

**CHANGELING**

A True Story

Written by

J. Michael Straczynski

**FADE IN:**

**BLACK SCREEN**

On which appears:

**EVERYTHING YOU ARE ABOUT TO SEE, HAPPENED**

The words slowly FADE OUT, taking us hard into

**EXT. COLLINS HOME - PRE-DAWN**

Angela  
Stadium.  
A small, pleasant house on a tree-lined street in Los Angeles circa 1928. 210 North Avenue 23. Not far from Dodger Stadium.

**SUPERIMPOSE: LOS ANGELES, MARCH 9, 1928.**

**INT. COLLINS HOME - CHRISTINE'S BEDROOM - PRE-DAWN**

to  
moves  
A Bakelite alarm clock hits 6:30 A.M. and RINGS. CHRISTINE COLLINS, thirties, attractive, rumped, reaches INTO FRAME to shut it off. She sits up, rubs tiredly at her face, and moves OS, switching on a radio as she goes. Music fills the air.

**INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

overhead.  
She throws water on her face as the music continues. She looks at herself in the mirror as the light flickers overhead.

She hits the wall offhandedly, something she does every day. The flickering stops. With a last look at the mirror, she smoothes back her hair and exits, switching off the light.

**INT. WALTER'S BEDROOM - LATER**

Dressed now, she flicks on the overhead light. WALTER  
COLLINS  
is nine years old, with light brown hair, though we don't  
see  
much of it or him, he's entangled in the sheets. It's  
important that we don't see him too clearly in most of the  
following scenes, but without drawing attention to that  
aspect.

**CHRISTINE**

Walter...time for school, honey.

She sits on the edge of the bed, runs a hand through his  
hair.

**WALTER**

Just ten more minutes --

**CHRISTINE**

Sorry, champ.  
(more)

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**CHRISTINE (Cont'd)**

You can sleep in all you want  
tomorrow, that's what Saturdays are  
for. Now hurry up or your breakfast  
will get cold.

**WALTER**

It's cereal, it's supposed to be  
cold.

She smiles, kisses him on the forehead, and exits. He sits  
on the edge of the bed, wavers, then falls back into bed  
again.

**EXT. PASADENA AVENUE - MORNING**

A street-car (known then as the Big Red) rumbles down the  
street in the gray light of morning, passing Ford Model A's  
and Hudsons and Nash four-door sedans.

**INT. STREET-CAR - CONTINUOUS**

Christine sits on one of the benches, Walter's face buried  
in  
her lap, still half-asleep. She nudges him as they come to  
an intersection by a grade school. It's early enough that

only a few other kids have arrived.

**CHRISTINE**

We're here, sweetie. Come on.

She hands him a sack lunch and follows as he slouches toward the door. She watches from the curb as he heads toward the school. Some of the teachers lounging outside nod to her as Walter approaches, so she knows they're aware that he's there.

She waves, then hurriedly gets back on the street-car as it rumbles away.

**INT. PACIFIC TELEPHONE COMPANY - SWITCHBOARD ROOM - DAY**

Located on Grand Avenue downtown, the huge switchboard room is a maze of switching stations, tangles of wires and heavy wooden headsets...a roar of buzzers, bells, circuits opening and closing, and a hundred female operators speaking at once.

Supervisors on skates roll up and down the narrow lanes created by the banks of switching stations, going from one operator to another as needed. Christine is one of them. She turns at the SOUND of a bell struck twice, then rolls down the lane toward an OPERATOR frantically waving a pink sheet of paper.

**CHRISTINE**

Okay Sandy, what's the prob--

The mortified operator hands her the headset and stalks off.

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**OPERATOR**

You deal with this one, I'm not going near it.

Christine struggles on the headset.

**CHRISTINE**

Hello? Yes, this is the supervisor, ma'am, what can I --

(checks board)

Yes, I can see that you're on a party line, ma'am, what can I --

(beat)

I know, it's unfortunate, but people sometimes do listen in on party lines. We hope to have private lines installed by --

(beat)

Well, what's he doing when you're on the phone?

(beat)

Are you sure? Maybe there's a problem with the phone line. He could be asthmatic, or --

(beat)

Oh. No, I...I've never heard of anything like that before either. Guess there's a first time for everything, right? No, I'm afraid there's nothing we can do about people abusing the equipment or... themselves. I'm sorry. I --

She reacts to the phone being hung up hard at the other end as the floor manager, BEN HARRIS, 30s, approaches.

**MR. HARRIS**

Everything all right?

**CHRISTINE**

Fine, Mr. Harris...fine...just someone having a problem with a... with the connection.

**MR. HARRIS**

Tell them to take the plug and shove it in and out a few times, that'll usually do it.

**CHRISTINE**

Unfortunately that was part of the problem. If you'll excuse me....

She roller-skates off toward another operator waving another pink sheet of paper.

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**EXT. PACIFIC TELEPHONE COMPANY - LUNCH AREA - DAY**

Christine sits alone, eating a bag lunch and reading a thick telephone company manual. Working hard to advance herself.

Then a bell rings: time to return to work. Other employees

gather up their belongings and start inside. As Christine closes the book, her bookmark falls out. As she picks it up, we see that it's a child's drawing: her and Walter (with

arrows

indicating who is who) on a green hill, under an orange sun.

She touches the drawing and smiles as the bell rings again. She grabs her belongs and heads back inside.

**EXT. SCHOOL - AFTERNOON**

Christine waits outside the school as another bell rings, announcing the end of classes. Kids run outside, Walter

among

them. He folds in alongside as they start down the sidewalk.

**CHRISTINE**

Hey, sport.

**WALTER**

Hey, mom.

**CHRISTINE**

So how was school?

**WALTER**

Okay. We learned about dinosaurs, and I got in a fight with Billy Mankowski.

**CHRISTINE**

What happened?

**WALTER**

He hit me.

**CHRISTINE**

Did you hit him back?

(he nods)

Good. Rule number one: Never start a fight, but always finish it. So why did he hit you?

**WALTER**

Because I hit him.

She stops, looks at him.

**CHRISTINE**

Wait...you hit him first?

(he nods)

Why?

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**WALTER**

He said my dad ran off because he didn't like me.

**CHRISTINE**

Your dad never even had a chance to meet you...so how could he not like you?

**WALTER**

Then why did he leave?

Christine takes his hand, and they continue down the sidewalk.

**CHRISTINE**

Well, the same day you were born, something else arrived. It came in the mail, in a box just slightly bigger than you. You know what was in that box?

(he shakes head)

Something called responsibility. Now, to some people, responsibility is fun, it's what you live your whole life for. Other people think it's the scariest thing in the world.

**WALTER**

So he ran away because he was scared of what was in the box?

**CHRISTINE**

Yup.

**WALTER**

That's dumb.

**CHRISTINE**

That's what I thought.

She turns and crouches down in front of him.

**CHRISTINE**

Walter, I decided a long time ago that I would always tell you the truth, that I would treat you like

a grown-up. I can't expect you to respect me unless I respect you.

(beat)

I've never lied to you. Your father leaving had nothing to do with you, and everything to do with what was in the responsibility box.

**WALTER**

Pinky-swear?

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**CHRISTINE**

Pinky-swear.

She takes his pinky in hers, gives a tug. He smiles.

**CHRISTINE**

First one to the corner store gets ice cream!

He laughs and tears off. She runs after him, letting him stay ahead of her the whole way.

**EXT. COLLINS HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

Walter is asleep on the floor, in front of the radio, which is playing the closing moments of Amos and Andy. Christine enters and turns off the radio. He stirs, looks up at her.

**WALTER**

Did I miss Amos and Andy?

**CHRISTINE**

I'm afraid so, sport. Come on now, time for bed.

She picks him up and carries him up the stairs.

**WALTER**

Are we still going to the movies tomorrow?

**CHRISTINE**

Uh-huh. I hear there's a new Charlie Chaplin playing down at Grauman's, and a new serial called The Mysterious Airman.

**WALTER**

Who's that?

**CHRISTINE**

I don't know. Nobody does. That's what makes him so mysterious.

**WALTER**

Oh. Am I too heavy for you to carry?

**CHRISTINE**

Not for years yet, Walter. Not for years.

And she disappears upstairs.

**EXT. COLLINS HOME - MORNING**

Just enough to bring us into

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**INT. COLLINS HOME - CHRISTINE'S BEDROOM - MORNING**

room

She's getting ready for the day and is almost out of the room when the phone rings. She hesitates, then picks it up.

**SUPERIMPOSE: MARCH 10, 1928**

**CHRISTINE**

Hello?

(beat)

Oh, hello, Margaret. I'm fine, thanks. No, I was just --

(beat)

You're kidding. When did she call in sick?

(checks watch)

What about Myrna? I know she could use the extra hours. Oh. No, it's just...I promised Walter I'd take him to the movies today. There has to be somebody else....

(beat)

All right, I...guess we can do it tomorrow. I'll get there as soon as I can. But just until four, okay? See you in a bit.

She hangs up. She doesn't like this, but there's no way out of it. She straightens and heads out of the room.

**INT. COLLINS HOME - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

A disappointed Walter sits on the couch as Christine puts things together quickly.

**CHRISTINE**

There's a sandwich and milk in the icebox, and I've asked Mrs. Riley if her daughter can stop by in a couple of hours, just to --

**WALTER**

I can take care of myself.

**CHRISTINE**

Of course you can. She's coming by to check on the house, not you.

She stops in front of him, kneels down to eye height.

**CHRISTINE**

Tomorrow, we'll go to the movies. Then we'll ride the Big Red down to Santa Monica and walk on the pier. How's that? That okay?  
(more)

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**CHRISTINE (Cont'd)**

(he nods)

Good. I'll be back before it gets dark.

**WALTER**

I'm not afraid of the dark. I'm not afraid of anything.

**CHRISTINE**

I know you're not, honey. That's how I raised you.  
(kisses his head)  
Be good. See you in a bit.

She heads out, the screen door clattering shut behind her.

**EXT. COLLINS HOME - CONTINUOUS**

back She crosses the lawn and turns at the sidewalk, glancing  
as Walter looks out at her from the window. She waves. He waves back. With one last look, she continues off.

**INT. PACIFIC TELEPHONE COMPANY - SWITCHBOARD ROOM - DAY**

If the place was hectic before, now it's even worse: lines buzzing, voices chattering, operators following Christine around with papers and question.

**OPERATORS**

We've got lines jammed from here to Ohio...he insists on talking to someone in charge...I've tried everything and the console's just dead...I need your signature here for a supply requisition....

late. Christine glances up at the clock, 4:39. She's already  
But she does what's necessary.

**CHRISTINE**

All right, get me the Omaha routing station, see if we can put the calls through their switchers...and let's get that console running....

following. She hurries off to take care of it all, the others

**INT. PACIFIC TELEPHONE COMPANY - HALLWAY - LATER**

Christine START on a clock which reads 5:20, then TILT DOWN as  
comes out of the switchboard room, pulling on a sweater,  
ready to leave...as the floor manager steps out of his office.

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**MR. HARRIS**

Christine...good, I was hoping to catch you. I've been following your work reports, and I just want you to know that I'm very impressed.

She glances down the block. The street car is approaching,

but she doesn't want to piss off her boss by running off.

**MR. HARRIS**

When I first suggested hiring female supervisors, my superiors weren't big on the idea. But you've held your own as well as any of our male supervisors, and --

**CHRISTINE**

Thank you, Mr. Harris, but I --

**MR. HARRIS**

Ben, please. Point is, we're looking for someone to take on a managerial position in our new Beverly Hills office. If you're interested I can --

**CHRISTINE**

That's great, Mr. Harris, I really appreciate the vote of confidence.

**MR. HARRIS**

Good, good...so maybe we could --

She looks up to see the streetcar right at the stop.

**CHRISTINE**

I'm sorry, but I really have to go.  
We'll talk on Monday. Good night!

She races out to

**EXT. PACIFIC TELEPHONE COMPANY - CONTINUOUS**

running after the streetcar as it closes its doors.

**CHRISTINE**

Wait...wait...hold on, just a --

But the streetcar rumbles away before she can catch it. Frustrated, she glances at her watch and sighs resignedly.

**INT. STREET-CAR - EARLY EVENING**

Christine sits on the front bench, watching as the shadows lengthen, then pulls the bell. The car rumbles to a stop as she steps out onto the sidewalk.

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**EXT. STREET - EARLY EVENING**

She passes a grocery store, where a clock reads 6:15, and continues past other houses on the pleasant, green street. We HEAR parents telling their kids to come in for dinner, radios playing music or radio dramas. Peaceful, charming. Christine smiles, turns the corner, looks to her house --

-- and it's dark, closed up. No lights on inside, no music or dramas on the radio. Dead silent.

Christine pauses, then picks up her pace. No need to panic, he could be upstairs asleep, could be in the back of the house, where the lights wouldn't show.

She goes to the front door. It's unlocked. She enters --

**INT. COLLINS HOME - LIVING ROOM - EVENING**

It's dark, silent. She puts her purse down. Looks around.

**CHRISTINE**

Walter?

Nothing. She goes into

**INT. KITCHEN**

switching on lights as she goes. Nothing. She checks the refrigerator. The sandwich she made Walter is untouched. She moves to the staircase.

**CHRISTINE**

Walter...?

**INT. WALTER'S ROOM**

She opens the door to his room. No Walter.

**EXT. COLLINS HOUSE**

She crosses to the sidewalk. Looks up and down the street.

**CHRISTINE**

Walter? Honey? Time to come in.

A little GIRL on a tricycle rolls past.

**CHRISTINE**

Susie honey, have you seen Walter?

**GIRL**

Nuh-uh.

hasn't The girl continues away. Christine's concerned, but she  
hit the panic button, not yet. She crosses the street to --

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**EXT. RILEY HOUSE**

RILEY, -- and rings the doorbell. The door opens and MRS.  
forties, emerges.

**CHRISTINE**

Mrs. Riley, I'm sorry to bother you  
at dinnertime, but I was wondering  
if Walter was here.

**MRS. RILEY**

No, I'm afraid not.

**CHRISTINE**

Do you know if Jamie was able to  
look in on him?

**MRS. RILEY**

Well, I mentioned it to her, but  
she was going to a dance with some  
of her friends...you know how  
teenagers are. Is everything all  
right?

**CHRISTINE**

I'm sure it's fine, I just...  
(beat)  
Thank you, Mrs. Riley.

Christine heads away.

**EXT. STREET**

Christine stops at the sidewalk in front of her house, looks  
up and down the street, arms folded against the growing  
chill.

**CHRISTINE**

Walter...? Walter....

She starts walking again. Faster now. Looking around trees and porches, anywhere a nine-year-old boy might hide. She hears children playing. Laughing. She picks up her pace, homing in on the sound.

She turns the corner to find three children playing, none of them Walter. She looks down the ominously empty streets.

Heels Her worry growing, she heads to the house. Faster now. clicking on the hard sidewalk.

**INT. COLLINS HOUSE - LIVING ROOM**

She bursts in, leaving the door open, looking around in case he came in while she was out. Nothing. She crosses to the phone, hesitates for just a BEAT, then picks up the receiver.

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**CHRISTINE**

Yes, Operator, give me the police.

then: There's a long pause as she waits, looks out the window,

POLICE DISPATCHER (on phone)  
Lincoln Heights Division.

**CHRISTINE**

Yes, hello, my name is Christine Collins, I live at 210 North Avenue 23...I'm calling to report a missing child...it's my son, he....

POLICE DISPATCHER (on phone)  
How long has he been gone?

**CHRISTINE**

I'm not sure...I just got home from work and...it could be since late this morning, it could be just an hour --

POLICE DISPATCHER (on phone)  
Have you checked around the neighborhood?

**CHRISTINE**

Yes, of course, I --

POLICE DISPATCHER (on phone)  
Maybe he lost track of the time.

**CHRISTINE**

No, he always stays around the house when it starts to get dark. Can you please send someone down here?

POLICE DISPATCHER (on phone)  
I'm sorry, but our policy is that we don't dispatch units on missing child cases for twenty-four hours.

**CHRISTINE**

What? But that's --

POLICE DISPATCHER (on phone)  
Ninety-nine times out of a hundred the kid shows up by morning. We don't have the resources to go chasing every kid who runs off with his pals and --

**CHRISTINE**

That's not Walter, he doesn't do that.

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POLICE DISPATCHER (on phone)  
With all due respect, ma'am, every parent who calls us says the same thing.

**CHRISTINE**

Please, I --

POLICE DISPATCHER (on phone)  
I'm sorry, but there's nothing I can do. I'll take your name and information, but that's all until tomorrow morning at the earliest.

**EXT. STREET - MOMENTS LATER**

Christine walks down the street, arms wrapped around herself.

**POLICE DISPATCHER (V.O.)**

I'm sure he'll show up by then.  
They always do.

She continues on, calling Walter's name as she disappears into the shadows.

**INT. COLLINS HOME - LIVING ROOM - MORNING**

Christine watches out the curtained living room windows,  
eyes  
red rimmed from worry but not from tears, not yet, as a  
police  
car finally pulls up. Neighbors look on as the officers get out and approach the house. HOLD on Christine's face, pale and worried, UNDER:

**REV. BRIEGLEB (V.O.)**

Our thoughts go out again to Mrs.  
Christine Collins, of Lincoln Heights --

**EXT. ST. PAUL'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - DAY**

Located at 5100 Coliseum Street

**REV. BRIEGLEB (V.O.)**

-- whose young son, Walter Collins,  
disappeared almost two weeks ago.

**INT. ST. PAUL'S CHURCH - DAY**

A large radio microphone with the call letters KGF is atop a podium, where PASTOR GUSTAV BRIEGLEB stands: fifties, barrel chested, no-nonsense, a fire-and-brimstone preacher. His congregation sits in hard wooden pews, listening and  
nodding.

**REV. BRIEGLEB**

Though she is not a member of our  
congregation, we pray for her today  
(more)

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**REV. BRIEGLEB (Cont'd)**

as we have every day since we first  
learned of her situation on the  
radio, and in the newspapers.  
(beat)

We are told that the Los Angeles  
Police Department is doing the best

it can to reunite mother and child,  
and I am sure that is true.

(beat)

But given its position as the most  
violent, corrupt and incompetent  
police department this side of the  
Rocky Mountains, that's not saying  
a great deal.

There's APPLAUSE and cheering from the pews. He lets it  
pass.

**REV. BRIEGLER**

Every day, new bodies show up along  
Mulholland, or in ditches, the work  
of Police Chief James Davis and his  
so-called "gun squad." Every day  
the needs of honest citizens are  
put second to greed and personal  
gain. Every day, the city sinks  
deeper into a cesspool of fear,  
intimidation and corruption. Once  
the City of Angels, Los Angeles is  
now a place where our protectors  
have become our brutalizers...where  
to be the law...is to be above the  
law...where none dare speak truth  
to power.

(beat)

But we will not be silent. We will  
continue to put their offenses and  
their failures in full view of the  
public. We will not be intimidated.

The place erupts into applause and cheering.

**INT. POLICE CHIEF JAMES DAVIS' OFFICE - DAY**

POLICE CHIEF JAMES E. DAVIS, 40s, hard-edged and tall,  
stands  
looking out the window as the radio drones on behind him.

REV. BRIEGLER (on radio)

Because while the "gun squad" speaks  
in the only language Chief Davis  
understands, we speak in the language  
of compassion, truth and strength.  
We speak for our fellow citizens,  
beaten and killed by a renegade  
police department.

(more)

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REV. BRIEGLER (on radio) (Cont'd)  
We speak for an innocent child,  
ripped from his mother's arms, now  
all but forgotten by the police.  
And that voice, my friends, will  
never be silenced.

More cheers and applause as Davis switches off the radio.

**DISSOLVE TO:**

**INT. COLLINS HOME - CHRISTINE'S BEDROOM - MORNING**

The alarm goes off, but Christine is already awake. Staring up at the ceiling. She slowly pulls herself up and moves OS.

**SUPERIMPOSE: APRIL 3, 1928**

**INT. WALTER'S BEDROOM - MORNING**

Christine walks past the door to his bedroom. Looks inside. Goes over to the bed. Her hand lingers, touching it, UNDER:

**MR. HARRIS (V.O.)**

Are you sure you're ready for this,  
Christine?

**INT. PACIFIC TELEPHONE COMPANY - HALLWAY - DAY**

Christine and Mr. Harris, the floor manager, approach the doors to the switchboard room.

**MR. HARRIS**

I mean, if you need more time --

**CHRISTINE**

The police are doing all they can,  
and frankly I could use the money.  
It's been almost a month, and...it  
wouldn't do any good to find Walter  
and bring him home if he doesn't  
have a home to come back to, right?

**MR. HARRIS**

Of course.

He smiles as he says it, but there's the sense that he  
doesn't

think Walter's coming back. It's been too long. She senses it, but moves past it, pushing open the door and entering

**INT. SWITCHBOARD ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

As loud as before...until the operators see Christine, and the noise stops. She tries to smile, as if to say, I'm okay, but can't quite manage it.

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Several women approach and hug her as the noise level begins to climb, but nowhere near what it was a moment earlier.

**MR. HARRIS**

Well...I'll leave you to it, then.

She nods as he exits, then heads off herself.

**INT. SWITCHBOARD ROOM - LATER**

Christine moves from station to station, the noise level still noticeably low. Every time she approaches an operator, they lower their voices, as if not to bother her.

One operator holds up a pink request sheet. Christine starts toward her, but then the operator glances to another supervisor and hands it off. Knowing she has to do something about this, she turns to the room and, in a firm, clear voice, says:

**CHRISTINE**

Excuse me, can I have your attention?

The room grows quiet. Everyone is looking at her.

**CHRISTINE**

Listen, everyone, I appreciate your consideration, but I'm not made of porcelain. I won't break down and cry if the station to station call to Kankakee doesn't go through.

(a thin smile)

Actually, I...promised myself that I wouldn't cry...wouldn't let myself cry...until I knew, one way or another, what....

(beat)

Point is...I like the noise here.  
So don't be afraid to talk and...push  
buttons, and drop things. If it  
wasn't noisy, how would I know I  
was in the right place?

She manages a thin smile as the place returns to normal.

**EXT. PHONE COMPANY LUNCH AREA - AFTERNOON**

Mr. Harris steps out into the lunch area where a number of  
the operators and supervisors are hanging out.

**MR. HARRIS**

Excuse me, has anyone seen Christine?

**OPERATOR**

I think I saw her in the back office.

He nods his thanks, and continues off.

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**INT. PHONE COMPANY - BACK OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER**

He approaches the door, slowing as he HEARS Christine  
inside.

**CHRISTINE (O.S.)**

-- well, if you do hear anything,  
would you let me know? Thanks, I  
appreciate it. Goodbye.

A hang-up, then dialing. He glances in the open doorway.

Christine sits at a table, phone in hand, a list of phone  
numbers in front of her. The list reads LAS VEGAS MISSING  
**PERSONS DEPARTMENT, SACRAMENTO MISSING PERSONS DEPARTMENT,**  
SAN FRANCISCO MISSING PERSONS DEPARTMENT...on and on...with  
each having multiple checks beside it, indicating all the  
times she's called. Her lunch sits untouched beside her.

