

ONCE A GRIFTER

by
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CITY SIDEWALK - DAY

ALLISON O'CONNOR, a self-confident, addictively charming woman in her thirties, walks down a classy Chicago street. Her business suit is sexy, yet professional and she has a magnetic presence that turns heads on the busy sidewalk.

Equally striking is the FRIZZY-HAIRED DOG that charges ahead of her at the end of a leash.

EXT. STREET CORNER - CONTINUOUS

Allison and the dog weave through the small CROWD surrounding a female GUITARIST. An IMPRESSED LISTENER stuffs a bill into the full tip jar.

RENEE HOPPER, a mid-twenties burnout, stands back from the crowd, taking a long drag on her cigarette. Allison shakes her head at the site of Renee, but Renee ignores her.

EXT. BROWNSTONE - CONTINUOUS

Clean-cut, in his thirties, the ideal salesman, BRAD HARPER, hangs a REAL ESTATE SIGN in front of an expensive brownstone. He does a double take as Allison passes by. She notices, smiles, and flicks her hair flirtatiously.

EXT. CITY MARKET - CONTINUOUS

PAULEY, a short, fat man with a cheap tie, unloads BOXES from the back of a RUSTED VAN. Allison passes by and the dog growls and nips at Pauley's pants. Pauley shakes the dog loose as Allison reigns in the dog, amused.

EXT. SPORTS BAR - CONTINUOUS

Allison approaches an upscale bar, taking the dog with her.

INT. SPORTS BAR - CONTINUOUS

A stressed-out BARTENDER cradles the phone in his neck as he pours drinks for the many waiting PATRONS.

BARTENDER
(on phone)
No. Check the order. I wanted two cases, not two bottles. Do you think I'm stupid?

The door flings open and Allison enters. She hurries to the bar, tying the dog's leash to the brass rail that runs along the counter. She pats the dog, then heads back toward the door.

The bartender notices, covering the phone with one hand.

BARTENDER (CONT'D)
Woah, woah, woah. What do you think you're doing lady?

ALLISON
 (looking back)
 Oh, yes. What a sweetie. I'll have
 a daiquiri when I get back. I'm
 just running over to my broker real
 quick.

The bartender fumbles to hang up the phone as he leans over
 the bar to look at the dog.

BARTENDER
 Wait... look, I... you can't leave
 that thing down there...

Allison returns to the bar, flashing a mesmerizing smile.

ALLISON
 You are so thoughtful. Thank you.

She picks up the dog and sets it on the bar instead.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
 Oh, I almost forgot. Now she is a
 show dog and very picky with her
 martinis. But she has that German
 ancestry, so cut her off at one,
 OK?

A CUSTOMER sits with his back to the dog. The dog slurps
 from the man's beer mug.

BARTENDER
 There's no way...

Allison runs a finger down the bartender's arm.

ALLISON
 I won't be long. Promise. And
 I'll have a nice Ben Franklin for
 you when I get back.

She winks and the bartender hesitates.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
 (grabbing the bartender's
 face.)
 You are so cute. I owe you.

She rushes out before he can respond. The bartender realizes
 with horror that the dog's face is buried in the bowl of
 pretzels.

EXT. STREET CORNER - DAY

The guitarist finishes her song to the applause of the small
 crowd. She nods thanks to several who drop bills into the
 jar.

Renee rolls her eyes with disgust and tosses her cigarette on the sidewalk. She makes her way toward the guitarist, who is counting her money and putting the bills back in the tip jar.

RENEE
You must not work down here much.

GUITARIST
Excuse me?

RENEE
Keeping that much money out in a jar. This area's packed with thieves.

GUITARIST
Really?

RENEE
You know what I'd do? I'm serious, unless you wanna lose it...

Renee pulls a white handkerchief from her pocket. She grabs the money from the jar and wraps it in the handkerchief.

RENEE (CONT'D)
Here. You gotta hide the money on you. Stick it somewhere safe.

*

Renee stuffs the handkerchief down the front of her shirt to demonstrate. The guitarist is very uncomfortable.

Renee pulls the handkerchief out and hands it back to the relieved guitarist.

RENEE (CONT'D)
Trust me. Ain't nobody going down there unless you tell them, ya know what I mean?

GUITARIST
Uh... Thanks.

The guitarist looks around nervously and puts the handkerchief down her shirt.

Renee starts across the street. A bus screeches to a halt almost hitting Renee.

*

*

RENEE
Watch where your going!

*

*

Slamming her hand on the front of the bus angrily, she continues across the street.

*

*

EXT. CITY MARKET - DAY

A METER MAID tears a ticket off her pad and places it under the windshield wiper of Pauley's van.

Pauley waddles up, ice cream cone in hand.

PAULEY
Officer, I was just about to move.
You see I dropped my change under
the van, and...

Oblivious, the meter maid gets in her cart and drives away.

PAULEY (CONT'D)
How do you live with yourself,
ripping people off like this?
(looking at ticket)
Fifty bucks?! This is highway
robbery!

Pauley throws the ticket into the van.

INT. BROWNSTONE - DAY

Brad leads a YOUNG MAN and his PREGNANT WIFE through a nicely furnished apartment.

BRAD
This is going to provide space for
a whole litter of children that are
coming, am I right?

PREGNANT WIFE
It's beautiful.

BRAD
They may not look packed now, but
they'll be completely out by the
end of the month. Now, I don't
want to pressure you, but I've got
a couple of other people who want
in on this deal... so I'd need the
deposit today.

HUSBAND
And it has to be cash?

BRAD
I know... it's these landlords,
they're afraid of getting ripped
off with bad checks.

There is a knock at the door and Allison pokes her head in.

ALLISON
Hi! I'm here to look at the
apartment. WOW! This place is
great.

The wife looks at her husband with apprehension.

HUSBAND
We'll take it.

Brad grins and extends a handshake to the husband.

INT. SPORTS BAR - DAY

The bartender pulls a napkin, and his finger, from the growling dog.

Renee sits at the bar, coughing terribly, and crushes a cigarette in the ash tray. She stops as she sees the dog.

RENEE
Is that your dog? I don't think
I've ever seen a nicer pure-breed
Mongolian Lap Dog.

BARTENDER
What? No, this stupid mutt is...

RENEE
Look at those lines. The tail. Do
you know what this dog's worth? My
grandmother shows these things
professionally. She'd pay a
thousand bucks for it.

BARTENDER
Look. The dog isn't mine. We
can't even have dogs in here. I'm
just...
(to dog)
Ouch! Sit! Sit!

Renee writes a number on the napkin as she stands to go.

RENEE
Here's my number. If you EVER
decide to sell... you call me
first.
(beat)
Oh, and...try a martini, these dogs
love 'em.

The bartender looks at the dog thoughtfully.

EXT. CITY MARKET - DAY

PAULEY stands by the back doors of the van which contains a stack of LCD TV boxes. A TEENAGER holds a LCD TV and checks out the rear plugs. *

PAULEY
This baby's got everything.
Picture so clear, you're like
reaching into the TV to make sure
it's not real. Ya know what I'm
talking about?

TEENAGER
And they're a hundred bucks?

PAULEY
 Look kid. The special price ends
 today, so make up your mind.

Another customer turns toward them. It is Brad.

BRAD
 Is that the LCD? Those retail for
 \$700. That's a great deal.

*
 *

The teenager looks at Brad, who is pulling out his wallet.

TEENAGER
 Yeah, OK. I'll take it.

The teen hands over a wad of cash as Pauley looks at Brad.

PAULEY
 Now that's a smart man.

Pauley grabs a box from the van and hands it over.

INT. CITY BAR - DAY

The bar is cluttered with empty martini glasses and olives.
 The bartender has his head in his hands as the intoxicated
 dog laps up another glass and keels over.

The door busts open and Allison drags herself in.

Seeing her, the panicked bartender props up the dog with a
 beer mug.

Allison collapses at the bar weeping.

BARTENDER
 What's going on?

ALLISON
 I lost it all! Who knew penny
 stocks were so volatile? They're
 just pennies! I don't even have
 money for a cab to my apartment...

The dog falls over again and is set up by the bartender who
 attempts to be nonchalant.

BARTENDER
 Gee, I'm sorry, lady... I don't
 know what to say...

Allison throws herself on the bartender.

ALLISON
 Oh, you sweet man. I don't even
 have a tip to give you... for
 watching my little darling.

Allison strokes the dog causing it to fall behind the bar with a thud.

BARTENDER

Uh, hey... hey... it's OK. He loves it back here. Uh, you know what? I might be able to help you. Would you ever consider selling your dog? I'd probably pay, say... \$300?

ALLISON

(recovering instantly)
Really?

EXT. BROWNSTONE - DAY

Allison walks down the street minus the dog. She passes the excited husband and his pregnant wife, who are examining the building's exterior.

A GRUFF MAN steps up to the brownstone door with a key.

PREGNANT WIFE

We just love your place! Where are you moving to?

GRUFF MAN

Moving? I'm not moving anywhere.

The husband and wife look at each other with concern.

EXT. STREET CORNER - DAY

The guitarist pulls some cash from the tip jar. She looks around cautiously and removes the handkerchief from her shirt. Opening it she REVEALS a stack of folded up newspaper.

EXT. CITY MARKET - DAY

The teenager sets the LCD TV box on the curb next to a FRIEND. *

TEENAGER

Check it out man!

Ripping open the box top, the teenager's jaw drops. It's a box of bricks.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Pauley stands by the door of the van as Brad tosses in his real estate sign.

Renee sitting shotgun with her feet out the window, counts the money in the white handkerchief.

Brad checks his watch and looks down the street.

Allison sneaks up behind Brad and jumps on his back. She kisses him on the cheek and waves a stack of bills in front of his face.

The phone rings at the nearby phone booth. Allison turns.

ALLISON
Allow me!

She grabs the handset.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
Hello? A show dog? Really? You must be mistaken. I think you've confused me with someone who cares.

She hangs up the phone and jumps in the van with a smile.

PAULEY
I miss the good old days when you could do this stuff for a living...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SKYSCRAPER - DAY

Allison is dressed in a sleek Armani business suit. She checks her Blackberry as she approaches the revolving door. *

INT. SKYSCRAPER, ELEVATOR - DAY

Allison stands behind a MALE EXECUTIVE and his FEMALE SECRETARY who is scanning a schedule book.

The elevator dings. Floor three.

The executive and secretary exit.

As the doors close, Allison curiously flips open the woman's wallet, which she has lifted. She slides out the woman's building pass.

INT. SKYSCRAPER, 20TH FLOOR HALL - DAY

Allison strolls toward a set of frosted glass doors and pushes through them.

INT. SCAM HEADQUARTERS, RECEPTION AREA - CONTINUOUS

A RECEPTIONIST talks casually on the phone. Seeing Allison enter, she quickly hangs up.

RECEPTIONIST
Uh, good morning, ma'am.

ALLISON
Give this to Scooter and have him make me one just like it...No jokes this time.

Allison hands the receptionist the building pass and ditches the wallet in the trash. She grabs the mail from the desk.

INT. SCAM HEADQUARTERS, BOILER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Moving through the office, Allison spots Brad through the open door of a conference room.

He is at a dry erase board with a cup of coffee, while a small group of EMPLOYEES listen intently. He gestures at a large, color-coded U.S. Map.

BRAD
So, red team should finish the
Midwest by Wednesday...

Allison, seen only by Brad, points at her watch and mimes eating a sandwich.

Brad nods with smile.

Shuffling through the mail, Allison moves on to a cluster of cubicles, where a SMALL ARMY OF WORKERS man the phones.

PHONE CALLER #1
Is this Mrs. Skinner? This is Mike
with the National Awards
Clearinghouse.

A letter catches Allison's attention. She tears it open.

PHONE CALLER #1 (CONT'D) *
Congratulations, Mrs. Skinner.
You're one of the Grand Prize
winners of a BRAND NEW JEEP GRAND
CHEROKEE!

Phone Caller #1 holds the phone to a tape player. Canned cheering plays.

Allison examines the letter, interested. It is a birth certificate.

Continuing along the row of Cubicles, Allison approaches Pauley who is coaching PHONE CALLER #2 and listening via a headset.

PAULEY
Where have you been? It's nearly
lunchtime!

ALLISON
I was at the suppliers, negotiating
a lower price. We're getting
robbed.

PAULEY
(turning back toward the
young man and whispering)
Keep going. Stick to the script.

PHONE CALLER #2 continues monotonously as Pauley cringes.

PHONE CALLER #2
Mrs. Johnson. We'll deliver your
new Jeep Grand Cherokee and the
keys directly to your doorstep.
All we need to guarantee your prize
is a small delivery fee of \$99.95.

Pauley sighs at the caller's poor delivery and turns to Allison.

ALLISON
Check it out. Allison O'Connor.

PAULEY
Your birth certificate? Are you
crazy?

PHONE CALLER #2
Well, uh, we can put that on a
credit card right now.

ALLISON
I know. I know. But I've never
had an ID with my real name. You
know, like normal people.

PAULEY
We're not normal people.

PHONE CALLER #2
No ma'am. There's no other fees at
all.

ALLISON
I'm not gonna use it. It's just
something to remind me of dad.

PAULEY
I was his partner for fifteen years
Allison. He wouldn't approve.

Allison folds the birth certificate and shoves it in her interior right suit pocket.

ALLISON
Don't worry. It's in the safe.

She pats her right chest and winks.

PHONE CALLER #2
Well, this offer is only good over
the phone. But I bet this would be
perfect for you. You have a
family?

Pauley spins and presses the hold button.

PAULEY
 No. No. Stop. You're doing it
 again. What's the first rule of
 any scam?

PHONE CALLER #2
 I...thought...

ALLISON
 Don't make it personal.

Allison continues through the office.

PAULEY
 Don't make it personal. We're not
 running a dial-a-friend service
 here. Name and credit card number.
 Then on to the next one.

Tossing down the headset, Pauley races to catch up with Allison.

PAULEY (CONT'D)
 These kids. I tell you, you just
 can't get good help these days.

Pauley holds the door for Allison as they exit the room.

INT. SCAM HEADQUARTERS, PRODUCTION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

They enter an open area where a WOMAN stands over a mechanical press. There is a puff of steam as the woman opens the lid to examine a freshly minted credit card.

PAULEY
 So we're almost through the East
 Coast. But the percentages are way
 down. I think we might need some
 sort of office contest just to get
 people going, ya know what I mean?

INT. SCAM HEADQUARTERS, MAIL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Pauley follows Allison around a stack of boxes. An EMPLOYEE takes address labels off a printer and slaps them on the boxes.

PAULEY
 Oh... and in the California focus
 groups, the Jeeps just aren't
 generating the excitement they do
 in the Midwest.

ALLISON
 Yeah, so? Offer them a Mercedes.

Further down the shipping assembly line, a WORKER drops miniature toy Jeeps in the boxes. A SECOND WORKER throws in a key, and a THIRD WORKER seals it up.

PAULEY
 Brilliant. One last thing. You're gonna like this. It was Brad's idea. When we get someone who's really falling for it, we've got these stickers.

Pauley grabs a piece of paper from a nearby desk. On it is a large sticker of a goofy-looking orange hat.

ALLISON
 A hat?

PAULEY
 The old carnival trick. Award hats to the biggest suckers...

ALLISON
 So the other carnies can recognize them.

PAULEY
 And keep bilking 'em. *

ALLISON
 I like it. Run the lawyer bit.

INT. SCAM HEADQUARTERS, BOILER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

They open a door, coming full circle to the phone room.

PAULEY
 Already in progress, boss.

PHONE CALLER #3 holds a piece of paper with the hat sticker.

PHONE CALLER #3
 Mrs. Austin, I'm from Smith, Barney, and Cooper. We're suing the National Awards Clearing House to make them provide actual Jeeps, as they promised, in compliance with 1978 regulations governing national contests.

Allison pulls a report from a stackable tray as she passes Renee, who is flirting shamelessly with a MALE EMPLOYEE.

PHONE CALLER #3 (CONT'D) *
 We're asking for a retainer fee from involved parties to help pay legal expenses. Do you have a credit card?

Studying the report, Allison heads toward a large corner office. A young man, SCOOTER, hands her the ID card.

ALLISON
 Five minutes. Not bad.

She examines her picture on the card. A hat sticker is on top of her head.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
Very funny.

Allison rips off the sticker and looks back to the report. She stops short of entering the office.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
Renee, why is your team billing
\$500 for these Jeeps?

Renee rolls her eyes, refusing to look back at Allison.

RENEE
Because I told them to.

ALLISON
My office. Now!

Renee makes a face to her coworkers.

INT. ALLISON'S OFFICE - DAY

Allison throws down the report on her imposing oak desk.

ALLISON
What do you think you're doing?

RENEE
Uh... Making money.

ALLISON
It's \$99 and you know it.

RENEE
It's a scam, Allison, not some
corporate price war.

