

HURRICANE COFFEE
Based on a true story

TEASER:

EXT - MISTINA'S BACKYARD - NIGHT

MISTINA (38ish), caffeine addict, white girl with colorful, black-girl braids piled on top her head, queen of the chaos, stands with a group of women clustered around a firepit. No fire. Bits of smashed pumpkin litter the site.

MISTINA
You know what I hate?

Mistina picks up a pumpkin and rolls it in her hands.

MISTINA (CONT'D)
Feeling like I'm not enough.

She sets the pumpkin on the fireside and picks up a bat.

MISTINA (CONT'D)
Like I have to do everything
myself. Because nobody shares my
vision.

She swings a bat at a pumpkin perched on the side of the pit. It explodes.

Mistina exhales. She takes a swig of wine cooler and hands the bat to RILEY (35ish), tattoos, punk hair, snarky attitude hiding a soft core.

Riley pauses to squeeze Mistina's hand.

RILEY
Not everyone's your ex, Dork. You
need a new rant.

MISTINA
Oh, I've got plenty--Like my
landlord doing a surprise
inspection today. I've been asking
Karen to fix the HVAC unit for
three months, but it felt like she
was more interested in looking for
"violations".

RILEY
She's money hungry. If she could
charge you for air, she would.

MISTINA

I agree--And then there's my son.
It would be nice if he'd start
talking to me again.

Riley tries to hand the bat back to Mistina.

RILEY

You need another turn. You've got a
lot more pumpkin smashing to do.

Mistina puts up her hands, refusing the bat. She moves next to JAMIE (8), her daughter, sitting on a lounge chair. Jamie takes her hand.

Riley readies the bat. She pauses. Deep breath.

RILEY (CONT'D)

Oh, what the hell-I hate feeling
like I'm less than, also.

Riley pulls the bat back.

RILEY (CONT'D)

And my boyfriend is a prick. But I
love him.

The whack of the bat sends pumpkin guts spewing into the air.

A third woman, PAIGE (50), business clothes but no shoes, intoxicated, reaches for the bat.

Paige staggers as she sets her pumpkin up.

PAIGE

Well, I loved being married. I just
hate the fucker who...

She glances at Jamie's wide eyes.

PAIGE (CONT'D)

Sorry.

Paige swings the bat, misses the pumpkin and twirls to drop to one knee.

Mistina grabs her waist and pulls her up.

MISTINA

You okay? You might want to sit
this round out.

Paige shakes her head. She lifts the bat again.

PAIGE
That cheater can go to Hell.

She slashes the pumpkin. It explodes. Mistina pulls pumpkin from her hair. Everyone lifts their drinks.

Jamie jumps from her lounge chair.

JAMIE
Can I do it, Mom?

MISTINA
Sure. What do you hate, Jamie? Not counting my meatloaf.

Jamie sets up a pumpkin and takes the bat.

JAMIE
I hate...

She lifts the bat upward. Glances fearfully at her mom.

JAMIE (CONT'D)
I hate my brother.

Jamie brings the bat down hard on top of the pumpkin. Splitting it. She starts to cry. Everyone else freezes.

She hits it several more times before her mother gets to her, throws the bat to the side and sprints into the house.

INT. JAMIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jamie throws herself inside. Rips down pictures of her and a teenage boy, snuggled under a Christmas tree, holding a puppy. She hucks it violently against the dresser.

Mistina quietly enters as Jamie flings herself on the bed. She lays beside her and pulls the weeping girl into her arms.

MISTINA
I'm so sorry, baby.

Sobbing echoes in the quiet room until Jamie pulls away.

JAMIE
Dad visits me. Why won't Michael?

MISTINA
The divorce has been hard on Michael, too. He's angry.

Mistina meets Jamie's eyes, her own streaming tears.

MISTINA (CONT'D)
Give him time, baby. He still loves
his little sister.

Jamie shakes her head sadly and buries her head again.

The rain increases and the sound pelts the window. Mistina sighs. She tips Jamie's head back.

MISTINA (CONT'D)
Hey. You know teenage boys. They'd
rather get caught picking their
nose in public than showing their
feelings.

Jamie sniffs. She snuggles back into her mom. Mistina sighs again.

END TEASER

ACT ONE

INT. MISTINA'S SUBURBAN - DAY

A city waking up to dark skies and drizzle.

Mistina drives. Balances a coffee holder on her dash.

Jamie and Riley are wedged so tightly among boxes and blankets that you can barely see them. It's a rolling disaster zone.

JAMIE

Mom, I can't move. When will we be there?

We follow Mistina gaze past the busy windshield wipers, to see a dreary strip mall shrouded in clouds and rain. There is no movement around the buildings.

MISTINA

You're a trooper. I'll make you a breakfast sandwich with a thousand pickles, when we get back to the shop.

RILEY

Suck it up, Jamie. We're all living inside a hoarder's edition of 'Extreme Carpool'.

Jamie wiggles under the pile of blankets piled above her head. They tilt, precariously. Mistina pushes them back and grabs the coffee again without shifting her eyes off the road.

MISTINA

Give her a pass, Riley. She didn't get much sleep last night.

She juggles the coffee tray again as a garbage truck pulls from behind a building, causing her to brake sharply.

MISTINA (CONT'D)

Nobody move. This entire car is like a game of Jenga.

The garbage men wave in acknowledgement. Rumbles past.

JAMIE

I call dibs on the first homeless person we see. You have to take blankets off my pile.

MISTINA

The homeless could be anywhere. They scattered as soon as the cops cleared the camp. I started getting calls an hour ago.

RILEY

And then Mother Nature had to say, "Oh, you're homeless? I'll just add a dose of biblical rain".

Mistina pulls behind the strip mall. Jamie's hand waves above the pile of blankets.

JAMIE

There, Mom! Under the roof.

Mistina cranks the wheel toward a group of wet, shivering HOMELESS PEOPLE. She slams into park.

MISTINA

Operation 'Dry socks and Blankets' here we go.

She leaves the vehicle running while she runs around the car with the hot coffee. Her passengers watch from inside, unable to move from their extreme seating positions.

RILEY

It may take an excavator to move me.

Jamie struggles frantically, toppling her pile into the driver seat. She sighs in relief.

EXT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Mistina hands coffee to the grateful homeless.

They encircle Mistina as she yanks open the passenger door. Blankets explode outward into Mistina's arms. She begins handing them out.

A HOMELESS HUSBAND grabs several blankets, wrapping them around his HOMELESS WIFE, who coughs. An ASIAN WOMAN, shivers so hard she can barely move.

Mistina tucks a blanket around her.

ASIAN WOMAN

Oh, my god. Thank you so much. It's
so cold.

Mistina wraps a second blanket around her.

MISTINA

I contacted the church. They'll
have a hot meal for you in about an
hour. And I have more blankets back
at the shop.

Riley staggers from the car holding coats.

RILEY

I thought that car was going to be
my casket.

She hands a coat to an OLDER MAN who smiles gratefully. He
tries to hug her.

RILEY (CONT'D)

No, no. Mistina's the hugger. I'm
the sidekick.

She grabs a blanket. Shoves it into his arms. Jamie also
pulls more blankets from the car.

JAMIE

I've got blankets. Who wants to
take one of my blankets?

A fourth person, RUSTY, thin and shivering, a guitar slung
over his shoulder, suddenly crumples to the ground.

A beat. Mistina's startled eyes move from Rusty to her
stricken daughter. She drops to her knees beside Rusty.

MISTINA

Riley. Call an ambulance.

He shakes his head. Tries to stand. And fails.

RUSTY

Don't call anyone. They'll clear
the lot and take our things.

Mistina supports his upper body. She smiles encouragingly at
Jamie.

MISTINA

He's freezing, Jamie. Bring him a
blanket.

Jamie nods eagerly, rushing to help. Mistina covers him.

MISTINA (CONT'D)
(to the group)
What's his story, guys?