DEPARTMENT  
She puts a check next to LAS VEGAS MISSING PERSONS  
then looks up as someone answers at the other end of the  
phone.

**CHRISTINE**

Missing Persons department, please.  
(beat)

Yes, hello, this is Christine Collins, I...yes, fine, thank you. I was just checking back to see if you had found any missing or lost children that might match the --

(beat)

I see. No, I appreciate that, it's just...it never hurts to make sure all the lines of communication are working. I mean, that's what I do for a living, right?

(beat)

Well, I'll try back next week. If you do hear anything in the meantime, would you be sure to let me know? Thanks. Goodbye.

She hangs up and ticks another department off the list and dials again. Mr. Harris heads away, deciding that whatever it was he planned to talk to her about...it can wait.

**CHRISTINE**

Missing persons department, please.

**DISSOLVE TO:**

**EXT. DINER - AFTERNOON**

A single car is parked in the dirt lot outside the small, roadside diner.

**SUPERIMPOSE: DE KALB, ILLINOIS. JULY 10, 1928**

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**INT. DINER - CONTINUOUS**

keeping  
tears  
The COOK who owns this dive is cleaning the griddle and an eye on the only two customers in the place: a MAN and a young BOY, both wearing hats, as was the custom. They're unkempt, dirty, like they've been on the road a long time. They finish the last of the food as the cook approaches, off the bill and puts it on the table.

**COOK**

Two dollars.

Tries The Man reaches for his wallet. Pats an empty pocket.  
the other pocket. Nothing.

**MAN**

Hell...looks like I left my wallet  
at home. Can I owe it to you?

**COOK**

No credit. Pay up or I call the  
cops. I'm tired of bums like you  
coming around here.

**MAN**

I'm not trying to stiff you, chief.  
I just left my wallet at home, that's  
all. I'll go back and get it.  
Five, ten minutes tops.

The Cook hesitates; he doesn't want the trouble of bringing  
in the cops, but he doesn't want to get stuck, either.

**COOK**

You got any collateral?

face The Man glances at the Boy seated beside him. The boy's  
is dirty, partially obscured by the hat.

**MAN**

Can't ask for better collateral  
than a man's own flesh and blood,  
right?

(to the boy)

You stay here, son, I'll be right  
back.

**BOY**

But --

**MAN**

Now don't give me any trouble.  
He's a good man to trust us like  
this. You just sit here while I go  
get my wallet. Okay?

19. CHANGELING A True Story

The boy nods reluctantly, looks away as the man rises.

**COOK**

Ten minutes, then I'm calling the  
cops.

warily The Man nods, exits and drives off. The Cook squints  
at the Boy, then at the wall clock. It's 2:00.

**EXT. DINER - LATER**

No car. Just the empty parking lot.

**INT. DINER - ON CLOCK**

who It's 3:15. The Cook is annoyed. He glances to the Boy,  
won't meet his gaze. Finally:

**COOK**

Ah, hell....

He goes to the phone. Clicks the receiver a few times.

**COOK**

Hello, Myrtle? It's Harve, down by  
the diner. Would you get me Sheriff  
Larsen? Yeah, I'll wait.

He casts a sour look in the boy's direction.

**COOK**

What's your name, son? Son...?

The boy takes a BEAT, looking out at the road. Then:

**BOY**

I don't remember.

**COOK**

Swell.

**INT. PACIFIC TELEPHONE COMPANY - SWITCHBOARD ROOM - DAY**

As before, Christine hurries from one station to another,  
lost in the barely-managed chaos. She stops at one station,  
glancing over papers, then looks over at --

with -- the window to Mr. Harris' office, where he is talking  
a police officer, CAPTAIN J. J. JONES, 30s, serious, arch.

She slows, unable to look away, a growing dread settling in  
her heart. Harris points out the window. Points...to her.  
The police captain nods and enters the switchboard room.

As Jones heads for her, the strength goes out of Christine's legs. She holds onto the a desk as he stops before her.

CHANGELING A True Story

20.

**JONES**

Mrs. Collins?

She manages a nod. Behind her eyes is the terror: he's going to tell me my son is dead. The room gets very quiet.

**JONES**

My name is Captain J. J. Jones, Lincoln Park Juvenile Division. My office supervises all runaway and missing child cases, including your son's, and....

(beat, a smile)

He's alive, Mrs. Collins. He was picked up two days ago by local police in De Kalb, Illinois. He's safe and unhurt. He was in the company of some drifter, we've got an APB out for him now, and --

crying  
But she hasn't heard anything past he's safe and unhurt. She almost goes to the floor as other women rush toward her, and embracing her.

all  
out  
For the first time, Christine cries, great wracking sobs, the emotion she's been fighting back all this time coming at last...he's okay...he's okay.

**DISSOLVE TO:**

**EXT. UNION STATION - DAY**

Jones and Christine are in a police car pulling up to the train station. It moves through a police line holding back a crowd of reporters who SHOUT questions at the passing car.

**CHRISTINE**

All these reporters...you didn't tell me --

**JONES**

Yours is a story with a happy ending,  
Mrs. Collins. People love happy  
endings.

(checks watch)

Train should be pulling in shortly.  
We'd better get a move on.

As Christine and Jones step out, they're mobbed by the  
press.  
Jones smiles splendidly for the cameras, waves, one arm  
wrapped  
around Christine, who looks stunned by it all.

**JONES**

Thank you...we'll have a statement  
for you in a little while.

(more)

CHANGELING A True Story

21.

JONES (Cont'd)

Right now the important thing is to  
re-unite this little lady with her  
son. So if you'll excuse us....

Beaming, Jones escorts Christine into Union Station.

**INT. TRAIN - DAY**

Seated on a bench is a POLICE MATRON, and beside her, the  
BOY  
from the De Kalb diner...who we will identify henceforth as  
"Walter." He is looking out the window at the passing  
scenery.

**"WALTER"**

Did you know that Los Angeles is  
where they make the Tom Mix movies?

**MATRON**

No, I didn't.

**"WALTER"**

His horse is named Blue.

(beat)

You think they'll let me watch them  
make a movie?

**MATRON**

I don't know, you'll have to ask.

But with all this attention, who knows, maybe they will.

The boy turns his attention back out the window as we HEAR the WHISTLE of the train pulling into Union Station.

**INT. UNION STATION - TRAIN PLATFORM - DAY**

We HEAR the same train whistle from this side as Christine and Jones come to the ramp, POLICE CHIEF DAVIS is waiting. The reporters are held back at the entrance to the platform.

**JONES**

Mrs. Collins, I'd like to introduce you to Chief of Police James E. Davis.

**CHRISTINE**

Oh, my, I didn't expect --

**DAVIS**

We don't get a lot of positive attention from the boys in the press these days, so it's good to be here when there's a positive story, don't you think?

CHANGELING A True Story

22.

But she's distracted, looking off to the end of the platform, where the train is starting to pull in.

**DAVIS**

I take it you've been treated well by my boys in the department?

**CHRISTINE**

Oh...yes, of course, they've been great. Well, there was that part about having to wait twenty-four hours before filing a report, but --

**DAVIS**

Technicalities aside --

The train stops. Doors begin to open.

**CHRISTINE**

Yes...other than that, no complaints.

They've all been wonderful.

**DAVIS**

Good, then you won't have any problem  
telling that to the press, and how  
the LAPD is concerned first and  
foremost with the safety of --

But she's already running down the platform as people start  
to step off the train. Jones exchanges a look with Davis.

**JONES**

Women. Just a sec....

He trots off to catch up with Christine, who walks alongside  
the train, looking from window to window, anxious, eager.

Then: the Matron gets off the train, her frame momentarily  
blocking the view of the boy beside her...but Christine

spots

them. With Jones not far behind, she breaks into a run.

**CHRISTINE**

Walter...Walter!

She runs toward them. The matron turns, sees her, smiles and  
gets out of the way, revealing the boy.

Christine stops. Staggers so hard she almost falls. She  
steps forward slowly, a hand going to her mouth. For a

moment,

we're not sure what's going through her mind. She looks to  
the matron, who smiles. Looks to the boy, who smiles.

Then she steps back a pace, horror sinking in as Jones comes  
jauntily alongside her.

CHANGEING A True Story

23.

**JONES**

Well? Aren't you going to --

**CHRISTINE**

He's not my son.

Jones freezes at the words.

**JONES**

I...what are you --

**CHRISTINE**

He's not my son.  
(beat)  
He's not my son.

**JONES**

I'm...I'm sure you're mistaken.

**CHRISTINE**

Mistaken?

**JONES**

He's been through four long, terrible months...he's gone through changes, lost weight --

**CHRISTINE**

I know my own son.

He glances over his shoulder to where the Chief of Police is waiting, not aware of any of this, and beyond him...the press.

**JONES**

I'm just saying...I mean, you're in shock, and he's changed, and --

He turns from her, stoops down to look at the boy.

**JONES**

What's your name, son? Can you tell me your name?

**"WALTER"**

Walter Collins.

Christine steps back as though slapped. This can't be.

**CHRISTINE**

It's a common name, it --

**JONES**

Do you know where you live, Walter?  
Do you know your home address?

The boy considers for a moment...then:

CHANGELING A True Story

24.

**"WALTER"**

My house is at 210 North Avenue 23,

Los Angeles, California.  
(beat)  
And that's my Mommy!

only  
And he RUNS to her, grabbing her around the waist, which magnifies her horror. Jones has no idea what to make of her, or this, or the boy. The only thing he knows is that the chief of police is standing right over there, smiling now that he thinks he's seen a mother and child reunion. The press is nearly insane trying to get through to them.

**JONES**

Mrs. Collins...listen to me. I know you're feeling uncertain right now, but that's to be expected...a boy this age changes so fast...but we've compensated for that in our investigation. We're experts in child identification. There's no question that this is your son.

**CHRISTINE**

It's not Walter.

**JONES**

It's not Walter as you remember him. That's why it's important for you to take him home, on a...trial basis.

**CHRISTINE**

A trial basis?

**JONES**

Once you've put him back in familiar surroundings, and given yourself time to recover from the shock of his changed condition...you'll see that it is him. I swear to you, Mrs. Collins. I give you my word. Trust me...this is your son.

dissimilar  
She looks from him to the boy...who is not terribly from Walter...so that even the audience may not be entirely sure if it's him or not...and part of her wants desperately to believe...the pressure is immense.

**JONES**

If there's any problem, any problem at all, come and talk to me and I'll take care of it.

(beat)  
Mrs. Collins...he has nowhere else  
to go.

25.           CHANGELING A True Story

It's an agonizing moment, then finally:

**CHRISTINE**

I...look, I'll take him home, but  
only because I...might not be  
thinking clearly right now, and --

**JONES**

Thank you.

Without giving her a moment to reconsider, he waves and the  
Chief of Police approaches as the press rushes toward them.

In an instant, they're overwhelmed by people shouting  
questions, flashbulbs popping, a fever of excitement.

**REPORTERS**

How does it feel to have your son  
home, Mrs. Collins? What did you  
think when you saw him for the first  
time?

**CHRISTINE**

It was...it's...hard to explain.

**JONES**

(jumping in)  
It was certainly quite a shock. At  
first she hardly recognized him.  
Perfectly natural, the boy's been  
through quite an ordeal.

**REPORTER**

How're you feeling, son?   Bet it  
feels great to be home.

**"WALTER"**

Yeah, it's great!

**DAVIS**

The Los Angeles Police Department  
is thankful for all the hard work  
done by the De Kalb County Sheriff's  
Department in helping to make this  
joyful reunion possible. The LAPD

is dedicated to serving the public  
at all times, and --

**ANOTHER REPORTER**

Can we get a photo of mother and  
son, Captain?

**CHRISTINE**

I --

CHANGELING A True Story

26.

**JONES**

Absolutely.

He poses Christine and "Walter" so she is holding the boy in  
her arms. Dazed, stunned, confused, she manages to smile for  
the cameras. Bulbs FLASH and --

around  
questions  
smiling  
-- time SLOWS DOWN, the SOUND MUTED, as Christine looks  
at it all as though in a dream...reporters shouting  
she doesn't hear...bulbs flashing...the boy beside her,  
at it all. He looks at her, mouths the word Mommy, as --

**INT. POLICE CAR - MOMENTS LATER**

moment  
-- the car door SLAMS and she and the boy sit side by side.  
The silence is in profound contrast to the madness of a  
earlier. An officer gets in they drive off, passing Jones  
and the Chief of Police, talking quietly off to one side.  
Christine looks to the boy. He smiles at her.

**INT. COLLINS HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT**

Studying  
The only noise is the clock on the wall, ticking. Christine  
sits at one end of the table, "Walter" at the other.  
him. He is finishing a sandwich, not meeting her gaze.

**CHRISTINE**

Was the sandwich all right?  
(he nods)  
Would you like some more milk?

**"WALTER"**

No.

**CHRISTINE**

No, thank you.

**"WALTER"**

No, thank you.

**CHRISTINE**

Now you need a bath. You're covered  
with soot from the train ride.

He turns, and heads up the stairs. She follows.

**INT. HALLWAY FRONTING BATHROOM - LATER**

and  
Carrying a pair of pajamas, Christine comes into the hall  
stops in front of the bathroom door. Knocks.

**CHRISTINE**

I found you a pair of pajamas. I  
bought them for Walter but he didn't  
like the fabric, so --

27. CHANGELING A True Story

**"WALTER" (O.S.)**

Ow!

She hears him fall and pushes the door open.

**INT. BATHROOM**

She helps "Walter" stand, discreetly turned away from us.

**CHRISTINE**

Are you all right?

**"WALTER"**

I fell. Stupid tub.

**CHRISTINE**

Did you hurt yourself? Let me see --

She stops suddenly, reacting to something we don't see.  
Looks slowly looks up to his face.

**CHRISTINE**

...circumcised....

She takes his hand and marches him out of the bathroom.

**INT. HALLWAY**

She places him against the wall where she measured Walter's growth over the years. The marks put him four inches shorter than the one labeled March. She looks at him, very serious.

**CHRISTINE**

The last time I measured Walter --  
the last time I measured my son --  
he was four inches taller than you  
are right now.

(beat)

Who are you?

(beat)

What are you doing here?

(beat)

Who are you?

He says nothing. HOLD on her look of growing desperation.

**INT. POLICE STATION - HALLWAY - DAY**

Jones walks quickly down the hall, trying to look interested in a clutch of papers in his hands, Christine following  
after.

**CHRISTINE**

He's not my son.

**JONES**

Mrs. Collins --

CHANGELING A True Story

28.

**CHRISTINE**

I don't know who he is, or why he's  
saying he's Walter, but there's  
clearly been some kind of mistake.

**JONES**

We agreed you would give him time  
to adjust --

**CHRISTINE**

He's four inches shorter than Walter.  
Boys his age don't shrink. If  
anything, he should be taller.

**JONES**

Maybe your measurements are off.  
Look, I'm sure there's a reasonable  
explanation for --

**CHRISTINE**

He's circumcised. Walter wasn't.

Jones glances back, uncomfortable about discussing  
circumcision  
with a woman in public view. He lowers his voice.

**JONES**

Mrs. Collins...your son was missing  
for four months. For at least part  
of that in the company of an as-yet  
unidentified drifter. Who knows  
what such a disturbed individual  
might have done? He could have had  
him...circumcised... might have --

**CHRISTINE**

Made him smaller? Captain, please --

He's on the move again, stepping into --

**INT. JONES' OFFICE - CONTINUOUS**

-- and getting behind his desk as Christine follows him in.

**CHRISTINE**

-- why won't you listen to me?

**JONES**

I am listening, damn it, I --

(beat, calmer)

I am listening. And I understand  
your feelings. He's changed, no  
mistake. You've both been through  
a terrible experience. That's why  
he needs your support and love to  
bounce back.

CHANGELING A True Story

29.

**CHRISTINE**

Captain, that boy wouldn't bounce  
back as my son if you coated him in  
rubber and dropped him off the roof.

He sits, shaking his head.

**JONES**

Why are you doing this, Mrs. Collins? You seem perfectly capable of taking care of the boy, your work pays you enough to attend to his personal needs...so I don't understand why you're trying to run away from your responsibilities --

**CHRISTINE**

I'm not running away from anything, least of all my responsibilities. I'm even taking care of that boy because right now I'm all he has. What worries me is that you've stopped looking for Walter.

**JONES**

Why should we look someone we've already found?

**CHRISTINE**

But you haven't found him. He's still out there somewhere, lost, maybe hurt....

**JONES**

His identity has been confirmed by the best minds in the field of child identification, people who know what they're doing.

**CHRISTINE**

And I don't? Captain, look, I don't want to cause trouble for you or the department. Honestly I don't. I know you've done everything you can...but there's been a terrible mistake, and I need your help if we're going to correct it...before it's too late. Please.

She exits. Annoyed, Jones paces, then picks up the phone.

**JONES**

Sara, get Dr. Tarr on the phone.

CHANGELING A True Story

**INT. COLLINS HOME - DAY**

Christine is cooking dinner when the doorbell rings. She opens the door to find a police officer and DR. EARL W.

TARR,

sixties, mildly eccentric in appearance.

**DR. TARR**

Mrs. Collins? Dr. Earl W. Tarr.  
Captain Jones sent me. I consult  
with him from time to time on  
juvenile cases. May I come in?

**CHRISTINE**

Oh...yes, of course.

She steps aside, and Dr. Tarr enters, looking around.

**CHRISTINE**

Thank you for coming. I'm surprised  
Captain Jones moved so quickly. I  
was starting to think he didn't  
believe me.

**DR. TARR**

Well, I'm here now, and we'll put  
all that to rights. Where is the  
boy?

He looks up as "Walter" comes downstairs. Noting that he said "the boy," not "your son," Christine looks relieved.

**DR. TARR**

Ah! There he is. A handsome young  
man. He has your eyes, doesn't he?  
And a little bit of the nose. Very  
fit, in spite of all his travails.  
A very resilient boy you've got  
here, Mrs. Collins.

As he bends down to look more closely at "Walter," Christine stiffens...she can't have heard that right.

**CHRISTINE**

Doctor Tarr, I thought you were  
here to help me.

**DR. TARR**

I am. Captain Jones said the boy  
had gone through some extreme  
physical changes, and asked me to  
look in on him...to reassure you in  
this your time of motherly concern.

**CHRISTINE**

My "motherly concern" isn't for him because he's not my son.

CHANGELING A True Story

31.

**DR. TARR**

Statements like that will hardly help the boy's self-esteem, now will they?

(beat)

Captain Jones said something about a change in height...?

**CHRISTINE**

He's four inches shorter than --

**DR. TARR**

Ah, well...hardly a mystery, Mrs. Collins. We've known for some time that trauma can affect the growth of children. Given the stress of the last four months his spine may have actually shrunk. It's uncommon, but within the realm of possibility.

**CHRISTINE**

What about the circumcision?

**DR. TARR**

Very likely his abductor thought it appropriate. After all, circumcision is hygienically sound. Must have been quite traumatic at the time. No wonder he's submerged the memory.

**CHRISTINE**

Look, doctor --

**DR. TARR**

As you can see, there's a perfectly sound medical explanation for all of this. But it's good for you to raise these questions. You should be apprised of all changes the lad went through during his absence.

**CHRISTINE**

Wouldn't I know whether or not he was my son? I'm his mother.

**DR. TARR**

Which means you're in no position to be objective. You are looking through the prism of extreme emotion at a boy who has changed from what you remember. He isn't the same boy that left here, just as a boy who goes off to war and returns isn't the same anymore.

(more)

CHANGELING A True Story

32.

DR. TARR (Cont'd)

A mother's heart, driven by intuition and emotion rather than logic, sees these changes and rebels, insists that this cannot be your son. But that doesn't change the facts.

(beat)

I'm willing to put my theory to the test of objectivity, Mrs. Collins... are you?

**CHRISTINE**

What're you --

Before she can react, he takes Walter by the hand and leads him outside. Christine follows them out to --

**EXT. COLLINS HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

-- as Dr. Tarr strides onward, the police officer and "Walter" walking alongside as Christine brings up the rear. A few houses down they come to a group of CHILDREN playing.

**DR. TARR**

Hello, children, my name is Dr. Earl W. Tarr. I'd like to ask you some questions.

**1ST KID**

My mom says we're not supposed to talk to strangers.

**DR. TARR**

Good boy. Quite right. But as you see I'm with the police, so it's all right. Now, I'm sure you know

Mrs. Collins here, and her son,  
Walter. How many of you recognize  
this young boy as Walter Collins?

He looks from one child to the other. They don't reply.  
Either they don't recognize him, or they're intimidated.

**DR. TARR**

Now, now, no need to be afraid.  
Surely you knew Walter, and played  
with him? So which of you can  
identify Walter for me, for his  
mother, and for the police? This  
officer would want you to do the  
right thing as good young citizens.

The kids exchange a glance. It's clear they don't recognize  
the boy, but they're intimidated by the presence of Tarr and  
the police officer. A few reluctantly raise their hands.  
Another of them goes to "Walter," who is shorter than he is.

CHANGELING A True Story

33.

**2ND KID**

Walter was as tall as me....

**DR. TARR**

Yes, precisely. He was as tall as  
you. Now he's not. He's lost a  
little height, you see. It's a  
thing called trauma. With luck,  
none of you will ever have to find  
out about it yourselves. So other  
than that, do you recognize this as  
your friend, Walter Collins?

**2ND KID**

I guess...

**CHRISTINE**

Dr. Tarr --

**DR. TARR**

Already ahead of you, Mrs. Collins;  
children can be intimidated. But  
not adults. Shall we try a neighbor?

He heads off again, like some very tall, strange bird  
marching  
down the street. Christine exchanges a look with the kids,

then heads off to follow.

**EXT. RILEY'S HOUSE - FOYER - MOMENTS LATER**

Tarr, Christine, Mrs. Riley, the officer and "Walter" stand on the porch.

**DR. TARR**

-- and we'd appreciate it if you could make a positive identification for us.

**MRS. RILEY**

I'd be happy to. I saw the boy often. Come closer, son.

She stoops down, studies "Walter's" face, turns it from side to side. Squints at him. He squints back at her. Note: she's not wearing glasses. Finally:

**DR. TARR**

Take your time...be sure.

**MRS. RILEY**

Oh, yes...yes...that's Walter all right. Used to come here all the time to play with my nephew, Roger.

CHANGELING A True Story

34.

**DR. TARR**

Thank you, Mrs. Riley. You've been a big help, I --

**CHRISTINE**

Before we go...Mrs. Riley, do you have the time?

**MRS. RILEY**

Certainly....

She looks at her watch. Holds it farther away. Can't quite focus on it. Pulls her glasses out from inside her blouse.

**MRS. RILEY**

My last concession to vanity; men don't make passes at women who wear glasses, you know.

(checks the watch)

Five o'clock.

**CHRISTINE**

Thank you.

Mrs. Riley nods and heads inside as Christine looks to Tarr, who shrugs off what was just demonstrated.