ALLISON
This is a carefully mapped out
operation with specific...

RENEE
Give me a break. The price is too
low! I'm tired of working all day
for jack.

ALLISON
You'll do what I say, or you can go
back to the streets and stuff money
down your training bra for a
living.

RENEE
My team has made five times...FIVE
TIMES as much as any other team.

ALLISON

Let me ask you something. Do you think some grandma is going get a lawyer over a hundred bucks? And if she did...do you know the regulations for credit fraud? Do you know the dollar amount that's flagged in VISA's computer systems? Do you know the federal law for postal contests? Have you thought about any of that? Because maybe you'd like to instruct me.

Renee is silent.

ALLISON (CONT'D)

I'm keeping your butt out of a cold, damp cell. Remember that.

RENEE

Well, thanks so much, Mother Theresa.

ALLISON

This is not a corner street scam! You can't just hide in the alley till the cops pass by.

RENEE

They don't scare me.

ALLISON

Yeah? Well, that's great 'cause if you screw-up there won't be a safe place for you in all of Chicago.

Renee pulls out a little card from her right pocket.

RENEE

I got a plan. See this? My "get out of jail free" card. A place to lay low if things get hot.

ALLISON

My plan keeps us out of trouble, not running from it.

RENEE

You think you know everything. I could run this place 10 times better than you could.

Allison sizes her up.

ALLISON

Fine. You want to be in charge? Be my guest. I'm going to lunch.

Storming out of the office, Allison collides with Renee.

INT. SCAM HEADQUARTERS, BOILER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Allison marches past the gawking coworkers.

Outside the conference room, she opens her hand and looks at Renee's card.

ALLISON
(to herself)
Amateur.

EXT. OUTDOOR CAFE - DAY

Allison and Brad sit at a table finishing lunch.

BRAD
So you fired her. Because she was coming on to me, right?

ALLISON
(laughing)
No, if she had been coming onto you, I'd have killed her.
(beat)
Anyway, now she's probably got her whole team upset with us.

BRAD
Office politics... the curse of the working man.
(beat)
Oh, I got something you're gonna like.

Brad slaps down a stack of colorful foreign bond certificates on the table.

ALLISON
What's that?

BRAD
Bonds. Spanish. I found it in my Grandmother's attic.

ALLISON
Are they real?

BRAD
She was a gypsy. Nothing about her was real. Anyway, I figure we can use 'em on some schmuck.

ALLISON
Nice.

BRAD
Keep 'em. I got a whole box.

Allison slips the stack into her suit pocket, but stops. She wrinkles her brow. Something's missing.

*

ALLISON
 (to herself)
 That little rat.

BRAD
 Who?

ALLISON
 Renee. You know, I might make a
 real crook out of that girl yet.

The waiter sets down the check and passes by.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
 I'll get it. My treat.

Allison opens her purse and sifts through dozens of credit cards. She picks one randomly and sets it down. Brad glances at the card.

BRAD
 Thanks so much...Mrs...Yoshi Wang.

Allison gives a mock Asian bow of her head.

BRAD (CONT'D)
 I tell you, Allison, I don't know
 how you do it.

ALLISON
 What?

BRAD
 All this. Don't you ever get tired
 of it all? I mean sometimes I
 think...are we going to be doing
 this when we're 50?

ALLISON
 Come on. Get serious.

BRAD
 I mean it. Haven't you ever
 thought about getting out? Having
 a family, a big dog, home cooked
 meals, lotsa kids?

ALLISON
 What? We hate kids. Once a
 grifter, always a grifter.

BRAD
 I just think, sometimes...that I
 want to go legit. Get a nice house
 in the suburbs...just me and you.
 You know?

For a moment, Allison desires it.

ALLISON
I guess I do... think about it
sometimes...

BRAD
I could go into something
honest...like multi-level marketing
or something.

Brad busts out laughing.

BRAD (CONT'D)
I had you! I had you. You totally
fell for it.

Allison snaps back, covering.

ALLISON
Get out! I knew it from the start.
You can't charm me...

BRAD
(mocking her)
But we hate kids...

ALLISON
You are so lame. Don't you have
work to do? *

BRAD
Yes, of course Mrs. Wang. I'll get
right back to the office.

Brad gets up from the table and kisses Allison.

ALLISON
Listen, I've got some errands to
run. Keep 'em in line, OK?

He exits the patio as Allison waves for the waiter.

EXT. SKYSCRAPER - DAY

Allison, latte in hand, nears the office building.

INT. SKYSCRAPER, LOBBY - DAY

She enters the lobby. It is empty except for two policemen,
OFFICER #1 and OFFICER #2.

At the elevators, Allison notices the officers checking her
out. She smiles at them as she steps in.

INT. SKYSCRAPER, ELEVATOR / 20TH FLOOR HALL - DAY

DING. As Allison steps off the elevator, she realizes the
entire floor is crawling with COPS.

Phone Caller #1 and Phone Caller #2 are being frisked against a wall. The receptionist and another employee are being questioned.

An officer dumps an entire box of credit cards in front of CAPT. NICHOLS, obviously in charge.

CAPT. NICHOLS
Holy Moses. OK. Call Headquarters and get more guys down here now! I want this building locked up! No one goes in or out or to the john unless I say so!

Snapping to her senses, Allison retreats to the elevator. She presses the ground floor button calmly but quickly. The doors begin to close, but a hand reaches between them.

The doors pop back open to reveal OFFICER #3.

OFFICER #3
Excuse me, ma'am. Do you work here?

ALLISON
Me? No, no. I must have pushed this floor by accident. I'm actually very late.

Allison presses the close button, but Officer #3 again holds the doors open.

OFFICER #3
May I see some identification please?

ALLISON
Identification? Sure. I'm sorry... is there something going on?

Using a tissue, Allison pulls a card from her purse and hands it through the doors to the officer. The officer takes his hand off the door to receive it.

OFFICER #3
(reading license)
Just a second... Miss
Kal..Kalenowski...

He turns his back briefly to Allison and motions to another officer.

Allison hits the close button and the doors shut. Officer #3 notices, too late.

OFFICER #3 (CONT'D)
Hey! Hold on.

Allison hears pounding as she watches the floor numbers slowly decrease. She is madly pressing the "Lobby" key.

ALLISON
 (to self)
 Come on. Come on.

An idea hits Allison. She quickly digs through her purse, then reaches over and presses the third floor button.

INT. SKYSCRAPER, LOBBY - DAY

The two officers watch the numbers above the elevator.

OFFICER #1
 (into walkie talkie)
 Hold on. She stopped at three.
 (to Officer #2)
 I got this. You watch the stairs.

Officer #2 nods and sprints toward the stairs.

INT. SKYSCRAPER, THIRD FLOOR HALL- DAY

Allison races down the hall, scanning the numbers on the office doors. She checks the card she's holding. The elevator DINGS behind her.

INT. SKYSCRAPER, THIRD FLOOR OFFICE - DAY

The female secretary, who was formerly in the elevator, sits at a desk typing. She's startled as Allison barges in.

ALLISON
 Hi. I'm from **IT**. We've tracked
 down a network virus to your
 computer. I need to take a look.

*

Allison marches straight to the secretary and starts helping her out of her chair. The secretary is overwhelmed.

SECRETARY
 Uh... right now?

ALLISON
 (annoyed)
 Do you want to crash the whole
 network? Go get some coffee...
 it'll only take a minute.

The secretary heads down the hall, **perturbed**.

*

Allison, settles herself in the chair. She grabs the nameplate of the woman and centers it on the desk.

INT. SKYSCRAPER, THIRD FLOOR HALL - DAY

Officer #1 works his way down the hall checking the doors.

INT. SKYSCRAPER, THIRD FLOOR OFFICE - DAY

Officer #1 sticks his head through the door way.

OFFICER #1
Excuse me, can I see your building
pass for this floor?

ALLISON
Now that's a line I've never heard.

OFFICER #1
No, ma'am. I'm looking for a woman.

ALLISON
Isn't every man? Here. *

She holds out her card conveniently over the nameplate on the desk. The officer inspects the card and nods.

OFFICER #1
Have you seen anyone pass by here?

ALLISON
Well...a woman was just here asking
about the service elevator.

OFFICER #1
Thank you, ma'am.

The officer dashes out the door.

INT. SKYSCRAPER, THIRD FLOOR HALL - DAY

Allison pokes her head out the doorway. The coast is clear.

She hustles to the elevator.

As the doors open, Officer #2 steps out of an office down the hall. Seeing Allison, he sprints toward her.

OFFICER #2
Wait. Stop! *

The doors have already closed.

EXT. SKYSCRAPER - DAY

Allison exits through the revolving doors and sighs with relief as she walks down the sidewalk.

Police cars and TV News trucks pull up behind her. OFFICERS rush to block off the entrance.

Officer #2 exits and scans the area, but cannot see her.

Allison disappears into the crowd.

INT. ALLISON'S TOWNHOUSE - DAY

Clothes litter the Ethan Allen bedroom. Allison hastily packs a duffle bag.

Grabbing papers off her dresser, she fans through them before stuffing them into a shredder.

The TV blares in the background.

TV NEWSMAN
Coming up at 11:00. Chicago Police
shut down the Harrison building
today after raiding an organization
believed to have bilked consumers
out of nearly twenty million
dollars.

ALLISON
Twenty-five.

Allison flips off the TV, checks the room, and departs.

EXT. HAVEN PARK, ENTRANCE - DUSK

The rusted steel sign reads "HAVEN PARK."

EXT. HAVEN PARK - SAME TIME

Allison chooses a bench with a view of the entire park. No one is nearby.

She is startled by rustling from inside a nearby bush.

PAULEY
Allison, is that you?

ALLISON
Pauley? What are you doing?

Pauley, dressed in overcoat and hat, struggles to free himself from a branch.

PAULEY
I didn't want to attract any
attention.

ALLISON
Ah.

PAULEY
Thank God you're here. When you
didn't show up for a while, I
thought maybe this wasn't the right
place. You know, the safe park...

ALLISON
Pauley, Pauley. Just sit. You're
at the right place. Did anyone
else get out?

Pauley sits, but bounces his legs with nervous energy.

PAULEY

I don't know. I was in the office next door, ya know, borrowing some office supplies when I heard...

ALLISON

What about Brad?

PAULEY

He'd just gotten back, but I didn't stick around. Oh man. What are we gonna do?

ALLISON

Settle down. We'll go to the bank tomorrow and close the accounts...

PAULEY

Uh oh.

ALLISON

What?

PAULEY

I don't have the books.

Allison jumps to her feet.

ALLISON

What do you mean you don't have the books. They're supposed to be with you wherever you go.

PAULEY

I know. I know. But I had a lot of paperclips to carry...

ALLISON

Paper clips? Damn it, Pauley. The cops'll be all over that place.

(beat)

We're just going to have to shut it down for a while. You got somewhere safe you can go?

PAULEY

Uh, yeah. I can visit my Uncle Sammy in Florida. He went legit a couple years ago. He's a politician.

ALLISON

Good. Go down there. We'll meet back here in say two months and take stock of everything.

PAULEY

What about you? You got anywhere to go?

Allison stops and considers.

ALLISON
I don't know.
(beat)
Wait.

She reaches into her pocket for the card.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
I do. Pauley, I need you to stay
here for a few days. See if you
can track down Brad. Tell him I'll
be in... Jasper. I'll wait to hear
from him.

PAULEY
What's that?

ALLISON
It's my get out of jail free card.

SERIES OF SHOTS, ALLISON'S CAR - NIGHT/DAWN

-- Allison speeds away from the bright lights of Chicago.

-- Map against steering wheel, Allison drives down a long
straight road between cornfields.

-- It's morning and Allison is exhausted.

-- Passing a pig farm, Allison grimaces and rolls up the
windows.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - DAWN

A oversized tractor blocks the road, moving slowly.

INT. ALLISON'S CAR - SAME TIME

Barely awake, Allison approaches the tractor.

Sudden realization.

She slams on her brakes and swerves.

EXT. FITZ PIG FIELD - CONTINUOUS

The car crashes through a wooden fence, plows over a hedge of
rose bushes, and skids to a stop inches from a lethargic pig.

Running from the tractor is MICHAEL FITZ, a fortyish man in
muddy overalls and a straw hat.

MICHAEL
(yelling)
I'm coming. Are you hurt?

Allison stumbles out of the car.

ALLISON
I'm fine.

Michael runs past her to the pig.

MICHAEL
Jerry, are you OK? Were you hit?
Can you stand?

Allison is dumbfounded.

ALLISON
Hey! Hey! It's just a pig.

MICHAEL
Yeah, my pig. You nearly hit my
pig.

ALLISON
I could've been killed and you're
worried about a pig?

MICHAEL
Not a pig. My pig. Jerry.

ALLISON
Who cares about bacon boy? I
could've been killed...

Michael sees the mangled rose bushes.

MICHAEL
Aaaaw... My roses! My fence!

ALLISON
It's just a fence.

Michael, offended, looks at her about to speak.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
I know. I know. Your fence. This
is insane.

MICHAEL
You destroyed it! You know how
long this took to build?

ALLISON
For a man of your intelligence?
Real long.

MICHAEL
Who do you think you are?

ALLISON
I'll tell you I am. I'm a lawyer,
and don't you dare imply that this
is my fault. First, there are no
hazard lights on **your** tractor.
(MORE)

ALLISON (CONT'D)

Second, you were well under the minimum speed limit, and third, that fence is not a regulated distance from the road. Don't mess with me, buddy, or I'll give you so much trouble you'll wish you never got up and put on your Wranglers.

Michael takes a step back.

MICHAEL

Okay, okay. I'm glad you're okay. Jerry's all right too. Maybe we can call it even.

ALLISON

You sure that's okay with Jerry?

They both look over at Jerry, who hasn't budged.

ALLISON (CONT'D)

I'll take that as a, "yes." Look, what do you say you help push my car back onto the road, and we'll never have to see each other again.

MICHAEL

Deal.

Allison pulls out her map and Renee's card.

ALLISON

Do you know, by any chance, how far Jasper is?

MICHAEL

Jasper? This is Jasper.

ALLISON

This is Jasper?

MICHAEL

Well, we like to call this the suburbs. You're about a mile from downtown. What brings you to Jasper?

ALLISON

Well, if you must know... I'm visiting a friend... my uncle actually.

Allison looks at the card.

ALLISON (CONT'D)

Uncle Buddy.

MICHAEL

Buddy? Buddy Jackson is your uncle?

ALLISON
Are there any other Buddys?

MICHAEL
No... Thankfully.

Allison climbs in the car and starts it.

ALLISON
Good. I mean it'll be good to see him. We haven't been in touch for a long time. It's a surprise visit really. Go ahead, give me a push.

Michael pushes on the bumper. The car wobbles back onto the road. GRINDING NOISES. HUGE BACKFIRE.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
My car...

MICHAEL
It's just a car.

With a glare from Allison, the car peels away. An explosion of black smoke bursts from the tail pipe, engulfing Michael.

Michael takes off his hat and fans the air smugly.

EXT. JASPER CITY LIMITS - DAWN

The car sputters. With one final BANG, the car coasts to the side of the road beneath a wooden sign that reads:

"Welcome to Jasper. Pork Capital of the World. Population: People 1,256 Pigs 15,486"

Allison attempts to start the car again.

ALLISON
Oh, come on. Come on.

*

It won't turnover. She gets out and kicks the door shut.

Taking off her heels, she hikes toward town.

EXT. MAIN STREET, JASPER - DAY

A scowling Allison marches through the one-stoplight town. The FEW PASSERBYS appear to be simple country farmers.

A sign in the window of one shop reads "Lu Lu's Boutique."

LU LU, large, jolly, and in her mid-forties, wears a bad dress from the eighties. She hums and hangs other tacky clothes on a sidewalk rack. Seeing Allison, she smiles.

LU LU
Morning!

FRANCOIS
 Voila! My new specialty...Pork
 Marsala! Go ahead, try it. You
 like. You like!

Bill takes a bite and savors the taste.

BILL
 Mmm. Perfect. Perfect as usual,
 Francois. You are a genius!

ANNIE
 Oh, Francois, it's magnificent. Is
 that a dash of ginger I taste?

Francois feigns great humility while beaming.

FRANCOIS
 Please. Please. You are too kind.
 But I cannot reveal my secrets now,
 can I?

Francois notices Allison at the front of the restaurant.

FRANCOIS (CONT'D)
 Excuse moi.

Francois prances toward Allison like a high-class host.

FRANCOIS (CONT'D)
 Good Morning, Madam. Just one,
 today?

Allison nods and follows him to a table, littered with
 napkins and crumbs.

FRANCOIS (CONT'D)
 Gus! Le table!

GUS, 24 and lanky, is an All-American moron. Wearing a pink
 apron, he mops the floors nearby. Trudging to Allison's
 table, he swipes his rag over the surface. Still filthy.

