

MUSIC OF THE HEART

Written by

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SHOOTING DRAFT
January 25, 1999

FADE IN:

CREDITS OVER PHOTOS IN AN ALBUM

The photos include a sepia-tone portrait of an Italian immigrant family... a b&w snapshot of ROBERTA, a nine-year-old girl playing violin in front of a refrigerator (1950)...

...Roberta and her dashing Italian father, hand-carving a wooden music stand... a b&w snapshot of Roberta in a communion dress... Roberta at 15, playing violin in front of the same refrigerator, eyes on the music stand...

...a color photo of two cute blonde little boys building a sandcastle on a beach... a color photo of a groom in a white naval uniform and his pretty bride, (Roberta at 25), her hand over his as they cut their wedding cake with a sword...

...a color photo of Roberta and her husband Greek dancing with another couple at an outdoor taverna. Roberta's husband and the other man's sexy wife are exchanging a slight smile...

HOLD ON THIS LAST PHOTO as we now see the ALBUM open on the floor of a bedroom, as if it's been tossed. We are:

INT. GUASPARI HOUSEHOLD, ROME, N. Y. - BEDROOM - DAY

(1988)

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Wake up, Roberta!

We hear the sound of KNOCKING as the CAMERA PANS a small, darkened guest room. A few streaks of daylight filter through Venetian blinds.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Come on, Bert -- get out of bed!

The CAMERA finds a WOMAN lying face down on a twin bed, thick wavy hair sprawled across her shoulders.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Please, Bert -- you need to get out of that bed.

The KNOCKING continues, and she puts the pillow over the top of her head.

END CREDITS

INT. GUASPARI BEDROOM - DAY

The WOMAN -- ROBERTA GUASPARI-DEMETRAS (38) -- retrieves the photo album from the floor, removes it. She's a beautiful woman with large, expressive eyes, but right now she looks like hell. She stares at the photo -- it's the two couples dancing. A quick glimpse of hurt on her face, then her jaw tightens and she rips the picture in half. There's muffled talking outside the door, and then two young boys' voices.

BOY'S VOICE (O.S.)

Can you come out now, Mommy? Please?

dresser,
into

She puts the half with her and her husband on the
then tears the woman off the other half and rips her
pieces.

BOY #2 (O.S.)

Mommy, Nick broke my crayon!

BOY #1 (O.S.)

Well, Lexi hit me and he almost
broke... he almost broke my ear!

As if
returns to
beyond

O.S. arguing "I DID NOT!" "YES YOU DID!" "LIAR!" etc.
that one action siphoned all her energy, Roberta
bed, gets into fetal position, and stares at a point
the wall, ignoring the O.S. voices.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Hear that? Your boys need you.

EXT. GUASPARI HOUSE - DOORWAY - DAY

Italian-
who
with
street.

ASSUNTA GUASPARI (58), Roberta's slender, tired
American mother, stands in the doorway of a well-tended
working-class home, addressing a young NAVAL OFFICER
holds a lengthy delivery inventory. It's a gray day
ominous storm clouds. Late 70's CARS are parked on the

ASSUNTA

But I have no room for this!

OFFICER

I'm sorry, M'am. We have orders to
deliver these.

Assunta looks beyond the man, dismayed.

HER POV

MOVERS
grabbing

Large wooden CRATES cover her front lawn, and TWO
plant down another. They hurry back to the TRUCK,

their
Several
whole

the next crate too quickly this time. It slips from
hands, CRASHES to the ground and splinters open.
VIOLIN CASES spill out. The crate looks like it holds a
lot more.

BACK TO SCENE

Roberta
than

Instantly a second-story window is flung open, and
sticks her head out, a hundred times more energized
we've seen her so far.

ROBERTA

Watch it, you idiots! Be careful
with those!

the

The men scramble to pick them up. Assunta looks at all
violins, then up at Roberta.

ASSUNTA

Why so many?

Roberta disappears inside and slams the window shut.

INT. GUASPARI LIVING ROOM - DAY

Greece,
middle
also
climb

The living room is filled with boxes shipped from
labelled by the U.S. NAVY. And on the floor, in the
of the boxes, are FIFTY VIOLIN CASES of various sizes,
with Greek and U.S. NAVY labels. NICK (7) and LEXI (5)
over the boxes as if they were giant blocks.

NICK

(calling)
Mommy, which box has our toys?

INT. GUASPARI HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

in

ROBERTA'S on the phone, yelling at someone. She's still
the same ratty nightgown.

ROBERTA

Look, I know he's there, so quit lying to me!... Then check under Lana Holden -- Mrs. Lana Holden... Fine. Just tell Lieutenant Demetras that his wife called and --

ASSUNTA grabs the phone from her hand and hangs it up.

ROBERTA

Ma!

ASSUNTA

No. I want you to listen to me. You can't keep doing this to yourself -- or to the boys. They need their mother now. You're a beautiful, talented woman and you have your whole life ahead of you.

ROBERTA

If I'm so beautiful and talented, why did Charles leave me?

ASSUNTA

Because Charles is a big jerk.
(beat)
Now get dressed.

She exits, leaving Roberta to mull over her words.

INT. GUASPARI KITCHEN - DAY

Coffee is brewing and homemade cinnamon rolls are cooling on a rack. We recognize the kitchen from the home movie footage. As Assunta clears the boys' breakfast dishes from the table, Roberta enters. She's dressed, but hasn't put on makeup or done much with her hair. It's a start.

ROBERTA

You really think Charles is a jerk?

ASSUNTA

From the day you married him.

ROBERTA

Why didn't you say something?

ASSUNTA

Since when do you listen to me?

sits
Roberta half-smiles, pours herself some coffee, then
down at the table.

ROBERTA

(sighs, then)
What am I gonna do?

ASSUNTA

First, you eat breakfast. Second,
you go out and get a job -- any job.
Your boys, god-bless-em, are good
eaters -- but I can't afford it.

ROBERTA

Mama, he's gonna get tired of her --
you'll see.

Assunta's face shows she's doubtful about this.

ASSUNTA

Well in the meantime, get a job.

INT. DEPARTMENT STORE - GIFT WRAP COUNTER - ROME, N.Y.

- DAY

present
unties
looks
and a
appears
Roberta is behind the counter, meticulously wrapping a
with ribbons, bows and stickers. At one point she even
a ribbon and redoes it because it's not perfect. She
pretty, but she's dressed conservatively, like a navy
housewife. There's only one other clerk wrapping gifts
long line of impatient customers. A male SUPERVISOR
behind Roberta.

SUPERVISOR

Just wrap. You're not Picasso.

He exits, and Roberta quickly tries to finish her task.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Picasso would probably put the bows
on the back of the box.

sexy
Roberta looks up to find BRIAN TURNER (40), a handsome,

guy with longish hair and a beat-up leather jacket.

ROBERTA

Brian Turner?

BRIAN

Hello, Roberta.

ROBERTA

I thought you moved away.

BRIAN

I did. I'm in town for my Mom's birthday.

gesture He holds out his hand. Roberta misunderstands the and tries to shake his hand.

BRIAN

No -- that's her gift.

ROBERTA

(embarrassed)

Oh! Sorry.

Roberta hands him the gift she's been wrapping.

BRIAN

It looks very pretty.

ROBERTA

Thank you.

(beat)

I heard you had a book published. I didn't read it but...

BRIAN

That's O.K. My parents didn't read it either. It looks good on their coffee table, though.

Roberta smiles.

BRIAN

So what are you doing here? I thought you'd be in Carnegie Hall by now.

HOLD ON ROBERTA as she takes this in.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - ROME, N.Y. - DAY

Roberta sits opposite Brian. Her lunch is untouched.

ROBERTA

My college professors said it was too late -- I hadn't had enough training to be a concert violinist. So I got a teaching degree instead.

BRIAN

I'll bet you're a great teacher.

ROBERTA

I think I am. It's just that...

(sighs)

See, every time I'd get started somewhere, Charles would be transferred... then I had my kids and took time off to raise them... and then when I decided to teach again, no one would hire me 'cause you can't count on a navy wife to stick around. I finally decided I'd start my own program -- Charles gave me the money and I bought fifty violins from this little Greek shop -- got started at a private school and then...

BRIAN

Your husband ran off with your best friend.

A beat.

ROBERTA

She wasn't my "best" friend. She was a friend.

(beat)

Charles is the last person you'd think would cheat on me -- he never broke a rule...

(a few beats)

I wake up one night -- it's like one in the morning -- and he's not in bed. I go outside and our neighbor -- this old Greek guy -- is sitting out there, smoking a cigar, so I ask if he's seen my husband. "He's taking a walk with the other officer's wife," he says. "He takes a walk every night with the other officer's wife."

of a

A beat as she gets lost in the memory. She takes a bite
french fry.

ROBERTA

God, these are cold.

BRIAN

So you're just gonna wrap presents
and wait for him to come back?

ROBERTA

You sound like my mother.

BRIAN

That's not very sexy.

ROBERTA

Are you trying to be sexy or be my
friend?

BRIAN

A little of both.

getting

Roberta smiles, blushing a bit. Brian looks at her,
an idea.

BRIAN

You know, I know this really cool
lady who runs this elementary school --
I wrote a piece on her. It's a public
school, but it's alternative -- she
might be able to create some kind of
gig for you. Let me give her a call.

ROBERTA

Great!

BRIAN

(takes his last bite
of sandwich)
If she hires you, though, you have
to be willing to relocate.

ROBERTA

Where is it?

EXT. SPANISH HARLEM, NEW YORK CITY - TRAVELLING SHOT -

DAY

names
walking
Latino
graffiti
stand.

A SALSA SONG PLAYS OVER as we see stores with Spanish
and signs; Black and Latino elementary school children
home from school; some burned-out buildings; Black and
teens playing basketball on a cement court; Spanish
on walls; elderly women buying fruit at a produce

back

PULL BACK TO REVEAL this is the POV of Roberta from the
seat of a cab. The SALSA SONG plays on the cab's radio.
Roberta looks scared shitless.

street,
brakes,

Suddenly, two YOUNG MEN flash down the middle of the
dart IN FRONT of the cab and the driver SLAMS on the
jerking Roberta forward.

TAXI DRIVER

Welcome to East Harlem.

**EXT. CENTRAL PARK EAST ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (CPE 1) - EAST
HARLEM - ESTABLISHING - DAY**

INT. JANET WILLIAMS' OFFICE - DAY

sits
on her
desk is
and
her.

JANET WILLIAMS, a Black woman (40's) with a kind face,
behind her desk and looks at Roberta's resume. A sign
desk indicates that she's the DIRECTOR. Also on the
a FRAMED PICTURE of Janet, her husband, daughter (14),
son (12). Roberta sits nervously in the chair opposite

JANET

(looking at resume)

Aside from half a term in a private
school -- in Greece -- and a year
teaching chorus in Hawaii -- ten
years ago -- it doesn't look like
you've had any other teaching
experience.

ROBERTA

Well, not traditional teaching

experience. I've been doing private lessons...

Janet looks for this on the resume.

ROBERTA

It's not on there... I taught my sons.

Janet smiles politely.

JANET

I'd like to help you, Mrs. Demetras. Brian spoke highly of you and I told him I'd consider starting a violin class... But without the proper qualifications, and without any experience in an inner city school...

Roberta nods, defeated.

JANET

I'm very sorry.

INT. CPE 1 - HALLWAY - DAY

watching

Roberta stands outside Janet's office, dejectedly the children noisily running through the hall.

INT. AREA OUTSIDE JANET WILLIAMS' OFFICE - THE NEXT DAY

Roberta knocks on Janet's door.

JANET (O.S.)

Yes?

are

As Roberta opens the door, we see that Nick and Lexi with her. All three have violins. INSIDE, Janet's in conversation with DENNIS RAUSCH (38), an uptight man tie that doesn't match his suit jacket. He's showing large scheduling chart.

with a

Janet a

ROBERTA

I'm sorry to interrupt, but I wanted you to meet my sons -- Nick, Lexi...

They enter.

INT. JANET'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

a Janet smiles at the boys, but clearly thinks Roberta's little off. Roberta holds her hand out to Dennis.

ROBERTA

Roberta Guaspari-Demetras.

Dennis shakes her hand, regarding her warily.

JANET

This is Dennis Rausch, our music teacher and program coordinator.

(beat)

Mrs. Demetras, didn't I make things clear yesterday?

ROBERTA

If I could just show you something -- it'll only take a minute.

take
Dennis Before Janet can answer, Roberta and the kids quickly out their violins and get into position. Janet and exchange a look.

DENNIS

Are we having a talent show? I should have brought my tap shoes.

three of
playing an
Janet's
over. Roberta ignores the jab, then nods to the boys. The them begin an incredibly impressive violin trio, ETUDE in three-part harmony. For the first measures, still annoyed by the intrusion, but she's quickly won over. Dennis watches impassively.

and
beat. Roberta and the boys finish their piece; Janet applauds Dennis joins in to be polite. The three take bows. A

LEXI

Will you hire her now?

Janet laughs, then gestures for them to sit.

JANET

How long have you boys been playing?

NICK

Since I was three.

LEXI

(contemplates, then)

Maybe since I was three and a half.

JANET

Your mom must be a good teacher.

NICK

(shrugs)

She's O.K.

Roberta gives Nick a look, but Janet smiles.

JANET

(to Roberta)

If you could teach our students to play like that, I'd be thrilled, but --

ROBERTA

I can. Any child can learn the violin.

DENNIS

Assuming they had the discipline.

ROBERTA

I'll teach them to have discipline.

JANET

A lot of our parents are struggling to feed their kids and pay the rent -- they don't have time to help them learn violin.

ROBERTA

They don't have to. If they can help, great -- but these kids will be committed. They'll practice on their own, they'll help each other in the classroom --

Dennis laughs. Roberta looks at him, a bit miffed.

DENNIS

(with an edge)

I think I know these students, Miss Demetras. Their attention span doesn't

go past do-re-mi. Maybe on a good day, I can get them to "fa."

ROBERTA

You're underestimating them. They can play as well as any other kids.

DENNIS

That I'd like to see.

ROBERTA

You will.

A beat. Janet observes the tension, then turns to Roberta.

JANET

(to Roberta)

For now I'll put you down as a sub, but I have to warn you -- even if it works out, the Board may not let me create a permanent position for you.

ROBERTA

That's O.K. I'll worry about that later.

(with a grateful look)

Thank you.

We see relief -- and fear -- in Roberta's face.

DENNIS

(to Janet)

Well, I've already planned out the whole term, and I can tell you right now, there's no room for this! Besides, where you gonna find money for violins?

ROBERTA

You need violins?

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

In a noisy music room with bad acoustics, Roberta tries to take control of fifty kids, third through fifth-graders, who are in a state of manic excitement over the FIFTY VIOLIN CASES on the floor.

ROBERTA

(gently)

Please do not open the cases, O.K.?

They ignore her.

ROBERTA

Look, can everyone just settle down
and listen to me -- please?

ANGLE - Three girls open their cases.

ROBERTA

(starting to lose it)

Keep them closed! Please.

ANGLE - Two boys open their cases.

ROBERTA

(to the boys)

Did you hear what I just said?

pretend
ANGLE - Three kids are using the violin cases as
machine guns -- and shooting each other.

ROBERTA

Put those down, please!

with
ANGLE - A boy and a girl are having a "sword fight"
their bows.

ROBERTA

(to the fencers)

Don't do that! Put the bows back in
the cases -- right now!

There's the SOUND of violin strings being plucked.

ROBERTA

Who's plucking?

violin
skinny
Roberta wheels around to find a girl plucking her
like a banjo, and doing a little dance. This is LUCY, a
Puerto Rican girl in perpetual motion.

ROBERTA

What have I been saying? Put that
away! Back in the case!

Roberta takes a breath. The kids settle down a bit.

ROBERTA

O.K. Thank you. That's much better.
(takes another breath)
I'll be dividing you into five
classes, but for today --

ANGLE - A boy plays "bongos" on his violin case.

ROBERTA

O.K. -- that's it! You! Stand up!

The bongo player stands.

ROBERTA

You will be the first student who
will NOT be in my violin class. Out!

The child looks stunned.

ROBERTA

I said OUT!

finally
She
With a sheepish expression, he exits. The room is
quiet -- and Roberta's amazed that something worked.
puffs up a little bit, enjoying the feeling of control.

ROBERTA

Who else would like to be kicked out
of my class?

a
The students stare at her, afraid of her now. DE SEAN,
small but tough Black boy, raises his hand.

ROBERTA

Are you raising your hand because
you want to be kicked out?

DE SEAN

Yeah.

ROBERTA

Why?

DE SEAN

I don't wanna learn no stupid violin.
It's for wimps.

ROBERTA

Who told you that?

DE SEAN

I just know.

ROBERTA

What's your name?

BOY

De Sean.

ROBERTA

Well, De Sean -- you haven't given me a good enough reason, so you're staying.

She looks around the room.

ROBERTA

Anyone else?

Silence.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - LATER

Black
scar
fingerboard,
smiles.

In front of the class, Roberta helps NAEEM, a graceful boy, hold the violin. He has a serious expression and a scar on his left cheek. Roberta controls the bow and fingerboard, but it appears that the boy is playing music. He smiles.

NAEEM

Hey, I play pretty good.

Roberta laughs.

ROBERTA

(to Naeem)

See how easy it is?

(to the class)

Maybe in the spring, we could have a big concert for your families and for the whole school.

(to the boy)

What's your name?

NAEEM

Naeem.

measuring
Roberta writes in a notebook and we see that she's
for violin sizes.

ROBERTA

(to class)

If you listen to me and do exactly
what I say, you're gonna sound
beautiful at the concert and you're
gonna be so proud of yourselves.

(to Naeem)

Good, Naeem. Your hand's staying
soft.

(to the class)

But if you don't listen to me, you'll
sound so bad that your own parents
will feel sick when they hear you.
They might even throw up.

ON THE KIDS, not used to a teacher speaking like that.