ASIAN WOMAN
Rusty's been out here awhile. I
don't think he has any more
diabetic meds.

Rusty tries to rise, again. Weakly.

RUSTY
I'll be okay. I just need to get
up.

MISTINA
Not a chance. You need to be seen.

Asian woman hands Mistina a coffee. Mistina helps Frank sip.
He drinks eagerly. Then coughs. Pushes it away.

RUSTY
My friends are cold. They don't
need cops pushing them around
again.

Mistina looks around the group. They shrug.

ASIAN WOMAN
It's okay. We'll leave. Help Rusty.

HOMELESS HUSBAND
I don't want my wife back out in
this. She's already sick.

Mistina studies the pouring rain. Comes to a decision.

MISTINA
You guys stay under shelter. We'll
drive Rusty ourselves.

RILEY
In the hoarder car? We don't have
room for us.

MISTINA
Dump the supplies here. We're
taking Rusty in. Now.

INT. HURRICANE COFFEE - MORNING

A mismatched sandwich/coffee shop with an apothecary cabinet and a tiny stage.

Jamie lip syncs on the stage. A pickle for a microphone. Bows to an imaginary audience. Takes a bite of her 'microphone'. Begins making faces into the laptop camera.

Two men lean on the counter watching Mistina try to hang a sign behind the counter: DEREK (43ish), dry humor, ex-military, walks with a cane, and EDDIE (post 40's), overthinker, conspiracy theorist.

Mistina's sign reads 'COFFEE-COFFEE', followed by the shop's mission written on it. Teeth gritted, she tries to get it on the hook.

DEREK

You know we're happy to help.

MISTINA

Shhhh. Carpenter at work.

She drops several nails. Straightens the sign ferociously.

Riley mixes syrups at the counter. Paige hovers nearby, sipping coffee.

RILEY

You should have seen her--"Throw those blankets out right now!". Our own little 'Captain Save the Homeless' doing her thing.

MISTINA

Rusty wouldn't be in that condition if he had housing. I'll make some calls to see if he qualifies for transitional.

TRAVIS (40ish), resume of a hundred jobs-master of none, walks from the back. Hair spiked, chains, eighties rock-n-roll personified. The room goes quiet.

Travis rotates. Derek nudges Eddie. They both grin.

DEREK

Halloween?

TRAVIS

They say to dress the part.

DEREK

Part of what? Mad Max?

TRAVIS

This is what drummers look like. Do you think I should put make-up on?

Mistina levels her sign. Smiling in spite of herself.

MISTINA

No-no. I'm sure you'll make enough impression with what you've got going on.

Travis glances at the mission board.

TRAVIS

You wrote coffee twice?

Mistina's board misses the hook and tips sideways. The guys surge forward. She stops its topple.

MISTINA

Coffee-Coffee is my mission.

DEREK

Because just saying 'coffee' once, isn't enough?

MISTINA

When I was a teenager, 'Coffee' meant sitting down with friends and flirting with the wait staff.

She steps back from the sign with a smile.

DEREK

So 'Coffee-Coffee' is double the caffeine, double the fun?

MISTINA

Coffee-Coffee meant the storm was brewing, the world was ending, and we felt like we couldn't breathe. It meant...help.

Quiet. Eddie nods somberly.

EDDIE

I get it. It's when 'the man' is trying to take you out and you don't know where to turn.

MISTINA

Exactly. People need a safe space
and resources. Coffee-Coffee.

EDDIE

I like it. Big Corporate will be
completely confused.

MISTINA

I want this business to succeed,
and I want to help people.

The sign falls to the counter. Mistina closes her eyes,
clenches her hands, and takes a frustrated breath.

Riley begins a coffee drink. The espresso machine sparks,
causing her to jump backward. Mistina shoves her sign against
the back wall and turns the espresso machine off.

MISTINA (CONT'D)

I thought I fixed that problem.

She pulls the side panel off, poking at the wires inside.

EDDIE

This isn't random. It's a perfect
example of Corporate Greed making
faulty equipment to keep you coming
back.

MISTINA

Eddie, Corporate Greed doesn't care
about me. They...

A loud 'POP'. Mistina jumps back with a squeal. The overhead
lights blink.

PAIGE

'I am enough'.

She looks up as everyone stares at her.

PAIGE (CONT'D)

What? That's my new mantra. It's
what you wanted when we smashed
pumpkins last night. If we all
believe we're 'enough' we can
handle anything.

MISTINA

I'd like to be enough of an
electrician.

She unplugs the machine and gingerly separates a frayed wire from the rest.

DEREK
Definitely electrical.

MISTINA
Thanks, Mr. Obvious.

EDDIE
Call an electrician.

MISTINA
That takes money.

She rips electrical tape with her teeth.

DEREK
Clearly qualified.

MISTINA
You the safety inspector?

DEREK
(leering)
Do I get to pick what I inspect?

Mistina rolls her eyes. Riley sets a sample of liquid on the counter.

RILEY
Inspect this...Maple-bacon vanilla.
Today's flavor experience. I should work here.

MISTINA
I can't even pay myself.

She slides the panel into place and flips the switch on.

MISTINA (CONT'D)
Let's hope that fixed it.

Riley eagerly pushes a carafe under the steamer.

RILEY
I want to try my new coffee flavor.

DEREK
Is nothing sacred from pig being added to it?

RILEY

You want boring? Head down the street.

DEREK

No. No. I'm saving myself for steak a la mocha.

The espresso machine rumbles ominously. Everyone freezes. It hums again. The milk foams. Everyone breathes.

EDDIE

Specialty syrups. That's a great way to get ahead of the competition--This could bring in customers.

Mistina climbs on a chair. Back to hanging her sign.

PAIGE

What customers?

She jumps forward and grabs the chair.

PAIGE (CONT'D)

Mistina, be careful. The chair was sliding.

Mistina waves her away.

MISTINA

I'm fine--I can't understand why the city hasn't given me my sign permit yet.

TRAVIS

If the coffee shop doesn't work, we can always turn this place into a rock venue.

MISTINA

This coffee shop has to work. It's too important to the community.

RILEY

Also...It's not like you stick with something more than a week.

TRAVIS

I'm a free-spirit. I thrive on new experiences.

DEREK

Napping is not a new experience.

TRAVIS

That's mean. I'm also a great
drummer.

Mistina pulls back carefully from the sign. It's hung. She puts the chair back with a grin.

MISTINA

You're a great drummer. Paige thinks we're all 'enough'. Who knows? This could be our best day ever.

Mistina's eye is caught by a woman who seems to be berating a homeless man, outside the shop.

MISTINA (CONT'D)

What is she doing?

Mistina scurries out the door, followed by the others.

EXT. HURRICANE COFFEE - CONTINUOUS

KAREN (60ish), carrying a clipboard, stands near a homeless, black man, FRANK, pushing a cart.

KAREN

I'm sure you'll be much more comfortable down the street.

Mistina steps protectively between them.

MISTINA

Hey. He's okay. He's one of my customers.

KAREN

He's...off-putting to the other tenants...

Karen sneaks a glance at a white truck parked near the entrance of the mall. It reads, 'COASTAL MERIDIAN PROPERTIES'. Under the name, in smaller letters, 'Building Tomorrow's South'. Two MEN stand talking while looking at the complex.

Mistina smiles reassuringly at Frank. She turns to Karen.

MISTINA

Ralph is one of my regulars. We're happy that he feels comfortable coming to us.

KAREN

Comfort. Yes. That's what we all
want for this place.

Another quick look at the truck.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Maybe he could find comfort
elsewhere.

Frank, embarrassed, pushes his cart down the pavement.

FRANK

(mumbling)

It's okay, Mistina. I'm used to it.

Mistina's eyes go cold. Quietly furious.

MISTINA

He wasn't hurting anyone, Karen. I
can ask him to come inside.

KAREN

Look. I get it. You've got
heartstrings. But there are other
tenants in this mall that don't
feel the same--

She pulls a notice off her clipboard. Thrusts it at Mistina.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Here. This notice is the reason I
stopped by.

