

**Lost Inside**

by  
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*Inspired by a true story*

Waves are gently crashing.

FADE IN:

EXT. BEACH - EVENING

A ROMANTIC COUPLE stroll hand-in-hand at surf's edge, barefoot, pants rolled up. The moon is full, its translucence permeating everything in sight, including...

The Atlantic Ballroom of the Palm Beach Hilton, its contemporary glass & chrome design the stand-out feature on the beach side of the massive property. The warmly lit ballroom is packed to capacity for a formal event.

MAN (V.O.)

*Michele...wake up, Honey...he's here...the little guy we've all been waiting for...*

INT. PALM BEACH HILTON LOBBY - EVENING

Prominently posted, *Today's Agenda - 8/31/96* welcomes the Florida Neurological Association's 10th Anniversary Gala honoring Sunrise Rehabilitation Center.

MAN (V.O.)

(desperate)

*He's finally here and you're sleeping through it! C'mon, Sweetheart! Your baby wants to meet his mommy!!*

INT. ATLANTIC BALLROOM - CONTINUOUS

A black-tie dinner for a thousand is in progress, with amateur home video playing on a giant screen: a NEWBORN is being introduced to his MOTHER in her hospital room, surrounded by FAMILY MEMBERS & STAFF. A joyous, milestone moment.

But *this* milestone isn't joyous; the new mother is comatose, and every adult in the room is fighting tears, private turmoil revealed on each face as new grandfather BUCK, a compact, muscular man in his early 50s, clutches the fidgety baby and tries in vain to illicit a response from his unconscious daughter.

BUCK

(even more desperate)

*C'mon, Michele, we **need** you...he  
needs you, Sweetheart...we can't...  
we don't wanna **raise** him without  
you...*

This, finally, is too much for a NURSE'S AIDE, who stifles a sob and rushes from the room. The baby's growing more restless, whimpers yielding to *wails* as the video freezes.

The ballroom lighting shifts to reveal an onstage podium and BONNIE ARNOLD, a cheerful blonde with a contagious smile.

BONNIE

(delightfully southern)

Ladies & gentlemen, nearly two  
years later, please welcome former  
Sunrise patient Michele Greene!

The audience applauds enthusiastically as MICHELE, 26, rises from her table; walking with a pronounced limp, she ascends to the stage with brief assistance from Buck. Bonnie embraces her, adjusts the mic for height. The applause dies down, the video screen fades to black and Bonnie recedes offstage, leaving Michele alone at the podium. She takes in the view of the immense, filled-to-capacity ballroom.

MICHELE'S POV - CONTINUOUS

She's clearly overwhelmed: the closest tables, full of loved ones, recede sweepingly, dizzyingly, to reveal the farthest reaches of the ballroom, where seemingly countless eyes stare expectantly. The very architecture of the room grows intimidating, its contemporary lines, high ceiling and dramatic lighting mocking her composure. Time stands still as Michele finds herself blinded by rows of elegant flickers from candle centerpieces; in her imagination they're growing, luminous flames taking on monstrous lives as they threaten to destroy the room.

*And she reacts to the sound of a massive explosion which only she hears.*

EXT. OCEAN PARK FIRE STATION NINE BACKYARD - DUSK (FLASHBACK)

A huge **fireball** engulfs the horizon a mere quarter-mile from the on-duty firefighters' leisurely bar-b-que. They jump, stumble and race to their units, every professional reflex kicking in even before the alarm klaxon bellows.

EXT. STATION NINE - SECONDS LATER

The crunch of gears, the flash of gleaming metal as the engines lurch out.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

SIRENS WAIL as Station Nine's two trucks arrive first on the horrendous scene: a passenger train has demolished a gasoline tanker and derailed upon 80 mph impact, creating a hellish inferno of twisted metal and wreckage randomly strewn in all directions. The train's first three cars have jack-knifed, the lead and second cars eventually skidding to a stop on their sides. Hysterical, panicked & dazed survivors, battered & bloodied, scramble from every steel & glass orifice, desperate to escape the spewing gasoline and fires raging inside the passenger cars.

*A fresh explosion erupts and screams from inside the second car reveal that some aren't so lucky; three passengers leap from shattered windows, engulfed in flames.*

Firefighters are racing from their trucks and straight into heroic, fearless action, some tackling passengers, others manning equipment. Several are positioned at the tanker, expertly communicating as they battle the relentless flames. One gets close enough to see inside the truck's cab, where...

A mass of burning, molten flesh is slumped over the steering wheel, barely resembling a human being. The firefighter hesitates, the horror being processed by wide eyes...eyes which are, somehow, familiar to us. But the moment passes and the work resumes, emotion taking a back seat to the gritty determination required to survive this otherworldly carnage.

Another explosion and more screams from inside the second car lead a trio of firefighters to don additional gear; among them is the firefighter who'd hesitated. Scaling the downed second car, they disappear into windows to rescue victims.

INT. BURNING TRAIN WRECKAGE - CONTINUOUS

Battling flames, the trio of firefighters search desperately for survivors but find only corpses...until they reach the rear of the car, where a man is trying to break through the wreckage to safety with two women; a third woman is succumbing to smoke. When the firefighters reach them, they pull the survivors to the floor and douse them with water; as one firefighter leads the group back toward the only safe passage out, another (the smallest of the trio) carries the now-unconscious woman to safety.

## EXT. BURNING TRAIN WRECKAGE - CONTINUOUS

A roof hatch in the train is smashed open, and the firefighter carrying the unconscious woman bursts forth, followed by the others. They stagger to safety, assisted by their colleagues. SIRENS WAIL as other emergency response units arrive.

## EXT. ACCIDENT SCENE - LATER

The fire's contained and the last of the victims are being transported as the men of Station Nine take a well-deserved breather. As headgear comes off and bottled water is guzzled, the slender firefighter who'd rescued the unconscious woman wanders away. STROMER, a six-foot-five behemoth of a man, notices and nudges HECTOR, handsome, 30s, Cuban-American, with a pronounced scar across his left cheek.

HECTOR  
(calling out)  
Yo, Verdita! Where you goin'?

The firefighter turns around, the headgear comes off to REVEAL Michele, the speaker from the Palm Beach Hilton, now 23 and softer, more feminine, beautiful. She's the firefighter who'd hesitated at the oil tanker's cab. She signals her colleagues that she's fine, she just needs a moment.

## MICHELE'S POV:

Train tracks disappearing into undeveloped, rural South Florida tranquility, untouched by the mayhem behind her...and the earth, which suddenly comes rushing toward her as she lunges forward to vomit in the underbrush.

## EXT. BROWARD COUNTY, FLA. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD - EVENING

Brand new ranch style homes, dotted by new sod & landscaping, many with pick-up trucks in the driveway.

## INT. MASTER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

On a king-sized bed, a young woman's hands fold men's clothes, pausing at a colorful, Polo-style golf shirt to caress the fabric. Across the room, a cardboard box lands with a *thud* among several others.

MICHELE (O.C.)  
Whoa. You're *doing* it again.

REVEALED are Michele, surrounded by several packing boxes, and CHRISTINA, 25, surrounded by piles of clothes on the bed. Their physical resemblance is striking, Christina a more petite version of her taller, more athletic younger sister. Christina's drinking a beer from a six-pack.

CHRISTINA

I'm sorry, it's just...I gave him this for Christmas.

(dazed)

It was the last XL at Burdine's. I made a girl undress the mannequin.

MICHELE

Chris, he had a lot of clothes. If we reminisce over every shirt this will take 'til *next* Christmas.

CHRISTINA

But why tonight? What's the harm in putting it off 'til...well, *later?! Isn't it comforting* having his clothes where he left them?

(a different shirt, glum)

Mom brought him *this* from the Bahamas last summer.

Michele joins her on the bed, takes the shirt.

MICHELE

(gently)

Hey. His clothes only clutter the closet and remind me he's gone. Why *shouldn't* his buddies have them?

(then)

It's time, okay? It's just time.

Christina sighs sadly.

CHRISTINA

You know what you need? You need your girlfriends.

Michele continues folding clothes.

MICHELE

(ambivalent)

Uh-huh.

CHRISTINA

They've joined my gym, y'know, all three of 'em, Janet, Misty, Jamie. I see 'em all the time.

MICHELE

I really don't care.

CHRISTINA

They're trying to be supportive,  
why won't you return their calls?!

Michele stops folding, clutches a shirt.

MICHELE

Their idea of support is dragging  
me to every bar from Boca to South  
Beach. Oh, and according to them  
the best way to mourn your husband  
is to jump in bed with random cute  
strangers.

CHRISTINA

Okay, they're not deep. But they  
care! You have *history*...

MICHELE

I have nothing in common with them  
anymore. Let it go.

Christina looks away, suddenly fighting tears.

MICHELE

Please don't do that, we're not  
crying tonight.

CHRISTINA

(rambling, crying)

I just..*hate* the *unfairness*! Every  
time I come home to this house I'm  
like, *Why* am I living here? *Why's*  
*my kid sister a widow* now?!

(blurting out)

Have a damn beer with me already!

Michele gives her a tissue.

MICHELE

Nah, I'm still sick from today.

Christina blows her nose with a *honk*. She picks up a pair of  
khaki shorts from a pile of pants, studies the seat.

CHRISTINA

(sad)

*Ohhh*...his butt looked so good in  
these.

She sneaks a guilty look at her sister...and they break into laughter, which for Michele too easily becomes tears.

MICHELE

*Great, so we are crying tonight,  
thanks!*

As they cry, Christina impulsively opens a beer and thrusts it at Michele...who's seized by the sudden urge to vomit and rushes to the bathroom.

CHRISTINA

(calling out)  
*Jeez, sorry. Didn't know you were  
serious.*

REVEALED are the framed photos on Michele's dresser: family vacations, Michele's firefighting academy graduation, a wedding photo of Michele and CONOR, mid-30s, green-eyed, redheaded, and a photo of Conor in his charter pilot's uniform, proudly standing beside a gleaming 1994 Cessna Citation CJ4.

EXT. FIRE STATION NINE - MORNING

Several MALE FIREFIGHTERS are engrossed in equipment maintenance, polishing and inventorying.

INT. FIRE STATION KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Hector is happily in his element whipping up a huge breakfast for the firehouse, easily keeping several culinary balls in the air at once.

INT. FIRE STATION WOMEN'S LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Water is running as Michele's drenched face rises into view of the mirror above the sink. She turns off the water, studies the dark circles under her eyes, the splotchy skin of her cheeks. Banging on the door jolts her, she dries her face.

HECTOR (O.C.)

*Hey Verdita, you fall **in** or  
somethin'?*

MICHELE

I'm fine!

HECTOR (O.C.)  
*Then get out here, got a surprise  
 for you!*

Michele steadies herself against the sink, takes a deep breath and heads for the door...on the other side of which she finds a skillet with a four-egg omelette, smothered with melted cheese & an aromatic green goop.

HECTOR  
 Three cheeses and Mom's Cuban  
 jalapeno sauce! You'll think  
 you're in *heaven!*

Michele's *horrified by the smell*; her face drains of color and she stumbles backward, in sudden need of any porcelain receptacle.

HECTOR  
 Wow. Mom's sauce usually gets  
 raves.

EXT. PHYSICIAN'S OFFICE - LATER

Michele is seen through a window in an examining room, listening, stunned, to her FEMALE DOCTOR. When the doctor offers Michele a supportive hug, the patient passes out.

EXT. SUBURBAN RANCH HOUSE - EARLY AFTERNOON

Michele's SUV is parked haphazardly across the driveway, alongside a similar vehicle and a sport cruiser boat, a 1994 Sea Ray 270 Sundancer.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Michele sits slumped in the comfy breakfast nook booth, ignoring her iced tea, staring out at the expansive backyard. MARY, 50-ish, a short, lively, bustling blonde, sits across from her, clearly stunned into silence...before *bursting into joyous tears*, hands flying to her mouth in disbelief, knocking over her iced tea. She's positively *ebullient*.

MARY  
 Oh honey! *C'mere c'mere c'mere!*

She reaches for Michele with a long, hard embrace, unwilling to let go.

MARY

(gushing)

*It's the most amazing...the most unbelievable...I just, I can't...oh my God!!!*

MICHELE

Mom, you're choking a pregnant woman.

BUCK (O.C.)

Uh...say **what?!**

The women look up to find Buck home from work, frozen in disbelief as he untucks his Broward County Sheriff's Department shirt.

A champagne cork **pops!**

INT. GREENE FAMILY LIVING ROOM- EVENING

It's a celebratory family gathering, the whole Greene clan: Buck & Mary; Michele; Christina; oldest daughter KELLY, fastidious & domestic, & good-guy husband STEVEN, both 30; and second-born, single parent cop HOLLY, 28, tough, every bit her father's daughter, with year-old son KYLE. Buck has opened a bottle and is filling champagne glasses. A big pile of wrapped gifts sits in the center of the group. Steven's the designated videographer, training his camcorder on anything that moves.

BUCK

Everyone grab a glass!

KELLY

What about *us?*!

REVEALED are Kelly & Michele's pregnancies; though both are in their seventh month, Kelly's huge everywhere while the only change in Michele's athletic body is her belly.

MICHELE

Yeah dad, jeez. A little consideration for the moms-to-be!

MARY

Hey, does your old dad not think of everything?

As Buck hands his pregnant daughters glasses, Mary flashes the bottle of sparkling cider from which they were filled. Holly repositions Kyle on her lap as she bottle-feeds him.

HOLLY

Hard stuff for me. And for the record, this kid's gonna stay an only child. Anyone ever compare a cervix to the size of a head?

KELLY

I'll be unconscious, thank you.

MICHELE

What?! No! We made a pact, natural all the way!

KELLY

*Please*, my hormones were *whacked* that night, that's *not* happening!

(to Steven)

I want a full-body epidural, my hairdresser on call *and* a venti Frappuccino at-the-ready.

STEVEN

Yes, dear.

MARY

How silly! I had all four of you without drugs and don't regret a single moment.

(to Michele)

You stick to your guns, natural childbirth's the way to go. Just remember, the feeling of complete disembowelment fades in time.

STEVEN

(queasy)

Uh, change of subject, please?

MICHELE

Yes! A toast!

Steven whips his video camera toward her.

MICHELE

Growing up we had a *supermom*...and to this day, like Dad, I am *madly* in love with you, and if I become even a...

(fighting tears)

...*fraction* of the mom you are, this will be the luckiest baby in all of South Florida.

Awwws all-around as Mary tears up, embraces Michele. Kelly smacks Michele's arm.

KELLY

(self-loathing)

Great! The perfect sappy sentiment from the one who's kept her perfect little figure! You'll probably go back to *saving the world* the moment they cut the umbilical cord!

MICHELE

(laughing)

Hey, they finally stuck me on desk assignment this week! I'm like *guys, gimme a break, I'm barely showing!*

Kelly shoves a handful of hors d'oeuvres into her mouth.

KELLY

(mumbling)

How lucky for you.

MICHELE

(intimately)

Kel, don't knock yourself. In fact, you're number one on my list. Sorry to hijack your birthday for a minute, Mom...

She pulls out, unfolds a piece of paper.

HOLLY

(rolling her eyes)

Oh yay, a Michelle list. Is it a novel, should we pee first?

KELLY

(shoving in more food)

Make it fast, I'm starving.

CHRISTINA

Sssh! It's good, I've read it.

MICHELE

You've *read my list?*

CHRISTINA

It was on the kitchen counter, I saw my name!

Michele clears her throat.

MICHELE

Okay, now this isn't like my usual lists, it's not ordered in any significant sequential...

HOLLY

Oh for God's sake...

KELLY

Just read it already!

MICHELE

Okay-okay!

(off her belly)

Last night I was telling this little guy what a cool family he'll have, and all the reasons his mom's grateful.

(to Kelly)

You've got that *voluptuous pregnant glow*. I wish I did. I think you look *totally beautiful*.

KELLY

(touched; her mouth full)

Really?

Michele takes her oldest sister's arm in solidarity.

MICHELE

Totally. You have no idea how much I've learned watching you be pregnant. You're a natural! So thank you. And Steven, you have my advance gratitude for the countless hours spent teaching your nephew to pitch, catch, bat and punt.

STEVEN

Cool! Can I teach him about girls?

MICHELE

No.

KELLY

No.

MICHELE

(to Christina)

And *you*, Noseybutt...you lose more hair in the shower than a Cocker Spaniel...but I'd never have survived this past year if you hadn't moved in.

She's absently feeling the ruby pendant heart which hangs from a simple, beautiful gold chain around her neck.

MICHELE

I owe you, Sweetie. Bigtime.

CHRISTINA  
 (suddenly misty)  
*Ohhhhh...*

She goes to Michele for a hug.

HOLLY  
 Look, I won't cry no matter what  
 sap you spew at me.

MICHELE  
 That's right, you won't, and I'm  
 grateful. You keep me grounded  
 whenever I spin off into *mommy-to-*  
*be land.*  
 (off Kyle)  
 And you're amazing with  
 him....better than you know. You  
 truly inspire me, Holly.

They share a silent moment...and Holly reluctantly tears up.

HOLLY  
 Okay, you suck.

INT. HALLWAY - LATER

Michele emerges from the bathroom.

