

CHANGING ARTS AND MINDS

Written by

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C O N T A C T S

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FADE IN:

EXT. MIDDLE EAST WAR ZONE - NIGHT

Blurry file footage of fully armed U.S. soldiers sneaking up to the gate of a compound. We hear the deep, authoritative voice of a male Commanding Officer (40s) speaking to a SWAT-like battle helmet worn by the stocky female soldier leading the team.

COMMANDING OFFICER (V.O.)
Neutralize any enemy combatants! I
repeat, any enemy combatants!

The combat troops advance on the house, take their positions, and the leader motions with hand signals.

COMMANDING OFFICER (V.O.)
Anyone with firearms or a
threatening posture! No other way!
Can't change their minds!

The leader is ready to charge into the house.

COMMANDING OFFICER (V.O.)
Remember your exit strategy.
(beat)
On your command.
(beat)
Have a nice day!

The leader and the soldiers burst through the gate, and we HEAR shockingly loud GUNFIRE, and see FLASHES of light, followed by the SCREAMS of women and children.

EXT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - MORNING

It's a warm spring morning when the school bell RINGS outside "Johnson Middle School."

SUPER: "8 years later, April 30th"

One last teacher, TERRI ROBINS (30s), a curvy, no-nonsense African American with an ax to grind, marches to the front door. She wears a bright Hawaiian-type blouse, khaki pants, and tennis shoes, and carries a canvas military backpack on her back. She mumbles to herself.

TERRI
I want this job!
(beat)
I need this job!
(MORE)

TERRI (CONT'D)
(longer beat)
I earned this job!

She looks left and right, as if for enemy combatants, before flinging open the heavy front door.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Terri takes two steps inside the door, where she's stopped by School Security OFFICER RAY SANTOS (40), a handsome, shy Latino in uniform and carrying a holstered Taser gun.

Officer Ray sees the sweat on Terri's brow, but quickly realizes she isn't a threat, and smiles sincerely.

OFFICER RAY
Can I help you?

Terri stops and gazes into Officer Ray's eyes. She smiles as if in a trance. She sighs. She feels safe -- a rare feeling.

TERRI
I'm here for the temporary art
teacher job. Terri Robins.

Officer Ray politely guides Terri to the office.

OFFICER RAY
Right this way, Ms. Robins. They'll
ask you to wear a visitor's badge
until you get a staff badge issued.

Officer Ray points to the office.

TERRI
Thanks, Officer...?

He sees a Boy (14) wandering the halls, and quickly heads in his direction.

OFFICER RAY
If you'll excuse me.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - OFFICE

Terri bursts into the office to the front desk to see a stern, elderly woman, MRS. BECKMAN (late-60s), open her eyes wide in fear. Terri is sweet as can be, as she hands Mrs. Beckman her I.D.

TERRI

Terri Robins. Here for the
temporary art teacher job.

Mrs. Beckman looks confused and frightened as Terri hands her
a resume.

MRS. BECKMAN

We have no jobs here.

Terri takes a step back. Stunned. Inhales a big breath.

MRS. BECKMAN (CONT'D)

We have positions.

(beat)

Regular art teacher, Ms. Harris,
ran a tight ship. Her baby decided
to come a month early, so we needed
the help. Some students disliked
her, but they all respected her.
Most dropped her class. Only six
students remain.

TERRI

Six students stuck it out.

Terri exhales as Mrs. Beckman scans the resume.

MRS. BECKMAN

(alarmed)

You're not Ms. Stout!

TERRI

Ms. Stout couldn't make it.
Probably out on emergency paternity
leave. The district sent me.

MRS. BECKMAN

Paternity leave, but she's a...

TERRI

Uh-huh! That's what I said.

MRS. BECKMAN

It's only one month until the end
of the semester. One class. Six
students who need the art class
credits to graduate...

TERRI

(interrupts)

I'll take it.

MRS. BECKMAN
First period. They're waiting for
you. Room 106. I'll get you a
temporary security badge.

Mrs. Beckman stands and walks into the next office as her
phone RINGS.

Terri reaches over and grabs the phone.

TERRI
Johnson Middle School.

Terri buries the phone in her gut to muffle the sounds of a
mad woman screaming into the phone.

Terri turns to whisper a threat into the phone.

TERRI (CONT'D)
That position's been filled.

Terri listens to the woman yelling, then replies sternly.

TERRI (CONT'D)
I said that position's been filled!

Officer Ray walks up behind Terri.

TERRI (CONT'D)
Understand?

Terri hangs up but keeps her hand on the phone.

OFFICER RAY
Everything okay, Ms. Robins?

Mrs. Beckman returns with a visitor's badge and sees Terri's
hand on the phone.

MRS. BECKMAN
Who was...?

TERRI
(interrupting)
Nutcase Robocall from the IRS. Fake
S-O-Bs call all the time. I hate
'em!

Mrs. Beckman reluctantly hands Terri a clip-on Visitor's
badge.

MRS. BECKMAN
Officer Ray can show you to your
classroom.
(MORE)

MRS. BECKMAN (CONT'D)
I'll have to do the routine
background check, Ms. Robins.

TERRI
You do that!

MRS. BECKMAN
I'm sure Principal Nordlin would
like to meet you after class, give
you a tour...

Terri smiles at Officer Ray.

TERRI
Tell him I'm busy. I'll pick up my
permanent security badge tomorrow.
I gotta get to class.

Terri hooks the officer's arm and marches away, leaving Mrs.
Beckman dumbfounded.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Terri marches down the hall with Officer Ray struggling to
keep up and sees the sign for the Men's Room.

Terri smiles at Officer Ray, pulls her arm free, and races to
the door.

TERRI
I'll need some art supplies.

Officer Ray's eyes open widely, but he doesn't stop her.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL MEN'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Terri enters the men's room to see two Boys (13) vaping.

The boys' eyes open widely as Terri yanks the two electronic
cigarettes from the boys' mouths, breaks them in half, and
tosses them in a dirty toilet.

She grabs six paper towels from the towel dispenser and
stomps out.

The boys' eyes open widely and stare at each other.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Officer Ray guides Terri to Room 106. The door is open.

TERRI
Thanks, Officer.

OFFICER RAY
Call me Ray.

TERRI
Ray of sunshine. That's what you
are. Everyone called me Sarge, but
now it's just Terri.

They share a moment before she enters.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Terri cautiously enters the room containing 25 desks.

Six students are scattered around the perimeter of the room, five of them stare at Terri with open eyes and dropped jaws, with one student, ERNESTO SANTOS (13), a frail Latino in the back corner of the classroom, slumped forward, looking in the opposite direction toward the windows.

Terri's eyes scan the room once more, as a soldier would to evaluate threats in priority order.

She eyes the two exits.

Finally, Terri takes a deep breath and sets her canvas military backpack aside the teacher's desk.

She stares at Ernesto as she sets her paper towels on the desk and feels for the Roll Call Sheet.

TERRI
I'm Terri, your art teacher for the
last month of the school year.
What's the matter with him?

MATT LOWENSTEIN (14), an insecure, mumbling, Jewish kid in expensive clothes, sits in the front row and speaks in a low volume and a thick New York accent. He lacks the confidence to make eye contact when he speaks.

MATT
That's Ernesto Santos. Talks when
he wants to, which ain't often. Ms.
Harris picked on him a lot just
because...

Terri glares at Matt. Ernesto looks out the window.

TERRI
(interrupts)
Who are you?

MATT
Matt Lowenstein. Flew in from
Brooklyn after spring break. Boy...

Terri snaps her fingers and glares at Matt.

TERRI
(imitating Matt)
Are my arms tired!
(angry)
Old joke. Save it for history
class.

No one sees Ernesto turn and crack a quick smile before he
stares out the window again.

Terri points to RHONDA JAMES (13), dressed like a bully with
an equally dangerous look.

RHONDA
What'd I do, sista?

TERRI
I ain't your sister. What's your
name?

Rhonda looks away.

RHONDA
Rhonda James, Ma'am.

Terri glares at Rhonda.

TERRI
Ma'am means bitch. Call me Terri.

RHONDA
Ms. Harris was a jerk, so most
everybody dropped the class, 'cept
us. You're not gonna be a jerk, are
ya, M...?

Terri snaps her fingers at Rhonda.

TERRI
Uh-huh.

Terri turns to write her name on the whiteboard: "Terri
Robins." She underlines Terri as Matt mumbles.

MATT

Ms. Robins? Can I go to the...?

Terri snaps her finger at Matt, and he shuts up and sits up straight.

Terri points to HUI "EMMA" CHANG (13) in a smart, matching pantsuit and white blouse. Emma wears glasses.

TERRI

What's your story?

Emma speaks beautiful English with a slight Chinese accent.

EMMA

I'm Hui Chang, from the People's Republic of China, but my American name is Emma Chang.

TERRI

What are you doing in this class?

EMMA

Tired of math and science. My father disapproves. Wants me to be an engineer. I want to change to be an artist.

Terri strolls over to Emma's desk and speaks softly.

TERRI

"Change is the essence of life; be willing to surrender what you are for what you could become," said Reinhold Niebuhr.

Terri looks around to see that all eyes are on her, even Ernesto's eyes.

Terri turns harsh. She points at JAKE STONE (13), a big, athletic, handsome blonde in a JV high school letter jacket, jeans, and cross-training shoes.

TERRI (CONT'D)

Let me guess. Coach told you this might be an easy "A" and last chance to get your GPA up for high school sports.

Jake laughs.

JAKE

Mind reader, Terri?

TERRI

If I read your mind, I'd draw a blank!

Jake is stunned, but Matt chuckles to himself.

Terri spins to point to DORRI KHAN (13), a shy, Middle-Eastern beauty in a ritzy black Niki athletic suit. Terri sees the tip of a beautiful hijab sticking out of Dorri's backpack under her desk, and her slightly messy hair.

DORRI

Dorri Khan. Needed the credits in art and humanities to graduate.

TERRI

Persian art has one of the richest art heritages in world history, including architecture, painting, metalworking, weaving, pottery, sculpture, and calligraphy for over 5,000 years.

(staring at the hijab)

We should be proud of our cultural heritage, don't you think?

DORRI

Yes, Ms. Robins.

TERRI

Terri!

The other students look perplexed.

Terri turns to Matt and hands him the paper towels.

TERRI (CONT'D)

Pass out the art paper to your classmates, will you, Matt?

Matt's eyes open widely, and he hesitates to stand.

TERRI (CONT'D)

Get a move on, Matt. Shake a leg.

Matt grabs the paper towels, rises, and begins to walk around the room.

Terri sees that Matt has a prosthesis on his right leg.

TERRI (CONT'D)

Michelangelo said, "A man paints with his brains and not with his hands."

Matt begins mumbling incessantly. Rhonda, Jake, and Emma chuckle at Matt's attempted humor.

MATT

Went all out on art supplies,
Terri.

(beat)

Must have taken two trips to the
john.

(beat)

Is this so our art projects can
hang in the Louvre or the Loo?

Terri smiles warmly.

TERRI

Louvre or Loo? You get points for
that international potty humor, but
speak up when you talk, Matt.

Matt smiles weakly, looks away, and retakes his seat.

MATT

Thanks, Terri. You're all art!

TERRI

(to Matt)

Not punny, Matt.

(to the class)

How many of you would be in this
class if you didn't need the arts
and humanities credits to graduate?

Emma slowly raises her hand.

TERRI (CONT'D)

Or to not piss off their parents?

Emma slowly lowers her hand. Ernesto glances at Emma, then he looks out the window.

Terri strolls back to a long-thin table against the back of the classroom with three drawings or paintings per student on the table.

TERRI (CONT'D)

Your best projects?

JAKE

Our three best products each. If we
do a better one, the teacher puts
it in and yanks out the loser
before the final art show.

