

FADE IN:

EXT. MIDWESTERN ROAD - JASPER, INDIANA -- LATE AFTERNOON

WIDE on a DESERTED two-lane ROAD -- flat, cornfields... space as far as the eye can see.

WE make out A LONE FIGURE, FRANKIE HECK, mom, late 30s, standing by the side of the road at a pay phone in an ILL-FITTING SUPERWOMAN COSTUME... leotard, tights... cape. She tugs at the rear of her leotard, trying for better coverage.

FRANKIE (V.O.)

Some people call this the middle of nowhere. You know, one of those places you fly over on your way from somewhere to somewhere else, but you wouldn't live here?

INT. AIRPLANE -- DAY

Passengers are reading, working on laptops, etc.

PILOT ON P.A. (O.S.)

Folks, right now we're flying over the great state of Indiana, if you'd like to take a look.

Not a single person so much as GLANCES out the window.

RESUME SCENE

FRANKIE (V.O.)

Well, look down next time, and you'll see us, down here in the middle. Our state's in the middle of the country and our town's in the middle of two factories..

EXT. FACTORY -- DAY

White, clean, quaint... puffing cute little PUFFS OF WHITE SMOKE from its smokestacks.

FRANKIE (V.O.)

... Little Debbie Snack Cakes on one side...

EXT. DIFFERENT FACTORY -- DAY

Spewing BLACK CLOUDS of horrible pollution.

FRANKIE (V.O.)

... and Hoosier Rubber and Tire on the other.

(MORE)

FRANKIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
*So on any given day the town can
 smell good or awful, depending on
 which way the wind is blowing.*

EXT. JASPER INDIANA PORCH -- DAY

A corn-fed middle-aged COUPLE sit on their porch -- look up and sniff the air... nod to each other... it's a good day.

EXT. JASPER INDIANA - VARIOUS SHOTS -- ESTABLISHING

Midwestern, America... malls, muffler shops, Applebee's...

FRANKIE (V.O.)
*We used to have to drive into Indy
 for a good dinner, but since they
 put in an Applebees... well, this
 place is pretty much heaven. What
 can I say? We like big portions at
 cheap prices and we don't read
 nutrition labels.*

EXT. MIDWESTERN ROAD -- DUSK

Frankie, tired, walks down the road in her costume.

FRANKIE (V.O.)
*So how'd I end up by the side of the
 road in this get up? Sit tight, I'm
 getting there. And no, I'm not an
 actual superhero...*

EXT. HECK HOUSE -- MORNING

Nondescript... one story ... lower middle class. Everything has the effect of being arrested somewhere in the 80's.

FRANKIE (V.O.)
*... not unless you count getting my
 kids out the door for school every
 morning.*

Chyron: A few weeks ago.

INT. HECK KITCHEN -- SAME

A MICROWAVE BEEPS. Frankie pulls out a frozen waffle.

FRANKIE
 (calling)
 I made breakfast! Let's go, let's
 go!

Morning chaos. Frankie, dressed for work, is doing a million things, opening the mail from yesterday as she haphazardly pulls breakfast together.

A slightly odd 7-YEAR-OLD BOY wanders through the kitchen, reading a book. His pants are wide open, but he doesn't notice.

FRANKIE (V.O.)

That's Brick. My husband and I read in a magazine kids go farther in life if they have interesting names. Turns out Brick's a cool name if you're Paul Newman in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. But if you're a weird seven-year-old named Brick, it's just an invitation for kids to throw you through a window.

Frankie zips up Brick's pants, hands him a waffle in a paper towel.

BRICK

You know you're my hero, right Mom?

FRANKIE

That's sweet, honey. Eat your waffle.

BRICK

(taking a bite)
It's still frozen.

FRANKIE

Then lick it. It'll last longer.

INT. HALLWAY - A FEW SECONDS LATER -- MORNING

Frankie pounds on the bedroom door.

FRANKIE

Elvis! Breakfast!

FRANKIE (V.O.)

Elvis -- After Costello, not Presley -- My oldest -- used to be a straight A student, varsity baseball...

INSERT - STILLS of the smiling, wholesome boy engaged in various school activities.

FRANKIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But he'd been in a funk since this summer when a teammate of his -- Dumb Darren -- you'll get it in a minute -- thought it'd be cool to play chicken with a cement truck.

EXT. ROAD - LAST SUMMER -- DAY

FLAT on an empty road. A teenage boy sprints across.

A BIG CEMENT TRUCK BARRELS ACROSS THE FRAME -- HONK! HONK!

When it clears the frame...

A MAKESHIFT SHRINE OF CANDLES, FLOWERS, TEDDY BEARS marks the spot. ELVIS, in baseball uniform, enters frame and drops a baseball on to the shrine.

FRANKIE (V.O.)

We tried to comfort him -- told him that's just how people die in Indiana, they're roadkill. But it flipped him out to realize how precariously perched we all are. He quit baseball, dropped his old friends... and after watching a late night movie on cable, found solace by assuming the identity of... Dean Martin.

INT. HALLWAY - RESUME SCENE -- MORNING

ELVIS comes out of his room, looking like the lead in a rat-pack movie... suit, skinny tie...

ELVIS

Relax, baby. It's cool.

Frankie rolls her eyes, looks at a piece of mail in her hand.

