



GIFTED
by
Tom Flynn

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Andy Cohen/Grade A Entertainment
Karen Lunder/FilmNation

FADE IN:

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

It's a Florida kitchen that must have been something in 1960.

FRANK ADLER, early 30's, carries a cereal box to the table.

Frank, tan and handsome, has the understated cool of a jazz musician. Like a poker player, he hides a deep-rooted melancholy behind a whimsical smile.

FRANK

Come on! Hey!

He hears no reply. Annoyed, he exits.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Frank raps on a closed bedroom door.

MARY (O.S.)

No.

FRANK

Let me see.

MARY (O.S.)

No! I'm not going.

FRANK

Come on. I made you special breakfast.

MARY (O.S.)

Forget it.

FRANK

Open up. Mary!

The door timidly opens, revealing MARY ADLER, a seven year-old, unbelievably cute, blond nuclear weapon. Possessing stunning intelligence, she doesn't talk or act like a normal seven year-old.

She wears a dress so cute and out of character it startles Frank. Mary notices the reaction.

MARY

I look like a Disney character.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Sitting on the counter is FRED, an orange tabby cat with one eye. Fred is not a "cat" cat. He's cool.

As Frank reads, we see Mary pour herself a cup of coffee. She sits, adds cream and sugar. Just as she's about to drink, Frank nonchalantly snatches it and pours it into the sink.

MARY

If I'm old enough to go to a stupid school, I'm old enough to drink coffee.

FRANK

No fuzzy logic at the breakfast table. Eat your cereal.

Mary pouts, then sifts through her cereal.

MARY

Where's the special?

FRANK

What?

MARY

You said you made me special breakfast.

Without dropping his paper, Frank turns the cereal box so she can read "Special K." Mary rolls her eyes.

MARY

Hilarious...Did you buy this just for that joke?

FRANK

Yep.

MARY

Okay, then funny...Please don't make me go. You can home school me.

FRANK

I don't think so.

MARY

But I don't want to go.

FRANK

I don't want to go to work, but I do.

MARY

You don't go to work, you fix boats
on the dock.

FRANK

Okay, poor example, but you're
still going.

MARY

But, but, but what about Fred?

FRANK

Fred.

There is a tradition of saying Fred's name in a crisp,
staccato way that is part nervous tic, part homage.

MARY

You won't take care of him, you
don't like cats.

FRANK

I don't like two-eyed cats. Fred,
as you can see, is monocular.

On Fred. He's staying out of it.

FRANK

Fred. He'll be fine, now no more
argument, we've discussed this ad
nauseam.

MARY

What's, what's ad nauseam?

FRANK

Oh, you don't know, do you? Looks
like somebody needs school.

On Mary. Pisses her off.

EXT. FRANK'S BUILDING - MINUTES LATER

They stand in front of this 1960's Florida Deco motel that
missed out on the restoration boom.

FRANK

This will be fun. You'll meet
people today you can borrow money
from the rest of your life.

MARY

You need new writers.

The bus arrives, door opens. Mary closes her eyes in defeat and trudges into the bus.

FRANK

You'll be fine. Just, I don't know,
be a kid.

The bus pulls away, and Frank's put-on cheerful look fades. Frank experiences a sudden wave of dread. He turns, stares into space. Suddenly, he senses he's being watched, looks up.

EXT. FRANK'S BUILDING - SAME

Standing on the second floor, flashing a condemning glare is ROBERTA TAYLOR, 40's, black, unforgettable face.

Frank's annoyed she's there. Busted, he compensates by delivering a used car salesman's smile as he exits.

ROBERTA

Uhh huhhh.

INT. FRANK'S LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Frank enters, slams the door, locks it. He's not halfway across the room when we hear keys, see the dead bolt turn, and Roberta enter. They stare at one another.

FRANK

Take anything you want, just don't hurt me.

ROBERTA

There is still time for you to undo this nonsense.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Frank pours two cups of coffee.

ROBERTA

You can get in your car and get that child before...

Frank motions with his head to O.S. Roberta looks, sees Fred.

ROBERTA

Good morning, Fred.
(to Frank)
Now go.

He hands her mug to her as he passes. She follows.

INT. FRANK'S LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

He sits down with the paper, she hovers.

ROBERTA

The cat's going to be out of the bag, you know that?

FRANK

Fred.

ROBERTA

Not that cat. How can you just sit there all calm and everything and make light of this? Now go fetch her back before it's too late.

FRANK

Are you technically allowed to use those keys to enter apartments whenever you want?

(off her look)

Look, I made a decision. I don't know if it's good or bad...

Roberta raises her hand like the kid who knows the answer.

ROBERTA

Ooo! Ooo! Ooo!

FRANK

I have no choice, she has to get out into the world. She has no friends her age, no social skills, she doesn't know how to be a child.

ROBERTA

But...

FRANK

Two nights ago she said that even if the Germans bail out the Euro, there could still be a world wide depression. I was staring at the ceiling for three hours.

Eye contact. Her eyes well up, and she turns away.

FRANK

Roberta. Come on, if you start crying I'll have to pretend to start crying.

ROBERTA

I'm so worried.

FRANK

You know, there is one thing you seem to be overlooking. This could work out.

ROBERTA

Maybe...but if anyone takes that baby away, I'll smother you in your sleep.

She shakes the keys at him.

She exits. Stay on Frank.

INT. LITTLE BAYOU SCHOOL - LATER - DAY

Calling the roll is BONNIE STEVENSON, 20's, bright and pretty. She notices her hand clutching the printout too tightly, and forces herself to calm her nerves.

BONNIE

Eric Haines?...Kaitlyn Johnson?...

People who mistake Bonnie's altruism for naiveté underestimate her. She's got a head on her shoulders.

Mary sits with her arms crossed. Across the aisle, JUSTIN GILMORE, shy, awkward 6 year-old steals glances at her. Justin is smitten, and when Mary catches him looking at her, she rolls her eyes. Could this get any worse?

BONNIE

Mary Adler? Mary Adler?

Bonnie scans the class, and the prime candidate is the petulant looking girl with her arms crossed.

BONNIE

Is that you, Mary?

Mary returns a strained smile, stretches her arms out and points to herself with both fingers. "There, you happy?"

Bonnie freezes for a second, then checks her off the list.

BONNIE
O-kay.

INT. LITTLE BAYOU SCHOOL CLASSROOM - LATER - DAY

Close on Bonnie's hand writing problems on the board.

BONNIE
That's right. Two plus two equals four. Very good, Donna. Now, who wants to try three plus three?

MARY (O.S.)
Are you kidding me?

Bonnie, taken aback, turns.

MARY
Three plus three? Really?

BONNIE
I beg your pardon?

MARY
What kind of school is this, anyway?

BONNIE
The kind where the students don't speak unless they have permission.

MARY
Alright, but everyone knows it's six.
(to class)
Am I right or what?

Lots of stunned kids just stare at her.

BONNIE
Excuse me, but no one talks in this class unless called upon, is that clear? Alright. Mary, would you stand please? Stand?

Mary drags herself out of the desk.

BONNIE
For a few days, some of you will feel I'm teaching you things you already know.
(MORE)

BONNIE (cont'd)
 Don't sit down, Mary, these
 problems are for you since you're
 so advanced. What's nine plus
 eight...

MARY (O.S.)
 Seventeen.

BONNIE
 Yes. Yes, it is. Okay then. What's
 seventeen and fiftee...

MARY (O.S.)
 Thirty-two.

Bonnie pauses, looks over her shoulder.

BONNIE
 Yes. Um, all right...fifty-seven,
 and one hundred and thirty fiv...

MARY
 One hundred, ninety-two.

A chill runs down Bonnie's spine. Stunned, she walks to Mary, scans her for any sign of a calculator.

BONNIE
 What's fifty-seven, multiplied by,
 one hundred and thirty-five?

Mary is surprised, frowns. Bonnie smiles and starts back for the front of class.

MARY (O.S.)
 Seven thousand, six hundred and
 ninety-five.

Bonnie looks back, goes to her desk and surreptitiously enters the problem on her computer. She sees the 7695.

MARY
 The square root is eighty-seven
 point seven...

Bonnie looks at her, then hits the square root key. It's 87.721149.

MARY
 And change.

Bonnie, stunned, stares at Mary.

MARY

We good? Terrific. Now, what does
ad nauseam mean?

Stay on Bonnie. What in the world does she have here?

EXT. DOCK - SAME

He paces. When he arrives at the end of the dock, he takes out his cell phone and checks the time. Still too early.

When he looks up, Frank sees a group of people having a party on the beach. Guys toss a football around. Girls and guys play in the waves. Not a care in the world.

Frank looks on wistfully.

INT. LITTLE BAYOU SCHOOL HALLWAY - LATER - DAY

CARLY ROSEN, early 30's, attractive veteran teacher sneaks out of her classroom to Bonnie's, waves to get Bonnie's attention. Bonnie comes to the door.

CARLY

So, scale of one to ten, how much
are you regretting your career
choice right now?

BONNIE

I have a very strange kid.

CARLY

Ha, I have twenty-seven.
(looks OS)
Oh shit. See ya.

The principal of the school, GLORIA DAVIS, 50's, waves at Bonnie. To understand Davis, just take one part lemon, two parts Bible, add a little Ayn Rand and stir.

DAVIS

Mind if I sit in?

BONNIE

Not at all.

INT. LITTLE BAYOU SCHOOL CLASSROOM - LATER - DAY

BONNIE

Class, I'd like to introduce to you
our school principal, Mrs Davis.

CLASS

Hello, Mrs Davis.

DAVIS

Hello children.

Mary raises her hand urgently.

BONNIE

Yes, Mary?

MARY

She's the boss?

BONNIE

She is our principal, yes. Now if everybody would...

Mary stands, turns to Davis, then claps her hands once.

MARY

Okay. Now I want you, to get on that phone, and call Frank, and tell him to get me out of here!

Davis stands, not remotely amused.

DAVIS

Young lady, just who do you think you're talking to...

MARY

(pointing at her)
I'm talking to you!!

Davis looks to Bonnie to ask WTF is going on here?

INT. LITTLE BAYOU SCHOOL - LATER - DAY

Carly and Bonnie stand down the hall as the last of the kids make their way for the exits. Frank and Mary emerge from the principal's office.

CARLY

Wait a minute, that's the dad? I know him. I mean, I don't know him, but I see him at Ferg's almost every Friday night. He's the quiet, damaged, hot guy.

BONNIE

What are you doing at Ferg's every Friday night?

CARLY
Trying to get picked up by him.

As Frank makes the final apologies to the principal os,
Bonnie summons her courage and follows.

EXT. LITTLE BAYOU SCHOOL - LATER - DAY

BONNIE
Excuse me. One second. Pardon me.

Frank turns.

MARY
It's my teacher. She probably wants
to remind me what one plus one is.

FRANK
You, go to the car.

She exits as Bonnie arrives.

BONNIE
I'm sorry to chase after, I mean,
to follow...I'm um...

FRANK
Mary's teacher?

BONNIE
What? Yes.

EXT. LITTLE BAYOU SCHOOL PARKING LOT - SAME - DAY

Mary hits the key fob, opens the door.

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK - A MOMENT LATER

She slips the key in the ignition and starts the truck. She cranks up the AC and radio, pulls the door closed.

EXT. LITTLE BAYOU SCHOOL - MOMENTS LATER - DAY

FRANK
I really am sorry for any trouble,
seriously. Now, gotta run.

BONNIE
No, wait. That's not what I wanted
to, why can't I talk?
(MORE)

BONNIE (cont'd)

Let me start over. I think your
child, Mary, may be gifted.

FRANK

What?

BONNIE

In math. Today she...

FRANK

Oh. Ohh. No, not um, not gifted...

BONNIE

No, I was there and she answered
some really difficult...

FRANK

Trachtenburg.

BONNIE

...Problems that a seven year-old
couldn't...What?

FRANK

Jakow Trachtenburg spent seven
years in a Nazi concentration camp.
To keep his mind sharp, he came up
with a method for rapid solving of
problems, the Trachtenburg method.

BONNIE

But, but she's seven.

FRANK

I learned it when I was eight, do I
look gifted to you?

(backing away)

Kind of gone out of vogue since the
invention of the calculator, but
you can still win a drink in a bar
using it. Sorry for the trouble.

Frank waves, grins, escapes. Stay on Bonnie's confused and somewhat disappointed face.

EXT. DOCK - AN HOUR LATER - DAY

A hot bowrider is parked at the dock on a fall Florida day.
White thunderheads boil into a deep blue sky.

INT. BOWRIDER. SAME. DAY.

Frank works on the engine. Mary paces around the boat.

MARY

For the record, I didn't want to go to this stupid school in the first place, and, and, the boy in the next row acts inappropriately for someone who is a child.

FRANK

I'm sorry, but I am still passive aggressively ignoring you. Go away.

She storms off, only to return.

MARY

Other kids answer questions, they don't get into trouble. I answer questions...

FRANK

You aren't in trouble for answering questions. You yelled at the principal.

Frank suddenly takes a quiet, NPR host tone.

FRANK

Oh, hey, you're going to find this interesting. I googled first-graders who scream at their principals, and you won't believe what the median average is.

MARY

What, what is it...

FRANK

None!

She stomps off and stewes.

Frank hops back on deck, starts the engine. It roars to life.

When Mary hears the engine, her whole demeanor changes. She ambles up to Frank, her head downcast.

MARY

I'm really sorry. I was wrong. I promise I'll do better.

Frank stares down at her.

MARY
So when are the people picking up
this boat?

She tilts her head so she can look at him with one eye.

FRANK
Get your stuff.

She jumps in the air, then runs to exit the boat.

FRANK
Don't run.

She runs like hell.

EXT. TAMPA BAY - LATER - DAY

The bowrider slices through smooth water.

EXT. BOWRIDER - SAME - DAY

Mary stands in the bow, the wind blowing her hair back. Her oversized sunglasses match her oversized life jacket.

On the seat next to her in his own life jacket is Fred, eye closed and nose in the air.

INT. BONNIE'S APARTMENT - SAME - DAY

She sits in front of the computer and pulls up the Wiki on Trachtenberg. She reads it.

BONNIE
Huh.

