a few beats)
I wake up one night -- it's like one in the morning -- and he's not in bed. I go outside and our neighbor -- this old Greek guy -- is sitting out there, smoking a cigar, so I ask if he's seen my husband. "He's taking a walk with the other officer's wife," he says. "He takes a walk every night with the other officer's wife."
A beat as she gets lost in the memory. She takes a bite of a French fry.

ROBERTA
God, these are cold.

BRIAN
So you're just gonna wrap presents and wait for him to come back?

ROBERTA
You sound like my mother.

BRIAN
That's not very sexy.

ROBERTA
Are you trying to be sexy or be my friend?

BRIAN
A little of both.

Roberta smiles, blushing a bit. Brian looks at her, getting an idea.

BRIAN
You know, I know this really cool lady who runs this elementary school -- I wrote a piece on her. It's a public school, but it's alternative -- she might be able to create some kind of gig for you. Let me give her a call.

ROBERTA
Great!

BRIAN
(takes his last bite of sandwich)
If she hires you, though, you have to be willing to relocate.

ROBERTA
Where is it?

EXT. SPANISH HARLEM, NEW YORK CITY - TRAVELLING SHOT - DAY
A SALSA SONG PLAYS OVER as we see stores with Spanish names and signs; Black and Latino elementary school children walking home from school; some burned-out buildings; Black and Latino teens playing basketball on a cement court; Spanish graffiti on walls; elderly women buying fruit at a produce stand.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL this is the POV of Roberta from the back seat of a cab. The SALSA SONG plays on the cab's radio. Roberta looks scared shitless.

Suddenly, two YOUNG MEN flash down the middle of the street, dart IN FRONT of the cab and the driver SLAMS on the brakes, jerking Roberta forward.

**TAXI DRIVER**
Welcome to East Harlem.

**EXT. CENTRAL PARK EAST ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (CPE 1) - EAST HARLEM - ESTABLISHING - DAY**

**INT. JANET WILLIAMS' OFFICE - DAY**

JANET WILLIAMS, a Black woman (40's) with a kind face, sits behind her desk and looks at Roberta's resume. A sign on her desk indicates that she's the DIRECTOR. Also on the desk is a FRAMED PICTURE of Janet, her husband, daughter (14), and son (12). Roberta sits nervously in the chair opposite her.

**JANET**
(looking at resume)
Aside from half a term in a private school -- in Greece -- and a year teaching chorus in Hawaii -- ten years ago -- it doesn't look like you've had any other teaching experience.

**ROBERTA**
Well, not traditional teaching
experience. I've been doing private lessons...

Janet looks for this on the resume.

**ROBERTA**

It's not on there... I taught my sons.

Janet smiles politely.

**JANET**

I'd like to help you, Mrs. Demetras. Brian spoke highly of you and I told him I'd consider starting a violin class... But without the proper qualifications, and without any experience in an inner city school...

Roberta nods, defeated.

**JANET**

I'm very sorry.

**INT. CPE 1 - HALLWAY - DAY**

Roberta stands outside Janet's office, dejectedly watching the children noisily running through the hall.

**INT. AREA OUTSIDE JANET WILLIAMS' OFFICE - THE NEXT DAY**

Roberta knocks on Janet's door.

**JANET (O.S.)**

Yes?

As Roberta opens the door, we see that Nick and Lexi are with her. All three have violins. INSIDE, Janet's in conversation with DENNIS RAUSCH (38), an uptight man with a tie that doesn't match his suit jacket. He's showing Janet a large scheduling chart.

**ROBERTA**

I'm sorry to interrupt, but I wanted you to meet my sons -- Nick, Lexi...

They enter.
INT. JANET'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Janet smiles at the boys, but clearly thinks Roberta's a little off. Roberta holds her hand out to Dennis.

ROBERTA

Roberta Guaspari-Demetras.

Dennis shakes her hand, regarding her warily.

JANET

This is Dennis Rausch, our music teacher and program coordinator.

(beat)

Mrs. Demetras, didn't I make things clear yesterday?

ROBERTA

If I could just show you something -- it'll only take a minute.

Before Janet can answer, Roberta and the kids quickly take out their violins and get into position. Janet and Dennis exchange a look.

DENNIS

Are we having a talent show? I should have brought my tap shoes.

Roberta ignores the jab, then nods to the boys. They begin an incredibly impressive violin trio, playing an ETUDE in three-part harmony. For the first measures, Janet's still annoyed by the intrusion, but she's quickly won over. Dennis watches impassively.

Roberta and the boys finish their piece; Janet applauds and Dennis joins in to be polite. The three take bows. A beat.

LEXI

Will you hire her now?

Janet laughs, then gestures for them to sit.
JANET
How long have you boys been playing?

NICK
Since I was three.

LEXI
(contemplates, then)
Maybe since I was three and a half.

JANET
Your mom must be a good teacher.

NICK
(shrugs)
She's O.K.

Roberta gives Nick a look, but Janet smiles.

JANET
(to Roberta)
If you could teach our students to play like that, I'd be thrilled, but --

ROBERTA
I can. Any child can learn the violin.

DENNIS
Assuming they had the discipline.

ROBERTA
I'll teach them to have discipline.

JANET
A lot of our parents are struggling to feed their kids and pay the rent -- they don't have time to help them learn violin.

ROBERTA
They don't have to. If they can help, great -- but these kids will be committed. They'll practice on their own, they'll help each other in the classroom --

Dennis laughs. Roberta looks at him, a bit miffed.

DENNIS
(with an edge)
I think I know these students, Miss Demetras. Their attention span doesn't
go past do-re-mi. Maybe on a good day, I can get them to "fa."

ROBERTA
You're underestimating them. They can play as well as any other kids.

DENNIS
That I'd like to see.

ROBERTA
You will.

A beat. Janet observes the tension, then turns to Roberta.

JANET
(to Roberta)
For now I'll put you down as a sub, but I have to warn you -- even if it works out, the Board may not let me create a permanent position for you.

ROBERTA
That's O.K. I'll worry about that later.
(with a grateful look)
Thank you.

We see relief -- and fear -- in Roberta's face.

DENNIS
(to Janet)
Well, I've already planned out the whole term, and I can tell you right now, there's no room for this! Besides, where you gonna find money for violins?

ROBERTA
You need violins?

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

In a noisy music room with bad acoustics, Roberta tries to take control of fifty kids, third through fifth-graders, who are in a state of manic excitement over the FIFTY VIOLIN CASES on the floor.
ROBERTA
 (gently)
 Please do not open the cases, O.K.?

They ignore her.

ROBERTA
 Look, can everyone just settle down and listen to me -- please?

ANGLE - Three girls open their cases.

ROBERTA
 (starting to lose it)
 Keep them closed! Please.

ANGLE - Two boys open their cases.

ROBERTA
 (to the boys)
 Did you hear what I just said?

ANGLE - Three kids are using the violin cases as pretend machine guns -- and shooting each other.

ROBERTA
 Put those down, please!

ANGLE - A boy and a girl are having a "sword fight" with their bows.

ROBERTA
 (to the fencers)
 Don't do that! Put the bows back in the cases -- right now!

There's the SOUND of violin strings being plucked.

ROBERTA
 Who's plucking?

Roberta wheels around to find a girl plucking her violin like a banjo, and doing a little dance. This is LUCY, a skinny Puerto Rican girl in perpetual motion.

ROBERTA
 What have I been saying? Put that away! Back in the case!
Roberta takes a breath. The kids settle down a bit.

**ROBERTA**

O.K. Thank you. That's much better.  
(takes another breath)
I'll be dividing you into five classes, but for today --

**ANGLE** - A boy plays "bongos" on his violin case.

**ROBERTA**

O.K. -- that's it! You! Stand up!

The bongo player stands.

**ROBERTA**

You will be the first student who will NOT be in my violin class. Out!

The child looks stunned.

**ROBERTA**

I said OUT!

With a sheepish expression, he exits. The room is finally quiet -- and Roberta's amazed that something worked. She puffs up a little bit, enjoying the feeling of control.

**ROBERTA**

Who else would like to be kicked out of my class?

The students stare at her, afraid of her now. **DE SEAN**, a small but tough Black boy, raises his hand.

**ROBERTA**

Are you raising your hand because you want to be kicked out?

**DE SEAN**

Yeah.

**ROBERTA**

Why?

**DE SEAN**

I don't wanna learn no stupid violin. It's for wimps.
ROBERTA
Who told you that?

DE SEAN
I just know.

ROBERTA
What's your name?

BOY
De Sean.

ROBERTA
Well, De Sean -- you haven't given me a good enough reason, so you're staying.

She looks around the room.

ROBERTA
Anyone else?

Silence.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - LATER

In front of the class, Roberta helps NAEEM, a graceful Black boy, hold the violin. He has a serious expression and a scar on his left cheek. Roberta controls the bow and fingerboard, but it appears that the boy is playing music. He smiles.

NAEEM
Hey, I play pretty good.

Roberta laughs.

ROBERTA
(to Naeem)
See how easy it is?
(to the class)
Maybe in the spring, we could have a big concert for your families and for the whole school.
(to the boy)
What's your name?

NAEEM
Naeem.

Roberta writes in a notebook and we see that she's measuring for violin sizes.

**ROBERTA**

(to class)
If you listen to me and do exactly what I say, you're gonna sound beautiful at the concert and you're gonna be so proud of yourselves.

(to Naeem)
Good, Naeem. Your hand's staying soft.

(to the class)
But if you don't listen to me, you'll sound so bad that your own parents will feel sick when they hear you. They might even throw up.

ON THE KIDS, not used to a teacher speaking like that.

**INT. BRIAN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

A funky apartment on the Upper West Side. Nick and Lexi are both asleep in sleeping bags on top of a futon on the floor, their suitcases nearby. Brian tiptoes past them, carrying two glasses of champagne. He knocks on his office door.

**ROBERTA (O.S.)**

Come in.

**INT. BRIAN'S APARTMENT - OFFICE - CONTINUOUS**

Roberta's in a bathrobe and nightgown, some rollers in her hair. She's tidying up her suitcase, etc., next to an old couch that's been made up as a bed. Leftist political books line a shelf above Brian's desk, including copies of *TO HELL AND BACK: INTERVIEWS WITH VIETNAM VETS* by BRIAN TURNER. His desk is covered with files and books pertaining to MIGRANT WORKERS. Brian enters.
ROBERTA
(referring to champagne)
What's this?

BRIAN
It's a toast.
(giving her a glass, holding his up)
To Roberta, who's made it through her first week.

They clink glasses and drink.

ROBERTA
I don't know, Brian. I'm hanging on by a thread there. Out of fifty kids, maybe six are listening to me.

BRIAN
Look at the progress. Didn't you say no one was listening to you on Monday?

Roberta laughs.

ROBERTA
I really appreciate all you've done for us. And I promise -- this weekend I'll start looking for a place.

BRIAN
There's no rush.

ROBERTA
No, we've put you out enough. You're supposed to be writing, not babysitting for us.
(crosses to his desk, flips through his Vietnam book)
I've started your book. It's very powerful.

BRIAN
Thank you.

Brian comes up behind her and starts to kiss her neck. Roberta's scared -- so she keeps talking, as if it's not really happening.

ROBERTA
So what made you choose migrant
workers for your next book? I mean, how do you know what to write about?

**BRIAN**

(kissing her neck)
I follow my gut, pay attention to what I'm being drawn to...

Roberta's aroused, in spite of herself. She turns around and faces him.

**ROBERTA**

What are you doing?

**BRIAN**

I've been waiting to do that since Mr. Baines' orchestra class.

**ROBERTA**

You didn't even notice me!

**BRIAN**

Sure I did. You used to ignore me and it drove me wild.

**ROBERTA**

You had at least five different girlfriends.

**BRIAN**

It didn't mean I had the one I wanted.

He gives her a flirtatious smile, then takes out one of her rollers.

**BRIAN**

You're not a navy wife anymore...

He moves to takes out another roller and Roberta stops him.

**ROBERTA**

Yes I am... legally.

**BRIAN**

And is it a navy requirement that you dress like it's the 1950's?

**ROBERTA**

I do not!
BRIAN
(goading her)
Who did you vote for in the last election?

ROBERTA
What does that have to do with anything?

BRIAN
Tell me.

ROBERTA
(hesitates, then)
I don't know. Charles filled out my absentee ballot.

BRIAN
Oh my God -- it's even worse than I thought!
(touching her hair)
Is this the same Roberta who got the orchestra to strike until they gave us new uniforms?

She laughs wistfully, then looks a little sad.

ROBERTA
That Roberta's not around anymore.

He pulls her towards him by the belt to her robe.

BRIAN
I don't believe that.

They kiss and it heats up quickly. Roberta pulls back.

ROBERTA
I shouldn't.

BRIAN
Because?

ROBERTA
The boys --

BRIAN
They're sleeping.

ROBERTA
I know, but... I'm still married.
BRIAN
And what's your husband doing right now?

A few beats, and she moves towards him.

INT. BRIAN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Sun streams into the room as Roberta awakens in Brian's bed, where a look of afterglow on her face. She suddenly remembers she is, and quickly looks at the clock.

ROBERTA
Oh shit -- the boys.

BRIAN (O.S.)
They're still sleeping.

She turns, relieved, until she sees that Brian's packing a suitcase.

ROBERTA
Where are you going?

BRIAN
Texas.

He dashes out. Roberta sits up, rattled by this news.

INT. BRIAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Brian excitedly gathers papers and files scattered around his electric typewriter.

ROBERTA (O.S.)
What's in Texas?

He turns to see Roberta in the doorway.

BRIAN
Farm workers. I just got the call -- it came through -- my research grant! It came through! Isn't that great?

ROBERTA
Today?
He places items into a carry-on bag, packing at a rapid clip. In contrast, Roberta seems to be moving in slow motion.

**BRIAN**
I've got a few families lined up there, some in California --

**ROBERTA**
How long will you be gone?

**BRIAN**
Two, three months.

**ROBERTA**
What?

**INT. BRIAN'S BATHROOM - DAY**

Brian throws toiletries into a plastic bag. Roberta enters.

**ROBERTA**
I thought... I just thought you were gonna be around. And then last night --

He stops what he's doing and looks at her.

**BRIAN**
Whoa. Roberta -- last night was great but did you think I was gonna marry you in the morning?

**ROBERTA**
No! Of course not.

We see in her face that part of her did think that.

**ROBERTA**
It's just that... we just got here and we're barely... I don't even know where to buy groceries.

Brian softens as he sees how vulnerable she is. He takes her in his arms.

**BRIAN**
You're gonna be fine. You have a job, a place to stay, your kids have a school to go to -- and there's a D'Agostino's around the corner.
She attempts a smile.

ROBERTA
Congratulations.

He kisses her forehead, then exits. HOLD ON ROBERTA, looking hurt and frightened.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

Roberta rosins her bow, standing in front of ten kids - third through fifth-grade -- who sit on the floor next to their violin cases. The kids are Black and Latino, with a couple of white faces. They're all talking and ignoring Roberta except for NAEEM and GUADALUPE, a petite Mexican violin girl with a long dark braid. [NOTE: We'll see other students from time to time, but this is the class we'll follow for Roberta's first year]

ROBERTA
And what am I doing now?

NAEEM/GUADALUPE
Rosining the bow.

ROBERTA
Good. And what am I doing when I turn this little screw?
(raising her voice)
Everyone stop talking. Right now!

The kids quiet down. Only Naeem raises his hand.

ROBERTA
Naeem?

NAEEM
Tightening the horse hair.

ROBERTA
(touches the heel of the bow)
And what do we call this?
Again, only Naeem raises his hand. Roberta sees him but turns to DE SEAN, who's talking to his neighbor.

    ROBERTA
    De Sean?

    DE SEAN
    Yeah?

    ROBERTA
    What do we call this?

    DE SEAN
    I don't know.

    ROBERTA
    Why not?

    DE SEAN
    I wasn't here.

    ROBERTA
    Yes you were but you weren't paying attention! Do you want people to think you're stupid?

This makes De Sean blush -- and it pisses him off.

    ROBERTA
    All right, Naeem -- tell them.

    NAEEM
    It's called the frog.

Some kids giggle and joke about this. Roberta points to the scroll of the violin.

    ROBERTA
    Anyone remember what this is?

LUCY, the fidgety girl, snaps her fingers.

    ROBERTA
    Lucy! Do you like people snapping their fingers when you're talking?

    LUCY
    Yeah!
The kids laugh. Roberta doesn't. She points to the scroll.

**ROBERTA**
What is this called?

**LUCY**
The jeri curl?

Roberta laughs, even though she's trying to be tough.