INT. BRIAN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

are
floor,
carrying
A funky apartment on the Upper West Side. Nick and Lexi
both asleep in sleeping bags on top of a futon on the
their suitcases nearby. Brian tiptoes past them,
two glasses of champagne. He knocks on his office door.

ROBERTA (O.S.)

Come in.

INT. BRIAN'S APARTMENT - OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

her
old
books
his
BRIAN
pertaining
Roberta's in a bathrobe and nightgown, some rollers in
hair. She's tidying up her suitcase, etc., next to an
couch that's been made up as a bed. Leftist political
line a shelf above Brian's desk, including copies of
own, TO HELL AND BACK: INTERVIEWS WITH VIETNAM VETS by
TURNER. His desk is covered with files and books
to MIGRANT WORKERS. Brian enters.

ROBERTA

(referring to champagne)
What's this?

BRIAN

It's a toast.
(giving her a glass,
holding his up)
To Roberta, who's made it through
her first week.

They clink glasses and drink.

ROBERTA

I don't know, Brian. I'm hanging on
by a thread there. Out of fifty kids,
maybe six are listening to me.

BRIAN

Look at the progress. Didn't you say
no one was listening to you on Monday?

Roberta laughs.

ROBERTA

I really appreciate all you've done
for us. And I promise -- this weekend
I'll start looking for a place.

BRIAN

There's no rush.

ROBERTA

No, we've put you out enough. You're
supposed to be writing, not
babysitting for us.

(crosses to his desk,
flips through his
Vietnam book)

I've started your book. It's very
powerful.

BRIAN

Thank you.

Brian comes up behind her and starts to kiss her neck.
Roberta's scared -- so she keeps talking, as if it's

not

really happening.

ROBERTA

So what made you choose migrant

workers for your next book? I mean,
how do you know what to write about?

BRIAN

(kissing her neck)
I follow my gut, pay attention to
what I'm being drawn to...

around and
Roberta's aroused, in spite of herself. She turns
faces him.

ROBERTA

What are you doing?

BRIAN

I've been waiting to do that since
Mr. Baines' orchestra class.

ROBERTA

You didn't even notice me!

BRIAN

Sure I did. You used to ignore me
and it drove me wild.

ROBERTA

You had at least five different
girlfriends.

BRIAN

It didn't mean I had the one I wanted.

her
He gives her a flirtatious smile, then takes out one of
rollers.

BRIAN

You're not a navy wife anymore...

him.
He moves to takes out another roller and Roberta stops

ROBERTA

Yes I am... legally.

BRIAN

And is it a navy requirement that
you dress like it's the 1950's?

ROBERTA

I do not!

BRIAN

(goads her)
Who did you vote for in the last
election?

ROBERTA

What does that have to do with
anything?

BRIAN

Tell me.

ROBERTA

(hesitates, then)
I don't know. Charles filled out my
absentee ballot.

BRIAN

Oh my God -- it's even worse than I
thought!
(touching her hair)
Is this the same Roberta who got the
orchestra to strike until they gave
us new uniforms?

She laughs wistfully, then looks a little sad.

ROBERTA

That Roberta's not around anymore.

He pulls her towards him by the belt to her robe.

BRIAN

I don't believe that.

They kiss and it heats up quickly. Roberta pulls back.

ROBERTA

I shouldn't.

BRIAN

Because?

ROBERTA

The boys --

BRIAN

They're sleeping.

ROBERTA

I know, but... I'm still married.

BRIAN

And what's your husband doing right now?

A few beats, and she moves towards him.

INT. BRIAN'S BEDROOM - DAY

bed,
where

Sun streams into the room as Roberta awakens in Brian's a look of afterglow on her face. She suddenly remembers she is, and quickly looks at the clock.

ROBERTA

Oh shit -- the boys.

BRIAN (O.S.)

They're still sleeping.

packing a

She turns, relieved, until she sees that Brian's suitcase.

ROBERTA

Where are you going?

BRIAN

Texas.

He dashes out. Roberta sits up, rattled by this news.

INT. BRIAN'S OFFICE - DAY

around

Brian excitedly gathers papers and files scattered his electric typewriter.

ROBERTA (O.S.)

What's in Texas?

He turns to see Roberta in the doorway.

BRIAN

Farm workers. I just got the call -- it came through -- my research grant! It came through! Isn't that great?

ROBERTA

Today?

clip.

He places items into a carry-on bag, packing at a rapid
In contrast, Roberta seems to be moving in slow motion.

BRIAN

I've got a few families lined up
there, some in California --

ROBERTA

How long will you be gone?

BRIAN

Two, three months.

ROBERTA

What?

INT. BRIAN'S BATHROOM - DAY

Brian throws toiletries into a plastic bag. Roberta
enters.

ROBERTA

I thought... I just thought you were
gonna be around. And then last night --

He stops what he's doing and looks at her.

BRIAN

Whoa. Roberta -- last night was great
but did you think I was gonna marry
you in the morning?

ROBERTA

No! Of course not.

We see in her face that part of her did think that.

ROBERTA

It's just that... we just got here
and we're barely... I don't even
know where to buy groceries.

Brian softens as he sees how vulnerable she is. He
takes her
in his arms.

BRIAN

You're gonna be fine. You have a
job, a place to stay, your kids have
a school to go to -- and there's a
D'Agostino's around the corner.

She attempts a smile.

ROBERTA

Congratulations.

looking He kisses her forehead, then exits. HOLD ON ROBERTA,
hurt and frightened.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

-
to
a
Mexican
violin
follow
Roberta rosins her bow, standing in front of ten kids -
third through fifth-grade -- who sit on the floor next
their violin cases. The kids are Black and Latino, with
couple of white faces. They're all talking and ignoring
Roberta except for NAEEM and GUADALUPE, a petite
girl with a long dark braid. [NOTE: We'll see other
students from time to time, but this is the class we'll
for Roberta's first year]

ROBERTA

And what am I doing now?

NAEEM/GUADALUPE

Rosining the bow.

ROBERTA

Good. And what am I doing when I
turn this little screw?

(raising her voice)

Everyone stop talking. Right now!

The kids quiet down. Only Naeem raises his hand.

ROBERTA

Naeem?

NAEEM

Tightening the horse hair.

ROBERTA

(touches the heel of
the bow)

And what do we call this?

turns

Again, only Naeem raises his hand. Roberta sees him but to DE SEAN, who's talking to his neighbor.

ROBERTA

De Sean?

DE SEAN

Yeah?

ROBERTA

What do we call this?

DE SEAN

I don't know.

ROBERTA

Why not?

DE SEAN

I wasn't here.

ROBERTA

Yes you were but you weren't paying attention! Do you want people to think you're stupid?

This makes De Sean blush -- and it pisses him off.

ROBERTA

All right, Naeem -- tell them.

NAEEM

It's called the frog.

the

Some kids giggle and joke about this. Roberta points to scroll of the violin.

ROBERTA

Anyone remember what this is?

LUCY, the fidgety girl, snaps her fingers.

ROBERTA

Lucy! Do you like people snapping their fingers when you're talking?

LUCY

Yeah!

scroll. The kids laugh. Roberta doesn't. She points to the

ROBERTA

What is this called?

LUCY

The jeri curl?

Roberta laughs, even though she's trying to be tough.

INT. DENNIS' MUSIC CLASSROOM - DAY

attached
METRONOME
a red
that

Dennis's twenty students play recorder in rows of theatre-style seats. Dennis sits at his desk, a ticking, and apathetically leads them in scales, using pen as a baton. He keeps one eye on a stack of quizzes he's marking, stopping to circle mistakes with the pen.

DENNIS

C-C-C-C, D-D-D-D, E-E-E-E...

ANGLE - Roberta stands in the hallway at the open door, dismayed by Dennis' uninspired teaching. She enters and crosses to Dennis, speaking quietly to him.

ROBERTA

Excuse me -- sorry to interrupt --

The students immediately start to chatter.

DENNIS

No talking!

He looks back at Roberta, annoyed by her intrusion.

ROBERTA

I'm supposed to take kids out of Miss Cooper's classroom for my ten o'clock class -- there's nobody there.

DENNIS

Miss Cooper's students have phys ed on Tuesdays.

ROBERTA

But you scheduled them for violin.

DENNIS

You must have read the schedule wrong.

ROBERTA

(trying to remain
polite)

I don't think so.

DENNIS

Well, I can't solve this problem for
you right now.

(nods to his class)

I'm trying to teach.

ROBERTA

So am I.

She exits.

INT. BRIAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lexi;

Lexi and Nick are in Brian's bed. Roberta's tucking in
he holds a toy truck with Greek writing on it.

LEXI

Can I bring a puppy for show and
tell tomorrow?

ROBERTA

Honey, we don't have a puppy.

NICK

Daddy said we could get one when we
moved back to America.

Roberta looks at Nick, then turns back to Lexi.

ROBERTA

How about your truck? I'll bet you're
the only one in school with a truck
from Greece.

NICK

When's Daddy coming back?

Roberta turns to Nick and tucks him in.

ROBERTA

Well, he's still on his tour, so
we'll just have to see but... It
shouldn't be too much longer.

LEXI

Is he gonna live with us and Brian?

ROBERTA

No, honey. We're just staying at
Brian's house for a little while.

She turns back to Nick who looks worried. She kisses
him.

ROBERTA

Good night, sweetie.

She kisses Lexi, then reaches to turn off the lamp.

NICK

No! Leave it on.

Roberta nods, smiles at her sons, and exits.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

Nine children stand, violins under their right arms,
bows
position
hanging down from their right hands, and try to
their feet as Roberta addresses them.

ROBERTA

Now take the right foot and put it
on a tile. Good. Now with the other
foot take a tiny step forward and
put it on a line. Try to make a box
with your feet --

She walks over to BENJAMIN, a white boy with glasses,
and
corrects his feet. She sees Lucy dancing in place.

ROBERTA

Lucy! Would you like to leave the
class right now?

Lucy nods, giggling. Roberta walks down the row of
students.

ROBERTA

You should feel very strong -- so
strong and balanced that if I wanted
to knock you over I couldn't.

her She crosses to TANISHA, a sweet-natured Black girl with hair in tiny braids, and gently pushes her belly.

ROBERTA

You see? If you're standing strong,
I can't even push you.

pudgy Roberta turns to De Sean, who's talking to JAMES, a Black/Puerto Rican boy.

ROBERTA

De Sean! James! Quiet!
(as she crosses to
another student)
Does anyone know where Naeem is?

TANISHA

I saw him this morning but he's not
here.

ROBERTA

Yes, I know he's not here -- that's
why I'm asking.

back. She gently pushes Guadalupe's belly. The girl stumbles

ROBERTA

See how I pushed you? It means your
feet aren't centered.

to Guadalupe tries to correct her feet. Roberta bends down
under help and sees that the little girl wears LEG BRACES
boys. her pants. Roberta stands and gestures to one of the

ROBERTA

Can you bring over a chair?
(to Guadalupe)
It's probably better for you to sit.

The boy brings the chair. Guadalupe sits, embarrassed.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

and Roberta walks through a school yard filled with kids

him.

parents picking them up. She sees Naeem and crosses to

ROBERTA

Where were you today, Naeem?

NAEEM

I can't be in violin class anymore.

ROBERTA

Why not?

NAEEM

My mother won't let me.

ROBERTA

What?

NAEEM'S MOTHER, MRS. ADISA, steps INTO FRAME. She's an attractive Black woman in a dress and head scarf made

of

African fabric.

MRS. ADISA

My son's got more important things to do than learn dead white men's music.

ROBERTA

They're gonna learn "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star"!

MRS. ADISA

How many Black classical composers can you name? How many Black classical violinists do you know?

ROBERTA

That doesn't mean it's the way it should be. Naeem's learning to play music -- and that makes him feel good about himself. Why should it matter who wrote it?

NAEEM

Please, Mom? Can't I be in the class?

Mrs. Adisa puts a protective arm around her son, then addresses Roberta.

MRS. ADISA

Look. I've seen this before. You

white women come up here and think
you can rescue our poor inner city
children who never asked to be rescued
in the first place. No thank you.

then She walks off with Naeem. He glances back at Roberta,
turns away quickly. Roberta watches after them.

INT. BRIAN'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Back: Roberta attempts to read Brian's book, To Hell and
the Interviews with Vietnam Vets, but she's distracted. She
glances at her purse, then back to the book. She puts
book down and dials the phone.

ROBERTA

Brian Turner's room, please.

book While she waits, she looks at Brian's picture on the
to jacket. There's no answer and she hangs up. She starts
takes straighten the already clean room, then gets her purse,
pictures. out her wallet, and opens it to the plastic covered

INSERT - PICTURES

were Charles in uniform; a studio shot of the boys when they
home 3 and 1; the whole family posed on the terrace of their
in Greece, a view of the ocean behind them.

BACK TO ROBERTA

She's really depressed herself now.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

shows her ALICE CROWLEY (50's), a no-nonsense Black teacher,
enters fifth-graders a globe. She doesn't turn as Roberta
STUDENTS and crosses to her. In the b.g. we see ROBERTA'S
waiting in THE HALL.

ALICE

And which ocean is this?

Kids simultaneously yell out "ATLANTIC" and "PACIFIC."

ROBERTA

Excuse me... I'm here for the violin students.

ALICE

(icy)
You're late.

ROBERTA

Just a couple of minutes -- I'm sorry.

ALICE

They're having a lesson now.

ROBERTA

But this is when they have violin class!

ALICE

That's not my problem.

Roberta's reluctant to argue in front of the kids; she exits.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

Lots of noise and chaos as kids run wild during lunch recess.
Janet rushes through the throngs while Roberta tries to keep up.

ROBERTA

I thought all the teachers agreed to this.

JANET

In theory.
(to a student)
Adam! I want you in my office right after lunch, you understand?

ADAM

What'd I do?

JANET

Think about it!

(to Roberta)
Whenever you pull kids out, it's a disruption, plus it's extra work for the teacher 'cause they have to fill the kids in on what they missed. Some teachers resent it.

ROBERTA

Well, can't you talk to them?

Janet stops walking and pulls a box cutter out of her pocket.

JANET

I took this off a second-grader this morning. I'll help you Roberta -- but I can't hold your hand here.

Janet starts to walk away, then turns.

JANET

A word of advice? When you're picking up your students, go to Alice's classroom first.

Roberta stands there as Janet walks on ahead.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

Roberta
The nine children hold their violins in position as addresses them.

ROBERTA

So pretend you're driving a car and I'm the policeman and I say STOP! Thumb up, fingers straight up, flat palm. Now you be policemen, but turn your hand and make it say stop to yourself.

helps.
ON THE CHILDREN, attempting this. She walks around and

DE SEAN

(to himself)
You're under arrest.

Some kids crack up and start joking and chatting.

ROBERTA

Knock it off, De Sean!

(to all)

If you kids can't take this seriously, I don't want you here. I'm teaching you a difficult instrument because I respect you and have faith that you can learn it. But none of that matters if you don't have respect for yourself.

couple,
Some of the children think about what she's saying. A
uncomfortable with the intensity, hold back giggles.

ROBERTA

Now turn your wrist so it's flat against the fingerboard, and that's how you'll set up your hand...

Roberta sees Guadalupe struggling.

ROBERTA

Guadalupe! You've got the violin in the wrong hand! How did that happen?

Embarrassed, Guadalupe corrects her position.

INT. BRIAN'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

puts
she
the
At the small kitchen table, Nick does homework and Lexi
stickers in a sticker book. Roberta's cooking dinner;
grabs a potholder and checks on a bubbling lasagna in
oven. The PHONE RINGS and she answers it.

ROBERTA

Hello?

CHARLES (O.S.)

Hello, Bobbi.

the
Her face falls as she hears the voice. She holds onto
counter to steady herself.

ROBERTA

Where are you?

CHARLES (O.S.)

(calm, detached)
I'm back in the States. I'm at my

parents.

Roberta closes the oven and gathers her courage.

ROBERTA

Are you still with her?

A beat.

CHARLES (O.S.)

No.

We watch Roberta's body collapse into a sense of
overwhelming relief. FOLLOW HER as she steps into THE HALLWAY, then stretches the phone into:

INT. BRIAN'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

She half-closes the door, leans against the sink and
starts to cry.

ROBERTA

(through tears)

We've missed you so much, Charles.
The boys... they can't wait for you
to come home... I know we'll have a
lot to work out and it won't be easy
right away, but we're gonna get
through this, you know? We're a family
and we belong together and --

CHARLES (O.S.)

(more emotive than
before)

Bobbi -- stop, O.K.? Just stop.

Roberta looks as if she's been slapped. A beat.

CHARLES (O.S.)

I want a divorce.

ROBERTA

What?

Silence.

ROBERTA

But you said... you and Lana... you
said it was over.

CHARLES (O.S.)

It is.

(beat)

It's over between us too, Bobbi.

her

HOLD ON ROBERTA, devastated. ANGLE on NICK, watching through the door.

INT. BRIAN'S HOTEL ROOM, TEXAS - NIGHT

and

Brian's on the phone with Roberta. He's in a t-shirt sweats, and his papers are scattered on the bed.

ROBERTA (O.S.)

He wouldn't even talk about it! No explanations, no discussion...

INTERCUT

agitated and

Roberta in Brian's living room. She's extremely her eyes are puffy from crying.

BRIAN

I can't believe you were still holding out hope. The guy hasn't called you or the kids in three months -- I thought you'd moved on.

ROBERTA

I never said that.

BRIAN

No? Maybe not with words.

This embarrasses her, then pisses her off.

ROBERTA

You know what? I shouldn't have called you. This was a mistake.

BRIAN

No, no -- I'm sorry. Look, I know it hurts, but you're gonna get through this, Roberta -- you will.

ROBERTA

I'm moving back to my Mom's.

BRIAN

What? You're gonna quit teaching in the middle of the term?

ROBERTA

I don't fit in there -- I'm not making any progress with the kids...

BRIAN

What are you gonna tell Janet -- your husband left you and nothing else matters?

ROBERTA

I don't know yet.