TERRI
No losers in art.

Terri's face suggests otherwise, as she scans poor watercolor paintings of flowers in a vase, poor sketches, and misshapen clay pots.

MATT
The principal and teacher have to agree on our grade at the end of the semester.

RHONDA
Unfair! The only class where the grade depends on a cracker principal.

Terri turns and glares at Rhonda.

TERRI
No one said life was fair. Art is very subjective, but I see room for improvement.

The students groan.

Terry looks at Ernesto's art to see a precise square, rectangle, and triangle.

TERRI (CONT'D)
Take out a pen, not a pencil, and draw a self-portrait. Do not write your name or the date on the page. You have five minutes. Go!

The students grumble. Ernesto stares blankly out the window.

LATER

TERRI (CONT'D)
Time is up. Turn the papers over on your desks. Rhonda, collect the papers without looking at them.

Rhonda struts around the room like a hard-ass and collects the artwork.

She slaps them down on Terri's desk, struts to her desk, and plops down.

Terri shuffles the papers and shows one to the class: it's a great drawing of a beautiful girl with Asian eyes. Matt mumbles as everyone looks at Emma.

MATT

Eyes got it! It's Emma! Duh!

TERRI

It may not be as easy if I asked in Beijing, population of over 21 million. Emma, put your drawing on the final-three table. A-plus.

Emma smiles at Ernesto, grabs the drawing, and runs to the back of the room.

EMMA

Which art project do I remove from my top three?

TERRI

It doesn't matter.

Everyone chuckles.

Terri pulls up another drawing, a poorly drawn portrait of an unsmiling woman with an Afro.

JAKE

Rhonda.

TERRI

How can you tell?

JAKE

The anger?

Rhonda turns to sneer at Jake, who responds defensively.

JAKE (CONT'D)

What'd I say?

Terri shows a drawing of an empty circle and an almost perfectly symmetrical circle. Terri stares at the drawing.

Silence.

Ernesto looks out the window.

Terri looks briefly at the other poorly drawn faces. None of the self-portraits show smiles, but Dorri's shows a face with a frown.

Terri glances at Dorri. Both look sad.

TERRI
That's all for today.
(points to the door)
Go!

MATT
But the bell ain't rung.

TERRI
(stern)
I said, That's all!

The students trudge out with their backpacks.

TERRI (CONT'D)
(mumbles)
What have I gotten myself into?

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER'S LOUNGE - DAY

Terri helps herself to a coffee mug that reads: "Mr. Big" and pours a cup of coffee. She sits.

Officer Ray walks by, peeks in the door, and whispers.

OFFICER RAY
That's Principal Nordlin's mug.
Very possessive.

TERRI
I didn't...

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN (60), a short, thin, bald man in a gray suit, storms into the lounge holding Terri's resume.

He glares at the coffee mug, and Officer Ray disappears.

Terri stares at his American Flag lapel pin.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
Hal Nordlin. Call me Principal Nordlin. You must be the temporary art teacher.
(reading the resume)
Terri Robins, Art History major, 4.0 GPA, sailed through your teaching credential.

TERRI
Principal Nordlin.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
Looking into why Ms. Stout declined
the position. District sent you,
huh?

Terri looks away as the Principal keeps reading.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN (CONT'D)
Decorated Army veteran, two tours
in Afghanistan.

The Principal slaps the resume in his hand.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN (CONT'D)
Why didn't you go straight into
teaching? The highest calling!

Terri looks back, smiles, and speaks softly.

TERRI
I asked myself that every day in
the desert.
(looks away)
Wish it were an easy answer. To pay
off college loans. Get the hell out
of Chicago's Lower East Side. To
change minds...

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
(interrupting)
Well, what was it?

Terri glares at him and stands, towering over her boss.

TERRI
Sir, to serve my country, sir.

The Principal is at a loss for words.

He points at his cup, sheepishly.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
That's my coffee mug.

TERRI
Sir, sorry, sir. I'll wash it up
good! Won't use it again.

Principal Nordlin takes a step back and speaks quickly.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
Welcome to the staff. Don't let
your students out 'til the bell
rings!

(MORE)

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN (CONT'D)
Officer Ray can give you the tour
tomorrow after school. Your
military training may be of little
use here.

Principal Nordlin turns and exits quickly.

TERRI
(mumbles)
I doubt that, Sir.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN (O.S.)
I heard that!

Terri smiles.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL ROOM - DAY

The six students filter into the room and shrug at the three
Blick Essentials Paint and Draw Easels (double-sided) in the
back of the room.

The students scatter to their same seats. Ernesto looks at
the door, waiting for Terri to enter.

Ernesto sees Jake eyeing Rhonda's body with lust in his eyes.

Ernesto turns to see Matt sneaking glances at Dorri, who
seems to know she is the target of Matt's affection.

Ernesto sees Matt turn back to the front of the room before
Dorri smiles in his direction. The other students are
oblivious to the games being played.

Emma turns completely around to scold Ernesto, who is four
seats back from Emma. She whispers to Ernesto.

EMMA
Stop breathing down my neck, creep.

Emma turns around.

Ernesto turns his head slowly from the open door to look out
the window in the opposite direction, hesitating briefly to
smile in Emma's direction.

Emma spins around again to see Ernesto staring out the
window.

Terri bursts in the door with her canvas rucksack on her back
and a Brand Tablet computer in her hand.

She sets down the rucksack by the side of the desk.

Terri holds up her Brand tablet computer and shows a photo of the cave art from Altamira Cave in Spain from the Stone Age.

TERRI

Let's play detective. Who, what, when, where, why? Our first question is, who?

MATT

(mumbles)

So simple even a caveman can do it!

Terri chuckles as she walks to each desk, showing the picture.

TERRI

From the TV commercial! Ha! Speak up, Matt! Cavemen, yes. Whether Neanderthal or modern humans, we can't say for sure.

(beat)

What? What is it?

EMMA

Bison?

DORRI

Or buffalo, right?

TERRI

Right.

(beat)

When was it painted?

JAKE

Like a million years ago?

Terri shakes her head 'no.' She strolls over to Ernesto's desk. He takes a one-second glance at her tablet computer and turns back to the window. Terri moves to the other desks.

TERRI

Our ancient human-like ancestors, Homo Erectus, were engraving shells as far back as half a million years ago, but this is more recent and highly sophisticated art.

MATT

Did you say Homo Erectus?

Terri ignores Matt, but Rhonda is annoyed.

RHONDA
Between 14,000 and 37,000 years
ago!

Terri is stunned. She smiles at Rhonda.

TERRI
That's right, Rhonda!

RHONDA
The cave is in northern Spain! I
assume "where" was next.

TERRI
Very good. You surprise me.

Terri stops and stares at everyone for dramatic effect,
though Ernesto is still looking outside.

TERRI (CONT'D)
The big question is why?

MATT
So he could post it on Cave Book?

TERRI
Seriously? Why?

JAKE
To brag about his kill! Hunter's 1,
animals zero!

TERRI
Good, Jake. Why else?

DORRI
To record an event that would
outlive the artist.

TERRI
Great, Dorri. "Life is short, the
art long," Hippocrates said. Why
else?

Rhonda speaks in a low, dull, slow voice.

RHONDA
Maybe he was just bored like the
rest of us.

Terri gives Rhonda a quick sneer of disapproval.

MATT

Maybe he couldn't spell the word
bison, so he drew it. B-I-S-...

Terri sternly turns to Matt.

TERRI

Matt, you said it was so simple
even a caveman could do it?

Matt smiles.

MATT

I sense a game show-like challenge
coming up with the new art
supplies!

Matt jumps up and heads to an easel in the back of the room.

The other students follow. Ernesto is the last to join on the
back side of the easel, furthest from Terri.

TERRI

Get to drawing, cave men and women.
I want you to draw the bison I
showed you, the best you can
remember it. Two students to an
easel. A charcoal pencil is
waiting. Those art supplies cost me
three days' pay, so make the most
out of them. You have twenty
minutes.

Jake pulls out his Brand smartphone.

TERRI (CONT'D)

No help from smartphones, Jake!
Rely on your superior brain power
and memories from the hunt!

LATER

Class is almost over.

TERRI (CONT'D)

Sign and date the bottom of your
cave art.

Terri walks to the back to see Matt's crude drawing first.

TERRI (CONT'D)

Not so simple, is it, Matt?

Matt smiles weakly as Terry moves to Rhonda's drawing, which is a little better than Matt's.

The students follow Terri as she assesses the drawings.

TERRI (CONT'D)

I see promise here. It wasn't simple for them either. They gathered manganese from the Pyrenees Mountains 150 miles to the north, and heated it to over 1600 degrees to get the long-lasting black in the drawings.

Terri nods approvingly at Emma's drawing and Dorri's drawing.

RHONDA

Fools burning all that wood for art supplies when they probably needed it to stay warm, cook food, and fend off bears and wolves and shit.

TERRI

Not to mention saber-toothed tigers and monstrous cave bears. Art must have been important to them.

Jake's drawing looks like a simple stick figure, making the other students chuckle.

TERRI (CONT'D)

Maybe football is so easy that even a caveman can do it.

Jake laughs at Terri's joke.

JAKE

I tried.

Terri and the other students see Ernesto's drawing and their mouths drop in awe.

DORRI

Wow!

Ernesto's "painting" is a close copy of the photo he saw for only a second, including red colors. We see a bloody paperclip, and Ernesto's hand is bleeding.

Terri's eyes open widely, but she speaks calmly.

TERRI

Jake, run and get some paper towels.

MATT

Jake, she means, art supplies.

TERRI

Ernesto, apply pressure to your finger until Jake returns.

Terri stays calm and keeps teaching.

TERRI (CONT'D)

The red pigments in the cave paintings came from limonite, containing iron hydroxide. When limonite is heated, it turns into red ochre. Used by prehistoric humans over 300,000 years ago in Zambia. Still used today.

Jake returns and hands wet and dry paper towels to Terri.

TERRI (CONT'D)

Thanks, Jake.

(to Ernesto)

Let's keep this to ourselves, shall we?

The students nod 'yes,' while Ernesto looks out the window.

TERRI (CONT'D)

The lesson for today is 'nothing is simple.' Especially art.

(softly to Ernesto)

Jonathan Swift said, "Vision is the art of seeing what is invisible to others."

Rhonda looks away, but the other students stare at Ernesto.

Silence.

Principal Nordlin pokes his head in the door and coughs loudly, as he sees Matt's and Jake's poor drawings. He can't see Ernesto's painting.

Terri and the students turn toward the Principal.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN

I hope those art supplies didn't come from our modest school budget, Ms. Robins.

TERRI

Sir, no, Sir.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN

And I hope we see far better works
of art in the future from your
class, Ms. Robins. If these
students perform this poorly for my
end-of-semester art review, they
won't be graduating and will be
required to take summer school.
Good day!

Terri bites her tongue and looks away.

The Principal exits quickly. Everyone is stunned.

The bell RINGS, and the other students, except Rhonda, pat
Ernesto on the back before grabbing their backpacks and
leaving.

Terri stares at Ernesto's fine painting.

TERRI

Ernesto, put your beautiful cave
painting on the back table. This is
one of your top three! A-plus!

Ernesto smiles weakly and looks away.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

The school is deserted. Officer Ray leads Terri on a tour.

OFFICER RAY

You know your classroom and the
teacher's lounge.

(beat)

You learned to stay clear of
Principal Nordlin and his coffee
mug.

TERRI

All I need to know.

OFFICER RAY

Cafeteria?

TERRI

Had enough military rations to last
a lifetime. Thanks, anyway.

OFFICER RAY

How's your class?

TERRI

Six kids who need the units to graduate. Only one has skills, but all children have potential.