Mistina looks at the notice. Utter silence. A beat.

MISTINA

I don't understand. I always pay at
the end of the month.

KAREN

Which means your four-thousand
dollars is technically a month
late. And another four-thousand is
due in five days.

She steps back with a falsely sweet smile.

KAREN (CONT'D)

So I need eight-thousand dollars to
have the books in order.

Mistina thrusts the notice back at her. Karen refuses to take
it.

MISTINA

You didn't have a problem before--
I'll get it caught up. I just need
some time.

KAREN

You've had time. Things have
changed. I have plans for this
complex.

MISTINA

Plans? What plans?

Everyone's eyes drifts to the white truck and back to Karen.

KAREN

This whole block is about to
change. It's important to stay
ahead of the wave.

MISTINA

We have a contract.

KAREN

I know. And if I don't get the full
eight-thousand dollars, that
contract will be in violation.

MISTINA

Seriously, I'll try to...

Karen's expression hardens.

KAREN

Seriously--you have five days. And
then you need to be out of here.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. HURRICANE COFFEE - DAY

Mistina enters like a zombie. She stops in front of her mission board, staring at it blankly.

MISTINA
She wants to throw me out--I can't
lose my shop.

Jamie puts her arms around Mistina. Silence. Riley paces.

RILEY
Breathe. Does she even know how
much this place means to people?--
It doesn't matter. We'll figure
this out.

JAMIE
Mom. Do we have to go back to the
coffee truck?

Mistina gives her a reassuring hug.

MISTINA
We sold the coffee truck, Baby.

She smiles bravely at Jamie.

MISTINA (CONT'D)
Go find something to do. We'll
figure this out.

Jamie takes her laptop to the counter. Watches her mom with worried eyes. Mistina's friends gather around.

MISTINA (CONT'D)
(quietly)
I just don't have enough customers
to make the money I need.

DEREK
Increase your insurance, you know,
in case...there's a fire?

EDDIE
I could make a power point
presentation.

DEREK

Nothing like a power point to have them lining up at the door.

EDDIE

For the landlord. *"Why Hurricane Coffee is Important to this Community"*. Maybe it would encourage her to work with Mistina.

RILEY

Forget that nonsense. I'll make syrups and we'll sell them.

PAIGE

Mistina needs advertising. She needs a stream of customers rushing in.

Travis jumps into action.

TRAVIS

I've got this.

He taps his drumsticks on a nearby table, grinning at Jamie.

TRAVIS (CONT'D)

Pickles, lattes...uh...machines that pop. Get your caffeine from the 'Hurricane Shop'.

Mistina almost smiles. Jamie giggles. Turns her laptop camera toward Travis.

Travis slides behind the counter. Taps his sticks in front of Jamie.

TRAVIS (CONT'D)

Piggy flavors, feeling low? Get your caffeine shot to go.

RILEY

Hey. I said 'maple-bacon'. Don't be downsizing my syrup skills.

Travis expands his drumming, sliding up and down the counter.

TRAVIS

Maple. Bacon. My mistake. Bring your money in here...uh....

He makes a face at Jamie, plinks along the top of the espresso machine and twirls.

JAMIE
(shouting)
We'll give you cake.

Jamie follows him with her laptop as he gets into his rhythm, adding the bean grinder and glasses to his solo.

Another twirl. His sticks hit the stack of glasses. They fall and shatter. He stops. Eyes wide in apology.

RILEY
Before we break?

Mistina throws up her hands, frustrated.

MISTINA
Mistina's patience is at stake?

TRAVIS
(glum)
Sorry, Mistina.

Travis picks up broken glass. Jamie skips away.

TRAVIS (CONT'D)
Just trying to cheer you up. You're
always there for everyone else.

Derek puts his hand on Mistina's arm, pulling her gaze.

DEREK
(quietly)
We all mean well.

Eddie picks up a business card and holds it up.

EDDIE
You need to think outside the box,
Mistina. Get these cards on the
streets.

Eddie twirls the card, thinking out loud.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
So, follow me. We learn a cool
dance routine...
(he demonstrates a few
steps)
...go downtown in costumes and
breakdance in the street. When we
have everyone's attention...
(he stops suddenly)
...the music stops...
(MORE)

EDDIE (CONT'D)
(mimes handing cards to
the others)

RILEY
Terrorizing the locals helps
us...how?

EDDIE
Everyone's got a phone. Hurricane
Coffee will go viral.

MISTINA
I opened a coffee shop that isn't
paying wages yet. I supplement with
work in a bar, and I'm raising a
kid, who needs...a lot of my time.
When did you want to practice these
dances?

RILEY
You're short on options. Make time.

DEREK
I can't break dance, with my bum
leg, but I could help out with the
kiddo or pick up supplies.

MISTINA
(slowly)
Accepting help always comes with an
emotional invoice. I can't afford
to get caught up in relationship
debt.

DEREK
You can't do everything alone. How
sad is that?

Mistina moves behind the counter. Overwhelmed.

MISTINA
This is the worse day, ever.

RILEY
Quit whining, girl. We're going to
help you fix your life with a flash-
mob. How fun is that?

Mistina looks around the shop. Her chin trembles.

Mistina takes a deep breath. She notices her shaking hands
and clasps them together. Her chin comes up.

MISTINA

What could a flash-mob promote?

RILEY

You could rent space out after the shop closes.

DEREK

Clubs? Karaoke?

EDDIE

Karaoke. That's good. You could call it 'Espresso Yourself' and sell tickets.

MISTINA

Best voice gets a coffee drink and biggest catastrophe has to pass the hat for the homeless? That is good. But I need a Karaoke machine.

RILEY

Cell phone and a speaker. Easy-peasy.

Mistina studies her friends. A beat.

DEREK

And?

MISTINA

Fine. I'll swap free food and coffee for help with a flash-mob. But after that--I've got it. I can run the shop myself.

Two TEENAGE GIRLS enter, holding phones. They see Travis.

FIRST TEENAGER

Look, it's the drummer.

SECOND TEENAGER

Ohhh...He's older than he looked like on my phone.

Travis stares. Indignant. Jamie rushes to her mom. Excited.

JAMIE

Mom. We're famous. They saw my TikTok video.

INT. BAR - DAY

The bar is dim, lit with light from the windows. No customers. A band is set up on the stage. Three BAND MEMBERS tune their instruments. All are dressed folksy. The GUITAR PLAYER checks his watch.

GUITAR PLAYER
I thought you said this guy was
coming...

Travis swaggers through the door, drumsticks in hand.

TRAVIS
Hey, man. Ready to jam some tunes?

The band members look at each other, confused. Travis pauses.

TRAVIS (CONT'D)
Uh...I'm here to try out for the
drummer position. Right?

SINGER
You realize this is a folk band?

Travis takes in their clothing. Realizes his mistake. He hastily flattens his hair and pulls his vest closed.

TRAVIS
Your ad didn't say that--Not to
worry. I can do this.

THE SINGER gestures toward the stage. Travis plops behind the drums. Visibly nervous.

He wipes his hands on his pants. Fiddles with his drumsticks. A nervous breath and a nod.

The group begins one of their tunes. Travis plays loud and fast, drowning them out. They stop. And stare. Until he realizes he's doing a solo. He stops.

TRAVIS (CONT'D)
Too fast? I'm a little nervous. Can
we try again?

KEYBOARD MAN
Uh...yeah. Just...follow us.

The band starts the song again. Travis plays very deliberate...and...slow. Too slow for the song.

Everyone stops and exchanges looks.

SINGER
What kind of music do you play?

TRAVIS
(small voice)
Country.

He slowly slumps.

TRAVIS (CONT'D)
Well...I actually only know two
songs.

An exchange of looks again. Travis stands up slowly.

TRAVIS (CONT'D)
I practiced for three months in my
friends garage. I was kinda' hoping
this was my thing.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Mistina scans oat milk and puts it in a bag with several
others.

