

ZOO STORY

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Registered: WGAw

FADE IN:

TITLE: On August 21, 1999, the first baby giant panda to survive in captivity in the United States was born at the World Famous San Diego Zoo. Her name is HUA MEI.

THE FIRST THREE YEARS

-- Grainy panda-cam of new mother BAI YUN tending to tiny, blind, hairless infant Hua Mei.

-- Months later, Hua Mei looks like a tiny panda.

-- Her first exam by JEFF WALTERS, mid-30's, kind eyes.

-- Tourist video of Hua Mei's first appearance in the enclosure. The crowd CHEERS.

-- Video and stills of other exams. Jeff and Hua Mei play.

EXT. GIANT PANDA EXHIBIT - SAN DIEGO ZOO - DAY

A trail of tourists checks camcorders and cameras outside the entrance.

On the other side...

INT. PANDA GIFT SHOP - DAY

Scores of shoppers buy panda t-shirts. Coffee mugs. Books. Videos.

EXT. GIANT PANDA EXHIBIT - DAY

Adult giant pandas BAI YUN and SHI SHI relax. Roll under trees. Nibble bamboo shoots.

Tourists scan for a glimpse of Hua Mei. Find none.

INT. GIANT PANDA RESEARCH CENTER - DAY

BOBBY DANIELS, eager early 30's, leads a tour of Cirque du Soleil rejects.

BOBBY

And this is the Director of the Giant Panda Research Station, Jeff Walters.

Jeff turns, smiles awkwardly. Loves animals, not the P.R.

JEFF

Thank you, Bobby. It's rare to have visitors back here. Usually it's just us and the pandas.

BOBBY

Given Jeff's stale jokes, I'm thankful for the company. Jeff, I'd like you to meet --

HUGO LESTRANGE, the French P.T. Barnum (if only he were so lucky), thrusts his hand at Jeff.

HUGO

Hugo LeStrange, ringmaster of the Cirque du--

SLAM! LI MING FANG, early 30's aspiring dragon lady, storms in.

LI MING

Mr. Walters, you know the rules. You wrote them. No visitors. Especially now.

HUGO

(perks up)
Now, Mademoiselle?

Li Ming stares, fumes.

JEFF

May I, reluctantly, introduce Miss Ming Fang. Chinese Liaison to the Giant Panda Rescue Program.

LI MING

"Li Ming."

JEFF

This is Hugo LeStrange, ringmaster of the Cirque du Sol--

HUGO

(bursts in)
Mademoiselle, we are the Cirque du Rouge.

Jeff, puzzled, glances at Bobby.

JEFF

Not the Cirque du Sol--

HUGO

NON! We are a genuine French troupe of death defying skill as those Canadian fools could only dream!

LESTER, Hugo's toady, slips from behind. Notes a small plastic black box with a dim LED.

LESTER

(picks it up)

What is this?

Jeff rushes, gently retrieves the box.

Hugo fires a dirty look at Lester.

JEFF

It's the prototype for a satellite tracking system. If it works, researchers could study animal migration patterns from anywhere in the world.

HUGO

Fascinating, I'm sure.

JEFF

(to Hugo)

Excuse us a moment.

Jeff nods Bobby over to one side.

JEFF (CONT'D)

(hushed)

You said this was the Cirque du Soleil.

BOBBY

I thought they were.

JEFF

How could you make that mistake like that? You love circuses.

BOBBY

The ones with animals. I didn't know there was more than one Cirque-doo-whatever. So much for the publicity boost.

JEFF

(sighs)

Let's get this over with.

Bobby nods. They rejoin the group.

JEFF (CONT'D)
 (to the Cirque)
 Where were we?

HUGO
 "Especially not now."

LI MING
 Bai Yun and Shi Shi, the adult pandas you
 see in the exhibit here, are on loan from
 China.

JEFF
 One condition of that loan is that any
 pandas born here must return to China
 after they reach three years of age.

LI MING
 My job is to supervise the transfer of
 Hua Mei to the Wolong Reserve in China. I
 serve my country by protecting its
 precious natural treasures.

HUGO
 When does this happy occasion occur?

JEFF
 Very soon. Today is her third birthday.
 (points outside)
 Watch.

EXT. GIANT PANDA EXHIBIT - DAY

A three-tiered cake of ice and bamboo shoots sits in the
 center of the enclosure. On top, a large carved-ice "3."

The tourists wait anxiously.

A door in the rear of the enclosure opens. HUA MEI
 toddles out.

JEFF (V.O.)
 Here's Hua Mei.

Camcorders train. Cameras flash. The crowd "awwwws."

Hua Mei spots the cake. Looks to Bai Yun, who nods
 approval.

Hua Mei bounds to the cake. Eagerly licks. Nibbles.

INT. GIANT PANDA RESEARCH CENTER - DAY

The Cirque performers "awww" in unison. Hugo is nauseated, puts on a good face.

JEFF

The shoots in that cake are a special variety of bamboo. It's their favorite. Our crop is the only one in the country.

Jeff gestures at the bamboo around the exhibit.

JULIETTE, radiant starlet, steps forward. Lester can't take his eyes off her.

JULIETTE

If there is a nature reserve in China, why are the pandas here?

LI MING

(toting party line)

China often loans or generously gives giant pandas as gifts to zoos as a special sign of friendship.

JEFF

Giant Pandas are a critically endangered species, Miss...

LESTER

Juliette.

Jeff catches Lester's longing gaze at her.

JEFF

Chinese conservationists work very hard. Multiple breeding programs increase the panda's chances for survival.

LI MING

I sometimes wonder if the zoos need the pandas more than the pandas need the zoos.

Jeff knows the rest of that tirade.

JEFF

(to Cirque)

I'm sure you didn't come here to listen to panda politics. Enjoy the rest of my favorite Zoo.

Jeff shakes hands with Hugo, nods to Juliette, EXITS.

EXT. GIANT PANDA EXHIBIT - DAY

The Cirque troupe passes the lengthy trail of tourists, performs as they go.

Brightly garbed French acrobats bound gaily, attempt to amuse.

HUGO

After the Zoo, see the Cirque! One last show tonight before we journey to Las Vegas, New York City, and then the greatest cities in Europe!

Some tourists snap photos. Others just stare.

TOURIST #1

Hey, it's the Cirque--

HUGO

Cirque du Rouge! Ladies and gentlemen, Cirque du Rouge!

The line stretches past

EXT. RED RIVER HOG ENCLOSURE - DAY

A collection of little-known smelly African hogs.

AT THE END OF THE LINE

ONE FAMILY suffers the stench.

An obnoxious FRENCH CLOWN (JEAN) tries to amuse their TWO YEAR OLD BOY.

The boy cracks up.

IN HIS EAR

The grunts of nearby hogs SHIFT, SHARPEN. The animals speak!

HOG #1

Can you believe these guys? Leapin' all over the place like rainbow-colored monkeys.

HOG #2
Careful, you'll offend the monkeys.

HOG #1
We may smell, but these guys just stink.

The BOY laughs, even harder.

HOG #1 (CONT'D)
(to nearby hummingbird)
Hey, you gettin' all of this? This is
classy material.

The HUMMINGBIRD nods, FLITS AWAY.

Hummingbird dashes for the base of

OWEN'S AVIARY

A wire-mesh enclosure surrounding a cathedral rib-cage.

INT. OWEN'S AVIARY - CONTINUOUS

Hummingbird zips inside. Finds an ORIOLE. The first in a
multi-hued disciplined line of communication. The Zoo
Vine.

HUMMINGBIRD
At the Hogs, moving south.

ORIOLE darts up to the next level, finds a waiting
THRUSH.

ORIOLE
Hogs. Southbound.

Thrush whizzes up another level, to a LORIKEET.

THRUSH
Hogs, southbound.

Lorikeet takes the message to the top of the aviary,
passes it along to a PIGEON outside.

EXT. GIRAFFE ENCLOSURE - DAY

A CALF bounces in excitement.

CALF
Mom, can I watch? I wanna see if they're
as freaky as the pigs say.

MOTHER GIRAFFE

Hogs, sweetheart. They prefer "hogs."

GEORGIA, gentle giraffe, watches. Shuffles into the shade, focuses on a tree.

MOTHER GIRAFFE (CONT'D)

Georgia, are you going to watch?

GEORGIA

No. Thank you.

INT. JAGUAR ENCLOSURE - DAY

Two typical jaguars -- tan with black spots -- lazily snack on thick steaks. With charming South American accents, they chide JACKSON, a rare black jaguar.

JAGUAR #1

Relax, Jackson.

JAGUAR #2

Yes. Have some steak. It is quite good today.

JACKSON

Enjoy the fruits of our jailors. I am getting out of here. You may join me, if you value freedom.

JAGUAR #1

Are you crazy?

JAGUAR #2

Look around. Great weather. Great view. Free steak.

JAGUAR #1

Why would we leave?

JAGUAR #2

Where would we go?

JACKSON

Anywhere. We should be masters of our destiny. Not slaves for their amusement.

Jaguars 1 and 2 glance at each other. Laugh.

JAGUAR #1

He needs to relax.

JAGUAR #2

You should watch the silly people perform. That might cheer you up.

Doubtful. Jackson fumes, paces the front of the cage.

EXT. ORANGUTAN ENCLOSURE - DAY

Rust-orange orangutans behind Plexiglas. Tourists watch. Point. Snap photos.

One orangutan, OSCAR, is fixated. His intense gaze studies their gadgets. Cell phones. Camcorders. Cameras.

A young orangutan, CHARLIE, tumbles next to him.

CHARLIE

Hey, Uncle Oscar, watch this!

Charlie somersaults in a circle around Oscar. The CROWD goes nuts, flashes burst like fireworks.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Just like the funny humans, huh?

Oscar watches the human response.

OSCAR

The Light of Joy!

CHARLIE

What?

OSCAR

The Light of Joy. It bursts whenever the human sees something they like. From the Approval Box. See?

Oscar points to a disposable camera.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

That is an Approval Box, but not an important one.

Points at a digital camera.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

They must have great standing among their people.

Charlie watches Oscar watch everything but him. Slinks away, rejected.

TALLULAH, a female orang, watches. Approaches Oscar.

TALLULAH
Did you like Charlie's trick?

TEENAGE GIRL flips open her cell phone. Aims at Oscar.

OSCAR
(absent)
Of course.
(pauses)
What trick?

TALLULAH
The one he just showed you.

Teenage Girl shows the phone to her friends.

OSCAR
A new Approval Box! It must be! Without
the Light of Joy? Most curious.

Oscar studies intently, new theories form in his mind.

Tallulah SIGHS, moves to Charlie. Puts her arm around him.

EXT. RHINOCEROS ENCLOSURE - DAY

Several rhinos wait along the back wall.

BUSTER, timid, approaches.

BUSTER
Did you hear? The humans are coming!
(beat)
Guys! Guys?

A ZOO KEEPER drops a fresh load of long grass over the back wall. Waiting rhinos converge.

Buster approaches. The others shift. Shuffle. Block.

BUSTER (CONT'D)
Fellas?
(blocked)
Hey, can I...

He gives up.

BUSTER (CONT'D)
I'll wait. Wouldn't want to make a pig of myself.

The biggest rhino, JOE, looks back, SNORTS.

BUSTER (CONT'D)
Of course, you're not, Joe.

Joe returns to the grass.

Buster sighs, moves back to the road. Waits.

EXT. FLAMINGO GROTTO - DAY

Among a flock of pink flamingos, five stand clustered together.

FLAMINGO #1
Hey, Floyd!

All five heads turn.

FLOYDS (ALL)
Yes?

FLAMINGO #1
You want to see the circus freaks?

FLOYDS (ALL)
You bet!

Five flamingos named Floyd rush to see FRENCH TUMBLERS (LUC and PICARD) pass.

Hugo strides at the front, in full barker mode.

HUGO
Come one, come all! Cirque du ROUGE! One night only!

The FLOYDS watch. One with a small dark spot, DOT, steps closer to another with perpetually ruffled head-feathers, SPIKE.

DOT
(smiles)
Aren't the French charming?

SPIKE
(shrugs)
Never noticed.

Dot sighs, returns to the performers. Floyd 3 glances at Floyds 4 and 5. They shrug.

INT. KOALA ENCLOSURE - DAY

Koalas sleep amid densely packed eucalyptus leaves. On the outer edge SYD snores.

EXT. GIANT PANDA EXHIBIT - DAY

Shi Shi rubs his back against a tree. Bai Yun watches Hua Mei nibble on her slowly melting prize.

Hua Mei looks to Bai Yun, shoot hanging out of her mouth.

HUA MEI

Mom?

BAI YUN

Finish chewing, sweetheart.

Hua Mei slurps the shoot, chews. Swallows.

HUA MEI

Mom?

BAI YUN

Yes, dear?

HUA MEI

They say I have to go someplace called "China."

BAI YUN

That's right.

HUA MEI

How come?

Hua Mei leaps on top of the ice-cake. Surfs it across the enclosure.

SHI SHI

"Why."

She crashes, unharmed. Picks herself up.

HUA MEI

That's what I said.

SHI SHI
You said "how come."

HUA MEI
You know what I meant.

Hua Mei licks, slurps, and nibbles her cake.

BAI YUN
There aren't very many of us left there,
now.

HUA MEI
You and Dad are here. If they need us
there, why are you here?

SHI SHI
It's complicated.
(changing subject)
You'll like China.

Chunk of the ice-cake slides off. Hua Mei captures it,
cradles. Ponders.

HUA MEI
I like it here. With you.

BAI YUN
I know, dear. When we grow up we
sometimes have to do things we may not
want to.

HUA MEI
How do you know which things?

Bai Yun and Shi Shi share a glance.

BAI YUN
You have to trust your heart.

HUA MEI
How?

SHI SHI
You'll know.
(lighter)
Hey, can I have some cake?

Shi Shi somersaults over, flops next to Hua Mei and the
cake. She giggles, slides it away.

Father and daughter frolic around the enclosure.

TO THE WEST

The setting sun bathes America's Finest City in golden glory.

EXT. FLAMINGO GROTTO - NIGHT

Flamingos perched on one leg. Heads tucked under wings for a night's sleep.

Dot shuffles closer to Spike. Sleeps. Spike edges away.

INT. KOALA ENCLOSURE - NIGHT

Syd SNORES. A nearby koala nudges him. The snoring stops. Briefly.

INT. JAGUAR ENCLOSURE - NIGHT

Jaguars 1 and 2 sleep. Dream.

Jackson focuses on the gate. Picks at the lock with a claw. Feels around, hears a CLICK.

Pulls back a BROKEN CLAW.

Jackson swats the gate, winces.

EXT. RHINOCEROS ENCLOSURE - NIGHT

Old hay covers packed earth, the choice sleeping spot where rhinos slumber.

Buster approaches, looks for a spot. The "sleeping" rhinos shift. Adjust. Block.

Buster gives up. Lays on bare ground. Tries to get comfortable. Fails.

INT. ORANGUTAN ENCLOSURE - NIGHT

Oscar peers beyond the plexi, searching for anything left behind.

Tallulah approaches.

TALLULAH

I've lived in zoos long enough to know
that most of us never see our families
again.

Oscar peels himself from the plexi. Watches her.

TALLULAH (CONT'D)

Charlie is such a sweet boy. You're very
lucky--

A cell phone RINGS.

