

CUSTODY

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. AKRON'S CANAL PARK - DAY

RICK STEVENS, thirty-six, is Middle America personified. He blends in at the crowded ballpark. Blue jeans, work boots, a ball cap and leather jacket complete his attire. He snacks

on

a bag of popcorn. The CRACK of the bat and the CROWD is on their feet. A BALL PLAYER slides safely into second with a double. JOHN SILVERSTEIN, thirty-three, business clad, talks on his cell phone. Calm and collected he appears unaffected by the cheering crowd. The sits with the crowd.

RICK

Helluva talent, that kid.

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

RICK

Probably be in the bigs in another year.

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

CUT TO:

INT. MELANIE'S HOUSE

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

MELANIE

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

CUT TO:

INT. MELANIE'S HOUSE - ZACH'S BEDROOM

ZACH SIMMERS, six, sits on his bed in pajamas.

ZACH

I'm ready.

Melanie ENTERS.

MELANIE

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

2.

ZACH

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

MELANIE

Zach, do you want mommy to get
fired?

ZACH

Yes.

MELANIE

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

CUT TO:

EXT. AKRON'S CANAL PARK - DAY

John still talks on his cell.

RICK

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

John ends his call and turns back to Rick.

JOHN

You.

RICK

Huh?

JOHN

Guys like you...

RICK

And me...

JOHN

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

RICK

You knew where you were going?

3.

JOHN

Absolutely.

RICK

At nineteen?

JOHN

Without question.

RICK

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

CUT TO:

EXT. DAIRY MART - DAY

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

MELANIE

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

ZACH

Mom?

Melanie pops her head back in the car.

MELANIE

What?

ZACH

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

until I'm thirteen.

MELANIE

Come on.

Zach EXITS.

CUT TO:

EXT. AKRON'S CANAL PARK - DAY

John's phone RINGS. He ignores the call.

JOHN

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

4.

RICK

You could focus?

JOHN

I was the King of Focus.

RICK

The Duke of Diligence?

JOHN

The Count of Concentration.

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

RICK

Duck.

JOHN

Huh?

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

RICK

The Polestar Prince.

CUT TO:

INT. DAIRY MART

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

MELANIE

Did you decide?

ZACH

I want Coke.

MELANIE

Get one.

ZACH

No, Pepsi.

(A beat)

No, Seven-Up. Maybe root beer.

MELANIE

Make up your mind already.

5.

ZACH

So many choices. A glance to her
watch.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET - AKRON OHIO - DAY

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

JOHN

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

RICK

I thought I did grow up...

JOHN

When you got married?

RICK

Yeah...

JOHN

You matured a little.

RICK

It's a process.

JOHN

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

CUT TO:

INT. DAIRY MART

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

ZACH

I want Sobe.

Melanie snatches the bottle back.

MELANIE

Too bad.

6.

An impatient LINE OF CUSTOMERS waits.

ZACH

I don't want Coke. I want Sobe.

Melanie puts the bottle back on the counter.

MELANIE

(To clerk.)

We'll take the soda.

Zach stomps his feet.

CLERK

Two dollars and...

MELANIE

Hold on a minute. Please?

CUSTOMER

Come on lady.

A beat as Zach and Melanie exchange glares.

MELANIE

Get your Sobe.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET - AKRON OHIO - DAY

The crowd has waned.

RICK

I thought I got direction...

JOHN

When Cindy had kids?

RICK

Yeah...

JOHN

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

RICK

East.

JOHN

Huh?

7.

RICK

My direction is east. I parked in
the deck.

JOHN

I'm right around the...

RICK

Corner?

JOHN

Yeah.

RICK

We're always going in different
directions.

JOHN

Mine are much more productive.

RICK

And much less adventurous.

JOHN

Well, I'm gonna...

RICK

Go?

JOHN

Yeah.

RICK

Then go.

JOHN

That's what I'm going to do.
Responsibility calls.

John turns and heads south. Rick takes a bite of popcorn,
looks to the sky for a moment, grins, and heads off
Northeast.

CUT TO:

INT. MELANIE'S CAR - DAY

Zach takes a long swig of Sobe.

ZACH

Sobe sucks. I want Coke.

CUT TO:

8.

EXT. MAIN STREET - AKRON OHIO - DAY

John jogs up behind Rick.

JOHN

You want to...

RICK

Get a beer?

JOHN

Yeah.

RICK

Can't.

JOHN

Can't?

RICK

Gotta get home.

JOHN

Why?

RICK

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

JOHN

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

JOHN

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

RICK

(Yelling over his shoulder.)
East.

JOHN

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

9.

Rick reaches the corner and darts across the street.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR DEALERSHIP

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

BOSS

You're late.

MELANIE

I know, but...

BOSS

No buts. You're late.

MELANIE

But...

BOSS

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

MELANIE

But...

BOSS

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

MELANIE

But...

BOSS

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

A beat as Melanie turns to leave.

BOSS

We still on for dinner?

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE CRUISER - DAY

TWO OFFICERS parked on Main watch Rick cross the street.

10.

OFFICER ONE

Is that...?

OFFICER TWO

You think...?

OFFICER ONE

Naw...

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

OFFICER TWO

Can't tell from here...

OFFICER ONE

Too far away. Let's roost him.

OFFICER TWO

Call it in.

CUT TO:

EXT. AKRON'S BUCHEL AVE - DAY

Rick walks East on Buchtel as Police cruiser creeps behind.

INT. POLICE CRUISER - DAY

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

OFFICER TWO

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

EXT. AKRON'S BUCHEL AVE - DAY

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

OFFICER ONE

Get em up. Up I said... up.

RICK

Huh?

OFFICER TWO

Get `em where we can see `em
slimeball.

Rick raises his hands, dropping his popcorn.

11.

OFFICER ONE

Oh, we got ourselves a litterbug here.

RICK

What?

Rick
One

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

RICK

What's going...

OFFICER ONE

Shaddup!

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

OFFICER TWO

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

RICK

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

OFFICER TWO

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

RICK

Yes.

Officer One appears very eager to discharge his weapon.

OFFICER ONE

Shut him the hell up, Jimmy.

OFFICER TWO

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

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

OFFICER ONE

He's looking at me funny, Jimmy.

OFFICER TWO

You have the right not to look at my partner in any way that might be construed as 'funny' which could result in harm to your person. Do you understand this right?

Rick nods again.

OFFICER ONE

He twitching?

OFFICER TWO

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

RICK

No Sir.

OFFICER ONE

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

OFFICER TWO

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

CUT TO:

INT. CAR DEALERSHIP

Melanie grabs her stuff.