**DR. TARR**

A boy is much larger than a watch,  
Mrs. Collins.  
(to "Walter")  
Come along, son.

Tarr takes "Walter's" hand and heads away, Christine following,  
anger growing in her eyes as we HEAR:

**CHRISTINE (V.O.)**

This is absolutely outrageous!

**INT. COLLINS HOME - KITCHEN - DAY**

She is on the phone, "Walter" finishing up his dinner in BG.

**CHRISTINE**

Captain, I...no, listen to me, this  
so-called doctor paraded me around  
my own neighborhood like some kind  
of derelict mother who couldn't  
even recognize her own --

(beat)

He found what he expected to find,  
what you obviously told him he would  
find, but it's not --

(beat)

No, I am not reassured.

(more)

CHANGELING A True Story

35.

**CHRISTINE (Cont'd)**

I thought we had an understanding,  
**I --**

(beat)

That I was embarrassed isn't the  
issue, the point is you're wasting  
time when you should be looking for  
my son, I --

(beat)

Then I want to see this report, so  
I can refute it, before it goes to  
anyone else, all right? Fine.

She hangs up. Hard. The events of the day have her teetering on the edge, but she's holding on. She pulls herself together and goes to the sink, furiously doing dishes for a silent BEAT before "Walter" looks up from his now-empty plate.

**"WALTER"**

I'm finished. Can I go to my room now?

**CHRISTINE**

Yes. Go on up.

"Walter" rises, as Christine continues to clean dishes, not looking back at him. Exhausted mentally, physically and emotionally. He goes to the door, stops, turns.

**"WALTER"**

G'night, Mommy.

Christine fumbles the plate and it SMASHES to the floor. She turns furiously to "Walter."

**CHRISTINE**

Stop saying that! I'm not your mother! And you're not my son! She moves toward him, her anger coming out at last.

**CHRISTINE**

**WHO ARE YOU? WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS TO ME? DAMN YOU! I WANT MY SON BACK!**

He tears off as she slumps to the floor, covering her eyes.

**CHRISTINE**

I want my son back...god, please... make it stop...just make it stop.

**INT. WALTER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT**

"Walter" is in bed, his back to the door, as Christine appears in the hallway. She steps into the room, sits on the bed.

CHANGELING A True Story

He doesn't move. Her voice is soft, but firm.

**CHRISTINE**

I was wrong to yell at you. You're still a child, and I think you don't really understand what you're doing, the hurt you're causing. Maybe this is all just some big game of pretend to you, but I need you to understand. Walter is...he's all I have, he's everything to me, and every day we lose because of this puts him further away from where I can help him.

(beat)

Whatever the police think, whatever the world thinks, we know the truth, don't we? We both know you're not Walter. Getting you to admit that may be the only chance I have to straighten this out before it's too late. Maybe you're afraid of getting in trouble, that you're in too deep. But you're not. You don't have to tell me who you are, you just have to tell them who you're not. Just... tell them the truth.

He doesn't respond. She gives it a moment in case he might open up, then rises and heads back into the hallway. She switches off the light and heads off down the hallway.

**DISSOLVE TO:**

**INT. ST. PAUL'S CHURCH - RECTORY - PRE-DAWN**

Pastor Briegleb is typing out his sermon for the day. He's exhausted. Looks at the clock. 6:30 a.m. He rubs tiredly at his face when he HEARS the THUMP of the newspaper being delivered. He stands, stretches and steps out to --

**EXT. ST. PAUL'S CHURCH - CONTINUOUS**

-- where the newspaper is visible on the front lawn. He  
picks  
it up and starts into the rectory as he unfolds the paper.  
Then: he slows, stunned by something he's reading. He  
looks  
up again, and hurries back into the rectory.

**INT. COLLINS HOME - CHRISTINE'S BEDROOM - PRE-DAWN**

She's in bed, asleep, as the telephone RINGS downstairs. She glances at the clock: 6:45. She clearly doesn't want to go down to answer it...then reluctantly climbs out of bed.

CHANGELING A True Story

37.

**INT. COLLINS HOME - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

The telephone is still ringing as she picks it up.

**CHRISTINE**

Hello?

REV. BRIEGLEB (on phone)

Is this Mrs. Christine Collins?

**CHRISTINE**

Yes? Who is this?

REV. BRIEGLEB (on phone)

My name is Gustav Briegleb, I'm the pastor over at St. Paul's --

**CHRISTINE**

Oh, yes, I heard some of your radio broadcasts after my son...you were very supportive, and I appreciate --

REV. BRIEGLEB (on phone)

Mrs. Collins...have you seen the Times today?

**CHRISTINE**

No, I --

REV. BRIEGLEB (on phone)

You'd better take a look. Then come by the parish in an hour for breakfast. I think we should meet.

She starts to reply, but the line goes dead. She hangs up the phone, pulls her robe closer around her, and steps out

to

**EXT. COLLINS HOME - PRE-DAWN**

where a copy of the Los Angeles Times sits on a neighbor's front lawn. She looks around, then dashes to pick it up. She unfolds it as she heads back, then abruptly stops. She can't believe what she's seeing.

CLOSE ON THE NEWSPAPER. The headline reads Mysterious Transformation in Collins Boy.

**EXT. ST. PAUL'S CHURCH - GARDEN - MORNING**

Briegleb is eating a big breakfast. Christine, newspaper in hand, is pacing, furious. She reads aloud from the paper.

**CHRISTINE**

"Acting on the request of the Los Angeles Police Department, Dr. Earl  
(more)

CHANGELING A True Story

38.

**CHRISTINE (Cont'd)**

W. Tarr, child specialist, examined Walter Collins to determine the cause of his loss of weight, paleness, confusion and run-down condition noticed since the return of the boy to his mother last Saturday."

**REV. BRIEGLEB**

Lovely bit of phrasing, isn't it? Noticed since the return of the boy to his mother. Not only does it state clearly that you are the boy's mother, one could infer from this that you are somehow responsible for these changes...and that the police are concerned for the boy's welfare in your hands.

(beat)

You should try the eggs, they're very good.

**CHRISTINE**

(still reading)

"I examined the boy quite thoroughly, Dr. Tarr said --

**INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT**

Dr. Tarr is sitting at a desk and speaking to a handful of reporters, enjoying the attention.

**DR. TARR**

-- and it's clear that he has something to tell. I'm sure that in time he will give his boyish story of the entire affair, but not until he has faith in his listener. And that is what is lacking: faith in the poor lad's story. In the course of my examination, I found nothing to dispute the findings by the LAPD.

**REPORTER**

How come he hasn't been able to tell anyone what happened while he was gone?

**DR. TARR**

I would say that the boy has either been coached or questioned to a point where he is largely confused about what happened to him during  
(more)

CHANGELING A True Story

39.

DR. TARR (Cont'd)

those many months. It's possible that his mental lapse may be the result of a blow to the head or a sudden shock which brought about a possible cranial injury. I believe that this condition will pass soon. Until then, I recommend that the police department continue working with him, exposing him to whatever elements of his previous life as may help restore his memory.

**BACK TO SCENE**

As she lowers the paper, incredulous. (And yes, what you just read was exactly what the doctor really said.)

**CHRISTINE**

Captain Jones promised he'd let me see the report before it went anywhere else.

**REV. BRIEGLER**

Someone in authority at the LAPD

lied? Good heavens, I may have to  
go lie down.

He laughs. She turns, looking stricken. He sobers at  
once.

**REV. BRIEGLEB**

I was not laughing at your situation,  
Mrs. Collins. It's just...after  
one has this sort of conversation  
enough times, a certain degree of  
hysteria begins to set in. Please,  
sit.

Reluctantly, she does. Shakes her head in disbelief.

**CHRISTINE**

Why are they doing this?

**REV. BRIEGLEB**

To avoid admitting a mistake...that  
they brought back the wrong boy.

(off her look)

Anyone reading that with half a  
brain would see through it instantly.  
Sadly, that leaves out about half  
the Times' readership, but still....

**CHRISTINE**

Thank you.

(more)

CHANGELING A True Story

40.

**CHRISTINE (Cont'd)**

I've been trying to get someone to  
say those words since...god, I was  
starting to think I was losing my  
mind.

(beat)

Thank you. At least someone believes  
me.

**REV. BRIEGLEB**

You have no idea how many people  
have sat in that very chair and  
said those exact same words to me  
in relation to our friends at the  
Los Angeles Police Department.

(beat)

Mrs. Collins, I have made it my

mission to bring to light all the things the LAPD would prefer no one knew anything about...a department ruled by violence, abuse, murder, corruption and intimidation.

**MONTAGE STARTS**

**INT. POLICE STATION - OFFICE - DAY**

FAUX NEWSREEL FOOTAGE of Police Chief Davis speaking before  
a bunch of microphones.

**REV. BRIEGLEB (O.S.)**

When Chief Davis took over the LAPD two years ago, he said --

**DAVIS**

(overlapping)  
We will hold court on gunmen in the Los Angeles streets. I want them brought in dead, not alive, and I will reprimand any officer who shows the least mercy to a criminal.

**EXT. STREET - NIGHT**

A crowd of police officers, armed with machine-guns, BLAST the hell out of a group of guys lined up against a wall.

**REV. BRIEGLEB (V.O.)**

He picked fifty of the most dangerous cops on the force, gave them machine guns and permission to shoot anyone who got in their way. He called them the Gun Squad. No lawyers. No trials. No questions, suspensions or investigations. Just piles of bodies.

CHANGELING A True Story

41.

**EXT. BACK ALLEY - NIGHT**

Another guy, beaten to a bloody pulp, is SHOVED out of a  
moving car and left in the rain.

**REV. BRIEGLEB (V.O.)**

Bodies in morgues, bodies in hospitals, bodies by the side of the road, barely alive. Not because the police wanted to wipe out crime, they just wanted to get rid of the competition.

**EXT. ROADSIDE - NIGHT**

carrying  
A pair of cops and a couple of thugs inspect a truck  
booze over the border from Canada, pay the freight and watch  
as the trucks drive off in the truck.

**REV. BRIEGLEB (V.O.)**

Mayor Cryer and half the police force are on the take. Prostitution, gambling, bootlegging, you name it.

(beat)

When the gloves came off, pretty soon the rest of the department got into the brutality act. Didn't want the Gun Squad to have all the fun, after all.

**INT. TENEMENT BUILDING - NIGHT**

Two officers are sexually assaulting a woman on the stairs.

**REV. BRIEGLEB (V.O.)**

The more they got away with it, the worse things got, because when you give folks the freedom to do whatever they want, as God saw in the Garden of Eden, they'll do just that.

**BACK TO SCENE**

With Christine and Briegleb, in the rectory garden.

**REV. BRIEGLEB**

This police department does not tolerate dissent, contradiction... or embarrassment, Mrs. Collins. You have the power to embarrass them...and they don't like it. Not when they became the Heroes of the Hour the day they stood there posing with you, having rescued a lost boy from the wilderness.

(more)

REV. BRIEGLEB (Cont'd)

(beat)

They will do everything they can to discredit you. I've seen it happen too many times to start going blind now. That's why I wanted to see you, so you'd know what you were getting into...and how to fight them.

**CHRISTINE**

Reverend Briegleb...I appreciate what you're saying, and what you're doing...but I'm not on a mission. The only thing I want is to find my son, that's all, and I just --

**REV. BRIEGLEB**

A lot of mothers' sons ended up being sacrificed to expediency around here, Mrs. Collins. Yours wouldn't be the first. Do this right, and maybe yours will be the last.

She gets up from the table, paces the garden.

**CHRISTINE**

If they honestly thought I was wrong, that'd be one thing...but if they don't care, if they're just trying to cover it up....

He picks up the article, waves it.

**REV. BRIEGLEB**

This is their attempt to win by framing the discussion their way. "Why, of course it's her son...yes, there have been changes...we're looking into it, and isn't it strange that they happened after the boy got home?"

(beat)

They're putting you in the position of having to disprove what they're saying...and that's hard. Most people believe what they hear from the police or the government. If

you play it their way, you...and  
your son...are going to lose.

She closes her eyes for a BEAT, then looks to him, her voice  
firmer, her decision made.

**CHRISTINE**

What do I have to do?

CHANGELING A True Story

43.

**REV. BRIEGLEB**

Change the rules of engagement. Re-  
define the argument. They brought  
in their expert, so you bring in  
yours. You have an advantage they  
don't. You know your son better  
than they ever will, and in that  
knowledge is the proof you need.

(beat)

Get that information, put it out  
there. Make them respond to you,  
not the other way around.

He gets up, walks toward her, puts his hands on her  
shoulders.

Giving her strength...but also his concern.

**REV. BRIEGLEB**

Once people side with the police,  
it's a hard climb...but even in a  
town as loud as this one, the voice  
of truth can be heard...if you're  
willing to take it all the way in  
spite of the dangers...and they are  
very real, Mrs. Collins, make no  
mistake. Once you open the book on  
these people, you're going to be  
looking over your shoulder every  
day, maybe for the rest of your  
life.

(beat)

You up to it, Mrs. Collins?

He looks in her eyes...and she meets his gaze levelly. The  
answer is evident.

**INT. WAITING ROOM - ANGLE ON DOOR - DAY**

We're in a dentist's office. Christine is waiting for a BEAT

before the door opens, and DR. JOHN MONTGOMERY emerges.

**CHRISTINE**

Well?

**DR. MONTGOMERY**

He had two cavities that needed filling. He put up a fight, but I took care of it.

**CHRISTINE**

And...?

He casts a look back at the closed door, shakes his head.

CHANGELING A True Story

44.

**DR. MONTGOMERY**

Your son's upper front teeth were separated by a small muscle. Made them sit about an eighth of an inch apart. The boy in that room has no such gap.

**CHRISTINE**

Does a gap like that get smaller with age? Because that's what they'll say.

**DR. MONTGOMERY**

In some cases, yes, it's possible. But the muscle between Walter's teeth prevents that from happening. They can never come together without an operation to sever the muscle, and I can tell you right now that he has never had such an operation.

**CHRISTINE**

Will you be willing to sign a letter saying that officially?

**DR. MONTGOMERY**

Pardon my language, but...hell, yes.

He hears an OS moan from the inner office.

**DR. MONTGOMERY**

Sounds like the anesthetic is wearing off.

(starts in, pauses)  
On the other hand, maybe I'll write  
that letter first. Give the little  
fella something to think about.

He smiles.

**INT. CLASSROOM - MORNING**

"Walter"  
Small, with wooden desks, chalkboard, all the basics.  
stands in front of MRS. FOX, fifties, wearing severe glasses  
and an equally severe expression. Christine stands nearby.

**CHRISTINE**

Well? What do you think? Is that  
the Walter Collins that you remember?

**MRS. FOX**

If it is, he's changed enormously.  
(to "Walter")  
Do you know who I am?

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**"WALTER"**

You're a teacher.

**MRS. FOX**

Yes, but even teachers have names.  
What's mine?

**"WALTER"**

I don't remember. I know you, but  
I don't remember your name.

**MRS. FOX**

My name is Mrs. Fox.   Now, take  
your seat.

"Walter" hesitates, then takes a seat.   The other kids  
laugh.

**MRS. FOX**

I didn't say take a seat. I said  
take your seat. Your assigned seat.  
You must know which one it is, you  
sat there for over a year.

"Walter" tries another vacant seat. There are only three  
vacant seats in the room. More laughter from the kids.

**MRS. FOX**

Try again. Here's a hint: There's only one more empty seat left.

He sits. Mrs. Fox looks to Christine.

**MRS. FOX**

Mrs. Collins, if that's your son, I'll eat my yardstick. Not only will I put that in writing, I'll swear to it in a court of law and in front of President Calvin Coolidge himself if I have to.

For the first time, Christine allows a hopeful smile.

**INT. COLLINS HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

The lights are low. Christine sits on the floor, sorting through a box containing artifacts of affection: class projects shaped made by Walter, trees and houses and clay dogs; a heart-shaped card Mother's Day card, hand-made, with I Love You, Mommy carefully printed on the front. She runs her finger over it, tracing the impression left by his pencil.

She starts to cry, and a tear falls onto the pencil drawing. She frantically dabs at it, trying to preserve it from distortion...then sets it down and covers her face, weeping.

**DISSOLVE TO:**

CHANGELING A True Story

46.

**EXT. CITY HALL - MORNING (RAIN)**

A cold, wet knot of reporters and photographers are waiting in the rain on the steps to City Hall. Christine sits in a car with Briegleb, looking at it all.

**SUPERIMPOSE: SEPTEMBER 6, 1928**

**REV. BRIEGLER**

I'll see you tonight at eight for my broadcast. I'll leave the back door open and a light on. Good luck.

She nods, exits the car and walks up the steps to the front of City Hall as he drives off. She stands before the press, looks at them for a moment, then begins.

**CHRISTINE**

Good morning. My name is Christine Collins. On March 10th, my nine year old son, Walter Collins, disappeared. A four month investigation resulted in a boy being brought to Los Angeles from De Kalb, Illinois. They told me, and all of you, that this boy was my son. They were wrong.

(beat)

The Los Angeles Police Department made a mistake...a terrible mistake. The boy they found is not my son. That is the reason for the supposed "transformation." I have letters from his dentist, his teachers and others confirming that this boy is not my son. The letters are being reprinted now, and I should have them for you tomorrow.

Flashbulbs pop, dazzling her. She composes herself.

**CHRISTINE**

I have given the police department every opportunity to admit their mistake and renew the search for my son. Since they have refused to do so, I have no choice but to present my case before the public. I hope this will persuade the police to finish the job they started, and bring my son home to me.

(beat)

Thank you.

CHANGELING A True Story

47.

As the reporters start to shout out questions, we PAN ACROSS to a BEAT COP who has been watching. He goes quickly to a police call-box, unlocks it and picks up the telephone.

**INT. LINCOLN HEIGHTS STATION - DAY**

can The glass door to Captain Jones' office is closed, but we

SEE him on the phone. Finally, he hangs up and comes out of the office. His tone is cold but neutral...we think this could go either way. He stops an officer.

**JONES**

Morelli, I want you to find the Collins woman and get her here. Bring her in the back way, and have a couple of matrons standing by.

**1ST COP**

Yes, sir.

He heads off as Jones goes into his office, closing the door.

**EXT. LINCOLN HEIGHT STATION - REAR ENTRANCE - DAY (RAIN)**

"Walter" A police car pulls up to the curb, and Christine and emerge from the back seat. They dash through the rain to the back door, followed by the 1st Cop.

**CHRISTINE**

Why are we using the back door?

**1ST COP**

Captain's orders. Front's jammed with reporters.

**CHRISTINE**

Is it?

She allows a moment of quiet satisfaction as she's led into

**INT. STATION - BULLPEN**

where she's directed to a wooden bench. A nearby clock reads 3:45. She sits, "Walter" silent beside her. In the BG, the Desk Sergeant puts a call on hold.

**DESK SERGEANT**

Hey...anybody want to take a call from the Royal Canadian Mounties? Ybarra?

DETECTIVE LESTER YBARRA, thirties, good looking, glances up.

**YBARRA**

What'd they do, lose a moose?

**DESK SERGEANT**

They need a juvenile living here illegally deported back to Canada. He's living with his cousin on some ranch near Riverside, in Wineville.

**YBARRA**

All right, I'll take it, got nothing better to do....

Ybarra takes the call as Jones' calls from his office.

**JONES**

Mrs. Collins.

Christine starts to take "Walter's" hand when a matron appears.

**JONES**

Leave the boy for now. We'll look after him.

She hands "Walter" over to the matron, then enters

**INT. JONES' OFFICE**

He leaves the door open and indicates for Christine to sit. She does. He paces, working up to what he's going to do.

**JONES**

You've put us through quite a bit of trouble, Mrs. Collins. This situation has become an embarrassment for the entire department.

**CHRISTINE**

It wasn't my intention to embarrass anyone.

**JONES**

No, of course not. You just told the papers we can't tell one boy from another as a compliment for the months we spent working on your case. Are you trying to make fools out of us? Is that it? Do you enjoy this?

**CHRISTINE**

No, of course not. I had to get your attention, I had to make you understand...he's not my son.

He circles, closing in on her. She becomes aware that the door is open, and he's doing this for the benefit of anyone who might be listening in.

CHANGELING A True Story

49.

**JONES**

You know what your problem is? You want to shirk your responsibilities as a mother. You enjoyed being a free woman, didn't you? Enjoyed not having to worry about a young son. You could do what you wanted, go where you wanted, see anyone you wanted. But then we found your son. Brought him back. And now he's an inconvenience. That's why you cooked up this whole scheme, to try and throw him to the state, let the state raise him for you.

**CHRISTINE**

That's not true!

**JONES**

No? Even the boy says he's your son. Why would he do that? How would he know to do that?

**CHRISTINE**

I don't know! All I know is that he's lying!

**JONES**

Maybe so. Maybe he is a liar. But that's how he's been trained, isn't it? Lying was born in both of you. You're a liar and a troublemaker and if you ask me you've got no business walking the streets of Los Angeles.

**CHRISTINE**

Just a minute --

**JONES**

Because either you know you're lying, or you're not capable of knowing if

you're lying or telling the truth.  
So which is it, Mrs. Collins? Are  
you a derelict mother? Or just  
nuts? Because from where I sit,  
those are the only options.

**CHRISTINE**

I'm not going to sit here and take  
this --

Jones stands between her and the door.

CHANGELING A True Story

50.

**JONES**

You want to bring in experts?  
Doctors? Well, I can do that too.  
(calling OS)  
Matron?

The door opens, and a POLICE MATRON enters. He looks back to  
Christine, his voice low, his anger replaced by cool  
determination. This scene is about to take an abrupt change.

**JONES**

Mrs. Collins...do you still insist  
that the boy out there is not your  
son?

**CHRISTINE**

Yes.

He nods to the matron, who moves to restrain her.

**CHRISTINE**

Wait...what are you doing?

The Matron cuffs Christine's hands behind her back.

**MATRON**

Please don't struggle, ma'am. You'll  
only hurt yourself.

A CLICK, and the handcuffs are in place.

**JONES**

(to the matron)  
You are to convey the prisoner to  
the Los Angeles County General  
Hospital Psychopathic Ward.

**CHRISTINE**

No...wait, you can't --

**JONES**

(still to matron)

Make the following entry in the booking department: Defendant states she has been deceived by police and others, and that they have given her a boy and tried to make her think it is her son when she says it is not.

**EXT. REAR OF POLICE STATION (MONTAGE)**

Christine is led, in handcuffs, into a waiting police van. (VO has been taken verbatim from the police report.)

CHANGELING A True Story

51.

**JONES (V.O.)**

Mrs. Collins has been known to us since about March 10, 1928, when she reported her nine-year-old son Walter missing.

**INT. VAN**

A stunned and dazed Christine rides in the back of the van

**JONES (V.O.)**

The boy was gone until July, 1928. Since his return, she has complained that he is still missing, and has made repeated requests that he be found, saying, "This is not my Walter," even though positive identification has been established.

**EXT. LA COUNTY GENERAL HOSPITAL - DAY**

The police van enters the hospital at 1200 North State Street.