EXT. EGMONT KEY WILDLIFE REFUGE - SAME - DAY

Mary doesn't build a sand castle, she engineers one. She uses a tape measure and square to make perfect right angles. She does this with bird-happy Fred tethered to her ankle.

EXT. EGMONT KEY WILDLIFE REFUGE - LATER - DAY

Frank sits down a few feet away from Mary.

FRANK
I'm sorry I yelled at you.

MARY

It's okay. I know I'm a pain in the ass.

FRANK

No. You're not. Well, you are. It's just, you can't show off like that at school...

MARY

I know.

FRANK

The first day, and already...

MARY

I know, I know. I'm sorry.

After a moment, Mary stands and carefully, so as not to disturb Fred, moves to Frank's lap. Mary puts her head against Frank's chest.

This is awkward for him. Always has been, maybe always will. Frank Adler doesn't do affection well.

MARY

Fred loves to watch the sandpipers. They run in, they run out, they run in, they run out.

On Fred. His head turns to follow them.

FRANK

Like kitty Wimbledon.

MARY

He thinks he'd like to catch one, but he'd regret it. Fred's not a killer, he's a lover. Fred.

FRANK

Fred.

MARY

Fred.

(a moment)

Would my mom have wanted me to go to this school?

FRANK

I can only guess. I will tell you this, she would want you to have friends.

MARY
Idiot friends?

FRANK
And she would want you to have
compassion for others...like a cat
can have for a sandpiper.

On Mary. A moment to process, then the real truth.

MARY
What, what if they don't like me?

FRANK
Then they're idiots.

Stay on Mary.

INT. LITTLE BAYOU SCHOOL CLASSROOM - NEXT DAY - DAY

Everyone is seated when Bonnie enters. Bonnie immediately notices Mary looking bored with her chin resting on her hand.

CLASS
Good morrrrrning, Miss Stevenson.

Bonnie stares at Mary. Mary rolls her eyes and relents.

MARY
Good morrrrrning, Miss Stevenson.

Mary suddenly realizes she's being watched. She turns and sees Justin staring at her.

MARY
Get a hold of yourself.

INT. LITTLE BAYOU SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAYS LATER - DAY

MARY
For my show and tell, I have the
most awesome cat in the history of
time. Not only is his name Fred,
but, wait for it...wait for it...

She lifts Fred out of the carrier.

MARY
He has just one eye. Uno. Go ahead
and count, but I promise you, it's
always one.
(MORE)

MARY (cont'd)
For Fred, binoculars are overkill.
Every Halloween, he's a pirate.

BOY
How did he lose his eye?

MARY
Bar fight.

On Bonnie. The more she sees Mary, the more she questions Frank saying this child is not gifted.

INT. LITTLE BAYOU SCHOOL CLASSROOM - LATER - DAY

Bonnie hands out an arithmetic test.

BONNIE
Take your time and think about how you get to the answer...

MARY (O.S.)
Done.

Bonnie turns and Mary is holding up the test, completed before most even started. Bonnie takes the paper, then slips Mary another piece of paper.

Mary looks down at a page of algebra problems that would challenge a high school student.

BONNIE
I knew you'd finish quickly, so, something extra.

Bonnie hands out the rest of the papers and goes back to her desk. She looks over her shoulder at Mary, then goes about her business.

She organizes materials for the next lesson.

She straightens her desk, puts books back on the book shelf.

Bonnie starts erasing the blackboard.

MARY (O.S.)
Done.

Bonnie slowly turns. Mary sits with her chin resting on interlaced fingers.

INT. BONNIE'S APARTMENT - LATER - DAY

Bonnie searches the web. She googles "Frank Adler." She gets a guy at a Rotary Club meeting. She googles "Francis Adler." Nada. She googles "Frank Adler mathematician." She gets nothing about Frank, but there are tons of hits for "Diane Adler."

She opens the page and views a Newsweek story on Diane Adler, a math genius in her 20's. Bonnie becomes transfixed, because the resemblance between Diane and Mary is unmistakable.

Bonnie searches other stories, then finds a story about Diane Adler's suicide.

BONNIE

Ohh.

EXT. FERG'S - LATER - NIGHT

Establishing. A huge bar packed with tons of young singles looking to hook up.

INT. FERG'S - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT

Bonnie enters. With her hair down and in jeans, she looks really different.

It's a huge place, so it takes her a minute to spot Frank. She summons her courage, walks to the bar.

She stands in front of him and gets his attention.

BONNIE

You lied to me.

FRANK

Then I'm telling the whole truth starting right now. I have no idea who you are.

INT. FERG'S - LATER

They've moved to a booth. Frank folds and unfolds Mary's algebra problems, looking at them every now and then.

FRANK

I was running ridiculously late for a date. My sister showed up unannounced, with Mary. Huh.

(MORE)

FRANK (cont'd)

Diane never just showed up, and she never brought the baby. I was in such a hurry that, you know, I didn't think anything of it.

BONNIE

Why would you?

FRANK

Yes, why would I? I didn't notice the look on her face, wasn't noteworthy then. Is now. I didn't look in the back seat of her car, which held all Mary's things. That would have been a red flag...but, I uh, I thought that showing up super late for my date might mess up my chances of getting laid.

(a moment)

I came home. Mary was on the couch. I found Diane on the bathroom floor.

BONNIE

Ohh.

FRANK

There's no way I could've known.
But I should've.

He takes a drink.

FRANK

Six and a half years later, Mary and I are still hanging out.

BONNIE

But um, what about the father?

FRANK

Ha. Diane was so socially awkward, she never dated enough to know a good guy from a bad guy. This particular one didn't last two months, much less nine.

BONNIE

No grandparents?

FRANK

My dad died when I was eight...My mother, the short version, turned her back on Diane when she got pregnant.

BONNIE

Really?

FRANK

Really.

BONNIE

Wow. This is just so sad.

FRANK

Oh, I'm sorry, I...

BONNIE

No, I'm glad you told me. I feel,
better, that you told me.

Frank nods. He smiles in a way that changes the mood.

BONNIE

So Mary, she is a genius, isn't
she?

FRANK

Mary who?

(a moment)

So here we are, the world's best
unqualified, illegal guardian, and
the nicest, prettiest first grade
teacher who hopefully won't rat us
out to her school. I'll do
everything in my power to make sure
she's not disruptive. She's going
to treat you, and others, with
respect. Word of honor, new and
improved Mary.

BONNIE

Mary who?

On Frank. What a cool thing for her to say.

INT. FRANK'S APARTMENT - A DAY LATER - DAY

Mary sits on the couch surrounded by used college math
textbooks. The book which currently fascinates her is called
"Advanced Complexity Theory." We see a monstrous problem
filling both pages.

Frank enters. Almost in a trance, she never looks up.

FRANK

Let's go outside.

MARY
No.

FRANK
It's nice out.

MARY
I don't care.

He takes her book, she grabs another. He takes that one, and all the rest. She looks up, annoyed.

EXT. ST PETE SEA WALL - MAGIC HOUR - DAY

Frank and Mary sit on the seawall where people gather to watch dolphins chase fish. Mary leans against him.

MARY
Is there a God?

FRANK
I don't know.

MARY
Just tell me.

FRANK
I would if I could, but I don't know, and neither does anyone else.

MARY
Roberta knows.

FRANK
No she doesn't. Roberta has faith, which is a great thing to have, but faith is about what you think and feel, not what you know.

MARY
What about Jesus?

FRANK
Love that guy. Do what he says.

MARY
But is he God?

FRANK

I don't know. I have an opinion, but it's my opinion, and I could be wrong, so why should I screw up yours. Use your head, but, don't be afraid to believe in things either.

MARY

Hmm. There was a guy on TV who said there was no God...

FRANK

Ha, the only thing different between atheists on TV and Roberta, is Roberta loves you and is trying to help. Here they come.

A school of fish haul ass right under their feet, followed by a pod of dolphins streaking through the water.

MARY

Sea World, gratis.

FRANK

I will tell you this. One way or another, we're all back together at the end. That is what you're asking, isn't it?

MARY

Yep.

FRANK

Then there you go. Now go find something else to worry about.

Mary considers it, and by her expression, is relieved.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - NEXT MONDAY - DAY

Justin watches as the bus pulls up. He's holding his art project in both arms. The bus stops, he enters.

INT. BUS - MOMENTS LATER - DAY

Justin begins down the aisle and Mary can't believe the size of his art project. He's built a miniature zoo, filled with all kinds of animals and structures. She looks down at her puny project. Annoyed, she shakes her head.

She watches Justin approach a seat occupied by 5th Grader RICKY HARMON, a vicious prick.

When Justin passes, Mary sees Ricky stick out his leg and trip Justin. He falls, smashing his zoo.

Ricky and his friends explode in laughter as Justin rises, sees his little animals strewn about, and begins to well up.

RICKY

Look out, the animals are escaping,
ha ha...Dumb ass.

Justin looks at all the laughing faces, and he's destroyed. With tears in his eyes he walks to the back of the bus.

Mary looks back at the humiliated boy, then at the laughing fools. Ominously, she rises.

MARY

You should not be laughing. You did a mean thing to a little kid.

RICKY

Yeah, yeah, what are you gonna do about it?

Her lips tighten, eyes narrow, and Ricky never saw it coming.

INT. LITTLE BAYOU SCHOOL - LATER

When Frank approaches the principal's office, a small crowd of people hanging in the hall stare at his arrival. With all those eyes on him, Frank slides inside the doorway.

INT. LITTLE BAYOU SCHOOL PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

Frank enters and sees this: A School Nurse applying ice to Ricky's badly broken nose. A whining Ricky with blood all over his shirt and pants. Ricky's super pissed mom. An even more pissed school principal, and Bonnie, who looks at the ceiling to keep from betraying her familiarity. All eyes on Frank as if to ask "well?"

FRANK

Now I was told on the phone there would be cupcakes.

INT. GLORIA DAVIS' PRIVATE OFFICE - LATER - DAY

Frank sits opposite Davis, with Bonnie and Davis' assistant, YVONNE, off to the side.

DAVIS

How do we resolve this? You know,
she could be expelled.

FRANK

Well, she needs to be taught a
lesson. My Mary is no better than
all the others who committed a
similar first offense and were
expelled.

DAVIS

Are you going to take this
seriously?

FRANK

Sure. I don't bluff you and you
don't bluff me, how's that?

DAVIS

Miss Stevenson believes that your
child is exceptional, and has
talents that our curriculum can't
begin to challenge. Now, it just so
happens, I am good friends with the
headmaster of the Oaks Academy for
Gifted Education...

FRANK

Now there's a school.

DAVIS

He's always said, if you find that
one in a million...

FRANK

And, the one in a million has
thirty thousand dollars tuition...

DAVIS

Mister Adler, I can get your
daughter a scholarship. Full ride.
I wouldn't say it if I couldn't do
it.

Frank glances at Bonnie, who looks away.

Frank stands, puts his face in his hands, and groans.

Davis, a little surprised, looks at Bonnie and Yvonne.

FRANK

Oh, you have no idea how much
easier this would make my life.

He sighs heavily, then looks at them.

FRANK

I realize that putting that girl, in that setting, I mean, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, that's what you do, right? The Oaks, it's a great school, I looked at it.

A moment, then very measured words.

FRANK

But, this family's had some history with special schools. I appreciate the offer, but Mary needs to be here. Today? Bad ending, can't hit people, but, I mean, a twelve year-old bullies a seven year-old, and she stands up? You have no idea how important it is to me that she did that. I'm so proud of her. Aren't you?

DAVIS

Mister Adler...

FRANK

I promise you she won't hit people, that will be made very clear, but Mrs Davis, if we separate our leaders, segregate them from normal people like me and you, you end up with congressmen. I wish I could take the offer but, sorry, she stays, unless you kick her out.

Frank starts to exit.

DAVIS

This is a mistake. We'll never be able to lift this child to the level of scholarship she deserves.

FRANK

Yeah, then just dumb her down into a decent human being and everyone will be happy.

He exits.

BONNIE

Excuse me.

Bonnie follows. Davis turns to Yvonne.

DAVIS

Did any of that make any sense to you? Bring me every piece of paperwork we have on this girl.

INT. LITTLE BAYOU SCHOOL - LATER

Bonnie catches up to him as he's exiting the building.

BONNIE

Are you sure you know what you're doing?

FRANK

Hell no.

He exits.

INT. LITTLE BAYOU SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY LATER - DAY

All the kids scramble to their seats as the bell rings. Bonnie stands, waits until everyone is settled.

On cue, Mary stands, reluctantly. As she does, we see across the aisle a defeated Justin staring down at his desk.

MARY

Okay, I'm supposed to say something. Hitting people is wrong. Even if they're bad. I won't do it again, so don't be afraid of me.

BONNIE

Thank you Mary...

MARY

Now can I say something I want to say?

BONNIE

Uh, sure.

MARY

Before they ruined it, Justin's zoo was the best art project, by far.

(to Justin)

It was awesome.

(to class)

A little round of applause wouldn't kill you.

Mary starts clapping and the class joins in.

On Justin. It's as if she reached into his chest and restarted his heart.

Stay on a moved Bonnie.

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK - LATER - DUSK - DAY

They pull into the lot of their building. Mary is looking out the passenger side window.

MARY

There's a lady standing in front of our door.

FRANK

Who is it?

MARY

How should I know? I'm seven. You tell me.

Frank kills the engine, leans over Mary and looks out the passenger side window. He sees a very elegant-looking woman waiting. On his face, we see a mixture of sudden surprise, and dread. He quickly covers it up before she can see.

FRANK

That...would be your grandmother.

Wide-eyed, Mary presses her face against the window.

MARY

Holy shit!

Indeed.

INT. FRANK'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

EVELYN ADLER, 50's, is, as they say, something. She's a classic New England beauty who carries herself like an aristocrat. Very rigid. Very proper. The moment you are certain Evelyn is a bitch, she will be funny and charming. She has layers.

To say she is out of her element in this apartment is an understatement. She occasionally dabs at her nose with a tissue.

The last of several presents are being opened. Mary rips paper to reveal the Apple logo.

MARY
An Apple? Whoa.

EVELYN
It's a Macbook Pro, darling. Top of
the line with the retina display.

FRANK (O.C.)
Fred.

She glances OC, momentarily distracted.

MARY
Thank you, Grandma.