Officer Ray looks away and snickers. Terri sees it.

OFFICER RAY

All of 'em? You ain't met the bullies.

Terri stops Officer Ray by putting a hand on his muscular arm. She speaks sternly.

TERRI

Every child has the potential to do great things! If I didn't believe that, I wouldn't have become a teacher!

Terri turns and stomps to an exit.

TERRI (CONT'D)

Thomas Edison said, "Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time."

Officer Ray looks bewildered.

OFFICER RAY

Didn't mean nothin'!

EXT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

Terri walks past a group of Four Bullies, including three Tough Boys (mixed ethnicity, ages 12-14) and Rhonda, who looks away.

The Bullies sneer as Terri walks by.

Terri ignores them but has a long way to walk to her car (a junky old sedan), so she picks up her pace.

The boys glare at Terri. Rhonda looks down.

Terri senses the stares and spins around to yell at the boys.

TERRI

You got nothin' on the terrorists who only looked at me once that way!

Terri sneers at the boys, then turns toward her car.

TERRI (CONT'D)
Minds are changed by teachers, not
bullies!

Seconds later, Terri hears the BOOM of a cherry bomb thrown in her direction.

Terri dives to the ground and covers her head. The contents of her bag (art supplies) spill out.

The boys and Rhonda scatter to the four winds.

Officer Ray runs out of the school with a tiny stun gun in his hands. He yells!

OFFICER RAY
You kids get back here!

Terri quickly picks herself up, grabs her art supplies and bag, and walks proudly to her heap of a car.

Officer Ray sees Terri get into her car and slowly drive off. He frowns.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL ROOM - MORNING

The six students are each one seat closer to the middle and front of the room when the bell rings.

SUPER: "One week later."

Moments later, Terri busts in the door and writes on the whiteboard: Elements of Hieroglyphs.

She turns quickly toward the speaker when Principal Nordlin's voice comes over the P.A. System.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN (O.S.)
Dear students, faculty, and staff.
It has come to my attention that
last week, four of our students
were involved with lighting
fireworks on school grounds after
school. This violates not only our
school policies, but because of our
unfortunate past with an active
shooter, any use of explosive or
incendiary devices of any kind is
cause for immediate expulsion.

Terri glances around the room. All eyes are on her except for Rhonda and Ernesto.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

We are currently reviewing security video of the event, but if those four students come forward now, some may get off with a warning or suspension.

(threatening)

If no one comes forward, the graduation dance will be eliminated. You have five minutes to come forward!

Terri shakes her head in disgust, and she shows a slide of Hieroglyphs from her tablet computer to the screen.

TERRI

(mumbles)

Good luck with that!

(loudly)

Hieroglyphics were an ancient form of artful writing used by the Egyptians, and described poorly by early scholars as simple picture stories.

EMMA

They weren't just pictures?

DORRI

Far more sophisticated than that!

TERRI

Right, Dorri. At first glance, and to the untrained eye. But if you look closely, you see the sun rising and setting behind figures, blood oozing from victims, and snakes that look to be striking.

Rhonda snaps at Terri.

RHONDA

Those were all drawn in two dimensions with the third dimension inferred by the viewer.

Principal Nordlin coughs loudly at the door,

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN

Were you late again, Ms. Robins?

TERRI
Right on time, Sir.

Jake, Emma, Dorri, and Matt nod yes. Matt speaks in a low, droll tone.

MATT
My watch has been running fast
since Daylight Saving Time,
Principal Nordlin. My shrink says
it's because I was born immaturally.

Principal Nordlin is puzzled.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
You mean, prematurely?

MATT
No, Sir, I'm sure he said
immaturally, but you might be right.
I was just a child when it
happened.

Dorri laughs, which Matt sees, and he smiles at her.

Principal Nordlin is upset.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
Ms. Robins, Officer Ray said you
might have been injured. I'm sorry
if any harm... er... could you
identify the students involved?

TERRI
I'm new here, Principal Nordlin. I
barely know my six students' names,
let alone the hundreds of other
students here.

Rhonda looks away.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
They won't get away with this!

TERRI
No, Sir. I'm sure the boys will
step forward, so the other students
are not unfairly punished by
withholding the graduation dance.

Jake looks horrified.

JAKE

Can't do that, Principal Nordlin! I already bought a new jacket and kicks. Ladies be so disappointed!

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN

Your fellow students are to blame, not me!

Terri strides over to Jake to console him, as Principal Nordlin looks on.

TERRI

Jake, I'm sure Principal Nordlin isn't serious about a collective punishment, where many innocent students are all punished for the actions of a few.

Principal Nordlin's eyes open widely.

TERRI (CONT'D)

First recorded in the second century B.C. in the Qin Dynasty in China, where if one person in your family committed a crime, that person and nine innocent family members were executed.

Emma is shocked.

EMMA

So cruel!

TERRI

Or the Intolerable Acts levied by King George on all our patriots after the Boston Tea Party!

MATT

That's un-American.

Principal Nordlin shakes his finger in anger.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN

See here, Ms. Robins!

TERRI

Or Union General William Tecumseh Sherman burning his way through the South on his "March to the Sea" in the American Civil War.

Principal Nordlin yells.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
That's enough, Ms. Robins!

Terri glares at the Principal.

TERRI
The truth is, collective punishment
creates bigger monsters. Justifying
the atomic bomb on innocent
civilians in Hiroshima and Nagasaki
created a world filled with
dangerous nuclear weapons.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
Ms...

Terri stomps toward the open door in anger.

TERRI
A cowardly drone attack that kills
one terrorist and a dozen innocent
civilians at the same time creates
hundreds of new terrorists,
Principal Nordlin. I've seen it!
I've been there! Collective
punishment doesn't work! Doesn't
change anyone's mind!

DORRI
Nope!

Terri slams the door in the Principal's face.

Matt, Jake, Dorri, and Emma cheer.

Ernesto hides a smile and looks outside.

Rhonda looks curiously at Terri as she returns calmly to the
whiteboard.

TERRI
Hieroglyphs consist of three kinds
of glyphs: phonetic glyphs,
including single-consonant
characters like an alphabet; and
various art figures, which narrow
down the meaning of the phonetic
words.

The speaker in the room screeches.

MRS. BECKMAN (V.O.)
Ms. Robins, please report to the
Principal's office.

Everyone looks at Terri, who ignores the voice.

TERRI

Hieroglyphs are written in rows or columns and can be read from left to right or from right to left. The direction of the human faces always points toward the beginning of the line.

MRS. BECKMAN (V.O.)

Now, Ms. Robins. Principal's office!

Terri picks up her canvas military backpack and tablet and marches toward the door.

TERRI

Draw me some hieroglyphs about what you learned today.

Terri storms out.

The students have looks of pity as they trudge to the easels.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Terri sits in silence as the aggravated Principal shuffles papers behind a huge desk.

Terri sees a wooden plaque on his desk that reads, "Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today."

She nods approvingly at the plaque.

Principal Nordlin speaks with authority.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN

You know why you're here!

TERRI

Art and history are as intertwined as the mind and the heart?

He scrambles the notes on his desk angrily.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN

Can't seem to find my notes on Ms. Stout, the teacher we wanted to hire before you showed up.

TERRI
(mumbles)
Imagine that?

He presses his intercom to Mrs. Beckman.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
Rita, do you have my notes on Ms.
Stout?

MRS. BECKMAN (O.S.)
A clean desk is a happy desk.

Principal Nordlin slams his fists on his desk.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
I will not have my authority
undermined by a temporary art
teacher! Do I make myself clear,
Ms. Robins?

TERRI
Undermined. Interesting word
choice. Sir, no, Sir. If the
military taught me anything, it's
that respect didn't come from rank;
it was earned.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
I'll get to the bottom of this!

TERRI
No doubt, Sir.

Terri turns the wooden plaque to face the flustered
Principal.

TERRI (CONT'D)
Your plaque, Sir?

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
Was here when I got the job twenty-
four years ago...

Terri stands and turns to exit.

TERRI
Know who said it?

Principal Nordlin stares at the plaque.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
Who?

TERRI
Malcolm X, Sir.

Principal Nordlin stands, irate and speechless.

TERRI (CONT'D)
I'd better get back to class.

Terri exits and winks at wide-eyed Mrs. Beckman, who heard everything.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL ROOM - DAY

Terri enters the classroom to see Ernesto sadly looking out the window from his desk, while the other students stare at his easel. We don't see Ernesto's artwork.

The other students see Terri and dart to their easels to continue drawing hieroglyphs.

TERRI
Sup?

The students stop drawing and shrug their shoulders.

Terri walks slowly past the other students' art projects before getting to Ernesto's easel in the corner.

She peeks at Ernesto's work and her jaw drops open in shock.

Ernesto's dark, gloomy artwork is an amalgamation of the history of collective punishment. We see second-century BC Chinese soldiers in the upper portion of the drawing killing peasants with swords, King George's redcoats bayoneting patriots, General Sherman burning houses with slaves in the windows, Hiroshima littered with bodies, and a drone strike killing children in the Middle East.

Terri admires the art, then turns horrified and sad for Ernesto.

TERRI (CONT'D)
I'm so sorry, Ernesto. Will you
forgive me?

Matt leaps to stand between Terri and Ernesto, facing Terri.

MATT
Forgive you? For what? Teaching
history and art?

EMMA

She has to turn him in. We all had to sign a sheet at orientation.

JAKE

District policy to protect students from suicides and violence against classmates, and all that B.S.!

Terri glares at Jake, then squats to be eye level with Ernesto, who remains looking out the window.

TERRI

I know your art isn't a threat to you or anyone.

(drops her eyes)

But it can be viewed as a threat by someone having other personal issues.

Terri stands, and Rhonda gets in Terri's face.

RHONDA

He don't mean nothing by it.

DORRI

Wouldn't hurt a fly!

Terri paces in a mix of concern and fear.

TERRI

Any sign of a potential threat of violence against other children. Could be verbal, email, poetry, art -- anything. I have to run it by Principal Nordlin, and he ain't exactly my friend. It's school policy and state law.

MATT

(mumbles)

They'll send him away again.

TERRI

Away? Again?

JAKE

He just drew what you said!

TERRI

The law and policies are clear. I have to inform the Principal. He has to tell his folks, and it has to be reported...

MATT
(mumbles)
To the cops?

Matt rips Ernesto's art page from the easel.

Ernesto stands and stops Matt from ripping his art.

Tears flow from Ernesto's eyes.

Matt lets go.

TERRI
I'll explain it to Principal
Nordlin.

Terri grabs the artwork, which Ernesto is reluctant to
surrender, but he finally does.

EMMA
Wait! If Ernesto tore it up, we
could all keep quiet.

Ernesto shakes his head, 'no.'

DORRI
He doesn't want it torn up!

TERRI
Come on, Ernesto. You'd better come
with me. It's just art. They'll
understand.

JAKE
How do you know they'll let him
off?

TERRI
A high school boy turned in an art
assignment in California that
showed him executing a cop who
busted him for marijuana. The art
teacher filed the report as
required. The kid never directly
threatened anyone. Even the cop
didn't feel threatened, and it was
an assigned class project to depict
injustice.

MATT
So the kid got off?

TERRI

Yes.

(very serious)

Did any of you feel directly
threatened by Ernesto's art?

The students shake their heads 'no,' as the bell RINGS.

TERRI (CONT'D)

Then they only have to determine if
he's a threat to himself, which I'm
sure he's not.

(beat)

They'll let him off!

Terri and Ernesto begin to walk out, side by side.

Rhonda shakes her head in disgust at Terri as she walks by.

RHONDA

Like hell they will.

Terri and Ernesto glance back at Rhonda sadly as they exit.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Terri and Ernesto sit quietly in two chairs, all alone in the
office. Ernesto's artwork is on the Principal's desk. The
door is closed.