BOSS

You never answered about tonight.

MELANIE

You're making a huge mistake.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUCHEL AVE. - DAY

An unmarked car pulls on scene. The door opens. Low in on walking feet and pan up to reveal DETECTIVE JOHNSON, (50's), a gruff man in tweed.

DETECTIVE JOHNSON

What do we got here boys?

OFFICER TWO

It's him. We got him.

OFFICER ONE

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

DETECTIVE JOHNSON

I'll take it from here boys.

OFFICER TWO

Report too?

DETECTIVE JOHNSON

No, that's your job.

OFFICER ONE

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

DETECTIVE JOHNSON

No one's getting shot today, Bobby.

OFFICER ONE

Can't I just wing him or something?

DETECTIVE JOHNSON

Jimmy; get him out of here.

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

CUT TO:

INT. MELANIE'S CAR - DAY

Melanie drives.

MELANIE

Tell me I'm not responsible... asshole. I have a kid. He has a goldfish. I have my dignity.

(MOR E)

14.

MEL ANIE (cont'd)
He has a brown ring on his collar.
He's nothing more than a turd with
feet.

CUT TO:

INT. UNMARKED CAR - DAY

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

DETECTIVE JOHNSON

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

RICK

A little? He represents your force?

DETECTIVE JOHNSON

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

RICK

His psychosis doesn't appear
disabling.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE - DAY

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

MELANIE

Where's Zach?

MRS. NELSON

Fired again?

MELANIE

I don't want to talk about it.

MRS. NELSON

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

CUT TO:

INT. AKRON POLICE DEPARTMENT - LINE UP ROOM

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

DETECTIVE JOHNSON

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

LADY IN BLACK

Can I see their profiles?

Detective Johnson keys a microphone.

DETECTIVE JOHNSON

Turn to your left. The men follow their instruction.

LADY IN BLACK

I just... I just don't know...

DETECTIVE JOHNSON

Back to front.

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

DETECTIVE JOHNSON

All of you face forward. The two turn forward.

LADY IN BLACK

Number three...

DETECTIVE JOHNSON

Are you sure?

LADY IN BLACK

Could you have him step forward?

The Detective keys his microphone again.

DETECTIVE JOHNSON

Number three take two steps forward.

Rick steps forward and the lights dim on the other four. Caught in the spotlight, Rick squints from the brightness.

The lady in black shifts in her seat. A long beat.

16.

LADY IN BLACK

That's him.

DETECTIVE JOHNSON

You're positive?

LADY IN BLACK

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

The detective keys his microphone once again.

DETECTIVE JOHNSON

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

DETECTIVE JOHNSON

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

The group follows the detective's instruction.

DETECTIVE JOHNSON

...and exit.

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

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THEATER - CONTINUOUS

Rick ENTERS on stage. The entire theater is cast in shades

of

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

JUDGE

Order in the court.

the

The noise level wanes, but not completely. Another RAP of gavel.

JUDGE

Order in the court, I say.

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

17.

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

PROSECUTOR

Have a seat.

JUDGE

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

RICK

Why am I here?

JUDGE

Are you being rhetorical?

RICK

Are you asking me?

JUDGE

You stand here today an accused man.

RICK

Accused? Accused of what?

JUDGE

You have been placed in custody of your children.

RICK

Huh?

PROSECUTOR

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

RICK

Yes, but...

PROSECUTOR

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

RICK

I do.

PROSECUTOR

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

RICK

I guess...

18.

PROSECUTOR

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

RICK

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

PROSECUTOR

A crime of passion, Mr. Stevens? How convenient.

(A beat)

And you accept the consequences of said actions?

RICK

Why am I here?

PROSECUTOR

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

RICK

Yeah, she's my wife.

PROSECUTOR

Was your wife, Sir. Was your wife. She recently filed for divorce. Were you aware of that?

RICK

No, no I wasn't.

PROSECUTOR

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

RICK

Again, no.

PROSECUTOR

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

(MOR E)

19.

PRO SECUT OR (cont'd)

On top of that you told this court that you accepted the responsibility of having said children, did you not?

RICK

Yes, but...

PROSECUTOR

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

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

JUDGE

Answer the question.

AUDIENCE

Answer the question.

Like a trapped animal, Rick looks for his escape.

PROSECUTOR

The question, Mr. Stevens.

RICK

How can you be sure it was me?

The audience hisses. The Judge RAPS his gavel.

PROSECUTOR

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

RICK

Time.

PROSECUTOR

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

A look of sad resignation crosses Rick's face.

PROSECUTOR

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

(MOR E)

20.

PRO SECUT OR (cont'd)

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

RICK

Yes, yes I did.

PROSECUTOR

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

(To the Judge)

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

RICK

What about Cindy?

PROSECUTOR

Excuse me?

RICK

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

The Prosecutor moves to Rick and whispers in his ear.

PROSECUTOR

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

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

JUDGE

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

RICK

Guilty of what?

21.

JUDGE

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

A GASP in the audience mixed with CHEERS. Rick appears dumbfounded. A BAILIFF approaches Rick and begins to lead

him

off stage. Rick scuffles and struggles. The Judge stands and begins to collect his files.

RICK

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

JUDGE

If you can't do the time, Mr. Stevens, then don't do the crime.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE - DAY

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

MELANIE

Highly Effective Strategies of Time
Management for the Single Parent?

MRS. NELSON

Learn it. Live it.

MELANIE

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

MRS. NELSON

Lots of single parents are married.

CUT TO:

INT. SUMMIT COUNTY JAIL - CELL

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

KRIS

Daddy!

22.

RICK

Hi guys.

PHILLIP

I love you daddy.

RICK

I love you too, Phillip.

NICHOLAS

I love you more.

RICK

I love you more.

NICHOLAS

I love YOU more.

KRIS

Daddy, how come you're in jail?

PHILLIP

Is this where we live?

KRIS

When can we see mommy?

RICK

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

PHILLIP

What's wrong Daddy?

RICK

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

KRIS

Is she okay?

RICK

She's kind of mad at daddy.

NICHOLAS

Mommy mad at me too?

RICK

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

23.

KRIS

What's she need time for?

RICK

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

NICHOLAS

I miss mommy.

RICK

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

KRIS

You don't want us either?

RICK

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

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

JAILER

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

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

CUT TO:

INT. MELANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Melanie sits on her couch and cries. Zach ENTERS.

ZACH

What's wrong mommy?

MELANIE

Nothing.

24.

ZACH

Why are you crying? Did I do something wrong?

MELANIE

Nothing at all baby.