Allison wrinkles her nose. Francois whips the napkin off the
 table and sets it in her lap.

ALLISON
 Look, I'm really tired. Can I get
 like an oat bran muffin or
 something, some sort of fruit bowl,
 and a latte?

FRANCOIS
 (opening the menu)
 Muffin? Perhaps you would like to
 look at our list of specials. We
 have a wonderful Pork Omelette.

ALLISON
 Ah, no thanks. No meat. Just
 something from your light menu.

Francois laughs, forcing her to take the menu.

FRANCOIS
 Madam! Surely you jest! No meat,
 at Le Oink? That is, how they
 say, impossible! Everything on our
 menu is from the best of the best
 of the finest little piggies raised
 right in Jasper. Anything else
 would be a tragedy!

ALLISON
 What? You only serve pork?

FRANCOIS
 No, No, No! Of course not.
 (laughs heartily)
 Also bacon, ham...bolgna.

ALLISON
 All right, look...I'll have a decaf
 and the "Piggie in a Blanket"

FRANCOIS
 But of course!

Francois grabs the menu and gets a few steps away.

ALLISON
 (calling after him)
 Oh, I forgot! Hold the piggie, OK?

Francois grits his teeth. Storms off.

Allison fingers Renee's card and shakes her head.

Gus continues to sling the mop near Allison. He slops it
 across her feet. Allison looks at her soaking shoes and
 bites her lip.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
 Excuse me, I think you missed a
 spot.

Gus, stops and Allison lifts her feet.

GUS
 Oh, thanks.

Gus whips the mop under the table.

ALLISON
 Hey...Gus...do you have a phone?

Gus points toward the rear of the store. Allison squishes
 over to the ancient pay phone and dials zero.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
 Hi, Operator? I'm on a pay phone
 and it just disconnected somehow.
 Yeah, I don't have any more
 change... Here's the number... 555-
 8366. Thanks.

The number rings and rings and rings.

Gus carries a plate of food past Allison to the last booth in
 the restaurant.

GUS
 Here, Buddy. We're still out of
 grits.

Allison spins at the name. She looks at the card.

She cautiously moves toward the booth. The man has his back
 turned toward her, and wears a large fishing hat.

ALLISON
 (softly)
 Excuse me. Are you Buddy Jackson?

BUDDY, an elderly black man, looks up. His mouth is full.

BUDDY
 Hmmmm? Me?

Allison sizes him up.

ALLISON
 Oh, I'm sorry. I think I'm looking
 for somebody else.

BUDDY
 Wait! Hold on there little lady.
 I'm Buddy Jackson. What can I do
 for ya?

Allison sits down skeptically. She leans in.

ALLISON
 Uh, OK. I'm the one who left you
 the message. I'm...Renee Hopper.

Buddy bursts into a grin.

BUDDY
 (loudly)
 Renee?! You're Renee Hopper?!
 Well I'll be! Look at you! I
 don't think I've seen you since you
 were what, eight?

ALLISON
 If you could keep it down...

She looks around the restaurant uneasily.

BUDDY

Well, you sure grew up pretty now,
 didn't you? Some big city hotshot.
 Boy, your daddy'd be proud.
 (yelling)
 Francois! Bring that food over
 here! She's with me.

ALLISON

Don't do that. I was under the
 impression you could help me lay
 low for a while.

Buddy over-reacts with caution.

BUDDY

Oh, yeah. Right. Sorry, I forgot.
 You're "on the lam", eh? Well
 don't you worry. Old Buddy has got
 everything planned out, yes sirree.
 Your "cover" is safe with me, you
 betcha!

Francois drops off the blanket, a piece of toast, for
 Allison.

FRANCOIS

(under his breath)
 There will be one very cold piggie
 tonight.

He throws his head in the air and marches off.

BUDDY

This is exciting. I haven't felt
 this rush in years.

ALLISON

Look, I don't mean to be rude, but
 have you done this before? You run
 a safe house, right?

BUDDY

Well, kind of. You gonna eat that?

EXT. BUDDY'S AUTO REPAIR - DAY

Beat-up cars sit in a makeshift lot next to Buddy's
 dilapidated house. Written in the car windows: "LIKE NEW!"
 "LEATHER INTERIOR!" "RIGOROUS 8 POINT SAFETY CHECK!"

Buddy fiddles with the front door lock.

BUDDY

Your dad and I had some gigs back
 in the day. Course I went legit
 years ago. Used cars. But I
 always saved a spare room, just in
 case he ever got in hot water.

ALLISON
It's just for a day or so.

INT. BUDDY'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The trailer-park-quality furnishings leave Allison frozen in her tracks. An old television blares a soap opera.

BUDDY
Oh, blast. The wedding episode! I forgot to tape it. Your room is this way. Here, let me get that.

Buddy snatches the bag off Allison's shoulder. She turns to protest, but he is already walking up the stairs.

INT. BUDDY'S GUEST ROOM - DAY

Buddy barges into the dirty cramped bedroom with a single, spring bed and scrappy little dresser. Allison follows behind him and takes back her bag, dropping it when she sees the room.

BUDDY
This is it. You get a beautiful view of the sunrise in here, yes sir.

Buddy whisks open the drapes revealing the police station directly across from the window. Allison flinches and quickly shuts them.

ALLISON
Are you crazy? You live across from the police station?

BUDDY
Don't worry, I've already set up a cover for you.

ALLISON
I am not staying here. As soon as my car's fixed...

*

Allison sits on the bed, which sinks like a rock to the floor, then bounces up and down like a yo-yo. She flips backwards, somersaulting to the floor.

Allison pops up from behind the bed.

Buddy, oblivious to the fall.

BUDDY
No one will suspect a thing.
See...
(lowering to a whisper)
I told Principal VanDorp you'd be there at 8am.
(beat)
Can I get you something to drink?

*

Buddy heads for the stairs. Allison chases after him.

ALLISON
What? Wait.

INT. BUDDY'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

They enter.

ALLISON
Hold on! I'm supposed to be where?

BUDDY
School. I told everyone you were coming to fill in as a teacher.

ALLISON
A job? You got me a job?

BUDDY
Well, Jasper ain't exactly a resort town for vacation...people'd be suspicious. Besides they really needed someone after Mr. Lacky kicked the bucket.

ALLISON
Now how am I supposed to do that? What am I teaching?

BUDDY
Uh. Hmmm. I can't remember. One of those subjects I think.

ALLISON
Forget it...I'm out of here. I'll walk to the next town if I have to.

Allison whips opens the door REVEALING Officer Barney.

BARNEY
Aha! There you are! I caught you!

Allison freezes.

ALLISON
Officer, I, uh...

BARNEY
Look, I can't stay long, cause there's an update coming in on the scanner about the big bust in Chicago, but I did want to come welcome you. We're all real happy you're here.

Allison is speechless.

BUDDY

Well, that's mighty nice of you, Barney. She's just settling in now.

BARNEY

Buddy here tells me you're one of the best. He said your last stop was in the Windy City. You know up there in Chicago.

ALLISON

Uh, yes. Yes. I'd like to think I'm one of the best. Lots of experience... teaching... that subject... that subject that we all love so much.

*

BARNEY

Oh, I almost forgot. The missus picked these for you. Here.

Officer Barney hands her a bouquet of wildflowers.

*

She looks at Buddy, Officer Barney, then the flowers.

MATCH TO:

EXT. JASPER HIGH - DAY

Flowers line the quaint school building as TEENS pour in.

INT. SCHOOL ENTRANCE - DAY

PRINCIPAL VANDORP, pompous, inept and with a full head of gray, leads a disinterested Allison down the hallway as KIDS rush by.

VANDORP

Miss Hopper, we keep our standards high here. I like to think of our little school as the Ivy League of the East, which is why I thought you'd fit in perfectly. But I will need you to fill out this application.

ALLISON

Oh! So I don't have the job for sure...

VANDORP

What? Of course you do. With Buddy's recommendation, how could I pass? We just need to have this on file.

ALLISON

Oh... Great.

VANDORP

So, Miss Hopper, what kinds of cutting edge learning activities will you be starting with?

ALLISON

Uh, well, you know... In my experience, it's always best to start with the basics... lots of homework problems... tests... that kind of thing.

*
*

VANDORP

Really? For drama class? Interesting!

ALLISON

Drama? Right. Well...

*

Interrupted by CHOKING sound. DUNCAN, a mischievous ninth-grade weasel, has a headlock grip on RUNT, a waif like boy of the same age with braces.

VANDORP

Duncan! What's going on here?

DUNCAN

Oh, Mr. Vandorp sir. See, Runt here was just choking and I was giving him...the high stick maneuver. Yeah, that's it.

Vandorp smiles at Renee.

VANDORP

See what I'm talking about, Miss Hopper? These kids are always using what they learn, even to the point of saving other's lives.

(to Duncan)

Nice work, Duncan. But it's called the Heimlich Maneuver. Now watch carefully, because your technique is a little off.

The Principal grabs the helpless Runt around the waist, lifts him off the ground and starts squeezing mercilessly.

ALLISON

Well, I guess I'll just move on to my classroom. Thanks a lot...

VANDORP

Geez, Duncan, what'd he eat? Here, help me brace him against the wall.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Allison glances at numbers above the doors and strains to see in the rooms as she passes them.

A nameplate reads "Miss Bea." MISS BEA, a clumsy, chemistry teacher in her 20s, pours liquid into a beaker. The concoction smokes and fizzes uncontrollably.

Coughing, Miss Bea drops the mixture and waves off the fumes. Aware of Allison, she composes herself.

MISS BEA

I'm okay.

Allison attempts a token smile and hurries off.

A man, back turned, mops the floor near the end of the hall.

ALLISON

Excuse me, sir? I'm a new teacher here. I'm a little lost.

The man turns. It is Michael, the driver of the tractor.

Unpleasant recognition.

ALLISON (CONT'D)

Well... So the pig farmer is also the school janitor. Aren't you the Renaissance man?

MICHAEL

Actually, our janitor's out sick. I'm the vice-principal. Michael Fitz. But you can call me Mr. Fitz.

*

Allison realizes her mistake.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

So you're our new teacher? That's funny... I didn't realize we were teaching Law.

ALLISON

Yes. Well, that's funny. You see there's a simple explanation, it's just that... well...as a drama teacher I do a lot of acting... and I had just come off a role on The Practice...you know David E. Kelly...No, you wouldn't. Anyway, I was still in character... and...

MICHAEL

Look, I don't know who you are or what brought you here suddenly...

ALLISON

I believe the other teacher died.

MICHAEL

We work real hard to provide a good education for these kids.

(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

If you're not here for that purpose, then your stay is going to be very short, understand?

ALLISON

More than you know.

Uncomfortable pause.

ALLISON (CONT'D)

Okay, thanks. See you 'round. Maybe at the teacher's lounge.

Allison backs up.

MICHAEL

Uh, Miss...?

ALLISON

Hopper. Renee Hopper.

MICHAEL

Miss Hopper.

He tilts his head toward the door they've been standing by.

Hiding embarrassment, she struts past him and in.

INT. DRAMA CLASSROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Allison SLAMS the door.

ALLISON

That egotistical pig loving...PIG!

Allison turns finding **SIX FRESHMEN** at desks. Snickers. *

MEGAN FITZ, a withdrawn, homely sixteen year old looks up with curiosity.

ALLISON (CONT'D)

Hi.

Allison crosses to the chalkboard.

ALLISON (CONT'D)

My name is Miss Hopper.

Writing her name on the board. The chalk breaks. Taking the eraser, she wipes the board, but there is piece of chalk between the folds.

The kids laugh.

ALLISON (CONT'D)

Good one.

She removes the chalk, erases and writes.

SPLAT! A slimy spitwad puts a period to her name.

Allison grits her teeth.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
(under breath)
I hate kids.

INT. BUDDY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

ALLISON
I...hate...kids! How could you do
this to me?

Watching TV, Buddy shoves popcorn into his mouth. Allison storms around him.

BUDDY
So it went well?

ALLISON
I'm leaving tonight. Did you fix
my car?

BUDDY
(mouth full)
Uh...No. Very busy today.

ALLISON
Then I'll take your truck.

BUDDY
I just started to work on my
brakes.

ALLISON
Then I'll steal a car. I'm not
staying in this town another day!

BUDDY
So what class did you end up
teaching?

ALLISON
Drama.

BUDDY
Oh, yeah. You're one of them
lesbians.

ALLISON
What?

BUDDY
Theater people. Lesbians.

ALLISON
They're called Thespians.

BUDDY
Would you sit? I can't see.

Allison sits down. Anger brewing.

BUDDY (CONT'D)
Some big city crook you are. Can't even pull off a teacher con for one day.

ALLISON
Oh, Please. As soon as I hear from Brad, I'm out of here.

Buddy chomps on popcorn, engrossed with the TV.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
Fix my car.

Allison storms up the stairs.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. FITZ KITCHEN - NIGHT

Megan and Michael sit at the dinner table. Michael eats from a large home cooked meal while Megan picks at her food.

MICHAEL
How was school today?

Long silence.

MEGAN
Fine.

MICHAEL
History test went okay?

More silence.

MEGAN
Dad, I'm all done. Okay?

Her plate is still full.

INT. JASPER HIGH MAIN OFFICE - DAY

Allison slips into the empty office and looks around.

INT. VANDORP'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

Through the window, Allison dials the phone.

Vandorp works on his computer. Michael stands in front of him.

MICHAEL
I just wish you'd consulted me on it, Jim. Did you check references?

VANDORP
 Michael, Michael. Buddy gave me a recommendation. Did you know that she was originally up for the role in Titanic?

MICHAEL
 I don't know...

VANDORP
 Don't be so suspicious.

Michael eyes Allison through the window.

VANDORP (CONT'D)
 Besides, I would have thought you'd appreciate having a pretty face around here.

MICHAEL
 Jim, I hardly think that's appropriate.

VANDORP
 When's the last time you went on a date? The Reagan Administration?

Michael rolls his eyes.

VANDORP (CONT'D)
 I'm just saying, you seem like you need a little fun in your life.

MICHAEL
 I'm fine.

VANDORP
 Ooo! Check this out, Michael. I'm getting this baby hooked up to the...World Wide Internet!

Michael rolls his eyes. He walks around to see a browser with a blank screen.

VANDORP (CONT'D)
 I don't get it. Where's my Yahoo?

MICHAEL
 Who's your ISP?

VANDORP
 Ooo. That sounds important.

INT. JASPER HIGH MAIN OFFICE - SAME TIME

Allison doodles on a note pad grinding the lead to the wood
 as she holds the phone to her ear.

*
 *

ALLISON
 Finally!...Right, I'm from the
 Gazette...Yes, I requested
 information about a prisoner.

Allison notices the NEWSPAPER on the desk. She picks it up.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
 No one fits that description?
 You're sure? OK, well it must be
 my mistake. Thank you, Warden.

Standing she flips over the paper. The headline leaves her
 breathless: "CHICAGO SCAM UNRAVELLED!"

The door to Vandorp's office opens and Michael backs out.

MICHAEL
 (to Vandorp)
 OK. Let me know how it goes.

Startled, Allison stuffs the paper behind the copier as
 Michael turns. She spins around and accidentally leans on
 the start button. The machine spits out pages.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
 Need some help?

ALLISON
 Uh, no, I'm just making copies.

Michael holds up a blank page.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
 Oh. I guess I need to darken it.

Michael nods suspiciously as he leaves.

INT. DRAMA CLASSROOM - DAY

Allison reads a book at her desk. The kids throw paper wads
 across the room. The bell rings.

ALLISON
 All right. All right. Study hall
 again today. Keep it down.

Duncan laughs, throwing a wad at ANGUS, a slow, Bunyanesque
 country boy. Megan puts her head on her desk.

JESSICA, the preppy, all-American student council president,
 stands.

JESSICA
 Uh, Miss Hopper? When are we going
 to start learning about acting?

ALLISON
 Any day, sweetheart. Just waiting
 for the textbooks.

Allison returns to her book. A few kids snicker.

JESSICA
Miss Hopper. How do you prefer to approach character behavior? The representational or presentational method?

ALLISON
Yes, exactly.

Runt's hand shoots up.

RUNT
Oh, Miss Hopper. Is it true that you once dated Ben Affleck? *

BECKY, a gum-chewing, athlete sits on top of her desk.

BECKY
Hey, tell us what it was like on the set of Planet of the Apes! Did you get your own trailer and stuff? Did you do your own stunts?

The other kids hands go up. Duncan rolls his eyes, disinterested.

ANGUS
Come on, Miss H. Show us something. I think I want to be an actor.

The kids laugh at this. All eyes are on Allison.

ALLISON
Really, it's hard to explain. There's a lot of work that goes into acting. I mean, well, you have to memorize all the lines. Then, you know...the director yells 'Action' and...uh, well...you have to...Act.