Oscar scans the darkness. Finds the LIGHT of the phone's
display. Fixates.

Tallulah shakes her head, disappointed. Crosses to a
slumbering Charlie. Strokes his head.

The phone RINGS. Oscar stares.

EXT. GIRAFFE ENCLOSURE - NIGHT

The Calf snuggles with its Giraffe Mother.

Georgia watches from a distance. Sheds a tear.

INT. GIANT PANDA RESEARCH CENTER - NIGHT

MONITORS with grainy black and white images of Hua Mei
sleeping next to Bai Yun. Shi Shi sleeps nearby.

The feed CUTS to SNOWY STATIC.

EXT. GIANT PANDA EXHIBIT - NIGHT

Leaves RUSTLE. Too loudly.

SHI SHI stirs, rises. SNARLS.

THWIP! A tranquilizer dart TAGS his side. He GROWLS.

SHI SHI

Bai Yun!

BAI YUN rises.

THWIP! THWIP! Two more darts strike Shi Shi. He falls.

Bai Yun ROARS at the bushes. THWIP! THWIP! THWIP! Bai Yun falls.

HUA MEI

Mom!

Thick French accents from the bushes.

JEAN (O.S.)

Did you have to hit her with three?

LUC (O.S.)

Mothers are fierce when protecting their young. I don't take chances.

Black-clad acrobats (JEAN and LUC) descend from the bamboo. Approach Hua Mei. She panics.

HUA MEI

Help! Somebody help!

The French ninjas simply hear small GROWLS.

JEAN

What about her?

LUC

No darts. Don't damage the merchandise.

Hummingbird flies over, sees the situation below.

HUMMINGBIRD

Hey, lay off her!

The ninjas hear only CHIRPS.

Hua Mei turns, smacks into a third French ninja (PICARD), who scoops her neatly into a large dark sack.

PICARD

Keep quiet.

JEAN

Nobody's here, are they Luc?

LUC

Just us, Jean.

Hummingbird zips into the enclosure, attacks the ninjas. They swat, clip a wing. Hummingbird falls.

JEAN

Can we get this over with, si'l vous
plaît?

LUC

I agree. The sooner we're done here, the
sooner we're done with Las Vegas.

JEAN

I hate the desert.

PICARD

Grab the darts.

Jean and Luc each take a slumbering panda, search their
fur.

JEAN

Three?

LUC

Idiot.

HUA MEI peeks through the top of the sack.

GLOVED HANDS clip a motorized climber onto the bag, then
to a zip-line.

CLICK! Hua Mei's sack FLIES across a wire. Trees blur
past at a dizzying pace. Hua Mei SCREAMS.

EXT. ROADSIDE - HIGHWAY 163 - NIGHT

The bag ZIPS out from the trees, JERKS to a stop. The
REAR GATE of a rented yellow truck ROLLS UP.

More French ninjas grab the sack, whisk it into a CAGE,
SLAM it shut. Gate ROLLS DOWN HARD.

The engine REVS. Tires SQUEAL. Speed away.

EXT. GIANT PANDA EXHIBIT - DAY

No lines. A SMALL CROWD ebbs. Newcomers read a sign.
Mumble. Shrug. Disperse. A GIRL looks up to her FATHER.

GIRL #1

(pleads)

I wanna see the baby panda!

FATHER #1

They won't be out today. Let's go check out the pigs.

GIRL #1

They stink!

HOG #1 (O.S.)

You ain't so hot yourself, kid!

INT. GIANT PANDA RESEARCH CENTER - DAY

Jeff and Bobby camp in front of monitors. Play the point where the video cuts.

JEFF

Again.

BOBBY

That's the tenth time, Boss. It's not going to change.

JEFF

They cut the feed. Is the line repaired yet?

BOBBY

The techs are on their way.

JEFF

I want security tightened. Hire guards.

BOBBY

They could have taken the adults last night if they wanted to.

JEFF

We don't know anything about who "they" are. Or what they want.

Jeff crosses to HOLDING CAGES, where Bai Yun and Shi Shi sit. Shi Shi looks up, groggy.

JEFF (CONT'D)

You wouldn't let them take her, would you? You would have fought. If you could.

(to Bobby)

Run blood work. Check for tranquilizers.

BOBBY

You got it, Boss.

JEFF

No prints. No video. I've got nothing. I have to get her back, Bobby.

BOBBY

You will.

JEFF

We can't tell Ming. She would sooner shut us down than help. We could lose the pandas.

BOBBY

That would be a lot of money lost.

JEFF

The money isn't what worries me. If we lose a panda, nobody will trust us with their animals. This could ruin the Zoo. We'd have to close down. Everything.

BOBBY

What do we tell her?

LI MING

What do you tell who?

Li Ming stands just inside the door.

JEFF

How long have you been standing there?

LI MING

Long enough to know you're hiding something.

BOBBY

It's... Jeff's mother. He forgot her birthday this year.

JEFF

Again.

LI MING

It's a shame to take the elderly for granted.

JEFF

My mom's not that old!

LI MING

How old is she?

Jeff searches the recesses of his mind, comes up empty.

LI MING (CONT'D)

I see.

(glances)

What happened to the bamboo on the south side?

Jeff peers through the southern window to A LARGE GAP where a huge swath has been cut.

BOBBY

Pests. Pesticide. Someone might have accidentally sprayed that portion. We brought the animals inside to be safe.

LI MING

Where is Hua Mei?

JEFF

(picks up the lead)

Quarantine.

Li Ming raises a skeptical eyebrow.

JEFF (CONT'D)

She may have eaten shoots from that section.

LI MING

Is she alright?

JEFF

She'll be fine.

LI MING

I told you that cake was a stupid idea! I'll have to put this in my report.

Frustrated, Li Ming EXITS.

JEFF

That buys us a little time.

BOBBY

To do what?

JEFF

(shrugs)

Anything.

INT. OWEN'S AVIARY - DAY

The Zoo Vine is on overdrive. Birds dart along the Aviary. Hummingbird dashes through a closing door.

HUMMINGBIRD

The video was cut. They don't know anything.

A LORIKEET zips up.

LORIKEET

French ninjas.

THRUSH

(brushes past)

Talked about Las Vegas. The desert.

AN ORIOLE dashes to the upper deck, to a PIGEON waiting outside.

ORIOLE

Bai Yun and Shi Shi are okay.

Pigeon nods, flies off.

INT. JAGUAR ENCLOSURE - DAY

Jackson paces the cage with unyielding determination. Jaguars 1 and 2 lounge in the pool.

JAGUAR #1

They say she was kidnapped.

JAGUAR #2

Are they sure she didn't run away?

JACKSON

(perks)

She escaped?

JAGUAR #2

It's possible.

JACKSON

Bravo, little panda! If only my cell mates had one tenth your courage.

JAGUAR #1

That's hardly fair.

JAGUAR #2

We don't want to escape.

Jaguar 2 splashes Jackson. Jackson SNARLS.

JACKSON

Enjoy your gilded cage, my defeated
cousins. If that tiny panda can escape,
so shall I!

EXT. GIRAFFE ENCLOSURE - DAY

Giraffe Mother and Calf listen intently to the Pigeon.

MOTHER GIRAFFE

That poor child, she must be terrified.

CALF

I wanna hear more about the ninjas!

FROM THE FAR SIDE Georgia overhears, approaches.

GEORGIA

What do the keepers know?

MOTHER GIRAFFE

Nothing. Word on the Vine is that French
ninjas are taking her to Las Vegas.

GEORGIA

Weren't the circus humans going there?

MOTHER GIRAFFE

That's what the loud one kept shouting.

GEORGIA

Perhaps they took Hua Mei.

CALF

I wanna go to Las Vegas! I wanna see
ninjas!

MOTHER GIRAFFE

Maybe later, dear.

GEORGIA

What else did he say? The loud one?

MOTHER GIRAFFE

(recalls)
New York, then Europe.

GEORGIA

If they leave New York with Hua Mei, we
may never see her again.

MOTHER GIRAFFE

The humans will find her, Georgia.

GEORGIA

How?

Mother Giraffe considers. Nods.

GEORGIA (CONT'D)

(to Pigeon)

It's up to us.

EXT. RHINOCEROS ENCLOSURE - DAY

The herd munches green grass. Buster stands behind.

JOE

(mouth full)

Kid got kidnapped. Tough luck.

(munches)

Crazy giraffe broad wants to go after
her, let her. It's not my problem.

The rest of herd GRUNTS agreement.

BUSTER

You don't care?

Joe raises his head, grass between his lips.

JOE

(full mouth)

You say somethin'?

BUSTER

You don't care that a poor little girl
was taken from her family? They might
never see her again!

JOE

You see any tears? If you're so
concerned, you save her, Buster.

Joe laughs. The herd LAUGHS through stuffed mouths.

Buster searches for something, anything, to make them
stop laughing.

BUSTER
 (blurts)
 Fine! I will. I'll go.

The herd stops laughing. Looks to Joe.

JOE
 Yeah. Whatever.

The MUNCHING resumes.

Buster suddenly realizes what he just said.

EXT. ORANGUTAN ENCLOSURE - DAY

Tallulah and Charlie chat with one of the pigeons.

TALLULAH
 An escape? Can she do that?

CHARLIE
 That sounds cool!

Oscar pulls himself away from the plexi.

OSCAR
 I will join her!

CHARLIE
 You will?

TALLULAH
 You will?

PIGEON
 Really?

OSCAR
 The world of man is not for the faint of heart. It is full of strange devices sure to confound them.

TALLULAH
 Oscar, are you sure you want to do this?

OSCAR
 It's the opportunity of a lifetime.

CHARLIE
 What if something happens to you?

JAGUAR #1
He's going.

JAGUAR #2
He's going.

EXT. GIRAFFE ENCLOSURE - NIGHT

Giraffe Mother and Calf stand off to one side, well out of the way of

GEORGIA, at one end. She studies the far end, especially the LARGE MOAT.

MOTHER GIRAFFE
Are you sure about this, dear? Maybe the humans will save her.

GEORGIA
"Maybe" isn't enough.

Georgia BOLTS for the far side, builds into a GALLOP.

The MOAT DRAWS NEAR. Fast. She LEAPS...

AND LANDS on the far side of the moat. She's free!

Georgia spins, reels, surprised herself.

CALF
Go Georgia!

Georgia nods. Gallops away.

EXT. ORANGUTAN ENCLOSURE - NIGHT

Oscar sits, eyes upward. Tallulah and Charlie nearby.

CHARLIE
What if she can't get out?

Oscar takes his eyes off the sky for one last glance through the plexi.

Georgia looks down, her long neck arches the wall.

GEORGIA
(to Charlie)
Oscar?

Charlie points to Oscar.

GEORGIA (CONT'D)

Oh. He's a bit bigger.

(to Oscar)

Are you ready?

Oscar nods, leaps for a branch. Swings himself up, around. In a few turns he LEAPS.

SAILS toward Georgia. Catches her mane, swings around. Slides down her neck. LANDS on her back.

Georgia GRUNTS at the impact.

OSCAR

Sorry.

GEORGIA

That's alright. Let's get the others.

Oscar hangs onto Georgia's back, she heads to...

INT. JAGUAR ENCLOSURE - NIGHT

Jackson paces, stares holes into the night.

JACKSON

They should have been here by now.

Jaguars 1 and 2 try to sleep.

JAGUAR #2

It's very difficult to sleep with all that pacing.

JAGUAR #1

And whining.

JACKSON

My apologies for never being as comfortable in chains as you.

CLICK! A steel door behind the Jaguars CREAKS open.

Oscar stands on the other side.

OSCAR

Which one of you is Jackson?

Jackson BOUNDS over the pool, past Oscar.

JAGUAR #1

Him.

JAGUAR #2

Enjoy.

EXT. RHINOCEROS ENCLOSURE - NIGHT

The herd slumbers on hay-covered earth. Buster stands alone. Nervous.

GEORGIA pokes her head over nearby bushes. Oscar scurries up her neck. Drops into the bushes.

Moments later, a heavy steel paddock door OPENS. Buster tiptoes past sleeping brethren.

OUTSIDE, Buster looks back toward the herd.

OSCAR

Should I leave this open?

JOE snores. Drool oozes from the corner of his mouth.

Buster shakes his head "no," walks away.

Oscar shrugs. Closes the door.

EXT. KOALA ENCLOSURE - NIGHT

Georgia, Jackson, Buster and Oscar search for the best exit route.

JACKSON

How do we escape?

GEORGIA

I'm not sure.

BUSTER

You don't know?

GEORGIA

We'll find a way.

INT. KOALA ENCLOSURE - NIGHT

SYD STIRS, awakened by the noisy voices outside.

OSCAR (O.S.)

How will we get to Las Vegas once we get out?

Syd sighs. Wants to get back to sleep.

SYD
(cranky)
Take a train.

EXT. KOALA ENCLOSURE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The escapees glance at one another.

GEORGIA
Say that again?

SYD (O.S.)
A train, mate.

OSCAR
That's a good idea.

SYD (O.S.)
I know.

INSIDE

Syd settles into his beloved leaves.

A RUST-COLORED HAIRY HAND slides in behind him. Grabs.

EXT. FLAMINGO GROTTO - NIGHT

The escapees walk past the Flamingos.

SYD on Buster's back, fumes.

SYD
(grumpy)
I said take a train. Not me.

GEORGIA
I'm sorry, Syd.

JACKSON
You have a wisdom that belies your
constant sleeping, gray one.

BUSTER
We need all the help we can get.

SYD
What's all this about?

OSCAR

You didn't hear the Vine?

SYD

The birds leave me alone. I can't abide anything interfering with my beauty sleep.

JACKSON

One might expect greater beauty from so much sleep.

SYD

Great, a comedic kitty. If that's how it's going to be, you can put me back right now. Being kidnapped is not my idea of a good time.

FLOYDS (ALL)

Kidnapped?

FIVE FLOYDS stand before them, ready and reporting for duty.

GEORGIA

And you would be?

FLOYDS (ALL)

Floyd!

GEORGIA

Which one?

Each Floyd points at another.

BUSTER looks from wing-tip to wing-tip, blinks.

BUSTER

All of you?

FLOYDS (ALL)

Right!

GEORGIA

Could just one of you speak, please?

Dot nudges Spike, smiles. Spike glances at her, puzzled.

SPIKE

We want to help find Hua Mei.

JACKSON
 (doubtful)
 How?

SPIKE
 You need fliers.

GEORGIA
 (diplomatic)
 We were hoping to keep the size of the
 group small to avoid being noticed.

The Floyds glance at the motley collection.

SPIKE
 How were you planning on getting out?

Georgia and crew exchange puzzled glances.

Spike looks to the rest of the Floyds, who nod together.

FLOYDS (ALL)
 Follow us!

The Floyds take flight, encircle the team, peel away.

Georgia cranes, looks past the Exit Plaza. The Floyds
 point proudly at a long stretch of fence.

The team catches up. Jackson sees BUSHES beyond.

JACKSON
 Freedom!

GEORGIA
 (to Floyds)
 It's perfect. Thank you.
 (to Buster)
 Buster, if you don't mind?

Buster looks from the fence to Georgia and back.

BUSTER
 Are you sure?

JACKSON
 What?

Syd and Oscar dismount.

BUSTER
 I hate violence.

JACKSON
I hate captivity!