ZACH

(Pulling a book from an
end table)

Tell me a story?

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

MELANIE

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

CUT TO:

INT. SUMMIT COUNTY JAIL - CELL

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

JAILER

Get yourself cleaned up.

RICK

Huh?

JAILER

You have visitors... in the courtyard.

EXT. SUMMIT COUNTY JAIL - COURTYARD - DAY

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

FATHER

Quite the pickle you've got yourself in.

RICK

So it seems.

Rick's MOTHER gives him a big hug.

25.

MOTHER

She was no good for you. I knew it

from the start.

RICK

Mom, don't... okay?

MOTHER

Just saying...

RICK

I know, but what's done is done.

The children notice their grandparents and run to greet them.

They tackle their grandfather's legs.

FATHER

There's my boys.

BOYS IN UNISON

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

MOTHER

You're dad and I are here for you.

RICK

I know mom.

MOTHER

Are you eating?

RICK

Yeah, I guess.

MOTHER

Do you need anything? Food? Money?

RICK

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

MOTHER

Um... Yeah... okay... I suppose that would be all right... we'd have to ask your father, but I don't see why that would be a problem.

(a beat)

Other than that everything's okay?

RICK

We're okay...

MOTHER

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

RICK

I like it here, mom.

MOTHER

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

RICK

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

MOTHER

You can't keep hiding forever.

RICK

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

MOTHER

Mary Ryan's son thinks you're hiding.

RICK

Do I know this guy?

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

MOTHER

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

Rick looks to a blue sky.

DISSOLVE TO:

27.

EXT. FAIR - DAY

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

walk

past. The two exchange a flirtatious glance.

CINDY

Scott? Scott?

SCOTT

(Catching up)
Yeah baby?

MOTHER (VO)

I hope she's living in hell too.

CUT TO:

INT. MELANIE'S HOUSE

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

ZACH

What ya doing?

MELANIE

Looking for a job.

ZACH

I know what you could do.

MELANIE

What's that?

ZACH

You could stay home with me.

MELANIE

What do you pay?

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

He

counts them.

ZACH

Sixty-five cents.

MELANIE

A day?

28.

ZACH

A week.

MELANIE

You can afford that?

ZACH

If it keeps my mommy home with me.

CUT TO:

INT. FRANK RYAN'S OFFICE - DAY

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

FRANK

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

RICK

It's hard...

FRANK

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

RICK

And you can help?

FRANK

Me? I'll put ya to work. Some long hours, but it all pays off. Keeps

you off the welfare system if ya know what I mean.

RICK

Yeah.

FRANK

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

29.

Rick stands to leave.

FRANK

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

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - EARLY MORNING

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

CUT TO:

INT. DAY-CARE

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

MS. HEATH

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

RICK

No, you seemed to cover everything. Ms. Heath bends down to the kid's level.

MS. HEATH

You're going to like it here.

The kids grab Rick's leg. Nicholas cries.

KRIS AND PHILLIP

No, daddy, don't leave us here.

Ms. Heath looks up to Rick.

MS. HEATH

(Reassuringly)

They'll be just fine.

30.

INT. BUILDING - DAY

Rick pushes a broom as the clock unwinds.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE

Melanie sits in front of her FIRST INTERVIEWER.

FIRST INTERVIEWER

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

CUT TO:

INT. DAY-CARE

The children are into everything. There appears to be absolutely no rules.

INT. BREAK ROOM

Rick eats his lunch.

CUT TO:

INT. DAY-CARE REST ROOM

The children are engaged in a food fight.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE

Melanie sits in front of her SECOND INTERVIEWER.

SECOND INTERVIEWER

Too Qualified.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Rick fumbles with his keys as he unlocks his car door.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE

Melanie sits in front of the THIRD INTERVIEWER.

31.

THIRD INTERVIEWER

Over qualified.

CUT TO:

INT. DAY-CARE

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

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE

Melanie sits in front of the FOURTH INTERVIEWER.

FOURTH INTERVIEWER

You're just not qualified.

CUT TO:

EXT. DAY-CARE PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The clock reads 7:55 as Rick shuts off his car and opens the door.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE

Melanie sits in front of the FIFTH INTERVIEWER.

FIFTH INTERVIEWER

I don't think I've seen such a perfect candidate.

CUT TO:

INT. DAY-CARE REST ROOM

The provider is hurriedly scrubbing the children's faces and hands.

CUT TO:

EXT. DAY-CARE - NIGHT

TRACKING BESIDE, Rick reaches the door and opens it.

CUT TO:

32.

INT. OFFICE

Melanie leans forward in her seat.

MELANIE

Really?

INT. DAY-CARE REST ROOM

The children are crying.

PROVIDER

You are bad, bad children.

CUT TO:

INT. DAY-CARE HALLWAY

Rick approaches the room. STEDICAM on Rick's face

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE

CU. on Fifth Interviewer.

FIFTH INTERVIEWER

Education level. Work experience.
You really fit the billet.

CUT TO:

INT. DAY-CARE ROOM

As Rick ENTERS the children run to him.

RICK

So, did everything go okay?

PROVIDER

They were angels.

RICK

Did you have fun boys?

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

BOYS IN UNISON

We love it.

CUT TO:

33.

EXT. DAY-CARE PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Rick loads the kids into the car.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - NIGHT

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

RICK

Get those seat belts on. The kids reluctantly comply.

RICK

So, how was your day?

BOYS IN UNISON

We're hungry.

RICK

Didn't they feed you? They said they would feed you. The brochure said meals provided.

KRIS

We didn't eat nuffin.

PHILLIP

Daddy, I'm hungry.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE

CU. on Melanie. She appears relieved.

FIFTH INTERVIEWER

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

CUT TO:

EXT. FAST FOOD RESTAURANT - NIGHT

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

34.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

flying

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

CUT TO:

INT. FRANK RYAN'S OFFICE - DAY

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

FRANK

So, how was your first week?

RICK

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

FRANK

Now you're talking.

Frank finds Rick's check and smiles as he hands him his laurels.

RICK

Two hundred and fifty bucks?

FRANK

Pretty good, huh?

RICK

Two-hundred-and-fifty-bucks?

FRANK

Don't spend it all in one place.

RICK

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

FRANK

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

35.

RICK

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

CUT TO:

INT. DAY-CARE - NIGHT

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

MS. HEATH

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

RICK

I'm a little short.

Rick takes the money from his pocket and hands it to Ms. Heath.

MS. HEATH

We take checks too.

RICK

Checks?

MS. HEATH

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

RICK

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

MS. HEATH

Ah.

RICK

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

MS. HEATH

You know Frank?

