

MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

By

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INT. HOME - EVENING

Two profiles side by side. In comfortable silence. A woman, far beyond pretty. A man, solid and strong. Both have their heads lowered - almost reverently.

Her expression is concentrated. Whatever she's gazing at bears the burden of her full attention. He is more at ease.

We pull back to reveal their hands moving in rhythm as they prepare food in a stylish kitchen.

RUBY MURRAY, 28, dices onions. Disobedient hair. Eyes shining with promise and possibility.

DEREK MURRAY, 29, seasons an array of vegetables. Handsome. In jeans. White T-shirt. Whiter sneakers. Casually, he glances over at her work. *

DEREK
Smaller, babe.

RUBY
Um... Okay, Emeril.

He smiles at her teasing, then turns to the stove, spooning his mixture into a sizzling pan. We can almost smell the aroma wafting through the air.

DEREK
What do I always tell you? Huh?
Don't be mad at the skills.

She shakes her head, dicing the onions into smaller pieces.

DEREK (CONT'D)
Degree on the wall. Another on the way. And can't boil water.

RUBY
Why do we both have to be good at this? Like my dicing prowess really adds to the meal.

DEREK
Your what?

RUBY
You don't need me in here.

DEREK
I always need you.

He comes up behind her and nuzzles her neck for a quick kiss.

DEREK

The couple that cooks together...

RUBY

Wow. If Rashad and them knew how corny you were...

They share a laugh. This is their routine.

He samples a morsel from the steaming pan. Then, gently places a piece in her mouth. His hand on the small of her back as she chews. She struggles to hold back her delight.

DEREK

You don't have to say anything. I already know.

She swats him playfully. The DOOR BELL rings and he goes to answer, still laughing with her.

DEREK (O.S.)

Don't be mad at the skills, Ruby!

She rolls her eyes with a grin and continues dicing. Then...

YELLING. A DOOR SLAMS. NOISE. SOUNDS OF A COMMOTION.

She moves curiously to the kitchen entry and sees MEN. Men coming through her front door WITH GUNS.

She sees Derek on the floor, face down with a gun pointed at his back. What *is* this? Then, they come toward her.

THE MEN

Knife! We got a knife! Down!
Drop down now! Drop the knife!

DEREK

Ruby! Drop the knife, Ruby!

She is still holding the knife she was dicing with, trembling. She quickly lets it fall to the ground.

As soon as she drops it, two men quickly grab her shoulders and push her down to the floor roughly.

THE MEN

Down now! Face down!

DEREK

Watch how you handlin' her!

She is face down and terrified. A man has a gun on her and his knee in her back as he HANDCUFFS her.

Her skin burns against the carpet. More men rush through their townhome, swarming every corner. Now, she sees their jackets. "ATF" is stitched on the back.

She looks over at Derek, stunned. His eyes are on her too, filled with pain. Desperate. A confession without words.

A plate CRASHES on the hardwood. The agents toss the closets. Overturn shelves, spilling her precious books. The men step on her medical texts, poetry collections and novels like cobblestones as they lift her to her feet. They navigate her downstairs in unison, one agent on each arm.

EXT. DEREK AND RUBY'S TOWNHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

As the men take her to the front door of the complex, she TRIPS on the last step, thrust head first into the moonlight. The agents hold her up and move her on quickly. The physical pain is a small thing compared to her humiliation. And fear.

Police cars surround their home. Neighbors gather outside, shocked. She drops her head to avoid their eyes.

An agent places his hand on top of her head and pushes her down into the back of an unmarked sedan. As the car door closes, Derek is brought out in handcuffs surrounded by officers. His body language screams defeat.

He searches for her in the confusion, finding her eyes just as he is put into a separate car. They focus on each other. Never breaking their gaze. Each from behind a car window.

As he is driven away, she leans her head on the glass and whispers his name.

EXT. GREYHOUND BUS STATION - EARLY MORNING

BEGIN CREDIT SEQUENCE

We see the dark, early morning sky before the sun rises. We see Ruby reading a pamphlet in low light.

RUBY (V.O.)
To implement P.S. 5267 at USP
Victorville, the institution
supplement must be read and signed
by the visitor in conjunction with
the Program Statement for federal
facility guidelines.

Faces come into focus. Women of all kinds. Black. Brown. Pacific Islanders.

A few with that unfortunate label of "poor white trash." Some with children. All going to the same place. All with a story behind their eyes.

RUBY (V.O.)

32 visiting points are allotted on the first day of each month. One hour equals one point. Points will not carry over from one month to another. After 15 minutes, any portion of an hour will count as a full hour.

Ruby stands tentatively in the line of women. Clearly a first-timer. The ladies give money to a MALE TICKET AGENT, who obliges without as much as an upward glance.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - CONTINUOUS

Ruby boards the bus, finds a seat and keeps to herself.

RUBY (V.O.)

The following visitor clothing requirements are strictly enforced. Tops will fully cover the upper body, including stomach, breasts and back. Tank tops and clothing made of see-through material are not permissible.

Most women are dressed to the nines within code.

RUBY (V.O.)

Dresses, skirts or tops that wrap around the body in a form-fitting manner are not permitted. Skirts and dresses must be no shorter than two inches above the mid-knee.

Each women interprets and maximizes the rules in her own way.

RUBY (V.O.)

In addition, the BOP has the discretion to refuse facility entry for any clothing deemed inappropriate for any reason on a case by case basis.

Ruby wears a simple top with a scoop neckline and an a-line skirt of the appropriate length.

She is the odd woman out. No one speaks to her. And, she doesn't speak to them. What is she doing here? She doesn't belong. She looks as if she's going to flee at any moment.

Then, a SAMOAN WOMAN with an INFANT seems to acknowledge her ever so slightly from across the aisle. Recognition that this isn't normal. That she is not alone.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS RIDE - CONTINUOUS

The bus weaves through the city streets and tall buildings around Downtown LA, before hitting the first of several freeways. There is no traffic in the dead of morning.

The cities and counties zoom by. Pasadena, Glendora, Fontana. The I-15 towards Barstow. Crestline, Wrightwood, Hesperia. Further and further away.

Some women chat. Some read or have headphones. Most sleep. But not Ruby. She takes it all in. Watching. Learning.

As the sky changes, she takes in the view. The San Bernardino Mountain range leading into the Mojave Desert. And then - VICTORVILLE: 2 miles.

The women and children grow quiet as a series of OMINOUS BUILDINGS come into view. A persistent chain link fence now runs alongside the bus like a steely escort. The fence is topped with coiled layers of CONCERTINA RAZOR WIRE.

A simple sign reminds the riders of their destination. As if they could have forgotten:

UNITED STATES PENITENTIARY VICTORVILLE

EXT. VICTORVILLE FEDERAL PRISON - A SHORT TIME LATER

Ruby, along with the other women and children from her bus, line up outside the facility near a BARBED WIRE FENCE. There are about 200 other visitors filing out of cars, taxicabs, city buses and on foot.

The morning air is cold. PRISON PERSONNEL watch the visitors from inside the office, flaunting their coffee.

Numbered cards are distributed down the line. The crowd gears up to wait. Veterans sit on blankets and pillows. Ruby stands.

END CREDIT SEQUENCE

INT. VICTORVILLE FEDERAL PRISON - LATER THAT MORNING

The gate is opened. Ruby and the visitors file in by number, forming another line outside the VISITOR PROCESSING CENTER.

Here the PRIMPING begins. Mirrors are flipped open. Brushes and hairspray make their debut. Lipgloss abounds.

Ruby notices almost everyone wiping their hands with cleanser and towelettes. She doesn't have that and doesn't know what it's for. She's lost.

The Samoan woman from the bus, PONGESA, sees her confusion.

PONGESA

It's for the Ion Scan. They look for drug traces.

RUBY

Oh.

PONGESA

It's the surest way you ain't gettin' in. That, and boobs.

RUBY

(touching her neckline)
Does this show too much?

PONGESA

(chuckling)
Nah, you're alright.

Pongesa hands her a few sanitizer wipes.

PONGESA

Wipe down real good. Your shoes, belt, buttons. Especially the hands. It's hella sensitive. You ain't gotta have nothing on you. But, it'll pick up a trace from something you touched back on the bus. Something on the money you handed dude at the station. A doorknob. Whatever.

Ruby wipes her hands carefully, as Pongesa counts her diapers and throws an extra one in the trash.

Other women toss lipsticks, combs, perfume and small mirrors in the trash bin. The blankets and pillows are ditched too. None of it is allowed past this point.

INT. USP VICTORVILLE PROCESSING CENTER - LATER

Ruby waits for her number to be called, then shows her I.D.

We see HER FILE on the computer. She's been issued a number in the system. Her picture comes up on the screen. The file states that she is a spouse. That Derek was convicted of FIREARM TRAFFICKING. And, that she is approved to visit.

An officer runs a handheld filter over her shoes, hands, legs and shoulders. We see the first signs of uncertainty as she awaits the results. She is soon cleared.

She's officially inside the prison.

INT. USP VICTORVILLE VISITING ROOM - A SHORT TIME LATER

A large room with barred windows. Just tables, benches and vending machines. GUARDS man the corners, emotionless. It is LOUD. There is no play area for the kids, so they run around restlessly.

The room is segregated by race. MEXICANS on one side. BLACKS on the other. WHITES, outnumbered, are in the middle.

The caged men begin to emerge. Each one takes his corner, making sure not to look at another inmate the wrong way. Making sure not to show weakness of any kind.

RUBY (V.O.)

Inmates will be permitted to embrace their visitor within good taste at the beginning and end of a visit. Inmates will not be permitted to hold the hand of a visitor, or put their arms around their visitor while seated. Inmates will sit across from visitors, not side by side.

With each man brought out, her apprehension grows.

Then, DEREK appears. She has to remind herself to smile. He goes to her with guarded anticipation. A beat as they drink each other in. Then, they HUG. Tentative at first. Then, eyes close. Arms wrap tight. His face in her hair. She holds on. Trying to make it last. Twenty seconds at most, until they let go awkwardly and sit opposite each other.

RUBY

You look good.

DEREK
No, you look good.

RUBY
I miss you.

DEREK
Me too.
(beat)
You alright?

RUBY
I'm fine. How about you?

DEREK
Are you okay, Ruby?

RUBY
I'm just fine, baby. How are you?

Her concern grows at his long silence. And then...

DEREK
How's school?

His words are loaded. She's caught off-guard.

RUBY
I was going to tell you.

His worst fear confirmed.

RUBY (CONT'D)
I can't focus on that right now.
I'll start back on next semester.

DEREK
(quietly)
What are you doing, Ruby?

RUBY
It's not for me right now.

DEREK
We talked about this.

RUBY
No, you talked about it.

A tense beat.

DEREK
Look, you don't have to do this.
Don't be a martyr.

RUBY

A martyr.

DEREK

You know what I mean.

RUBY

I'm your wife. I'd fully expect you to be here if the tables were turned.

DEREK

Well, I don't expect that. I don't want this for you.

RUBY

To be frank with you, I don't care what you want right now.

DEREK

Listen to me. Let's be realistic. You were on your way to doing something. Don't stop.

RUBY

We were on our way.

This lands hard on him. What could have been.

RUBY (CONT'D)

It's a break that's all. My heart's not in it right now. Next semester, okay?

DEREK

(almost to himself)
I can't believe this.

RUBY

It's not that serious. I said I'll go back soon.

DEREK

You just dropping out after all that work? I mean, who are you talking to here? I know what's up. Why would you do that? Look how they got me in here. I can't do this. I can't take care of you. I can't even hold your hand. You don't need to be here. I don't want you to. I don't want you to see me like this.

He's clearly in pain. They both are.

RUBY

It doesn't matter where I see you. Listen to me. As long as I see you. You look the same to me wherever you are. You hear me? This is what we've got now. It's not good. But it's what we've got. And, you will do it. We will see each other on every weekend. You'll call every day. You'll know about my day. And, I'll know about yours. Like always. You need to make this work. So when you come home, we start over. That's what we're going to do.

DEREK

Eight years, Ruby. You don't wanna do this for eight years.

RUBY

Five years with good time.

DEREK

You're not even listening to me. Try to understand what I'm saying.

RUBY

You're not listening to me. What's supposed to happen in this scenario of yours? I can't get up here on weekends around labs. I'll miss any call you make during the day because of class. I barely had time when you were home. So how's it supposed to work with you two hours away both ways? Let's not talk about when residency starts.

DEREK

I know. It doesn't work.