MARY (O.C.)  
 I always forget what a holy terror  
 you were.

Michele finds her studying the Greene family hall of photos.

MICHELE  
 Oh, not the chocolate thing again.  
 You should frame new pictures.

MARY  
 Thanks for your list. Especially  
 Kelly, she's feeling bad about her  
 weight.

MICHELE  
 Well *Mom*, she's a *Hoover!*

MARY  
 I know, her doctor's working on it.  
 But you were sweet...you made her  
 feel good about herself for a  
 minute.

They share an intimate smile; Mary takes her daughter's arm.

MARY

(off the photo)

I remember this like it was yesterday. You made a mess, but I didn't mind. Come to think of it, I never got mad at you. You were always *my coolest kid*.

MICHELE

(surprised)

Mom! Isn't that like having a *favorite?!*

Mary offers an enigmatic smile...then touches the ruby heart Michele wears.

MARY

Do you know how happy it makes Chrissie that you still wear this?

MICHELE

Well she had good taste even in middle school!

Laughter rings out from the dining room.

MARY

Know somethin'? You're *still* my coolest kid.

She gives her daughter a wink, then escorts her back to dinner. REVEALED is the photo on the wall: a 1972 Easter family portrait in which two-year-old Michele, impossibly cute, is completely smeared with melted chocolate bunny, as is identically dressed four-year-old Christina, her shadow, protector and best friend.

EXT. MICHELE'S HOUSE - LATE NIGHT

Crickets are chirping. Michele's SUV & Christina's sports car are parked in the driveway.

INT. MASTER BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Michele finishes brushing her teeth and smooths down her nightgown, studying her belly in the mirror, first one angle, then another.

CHRISTINA (O.C.)

How about August?

MICHELE

(absently)

Dumb. He's due in October.

CHRISTINA (O.C.)

But it means *majestic*. You could nickname him *Augie*.

Michele clicks off the bathroom light.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Christina's camped out on Michele's bed, engrossed in *The Big Book of Baby Names*.

MICHELE

That has to be the worst one so far.

CHRISTINA

C'mon! It was good enough for Augie Donatelli!

(off her look, scanning the page)

Famous, uh, umpire. Made history for...*hand signals* or something.

Michele opens her night stand drawer, retrieves a floral print-covered journal and a pen.

CHRISTINA

Then how about...

(off the book)

*Bailey!...or Balthasar!...*

MICHELE

(laughing)

*Balthasar? Gross!*

CHRISTINA

*...or Barclay, or Barnaby?!*

Michele cringes, then takes the book and sends it sailing across the room. She consults her journal.

MICHELE

Face it, Aunt Chrissie, so far it's a very short list. *One*, to be exact.

CHRISTINA

(hesitant)

But...well...there's still always  
Conor.

Michele sighs, yawns.

MICHELE

G'night, Sweetie. Wake me when you  
leave for school.

Christina smiles sadly and trudges off to bed as Michele  
clicks off her lamp.

EXT. MICHELE'S HOUSE - DAWN

A newspaper lands on the front lawn with a *thud*.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Coffee's brewing, Christina's perched atop the counter  
perusing the newspaper beside an empty mug and an empty  
travel cup. She's dressed smartly for her day in a brown  
plaid skirt & attractive cream-colored silk blouse.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

Michele lies awake, staring at the ceiling. There's a gentle  
rap at the door and Christina comes in with a mug of coffee.

CHRISTINA

Rise & shine, sleepy-...oh! You're  
awake.

MICHELE (O.S.)

(groggy)

*Chris...my head, it's...pounding...*

She sits up with difficulty. Christina sits beside her.

CHRISTINA

Awww...where?

Michele touches her temples.

CHRISTINA

Let's try some pressure...

She gently rubs both of her temples for a moment.

CHRISTINA  
How's that feel?

Michele can't keep her eyes open.

MICHELE  
Nauseous...hurts...

CHRISTINA  
I'll get Tylenol. Want me to call  
Dr. Moore?

MICHELE  
(irritated)  
It's a *headache*, I'm not having  
*contractions!*

Chris rubs her arm sympathetically.

INT. COMMUNITY COLLEGE CLASSROOM - LATER

Chatty students file out of class, glad to be free.  
Christina anxiously checks her watch as she confers with a  
lingering co-ed.

INT. MICHELE'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Michele, asleep on the couch, tosses fitfully but hasn't been  
awakened by the outgoing message on the machine, which beeps.

CHRISTINA (V.O.)  
Hey, Spud, checking on your poor  
little head, hopin' it went away.  
The pain, I mean. Not your head.  
Dumb joke. Call me, 'kay? I've  
got an hour between classes. Love  
ya.

INT. CHRISTINA'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Christina hangs up, tries to focus on work. The nameplate on  
her desk reads *C. Greene, English Dept. Graduate Teaching  
Assistant.*

EXT. MICHELE'S HOUSE - EVENING

Christina's sports car zooms up, parks in the driveway.

INT. LIVING ROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Christina's on the phone, perched on the couch beside Michele, who's motionless, still wearing her nightgown. Her head's sunken into a pillow, her matted hair's a rat's nest; she stares into the distance, dazed, her face streaked with tears. On the coffee table, a half-empty yogurt cup & a banana peel reveal her nutritional intake for the day.

CHRISTINA

(listening intently)

*Right...yes, but it's been an entire **day** and I...okay, right, fine...thanks for your time, sorry to bother you at home...good-night.*

She disconnects, takes Michele's hand.

CHRISTINA

She said more Tylenol and put ice on your scalp and rub it. And here, Sweetie, you need elevation.

She carefully re-positions her pillow for height.

CHRISTINA

Why didn't you call me? Or Mom, or anyone?

MICHELE

(weak)

*Hurts...just want to...be still...*

CHRISTINA

We'll go in first thing, okay?

She studies Michele's face as she rubs her temple.

CHRISTINA

How 'bout a bath? And then we'll get you into bed.

MICHELE

*Don't wanna...move.*

Christina sighs, glances over at a clock: almost 9PM.

FADE TO BLACK.

A moment of silence...and then *moans*. Awful, from-the-gut, no holds barred *moans*.

CHRISTINA'S POV -

A jolt of green light from the alarm clock: 2:30AM. Darkness as she closes her eyes. But the *moans* again jolt her awake.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Christina rushes down the stairs, spots Michele crumpled beside the couch. Fueled by sudden fear, she races to her.

CHRISTINA

*Oh my...God!!! Sweetie what is it?! What's wrong, talk to me!*

But Michele's eyes barely flutter open, and all she can offer are more moans.

EXT. MICHELE'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Christina *bursts through* the front door backwards, awkwardly maneuvering a rolling dining room chair, on which she's propped the semi-unconscious Michele. As light rain falls, she works with the strength & dexterity of an adrenaline-fueled panic, reclining the passenger seat of her sports car before desperately laboring to slide Michele into place.

CHRISTINA

*That's it, good, just stay with me!!! Oh God Michele, oh God oh God oh God...*

In no time she's behind the wheel and peeling out of the driveway. She ignores a stop sign a block away, speeding away into the night.

INT. ER WAITING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

CHRISTINA'S POV -

Through a chaotic haze comes a rush of sensory stimuli: faces, bright lights, jarring sounds. Through it all, hospital clocks note the passing of time:

INT. ER WAITING ROOM - 3:15AM

Christina paces while Buck hounds the ER staff; an ER DOCTOR materializes with an update and the blood pounding in Chris's ears drowns out all but random words.

ER DOCTOR  
*...blood clot...4 centimeters...  
 right side of brain...immediate  
 surgery...family...ASAP...time left  
 to say good-bye...*

Christina stumbles backward against a wall. An ER NURSE appears, offers her Michele's rings and the ruby pendant on a gold chain.

ER NURSE  
*...for safekeeping.*

INT. ER WAITING ROOM - 4:00AM

The rest of the family have arrived. Mary, Kelly, Steven (in his police uniform) and Holly (with Kyle) are all in various states of panic as a new physician, DR. ROBERT FRIEDLINE, updates them.

CHRISTINA'S POV -

Again, her forced-perspective haze mirrors her warped emotional state.

DR. FRIEDLINE  
*...aneurysm...burst...surgery...  
 should airlift to Miami...transport  
 out-of-the-question...going into  
 labor...immediate C-Section...brain  
 surgery possible...more than three  
 hours...*

INT. ER WAITING ROOM - 6:50AM

Pacing...staring into space...waiting in silence...styro cups of coffee, everyone lost in thought, a million miles apart... Kyle asleep in Holly's arms.

INT. ER WAITING ROOM - 7:30AM

The desperate family crowd DR. PATTY SULLIVAN, an energetic OB/GYN, when she emerges from the OR.

DR. SULLIVAN  
*He's a healthy baby boy! Four-and-  
 a-half pounds, so we need to...*

As her voice drones on, Christina's head echoes with...

DR. SULLIVAN (V.O.)  
*Healthy baby boy...four-and-a-half  
 pounds...healthy baby boy...  
 healthy baby boy...*

CHRISTINA  
 (hushed)  
*Thank you, God...thank you...*

INT. ER WAITING ROOM - 10:30AM

The hours have taken their toll. No one speaks, and not even Kyle's playful antics can elicit smiles. Finally, Holly erupts.

HOLLY  
*I'm **sorry** but **God's** picking on us!  
 I mean, first Conor, now **this?!  
 Maybe at some point it's like, "Hey,  
them! Let's really screw with  
them!"***

KELLY  
 (steady)  
 He doesn't do that, Holly. It's  
 not the way He works.

HOLLY  
 Oh, and that's *He* with a capital *H*,  
 huh?! Well how *does* he work,  
 Kell?! Is he on *vacation?! Use  
 your special influence, **find out!***

Before Kelly can take the bait, Dr. Friedline emerges from a three-hour surgery. The family spring to attention, some optimistic, some sick with dread.

CHRISTINA'S POV -

Blood pounding in her head, tunnel-vision focus on Friedline's mouth.

DR. FRIEDLINE  
*...comatose state...blood flow to  
 baby...cranial hemorrhaging...hour-  
 to-hour at this point...brain  
 damage a certainty...limited  
 mobility...long, slow recovery...  
 extensive physical therapy...no  
 guarantee...*

The pounding in Christina's ears finally drowns him out.

## INT. MICHELE'S HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER

A NURSE escorts Mary & Christina into the darkened room, murmurs encouraging words and leaves. They approach the bed, stunned by what they find: an endless tangle of tubes, wires. Gauze & bandaging cover Michele's surprisingly tiny head, revealing little of her face. Respirator. Catheters. Impossible-to-identify fluids. The awkwardly-positioned left arm...right leg, right foot...the odd, otherworldly look of comatose sleep that isn't sleep. Christina is instantly lulled into a daze by the blips & beeps of the machines which monitor and maintain.

MARY

It's okay, Chris. She's here.  
She's still with us.

CHRISTINA

(dazed)

But she's...so...*helpless*, she  
looks...*small*...

She's unsteady on her feet; Mary guides her to a chair.

MARY

No. That's deceiving. She's not  
helpless, she's tough.

Christina can't take her eyes off her sister.

## INT. HOSPITAL NURSERY - LATER

A PEDIATRIC NURSE escorts Christina to the premature newborn section, where she joins Kelly and Holly observing their tiny nephew through the glass. Their reactions to the four-and-a-half pound BABY BOY are powerful: the hormonal Kelly weeps with joy, Christina stares in stunned disbelief and the ever-stoic Holly puts a supportive arm around each of them. Together the sisters form a unified front against whatever the future may bring.

## INT. MICHELE'S HOSPITAL ROOM - LATE NIGHT

The machines blip & beep as Christina sits slumped in a bedside chair, propped by a pillow, watching Michele. She absently toys with Michele's ruby pendant, now around her own neck; she clutches a plastic bag, its contents not visible. A nasty thunderstorm rages outside...and a particularly violent *thunderclap* spurs her to reach into her purse for a pen and a purple, velvety journal. She takes a deep breath and begins to scribble, her hand racing to keep pace with her thoughts.

CHRISTINA (V.O.)  
*Where do I begin? This is a  
 journal to share with you when you  
 wake up. Spud...our little  
 Michele...*

Close to tears, she stares out at the storm for a moment... then commences writing furiously, dropping the plastic bag she'd been clutching; it's stuffed with Michele's long, thick brunette hair.

TITLE CARD: DAY 2

INT. MICHELE'S HOSPITAL ROOM - EARLY MORNING

Outside, the thunderstorm continues unabated. Christina wakes up in the chair to find Mary & Buck standing beside the bed and her journal, now several pages long, open on her lap. She quickly closes it and rises, stretches; the chair's really done a number on her back. Mary lovingly touches Michele's arm, allowing herself a moment of self-pity before adopting a no-nonsense attitude.

MARY  
 Okay, here's the agenda: Dr. Friedline's in at noon so we should be ready with any new questions. Holly's drafting a schedule of shifts for all of us, Kelly's up with the baby right now...oh, and number one priority, introducing him to his mommy. We have nurse Robin's permission.

She nods to Buck, who whips out a video camera.

CHRISTINA  
 (overwhelmed)  
 Uh...no, I don't...I don't think we should do that.

BUCK  
 Why not?

MARY  
 Why not?

CHRISTINA  
 (flustered)  
*'Cause she...I mean, because we...  
 just can't! Not now, not like  
 this!*

She collapses back into the chair. Mary kneels beside her.

MARY

(as if to a child)

Chrissie, your sister's in a *coma*, and it could be a day or week or month before she comes back to us. So either we take a *proactive* approach to waiting or we sit on our *duffs* and do nothing! As you know, your father and I aren't duff-sitters, and quite frankly neither are you!

BUCK

Mary, let it go.

MARY

She's feeling *sorry* for herself, she's not looking at the big picture! The baby needs to meet his mommy, because...

(suddenly choked up, to Christina)

*... 'cause **God forbid** our optimism is naïve and our prayers don't **work** and he never knows her! This **video's** the only record he would have of...them together and...could you live with yourself for saying **no?** Because I assure you, young lady, **I could not!***

(then)

Go home, Chrissie. Sleep in your bed. She won't be alone, not for a minute.

Christina lets the words sink in...then slowly reaches over to touch Michele for the first time.

CHRISTINA

Hear that, Spud? You're gonna... meet...

(the tears coming)

*...you get to...**meet your baby...***

She bolts from the room, clutching the hair bag & journal.

EXT. MICHELE'S HOUSE - MORNING

Christina's car squeals past the driveway and onto the lawn. She dashes through the downpour into the house, oblivious to two plastic-wrapped newspapers submerged in a puddle.

INT. FOYER - CONTINUOUS

She inadvertently kicks a pile of mail away from the mail slot. Passing the phone nook, she doesn't notice the answering machine is blinking **FULL**.

INT. MICHELE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

In the doorway, she stands mesmerized by the perfectly made bed...until a bone-rattling *thunderclap* jolts her. She rushes to Michele's night stand and retrieves the floral print journal; holding it seems to calm her, and she studies the first page, on which Michele has formally transcribed ***Michele's Book of Lists***. She smiles as she turns the pages, revealing list after list: *Family & Friend Milestones...Gift Preferences...Household Chores...Videos to Rent...Favorite Quotes...and, finally, Baby Names*. Several names are written and crossed out, but only one is highlighted in yellow: ***Jeremy***.

INT. HOSPITAL NURSERY - AFTERNOON

Christina sits in a rocking chair feeding her nephew as a PEDIATRIC NURSE watches approvingly. When she steps away from the empty bassinet, REVEALED is a new nameplate: GREENE, JEREMY MICHAEL.

TITLE CARD: DAY 3

EXT. HOSPITAL VISITORS' PARKING LOT - EARLY MORNING

The rain continues; the visitors' parking lot is nearly deserted, save a handful of cars.

INT. MICHELE'S HOSPITAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Buck, Mary, Kelly, Holly & Christina wait in various states of composure, or lack thereof. Buck & Holly, in their police uniforms, are at Michele's bedside, holding her hand. ROBIN, the day nurse, arrives with a NURSE'S AIDE holding two-day-old Jeremy. Mary maneuvers the camcorder as Robin takes the baby from the aide, hands him to Buck.

POV - MARY'S CAMCORDER - CONTINUOUS

Buck whispers something into his grandson's ear, then lovingly places him on the bed beside Michele.

BUCK

*Michele...wake up, Honey...he's here...the little guy we've all been waiting for...*

Holly absently strokes Michele's shoulder.

BUCK

(desperate)

*He's finally here and you're sleeping through it! C'mon, Sweetheart! Your baby wants to meet his mommy!!*

END CAMCORDER POV

Silence as everyone waits breathlessly; the only sounds are Michele's ventilator and life support equipment. Time seems to stand still...until a tiny cry escapes from Jeremy. This is too much for the nurse's aide, who stifles a sob and rushes from the room. Jeremy grows more restless, whimpers now giving way to wails. There's not a dry eye in the room.

BUCK

(even more desperate)

*C'mon, Michele, we **need** you...he needs you, Sweetheart...we can't... we don't wanna **raise** him without you...*

He's losing the battle for his emotions. Robin instinctively takes the baby. Mary stops recording.

BUCK

(dazed)

*Maybe...Chrissie was right. Bad idea.*

TITLE CARD: DAY 5

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - LATE AFTERNOON

A conference room door is ajar, voices can be heard from inside.