RICK

I work for him.

Ms. Heath looks back to her books.

36.

MS. HEATH

That changes everything.

RICK

Great.

MS. HEATH

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

RICK

Huh?

MS. HEATH

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

RICK

So, I'm forty-five dollars short...

MS. HEATH

And thirty-six cents. Don't worry about it. It's your first week. You didn't know, so, we'll let it ride and just add it to next week's balance. A beat as Rick turns to leave.

MS. HEATH

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

RICK

Really?

MS. HEATH

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

RICK

Potty train? Nicky?

MS. HEATH

(Handing Rick the pamphlet)
The toddler.

CUT TO:

INT. MELANIE'S HOUSE

Melanie sits at a computer.

37.

ZACH

Mommy?

MELANIE

Yes, baby?

ZACH

When are we going to have a normal life.

MELANIE

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

ZACH

I mean when are we going to be like

other people?
She pulls a flyer from the printer. CU. on flyer: **BABY SITTING**

INT. SUMMIT COUNTY JAIL CELL

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

NICHOLAS

Big boy go potty.

RICK

Are you a big boy?

NICHOLAS

Huge-mong-gus.

CUT TO:

INT. GROCERY STORE

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

CUT TO:

INT. SUMMIT COUNTY JAIL CELL - LATER

Rick sets Nicholas on the potty.

38.

RICK

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

Nicky shakes his head no.

RICK

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

Nicky shakes his head again no again.

RICK (CONT'D)

Daddy will buy Nicky a toy from the store.

NICHOLAS

Okay.

RICK

If Nicky goes potty on the potty.

Nicky shakes his head no and begins to cry.

NICHOLAS

I want a toy!

CUT TO:

INT. WALMART

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

CUT TO:

INT. SUMMIT COUNTY JAIL CELL

Nicky stands in front of his father.

NICHOLAS

I have to go potty?

Rick sits up abruptly.

RICK

Really?

39.

NICHOLAS

All done.

CUT TO:

INT. DAY-CARE - NIGHT

Rick is in Ms. Heath's office again.

MS. HEATH

How's the potty training coming?

RICK

I think we're making progress.

MS. HEATH

Three hundred forty and...

RICK

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

MS. HEATH

You're still short.

RICK

I know and I'm working on that.

MS. HEATH

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

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

KRIS

I didn't do it.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM

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

MOTHER

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

40.

RICK

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

FATHER

Boys will be boys. A NURSE peeks out.

NURSE

Mr. Stevens can you come back? The doctor could use your help in calming the child down.

RICK

Mom?

MOTHER

Just go. I'll watch these two.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL SUTURE ROOM

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

DOCTOR

Thank God.

RICK

How can I help?

DOCTOR

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

Rick moves to Phillip.

RICK

Hi little buddy.

PHILLIP

Hi Daddy.

RICK

I need you to be a good boy, okay?

PHILLIP

Okay daddy.

41.

RICK

So, did you have fun today.

PHILLIP

Uh huh.

RICK

Did you play with all your friends?

PHILLIP

Uh huh.

The doc injects the child.

PHILLIP

That fuckin' hurts!

RICK

Phillip!

PHILLIP

But daddy, it does.

RICK

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

PHILLIP

Okay.

RICK

(To Doctor)

I'm sorry.

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

PHILLIP

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

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL EMERGENCY AREA

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

RICK

Look I'm really sorry.

42.

DOCTOR

Can I ask you something?

Rick shifts uncomfortably.

RICK

Sure, I guess.

DOCTOR

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

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM

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

RICK

Insurance?

RECEPTIONIST

Yeah, Insurance. That thing that covers medical emergencies?

RICK

I don't think I have any.

RECEPTIONIST

Everybody has insurance.

RICK

I don't think I do.

RECEPTIONIST

Okay.

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

\$637.50

RICK

Can I run a tab?

RECEPTIONIST

You don't have a check?

CUT TO:

EXT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

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

RICK

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

MOTHER

It can be done.

RICK

I don't see how.

MOTHER

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

RICK

God doesn't pay day-care.

MOTHER

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

RICK

Could you watch them?

MOTHER

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

RICK

How `bout tonight, so I can catch a breath?

MOTHER

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

RICK

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

44.

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

MOTHER

Take this.

RICK

I don't want your money mom.

MOTHER

Take the money.

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

CUT TO:

INT. SUMMIT COUNTY JAIL CELL

Nicky sits on the potty.

NICHOLAS

I can't do it Daddy.

RICK

You can do it.

NICHOLAS

I can't do it.

RICK

Would you do it for a nickel?

NICHOLAS

I can't do it.

Rick lifts the child from the toilet.

RICK

Watch daddy.

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

RICK

Daddy go potty in the potty.

NICHOLAS

Daddy?

RICK

Yes, Nicky?

45.

NICHOLAS

I peed.

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

RICK

Hi.

MELANIE

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

RICK

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

NICHOLAS

My daddy has a big pee-pee.

RICK

I was just demonstrating the art
of...

MELANIE

It's okay. I saw.

RICK

(Mumbling)
Great.

Melanie ENTERS the cell followed by Zach.

RICK

You have a kid.

MELANIE

So do you.

RICK

Not criticizing, just surprised. I
don't believe anyone at their old

day-care had kids. If they did they kept them in a closet and only brought them out on special occasions. Christmas, Easter, an occasional birthday, and maybe when they had friends over for dinner, but only as a status symbol. It was like they'd say, "Here's the white picket fence. Here's the SUV. Here's the dog. Oh yes, here's the 2.5 children. Kids you can get back in the closet now."

46.

MELANIE

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

RICK

That has potential.

MELANIE

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

RICK

So, what's his name?

ZACH

I'm Zach.

Rick drops to a knee and extends his hand.

RICK

Hello Zach. I'm Rick.

ZACH

You're old.

RICK

You got me there. I am old.

ZACH

How old?

RICK

Older than dirt. When I was a kid

we didn't have dirt. We had rocks and we had hammers. If we wanted dirt we banged a few rocks with really big hammers, and then we had dirt.

MELANIE

Worked the chain gangs?

ZACH

You're too old for my mom.

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

47.

RICK

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

MELANIE

Mel.

RICK

Mel.

The four boys run OS to play.

MELANIE

Beautiful kids.

RICK

Thanks. So's your's.

MELANIE

Ever try Cheerios?

RICK

Huh?

MELANIE

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

RICK

I'll have to try that. So, any

questions about the job? Melanie
moves towards the boys.

MELANIE

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

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

ZACH

My mom tells great stories.

KRIS

We don't have a mom.