FRANKIE

My new driver's license. 'Bout time.

She opens the envelope and looks at it, stunned -- shows it to Elvis.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Hey. Is this what I look like?

Elvis shrugs, yeah, and continues down the hallway.

INT. HECK BEDROOM -- A FEW MOMENTS LATER

Frankie runs in, looks in the mirror... compares what she sees to the picture.

FRANKIE

(under her breath)

Oh my God. When did this happen?

She fishes through the dresser drawer, pulls out a SHARPIE PEN, starts coloring her grey hairs with it. Her husband, MIKE, 39, upstanding, Midwestern, but honest to the point of annoyance sometimes, watches her in the mirror.

MIKE

You missed a spot.

FRANKIE

(shows picture)

Mike. Look at this. It's been seven years since I got my last license picture taken. All this time I thought I looked basically the same -- you know, same hair, same basic features. But look at this one, compared to my old one. You see that?

CLOSE ON

The two licenses side by side... one hopeful and smiling... the other, well... haggard.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Something's different. It's in the eyes. I think what is missing... what is it exactly? Oh, right. I know what's missing -- it's hope.

MIKE

Well, sure. Back then you were all young and shiny, wondering what your life was gonna be and now, well... now you know.

She takes this in.

FRANKIE

Does it ever bum you out? You know, that I'm not all young and shiny anymore? That my body's starting to, you know... go?

MIKE

(shrugs)

Yeah. Sure, it's a huge bummer. But what are ya gonna do?

Frankie swats him on the arm. He laughs.

SUE (O.S.)

Mo-om!

SUE, 14, unremarkable in her averageness, comes in carrying a pair of destroyed leg warmers.

FRANKIE

Sue -- why aren't you dressed?

FRANKIE (V.O.)

You heard right. "Sue." Our success names? Only got two out of three. But it was a promise Mike had made to his grandma on her deathbed.

FLASHBACK -- THE DEATHBED

Mike's unbelievably gnarled GRANDMA reaches out and GRABS them with her bony fingers.

GRANDMA
(barely a whisper)
Sue.

And she dies.

RESUME SCENE

FRANKIE (V.O.)
Unfortunately, Sue was living up to the curse of her average name.

SUE
The washer ate my leg warmers. I need 'em 'cause... guess what? I'm trying out for Show Choir this week!

FREEZE on Frankie and Mike's look of dread.

FRANKIE (V.O.)
See that expression? That is not an expression parents should have on their faces when their daughter tells them she's trying out for something. But see, Sue had a long history of things she tried out for...

FLASHBACKS -- QUICK CUTS

- Sue trying out for swim team. She swims a few strokes, then stops to wipe her eyes, swims a few more strokes, stops to wipe her eyes...

- Sue trying to be elected for student council. She speaks so softly and weakly, nobody can hear a word.

- Sue trying out for gymnastics. She jumps over a pommel horse and lands flat on her back, unconscious.

FRANKIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
If only she'd been named Cassandra like I wanted.

RESUME SCENE

UNFREEZE Frankie and Mike who instantly plaster smiles on their faces.

FRANKIE
Show choir? Super. That ought to be fun to try out for.

SUE

I wish you would have told me about the washer. My leg warmers are ruined.

FRANKIE

Mike, I thought you were going to fix that thing.

MIKE

It's unfixable.

(with a grin)

Just like you, Frankie. Used to be all shiny and new and now the old girl's just worn out.

CLOSE ON FRANKIE, looking in the mirror.

FRANKIE (V.O.)

He thought he was being cute, but that drivers license thing had hit me like a ton of bricks. I looked like I'd been hit by a ton of bricks. But who or what had done this to me?

INT. KITCHEN -- A FEW MINUTES LATER

Frankie crosses through, EYEING THEM ALL with suspicion.

ELVIS (O.S.)

Hey, Mom -- this waffle's still froz --

FRANKIE

Lick it.

EXT. HECK HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

The family heads out, licking their frozen waffles... all sniff the air in disgust.... smells like tires. Ew.

SMASH CUT TO:

MAIN TITLE

ACT ONE

EXT. JASPER - ESTABLISHING -- MORNING

FRANKIE (V.O.)

*We're a two job family. Two jobs
and no career. Mike manages a bunch
of idiots down at the quarry...*

INT. LIMESTONE QUARRY - MORNING

Mike sits behind a desk pushing papers. A sign behind him reads "NUMBER OF DAYS WITHOUT A WORK-RELATED INJURY: 0"

EXT. EHLERS FORD - MORNING

FRANKIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

*...And my most recent job is selling
cars at Jasper's foremost new and
used Ford dealer.*

INT. EHLERS FORD -- CONTINUOUS

The place hasn't changed decor since the 60's. Brown paneling, paintings of ducks and geese on the walls. Frankie and the SALESMEN are opening their monthly paychecks. PETE, 40's, THE KING OF SALES, a paunchy Midwesterner, opens his and smiles widely.

PETE

(feigning modesty)

Wow. Wow, wow, wow. What a month,
huh?

But Frankie, distracted, is looking at her paycheck in disbelief. It's so low.

INT. MR. EHLERS' OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

Guns, animal heads, Hoosier basketball posters stare at Frankie from all sides. MR. EHLERS, 60'S, brush-cut, a good ol' boy looks at her check, slides it across the desk back to her.