**INT. DENNIS' MUSIC CLASSROOM - DAY**

Dennis's twenty students play recorder in rows of attached theatre-style seats. Dennis sits at his desk, a METRONOME ticking, and apathetically leads them in scales, using a red pen as a baton. He keeps one eye on a stack of quizzes he's marking, stopping to circle mistakes with the pen.

**DENNIS**
C-C-C-C, D-D-D-D, E-E-E-E...

ANGLE - Roberta stands in the hallway at the open door, dismayed by Dennis' uninspired teaching. She enters and crosses to Dennis, speaking quietly to him.

**ROBERTA**
Excuse me -- sorry to interrupt --

The students immediately start to chatter.

**DENNIS**
No talking!

He looks back at Roberta, annoyed by her intrusion.

**ROBERTA**
I'm supposed to take kids out of Miss Cooper's classroom for my ten o'clock class -- there's nobody there.

**DENNIS**
Miss Cooper's students have phys ed on Tuesdays.

**ROBERTA**
But you scheduled them for violin.
DENNIS
You must have read the schedule wrong.

ROBERTA
(trying to remain polite)
I don't think so.

DENNIS
Well, I can't solve this problem for you right now.
(nods to his class)
I'm trying to teach.

ROBERTA
So am I.

She exits.

INT. BRIAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT
Lexi and Nick are in Brian's bed. Roberta's tucking in Lexi; he holds a toy truck with Greek writing on it.

LEXI
Can I bring a puppy for show and tell tomorrow?

ROBERTA
Honey, we don't have a puppy.

NICK
Daddy said we could get one when we moved back to America.

Roberta looks at Nick, then turns back to Lexi.

ROBERTA
How about your truck? I'll bet you're the only one in school with a truck from Greece.

NICK
When's Daddy coming back?

Roberta turns to Nick and tucks him in.

ROBERTA
Well, he's still on his tour, so we'll just have to see but... It shouldn't be too much longer.
LEXI
Is he gonna live with us and Brian?

ROBERTA
No, honey. We're just staying at Brian's house for a little while.

She turns back to Nick who looks worried. She kisses him.

ROBERTA
Good night, sweetie.

She kisses Lexi, then reaches to turn off the lamp.

NICK
No! Leave it on.

Roberta nods, smiles at her sons, and exits.

INT. MUSIC ROOM – DAY

Nine children stand, violins under their right arms, bows hanging down from their right hands, and try to position their feet as Roberta addresses them.

ROBERTA
Now take the right foot and put it on a tile. Good. Now with the other foot take a tiny step forward and put it on a line. Try to make a box with your feet --

She walks over to BENJAMIN, a white boy with glasses, and corrects his feet. She sees Lucy dancing in place.

ROBERTA
Lucy! Would you like to leave the class right now?

Lucy nods, giggling. Roberta walks down the row of students.

ROBERTA
You should feel very strong -- so strong and balanced that if I wanted to knock you over I couldn't.
She crosses to TANISHA, a sweet-natured Black girl with her hair in tiny braids, and gently pushes her belly.

ROBERTA
You see? If you're standing strong, I can't even push you.

Roberta turns to De Sean, who's talking to JAMES, a pudgy Black/Puerto Rican boy.

ROBERTA
De Sean! James! Quiet! (as she crosses to another student)
Does anyone know where Naeem is?

TANISHA
I saw him this morning but he's not here.

ROBERTA
Yes, I know he's not here -- that's why I'm asking.

She gently pushes Guadalupe's belly. The girl stumbles back.

ROBERTA
See how I pushed you? It means your feet aren't centered.

Guadalupe tries to correct her feet. Roberta bends down to help and sees that the little girl wears LEG BRACES under her pants. Roberta stands and gestures to one of the boys.

ROBERTA
Can you bring over a chair? (to Guadalupe)
It's probably better for you to sit.

The boy brings the chair. Guadalupe sits, embarrassed.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

Roberta walks through a school yard filled with kids and
parents picking them up. She sees Naeem and crosses to him.

ROBERTA
Where were you today, Naeem?

NAEEM
I can't be in violin class anymore.

ROBERTA
Why not?

NAEEM
My mother won't let me.

ROBERTA
What?

NAEEM'S MOTHER, MRS. ADISA, steps INTO FRAME. She's an attractive Black woman in a dress and head scarf made of African fabric.

MRS. ADISA
My son's got more important things to do than learn dead white men's music.

ROBERTA
They're gonna learn "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star"!

MRS. ADISA
How many Black classical composers can you name? How many Black classical violinists do you know?

ROBERTA
That doesn't mean it's the way it should be. Naeem's learning to play music -- and that makes him feel good about himself. Why should it matter who wrote it?

NAEEM
Please, Mom? Can't I be in the class?

Mrs. Adisa puts a protective arm around her son, then addresses Roberta.

MRS. ADISA
Look. I've seen this before. You
white women come up here and think you can rescue our poor inner city children who never asked to be rescued in the first place. No thank you.

She walks off with Naeem. He glances back at Roberta, then turns away quickly. Roberta watches after them.

**INT. BRIAN'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

Roberta attempts to read Brian's book, To Hell and Back: Interviews with Vietnam Vets, but she's distracted. She glances at her purse, then back to the book. She puts the book down and dials the phone.

**ROBERTA**

Brian Turner's room, please.

While she waits, she looks at Brian's picture on the book to the jacket. There's no answer and she hangs up. She starts straighten the already clean room, then gets her purse, out her wallet, and opens it to the plastic covered pictures.

**INSERT - PICTURES**

Charles in uniform; a studio shot of the boys when they were 3 and 1; the whole family posed on the terrace of their home in Greece, a view of the ocean behind them.

**BACK TO ROBERTA**

She's really depressed herself now.

**INT. CLASSROOM - DAY**

ALICE CROWLEY (50's), a no-nonsense Black teacher, shows her fifth-graders a globe. She doesn't turn as Roberta and crosses to her. In the b.g. we see ROBERTA'S waiting in THE HALL.
ALICE
And which ocean is this?

Kids simultaneously yell out "ATLANTIC" and "PACIFIC."

ROBERTA
Excuse me... I'm here for the violin students.

ALICE
(icy)
You're late.

ROBERTA
Just a couple of minutes -- I'm sorry.

ALICE
They're having a lesson now.

ROBERTA
But this is when they have violin class!

ALICE
That's not my problem.

Roberta's reluctant to argue in front of the kids; she exits.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

Lots of noise and chaos as kids run wild during lunch recess. Janet rushes through the throngs while Roberta tries to keep up.

ROBERTA
I thought all the teachers agreed to this.

JANET
In theory.
(to a student)
Adam! I want you in my office right after lunch, you understand?

ADAM
What'd I do?

JANET
Think about it!
(to Roberta)
Whenever you pull kids out, it's a disruption, plus it's extra work for the teacher 'cause they have to fill the kids in on what they missed. Some teachers resent it.

ROBERTA
Well, can't you talk to them?

Janet stops walking and pulls a box cutter out of her pocket.

JANET
I took this off a second-grader this morning. I'll help you Roberta -- but I can't hold your hand here.

Janet starts to walk away, then turns.

JANET
A word of advice? When you're picking up your students, go to Alice's classroom first.

Roberta stands there as Janet walks on ahead.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

The nine children hold their violins in position as Roberta addresses them.

ROBERTA
So pretend you're driving a car and I'm the policeman and I say STOP! Thumb up, fingers straight up, flat palm. Now you be policemen, but turn your hand and make it say stop to yourself.

ON THE CHILDREN, attempting this. She walks around and helps.

DE SEAN
(to himself)
You're under arrest.

Some kids crack up and start joking and chatting.

ROBERTA
Knock it off, De Sean!
(to all)
If you kids can't take this seriously,
I don't want you here. I'm teaching
you a difficult instrument because I
respect you and have faith that you
can learn it. But none of that matters
if you don't have respect for
yourself.

Some of the children think about what she's saying. A
couple, uncomfortable with the intensity, hold back giggles.

ROBERTA
Now turn your wrist so it's flat
against the fingerboard, and that's
how you'll set up your hand...

Roberta sees Guadalupe struggling.

ROBERTA
Guadalupe! You've got the violin in
the wrong hand! How did that happen?

Embarrassed, Guadalupe corrects her position.

INT. BRIAN'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

At the small kitchen table, Nick does homework and Lexi
puts stickers in a sticker book. Roberta's cooking dinner;
she grabs a potholder and checks on a bubbling lasagna in
the oven. The PHONE RINGS and she answers it.

ROBERTA
Hello?

CHARLES (O.S.)
Hello, Bobbi.

Her face falls as she hears the voice. She holds onto
the counter to steady herself.

ROBERTA
Where are you?

CHARLES (O.S.)
(calm, detached)
I'm back in the States. I'm at my
parents.

Roberta closes the oven and gathers her courage.

**ROBERTA**
Are you still with her?

A beat.

**CHARLES (O.S.)**
No.

We watch Roberta's body collapse into a sense of overwhelming relief. FOLLOW HER as she steps into THE HALLWAY, then stretches the phone into:

**INT. BRIAN'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS**

She half-closes the door, leans against the sink and starts to cry.

**ROBERTA**
(through tears)
We've missed you so much, Charles. The boys... they can't wait for you to come home... I know we'll have a lot to work out and it won't be easy right away, but we're gonna get through this, you know? We're a family and we belong together and --

**CHARLES (O.S.)**
(more emotive than before)
Bobbi -- stop, O.K.? Just stop.

Roberta looks as if she's been slapped. A beat.

**CHARLES (O.S.)**
I want a divorce.

**ROBERTA**
What?

Silence.

**ROBERTA**
But you said... you and Lana... you said it was over.
CHARLES (O.S.)
It is.
(beat)
It's over between us too, Bobbi.

HOLD ON ROBERTA, devastated. ANGLE on NICK, watching her through the door.

INT. BRIAN'S HOTEL ROOM, TEXAS - NIGHT

Brian's on the phone with Roberta. He's in a t-shirt and sweats, and his papers are scattered on the bed.

ROBERTA (O.S.)
He wouldn't even talk about it! No explanations, no discussion...

INTERCUT

Roberta in Brian's living room. She's extremely agitated and her eyes are puffy from crying.

BRIAN
I can't believe you were still holding out hope. The guy hasn't called you or the kids in three months -- I thought you'd moved on.

ROBERTA
I never said that.

BRIAN
No? Maybe not with words.

This embarrasses her, then pisses her off.

ROBERTA
You know what? I shouldn't have called you. This was a mistake.

BRIAN
No, no -- I'm sorry. Look, I know it hurts, but you're gonna get through this, Roberta -- you will.

ROBERTA
I'm moving back to my Mom's.

BRIAN
What? You're gonna quit teaching in the middle of the term?

**ROBERTA**
I don't fit in there -- I'm not making any progress with the kids...

**BRIAN**
What are you gonna tell Janet -- your husband left you and nothing else matters?

**ROBERTA**
I don't know yet.

**INT. BRIAN'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**
Roberta lies awake on the futon, heartbroken.

**INT. BRIAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT**
Roberta stands and watches Nick and Lexi sleep. She lies down beside them and closes her eyes.

**INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY**
Roberta walks through crowds of kids towards Janet who's in the middle of confronting a boy student. Janet holds a FIFTY-DOLLAR BILL. Roberta hangs back and waits for a chance to speak.

**BOY**
My mother gave it to me.

**JANET**
Why would she give you fifty dollars?

**BOY**
To buy breakfast.

Janet gives him a stern look.

**JANET**
Do you know how hard your mother works? Do you think it's right for you steal from her?

**BOY**
I didn't!

**JANET**
Well let's go call her right now and ask her.

As Janet turns to walk off, Roberta crosses to her.

**ROBERTA**
I need to speak to you. It's important.

**JANET**
It'll have to wait.  
(to the boy)  
Come on. In my office.

Roberta watches as Janet dashes off with the boy in tow.

**INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY**

Guadalupe sits on a chair in the empty room, struggling to set up her violin. Roberta enters, surprised to see her.

**ROBERTA**
Guadalupe? What are you doing here?

**GUADALUPE**
I can't get the stop sign.

**ROBERTA**
Honey, your teacher's probably looking for you.

Guadalupe sighs, then hands Roberta the violin.

**GUADALUPE**
I can't come anymore. It's too hard.

**ROBERTA**
The violin is hard for everyone.

**GUADALUPE**
But everyone else is better than me. I'll always be slow.

Roberta looks at her sadly and puts the violin in its case.
ROBERTA
Did you ever hear of Itzhak Perlman?

GUADALUPE
No.

ROBERTA
He's one of the greatest violinists in the world, and he has problems with his legs too. He walks with two canes -- but he still makes the most beautiful music.

GUADALUPE
And he sits down when he plays?

ROBERTA
He has to.

Guadalupe takes this in.

GUADALUPE
He was your student?

Roberta laughs.

ROBERTA
No. But if he was, I'd tell him the same thing I'm telling you. You shouldn't quit something just because it's hard.

GUADALUPE
But I can't stand strong.

ROBERTA
Standing strong doesn't only mean using your legs. You can stand strong on the inside too.

(beat)

Know what I mean?

Guadalupe nods. Roberta holds out the violin case. Guadalupe lunges forward and hugs her around the waist. Roberta awkwardly accepts the hug, startled and touched by it, and strokes the girl's hair. Guadalupe lets go, takes the violin and exits. HOLD ON ROBERTA as she absorbs what just happened. JANET pokes her head into the room.
Janet
You wanted to speak to me?

Roberta
Oh. Umm -- that's O.K. It's taken care of.

Janet looks at her curiously, then exits.

Int. Empty Apartment - East Harlem - Day

Roberta walks around an empty, rundown apartment, her expression somber. Crayon markings on the walls, cigarette burns on the floors, a filthy bathroom and kitchen. An older Puerto Rican woman stands back as Roberta inspects the place. Roberta wipes grease off one of the windows.

Landlady
Is just for you and your boys?

Roberta
Yes.

Landlady
No husband? No boyfriend?

A beat.

Roberta
No.

Ext. School Yard - Lunch Recess - Day

Roberta enters the yard from inside the school. It's filled to filled with kids playing, including Nick and Lexi. She waves them and Lexi runs up to her, carrying a piece of artwork.

Lexi
Look what I made you, Mommy!

He gives her a tempera painting of a man's face, the background decorated with glued-on macaroni. It says Daddy.

Roberta
He runs off. Roberta exhales, sits down alone on a bench and takes out her lunch. She smiles at ALICE CROWLEY and TEACHER but they cross to another bench. ISABEL VASQUEZ approaches, a lively Puerto Rican woman with a strong New York accent.

**ISABEL**

What'sa matter -- you got cooties?

**ROBERTA**

Apparently.

**ISABEL**

I'll take my chances.

(extends a hand)
Isabel Vasquez. Second grade.

**ROBERTA**

Roberta Demetras. I'm the --

**ISABEL**

Violin teacher. I know.

She sits down beside Roberta, takes out her lunch.

**ROBERTA**

Is it my imagination, or does everyone hate me?

**ISABEL**

It's hard to fit in when you're doing a special program. People figure you're not gonna be here very long, so why make the effort?

(beat)
It may take a while for folks to warm up, but nobody hates you.

**ROBERTA**

(sotto)
What about Alice Crowley?

**ISABEL**

(sotto)
A) she thinks the violin's a waste of time... and B) -- she's a bitch.

Roberta laughs.

**ROBERTA**

And then there's Dennis.

**ISABEL**

The Music Man. You've had the bodacity to threaten his private little empire -- not to mention the fact that you messed up his sacred scheduling chart.

**ROBERTA**

How come you're being nice to me?

**ISABEL**

Ulterior motives. I want my daughter in your class next year.

Roberta smiles.

**ROBERTA**

If I'm here next year.

**ISABEL**

You will be.

**INT. ROBERTA'S NEW APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

LEXI'S PAINTING is on the wall, along with a crayon drawing of himself, Roberta, and Nick in front of a house.

ANGLE - ROBERTA looks out the window. She's gotten some used furniture, cleaned the place, and it's less depressing.

**ROBERTA'S POV OUT THE WINDOW**

On the street below, three prostitutes stand at the corner. Two men sit on a stoop, smoking a joint, and in a parked car, three men seem to be making a drug deal. One of the buildings on the street is burned out, missing a front door.

**BACK TO SCENE**
Nick, in his pajamas, enters and crosses to his mother. She smiles at him and they both look out the window.

**NICK**
In Greece, we could see the ocean. Remember?

**ROBERTA**
I remember. And the fishing boats...

**NICK**
And the octopuses.

Roberta smiles and puts her arm around him.

**NICK**
Is Daddy coming here soon?

Roberta tenses up.