Principal Nordlin and a female uniformed Police Officer (60s;
gray hair) approach the door from outside, but do not enter.

Terri and Ernesto see them whispering and pointing to the
artwork on the desk.

Finally, the Principal and Police Officer enter and shut the
door.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN

This is Officer Downs from Metro.
She's just observing our routine
process. Nothing to worry about,
Ernesto.

Principal Nordlin half-smiles at Ernesto, then glares at
Terri.

TERRI

Nice to meet you, Officer Downs.
This is entirely a
misunderstanding, you see...

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
We've already discussed the report,
Ms. Robins.

(points to the art)
I've sent a photo to the District Psychologist, and she agrees one hundred percent.

TERRI
Agrees with what?

Officer Ray opens and bursts through the door. Ernesto stands and leaps to hug Officer Ray.

Son! OFFICER RAY Daddy! ERNESTO

Son?

TERRI

OFFICER RAY
I should have...

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
Ray, glad you made it back from
Jefferson.
(to the Police Officer)
We share the school security
position. Cost-saving measure.

OFFICER RAY
What's going on here?

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
Ernesto has drawn some very
disturbing, some say threatening,
images of killing school-age
children.

Officer Ray and Terri are shocked.

What? OFFICER RAY What? TERRI

Ernesto stares out the window with a blank look.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
It's not the boy's fault. He was
totally unsupervised during class.

Terri gets defensive.

TERRI
You summoned me to your office!

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
Mrs. Beckman called you in.

TERRI
Under your orders, presumably.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
Regardless, the District
Psychologist is very worried.

OFFICER RAY
Worried? About what?

Principal Nordlin whispers, but Ernesto turns toward him to hear.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
Ray, she's concerned he may harm
himself or others.

Officer Ray, Principal Nordlin, and the Police Officer study the gloomy artwork.

Terri slams her hand on the art.

TERRI
All art has context. Principal
Nordlin interrupted my class and
threatened students with collective
punishment, canceling the
Graduation Dance for all students
because of the actions of a few.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
Another matter entirely.

TERRI
I launched into a quick history
lesson on the failings of
collective punishment.

Terri points out portions of Ernesto's artwork.

TERRI (CONT'D)
Qin Dynasty, China, killing
innocent members of a family...

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
Please stop, Ms. Robins. You're not
helping...

Terri points at different parts of the art.

TERRI

Boston Tea Party, Sherman's March
to the Sea, Hiroshima, and a
cowardly drone strike. It's all
here!

(to the Principal)

You heard me, too. All Ernesto did
was draw it.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN

(to Officer Ray and the
Police Officer)

No one draws that fast in a few
minutes. The District Psychologist
confirmed that this anger came from
deep within the poor child.

Terri gets in Officer Ray's face.

TERRI

You know he can. Must have seen him
do this before.

Officer Ray looks bewildered at Terri and his son.

OFFICER RAY

Never seen him draw. Barely talks.
Says Daddy a lot since... since his
mom passed.

Officer Ray looks away, tears in his eyes.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN

The boy needs more help than we can
provide.

TERRI

You're wrong! Let me show you his
caveman art.

The Police Officer helps to restrain angry Terri.

Terri glares at the policewoman.

TERRI (CONT'D)

Don't you dare touch me!

Officer Ray calmly steps between the women.

OFFICER RAY

Not helping. Calm down. Please.

Terri shakes free and takes a seat.

TERRI
Just let me show you.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
Your five other students drew
Egyptian hieroglyphs?

TERRI
Yes, but...

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
We have some concerns. So does the
District. Ernesto will just receive
a little extra counseling at the
county hospital.

Office Ray hugs his child.

	OFFICER RAY	ERNESTO
What?		No!

Terri shakes her head in disgust and mumbles.

TERRI
Totally unjust!

The Police Officer grabs the artwork and guides Officer Ray
and Ernesto out the door.

Officer Ray and Terri share a moment.

Halfway out the door, Ernesto races back to hug Terri.

TERRI (CONT'D)
We'll keep your desk warm for when
you come back. Okay, Ernesto?

Officer Ray turns back to see Ernesto smiling.

OFFICER RAY
Never saw him do that either!

TERRI
(to Ray)
He's the one student with all the
vision. The rest of us are simple
observers.

Terri pats Ernesto on the back as he exits with his dad.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Terri drives her old sedan slowly in front of a dark, dilapidated house in a poor neighborhood.

She squints to read the address on a yellow sticky note, "Santos -- 1043 34th St."

She parks and grabs a rolled-up piece of art from class, and slowly approaches the door.

She hesitates before knocking.

Officer Ray opens the door a few inches to see Terri.

OFFICER RAY

Hi, Terri. This isn't a good time.

TERRI

Just wanted to apologize and show you something.

Terri holds up the rolled-up artwork.

Ray opens the door, and Terri steps in.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Terri sees a neat but sparsely furnished home. It's dimly lit, adding to Ray's somber mood. There is a small couch, an end table, and lamp, and a TV in the family room.

OFFICER RAY

Got the one couch. A psychologist said it helps bring us together.

TERRI

Ernesto okay?

OFFICER RAY

Sleeping. Sleeps with a TV on a cartoon channel all night.

TERRI

Whatever works.

OFFICER RAY

Yeah. Whatever works.

Terri sits on the couch and pats the couch for Ray to sit next to her.

TERRI

Look, I had to do it. Didn't know his mental status, and...

Ray sits down, but avoids eye contact.

OFFICER RAY

Don't have to explain.

TERRI

I do. You said you never saw him draw.

OFFICER RAY

Didn't. He watches cartoons.

Terri rolls out Ernesto's cave drawing.

Ray's eyes open widely.

TERRI

He glanced at a photo of a cave drawing on my tablet computer for less than two seconds, and painted this in thirty minutes.

Ray can't believe his eyes.

OFFICER RAY

No! Why didn't you show this to Principal Nordlin?

TERRI

I couldn't. It was supposed to be with a charcoal pencil only.

OFFICER RAY

So?

TERRI

He stabbed his hand with a paperclip for the red pigment. Didn't know what to do.

Ray shakes his head in disbelief.

TERRI (CONT'D)

The proportions are identical to the photo I showed him for two seconds.

Terri pulls out her phone and shows the cave art to Ray.

TERRI (CONT'D)
Recalled it perfectly from memory.

Ray picks up the artwork.

OFFICER RAY
Stabbed himself?

Terri stands and paces. She whispers.

TERRI
Didn't see it. His easel was in the corner. Not a peep out of him. His self-portrait the day before was an empty, perfect circle! I expected the same for his next assignment.

OFFICER RAY
I see.

TERRI
Sent a student to get paper towels to clean up his hand. Ernesto applied pressure, and his hand stopped bleeding. I probably should have said something.

OFFICER RAY
But you didn't know I was his father.

TERRI
And self-mutilation for the sake of getting the art exactly right. I've never seen anything like this.

Ray stares at the artwork.

OFFICER RAY
Tragically beautiful.

TERRI
You smiled at me the first time you saw me. It meant a lot. I felt safe. That's a rare feeling for me. I couldn't tell you at the time how important that was for me.

Their eyes meet in silence.

Terri sits inches away from Ray and moves in for a kiss, but he doesn't kiss her. Instead, he smiles warmly. They "connect."

She moves back a few inches on the couch.

TERRI (CONT'D)
Is Ernesto okay?

Ray stands, paces, and whispers.

OFFICER RAY
Four years, two months, and
thirteen days ago, Ernesto was
diagnosed on the autism spectrum.

TERRI
But his gift for art...

Ray rolls up the artwork and hands it back to Terri.

He sadly looks at Terri in the eyes.

OFFICER RAY
His mom committed suicide that
night.

Terri stands and motions awkwardly like she wants to hug Ray,
but he turns from her.

TERRI
Oh, my God. So sorry.

Ray pleads to Terri, pointing at the scroll of art.

OFFICER RAY
The blood.
(beat)
You can't tell anyone about that.
They'll take my boy away.

Terri puts the scroll behind her back.

TERRI
No. No. I won't. Ever! I'll swear
on a stack of Bibles it was paint.

Ray guides Terri to the door.

OFFICER RAY
He sees the District Psychologist
tomorrow, then we have an
appointment at county.

Ray opens the door.

TERRI
But his gift?

As she steps out the door, she turns to see Ray drop his head and make the sign of the cross.

OFFICER RAY

You see a gift. I see a curse.

Terri is shocked.

TERRI

What?

OFFICER RAY

Ernesto won't be returning to your class. I'm sorry.

Ray shuts the door.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL ROOM - DAY

The five remaining students sit around the perimeter of the classroom again, occasionally looking back at Ernesto's empty desk.

SUPER: "Three Days later."

Rhonda is doodling in a notebook.

Terri shows a slide of a statue from Ancient Greece.

TERRI

A major evolution in art can be seen in Ancient Greece, where the fifth-century B.C. sculptor Polykleitos set a new standard for carving human proportions and musculature.

Terri looks around the room to see that no one is paying attention.

She turns a desk toward the students and takes a seat.

TERRI (CONT'D)

Wanna talk about it?

EMMA

(angry)

You never mention ancient Chinese art.

The students turn to Emma.

TERRI

Fair point. My classes were in Western Art History. We knew so little about the Far East. Sorry.

DORRI

Skipped over Mesopotamia, too.

MATT

Maybe Jewish artists are like Jewish sports legends.

Terri chuckles.

TERRI

Sorry again. But this isn't what's on everyone's mind.

Jake sits up straight.

JAKE

What's gonna happen to Ernesto?

TERRI

Can't talk about it.

Rhonda stops doodling but doesn't look up.

RHONDA

Or won't.

Terri stands and paces, twitching a bit.

TERRI

Can't talk about a student's personal matters. Unethical.

Rhonda glares at Terri.

RHONDA

Unethical to yank him from class!

Terri returns to the desk she was sitting at. The students see her twitch nervously from time to time.

TERRI

I can tell you everyone has some kind of issue, but it's not my place to talk about them.

MATT

Should be able to talk about anything.

(MORE)

MATT (CONT'D)
(glances at his leg)
But I know we don't.

Dorri glances at her backpack.

Silence.

Terri establishes eye contact with the students as she speaks.

TERRI
I have PTSD, and not a mild case.

MATT
Post-something, right?

TERRI
Post-traumatic Stress Disorder.
(beat)
No one returns from war unscathed.
Recurrent horrible memories.
Reliving 'em. Nightmares. Cold
sweats. Can hit anytime.

Rhonda looks away. Terri sees it.

TERRI (CONT'D)
Used to love the 4th of July as a
kid.
(sad)
Scares me to death now.

Terri stands, paces.

MATT
Geez!

TERRI
I still get help. Don't want your
pity.
(beat)
The reason I'm telling you this is
that I'm better than most. Saw some
bad things. Very bad things. Saw
fellow soldiers, just kids, go
insane.
(whispers)
See, mental health isn't black or
white. It's all a spectrum -- a
gradient.
(faces the students)
(MORE)

TERRI (CONT'D)

Ain't nobody perfect, and it don't take much for fairly normal people to come unglued, to have a bad day, or have an incident. Know what I'm saying?!

All students, but Rhonda, nod 'yes.'

Terri stands and laughs.

TERRI (CONT'D)

Enough sad talk. I'm reminded of one of my favorite books, Practical Demonkeeping by Christopher Moore, who said, "If you think anyone is sane, you just don't know enough about them."

Everyone chuckles, even Rhonda, who writes down, "Practical Demonkeeping" by Christopher Moore.

TERRI (CONT'D)

Your next assignment is to draw, paint, or mold clay into anything Greek. Your best work. Go!

The PA speaker in the room squeals as the students head to the easels.