HOLLY (O.S.)

(irritated)

*How 'bout you cut the crap and say what you mean?!*

BUCK (O.S.)

*Holly!*

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A family meeting is in progress: Mary, Buck, Kelly & Christina hang onto Dr. Friedline's every word as Holly stares out the window at the gray, miserable drizzle.

HOLLY

No, he's being vague, we don't have time for vague!

MARY

Sweetie, he's doing his job!

HOLLY

If it's a worst case scenario, just tell us!

DR. FRIEDLINE

(condescending patience)

What I'm *saying* is the longer she remains unresponsive, the bleaker the picture. We can only hang onto hope so long, and day five's a bad sign. At this point I'd advise you to reevaluate your options on day eight...

Holly spins toward him.

HOLLY

(disgusted)  
*Reevaluate our options?!*

DR. FRIEDLINE

...and perhaps consider the possibility of not continuing down this road.

A stunned silence descends upon the room.

HOLLY

(simmering)  
You're saying give up on her.

MARY

Honey, that's not what...

HOLLY

It's called a *euphemism*, Mother!  
He's telling us to pull the goddamned *plug!*

BUCK

*Holly that's enough!*

Holly backs away, taking in her family contemptuously.

HOLLY

You're damned right, Dad! Chat up *Dr. Doom* all day, see how far you get!

(MORE)

HOLLY (cont'd)  
 Cause he doesn't *know* Michele!  
 She's a fighter, from a *family* of  
 fighters! So his premature  
 deadlines and ultimatums are just  
 wasting our time!

She storms out of the room; Kelly follows.

DR. FRIEDLINE  
 (abrupt)  
 May I continue? I've been here  
 before. Many times. And false  
 hope is a *trap* that's easy to fall  
 into, it's *comforting*, it's  
*soothing*. That's not to say  
 Michele won't wake up, it's good to  
 hope up to a point. But beyond  
 that point medical realities take  
 over, and I'm telling you three  
 more days is the appropriate time  
 frame from which to view those  
 realities.

No one responds.

DR. FRIEDLINE  
 (clearly offended)  
 And for the record, *doom* doesn't  
 enter into it. Careful  
 consideration and preparation do.

MARY  
 (gentle but firm)  
 Thank you...Dr. Friedline. We'd  
 like to be alone now.

Dr. Friedline considers, then nods and leaves.

CHRISTINA  
 Holly's right. He doesn't know  
 her. As long as there's a chance  
 she'll wake up...

She doesn't continue.

BUCK  
 (picking up the thread)  
 Absolutely. Yep. So I don't care  
 if it's day *eight* or day *fifty-*  
*eight*...we're not having that  
 conversation. It's not up to them  
 to...  
 (forcing the word)  
 (MORE)

BUCK (cont'd)  
*...decide. It's not up to us.  
 It's up to her.*

He looks at the family, weighing the impact of his words.

BUCK  
 (absolutely certain)  
 Yeah. It's up to Michele.

TITLE CARD: DAY 8

EXT. MICHELE'S HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

The *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* lands on the front lawn, near the pile of seven other drenched, plastic-wrapped newspapers. On its front page: a photo of Michele in formal firefighting regalia.

EXT. KEY WEST FIRE STATION - MORNING

Over coffee, several FIREFIGHTERS listen to a colleague read the newspaper's accompanying story.

FIREFIGHTER  
*Greene, 23, an Oakland Park  
 firefighter/paramedic, has not  
 regained consciousness since her  
 emergency Caesarian section...*

INT. BOCA RATON POLICE STATION - MORNING

Just breaking from a pre-shift meeting, a group of COPS are looking at the newspaper one of them reads.

COP  
*...and brain surgery early Monday  
 after the sudden rupture of a blood  
 vessel in her head.*

INT. JUPITER FIRE STATION - MORNING

Several FIREFIGHTERS are cleaning equipment as their FIRE CAPTAIN reads the story.

FIRE CAPTAIN  
*A CAT scan showed bleeding in her  
 skull and emergency room surgeons  
 removed a blood clot. She remains  
 on a respirator.*

EXT./INT. CHRISTINA'S CAR - LATE MORNING

Christina drives onto the hospital grounds on auto-pilot, lost in thought...until she comes to the stunned realization that the visitors' lot is overrun by parked police cruisers & fire vehicles...from cities & municipalities as far away as Port St. Lucie to the north, Key West to the south.

INT. HOSPITAL ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

Christina enters the hospital and finds the lobby *crawling* with cops & firefighters. A Broward County Sheriff's Department officer approaches her, triggering a flood of attention, and suddenly she's surrounded by supportive men & women in uniform. Overwhelmed, she's grateful when Robin, the nurse, breaks through the crowd to rescue her.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

Christina anxiously follows Robin to Michele's room.

CHRISTINA

*Just tell me...*

ROBIN

No, I want you to *see*, it's better I don't say too much. Your parents are on their way, and I..

CHRISTINA

No surprises, please, I'd rather...

ROBIN

(finger to the lips)  
*Bup-bup-bup!*

INT. MICHELE'S HOSPITAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The first thing Christina sees is Holly, uncharacteristically emotional, holding Michele's hand.

CHRISTINA

(frantic)  
*What? What the hell's wrong?!  
Just tell me!*

Then she sees it: Michele's eyes are open, her body is twitching. Suddenly unsteady, Christina stumbles to the bed.

CHRISTINA

*Michele?!*

ROBIN

We don't know if she can hear us,  
she's still unresponsive. But she  
spent a restless night...

HOLLY

She moved! It was incredible!

ROBIN

Dr. Friedline spent time with her,  
and...

HOLLY

(blurting out)

*She's out of the woods!*

Christina kneels beside the bed, gently convulsing; when Holly grips her shoulder, she unconsciously wraps an arm around Holly's legs, pulling her close. Robin leaves the room. Letting her own tears come, Holly notices a change in the room: light. At the foot of the bed, creeping up Michele's body. She looks outside, stunned to see sunlight for the first time since Michele's injury eight days earlier; she adjusts the blinds as the light approaches Michele's face, the comatose eyes staring vacantly, a look void of comprehension...but now with a difference. A big difference.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

A *jubilant* family conference with the ever-sober Dr. Friedline, who refers to charts, files and CAT scan results with assistance from Robin, who unabashedly shares in the family's joy.

DR. FRIEDLINE

This shading represents the areas impacted by cranial hemorrhaging. It's a singular pattern, indicative of the random path blood took in Michele's brain. Which is a perfect analogy for how each patient's different and every recovery's unique. So quite frankly, we can't be sure which damages will manifest. One guarantee is short-term memory loss. She may remember nothing of the injury or events surrounding it. And even when she starts communicating, her daily cognitive retention could be severely impaired;

(MORE)

DR. FRIEDLINE (cont'd)  
 for a time, each day could be  
 square one, certain details may  
 continuously escape her. Other  
 things she'll remember clearly.  
 It's pretty random.

MARY  
 (stunned)  
 You're saying she won't know us?

DR. FRIEDLINE  
*Details* will be lost. We just  
 won't know which ones at first.

His words sink in, deflating some of the joy in the room.

ROBIN  
 May I, Doctor?

He nods.

ROBIN  
 As for long-term physical recovery,  
 you'd be hard-pressed to find a  
 better patient profile; her age and  
 pre-trauma conditioning make her an  
 exceptional candidate for highly  
 successful physical therapy...which  
 in turn can only positively impact  
 other facets of her recovery.

She presents the family with a huge, stuffed-to-capacity  
 spiral notebook, the cover of which reads *Welcome to Sunrise  
 Rehabilitation Center*.

EXT. SUNRISE REHABILITATION CENTER - AFTERNOON

Buck, Mary & Christina arrive for a tour and are greeted by  
 contagiously cheerful Admissions Director Bonnie Arnold.

INT. SUNRISE PHYSICAL THERAPY WING - LATER

The Greenes are clearly impressed by the caring, highly  
 trained staff, top-notch facilities and state-of-the-art  
 physical therapy equipment.

CHRISTINA (V.O.)  
*I wish I could fast-forward a year  
 to spare you the hard work that  
 lies ahead. But if there's one  
 thing I know about you, you thrive  
 on challenges. You live for them.*

## INT. MICHELE'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Christina writes in her journal as a NIGHT NURSE changes Michele's head bandages; he calls Christina over to view the incision, which extends from mid-forehead to the back of her bare scalp and around to her right ear, marked by a trail of fifty-three staples. Christina studies it soberly, forcing herself to take it all in when clearly it's making her sick. Michele seems slightly more alert, though not any more responsive as she stares straight ahead into space.

CHRISTINA (V.O.)

*Now when I look at you I can tell  
you're on your way back to us...  
each time I see your face there's  
more of **you** there fighting to break  
through. And I **know** that  
determined look. It's the look of  
a **true fighter!** It says **I'll never  
quit!***

Moonlight streams through the blinds, illuminating Michele's face as the nurse leaves and Christina returns to her bedside chair. She holds Michele's hand and continues writing. But suddenly her pen stops moving. She looks at her other hand ...*stunned to realize Michele is squeezing it!* She finds Michele looking back at her, focusing on something for the first time since emerging from the coma.

## INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - MORNING

Mary's a bundle of bustling energy; Kelly can't keep up.

KELLY

Mom! Kinda *pregnant* here?!

MARY

Sorry dear, I can't tarry!

Kelly blocks her mother, stopping her in her tracks.

KELLY

Do you really think this is a  
good...

MARY

She recognized her! That's *huge!*  
And every second we waste *debating*  
this is time we can't get back!  
Haven't we lost *enough* time?  
Hasn't your poor *sister?*

KELLY

What makes you think this time will be *different*?

MARY

We are introducing that baby to his mother again, so unless you're prepared to wrestle me to the ground *I suggest you move it, sister!*

INT. MICHELE'S HOSPITAL ROOM - A MOMENT LATER

Mary comes in to find Robin prepping Michele for visitors; Christina is holding her hand.

MARY

For heaven's sake, you look awful! Did you spend the night in here *again*?

ROBIN

I keep telling her, what's the point of having a bed reserved for family if you don't use it?

Mary takes Michele's other hand.

MARY

Hello, Sweetie!

Michele stares at her mother with...what? Recognition? Confused anticipation? Whatever it is, it's *progress*.

MARY

Oh, you were *right!* This is *wonderful!*

Buck bursts into the room, elated.

BUCK

*Smiles?! She's giving us smiles?!*

ROBIN

More like *looks*, actually, but it's a start!

BUCK

Hey, Kiddo, you got a "look" for your ol' dad?

Michele turns her focus to him; it brings him to tears.

BUCK  
 Oh yeah. Nice. That's real, real nice.

A PEDIATRIC NURSE has come into the room with Jeremy; Robin takes him, hands him to Buck, who presents him to Michele. Michele's focus shifts until she's clearly taking Jeremy in, for a moment with no visible response...until she cries.

BUCK  
 Oh, Kiddo...

The others all react, comforting Michele, intervening...but as Michele's face begins to contort in new, unexpected ways, the mood shifts to unabashed joy: *Wow, look at those faces...That's it, Michele, let it out...This is great, etc.*

TITLE CARD: A FEW DAYS LATER

EXT. SUNRISE REHABILITATION CENTER - LATER

Buck's talking with a team of Michele's firefighter colleagues at their paramedic van, shaking hands and thanking them for transport assistance.

INT. SUNRISE ROOM 224 WEST - CONTINUOUS

Michele's been made comfortable in her bed. Mary privately confers with Bonnie over paperwork. Across the room, Michele's new roommate GAIL stares at them, expressionless... and not-so-softly *moaning*. Her physical condition is similar to Michele's, recently awakened from a coma with her limbs frozen in (even more) painfully awkward positions.

BONNIE  
 (confidentially)  
 We did everything we could. Ocean Park's coverage simply doesn't provide for a private room.

MARY  
 Not a problem, we were made aware.  
 But, um...  
 (whispering, re: Gail)  
 ...does *this* go on all the time?

BONNIE  
 Naah, she's just excited to see ya'll. I think they'll be good for each other, their conditions are remarkably similar.  
 (MORE)

BONNIE (cont'd)  
 (winking)  
 Gail's a model patient, you'll see!

INT. SUNRISE ROOM 224 WEST - DUSK

Michele is sleeping, Christina is writing in her journal... or, rather, trying to. Across the room, Gail's moaning is low enough to not disturb Michele's rest but disruptive enough to distract Christina.

CHRISTINA (V.O.)  
 I'm excited about this place.  
 Everything about it feels...

She looks up, smiles politely at Gail, continues writing.

CHRISTINA (V.O.)  
 ...*almost* everything feels right.  
 We'll all sleep better tonight  
 knowing you're out of danger and on  
 your way to one hundred per cent  
 recovery.

She adjusts the sheet on Michele's bed, continues writing.

CHRISTINA (V.O.)  
 Sometimes I think you...

Gail's moans intensify. Frustrated, Christina grabs the privacy curtain in the middle of the room and yanks it shut. The moans abruptly cease and Christina smiles, returns to her chair.

GAIL (O.C.)  
***Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!***

The *piercing cry* jolts Michele awake. Panicked, Christina yanks the curtain back open, and Gail's moans return to normal decibels.

GAIL'S POV: Christina whispers soothingly to Michele; Gail's focus shifts to the window near her bed, and the empty chair next to it. She closes her eyes.

YOUNG WOMAN (V.O.)  
 (super-excited)  
 Okay! First you should know I'm  
*super-excited* you all wanna help me  
 bring Michele along!

EXT. SUNRISE COURTYARD - MORNING

LAURA SILVER is perky, especially youthful, twentysomething. Buck & Mary are clearly skeptical.

LAURA

And there's every reason to be optimistic! But remember, physical therapy is *work*, and not just for Michele. Each time she cries, every time she fights me or gives up, *you'll* need to stay strong. If that means leaving the session to clear your head, fine...but whoever assists has to stay on *my* side, even when it seems cruel. Because I will *never* challenge her to do something she's not capable of. So I need to have your *trust* every step of the way.

MARY

Dear, may I ask you a question?

LAURA

(a practiced response)

B.S. from Rutgers, double major chemistry & exercise science. Masters degree from Florida State in physical therapy, with advanced application in motor neuro-physiology & the biophysics of human movement. I've been practicing for just over a year. And I'm twenty-four.

Jaws have dropped; that's good enough for them.

MARY

Well! How lovely! Michele's twenty-four, too!

LAURA

I know. That's one reason I'm super-excited!

MICHELE (V.O.)

*C'mon you old bag! I know it's tough but try to keep up!*

EXT. BEACH - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Michele & Christina are on a beach run; it's a brutal South Florida summer's day, but they're both in excellent shape. Michele, especially, seems impervious to the heat and is ahead of her sister.

CHRISTINA

If I'm old, what're you?!

MICHELE

Younger! Two years is *eternity!*  
Muscles atrophy, bones get  
brittle...

CHRISTINA

I'm holding **back!** If I wanted to I  
could leave you in the *dust!*

MICHELE

*Try it!*

And Christina *does*, sprinting and easily catching Michele. Their eyes flash fire, their competitive spirits are engaged, and now they're racing each other at breakneck speed.

CHRISTINA

*Spud, you...can't keep up...this  
pace!*

MICHELE

*Correction: **you** can't!*

Christina *pours it on...*but Michele has no problem breaking away, and soon Christina must stop, bent over as she walks circles, gasping for breath. Michele doubles back playfully, and Christina *lunges* into the surf, *splashing* Michele, drenching her. Michele follows suit, *splashing* her back. A wave crashes and knocks them into the water, where all they can do is laugh and splash each other.

LAURA (V.O.)

Christina? Excuse me? Chris?

EXT. SUNRISE PATIENT RECREATION GROUNDS - AFTERNOON

In the shade of a giant oak tree near a small lake, Christina & Laura sit on a bench next to Michele, who's strapped into a state-of-the-art wheelchair equipped with every conceivable bell & whistle (headrest, limb positioners, etc.). She's wearing street clothes.

CHRISTINA

(dazed)

Sorry. What was the question?

LAURA

What kinds of things does Michele do? For exercise. Fitness.

Christina studies her semi-alert sister staring out at the lake, transfixed by the serenity. When Christina takes her hand, Michele offers a half-smile.

CHRISTINA

Hikes. Beach runs. Water-skiing, biking.

(sadly)

Conor was a charter pilot, they always talked about trying, y'know, extreme things. Hang-gliding, skydiving, all that... stuff.

(her voice trailing off)

Whatever. Who needs that anyway?

LAURA

(sharp)

Michele does. So let's work toward it!

Christina considers.

CHRISTINA

(grateful)

Yeah. Okay. Sure.

(to Michele)

You look great. Didn't Mom give you that last birthday?

(to Laura)

Mom dressed us alike in elementary school. We're two years apart, but she was big for her age so we wore the same size and kinda...

(her voice trailing off)

...y'know, looked like...twins.

She shakes off her sadness, pats Michele's hand.

CHRISTINA

Anyway. It's good to see her in her own clothes.

Laura pats Michele's other hand.

LAURA

It's good to be in her own clothes.

EXT. GREENE FAMILY HOME - LATE NIGHT

Crickets chirp. A single light shines from the dining room.