Georgia catches that.

JACKSON (CONT'D)
(covers)
For Hua Mei. She is captive. I hate it.

GEORGIA
(gently)
Buster, please.

Buster sighs, backs up. Draws a bead, CHARGES. Crushes the fence!

Jackson bounds through the breach. Oscar follows with Syd.

Georgia nods to the Floyds.

GEORGIA (CONT'D)
We would be honored to have you join us.

FLOYDS (ALL)
Great!

EXT. RAIL YARD - SAN DIEGO - NIGHT

The animals sneak between rail cars. The Floyds fly overhead, scout.

OUTSIDE A YELLOW TRAIN

Oscar SLIDES open a door, peers inside.

BUSTER
Are we sure this is it?

GEORGIA
The rats said it goes to Las Vegas.

OSCAR
Do we trust the rats?

JACKSON
I don't think they'd lie to me.

Jackson smiles, bares FANGS.

The crew hops in. Oscar SLIDES the door shut.

EXT. EXIT PLAZA - SAN DIEGO ZOO - DAY

GLOVED HANDS retrieve a mangled chain-link. Workers mend twisted fence.

Jeff approaches, morning Jamba Juice in hand, daypack slung over one shoulder. SIPS on his straw, puzzled.

EXT. JAGUAR ENCLOSURE - DAY

Jaguar 1 and 2 slip into the pool for their morning dip.

Jeff sucks on the straw.

JEFF

I thought we had a black one.

INT. GIANT PANDA RESEARCH CENTER - DAY

Jeff enters, finds Bobby at the monitors.

BOBBY

You're not going to believe this, Boss.

GRAINY VIDEO of Buster demolishing the fence, and the rest following.

Jeff follows various feeds of the jailbreak.

JEFF

If Ming knew what I was thinking she'd have me committed.

BOBBY

What are you talking about?

JEFF

We've never seen inter-species cooperation in the wild. One animal escaped, helped another, and they helped another. They coordinated a jailbreak.

BOBBY

You're starting to scare me, Boss.

JEFF

Think it through.

(checks over his shoulder)

Whoever took Hua Mei knew enough to cut the video to hide their identity.

(MORE)

JEFF (CONT'D)

We actually have tape of these animals to watch. What does that tell you?

BOBBY

They forgot to bring wire cutters?

JEFF

(shoots him a look)

There was no human involvement. These animals did exactly what it looks like they did. They escaped.

BOBBY

That's crazy.

JEFF

Give me a better explanation.

Bobby looks from Jeff to the monitors, pauses. Glances back to Jeff, starts to speak. Stops. Shrugs.

EXT. RAIL TRACKS - ARIZONA DESERT - DAY

A hundred yellow rail cars snake along steel tracks, the only mark of man amid vast desert scrub.

INT. RAIL CAR - YELLOW TRAIN - DAY

The escaped animals travel in a cramped and loaded boxcar.

BUSTER shifts, bumps a palette. Knocks Jackson off.

JACKSON

Watch it, you oaf!

BUSTER

Sorry.

Georgia's neck stretches past the Floyds. She groans. Stretches. Twists. The Floyds duck.

GEORGIA

Pardon me.

Rearing slightly, she brushes against Oscar, atop a nearby box.

GEORGIA (CONT'D)

Excuse me.

SYD SNORES atop another stack, oblivious.

BUSTER

At least one of us is comfortable.

OSCAR

He appears to be comfortable anywhere.

GEORGIA

Lucky for him.

JACKSON

We do not need luck. We need a plan.

BUSTER

I wasn't going to ask, but there's a lot I don't understand.

OSCAR

How do we find the Cirque? What do we do if we find them?

JACKSON

Some of us may have better luck on our own.

Georgia senses discord among the troops.

GEORGIA

Everyone, please, settle down. We'll work these things out.

BUSTER

When do we eat?

GEORGIA

When we can.

JACKSON

Some of us don't have to wait.

Jackson licks his lips, with his eyes cast firmly on the slumbering Syd.

GEORGIA

(to Jackson)

When I was a calf, lions attacked our herd. One tried to catch me. My mother stopped it. Do you know how?

Silence. The animals raptly await the answer.

Jackson stares, menacing. Georgia meets that with steely resolve.

GEORGIA (CONT'D)

She kicked it. One kick brought down the king of the jungle.

Amazed stares shift from Georgia to Jackson and back.

GEORGIA (CONT'D)

We will eat when we find food. No one in this car is food. Are we clear?

Everyone but Jackson nods. Jackson stares, unflinching.

BRAKES HISS. The train slows.

INT. MAIN CAR - RED CIRQUE DU ROUGE TRAIN - DAY

Cramped Cirque performers slide into one another as their car slows.

JEAN

Hey, back off!

LUC

You slid into me.

PICARD

This is insufferable.

Juliette slides toward the edge of her seat. Lester reaches, stops her. Stares at his hands around her waist.

LESTER

(sheepish)

Sorry.

JULIETTE

Performers should not ride steerage. It's insulting.

LESTER

It's just for this trip. You'll see, Juliette. After New York--

JULIETTE

It will be more of the same. It's not the panda that has us riding in box cars.

Hugo steadies himself, grumbles.

HUGO

Would you all quit this incessant whining?

JULIETTE

I could name another Cirque that does not humiliate their artistes like this.

HUGO

Don't you dare.

JULIETTE

Cirque du Sol--

HUGO

ENOUGH! After everything I have done for you, you miserable strumpet.

Hugo storms through the rear door, into

INT. HUGO'S CAR - RED CIRQUE DU ROUGE TRAIN - DAY

Sunlight slices through narrow windows. Hugo pulls himself in, braces against the SLOWING of the train.

The car GRINDS to a halt.

Hugo sits next to a covered crate. Removes the cover. HUA MEI sits inside.

Hugo leans in. Hua Mei retreats against steel bars.

HUGO

You are so lucky, little panda.

HUA MEI

It doesn't feel like it.

Hugo hears nothing.

HUGO

You have no idea the torment I suffer for those ungrateful, spoiled, brats! "The other Cirque wouldn't do this." "The other Cirque wouldn't do it that." They want more money. More benefits. Even--
(shudders)

Unions!

Hugo calms. Watches Hua Mei. Drawn closer by her darling EYES.

HUGO (CONT'D)

This will all change soon, my Celestial treasure. You are the key to my future.

HUA MEI
Can I go home now?

Hugo rises, reaches for the lid of the cage.

HUGO
Perhaps a pet will calm my nerves. Come
here, darling.

Hugo reaches in. Hua Mei recoils.

Hugo's grinning face draws near. Hua Mei snaps. Lunges
for Hugo, CHOMPS his hand. Hard.

Hugo screams!

Hua Mei scrambles out of the cage. Hugo hops in pain.
Cradles his wound.

HUGO (CONT'D)
LESTER!

Hua Mei scales the wall, heads for the windows.

HUA MEI
Help! Somebody! Over here!

INT. RAIL CAR - YELLOW TRAIN - DAY - SIMULTANEOUS

Georgia rises fast, hits the ceiling.

HUA MEI (O.S.)
Help me! Someone! Help!

Jackson leaps up. Georgia peeks out, sees

A RED TRAIN, with matching windows through which she sees
HUA MEI.

GEORGIA
It's her. It's Hua Mei!

JACKSON
Everyone out!

Oscar tumbles to the door. SLIDES it open.

EXT. HUGO'S CAR - RED CIRQUE DU ROUGE TRAIN - DAY

Hua Mei hangs onto the sill, her claws dig into aging
wood.

HUGO (O.S.)

LESTER!

HUA MEI

Help! Over here! Help me!

Her eyes go wide when she spots

THE ZOO ANIMALS, crossing the switch yard.

INT. HUGO'S CAR - RED CIRQUE DU ROUGE TRAIN - DAY

Lester bursts into the room, spots Hugo holding his hand.

LESTER

Are you alright?

HUGO

Get her!

Hugo nods toward Hua Mei, clinging onto the window.

Lester skirts past Hugo, bumps his hand. Hugo HOWLS.

LESTER

Sorry.

HUGO

Idiot!

Lester dances past Hugo, toward the window.

EXT. RAIL SWITCH YARD - BULLHEAD CITY, AZ - DAY

Georgia leads. Jackson closes fast. Buster carries Oscar and Syd on his back. The Floyds above.

GEORGIA

We're coming, Hua Mei!

THE TRACKS UNDER THE RED TRAIN TURN

GROAN and GRIND as the red train re-routes.

Georgia watches the windows. Hua Mei disappears.

GEORGIA (CONT'D)

Hua Mei!

INT. HUGO'S CAR - RED CIRQUE DU ROUGE TRAIN - DAY

Lester tries to wrangle Hua Mei. She squirms, breaks free. Bolts toward Hugo, dives between his legs.

Lester dives after, head butts Hugo in the groin. Hugo drops.

Lester scrambles, snags Hua Mei by her paw. Grapples her from behind. Rises.

OUTSIDE, THE TRACKS LOCK

The entire train ROCKS.

INSIDE

Lester trips. Hua Mei slips. Lands squarely into the cage.

The lid SLAMS hard. Hugo's good hand LATCHES it.

THE CIRQUE ENGINE RUMBLES TO LIFE

Hugo and Lester LURCH as the train CHUGS forward.

OUTSIDE

The animals run for the red train as it leaves the yard.

BUSTER

(pants)

Go on without me!

GEORGIA

We can make it!

RAIL WORKER #1

Hey! How did they get here?

RAIL YARD WORKERS point, run toward them.

JACKSON

We've got company, Boss.

The red train pulls farther away. They won't make it.

Georgia looks for other options.

GEORGIA

Back to the train!

The pack turns wide, circles back to the yellow train.

THE FLOYDS ABOVE

See the yellow train pull away.

FLOYDS (ALL)
Uh-oh!

GEORGIA
What is it?

SPIKE
We need a different plan.

A cover-all brigade of RAIL WORKERS rush after them. Cut off one escape route. Then another.

Georgia glances. Desperate. Spots an opening. A BLUE TRAIN, with an open door.

GEORGIA
Split up! Meet on the blue train.

Georgia and the Floyds break one away. Jackson, Buster and his passengers another.

The rail workers disperse randomly, haphazard.

THE FLOYDS fly interference. Georgia leaps into the blue train.

JACKSON runs circles around another group of rail workers, clears the way for

BUSTER'S charge. On his back, OSCAR grabs Syd.

OSCAR
Wake up!

SYD
(groggy)
What?

OSCAR
Pull!

Oscar swings Syd wide, an extension of his own long arm.

SYD
Pull what?

SYD SAILS toward a lever, catches on. PULLS.

A LOADING RAMP drops with a loud WHAM!

Oscar whips Syd back on board.

Buster charges into the car, SKID-STOPS just shy of Georgia.

THE BLUE TRAIN'S ENGINE RUMBLES

INSIDE

The animals lurch as the train moves forward.

THE BLUE TRAIN PULLS AWAY

ON BOARD

GEORGIA

Where's Jackson?

Georgia pokes her head outside, sees the yard shrinking.

Oscar, leans out the other side.

OSCAR

(points)

There!

OUTSIDE

Jackson runs like a cat possessed, gains on their car.

IN THE YARD

One WORKER spots Jackson, points.

RAIL WORKER #1

There!

ON THE TRAIN

The animals rush to watch. Hope to help.

JACKSON nears the door at a furious pace.

JACKSON

Move!

OSCAR

What?

JACKSON

MOVE!

Georgia gets it. Sweeps everyone back with her neck.

JACKSON LEAPS for the opening, nails it. Lands. Drops.
Pants.

Everyone gathers. Congratulates him.

SYD

Where are we going?

The animals look to one another for the answer.

INT. HUGO'S CAR - RED CIRQUE DU ROUGE TRAIN - DAY

Lester slides bamboo shoots into Hua Mei's cage.

Hugo wraps his hand.

HUGO

(furious)

What took you so long? I had to call
twice. I should never have to call you
twice.

LESTER

Juliette needed help.

HUGO

It's always Juliette!

Lester sinks. He's heard this before.

HUGO (CONT'D)

You love her. It's sad, really. We both
know you don't stand a chance.

Lester nods, weakly.

HUGO (CONT'D)

A beautiful creature like that would
never sink so low. Nobody will love you,
Lester. Nobody even likes you. Except me.

Hugo finishes wrapping his hand, plops into his chair.

HUGO (CONT'D)

Why do you think I'm doing all of this?
The panda. The buyer. It's for the
Cirque. For Juliette. For you.

LESTER
(meek)
Thank you.

INT. GIANT PANDA RESEARCH CENTER - NIGHT

A COMPUTER SCREEN with photos of the rail workers. The headline: "ANIMALS ESCAPE CIRCUS TRAIN."

BOBBY
(reads)
"Several flamingos were also reported fleeing the scene."

JEFF
It's them. Where was this?

BOBBY
Bullhead City, Arizona. How did they make it that far?

JEFF
Probably took a train.

Bobby slowly spins in his chair, faces Jeff. Stares.

JEFF (CONT'D)
I know how that sounds. I'm still open to better theories.

Bobby thinks a moment. Shrugs.

JEFF (CONT'D)
Set up the retrieval team. Parker, Richards, and Murdock.

Jeff slings his daypack, heads for the door.

BOBBY
Where are you going?

JEFF
I'm getting my animals back.

BOBBY
"Your" animals?

JEFF
There is a connection between Hua Mei's abduction and their escape. I just have to figure out what that is.

BOBBY
How can I help?

JEFF
Keep Ming the Merciless off my tail.

Bobby nods.

JEFF (CONT'D)
Thanks, Bobby.

Jeff EXITS.

INT. RAIL CAR - BLUE TRAIN - DAY

Jackson perches atop a tower of crates marked JUNGLE FEVER.

Buster takes up most of the center.

Georgia stretches. Knocks Oscar off his wooden perch.

OSCAR
OOF!

GEORGIA
I'm sorry.

The Floyds rearrange. Bounce off Buster.

BUSTER
Hey!

FLOYDS (ALL)
Sorry.

JACKSON
Brilliant strategy.

GEORGIA
We had no choice.

BUSTER
We don't even know where we're going.

OSCAR
At least we didn't get captured.

BUSTER
When do we eat?

JACKSON

Why did I bother to catch up? You have no idea of what to do even if you succeed.

Syd SNORES loudly from Buster's back.

GEORGIA

This isn't about us. It's about Hua Mei.

JACKSON

Why do you care? What is in it for you?

GEORGIA

Nothing.

JACKSON

I don't believe that.

Georgia's deep brown eyes grow even softer, on the verge of tears. Pokes her head through the side window.

OUTSIDE, she sheds a tear, carried off by the wind.

EXT. RAIL SWITCH YARD - BULLHEAD CITY, AZ - DAY

A jet-black VAN and SEMI approach, dust billows in their wake.

They stop. Jeff hops out. Followed by PARKER, RICHARDS, and MURDOCK; animal bounty hunters.

INT. RAIL BOSS'S OFFICE - DAY

RAIL BOSS pounds keys on a grimy terminal. Jeff waits. Parker stands behind him.

RAIL BOSS

(checks screen)

Manifest says set decorations for "Jungle Fever."

JEFF

My animals were all on that train?

RAIL BOSS

My guy saw the black cat jump on. Swears he saw a giraffe inside.