MRS. BECKMAN (O.S.)

Ms. Robins, please stop in after class.

Terri rolls her eyes in disgust.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Terri enters Principal Nordlin's office to hear Principal Nordlin talking on a speakerphone to MADELYNN YATES (50s), a stuffy woman.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN

Yes, Ma'am, that's when Ms. Robins just showed up.

(beat)

She just stepped into the office, so could you repeat that, Ma'am?

MADELYNN (O.S.)

Yes. This is Madelynn Yates from Human Resources at the District. Ms. Robins, can you hear me, okay?

Terri moves in closer to the speaker and answers questions in a loud humming, rather than words.

TERRI

Uh-huh!

Principal Nordlin looks curiously at Terri.

MADELYNN (O.S.)

Did you know that your temporary teaching position at Johnson was first offered to Ms. Rebecca Stout?

Terri acts surprised.

TERRI

Uh. Uh.

MADELYNN (O.S.)

Principal Nordlin, did Ms. Stout ever come in to secure her new job?

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN

I heard from your office that she would be coming in with a resume, but to the best of our knowledge, she never showed up.

TERRI

Hmmmmmm.

MADELYNN (O.S.)

Could have lost interest, I guess.

TERRI

Uh-huh!

Principal Nordlin turns his head to Terri.

MADELYNN (O.S.)

Ms. Robins, you're to be commended for taking the initiative in looking for work, but we need you to resubmit your resume.

TERRI

Uh-huh!

MADELYNN (O.S.)

We can't seem to be able to put our fingers on it. The place is a mess, so close to summer. I've got to run. Bye-bye now.

TERRI

Uh-huh.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN

If there's more checking to do, I
can...

Click. Principal Nordlin and Terri hear Madelynn hang up.

TERRI

Well, that takes care of that. Hear
anything more from the Santos
family?

Principal Nordlin shakes in frustration.

Mrs. Beckman enters the room quickly.

MRS. BECKMAN

Ms. Robins, Mr. Wei Chang is
waiting to speak to you in your
classroom.

Terri smiles like it's good news.

TERRI

Oh, what a nice surprise!

She exits quickly.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL ROOM - DAY

WEI CHANG (40s) is dressed in a nice suit and tie, with a
briefcase in hand, when Terri enters with a smile and
outstretched arm.

TERRI

Mr. Chang. I'm Terri Robins, Hui's
art teacher.

Wei shakes her hand with a puzzled look.

WEI

Hui? Not Emma?

TERRI

That brilliant, talented, and
beautiful girl of yours goes by
Emma and Hui. She's proud of her
heritage and culture, especially
the arts.

Wei is at a loss for words, so Terri keeps going.

TERRI (CONT'D)

Even late in the semester, she shows great promise.

WEI

She says your class is her favorite by far.

TERRI

And she's been happy?

WEI

Yes, but we were steering her to the sciences and engineering.

TERRI

Where she was unhappy?

WEI

Yes, but for her future...?

TERRI

You'd like to see her less happy than happy? What kind of future does she want, Mr. Chang?

Wei struggles to speak again.

WEI

She hasn't shown us any of her art.

Terri looks around her desk. She sees Emma's self-portrait and Ernesto's cave drawing.

TERRI

Saving it here for Principal Nordlin's final review at the semester's end art show.

Terri shows Mr. Chang Emma's self-portrait.

TERRI (CONT'D)

She drew this. It only lacks a smile.

Mr. Chang looks away.

Terri slowly unrolls Ernesto's "cave art."

Mr. Chang's eyes open wide. He smiles.

WEI

It appears I have underestimated my daughter's art.

TERRI
Under-appreciated her heart, I
would say.
(glares at Mr. Chang)
If you'll excuse me, I have a
lesson to plan.

As Mr. Chang bows slightly and exits, Mrs. Beckman storms in.

MRS. BECKMAN
Ms. Robins, please come with me.

Terri is perplexed.

TERRI
What is it now?

MRS. BECKMAN
Ms. Stout is in the office,
claiming you threatened her and
stole her job! You're being
dismissed.

Mrs. Beckman turns in a huff and exits.

TERRI
Maybe we can skip the trial and go
straight to the hangin'!

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Principal Nordlin sits like the judge, with MS. STOUT (60s),
a gray-haired woman in a bland floral dress clutching her
purse, as Terri enters.

Terri glares at Ms. Stout's clenched hands. Angry.

TERRI
Not gonna steal your purse.

MS. STOUT
Stole my job!

Terri remains calm.

TERRI
They only have positions here, and
you didn't show up.

Principal Nordlin stands to restore order.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
I have a call into the District to
settle the matter.

TERRI
Whatever you think is right,
Principal Nordlin.

Ms. Stout points at Terri.

MS. STOUT
How did you hear about the position
here? Eavesdropping?

TERRI
Posted on the District website! I
wandered in to see if it was still
available.

MS. STOUT
It was you on the phone who told me
the job was filled! You threatened
me.

TERRI
I don't recall!

Principal Nordlin yells at Terri.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
You threatened an applicant?!

TERRI
I said I didn't recall threatening
an applicant. That's all!

Principal Nordlin is stunned. He presses his intercom for
Mrs. Beckman, who races into the office.

MRS. BECKMAN
Yes, Sir.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
Mrs. Beckman, did you threaten Ms.
Stout on the phone the day Ms.
Robins showed up?

MRS. BECKMAN
No, Sir.

Terri looks away.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
Check with Officer Ray.

MRS. BECKMAN

Yes, Sir.

Mrs. Beckman leaves in a huff.

Principal Nordlin's phone rings, and he answers it right away.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN

Ah, District H.R. We'll get to the bottom of this.

He turns from the others and mumbles into the phone.

He listens.

He turns to glare at Terri.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN (CONT'D)

I see. Yes, I know what to do.

Terri glares at Principal Nordlin and then at Ms. Stout.

TERRI

I'll get my things and show myself out.

Terri turns and exits with her head held high in dignity.

EXT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

Terri exits the school with a small box of supplies and her canvas military backpack.

She sees Rhonda and her three bully friends halfway out to her car.

Terri's head is held high in dignity, as the boys laugh, but Rhonda, smoking a cigarette like a tough girl, speaks up.

RHONDA

Hey, Terri, everyone's Greek art projects turned out great. Especially Jakes! Who knew, right? You'll love 'em.

(beat)

Where you goin', girl?

Terri glances over to Rhonda.

TERRI

Fired.

Rhonda's eyes open in disbelief. She starts to follow Terri to her car. The boys stand there laughing.

RHONDA
Fired?! For what?

Terri avoids eye contact with Rhonda.

TERRI
Taking a job under false pretenses,
threatening the real candidate for
the job, teaching dangerous
philosophies, and endangering young
hearts and minds.

RHONDA
You threatened that old bag who
could barely walk in the front
door.

TERRI
Watch it, girl. Age discrimination
is as ugly as the others.

RHONDA
That sucks for me!

TERRI
(snickers)
Not as much as the company you
keep.

Rhonda glances back at the boys as Terri opens her car door and throws in the box angrily.

RHONDA
Just boys!

TERRI
Dragging you down like a flightless
penguin when you have a mind that
should be soaring with eagles.

Terri gets in her car and races off.

Rhonda stares at the car.

EXT. CITY PARK - NIGHT

Terri sits at a picnic table reading a library book on "Art History" as the sun sets.

Terri closes the book and lumbers to her car.

She unlocks the trunk. We see a pillow and blanket, a small bath bag, a towel, a flashlight, a dry-cleaning bag with her army uniform in it, a bag of clothes, and six more library books on art history. The trunk is meticulously and neatly packed.

She grabs a flashlight, a towel, and a bath bag.

She locks the trunk and heads to the dark, concrete restrooms nearby.

LATER

Terri sleeps in her car with a pillow and a single blanket. One hand clutches a flashlight.

BEGIN DREAM SEQUENCE

We SEE file footage of nighttime battles in the Middle East, and Special Forces busting down doors and searching houses for ISIS fighters.

Bombs start falling all around. Loud explosions are rocking the soldiers, crumbling buildings, dust, and darkness -- panic sets in, as radios call for immediate evacuation, and sirens sound.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

Terri wakes suddenly in a cold sweat. Her hand shakes as she turns on the flashlight and looks around.

Terri's eyes are wide open.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL ROOM - MORNING

All six students sit around the perimeter of the room as Office Ray guides Ms. Stout into the room.

None of the students make eye contact with Ms. Stout. Ernesto looks out the window and does not acknowledge his father.

OFFICER RAY

This is Ms. Stout. Principal
Nordlin will be here in a minute to
introduce your new art teacher.

Ms. Stout smiles uncaringly at the students.

MS. STOUT

I see there are only six of you.
That's going to make life easy.

Silence.

Officer Ray waves quickly to Ernesto, who ignores his dad and continues to look out the window.

Officer Ray shrugs and walks off.

MS. STOUT (CONT'D)

Why don't we go around the room and introduce ourselves as I take roll?

MATT

Roll? Ate a roll in first grade. Is this one Kosher?

Ms. Stout glares at Matt.

MS. STOUT

And who might you be?

MATT

Matt. Matthew Lowenstein, present. But I wish I weren't.

Ms. Stout looks at her roll card.

MS. STOUT

You wish you weren't Matt Lowenstein?

MATT

Wish I weren't present.

MS. STOUT

(smirks)

That's two of us.

JAKE

Why isn't Terri here?

MS. STOUT

That's a question for school administrators. Who are you?

Jake looks away and shrugs in disgust.

JAKE

Jake.

Emma raises her hand reluctantly.

EMMA

Emma Chang. The roll card may say Hui.

MS. STOUT
You'll answer to Miss Chang.

EMMA
Don't count on it.

Ms. Stout points to Dorri and coughs.

DORRI
Dorri Khan. What kind of
administration problems?

MS. STOUT
Can we forget about Ms. Robins?

Ms. Stout glares at Ernesto, looking out the window.

MS. STOUT (CONT'D)
Eyes on me, Ernesto Santos. Heard
about you.

RHONDA
Leave him alone.

Ms. Stout snaps at Rhonda.

MS. STOUT
Who might you be?

RHONDA
Rhonda. Rhonda James.

MS. STOUT
Well, Rhonda Rhonda James, would
you please remove those easels from
the back of the room? I teach
professional "Art Appreciation,"
not a children's art class.

The students are stunned.

Ernesto turns his head to glare at Ms. Stout, just as
Principal Nordlin pokes his head in with a smile.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
Morning class.

MATT
Yes, we are.

Principal Nordlin sees that everyone is gloomy watching
Rhonda collect the easels.

Rhonda glares at Ms. Stout and then at Principal Nordlin.

RHONDA
We want Ms. Robins back! Why she
was fired?

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
It's "Why was she fired?"
(beat)
Irregularities in her application
process and her resume.

The students look perplexed.

RHONDA
Easily corrected.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
Not in her case, and none of your
business. Ms. Stout is your teacher
now. Pay her respect or you'll be
suspended!

Rhonda shrugs and mumbles something bad, and inaudible to all
but the students.

RHONDA
Big freaking deal.

Principal Nordlin gets the gist of the conversation and is
irate.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
That's it, young lady. You've just
earned a three-day suspension!

Rhonda tosses the easels in the corner of the classroom with
a CRASH.

The other students cheer for Rhonda as Principal Nordlin
guides her out of the room.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Principal Nordlin is in a huff, and he leads Rhonda down the
hallway.

Officer Ray approaches from the opposite direction with a
perplexed look.

OFFICER RAY
Officer Ray, please escort Ms.
James off the school grounds while
Mrs. Beckman calls her parents.

RHONDA
(mumbles)
Good luck with that!

Officer Ray guides Rhonda out the front door.