INT. MARY & BUCK'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

In the darkness, scissors can be heard cutting, cutting, cutting; it wakes up Buck, who turns on his lamp, rubs his eyes. The alarm clock reads past 2AM.

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mary's gulping coffee, hard at work on a creative project, the dining room table strewn with photos, mementos and colorful construction paper, all of which surround a giant scrapbook. Buck trudges in, pajama-clad.

BUCK

What the heck are you doin'?

MARY

(hyper-caffeinated)

No time for chat!

He looks over her shoulder.

BUCK

What's so important you need to stay up all night?

MARY

Scrapbook. For Michele.

BUCK

It's two in the morning! You *know* what coffee does to...

Mary slams her scissors onto the table but doesn't look up.

MARY

(fighting tears, her voice quivering)

*She's lying in that rehab place, she can't speak or walk, she can't remember things! Have you looked in her eyes? She's scared, Buck! And I won't take a back seat while she struggles to remember her life! So when I walk in that place tomorrow this book will be bulging at the seams, if I have to drink twenty espressos to make it happen!*

She resumes her task with a vengeance. Buck rubs her shoulders...then sits beside her, ready to pitch in.

BUCK  
Sergeant Greene reporting for duty,  
ma'am.

Mary slides over a stack of photos.

MARY  
This is high school! Separate  
volleyball, softball, cross-country  
& swim team!

BUCK  
Ten-four.

He sips her coffee, practically chokes.

BUCK  
Good God, Mary, this is *jet fuel!*

MICHELE (V.O.)  
*Ahhhhhhh...*

INT. SUNRISE SPEECH THERAPY WING - MORNING

While Christina watches, Michele works with speech therapist MINDY, a nurturing, *zaftig* woman of infinite patience. At the moment, the patient is sticking out her tongue.

MINDY  
*Mazel tov, yes! Now the pucker!*

Michele puckers her lips.

MINDY  
Yes! And the side-to-side tongue?!

Michele opens wide, moves her tongue from cheek to cheek.

MINDY  
I'm *kvelling* with joy! Show me  
those pearly whites again!

Michele bares her teeth.

MINDY  
And let's *bring it on home* with  
that fabulous, sexy *smile!*

Michele smiles for her; Mindy hugs her warmly.

MINDY

*Bubelah, you're a natural! We'll have you talking a blue streak in no time!*

Michele tries out her new smile again, this time unprompted.

INT. SUNRISE ROOM 224 WEST - CONTINUOUS

Mary fidgets as she stares absently out the window. When an ORDERLY wheels Michele into the room, Mary spins around, overstimulated by caffeine and sleep deprivation.

MARY

Sweetheart! I have a surprise!

She flashes the stuffed scrapbook, its cover decorated with photos, flashy graphics and the title *Michele's Book of Memories*. Michele stares at it blankly.

MONTAGE: *EARLY PROGRESS AT SUNRISE*

\*Dr. Friedline finishes a procedure adding a plug to Michele's tracheotomy tube, allowing her to attempt sounds, low but audible. Gail, meanwhile, blurts out random shouts & moans & cries.

\*First physical therapy session with Laura (Buck assisting); Michele's learning to communicate by moving her head for *yes* & *no*.

\*A bio valve cast has been designed & fitted for her right leg & foot drop; her extremities are slowly being unfrozen from their "coma positions."

\*Michele's firefighter colleagues O'PREY, Stromer & Hector visit her in her room.

\*Second session with Mary's memory book; Michele's more interested this time, but is clearly overwhelmed by the amount of information.

\*Physical therapy session, Holly assisting. Her facial expressions have become more "recognizably Michele." Being guided for the first time into Laura's "standing machine" is grueling & painful, resulting in a bladder "accident" and angry, embarrassed tears.

\*Michele in bed with Jeremy positioned on her body; with help from her family, she's holding Jeremy's bottle for a feeding. Her interest level, however, is less than maternal.

\*Third session with Mary's memory book: Michele's completely invested, but her emotions are a roller coaster; she responds favorably to certain images (parents, sisters, firefighting career) but with tears & hostility to others (her pregnancy, her home, her wedding). Mary is overwhelmed, but soldiers on because she must.

\*Dr. Friedline finishes a procedure removing the tracheotomy tube; Mindy's there to assist Michele in forming real words. As Gail makes her usual disturbance-of-the-peace, Michele's first attempted words are **Make...her...shut uuuup...** **NOTE:** henceforth, no matter how fully recovered, Michele's speech will always sound different than before, somewhat...*halting*.

INT. SUNRISE ROOM 215 EAST - MORNING

Michele's wheeled by a NURSE into a new, private room, accompanied by Mary.

MARY

And see the wonderful view?! The whole park is visible from this wing!

The nurse starts to transfer Michele to her new bed.

MICHELE

*Noooooo!*

Mary takes over.

MARY

Thanks, we'll just sit by the window for now.

The nurse smiles, positions Michele's wheelchair near the window and leaves them alone. Mary pulls up a chair and sits watching her daughter stare out the window, lost in thought. After a moment, she pulls out an official-looking letter.

MARY

By the way, we really owe the doc for the new room.

(reading)

*"...and as a necessity for Michele's peace of mind and, therefore, her continued physical improvement, it is my sincere recommendation that..."*

MICHELE

(flat)

*Blah...blah...blah.*

Mary attempts a smile, sets the letter on the night stand.

MARY

Well, you can look at this later.  
But hey, guess what? More good  
news!

Michele doesn't look at her.

MARY

But maybe we should let someone  
more *in-the-loop* tell you.

She glances toward the doorway, where Hector's patiently waiting. She excitedly motions him in and he joins them. Michele glances over.

HECTOR

(upbeat)  
Hey, *Verdita!*

Apparently disinterested, Michele returns her gaze to the window. Mary encourages Hector.

HECTOR

So, uh, listen...your mom & dad  
wanted me to stop by and tell you  
that, uh...well, Station Nine has  
donated their sick hours to you.  
(pause)  
All our sick time. Everyone's.

Michele continues staring blankly outside.

MARY

(blurting out)  
Michele! *Their whole bank of sick  
hours! One entire **year's** salary!  
Whaddya think of **that?!***

Michele slowly turns to stare at them, her look unchanged. But tears are rolling down her cheeks. Mary dries her eyes.

MARY

(light)  
Hey, it's a good thing, it means  
people love you!

But the crying doesn't stop.

MICHELE

(struggling mightily)  
*I can't...**do**...any...thing!*  
(MORE)

MICHELE (cont'd)  
*I can't...walk...nnn...othing  
 works, I just...want...I want...  
 want...*

She's desperate to be understood but is stuck on the word.

MARY  
 (her heart breaking)  
*What, Sweetie, what do you want?!*

HECTOR  
 (simply)  
 She wants to come back to work.  
 Isn't that right, buddy?

Michele nods as eagerly as she can, and chokes out a sob along with some words.

MICHELE  
*Nor...mal!!! Wanna...be...nnnn...  
 ormal...a...ggain...*

She stares at Hector for a tortured moment.

MICHELE  
*Who...are you???*

Hector looks away, stunned.

MARY  
 Oh, Sweetie, you know Hector. He's  
 your colleague, your co-worker.  
 He's your friend.  
 (sudden thought)  
 And look what he brought!

Hector takes his cue, retrieves a big portable stereo from the doorway.

HECTOR  
 I thought...we thought maybe you'd  
 like your music with you, so...

Mary nods her encouragement, and he punches a few buttons to start a song: the overproduced, bombastic rock tune *I'd Do Anything for Love (But I Won't Do That)*. They eagerly study Michele's face.

HECTOR  
 No big deal if you don't, uh...  
 remember. It's just, kinda, one of  
 your favorites so we thought,  
 y'know, maybe...

MICHELE  
 (struggling)  
*Meat...Loaf...*  
 (then)  
*Duh.*

She stares back out the window; Mary and Hector share a look and break into relieved grins.

INT. SUNRISE PHYSICAL THERAPY WING - AFTERNOON

Laura & Buck are working with Michele in the "standing machine," with Hector observing, learning. Laura holds her ankles while Buck guides her upper body. Though she's more familiar with it now, Michele's contorted facial expressions and angry tears reveal how grueling this machine is.

LAURA  
*That's it...just a little longer...*

HECTOR  
*C'mon Verdita, show this damned contraption who's boss!*

LAURA  
 (off her stopwatch)  
*...and five...four...three...two...*

But at the last possible second Michele's strength gives out and she collapses into her father's arms. As she's helped into her wheelchair (now minus most of the bells & whistles, most notably the bulky headrest), it's clear she's once again wet herself. Laura grabs a towel for clean-up as Buck steels himself for the inevitable emotional meltdown.

BUCK  
 (soothing)  
 Alrighty, deep breaths, we're okay...

But Michele's face boasts an exhausted grin.

MICHELE  
 (struggling)  
*I...guess...you guys...are all on...*  
 (gleefully blurting out)  
*...piss patrol!!!*

Buck shoots the others a look...then bursts out laughing, hugging Michele.

BUCK

Yep, that's right! That's called a sense of humor! *So it's official, folks: Michele's definitely back!!!*

But Laura's uneasy smile belies her skepticism.

INT. SUNRISE CAFETERIA - LATER

Laura & Buck are talking over coffee.

LAURA

I'm just saying her memories won't all come back.

BUCK

(dismissive)

Sure, okay, the doc covered that!

LAURA

I mean memories of *herself*.

She leans in.

LAURA

Traumatic brain injury frequently results in a changed personality. Sometimes profoundly changed. So there's inherent danger in expecting all the old behaviors to return. In reality, a patient may already be a different version of who they were before.

BUCK

But *c'mon*, her sense of *humor's* back! That's a *good* sign!

LAURA

Yes...little things *will* come up to remind you of who Michele *was*...

BUCK

(annoyed)

Whoa! I get what you're saying... but she's the same kid as before!

LAURA

(gently)

Okay, yes, to a point. But every injury's different, so we're talking *degrees*. The question is *when* are changes revealed, and *how*?

(MORE)

LAURA (cont'd)  
 And regardless of what she says or  
 does, she'll need patience and  
 acceptance. Especially with  
 unexpected behaviors.

(pause)

I always counsel steering clear of  
 proclamations like "*She's back!*"

Buck has lost himself in thought.

LAURA  
 Sorry, Buck...but it's important  
 you hear that.

BUCK  
 (faraway)  
*Piss.*

LAURA  
 Yes, I know, it was funny...

BUCK  
 No, it's just...  
 (disturbed)  
 It's not a word she'd ever use.

MICHELE (V.O.)  
*Nnn-noooooo!!!*

INT. SUNRISE ROOM 215 EAST - MORNING

Michele's in her bed, adamantly refusing to be helped into  
 her wheelchair by Christina, Hector or a NURSE. Her mood is  
 ugly.

CHRISTINA  
 (frustrated)  
 Michele...this isn't getting us  
 anywhere!

HECTOR  
 C'mon, buddy, Mindy's waiting for  
 us, you like Mindy, remember?

MICHELE  
*Nnn-noooooo!!!*

Christina sighs.

CHRISTINA  
 (to the nurse)  
 I'm sorry, maybe later.

The nurse leaves, Christina sinks into a chair.

CHRISTINA

(to Hector)

You wanna explain to her if she skips today she'll skip next time too, then she'll be skipping everything and what's the point of even being here?

(to Michele)

Hey, remember *Gail*?

(dead-on impersonation)

**Ahh!!!**

Michele's jolted into looking at her.

CHRISTINA

Exactly! That how you want your recovery to go, is that the kind of patient you wanna be?

MICHELE

(angry)

Wanna...go **hhhhhome!**

HECTOR

And you will! That's what you're working toward!

(sudden thought, to Christina)

Hey! Maybe now's a...y'know, good time.

Christina considers, then produces a small jewelry box. She opens it and presents it to Michele...who stares in stunned silence at the ruby pendant heart and gold chain inside. It seems to have a calming effect on her.

CHRISTINA

Would you like to wear it? I should probably get permission first, but it's so beautiful on you.

Michele awkwardly bats Christina's hand away.

MICHELE

(a furious outburst)

***I...can go home...nnnnnow! You kkk...keeeep me here, you...waaant me here! Therapy is bull...shit, wasting... time! I hate...you...you...lllie...Chris...teen...a!!!***

The exertion of speech is too much; she turns away, mumbling repetitively through exhausted tears.

MICHELE

*You...want me...here...you want...  
me here...you do, you...want  
me...here...*

Christina looks down in silence, too embarrassed to meet Hector's gaze.

INT. SUNRISE EAST PATIENT WING, CORRIDOR - LATER

Mary's just received an earful from Hector.

MARY

That's ridiculous, she didn't mean it! She doesn't blame her sister!

HECTOR

Maybe not, but she was furious. I've never seen her like that.

MARY

Fine, okay.  
(steely)  
I think it's time for a good old-fashioned *mother intervention*.

A TAPE IS PUSHED INTO A VCR, THE *PLAY* BUTTON IS PUSHED.

INT. SUNRISE ROOM 215 EAST - LATER

Michele's still in bed, still staring at the wall.

BUCK (V.O.)

*Michele...wake up, Honey...he's  
here...the little guy we've all  
been waiting for...*

Involuntarily, Michele looks over to find her image on the television screen; it's the video footage shot the first day Jeremy was brought into her hospital room. She watches, shocked, transfixed by her own comatose image and by the moment she & her baby were introduced. Mary pauses the tape, leans in close to her daughter.

MARY

**See** how far you've come? Just think how far you're **going**.

Michele is unable to look away from her video image.

MICHELE (V.O.)  
*Do we...haveta stop? Let's...go!*

INT. SUNRISE SPEECH THERAPY WING - AFTERNOON

Mindy is putting away her materials.

MINDY  
 Listen, doll, nothing makes me  
 happier than hearing that...but  
 it's been *go-go-go* since dawn and  
 I'm ready to drop!

The door opens slightly; Mindy smiles and nods. Laura creeps  
 silently into the room behind Michele.

MINDY  
 (mischievous)  
 But I'll tell ya what...since  
 you're in rare form, let's do one  
 last exercise. It's a question.

MICHELE  
 (enthusiastic)  
 Okay!

MINDY  
 Really *think* before you answer,  
 it's gotta come from your heart.  
 Ready?

Michele nods.

MINDY  
 Here it is: if you could have  
 Thanksgiving dinner *anywhere* next  
 week, where would it be?

Michele's smile fades; she seems confused.

MINDY  
 C'mon, you can do it! *One word!*

MICHELE  
 But I...I can't...  
 (starting to cry)  
*That's...mean...*

MINDY  
 Oh, doll, *no*, it's a *good* thing,  
 trust me!

She turns the wheelchair around to face Laura, who thrusts paperwork at Michele.

LAURA

Your first day pass home! You're ready, don't you think? Unless, of course, you'd rather eat the cafeteria's turkey & stuffing.

(shuddering)

No offense to the fine hairnet ladies, but if I were you, I'd take this and *run!*

Michele's jaw drops.

TITLE CARD: A WEEK LATER

INT. SUNRISE ROOM 215 EAST - EVENING

Hector's been reading the latest *People* magazine to Michele, but he has fallen asleep. Christina comes in.

CHRISTINA

Uh...isn't it better if he stays awake when he reads to you?

MICHELE

(grinning)

*In...theory.*

CHRISTINA

Ready for *stand & pivot?*

Michele nods, and Christina helps her out of bed and to a standing position. Hector wakes up.

HECTOR

Oh. Hi. Sorry.

MICHELE

*You were...snoring. Was...funny.*

HECTOR

Glad I'm so entertaining.

MICHELE

*Me...too.*

Christina starts the exercise, in which Michele pivots on one foot in one direction, and then on the other in the other direction, safely guided as much as necessary. Hector's watching with great interest...which Michele notices.

MICHELE  
*No...let him...do...it!*

Christina stops the exercise.

CHRISTINA  
 Does he know how?

Michele nods as vigorously as she can.

HECTOR  
 (hesitant)  
 Uh, well, I mean, I've *watched* and  
 all, but I don't know if...

MICHELE  
 (blurting out)  
*Wimp!!!*

Hector decides to give it his best shot; he carefully takes Christina's place and together he & Michele easily complete the routine under Christina's watchful eye. At its conclusion, however, something unexpected happens: Hector & Michele find themselves face-to-face, overcome with grins, unable to take their eyes off each other. Michele awkwardly reaches up, touches his left cheek roughly, tracing his scar.

MICHELE  
*Scar...face...gonna call...you...  
 Scar...face...*

Christina's mortified, but Hector bursts out laughing.

MICHELE  
*Wanna...go...again!*

Hector looks to Christina for approval...then guides Michele through the exercise again, even more smoothly this time.

CHRISTINA (V.O.)  
 In that moment there was no  
 sadness, no self-pity...there was  
 just Michele working hard...and  
 connecting to someone like I  
 haven't seen since this started...

EXT. MICHELE'S HOUSE - LATE NIGHT

Light shines from an upstairs bedroom.

INT. CHRISTINA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Christina sits in bed, writing in the journal.

CHRISTINA (V.O.)  
 ...and what I saw when I looked in  
 her eyes was simple: our Michele is  
 coming back.