JEFF

That train and the Cirque train are both going to Vegas?

RAIL BOSS

(nods)

Crew on the other end says they can contain your animals. They'll be waiting for you.

JEFF

(turns to leave)

Thanks.

RAIL BOSS

Got any passes to your Zoo, Mr. Walters?

Jeff nods to Parker. EXITS.

Parker, stoic, reaches into his coat. Rail Boss watches, nervous.

Parker flips out his hand. Rail Boss flinches. Relaxes. Two tickets, on the counter.

Parker smiles. EXITS.

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - DAY - LATER

The black van and semi speed along dusty asphalt.

INSIDE THE VAN

Parker drives. Jeff sits shotgun. Busy with an unruly map. Cradles a phone with his shoulder.

JEFF

We're heading to Vegas now. Should be there in a few hours.

BOBBY (V.O.)

You mentioned the Cirque du Rouge.

BACK AT THE PANDA STATION

Bobby shifts in his chair. Nervous.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

Think there's a connection?

JEFF (V.O.)

It could be coincidence. Considering these past couple days, I'm not a big fan of coincidence.

Li Ming ENTERS. Spots Bobby on the phone.

LI MING
Who are you on with?

BOBBY
(covers)
You know how it is, Ma. Same stuff,
different day.

IN THE VAN

JEFF
Is she there?

BOBBY (V.O.)
Gotta go, Ma. The pandas are puking.

LI MING
What? They're fine, except for Hua Mei,
who you won't--

CLICK!

JEFF
Bobby? Bobby?
(closes phone)
Nuts.

EXT. THE STRIP - LAS VEGAS - DAY

The commercialized glory of Sin City. The black LUXOR
pyramid. Dancing BELLAGIO fountains.

An excavated crater hosts the partially-clad steel
skeleton of the future JUNGLE FEVER.

EXT. RAIL YARD - LAS VEGAS - DAY

A battalion of rail workers unload the blue train into a
WAREHOUSE.

Our animals neatly march out behind pushed crates.

JACKSON
Now?

GEORGIA
Too many watching. If we run we start
with them on our tails.

BUSTER
So what do we do?

GEORGIA

Go with them. They don't seem to mind as long as we behave.

Oscar, perched on Buster's back, casually surveys the workers. He hears KEYS JINGLING, looks to

THE BELT OF ONE WORKER

A thick set of noisy keys jangle next to a GameBoy.

Oscar squints to get a better look.

The animals enter the warehouse, flanked by workers.

JACKSON

It's a trap. I know it.

The workers step closer. Herd the animals.

GEORGIA

Maybe not.

Oscar glances down. Spots a LARGE METAL PLATE they stand on.

OSCAR

How curious.

A HUMAN HAND nears a switchbox.

VEGAS CARGO JOCK

Now!

A KLAXON SOUNDS. The animals instinctively cluster.

Steel fence gates DROP from above, land with loud CLANGS!

VEGAS CARGO JOCK (CONT'D)

I told you it would work.

JACKSON

I told you it was a trap!

The cargo workers close in on the cage.

VEGAS CARGO JOCK #2

What next?

VEGAS CARGO JOCK

Wait for the Jungle Fever guys. If they want them, they'll have to pay up.

Cargo workers move in for a closer look.

VEGAS CARGO JOCK #2
How did you know they weren't part of the
shipment?

VEGAS CARGO JOCK
(points at Syd)
The koala. No koalas in the jungle.

VEGAS CARGO JOCK #2
Like the tourists would notice.

Oscar hears JANGLING KEYS on the human in front of him.
Looks at the belt. Eyes wide.

INT. WAREHOUSE - LAS VEGAS - NIGHT

A column of light shines on the imprisoned zoo animals.
The rest sits dark. Foreboding.

A LONE CARGO WORKER patrols. Keys jingle.

The Floyds line one wall, sing in five-part harmony. Dot
has the high end.

FLOYDS (ALL)
(singing)
"Nobody knows the troubles I've seen"

Jackson paces. Desperately scans for any possible exit.

JACKSON
Wonderful plan, boss.

FLOYDS (ALL)
(singing)
"Nobody knows the sorrow."

JACKSON
(snaps at the Floyds)
Stop that!

BUSTER
What now?

JACKSON
Ask the giraffe. This must be another
part of her master plan.

GEORGIA
That's enough.

Syd SNORES loudly from Buster's back.

JACKSON

I agree. You said follow them. You said they were happy as long as we behaved. I said they were just like any other human.

GEORGIA

Maybe you're right.

Jackson stops pacing, moves to directly confront Georgia.

JACKSON

"Maybe?" Look at us!

GEORGIA

Fighting with me won't free you.

Jackson stares daggers. Works the odds of being able to take her.

Georgia matches his heated stare with her own.

BEEP! BLIP! BEE-BEEP!

Jackson and Georgia blink. Look to

THE FAR CORNER

Where Oscar sits. His back to them. BLIP! BUH-BLEEP!

The animals close. Georgia peers over his shoulder, sees

THE GAMEBOY

GEORGIA (CONT'D)

Where did you find that?

OSCAR

(engrossed)

On one of the humans.

JACKSON

The one with the noisy pants?

OSCAR

(nods)

That's the one.

Jackson blows his stack.

JACKSON

Those were keys!

OSCAR
(absently)
I've seen keys before. This is new.

JACKSON
(enraged)
We could have escaped!

Jackson bares fangs, raises claws.

GEORGIA
Buster, please.

Buster squeezes between the furious jaguar and oblivious orangutan. Stand off.

BEEP! BU-BLIP! BZZZT!

Syd stirs, rubs his eyes.

SYD
Oh, look. One of those Game-kid things.

OSCAR
(smiles)
You know it?

SYD
I've seen a few.

Syd senses the tension. Sizes up the stand-off.

SYD (CONT'D)
Here's an idea.

Everyone stares at Syd.

THE LONE CARGO WORKER

Sweeps his light through the darkness. Keys JINGLE every other step.

BEEP! BLIP! BU-BLEEP! BZZT!

He glances. Follows the sound to

THE ANIMAL'S CAGE

Oscar huddles in one corner. The others sleep.

Lone Cargo Worker closes. Oscar looks up, offers the GameBoy to the Worker.

Worker reaches into the cage. Hesitates.

Oscar smiles. Grabs the Workers arm. YANKS him against the bars with a SLAM!

The animals spring into action.

SPIKE lifts the keys with his beak.

Oscar lets go. Lone Cargo Worker reels. Panics.

Oscar flips through keys. Tries each.

Lone Cargo Worker stares in disbelief.

CLICK!

The cage door opens. The animals charge out.

Lone Dock Worker freaks. Bolts for the exit.

Jackson BOUNDS across the floor, blocks the exit.

Worker turns, faces

BUSTER

Who lets out an angry SNORT.

Long Cargo Worker is trapped. Knows it.

Jackson walks slowly toward him. Buster backs away. They're herding him!

Worker stumbles into the cage. Buster SLAMS the gate. Oscar tosses the KEYS.

EXT. FREMONT STREET - LAS VEGAS - NIGHT

Crowds armed with yard-long margaritas churn beneath a video canopy that spans several football fields.

The zoo animals creep into the crowd. Try to remain inconspicuous.

A drunk bead-laden FREMONT TOURIST notices.

FREMONT TOURIST #1
Will you look at that?

Heads turn. Voices MURMUR

FREMONT TOURIST #2
Must be a stunt for that new jungle
casino.

The animals huddle closer, following Georgia through the
crowd.

GEORGIA
Stay calm. Stick together.

FREMONT TOURIST #1
Can't be. They've got a koala.

FREMONT TOURIST #3
Where are the handlers?

FREMONT TOURIST
Maybe they're robots!

Cameras FLASH like paparazzi gone wild.

OSCAR
Approval!

BUSTER
What?

A flash BURSTS in Buster's face. Buster stumbles, bumps a
tourist, who falls.

BUSTER (CONT'D)
I am so sorry.

FREMONT TOURIST
They've gone wild!

BUSTER
Huh?

A LADY screams! The crowd grows restless.

JACKSON
That's it. We're getting out of here!

Jackson SNARLS. Clears a path. The rest follow.

The crowd loses it! Some scream. Some run. Several
follow, cameras up.

EXT. THE STRIP - LAS VEGAS - NIGHT

Buster clears a path through crowded sidewalks.

BUSTER

Pardon me. Excuse me. Madam, please!

Behind, the throng of tourists grows larger, the flashbulbs more intense.

The entire menagerie passes the BELLAGIO FOUNTAINS in mid-show.

Dot leans close to Spike.

DOT

Isn't it romantic?

Spike does a double-take, unsure if he heard that right.

INT. MIRAGE - LAS VEGAS - NIGHT

The zoo animals burst into the casino, tow tourists in their wake. Slot machines and video poker CHIME and CLANG loudly.

Oscar is in tech-heaven.

OSCAR

Will you look at that?

JACKSON

Later!

GEORGIA

This way!

The animals break to one side, find themselves

IN FRONT OF THE WHITE TIGERS

The entire pack stops cold, stares.

THE TIGERS stare back, glancing from the zoo animals to each other.

WHITE TIGER #1

Well, this takes the cake. Jungle Fever isn't even finished and they pull a stunt like this.

WHITE TIGER #2

No taste at all.

GEORGIA

We're not with any casino.

JACKSON

We're on a mission.

WHITE TIGER #1

Of course you are. Saving the world, are we?

GEORGIA

Just one baby panda.

JACKSON

She has been kidnapped by a travelling circus that has no animals.

GEORGIA

They're performing tonight, then leaving for New York.

The white tigers huddle, converse quietly. WHITE TIGER #1 approaches the plexi-glass.

WHITE TIGER

That would be the Cirque du Rouge. They cancelled their evening show. Couldn't sell a single seat. They're leaving town tonight.

GEORGIA

How?

WHITE TIGER #2

By train. I hear they even make their performers move luggage.

GEORGIA

Where?

WHITE TIGER

South. Follow the street past the Luxor. Bright light. Black pyramid. Can't miss it.

Georgia BOWS. White Tiger #1 returns.

Syd SNORES.

The CROWDS burst in, chase the animals.

GEORGIA

Move out!

The zoo animals flee into

THE CASINO FLOOR

Syd stirs, rubs his eyes.

 SYD
Where are we?

 OSCAR
Vegas.

 JACKSON
This is impossible!

 GEORGIA
There are no exits.

 OSCAR
They don't want the humans to escape.

 SYD
Good for us, right?

Georgia and Jackson share a glance. He's right.

 GEORGIA
Floyds! Find an exit.

 FLOYDS (ALL)
Right!

The Floyds break formation like fighter pilots, fan out.

 GEORGIA
Split up. Buster, you follow Jackson.
I'll meet you at the exit.

Jackson and Buster (with Oscar and Syd atop) RUMBLE through the slot machines. Buster knocks a couple over.

COINS POUR OUT

Gamblers swarm the bounty.

Georgia breaks the other way. The CROWDS spot her head above the fray. Follow.

Spike spots an exit sign.

 SPIKE
Over here!

The Floyds converge on Spike. Jackson and Buster change course through roulette tables. Past the Floyds. EXIT.

Georgia drops her head low, runs at a near-crouch through the exit.

THE TOURISTS

Lose Georgia. Mill about. Lost.

EXT. RAIL YARD - LAS VEGAS - NIGHT

Lester, Jean, and Luc grab Hua Mei's covered cage.

INSIDE

Hua Mei peers under the cover, sees RAILROAD TRACKS.

OUTSIDE

The trio slides the cage off the truck.

JEAN

(grunts)

Something so small should be lighter.

LUC

It's the cage, moron.

HUA MEI'S PAW slips a few bamboo shoots through the bars.

Six hands lug the cage, lift. DROP onto the car. Take a breather. Hugo approaches.

HUGO

What are you waiting for? Get on board!

THE ENGINE RUMBLES to life.

The red Cirque train pulls slowly away.

FROM THE FAR END

The FLOYDS fly into view. Georgia, Jackson, and Buster (carrying Syd and Oscar) charge behind.

GEORGIA

There they are!

THE RED TRAIN CHUGS on, clears the yard. Gathers speed.

BUSTER

We're too late!

JACKSON

I can make it.

THE TRAIN pulls even further away. Jackson bolts ahead of the pack.

FLASHBULBS behind. SIRENS blare.

OSCAR

They've found us!

GEORGIA

(glances)

Jackson!

Jackson watches the train pull away. Glances back at the struggling rhino. Slows. Turns. Rejoins the pack.

JACKSON

What now, fearless leader?

Georgia searches.

GEORGIA

Floyds! What are our options?

The flamingos circle. Spiral.

FLOYD #4

Over here!

The animals scramble to Floyd #4, at

A WHITE OLD-TIME CIRCUS TRAIN

Decorated with faded paintings of elephants, lions, and bears. "J.R. OPPENHEIMER'S OLD-TIMEY CIRCUS."

FLASHES and SIRENS draw closer.

GEORGIA

Find the animal cars.

Airborne Floyds fly the length of the train.

SPIKE

Here!

Georgia, Jackson, and Buster scurry to the converging Floyds. Board.

INT. ANIMAL CAR - OLD TIMEY CIRCUS - NIGHT

Georgia and Buster FREEZE. Jackson boards behind, bumps into Buster.

JACKSON

Keep moving!

Jackson looks from Buster to Georgia. Follows their frightened stares to

SEVERAL LIONS

Safely behind bars.

Jackson approaches, lowers his head.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Mighty cousins, we humbly ask asylum from the world of Man.

The Lions exchange glances. All look to a generously maned HEAD LION. He studies Jackson.

HEAD LION

What are you on about?

DOORS SLIDE SHUT O.S.

Georgia snaps out of it. Peeks outside, spots

CIRCUS WORKERS

Closing car doors one at a time. Work their way closer.

GEORGIA

Please, we need to hide. May we travel with you?

Head Lion looks back at the rest of the pride.

HEAD LION

Mi casa, su casa.

Georgia bows deep as she can. Head Lion nods.

GEORGIA

They're coming. Everyone, hide.

The Floyds cautiously skirt the lion-filled cage. Georgia and Jackson follow them.

TWO CARS DOWN

Workers SLIDE another door SHUT.

Buster stands frozen. Oscar leans toward his face.

OSCAR
Buster? Buster!

SLAM! The car behind closes.

Syd wakes. Flicks out one claw. Pokes Buster's butt.

BUSTER
YEOWWW!

Buster scrambles for the shadows behind the lion cage.

THE CIRCUS WORKERS

Approach. SLAM the door.

EXT. WHITE OLD-TIMEY CIRCUS TRAIN - NIGHT - LATER

The rickety locomotive barrels through the midnight desert.

INT. ANIMAL CAR - OLD TIMEY CIRCUS - NIGHT

Zoo animals encircle caged lions.

HEAD LION
We play Wichita then New Jersey. That's close to New York. You can stay 'till then. Your friend has already settled in.

Syd SNORES, nestled in cargo nets.

GEORGIA
Thank you.

EXT. RAIL YARD - LAS VEGAS - NIGHT

A few tourists linger. Squad cars sit dark and silent.

Parker, Richards, and Murdock take statements from tourist and cop alike.

Jeff crosses tracks, phone cradled against his ear.

JEFF

(to phone)

The records are a mess. Some confusion about the Cirque and another circus.