EXT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

Rhonda drags her feet.

RHONDA
Why was Terri fired? What
irregularities are on her
application?

Officer Ray slows down to talk.

OFFICER RAY
Won't tell me either! Must be bad,
is all I know.
(beat)
What'd you do to get suspended?

RHONDA
Questioned it. School's for asking
questions, ya know.

Officer Ray smiles warmly.

OFFICER RAY
Yeah, right. I'll try to find out.
Come back after school.

Rhonda gives a half-smile back.

OFFICER RAY (CONT'D)
Where will you go?

RHONDA
Library. Where I always go.

Officer Ray turns.

OFFICER RAY
Careful walking through City Park.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Officer Ray passes the office to see Mrs. Beckman hanging up
the phone with a look of frustration.

Principal Nordlin races out of the office and down the hall with an angry look on his face.

Officer Ray steps into the office with a smile.

OFFICER RAY

My son is very disappointed with
Ms. Robins gone. What can I tell
him?

(sadly)

He doesn't speak to others.

Mrs. Beckman studies Officer Ray for a moment. She whispers.

MRS. BECKMAN

He won't tell a soul?

OFFICER RAY

Not a soul.

MRS. BECKMAN

District HR can't say why Ms. Stout
didn't take the job in the first
place. Had no record of Ms. Robins
coming in for an interview, and
other irregularities they can't
discuss -- district policy! But I
think there was some funny business
with Ms. Robins, if you ask me.

OFFICER RAY

Big deal, maybe she just needed the
job!

MRS. BECKMAN

The district won't give us a
reason! Not good for anybody.

Officer Ray turns in disgust and begins to exit.

OFFICER RAY

'Cept the students, the school, and
the teacher in this case.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL ROOM - DAY

Ms. Scout lectures on Renaissance art. The students are
disinterested and ignore her, but she lectures in a droll
monotone.

SUPER: "A few days later."

MS. STOUT

Encyclopedia Britannica describes
"Renaissance art, produced during
the 14th, 15th, and 16th centuries
in Europe under the combined
influences of an increased
awareness of nature, a revival of
classical learning, and a more
individualistic view of man.
However, scholars no longer believe
that the Renaissance marked an
abrupt break with medieval values.
So, is the French word renaissance,
literally "rebirth," accurate?

Ms. Stout looks around the room and sees that no one is listening.

Matt speaks up without eye contact.

MATT

Maybe, after-birth is a more
accurate description.

Ms. Stout glares at Matt and points to the door.

MS. STOUT

To the Principal's Office, Mr.
Lowenstein.

Matt stomps out of the room, holding up a fist in protest.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Rhonda meekly walks into the library, looking for a quiet, deserted corner to hang out.

Rhonda walks past several rows of bookshelves, small tables, and chairs.

She sees an African-American woman with her head down on one table, sleeping, but the woman's head faces the other direction.

Rhonda walks past another row of bookshelves and stops cold.

Rhonda backs up to look down at the black woman again.

Rhonda stares for a moment until she sees Terri's canvas military backpack.

She's stunned. She mumbles.

RHONDA
Gotta find Officer Ray.

Rhonda sneaks out of the library.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Matt (still with a raised fist), Jake, Emma, and Dorri stand solemnly in the office.

OFFICER RAY
What am I going to do? I can't
suspend all of you? It'll look bad
in the District Office!

EXT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

The three male Bullies linger outside the school, so Rhonda waits out of sight.

Officer Ray steps out to yell at the boys.

OFFICER RAY
Hey, you kids. Go home!

The Bullies take off running.

When it's all clear, Rhonda, in a panic, runs up to Officer Ray.

OFFICER RAY (CONT'D)
Ms. James, what is it?

RHONDA
It's Terri. I mean, Ms. Robins.
She's at the library. Asleep. Why?

Officer Ray pities Rhonda.

OFFICER RAY
Mrs. Beckman won't tell me a thing.

RHONDA
Did you call the District?

OFFICER RAY
They can't release personal
information on an employee without
a court order.

RHONDA
She looked...

OFFICER RAY

Horrible?

Rhonda looks away.

RHONDA

No.

OFFICER RAY

Tired? Angry?

RHONDA

No.

(sadly)

Homeless.

Officer Ray looks away sadly.

OFFICER RAY

She needed the job more than anyone. No permanent address, I bet. But that doesn't mean you can lie on an application.

RHONDA

About having a home?

OFFICER RAY

About having a local or permanent address. She just had to be honest.

RHONDA

I bet they wouldn't hire her.

OFFICER RAY

I'll go ask the district HR people. But I'll have to take Ernesto. Can't leave him here.

RHONDA

We could go back to the library and see if we can help her.

OFFICER RAY

Some people are too proud to ask for help, especially military vets. We'll all go to the district, then to the library. Ernesto will want to help if he can. Stay here. I'll get Ernesto.

Officer Ray runs into the school.

INT. OFFICER RAY'S PICKUP TRUCK - AFTERNOON

Officer Ray drives a brand pickup truck with his son sitting next to him, and Rhonda riding shotgun. Ernesto looks straight ahead.

OFFICER RAY
I'll do the talking when we get to
District. Won't have much time.
Closes at five.

Rhonda looks over and nods at Officer Ray, while Ernesto looks straight ahead.

ERNESTO
Jake likes you, Rhonda.

Rhonda glances at Ernesto, stunned.

RHONDA
What's that you say?

ERNESTO
Matt likes Dorri.

Officer Ray places a hand gently on Ernesto's leg.

OFFICER RAY
That's enough, Ernesto.

RHONDA
What makes you think Jake likes me?
He could have any...

ERNESTO
(interrupts)
Girl he wants. He knows that!

RHONDA
(laughs)
Yes, he does.

ERNESTO
Hui, I mean Emma, needs my help
with Algebra.

Officer Ray places a hand gently on Ernesto's leg again.

OFFICER RAY
That's enough, Ernesto.

RHONDA
Are you making this all up?

ERNESTO
Jake watches your bum.

Rhonda looks away.

RHONDA
You're making that shit up!

Officer Ray glares at Ernesto and Rhonda, but wisely chooses not to get involved.

ERNESTO
Every day, he races to beat you to
class and sits in the back to watch
your bum.
(beat)
All he does.
(beat)
All day long.

Rhonda smiles, but doesn't let on, still looking away.

RHONDA
No shit?

ERNESTO
No... Daddy, can I say shit?

OFFICER RAY
(smiles)
Just this once.

ERNESTO
No shit.

EXT. DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Officer Ray stops at the District Administration Building.

OFFICER RAY
We're here. No more talk about all
this nonsense! Rhonda, please
excuse Ernesto.

ERNESTO
Sorry, Daddy.

OFFICER RAY
I'll be back in ten minutes.

Ray hops out as Ernesto and Rhonda break into laughter.

LATER

Officer Ray exits with a small piece of paper in his right hand.

EXT./INT. OFFICER RAY'S PICKUP TRUCK - AFTERNOON

He opens the driver's door to interrupt a conversation and sees Ernesto and Rhonda elbowing each other playfully.

ERNESTO

Do not.

RHONDA

Do so. You like her! Admit it.

ERNESTO

Do not...

OFFICER RAY

More important matters. Gotta get to the library!

Officer Ray races off.

INT. LIBRARY - AFTERNOON

Rhonda leads the way, as Officer Ray and Ernesto follow closely.

Rhonda leads them slowly to a table where Terri is charging her tablet computer and scrolling through job openings online. Three books on art are scattered on the table.

Terri turns to see them approaching and flicks off the tablet computer.

TERRI

Ray, Ernesto, and Rhonda. To what do I owe the pleasure of your company?

Rhonda turns her head, bewildered.

RHONDA

Town library, not Buckingham Palace!

Officer Ray steps in front of Rhonda.

OFFICER RAY

Worried about you. Left under bad circumstances. Kinda ran off.

TERRI
Pushed out, as I recall.

Ernesto stares at the military knapsack and the tablet computer charging. Terri gets defensive, grabs her knapsack straps, and glares at Ernesto.

TERRI (CONT'D)
Goes everywhere I go. Like keeping my tablet charged up, too.

OFFICER RAY
No way of getting in touch with you...

Terri stands and interrupts Ray as she unplugs her tablet and shoves it in her knapsack.

TERRI
Time to move on, is all. I wear out my welcome in some places. I get that!

Rhonda steps up, but with a compassionate voice.

RHONDA
You were a soldier. First day of class, you looked around like we were terrorists or something.

TERRI
Force of habit.

RHONDA
The habit of forces. Looked at each of us and then at the doors. Then, when that cherry bomb went off in the parking lot...

Terri interrupts in a snippy manner.

TERRI
Very observant!

OFFICER RAY
She didn't mean nothing by it.

Terri glares at Ray.

TERRI
You didn't want Ernesto in my classroom!

Ernesto glares at his dad, who looks away.

TERRI (CONT'D)
I'd better be going.

Ernesto is the only one to see that Terri's right pinky finger is twitching. He tries to speak but can't.

His father sees Ernesto's anguished face and anticipates Ernesto's question.

OFFICER RAY
Where will you go?

Terri looks sadly at Ernesto, who is shaking his head 'no' to his dad. She speaks sternly to them all.

TERRI
Don't worry 'bout me. I'm a survivor.

Rhonda looks away helplessly and mumbles.

RHONDA
But not a thriver.

Terri spins to her angrily and defensively.

TERRI
What do you know about thrivin'?
Hangin' with those bad boys?
Buttin' into other people's
business?!

Terri grabs her knapsack and storms out.

Ernesto pulls on his dad's sleeve and mumbles.

ERNESTO
Needs her medication.

Officer Ray and Rhonda look at Ernesto with puzzled looks.

Ernesto shakes his right pinky finger.

Rhonda's eyes open wide as she gets in Ernesto's face.

RHONDA
What did you see?

Ernesto looks at his dad with pity.

OFFICER RAY
Son? What did you see?

Ernesto shrugs an 'I don't know'-look to the two of them.

Officer Ray exits quickly with Ernesto and Rhonda in tow.

EXT. LIBRARY - DUSK

Officer Ray looks up and down the street, but sees no sign of Terri.

Rhonda looks up as if to think.

RHONDA
City park!

OFFICER RAY
City Park?

RHONDA
She's homeless.

Ernesto nods in agreement.

OFFICER RAY
About eleven percent of homeless
adults are veterans.

RHONDA
And about 45% of all homeless
veterans are African American or
Hispanic, despite only accounting
for 10.4% and 3.4% of the U.S.
veteran population, respectively.

Officer Ray stares at Rhonda.

RHONDA (CONT'D)
I just looked it up.

OFFICER RAY
So did I. Let's go!

They race to Officer Ray's pickup.

INT. OFFICER RAY'S PICKUP TRUCK - NIGHT

As Ray drives around the outskirts of the park, Rhonda
(sitting shotgun) removes her cell phone from her jeans and
punches in a number.

RHONDA
It's Rhonda.
(angry)
How many Rhonda's you know?

Ray whispers to his son.

OFFICER RAY
Who's she calling?

Ernesto smiles.

ERNESTO
Jake.

Rhonda playfully elbows Ernesto.

RHONDA
Looking for Terri in the park. Call
the others.

Rhonda listens, then gets angry again.

RHONDA (CONT'D)
Not the football team! Other
members of the class who can
identify her.

Officer Ray yells at Rhonda.

OFFICER RAY
Flashlights, bright clothing,
cellphones. Don't involve the
police. Only missing for a few
hours.

RHONDA
South picnic tables. Twenty
minutes.

EXT. CITY PARK - NIGHT

The teens stand a few feet from a picnic table, and apart
from the other students.

Officer Ray glances at the students while talking.