Now, she understands what he's trying to do.

RUBY

Whatever you're thinking I'd do if we broke up, you're wrong.

(beat)

You made a commitment to me.

DEREK

I'm not trying to break my
commitment to you, Ruby. I'm
trying to tell you, I want you to
keep going with your life. Don't
stop for this. Look at this.
Don't stop for me.

RUBY

You are me. Remember?

This crushes him.

RUBY (CONT'D)

If you were telling the truth when
you said you'd make this right...
Make it right.

A long, serious beat. She's not going to fail at this.

RUBY (CONT'D)

Five years with good time.
(beat)
Say it.

He can't.

RUBY (CONT'D)

Say it, Derek.

He doesn't want to.

RUBY

For me.

He meets her eyes. They look at each other deeply.

RUBY

What about me?

She's breaking his heart. Defeated, he gives her what she
wants. Against his own.

DEREK

(with effort)
Five with good time.

INT. CITY BUS - MID-CITY - EARLY EVENING

We look through a CITY BUS WINDOW. It's dusk as we move
through a part of Los Angeles not captured on postcards.

Latino men play soccer in the park. An elderly black woman enters a storefront church in heels and pearls. A teenager rides a bike with his girl on the handlebars.

Ruby observes the hustle and bustle beyond the bus. She's FOUR HARD YEARS OLDER than we just saw her. Her original beauty now hidden beneath hospital scrubs and convenient hair.

She exits with a familiar wave to the driver. Then, ignores a passerby and his pick-up line. This is her neighborhood. She knows who's worth a word and who isn't.

INT. CHECK CASHING PLACE - A SHORT TIME LATER

Ruby reads ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY magazine in line.

When its her turn, she slides cash and a form through a slot in the BULLETPROOF GLASS.

RUBY
(in a low voice)
\$300 for commissary please.

INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A moth flutters against the porch light. Ruby knocks on the front door. No answer. She tries again, louder. Nothing. Then, after some thought, she enters with her key.

On the other side of the door comes an attractive, older woman. Still wet in her bathrobe and irritated about it. This is her mother, RUTH, 55.

RUTH
If you're going to use the key, why knock?

RUBY
Sorry.

Ruth goes back to the bathroom. Ruby crosses to the T.V.

RUBY (CONT'D)
I brought cheap Chinese. I was going to watch the awards over here. Remember?
(beat)
If I leave my place when it's over, I won't make it to work on time.
(a long beat)
Ma?

RUTH (O.S.)
 Fine, fine.

A modest home adorned with PHOTOS of Ruby and her sister, ROSIE. In a larger frame is a picture of a sweet little boy, NICKIE.

Ruby sets out the Chinese food. Ruth returns, dry this time.

RUBY
 Where's Nickie? Rosie came early?

A beat as Ruby watches her mother fidget. Something's wrong.

RUTH
 I don't want to talk about that girl right now.
 (beat)
 She's completely irrational. Who knows what I did to her this week. She's putting him in an after-school program. Did she discuss this with you? Are you going to be picking him up?

RUBY
 This is the first I'm hearing.

Ruth doesn't believe that for a minute. They begin to eat. Ruby switches the TV to red carpet arrivals.

RUBY (CONT'D)
 I'm going to be taking some extra shifts. So, I'm not sure how much I can help if that's what she's thinking.

RUTH
 Day shifts?

RUBY
 I'm just trying to catch up on a few things.

RUTH
 Good. Finally. Time to get on with it...

RUBY
 Today's a good day, Ma. Let's not...

RUTH

Oh, I forgot. Today's special. Is this how you're supposed to spend today, darling? This is it?

Ruby's focuses on the happy celebrities on TELEVISION.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Is this how people celebrate? Watching strangers dressed up on TV? I'm talking here.

RUBY

I don't know, Ma.

RUTH

Oh, am I bothering you? Okay, well don't let me bother you and your friends here.

Off Ruby as Ruth walks away.

INT. HOSPITAL LOBBY - NIGHT

The hospital is hallow. A deep quiet floats where there was a sea of noise only hours earlier. The janitor's vacuum hums as Ruby stands in the deserted gift shop. Elevator music wafts in. She reviews the greeting cards, one after another.

INT. NURSES LOUNGE - LATER

Ruby writes on an anniversary card: *"Next year, I'll whisper this in your ear. Happy anniversary. I love you."* She brings the envelope to her lips, lingers, then seals it.

INT. HOSPITAL LOBBY - LATER

At the mail slot, she slips the card through and watches it fall. Then, starts down the sterile white hallway.

INT. PATIENT ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Ruby hands a CANCER PATIENT a pill cup from a metal tray.

RUBY

I can't dispense Morphine without an order. He didn't leave one.

PATIENT

So what the hell am I supposed to do here, huh? I need something.

RUBY

The strongest I can administer is T3 until I can get Dr. Massey on the phone. It's got Codeine.

PATIENT

Fuck Codeine. I'll have to wait three hours for it to wear off before I can get the Morphine. This is bullshit! You know it is. He can't just leave me here like this. I need Morphine. Please help me.

RUBY

There's nothing I can do, but keep paging him. If you want to try the T3, it'll take the edge off a little bit while we wait.

He closes his eyes in pain. She's helpless. And then... She leans into him. Close.

RUBY

You are stronger than this thing.
(after a beat, he nods)
I've got smooth, cool popsicles. I got grape. I got cherry. Orange? C'mon, sweetie.

She places his hand on his chest to comfort him.

PATIENT

Cherry.

RUBY

Cherry it is. And, Conan starts in
15.

She does a little Conan O'Brien dance, snipping an imaginary cord on each hip and getting a sad smile from her patient.

RUBY (CONT'D)

I'll keep paging the doctor.

The patient nods, then turns away in agony. Ruby watches him for a moment. As she crosses the room upset, she shoves the PILL CUP INTO HER POCKET.

EXT. BUS STOP - MORNING

Ruby stands in the early morning sunshine, tired. People walk past her to start their workdays just as hers is ending. Others waiting with her at the bus stop appear irritated. She looks at her watch, then up the street.

She pulls a bus schedule from her purse and examines the jigsaw puzzle of times and tables. Frustrated, she begins to WALK QUICKLY from this stop and around the corner to another.

INT. CITY BUS - MINUTES LATER

The doors SWING OPEN to reveal BRIAN, commanding the driver's seat. The hardworking type with a sly smile. Thirties.

Ruby runs up, out of breath, and waits behind a YOUNG MAN.

YOUNG HUSTLER

Just 'til tomorrow. C'mon, man.

Ruby closes her eyes. She's had a long night and a longer morning. Listening to this is the last thing she needs.

BRIAN

(amused)

My man! You ain't paid for last week. What am I? Your daddy? Need to get a job, brother. Step on outside, man.

The young hustler climbs off the bus, defeated. Ruby steps up with bus schedule in hand.

BRIAN

(to Ruby)

You believe that?

RUBY

You go to Alameda and Wilmington?

BRIAN

Um, Alameda and Rosecrans.

RUBY

And, then can I get the 19 to Pine?

BRIAN

You don't wanna do that. You need to pick up the 72 in front of the hospital.

RUBY

The 72 in front of the hospital is late as usual and I've been up all night. So can you just tell me if the 19 gets me there?

BRIAN

Oh. Yeah, it does. It'll take you a little out the way but... at least you'll be moving.

She tucks the schedule in her purse and feeds the farebox impatiently.

RUBY

(under her breath)

You all need to get better organized.

BRIAN

I'll make sure to pass that along at the next company retreat.

Wait. Is he trying to be funny? Any other day, she might have chuckled with him, but not today.

INT. BRIAN'S BUS - MINUTES LATER

Waves of people pour onto the bus, all jockeying for position. Ruby sits in her scrubs, watching the cars below.

She catches a glimpse of a REGAL OLD WOMAN, well-dressed, slowly making her way down the narrow aisle. She's about seventy-five, gentle in appearance but determined in spirit.

The woman finds no empty seats, so she holds onto a balance bar. At this, Ruby immediately stands and waves her over.

RUBY

Have a seat, ma'am.

OLD WOMAN

Thank you, honey.

NEW ANGLE on the bus' REARVIEW MIRROR. We see Brian as he observes the kindness that just took place.

When the old woman is seated and settled, she smiles up at Ruby who is standing above her.

OLD WOMAN

I'm Cornelia.

RUBY

Hello.

Ruby just wanted to give her a seat - not have a conversation. She delves into her US WEEKLY. But as Ruby stands over Cornelia, she can't help but watch.

The old woman begins to KNIT UP A STORM with bright red yarn.

Her fingers twirl as she gazes out the GRIMY BUS WINDOW with a private smile. It's as if she sees something good out there - not the pawn shops and liquor stores dotting the way.

Ruby follows her eyes. Doesn't see anything worth watching and goes back to the world within her magazine.

INT. CITY BUS - LATER

Ruby sits next to Cornelia now, watching her knit out of the corner of her eye. Cornelia senses her observer.

CORNELIA

You know how?

RUBY

Um, no. No, I don't.

CORNELIA

It's good to know.

RUBY

It looks hard actually.

CORNELIA

Nope. See this loop? Then twist and pull through. Watch it again. See? Try it.

RUBY

Oh. No, thank you. It's okay.

CORNELIA

Too hard, huh?

Cornelia pokes out her bottom lip making a PATHETIC FACE. Ruby can't help but laugh, then surprises herself by taking the yarn. The old woman watches her student attempt a loop and smiles with satisfaction.

CORNELIA

See? You'll be making things soon.

RUBY

I don't know about that.

CORNELIA

Keep at it. It's meditation more than anything. Just something to be creative. Get wild and crazy. Express yourself.

RUBY

Wild and crazy with knitting.

Cornelia pulls purple yarn from her bag for Ruby.

RUBY (CONT'D)

We're gonna mess it up.

CORNELIA

Girl, you'd better weave that in.

RUBY

I don't know where to start.

CORNELIA

Just start.

(of Ruby's hesitation)

What's the problem, Sweetpea? It's not brain surgery.

Ruby laughs at the little woman. This is ridiculous. She makes her loops into a hideous design.

CORNELIA

Oh my. Look at that.

RUBY

This is bad.

CORNELIA

Bad, but yours. You keep that.

RUBY

Oh no, ma'am. Thank you.

CORNELIA

Shoot, I don't want it!

Cornelia is as sharp as a whip, with a contagious energy.

CORNELIA (CONT'D)

And it's Cornelia.

RUBY

Cornelia. I'm Ruby.

EXT. RUBY'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Ruby reviews the contents of her mailbox with disappointment.

She drags up the stairs to her place with a shopping bag.

A woman and her pre-teen daughter are rushing out of their apartment down the stairs at the same time.

RUBY
Morning, you guys.

RUSHING MOM
Late again.

PRE-TEEN
Night, Ruby.

RUBY
Have a good one.

Ruby reaches her floor, exhausted. But suddenly, she brightens.

A VASE OF RED ROSES sits next to her door. She kneels down and seizes the card. *"I love you every day. Derek."* Happiness.

INT. RUBY'S PLACE - MOMENTS LATER

Ruby kicks off her shoes and pulls off her scrubs.

She admiringly places the vase on the center of a round kitchen table.

The apartment is small and colorless. It's clearly a place to just eat and sleep and get ready for work to do it all over again.

Ruby takes a CARDBOARD BOX from underneath her desk and reaches into her shopping bag for a cellophane-wrapped novel. Carefully, she places it next to several crossword puzzle books and magazines addressed to Derek. Two thick photo envelopes are tucked inside as well.

INT. RUBY'S PLACE - LATER THAT MORNING

In her tiny kitchen, she places a Chicken Pot Pie in the microwave. She matter-of-factly eats at the table near her flowers while watching kids walk to school.

INT. RUBY'S BEDROOM - LATER

Sunlight shines through the blinds. She shuts them and sets the alarm to 2:30 p.m. E! is on TELEVISION in the b.g.

Ruby sits on her bed, spilling the contents of the CRUMPLED PILL CUP into her hand. She swallows the pills with ease, then lays back on her bed, awaiting the effect.

Soon, we see what she feels. What she wants. As if it were real. The sheets begin to move. DEREK is beside her. He reaches for her. She sinks into him. They fall asleep - together.

EXT. PRE-SCHOOL LOBBY - LATER THAT DAY

Ruby kneels next to her nephew, NICKIE, 5, as he takes his jacket from a miniature hook. The boy is introverted compared to the spastic energy of the other kids. Very matter-of-fact in his movements.