ZACH

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

48.

MELANIE

Once upon a time...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

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

MELANIE

The end...

BOYS IN UNISON

Read it again. Read it again. Read
it again.

MELANIE

I'm gonna talk to your dad.

BOYS IN UNISON

Please.

MELANIE

We'll read another one in a little
bit.

RICK

You have a real knack there.

MELANIE

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

RICK

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

RICK

You want the job?

MELANIE

I'd like that.

CUT TO:

49.

INT. BUILDING - DAY

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

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

Melanie is fixing the boys sandwiches.

CUT TO:

INT. BUILDING LUNCH ROOM DAY

Rick and the woman sit eating lunch.

WOMAN

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

RICK

Maybe we should...

WOMAN

Go out sometime? I'd like that. When?

RICK

I don't know... maybe...

WOMAN

Tonight?

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

Melanie on the phone.

MELANIE

No problem.

The boys run to her as she hangs up.

KRIS

Who was that?

MELANIE

That was your daddy.

PHILLIP

I love daddy.

50.

KRIS

Is he coming home?

MELANIE

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

They all snicker.

MELANIE

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

BOYS IN UNISON

Yeah!

Melanie chases them in circles. They fall in a pile and wrestle.

CUT TO:

INT. LUGIGIS - NIGHT

Rick picks at his food. The woman has barely touched her plate.

WOMAN

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

RICK

Um... three.

WOMAN

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

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

The boys jump on a bed.

CUT TO:

INT. LUGIS - NIGHT

Rick appears completely devoid of the conversation.

51.

WOMAN

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

RICK

Um... kinda.

WOMAN

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

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME - RICK'S DAYDREAM

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

KRIS

You're not my mom.

PHILLIP AND NICKY

Yeah!

CUT TO:

INT. LUIGIS - NIGHT

Rick motions for the check.

RICK

You can't.

CUT TO:

EXT. LUIGIS - NIGHT

Rick flees on foot. The Woman gives chase.

CUT TO:

52.

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

Melanie tucks the boys into bed.

CUT TO:

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Rick sits with WOMAN 2.

WOMAN 2

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

CUT TO:

EXT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Rick jumps into his car, locking the doors behind him. Woman

tugs at the door handle as he drives away.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

Melanie pours two glasses of wine.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOMAN 3'S HOUSE - NIGHT

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

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

Melanie lights a candle on a table set for two.

CUT TO:

INT. WOMAN 3'S HOUSE BEDROOM - NIGHT

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

CUT TO:

53.

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

Melanie finishes eating alone and blows out the candle.

CUT TO:

INT. WOMAN 3'S HOUSE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Woman 3 rests her head on Rick's shoulder.

RICK

That was incredible.

WOMAN 3

Yeah.

RICK

I know I haven't known you very long, but I there's something I need to say...

CUT TO:

EXT. WOMAN 3'S HOUSE - NIGHT

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

RICK

(Calling out)
Was it something I said?

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

Melanie washes the dishes.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Rick drives home in silence.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

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

54.

MELANIE

Did you have a good time?

RICK

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

MELANIE

What happened?

RICK

Why can't I find a woman like you?

MELANIE

You're trying too hard.

RICK

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

MELANIE

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

Melanie sits up and puts on her shoes.

RICK

You want to stay and...

MELANIE

I'm going to get...

RICK

Going?

MELANIE

Yeah.

RICK

You sure?

MELANIE

Positive.

A beat as they study each other's eyes.

55.

NICHOLAS (OS)

Daddy, I have to potty.

MELANIE

I'll see you tomorrow.

RICK

Ok.

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

CUT TO:

INT. BATH ROOM

Rick is on his hands and knees wiping the floor around the toilet.

NICHOLAS

Nicky almost do'd it.

RICK

Almost, baby boy. Almost.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET - AKRON OHIO - DAY

Rick walks against the flow of the CROWD. As if in a dream, everywhere he looks he sees Melanie. Every woman has her face.

CUT TO:

INT. NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

John

The lights STROBE in rhythm to the music. Rick sits with and his wife CARRIE SILVERSTEIN.

CARRIE

Finally had to grow up?

RICK

Yeah, I...

JOHN

You've got direction.

RICK

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

56.

CARRIE

Good for you.

RICK

Yeah, but is it good for the kids?

JOHN

Do the kids have direction?

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME - RICK'S DAYDREAM

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

RICK

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

CUT TO:

INT. NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

Rick stirs to reality.

RICK

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

JOHN

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

CUT TO:

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

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

MOTHER

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

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

57.

PHILLIP

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

MOTHER

And what are those? Phillip takes a deep breath.

PHILLIP

I can go to college and move the hell out of his house. I can join the military and move the hell out of his house, or I can get a job and...

RICK

... move the hell out of my house.

MOTHER

Rick!

CUT TO:

INT. NIGHT CLUB

Rick shakes his head.

RICK

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

JOHN

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

RICK

And you do this with your kids?

JOHN

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

CARRIE

I think Rick is doing a wonderful job.

RICK

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

Carrie stands.

58.

CARRIE

Excuse me, gentleman, I need to powder my nose.

Carrie walks off.

JOHN

I can't believe you.

RICK

What?

JOHN

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

RICK

I'm just saying it's hard.

JOHN

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

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

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

CUT TO:

INT. NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

Rick takes a swig of his beer.

JOHN

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

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

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

CUT TO:

INT. NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

John isn't letting this soapbox go.

JOHN

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

RICK

It does have its advantages, I suppose.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

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

CUT TO:

INT. NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

John realizes the beer bottles are empty.

JOHN

Another?

RICK

Uh...

JOHN

On me.

RICK

Sure.

John heads to the bar. Carrie approaches the table.

RICK

He went to grab a couple beers.

CARRIE

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

RICK

Carrie, I don't even have the funds to buy my own beer.

CARRIE

Love isn't about money. Love is about truth and selflessness and discovering who you are and who'll be. Someday, someone will find you.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME - NIGHT

Melanie talks on the phone. Rick pulls her from her seat.

MELANIE

I'll call you back.

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

MELANIE

What?

Rick pulls her in for a kiss.

MELANIE

What was that for?

RICK

For finding me.

CUT TO:

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

Rick and Melanie sleep in each other's arms. Nicholas stands at the bed.

NICHOLAS

Have to potty, daddy.

Rick stirs.

RICK

Go potty, buddy.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME - BATH ROOM

Nicholas holds the box of Cheerios.

CUT TO:

61.

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

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

RUNNING WATER.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME - BATH ROOM

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

CUT TO:

INT. FRANK RYAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Frank sits at his desk.