**INT. LA COUNTY GENERAL HOSPITAL - RECEIVING AREA - DAY**

A sterile, dreary, white-on-white place where in the background, we can HEAR the sounds of the insane crying out. The matron leads a stunned Christine to the front desk.

**JONES (V.O.)**

She suffers from paranoia, delusions of persecution, and dislocation from reality. She may be a threat to herself or others. We recommend that she be conveyed to the psychopathic ward for treatment and observation until her senses can be restored.

up. The matron stops before the desk. The NURSE barely looks

**MATRON**

Got another code twelve.

**NURSE**

Name?

**MATRON**

Collins. Christine.

**CHRISTINE**

Wait...please, this is a mistake.

**NURSE**

(to matron)  
Certifying officer?

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**MATRON**

Captain J. J. Jones, Lincoln Heights division.

**CHRISTINE**

(forced calm)  
Please...you have to listen to me. The police are doing this to punish me. They tried to force this boy on me and tell me he was my son, but it wasn't my son, and now they say I'm crazy --

She stops, noting the looks exchanged between the nurse and the matron. Her story sounds insane, even to her. She begins to realize the depth of her predicament.

**CHRISTINE**

Oh, god...oh god, please, no....

**NURSE**

If you continue to struggle I'll  
have to put you in a straitjacket.  
Do you want that?  
(she shakes head)  
Good. Then behave yourself.  
(to orderlies)  
Code twelve.

The matron turns Christine over to two large male ORDERLIES,  
who take her by the arms and lead her into the psycho ward.

**CHRISTINE**

No, please, you have to listen to  
me...wait...please!

insane They force-march her down the hall, the screams of the  
growing louder, falling deeper into the nightmare.

**INT. HOSPITAL - EXAMINING ROOM**

Christine is ushered into the room by a NURSE.

**NURSE**

Take off your clothes.

**CHRISTINE**

Why?

**NURSE**

Physical examination, body cavity  
search and de-lousing. Required  
for all new patients.

The nurse begins putting on a pair of rubber gloves.

CHANGELING A True Story

53.

**CHRISTINE**

That's not necessary --

**NURSE**

You can remove your clothes yourself,  
or I can have the orderlies do it  
for you. Which do you prefer?

Reluctantly, Christine begins to remove her clothes.

**INT. SHOWER ROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

ON CHRISTINE'S FACE as she stands in a spray of water and disinfectant, some coming from the showerhead above, some from a hose sprayed on her by the Nurse in BG. Christine's eyes are closed, trying to shut out the sense of violation.

**NURSE**

Spread your legs.  
(a beat)  
Wider.

Biting her lip, Christine complies.

**INT. HALL - LATER**

Wet hair plastered to her face, dressed in a hospital gown, Christine is led down a long hall by the Nurse. As she passes

the closed doors, we HEAR women weeping, talking to themselves, crying out, screaming, beating on the walls. Fingers poke through narrow viewing slits in the doors.

The Nurse pulls out a key-ring and unlocks one of the doors.

**NURSE**

Inside.

Christine enters --

**INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Bare, forbidding, four white walls and a narrow slit of a window. It's a two-person room. Sitting on the other bed is another PATIENT.

**NURSE**

This is your room. The doctor's left for the day. He'll see you in the morning.

**CHRISTINE**

The morning? But...wait, I've got to talk to someone in authority --

**NURSE**

Sorry.

CHANGELING A True Story

**PATIENT**

My room...no, no...this is...this  
is MY room....

**CHRISTINE**

Then if I could just use the phone.

**NURSE**

Phone privileges are earned by good  
behavior. You're not allowed  
newspapers, magazines, radio, books  
or sharp objects. This is for your  
own good.

The Nurse exits, closing and locking the door.

**CHRISTINE**

Wait...please! There's been a  
terrible mistake!

Nothing. She's alone with the other Patient, who doesn't  
much like the noise and disturbance.

**PATIENT**

My room. My room.                    They SAID it  
was MY ROOM!

**CHRISTINE**

I'm sorry, I --

**PATIENT**

**MY ROOM!            MY ROOM!            MY ROOM!            MY  
ROOM!**

She starts SCREAMING.            Christine covers her ears.

**EXT. HOSPITAL - CONTINUOUS**

We slowly PULL AWAY from the narrow window, and the sound of  
screaming, into the late afternoon rain and growing  
darkness.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. OLD ROAD - EARLY EVENING**

A lone truck sits beside the road, hood open, steam coming  
from the radiator.

working  
GORDON NORTHCOTT, thirties, thin and angular, finishes  
on the car as a police car approaches. The detective we saw  
earlier, Ybarra, is inside. He rolls down the window.

**YBARRA**

Problem?

CHANGELING A True Story

55.

**GORDON**

Overheated, that's all. She'll be fine in a bit.

**YBARRA**

Listen, could you give me a hand? I'm trying to find a place called the Northcott Ranch, up by Wineville.

As he answers, Gordon moves casually to the back of the open truck to get a rag to wipe his hands. There is a GUN on the floor of the trunk. Gordon picks it up inside the rag.

**GORDON**

Northcott Ranch...oh yeah. You're almost there. Follow this west for about two, three miles. Then the next right. That'll bring you right to it. Something going on?

**YBARRA**

Just looking into a juvenile matter. Thanks for the help.

Ybarra drives away. As soon as he's out of sight, Gordon slams the hood, runs to the driver's side and starts the truck, still steaming. He drives off as fast as he can.

**EXT. NORTHCOTT RANCH - EVENING**

A long, low house, stonework and brick and wood, behind a large open area cluttered with junked cars. At the far end of the open area is a chicken coop, about fifteen feet long. Ybarra drives up in front of the house, gets out, looks around.

**YBARRA**

Hello?

**ANOTHER ANGLE - POV SHOT**

Someone is watching as Ybarra moves toward the main house.

**YBARRA**

Anybody home?

**BACK TO SCENE**

Ybarra glances off to a rustling SOUND, and follows it to

**EXT. CHICKEN COOP**

A few chickens inside, held back by wire. An ax is nearby, its stained edge buried in an old wooden stump. A corner of the coop seems to have come down and been crudely repaired.

CHANGELING A True Story

56.

**BACK TO SCENE**

As suddenly someone runs across the dirt yard into the house,  
SLAMMING the door. Ybarra runs to the porch, tries the door. Locked from the inside. He pounds on the door.

**YBARRA**

This is the police. I have a warrant  
for a minor named Sanford Clark.  
Open the door and stand aside.

No reply. He braces himself and KICKS open the door.

**INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN**

The door BANGS against the wall. Flies buzz around the place.  
The kitchen is in shadows, but there's no question it's a mess. Ybarra moves cautiously through the kitchen. No sound except the wood creaking beneath his feet as he enters

**INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS**

Old, musty, shadowed. The ticking of an old grandfather clock.  
There's no one in sight. Ybarra moves down the hall, glances into two adjoining rooms. Nothing. He continues into

**INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Curtains drawn, dark, cocooned against the outside world. Ybarra makes a circuit of the room, then STOPS at a creak of wood from a CLOSET. He moves toward it. Pauses. Reaches for the doorknob...as suddenly a clock CHIMES loudly and the closet explodes outward and --

knocking -- SANFORD CLARK, 15, runs out. He slams into Ybarra,  
him down. They go down in a tumble of limbs, wrestling on  
the floor as Sanford tries to escape.

**YBARRA**

Stop it! Stop it or I'll push your  
face through the floor!

Breathing hard, Sanford finally stops struggling. Ybarra  
cuffs Sanford's hands behind his back.

**YBARRA**

On your feet.

Sanford stands, and as Ybarra leads him out, we PAN TO a  
mantle and a photo that shows Sanford Clark and a man we recognize  
as the one we saw by the road earlier: Gordon Northcott.

**INT. YBARRA'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER**

Ybarra locks Sanford in the car, then climbs in the driver's  
side. He checks a cut on his face in the rear-view mirror.

CHANGELING A True Story

57.

**YBARRA**

Jesus...what the hell's wrong with  
you? Don't you know assaulting a  
cop is against the law?

**SANFORD**

What difference does it make now?

**YBARRA**

We're just sending you back to  
Canada, son, it isn't the end of  
the world.

**SANFORD**

What?

**YBARRA**

You can't just stay in the U.S. as  
long as you want, pal. We've got a  
orders to send you back home, and --

Suddenly Sanford starts laughing. It's a nearly hysterical  
laugh, half fear and half relief...Ybarra isn't there for

the

reasons he thought. Ybarra is puzzled by his reaction.

**YBARRA**

Didn't know Canada was that funny.

Ybarra puts the car into gear and drives off.

**EXT. ST. PAUL'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - NIGHT**

Enough to ESTABLISH, then:

**INT. ST. PAUL'S - CONTINUOUS**

Gustav Briegleb sits behind the microphone, waiting to go on the air. He looks at the clock. 7:59. Glances to an AIDE.

**BRIEGLEB**

No word from Mrs. Collins?

(aide shakes head)

Get on down to her house, make sure she's all right. If she's not there, call the LAPD, see what they know.

The aide hurries off as Briegleb turns back to the microphone and touches a switch. The ON THE AIR lamp glows to life.

**BRIEGLEB**

This is Pastor Gustav A. Briegleb of St. Paul's Presbyterian Church, bringing you the Lord's word on radio KGF. Good evening.

CHANGELING A True Story

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**INT. HOSPITAL - MENTAL WARD - SAME TIME**

Christine is in bed, wide awake, the sounds of the asylum somewhat lessened now. Her face is dimly lit by moonlight.

**BRIEGLEB (V.O.)**

I had hoped to have a guest with us tonight, but apparently she has been delayed. Since she can't be here to tell you what she told the press this afternoon, I'll fill in the best I can. I'm going to tell you what happened, and I'm going to keep telling you right here, every night...until someone does something about it.

On her face, we go to

**INT. UNION STATION - TICKET BOOTH - NIGHT**

Gordon Northcott makes his way to the ticket booth.

**GORDON**

I'd like a ticket to Canada. Alberta or Vancouver, whatever's leaving tonight.

**TICKET VENDER**

Don't have anything going that far tonight. Best I can do is put you on a train for Seattle. From there you can transfer to one of the locals or drive across the border.

**GORDON**

That'll be fine.

**TICKET VENDER**

Round-trip?

**GORDON**

One way.

The vender moves away to pull the ticket. Gordon glances at a cop heading his way. Stiffens. The cop continues past him. Gordon relaxes as the vender slides the ticket across.

**TICKET VENDER**

That'll be fifteen dollars.

Gordon pays for the ticket and heads toward the boarding gates.

**DISSOLVE TO:**

CHANGELING A True Story

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**EXT. HOSPITAL - MORNING**

Just enough to establish the transition.

**INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING**

Christine is on top of the bed, eyes open, not having slept all night. She's staring at the woman on the next cot. The woman is staring back at her. The second-hand on a clock

behind protective chicken-wire passes 8:00 and a loud BELL goes off, announcing the start of the day.

We hear doors being unlocked up and down the hall. Christine stands, pulls her hair back, and catches her reflection in the window: pale, drawn, smudged, and in a hospital gown... looking like someone who actually belongs in this place.

The door opens and she steps into the hall as a NURSE passes.

**CHRISTINE**

Can I see the doctor? Or someone in charge --

**NURSE**

Breakfast is half an hour.

**CHRISTINE**

But I --

**NURSE**

Down the hall. The doctor will call for you when he's ready.

(beat)

Go or stay, either way I lock the door.

Christine doesn't want to stay, so she moves off.

**INT. HOSPITAL - MENTAL WARD - DINING AREA - MORNING**

Christine and the other patients sit at long tables. A few talk in quiet whispers, but most eat silently, staring vacantly ahead. Some have scars showing lobotomies or electroconvulsive (shock) therapy. It's a scary bunch. Christine isn't eating.

Another female patient, CAROL DEXTER, thirties, watches Christine then slides closer. A BEAT, then:

**CAROL DEXTER**

You should eat. Eating is normal. You got to do everything you can to look normal. That's the only chance you've got. Besides, you'll need the strength.

CHANGELING A True Story

Christine is startled by the level-headedness of the advice from someone she assumed was probably nuts. Reluctantly, she begins eating the cold-looking oatmeal.

**CAROL DEXTER**

My name's Carol Dexter. What's yours?

**CHRISTINE**

Christine. Christine Collins.

Christine reacts to the taste of the food, which is awful.

**CAROL DEXTER**

Finish it all. I know it's hard, but you have to try. Lunch isn't as bad. Close, but not as --

**CHRISTINE**

I won't be here that long. As soon as I can talk to a doctor, they'll realize there's been a terrible mistake and --

**CAROL DEXTER**

Yeah, that always works.  
(beat, quieter)

I heard them talking. You're here on a code twelve, police action. The doctors, the staff, they figure that if the police sent you here, there must be a good reason for it.

**CHRISTINE**

Then I'll just have to prove that I'm not insane.

**CAROL DEXTER**

Yeah? How? The more you try to act sane, the crazier you start to look. If you smile too much, you're delusional or stifling hysteria. If you don't smile, you're depressed. If you're neutral you're emotionally withdrawn and potentially catatonic.

**CHRISTINE**

You seem to have given this a great deal of thought.

**CAROL DEXTER**

I have. Don't you get it? You're

code twelve. So am I. We're here  
for the same reason.

(beat)

We pissed off the cops.

CHANGELING A True Story

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Christine sits back heavily, starting to understand the  
world  
more than she ever wanted to.

**CAROL DEXTER**

What, you thought you were the only  
one?

(points os)

The lady over there was married to  
a cop who kept beating her up.  
When she tried to tell somebody,  
they sent her here. And that one?  
The police beat the crap out of her  
brother, broke both his arms. When  
she complained to the papers, they  
picked her up and...

**CHRISTINE**

What about you?

**CAROL DEXTER**

I...work nights.

(Chris doesn't get it)

I mean, I work nights. Downtown.  
In some of the clubs. You know.

It gets through. Hooker. Christine nods.

**CAROL DEXTER**

This one client started hitting me,  
and he wouldn't stop. So I filed a  
complaint. Turns out he was a cop.  
Next thing I know, I'm here.

**CHRISTINE**

But how can they --

**CAROL DEXTER**

You're kidding right? Hey, everybody  
knows women are fragile, right?  
They're all emotions, no logic,  
nothin' goin' on upstairs. And  
sometimes, like when they say

something that's a little, y'know,  
inconvenient...they just go fucking  
nuts, pardon my French. If we're  
insane, nobody has to listen to us.  
I mean, who are you going to believe,  
some crazy woman trying to destroy  
the integrity of the force, or a  
police officer? Then once they get  
us in here, we either learn to  
behave, and shut up, or --  
(beat)  
Or you don't go home...or you go  
home like that.

CHANGELING A True Story

62.

She nods to an older woman whose upper temples are marred by  
surgical scars. Lobotomized. Christine turns away.

**CAROL DEXTER**

Better finish up your oatmeal.  
Want to look sane for the doctors.  
Then I want to hear what they nailed  
you for.

Numb with horror, Christine forces down the oatmeal.

**INT. JUVENILE DETENTION HALL - DAY**

Sanford Clark sits near several other juveniles being held.  
Pensive, nervous, he watches a kid absently tapping a ruler  
against his knees.

back -- FEATURE the ruler. Rising. Falling. Tapping. Then

IN ON -- on Sanford as we hear it continuing to tap OS. PUSH  
his face. Then, suddenly --

**FLASHBACK**

-- on a HATCHET, rising and falling in tune with the ruler  
tapping. There's blood on the hatchet.

Gordon Northcott's eyes glitter insanely as he brings the  
hatchet down again and just as it comes right AT US we flash

--

**BACK TO SCENE**

As Sanford CRIES OUT with the memory. We PULL BACK to see the others in the room staring at him. He turns away, won't meet their gaze. Something's terribly wrong.

Just then, an ADMINISTRATOR comes in.

**ADMINISTRATOR**

Clark...Sanford Clark.

Sanford rises, goes to the Administrator.

**ADMINISTRATOR**

Paperwork's come through. You'll be deported back to Canada day after tomorrow. The police there will to decide what to do with you next. I hope your stay here has convinced you not to try crossing the border illegally in future.

He starts to turn and walk away when:

CHANGELING A True Story

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**SANFORD**

Wait, I...I want to talk to the officer who brought me in.

**ADMINISTRATOR**

I'm sure he has far more important things to do than --

**SANFORD**

Please. It's important.

The Administrator senses that he's sincere, and troubled.

**ADMINISTRATOR**

He's off-duty until tomorrow, but... I'll see what I can do. No promises.

And with that, the administrator heads away.

**EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - AFTERNOON**

Gordon Northcott is hitch-hiking by the side of the road. A truck approaches, passes him...then slows and stops. Gordon runs up to the truck as the DRIVER leans out.

**DRIVER**

How far you going?

**GORDON**

Vancouver.

**DRIVER**

Hop in.

lifts  
Gordon climbs into the truck and goes to shove his bag under the seat...when something metallic bangs underneath. He  
out a short length of metal pipe.

**DRIVER**

Don't worry about that, pal. Just a little insurance. A couple of guys tried to hijack my truck a few years ago so they could run booze over the border. You can't be too safe, you know?

**GORDON**

Yeah, I surely do.

suddenly  
Gordon smiles, moves as if to hand the pipe back...and  
SLAMS it DOWN on the Driver's head...over and over and over. Blood splatters his face. Breathing hard, Gordon shoves the Driver out of the truck into the undergrowth then drives  
off.

64.  
CHANGEING A True Story

**INT. HOSPITAL - MENTAL WARD - HALLWAY - DAY**

Wearing a bandage on one arm, Christine is escorted down the hall by one of the nurses. She's led into --

**INT. HOSPITAL - STEELE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS**

-- where DOCTOR JONATHAN STEELE stands as Christine enters. He's in his fifties, heavy-set, serious.

**STEELE**

Mrs. Collins...Dr. Jonathan Steele.  
Please, have a seat.

chairs  
The nurse leaves. Christine notes that there are three  
in a row. Could be a test. She sits in the middle chair. Sits as straight as she can. Trying to look sane.

**STEELE**

I hope your stay has been comfortable so far.

**CHRISTINE**

Fine. Thank you.

**STEELE**

Really? I'd think it would be quite difficult at first.

**CHRISTINE**

(catching herself)

Well, it was. Difficult, I mean. But comfortable.

He makes a note of this. She grimaces. This isn't going well. He motions to the bandage on her arm.

**STEELE**

I see they took a blood test.

**CHRISTINE**

Wasserman Test. To check for syphilis. Apparently it can affect the mind.

**STEELE**

The idea that someone thinks you should be checked for syphilis...did that upset you?

**CHRISTINE**

No. Not at all. I'm sure it's... standard procedure.

She smiles a forced smile. Trying to appear level-headed.

CHANGELING A True Story

65.

**STEELE**

Yes. Exactly. Standard procedure. We have to cover all bases, and --

**CHRISTINE**

(covering her bases)

But...at the same time...I imagine that it would be...would probably be upsetting to...some people that someone else might...suspect that

of them.

(beat)

However inappropriate that might be.

She flashes another wan smile. He makes another note, picks up the report on his desk, glances it over.

**STEELE**

According to your file, you believe the police have substituted a fake boy for your son. Is that true?

**CHRISTINE**

I didn't say they substituted a fake boy, just...not the right boy.

(beat)

They brought back the wrong boy. Not my son. He's still missing.

He starts pulling out papers from his file.

**STEELE**

That's strange...you see, I have here a newspaper article with a photo of you at the train station, welcoming your son home. That is you in the photo, isn't it?

**CHRISTINE**

Yes.

**STEELE**

So at first he was your son, but now he's not your son.

(beat)

Has this been going on for a long time? People...changing, becoming something other than what they are?

**CHRISTINE**

People don't change, doctor.

**STEELE**

You don't think people change?

CHANGELING A True Story

66.

**CHRISTINE**

That's not what I --

**STEELE**

And the police...they're not out to persecute you?

**CHRISTINE**

No. Of course not.

**STEELE**

The police are here to protect us.

**CHRISTINE**

That's right.

He nods. She's trying to say what she thinks he wants to hear. It's a chess match that ends with:

**STEELE**

That's odd, because according to the head nurse, when you were admitted you accused the police of conspiring to do this deliberately, to punish you. So either she and the interns are also conspiring against you...or you're changing your story.

(beat)

Do you often have trouble telling reality from fantasy, Mrs. Collins?

He sits back. Christine's face tells the story.

**INT. JUVENILE DETENTION HALL - DAY**

It's raining. The Administrator enters with Detective Ybarra.

**ADMINISTRATOR**

I'm sorry to bring you out in this weather, detective, but the boy has been quite insistent.

**YBARRA**

It's all right, I'll just see what he has to say so I can go home and get dry. Where is he?

**ADMINISTRATOR**

Room seven.

**INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

A single table, two chairs. Sanford sits quietly, nervously, as Ybarra hangs his wet coat up on a hook.

CHANGELING A True Story

67.

**YBARRA**

It's raining cats, dogs and democrats  
out there, so this better be worth  
it.

He sits across the table from Sanford, lights up a  
cigarette.  
Sanford's mouth works for a moment, but nothing comes out.

**YBARRA**

Well?

**SANFORD**

Look, I -- this isn't easy, okay?

**YBARRA**

Nothing is.

A long BEAT. Sanford composes himself, begins:

**SANFORD**

My cousin's Gordon Northcott. He  
owns the ranch where you found me.  
He let me live there in exchange  
for watching the place when he was  
gone, doing chores, stuff like that.  
Said I could stay on as long as I  
wanted to. I figured that also  
meant I could leave whenever I wanted  
to, but he wouldn't let me.

**YBARRA**

Are you saying he held you prisoner?  
(sanford nods)  
Bull. When I got to the ranch you  
were running around free as a  
jaybird. Could've left any time  
you wanted. So what's this, some  
kind of story to cover why you were  
in the country illegally?

**SANFORD**

No...no, it's nothing like that.

**YBARRA**

Because I don't have time for --

**SANFORD**

Listen to me, please. He said --

**YBARRA**

What? What did he --

**SANFORD**

He said that if I tried to leave,  
he'd kill me!

(more)

CHANGELING A True Story

68.

**SANFORD (Cont'd)**

You don't understand, you don't  
know what he's like, what he...what  
we did...what he made me do.

Sanford is in tears by now. Ybarra realizes that there's  
something real going on here, and backs off.

**YBARRA**

Okay, lets start at the beginning.  
What did he make you do?

Sanford closes his eyes. Takes a long beat. Finally....

**SANFORD**

Him and me...me and Gordon, we...  
(beat, softly)  
...we killed some kids.

Ybarra freezes, the cigarette not moving in his hand.

**SANFORD**

I didn't mean to, I swear...he made  
me help him, said if I didn't he'd  
kill me, too. Please, you gotta  
help me...I'm scared...I don't want  
to go to Hell for killing kids.

**YBARRA**

What kids?

**SANFORD**

I don't know...I never knew their  
names.

**YBARRA**

How many kids?

**SANFORD**

All together?

He thinks about it for a moment. The fact that he has to add them all up is almost as chilling as what follows next.