MISS DOLLY, the pre-school director, waves goodbye to him.

MISS DOLLY

Nick, have a good weekend, okay?

NICKIE

Okay, Miss Dolly.

(to Ruby)

That's my new name. Nick.

RUBY

Oh yeah? You tell your Mommie?

NICKIE

It's my new school name.

RUBY

So, I can still call you Nickie?

NICKIE

Yes, if you want to.

He struggles to put his jacket on.

RUBY

Do it Grammie's way.

Ruby lays the jacket on the floor in front of him upside down. He leans over and slips his arms through the sleeves, then FLIPS it over his head with a grin. They high-five.

INT. ROSIE'S PLACE - EVENING

Ruby and Nickie are entrenched in coloring books when ROSIE unlocks the front door. She enters in full GEISHA MAKEUP and a short skirt. All voluptuous confidence. Nickie giggles.

ROSIE
Gets him every time.

She goes over to her son and kisses him on the cheek. Then, begins peeling off the skimpy uniform.

ROSIE (CONT'D)
How you doing, Pop?

RUBY
Well, it *is* a little ridiculous.

ROSIE
The place is called Concubine.
What did we expect?

RUBY
I'm surprised it's not being picketed yet. It's like being called Mamie's, and your uniform is an Aunt Jemima get-up.

ROSIE
Shoot, for the tips I'm bringing in, I'd even throw in a "Yessa Massa."

Ruby shakes her head, unamused.

ROSIE (CONT'D)
What? I made \$244 today - on a lunch shift! That's a weekend's worth of tips at Fridays. These Hollywood folks don't play. Tipping is an art for these people. And, my baby needs to go to Disneyland and Laker games this summer. Ain't that right, Pop?

*
*

Nickie just starts to laugh at her again. Then, an idea.

NICKIE
Aunt Rube! Mom's a good picture for Uncle Derek right now!

RUBY
You're right! You take it.

Rosie rocks an "America's Next Top Model" pose for the disposable camera, then keeps talking without missing a beat.

ROSIE
More importantly, I might find a nice d-a-d-d-y type up in there.

Ruby rolls her eyes as Rosie heads to the bathroom.

ROSIE (O.S.)

In a minute, I can get a real
babysitter who respects me. Teach
him something, instead of filling
his head with crap about me.

Ruby looks over at Nickie, who pretends he didn't hear that. Rosie comes back out with a clean face. She's a slightly younger, much hipper version of Ruby.

ROSIE

Let's eat.

INT. PAULIE'S - LATER THAT NIGHT

A hole-in-the-wall. Ruby, Rosie and Nickie sit eating at barstools. The sisters watch the boy grapple with an oversized taco, getting a kick at the mess he's making. He motions for Rosie to take a bite, and in doing so, accidentally flings sauce in his mother's hair and on Ruby's top. A stunned moment before they all break out laughing.

ROSIE

Little boy, no you didn't! I just
got my hair done, Nicholas!

Nickie is convulsing with giggles while Ruby taps at her shirt with a napkin and a smile.

ROSIE (CONT'D)

Put some water on it. It'll stain.

RUBY

I don't care. It's fine.

Rosie heads to the restroom to get cute again. A beat later, Ruby feels a tap on her shoulder. She turns to find, GINA, a beauty in tight pants with a shy little girl of 10, DEEDEE.

GINA

Hello Ruby.

Ruby, immediately self-conscious about her appearance, dabs her napkin in water and wipes at the sauce on her shirt.

RUBY

Hi, Gina. Hi there, DeeDee.

GINA

This has to be Rosie's boy...

Nickie swivels around, but Ruby protectively turns him back.

RUBY
How've you been?

GINA
Excellent. And yourself?

RUBY
I'm well.

GINA
So... how is he?

RUBY
He's fine.

GINA
Right. Well, tell Mr. Fine we need money. I haven't seen a dime in two months.

RUBY
We sent school clothes last month.

GINA
She don't need clothes. She needs money. How do you all think we're living? I depend on that money.

RUBY
I know. I'm trying. We're trying.

GINA
He's not seeing her until he pays.

Nickie tries to turn again, but Ruby holds him still.

RUBY
You never let him see her when he did pay. She's been on the visitation list for four years.

GINA
Just because I don't want to drag her all the way up to that place don't mean he's not gonna pay. We need cash, not prizes, okay?

RUBY
He's doing the best he can. You could at least let him talk to her on the phone. That's not right.

GINA

You're not as smart as people say. Why do you care if I take her to see him? If I were you, I wouldn't want me coming around too much.

ROSIE

Gina, Ruby ain't worried about you.

Gina turns to find ROSIE, standing very close and very confident. Gina is taken aback, but recovers.

GINA

Sure, she's not.

They watch Gina as she leaves hand-in-hand with DeeDee. Nickie finally gets a look in, wide-eyed.

EXT. RUBY'S PLACE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Rosie pulls onto Ruby's street. Nickie is in the backseat.

ROSIE

I don't need you to babysit. We'll take him with us. This is how we build a social life. And I need one, dude. Dockweiler'll be packed for the long weekend. C'mon.

RUBY

I can't, Rose. I'm exhausted.

ROSIE (CONT'D)

(to Nickie)

We want to go out, huh Pop?

NICKIE

Yes.

ROSIE

Tell Aunt Rube let's go out.

NICKIE

Let's go out, Aunt Rube.

RUBY

I can't, Pop. I'm going to see Uncle Derek on the big ship.

ROSIE

Can't you miss one time? Nickie, tell her let's live a little.

NICKIE

Let's live, Aunt Rube. You can
bring Uncle Derek. Go get him and
bring him with us.

Ruby and Rosie ignore that as the car pulls up to Ruby's
place. She squeezes Nickie before climbing out.

Rosie and Nickie watch her for safety as she walks to her
building and grabs the mail from the box. Once she's inside
the gate, they drive away.

Ruby leafs through her mail as she makes her way up the
stairs. Then, SHE STOPS COLD. Close on AN OFFICIAL-LOOKING
LETTER from USP Parole Board.

She rips it open. We watch her read. We watch her face
change. We watch JOY WASH OVER HER.

She turns and RUNS. Out the gate. Onto her street. Rosie's
car is half-way up the block. Ruby is laughing and waving.

RUBY

(at the top of her lungs)
Rose! Rosie!

Dogs bark. She's in the middle of the street now. Jumping
to get her sister's attention. Laughing and jumping.

Rosie's brake lights go on. She makes a U-Turn, then speeds
back to Ruby standing in the street.

ROSIE

(alarmed)
What's wrong?

Nickie is all worry from the back seat. Ruby can't speak.
She hands Rosie the letter.

ROSIE

(reading)
USP Inmate Derek J. Murray is
eligible for early... Oh Good
Jesus.

Ruby's wide smile trumps all. Rosie hops out of the car and
grabs her sister. They sway and hug as Nickie watches on,
happily.

INT. RUBY'S PLACE - NIGHT

Wrapped in a bath towel, she moves around her apartment with
an excited energy. Like she's getting ready for a date.

Clothes are spread out over the bed as she examines one outfit after another. She paints her fingernails.

She breaks a roll of quarters into the clear pouch. Grabs the care package from under her desk and sifts through the photo envelopes, counting out 10 images to take with her.

She opens a package of cheap white pillows and pulls one out. She matter-of-factly places it in a shopping bag with a package of sanitizer wipes and 99-cent lipstick.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS RIDE - MORNING

Ruby is in a fantastic mood as she sits with PONGESA and her now four-year old daughter.

PONGESA
He dedicated a song to me on Art
Laboe last Sunday.

RUBY
I'm jealous. Which one?

PONGESA
Jodeci. "Forever My Lady."

RUBY
Perfect.

PONGESA
I know. It made me cry. I'm gonna
do "Adore" back to him this
weekend. We played that every week
when I was suspended.

RUBY
Suspended? For what?

PONGESA
Kissing.

RUBY
What? No, you didn't.

PONGESA
I never told you that? Girl, yeah.
We were going at it. They didn't
even see us for a few minutes.

The women crack up together. Pongesa's daughter giggles too.

PONGESA (CONT'D)

Then, they came over and told me to get up and terminated the visit. I couldn't see him for ninety days.

RUBY

Uh-uh! I don't believe you did that.

PONGESA

I know, huh? I wouldn't do it now, but back then, I didn't even care. I was like whatever.

Smiling, the women enjoy the memory just before it fades.

The Greyhound continues down the dusty highway. Ruby turns to gaze out the window, with a private smile.

INT. VISITOR'S ROOM - DAY

Ruby waits among the other visitors. If they only knew her good news.

DEREK emerges from behind a steel door. He is more muscular than we've seen him before. His head now shaved bald.

She practically jumps up from her seat. They hug tight, then sit opposite each other. She's beyond excited.

RUBY

Can you even believe it? I can't believe it. Ten months early? Baby, you're coming home!

He nods half-heartedly.

DEREK

It's good news.

RUBY

It's great news!

DEREK

I just don't want to get our hopes up too high. You know they don't do us fair.

She's puzzled by the response. This is what they've been waiting for.

RUBY

You're just nervous. I am too. But, remember there's a better chance you're coming home than not. They're overcrowded in here. They want to let out non-violent offenders. With stable homes. You got everything going for you. You're coming home!

He looks at her, so giddy, so beautiful. He tries to match her enthusiasm, nodding his head with a smile.

DEREK

It's great news, baby.

RUBY

Heck yes, it is! So, look, I set a meeting with Fraine on the 28th to go over stuff for the hearing. I want her to talk to Littleton and try to get a positive report or recommendation. Legal Aid says unit managers sometimes give them.

DEREK

When'd you talk to Fraine's office?

RUBY

This morning. I called the emergency number and got an assistant. It's all set.

DEREK

That's a lot of money, Ruby.

RUBY

She's almost paid up from the trial. Just two more payments and we're even. Let's just use her. It won't hurt, right?

Derek's not pleased with the idea. An awkward silence. What's wrong with him? She tries to lighten the mood.

RUBY (CONT'D)

I saw DeeDee at Paulie's.

DEREK

How she look?

RUBY

Pretty. Sweet. She's a sweet little girl.

DEREK
Yeah? Gina give you any problems?

RUBY
Nope.

He gives her a look. He knows better.

RUBY (CONT'D)
Gina's Gina. Beautiful and stank.

DEREK
How about just stank.

RUBY
Okay.

DEREK
(amused)
Okay.

They're connected again. Back to themselves for a moment.

RUBY
What's that?

DEREK
What?

RUBY
That.

She reaches across the table and pulls down the collar of his shirt to reveal part of an INTIMIDATING TATTOO. She runs her hand over it. It's fairly recent. And then...

GUARD ON INTERCOM
Table 16. Back it up.

At this, Derek begins to fume. He turns to the guard defiantly, staring him down. Ruby clenches his wrist.

GUARD ON INTERCOM
Problem, 16?

RUBY
Derek. Don't. What are you doing?

He turns back, upset. She's completely surprised by his reaction and she can't help but stare at the tattoo.

DEREK
It's just a tat, Ruby.

RUBY
That's obvious. Of what?

DEREK
Just some street shit.

RUBY
Street shit? What does that mean?

DEREK
It don't mean nothing. Just something to do.

RUBY
It obviously means something.

DEREK
Ruby, a tattoo is the least of my worries. Just leave it.

RUBY
(beat)
What's going on in here, Derek?

DEREK
What do you think's going on?

Eye to eye for a moment longer than comfortable. They'll never get used to the visiting room relationship. Intimacy within the confines of one overcrowded room. No privacy. No air. Just tension. And, a ticking clock.

RUBY
I'm thinking you're working and studying and keeping your head down so you can come home. That's what I think.

Her fear is palpable. He eases up, smooths it over.

DEREK
It's just for show. It ain't nothing. Don't worry about me.

She's unconvinced. An awkward beat.

DEREK
Remember what we were doing six years ago this weekend? What is it about 2:00 right now? So, we're on the water. Crystal blue. Sun's setting. You had on that little white thing. With the yellow... uh-huh... looking gorgeous.

(MORE)

DEREK (cont'd)
We both trying not to get seasick
'cause we ain't never sailed
before.

The memory softens her.

RUBY
Eating saltine crackers.

DEREK
Trying to be sexy at the beach
eating saltine crackers.

They laugh a little. Then...

DEREK
Happy anniversary, baby.

RUBY
Happy anniversary.