(beat)

Bobby? What's the situation with Ming?

BOBBY

(over phone)

Yeah... about that--

JEFF

Bobby, what about Ming? Where is she?

LI MING (O.S.)

Right behind you.

Jeff freezes. Judgement day.

JEFF

(to phone)

I'll call you back.

(closes phone, faces Ming)

Ming. How are you?

LI MING

I expected something more than that.

JEFF

"Fancy meeting you here?"

LI MING

Bobby told me everything.

JEFF

"Everything?"

LI MING

Hua Mei is not in quarantine. She was kidnapped. Several animals escaped. You think they're working together. And somehow it all ties into the French circus freaks.

JEFF

(considers)

That's everything.

(beat)

So what happens now? You give me a lecture, expose this operation, and ruin my zoo?

LI MING

You might learn something from a lecture.
You just rode off like the Lone Stranger.

JEFF

Ranger. The Lone Ranger. Technically, he
didn't ride alone.

LI MING

Whatever. That cowboy mentality would
never be tolerated back home. We value
teamwork.

JEFF

Please spare me another "once upon a time
in China" speech. You're not mad that I
did this without a team. You're mad you
weren't on it.

(turns)

I have to get back to work.

Steamed, Li Ming turns. Spots something. Crossing, she
picks up

BAMBOO SHOOTS

LI MING

Impossible.

JEFF

What?

(sees the shoots)

Those are mine. From the zoo.

LI MING

Hua Mei was here.

JEFF

So was the Cirque du Rouge. So were the
rest of my animals.

(beat)

We need to find out which train they
boarded. Where did you find those?

LI MING

Right here.

Jeff looks down, notices

HUMAN FOOTPRINTS

JEFF
 (follows tracks)
 These tracks lead to this set of rails.
 We need to know what train left here.
 (spots something else)
 Wait...

BROAD ROUND RHINO TRACKS

JEFF (CONT'D)
 Rhinoceros.

He follows them along the rails.

JEFF (CONT'D)
 Large cat. Giraffe.

Jeff hustles along, carefully follows them to

JEFF (CONT'D)
 Another train.
 (beat)
 Parker!

Jeff runs past Li Ming.

JEFF (CONT'D)
 Parker! The animals boarded another
 train. Find out which one left from those
 tracks.

Parker nods, heads back to Richards and Murdock.

JEFF (CONT'D)
 (faces Li Ming)
 Before you decide what you're going to
 do, I may as well tell you my theory
 about all of this.
 (beat)
 Ready?

Li Ming is unsure. Nods anyway.

JEFF (CONT'D)
 I think the pack of missing animals
 coordinated an escape to rescue Hua Mei
 from the Cirque du Rouge.
 (beat)
 You can either help me or have me
 committed. It's your choice.

Li Ming studies the bamboo shoots. Then Jeff.

LI MING
You're insane.

Jeff sighs. It's over.

LI MING (CONT'D)
I'll help.

JEFF
(blinks)
You will?

LI MING
If word gets out that Hua Mei has been
kidnapped, those who took her decide to
get rid of her. My job is to see Hua Mei
returned safely.
(studies the leaves)
If working with a lunatic cowboy is what
it takes, then that's what I'll do.

Jeff and Li Ming study each other. Jeff nods. She's
right.

EXT. OLD-TIMEY CIRCUS TENT - WICHITA - DAY

Circus workers set up the Big Top. Huge stakes are
POUNDED into earth. Long ropes STRETCH taut.

INSIDE

Teams of men PULL ROPES. A massive CENTER POLE rises into
place, CREAKS under the weight of stretched canvas.

OUTSIDE

The Lions rehearse with a whip-wielding LION TRAINER.

Various animals, in cages and out, surround them.
Rehearse their own acts.

Georgia, Jackson, Buster, Oscar, and the Floyds eat and
drink their fill. A KEEPER fills a trough with water.

LION TRAINER
(watching)
Whose act are those for?

KEEPER
(shrugs)
Dunno. Bert's maybe.

Lion Trainer shrugs, returns to the Lions. A flick of the wrist, CRACK of the whip, and Head Lion leaps through a large HOOP gracefully.

JACKSON

Excellent!

HEAD LION

(bows)

Worked on that for years.

GEORGIA

It shows.

A full-bellied Syd SNORES.

Oscar watches a BEAR ride a unicycle, fascinated. Another BEAR IN A TUTU practices furry pirouettes.

GEORGIA (CONT'D)

Why don't you come with us? We could use your help.

Nearby ELEPHANTS balance on various BALLS, STOOLS. A trio stands in a pachyderm pyramid.

ELEPHANT

Are you crazy? I've waited years to get into this show.

Other elephants NOD agreement.

HEAD LION

We're entertainers, darling. This is what we know.

Georgia watches.

Syd SNORES.

EXT. CARGO AIRPORT - LAS VEGAS - DAY

Parker, Richards, and Murdock load the van and semi onto a massive transport plane.

Li Ming pours over train records. Jeff paces with his cell.

JEFF

(to phone)

Ming is checking the records now.

BOBBY
 (over phone)
 She's helping? Working with you?

JEFF
 I know. Her job is on the line, too.
 (silence)
 Bobby, are you there?

BOBBY
 Yeah. I'm here.

JEFF
 I think we're getting close.
 (more silence)
 Can you hear me?

LI MING
 (holds up a page)
 I found it.

BOBBY
 I hear you.

JEFF
 I'll call you back.

Jeff closes the phone. Pauses. Something's off.

Jeff crosses, looks at the page.

JEFF (CONT'D)
 They boarded a circus train? They could
 be on until Kansas or New Jersey.

LI MING
 Unless someone spots them before the next
 stop.

JEFF
 We still don't know what train loaded Hua
 Mei, do we?

LI MING
 (shakes her head)
 The only thing that links her to the
 Cirque du Rouge is your theory.

JEFF
 We'll go to Kansas.

LI MING
 What about Hua Mei?

JEFF

It's just a theory. We should focus on
the animals we can find.

Li Ming nods.

JEFF (CONT'D)

Parker! Wichita!

INT. OLD-TIMEY CIRCUS TENT - WICHITA - NIGHT

An old-fashioned circus performs for a packed house.

Innumerable CLOWNS emerge from the smallest car ever.

ELEPHANTS march tail-in-trunk past the CENTER RING, where
a RING MASTER emcees.

BACKSTAGE

Behind great curtains Georgia, Jackson, Buster, Oscar,
Syd and the Floyds stir inside a makeshift corral.

JACKSON

(fumes)

I can't believe I let you talk me into
this. Again.

Syd SNORES loudly.

GEORGIA

It was only a matter of time before they
figured out we weren't part of any act.

BUSTER

She's right. If we ran, they'd have
caught us anyway.

JACKSON

They would not have captured me.

BUSTER

We're not all as fast as you.

JACKSON

That is not my problem!

Syd stirs. Glances.

SYD
 Looks like it is, mate.
 (surveys the pen)
 What are we doing in here?

The rest stare at the marsupial.

SYD (CONT'D)
 (off them)
 Thumbs.

GEORGIA
 Excuse me?

SYD
 (nods to Oscar)
 He's got thumbs, hasn't he?

Georgia looks at Oscar. Back to Syd.

GEORGIA
 Oscar, you're on.

Oscar stares blankly. Georgia arches her head over the pen's gate.

Oscar gets it. Swings himself up her legs, scales her neck. Drops.

Oscar lands outside the pen. Flips the latch. Opens the door.

The animals exit the pen.

JACKSON
 You forgot you had thumbs?

Oscar shrugs.

GEORGIA
 Let's go.

Georgia leads through curtains, straight into

THE CENTER RING

The lion act is in full swing. Lion Trainer CRACKS his whip in the center. The hoop stands ready.

The zoo animals FREEZE.

HEAD LION spots them, glances.

HEAD LION
Quick, do something.

GEORGIA
What?

HEAD LION
Right now you're another act. Keep
standing there like that and they'll
think you've escaped.

THE LION TRAINER, crosses to Head Lion, opens its mouth.
Sticks his head inside.

JACKSON
We did escape.

HEAD LION
(mouthful of trainer)
You want them to know that?

GEORGIA
He's right. Everybody, blend in.

BUSTER
(glances)
How?

GEORGIA
Do something you saw them rehearse.

OSCAR
They're trained professionals.

GEORGIA
We don't have to be good.

Jackson spots an open stand at the lions, leaps to it.

Oscar slides off Buster's back, searches.

The Floyds take flight.

Georgia marches in step behind the elephants.

BUSTER
Sure, she got the easy job. What do I do?

SYD
(points)
Ball.

A giant BALL waits near the center pole.

BUSTER
You're joking.

SYD
Find a better idea.

Buster moves to the ball, studies it.

SYD (CONT'D)
You have to get on.

BUSTER
Then what?

SYD
Balance.

Buster puts a front foot on it, tests the roll.

THE FLOYDS

Land in a flamingo pyramid. The crowd APPLAUDS.

They scatter, reform in an inverted pyramid. APPLAUSE.

The disperse again, flying in formations over the crowd.
APPLAUSE.

BACK AT THE LIONS

The WHIP CRACKS. A lion jumps through the hoop. CRACK.
Leap. The line moves. Reaches JACKSON.

JACKSON
All too easy.

Jackson rears back, readies.

THE HOOP BURSTS INTO FLAMES

JACKSON (CONT'D)
Madre di Dios.

CRACK. Jackson LEAPS, clears the flames, lands on the
other side.

THE CROWD cheers their approval.

BUSTER

All four feet on the ball, shifts his weight for balance.
APPLAUSE.

BUSTER
This isn't so hard.

The ball moves. Buster panics, adjusts. The ball ROLLS.
Buster shuffles, rides. Heads for the center ring.

FROM THE CURTAINS

Oscar emerges wearing a tutu, unsteadily rides a
unicycle. Weaves. Bobs. Spins.

GEORGIA
(watches)
Oscar, what are you doing?

JACKSON
What are you wearing?

OSCAR
The balancing device worked for the
dancer. It should help me.

BUSTER
(glances)
Does it work?

OSCAR
I'm not sure.

Oscar veers straight for the lions. The Lion Trainer
dives out of the way. The Lions step back as

OSCAR PLOWS into the burning hoop. Knocks it over.

JACKSON
I'd hate to see how you do without it.

CIRCUS TECHNICIANS emerge from wings.

Oscar sees the FIRE EXTINGUISHERS in their hands. Watches
intently. Peddles backward absently.

Technicians DOUSE the fire in quick foamy bursts.

Oscar watches, fascinated. Peddles right back into

BUSTER

On the balancing ball.

BUSTER
Watch out!

Too late. Oscar BUMPS Buster, who teeters. Rolls backward.

Buster backpedals, steers the ball straight into

THE MASSIVE CENTER POLE

The crowd GASPS.

Buster bounces into the pole. THUMP.

Silence. Syd stares at the pole.

SYD
(points)
We've got a problem.

Buster follows Syd's claw to a CRACK IN THE CENTER POLE.

The split fractures, spiders out like CRACKLING black lighting up the pole.

CRRRRREEEEAAAKKK!

Buster scrambles off the ball.

SYD (CONT'D)
RUN!

Buster dashes from the pole. Audience members shift, nervous.

CRIIIICCKK!

Georgia picks up Oscar. Jackson bolts in pursuit. The Floyds fly after them.

CRACK! The center pole shifts.

The crowd PANICS, FLEES.

The CENTER POLE buckles. SNAPS. Collapses.

Great sails of canvas fall, slowed slightly by the air.

OUTSIDE

Human and animal SCRAMBLE to safety. Finding it, each turns. Watches the tent collapse.

The zoo animals regroup, take a head count. Georgia sees the circus animals nearby doing the same.

GEORGIA

You must know how sorry we are.

Head Lion looks to the other lions, elephants, bears.
They're all furious.

HEAD LION

We let you into our show, our home, and
this is how you repay us.

BUSTER

I am very very sorry.

HEAD LION

We're going to spend the rest of our
careers making up for your carelessness.

GEORGIA

It was an accident.

HEAD LION

You should leave. Now.

Georgia scans the faces of the circus animals. Nods.
Leaves.

Buster watches Georgia, looks to the circus animals.
Follows Georgia.

Jackson studies the Head Lion. Hangs his head. Follows
Buster.

Approaching SIRENS serenade their retreat into the night.

EXT. OLD-TIMEY CIRCUS - DAY

Parker, Richards, and Murdock take statements from
various circus workers.

Jeff and Li Ming survey the carnage.

LI MING

French acrobats. Las Vegas. Now a
destroyed circus.

(beat)

This entire country is insane.

JEFF

Maybe it's just me.

LI MING

This is where the circus found their animals.

Jeff studies the ground.

JEFF

Just their animals?

LI MING

They don't use any that match the ones you're missing.

JEFF

(following tracks)

They were here.

(points)

They went that a-way.

(shrugs)

Too many movies.

EXT. CORNFIELD - DAY

Infinite rows of corn stretch across the horizon, past a plain white FARMHOUSE.

SAMMY, age 10, fixes his bicycle chain. Hears RUSTLING. Looks up, sees

FLAMINGOS

Five of them, fly past.

GEORGIA'S HEAD

Glides above tall stalks.

IN THE CORN

She leads Jackson and Buster through the fields. Oscar rides. Syd SNORES.

JACKSON

I wish we could do something to stop that infernal rumbling.

BUSTER

He's asleep, what can he do?

JACKSON

Give away our location. Get us all captured. Again.

GEORGIA

You're not going to let that go, are you?

JACKSON

Perhaps when you finally tell us why you are so determined to continue this doomed mission.

BUSTER

Doomed?

They RUSTLE through a few rows in silence.

GEORGIA

I was captured by poachers back home. After they captured me, they chased my daughter. There was an accident.

(beat)

She died.

BUSTER

I'm sorry.

JACKSON

There was nothing you could do.

GEORGIA

That does not change how I felt. Or how I feel.

(beat)

If I can save Hua Mei, if I can spare her parents that grief, then I have to.

Jackson is quiet. Clearly moved. Opens his mouth to speak

CRACK

Jackson whirls. SNARLS.

JACKSON

We've got company.

Georgia looks back, spots

SAMMY

On his bike, frozen.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Shall I dispatch him?

GEORGIA

It's just a little boy.

JACKSON
A little human boy.

GEORGIA
We can out run him.
(skyward)
Floyds?

FLOYDS (ALL)
Yes?

GEORGIA
Find us a way out of here. Quickly.

FLOYDS (ALL)
Roger!

Georgia quickens her pace. Jackson and Buster follow.
RUSTLING through the rows until they reach...

EXT. INTERSTATE - DAY

Jackson's head pops out. Oscar over him. Then Buster.
Georgia above all.

Syd SNORES.

BUSTER
Where are we?

A TRACTOR-TRAILER SEMI

Barrels past, ROARING along the asphalt.

The animals emerge from the cornfields, glance around.

ANOTHER SEMI

ROLLS past. Sees them. HONKS.

Syd wakes.

SYD
Are we taking a truck now?

JACKSON
(to Georgia)
That's a good idea.

INT. TRUCK CAB - DAY

A GRIZZLED DRIVER hangs onto the massive wheel of his rig. Digs in one nostril. Pulls out a booger. Flicks it out the window.

Something PINK flashes past. Driver blinks. Spike flies alongside. Winks.

