



# LOUELLA



15,000-  
17,000

Number of foreigners  
that are trafficked into  
the United States every  
year.




250,000-  
350,000

Number of American-born  
children under the age of 18  
that are at risk of being sexually  
trafficked here in the United  
States every year.



12-14  
YEARS  
OLD

Average age American  
girls enter into  
prostitution.



48-72  
HOURS

Average amount of time the  
victim is typically lured or  
forced into prostitution after  
running away from home.


**“No one is exempt. Class, education,  
race, none of them are deciding factors in  
who falls victim to the sex trade.”**

*– Patricia Spencer, Lieutenant Metro  
Vice Las Vegas Police Department*

A dimly lit room with a window showing a bright orange glow, possibly a fire or sunset. The room is dark, with the light from the window casting a warm, orange glow on the walls and floor. The window is on the left side of the frame, and the light is very bright, almost blinding. The rest of the room is in shadow, with some faint outlines of furniture or objects visible.

There is a common misconception that human trafficking is predominantly a foreign issue but it is just as much a home-grown issue as it is a global one.

Based on extensive research, Louella tells one of the most common stories of how young girls and boys fall victim to becoming sexually trafficked.

A wooden closet rod is mounted on a wall with a pinkish-red hue. Three hangers are suspended from the rod: a white plastic hanger on the left, and two black wire hangers on the right. The background is a plain wall with a vertical seam. To the right, a portion of a door with a brass doorknob is visible.

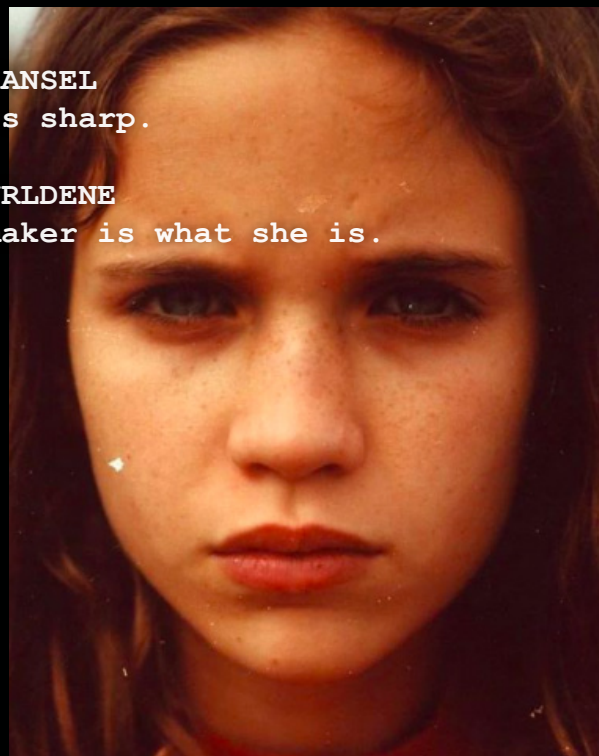
A twelve year old girl runs away from  
an abusive home and is quickly picked  
up by a charming man who emotionally  
seduces her into prostitution in the  
underbelly of Las Vegas.



HANSEL  
She's sharp.



BURLDENE  
Wayward troublemaker is what she is.





## Director's Statement:

I tell stories about people enduring through trauma because it is my own story and one I don't see reflected back enough. Although I was not a victim of sex trafficking, sexual abuse is one of the cornerstones of a minor falling prey to becoming trafficked. I am a survivor of childhood sexual abuse and for me, *Louella* is a means to start a conversation about a largely unseen but rampant issue in America. What drew me so deeply into the desire to tell this story was the understanding that I, and countless children, could have been *Louella*.

All of my work as a filmmaker is about fostering empathy and understanding for situations and people we may not understand initially, in a way that allows us to see ourselves in the characters. Although many of us don't know what it's like to be sexually trafficked, or even abused, what we do understand is the yearning to be loved and that incredibly difficult transition we all make from childhood into adolescence.

Cinematically, I want the audience to see *Louella's* world through her eyes. I see her world as harrowing but not entirely without hope. Although a stark, gritty aesthetic might seem appropriate at first glance, I don't think it would properly serve her story. To understand her we have to see the world through her still hopeful lens: cinematic, even beautiful. A world that is rich with wonder and possibility yet slowly lifting its veil to reveal glimpses of the darker sides of life. Much like the desert where our story takes place: harsh, unforgiving, even brutal, and still full of life, expansive, and often breathtaking.