A moment of understanding passes between them. Tender.

DEREK (CONT'D)
When's the last time you went to
the beach?

RUBY
I don't even know. Rosie was just
talking about taking Nickie to
Dockweiler. To see the fireworks.

DEREK
You going, right? You gotta go.
Have some fun. Take me a picture.

She nods. Then, reaches into her pouch and pulls out several
PICTURES. Nickie and Rosie. Billboards. And one of DeeDee.

RUBY
It's just the back of her. It's
all I could get.

Ruby's looking at the picture. Derek's looking at her.

EXT. DOCKWEILER BEACH - NIGHT

Fireworks erupt, lighting the dark sky. Ruby, Rosie and
Nickie are beachside, gazing to the heavens.

ROSIE
Okay, don't tell Ma. I don't want to hear her mouth about it. This is a serious theory, okay?

RUBY
Okay.

ROSIE
Okay, this lady on OWN was talking about how to meet your mate. Key word being 'meet.' As in half way. Put yourself in the right places to meet who you want.

RUBY
Uh-huh.

ROSIE
So, if you want a man who'll mow the lawn, don't go to the bar. Go to Home Depot. If you want a man who'll take your boy to see fireworks at the beach, bitch, go see fireworks at the beach.

RUBY
Is that why we're here?

ROSIE
That's why I'm here.

CUT TO:

The sisters stroll up the shore. Folks are camped out with blankets. Bonfires light the night. MUSIC is all around from cars and portable radios. Nickie is mesmerized.

O.S.
Hey! Excuse me! Excuse me, Sis.

They turn to find Brian, trudging through the sand. Breaking away from a group near a fire. Looking handsome in jeans.

BRIAN
I thought that was you!

RUBY
Oh. Hi!

He reaches them a little out of breath.

BRIAN
I saw you walking over here and I'm
yelling across the beach realizing
I didn't even know your name.
Didn't mean to be rude.

RUBY
No, it's fine. Ruby.

BRIAN
Ruby. Brian.

They shake hands, and he holds on a little longer than
kosher. Ruby notices. Rosie only sees a fresh prospect.
She reaches for his hand and he obliges with a quick grip.

ROSIE
I'm Rosie.

RUBY
Um... My sister and my nephew.
(to Rosie)
This is... Brian... one of my bus
drivers when I get off work.

Rosie nods and grins, not taking her eyes off of him.

BRIAN
Nice to meet you.
(to Nickie)
What's up, man? What's your name?

NICKIE
Nick.

ROSIE
Nickie.

BRIAN
(with a wink)
Hi Nickie.

Rosie's loving the attention he's giving her son.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
(to Ruby)
I'm surprised to see you out this
way.

RUBY
We came to see the show.

ROSIE

I had to convince her to come. But it's such a beautiful night. You can't waste a night like this, right?

Ruby knows that voice. It's Rosie's sexy voice. She looks over and does a double take when she finds Rosie's hooded sweat jacket unzipped, revealing a low-cut tank top.

BRIAN

Yeah, it was a good show this year. Hey, why don't ya'll come on over? There's Phillips BBQ. Cold beer.

Rosie's ready to accept the invite but Ruby answers first.

RUBY

We were just heading out.

BRIAN

(teasing)

Where you going? Can I come?

Rosie gets the message loud and clear. Then smiles slyly, watching her sister handle some long-overdue attention.

RUBY

I'm sure you'd rather be here.

Two pretty women near the fire HOWL with laughter, beer in hand. His group is having big fun.

BRIAN

You working tonight?

RUBY

Yeah, I am.

Rosie's disappointed at the lie.

BRIAN

You only work every other night.

RUBY

How do you know that?

BRIAN

I take you home.

RUBY

(amused)

I mean, the exact days.

BRIAN
A brother's got a good memory.
What can I say?

Rosie raises an eyebrow, impressed.

RUBY
Well, I worked on yesterday but I
picked up a shift on tonight too.

BRIAN
What's that? "On yesterday." "On
tonight." Alabama? Georgia?

Rosie's loving this.

RUBY
Uh... Montgomery, I guess.

BRIAN
The Gump.

ROSIE
(jumping in)
Wait, what you know about the Gump?

BRIAN
I know a lil' somethin' somethin'
'bout 'round that way. I was
stationed at Maxwell down there.

ROSIE
Our dad was stationed there for a
minute. That's crazy, huh Rube?

Ruby nods. Wanting this whole exchange to be over.

BRIAN
Well, I guess I'll see you Tuesday?

RUBY
Yes. Okay.

BRIAN
'Nite, Nick. I mean, Nickie. Good
night, ladies.

ROSIE
Good night.

He waves at all of them then returns to the party.

ROSIE (CONT'D)
Um?

RUBY

What?

ROSIE

What's up with *that*? He was all up
in your face. What's up?

Ruby holds up her hand, displaying her wedding ring.

ROSIE (CONT'D)

I gotta get us one of those.

Rosie grabs Nickie's hand and walks ahead. Ruby turns to watch Brian's party for a moment. The men and women laugh together and dance to the music. Free and unburdened.

Ruby smiles at them. Her time is soon coming.

As she begins to walk away from the beach, we see what she feels. What she wants. DEREK is walking beside her. His arm casually around her. They stroll along - together.

INT. RUBY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Ruby sits at her desk surrounded by forms and affidavits.

RUBY

(on the phone)

Mr. Littleton, I'm calling
regarding Inmate #P48057, North
Hall, Level D. Derek J. Murray.
My registrant number is 051954.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS STATION - EARLY MORNING

The male ticket agent ignores her while giving her a ticket.

RUBY (V.O.)

I haven't heard from him in four
days.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - MORNING

She knits furiously as she rides this time. Deep in thought.

RUBY (V.O.)

Our routine is for him to call on
Tuesday and Thursday and I go up on
Saturday. But I haven't heard from
him since last Saturday.

(MORE)

RUBY (V.O) (cont'd)
I'm concerned and hoping you can
check his status.

EXT. VICTORVILLE FEDERAL PRISON - MORNING

She waits in the cold line outside the gates. Anxious.

RUBY (V.O.)
I know you're busy and I appreciate
you taking the time to check.

INT. VICTORVILLE FEDERAL PRISON - LATER

A guard is processing her.

RUBY (V.O.)
Again, Inmate #P48057, Derek J.
Murray. And my phone number is 323-
898-5101. Thank you very much.

INT. VICTORVILLE ADMINISTRATOR'S OFFICE - LATER

Ruby sits at a metal desk across from Derek's unit manager,
MR. LITTLETON. He reviews a file.

MR. LITTLETON
No wonder we couldn't locate him in
Gen Pop. Seems there was a fight
on his block a few days back.

RUBY
Is he okay?

MR. LITTLETON
(reading)
Medic took a look. Held him for 48
hours. Released him back to the
block last night.

RUBY
So he's okay, right?

MR. LITTLETON
Assume so. They released him. The
disciplinary record doesn't have a
lot of detail on that. You'd have
to file for a medical record.
There's some pretty serious
offenses attached to this incident.
Two inmates critical.

(MORE)

MR. LITTLETON (cont'd)
Looks like a guard was involved.
Doesn't say what the extent of that
injury was.

RUBY
Can he use the phones now or can I
get a medical visit or something?

MR. LITTLETON
You don't understand. He's got
charges from this incident. Says
he was released from the medic into
Gen Pop lockdown awaiting solitary
transfer. One week in Ad Seg.

RUBY
Wait. What? What are the charges?

MR. LITTLETON
Assault, instigating a melee.

RUBY
A melee? That can't be right.

MR. LITTLETON
It's right alright. He's a
convicted felon. Not a stretch.

RUBY
Please don't patronize me, sir.
I'm just asking for information.
We have a parole hearing on the
books.

MR. LITTLETON
Look. It's a lockdown situation in
there. Then he's in the hole. I
don't know what else to tell you.

EXT. VICTORVILLE BUS STOP - DAY

She stands at the bus bench, alone. Looking out on the long
stretch of road ahead.

INT. ROSIE'S PLACE - DAY

Nickie's enjoying cartoons. Ruby, clearly exhausted, does
the same day over again. As she stacks her sister's BRIDAL
MAGAZINES in a neat pile, there's a KNOCK on the door. The
peephole reveals RUTH.

RUBY

Hi.

RUTH

Hi. Where's Rosie?

RUBY

At work.

RUTH

You're watching the baby?

Ruth doesn't wait for an answer, walking past Ruby.

NICKIE

Hi Grammie.

RUTH

Hi Sweetie.

(to Ruby)

I raised two kids but she thinks you can take better care of him.

RUBY

I'm just right up the street.

RUTH

I can be here in 10 minutes. Or, he could be over with me in a clean place for a change. And when are you supposed to sleep? You're working some nights, some days --

RUBY

I actually decided not to do the days.

RUTH

Why?

Ruby looks over to make sure Nickie isn't listening.

RUBY

I don't feel good about missing his calls right now. He's going through a tough time, I think.

RUTH

Oh he's going through a tough time? I see. Then, by all means, sit home and wait to comfort him. That makes a lot of sense.

Ruth lowers her voice. They both watch Nickie, singing along to cartoons on TELEVISION.

RUTH (CONT'D)
Why is she trying to keep me from my grandson?

RUBY
She's not trying to keep you from him, Ma. Maybe she just has a certain way she wants to do things.

RUTH
You two always have a certain way you want to do things. It never seems to involve me.

Ruby doesn't know what to say.

RUBY
I'm sorry, Ma.

Disappointed with the answer, Ruth goes to Nickie.

NICKIE
Where you going, Grammie?

RUTH
Home, baby. Be good for me.

NICKIE
Okay, love you.

RUTH
I love you too.

She shuts the door behind her.

INT. BRIAN'S BUS - MORNING

Ruby climbs onto the bus and goes to drop her coins in the farebox. Brian COVERS THE SLOT with his hand.

BRIAN
How's your day going?

It's clear he wants to talk - maybe even flirt. She's not sure how she feels about that, but stands near him on the crowded bus anyway.

RUBY
Okay. And yours?

BRIAN
Can't complain. It was good to see
you the other night.

RUBY
Yeah. You too.

BRIAN
You look different in real clothes.

RUBY
You too.

BRIAN
So, you like music?

RUBY
Um... yeah.

BRIAN
You sure? I know it's a tough
question. If you need more time...

RUBY
(giving in)
Yes, I like music.

BRIAN
You been to JuJu's? In Leimert?
Cool little afterhours spot.

Ruby shakes her head no.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
Good place to unwind after work.
Or, before work in your case. This
nice deejay's spinning on Wednesday
if you want to check it out.

RUBY
(a beat)
You see my ring, right?

BRIAN
Yeah, but I... You don't seem....
My bad. My bad. I didn't mean to
offend you. A ring doesn't always
mean... I thought you might've been
separated or something. I know a
sister who rocks one so she can
walk up the street without getting
hollered at. I figured it was
something like that. That's on me.

He pulls over. As riders begin to pour in, she ventures deeper into the bus to find a safe place. He watches her.

INT. BRIAN'S BUS - LATER THAT MORNING

Cornelia and Ruby sit side by side, both knitting on the same piece as is now their routine. Comfortable together. Like old friends.

CORNELIA
(under her breath)
Cornelia, you going to hell.

RUBY
I'm sorry?

CORNELIA
I've lived a pretty good life but sure as I sit here I know I'm going to hell.

RUBY
What?

CORNELIA
Not right for a woman my age. Look at me, straight from church and just sinnin' already. But can I tell you about that dark drink of water?

Cornelia motions toward the front of the bus in Brian's direction as he assists a rider in a wheelchair onto the bus. Ruby watches him, then shakes her head.

RUBY
You're something else.

CORNELIA
I know I am. That's what I know. But that young man reminds me of somebody nice. So when I see him I'm not thinking the right things. Hellbound, I'm telling you!

Cornelia cracks up. Ruby joins in.

RUBY
What you thinking about?

CORNELIA
Oh no.

RUBY
Tell me. You've gone ahead and
opened the can. Might as well.

CORNELIA
Billy Fisher.

RUBY
Billy Fisher.

CORNELIA
Hmmm. The most beautiful black man
I ever did see.

Ruby settles in for a good story, with a grin.

RUBY
Fine?

CORNELIA
Honey, yes. Hard-working like that
one there. With a crooked smile
just the same. Comfortable in his
own skin, strong with his hands,
and I'm telling you... I couldn't
get air when I was around that man.
Plain couldn't breathe the first
few times around him.