She slides in her credit card and waits for the receipt.

Her purse vibrates. She pulls her phone and looks at the text
that came through. Her face reflects terror. She grabs her
bag and runs for the door.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Mistina swings into the gas station and pulls to the side.
She jumps out and runs toward the store front.

MICHAEL, (16) walks out in time to see Mistina cutting across
the lot, toward him.

He panics. And runs.

Mistina chases after.

MISTINA
Michael. Stop. We need to talk.

Michael drops his soda and snacks. He keeps running. Mistina
is no match, but keeps running also.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

--Michael runs down the side of the road. Mistina follows.

--Michael cuts across a lot. Mistina follows, further back.

MISTINA (CONT'D)
(calling out)
I'm not stopping. You're going to
give me a heart attack.

--Michael cuts around some buildings and back on the street again. Mistina follows.

--Michael finally sits down on the curb. Panting. Exhausted. He watches his mom catch up.

END MONTAGE.

Mistina joins him. Collapses. Barely able to breath. She lays back on the grass.

MICHAEL
Dad?

Mistina sits up. Weary.

MISTINA
He's looking, too. I just happen to
know your haunts.

Michael nods. He stares at the ground. Mistina sends off a text.

MISTINA (CONT'D)
I have to tell him where you're at.

A shrug. A beat. Mistina can't help but touch his head. He yanks away. Irritated.

MISTINA (CONT'D)
(gently)
They moved your girlfriend to
another foster home?

His mouth tightens but he doesn't respond.

MISTINA (CONT'D)
Do you think the two of you would
get very far?

Michael turns to her, lashing out.

MICHAEL
You don't understand. I love her.

Michael slumps on the curb again.

MISTINA
I understand. It's why I came after
you.

Michael sends her a sideways glance.

MISTINA (CONT'D)
You get that from me, you know.
Once I care about something, I
don't know how to quit. It's all or
nothing.

She rubs her leg and stands. Stretches painfully. Michael
almost smiles.

MICHAEL
Guess I didn't get the running part
from you.

MISTINA
None of our family has the running
part.

Mistina drops back down, next to Michael.

MISTINA (CONT'D)
You don't have the ability to
support yourselves. Where were you
planning on going?

MICHAEL
It doesn't matter. We'd be
together.

MISTINA
Trying to help a friend makes us
more the same than different.

MICHAEL
I chose my girlfriend. You chose a
business over dad.

MISTINA
I chose to be true to who I am.
Someone who cares about others.
Having a fancy car doesn't mean
much to me.

Michael hunches his shoulders.

MISTINA (CONT'D)
It doesn't mean that I wouldn't be
there for you. I love you.

Mistina picks up a pebble, glancing sideways at his stiff expression.

MICHAEL

Those homeless people are more important to you than your own kids.

MISTINA

That's not true--I'm so sorry if I gave you that impression. My work is important, but how many times have you complained because I'm a helicopter mom? That you needed space?

Michael stares at the ground. Mistina studies his sullen face.

MISTINA (CONT'D)

Your dad and I are two unrelated people who chose to go their own ways. But Michael...

Michael slowly looks up.

MISTINA (CONT'D)

...Your dad and I are both related to you. That love never goes away, for either of us.

A slow nod and semi-smile from Michael.

MISTINA (CONT'D)

When this is over, think about stopping by. Your sister and I kinda feel like...we were left behind.

Silence. A beat. A sideways glance.

MICHAEL

I didn't mean for it to be like that.

Mistina touches his hand.

MISTINA

Then drop in. Just so that...I know you're still mine, too.

INT. HURRICANE COFFEE - DAY

No customers. Riley plays on her phone. Derek sips coffee. Jamie munches a sandwich.

Mistina tears through the door. Tosses her purse under the counter. Jamie's looks at the purse.

MISTINA

I'm sorry. I should have locked up
and put a sign on the door.

RILEY

Will you stop, already? It wouldn't
kill me to make someone a cup of
coffee.

She waves her phone triumphantly.

RILEY (CONT'D)

And I found you a blogger. She'll
be in to interview you tonight.

DEREK

A blogger? That's...great. Nothing
hard about impressing a critic.

Mistina puts milk away, her excitement evident.

MISTINA

A good blog could put me on the
map.

Riley holds up the jar of pickles.

RILEY

Hey. What if we made something like-
fried pickles with bacon? Something
the blogger could get excited
about.

DEREK

That's what Mistina needs. More
pickle addicts around here. And-
really? The bacon thing again?

MISTINA

I'm more interested in the blogger
knowing how we help people.

She pauses to jot down a note.

MISTINA (CONT'D)
That reminds me. When Rusty gets out of the hospital, I want to set him up with a cellphone. For emergencies.

DEREK
I might have a spare at home. It will need minutes on it.

Jamie runs up to Mistina.

JAMIE
Mom. There's a lady on Facebook who has two baby squirrels. She needs someone to help her.

MISTINA
Why do you have my cellphone?

JAMIE
I found it. She's afraid they might die. She needs help.

MISTINA
You found it...in my purse?

JAMIE
Mom. They're dying. They fell out of a tree and she took them inside and now they won't eat.

MISTINA
Put my cellphone back. We're going to be here all day.

JAMIE
But the squirrels...

MISTINA
I don't have a blogger coming tomorrow. We'll talk about the squirrels then.

JAMIE
They could be dead by then.

MISTINA
You got a kitten to cuddle with when your dad and I divorced. That's your quota of wildlife this year.

Jamie slams herself into the back room.

JAMIE (O.S.)

That's not the same. You help everybody else but let a baby squirrel die.

RILEY

Sounds like...you.

MISTINA

She has a bleeding heart.

RILEY

Says the woman who fills the homeless pantry before she buys food for herself.

Mistina sighs and sinks into a chair.

MISTINA

(raising her voice)

Jamie, bring me my phone. We'll make a call.

JAMIE (O.S.)

Whooey!

Mistina catches Derek's grin.

MISTINA

She needs something to occupy her mind.

Derek folds his arms, continuing to grin.

MISTINA (CONT'D)

What? The divorce has been hard on her. Squirrels are easy.

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

A GENTLEMAN (65), escorts Paige into the restaurant. He signals the waitress to seat them and turns to Paige.

GENTLEMAN

You're the first girl who looks like her picture in the dating app.

PAIGE

I hope that's a good thing.

He glances appreciatively at her outfit.

GENTLEMAN
And those shoes...

He smiles at her as the waitress approaches.

GENTLEMAN (CONT'D)
...You have beautiful feet.

EXT. MISTINA'S CAR - HOSPITAL - AFTERNOON

Mistina helps Rusty into the car. Jamie, dressed like a ninja, sits in the back with a shoebox. A dog, KARMA, sits on the seat beside her, very interested in the box.

Rusty catches Mistina's eye and nods his thanks. She tucks his guitar in beside him.

MISTINA
Jamie, don't let Karma get too
close. She's liable to think those
squirrels are a snack.

INT. DEREK'S HOUSE - DAY

Derek sets up a new phone. Eddie slams his computer shut and stares at it glumly. A beat.

EDDIE
My manager doesn't think it's
'reader worthy' yet.

He watches Derek. A beat.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Really? You bought a phone for a
homeless man. That's taking
'impressing a girl' to a new level.

Derek tucks everything back in the packaging. A smile. He grabs his coat.

DEREK
Maybe. Are you coming?

INT. KAREN'S CAR - DAY

Karen and MAYOR HATHAWAY (50's, cold, calculating) sit in a car, across the street from Hurricane Coffee.

MAYOR HATHAWAY
You told me she'd fold months ago.

KAREN
She's resilient.

A beat

KAREN (CONT'D)
The other tenants already caved.

Mayor Hathaway sits back.

MAYOR HATHAWAY
My doners want that land. Luxury
apartments. Tax revenue.

She waves her hand vaguely toward Hurricane Coffee.

