

CHANGELING

A True Story

Original Screenplay by

J. Michael Straczynski

CHANGELING

A True Story

FADE IN:

BLACK SCREEN

On which appears:

EVERYTHING YOU ARE ABOUT TO SEE, HAPPENED

The words slowly FADE OUT, taking us hard into

EXT. COLLINS HOME - PRE-DAWN

A small, pleasant house on a tree-lined street in Los Angeles circa 1928. 210 North Avenue 23. Not far from Dodger Stadium.

SUPERIMPOSE: LOS ANGELES, MARCH 9, 1928.

INT. COLLINS HOME - CHRISTINE'S BEDROOM - PRE-DAWN

A Bakelite alarm clock hits 6:30 A.M. and RINGS. CHRISTINE COLLINS, thirties, attractive, ruffled, reaches INTO FRAME to shut it off. She sits up, rubs tiredly at her face, and moves OS, switching on a radio as she goes. Music fills the air.

INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

She throws water on her face as the music continues. She looks at herself in the mirror as the light flickers overhead. She hits the wall offhandedly, something she does every day. The flickering stops. With a last look at the mirror, she smooths back her hair and exits, switching off the light.

INT. WALTER'S BEDROOM - LATER

Dressed now, she flicks on the overhead light. WALTER COLLINS is nine years old, with light brown hair, though we don't see much of it or him, he's entangled in the sheets. It's important that we don't see him too clearly in most of the following scenes, but without drawing attention to that aspect.

CHRISTINE

Walter...time for school, honey.

She sits on the edge of the bed, runs a hand through his hair.

WALTER

Just ten more minutes --

CHRISTINE

Sorry, champ.

(more)

CHRISTINE (Cont'd)

You can sleep in all you want tomorrow, that's what Saturdays are for. Now hurry up or your breakfast will get cold.

WALTER

It's cereal, it's supposed to be cold.

She smiles, kisses him on the forehead, and exits. He sits on the edge of the bed, wavers, then falls back into bed again.

EXT. PASADENA AVENUE - MORNING

A street-car (known then as the Big Red) rumbles down the street in the gray light of morning, passing Ford Model A's and Hudsons and Nash four-door sedans.

INT. STREET-CAR - CONTINUOUS

Christine sits on one of the benches, Walter's face buried in her lap, still half-asleep. She nudges him as they come to an intersection by a grade school. It's early enough that only a few other kids have arrived.

CHRISTINE

We're here, sweetie. Come on.

She hands him a sack lunch and follows as he slouches toward the door. She watches from the curb as he heads toward the school. Some of the teachers lounging outside nod to her as Walter approaches, so she knows they're aware that he's there.

She waves, then hurriedly gets back on the street-car as it rumbles away.

INT. PACIFIC TELEPHONE COMPANY - SWITCHBOARD ROOM - DAY

Located on Grand Avenue downtown, the huge switchboard room is a maze of switching stations, tangles of wires and heavy wooden headsets...a roar of buzzers, bells, circuits opening and closing, and a hundred female operators speaking at once.

Supervisors on skates roll up and down the narrow lanes created by the banks of switching stations, going from one operator to another as needed. Christine is one of them. She turns at the SOUND of a bell struck twice, then rolls down the lane toward an OPERATOR frantically waving a pink sheet of paper.

CHRISTINE

Okay Sandy, what's the prob--

The mortified operator hands her the headset and stalks off.

OPERATOR

You deal with this one, I'm not going near it.

Christine struggles on the headset.

CHRISTINE

Hello? Yes, this is the supervisor, ma'am, what can I --

(checks board)

Yes, I can see that you're on a party line, ma'am, what can I --

(beat)

I know, it's unfortunate, but people sometimes do listen in on party lines. We hope to have private lines installed by --

(beat)

Well, what's he doing when you're on the phone?

(beat)

Are you sure? Maybe there's a problem with the phone line. He could be asthmatic, or --

(beat)

Oh. No, I...I've never heard of anything like that before either. Guess there's a first time for everything, right? No, I'm afraid there's nothing we can do about people abusing the equipment or... themselves. I'm sorry. I --

She reacts to the phone being hung up hard at the other end as the floor manager, BEN HARRIS, 30s, approaches.

MR. HARRIS

Everything all right?

CHRISTINE

Fine, Mr. Harris...fine...just someone having a problem with a... with the connection.

MR. HARRIS

Tell them to take the plug and shove it in and out a few times, that'll usually do it.

CHRISTINE

Unfortunately that was part of the problem. If you'll excuse me....

She roller-skates off toward another operator waving another pink sheet of paper.

EXT. PACIFIC TELEPHONE COMPANY - LUNCH AREA - DAY

Christine sits alone, eating a bag lunch and reading a thick telephone company manual. Working hard to advance herself.

Then a bell rings: time to return to work. Other employees gather up their belongings and start inside. As Christine closes the book, her bookmark falls out. As she picks it up, we see that it's a child's drawing: her and Walter (with arrows indicating who is who) on a green hill, under an orange sun.

She touches the drawing and smiles as the bell rings again. She grabs her belongs and heads back inside.

EXT. SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

Christine waits outside the school as another bell rings, announcing the end of classes. Kids run outside, Walter among them. He folds in alongside as they start down the sidewalk.

CHRISTINE

Hey, sport.

WALTER

Hey, mom.

CHRISTINE

So how was school?

WALTER

Okay. We learned about dinosaurs, and I got in a fight with Billy Mankowski.

CHRISTINE

What happened?

WALTER

He hit me.

CHRISTINE

Did you hit him back?

(he nods)

Good. Rule number one: Never start a fight, but always finish it. So why did he hit you?

WALTER

Because I hit him.

She stops, looks at him.

CHRISTINE

Wait...you hit him first?

(he nods)

Why?

WALTER

He said my dad ran off because he didn't like me.

CHRISTINE

Your dad never even had a chance to meet you...so how could he not like you?

WALTER

Then why did he leave?

Christine takes his hand, and they continue down the sidewalk.

CHRISTINE

Well, the same day you were born, something else arrived. It came in the mail, in a box just slightly bigger than you. You know what was in that box?

(he shakes head)

Something called responsibility. Now, to some people, responsibility is fun, it's what you live your whole life for. Other people think it's the scariest thing in the world.

WALTER

So he ran away because he was scared of what was in the box?

CHRISTINE

Yup.

WALTER

That's dumb.

CHRISTINE

That's what I thought.

She turns and crouches down in front of him.

CHRISTINE

Walter, I decided a long time ago that I would always tell you the truth, that I would treat you like a grown-up. I can't expect you to respect me unless I respect you.

(beat)

I've never lied to you. Your father leaving had nothing to do with you, and everything to do with what was in the responsibility box.

WALTER

Pinky-swear?

CHRISTINE

Pinky-swear.

She takes his pinky in hers, gives a tug. He smiles.

CHRISTINE

First one to the corner store gets
ice cream!

He laughs and tears off. She runs after him, letting him
stay ahead of her the whole way.

EXT. COLLINS HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Walter is asleep on the floor, in front of the radio, which
is playing the closing moments of Amos and Andy. Christine
enters and turns off the radio. He stirs, looks up at her.

WALTER

Did I miss Amos and Andy?

CHRISTINE

I'm afraid so, sport. Come on now,
time for bed.

She picks him up and carries him up the stairs.

WALTER

Are we still going to the movies
tomorrow?

CHRISTINE

Uh-huh. I hear there's a new Charlie
Chaplin playing down at Grauman's,
and a new serial called The
Mysterious Airman.

WALTER

Who's that?

CHRISTINE

I don't know. Nobody does. That's
what makes him so mysterious.

WALTER

Oh. Am I too heavy for you to carry?

CHRISTINE

Not for years yet, Walter. Not for
years.

And she disappears upstairs.

EXT. COLLINS HOME - MORNING

Just enough to bring us into

INT. COLLINS HOME - CHRISTINE'S BEDROOM - MORNING

She's getting ready for the day and is almost out of the room when the phone rings. She hesitates, then picks it up.

SUPERIMPOSE: MARCH 10, 1928

CHRISTINE

Hello?

(beat)

Oh, hello, Margaret. I'm fine, thanks. No, I was just --

(beat)

You're kidding. When did she call in sick?

(checks watch)

What about Myrna? I know she could use the extra hours. Oh. No, it's just...I promised Walter I'd take him to the movies today. There has to be somebody else....

(beat)

All right, I...guess we can do it tomorrow. I'll get there as soon as I can. But just until four, okay? See you in a bit.

She hangs up. She doesn't like this, but there's no way out of it. She straightens and heads out of the room.

INT. COLLINS HOME - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A disappointed Walter sits on the couch as Christine puts things together quickly.

CHRISTINE

There's a sandwich and milk in the icebox, and I've asked Mrs. Riley if her daughter can stop by in a couple of hours, just to --

WALTER

I can take care of myself.

CHRISTINE

Of course you can. She's coming by to check on the house, not you.

She stops in front of him, kneels down to eye height.

CHRISTINE

Tomorrow, we'll go to the movies. Then we'll ride the Big Red down to Santa Monica and walk on the pier. How's that? That okay?

(more)

CHRISTINE (Cont'd)

(he nods)

Good. I'll be back before it gets dark.

WALTER

I'm not afraid of the dark. I'm not afraid of anything.

CHRISTINE

I know you're not, honey. That's how I raised you.

(kisses his head)

Be good. See you in a bit.

She heads out, the screen door clattering shut behind her.

EXT. COLLINS HOME - CONTINUOUS

She crosses the lawn and turns at the sidewalk, glancing back as Walter looks out at her from the window. She waves. He waves back. With one last look, she continues off.

INT. PACIFIC TELEPHONE COMPANY - SWITCHBOARD ROOM - DAY

If the place was hectic before, now it's even worse: lines buzzing, voices chattering, operators following Christine around with papers and question.

OPERATORS

We've got lines jammed from here to Ohio...he insists on talking to someone in charge...I've tried everything and the console's just dead...I need your signature here for a supply requisition....

Christine glances up at the clock, 4:39. She's already late. But she does what's necessary.

CHRISTINE

All right, get me the Omaha routing station, see if we can put the calls through their switchers...and let's get that console running....

She hurries off to take care of it all, the others following.

INT. PACIFIC TELEPHONE COMPANY - HALLWAY - LATER

START on a clock which reads 5:20, then TILT DOWN as Christine comes out of the switchboard room, pulling on a sweater, ready to leave...as the floor manager steps out of his office.

MR. HARRIS

Christine...good, I was hoping to catch you. I've been following your work reports, and I just want you to know that I'm very impressed.

She glances down the block. The street car is approaching, but she doesn't want to piss off her boss by running off.

MR. HARRIS

When I first suggested hiring female supervisors, my superiors weren't big on the idea. But you've held your own as well as any of our male supervisors, and --

CHRISTINE

Thank you, Mr. Harris, but I --

MR. HARRIS

Ben, please. Point is, we're looking for someone to take on a managerial position in our new Beverly Hills office. If you're interested I can --

CHRISTINE

That's great, Mr. Harris, I really appreciate the vote of confidence.

MR. HARRIS

Good, good...so maybe we could --

She looks up to see the streetcar right at the stop.

CHRISTINE

I'm sorry, but I really have to go. We'll talk on Monday. Good night!

She races out to

EXT. PACIFIC TELEPHONE COMPANY - CONTINUOUS

running after the streetcar as it closes its doors.

CHRISTINE

Wait...wait...hold on, just a --

But the streetcar rumbles away before she can catch it. Frustrated, she glances at her watch and sighs resignedly.

INT. STREET-CAR - EARLY EVENING

Christine sits on the front bench, watching as the shadows lengthen, then pulls the bell. The car rumbles to a stop as she steps out onto the sidewalk.

EXT. STREET - EARLY EVENING

She passes a grocery store, where a clock reads 6:15, and continues past other houses on the pleasant, green street. We HEAR parents telling their kids to come in for dinner, radios playing music or radio dramas. Peaceful, charming. Christine smiles, turns the corner, looks to her house --

-- and it's dark, closed up. No lights on inside, no music or dramas on the radio. Dead silent.

Christine pauses, then picks up her pace. No need to panic, he could be upstairs asleep, could be in the back of the house, where the lights wouldn't show.

She goes to the front door. It's unlocked. She enters --

INT. COLLINS HOME - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

It's dark, silent. She puts her purse down. Looks around.

CHRISTINE

Walter?

Nothing. She goes into

INT. KITCHEN

switching on lights as she goes. Nothing. She checks the refrigerator. The sandwich she made Walter is untouched. She moves to the staircase.

CHRISTINE

Walter...?

INT. WALTER'S ROOM

She opens the door to his room. No Walter.

EXT. COLLINS HOUSE

She crosses to the sidewalk. Looks up and down the street.

CHRISTINE

Walter? Honey? Time to come in.

A little GIRL on a tricycle rolls past.

CHRISTINE

Susie honey, have you seen Walter?

GIRL

Nuh-uh.

The girl continues away. Christine's concerned, but she hasn't hit the panic button, not yet. She crosses the street to --

EXT. RILEY HOUSE

-- and rings the doorbell. The door opens and MRS. RILEY, forties, emerges.

CHRISTINE

Mrs. Riley, I'm sorry to bother you at dinnertime, but I was wondering if Walter was here.

MRS. RILEY

No, I'm afraid not.

CHRISTINE

Do you know if Jamie was able to look in on him?

MRS. RILEY

Well, I mentioned it to her, but she was going to a dance with some of her friends...you know how teenagers are. Is everything all right?

CHRISTINE

I'm sure it's fine, I just...

(beat)

Thank you, Mrs. Riley.

Christine heads away.

EXT. STREET

Christine stops at the sidewalk in front of her house, looks up and down the street, arms folded against the growing chill.

CHRISTINE

Walter...? Walter....

She starts walking again. Faster now. Looking around trees and porches, anywhere a nine-year-old boy might hide. She hears children playing. Laughing. She picks up her pace, homing in on the sound.

She turns the corner to find three children playing, none of them Walter. She looks down the ominously empty streets.

Her worry growing, she heads to the house. Faster now. Heels clicking on the hard sidewalk.

INT. COLLINS HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

She bursts in, leaving the door open, looking around in case he came in while she was out. Nothing. She crosses to the phone, hesitates for just a BEAT, then picks up the receiver.

CHRISTINE

Yes, Operator, give me the police.

There's a long pause as she waits, looks out the window, then:

POLICE DISPATCHER (on phone)

Lincoln Heights Division.

CHRISTINE

Yes, hello, my name is Christine Collins, I live at 210 North Avenue 23...I'm calling to report a missing child...it's my son, he....

POLICE DISPATCHER (on phone)

How long has he been gone?

CHRISTINE

I'm not sure...I just got home from work and...it could be since late this morning, it could be just an hour --

POLICE DISPATCHER (on phone)

Have you checked around the neighborhood?

CHRISTINE

Yes, of course, I --

POLICE DISPATCHER (on phone)

Maybe he lost track of the time.

CHRISTINE

No, he always stays around the house when it starts to get dark. Can you please send someone down here?

POLICE DISPATCHER (on phone)

I'm sorry, but our policy is that we don't dispatch units on missing child cases for twenty-four hours.

CHRISTINE

What? But that's --

POLICE DISPATCHER (on phone)

Ninety-nine times out of a hundred the kid shows up by morning. We don't have the resources to go chasing every kid who runs off with his pals and --

CHRISTINE

That's not Walter, he doesn't do that.

POLICE DISPATCHER (on phone)
With all due respect, ma'am, every
parent who calls us says the same
thing.

CHRISTINE
Please, I --

POLICE DISPATCHER (on phone)
I'm sorry, but there's nothing I
can do. I'll take your name and
information, but that's all until
tomorrow morning at the earliest.

EXT. STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Christine walks down the street, arms wrapped around herself.

POLICE DISPATCHER (V.O.)
I'm sure he'll show up by then.
They always do.

She continues on, calling Walter's name as she disappears
into the shadows.

INT. COLLINS HOME - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Christine watches out the curtained living room windows, eyes
red rimmed from worry but not from tears, not yet, as a police
car finally pulls up. Neighbors look on as the officers get
out and approach the house. HOLD on Christine's face, pale
and worried, UNDER:

REV. BRIEGLER (V.O.)
Our thoughts go out again to Mrs.
Christine Collins, of Lincoln Heights --

EXT. ST. PAUL'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - DAY

Located at 5100 Coliseum Street

REV. BRIEGLER (V.O.)
-- whose young son, Walter Collins,
disappeared almost two weeks ago.

INT. ST. PAUL'S CHURCH - DAY

A large radio microphone with the call letters KGF is atop a
podium, where PASTOR GUSTAV BRIEGLER stands: fifties, barrel
chested, no-nonsense, a fire-and-brimstone preacher. His
congregation sits in hard wooden pews, listening and nodding.

REV. BRIEGLER
Though she is not a member of our
congregation, we pray for her today
(more)

REV. BRIEGLER (Cont'd)
as we have every day since we first
learned of her situation on the
radio, and in the newspapers.

(beat)

We are told that the Los Angeles
Police Department is doing the best
it can to reunite mother and child,
and I am sure that is true.

(beat)

But given its position as the most
violent, corrupt and incompetent
police department this side of the
Rocky Mountains, that's not saying
a great deal.

There's APPLAUSE and cheering from the pews. He lets it pass.

REV. BRIEGLER

Every day, new bodies show up along
Mulholland, or in ditches, the work
of Police Chief James Davis and his
so-called "gun squad." Every day
the needs of honest citizens are
put second to greed and personal
gain. Every day, the city sinks
deeper into a cesspool of fear,
intimidation and corruption. Once
the City of Angels, Los Angeles is
now a place where our protectors
have become our brutalizers...where
to be the law...is to be above the
law...where none dare speak truth
to power.

(beat)

But we will not be silent. We will
continue to put their offenses and
their failures in full view of the
public. We will not be intimidated.

The place erupts into applause and cheering.

INT. POLICE CHIEF JAMES DAVIS' OFFICE - DAY

POLICE CHIEF JAMES E. DAVIS, 40s, hard-edged and tall, stands
looking out the window as the radio drones on behind him.

REV. BRIEGLER (on radio)

Because while the "gun squad" speaks
in the only language Chief Davis
understands, we speak in the language
of compassion, truth and strength.
We speak for our fellow citizens,
beaten and killed by a renegade
police department.

(more)

REV. BRIEGLER (on radio) (Cont'd)
We speak for an innocent child,
ripped from his mother's arms, now
all but forgotten by the police.
And that voice, my friends, will
never be silenced.

More cheers and applause as Davis switches off the radio.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. COLLINS HOME - CHRISTINE'S BEDROOM - MORNING

The alarm goes off, but Christine is already awake. Staring up at the ceiling. She slowly pulls herself up and moves OS.

SUPERIMPOSE: APRIL 3, 1928

INT. WALTER'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Christine walks past the door to his bedroom. Looks inside. Goes over to the bed. Her hand lingers, touching it, UNDER:

MR. HARRIS (V.O.)
Are you sure you're ready for this,
Christine?

INT. PACIFIC TELEPHONE COMPANY - HALLWAY - DAY

Christine and Mr. Harris, the floor manager, approach the doors to the switchboard room.

MR. HARRIS
I mean, if you need more time --

CHRISTINE
The police are doing all they can,
and frankly I could use the money.
It's been almost a month, and...it
wouldn't do any good to find Walter
and bring him home if he doesn't
have a home to come back to, right?

MR. HARRIS
Of course.

He smiles as he says it, but there's the sense that he doesn't think Walter's coming back. It's been too long. She senses it, but moves past it, pushing open the door and entering

INT. SWITCHBOARD ROOM - CONTINUOUS

As loud as before...until the operators see Christine, and the noise stops. She tries to smile, as if to say, *I'm okay*, but can't quite manage it.

Several women approach and hug her as the noise level begins to climb, but nowhere near what it was a moment earlier.

MR. HARRIS

Well...I'll leave you to it, then.

She nods as he exits, then heads off herself.

INT. SWITCHBOARD ROOM - LATER

Christine moves from station to station, the noise level still noticeably low. Every time she approaches an operator, they lower their voices, as if not to bother her.

One operator holds up a pink request sheet. Christine starts toward her, but then the operator glances to another supervisor and hands it off. Knowing she has to do something about this, she turns to the room and, in a firm, clear voice, says:

CHRISTINE

Excuse me, can I have your attention?

The room grows quiet. Everyone is looking at her.

CHRISTINE

Listen, everyone, I appreciate your consideration, but I'm not made of porcelain. I won't break down and cry if the station to station call to Kankakee doesn't go through.

(a thin smile)

Actually, I...promised myself that I wouldn't cry...wouldn't let myself cry...until I knew, one way or another, what....

(beat)

Point is...I like the noise here. So don't be afraid to talk and...push buttons, and drop things. If it wasn't noisy, how would I know I was in the right place?

She manages a thin smile as the place returns to normal.

EXT. PHONE COMPANY LUNCH AREA - AFTERNOON

Mr. Harris steps out into the lunch area where a number of the operators and supervisors are hanging out.

MR. HARRIS

Excuse me, has anyone seen Christine?

OPERATOR

I think I saw her in the back office.

He nods his thanks, and continues off.

INT. PHONE COMPANY - BACK OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

He approaches the door, slowing as he HEARS Christine inside.