*Louella* is not an easy story, but just as life often does to us, her story is meant to break your heart wide open.

## Erin Cantelo | *Writer & Director*

Writer-Director Erin Cantelo was most recently hired by *Mayans MC* showrunner and co-creator Elgin James to co-write the character driven action *THE HEIGHTS ABOVE* that James will direct. In 2022 her screenwriting garnered several awards, including Best Short Script in Film Pipeline's Screenplay Competition with her script *WALL*, 3rd place in The Golden Script Competition with her short script *LOUELLA*, and was a finalist in the ScreenCraft Short Screenplay Competition with *THE LONGEST WALK*. She created and directed the short documentary series *SUBCULTURES* and has directed and produced content for OWN/Harpo Studios, Participant Media/SoulPancake, Sandwich Video, and many more.

With a belief that as a filmmaker you have to live stories worth telling, some of her favorite accomplishments have been off-set. Including a 4 month solo trip to Southeast Asia where she took a 5 day motorbike trip in rural Laos alone, a 10 day silent meditation retreat in Southern Thailand, and a cargo ship ride home from Hong Kong all the way to California in which she was the only passenger as well as the only woman on board.

Erin loves to tell stories about characters healing from their own trauma or grief, with the aim to break your heart wide open.





## Ed Skrein | Actor “Hansel”

“I have the honor and privilege to be very selective about the projects I choose to sign onto. For me the story not only has to be compelling and have a clear sense of voice and vision, but there also needs to be the hard to define spark that the character and script hold for me to be truly compelled to say yes and commit to a film. When I read Erin’s script, Louella, I was moved by its delicate and challenging tone. I saw that certain kind of spark - a challenging character I don’t know how I’ll tackle and the story itself felt like an important one that needed to be told. The poignant, beautiful and scary unknown. I hope others feel the same way and want to support Erin and me in telling this story.” - Ed Skrein

Ed Skrein grew up in North London, graduated with a degree in Fine Arts from Central Saint Martins, and is one of the most highly versatile artists of his generation. He was selected by Screen International as one of their “Stars of Tomorrow”, which showcases the next generation of talent from the UK.

Skrein starred as the villain Ajax in Marvel’s box office hit, Deadpool (2016), directed by Tim Miller and alongside Ryan Reynolds. Skrein also played Zapan in director Robert Rodriguez’s Alita: Battle Angel (2019) and most recently starred in Zack Snyder’s upcoming sci-fi epic Rebel Moon (2023).



## Jason Kisvarday | *Production Designer*

Award-winning Production Designer, Jason Kisvarday is known for his work on eclectic and surreal movies like “Everything Everywhere All At Once”, “Swiss Army Man”, “Palm Springs”, “Sorry to Bother You” and “The Greasy Strangler”. Also known for his strong work on music videos, Jason has been nominated twice for Best Art Direction at the MTV Music Videos Award for Childish Gambino’s “This is America” and DJ Snake’s “Turn Down for What”.





LOUELLA

Written by  
Erin Cantelo

Based on the true stories of millions of  
American Children.

EXT. DESERT, OUTSIDE OF DEATH VALLEY - DAY

Barren rocky mountains spill into the dry wasteland. The only vegetation here is brittle and covered in thorns. Far in the distance, LOUELLA (12) petite, SINGS to herself as she throws a rock as hard as she can. She carries a BB-gun that could easily be mistaken for a rifle.

She wears a faded pink t-shirt, jeans, and beat up white Converse, something written on the toes. She picks up another rock and mumbles to herself - playing pretend or mimicking an argument, it's hard to tell. She CHUCKS the rock. A young, blue-bellied LIZARD suns itself atop a boulder.

Her feet stop in their tracks. The BB-gun rises.

She aims. FIRES.

The lizard BITES the dust.

She gasps, wide eyed, RUNS to the rock.

Crouches down.

The lizard, struck near its head. Hobbles like a drunk.

LOUELLA

Oh no! I'm so sorry.

Her eyes well up. She cups the lizard in her hands.

Bolts across the unforgiving terrain.

EXT. SIDE YARD - LATER

Louella rummages through a recycling bin against the side of a tract home, holding the lizard in one hand. She grabs an empty two liter soda bottle.

Hands full, she struggles to retrieve a hidden key near the side door. Opens the door. Drops a few things.

LOUELLA

Shit.

She glances at the door and dropped items, unsure what to tackle first.