**ROBERTA**
Well, that's something I've been wanting to talk to you about. Daddy's not gonna live with us anymore. You and Lexi will have special times when you stay with him, like at Christmas.

A beat.

**NICK**
Can you tell the birthday story?

Roberta looks at him, concerned that he's not responding to her news.

**ROBERTA**
Don't you want to talk about what I told you?

**NICK**
I want to hear the birthday story.

A beat as she contemplates whether to push or not, then:

**ROBERTA**
It was the day of Grandpa's birthday, and I was sad because he had died a few months back.
NICK
But you knew I'd be born that day.

ROBERTA
So I packed a bag and got all ready --

NICK
And Daddy laughed.

ROBERTA
I said, "It's my father's birthday, and the baby's gonna be born today."

NICK
He didn't believe you. But I was born. The same day as Grandpa.

ROBERTA
It was a happy day.

NICK
Was Daddy happy too?

She looks at him, taken aback by the question.

ROBERTA
Of course he was.

NICK
Then why is he leaving me?

Roberta, overcome with emotion, can barely answer.

ROBERTA
He's not leaving you, Nick. He loves you and Lexi very much.

NICK
Then why can't he live here?

ROBERTA
(struggling)
It's very hard to explain... Sometimes things happen between grown-ups... and they just can't be together.

The CAMERA moves behind them as they continue to look out the window, and we see Nick move away from his mother.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY
The kids play "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" and they sound awful. Roberta looks disgusted as she leads them.

**ROBERTA**

Slow bows! Slow bows! Don't squeeze!
Stop! Everybody stop!
(to De Sean)
How much did you practice this week?

**DE SEAN**

My asthma -- it was very bad and I had to go to the hospital.

**ROBERTA**

Again? You told me you went to the hospital last week.

**DE SEAN**

Oh yeah. Maybe it was last week.

Roberta rolls her eyes, then turns to Lucy.

**ROBERTA**

Lucy -- you sounded the worst of all. Have you practiced?

**LUCY**

No.

**ROBERTA**

Why not? You can't be in this class if you don't practice!

**LUCY**

My grandma got mugged.

A beat.

**ROBERTA**

Oh. I'm sorry. Is she O.K.?

**LUCY**

She died.

Roberta stands there, sobered.

**ROBERTA**

I'm really sorry, Lucy.
(tries to get her bearings)
Just do the best you can.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

A group of kids stand together with their violins and chat. Roberta exits the building and they greet her. She waves back, but she's clearly still upset by her interaction with Lucy. She sees Naeem and his mother and approaches them.

NAEEM

Hi, Roberta.

ROBERTA

Hi, Naeem. Can I talk to your mom for a minute?

Naeem nods and moves off.

ROBERTA

Look, I didn't come up here to rescue anybody. I'm a single mother and I needed a job. And I know you think you're protecting your son, but you're not. I mean, what if Arthur Ashe's mother had stopped him from playing tennis because it's a "white man's game"?

(beat)

The important thing is that when Naeem plays music, his whole face lights up. You should see him.

Mrs. Adisa takes this in. Roberta exits. Mrs. Adisa looks longing for Naeem and sees him watching the violin students, to be among them. She watches her son with compassion.

EXT. OUTDOOR MARKET - DAY

Roberta and the boys shop in a colorful outdoor produce market in their neighborhood.

The boys suddenly rush over to A MAN sitting on the ground with mixed-breed PUPPIES in a cardboard box. The boys
them excitedly. Roberta watches her sons; they're happier than she's seen them in ages.

INT. ROBERTA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A brown puppy is jumping all over Nick and Lexi who laugh delightedly. Roberta is putting down newspapers.

ROBERTA
We all have to take turns cleaning up, O.K.?

The boys are oblivious to her -- they're in heaven.

ROBERTA
(to herself)
Yeah, right.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

Roberta's SCREAMING at the kids as they play "Twinkle Little Star."

ROBERTA
First finger on the E! Three -- two -- one -- open!
(to a white girl with pigtails)
Wrong string, Becky! We've done this fourteen times! And look at your nails! You're supposed to cut them for violin class! O.K, everybody stop! It sounds horrible! I can't believe how bad it sounds!

They stop playing. Tanisha raises her hand.

ROBERTA
Is this an important question, Tanisha?

Tanisha nods.

TANISHA
Do you have two of those skirts?

ROBERTA
What?
You wore a skirt just like it on Monday.

Some of the kids crack up.

You know, Tanisha -- I don't think that's such an important question.
(to class)
O.K. Let's try --

The door opens and Naeem enters with Mrs. Adisa.

Crosses to them.

Naeem and I were wondering if he could still be in the class.

A beat.

I'd love that.
(to Naeem)
You'll have a lot of catching up to do. You think you can work that hard?

Yeah, I can.

Maybe we can also arrange some private lessons at my house.

I wouldn't have the money for that.

That's O.K.
(to Naeem)
Why don't you go grab one of my spare violins?

Naeem happily runs to the extra violins at the front of the room; Mrs. Adisa nods to Roberta with a look of gratitude, then exits. Roberta crosses back to the front of the room.
Let's try it again.

They begin again, and we see Naeem take out a violin and join in. As they play, Roberta's ears perk up at something she's hearing. She crosses to Lucy.

ROBERTA
What are you playing?

LUCY
Twinkle.

ROBERTA
(to class)
Everyone stop!
(to Lucy)
Let me hear.

Lucy hesitates, thinking she's in trouble. She plays a jazz variation of the song. Roberta smiles.

ROBERTA
Did someone teach you that?

LUCY
No. I made it up.

ROBERTA
That's really great, Lucy. I'm proud of you.

Lucy beams.

ROBERTA
(to class)
All of you -- try it.

The class plays Lucy's jazz variation and Naeem happily joins in.

INT. JANET WILLIAMS' OFFICE - DAY

Roberta sits opposite Janet and MRS. LAMB, a white woman in her 30's.

MRS. LAMB
You're shouting at them. All the time.

ROBERTA
Not all the time. But if they don't listen --

MRS. LAMB
Didn't you tell them that they were making their parents sick?

Janet raises her eyebrows at this.

ROBERTA
That wasn't exactly what I said --

MRS. LAMB
I'm raising Becky in a supportive atmosphere. I don't send her to school to be abused.

ROBERTA
I'm just trying to discipline them. If they're gonna learn an instrument, they need to take it seriously --

JANET
I think what Mrs. Lamb is trying to say, Roberta, is that you're a little too harsh. I'm sure you might be able to soften some of your comments to the children?

She gives Roberta a long hard look. Roberta nods.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

Roberta listens to the students play "Go Tell Aunt Rhody" -- badly. They finish and stare at her, afraid of her response.

ROBERTA
Well, that was... that was pretty good... that wasn't too bad...

They look at her in disbelief, then look at each other.

DE SEAN
It wasn't? I thought we stunk.

ROBERTA
I wouldn't put it that way... You all just need to practice a bit more.
(to James)
James, have you practiced this week?

The boy nervously shakes his head no.

**ROBERTA**
Can you please try a little harder for next week?

James nods. The kids are baffled by her politeness.

**ROBERTA**
Good. Just do the best you can.

**DE SEAN**
Why you acting like that?

**ROBERTA**
Like what?

**DE SEAN**
Nice.

**ROBERTA**
Don't you want a nice teacher?

**DE SEAN**
I already got nice teachers. You added some variety.

**LUCY**
Yeah. We like you better the way you used to be.

**ROBERTA**
Oh.
(to Becky)
What about you, Becky?

**BECKY**
Yeah. This is even worse. You're acting weird now.

A beat.

**ROBERTA**
Well, then -- I take it back. You all stunk.

The kids laugh.
ROBERTA
But don't tell your parents I said so!

The kids laugh again.

INT. KENNEDY AIRPORT - DEPARTURE GATE - DAY

Christmas MUZAK plays in the b.g. as Roberta kisses and hugs Lexi and Nick goodbye. A FLIGHT ATTENDANT stands nearby.

LEXI
Can't you come with us? Please?

ROBERTA
Honey, I told you. This is Daddy's special time with you.

Lexi looks upset; Nick is stoic. Roberta hugs them one last time. The FLIGHT ATTENDANT steps forward.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
I'll take good care of them.

The FLIGHT ATTENDANT escorts them into the jet way. Roberta holds back tears as they get further away from her. At last moment, Lexi turns and waves; Nick does not. waves, tears starting to fall, and the boys disappear from sight. She observes all the families travelling together, and feels like the loneliest person in the airport.

INT. ROBERTA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Roberta enters her apartment, back from the airport, double-locks the door behind her. You can see on her face that she's dreading the emptiness. She crosses to a small Christmas tree, obviously decorated by her and the boys, and plugs in the tiny blinking lights. It's not exactly
Rockefeller Center. She turns on the T.V., playing IT'S WONDERFUL LIFE.

She crosses to the kitchen, then returns with a carton of eggnog, a glass, and a bottle of rum. She sits down on the couch, pours herself some eggnog, adds rum, adds more rum, goes back into the kitchen, returns with nutmeg, sprinkles some on top, then drinks. She sighs, glancing miserably at the tree and the T.V. Pathetic. She couldn't look any less festive if she tried. There's a KNOCK on the DOOR.

Roberta gets up and warily approaches the door.

ROBERTA
Who is it?

BRIAN (O.S.)
Santa Claus.

She looks through the peephole, then quickly unlocks the door and opens it, revealing BRIAN, giving her a big smile. He looks sexy as hell (even with a silly lit-up Santa pin on his leather jacket), and he holds a long-stemmed red rose in one hand, and a Christmas present in the other.

BRIAN
I'm back.

Roberta's thrilled and relieved to see him. She embraces him, and they kiss passionately.

INT. BROWNSTONE - DAY (TIME CUT - TWO MONTHS LATER)

CLOSE ON plaster walls being knocked down with sledgehammers. REVEAL Brian, Roberta, and a couple of workmen knocking down the walls in an old brownstone.
EXT. BROWNSTONE - EAST HARLEM - THE SAME DAY

A mild winter day. Roberta, covered with plaster dust and overheated from working, leans against a car and drinks beer. The three-story brick building has some graffiti and is badly in need of a paint job; there are a few windows, and the front stairs need repairing. WORKMEN in and out. We can see from the STREET SIGNS that we're 118th STREET, a few houses off FIRST AVENUE.

Brian (also dust-covered), Nick and Lexi toss around a football. LAWRENCE (6), a Black boy who lives next door, joins them. Brian crosses to Roberta, sweaty and out of breath. He takes a swig of her beer.

ROBERTA
O.K., enough goofing off -- back to work.

BRIAN
You trying to kill me?

She laughs and they kiss.

ASSUNTA comes up the street with a bag of take-out food. She casts a dubious glance at the lovers.

ASSUNTA
I was the only person in the whole coffee shop not speaking Spanish.

Roberta rolls her eyes. O.S. a car BACKFIRES.

ASSUNTA
You hear that? Gunshots! How you gonna live here by yourself?
(calling)
Boys, come eat!

ROBERTA
I work in this neighborhood, Mama. I want to live here.
The boys approach and Assunta hands them sandwiches. Lawrence hangs back. Assunta calls to him.

ASSUNTA
What's your name?

LAWRENCE
Lawrence.

ASSUNTA
You hungry, Lawrence?

Lawrence nods and she hands him a sandwich. Roberta smiles at her mother's gesture. The kids move off to Lawrence's front steps and Assunta gives Roberta and Brian sandwiches.

ASSUNTA
(to Brian)
Why did you let her buy this house?

BRIAN
Hey, your daughter does what she wants -- or haven't you noticed?

ASSUNTA
I've noticed.

INT. ROBERTA'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Robert washes dishes and Assunta dries. The leftovers from an Italian dinner are on the counter.

ASSUNTA
I still don't understand the rush.

ROBERTA
Having my own place will make me feel like I'm really starting my life again.

ASSUNTA
But if you invested your divorce settlement, you could buy something nice someday. It's bad enough that you've been renting in this neighborhood, but to lock yourself into a mortgage --
ROBERTA
(snapping)
Mama, please. Just stop!

Assunta backs off. Roberta feels guilty and moves to her.

ROBERTA
Don't worry, O.K.? Besides, if things keep going well, I'm sure eventually Brian will move in with us.

A few beats.

ASSUNTA
How much do you know about this man?

ROBERTA
Brian's a good person, he's helped me a lot, he's great with the boys -- since he got back to town, it's been really sweet.

ASSUNTA
(with an attitude)
And how long has he been back?

ROBERTA
Two months.

ASSUNTA
That's not very long. Don't make the same mistake twice, Bert. You barely knew Charles when you married him.

ROBERTA
(defensive)
I don't get it -- you'reragging on me about buying the house -- I would think you'd want Brian to live with me.

ASSUNTA
Not if he's the wrong person.

Roberta locks her jaw, not wanting to believe that she's right.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY
The kids play "Allegro," Roberta leading them.

ROBERTA
Get ready, now -- we're coming up to the fermata...

They reach a certain note, then pause.

ROBERTA
Hold... Hold... Don't anybody move. Now at the Spring Concert, the audience is gonna be dying for that next note -- but we'll make them wait. As a matter of fact, I think I'll go grab a cup of coffee.

She starts for the door and the kids moan and groan: "Come on, Roberta!" "Roberta, get back here!" She smiles.

ROBERTA
Well, O.K. But you have to promise you'll all start together.

She nods. They begin again -- all at different times.

DE SEAN
Man. We'll never get that right.

ROBERTA
That's not a very nice thing to say about your classmates.
(to class)
How many people think they can get it right by the concert?

All the kids raise their hands. De Sean looks around, embarrassed, then raises his too. Roberta smiles.

INT. ROBERTA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Brian and Roberta finish making love on the futon. They lie in each other's arms, still breathing heavily.

ROBERTA
I love you.

Brian makes a sound that's either panting or laughing.

ROBERTA
Did you just laugh?
BRIAN
I'm sorry. It's just...

Roberta looks at him, offended.

ROBERTA
What?

BRIAN
Why do people feel like the minute something's going great, they gotta name it?
(beat)
Once you name something, you snuff the life out of it.

She disentangles from him.

ROBERTA
Jesus, Brian. Do you still get away with that crap? It's not the Sixties anymore.

BRIAN
Well, maybe if you'd actually gone through the Sixties, you'd know what I'm talking about.

ROBERTA
Fine! We won't name it, we won't talk about it, we'll act like we have no feelings for each other whatsoever!

She angrily turns on her side with her back to him.

Brian regrets hurting her and moves to her, kissing her shoulder.

BRIAN
I'm sorry. I'm being an asshole.
(sweetly teasing)
You can say you love me if you want.

ROBERTA
Forget it. I changed my mind.

He laughs and coaxes her to kiss him -- a temporary truce.

INT. BROWNSTONE - DAY
ERNIE (70's), a rickety Black man in work boots, looks baffled by a tangled mess of wires protruding from a wall. Roberta approaches.

ROBERTA
How's it coming, Ernie?

ERNIE
Well, if I could just remember what I did here yesterday, I'd be moving a whole lot faster.

(beat)
You look real pretty today, honey.

Brian overhears, rolls his eyes and pulls her aside.

BRIAN
You're crazy. Why did you hire him?

ROBERTA
He needed a job. Besides, he's wired all of East Harlem.

BRIAN
When? Fifty years ago?

Brian sighs and walks off into another room. Two MEN carry in large panels of sheetrock with old WALLPAPER on it.

ROBERTA
Why is there wallpaper on it?

MAN #1
That's how it comes.

They lean the panels against a wall. Roberta turns to Ernie.

ERNIE
Yep, that's how it comes now.

The guys quickly exit. Brian re-enters and sees the panels.

BRIAN
What the hell is this?

ROBERTA
BRIAN
You've gotta be kidding. Those ex-cons you hired ripped this off -- and you too!

Roberta feels stupid but doesn't want to show it.

ROBERTA
Look -- this house is taking every penny of my settlement. I can't afford fancy union workers!

BRIAN
(throwing up his hands)
Fine. Do it your way.

He stomps off. ANOTHER ANGLE - Nick watches them fight and looks distressed.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY
Lots of screaming and commotion as the kids crowd around a fight in progress. As we move through the crowd we see NICK's in a fight with another boy; Nick's nose is bleeding and he has the boy in a headlock. TWO TEACHERS run over to break it up.

INT. AREA OUTSIDE JANET'S OFFICE - DAY
Nick sits outside, holding an ice pack to his bloody nose.

INT. JANET'S OFFICE - DAY
Roberta stands opposite Janet.

JANET
I'm giving him a two-day suspension -- but next time he'll be expelled.

ROBERTA
There won't be a next time -- I promise.