OFFICER RAY
Thanks for coming. We think Ms.
Robins is here and may be in need
of our compassion and support, but
we just want to see if she's safe.

MATT
Safe from what?

OFFICER RAY
Maybe herself. Don't know. Just
need to find her. To remain safe, I
have to split you up into teams of
two.

The teens look around nervously.

OFFICER RAY (CONT'D)
You have my number. Call me if you
see her.

DORRI
What if we don't find her?

OFFICER RAY
If we don't find her, you'll go
home, and Ernesto and I will go to
the police to file a report.

JAKE
(mumbles)
I'll team with Rhonda if she's not
angry.

Rhonda glares at Jake but takes a step towards him.

RHONDA
Concerned, not angry.

JAKE
Sorry.

Rhonda shakes her head in disgust but takes another step
toward Jake.

Matt takes a step toward Dorri and smiles at her hijab.

MATT
Forgot my yarmulke, but I'm packing
fourteen years of guilt from my
mother.

Dorri smiles and looks away.

RHONDA
Emma, why don't you stick with
Ernesto, while Office Ray stays
here to receive our check-in phone
calls?

JAKE
When do we call in? I wasn't
listening.

Emma stands alone at the end of one table, while Ernesto and his dad stand by another table.

RHONDA

We should stagger the calls to avoid busy signals. We'll call in every eleven minutes. Matt and Dorri, every nine minutes; and Emma and Ernesto, every seven minutes. The least amount of overlap in the first hour.

Ernesto glances at Emma, then shyly looks away.

OFFICER RAY

If we don't find her by then, meet back here. If you get lost, call me. Yell if you ever feel threatened. Got it.

EMMA

What do we say if we find her?

OFFICER RAY

Say what's on your mind.

The teams head off.

Rhonda whispers to Jake as they walk with flashlights.

RHONDA

I'm gonna invite her to stay with us for a few days.

JAKE

That's kind of you.

RHONDA

You act surprised.

JAKE

I was gonna ask my folks, but I know they wouldn't.

RHONDA

You sure?

Jake smiles.

JAKE

Not sure. They can be nice sometimes, I guess.

Rhonda reaches her hand for Jake to hold. He gently holds her hand, and they share a moment.

Twenty yards away, we hear Matt struggling to speak with Dorri.

MATT

I... I... was hoping to...

DORRI

(interrupts)

You are more confident in class or large groups, but extremely nervous one-on-one.

Matt looks startled.

MATT

Es... es... especially when I'm alone.

DORRI

I get that. It's hard to be you or me when we don't know who to be.

Matt looks utterly confused.

MATT

Never thought of it that way.

DORRI

See, you didn't stutter.

Twenty yards away, Emma shyly begins to speak to Ernesto.

EMMA

How are you getting the best grade in our Algebra class?

Ernesto looks away.

ERNESTO

I didn't know.

EMMA

You didn't know you have the best grade?

ERNESTO

I didn't know it would upset you.

EMMA

Not upset. Just don't understand.

Ernesto looks straight ahead again.

ERNESTO
Me? Or Algebra.

EMMA
You, I get. Best artist in the
world. Smartest kid in algebra.
(smiles at Ernesto)
Maybe I don't understand myself.

Ernesto senses the smile and smiles briefly.

Forty yards away, Rhonda spots Terri sitting at a dark picnic table and resting her head on a sweater. She has her military knapsack next to her on the bench seat.

Rhonda whispers to Jake.

RHONDA
There she is. Text Officer Ray.

Jake whips out his phone and texts Ray: "Found her. Picnic tables on NW side of park."

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY PARK - NIGHT

Ray receives the text and sends a group text: "Found her. NW picnic table. On my way."

Ray races off.

BACK TO:

EXT. CITY PARK - NIGHT

Rhonda and Jake get messages, but Rhonda's phone rings loudly.

Terri awakens and turns with a flashlight gripped in her hand.

Suddenly, the three Bullies, dressed in all black and wearing ski masks, run from the opposite direction and steal Terri's knapsack and run off.

Rhonda screams.

RHONDA
Stop, thief!

Rhonda calls 9-1-1.

Terri reacts like a trained military fighter. She dives at the slowest boy and tackles him.

TERRI
I'll kill you!

Terri is vicious and about to punch the boy in the neck when her hands shake in fear.

The boy shakes free and runs away, just as Rhonda, Jake, and Officer Ray reach her.

OFFICER RAY
We're here, Terri. You'll be okay.

Terri collapses to the ground, and her entire body begins to shake.

Rhonda glares at the boy running away, but Terri is having a seizure, and everyone stands around helplessly, staring.

OFFICER RAY (CONT'D)
Call an ambulance.

Officer Ray bends down to clear around Terri and comfort her.

INT. HOSPITAL - MORNING

Terri lies in bed in a dark room. She has electrodes monitoring her heart.

In a corner chair, Ernesto sleeps in a big chair with his dad, who is fighting sleep.

A Nurse (30s) enters and unceremoniously raises the window shade to let in bright sunshine.

NURSE
Wake up, sleepyheads!

The Nurse checks the monitors as Terri begins to stir.

OFFICER RAY
Is she gonna be okay?

Nurse smiles, and Terri returns a weak smile, sits up, sees Officer Ray smiling, and Ernesto rubbing his eyes.

NURSE
Fine. Doc says stress, missed pills, and dehydration probably brought on the seizure.

Terri looks softly at Ray.

TERRI
Been here all night?

NURSE
Two nights!

TERRI
Two nights?

NURSE
Gave the doc time to get your med
records from the Army. And, this
nice man has been by your side the
whole time.

Officer Ray sits up.

OFFICER RAY
It was a weekend anyway!

The nurse glances at Ray and snickers.

NURSE
See the way you look at her. And
your boy has a connection.

TERRI
(mumbles)
Guess I shouldn't have spent my
prescription money on art supplies.

NURSE
You got that right!

The nurse and Ernesto smile at each other before the nurse
exits the room.

Rhonda bursts in the door carrying Terri's knapsack. She has
a swollen eye and a bandage on her arm, but a smile on her
face.

Terri smiles and puts her arms out.

Rhonda moves in for the hug.

TERRI
You're hurt.

RHONDA
Not as hurt as those three boys
when Jake saw what they did to me.

OFFICER RAY
We'll pretend we didn't hear that!

Terri investigates the contents of her bag.

RHONDA
It's all there.

Terri pulls out a small leather-bound journal.

TERRI
Funny. Don't care about my
decorations and medals. Didn't want
to lose my journal. My self-
respect.

Ray, Rhonda, and Ernesto stare at the journal.

Terri clutches it to her heart.

Ernesto looks into Terri's eyes.

ERNESTO
What's in there?

Terri looks sadly at Ernesto.

TERRI
All the things I couldn't tell my
commanding officers, my fellow
soldiers, and the poor people whose
homes, families, and way of life we
destroyed daily.
(sad)
All the things I was afraid to tell
myself.
(looks away)
All the things I needed help with,
but was too proud to ask for.

Terri looks at Ray and Rhonda.

TERRI (CONT'D)
We told ourselves we were doing the
right thing, killing terrorists to
make the world a better place.
(beat)
But nothing was getting all that
much better for regular people, you
know? And, I came home to this
place, without a job, a home, or
adequate mental health care...

Terri looks away as Rhonda lowers her eyes.

RHONDA

And all you wanted to do was teach.

TERRI

Don't get me wrong. I'm glad I served my country, and I get benefits...

The nurse re-enters the room with a bag of Terri's clothes.

OFFICER RAY

But the costs were higher than you predicted.

The nurse hands Terri the bag of clothes and smiles.

NURSE

And you haven't seen our bill yet!

There are weak smiles all around.

OFFICER RAY

Sorry about what I said the other night. You're welcome to stay with Ernesto and me until you get your feet on the ground.

TERRI

Thanks. I don't know...

Ernesto looks sad.

RHONDA

My mom said the same thing.

TERRI

Thanks. I'll be okay. Really.

OFFICER RAY

We'll go see about other teaching positions in the area! Mrs. Beckman said she'd help.

Ernesto and Rhonda hug Terri before leaving. Officer Ray waves and smiles as he exits.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Terri stands at the front door to Ray and Ernesto's house. She makes two false attempts to knock, and finally does.

Terri can hear Ray and Ernesto running to the door.

They open the door with huge smiles.

OFFICER RAY
Hoping you'd show up.

TERRI
I could use a steady mailing
address.

ERNESTO
We fixed up the guest room.

Ray smiles at his son.

OFFICER RAY
It's a small storage room.

Ernesto reaches out for Terri's hand.

ERNESTO
Come on. I'll show you.

Ernesto pulls Terri in.

INT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Terri smiles at Ray, and they share a moment, as Ernesto
guides Terri past the couch.

ERNESTO
We put a pillow and blankets behind
the couch.

OFFICER RAY
Never seen him this...

ERNESTO
Get you a real bed soon, we
promise, don't we, Dad?

TERRI
I just need the address...

Ray pulls out a rental receipt.

OFFICER RAY
(interrupting)
I made you a receipt for the first
and last month's rent.

TERRI
But I...

ERNESTO
Rhonda mailed you a letter here
today. She's lit.

Terri's eyes open widely with a smile.

OFFICER RAY
To establish your address...

TERRI
I can't repay...

OFFICER RAY
We can't repay you enough for your
service.

TERRI
Can I do anything to help?

Ray points to Ernesto and Terri.

OFFICER RAY
Help each other remember your meds,
and don't miss appointments.

Ernesto hugs Terri, then Ray joins in.

TERRI
Tomorrow I'll go talk to the
District Office folks about
positions. Maybe summer school?

They all share a moment.

Ernesto gazes at them like he wants something more.

Terri gazes at Officer Ray and kisses him softly on the lips.

Ernesto skips out of the room wearing the biggest smile ever.

Officer Ray and Terri hug and smile.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Ms. Stout throws up her arms as she stomps down the hallway
toward the exit.

Mrs. Beckman sees her pass by and yells at her.

MRS. BECKMAN
Ms. Stout? Where are you...

MS. STOUT

I've had it with their peaceful protests, fists in the air, and snoring.

MRS. BECKMAN

But...

MS. STOUT

They don't appreciate art! They're incapable of appreciating anything or anyone.

MRS. BECKMAN

Not quite anyone.

MS. STOUT

I quit!

Ms. Stout storms out of the building with Officer Ray holding open the door.

Mrs. Beckman smiles at Officer Ray, who acts surprised, then smiles back.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL ROOM - MORNING

SUPER: "One week later."

Ernesto enters the front door wearing Jake's Junior Varsity jacket, with Jake right behind him.

Emma, Dorri, Matt, and Rhonda sit in a tight circle with two empty desks.

ERNESTO

Should have seen the looks I got.
Jake Stone is a friend of mine!

Ernesto begins to take off the jacket.

JAKE

Keep it. I'll be varsity next year and get another one.

ERNESTO

Really, Jake? That's lit!

EMMA

Looks great on you, Ernesto.

Rhonda pats Jake's hand as he sits next to her.

Terri steps in the door carrying her same knapsack. She smiles at the circle of desks.

TERRI

Today, we'll discuss the Renaissance, the way it should be taught. Inquisition and all!

MATT

Terri, how did you...?

TERRI

Your last teacher quit.

(beat)

I wonder why?

The students pretend to be shocked.

Terri sounds unconvinced as she digs through her knapsack.

TERRI (CONT'D)

Uh-huh! Better show adults respect! And everybody has something going on in the background that may not be obvious on the outside.

She glares at the students, who stop smiling.

Terri pulls out three small boxes of pastel chalks.

TERRI (CONT'D)

Pastels can be traced back to the Renaissance. They are said to have originated in Northern Italy during the 16th century, and they became a favorite of the masters, including Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo.