EVELYN
Grandmother or Evelyn will do just
fine. Mary, the battery is fully
charged, and there's some
interesting software for you to
explore...

FRANK
Yes, but sadly, school night, and
there's homework to do. What a
surprise though, right? Say good
night to Grandmother or Evelyn.

MARY
Good night.

Frank ushers her out.

EXT. FRANK'S BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

Evelyn fishes tissue out of her purse and dabs at her eyes,
blows her nose.

EVELYN
I'd kill a priest for a Benadryl.
Who'd ever think you'd have a cat?

FRANK
Fred.

EVELYN
I beg your pardon?

FRANK
Nothing. So let me guess, our
lovely school principal, Mrs.
Davis?

EVELYN

Never get on the bad side of small-minded people who have a little authority, I thought I taught you that.

FRANK

What are you doing here?

EVELYN

Sightseeing...You don't think I have the right to see my own granddaughter?

FRANK

I do, and I'm thrilled your seven year exhaustive search has finally come to a fruitful conclusion.

EVELYN

I don't think this is an appropriate time to talk. Certainly not the setting. While I was waiting, a cockroach this big tried to steal my shoe.

FRANK

Yeah, they'll take a shoe.

A moment of mutual admiration before Evelyn opens the door of her rental car.

EVELYN

Honestly, this? This Godforsaken mosquito ranch was a conscious choice?

FRANK

I can drop you back at the airport.

On Evelyn. Her eyes tell us that's not going to be the case.

INT. FRANK'S LIVING ROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Frank enters.

Mary's eyes are transfixed on the laptop screen.

MARY

This thing is lllloaded with cool problems.

Stay on Frank.

EXT. FISHTAILS GRILL - NEXT AFTERNOON - DAY

Establishing shot of a little beer and seafood place right on a marina. It's the kind of outdoor-only place that has rolls of paper towels on the table instead of napkins.

EXT. FISHTAILS GRILL - SAME

Evelyn wore the wrong clothes for Florida.

EVELYN

I drove by a dozen restaurants with air conditioning. You did this to spite me.

FRANK

It's bucket of beer Tuesday.

EVELYN

Oh well, then.

FRANK

Want to split one, or get your own?

A moment.

EVELYN

So, are you teaching?

FRANK

I repair boats.

EVELYN

Please.

FRANK

Not bad at it either.

EVELYN

Well, then that explains this.

(points at his face)

They don't sell sunscreen here?

FRANK

I wear sunscreen...

EVELYN

Not enough. And you need a hat...

FRANK

I'm...

EVELYN

A big hat that shades your face and neck, you're playing Russian roulette with your skin. You look like a porn producer.

FRANK

Okay. I appreciate the advice, I do, but um, we aren't here to talk about sunscreen, are we?

EVELYN

Oh, so no more small talk? That's a shame...Okay. The environment, uh, you have created for that child, where she lives, the school she attends, it's substandard, every bit of it.

FRANK

I disagree.

EVELYN

We're going nowhere if we're not going to be honest with each other.

FRANK

I am being honest.

EVELYN

I see. Fine. Well, I'm not leaving without her.

FRANK

Then you're staying.

EVELYN

Frank, please, listen to reason. At some point, either you are going to come to the conclusion, or someone in authority is going to spell it out for you, that the child's best interest is all that matters. Put in that context, the outcome is a fait accompli.

FRANK

Wow, Evelyn, that's a lot of scheming for just a three hour flight.

EVELYN

I skipped the movie. You absconded with a six month-old girl without so much as a phone call...

FRANK

A girl you didn't care about until thirty-six hours ago...

EVELYN

Not true.

FRANK

The worst private detective in New England could've tracked me down without ever leaving his office.

The WAITRESS drops off menus.

WAITRESS

I'll be right with you.

FRANK

I'll tell you this, I've said nothing, done nothing, to poison the well. If you want to be in her life, I think that's terrific, come on down.

EVELYN

Sorry, I have a strict "No Third World" policy.

FRANK

Aww, you'll love Florida. You'll be wrestling gators and riding the scooter-carts at Walmart within a week.

EVELYN

Why don't you, for once in your life, do a sensible thing?

FRANK

If you're going to make me pull rank, I will. Diane didn't want you to have her.

EVELYN

Diane, Diane didn't always think things out very...

FRANK

Arguably one of the brightest minds
on the planet, good luck going down
that road...

EVELYN

And what do you think she'd say if
she saw how her child is living
now? Huh? Do you honestly think
she'd be pleased? I can provide for
her. I can enrich her life...

FRANK

Come on, you're gonna take that
girl and bury her in tutors. Then,
you'll loan her out to some think
tank where she can talk non-trivial
zeroes with old Russian guys.

EVELYN

And you'd bury her under a rock.
Look, I don't expect you to
understand the price you have to
pay for greatness.

FRANK

Oh, I do, it's why I have Mary in
the first place.

EVELYN

That's uncalled for...Your sister
had a laundry list of problems.
Yes, she had a great mind, given to
her from God and me...

FRANK

Not necessarily in that order...

EVELYN

But she was flawed. The lack of
focus, the self pity, the
promiscuity. She could have solved
the Navier-Stokes problem, and gone
down in history as one of the
greatest mathematicians of all
time, but she didn't, because she
couldn't finish. You can have all
the ability in the world, but it's
meaningless without results. The
ugly truth is, she was weak. Weak
like her father, and weak like,
well.

FRANK

If it's who I think it is, kind of
a black cloud over our luncheon.

EVELYN

I had hoped we could have talked
like adults about this, but it
seems you have a different agenda.

FRANK

This table is full of agendas,
don't sell yourself short...

EVELYN

You're still stubborn and
vindictive...

FRANK

Careful, mother, there's an apple
and tree analogy lurking.

Evelyn stands just as the waitress returns.

WAITRESS

You guys ready to order?

EVELYN

Here's an idea: stop thinking about
me and you, and start thinking
about what's best for the child,
then do an inventory of your
resources versus my resources. For
any reasonable person, a clear
picture will emerge.

Evelyn hands the waitress a ten dollar bill.

EVELYN

He'll have the bucket of beer.

She exits. Stay on Frank.

EXT. TAMPA BAY - LATER

This time they're cruising in a Grady White CC with two giant
Yamaha outboards. Frank at the controls, Fred as co-pilot.

In the bow we find Mary. She turns her head and looks OS.

MARY'S POV

Justin rides in the bow with her. He looks intently at
everything around him. This is cool.

EXT. FORT DESOTO BEACH - LATER

Frank sits with his back to the dunes. Troubled thought.

Frank glances to his left and sees a wonderful thing. Mary plays with Justin. Plays like a kid.

Stay on Frank. This should make him happy.

INT. PINELLAS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - CLEARWATER - DAY

Frank and his lawyer, GREG CULLEN, 30's, occupy one table, while Evelyn and her lawyer, AUBRY STOKES, sit at the other.

The attractive black woman holding an armful of folders is WANDA HARDAWAY, the bailiff.

AMANDA DOBSON is mid 50's platinum blond who walks with the aid of a cane. She reps Florida Child Services.

On the bench, the honorable EDWARD NICHOLS, a former Marine with a shock of jet black hair. Nichols is affable, as long as everyone does what they are supposed to do.

Roberta is seated in the spectator section.

NICHOLS

(cupping microphone)

Wanda, is that the McMichael file?

No? Will you? Thank you.

(to the court)

Okay, Adler...grandmother and uncle. Really? Are you sure you folks don't want to go out in the hall and settle this?...No? That's a shame. Mister Cullen, you're for the uncle?

Cullen stands. Greg Cullen is a black man who was a cop who put himself through law school at night. Unimpressive by design, he loves being underestimated. He's savvy, creative, and brutally direct.

CULLEN

Yes sir, your honor.

NICHOLS

We're going to have to start charging you room and board. And I see Mister Stokes. You're on the wrong side of the bay, aren't you?

Aubry Stokes is a balding but handsome, old school lawyer from a Tampa "silk stocking" law firm. He knows everybody, and everybody knows him. He has charm out the ass.

STOKES

Very happy to be here, your honor.

NICHOLS

For the record, Mrs Dobson is representing the State of Florida child welfare department.

(to Stokes)

Well, what's your side of it?

STOKES

Your honor, my client, Mrs Adler, is the maternal grandmother of the child. Her daughter, the girl's mother, was a troubled woman, and seven years ago took her own life. It was at this time that Mister Adler preemptively and illegally took custody of the girl and spirited her across state lines for the purpose of denying my client custody. There is evidence that the child is currently living in unclean and unwholesome conditions. We petition the court to grant my client full custody of the child, so she can return her to the state of Massachusetts and give her the care to which she is entitled.

On Roberta. Worry.

Stokes sits. Nichols nods at Cullen, who stands.

CULLEN

My client took a toddler under his wing for one reason only: it was his sister's desire that he do so. My client has been her constant care-giver, and, your honor, as to the living conditions, I've been in this home. It's fine. I mean, if we adopt standards based on our northern friends' aversion to Palmetto bugs, we won't have a child left south of Tallahassee.

Gets laughs. He sits.

Nichols looks at Frank and Evelyn.

NICHOLS

Okay, last call before this starts
costing a lot more money.

STOKES

My client will need reasonable
access to the child for
psychological evaluation, and
visitation.

NICHOLS

So ordered. Mrs Dobson, you'll have
the state get over there and look
at the living conditions?

DOBSON

On the books, your honor.

NICHOLS

Your efficiency astounds.
(to court)
Alright folks, drive carefully.

The lawyers stand and Evelyn immediately leaves the room.

FRANK

Her lawyer has a nice suit.

CULLEN

More weight's put on the talent
competition. Relax. Go have a few
cocktails.

INT. COURTHOUSE HALLWAY - LATER

Roberta and Frank walk down the hallway in numbed silence.

FRANK

Would you like to have Mary
tonight?

ROBERTA

Why wouldn't I have Mary tonight?

FRANK

Wow.

ROBERTA

I told you something like this
would happen. Now look where we
are. And I'm supposed to believe
you know what you're doing? You
couldn't even find a white lawyer.

FRANK

Just, just, wow...Look, don't
worry...

ROBERTA

Don't tell me that. Don't. There's nothing you can say that's going to make me feel good, because I have no say in any of this. I'm not a blood relative. I'm not a legal guardian. I'm nothing, just the black lady who lives in the building whose opinion means shit, whose feelings mean shit.

(a beat)

"Would I like to have Mary tonight?" I'd like to have Mary every night.

She waves her hands to ward off any response, and she exits.

EXT. ROBERTA'S APARTMENT - LATER - NIGHT

The apartment is rocking, a dance beat shaking the window.

INT. ROBERTA'S APARTMENT - SAME

Roberta and Mary are dancin'. They are tearing it up.

On Roberta. She has more shakes than a cedar roof.

On Mary. Eyes closed, she bobs her head back and forth while stabbing the air with her fingertips.

On Roberta. She does a modified Cupid Shuffle.

On Mary. A little "Chicken Noodle Soup" anyone?

On Fred. Some Rollee Pollee action on the floor.

Close on Roberta. She smiles at Mary, but when Mary turns around, we see the fear overcome Roberta. Then, when she realizes Mary is turning again, she covers up and all is happy again, as far as Mary is concerned.

INT. FERG'S - LATER

Bonnie scours the place, but no Frank. She sighs, looks at her watch.

EXT. FERG'S PARKING LOT - LATER

Bonnie opens the door and exits and they almost run into one another.

BONNIE

Oh. Hi.

FRANK

Hi.

BONNIE

Look, I heard Davis bragging about a custody case, then I found out whose. I feel terrible, but, I wanted you to know, after we talked, I said nothing, to no one. I swear...It's important to me that you know.

FRANK

I know.

(a beat)

My lawyer told me to get drunk.
Wanna join me?

INT. FERGS - AN HOUR LATER

Shots and beer chasers on the table.

BONNIE

I actually was a pretty smart first grader myself.

FRANK

I'll bet.

BONNIE

Nowhere near Mary, but, after three weeks, they pulled me out of first grade and put me in second.

FRANK

And how'd that work out?

BONNIE

Sucked. The girls hated me, little miss skip-a-grade.

(MORE)

BONNIE (cont'd)

One time, I got invited to a birthday party, and I was so excited because maybe they finally were giving me a chance, and I bought a great present, got all dressed up, and went to the address and it was a gas station.

FRANK

Aw, that's terrible.

BONNIE

And they never grew out of it. They hated me through high school. Oh, I used to have these fantasies that I, you know, had my own TV series, or won an Academy Award, or was First Lady, so they could see me on TV and hate themselves.

She's off in space for a moment, then comes to Earth.

BONNIE

Instead, I'm living in my parents' house, up to my ass in student loans, making the big bucks teaching school...Oh if they could see me now.

Now she looks at Frank as if expecting him to weigh in. Frank was unprepared.

FRANK

Well, at least you're not fat.

A moment, then Bonnie grins in disbelief.

BONNIE

Thank you! Inappropriate, but...

FRANK

I mean, those girls, living in Florida, they have to be huge by now.

BONNIE

Thank you!

(gestures to her body)

And check this out. Seriously. I may not have my own TV series, but at the high school reunion I won't need more than one chair.

Frank raises his shot glass in a toast.

FRANK
Here's to the mean girls.

BONNIE
Suck it, porkers.

They down the shots, eye one another.

INT. FRANK'S BEDROOM - LATER

They knock over Frank's night table as they lustfully fall into bed while making out. Bonnie finally breaks.

BONNIE
Are you positive there's no way.

FRANK
The predetermined all clear has never failed, I swear.

BONNIE
No. No, I can't do this. I can't.

FRANK
Alright. Alright. I'll take you home. Just let me...

She attacks him. They make out, and when he rolls over on top of her, we

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. FRANK'S BEDROOM - NEXT MORNING - DAY

A sliver of annoying sunlight wakes Bonnie. She opens her eyes and has no clue as to where she could be. Looks left, no idea. Looks right, sees sleeping Frank Adler. Bonnie closes her eyes and we see a gigantic "oh no" expression.

INT. ROBERTA'S APARTMENT - SAME

Mary looks through a pile of DVDs. Mary calls out.

MARY
I can't find it.

ROBERTA (O.S.)
It's right there.

MARY

No it isn't. You come and find it.