INT. HOUSE, BEDROOM - DUSK

Through the distorted plastic of the soda bottle: the lizard sits on a rock. A tiny band-aid on its wounded head.

Louella sits on the floor coloring amongst scattered toys.

Her drawing, a skyline with a white castle, black pyramid with a beam of light at its pinnacle, pink and white circus tent, and a pirate ship. The sound of the front door CLOSES.

WOMAN (O.S.)

HEY!

Louella hops up and rushes into...

INT. ENTRY - MOMENTS LATER

Louella barrels towards the door but HATLS. Tucks against the closest wall - making herself small.

SARAH (30's), trying too hard to appear put-together, fumbles with grocery bags as she props the door open for ALLEN (30's-40's), small town preppy, who saunters in with a couple take-out bags.

ALLEN

Hey, Lou.

SARAH

Allen brought Nicco's.

Louella forces a smile. Fidgets. Watches...

Sarah and Allen flirt their way to the kitchen - new love.

Louella eyes the two, dejected.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Sarah laughs a little too hard over a mediocre pasta dish as Allen refills her wine glass with a healthy pour.

Louella pushes her untouched spaghetti around.

SARAH

(Re: her food)

Lou.

Louella twirls ONE strand of spaghetti onto her fork. Glares at Sarah as she takes a defiant bite.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

The room is dark. Coyotes YIP in the distance. Louella's drawing sits behind the lizard in its little house. The drawing now complete with a starry night sky.

Louella, camped on the floor with a blanket and pillow under a nightlight, gazes at the drawing. She grabs a nearby book of fairy tales and opens it.

Inside, a photo of a smiling YOUNG LOUELLA (3) held up by a cheerful JACOB (28), blonde and distinctly not Allen, in front of the castle entrance of the EXCALIBUR HOTEL AND CASINO.

She places the photo inside the lizard's house, in front of the same white castle in her drawing.

A noise from the other room. Louella perks up.

The doorknob turns.

She throws a shirt over the lizard's house. Closes her eyes.

The door opens. Allen's silhouette appears. He carefully closes the door behind him. He gets on the floor. Strokes her arm. She pretends to be asleep. He peels the blanket off her.

INT. HOUSE, KITCHEN - MORNING

Louella sits at the breakfast bar drawing a colorful lizard - her way of coping.

Sarah sits across from her, fresh cup of coffee in hand. Eyes Louella a moment - searching for something she can't place. She reaches for Louella.

But Louella recoils. Unable to meet her gaze, full of shame.

SARAH

Hey.

Sarah misreads Louella's silence as resentment. Sarah picks up her phone and plays a SONG. She hums to the song, eyes on Louella - an attempt to engage her.

Louella barely meets Sarah's gaze. Sarah persists. Louella cracks a smile - hungry for the attention. Sarah takes Louella's hand and twirls her on the stool she sits on just as...

Allen walks in. All joy drains from Louella. Sarah sees it. Something in her registering but-



Allen wraps his arm around Sarah. Kisses the top of her head.

ALLEN  
Good morning.

And for a moment. Sarah melts. Allen reaches for her phone and turns down the music.

Louella looks to her mom - desperate to be seen.

Allen kisses Sarah again and Louella's moment vanishes.

ALLEN (CONT'D)  
You two eat already?

Louella SNATCHES her drawing and rushes out.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Louella storms down the hall. Drawing clenched in her fist.

SARAH (O.S.)  
Lou.

INT. HOUSE, BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Louella SLAMS the door. Plops down, defeated. Pulls the shirt off the lizard's house.

The lizard lays on the rock. Motionless. DEAD.

She reaches in, touches the lizard. Nothing.

She bursts into tears.

LOUELLA  
I'm so sorry...

Takes a few deep breaths to calm herself. Stares at the lizard's house.

Her colorful drawing. The lizard, still.

She gets up.

She shoves clothes and the photo of her dad into a ratty old backpack. Unzips the pouch on a Glow Worm stuffed animal, retrieving a hidden pile of change. On the floor, the lizard laid out on her faded pink t-shirt.

EXT. SIDE YARD/STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Louella climbs out the bedroom window, full backpack on. Hurries towards the sidewalk.

Her walk becomes brisk. She glances behind her - the coast is clear. She jogs. Runs. Sprints. Past homes that hold their own secrets. She slows. Stops.

Ahead of her, the intersection at the end of her street.

She looks back at the house. Nervous. Clutches the straps of her backpack. Keeps moving.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - LATER

Harsh desert and jagged mountains on the horizon. Houses are few and far between. Louella is a speck as she walks on the side of the road.