CHRISTINE (O.S.)
-- well, if you do hear anything,
would you let me know? Thanks, I
appreciate it. Goodbye.

A hang-up, then dialing. He glances in the open doorway.

Christine sits at a table, phone in hand, a list of phone numbers in front of her. The list reads LAS VEGAS MISSING PERSONS DEPARTMENT, SACRAMENTO MISSING PERSONS DEPARTMENT, SAN FRANCISCO MISSING PERSONS DEPARTMENT...on and on...with each having multiple checks beside it, indicating all the times she's called. Her lunch sits untouched beside her.

She puts a check next to LAS VEGAS MISSING PERSONS DEPARTMENT then looks up as someone answers at the other end of the phone.

CHRISTINE
Missing Persons department, please.
(beat)
Yes, hello, this is Christine
Collins, I...yes, fine, thank you.
I was just checking back to see if
you had found any missing or lost
children that might match the --
(beat)
I see. No, I appreciate that, it's
just...it never hurts to make sure
all the lines of communication are
working. I mean, that's what I do
for a living, right?
(beat)
Well, I'll try back next week. If
you do hear anything in the meantime,
would you be sure to let me know?
Thanks. Goodbye.

She hangs up and ticks another department off the list and dials again. Mr. Harris heads away, deciding that whatever it was he planned to talk to her about...it can wait.

CHRISTINE
Missing persons department, please.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DINER - AFTERNOON

A single car is parked in the dirt lot outside the small, roadside diner.

SUPERIMPOSE: DE KALB, ILLINOIS. JULY 10, 1928

INT. DINER - CONTINUOUS

The COOK who owns this dive is cleaning the griddle and keeping an eye on the only two customers in the place: a MAN and a young BOY, both wearing hats, as was the custom. They're unkempt, dirty, like they've been on the road a long time. They finish the last of the food as the cook approaches, tears off the bill and puts it on the table.

COOK
Two dollars.

The Man reaches for his wallet. Pats an empty pocket. Tries the other pocket. Nothing.

MAN
Hell...looks like I left my wallet
at home. Can I owe it to you?

COOK
No credit. Pay up or I call the
cops. I'm tired of bums like you
coming around here.

MAN
I'm not trying to stiff you, chief.
I just left my wallet at home, that's
all. I'll go back and get it.
Five, ten minutes tops.

The Cook hesitates; he doesn't want the trouble of bringing in the cops, but he doesn't want to get stuck, either.

COOK
You got any collateral?

The Man glances at the Boy seated beside him. The boy's face is dirty, partially obscured by the hat.

MAN
Can't ask for better collateral
than a man's own flesh and blood,
right?
(to the boy)
You stay here, son, I'll be right
back.

BOY
But --

MAN
Now don't give me any trouble.
He's a good man to trust us like
this. You just sit here while I go
get my wallet. Okay?

The boy nods reluctantly, looks away as the man rises.

COOK

Ten minutes, then I'm calling the
cops.

The Man nods, exits and drives off. The Cook squints warily
at the Boy, then at the wall clock. It's 2:00.

EXT. DINER - LATER

No car. Just the empty parking lot.

INT. DINER - ON CLOCK

It's 3:15. The Cook is annoyed. He glances to the Boy, who
won't meet his gaze. Finally:

COOK

Ah, hell....

He goes to the phone. Clicks the receiver a few times.

COOK

Hello, Myrtle? It's Harve, down by
the diner. Would you get me Sheriff
Larsen? Yeah, I'll wait.

He casts a sour look in the boy's direction.

COOK

What's your name, son? Son...?

The boy takes a BEAT, looking out at the road. Then:

BOY

I don't remember.

COOK

Swell.

INT. PACIFIC TELEPHONE COMPANY - SWITCHBOARD ROOM - DAY

As before, Christine hurries from one station to another,
lost in the barely-managed chaos. She stops at one station,
glancing over papers, then looks over at --

-- the window to Mr. Harris' office, where he is talking with
a police officer, CAPTAIN J. J. JONES, 30s, serious, arch.

She slows, unable to look away, a growing dread settling in
her heart. Harris points out the window. Points...to her.
The police captain nods and enters the switchboard room.

As Jones heads for her, the strength goes out of Christine's
legs. She holds onto the a desk as he stops before her.

JONES

Mrs. Collins?

She manages a nod. Behind her eyes is the terror: *he's going to tell me my son is dead.* The room gets very quiet.

JONES

My name is Captain J. J. Jones,
Lincoln Park Juvenile Division. My
office supervises all runaway and
missing child cases, including your
son's, and....

(beat, a smile)

He's alive, Mrs. Collins. He was
picked up two days ago by local
police in De Kalb, Illinois. He's
safe and unhurt. He was in the
company of some drifter, we've got
an APB out for him now, and --

But she hasn't heard anything past *he's safe and unhurt.* She almost goes to the floor as other women rush toward her, crying and embracing her.

For the first time, Christine cries, great wracking sobs, all the emotion she's been fighting back all this time coming out at last...*he's okay...he's okay.*

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. UNION STATION - DAY

Jones and Christine are in a police car pulling up to the train station. It moves through a police line holding back a crowd of reporters who SHOUT questions at the passing car.

CHRISTINE

All these reporters...you didn't
tell me --

JONES

Yours is a story with a happy ending,
Mrs. Collins. People love happy
endings.

(checks watch)

Train should be pulling in shortly.
We'd better get a move on.

As Christine and Jones step out, they're mobbed by the press. Jones smiles splendidly for the cameras, waves, one arm wrapped around Christine, who looks stunned by it all.

JONES

Thank you...we'll have a statement
for you in a little while.

(more)

JONES (Cont'd)

Right now the important thing is to re-unite this little lady with her son. So if you'll excuse us....

Beaming, Jones escorts Christine into Union Station.

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Seated on a bench is a POLICE MATRON, and beside her, the BOY from the De Kalb diner...who we will identify henceforth as "Walter." He is looking out the window at the passing scenery.

"WALTER"

Did you know that Los Angeles is where they make the Tom Mix movies?

MATRON

No, I didn't.

"WALTER"

His horse is named Blue.

(beat)

You think they'll let me watch them make a movie?

MATRON

I don't know, you'll have to ask. But with all this attention, who knows, maybe they will.

The boy turns his attention back out the window as we HEAR the WHISTLE of the train pulling into Union Station.

INT. UNION STATION - TRAIN PLATFORM - DAY

We HEAR the same train whistle from this side as Christine and Jones come to the ramp, POLICE CHIEF DAVIS is waiting. The reporters are held back at the entrance to the platform.

JONES

Mrs. Collins, I'd like to introduce you to Chief of Police James E. Davis.

CHRISTINE

Oh, my, I didn't expect --

DAVIS

We don't get a lot of positive attention from the boys in the press these days, so it's good to be here when there's a positive story, don't you think?

But she's distracted, looking off to the end of the platform, where the train is starting to pull in.

DAVIS

I take it you've been treated well
by my boys in the department?

CHRISTINE

Oh...yes, of course, they've been
great. Well, there was that part
about having to wait twenty-four
hours before filing a report, but --

DAVIS

Technicalities aside --

The train stops. Doors begin to open.

CHRISTINE

Yes...other than that, no complaints.
They've all been wonderful.

DAVIS

Good, then you won't have any problem
telling that to the press, and how
the LAPD is concerned first and
foremost with the safety of --

But she's already running down the platform as people start to step off the train. Jones exchanges a look with Davis.

JONES

Women. Just a sec....

He trots off to catch up with Christine, who walks alongside the train, looking from window to window, anxious, eager.

Then: the Matron gets off the train, her frame momentarily blocking the view of the boy beside her...but Christine spots them. With Jones not far behind, she breaks into a run.

CHRISTINE

Walter...Walter!

She runs toward them. The matron turns, sees her, smiles and gets out of the way, revealing the boy.

Christine stops. Staggered so hard she almost falls. She steps forward slowly, a hand going to her mouth. For a moment, we're not sure what's going through her mind. She looks to the matron, who smiles. Looks to the boy, who smiles.

Then she steps back a pace, horror sinking in as Jones comes jauntily alongside her.

JONES

Well? Aren't you going to --

CHRISTINE

He's not my son.

Jones freezes at the words.

JONES

I...what are you --

CHRISTINE

He's not my son.

(beat)

He's not my son.

JONES

I'm...I'm sure you're mistaken.

CHRISTINE

Mistaken?

JONES

He's been through four long, terrible months...he's gone through changes, lost weight --

CHRISTINE

I know my own son.

He glances over his shoulder to where the Chief of Police is waiting, not aware of any of this, and beyond him...the press.

JONES

I'm just saying...I mean, you're in shock, and he's changed, and --

He turns from her, stoops down to look at the boy.

JONES

What's your name, son? Can you tell me your name?

"WALTER"

Walter Collins.

Christine steps back as though slapped. This can't be.

CHRISTINE

It's a common name, it --

JONES

Do you know where you live, Walter?
Do you know your home address?

The boy considers for a moment...then:

"WALTER"

My house is at 210 North Avenue 23,
Los Angeles, California.

(beat)

And that's my Mommy!

And he RUNS to her, grabbing her around the waist, which only magnifies her horror. Jones has no idea what to make of her, or this, or the boy. The only thing he knows is that the chief of police is standing right over there, smiling now that he thinks he's seen a mother and child reunion. The press is nearly insane trying to get through to them.

JONES

Mrs. Collins...listen to me. I know you're feeling uncertain right now, but that's to be expected...a boy this age changes so fast...but we've compensated for that in our investigation. We're experts in child identification. There's no question that this is your son.

CHRISTINE

It's not Walter.

JONES

It's not Walter as you remember him. That's why it's important for you to take him home, on a...trial basis.

CHRISTINE

A trial basis?

JONES

Once you've put him back in familiar surroundings, and given yourself time to recover from the shock of his changed condition...you'll see that it is him. I swear to you, Mrs. Collins. I give you my word. Trust me...this is your son.

She looks from him to the boy...who is not terribly dissimilar from Walter...so that even the audience may not be entirely sure if it's him or not...and part of her wants desperately to believe...the pressure is immense.

JONES

If there's any problem, any problem at all, come and talk to me and I'll take care of it.

(beat)

Mrs. Collins...he has nowhere else to go.

It's an agonizing moment, then finally:

CHRISTINE

I...look, I'll take him home, but only because I...might not be thinking clearly right now, and --

JONES

Thank you.

Without giving her a moment to reconsider, he waves and the Chief of Police approaches as the press rushes toward them.

In an instant, they're overwhelmed by people shouting questions, flashbulbs popping, a fever of excitement.

REPORTERS

How does it feel to have your son home, Mrs. Collins? What did you think when you saw him for the first time?

CHRISTINE

It was...it's...hard to explain.

JONES

(jumping in)

It was certainly quite a shock. At first she hardly recognized him. Perfectly natural, the boy's been through quite an ordeal.

REPORTER

How're you feeling, son? Bet it feels great to be home.

"WALTER"

Yeah, it's great!

DAVIS

The Los Angeles Police Department is thankful for all the hard work done by the De Kalb County Sheriff's Department in helping to make this joyful reunion possible. The LAPD is dedicated to serving the public at all times, and --

ANOTHER REPORTER

Can we get a photo of mother and son, Captain?

CHRISTINE

I --

JONES

Absolutely.

He poses Christine and "Walter" so she is holding the boy in her arms. Dazed, stunned, confused, she manages to smile for the cameras. Bulbs FLASH and --

-- time SLOWS DOWN, the SOUND MUTED, as Christine looks around at it all as though in a dream...reporters shouting questions she doesn't hear...bulbs flashing...the boy beside her, smiling at it all. He looks at her, mouths the word Mommy, as --

INT. POLICE CAR - MOMENTS LATER

-- the car door SLAMS and she and the boy sit side by side. The silence is in profound contrast to the madness of a moment earlier. An officer gets in they drive off, passing Jones and the Chief of Police, talking quietly off to one side.

Christine looks to the boy. He smiles at her.

INT. COLLINS HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

The only noise is the clock on the wall, ticking. Christine sits at one end of the table, "Walter" at the other. Studying him. He is finishing a sandwich, not meeting her gaze.

CHRISTINE

Was the sandwich all right?

(he nods)

Would you like some more milk?

"WALTER"

No.

CHRISTINE

No, thank you.

"WALTER"

No, thank you.

CHRISTINE

Now you need a bath. You're covered with soot from the train ride.

He turns, and heads up the stairs. She follows.

INT. HALLWAY FRONTING BATHROOM - LATER

Carrying a pair of pajamas, Christine comes into the hall and stops in front of the bathroom door. Knocks.

CHRISTINE

I found you a pair of pajamas. I bought them for Walter but he didn't like the fabric, so --

"WALTER" (O.S.)

Ow!

She hears him fall and pushes the door open.

INT. BATHROOM

She helps "Walter" stand, discreetly turned away from us.

CHRISTINE

Are you all right?

"WALTER"

I fell. Stupid tub.

CHRISTINE

Did you hurt yourself? Let me see --

She stops suddenly, reacting to something we don't see.
Looks slowly looks up to his face.

CHRISTINE

...circumcised....

She takes his hand and marches him out of the bathroom.

INT. HALLWAY

She places him against the wall where she measured Walter's growth over the years. The marks put him four inches shorter than the one labeled March. She looks at him, very serious.

CHRISTINE

The last time I measured Walter --
the last time I measured my son --
he was four inches taller than you
are right now.

(beat)

Who are you?

(beat)

What are you doing here?

(beat)

Who are you?

He says nothing. HOLD on her look of growing desperation.

INT. POLICE STATION - HALLWAY - DAY

Jones walks quickly down the hall, trying to look interested in a clutch of papers in his hands, Christine following after.

CHRISTINE

He's not my son.

JONES

Mrs. Collins --

CHRISTINE

I don't know who he is, or why he's saying he's Walter, but there's clearly been some kind of mistake.

JONES

We agreed you would give him time to adjust --

CHRISTINE

He's four inches shorter than Walter. Boys his age don't shrink. If anything, he should be taller.

JONES

Maybe your measurements are off. Look, I'm sure there's a reasonable explanation for --

CHRISTINE

He's circumcised. Walter wasn't.

Jones glances back, uncomfortable about discussing circumcision with a woman in public view. He lowers his voice.

JONES

Mrs. Collins...your son was missing for four months. For at least part of that in the company of an as-yet unidentified drifter. Who knows what such a disturbed individual might have done? He could have had him...circumcised... might have --

CHRISTINE

Made him smaller? Captain, please --

He's on the move again, stepping into --

INT. JONES' OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

-- and getting behind his desk as Christine follows him in.

CHRISTINE

-- why won't you listen to me?

JONES

I am listening, damn it, I --
(beat, calmer)

I am listening. And I understand your feelings. He's changed, no mistake. You've both been through a terrible experience. That's why he needs your support and love to bounce back.

CHRISTINE

Captain, that boy wouldn't bounce back as my son if you coated him in rubber and dropped him off the roof.

He sits, shaking his head.

JONES

Why are you doing this, Mrs. Collins? You seem perfectly capable of taking care of the boy, your work pays you enough to attend to his personal needs...so I don't understand why you're trying to run away from your responsibilities --

CHRISTINE

I'm not running away from anything, least of all my responsibilities. I'm even taking care of that boy because right now I'm all he has. What worries me is that you've stopped looking for Walter.

JONES

Why should we look someone we've already found?

CHRISTINE

But you haven't found him. He's still out there somewhere, lost, maybe hurt....

JONES

His identity has been confirmed by the best minds in the field of child identification, people who know what they're doing.

CHRISTINE

And I don't? Captain, look, I don't want to cause trouble for you or the department. Honestly I don't. I know you've done everything you can...but there's been a terrible mistake, and I need your help if we're going to correct it...before it's too late. Please.

She exits. Annoyed, Jones paces, then picks up the phone.

JONES

Sara, get Dr. Tarr on the phone.

INT. COLLINS HOME - DAY

Christine is cooking dinner when the doorbell rings. She opens the door to find a police officer and DR. EARL W. TARR, sixties, mildly eccentric in appearance.

DR. TARR

Mrs. Collins? Dr. Earl W. Tarr.
Captain Jones sent me. I consult
with him from time to time on
juvenile cases. May I come in?

CHRISTINE

Oh...yes, of course.

She steps aside, and Dr. Tarr enters, looking around.

CHRISTINE

Thank you for coming. I'm surprised
Captain Jones moved so quickly. I
was starting to think he didn't
believe me.

DR. TARR

Well, I'm here now, and we'll put
all that to rights. Where is the
boy?

He looks up as "Walter" comes downstairs. Noting that he said "the boy," not "your son," Christine looks relieved.

DR. TARR

Ah! There he is. A handsome young
man. He has your eyes, doesn't he?
And a little bit of the nose. Very
fit, in spite of all his travails.
A very resilient boy you've got
here, Mrs. Collins.

As he bends down to look more closely at "Walter," Christine stiffens...she can't have heard that right.

CHRISTINE

Doctor Tarr, I thought you were
here to help me.

DR. TARR

I am. Captain Jones said the boy
had gone through some extreme
physical changes, and asked me to
look in on him...to reassure you in
this your time of motherly concern.

CHRISTINE

My "motherly concern" isn't for him
because he's not my son.

DR. TARR

Statements like that will hardly help the boy's self-esteem, now will they?

(beat)

Captain Jones said something about a change in height...?

CHRISTINE

He's four inches shorter than --

DR. TARR

Ah, well...hardly a mystery, Mrs. Collins. We've known for some time that trauma can affect the growth of children. Given the stress of the last four months his spine may have actually shrunk. It's uncommon, but within the realm of possibility.

CHRISTINE

What about the circumcision?

DR. TARR

Very likely his abductor thought it appropriate. After all, circumcision is hygienically sound. Must have been quite traumatic at the time. No wonder he's submerged the memory.

CHRISTINE

Look, doctor --

DR. TARR

As you can see, there's a perfectly sound medical explanation for all of this. But it's good for you to raise these questions. You should be apprised of all changes the lad went through during his absence.

CHRISTINE

Wouldn't I know whether or not he was my son? I'm his mother.

DR. TARR

Which means you're in no position to be objective. You are looking through the prism of extreme emotion at a boy who has changed from what you remember. He isn't the same boy that left here, just as a boy who goes off to war and returns isn't the same anymore.

(more)

DR. TARR (Cont'd)

A mother's heart, driven by intuition and emotion rather than logic, sees these changes and rebels, insists that this cannot be your son. But that doesn't change the facts.

(beat)

I'm willing to put my theory to the test of objectivity, Mrs. Collins... are you?

CHRISTINE

What're you --

Before she can react, he takes Walter by the hand and leads him outside. Christine follows them out to --

EXT. COLLINS HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

-- as Dr. Tarr strides onward, the police officer and "Walter" walking alongside as Christine brings up the rear. A few houses down they come to a group of CHILDREN playing.

DR. TARR

Hello, children, my name is Dr. Earl W. Tarr. I'd like to ask you some questions.

1ST KID

My mom says we're not supposed to talk to strangers.

DR. TARR

Good boy. Quite right. But as you see I'm with the police, so it's all right. Now, I'm sure you know Mrs. Collins here, and her son, Walter. How many of you recognize this young boy as Walter Collins?

He looks from one child to the other. They don't reply. Either they don't recognize him, or they're intimidated.

DR. TARR

Now, now, no need to be afraid. Surely you knew Walter, and played with him? So which of you can identify Walter for me, for his mother, and for the police? This officer would want you to do the right thing as good young citizens.

The kids exchange a glance. It's clear they don't recognize the boy, but they're intimidated by the presence of Tarr and the police officer. A few reluctantly raise their hands. Another of them goes to "Walter," who is shorter than he is.

2ND KID

Walter was as tall as me....

DR. TARR

Yes, precisely. He was as tall as you. Now he's not. He's lost a little height, you see. It's a thing called trauma. With luck, none of you will ever have to find out about it yourselves. So other than that, do you recognize this as your friend, Walter Collins?

2ND KID

I guess...

CHRISTINE

Dr. Tarr --

DR. TARR

Already ahead of you, Mrs. Collins; children can be intimidated. But not adults. Shall we try a neighbor?

He heads off again, like some very tall, strange bird marching down the street. Christine exchanges a look with the kids, then heads off to follow.

EXT. RILEY'S HOUSE - FOYER - MOMENTS LATER

Tarr, Christine, Mrs. Riley, the officer and "Walter" stand on the porch.

DR. TARR

-- and we'd appreciate it if you could make a positive identification for us.

MRS. RILEY

I'd be happy to. I saw the boy often. Come closer, son.

She stoops down, studies "Walter's" face, turns it from side to side. Squints at him. He squints back at her. Note: she's not wearing glasses. Finally:

DR. TARR

Take your time...be sure.

MRS. RILEY

Oh, yes...yes...that's Walter all right. Used to come here all the time to play with my nephew, Roger.

DR. TARR

Thank you, Mrs. Riley. You've been
a big help, I --

CHRISTINE

Before we go...Mrs. Riley, do you
have the time?

MRS. RILEY

Certainly....

She looks at her watch. Holds it farther away. Can't quite
focus on it. Pulls her glasses out from inside her blouse.

MRS. RILEY

My last concession to vanity; men
don't make passes at women who wear
glasses, you know.
(checks the watch)
Five o'clock.

CHRISTINE

Thank you.