RICK

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

FRANK

Where are you going? What will you
do?

RICK

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

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

FRANK (OS)

You'll never make it without me!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. OFFICE BUILDING

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

CUT TO:

in

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - CUBICLE

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

CUT TO:

62.

EXT. PARK - DAY

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

CUT TO:

INT. PIZZA JOINT

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

RICK

Phillip, what's wrong?

PHILLIP

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

MELANIE

What's so important about that piece?

KRIS

It's bigger.

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

RICK

Easy on the drinks guys.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

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

MELANIE

What's wrong, Phillip?

Rick opens the envelope and pulls out a note.

PHILLIP

I gotta pee and Kris...

RICK

We're not going to fight over the bathroom.

(Calling out)

(MOR E)

63.

RIC K (cont'd)

Kris, your brother has to go too.
Share!

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

MELANIE

What's that?

Rick looks up from his reading.

RICK

Huh? Oh, this? Nothing!

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

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME - BATH ROOM

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

PHILLIP

This time mine's bigger.

Kris begins to cry.

CUT TO:

INT. COZY CAFE - DAY

STEDICAM on face as Rick ENTERS. Rick's POV: Cindy sits at a table in the back. CU. on Rick as he approaches the table.

CINDY (OS)

I'm really glad you could make it.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SUMMIT COUNTY JAIL

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

RICK

I took off work to be here.

CINDY

Thank you.

RICK

So, what do you want?

64.

CINDY

I want to see your boys.

RICK

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

CINDY

I'm their mother.

RICK

You forfeited that obligation, remember?

CINDY

That's not fair!

RICK

You abandoned your kids!

CINDY

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

RICK

Is there?

CINDY

I just want to see the boys.

RICK

You think they even know who you are?

CINDY

I'm their mother.

RICK

You keep saying that.

CINDY

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

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - RICK'S FLASHBACK

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

MAN

Next...

65.

Cindy lies in bed smoking a cigarette.

CUT TO:

INT. SUMMIT COUNTY JAIL

Cindy appears impatient.

CINDY

Rick? Rick? Rick?

RICK

Huh?

CINDY

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

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

Rick watches Melanie and the boys play NINTENDO.

RICK

Hi guys.

BOYS IN UNISON

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

MELANIE

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

RICK

Come on guys. Someone is here to see you.

MELANIE

Rick?

(A beat)

Rick?

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

CUT TO:

66.

EXT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME - DAY

Cindy closes the car door.

CINDY

Thank you.

RICK

Three hours.

CINDY

They'll be here.

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

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

Melanie packs her things.

RICK

Where are you going.

MELANIE

Anywhere you're not.

RICK

What about the boys? What about me?

MELANIE

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

RICK

What are you talking about?

MELANIE

Why was she here? What was that?

RICK

She's their mother.

MELANIE

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

RICK

She's their mother.

MELANIE

Who willingly walked out of their lives.

67.

RICK

She's their mother.

MELANIE

You keep saying that.

RICK

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

me...

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

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

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

Rick continues.

RICK

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

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

A PEDESTRIAN drops a coin in ricks coffer.

PEDESTRIAN

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

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

Melanie finishes packing her suitcase.

68.

MELANIE

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

Melanie EXITS, SLAMMING the door behind her.

CUT TO:

EXT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME - DUSK

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

KRIS

When can we see you again?

CINDY

Someday.

PHILLIP

Is someday tomorrow?

CINDY

Someday is someday, baby.

RICK

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

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

CINDY

I'm sorry.

RICK

For?

CINDY

I thought things had changed.

RICK

But?

CINDY

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

69.

RICK

I could have told you that.

CINDY

I had to give it a shot. Rick turns

to walk away.

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

RICK

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

CINDY

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

A furious PULL BACK

CUT TO:

INT. SUMMIT COUNTY JAIL

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

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME - MORNING

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

PHILLIP

Is Mel coming today?

RICK

I don't know, buddy.

NICHOLAS

Daddy?

RICK

Yes Nicky?

NICHOLAS

I love Mel.

RICK

She loves you too.

The clock unwinds.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME - MID-DAY

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

KRIS (OS)

Daddy... Daddy... Dad!

RICK

(Yelling)

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

Kris ENTERS.

KRIS

Dad?

RICK

Yeah?

KRIS

Phillip's in the closet

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME - BED ROOM

Rick unlocks the closet door and lets Phillip out.

RICK

What were you doing in there?

PHILLIP

Being Daddy.

RICK

Who locked the door?

KRIS

Wasn't me...

PHILLIP

I did.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

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

MOTHER

Rick?... Rick?... Rick?

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

MOTHER

Take care of my babies.

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

INT. RICK'S PARENT'S HOME - BEDROOM

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

FATHER

What are you giving him money for?

MOTHER

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

FATHER

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

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

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

CUT TO:

INT. RICK'S PARENT'S HOME - BEDROOM

CU. on Rick's mom.

FATHER (OS)

You could watch the boys while he works.

MOTHER

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

Slowly pulling up and away reveals another cell.

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

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

REPRESENTATIVE

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

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

REPRESENTATIVE (CONT'D)

It's a start, but not nearly enough.

STRIKE

The Rep. EXITS shutting off the lights behind him. The
of a match, and a candle is lit. In the flicker of the flame
Rick has a look of desperation. He holds a gun. Rick's POV:
Looking down on his sleeping children.

73.

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

CUT TO:

INT. SUMMIT COUNTY JAIL CELL - DAY

A BANG against the bars wakes Rick and the boys.

JAILER

I always knew you were a lifer.

CUT TO:

INT. ADOPTION AGENCY

Rick sits across the desk from an ADOPTION AGENT.

ADOPTION AGENT

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

CUT TO:

EXT. ROSS PARK - DAYDREAM

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

CUT TO:

INT. ADOPTION AGENCY

Rick snaps back from his daydream.

RICK

They'll be together though, right?

ADOPTION AGENT

Mr. Stevens, I wish I could make that promise, but the odds of an adoptive family willing to take them all is astronomical.

Rick stands.

74.

RICK

Come on guys we're out of here.

ADOPTION AGENT

Mr. Stevens?

RICK

I'm sorry, I made a mistake.

CUT TO:

EXT. SUMMIT COUNTY JAIL - COURTYARD - DAY

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

RICK

(Calling out.)

Can I get some help here.

His calls go unanswered.

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

RICK

Can you help me?

CONVICT

Can you help him?

RICK

I don't know.

CONVICT

What does he need?

RICK

I don't know.