MAYOR HATHAWAY (CONT'D)
Not that circus she seems to be
running over there.

KAREN
I've raised her rent. Refused to
fix her HVAK. I even had her car
towed. I think demanding double
rent will do the trick.

MAYOR HATHAWAY
Heap the pressure on. Find
something--anything--to get her
out. I don't care if it's a code
violation or a condemned building.

Karen's jaw firms.

MAYOR HATHAWAY (CONT'D)
This week. Understood?

Karen nods. She leans forward, watching Mistina pull up and
enter--followed by Jamie, Rusty, and the dog, Karma.

She pulls her cell phone out and dials. Smirks at Mayor
Hathaway.

KAREN
Hi. Health Department?

A beat.

KAREN (CONT'D)
I'd like to report an animal in a
food establishment.

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. HURRICANE COFFEE - DAY

Several CUSTOMERS sip coffee drinks, either sitting at various tables or looking at the consignment area.

Riley leans on the counter, watching Derek. He sits at a back table, instructing Rusty on how to use the cellphone.

Mistina and Jamie sit at another table. Mistina helps Jamie support a tiny squirrel, wrapped in a baby blanket. They give it milk from a tiny bottle. A second squirrel lays wrapped in a small box nearby.

MISTINA

Take your time. He's really weak.
He may not make it.

Jamie nods, her concentration on the squirrel. Mistina joins Riley. Her eyes haven't left Derek.

RILEY

He's laying it on pretty thick with the "I'm just a guy who helps the homeless" routine. He's got the hots for you.

MISTINA

I already had the, "I'm not interested talk with him". But I'm not going to turn down help for someone who needs it.

Mistina takes up a rag and wipes down the espresso area. Her gaze strays to Derek.

MISTINA (CONT'D)

You don't think he got the message?

RILEY

Oh, he got a message. That cell phone is like handing a business card to the homeless guy that says, "Smile and show the lady, at the counter, that I'm single, available, and amazing"

MISTINA

As long as he teaches our homeless friend how to use it.

RILEY

Seriously, Mistina. He's a nice guy.

MISTINA

My husband was a nice guy. Men just don't understand my drive. I want this shop to succeed.

RILEY

Maybe Derek is the exception.

MISTINA

I need time to figure out who I am. I don't need pressure or pity.

RILEY

Oh, pity is the last thing that boy is thinking of when he looks at you.

EDNA, well-meaning busybody, stumbles in shaking her umbrella and sending a spray of water flying.

EDNA

Can I get a hot breva?

Mistina turns to the espresso machine with a cheerful smile and starts the drink.

MISTINA

Of course.

The machine rumbles. Overhead lights flicker. Mistina smacks the espresso machine.

MISTINA (CONT'D)

Come on, Sir Beans-a-lot. Stay with us.

EDNA

Trouble with your machine?

MISTINA

I thought I had it fixed but it still seems to have an electrical glitch.

Derek leans on the counter, near Edna.

DEREK

Great grandma's ghost, at it again?

MISTINA

God, I hope not. I don't need a poltergeist tainting my review.

EDNA

Review?

MISTINA

I have a blogger coming. One positive post and we could go from surviving to thriving overnight.

EDNA

You look pretty busy now.

MISTINA

Thanks to my daughter's TicTok antics. But not enough to cover an eviction notice staring me in the face.

EDNA

Why don't you advertise your space for meetings? There are lots of groups in town.

RILEY

We were thinking entertainment. Meetings? That would work, too.

MISTINA

Anything helps. Who would we contact?

EDNA

I don't know. Google places. Service clubs. 4-H. Churches. Everyone needs a place to meet.

MISTINA

I'd let them come in for free if they'd buy coffee and food.

EDNA

Free is a bad choice for a starving business. Pretty good for a 'try before you buy' campaign.

MISTINA

We have to start somewhere. This month we gave away...

She pauses to read off a paper tacked to the side of the fridge.

MISTINA (CONT'D)
...twenty-six meals, handed out
four bags or resources, and dropped
off blankets at two encampments.
If I can catch up rent, I can keep
this going.

Mistina takes a drink to Rusty.

RUSTY
Thanks. I didn't expect this.

MISTINA
I never know what to expect--Why
don't you come in the back? We'll
get you some supplies.

Mistina picks up the guitar and helps Rusty to his feet. He follows her toward the back.

EXT. BACKROOM - AFTERNOON

A couch with blankets on it. A small TV. Shelves lining the walls with stacks of clothing, and necessities.

Mistina packs an overflowing bag.

MISTINA
Toothbrush, soap...oh, and a
contact list of services to call if
you need help. Or if you're bored
and just want to prank call.

RUSTY
(nodding, overwhelmed)
You're treating me like royalty.

MISTINA
If you don't mind self-serve.
(gestures to the opposite
wall)
And in this kingdom your blankets
and supplies for hurricane weather
are on that wall. Take anything you
need.

Rusty picks up a blanket, feeling the weight.

RUSTY
Why do you do this?

Mistina smiles sadly.

MISTINA

My therapist has a list: Parents violent divorce, an abusive relationship, boyfriend died in an accident, ex committed suicide...Yada yada.

Rusty watches her quietly. Steady.

MISTINA (CONT'D)

My kids are traumatized by divorce-- so there's that too.

Rusty's gaze never waivers. Mistina becomes uncomfortable. She begins folding blankets from a basket.

MISTINA (CONT'D)

Everyone has a story.

RUSTY

But why...

He gestures around the room.

RUSTY (CONT'D)

...this. Why me?

Mistina stops folding and meets his gaze, head on.

MISTINA

In my darkest hour...I tried to commit suicide. And someone very dear to me, helped me through it. Then, when he overdosed, I stepped in and stood by his side. We saved each other.

Mistina gestures to the shelves of supplies surrounding them.

MISTINA (CONT'D)

I help because maybe...just maybe...this will be the time that someone else is saved. And because when I'm helping others...for a little while...I don't feel the need to lie in my shower and cut myself.

Rusty holds her gaze. No shock. Understanding.

RUSTY

I heard the others talking about an eviction notice.

Mistina's nods, her smile strained.

MISTINA
If I lose this shop--I lose
everything.

She sets several folded blankets on the shelves.

MISTINA (CONT'D)
I'm sharing so that you can feel
comfortable sharing too. Someday--
When your ready. If it weren't for
the grace of God, I could be right
where you are.

Rusty nods slowly. He gives his own haunted smile.

RUSTY
PTSD. I lost people, too. Sometimes
I feel...almost...normal. And
sometimes the demons seem to sit on
my chest.

Mistina reaches out and squeezes his hand. A moment of unity.

MISTINA
There's a bathroom through the door
where you can wash up and change.

She leaves Rusty with a warm smile.

INT. HURRICANE COFFEE - AFTERNOON

Eddie and Derek watch Riley thumb through her phone.

Jamie sits on a couch, her squirrels tucked out of sight in
their box. Karma lounges at her feet, tied to the couch leg.
Edna watches from a nearby lounge chair.

Travis enters (T-shirt, jeans, boots, cowboy hat. The real
him.) Not his happy-go-lucky self.

DEREK
Your interview?

Travis shakes his head glumly. Riley holds up her phone.

RILEY
Then you have time to help us with
a song for this flash-mob thing.

The door chimes. Paige rushes in and stops.

PAIGE
(chants)
I attract smart men.

RILEY
There's only a couple here and I'm
not sure how smart they are.

DEREK
Hey. I resent that.

PAIGE
I changed my mantra. You have to
say it out loud for the universe to
hear it.

Paige drops her purse next to Jamie and joins her friends.

PAIGE (CONT'D)
I swear. I doubt there are anymore
idiots in this town. I seem to have
gone out with them all.

DEREK
Ahh. Mr. Right crashed and burned?

PAIGE
More like Mr. Clean with a foot
fetish.

DEREK
Did you bail on him when he went to
the bathroom?

EDDIE
Wait. You're one of those women?