MR. EHLERS

Ain't nothing wrong with the check,
Frances. That there is your base
salary. And that's what it's gonna be
until you sell a car and get a
commission. One week left in the month.
You sell a car, or we may have to...
reevaluate.

FRANKIE

Well, you know, sales is a new skill
I'm learning, and I have come real close.

MR. EHLERS

(re: head on wall)

See that moose up there? He came real close to not being hit by a bullet. You see what I'm saying?

FRANKIE

Yes, I --

MR. EHLERS

(shaking his head)

I don't get it. All the articles I've read say women want to buy cars from other women. That's why I went against all judgment and hired one. You have the opportunity here to carry a torch for all ladykind, or burn the whole deal down. It's up to you.

Frankie can't believe this guy, but knows she has to be civil.

FRANKIE

Wow. Lotta responsibility. I'm kinda like the Rosa Parks of Ehlers Ford, huh?

MR. EHLERS

Rosa Parks. Don't even get me started on *her*.

(then)

And by the way, you ever get your new driver's license? We've got to post them and that old one didn't look a thing like you.

Frankie reluctantly shows him the new one.

MR. EHLERS (CONT'D)

Oh yeah. Now *that's* you.

INT. EHLERS FORD - SHOWROOM -- A LITTLE LATER

Frankie, feeling the pressure, is reeling in a potential car-buyer, MR. YAMAMOTO.

FRANKIE

Now, you're gonna want to get this car by the end of the month, because, and I'm not supposed to even tell you this... after the first the price is gonna go way up. On account of the rising rubber prices overseas. Now I'll just get the keys and what say we take your new car here on a test drive?

Frankie crosses to the back to get the key, hears the aging P.A. system.

P.A. (O.S.)
 Frankie, you have a call on line one.
 Your son's school is on line one.

FRANKIE
 No, no, no... not now, not now.

She picks up the wall phone.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)
 This is Frankie. Is everything okay?

EXT. JASPER ELEMENTARY FRONT STEPS -- 3:35 PM

Brick sits all by himself, waiting for his ride that hasn't come.

BACK TO SCENE

FRANKIE
 Dammit.

She dials.

INT. MIKE'S OFFICE -- INDIANA LIMESTONE

MIKE
 (into phone)
 Dammit. Well, you said you were
 picking him up.

FRANKIE
 No, Mike, you said you were --

INT. SHOWROOM FLOOR -- SAME TIME

Pete, seeing Mr. Yamamoto all alone, moves in for the kill. Through the window, we see Frankie notice. She starts knocking on the glass, wildly gesticulating, no, no! She shoots Pete a stern mom look that makes him step back.

INT. CAR -- A FEW MINUTES LATER

Frankie and Mr. Yamamoto are on the test drive.

FRANKIE
 Sorry about the little delay.
 Everything's fine. Anyway, take a
 right up here... you see how smooth
 it takes the turns? This model's
 won awards for handling. Now, you're
 gonna go all the way down to the
 next street and take a quick left --
 if you're not sure if you can afford
 to purchase the vehicle at this time,
 we do have many great leasing plans
 available... get in the right lane
 aaaand -- Pull over right here!
 (leaning out window)
 Get in! Get in!

And Brick scrambles into the back seat with his backpack. As they pull away from the school, Mr. Yamamoto is startled, but Frankie makes like this is nothing unusual.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Brick, honey? How do you like those seats?

BRICK

They're amazing. They also come with optional leather trim and Preferred Suede inserts.

She and Brick look at Mr. Yamamoto, sellin' it.

CUT TO:

EXT./INT. EHLERS FORD -- LATER

Frankie and Brick sit staring out the window drinking out of Ford mugs, as in the foreground, Mr. Yamamoto PEELS OUT in his own car. Brick puts his hand on Frankie's knee.

BRICK

At least you're still my hero.

FRANKIE

Yeah, thanks.

INT. HECK KITCHEN -- THAT NIGHT

Frankie and Brick come in, DUMP a bunch of McDonald's on the table.

FRANKIE

(calling)
I made dinner!

The rest of the family ambles in. Elvis tries to grab his food and take it to his room.

MIKE

Hey, Dino! Where do you think you're going?

FRANKIE

We may be coming home late all the time, but we are a family, and we are eating together as a family!

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM -- A FEW MINUTES LATER

The entire family is lined up on the couch, eating their McDonald's on TV trays and watching Dancing With the Stars.

They all eat silently, but when the commercial comes on, Frankie grabs the remote and mutes.

FRANKIE

Commercial! Okay, quick let's hear about everybody's day.

SUE

Well... I'm trying to decide what number I should do for my show choir audition. I'm between --

The whole family shoots each other the familiar LOOK OF DREAD.

SUE (CONT'D)

(noticing)

What?

ELVIS

Does it really matter what song you pick? There's no way you're gonna make it.

SUE

Mom!

FRANKIE

(glaring at Elvis)

Your brother just means you should choose whatever song you like.

BRICK

You have a meeting with my teacher Monday.

FRANKIE

What?

BRICK

It's imperative that you both be there she says.

(whispering the word
to himself)

Imperative.

MIKE

Who's he whispering to? Why does he do that?

(to Brick)

I told you to knock that off.