She stares out the window at the black of night, smiles and re-writes that in big, bold underlined capital letters: **OUR MICHELE IS COMING BACK!!!!**

EXT. SUNRISE REHABILITATION CENTER - LATE MORNING

Through a window in the east residential wing, Michele can be seen in her wheelchair, calmly staring out at the gray day. But behind her calm eyes it's anything but placid.

MICHELE (V.O.)  
 (shouting)  
***I'm going around!***

EXT. RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD - EVENING

A house is ablaze. Several physically & mentally HANDICAPPED RESIDENTS have just barely escaped or been saved by STAFFERS from the inferno which was their group home; the street is a red & orange-glowing circus of horrified ONLOOKERS, flashing lights and emergency vehicles, including a unit from Ocean Park Station Nine. As O'Prey directs the crew, Michele's attention is seized by a distraught YOUNG MAN who's sobbing, yelling to no one in particular; she strains to hear the word he repeats over & over...

YOUNG MAN  
***St-st-st-ephanie!!! St-st-st-ephanie!!!***

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Alone, Michele stakes out the rear of the house and through a window locates a wheelchair-bound young woman, STEPHANIE, alone and petrified in a small bedroom thick with smoke. Acting on pure bravery & instinct, Michele hacks her way into the room and rescues her, escaping to the safety of the backyard just as flames burst through the closed bedroom door, completely engulfing the room. Thrown to the ground by the blast's pressure, Michele cradles Stephanie's frail frame, shielding her from the heat.

MICHELE'S POV -

Stephanie's look of petrified shock...and unspeakable gratitude.

WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)  
 (playful)  
*Gobble-gobble! Looks like  
 someone's turkey-mobile is here!*

INT. SUNRISE ROOM 215 EAST - LATE MORNING

A NURSE has arrived to escort Michele outside for transport. Michele offers a lackluster smile.

EXT. MICHELE'S HOUSE - LATER

In the driveway, Buck & Steven assist two MEDICS transporting Michele & her wheelchair from a Sunrise patient van. Mary & Christina rush out of the house and are greeted by Michele's thousand-watt smile.

MARY  
*Yay! She's home!*

STEVEN  
 You all shoulda heard her on the ride...so damned adorable, she talked up a blue streak, we couldn't get a word in edgewise!

Buck guides Michele's wheelchair toward the house.

BUCK  
 Got a *big day* planned for you, Kiddo! Your mom's outdone herself, I swear this turkey's *forty pounds!*

But the closer she gets to the house, the more Michele's smile fades; soon she's staring at the house with unabashed *dread*, which only Christina notices.

BUCK  
 And check out the nifty *ramp* your old man installed! You'll be *poppin' wheelies* on this baby by Christmas!

CHRISTINA  
 (*sotto voce*)  
*Dad...something's wrong.*

A big, booming voice rings out from the front yard.

VOICE (O.C.)  
*Happy Thanksgiving, people!*

Michele's entire demeanor changes; her face lights up and she contorts her body toward the voice.

MICHELE  
(elated)  
*Joe!*

Buck turns her wheelchair toward the approaching JOE, 50-ish, a hulking, rugged man walking a Shepherd-Lab mix.

MICHELE  
(even more elated)  
***Rocky!!!***

The friendly dog breaks free, races to her. They greet each other with unabashed affection.

JOE  
Sorry to intrude...

BUCK  
No intrusion! Good to see you!

Warm greetings all-around.

JOE  
So she's home! Great news!

MARY  
Well, it's a day pass, but  
yes, it's a big step.

MICHELE  
*Who's a...good boy, Rock?!*  
*Who's a...good boy?!*

Joe kneels beside the wheelchair.

JOE  
Welcome home, neighbor. I don't  
mind telling you we've all been  
mighty worried about you around  
here.

MICHELE  
(grinning)  
*Don't haveta...worry...Joe.*  
*I'm...okay.*

JOE  
Ya look *better* than "okay" to me,  
young lady. You look *fantastic!*

He gives her a gentle shoulder squeeze.

JOE

(winking)

We're looking forward to seeing you back home for *good*. And whenever you need *anything*, you know where to find me & the Rock here.

He picks up Rocky's leash.

JOE

You folks enjoy your holiday now. Give my best to the family.

Waves and good-byes all-around...until Michele's weak voice rises above the others.

MICHELE

*You tell...Mimi...watch...out for ...stairs!*

JOE

Well now you can be sure I'll do that, Michele. I'll give her your best wishes.

Everyone continues on into the house...except Christina, who follows Joe to the sidewalk.

CHRISTINA

Uh...Joe. Sorry, what's she talking about?

JOE

Aw, you remember, last summer? My wife Dee took a nasty spill at our timeshare in the Keys. She's fine now.

CHRISTINA

(clueless)

Yeah...right. That's good. So who's *Mimi*?

JOE

(grinning)

Pet name.

(confidential)

*Not a lot of people know it. Kinda private.*

With a wink and a wave he & Rocky are gone.

## INT. MICHELE'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

Michele's comfortably ensconced on the couch between Kelly and Holly, who provide a steady stream of chat; Jeremy's been safely placed on her lap, and she's getting acquainted with new nephew STEVEN, JR., on Kelly's lap. Kyle & his Uncle Steven play with building blocks on the floor. The mood is upbeat, the house beautifully decorated for Thanksgiving. A holiday-themed banner proclaims *Welcome Home, Michele!* An abundance of framed photos from every stage of Michele's life are on display specifically for her. But rather than being engaged, Michele's smiling blankly. Christina & Buck watch her from the dining room.

BUCK

It's your imagination. She's having the time of her life.

CHRISTINA

(disturbed)

I know you want this to go well, but c'mon Dad, look at her! That's a plastered-on smile, she has no idea where she is!

BUCK

Aw, Chris, you're full of it, a smile's a smile. Plus, you said so yourself, it was *old home week* outside. *How's* she's gonna remember some lady's secret nickname but not her own *house?!?*

CHRISTINA

But they told us to expect some...

BUCK

(calling out)

*Michele?!?*

He joins the others, scooting in next to Michele.

BUCK

You having a good time, everything okay?

MICHELE

(polite smile)

*Yes...fine...*

BUCK

Great! Let's see the rest of the homestead, huh? Thought we'd start with the koi.

Michele's face registers polite confusion.

KELLY

Dad, she might not remember the...

BUCK

Aw, *sure* she does!

(to Michele)

The pond out back! Our big project, Memorial Day weekend? 'Course, your ol' Dad did all the heavy liftin'...gotta see 'em now, Honey, big ol' roly-poly fish, Chris goes overboard feedin' 'em, I think...

Michele's face registers a dawning panic attack as she squeezes her sisters' hands.

HOLLY

Dad, *nix* on the *fish*, huh?

Mary pops her head in from the kitchen.

MARY

Carving time, Bucky! Twenty minutes to dinner, gang!

Buck springs into action, handing Jeremy to Holly and gingerly sweeping Michele up into his arms.

BUCK

You heard your Mom, *let's hit it!* Got just enough time for a quick spin before we chow down!

HOLLY

I don't think she's up for it, Dad.

BUCK

(irritated)

Girls, *work* with me here, she needs *stimulation!* It's her *home*, not a damned visiting parlor at Sunrise!

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - A MOMENT LATER

Holly & Christina reluctantly trek down the hall, opening doors and clearing the way for Buck, who carries Michele.

BUCK

Good thing we're doin' this *now*,  
Kid, if I know you, you'll eat  
like a horse and weigh a ton after  
dinner.

But Michele's panicked face says it all: *she has absolutely no memory of her own house.*

MICHELE'S POV:

Being carried down the hall, stopping first in this room,  
then that, everything a generic blur while her father's voice  
drones on & on, the words all jumbled nonsense. *Finally,*  
*totally panic-stricken, she starts to softly cry.*

CHRISTINA

Dad, it's not working!

HOLLY

Okay, let's wrap this up...

BUCK

(ignoring them)  
...and remember I said light blue?  
But no, your mother was all about  
the eggshell! *Eggshell!* What  
kinda *color* has a name like...

MICHELE

(tearfully blurting out)  
*I...wanna go home! Take me...home,*  
*I wanna go...home!!!*

Buck is so stunned he nearly loses his grip on her.

INT. MICHELE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

As Holly helps Buck position Michele on the bed, they all  
attempt to calm her.

CHRISTINA

*It's okay, Spud...*

MICHELE

(struggling to speak)  
*...wanna...go home, take*  
*me...home...*

BUCK

Michele! You are home!

HOLLY

(confidentially)  
*Dammit Dad, I told you...*

BUCK

This is your bedroom! Look, right  
there, your hairbrushes! Your  
mirror and make-up, your, uh,  
vanity table thingie...

Michele stares fearfully at everything.

BUCK

It's okay you don't remember, it'll  
come back to you, I promise...

MICHELE

(whimpering)  
...wanna...go...wanna *go*...

BUCK

(thoroughly shaken)  
Right, we'll go...just, let's sit a  
minute, let's be still, and quiet  
...everything's gonna be fine...

Michele locks eye contact with Christina, which calms her slightly. Buck watches helplessly, shell-shocked.

BUCK

I thought...I just...thought...  
(sighing)  
...aww, sonofabitch...

He falls back against the bed and stares at the ceiling, grateful for the moment of relative calm.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Buck's sitting on the porch swing, stationary, staring up at the night sky, lost in thought. The front door opens, the family's laughter & music & conversation spilling forth as Mary pops her head out.

MARY

Hey Grandpa, Kyle still wants that  
piggyback ride before he conks out.

Buck absently glances at her, nods dutifully. She ducks back inside, continuing an animated conversation, and he stares back out at the night...and begins to cry like the lost, heartbroken man he is.

EXT. SUNRISE - AFTERNOON

Laura's teaching Buck the proper technique for transporting Michele in his pick-up truck; she finishes a maneuver with the training mannequin.

LAURA

...no-no, slip your hand underneath like *this* and pull the harness buckle at the same *time*. Try again!

But Buck's lost in thought.

BUCK

Huh? Oh, sure.

(then)

We shouldn't have brought her home so soon.

LAURA

(annoyed)

Let it go already! You can't read her mind, you're not psychic. Don't beat yourself up every time she cries.

Buck mumbles something; Laura leans against the truck, crossing her arms.

LAURA

Let's be clear about something, Mister: *you don't get to feel sorry for yourself*, not for a day, not for a minute. Because it rubs off on Michele, and what happens if we let *her* give in to self-pity?!

Buck shrugs.

LAURA

Buck. I need you to do this again but *without* giving the dummy a concussion. 'Cause if I can't sign off on your transport skills, she'll atrophy of boredom every weekend in that place. Then you'll *really* have something to mope about.

Buck's eyes narrow in angry determination. He springs into action, perfectly executing every step he's been taught.

LAURA

Nicely done.

(mock irritation)

*Man*, if I could just get through one case without making the *woe-is-me* speech to a family member!

EXT. MICHELE'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Holly lugs a Christmas tree from the back of her pick-up truck into the house.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

The tree has been prominently displayed. Holly hangs garland as Michele selects ornaments on the couch.

HOLLY

This enough room for ornaments?

MICHELE

(her speech greatly improved)

Where did these...*ugly* balls come from?!

HOLLY

Beats me. Maybe Chris knows.

MICHELE

I...*hate* them!

She roughly brushes the box aside; the balls inside tinkle loudly...perhaps even breaking.

HOLLY

Okay, I get that you hate 'em, no need to break 'em.

Christina bursts from the kitchen with eggnog & cookies.

CHRISTINA

You both have to be honest about my new eggnog recipe! It's got, like, five weird ingredients so I have no idea if it's good, Mom got it from Bonnie at Sunrise.

Holly gulps her eggnog.

HOLLY

*Mmmmmmm! Fantastic!*

CHRISTINA

You don't count, you like everything. Michele's the real test.

Michele sips...*then spits it out, spraying everywhere.*

HOLLY  
*Christ, Michele!*

MICHELE  
 She said be *honest!* I honestly  
*hate it!!!*

Christina scurries to clean up the mess.

CHRISTINA  
 It's fine, she's probably right, I  
 should've made it the usual way.

Holly grabs her arm.

HOLLY  
 Hey! Michele made the mess,  
 Michele can clean the mess!

CHRISTINA  
 No, it's okay. I mean, she's...

MICHELE  
 What? *What* am I? *Helpless?*  
*Retarded?*

Christina stares at her...then looks at Holly.

CHRISTINA  
 You're right. She *can* clean it up.

She returns to the kitchen.

HOLLY  
 You hurt her feelings, Michele.  
 Remember *tact?*

Michele ignores her, returning to the ornaments to roughly  
 sort through more boxes, dismissing all of them.

MICHELE  
 These *all...*  
 (searching for the word)  
 ...*suck!* How can we decorate a  
 damned *Christmas tree* with nothing  
 but...  
 (searching for the word)  
 ...*sucky ornaments?!* And stop  
*lookin' at me like I have two*  
*heads, what's your problem?!*

Holly takes a photo-ornament from a box, hands it to her.

HOLLY

You had the exact same ornaments  
last year. And as you can see,  
they weren't sucky *then*.

She leaves the room. Once alone, Michele glances at the ornament and finds a photo of her, Holly & Christina, proudly showing off a beautifully decorated Christmas tree. Recognition flashes across her face.

INT. MICHELE'S LIVING ROOM - EVENING (FLASHBACK)

Michele, Holly & Christina decorating the Christmas tree, laughing, having a blast with a playfully fast three-person assembly line.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Clearly shaken by the memory, Michele inadvertently gulps her eggnog, realizing it's not so bad. Then she studies the mess she's made and sighs.

MICHELE

(calling out)

*Well shit-on-a-shingle, people,  
could someone at least bring me a  
towel?!*

TITLE CARD: *ONE MONTH LATER*

INT. SUNRISE PHYSICAL THERAPY WING - MORNING

Laura & Michele are hard at work on one of Laura's many machines. The patient's being especially difficult.

LAURA

(tough love)

I'm not listening.

MICHELE

*But it **hurts!** I'm **tired!***

LAURA

(mimicking)

*It **hurts!** I'm **tired!***

MICHELE

(furious)

*You are **such a bitch!***

LAURA  
 (laughing)  
 I'm rubber, you're glue!

She pushes Michele for one...final...excruciating...*rep!*

LAURA  
 That's it! We're done! Over!  
 Proverbial end-of-the-line!

MICHELE  
 (irritated)  
 What?!

Laura retrieves a thick folder, spreads out various charts, graphs & schedules.

LAURA  
 You're going home. To stay.

Michele just stares, dumbfounded.

MICHELE  
 (stammering)  
 But...what about...I, I mean, we  
 can't just *stop*...

LAURA  
 You won't. Sunrise assigns an  
 outpatient therapist, you'll work  
 at home three days a week. You'll  
 love him. Or her. Whomever.  
 (light)  
 Don't give me that look. I ride  
 you too hard anyway, you just  
*called me a bitch!*

INT. SUNRISE PATIENT WING, HALLWAY - A MOMENT LATER

Michele walks slowly, relying on her state-of-the-art walker;  
 Laura studies her as they make their way down the hallway.

LAURA  
 Honestly, you should be doing  
 cartwheels. Home...your own bed,  
 your kitchen...no more terrazzo  
 floors and cafeteria gruel. You're  
*free.*

MICHELE  
 (sadly)  
 The food's not so terrible here.  
 (MORE)

MICHELE (cont'd)  
 (then)  
 I thought we were friends.

Laura smiles enigmatically as she guides Michele into the darkened cafeteria.

INT. SUNRISE CAFETERIA - CONTINUOUS

MICHELE  
 (irritated)  
 I'm not *hungry!* And why is it  
*dark?!*

The lights come on, *revealing a surprise party!*

EVERYONE  
*Surprise!!!*

Michele's jaw drops. Her family are all here, as are most of the Sunrise staff. Everyone laughs, cheers, applauds and surrounds her as she leans on her walker to take it all in, including the colorful banner which reads *Congratulations, Michele! We'll miss you!* Her joyful tears reveal that the sentiment's mutual.

INT. SUNRISE CAFETERIA - LATER

The cake's gone, the punch bowl's empty and Michele's bio valve casts have been autographed by the staff and presented to her. Laura & Mary watch as staffers hug Michele good-bye.

MARY  
 She'll especially miss you.

LAURA  
 She'll do fine with outpatient therapy.

MARY  
 I don't know...she's pretty devastated you can't stay on her case. Isn't there *some way* to bend program policy?

Laura smiles sadly, squeezes Mary's hand...and impulsively decides to leave. She pats Michele's shoulder.

LAURA  
 (light)  
 Love ya mean it. But I hate good-byes so don't get me started, let's just keep it breezy!

And she's gone, leaving Michele to stare after her, stunned.

INT. SUNRISE ROOM 224 WEST - LATER

From the window, the view of the parking lot: Michele being expertly helped by Buck from wheelchair to truck, surrounded by the rest of the family, their cars & trucks parked nearby for easy transport of Michele's personal effects & physical therapy equipment.

Gail, Michele's former roommate, stares out at them with a deeply mournful look, her guest chair still empty, her condition only marginally improved.

EXT. MICHELE'S HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

The morning newspaper is tossed from a moving car and lands at Christina's feet. Dressed for her day in academia, she picks up the paper and stares out at the still neighborhood, sipping coffee, troubled.