INT. BRIAN'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Roberta lies awake on the futon, heartbroken.

INT. BRIAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

lies Roberta stands and watches Nick and Lexi sleep. She down beside them and closes her eyes.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

who's in Roberta walks through crowds of kids towards Janet the middle of confronting a boy student. Janet holds a FIFTY-DOLLAR BILL. Roberta hangs back and waits for a chance to speak.

BOY

My mother gave it to me.

JANET

Why would she give you fifty dollars?

BOY

To buy breakfast.

Janet gives him a stern look.

JANET

Do you know how hard your mother works? Do you think it's right for you steal from her?

BOY

I didn't!

JANET

Well let's go call her right now and ask her.

As Janet turns to walk off, Roberta crosses to her.

ROBERTA

I need to speak to you. It's important.

JANET

It'll have to wait.
(to the boy)
Come on. In my office.

Roberta watches as Janet dashes off with the boy in tow.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

Guadalupe sits on a chair in the empty room, struggling to set up her violin. Roberta enters, surprised to see her.

ROBERTA

Guadalupe? What are you doing here?

GUADALUPE

I can't get the stop sign.

ROBERTA

Honey, your teacher's probably looking for you.

Guadalupe sighs, then hands Roberta the violin.

GUADALUPE

I can't come anymore. It's too hard.

ROBERTA

The violin is hard for everyone.

GUADALUPE

But everyone else is better than me.
I'll always be slow.

Roberta looks at her sadly and puts the violin in its case.

ROBERTA

Did you ever hear of Itzhak Perlman?

GUADALUPE

No.

ROBERTA

He's one of the greatest violinists in the world, and he has problems with his legs too. He walks with two canes -- but he still makes the most beautiful music.

GUADALUPE

And he sits down when he plays?

ROBERTA

He has to.

Guadalupe takes this in.

GUADALUPE

He was your student?

Roberta laughs.

ROBERTA

No. But if he was, I'd tell him the same thing I'm telling you. You shouldn't quit something just because it's hard.

GUADALUPE

But I can't stand strong.

ROBERTA

Standing strong doesn't only mean using your legs. You can stand strong on the inside too.

(beat)

Know what I mean?

Guadalupe
and
violin
happened.

Guadalupe nods. Roberta holds out the violin case.
lunges forward and hugs her around the waist. Roberta awkwardly accepts the hug, startled and touched by it,
strokes the girl's hair. Guadalupe lets go, takes the
and exits. HOLD ON ROBERTA as she absorbs what just
JANET pokes her head into the room.

JANET

You wanted to speak to me?

ROBERTA

Oh. Umm -- that's O.K. It's taken care of.

Janet looks at her curiously, then exits.

INT. EMPTY APARTMENT - EAST HARLEM - DAY

cigarette
older
place.

Roberta walks around an empty, rundown apartment, her expression somber. Crayon markings on the walls, burns on the floors, a filthy bathroom and kitchen. An Puerto Rican woman stands back as Roberta inspects the place. Roberta wipes grease off one of the windows.

LANDLADY

Is just for you and your boys?

ROBERTA

Yes.

LANDLADY

No husband? No boyfriend?

A beat.

ROBERTA

No.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - LUNCH RECESS - DAY

filled
to
artwork.

Roberta enters the yard from inside the school. It's with kids playing, including Nick and Lexi. She waves them and Lexi runs up to her, carrying a piece of artwork.

LEXI

Look what I made you, Mommy!

DADDY.

He gives her a tempera PAINTING of a man's face, the background decorated with glued-on macaroni. It says

ROBERTA

(covering her
discomfort)
That is so beautiful!

bench and
another
(25)
New

He runs off. Roberta exhales, sits down alone on a
takes out her lunch. She smiles at ALICE CROWLEY and
TEACHER but they cross to another bench. ISABEL VASQUEZ
approaches, a lively Puerto Rican woman with a strong
York accent.

ISABEL

Whatsa matter -- you got cooties?

ROBERTA

Apparently.

ISABEL

I'll take my chances.
(extends a hand)
Isabel Vasquez. Second grade.

ROBERTA

Roberta Demetras. I'm the --

ISABEL

Violin teacher. I know.

She sits down beside Roberta, takes out her lunch.

ROBERTA

Is it my imagination, or does everyone
hate me?

ISABEL

It's hard to fit in when you're doing
a special program. People figure
you're not gonna be here very long,
so why make the effort?

(beat)

It may take a while for folks to
warm up, but nobody hates you.

ROBERTA

(sotto)

What about Alice Crowley?

ISABEL

(sotto)

A) she thinks the violin's a waste of time... and B) -- she's a bitch.

Roberta laughs.

ROBERTA

And then there's Dennis.

ISABEL

The Music Man. You've had the bodacity to threaten his private little empire -- not to mention the fact that you messed up his sacred scheduling chart.

ROBERTA

How come you're being nice to me?

ISABEL

Ulterior motives. I want my daughter in your class next year.

Roberta smiles.

ROBERTA

If I'm here next year.

ISABEL

You will be.

INT. ROBERTA'S NEW APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

drawing
LEXI'S PAINTING is on the wall, along with a crayon
of himself, Roberta, and Nick in front of a house.

used
ANGLE - ROBERTA looks out the window. She's gotten some
furniture, cleaned the place, and it's less depressing.

ROBERTA'S POV OUT THE WINDOW

corner.
parked
the
door.
On the street below, three prostitutes stand at the
Two men sit on a stoop, smoking a joint, and in a
car, three men seem to be making a drug deal. One of
buildings on the street is burned out, missing a front

BACK TO SCENE

She

Nick, in his pajamas, enters and crosses to his mother.
smiles at him and they both look out the window.

NICK

In Greece, we could see the ocean.
Remember?

ROBERTA

I remember. And the fishing boats...

NICK

And the octopuses.

Roberta smiles and puts her arm around him.

NICK

Is Daddy coming here soon?

Roberta tenses up.

ROBERTA

Well, that's something I've been
wanting to talk to you about. Daddy's
not gonna live with us anymore. You
and Lexi will have special times
when you stay with him, like at
Christmas.

A beat.

NICK

Can you tell the birthday story?

Roberta looks at him, concerned that he's not
responding to her news.

ROBERTA

Don't you want to talk about what I
told you?

NICK

I want to hear the birthday story.

A beat as she contemplates whether to push or not,
then:

ROBERTA

It was the day of Grandpa's birthday,
and I was sad because he had died a
few months back.

NICK

But you knew I'd be born that day.

ROBERTA

So I packed a bag and got all ready --

NICK

And Daddy laughed.

ROBERTA

I said, "It's my father's birthday,
and the baby's gonna be born today."

NICK

He didn't believe you. But I was
born. The same day as Grandpa.

ROBERTA

It was a happy day.

NICK

Was Daddy happy too?

She looks at him, taken aback by the question.

ROBERTA

Of course he was.

NICK

Then why is he leaving me?

Roberta, overcome with emotion, can barely answer.

ROBERTA

He's not leaving you, Nick. He loves
you and Lexi very much.

NICK

Then why can't he live here?

ROBERTA

(struggling)

It's very hard to explain... Sometimes
things happen between grown-ups...
and they just can't be together.

out
The CAMERA moves behind them as they continue to look
the window, and we see Nick move away from his mother.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

sound

The kids play "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" and they awful. Roberta looks disgusted as she leads them.

ROBERTA

Slow bows! Slow bows! Don't squeeze!
Stop! Everybody stop!
(to De Sean)
How much did you practice this week?

DE SEAN

My asthma -- it was very bad and I had to go to the hospital.

ROBERTA

Again? You told me you went to the hospital last week.

DE SEAN

Oh yeah. Maybe it was last week.

Roberta rolls her eyes, then turns to Lucy.

ROBERTA

Lucy -- you sounded the worst of all. Have you practiced?

LUCY

No.

ROBERTA

Why not? You can't be in this class if you don't practice!

LUCY

My grandma got mugged.

A beat.

ROBERTA

Oh. I'm sorry. Is she O.K.?

LUCY

She died.

Roberta stands there, sobered.

ROBERTA

I'm really sorry, Lucy.
(tries to get her bearings)

Just do the best you can.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

chat.
waves
with
them.

A group of kids stand together with their violins and Roberta exits the building and they greet her. She back, but she's clearly still upset by her interaction Lucy. She sees Naeem and his mother and approaches

NAEEM

Hi, Roberta.

ROBERTA

Hi, Naeem. Can I talk to your mom for a minute?

Naeem nods and moves off.

ROBERTA

Look, I didn't come up here to rescue anybody. I'm a single mother and I needed a job. And I know you think you're protecting your son, but you're not. I mean, what if Arthur Ashe's mother had stopped him from playing tennis because it's a "white man's game"?

(beat)

The important thing is that when Naeem plays music, his whole face lights up. You should see him.

looks
longing

Mrs. Adisa takes this in. Roberta exits. Mrs. Adisa for Naeem and sees him watching the violin students, to be among them. She watches her son with compassion.

EXT. OUTDOOR MARKET - DAY

market

Roberta and the boys shop in a colorful outdoor produce in their neighborhood.

ground
pet

The boys suddenly rush over to A MAN sitting on the with mixed-breed PUPPIES in a cardboard box. The boys

happier

them excitedly. Roberta watches her sons; they're than she's seen them in ages.

INT. ROBERTA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

laugh

A brown puppy is jumping all over Nick and Lexi who delightedly. Roberta is putting down newspapers.

ROBERTA

We all have to take turns cleaning up, O.K.?

The boys are oblivious to her -- they're in heaven.

ROBERTA

(to herself)
Yeah, right.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

Twinkle

Roberta's SCREAMING at the kids as they play "Twinkle Little Star."

ROBERTA

First finger on the E! Three -- two -- one -- open!

(to a white girl with pigtails)

Wrong string, Becky! We've done this fourteen times! And look at your nails! You're supposed to cut them for violin class! O.K, everybody stop! It sounds horrible! I can't believe how bad it sounds!

They stop playing. Tanisha raises her hand.

ROBERTA

Is this an important question, Tanisha?

Tanisha nods.

TANISHA

Do you have two of those skirts?

ROBERTA

What?

TANISHA

You wore a skirt just like it on Monday.

Some of the kids crack up.

ROBERTA

You know, Tanisha -- I don't think that's such an important question.
(to class)
O.K. Let's try --

Roberta

The door opens and Naeem enters with Mrs. Adisa.
crosses to them.

MRS. ADISA

Naeem and I were wondering if he could still be in the class.

A beat.

ROBERTA

I'd love that.
(to Naeem)
You'll have a lot of catching up to do. You think you can work that hard?

NAEEM

Yeah, I can.

ROBERTA

Maybe we can also arrange some private lessons at my house.

MRS. ADISA

I wouldn't have the money for that.

ROBERTA

That's O.K.
(to Naeem)
Why don't you go grab one of my spare violins?

the
gratitude,
room.

Naeem happily runs to the extra violins at the front of
room; Mrs. Adisa nods to Roberta with a look of
then exits. Roberta crosses back to the front of the

ROBERTA

(to class)
Let's try it again.

and
something
They begin again, and we see Naeem take out a violin
join in. As they play, Roberta's ears perk up at
she's hearing. She crosses to Lucy.

ROBERTA
What are you playing?

LUCY
Twinkle.

ROBERTA
(to class)
Everyone stop!
(to Lucy)
Let me hear.

jazz
Lucy hesitates, thinking she's in trouble. She plays a
variation of the song. Roberta smiles.

ROBERTA
Did someone teach you that?

LUCY
No. I made it up.

ROBERTA
That's really great, Lucy. I'm proud
of you.

Lucy beams.

ROBERTA
(to class)
All of you -- try it.

joins
The class plays Lucy's jazz variation and Naeem happily
in.

INT. JANET WILLIAMS' OFFICE - DAY

woman in
Roberta sits opposite Janet and MRS. LAMB, a white
her 30's.

MRS. LAMB

You're shouting at them. All the time.

ROBERTA

Not all the time. But if they don't listen --

MRS. LAMB

Didn't you tell them that they were making their parents sick?

Janet raises her eyebrows at this.

ROBERTA

That wasn't exactly what I said --

MRS. LAMB

I'm raising Becky in a supportive atmosphere. I don't send her to school to be abused.

ROBERTA

I'm just trying to discipline them. If they're gonna learn an instrument, they need to take it seriously --

JANET

I think what Mrs. Lamb is trying to say, Roberta, is that you're a little too harsh. I'm sure you might be able to soften some of your comments to the children?

She gives Roberta a long hard look. Roberta nods.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

Roberta listens to the students play "Go Tell Aunt Rhody" --
badly. They finish and stare at her, afraid of her response.

ROBERTA

Well, that was... that was pretty good... that wasn't too bad...

They look at her in disbelief, then look at each other.

DE SEAN

It wasn't? I thought we stunk.

ROBERTA

I wouldn't put it that way... You
all just need to practice a bit more.
(to James)
James, have you practiced this week?

The boy nervously shakes his head no.

ROBERTA

Can you please try a little harder
for next week?

James nods. The kids are baffled by her politeness.

ROBERTA

Good. Just do the best you can.

DE SEAN

Why you acting like that?

ROBERTA

Like what?

DE SEAN

Nice.

ROBERTA

Don't you want a nice teacher?

DE SEAN

I already got nice teachers. You
added some variety.

LUCY

Yeah. We like you better the way you
used to be.

ROBERTA

Oh.

(to Becky)

What about you, Becky?

BECKY

Yeah. This is even worse. You're
acting weird now.

A beat.

ROBERTA

Well, then -- I take it back. You
all stunk.

The kids laugh.

ROBERTA

But don't tell your parents I said
so!

The kids laugh again.

INT. KENNEDY AIRPORT - DEPARTURE GATE - DAY

hugs
nearby.
Christmas MUZAK plays in the b.g. as Roberta kisses and
Lexi and Nick goodbye. A FLIGHT ATTENDANT stands

LEXI

Can't you come with us? Please?

ROBERTA

Honey, I told you. This is Daddy's
special time with you.

last
time. The FLIGHT ATTENDANT steps forward.
Lexi looks upset; Nick is stoic. Roberta hugs them one

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

I'll take good care of them.

Roberta
the
Roberta
from
together,
The FLIGHT ATTENDANT escorts them into the jet way.
holds back tears as they get further away from her. At
last moment, Lexi turns and waves; Nick does not.
waves, tears starting to fall, and the boys disappear
sight. She observes all the families travelling
and feels like the loneliest person in the airport.

INT. ROBERTA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

and
face
small
boys, and
Roberta enters her apartment, back from the airport,
double-locks the door behind her. You can see on her
that she's dreading the emptiness. She crosses to a
Christmas tree, obviously decorated by her and the
plugs in the tiny blinking lights. It's not exactly

A

Rockefeller Center. She turns on the T.V., playing IT'S
WONDERFUL LIFE.

of
the
rum,
sprinkles
at
less

She crosses to the kitchen, then returns with a carton
eggnog, a glass, and a bottle of rum. She sits down on
couch, pours herself some eggnog, adds rum, adds more
goes back into the kitchen, returns with nutmeg,
some on top, then drinks. She sighs, glancing miserably
the tree and the T.V. Pathetic. She couldn't look any
festive if she tried. There's a KNOCK on the DOOR.
Roberta gets up and warily approaches the door.

ROBERTA

Who is it?

BRIAN (O.S.)

Santa Claus.

the
smile.

She looks through the peephole, then quickly unlocks
door and opens it, revealing BRIAN, giving her a big

Claus
red

He looks sexy as hell (even with a silly lit-up Santa
pin on his leather jacket), and he holds a long-stemmed
rose in one hand, and a Christmas present in the other.

BRIAN

I'm back.

embraces

Roberta's thrilled and relieved to see him. She
him, and they kiss passionately.

INT. BROWNSTONE - DAY (TIME CUT - TWO MONTHS LATER)

sledgehammers.
down

CLOSE ON plaster walls being knocked down with
REVEAL Brian, Roberta, and a couple of workmen knocking
the walls in an old brownstone.

EXT. BROWNSTONE - EAST HARLEM - THE SAME DAY

and
a
on it
broken
file
on

A mild winter day. Roberta, covered with plaster dust overheated from working, leans against a car and drinks beer. The three-story brick building has some graffiti and is badly in need of a paint job; there are a few windows, and the front stairs need repairing. WORKMEN in and out. We can see from the STREET SIGNS that we're 118th STREET, a few houses off FIRST AVENUE.

door,

Brian (also dust-covered), Nick and Lexi toss around a football. LAWRENCE (6), a Black boy who lives next door, joins them. Brian crosses to Roberta, sweaty and out of breath. He takes a swig of her beer.

ROBERTA

O.K., enough goofing off -- back to work.

BRIAN

You trying to kill me?

She laughs and they kiss.

food. She

ASSUNTA comes up the street with a bag of take-out food. She casts a dubious glance at the lovers.

ASSUNTA

I was the only person in the whole coffee shop not speaking Spanish.

Roberta rolls her eyes. O.S. a car BACKFIRES.

ASSUNTA

You hear that? Gunshots! How you gonna live here by yourself?

(calling)

Boys, come eat!

ROBERTA

I work in this neighborhood, Mama. I want to live here.

Lawrence The boys approach and Assunta hands them sandwiches.
hangs back. Assunta calls to him.

ASSUNTA

What's your name?

LAWRENCE

Lawrence.

ASSUNTA

You hungry, Lawrence?

smiles
Lawrence's
sandwiches.
Lawrence nods and she hands him a sandwich. Roberta
at her mother's gesture. The kids move off to
front steps and Assunta gives Roberta and Brian

ASSUNTA

(to Brian)

Why did you let her buy this house?

BRIAN

Hey, your daughter does what she
wants -- or haven't you noticed?

ASSUNTA

I've noticed.

INT. ROBERTA'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

from
Robert washes dishes and Assunta dries. The leftovers
an Italian dinner are on the counter.

ASSUNTA

I still don't understand the rush.