**SANFORD**

About...twenty, I guess.

**YBARRA**

You're lying.

**SANFORD**

No, it's true, I swear!

**YBARRA**

Twenty kids.

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**SANFORD**

Yeah...thereabouts...I kinda stopped counting after a while, and Gordon said one or two might've gotten away, but --

**YBARRA**

Nobody can just up and kill twenty kids --

**SANFORD**

We did...yeah, we did that....

**YBARRA**

How?

Sanford looks off, pauses, then, softly and slowly....

**SANFORD**

Most times we'd bring back just one or two...sometimes as many as three.

**EXT. NORTHCOTT RANCH - FLASHBACK - DAY**

checking  
Gordon is at his truck, the same one we saw earlier,  
the engine as Sanford looks on nervously.

**SANFORD (V.O.)**

I always knew when he was getting

ready 'cause he'd go through the car and clean it up, make sure the tires were good, the engine...he was always afraid something'd break down and we'd be caught.

Gordon slams the hood shut, looks to Sanford. Smiles.

**GORDON**

Time to go.

**EXT. STREET - DAY**

A kid is walking down the street, playing idly, by himself, as the truck starts to approach from behind.

**SANFORD (V.O.)**

We'd go a different direction every time, never hit the same part of town twice. Sometimes we'd go for hours, just driving around, until we found somebody.

The truck comes beside the kid and Gordon leans out the window.

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**SANFORD (V.O.)**

He'd use all kinds of different stories. Sometimes he'd say he had free tickets for the circus, or he was looking for a lost dog...that one worked real good. Other days --

**GORDON**

There you are, we've been looking for you like mad.

FLASH-IMAGE: to a different kid, a different street.

**KID**

You have?

**GORDON**

Sure thing. Your folks, they got in an accident. They sent us to find you. They're hurt real bad. The police took 'em to the hospital, but they didn't have time to come

find you, so we said we'd do it.  
Now come on, hurry...we gotta get  
to the hospital, see your folks.

FLASH-IMAGE: Yet another kid, who hesitates, looks to  
Sanford.

**SANFORD (V.O.)**

A lot of kids won't get in a car  
alone with a stranger, but when  
he's got a kid there with him, that  
made it easier.

(beat)

They'd look to me, and figure if I  
was safe, they would be too. That's  
why he needed me, see?

**SANFORD**

It's okay. Come on in.

FLASH-IMAGE: Back to the first kid, who takes one last BEAT,  
then gets into the car.

**SANFORD (V.O.)**

Every time they got in the truck,  
it was like I wanted to die.

**GORDON**

Good boy! Now hold on, it's a long  
drive and we gotta fly.

And the truck heads off.

CHANGELING A True Story

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**SANFORD (V.O.)**

Then, as soon as we got back to the  
ranch...they went in the coop.

**EXT. NORTHCOTT RANCH - CHICKEN COOP - NIGHT**

The boy, crying, is tossed into the chicken coop. There  
are two other boys there, also crying and screaming.

**SANFORD (V.O.)**

Some days he'd do 'em right off.  
Other days, he'd wait, pick up a  
few more, keep 'em in the coop until  
he had like four or five, 'cause --  
(beat)

-- 'cause he liked to hear 'em scream  
all at once. Like they were some  
kinda chorus. And then....

**QUICK IMAGES**

coop. Gordon, eyes insane with blood lust, stumbles toward the

**SANFORD (V.O.)**

...and then....

The kids, screaming.

light Sanford looking on, afraid to move, the single overhead  
in the coop swinging wildly.

Gordon grabbing an ax. Raising it.

On Sanford's eyes, terrified.

The ax begins to fall in SLOW MOTION and --

**BACK TO SCENE**

it -- as the long ash at the end of Ybarra's cigarette, TUMBLES  
to the floor in SLOW MOTION, end over end, SHATTERING when  
hits the floor and bringing us back to full speed.

**SANFORD**

Sometimes...sometimes he'd leave  
one or two of 'em alive...barely  
anyway...and tell me...finish 'em.  
Finish 'em...or I'll finish you.

(beat)

And I did...I did...oh god...oh,  
sweet Jesus...I killed 'em...I killed  
'em...I killed 'em....

Then: silence, except for Sanford's sobbing. Ybarra realizes  
he hasn't been breathing. He tries to find his voice.

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**YBARRA**

These...uhm...these kids...do you  
think...if you saw them again, do  
you think you'd recognize them?  
(sanford nods)

Just a second.

missing He goes to his coat and pulls out a batch of photos of  
kids bound with a rubber band. Hands it to Sanford.

**YBARRA**

I haven't updated these in a while,  
but still, it should be....

(beat)

Just go through...and if you see  
any faces you recognize, put it on  
the table.

Sanford takes the photos. Starts going through them.

A photo, a face, goes down on the table. Then another. A  
third. With each photo slapped down the SLAP gets louder,  
BOOMING at us. Another photo. Another. Row after row.  
He's crying, sobbing, but still putting down photos.

stumbles Then he SLAMS down the last one and half-falls, half-  
out of his chair, sobbing...goes to the corner of the room  
and slides down the wall until he's sitting in a fetal  
position, hands covering his face. Sobbing  
uncontrollably.

over, Numb, Ybarra goes to the table, picks up a photo. Looks at  
it. Turns it over to the name, then picks up another. Then  
a third. When he picks up the fourth photo and turns it  
he stops, staring at it.

**YBARRA**

...shit....

The name on the back of the photo is WALTER COLLINS.

**JONES (V.O.)**

He's lying.

**INT. JONES' OFFICE - DAY**

Jones is on the phone, pissed and getting more pissed by the  
moment. INTERCUT between Jones and Ybarra in juvenile hall  
during the conversation.

**JONES**

Have you gone soft in the head,  
Les?

**YBARRA**

Sir, I --

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**JONES**

He's playing you! He knows he's in trouble, so he's come up with some cock and bull story about how he was forced to stay in the country --

**YBARRA**

With all due respect, sir, I don't think so. You didn't see him, the kid's scared half out of his mind --

**JONES**

He picked the Collins kid! We found him, remember? Haven't you been reading the papers?

(beat)

Or maybe you have, is that it?

He backhands a newspaper on his desk, headlined **DISTRAUGHT MOTHER CLAIMS POLICE RETURNED WRONG CHILD.**

**YBARRA**

Sir, if you'd just listen --

Just then a secretary sticks her head in the doorway.

**SECRETARY**

I'm sorry, captain, but he's here again...that reverend, Briegleb. He's asking about Christine Collins.

**JONES**

Tell the sonofabitch to get the hell off police property before I have him arrested for disturbing the peace.

**SECRETARY**

I tried. He said he's not leaving... him, or his friends.

There's a disturbance off-screen and she goes to deal with it as Jones gets further wound up to ninety.

**JONES**

What the hell...?

He's drawn to the window by the sound of voices. He peeks through the slats. Several dozen placard-carrying parishioners and members of the Women's Temperance League are standing in the street, beating drums and calling Christine's name.

**JONES**

Jesus jumped down....

He realizes he's still on the phone.

CHANGELING A True Story

74.

**JONES**

Ybarra? Listen. You're not to do anything except come back here.

**YBARRA**

Sir, department policy requires that all allegations of homicide have to be investigated. And these are kids, for chrissakes --

**JONES**

Departmental policy is what I say it is, you got that? Now I'm ordering you to get your ass back here with that kid, you got that? You bring him here and you talk to no one, got it? Nobody!

He slams the phone down. CUT BACK TO --

-- Ybarra in juvenile hall, agonizing over this. Finally, his voice resigned, he looks into the interrogation room.

**YBARRA**

All right, let's go.

**INT. POLICE STATION - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER**

Jones has come out into the hall, where Briegleb, several supporters and a handful of reporters are standing at the receiving officer's desk. They approach quickly.

**BRIEGLER**

Are you Captain Jones?

**JONES**

I am.

**BRIEGLEB**

What the hell have you done with Christine Collins? Don't try and lie your way out of it. I talked to several neighbors who saw her being driven off in a police car.

**JONES**

Mrs. Collins has been placed in protective custody following a mental breakdown.

**BRIEGLEB**

A what?!

CHANGELING A True Story

75.

**JONES**

Her statements and behavior have been found to be consistent with a delusional state of mind that could make her a danger to herself or others. In the public interest, we are looking after her son while she gets the help she clearly needs.

**BRIEGLEB**

Where?

**JONES**

Sorry, we're withholding that information to respect the privacy of the family. But I can assure you that she's getting the best treatment available. That's all.

He heads back the way he came as the others shout questions after him, held back by other police officers.

**INT. HOSPITAL - MENTAL WARD - DAY ROOM - AFTERNOON**

Patients are being corralled into a line that extends to a barred window where a nurse is dispensing pills.

**VOICE ON PA**

Line-up for medication.      Line up  
for medication....

Christine is nudged forward by an orderly, Carol beside her.

**ORDERLY**

Go on. Move up.

**CHRISTINE**

What for?

**ORDERLY**

Medication.

**CHRISTINE**

What kind of medication?

**ORDERLY**

The kind that's good for you. Help  
you relax.

She's nudged to the window, where a nurse hands out a pill  
and water.

**CHRISTINE**

I don't want to relax...I'm fine,  
and I won't take something unless I  
know what it is!

CHANGELING A True Story

76.

**NURSE**

Orderly --

**CHRISTINE**

Just listen --

**NURSE**

-- we can force-feed it to you if  
that's what you want.

Christine sees Dr. Steele, breaks away and rushes to him.

**CHRISTINE**

Doctor...Doctor Steele --

**STEELE**

I heard.

**CHRISTINE**

I don't know what's going on, but  
I'm not taking anything until --

**STEELE**

I understand. Come with me.

He moves off into an adjoining room. Carol Dexter, next in line, takes her pill...but keeps an eye on Christine.

**INT. HOSPITAL - STEELE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS**

He goes to his desk as she stands in the doorway.

**CHRISTINE**

I don't have anything wrong with me that I should have to take medication.

**STEELE**

There's nothing wrong with you.

**CHRISTINE**

That's right.

**STEELE**

You're fine.

**CHRISTINE**

Yes.

He pulls a typed letter out of his desk, slides it across.

**STEELE**

Then you shouldn't have any trouble signing this.

She picks it up, reads as he continues:

CHANGELING A True Story

77.

**STEELE**

By signing, you certify that you were wrong when you stated the boy returned by the police was not your son. It further stipulates that the police acted properly in sending you here for observation and absolves them of all responsibility for --

**CHRISTINE**

I won't sign it.

**STEELE**

Then your condition is not improved.  
(beat)

Sign it, and you can be out of here  
first thing tomorrow.

**CHRISTINE**

I won't sign it!

She tears up the sheet of paper.

**CHRISTINE**

I was not wrong! That boy is not  
my son! And I am not going to stop  
telling the truth about this! And  
you're not going to stop me, and  
the police aren't going to stop me --

**STEELE**

Mrs. Collins, you're becoming  
agitated.

**CHRISTINE**

-- I will tear down the walls of  
this place with my bare hands if I  
have to, but one way or another --

**STEELE**

Orderly!

An orderly appears in the doorway.

**STEELE**

The patient is disturbed, hyperactive  
and is threatening the staff. See  
to it she is properly sedated.

**CHRISTINE**

No!

She BURSTS past the orderly, running into

CHANGELING A True Story

78.

**INT. HOSPITAL - MENTAL WARD - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS**

running, pursued by orderlies, two more blocking her way.

**CHRISTINE**

No, I won't let you!           Someone,  
please, help me!

They TACKLE her and bring her down. She struggles as the

others look on, and you can see in their eyes that they  
don't like what they're seeing, there's rage --

-- and a furious Carol Dexter comes to her aid. She JUMPS  
into the struggle. Biting. Kicking. Scratching.

Steele comes on the run just as the orderlies peel Carol off  
the fight, spinning her around to face Steele, who SLAPS  
her.

**STEELE**

Stay out of this! This is none of  
your business!

(to the rest)

This is police business! You'll  
stay out of it if you know what's  
good for you!

He looks to Carol, Christine restrained behind them.

**STEELE**

You'd think you had enough trouble  
with the law just being a whore,  
wouldn't you?

He smiles. She gets a hand free and SLUGS him, hard, a nail  
slicing his cheek. He touches his face. It comes back with  
blood. Then he looks to the orderly.

**STEELE**

Attacking a staff member. Room  
eighteen. Electro-convulsive  
therapy.

The orderly hauls Carol off, kicking and screaming, as  
Christine is moved toward the nurse's station.

**CHRISTINE**

Carol! No, leave her alone! What're  
you --

They force a pill in her mouth, following with water as they  
hold her nose, forcing her to swallow. She chokes, swallows.  
They march her down the hall as Steele returns to his  
office.

**CHRISTINE**

Carol....!

CHANGELING A True Story

**INT. ROOM EIGHTEEN - CONTINUOUS**

orderlies  
applies  
The electro-shock room. Carol struggles against the  
who force her down onto the gurney. A nurse behind her  
conductor jelly to her temples as another orderly shoves a  
rubber bite-guard into her mouth.

violent  
Then a pair of metal pincers, points covered in cloth, are  
pressed against her temples. A button is pushed...and her  
body goes RIGID as a jolt of electricity blasts through her  
body. (This was, remember, fairly common practice for  
behavior in the 1920s.)

Then she passes out, her eyes rolling up in her head.

**INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

Christine is peering out the narrow slot in her door as she  
sees Carol being wheeled down the hall and put into her bed.  
Christine, sobbing, collapses slowly to the floor, caught in  
a nightmare and unable to wake up.

**DISSOLVE TO:**

**INT. POLICE STATION - DAY**

arranging  
Detective Ybarra is sitting at his desk, not happy about a  
lot of his life at this moment. He's turning over the photos  
of the missing kids identified by Sanford Clark and  
them on his desk the way you might arrange cards, playing  
solitaire. He looks up --

-- to see Sanford being led out of one of the holding areas,  
hands cuffed, clothes in his hands. Being transferred to a  
waiting bus. The two exchange a look. Ybarra looks away.  
Sanford continues toward the bus.

Finally, in agony, Ybarra can't take it any more. He rises,  
goes to the officer standing by the door to the bus.

**YBARRA**

It's all right, I'll take it from  
here.

**OFFICER**

But --

**YBARRA**

We need him for questioning. Come  
on....

He leads Sanford away, then stops two passing officers.

CHANGELING A True Story

80.

**YBARRA**

You two...you've just been  
requisitioned for backup. I'll  
explain on the way.

He hurries off. The officers follow, not sure what's up.

**INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - EVENING**

Christine sits beside Carol's bed. She's awake but dazed.  
Christine dabs a wet cloth against her forehead.

**CHRISTINE**

You shouldn't have done that.

**CAROL DEXTER**

(with difficulty)  
Wanted...to. Felt...good.

Carol takes her hand, holds it.

**CAROL DEXTER**

I lost...two babies...to back alley  
doctors...no choice....

(beat)

Never had...the chance...to fight  
for them. You do. Don't stop.

**CHRISTINE**

I won't...I won't.

**CAROL DEXTER**

Fuck them...and the horse...they  
rode in on.

Christine manages a thin smile, despite her tears.

**CHRISTINE**

That's hardly appropriate language  
for a lady, now is it?

**CAROL DEXTER**

Hell, yeah...there are times...that's exactly the right thing to say.

**CHRISTINE**

And when's that?

**CAROL DEXTER**

When you've got...nothing left to lose.

Christine touches her face, and we know she's heard this.

**DISSOLVE TO:**

CHANGELING A True Story

81.

**EXT. NORTHCOTT RANCH - EVENING**

Two squad cars pull up to the ranch. Ybarra and the other officers get out, guns up, not knowing if Gordon is still there or not.

**SUPERIMPOSE: SEPTEMBER 12, 1928**

They move quickly through the area, checking the house. Everything's dark, silent. One officer runs into the house, there's a long pause...then he pokes his head out again.

**OFFICER**

All clear.

Ybarra goes back to the car, opens the door. Sanford emerges.

**YBARRA**

All right. Show me.

Sanford hesitates, then starts toward a nearby barn.

**INT. BARN - CONTINUOUS**

He slides the door open and walks to the far end. The dirt here is a strange white-yellow color. Ybarra follows, still keeping a wary eye out for trouble. He looks down at where Sanford has stopped. Several bags marked LYE are nearby.

**YBARRA**

This it? You're sure?

him. Sanford nods. Ybarra edges toward a shovel, hands it to

**YBARRA**

Dig.  
(off sanford's look)  
You put 'em in the ground, you can  
take 'em out of the ground. Go on.

Sanford takes the shovel and starts cutting out sections of dirt and lye, dust rising around them. Ybarra watches, pensively, as the other officers edge their way in. He's looking the other way when one of the officers reacts:

**OFFICER**

Holy god....

Ybarra glances back...to see a child's shoe being unearthed. And beside it...bones. And then...a skull.

**YBARRA**

Call it in...get the coroner and  
every officer in a twenty mile radius  
here inside the hour.  
(more)

CHANGELING A True Story

82.

**YBARRA (Cont'd)**

Then put out an APB on Gordon Stewart  
Northcott, the info is in my car.  
Go on....

Sanford, The officer races out of the barn as Ybarra looks to  
who is still digging, crying as he goes.

**YBARRA**

You can stop now, son.  
(he doesn't)  
You can stop now. It's over. We  
can take it from here. It's over.

ground, Sobbing, Sanford drops the shovel and collapses on the  
hands covering his face, crying in great, heaving sobs.

**DISSOLVE TO:**

**INT. HOSPITAL - MENTAL WARD - HALLWAY - MORNING**

The patients are lined up outside their rooms for inspection.

Steele passes down them in review. Stops in front of Christine, who looks exhausted, worn, pale, her eyes bloodshot...but still defiant. He glances to the orderlies.

**STEELE**

Privacy, please.

The orderlies move all of the other patients away, except for

Christine, who shares a glance with Carol. Several other orderlies remain. He glances at her chart in his hands.

**STEELE**

I see you've still been refusing medication, requiring force-feeding. I see they switched to a rubber tube. I hear that can quite uncomfortable.

She doesn't answer. Her eyes never leave his. He pulls another copy of the letter out of the folder.

**STEELE**

Six days, Mrs. Collins, and no progress. We may have to go to more...strenuous therapies.

(beat)

Unless you're willing to prove you're doing better...by signing this.

He holds it up in front of her. She focuses first on it, then on him...and finally, her spine where it needs to be even if the rest of her is in shambles, looks at him and says:

83. CHANGELING A True Story

**CHRISTINE**

Fuck you....and the horse...you rode in on.

He nods, shrugs, puts the letter back in the folder. Turns to the orderlies.

**STEELE**

Room eighteen.

Christine They GRAB her and start muscling her down the hall,  
kicking and screaming as they go. Steele continues out to

**INT. HOSPITAL - RECEIVING AREA - MOMENTS LATER**

where he comes through the double-barred door just as Gustav Briegleb charges in the front door, carrying a newspaper.

**BRIEGLER**  
**I WANT TO TALK TO SOMEBODY IN CHARGE!**  
**RIGHT NOW!**

**NURSE**  
Sir, please --

**BRIEGLER**  
**WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE!**

Steele approaches.

**STEELE**  
I'm head doctor on duty. What's  
the problem?

**BRIEGLER**  
You the doctor who's got Christine  
Collins locked up in here?  
Intercut with:

**INT. ROOM EIGHTEEN - CONTINUOUS**

They wheel Christine into the room, struggling, fighting  
against the straps that pin her to the gurney.

**INT. HOSPITAL - RECEIVING AREA - CONTINUOUS**

Steele turns away from Briegleb, unconcerned.

**STEELE**  
Sorry, we don't discuss our cases  
with anyone other than family --

**BRIEGLER**  
You'll damned well discuss this one  
with me!

CHANGELING A True Story

Sir --

Briegleb THRUSTS the newspaper into Steele's hands.

**BRIEGLB**

Read it! Read it, damn you!

Steele unfolds the paper, looks at the headline, which we don't see. His reaction, though, is ominous and serious.

**INT. ROOM EIGHTEEN - CONTINUOUS**

The nurse behind Christine applies the conductor jell to her temples. She's fighting the best she can, but it's hopeless. The nurse picks up the electro-shock pincers. Places them on Christine's temples. Reaches for the button --

stopping -- as suddenly the door opens, and a nurse steps in, the process. The nurse goes to the one at the controls, whispers in her ear. The nurse then says something quietly to the orderly, who starts to undo the straps that hold Christine to the gurney.

**NURSE**

The doctor wants to see you.

They pull her up off the gurney.

**INT. HOSPITAL - STEELE'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER**

Christine is ushered inside, where Steele is waiting. He looks upset about something.

**STEELE**

Mrs. Collins.

She forces herself to stand straight, not easy given what she's just been through. He approaches.

**STEELE**

One last time. Are you, or are you not, prepared to sign that letter?

She looks up into his face, her resolve unshaken, her voice dry but firm for:

**CHRISTINE**

No.

He studies her for one last BEAT, then turns his back.

**STEELE**

You're free to go.

CHANGELING A True Story

85.

Christine takes a moment to process this...not sure if she heard this right, or if it's a trick.

**CHRISTINE**

...what?

**STEELE**

Your clothes are in the next room.  
You can change there.

She hesitates a second, looks to the orderly, being careful in case this is a set-up.

**CHRISTINE**

Next door.

**STEELE**

That's right.  
(to the orderly)  
See to it.

The orderly nods. She takes one last look around, then gets the hell out of the room. Alone, Steele picks up the newspaper that had been laying face-down on his desk, looks at it, and shakes his head.

**STEELE**

Christ....

**INT. HOSPITAL - MENTAL WARD - DAY ROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

Carol is there as Christine, now in her regular clothes, comes dashing in. Carol sees her, goes to her.

**CAROL DEXTER**

You're getting out?

**CHRISTINE**

I am out.

**CAROL DEXTER**

How --

**CHRISTINE**

I don't know...but I couldn't go  
without saying goodbye --

**CAROL DEXTER**

Christine, don't be stupid, get out  
of here fast in case they change  
their mind.

**CHRISTINE**

I will...but I want you to know:  
once I have my boy back, I'm coming  
(more)

CHANGELING A True Story

86.

**CHRISTINE (Cont'd)**

back here...for you, and the others.  
This is wrong, and we can stop it --

**CAROL DEXTER**

You are crazy.

**CHRISTINE**

Watch me.

Carol They hug. Christine breaks the hug, and hurries away as  
looks on, crying.

**INT. HOSPITAL - RECEIVING AREA - MOMENTS LATER**

Christine comes to the area where she was checked in. No one  
is looking at her. She passes the nurse's station and heads  
toward the door. Opens it. Fresh air comes in. Freedom.  
She steps out the front door as --

-- a moment later, Briegleb passes through the hallway with  
an admissions official, having not seen her.

**BRIEGLER**

You give me every piece of paper  
you've got on this case, you hear  
me? Every piece!

The official moves on, nervous, as Briegleb looks to the  
receiving nurse.