DUNCAN
Oh, come on! You don't know a thing about acting. I bet you made up that whole thing about being a movie star.

ALLISON
Made it up? Don't you watch Access Hollywood? I dated Ben. Bad kisser so I dumped him. Look, I just don't want to tell you too much before the textbooks get here. I want it to all be fresh. *

Megan raises her head to take stock of the situation.

JESSICA
But, Miss Hopper, surely you can...

DUNCAN
Just leave it alone, OK, Jessica?
Think about it. She's a Hollywood A-
list star you've never heard of who
wants to teach high school in
Jasper! She doesn't know anything.
Can we all just go back to study
hall?

The other students believe him. Disappointment.

ALLISON
Hey, wait. You. What's your name?

DUNCAN
Duncan. Look lady, it's cool with
us. I don't care what you're here
for, OK?

BECKY
Hey, are you running from the
police or something?

Allison is shaken. Her cover is cracked.

It hits her.

ALLISON
Look. You want acting? I know all
about acting. Come on, let's go.

Allison heads toward the door. No one moves.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
Let's go. Field trip. Acting.
Lesson One.

ANGUS
Awesome!

BECKY
I love field trips.

The kids jump from their seats. Megan reluctantly gets up.

INT. FRANCOIS' DINER - DAY

A couple tables are pushed together and the kids sit with
large plates of food. Laughing.

Megan is stone faced. Her plate is untouched.

ANGUS
Oh, that is good stuff.

DUNCAN
Dude, that's like your fourth plate.

ANGUS
Hey Megan, are you eating that?

Megan pushes her plate over to Angus.

Allison spears the pork chop in route.

ALLISON
(imitating Francois)
Sacreblu! Megan! You did not touch le pork! This is from the finest of the finest piggies in Jasper.

Laughter. Megan cracks a smile.

ANGUS
Man, that's good. That's real good. Are we going to learn accents and stuff?

DUNCAN
Why? You already know hillbilly and redneck.

Allison sets down the pork.

ALLISON
Angus, by the time I'm done with you, I'll turn you into the International House of Pancakes.

More laughter. Runt joins them, but his smile fades.

RUNT
I don't get it.

ALLISON
First though, we have to learn the basics.

JESSICA
Like getting an agent!

ALLISON
Not quite. Acting isn't just movie cameras and red carpet. It's about manipulating people. Getting them to believe what deep down they want to believe or are afraid to believe.

Jessica takes notes.

JESSICA
Wait. Could you repeat that?

Francois approaches and surveys the extensive mess with disdain. He sets the check down.

ALLISON
OK, guys, pass in some money.

The kids panic.

BECKY
What? I don't have money on me?!

JESSICA
We thought you were paying for it!

DUNCAN
Hey, Runt. Give me some money

RUNT
You took my money yesterday.

Megan unzips her purse. Allison stops her.

Sliding an envelope out her pocket, Allison dumps the contents into her hand: A DEAD COCKROACH. Megan watches.

Allison picks up a bite of food from her plate.

ALLISON
Come on. Surely you have money for this fine, high-class meal.

She puts the food into her mouth. She stops. Gagging dramatically. She waves her hands wildly. COUGH. CHOKE.

JESSICA
Miss Hopper! Are you OK?

Francois runs to the table.

FRANCOIS
Madam! Madam!

Megan watches with fascination.

RUNT
She's choking! Duncan, do something!

DUNCAN
Dude, I don't know the real Heim... Heim...thing!

Allison falls to the floor.

BECKY
She's turning blue! Call an ambulance!

CLOSE UP: Allison's hand with the cockroach.

Allison puts her hand to her mouth and gives one last gag.

The cockroach falls to the ground!

Jessica screams!

BECKY (CONT'D)
Eeww. Gross!

RUNT
Disgusting!

DUNCAN
Cool.

Allison, feigns recovery.

ALLISON
What kind of restaurant is this?
Did you see that? There was a
cockroach in my food!

FRANCOIS
That can't be! I...uh...That is
impossible!

ALLISON
This diner is through. I
practically died! And you expect
me to pay for this slop. It's a
pigsty in here.

ANGUS
Actually, pigs are very clean.

Allison pushes Angus behind her.

FRANCOIS
Please, madam...

ALLISON
Wait until the newspaper hears
about this.

Allison brushes herself off.

FRANCOIS
Madam! There is some mistake, I'm
sure. I assure you this has never
happened before! Please! The
meals are on the house! Free! I
insist.

Allison and the kids march out.

Megan leaves a tip and hurries to catch-up.

EXT. FRANCOIS' DINER - DAY

The kids huddle around Allison. Through the window, Francois yells at Gus and points to the ground.

BECKY
Miss Hopper, are you OK?

ALLISON
That, my young friends...is acting.

Allison holds up another cockroach and bends it. Rubber.
Smiles spread.

RUNT
No way!

JESSICA
Is that legal?

DUNCAN
Of course, it's acting!

ALLISON
(laughing)
Not just acting. It's art.

Allison motions for them to follow and heads down the sidewalk. Megan looks after her, and smiles.

INT. END OF THE HALLWAY - DAY

The kids file into the classroom. Angus, still eating, gives Allison a high five as he enters the class.

INT. MICHAEL'S CLASSROOM - SAME TIME

Michael writes on the board. Through his door window he sees the kids entering Allison's classroom.

MICHAEL
(to his class)
Pardon me...

INT. END OF THE HALLWAY - SAME TIME

Michael enters the hall as Allison is about to shut her door.

MICHAEL
What are you doing?

ALLISON
Oh, hey, Mikey.

MICHAEL
Did you take the kids off campus?

ALLISON
Yeah, a little field trip. Acting
stuff.

MICHAEL
Did you clear it through the
office?

ALLISON
We just walked down the street.

MICHAEL
What about permission slips? Did
anyone know where you were going?
What if something happened?

ALLISON
It's a one stoplight town.

MICHAEL
Let's get a few things straight.
You're the teacher. The responsible
one. The parents trust these kids
to you.

ALLISON
Lighten up. The parents don't care
if...

MICHAEL
I'm a parent. I care.
(beat)
Second, look at how you're dressed.
We're professionals, examples. We
can't prance around in skintight
outfits like a runway model.

ALLISON
I didn't think you even noticed.

MICHAEL
I meant...As your vice-principal, I
suggest you get some professional
attire. And third... You are here
to teach, not hold study hall.

ALLISON
That was only for...

MICHAEL
Have you started work on the
festival?

ALLISON
Festival?

MICHAEL
The Pork Festival.

ALLISON
You have a festival for pork?

Allison laughs but covers her mouth on Michael's stern look.

MICHAEL
Didn't you even read the class syllabus? Every year the drama class does a play about the founding of Jasper. You're directing.

ALLISON
This is your answer to giving the kids a good education?

MICHAEL
Just teach it, OK? I'm watching you.

ALLISON
So you've said...

Michael, embarrassed, storms into his classroom.

Allison smiles to herself.

INT. LU LU'S BOUTIQUE - DAY

Allison browses through racks of obnoxious dresses.

Lu Lu bounces up with a big smile.

LU LU
Hidee Ho! Everything with a sticker is fifty percent off, and without, it's half.
(yelling to stockroom)
Snookems! I need that box out front!

Allison pulls out a ghastly plaid blouse and shakes her head.

Duncan appears from the stockroom with a box full of large women's bras. Seeing Allison, he turns in horror.

LU LU (CONT'D)
There you are! Now, just sort those on the racks for me!

Lu Lu grabs Duncan by the face and gives him a motherly kiss.

LU LU (CONT'D)
That's a sweet boy.

Beet red, he shuffles past Allison.

ALLISON
(whispering)
Nice work there, Snookems.

Returning to the rack, she selects an enormous skirt.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
Excuse me. Uh, Lu Lu, right? Do
you have this in a smaller size?

Lu Lu looks up from a product catalog.

LU LU
Sorry, Deary. That's my smallest.

ALLISON
You know, Lu Lu...Can I see that?

Allison flips through some pages of the catalog.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
Have you ever considered stocking
some of these?

Interested, Lu Lu examines the page.

EXT. FRANCOIS' DINER - DAY

Walking past the window, Allison sees an exhausted Gus
scrubbing a table. Francois performs the white glove test.

Allison crosses the street. Behind her, there is the SQUEAL
of tires and a SIREN.

BARNEY (O.S.)
Freeze! Don't move!

Instinctively, Allison puts her hands on her head.

ALLISON
Listen, There must be a mistake...

Barney fights to free himself from his seat belt.

BARNEY
Cut the chatter, tough guy. I know
who I'm dealing with. I just
witnessed it myself. You
jaywalked. Walked straight across
the street with no remorse. That's
what really gets me heated.

Allison drops her hands.

Barney approaches, ticket pad in hand. His pen won't work.

ALLISON
Really, Officer Barney, there's no
need for this. If you want my
autograph, I'll be glad to give it
to you.

Officer Barney is confused.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
I know, I know. You've seen me a million times on Baywatch but were afraid to ask.

BARNEY
Now hold on here...I... Baywatch?

ALLISON
Cops do this all the time.

Allison autographs the ticket.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
There. Hang that in your office. When I get my headshots, I'll send you one.

BARNEY
Wait, I...Gee, I never had a celebrity autograph.

ALLISON
No problem. You keep this city safe, and I'll take care of the beaches.

Allison winks and walks off.

INT. DRAMA CLASSROOM - DAY

Kids with scripts at the front of the class.

BECKY
(chewing gum at the same time)
So, in 1863, our founding father Jedediah Jasper and his wife, Clarabel, along with their seventeen children, pressed across the prairie land.

RUNT
(monotone)
Oh, dearest Father. How much longer till we get there?

ANGUS
(having trouble reading)
Be quiet, son. You could spook our large herd of pot-bellied Cheshire breeding hogs, which everyone knows are the perfect breed for pork tenderloins, a lean meat that contains less fat and even fewer calories than chicken.

Allison nods off in the back of the classroom.

Duncan tries to be cool.

DUNCAN
But dear mother, where are we
going?

There is a pause. Megan shuffles with embarrassment.

BECKY
Come on, Megan. That's you.

MEGAN
Miss Hopper, do I have to read a
part?

ALLISON
It's okay, Megan. No one's
expecting Shakespeare.

Duncan sighs and shakes his head.

DUNCAN
But dear mother, where are we
going?

MEGAN
(nervous)
Fear not, dear small Timmy, my
youngest and sweetest son who will
one day invent the automatic hog
feeding trough...I will protect
you...because...

She forces herself to continue.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
Because I love you deeply and will
always love you.

The class bursts out in laughter at Megan.

BECKY
Nice work, Megan!

DUNCAN
Oh Mommy, I love you so much too.

JESSICA
Miss Hopper, why'd you let Megan
read that part? I should be the
lead.

RUNT
That was so lame, Megan!

ALLISON
Hey, Hey! Stop it. That was fine,
Megan, just fine.

Allison leafs through the script painfully.

INT. JASPER HIGH MAIN OFFICE - DAY

A file drawer full of papers. Fingers stop at a folder labeled "Renee Hopper."

Michael looks around carefully and opens the folder.
REVEALING Allison's employment application.

Allison enters the office.

ALLISON
Hey, Mikey.

Michael jumps.

MICHAEL
Oh, hey. It's you. How's it going?

ALLISON
(suspicious)
Fine. What's with you?

MICHAEL
Nothing.

ALLISON
Nothing? You look like I caught you cheating or something.

Michael fakes a laugh.

MICHAEL
Right. That's funny. I was just busy, you know, doing stuff.

Allison sits by the phone.

ALLISON
Take it from an expert. When the teacher catches you, first, don't panic. Second, act disinterested. And third, divert attention. You'd be amazed at how little people notice.

MICHAEL
Oh, so you've had experience in this area.

ALLISON
Mikey, Mikey. If it weren't for "borrowing" the homework of honest people like you...I probably never would have passed high school.

Allison grins and dials the phone.

MICHAEL
Did you get the script for the festival?

ALLISON
That 'a boy. Change the subject. Yeah, I got it. You actually perform this... this...thing every year?

Michael grabs the file from the top of the cabinet and walks over to the Principal Vandorp's office.

MICHAEL
Ah yes...Principal Vandorp wrote that thing. Keep in mind he loves the part where Jebediah fights off the Indians to save the crippled pig.

More smiles as Michael enters Vandorp's office.

INT. VANDORP'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

Michael, alone, pulls out the Allison's application. Scanning it, he picks up the phone and dials.

INT. JASPER HIGH MAIN OFFICE - SAME TIME

Allison's on the phone.

ALLISON
C'mon Pauley. Where could he be? Well, you know where I am. Bye.

Vandorp enters the office.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
Hey, boss.

VANDORP
Ooo. I like the sound of that.

He passes through with a smile to his office.

INT. VANDORP'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

MICHAEL
Yes, I'm trying to get some information about a former student.

Vandorp opens the door surprising him.

VANDORP
Michael, what are you doing?

Michael slaps down the phone. Remembering Allison's advice, he calms.

MICHAEL

Oh... I was just calling the lunchroom to find you. I thought you might show me what happened with the computer.

VANDORP

Ah, yes! It's amazing! Did you know you can get stock quotes all the way from New York?

Michael smiles to himself, slides the resume back into the file folder, and looks out the office window at Allison.

SERIES OF SHOTS

-- Rita, the hair stylist, talks to Betty while curling her hair.

RITA

And I heard that in **The Lord of the Rings** she played **an Orc**.

*
*

-- Allison, on the phone, shakes her head with discouragement.

-- Barney shows off Renee's signature to the Mayor and Felix.

-- Allison smiles as Becky gives her an apple. Angus hands her some cuts of pork tenderloin, which she accepts graciously.

-- Francois, wearing a **surgical** mask and hair net, sets down a meal for Bill and Annie.

*

BILL

Obviously she has millions. All the big stars do.

-- Allison races to the office phone. Answers. Disappointed, she hands it to Vandorp.

-- Lu Lu posts a sign reading "NEW FASHIONS!" in the window.

-- Felix and the Mayor argue in front of the store.

MAYOR DIPPER

Them movie stars always come back to their theater roots.

FELIX

Dang-gummit, Mayor. She ain't no teacher. She's doing research for a movie role.

-- The office phone rings, but no one answers.

-- Kids eat BLTs in the cafeteria.

Allison and Miss Bea sit amidst a group of kids. Miss Bea's soda explodes as she opens it. Allison laughs with the kids.

Michael looks on with jealousy from the next row. He eats by himself while reading a book.

INT. BUDDY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Buddy shovels down a TV dinner in front of the tube.

Nearby, Allison reads the book "Drama for Dummies."

ALLISON

Do we have to watch this again?

BUDDY

I never miss it. See, tonight Trish finds out it was her twin sister that kissed Mason at the homecoming game.

ALLISON

Oh, give me a...Trish has a twin sister?

BUDDY

From England. And Amber, who's in love with Mason tells Dillon about Trish's date with Grant. Now that's drama!

Allison's light bulb goes on. She picks up her note pad.

INT. JASPER HIGH MAIN OFFICE - DAY

Allison reads the script pages as she pulls them from the printer.

Michael hurriedly enters holding a bunch of roses.

Near collision.

ALLISON

Whoa. Slow down there.

MICHAEL

Sorry. I'm running a little late.

ALLISON

Wow. For me? How kind!

MICHAEL

Uh, no, see. Well, yes, kind of. I just cut these. It's a hobby. Growing roses...

ALLISON

I know. I've been through your garden before.

MICHAEL
 (smug)
 Oh, that's right. Anyway, I occasionally bring some in for the teachers.

ALLISON
 Really?

MICHAEL
 Uh, yeah. I just try to do something nice now and then to build uh...team morale and...so, uh...here... *

Michael hands her a flower. Awkward. At a loss for words.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
 ...Go team.

She smells it coyly.

ALLISON
 Does this mean we're going steady?

MICHAEL
 No.

Allison laughs.

ALLISON
 Well, thank you. This is very sweet. I don't care what everybody says. You're all right.

Allison walks out.

Michael looks after her in a bit of a trance. The phone rings.

MICHAEL
 Hello. Jasper High...Who?...Oh, you must mean Miss Hopper. You just missed her...Now who did you say you were?

INT. DRAMA CLASSROOM - DAY

Allison hands each student a script at the front of the room.

ALLISON
 OK, now I made a few changes to spice it up. Let's just run with it.

The kids shuffle around into positions.

BECKY

It's a hot steamy night in 1863.
Jebediah Jasper has slipped away
from the campfire for a secret
rendezvous...

JESSICA

Oh Jeb. I just can't take living
like this anymore. Have you told
Clarabel about us?

INT. END OF THE HALLWAY - SAME TIME

Heading to his room, Michael overhears the scene continue
through the open door.

ANGUS (O.S.)