Spike pours on the speed, pulls ahead. Driver's eyes follow, to

A RHINOCEROS

In the middle of the lane.

Driver panics. SLAMS the brakes. SKIDS to a SCREECHING halt.

OUTSIDE

Buster lays on the road.

BUSTER

I am so glad he stopped.

Hidden behind him are Oscar and Syd.

SYD

We're not done yet.

OSCAR

You're sure this will work?

SYD

Trust me.

The DRIVER opens his door. Approaches Buster with caution.

SYD (CONT'D)

Go.

Oscar rises.

The driver stops. Stares.

Oscar climbs up and over Buster. Waddles closer.

The driver backs away slowly. Oscar advances.

SYD (CONT'D)

Now!

OSCAR

It's stupid.

SYD

Do it!

Oscar sighs. Slides one long finger up his nose.

GRIZZLED DRIVER

That's disgusting.

Oscar digs. Moves closer.

Driver cringes, backs closer to the rig. Near the door.

Oscar pulls his finger out, loaded with a huge slimy booger. Offers it to the driver.

Driver SCREAMS, spins, SLAMS into the truck door, knocks himself out!

Buster looks. Rises, with Syd.

OSCAR

I can't believe that worked.

SYD

Told you.

Oscar opens the trailer doors, clearly marked "GARDEN STATE PRODUCE." Decorated with a cheerful cornucopia.

Georgia, Jackson, and the Floyds emerge from the cornfield, hop in. Dot leans in close to Spike.

DOT

That was so dashing.

Spike stares. Blinks. Dot ducks inside. Spike follows.

The door SLAMS. Wakes the DRIVER.

Driver shakes it off. Glances. He's alone. Empties a hip flask. Ponders. Tosses the flask.

He starts the ENGINE and drives away.

FROM THE CORNFIELDS

Sammy walks his bike out. Amazed.

INT. TRAILER - GARDEN STATE PRODUCE TRUCK - DAY

Crates of freshly raided produce lie open. Happy animals munch an assortment of fruits and vegetables.

Jackson messily devours hapless tomatoes.

BUSTER

When I woke up, my entire herd had moved on.

GEORGIA

They forgot about you?

BUSTER

I don't know.

(beat)

That's when they caught me. I was in a few other zoos, but none were as nice as San Diego.

(contemplates)

It's my home. If we don't get Hua Mei back, I could lose it.

JACKSON

(between bites)

How did they get you, Oscar?

Oscar pulls an orange out of his mouth. Swallows.

OSCAR

I found one of their Approval Boxes. Just as I was about to unlock it's secrets--

BUSTER

They caught you.

Oscar nods.

GEORGIA

Was that your nephew I saw back at the Zoo?

OSCAR

(nods, takes a bite)

Charlie.

BUSTER

Wow. I've never even seen anyone I knew on the inside.

GEORGIA

It's very rare. You're quite lucky.

Oscar remembers Tallulah's words. Nods.

GEORGIA (CONT'D)

Jackson?

Jackson wipes seeds from his mouth. Sees all eyes on him.

JACKSON

I ran away from home.

(beat)

After a fight with my mother.

(remembers)

That's when they found me. I put up quite a fight. Escaped from every cage they put me in. Until San Diego.

Georgia studies him.

GEORGIA

What was it about? The fight with your mother?

Jackson searches his memories. Comes up empty.

JACKSON

I don't remember. Isn't that strange? Something so small yet it changed my life forever.

GEORGIA

That's why you agreed to help. You wanted to escape.

Oscar and Buster finally get it. Look to Jackson.

JACKSON

It was obviously a very bad plan.

Syd SNORES.

EXT. INTERSTATE - NIGHT

Jeff and Li Ming stand roadside, look back at the rows of corn behind them.

Li Ming watches Sammy, uncertain.

JEFF

They hijacked a truck.

Sammy nods.

JEFF (CONT'D)
With... a booger?

Sammy nods.

LI MING
This entire country is insane.

Jeff kneels. Puts his hand on Sammy's shoulder.

JEFF
I believe you.

Sammy smiles.

LI MING
You would.

JEFF
Do you remember anything about the truck?
Was there anything written on it?

SAMMY
Garden something.

JEFF
Close your eyes. See it in your mind.

SAMMY
(concentrates)
Garden State. Produce.

JEFF
Which way did the Garden State Produce
truck go?

Sammy points.

JEFF (CONT'D)
East.

LI MING
Of course.

EXT. RAIL YARD - NEW YORK CITY - DAY

The red Cirque train sits amid aged red brick and steel.

Performers unload the train. Jean and Luc struggle with a
crate.

Lester helps Juliette with her gear.

Hugo struts through, jubilant.

HUGO

Be of good cheer, my darlings! I have secured us a date with destiny at Madison Square Garden. After that, we will all get what we so richly deserve.

Jean, Luc, and Picard check the coast. Just pigeons. The trio lift and slide the cage from the train.

HUGO (CONT'D)

So cheer up! That's an order!

The cover SNAGS, slides off. Reveals Hua Mei, who glances excitedly.

One particular pigeon, ERNIE, notes the exposed baby panda. Flies over to get a closer look.

PICARD

Idiots!

LUC

Cover it, quick!

Jean flails. Retrieves the fabric. Flips it quickly over the cage.

The trio resumes their labors. Ernie circles overhead.

EXT. GARDEN STATE PRODUCE - DAY

A long, low, squat gray building decorated with bright cornucopia.

A FAMILIAR G.S.P. SEMI

Backs up to the loading dock.

One DOCK WORKER reaches for the door. Turns the handle.

DOCK CO-WORKER

Not that one! Wait for the--

The doors BURST open.

A flurry of pink feathers as the Floyds fly out, followed by the heavy stomps of Buster's exit.

Dock workers stumble and retreat.

Jackson pounces onto the dock. Georgia's head peeks out, followed by her lengthy neck.

The dock workers try to encircle the animals. Jackson SNARLS. They pause.

The animals charge for the main gate. As they near it,

A BLACK VAN AND SEMI

Approach from the other side.

Georgia's vantage gives her a perfect view of

JEFF AND LI MING

Inside the lead van.

LI MING

They weren't supposed to open the trailer.

JEFF

Someone missed the memo.

The animals reach the gate first. Buster mows down the chain link fence with ease.

The van SCREECHES to a halt. The semi SKIDS just short of its bumper.

IN THE CAB

Parker breathes a quick sigh. Richards releases the dash.

The animals swarm past the stopped vehicles, cross the street into nearby woods.

JEFF (CONT'D)

(into radio)

Turn around!

Jeff revs, whips around, side-swipes a post. Murdock slides off the rear seat.

MURDOCK

Hey!

JEFF

Where's your seat belt?

LI MING
I'm driving.

JEFF
What?

LI MING
Switch.

Uncertain but desperate, Jeff switches seats with Li Ming.

Li Ming pulls away from the post, spins a dizzying whip turn. Heads for the gate.

Pulling up to the semi,

LI MING (CONT'D)
Grab your capture gear and get in.

Parker stares.

JEFF
Do it, Parker!

Parker and Richards reach into the back of the cab, grab their rifle cases.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

The zoo animals emerge from the tree-line onto a suburban street of cookie-cutter houses and manicured lawns.

Georgia cranes her neck. Looks for an escape route. The Floyds fly support.

GEORGIA
See anything?

FLOYDS (ALL)
Houses.

TIRES SQUEAL BEHIND THEM

The Floyds fly a high lap looking for the sound.

FLOYDS (ALL) (CONT'D)
It's them!

GEORGIA
Everyone hide!

BUSTER

Where?

GEORGIA

Anywhere!

The animals scatter toward the houses on either side.

-- Georgia ducks behind a house.

-- Buster huddles behind a fence.

-- Jackson leaps over a hedge.

-- The Floyds take lawn-ornament poses on the lawns.

THE BLACK VAN

Screeches around the corner.

JEFF

Slow down. We'll blow right past them.

Li Ming eases off the gas.

The van cruises along the street, passes flamingo-dotted lawns.

MURDOCK

Those are the most lifelike lawn ornaments I've ever seen.

Jeff and Li Ming share a glance. She throws it into reverse. Hard.

SPIKE

They're onto us!

The Floyds take flight, circle high.

Jeff, Li Ming, Parker, Murdock, and Richards emerge from the van. Parker trains a tranquilizer rifle at the Floyds.

FLOYDS (ALL)

Run!

Georgia pops up from behind her house.

GEORGIA

They're on foot! Now's our chance!

Buster, Oscar and Syd on top, and Jackson spring from their hiding places, blaze past the zoo team. Too fast for anyone to get a clean shot.

The Floyds flock past the fleeing animals.

SPIKE
Ahead on the right!

DOT
An opening back into the woods!

The zoo animals charge for the opening, the zoo humans hot on their heels.

OSCAR
They're rather fast for humans.

GEORGIA
Too fast.

JACKSON
I'll cover you!

Jackson breaks ranks, turns RIGHT FOR THE HUMANS! Bares his fangs, SNARLS fiercely.

Jeff and crew startle, skid, stop. Fall back.

Georgia, Buster and passengers, and the Floyds reach the gap, enter the woods.

GEORGIA
(looks back)
Jackson!

JACKSON
Run!

The humans regain their composure. Parker aims the tranquilizer rifle. Murdock raises a net-gun like a bazooka.

Jackson charges closer, all fangs and business.

Richards loads a round. Pats Murdock.

RICHARDS
Go!

Murdock launches -- WHOOMP! -- the net wraps around Jackson.

Jackson SNARLS, swipes deadly claws.

From the tree line

JACKSON
 Jackson! No!

PARKER
 Sorry, pal.

THWIP! A DART strikes ebony fur.

Jackson slows, barely, still growls. Swipes.

JACKSON
 Save Hua Mei!

THWIP-THWIP!

Jackson's eyes narrow. He collapses.

JACKSON (CONT'D)
 (fading)
 Save her.

Jackson's vision GOES BLACK.

EXT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - DAY

Hugo's cloying mug haunts the six-story screen which
 adorns this modern Coliseum.

ON STAGE

The Cirque performers unpack. Jean, Luc, and Picard open
 crates. Check costumes.

Lester straightens long silk ropes, checks the ends and
 safety latches.

JULIETTE
 Thank you.

LESTER
 You're welcome.

A small smile. A soft moment.

BACKSTAGE

Hua Mei's cage sits, half uncovered. She nibbles on
 shoots.

The stage door opens, Ernie the Pigeon flies inside.
Settles on her cage.

ERNIE
There you are.

HUA MEI
Do I know you?

ERNIE
I doubt it. This is your first trip to
the Big Apple. Am I right?

Hua Mei nods.

ERNIE (CONT'D)
You look like you got some time on your
hands, kid. Tell your old Uncle Ernie
your tale of woe. I heard 'em all.

HUA MEI
Not this one.

ERNIE
Try me.

HUA MEI
(nods)
Okay...

EXT. BOARDWALK - MARGATE, NEW JERSEY - DAY
Georgia's head droops. Buster trudges along.
From his back, Oscar stares blankly at
LUCY - THE GIANT WOODEN ELEPHANT

OSCAR
I don't get it.

BUSTER
What?

OSCAR
What would they do with a giant elephant
made of wood?

SYD
Not everything has a point, mate.

The zoo animals continue their aimless, depressed shuffle. Even the Floyds look down in the dumps.

BUSTER
(to Georgia)
What now?

GEORGIA
I don't know.

FLOYDS (ALL)
(monotone)
Where to?

GEORGIA
I don't know.

The troupe stops. Georgia rests her weary head on the seawall, looks out at the ocean. Seagulls fly overhead.

GEORGIA (CONT'D)
I wonder if I ever knew.

Dot's head droops, rests on Spike's shoulder.

SPIKE
(snaps)
That's IT!
(shrugs off Dot's head)
You're always standing right next to me.
Talking about the charming French.
Romantic fountains. Dashing me. What's
going on?

Dot looks wounded. Floyds 3-5 look from Spike to Dot, back again.

DOT
(realizing)
You don't know. All this time I've had a
crush on you, and you never knew.

Now Spike is confused, along with the rest of the Floyds.

DOT (CONT'D)
I came to get you away from the rest of
the flock so you'd finally notice me.
(blunt)
I'm a girl!

Floyd 3 snickers. Laughs. It spreads. Floyds 4 and 5 burst into laughter. Roll. Grab their sides.

Spike smiles. Laughs. Dot laughs. Buster, Oscar, and Syd laugh, too.

Georgia smiles softly. Still depressed.

GEORGIA

One mystery solved. Too bad we still don't know how to find Hua Mei.

OVERHEAD

One GULL breaks formation, swoops, lands on the wall next to Georgia.

GULL

Did you say Hua Mei?

GEORGIA

(head raises a little)
Yes. Yes, I did.

GULL

Cute as a button panda over the Garden?

GEORGIA

You've seen her?

GULL

It's all every animal between here and Manhattan can talk about.

Georgia stands up. Looks from the Gull to the ocean.

GEORGIA

Every animal?

GULL

She's the talk of the tri-state area.

Georgia looks to the zoo crew with renewed energy.

GEORGIA

I've got an idea.

GULL

(at Dot)
Hey, who's the cute chick?

INT. WAREHOUSE - NEW JERSEY - NIGHT

Jackson stirs, slowly recovers from the tranquilizers. Sees two very blurry RATS (LEO and MARV).

LEO
Whoa-ho-ho, look who's wakin' up.

MARV
Yeah, not so tough now are ya, big guy?

Jackson squints, the rats come into focus. So do the bars of his cage.

JACKSON
Where am I?

LEO
Hey Marv, this guy don't even know what state he's in.

MARV
Then he's in the state of denial, ain't he, Leo?

The two rats crack each other up.

JACKSON
Where am I?

LEO
Big cats. No sense of humor.

MARV
You're in Jersey, pal.

Jackson sits up slowly, surveys the staging area.

-- Parker checks over his tranq rifle

-- Murdock re-loads the net-gun

-- Richards preps a series of cages

Nearby, Jeff and Li Ming in mid-debate.

JEFF
You saw how they worked together.

LI MING
Yes, I did. Maybe you're not completely crazy. It doesn't help us find Hua Mei or the other animals.

Jackson glances back to the rats.

JACKSON
The others, what happened to them?

LEO

Word on the street is they got away.

MARV

Somewhere on the shore, last I heard.

JEFF

I think the animals are the key. If we find them, we find Hua Mei.

LI MING

I was wrong. You are completely crazy.

Jackson watches them carefully.

JACKSON

This is the key to my freedom.

LEO

What the heck is he talking about?

MARV

You mean that baby panda?

JACKSON

(to the rats)

I need your help.

Leo and Marv share a glance and a nod.

LEO

(best Godfather impression)

We will do this thing for you.

MARV

(less great Godfather)

But know that someday, we will ask you to return the favor.

The two rats burst out laughing.

LEO

Oh, I love that movie.

Jackson GROWLS

MARV

Yeah, yeah, we'll help.

LEO

We're serious about the favor, though.

INT. MAIN THEATER - MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

The seats are packed. The crowd enthralled by the acrobatics of the Cirque performers.

BACKSTAGE

Hugo paces at a desk, phone glued to his sweaty ear, revolver in his free hand.

HUGO
 (to phone)
 Pier 42. Keep your men off the main deck.
 Because I said so!