CONVICT

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

RICK

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

CONVICT

Yes you can.

75.

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

CONVICT

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

RICK

But I...

CONVICT

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

RICK

How?

CONVICT

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

CUT TO:

INT. SUMMIT COUNTY JAIL - HALL

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

FADE TO:

INT. WELFARE OFFICE

WOMAN

Rick and the boys wait for their caseworker. A pregnant

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

76.

RICK

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

A CASEWORKER comes to Rick.

CASE WORKER

Mr. Stevens, I can see you now. Rick and the Pregnant Woman lock eyes.

PREGNANT WOMAN

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

CASE WORKER

Mr. Stevens?

RICK

I didn't mean it like that?

PREGNANT WOMAN

No one ever does.

CASE WORKER

Mr. Stevens?

Rick and the woman continue their stare.

CASE WORKER

Mr. Stevens? I can see you now.

RICK

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

CASE WORKER

Excuse me?

RICK

Responsibility calls.

CUT TO:

77.

INT. SUMMIT COUNTY JAIL CELL

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

NICHOLAS

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

RICK

Once upon a time...

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

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

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

NICHOLAS

Daddy, I'm hungry.

Nicholas pulls his shirt up to reveal his stomach.

NICHOLAS

It's very, very empty.

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

PHILLIP

Daddy, I'm thirsty.

Rick takes a long look at his beer.

RICK

Get your coats on.

KRIS

We're leaving guys.

CUT TO:

INT. GROCERY STORE

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

78.

CLERK

Thirty-two hundred and fifty-six dollars.

Rick looks dumb founded.

OLDER WOMAN

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

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

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

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET - AKRON OHIO - DAY

Rick and his mother walk along.

RICK

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

Rick's mom reaches in her purse.

RICK

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

MOTHER

What do you need.

RICK

For you to believe in me.

CUT TO:

EXT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME - DAY

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

CUT TO:

79.

INT. STORE

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

MELANIE

I know you.

CINDY

Excuse me?

MELANIE

Rick's ex-wife?

CINDY

And you are?

MELANIE

Can I ask you a question? What is

Phillip's favorite color?

CINDY

Huh?

MELANIE

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

CINDY

I don't know. Why?

MELANIE

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

(MOR E)

80.

MEL ANIE (cont'd)

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

CINDY

What's your point?

MELANIE

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

CINDY

So, why are you here with slick and not with "your" kids?

A beat.

MELANIE

Things change.

CINDY

Yeah... yeah they do. Now if you'll excuse me I need to find the asparagus.

(A beat)

I couldn't do it, ya know?

Melanie turns back around.

MELANIE

Do what?

CINDY

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

MELANIE

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

CINDY

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

CUT TO:

81.

EXT. GORGE PARK - DAY

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

RICK

Well, guys, I guess this is it.

KRIS

We can do it daddy.

RICK

Yes we can.

falls

Rick stretches out. The boys jog in place. Rick cracks his neck. The boys crack their knuckles. In SLOW MOTION they begin their ascent, running wildly up the incline. Rick

flat on his face. The boys all trip over him, leaving them all in a pile. Rick bounces up and dusts himself off. The boys do the same and away they go.

CUT TO:

EXT. A LARGE ESTATE IN BATH - DAY

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

CUT TO:

EXT. GORGE PARK - DAY

Rick carries the boys. Phillip is draped across his shoulder. Nicholas hangs around his neck. Kris clings to Rick's leg

and

is dragged with each step. They pass a weary CLIMBER who has taken a moment to catch his breath.

CLIMBER

You can do it.

RICK

Yes we can.

CUT TO:

EXT. A LARGE ESTATE IN BATH - DAY

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

CUT TO:

82.

EXT. GORGE PARK - DAY

The boys are dragging Rick up the hill.

CUT TO:

EXT. A LARGE ESTATE IN BATH - DAY

Rick and the boys are crowded onto the seat of a large commercial mower.

CUT TO:

EXT. GORGE PARK - DAY

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

RICK

What is it, Kris?

Kris points up.

KRIS

Look daddy.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

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

CUT TO:

EXT. GORGE PARK - DAY

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

PHILLIP

We can do it.

RICK

(Through a weary voice.)
Yes we can.

CUT TO:

83.

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME - LIVING ROOM

Rick wears his painter's pants. The boys are armed with an

assortment of paintbrushes. Paint cans and ladders adorn the room.

CUT TO:

EXT. GORGE PARK - DAY

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

CUT TO:

EXT. THE CHAPEL - DAY

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

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME - LIVING ROOM

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

RICK

Kris!

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

KRIS

Hey!

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

CUT TO:

INT. THE CHAPEL

A CHOIR of voices sings.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Melanie and her boyfriend sit in silence. A beat.

BOYFRIEND

What's wrong? What did I do?

MELANIE

Not you, it's me.

BOYFRIEND

What then?

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

MELANIE

I'm sorry.

Melanie EXITS the car and runs down the street.

CUT TO:

EXT. GORGE PARK - DAY

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

RICK

Put the stone down.

PHILLIP

But...

RICK

No buts: Put the stone down.

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

RICK

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

A RESTING CLIMBER appears.

RESTING CLIMBER

Long way up.

RICK

Yeah.

RESTING CLIMBER

Long way down for that matter.

RICK

That too.

A beat.

85.

RICK

So, what's your point.

RESTING CLIMBER

No point, just an observation.
Drink?

The climber holds out a canteen.

RICK

I'm okay.

RESTING CLIMBER

For the boys.

NICHOLAS

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

RICK

Go ahead.

The climber hands the boys the canteen.

RESTING CLIMBER

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

RICK

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

RESTING CLIMBER

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

RICK

We can do this.

RESTING CLIMBER

Yes you can.

A reinvigorated Rick hops to his feet.

RICK

We can do this!

BOYS IN UNISON

Yes we can!

CUT TO:

86.

INT. THEATER

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

PROSECUTOR

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

RICK

I just needed clarification.

PROSECUTOR

On what, Mr. Stevens? On what?

RICK

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

JUDGE

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

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Your inquiry, Mr. Stevens? Is it in the best interest of the children or in the best interest of you?

RICK

I don't know.

PROSECUTOR

He doesn't know. He just doesn't know.

RICK

I don't know.

JUDGE

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

RICK

But...

PROSECUTOR

Tell it to someone who cares, Mr. Stevens.

87.

RICK

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

PROSECUTOR

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

CUT TO:

EXT. PARK - DAY

In B&W SLO-MO: Rick stands watching his sons play. The wind blows the leaves of a tree. The boys run further and further out until they are out of sight. Rick calls out to them. Slowly, across the field, three young adults return. Rick is

now an old man, hunched over and aged with wrinkles. The three young men walk beside their elderly father, supporting him with each step.