ROBERTA

I'm doing lady business. You were
the last person to watch it. What
did you do with it?

Mary thinks hard. Suddenly, it comes to her.

MARY

(to herself)

Ooo.

She starts to run down the hall, then she sees Roberta's keys. Mary grabs the keys and exits.

EXT. FRANK'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Mary tries several keys until she finds a winner. She opens the door.

INT. FRANK'S APARTMENT - SAME

Bonnie walks into the bathroom with a sheet wrapped around her. As she's being revolted by her image in the mirror, she hears a sound approaching.

INT. HALLWAY - SAME

Mary runs down the hall until the presence in the bathroom stops her. She turns. Her jaw drops.

She and Bonnie now stare at one another. Finally, Mary grins.

MARY

Good Morrrrninnng, Miss Stevenson.

INT. FRANK'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

Frank and Bonnie sit on the couch, Mary in a chair in front of them. Frank searches for the right words.

FRANK

Okay. Mary, when mommies and
daddies love each other very
much...

Bonnie gives him an elbow to the ribs.

FRANK

Let me put it another way, then.
Mary...

MARY

Oh, come on. I go to Roberta's every Friday night. What do you think I think is going on? You guys are the ones making a big deal out of this, I just want my Sponge Bob DVD.

She waves it at them.

MARY

So can I go now?

BOTH OF THEM

Yes!

INT. BONNIE'S CAR - LATER

Bonnie starts the engine, opens the window. Frank leans in.

FRANK

Look, I um...

BONNIE

I am really incapable of having this conversation now, if that's okay.

FRANK

Good, because I had no idea of what I was going to say.

They exchange nods, then she exits.

Frank closes his eyes, shakes his head in regret. When he turns, he sees Roberta's grin, ear to ear.

Frank ignores her, walks to his mail box, fetches his mail.

ROBERTA

Was that really Mary's teacher? I got a book called fundamentals of decision-making. You can borrow it.

FRANK

I'm sorry, but aren't you just the black lady who lives in the building?

He opens an envelope containing a legal size letter.

ROBERTA

Hey. Yeah, I'm um, I'm sorry I said
that yesterday.

FRANK

No harm, no foul.

Roberta smiles, but stops when she sees Frank is troubled by
the letter.

ROBERTA

What's it say?

FRANK

It says Mary gets to go to Boston
for a couple days.

(off her reaction)

Just two days, relax.

Frank hides his concern for Roberta's sake.

EXT. BOSTON - DAYS LATER - DAY

Establishing shots of the city.

INT. TOWN CAR - SAME - DAY

Mary has her nose to the window as she looks out at the city.

EVELYN

What do you think?

MARY

Cool.

INT. BURBERRY - LATER - DAY

Evelyn and the salesperson wait for her to emerge from the
dressing room. Mary finally steps out, wearing a bow detail
check dress and rain boots. Ridiculously cute.

Evelyn and the clerk beam.

MARY

You can't be serious. When am I
ever going to wear this in Florida?

Ah, the million dollar question. Evelyn bites her lip before
turning to the clerk.

EVELYN
We'll take it.

Mary rolls her eyes.

EXT. EVELYN'S TOWNHOUSE - LATER - NIGHT

Establishing. Her Beacon Street townhouse. Like a page from Architectural Digest.

INT. GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

Mary sits atop a huge four-poster bed. She plays a game on her laptop when Evelyn enters. Evelyn frowns, takes the laptop from her.

EVELYN
Enough of that, we have a big day tomorrow. I didn't buy you this so you could play games, anyway. Do you need anything?

MARY
Yeah, a ladder.

A moment, on Evelyn.

EVELYN
I'm so happy you're here. Well, good night.

MARY
Good night.

Evelyn turns off the light.

EXT. HARVARD - NEXT DAY - DAY

Establishing.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

A student, LIJUAN, copies a problem from a piece of paper to the blackboard. Seated at his desk is SEYMORE SHANKLAND, a formidable looking professor with a round face and full white beard.

Lijuan stops copying, looks confused.

LIJUAN
Doctor Shankland, this problem
is...

SHANKLAND
I know, just copy it exactly as you
see it written.

LIJUAN
But it's...

SHANKLAND
Exactly as written, please.

Lijuan, annoyed, follows her professor's orders and continues.

INT. HALLWAY - LATER - DAY

Evelyn leads Mary by the hand through a mass of students.

MARY
Some kind of crowded.

EVELYN
Someday you'll go to school here.
Here we are.

She opens the door and they enter.

INT. CLASSROOM - LATER - DAY

Evelyn and Shankland huddle near a window. They both steal glances OC. Evelyn looks nervous and annoyed.

The object of their interest, Mary, stands before the blackboard. She looks up at the problem.

Evelyn looks at Shankland and sees disappointment on his face. She whispers to him.

EVELYN
Don't be smug, Seymore.

SHANKLAND
She's had plenty of time.

EVELYN
She traveled yesterday, slept in a
strange bed, give her some...

He cuts her off by walking away. She follows.

Shankland comes next to Mary, crouches down.

SHANKLAND

So Mary, I see you're looking at
our little problem. So what do you
think of it?

MARY

Little? It's big.

He smiles, then looks up at Evelyn with a condescending expression that really aggravates her.

EXT. HARVARD SCIENCE CENTER - MINUTES LATER - DAY

Evelyn hustles her out of the building.

MARY

Why are you so mad all of a sudden?

EVELYN

I'm not mad, I'm annoyed. Not with you, dear, with that pompous ass Shankland. We were just supposed to have a chat, and he ambushes us with that problem.

MARY

Yeah, and it was wrong.

EVELYN

What?

MARY

Way wrong. He was all excited about it, and I was like, thinking, "come on, read a book."

On Evelyn, her eyes intent and excited. She grins and hugs Mary, then pulls her by the arm back to the entrance.

MARY

Whoa!

They reenter.

INT. CLASSROOM - MINUTES LATER - DAY

Mary, standing on a chair, erases the erroneous terms and writes in the correct ones.

Shankland stares in awe. Big goose bump stuff.

SHANKLAND
I owe you an apology.

EVELYN
You think?

SHANKLAND
Mary? You knew the problem was incorrect, why didn't you say something?

MARY
Frank says I'm not supposed correct older people. Nobody likes a smart ass.

Evelyn gives him one last glare, then watches, with pride, as her granddaughter finishes the problem.

EXT. TAMPA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - LATER - NIGHT

Frank pulls up to the curb just as Mary and Evelyn emerge from the terminal, loaded with shopping bags.

Mary grins, lifts the bags to her sides.

MARY
I'm lllloaded with swag.

Frank and Evelyn trade stares. Her confidence is off-putting.

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK - DAYS LATER - DAY

They drive along the marina on Beach Drive.

MARY
I think this is stupid.

FRANK
Well it isn't. It's actually very important.

MARY
Why don't we just call Evelyn and tell her I don't want to?

FRANK
Can't. Your grandmother wants to make sure you're having a good life, so, again, what are you going to do?

MARY
Tell the truth.

FRANK
Exactly. Don't make up things you think they want to hear because they'll know you're lying. Right?

MARY
Yeah.

FRANK
And no goofing on them if they start to annoy you. You know how you are.

MARY
Frank?

FRANK
Mary?

MARY
I like Evelyn, she looks like my mom, but I don't want to live with her. She's bossy.

FRANK
I've heard that...Don't worry, you're not going anywhere.

MARY
Swear?

FRANK
I swear.

MARY
Okay. Still, this is going to suck.

INT. PSYCHOLOGIST'S OFFICE - LATER

Mary's therapist, ANTHONY GOLDING, 30's, is a balding, colorless do-gooder gone wrong. He starts off by bringing out two dolls.

GOLDING
Mary, to help us out, I have two dolls, one that represents your uncle Frank, and this one represents you.

MARY

Okay, bad start. Why don't you ask a question, and I'll give you an answer. Lose the puppet show.

INT. PSYCHOLOGIST'S OFFICE - LATER

GOLDING

When, let's say, you do something bad at home, does Uncle Frank ever spank you?

MARY

I never do anything wrong at home, only at school.

GOLDING

Oh, do you get in trouble at school?

MARY

Constantly.

INT. PSYCHOLOGIST'S OFFICE - LATER

GOLDING

Has Uncle Frank ever, oh I don't know, wanted you to take a nap in his room when you didn't want to?

MARY

Where do you get these questions, seriously?

INT. PSYCHOLOGIST'S OFFICE - LATER

GOLDING

Did your uncle coach you on what to say today?

MARY

He said I couldn't goof on you, but you're pushing it.

INT. PSYCHOLOGIST'S OFFICE - LATER

MARY

I have another cheer for Fred, wanna hear it?

GOLDING

I think we've talked plenty enough
about the cat. Now if we could...

MARY

Fred. Fred. Fred-Fred-Fred! Go-Ooo
Freddie!

GOLDING

Keep working on it.

MARY

(narrowed eyes)

It's perfect.

INT. PSYCHOLOGIST'S OFFICE - LATER

GOLDING

Are you mad at your mother? For
going away?

MARY

She didn't "go away," she killed
herself.

GOLDING

And does that make you feel angry
at times?

MARY

No.

GOLDING

Do you ever blame yourself for what
happened to your mother?

MARY

(angrily)

No.

She turns sullenly inward.

INT. PSYCHOLOGIST'S OFFICE WAITING ROOM - LATER

Mary enters and Frank stands.

FRANK

Well? How'd it go?

She walks right past him, exits. He follows.

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK - LATER

Going home. Long silence before she speaks.

MARY

Did my mom kill herself because of
me?

FRANK

No. She got a head cold because of
you, once.

MARY

Be serious.

FRANK

Little girl, I swear. At six months
you had not yet begun to annoy
people. Right now, on the other
hand.

MARY

My mother was beautiful and smart
and she loved me.

FRANK

That is correct.

MARY

That guy's lucky I can't hit people
anymore.

EXT. LITTLE BAYOU SCHOOL - DAYS LATER - DAY

Bonnie exits the school. As she walks to her car she looks up
and sees him.

Frank stands next to his truck.

INT. BOHEMIA CAFE - LATER

Over coffee.

BONNIE

I walked in the door, and my mom
said, "good morning," but I heard,
"you slut."

FRANK

Maybe I'll drop by later and let
your dad kick my ass, would that
help?

BONNIE

I've never had a one night stand before. Did I say that loud enough?

He sees her struggle with whatever's coming.

BONNIE

I um, I'm attracted to you. Very. And um, I have a sneaking suspicion that's not going to be good for me, is it? I mean, not even counting the parent-teacher of it all.

FRANK

Uncle-teacher...Sorry.

BONNIE

I know you have these problems with Mary, and, you know, you've got this sadness about you...and that's, oh boy, that's like catnip to me. I have an addiction to fixer guys.

FRANK

Huh. I'm a fixer?

BONNIE

Dude.

(a moment)

So, a little truth now could save me a lot of trouble later. If, let's say, I get involved, I'm going to get annihilated, right?

Frank starts to reply, then we see him stop himself, look away and reconsider. Finally he turns back to her.

FRANK

If the past is any indication, yeah, pretty much.

(a moment)

I've had very few relationships since Mary entered my life, but the ones I've had I always start with this same disclaimer...I'll never love you, never commit to you. Ever. If you choose to proceed, it's at your own peril.

(MORE)

FRANK (cont'd)

Now, if this were contrived, it'd be the greatest reverse psychology scam of all time, considering the results, but um, it isn't, and I guess I should be responsible and end these things before they start, but there are certain women who are so appealing, in personality, and naked...

He holds out his palms to indicate her. She blushes.

FRANK

...you ache for their company.

He makes sure she sees this sentiment is genuine.

FRANK

For those who sign off, I do something truly insidious. I'm good to you. I remember birthdays and make you dinner. I listen. Intentionally or unintentionally, I make you want it to last, and, as advertised, it never does.

BONNIE

We're talking "you," the universal you, right? You changed case...

FRANK

You, end up regretting it, end up hating yourself for investing so much time and so much emotion in someone so defective.

A moment.

BONNIE

Well, for the record, this sucks. Just hypothetically, if I were to sign off, would you be insidiously involved with me?

FRANK

In a second.

Stay on them.

EXT. PINELLAS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - A WEEK LATER - DAY

Evelyn and her attorney walk from the parking lot. Some of the dregs of humanity are heading the other way.

She passes a pair of redneck car thieves. Then she passes a couple of meth addicts. Then the tattooed strippers.

EVELYN

It's not the heat, it's the humanity.

INT. PINELLAS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - LATER

Same cast of characters with the addition of, on the stand, BRADLEY POLLARD, late 20's, really handsome in a frat boy kind of way.

STOKES

Mister Pollard, are you the natural father of Mary Adler?

POLLARD

Yes, yes I am.

STOKES

How can you be certain of this?

POLLARD

Well, I always knew, but then, you had me take a DNA test.

Stokes picks up a folder and hands it over to the court.

STOKES

I would offer the test results as presumptive evidence that Mr. Pollard is the father and natural guardian of the minor. Also, the affidavit of Mr. Pollard nominating the maternal grandmother, Evelyn Adler, as legal guardian of the minor.

On Frank. He squirms a little in his seat.

NICHOLS

Thank you.

STOKES

Mister Pollard, has my client offered you any kind of monetary reward, or employment for you coming forward today?

POLLARD

No, sir, I have a job of my own.

STOKES

Nothing to be gained for you to be
here, is this correct?

POLLARD

Yes, sir.

Stokes takes a seat. Cullen rises, carries a laptop with him.

CULLEN

Mister Pollard, when was the last
time you saw Mary?

Pollard becomes uncomfortable, looks at Stokes.

CULLEN

It's an easy question, I don't
think you need Mister Stokes' help.
Last time you saw her?

POLLARD

I've never seen her.

CULLEN

Why not?

POLLARD

Well, by the time I heard about
Diane passing, the baby was already
gone.

CULLEN

Did you try to find her?

POLLARD

The best I could. I couldn't just
go and search the entire country.

Cullen sets the laptop on the arm of the stand.

CULLEN

You use a computer at work?

POLLARD

Sure.

CULLEN

Help me out. Google Mary Adler, and
let's see what we find.

Pollard really looks nervous. He starts typing.

CULLEN
Know what? Better add her middle
name to narrow it down.

Pollard looks up at him like a deer in the headlights.