RUBY
So, what happened?

CORNELIA
He asked after me and that was
that. We were together for a good
long time.

RUBY
So, it was happily ever after?

CORNELIA
That it was.
(beat)
You got a man, Sweetpea?
(Ruby nods)
What's he like?

RUBY
He's not around much.

CORNELIA
Sometimes that's better. Don't you
sit up nights waiting for him to
come home.

(MORE)

CORNELIA (cont'd)

When he comes on home, you just say something sweet and go on about your business. Enjoy your evening or day or what have you. Have your own things to do. See your girlfriends. That's the mistake we make. We don't do what we should. When he's there, he's there. When he's not, just go and live your day, you hear? I'd do my shopping. Watch my stories. Make my visits or what have you. It's better that way.

RUBY

Yes, ma'am.

CORNELIA

You don't believe me. I can tell. Think I'm just an old lady who don't know what I'm talking about. But believe me, it'll save you a lot of worrying.

RUBY

I believe you.

Cornelia points outside and gathers her things.

CORNELIA (CONT'D)

Slow on the draw today, Sweetpea.

Ruby pulls the CALL BELL for Cornelia.

RUBY

Have a good day, Ms. Cornelia.

CORNELIA

I intend to.

The old woman makes her way down the aisle towards the front. Brian slides out of his seat and respectfully places her arm around his. She gazes up at him.

BRIAN

Ms. Cornelia, watch your step here.

CORNELIA

Brian honey, I'll see you tomorrow?

BRIAN

I'll be here waiting for you. Have a good day now.

Brian and Ruby's eyes meet for a quick smile as he climbs back into his seat. She turns to watch Cornelia stride up the street. The picture of class. Dignified and independent.

Ruby unconsciously straightens in her seat, adjusts her jacket and pats her hair into place.

EXT. RUBY'S PLACE - DAY TO NIGHT

Ruby enters her apartment. We see the day go by. Life moves as folks head to work. Kids walk to school.

And over all this activity, we hear DEREK'S VOICE.

DEREK (V.O.)

Hi Baby. I know you're worried, but don't be because I'm fine. I'm more worried about you, and what you think is going on in here. I'm sorry to put you through this. You probably came up here. I don't know how much you know. There was a fight and some things went down. If people runnin', you run, Ruby. If they fight, you fight. They thought I was in the middle of it, but I wasn't...

Ruby closes the blinds as usual and sets her alarm. She sits on the bed. The mailman comes. Brothers fix a car across the street. A woman walks her dog.

DEREK (V.O.)

Baby, I'm trying to come home. You gonna have the things we had again. Everything you deserve. But no shortcuts this time. I promise you. I'm gonna be better. I'm trying. But to be honest, there's nothing in here for the better. I'm trying though. The worst part is thinking about what you're thinking. I hate to put you through tears. It kills me.

She reaches for a pill cup in the pocket of her scrubs. Kids are home from school. They play in the street.

DEREK (V.O.)

Rashad's bringing you some money that's owed me. I know I said she's a waste of money, but I think I do need Fraine for the hearing.

(MORE)

DEREK (V.O.) (cont'd)
I need somebody who knows what
they're doing.

She takes the pill and lays back, staring at the ceiling.

DEREK (V.O.)
This lockdown is pretty bad and I
don't know when it's gonna be over.
I hope this hook-up works and you
get this letter. I don't even know
if you'll get this. But I pray you
do. When I'm home, you won't have
to worry about nothing. It'll be
like it used to be. I'll take care
of you. I'll take care of
everything. Love. Derek.

Streetlights flicker on. The starless sky looms, open and
inviting. Ruby begins to walk down the street to her bus.

INT. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Ruby sits in a well-appointed outer office of SHAW, FRAINE,
BOBB & ASSOCIATES, leafing through magazines. An ASSISTANT
appears. *

ASSISTANT
Mrs. Murray?

Ruby stands but the woman motions for her to remain seated.

ASSISTANT (CONT'D)
Hi there. I'm supposed to get a
money order from you?

RUBY
(handing it over)
Yes.

ASSISTANT
Thank you.

The woman hands the money order to the receptionist. Then
returns to Ruby.

ASSISTANT (CONT'D)
Mrs. Murray, Ms. Fraine asked me to
notify you that we won't be able to
open the parole case unless you can
remit the retainer in full.

RUBY
I've been making regular payments.

ASSISTANT

Yes, the fees for the original defense are now reconciled. But, from our end, I guess it's risky to continue with the next proceeding without the full payment. Because you'd been paying, well... slowly.

Ruby is stunned. Her surprise quickly grows into anger.

ASSISTANT

I don't know much about this. I'm sorry.

RUBY

I'd like to speak with her directly.

ASSISTANT

I'm sorry I don't have anything on her calendar open this week.

Ruby grabs her purse and rises to leave. Defeats starts to seep in. But almost to the exit, she suddenly turns back.

Heading with determination through those back office doors.

INT. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Ruby walks swiftly down the interior hallway, glancing at signs on each office door as she passes. The assistant trails behind, desperate to stop her.

Finally, Ruby sees a door inscribed with: ALBERTA FRAINE. With a quick twist of the knob, Ruby opens the door.

The lawyer is consulting with a well-dressed Latino couple. Ruby's inside before she can say a word.

RUBY

You're dropping me?

FRAINE

Ruby. Can you give me a min...

RUBY

You can cheat me with your fees. You've been doing that since day one. Giving me an hour of prep and charging me for five. But what you won't do is jeopardize our case.

FRAINE
 (embarrassed)
 Ruby, I'm going to need you to...

RUBY
 If you're asking me to pay in full
 up front with two weeks notice,
 you're dropping me. You know I
 can't do it. You know that!

FRAINE
 Mrs. Murray...

RUBY
 He's in there with murderers and
 rapists. A thousand murderers and
 rapists and thugs on his block
 alone. And, you're putting me in a
 situation where I can't help him.

FRAINE
 We have certain costs to
 consider...

RUBY
 You've been paid! I paid every
 month as stipulated in the payment
 arrangement made with your
 accounting department. On a case
 you lost by the way, but doesn't
 matter. What were you going to do?
 String me along until the hearing
 date? This is our life. I don't
 know if this is an ethics violation
 or what, but I'll be contacting the
 bar. And every professional
 organization you belong to. Is
 this how your treat all your
 clients, Ms. Fraine? Or just the
 black and brown ones?

*

The Latino couple frowns, waiting for the answer too.

FRAINE
 You know that's not true. We can
 deal with this.

RUBY
 How are we going to deal with this?

FRAINE
 (crossing to her)
 The existing retainer is obviously
 outside of your comfort zone.
 (MORE)

FRAINE (cont'd)

Perhaps we put an associate on the case who is more in your range.

RUBY

I want you.

FRAINE

I don't ordinarily handle parole reviews. My associates are very competent.

They are eye to eye now.

RUBY

You said, he's a small fish in a big money business. Nobody regulates the gun makers or cares about the unlicensed white boys at the gunshows who buy and sell with no problem whatsoever. The low man on the totem pole is the easiest to reach. You said all that to me. If you show up at the review, it carries some weight. He asked for you specifically. Look, I know you need your money and you don't want to wait forever for it. I get it. I just can't pay it all up front.

FRAINE

Ruby, that payment arrangement was reconfigured twice for you. Only because of this... passion. Don't get in over your head again.

RUBY

The offense was non-violent. First-time. No priors. He's doing good time. Stable home life. There's a chance.

FRAINE

Could you do 50%? Can you do half?

RUBY

I can get it.

FRAINE

Okay. See? This is called a negotiation. It's not uncommon.
(to the couple)
See? No problems here.

Off Ruby, triumphant but troubled.

INT. RUTH'S APARTMENT - DAY

Ruby sits across from Ruth at the dining room table as if she's on the witness stand.

RUTH
How much, Ruby.

RUBY
It's \$2,500. I have \$500, but they need half up front.

RUTH
I have to do math now too?

RUBY
It's seven fifty.

RUTH
Seven hundred and fifty dollars.

Ruth shakes her head and reaches into her purse for the checkbook.

Each moment feels longer than the last as Ruby watches her mother write "Seven Hundred and Fifty Dollars." She LOWERS HER HEAD and counts the seconds until this is over.

RUTH
My car payment is due on the 15th.

RUBY
I'll have it back to you by then.

Ruth looks upon her daughter. It's a pained look brimming with tenderness. But it is brief. She tears the check from its book and slides it across the table.

RUTH
Hold your head up please.

Then, she rises to leave. Off Ruby.

INT. BRIAN'S BUS - DAY

Ruby rides as usual. The bus BUMPS along. Everyone rises and falls together in a weird sort of harmony.

Cornelia makes her way onto the bus. We notice that she passes by Brian without a word.

Brian nods at her from his perch, but the old woman doesn't respond. Her eyes are VACANT as she flashes her bus pass.

Ruby waves her over. Cornelia looks at her usual companion as if she's a perfect stranger. Ruby waves again. Cornelia doesn't recognize her. Then, the woman slips into a seat several places away.

THROUGH THE REARVIEW MIRROR, Brian watches regretfully, knowingly.

The old woman's eyes are empty, disconnected. Ruby struggles to understand. Never taking her eyes off of Cornelia.

INT. BRIAN'S BUS - LATER THAT MORNING

Ruby watches Cornelia closely. The old woman's stop is coming up but she doesn't make a move.

Ruby tugs at the CALL BELL for her from afar. Cornelia is motionless. Ruby looks up to the front of the bus towards Brian, unsure of what to do. He is watching through his rearview.

As he pulls the bus to the curb, he calls out.

BRIAN
Del Amo Boulevard!

Cornelia doesn't move. Riders file out and load on. Ruby begins to rise and go toward Cornelia. Then Brian gets up and makes his way to her first.

BRIAN
Hello, Ma'am. You asked me to let
you know when we were at Del Amo.

Cornelia looks up at him. An uncertain beat.

CORNELIA
Yes. Thank you, sir.

BRIAN
Yes, ma'am. You live near here?

CORNELIA
I do. Just up the road.

BRIAN
I wish I could take you right up to
your door. Let me help you down
these steps.

CORNELIA
No thank you kindly. I'm fine.

Cornelia makes her way to the exit. Ruby watches her head up the street, moving to the front of the bus near Brian to keep an eye on the old woman.

RUBY
Has that happened before?

BRIAN
Yeah.

RUBY
A lot?

BRIAN
On and off. It just kind of comes and goes. Is it Alzheimers or...?

RUBY
Well, not necessarily. It could be other things.

BRIAN
Rough to watch, whatever it is.

RUBY
Is she going to get home okay? I should follow her.

BRIAN
She knows her way. She just forgot.

They watch her turn the corner through the window.

RUBY
How long have you been driving her?

BRIAN
About two years. One time, she didn't ride for a week. Then came back as good as new. I asked Metro and they said if she's functioning and isn't a danger to herself or other riders, wasn't much I could do. It's just real tough with her because when she's in her right mind, she's so alive, you know? But then, she doesn't know you and... it just breaks your heart.

Devastated, Ruby knows the feeling.

INT. RUBY'S PLACE - DAY

A KNOCK at the door. Ruby is half-dressed when she answers.

RUBY
I'm almost read...

She's stunned to see RASHAD, Derek's friend. He's attractive enough to distract from a bad attitude and purposely laconic persona. But any woman with sense would know to stay away.

RUBY (CONT'D)
(tying her robe)
Rashad. I thought you were Rosie.

RASHAD
I'm just dropping this off for D.

He hands her a thick envelope. She hesitates, then takes it.

RUBY
His parole hearing's today.

RASHAD
Yeah.

RUBY
I'll let you know how it goes?

RASHAD
(walking away)
Yeah, aight.

INT. VICTORVILLE HEARINGS ROOM - DAY

Several men and women sit on a panel. Ruby and Rosie are in folding chairs, side by side.

At the inmate's table, Fraine leafs through a file. Ruby fumbles through her file too. A bundle of nerves. Rosie takes her sister's hand.

Ruby squeezes Rosie's hand and swallows hard. This is it. This is the day she's been praying for.

The side door opens and Derek is led in. He appears to be well, wearing a dark blue suit.

From several rows back, Ruby reviews every inch of him. He doesn't look her way as he takes his seat. Concentrating on what his lawyer is saying.

Ruby watches their conference intently, but can only see his profile and the back of his head.

TIMECUT:

The hearing is underway.