Hugo hangs up. Exasperated. Pops open the revolver, examines the chambers.

ONLY FOUR BULLETS

HUGO (CONT'D)
 Too poor for all six.

ERNIE the pigeon waddles low over to Hua Mei's cage, slips under the cover.

INSIDE THE CAGE

HUA MEI
 Ernie! I'm glad it's you.

ERNIE
 Me too, kid. Your friends are all over the news.

HUA MEI
 Really?

ERNIE
 Them and a black jaguar they caught in Jersey.

HUA MEI
 Oh no! That's terrible. They're trying to save me.

ERNIE
 I know. They need your help.

HUA MEI
 Anything.

ERNIE

Break me off a piece of one of those shoots.

Hua Mei nods. Snaps a bamboo shoot in half, hands it to Ernie.

HUA MEI

What's it for?

ERNIE

(beaks it)

Sit tight!

Ernie ducks out.

HUA MEI

(shrugs)

Okay.

EXT. GEORGE WASHINGTON BRIDGE - NIGHT

Lattice-steel towers support the span of one of the busiest bridges in the world, sporting eight lanes on the

UPPER DECK

All Manhattan-bound lanes sit stagnant. Drivers shake angry fists.

Ahead of the furious parking lot, Georgia and Buster gallop toward the city. The Floyds fly scout overhead.

HORNS blare.

OSCAR

That means they like us!

SYD

I wouldn't be so sure, Oscar.

One ANGRY DRIVER pumps his fist, pounds the horn.

ANGRY DRIVER

Get back to the Zoo, you bums!

A rat runs across his hood.

ANGRY DRIVER (CONT'D)

C'mon!

More rats. Packs of squirrels. Squadrons of PIGEONS.

ANGRY DRIVER (CONT'D)

What the heck?

A WAVE of urban animals. Pigeons. Rats. Hawks. Squirrels.
Every animal between here and Jersey.

RAT

Where we goin'?

PIGEON

The Garden!

RAT

Oh, I love the Garden!

SQUIRREL

Any excuse to go to the City, huh, pal?

INT. WAREHOUSE - NEW JERSEY - NIGHT

Jeff approaches Jackson's cage. Thick steak in hand.

JEFF

You must be hungry.

Jackson stares at Jeff.

Jeff slides open a feed tray. Drops the steak in. Closes the tray.

Jackson simply stares.

Jeff's eyes meet Jackson's. They connect on an unspoken, primal, level.

LI MING

Jeff?

Li Ming puts her hand on his shoulder.

LI MING (CONT'D)

(softly)

Jeff.

Jeff blinks. Shakes it off. Looks to Li Ming. She points to

JACKSON'S PAW

A bamboo shoot peeks from underneath.

JEFF

Hua Mei's.

LI MING

How did he get it?

From the rear of the cage

MARV

He had help.

LEO

How about a little credit here?

JACKSON

(low)

Hush.

Jeff looks from the shoot back to Jackson, their eyes lock.

LI MING

He didn't have that when we captured him.

JEFF

They got it to him.

Li Ming looks from Jeff to Jackson and back. Processes.

LI MING

You mean the animals, don't you?

Jeff nods.

INT. MAIN STAGE - MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

Juliette spins gracefully from her silken ropes.

LESTER watches from the wings, peeks through the curtain at

THE PACKED HOUSE

Filled with spellbound spectators.

BACKSTAGE

Hugo paces around Hua Mei's covered cage, rapping an umbrella against it.

HUGO

Soon, little treasure. Very soon.

INSIDE

HUA MEI
(covers her ears)
Not soon enough!

ON STAGE

Juliette's mid-air pirouettes whirl faster, nearing climax.

Lester smiles.

A low RUMBLING builds in the distance.

Lester glances, searches for the source.

BACKSTAGE

Hugo hears it. Stops tapping.

INSIDE THE CAGE

Hua Mei glances, tries to peek under the cover.

HUA MEI (CONT'D)
Um... what's that?

The RUMBLING grows LOUDER. CLOSER.

ON STAGE

Juliette twirls with blinding speed and elegance.

THE AUDIENCE

Applauds wildly.

The RUMBLING sounds like a stampede.

THE THEATER DOORS BURST OPEN!

Buster leads a charge down the aisles, past a stunned audience.

BUSTER
Out of the way! Coming through!

ON STAGE

Juliette's concentration is shattered, she slips, entangles.

IN THE AUDIENCE

MSG PATRON #1
I thought this circus didn't have
animals?

THROUGH OTHER DOORS

Georgia leads a column of urban animals, gallops toward
the stage.

LESTER bolts from the wings to help Juliette.

FROM ANOTHER DOOR

Rider-less horses, complete with their NYPD saddle-
blankets, emerge at full gallop.

The AUDIENCE isn't sure what to make of it. Most freeze.
Others whip out cameras.

HUGO jogs from backstage. Sees the NYPD mounts. Panics.

HUGO
We've been ratted out!
(to Lester)
Lester! Come on!

LESTER
(fighting with ropes)
What about Juliette?

HUGO
Leave her!

Lester looks back at Hugo. Returns to the ropes.

LESTER
(watches Juliette's eyes)
I can't.

HUGO
(throws his hands up)
Imbecile!

Hugo storms

BACKSTAGE

He stops short when he sees--

OSCAR AND SYD

At Hua Mei's cage. Cover off. Latch open.

Hugo panics, searches. Snatches the umbrella. Charges the orangutan and koala.

HUGO (CONT'D)
Get away! Back, you monkeys!

SYD
Hold on there, mate. We're not all primates, you know.

Oscar places himself between Hugo and the cage. Hugo thrusts, Oscar tumbles, dodges.

OSCAR
A little help here?

FLOYDS (ALL O.S.)
Roger!

The Floyds lead an aerial assault, pigeons in tow. Feathers fly as flamingo and pigeon strafe Hugo. His umbrella flails wildly, lunges

RIGHT AT SPIKE

Dot banks hard, bumps him out of the way.

SPIKE
Thanks!

Dot smiles, resumes her attack run.

Jean, Luc, and Picard lead the retreating Cirque performers.

HUGO
(to them)
Get her out of here!

Picard grabs the cover, throws it over the cage. The trio lifts, hauls the cage through a stage door.

ON STAGE

Lester frees Juliette. Helps her up. Their eyes meet.

LESTER
We should go.

JULIETTE

(nods)

Yes.

BACKSTAGE

Georgia, Buster, and the NYPD mounts arrive.

GEORGIA

(watching Hugo escape)

Floyds! Stay on him. They've got Hua Mei!

Oscar tumbles to Buster, swings himself up.

BUSTER

Let's get 'em!

The animals charge out into

EXT. BACK ALLEY - NIGHT

The French trio slides Hua Mei's cage into the back of a truck. Dodge dive-bombing pigeons and flamingos.

IN THE CAB

Hugo fumbles with the keys, finds the right one. Checks the side mirrors, sees

GEORGIA AND BUSTER

Emerging from the stage door, in hot pursuit.

Lester and Juliette hop in.

HUGO

I told you to leave her.

LESTER

I know.

HUGO

(starts the engine)

We'll talk.

Tires spin, smoke.

Jean, Luc, Picard and the other Cirque performers leap onto the truck, clinging in desperate yet graceful acrobatic poses.

The truck SCREECHES down the alley, barrels into mid-town traffic.

INT. WAREHOUSE - NEW JERSEY - NIGHT

Jackson watches the human debate like a tennis match.

LI MING

How could the other animals get it to him?

JEFF

They obviously communicate with each other. Maybe they're working with the local animals.

LI MING

I stand corrected. That may be the craziest thing I've ever heard.

(to Parker)

When do we call a psychologist?

Parker shrugs. Behind, Murdock tunes a radio. Listens over headsets.

JEFF

Li Ming, in any other situation, I'd agree with you.

LI MING

Say that again.

JEFF

I'd agree with you.

LI MING

Before that. You said "Li Ming."

JEFF

That's your name.

LI MING

I didn't think you knew.

JEFF

I knew. You always gave me such a hard time that I said it wrong just to bug you. We're beyond that now.

Li Ming regards Jackson a moment.

LI MING

What would you do, assuming you're not
crazy?

Jeff looks to Jackson. Their eyes meet. Lock.

Murdock tosses off his headset.

MURDOCK

You've got to hear what's happening at
the Garden.

EXT. MANHATTAN STREETS - NIGHT

The Cirque truck plows through traffic, acrobats cling
through hairpin turns.

The truck blows past an NYPD squad car.

NYPD OFFICER #1

(into radio)

Dispatch, you're not gonna believe this.

A riderless NYPD mount gallops past. Then another.

DISPATCH (V.O.)

Unit twelve, please repeat last
transmission.

Georgia gallops past. Buster pushes as fast as he can,
Oscar hangs on for dear life. A pack of squirrels scurry
across the hood.

NYPD OFFICER #1

(into radio)

I, uh... said you're not gonna believe
this.

THE CIRQUE TRUCK

Skids around a corner. Jean's legs fly out on the turn.
Luc and Picard pull him back.

The NYPD mounts round the turn, hot on their treads.
Georgia and Buster behind. The Floyds and pigeons fly
overhead.

SIRENS BLARE

As more NYPD squad cars join the pursuit.

OSCAR
 (glances back)
 I don't think that's approval.
 (beat)
 Shiny, though.

GEORGIA
 They might try to catch us.

LEAD NYPD MOUNT
 (glances back)
 Break off. We'll continue the pursuit.

Georgia breaks down an alley. Buster follows, Floyds pursue.

Ernie flies point on the pigeon formation, stays with the mounts.

ERNIE
 We'll keep in touch!

SPIKE
 Thanks!

INSIDE THE LEAD SQUAD CAR

NYPD OFFICER #1
 (into radio)
 The animals broke off!

DISPATCH (V.O.)
 Stay with the truck, unit twelve.

NYPD OFFICER #1
 (into radio)
 Roger.

The squad car pulls up behind the NYPD horses.

LEAD NYPD MOUNT
 Let 'em pass, boys.

The horses part in two neat columns. NYPD Officer #1's car passes.

LEAD NYPD MOUNT (CONT'D)
 (nods)
 Go get 'em.

Officer nods. Mute and stunned. Guns the motor.

ON THE CIRQUE TRUCK

PICARD
 (glances back)
 We lost the animals!

LUC
 But not the cops!

The squad cars speed behind, draw closer.

Hugo spins the wheel. Juliette clings to Lester as they lurch.

The acrobats outside strain to hold on.

INSIDE HER CAGE

Hua Mei slides into the bars, GRUNTS.

HUA MEI
 Oof!

The Cirque truck nears the end of the alley. Bright lights beyond.

NYPD squad cars right on their heels.

LESTER
 No.

HUGO
 Yes.

LESTER
 Oh no.

HUGO
 Oh yes!

The truck burst out of the alley, plows right into

TIMES SQUARE

Neon. Giant video displays. Saturday night crowds.

BEHIND

NYPD Officer #1 nears the end of the alley, sees where it leads. SLAMS brakes, SKIDS hard.

The other cars brake hard. One skids, REAR-ENDS Officer #1.

Hugo swerves wildly. People dive away. Hugo sideswipes a hot-dog cart. Wieners everywhere.

NYPD OFFICER #1

(into mike)

Dispatch! He's in Times Square. Pursuit terminated.

DISPATCH (V.O.)

Roger, unit twelve. Aerial units en route.

IN THE AIR

Ernie's squadron of pigeons watches the chaos below, sees Hugo swerve down a narrow street.

ERNIE

Heading for the docks. Spread the word.

WINGMAN PIGEON

Roger!

Wingman breaks formation.

IN ANOTHER ALLEY

Georgia leads Buster and the Floyds away from the sirens.

The Floyds fly overhead. Wingman alongside. Wingman breaks.

SPIKE

(to Georgia)

The docks!

GEORGIA

Which way?

FLOYDS (ALL)

Follow us!

The Floyds pull ahead. Georgia follows. Buster GRUNTS, pours on what little speed he has left.

BUSTER

I hope we find them soon.

INT. WAREHOUSE - NEW JERSEY - NIGHT

Jeff approaches Jackson's cage. Tracking collar in hand.

Parker, Richards, and Murdock stand ready with net and tranquilizer guns.

LI MING

Are you sure about this?

Jeff and Jackson's eyes meet. Human and feline connect. Bond.

Jeff nods. Reaches for the cage.

JEFF

Yes. I am.

Jeff opens the cage.

EXT. MAIN DECK - CONTAINER SHIP - NIGHT

Jean, Luc, Lester, and Picard wrangle the heavy cage up the gangplank. Set it on deck with a KLANG!

HUGO

Careful, imbeciles!

JEAN

I certainly hope all this will be worth it.

Picard and Luc nod. Lester wipes his brow.

Hugo takes a few steps, his back to them.

HUGO

Oh, it will be.

(spins, revolver out)

For me!

The performers are stunned.

JEAN

Qoi?

LUC

What?

PICARD

Huh?

LESTER

(pieces together)

You're taking her for yourself.

HUGO

It's even worse than that. There is no buyer. No sale. This panda will be the main attraction of my new circus. Only the most endangered animals in the world viewed by the wealthiest people in the world. Soon my name will be on the lips of the world's elite. I will be famous among the famous!

LESTER

I'll expose you.

Hugo trains the pistol on Juliette.

HUGO

I think not.

Lester steps between Juliette and the revolver.

LESTER

Take the panda. Leave me the Cirque.

HUGO

It's dead!

LESTER

I'll save it.

HUGO

By yourself?

JULIETTE

(takes Lester's hand)

With me.

Lester looks to Juliette. Surprised. Smiles. She returns the smile.

HUGO

Hello? Remember me? The one with a gun?

(disgusted)

Take the whole miserable lot.

Lester and Juliette, hand-in-hand, descend the gangplank.

HUGO (CONT'D)

(after them)

You'll fail! You're a failure! It's all you can do!

Picard, Luc, Jean, and the rest exchange glances.

JEAN
He's only got six shots.

Hugo glances at the revolver. Remembers he only has four.

LUC
He can't take us all.

PICARD
We'll take the panda.

A familiar low RUMBLING builds O.S.

PICARD (CONT'D)
Then again.

LUC
Perhaps not.

JEAN
Lester!

The trio run down the gangplank, followed by the rest of the Cirque.

Hugo stands alone with the covered cage.

PICARD (O.S.)
Can we keep our jobs?

LUC (O.S.)
We'll even take a pay cut!

JEAN (O.S.)
A pay cut would be lovely!

ON THE DOCK

Georgia leads the charge of the zoo animals.

EXT. TIMES SQUARE - NIGHT

NYPD officers straighten up. Take witness reports.

A few DOGS feast on fallen wieners.

A black feline BLUR RUSHES past.

JACKSON
(on the run)
Which way?

Stunned dogs point toward the docks.

Jackson bounds across the busy plaza. Most locals don't notice. Most tourists snap photos.

ON JACKSON'S NECK

The bright LED FLASHES

INT. HELICOPTER - NIGHT

A BLIP

Speeds along a map of the city.

Jeff and Li Ming watch the flat-screen, fascinated.

JEFF

Boy, is he fast.

EXT. MAIN DECK - CONTAINER SHIP - NIGHT

The zoo animals storm the ship.

Hugo raises his pistol, aims.