**BRIEGLER**

When does she come down?

Before she can answer, we jump out to

**EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS**

Where Christine walks among the sidewalk traffic. Free. Vindicated. She starts to pass a news-stand, where a NEWS VENDOR is calling out headlines, peddling papers.

**NEWS VENDOR**

Hurricane hits West Palm Beach!  
Babe Ruth hits 53rd home run!  
Kids found murdered in Riverside!

The last line stops Christine...just a bad sense that grows as she turns to the news vendor, who keeps on going.

**NEWS VENDOR**

Biggest Crime in Los Angeles History!  
(beat)  
Collins Boy Assumed Dead on Ranch!

CHANGELING A True Story

87.

Christine's knees buckle as she hears this. She starts to go down as Briegleb runs toward her from the hospital.

**REV. BRIEGLER**

Mrs. Collins...Christine...!

**CHRISTINE**

No...god...no....

And she collapses into his arms, sobbing uncontrollably, as passers-by glance over at her...and continue walking.

**REV. BRIEGLER**

I'm sorry...I didn't want you to  
find out like this...I'm sorry...I'm  
sorry....

But they're just words. She doesn't hear them.

**INT. POLICE STATION - HALLWAY - DAY**

Captain Jones is pacing nervously in the hallway for a long BEAT when another officer steps out of an office with a

brass

nameplate that reads CHIEF OF POLICE JAMES E DAVIS.

**OFFICER**

The chief will see you now.

Jones straightens his tie and steps into

**INT. CHIEF DAVIS' OFFICE - CONTINUOUS**

lots of dark wood and filtered light. Davis is sitting at his desk, looking at a series of newspapers in front of him as Jones steps up and stands before the desk.

**DAVIS**

I don't know if you're aware of it, Captain, but I have an exceptionally good vocabulary. I'm a terror at Scrabble, crossword puzzles, but even I'm in awe of the vocabulary that the press and the city council have been exercising in reference to this department courtesy of the Christine Collins...incident.

(scans papers)

Incompetent. Cowardly. Bullying. Reprehensible. Mendacious and invidious...those two courtesy of that prick Gustav Briegleb. Bonus words in Scrabble, both of them. Especially invidious. Hard to work that one into a conversation. But he managed it, all right.

CHANGELING A True Story

88.

**JONES**

Sir, I --

**DAVIS**

The key, of course, is the context in which words like this get used. You have to do that in scrabble, you know, when somebody challenges a word...show how it's used in a sentence. So "incompetent," as in --

(reads)

"A department so incompetent that they never realized that up to twenty children were being kidnapped and murdered under their very noses."

(looks over)

And here: "So incompetent that they insisted they knew better than a

mother the identity of her own child, forced him upon her, and then incarcerated her when she confronted them with evidence of their own reprehensible behavior." That was a two-fer. Incompetent and reprehensible in the same sentence. Guy must be a real terror at crossword puzzles.

Davis gets up and crosses the room, looking out through the slatted windows at the busy Los Angeles street outside.

**DAVIS**

Captain, your handling of the Collins case has exposed this department to public ridicule. There is even the potential for civil and criminal liability.

**JONES**

Sir, nobody could have known what was going on up at that ranch. Not us, not the Sheriff's Department, the Marshall's Office...as for the Collins woman....

(beat)

I'm still not convinced that her kid is among the victims up in Wineville.

**DAVIS**

No?

**JONES**

No, sir.

(more)

CHANGELING A True Story

89.

**JONES (Cont'd)**

There were four other photos of missing boys that looked a lot like him...this Clark kid could have been mistaken.

**DAVIS**

Maybe he was...which raises the obvious question: so what?

**JONES**

Sir?

Davis turns back to him from the window.

**DAVIS**

The Mayor wants this to go away. I want this to go away. The way you do that is to stop insisting that Walter Collins was not among those kids killed up at that goddamned ranch. Because if the boy you brought back isn't Walter Collins, and he's not dead up at that ranch, then where the hell is he? People will want to know why we haven't found him. Why we aren't we doing our job.

(beat)

But if, on the other hand, he is, or could be among those poor boys killed up in Wineville...then the inquiries stop. It's a momentary embarrassment that you'll have to live with...but better a short inconvenience than a lingering problem, wouldn't you say, Captain?

Jones doesn't like it, but he swallows his pride. Nods.

**JONES**

Yes, sir.

**DAVIS**

The boy's been gone for nearly a year. If he was going to be found, it would've happened by now. Whether he was up at that ranch or not, the truth is he probably is dead somewhere. Better his mother accepts that now rather than later, don't you think?

**JONES**

Yes, sir.

CHANGELING A True Story

90.

**DAVIS**

Good. That'll be all, Captain.

Jones starts to leave, then looks back as Davis settles back

behind his desk.

**JONES**

Sir, there's talk of an investigation by the police commission.

**DAVIS**

Let me worry about the commission. But it wouldn't hurt to find out just who the fuck that kid is you brought back from De Kalb and why he did this, because the press bought into his bullshit same as we did. That we were all taken in by the scheming little bastard may help take some of the sting off this.

**JONES**

My boys are working on it now, sir.

And he exits as we go to

**INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY**

notepad

Detective Ybarra is sitting on one side of a table, a in front of him, staring across at "Walter," who isn't very happy right now, and is staring back with substantial venom. His true, nasty personality is free to come out at last. There's a long BEAT, then:

**"WALTER"**

I want a glass of water.

**YBARRA**

Tough.

**"WALTER"**

(mocking)

"Tough!"

**YBARRA**

What's your name?

**"WALTER"**

Walter Collins.

**YBARRA**

Walter Collins is dead.

**"WALTER"**

(shrugs)

I didn't do it.

CHANGELING A True Story

91.

**YBARRA**

Look, let me explain something to you. Because of your lies, you've ruined a woman's life embarrassed the police department, and got the whole city up in arms over this.

"Walter" considers this for a BEAT, then smiles.

**"WALTER"**

Got a lot done, didn't I?

Ybarra exchanges a look with the matron, then closes up his notepad.

**YBARRA**

All right, if that's how you want it, then I guess we're done here.

(to matron)

Tell County Jail we're remanding him for trial.

**"WALTER"**

Wait...what's remanding? What trial?

**YBARRA**

I told you, the real Walter Collins was murdered.

**"WALTER"**

So? I didn't do anything! I wasn't even here when it happened!

**YBARRA**

By pretending to be Walter Collins, you're interfering in a police investigation of a kidnapping and murder. We can try you as an accomplice to murder after the fact.

(beat)

Too bad. County Jail is a lot worse than juvenile hall or a foster home. A lot worse.

**"WALTER"**

You can't do that...I'm just a kid!

**YBARRA**

Sanford Clark is a kid, too.  
Fifteen. But he's going to jail.  
All murderers and their accomplices  
go to jail. Everyone knows that.

(to the matron)

Get him out of here. It's out of  
my hands now.

CHANGELING A True Story

92.

He heads for the door when "Walter" cries out, scared.

**"WALTER"**

Wait! I don't want to go to jail.

**YBARRA**

Prove it.

And on the boy's face, we HEAR:

**YBARRA (V.O.)**

Arthur Hutchins.

**INT. JONES' OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER**

Ybarra is standing in the doorway to Jones' office, speaking  
to the Captain and looking at his notepad.

**YBARRA**

The boy's real name is Arthur  
Hutchins Junior, age twelve, a  
runaway from Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

**JONES**

Did you check the wire services?

Ybarra holds up a missing persons sheet.

**YBARRA**

Checks out. The report was filed  
by his divorced mother, who lives  
in Clinton, Iowa with the boy's  
grandmother. Apparently he didn't  
like living with the old lady, she  
didn't let him get away with the  
stuff he usually got away with, and  
one day...he up and left.

**JONES**

What about the man he showed up  
with at the diner?

**YBARRA**

Just some drifter. The boy was  
hungry, ran into this guy who said  
he knew how to get some food and  
not have to pay for it. Only when  
they finished, he left the kid behind  
while he cut out. When the police  
picked him up, they started going  
through the wire reports about  
missing kids --

**JONES**

And he overheard them say the name  
Walter Collins.

CHANGELING A True Story

93.

**YBARRA**

Bingo.

**JONES**

But why that one? I mean, of all  
the police departments he could've  
screwed up, why Los Angeles?

**YBARRA**

I asked him the same question.

**INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - FLASHBACK**

Moments earlier. PUSHING IN on "Walter" for:

**"WALTER"**

I...I knew that Los Angeles was  
where they made the Tom Mix movies.  
I figured maybe I could meet Tom  
Mix. Maybe he'd even let me ride  
his horse.

(beat)

His horse is named Blue. Did you  
know that?

**DISSOLVE TO:**

**INT. ST. PAUL'S CHURCH - RECTORY - DAY**

Christine is in a bed in a small room in the rectory, a tray beside her, still recovering from her experience. Briegleb enters and approaches a nearby chair.

**BRIEGLB**

How are you feeling?

**CHRISTINE**

A little better, thanks. The sleep helped. Anything new outside?

**BRIEGLB**

Nothing that can't wait until you're stronger. The police still have a car parked outside. They want to know what your next move is.

**CHRISTINE**

I want to go home.

**BRIEGLB**

And then?

She takes a BEAT, then slowly, gingerly gets out of bed.

CHANGELING A True Story

94.

**CHRISTINE**

I've been giving that a great deal of thought ever since I got out of that...place. All those women, and what they did about Walter....

(beat)

They're going to just keep on doing it, aren't they? Nothing's going to change...unless we make it change.

She glances out the window, to the police car parked across the street.

**CHRISTINE**

I used to tell Walter, "Never start a fight...but always finish it." I didn't start this fight...but by god I'm going to finish it.

**BRIEGLB**

It's dangerous, and you've already been through a great deal, Mrs. Collins. Right now you're

sufficiently high-profile that the police will hesitate to come after you out in the open...but if they see their position threatened, that could change quickly.

(beat)

Your life could be in danger.

She takes a beat, then turns to him from the window.

**CHRISTINE**

"Always finish it. Always."

**EXT. ROW HOUSE - VANCOUVER - EVENING**

A series of red-brick rowhouses line a quiet street. We see couples walking, hand in hand, kids playing...then we notice Gordon Northcott coming around the corner. He looks around, then cuts across a yard, jumping over a fence to get to

**INT. ROW HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING**

rings.  
where RACHEL CLARK, 30s, is doing dishes as the doorbell

**RACHEL CLARK**

Just a minute....

She opens the door and finds Gordon Northcott standing outside.

**GORDON**

Hi, sis.

There's a flicker of a pause...was she expecting him?

CHANGELING A True Story

95.

**RACHEL CLARK**

Gordon...I didn't know you were back in town.

**GORDON**

Got in a couple of days ago, figured I'd surprise you. That okay?

**RACHEL CLARK**

Yes...yes, of course. Come on in.

She steps aside as he enters, looks around.

**GORDON**

Where's that little niece of mine?

**RACHEL CLARK**

She...went into town. Should be back this evening. Bob's here --

**GORDON**

Good. Need to talk to him about staying on for a few days.

**RACHEL CLARK**

Staying --

**GORDON**

Listen, can I use your bathroom? It's been a long ride and I could use a shower.

**RACHEL CLARK**

Of course.

He passes her and heads upstairs. She steps to the back of the house, where her husband, BOB, is coming in through the back, wiping engine grease off his hands with a towel.

**BOB**

Is that --

(she nods, scared)

Go next door. I'll call the police. Hurry.

She rushes past him into the other room to do just that.

**INT. ROWHOUSE - BATHROOM - LATER**

Gordon is toweling off his hair when he hears a car door slam shut. Then another. He peers out the window. Several Royal Canadian Mounted Police cars have pulled up along the street. Mounties are getting out, moving quietly toward the house.

CHANGELING A True Story

96.

**INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

Bob quietly lets the Mounties in. They signal for Bob to get the hell out of there. Guns in hand, they climb the stairs.

Suddenly there's the SOUND of breaking glass from above.

Gordon They race up the stairs to find the window broken, and fleeing across an adjoining rooftop.

**MOUNTIE**

Go around the other side! Cut him off!

The others take off as he and another Mountie climb through the broken window in pursuit of Northcott.

**EXT. ROWHOUSES - NIGHT**

WHISTLES Gordon races up one rooftop, over the top, then leaps to the next one as, below, Mounties race to keep up with him, blowing furiously. He looks behind him to see the other two Mounties running rooftop to rooftop, coming fast.

Gordon runs faster, going at angles to put more distance between himself and the police on the ground...and making increasingly more difficult and dangerous leaps from rooftop to rooftop.

He leaps across one chasm, barely makes it, keeps running. The rooftop Mounties follow. One of them makes the jump successfully, but the other falls short, plummeting to the ground three stories below. A leg snaps on impact. The first Mountie hesitates, looks down. The second one waves him on.

**SECOND MOUNTIE**

Go on! Get the bastard!

He nods and continues the chase. Gordon runs for all he's worth. The Mountie keeps after him.

Gordon makes another leap. The Mountie jumps...but he's short.

He grabs onto a rain gutter. Gordon sees his situation, runs back, and STOMPS on the Mountie's hands, trying to get him to shake loose. The gutter starts to tear free --

-- when a Mountie down below FIRES at Gordon, making him back

off. The Mountie clinging to the gutter starts to fall, then grabs a nearby pipe and crawls up to the roof. Keeps coming.

Gordon keeps running...but comes to a chasm too wide to be jumped. He hesitates, starts to cut back in another direction --

-- when the Mountie TACKLES him hard. The two go down in a tangle of limbs, fighting, punching, kicking.

CHANGELING A True Story

97.

going They SLIDE down the steeply angled roof and barely avoid over the edge.

the With nowhere else to run, Gordon fights for all he's got, punches from both coming fast and furious. Finally, the Mountie backs off just a bit --

**MOUNTIE**

Screw this...I'm too old for this  
fightin' shit....

-- and DIVES at Gordon, taking them both off the edge of the two-story roof and DOWN into --

flowers -- a garden below, CRASHING through carefully manicured  
cushioned and trees to land with a THUD, the Mountie's impact  
by Gordon.

staggers As the other Mounties come on the run, the first one to his feet and yanks up a bruised, bleeding but otherwise intact Gordon. Looks at him nose-to-nose.

**MOUNTIE**

**YOU...ARE UNDER...ARREST!**

And he YANKS Gordon toward the other waiting officers.

**INT. CHRISTINE'S HOUSE - DAY**

another Christine opens the door to find Reverend Briegleb and man on her porch, S. S. HAHN, late fifties.

**BRIEGLER**

Mrs. Collins, I want you to meet a  
friend of mine, Mr. Hahn.

**CHRISTINE**

Hello.

**HAHN**

Mrs. Collins. My deepest condolences  
on your loss.

**REV. BRIEGLER**

Can we come in?

**CHRISTINE**

Yes...of course.

She steps aside to let them in, closing the door under:

**CHRISTINE**

Mr. Hahn, was it?

**HAHN**

Yes.

CHANGELING A True Story

98.

**CHRISTINE**

I appreciate the sentiment, but so  
far they still haven't positively  
identified any of the...remains...  
as Walter's.

**HAHN**

But he was identified, was he not?

**CHRISTINE**

Yes, but...I guess I still can't  
accept it. It doesn't feel real to  
me.

**HAHN**

It never does. I lost a daughter  
to polio five years ago. There's  
not a day goes by I don't think, I  
should mention this to Claudine...  
then I remember she's not here.

**CHRISTINE**

I'm sorry. Please, sit.

They do as Christine looks to Briegleb.

**CHRISTINE**

I've been on the phone all day with  
the appointment secretary for the  
police commission. They won't let  
me testify at the hearing, or call

witnesses. They say it's not necessary.

**REV. BRIEGLEB**

I know. My sources tell me the police commission is going to come out with a report that whitewashes the whole thing. They're going to say that Jones and the rest of the LAPD did absolutely nothing wrong, that the real blame is with the kid...and with you, for being difficult and forcing them to put you away for your own safety.

**CHRISTINE**

Then we'll just have to hire a lawyer...bring a civil suit and try to get the City Council to call for a hearing by the Welfare Board.

**REV. BRIEGLEB**

Just one problem.  
(more)

CHANGELING A True Story

99.

**REV. BRIEGLEB (Cont'd)**

Not one lawyer outside this room was willing to take on the Police Department. Too risky, they said. So finally I went to the very best attorney in town, a man who's sued the city four times and won. Unfortunately, we could never afford to hire him.

**CHRISTINE**

(crestfallen)  
I see....

**HAHN**

Which is why I'm doing this pro bono.

(a smile)

It would be my honor to defend your honor, Mrs. Collins. In my fifteen years as a lawyer, I have never seen anyone fight as long or as hard as you have, in what is so

clearly in the cause of justice.

**REV. BRIEGLEB**

Now I want you to tell Mr. Hahn here the whole story, from end to end, leave nothing out, he'll need it all if he's going to get the City Council involved.

**CHRISTINE**

Of course. One thing, though. A personal favor. When we've finished here today, could you spare a few minutes to come with me downtown.

**HAHN**

Of course. Where downtown?

**INT. LA COUNTY GENERAL HOSPITAL - MENTAL WARD - DAY**

Hahn marches into the receiving area with Christine Collins and Briegleb. He goes to the receiving nurse.

**NURSE**

Yes? May I --

She sees Christine Collins and the sentence dies midway. Hahn pulls out a handful of papers.

**HAHN**

My name is S. S.  
(more)

CHANGELING A True Story

100.

**HAHN (Cont'd)**

Hahn, and I have a court order for the immediate release of all women being detained in this institution under the designation Code Twelve pending a formal inquiry into the reasons for their detainment.

**NURSE**

I'm sorry, but the doctor in charge won't be in until tomorrow morning and --

**HAHN**

Let me be clearer. Either you open those doors and produce the people

named in that court order, or you  
will find yourself on the other  
side of those bars...without a key.

The nurse exchanges a sour look with Christine and heads  
off.

**EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY**

One by one, the Code Twelve patients are brought out of the  
hospital and into the light. One of the last to emerge is  
Christine.

She runs to her, embraces her, sobbing.

**CAROL DEXTER**

I knew you'd come...I knew you'd  
come back...I knew you'd come....

**CHRISTINE**

It's all right...everything's going  
to be all right now....

And in Christine's face, we see a flicker of pride and one  
simple truth: if she could not save her son, she could at  
least save these women. As they move toward her, Hahn and  
Briegleb, we HEAR a TRAIN WHISTLE that segues us into

**EXT. UNION STATION - TRAIN PLATFORM - DAY**

several  
Gordon Northcott, handcuffed, is led out of a train by  
officers. The waiting PRESS rush toward him. He seems to  
enjoy the attention. Among the shouted questions we hear:

**REPORTER**

Mr. Northcott, any comment on your  
arrest?

**GORDON**

I'm feeling fine.  
(more)

CHANGELING A True Story

101.

**GORDON (Cont'd)**

I've been on a little vacation, as  
some of you know. It was a pleasant  
vacation, and the police have  
certainly provided me with a lot of

amusement.

**REPORTER**

How did you avoid capture?

**GORDON**

Well, I didn't, did I? Didn't know anyone wanted me until just recently. Didn't even try. My luggage still has my initials on it.

**ANOTHER REPORTER**

Did you know why the police were after you?

**GORDON**

No, but I figured it would be best if I stayed out of it.

**REPORTER**

Anything to say to the parents of the children you murdered?

**GORDON**

No comment.

And on that the police hustle Gordon away.

**INT. CHIEF DAVIS' OFFICE - DAY**

door  
Davis is filling out paperwork as the door opens. He looks up as LOS ANGELES MAYOR GEORGE CRYER enters, closing the door after him again.

**DAVIS**

Mayor Cryer...this is unexpected.

**CRYER**

So was this.

picks  
He drops a series of court documents on Davis' desk. He picks them up, examines them.

**CRYER**

Subpoenas, requests for depositions, interrogatories...all courtesy of Mr. Hahn and his new client, Christine Collins.  
(more)

CRYER (Cont'd)

You don't have to look them over too closely, Chief, your own copies should be arriving any time now.

(beat)

The City Council has also agreed to look into this, starting immediately.

**DAVIS**

Goddamnit....

**CRYER**

I thought this was supposed to go away. This is an election year, I can't afford this kind of press.

**DAVIS**

It is going away, sir. I instructed Captain Jones --

**CRYER**

I'm afraid falling on his sword and saying he made a mistake isn't going to be good enough, Chief. If we take him out of the picture for a while, it might help calm things down until the hearing's finished.

(beat)

There are several people on the council who are planning to run against me, and they'd love to accuse me of allowing a renegade police force to operate with impunity.

Cryer shakes his head, walks off a pace.

**CRYER**

Our friends in the press are having a field day with this mess. I'm getting five hundred phone calls, letters and telegrams a day demanding to know what the hell is going on at City Hall that we allow our police force to brutalize women and misplace children. Christ, all this picture needs now is for somebody to kick a puppy for the cameras.

(beat)

This is a train, Chief, and we need to either get in front of it, or be

run over by it.

**DAVIS**

Mayor Cryer...I stand by my men.  
You know that.

CHANGELING A True Story

103.

**CRYER**

I do. And you know where I stand.  
So the question is..are we going to  
stand together...or hang together?

He lets the question sit as we go to

**EXT. CITY HALL - DAY**

Mayor Cryer stands beside Chief Davis and addresses a rather  
noisy and worked-up press corps from behind a podium.

**MAYOR CRYER**

Gentlemen...gentlemen, please. As  
Mayor of Los Angeles, it is my duty  
to preserve the peace in our city,  
which has been disrupted by recent  
events in the case of Christine  
Collins. As a result, we have  
decided that Captain J. J. Jones of  
the Lincoln Heights Division is to  
be suspended from active duty,  
effective immediately.

**REPORTER**

What's the charge, Chief?

**CHIEF DAVIS**

The charge is conduct unbecoming an  
officer, and using improper and  
abusive language toward Mrs. Collins.  
It further charges that he exceeded  
his authority as a police officer  
by incarcerating Mrs. Collins on  
the alleged charge of insanity  
without sufficient cause.

**REPORTER**

Mayor Cryer, are you aware that the  
City Council has said it plans to  
open its own investigation into the  
Collins case?

**MAYOR CRYER**

I've heard this, yes. But since one of the main purposes of such a hearing by the City Council would be to suspend Captain Jones, and since that action has now been taken, the question is moot.

**REPORTER**

Which makes it look like the only reason Jones is being suspended is to head off the City Council  
(more)

CHANGELING A True Story

104.

**REPORTER (Cont'd)**

investigation. Are you concerned that an outside investigation might go uncomfortably high up the food chain?

**CHIEF DAVIS**

I won't even dignify that question with a response. Good day.

The two head back into

**INT. CITY HALL - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS**

Glancing back over their shoulders at the press outside.

**CRYER**

Cheer up, Chief. That little show should take the wind out of their sails. By Monday, this issue will be as cold as yesterday's fish. Never underestimate the public's lack of attention and potential for apathy. Old news is dead news, you'll see.