JANET
Have you noticed your son lately? He's tied up in knots and he needs help.

ROBERTA
Janet, kids fight. You're making too much of this.

JANET
He was choking the kid. (beat) Nick's in trouble, Roberta. You need to deal with it.

Roberta takes this in, upset.

INT. ROBERTA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Roberta plays "Go Tell Aunt Rhody" with Guadalupe, DeSean, Naeem, Benjamin, and two kids from the other classes. Lexi plays along with them. Nick enters from the kitchen, eating a cookie, ignoring the students. He turns on the T.V.

ROBERTA (to students)
Keep playing, guys.

Roberta crosses to Nick and shuts off the T.V.

ROBERTA
You can watch when we're done.

NICK
It's my house! They don't live here -- I do!

ROBERTA (sotto)
Nick honey -- the kids are real nervous about the Spring concert. You could probably give them some pointers.

NICK
I don't feel like it.

He reaches for the T.V. dial and she stops him.

ROBERTA
I said no.

She crosses back to her students; Nick turns on the T.V.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - DAY

Brian, Nick and Lexi laugh as they play frisbee alongside a DUCK POND. Roberta watches, relieved to see Nick enjoying himself.

BRIAN
Good catch Nick!

Nick throws it back to Brian and it lands in the WATER.

BRIAN
(mock sternly)
Uh-oh. You know what that means?

He stalks towards Nick menacingly, picks him up and he's going to throw him into the water. Nick laughs hysterically.

NICK
(through laughter)
Don't! Don't throw me in!

BRIAN
What'sa matter? Afraid of a little water? The ducks aren't afraid! Are you a chicken or a duck?

NICK
Don't! Don't throw me!

BRIAN
Looks like you got yourself a chicken, Roberta!

NICK
I'm not a chicken!

BRIAN
Well then you must be a duck!

He pretends again to throw Nick in, then puts him down.

Lexi holds out his arms to Brian.
LEXI
Throw me in the water, Brian! Do it to me!

Brian sprints him up and Lexi starts laughing. Roberta laughs along, happy to see the affection between Brian and her sons.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - A LITTLE LATER

Brian and Roberta speak as they stroll; the boys run ahead of them, dragging sticks along the pavement. In the b.g. we see HARLEM STREETS bordering the park.

ROBERTA
You seem to be the only one who can get Nick to laugh these days.

BRIAN
He misses his dad. I'm just a surrogate.

ROBERTA
No -- I think Nick really likes you. (taking his arm)
You know... we're all hoping you'll move into the new house with us.

BRIAN
Whoa. Can we just slow down here a minute? It's too much like getting married.

ROBERTA
What's so bad about that?

BRIAN
That kind of commitment just isn't realistic. I mean, how can we know that you and I will even be able to stand each other in five years?

ROBERTA
Well, we don't. But if two people care about each other, they take a chance.

BRIAN
And look what happened to you and Charles.

**ROBERTA**
I'm not talking about Charles. I'm talking about us.

**BRIAN**
Look, Roberta. Marriage is based on a belief that one person can completely meet another person's needs. I just don't buy that.

This is making her nervous. She looks at him, afraid of what he might be saying.

**ROBERTA**
(carefully)
What are you saying? If there's some need you have that I don't meet, you'd go and get it "met" by someone else?

He heaves a sigh of frustration, not wanting to answer the question.

**BRIAN**
I'm saying that it's the 80's and it's a fantasy to think of marriage lasting these days. One out of two marriages ends in divorce!

**ROBERTA**
You didn't answer my question. (beat)
If I don't meet all your needs, and we're in a committed relationship -- forget marriage for a minute; I'm just talking about a relationship -- would you go to someone else?

A beat.

**BRIAN**
In theory, yes.

**ROBERTA**
In theory.

Roberta looks very disheartened. Brian feels badly.
BRIAN
Robert, we've got something good right now -- that's the important thing. Let's just keep it that way, O.K.?

He pulls her to him, kissing her neck, but she pulls away from him. ON NICK, observing with an anxious expression.

INT. ROBERTA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

NICK (O.S.)
(whining)
Why can't he?

Roberta looks distressed by her talk with Brian as she and the boys enter, back from the park.

ROBERTA
He just can't, O.K.? Brian's at his house tonight, and we're at ours.

NICK
Well then I wanna go to his house.

ROBERTA
Enough, Nick. Now why don't you and your brother practice while I make dinner.

NICK
I don't feel like practicing.

ROBERTA
Well do it anyway.

NICK
I wanna go to Brian's!

ROBERTA
Stop whining, and get your violin.

Nick stomps off to get his violin. Lexi follows. Roberta puts down her bag and takes off her coat. While Lexi sets up his violin, Nick opens his violin case, takes out the violin...
and angrily starts playing, loudly and roughly.

**ROBERTA**
What the hell are you doing?

**NICK**
The problem with you is you're mean to everybody and then they don't want to be with you!

**ROBERTA**
I've heard just about enough from you, young man. Now set your violin up properly and start practicing.

Nick THROWS the violin against the floor. Roberta's speechless.

**NICK**
I hate the violin!

**ROBERTA**
You pick that violin up right now and don't you ever ever --

Nick picks up the violin and THROWS the violin down even harder, then YELLS at Roberta before she can even respond.

**NICK**
It's all your fault! You made Daddy leave and you're gonna make Brian leave too! You're gonna be all alone and I'll have to take care of you!

Roberta is stunned. The anger drains out of her as she suddenly sees what this is all about.

**ROBERTA**
Nick -- you don't have to take care of me.

**NICK**
Then who's going to?

**ROBERTA**
I'll take care of myself -- and I'll take care of you and Lexi. I promise.

**NICK**
You didn't try hard enough. You made
Daddy leave us.

This hits her in the solar plexus. Her hurt and vulnerability start to pour out.

**ROBERTA**
That's not true. I begged him not to leave, but he didn't listen.

**NICK**
Why not?

Roberta hesitates, but knows she has to tell them the truth.

She addresses both boys.

**ROBERTA**
Your father met someone he liked more than Mommy, and then --

**NICK**
Who?

Roberta swallows, shocked to hear him ask this. She can hardly answer him.

**ROBERTA**
Lana. Remember our friends Lana and Tom?

**NICK**
Is he gonna marry her now?

**ROBERTA**
No, but he's not coming back... to me.

Nick and Lexi look very upset, not only from hearing the finality in her words, but from seeing their mother's pain.

Roberta moves closer to them.

**ROBERTA**
I'll take care of you, Nick. You too, Lexi. I promise. I'm not going anywhere. We're still a family.

Nick starts crying. Roberta takes him in her arms. Lexi starts
to cry and Roberta holds him too.

ROBERTA
(softly, to both)
I promise.

INT. BROWNSTONE - DAY

Ernie's radio plays a BLUES SONG. The BRICK WORKERS' radio plays SPANISH MUSIC, and the PAINTERS' radio plays a RAP SONG. Roberta stands in the middle, about to lose her mind.

HER POV - Ernie sits on a stool facing his wiring. He's fast asleep. ANOTHER ANGLE - The brick workers build a crooked fireplace.

BACK TO SCENE

Roberta sighs heavily, then crosses to the painters.

ROBERTA
What color is this?

PAINTER
White.

ROBERTA
I told you Eggshell.

PAINTER
Eggshells are white.

Brian watches this interaction as he sands a door.

BRIAN
You're an idiot! I told you -- you can't be your own contractor.

ROBERTA
You're right. I'm an idiot.

She crosses to Ernie and shakes him.

ROBERTA
Wake up, Ernie.

He looks at her groggily.
ROBERTA
You're fired.

She crosses to the brick workers.

ROBERTA
You're fired.

She crosses to the painters.

ROBERTA
You're fired.

Brian smiles at her, impressed.

BRIAN
That's more like it.

ROBERTA
You're fired too.

Brian laughs.

ROBERTA
No, Brian. I mean it. I need to be with a man who can make a commitment to me. I need that, and my sons need that.

(beat)
So can you?

BRIAN
(hesitates, then)
Roberta --

His tone and expression tell her the words are not forthcoming.

ROBERTA
Get out.

He looks at her, shocked by her toughness, but knows he can't give her what she wants. He exits. Roberta stands in middle of the room, a determined look on her face.

INT. SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

ROBERTA
Stands in the aisle, leading the students and playing violin.

ON STAGE

The fifty fifth-grade students play the "Twinkle" variations. Their playing is impeccable and they look terrific. As the CAMERA PANS the audience, we recognize: MRS. ADISA, tears in her eyes as she watches Naeem; MRS. LAMB and her husband, watching Becky in amazement; ISABEL and her daughter sitting with ASSUNTA, NICK and LEXI; JANET, impressed as hell; and DENNIS, seething with jealousy. As the kids start the jazz variation of "Twinkle," a WOMAN elbows her husband:

WOMAN

That's the one Lucy wrote!

The CAMERA returns to the children and captures their own pride in their playing, including LUCY, who smiles as she hears her song played by fifty.

THE CONCERT - TIME DISSOLVE

The students are now playing "Allegro," and they reach fermata. They hold their positions in silence and the audience watches in anticipation. Roberta cues them and they play the next note in perfect unison. An involuntary smile lights on DE SEAN's face. They finish the song, the audience applauds, and Roberta turns to face them. She lights up when she sees how thrilled Janet looks, and Janet in turn raises her hands higher as she applauds.

DISSOLVE TO:
EXT. CPE 1 - DAY - ESTABLISHING - TIME CUT (1998)

The side of the building now has an impressive mural: an urban landscape with three super heroes -- Puerto Rican, Black, and white -- rising up out of the street. It reads **ONLY THE STRONG SHALL SURVIVE.***

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Roberta stands in front of a classroom of twenty cute first-graders -- mostly Black and Latino, a few white -- on the floor, chatting excitedly. Even though Roberta's ten years older, she seems more youthful; her wavy hair is loose over her shoulders, her clothing's casual and artistic. Beside her is Janet, her hair flecked with gray, and Dennis, who looks pretty much the same. The classroom teacher is a little older, a little tougher.

**ISABEL**

C'mon everybody, settle down -- Janet wants to talk to you.

**JANET**

Today's a very special day because we're starting the tenth year of the East Harlem Violin Program. This is a wonderful opportunity for you, so I want you to talk to your parents about whether you'd like to try this.

**ISABEL**

My daughter took violin with Roberta when she was your age, and now she's in high school and she still talks about how much she loved it.

**DENNIS**

Janet and I started this program because we knew how much you kids could benefit from it.
CUTAWAY to Roberta and Janet exchanging glances over taking credit for the program.

DENNIS
You should know, however, that the violin is a difficult instrument.

JUSTIN, a Black boy with attitude, raises his hand. He always wears a puffy red, yellow and green crocheted beret. Isabel nods to him.

JUSTIN
Who's that lady in the back?

ANGLE - DOROTHEA (Doro-taya) VAN HAUFTEN (40's), an elegant, beautiful woman, smartly dressed, takes photographs from the back of the room.

JANET
That's Dorothea Van Hauften --

JUSTIN
Say what? What kinda name is that?

ISABEL
Justin -- sshh!

JANET
-- and she's taking pictures of Roberta's classes for a magazine article about music education.

JUSTIN
I wanna be in the magazine!

ISABEL
First things first, Justin. Roberta's gonna explain to you about the "lottery."

ROBERTA
I used to just teach fifty kids at
this school. But now I teach a hundred
and fifty kids at three East Harlem
schools and there's so many children
who want to take violin classes that
we have to have a lottery.

VANESSA raises her hand, a white girl whose clothes and
accessories are always adorned with cats.

VANESSA
Can I be in the class?

ISABEL
Roberta's explaining that. Just
listen.

ROBERTA
After your parents sign your
permission slips, I'm gonna put them
in a sack, and I'll pick fifty names
from each school.

ANGLE - Ramon listens intently with his fingers
crossed.

ROBERTA
So everyone bring in your slips by
Friday, and I'll come back and tell
you who's in violin class.

ISABEL
Remember, she's just picking names
from a hat. It doesn't mean that
anyone's better than anyone else.

RAMON raises his hand.

RAMON
(to Roberta)
I really really hope that I get in
the class.

Roberta looks at him, struck by his sweetness.

ROBERTA
I hope so too.

EXT. 118TH STREET - STREET SIGN - ESTABLISHING - DAY

EXT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - DAY
The brownstone looks a lot better than when we last saw it. Graffiti's been removed, the stairs have been repaired, windows have security bars, and there are flowers in pots in front of the building. Roberta steps INTO walking Allegra, now a 10-year-old dog.

**INT. BROWNSTONE - DAY**

The house is transformed: the first floor is one long open room with oak floors, a living room in front with a beautiful fireplace and a grand piano, and a country kitchen in rear, complete with pots hanging over a large butcher block.

NICK (17) practices cello and LEXI (15) practices piano; they play Haydn's "Trio #13." Now handsome young men, blonde hair has darkened to brown. Nick is huskier; Lexi has a slighter build. Both are passionate, talented musicians.

On the couch, RACHEL (12), a mature, beautiful Black girl, rosin her bow.

**RACHEL**

How come you guys don't play the violin?

**LEXI**

Well, picture her being your teacher and your mother.

Rachel cracks up but stifles her laughter as Roberta enters from outside with Allegra.

**ROBERTA**

Hi Rachel. Be right with you.

As Roberta removes Allegra's leash, Rachel and Lexi share a
conspiratorial look. In the b.g., Nick packs up his cello.

**ROBERTA**
(to Nick)
You're gonna practice upstairs?

**NICK**
No. I'm done.

**ROBERTA**
Already? You've barely practiced.

**NICK**
What -- are you timing me with a stop watch? Why don't you pick on Lexi for a change?

**LEXI**
'Cause I'm perfect.

Nick jostles him and heads upstairs. Lexi gets up from the piano.

**LEXI**
(to Rachel)
Have a good lesson.

He crosses to a sharp-looking bike parked behind the front door and addresses Roberta.

**LEXI**
I'll be back in a couple of hours.

**ROBERTA**
Be careful.

Lexi mouths "be careful" along with her.

**EXT. RIVER EAST PARK - DUSK**

Lexi plays basketball with a group of Black and Latino guys. Despite his small stature, he's a great athlete, and an accepted part of the group. The game ends. He and his buddy Lawrence (now 16), both all sweaty, cross to a water fountain. As Lexi takes a drink --
MALE VOICE (O.S.)
Can I try your bike?

Lexi wipes his mouth and looks up at HENRY (18), a tall, intimidating Black teenager who towers over him. Lawrence watches tensely.

LEXI
I'm gonna be leaving pretty soon.

HENRY
Just wanna take it for a spin.

LAWRENCE
C'mon, Henry -- he don't want to loan you his bike.

HENRY
I didn't hear him say that.
(to Lexi)
Is that true? Did you say that?

Lexi looks at him, knowing there's only one right answer.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Roberta and Rachel play Bach's "Minuet One" together on the violin. The girl has obvious talent.

ROBERTA
Vibrato... don't wiggle your wrist.

Rachel stops, frustrated.

RACHEL
Dang! I can't get that right.

ROBERTA
You almost have it.

RACHEL
Almost isn't good enough.

ROBERTA
Did I turn you into such a perfectionist?

RACHEL
No. I came that way.

**ROBERTA**
(smiles, then)
Just as long as you get it right for your Julliard audition.

**RACHEL**

What?

**ROBERTA**
I've recommended you for a gifted kids scholarship.

Rachel looks at her in wide-eyed gratitude.

ANGLE - Lexi enters the front door, a glum look on his face.

**ROBERTA**
Where's the bike?

**INT. HONDA/EXT. EAST HARLEM STREETS - NIGHT**

Roberta drives with Nick in the front, Lexi and Lawrence in the back. They're in a dangerous looking part of East Harlem.

**LEXI**
Mom, please. Don't do this to me!

**NICK**
C'mon, Mom -- why don't you let me handle this?

**ROBERTA**
Are we getting closer, Lawrence?

**LAWRENCE**
It's the next block up.

**LEXI**
(to Roberta)
You don't have to do this. I'll pay you back.

**ROBERTA**
How? It took me six months to save up for it.

**NICK**
I'll help him, O.K.? We'll both pay you back.

LEXI
Or we'll ask Dad -- he'll help us out.

ROBERTA
Yeah, right.

LAWRENCE
O.K., slow down. It's the second one on the right.

Roberta slows the car down next to a HOUSING PROJECT.

EXT. HOUSING PROJECT - NIGHT
Not a place you'd want to go into, even in the daytime.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL this is their POV from INSIDE THE CAR.
The boys look frightened, but Roberta's on a mission.

NICK
C'mon Mom, let's get out of here.