CULLEN
Eileen.

On Stokes. He doesn't like the way this is going.

CULLEN
Hit enter...Page two, second hit.
Would you please tell the court
what you see there?

POLLARD
It's a newspaper article, called
"Not So Terrible Two's."

Cullen takes the laptop back.

CULLEN
And one of them is Mary Eileen
Adler, same name as your daughter,
born the same day as your daughter,
with a photograph, well, in your
defense, you'd never recognize it.

STOKES
Your honor, this is...

CULLEN
Your Honor, if there's one thing
that's sadly obvious, Mr. Pollard
has never been a genuine guardian
of the minor, and his nomination of
Ms. Adler is no less disingenuous.

Nichols takes a long pause to consider.

NICHOLS
While the State of Florida gives
deference to a nomination by the
natural parent, I'm inclined to
side with Mister Cullen and his
laptop at this time.

INT. COURTHOUSE HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Evelyn and Frank find themselves exiting at the same time.

EVELYN

Don't gloat.

FRANK

Wouldn't think of it. Walk you to
the car?

EXT. PINELLAS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

They stroll down the tree-shrouded walkway.

EVELYN

I've always wanted to visit New
Guinea, and now I have.

FRANK

You're a delicate flower, Evelyn.
We've been so preoccupied I'm
ashamed to ask, how's Walter?

EVELYN

Ha. You wouldn't believe it if I
told you.

FRANK

What?

EVELYN

Well, your step-father is in
Montana. He bought a ranch.

FRANK

Bullshit.

EVELYN

Exactly. A man, whose idea of
roughing it is being too far from
the ice machine at the Ritz
Carlton, now owns a thousand acres
of grass and dung. Walter Price is
a cowboy.

FRANK

Walter Price wears a Brooks
Brothers suit to take out the
garbage.

EVELYN

He has a cowboy hat, and cowboy
boots, and a horse that doesn't
know dressage.

FRANK

And there's some logical reason for
this?

EVELYN

Mid-life crisis, apparently.

FRANK

He's seventy!

EVELYN

I know. Must have been on a time
delay or something. I guess I
should be happy it wasn't a twenty-
five year-old cocktail waitress,
but then again, an affair you can
explain to friends in a minute, for
this, you put on a pot of coffee.

FRANK

And he's out there now?

EVELYN

Yesiree. Ridin' the range. Punchin'
doggies.

Frank grins as he takes a moment to picture it.

FRANK

"He had a six gun on his hip, and a
saddlebag full of Lipitor."

She smiles.

EVELYN

Fastest asset management in the
west.

FRANK

Ha!

EVELYN

The man who shot Liberty Mutual.

Frank laughs. Evelyn grins widely.

EVELYN

That's what I've been calling him.

FRANK

That's really, really funny.

They have a terrific moment together as they walk on.

EXT. COURTHOUSE PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

The driver opens the car door and she enters, door is closed. She lowers the window.

FRANK
(to Driver)
Take her to the airport.

Evelyn even smiles at that. Frank leans in.

FRANK
Go home. Or Montana. Rustle some cattle.

A moment. Evelyn sobers, shakes her head "no."

EVELYN
You know I have no desire to hurt you. I hate it that we're at odds.

FRANK
We're always at odds.

EVELYN
Yes, well then, that's the job description, isn't it?
(to driver)
Hotel.
(to Frank)
But you wouldn't know that. You're not a parent.

Their eyes lock, then the car pulls away. Stay on Frank.

INT. FRANK'S LIVING ROOM - LATER - NIGHT

Roberta sits on the couch with Fred. Mary trudges around the living room.

ROBERTA
Come on, stop this, come sit up here with me.

MARY
No.

Frank, troubled with thought, sits across the room.

ROBERTA
Come on.

MARY

If I was the dad of a little girl,
and I never saw her, and I was in
the same town, I would visit her.

She exits down the hall.

FRANK

I'm warning you, don't start in.

ROBERTA

Why did you have to tell her?

FRANK

Because it was the truth, and her
Grandmother would tell her if I
didn't.

ROBERTA

Well I hope you're happy.

Mary reenters.

MARY

Do you think maybe he was afraid I
would want all the birthday
presents he never sent?

ROBERTA

Mary, the sooner you stop worrying
over men who aren't worth a damn,
the better off you'll be.

MARY

He didn't even need directions. He
could have followed you here.

She exits.

ROBERTA

Speaking of men who aren't worth a
damn.

On Frank. This is getting old.

Mary reenters.

MARY

Doesn't he even want to see what I
look like? What's wrong with me?

Roberta goes to her, embraces her.

FRANK

Alright, I've had enough of this.
Mary, get your shoes on.

MARY

Why?

ROBERTA

Yeah, why?

EXT. BAYFRONT HOSPITAL - LATER - NIGHT

Establishing.

INT. BAYFRONT HOSPITAL MATERNITY FAMILY LOUNGE - NIGHT

Frank and Roberta and Mary sit among three groups of anxious families waiting for news. Frank enjoys a magazine.

MARY

What are we doing here?

FRANK

Waiting.

ROBERTA

We can see that. Why?

FRANK

Because I said so.

MARY

How long do we have to stay here?

FRANK

As long as it takes, now keep your voice down, it's a hospital.

MARY

Arrgh.

She contorts into antagonistic poses. Roberta gives Frank the stink eye.

INT. BAYFRONT HOSPITAL MATERNITY FAMILY LOUNGE - LATER

Mary drapes herself over Frank's knees to get his attention. Frank turns another page.

INT. BAYFRONT HOSPITAL MATERNITY FAMILY LOUNGE - LATER

Mary lies on the floor at Frank's feet.

MARY

Can we please go home?

FRANK

No.

INT. BAYFRONT HOSPITAL MATERNITY FAMILY LOUNGE - LATER

Mary is nodding off in Roberta's arms when the door from the delivery room opens. Frank rouses her.

Mary and Roberta look on as a FATHER enters the room and his entire family rises.

FATHER

We have...a healthy and beautiful
baby girl.

The room erupts. The family goes crazy. Everyone is happy, and they hug the father and one another. Some people cry. Brothers high five.

Mary watches with keen interest.

Finally, she turns to Frank for the significance.

FRANK

This is exactly how it was when you
were born.

MARY

This happy?

FRANK

This happy.

Mary looks back at the celebration.

Roberta looks at Frank with surprised admiration.

MARY

Who came out and told everyone?

FRANK

I did.

Mary looks at the celebration again, then turns to him.

MARY
Can we stay for another?

Frank shrugs, turns to Roberta.

ROBERTA
Hell yes.

INT. BAYFRONT HOSPITAL MATERNITY FAMILY LOUNGE - LATER

A GRANDMOTHER emerges from the delivery area and her family rises.

GRANDMOTHER
It's a boy!

The place erupts like before, but this time, Mary and Roberta join in.

They congratulate family members.

They give high fives.

They join in on family hugs.

Frank looks on from a distance.

INT. MARY'S ROOM - LATER

Pan to find her. Mary sleeps with Fred's back along her chest and stomach, his sleeping head tucked under her chin.

Reverse and we find Frank standing in her doorway, looking at her.

The sound of keys in the front door snaps him out of it.

INT. FRANK'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Roberta enters with a tray covered in foil.

FRANK
You know, if you knock I'll answer
the door. What's this?

He peels the foil back, revealing cookies.

FRANK
You baked cookies at midnight?

She cuts him off with a surprise hug and kiss. When they break, her eyes are misty. Roberta backs away to exit.

ROBERTA

You're one curious fellow. Every time I start to buy into the loner guy bullshit you like everyone to believe, you turn around and do something like tonight for the baby. So, I made you cookies.

She hands him the tray and smiles way too lovingly.

FRANK

I hate cookies.

ROBERTA

Sure you do, darling. Sure you do.

She exits. Stay on Frank.

EXT. DOCK - DAYS LATER. DAY.

Frank is working on a boat when his phone rings.

FRANK

Hello?

INT. PINELLAS COUNTY COURTHOUSE LOBBY - SAME

Cullen near the escalator.

Intercut with dock.

CULLEN

Frank, I'm about to go into court so I'll make it short, your check bounced.

FRANK

What?

CULLEN

I know it's just a bookkeeping mistake on your part...

FRANK

Oh, man, I'm really sorry...

CULLEN

I'm dedicated to this case, but
FYI, this is the money-loser of all
time for me, even if your checks
clear.

FRANK

I'll get you the money today,
I'm...

CULLEN

I'm getting papered to death by the
other side, and it's only going to
get worse. Now listen, this is
quickly becoming a question of not
how far you're willing to go, but
how far you can go. You understand?

FRANK

I promise you that I'll...

CULLEN

Beg, borrow, I can't legally say
steal, but fill the coffers. Catch
you later.

Click. Frank stares at the phone.

EXT. UNCLE BOB'S SELF STORAGE - DAYS LATER - DAY

Establishing.

EXT. UNCLE BOB'S SELF STORAGE

The metal roll-up door clangs open on Frank's unit, revealing treasures from his past life.

One thing in particular is Frank's POV focus: A plastic file storage box covered in dust.

Frank opens a folding chair and sits, waits.

EXT. UNCLE BOB'S SELF STORAGE - LATER

People mill around his storage locker sale.

EXT. UNCLE BOB'S SELF STORAGE - LATER

A man counts out pennies on the dollar for Frank's skis and ski wear. Frank reluctantly takes the cash. The run on the stuff has begun.

EXT. UNCLE BOB'S SELF STORAGE - LATER

A DUDE who looks like he's never worn a suit pays Frank pennies on the dollar.

DUDE

So you sure this Brooks Brothers is good stuff? I don't want to spend thirty bucks for crap.

Frank can only smile through the pain.

EXT. UNCLE BOB'S SELF STORAGE - LATER

Scuba gear? Walking away.

EXT. UNCLE BOB'S SELF STORAGE - LATER

A guy walks away with Frank's top of the line golf clubs. On Frank as he watches his babies go off with another man.

EXT. UNCLE BOB'S SELF STORAGE - LATER

If you think the golf clubs hurt, two guys roll away Frank's Triumph Bonneville motorcycle. This is the worst.

EXT. UNCLE BOB'S SELF STORAGE

The unit now has only odds and ends, and the file box. LARRY CARTER, a dirty-shirt-wearing, cigar-smoking deal-hunter stands with his consignment store truck and his two teenaged kids in the background.

LARRY

Okay, I'll give you two hundred for washer and the dryer, the rest of the odds and ends is junk.

(off Frank's nod)

Deal.

(to boys)

Yo!...Everything you see.

The boys come in and start carrying stuff. One of them starts to pick up the file box.

FRANK
No...No, the file box stays.

The kid shrugs, goes after other stuff.

EXT. UNCLE BOB'S SELF STORAGE - LATER

Frank sits on the ground and stares at the storage unit, empty but for that file box. Frank looks at the box with trepidation. Inside it is something ominous.

INT. PINELLAS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAYS LATER - DAY

Golding, the psychologist, is on the stand.

GOLDING
Throughout the interview, the subject was openly hostile, and, in our opinion, presented an unhealthy cynical view of her world.

STOKES
And what else did you discover in the session?

GOLDING
The minor has unresolved issues with her mother. These are issues that could be easily resolved by a care-giver who spent the time and effort to talk them through.

STOKES
And you do not believe the child is getting the care she needs in her current care-giver situation?

GOLDING
I see no evidence of progress in this regard as it pertains to the minor.

Stokes nods and takes a seat. Cullen stands.

CULLEN
What percent of the cost of your evaluation did my client pay for?

GOLDING

None.

CULLEN

What percent did Mrs Adler pay for?

GOLDING

One hundred percent.

CULLEN

Looks like she got her money's
worth. Withdrawn.

INT. PINELLAS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - LATER

Evelyn Adler sits in the witness stand like she owns it.

Cullen sets down his notes and approaches.

Frank looks on from behind the table.

Roberta sits in the Gallery.

CULLEN

Mrs Adler, in your earlier
testimony here today, you've
painted a pretty dim picture of
your own son, don't you think?

EVELYN

I'm under oath. I take no pleasure
in it.

CULLEN

So, your son is a failure in life.
Your daughter took her life. You're
0 for two.

STOKES

Objection.

CULLEN

Withdrawn...

EVELYN

If I go one for three, I'm in the
Hall of Fame.

CULLEN

Ah, you know your baseball. Fenway
Park, love to go there sometime.
How often, in a year, did you take
your daughter to a game?

EVELYN

Diane wasn't interested in sports.

CULLEN

She never asked to go to a game,
ever?

EVELYN

I don't recall her ever asking.

CULLEN

Just out of curiosity, Fenway's a
tough ticket, where do you get
yours?

EVELYN

My husband has season tickets.

CULLEN

And how long has he had them?

EVELYN

Thirty years, but I've only been
married to him for twenty.

CULLEN

And Diane never went to one
game...Mrs Adler, what color was
the dress Diane wore to her prom?

EVELYN

Diane didn't attend a prom because
she didn't go to a high school.

CULLEN

No prom? What sports did she play?

EVELYN

As I said earlier, she wasn't
interested in sports.

CULLEN

Did she go to camp in the summer?

EVELYN

No.

CULLEN

Community swimming pool?

EVELYN

We have our own pool.

CULLEN
Girl scouts?

EVELYN
No.

CULLEN
What did she do with all that time?

EVELYN
She loved mathematics. It was her passion. She preferred it to all other things.

CULLEN
All other? Mrs Adler, who's Paul Riva?

EVELYN
He was a boy from the neighborhood.

CULLEN
Oh come on, Mrs Adler, Paul Riva was much more than a boy from the neighborhood. Paul was Diane's first love, wasn't he?

EVELYN
I wouldn't characterize it that way, no.

CULLEN
How would Diane characterize it?

EVELYN
Diane was seventeen years old at the time. She didn't know anything about love.

CULLEN
Mrs Adler, in January of 1998, did your daughter and young Mister Riva run away together?

EVELYN
He coerced her.

CULLEN
Where'd they go?

EVELYN
Vermont.

CULLEN

And you called the police, didn't you?

EVELYN

Yes.

CULLEN

Because he kidnapped her?

EVELYN

Yes.

CULLEN

And where did the police find Diane and Paul?

EVELYN

I told you, Vermont.