Right now she thinks you're the
family maid, not the twin sister of
my ex-wife who was drowned during
the witch trials of '55. She could
never understand what we have.

Double-take. Curious, Michael spies on the performance.

JESSICA (O.S.)

But I can't hide it any longer. I
love you Jeb. I want you... BAD.

Michael's jaw drops. Looking around, aghast, he spots Vandorp
down the hall. Michael waves for him to come over.

ANGUS (O.S.)

Quiet! Here comes Clarabel now!

Vandorp walks up. Michael grabs his arm and positions him to
watch.

INT. DRAMA CLASSROOM - SAME TIME

Megan, still nervous, looks at Allison.

ALLISON

Good. Go ahead, Megan. You can do
it.

MEGAN

Jebediah Jasper! How dare you!
I'm not blind to what's going on
here.

JESSICA (O.S.)

Leave him alone, Clarabel. I need
him now. If you can't take life
out here, maybe you should have
stayed back in New York with your
rich daddy and his non-union
horseshoe factory!

INT. END OF THE HALLWAY - SAME TIME

Michael, appalled, turns to Vandorp with a "Can you believe this?" look. Vandorp furrows his brow.

INT. DRAMA CLASSROOM - SAME TIME

Megan gains confidence, building to a dramatic peak.

MEGAN

Well, sorry Roxanne, if that is your name. But I need him too. Do you think it's easy taking care of seventeen kids who miss their home? Who are tired and hungry? Who will probably never see their grandparents again? Timmy is so scared, he hasn't slept in two nights. Did you know that Jeb? Did you? I know you're trying to save us, but these kids don't need a warrior. They need a Father! And so help me God, if you dare let any of them down, this barren land will be the least of your problems!

The class is stunned at the performance.

Allison breaks the silence with a slow clapping.

ALLISON

Now we're getting somewhere.

Megan smiles.

INT. END OF THE HALLWAY - DAY

Michael stares, proud and confused.

VANDORP

She's good.

Vandorp slaps Michael on the back. A smile creeps across Michael's face.

INT. FITZ KITCHEN - EVENING

Michael chops carrots as Megan sits reading an acting book.

MICHAEL

Megan. I'm not going to tell you again. I want those chores done before dinner.

Sound of SLURPING from off screen.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Jerry! You better not be drinking out of the toilet again!

Jerry the pig, lumbers into the kitchen licking his lips.
The doorbell rings. *

INT. FITZ FRONT DOOR - CONTINUOUS

Megan opens the door, revealing Allison.

MEGAN
Miss Hopper!

ALLISON
Hi, Megan!

MEGAN
What brings you out here?

ALLISON
I just wanted to talk to you about
the play and thought I'd stop by.

MEGAN
Sure, come on in.

INT. FITZ KITCHEN - SAME TIME

Michael realizes it's Allison and listens in.

INT. FITZ FRONT DOOR - SAME TIME

ALLISON
It'll just take a minute. I've
been looking at all the parts...
and... well, you've been doing a
great job. I think you'd be
perfect for the part of Clarabel.

MEGAN
Get out. The lead? Me?

ALLISON
You can do it.

MEGAN
You really think so?

ALLISON
Whatta ya say?

MEGAN
Sure...OK...Oh, man! Thanks, Miss
Hopper!

Megan hugs Allison.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
Hey! Can you stay for dinner, my
dad's making a ton of stuff?

ALLISON
Well, I...

MEGAN
(yelling)
Dad! Miss Hopper's gonna stay for
dinner, OK?

ALLISON
Oh Megan, I don't want to be a
bother.

MEGAN
Are you kidding? Every night he
makes a huge meal.

Michael appears in the doorway. Apron on. Carrot in hand.

MICHAEL
Oh, uh, hi, Miss Hopper. Megan, I
actually hadn't really prepared...

Allison reacts to seeing him in the apron. She likes it.

ALLISON
You like to cook? I didn't know
that about you, Michael.
(beat)
Sure, I'll stay. Thanks.

MEGAN
Cool! Dad, Miss Hopper's going to
come with me while I do my chores,
OK? Come on, Jerry!

Megan drags Allison out the door.

Michael snaps out of a trance. Checking the mirror in the
hall, he goes to run a comb through his hair. He realizes
that he is holding a carrot instead.

INT. BARN - DAY

Megan and Allison carry a heavy bucket toward the door.

MEGAN
Yeah! So he's punching buttons on
the calculator trying to explain
why the interest rate's a rip-off,
and Buddy's just got this stupid
look like...

Megan demonstrates. They laugh.

ALLISON
Has your dad always been so
serious?

Megan sobers momentarily.

MEGAN
 No, not always...
 (beat)
 Come on. They're out here.

EXT. FITZ BACK PORCH - DAY

Michael steps out of the house and looks off toward the barn.

MICHAEL
 (yelling)
 Megan! Dinner's ready!

They are too far away. He heads for the barn.

EXT. PIG FIELD - DAY

Allison and Megan step gingerly through the mud.

MEGAN
 Watch your step. These are the
 outsiders.

ALLISON
 The outsiders?

MEGAN
 Well, I call them that. They don't
 get to come inside like Jerry. We
 don't give them names, we don't get
 to know them. If you're going to
 send them to slaughter, you can't
 make it personal.

ALLISON
 I could see that. So what about
 Jerry?

MEGAN
 Dad got a little too close.

Allison laughs and almost slips. Megan giggles and catches her.

ALLISON
 So just dump it in? You don't
 clean the trough first?

MEGAN
 (laughing)
 Clean it? Yeah, hold on, let me
 get our dishrag from the house.

Michael nears them.

ALLISON
 (hillbilly drawl)
 Hey! Look at me, Farmer Mike. I's
 just like you feeding the piggies
 here down on the farm.

She struggles to lift the bucket.

MICHAEL
Very funny.

ALLISON
I hope you cook better for us!

Allison and Megan, already giggly, start laughing again.

Michael, shaking his head at their silliness, steps around a large mud puddle and reaches for the bucket.

MICHAEL
Here. Let me help.

Michael puts his arms around Allison.

ALLISON
I've got it.

Allison, trying to keep it from him, wobbles. Michael lets go awkwardly and Allison falls in the mud with a SPLAT!

MICHAEL
Oh! I'm sorry, Renee. Let me help.

He reaches down. Taking his hand, Allison drags him down into the mud.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Hey!

Allison laughs, taking some slop and slinging it at Michael.

MEGAN
Easy, Miss Hopper. Don't spoil his dinner!

There's a lot of laughing as Michael pins Allison down.

ALLISON
(amidst laughter)
Stop!

Allison heaves handfuls of mud at Michael. Megan, in stitches, shields herself from flying mud.

Several pigs plop down to join in the muddy mess.

Allison scrambles away into the protection of Michael's arms. Realizing the situation, they pull back.

INT. FITZ KITCHEN - NIGHT

The three sit at the dinner table. Allison wears baggy old clothes of Michael's. Hair messed. Michael has a spot of mud smudged across his forehead.

MICHAEL
 So, since the proceeds go to the school, Megan and I figured we'd better at least raise some pigs for the festival. But believe it or not, they do grow on you.

ALLISON
 I've noticed.

Allison looks at her feet where Jerry lies.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
 This is good. You cook like this every night?

MICHAEL
 Oh, it's nothing.

Silence as Michael and Allison eat.

Megan beams, looking at both of them.

Michael notices Megan's staring.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
 What?

MEGAN
 Nothing.

Megan starts eating.

EXT. BUDDY'S AUTO REPAIR - NIGHT

Carrying her muddy clothes, Allison walks to the door. She is smiling to herself remembering the evening.

A Cadillac is parked at the side of the house. Lost in her thoughts, she doesn't notice.

As she reaches for the door, it swings open REVEALING Brad.

INT. BUDDY'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

BRAD
 Allison! Hey!

Allison, stunned, drops her muddy clothes.

Brad grabs her in a bear hug. She struggles to free herself.

ALLISON
 Brad! What the hell are you doing here?!

BRAD
 Hello would've been fine.

ALLISON

Oh, I didn't mean...Look, I called you for weeks and nothing. Now you just show up out of nowhere, it's just a little overwhelming, that's all.

Avoiding Brad, Allison moves between Buddy and the TV. Buddy leans to the side to see.

BRAD

Sorry. I had heat on me for nearly a month. It wasn't so easy to just phone and say, hello.

(beat)

Whose clothes are you wearing?

ALLISON

These? Oh, I was at a farm and fell...

BRAD

Farm? What've you been doing?

Spotting her drama book on the floor, Allison inconspicuously kicks it under the couch.

ALLISON

You know just hanging with...Buddy here.

Buddy extends the bowl of popcorn, still glued to the tube.

BRAD

Yeah, fun.

(beat)

So, did you see my new wheels? The Caddy? I hooked up with some old pals in Detroit. Part of the UAW. I've got our next gig all set up.

ALLISON

Great. Can't wait.

BRAD

We can drive up there tomorrow.

ALLISON

When? I can't leave tomorrow. I've...I've...got things to settle.

BRAD

Oh...I see...you got your own little con going here. That's cool. I can stay a little while, help out.

ALLISON

No. I mean, I have to do this by myself. I'll catch up with you there in a week or two, OK?

Brad stares down Allison.

BRAD
You want me to go?

ALLISON
I'll explain it later...Please?

She leans against him, arms around his neck. Eyes pouting.

BRAD
Sure, Allison, whatever you say.
Can I at least stay till tomorrow?

Brad attempts a kiss, but Allison ducks and heads to the stairs.

ALLISON
Of course. You can leave in the morning. I'm going to bed.

BRAD
There's a good idea.

Brad follows.

ALLISON
Buddy'll set you up on the couch.
Just write some directions for
where you'll be, OK? Good night.

*

BRAD
Allison, wait...

The sound of a door slam.

Brad slumps on the couch next to Buddy. Buddy offers the bowl.

INT. BUDDY'S LIVING ROOM - DAWN

Crammed uncomfortably on the couch, Brad sleeps in his boxers.

Allison sneaks down the stairs, ready for school.

Passing Brad she hesitates. She reaches to touch him. Instead she pulls the drama book from under the couch.

She pauses momentarily at the door, then exits.

INT. FITZ KITCHEN - DAY

Michael and Megan eat cereal.

MEGAN
I'll be home about 5:30. Miss
Hopper said we're gonna run through
the first act.

MICHAEL
5:30? Aren't you rehearsing in
class?

MEGAN
Dad, I'm the lead. We don't have
enough time just in class.

Michael sets down his spoon.

MICHAEL
What about your chores?

MEGAN
I'll do them after.

MICHAEL
Maybe you should do a smaller part.
I don't want you falling behind in
your schoolwork.

MEGAN
I won't.

MICHAEL
Megan, I'm telling you no. You'll
have to ask for a different part.

MEGAN
Dad!

MICHAEL
Megan, this is a big step for you.
I'm not sure you're ready.

Michael regrets his words as soon as they are out of his
mouth.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
I just don't want you to get hurt.

Megan shoves her cereal away and heads toward the door.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Megan. Hold on. Let's talk about
this on the way to school.

MEGAN (O.S.)
I'm riding my bike.

The door slams. Michael exhales and pushes his cereal away
too.

EXT. BUDDY'S AUTO REPAIR - DAY

Brad staggers out the front door.

He tosses his duffle bag in his trunk and scans the town.

EXT. MAIN STREET, JASPER - DAY

Brad shuffles past Lu Lu's store. Betty, the elderly woman from the hair salon, exits dressed in a sleek leather outfit.

Crossing the street he passes Barney and Lois.

 LOIS
That's 8 tickets this month,
Barney!

 BARNEY
The law has to be enforced, Lois.

 LOIS
 (calming)
OK. Just keep it for me, and we'll
talk about it at dinner tonight.

Lois gives Barney a kiss.

 BARNEY
Be careful, honey.

Brad spots the diner and enters.

INT. FRANCOIS' DINER - DAY

Brad at a table stuffs down food. Francois stands nearby. Bill and Annie are in the next booth reading the newspaper.

 FRANCOIS
Everything was good? You like?
You like? This is the finest
restaurant in this city. Very
clean!

 BRAD
Yes. Mmm. Great. Thanks.

Francois returns to the kitchen as Rita enters the diner.

 RITA
There you are.

Brad looks around to see whom she's talking to. To his surprise she slides into his booth.

 RITA (CONT'D)
Welcome to Jasper! Buddy's told me
all about you.

 BRAD
He did?

 RITA
Of course. It must be fun having a
movie star as your sister.

BRAD
 Oh, it sure is. She's the best
 movie star sister a guy could ever
 have.

RITA
 I don't have to tell you this, but
 we just love, Renee.

BRAD
 Renee?

RITA
 She's doing a great job teaching
 those kids.

BRAD
 (choking)
 Kids?

RITA
 Well, I won't keep bothering you.
 Welcome to Jasper.

Brad fakes a smile and continues to eat.

Rita plops in the next booth with Bill and Annie.

RITA (CONT'D)
 Oh, sweeties. I just heard. I
 think it's just tragic.

Annie wipes a tear from her eye with a napkin as Rita hugs
 her.

RITA (CONT'D)
 Jessica was groomed to play that
 part.

BILL
 We're looking into it.

Gus brings Rita a cup of coffee.

RITA
 Thanks, dearie. You know what else
 I heard? The mayor thinks we can
 raise even more money this year at
 the festival.

Brad stops his fork in mid-air. Listening.

RITA (CONT'D)
 I know! Isn't that wonderful. With
 the carnival, pig auction, and
 anonymous donations...

Bill beams with pride.

RITA (CONT'D)
There's talk it's over \$15,000.

Brad, a shifty smile.

BRAD
Allison! You sneaky little dog...

Francois sets down a check for Brad. Brad looks at the check with a smirk.

Brad starts coughing terribly and falls to the floor. Out comes a cockroach.

Francois' eyes bulge in shock.

INT. JASPER HIGH LUNCH ROOM - DAY

A glob of nasty food is slapped onto a lunch tray.

Allison cringes and reluctantly takes her tray. She joins the students walking toward tables.

They pass Michael at a table alone with his book.

ALLISON
Hey guys, let's give old Mr. Fitz some company.

BECKY
Miss Hopper...

DUNCAN
She's just kidding.

Allison sits at Michael's table.

ANGUS
She is such good actress.

RUNT
I think she's serious.

JESSICA
It's called method acting.

ANGUS
Wow, the realism.

The kids descend on Michael's table. He's uncomfortable.

ALLISON
So whatcha reading, Farmer Mike?

MICHAEL
Huh? Megan's novel for English. I thought I'd read it in case she needed any help.

ALLISON
You are unreal.

DUNCAN
That is so cool! Could you
summarize chapter eight. We've got
a test today.

Megan passing by the table.

BECKY
Megan. Pull up a chair.

MEGAN
No, thanks. I gotta study.

ALLISON
Come on, Megan. I won't tell
anyone Mr. Fitz is your dad.

MEGAN
No, really... I can't.

MICHAEL
You can take a little break. Sit
down.

MEGAN
I don't want to, OK?

MICHAEL
Megan!

ALLISON
It's OK, she doesn't have...

MICHAEL
No, she can join us.

MEGAN
(sarcastic)
You always know what's best for me,
don't you?

Megan slams her tray down and storms out of the cafeteria.

Frustrated, Michael prepares to follow her. Allison rises
and puts a hand on his shoulder to stop him.

INT. SCHOOL ENTRANCE - DAY

Megan disappears down the hall as Allison hurries after her.

ALLISON
Megan! Wait up!

Allison is cut off as the office door opens. Brad and
Vandorp enter the hall like best buddies.

VANDORP
That is unbelievable!
(seeing Allison)
Oh, Renee! Hey! I want to thank
you for inviting your brother to
town.

ALLISON
Hey...hey...Bro. I thought you
were leaving today?

BRAD
Good one, Sis. I was just telling
old Jimmy here about your plan for
the festival.

ALLISON
My plan?

VANDORP
Very impressive. Brad told me all
about how you raised money for
Oprah Winfrey's Stray Cat
charitable fund!

BRAD
Well, they didn't name the building
the "Renee Hopper Center for Pet
Grooming" for nothing. You know,
Jim, I was just thinking that with
some of that extra money, you could
put skylights here in the lobby.
Maybe a statue of you right over
there.

VANDORP
Ooo...Now that would be nice.

Allison scowls at Brad. Brad winks back.

BRAD
Well, I'll let you guys get back to
work. You're doing a great job
with these kids, Jim.

VANDORP
I don't know how to thank you.

BRAD
Hey, we're glad we can be involved.
Right...Renee?

ALLISON
Um, I'd like to talk to you.

BRAD
(to VanDorp)
Always wanting to plan.
(to Allison)
(MORE)

BRAD(CONT'D)

Hey, get to class...I know how you love those kids. I'll be in touch, Jim.

Brad shakes Vandorp's hand and exits.