ROBERTA
Lock the doors.
And she exits. The boys watch as she heads for the building, then Lexi shakes his head and covers his face.

LEXI
I'm dead. She's gonna get me killed.

Nick jumps out of the car and heads after her.

NICK
I'm coming with you!

ROBERTA
No. Get back in the car and stay with the boys.

Nick hesitates and heads back. Roberta presses on.

Lawrence opens the window and calls to her.

LAWRENCE
Don't take the stairs!

**INT. TENEMENT BUILDING - LOBBY - NIGHT**

CLOSE ON THE ELEVATOR DOOR with a handwritten SIGN that reads **OUT OF ORDER.**

WIDER - Roberta stands in front of the elevator, tensely at the sign. She takes a deep breath, then heads for the staircase.

**INT. TENEMENT BUILDING - STAIRWELL - NIGHT**

Roberta climbs the dimly-lit stairs of a dilapidated, scary building. O.S. a BABY CRIES, a couple of TV's BLARE.

**INT. TENEMENT BUILDING - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS**

At the top of the stairs, Roberta turns down the hall, passing a door riddled with bullet holes. She finds the apartment and knocks. No response. She knocks again.

**OLD WOMAN (O.S.)**

Yeah?

**ROBERTA**

I'm a school teacher. Henry has taken my son's bicycle and I want it back.

A beat, then the door cracks open, an OLD WOMAN visible through the chain lock.

**OLD WOMAN**

Henry's not here.

**ROBERTA**

Well you tell Henry that if he returns the bike, I won't have to notify the police -- or his school principal. Although since I am a teacher, it would be very easy for me to do that.

A couple of beats.

**OLD WOMAN**

He's not home. He doesn't get home
till late.

ROBERTA
How late?

OLD WOMAN
Not till after ten.

ROBERTA
I'll be on the steps of CPE 1 at 11 P.M. I'll be waiting for him.

The door closes. Roberta exhales. Did she just do that?

EXT. CPE 1 - NIGHT

Roberta, Nick, Lexi and Lawrence sit on the front steps of the school. The street is deserted.

LEXI
You're crazy. He's not gonna show.

Roberta sits confidently.

NICK
You think he actually cares that you're a teacher? You think he even goes to school?

LEXI
C'mon, Mom -- let's just go.

ROBERTA
It's only five after eleven.

Nick and Lexi roll their eyes and exchange a look: she's nuts. Suddenly, there's the SOUND of a bicycle. Nick, and Lawrence look towards the sound, incredulous. Lexi stands. Henry rides up on the bike and dismounts. Lexi looks directly at him as he takes the bike from him.

HENRY
I was just borrowing it.

He glances at Roberta, then walks off.
INT. CPE 1 - CLASSROOM - DAY

Roberta stands in front of Isabel's class and calls out names, handing the selected children acceptance letters. The kids are charged up; "My heart is pounding!" "Please pick me!"

ROBERTA
Shandra Wilson.

A pretty Black girl with braids and tons of barrettes jumps up and down, then runs up for her letter. The kids SQUEAL and CHEER for each student called. Shandra hugs her best friend MYESHA, a chubby Black girl who also holds a letter.

ROBERTA
Justin Brady.

JUSTIN raises his fists in triumph. ANGLE - RAMON anxiously waits to see if his name will be called. JUSTIN sits down next to him, waves his letter in Ramon's face, taunting him.

ROBERTA
Vanessa Klein.

Vanessa takes her letter and smiles. She puts it into her cat-shaped backpack.

ROBERTA
O.K. One more name...

Ramon crosses his fingers and holds his breath.

ROBERTA
Leonard Hood.

LEONARD, a scrawny white boy takes his letter, scared by it. He starts to cry.
Leonard
It's too hard! I don't wanna do it!

Isabel
Don't you even wanna try, Leonard?

Leonard
(through tears)
I don't want to!

Isabel looks at Roberta.

Roberta
Well, O.K. then. I'll pick someone else.
(she picks a name)
Ramon Olivas.

Ramon's face lights up.

Ext. School Yard - Day

As Roberta walks through the yard, she sees kids excitedly showing acceptance letters to their moms. Shandra and Myesha hold hands as they run to Shandra's mom, Beverly Wilson, pushing a stroller. She looks at the letter and hugs Shandra.

Angle - Ramon reads his letter to his mother, Concepcion (45), whose eyes tell you that she's lived through a lot. She speaks with a Puerto Rican accent.

Ramon
This is to inform you that your child, Ramon Olivas, has been chosen by lottery to be in the violin program.

Concepcion
You happy?

Ramon spins round and round with the letter in his hand.

Concepcion
I think you're happy.
EXT. RIVER EAST ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY

Roberta illegally parks her old Honda, rushes out of the car, grabs her book bags and three violins, pulls a ticket from her pocket and puts it on the windshield.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
(German accent)
Does that really work?

Roberta turns. It's DOROTHEA, the PHOTOGRAPHER we saw in the classroom.

ROBERTA
No. But I keep trying. And maybe someday the school will give me a parking space!

She rushes towards the school and Dorothea follows her.

DOROTHEA
Wait --

She hands Roberta a thin box. Roberta puts down her violins, glances inside it and forgets about being late.

INSERT
-- Terrific black and white shots of Roberta's advanced classes playing violin.

ROBERTA (O.S.)
God, these are great.

BACK TO SCENE

DOROTHEA
Those copies are for you.

ROBERTA
Thank you. Can I... pay for you them?

DOROTHEA
Don't be silly. Besides -- you'll need your money for parking tickets.

They smile at each other.
DOROTHEA
What you're doing for these children is wonderful. My husband's a violinist -- he was quite impressed when I told him about you.

ROBERTA
What's his name?

DOROTHEA
Arnold Steinhardt.

ROBERTA
Of the Guarneri String Quartet?

Dorothea nods, and hands Roberta a card.

DOROTHEA
Stay in touch. Let us know when the kids have a concert.

RACHEL, heading for school, calls out to Roberta.

RACHEL
Don't be late for violin class! I hear the teacher's really mean.

Roberta smiles, slips the card in her pocket, nods to Dorothea and follows Rachel.

INT. RIVER EAST SCHOOL - MUSIC ROOM - DAY

Roberta's advanced class plays "Can-Can." Rachel's one of the eight sixth-graders. Roberta plays along, crossing to AMANDA, a white girl in a country-western outfit.

ROBERTA
Amanda, what did I tell you about wearing cowboy boots to violin class? They're too slippery!

She crosses to a pudgy Black/Puerto Rican boy with glasses.

ROBERTA
Relax your two, Simon...

She glances at STEPHANIE, a white girl with red hair, next
to KENNY, a Black boy with an earnest expression.

ROBERTA
Your stop sign has to be up, Kenny!
Stephanie, it doesn't look like you ever had a lesson with me!

CARLOS (13) hurries in, a handsome Black boy in a baseball jacket that says "LOS LEONES." He looks 15.

ROBERTA
Where's your violin, Carlos?

CARLOS
It's coming.

He nervously looks down the hall.

ROBERTA
What, is it walking here by itself?

A Black third-grade girl rushes into the room and hands Carlos his violin, then runs off. Roberta crosses to Carlos as he quickly readies the violin.

ROBERTA
Your buddies giving you a hard time?

CARLOS
Look, it's just not cool. You wouldn't understand.

ROBERTA
Hey, you want your sister to carry your violin, that's fine. But is she practicing for you too? Because lately, that's how it sounds.

CARLOS
I've been busy! I've been --

ROBERTA
I'm not interested! Just get here on time, and commit to this class or I don't want you in here, you understand?

He nods sullenly.
ROBERTA
You're a good violinist, Carlos --
and it's definitely not "cool" to
waste your own talent.

Carlos takes this in as Roberta crosses to another

student.

EXT. RAMON'S APARTMENT - EAST HARLEM - ESTABLISHING -

NIGHT

It's upstairs from a grocery store on a busy street.

INT. RAMON'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ramon sits on the floor, upset, half-heartedly building

with

Legos, while his parents argue in the KITCHEN. His

father

MANUELO is a stocky, muscular man. INTERCUT between the
two

areas. This is a modest, well-kept apartment. Off the

kitchen, religious candles burn on a shelf above a washing

machine.

MANUELO
Why didn't you show it to me?

CONCEPCION
It just needed one parent's signature.

MANUELO
(with some Spanish)
Well, I'm his parent and I don't
give permission! He should be playing
baseball, not the violin!

CONCEPCION
It makes him happy.

ON RAMON, looking far from happy at the moment.

EXT. RIVER EAST SCHOOL - DAY

Rachel steps off a city bus, carrying her violin. She

passes

two sixth-grade boys and a girl.

BOY #1
(loudly)
Ooh, check out little Miss Violinhead.
 GIRL
She carry that violin with her all
the time 'cause she think she special.

Rachel turns to them.

RACHEL
I am special.

She proudly continues on, then sees Roberta walking
towards
the school and catches up to her.

RACHEL
(nonchalant)
So I heard from Julliard.

Roberta stops and looks at her.

ROBERTA
And?

RACHEL
They said yes!

Roberta gives her a big hug.

INT. CPE 1 - MUSIC ROOM - DAY

ON THE BEGINNER'S CLASS, including Ramon, as they play
"Lightly Row." Roberta walks around, making corrections
as
she addresses the students. She doesn't see Justin
poking
at
away
Ramon with his bow; Ramon swats the bow away and glares
his nemesis. Roberta moves some of Shandra's braids
from the violin.

ROBERTA
So when you take the violins home,
tape your music to the wall directly
in front of your nose so you can
play with perfect posture. Your
parents are gonna be so excited to
hear you play!

INT. RAMON'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT
"Lightly Row." His brothers, PEDRO (18) and ERNESTO (17), cringe as they try to watch T.V. Ernesto gives up and puts on his Walkman; Pedro's ready to break the violin. Concepcion listens patiently as she folds laundry, but even she winces.

PEDRO
(yelling)
Ramon! How many cats you killing in there?

INTERCUT RAMON - He plays with pride, eyes on the music taped to the wall.

INT. CPE 1 - MUSIC ROOM - DAY (A FEW MONTHS LATER)

ON RAMON, his improved playing showing that time has passed.

WIDER - the beginner's class plays "Lightly Row."

JUSTIN is struggling more than the other students.

ROBERTA plays along with the class, eyeing each student.

ROBERTA
More bow! To the frog! Myesha, your stop sign line should be touching. Don't let it wiggle! You're on the wrong string, Justin! And look at your feet!

Vanessa enters the front door without her violin.

ROBERTA
Where's your violin?

VANESSA
I forgot.

ROBERTA
Goodbye! And you may be dropped.

Vanessa pouts and exits. Roberta moves to ROSARIO, a Puerto Rican girl.

ROBERTA
Look at those nails, Rosario!
She pulls a clipper from her pocket and swiftly clips them. MYESHA nervously glances at her own nails.

ROBERTA
I see you over there, Myesha.

She moves to Ramon and corrects his bowing position.

ROBERTA
(to Ramon)
You're doing much better.

As Roberta walks on to the next student, Justin purposely knocks over Ramon's music stand.

RAMON
Drop dead, Justin!

JUSTIN
It was a accident!

RAMON
Was not!

ROBERTA
Ramon, I don't like that kind of talk. Justin, pick up his stand, now! Our spring concert is in three weeks and you might not be in it. Is that what you want?

EXT. CPE 1 – DAY

As Roberta heads for her car, she sees Vanessa being helped into a car by her FATHER, his suit wrinkled and tie loosened. There's SNOW on the ground.

ROBERTA
Mr. Klein? I'm gonna have to drop Vanessa from the class if she keeps forgetting her violin.

MR. KLEIN
(sotto)
She's going back and forth between houses. My wife and I split up.
ROBERTA
(softening)
Oh. I'm sorry.

Roberta leans into the car window.

ROBERTA
Vanessa, maybe you could write down for your Mom and Dad which days are violin days.

VANESSA
(almost in tears)
The tape doesn't stick.

ROBERTA
What?

VANESSA
I taped the music to the wall at my Mom's house and then I took it to my Dad's house and it doesn't stick anymore.

Mr. Klein's eyes tear up and he quickly wipes them.

ROBERTA
Well you know what? That's an easy problem to solve.

She looks through her book bag, takes out a piece of music and gives it to her.

ROBERTA
Now you have two, O.K.? One for each house.

Vanessa nods, clutching the piece of music. Roberta and Mr. Klein exchange a look. She touches his arm, then walks off.

INT. RAMON'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ramon, holding his bow and violin, crosses to his father who's watching a baseball game on T.V.

RAMON
You wanna hear my new song, Papa?
MANUELO
(in Spanish)
Not right now.

Ramon exits, hurt. Concepcion watches from the side, and crosses to her husband.

CONCEPCION
We made mistakes with Pedro and Ernesto and we can't fix them now, but Ramon -- he works so hard. The violin makes him want to be good at everything.

He shows no response, and she exits. ManueLo ponders what she said.

EXT. CPE 1 ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY (MORNING)

Roberta approaches the school on a winter morning. She smiles as she sees Vanessa get out of her MOTHER'S car with her violin. Roberta nears the front door and finds Isabel and some teachers huddled in conversation. A few students are crying.

ROBERTA
(to Isabel)
What happened?

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

The beginners sit on the floor and rosin their bows. A few chat, but it's quieter than usual, except for RAMON who "blessing" kids with his violin bow.

RAMON
You go to heaven... You go to hell...
You go to hell... heaven...

Roberta enters slowly. She looks very shaken up. She takes note of what Ramon is doing, and overhears Toussaint and Shandra in mid-conversation.
TOUSSAINT
My grandpa died and my uncle, so that makes six.

SHANDRA
I know more than that. At least seven people... maybe even nine.

Roberta gently tells Ramon to sit, and then she sits down on a child-sized chair in front of them.

ROBERTA
(quietly)
I know that you've all heard the bad news about Justin.

MYESHA
I didn't hear.

TOUSSAINT
There was a drive-by shooting by his house and he got shot on accident and he died.

Myesha takes this in, looking sad.

ROBERTA
Does anyone want to talk about it?

RAMON
(angry)
I think we should just play violin.

Roberta watches him.

INT. RAMON'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN AREA - DAY

Concepcion cooks chicken and Pedro sets the table, whistling a long to Ramon's O.S. violin playing "We Shall Overcome." There's a KNOCK on the door. Concepcion answers it, revealing Roberta.

CONCEPCION
Roberta! Come in.

Roberta enters.
ROBERTA
I came by to check on Ramon.

CONCEPCION
(confused)
Why?

ROBERTA
Didn't he tell you what happened at school?

Concepcion shakes her head no.

INT. RAMON'S ROOM - DAY
Ramon is still playing violin as Concepcion and Roberta enter.

When he sees Roberta he straightens up even more.

CONCEPCION
Roberta wants to talk to you, O.K.?

He nods. Concepcion touches his head, then exits.

RAMON
Did that sound O.K.?

ROBERTA
Yeah, it did.

Ramon smiles, pleased with himself.

ROBERTA
I've been thinking about Justin.
Remember how mad I got the last time I saw him?

RAMON
Yeah. You got very strict with him.

ROBERTA
It wasn't always so easy to be nice to him, you know?

Ramon looks away from her, upset.

RAMON
You think Justin's in heaven or hell?

ROBERTA
Heaven.
Ramon runs his fingers along his bow.

    RAMON
    I told him to drop dead.

Roberta touches Ramon's back.

    ROBERTA
    Justin didn't die because of what you said. I promise.

    RAMON
    How do you know?

    ROBERTA
    I don't think you're that powerful, do you? I mean, if you had such powers, just imagine what kind of violin player you'd be by now!

    RAMON
    Yeah. I'd be better than you!

They laugh together, then Ramon looks sad again.

    ROBERTA
    It's O.K. to cry, you know.

    RAMON
    Not for a man.

    ROBERTA
    My boys still cry and they're big, strong young men now. (beat) I bet Justin's daddy cried.

Ramon's eyes get teary. Roberta quietly leaves the room.

EXT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - ESTABLISHING - DAY (SPRING)

INT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Roberta brings in the mail, looking curiously at a manila envelope with a return address from the NY REVIEW OF BOOKS. She opens it, looks inside, then pours out a batch of other letters onto the table. They're addressed to BOX HOLDER 127.
She opens one, reads it, then rushes to an INTERCOM.

**ROBERTA**

Nick, Lexi! Get down here right now!

**INT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - MOMENTS LATER**

**NICK**

We were just trying to help!

Nick and Lexi stand by the table, opposite Roberta -- with the incriminating pile of letters between them.

**ROBERTA**

This is humiliating!

**NICK**

Mom, no one knows it's you! I mean, you don't even have to read them if you don't want to.