Mrs. Riley nods and heads inside as Christine looks to Tarr,
who shrugs off what was just demonstrated.

DR. TARR

A boy is much larger than a watch,
Mrs. Collins.
(to "Walter")
Come along, son.

Tarr takes "Walter's" hand and heads away, Christine following,
anger growing in her eyes as we HEAR:

CHRISTINE (V.O.)

This is absolutely outrageous!

INT. COLLINS HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

She is on the phone, "Walter" finishing up his dinner in BG.

CHRISTINE

Captain, I...no, listen to me, this
so-called doctor paraded me around
my own neighborhood like some kind
of derelict mother who couldn't
even recognize her own --
(beat)
He found what he expected to find,
what you obviously told him he would
find, but it's not --
(beat)
No, I am not reassured.
(more)

CHRISTINE (Cont'd)

I thought we had an understanding,
I --

(beat)

That I was embarrassed isn't the
issue, the point is you're wasting
time when you should be looking for
my son, I --

(beat)

Then I want to see this report, so
I can refute it, before it goes to
anyone else, all right? Fine.

She hangs up. Hard. The events of the day have her teetering on the edge, but she's holding on. She pulls herself together and goes to the sink, furiously doing dishes for a silent BEAT before "Walter" looks up from his now-empty plate.

"WALTER"

I'm finished. Can I go to my room
now?

CHRISTINE

Yes. Go on up.

"Walter" rises, as Christine continues to clean dishes, not looking back at him. Exhausted mentally, physically and emotionally. He goes to the door, stops, turns.

"WALTER"

G'night, Mommy.

Christine fumbles the plate and it SMASHES to the floor. She turns furiously to "Walter."

CHRISTINE

Stop saying that! I'm not your
mother! And you're not my son!

She moves toward him, her anger coming out at last.

CHRISTINE

WHO ARE YOU? WHY ARE YOU DOING
THIS TO ME? DAMN YOU! I WANT MY
SON BACK!

He tears off as she slumps to the floor, covering her eyes.

CHRISTINE

I want my son back...god, please...
make it stop...just make it stop.

INT. WALTER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

"Walter" is in bed, his back to the door, as Christine appears in the hallway. She steps into the room, sits on the bed.

He doesn't move. Her voice is soft, but firm.

CHRISTINE

I was wrong to yell at you. You're still a child, and I think you don't really understand what you're doing, the hurt you're causing. Maybe this is all just some big game of pretend to you, but I need you to understand. Walter is...he's all I have, he's everything to me, and every day we lose because of this puts him further away from where I can help him.

(beat)

Whatever the police think, whatever the world thinks, we know the truth, don't we? We both know you're not Walter. Getting you to admit that may be the only chance I have to straighten this out before it's too late. Maybe you're afraid of getting in trouble, that you're in too deep. But you're not. You don't have to tell me who you are, you just have to tell them who you're not. Just... tell them the truth.

He doesn't respond. She gives it a moment in case he might open up, then rises and heads back into the hallway. She switches off the light and heads off down the hallway.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ST. PAUL'S CHURCH - RECTORY - PRE-DAWN

Pastor Briegleb is typing out his sermon for the day. He's exhausted. Looks at the clock. 6:30 a.m. He rubs tiredly at his face when he HEARS the THUMP of the newspaper being delivered. He stands, stretches and steps out to --

EXT. ST. PAUL'S CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

-- where the newspaper is visible on the front lawn. He picks it up and starts into the rectory as he unfolds the paper.

Then: he slows, stunned by something he's reading. He looks up again, and hurries back into the rectory.

INT. COLLINS HOME - CHRISTINE'S BEDROOM - PRE-DAWN

She's in bed, asleep, as the telephone RINGS downstairs. She glances at the clock: 6:45. She clearly doesn't want to go down to answer it...then reluctantly climbs out of bed.

INT. COLLINS HOME - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The telephone is still ringing as she picks it up.

CHRISTINE

Hello?

REV. BRIEGLER (on phone)

Is this Mrs. Christine Collins?

CHRISTINE

Yes? Who is this?

REV. BRIEGLER (on phone)

My name is Gustav Briegleb, I'm the pastor over at St. Paul's --

CHRISTINE

Oh, yes, I heard some of your radio broadcasts after my son...you were very supportive, and I appreciate --

REV. BRIEGLER (on phone)

Mrs. Collins...have you seen the Times today?

CHRISTINE

No, I --

REV. BRIEGLER (on phone)

You'd better take a look. Then come by the parish in an hour for breakfast. I think we should meet.

She starts to reply, but the line goes dead. She hangs up the phone, pulls her robe closer around her, and steps out to

EXT. COLLINS HOME - PRE-DAWN

where a copy of the Los Angeles Times sits on a neighbor's front lawn. She looks around, then dashes to pick it up. She unfolds it as she heads back, then abruptly stops. She can't believe what she's seeing.

CLOSE ON THE NEWSPAPER. The headline reads Mysterious Transformation in Collins Boy.

EXT. ST. PAUL'S CHURCH - GARDEN - MORNING

Briegleb is eating a big breakfast. Christine, newspaper in hand, is pacing, furious. She reads aloud from the paper.

CHRISTINE

"Acting on the request of the Los Angeles Police Department, Dr. Earl
(more)

CHRISTINE (Cont'd)

W. Tarr, child specialist, examined Walter Collins to determine the cause of his loss of weight, paleness, confusion and run-down condition noticed since the return of the boy to his mother last Saturday."

REV. BRIEGLEB

Lovely bit of phrasing, isn't it? Noticed since the return of the boy to his mother. Not only does it state clearly that you are the boy's mother, one could infer from this that you are somehow responsible for these changes...and that the police are concerned for the boy's welfare in your hands.

(beat)

You should try the eggs, they're very good.

CHRISTINE

(still reading)

"I examined the boy quite thoroughly, Dr. Tarr said --

INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Dr. Tarr is sitting at a desk and speaking to a handful of reporters, enjoying the attention.

DR. TARR

-- and it's clear that he has something to tell. I'm sure that in time he will give his boyish story of the entire affair, but not until he has faith in his listener. And that is what is lacking: faith in the poor lad's story. In the course of my examination, I found nothing to dispute the findings by the LAPD.

REPORTER

How come he hasn't been able to tell anyone what happened while he was gone?

DR. TARR

I would say that the boy has either been coached or questioned to a point where he is largely confused about what happened to him during
(more)

DR. TARR (Cont'd)
those many months. It's possible that his mental lapse may be the result of a blow to the head or a sudden shock which brought about a possible cranial injury. I believe that this condition will pass soon. Until then, I recommend that the police department continue working with him, exposing him to whatever elements of his previous life as may help restore his memory.

BACK TO SCENE

As she lowers the paper, incredulous. (And yes, what you just read was exactly what the doctor really said.)

CHRISTINE
Captain Jones promised he'd let me see the report before it went anywhere else.

REV. BRIEGLER
Someone in authority at the LAPD lied? Good heavens, I may have to go lie down.

He laughs. She turns, looking stricken. He sobers at once.

REV. BRIEGLER
I was not laughing at your situation, Mrs. Collins. It's just...after one has this sort of conversation enough times, a certain degree of hysteria begins to set in. Please, sit.

Reluctantly, she does. Shakes her head in disbelief.

CHRISTINE
Why are they doing this?

REV. BRIEGLER
To avoid admitting a mistake...that they brought back the wrong boy.
(off her look)
Anyone reading that with half a brain would see through it instantly. Sadly, that leaves out about half the Times' readership, but still....

CHRISTINE
Thank you.
(more)

CHRISTINE (Cont'd)

I've been trying to get someone to say those words since...god, I was starting to think I was losing my mind.

(beat)

Thank you. At least someone believes me.

REV. BRIEGLER

You have no idea how many people have sat in that very chair and said those exact same words to me in relation to our friends at the Los Angeles Police Department.

(beat)

Mrs. Collins, I have made it my mission to bring to light all the things the LAPD would prefer no one knew anything about...a department ruled by violence, abuse, murder, corruption and intimidation.

MONTAGE STARTS

INT. POLICE STATION - OFFICE - DAY

FAUX NEWSREEL FOOTAGE of Police Chief Davis speaking before a bunch of microphones.

REV. BRIEGLER (O.S.)

When Chief Davis took over the LAPD two years ago, he said --

DAVIS

(overlapping)

We will hold court on gunmen in the Los Angeles streets. I want them brought in dead, not alive, and I will reprimand any officer who shows the least mercy to a criminal.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

A crowd of police officers, armed with machine-guns, BLAST the hell out of a group of guys lined up against a wall.

REV. BRIEGLER (V.O.)

He picked fifty of the most dangerous cops on the force, gave them machine guns and permission to shoot anyone who got in their way. He called them the Gun Squad. No lawyers. No trials. No questions, suspensions or investigations. Just piles of bodies.

EXT. BACK ALLEY - NIGHT

Another guy, beaten to a bloody pulp, is SHOVED out of a moving car and left in the rain.

REV. BRIEGLER (V.O.)
Bodies in morgues, bodies in hospitals, bodies by the side of the road, barely alive. Not because the police wanted to wipe out crime, they just wanted to get rid of the competition.

EXT. ROADSIDE - NIGHT

A pair of cops and a couple of thugs inspect a truck carrying booze over the border from Canada, pay the freight and watch as the trucks drive off in the truck.

REV. BRIEGLER (V.O.)
Mayor Cryer and half the police force are on the take. Prostitution, gambling, bootlegging, you name it.
(beat)
When the gloves came off, pretty soon the rest of the department got into the brutality act. Didn't want the Gun Squad to have all the fun, after all.

INT. TENEMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Two officers are sexually assaulting a woman on the stairs.

REV. BRIEGLER (V.O.)
The more they got away with it, the worse things got, because when you give folks the freedom to do whatever they want, as God saw in the Garden of Eden, they'll do just that.

BACK TO SCENE

With Christine and Briegleb, in the rectory garden.

REV. BRIEGLER
This police department does not tolerate dissent, contradiction... or embarrassment, Mrs. Collins. You have the power to embarrass them...and they don't like it. Not when they became the Heroes of the Hour the day they stood there posing with you, having rescued a lost boy from the wilderness.
(more)

REV. BRIEGLER (Cont'd)

(beat)

They will do everything they can to discredit you. I've seen it happen too many times to start going blind now. That's why I wanted to see you, so you'd know what you were getting into...and how to fight them.

CHRISTINE

Reverend Briegleb...I appreciate what you're saying, and what you're doing...but I'm not on a mission. The only thing I want is to find my son, that's all, and I just --

REV. BRIEGLER

A lot of mothers' sons ended up being sacrificed to expediency around here, Mrs. Collins. Yours wouldn't be the first. Do this right, and maybe yours will be the last.

She gets up from the table, paces the garden.

CHRISTINE

If they honestly thought I was wrong, that'd be one thing...but if they don't care, if they're just trying to cover it up....

He picks up the article, waves it.

REV. BRIEGLER

This is their attempt to win by framing the discussion their way. "Why, of course it's her son...yes, there have been changes...we're looking into it, and isn't it strange that they happened after the boy got home?"

(beat)

They're putting you in the position of having to disprove what they're saying...and that's hard. Most people believe what they hear from the police or the government. If you play it their way, you...and your son...are going to lose.

She closes her eyes for a BEAT, then looks to him, her voice firmer, her decision made.

CHRISTINE

What do I have to do?

REV. BRIEGLER

Change the rules of engagement. Re-define the argument. They brought in their expert, so you bring in yours. You have an advantage they don't. You know your son better than they ever will, and in that knowledge is the proof you need.

(beat)

Get that information, put it out there. Make them respond to you, not the other way around.

He gets up, walks toward her, puts his hands on her shoulders. Giving her strength...but also his concern.

REV. BRIEGLER

Once people side with the police, it's a hard climb...but even in a town as loud as this one, the voice of truth can be heard...if you're willing to take it all the way in spite of the dangers...and they are very real, Mrs. Collins, make no mistake. Once you open the book on these people, you're going to be looking over your shoulder every day, maybe for the rest of your life.

(beat)

You up to it, Mrs. Collins?

He looks in her eyes...and she meets his gaze levelly. The answer is evident.

INT. WAITING ROOM - ANGLE ON DOOR - DAY

We're in a dentist's office. Christine is waiting for a BEAT before the door opens, and DR. JOHN MONTGOMERY emerges.

CHRISTINE

Well?

DR. MONTGOMERY

He had two cavities that needed filling. He put up a fight, but I took care of it.

CHRISTINE

And...?

He casts a look back at the closed door, shakes his head.

DR. MONTGOMERY

Your son's upper front teeth were separated by a small muscle. Made them sit about an eighth of an inch apart. The boy in that room has no such gap.

CHRISTINE

Does a gap like that get smaller with age? Because that's what they'll say.

DR. MONTGOMERY

In some cases, yes, it's possible. But the muscle between Walter's teeth prevents that from happening. They can never come together without an operation to sever the muscle, and I can tell you right now that he has never had such an operation.

CHRISTINE

Will you be willing to sign a letter saying that officially?

DR. MONTGOMERY

Pardon my language, but...hell, yes.

He hears an OS moan from the inner office.

DR. MONTGOMERY

Sounds like the anesthetic is wearing off.

(starts in, pauses)

On the other hand, maybe I'll write that letter first. Give the little fella something to think about.

He smiles.

INT. CLASSROOM - MORNING

Small, with wooden desks, chalkboard, all the basics. "Walter" stands in front of MRS. FOX, fifties, wearing severe glasses and an equally severe expression. Christine stands nearby.

CHRISTINE

Well? What do you think? Is that the Walter Collins that you remember?

MRS. FOX

If it is, he's changed enormously.
(to "Walter")
Do you know who I am?

"WALTER"

You're a teacher.

MRS. FOX

Yes, but even teachers have names.
What's mine?

"WALTER"

I don't remember. I know you, but
I don't remember your name.

MRS. FOX

My name is Mrs. Fox. Now, take
your seat.

"Walter" hesitates, then takes a seat. The other kids laugh.

MRS. FOX

I didn't say take a seat. I said
take your seat. Your assigned seat.
You must know which one it is, you
sat there for over a year.

"Walter" tries another vacant seat. There are only three
vacant seats in the room. More laughter from the kids.

MRS. FOX

Try again. Here's a hint: There's
only one more empty seat left.

He sits. Mrs. Fox looks to Christine.

MRS. FOX

Mrs. Collins, if that's your son,
I'll eat my yardstick. Not only
will I put that in writing, I'll
swear to it in a court of law and
in front of President Calvin Coolidge
himself if I have to.

For the first time, Christine allows a hopeful smile.

INT. COLLINS HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The lights are low. Christine sits on the floor, sorting
through a box containing artifacts of affection: class projects
made by Walter, trees and houses and clay dogs; a heart-shaped
card Mother's Day card, hand-made, with *I Love You, Mommy*
carefully printed on the front. She runs her finger over it,
tracing the impression left by his pencil.

She starts to cry, and a tear falls onto the pencil drawing.
She frantically dabs at it, trying to preserve it from
distortion...then sets it down and covers her face, weeping.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CITY HALL - MORNING (RAIN)

A cold, wet knot of reporters and photographers are waiting in the rain on the steps to City Hall. Christine sits in a car with Briegleb, looking at it all.

SUPERIMPOSE: SEPTEMBER 6, 1928

REV. BRIEGLEB

I'll see you tonight at eight for my broadcast. I'll leave the back door open and a light on. Good luck.

She nods, exits the car and walks up the steps to the front of City Hall as he drives off. She stands before the press, looks at them for a moment, then begins.

CHRISTINE

Good morning. My name is Christine Collins. On March 10th, my nine year old son, Walter Collins, disappeared. A four month investigation resulted in a boy being brought to Los Angeles from De Kalb, Illinois. They told me, and all of you, that this boy was my son. They were wrong.

(beat)

The Los Angeles Police Department made a mistake...a terrible mistake. The boy they found is not my son. That is the reason for the supposed "transformation." I have letters from his dentist, his teachers and others confirming that this boy is not my son. The letters are being reprinted now, and I should have them for you tomorrow.

Flashbulbs pop, dazzling her. She composes herself.

CHRISTINE

I have given the police department every opportunity to admit their mistake and renew the search for my son. Since they have refused to do so, I have no choice but to present my case before the public. I hope this will persuade the police to finish the job they started, and bring my son home to me.

(beat)

Thank you.

As the reporters start to shout out questions, we PAN ACROSS to a BEAT COP who has been watching. He goes quickly to a police call-box, unlocks it and picks up the telephone.

INT. LINCOLN HEIGHTS STATION - DAY

The glass door to Captain Jones' office is closed, but we can SEE him on the phone. Finally, he hangs up and comes out of the office. His tone is cold but neutral...we think this could go either way. He stops an officer.

JONES

Morelli, I want you to find the Collins woman and get her here. Bring her in the back way, and have a couple of matrons standing by.

1ST COP

Yes, sir.

He heads off as Jones goes into his office, closing the door.

EXT. LINCOLN HEIGHT STATION - REAR ENTRANCE - DAY (RAIN)

A police car pulls up to the curb, and Christine and "Walter" emerge from the back seat. They dash through the rain to the back door, followed by the 1st Cop.

CHRISTINE

Why are we using the back door?

1ST COP

Captain's orders. Front's jammed with reporters.

CHRISTINE

Is it?

She allows a moment of quiet satisfaction as she's led into

INT. STATION - BULLPEN

where she's directed to a wooden bench. A nearby clock reads 3:45. She sits, "Walter" silent beside her. In the BG, the Desk Sergeant puts a call on hold.

DESK SERGEANT

Hey...anybody want to take a call from the Royal Canadian Mounties? Ybarra?

DETECTIVE LESTER YBARRA, thirties, good looking, glances up.

YBARRA

What'd they do, lose a moose?

DESK SERGEANT

They need a juvenile living here illegally deported back to Canada. He's living with his cousin on some ranch near Riverside, in Wineville.

YBARRA

All right, I'll take it, got nothing better to do....

Ybarra takes the call as Jones' calls from his office.

JONES

Mrs. Collins.

Christine starts to take "Walter's" hand when a matron appears.

JONES

Leave the boy for now. We'll look after him.

She hands "Walter" over to the matron, then enters

INT. JONES' OFFICE

He leaves the door open and indicates for Christine to sit. She does. He paces, working up to what he's going to do.

JONES

You've put us through quite a bit of trouble, Mrs. Collins. This situation has become an embarrassment for the entire department.

CHRISTINE

It wasn't my intention to embarrass anyone.

JONES

No, of course not. You just told the papers we can't tell one boy from another as a compliment for the months we spent working on your case. Are you trying to make fools out of us? Is that it? Do you enjoy this?

CHRISTINE

No, of course not. I had to get your attention, I had to make you understand...he's not my son.

He circles, closing in on her. She becomes aware that the door is open, and he's doing this for the benefit of anyone who might be listening in.

JONES

You know what your problem is? You want to shirk your responsibilities as a mother. You enjoyed being a free woman, didn't you? Enjoyed not having to worry about a young son. You could do what you wanted, go where you wanted, see anyone you wanted. But then we found your son. Brought him back. And now he's an inconvenience. That's why you cooked up this whole scheme, to try and throw him to the state, let the state raise him for you.

CHRISTINE

That's not true!

JONES

No? Even the boy says he's your son. Why would he do that? How would he know to do that?

CHRISTINE

I don't know! All I know is that he's lying!

JONES

Maybe so. Maybe he is a liar. But that's how he's been trained, isn't it? Lying was born in both of you. You're a liar and a troublemaker and if you ask me you've got no business walking the streets of Los Angeles.

CHRISTINE

Just a minute --

JONES

Because either you know you're lying, or you're not capable of knowing if you're lying or telling the truth. So which is it, Mrs. Collins? Are you a derelict mother? Or just nuts? Because from where I sit, those are the only options.

CHRISTINE

I'm not going to sit here and take this --

Jones stands between her and the door.

JONES

You want to bring in experts?
Doctors? Well, I can do that too.
(calling OS)
Matron?

The door opens, and a POLICE MATRON enters. He looks back to Christine, his voice low, his anger replaced by cool determination. This scene is about to take an abrupt change.

JONES

Mrs. Collins...do you still insist
that the boy out there is not your
son?

CHRISTINE

Yes.

He nods to the matron, who moves to restrain her.

CHRISTINE

Wait...what are you doing?

The Matron cuffs Christine's hands behind her back.

MATRON

Please don't struggle, ma'am. You'll
only hurt yourself.

A CLICK, and the handcuffs are in place.

JONES

(to the matron)

You are to convey the prisoner to
the Los Angeles County General
Hospital Psychopathic Ward.

CHRISTINE

No...wait, you can't --

JONES

(still to matron)

Make the following entry in the
booking department: Defendant states
she has been deceived by police and
others, and that they have given
her a boy and tried to make her
think it is her son when she says
it is not.

EXT. REAR OF POLICE STATION (MONTAGE)

Christine is led, in handcuffs, into a waiting police van.
(VO has been taken verbatim from the police report.)

JONES (V.O.)

Mrs. Collins has been known to us since about March 10, 1928, when she reported her nine-year-old son Walter missing.

INT. VAN

A stunned and dazed Christine rides in the back of the van

JONES (V.O.)

The boy was gone until July, 1928. Since his return, she has complained that he is still missing, and has made repeated requests that he be found, saying, "This is not my Walter," even though positive identification has been established.