A JUNKY CAR comes up fast from behind her. It's too close. Louella flinches as it barrels past her. The DRIVER speeds on, like they didn't even see her.

EXT. PAHRUMP, MAIN DRAG/HIGHWAY 160 - LATER

Heat waves rise from the asphalt as Louella walks on the sidewalk of the four-lane highway that doubles as the town's main drag.

Flanked by the old-west-themed Gold Town Casino, ATV store, and the Pahrump Nugget Hotel and Casino. A SHERIFF'S CAR, lights and sirens blaring, blazes past her.

She squints in the harsh sun, sweat covers her brow. She spots something.

A SCOWLING OLD MAN sits at a bus stop. Louella approaches.

LOUELLA

Excuse me, do you know where the bus to Vegas stops?

He glares at her. Tight lipped, arms crossed. No response.

A LOCAL WOMAN sits nearby. She chimes in but we don't hear her.

LOUELLA

The castle?

EXT. HIGHWAY 160/MAIN DRAG, VARIOUS - LATER

On the toes of Louella's Converse in permanent marker:  
 "Don't Worry" on the left "Be Happy" on the right. They pass  
 in succession: Don't Worry. Be Happy. Don't Worry. Be Happy.

She looks down at her feet as she walks. Wipes the sweat from  
 her brow. Looks up. Stops in her tracks.

Ahead of her, a white castle with red turrets:

EXT. KINGDOM GENTLEMAN'S CLUB - CONTINUOUS

Louella approaches the castle in wonder.

A cheap cement building made to look like a castle. Painted  
 silhouettes of busty girls line the sides.

A billboard next to it with an open-mouthed, half-naked girl  
 proclaims the "Kingdom Gentleman's Club".

Louella examines the billboard a moment. Cocks her head into  
 the same position as the girl. A low rumble catches her ear.  
 She looks ahead.

Across the street:

EXT. MAVERIK GAS STATION - CONTINUOUS

A BUS pulls away from the curb.

BACK TO:

LOUELLA

Shit!

Louella runs as fast as she can across the street. Waves down  
 the bus. Dust kicks up as it speeds off. Too late.

LOUELLA

Dammit.

She looks around. The parking lot is empty, save an old  
 pickup truck. The place is surrounded by dirt lots and the  
 strip club - this is the sticks.

Louella looks up at the Maverik sign: red letters and the  
 image of a majestic mountain surrounded by a great pine  
 forest beneath it.

INT. MAVERIK GAS STATION, CONVENIENCE STORE - MOMENTS LATER

A bell on the door jingles as Louella enters.

A VINTAGE TUNE with a female crooner sounds from a radio on the check-out counter.

From Louella's vantage point, the place looks empty. She walks deeper, past perfect rows of candy and chips. Arrives at the front counter.

LOUELLA

Hello?

BURLDENE (O.S.)

Can I help you?

LOUELLA

-Jesus!

BURLDENE (70's) beautiful but weathered, carries herself with a dignity that doesn't match her current standing. She leans forward from a tall stool behind the counter.

LOUELLA

Sorry. You scared me.

BURLDENE

Bit of advice darlin, women of a certain age don't appreciate hearing they're frightful.

Louella doesn't know how to respond.

BURLDENE

Can I help you with somethin'?

LOUELLA

Yes. Sorry. Do you know when the next bus to Vegas is?

Burldene checks her watch.

BURLDENE

Twelve-fifteen-

LOUELLA

-Like midnight?

BURLDENE

You didn't let me finish. And you might watch your tone, young lady.

Louella obliges.

BURLDENE  
Next bus comes at twelve-fifteen,  
tomorrow.

LOUELLA  
Tomorrow?!

BURLDENE  
Yes. Tomorrow. And what did I just  
say about your tone?

LOUELLA  
Sorry. How much is a ticket?

BURLDENE  
Eighteen-fifty.

Sweat drips down Louella's forehead. She exhales. Uneasy on  
her feet.

LOUELLA  
(Quietly)  
...Oh my god.

Burldene examines her.

BURLDENE  
Shouldn't you be home?

Louella shoots her a look.

EXT. MAVERIK GAS STATION, CONVENIENCE STORE - MOMENTS LATER

Louella throws the door open and storms outside. She paces -  
soaking in what she's gotten herself into.

LOUELLA  
Fuck!