(glances at pile)

Although obviously, a lot of guys are interested in dating you.

**ROBERTA**

No. A lot of guys are interested in dating you and Lexi.

(beat)

What did you say about me, anyway?

They thought she'd never ask.

**NICK**

"Beautiful musician, late 40's, tired of playing solo --

**LEXI**

-- seeks a healthy, stable, attractive man who's not afraid of a duet with a strong, independent woman.

**NICK**

My violin playing will feed your soul...

**LEXI**

...And my lasagna will be music to your palate."

They beam with pride. Roberta looks at them, mortified.
ROBERTA
Oh, my God.

LEXI
Did you catch all the music metaphors?

ROBERTA
Don't you think it's a little weird that you're trying to get your mother a date?

NICK
Don't you think it's a little weird that you're not even interested in dating?

ROBERTA
Boys, look. Number one -- even if I wanted to date, I don't have time. And number two -- I've got my teaching, I've got you guys -- that's all I need.

The boys nod, disappointed, and she exits. They look at each other with glum expressions.

LEXI
(to Nick)
I really thought she'd like the music metaphors.

INT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Roberta lies on the couch, reading the personal ad letters. She tosses one aside, then opens another.

INSERT
The letter is designed like a newspaper with a headline that reads: JOURNALISM PROFESSOR DAN PAXTON ANSWERS PERSONAL AD; HOPES RUN HIGH BEAUTIFUL MUSICIAN WILL CALL FOR A DATE!

BACK TO SCENE
Roberta can't help but be charmed.

INT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT
Roberta, Nick and Lexi play Haydn's "Trio #13" together on their respective instruments. We sense that this is a special family ritual. They play throughout their conversation:

ROBERTA
I think you're flat, Nick.

NICK
I'm not flat.

ROBERTA
The B sounded flat.

NICK
Just play the violin, Mom. I'll take care of the cello.

They play for a few beats.

LEXI
You nervous, Mom?

ROBERTA
No. I'm fine.

The DOORBELL rings and Roberta jumps up, bolting into the bathroom down the hall.

Lexi and Nick exchange a smile, then Lexi crosses to the door and opens it.

INT. DOORWAY - CONTINUOUS

Standing in the doorway is a man in casual college professor attire. He's nice-looking, but no Prince Charming. He shakes Lexi's hand and smiles warmly.

DAN
Hi. I'm Dan Paxton.

Lexi shows him in.

INT. ROBERTA'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

IN THE MIRROR - Roberta takes a last look at herself,
wondering if he'll find her attractive. She touches her hair, adjusts her dress, then takes a deep breath as she builds up her courage.

**INT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Roberta enters the living room where Dan is chatting with Nick and Lexi. Dan sees her and is instantly smitten.

**DAN**

(shaking her hand)

Wow. An honest woman.

**ROBERTA**

Honest?

**DAN**

Your ad. When you said you were beautiful, you were telling the truth.

She smiles, blushing, and avoids eye contact with her sons who are trying really hard not to laugh. As she and Dan start to exit:

**NICK**

Make sure you're home by midnight, young lady.

**INT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

**CLOSE ON CLOCK**

It reads 12:30.

WIDER - Nick and Lexi play a video game on the TV screen. O.S., there's the SOUND OF A CAR. They race to the window.

**LEXI**

Ten bucks he tries to kiss her.

**NICK**

That's a no-brainer. Of course he'll try. The real question is whether she'll let him.
LEXI
O.K. -- ten bucks she lets him.

NICK
You're on.

They stare out the window intently.

INT. DAN'S CAR - NIGHT

Dan pulls his car up in front of Roberta's house. Beside him, Roberta holds a program from a Lincoln Center concert. Roberta's tense, but Dan seems relaxed and centered in his attraction to her.

DAN
I had a lot of fun tonight.

ROBERTA
Yeah, I did too.

DAN
I have a confession -- I've never answered an ad before. I did it on a dare.

ROBERTA
Well, I have a confession -- my boys placed the ad behind my back.

They both laugh, then smile at each other. An awkward beat:

will he or won't he? Dan leans in to kiss her, and Roberta turns away, uncertain.

ROBERTA
Look, Dan -- I went along with this 'cause it's been a while. Quite a while... And I had a very nice time... but I'm not sure if I'm ready to get involved with anyone right now.

A beat. Roberta feels badly about rejecting him.

DAN
(deadpan)
Does this mean I don't get any lasagna?
Roberta cracks up. Dan smiles at her.

**INT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - NIGHT**

Roberta enters. The boys are back to their video game, covering that they've been spying on her.

**ROBERTA**
Why are you guys still up?

**NICK**
(all innocence)
Why? Is it late?

**ROBERTA**
Good try, Nick.

**LEXI**
So how was it?

**ROBERTA**
Well... he's nice.

**NICK**
"Nice"? As in "let's just be friends" nice?

**ROBERTA**
I don't know yet. We'll see.

Nick looks disappointed.

**NICK**
There's still a lot more letters.

**ROBERTA**
Good night, Nick.

She starts heading upstairs.

**LEXI**
Hey, Mom -- can you loan me ten dollars?

**INT. CPE 1 - MUSIC ROOM - DAY**

THE BLACKBOARD reads: SPRING CONCERT IN 10 DAYS!

**PRACTICE**

**PRACTICE PRACTICE!**
Roberta rushes in, frazzled, not noticing at first that the beginners are very quiet -- and that most don't have violins.

**ROBERTA**

Guys, I'm so sorry -- I got stuck over at CPE 2...

She puts her stuff down, then looks at the kids.

**ROBERTA**

What's going on? Where are all your violins?

**RAMON**

We heard you got fired.

**ROBERTA**

What?!

**EXT. HALLWAY — DAY**

Janet and Dennis talk outside Janet's office. Roberta storms over to them. Janet looks at her, alarmed.

**ROBERTA**

Is it true?

**JANET**

Why don't you come in my office?

**ROBERTA**

It's true? You're firing me?

**JANET**

It's not me, Roberta. The Board of Ed. cut the budget, the District had to comply, and as of the end of this term, the violin program has been... excessed.

Roberta takes this in, momentarily speechless. In the b.g., the beginners slip into the hall to watch.

**ROBERTA**

Excessed.

(beat)

They specifically said that my violin program has to go.
JANET
They've slashed the budget -- music and art programs got hit the worst.

ROBERTA
What about Dennis' classes?

DENNIS
I'm tenured, Roberta.

Roberta looks at him, then back to Janet.

ROBERTA
When was this decided?

JANET
Things happened very quickly... I wanted to tell you myself --

ROBERTA
(reeling)
I just... I can't even believe this is happening!

DENNIS
Why not? You're a sub. Your position has never been permanent.

JANET
Shut up, Dennis! You're not helping!
(softly, to Roberta)
Come into my office, please.

They leave Dennis standing there, looking as if he's had his face slapped.

INT. JANET WILLIAMS' OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

ROBERTA
There's gotta be a way to fight this!

JANET
Fight it with what? I don't have any other extra programs to give them instead.

ROBERTA
Oh, I see. So after ten years, after fourteen hundred children have learned to play the violin, this is just an
"extra program."

**JANET**
You know I don't feel that way and you know damn well I've been standing by you all these years! You think I haven't noticed what you've done for these kids?

**ROBERTA**
Then do something!

**JANET**
(points to her phone)
I've been on this phone for the past three days trying to "do something" -- the District office can't even stand the sound of my voice. Believe me, there are some people around here I'd much rather get rid of. But as far as the Board's concerned, violin classes are not a priority.

Roberta's fury starts to give way to grief. She looks terribly wounded. Janet looks at her helplessly.

**JANET**
I don't have the power here, Roberta. I'm so sorry.

A beat, and Roberta exits.

**EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY**

Roberta's dazed and in pain as she walks through the crowds of children, oblivious to kids calling her name and waving.

**INT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - DAY (LATE AFTERNOON)**

Nick and Lexi enter the darkened house, chatting as Nick wheels in the bike and Lexi bounces a basketball. They turn on a light to reveal

**ROBERTA**
sitting at the kitchen table with a glass of wine, her face ashen.
NICK
What happened?

EXT. STREETS - DAY (LATE AFTERNOON)

Roberta, Nick and Lexi walk Allegra in their neighborhood.

Roberta looks worn out.

ROBERTA
I'm a good teacher. I've worked so hard to give these kids something to be proud of.

Lexi moves to comfort her.

LEXI
I'm so sorry, Mom. I can't believe they did this to you.

ROBERTA
It's like when my father got killed. For twenty years, he followed every safety rule the factory had, and then someone else flips the wrong switch...

(she chokes up)

It's not fair. You do everything right and then...

NICK
It's the wrong analogy. You couldn't do anything about Grandpa's death. It was irreversible. This isn't.

ROBERTA
Tell that to the Board of Education.

NICK
Let me ask you something. Why did you risk your life for a bicycle?

Roberta and Lexi look at Nick, baffled as to the relevance of the question.

ROBERTA
I did not risk my life.

NICK
Of course you did! That building? Threatening Henry? And for what --
two hundred dollars?

ROBERTA
No. Not for that.

LEXI
Then why?

ROBERTA
When someone steals something that belongs to my kids, I'm not gonna sit back and let that happen!

A beat as she realizes what she's just said. The boys look at her and the three of them stop walking.

ROBERTA
Guys -- you need to think about this. If I try to fight this -- with no salary coming in -- I could lose the house, screw up your college plans... It would be a lot safer to just go out tomorrow and get a job in a private school.

LEXI
Yeah, but is that where you really want to be?

INT. ROBERTA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Roberta frantically searches through her purse, then crosses to a hall closet and quickly checks the pockets of her coats.

She feels inside a jacket pocket, then finds it: DOROTHEA'S BUSINESS CARD.

EXT. COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY - ESTABLISHING - DAY

INT. COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY - DEPT. OF JOURNALISM - DAY

FOLLOW DAN PAXTON as he walks down the hall towards his office and sees a strange silver object on the floor in front of his office door. He picks it up.
ANYONE

---

A foil-covered plate with a note on top: **DO YOU KNOW AT THE NEW YORK TIMES?**

BACK TO SCENE

Dan lifts up the foil to reveal a large piece of LASAGNA.

INT. CPE 1 AUDITORIUM - THE CONCERT - STAGE - NIGHT

SEVENTY-FIVE KIDS play "We Shall Overcome" and it's incredibly moving. Nick's on cello, Lexi plays piano. ROBERTA proudly leads the children. At the side of the stage, we see DOROTHEA photographing the concert. THE CAMERA PANS THE AUDIENCE teary-eyed parents, many of them with CAM CORDERS. We find Ramon's family. Manvelo is riveted by his son's playing, and he starts to cry. Concepcion knows this without looking. She takes his hand.

ANGLE - JANET stands along the side and her eyes start to fill with tears. She tries to stay composed, then discreetly exits the auditorium.

The song ends and the audience APPLAUDS, rising from their seats, including ASSUNTA (now 65), next to ISABEL and DAN. Someone remains seated: a REPORTER (40's), sitting beside Dan and taking notes.

The STUDENTS bow, then point to Roberta who bows and takes the stage. She gestures for people to sit. A beginner student brings her flowers. Roberta kisses her, then approaches the mike.

ROBERTA
The beautiful concert that you just heard could be the last concert of the East Harlem Violin Program. The Board of Education and the District Superintendent don't think that music is important for our children. But they're wrong -- and they're in for a fight.

The parents stand and applaud. We see the REPORTER writing quickly. Dorothea snaps more pictures. Roberta extends an arm towards the kids, directing the applause at them.

INT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

ROBERTA is vacuuming the living room while Assunta dusts. Extra chairs are set up in the living room in preparation for a meeting. The doorbell RINGS.

ROBERTA
Someone's early.

FOLLOW ASSUNTA to the DOOR. She opens it, revealing who's carrying two bags of groceries. Assunta's demeanor instantly cools when she sees her. In the b.g. Roberta sees Janet and turns off the vacuum cleaner.

JANET
Hello, Assunta. How are you?

ASSUNTA
I'd be a lot better if my daughter had a job next year.

ROBERTA
Ma!

JANET
(to Assunta)
I would too.
Janet briskly walks into THE LIVING ROOM, puts the grocery bags down on a table, and begins to take things out of them. Roberta watches her, mystified.

**JANET**
(to Roberta)
Sorry I'm early, but I figured we'd need time to set up.

Roberta watches Janet for a beat, then addresses Assunta.

**ROBERTA**
Mama, why don't you take Allegra out for a walk?

Assunta hesitates for a beat, then gets the dog and exits.

Janet continues unpacking the bags as if there's nothing unusual about her being there. Cheeses, crackers, bread, salads, fruit, paper plates, napkins, etc. She sees Roberta's confused expression.

**JANET**
You are having a meeting here tonight, right? Parents and teachers?

**ROBERTA**
Well, yes, but ...

**JANET**
Take it from me. If you want to get parents to help you with something, you have to feed them.

She holds up two wedges of cheese.

**JANET**
You have a cutting board for these?

Roberta crosses into the kitchen and returns with a cutting board and a knife.

**JANET**
(as she continues to unpack)
And if you think parents are bad, teachers are even worse, no offense. If you don't feed them, you never get anything extra out of them. That's why I got this.

She pulls out an Entenmann's blackout cake.

**JANET**

Entenmann's gets them every time.

Roberta continues to stare in amazement at Janet.

**JANET**

What? Don't tell me you expected me to bring something homemade.

**ROBERTA**

(as she takes the cake from her)

Well, no... I --

**JANET**

Good. Because take it from me -- my own family begs me to stay out of the kitchen.

**ROBERTA**

What I didn't expect was for you to be here.

**JANET**

Why not? We've gotta figure out a way to fight this.

(as she arranges crackers on a plate)

After ten years, Roberta, I can't imagine walking through those hallways and not hearing that off-key, screechy, scratchy, nails-on-the-blackboard violin music.

Roberta smiles. Janet holds up a baguette.

**JANET**

What do you think? Cut it into slices now, or leave it whole?

**ROBERTA**

Let's cut it now. It'll be less messy.
Janet hands her the bread. A beat as the two women exchange a private smile, then return to their respective tasks.

INT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - NIGHT

There's a crowd of PARENTS assembled in Roberta's front room, CONCEPCION, BEVERLY WILSON (Shandra's mom), MR. ADAMS (Black) and MRS. ADAMS (Puerto Rican), the parents of James (from first year) and Simon. DOROTHEA, JANET, ISABEL are also there; ASSUNTA is keeping tabs on the refreshments.

**ISABEL**

Don't they realize how much this program helps the kids?

**MR. ADAMS**

Simon's our third child to study with Roberta. James is pre-med, April's valedictorian -- now that says something!

**MR. KLEIN**

I think we should inundate the Board and the District with letters.

**JANET**

You're wasting your time. The Board and the District are not gonna pay for this program, no matter how many letters they get.

Disappointed grumblings.

**ISABEL**

What if we raise the money ourselves?

**JANET**

I can't see how they'd object to that.

A beat as people take this in.

**CONCEPCION**

Well once that newspaper article comes out, that should help bring in
money.

BEVERLY
Yeah, but what if it doesn't? For all we know, it's gonna be buried on the back page. Besides, who says anyone's gonna give a damn about our kids?

DOROTHEA
(to Roberta)
What if you do a benefit concert? We can raise a batch of money from ticket sales, and then the concert itself could be great publicity. There's word of mouth... you could get reviewed...

ROBERTA
It better be a good concert!

Some people laugh but we see the anxiety on Roberta's face.

ROBERTA
We have to offer something more than me and the kids.
(to Dorothea)
Do you think maybe your husband would perform with us?

DOROTHEA
(slyly)
I'm sure I could persuade him with a little pillow talk. And maybe he can get another violinist too -- Itzhak Perlman, perhaps.

This gets people's attention.

ROBERTA
That would be fantastic.

DOROTHEA
We could rent a place like the 92nd Street Y -- it's perfect for this. It seats about nine hundred people and if we charge between fifty and a hundred a ticket --

ISABEL
(to Roberta)
We could probably raise enough to reinstate your program for a year.

JANET
Sounds like a plan.

ROBERTA
(half to herself)
It better be a good concert.

The DOORBELL RINGS and Roberta crosses to get it. DAN enters, holding copies of the NY POST, the DAILY NEWS, and a couple of other papers. Each paper has been opened to a specific page.

DAN
Take your pick.

Roberta grabs the top one -- the POST -- opened to page 5.

INSERT
The page has a photo of Roberta at the Spring Concert, and a large article headlined A VIOLIN TEACHER FIGHTS BACK.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

Lots of chaos as a TELEVISION NEWS CREW sets up. Roberta tries futilely to get the beginners to pay attention to her.