EXT. LA COUNTY GENERAL HOSPITAL - DAY

The police van enters the hospital at 1200 North State Street.

INT. LA COUNTY GENERAL HOSPITAL - RECEIVING AREA - DAY

A sterile, dreary, white-on-white place where in the background, we can HEAR the sounds of the insane crying out. The matron leads a stunned Christine to the front desk.

JONES (V.O.)

She suffers from paranoia, delusions of persecution, and dislocation from reality. She may be a threat to herself or others. We recommend that she be conveyed to the psychopathic ward for treatment and observation until her senses can be restored.

The matron stops before the desk. The NURSE barely looks up.

MATRON

Got another code twelve.

NURSE

Name?

MATRON

Collins. Christine.

CHRISTINE

Wait...please, this is a mistake.

NURSE

(to matron)

Certifying officer?

MATRON

Captain J. J. Jones, Lincoln Heights
division.

CHRISTINE

(forced calm)

Please...you have to listen to me.
The police are doing this to punish
me. They tried to force this boy
on me and tell me he was my son,
but it wasn't my son, and now they
say I'm crazy --

She stops, noting the looks exchanged between the nurse and
the matron. Her story sounds insane, even to her. She begins
to realize the depth of her predicament.

CHRISTINE

Oh, god...oh god, please, no....

NURSE

If you continue to struggle I'll
have to put you in a straitjacket.
Do you want that?
(she shakes head)
Good. Then behave yourself.
(to orderlies)
Code twelve.

The matron turns Christine over to two large male ORDERLIES,
who take her by the arms and lead her into the psycho ward.

CHRISTINE

No, please, you have to listen to
me...wait...please!

They force-march her down the hall, the screams of the insane
growing louder, falling deeper into the nightmare.

INT. HOSPITAL - EXAMINING ROOM

Christine is ushered into the room by a NURSE.

NURSE

Take off your clothes.

CHRISTINE

Why?

NURSE

Physical examination, body cavity
search and de-lousing. Required
for all new patients.

The nurse begins putting on a pair of rubber gloves.

CHRISTINE

That's not necessary --

NURSE

You can remove your clothes yourself,
or I can have the orderlies do it
for you. Which do you prefer?

Reluctantly, Christine begins to remove her clothes.

INT. SHOWER ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

ON CHRISTINE'S FACE as she stands in a spray of water and disinfectant, some coming from the showerhead above, some from a hose sprayed on her by the Nurse in BG. Christine's eyes are closed, trying to shut out the sense of violation.

NURSE

Spread your legs.
(a beat)
Wider.

Biting her lip, Christine complies.

INT. HALL - LATER

Wet hair plastered to her face, dressed in a hospital gown, Christine is led down a long hall by the Nurse. As she passes the closed doors, we HEAR women weeping, talking to themselves, crying out, screaming, beating on the walls. Fingers poke through narrow viewing slits in the doors.

The Nurse pulls out a key-ring and unlocks one of the doors.

NURSE

Inside.

Christine enters --

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Bare, forbidding, four white walls and a narrow slit of a window. It's a two-person room. Sitting on the other bed is another PATIENT.

NURSE

This is your room. The doctor's
left for the day. He'll see you in
the morning.

CHRISTINE

The morning? But...wait, I've got
to talk to someone in authority --

NURSE

Sorry.

PATIENT

My room...no, no...this is...this
is MY room....

CHRISTINE

Then if I could just use the phone.

NURSE

Phone privileges are earned by good
behavior. You're not allowed
newspapers, magazines, radio, books
or sharp objects. This is for your
own good.

The Nurse exits, closing and locking the door.

CHRISTINE

Wait...please! There's been a
terrible mistake!

Nothing. She's alone with the other Patient, who doesn't
much like the noise and disturbance.

PATIENT

My room. My room. They SAID it
was MY ROOM!

CHRISTINE

I'm sorry, I --

PATIENT

MY ROOM! MY ROOM! MY ROOM! MY
ROOM!

She starts SCREAMING. Christine covers her ears.

EXT. HOSPITAL - CONTINUOUS

We slowly PULL AWAY from the narrow window, and the sound of
screaming, into the late afternoon rain and growing darkness.

CUT TO:

EXT. OLD ROAD - EARLY EVENING

A lone truck sits beside the road, hood open, steam coming
from the radiator.

GORDON NORTHCOTT, thirties, thin and angular, finishes working
on the car as a police car approaches. The detective we saw
earlier, Ybarra, is inside. He rolls down the window.

YBARRA

Problem?

GORDON

Overheated, that's all. She'll be fine in a bit.

YBARRA

Listen, could you give me a hand? I'm trying to find a place called the Northcott Ranch, up by Wineville.

As he answers, Gordon moves casually to the back of the open truck to get a rag to wipe his hands. There is a GUN on the floor of the trunk. Gordon picks it up inside the rag.

GORDON

Northcott Ranch...oh yeah. You're almost there. Follow this west for about two, three miles. Then the next right. That'll bring you right to it. Something going on?

YBARRA

Just looking into a juvenile matter. Thanks for the help.

Ybarra drives away. As soon as he's out of sight, Gordon slams the hood, runs to the driver's side and starts the truck, still steaming. He drives off as fast as he can.

EXT. NORTHCOTT RANCH - EVENING

A long, low house, stonework and brick and wood, behind a large open area cluttered with junked cars. At the far end of the open area is a chicken coop, about fifteen feet long. Ybarra drives up in front of the house, gets out, looks around.

YBARRA

Hello?

ANOTHER ANGLE - POV SHOT

Someone is watching as Ybarra moves toward the main house.

YBARRA

Anybody home?

BACK TO SCENE

Ybarra glances off to a rustling SOUND, and follows it to

EXT. CHICKEN COOP

A few chickens inside, held back by wire. An ax is nearby, its stained edge buried in an old wooden stump. A corner of the coop seems to have come down and been crudely repaired.

BACK TO SCENE

As suddenly someone runs across the dirt yard into the house, SLAMMING the door. Ybarra runs to the porch, tries the door. Locked from the inside. He pounds on the door.

YBARRA

This is the police. I have a warrant
for a minor named Sanford Clark.
Open the door and stand aside.

No reply. He braces himself and KICKS open the door.

INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN

The door BANGS against the wall. Flies buzz around the place. The kitchen is in shadows, but there's no question it's a mess. Ybarra moves cautiously through the kitchen. No sound except the wood creaking beneath his feet as he enters

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Old, musty, shadowed. The ticking of an old grandfather clock. There's no one in sight. Ybarra moves down the hall, glances into two adjoining rooms. Nothing. He continues into

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Curtains drawn, dark, cocooned against the outside world. Ybarra makes a circuit of the room, then STOPS at a creak of wood from a CLOSET. He moves toward it. Pauses. Reaches for the doorknob...as suddenly a clock CHIMES loudly and the closet explodes outward and --

-- SANFORD CLARK, 15, runs out. He slams into Ybarra, knocking him down. They go down in a tumble of limbs, wrestling on the floor as Sanford tries to escape.

YBARRA

Stop it! Stop it or I'll push your
face through the floor!

Breathing hard, Sanford finally stops struggling. Ybarra cuffs Sanford's hands behind his back.

YBARRA

On your feet.

Sanford stands, and as Ybarra leads him out, we PAN TO a mantle and a photo that shows Sanford Clark and a man we recognize as the one we saw by the road earlier: Gordon Northcott.

INT. YBARRA'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Ybarra locks Sanford in the car, then climbs in the driver's side. He checks a cut on his face in the rear-view mirror.

YBARRA

Jesus...what the hell's wrong with you? Don't you know assaulting a cop is against the law?

SANFORD

What difference does it make now?

YBARRA

We're just sending you back to Canada, son, it isn't the end of the world.

SANFORD

What?

YBARRA

You can't just stay in the U.S. as long as you want, pal. We've got a orders to send you back home, and --

Suddenly Sanford starts laughing. It's a nearly hysterical laugh, half fear and half relief...Ybarra isn't there for the reasons he thought. Ybarra is puzzled by his reaction.

YBARRA

Didn't know Canada was that funny.

Ybarra puts the car into gear and drives off.

EXT. ST. PAUL'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - NIGHT

Enough to ESTABLISH, then:

INT. ST. PAUL'S - CONTINUOUS

Gustav Briegleb sits behind the microphone, waiting to go on the air. He looks at the clock. 7:59. Glances to an AIDE.

BRIEGLER

No word from Mrs. Collins?
(aide shakes head)
Get on down to her house, make sure she's all right. If she's not there, call the LAPD, see what they know.

The aide hurries off as Briegleb turns back to the microphone and touches a switch. The ON THE AIR lamp glows to life.

BRIEGLER

This is Pastor Gustav A. Briegleb of St. Paul's Presbyterian Church, bringing you the Lord's word on radio KGF. Good evening.

INT. HOSPITAL - MENTAL WARD - SAME TIME

Christine is in bed, wide awake, the sounds of the asylum somewhat lessened now. Her face is dimly lit by moonlight.

BRIEGLER (V.O.)

I had hoped to have a guest with us tonight, but apparently she has been delayed. Since she can't be here to tell you what she told the press this afternoon, I'll fill in the best I can. I'm going to tell you what happened, and I'm going to keep telling you right here, every night...until someone does something about it.

On her face, we go to

INT. UNION STATION - TICKET BOOTH - NIGHT

Gordon Northcott makes his way to the ticket booth.

GORDON

I'd like a ticket to Canada. Alberta or Vancouver, whatever's leaving tonight.

TICKET VENDER

Don't have anything going that far tonight. Best I can do is put you on a train for Seattle. From there you can transfer to one of the locals or drive across the border.

GORDON

That'll be fine.

TICKET VENDER

Round-trip?

GORDON

One way.

The vender moves away to pull the ticket. Gordon glances at a cop heading his way. Stiffens. The cop continues past him. Gordon relaxes as the vender slides the ticket across.

TICKET VENDER

That'll be fifteen dollars.

Gordon pays for the ticket and heads toward the boarding gates.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HOSPITAL - MORNING

Just enough to establish the transition.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING

Christine is on top of the bed, eyes open, not having slept all night. She's staring at the woman on the next cot. The woman is staring back at her. The second-hand on a clock behind protective chicken-wire passes 8:00 and a loud BELL goes off, announcing the start of the day.

We hear doors being unlocked up and down the hall. Christine stands, pulls her hair back, and catches her reflection in the window: pale, drawn, smudged, and in a hospital gown... looking like someone who actually belongs in this place.

The door opens and she steps into the hall as a NURSE passes.

CHRISTINE

Can I see the doctor? Or someone
in charge --

NURSE

Breakfast is half an hour.

CHRISTINE

But I --

NURSE

Down the hall. The doctor will
call for you when he's ready.

(beat)

Go or stay, either way I lock the
door.

Christine doesn't want to stay, so she moves off.

INT. HOSPITAL - MENTAL WARD - DINING AREA - MORNING

Christine and the other patients sit at long tables. A few talk in quiet whispers, but most eat silently, staring vacantly ahead. Some have scars showing lobotomies or electro-convulsive (shock) therapy. It's a scary bunch. Christine isn't eating.

Another female patient, CAROL DEXTER, thirties, watches Christine then slides closer. A BEAT, then:

CAROL DEXTER

You should eat. Eating is normal.
You got to do everything you can to
look normal. That's the only chance
you've got. Besides, you'll need
the strength.

Christine is startled by the level-headedness of the advice from someone she assumed was probably nuts. Reluctantly, she begins eating the cold-looking oatmeal.

CAROL DEXTER

My name's Carol Dexter. What's yours?

CHRISTINE

Christine. Christine Collins.

Christine reacts to the taste of the food, which is awful.

CAROL DEXTER

Finish it all. I know it's hard, but you have to try. Lunch isn't as bad. Close, but not as --

CHRISTINE

I won't be here that long. As soon as I can talk to a doctor, they'll realize there's been a terrible mistake and --

CAROL DEXTER

Yeah, that always works.

(beat, quieter)

I heard them talking. You're here on a code twelve, police action. The doctors, the staff, they figure that if the police sent you here, there must be a good reason for it.

CHRISTINE

Then I'll just have to prove that I'm not insane.

CAROL DEXTER

Yeah? How? The more you try to act sane, the crazier you start to look. If you smile too much, you're delusional or stifling hysteria. If you don't smile, you're depressed. If you're neutral you're emotionally withdrawn and potentially catatonic.

CHRISTINE

You seem to have given this a great deal of thought.

CAROL DEXTER

I have. Don't you get it? You're code twelve. So am I. We're here for the same reason.

(beat)

We pissed off the cops.

Christine sits back heavily, starting to understand the world more than she ever wanted to.

CAROL DEXTER

What, you thought you were the only one?

(points os)

The lady over there was married to a cop who kept beating her up. When she tried to tell somebody, they sent her here. And that one? The police beat the crap out of her brother, broke both his arms. When she complained to the papers, they picked her up and...

CHRISTINE

What about you?

CAROL DEXTER

I...work nights.

(Chris doesn't get it)

I mean, I work nights. Downtown. In some of the clubs. You know.

It gets through. Hooker. Christine nods.

CAROL DEXTER

This one client started hitting me, and he wouldn't stop. So I filed a complaint. Turns out he was a cop. Next thing I know, I'm here.

CHRISTINE

But how can they --

CAROL DEXTER

You're kidding right? Hey, everybody knows women are fragile, right? They're all emotions, no logic, nothin' goin' on upstairs. And sometimes, like when they say something that's a little, y'know, inconvenient...they just go fucking nuts, pardon my French. If we're insane, nobody has to listen to us. I mean, who are you going to believe, some crazy woman trying to destroy the integrity of the force, or a police officer? Then once they get us in here, we either learn to behave, and shut up, or --

(beat)

Or you don't go home...or you go home like that.

She nods to an older woman whose upper temples are marred by surgical scars. Lobotomized. Christine turns away.

CAROL DEXTER

Better finish up your oatmeal.
Want to look sane for the doctors.
Then I want to hear what they nailed
you for.

Numb with horror, Christine forces down the oatmeal.

INT. JUVENILE DETENTION HALL - DAY

Sanford Clark sits near several other juveniles being held. Pensive, nervous, he watches a kid absently tapping a ruler against his knees.

FEATURE the ruler. Rising. Falling. Tapping. Then back --
-- on Sanford as we hear it continuing to tap OS. PUSH IN ON his face. Then, suddenly --

FLASHBACK

-- on a HATCHET, rising and falling in tune with the ruler tapping. There's blood on the hatchet.

Gordon Northcott's eyes glitter insanely as he brings the hatchet down again and just as it comes right AT US we flash --

BACK TO SCENE

As Sanford CRIES OUT with the memory. We PULL BACK to see the others in the room staring at him. He turns away, won't meet their gaze. Something's terribly wrong.

Just then, an ADMINISTRATOR comes in.

ADMINISTRATOR

Clark...Sanford Clark.

Sanford rises, goes to the Administrator.

ADMINISTRATOR

Paperwork's come through. You'll be deported back to Canada day after tomorrow. The police there will to decide what to do with you next. I hope your stay here has convinced you not to try crossing the border illegally in future.

He starts to turn and walk away when:

SANFORD

Wait, I...I want to talk to the officer who brought me in.

ADMINISTRATOR

I'm sure he has far more important things to do than --

SANFORD

Please. It's important.

The Administrator senses that he's sincere, and troubled.

ADMINISTRATOR

He's off-duty until tomorrow, but... I'll see what I can do. No promises.

And with that, the administrator heads away.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - AFTERNOON

Gordon Northcott is hitch-hiking by the side of the road. A truck approaches, passes him...then slows and stops. Gordon runs up to the truck as the DRIVER leans out.

DRIVER

How far you going?

GORDON

Vancouver.

DRIVER

Hop in.

Gordon climbs into the truck and goes to shove his bag under the seat...when something metallic bangs underneath. He lifts out a short length of metal pipe.

DRIVER

Don't worry about that, pal. Just a little insurance. A couple of guys tried to hijack my truck a few years ago so they could run booze over the border. You can't be too safe, you know?

GORDON

Yeah, I surely do.

Gordon smiles, moves as if to hand the pipe back...and suddenly SLAMS it DOWN on the Driver's head...over and over and over. Blood splatters his face. Breathing hard, Gordon shoves the Driver out of the truck into the undergrowth then drives off.

INT. HOSPITAL - MENTAL WARD - HALLWAY - DAY

Wearing a bandage on one arm, Christine is escorted down the hall by one of the nurses. She's led into --

INT. HOSPITAL - STEELE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

-- where DOCTOR JONATHAN STEELE stands as Christine enters. He's in his fifties, heavy-set, serious.

STEELE

Mrs. Collins...Dr. Jonathan Steele.
Please, have a seat.

The nurse leaves. Christine notes that there are three chairs in a row. Could be a test. She sits in the middle chair. Sits as straight as she can. Trying to look sane.

STEELE

I hope your stay has been comfortable so far.

CHRISTINE

Fine. Thank you.

STEELE

Really? I'd think it would be quite difficult at first.

CHRISTINE

(catching herself)
Well, it was. Difficult, I mean.
But comfortable.

He makes a note of this. She grimaces. This isn't going well. He motions to the bandage on her arm.

STEELE

I see they took a blood test.

CHRISTINE

Wasserman Test. To check for syphilis. Apparently it can affect the mind.

STEELE

The idea that someone thinks you should be checked for syphilis...did that upset you?

CHRISTINE

No. Not at all. I'm sure it's... standard procedure.

She smiles a forced smile. Trying to appear level-headed.

STEELE

Yes. Exactly. Standard procedure.
We have to cover all bases, and --

CHRISTINE

(covering her bases)

But...at the same time...I imagine
that it would be...would probably
be upsetting to...some people that
someone else might...suspect that
of them.

(beat)

However inappropriate that might
be.

She flashes another wan smile. He makes another note, picks
up the report on his desk, glances it over.

STEELE

According to your file, you believe
the police have substituted a fake
boy for your son. Is that true?

CHRISTINE

I didn't say they substituted a fake
boy, just...not the right boy.

(beat)

They brought back the wrong boy.
Not my son. He's still missing.

He starts pulling out papers from his file.

STEELE

That's strange...you see, I have
here a newspaper article with a
photo of you at the train station,
welcoming your son home. That is
you in the photo, isn't it?

CHRISTINE

Yes.

STEELE

So at first he was your son, but
now he's not your son.

(beat)

Has this been going on for a long
time? People...changing, becoming
something other than what they are?

CHRISTINE

People don't change, doctor.

STEELE

You don't think people change?

CHRISTINE

That's not what I --

STEELE

And the police...they're not out to persecute you?

CHRISTINE

No. Of course not.

STEELE

The police are here to protect us.

CHRISTINE

That's right.

He nods. She's trying to say what she thinks he wants to hear. It's a chess match that ends with:

STEELE

That's odd, because according to the head nurse, when you were admitted you accused the police of conspiring to do this deliberately, to punish you. So either she and the interns are also conspiring against you...or you're changing your story.

(beat)

Do you often have trouble telling reality from fantasy, Mrs. Collins?

He sits back. Christine's face tells the story.

INT. JUVENILE DETENTION HALL - DAY

It's raining. The Administrator enters with Detective Ybarra.

ADMINISTRATOR

I'm sorry to bring you out in this weather, detective, but the boy has been quite insistent.

YBARRA

It's all right, I'll just see what he has to say so I can go home and get dry. Where is he?

ADMINISTRATOR

Room seven.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A single table, two chairs. Sanford sits quietly, nervously, as Ybarra hangs his wet coat up on a hook.

YBARRA

It's raining cats, dogs and democrats
out there, so this better be worth
it.

He sits across the table from Sanford, lights up a cigarette.
Sanford's mouth works for a moment, but nothing comes out.

YBARRA

Well?

SANFORD

Look, I -- this isn't easy, okay?

YBARRA

Nothing is.

A long BEAT. Sanford composes himself, begins:

SANFORD

My cousin's Gordon Northcott. He
owns the ranch where you found me.
He let me live there in exchange
for watching the place when he was
gone, doing chores, stuff like that.
Said I could stay on as long as I
wanted to. I figured that also
meant I could leave whenever I wanted
to, but he wouldn't let me.

YBARRA

Are you saying he held you prisoner?
(sanford nods)
Bull. When I got to the ranch you
were running around free as a
jaybird. Could've left any time
you wanted. So what's this, some
kind of story to cover why you were
in the country illegally?

SANFORD

No...no, it's nothing like that.

YBARRA

Because I don't have time for --

SANFORD

Listen to me, please. He said --

YBARRA

What? What did he --

SANFORD

He said that if I tried to leave,
he'd kill me!

(more)

SANFORD (Cont'd)

You don't understand, you don't
know what he's like, what he...what
we did...what he made me do.

Sanford is in tears by now. Ybarra realizes that there's
something real going on here, and backs off.

YBARRA

Okay, lets start at the beginning.
What did he make you do?

Sanford closes his eyes. Takes a long beat. Finally....

SANFORD

Him and me...me and Gordon, we...
(beat, softly)
...we killed some kids.

Ybarra freezes, the cigarette not moving in his hand.

SANFORD

I didn't mean to, I swear...he made
me help him, said if I didn't he'd
kill me, too. Please, you gotta
help me...I'm scared...I don't want
to go to Hell for killing kids.