PAIGE
Hey. I only did that one time. And
that guys house was so...
(shudders)
...dirty that I had to get out of
there.

Travis plays a drum tempo on the table, with his fingers.

TRAVIS
Paige went looking for Mr. Right.
Saw his feet and then took flight.

Paige makes a face.

PAIGE

His comment about my shoes should have warned me. He wanted to talk about fetishes all afternoon and then he insisted on showing me his pedicure.

DEREK

Like...in the restaurant?

PAIGE

Right? I made it through the salad but then he suggested I take off my heels and "sliiiide my foot across his". I couldn't handle it. I just...left.

DEREK

So maybe Mr. Slightly Less Worst than the last guy.

PAIGE

I don't see you doing any better with your dating life.

Mistina comes from the back room. Derek sighs as his eyes follow her.

DEREK

The women I like...never know I'm there.

TRAVIS

You're trying too hard. Dating is about enjoying a ladies company with no strings attached.

PAIGE

I don't want strings. I want someone who's not a trainwreck.

Mistina pulls her phone out.

MISTINA

Everyone's here. Anyone have an idea on a song to use? I've got everything on here, from country to jazz.

Riley holds up her own phone.

RILEY

Let me do this, Mistina. Your country crap isn't going to motivate anyone but Farmer Brown and his goat.

Riley starts playing 'TWISTED' by Adrian Von Ziegler. She begins a stiff, zombie type movement.

DEREK

That's the one. Nothing says, "I want to try a new coffee cafe", like a broken robot at a graveyard smash...not.

Paige scrolls through her phone.

PAIGE

We need something upbeat! It's one of the first things they taught us about marketing. I have a whole playlist by Beyonce.

Paige plays Beyonce's song, 'SIGN'. She begins overexaggerated moves, reaching high, lunges, and then swaying forward to brush the ground with her fingers. Trying way to hard. It shows.

MISTINA

Paige, none of the guys can do power yoga.

Eddie moves to the front. He sets his phone on the table and plays, 'Theta Waves Meditation Music: 5 Minute Brain Activation Binaural Beats'.

EDDIE

Have you thought about binaural beats music? It's cosmic. I've never heard about anyone breakdancing on the streets to this.

Eddie moves slowly, very fluid, like a helium balloon space man.

RILEY

I can feel my brain cells floating away.

MISTINA

If we're going to do this, it has to be something upbeat. Something we all know.

JAMIE

Ohh! I know. 'BABY SHARK'.

MISTINA

No, Jamie. Everyone stop--Something that represents all of us.

TRAVIS

Then choose something old school. Maybe with a bit of rap to keep to the breakdance theme.

MISTINA

Like...?

DEREK

...'It's Tricky' by Run-D.M.C.

PAIGE

You? Listen to Run-D.M.C.?

DEREK

It's bad boy stuff.

Travis scrolls through his phone.

TRAVIS

Good choice, man.

PAIGE

Yeah...I like it.

DEREK

Unbelievable. Everyone agrees?

MISTINA

Play the music and we'll find some moves that matches the beat.

Travis hits the music. Everyone dances.

Derek trips over his own feet and knocks into Paige who lip syncs with wild abandon. Eddie vibes on his own.

The door jingles and several PEOPLE walk in. The dancers pause.

RILEY

Want me to help them?

MISTINA

No. I'm on it. Can you just narrow this down to a few steps that we can all repeat?

Mistina moves behind the counter and starts taking orders, while the others continue to practice dance moves.

MONTAGE

Series of quick shots showing building chaos.

--Mistina waits on several people.

--A CURIOUS WOMAN reads the mission sign.

--A stressed MOM enters. Carrying a screaming BABY.

--Mistina works fast, ringing people. Fixing drinks. The espresso machine sputters, pauses, keeps working. Mistina sighs her relief.

--People look at the clock. Several walk out. Riley joins Mistina.

RILEY
(aside to Mistina)
I can help.

Mistina shakes her head. She tries to work faster, sloshing drinks and making messes.

--A HOMELESS WOMAN shuffles in the door. Hesitates near the counter. Mistina nods but keeps making drinks.

--Three BUSINESS MEN walk in. Mistina nods again and smiles at them. Keeps working. They look at their watches.

--Mistina puts Mom's drink up. She struggles to balance the baby and pay. She knocks over her drink. She starts to cry.

MISTINA
It's okay. I'll get you another.

Riley sidles up again.

RILEY
(quietly)
Let...me...help.

MISTINA
(quiet but short)
No. I have this.

--The Business Men fidget. Look at their watches. Mumble to each other.

END MONTAGE

Riley starts mopping up the counter.

MISTINA
I said, 'I've got this'.

RILEY
Shush. You obviously don't.

The Curious Woman mops at her eyes. Mistina starts another drink.

MISTINA
Uhhh...is there something I can do
to help you?

The Curious Woman sniffs.

CURIOUS WOMAN
It's your sign. I lost my sister to
an abusive situation. Seeing this
sign...knowing you're a safe place.
It just touches me.

Mistina sets Mom's new drink on the counter and turns to Curious Woman.

MISTINA
(softly)
Thank you. It's personal to me too.

She smiles at the frustrated Business Men.

MISTINA (CONT'D)
It'll be just another minute.

Mistina turns to Homeless Woman.

MISTINA (CONT'D)
What can I get you?

Homeless Woman gestures toward the door.

HOMELESS WOMAN
Your sign out there--'COMMUNITY
MEALS AVAILABLE'. I can get
something to eat and drink?

MISTINA
Of course.

BUSINESS MAN
(frustrated)
We're missing our lunch window.

All three Business Men stomp out the door.

Mistina pauses. Conternation. Quickly returns to the task at hand--puts a sandwich, from the fridge, on the counter. Adds a cup of coffee to go.

Homeless Woman holds an energy drink and snacks. She starts to tuck everything in her backpack.

MISTINA
Sorry. Just the sandwich and coffee.

HOMELESS WOMAN
I thought I could get food and drink.

MISTINA
We don't give away energy drinks or snacks. That's where my profit comes from.

HOMELESS WOMAN
Oh...I get it. Y'all just give bologna sandwiches and coffee to us hungry people and save the good stuff for yourselves.

MISTINA
(guilty)
I'm buying what I can out of my profits. It's all I can afford.

Homeless Woman takes the sandwich and coffee. She smiles.

HOMELESS WOMAN
I'm just messin' with ya. I get it.
This is the first thing I've had all day.

She waves as she leaves. Everyone else is gone also.

Mistina sighs. A beat. Mistina notices Riley's look.

MISTINA
What? Don't say it...

RILEY
You have good friends--Who don't mind helping. Use them.

MISTINA

You know how I feel about accepting help.

RILEY

You're losing customers. And here's the thing...

Riley looks around and lowers her voice.

RILEY (CONT'D)

I can't keep hanging around, trying to help, and leaving all the bills for my boyfriend. Love the dude but he's not ready to take care of a soccer team.

MISTINA

I don't expect you to, but three is not a soccer team. It's more like a makeup party--Don't worry about me. You're not my employee. Take care of your family.

RILEY

You are my family. You get me. But my kids are like a pack of wolves. They eat us out of house and home. Thank goodness they're in high school now.

MISTINA

Because high schoolers are so easy to take care of. No drama there.

RILEY

Not as long as they have wi-fi and a fridge full of snacks. They practically raise themselves.

A beat.

RILEY (CONT'D)

The point is, quit being a dumbass. Take the help when you have it. Get your shop off the ground so that you can hire someone--Like me.

Travis, Paige, Eddie, and Derek wrap up their dance practice.

Travis notices Jamie, now blowing up balloons. Karma sits next to her, waving her tail.

TRAVIS

That's what I need. Dog therapy.

He wanders to pet Karma. Derek joins Mistina at the counter.

DEREK

Looked like you had quite a rush.

MISTINA

It was a cluster. I'm glad the
blogger isn't here yet.

Derek watches Travis with Karma.