ROBERTA

Having my own place will make me
feel like I'm really starting my
life again.

ASSUNTA

But if you invested your divorce
settlement, you could buy something
nice someday. It's bad enough that
you've been renting in this
neighborhood, but to lock yourself
into a mortgage --

ROBERTA

(snapping)

Mama, please. Just stop!

Assunta backs off. Roberta feels guilty and moves to her.

ROBERTA

Don't worry, O.K.? Besides, if things keep going well, I'm sure eventually Brian will move in with us.

A few beats.

ASSUNTA

How much do you know about this man?

ROBERTA

Brian's a good person, he's helped me a lot, he's great with the boys -- since he got back to town, it's been really sweet.

ASSUNTA

(with an attitude)

And how long has he been back?

ROBERTA

Two months.

ASSUNTA

That's not very long. Don't make the same mistake twice, Bert. You barely knew Charles when you married him.

ROBERTA

(defensive)

I don't get it -- you're ragging on me about buying the house -- I would think you'd want Brian to live with me.

ASSUNTA

Not if he's the wrong person.

Roberta locks her jaw, not wanting to believe that she's right.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

The kids play "Allegro," Roberta leading them.

ROBERTA

Get ready, now -- we're coming up to the fermata...

They reach a certain note, then pause.

ROBERTA

Hold... Hold... Don't anybody move. Now at the Spring Concert, the audience is gonna be dying for that next note -- but we'll make them wait. As a matter of fact, I think I'll go grab a cup of coffee.

"Come on, Roberta!" "Roberta, get back here!" She smiles.

ROBERTA

Well, O.K. But you have to promise you'll all start together.

She nods. They begin again -- all at different times.

DE SEAN

Man. We'll never get that right.

ROBERTA

That's not a very nice thing to say about your classmates.
(to class)
How many people think they can get it right by the concert?

All the kids raise their hands. De Sean looks around, embarrassed, then raises his too. Roberta smiles.

INT. ROBERTA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

lie Brian and Roberta finish making love on the futon. They in each other's arms, still breathing heavily.

ROBERTA

I love you.

Brian makes a sound that's either panting or laughing.

ROBERTA

Did you just laugh?

BRIAN

I'm sorry. It's just...

Roberta looks at him, offended.

ROBERTA

What?

BRIAN

Why do people feel like the minute something's going great, they gotta name it?

(beat)

Once you name something, you snuff the life out of it.

She disentangles from him.

ROBERTA

Jesus, Brian. Do you still get away with that crap? It's not the Sixties anymore.

BRIAN

Well, maybe if you'd actually gone through the Sixties, you'd know what I'm talking about.

ROBERTA

Fine! We won't name it, we won't talk about it, we'll act like we have no feelings for each other whatsoever!

Brian
She angrily turns on her side with her back to him.
regrets hurting her and moves to her, kissing her
shoulder.

BRIAN

I'm sorry. I'm being an asshole.
(sweetly teasing)
You can say you love me if you want.

ROBERTA

Forget it. I changed my mind.

He laughs and coaxes her to kiss him -- a temporary
truce.

INT. BROWNSTONE - DAY

baffled
Roberta

ERNIE (70's), a rickety Black man in work boots, looks by a tangled mess of wires protruding from a wall. approaches.

ROBERTA

How's it coming, Ernie?

ERNIE

Well, if I could just remember what I did here yesterday, I'd be moving a whole lot faster.

(beat)

You look real pretty today, honey.

Brian overhears, rolls his eyes and pulls her aside.

BRIAN

You're crazy. Why did you hire him?

ROBERTA

He needed a job. Besides, he's wired all of East Harlem.

BRIAN

When? Fifty years ago?

carry

Brian sighs and walks off into another room. Two MEN in large panels of sheetrock with old WALLPAPER on it.

ROBERTA

Why is there wallpaper on it?

MAN #1

That's how it comes.

Ernie.

They lean the panels against a wall. Roberta turns to

ERNIE

Yep, that's how it comes now.

panels.

The guys quickly exit. Brian re-enters and sees the

BRIAN

What the hell is this?

ROBERTA

Sheetrock.

BRIAN

You've gotta be kidding. Those ex-cons you hired ripped this off -- and you too!

Roberta feels stupid but doesn't want to show it.

ROBERTA

Look -- this house is taking every penny of my settlement. I can't afford fancy union workers!

BRIAN

(throwing up his hands)
Fine. Do it your way.

He stomps off. ANOTHER ANGLE - Nick watches them fight
and looks distressed.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

Lots of screaming and commotion as the kids crowd
around a fight in progress. As we move through the crowd we see
that NICK's in a fight with another boy; Nick's nose is
bleeding and he has the boy in a headlock. TWO TEACHERS run over
to break it up.

INT. AREA OUTSIDE JANET'S OFFICE - DAY

Nick sits outside, holding an ice pack to his bloody
nose.

INT. JANET'S OFFICE - DAY

Roberta stands opposite Janet.

JANET

I'm giving him a two-day suspension -- but next time he'll be expelled.

ROBERTA

There won't be a next time -- I promise.

JANET

Have you noticed your son lately?
He's tied up in knots and he needs
help.

ROBERTA

Janet, kids fight. You're making too
much of this.

JANET

He was choking the kid.

(beat)

Nick's in trouble, Roberta. You need
to deal with it.

Roberta takes this in, upset.

INT. ROBERTA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Sean,
Lexi
eating

Roberta plays "Go Tell Aunt Rhody" with Guadalupe, De
Naeem, Benjamin, and two kids from the other classes.
plays along with them. Nick enters from the kitchen,
a cookie, ignoring the students. He turns on the T.V.

ROBERTA

(to students)

Keep playing, guys.

Roberta crosses to Nick and shuts off the T.V.

ROBERTA

You can watch when we're done.

NICK

It's my house! They don't live here --
I do!

ROBERTA

(sotto)

Nick honey -- the kids are real
nervous about the Spring concert.
You could probably give them some
pointers.

NICK

I don't feel like it.

He reaches for the T.V. dial and she stops him.

ROBERTA

I said no.

T.V. She crosses back to her students; Nick turns on the

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - DAY

alongside a Brian, Nick and Lexi laugh as they play frisbee
enjoying DUCK POND. Roberta watches, relieved to see Nick
himself.

BRIAN

Good catch Nick!

Nick throws it back to Brian and it lands in the WATER.

BRIAN

(mock sternly)

Uh-oh. You know what that means?

pretends He stalks towards Nick menacingly, picks him up and
he's going to throw him into the water. Nick laughs
hysterically.

NICK

(through laughter)

Don't! Don't throw me in!

BRIAN

Whatsa matter? Afraid of a little
water? The ducks aren't afraid! Are
you a chicken or a duck?

NICK

Don't! Don't throw me!

BRIAN

Looks like you got yourself a chicken,
Roberta!

NICK

I'm not a chicken!

BRIAN

Well then you must be a duck!

Lexi He pretends again to throw Nick in, then puts him down.
holds out his arms to Brian.

LEXI

Throw me in the water, Brian! Do it to me!

laughs
sons.

Brian swoops him up and Lexi starts laughing. Roberta along, happy to see the affection between Brian and her

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - A LITTLE LATER

ahead
b.g. we

Brian and Roberta speak as they stroll; the boys run of them, dragging sticks along the pavement. In the see HARLEM STREETS bordering the park.

ROBERTA

You seem to be the only one who can get Nick to laugh these days.

BRIAN

He misses his dad. I'm just a surrogate.

ROBERTA

No -- I think Nick really likes you.
(taking his arm)
You know... we're all hoping you'll move into the new house with us.

BRIAN

Whoa. Can we just slow down here a minute? It's too much like getting married.

ROBERTA

What's so bad about that?

BRIAN

That kind of commitment just isn't realistic. I mean, how can we know that you and I will even be able to stand each other in five years?

ROBERTA

Well, we don't. But if two people care about each other, they take a chance.

BRIAN

And look what happened to you and Charles.

ROBERTA

I'm not talking about Charles. I'm talking about us.

BRIAN

Look, Roberta. Marriage is based on a belief that one person can completely meet another person's needs. I just don't buy that.

what This is making her nervous. She looks at him, afraid of he might be saying.

ROBERTA

(carefully)

What are you saying? If there's some need you have that I don't meet, you'd go and get it "met" by someone else?

the He heaves a sigh of frustration, not wanting to answer the question.

BRIAN

I'm saying that it's the 80's and it's a fantasy to think of marriage lasting these days. One out of two marriages ends in divorce!

ROBERTA

You didn't answer my question.

(beat)

If I don't meet all your needs, and we're in a committed relationship -- forget marriage for a minute; I'm just talking about a relationship -- would you go to someone else?

A beat.

BRIAN

In theory, yes.

ROBERTA

In theory.

Roberta looks very disheartened. Brian feels badly.

BRIAN

Roberta, we've got something good
right now -- that's the important
thing. Let's just keep it that way,
O.K.?

away
He pulls her to him, kissing her neck, but she pulls
from him. ON NICK, observing with an anxious
expression.

INT. ROBERTA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

NICK (O.S.)

(whining)
Why can't he?

and
Roberta looks distressed by her talk with Brian as she
the boys enter, back from the park.

ROBERTA

He just can't, O.K.? Brian's at his
house tonight, and we're at ours.

NICK

Well then I wanna go to his house.

ROBERTA

Enough, Nick. Now why don't you and
your brother practice while I make
dinner.

NICK

I don't feel like practicing.

ROBERTA

Well do it anyway.

NICK

I wanna go to Brian's!

ROBERTA

Stop whining, and get your violin.

Roberta
sets up
violin
Nick stomps off to get his violin. Lexi follows.
puts down her bag and takes off her coat. While Lexi
his violin, Nick opens his violin case, takes out the

and angrily starts playing, loudly and roughly.

ROBERTA

What the hell are you doing?

NICK

The problem with you is you're mean to everybody and then they don't want to be with you!

ROBERTA

I've heard just about enough from you, young man. Now set your violin up properly and start practicing.

Nick **THROWS** the violin against the floor. Roberta's speechless.

NICK

I hate the violin!

ROBERTA

You pick that violin up right now and don't you ever ever --

Nick picks up the violin and **THROWS** the violin down even harder, then **YELLS** at Roberta before she can even respond.

NICK

It's all your fault! You made Daddy leave and you're gonna make Brian leave too! You're gonna be all alone and I'll have to take care of you!

Roberta is stunned. The anger drains out of her as she suddenly sees what this is all about.

ROBERTA

Nick -- you don't have to take care of me.

NICK

Then who's going to?

ROBERTA

I'll take care of myself -- and I'll take care of you and Lexi. I promise.

NICK

You didn't try hard enough. You made

Daddy leave us.

vulnerability This hits her in the solar plexus. Her hurt and start to pour out.

ROBERTA

That's not true. I begged him not to leave, but he didn't listen.

NICK

Why not?

truth. Roberta hesitates, but knows she has to tell them the She addresses both boys.

ROBERTA

Your father met someone he liked more than Mommy, and then --

NICK

Who?

hardly Roberta swallows, shocked to hear him ask this. She can answer him.

ROBERTA

Lana. Remember our friends Lana and Tom?

NICK

Is he gonna marry her now?

ROBERTA

No, but he's not coming back... to me.

the pain. Nick and Lexi look very upset, not only from hearing finality in her words, but from seeing their mother's Roberta moves closer to them.

ROBERTA

I'll take care of you, Nick. You too, Lexi. I promise. I'm not going anywhere. We're still a family.

starts Nick starts crying. Roberta takes him in her arms. Lexi

to cry and Roberta holds him too.

ROBERTA

(softly, to both)
I promise.

INT. BROWNSTONE - DAY

radio
RAP
mind.
Ernie's radio plays a BLUES SONG. The BRICK WORKERS
plays SPANISH MUSIC, and the PAINTERS' radio plays a
SONG. Roberta stands in the middle, about to lose her

fast
crooked
HER POV - Ernie sits on a stool facing his wiring. He's
asleep. ANOTHER ANGLE - The brick workers build a
fireplace.

BACK TO SCENE

Roberta sighs heavily, then crosses to the painters.

ROBERTA

What color is this?

PAINTER

White.

ROBERTA

I told you Eggshell.

PAINTER

Eggshells are white.

Brian watches this interaction as he sands a door.

BRIAN

You're an idiot! I told you -- you
can't be your own contractor.

ROBERTA

You're right. I'm an idiot.

She crosses to Ernie and shakes him.

ROBERTA

Wake up, Ernie.

He looks at her groggily.

ROBERTA

You're fired.

She crosses to the brick workers.

ROBERTA

You're fired.

She crosses to the painters.

ROBERTA

You're fired.

Brian smiles at her, impressed.

BRIAN

That's more like it.

ROBERTA

You're fired too.

Brian laughs.

ROBERTA

No, Brian. I mean it. I need to be with a man who can make a commitment to me. I need that, and my sons need that.

(beat)

So can you?

BRIAN

(hesitates, then)

Roberta --

His tone and expression tell her the words are not forthcoming.

ROBERTA

Get out.

can't
the
He looks at her, shocked by her toughness, but knows he give her what she wants. He exits. Roberta stands in middle of the room, a determined look on her face.

INT. SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

ROBERTA

violin. Stands in the aisle, leading the students and playing

ON STAGE

variations. The fifty fifth-grade students play the "Twinkle"
Their playing is impeccable and they look terrific.
As the CAMERA PANS the audience, we recognize: MRS.
ADISA, tears in her eyes as she watches Naeem; MRS. LAMB and
her husband, watching Becky in amazement; ISABEL and her
daughter sitting with ASSUNTA, NICK and LEXI; JANET, impressed
as hell; and DENNIS, seething with jealousy. As the kids
start the jazz variation of "Twinkle," a WOMAN elbows her
husband:

WOMAN

That's the one Lucy wrote!

own The CAMERA returns to the children and captures their
she pride in their playing, including LUCY, who smiles as
hears her song played by fifty.

THE CONCERT - TIME DISSOLVE

the The students are now playing "Allegro," and they reach
audience fermata. They hold their positions in silence and the
play the watches in anticipation. Roberta cues them and they
lights on next note in perfect unison. An involuntary smile
applauds, DE SEAN's face. They finish the song, the audience
and Roberta turns to face them.

and She lights up when she sees how thrilled Janet looks,
Roberta. Janet in turn raises her hands higher as she applauds

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CPE 1 - DAY - ESTABLISHING - TIME CUT (1998)

an
Rican,
reads

The side of the building now has an impressive mural:
urban landscape with three super heroes -- Puerto
Black, and white -- rising up out of the street. It
ONLY THE STRONG SHALL SURVIVE.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

first-
sitting
ten
loose
Beside
who
ISABEL,

Roberta stands in front of a classroom of twenty cute
graders -- mostly Black and Latino, a few white --
on the floor, chatting excitedly. Even though Roberta's
years older, she seems more youthful; her wavy hair is
over her shoulders, her clothing's casual and artistic.
her is Janet, her hair flecked with gray, and Dennis,
looks pretty much the same. The classroom teacher is
a little older, a little tougher.

ISABEL

C'mon everybody, settle down -- Janet
wants to talk to you.

JANET

Today's a very special day because
we're starting the tenth year of the
East Harlem Violin Program. This is
a wonderful opportunity for you, so
I want you to talk to your parents
about whether you'd like to try this.

ISABEL

My daughter took violin with Roberta
when she was your age, and now she's
in high school and she still talks
about how much she loved it.

DENNIS

Janet and I started this program
because we knew how much you kids
could benefit from it.

Dennis

CUTAWAY to Roberta and Janet exchanging glances over
taking credit for the program.

DENNIS

You should know, however, that the
violin is a difficult instrument.

always

Isabel

JUSTIN, a Black boy with attitude, raises his hand. He
wears a puffy red, yellow and green crocheted beret.
nods to him.

JUSTIN

Who's that lady in the back?

elegant,

from the

ANGLE - DOROTHEA (Doro-taya) VAN HAUF TEN (40's), an
beautiful woman, smartly dressed, takes photographs
back of the room.

JANET

That's Dorothea Van Hauften --

JUSTIN

Say what? What kinda name is that?

ISABEL

Justin -- sshh!

JANET

-- and she's taking pictures of
Roberta's classes for a magazine
article about music education.

JUSTIN

I wanna be in the magazine!

ISABEL

First things first, Justin. Roberta's
gonna explain to you about the
"lottery."

adorable

adoration.

Roberta steps forward. RAMON OLIVAS (7), a small,
Puerto Rican boy with a crew cut, watches her with

ROBERTA

I used to just teach fifty kids at

this school. But now I teach a hundred and fifty kids at three East Harlem schools and there's so many children who want to take violin classes that we have to have a lottery.

VANESSA raises her hand, a white girl whose clothes and accessories are always adorned with cats.

VANESSA

Can I be in the class?

ISABEL

Roberta's explaining that. Just listen.

ROBERTA

After your parents sign your permission slips, I'm gonna put them in a sack, and I'll pick fifty names from each school.

ANGLE - Ramon listens intently with his fingers crossed.

ROBERTA

So everyone bring in your slips by Friday, and I'll come back and tell you who's in violin class.

ISABEL

Remember, she's just picking names from a hat. It doesn't mean that anyone's better than anyone else.

RAMON raises his hand.

RAMON

(to Roberta)

I really really hope that I get in the class.

Roberta looks at him, struck by his sweetness.

ROBERTA

I hope so too.

EXT. 118TH STREET - STREET SIGN - ESTABLISHING - DAY

EXT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - DAY

it.
the
blooming
FRAME,

The brownstone looks a lot better than when we last saw Graffiti's been removed, the stairs have been repaired, windows have security bars, and there are flowers in pots in front of the building. Roberta steps INTO walking Allegra, now a 10-year-old dog.

INT. BROWNSTONE - DAY

open
beautiful
the
block.

The house is transformed: the first floor is one long room with oak floors, a living room in front with a fireplace and a grand piano, and a country kitchen in rear, complete with pots hanging over a large butcher

piano;
their
Lexi has
musicians.