YBARRA

What kids?

SANFORD

I don't know...I never knew their
names.

YBARRA

How many kids?

SANFORD

All together?

He thinks about it for a moment. The fact that he has to add
them all up is almost as chilling as what follows next.

SANFORD

About...twenty, I guess.

YBARRA

You're lying.

SANFORD

No, it's true, I swear!

YBARRA

Twenty kids.

SANFORD

Yeah...thereabouts...I kinda stopped counting after a while, and Gordon said one or two might've gotten away, but --

YBARRA

Nobody can just up and kill twenty kids --

SANFORD

We did...yeah, we did that....

YBARRA

How?

Sanford looks off, pauses, then, softly and slowly....

SANFORD

Most times we'd bring back just one or two...sometimes as many as three.

EXT. NORTHCOTT RANCH - FLASHBACK - DAY

Gordon is at his truck, the same one we saw earlier, checking the engine as Sanford looks on nervously.

SANFORD (V.O.)

I always knew when he was getting ready 'cause he'd go through the car and clean it up, make sure the tires were good, the engine...he was always afraid something'd break down and we'd be caught.

Gordon slams the hood shut, looks to Sanford. Smiles.

GORDON

Time to go.

EXT. STREET - DAY

A kid is walking down the street, playing idly, by himself, as the truck starts to approach from behind.

SANFORD (V.O.)

We'd go a different direction every time, never hit the same part of town twice. Sometimes we'd go for hours, just driving around, until we found somebody.

The truck comes beside the kid and Gordon leans out the window.

SANFORD (V.O.)

He'd use all kinds of different stories. Sometimes he'd say he had free tickets for the circus, or he was looking for a lost dog...that one worked real good. Other days --

GORDON

There you are, we've been looking for you like mad.

FLASH-IMAGE: to a different kid, a different street.

KID

You have?

GORDON

Sure thing. Your folks, they got in an accident. They sent us to find you. They're hurt real bad. The police took 'em to the hospital, but they didn't have time to come find you, so we said we'd do it. Now come on, hurry...we gotta get to the hospital, see your folks.

FLASH-IMAGE: Yet another kid, who hesitates, looks to Sanford.

SANFORD (V.O.)

A lot of kids won't get in a car alone with a stranger, but when he's got a kid there with him, that made it easier.

(beat)

They'd look to me, and figure if I was safe, they would be too. That's why he needed me, see?

SANFORD

It's okay. Come on in.

FLASH-IMAGE: Back to the first kid, who takes one last BEAT, then gets into the car.

SANFORD (V.O.)

Every time they got in the truck, it was like I wanted to die.

GORDON

Good boy! Now hold on, it's a long drive and we gotta fly.

And the truck heads off.

SANFORD (V.O.)

Then, as soon as we got back to the ranch...they went in the coop.

EXT. NORTHCOTT RANCH - CHICKEN COOP - NIGHT

The boy, crying, is tossed into the chicken coop. There are two other boys there, also crying and screaming.

SANFORD (V.O.)

Some days he'd do 'em right off.
Other days, he'd wait, pick up a few more, keep 'em in the coop until he had like four or five, 'cause --
(beat)
-- 'cause he liked to hear 'em scream all at once. Like they were some kinda chorus. And then....

QUICK IMAGES

Gordon, eyes insane with blood lust, stumbles toward the coop.

SANFORD (V.O.)

...and then....

The kids, screaming.

Sanford looking on, afraid to move, the single overhead light in the coop swinging wildly.

Gordon grabbing an ax. Raising it.

On Sanford's eyes, terrified.

The ax begins to fall in SLOW MOTION and --

BACK TO SCENE

-- as the long ash at the end of Ybarra's cigarette, TUMBLES to the floor in SLOW MOTION, end over end, SHATTERING when it hits the floor and bringing us back to full speed.

SANFORD

Sometimes...sometimes he'd leave one or two of 'em alive...barely anyway...and tell me...finish 'em. Finish 'em...or I'll finish you.
(beat)
And I did...I did...oh god...oh, sweet Jesus...I killed 'em...I killed 'em...I killed 'em....

Then: silence, except for Sanford's sobbing. Ybarra realizes he hasn't been breathing. He tries to find his voice.

YBARRA

These...uhm...these kids...do you think...if you saw them again, do you think you'd recognize them?

(sanford nods)

Just a second.

He goes to his coat and pulls out a batch of photos of missing kids bound with a rubber band. Hands it to Sanford.

YBARRA

I haven't updated these in a while, but still, it should be....

(beat)

Just go through...and if you see any faces you recognize, put it on the table.

Sanford takes the photos. Starts going through them.

A photo, a face, goes down on the table. Then another. A third. With each photo slapped down the SLAP gets louder, BOOMING at us. Another photo. Another. Row after row. He's crying, sobbing, but still putting down photos.

Then he SLAMS down the last one and half-falls, half-stumbles out of his chair, sobbing...goes to the corner of the room and slides down the wall until he's sitting in a fetal position, hands covering his face. Sobbing uncontrollably.

Numb, Ybarra goes to the table, picks up a photo. Looks at it. Turns it over to the name, then picks up another. Then a third. When he picks up the fourth photo and turns it over, he stops, staring at it.

YBARRA

...shit....

The name on the back of the photo is **WALTER COLLINS**.

JONES (V.O.)

He's lying.

INT. JONES' OFFICE - DAY

Jones is on the phone, pissed and getting more pissed by the moment. INTERCUT between Jones and Ybarra in juvenile hall during the conversation.

JONES

Have you gone soft in the head, Les?

YBARRA

Sir, I --

JONES

He's playing you! He knows he's in trouble, so he's come up with some cock and bull story about how he was forced to stay in the country --

YBARRA

With all due respect, sir, I don't think so. You didn't see him, the kid's scared half out of his mind --

JONES

He picked the Collins kid! We found him, remember? Haven't you been reading the papers?

(beat)

Or maybe you have, is that it?

He backhands a newspaper on his desk, headlined DISTRAUGHT MOTHER CLAIMS POLICE RETURNED WRONG CHILD.

YBARRA

Sir, if you'd just listen --

Just then a secretary sticks her head in the doorway.

SECRETARY

I'm sorry, captain, but he's here again...that reverend, Briegleb. He's asking about Christine Collins.

JONES

Tell the sonofabitch to get the hell off police property before I have him arrested for disturbing the peace.

SECRETARY

I tried. He said he's not leaving... him, or his friends.

There's a disturbance off-screen and she goes to deal with it as Jones gets further wound up to ninety.

JONES

What the hell...?

He's drawn to the window by the sound of voices. He peeks through the slats. Several dozen placard-carrying parishioners and members of the Women's Temperance League are standing in the street, beating drums and calling Christine's name.

JONES

Jesus jumped down....

He realizes he's still on the phone.

JONES

Ybarra? Listen. You're not to do anything except come back here.

YBARRA

Sir, department policy requires that all allegations of homicide have to be investigated. And these are kids, for chrissakes --

JONES

Departmental policy is what I say it is, you got that? Now I'm ordering you to get your ass back here with that kid, you got that? You bring him here and you talk to no one, got it? Nobody!

He slams the phone down. CUT BACK TO --

-- Ybarra in juvenile hall, agonizing over this. Finally, his voice resigned, he looks into the interrogation room.

YBARRA

All right, let's go.

INT. POLICE STATION - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Jones has come out into the hall, where Briegleb, several supporters and a handful of reporters are standing at the receiving officer's desk. They approach quickly.

BRIEGLER

Are you Captain Jones?

JONES

I am.

BRIEGLER

What the hell have you done with Christine Collins? Don't try and lie your way out of it. I talked to several neighbors who saw her being driven off in a police car.

JONES

Mrs. Collins has been placed in protective custody following a mental breakdown.

BRIEGLER

A what?!

JONES

Her statements and behavior have been found to be consistent with a delusional state of mind that could make her a danger to herself or others. In the public interest, we are looking after her son while she gets the help she clearly needs.

BRIEGLER

Where?

JONES

Sorry, we're withholding that information to respect the privacy of the family. But I can assure you that she's getting the best treatment available. That's all.

He heads back the way he came as the others shout questions after him, held back by other police officers.

INT. HOSPITAL - MENTAL WARD - DAY ROOM - AFTERNOON

Patients are being corralled into a line that extends to a barred window where a nurse is dispensing pills.

VOICE ON PA

Line-up for medication. Line up for medication....

Christine is nudged forward by an orderly, Carol beside her.

ORDERLY

Go on. Move up.

CHRISTINE

What for?

ORDERLY

Medication.

CHRISTINE

What kind of medication?

ORDERLY

The kind that's good for you. Help you relax.

She's nudged to the window, where a nurse hands out a pill and water.

CHRISTINE

I don't want to relax...I'm fine, and I won't take something unless I know what it is!

NURSE

Orderly --

CHRISTINE

Just listen --

NURSE

-- we can force-feed it to you if
that's what you want.

Christine sees Dr. Steele, breaks away and rushes to him.

CHRISTINE

Doctor...Doctor Steele --

STEELE

I heard.

CHRISTINE

I don't know what's going on, but
I'm not taking anything until --

STEELE

I understand. Come with me.

He moves off into an adjoining room. Carol Dexter, next in line, takes her pill...but keeps an eye on Christine.

INT. HOSPITAL - STEELE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

He goes to his desk as she stands in the doorway.

CHRISTINE

I don't have anything wrong with me
that I should have to take
medication.

STEELE

There's nothing wrong with you.

CHRISTINE

That's right.

STEELE

You're fine.

CHRISTINE

Yes.

He pulls a typed letter out of his desk, slides it across.

STEELE

Then you shouldn't have any trouble
signing this.

She picks it up, reads as he continues:

STEELE

By signing, you certify that you were wrong when you stated the boy returned by the police was not your son. It further stipulates that the police acted properly in sending you here for observation and absolves them of all responsibility for --

CHRISTINE

I won't sign it.

STEELE

Then your condition is not improved.
(beat)
Sign it, and you can be out of here first thing tomorrow.

CHRISTINE

I won't sign it!

She tears up the sheet of paper.

CHRISTINE

I was not wrong! That boy is not my son! And I am not going to stop telling the truth about this! And you're not going to stop me, and the police aren't going to stop me --

STEELE

Mrs. Collins, you're becoming agitated.

CHRISTINE

-- I will tear down the walls of this place with my bare hands if I have to, but one way or another --

STEELE

Orderly!

An orderly appears in the doorway.

STEELE

The patient is disturbed, hyperactive and is threatening the staff. See to it she is properly sedated.

CHRISTINE

No!

She BURSTS past the orderly, running into

INT. HOSPITAL - MENTAL WARD - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

running, pursued by orderlies, two more blocking her way.

CHRISTINE

No, I won't let you! Someone,
please, help me!

They TACKLE her and bring her down. She struggles as the others look on, and you can see in their eyes that they don't like what they're seeing, there's rage --

-- and a furious Carol Dexter comes to her aid. She JUMPS into the struggle. Biting. Kicking. Scratching.

Steele comes on the run just as the orderlies peel Carol off the fight, spinning her around to face Steele, who SLAPS her.

STEELE

Stay out of this! This is none of
your business!
(to the rest)
This is police business! You'll
stay out of it if you know what's
good for you!

He looks to Carol, Christine restrained behind them.

STEELE

You'd think you had enough trouble
with the law just being a whore,
wouldn't you?

He smiles. She gets a hand free and SLUGS him, hard, a nail slicing his cheek. He touches his face. It comes back with blood. Then he looks to the orderly.

STEELE

Attacking a staff member. Room
eighteen. Electro-convulsive
therapy.

The orderly hauls Carol off, kicking and screaming, as Christine is moved toward the nurse's station.

CHRISTINE

Carol! No, leave her alone! What're
you --

They force a pill in her mouth, following with water as they hold her nose, forcing her to swallow. She chokes, swallows. They march her down the hall as Steele returns to his office.

CHRISTINE

Carol....!

INT. ROOM EIGHTEEN - CONTINUOUS

The electro-shock room. Carol struggles against the orderlies who force her down onto the gurney. A nurse behind her applies conductor jelly to her temples as another orderly shoves a rubber bite-guard into her mouth.

Then a pair of metal pincers, points covered in cloth, are pressed against her temples. A button is pushed...and her body goes RIGID as a jolt of electricity blasts through her body. (This was, remember, fairly common practice for violent behavior in the 1920s.)

Then she passes out, her eyes rolling up in her head.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Christine is peering out the narrow slot in her door as she sees Carol being wheeled down the hall and put into her bed. Christine, sobbing, collapses slowly to the floor, caught in a nightmare and unable to wake up.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Detective Ybarra is sitting at his desk, not happy about a lot of his life at this moment. He's turning over the photos of the missing kids identified by Sanford Clark and arranging them on his desk the way you might arrange cards, playing solitaire. He looks up --

-- to see Sanford being led out of one of the holding areas, hands cuffed, clothes in his hands. Being transferred to a waiting bus. The two exchange a look. Ybarra looks away. Sanford continues toward the bus.

Finally, in agony, Ybarra can't take it any more. He rises, goes to the officer standing by the door to the bus.

YBARRA

It's all right, I'll take it from here.

OFFICER

But --

YBARRA

We need him for questioning. Come on....

He leads Sanford away, then stops two passing officers.

YBARRA

You two...you've just been
requisitioned for backup. I'll
explain on the way.

He hurries off. The officers follow, not sure what's up.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - EVENING

Christine sits beside Carol's bed. She's awake but dazed.
Christine dabs a wet cloth against her forehead.

CHRISTINE

You shouldn't have done that.

CAROL DEXTER

(with difficulty)

Wanted...to. Felt...good.

Carol takes her hand, holds it.

CAROL DEXTER

I lost...two babies...to back alley
doctors...no choice....

(beat)

Never had...the chance...to fight
for them. You do. Don't stop.

CHRISTINE

I won't...I won't.

CAROL DEXTER

Fuck them...and the horse...they
rode in on.

Christine manages a thin smile, despite her tears.

CHRISTINE

That's hardly appropriate language
for a lady, now is it?

CAROL DEXTER

Hell, yeah...there are times...that's
exactly the right thing to say.

CHRISTINE

And when's that?

CAROL DEXTER

When you've got...nothing left to
lose.

Christine touches her face, and we know she's heard this.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. NORTHCOTT RANCH - EVENING

Two squad cars pull up to the ranch. Ybarra and the other officers get out, guns up, not knowing if Gordon is still there or not.

SUPERIMPOSE: SEPTEMBER 12, 1928

They move quickly through the area, checking the house. Everything's dark, silent. One officer runs into the house, there's a long pause...then he pokes his head out again.

OFFICER

All clear.

Ybarra goes back to the car, opens the door. Sanford emerges.

YBARRA

All right. Show me.

Sanford hesitates, then starts toward a nearby barn.

INT. BARN - CONTINUOUS

He slides the door open and walks to the far end. The dirt here is a strange white-yellow color. Ybarra follows, still keeping a wary eye out for trouble. He looks down at where Sanford has stopped. Several bags marked LYE are nearby.

YBARRA

This it? You're sure?

Sanford nods. Ybarra edges toward a shovel, hands it to him.

YBARRA

Dig.

(off sanford's look)

You put 'em in the ground, you can take 'em out of the ground. Go on.

Sanford takes the shovel and starts cutting out sections of dirt and lye, dust rising around them. Ybarra watches, pensively, as the other officers edge their way in. He's looking the other way when one of the officers reacts:

OFFICER

Holy god....

Ybarra glances back...to see a child's shoe being unearthed. And beside it...bones. And then...a skull.

YBARRA

Call it in...get the coroner and every officer in a twenty mile radius here inside the hour.

(more)

YBARRA (Cont'd)

Then put out an APB on Gordon Stewart
Northcott, the info is in my car.
Go on....

The officer races out of the barn as Ybarra looks to Sanford,
who is still digging, crying as he goes.

YBARRA

You can stop now, son.
(he doesn't)
You can stop now. It's over. We
can take it from here. It's over.

Sobbing, Sanford drops the shovel and collapses on the ground,
hands covering his face, crying in great, heaving sobs.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - MENTAL WARD - HALLWAY - MORNING

The patients are lined up outside their rooms for inspection.
Steele passes down them in review. Stops in front of
Christine, who looks exhausted, worn, pale, her eyes
bloodshot...but still defiant. He glances to the orderlies.

STEELE

Privacy, please.

The orderlies move all of the other patients away, except for
Christine, who shares a glance with Carol. Several other
orderlies remain. He glances at her chart in his hands.

STEELE

I see you've still been refusing
medication, requiring force-feeding.
I see they switched to a rubber
tube. I hear that can quite
uncomfortable.

She doesn't answer. Her eyes never leave his. He pulls
another copy of the letter out of the folder.

STEELE

Six days, Mrs. Collins, and no
progress. We may have to go to
more...strenuous therapies.
(beat)
Unless you're willing to prove you're
doing better...by signing this.

He holds it up in front of her. She focuses first on it,
then on him...and finally, her spine where it needs to be
even if the rest of her is in shambles, looks at him and says:

CHRISTINE

Fuck you...and the horse...you
rode in on.

He nods, shrugs, puts the letter back in the folder. Turns
to the orderlies.

STEELE

Room eighteen.

They GRAB her and start muscling her down the hall, Christine
kicking and screaming as they go. Steele continues out to

INT. HOSPITAL - RECEIVING AREA - MOMENTS LATER

where he comes through the double-barred door just as Gustav
Briegleb charges in the front door, carrying a newspaper.

BRIEGLER

I WANT TO TALK TO SOMEBODY IN CHARGE!
RIGHT NOW!

NURSE

Sir, please --

BRIEGLER

WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE!

Steele approaches.

STEELE

I'm head doctor on duty. What's
the problem?

BRIEGLER

You the doctor who's got Christine
Collins locked up in here?

Intercut with:

INT. ROOM EIGHTEEN - CONTINUOUS

They wheel Christine into the room, struggling, fighting
against the straps that pin her to the gurney.

INT. HOSPITAL - RECEIVING AREA - CONTINUOUS

Steele turns away from Briegleb, unconcerned.

STEELE

Sorry, we don't discuss our cases
with anyone other than family --

BRIEGLER

You'll damned well discuss this one
with me!

STEELE

Sir --

Briegleb THRUSTS the newspaper into Steele's hands.

BRIEGLER

Read it! Read it, damn you!

Steele unfolds the paper, looks at the headline, which we don't see. His reaction, though, is ominous and serious.

INT. ROOM EIGHTEEN - CONTINUOUS

The nurse behind Christine applies the conductor jell to her temples. She's fighting the best she can, but it's hopeless. The nurse picks up the electro-shock pincers. Places them on Christine's temples. Reaches for the button --

-- as suddenly the door opens, and a nurse steps in, stopping the process. The nurse goes to the one at the controls, whispers in her ear. The nurse then says something quietly to the orderly, who starts to undo the straps that hold Christine to the gurney.

NURSE

The doctor wants to see you.

They pull her up off the gurney.

INT. HOSPITAL - STEELE'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Christine is ushered inside, where Steele is waiting. He looks upset about something.

STEELE

Mrs. Collins.

She forces herself to stand straight, not easy given what she's just been through. He approaches.

STEELE

One last time. Are you, or are you not, prepared to sign that letter?

She looks up into his face, her resolve unshaken, her voice dry but firm for:

CHRISTINE

No.

He studies her for one last BEAT, then turns his back.

STEELE

You're free to go.

Christine takes a moment to process this...not sure if she heard this right, or if it's a trick.

CHRISTINE
...what?

STEELE
Your clothes are in the next room.
You can change there.

She hesitates a second, looks to the orderly, being careful in case this is a set-up.

CHRISTINE
Next door.

STEELE
That's right.
(to the orderly)
See to it.

The orderly nods. She takes one last look around, then gets the hell out of the room. Alone, Steele picks up the newspaper that had been laying face-down on his desk, looks at it, and shakes his head.

STEELE
Christ....

INT. HOSPITAL - MENTAL WARD - DAY ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Carol is there as Christine, now in her regular clothes, comes dashing in. Carol sees her, goes to her.

CAROL DEXTER
You're getting out?

CHRISTINE
I am out.

CAROL DEXTER
How --

CHRISTINE
I don't know...but I couldn't go
without saying goodbye --

CAROL DEXTER
Christine, don't be stupid, get out
of here fast in case they change
their mind.

CHRISTINE
I will...but I want you to know:
once I have my boy back, I'm coming
(more)

CHRISTINE (Cont'd)
back here...for you, and the others.
This is wrong, and we can stop it --

CAROL DEXTER
You are crazy.

CHRISTINE
Watch me.

They hug. Christine breaks the hug, and hurries away as Carol looks on, crying.

INT. HOSPITAL - RECEIVING AREA - MOMENTS LATER

Christine comes to the area where she was checked in. No one is looking at her. She passes the nurse's station and heads toward the door. Opens it. Fresh air comes in. Freedom. She steps out the front door as --

-- a moment later, Briegleb passes through the hallway with an admissions official, having not seen her.

BRIEGLER
You give me every piece of paper
you've got on this case, you hear
me? Every piece!

The official moves on, nervous, as Briegleb looks to the receiving nurse.

BRIEGLER
When does she come down?