BRICK

I like it. It soothes me.

FRANKIE

What kind of teacher meeting? We never got any note.

MIKE

If it was important they'd have sent
us a note.

Brick spits out a chewed up wad of paper he hadn't been aware
he was chewing, gives it to them. This kind of thing happens.

SUE

You are so weird.

FRANKIE

(reading it)

Great. It's Monday. I gotta work
Monday.

MIKE

I can't get off either. Let's just
call Mrs. Whatserface and tell her
we need to reschedule.

FRANKIE

It's late. We have no way of getting
in touch with her now.

BRICK

Sorry.

(whispering to himself)

Sorry.

(to Mike, re:
whispering)

Sorry.

FRANKIE

(kissing his head)

It's okay, we'll figure it out.
Elvis? How was your day?

ELVIS

Well, it was --

SUE

Next commercial! Next commercial!

Frankie quickly UNMUTES... the family instantly turns their
attention back to Dancing With the Stars, and we...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM -- LATER THAT NIGHT

Mike's got his head in the washing machine, trying to fix
it. Frankie sits on the dryer handing him tools.

FRANKIE

I am so hot for you when you fix stuff.

MIKE

I'm not just man-candy you know. I
have a brain, too.

FRANKIE

Ooh. Candy.
 (rifling through
 cabinets)
 I think I hid some in here from
 Halloween when I told the kids it'd
 rot their teeth.

She finds it, tosses some to Mike, who's feeling under the washer.

MIKE

Uh-oh, didn't Brick lose a hamster a while back? False alarm, just lint.
 (then)
 Frankie, I don't think I can fix this thing.

FRANKIE

Well, look on the bright side, if you get a raise or I sell a car we can just barely not afford to get a new one.

They laugh. Sue appears in the doorway in her pajamas.

SUE

Are you guys disappointed in me?
 You know, that I never make anything?

MIKE

(utterly without sarcasm)
 Sure I'm disappointed, honey. This is the twelfth thing you're trying out for. I'm beginning to wonder if it's you, if it's me. Something I did...?

Frankie shoots him a look that says maybe this isn't the best way to handle this.

SUE

I'm thinking maybe I won't try out for show choir... if you don't think I should.

Frankie and Mike share a look.

FRANKIE (V.O.)

Of course she shouldn't. I mean, show choir in Indiana is huge. Next to basketball, its combination of singing and dazzling Broadway-caliber choreography is the most cutthroat competition around.

QUICK CUTS of STOCK FOOTAGE OF different Indiana show choirs singing and dancing to such classics as "Mr. Bojangles,"

"We are Family"... "Aquarius." (Think theme park -- flipped hair, sequins... too much makeup)

FRANKIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I didn't want to see her get hurt again.

CLOSE ON Sue's oh so average self, absently picking at her braces.

FRANKIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But then I looked at her face, and I thought about my driver's license, and how you really only even have hope 'til you're thirty. What had happened to me would happen to Sue one day, but I was damned if I was gonna rush it.

FRANKIE

(deep breath)

Go for it.

SUE

You really think so?

(then)

Dad?

MIKE

This could be your year.

She hugs them both, runs out. As soon as she's out of earshot:

MIKE (CONT'D)

Here we go again.

(shaking his head)

You know, everyone's always saying sticktuitiveness is a virtue. But maybe the real virtue's knowing when to cut bait.

FRANKIE

Well, maybe this time'll be different.

SUE (O.S.)

(singing weakly and off-key)

"This is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius, the age of Aquariu-us..."

Mike sticks his head back in the washing machine as the painful singing continues.

FRANKIE

You got room in there for one more?

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. CHURCH -- SUNDAY MORNING

The family's filing out, but Frankie kneels in her own private prayer.

FRANKIE

Dear Lord, I know in your infinite wisdom, there was a reason Sue didn't make swim team, or band, or 4-H, or art club... which frankly seemed weird because everybody gets in to art club. But please, please let her make show choir. Thank you.

She starts to get up, then:

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Oh, and please let the washing machine hang on a little longer.

She starts to get up again, then:

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Oh, and -- No, you know what, I've got a bunch of stuff, but I'm just gonna stick with those two for now. Amen.

And she gets up and continues down the aisle.

EXT. HECK BACKYARD -- LATER THAT AFTERNOON

PAN ACROSS a table set with chips... dip... more dip... various "salads" that don't contain lettuce...

FRANKIE (V.O.)

*Sunday's a day of rest and relaxation.
For God, maybe. The rest of us have
to spend it with our family.*

Frankie gets food ready, as Mike works the barbeque. The backyard's littered with old people in lawn chairs. Mike's Dad, BIG MIKE, 70's, bigoted, gruff, has Elvis cornered.

BIG MIKE

Are you queer? 'Cause you dress like you're queer.

On the patio, Sue practices her show choir audition routine for AUNT GINNIE AND AUNT EDIE, two ancient fossils, who sit drinking booze, messily eating dip, and chain smoking. They manage to be glamorous and disgusting at the same time.

Sue finishes with a flourish. They applaud as vigorously as old people can... then SHOOT FRANKIE THAT SAME, "OH NO," LOOK. She shrugs, "I know."

FRANKIE

(shouting)

Come on, everybody! It's getting cold. We should all come in and eat together as a family!