NICK (17) practices cello and LEXI (15) practices they play Haydn's "Trio #13." Now handsome young men, blonde hair has darkened to brown. Nick is huskier; a slighter build. Both are passionate, talented

girl,

On the couch, RACHEL (12), a mature, beautiful Black rosins her bow.

RACHEL

How come you guys don't play the violin?

LEXI

Well, picture her being your teacher and your mother.

enters

Rachel cracks up but stifles her laughter as Roberta from outside with Allegra.

ROBERTA

Hi Rachel. Be right with you.

share a

As Roberta removes Allegra's leash, Rachel and Lexi

cello. conspiratorial look. In the b.g., Nick packs up his

ROBERTA

(to Nick)

You're gonna practice upstairs?

NICK

No. I'm done.

ROBERTA

Already? You've barely practiced.

NICK

What -- are you timing me with a stop watch? Why don't you pick on Lexi for a change?

LEXI

'Cause I'm perfect.

the Nick jostles him and heads upstairs. Lexi gets up from piano.

LEXI

(to Rachel)

Have a good lesson.

front He crosses to a sharp-looking bike parked behind the door and addresses Roberta.

LEXI

I'll be back in a couple of hours.

ROBERTA

Be careful.

Lexi mouths "be careful" along with her.

EXT. RIVER EAST PARK - DUSK

guys. Lexi plays basketball with a group of Black and Latino

buddy Despite his small stature, he's a great athlete, and an accepted part of the group. The game ends. He and his

fountain. Lawrence (now 16), both all sweaty, cross to a water

As Lexi takes a drink --

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Can I try your bike?

tall,
Lawrence
Lexi wipes his mouth and looks up at HENRY (18), a
intimidating Black teenager who towers over him.
watches tensely.

LEXI

I'm gonna be leaving pretty soon.

HENRY

Just wanna take it for a spin.

LAWRENCE

C'mon, Henry -- he don't want to
loan you his bike.

HENRY

I didn't hear him say that.
(to Lexi)

Is that true? Did you say that?

Lexi looks at him, knowing there's only one right
answer.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

the
Roberta and Rachel play Bach's "Minuet One" together on
violin. The girl has obvious talent.

ROBERTA

Vibrato... don't wiggle your wrist.

Rachel stops, frustrated.

RACHEL

Dang! I can't get that right.

ROBERTA

You almost have it.

RACHEL

Almost isn't good enough.

ROBERTA

Did I turn you into such a
perfectionist?

RACHEL

No. I came that way.

ROBERTA

(smiles, then)

Just as long as you get it right for your Julliard audition.

RACHEL

What?

ROBERTA

I've recommended you for a gifted kids scholarship.

Rachel looks at her in wide-eyed gratitude.

ANGLE - Lexi enters the front door, a glum look on his face.

ROBERTA

Where's the bike?

INT. HONDA/EXT. EAST HARLEM STREETS - NIGHT

Lawrence in
Harlem.
Roberta drives with Nick in the front, Lexi and the back. They're in a dangerous looking part of East

LEXI

Mom, please. Don't do this to me!

NICK

C'mon, Mom -- why don't you let me handle this?

ROBERTA

Are we getting closer, Lawrence?

LAWRENCE

It's the next block up.

LEXI

(to Roberta)

You don't have to do this. I'll pay you back.

ROBERTA

How? It took me six months to save up for it.

NICK

I'll help him, O.K.? We'll both pay you back.

LEXI

Or we'll ask Dad -- he'll help us out.

ROBERTA

Yeah, right.

LAWRENCE

O.K., slow down. It's the second one on the right.

Roberta slows the car down next to a HOUSING PROJECT.

EXT. HOUSING PROJECT - NIGHT

time.
Not a place you'd want to go into, even in the day

CAR.
PULL BACK TO REVEAL this is their POV from INSIDE THE

The boys look frightened, but Roberta's on a mission.

NICK

C'mon Mom, let's get out of here.

ROBERTA

Lock the doors.

building,
And she exits. The boys watch as she heads for the
then Lexi shakes his head and covers his face.

LEXI

I'm dead. She's gonna get me killed.

Nick jumps out of the car and heads after her.

NICK

I'm coming with you!

ROBERTA

No. Get back in the car and stay with the boys.

Lawrence
Nick hesitates and heads back. Roberta presses on.
opens the window and calls to her.

LAWRENCE

Don't take the stairs!

INT. TENEMENT BUILDING - LOBBY - NIGHT

reads
CLOSE ON THE ELEVATOR DOOR with a handwritten SIGN that

OUT OF ORDER.

staring
heads for
WIDER - Roberta stands in front of the elevator,
tensely at the sign. She takes a deep breath, then
the staircase.

INT. TENEMENT BUILDING - STAIRWELL - NIGHT

scary
Roberta climbs the dimly-lit stairs of a dilapidated,
building. O.S. a BABY CRIES, a couple of TV's BLARE.

INT. TENEMENT BUILDING - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

passing
apartment
At the top of the stairs, Roberta turns down the hall,
a door riddled with bullet holes. She finds the
and knocks. No response. She knocks again.

OLD WOMAN (O.S.)

Yeah?

ROBERTA

I'm a school teacher. Henry has taken
my son's bicycle and I want it back.

A beat, then the door cracks open, an OLD WOMAN visible
through the chain lock.

OLD WOMAN

Henry's not here.

ROBERTA

Well you tell Henry that if he returns
the bike, I won't have to notify the
police -- or his school principal.
Although since I am a teacher, it
would be very easy for me to do that.

A couple of beats.

OLD WOMAN

He's not home. He doesn't get home

till late.

ROBERTA

How late?

OLD WOMAN

Not till after ten.

ROBERTA

I'll be on the steps of CPE 1 at 11
P.M. I'll be waiting for him.

The door closes. Roberta exhales. Did she just do that?

EXT. CPE 1 - NIGHT

of Roberta, Nick, Lexi and Lawrence sit on the front steps
the school. The street is deserted.

LEXI

You're crazy. He's not gonna show.

Roberta sits confidently.

NICK

You think he actually cares that
you're a teacher? You think he even
goes to school?

LEXI

C'mon, Mom -- let's just go.

ROBERTA

It's only five after eleven.

she's Nick and Lexi roll their eyes and exchange a look:
Lexi nuts. Suddenly, there's the SOUND of a bicycle. Nick,
stands. and Lawrence look towards the sound, incredulous. Lexi

directly Henry rides up on the bike and dismounts. Lexi looks
at him as he takes the bike from him.

HENRY

I was just borrowing it.

He glances at Roberta, then walks off.

INT. CPE 1 - CLASSROOM - DAY

names,
kids
me!"

Roberta stands in front of Isabel's class and calls out handing the selected children acceptance letters. The are charged up; "My heart is pounding!" "Please pick

ROBERTA

Shandra Wilson.

jumps
SQUEAL
best
letter.

A pretty Black girl with braids and tons of barrettes up and down, then runs up for her letter. The kids and CHEER for each student called. Shandra hugs her friend MYESHA, a chubby Black girl who also holds a

ROBERTA

Justin Brady.

anxiously
down
him.

JUSTIN raises his fists in triumph. ANGLE - RAMON waits to see if his name will be called. JUSTIN sits next to him, waves his letter in Ramon's face, taunting

ROBERTA

Vanessa Klein.

her

Vanessa takes her letter and smiles. She puts it into cat-shaped backpack.

ROBERTA

O.K. One more name...

Ramon crosses his fingers and holds his breath.

ROBERTA

Leonard Hood.

LEONARD, a
starts

RAMON looks crushed. JUSTIN taunts him some more. scrawny white boy takes his letter, scared by it. He to cry.

LEONARD

It's too hard! I don't wanna do it!

ISABEL

Don't you even wanna try, Leonard?

LEONARD

(through tears)

I don't want to!

Isabel looks at Roberta.

ROBERTA

Well, O.K. then. I'll pick someone else.

(she picks a name)

Ramon Olivas.

Ramon's face lights up.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

excitedly

As Roberta walks through the yard, she sees kids showing acceptance letters to their moms.

mom,
letter

SHANDRA and MYESHA hold hands as they run to Shandra's BEVERLY WILSON, pushing a stroller. She looks at the and hugs Shandra.

CONCEPCION
lot.

ANGLE - RAMON reads his letter to his mother, (45), whose eyes tell you that she's lived through a lot. She speaks with a Puerto Rican accent.

RAMON

This is to inform you that your child, Ramon Olivas, has been chosen by lottery to be in the violin program.

CONCEPCION

You happy?

hand.

Ramon spins round and round with the letter in his

CONCEPCION

I think you're happy.

EXT. RIVER EAST ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY

the
parking

Roberta illegally parks her old Honda, rushes out of car, grabs her book bags and three violins, pulls a ticket from her pocket and puts it on the windshield.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

(German accent)
Does that really work?

in the

Roberta turns. It's DOROTHEA, the PHOTOGRAPHER we saw classroom.

ROBERTA

No. But I keep trying. And maybe someday the school will give me a parking space!

She rushes towards the school and Dorothea follows her.

DOROTHEA

Wait --

violins,

She hands Roberta a thin box. Roberta puts down her glances inside it and forgets about being late.

INSERT

-- Terrific black and white shots of Roberta's advanced classes playing violin.

ROBERTA (O.S.)

God, these are great.

BACK TO SCENE

DOROTHEA

Those copies are for you.

ROBERTA

Thank you. Can I... pay for you them?

DOROTHEA

Don't be silly. Besides -- you'll need your money for parking tickets.

They smile at each other.

DOROTHEA

What you're doing for these children is wonderful. My husband's a violinist -- he was quite impressed when I told him about you.

ROBERTA

What's his name?

DOROTHEA

Arnold Steinhardt.

ROBERTA

Of the Guarneri String Quartet?

Dorothea nods, and hands Roberta a card.

DOROTHEA

Stay in touch. Let us know when the kids have a concert.

RACHEL, heading for school, calls out to Roberta.

RACHEL

Don't be late for violin class! I hear the teacher's really mean.

Dorothea
Roberta smiles, slips the card in her pocket, nods to
and follows Rachel.

INT. RIVER EAST SCHOOL - MUSIC ROOM - DAY

of
to
Roberta's advanced class plays "Can-Can." Rachel's one
the eight sixth-graders. Roberta plays along, crossing
AMANDA, a white girl in a country-western outfit.

ROBERTA

Amanda, what did I tell you about wearing cowboy boots to violin class? They're too slippery!

glasses.
She crosses to a pudgy Black/Puerto Rican boy with

ROBERTA

Relax your two, Simon...

next
She glances at STEPHANIE, a white girl with red hair,

to KENNY, a Black boy with an earnest expression.

ROBERTA

Your stop sign has to be up, Kenny!
Stephanie, it doesn't look like you
ever had a lesson with me!

baseball

CARLOS (13) hurries in, a handsome Black boy in a
jacket that says "LOS LEONES." He looks 15.

ROBERTA

Where's your violin, Carlos?

CARLOS

It's coming.

He nervously looks down the hall.

ROBERTA

What, is it walking here by itself?

Carlos

he

A Black third-grade girl rushes into the room and hands
his violin, then runs off. Roberta crosses to Carlos as
quickly readies the violin.

ROBERTA

Your buddies giving you a hard time?

CARLOS

Look, it's just not cool. You wouldn't
understand.

ROBERTA

Hey, you want your sister to carry
your violin, that's fine. But is she
practicing for you too? Because
lately, that's how it sounds.

CARLOS

I've been busy! I've been --

ROBERTA

I'm not interested! Just get here on
time, and commit to this class or I
don't want you in here, you
understand?

He nods sullenly.

ROBERTA

You're a good violinist, Carlos --
and it's definitely not "cool" to
waste your own talent.

Carlos takes this in as Roberta crosses to another
student.

**EXT. RAMON'S APARTMENT - EAST HARLEM - ESTABLISHING -
NIGHT**

It's upstairs from a grocery store on a busy street.

INT. RAMON'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ramon sits on the floor, upset, half-heartedly building
with Legos, while his parents argue in the KITCHEN. His
father MANUELO is a stocky, muscular man. INTERCUT between the
two areas. This is a modest, well-kept apartment. Off the
kitchen, religious candles burn on a shelf above a washing
machine.

MANUELO

Why didn't you show it to me?

CONCEPCION

It just needed one parent's signature.

MANUELO

(with some Spanish)

Well, I'm his parent and I don't
give permission! He should be playing
baseball, not the violin!

CONCEPCION

It makes him happy.

ON RAMON, looking far from happy at the moment.

EXT. RIVER EAST SCHOOL - DAY

Rachel steps off a city bus, carrying her violin. She
passes two sixth-grade boys and a girl.

BOY #1

(loudly)

Ooh, check out little Miss Violinhead.

GIRL

She carry that violin with her all
the time 'cause she think she special.

Rachel turns to them.

RACHEL

I am special.

towards She proudly continues on, then sees Roberta walking
the school and catches up to her.

RACHEL

(nonchalant)

So I heard from Julliard.

Roberta stops and looks at her.

ROBERTA

And?

RACHEL

They said yes!

Roberta gives her a big hug.

INT. CPE 1 - MUSIC ROOM - DAY

as ON THE BEGINNER'S CLASS, including Ramon, as they play
poking "Lightly Row." Roberta walks around, making corrections
at she addresses the students. She doesn't see Justin
away Ramon with his bow; Ramon swats the bow away and glares
his nemesis. Roberta moves some of Shandra's braids
from the violin.

ROBERTA

So when you take the violins home,
tape your music to the wall directly
in front of your nose so you can
play with perfect posture. Your
parents are gonna be so excited to
hear you play!

INT. RAMON'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

"Lightly
as
listens

SCREECHING comes from Ramon's room as he practices
Row." His brothers, PEDRO (18) and ERNESTO (17), cringe
they try to watch T.V. Ernesto gives up and puts on his
Walkman; Pedro's ready to break the violin. Concepcion
patiently as she folds laundry, but even she winces.

PEDRO

(yelling)
Ramon! How many cats you killing in
there?

taped

INTERCUT RAMON - He plays with pride, eyes on the music
to the wall.

INT. CPE 1 - MUSIC ROOM - DAY (A FEW MONTHS LATER)

passed.

ON RAMON, his improved playing showing that time has
WIDER - the beginner's class plays "Lightly Row."

Roberta

JUSTIN is struggling more than the other students.
plays along with the class, eyeing each student.

ROBERTA

More bow! To the frog! Myesha, your
stop sign line should be touching.
Don't let it wiggle! You're on the
wrong string, Justin! And look at
your feet!

Vanessa enters the front door without her violin.

ROBERTA

Where's your violin?

VANESSA

I forgot.

ROBERTA

Goodbye! And you may be dropped.

Puerto

Vanessa pouts and exits. Roberta moves to ROSARIO, a
Rican girl.

ROBERTA

Look at those nails, Rosario!

them. She pulls a clipper from her pocket and swiftly clips MYESHA nervously glances at her own nails.

ROBERTA

I see you over there, Myesha.

She moves to Ramon and corrects his bowing position.

ROBERTA

(to Ramon)

You're doing much better.

As Roberta walks on to the next student, Justin purposely knocks over Ramon's music stand.

RAMON

Drop dead, Justin!

JUSTIN

It was an accident!

RAMON

Was not!

ROBERTA

Ramon, I don't like that kind of talk. Justin, pick up his stand, now! Our spring concert is in three weeks and you might not be in it. Is that what you want?

EXT. CPE 1 - DAY

As Roberta heads for her car, she sees Vanessa being helped into a car by her FATHER, his suit wrinkled and tie loosened. There's SNOW on the ground.

ROBERTA

Mr. Klein? I'm gonna have to drop Vanessa from the class if she keeps forgetting her violin.

MR. KLEIN

(sotto)

She's going back and forth between houses. My wife and I split up.

ROBERTA

(softening)

Oh. I'm sorry.

Roberta leans into the car window.

ROBERTA

Vanessa, maybe you could write down for your Mom and Dad which days are violin days.

VANESSA

(almost in tears)

The tape doesn't stick.

ROBERTA

What?

VANESSA

I taped the music to the wall at my Mom's house and then I took it to my Dad's house and it doesn't stick anymore.

Mr. Klein's eyes tear up and he quickly wipes them.

ROBERTA

Well you know what? That's an easy problem to solve.

music She looks through her book bag, takes out a piece of
and gives it to her.

ROBERTA

Now you have two, O.K.? One for each house.

Mr. Vanessa nods, clutching the piece of music. Roberta and
off. Klein exchange a look. She touches his arm, then walks

INT. RAMON'S HOUSE - NIGHT

father Ramon, holding his bow and violin, crosses to his
who's watching a baseball game on T.V.

RAMON

You wanna hear my new song, Papa?

MANUELO

(in Spanish)

Not right now.

and
Ramon exits, hurt. Concepcion watches from the side,
crosses to her husband.

CONCEPCION

We made mistakes with Pedro and
Ernesto and we can't fix them now,
but Ramon -- he works so hard. The
violin makes him want to be good at
everything.

what
He shows no response, and she exits. Manuело ponders
she said.

EXT. CPE 1 ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY (MORNING)

smiles
her
and
are
Roberta approaches the school on a winter morning. She
as she sees Vanessa get out of her MOTHER'S car with
violin. Roberta nears the front door and finds Isabel
some teachers huddled in conversation. A few students
crying.

ROBERTA

(to Isabel)

What happened?

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

few
is
The beginners sit on the floor and rosin their bows. A
chat, but it's quieter than usual, except for RAMON who
"blessing" kids with his violin bow.

RAMON

You go to heaven... You go to hell...
You go to hell... heaven...

takes
and
Roberta enters slowly. She looks very shaken up. She
note of what Ramon is doing, and overhears Toussaint
Shandra in mid-conversation.

TOUSSAINT

My grandpa died and my uncle, so
that makes six.

SHANDRA

I know more than that. At least seven
people... maybe even nine.

down on Roberta gently tells Ramon to sit, and then she sits
a child-sized chair in front of them.