DEREK

Great. Even female dogs love him.

MISTINA

He just slipped her a treat.

DEREK

That's the problem with my dating
life. I don't carry treats.

MISTINA

Milk bones aren't the way to a
woman's heart.

DEREK

So for the purposes of research--
filet mignon or chocolate?

MISTINA

My dates are underwear-movie
parties with my daughter. You're on
your own with the ladies.

DEREK

Sexy. Snore on the couch while your
kid watches cartoons' sort of gal.

MISTINA

Just got divorced and don't want
any bullshit' sort of gal.

DEREK

Same thing.

Derek turns. Mistina stops him with a hand on his arm.

MISTINA

Every ounce of energy, I have, is
focused on keeping this shop open.
I don't have time for...

Derek raises his hand. Locks eyes with her. He nods.

MISTINA (CONT'D)
I appreciate the attention but...

DEREK
Mistina.

MISTINA
Dating isn't high on....

DEREK
Mistina.

MISTINA
What?

DEREK
I won't deny that I'm attracted to
you, but when I gave that phone to
Rusty...

Mistina watches him fumble for words.

DEREK (CONT'D)
...it felt like I was doing
something that mattered. It had a
cause...like this flash-mob thing.

MISTINA
It makes all your own issues
seem....

DEREK
...Yea...it does.

He taps her hand. They share a smile. A deeper understanding.
He grins. The mood lightens.

DEREK (CONT'D)
It's not all about you, Babe.

Mistina turns her attention toward two MEN, in business
suits, who drift in. Derek heads for Jamie and Travis.

MISTINA
How can I help you?

FIRST INSPECTOR
We're from the Health Department. I
understand you have animals here?

END ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

INT. HURRICANE COFFEE - CONTINUOUS

Mistina rushes to pull the men to the side.

MISTINA

We have a dog and a couple of squirrels, but they aren't anywhere near the food area.

The inspectors watch Derek and Travis pet Karma.

FIRST INSPECTOR

We can see that. As long as that dog stays leashed over there--You said 'squirrels'?

MISTINA

They're in a shoebox. They aren't even crawling yet.

FIRST INSPECTOR

Make sure they're in a cage when they start. You get things scampering around your shop and we'll have a problem.

SECOND INSPECTOR

We also need to check out the rest of your set-up while we're here.

MISTINA

Of course. Feel free to look around.

Travis, unaware of the inspectors, leans over Jamie and opens the shoebox.

TRAVIS

You got a puppy in there, kiddo?

He pulls away the baby blanket. Staggers back.

TRAVIS (CONT'D)

Whoa...Baby Girl--Those are rodents.

Visibly shaken, he rubs his arms.

TRAVIS (CONT'D)
I touched their blanket. I'm
allergic to rodents. Allergic.

Jamie pulls the squirrels protectively closer.

JAMIE
They're not rodents.

TRAVIS
Same difference. Those things are
only good for cat bait.

JAMIE
(raising her voice)
They aren't cat bait. Mom.

Mistina whirls around, taking in the scene.

MISTINA
(to the health inspectors)
Excuse me.

She rushes to Travis.

MISTINA (CONT'D)
Travis, you didn't even touch them.
(undertone)
Quit making a scene.

Travis feels his face. He visibly tries to calm himself in
front of Jamie, turning toward Mistina.

TRAVIS
(panic)
My face will swell up if I inhaled
any of their dandruff.

DEREK
You look pretty red.

Mistina sends Derek a look.

MISTINA
Shhhhh.

RILEY
(grinning)
Squirrel germs could be airborne.

Travis glances at Jamie's indignant face. He produces a
lopsided grin as he taps on the table top.

TRAVIS

Not to worry--Squirrels can be nice. Allergic reactions are just for--mice.

Travis gives Jamie a strained smile and a wink. He turns to Mistina.

TRAVIS (CONT'D)

(whisper)

I didn't mean to upset her. I'm serious--I might need an epi pen.

Mistina pushes Travis toward the back.

MISTINA

(hissing)

Travis, there's Benadryl in the bathroom. Go. Now.

Derek shakes his head sadly.

DEREK

Tough he-man taken down by tiny woodland creature. Does that echo movie rights?

MISTINA

Not helping, Derek.

DEREK

I totally am. I once heard about a man being mauled by raccoons. These squirrels? Probably the brains of the operation.

JAMIE

They're babies.

Travis shuts himself in the bathroom.

MISTINA

Jamie. Don't let any of the animals out of that back corner. We don't want to upset anyone else with allergy issues.

Mistina whirls toward her friends.

MISTINA (CONT'D)

Really? I have never seen Travis upset...ever. And the first time he is, you keep at him like a pack of wolves?

Derek hunches his shoulders and looks down.

Riley chews on her lips.

Jamie rocks, hugging her box of squirrels to her.

MISTINA (CONT'D)

(low voice)

I'm four days away from losing my
dream and you're traumatizing one
of our own with woodland jokes?

The friends shift uncomfortably, looking away. Mistina turns as the two inspectors join them.

MISTINA (CONT'D)

These men are from the Health
Department.

Her friends freeze. Realization. First Inspector peers at the tiny squirrels.

FIRST INSPECTOR

They're pretty small to cause so
much chaos.

Mistina sighs when she sees his smile.

JAMIE

Do you want to see how I feed them?

FIRST INSPECTOR

I sure do.

Mistina rushes to the apothecary cabinet and pulls out ingredients.

MISTINA

While you're busy inspecting, I'll
make Travis some anti-allergy tea--
Just in case.

Jamie lifts a baby squirrel out to show the inspector.

Mistina points her finger at her friends and makes a warning face, behind the inspectors backs. Then carries her tea makings to the counter.

No one notices Edna sitting in the corner. Capturing everything on her phone.

INT. HURRICANE COFFEE - LATER - DAY

Mistina stands at the door with the inspectors.

Derek, Paige, Eddie, and Riley sit at a front table with Travis. He has a cup of tea in front of him. He keeps an eye on Jamie in the back.

DEREK

Sorry, buddy. We didn't realize it was so serious.

TRAVIS

I've been in the hospital twice.

He stares at his cup.

TRAVIS (CONT'D)

I could've made it worse for Mistina.

RILEY

It wasn't intentional. The rest of us should have known better.

PAIGE

It's time to really have Mistina's back. She needs us.

Mistina listens to the inspectors final words.

SECOND INSPECTOR

We didn't even find dust under the fridge unit.

MISTINA

My son has dust allergies. I've always been hyper-vigil.

SECOND INSPECTOR

Well it shows. I have no problems with this place. Just get the list of repairs done.

First inspector moves closer and lowers his voice.

FIRST INSPECTOR

If you want my opinion...watch your back. There's talk, circulating through the city agencies, that the mayor has his eye on this property.

MISTINA
Coastal Meridian Properties? We saw
their truck.

First Inspector shrugs.

FIRST INSPECTOR
I couldn't say. It's gossip right
now. Just--watch yourself.

He smiles and steps out the door with a wave.

Mistina watches the door close behind the inspectors. She slumps in a chair with her friends.

MISTINA
More things to fix. More money
going out. I just can't seem to
catch a break.

Riley grabs her keys. Flips the open sign to closed.

RILEY
Save it for the next pumpkin
smashing. We have to get downtown.

MISTINA
It's all hanging on our karaoke
advertising now. Is everyone
sure...

RILEY
Dude. We talked about this. We're
all doing this. Together. Deal with
it.

Mistina takes a deep breath and nods. Edna sidles up.

EDNA
Mistina. Are you okay with the
homeless man being next to your
kid? I could smell him when he came
in.

Mistina glances at Rusty and Jamie. Rusty is gently holding a baby squirrel, his head close to Jamie's. Both are smiling.

MISTINA
He just washed up. If you sniff him
now you'll probably smell soap de
cologne...

EDNA

...you shouldn't let him close to
your kid.

MISTINA

My kids fine. If you don't like
Rusty, you don't have to hang with
him.