MICHELE (V.O.)  
(annoyed)  
Help?

INT. MICHELE'S BEDROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

The bedroom's been rearranged to accommodate Michele's special needs, with physical therapy equipment, walker, cane, etc. Christina oversees Jeremy's feeding, but she's lost in thought, unfocused. Jeremy's body slips, his head at an awkward angle.

MICHELE  
(very annoyed)  
**Uh, hello?! Help!**

Christina jolts to attention, quickly adjusts Jeremy, who continues enjoying his bottle.

CHRISTINA  
(rote)  
That's it, you're good, doin'  
great...

A moment of awkward silence.

MICHELE  
My bed feels weird! I hate it!

CHRISTINA

Oh. Well, we can get a new one, no problem.

Michele looks at her like she's an idiot.

MICHELE

Why the hell would I want another bed? I already have this one!

Christina smiles vacantly, playfully takes one of Jeremy's wiggling limbs.

MICHELE

(blurting out)

And when are you moving out? I can handle him alone, y'know!

CHRISTINA

(stunned)

We...we've covered this. You've got a month of home therapy before...

MICHELE

Uh-huh, sure, whatever, fine.

CHRISTINA

Michele, I'm here to *help*.

MICHELE

Hey, I'm not a freaking *retard*, I know that! Whaddy want me to *do*, cartwheels?! It's not like I've got *the Queen of Cuba* livin' under my roof! Now *that* I might get *excited* about!

CHRISTINA

(mock chipper change-of-subject)

Let's take a look at your schedule!

She retrieves a chart from the night stand, a detailed weekly breakdown of each day with time increments assigned to Christina, Kelly, Holly, Mary, Buck...and "outpatient PT."

CHRISTINA

I think you'll find it's easy to follow, Spud. The colors were Mom's idea, naturally. Remember how she coded when we were kids? She always used red for...

MICHELE  
 (irritated)  
*What'd* you call me?

Christina stares blankly.

MICHELE  
 (as if to an idiot)  
*Hello, just now, you called me a name?!*

CHRISTINA  
 Uh...Spud.

MICHELE  
*Why?!*

CHRISTINA  
 (hesitant)  
 You...were fascinated with the space race as a kid. And *Sputnik* was the first artificial satellite put into orbit. It's all you talked about when you learned it in school...only you said *Spud-nik*, and it just kinda stuck.  
 (pause)  
 I've always called you that but I can stop if you want.

MICHELE  
 Yeah, why dontcha do that, it's a freakin' retardo nickname.

As Christina processes, Michele spots something on the night stand: a small jewelry box. She roughly opens it, finds the ruby pendant heart.

MICHELE  
 (disgusted)  
 And Christ, why does *this* thing keep poppin' up?! For the last time, *I don't want it, it's ugly!*

She awkwardly rips the necklace out of the box and throws it across the room...where it lands in a heap, its chain broken. Christina stares at her in disbelief.

CHRISTINA  
 I gave you that when you were in seventh grade. You've worn it almost every day since.

Michele starts to respond angrily, but instead backs down, confused and disoriented.

MICHELE

Yeah, well...how'm I s'posed to know that? I can't *remember* stuff, remember?!

The doorbell rings. Christina checks her watch.

CHRISTINA

(softly)

And it's not ugly. But sometimes you are.

She leaves. Michele tries to shake off her sister's words, struggling to look outside at the front door, but with Jeremy on her lap she can't get in position to see anything and grows frustrated...until a familiar voice rings out from downstairs.

LAURA (O.C.)

Now *how* could I subject another therapist to all her *crap*?! It'd be downright unprofessional!

Michele's grin lights up the room.

EXT. BACKYARD - AFTERNOON

Laura & Michele work with a huge physical therapy body-resistance ball; Michele's strength is surprising, considering the effort which even walking takes.

LAURA

*And five...four...three...two...  
one!*

She opens a bottled water for Michele, who eagerly gulps.

MICHELE

Y'know, I was at Sunrise three months.

LAURA

Gosh, I was there. Maybe you saw me a time or two.

MICHELE

And that whole time, all I could think about was comin' home. So why's it *suck* so much?!

LAURA

Way ahead of you here. You want direction and a sense of purpose. You want your life back!

MICHELE

**Damn straight!** And **this** ain't it, this whole **set-up!** My dumb sister helpin' me take care of my own **kid** and me still a **cripple** and I swear to God I barely even remember my own friggin' **house!** This is **empty,** this is **nothing!!!**

LAURA

Well **damn,** just give **up** then! I mean, you've been home a whole **day** already, why isn't life completely back to **normal?!**

MICHELE

Is that sarcasm?

LAURA

(sarcastic)

**Noooooo!**

(then)

Listen, what you're feeling is normal. Now that you're home you're shifting your *focus*. Your mobility, your range-of-motion, speech...all the things you've fought to bring back are *coming back*, but now things get tricky: how do you merge your old life with your *new* one? You're *much* luckier than other clients I've had, you've come back enough to *do* that!

(gently)

But go easy on yourself. Set new goals and work toward 'em. Take time to rebuild your life...figure out what you want to be.

She starts to pack up her equipment.

MICHELE

But I already know that stuff. What I wanna be.

LAURA

Great! What?

MICHELE

Well *duhhh!* A firefighter! I'm goin' back to my job!

(off Laura's stunned look)

Hey, isn't that why we're still screwin' around with all this equipment?

Laura is speechless.

EXT. OCEAN PARK STATION NINE - AFTERNOON

Laura & Michele sit in Laura's parked Volvo station wagon.

EXT./INT. LAURA'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Michele stares at the fire station; she's nervous, fidgety.

MICHELE

(frustrated)

Okay, I know I said what I said but I didn't mean...*I can't see these guys today, I'm not ready, I...just start the car, drive away!*

Laura throws her keys out the window, toward the station.

LAURA

Whoops. Butterfingers me.

INT. OCEAN PARK STATION NINE KITCHEN- LATER

Laura chats with a few of the guys as she watches Michele visit with her colleagues, who are obviously glad to welcome her back into the fold, teasing and bantering like old times; Hector, especially, is thrilled, and has naturally assumed the role of personal valet. At one point Michele glances nervously at Laura, who winks at her. *But suddenly, the station alarm klaxon bellows and the on-duty firefighters of OP Station Nine launch into their familiar emergency routines, responding to the call.* Seemingly in a flash, Michele & Laura are left alone in the empty firehouse kitchen. Michele is devastated, lost.

INT. FIRE STATION BATHROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Michele's troubled reflection stares back from the medicine cabinet mirror.

The water is running, and after a moment her reflection slowly, awkwardly bends out of view as she splashes herself with water...and the reflection which pops back into view is the "old Michele": short, stubbly hair replaced by gorgeous, flowing chestnut locks; ruddy, pale skin by creamy, tan complexion; rumpled clothes by her firefighter blues; she is in every way a perfect picture of robust health. Amazed, she stares at herself, the burdens of life-altering handicaps momentarily erased. But detail by detail reality intrudes...and she's left with her real reflection. Traumatized, she swings the medicine cabinet open so hard the glass shatters against the wall. She stands frozen as glass tinkles to the floor...and her tear-streaked, grimly determined face says it all: *there's hard work to be done.*

EXT. MARY & BUCK'S HOUSE - EVENING

Laura's Volvo is parked on the street.

BUCK (V.O.)  
 (incredulous)  
 Are you crazy?! Do you even know  
 what that entails?

LAURA (V.O.)  
 Buck? That's not being helpful.

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Laura's sitting at the family picnic table, Buck is pacing.

LAURA  
 At this point no goal should be discouraged, working toward anything only makes her stronger. You and I both know she can't be a firefighter again. But my job is to keep her focused and get her stronger, and the agility test is perfect for that.

Buck tries to respond but he's too frustrated.

LAURA  
 Michele's not ready to accept that a chapter of her life is over. We need to help her do that, yes...but we also have to give her a reason to get out of bed.

BUCK  
 She's got Jeremy now!

LAURA

*Whom she doesn't remember giving birth to! C'mon, Buck, put yourself in her place. Being who she was before...being who she is now? What if someone said you couldn't be a *police officer* anymore...but deep down, to the core of your soul...*

(intense)

*...you knew everyone was full of shit?*

Buck finally stops pacing, considers.

BUCK (V.O.)

*C'mon Kiddo, you lazy couch potato! That can't be the best you can do?!*

EXT. MICHELE'S BACKYARD - MORNING

The backyard is a maze of equipment, ladders, dummies, hoses, etc. Michele's suffering through obstacle course work, coached by Laura and cheered on by Buck & Hector. The level of difficulty is painful to watch.

HECTOR

*Pick up the pace, Verdita! This ain't kindergarten playtime!*

KELLY (V.O.)

Y'know, Michele, maybe you should just appreciate the fact that you can stay home to raise your son, and let that be enough.

INT. MICHELE'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Kelly feeds Steven, Jr. at the kitchen table while Michele struggles to multi-task, pouring coffee and feeding Jeremy.

KELLY

I mean, if *I* was getting seventeen hundred bucks a month disability from the state...and Honey, be *realistic!* Isn't it a bit much to think you can even *finish* that test with all your physical limitations?

Michele offers her a cup of coffee...and a generous helping of steely, squinty-eyed determination.

EXT. FRONT YARD - AFTERNOON

Michele's battling with the hoses under Laura's supervision on a hot, muggy day; several neighbors cheer her on.

MICHELE (V.O.)  
Seven minutes! I'm gonna finish  
that course in *seven minutes!*

INT. KITCHEN - LATE AFTERNOON

Christina's unpacking grocery bags as Michele makes supper for Jeremy, now nearly a year old.

CHRISTINA  
Is that *realistic?* Laura says  
focus on *training*, not results!  
What if you get hurt, or...

MICHELE  
*What if what if what freakin' IF!*  
You don't get it! Laura & me, we  
can go the distance! We're  
like...like...*Thelma &, y'know,*  
*what's her name!*

CHRISTINA  
Really? Great analogy. Except  
Thelma & *Louise* drove over a *cliff*  
together. Then *died.*

Michele considers, then bursts out laughing; it's a laugh we haven't heard before: coarse and gruff, nothing like her sweet, feminine, pre-injury laugh. She limps across the kitchen to pour Jeremy's juice, but without total concentration spills most of it on the counter.

MICHELE  
(muttering)  
*Oh for...shit's sake...*

She grabs a dirty dish towel, haphazardly cleans up. Christina tends to a huge bouquet of flowers.

MICHELE  
What's with all the junk?

CHRISTINA  
(rising above)  
Not junk. Party supplies...

She retrieves Jeremy from his highchair.

CHRISTINA  
 ...for *this* rugrat's party!

She flies Jeremy through the air. He laughs & laughs.

CHRISTINA (laughing) <i>Who's my big man?! Who's my          sweet, handsome little          birthday boy?!</i>	MICHELE (mumbling) <i>I told you...I don't          wannahvaparty so          whydjabuystuffand...</i>
---	--

She flies Jeremy again, prompting fresh peals of laughter.

CHRISTINA  
 (laughing)  
*Who's gonna be a high-wire acrobat,  
 huh?! Or maybe a bigtime fearless  
 daredevil movie stuntman!*

MICHELE  
 (screaming)  
*I don't wanna have a goddamned  
 party tomorrow Christina!!!*

Christina stops playing with Jeremy, who's stopped laughing and now seems on the verge of crying; only his aunt's quick-thinking acquisition of the nearest pacifier keeps him calm.

CHRISTINA  
 You wanna, maybe, not do that  
 around him?

MICHELE  
 I don't wanna party!

CHRISTINA  
 Everything's done! Mom cooked,  
 Holly & I are decorating, all you  
 have to do is sit back and enjoy!

MICHELE  
 (seething anger)  
*What exactly should I enjoy?!  
 Pounding headaches?! Blacked-out  
 vision in my left eye? Falling  
 down the stairs 'cause my balance  
 is for shit?! I'm workin' my ass  
 off to get my life back,  
 (spitting out her name)  
Chris-teen-a, and 'til I pass the  
 motherfreakin' agility test I could  
 kinda live without celebratin'! So  
 'scuse me but these...*

She heaves the flowers across the room.

MICHELE

...won't help me sit back & enjoy  
squat!

That does it! Jeremy spits out his pacifier and starts bawling.

CHRISTINA

(steady)

Look...I know tomorrow's the anniversary of that day. But it's also his first birthday...so maybe as a mom you could put a lid on the tantrums long enough to let him blow out some candles.

(sudden thought)

Plus, your friend Hector's coming, and after all he's done you should try acting *somewhat* civilized.

She leaves the room with Jeremy.

CHRISTINA (O.S.)

Flowers do better in water than on the floor. Just a thought.

Michele seethes...until she spots Jeremy's pacifier on the floor. It dissipates her anger and she struggles to pick it up; when she rises, her eyes are full of tears.

INT. MICHELE'S DINING ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

REVEALED are the flowers beautifully arranged in a vase.

CHRISTINA (O.C.)

What exactly *could* I do, Mom?! She was already *gone!*

Mary is clutching a note.

MARY

(at a loss)

Well then...why hadn't you hidden the *keys?! Why* did she have them in the *first* place?!

Buck and Hector come into the house, loaded down with food trays, making friendly guy small talk.

MARY

Buck, she's gone! She took the  
baby in the car!

She shoves the note at him.

BUCK

(reading)

*Went to pick-up cake.*

(panicked)

What is she, *nuts?!?*

Uncomfortable, Hector heads back out the door.

HECTOR

I'll just, uh, get the rest of the  
food.

EXT. BAKERY - LATE AFTERNOON

The sky is ominous, with storm clouds looming. Michele's SUV is parked in a handicapped spot with the engine running, dry cleaning hanging and Jeremy strapped into his car seat. Emerging from the bakery cradling a huge cake box, Michele struggles to manage the door but rudely waves off a fellow patron's offer of assistance.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - A FEW MINUTES LATER

A light rain is falling on a stretch of two-lane blacktop with a shallow ditch on either side. Michele's SUV comes cruising past...as does a bright yellow sports car, speeding in the opposite direction.

INT. MICHELE'S SUV - CONTINUOUS

White-knuckling the steering wheel, Michele is startled by the proximity of the sports car zooming past her open window.

MICHELE

(calling out)

Nice, *asshole!* Little *closer*, huh?

Jeremy rattles his baby toy, laughs at his funny mommy. An intersection looms.

MICHELE

(mumbling)

Jesus, people, why dontcha make the  
signs *smaller!* Not like we haveta  
*read* 'em or anything!

She slows down, struggles to read the signs...but she's passing the intersection.

MICHELE

*So what the hell...is it Broward  
Lakes or not?!*

(sudden decision)

***Shit-kiddo-hold-on!!!***

She impulsively brakes to negotiate a u-turn, but turns before it's safe and sends the SUV into a tailspin which sends it flipping once, twice, three times. It lands on its side in the ditch on the opposite side of the road...and begins filling with water.

Jeremy, though safely strapped in his car seat and clearly uninjured, *wails and wails*. Michele is momentarily stunned, until her firefighter's instincts kick in. Despite the physical limitations which significantly slow her down, she laboriously makes all the right moves to free herself and Jeremy from the vehicle, collapsing to the ground a safe distance away as a car's headlights approach in the distance.

EXT. BROWARD WESTFIELD HOSPITAL - LATER

The sky has released a torrential downpour.

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mary, Buck & Holly surround Michele, seated on an examining table with a bandage across her cheek; basically it's an inquisition.

MICHELE

You're all so damned dramatic! I'm fine, Jeremy's fine!

(grinning)

*Car's not so fine.*

HOLLY

(disgusted)

That a *joke?* Great. Perfect.

BUCK

Michele, you *have* to put Jeremy *first!*

MICHELE

(suddenly nasty)

Oh, so *that's* the problem, I'm a ***bad mother!*** ***Christ*** you people beat around a *bush!*

(MORE)

MICHELE (cont'd)

It's not enough I'm a *cripple* but now you wanna tell me how to raise my freakin' kid? Unbelievable!

Jeremy's laughter rings out from another room as Mary beats back tears and sits, holding her head in her hands.

HOLLY

Stop putting words in our mouths! No one in this family thinks you're anything but *amazing* with him, considering what you've been through. But you won't *listen*, you won't try to understand you don't always know what's *best!*

MICHELE

What, you think 'cause you had your kid *first* you can tell me what to do with *mine?! You're no better than me, Holly, so shut your piehole!*

HOLLY

(angry)

*Hey! You could've killed your son tonight!* Do you *get* that, is it *direct* enough or am I beating around a *bush?!*

MICHELE

(seething)

Fine! Why dontcha call Child Services on me! Take me away in *handcuffs!*

HOLLY

*Don't tempt me!*

MARY

*Both of you, stop now!*

MICHELE

Oh, *now* we hear from the freakin' mother-of-the-year, who's never been accused of *anything!* Guess you wrote the *book* on raising babies!

MARY

(crushed)

*Oh...Michele...*

She bursts into tears and leaves the room, practically colliding with a NURSE bringing in Jeremy.

NURSE

Not a scratch! Laughed the whole time we checked him out!

MICHELE

(smug)

**See?!**

Holly gratefully takes her nephew, privately confers with the nurse. Buck gets in Michele's face.