**DISSOLVE TO:**

**INT. CHRISTINE'S HOUSE - NIGHT**

She opens the door as Briegleb enters with three really large,

trench

dangerous looking men, one of whom is carrying a heavy coat.

**CHRISTINE**

Reverend, what --

**BRIEGLER**

Sorry to barge in so late, Mrs. Collins, but it took me a while to find the right people for the right job. These three gentlemen are members of my congregation who, before coming to the Lord, had lived lives of brutality, vice and crime. Now they are pledged to doing god's work...and if this isn't it, I don't know what is.

**CHRISTINE**

I don't understand.

**BRIEGLER**

People who bring charges against the police have a habit of  
(more)

CHANGELING A True Story

105.

**BRIEGLER (Cont'd)**

disappearing right before the trial. I'm a big believer in the power of prayer, Mrs. Collins...but a little backup from time to time never hurts.

The others nod as they make themselves comfortable in the living room.

**CHRISTINE**

I see...well, I...thank you. Can I get you anything?

**BRIEGLER**

Since we don't plan on sleeping, coffee would be lovely.

She heads off to get some coffee. As one of the men puts his coat behind the sofa, we see that it contains a sawed-off shotgun. Briegler looks out the window, to where a police car sits, watching the house.

**DISSOLVE TO:**

**INT. CHRISTINE'S HOUSE - MORNING**

She's dressed in her best dress, putting on a hat and a pair of gloves. Her hands are shaking. She squeezes them together,  
closes her eyes. Focuses. With one final, deep breath, she heads out.

**EXT. COLLINS HOME - MORNING**

The same police car is there as Christine gets into a car with Briegleb and the two drive off. The other three men get into another car and follow. The police car in turn pulls away from the curb, following both cars.

**EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - BRIEGLEB'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER**

He's aware that they're being followed, glancing in the rear view mirror to keep an eye on things. Looks over to Christine,  
smiles encouragingly. Looks ahead.

**BRIEGLEB**

Traffic's getting heavy. We'll go up Spring.

He turns. The other cars do the same. But the traffic here is even worse. Just then, Briegleb looks back in his rear view mirror to see --

-- another police car pulling out of a driveway and cutting off the car with Christine's bodyguards.

CHANGELING A True Story

106.

Briegleb turns quickly, trying to get ahead, but the street's  
too busy. He looks in the mirror to see that another police car glide into position two cars behind them.

Traffic stops. Jammed. Briegleb is nervous, sensing the very real possibility of a hit being set up. The traffic is lined right up against parked cars on either side. Then there's a momentary break in traffic.

**BRIEGLEB**

Hold on.

He turns hard into the driveway of a closed shop and shuts off the engine. Jumps out and opens the door for Christine, who gets out.

**BRIEGLER**

Start walking. Quickly.

They do. He glances back at the police car. The two inside start to open the doors, but they can't get them open, being right up against parked cars on one side and traffic on the other. They run the siren to clear traffic, but it's too late as --

-- Christine and Briegleb hurry down the street on foot, Briegleb glancing behind them. The foot- and car-traffic is very heavy...we HEAR horns honking and, in the distance, something that could be the sound of lots of people.

**REV. BRIEGLER**

Almost there. Just a few more blocks.

**CHRISTINE**

Where is all this traffic's coming from...?

Briegleb glances back. The police car has popped its doors, and two trench-coated officers are getting out. Christine stops a man passing in the opposite direction.

**CHRISTINE**

Excuse me, can you tell me what the problem is up ahead?

**MAN**

Didn't you hear? It's the biggest protest I've ever seen.

**REV. BRIEGLER**

Protest?

**OFFICER**

Yeah...over that Collins broad, if you can believe that.

CHANGELING A True Story

107.

He moves on. Briegleb and Collins slowly exchange a look somewhere between disbelief and "oh shit."

**CHRISTINE**

He didn't mean...he couldn't mean --

**REV. BRIEGLEB**

I don't know...all I know is that I  
think I just stopped breathing....

They walk quickly up one clogged street and down another,  
the  
police following on foot...moving toward the SOUND of  
voices,  
drums, and cars honking... until they turn onto Spring  
Street --

-- and find themselves in the middle of the biggest protest  
march ever recorded in the history of Los Angeles to this  
date. Thousands of people crowd into the street,  
overwhelming  
the police presence...not rioting, but making their voices  
heard.

The Salvation Army, the Women's Temperance Society, the  
Society  
for Justice, Catholic groups, Union groups and ordinary  
citizens carrying placards and signs that read WE SUPPORT  
CHRISTINE COLLINS and JUSTICE FOR MRS. COLLINS and THE LAPD:  
A CITY'S SHAME...it just goes on and on and on. Christine  
looks out to see her boss from the telephone company, Mr.  
Harris, marching arm in arm with the rest. He sees her,  
smiles, tips his hat and continues marching.

Christine is stunned...Briegleb even moreso.

**CHRISTINE**

Oh...my....

**REV. BRIEGLEB**

The Lord works in mysterious ways,  
Mrs. Collins.  
He looks behind them, to where the police have stopped.  
There's no way in hell they can make a move in the face of  
something as big as t his. Briegleb smiles.

**REV. BRIEGLEB**

Boy howdy, does He ever. Come on.

They continue up the street toward City Hall.

**THORPE (V.O.)**

Ladies and Gentlemen...can I have  
your attention, please....

**INT. CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS - DAY**

This is a big room, and one thousand observers fill every available chair with more standing along the wall in back. It's a circus. Christine sits with Hahn.

CHANGELING A True Story

108.

Briegleb is in a seat behind the main section. FLASHBULBS pop as THORPE, a city councilman, speaks.

**SUPERIMPOSE: OCTOBER 24, 1928**

**THORPE**

There are nearly one thousand people gathered in this chamber, more than have ever been in this room before.

**EXT. CITY HALL - PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS**

Speakers are lowered from the window into the parking lot where hundreds of others are gathered to listen.

**THORPE**

(on pa)

I therefore ask you to refrain from demonstrations of any kind. We're all here because we want to find out the real facts in this case, and everybody is going to be heard if we have to sit here for a week.

**BACK TO SCENE**

As Thorpe looks to the other members of the Council, and the area where witnesses are supposed to wait to be called upon. A number of seats are empty.

**SECOND COUNCILMAN**

Mr. Thorpe, I don't see any other members of the Police Commission.

**THORPE**

That's odd...we specifically stipulated that we would begin our hearings with testimony from the police department. Are there any representatives of the Police Commission in the room?

(no answer)

Is Chief Davis here?

(no reply)  
Is Captain Jones here? Is there  
anyone here representing the police?

A REPORTER raises his hand, then stands.

**REPORTER**

Mr. Chairman...Richard Thomas, The  
Evening Herald. Both the Police  
Chief and Captain Jones are in San  
Pedro for a police inspection at a  
station there.

(more)

CHANGELING A True Story

109.

REPORTER (Cont'd)

Only reason I know is we have a  
couple of our boys out covering the  
thing.

**THORPE**

Are you telling me they directly  
violated the wishes of the City  
Council? That they refused to attend  
a vital hearing so they could conduct  
a routine inspection in San Pedro?  
And what the hell is Jones doing at  
an inspection after being suspended?

(beat)

I hate to call a recess before we've  
even started, but I think a few  
phone calls are in order. So we'll  
take a half hour break, then continue  
with the witnesses who have appeared  
here today. But let it be known  
that Captain Jones and Police Chief  
Davis will be subpoenaed and required  
to appear here tomorrow morning.

There's APPLAUSE from the crowd which breaks up into pockets  
of discussion as a BAILIFF approaches Hahn and whispers into  
his ear. Hahn nods, looks to Christine.

**HAHN**

Mrs. Collins, could you come across  
the street with me for just a moment?

**CHRISTINE**

But...shouldn't we --

**HAHN**

I think there's something you should see.

Puzzled, curious, Christine gets up and exits with Hahn.

**INT. LA COUNTY COURTHOUSE - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER**

Hahn is moving quickly down the hall toward a courtroom door,  
Christine following.

**HAHN**

-- the police decided it was best to keep this off the main docket in order to avoid exactly the sort of chaos we have across the street.

He gets to the door, pauses. Looks back to her. She nods.  
He opens the door and they enter

CHANGELING A True Story

110.

**INT. COURTROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Dead silence, in marked contrast to the city council room. As she enters, she sees people sitting silently in the gallery...row after row of couples, mothers and fathers,  
some

weeping softly. Some of them notice Christine's entrance and nod to her with sadness and a strange sense of common bond...they are all carrying the same grief.

One of the couples, MR. AND MRS. CLAY, see Christine and go to her, speaking softly. They should be distinct enough in appearance that we will recognize them instantly when we see them again later.

**MRS. CLAY**

Mrs. Collins? I'm Leanne Clay,  
this is my husband, John...I just  
wanted to pass on my sympathies.  
What we went through, waiting to  
hear anything about our son David,  
was bad enough, and now this....

(beat)

But there was no call for what the  
police did to you...no call at all.

She nods her thanks as a door at the other end of the courtroom opens. They take their seats as a judge and two attorneys take their places, preceded by a bailiff.

**BAILIFF**

All rise.

They do. The judge takes his seat. The rest of the room also sits. He nods to the bailiff, who in turn opens another door, leading to the holding area.

As Christine looks on, Gordon Stewart Northcott is ushered into the courtroom for his initial plea. Some women break into tears at the sight of him. He first seems startled by the presence of so many, then he smiles. An audience.

As he takes his place beside his attorney, he looks down the room and meets the gaze of Christine Collins. Her face pales, as though slapped...but she doesn't look away.

**GORDON**

Hey...I saw you in the papers. You got a lot of moxie, standing up to the police like that.

The bailiff forcibly turns him around to face the judge. Christine's hands grip the seat she's in until her knuckles turn white...but she doesn't allow him the satisfaction of seeing her react to his comments. The judge looks up.

CHANGELING A True Story

111.

**JUDGE**

Gordon Stewart Northcott, you have been charged with three counts of murder in the first degree, with an additional seventeen counts under review by the district attorney's office. How do you plea?

**GORDON**

Not guilty, your honor.

He glances back at his audience. The bailiff rights him again.

**JUDGE**

In light of the defendant's penchant

for international travel, no bail will be set. This court will receive preliminary motions by tomorrow morning, with a trial date to be set for the earliest opening on the court's calendar.

(beat)

The defendant is remanded into custody. Bailiff....

his The bailiff removes Gordon, who shares one last look with audience, and Christine in particular. He winks at her. She doesn't give him a flicker of satisfaction with a reaction. But once he's gone, she sits heavily and covers her eyes, fighting tears. Hahn puts a hand on her shoulder, but says nothing. There's nothing to say.

**JONES (V.O.)**

The boy, Walter Collins, was reported as missing on March 10, 1928.

**INT. CITY COUNCIL ROOM - DAY**

Jones is at last on the stand. Hahn stands before him, the rest of the City Council, Christine and the huge audience looking on.

**JONES**

We then instituted a nationwide search. On July 10, we received a cable indicating that a boy matching his description had been found in De Kalb, Illinois. Upon questioning, he admitted to being Walter Collins, and we made arrangements to transport him back to California.

**HAHN**

Where Mrs. Collins told you the boy was not her son.

CHANGELING A True Story

112.

**JONES**

Yes. She denied his identity in spite of all evidence pointing to the contrary.

**HAHN**

But as subsequent events have

demonstrated, she was correct. So what prompted you to send her for psychological evaluation?

**JONES**

Whether or not this was in fact the correct boy was not relevant to my decision. Throughout this period, she acted strangely. She was often cool, aloof and unemotional, especially when presented with the boy we located in De Kalb, and in our subsequent conversations. It was because of her disturbing behavior that I submitted her for observation to the psychopathic ward of Los Angeles County General Hospital.

**HAHN**

Just like that. You snap your fingers and an innocent woman is thrown into the psycho ward.

**JONES**

She wasn't --

Hahn turns away, playing to the council and the audience.

**HAHN**

Every home in this state is in grave danger when a Police Captain can take a woman into his office and, five minutes later, have her thrown into the psychopathic ward on his own authority!

The crowd applauds and cheers. Joes fights to be heard.

**JONES**

(over the crowd)  
She wasn't --

**HAHN**

What was that, Captain?

**JONES**

She wasn't thrown. She was... escorted.

CHANGELING A True Story

There's laughter from the gallery. He doesn't like it.

**HAHN**

Escorted, thrown, the verb doesn't matter, Captain. What does matter is that her incarceration was ordered without a warrant.

Hahn goes to the exhibit table, picks up several papers.

**HAHN**

I am holding a carbon copy of the affidavit of insanity that was issued in the case of the State of California vs. Christine Collins. Who signed the affidavit?

**JONES**

I did.

**HAHN**

And what is the date on this document?

**JONES**

September 12th.

**HAHN**

But Mrs. Collins was incarcerated on September 6th.

**JONES**

The form is backdated.

**HAHN**

Yes, so it would appear. The bottom of the page is reserved for recording where and when the warrant was served. But it has not been filled in. May I assume from this that the warrant was never served?

**JONES**

That's correct. There was no need to serve the warrant since she was at that time already in custody.

**HAHN**

Let me see if I have this straight. A woman was thrown into the

psychopathic ward without a warrant,  
because no warrant existed, and  
when it was finally written six  
days later, there was no need to  
sign it or go to a judge because  
(more)

CHANGELING A True Story

114.

HAHN (Cont'd)  
she was already in the asylum! Is  
this correct, Captain?

**JONES**  
Technically...yes.

More murmuring from the crowd.

**JONES**  
Extraordinary steps were necessary  
because we were dealing with an  
extraordinary situation! Is it our  
fault that we were being deceived  
by the boy who claimed to be Walter  
Collins? No. In light of his claims  
and her behavior, who wouldn't begin  
to wonder if there was something  
wrong with her?

**HAHN**  
Because she questioned you.

**JONES**  
Because she wouldn't listen, because  
she insisted on being obstinate and  
taking matters into her own hands  
best left to qualified officers,  
because --

**HAHN**  
Because she was fighting for the  
life of her son! A boy who may  
have still been alive while you  
were wasting valuable time denying  
you had done anything wrong!

This silences both Jones and the crowd. You could hear a pin  
drop. Hahn approaches Jones, and now speaks softly.

**HAHN**

And in the end, that's what happened, isn't it? At some point, while all this was going on, Walter Collins died along with as many as nineteen other youths on the Northcott Ranch in Wineville. Is that correct, Captain?

Jones looks to Chief Davis. It's a moment. Then:

**JONES**

Yes. It is.

Christine's face falls into her hands. The place erupts.

CHANGELING A True Story

115.

**HAHN**

No further questions.

Hahn walks away from a devastated looking Jones.

**EXT. UNION STATION - DAY**

A small crowd is assembled at the front of the station,

where

Chief Davis stands with the Boy who had been "Walter" as a train pulls up before them.

**CHIEF DAVIS**

-- so after much effort, we were able to identify this boy, who has been responsible for so much recent trouble, as Arthur Hutchins of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Between this, and the arrest of the man suspected of murdering the real Walter Collins, we have cleared up two of the biggest mysteries in the history of Los Angeles.

(beat)

I hope that you gentlemen of the press will give as much space to the good things we do as the mistakes that are made on rare occasions.

Just then, he turns as a Matron comes off the train with

JANET

HUTCHINS, middle thirties, the boy's mother.

**CHIEF DAVIS**

Ladies and gentlemen, let me introduce you to the boy's real mother, Mrs. Janet Hutchins.

She goes to him and hugs him. "Walter" looks like he wishes he were somewhere on Mars. Davis moves closer to them to be in frame while the FLASHBULBS pop. She's in the same pose as they got Christine to take when she "accepted" her lost son.

**MOTHER**

I hope he hasn't been too much trouble for you.

**CHIEF DAVIS**

Oh, no, not at all....

He towels the boy's head like he'd like to cut it off. Then he nods to an aide, who approaches with a bundle of clothes.

**WRIGHT**

Mrs. Hutchins...Mrs. Collins, the woman he was staying with, wanted him to have these. They're the clothes she let him wear.

CHANGELING A True Story

116.

**MOTHER**

Well, thank you. Isn't that nice, Arthur? Tell the nice officer thank you.

**"WALTER"**

I don't want 'em! Give 'em to somebody else!

**DAVIS**

Precocious little fellow, isn't he?

**"WALTER"**

It's not my fault! It was the police! They said I was Walter Collins, not me! It wasn't my idea!

She yanks him away. Davis smiles gamely at the reporters.

**CHIEF DAVIS**

There...blame the police for your own mistakes. We've seen a lot of

that lately, haven't we?

**DISSOLVE TO:**

**MONTAGE**

Shot MOS, under MUSIC, somber and moving, INTERCUTTING  
between the two trials.

Christine on the stand, speaking quietly.

Officer Ybarra on the stand.

Chief Davis on the stand.

The murder jury being shown photographs of the Northcott  
ranch.

Walter's dentist showing a drawing of Walter's teeth.

His teacher, Mrs. Fox, also testifying.

Bits of clothing entered into evidence.

Dr. Steele testifying.

Ending on Christine seated, reserved, holding it all in...  
watching. We HOLD on her face to bring us into --

**INT. WALTER'S BEDROOM - MORNING**

Christine is sitting on Walter's bed. She runs a hand along  
the sheets, straightening and smoothing them out, her eyes  
moist but not crying. We HEAR a knock on the front door  
downstairs, and the door opening.

CHANGELING A True Story

117.

**CHRISTINE**

I'm up here, Reverend.

She continues as Briegleb comes up the stairs and enters the  
room. Sees her. Takes off his hat. A show of sympathy.

**CHRISTINE**

When Walter was...when he was here,  
I'd walk past his bedroom when he  
was asleep, and even if I couldn't  
see him, or hear him, I could...feel  
him in here.

**REV. BRIEGLEB**

Mothers and their children are connected in amazing ways. My uncle joined the army during the big war, and the day he died, before we ever heard a word about it, my grandmother woke up in the middle of the night and said, "Bobby's gone." She just...knew.

Christine nods, taking it in, then:

**CHRISTINE**

That's why I don't think Walter is dead. I can still feel him, in this room.

**REV. BRIEGLEB**

Mrs. Collins --

**CHRISTINE**

I know what the police said. But the remains...what they found on that ranch is so...most of it can't even be properly identified. What if that boy made a mistake when he picked Walter's picture?

**REV. BRIEGLEB**

I understand that you don't want to accept this. What mother does? But you have to let go...and start over. For yourself. He'd want you to move on.

**CHRISTINE**

Maybe. And maybe he'd want me to keep looking. Maybe he's waiting for me, somewhere.

**REV. BRIEGLEB**

He is, Christine.  
(more)

CHANGELING A True Story

118.

**REV. BRIEGLEB (Cont'd)**

In that place where we will all be reunited with our loved ones someday.

And on that day, he will know, front  
to back, end to end, heart and  
soul... that you did everything you  
could, Christine. Everything.

checks She nods absently, finishes adjusting the sheets. He  
his watch.

**REV. BRIEGLER**

We should go.

She nods again, and stands. He heads out of the room, and  
she lingers for a moment, taking one last look around before  
turning off the night-light, and sees the drawing he made of  
the two of them walking together beneath an orange sun. HOLD  
on that image as we HEAR a gavel hammering and:

**THORPE (V.O.)**

This meeting will now come to order.

**INT. CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS - DAY**

PUSHING IN on Thorpe, at the center of the council's long  
table, addressing the crowd and Christine.

**THORPE**

This Committee has now heard all of  
the testimony, and in light of the  
facts presented, issues the following  
statement.

**INTERCUT WITH**

**INT. COURTROOM - DAY**

grieving Where Northcott stands before the judge, jury, and the  
family members.

**JUDGE**

Mr. Foreman, has the jury reached a  
verdict?

**FOREMAN**

We have, your honor.

**INT. CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CONTINUOUS**

Still pushing in.

**THORPE**

While the City Council has no power

to directly remove commissioners or  
(more)

119.

CHANGELING A True Story

THORPE (Cont'd)

the employees who serve under them,  
it nevertheless can perform the  
function of making recommendations.  
This committee therefore reports  
and recommends:

(beat)

First, that the majority members of  
the Police Commission deserve the  
severest condemnation for their  
decision to whitewash the Collins  
case.

APPLAUSE erupts from the gallery at this.

**INT. COURTROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Quietly PUSHING IN on Northcott, the Judge, Jury, others.

**JUDGE**

Bailiff, will you bring me the  
verdict of the jury?

The bailiff complies. The judge reads it, hands it back to  
the Bailiff, who brings it back to the Foreman.

**INT. CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CONTINUOUS**

As before.

**THORPE**

Second, we recommend that the  
suspension of Captain Jones be made  
permanent.

Even louder applause, some cheering. The pattern continues  
through the balance of the statement.

**INT. COURTROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Favoring Northcott.

**JUDGE**

Will the defendant please rise?

Northcott rises, still smiling, defiant.

**INT. CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CONTINUOUS**

As before.

**THORPE**

Third, that steps be taken to investigate a change in the prevailing laws and procedures by  
(more)

CHANGELING A True Story

120.

**THORPE (Cont'd)**

which a citizen of this city can be subjected to incarceration in the county's mental facilities.

(beat)

Finally, restoration of public confidence in the police department can only be achieved by the removal of its chief of police, and this committee so recommends.

(beat)

This hearing is concluded.

The place explodes with cheers.

**INT. COURTROOM - CONTINUOUS**

As the foreman stands again.

**JUDGE**

You may read the verdict.

**FOREMAN**

We the jury find the defendant, Gordon Stewart Northcott...guilty on all counts of murder in the first degree.

There are gasps and cries and tears...but Northcott is defiant.

**JUDGE**

Does the defendant wish to make a statement before judgment is passed?

**GORDON**

Yeah, I want to make a statement. I want to make it real clear that I

never once got a fair shake from you, your "honor," or this court. The only one of you here worth a goddamn is her --

(points to christine)

-- 'cause she's the only one never badmouthed me to the press. She understands what it is when the police frame you for something you didn't do and throw you in the hole. Isn't that right?

He looks to her. She doesn't flinch.

**GORDON**

I want you to know, Mrs. Collins, I never killed your boy. I --

CHANGELING A True Story

121.

**JUDGE**

That's enough! Counsel, you will get control of your client or I will have him bound and gagged.

The defense attorney yanks Gordon around to face the judge.

**JUDGE**

Gordon Stewart Northcott, it is the judgment of this court that you will be conveyed to San Quentin Prison, where you will be held in solitary confinement for a period of two years, until October 2nd, 1930. On that date, you are to be hanged by the neck until dead. May god have mercy on your soul.

And he brings down the gavel.

**EXT. COUNTY COURTHOUSE - AFTERNOON**

Christine is standing outside, putting the horrors of the day out of her thoughts, as a door opens and Chief Davis comes out, followed by several reporters.

**CHIEF DAVIS**

-- no, as I said after the hearing, I have every intention of finishing

my term as Chief of the Los Angeles Police Department. I will not resign. I will fight to the finish. The Collins case was merely an excuse for certain politicians who have been trying to have me removed for some time, and I --

in He pauses as he sees Christine. Looks away and continues a lowered voice.