She LAUNCHES her backpack as far as she can. Realizes what  
she's done.

LOUELLA  
Aw fuck.

She walks over and picks up her bag. Plops down on the curb  
in front of the store.

LATER

Small piles of change sit on the curb as Louella counts it  
out.

LOUELLA  
 (Counting piles)  
 Thirteen, fourteen, fifteen...  
 (Mouthing silent numbers)  
 Twenty and...

She thumbs a smaller pile totaling eleven cents. Sighs.  
 Stares out into the desert.

Rugged purple mountains on the horizon. The breeze and  
 rustling of dry brush the only sounds.

She closes her eyes. A bead of sweat drips down her brow.

INT. MAVERIK GAS STATION, FRIDGE - LATER

Louella opens the glass fridge door. Grabs a bottle of soda,  
 opens it, takes a few chugs. Catches her breath. Rests her  
 head on the shelf of the fridge and soaks in the cold.

BURLDENE (O.S.)  
 You aren't fixing to stay here all  
 night are you?

Louella looks back at Burldene.

LOUELLA  
 What time are you off?

BURLDENE  
 Six. But I can't help you.

LOUELLA  
 Wasn't asking. And if you're off at  
 six, then no. I'm not staying here  
 all night.

A MAN LAUGHS.

Louella turns to see:

HANSEL (20's), magnetic, exudes a charm and confidence beyond  
 his looks, stands a couple aisles over.

BURLDENE  
 Something funny?

HANSEL  
 She's sharp.

BURLDENE  
 Wayward troublemaker is what she  
 is.

LOUELLA

Oh come on.

BURLDENE

You ever planning to pay for that  
pop?

LOUELLA

Eventually.

HANSEL

-I'll pay for it.

BURLDENE

The last thing she needs is  
charity.

HANSEL

Cut her some slack. She's a paying  
customer now.

He winks at Louella. She smirks.

Burldene sighs - she just doesn't have the patience or energy  
for it.

BURLDENE

Fine. Make her your problem.

LOUELLA

Can I use your bathroom?

BURLDENE

For heaven's sake.

Hansel shrugs at Burldene, amused. Burldene, taxed.

BURLDENE

Make it quick.  
(To Hansel)  
You better watch yourself.

INT. MAVERIK GAS STATION, BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Louella walks in, backpack on. Looks in the mirror. She's  
sweaty, disheveled.

LOUELLA

Jesus.

She rinses her face in the sink. No paper towels - uses the  
hand-dryer to dry her face.

She whips her hair back. Checks herself out. Pulls her hair up in a couple different styles, discerning which looks best.

EXT. MAVERIK GAS STATION - MOMENTS LATER

Louella walks out the front door, now in a tank top. Hansel smokes a cigarette on the curb.

HANSEL  
You changed.

LOUELLA  
(Self-conscious)  
Oh. Yeah.

HANSEL  
I like your top.

LOUELLA  
Thanks. The other one was gross...  
Not that I'm gross, it was just...  
It was really hot out.

He chuckles. They're silent a moment.

LOUELLA  
Thanks for the pop.

HANSEL  
Pop? You from the Midwest?

LOUELLA  
My mom's from Wisconsin.

HANSEL  
What about your dad?

She thinks.

LOUELLA  
I don't know actually.

HANSEL  
Oh. One of those.

LOUELLA  
He died when I was four.

HANSEL  
Shit. I'm sorry.

LOUELLA  
I only met him a few times.



HANSEL  
You like him?

She nods.

LOUELLA  
He was really fun.

This strikes Hansel - clearly a girl who hasn't had much fun in her life. They're silent a moment. He studies her.

HANSEL  
Can I ask you something?

LOUELLA  
Sure.

HANSEL  
What are you doing just hanging around here?

LOUELLA  
What are you doing hanging around here?

HANSEL  
I was visiting a friend.

She's silent.

LOUELLA  
What... I forgot what I was gonna say.

She fidgets, nervous. He notices.

HANSEL  
This the first time you run away from home?

She recoils.

HANSEL  
Don't worry. I'm not gonna bust you.

He motions for her bag.

HANSEL  
May I?

LOUELLA  
What?

HANSEL  
From one seasoned runaway to  
another. Just want to see how you  
did.

LOUELLA  
Why?

HANSEL  
I mean, what else are you gonna do  
right now?

She resists.

HANSEL  
We can make it a game if you want.

She eyes him.

LOUELLA  
Like how?