BUCK

I know...things are difficult for you. But you will apologize to your mother. She doesn't deserve to be spoken to like that and you **won't** do it again.

His tone has a powerful effect on her; she stares into his eyes for a moment, then looks at her son, possibly just now realizing what's happened, what *could* have happened. She stumbles out of the room.

EXT. HOSPITAL GROUNDS PARK - LATER (LATE AFTERNOON)

Michele's sitting against a tree; she's been crying. Buck appears and watches her for a moment, then joins her on the ground.

MICHELE

*You all think I'm a freakin' **retard!***

BUCK

(exasperated)

*No, Michele! But people don't **test** certain things! A **normal** person knows her **limitations** and considers **consequences** before jumping behind the wheel to **prove** she's normal by doing what she **can't physically do!***

MICHELE

(crying)

*So I'm **not** normal then! I'm just a retarded crippled **bad mother!***

She gets up too quickly, carelessly...and loses her balance, tumbling to the ground, her head barely missing the tree.

BUCK

*Stop doing that to yourself! Try to accept that you've changed, that your mind doesn't work the same! You need guidance sometimes! Learn to take it!*

Again she tries to get up, get away...and this time she does hit her head and fall to the ground. Buck barely resists the urge to help.

BUCK

There! Happy now?!

They remain still for a moment, on the ground, against the tree.

MICHELE

(finally; hesitant)

Dad...there are...times I start to say or do somethin'...and there's a pull, like someone wants to...stop me. But it's just a flash, and then sure 'nuff I'm in trouble, I've ruined somethin' or someone's pissed or I'm pissed...

(crying)

When you say I'm different, I...

(really sobbing now)

*...know I am! I know it, Dad...but I wanna be myself again, I wanna do what I did, I wanna save lives and fight fires and remember stuff I liked and didn't like! I made lists, Dad, I found lists from before that I don't even remember! And I hate lists, they're stupid and I don't know why I made 'em!*

BUCK

Lists, huh? Of what?

MICHELE

(blurting out)

*Dumb stuff! Household cleaners! Recipes! Jokes I musta thought were funny but they're not funny, they're stupid!*

Buck takes all this in...then bursts out laughing.

MICHELE

(frustrated)

Don't laugh at me!

BUCK  
I'm laughing *with you!*

MICHELE  
(angry)  
***But I'm not laughing!***

Buck puts an arm around his daughter.

BUCK  
Okay, tell ya what: from now on when I see you exercise poor judgment, I'll help you out, I'll, uh...give you a sign.  
(sudden thought)  
Hey! Remember what Carol Burnett did, that earlobe business?!  
(off her blank stare)  
Aw c'mon, we watched her together, it was "our thing!" Your sisters felt so left out!

Michele smiles; she remembers.

BUCK  
It could be "our thing" again. Me tellin' you ***pull back***. Let's practice: say you're gonna, uh, race up the stairs holdin' Jeremy and your mom's cobalt vase!

MICHELE  
(too loud)  
***Right, like I'd do that! See, might as well just call me a retard, 'cause that's...***

Buck gives his earlobe an exaggerated tug; Michele rolls her eyes, but it shuts her up. Buck smiles.

BUCK  
Listen. You got royally screwed and you can't undo that. But you can learn to take life ***slow***. You can focus, think things through. In ***everything*** you do.

MICHELE  
(desperate)  
***What's the point, Dad? What good am I if I can't...do...the only thing I've ever been good at?!***

Buck considers...but he has no answer for her.

EXT. MICHELE'S HOUSE - LATER

Buck carries Jeremy up the walkway, trailed by Holly & Mary, who cradles the mangled cake box. Michele, straggling behind, catches sight of her living room through the windows: circus clown motif streamers, balloons, banners, party favors. It's a bit much.

MICHELE

Holy shit, did Ringling Brothers puke up their *guts* in there?!

HOLLY

Why don't you just...not talk?

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Christina rushes to greet them.

CHRISTINA

Hey! Are you okay?!

HOLLY

She survived. Dumb blind luck.

MICHELE

So where's the damn party?

CHRISTINA

Everyone left! We didn't know if you'd be...I mean, the mood was... subdued.

HOLLY

Babies in car crashes do that to folks. Funny thing.

MICHELE

So we'll do a party *next* year. It's not like my kid won't have other freakin' *birthdays*.

Disgusted, Holly takes Jeremy and heads upstairs. As Mary sets the distressed cake box on the coffee table, Hector emerges from the kitchen engrossed in a bowl of ice cream.

HECTOR

Hey *Verdita!* Heard you earned your NASCAR stripes today!

Michele stops in her tracks; no one speaks for a moment, caught off-guard by the unexpected electricity in the room.

MICHELE  
(finally)  
Uh...want some cake with that?

She opens the cake box...and together they stare at the mangled, smashed, totally demolished clown birthday cake they find inside.

INT. JEREMY'S BEDROOM - LATER

Holly & Christina are watching Jeremy sleep in the darkened room, both content to let the moment last.

CHRISTINA  
(whispering)  
I could watch him sleep forever.

HOLLY  
(whispering)  
Yeah, he's kinda perfect.  
Especially considering...  
everything.

Christina goes to draw the blinds...but freezes when she spots Michele & Hector down in the backyard, engrossed in conversation. She watches for a moment, surprised at their intimacy, at Michele's disarming, non-combative mood.

HOLLY  
What's wrong?

CHRISTINA  
(smiling to herself)  
Nothing. For a change.

INT. MICHELE'S BEDROOM - LATE NIGHT

Michele's at her vanity table near the window, awkwardly applying moisturizer. She spots Christina in the mirror.

CHRISTINA  
Long day, huh?

MICHELE  
(defensive)  
I know what I did, y'know. The turn. It was too sudden, and the stupid road was wet.

CHRISTINA  
(soft)  
Yeah. Stupid road.

Michele turns toward her.

MICHELE

Well look who's talkin', little  
Miss *puts her make-up on in the car*  
*while slurpin' coffee and changin'*  
*the CD!*

CHRISTINA

(sad)

I just came to say good-night.

She leaves; Michele stares at the empty doorway for a moment.

MICHELE

(mumbling, deflated)

Yeah, sure...right back atcha.

INT. CHRISTINA'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Christina climbs into bed, begins reading the book on her night stand...but can't concentrate. Impulsively, she retrieves her old purple journal from the night stand drawer. When she writes, her energy is *so intense* that *her pen rips the paper*. After a moment she stops and studies what she's written. REVEALED is a list she's begun entitled *Things I Miss Most About Michele!!!!*

KELLY (V.O.)

Well that's ridiculous! She's not all *that* different! A little *impatient*, sure, but that's to be expected.

INT. KELLY'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Three sisters have gathered for coffee in Kelly's picture-perfect, floral-themed kitchen. Holly's in her uniform, ready for work.

HOLLY

A *little* impatient? She bit my *head* off last week when I reminded her *milk should be refrigerated*.

KELLY

(bright)

That's our Michele, so contrary!  
Have more cookies, I used my  
homemade boysenberry jam!

CHRISTINA

Kell, that's the *point*, she's not "our Michele!" She's like...the "anti-Michele!" She was sweet, now she's *mean*! She was gentle, now she's...*gruff*! I'm always on *eggshells*, half the time I just say nothing 'cause yeah, she'll bite my head off! She's not even *close* to the same person she was, and she doesn't seem to be coming *back*!

KELLY

Oh, for heaven's sake, that's outrageous...

HOLLY

Did you *spend* time with her before the injury? Do you *pay* attention when she talks now?

CHRISTINA

And Dad just tells me to be more *patient*, and of course Mom thinks if she makes more pretty scrapbooks we can pretend we still live in *Disneyland*, which is *so* helpful...

HOLLY

Kinda like you, Kell.

KELLY

Both of you, don't be gloomy gusses! She's not a *pod person*, or some awful *science fiction clone*! She's Michele! Different, yeah...but she's Michele!

She shoves the plate of cookies between her sisters and bustles off to the sink to wash dishes.

KELLY

Finish those, the last thing we need in our house is more cookies.

HOLLY

(rolling her eyes)  
I'm off to work, she's all yours.

She kisses Christina's cheek and leaves.

KELLY

(bright)

Honestly, it's like you two *look*  
for reasons to complain instead of  
just taking the good with the bad!  
Maybe if you came to *church* once in  
a doggoned while you'd have a  
better *outlook* on these things!

She accidentally shatters a glass in the sink...and impulsively  
*loses it.*

KELLY

*Shit! Motherf...goddamn these lousy  
Wal-Mart juice glasses! I am never  
ever buying their cheap sweatshop  
products again!!!*

TITLE CARD: *SIX MONTHS LATER*

INT. MICHELE'S BEDROOM - DAWN

Michele's eyes pop open seconds before the alarm rings.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Dressed in her workout clothes, Michele's a whirling dervish  
despite her physical limitations as she brews coffee, feeds  
Jeremy, makes breakfast and cleans out the fridge.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - MORNING

Michele lugs her hoses, giving everything she's got; Laura  
coaches her, several neighbors cheer her on. Clearly her  
speed & dexterity have improved in recent months.

EXT. BACKYARD - LATE MORNING

Ladder/obstacle course work; again, it's amazing that she can  
do the things she's doing. While not especially graceful or  
fast, she's absolutely focused, committed and intense in  
every move she makes.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - MID-AFTERNOON

Laura finishes loading her equipment into her Volvo. Michele  
shadows her like an anxious kid.

MICHELE  
Just once more with the hoses!

LAURA  
(laughing)  
No!

MICHELE  
Then leave the obstacle course  
stations, I can time myself!

LAURA  
No!

MICHELE  
Then how about...

Laura slams the hatchback.

LAURA  
How about you take care of your  
body by resting the next nineteen  
hours?!

MICHELE  
Laura, *c'mon!* We've got the whole  
*day!*

LAURA  
C'mere, you crazy girl.

She embraces Michele, grasps her face.

LAURA  
You have done *amazing* work the last  
twelve months. You should feel  
*really* good about where you're at.

MICHELE  
Yeah, but...

LAURA  
*But* you're going to march your butt  
inside, take a hot shower and spend  
the day with your son. Relax,  
maybe watch *Toy Story* together for  
the 83rd time!

She gives Michele a gentle push toward the house.

LAURA  
I'll call you later!

INT. FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Michele trudges in as Christina rushes from the family room, ready for class.

CHRISTINA

I'm out the door! J's got his Little People Garage, he's had his lunch and I promised him ice cream so don't forget! How was training?

MICHELE

(mumbling)  
'sokay, I guess.

CHRISTINA

You are gonna be so awesome tomorrow!

She grabs her keys, kisses Michele's cheek.

CHRISTINA

Love you! *Ciao!*

She goes, leaving Michele staring at the closed front door.

JEREMY (V.O.)

*Vroom! Vroom-vroom-vroom!*

INT. FAMILY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Michele wanders into the room and finds Jeremy, now 18 months of non-stop all-boy energy, hard at play with his Fisher-Price Little People Garage. Surrounded by his plastic cars & people & animals, he's completely, self-sufficiently engrossed in his imaginary world. Michele stares at him for the longest time, then leaves the room.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

She goes to the freezer, methodically takes out ice cream, sets it on the counter with a bowl, spoon and napkin. She opens the ice cream container and stares out the window, distracted.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Awkwardly side-stepping Jeremy's toys, Michele makes her way to the entertainment center, selects a few animated films...then finds herself staring at a row of home movies.

MICHELE (V.O.)

...because you made me work hard.  
You reminded me that's the only way  
to get what we want...

INT. FAMILY ROOM - LATER

Videotapes are piled on the coffee table. Michele's perched on the couch, remote in hand, transfixed by her image on the TV screen: standing on a table in a crowded private room of a sports pub, she's addressing her fellow cadets in front of a banner which reads *Congratulations, Cadets!* She's 21 and gorgeous, with long, thick hair and flawless skin.

MICHELE

...and you opened your arms to  
welcome a sister, and showed her  
the true meaning of brotherhood.

UNRULY CADET (O.C.)

*Booo! Borrrr-ing! Call the cliché  
police!*

MICHELE

(flashing a perfect smile)  
*No, let's call the fashion police  
for you! Van Halen t-shirts went  
out in '84!*

She raises her beer mug.

MICHELE

To the Central Florida Firefighter  
Academy summer class of '90...I'd  
be proud to ride with each and  
every one of you guys!  
(off the unruly cadet)  
*Almost every one of you!*

The cadets erupt in support and rush Michele, slapping her on the back, toasting her, etc. *MUTE* flashes on the screen as the scene freezes...rewinds... and replays. Michele approaches the TV and stares as the scene unfolds again. The phone rings but she's transfixed by the television and doesn't move. Jeremy, meanwhile, has grown bored with his Little People Garage and has moved onto his Little People Animal Farm.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - EVENING

The house is completely dark, save the electronic light emitting from the TV.

Videotapes & boxes are strewn everywhere with no rhyme or reason. Still on the floor, Michele sits way too close to the *mute* TV, remote in hand as she studies the frozen image on-screen: *newborn Jeremy has been placed on his comatose mother, surrounded by the family.*

The image *rewinds*, flickering light across Michele's tear-streaked face as she works the remote. She pushes *play* and watches as...*Buck whispers something into his grandson's ear, then lovingly places him on the bed beside Michele.* The scene continues without audio, Buck imploring the comatose Michele to wake up, meet her baby, etc. *A nurse's aide rushes from the room. Newborn Jeremy's face contorts as his whimpers give way to wails...*

Real-life sobs ring out in the family room as infant Jeremy reaches out to his mommy, desperate for attention, a new diaper, a meal, *anything*. But she's transfixed by the screen and doesn't notice him, his wails or his little red face, now scrunched up in pure, helpless misery. The room is illuminated by headlights in the driveway. Urgent knocking, the door is tried and Laura rushes in, takes quick inventory of the situation, rushes to retrieve Jeremy and turn on a table lamp.

LAURA

What's up?! I've called six times!

Michele *freezes* the video but doesn't look up. Laura follows her gaze to the screen, studies the still image from the hospital room, sees the videos strewn about. She sighs.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Laura sits at the table feeding the Jeremy, the happy recipient of a dry diaper. Across the table, Michele absently twirls a spoon in the liquefied ice cream.

LAURA

That's nasty.

MICHELE

I can't do it, can I? Qualify for state recertification.

LAURA

What do you think?

Michele considers for a moment.

MICHELE

(slow; devastated)

I think...seven minutes is impossible. And I won't ever be a firefighter again.

LAURA

Which makes you brave for trying.

No one speaks for a moment.

LAURA

(gently)

Y'know what I believe in? *Destiny*. We each take a journey uniquely our own...and from where I sit, my friend, yours is..

(smiling, sudden tears)

...oh, yours is **remarkable!** But things get lost along the way, no journey's complete without detours, right? So if I'm really your friend, and believe me, I am, I ask you one favor before your big day tomorrow: while you fall asleep tonight, think about the journey that's brought you to today...and about how special you are, how many people truly love you, all the lives you've touched. 'Cause I guarantee that when you put those things in perspective, not going back to your job won't be the tragedy it feels like right now.

Michele is weighing her friend's words...but she hasn't stopped twirling the spoon in the liquefied white goop...and now she *bursts into tears*.

MICHELE

***Oh, poor J! I've made soup of his  
White Chocolate Marshmallow Dream!***

Laura laughs and reaches for Michele's free hand, squeezing it, watching her mourn the loss of an impossible dream.

EXT. BROWARD FIREFIGHTING ACADEMY - MORNING

A beautiful spring morning. Eighty or so people mill about, friends & family, police & firefighter colleagues greeting each other with a wonderful sense of *occasion*.

## INT. LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Michele is suited up, ready for the agility test. Sitting on a bench, she stares at an open locker in which she's neatly arranged her street clothes. After a moment, REVEALED in the locker is the photo that had appeared in the newspaper: her in her old uniform, proudly perched atop a fire truck. She slams the locker shut.

## EXT. AGILITY COURSE - MOMENTS LATER

Michele's at the starting line, conferring with an ACADEMY OFFICIAL. When they're finished, he takes his position just off the course, starting pistol at-the-ready.

And...BANG!

\*Hose Roll Pull: from the starting line, Michele pulls a 50-foot roll of 2.5-inch hose (folded in half and coupled to itself, weighing 32 lbs.) to the designated drop point 200 feet away. Her training, in afternoon heat, for this part of the test pays off beautifully.

\*Stairs: proceeding to the next station, she must climb 5 short flights of stairs (8 steps per flight) to a platform.

\*Weight Pull: she then raises and lowers a 25-pound weight, attached to a rope, hand over hand up over the handrail, touches the floor and then back over the handrail and hand over hand down to the ground. She struggles mightily with this, due to her limited arm & shoulder range-of-motion.

***This agility test is taking every ounce of physical ability & psychological concentration in Michele's being...and some moments are clearly grueling.***

\*Hose Carry: she climbs back down the stairs, where she picks up a 50-foot roll of 2.5-inch hose and carries it over her shoulder up 8 short flights (8 steps per flight) and back down. She's fighting to keep her balance at this point, her damaged equilibrium wreaking havoc with her ability to move consistently forward as she climbs or descends.