Before she can answer, we jump out to

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Where Christine walks among the sidewalk traffic. Free. Vindicated. She starts to pass a news-stand, where a NEWS VENDOR is calling out headlines, peddling papers.

NEWS VENDOR
Hurricane hits West Palm Beach!
Babe Ruth hits 53rd home run!
Kids found murdered in Riverside!

The last line stops Christine...just a bad sense that grows as she turns to the news vendor, who keeps on going.

NEWS VENDOR
Biggest Crime in Los Angeles History!
(beat)
Collins Boy Assumed Dead on Ranch!

Christine's knees buckle as she hears this. She starts to go down as Briegleb runs toward her from the hospital.

REV. BRIEGLER
Mrs. Collins...Christine...!

CHRISTINE
No...god...no....

And she collapses into his arms, sobbing uncontrollably, as passers-by glance over at her...and continue walking.

REV. BRIEGLER
I'm sorry...I didn't want you to
find out like this...I'm sorry...I'm
sorry....

But they're just words. She doesn't hear them.

INT. POLICE STATION - HALLWAY - DAY

Captain Jones is pacing nervously in the hallway for a long BEAT when another officer steps out of an office with a brass nameplate that reads CHIEF OF POLICE JAMES E DAVIS.

OFFICER
The chief will see you now.

Jones straightens his tie and steps into

INT. CHIEF DAVIS' OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

lots of dark wood and filtered light. Davis is sitting at his desk, looking at a series of newspapers in front of him as Jones steps up and stands before the desk.

DAVIS
I don't know if you're aware of it,
Captain, but I have an exceptionally
good vocabulary. I'm a terror at
Scrabble, crossword puzzles, but
even I'm in awe of the vocabulary
that the press and the city council
have been exercising in reference
to this department courtesy of the
Christine Collins...incident.

(scans papers)

Incompetent. Cowardly. Bullying.
Reprehensible. Mendacious and
invidious...those two courtesy of
that prick Gustav Briegleb. Bonus
words in Scrabble, both of them.
Especially invidious. Hard to work
that one into a conversation. But
he managed it, all right.

JONES

Sir, I --

DAVIS

The key, of course, is the context in which words like this get used. You have to do that in scrabble, you know, when somebody challenges a word...show how it's used in a sentence. So "incompetent," as in --

(reads)

"A department so incompetent that they never realized that up to twenty children were being kidnapped and murdered under their very noses."

(looks over)

And here: "So incompetent that they insisted they knew better than a mother the identity of her own child, forced him upon her, and then incarcerated her when she confronted them with evidence of their own reprehensible behavior." That was a two-fer. Incompetent and reprehensible in the same sentence. Guy must be a real terror at crossword puzzles.

Davis gets up and crosses the room, looking out through the slatted windows at the busy Los Angeles street outside.

DAVIS

Captain, your handling of the Collins case has exposed this department to public ridicule. There is even the potential for civil and criminal liability.

JONES

Sir, nobody could have known what was going on up at that ranch. Not us, not the Sheriff's Department, the Marshall's Office...as for the Collins woman....

(beat)

I'm still not convinced that her kid is among the victims up in Wineville.

DAVIS

No?

JONES

No, sir.

(more)

JONES (Cont'd)

There were four other photos of missing boys that looked a lot like him...this Clark kid could have been mistaken.

DAVIS

Maybe he was...which raises the obvious question: so what?

JONES

Sir?

Davis turns back to him from the window.

DAVIS

The Mayor wants this to go away. I want this to go away. The way you do that is to stop insisting that Walter Collins was not among those kids killed up at that goddamned ranch. Because if the boy you brought back isn't Walter Collins, and he's not dead up at that ranch, then where the hell is he? People will want to know why we haven't found him. Why we aren't we doing our job.

(beat)

But if, on the other hand, he is, or could be among those poor boys killed up in Wineville...then the inquiries stop. It's a momentary embarrassment that you'll have to live with...but better a short inconvenience than a lingering problem, wouldn't you say, Captain?

Jones doesn't like it, but he swallows his pride. Nods.

JONES

Yes, sir.

DAVIS

The boy's been gone for nearly a year. If he was going to be found, it would've happened by now. Whether he was up at that ranch or not, the truth is he probably is dead somewhere. Better his mother accepts that now rather than later, don't you think?

JONES

Yes, sir.

DAVIS

Good. That'll be all, Captain.

Jones starts to leave, then looks back as Davis settles back behind his desk.

JONES

Sir, there's talk of an investigation by the police commission.

DAVIS

Let me worry about the commission. But it wouldn't hurt to find out just who the fuck that kid is you brought back from De Kalb and why he did this, because the press bought into his bullshit same as we did. That we were all taken in by the scheming little bastard may help take some of the sting off this.

JONES

My boys are working on it now, sir.

And he exits as we go to

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Detective Ybarra is sitting on one side of a table, a notepad in front of him, staring across at "Walter," who isn't very happy right now, and is staring back with substantial venom. His true, nasty personality is free to come out at last. There's a long BEAT, then:

"WALTER"

I want a glass of water.

YBARRA

Tough.

"WALTER"

(mocking)

"Tough!"

YBARRA

What's your name?

"WALTER"

Walter Collins.

YBARRA

Walter Collins is dead.

"WALTER"

(shrugs)

I didn't do it.

YBARRA

Look, let me explain something to you. Because of your lies, you've ruined a woman's life embarrassed the police department, and got the whole city up in arms over this.

"Walter" considers this for a BEAT, then smiles.

"WALTER"

Got a lot done, didn't I?

Ybarra exchanges a look with the matron, then closes up his notepad.

YBARRA

All right, if that's how you want it, then I guess we're done here.

(to matron)

Tell County Jail we're remanding him for trial.

"WALTER"

Wait...what's remanding? What trial?

YBARRA

I told you, the real Walter Collins was murdered.

"WALTER"

So? I didn't do anything! I wasn't even here when it happened!

YBARRA

By pretending to be Walter Collins, you're interfering in a police investigation of a kidnapping and murder. We can try you as an accomplice to murder after the fact.

(beat)

Too bad. County Jail is a lot worse than juvenile hall or a foster home. A lot worse.

"WALTER"

You can't do that...I'm just a kid!

YBARRA

Sanford Clark is a kid, too. Fifteen. But he's going to jail. All murderers and their accomplices go to jail. Everyone knows that.

(to the matron)

Get him out of here. It's out of my hands now.

He heads for the door when "Walter" cries out, scared.

"WALTER"

Wait! I don't want to go to jail.

YBARRA

Prove it.

And on the boy's face, we HEAR:

YBARRA (V.O.)

Arthur Hutchins.

INT. JONES' OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Ybarra is standing in the doorway to Jones' office, speaking to the Captain and looking at his notepad.

YBARRA

The boy's real name is Arthur Hutchins Junior, age twelve, a runaway from Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

JONES

Did you check the wire services?

Ybarra holds up a missing persons sheet.

YBARRA

Checks out. The report was filed by his divorced mother, who lives in Clinton, Iowa with the boy's grandmother. Apparently he didn't like living with the old lady, she didn't let him get away with the stuff he usually got away with, and one day...he up and left.

JONES

What about the man he showed up with at the diner?

YBARRA

Just some drifter. The boy was hungry, ran into this guy who said he knew how to get some food and not have to pay for it. Only when they finished, he left the kid behind while he cut out. When the police picked him up, they started going through the wire reports about missing kids --

JONES

And he overheard them say the name Walter Collins.

YBARRA

Bingo.

JONES

But why that one? I mean, of all the police departments he could've screwed up, why Los Angeles?

YBARRA

I asked him the same question.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - FLASHBACK

Moments earlier. PUSHING IN on "Walter" for:

"WALTER"

I...I knew that Los Angeles was where they made the Tom Mix movies. I figured maybe I could meet Tom Mix. Maybe he'd even let me ride his horse.

(beat)

His horse is named Blue. Did you know that?

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ST. PAUL'S CHURCH - RECTORY - DAY

Christine is in a bed in a small room in the rectory, a tray beside her, still recovering from her experience. Briegleb enters and approaches a nearby chair.

BRIEGLER

How are you feeling?

CHRISTINE

A little better, thanks. The sleep helped. Anything new outside?

BRIEGLER

Nothing that can't wait until you're stronger. The police still have a car parked outside. They want to know what your next move is.

CHRISTINE

I want to go home.

BRIEGLER

And then?

She takes a BEAT, then slowly, gingerly gets out of bed.

CHRISTINE

I've been giving that a great deal of thought ever since I got out of that...place. All those women, and what they did about Walter....

(beat)

They're going to just keep on doing it, aren't they? Nothing's going to change...unless we make it change.

She glances out the window, to the police car parked across the street.

CHRISTINE

I used to tell Walter, "Never start a fight...but always finish it." I didn't start this fight...but by god I'm going to finish it.

BRIEGLER

It's dangerous, and you've already been through a great deal, Mrs. Collins. Right now you're sufficiently high-profile that the police will hesitate to come after you out in the open...but if they see their position threatened, that could change quickly.

(beat)

Your life could be in danger.

She takes a beat, then turns to him from the window.

CHRISTINE

"Always finish it. Always."

EXT. ROW HOUSE - VANCOUVER - EVENING

A series of red-brick rowhouses line a quiet street. We see couples walking, hand in hand, kids playing...then we notice Gordon Northcott coming around the corner. He looks around, then cuts across a yard, jumping over a fence to get to

INT. ROW HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

where RACHEL CLARK, 30s, is doing dishes as the doorbell rings.

RACHEL CLARK

Just a minute....

She opens the door and finds Gordon Northcott standing outside.

GORDON

Hi, sis.

There's a flicker of a pause...was she expecting him?

RACHEL CLARK

Gordon...I didn't know you were
back in town.

GORDON

Got in a couple of days ago, figured
I'd surprise you. That okay?

RACHEL CLARK

Yes...yes, of course. Come on in.

She steps aside as he enters, looks around.

GORDON

Where's that little niece of mine?

RACHEL CLARK

She...went into town. Should be
back this evening. Bob's here --

GORDON

Good. Need to talk to him about
staying on for a few days.

RACHEL CLARK

Staying --

GORDON

Listen, can I use your bathroom?
It's been a long ride and I could
use a shower.

RACHEL CLARK

Of course.

He passes her and heads upstairs. She steps to the back of
the house, where her husband, BOB, is coming in through the
back, wiping engine grease off his hands with a towel.

BOB

Is that --

(she nods, scared)

Go next door. I'll call the police.
Hurry.

She rushes past him into the other room to do just that.

INT. ROWHOUSE - BATHROOM - LATER

Gordon is toweling off his hair when he hears a car door slam
shut. Then another. He peers out the window. Several Royal
Canadian Mounted Police cars have pulled up along the street.
Mounties are getting out, moving quietly toward the house.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Bob quietly lets the Mounties in. They signal for Bob to get the hell out of there. Guns in hand, they climb the stairs.

Suddenly there's the SOUND of breaking glass from above. They race up the stairs to find the window broken, and Gordon fleeing across an adjoining rooftop.

MOUNTIE

Go around the other side! Cut him off!

The others take off as he and another Mountie climb through the broken window in pursuit of Northcott.

EXT. ROWHOUSES - NIGHT

Gordon races up one rooftop, over the top, then leaps to the next one as, below, Mounties race to keep up with him, WHISTLES blowing furiously. He looks behind him to see the other two Mounties running rooftop to rooftop, coming fast.

Gordon runs faster, going at angles to put more distance between himself and the police on the ground...and making increasingly more difficult and dangerous leaps from rooftop to rooftop.

He leaps across one chasm, barely makes it, keeps running. The rooftop Mounties follow. One of them makes the jump successfully, but the other falls short, plummeting to the ground three stories below. A leg snaps on impact. The first Mountie hesitates, looks down. The second one waves him on.

SECOND MOUNTIE

Go on! Get the bastard!

He nods and continues the chase.

Gordon runs for all he's worth. The Mountie keeps after him.

Gordon makes another leap. The Mountie jumps...but he's short. He grabs onto a rain gutter. Gordon sees his situation, runs back, and STOMPS on the Mountie's hands, trying to get him to shake loose. The gutter starts to tear free --

-- when a Mountie down below FIRES at Gordon, making him back off. The Mountie clinging to the gutter starts to fall, then grabs a nearby pipe and crawls up to the roof. Keeps coming.

Gordon keeps running...but comes to a chasm too wide to be jumped. He hesitates, starts to cut back in another direction --

-- when the Mountie TACKLES him hard. The two go down in a tangle of limbs, fighting, punching, kicking.

They SLIDE down the steeply angled roof and barely avoid going over the edge.

With nowhere else to run, Gordon fights for all he's got, the punches from both coming fast and furious. Finally, the Mountie backs off just a bit --

MOUNTIE
Screw this...I'm too old for this
fightin' shit....

-- and DIVES at Gordon, taking them both off the edge of the two-story roof and DOWN into --

-- a garden below, CRASHING through carefully manicured flowers and trees to land with a THUD, the Mountie's impact cushioned by Gordon.

As the other Mounties come on the run, the first one staggers to his feet and yanks up a bruised, bleeding but otherwise intact Gordon. Looks at him nose-to-nose.

MOUNTIE
YOU...ARE UNDER...ARREST!

And he YANKS Gordon toward the other waiting officers.

INT. CHRISTINE'S HOUSE - DAY

Christine opens the door to find Reverend Briegleb and another man on her porch, S. S. HAHN, late fifties.

BRIEGLER
Mrs. Collins, I want you to meet a
friend of mine, Mr. Hahn.

CHRISTINE
Hello.

HAHN
Mrs. Collins. My deepest condolences
on your loss.

REV. BRIEGLER
Can we come in?

CHRISTINE
Yes...of course.

She steps aside to let them in, closing the door under:

CHRISTINE
Mr. Hahn, was it?

HAHN
Yes.

CHRISTINE

I appreciate the sentiment, but so far they still haven't positively identified any of the...remains... as Walter's.

HAHN

But he was identified, was he not?

CHRISTINE

Yes, but...I guess I still can't accept it. It doesn't feel real to me.

HAHN

It never does. I lost a daughter to polio five years ago. There's not a day goes by I don't think, I should mention this to Claudine... then I remember she's not here.

CHRISTINE

I'm sorry. Please, sit.

They do as Christine looks to Briegleb.

CHRISTINE

I've been on the phone all day with the appointment secretary for the police commission. They won't let me testify at the hearing, or call witnesses. They say it's not necessary.

REV. BRIEGLER

I know. My sources tell me the police commission is going to come out with a report that whitewashes the whole thing. They're going to say that Jones and the rest of the LAPD did absolutely nothing wrong, that the real blame is with the kid...and with you, for being difficult and forcing them to put you away for your own safety.

CHRISTINE

Then we'll just have to hire a lawyer...bring a civil suit and try to get the City Council to call for a hearing by the Welfare Board.

REV. BRIEGLER

Just one problem.
(more)

REV. BRIEGLER (Cont'd)

Not one lawyer outside this room was willing to take on the Police Department. Too risky, they said. So finally I went to the very best attorney in town, a man who's sued the city four times and won. Unfortunately, we could never afford to hire him.

CHRISTINE

(crestfallen)

I see....

HAHN

Which is why I'm doing this pro bono.

(a smile)

It would be my honor to defend your honor, Mrs. Collins. In my fifteen years as a lawyer, I have never seen anyone fight as long or as hard as you have, in what is so clearly in the cause of justice.

REV. BRIEGLER

Now I want you to tell Mr. Hahn here the whole story, from end to end, leave nothing out, he'll need it all if he's going to get the City Council involved.

CHRISTINE

Of course. One thing, though. A personal favor. When we've finished here today, could you spare a few minutes to come with me downtown.

HAHN

Of course. Where downtown?

INT. LA COUNTY GENERAL HOSPITAL - MENTAL WARD - DAY

Hahn marches into the receiving area with Christine Collins and Briegleb. He goes to the receiving nurse.

NURSE

Yes? May I --

She sees Christine Collins and the sentence dies midway. Hahn pulls out a handful of papers.

HAHN

My name is S. S.
(more)

HAHN (Cont'd)

Hahn, and I have a court order for the immediate release of all women being detained in this institution under the designation Code Twelve pending a formal inquiry into the reasons for their detainment.

NURSE

I'm sorry, but the doctor in charge won't be in until tomorrow morning and --

HAHN

Let me be clearer. Either you open those doors and produce the people named in that court order, or you will find yourself on the other side of those bars...without a key.

The nurse exchanges a sour look with Christine and heads off.

EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY

One by one, the Code Twelve patients are brought out of the hospital and into the light. One of the last to emerge is Carol Dexter, who blinks against the light, and sees Christine. She runs to her, embraces her, sobbing.

CAROL DEXTER

I knew you'd come...I knew you'd come back...I knew you'd come....

CHRISTINE

It's all right...everything's going to be all right now....

And in Christine's face, we see a flicker of pride and one simple truth: if she could not save her son, she could at least save these women. As they move toward her, Hahn and Briegleb, we HEAR a TRAIN WHISTLE that segues us into

EXT. UNION STATION - TRAIN PLATFORM - DAY

Gordon Northcott, handcuffed, is led out of a train by several officers. The waiting PRESS rush toward him. He seems to enjoy the attention. Among the shouted questions we hear:

REPORTER

Mr. Northcott, any comment on your arrest?

GORDON

I'm feeling fine.
(more)

GORDON (Cont'd)

I've been on a little vacation, as some of you know. It was a pleasant vacation, and the police have certainly provided me with a lot of amusement.

REPORTER

How did you avoid capture?

GORDON

Well, I didn't, did I? Didn't know anyone wanted me until just recently. Didn't even try. My luggage still has my initials on it.

ANOTHER REPORTER

Did you know why the police were after you?

GORDON

No, but I figured it would be best if I stayed out of it.

REPORTER

Anything to say to the parents of the children you murdered?

GORDON

No comment.

And on that the police hustle Gordon away.

INT. CHIEF DAVIS' OFFICE - DAY

Davis is filling out paperwork as the door opens. He looks up as LOS ANGELES MAYOR GEORGE CRYER enters, closing the door after him again.

DAVIS

Mayor Cryer...this is unexpected.

CRYER

So was this.

He drops a series of court documents on Davis' desk. He picks them up, examines them.

CRYER

Subpoenas, requests for depositions, interrogatories...all courtesy of Mr. Hahn and his new client, Christine Collins.

(more)

CRYER (Cont'd)

You don't have to look them over too closely, Chief, your own copies should be arriving any time now.

(beat)

The City Council has also agreed to look into this, starting immediately.

DAVIS

Goddamnit....

CRYER

I thought this was supposed to go away. This is an election year, I can't afford this kind of press.

DAVIS

It is going away, sir. I instructed Captain Jones --

CRYER

I'm afraid falling on his sword and saying he made a mistake isn't going to be good enough, Chief. If we take him out of the picture for a while, it might help calm things down until the hearing's finished.

(beat)

There are several people on the council who are planning to run against me, and they'd love to accuse me of allowing a renegade police force to operate with impunity.

Cryer shakes his head, walks off a pace.

CRYER

Our friends in the press are having a field day with this mess. I'm getting five hundred phone calls, letters and telegrams a day demanding to know what the hell is going on at City Hall that we allow our police force to brutalize women and misplace children. Christ, all this picture needs now is for somebody to kick a puppy for the cameras.

(beat)

This is a train, Chief, and we need to either get in front of it, or be run over by it.

DAVIS

Mayor Cryer...I stand by my men. You know that.

CRYER

I do. And you know where I stand.
So the question is..are we going to
stand together...or hang together?

He lets the question sit as we go to

EXT. CITY HALL - DAY

Mayor Cryer stands beside Chief Davis and addresses a rather noisy and worked-up press corps from behind a podium.

MAYOR CRYER

Gentlemen...gentlemen, please. As Mayor of Los Angeles, it is my duty to preserve the peace in our city, which has been disrupted by recent events in the case of Christine Collins. As a result, we have decided that Captain J. J. Jones of the Lincoln Heights Division is to be suspended from active duty, effective immediately.

REPORTER

What's the charge, Chief?

CHIEF DAVIS

The charge is conduct unbecoming an officer, and using improper and abusive language toward Mrs. Collins. It further charges that he exceeded his authority as a police officer by incarcerating Mrs. Collins on the alleged charge of insanity without sufficient cause.

REPORTER

Mayor Cryer, are you aware that the City Council has said it plans to open its own investigation into the Collins case?

MAYOR CRYER

I've heard this, yes. But since one of the main purposes of such a hearing by the City Council would be to suspend Captain Jones, and since that action has now been taken, the question is moot.

REPORTER

Which makes it look like the only reason Jones is being suspended is to head off the City Council

(more)

REPORTER (Cont'd)
investigation. Are you concerned
that an outside investigation might
go uncomfortably high up the food
chain?

CHIEF DAVIS
I won't even dignify that question
with a response. Good day.

The two head back into

INT. CITY HALL - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Glancing back over their shoulders at the press outside.

CRYER
Cheer up, Chief. That little show
should take the wind out of their
sails. By Monday, this issue will
be as cold as yesterday's fish.
Never underestimate the public's
lack of attention and potential for
apathy. Old news is dead news,
you'll see.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CHRISTINE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

She opens the door as Briegleb enters with three really large,
dangerous looking men, one of whom is carrying a heavy trench
coat.