HANSEL  
...I'll tell you three things about  
you. If I'm right about all three,  
I win. If I'm wrong about even one,  
you win.

LOUELLA  
Alright.

HANSEL  
What do you want to wager?

LOUELLA  
Like if I win?

HANSEL  
Yeah.

She thinks a moment - light bulb.

LOUELLA  
A ride to Vegas.

HANSEL  
Wow. Big spender.  
...Okay.

He extends his hand to shake.

LOUELLA  
Wait. What if I lose?

HANSEL  
I give you a ride home.

She shrinks.

LOUELLA  
Three things?...  
(Sizing him up)  
Deal.

He gestures for the bag.

LOUELLA  
What?

HANSEL  
I'm not psychic.

LOUELLA  
That seems like cheating.

HANSEL  
We don't have to play.

She glares at him. Hands over the bag. He unzips it, digs around.

HANSEL  
You're hungry.

LOUELLA  
Yeah so what?

HANSEL  
That's one for me.

LOUELLA  
What?!

HANSEL  
You didn't pack any food.

LOUELLA  
Shit. I couldn't... whatever. That  
doesn't seem fair.

He looks at her - truly seeing her.

HANSEL  
You've never known fair.

Her silence says it all.

HANSEL

Last one...

Louella looks defeated. Hansel sees it.

HANSEL

Your name is Sarah.

She lights up, shakes her head *no*.

HANSEL

What?

He opens the backpack. *SARAH* scrawled in permanent marker on the inside.

LOUELLA

My mom.

HANSEL

Shit. Well. Looks like you've won yourself a ride to Vegas.

LOUELLA

Seriously?

HANSEL

Unfortunately I'm a man of my word.

INT. MAVERIK GAS STATION, CONVENIENCE STORE - A LITTLE LATER

Burldene purses her lips as she lays cash on the counter next to a pile of snacks, counting out change.

Louella and Hansel stand on the other side of the counter. Louella grabs the cash. Hansel smiles *thanks*.

Burldene raises an annoyed eyebrow. Watches them go...

BURLDENE

(Quietly to herself)

Not my goddamn problem.

EXT. MAVERIK GAS STATION, CONVENIENCE STORE - MOMENTS LATER

Hansel and Louella walk towards a white Mustang convertible, snacks and sodas in hand. Louella balances on the curb.

HANSEL

Can I ask you something else?

LOUELLA

Sure.

HANSEL

Why is there a dead lizard in your bag?

Her cheeks flush.

LOUELLA

It was an accident.

She fights off her emotions.

HANSEL

Hey... It's okay.

He comforts her. She calms.

HANSEL

Tell you what, I've got an idea.

INT. WHITE MUSTANG/ EXT. ROAD TO VEGAS - GOLDEN HOUR

The top is down. Golden light on Louella's face as the wind whips through her hair. She looks over at Hansel behind the wheel.

He smiles at her. She sticks her hand out of the car, moves it up and down - like a wave on the air.

EXT. LAS VEGAS VALLEY OVERLOOK - SUNSET/DUSK

The bright lights of the strip and city sparkle in the distance. The kind of overlook made for lovers. Hansel stands at the edge.

HANSEL

Dearly beloved...

Louella watches him, smiling.

HANSEL

We are gathered here today to celebrate the all too brief life of...

LOUELLA

Sam.

HANSEL

Sam, the lizard.

In a tiny grave, the lizard lays belly up. A few wild flowers next to it.

HANSEL

Our time with you was simply not enough. You were a good friend and companion. You will always be missed and remembered. Would you like to say a few words?

LOUELLA

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to kill you. I didn't think I'd actually hit you. ...I hope you liked your house.

She looks up for approval.

HANSEL

Amen.

LOUELLA

Amen.

Hansel kneels. Cups his hands around the dirt piled next to the little grave. Nods for her to join. Places his hands on the back of hers but she hesitates. Her eyes well up with tears. She covers her face. Weeps.

LOUELLA

(Embarrassed)

I'm sorry.

He puts his arm around her.

HANSEL

Let it out.

LOUELLA

I don't want to do it.

HANSEL

You don't want to bury him?

LOUELLA

Her. Yeah.

HANSEL

Okay. We won't.

EXT. WHITE MUSTANG/LAS VEGAS VALLEY OVERLOOK - LATER

It's dark. Louella and Hansel stare at the glittering city a few moments.

HANSEL

If someone waved a magic wand and you'd get to do exactly what your heart desired, what would it be?

She recoils, too shy. He nudges her.