MATT

Leo and Mike worked in pastels?

Terri ignores Matt, and he smiles.

RHONDA

Is it true they had only black, white, and red, not the 1,600 hues we have today?

TERRI

Yes, so you'll use only those three colors today!

Terri glares at Ernesto.

TERRI (CONT'D)
No bloodletting for the red!

Ernesto smiles, then looks out the window.

Terri claps her hands.

TERRI (CONT'D)
Get those easels set up and get to work.

Emma looks worried.

EMMA
Uh oh.

TERRI
(to Emma)
There is art in every heart.
(to the class)
And you've all got projects to complete if you expect to pass the final inspection by Principal Nordlin.

The students get to work.

EXT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

The three Bullies linger further from the front door as Rhonda exits the school. Rhonda's backpack is heavy with books.

She sees the boys and turns to exit the parking lot in the opposite direction.

The Bullies walk in her direction.

Rhonda glances back at the boys, who are now closer to the front door of the school.

Jake and Matt exit the front door and glare at the Bullies, who stop to stare down Jake and Matt.

Matt puts on a tough look, then speaks in a loud, authoritative voice for the first time.

MATT
One and a half against three. Gotta love them odds.

Jake glances at Matt and slaps his shoulder playfully.

JAKE
You got this, Matt. I'll help
Rhonda with her books.

Jake points at the Bullies and runs to catch up with Rhonda.

JAKE (CONT'D)
I warned you boys.

The Bullies freeze, glance at Rhonda, then look back at Matt and step slowly toward him.

Matt points to the roof of the school.

MATT
My buddy, Officer Ray, tells me the
new security cameras have full face-
recognition capabilities.

The Bullies look at the roof but don't see any cameras. They keep walking toward Matt.

MATT (CONT'D)
Assault and battery, even the
threat of violence, carries a max
of five years.

Matt looks toward Jake and Rhonda, who are now far away.

The Bullies slow down and occasionally look up for cameras.

Matt speaks like a powerful attorney.

MATT (CONT'D)
Unless they add hate crime to it.
Like the other night at the Park
with Ms. Robins.

The Bullies freeze.

MATT (CONT'D)
Tried as adults. Could carry an
extra ten years. Each!
(beat)
Out by age twenty-nine.

The Bullies look at each other and turn to walk away.

MATT (CONT'D)
But it would be worth it, right?

The boys continue to walk away, glancing back at the roof of the school, as Officer Ray steps out of the front door.

Officer Ray puts an arm around Matt.

OFFICER RAY
Everything okay, Mr. Lowenstein?

Matt now speaks in his regular, low-tone voice.

MATT
My mom's picking me up for an after-school drama class at the high school. Just telling the boys about our new security cameras.

Officer Ray looks up at the roof, bewildered.

OFFICER RAY
We don't have...

Matt's Mom drives up in a Brand Sedan.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL ROOM - DAY

Dorri brings in three beautiful hand-woven hijabs. Dorri is wearing another one. Matt smiles, and they share a moment.

SUPER: "The next day"

TERRI
These are spectacular.

DORRI
Hand-woven. Did them myself. Each one takes a week of late nights after homework.

TERRI
You have found your medium, and your heart has found you.

DORRI
Yeah. I can't draw worth a shit.

Matt stands and speaks authoritatively again.

MATT
Before she turns them in, there's something we all must do.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

We see a crowded hallway with 30 Students (12-14) walking, talking, and joking around.

Out of Terri's classroom march Terri and her students. Terri and the girls wear hijabs. Matt's arm is around Dorri, Jake's arm is around Rhonda, and Ernesto and Emma are holding hands.

They walk proudly down the hall, being cheered by the other students.

Principal Nordlin glares, but Mrs. Beckman smiles at the peaceful protestors.

Emma whispers to Ernesto as they walk proudly.

EMMA

Can you help me study for my
Algebra final tonight?

ERNESTO

(looks away, chuckling)
Think one night will be enough?

EMMA

Gotta be your house or the library.
My dad thinks I'm smart.

ERNESTO

My dad loves me for who I am.

EMMA

He's a kind man, and you're just
like him.

Ernesto smiles.

ERNESTO

I think I'm falling in like.

Officer Ray smiles from the main entrance doors.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL ROOM - AFTERNOON

SUPER: "Second-to-last day of school: Judgement Day"

A banana is taped to the door with duct tape.

Jake laughs as he points to his Greek art, a drawing of the full backsides of two male nude Olympic athletes.

JAKE

Just to freak my dad.

Terri chuckles as Rhonda grabs Jake's arm.

RHONDA

Wait 'til my ma sees me dating you!

Emma walks up to Terri with a worried face and whispers.

EMMA

I didn't draw my self-portrait.

Terri glances at Emma's other two art pieces: a poorly painted vase with ugly flowers, and a badly formed clay ashtray.

TERRI

I know, Hui. Figured someone helped.

Terri glances at Ernesto, who is looking out the window and smiling. She pats Emma on the shoulder.

TERRI (CONT'D)

5,000 years of civilization, and we all have things to learn. By the way, I like the name your loving parents gave you, Hui, meaning intelligent and wise.

EMMA

But I'm not intelligent or wise.

TERRI

If Joseph B. Wirthlin is right, "We know that we are often judged by the company we keep."

(glances at Ernesto)

You are very intelligent and very wise. A lesson Rhonda and you all are learning.

Terri and Rhonda exchange glances and share a moment.

Terri stops at Dorri's display of three beautiful hand-woven hijabs. Dorri is wearing a fourth one, equally beautiful.

Dorri pulls another hijab from behind her back and presents it to Terri.

Terri smiles warmly, and a tear rolls down her face. Then another tear, and another.

DORRI

What is the matter, Terri?

TERRI

I saw many innocent young women
killed for little more than wearing
a hijab. And many children died at
their sides.

(beat)

Not sure we changed a single mind.

The students gather around Terri.

DORRI

No, but you did.

MATT

(confident)

Six anyway.

Officer Ray enters with a single red rose and hands it to
Terri.

OFFICER RAY

Make that seven.

Rhonda playfully confronts Terri.

RHONDA

Terri, you've quoted a hundred
brainiacs this past month. That's
what they think! But what do you
think? Care to enlighten us?

Terry hesitates, then answers the question nervously.

TERRI

Children must be taught how to
think, not what to think.

RHONDA

That was Margaret Mead.

TERRI

Okay then. I think we should train
more diplomats than soldiers. Use
teachers as our only weapons.

The students cheer.

TERRI (CONT'D)

I think teachers should be paid as
much as generals, not privates.

The students cheer.

TERRI (CONT'D)

I think we let our differences define us, rather than our similarities.

The students cheer.

Terri turns deadly serious.

TERRI (CONT'D)

I think if we share the tolerance and love you showed each other and me, the world will be a better place for future generations.

The students cheer, and Officer Ray claps wildly.

Principal Nordlin enters with Mrs. Beckman, who has a clipboard in one hand, a pen in the other, and a surprisingly genuine smile for the students and their art.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN

I saw your proposed grades, Ms. Robins. I need to inspect the art and confirm their progress for myself.

Terri points to the front of the room.

TERRI

Their artwork from earlier in the semester is in the front of the room. Their late-semester artwork is here in the back.

The front of the classroom has hideous art projects taped on the walls.

Principal Nordlin spends little time in the front and smirks and snickers in disgust.

Terri points to the banana and duct tape art on the door.

TERRI (CONT'D)

I'd like to remind Principal Nordlin that Maurizio Cattelan had a banana duct taped to the wall of an art gallery, which reportedly sold for \$120,000 in December 2019.

Principal Nordlin stares at the banana in disgust.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN

Art is in the eye of the beholder,
is that it, Ms. Robins?

TERRI

In the heart of the beholder. Come
see what my students have done in
the past month.

Principal Nordlin is drawn to Ernesto's cave painting first.
He squints to examine the red and rust hues.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN

Is that...?

Jake motions Principal Nordlin toward his Greek drawing.

MATT

Principal Nordlin, did you know the
red ochre found in the actual cave
paintings came from limonite found
more than a hundred miles from the
cave?

Mrs. Beckman is already staring at the sketch of the nude
athletes.

MATT (CONT'D)

And many Greek athletes in the
Olympics performed in the nude.

Principal Nordlin stares for too long at the drawing,
eliciting snickers from Ernesto and Emma.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN

Fascinating.

MRS. BECKMAN

Such detail! Excellent artwork, Mr.
Stone.

Mrs. Beckman tries to see Jake's backside, as Terri nudges
them to Dorri's hijabs.

DORRI

Each hijab, or head scarf, is hand-
woven from the finest silk.

TERRI

Each takes a week to make, and a
lifetime of honor and respect goes
into each one.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
They're beautiful!

Principal Nordlin and Mrs. Beckman both turn back to Jake's nude sketch, which Matt has picked up to look at the back.

MATT
Curious to see if they were
circumcised, that's all.

The students chuckle as Matt returns the art to the table.

Rhonda steps in front of Matt and points to his drawing (in colorful pastels) of the symbols of peace from many cultures and religions.

RHONDA
We learned a lot about the
integration and tolerance of
different cultures from Ms. Robins.
That's something we'll carry with
us for the rest of our lives, as
you can see from Matt's drawing of
the Star of David and other symbols
of peace from other cultures.

Mrs. Beckman and Principal Nordlin nod approvingly and move on the Emma's art, which is average at best, except for Emma's self-portrait.

EMMA
Mostly, we learned about ourselves
and who our friends are.

Emma sneaks a glance at Ernesto, who smiles.

Terri steps between the art table and the school administrators to guide them out of the classroom.

TERRI
As you can see, the students
learned a lot. There's no
comparison to their earlier works.
They all earned A's in my book!

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
I agree, Ms. Robins. Mrs. Beckman,
please see to it that the artwork
is proudly displayed in our hallway
for the last day of school.

MRS. BECKMAN
Yes, Principal Nordlin. I love them
all! So proud of the students!
(MORE)

MRS. BECKMAN (CONT'D)
And so proud of you, Ms. Robins!
The two other art teachers were
such jerkwads!

Principal Nordlin rolls his eyes in disgust at Mrs. Beckman,
as the students chuckle.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
Come along, Mrs. Beckman!

As they exit, the students gather around Terri to hug once
more.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL HALLWAY

SUPER: "Last day of school"

We see a "Teacher of the Month" award and photo of Terri, and
the student art projects proudly displayed in the hallways.

Principal Nordlin catches Terri before she exits.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
Excuse me, Teacher of the Month,
Ms. Robins.

TERRI
Yes, Principal Nordlin.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
It seems our regular art teacher
decided to take next year off with
her new child...

TERRI
(defensive)
I had nothing to do with that...

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
No, I know.
(hands her an envelope)
I wanted to offer you a one-year
extension on your contract...

Terri snatches the envelope and interrupts.

TERRI
I'll take it. At a higher salary,
of course.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
And medical.

TERRI
I can teach anything!

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
Literature?

TERRI
I love books. You know what Groucho Marx said, "Outside of a dog, a book is man's best friend. Inside of a dog, it's too dark to read."

Principal Nordlin stares at Terri curiously as they walk to the front door.

PRINCIPAL NORDLIN
Coming to the dance tonight? Next year's eighth-graders are even wilder!

TERRI
Wouldn't miss it! Hot date! I'm bringing my own security. And, you know what they say, "Change is the essence of life..."

She chuckles.

ROLL CREDITS

INT. GYM - NIGHT

We SEE the Graduation Dance (and cast party) with Terri dancing with Ray, Rhonda dancing with Jake, Matt wearing a yarmulke dancing with Dorri in a hijab, and Ernesto dancing with Emma. Principal Nordlin dances with Mrs. Beckman. The extras also dance.

FADE OUT.

THE END