ROBERTA

(quietly)
I know that you've all heard the bad
news about Justin.

MYESHA

I didn't hear.

TOUSSAINT

There was a drive-by shooting by his
house and he got shot on accident
and he died.

Myesha takes this in, looking sad.

ROBERTA

Does anyone want to talk about it?

RAMON

(angry)
I think we should just play violin.

Roberta watches him.

INT. RAMON'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN AREA - DAY

whistling Concepcion cooks chicken and Pedro sets the table,
Overcome." along to Ramon's O.S. violin playing "We Shall
revealing There's a KNOCK on the door. Concepcion answers it,
Roberta.

CONCEPCION

Roberta! Come in.

Roberta enters.

ROBERTA

I came by to check on Ramon.

CONCEPCION

(confused)

Why?

ROBERTA

Didn't he tell you what happened at school?

Concepcion shakes her head no.

INT. RAMON'S ROOM - DAY

Ramon is still playing violin as Concepcion and Roberta enter.

When he sees Roberta he straightens up even more.

CONCEPCION

Roberta wants to talk to you, O.K.?

He nods. Concepcion touches his head, then exits.

RAMON

Did that sound O.K.?

ROBERTA

Yeah, it did.

Ramon smiles, pleased with himself.

ROBERTA

I've been thinking about Justin.
Remember how mad I got the last time I saw him?

RAMON

Yeah. You got very strict with him.

ROBERTA

It wasn't always so easy to be nice to him, you know?

Ramon looks away from her, upset.

RAMON

You think Justin's in heaven or hell?

ROBERTA

Heaven.

Ramon runs his fingers along his bow.

RAMON

I told him to drop dead.

Roberta touches Ramon's back.

ROBERTA

Justin didn't die because of what you said. I promise.

RAMON

How do you know?

ROBERTA

I don't think you're that powerful, do you? I mean, if you had such powers, just imagine what kind of violin player you'd be by now!

RAMON

Yeah. I'd be better than you!

They laugh together, then Ramon looks sad again.

ROBERTA

It's O.K. to cry, you know.

RAMON

Not for a man.

ROBERTA

My boys still cry and they're big, strong young men now.

(beat)

I bet Justin's daddy cried.

Ramon's eyes get teary. Roberta quietly leaves the room.

EXT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - ESTABLISHING - DAY (SPRING)

INT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Roberta brings in the mail, looking curiously at a manila envelope with a return address from the NY REVIEW OF BOOKS. She opens it, looks inside, then pours out a batch of other letters onto the table. They're addressed to BOX HOLDER 127.

She opens one, reads it, then rushes to an INTERCOM.

ROBERTA

Nick, Lexi! Get down here right now!

INT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - MOMENTS LATER

NICK

We were just trying to help!

with Nick and Lexi stand by the table, opposite Roberta --
the incriminating pile of letters between them.

ROBERTA

This is humiliating!

NICK

Mom, no one knows it's you! I mean,
you don't even have to read them if
you don't want to.

(glances at pile)

Although obviously, a lot of guys
are interested in dating you.

ROBERTA

No. A lot of guys are interested in
dating you and Lexi.

(beat)

What did you say about me, anyway?

They thought she'd never ask.

NICK

"Beautiful musician, late 40's, tired
of playing solo --

LEXI

-- seeks a healthy, stable, attractive
man who's not afraid of a duet with
a strong, independent woman.

NICK

My violin playing will feed your
soul...

LEXI

...And my lasagna will be music to
your palate."

They beam with pride. Roberta looks at them, mortified.

ROBERTA

Oh, my God.

LEXI

Did you catch all the music metaphors?

ROBERTA

Don't you think it's a little weird
that you're trying to get your mother
a date?

NICK

Don't you think it's a little weird
that you're not even interested in
dating?

ROBERTA

Boys, look. Number one -- even if I
wanted to date, I don't have time.
And number two -- I've got my
teaching, I've got you guys -- that's
all I need.

each
The boys nod, disappointed, and she exits. They look at
other with glum expressions.

LEXI

(to Nick)

I really thought she'd like the music
metaphors.

INT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

letters.
Roberta lies on the couch, reading the personal ad
She tosses one aside, then opens another.

INSERT

that
AD;
The letter is designed like a newspaper with a headline
reads: JOURNALISM PROFESSOR DAN PAXTON ANSWERS PERSONAL
HOPES RUN HIGH BEAUTIFUL MUSICIAN WILL CALL FOR A DATE!

BACK TO SCENE

Roberta can't help but be charmed.

INT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

on
special

Roberta, Nick and Lexi play Haydn's "Trio #13" together
their respective instruments. We sense that this is a
family ritual. They play throughout their conversation:

ROBERTA

I think you're flat, Nick.

NICK

I'm not flat.

ROBERTA

The B sounded flat.

NICK

Just play the violin, Mom. I'll take
care of the cello.

They play for a few beats.

LEXI

You nervous, Mom?

ROBERTA

No. I'm fine.

the

The DOORBELL rings and Roberta jumps up, bolting into
bathroom down the hall.

the

Lexi and Nick exchange a smile, then Lexi crosses to
door and opens it.

INT. DOORWAY - CONTINUOUS

professor

Standing in the doorway is a man in casual college
attire. He's nice-looking, but no Prince Charming. He
shakes
Lexi's hand and smiles warmly.

DAN

Hi. I'm Dan Paxton.

Lexi shows him in.

INT. ROBERTA'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

IN THE MIRROR - Roberta takes a last look at herself,

hair,
builds up

wondering if he'll find her attractive. She touches her
adjusts her dress, then takes a deep breath as she
her courage.

INT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

with

Roberta enters the living room where Dan is chatting
Nick and Lexi. Dan sees her and is instantly smitten.

DAN

(shaking her hand)
Wow. An honest woman.

ROBERTA

Honest?

DAN

Your ad. When you said you were
beautiful, you were telling the truth.

sons
start

She smiles, blushing, and avoids eye contact with her
who are trying really hard not to laugh. As she and Dan
to exit:

NICK

Make sure you're home by midnight,
young lady.

INT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE ON CLOCK

It reads 12:30.

screen.
window.

WIDER - Nick and Lexi play a video game on the TV
O.S., there's the SOUND OF A CAR. They race to the

LEXI

Ten bucks he tries to kiss her.

NICK

That's a no-brainer. Of course he'll
try. The real question is whether
she'll let him.

LEXI

O.K. -- ten bucks she lets him.

NICK

You're on.

They stare out the window intently.

INT. DAN'S CAR - NIGHT

Beside
concert.
his

Dan pulls his car up in front of Roberta's house.
him, Roberta holds a program from a Lincoln Center
Roberta's tense, but Dan seems relaxed and centered in
attraction to her.

DAN

I had a lot of fun tonight.

ROBERTA

Yeah, I did too.

DAN

I have a confession -- I've never
answered an ad before. I did it on a
dare.

ROBERTA

Well, I have a confession -- my boys
placed the ad behind my back.

beat:
Roberta

They both laugh, then smile at each other. An awkward
will he or won't he? Dan leans in to kiss her, and
turns away, uncertain.

ROBERTA

Look, Dan -- I went along with this
'cause it's been a while. Quite a
while... And I had a very nice time...
but I'm not sure if I'm ready to get
involved with anyone right now.

A beat. Roberta feels badly about rejecting him.

DAN

(deadpan)
Does this mean I don't get any
lasagna?

Roberta cracks up. Dan smiles at her.

INT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - NIGHT

Roberta enters. The boys are back to their video game, covering that they've been spying on her.

ROBERTA

Why are you guys still up?

NICK

(all innocence)

Why? Is it late?

ROBERTA

Good try, Nick.

LEXI

So how was it?

ROBERTA

Well... he's nice.

NICK

"Nice"? As in "let's just be friends"
nice?

ROBERTA

I don't know yet. We'll see.

Nick looks disappointed.

NICK

There's still a lot more letters.

ROBERTA

Good night, Nick.

She starts heading upstairs.

LEXI

Hey, Mom -- can you loan me ten
dollars?

INT. CPE 1 - MUSIC ROOM - DAY

THE BLACKBOARD reads: SPRING CONCERT IN 10 DAYS!

PRACTICE

PRACTICE PRACTICE!

the
violins.

Roberta rushes in, frazzled, not noticing at first that
beginners are very quiet -- and that most don't have

ROBERTA

Guys, I'm so sorry -- I got stuck
over at CPE 2...

She puts her stuff down, then looks at the kids.

ROBERTA

What's going on? Where are all your
violins?

RAMON

We heard you got fired.

ROBERTA

What?!

EXT. HALLWAY - DAY

Janet and Dennis talk outside Janet's office. Roberta
storms
over to them. Janet looks at her, alarmed.

ROBERTA

Is it true?

JANET

Why don't you come in my office?

ROBERTA

It's true? You're firing me?

JANET

It's not me, Roberta. The Board of
Ed. cut the budget, the District had
to comply, and as of the end of this
term, the violin program has been...
excessed.

Roberta takes this in, momentarily speechless. In the
b.g.,
the beginners slip into the hall to watch.

ROBERTA

Excessed.

(beat)

They specifically said that my violin
program has to go.

JANET

They've slashed the budget -- music
and art programs got hit the worst.

ROBERTA

What about Dennis' classes?

DENNIS

I'm tenured, Roberta.

Roberta looks at him, then back to Janet.

ROBERTA

When was this decided?

JANET

Things happened very quickly... I
wanted to tell you myself --

ROBERTA

(reeling)

I just... I can't even believe this
is happening!

DENNIS

Why not? You're a sub. Your position
has never been permanent.

JANET

Shut up, Dennis! You're not helping!
(softly, to Roberta)
Come into my office, please.

They leave Dennis standing there, looking as if he's
had his face slapped.

INT. JANET WILLIAMS' OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

ROBERTA

There's gotta be a way to fight this!

JANET

Fight it with what? I don't have any
other extra programs to give them
instead.

ROBERTA

Oh, I see. So after ten years, after
fourteen hundred children have learned
to play the violin, this is just an

"extra program."

JANET

You know I don't feel that way and you know damn well I've been standing by you all these years! You think I haven't noticed what you've done for these kids?

ROBERTA

Then do something!

JANET

(points to her phone)

I've been on this phone for the past three days trying to "do something" -- the District office can't even stand the sound of my voice. Believe me, there are some people around here I'd much rather get rid of. But as far as the Board's concerned, violin classes are not a priority.

terribly
wounded. Roberta's fury starts to give way to grief. She looks at her helplessly.

JANET

I don't have the power here, Roberta. I'm so sorry.

A beat, and Roberta exits.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

crowds
waving.
Roberta's dazed and in pain as she walks through the of children, oblivious to kids calling her name and

INT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - DAY (LATE AFTERNOON)

Nick
turn
Nick and Lexi enter the darkened house, chatting as wheels in the bike and Lexi bounces a basketball. They on a light to reveal

ROBERTA

sitting at the kitchen table with a glass of wine, her face ashen.

NICK

What happened?

EXT. STREETS - DAY (LATE AFTERNOON)

Roberta, Nick and Lexi walk Allegra in their neighborhood.

Roberta looks worn out.

ROBERTA

I'm a good teacher. I've worked so hard to give these kids something to be proud of.

Lexi moves to comfort her.

LEXI

I'm so sorry, Mom. I can't believe they did this to you.

ROBERTA

It's like when my father got killed. For twenty years, he followed every safety rule the factory had, and then someone else flips the wrong switch...

(she chokes up)

It's not fair. You do everything right and then...

NICK

It's the wrong analogy. You couldn't do anything about Grandpa's death. It was irreversible. This isn't.

ROBERTA

Tell that to the Board of Education.

NICK

Let me ask you something. Why did you risk your life for a bicycle?

Roberta and Lexi look at Nick, baffled as to the relevance of the question.

ROBERTA

I did not risk my life.

NICK

Of course you did! That building? Threatening Henry? And for what --

two hundred dollars?

ROBERTA

No. Not for that.

LEXI

Then why?

ROBERTA

When someone steals something that belongs to my kids, I'm not gonna sit back and let that happen!

look
A beat as she realizes what she's just said. The boys
at her and the three of them stop walking.

ROBERTA

Guys -- you need to think about this. If I try to fight this -- with no salary coming in -- I could lose the house, screw up your college plans... It would be a lot safer to just go out tomorrow and get a job in a private school.

LEXI

Yeah, but is that where you really want to be?

INT. ROBERTA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

crosses
coats
Roberta frantically searches through her purse, then
to a hall closet and quickly checks the pockets of her
and jackets.

DOROTHEA'S
She feels inside a jacket pocket, then finds it:

BUSINESS CARD.

EXT. COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY - ESTABLISHING - DAY

INT. COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY - DEPT. OF JOURNALISM - DAY

office
of
FOLLOW DAN PAXTON as he walks down the hall towards his
and sees a strange silver object on the floor in front
his office door. He picks it up.

INSERT

ANYONE -- A foil-covered plate with a note on top: DO YOU KNOW
AT THE NEW YORK TIMES?

BACK TO SCENE

LASAGNA. Dan lifts up the foil to reveal a large piece of

INT. CPE 1 AUDITORIUM - THE CONCERT - STAGE - NIGHT

incredibly SEVENTY-FIVE KIDS play "We Shall Overcome" and it's
proudly moving. Nick's on cello, Lexi plays piano. ROBERTA
DOROTHEA leads the children. At the side of the stage, we see
of photographing the concert. THE CAMERA PANS THE AUDIENCE
FIND teary-eyed parents, many of them with CAM CORDERS. We
playing, Ramon's family. Manuelo is riverted by his son's
looking. and he starts to cry. Concepcion knows this without
She takes his hand.

to ANGLE - JANET stands along the side and her eyes start
discreetly fill with tears. She tries to stay composed, then
exits the auditorium.

their The song ends and the audience APPLAUDS, rising from
DAN. seats, including ASSUNTA (now 65), next to ISABEL and
beside Someone remains seated: a REPORTER (40's), sitting
Dan and taking notes.

takes The STUDENTS bow, then point to Roberta who bows and
student the stage. She gestures for people to sit. A beginner
the brings her flowers. Roberta kisses her, then approaches
mike.

ROBERTA

(to the audience)

The beautiful concert that you just heard could be the last concert of the East Harlem Violin Program. The Board of Education and the District Superintendent don't think that music is important for our children. But they're wrong -- and they're in for a fight.

writing
an
Ramon

The parents stand and applaud. We see the REPORTER quickly. Dorothea snaps more pictures. Roberta extends arm towards the kids, directing the applause at them. Ramon gives her a thumbs up.

INT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

dusts.
preparation

ROBERTA is vacuuming the living room while Assunta Extra chairs are set up in the living room in preparation for a meeting. The doorbell RINGS.

ROBERTA

Someone's early.

JANET,
demeanor
sees

FOLLOW ASSUNTA to the DOOR. She opens it, revealing who's carrying two bags of groceries. Assunta's demeanor instantly cools when she sees her. In the b.g. Roberta sees Janet and turns off the vacuum cleaner.

JANET

Hello, Assunta. How are you?

ASSUNTA

I'd be a lot better if my daughter had a job next year.

ROBERTA

Ma!

JANET

(to Assunta)
I would too.

grocery
them.

Janet briskly walks into THE LIVING ROOM, puts the
bags down on a table, and begins to take things out of
Roberta watches her, mystified.

JANET

(to Roberta)

Sorry I'm early, but I figured we'd
need time to set up.

Assunta.

Roberta watches Janet for a beat, then addresses

ROBERTA

Mama, why don't you take Allegra out
for a walk?

exits.

nothing

bread,

Roberta's

Assunta hesitates for a beat, then gets the dog and
Janet continues unpacking the bags as if there's
unusual about her being there. Cheeses, crackers,
salads, fruit, paper plates, napkins, etc. She sees
confused expression.

JANET

You are having a meeting here tonight,
right? Parents and teachers?

ROBERTA

Well, yes, but ...

JANET

Take it from me. If you want to get
parents to help you with something,
you have to feed them.

She holds up two wedges of cheese.

JANET

You have a cutting board for these?

cutting

Roberta crosses into the kitchen and returns with a
board and a knife.

JANET

(as she continues to
unpack)

And if you think parents are bad,
teachers are even worse, no offense.
If you don't feed them, you never
get anything extra out of them. That's
why I got this.

She pulls out an Entenmann's blackout cake.

JANET

Entenmann's gets them every time.

Roberta continues to stare in amazement at Janet.

JANET

What? Don't tell me you expected me
to bring something homemade.

ROBERTA

(as she takes the
cake from her)

Well, no... I --

JANET

Good. Because take it from me -- my
own family begs me to stay out of
the kitchen.

ROBERTA

What I didn't expect was for you to
be here.

JANET

Why not? We've gotta figure out a
way to fight this.

(as she arranges
crackers on a plate)

After ten years, Roberta, I can't
imagine walking through those hallways
and not hearing that off-key,
screechy, scratchy, nails-on-the-
blackboard violin music.

Roberta smiles. Janet holds up a baguette.

JANET

What do you think? Cut it into slices
now, or leave it whole?

ROBERTA

Let's cut it now. It'll be less messy.

exchange

Janet hands her the bread. A beat as the two women
a private smile, then return to their respective tasks.

INT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - NIGHT

room,
CONCEPCION,
MRS.
Roberta's
there;

There's a crowd of PARENTS assembled in Roberta's front
talking at once, yelling out ideas, including
BEVERLY WILSON (Shandra's mom), MR. ADAMS (Black) and
ADAMS (Puerto Rican), the parents of James (from
first year) and Simon. DOROTHEA, JANET, ISABEL are also
ASSUNTA is keeping tabs on the refreshments.

ISABEL

Don't they realize how much this
program helps the kids?

MR. ADAMS

Simon's our third child to study
with Roberta. James is pre-med,
April's valedictorian -- now that
says something!

MR. KLEIN

I think we should inundate the Board
and the District with letters.