CHRISTINE
Reverend, what --

BRIEGLER
Sorry to barge in so late, Mrs.
Collins, but it took me a while to
find the right people for the right
job. These three gentlemen are
members of my congregation who,
before coming to the Lord, had lived
lives of brutality, vice and crime.
Now they are pledged to doing god's
work...and if this isn't it, I don't
know what is.

CHRISTINE
I don't understand.

BRIEGLER
People who bring charges against
the police have a habit of
(more)

BRIEGLER (Cont'd)
disappearing right before the trial.
I'm a big believer in the power of
prayer, Mrs. Collins...but a little
backup from time to time never hurts.

The others nod as they make themselves comfortable in the living room.

CHRISTINE
I see...well, I...thank you. Can I
get you anything?

BRIEGLER
Since we don't plan on sleeping,
coffee would be lovely.

She heads off to get some coffee. As one of the men puts his coat behind the sofa, we see that it contains a sawed-off shotgun. Briegler looks out the window, to where a police car sits, watching the house.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CHRISTINE'S HOUSE - MORNING

She's dressed in her best dress, putting on a hat and a pair of gloves. Her hands are shaking. She squeezes them together, closes her eyes. Focuses. With one final, deep breath, she heads out.

EXT. COLLINS HOME - MORNING

The same police car is there as Christine gets into a car with Briegler and the two drive off. The other three men get into another car and follow. The police car in turn pulls away from the curb, following both cars.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - BRIEGLER'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

He's aware that they're being followed, glancing in the rear view mirror to keep an eye on things. Looks over to Christine, smiles encouragingly. Looks ahead.

BRIEGLER
Traffic's getting heavy. We'll go
up Spring.

He turns. The other cars do the same. But the traffic here is even worse. Just then, Briegler looks back in his rear view mirror to see --

-- another police car pulling out of a driveway and cutting off the car with Christine's bodyguards.

Briegleb turns quickly, trying to get ahead, but the street's too busy. He looks in the mirror to see that another police car glide into position two cars behind them.

Traffic stops. Jammed. Briegleb is nervous, sensing the very real possibility of a hit being set up. The traffic is lined right up against parked cars on either side. Then there's a momentary break in traffic.

BRIEGLEB

Hold on.

He turns hard into the driveway of a closed shop and shuts off the engine. Jumps out and opens the door for Christine, who gets out.

BRIEGLEB

Start walking. Quickly.

They do. He glances back at the police car. The two inside start to open the doors, but they can't get them open, being right up against parked cars on one side and traffic on the other. They run the siren to clear traffic, but it's too late as --

-- Christine and Briegleb hurry down the street on foot, Briegleb glancing behind them. The foot- and car-traffic is very heavy...we HEAR horns honking and, in the distance, something that could be the sound of lots of people.

REV. BRIEGLEB

Almost there. Just a few more blocks.

CHRISTINE

Where is all this traffic's coming from...?

Briegleb glances back. The police car has popped its doors, and two trench-coated officers are getting out. Christine stops a man passing in the opposite direction.

CHRISTINE

Excuse me, can you tell me what the problem is up ahead?

MAN

Didn't you hear? It's the biggest protest I've ever seen.

REV. BRIEGLEB

Protest?

OFFICER

Yeah...over that Collins broad, if you can believe that.

He moves on. Briegleb and Collins slowly exchange a look somewhere between disbelief and "oh shit."

CHRISTINE

He didn't mean...he couldn't mean --

REV. BRIEGLER

I don't know...all I know is that I think I just stopped breathing....

They walk quickly up one clogged street and down another, the police following on foot...moving toward the SOUND of voices, drums, and cars honking... until they turn onto Spring Street --

-- and find themselves in the middle of the biggest protest march ever recorded in the history of Los Angeles to this date. Thousands of people crowd into the street, overwhelming the police presence...not rioting, but making their voices heard.

The Salvation Army, the Women's Temperance Society, the Society for Justice, Catholic groups, Union groups and ordinary citizens carrying placards and signs that read WE SUPPORT CHRISTINE COLLINS and JUSTICE FOR MRS. COLLINS and THE LAPD: A CITY'S SHAME...it just goes on and on and on. Christine looks out to see her boss from the telephone company, Mr. Harris, marching arm in arm with the rest. He sees her, smiles, tips his hat and continues marching.

Christine is stunned...Briegleb even moreso.

CHRISTINE

Oh...my....

REV. BRIEGLER

The Lord works in mysterious ways,
Mrs. Collins.

He looks behind them, to where the police have stopped. There's no way in hell they can make a move in the face of something as big as this. Briegleb smiles.

REV. BRIEGLER

Boy howdy, does He ever. Come on.

They continue up the street toward City Hall.

THORPE (V.O.)

Ladies and Gentlemen...can I have your attention, please....

INT. CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS - DAY

This is a big room, and one thousand observers fill every available chair with more standing along the wall in back. It's a circus. Christine sits with Hahn.

Briegleb is in a seat behind the main section. FLASHBULBS pop as THORPE, a city councilman, speaks.

SUPERIMPOSE: OCTOBER 24, 1928

THORPE

There are nearly one thousand people gathered in this chamber, more than have ever been in this room before.

EXT. CITY HALL - PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Speakers are lowered from the window into the parking lot where hundreds of others are gathered to listen.

THORPE

(on pa)

I therefore ask you to refrain from demonstrations of any kind. We're all here because we want to find out the real facts in this case, and everybody is going to be heard if we have to sit here for a week.

BACK TO SCENE

As Thorpe looks to the other members of the Council, and the area where witnesses are supposed to wait to be called upon. A number of seats are empty.

SECOND COUNCILMAN

Mr. Thorpe, I don't see any other members of the Police Commission.

THORPE

That's odd...we specifically stipulated that we would begin our hearings with testimony from the police department. Are there any representatives of the Police Commission in the room?

(no answer)

Is Chief Davis here?

(no reply)

Is Captain Jones here? Is there anyone here representing the police?

A REPORTER raises his hand, then stands.

REPORTER

Mr. Chairman...Richard Thomas, The Evening Herald. Both the Police Chief and Captain Jones are in San Pedro for a police inspection at a station there.

(more)

REPORTER (Cont'd)

Only reason I know is we have a couple of our boys out covering the thing.

THORPE

Are you telling me they directly violated the wishes of the City Council? That they refused to attend a vital hearing so they could conduct a routine inspection in San Pedro? And what the hell is Jones doing at an inspection after being suspended?
(beat)

I hate to call a recess before we've even started, but I think a few phone calls are in order. So we'll take a half hour break, then continue with the witnesses who have appeared here today. But let it be known that Captain Jones and Police Chief Davis will be subpoenaed and required to appear here tomorrow morning.

There's APPLAUSE from the crowd which breaks up into pockets of discussion as a BAILIFF approaches Hahn and whispers into his ear. Hahn nods, looks to Christine.

HAHN

Mrs. Collins, could you come across the street with me for just a moment?

CHRISTINE

But...shouldn't we --

HAHN

I think there's something you should see.

Puzzled, curious, Christine gets up and exits with Hahn.

INT. LA COUNTY COURTHOUSE - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Hahn is moving quickly down the hall toward a courtroom door, Christine following.

HAHN

-- the police decided it was best to keep this off the main docket in order to avoid exactly the sort of chaos we have across the street.

He gets to the door, pauses. Looks back to her. She nods. He opens the door and they enter

INT. COURTROOM - CONTINUOUS

Dead silence, in marked contrast to the city council room. As she enters, she sees people sitting silently in the gallery...row after row of couples, mothers and fathers, some weeping softly. Some of them notice Christine's entrance and nod to her with sadness and a strange sense of common bond...they are all carrying the same grief.

One of the couples, MR. AND MRS. CLAY, see Christine and go to her, speaking softly. They should be distinct enough in appearance that we will recognize them instantly when we see them again later.

MRS. CLAY

Mrs. Collins? I'm Leanne Clay,
this is my husband, John...I just
wanted to pass on my sympathies.
What we went through, waiting to
hear anything about our son David,
was bad enough, and now this....

(beat)

But there was no call for what the
police did to you...no call at all.

She nods her thanks as a door at the other end of the courtroom opens. They take their seats as a judge and two attorneys take their places, preceded by a bailiff.

BAILIFF

All rise.

They do. The judge takes his seat. The rest of the room also sits. He nods to the bailiff, who in turn opens another door, leading to the holding area.

As Christine looks on, Gordon Stewart Northcott is ushered into the courtroom for his initial plea. Some women break into tears at the sight of him. He first seems startled by the presence of so many, then he smiles. An audience.

As he takes his place beside his attorney, he looks down the room and meets the gaze of Christine Collins. Her face pales, as though slapped...but she doesn't look away.

GORDON

Hey...I saw you in the papers. You
got a lot of moxie, standing up to
the police like that.

The bailiff forcibly turns him around to face the judge. Christine's hands grip the seat she's in until her knuckles turn white...but she doesn't allow him the satisfaction of seeing her react to his comments. The judge looks up.

JUDGE

Gordon Stewart Northcott, you have been charged with three counts of murder in the first degree, with an additional seventeen counts under review by the district attorney's office. How do you plea?

GORDON

Not guilty, your honor.

He glances back at his audience. The bailiff rights him again.

JUDGE

In light of the defendant's penchant for international travel, no bail will be set. This court will receive preliminary motions by tomorrow morning, with a trial date to be set for the earliest opening on the court's calendar.

(beat)

The defendant is remanded into custody. Bailiff....

The bailiff removes Gordon, who shares one last look with his audience, and Christine in particular. He winks at her. She doesn't give him a flicker of satisfaction with a reaction. But once he's gone, she sits heavily and covers her eyes, fighting tears. Hahn puts a hand on her shoulder, but says nothing. There's nothing to say.

JONES (V.O.)

The boy, Walter Collins, was reported as missing on March 10, 1928.

INT. CITY COUNCIL ROOM - DAY

Jones is at last on the stand. Hahn stands before him, the rest of the City Council, Christine and the huge audience looking on.

JONES

We then instituted a nationwide search. On July 10, we received a cable indicating that a boy matching his description had been found in De Kalb, Illinois. Upon questioning, he admitted to being Walter Collins, and we made arrangements to transport him back to California.

HAHN

Where Mrs. Collins told you the boy was not her son.

JONES

Yes. She denied his identity in spite of all evidence pointing to the contrary.

HAHN

But as subsequent events have demonstrated, she was correct. So what prompted you to send her for psychological evaluation?

JONES

Whether or not this was in fact the correct boy was not relevant to my decision. Throughout this period, she acted strangely. She was often cool, aloof and unemotional, especially when presented with the boy we located in De Kalb, and in our subsequent conversations. It was because of her disturbing behavior that I submitted her for observation to the psychopathic ward of Los Angeles County General Hospital.

HAHN

Just like that. You snap your fingers and an innocent woman is thrown into the psycho ward.

JONES

She wasn't --

Hahn turns away, playing to the council and the audience.

HAHN

Every home in this state is in grave danger when a Police Captain can take a woman into his office and, five minutes later, have her thrown into the psychopathic ward on his own authority!

The crowd applauds and cheers. Joes fights to be heard.

JONES

(over the crowd)
She wasn't --

HAHN

What was that, Captain?

JONES

She wasn't thrown. She was... escorted.

There's laughter from the gallery. He doesn't like it.

HAHN

Escorted, thrown, the verb doesn't matter, Captain. What does matter is that her incarceration was ordered without a warrant.

Hahn goes to the exhibit table, picks up several papers.

HAHN

I am holding a carbon copy of the affidavit of insanity that was issued in the case of the State of California vs. Christine Collins. Who signed the affidavit?

JONES

I did.

HAHN

And what is the date on this document?

JONES

September 12th.

HAHN

But Mrs. Collins was incarcerated on September 6th.

JONES

The form is backdated.

HAHN

Yes, so it would appear. The bottom of the page is reserved for recording where and when the warrant was served. But it has not been filled in. May I assume from this that the warrant was never served?

JONES

That's correct. There was no need to serve the warrant since she was at that time already in custody.

HAHN

Let me see if I have this straight. A woman was thrown into the psychopathic ward without a warrant, because no warrant existed, and when it was finally written six days later, there was no need to sign it or go to a judge because

(more)

HAHN (Cont'd)
she was already in the asylum! Is
this correct, Captain?

JONES
Technically...yes.

More murmuring from the crowd.

JONES
Extraordinary steps were necessary
because we were dealing with an
extraordinary situation! Is it our
fault that we were being deceived
by the boy who claimed to be Walter
Collins? No. In light of his claims
and her behavior, who wouldn't begin
to wonder if there was something
wrong with her?

HAHN
Because she questioned you.

JONES
Because she wouldn't listen, because
she insisted on being obstinate and
taking matters into her own hands
best left to qualified officers,
because --

HAHN
Because she was fighting for the
life of her son! A boy who may
have still been alive while you
were wasting valuable time denying
you had done anything wrong!

This silences both Jones and the crowd. You could hear a pin
drop. Hahn approaches Jones, and now speaks softly.

HAHN
And in the end, that's what happened,
isn't it? At some point, while all
this was going on, Walter Collins
died along with as many as nineteen
other youths on the Northcott Ranch
in Wineville. Is that correct,
Captain?

Jones looks to Chief Davis. It's a moment. Then:

JONES
Yes. It is.

Christine's face falls into her hands. The place erupts.

HAHN

No further questions.

Hahn walks away from a devastated looking Jones.

EXT. UNION STATION - DAY

A small crowd is assembled at the front of the station, where Chief Davis stands with the Boy who had been "Walter" as a train pulls up before them.

CHIEF DAVIS

-- so after much effort, we were able to identify this boy, who was has been responsible for so much recent trouble, as Arthur Hutchins of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Between this, and the arrest of the man suspected of murdering the real Walter Collins, we have cleared up two of the biggest mysteries in the history of Los Angeles.

(beat)

I hope that you gentlemen of the press will give as much space to the good things we do as the mistakes that are made on rare occasions.

Just then, he turns as a Matron comes off the train with JANET HUTCHINS, middle thirties, the boy's mother.

CHIEF DAVIS

Ladies and gentlemen, let me introduce you to the boy's real mother, Mrs. Janet Hutchins.

She goes to him and hugs him. "Walter" looks like he wishes he were somewhere on Mars. Davis moves closer to them to be in frame while the FLASHBULBS pop. She's in the same pose as they got Christine to take when she "accepted" her lost son.

MOTHER

I hope he hasn't been too much trouble for you.

CHIEF DAVIS

Oh, no, not at all....

He towels the boy's head like he'd like to cut it off. Then he nods to an aide, who approaches with a bundle of clothes.

WRIGHT

Mrs. Hutchins...Mrs. Collins, the woman he was staying with, wanted him to have these. They're the clothes she let him wear.

MOTHER

Well, thank you. Isn't that nice,
Arthur? Tell the nice officer thank
you.

"WALTER"

I don't want 'em! Give 'em to
somebody else!

DAVIS

Precocious little fellow, isn't he?

"WALTER"

It's not my fault! It was the
police! They said I was Walter
Collins, not me! It wasn't my idea!

She yanks him away. Davis smiles gamely at the reporters.

CHIEF DAVIS

There...blame the police for your
own mistakes. We've seen a lot of
that lately, haven't we?

DISSOLVE TO:

MONTAGE

Shot MOS, under MUSIC, somber and moving, INTERCUTTING between
the two trials.

Christine on the stand, speaking quietly.

Officer Ybarra on the stand.

Chief Davis on the stand.

The murder jury being shown photographs of the Northcott ranch.

Walter's dentist showing a drawing of Walter's teeth.

His teacher, Mrs. Fox, also testifying.

Bits of clothing entered into evidence.

Dr. Steele testifying.

Ending on Christine seated, reserved, holding it all in...
watching. We HOLD on her face to bring us into --

INT. WALTER'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Christine is sitting on Walter's bed. She runs a hand along
the sheets, straightening and smoothing them out, her eyes
moist but not crying. We HEAR a knock on the front door
downstairs, and the door opening.

CHRISTINE

I'm up here, Reverend.

She continues as Briegleb comes up the stairs and enters the room. Sees her. Takes off his hat. A show of sympathy.

CHRISTINE

When Walter was...when he was here, I'd walk past his bedroom when he was asleep, and even if I couldn't see him, or hear him, I could...feel him in here.

REV. BRIEGLER

Mothers and their children are connected in amazing ways. My uncle joined the army during the big war, and the day he died, before we ever heard a word about it, my grandmother woke up in the middle of the night and said, "Bobby's gone." She just...knew.

Christine nods, taking it in, then:

CHRISTINE

That's why I don't think Walter is dead. I can still feel him, in this room.

REV. BRIEGLER

Mrs. Collins --

CHRISTINE

I know what the police said. But the remains...what they found on that ranch is so...most of it can't even be properly identified. What if that boy made a mistake when he picked Walter's picture?

REV. BRIEGLER

I understand that you don't want to accept this. What mother does? But you have to let go...and start over. For yourself. He'd want you to move on.

CHRISTINE

Maybe. And maybe he'd want me to keep looking. Maybe he's waiting for me, somewhere.

REV. BRIEGLER

He is, Christine.

(more)

REV. BRIEGLER (Cont'd)

In that place where we will all be reunited with our loved ones someday. And on that day, he will know, front to back, end to end, heart and soul... that you did everything you could, Christine. Everything.

She nods absently, finishes adjusting the sheets. He checks his watch.

REV. BRIEGLER

We should go.

She nods again, and stands. He heads out of the room, and she lingers for a moment, taking one last look around before turning off the night-light, and sees the drawing he made of the two of them walking together beneath an orange sun. HOLD on that image as we HEAR a gavel hammering and:

THORPE (V.O.)

This meeting will now come to order.

INT. CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS - DAY

PUSHING IN on Thorpe, at the center of the council's long table, addressing the crowd and Christine.

THORPE

This Committee has now heard all of the testimony, and in light of the facts presented, issues the following statement.

INTERCUT WITH

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Where Northcott stands before the judge, jury, and the grieving family members.

JUDGE

Mr. Foreman, has the jury reached a verdict?

FOREMAN

We have, your honor.

INT. CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CONTINUOUS

Still pushing in.

THORPE

While the City Council has no power to directly remove commissioners or
(more)

THORPE (Cont'd)

the employees who serve under them, it nevertheless can perform the function of making recommendations. This committee therefore reports and recommends:

(beat)

First, that the majority members of the Police Commission deserve the severest condemnation for their decision to whitewash the Collins case.

APPLAUSE erupts from the gallery at this.

INT. COURTROOM - CONTINUOUS

Quietly PUSHING IN on Northcott, the Judge, Jury, others.

JUDGE

Bailiff, will you bring me the verdict of the jury?

The bailiff complies. The judge reads it, hands it back to the Bailiff, who brings it back to the Foreman.

INT. CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CONTINUOUS

As before.

THORPE

Second, we recommend that the suspension of Captain Jones be made permanent.

Even louder applause, some cheering. The pattern continues through the balance of the statement.

INT. COURTROOM - CONTINUOUS

Favoring Northcott.

JUDGE

Will the defendant please rise?

Northcott rises, still smiling, defiant.

INT. CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CONTINUOUS

As before.

THORPE

Third, that steps be taken to investigate a change in the prevailing laws and procedures by
(more)

THORPE (Cont'd)

which a citizen of this city can be subjected to incarceration in the county's mental facilities.

(beat)

Finally, restoration of public confidence in the police department can only be achieved by the removal of its chief of police, and this committee so recommends.

(beat)

This hearing is concluded.

The place explodes with cheers.

INT. COURTROOM - CONTINUOUS

As the foreman stands again.

JUDGE

You may read the verdict.

FOREMAN

We the jury find the defendant, Gordon Stewart Northcott...guilty on all counts of murder in the first degree.

There are gasps and cries and tears...but Northcott is defiant.

JUDGE

Does the defendant wish to make a statement before judgment is passed?

GORDON

Yeah, I want to make a statement. I want to make it real clear that I never once got a fair shake from you, your "honor," or this court. The only one of you here worth a goddamn is her --

(points to christine)

-- 'cause she's the only one never badmouthed me to the press. She understands what it is when the police frame you for something you didn't do and throw you in the hole. Isn't that right?

He looks to her. She doesn't flinch.

GORDON

I want you to know, Mrs. Collins, I never killed your boy. I --

JUDGE

That's enough! Counsel, you will get control of your client or I will have him bound and gagged.

The defense attorney yanks Gordon around to face the judge.

JUDGE

Gordon Stewart Northcott, it is the judgment of this court that you will be conveyed to San Quentin Prison, where you will be held in solitary confinement for a period of two years, until October 2nd, 1930. On that date, you are to be hanged by the neck until dead. May god have mercy on your soul.

And he brings down the gavel.

EXT. COUNTY COURTHOUSE - AFTERNOON

Christine is standing outside, putting the horrors of the day out of her thoughts, as a door opens and Chief Davis comes out, followed by several reporters.

CHIEF DAVIS

-- no, as I said after the hearing, I have every intention of finishing my term as Chief of the Los Angeles Police Department. I will not resign. I will fight to the finish. The Collins case was merely an excuse for certain politicians who have been trying to have me removed for some time, and I --

He pauses as he sees Christine. Looks away and continues in a lowered voice.

CHIEF DAVIS

-- anyway, I remain confident that the Mayor's office will stand firmly behind me. That's all.