HANSEL

It's okay. You can tell me.

LOUELLA

(Mumbles)

Be a singer.

HANSEL

I'm sorry, what was that?

LOUELLA

Be a singer.

HANSEL

Lay it on me.

She clams up. Refuses to.

HANSEL

Okay. Whenever you're ready.

The song on the radio changes, it's the same SONG that Sarah played earlier. Louella turns her head to listen.

HANSEL

What?

LOUELLA

...I love this song.

Hansel hops off the car and extends his hand. She places her hand in his and hops down. He bows. Twirls her, they dance. The city lights sparkle in the background as the SONG PLAYS...

MONTAGE

EXT. LAS VEGAS STRIP - LATER

Flashing lights dance on Louella's face as Hansel points out one of the glittering spectacles. She watches, awestruck.

Louella and Hansel walk on the strip. They share some deep-fried Oreos. She takes a bite, in heaven. Hansel laughs.

EXT. NEW YORK NEW YORK HOTEL - LATER

Hansel and Louella sit side by side on the roller coaster. Louella scream-laughes. Hansel jokes around. She lights up, laughs even harder.

EXT. EXCALIBUR - LATER

Hansel's hands cover Louella's eyes. He pulls them away. She opens, wide-eyed.

The larger than life white castle with red and blue turrets, even bigger and better than in the photo with her father.

Hansel puts his arm around Louella. She leans her head on his chest.

INT. PHOTO BOOTH - LATER

Hansel and Louella make faces as the flashes go off. He tickles her. She laughs and squirms.

After, they linger in the booth. Hansel gazes at her. Louella is over the moon.

END MONTAGE

EXT. LAS VEGAS STRIP - NIGHT

Louella struts in a cool-girl jacket alongside Hansel. A few shopping bags in their hands. He stops her.

HANSEL

Hang on.

He pulls the price tag off and hands it to her. Still on cloud nine, they walk.

HANSEL

So you're here. Now what?



She slows, wind taken out of her sails - hasn't thought this through.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - MORNING

Typical Vegas. Flashy but nothing opulent. Louella lays in bed fully clothed. She stares at the soft morning light that pours through the windows.

Hansel sits with his back to her in a t-shirt and jeans.

She turns around.

LOUELLA

Morning.

He forces a smile. Gets up.

EXT. MOTEL ROOM, OUTSKIRTS OF VEGAS - MOMENTS LATER

Hansel leans on the rail, stares into the desert. Louella walks out of their room and joins him. Silence.

LOUELLA

Are you mad at me?

HANSEL

No. I'm just... I really like you.  
Girls like you are rare, Louella.

She hangs on his words.

HANSEL

But... I just wish the timing was better.

LOUELLA

What do you mean?

HANSEL

...I'm in some trouble.

LOUELLA

Like how?

HANSEL

Money stuff. But... I should probably take you home.

LOUELLA

What?

HANSEL  
 (Apologetic)  
 I know. Hey... Look at me.

He tips her chin up to meet his gaze.

HANSEL  
 Nothing can change how I feel about  
 you.

LOUELLA  
 Please... There has to be  
 something...

HANSEL  
 I can't ask you.

LOUELLA  
 Ask me.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Louella sits on the bed cross-legged.

HANSEL  
 Ready?

She nods.

HANSEL  
 Close your eyes.

She closes them. He places a shoebox in front of her.

HANSEL  
 Open.

She opens, looks to him. He nods for her to open the box. She pulls a pair of red stilettos out of the box. Platform sole. Dainty ankle strap.

HANSEL  
 You like them?

She nods.

HANSEL  
 Come here.

He motions her to the edge of the bed. She sets her feet on the floor. He kneels at her feet. Peels off her tattered "Don't Worry - Be Happy," Converse.

Guides her foot into the stiletto, fastens the ankle strap.  
Starts on the other foot. Notices her smiling.

HANSEL

What?

LOUELLA

It's like Cinderella.

He kisses the back of her hand - like a goddamn prince.

HANSEL

You know what Cinderella was?

LOUELLA

What?

HANSEL

A future queen.

She hangs on his words.

HANSEL

Come here.

He stands up, takes her hands. She stands.

LOUELLA

Oh my god.

He guides her. She walks carefully.

LOUELLA

How do girls wear these?

HANSEL

Practice.

She wobbles.

LOUELLA

It's a little scary.

HANSEL

You look beautiful.

She blushes.

He twirls her as they reach the wall. He lets go. Walks to  
the opposite end of the room.