Buster charges, full tilt.

Hugo panics, steps back, tumbles over the cage. He FIRES, wild. He lands hard, gun knocked loose.

Hugo scrambles, disappears in the stacks of shipping containers.

GEORGIA

Don't let him get away!

The Floyds fly, search from above. Georgia stretches her head high, searches.

Buster waits for orders. Oscar slides off his back.

BUSTER

Where are you going?

OSCAR

Found something useful.

Buster sighs.

FLOYDS (ALL O.S.)

Over here!

Buster forgets Oscar, follows the call and Georgia.

IN THE STACKS

Hugo ducks. Turns. Sees a gap between containers, bolts.

Georgia STOMPS on a container door, knocks it loose.
KICKS, spins it open wide into

HUGO'S PATH

Hugo slams, bounces off. Falls. Hauls himself up.
Retreats.

Sweaty, out of breath, Hugo runs down another row. Spins
around another corner.

GEORGIA

Where is he?

OVERHEAD

The Floyd's search pattern spots him.

SPIKE

Buster, by you!

BUSTER

Turns his head, listens. Hears panicked FOOTSTEPS. With a
quick flick of his prodigious rump, BUMPS the end of an
entire container over three feet.

Flesh THUDS into metal.

HUGO (O.S.)

Merde!

Buster smiles.

ABOVE

FLOYDS (ALL)

He's heading for the cage!

Hugo emerges from the stacks. Right where he started.
Finds

THE GUN

Seizes it, spins to face

FOAM

Oscar flocks Hugo from head to toe with a fire-extinguisher.

Hugo flails, lets out a high-pitched scream. Scurries. Clears his eyes.

The Floyds descend, fly a containment pattern. A beak in the butt. One on the head.

Hugo raises the gun.

SPIKE spots it, aimed right at

DOT

Spike banks hard.

Hugo FIRES.

Spike knocks Dot clear. The shot grazes his wing.

SPIKE
(falls)

OW!

DOT
Oh no!

Hugo laughs. Wipes his eyes. Heads for the crate.

Buster comes out of the stacks. Oscar drops the extinguisher, heads to Spike.

GEORGIA
(glances)
Has anybody seen Syd?

Hugo flips the cover back just enough to see the latch. Flips it. Flings it open.

SYD

Springs out. A flurry of fur and claw fury.

SYD
Keee-ya!

Syd spins and whirls, whoops and hollers, claws fly. Shreds Hugo's clothes. Hugo reels. Flails.

Hua Mei tumbles out of the cage.

GEORGIA

Hua Mei! Run!

Hua Mei looks at Georgia, the rest of the chaos. Nods. Scrambles.

Syd sends a final kick, stuns Hugo. He lands, toddles over to Hua Mei.

SYD

Climb down!

HUA MEI

What?

SYD

Trust me.

Hugo recovers. Remembers the pistol. Trains it on Syd, who tumbles over the edge.

Hugo aims at Hua Mei.

A SNARLING JACKSON

POUNCES into Hugo, knocks him down.

The gun CLATTERS onto the deck.

Hua Mei clears the edge.

Jackson tumbles mid-air, nails the landing. GROWLS at Hugo.

Hugo stares at the cat.

OVER THE SIDE

Syd and Hua Mei climb down the mooring ropes, claw-over-claw.

SYD (CONT'D)

You're doing great, kid. Keep it up.

Hua Mei looks down, gasps.

SYD (CONT'D)

Oh yeah. Don't look down.

HUA MEI

Thanks.

ON DECK

Hugo stares at Jackson, debates his odds.

OVERHEAD

Helicopters WHUP their approach. Spotlights scan the ship. SIRENS draw near. The jig is up.

Hugo grabs the pistol. Retreats for the side railing, flips open a

STORAGE LOCKER

Hugo grabs an inflatable raft.

Jackson pauses. Uncertain.

Hugo smiles. YANKS the rip-cord. The bundle HISSES, EXPANDS. Hugo tosses it over the edge.

The RAFT INFLATES as it falls. Lands with a SPLASH.

Hugo pockets the pistol. Waves.

HUGO

Bye-bye, kitty.

He leaps over the side!

Georgia, Buster, Oscar, and Jackson peer over the edge. Watch Hugo SPLASH!

Hugo gasps for air, drags himself into the raft. Flops in, rolls on his back. Pants.

LOOKS UP

He spies Syd and Hua Mei on the rope.

He can still win! Hugo fishes the revolver out, aims at

THE MOORING ROPE

Hugo squints. Closes one eye. Aims behind the animals. FIRES!

NICKS THE ROPE!

It shifts. Syd and Hua Mei ROCK.

HUA MEI

Help!

SYD
Keep climbing!

Hugo aims. FIRES!

THE ROPE SNAPS!

Syd and Hua Mei fall! Hua Mei SCREAMS, tumbles.

Lands right in Hugo's lap!

Hugo takes the nape of her neck in his meaty hand.

HUGO
You're not getting away from me!

THUMP!

Hugo glances. Syd perches on the side of the raft.

Hugo trains the pistol on Syd. Pulls the trigger. CLICK.

Syd smiles. Flicks out one incredibly sharp claw.

Hugo blinks. Realizes.

HUGO (CONT'D)
Non!

Syd winks. The claw flashes. POP!

Air HISSES its rapid escape from the raft.

Hugo nearly cries.

HUGO (CONT'D)
No! No! No! Why me?

The raft collapses, SINKS.

Hugo flails in the water.

HUGO (CONT'D)
I cannot swim!

Hua Mei paddles for all she's worth.

HUA MEI
Me either!

SYD
(splashing)
Oh, right. Me neither.

FROM ABOVE

Jackson LEAPS, dives right for them!

Hugo grabs Hua Mei, pulls her close.

HUA MEI

Help!

Jackson hits. SPLASH!

Hugo flails with his free hand. Almost swims.

Jackson can't get near. Syd goes under. Jackson dives, snatches him.

Hugo reaches rungs of the nearest post. Climbs. Hua Mei under one arm, unconscious.

ON THE PIER

Hugo reaches the top. Pulls himself and Hua Mei onto the dock. Pants heavily. Soaked.

Hugo rises. Picks up Hua Mei. Smiles, triumphant.

A SPOTLIGHT

Hits him from a HELICOPTER above. Another from a HARBOR POLICE BOAT below.

Georgia, Buster, Oscar, and the Floyds approach, encircle him.

Jackson rises from the ladder behind. Syd hangs from his mouth like a wet kitten. Both SNARL.

Hugo glances, surrounded by animals. Debates his chances.

He suddenly notices the ring of NYPD and SWAT officers surrounding them.

Hugo smiles, feebly. Sets Hua Mei down gently. Takes a step back.

Hua Mei doesn't move.

GEORGIA

Hua Mei?

JEFF and LI MING emerge from the circle of cops, rush to Hua Mei.

JEFF

Hua Mei!

Jeff scoops her up. She doesn't move.

Jeff notes the wet fur, spins her over. Pats her back once. Twice. Whacks a third.

The animals gasp!

Hua Mei sputters. Coughs. Spits water. Opens her eyes.

The animals release a collective sigh.

Jeff smiles, hugs Hua Mei. Over his shoulder, Hua Mei sees the zoo animals.

HUA MEI

Thank you, everybody.

Georgia sheds a tear. Buster snuffles. Oscar wipes his eyes.

Hugo slinks slowly away. Weapons cock -- CH-CHIK. Hugo stops. Raises his hands.

NYPD OFFICER #1 grabs Hugo. Spin him onto a squad car. Pats him down.

HUGO

I will be infamous! The trial of the century! Everyone will know my name!

NYPD OFFICER #1

We're gonna keep this quiet. Grand jury. No press.

Officers lead Hugo to the back of a squad car. Open the door. Slide Hugo in.

NYPD OFFICER #1 (CONT'D)

Nobody's ever gonna know this even happened, Mister...

HUGO

LeStrange! Hugo Le--

The squad car door SLAMS.

NYPD OFFICER #1

I always get the crazy ones.

Jeff looks at Hua Mei. Then to Li Ming.

JEFF

She's all yours.

Jeff hands Hua Mei over. Li Ming takes her, strokes her head.

LI MING

I think she's going to be just fine.

Jeff looks over at the rest of the zoo animals. Sees the wounded Floyd.

JEFF

Parker! Murdock! Get a med-kit. Check him out!

Parker jerks his thumb toward Jackson, Buster, and Georgia.

PARKER

What about them?

Jeff watches them a moment.

JEFF

They won't stop you.

Jeff locks eyes with Jackson. Nods. Jackson nods back.

Jeff looks across the animals. Stops at Georgia.

JEFF (CONT'D)

The first one to escape. Thank you.

Georgia lowers her head. Nods.

GEORGIA

You're welcome.

Jeff stares. Did he actually hear that?

Parker and Murdock attend to Spike.

Humans and animals regard each other on the Manhattan dock.

EXT. VARIOUS ENCLOSURES - SAN DIEGO ZOO - DAY

Birds circulate, pass word of the return.

ORIOLE

They're back! They're all back!

IN THE AVIARY

THRUSH

They did it!

LORIKEET

They saved Hua Mei!

INT. KOALA ENCLOSURE - DAY

Tourists point out koalas in the trees. Snap photos.
Syd, cozy in the branches, SNORES.

EXT. FLAMINGO GROTTO - DAY

Floyds #3-5 chatter among themselves. Dot stands alone.

FLOYD #5

And that thing with the semi --

Spike walks by. Flower in his beak. Offers Dot the flower. She smiles. Takes it.

Floyds 3-5 burst into laughter!

Spike takes her wing in his. Walks away.

Floyds 3-5 stop laughing. Glance at each other. Shrug.

INT. RHINOCEROS ENCLOSURE - DAY

Buster rests in the shade. Joe looks back to the others, chuckles.

JOE

So, Buster, did you have a good time?

Buster thinks about it for a moment.

BUSTER

Yeah. I did. It was a lot of fun.

JOE

Why come back?

BUSTER

(shrugs)
This is my home.

Joe looks for a wisecrack. Finds none.

The KEEPERS

Toss fresh grass into the enclosure. The rhinos look from Joe to the grass.

Joe watches Buster.

BUSTER (CONT'D)

Ooo, lunch. Care to join me?

Buster casually saunters toward the grass.

Joe has nothing. Stunned.

JOE

Uh... sure.

Joe shrugs. Joins Buster. The two munch.

The other rhinos join. Buster scoots, lets them in. Eats.

EXT. ORANGUTAN ENCLOSURE - DAY

Tourists crowd their side of the plexi. Phones RING.
Cameras FLASH.

Oscar sits, his back to them. Gaze intently follows Charlie.

OSCAR

Show me that again, Charlie!

CHARLIE

Sure thing, Uncle Oscar!

Charlie tumbles, somersaults. The crowd eats it up. So does Oscar.

TALLULAH

Sits next to Oscar. Takes his hand in hers. Their eyes meet.

Charlie tumbles around them. Oscar watches. Smiles.

INT. JAGUAR ENCLOSURE - DAY

Jaguars 1 and 2 soak in the pool.

Jackson bites off two small pieces of a thick steak.
Slides them over to

LEO & MARV

The Jersey warehouse rats.

LEO
Ah, this is the life, Marv.

MARV
You said it, Leo.

Jackson gazes at the clouds drifting above.

JACKSON
Yes, it is.

Jackson gnaws on the steak. PURRS.

EXT. GIRAFFE ENCLOSURE - DAY

Mother Giraffe watches her calf try to reach the high
branches.

MOTHER GIRAFFE
Almost there, sweetie.

Calf balances on the tips of its hooves, teeters. Falls.
Laughs.

Georgia laughs with them.

GEORGIA
You'll make it. Someday.

Georgia smiles.

INT. GIANT PANDA RESEARCH CENTER - DAY

Bobby sits nervously at the console.

Jeff and Li Ming enter. Laughing like longtime friends.

BOBBY
You seem to be getting along rather well.

JEFF
I'm sure that's a surprise to you.

BOBBY

What are you talking about?

Parker, Richards, and Murdock enter. Followed by two SAN DIEGO POLICE OFFICERS.

LI MING

You folded way to easily when I caught you on the phone with Jeff.

JEFF

I couldn't believe it, but somewhere between Wichita and Hoboken we figured it out.

LI MING

You were in on it the whole time.

BOBBY

(realizes they're serious)
You don't have any proof.

JEFF

Just a signed confession from Hugo LeStrange. You gave them the plans to our security systems. The backstage tour was your idea.

LI MING

Book him, Dan-O!
(shrugs)
Too much T.V.

The officers cuff Bobby.

JEFF

Bobby, you're fired.

The officers drag him to the door.

BOBBY

I hate being called "Bobby." My name is Rob--

The door SLAMS shut.

EXT. GIANT PANDA EXHIBIT - DAY

Hua Mei enters the enclosure much to the delight of her parents and the assembled crowd.

HUA MEI

Mom! Dad!

BAI YUN

SHI SHI

Hua Mei!

Hua Mei!

Parents and child reunite. Big hugs. Tumbles.

AMONG THE CROWD

-- the Arizona RAIL BOSS with equally husky family.

-- SAMMY, from Kansas, with his parents.

BAI YUN

We were so worried about you!

SHI SHI

Are you alright?

HUA MEI

I'm great! And you know what?

BAI YUN

What?

HUA MEI

I really want to see my new home.

More panda hugs and tumbles.

INT. GIANT PANDA RESEARCH CENTER - DAY

Jeff and Li Ming watch from their side of the glass, with the pride of happy parents.

JEFF

She'll have to leave soon.

LI MING

You could come with her.

JEFF

I wouldn't do well in the wild.

LI MING

To visit.

JEFF

(studies her)

I'd like that.

EXT. GIANT PANDA EXHIBIT - MAGIC HOUR

Hua Mei plays happily with her parents. Above, the gold-orange sun sets on another glorious San Diego day.

EPILOGUE

INT. ANIMAL STALLS - DAY

Hugo sports institutional orange and chest-high waders. Knee deep in manure. Shovels.

JEFF (V.O.)

Hugo LeStrange was sentenced by a Federal Grand Jury to five years hard labor and five-thousand hours of community service.

Hugo SLIPS, lands face-first.

HUGO

Merde!

INT. LAS VEGAS THEATER

Juliette spins on her ropes, wears a sexy jungle ensemble.

JEFF (V.O.)

Lester received a pardon in exchange for his testimony against Hugo.

Lester peeks out from the side curtains at a PACKED AUDIENCE.

JEFF (V.O.) (CONT'D)

He later negotiated a merger with the Cirque du Soleil, and now manages their show at the new Jungle Fever Casino in Las Vegas. Juliette headlines as Queen of the Vine.

Jean, Luc, and Picard, tumble below in monkey suits.

EXT. WOLONG NATURE RESERVE - CHINA - DAY

Lush emerald bamboo forests set with a light mist.

LI MING (V.O.)
Jeff eventually visited the Wolong Nature
Reserve in China.

INT. WOLONG GIANT PANDA RESEARCH STATION - DAY

Jeff and Li Ming watch monitors with great joy.

LI MING (V.O.)
He was present when Hua Mei later gave
birth to her own children.

TWO TINY PINK BABY PANDAS

LI MING (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Twins.

Hua Mei licks and protects her two small charges.

FADE OUT.