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM -- A FEW MINUTES LATER

The entire family sits staring in front of the TV with plates in their laps, watching *Desperate Housewives*.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BRICK'S CLASSROOM -- THE NEXT DAY

Frankie and Mike sit at a little table with Brick's teacher, MRS. RETTIG, a giant woman in a sweater with applique scarecrows on it.

FRANKIE (V.O.)

I'd gotten an hour off work for Brick's teacher meeting by telling Mr. Ehlers I had "woman problems." Not the most creative in my arsenal, but in a pinch you can't beat the classics.

MRS. RETTIG

(delicately)

Brick... is a very "quirky" child. Maybe... clinically quirky, even.

Frankie and Mike just look at her.

FRANKIE

We have no idea what you mean.

FRANKIE (V.O.)

We knew exactly what she meant.

QUICK CUTS

A series of Brick's odd behaviors

- Brick talks close and loud into A KID'S face. The kid's recoiling.

- Brick walks to the bathroom pulling down his pants before he gets there, as KIDS snicker.

- A group of KIDS focused on MRS. RETTIG talking, as Brick faces the opposite way, reading the school supply catalogue.

RESUME SCENE

MRS. RETTIG

He's a very bright boy, reads everything he can get his hands on, but the other kids don't really know how to relate to him. He gets this look a lot.

She cocks her head to the side, perplexed.

QUICK CUTS

One after another, different kids look INTO CAMERA, head cocked, perplexed.

MRS. RETTIG (CONT'D)

He doesn't seem to mind, but I feel Brick could benefit from a series of more formal tests... to see if we can help him... integrate. Our "S is for Special" Success Team is here as a resource --

FRANKIE

Yeah, okay. You know, Brick may not be like everybody else, but he's funny and sweet and probably a genius who's gonna cure diseases or invent a new kind of wrench or something and just because he's not fitting into some cookie cutter mold doesn't mean something's the matter with him that needs fixing. Our oldest son had a completely pointed head until he was six --

MIKE

(nodding)
Like a candy corn.

FRANKIE

And sure people stared at us in WalMart, but you know what we did? We knit him a hat, let it be, and it flattened out all on it's own.

All three hundred pounds of Mrs. Rettig is staring.

MIKE

I think what we're trying to say is thanks for your concern, but our Brick doesn't need any special anything. He's fine.

INT. HALLWAY/GYMETERIA -- A FEW MINUTES LATER

Frankie and Mike are on their way out. They walk past the "gymeteria," look in.

THEIR POV

Lunchtime chaos. Brick sits all alone, his back to everyone, eating a sandwich. They go over and Mike physically TURNS BRICK AROUND so he's at least facing other kids.

MIKE

Hey buddy, don't you want to play with some of those boys? Looks like they're having fun.

BRICK

(nonchalant)

No thanks. I have my backpack to keep me company.

They see his backpack is indeed propped up across from him. They share a look -- Ouch.

MIKE

(sotto)

So how much we talking here for this testing?

FRANKIE

More than the commission on a hatchback, but hopefully not as much as a SUV.

INT. EHLERS' CAR DEALERSHIP -- DAY

QUICK CUTS

Frankie urgently trying to sell a car day after day, her enthusiasm waning with each effort.

FRANKIE MONDAY

Hi! I'm Frankie --

FRANKIE TUESDAY

What'll it take to put you in this car today?

FRANKIE WEDNESDAY

How can I put you in this car today?

FRANKIE THURSDAY

I'd like to put you in this car today.

FRANKIE FRIDAY

... You feel like getting in this car today?

ANGLE TO REVEAL Frankie is now talking to a somewhat frumpy woman in her 40s, GAIL.

GAIL

Oh, well, I don't know --

FRANKIE

You know what? Forget it. You're either gonna buy a car or you're not and me hounding you isn't gonna make one hell of a difference. Just flag me down if you have a question, okay?

Frankie starts to walk away.

GAIL

Actually, I am interested in this car.

FRANKIE

Oh yeah?

GAIL

Yeah, mine keeps breaking down. But I was just wondering if a convertible is too wild for me?

FRANKIE

Are you kidding? Wild on the outside, but dependable on the inside. See, this has a V-8 --

P.A. (O.S.)

Frankie. Call on line one.

FRANKIE

-- engine. You're not going to be spending time --

P.A. (O.S.)

It's your husband.

FRANKIE

-- in the shop with --

P.A. (O.S.)

He sounds mad.

GAIL

Do you need to take that? I can wait.

FRANKIE

You sure? I'm sorry.

Frankie marches over to the wall phone.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

(into phone)

What?

MIKE (O.S.)
You gotta pick up Brick.

FRANKIE
No. Today is definitely your day.
Remember, I wrote it on your hand.

MIKE (O.S.)
(annoyed)
I know that, but I'm in the
principal's office right now. *Elvis'*
principal. And no, he's not hurt...
yet.

FRANKIE
(glancing at Gail)
Oh, man. I just... I can't leave
right this second. Tell Brick to
stay put and I'll get there as soon
as I can.
(to Gail, hanging up)
Sorry.

Frankie notices the King of Sales circling nearby.

GAIL
Look, I can always come back another
day. I'll wait for you.
(with a smile)
I'm a mom too. I know what it's
like.

FRANKIE
Ohhh, thank you.