ROBERTA
Kids, listen to me -- it's really important that you don't look at the camera and you try to act as natural as possible.

Dennis storms in.

DENNIS
Who authorized this?

ROBERTA
Janet.

DENNIS
Well Janet's not here today and I want these people out of here.

The kids quiet down and watch them argue. A CAMERA GUY starts shooting the argument and Dennis sees him.

DENNIS
Turn that off, you hear me?

ROBERTA
Why are you doing this? We're not bothering anyone.

DENNIS
You're disrupting school and I want them out of here -- now.

ROBERTA
You still don't get it, do you? I don't care if you hate me, Dennis -- that's your business. But think about the students for once. Every time you interfere, you're not hurting me -- you're hurting them.

She points to the kids. They're silent, waiting to see if Roberta got through to him. A beat.

DENNIS
Get these people out of here or I'm calling the police.

ROBERTA
Go right ahead, call them. That'll look real good on the eleven o'clock news.

A beat and he exits. Roberta takes a deep breath, then turns back to the kids who are watching her, impressed.

RAMON
I don't hear no sirens.

INT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

ON THE TV is the news segment: ROBERTA speaks to an unseen interviewer.
ROBERTA
I'm from a blue collar family, and if it weren't for the lessons I got in public school, I never would have learned the violin.

It CUTS TO Roberta's beginners speaking to the interviewer.

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)
How does it make you feel to lose your violin program?

SHANDRA
It makes us sad!

RAMON
Yeah, like we're never gonna have no more violin lessons --

VANESSA
And it's bad because... because we love violin class.

WIDER - REVEAL Roberta, Lexi and Nick watching the TV.

INT. ARNOLD STEINHARDT AND DOROTHEA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

ON TV - THE SAME NEWS SEGMENT, ANOTHER SOUND BITE

ROBERTA
Yes, I've gotten offers from two private schools, but this is where I want to be.

DOROTHEA (O.S.)
Arnold, these kids need help.

WIDER - REVEAL a comfortable Upper East Side apartment and DOROTHEA watching T.V. while ARNOLD practices violin.

There's FRAMED PHOTOGRAPHY on the walls, signed by Dorothea.

ARNOLD
Didn't we send them a donation?

DOROTHEA
They need something bigger. And you can't just write a check -- you have to get involved.
ARNOLD

Involved how?

The look on her face tells him it's more than he bargained for.

ARNOLD

Uh-oh.

INT. SERIES OF SHOTS - DAY

1. Arnold Steinhardt speaks on the phone. His Roladex is open to the name ITZHAK PERLMAN. In the b.g., Dorothea tensely waits to hear if Itzhak Perlman will say yes.

2. Parents, Roberta, Nick and Lexi hang "FIDDLEFEST CONCERT" posters around their neighborhood, announcing a concert at THE 92ND STREET Y with ARNOLD STEINHARDT, ITZHAK PERLMAN and STUDENTS FROM THE EAST HARLEM VIOLIN PROGRAM.

3. Parents -- including Beverly Wilson, Concepcion, Mr. Adams and Carlos' mom and dad -- stuff envelopes with INVITATIONS to "FIDDLEFEST" and accompanying LETTERS and TICKET ORDER FORMS. Roberta and Dorothea open envelopes with filled-TICKET ORDER FORMS and CHECKS. They stack the checks in a pile, address return envelopes and place FIDDLEFEST TICKETS inside them.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

Thirty-three excited kids from Roberta's different classes chat, tune their violins, rosin their bows. The students include Carlos, Stephanie, Amanda, Kenny, Rachel, Simon, Ramon, Vanessa, and Shandra. Roberta enters the room, full of energy, and addresses them as she heads to the
ROBERTA
Listen up, everyone! Quiet down!

The students give her their attention.

ROBERTA
You are my very best beginner and advanced violin students and I've chosen you to play in Fiddlefest because I trust that you can handle the pressure. It's gonna be a lot of work -- a lot. Right now, we've sold some tickets, but I'm not gonna be back here in the fall if the audience storms out of their seats, demanding a refund!

She nods to Rachel who starts handing out sheets of music.

ROBERTA
Rachel's gonna be my lieutenant and I expect you to listen to her.

Ramon looks through his music sheets.

RAMON
Bach's "Minuet One"?

ROBERTA
People are gonna be paying good money for this concert -- we're not just gonna play "Twinkle."

(handling out papers)
I'm passing out a contract that you and your parents need to sign.

The kids read the contracts. Carlos' eyes widen.

CARLOS
Every Saturday and Sunday?

ROBERTA
Plus night time rehearsals during the week. There's only six weeks till the concert, so classes in school won't be enough.

The kids look sobered by this.

ROBERTA
Come to think of it, we'll probably also need to meet before school.

Lots of grumbling: "Say what?" "No way!" "Before school?"

I'm a be sleepwalking!

**ROBERTA**

You've heard of Navy Seal Training? Well, this is gonna be Roberta String Training.

**ANOTHER ANGLE** - Two young men and two young women walk in, carrying violins. We realize from the scar that one is NAEEM (20), now a strikingly handsome man, over six feet tall. With him is DE SEAN (19), a short guy with dreadlocks, looking more like a rapper than a violinist. GUADALUPE (19), with a cane, is now a beautiful young woman, her long braid pinned up. The fourth is a reserved Puerto Rican woman (20).

**ROBERTA**

Oh my god! Naeem! De Sean! (hugs them) Guadalupe!

She hugs her, then looks closely at the other woman.

**ROBERTA**

Lucy? Is that you?

The woman snaps her fingers and smiles. Roberta laughs and embraces her, then turns to the students.

**ROBERTA**

Kids, these are four of my very first violin students and I've asked them to play in the concert with us. (to the alumni) I was just telling them how hard they're gonna have to work.

**DE SEAN**

(to class)

Take it from me -- this lady don't
lie. Y'all are gonna work your butts off.

INT. RAMON'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ramon's father carefully reads the violin contract while Ramon and Concepcion anxiously watch. He stops to look up a word in the English-Spanish dictionary beside him. His mom is squirming. Manelo nods as he finishes reading, then SIGNS the contract. Ramon breaks into a smile, throws his little arms around his Papa and kisses him.

EXT. RIVER EAST - DAY

School’s letting out; Carlos’ sister exits, carrying his violin. A few beats later, Carlos quickly exits, checking his watch. He sees his LOS LEONES teammates standing in a group, and tries to bypass them without being noticed, but they spot him.

TEAMMATE #1
Hey Carlos! Where ya goin'? We got a game, remember?

CARLOS
Yeah, I know, but... I can't make it.

TEAMMATE #1
What you talkin' about?

CARLOS
I just can't make it.

TEAMMATE #2
You got a date with the violin teacher?

A beat.

CARLOS
Yeah. I do.
He dashes off, a barrage of Spanish and English curses behind him, and crosses to his sister, waiting for him DOWN STREET. He takes the violin from her and carries it himself.

INT. CPE MUSIC ROOM - DAY

The Fiddlefest kids, including Carlos, Vanessa, Shandra, Ramon, Stephanie, Amanda, Kenny, Simon, Thomas, De Sean and Guadalupe practice Bach's "Minuet One," Roberta leading and giving direction. They're playing badly.

Rachel plays as well, but walks around the room making corrections. It's early morning, and the kids look half-asleep.

ROBERTA
Frog! Frog! I need more accents on the down beat! More bow! More!

They play a few more bars and still sound pretty bad.

ROBERTA
Stop! Stop!
(they do so)
You sound horrible! Isn't anyone practicing?

CARLOS
How can we practice? We're rehearsing all the time.

Some kids laugh, including Stephanie.

ROBERTA
(to Stephanie)
You think this is funny, Stephanie?
(to all of them)
You think the four hundred people who've bought tickets so far will think it's funny too? You think Itzhak Perlman will think it's funny that he's donating his time and you're all gonna stink?

Vanessa yawns and Roberta sees her. Uh-oh.
ROBERTA
Am I boring you, Vanessa?

VANESSA
No. It's 7:30 in the morning. I'm just tired.

ROBERTA
There's no time to be tired.
(to all, getting her violin in position)
Let's try it again.

INT. ARNOLD AND DOROTHEA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Dorothea opens the door for Roberta who just charges in, agitated, without even saying hello. We sense that too, is troubled by something.

ROBERTA
I must have been crazy to agree to this. They're never gonna be ready. And you should hear the Bach Double! A disaster. So the good news is tickets are selling like hot cakes, but the bad news is that the kids sound like shit.

DOROTHEA
There's more bad news... We've lost the Y.

Roberta looks at her, aghast.

ROBERTA
What?!

DOROTHEA
They had a flood -- a water heater burst... The concert hall was damaged and they've cancelled all events.

ROBERTA
Until when?

DOROTHEA
"Until further notice."

ROBERTA
This can't happen! We've sold tickets! We've done publicity! The concert's in three weeks!

DOROTHEA
I've been on the phone all morning calling other theaters. Nothing's available.

They both sink into the couch, completely undone by this.

ROBERTA
Just keep looking.

INT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - NIGHT

The Fiddlefest kids are crammed into Roberta's house, (including De Sean, Guadalupe, Ramon, Vanessa, Shandra, Carlos, Thomas, Stephanie, Amanda, Kenny, and Simon), rehearsing "Orange Blossom Special." They play badly.

Rachel helps Roberta correct students.

ROBERTA
Stop! Someone's playing the wrong notes! And you shouldn't need your music anymore! Except for the Bach Double, everything has to be memorized by next rehearsal!

The kids look at each other, daunted.

ROBERTA
And you sound like you're sleepwalking. Your heart's not even in it.

VANESSA
Maybe 'cause we don't have a place for the concert.

Roberta looks at her, and then notices the despondent looks on many of the kids' faces.

ROBERTA
Well, you're right. This might all be for nothing. So we can either keep on rehearsing in case we find a place -- or we can just... give up.
DE SEAN
Am I hearing right? Did you use the words "give up"?
(t to the students)
Let's take a vote. How many of you want to give up?

No one raises a hand. Roberta takes this in.

GUADALUPE
See? You taught us well.

INT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - KITCHEN - DAY

It's early morning. Lexi cooks breakfast while Nick and Roberta look at scribbled-on, marked-up lists.

ROBERTA
What about in the Bronx?

NICK
There's nothing.
(beat)
Why don't you just do it in one of the schools? It'll be a lot smaller but --

ROBERTA
We won't make enough money.

LEXI
What about postponing it?

ROBERTA
Itzhak and Arnold are booked all summer.

They all look depressed. Lexi places an equally depressing-looking stack of pancakes on the table. There's a BANGING on the door, startling everyone.

DOROTHEA (O.S.)
It's Dorothea.

Nick opens the door and Dorothea rushes in, out of breath, talking a mile a minute.

DOROTHEA
I have good news -- really good news.
Arnold got a call from his friend Wally Scheur who heard about us losing the Y and wanted to see how he could help -- and then Wally had this brilliant idea and called his friend Isaac Stern and it's all arranged! We have a new place for Fiddlefest!

**ROBERTA**

Where?

**DOROTHEA**

Carnegie Hall.

Dorothea grins from ear to ear, Nick and Lexi whoop and holler, and all wait for Roberta to jump up and down for joy -- but she looks stricken.

**ROBERTA**

(panicked)

Carnegie Hall?

**INT. CARNEGIE HALL - DAY**

CLOSE ON THE CEILING OF CARNEGIE HALL, revolving slowly.

**PULL BACK TO REVEAL THIS IS ROBERTA'S POV**

She stands on the empty stage, gazing at the ceiling as slowly turns around. She's holding her violin case. She looks at the UPPER BALCONIES -- THE LOWER BALCONIES -- THE ORCHESTRA SEATS. Her footsteps echo as she walks towards the front of the stage, then stops.

**CLOSE ON ROBERTA**

We can see her imagining the audience on the night of the concert. She can't believe her eyes. A beat, and she looks around to make sure she's alone. She takes out her violin, "audience," then starts to play the second violin part of the Bach Double...
Concerto. Suddenly, there's the SOUND of a stage door opening. Roberta stops.

**MALE VOICE (O.S.)**
Incredible sound in this room, no?

Roberta turns to see ISAAC STERN approaching her. She's completely flustered.

**ROBERTA**
Oh my god -- Isaac Stern.

**ISAAC STERN**
You must be Roberta.

**ROBERTA**
Thank you so much for helping us.

**ISAAC STERN**
(looking out at the hall)
Would you believe in 1960, they tried to tear this place down? They wanted to replace it with a bright red skyscraper -- we called it "the red terror."

**ROBERTA**
You're kidding.

**ISAAC STERN**
We had to fight like hell, but with a lot of help, we saved Carnegie Hall.

Roberta takes this in, relating it to her own struggle.

**ISAAC STERN**
If it's all right with you, I'd like to play in your concert. Maybe bring a couple of friends...

**ROBERTA**
Yes, of course! That would be great!

Isaac nods, then touches her shoulder.

**ISAAC STERN**
Don't give up.

**EXT. SIDEWALK CAFE, UPPER WEST SIDE - DAY**
Roberta pours nervous energy into her cappuccino, adding cinnamon, chocolate, and sugar, stirring loudly. Dan sits across from her, observing.

**ROBERTA**
I just don't see how I'm gonna do this. It's huge. It's gigantic! It's Carnegie Hall! And listen to this: now Isaac Stern wants to play with us -- Diane Monroe, Michael Tree -- there's other people calling --

**DAN**
That's fantastic!

**ROBERTA**
Fantastic? I'll never get the kids up to speed in time, I'll never get myself up to speed. I'm gonna be playing side by side with the world's greatest violinists.

**DAN**
And "the world's greatest violinists" are playing side by side with you because they want to help you win this fight.

He offers her a forkful of some decadent-looking chocolate cake, but she shakes her head.

**ROBERTA**
Yes, but... you don't understand. Maybe there's a good reason why I never made it as a violinist -- maybe I just can't cut it. I keep blaming it on not having enough early training, but if I were talented, if I had a gift --

**DAN**
But you do have a gift. You're gonna put thirty East Harlem kids on stage at Carnegie Hall not because they're prodigies, but because you got them to stick with something that's hard as hell and to strive for excellence -- which, by the way, I certainly wasn't
striving for when I was their age. Not to mention the other ten years' worth of students whose lives were changed because of you. That's your talent, Roberta.

She takes this in, looks at him gratefully and puts her hand over his. He strokes her hand.

**ROBERTA**

I'm scared.

**DAN**

I know.  
(beat)  
And by the way, I happen to think you're a pretty good violinist too.

**ROBERTA**

You've barely heard me play.

**DAN**

I've heard enough to know you're gonna do just fine.

Roberta looks at him with trepidation. Dan takes another forkful of his cake.

**DAN**

Besides, no one's gonna be paying attention to your playing anyway.

Roberta laughs. Dan smiles, glad he got her to lighten up.

**EXT. CPE 1 - DAY (EARLY MORNING)**

The Fiddlefest kids (including Ramon, Shandra, Vanessa, Sean, Naeem, Guadalupe, Lucy, Simon, Stephanie, Amanda and Kenny -- but RACHEL is absent) stand outside the locked school gate, waiting for Roberta. Some of the kids have their violins out of the cases, tuning them.

**CARLOS**

Teacher's late. I think she should be dropped, don't you?
Kids laugh.

**RAMON**
Yeah. I don't think we should let her play in Fiddlefest!

A few kids start playing "CAN-CAN." It catches on, and more of them join in. PASSERSBY stop to listen, and some change into the open cases. RAMON and a couple of other kids grin at this.

CARLOS steps in front of the kids as he plays, and begins an uncanny imitation of Roberta:

**CARLOS**
More bow! To the frog! You sound terrible! I can't believe how terrible you sound!

The kids crack up, but a few spot ROBERTA heading quickly up the street. Carlos is oblivious to this -- and no one signals him that Roberta's watching.

**CARLOS**
You're gonna make everyone in Carnegie Hall sick to their stomachs! That's right, they're gonna pay a thousand dollars a ticket and you're gonna make them throw up on their gowns and tuxedos!

Carlos senses a presence and turns to see Roberta. A tense beat as he awaits her reaction.

**ROBERTA**
(in all seriousness)
If you're gonna imitate me, do it right.

(corrects his posture)
Shoulders back. Violin higher. Check your feet. There.

(beat)
G'head, Carlos. Continue.
Carlos freezes.

**CARLOS**
No, that's O.K. You can take it from here.

Roberta nods, and addresses the kids as she unlocks the gate.

**ROBERTA**
He's right, by the way. You do sound terrible, and you are gonna make everyone in Carnegie Hall sick to their stomachs.