He motions for her to come toward him.

She shakes her head *no*.

HANSEL  
You can do it.

She's frozen. Sighs. Takes a cautious step forward. She walks but it's a struggle.

LOUELLA  
I'm sorry.

HANSEL  
Just keep going.

LOUELLA  
They're really hard to walk in.

HANSEL  
Try putting your weight on your toes.

LOUELLA  
(Trying)  
I don't think I'm doing it right.

HANSEL  
Try walking heel to toe.

LOUELLA  
How?

He reaches down and grabs her foot. Manipulates it.

HANSEL  
Heel, toe. Heel, toe. Got it?

She walks. Focused. Slowly gets the hang of it. She smiles, looks to Hansel for approval.

HANSEL  
Better. Sway your hips a little.

She tries. It's awkward. Throws her off. Way off.

HANSEL  
Just make it more sexy.

LOUELLA  
(Snaps)  
I don't know how.

His veneer drops, he stares her down - it's startling. She shrinks. Scared.

He kneels in front of her.

HANSEL  
I need your help.

LOUELLA  
I know.

She looks down.

HANSEL  
Maybe this is too much for you.

LOUELLA  
...

He stands.

HANSEL  
I understand... I'll take you back  
home tonight.

LOUELLA  
What? Wait.

He turns to look at her.

LOUELLA  
...Let me try again.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Louella applies lip gloss. Checks herself out in front of a mirrored wall near the bathroom. She's fully made up, wears a tight black mini-dress and the red stilettos.

She opens her mouth, half pouts - mimics that sexy 'o' face she saw on the billboard. It all makes her look a little older. Sexy even.

Hansel studies her from across the room.

She takes in her reflection. Suddenly overcome with emotion. She tears up but fights it. Groans in frustration. Angry.

He approaches. Wraps his arms around her. Cradles her. Hums the song they danced to at the overlook.

She clutches him. Childlike. Scared.

He holds her, oddly satisfied - like a lion after devouring its prey.

INT. CASINO HOTEL, HALLWAY - NIGHT

Louella's feet in red stilettos as she treks across the patterned carpet. Her walk still a bit unsteady but improved.

Black dress. Makeup. Checks something in her hand and scans the doors.

She stops in front of room 516.

Across the hall, a NEARBY DOOR opens. Louella freezes.

A HIGH GIRL (16) trans, exits room 519. She wears tight cut-off denim shorts, tank top, and heels. She's disheveled and clearly on something. She adjusts her bra.

Louella blatantly stares.

The High Girl notices.

HIGH GIRL  
(To Louella)  
Baby girl...

She lingers - recognizes something all too familiar.

Louella stares. High Girl, now melancholy.

HIGH GIRL  
...Take your time. It happens so  
fast.

She walks down the hallway. Louella watches her go.

Louella turns back to the door for 516. She hesitates. Stares into space - a long, painful moment.

She raises her fist. Knocks.

LATER

She slowly exits room 516. Her eyes vacant, her hair askew.

INT. MUSTANG, PARKING GARAGE - NIGHT

Hansel sits in the car. Louella climbs in. Dazed. Hands him a purse. He kisses the top of her head - an unmistakable echo of Allen and Sarah.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Hansel sleeps, cast in the gray light before dawn.

Louella sits on the edge of the bed. Watches him. Still in the black dress from earlier.

A LITTLE LATER

Louella slowly opens the door. Backpack over her shoulder. Sneaks out.

EXT. MOTEL - DAWN, BEFORE SUNRISE

The desert beyond the motel is cast in dull purple light. In the empty dirt lot next to the motel, Louella walks barefoot, stilettos in one hand. She crouches down.

The spike of Louella's stiletto digs into the dirt. She digs a small hole.

She lays her faded pink t-shirt and dead lizard into the hole. Places a wildflower on its shriveled belly. Places her hand on the lizard and closes her eyes.

She folds the t-shirt over the lizard. Covers her with dirt.

She looks to the motel. No sign of Hansel.

She stands and bows her head. Tears stream down her cheeks. She walks onward.

She opens her mouth and SINGS.

It's the same song Sarah played and that she and Hansel danced to at the overlook.

Louella's version is slow. Raw. She emotes in the way only those of us who have suffered greatly can.

Stunning. Heartbreaking.

Behind her, the sun crests. Light pierces the horizon. She looks out to the desert. Sings her final notes. More woman than the girl we first met.

CUT TO BLACK