Vandorp flashes Allison a toothy grin as she uncomfortably returns the smile.

INT. DRAMA CLASSROOM - DAY

Allison enters, frazzled.

The kids huddle around Megan. Her eyes are red.

ALLISON
Megan. There you are.

BECKY
What are we going to do, Miss Hopper?

RUNT
Mr. Fitz won't let her do the lead.

ANGUS
We can't do the play without Megan.

JESSICA
I could do it. I know the part.

DUNCAN
Oh, get over it, Jessica. You suck.

Jessica's jaw drops.

ALLISON
Duncan, zip it. Jessica you're perfect for your part. Everyone just calm down. Megan is our lead.

Megan looks up quizzically.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
Now what exactly did your dad tell you?

MEGAN
He said I couldn't rehearse after school because of my chores. He thinks that...

ALLISON
OK. OK. We can work with that. You guys just concentrate on the play.

The kids look uncertain.

EXT. BUDDY'S AUTO REPAIR - DAY

Brad is washing the Cadillac as Allison marches up.

ALLISON
What in the world are you doing?

BRAD
Hey, Babe.

ALLISON
Don't "hey babe" me. Was I unclear last night?

BRAD
Well you certainly were cold. You turn me on when you're like that.

ALLISON
I've been here for over a month. You have no idea what I've been up to. You can't just...

Brad pulls a little box from the car. He hands it to her.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
What's this?

BRAD
I wanted to give it to you last night. Open it.

Allison opens the box. Inside are a set of keys and a tiny Ford Explorer like the ones in the Chicago scam.

ALLISON
Brad, I don't have time for this...

BRAD
There's a gold one waiting for you in Detroit.

Allison doesn't understand.

BRAD (CONT'D)
The real thing. You have no idea how rich this scam is, Allie. Anyway, I know you like the Explorers...So I got you one with leather seats and the little LCD screens in the head rests.

*
*
*

Allison softens a little.

ALLISON
Are you serious?

BRAD

We're back in the big leagues, now. Although this little con you've got going seems fun. Do you like, smoke in the teacher's lounge between classes?

ALLISON

No. The teacher's lounge is a busted copier and a water machine.

*

Allison tosses the keys in the air.

ALLISON (CONT'D)

Is this the kind you can start by remote in the winter?

Brad nods as Allison's eyes light up.

BRAD

I found out about the Pig Festival.

ALLISON

Pork Festival.

BRAD

Whatever. I know that they raise fifteen thousand cash.

ALLISON

Fifteen thousand? How much does a pig cost?

BRAD

Like you didn't know.

ALLISON

I didn't.

Brad looks into her eyes.

BRAD

Man, you're good. Anyway, whatever you had planned, I got a better hustle. Remember those fake bonds I found in Chicago?

ALLISON

Sure.

BRAD

So we run a big company out of Mexico. We have this nice deal with non-profits. They give us American cash in exchange for South American bonds worth double the value. They make money for the school, we're able to funnel some of our money and beat rising inflation rates.

ALLISON
Vandorp fell for that?

BRAD
He said he'd read about them on the
Internet.

ALLISON
(laughing)
That is good.

Brad, scrubbing on the car.

BRAD
What's with the birds out here?

He slings water across the car, splashing Allison.

Playfully, Allison grabs the hose and squirts him in the leg.
There is laughing as he chases her.

MONTAGE

EXT. JASPER CITY STREET - DAY

Angus hangs a poster advertising the big Pork Festival.

EXT. PIG FIELD - NIGHT

Allison and the kids hide in the ditch.

Megan opens the barn door and waves for them to come.

They scramble from the ditch, jump the fence and slip into
the barn. Miss Bea trails the group. Leaping the fence, she
catches her foot and crashes to the ground.

INT. FITZ BARN - NIGHT

A makeshift stage of hay and bags of pig feed.

Allison directs Megan and Jessica on stage. Miss Bea minds
the script. Angus takes care of Jerry the pig. Duncan
guards the door.

INT. BUDDY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Allison is sandwiched between Buddy and Brad on the couch.
Buddy and Allison gripped by the TV, share the popcorn.

Brad sleeps; his head resting on Allison's shoulder.

INT. JASPER HIGH MAIN OFFICE - DAY

Allison awkwardly passes Michael in a tight spot in the
office. Michael, looking after her, runs into the wall.

INT. FITZ BARN - EVENING

Becky and Miss Bea paint a canvas flat.

Allison holds a board as Runt hammers on a single nail. Unable to drive it in. He sets down his hammer and wipes his brow.

Megan picks up the hammer and drives the nail in with one swing.

Runt looks at the nail, amazed.

INT. FRANCOIS' DINER - DAY

Brad sits with Vandorp, laughing and eating.

Gus scrubs the floor with a toothbrush. Pointing to a spot he missed, Francois smacks him upside the head.

Allison walks by the window with Michael and sees Brad in the diner. She distracts Michael, and quickly walks away.

EXT. PIG FIELD - DAY

Michael, passing the pigs, notices the trough is empty. He shakes his head as he grabs the hose and fills the trough.

INT. DRAMA CLASSROOM - DAY

Allison gives Megan a makeover and does her hair. Megan looks great.

EXT. JASPER CITY STREET - DAY

TOWNSPEOPLE hang banners for the festival. Some are building the stage on the main street.

At the corner, MAN 1 holds the end of a 10-foot plank under his arm and a ticket in the other hand. At the other end of the plank, Officer Barney hands a ticket to MAN 2.

Felix pounds a table as he and the Mayor argue over the stage blueprints.

INT. FITZ BARN - NIGHT

Allison sits on a bail of hay as Megan and Angus rehearse.

Duncan and Runt sneak up and stuff hay down the back of Allison's shirt.

Hay fight.

INT. BUDDY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Brad rips open a box from UPS. He pulls out a stack of bonds which he shows to Allison.

Allison tries to hide her apprehension.

INT. BUDDY'S GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

Under the light of a small lamp, Allison sits alone on the bed fingering the toy truck and thinking.

The sign for "Police Station" shines through the window.

EXT. PIG FIELD - DAY

Michael carries tools to the barn. He notices the trough is empty again.

INT. FITZ BARN - DAY

Michael opens a cabinet to put the tools away. To his right, he spots a patch of blue fabric sticking out from under a hay bale.

Curious he climbs around the bales... discovers all the props from the drama production.

END MONTAGE

INT. FITZ KITCHEN - NIGHT

Michael prepares food, while Jerry begs at his feet.

MICHAEL
You're not getting any, so go away.

Jerry doesn't budge.

Megan bounces in and sits at the table with her script.

MEGAN
Hi, Dad.

MICHAEL
I noticed that you didn't fill the trough with fresh water yesterday.

MEGAN
Really? That's weird. Must have forgot.

MICHAEL
You were out there for two hours.

MEGAN
Well you know, I was hanging out with Jerry, doing homework...

MICHAEL
Megan Elisabeth. You want to tell me the truth?

Megan freezes.

Michael starts for the table, stumbling over Jerry.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
 Jerry, would you get out of the way.
 (beat)
 Megan, there's an entire set in our barn. What's going on?

MEGAN
 Dad. Look, I finished all my chores pretty much every day. I didn't stay after school. That's what you said...

MICHAEL
 You lied to me, Megan.

MEGAN
 But Miss Hopper said that...

MICHAEL
 Oh, Miss Hopper said. Well, Megan, I'm your...

Michael turns toward the counter nearly falling over Jerry.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
 (gathering himself)
 I'm you're father. How am I supposed to trust you? Did Miss Hopper tell you to lie?

MEGAN
 No. She just showed us a solution.

MICHAEL
 A dishonest solution.

MEGAN
 You can't stop me from doing this part. I'm not a little kid!

MICHAEL
 Megan.

Megan stomps to the foot of the stairs.

MEGAN
 It's not fair. If mom were here, she'd let me, and you know it.

She pounds up the stairs.

Michael follows, side stepping Jerry. He stops in the doorway.

MICHAEL
 Megan! Come down here.

Silence. Frustration.

With a sigh, he turns...falling out of frame with a thud.

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

Jerry...

INT. BUDDY'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Brad roots through the refrigerator, dressed in boxers. Through the doorway, Buddy can be seen sitting on the living room couch.

BRAD

(yelling)

Hey, Buddy, you got any more of those Rocky Mountain things?

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

BUDDY

Nope, finished 'em for breakfast.

A knock at the door. Buddy gets up and opens it, REVEALING Michael.

BUDDY (CONT'D)

Michael! What brings you out here?

Allison, coming down the stairs, stops in the nook between the living room and the kitchen.

MICHAEL

Hi, Buddy. Can I talk to Renee?

At the sound of Michael's voice, Allison glances into the kitchen. Brad is walking toward her carrying a pie. Panic.

She throws the door to the kitchen closed.

BUDDY

Here, let me take your coat. Come on in.

Allison rushes to the front door.

ALLISON

(speaking quickly)

Hey Michael. What's up? I was just about to take an evening walk. Would you like to join me? Great. OK, see you later, Buddy.

She shoves Michael out the door and slams it behind her.

Buddy shrugs and tosses Michael's coat on the couch. He walks back toward the kitchen and opens the door.

Brad stands, pie in his face.

BUDDY
Were you gonna share that?

EXT. BUDDY'S AUTO REPAIR - NIGHT

There is an opening in the woods behind the house and Allison bolts down the path.

MICHAEL
Renee. Hold on.

ALLISON
This way. Gotta keep up the pace.

She disappears into the grove of trees. Michael follows her.

EXT. GROVE OF TREES - NIGHT

The path opens to a field, revealing a vast moonlit spread of farmland. Allison speeds into the clearing.

Moments later, Michael stumbles out, looking for her.

MICHAEL
For crying out loud, Renee, what are you doing?

Michael leans against the nearby fence rail. Frustrated.

Allison keeps going.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Did you think I wouldn't find out?

Allison slows and turns.

ALLISON
Find out what?

MICHAEL
Your little secret.

Allison approaches Michael at the fence.

ALLISON
Michael...Look, it's not what you think...

MICHAEL
What kind of example is this for the kids? You knew I didn't want her to have the lead.

ALLISON
Oh...the play. That's no big deal... The students and I...

MICHAEL
It is a big deal. She's my
daughter. I'm responsible for
more than just her homework.

ALLISON
I was just trying to help.

MICHAEL
I've spent the last sixteen years
raising this child. I gave her a
name. I taught her to ride a bike,
cooked for her, taught her values.
The last thing I need is help from
someone I can't trust.

Michael goes to leave.

ALLISON
Michael, wait.

Wanting to keep walking, he stops. Irked.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
You're doing a great job with her.
She's a good kid.

Michael exhales, leaning his back against the fence.

A short distance away, Allison sits on the fence.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
I mean... my dad was sent to prison
when I was eight. He stuck me with
his business partners. I never did
a school drama, played softball,
talked on the phone with other
girls.
(beat)
Sometimes on a clear night like
this, I'd go out to the park, Haven
Park in Chicago, and look at the
stars and wonder what it would be
like to have...to have...even
someone to ground me.

Michael looks at her. Sympathy.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
You're a good dad. And she's so
talented.

MICHAEL
Yeah, well... that's not the...

ALLISON
I mean, really talented. It's
obviously from her mother's side.

Michael manages a weak smile, which quickly fades.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
Did I say something wrong?

MICHAEL
When Heather, my wife, started chemotherapy, she was real weak. Couldn't get out of bed. Megan would come in with her dolls, and they'd act out little stories...

ALLISON
I'm sorry. I didn't know.

Allison looks down, unsure what to say.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
When did she...

MICHAEL
Ten years. The chemo was unbearable. So when we heard about this place in Mexico... They had a natural healing process with fruits, herbs, and blood treatments. It was expensive, but...Well, she stopped the chemo, and we went down there. The place was cramped, dirty. They didn't do anything unusual. A month later we came back, but she only looked worse. Megan was six.

ALLISON
Oh, Michael.

MICHAEL
After the funeral, I got a lawyer and tried to contact them. The place was gone. That's when we moved to Jasper. Where people are true to their word. I just don't want Megan to hurt anymore.

ALLISON
You're going to be so proud of her. I promise.

They gaze up at the stars.

EXT. BUDDY'S AUTO REPAIR - NIGHT

Allison and Michael walk slowly toward the house.

MICHAEL
So maybe you'd like to join me...and Megan at the festival tomorrow.

ALLISON
Sure. That'd be fun.

MICHAEL
Great. I'll see you there.

Allison nods as he turns to go. She looks after him momentarily then enters the house.

About to climb in the truck, Michael stops.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
(to himself)
Jacket.

Michael goes to the house. Through the window, he sees Brad embracing Allison. Confused, Michael turns back to his truck.

Allison pushes Brad away.

INT. BUDDY'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Buddy is gone. Brad paces, shaking his head.

ALLISON
Let's just forget it OK?

BRAD
Are you crazy? It's like taking
candy from a baby.

ALLISON
They're good people, Brad. I
just...

BRAD
Good people? Listen to yourself,
Allison. Since when did that come
into play?

ALLISON
This is different. I've lived
here. It's not...

BRAD
What is with you? You're like a
different person. I've gotta get
you out of here. You're losing it,
Allie.

ALLISON
I won't do it. Just go to Detroit
and I'll be there in a couple
days...

Brad is in Allison's face.

BRAD
This is going down and you're not
gonna stop it. I will get this
money with or without you.
(MORE)

BRAD(CONT'D)

You want me to announce to everyone
who the real Renee Hopper is? Do
you, Allison O'Connor?
(beat)
You're gonna help me finish this.
Then we'll both go to Detroit.

Allison moves towards the stairs.

BRAD (CONT'D)

You'll thank me for this. You
will.

She exits up the stairs hurriedly.

EXT. THE PORK FESTIVAL - DAY

The farmland at the edge of town has been transformed into a
country fair. There are the usual cheap rides, game booths.

EXT. THE PORK FESTIVAL, STRONGMAN GAME - DAY

Vandorp stands with an oversized mallet and a wad of money.
SARAH, a girl about five stuffs her face with cotton candy.

SARAH

I want the bunny!!!!

VANDORP

Hold on, Sarah. I've got it this
time.

CARNIVAL WORKER 1, A grimey, little, 50ish man, takes
Vandorp's cash.

CARNIVAL WORKER 1

You are getting closer. Much
closer.

Vandorp musters all his strength and pounds on the pad.

Carnival Worker 1 presses a button on the back of the game.
The metal ball falls short of ringing the bell.

VANDORP

Ooooo! That was close! OK, give
me three more.

*

Handing Carnival Worker 1 another bill.

EXT. THE PORK FESTIVAL, GAME AREA - DAY

TOWNSPEOPLE mill about the grassy area stuffing down
corndogs, popcorn, and various treats.

Allison hands out flyers to passersby. Approaching Barney.

*

ALLISON

Don't forget the big show tomorrow
night.

BARNEY
Of course not.

Barney takes the flyer as Lois marches up waving a ticket.

LOIS
Barney, this is the last straw!

BARNEY
When parallel parking you gotta be within 12 inches of the curb, Lois.

LOIS
We're parking IN A FIELD, Barney!
There is no curb. So help me,
Renee, they'll give me more than a
ticket for what I'm going to do to
this man...

Allison smiles.

ALLISON
Lois, I think he's just concerned
for you.

LOIS
Concerned?! Well, I find it...

ALLISON
He doesn't want you to get hurt.
Think of each ticket as a little
love note.

Lois softens, looking at her husband with hopeful eyes.

LOIS
Barney?

BARNEY
Well, I... I... Uh...

Lois throws her arms around Barney.

ALLISON
See you kids tomorrow.

Allison spots Michael buying an "elephant ear."

ALLISON (CONT'D)
There you are.

MICHAEL
Allison, hey. Hold on.

Michael finishes paying and joins her.

ALLISON
There's something I need to talk to
you about.

MICHAEL
Is something wrong?

ALLISON
Well, it's hard to explain...I haven't been completely honest.

MICHAEL
It's about your friend.

ALLISON
Friend?

MICHAEL
The guy I saw you with last night. I understand.

ALLISON
Oh, Brad. No. He's not my friend...I mean he's my friend, but in a brotherly sort of way...You know. Uh, yeah, he's my brother. You haven't met?

MICHAEL
Brother? Oh. No.

Megan runs up, food in hand.

MEGAN
Miss Hopper, hi.

ALLISON
Megan.

Vandorp and Sarah are walking nearby.

VANDORP
Hey! Michael, check out my lucky hat!

Vandorp pulls on a goofy orange hat, like the one on the stickers from the Chicago office.

MICHAEL
Where'd you get that thing?

VANDORP
I won it. Sharp, huh?

Allison pulls it off his head.

ALLISON
Don't wear that.

Vandorp grabs it back from Allison.

VANDORP
Hey. Win one yourself.

SARAH

Daddy! I want the frog! I want
the frog!