She hugs her, takes off, and we:

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

Frankie enters, with Brick in tow. Mike is in the process
of laying into Elvis.

MIKE
What the hell's the matter with you?
You're dressing like a moron, you
gave up baseball -- and probably a
scholarship -- and now this?!

FRANKIE
What'd he do?

INT. HIGH SCHOOL BATHROOM -- EARLIER THAT DAY

Elvis is crouched on the bathroom floor, running a floating
craps game for money.

RESUME SCENE

MIKE

Oh, I didn't even tell you the best part. He missed a test while doing it!

(to Elvis)

You think you're getting into a college this way? Huh? Do ya?

ELVIS

I don't care.

MIKE

Fine. You like gambling? You like broads? Here's your punishment -- You're spending every day after school playing canasta with your great aunts Ginny and Edie. For a month. Got it, Dino?

ELVIS

You know why I dress like this? 'Cause the Rat Pack knew how to live! What do you want me to do -- live my life in the same boring way you two do, then get hit by a cement truck?! I don't want to live my life like that! I don't want to be you!

And Elvis storms to his room.

FRANKIE

(yelling after)

Yeah? Well, I don't want to be me either!

Elvis' door SLAMS. A beat.

MIKE

(shaking his head)

Damn it. And he's the one we don't need to worry about.

Frankie puts a hand on his shoulder.

BRICK

Mom, you're my superhero.

FRANKIE

(preoccupied, forgot he was there)

Okay, that's sweet, honey, but we're kinda --

BRICK

You'll need a costume.

(then whispering)

Costume.

FRANKIE

Huh?

BRICK

I'm doing a book report on Superwoman. It's a comic serio-novel from Harcourt Press, Copyright 2001 and you have to come dressed up like Superwoman so I can show and tell you as part of my project.

FRANKIE

And when all is this report supposed to take place?

BRICK

Sometime Monday, I think.

FRANKIE

Dammit, Brick, you can't do this anymore! You have to tell me these things earlier!

BRICK

I did! I've been telling you all week you're my superhero! Didn't you listen?!

Brick bursts into tears and runs out to the backyard.

FRANKIE

Brick, I didn't mean it! Don't cry -- Brick!

MIKE

Let him be.

She sits down next to Mike. They both feel like crap.

FRANKIE

You know what? I don't need a fancy house, or a good car, or professional hair color... but I pride myself on the fact that I think I'm a pretty good mom. But lately... I don't know. And if I'm not at least a good mom... then my driver's license picture is right. There is no hope.

MIKE

Hey, I don't wanna hear that. You are a great mom. Sure, Brick's weird, Sue has no recognizable talent and Elvis is flushing his future down the toilet. But that's not our fault.

FRANKIE
Then whose fault is it?

MIKE
Our parents and their lousy genes.

Frankie laughs despite herself. Just then, Sue bursts in the front door, full of excitement.

SUE
I did it! I made Show Choir!

Mike and Frankie stare, shocked and skeptical.

FRANKIE
You did?

FREEZE ON THEIR INCREDULOUS EXPRESSIONS.

FRANKIE (V.O.)
*Again. The faces? Not good faces
for a parent to make.*

UNFREEZE.

SUE
Yes! And they already rotated me in
and I've got to learn everything
super quick for our first competition
on Friday.

FRANKIE
(hugging her)
Well, God, Sue... this is huge!

MIKE
C'mere girl. I am proud of you.

SUE
Thanks, Dad. I better get my homework
done 'cause I am going to so busy!

Sue floats to her room. When they hear her door close, Mike and Frankie look at each other in amazed disbelief -- break into a happy parent dance.

MIKE
(chanting)
Who's awesome?

FRANKIE
We're awesome! Yeah, yeah, we're
awesome!

They're feeling pretty good about themselves. In their exuberance, Mike lifts Frankie up on top of the washing machine, just as it kicks into shaking mode.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Oooh... who needs a new washer.

FRANKIE (V.O.)

And right then and there I felt the presence of God. Maybe this was the ray of hope we were waiting for. Finally we were turning a corner.

EXT. HOUSE -- THE NEXT DAY

The sun is shining, the air is crisp. Frankie steps outside, takes a deep sniff.

FRANKIE

Mmmm... snack cakes.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM -- A FEW NIGHTS LATER

SPOTLIGHT ON a slightly made-up MALE CHOIR DIRECTOR.

CHOIR DIRECTOR

(into mic)

And now ladies and gentlemen... from Jasper County High School, under the direction of Roger Stadge... the Jasper Swingsations!

Lots of applause and cheers especially from Frankie and Mike who are looking pretty darn proud. Elvis looks like he's being held prisoner and Brick's reading a book...

FRANKIE (V.O.)

I couldn't believe Sue had made it. I mean, this was the closest thing to glamour you find in Jasper, Indiana.

ANGLE ON the JASPER SWINGSATIONS taking the stage. Overly made-up blondes with flipped hair in Lawrence Welk-ish sparkly dresses and boys who don't yet realize they're gay in silky red shirts and jazz pants dance on while singing the swinging classic, "Ballin' the Jack".

JASPER SWINGSATIONS

"First you put your two knees close up tight; Then you sway it to the left and you sway it to the right..."

Frankie scans the stage, then concerned, whispers to Mike.