**CHIEF DAVIS**

-- anyway, I remain confident that the Mayor's office will stand firmly behind me. That's all.

The press continue after him, not really noticing Christine, who takes one last look around at it all...and walks slowly away. Alone.

**BLACK SCREEN**

1930 **SUPERIMPOSE: TWO YEARS LATER. TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 30,**

122. CHANGELING A True Story

**INT. STREET CAR - MORNING**

stops Christine, alone, rides the street car to work. The car in front of a school. Walter's school. She looks out the window, to where children are playing. Then looks away again as the street-car starts moving again.

**INT. PACIFIC TELEPHONE COMPANY - SWITCHBOARD ROOM - DAY**

some Christine is back at work again, as she had been, though station of the light has gone out of her eyes. She moves from to station, nodding her approval or checking off forms. She glances to the clock, it's a little after two, then goes to Mr. Harris, who has just come out onto the floor.

**CHRISTINE**

Ten minute break?

**MR. HARRIS**

Of course.

She starts away, turning at:

**MR. HARRIS**

You know...one of these days you might consider actually taking one of these ten minute breaks. Might be good for you.

**CHRISTINE**

We'll see. Thanks, Ben.

She heads off toward a back room. He watches her go with a combination of awe, respect and deep sadness.

**INT. PHONE COMPANY - BACK OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER**

Christine is on the telephone, crossing off contact numbers on a pad of paper.

**CHRISTINE**

Yes, hello, this is Christine Collins, we spoke yesterday about my son...fine, thank you. I was wondering if you'd had a chance to go through the file on runaways in your area in case anyone resembling Walter had --

(beat)

I see. No, thank you, I appreciate the information. Would it be all right if I called you again, in a month or so? Thank you. Goodbye.

She checks his number off her list as Hahn appears in the partially open door behind her.

CHANGELING A True Story

123.

He's heard part of the conversation, and there's a sadness in his eyes.

She starts to dial again when he knocks on the door. She turns to see him, mid-dial.

**HAHN**

Mrs. Collins.

**CHRISTINE**

Oh, hello, I was just --

**HAHN**

I know. That's...why I wanted to see you.

His tone is grave, and she knows that something's happened. She hangs up the phone, missing the cradle the first time.

**HAHN**

It's about Walter. We had...well, we received a very strange telegram.

**CHRISTINE**

From who?

**HAHN**

Gordon Northcott. He's...he's asked to see you.

**CHRISTINE**

Why?

**HAHN**

He said he knows you're still looking for your son, and before he dies --

(beat)

He says that he lied when he testified that he didn't kill Walter. He's willing to finally admit that he did it. He says that if you come up to see him, in person...he'll tell you the truth, to your face...so that you can get on with your life and have some peace.

**DISSOLVE TO:**

**INT. TRAIN - DAY**

Christine is on the train headed north. The telegram is in her hand.

CHANGELING A True Story

124.

**HAHN (V.O.)**

As you know, he's set to be executed the day after tomorrow at San Quentin, so....

(beat)  
You don't have a lot of time.

**EXT. SAN FRANCISCO - SAN QUENTIN PRISON - AFTERNOON**

gray,  
She gets out of a taxi in front of the prison. It's a  
grim sight, and moves toward it.

**HAHN (V.O.)**

Took me most of the morning to make  
all the arrangements. Turns out  
you're the first woman in thirty  
years the state has allowed to visit  
a serial killer on the night of his  
execution.

**INT. SAN QUENTIN - INTERVIEW ROOM - AFTERNOON**

Four bare walls and a long table. Two chairs. One window,  
behind bars and chicken wire. Christine waits, alone. Then:  
we HEAR footsteps approaching down the hall. A moment later,  
a PRISON GUARD escorts Northcott into the room. Northcott  
nods to Christine, then glances to the guard, who looks to  
Christine.

**PRISON GUARD**

I can stay in the room if you want,  
ma'am.

**CHRISTINE**

No, I'm...sure I'll be fine.

**PRISON GUARD**

All right...I'll be right outside  
the door if you need anything.  
(to northcott)  
Twenty minutes.

The guard exits, leaving the two alone.

**GORDON**

Don't suppose you've got a cigarette?

**CHRISTINE**

No, I don't smoke.

He nods, walks to the window to a nearby structure.

**GORDON**

That's where they do it, you know.  
That building right over there.

**CHRISTINE**

That's where they do what?

**GORDON**

The hangings. Ten o'clock tonight, I get to see what's inside. I hear there's thirteen steps going up to the gallows... 'cause thirteen is unlucky. Helps make sure you're gonna go to hell when you die. But I got 'em beat. I outsmarted 'em.

He looks to Christine, smiles nervously, glances back out  
the window.

**GORDON**

They're gonna let me have whatever I want for dinner. Got a steak coming, with spinach, mashed potatoes and green beans. I always wondered why they did that whole last meal thing. One of the other guys on Death Row said when you take the drop, you foul yourself, and everything you ate...comes out the other end. So maybe that's why they make sure you got something in you when it happens. They like knowing you fouled yourself on the way to --

He stops himself. Turns from the window.

**GORDON**

Sure you don't got a cigarette?

She shakes her head. He nods absently for a moment.

**GORDON**

The warden, Clinton Duffy, he's a good guy. He's writing a book about all the death sentences he's carried out in this place. Says it's called "Eighty-Eight Men and Two Women." Beats my record all to hell.

**CHRISTINE**

Mr. Northcott...you asked me to come to see you. You said if I did, you would tell me the truth about my son. Well, I'm here.

**GORDON**

Yeah...yeah, you are. But see, the thing is, I didn't think you'd really come, and now --

CHANGELING A True Story

126.

He's pacing, growing more agitated and scared.

**CHRISTINE**

Now what?

**GORDON**

I didn't expect....

(beat)

I don't want to see you.

**CHRISTINE**

What?

**GORDON**

I can't do this...I can't talk to you...not today, not tonight, not with what they're going to do to me. It's one thing to send a telegram, that's easy, but right now, right here, in person, I --

(beat)

I can't tell you what you want to hear, Mrs. Collins. I can't, I can't --

**CHRISTINE**

Why not?

**GORDON**

Because I don't want to die with a lie on my lips!

He turns from her, in anguish...but is he just playing her?

**GORDON**

I did my penance, I asked God to forgive me for my sins...and I've

been good, ever since...if I commit  
a sin now, if I lie now...I'm out  
of time, I can't be forgiven again...  
I don't want to go to hell --

She goes around to him, faces him.

**CHRISTINE**

Mr. Northcott...look at me.  
(beat)  
Look at me.

He turns almost against his will...meets her eyes.

**CHRISTINE**

Did you...kill...my son?

His eyes go wide and he CRIES OUT, stumbling back and away  
from her.

CHANGELING A True Story

127.

**GORDON**

Get away from me...I don't know  
anything about it!

**CHRISTINE**

Mr. Northcott --

**GORDON**

I'm innocent!  
(pounds door)  
Guard! Guard!

The guard enters, going to Northcott.

**CHRISTINE**

No, wait, please --

**PRISON GUARD**

It's okay, ma'am, they always get a  
little nuts the day of.

She pushes past him to Northcott, grabs the front of his  
shirt.

**CHRISTINE**

Did you kill him? Did you kill my  
son?

He screams in anguish, and the guard hauls him out, closing the door after him. Christine tries to open the door, but it won't open.

**CHRISTINE**

Mr. Northcott...Mr. Northcott!

She slowly slides to the floor, crying as we HEAR the SOUND of CHAINS clanking, and we....

**DISSOLVE TO:**

**INT. EXECUTION AREA - NIGHT**

The door to the prison yard opens and closes as Northcott is led into the area with the scaffolding. The Warden is there, waiting at the foot of the gallows, along with a chaplain.

Several other parents, including Mr. and Mrs. Clay, are in the witness gallery at the back, separated from the gallows area by a large plate glass window. Christine is among the parents. The Clays see her, and put a hand on her arm for strength. Christine nods, accepting it, and moves to one side.

Northcott, legs and arms bound in chains, makes his way to the warden at the base of the gallows. A clock reads 9:50.

CHANGELING A True Story

128.

**WARDEN**

Gordon Stewart Northcott, you have been found guilty of murder, the penalty for which is death by hanging. There have been no stays or reprieves, therefore the execution will go forward as stipulated under the laws of the State of California. Do you have any last words?

**GORDON**

No...nothing.  
(to chaplain)  
I kept clean after I confessed,  
reverend...just like I said I would.

The chaplain nods silently as the warden looks to the guards, who begin to escort Northcott up the steps to the gallows.

**GORDON**

Will it...will it hurt?  
(no reply)  
Please...not so fast...don't make  
me walk so fast!

They struggle with him now, pushing and carrying him up the last of the thirteen steps to the top. They tie his legs together, and cinch his arms tightly in place.

**GORDON**

Thirteen steps...thirteen steps...  
but I didn't touch all of 'em, you  
bastards...I didn't touch all of  
'em!

secure They start to slip a black felt mask over his head and  
the rope. He looks desperately to the witnesses.

**GORDON**

A prayer! Please, somebody, say a  
prayer for me!

executioner The mask goes on and is tightened into place. The  
warden approaches the handle that will open the trap door. The  
looks to the clock...9:59. From beneath the hood we HEAR, in  
a terrified, shaking voice:

**GORDON**

Silent night...holy night...all is  
calm...all is bright...round yon  
virgin mother and child...holy infant  
so tender and mild --

Just then the warden nods to the executioner who pulls the lever and the trap door JERKS OPEN.

CHANGELING A True Story

129.

Northcott FALLS through the door six feet then there's a SNAP...and the body bounces in SLOW MOTION at the end of the rope...as we HEAR the sound of his heart slowing...slowing...until it finally stops.

witness Christine covers her eyes. There is no cheering in the  
room. Only the sound of weeping.

**EXT. SAN QUENTIN - NIGHT**

Slowly, the witnesses exit the prison. We find Christine among them. She nods good-night to some of them, including the Clays, then starts off on her own, heading into the night.

**DISSOLVE TO:**

**BLACK SCREEN**

**SUPERIMPOSE: FIVE YEARS LATER. FEBRUARY 27, 1935**

And: SEVEN YEARS AFTER THE DISAPPEARANCE OF WALTER COLLINS

**EXT. PACIFIC TELEPHONE COMPANY - AFTERNOON**

Just to ESTABLISH, then:

**INT. TELEPHONE COMPANY - CHRISTINE'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON**

The brass plate on the partially open door announces C. COLLINS, ASSISTANT MANAGER. She's filling out paperwork as there's a KNOCK and a group of other employees and operators appears in the doorway.

**OPERATOR**

Hey, Chris...we're having an Oscar party tonight at my apartment, you want to come?

**CHRISTINE**

I can't...I've got a million forms to fill out --

**OPERATOR**

C'mon, please, they can wait --

**CHRISTINE**

Sandy, you guys blew out the phone lines between here and Baltimore, someone has to clean up the mess, and that's me. Besides, I've got a radio right here, I can follow the whole thing.

**OPERATOR**

You're sure?

CHANGELING A True Story

130.

**CHRISTINE**

Positive. Go on, have fun.

They head off. Christine focuses on her work. There's  
another knock on the door.

**CHRISTINE**

I said I can't go --

**MR. HARRIS**

Are you sure?

She looks up to see Ben Harris in the doorway. He smiles.

**MR. HARRIS**

I'm meeting some friends for dinner  
at Musso and Frank's on Hollywood.  
They're going to pipe the Oscar  
ceremony through to the restaurant.  
Should be quite a night. I'd love  
it if you'd come.

**CHRISTINE**

Ben, that's very sweet, and I wish  
I could...but I really need to stay  
and finish this.

He nods, taking the rejection well. Starts off when:

**CHRISTINE**

Ben...? I put down two dollars on  
"It Happened One Night" for best  
picture. Seems I'm the only one  
here who thinks it has a chance  
against "Cleopatra." If I win, how  
about we have dinner tomorrow night  
to celebrate?

**MR. HARRIS**

You've got a deal, Christine. Good  
night.

**CHRISTINE**

'Night.

**MR. HARRIS**

How about I call you if you win?

**CHRISTINE**

I'll be here.

And with a smile, he's gone.

CHANGELING A True Story

**INT. TELEPHONE COMPANY - SWITCHBOARD ROOM - NIGHT**

The night shift operators are working, a smaller group but still busy. We PAN through them until we start to HEAR the sound of radio-miked applause, then:

**IRWIN S. COBB**

(on radio)

Thank you. And now, it gives me distinct honor to present the category of Best Picture for 1934.

**INT. CHRISTINE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS**

Where Christine is still working as the Academy Awards of 1935 play themselves out on the radio.

**IRWIN S. COBB**

(on radio)

The nominees are "The Gay Divorcee," "Here Comes the Navy," "The Barrets of Wimpole Street," "One Night of Love," "The Thin Man," "Cleopatra" --

**CHRISTINE**

Over-rated....

**IRWIN S. COBB**

(on radio)

"Viva Villa," "The White Parade," and "It Happened One Night."

**CHRISTINE**

Clark Gable, Claudette Colbert. I rest my case.

**IRWIN S. COBB**

(on radio)

And the Oscar for Best Picture goes to....

(beat)

"It Happened One Night."

APPLAUSE comes through the radio...and Christine is as pleased as if she'd just won herself.

**CHRISTINE**

(calling out door)  
I knew it...I knew it! I told you  
so!

She's just about to go back to her work when the phone  
rings.

She picks it up, smiling.

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**CHRISTINE**

Ben, it looks like dinner is on me,  
**I --**

She stops. It's not Ben on the phone.

**CHRISTINE**

Yes, this is she. Mrs. Clay? No,  
of course I remember you, how are  
you? Is everything --

She freezes at something she hears.

**CHRISTINE**

When? Where did they --  
(beat)  
No, of course...I'll be right there.

She hangs up, grabs her coat, and races out the door.

**EXT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT**

Christine climbs out of a taxi and rushes into the station.

**INT. INTERVIEW ROOM - VIEWING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

Christine is ushered into a room with a long two-way mirror  
that looks out into an interview room. Mr. and Mrs. Clay are  
already there. In the other room is Detective Ybarra, and a  
young boy, DAVID, age 13. Mrs. Clay sees her, and they  
embrace.

**MRS. CLAY**

I wanted to go to him right off,  
but they said it was important to  
talk to him alone first.

**CHRISTINE**

Are they sure it's --

**MRS. CLAY**

They're sure, but more important,  
I'm sure.

(beat)

It's my boy, all right...it's David.  
He's alive, Christine. They found  
him up in Hysperia.

**CHRISTINE**

But how --

Mr. Clay motions for them to shush. They turn their  
attention to the other room, where Ybarra looks up from making notes.

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**YBARRA**

All right, so after you got into  
the car, what happened next?

**DAVID**

They drove me around for a long  
time, then we ended up at this ranch --

**EXT. NORTHCOTT RANCH - FLASHBACK - NIGHT**

David is shoved into the chicken coop. Several other BOYS  
are already there, scared, crying. They lunge at the door,  
trying to get out, but it slams shut in their faces.

They scream, trying to get out. Gordon SLAMS an arm  
against the door, scaring them.

**GORDON**

**SHUT UP!**

(grinning)

I'll see you boys later....

He laughs and moves off, Sanford accompanying him, looking  
very guilty.

**YBARRA (V.O.)**

Were there other boys present?

**DAVID (V.O.)**

Yeah...six, I think. It was a long  
time ago.

**YBARRA (V.O.)**

Did you speak to them? Do you remember any of their names?

**INT. CHICKEN COOP - LATER**

PANNING the boys huddled against one wall, scared.

**DAVID (V.O.)**

Yeah...two of them were brothers, I think their last name was Winslow, something like that. The oldest was Jeffrey, I think he was around eleven....

(beat)

...and Walter.

We STOP PAN on the last kid...on Walter Collins, at last.

**INT. INTERVIEW ROOM - VIEWING ROOM**

As Christine REACTS to this, her hand flying to her mouth. Not daring to breathe.

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**YBARRA**

Walter.

**DAVID**

Yeah.

**YBARRA**

Do you remember his last name?

**DAVID**

Collins.

Christine covers her face. Can barely stand up.

**YBARRA**

So if you only remember some of the names of the rest, how come you remember his full name?

**DAVID**

Because of what happened.

**INT. CHICKEN COOP - NIGHT**

Two of the kids, Walter and Jeffrey, are sitting in a corner, talking quietly, urgently.

**DAVID (V.O.)**

Walter and Jeffrey were talking when everybody else was screaming. They were scared, same as the rest of us, but they weren't scared stupid. They kept checking around until they found a part of the coop where the chicken wire was all messed up.

dust They pull at the wiring. Part of the roof weakens and sifts down.

**DAVID (V.O.)**

They figured we might be able to yank the chicken wire and bring down the corner, maybe make enough room to get out of there and run... but it would make an awful lot of noise and if it wasn't wide enough, we'd be stuck. It might even bring the whole place down.

**WALTER**

We gotta try it!

**FIRST WINSLOW BOY**

No! What he hears --

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**JEFFREY**

We have to get out of here!

**FIRST WINSLOW BOY**

I'm afraid!

And in an echo of what he told his mother the last time he saw her:

**WALTER**

I'm not. I'm not afraid of anything.

(beat)

Don't you want to go home? Don't

you want to see your mom again?

The Winslow kids nod, and start crying. Jeffrey and Walter look to the rest.

**JEFFREY**

Anybody else?

David holds up his hand.

**JEFFREY**

Okay. Anybody who doesn't want to come, get over at that end in case this comes down.

The Winslow boys and two others scramble to the other end, too terrified to try and escape. Jeffrey, David and Walter go to the weakened corner of the coop.

**JEFFREY**

When we get out, we split up, go in different directions, they can't catch all of us. Ready?

They nod, and get into position, each taking a part of the wire framework.

**JEFFREY**

Pull!

They do so, pulling for all they're worth...struggling...the ceiling SHIFTS above them, dirt falling all over the place...

they pull harder, the wire cutting into fingers, but still pulling...then suddenly --

-- the corner FALLS AWAY, part of the roof starting to come down with it. The NOISE is substantial.

**JEFFREY**

Go!

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They race out the opening, Jeffrey first, then Walter, then David...but just as the first two get clear --

**DAVID**

Help!

Walter turns to see David stuck in the wiring. LIGHTS go on

around the ranch. He hesitates...then RUNS back to David, helps to untangle him. They HEAR a SHOTGUN blast, and FEET running their way.

**DAVID**

Hurry!

Walter gets him untangled, and the two RACE away from the coop, running for all they're worth as a FLASHLIGHT hits  
first  
one, then the other. They RUN --

-- and David catches one last glimpse of Walter running, heading for the line of trees....

**YBARRA (V.O.)**

And that's the last you saw of him?

**INT. INTERVIEW ROOM - VIEWING ROOM - NIGHT**

As the interview continues. David nods.

**DAVID**

That's the last I saw of any of 'em.

**YBARRA**

So you don't know if either of the other two were captured?

**DAVID**

No. All I know is, if he hadn't come back for me...I don't think I ever would've gotten out of there.

**YBARRA**

What happened after that?

**DAVID**

I hid in the woods for two days, too scared to move, because I was sure they'd find me. I finally started walking, but every time a car came up I was afraid it was them. So I kept off the main roads until I saw a train stopped at a crossing, and I jumped in.

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**YBARRA**

Why didn't you tell anyone what had happened?

**DAVID**

I was afraid! I thought they'd come after me, or my folks...so I didn't tell anybody. I was on my own until I got a free meal from this lady, Mrs. Lansing. I told her I was an orphan, on my own. She said I could stay on, and...I did.

(beat)

Every night, I'd wake up, thinking they were right outside my window. Then I heard the police talking on the radio about what happened at the ranch, and I thought, for sure I can't go back now.

**YBARRA**

Why not?

**DAVID**

Since I didn't tell anybody what happened, I was afraid they'd blame me for those kids being dead. So I just...stayed away.

**YBARRA**

So what made you come forward now, after all this time?

David looks away, his eyes tearing up. Finally:

**DAVID**

I miss my mom...I miss my dad...I just...I just want to go home.

And it's all Mrs. Clay can take. Sobbing, she runs out of the viewing room and into the interview room, where she goes to her son and embraces him, holds him, the two crying into one another's arms.

**EXT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT**

Christine and Ybarra watch as Mr. and Mrs. Clay lead their son into their car. As they drive off, Christine finally breaks the silence.

**YBARRA**

Still can't believe it. Five years,  
case closed, everyone thinks he's  
dead...and there he is.

(more)

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YBARRA (Cont'd)

And he wouldn't be, if it wasn't  
for Walter.

(beat)

Your son did a brave thing, Mrs.  
Collins. You should be very proud  
of him.

**CHRISTINE**

I am.

**YBARRA**

You don't think he's still out there,  
do you?

**CHRISTINE**

Why not? Three boys made a run for  
it that night, Detective. If one  
got out, maybe either or both of  
the others did too. Maybe Walter  
went through the same fears he did.  
Afraid to come home or identify  
himself, afraid he'd get into  
trouble, that people might think it  
was his fault. Either way, it gives  
me something I didn't have before  
tonight.

**YBARRA**

What's that?

She looks at him...and smiles.

**CHRISTINE**

Hope.

She turns and walks off into the night, as we SUPERIMPOSE:

Gordon Stewart Northcott was hanged on October 2, 1935

In exchange for his cooperation and a guilty plea, Sanford  
Wesley Clark was sentenced to the Whittier State School for

returned Boys for five years. Upon being released in 1934, he home to Canada, and was never heard from again.

Upon returning to duty after his suspension, Captain J. J. Jones was demoted to Lieutenant and subsequently sued by Christine Collins in civil court. He was found guilty and fined \$10,800 (equal to \$125,000 in 2006 dollars). He never paid.

One year after the City Council recommended the removal of the Los Angeles Chief of Police, James E Davis resigned from office and was replaced by Roy E. Steckel.

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Red Davis reclaimed that office in 1933, where he created the Squad, notorious for attacking Communists and their offices, but was forced to resign a second time under a cloud of police corruption.

of In the aftermath of the City Council hearings, the criminal justice system in California was revised to prevent women from being incarcerated or institutionalized for the crime disagreeing with a male police officer. Strict medical procedures were set in place to prevent future abuse.

voted In November 1929, Los Angeles Mayor George E. Cryer was out of office after three terms. He was later found to have been the front man for the Crawford Organized Crime Syndicate, which ran prostitution and gambling rackets throughout Southern California.

For the rest of his life, Reverend Gustav A. Briegleb used his radio show to expose police misconduct and political corruption. He also published "The Layman's Handbook of Daniel."

became The California community of Wineville, near Riverside, order synonymous with the infamous Northcott Murder Ranch. In to shake free of the scandal, the residents changed its name

to Mira Loma.

Christine Collins never stopped searching for her son.

The fate of Walter Collins remains a mystery. If he was able to escape the Northcott Ranch, he would be 86 years old today.

**FADE OUT:**

**THE END**