EDNA

But...

MISTINA

Edna. I love that you are concerned
but I want everyone to feel
welcome. Maybe we can all work
together to make this a safe place.

Edna slowly nods. Mistina takes Edna's hand and squeezes it.
A warm smile. They both look toward the door as it chimes.

Michael, her son, enters and stands. Awkward. Mistina rushes
to pull him in, followed closely by Jamie.

JAMIE

Michael, you came.

Michael accepts her spontaneous hug, pulling a pack of cards
from his pocket.

MICHAEL

I brought you a deck of those
collector cards you like.

Jamie sucks in her breath. Takes the cards eagerly.

MISTINA

Want to be part of a flash-mob?

Michael pulls back, confused.

MICHAEL

A flash-mob?

MISTINA

Yep. If we can...

She pauses as she catches sight of Edna, capturing the chaos
with her phone.

MISTINA (CONT'D)

Edna? What're you doing?

Edna turns, sliding her phone out of sight.

EDNA

Just a little prep work. I end up
with a better blog if I arrive
early enough to see the real deal.

Mistina's mouth gapes. A beat.

MISTINA

You're...the blogger?

Mistina shakes her head in disbelief. She shoulders slump.

MISTINA (CONT'D)

Things just get better and better.

Edna picks up her coat and heads out the door.

EDNA

I'd like to stop back tonight and
see if the karaoke thing works out.

She pauses in the doorway.

EDNA (CONT'D)

Don't worry. This place has more
heart than anything I've seen.

EXT. DOWNTOWN - DAY

Light is just starting to dim, mainly due to rain clouds.

Mistina and Jamie exit her car. Mistina tucks a blanket
around Rusty, sitting in the back seat.

MISTINA

I hope you'll be able to see
everything from here.

Rusty grins.

RUSTY

I'm warm. I'm dry. No complaints.

Michael joins them.

MICHAEL

I found a parking spot in the
alley.

Across the street, Riley and Eddie pretend to be window
shopping. They give Mistina a thumbs up.

A drop of rain hits Mistina.

MISTINA

Oh, no. Not a South Carolina rain storm.

JAMIE

Do we still get to dance?

MISTINA

Yep.

Mistina scans the crowd and spies Travis further down the street. He holds up a speaker and grins. Mistina nods

Travis moves to the corner as a stream of cars zoom by.

Rain starts to fall gently. The light is red now. Travis flips on the music. Run-D.M.C. blares down the street.

Travis jumps in the crosswalk and does the steps of their practiced dance: He slides left. Slides right. A quick one-eighty and then--

--The light changes. Cars surge. He leaps to the pavement. A crowd starts to stop on the sidewalk. Intrigued.

Paige and Eddie join Travis. They repeat the steps on the sidewalk. Slide left. Slide right. And then--

--they turn in different directions and Eddie elbows Travis in the gut. Travis glares at Eddie.

They roll their shoulders front and back and then a few steps of moonwalking, followed by--

--the light turns green again.

The three jump back into the crosswalk to repeat their dance. Mistina and Jamie join them this time. The steps are repeated before Eddie and Derek scurry into the mix.

Eddie joins the dancers and Derek turns a megaphone on the cars.

DEREK

Looking for some live entertainment folks? Come on down to HURRICANE COFFEE--tonight.

The light turns yellow. The team backs toward the curb. Derek catches his foot and falls backward. Cars swarm past at the green light.

The crowd laughs, thinking it's part of the fun. Horrified, Mistina rushes to help him up. Eddie grabs the megaphone.

EDDIE

That's right. Live entertainment
folks. HURRICANE COFFEE--Six p.m.--
tonight.

Derek is up but Eddie still has the megaphone. Derek joins in the dancing. The crowd, on the sidewalk, swells around them.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

Tonight folks. HURRICANE COFFEE.
Six p.m.--Karaoke.

The sky opens and pelts them with rain. Derek missteps and knocks into Travis who stumbles into Mistina.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

Karaoke. 6pm. It's our very first
'Espresso Yourself'.

Mistina loses step and bumps Paige.

Paige gets flustered and loses step. She starts swaying in place.

The crowd pulls coats over their heads and laugh like it's part of the act, reluctant to break and run from the rain.

Riley gets knocked to the side by Paige's swaying arms.

She looks at the laughing crowd and stomps to the front of the dancers, pushing Eddie to the side.

She pops out a few punk moves and wows the crowd.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

Tonight. Six p.m. Karaoke. Espresso
Yourself.

Riley steps back in line to a wave of clapping. The crowd has phones out. The situation has gone viral.

Derek swings Mistina out front. He guides her in a few surprisingly elegant swing moves, finishing with a bow.

Mistina pulls Michael from the crowd.

Michael rises to the occasion. Break dances. Down on his back in the rain. Up again to more delighted clapping from the crowd. He grins at Mistina.

Travis pretends to drum on everything...and everyone. Derek grabs business cards and hands them out, doing a version of a robot.

The megaphone is wet now. Eddie keeps trying.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Karao....toni....six...

His megaphone sputters. He shakes it.

Paige does high kicks and leaps around the circle of spectators, handing out more business cards.

The rain becomes a torrent. Lightning flashes. The crowd runs for cover.

The friends also run. Laughing. Drenched. They huddle under an awning. High fives all around.

MISTINA
We got their attention.

JAMIE
Mom. That was fun.

Mistina hugs her grinning kids to her.

PAIGE
We did it. Tonight--together--we
were enough.

DEREK
Yep. But enough to bring in karaoke
customers?

MISTINA
I hope so. Karen can't evict me if
I make my rent.

EDDIE
That's what you said when you
opened the coffee truck in the
mayor's neighborhood--And he found
a way to evict you.

The group goes silent a moment. Mistina rallies.

MISTINA
Well, I'm right where God wants me
to be now--I'm sorry you all had to
be dragged out in the rain.

TRAVIS
Are you kidding? This--mattered.

PAIGE
To all of us, too.

DEREK

Then we'd all better stick together
and keep this going.

Riley glances at Mistina.

RILEY

No doubt. We all know how Mistina
welcomes everyone's help.

MISTINA

Yes, I do.

A shared grin and then...

MISTINA (CONT'D)

Crap. I've got to get back and set
up if we're doing karaoke tonight.

She turns to Michael.

MISTINA (CONT'D)

Will you come back to the shop and
hang? Our first karaoke night.

Michael shrugs. Hesitant.

MICHAEL

No. I need dry clothes. And I'm
meeting up with friends.

Mistina nods. Tries not to show her disappointment.

MISTINA

It's okay. Teenagers are busy.

MICHAEL

I'll come around again, Mom.

Mistina searches his face.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I promise.

Jamie turns sadly toward the car. Michael sighs.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Hey, Jamie.

Jamie looks back.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Maybe you and Mom can meet me for
lunch on Sunday.

Jamie flashes a brilliant smile.

The group scatters toward their cars. A heavy-set man, MASON (50's), from the crowd, approaches Riley. He holds up a HURRICANE COFFEE business card.

MASON

My Dungeons and Dragons group has outgrown my basement. Do you rent out your shop to groups?

INT. KAREN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Karen enters her office, wearing the same clothes she wore in the car with the mayor. The storm outside flashes light across documents on her desk.

Her cell phone chimes and she answers it, flipping on the light.

KAREN

(into phone)

Yeah...The mayor was clear. She'll be out by Friday. Don't worry.

She moves to study a large blueprint, tacked to the wall. It shows a picture of an elegant apartment complex.

KAREN (CONT'D)

I said, 'Don't worry'. You do your part and I'll do mine.

A beat.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Yep. Send the documents over. You should be able to start teardown in about two weeks.

She ends the call and paces the room. She pauses to look at a picture of a stern man, sitting on the desk.

KAREN (CONT'D)

You were wrong, Dad. You never thought I had what it takes.

She leans forward to look into identical eyes.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Well, watch me now.

END PILOT