FRANKIE

Do you see Sue?

Mike scans the stage.

PAN ACROSS the line of singing and dancing girls. None of them Sue.

MIKE

No. Where the hell is she?

ANGLE ON the stage as just then, CREW MEMBERS dressed in black appear on the side of the risers to hand out bowler hats to the performers. And there in the darkness is Sue.

MIKE (CONT'D)

(realizing)

... She's on the crew?

ELVIS

Great. The only thing more embarrassing than show choir is being on the crew for show choir.

FRANKIE

You're dressed like Dean Martin and gambling in the john so I think you've lost the right to talk about embarrassing!

ON STAGE a GIRL begins her solo. A big-haired SHOW MOM leans over and whispers to Frankie.

BIG-HAIRED SHOW MOM

That's my Brittany. Where's yours?

FRANKIE

(vaguely indicating
no one in particular)

She's that one.

BIG-HAIRED SHOW MOM

Which one?

FRANKIE

(same motion)

Over there.

BIG-HAIRED SHOW MOM

Where?

FRANKIE

She's in the wings, holding the stool, okay?!

BIG-HAIRED SHOW MOM

Oh.

Frankie turns back to Mike.

FRANKIE

Why didn't she tell us she was only on the crew?

MIKE

I don't know. She does look really happy though.

Frankie looks.

ANGLE ON Sue. She does look happy -- she's smiling while she finishes collecting the hats. As the show choir "takes it down" and launches into their schmaltzy sign-language version of "Where is Love?" Sue runs out alone and places stools on the stage. Seeing Sue so excited does something to Mike. He nudges the big-haired mom.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Hey. That's my daughter. That's my daughter right there!
 (jumping to his feet
 and applauding)
 Go Sue!

Frankie stands and joins him. They're hooting and hollering, nudging Elvis and Brick to join in. Everyone around them is giving them strange looks, but they don't care. This is Sue's moment, and dammit they're going to give it to her.

ANGLE ON the stage, where Sue hears them. She looks at them from the stage, and smiles proudly -- it's a sweet moment. Until the girls who are performing back up to sit on the stools only to realize too late (thanks to Sue being distracted) that THE STOOLS ARE IN THE WRONG PLACE.

One girl FALLS HARD ON HER ASS... the other tries to save herself by GRABBING A NEARBY GIRL... they BOTH GO DOWN, which starts a CHAIN REACTION, all the Swingsations going down in a tangle of red shirts and dresses.

Frankie and Mike cringe in horror.

INT. CAR -- NIGHT

The family rides home from the concert in silence. Sue glares at Frankie, as only a teenager can.

SUE

This is all your fault!

And on Frankie's reaction, we...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. HECK BEDROOM -- MORNING

Frankie sits up in bed and looks at her reflection in the mirror across the room.

FRANKIE (V.O.)

No wonder my face looks the way it does. The Swingsation disaster had gotten Sue kicked off crew and sent us right back into the dumper. Our good times had lasted one week.

She FLOPS back down into the bed. Suddenly, Brick's there poking her.

FRANKIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

So when Brick said it was the day of his book report, I'd had it. I did what any self-respecting parent would do...

She throws back the covers.

FRANKIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I put on my Spanx and went.

VARIOUS SHOTS OF Frankie trying to squeeze into her Spanx.

FRANKIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

What could I do? He's my kid... his best friend is a backpack. I couldn't undo the twenty-seven hours he'd spent in the birth canal, but I could do this.

INT. SECOND GRADE CLASSROOM -- DAY

The kids sit on the carpet listening to Mrs. Rettig, who now wears a sweater with applique apples on it.

MRS. RETTIG

...Now the rainforest is made up of three levels -- the canopy --

Frankie, dressed as Superwoman, walks in. The kids and teacher turn and stare at her surprised.

MRS. RETTIG (CONT'D)

Oh. That's next Monday.

The kids start to snicker and laugh. Frankie, feeling horrible for Brick, frantically tries to save the situation.

FRANKIE
 (powerful Superwoman
 voice)
 I command you all to stop laughing!

A beat as they all look at her, then start laughing harder than ever.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)
 Brick --

BRICK
 Just go, Mom! You're embarrassing me.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY

Frankie trudges down the hallway, deflated. Underneath her costume, her Spanx suddenly roll down to her hips, causing an unflattering bulge. At least no one noticed -- no one but the cute male gym teacher walking toward her. Great. She tries to tug them up when her phone rings.

FRANKIE
 (into phone)
 Hello?

MR. EHLERS (O.S.)
 Frankie? Ehlers here. A woman named Gail Spreen is here to buy a car and is requesting you. I told her Pete could --

FRANKIE
 (panicked)
 No! That's my customer! Don't let her move! I'll be right there!

She runs out the door, pulling up her tights.

INT. MUSTANG -- A LITTLE LATER

Frankie, now in a dress, is in the passenger seat taking Gail for a test drive. Desperate to sell the car, she's letting the stress get to her, and it shows.

FRANKIE
 (manic)
 -- and the braking system. Did I forget about the brake system? I can't forget the brake system. It has twin-piston front calipers which means these are the best brakes the Mustang has ever had --

GAIL
 (gently)
 Frankie. Are you okay? You seem a little...stressed.