VANDORP

Ah, the softball toss. Little do
they know, I was a second string
right fielder back in junior high!

Hurrying away, he winks at them and starts pulling out money.

MICHAEL

What do you say we introduce Miss
Hopper to the wonder that is the
Appalachian Sled.

ALLISON

The what?

MEGAN

It's a tradition.

Megan grabs Michael and Allison by the hand dragging them
through the crowd.

MONTAGE

EXT. THE PORK FESTIVAL, APPALACHIAN SLED - DAY

The sled rattles swiftly around in a circle.

Allison, in the outer seat, is squished by Michael and Megan
as they press into her. Allison squeals in protest while
Michael and Megan laugh.

EXT. THE PORK FESTIVAL, AUCTION TENT - DAY

The Mayor is at a podium, as auctioneer. Felix stands
proudly next to several pigs as FARMERS bid. *

In the viewing stands, Allison, Megan, and Michael watch with
amusement. Michael slyly grabs Allison's hand and raises it
for a bid. She pulls it down, horrified. Megan and Michael
laugh.

EXT. THE PORK FESTIVAL, JUPITER JUMP - DAY

Michael, Megan, and Allison jump in the air filled plastic
chamber. Allison pushes Michael down and leaps over him.

EXT. THE PORK FESTIVAL, GAME AREA - EVENING

Vandorp, wearing his hat, carries an arm full of stuffed
animals as he chases Sarah. He spots Michael and Allison,
points to the hat, and flashes them the "thumbs up" sign.

EXT. THE PORK FESTIVAL, FOOD COURT - EVENING

Francois and Gus, at their food stand, sell hotdogs on a stick. Angus holds four in each hand.

Allison, Megan, and Michael split a swirl of cotton candy.

EXT. FERRIS WHEEL - EVENING

Allison and Michael, sitting in one of the baskets, descend as popcorn showers down on them. The basket above comes into frame REVEALING Angus and Megan dropping the popcorn.

The popcorn stops falling as their basket ascends.

MICHAEL

So what did you really want to talk to me about?

ALLISON

Huh? Uh...I can't remember. Must not have been important.

Michael shrugs and looks out across the farmland. Allison scans the fields in the opposite direction. After a moment, she rests her head on Michael's shoulder.

Startled, he smiles and puts his arm around her.

Their basket stops at the bottom next to Duncan, Becky, Runt, and Jessica standing in line.

BECKY

Hey, it's Miss Hopper and Mr. Fitz.

Michael turns his head quickly as Allison lifts her head and knocks him in the jaw accidentally.

JESSICA

That's disgusting.

DUNCAN

Way to go, Mr. Fitz.

Michael holds his chin while Allison rubs her head. They step out of their basket.

Brad stands behind one of the game booths. He watches Allison exit the Ferris Wheel.

EXT. THE PORK FESTIVAL, GAMES AREA - NIGHT

Allison and Michael walk along the row of games. Michael spots the basketball shoot. He picks up a ball and spins it between his hands.

MICHAEL

What do you say we make a bet?

ALLISON
Yeah, like what?

MICHAEL
How about, if I make all three, you
come over and cook dinner one
night.

ALLISON
You like TV dinners?

MICHAEL
And if I miss, you have to come
over and I'll cook.

Allison smiles.

ALLISON
OK, but I'm not feeding the pigs
again.

Michael readies his shot. Vandorp passes with his arms
loaded with stuffed animals and a sleeping Sarah.

Allison grabs his hat.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
We need to borrow this.

VANDORP
Need a little luck?

MICHAEL
Nope.

VANDORP
Well, keep it. I can't afford
anymore **luck**.

*

Vandorp walks on as Allison puts the hat on Michael's head.

Michael rolls his eyes up to see the brim of the hat. He
smirks and eyes the basket. **He shoots the ball.**

*

EXT. THE PORK FESTIVAL, PARKING FIELD - NIGHT

Michael and Allison walk between the rows of pick-ups.
Michael still adorning the hat.

ALLISON
So would you prefer the salisbury
steak or rigatoni alfredo? **The
steak comes with those cute red
potatoes.**

*
*
*

MICHAEL
I can see I'm gonna be spoiled.

They stop at Michael's truck. Allison leans against the
door.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
 You know, I had a really good time.

ALLISON
 How am I suppose to take you
 seriously with that hat on?

Allison pulls it off his head and tosses it in the truck window.

MICHAEL
 Hey, my lucky hat.
 (beat)
 Can I...uh...give you a ride home?

Over Michael's shoulder, Allison spots Brad sitting on the hood of his Cadillac eating a snowcone and watching her. Brad grins and waves.

ALLISON
 Uh...I can't...I mean...I'm just gonna walk.

MICHAEL
 Oh...Okay. Sure.

ALLISON
 Thanks for letting me crash the Fitz family party. I'll see you tomorrow.

Michael gets in his truck.

MICHAEL
 Yeah, tomorrow. Bye.

*

He drives away.

Allison approaches Brad, who is finishing his cone.

BRAD
 I'm surprised he likes you, Allie.
 You're not his sister.

ALLISON
 You're gonna scratch the hood.

MICHAEL
 You're good at this. If I didn't know better, I'd say you like him.

ALLISON
 You know. It's just another job.

She climbs in the car.

INT. JASPER HIGH MAIN OFFICE - DAY

As the copier spits out pages, Michael creates neat stacks on the lid of the machine.

The machine runs out of paper. Michael grabs a nearby ream, and pops open the side drawer. Something behind the copier catches his eye.

He pulls it out. The newspaper.

He scans the headline "CHICAGO SCAM UNRAVELLED!" Curious, He looks closer at the picture below.

CLOSE UP: The Harrison Building with cop cars surrounding it. In the corner of the picture, Allison is walking away from the building.

Michael sits.

EXT. JASPER CITY STREET - NIGHT

In the center of town, the stage and rows of chairs fill the street. Carnival lights illuminate the town as TOWNSPEOPLE mingle and take their seats.

Off to the side, Vandorp and the Mayor survey the crowd.

VANDORP

Where's Felix? Brad's supposed to be here any minute.

MAYOR DIPPER

Hold your horses. He's sorting the money now.

The Mayor heads off.

EXT. STAGE - DAY

Angus, in colonial garb, adjusts the microphone.

ANGUS

Testing. Testing.

Duncan, embarrassed, peeks out from the curtain. He is dressed as a pig.

DUNCAN

That's fine! Come on already!

EXT. JASPER CITY STREET - NIGHT

Michael pushes his way through the crowd to Vandorp.

MICHAEL

Jim, we need to talk.

VANDORP

Not right now, Mike. I'm looking for Brad.

MICHAEL
This is important. It's about
Renee. I don't know how to even
put this...

MEGAN (O.S.)
Dad!

Megan runs up, excited. She is dazzling in an elaborate
period gown. Her hair glistens under the lights.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
Where have you been? It's about to
start!

Michael takes a long look at Megan. Captivated by her.

MICHAEL
Wow. You look great, honey.

MEGAN
I saved you a spot at the front,
OK?
(beat)
Augh! Can you believe this! Look
at me! This is the best day of my
life!

Megan kisses him on the cheek and races off. Michael watches
her go, dazed.

VANDORP
So you wanted to talk to me about
Renee?

Michael snaps to.

MICHAEL
Huh? Oh, yeah. I need to show
you...
(beat)
Wait. Why are you looking for
Brad?

VANDORP
He's helping with the exchange.
This money'll take Jasper High into
the twentieth century.

Michael glances down at the newspaper headline.

MICHAEL
What do you mean exchange?

VANDORP
We're taking the festival money...
And Brad and Renee say...

MICHAEL
 OK. Look. I want you to put a
 hold on everything. I need to
 talk to Renee. Please. Don't do
 anything.

Michael pushes through the crowd.

EXT. BACKSTAGE - DAY

Costumed kids are huddled around Allison.

ALLISON
 OK, guys. This is it.

ANGUS
 I can't go out there. I'm gonna
 mix up my lines, I know it.

BECKY
 Miss Hopper, Miss Bea just stepped
 through the canyon backdrop! It's
 totally ripped.

ALLISON
 Hey. Stop. Listen up. Listen to
 me! Angus, you can do it. If
 anyone drops a line, someone cover.

Megan nods. Her eyes are filled with excitement.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
 And forget about the set. Forget
 about the people. This is about
 you guys and the story of Jasper.

She looks into the eyes of each student.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
 You guys'll be great.

Hugging them.

EXT. SIDE OF STAGE - NIGHT

Michael tries to go backstage. Miss Bea guards the side.

MICHAEL
 Is Miss Hopper back there? I need
 to talk to her.

MISS BEA
 I'm sorry, Mr. Fitz, but we're
 trying to put on a play here. You
 can talk to her at intermission.

Canned banjo music plays as the curtain opens.

Michael, frustrated, runs his hand through his hair.

MICHAEL
 OK. You know what...just give her
 this as soon as you can.

Handing her the folded newspaper, he moves to his seat.

EXT. STAGE - CONTINUOUS

A poorly painted scene of an old colonial town. A wagon sits
 center stage as Angus and Runt load it with crates.

Duncan, in a pig outfit, enters stage left.

DUNCAN
 (embarrassed)
 Oink. Oink. Oink.

EXT. JASPER CITY STREET, AUDIENCE - CONTINUOUS

Lu Lu beams with pride and nudges Lois next to her.

LU LU
 That's my boy!

Lois nods. Impressed.

EXT. STAGE - CONTINUOUS

ANGUS
 Ah, a beautiful day to start our
 journey. Little Timmy, round up
 the pigs. We're about to shove off.

RUNT
 Okay, Pa.

Runt has a large stick and whacks Duncan with it. After a
 few swats, Duncan grabs the stick angrily.

DUNCAN
 Hey!

Duncan, realizing he's on stage, let's go of the stick.

DUNCAN (CONT'D)
 Uh...Oink. Oink.

Duncan crawls off stage chased by Runt.

EXT. BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Duncan and Runt pass Allison. She's enjoying every minute.

EXT. STAGE - CONTINUOUS

Jessica, in a hooped skirt, enters. Throwing herself at
 Angus.

JESSICA
 (bad Scarlet O'Hara
 impression)
 Oh, Jeb! Don't leave me. The
 prairies are dangerous. Why, oh,
 why can't you stay here in New
 York?

ANGUS
 Don't try to stop me, Roxanne.
 This town is caging me in. I need
 open land, something better,
 something bigger.

JESSICA
 But what about us?! You can't tell
 me I don't mean something to you.
 We have a passion that you and
 Clarabel never had.

ANGUS
 I can't bear to leave you either,
 Roxanne. Why don't you come with
 us?

JESSICA
 But Clarabel, won't she find out
 about... the baby?

MUSIC surges. She rubs her stomach.

EXT. JASPER CITY STREET, AUDIENCE - CONTINUOUS

Rita covers her mouth excited. Betty, wide-eyed, fans
 herself.

EXT. STAGE - CONTINUOUS

Angus pulls her close. Jessica's hat pokes him in the eye.

ANGUS
 Ooo. Uh...She didn't know here,
 and she doesn't have to know there.

EXT. JASPER CITY STREET, AUDIENCE - CONTINUOUS

The Mayor looks on, confused by what he is seeing.

Buddy munches on popcorn, hanging on every word.

Bill and Annie are full of pride at Jessica's performance.

EXT. STAGE - CONTINUOUS

Angus looks behind him toward the balcony.

ANGUS
 Quick, she's coming! You've got to
 hide.

Angus pushes Jessica into the covered wagon. He gets caught in her petticoats and must struggle to untangle himself.

From the balcony, Megan makes a grand entrance.

MEGAN

Jebediah! The children are almost packed. Today we will embark on a journey. We shake the dust of this town from our feet and start a fresh. Today, our adventure begins!

EXT. JASPER CITY STREET, AUDIENCE - CONTINUOUS

Michael watches Megan, smiling.

EXT. STAGE - CONTINUOUS

Megan flows gracefully down the stairs.

EXT. BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Allison watches proudly. Miss Bea comes up behind Allison. Handing her the newspaper she whispers into Allison's ear.

Allison, confused, unfolds the paper and sees the headline and picture. Her joy is deflated.

Looking up from the paper, she looks to the audience.

EXT. JASPER CITY STREET, AUDIENCE - CONTINUOUS

ALLISON'S POV:

Michael still smiling. Over his shoulder...

Brad approaches Vandorp who stands at the back of the audience. Vandorp shakes his hand and points toward the stage.

Brad, irritated, rolls his eyes then feigns a smile.

EXT. BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Kids push set pieces, grab props, and put on costumes.

Miss Bea applies war paint on Becky in an Indian outfit.

EXT. STAGE - NIGHT

Megan searches through the wagon as Runt stands nearby.

MEGAN

Timmy, go get your father! Our food rations are gone too!

RUNT

Gone? But Mother, we won't be to the next trading post for a full week.

MEGAN

I know. Timmy, something's definitely not right. First, someone loosened the wheel on our wagon. Then that stray arrow took off the lobe of my right ear. And now the food is missing. We've got to get through this mountain pass by nightfall or we'll be trapped in Indian territory.

RUNT

Momma, I'm scared. Why doesn't Daddy do something?

MEGAN

You go hide with your father. I'll take care of everything.

Megan pulls an enormous musket from the wagon, ominously.

Miss Bea walks across the stage carrying a sign reading "INTERMISSION" as the curtain drops on top of her. She fights it off.

EXT. JASPER CITY STREET, AUDIENCE - CONTINUOUS

Eruption of applause.

Francois jumps to his feet, clapping furiously.

FRANCOIS

Bravo! Magnifico!

He looks over at Gus who is just sitting and applauding. Francois smacks Gus over the head with his program.

Gus springs up expressing the same excitement as Francois.

EXT. BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

The kids disappear toward a dressing area.

Allison looks out between a crack in the curtain.

EXT. JASPER CITY STREET, AUDIENCE - CONTINUOUS

ALLISON'S POV: Brad shows Vandorp the bond certificates.

EXT. BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Allison swallows hard.

Michael walks up behind her.

MICHAEL
It's been a great show, so far
hasn't it?

ALLISON
Michael... I...

MICHAEL
Yeah. The whole audience is on the
edge of their seat. Can't wait to
see how it ends.

ALLISON
Look, I'm sorry. This is...is very
hard to explain right now.

MICHAEL
Try me.

ALLISON
I didn't plan any of this. But I
can fix it. I can. You've got to
believe me.

MICHAEL
You know, I've always wondered why
Megan loved to pretend. She has an
imagination just like her mother's.
I've always been more realistic.
But, I was thinking tonight...
and...you know, it's like when
someone's on stage...Just for a
moment, they can become someone
else and forget about their past.

Silence. Neither of them look at each other.

ALLISON
Does the show have to end?

Becky comes running up from the side.

BECKY
Let's go, Ms. Hopper. We're almost
ready.

ALLISON
OK, I'm coming.

She turns back toward Michael, pleading.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
I need you to trust me, Michael. I
promise, I'd never do anything to
hurt this town...to hurt you.

There is a long pause as Michael looks deeply into her eyes.

Allison can't maintain eye contact any longer. She runs to
join the kids.

EXT. STAGE - NIGHT

Several kids lay around a battered wagon, covered with arrows. Duncan, in his pig outfit, is on his back, arrow in the heart.

Megan lights a bomb and throws it off stage.

EXT. BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Becky catches the bomb, as Miss Bea mixes two chemicals in a beaker. Miss Bea sets the beaker on a shielded table. They both turn their backs and plug their ears.

EXT. STAGE - CONTINUOUS

From the side of the stage, a thundering EXPLOSION.

Becky, dressed as an Indian, staggers on stage and collapses.

EXT. JASPER CITY STREET, AUDIENCE - CONTINUOUS

Lu Lu wipes the stream of tears from her eyes.

Francois is practically in Gus' lap with wide-eyed fear.

EXT. STAGE - CONTINUOUS

Angus peeks out from under the wagon.

ANGUS
Are they gone?

Megan walks around the wagon and picks-up the musket.

MEGAN
Yes, they're gone, Jeb. But they
killed almost the entire herd.
There are only two pigs left.

EXT. JASPER CITY STREET, AUDIENCE - CONTINUOUS

Felix and the Mayor wipe tears from their eyes.

EXT. STAGE - CONTINUOUS

Jessica suddenly sits up, an arrow wedged under her arm.

JESSICA
Oh! Jeb! They hit me!

Angus runs over.

ANGUS
Oh, Roxanne! Roxanne, my love.
Are you, OK? The baby! Oh, no!

RUNT
 Roxanne? I thought you were the
 maid?

ANGUS
 Timmy, Clarabel. There's something
 I must tell you.

EXT. BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Allison paces. She peers through the curtain at the
 audience.

BRAD (O.S.)
 Excuse me, Miss, but could you
 watch my dog for a second? I've
 got a significant sum to go invest
 with my broker.