\*Hose Move/Return: she then places the 50-foot roll of hose at the bottom of the stairs and proceeds to move four 50-foot rolls of 2.5-inch hose 25 feet in one direction, and then returns each roll back in the opposite direction.

\*Horizontal Ladder: next, she proceeds to a platform 5 feet above the ground; using only her hands, she moves across the length of a 20-foot ladder suspended 10 feet above the ground.

At the other end of the ladder, however, where she must pull herself up to another 5-foot high platform and reach a contact point, she seems to give up, her body simply faltering as she mentally allows it to take over.

*Then she spots Hector, cheering her on harder & louder than anyone else; the sight of him sends a jolt through her system...and suddenly she's back in the game!*

Struggling mightily, she finishes this station as required, returning in the same manner across the ladder to the original platform.

\*Hose Pull: the light at the end of the tunnel! A 50-foot section of hose must be pulled back to the finish line 200 feet away...

*And she finishes!* Almost immediately, Laura reaches her with water and cool towels, carefully helping her to the ground. The women high-five as they're quickly surrounded by elated family & friends. Amidst the cheers, laughter & tears, Michele's exhausted face looks up at the people in the world who mean the most to her, and for just a moment she's happy, every pain, loss & concern vanished in the thrill of her accomplishment.

Then she sees the frozen display of the digital time clock elevated at the finish line: **14:49**...and everything else becomes a blur, the cheerful celebration now just so much noise ringing painfully in her ears.

EXT. MICHELE'S HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

Christina's saying good-night to guests at the front door.

INT. FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Exhausted, she yawns and locks the front door. The house's celebratory destruction tells the tale of the all-day party in Michele's honor.

INT. MICHELE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Michele is lying on top of the bedspread, shoes kicked off, staring at the ceiling...clutching a letter.

BONNIE (V.O.)

Aw, it's just the Florida  
Neurological Association, sugar...  
cocktails, dinner, silent auction,  
thousand or so folks, no big whoop!

(MORE)

BONNIE (V.O.) (cont'd)  
 And it's a month away, ya got  
 plenty of time.

INT. DEN - AFTERNOON

REVEALED on display throughout the room are the remnants of Michele's earlier life as an overachieving athlete: trophies, medals, ribbons, plaques, commendations, framed photos & newspaper articles...and, finally, REVEALED on the desk is a framed 8x10 photo of the post-injury Michele the moment she completed the agility test, every ounce of pain & elation etched on her face. Now she sits staring at the computer screen, the official-looking letter open beside the photo. After a moment her concentration breaks and she sighs, glances at Jeremy playing in his playpen.

MICHELE  
 How about *you*, J? Any ideas for a  
 brilliant, soul-stirring speech?

REVEALED is the screen, on which she has written *Good evening! I'm Michele Greene*. The cursor blinks mockingly. From the playpen comes a resonant Fisher-Price *The cow says, Moo!* She types *Mooo!* When she stands & stretches, goes to Jeremy for a kiss, it's apparent her limp is permanent.

MICHELE  
 Know how Mommy procrastinates? She  
*cleans!* Yes she *cleans* 'cause she  
 freakin' hates *that*, too, and it's  
 the lesser of two sucky evils!

INT. CHRISTINA'S BEDROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Dropping her own bedsheets, Michele makes short work of stripping Christina's bed. Picking up the first pile, she loses her balance, tumbles into the naked mattress and slides clumsily to the floor.

MICHELE  
 (to herself)  
 Son-of-a...! Mommy's *mission* today  
 is to not freakin' fall on her  
 freakin' *ass!*

As she gathers her strength and balance to climb off the floor, something catches her eye: a purple, velvet journal, on the floor behind the night stand. She retrieves it, opens it...and her ruby pendant heart and chain fall out; the chain has been repaired. She reads a page, her face falling in stunned surprise. She flips through the journal, finding pages and pages of Christina's handwriting.

She considers for a moment, then gives up her plan to rise from the floor, sinking against the bed as she loses herself in her sister's words.

<p>MICHELE</p> <p><i>Where do I begin? This is a journal to share with you when you wake up. Spud...our little Michele...</i></p>	<p>CHRISTINA (V.O.)</p> <p><i>Where do I begin? This is a journal to share with you when you wake up. Spud...our little Michele...</i></p>
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INT. DEN - LATER

Back at the computer, Michele stares at the blank screen... then the journal's last page...then the screen. She slowly deletes *mooo!* Then she goes to town, typing as fast as she can to keep up with her racing thoughts. The ruby pendant heart sits on the desk beside her computer.

EXT. STATION NINE BASKETBALL COURT - AFTERNOON

It's Hector & Stromer vs. MARK & LANCE, rookie firefighter colleagues, in a sweaty, intense game of two-on-two. Stromer scores the winning basket with flair; he & Hector high-five in celebration.

INT. STATION NINE LOCKER ROOM - LATER

Steam rolls out of the shower room around the corner as Hector finishes shaving at a sink, in boxer shorts with a towel around his neck. The rookies lumber past toward their lockers muttering about their loss; Hector splashes his face...and finds himself captivated by his reflection, specifically the scar across his left cheek. He's lost in thought when Stromer emerges towel-clad from the showers.

STROMER

Yeah pretty boy, your face is great, let's go, happy hour don't last all night!!

HECTOR

(dazed)

I...can't. Got somethin' else.

STROMER

Those bozos are *buyin'!* What's so important you can skip *free booze?!*

## EXT. MICHELE'S HOUSE - DUSK

Hector parks his motorcycle in the driveway beside Michele's SUV. He approaches the front door, finds the house dark inside and out. He rings the doorbell and waits. As he's about to ring again, something catches his eye through the living room window; closer inspection reveals Michele's silhouette on the couch, motionless. He raps on the window.

HECTOR  
(calling out)  
Yo Verdita! Whatcha doin'?!

She casually glances his way, doesn't respond.

HECTOR  
Nice greeting, *chica!* You gonna  
invite me in, or what?

MICHELE  
(calling out, flat)  
Door's unlocked. It's a free  
country.

## INT. LIVING ROOM - A MOMENT LATER

In the lengthening shadows, Hector is perched at the edge of the couch beside Michele. The purple journal is open in Michele's lap.

MICHELE  
Didn't know my sister knew so many  
big words. But then, guess I  
didn't know my sister.

HECTOR  
(at a loss)  
Uh-huh, sure...but to be fair, it  
probably wasn't, y'know, meant for  
you to read. Hey, you *sure* you  
don't want some lights on?

MICHELE  
Bullshit!

She flips to a page in the journal.

MICHELE  
(reading)  
*This is a journal to share with you  
when you wake up. Spud...our  
little Michele...*  
(angry)  
(MORE)

MICHELE (cont'd)

And by the way, what's with that name you call me?! It's not even a word! You & my sister, always with the stupid nicknames!

HECTOR

(hurt)

Verdita? Sure it's a word. Verde. Green. Remember? It was, like, your second day as a rookie, I think, and Stromer called you Greenie, and it just kinda...

MICHELE

(exploding)

Oh cut the **shit**, Hector! I know what you guys **say** about me! Showin' up on the agility course, **laughin' at the freakin' gimp who thinks she's still a firefighter!**

HECTOR

(stunned)

Uh...hey, you've got some wrong ideas!

He tries to take the journal from her...

HECTOR

Y'know what, let's put this thing away for now...

...but Michele angrily yanks it back and can't look at him.

MICHELE

I don't...remember you calling me anything when I was...I don't remember **bein'** a rookie, okay?!

HECTOR

Hey, it's cool, c'mon. You knew some of your memory wasn't coming back. No biggie.

MICHELE

Don't *pacify me!* Ever since the coma everyone's *waiting!* My whole damned *family!* God, especially *Christina!* Everything I do disappoints her, and I know I'm not *nice* to her, Hector, but I swear I don't know *how* to be! 'Cause  
(angrily fighting tears)

(MORE)

MICHELE (cont'd)

I don't **remember** what we were **like**,  
I mean I guess we were **close** or  
whatever, but it's just not...  
**happening**, y'know?! And the  
**videos**, lying there like a  
**vegetable** and when I wake up it's  
"your baby this and that" and I'm  
like, uh, okay, if you **say so!** And  
then yeah, some things come  
back...but I **don't** remember being  
**pregnant** or **married** or living in  
this **house...**

(losing the emotional  
battle)

...and without memories I can't be  
sure I'm the person who **did** those  
things! I'm like some **half-person**,  
I just **take up space** while we wait  
for the other **half** to show up! But  
she never **does!**

She clutches the journal tightly.

MICHELE

I dunno, maybe I **shoulda** died,  
right? It'd be better than living  
in this...freakin' **gray zone** my  
life's become!

HECTOR

(sharp)

Hey! You've got a **son** asleep  
upstairs.

MICHELE

You don't **get it!**

HECTOR

What don't I get?! That you've  
come back as far as you can but  
it's not enough for you? Or that  
your family's still in mourning?!

MICHELE

(scoffing)

Yeah, **right**, like **that** makes sense!

HECTOR

No, it does! They're mourning what  
you've all **lost**. The person you  
were, the stuff you don't  
**remember...**but y'know what?

(MORE)

HECTOR (cont'd)

There's not a single day they're not grateful you're *here*, that **you** weren't lost. You don't *think* about that, do ya, that you were almost a goner?! It leaves a scar with folks! So cut 'em some *slack*, huh?

MICHELE

*I've...changed, okay?! It's right here in my own sister's...words! She doesn't know...who I am now, I'm not the same...sister, or daughter, or anything, and they all...they want me fixed, like I'm...broken...*

(breaking down)

*...and I know what I've...lost, I know so much has...changed...*

(finally, really crying)

*...but the one thing I...can't... take changing...is...people... tolerating me...and wishin'...I was the person I useta be!!!*

(sobbing)

*I can't be...who I was, I just... can't be...her...*

Hector holds her while she cries. When her tears finally subside, he uses one shirt sleeve for her eyes, holds out the other for her nose.

HECTOR

Blow.

Michele looks at him like he's insane, then realizes he's kidding and reluctantly smiles. He fetches a box of tissues for her, and together they sit for a moment in the darkness, grateful for the peace & quiet.

HECTOR

(finally)

Sure you don't want some light?

Michele shakes her head...and in the darkness realizes Hector is staring into her eyes. Neither of them can look away. He gives her a sympathetic smile, gently brushing hair out of her face...then, impulsively, kisses her. It's mutual...but doesn't go beyond *tender* and *gentle*. Michele forgets about the journal, lets it fall to the floor. She doesn't, however, stop clutching what's REVEALED in one hand: the gold chain with the ruby pendant heart.

INT. PALM BEACH HILTON LOBBY - EVENING

*Today's Agenda - 8/31/96* welcomes the Florida Neurological Association's 10th Anniversary Gala honoring Sunrise Rehabilitation Center.

INT. ATLANTIC BALLROOM - CONTINUOUS

Michele is on stage, staring out at the crowd, startled to see *fire* everywhere: the elegant candle centerpieces grow in her imagination until their luminous flames take on their own lives, threatening to destroy the room...but they don't. Instead, they diminish in stature 'til they're simply candles again. Michele clears her throat and speaks.

MICHELE

(stunned)

Wow. This is, uh...scary.

She suddenly remembers the speech in her hand.

MICHELE

Oh! *Hello*, this would help!

(reading, stiff)

The Sunrise board of trustees have asked me to offer first-person narrative about surviving brain injury, and I'm happy to do so.

Bonnie waves her down from offstage and pantomimes coaching: *Relax! Smile!* Michele nods, tries to loosen up.

MICHELE

Like most parents, ours read bedtime stories when my sisters and me were kids. There's one about a girl who got lost in the woods and found a house identical to hers, where *her exact clone* was living a parallel life; all the details were the same, but *she* was different; she *loved* spinach, her clone *hated* it, and so on.

At a front table, Buck whispers to Mary.

BUCK

What the hell's she talking about?

MARY  
I have no idea!

MICHELE  
One day, her two selves met  
and something mystical  
happened...but I don't  
remember what and who cares  
anyway...

MICHELE  
...but it's a good metaphor for  
life after brain injury: you're  
basically two versions of yourself.  
You know the other one existed,  
'cause there are pictures, and  
people talk about her. And people  
want her to come back...they prefer  
her to you. And I've gotta tell  
you, that hurts a lot.  
(an offstage glance)  
Can we, uh, do the thing?

She looks back at the screen as an image appears: the last  
page of Christina's journal, the list entitled *Things I Miss  
Most About Michele!!!!* She shares a smile with Christina at  
her table, then takes a deep breath and forges on, referring  
to the screen as necessary.

MICHELE  
*Number one: always talked to me  
about everything.* Okay, so I was  
more open about stuff before, like  
secrets & dreams. Huh. *Two: she  
cared about us more than she cared  
about work.* Uh, jeez, I was just  
tryin' to become a firefighter  
again, but I get it. And *three...*

Glancing back at the screen, she speaks sideways into the  
mike; anything to avoid the audience at this point.

MICHELE  
...wow, three's tough. *Simple  
kindness!!!!* And, um, clearly she  
went nuts with exclamation marks  
and, uh, ripped the page, so I  
guess she was makin' a point.

She turns back to the audience, her eyes full of tears.

MICHELE  
Y'know, brain injury really *sucks*.  
Forgetting chunks of your life,  
like who you were in your own  
family, and how you treated 'em...  
(MORE)

MICHELE (cont'd)

ya gotta relearn those things just like walkin' & talkin'. And some things don't ever come back...

(letting the tears come)

*...but you **try**, you don't give up...and if people loved the **old** you they'll hopefully love the **new** you, the one that can't do her **job** anymore and never gets **sappy** like before and isn't **patient** and can't **drive** worth sh...*

(catching herself)

*...crap, and **curses** more than she should.*

(softly)

And can't remember important things, no matter how hard she tries. Like simple kindness.

(to Christina)

Or who your best friend was.

Christina smiles through her own tears. Michele gently touches the ruby pendant heart she's wearing, looks offstage.

MICHELE

I think we've embarrassed my sis enough, *lose the thing?*

The screen goes dark. Michele looks down at her speech.

MICHELE

So yeah. Almost two years later I get that I *don't* get to have the exact life I had. But accepting limitations, learning to work with 'em...that's what makes rehab a success. And through it all you're grateful you haven't lost the *best* things...those people sittin' over there. Sometimes they're a pain in the *butt*...but I guess they'd say *that's* a two-way street.

(deep breath)

So thanks to Sunrise for lettin' me acknowledge your amazing work... with special mention to my *awesome* physical therapist, I could blab on about her but it'd be sappy so never mind.

She awkwardly bumps the microphone as she leaves the podium. Enthusiastic applause rises and swells...and as Bonnie approaches from the wings, Michele is stopped in her tracks by her own reflection in an offstage full-length mirror.

Like the last time her eyes deceived her in this way, she stares at her younger, pre-injury self: long, thick hair cascading down her back, carefree smile...

BONNIE (O.C.)  
Michele? Sugar, you okay?

The applause dies down, the ballroom goes silent, all eyes on Michele staring at her own reflection. Will she burst into tears, rage at the mirror's injustice? No. She shakes off her confusion, smiles at her real reflection and graciously accepts Bonnie's hug & assistance.

MICHELE  
Yeah. I think I'm good.

INT. ATLANTIC BALLROOM - A MOMENT LATER

Michele's table is surrounded by well-wishers, including familiar faces from Sunrise. Mary clutches her daughter.

MARY  
Honey! Your father and I don't remember that bedtime story.

MICHELE  
(winking)  
It's called *givin' the people what they want*, Mom.

She spots her three sisters engrossed in conversation with two 50-ish WOMEN, clearly about Michele.

MICHELE  
(annoyed)  
Who are *they?!*

LAURA  
Co-chairs of the FNA!

MICHELE  
The *whozywhatsit?!*

LAURA  
Uh, hello? The Florida Neurological Association?! Apparently there's *official interest* in your speaking at this year's holiday celebration.

Michele grins and starts to make a beeline for the women...but Hector intercepts her with a quick comment whispered into her ear, a business card and a nod toward the MAN chatting up Buck. REVEALED is the card: **Lucky Jordan, Fire Inspection Director, Broward County Dept. of Education.**

MICHELE  
(impulsive, way too loud)  
**No...mother-freakin' way!!!**

All conversation in the vicinity stops, everyone stares at her...and Buck waves her down with an exaggerated *two-handed* Carol Burnett *triple* earlobe-tug. As Michele chokes back laughter, Hector escorts her toward the waiting women.

HECTOR  
C'mon, Verdita. Let's go meet your fan club.

MICHELE  
Hey, Cuban Pete! You ever gonna just freakin' call me plain ol' Michele?

HECTOR  
Huh. Hadn't thought about it. You want me to?

Michele slowly, gently traces the scar across his cheek... then flashes him a thousand-watt grin.

MICHELE  
**Hell no!**

She yanks him away toward the women.

TITLE CARD (OVER CONTINUING ACTION):

*Although unable to meet the physical demands of firefighting, Michele Greene resumed her career by joining the Broward County Department of Education as a Fire Inspector. She continues to inspire people with her dedication to helping others while meeting the daily demands of life as a single parent living with permanent, life-altering brain injury.*

FADE OUT.