FRANKIE

(stressed)

What? No, I'm fine. I'm perfect.
Where was I? Air bags! How could I
forget air bags?

GAIL

You know, I'm a mom too. I know
what it's like to balance work and
kids. I've got three.

FRANKIE

I've got three too.

GAIL

Isn't it hard?

Frankie looks at her. She can't help herself, but under the
exhaustion, this moment of kindness is more than she can
take and she starts to cry.

FRANKIE

So hard! I feel like I'm spread so
thin I can't do anything right.

GAIL

I know. Some days I swear I just
feel like getting in the car and
driving and driving and never coming
back. You ever feel like that?

FRANKIE

Only every day.

They smile at each other a conspiratorial smile.

EXT. TOWN -- DAY

FRANKIE

Woo-hoo!

The convertible top now down, Frankie and Gail tear down the
two-lane highway. Thelma and Louise on the open road!

VARIOUS SHOTS OF THE CONVERTIBLE

They zoom past the factory... past the JCPenney's... past
the Paul Bunyan Muffler Man... and out into the countryside...

INT. MUSTANG -- CONTINUOUS

FRANKIE

(laughing)

Hey, you want to see something? You
want to see what I did for my kid's
book report?

She unbuttons her dress to reveal the Superwoman costume
underneath.

GAIL

Oh my God!

FRANKIE

(laughing)

And then it wasn't even the right day!

Gail laughs. Frankie feels amazing. She whips off the dress, stands in the car and waves it in the air. The wind pulls it from her hand -- and it flies away! Frankie's surprised, but then laughs and continues to feel the wind in her hair, her cape billowing behind her.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Yeah, baby!

BUMP!

GAIL

What was that?

FRANKIE

I don't know. Did we hit something?

Gail stops the car.

GAIL

Is there something wrong with this car? Maybe you better check.

FRANKIE

(climbing out)

I'm sure it's fine.

She gets on her knees on the road and crouches down to peer under the car.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

I don't see anything --

But before she can finish, the car SCREECHES AWAY, Gail behind the wheel stealing it!

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Hey!

GAIL

(yelling back)

Sorry! I've got three kids in jail!

FRANKIE

Wha --?

(calling)

You'll never get away with this! I have your license back at the office!

(MORE)

FRANKIE (CONT'D)
 (then realizing)
 I bet that's not even her real
 license. The picture was too good.

Frankie stands in the middle of the cornfields with nothing but her Superwoman costume, stunned.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD -- BACK TO WHERE WE STARTED

Frankie walks down the road in her costume, wiped out, exhausted, as the sun is setting. She looks up to see a HUGE TRUCK barreling down on her. She doesn't move, stares mesmerized as it gets closer and closer...

FRANKIE (V.O.)
*Oh please, I'm not that desperate.
 I just noticed it was a Little Debbie
 truck and was hoping a chocolate
 Ring Ding would fall out.*

She steps out of the way and it passes her by in a WHOOSH.

Lo and behold, right behind the truck is their little old family Honda with Mike at the wheel. He leans out the window.

MIKE
 Somebody call for a ride?

Frankie peers in and sees her whole family -- Elvis, Sue, and Brick -- are inside.

FRANKIE (V.O.)
*That's the thing about family.
 They're the ones who suck the hope
 out of you, but they're also the
 ones who can give it back.*

Frankie goes to get in, but Mike speeds up. As she goes to grab the door handle again, he keeps going a little faster and faster. Very funny.

MIKE
 Not very fast for a Superhero.

Frankie shoots him a look, then finally gets in.

INT. CAR -- CONTINUOUS

MIKE
 Wanna grab some dinner?

Frankie nods. They ride quietly for a beat.

FRANKIE (V.O.)
*Tomorrow I'd have to deal with the
 stolen car, and getting Sue back on*
 (MORE)

FRANKIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
*crew. But right then... I just wanted
 potato skins.*

Frankie looks at her family.

FRANKIE
 I love you guys, you know.

SUE
 We know, Mom.

A beat. Elvis looks up, their eyes meet in the rear view mirror. He gives a little nod. She accepts. Brick just reads his book. Frankie looks at Mike.

FRANKIE
 Hey. How come you never tell me you
 love me?

MIKE
 I told you I loved you the day I
 married you. If anything had changed,
 I'd have let you know.

He puts his hand on Frankie's knee, gives it a squeeze.
 Frankie smiles. Good enough.

EXT. APPLEBEE'S - CONTINUOUS

MUSIC CUE: "This Will Be Our Year" by Pablo

A WIDE SHOT of Mike parking the Honda in the big parking lot.

FRANKIE (V.O.)
*So yeah, back then on the old license
 I didn't know what my life was gonna
 be. And Mike's right... now I know.
 This is my life. It's not gonna be
 in People Magazine or anything, but
 it's all right.*

The family walks together up to the entrance.

FRANKIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
*The thing is, some people are meant
 to be in the spotlight, and some are
 meant to drag the stools. I've always
 been more the stool-dragging kind...
 all moms are. 'Cause the truth is,
 if nobody's there to make sure the
 stools are where they're supposed to
 be... everybody falls on their ass.*

Through the window of Applebee's, we see the family eating dinner together. PAN UP to reveal an airplane passing by overhead, on its way to somewhere else. And we...

FADE OUT.

END OF SHOW