CUT TO:

EXT. MELANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

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

MELANIE

What do you want?

RICK

I'm a proud man, sometimes foolish.

88.

MELANIE

Go on.

RICK

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

MELANIE

And?

RICK

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

MELANIE

Yes you did.

RICK

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

MELANIE

Life's not fair Rick.

RICK

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

deserved.

MELANIE

You're right.

RICK

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

MELANIE

Cut the bullshit, Rick.

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

RICK

(In Mel's ear)

I can live my life alone. I can
raise my kids alone. I can walk
this path alone. I'd much rather do
it with you.

89.

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

MELANIE

I can't.

She turns to go inside.

RICK

Can't?

MELANIE

(Turning back around.)

I won't.

RICK

I shouldn't have come here.

MELANIE

No, you shouldn't have.

Rick turns to leave.

MELANIE

You just don't get it do you?

RICK

Get what?

MELANIE

You're here for you, you selfish prick.

CUT TO:

INT. MELANIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT - DAYDREAM

Melanie lays in bed covering her ears.

MELANIE (VO)

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

(MOR E)

90.

MEL ANIE (VO) (cont'd)

So, don't come knocking on my door, asking for my heart, if you don't have room for me.

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

KRIS

I could have looked sad.

PHILLIP

I can look sad too.

KRIS

But I look sadder.

NICHOLAS

I sad.

Nicholas starts to cry.

CUT TO:

EXT. GORGE PARK - DAY

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

PHILLIP

Don't quit, daddy.

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

KRIS

Daddy doesn't quit.

CUT TO:

INT. NIGHT CLUB

Rick and John sit at the bar.

JOHN

You love her?

RICK

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

JOHN

If you think you're in love you are.

91.

RICK

I suppose I am.

JOHN

Does your heart skip a beat when she walks by?

RICK

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

JOHN

Does your heart skip a beat when she walks by?

RICK

Yes.

JOHN

Do your palms sweat when you think about her?

RICK

Yes.

JOHN

Does she inspire you?

RICK

With music and poetry.

JOHN

And is there passion?

RICK

There's fire.

JOHN

And have you ever told her this?

RICK

She knows.

JOHN

Have you ever told her this?

RICK

No.

JOHN

Don't you think you should?

RICK

It only confuses things.

92.

JOHN

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

JOHN

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

RICK

You didn't marry your best friend?

JOHN

No.

RICK

I thought you had things all planned out.

JOHN

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

RICK

It's not too late, you know?

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

RICK

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

INT. PARENT'S HOUSE

Rick BURSTS through the front door. His mother appears aghast.

RICK

I need you to watch the boys.

MOTHER

But you're father...

Rick's Father ENTERS.

FATHER

Woman, enough.

MOTHER

But...

93.

FATHER

No more excuses. It's time to live life and enjoy our grandkids.

(To Rick)

Go. The boys will be fine.

MOTHER

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

Rick BOLTS out of the house.

CUT TO:

INT. RESTAURANT

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

MELANIE

(To herself)

Oh shit.

CUSTOMER

Whoa!

The cup has nearly reached the brim.

MELANIE

Sorry.

CUSTOMER

Pay attention, would ya?

Rick reaches her.

MELANIE

What do you want?

RICK

To talk.

MELANIE

I'm working.

RICK

I know.

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

MELANIE

So, where are the boys?

94.

RICK

They're at my parents.

MELANIE

What? Not going to use them to try to persuade me with guilt?

RICK

Is that what you thought?

MELANIE

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

CUSTOMER 2

Ma'am.

RICK

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

CUSTOMER 2

I'd just like some coffee.

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

CUSTOMER 2

(Calling out.)
Excuse me, Miss?

RICK

What is your problem?

CUSTOMER 2

Cold.

RICK

What?

CUSTOMER 2

The coffee, it's cold.

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

RICK

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

Rick moves to Melanie.

95.

MELANIE

I can't believe you came here.

RICK

I can't believe you're a waitress.

MELANIE

Beats chasing around after snot nosed brats all day.

RICK

I thought you liked my kids.

MELANIE

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

RICK

I deserved that.

MELANIE

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

RICK

This isn't about the kids.

MELANIE

Then what's it about?

RICK

It's about me, the selfish prick.

MELANIE

About you?

RICK

Hear me out, okay?

MELANIE

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

RICK

Okay, okay.

MELANIE

Ten.

96.

RICK

Melanie, there is a grace about you

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

MELANIE

Go on.

RICK

I think my ten seconds are up.

MELANIE

Who's counting?

CUSTOMER 2

Miss... My coffee?

Melanie sets the coffee on a nearby table.

MELANIE

Get it yourself.

RICK

I love you.

MELANIE

I don't think I heard you.

RICK

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

MELANIE

That's not what you said.

RICK

I said I love you.

MELANIE

As brutal as that can be?

RICK

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

MELANIE

I kind of like you too.

CUT TO:

EXT. GORGE PARK - DAY

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

MELANIE

I never thought you'd make it.

RICK

Been waiting long?

MELANIE

I never thought you'd find me.

RICK

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

MELANIE

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

RICK

One step at a time?

MELANIE

Side by side?

RICK

Maybe you could carry me?

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

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL SUBURBAN HOME

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

98.

INT. SUMMIT COUNTY JAIL - CELL

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

JAILER

Getting out of here, huh?

RICK

It's time to move on.

JAILER

If you leave don't ever come back.

RICK

Not even...

JAILER

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

CUT TO:

INT. RICK'S PARENT'S HOME

Rick's Mom and the boys are playing.

KRIS

Grandma?

MOTHER

Yes, Kris?

KRIS

Grandma I love you.

PHILLIP

I love her more.

NICHOLAS

I love her the whole universe.

MOTHER

I love you all the whole universe

plus one.

CUT TO:

INT. THEATER

Rick and Melanie walk across the stage.

99.

MELANIE

So, this is where it all happened.

RICK

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

MELANIE

A bunch of innocent bystanders?

RICK

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

MELANIE

All the world's a stage.

RICK

Always casting dispersions.

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

the

distance.

JUDGE (OS)

Guilty as charged.

MELANIE

Did you hear that?

RICK

Hear what?

MELANIE

Nothing... nothing at all.

CUT TO:

INT. CANAL PARK - DAY

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

100.

JOHN

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

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

JOHN

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

RICK

Duck!

JOHN

Huh?

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

FADE TO BLACK.