JANET

You're wasting your time. The Board
and the District are not gonna pay
for this program, no matter how many
letters they get.

Disappointed grumblings.

ISABEL

What if we raise the money ourselves?

JANET

I can't see how they'd object to
that.

A beat as people take this in.

CONCEPCION

Well once that newspaper article
comes out, that should help bring in

money.

BEVERLY

Yeah, but what if it doesn't? For all we know, it's gonna be buried on the back page. Besides, who says anyone's gonna give a damn about our kids?

DOROTHEA

(to Roberta)

What if you do a benefit concert? We can raise a batch of money from ticket sales, and then the concert itself could be great publicity. There's word of mouth... you could get reviewed...

ROBERTA

It better be a good concert!

Some people laugh but we see the anxiety on Roberta's face.

ROBERTA

We have to offer something more than me and the kids.

(to Dorothea)

Do you think maybe your husband would perform with us?

DOROTHEA

(slyly)

I'm sure I could persuade him with a little pillow talk. And maybe he can get another violinist too -- Itzhak Perlman, perhaps.

This gets people's attention.

ROBERTA

That would be fantastic.

DOROTHEA

We could rent a place like the 92nd Street Y -- it's perfect for this. It seats about nine hundred people and if we charge between fifty and a hundred a ticket --

ISABEL

(to Roberta)

We could probably raise enough to
reinstate your program for a year.

JANET

Sounds like a plan.

ROBERTA

(half to herself)
It better be a good concert.

enters,
couple
specific

The DOORBELL RINGS and Roberta crosses to get it. DAN
holding copies of the NY POST, the DAILY NEWS, and a
of other papers. Each paper has been opened to a
page.

DAN

Take your pick.

5.

Roberta grabs the top one -- the POST -- opened to page

INSERT

and a

The page has a photo of Roberta at the Spring Concert,
large article headlined A VIOLIN TEACHER FIGHTS BACK.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

Roberta
her.

Lots of chaos as a TELEVISION NEWS CREW sets up.
tries futilely to get the beginners to pay attention to

ROBERTA

Kids, listen to me -- it's really
important that you don't look at the
camera and you try to act as natural
as possible.

Dennis storms in.

DENNIS

Who authorized this?

ROBERTA

Janet.

DENNIS

Well Janet's not here today and I
want these people out of here.

starts The kids quiet down and watch them argue. A CAMERA GUY
shooting the argument and Dennis sees him.

DENNIS

Turn that off, you hear me?

ROBERTA

Why are you doing this? We're not
bothering anyone.

DENNIS

You're disrupting school and I want
them out of here -- now.

ROBERTA

You still don't get it, do you? I
don't care if you hate me, Dennis --
that's your business. But think about
the students for once. Every time
you interfere, you're not hurting me --
you're hurting them.

if She points to the kids. They're silent, waiting to see
Roberta got through to him. A beat.

DENNIS

Get these people out of here or I'm
calling the police.

ROBERTA

Go right ahead, call them. That'll
look real good on the eleven o'clock
news.

turns A beat and he exits. Roberta takes a deep breath, then
back to the kids who are watching her, impressed.

RAMON

I don't hear no sirens.

INT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

unseen ON THE TV is the news segment: ROBERTA speaks to an
interviewer.

ROBERTA

I'm from a blue collar family, and if it weren't for the lessons I got in public school, I never would have learned the violin.

It CUTS TO Roberta's beginners speaking to the interviewer.

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)

How does it make you feel to lose your violin program?

SHANDRA

It makes us sad!

RAMON

Yeah, like we're never gonna have no more violin lessons --

VANESSA

And it's bad because... because we love violin class.

WIDER - REVEAL Roberta, Lexi and Nick watching the TV.

INT. ARNOLD STEINHARDT AND DOROTHEA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

ON TV - THE SAME NEWS SEGMENT, ANOTHER SOUND BITE

ROBERTA

Yes, I've gotten offers from two private schools, but this is where I want to be.

DOROTHEA (O.S.)

Arnold, these kids need help.

and
WIDER - REVEAL a comfortable Upper East Side apartment

There's
DOROTHEA watching T.V. while ARNOLD practices violin.

FRAMED PHOTOGRAPHY on the walls, signed by Dorothea.

ARNOLD

Didn't we send them a donation?

DOROTHEA

They need something bigger. And you can't just write a check -- you have to get involved.

ARNOLD

Involved how?

bargained

The look on her face tells him it's more than he
for.

ARNOLD

Uh-oh.

INT. SERIES OF SHOTS - DAY

is

1. Arnold Steinhardt speaks on the phone. His Roladex
open to the name ITZHAK PERLMAN. In the b.g., Dorothea
waits to hear if Itzhak Perlman will say yes.

tensely

CONCERT"

2. Parents, Roberta, Nick and Lexi hang "FIDDLEFEST
posters around their neighborhood, announcing a concert
at
PERLMAN and
STUDENTS FROM THE EAST HARLEM VIOLIN PROGRAM.

at

PERLMAN and

Adams

INVITATIONS

ORDER

out

a

TICKETS

3. Parents -- including Beverly Wilson, Concepcion, Mr.
and Carlos' mom and dad -- stuff envelopes with
to "FIDDLEFEST" and accompanying LETTERS and TICKET
FORMS. Roberta and Dorothea open envelopes with filled-
TICKET ORDER FORMS and CHECKS. They stack the checks in
pile, address return envelopes and place FIDDLEFEST
inside them.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

classes

students

Simon,

full

front.

Thirty-three excited kids from Roberta's different
chat, tune their violins, rosin their bows. The
include Carlos, Stephanie, Amanda, Kenny, Rachel,
Ramon, Vanessa, and Shandra. Roberta enters the room,
of energy, and addresses them as she heads to the

ROBERTA

Listen up, everyone! Quiet down!

The students give her their attention.

ROBERTA

You are my very best beginner and advanced violin students and I've chosen you to play in Fiddlefest because I trust that you can handle the pressure. It's gonna be a lot of work -- a lot. Right now, we've sold some tickets, but I'm not gonna be back here in the fall if the audience storms out of their seats, demanding a refund!

She nods to Rachel who starts handing out sheets of music.

ROBERTA

Rachel's gonna be my lieutenant and I expect you to listen to her.

Ramon looks through his music sheets.

RAMON

Bach's "Minuet One"?

ROBERTA

People are gonna be paying good money for this concert -- we're not just gonna play "Twinkle."

(handing out papers)

I'm passing out a contract that you and your parents need to sign.

The kids read the contracts. Carlos' eyes widen.

CARLOS

Every Saturday and Sunday?

ROBERTA

Plus night time rehearsals during the week. There's only six weeks till the concert, so classes in school won't be enough.

The kids look sobered by this.

ROBERTA

Come to think of it, we'll probably
also need to meet before school.

school?"
Lots of grumbling: "Say what?" "No way!" "Before
I'ma be sleepwalking!"

ROBERTA

You've heard of Navy Seal Training?
Well, this is gonna be Roberta String
Training.

in,
NAEEM
tall.
looking
walking
braid
(20).
ANOTHER ANGLE - Two young men and two young women walk
carrying violins. We realize from the scar that one is
(20), now a strikingly handsome man, over six feet
With him is DE SEAN (19), a short guy with dreadlocks,
more like a rapper than a violinist. GUADALUPE (19),
with a cane, is now a beautiful young woman, her long
pinned up. The fourth is a reserved Puerto Rican woman

ROBERTA

Oh my god! Naeem! De Sean!
(hugs them)
Guadalupe!

She hugs her, then looks closely at the other woman.

ROBERTA

Lucy? Is that you?

and
The woman snaps her fingers and smiles. Roberta laughs
embraces her, then turns to the students.

ROBERTA

Kids, these are four of my very first
violin students and I've asked them
to play in the concert with us.
(to the alumni)
I was just telling them how hard
they're gonna have to work.

DE SEAN

(to class)
Take it from me -- this lady don't

lie. Y'all are gonna work your butts off.

INT. RAMON'S HOUSE - NIGHT

while
up a
Ramon and
reading,
throws

Ramon's father carefully reads the violin contract
Ramon and Concepcion anxiously watch. He stops to look
word in the English-Spanish dictionary beside him.
his mom are squirming. Manuelo nods as he finishes
then SIGNS the contract. Ramon breaks into a smile,
his little arms around his Papa and kisses him.

EXT. RIVER EAST - DAY

Carlos'
checking
a
but

School's letting out; Carlos' sister exits, carrying
violin. A few beats later, Carlos quickly exits,
his watch. He sees his LOS LEONES teammates standing in
group, and tries to bypass them without being noticed,
they spot him.

TEAMMATE #1

Hey Carlos! Where ya goin'? We got a
game, remember?

CARLOS

Yeah, I know, but... I can't make
it.

TEAMMATE #1

What you talkin' about?

CARLOS

I just can't make it.

TEAMMATE #2

You got a date with the violin
teacher?

A beat.

CARLOS

Yeah. I do.

behind
THE
himself.

He dashes off, a barrage of Spanish and English curses
him, and crosses to his sister, waiting for him DOWN
STREET. He takes the violin from her and carries it

INT. CPE MUSIC ROOM - DAY

Shandra,
and
them

The Fiddlefest kids, including Carlos, Vanessa,
Ramon, Stephanie, Amanda, Kenny, Simon, Thomas, De Sean
Guadalupe practice Bach's "Minuet One," Roberta leading
and giving direction. They're playing badly.

half-

Rachel plays as well, but walks around the room making
corrections. It's early morning, and the kids look
asleep.

ROBERTA

Frog! Frog! I need more accents on
the down beat! More bow! More!

They play a few more bars and still sound pretty bad.

ROBERTA

Stop! Stop!
(they do so)
You sound horrible! Isn't anyone
practicing?

CARLOS

How can we practice? We're rehearsing
all the time.

Some kids laugh, including Stephanie.

ROBERTA

(to Stephanie)
You think this is funny, Stephanie?
(to all of them)
You think the four hundred people
who've bought tickets so far will
think it's funny too? You think Itzhak
Perlman will think it's funny that
he's donating his time and you're
all gonna stink?

Vanessa yawns and Roberta sees her. Uh-oh.

ROBERTA

Am I boring you, Vanessa?

VANESSA

No. It's 7:30 in the morning. I'm just tired.

ROBERTA

There's no time to be tired.
(to all, getting her
violin in position)
Let's try it again.

INT. ARNOLD AND DOROTHEA'S APARTMENT - DAY

in,
Dorothea
Dorothea opens the door for Roberta who just charges
agitated, without even saying hello. We sense that
too, is troubled by something.

ROBERTA

I must have been crazy to agree to this. They're never gonna be ready. And you should hear the Bach Double! A disaster. So the good news is tickets are selling like hot cakes, but the bad news is that the kids sound like shit.

DOROTHEA

There's more bad news... We've lost the Y.

Roberta looks at her, aghast.

ROBERTA

What?!

DOROTHEA

They had a flood -- a water heater burst... The concert hall was damaged and they've cancelled all events.

ROBERTA

Until when?

DOROTHEA

"Until further notice."

ROBERTA

This can't happen! We've sold tickets!
We've done publicity! The concert's
in three weeks!

DOROTHEA

I've been on the phone all morning
calling other theaters. Nothing's
available.

They both sink into the couch, completely undone by
this.

ROBERTA

Just keep looking.

INT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - NIGHT

The Fiddlefest kids are crammed into Roberta's house,
(including De Sean, Guadalupe, Ramon, Vanessa, Shandra,
Carlos, Thomas, Stephanie, Amanda, Kenny, and Simon),
rehearsing "Orange Blossom Special." They play badly.

Rachel

helps Roberta correct students.

ROBERTA

Stop! Someone's playing the wrong
notes! And you shouldn't need your
music anymore! Except for the Bach
Double, everything has to be memorized
by next rehearsal!

The kids look at each other, daunted.

ROBERTA

And you sound like you're
sleepwalking. Your heart's not even
in it.

VANESSA

Maybe 'cause we don't have a place
for the concert.

Roberta looks at her, and then notices the despondent
looks
on many of the kids' faces.

ROBERTA

Well, you're right. This might all
be for nothing. So we can either
keep on rehearsing in case we find a
place -- or we can just... give up.

DE SEAN

Am I hearing right? Did you use the words "give up"?
(to the students)
Let's take a vote. How many of you want to give up?

No one raises a hand. Roberta takes this in.

GUADALUPE

See? You taught us well.

INT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - KITCHEN - DAY

It's early morning. Lexi cooks breakfast while Nick and Roberta look at scribbled-on, marked-up lists.

ROBERTA

What about in the Bronx?

NICK

There's nothing.
(beat)
Why don't you just do it in one of the schools? It'll be a lot smaller but --

ROBERTA

We won't make enough money.

LEXI

What about postponing it?

ROBERTA

Itzhak and Arnold are booked all summer.

depressing-
BANGING on
They all look depressed. Lexi places an equally looking stack of pancakes on the table. There's a the door, startling everyone.

DOROTHEA (O.S.)

It's Dorothea.

breath,
Nick opens the door and Dorothea rushes in, out of talking a mile a minute.

DOROTHEA

I have good news -- really good news.

Arnold got a call from his friend
Wally Scheur who heard about us losing
the Y and wanted to see how he could
help -- and then Wally had this
brilliant idea and called his friend
Isaac Stern and it's all arranged!
We have a new place for Fiddlefest!

ROBERTA

Where?

DOROTHEA

Carnegie Hall.

Dorothea grins from ear to ear, Nick and Lexi whoop and
holler, and all wait for Roberta to jump up and down
for joy --
but she looks stricken.

ROBERTA

(panicked)
Carnegie Hall?

INT. CARNEGIE HALL - DAY

CLOSE ON THE CEILING OF CARNEGIE HALL, revolving
slowly.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL THIS IS ROBERTA'S POV

She stands on the empty stage, gazing at the ceiling as
she slowly turns around. She's holding her violin case. She
looks at the UPPER BALCONIES -- THE LOWER BALCONIES -- THE
ORCHESTRA SEATS. Her footsteps echo as she walks towards the
front of the stage, then stops.

CLOSE ON ROBERTA

We can see her imagining the audience on the night of
the concert. She can't believe her eyes. A beat, and she
looks around to make sure she's alone. She takes out her
violin, takes a deep breath as she looks out towards her
"audience," then starts to play the second violin part of the Bach
Double

opening. Concerto. Suddenly, there's the SOUND of a stage door

Roberta stops.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Incredible sound in this room, no?

Roberta turns to see ISAAC STERN approaching her. She's completely flustered.

ROBERTA

Oh my god -- Isaac Stern.

ISAAC STERN

You must be Roberta.

ROBERTA

Thank you so much for helping us.

ISAAC STERN

(looking out at the
hall)

Would you believe in 1960, they tried to tear this place down? They wanted to replace it with a bright red skyscraper -- we called it "the red terror."

ROBERTA

You're kidding.

ISAAC STERN

We had to fight like hell, but with a lot of help, we saved Carnegie Hall.

Roberta takes this in, relating it to her own struggle.

ISAAC STERN

If it's all right with you, I'd like to play in your concert. Maybe bring a couple of friends...

ROBERTA

Yes, of course! That would be great!

Isaac nods, then touches her shoulder.

ISAAC STERN

Don't give up.

EXT. SIDEWALK CAFE, UPPER WEST SIDE - DAY

adding
sits

Roberta pours nervous energy into her cappuccino,
cinnamon, chocolate, and sugar, stirring loudly. Dan
across from her, observing.

ROBERTA

I just don't see how I'm gonna do
this. It's huge. It's gigantic! It's
Carnegie Hall! And listen to this:
now Isaac Stern wants to play with
us -- Diane Monroe, Michael Tree --
there's other people calling --

DAN

That's fantastic!

ROBERTA

Fantastic? I'll never get the kids
up to speed in time, I'll never get
myself up to speed. I'm gonna be
playing side by side with the world's
greatest violinists.

DAN

And "the world's greatest violinists"
are playing side by side with you
because they want to help you win
this fight.

chocolate

He offers her a forkful of some decadent-looking
cake, but she shakes her head.

ROBERTA

Yes, but... you don't understand.
Maybe there's a good reason why I
never made it as a violinist -- maybe
I just can't cut it. I keep blaming
it on not having enough early
training, but if I were talented, if
I had a gift --

DAN

But you do have a gift. You're gonna
put thirty East Harlem kids on stage
at Carnegie Hall not because they're
prodigies, but because you got them
to stick with something that's hard
as hell and to strive for excellence --
which, by the way, I certainly wasn't

striving for when I was their age.
Not to mention the other ten years'
worth of students whose lives were
changed because of you. That's your
talent, Roberta.

hand

She takes this in, looks at him gratefully and puts her
over his. He strokes her hand.

ROBERTA

I'm scared.

DAN

I know.

(beat)

And by the way, I happen to think
you're a pretty good violinist too.

ROBERTA

You've barely heard me play.

DAN

I've heard enough to know you're
gonna do just fine.

another

Roberta looks at him with trepidation. Dan takes
forkful of his cake.

DAN

Besides, no one's gonna be paying
attention to your playing anyway.

up.

Roberta laughs. Dan smiles, glad he got her to lighten

EXT. CPE 1 - DAY (EARLY MORNING)

De

and

school

violins

The Fiddlefest kids (including Ramon, Shandra, Vanessa,
Sean, Naeem, Guadalupe, Lucy, Simon, Stephanie, Amanda
Kenny -- but RACHEL is absent) stand outside the locked
gate, waiting for Roberta. Some of the kids have their
out of the cases, tuning them.

CARLOS

Teacher's late. I think she should
be dropped, don't you?

Kids laugh.

RAMON

Yeah. I don't think we should let her play in Fiddlefest!

more
drop
kids
A few kids start playing "CAN-CAN." It catches on, and of them join in. PASSERSBY stop to listen, and some change into the open cases. RAMON and a couple of other grin at this.

begins an
CARLOS steps in front of the kids as he plays, and uncanny imitation of Roberta:

CARLOS

More bow! To the frog! You sound terrible! I can't believe how terrible you sound!

quickly up
signals
The kids crack up, but a few spot ROBERTA heading the street. Carlos is oblivious to this -- and no one him that Roberta's watching.