Allison turns.

Brad leans against a wall, casually swinging a plastic shoe
 bag.

ALLISON
 It's about time. I was getting
 worried.

BRAD
 This town is a goldmine. If they
 were anymore trusting, I could get
 the deed to the entire city.

ALLISON
 How much?

BRAD
 Twenty thousand.

ALLISON
 Serious? Let me see.

Brad tosses her the bag. Allison opens it on the ground next
 to a heap of costumes REVEALING rolls of cash.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
 We can't keep it in here. I've got
 a purse.

She wraps the money in a handkerchief and then stuffs the
 handkerchief in a leather purse.

BRAD
 (looks around anxiously)
 Come on, let's go.

She smiles, gets up, and holds out the purse to Brad. He
 doesn't take it.

BRAD (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

ALLISON
Huh?

BRAD
Allison. What is going on with
you?

He opens the purse and dumps it's contents on the ground. It is just a bunch of newspaper.

Allison smiles and turns to him playfully.

ALLISON
I can never get you! OK, here.
Let's go.

She hands him the plastic bag and kisses him on the cheek.

Brad grabs her arm strongly as she passes him.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
Ouch! Brad! Come on!

He takes the plastic bag and dumps the contents on the floor. More newspaper.

BRAD
Listen to me. Give me the cash and
get in the car.

ALLISON
Stop. You're hurting me. We can't
do this. It's not right. Let's
just forget it.

Brad throws her to the ground angrily.

He goes over to the pile of costumes and whips through them. Hidden underneath is the cash.

BRAD
You gotta get out of here, Allie.
Come on.

Allison doesn't move.

BRAD (CONT'D)
Damn it, get in the car!

Brad starts to walk away, expecting her to come.

ALLISON
No.

Changing tactics, Brad comes to her.

BRAD
Allison. I love you and I can't
let you do this. A couple days and
you're going to forget everything.
I promise.

ALLISON
Don't touch me. Don't ever touch
me, again. I'm done. It stops
here.

Brad gets up. He walks about ten steps away and turns.

BRAD
I'll be in Detroit.

ALLISON
I won't be coming.

Brad exhales in amazement.

BRAD
I think you've mistaken yourself
for someone who cares.

He rushes away.

Allison collapses to the ground and cries.

EXT. STAGE - NIGHT

Angus lowers a limp Jessica to the ground.

ANGUS
She's gone. Gone! Curse this
trail. Curse this land. I give
up. I'm sorry Clarabel, but it's
all over.

He throws himself on the ground.

EXT. JASPER CITY STREET, AUDIENCE - CONTINUOUS

Lois and Barney hold each other tight. They are both
weeping.

EXT. BACKSTAGE - SAME TIME

Allison, crying, rips a page from her notebook. She starts
writing a note: "MICHAEL, "

EXT. JASPER CITY STREET, AUDIENCE - NIGHT

Michael watching the stage, looks back briefly. He freezes.

Vandorp is showing the mayor the bond certificates.

Michael takes a deep breath, and looks back toward the stage.

EXT. STAGE - CONTINUOUS

Megan bends down beside Angus.

MEGAN

Jeb. It'll be OK. Look... the sun is coming up. Just look at this land. It's beautiful. We can't give up. Not now. We can build again here. Start over. I know that this journey was not what we expected, but it had a purpose. I forgive you, Jebediah. This land... is a clean slate. Together we can build something that will stand apart from the wilderness of life. This is our land. This is Jasper.

The curtain closes. APPLAUSE.

The curtain opens and the students bow.

EXT. JASPER CITY STREET, AUDIENCE - CONTINUOUS

The audience applauds with gusto. Francois and Gus hold each other, crying tears of joy.

Michael claps deliberately.

EXT. BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Allison, looks through the crack between two set backdrops to see Megan. She sets her note on the prop table, and begins to walk away.

EXT. THE PORK STAGE - NIGHT

Megan is center stage bowing. She steps back and grabs the hand of the other cast members who are bowing.

MEGAN

Wait! Where's Miss Hopper?

Megan, the kids look around. Becky grabs a bouquet of flowers.

ANGUS

Miss Hopper!

EXT. BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Allison is at the edge of the backstage area. In front of her, the road stretches away from the town.

She looks toward the road, then toward the stage.

She turns back.

EXT. STAGE - NIGHT

Allison walks out tentatively. The audience is on their feet, applauding.

Becky hands her the flowers as the kids push her center stage.

Michael smiles softly, joining in the applause.

Megan grabs a microphone and hands it to Allison.

ALLISON
Stop. Please.

More cheering.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
Please. I don't deserve this.

The applause settles as Allison tears up.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
The last two months have been amazing. These have been the best days of my life. You guys are great kids...I'm proud of you. But I don't deserve...it's just...
(beat)
I lied to you. My name's not Renee Hopper. I've never taught school before in my life. The man you thought was my brother is really a thief.

Officer Barney reaches for his gun.

Lu Lu looks confused. Felix and the Mayor, worried.

Michael sadly looks down, but returns to looking at her. Proud.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
We've never helped a charity. We don't multiply money, we don't award prizes, we don't provide once in a lifetime deals...We take money. We steal.

The kids are shocked, confused.

Vandorp scratches his head and glances at Buddy. Buddy shrugs.

Allison looks directly at Michael. He nods approval.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
You trusted me, and...And I failed you. I really didn't mean for it to turn out this way.
(MORE)

ALLISON(CONT'D)

I really do care for you all. I'm
so sorry...I'm...

She sets the microphone and flowers down as she runs off.

Pandemonium sets in.

FELIX

Then what happened to the money?

BILL

Where is our school money?

ANNIE

Barney, stop her! Don't let her
get away!

Barney goes flush and faints.

Lu Lu runs up the stage steps and grabs Duncan.

LU LU

Did she hurt you, snookems?

The Mayor and Felix are trying to reach Vandorp.

Megan is stunned. Snapping to her senses, she picks up the
flowers, and chases after Allison.

EXT. THE PORK FESTIVAL, PARKING FIELD - NIGHT

Megan, carrying the flowers, weaves through the cars. She
spots Allison at Buddy's truck.

MEGAN

Miss Hopper. Wait!

ALLISON

That's not my name.

MEGAN

But...

ALLISON

Tell Buddy, I'm sorry about the
truck, and I'll send him money when
I can.

MEGAN

You can't leave...

Climbing in the truck, Allison tries to keep a stiff upper
lip.

Megan is crying.

ALLISON

You'll forget all about me in time.

MEGAN
But we need you. I need you. My
dad...

Allison pauses for a second at the mention of Michael.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
Please...

She starts the truck.

ALLISON
Megan, you deserve so much better
than me. Say goodbye to your dad
for me.

Allison puts the truck into drive and pulls away.

Megan drops the flowers to the ground, scattering them. She
falls in the midst of them and cries.

EXT. STAGE - NIGHT

The crowd is restless. Huddled in groups.

BILL
We've got fingerprints all over her
classroom! She won't get away.
We'll get the FBI!

Michael jumps up on the stage and grabs the microphone.

MICHAEL
Everyone, listen up. Hey! Let's
calm down. Let's not jump to
conclusions.

FELIX
The money's gone. It's all gone.

MICHAEL
OK. OK. Maybe the money is gone.
We're all OK. It's just money.

BILL
Just money!

MAYOR DIPPER
That woman's a crook!

MICHAEL
That woman? Listen to yourselves.
We're talking about Renee!

RITA
If that is her **real** name...

*

MICHAEL
Now hold on a second. Think about
what she brought to this town...
(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

(beat)
Lu Lu, look at yourself.

Lu Lu, in her chic outfit, nods reluctantly.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Barney, Lois.

Lois and Barney are holding hands. They look down at their hands, then at each other.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Lord knows your diner has never
been this clean, Francois.

Francois sticks his nose in the air, defiantly.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Buddy... you actually almost fixed
a car.

Buddy looks heartbroken.

BILL
She took twenty thousand dollars!

MICHAEL
Yeah, maybe so. But this
festival...this drama...these kids.
How do you put a price on that?
I'd gladly pay twenty thousand
dollars for the life she brought to
this town... to my family. Even if
she got all the money... well, I
think we still got the better end
of the deal.

There is silence. People have calmed.

BECKY
We trusted her, Mr. Fitz.

MICHAEL
Yes. We trusted her. And we'd do
it again. Cause that's what
Jasper's about. This is a place
where people find the best in each
other and care for each other.
It's why I came here.

ANGUS
But who is she?

Silence. Michael scans the stage and audience.

MICHAEL
I think we **already** know.

*

Slowly heads nod in agreement.

INT. BUDDY'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Allison chokes back tears as she drives past a sign reading "Chicago 75 Miles"

EXT. THE PORK FESTIVAL, PARKING FIELD - NIGHT

Hands in pockets, Michael slowly walks through the quiet parking lot.

He approaches Megan, who sits in an open parking space, crying. The flowers are scattered all over the ground.

MICHAEL

You were great tonight. Your mom would be proud.

He reaches out to help her up. She ignores him.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Come on. Let's get you home. Miss Bea's coming over.

Megan looks up, questioning.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

You don't expect me to let her go, do you?

Megan grabs Michael's hand and hugs him.

EXT. CHICAGO CITY STREET - NIGHT

Michael maneuvers his truck through Chicago traffic.

INT. CHICAGO HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Michael on the bed. Pages from the phone book all around him.

MICHAEL

(into phone)

Yes. I'm looking for one of your guests. Renee Hopper? Uh, actually...sometimes she checks in under different names. Do you have anyone who's about 5 foot 8, very attractive, brown hair...Hello? Hello?

Michael slams down the phone and crosses off another name on the pages.

Dozens of names are crossed off.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CHICAGO HOTEL ROOM - DAWN

Michael is asleep in the middle of the phone book pages.

EXT. CHICAGO POLICE DEPARTMENT - DAY

Allison stands across the street from the busy police station. Biting her lip. Watching. *

TWO POLICE OFFICERS drag a TOUGH LOOKING MAN from the back seat of the patrol car.

Allison's eyes are fixed on the man.

His handcuffs. His defeated posture.

The officers shove the man forward and he falls. They grab him by the shirt and lift him up.

Allison breathes deep and starts for the station.

EXT. HAVEN PARK, ENTRANCE - DAY

Michael looks up from the map and walks under the sign reading "HAVEN PARK."

INT. CHICAGO POLICE STATION, CAPTAIN NICHOL'S OFFICE - DAY

Allison sits uncomfortably in an office as POLICE OFFICERS pass by.

Capt. Nichols bursts through the door.

CAPT. NICHOLS
Sorry to make you wait. What can I
do for you?

Allison pauses as she looks over Nichols, the man who brought her down.

ALLISON
Uh...I'm here about the Harrison
Building bust.

CAPT. NICHOLS
Oh, another one...That case is
closed. Look, I'm sorry if they
scammed you, but there's no more
money.

ALLISON
It's not that. I came to turn
myself in.

Nichols laughs.

CAPT. NICHOLS
That's a good one.

He focuses on his paperwork. Disinterested.

*

ALLISON
Really. I ran the whole operation.

CAPT. NICHOLS
Sure you did. Listen, lady, I don't know what you're trying to pull, but we already caught the ringleader.

ALLISON
What? Who?

CAPT. NICHOLS
Allison O'Connor.

ALLISON
I'm Allison O'Connor.

CAPT. NICHOLS
(sarcastic)
Right.

ALLISON
I am.

CAPT. NICHOLS
I don't have time for this. I caught Allison O'Connor personally. She was prancing around in the corner office barking out orders.

ALLISON
But she wasn't...

CAPT. NICHOLS
For crying out loud, she had her birth certificate in her pocket.

ALLISON
She's in jail?

CAPT. NICHOLS
(shaking his head)
She was smooth. At her arraignment, somehow she swiped an ID, impersonated a county official, pick-pocketed the judge and was on her way out the building. Would've gotten away...except she got hit by a bus crossing the street. Jay walkin'll kill ya.

ALLISON
Eewww.

CAPT. NICHOLS
Case closed.

Allison is lost in thought.

CAPT. NICHOLS (CONT'D)
Now ,if you'll excuse me, I really
do have to get back to work.

ALLISON
But...

CAPT. NICHOLS
Have a nice day, Ma'am.

He opens the door and Allison walks out, still stunned.

EXT. HAVEN PARK - DAY

SERIES OF SHOTS:

-- Michael sits on a bench scanning the park. A HOTDOG
VENDOR nearby sells to VISITORS.

-- Michael pacing near the bench.

-- Michael checking his watch.

-- Michael eating a hotdog.

-- Michael lounging on the bench.

EXT. HAVEN PARK - DUSK

Michael sits on the bench, asleep. His head bobs, waking
him. He stretches as he looks around the park.

The hotdog vendor packs up his stuff and pushes the cart
away.

Michael stands, defeated.

EXT. HAVEN PARK, ENTRANCE - DUSK

Michael's truck is parked along the road.

He climbs in. Discouraged, Michael kicks the lucky hat from
under his feet to the pavement.

Pulling the door shut, he drives off.

EXT. HAVEN PARK - NIGHT

Allison, reflective, strolls through the park with an ice
cream cone. She passes a man sleeping on a bench, covered
with newspaper.

The man stirs from behind her and sits up...It's Pauley.

PAULEY
Allison? Is that you?

Allison stops.

ALLISON
Pauley?

Pauley pushes off the papers and walks to her. They hug.

PAULEY
Geez, I didn't think you were ever gonna show up. I've been here over a week.

ALLISON
What?

PAULEY
It's October. You said to meet back here in two months.

ALLISON
Oh, right.

They stroll down the path.

PAULEY
Did Brad tell you he's got a deal set up in Detroit? We'll have an operation up and running in no time...

ALLISON
Pauley. I'm not going.

PAULEY
Huh? This could be big.

ALLISON
Something happened. I'm out.

PAULEY
What? What happened? You can't go clean. You're the best.

Pauley sees it in her eyes.

PAULEY (CONT'D)
You're serious. Allison, listen. You won't fit in in the real world. You know what they say, once a grifter, always...

ALLISON
You really believe that?

Pauley stops.

PAULEY
Nah. Of course not. But it's a hell of an excuse.

They laugh together.

PAULEY (CONT'D)
That's great. You know...I've
thought about going legit. Maybe
become a movie producer.

ALLISON
You should.

PAULEY
I think your dad would be proud.

ALLISON
I'm going to miss you, Pauley.

Allison gives him a hug.

PAULEY
Who, me? Nah!
(beat)
Come on. Let's go get some dinner.
I'm buying this time. I mean,
actually buying this time.

ALLISON
No, thanks.

PAULEY
Keep in touch.

They hug.

ALLISON
I know how to find you.

Pauley saunters down the walkway out of sight.

EXT. HAVEN PARK, ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

Allison approaches Buddy's truck parked on the street.
Something orange catches her eye along the curb.

Walking to it, she discovers it's the lucky hat.

Allison picks it up. She looks around.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET, JASPER - DAY

Townspeople are taking down the stage, banners, and bringing
the town back to normal.

EXT. BACKSTAGE - DAY

Michael, alone, pries two boards apart from a flat. He
stops, wiping his brow. Sensing someone watching, he looks
up.

Allison stands about twenty feet away.

ALLISON
Hi.

MICHAEL
You came back.

ALLISON
I thought you may need this.

She holds the hat out for him. Michael walks over to her.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
Maybe I should introduce myself.
I'm...

Michael stops her, gently touching his fingers to her lips. Allison looks into his eyes. Hopeful.

MICHAEL
You're Renee.

Allison smiles. She throws her arms around Michael. As they hug, he lifts her off the ground.

Barney rushes up with Principal Vandorp in tow. The Mayor, Buddy, Lu Lu and others follow.

BARNEY
She's right over here, Jim.

Michael sets her down. Allison tenses.

VANDORP
Renee, I need to talk to you.

ALLISON
Principal Vandorp, I'm so sorry.
If you'll just give me a chance,
I'll repay every cent...

VANDORP
Repay? You don't need to repay anything. I knew I'd seen those bonds on the internet. They were actually genuine certificates of Banco Federale in Argentina. They'd been stolen ten years ago. The reward was worth \$50,000

Allison is dumbfounded.

ALLISON
They were real?

Michael smiles and nods that it's true.

VANDORP

So I'm thinking of buying some video equipment for the drama department. Set up a television studio. But we still need a teacher.

LU LU

Please stay, Renee.

ALLISON

Me? Uh...

BUDDY

I got an extra room.

Allison looks to Michael who nods with approval.

Megan and the kids round the corner and see Allison.

MEGAN

Miss Hopper! You're back!

Megan runs and gives Allison a hug. The other kids circle around Allison each giving her a hug.

Michael steps up to Allison as everyone else backs away.

Putting his arms around Allison, they gaze into each other's eyes. And kiss.

FADE OUT.