The press continue after him, not really noticing Christine, who takes one last look around at it all...and walks slowly away. Alone.

BLACK SCREEN

SUPERIMPOSE: TWO YEARS LATER. TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 1930

INT. STREET CAR - MORNING

Christine, alone, rides the street car to work. The car stops in front of a school. Walter's school. She looks out the window, to where children are playing. Then looks away again as the street-car starts moving again.

INT. PACIFIC TELEPHONE COMPANY - SWITCHBOARD ROOM - DAY

Christine is back at work again, as she had been, though some of the light has gone out of her eyes. She moves from station to station, nodding her approval or checking off forms. She glances to the clock, it's a little after two, then goes to Mr. Harris, who has just come out onto the floor.

CHRISTINE

Ten minute break?

MR. HARRIS

Of course.

She starts away, turning at:

MR. HARRIS

You know...one of these days you might consider actually taking one of these ten minute breaks. Might be good for you.

CHRISTINE

We'll see. Thanks, Ben.

She heads off toward a back room. He watches her go with a combination of awe, respect and deep sadness.

INT. PHONE COMPANY - BACK OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Christine is on the telephone, crossing off contact numbers on a pad of paper.

CHRISTINE

Yes, hello, this is Christine Collins, we spoke yesterday about my son...fine, thank you. I was wondering if you'd had a chance to go through the file on runaways in your area in case anyone resembling Walter had --

(beat)

I see. No, thank you, I appreciate the information. Would it be all right if I called you again, in a month or so? Thank you. Goodbye.

She checks his number off her list as Hahn appears in the partially open door behind her.

He's heard part of the conversation, and there's a sadness in his eyes.

She starts to dial again when he knocks on the door. She turns to see him, mid-dial.

HAHN
Mrs. Collins.

CHRISTINE
Oh, hello, I was just --

HAHN
I know. That's...why I wanted to see you.

His tone is grave, and she knows that something's happened. She hangs up the phone, missing the cradle the first time.

HAHN
It's about Walter. We had...well, we received a very strange telegram.

CHRISTINE
From who?

HAHN
Gordon Northcott. He's...he's asked to see you.

CHRISTINE
Why?

HAHN
He said he knows you're still looking for your son, and before he dies --
(beat)
He says that he lied when he testified that he didn't kill Walter. He's willing to finally admit that he did it. He says that if you come up to see him, in person...he'll tell you the truth, to your face...so that you can get on with your life and have some peace.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Christine is on the train headed north. The telegram is in her hand.

HAHN (V.O.)

As you know, he's set to be executed
the day after tomorrow at San
Quentin, so....

(beat)

You don't have a lot of time.

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO - SAN QUENTIN PRISON - AFTERNOON

She gets out of a taxi in front of the prison. It's a gray,
grim sight, and moves toward it.

HAHN (V.O.)

Took me most of the morning to make
all the arrangements. Turns out
you're the first woman in thirty
years the state has allowed to visit
a serial killer on the night of his
execution.

INT. SAN QUENTIN - INTERVIEW ROOM - AFTERNOON

Four bare walls and a long table. Two chairs. One window,
behind bars and chicken wire. Christine waits, alone. Then:
we HEAR footsteps approaching down the hall. A moment later,
a PRISON GUARD escorts Northcott into the room. Northcott
nods to Christine, then glances to the guard, who looks to
Christine.

PRISON GUARD

I can stay in the room if you want,
ma'am.

CHRISTINE

No, I'm...sure I'll be fine.

PRISON GUARD

All right...I'll be right outside
the door if you need anything.

(to northcott)

Twenty minutes.

The guard exits, leaving the two alone.

GORDON

Don't suppose you've got a cigarette?

CHRISTINE

No, I don't smoke.

He nods, walks to the window to a nearby structure.

GORDON

That's where they do it, you know.
That building right over there.

CHRISTINE

That's where they do what?

GORDON

The hangings. Ten o'clock tonight, I get to see what's inside. I hear there's thirteen steps going up to the gallows... 'cause thirteen is unlucky. Helps make sure you're gonna go to hell when you die. But I got 'em beat. I outsmarted 'em.

He looks to Christine, smiles nervously, glances back out the window.

GORDON

They're gonna let me have whatever I want for dinner. Got a steak coming, with spinach, mashed potatoes and green beans. I always wondered why they did that whole last meal thing. One of the other guys on Death Row said when you take the drop, you foul yourself, and everything you ate...comes out the other end. So maybe that's why they make sure you got something in you when it happens. They like knowing you fouled yourself on the way to --

He stops himself. Turns from the window.

GORDON

Sure you don't got a cigarette?

She shakes her head. He nods absently for a moment.

GORDON

The warden, Clinton Duffy, he's a good guy. He's writing a book about all the death sentences he's carried out in this place. Says it's called "Eighty-Eight Men and Two Women." Beats my record all to hell.

CHRISTINE

Mr. Northcott...you asked me to come to see you. You said if I did, you would tell me the truth about my son. Well, I'm here.

GORDON

Yeah...yeah, you are. But see, the thing is, I didn't think you'd really come, and now --

He's pacing, growing more agitated and scared.

CHRISTINE

Now what?

GORDON

I didn't expect....

(beat)

I don't want to see you.

CHRISTINE

What?

GORDON

I can't do this...I can't talk to you...not today, not tonight, not with what they're going to do to me. It's one thing to send a telegram, that's easy, but right now, right here, in person, I --

(beat)

I can't tell you what you want to hear, Mrs. Collins. I can't, I can't --

CHRISTINE

Why not?

GORDON

Because I don't want to die with a lie on my lips!

He turns from her, in anguish...but is he just playing her?

GORDON

I did my penance, I asked God to forgive me for my sins...and I've been good, ever since...if I commit a sin now, if I lie now...I'm out of time, I can't be forgiven again... I don't want to go to hell --

She goes around to him, faces him.

CHRISTINE

Mr. Northcott...look at me.

(beat)

Look at me.

He turns almost against his will...meets her eyes.

CHRISTINE

Did you...kill...my son?

His eyes go wide and he CRIES OUT, stumbling back and away from her.

GORDON

Get away from me...I don't know
anything about it!

CHRISTINE

Mr. Northcott --

GORDON

I'm innocent!
(pounds door)
Guard! Guard!

The guard enters, going to Northcott.

CHRISTINE

No, wait, please --

PRISON GUARD

It's okay, ma'am, they always get a
little nuts the day of.

She pushes past him to Northcott, grabs the front of his shirt.

CHRISTINE

Did you kill him? Did you kill my
son?

He screams in anguish, and the guard hauls him out, closing
the door after him. Christine tries to open the door, but it
won't open.

CHRISTINE

Mr. Northcott...Mr. Northcott!

She slowly slides to the floor, crying as we HEAR the SOUND
of CHAINS clanking, and we....

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. EXECUTION AREA - NIGHT

The door to the prison yard opens and closes as Northcott is
led into the area with the scaffolding. The Warden is there,
waiting at the foot of the gallows, along with a chaplain.

Several other parents, including Mr. and Mrs. Clay, are in
the witness gallery at the back, separated from the gallows
area by a large plate glass window. Christine is among the
parents. The Clays see her, and put a hand on her arm for
strength. Christine nods, accepting it, and moves to one
side.

Northcott, legs and arms bound in chains, makes his way to
the warden at the base of the gallows. A clock reads 9:50.

WARDEN

Gordon Stewart Northcott, you have been found guilty of murder, the penalty for which is death by hanging. There have been no stays or reprieves, therefore the execution will go forward as stipulated under the laws of the State of California. Do you have any last words?

GORDON

No...nothing.
(to chaplain)
I kept clean after I confessed,
reverend...just like I said I would.

The chaplain nods silently as the warden looks to the guards, who begin to escort Northcott up the steps to the gallows.

GORDON

Will it...will it hurt?
(no reply)
Please...not so fast...don't make
me walk so fast!

They struggle with him now, pushing and carrying him up the last of the thirteen steps to the top. They tie his legs together, and cinch his arms tightly in place.

GORDON

Thirteen steps...thirteen steps...
but I didn't touch all of 'em, you
bastards...I didn't touch all of
'em!

They start to slip a black felt mask over his head and secure the rope. He looks desperately to the witnesses.

GORDON

A prayer! Please, somebody, say a
prayer for me!

The mask goes on and is tightened into place. The executioner approaches the handle that will open the trap door. The warden looks to the clock...9:59. From beneath the hood we HEAR, in a terrified, shaking voice:

GORDON

*Silent night...holy night...all is
calm...all is bright...round yon
virgin mother and child...holy infant
so tender and mild --*

Just then the warden nods to the executioner who pulls the lever and the trap door JERKS OPEN.

Northcott FALLS through the door six feet then there's a SNAP...and the body bounces in SLOW MOTION at the end of the rope...as we HEAR the sound of his heart slowing...slowing...until it finally stops.

Christine covers her eyes. There is no cheering in the witness room. Only the sound of weeping.

EXT. SAN QUENTIN - NIGHT

Slowly, the witnesses exit the prison. We find Christine among them. She nods good-night to some of them, including the Clays, then starts off on her own, heading into the night.

DISSOLVE TO:

BLACK SCREEN

SUPERIMPOSE: FIVE YEARS LATER. FEBRUARY 27, 1935

And: SEVEN YEARS AFTER THE DISAPPEARANCE OF WALTER COLLINS

EXT. PACIFIC TELEPHONE COMPANY - AFTERNOON

Just to ESTABLISH, then:

INT. TELEPHONE COMPANY - CHRISTINE'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

The brass plate on the partially open door announces C. COLLINS, ASSISTANT MANAGER. She's filling out paperwork as there's a KNOCK and a group of other employees and operators appears in the doorway.

OPERATOR

Hey, Chris...we're having an Oscar party tonight at my apartment, you want to come?

CHRISTINE

I can't...I've got a million forms to fill out --

OPERATOR

C'mon, please, they can wait --

CHRISTINE

Sandy, you guys blew out the phone lines between here and Baltimore, someone has to clean up the mess, and that's me. Besides, I've got a radio right here, I can follow the whole thing.

OPERATOR

You're sure?

CHRISTINE

Positive. Go on, have fun.

They head off. Christine focuses on her work. There's another knock on the door.

CHRISTINE

I said I can't go --

MR. HARRIS

Are you sure?

She looks up to see Ben Harris in the doorway. He smiles.

MR. HARRIS

I'm meeting some friends for dinner at Musso and Frank's on Hollywood. They're going to pipe the Oscar ceremony through to the restaurant. Should be quite a night. I'd love it if you'd come.

CHRISTINE

Ben, that's very sweet, and I wish I could...but I really need to stay and finish this.

He nods, taking the rejection well. Starts off when:

CHRISTINE

Ben...? I put down two dollars on "It Happened One Night" for best picture. Seems I'm the only one here who thinks it has a chance against "Cleopatra." If I win, how about we have dinner tomorrow night to celebrate?

MR. HARRIS

You've got a deal, Christine. Good night.

CHRISTINE

'Night.

MR. HARRIS

How about I call you if you win?

CHRISTINE

I'll be here.

And with a smile, he's gone.

INT. TELEPHONE COMPANY - SWITCHBOARD ROOM - NIGHT

The night shift operators are working, a smaller group but still busy. We PAN through them until we start to HEAR the sound of radio-miked applause, then:

IRWIN S. COBB
(on radio)
Thank you. And now, it gives me
distinct honor to present the
category of Best Picture for 1934.

INT. CHRISTINE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Where Christine is still working as the Academy Awards of 1935 play themselves out on the radio.

IRWIN S. COBB
(on radio)
The nominees are "The Gay Divorcee,"
"Here Comes the Navy," "The Barrets
of Wimpole Street," "One Night of
Love," "The Thin Man," "Cleopatra" --

CHRISTINE
Over-rated....

IRWIN S. COBB
(on radio)
"Viva Villa," "The White Parade,"
and "It Happened One Night."

CHRISTINE
Clark Gable, Claudette Colbert. I
rest my case.

IRWIN S. COBB
(on radio)
And the Oscar for Best Picture goes
to....
(beat)
"It Happened One Night."

APPLAUSE comes through the radio...and Christine is as pleased as if she'd just won herself.

CHRISTINE
(calling out door)
I knew it...I knew it! I told you
so!

She's just about to go back to her work when the phone rings. She picks it up, smiling.

CHRISTINE

Ben, it looks like dinner is on me,
I --

She stops. It's not Ben on the phone.

CHRISTINE

Yes, this is she. Mrs. Clay? No,
of course I remember you, how are
you? Is everything --

She freezes at something she hears.

CHRISTINE

When? Where did they --
(beat)

No, of course...I'll be right there.

She hangs up, grabs her coat, and races out the door.

EXT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Christine climbs out of a taxi and rushes into the station.

INT. INTERVIEW ROOM - VIEWING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Christine is ushered into a room with a long two-way mirror that looks out into an interview room. Mr. and Mrs. Clay are already there. In the other room is Detective Ybarra, and a young boy, DAVID, age 13. Mrs. Clay sees her, and they embrace.

MRS. CLAY

I wanted to go to him right off,
but they said it was important to
talk to him alone first.

CHRISTINE

Are they sure it's --

MRS. CLAY

They're sure, but more important,
I'm sure.

(beat)

It's my boy, all right...it's David.
He's alive, Christine. They found
him up in Hysperia.

CHRISTINE

But how --

Mr. Clay motions for them to shush. They turn their attention to the other room, where Ybarra looks up from making notes.

YBARRA

All right, so after you got into the car, what happened next?

DAVID

They drove me around for a long time, then we ended up at this ranch --

EXT. NORTHCOTT RANCH - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

David is shoved into the chicken coop. Several other BOYS are already there, scared, crying. They lunge at the door, trying to get out, but it slams shut in their faces.

They scream, trying to get out. Gordon SLAMS an arm against the door, scaring them.

GORDON

SHUT UP!

(grinning)

I'll see you boys later....

He laughs and moves off, Sanford accompanying him, looking very guilty.

YBARRA (V.O.)

Were there other boys present?

DAVID (V.O.)

Yeah...six, I think. It was a long time ago.

YBARRA (V.O.)

Did you speak to them? Do you remember any of their names?

INT. CHICKEN COOP - LATER

PANNING the boys huddled against one wall, scared.

DAVID (V.O.)

Yeah...two of them were brothers, I think their last name was Winslow, something like that. The oldest was Jeffrey, I think he was around eleven....

(beat)

...and Walter.

We STOP PAN on the last kid...on Walter Collins, at last.

INT. INTERVIEW ROOM - VIEWING ROOM

As Christine REACTS to this, her hand flying to her mouth. Not daring to breathe.

YBARRA

Walter.

DAVID

Yeah.

YBARRA

Do you remember his last name?

DAVID

Collins.

Christine covers her face. Can barely stand up.

YBARRA

So if you only remember some of the names of the rest, how come you remember his full name?

DAVID

Because of what happened.

INT. CHICKEN COOP - NIGHT

Two of the kids, Walter and Jeffrey, are sitting in a corner, talking quietly, urgently.

DAVID (V.O.)

Walter and Jeffrey were talking when everybody else was screaming. They were scared, same as the rest of us, but they weren't scared stupid. They kept checking around until they found a part of the coop where the chicken wire was all messed up.

They pull at the wiring. Part of the roof weakens and dust sifts down.

DAVID (V.O.)

They figured we might be able to yank the chicken wire and bring down the corner, maybe make enough room to get out of there and run... but it would make an awful lot of noise and if it wasn't wide enough, we'd be stuck. It might even bring the whole place down.

WALTER

We gotta try it!

FIRST WINSLOW BOY

No! What he hears --

JEFFREY

We have to get out of here!

FIRST WINSLOW BOY

I'm afraid!

And in an echo of what he told his mother the last time he saw her:

WALTER

I'm not. I'm not afraid of
anything.

(beat)

Don't you want to go home? Don't
you want to see your mom again?

The Winslow kids nod, and start crying. Jeffrey and Walter look to the rest.

JEFFREY

Anybody else?

David holds up his hand.

JEFFREY

Okay. Anybody who doesn't want to
come, get over at that end in case
this comes down.

The Winslow boys and two others scramble to the other end, too terrified to try and escape. Jeffrey, David and Walter go to the weakened corner of the coop.

JEFFREY

When we get out, we split up, go in
different directions, they can't
catch all of us. Ready?

They nod, and get into position, each taking a part of the wire framework.

JEFFREY

Pull!

They do so, pulling for all they're worth...struggling...the ceiling SHIFTS above them, dirt falling all over the place... they pull harder, the wire cutting into fingers, but still pulling...then suddenly --

-- the corner FALLS AWAY, part of the roof starting to come down with it. The NOISE is substantial.

JEFFREY

Go!

They race out the opening, Jeffrey first, then Walter, then David...but just as the first two get clear --

DAVID

Help!

Walter turns to see David stuck in the wiring. LIGHTS go on around the ranch. He hesitates...then RUNS back to David, helps to untangle him. They HEAR a SHOTGUN blast, and FEET running their way.

DAVID

Hurry!

Walter gets him untangled, and the two RACE away from the coop, running for all they're worth as a FLASHLIGHT hits first one, then the other. They RUN --

-- and David catches one last glimpse of Walter running, heading for the line of trees....

YBARRA (V.O.)

And that's the last you saw of him?

INT. INTERVIEW ROOM - VIEWING ROOM - NIGHT

As the interview continues. David nods.

DAVID

That's the last I saw of any of 'em.

YBARRA

So you don't know if either of the other two were captured?

DAVID

No. All I know is, if he hadn't come back for me...I don't think I ever would've gotten out of there.

YBARRA

What happened after that?

DAVID

I hid in the woods for two days, too scared to move, because I was sure they'd find me. I finally started walking, but every time a car came up I was afraid it was them. So I kept off the main roads until I saw a train stopped at a crossing, and I jumped in.

YBARRA

Why didn't you tell anyone what had happened?

DAVID

I was afraid! I thought they'd come after me, or my folks...so I didn't tell anybody. I was on my own until I got a free meal from this lady, Mrs. Lansing. I told her I was an orphan, on my own. She said I could stay on, and...I did.

(beat)

Every night, I'd wake up, thinking they were right outside my window. Then I heard the police talking on the radio about what happened at the ranch, and I thought, for sure I can't go back now.

YBARRA

Why not?

DAVID

Since I didn't tell anybody what happened, I was afraid they'd blame me for those kids being dead. So I just...stayed away.

YBARRA

So what made you come forward now, after all this time?

David looks away, his eyes tearing up. Finally:

DAVID

I miss my mom...I miss my dad...I just...I just want to go home.

And it's all Mrs. Clay can take. Sobbing, she runs out of the viewing room and into the interview room, where she goes to her son and embraces him, holds him, the two crying into one another's arms.

EXT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Christine and Ybarra watch as Mr. and Mrs. Clay lead their son into their car. As they drive off, Christine finally breaks the silence.

YBARRA

Still can't believe it. Five years, case closed, everyone thinks he's dead...and there he is.

(more)

YBARRA (Cont'd)

And he wouldn't be, if it wasn't
for Walter.

(beat)

Your son did a brave thing, Mrs.
Collins. You should be very proud
of him.

CHRISTINE

I am.

YBARRA

You don't think he's still out there,
do you?

CHRISTINE

Why not? Three boys made a run for
it that night, Detective. If one
got out, maybe either or both of
the others did too. Maybe Walter
went through the same fears he did.
Afraid to come home or identify
himself, afraid he'd get into
trouble, that people might think it
was his fault. Either way, it gives
me something I didn't have before
tonight.

YBARRA

What's that?

She looks at him...and smiles.

CHRISTINE

Hope.

She turns and walks off into the night, as we SUPERIMPOSE:

Gordon Stewart Northcott was hanged on October 2, 1935

In exchange for his cooperation and a guilty plea, Sanford
Wesley Clark was sentenced to the Whittier State School for
Boys for five years. Upon being released in 1934, he returned
home to Canada, and was never heard from again.

Upon returning to duty after his suspension, Captain J. J.
Jones was demoted to Lieutenant and subsequently sued by
Christine Collins in civil court. He was found guilty and
fined \$10,800 (equal to \$125,000 in 2006 dollars). He never
paid.

One year after the City Council recommended the removal of
the Los Angeles Chief of Police, James E Davis resigned from
office and was replaced by Roy E. Steckel.

Davis reclaimed that office in 1933, where he created the Red Squad, notorious for attacking Communists and their offices, but was forced to resign a second time under a cloud of police corruption.

In the aftermath of the City Council hearings, the criminal justice system in California was revised to prevent women from being incarcerated or institutionalized for the crime of disagreeing with a male police officer. Strict medical procedures were set in place to prevent future abuse.

In November 1929, Los Angeles Mayor George E. Cryer was voted out of office after three terms. He was later found to have been the front man for the Crawford Organized Crime Syndicate, which ran prostitution and gambling rackets throughout Southern California.

For the rest of his life, Reverend Gustav A. Briegleb used his radio show to expose police misconduct and political corruption. He also published "The Layman's Handbook of Daniel."

The California community of Wineville, near Riverside, became synonymous with the infamous Northcott Murder Ranch. In order to shake free of the scandal, the residents changed its name to Mira Loma.

Christine Collins never stopped searching for her son.

The fate of Walter Collins remains a mystery. If he was able to escape the Northcott Ranch, he would be 86 years old today.

FADE OUT:

The End