The kids start filing in. Rachel comes up the street and catches up to Roberta.

**RACHEL**
I need to talk to you.

Roberta sees how distressed Rachel looks.

**ROBERTA**
(to kids)
I'll be right in. Start on Minuet One.

(to Rachel)
What's wrong?

**RACHEL**
We're moving away.

**ROBERTA**
What? Where are you moving?

**RACHEL**
(looking downward)
It's a secret... My father... he's been hurting my mom... We have to leave.

**ROBERTA**
(gently)
Has he been hurting you too?

Rachel shakes her head no, then starts to cry a little.

**RACHEL**
I'm sorry about Julliard... and the concert.
She hands Roberta her violin.

**ROBERTA**
Keep it. Take it with you.

**RACHEL**
No... I don't want to play anymore.

**ROBERTA**
What?! You can't give up violin, Rachel -- it's a part of you. A very important part.

Rachel looks anguish. Roberta moves closer and touches her arm.

**ROBERTA**
Please honey. Just take it.

**RACHEL**
I don't want to.

Roberta looks at her, pained, then hugs her. Rachel quickly kisses Roberta goodbye and exits. Roberta watches her.

**INT. CPE 1 - MUSIC ROOM - A LITTLE LATER**

Roberta leads De Sean, Naeem, Guadalupe, Lucy, Stephanie, Thomas, Carlos, Erica and Nicholas in the Bach Double Concerto. The other kids watch. Roberta's on the edge of hysteria. She signals the players to stop.

**ROBERTA**
No, no, no! Accent the up bow after the slurred notes and then it'll get you off of those slurred notes! You Double Concerto kids need to be working harder! This is the grand finale of the concert! You're each gonna be sharing a music stand with one of the world's greatest violinists!

The kids say "the world's greatest violinists" along with her -- they've obviously been hearing this a lot.
glares at them.

**ROBERTA**
I think we should forget the Bach Double.
(to the other kids)
And you guys are never gonna get Minuet One. I think we should drop that too.

**VANESSA**
No! We can do it, Roberta!

**CARLOS**
And we'll get the Bach Double. We will.

She stops, takes a breath.

**NAEEM**
It's gonna be O.K., Roberta.

**ROBERTA**
(vulnerable)
You think?

All the kids nod. A few beats.

**ROBERTA**
O.K...
(not believing it)
It's gonna be O.K.

She crosses to take a look at her music, and the kids exchange looks that say, "Oh shit. What did we just promise?"

**REHEARSAL MONTAGE - SERIES OF SHOTS - DAY**

1. Carlos practices violin against the fence around River East School. In the b. g., his buddies make fun of him.

2. Shandra practices in a school stairwell, ignoring a boy who pulls one of her braids as he passes by.

3. Stephanie practices at a bus stop, her eyes closed, then looks up and realizes she's just missed her bus.
4. Ramon practices in his living room, his father watching attentively, then helping him lift the violin higher.

5. Vanessa practices in a crowded school hallway, frustrated as kids keep bumping into her.

6. Roberta, in her nightgown, practices in front of her refrigerator in the middle of the night.

INT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - DAY (LATE AFTERNOON)

Pandemonium. Nick and Lexi, both in tuxes, are doing several tasks at once while Roberta, in a simple black velvet dress and stockinged feet, tries to put on her makeup but keeps poking her head out of the bathroom, giving orders. Allegra BARKS outside the back door.

ROBERTA
Nick -- did you feed Allegra?

NICK
(fixing Lexi's tie)
Yes, Mom.

ROBERTA
Lexi, can you make sure the charts are still in my bag?

LEXI
I already checked, Mom.

ROBERTA (O.S.)
Check again, please. And look for my repair kit too.

ASSUNTA descends the staircase, dressed in a formal dress. She holds a small jewelry box and heads for the bathroom.

ASSUNTA
Bert, which earrings you want?

Roberta sticks her head out and picks the earrings. Assunta enters the small bathroom to work on her own makeup.
ROBERTA
Nick? Get two more violins.

NICK
You've already got two -- how many emergencies can there be?

A beat.

ROBERTA
Get three more. And make sure a couple of them are half-size.

Nick rolls his eyes and runs upstairs while Lexi organizes things by the door: Nick's cello, Roberta's papers, extra violins. Roberta rushes out of the bathroom, adjusting earrings. She starts compulsively straightening the house.

ROBERTA
Lexi -- can you call about the car again?

LEXI
Mom, they're not gonna forget to send a car!

Nick comes running down the stairs with the violins and stares in disbelief at Roberta fluffing a couch pillow.

NICK
What are you doing?

ROBERTA
Just straightening a little.

NICK
You're insane, you know that? (grabs the pillow) Finish getting dressed!

He throws the pillow onto the couch. Roberta heads upstairs.

INT. CARLOS' ROOM - DAY

IN THE MIRROR - Carlos adjusts his tuxedo. We see the
reflection of his baseball bat, glove and trophies in room behind him.

**INT. GUADALUPE'S ROOM - DAY**

Guadalupe's mom pins up her braid, then steps back to look at her daughter, radiant in a floral gown. Her mom starts to cry.

**INT. SHANDRA'S ROOM - DAY**

Beverly puts rhinestone-studded barrettes in Shandra's hair.

**INT. RAMON'S ROOM - DAY**

ON RAMON - He's in a sharp black suit and looks very dapper.

WIDER - Manuelo and Concepcion stand back to admire him, then Manuelo straightens Ramon's tie, brimming with pride over his son.

**INT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - FRONT ROOM - DAY**

**ROBERTA (O.S.)**

**SHIT!**

Nick and Assunta look towards the stairs. Roberta comes running down.

**ROBERTA**

Can you believe this?

She turns around, revealing a RIP on the back of the dress, next to the zipper. The DOORBELL RINGS.

**ROBERTA**

It can't be time! Is it time?

**ASSUNTA**

I'll sew it in the car.

**EXT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - DAY**

Roberta, Assunta and the boys step outside, amazed to see a
STRETCH LIMOUSINE double-parked in front, a CHAUFFEUR waiting.

LEXI
See? I told you they'd send a car.

Robert'a open-mouthed. She leads her entourage towards the limo. THE NEIGHBORS come out of their houses to watch. Some lean out windows, gawking. Ad libs... "Who's that?"

"It's the Violin Lady!" LAWRENCE, dressed in a tux, gives high sign.

The chauffeur helps Roberta and Assunta into the limo while Nick and Lexi start to load the instruments into the trunk.

INT. LIMOUSINE - CONTINUOUS

Roberta sits down beside Assunta and turns around so can mend the tear in her dress. Assunta partially unzips the dress and starts stitching it from the inside.

ROBERTA
Thank you, Mama.

ASSUNTA
Don't worry about it. You rip -- I sew.

ROBERTA
Not just for that.
(beat)
Thank you for getting me out of bed.

Assunta stitches, remembering, and smiles.

ASSUNTA
Don't thank me -- thank Charles.

ROBERTA
Charles?!

ASSUNTA
If that jerk hadn't of left you, none of this would've happened.
Roberta contemplates this. A beat.

**ROBERTA**

Thank you, Charles.

Her last stitch finished, Assunta rips the needle from the thread.

**EXT. CARNEGIE HALL - ESTABLISHING - DUSK**

**INT. CARNEGIE HALL - BACK STAGE - NIGHT**

The kids and their parents are practically boiling over excitement. Last minute kisses, violin tunings, and clothing adjustments take place throughout the room.

The boys are in suits or tuxes, the girls in velvet or flowered dresses, some with bows in their hair, some with their hair up in buns. Roberta tries to take a head count, Dorothea confers with a stage manager, Assunta fixes a boy's tie, and Janet helps one girl with her hair, stopping in the middle to button the back of another girl's dress.

**ROBERTA**

Where's Vanessa? Has anyone seen Vanessa?

Janet looks at her, concerned.

**JANET**

I'll call her house.

**ANGLE** - Roberta sees MRS. ADISA enter the room with Naeem. They excuses. They to --
he takes her hand, and then kisses her on the cheek.

BRIAN
Congratulations.

ROBERTA
Thank you...

BRIAN
I knew you'd get here sooner or later.
I'm glad I'm here to see it.

A beat.

ROBERTA
I am too.

INT. CARNEGIE HALL - BACKSTAGE WINGS AREA - NIGHT

Guadalupe shyly approaches Itzhak Perlman, her mother behind her, silently encouraging her.

GUADALUPE
Excuse me, Mr. Perlman?

He turns around.

GUADALUPE
(extends a hand)
I'm Guadalupe. I've wanted to meet you for a long time.

He smiles at her and they shake hands.

ITZHAK PERLMAN
A pleasure to meet you, Guadalupe.

As Guadalupe introduces him to her mother, CARLOS approaches.

CARLOS
You nervous, Mr. Perlman?

ITZHAK PERLMAN
Should I be?

CARLOS
Us kids are gonna be great -- I don't know about you guys. How much did you practice?
Itzhak Perlman laughs.

**INT. CARNEGIE HALL - BACK STAGE - NIGHT**

Roberta talks to Janet with a worried expression.

**ROBERTA**
You called Vanessa's father and mother?

**JANET**
No answer at either.

A Carnegie Hall staff person in a suit enters.

**STAFF PERSON**
Half hour call! It's now half hour call! So pace yourself accordingly. Don't get more than thirty minutes worth of nervous!

The room electrifies with nerves.

**VANESSA**
rushes into the room with her father. She's out of breath, her stocking has a big run in it, and she's in tears.

**VANESSA**
They stole the car!

**MR. KLEIN**
With the violin.

**ROBERTA**
Oh my God.
(calling)
Nick, Lexi --

**NICK**
Done.

The boys rush over to the extra violins and look to find the right size.

**VANESSA**
(crying)
And then when we were getting a taxi, I fell down.
Roberta comforts her and Janet moves in.

**JANET**
C'mon honey -- let's get you cleaned up.

ANGLE - DAN enters with a bouquet of long-stemmed red roses. He's in a tux and looks very handsome. He crosses to Roberta, hands her the flowers, and they hug.

**DAN**
You're glowing.

**ROBERTA**
It's terror.

**INT. CARNEGIE HALL - NIGHT**

The hall is filling to capacity as people take their seats, the room buzzing with voices.

**INT. CARNEGIE HALL - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT**

The CARNEGIE HALL staff person enters.

**STAFF PERSON**
FIVE MINUTE CALL. WE NOW HAVE FIVE MINUTES.

The tension in the room shoots sky high.

**INT. CARNEGIE HALL - STAGE - PODIUM - NIGHT**

Janet stands onstage and addresses the audience.

**JANET**
When I became the principal of Central Park East Elementary, I envisioned a school where children could fulfill their highest potential, despite the challenges of poverty and racism. Ten years ago, Roberta Guaspari walked into my office because she needed a job, and because she had a vision that any child could learn the violin. We put our dreams together and created the East Harlem Violin Program which has helped more than a thousand students expand their vision of what's
possible in their lives. When a program like this is cut, our children's future is compromised. I want to thank you for your support. Enjoy the concert.

INT. CARNEGIE HALL - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

In the b.g. we hear the audience APPLAUDING Janet.

Roberta holds up her hands to quiet down the anxious students.

ROBERTA
Everyone -- attention please!

They become quiet.

ROBERTA
I want you all to take a second just to breathe, O.K.? Deep breath.

The kids breathe.

ROBERTA
I would like you all to play with your heart, all right? Play like I know you can play. You'll be wonderful. Watch me, don't look out in the audience -- you don't need to be afraid. It's gonna be really wonderful. So play -- play from here.

She pats her heart.

INT. CARNEGIE HALL - BACKSTAGE CORRIDOR - NIGHT

The kids head out towards the stage, the APPLAUSE getting louder as they get closer.

INT. CARNEGIE HALL - STAGE - NIGHT

CRANE SHOT of the children on stage, in their positions.

REVERSE SHOT - FOUR FILLED BALCONIES

BACK TO THE STAGE

Some of the kids look awestruck by the audience; one
waves hi to her family. Roberta walks out to APPLAUSE. bows to the audience, turns to the kids, signals them slight nod and the BACH MINUET ONE begins. We've heard all phases, and now it is flawless.

PAN the STUDENTS watching her: VANESSA, wearing a corsage; SIMON in his red bow tie; SHANDRA in black velvet with pearls; NAEEM standing proud and tall, DE SEAN in dreadlocks and a tux; RAMON playing from his heart...

INT. CARNEGIE HALL - BACK STAGE - CONTINUOUS

Isaac Stern, Itzhak Perlman, Michael Tree, Arnold Steinhardt, Diane Monroe, Karen Briggs and Mark O'Connor wait back stage, chatting and listening to the kids.

INT. CARNEGIE HALL - THE STAGE - MOMENTS LATER

The students finish MINUET ONE. There's an exquisite moment of silence, then APPLAUSE.

INT. CARNEGIE HALL - THE STAGE - LATER

Country fiddler MARK O'CONNOR plays ORANGE BLOSSOM with the kids. He improvises, surprising them as his violin makes the sound of a TRAIN moving through a tunnel. RAMON smiles, awed by this -- but he remains calm and professional.

INT. CARNEGIE HALL - BACK STAGE CORRIDOR - LATER

As the guest violinists head for the stage, we hear their names over a mike, mixed with APPLAUSE:

MALE VOICE (V.O.)
Isaac Stern, Itzhak Perlman, Arnold Steinhardt, Diane Monroe, Michael Tree, Mark O'Connor and Karen Briggs.
INT. CARNEGIE HALL - STAGE - MOMENTS LATER

CRANE SHOT of the six guest violinists on stage for the Grand Finale, each one sharing a music stand with a student. Roberta nods, and they begin THE BACH DOUBLE CONCERTO. She face the audience as she joins them.

MOVE IN AND PAN the performers and students: NAAEM stands with ARNOLD STEINHARDT; ISAAC STERN stands and with GUADALUPE, sitting beside him; ITZHAK PERLMAN sits plays next to CARLOS, standing beside him; MICHAEL TREE beside DE SEAN; DIANE MONROE plays beside LUCY; KAREN plays beside THOMAS, and MARK O'CONNOR plays beside NICK plays cello; LEXI plays the piano behind them; playing with her own solo music stand, ROBERTA.

Their expressions are serious and passionate, broken by occasional smiles lighting on faces: Isaac Stern... Lucy... Carlos... Itzhak Perlman... Diane Monroe... De Seán. The song finishes and the APPLAUSE begins. The OTHER FIDDLEFEST PLAYERS come out from back stage, RAMON in and join the rest. More applause. The CAMERA PULLS BACK INCLUDE the audience facing the stage, then REVERSES to the audience standing in the orchestra and balconies.

We see the students' PARENTS; JANET, ISABEL and their families; ASSUNTA, LAWRENCE and DOROTHEA; DAN; CONCEPCION, can't MANUELO and their sons; BRIAN; and DENNIS -- even he stop himself from applauding.

BACK AGAIN to the stage where the students and guest violinists bow... and MOVE IN CLOSER on ROBERTA in her moment of triumph.
INT. CARNEGIE HALL - STAGE - PODIUM - MOMENTS LATER

Roberta addresses the audience. Her voice is strong but softer around the edges; she is a woman in a state of grace.

ROBERTA
We're all here tonight because we have a bigger mission: to take the magical spirit of tonight's concert with us out into the world, and to fight for music and art to be a part of every child's education. Thank you.

The APPLAUSE is DEAFENING, then slowly diminishes as we:

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CPE 1 - MUSIC CLASSROOM - DAY

Roberta addresses ten first-graders sitting in a circle on the floor. She points to the horsehair on her bow.

ROBERTA
And this? What's this?

BOY
The frog hair?

Roberta and the kids laugh.

ROBERTA
Did you ever see a frog with hair?

The boy smiles and shakes his head.

A FEW KIDS
It's horsehair!

ROBERTA
That's right.  
(to the boy)
But you're right, there is a frog. Can you show me where it is?

One girl raises her hand with urgency.

GIRL
Ooh! I know!

ROBERTA

Sssh -- let him answer.

The boy points to the frog of the bow and Roberta smiles.

And as she continues her lesson, her voice recedes and we:

OUT:

FADE

THE END

CRAWL:

Roberta Guaspari lives in East Harlem with her daughter Sofia, whom she adopted from El Salvador. Nick is a professional cellist in a graduate music program, and Alexi has been accepted to medical school.

Roberta teaches violin to approximately 150 students a year in three East Harlem elementary schools. The East Harlem Violin Program, however, is still not funded by the New York City Board of Education.

The money raised from Fiddlefest supported Roberta's violin program for three years. Roberta and Opus 118 continue fundraising efforts to keep the program alive.