CULLEN

Stowe, Vermont, wasn't it? Resort town. Stowe mountain...He took her skiing, didn't he? Kidnappers don't usually take victims skiing, but this was what Paul did, because he loved your daughter, didn't he?

EVELYN

No.

CULLEN

And when they returned, you pressed kidnapping charges, and you filed a law suit against his parents until Paul Riva stopped calling Diane, didn't you?

EVELYN

Yes.

CULLEN

And Diane never saw or heard from Paul Riva ever again, did she?

EVELYN

Not to my knowledge.

CULLEN

How did Diane take it?

EVELYN

She was upset, for a while. She lost focus.

CULLEN

Lost focus? Mrs Adler, didn't Diane Adler attempt to take her own life in March of 1999?

EVELYN

This episode was minor. It was nothing.

CULLEN

I have the hospital report in my hand.

EVELYN

Yes, and I can go to your hospital and get your records and make them look as sinister as the situation calls for, it was nothing. Diane was not like regular people. She was extraordinary, and extraordinary people come with singular issues and needs. You have no idea the capabilities she possessed. One in a billion. And you would say, "fine, let's just throw that away so the boy who cuts our yard can have a sexual conquest," well, maybe before you make that decision you stand in my shoes. I had a responsibility that went beyond a mother daughter relationship. The greatest discoveries, which have improved life on this planet, have come from minds rarer than radium. Without them, we'd still be crawling in mud. And, for your information, counselor, a year after this incident with this boy, Diane thanked me for my intervention. Yes. She realized she had made a mistake, and she thanked me. You see, Diane understood she was accountable for the gifts God gave her, and she didn't shy from it... And I think if she were here today, mister attorney, she would refute your baseless insinuations, that she would give up a divine calling, and take her own life, just because mommy didn't get her a little red wagon.

There is no "Captain Queeg" moment of realization for Evelyn. She's defiant.

CULLEN
No more questions.

INT. PINELLAS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - NEXT MORNING - DAY

Roberta is in her usual seat in the gallery. Bonnie enters, sits next to Roberta.

BONNIE
I couldn't stand it, I called in sick.

INT. PINELLAS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - LATER

Frank is on the stand. Stokes approaches.

STOKES
Mister Adler, where are you currently employed?

FRANK
I repair boats.

STOKES
Really? At which marina?

FRANK
I don't work at a marina, I freelance.

STOKES
So safe to say, no health insurance?

FRANK
No.

STOKES
What do you do then, when little Mary gets sick? Repair a doctor's boat?

CULLEN
Objection.

NICHOLS
Sustained.

STOKES

Forgive me. Mister Adler, how old were you when your sister passed?

FRANK

Twenty-six.

STOKES

What were you doing for a living?

FRANK

I was a teacher.

On Bonnie, her reaction.

STOKES

You're being modest. You were a professor, at Boston University, weren't you?

FRANK

Yes.

STOKES

What did you teach?

FRANK

Philosophy.

STOKES

Wow. Now please don't take this the wrong way, but were you fired?

FRANK

No.

STOKES

You see, I knew the answer to that question because I talked to your superiors and they were effusive in their praise. They said you had a brilliant future. Why'd you quit? Because of Mary?

FRANK

Yes.

STOKES

And the reason you didn't keep both Mary and your job is because you wanted to keep the child away from your mother?

FRANK

Yes.

STOKES

You miss teaching?

FRANK

Not really.

STOKES

Right. Let's go back to six months before your sister passed. Were you in a relationship at that time?

FRANK

Yes.

STOKES

With a grad student named Caroline Edwards?

FRANK

Yes.

STOKES

Nice person, Caroline?

FRANK

Yes.

STOKES

You broke up a few months later.
Why?

FRANK

Lot of reasons. Conflicting schedules, heavy work loads.

STOKES

Now Mister Adler, you are aware that we took Ms. Edwards' deposition, therefore, you must know she did not cite those issues as the reason the relationship ended. Do you recall the real reason why the relationship ended?

FRANK

I don't remember.

Stokes goes to his desk and returns with a document.

STOKES

This is Caroline Edwards' deposition. Would you read the highlighted portion? Please?

FRANK

"I broke it off because I wanted children and Frank didn't. He had never misled me about it, I just thought I could change his mind. I was wrong."

STOKES

And the next highlighted text, please?

FRANK

"He felt unfit to be a father. He always had intimacy issues, even with me, but he was adamant that his participation would be unfair to a child."

STOKES

Thank you. How many months later was it when your sister took her own life?

FRANK

Four.

STOKES

You had a change of heart?

FRANK

Extraordinary circumstances require an extraordinary response.

STOKES

Ah, so for you to be intimate, to provide emotional support, this is an extraordinary effort?

FRANK

That's not what I meant...

STOKES

Mister Golding, the psychologist, says Mary is an angry little girl.

FRANK

He's wrong.

STOKES

Really? Weren't you called to the school on Mary's first day because she screamed at the principal?

FRANK

I wouldn't characterize it as a scream.

STOKES

A few weeks later, did Mary attack a boy, without provocation, on the school bus?

FRANK

That boy had just tripped an innocent seven year-old...

STOKES

Did she break the boy's nose? Yes or no?

FRANK

Yes, but...

STOKES

And where is she learning this kind of behavior? Not from my client. Who is her primary care giver?

NICHOLS

You have to answer, Mister Adler.

FRANK

I am, but that doesn't mean that I'm...

STOKES

Aren't you angry with your sister, for killing herself, leaving you with a responsibility that you did not want, nor were capable of handling?

FRANK

No.

STOKES

Aren't you angry with my client, right now?

FRANK

No.

STOKES

A child senses anger, Mister Adler.
She's picking it up from you, isn't
she?

FRANK

Mary is not an angry kid. She's a
good kid...

STOKES

A child senses resentment,
consciously or unconsciously...

FRANK

I don't resent...

STOKES

You have no resentment whatsoever
that you lost a career that may be
irreplaceable?

FRANK

Now how do you know that I don't
prefer fixing boats?

STOKES

Look, I don't think you're a bad
guy. I think you did an honorable,
albeit misguided thing. You made an
impulsive decision seven years
ago...

FRANK

It was the only decision...

STOKES

You're a man who never wanted
children, whose only reason for
having this child was to prevent
someone else from having her, is
that not true?

FRANK

Things change. Look, I may not be
perfect father material, but I
changed the diapers, and I sat up
with her when she had the flu,
bought the clothes, read the books,
answered the thousands of
questions. I showed up for the hard
parts, and what I needed to learn,
I learned on the job.

STOKES

The girl is seven. The hard parts are still to come, trust me, I have teenagers. Every year, it's going to be more complicated. You don't have the income, you don't have the environment, your decision-making is suspect. Tell us honestly, right now, under oath, a man who taught philosophy should have some respect for the truth, tell us, is your continued guardianship in the best interest of this child?

Frank hesitates just long enough to appear unsure.

FRANK

Yes. Yes it is.

On Bonnie and Roberta. Even they think it came out shaky.

INT. FRANK'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

Frank lies on the couch, trying to read the paper, but his mind races.

Mary comes sprinting into the room and leaps on top of Frank, crushing the newspaper into his chest.

MARY

Research and development has come up with a brand new Fred cheer, and they asked if I would run it by you...S-O-C-K-I-T, sock it to me, Freddy. Sooooccck it! Chii chii chii chii. Sooooccck it! Chii chii chii chii.

She holds out her arms at the end.

FRANK

Tell R and D they have a winner.

MARY

That's exactly what I said.

She jumps off and runs down the hallway.

MARY (O.S.)

S-O-C-K-I-T, sock it to me, Freddy. Sooooccck it! Chii chii chii chii. Sooooccck it! Chii chii chii chii.

Remain on Frank.

INT. VINOY HOTEL - LATER - NIGHT

Frank enters the restored lobby of this 1920's masterpiece of a hotel.

INT. VINOY HOTEL RESTAURANT - MOMENTS LATER

Frank enters, sees his mother seated at a table, receiving the check from a waiter. They make eye contact, and after a moment, she holds out her hand to offer him a seat. Frank approaches, sits.

EVELYN

Well, your lawyer made me look like
a monster and mine made you look
foolish. At least yours is cheap.

She holds out the bottle of wine as an offer, he refuses.

EVELYN

You sure? Willamette Valley?
No? Ah, well.

She gathers up her belongings.

FRANK

There's still time for you to do
the right thing.

EVELYN

I am doing the right thing.

FRANK

Please, mother.

EVELYN

Oh, now it's please mother,
somebody drop the balloons.

She stands, walks. He pursues.

INT. VINOY HOTEL RESTAURANT - MOMENTS LATER

Passing the hostess desk.

FRANK

Do you have even a moment where you
consider - it's Mary's life.

EVELYN

Frank, I'm exhausted, and it's out
of our hands now anyway...

FRANK

She has a right to...

EVELYN

She is a child...

FRANK

A right to her own destiny.

EVELYN

Ha. If you want to know why the
country is currently circling the
toilet, everything you need to know
is in that sentence.

(to Hostess)

Thank you.

They exit.

INT. VINOY HOTEL - OUTSIDE RESTAURANT - MOMENTS LATER

FRANK

She's a human being, she's not a
commodity.

EVELYN

We're all commodities. Grow up.

FRANK

Let her be a kid. If later she
chooses...

EVELYN

Chooses? Chooses? She has a gift...

FRANK

I'm not sure she does. Not in your
hands. Not with your track record.

EVELYN

Oh, here we go again. Past or
present, son. Pick a generation and
stick to it.

FRANK

You're ready to pick up right where
you left off. You haven't learned
from your mistakes because in your
mind, you've never made one.

EVELYN

Oh, is that right?

FRANK

Yes...

EVELYN

You know everything. Well, at least...

FRANK

I know you're incapable of change...

EVELYN

At least! At least I'm doing what I'm doing under the courage of my convictions. You, you on the other hand, are blowing in the wind.
"I'll just go to Florida and hope it all works out," there's a plan. Let me tell you something, no one in that courtroom today was convinced by anything you said, not a damned word of it, least of all you.

She turns the corner. He follows.

INT. VINOY HOTEL - GRAND HALL - MOMENTS LATER

He follows her into this magnificent hall.

EVELYN

But, hey, I know a great idea. Let's let Mary decide what she wants to do. Let her have cake for breakfast. Then she can follow in your footsteps and pursue a field where every novel idea was hashed out two thousand years ago, then teach it at the fifth best college in Boston.

Off his reaction.

EVELYN

You started this, you did. Every chance you get, you make some underhanded, accusatory comment about Diane, as if I've had no loss, as if I have no feelings about it, well I'm fed up.

(MORE)

EVELYN (cont'd)

Understand? Fed up. You don't know what or how I feel. Have you lost a child? Have you? I lost both of mine on the same day.

FRANK

What do you call this?!

EVELYN

She's not your child! She never was your child. When are you going to get that through your head?

It lays heavy.

EVELYN

It's out of my hands. And it's late and I'm, I'm done with this.

She turns and starts up the marble staircase.

FRANK

I wish I could hate you. It's not for a lack of trying.

She stops, turns around.

FRANK

I always end up feeling sorry for you.

EVELYN

Me? Pfft.

FRANK

You don't have the goods yourself, do you, so you ride the coattails of children. You attach yourself to other people's talent, forgetting that it's the shark people want to see, not the remora.

EVELYN

Been rehearsing this, have you...

FRANK

You're a bottomless pit of narcissism, Evelyn, elbowing your way into importance by association. And for it, you will sacrifice everything, and everyone. And that is tragic. To me.

We see on her face a glimpse of rare unsureness.

FRANK

"Minds rarer than radium?" What a crock. It's all about you. It's always been about you. It will always be about you.

Now on Evelyn. Never has Frank seen her react like this. For once, he has her on the ropes. Then, to his utter disbelief, Evelyn does a truly horrifying thing.

She gathers herself, and takes a bow. A deep, theatrical, royal bow.

Power restored, she looks up at him, claims victory with her eyes, then turns her back and walks up the stairs.

Stay on Frank.

INT. DINER - NEXT MORNING - DAY

Frank enters. Looks around.

He sees Cullen waving to him.

INT. DINER - LATER

FRANK

Now wait a minute, go back, who sat down with who?

CULLEN

It was me, Stokes and Judge Nichols.

FRANK

Why would Nichols be there?

CULLEN

Because Stokes and I could agree that water's wet, but unless Nichols approves, there's nothing. So listen...Mary would be placed in a fostering situation...

FRANK

No no no...

CULLEN

Frank. Listen. The foster family is not only top notch, but in Tampa, twenty-five minutes door to door from you.

(MORE)

CULLEN (cont'd)
 She attends the Oaks, great school.
 On her twelfth birthday, she goes
 back to court and can decide then
 where she wants to live, and with
 who. Not what you want, I know, but
 not bad. Now listen, if you say no
 to this, then we walk into court
 and Nichols is going to do his
 thing, and I can name you fifty
 outcomes that aren't as attractive,
 not remotely.

On Frank. He thinks hard.

FRANK
 But why would they...
 (a beat)
 They think they're going to lose.

CULLEN
 Yes they do.

Frank stares at Cullen, thinks, then it dawns on him.

FRANK
 You think we're going to lose.

CULLEN
 Yes I do.

INT. JUDGE NICHOLS CHAMBERS - LATER

Frank and Cullen on one side, Evelyn and Stokes on the other, Nichols at the head of the table.

At the other end of the table is DAVID and VAL LARSEN, 40's, the foster parents.

David is a smiley, chubby, red-haired forgettable guy in ironed khakis, and Val looks like every real estate agent you've ever met.

Off to the side is Amanda Dobson from Child Services.

NICHOLS
 Well, folks, I don't see any reason
 for this to not move forward. Mr
 and Mrs Larsen, your references are
 exceptional.
 (to Dobson)
 Am I correct about that?

DOBSON

Judge, I have worked with this family in the past, and have always seen the fostered child thrive in the environment.

NICHOLS

So the state is on board?

DOBSON

We are, your honor.

NICHOLS

Well, we've got some coordinating to do, and everybody's got to sign some stuff, but it appears we're concluded. Just let me say one last thing...a lot of hurtful things were brought up in court because you folks couldn't fix this yourselves. Going forward I expect you to be civil at a minimum, as that is, truly, in the best interest of the child.