CARLOS

You're gonna make everyone in Carnegie Hall sick to their stomachs! That's right, they're gonna pay a thousand dollars a ticket and you're gonna make them throw up on their gowns and tuxedos!

tense
Carlos senses a presence and turns to see Roberta. A beat as he awaits her reaction.

ROBERTA

(in all seriousness)
If you're gonna imitate me, do it right.
(corrects his posture)
Shoulders back. Violin higher. Check your feet. There.
(beat)
G'head, Carlos. Continue.

Carlos freezes.

CARLOS

No, that's O.K. You can take it from here.

Roberta nods, and addresses the kids as she unlocks the gate.

ROBERTA

He's right, by the way. You do sound terrible, and you are gonna make everyone in Carnegie Hall sick to their stomachs.

The kids start filing in. Rachel comes up the street and catches up to Roberta.

RACHEL

I need to talk to you.

Roberta sees how distressed Rachel looks.

ROBERTA

(to kids)

I'll be right in. Start on Minuet One.

(to Rachel)

What's wrong?

RACHEL

We're moving away.

ROBERTA

What? Where are you moving?

RACHEL

(looking downward)

It's a secret... My father... he's been hurting my mom... We have to leave.

ROBERTA

(gently)

Has he been hurting you too?

Rachel shakes her head no, then starts to cry a little.

RACHEL

I'm sorry about Julliard... and the concert.

She hands Roberta her violin.

ROBERTA

Keep it. Take it with you.

RACHEL

No... I don't want to play anymore.

ROBERTA

What?! You can't give up violin,
Rachel -- it's a part of you. A very
important part.

touches her
arm.

ROBERTA

Please honey. Just take it.

RACHEL

I don't want to.

quickly
Roberta looks at her, pained, then hugs her. Rachel
kisses Roberta goodbye and exits. Roberta watches her.

INT. CPE 1 - MUSIC ROOM - A LITTLE LATER

Stephanie,
of
Roberta leads De Sean, Naeem, Guadalupe, Lucy,
Thomas, Carlos, Erica and Nicholas in the Bach Double
Concerto. The other kids watch. Roberta's on the edge
of hysteria. She signals the players to stop.

ROBERTA

No, no, no! Accent the up bow after
the slurred notes and then it'll get
you off of those slurred notes! You
Double Concerto kids need to be
working harder! This is the grand
finale of the concert! You're each
gonna be sharing a music stand with
one of the world's greatest
violinists!

with
Roberta
The kids say "the world's greatest violinists" along
her -- they've obviously been hearing this a lot.

glares at them.

ROBERTA

I think we should forget the Bach Double.

(to the other kids)

And you guys are never gonna get Minuet One. I think we should drop that too.

VANESSA

No! We can do it, Roberta!

CARLOS

And we'll get the Bach Double. We will.

She stops, takes a breath.

NAEEM

It's gonna be O.K., Roberta.

ROBERTA

(vulnerable)

You think?

All the kids nod. A few beats.

ROBERTA

O.K...

(not believing it)

It's gonna be O.K.

exchange She crosses to take a look at her music, and the kids looks that say, "Oh shit. What did we just promise?"

REHEARSAL MONTAGE - SERIES OF SHOTS - DAY

- River
1. Carlos practices violin against the fence around East School. In the b. g., his buddies make fun of him.
 2. Shandra practices in a school stairwell, ignoring a boy who pulls one of her braids as he passes by.
 3. Stephanie practices at a bus stop, her eyes closed, then looks up and realizes she's just missed her bus.

watching
4. Ramon practices in his living room, his father attentively, then helping him lift the violin higher.

frustrated
5. Vanessa practices in a crowded school hallway, as kids keep bumping into her.

6. Roberta, in her nightgown, practices in front of her refrigerator in the middle of the night.

INT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - DAY (LATE AFTERNOON)

several
dress
keeps
Allegra
Pandemonium. Nick and Lexi, both in tuxes, are doing tasks at once while Roberta, in a simple black velvet and stockinged feet, tries to put on her makeup but poking her head out of the bathroom, giving orders. BARKS outside the back door.

ROBERTA

Nick -- did you feed Allegra?

NICK

(fixing Lexi's tie)

Yes, Mom.

ROBERTA

Lexi, can you make sure the charts are still in my bag?

LEXI

I already checked, Mom.

ROBERTA (O.S.)

Check again, please. And look for my repair kit too.

dress.
bathroom.
ASSUNTA descends the staircase, dressed in a formal She holds a small jewelry box and heads for the

ASSUNTA

Bert, which earrings you want?

Assunta
Roberta sticks her head out and picks the earrings. enters the small bathroom to work on her own makeup.

ROBERTA

Nick? Get two more violins.

NICK

You've already got two -- how many emergencies can there be?

A beat.

ROBERTA

Get three more. And make sure a couple of them are half-size.

organizes
extra
the
house.

Nick rolls his eyes and runs upstairs while Lexi things by the door: Nick's cello, Roberta's papers, violins. Roberta rushes out of the bathroom, adjusting earrings. She starts compulsively straightening the

ROBERTA

Lexi -- can you call about the car again?

LEXI

Mom, they're not gonna forget to send a car!

stares

Nick comes running down the stairs with the violins and in disbelief at Roberta fluffing a couch pillow.

NICK

What are you doing?

ROBERTA

Just straightening a little.

NICK

You're insane, you know that?
(grabs the pillow)
Finish getting dressed!

upstairs.

He throws the pillow onto the couch. Roberta heads

INT. CARLOS' ROOM - DAY

IN THE MIRROR - Carlos adjusts his tuxedo. We see the

the reflection of his baseball bat, glove and trophies in room behind him.

INT. GUADALUPE'S ROOM - DAY

look starts to Guadalupe's mom pins up her braid, then steps back to at her daughter, radiant in a floral gown. Her mom cry.

INT. SHANDRA'S ROOM - DAY

hair. Beverly puts rhinestone-studded barrettes in Shandra's

INT. RAMON'S ROOM - DAY

dapper. ON RAMON - He's in a sharp black suit and looks very him, WIDER - Manuelo and Concepcion stand back to admire pride then Manuelo straightens Ramon's tie, brimming with over his son.

INT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - FRONT ROOM - DAY

ROBERTA (O.S.)

SHIT!

Nick and Assunta look towards the stairs. Roberta comes running down.

ROBERTA

Can you believe this?

dress, She turns around, revealing a RIP on the back of the next to the zipper. The DOORBELL RINGS.

ROBERTA

It can't be time! Is it time?

ASSUNTA

I'll sew it in the car.

EXT. ROBERTA'S BROWNSTONE - DAY

see a Roberta, Assunta and the boys step outside, amazed to

waiting. STRETCH LIMOUSINE double-parked in front, a CHAUFFEUR

LEXI

See? I told you they'd send a car.

the Roberta's open-mouthed. She leads her entourage towards
Some limo. THE NEIGHBORS come out of their houses to watch.
"It's lean out windows, gawking. Ad libs... "Who's that?"
Lexi a the Violin Lady!" LAWRENCE, dressed in a tux, gives
high sign.

while The chauffeur helps Roberta and Assunta into the limo
trunk. Nick and Lexi start to load the instruments into the

INT. LIMOUSINE - CONTINUOUS

Assunta Roberta sits down beside Assunta and turns around so
unzips the can mend the tear in her dress. Assunta partially
dress and starts stitching it from the inside.

ROBERTA

Thank you, Mama.

ASSUNTA

Don't worry about it. You rip -- I
sew.

ROBERTA

Not just for that.

(beat)

Thank you for getting me out of bed.

Assunta stitches, remembering, and smiles.

ASSUNTA

Don't thank me -- thank Charles.

ROBERTA

Charles?!

ASSUNTA

If that jerk hadn't of left you,
none of this would've happened.

Roberta contemplates this. A beat.

ROBERTA

Thank you, Charles.

the
Her last stitch finished, Assunta rips the needle from
thread.

EXT. CARNEGIE HALL - ESTABLISHING - DUSK

INT. CARNEGIE HALL - BACK STAGE - NIGHT

with
clothing
The kids and their parents are practically boiling over
excitement. Last minute kisses, violin tunings, and
adjustments take place throughout the room.

with
count,
boy's
in the
The boys are in suits or tuxes, the girls in velvet or
flowered dresses, some with bows in their hair, some
their hair up in buns. Roberta tries to take a head
Dorothea confers with a stage manager, Assunta fixes a
tie, and Janet helps one girl with her hair, stopping
middle to button the back of another girl's dress.

ROBERTA

Where's Vanessa? Has anyone seen
Vanessa?

Janet looks at her, concerned.

JANET

I'll call her house.

Naeem.
they
excuses
They
to
--
ANGLE - Roberta sees MRS. ADISA enter the room with
The two women walk towards each other and embrace. As
start to chat, Roberta suddenly sees someone and
herself: BRIAN is walking towards her, wearing a tux.
smile at each other, but Roberta's clearly a bit shaken
see him. They're not quite sure how to greet each other

he takes her hand, and then kisses her on the cheek.

BRIAN

Congratulations.

ROBERTA

Thank you...

BRIAN

I knew you'd get here sooner or later.
I'm glad I'm here to see it.

A beat.

ROBERTA

I am too.

INT. CARNEGIE HALL - BACKSTAGE WINGS AREA - NIGHT

behind
Guadalupe shyly approaches Itzhak Perlman, her mother
her, silently encouraging her.

GUADALUPE

Excuse me, Mr. Perlman?

He turns around.

GUADALUPE

(extends a hand)

I'm Guadalupe. I've wanted to meet
you for a long time.

He smiles at her and they shake hands.

ITZHAK PERLMAN

A pleasure to meet you, Guadalupe.

approaches.
As Guadalupe introduces him to her mother, CARLOS

CARLOS

You nervous, Mr. Perlman?

ITZHAK PERLMAN

Should I be?

CARLOS

Us kids are gonna be great -- I don't
know about you guys. How much did
you practice?

Itzhak Perlman laughs.

INT. CARNEGIE HALL - BACK STAGE - NIGHT

Roberta talks to Janet with a worried expression.

ROBERTA

You called Vanessa's father and mother?

JANET

No answer at either.

A Carnegie Hall staff person in a suit enters.

STAFF PERSON

Half hour call! It's now half hour call! So pace yourself accordingly. Don't get more than thirty minutes worth of nervous!

The room electrifies with nerves.

VANESSA

breath,
rushes into the room with her father. She's out of her stocking has a big run in it, and she's in tears.

VANESSA

They stole the car!

MR. KLEIN

With the violin.

ROBERTA

Oh my God.
(calling)
Nick, Lexi --

NICK

Done.

find the
The boys rush over to the extra violins and look to right size.

VANESSA

(crying)
And then when we were getting a taxi, I fell down.

Roberta comforts her and Janet moves in.

JANET

C'mon honey -- let's get you cleaned up.

roses.
Roberta,
ANGLE - DAN enters with a bouquet of long-stemmed red
He's in a tux and looks very handsome. He crosses to
hands her the flowers, and they hug.

DAN

You're glowing.

ROBERTA

It's terror.

INT. CARNEGIE HALL - NIGHT

seats,
The hall is filling to capacity as people take their
the room buzzing with voices.

INT. CARNEGIE HALL - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

The CARNEGIE HALL staff person enters.

STAFF PERSON

FIVE MINUTE CALL. WE NOW HAVE FIVE MINUTES.

The tension in the room shoots sky high.

INT. CARNEGIE HALL - STAGE - PODIUM - NIGHT

Janet stands onstage and addresses the audience.

JANET

When I became the principal of Central Park East Elementary, I envisioned a school where children could fulfill their highest potential, despite the challenges of poverty and racism. Ten years ago, Roberta Guaspari walked into my office because she needed a job, and because she had a vision that any child could learn the violin. We put our dreams together and created the East Harlem Violin Program which has helped more than a thousand students expand their vision of what's

possible in their lives. When a program like this is cut, our children's future is compromised. I want to thank you for your support. Enjoy the concert.

INT. CARNEGIE HALL - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Roberta
In the b.g. we hear the audience APPLAUDING Janet.
holds up her hands to quiet down the anxious students.

ROBERTA

Everyone -- attention please!

They become quiet.

ROBERTA

I want you all to take a second just to breathe, O.K.? Deep breath.

The kids breathe.

ROBERTA

I would like you all to play with your heart, all right? Play like I know you can play. You'll be wonderful. Watch me, don't look out in the audience -- you don't need to be afraid. It's gonna be really wonderful. So play -- play from here.

She pats her heart.

INT. CARNEGIE HALL - BACKSTAGE CORRIDOR - NIGHT

getting
The kids head out towards the stage, the APPLAUSE
louder as they get closer.

INT. CARNEGIE HALL - STAGE - NIGHT

positions.
CRANE SHOT of the children on stage, in their

REVERSE SHOT - FOUR FILLED BALCONIES

BACK TO THE STAGE

subtly
Some of the kids look awestruck by the audience; one

She waves hi to her family. Roberta walks out to APPLAUSE.
with a bows to the audience, turns to the kids, signals them
it in slight nod and the BACH MINUET ONE begins. We've heard
all phases, and now it is flawless.

corsage; PAN the STUDENTS watching her: VANESSA, wearing a
pearls; SIMON in his red bow tie; SHANDRA in black velvet with
and a NAEEM standing proud and tall, DE SEAN in dreadlocks
tux; RAMON playing from his heart...

INT. CARNEGIE HALL - BACK STAGE - CONTINUOUS

Steinhardt, Isaac Stern, Itzhak Perlman, Michael Tree, Arnold
stage, Diane Monroe, Karen Briggs and Mark O'Connor wait back
chatting and listening to the kids.

INT. CARNEGIE HALL - THE STAGE - MOMENTS LATER

moment The students finish MINUET ONE. There's an exquisite
of silence, then APPLAUSE.

INT. CARNEGIE HALL - THE STAGE - LATER

SPECIAL Country fiddler MARK O'CONNOR plays ORANGE BLOSSOM
violin with the kids. He improvises, surprising them as his
makes the sound of a TRAIN moving through a tunnel.

RAMON smiles, awed by this -- but he remains calm and professional.

INT. CARNEGIE HALL - BACK STAGE CORRIDOR - LATER

their As the guest violinists head for the stage, we hear
names over a mike, mixed with APPLAUSE:

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

Isaac Stern, Itzhak Perlman, Arnold
Steinhardt, Diane Monroe, Michael
Tree, Mark O'Connor and Karen Briggs.

INT. CARNEGIE HALL - STAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Grand
Roberta
turns to
shares a
plays
and
plays
BRIGGS
STEPHANIE.
and,
Lucy...
front,
TO
show
CONCEPCION,
can't
moment

CRANE SHOT of the six guest violinists on stage for the
Finale, each one sharing a music stand with a student.
nods, and they begin THE BACH DOUBLE CONCERTO. She
face the audience as she joins them.

MOVE IN AND PAN the performers and students: NAAEM
stand with ARNOLD STEINHARDT; ISAAC STERN stands and
with GUADALUPE, sitting beside him; ITZHAK PERLMAN sits
plays next to CARLOS, standing beside him; MICHAEL TREE
beside DE SEAN; DIANE MONROE plays beside LUCY; KAREN
plays beside THOMAS, and MARK O'CONNOR plays beside
NICK plays cello; LEXI plays the piano behind them;
playing with her own solo music stand, ROBERTA.

Their expressions are serious and passionate, broken by
occasional smiles lighting on faces: Isaac Stern...
Carlos... Itzhak Perlman... Diane Monroe... De Sean.

The song finishes and the APPLAUSE begins. The OTHER
FIDDLEFEST PLAYERS come out from back stage, RAMON in
and join the rest. More applause. The CAMERA PULLS BACK
INCLUDE the audience facing the stage, then REVERSES to
the audience standing in the orchestra and balconies.

We see the students' PARENTS; JANET, ISABEL and their
families; ASSUNTA, LAWRENCE and DOROTHEA; DAN;
MANUELO and their sons; BRIAN; and DENNIS -- even he
stop himself from applauding.

BACK AGAIN to the stage where the students and guest
violinists bow... and MOVE IN CLOSER on ROBERTA in her
of triumph.

INT. CARNEGIE HALL - STAGE - PODIUM - MOMENTS LATER

softer
Roberta addresses the audience. Her voice is strong but
around the edges; she is a woman in a state of grace.

ROBERTA

We're all here tonight because we
have a bigger mission: to take the
magical spirit of tonight's concert
with us out into the world, and to
fight for music and art to be a part
of every child's education. Thank
you.

The APPLAUSE is DEAFENING, then slowly diminishes as
we:

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CPE 1 - MUSIC CLASSROOM - DAY

on
Roberta addresses ten first-graders sitting in a circle
the floor. She points to the horsehair on her bow.

ROBERTA

And this? What's this?

BOY

The frog hair?

Roberta and the kids laugh.

ROBERTA

Did you ever see a frog with hair?

The boy smiles and shakes his head.

A FEW KIDS

It's horsehair!

ROBERTA

That's right.

(to the boy)

But you're right, there is a frog.
Can you show me where it is?

One girl raises her hand with urgency.

GIRL

Ooh! I know!

ROBERTA

Sssh -- let him answer.

The boy points to the frog of the bow and Roberta smiles.
And as she continues her lesson, her voice recedes and we:

FADE

OUT:

THE END

CRAWL:

Roberta Guaspari lives in East Harlem with her daughter Sofia, whom she adopted from El Salvador. Nick is a professional cellist in a graduate music program, and Alexi has been accepted to medical school.

Roberta teaches violin to approximately 150 students a year in three East Harlem elementary schools. The East Harlem Violin Program, however, is still not funded by the New York City Board of Education.

The money raised from Fiddlefest supported Roberta's violin program for three years. Roberta and Opus 118 continue their fundraising efforts to keep the program alive.