FRAINE

Alberta Fraine representing Derek J. Murray. #P48057. As you know, Mr. Murray has served four years and two months consecutively without undisputed incident. We're here today to request a minimum time served enforcement. Mr. Murray is a married man. He and his wife, Mrs. Roberta M. Murray, registrant #051954, were married prior to his conviction. Mrs. Murray, who is present here today, is an employed registered nurse who maintains the couple's residence. She is in full support of the minimum release.

A man on the panel chimes in.

MAN

(impressed)

It's been awhile, Ms. Fraine.

FRAINE

Yessir, hello.

MAN

Several things. An incident that just happened last month. Clearly on the facility record.

FRAINE

If I may re-state, I said "undisputed" incident. Mr. Murray is disputing the facility's charges against him for the unfortunate events of last month. He did not initiate the disruptive activity.

MAN

Facility presented tape on this. I saw your client in action. The contraband weapon was...

(looking through papers)

... a pipe, I think.

A pipe? Did Ruby hear that right?

FRAINE

If I may, the recorded angle was obscured and didn't allow a full view of the incident. It doesn't show that Mr. Murray was first assaulted out of camera range. He was admitted to the medic for the injury.

Derek shifts in his seat.

FRAINE (CONT'D)

May I remind the board that Mr. Murray has served over four and a half years without a single facility charge before the disputed event. He's one of the good guys.

MAN

Block administrators have noted gang affiliation on this inmate's file since his arrival.

Ruby has changed. The hope on her face replaced by something almost indecipherable. Fear, confusion, anger.

FRAINE

Respectfully, every man in here has gang affiliation. My client is not an active participant in any gang activity whatsoever. No charges have been filed by the facility at any point. May I submit that when you are surrounded by gang activity, you become guilty by association.

MAN

What's this internal disciplinary warning? Two years ago. Involving sexual contact with an officer. Jacinta Sanchez. Consensual contact before she was dismissed.

Derek drops his head.

ROSIE

What the hell...

Ruby blinks back her disbelief. Not sure if she heard right. This is not happening. She wants to scream, but cannot move.

FRAINE

Sir, the facility did not bring formal charges against the officer or my client for the alleged contact.

MAN

(to the panel)

Anything else?

(to Fraine)

Okay, Ms. Fraine. Thank you. Please be in touch with the board on its ruling. We're adjourned.

And with that, it's over. Fraine whispers to Derek, but he is no longer listening. The officer approaches him.

Ruby doesn't take her eyes off him. The tension in her body is palpable. Her back erect as she strains to see him around the officer. She's desperate to make eye contact, but Derek doesn't look up.

He rises from the table and holds out his hands in front of him. The officer handcuffs him and leads him to the door. She follows him with her eyes. Willing him to turn. Her jaw clenched. Her face in turmoil.

In SLOW MOTION, he moves toward the exit. He is at the door, walking through it.

And then, the very instant before he disappears on the other side, he LOOKS AT HER.

It's just a moment, seemingly all that he can bear. But, in that millisecond, she sees his shame. And he sees what he didn't want to. Her rage.

And then - HE IS GONE.

Devastation is not the word. Rosie reaches for Ruby and holds on tight. Fraine and others look on. Rosie looks ready to fight them all.

Slowly, mournfully, Ruby buries her head on her sister's shoulder.

INT. EMPTY PATIENT ROOM - NIGHT

From the door, a SILHOUETTE through the curtain.

On the curtain's other side, the vertical blinds cast shadows across Ruby's face. She sits still on the edge of a neatly-made bed. Quietly imploding.

In her hands are a FEW DOZEN PILLS. Her face is tear-stained as she stoically considering what is before her.

Then, she shovels the pills in her mouth. Clenching her eyes shut and SWALLOWING hard. With each passing moment, we fear for her. Her expression is inscrutable. Sitting on the edge of the bed. Almost catatonic.

And then, emotion emerges. Ever so slight. It's anger. She rises from her place, heavy. We track her as she crosses the dark room.

The BATHROOM LIGHT flicks on, shining through a half-open door. We hear her VOMITING.

INT. TAXICAB - NIGHT

Ruby rides for a while, fighting off her demons as the city passes outside the window.

A freeway sign: CRENSHAW BOULEVARD - 4 MILES.

The plexiglass of the taxi barrier is dirty and through it the city lights blur all around her. In a haze.

Another sign: CRENSHAW BOULEVARD - 2 MILES.

Her mind is working. Deciding. Where is she going? She doesn't know what to do. Then a snap decision.

The cab comes upon another sign: CRENSHAW BOULEVARD - EXIT.

RUBY
(almost to herself)
Can you get off here?

CABBIE
Huh?

RUBY
I changed my mind. Crenshaw and
Leimert please.

She pulls off her scrub top and stuffs it into her bag. She adjusts her wifebeater undershirt, then pulls out a lipgloss. Checking her REFLECTION in the window.

EXT. LEIMERT PARK - NIGHT

Ruby arrives at Leimert Park, an artsy area in South Central LA. We see folks dining out at THE KITCHEN and catching some jazz at THE WORLD. Men playing chess under a streetlamp.

A group of cool-looking people stand outside a hole-in-the-wall joint. It's JUJU.

Then, with a deep breath, she walks towards the club.

EXT. JUJU - CONTINUOUS

We hear BJORK singing over KRS-1's "Jack of Spades" beat. A brother with cornrows hustles indie CDs and more.

BROTHER

All the local favs, ya'll. CVE,
Hip Hop Klan, Chali2na, Abstract,
Medusa, Aceyalone, Figures of
Speech. Classic Good Life, LA
underground, ya'll.

INT. JUJU - CONTINUOUS

A woman wearing an Indian sari over jeans, enforces the cover charge from her perch on a high stool.

Ruby ventures deeper inside the cozy space. Folks are grooving to the music, chilling on couches along the walls.

A FEMALE DEEJAY is atop a small stage like a queen on a throne. Her subjects bob their dreads, braids and 'fros in praise of what she's spinning.

Ruby spies Brian across the room immersed in a serious game of DOMINOES. As she approaches, he sees her and lights up with surprise. She smiles back, approaching him.

RUBY

Hi.

BRIAN

(rising from his seat)

Hi.

RUBY

You were right.

BRIAN

About what?

She holds up her hand, showing her ring. He takes her hand.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Okay. It's okay.

TIMECUT:

They are on the jam-packed dance floor getting their groove on. With a drink in one hand, Ruby lets her hair down, literally, with the other hand.

A couple nearby is cutting a serious rug, maybe too serious. These over-the-top dancers have everyone around them in awe.

Brian begins to mimic the guy. She's almost in tears with laughter.

The song changes to a sultry, electronic instrumental. She boldly slips her hand down to the small of his back as they sway together.

INT. BRIAN'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Ruby and Brian ride in his F150. The RADIO is on. She's full of liquid courage. He seems a little nervous.

BRIAN

I don't get over to this side of town too much. Nice little pocket. What bus you take at night?

RUBY

Two actually. The 117 and the 210.

BRIAN

Then you know Robrico.

RUBY

Been riding with him for years.

BRIAN

Good guy, huh?

RUBY

Yeah, he's a sweetheart.

His cell phone RINGS.

BRIAN

Hello, Beautiful.

Ruby reacts but hides it well. She turns toward the window, wishing she could make herself invisible.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Good, good. I'll be late tonight.

(listening then smiling)

Okay, you get that beauty sleep.

I'll call you tomorrow.

(MORE)

BRIAN (CONT'D)
 (listening)
 Love you too.

He hangs up. Ruby wants to open the door and jump out.

BRIAN
 Got kids?

RUBY
 Huh? Oh no. No, I don't. You?

BRIAN
 A little girl. Well, not little anymore. 15. That was the nightly call that costs me \$60 a month on the new cell phone that I got hustled into buying.
 (feminine voice)
 "Daddy, I need to call and check on you every night. I worry about you drivin' the streets."
 (back to normal)
 That girl's got me wrapped around her little finger.

Ruby ventures out.

RUBY
 I'm sure her mother had something to say about that.

BRIAN
 Oh, I'm sure she did too. But she doesn't speak to me, so whatever it was, she said it to somebody else.

EXT./INT. BRIAN'S TRUCK - NIGHT

The truck pulls to the curb. From inside, Ruby looks up at her apartment as Brian walks around to open her door. But when he opens it, she doesn't move.

She motions for him to "come here." He does, ducking inside.

Face to face. She leans over and KISSES him. Tentatively at first. And then, more.

He leans into the car, holding her hips and trying to keep his balance. A CAR DRIVES BY, and they come up for air.

He is searching her eyes, trying to figure out what's next.

RUBY
Let's go somewhere.

BRIAN
What about here?

RUBY
Not here.

INT. BRIAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

His apartment is a small open space with floor to ceiling windows. The amber light of the street lamps stream through the blinds, casting shadows on the scarcely furnished room.

She sees her reflection in the window. The wind blows paper bags and soda cans on the street several hundred feet below. She watches them dance, placing her hand on the glass.

BRIAN
You should see my old house.
Plush. This neighborhood sucks and
the building's falling apart, but
the view...

She turns her back on the city and focuses on him.

BRIAN
(with new meaning)
The view is amazing.

Not there to talk, she walks towards him.

He wraps his arms around her. Hers wrap around him. And unexpectedly, they stay that way for a while.

TIMECUT:

She lays away from him as he sleeps, watching the sun rising over the buildings through the window. Alone with her thoughts. She tries to figure out how to feel. Then, he puts his hand on her side.

BRIAN
Don't think.

He moves behind her, holding her. She leans back, and rests.

INT. MONTAGE

We see the things rarely seen after a night like this.

Leaving the apartment together, awkwardly. Driving in the car side by side. He swerves into Krispy Kreme. They eat doughnuts in the car as she empties packets of sugar into their coffee. He pulls up to her apartment.

She exits the car and gives him a quick peck before heading upstairs to her place.

EXT/INT. RUBY'S PLACE - MORNING

She enters her apartment slowly. Then turns on the answering machine. Standing still, she surveys her home, her life.

She leans back against the wall, and slides down until she is a jumble on the floor. Her arms are around her knees. She looks at nothing in particular, completely absorbed in the memory of her intimate encounter and what it all means.

We see what she feels. DEREK sitting across from her, watching.

EXT. ROSIE'S PLACE - DAY

The sisters sit on Rosie's small balcony, flipping through circulars in the Sunday paper.

ROSIE

I don't even know what she likes.

RUBY

You know exactly what she likes.
Why you trying to act like you
don't talk to her everyday still.

ROSIE

I don't. Maybe every other day.
But its just cause she's always
calling and coming by. It's her
birthday. Otherwise, I wouldn't -

RUBY

Give it up, co-dependent.

ROSIE

She's trying to apologize in her
own special jacked up way. Look at
this.

Rosie shows her a picture from a catalog.

RUBY

That looks like you.

ROSIE

It needs to look like you. Men
like red. Attracts their eye.
(beat)
My treat. For when you're ready.

RUBY

I kinda went out the other night.

ROSIE

What? Where? You didn't call me?

RUBY

It was spur of the moment. To this
little lounge. I met up with
Brian. You remember him?

ROSIE

You met up with him.

RUBY

We danced. And he took me home.

ROSIE

You danced and he took you home?
What's that mean?

RUBY

Doesn't mean anything.

ROSIE

You kiss him?
(off Ruby's nod)
I'll be damned! Hells yes!

RUBY

Don't.

ROSIE

The past is past! The future is
kinda cute with a good job!

RUBY

It was a one time thing.

ROSIE

Why, dude? Why can't you do you?

RUBY

'Cause I can't.

ROSIE

Derek's doing his thing. Clearly.
He ain't thinking about you.

RUBY
 (hurt)
 Don't.

Rosie lets it go.

INT. RUBY'S PLACE - NIGHT

Ruby irons, getting ready for work. The cell phone rings. The screen reads "Victorville CTF."

She doesn't answer. One ring. Two. Three. Four.

She dials into her voicemail.

DEREK
 (on message)
 I only got a few minutes on this card. I know you're there. Fourth message. I know you're sitting right there. You don't want to talk to me. You shouldn't want to. You shouldn't have ever wanted to. I'm sorry for what I've done to you. I knew better. From the beginning, I knew better. Maybe you did too. You're doing the right thing now.
 (with difficulty)
 Okay.
 (beat)
 Okay.

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The phone clicks off. Off Ruby, in pain.

INT. BRIAN'S BUS - MORNING

Cornelia and Ruby sit together on the hot bus. Knitting. It's a good day for the old woman. Back to her old self.