EXT. COURTHOUSE LOBBY - LATER

Evelyn and Frank face to face. Frank has dead eyes.

EVELYN

I've been thinking a lot about the word compromise. Depending on how you use it, it can be good or bad. On one hand, good, challenging school. On the other...

Her POV glimpse of the Larsens emerging from the courtroom.

EVELYN

...schlubby, vanilla foster people. They can watch sitcoms with her, take her to Olive Garden, teach her to say "irregardless."

(off his glare)

I'm sorry. I'm angry at you. And you, with me. In a perfect world, it would cancel out, but, then again, probably not. Probably not.

A moment.

EVELYN

We both lost, but Mary won...even
if it is compromised.

She gets nothing but more of the dead stare.

EVELYN

Yes. Yes. Well, then. Goodbye,
Frank.

Frank watches her walk to the exit, where she is met by her waiting attorney.

On Evelyn. As Stokes opens the door for her, she looks again at the Larsens.

EVELYN

What do we know about these people,
really?

STOKES

Well, the state does a...

EVELYN

No, I mean what do we know about them, really?

STOKES

I've got a guy who can look into them.

EVELYN

I'll bet you do.

They exit.

On Frank. He watches Evelyn exit. He stands there, as we:

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. ROBERTA'S APARTMENT - A WEEK LATER - DAY

Roberta sits on the floor in the middle of the room, and she weeps.

INT. LITTLE BAYOU SCHOOL CLASSROOM - SAME

Bonnie sits at her desk, numb with sadness.

BONNIE'S POV

Mary's desk is empty.

Bonnie's eyes move just slightly to the right, and she sees him.

On Justin. He covers his face with his hands, to hide his tears.

Bonnie rises. She walks to him, kneels, and embraces him.

Wide on the classroom. Bonnie stays with him.

EXT. LARSEN RESIDENCE - SAME

Establishing. Big, Mediterranean style house in gated community.

INT. LARSEN RESIDENCE - SAME

Frank kneels in front of her.

FRANK

There's no need to cry, I am only twenty-five minutes away...

MARY

Please don't leave me here. Please.

FRANK

Now, you are going to go to a much better school...

MARY

I don't want to, I want my crummy school. Please.

FRANK

And you have Fred.

VAL

We love cats, Mary.

FRANK

Once a month, you get to come back and stay with me and Roberta...

MARY

I want you and Roberta now!

FRANK

And in a few years, if you want, you can come back...

MARY

I want to stay with you! You
promised me...

FRANK

Now come on...

MARY

But you promised. Why are you
leaving me here?

FRANK

You know why, we've been over this
ad naus...We've been over it. I
have to do what the court says.

Frank looks up, and David nods to the door.

DAVID

It's best.

Frank tries to give her a hug but she pushes him away.

MARY

No! Nooo!

VAL

We'll call you.

Frank begins the long walk to the car.

Mary horribly wails.

MARY

Don't go! Frank! Don't go! Please!
Please! Please don't go!

He exits. Val closes the door.

EXT. LARSEN RESIDENCE

We dolly back on Frank's face as he exits. Mary appears in
the window.

MARY

Don't leave me! Frank! You said I'd
stay with you, you promised! No!
Please don't leave me here, come
back, don't leave me! No! No!!

A pair of hands pull the screaming child from the window as
Frank walks like a zombie to his truck.

EXT. DOCK - LATER THAT DAY - NIGHT

Bonnie comes to the dock. She looks out at a boat moored there, lit up by flood lights. She starts out.

EXT. CABIN CRUISER - MOMENTS LATER

She comes on board and Frank looks up for just a second, goes back to working on the engine.

She sits near the compartment opening, says nothing. Many moments go by in silence.

FRANK

I don't know which mistake is worse, designing a water pump that leaks, or putting it in a place no human being can reach. My fantasy is I meet the engineer who designed this and I beat the shit out of him. I was hoping you were him.

He glances up at her.

FRANK

How, how do you design something you know is going to fail? You'd have to be devious, or clueless, right?

He looks away.

FRANK

Well, either way, I'm kicking his ass.

Frank shimmies his body into a small space between the engine and hull. He lifts the new pump into place with one hand while blindly trying to start a nut onto a bolt, but he can't get it started and it falls into the bilge.

Frank sighs, sets the pump carefully down, lets his body relax into the sharp edges of the engine.

FRANK

After the first few weeks, I knew I'd made a mistake. I knew I had to give her up, find a real family for her, I was in way over my head.

He gathers himself and pushes his body out. A piece of steel rips his shirt and skin.

He stands waist high in the deck opening and Bonnie glances at the streak of blood on his t-shirt. She watches him go through a bin of nuts and washers.

FRANK

Every day I would get up and say this is the day, I'm calling child services...And every day she would do something so incredibly cool. I mean, her personality was just exploding, and she was funny, and she was angry, and sad and happy and cute, and just, just so damned entertaining.

He holds up the nut between two fingers to show her, then goes below.

Frank shimmies in on elbows and ribs.

FRANK

So I kept her. Like, "hey I found a puppy, I think I'll keep her." Not because it's in her best interest, and not because I'm capable of loving a child...a child, by the way, who might still have a mother had I just stopped long enough to notice she needed me.

Frank threads his arm between obstructions, puts the pump into place, feels for the bolt. He puts the nut between two fingers and tries to start it. He manipulates it so carefully, and just as he has it in position, it falls.

Frank drops his head, takes measured breaths.

FRANK

Today, six and a half years later, I finally got her to the foster home, and you know what? It went great. She loved it. I thought it was going to be a nightmare of abandonment and betrayal, but as it turns out, huge success, I'm a hero.

Frank pulls the new water pump off the bolts, starts out.

He lifts himself onto the deck, picks up the water pump and throws it as far as he can into the bay.

He stares out into the darkness, breathing heavily.

FRANK

One thing I could always fall back on in times of doubt was, at least I was better than Evelyn. She was a solid, reliable bad guy. Feeling irresponsible? Compare yourself to her and smell like a rose...Well, judging by today, and I failed to notice the irony when I said it the first time, but, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

She watches him turn, walk across the deck, and exit down the dock.

Bonnie stays on the boat. Stay on her.

EXT. LARSEN RESIDENCE - A WEEK LATER - DAY

Carrying a wrapped gift, Frank walks to the door and rings the bell.

David answers and immediately steps outside.

DAVID

Hi Frank. Um, we have a bit of a problem...

FRANK

What?

DAVID

Mary's fine, but she's having a bit of a meltdown...

FRANK

Well let me see her and I'll...

DAVID

I think that's a bad idea...

FRANK

Look, I've been through these things, I think I can...

DAVID

No. Stop. Listen...Frank, you're the reason for the meltdown.

FRANK

What?

DAVID

She's a little angry. I'm sorry,
she doesn't want to see you.

On Frank.

DAVID

It's totally predictable. She's
going to need some time, and in
time, it will subside.

FRANK

Just let me have five minutes with
her.

DAVID

It'll make it worse, I'm telling
you it'll make it worse. Trust me
on this. I know it hurts, but a
little patience now pays enormous
dividends down the road. Go home,
don't worry. Let us work our magic.

David gives him an encouraging pat on the shoulder.

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - NEXT DAY - DAY

Frank loads his clothes into the washer.

Roberta enters, laundry basket in her hands.

They make eye contact. Roberta walks past him without a word spoken.

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - LATER

Frank sits in a chair waiting for the dryer. We see he's lost
in thought.

Roberta enters. She passes, puts more change in the dryer.

She turns, walks back past him, and we hear her exiting O.S.

After a moment, we hear steps return.

Roberta comes and sits in the chair next to Frank. She
doesn't look at him, but after a few long moments, she takes
his hand in hers.

Frank looks at her hand, then looks straight ahead.

They sit in silence.

INT. FRANK'S APARTMENT - DAYS LATER - NIGHT

Frank sweeps the kitchen floor.

INT. FRANK'S APARTMENT - LATER

Frank opens the closet door to return the broom and dust pan. Falling from the shelf above is Mary's bucket. Spilling out is her tape measure and square and shovels.

Frank stares at them on the floor. He then picks them up, puts them back on the shelf, then closes the door and exits.

INT. FRANK'S LIVING ROOM - DAYS LATER - DAY

Frank answers the front door. It's Justin. He just stands, looking at the ground.

FRANK
Mary's not here, Justin.

JUSTIN
I know.

Justin still looks down. Frank looks at him. A long silence.

FRANK
Well, I'm sorry, but I have some things to do, okay?

JUSTIN
I saw Fred...on the internet.

On Frank. What?

EXT. I-275 - LATER

We see Frank's truck weaving in and out of traffic at an alarming speed.

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK

He drives fast, focused.

HIS POV

He blows by cars, changing lanes three at a time.

EXT. HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY ANIMAL SERVICES - LATER

Frank's truck comes around the corner, squeals into the lot. He exits the truck and runs into the building.

INT. HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY ANIMAL SERVICES

Two women sit at the front desk as Frank runs up.

WOMAN #1
Hi, can we help...

FRANK
Do you have a one-eyed orange cat named Fred?!

WOMAN #1
We have a one-eyed cat, but I don't know what his name is...

FRANK
Where?!

The first woman looks at the second for help. The second grimaces.

WOMAN #2
Ooo...I don't know, today was his last day.

Frank stands in shock for a second, then sprints down the hall.

WOMAN #1
Wait! You can't go back there.

She jumps up.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

He sprints down the hallway.

INT. EXAMINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

He bursts in. Nothing but dogs and people shocked by the look on his face.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

He runs door to door, looking into rooms and finding nothing.

WOMAN #1 (O.S.)
Hey! You cannot be back here!

INT. SURGERY ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Frank enters the room and stops dead in his tracks. Two men in med assistant wear stand near a table, four hypodermic needles on the tray before them.

FRANK
Where's Fred?

MAN#1
What are you doing back here?

Frank goes from cage to cage looking inside for him, but all the cages are empty.

Now the woman comes into the room.

WOMAN #1
I told him he couldn't come back
here...

FRANK
Where's Fred?!

MAN#1
Look buddy...

FRANK
One eye! Orange cat!

MAN#1
Jane, call the police.

She goes to the phone and that's when he hears it. That odd meow.

Frank runs into the next room.

INT. HOLDING ROOM

Frank skids to a halt, and there, in a row of cages with three other cats, is Fred. He sort of meows again.

On Frank. He lets out a guttural scream that echoes throughout the entire complex.

Frank slumps to the floor. He closes his eyes and rests his head against the cage. Inside, Fred purrs and rubs his face against Frank's forehead.

FRANK
Oh God...Oh Jesus...

Suddenly, Frank's eyes open. He looks up at them in a way that's unnerving.

FRANK
Who brought you this cat?

WOMAN #2
A red haired guy.

WOMAN #1
Larsen! I remember because he spells it "e-n" instead of "o-n."

WOMAN #2
Yeah, Larsen. He said it was an allergy issue.

Tight on Frank as his eyes narrow.

EXT. UNCLE BOB'S SELF STORAGE - LATER

The key is jammed into the lock.

The roll-up metal door slides open.

The plastic file box stands alone.

Reverse on Frank. He stares at it.

Frank moves. He picks up the box.

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK - MOMENTS LATER

Frank opens the passenger door. He loads the box on the floor. He'd put it on the seat, but it's taken by Fred's carrier, and, three others. Fred is now joined by his three death row buddies.

EXT. UNCLE BOB'S SELF STORAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Frank closes the truck door, exits, leaving the storage unit wide open.

INT. LARSEN RESIDENCE - NEXT MORNING - DAY

Val goes to see who's at the door. She looks through the peep hole and sees it's Frank. She shakes her head sadly, then opens the door.

VAL

Frank, I'm sorry but this isn't a visitation day...

Frank walks right past her.

VAL

Wait, you just can't walk in here.
David!

Now Roberta and Bonnie enter. Bonnie carries the file box and Roberta carries a manila envelope. David enters, sees Frank, almost runs into Roberta.

DAVID

Frank. Wait.

They continue through. David, panicked, runs after Frank.

DAVID

Frank, wait. Frank! I'm sorry!

EXT. LARSEN RESIDENCE - SECONDS LATER

It's a huge back yard separating the main house and guest house. David has caught up, is on Frank's heels.

DAVID

She told us that she could help us with our expenses, that helping us was helping Mary, no strings attached. Who wouldn't say yes to that? But there were strings attached. She just, she just took over. It's like we live in her house, now. Frank, please, I tried to talk to her, but she's, but she's...

Roberta takes him by the arm, stops him.

ROBERTA

Hey. We know exactly what you've been up against, we get it. You can get out of this, right now, by simply turning around. Five, four, three...

Frank arrives at the door to the guest house. Finding it locked, he kicks it in.

ROBERTA
Two.

David looks at Roberta, then simply turns around. He walks back to the house.

INT. GUEST HOUSE - SECONDS LATER

Frank enters. The living room has been turned into a classroom. There are blackboards filled with complex problems on either side of a long conference table.

Mary sits at the far end of the table, flanked by two scholarly-looking tutors.

To the left, Evelyn sits on a couch reading the Wall Street Journal.

A stunned silence for a second or two. Frank looks at a rising Evelyn. Roberta and Bonnie enter.

EVELYN
What are you doing here?

BONNIE
We were just about to ask you the same thing.

Frank makes eye contact with Mary. She stares daggers.

EVELYN
This is in violation of the court order...

BONNIE
We were just about to say the same thing.

FRANK
Let's go home, Mary.

Mary shakes her head "no."

EVELYN
This is trespassing! I'm calling the police...

As fast as Evelyn produces her iphone, Bonnie snatches it out of her hand, flips it to Roberta who pockets it. Evelyn takes a step towards Roberta, sees Roberta's glare, thinks again.

FRANK

Come on.

Mary again shakes her head "no."

Frank starts around the table and Evelyn and one of the tutors cuts him off.

EVELYN

You have no right, this is private property.

Frank moves by him and the second tutor rises to stop him.

Mary sees her opportunity and she darts around the table and out the door.

FRANK

Mary!

Frank runs after her out the door.

When everyone tries to follow, Roberta blocks the exit.

ROBERTA

Think again!

The tutors back down.

EXT. LARSEN BACK YARD - SECONDS LATER

Mary sprints across the grass.