RUBY
 How was service this morning?

CORNELIA
 Oh, pastor had a powerful sermon. Said we have to find the, um.... what was it... the private wish. That's something we really want deep down, but we think we don't deserve.

(MORE)

CORNELIA (cont'd)
Said to ask yourself what makes you
happy and see if it's the same
thing that makes God happy.

RUBY
I see.

CORNELIA
I could want to streak across this
bus because this heat isn't making
me too happy right now. But would
that make God happy? God would
say, "Cornelia, sweetpea, put your
clothes on please."

Ruby chuckles with Cornelia. She catches Brian watching them
through his REARVIEW.

CORNELIA (CONT'D)
Pastor says, you should treat
yourself sweet like a baby. I
liked that.

RUBY
That's a nice thought.

The women's knitting hooks dance in a familiar rhythm.

CORNELIA
Yes, a nice thought. I'm going to
try hard to remember it.

Ruby looks to Cornelia, who returns her gaze. Cornelia knows
what is happening to her. It passes between them, unspoken.

CORNELIA
Shoot, if I had a private wish, I
made it true. I wished I could
travel and see things, and I did.
I wished I had a little piece of
the world just for me, a house, and
I had that. If I want to go to
service every single night, I'll do
it. I want to watch David
Letterman and eat Oreos in bed,
I'll do that too.

RUBY
Is that the kind of wish he was
talking about? The Oreo wish?

CORNELIA
Honey, I don't know but I got happy
anyway. What's your wish?

RUBY
Oh, I don't know.

CORNELIA
Well, what makes you happy?

Ruby thinks and shrugs.

CORNELIA
C'mon.

A beat.

RUBY
My nephew.

CORNELIA
Okay, how old is he?

RUBY
He's five.

CORNELIA
That's a beautiful age, isn't it?
See you have something.
(beat)
You know it's not really still a
private wish if you tell me. Then
it'd be a public wish. I don't
know the rules exactly, but private
is private.

Cornelia pats Ruby's hand, letting her off the hook. Ruby
nods, soothed by the old woman's attention.

INT. BRIAN'S BUS - MORNING

Brian's bus sits at the curb. It's the end of the line. The
few remaining passengers spill out. Ruby remains in her
seat. Brian flicks a SILVER LEVER, shutting them in as the
doors slide close. Picking up a soda can and newspaper as he
walks toward her. She watches him.

BRIAN
This seat taken?

She motions for him to sit next to her.

BRIAN
I kept waiting for you to change
your mind and get off somewhere.
(then)
I been thinking about you all day.

RUBY
Is that a problem?

BRIAN
Uh, yeah kinda.

RUBY
Why's that?

BRIAN
'Cause about a dozen people probably got themselves free rides today. And 'cause I'm on city property with a vixen next to me.

RUBY
Vixen. Good word.

He leans in to kiss her. It's more tender than she expected.

BRIAN
Want to see a movie this weekend?
Don't say you're working.

RUBY
I don't know if we like the same kind of movies.

BRIAN
What kind do you like?

RUBY
Indie ones. Foreign ones.

BRIAN
Movies where a brother's got to read.

RUBY
Yeah, those.

BRIAN
I can swing with subtitles.

RUBY
They play on the Westside mostly.
They don't show them over here.

He gently brushes a strand of hair from her face.

BRIAN
It's not a problem.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Ruby and Nickie walk together on a sunny afternoon. Fast food signs and beauty shops call out from every corner.

As she stops to buy a newspaper, Nickie watches a teenager exchange something small with a man. The teen's eyes dart left and right, until they land on Nickie. Nickie smiles at him, innocent. The teenager smiles a real smile back.

Ruby follows her nephew's eyes, then immediately takes his hand in hers and crosses the street.

NICKIE

Aunt Rube.

RUBY

Hmm?

NICKIE

Why don't you care about Grammie?

She slows her pace and leans into him.

RUBY

What'd you say, Pop?

NICKIE

Why don't you care about Grammie?

RUBY

I do care about Grammie. I love Grammie.

NICKIE

Okay.

RUBY

What made you think that I don't care about her?

NICKIE

Grammie said.

RUBY

Grammmie said I didn't care about her?

NICKIE

Yes.

RUBY

Well, she made a mistake, okay?

NICKIE

Okay... She said you only care about Uncle Derek. I told her it's because he's at the war.

RUBY

I love everybody the same, Pop. You, your Mom, Grammie, Uncle Derek. Everybody the same. Okay?

NICKIE

Okay. Is he nice?

RUBY

Yeah. He's nice.

NICKIE

What does he like to play?

RUBY

He likes to...

(a beat as she remembers)

He likes to play outside. Basketball and stuff. He likes to cook. He's a real, real good cook.

NICKIE

What does he make?

RUBY

Oh, he makes everything. He makes good gumbo. Delicious. With crab and shrimp and... And, he makes very good tacos.

NICKIE

When is Uncle Derek coming home?

RUBY

I don't know, Pop.

INT. ROSIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Rosie quietly shuts Nickie's door and creeps into the dark living room, lit only by the TELEVISION.

Ruby reclines in an overstuffed chair watching MO'NIQUE, lulled into a latenight haze. Rosie falls onto the couch.

RUBY

He asked me about Derek today.

ROSIE

Ugh. Sorry.

RUBY

He just asked what he liked to do.
Couldn't tell him Uncle Derek does
dirt while Aunt Rube watches.
Doesn't go over well with the kids.

Rosie looks over at Ruby, who keeps her eyes on the screen.

ROSIE

So, that's the new thing? You
watched.

Ruby keeps her eyes on the TV.

ROSIE (CONT'D)

Maybe it's healthy to make excuses.
I don't know. But I think it's
pretty simple. He messed up and
they locked him up. Period.

RUBY

Every month he'd be gone four, five
days. What'd I think? He and
Rashad were really going to visit
"friends?" Always helping somebody
move to a new city? That condo.
All that furniture. The new truck.
I wasn't blind.

ROSIE

You believed what he told you. How
is that your fault?

RUBY

I knew something wasn't right. I
ignored it. I wanted everything we
had. I let him think I could only
be happy with all that stuff.
That's on me.

ROSIE

You're here blaming yourself while
he's in there doing God knows what?
Is whoring with a guard your fault
too? That's just taking it too
far. I mean, c'mon. Get a grip.

RUBY

I don't think you're not in a
position to give advice about
relationships, so don't.

Her words bruise as soon as they're spoken.

RUBY (CONT'D)

I didn't mean that.

ROSIE

It's cool. You're right. I don't know a thing about relationships. I haven't had one man whose stayed in my life like you've had. When he got locked up, I actually had this crazy thought, that at least she's got someone who would care if she disappeared. Even if he is locked up, she's got somebody who could say, I remember you when you were beautiful and young. And who would always see that in you... That's not happening for me. I have to see it in myself. But at least I see it, dude. You can't see two feet in front of you.

With that, Rosie turns up the volume on the TV.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - DAY

Ruby and Brian sit side by side, watching the big screen.

IN THE FILM, a black man in his thirties sits shirtless on the edge of a bed. He strokes the arm of a plain white woman in her sixties, dressed in a nightgown. The scene appears oddly platonic, as if he is comforting her after a hard day.

Then, the film jump cuts to the next morning. Obviously postcoital. The old woman stands over the bed as she watches the young man sleep.

BRIAN

What the? Did...?

Brian turns to Ruby, at a loss for words.

BRIAN

Did they just...? Did...?

Ruby is amused by his reaction.

BRIAN

Ah, nah. What kinda movie you got me up in? I didn't agree to this...

EXT. MOVIE THEATER - LATER

A MOVIEHOUSE on the Westside, a predominantly white area. The marquee reads "ALI: FEAR EATS THE SOUL."

Ruby and Brian stroll out, in the midst of a conversation.

BRIAN

I get that. I understand what they're trying to say, but it wasn't realistic.

RUBY

It's not about being realistic. It's making a point. Showing you something so far out of bounds that it makes you think.

BRIAN

And I appreciate that. But the point could have been better made if she wasn't like... *that* old. C'mon. Of course, the first thing you think is he's hustling her.

RUBY

He gives her money!

BRIAN

I know! That's when I'm thinking, "Brother, what's really going on?"

RUBY

He was an outcast. Everybody treated him like less, except her.

BRIAN

Okay, yes. I get that. But why does he go in her bedroom?

RUBY

That's all he had to give.

BRIAN

Nah, I don't buy it. I understand the premise, okay? I read it all just like you did. But ain't a brother in his right mind getting down like that. I don't care if people treat you like nothing. She was damn near 70 something years old. There wasn't a real future with her.

RUBY

She wasn't 70. And what 70 years old don't have a future? And, maybe it wasn't about a future. Maybe it was about the past - what they had gone through - and how they were dealing with it.

BRIAN

Everything's about the future.

He grabs her hand and they walk across the street. Then...

RUBY

You're not going to ask me about my situation?

BRIAN

I figure you'll tell me when you want me to know. My wife.... My ex hated that. Letting people just say what they want to say when they want to say it. Radical. She thought it meant I didn't care because I didn't ask her a thousand questions.

RUBY

Well, you need to know that I'm married. That I've been separated from my husband for about 5 years. And that, with him, I don't know what's going to happen next.

BRIAN

Okay. And you need to know, that I'm going to try to be what's happening next.

And with that, he opens the door to his truck. A beat as she hesitates, still processing what he's said. She climbs in. He closes the door with confidence.

INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - EVENING

The table is set with birthday decor. Close on Nickie as he plays with his food. It's quiet except for the sounds of KNIVES & FORKS in motion. He seems used to it. Then we see Ruth, Rosie and Ruby eating in uncomfortable silence.

RUTH

I thought this might be nice, at least for my birthday.

(MORE)

RUTH (cont'd)
But it's obvious that you two don't
want to be here.

RUBY
Of course, we want to be here, Ma.

RUTH
Well, you wouldn't know it.
Someone looking in the window would
think we're three strangers sitting
here.

(beat)
Why are we like this?

Ruby and Rosie look at each other, waiting.

RUTH (CONT'D)
I'd like to know. I'd like to know
why sitting together and having a
meal like a family is so painful.
Why I'm not allowed to even babysit
my own grandson...

ROSIE
Here we go.

RUTH
Yes, that's right. Here we go. I
wanna know.

NICKIE
I wanna know.

ROSIE
Nicholas, watch yourself.

RUTH
Don't do that to him. Let him
speak. That's how he learns.

ROSIE
If I'd said that when I was his
age, I would have been smacked
across the mouth.

RUTH
I know what my mistakes were,
Rosie. You don't have to make the
same ones.

ROSIE
Trust me, I'm not.

RUTH

You are. It's not supposed to be like this. One person having to do everything. One young woman. Having to do it all. I used to pray for somebody to help me. But there was nobody. I'm here. Why don't you let me?

ROSIE

Ma, please...

RUTH

Nobody's talking bad about you, Rosie. Whatever you have in your head that I said about you or think about you. The boy has eyes and ears. He knows you're struggling. Don't fool yourself thinking he doesn't know. I did that. I was too busy trying to put gas in the car, I didn't take those few extra minutes to listen. To answer. So you found all kinds of answers from other people. Both of you. That's why you're in the situations you're in now. I don't want that to happen to this boy.

ROSIE

Situations. Nice.

RUTH

Yes, situations. Single with a baby and no money, struggling just to make it.

(to Ruby)

And...

Ruth just shakes her head.

RUBY

Beyond description.

RUTH

Every year it's next year with you. For the job, the car. It's always soon. But soon never comes with you. And med school... well, no one even brings that up anymore. You sit by the phone in a dark apartment waiting for that Negro to call you. From prison. Prison, Ruby.

Nickie reacts quietly.

RUBY
I'm trying my best, Ma.

RUTH
This is not your best. You don't have anything to say if it's not about him. Your head used to be filled with things. "Ma, read this article. This poem. This book." We couldn't shut you up. Now all you talk about is him! All you read about is who broke up with who and who went to what party and you don't know none of 'em! What is that?

Nickie begins to tear up. Rosie picks him up.

ROSIE
Ma, leave her alone.

RUTH
Nothing to say, right?

RUBY
I don't know, Ma.

RUTH
"I don't know, Ma." So I win?
"I'm sorry, Ma." That's all you ever say. That's all I can get from you. Why don't you ever say anything anymore, Ruby?

RUBY
What are you talking about, Ma?

RUTH
Say something!

NICKIE
(crying)
Don't do that.

Rosie rises and carries Nickie out of the room.

RUBY
What do you want to me say?

Ruby stands from the table. Ruth follows.

RUTH
 Anything. My expectations are so low, I'll take anything from you at this point.

Ruby's fuse is lit.

RUTH (CONT'D)
 You don't have anything to say to this? No thoughts? Nothing going on upstairs anymore?
 (then)
 Speak up, Ruby. This is not you. Speak up for yourself. Can't you --

RUBY
 I'm done.

Ruth is taken aback by the power in her daughter's voice. Strong and clear.

RUBY
 I'm done with this.

Ruby picks up her purse and leaves. Ruth watches - pained, but proud.

INT. PATIENT ROOM - NIGHT

Ruby administers IV medication. A nurse's assistant enters.

NURSE'S ASSISTANT
 Someone here for you.

INT. VISITOR'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Ruby finds Rashad in a black leather coat and his usual scornful expression.

Ruby closes the door behind them in the empty visitor's room. Rashad stands before her, dripping with attitude.

RUBY
 (concerned)
 What's up?

RASHAD
 What's up with you?

RUBY
 What're you talking about?

RASHAD
What the fuck are you doing?

RUBY
Excuse me?

RASHAD
You telling him or I'm telling him?

Rashad stares her down. He knows.

RASHAD (CONT'D)
You telling him or I'm telling him?

A beat as they glare at each other.

RUBY
I'll tell him.

RASHAD
He's calling me everyday asking
what's up with you. Is she okay?
Go check on her. And you up here
with some fool who drives a bus.
Ain't even trying to hide.

RUBY
You don't know what you're talking
about.

RASHAD
You foul that's what I'm talking
about. I always knew it, but he's
always trying to convince somebody
you a fucking queen or some shit.
I knew this was gonna happen. He's
making me give you more money,
convince you to take a fucking
phone call. From your own husband.
And you up in his bed?

RUBY
I never brought anybody to our bed!

RASHAD
Oh, that's better.

RUBY
It's a difference!

RASHAD
I'm glad this is about to be over.

RUBY

Be clear. It's over when I say it's over. You don't know me. You don't know nothing about us. If you knew half of what you think you know, you wouldn't be up in my face.

Ruby turns for the door, incensed.

RASHAD

You talkin' to my man or what?

RUBY

I'll talk to my man when I'm good and damn well ready.

And with that, she's gone.

EXT. BUSYARD - NIGHT

Rows and rows of buses are parked, recuperating from another day. Drivers head out of a small building. Ruby watches from the employee parking lot, near Brian's truck. He heads towards it, in a quiet but stern cell phone conversation. As he gets closer, WE HEAR HIM.

BRIAN

(on the phone)

You want to throw this family away, that's up to you.

He listens, then reacts. He is at the truck now, but doesn't see Ruby on the other side. She regrets being there.

BRIAN

I didn't throw it away. What else can I do? How many ways can I say it? I didn't ever want this. This is all you. You're the one who can't forgive.

Whatever was said on the other line was quick, because one second later, he BANGS HIS FIST on the hood of his truck. Ruby emerges from the darkness.

Startled, he looks at her, on the verge of exploding.

BRIAN

You scared me.

RUBY

What'd she say?

BRIAN

What?

RUBY

You said, "You can't forgive."
What'd she say?

BRIAN

"But I can forget."

INT. RUBY'S BEDROOM - NEXT MORNING

Morning light seeps into the room. Ruby sits on the edge of her bed, her hands clasped in prayer. Everything about her screams regret.

Then, we discover Brian, asleep on the rumpled sheets. She stands over him, considering this man with some sadness. Pulls a sheet over his shoulder, then looks around the bedroom.

On her night stand is a FRAMED PHOTO of her and Derek. At that moment, the image is unbearable. She slowly turns away, then heads into the bathroom. From the half-opened door, we HEAR THE WATER of the shower.

INT. RUBY'S BEDROOM - LATER

The PHONE RINGS. Once.

Brian stirs in the bed.

The PHONE RINGS. Twice.

He turns over and finds that Ruby isn't there. Looks to the bathroom door. The SHOWER IS STILL ON.

On the third ring, he reaches for her phone on the nightstand. The screen reads "VICTORVILLE USF."

Brian sits up in the bed, staring at it as it rings again.

INT. RUBY'S LIVING ROOM - A SHORT WHILE LATER

Ruby in a robe standing at the bedroom door, watching Brian holding her cell phone.

RUBY

Hey.

BRIAN
Whose in Victorville?

RUBY
My husband.

BRIAN
What'd he do?

RUBY
Guns.

BRIAN
How long's he got?

RUBY
A while longer.

BRIAN
Like what?

RUBY
Four more years or something.

BRIAN
And, you're staying with him?

Ruby doesn't respond.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
We've got something. Don't we?

RUBY
Yes.

BRIAN
We could have a life.

RUBY
I know.

BRIAN
You still love him?

A beat.

BRIAN
Well, I still love my wife. But
its not happening. It's not going
to happen. You and me - we could
happen.

She doesn't have a response to this. His declaration hangs
in the air. For a moment too long.

Then, he walks past her and into the bedroom. Coming out moments later. Buttoning his shirt.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

You think he's going to get out and you live happily ever after?

RUBY

I don't know.

Disappointed, he nods and walks through the front door.

EXT. BUSTOP - DAY

Cornelia sits at a bus stop on a treelined street. Ruby approaches. Unsure of who she'll find.

She sits on the bus bench next to the old woman, who looks up and smiles politely. NO RECOGNITION. At this, Ruby's eyes well with tears.

CORNELIA

Oh no. No. No. What's wrong? Oh my goodness. Are you okay?

The tears spill forward softly. Ruby nods yes. Cornelia moves to comfort her, placing her hand on Ruby's.

CORNELIA

Oh, it's okay. It's going to be okay.

Ruby looks at Cornelia. Crushed at the thought of this woman falling apart. Devastated at the shambles of her own life.

CORNELIA

Where do you live, Sweetpea?

RUBY

Cornelia.

CORNELIA

It's okay. Don't you worry.

Cornelia brushes away her tears. A gesture that makes Ruby's heart ache and soar at the same time.

EXT. RUBY'S APARTMENT - DAY

It's a windy day. Ruby sits huddled on the steps, wrestling with her yarn. Deep in thought. The trees sway back and forth above her, waving her in their direction.

INT. NURSES LOUNGE - NIGHT

Ruby sits at the table, writing a letter.

INT. RUBY'S PLACE - NIGHT

She is at her desk, gathering papers.

EXT. STREET CORNER - EARLY MORNING

It's early in the morning. The sky is cloudless, still a dark blue. Ruby slides a large envelope in public mailbox and drops it in.

INT. VICTORVILLE VISITING ROOM - DAY

Derek walks through the doors, with a soft expression. Thrilled to see her, but keeping his composure. They exchange a heartfelt hug. Then, sit across from each other.

DEREK

I missed you.

RUBY

I missed you too.

DEREK

I'm sorry - about everything.

RUBY

I know you are. Me too.

DEREK

You got nothing to be sorry about. I got caught up. I don't want you to think of me like this. In here. Being this way. I wanted to make you feel like everything was okay, but it never was. Not since the day I walked in here. I got a better handle on things now though. I'm turning it all around. Things are different now. I promise you.

RUBY

They're different for me too.

A beat as she considers what she's about to do. She memorizes him. Her husband. The man she's been waiting for - for four years. The man she has loved more than herself.

RUBY (CONT'D)

I tried.

He searches her eyes, trying to decipher what that means.

RUBY (CONT'D)

I tried really hard.

Fearing the worst, he begins to speak. She beats him to it.

RUBY (CONT'D)

You're not the only one who made mistakes. I made a lot. This is not how we're supposed to be living. Betraying each other.

He reacts to her revelation. A deep pain washes over him.

RUBY (CONT'D)

I'm not giving up on you. I told you I wouldn't and I won't.

DEREK

(stunned)

I don't know what you're saying.

RUBY

I'm saying, I won't be here next Saturday. Or the Saturday after that. Or after that. I'm not going to do another four years with you.

He has no words. Does he fight her? Or let her go? He can't decide. And doesn't know what to say.

RUBY (CONT'D)

I mailed you all the paperwork on your case. Everything's in there for when you're ready to do what you need to do. Not when I want you to, but when you're ready. You can survive this and be a better man for it. I believe that.

(nodding to others)

Maybe he can't. Or he can't. But, I know you. I know the best you.

They study each other. Each untangling memories, expectations.

RUBY (CONT'D)

This woman I know, this great woman I know, told me - when he's there, he's there. And, that'll be good if it happens. But when he's not there - she told me to live my day. I need to do that.

She leans forward and touches his face, taking him off guard. Tracing his jawline and cheekbones. His eyelids. His lips. He wants to resist her, but can't.

RUBY (CONT'D)

She told me to say something sweet, then - go about my business.

She smiles with some sadness. Then, she slides off her seat and moves to him. In one smooth motion, she is on his lap.

He looks at her, eyes glassy. But he won't let them fall.

She leans in, their lips almost touching. He pulls away a bit to look at the guards, who are oblivious for the moment. She gently turns his face to hers. He gets it. The guards don't matter to her anymore. This is goodbye.

So, he reaches for her. Holding her face in his hands. He whispers, "I'm sorry." And then, a loving perfect kiss. Soul-stirring. Something to remember.

Inmates HOOP and HOLLER. Officers rush across the room.

SLOW MOTION: All the activity around them is a blur for the few moments before the guards reach them. The kiss blossoms into an embrace. Filled with emotion. Their bodies saying everything they can't articulate. They cling to each other. She tells him she loves him. Their faces so close. Savoring the moment. The intimacy. Then... it's over.

Ruby and Derek, still holding each other, are SURROUNDED.

EXT. VICTORVILLE FEDERAL PRISON - DAY

Ruby is escorted off the premises by a FEMALE OFFICER.

RUBY (V.O.)

*One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began...*

INT. TREELINED PARK - DAY

Rosie sits alone on a blanket, watching Nickie on the swings.

RUBY (V.O.)
*Though the voices around you kept
 shouting their bad advice....*

We see what she longs for.

A MAN WITH A PLEASANT FACE walks over to Nickie and pushes him on the swing. They both wave at her. She waves back, with a satisfied smile.

INT. STORE - DAY

Ruth browses, alone.

RUBY (V.O.)
*Though the whole house began to
 tremble and you felt the old tug
 at your ankles. "Mend my life" each
 voice cried. But you didn't stop.
 You knew what you had to do...*

We see what she longs for.

Suddenly, she hears "Mom!" Ruby and Rosie point to a display and pull her over. One on each side. Together and happy.

EXT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - DAY

Brian washes his truck in front of a well-kept home, alone.

RUBY (V.O.)
*Though the wind pried with its
 stiff fingers at the very
 foundations, though their
 melancholy was terrible...*

We see what he longs for.

His teenage daughter and his wife are on the lawn, splashing water with a garden hose.

INT. VICTORVILLE PRISON - DAY

Derek sits in the prison yard, reading. Next to him is a large manila envelope with papers and a BEAUTIFUL KNIT SCARF.

RUBY (V.O.)
*It was already late enough, and a
 wild night, and the road full of
 fallen branches and stones....*

CLOSE on Derek as he longs for...

INT. RUBY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Derek and Ruby together, side by side at their kitchen sink.

The window is open and a breeze catches the curtains. He washes a dish. Then, passes it to Ruby to dry. His hands swirl around in the suds, caressing the warm water.

EXT. RUBY'S APARTMENT - REAL TIME - MORNING

CLOSE ON RUBY as she locks her front door.

RUBY (V.O.)
*But little by little, as you left
 their voices behind, the stars
 began to burn through the sheets of
 clouds...*

EXT. RUBY'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

She walks down the stairs just as her neighbors rush past her as usual. But this time, she is going the same way.

RUBY (V.O.)
*And there was a new voice which you
 slowly recognized as your own, that
 kept you company as you strode
 deeper and deeper into the world...*

EXT. BUS STOP - MOMENTS LATER

Ruby stands with several other people in the morning rush.

RUBY (V.O.)
*Determined to do the only thing you
 could do. Determined to save the
 only life you could save.*

A woman in a suit nods to her.

WOMAN IN A SUIT
 Morning.

RUBY
 Good morning.

A bus pulls up. And she climbs on with everyone else.

FADE TO BLACK.