Frank gains on her.

Finally, he catches up. He grabs her. He turns her.

Mary starts slapping his face.

MARY

No! No! No!

FRANK

Stop!

MARY

No!

FRANK

Stop!

MARY
No! Let me go! Let me go! Let me
go!

Frank pulls her to him, and he holds her tightly. She screams and cries and tries to free herself until she can no longer.

Frank closes his eyes and presses his face against hers.

Mary stops resisting, wraps her arms around his neck.

MARY
You promised me.

FRANK
I made a mistake.

MARY
You said you wouldn't leave me.

FRANK
I made a mistake.

MARY
I was so sad.

FRANK
I'm sorry.

She holds on to him desperately. After a moment she looks at him with tears in her eyes.

MARY
They took Fred away...

FRANK
I've got him.

MARY
What?

FRANK
I've got him. He's safe.

MARY
Where?

FRANK
At our house, with three other - never mind, that's a long story. We could go see him, if you like.

A moment.

MARY

How, how do I know you won't leave
me again?

FRANK

Because, as it turns out, you are
in the best interest of me.

She puts her head on his chest and Frank wraps her up.

INT. GUEST HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Frank enters and releases Mary. She runs to Roberta, jumps
into her arms, wraps her arms around her.

ROBERTA

Oh my baby. My baby.

As she's hugging Roberta, she makes eye contact with a
tearful Bonnie. Mary smiles, waves. Bonnie grins.

Bonnie hands Frank the Box and the manila envelope. Frank
nods at the door and Roberta and Bonnie begin to exit with
Mary.

EVELYN

I had permission from these people
to be here. I am acting within the
law...Wait, where are they going?

FRANK

Just outside. You and I have to
talk.

(to Tutors)

You. You. Out.

Frank takes a step toward them and they bail.

EVELYN

Where are they taking her? Mary!

Frank sets the box on the table before her.

FRANK

Just outside. Nobody's going
anywhere. Not yet.

EVELYN

You can't do this. This is
trespassing...

FRANK

I'm going to ask you to focus now.
There's a potential for some of
this to be unpleasant, but under
the circumstances...

EVELYN

I don't know what you're talking
about, nor do I care, now bring
Mary back in here. Now.

FRANK

Five months before her death, Diane
brought me this...

EVELYN

Fine, I want my phone so I can call
the police.

Frank reaches into his pocket for her phone.

FRANK

This is the Navier Stokes problem.
She solved it.

EVELYN

One of your people took my...What?
What?

FRANK

Here's your phone.

He hands it to her.

EVELYN

No, what did you say just...

FRANK

Navier Stokes. A completed proof.

She looks at the box. She's stunned, but she recovers.

EVELYN

It is not. What do you take me for?

FRANK

Someone who can start
authenticating it this afternoon.

Evelyn now stares at the box.

FRANK

I just breathed the possibility of its existence to Terry Sparks at Harvard and he's champing at the bit. I know you trust him. I would have given it to Seymore, but he would have called you the moment he got off the phone with me, and he's an asshole.

EVELYN

No, no, no no. It's, it's a diversion. I, I go back to Boston while you leave the country...

FRANK

I took her once without aid of an extravagant lie, why would I need one now?

She momentarily entertains the thought that it could be real, then shakes her head "no."

EVELYN

No, Diane, she would have told me!

FRANK

Yeah, well, we had a series of arguments about that...

EVELYN

Did you not hear what I said? We, we worked on it together for fifteen years! If she had proved it she would have told me!

She sees pity in his eyes, and it unnerves her more, and makes her frantic.

EVELYN

This is ridiculous. It's, it's absurd.

(off no response)

No. No, even if she, for whatever reason, didn't tell me, she, she would have published it.

(off no response)

But what you're suggesting makes no, it makes no sense. It's a millennium problem! You might refuse prize money, you, you, you might refuse a medal, but all mathematicians would share it. She would have.

FRANK
I'm sorry.

EVELYN
Sorry? You're not sorry, you're lying!

FRANK
Call Terry Sparks...

EVELYN
I'm not calling anyone! Now, now tell the truth, you've made this up.
(off no response)
To humiliate me.

He shakes his head "no."

EVELYN
She would have published it. I don't know why I'm even listening to this nonsense. I'm calling the police.

She starts dialing. Frank takes a step closer, speaks softly.

FRANK
I was instructed, if anything happened to her, to publish it, post-mortem.

She stops dialing. She's confused.

EVELYN
That doesn't make sense, either. It's been seven years, your story doesn't hold up. If that's a finished proof, then what in God's name are you waiting for?

FRANK
The post-mortem...it wasn't her death that she was, um, that she was referring to.

On Evelyn. In seconds, she understands, and it takes her breath away. She's terribly hurt, but at the same time, she realizes that the box may contain what he says it does.

EVELYN
That's a terrible thing to say to me.

FRANK

It was a terrible thing for her to
do, in my opinion.

She walks to the file box, her eyes fixed on it.

FRANK

A finished proof. Greatness in a
box.

EVELYN

My God. My God.
(a moment)
If this is a lie...

FRANK

Think, would I lie about it? Could
Diane have been mistaken?

No way. Evelyn puts a hand on the lid.

EVELYN

You kept this from me. All this
time.

(a moment)

And now, out of desperation, you
think this buys you Mary?

FRANK

I do.

EVELYN

Do you honestly believe...

FRANK

I have no doubt...

EVELYN

That I'd trade my granddaughter...

FRANK

In every version. Who was it who
said results are all that matters?

A moment, then a sad, sympathetic smile comes to her face.

EVELYN

Frank. Poor Frank. All this drama,
and you, you don't have the rights
to either.

The look on his face surprises her. It's disappointment.

Frank turns, returns with the manila envelope. He pulls out a document, hands it to her.

Evelyn stares at him as she puts on her glasses, then reads. We see her demeanor change drastically.

FRANK

She anticipated this, so she put it in trust. You see, I'm both beneficiary, and trustee.

Evelyn drops the paper to her side. She walks to a window, stares outside.

Frank studies her. He gives her time.

All of this plays on her.

FRANK (O.C.)

I imagine you'll want to get into this as soon as possible. I'm sure other people have been working on their own solutions while it's been sitting in my storage unit. You're going to need an editor, and a journal, that's just to publish. Once this goes public, everyone with a competing theory is going to come after you. At least two years of defending it, minimum. The sciences' press is going to be all over you. Mainstream press, too, if you play up the "lost for seven years" angle, they eat that stuff up.

She still stares out the window. He goes to the door.

FRANK

Bottom line, I don't think you'll have time for much else.

He opens the door, starts to exit.

EVELYN

Did she really hate me?

FRANK

I can't speak for her.

He nods at the box.

FRANK

Think it over. Let me know how you want to play it.

He exits.

Slowly, we move in on Evelyn. Everything plays on her face, in silence. A tortured and unforgettable face, in perfect light.

INT. LARSEN RESIDENCE - AN HOUR LATER - DAY

Bonnie and Roberta pack Mary's bags. When David Larsen walks by, Roberta gives him a glare that puts life into his step.

INT. GUEST HOUSE - SAME - DAY

Evelyn stands next to the table, looks up when Mary and Frank enter. At Frank's urging, she walks to her grandmother.

MARY

Frank says you're having a bad day and I can't bring up the whole Fred of it all, but someday, we're going to have a conversation.

EVELYN

Mary, I...

MARY

(to Frank)

Who gives away someone else's cat...

FRANK

Hey.

MARY

(to Frank)

Well?

FRANK

Knock it off.

MARY

Alright.

FRANK

Give your grandmother a hug.

Evelyn kneels, waits for her. Mary reluctantly complies, and that reluctance tears at Evelyn a bit. Mary squirms away and goes to the door, exits. Evelyn stares at the empty doorway.

EVELYN

Can you fix that for me?

FRANK

It's between you and her.

EVELYN

Soften it a little?

FRANK

I'm out of the middleman business.

EVELYN

May I come see her?

FRANK

Depends.

EVELYN

You've won. May I see her?

Frank sees how hard this is for her. After considering, he nods.

FRANK

In time.

Frank and Evelyn have a moment, then he exits.

Stay on Evelyn.

EXT. GUEST HOUSE - SECONDS LATER - DAY

Mary jumps into Frank's arms.

MARY

Get me the Hell out of here.

Frank picks her up and they walk away. At the last moment, Frank looks over his shoulder at the guest house.

INT. GUEST HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER - DAY

Evelyn now stands alone with it. She hovers. Carefully, she opens the lid.

She picks up some of the papers.

After many moments, she looks down and notices her phone.

Evelyn picks up the phone. She pages through contacts, then selects, and dials.

As the phone rings, we go tighter and tighter. She notices a different type of paper about two thirds down in the box, and she manages to get it in her hands.

Evelyn now looks at pages of her daughter's hand-written notes.

With the phone endlessly ringing, she turns page after page of Diane's notes, her doodles.

Finally, we hear the phone answered and the voice of a young woman.

RECEPTIONIST
(on phone)
Good afternoon, Harvard
Mathematics, how may I direct your call?

On Evelyn's face. It all descends on her now.

RECEPTIONIST
(on phone)
Hello?

Anguish in her eyes. Her knees weaken, she slumps and sits on the floor, one hand grabbing a table leg.

RECEPTIONIST
(on phone)
Hello? Harvard Mathematics. Is anyone there?

A tear now slides down her cheek.

RECEPTIONIST
(on phone)
I'm sorry, but I can't hear you.

She puts her hands over her eyes.

RECEPTIONIST
(on phone)
Okay, I'm going to hang up and you can call back...

EVELYN
No!

RECEPTIONIST

(on phone)

There you are. Can I help you?

EVELYN

No. Yes. Yes. Terry Sparks, please.

RECEPTIONIST

(on phone)

I'm sorry, I can't hear you very well, could you...

EVELYN

Sparks. Evelyn Adler for Terry Sparks, please.

RECEPTIONIST

(on phone)

I'll connect you.

Her face grimaces in pain. She is startled by his voice.

TERRY SPARKS

(on phone)

Evelyn, my God I've been frantic. I hardly slept last night. You must be walking on air!

EVELYN

Yes...Yes. Very much so.

TERRY SPARKS

(on phone)

I'm just so excited. Frank drops this bomb on me, then tells me I can't say a word to anyone, it's torture! I mean, you can imagine, right?

EVELYN

Yes.

TERRY SPARKS

(on phone)

Are you okay? You sound like you have a cold.

She wipes her face frantically. Evelyn takes a deep breath.

EVELYN

Yes, um, yes, there's a bug going around here.

TERRY SPARKS

(on phone)

Well take care of yourself, and
then get on the earliest flight
possible, because you and I are
about to set the world on fire.
When can you be here?

On Evelyn. She wipes away tears.

EVELYN

Tomorrow. I can be, I can be there
tomorrow.

Stay on her as we:

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA - MONTHS LATER - DAY

Establishing shots of campus.

INT. LECTURE HALL

The PROFESSOR works through a problem on the board in this amphitheater style classroom.

PROFESSOR

To understand this connection, let
me talk about a special case when A
and B are equal to 1. When A and B
are equal to one, what this looks
like is A squared minus Y squared
is equal to one.

Reverse. We slowly pan down a row of students, young men in jeans and young women in shorts, all focused.

PROFESSOR (O.S.)

Now here's the trick. I can write
this as X minus Y times X plus Y.

Finally the camera pans to Mary, now eight years-old. She sits in a seat that swallows her. Mary is fascinated by the lecture, but best of all, for us, she's wearing her Brownie uniform to class today.

PROFESSOR (O.S.)

And now I will choose new
coordinates, which is X prime
equals X minus Y, and Y prime
equals X plus Y.

Linger on her.

INT. USF HALLWAY - LATER

Mary walks through the hall with people twice her size.

INT. FRANK'S CLASSROOM - LATER

Frank sits at his desk surrounded by a hipster student, RICHARD, and several of his amused classmates.

Mary appears at the door and waits impatiently.

RICHARD

No, come on, you are not giving
this a chance.

FRANK

Convince me.

RICHARD

Okay, we can reconcile some
apparently obvious truths about our
experience of the world, with the
possibility of certain kinds of
perceptual error.

This amuses Frank.

RICHARD

I believe the C you gave me on my
paper is a hallucination, and if I
get less than a B, then you don't
exist...

MARY (O.S.)

Excuse me.

They all look OS.

On Mary. She does a hand flourish to indicate her Brownie uniform, then points to an imaginary watch on her wrist.

FRANK

Very entertaining, Rich, but gotta
run.

(MORE)

FRANK (cont'd)

If you put as much work into your papers as you do negotiating the grade, you'd get an A, easily.

Frank exits with her.

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK - LATER

Mary squirms in her seat belt to see over the dashboard. She looks annoyed with their progress.

FRANK

What?

MARY

You drive like an old lady.

FRANK

It's Florida, I'm blending in.

MARY

Argh.

FRANK

How was class?

MARY

Mmm, fun. Not like regular-school-fun, but interesting. How was yours?

FRANK

Fun.

MARY

What did you talk about?

FRANK

Existence.

MARY

Existence?

FRANK

Yep. I think, therefore I am.

MARY

Well of course you are. That's obvious.

(a moment)

I think about Fred, therefore I am.

FRANK
Cogito ergo Fred.

MARY
He's a dude, he's a guy, he only
has one eye. Fred.

FRANK
Fred.

MARY
Fred.

Frank turns the wheel and they arrive at Little Bayou School.

FRANK
Here we are.

Mary looks up and sees the kids playing at recess. She undoes her seat belt.

FRANK
Hey, easy. Wait until I come to a
stop.

MARY
Then come to a stop, already!

He stops the truck and she dashes out. Frank exits.

EXT. LITTLE BAYOU SCHOOL - SAME

Mary sprints across the grass towards the kids, several who wave to urge her to hurry up. Bonnie turns, sees Mary approaching.

On Mary's face as she runs. Pure joy.

On Frank. Slowly move in on his face.

He watches Mary join her friends. He sees how animated she is. How happy she is. How she fits in.

He makes eye contact with Bonnie. There's something more going on between them. Something good.

Last, he looks back at Mary. He lingers on her.

Stay on Frank as a small, indisputable smile appears on his face.

FADE TO BLACK: