

DOUDOU
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EXT. SKY - DAY

A descent through brilliant blue sky to grey-black winter storm clouds. Below the angry, roiling billows nestles a --

EXT. SMALL QUAIN TOWN - DAY

of picturesque Victorian architecture blanketed in snow. It looks like... Christmas.

A snowflake swirls down, down, down. The city comes into focus as the delicate flake makes its frozen journey.

White smoke belches from the chimneys of weathered stone houses. Closer now, Fifties vintage cars spin tires and swerve on the icy streets.

The snowflake drifts past a stately bell tower to --

STREET LEVEL

where it lands on a Man's cheek. Annoyed, he brushes it off without a second thought.

An odd sight. A Child in his pajamas rounds a corner.

His name is OSCAR (10). Striking blue eyes, freckles on scarlet-from-the-cold cheeks. Oscar clings to a STUFFED WHITE RABBIT as he wanders with no direction and a sad, searching stare on his face.

People hustle and bustle by without a look, including a Businessman in warm, expensive overcoat and hat.

Oscar screws up his courage and approaches him,

OSCAR
Sir, can you help me? Please.

The Businessman fires a disdainful look at Oscar. He pushes past and briskly moves on.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
Mom? Dad?

Oscar rushes up on other self-absorbed Adults. He pleads,

OSCAR (CONT'D)
Please... I'm lost. I have to find
my family. Help me.

No one misses a step to consider Oscar.

An intense snowfall whips up.

Dejected, Oscar sinks to the chilly cobblestone street in the bell tower's shadow, his loyal Stuffed Rabbit beside him.

LATER

Several inches of fast-falling snow bury the empty street. People long ago retreated to cozy homes from the nasty storm.

Almost completely covered, the motionless Oscar shivers uncontrollably, cheeks flame red.

Oscar's heavy eyelids flutter in a fight to stay open. He squeezes the wet Stuffed Rabbit.

Oscar's exhaled breath is a steamy mist that rises to the bell tower. The ominous BELLS TOLL twelve times. Midnight.

EXT. ORPHANAGE - SAME

Silhouetted in the dark, a grand Victorian house.

The TOLLING BELLS reverberate in the near distance.

An inviting yellow light blazes in one window. The hopeful face of a Little Girl contemplates the heavens.

A shooting star streaks across the velvety black sky.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Oscar's eyes are shut. The steamy mist is no longer.

A dazzling yellow sphere of light escapes Oscar's body. The magical glow floats and swirls about him before finding its home in the Stuffed Rabbit's belly.

RABBIT comes alive. Black eyes turn blue. Freckles bloom on hairy cheeks.

EXT. ORPHANAGE - DAY

An imposing Victorian mansion plunges in the morning light. Over the entrance, a SIGN WITH A BABY'S HANDPRINT reads: "ORPHANAGE FOR GIRLS"

INT. DORMITORY - DAY

MA'AM (40s), a very tall lady has wild hair that frizzes like she stuck a finger in an electrical outlet.

She walks up a row of Girls like a general inspecting troops. The well-disciplined Girls wait in front of their beds.

MA'AM

Lola?

Popular and educated, LOLA (11) is what the other Girls want to be like. She smiles at Ma'am and waits for instructions.

MA'AM (CONT'D)

Today, it's your turn to wash the dishes.

Lola's definitive nod to Ma'am assures it will be done.

MA'AM (CONT'D)

Janice? Your mission today, teach the twins how to correctly make their beds.

Ma'am grimaces at the Twins sloppy, hastily made beds.

The bickering, outgoing twins, ABBY and LILLY (8), snicker.

The Orphanage's oldest girl JANICE (15) is smart and wise. She nods. Her smile at Ma'am reveals a gap between her teeth.

Ma'am gestures to APPOLINE (12) who stands out among the rest. Beside a reserved air and small stature for someone her age, there's just something... different about Appoline.

MA'AM (CONT'D)

Appoline?

APPOLINE

Yes?

MA'AM

I have a very special mission for you. Meet me in my office this afternoon and I'll tell you all about it.

With curly blond hair, the stuck-up NELLY (13) rolls her eyes at the special request. She hurls a dirty look at Appoline.

Ma'am opens her arms to invite the Girls into a warm and loving group hug.

MA'AM (CONT'D)
Come on in girls.

The Smallest embrace Ma'am's legs while Older Girls close the circle with their arms.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Appoline perches at one end of the table. At the opposite end, Ma'am enjoys the Girl's gentle socialization and laughs.

Appoline peers out a window at some unseen thing a thousand miles. She snaps back when Ma'am stands up.

MA'AM
May I have your attention?

The Girls immediately give it to her.

APPOLINE
(mutters)
At the end of the week...

MA'AM
At the end of the week, we have Parents' Night. If you are kind and wise, you may have a chance to be adopted by a nice family.

The Girls twitter with excitement and whisper to each other.

MA'AM (CONT'D)
Please calm down. I'm counting on you to wear your most beautiful dress and most beautiful smile for the event.

SAVANNAH (6), a very emotional Girl, drops her arms on the table, already defeated.

SAVANNAH
I won't get picked. I'll sit this one out.

JANICE
Don't. Look how cute you are! What a dream... I'm too old now, no one wants an old girl like myself. They prefer delicious dimples like yours.

A sudden smile carves Savannah's cheeks of her prettiest dimples.

Ma'am swings her gaze to grin wanly at Appoline.

INT. GAME ROOM - LATER

A rosy fire CRACKLES in the fireplace.

In a worn but comfy armchair near the blaze, Appoline reads *Peter Pan*.

APPOLINE

(whispers)

If only the Darling family really
existed.

Hosting a tea party, Lilly and Abby fight over the teapot.

Lola and Savannah draw pictures of family dreams: Houses with picket fences, a mom, a dad, a big dog... them.

Nelly spies Appoline. She sneaks up behind the armchair.

NELLY

Boo!

Appoline leaps with surprise.

NELLY (CONT'D)

How's Ma'am's pet. Aren't you a
little old to still believe in
Neverland?

Nelly prances royally and laughs at a joke only she gets.

APPOLINE

Leave me alone Nelly!

NELLY

Peter Pan isn't coming to save you.
Why would he want a girl like you?

Appoline rises to leave. Nelly blocks the way.

NELLY (CONT'D)

That's probably why you never come
to Parents' Night. You're afraid no
one will pick you. It's why you're
Ma'am's favorite. She feels sorry
for you. Isn't that right?

APPOLINE

You're wrong!

Ma'am lugs the big box of donated toys into the room. The tip of Rabbit's ear pokes from it.

MA'AM

Girls, I have a surprise for you.

All the Girls except Appoline gather around Ma'am and box.

Appoline sighs with relief at being freed from Nelly's clasp.

MA'AM (CONT'D)

Don't forget, one toy per girl.
Otherwise, there won't be enough
for each of you.

As soon as Ma'am drops the box in the center of the room, it devolves into a hysterical fight over the toys.

The Twins enter the ring: Round One, a stuffed animal; Round Two, a doll.

LILLY

It's mine!

ABBY

No, it's mine! I saw it first.

The Twins stretch the poor doll to near breaking.

Lola spots the damp Rabbit in the box's corner. Its deep blue eyes also grab Appoline's attention.

A faint murmur, resembling a boy's voice, is barely audible amid the room's bustle, catching Appoline's attention as she shares her first glance with Rabbit.

Finally, Lola pushes Janice and snatches the mysterious Rabbit.

The Girls flee to play with their hard-fought booty. Appoline checks the box. Empty.

Ma'am entered with a kind smile of her lips.

MA'AM

I have a surprise for you. Close
your eyes and hold out your hands.

Thrilled, Appoline does as asked.

Ma'am places a delicate wooden music box in her hands.

MA'AM (CONT'D)

Open them.

Appoline glows. She opens the box immediately. Two mechanical dancers pop up and twirl. SOFT MUSIC plays.

APPOLINE

Thank you very much. It's very pretty.

MA'AM

I know you've always wanted one.
(leans in)
You sacrifice so other girls can have toys before you, but don't forget yourself. I'm proud of you, you know.

The two dancers continue their elegant pas de deux.

MA'AM (CONT'D)

Tomorrow, maybe one of you will leave... Fortunately, you don't want to leave us, do you?

Appoline takes a second of hesitation before answering.

APPOLINE

No, Ma'am, I don't want to leave.

MA'AM

I'm glad to hear that. You're a valuable family member, and we all love you.

Ma'am smiles and places a comforting hand on her shoulder.

INT. DORMITORY - NIGHT

The music box rests on Appoline's nightstand. She closes the lid then slides under the bed's wool blanket.

Lola uses care to put Rabbit in her trunk. She closes her eyes and shakes a snow globe with a castle scene.

LOLA

My wish is to find a family tomorrow night.

Ma'am tucks a crying Savannah in bed.

SAVANNAH

(sobbing)
I want my Poppa'.

Ma'am drops a kiss on her forehead.

MA'AM

Good night and sweet dreams, little ones. Tomorrow will be sweeter than today.

GIRLS

Gooooood night, Ma'am.

Appoline reads a bit of *Peter Pan* before --

LIGHTS OUT

LATER

In the quiet of the night, a few Girls toss and turn.

Savannah is finally asleep, cheeks still wet, while Nelly snores like a nocturnal orchestra.

Appoline sleeps with the book resting on her face.

A SNEEZE echoes in the dark dormitory.

Appoline startles awake. She's surprised by the book and pushes it off.

She checks the dorm. Nothing out of the ordinary. All the Girls are fast asleep.

A SNIFFLE wafts on the dorm's air.

Appoline quietly slips out of bed to investigate. No one seems sick. She creeps around to make sure.

OSCAR (O.S.)

Mummy? Daddy? Where are you?

Appoline rubs her eyes. Convinced she's awake, she moves to the sound - Lola's bed.

Lola's eyes rapidly move in REM - the sleep of dreams.

The full Moon spotlights Lola's trunk. The outline of a Little Boy highlighted in moon blue shines through.

Curious but a little freaked, Appoline nonetheless slowly opens the trunk.

A girl's trunk: dresses, shoes, diaries... and the White Stuffed Rabbit. Appoline's attention draws to the Rabbit. His plastic whiskers twitch and the pink nose is wet.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
At last! Hello! Do you know where
my mummy and daddy are?

Rabbit blinks both eyes. His lips move when he talks.

Appoline gasps. Her lips also move but no words come forth.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
Hello? Do you hear me?

A light turns on outside the dormitory door.

Appoline drops the trunk lid, runs to hide under her covers.

Ma'am discreetly enters to check the room. All appears to be in order.

INT. AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Parents' Night.

A BUZZ runs through the ornate Victorian space complete with stage and balcony. Couples of all stripes - wealthy, middle and working class - funnel in on tiptoes, quickly find seats.

Farmers MARY and GEORGE, stand out in high boots that leave muddy footprints in their wake.

ON THE BALCONY

Appoline fits together the puzzle of torn pages.

Enviously, she looks down on the gathered Couples. She sighs a sigh too heavy for a 12-year-old.

She starts over on a blank notebook page.

BACKSTAGE

Behind a maroon curtain with a fringe of gold, nervous Girls primp and preen like miniature Miss America hopefuls. They're overdone in dresses, colorful hair ribbons and loop earrings.

Ma'am supervises. She looks over the Group. Satisfied after a slight fix of Lola's ribbon, she SNAPS a finger.

The curtain rises for --

SERIES OF SHOTS - THE PARADE OF ORPHANS

A spotlight gleams in center stage.

- Lola confidently strides on stage and blooms in the light.

LOLA

My name is Lola. I'm 11 years old.
My mother left us last year, and
the world around me shattered into
a thousand pieces.

She pauses for a solemn moment. Then, with a gleam of
resilience.

LOLA (CONT'D)

However, I find strength in life's
little pleasures. I love taking
care of myself and cherishing the
precious moments when I can play
with my friends.

- Janice waves and really sells it with an alluring smile.

JANICE

I know I'm older than anyone here
and no longer a child, but I'd be
really grateful if I could spend my
last years before adulthood with a
loving family. That's all I ever
wanted, and I promise to be the
best daughter I can be.

- Abby and Lilly fight and push each other into the light.

LILLY

I'm Abby!

ABBY

No. I'm Abby!

One minute later, they attempt a pirouette before falling on
their butts. They recover and bow as if they've won Olympic
Gold.

- Nelly commands the stage.

NELLY

Math is easy for me. That's why I
know you plus me equals a family.

Pleased with her cleverness, Nelly flashes a showy grin.

NELLY (CONT'D)

I also dance..
(a few steps)
...and love baking!

- Ma'am gently pushes Savannah into the light.

Savannah's hand tremble and she freezes at the sight of the crowd. She cannot speak, cries and rushes off stage.

- All the Girls follow Ma'am onstage. They form a line, join hands and bow.

The Couples politely APPLAUD.

MA'AM

Thank you for attending tonight.
How about another round of applause
for these lovely girls?

The Audience obliges. Ma'am and the Girls bow again.

APPOLINE

closes the notebook.

Ma'am looks up and waves at her.

INT. DORMITORY - NIGHT

Excited, Savannah and Janice flit around Lola.

JANICE

How lucky, I wish I were in your
shoes!

LOLA

It's not luck. It's the magical
snow globe. It made my wish come
true.

Lola shakes the globe. Snow cascades onto the castle.

LOLA (CONT'D)

It's yours now. Make a wish every
night. Maybe it'll help you like it
help me.

Janice is already trying the magical globe.

Savannah runs in tears in Lola's arm.

SAVANNAH

We'll miss you so much!

LOLA

Don't you worry, I'll never forget
any of you. I'll write every week!

Under her blanket, Appoline peeks at the celebration. The Girls scream with joy. Their eyes sparkle with hope.

Ma'am arrives to comfort her dear pensioners.

MA'AM

I know you're all hoping for a forever home as soon as possible, but sometimes things just don't work out the way we want them to. This doesn't mean that your chance to find a happy, loving family will never come. It just means it may take a little longer to find the right one.

LATER

Nelly's annoying SNORES disturb the peace in the quiet dorm.

In bed, Appoline holds knees with her arms. The only Girl awake. Deep in thought, she's mesmerized by Lola's trunk.

In the trunk, the silvery Moon paints the boy's shadow.

INT. DORMITORY - MORNING

Lola slings toys, dresses and other girly-girl things from her trunk into a suitcase. The Rabbit waits on Lola's bed.

Janice learns the undisciplined twins how to tuck their beds.

There's something on Appoline's mind. She keenly observes Lola.

Appoline carries the music box like it's a great ancient treasure.

LOLA

What is it? I'll be leaving soon. My new family is due any time. Are you sad I'm leaving. Like the rest?

Appoline and Oscar lock eyes.

APPOLINE

Oh, sure. It's been a pleasure knowing you.

But Appoline's eyes are already mesmerized under the Rabbit's gaze.

LOLA
Thank you, I love it!

Appoline clears her throat, ready to negotiate with Lola.

APPOLINE
Isn't it beautiful? Can I ask you something in return? It'll be like a souvenir of you, always here with me.

LOLA
You're so clever! Here, take one of my favorite toys.

Lola offers snow globes and lovely dolls.

APPOLINE
I know it's a better deal for you, so how about swapping the stuffed rabbit for the music box?

LOLA
Are you sure? This dirty old rabbit? How about something else?

Lola offers snow globes and dolls.

APPOLINE
The rabbit's fine. I'll take good care of it.

Lola and Appoline swap. They seal the deal with a warm hug.

INT. MAIN DOOR - DAY

The Girls wave final goodbyes to Lola. A few tears fall.

Ma'am kneels to take Lola in her arms.

MA'AM
Take care of yourself and your new parents. No matter what, I'll be here for you. Always.

Lola wriggles with impatience.

The door swings opens. Lola dashes out without a look back.

Ma'am wallows in overwhelming feelings of sadness and hope.

INT. DORMITORY - NIGHT

Moonlight softly spills through the window, casting a silvery glow on the floor. Beds line up like islands in the darkness, each girl sleeping peacefully under sheets, Nelly's snoring leading the quiet harmony.

Only one girl is still awake—Appoline. She sits upright, fixated on Rabbit.

APPOLINE

Mis-- Mister Rabbit? Are you there?

The Rabbit's nose twitches, whiskers wiggle. He SNEEZES.

Amazed, Appoline stifles a GASP with a hand to her mouth.

OSCAR

Aaaah, I held that in for a long time. A rabbit? I'm not a rabbit. I'm a boy.

Appoline smiles in wide-eyed relief. Maybe she's not nuts.

APPOLINE

A boy?

OSCAR

Of course. My name is Oscar.

APPOLINE

A boy in a stuffed rabbit then.

OSCAR

What's your story, morning glory?

She holds a mirror from the night stand up to Oscar's face.

Oscar snorts in shock.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Wait... What? How-- how is that possible?

APPOLINE

Not a clue. I thought I went off the deep end because of you.

OSCAR

I must be the crazy one.

Oscar SNIFFLES.

APPOLINE
That's a bad cold.

OSCAR
I feel so cold.

Appoline wraps Oscar in a blanket.

APPOLINE
Let's get you warm.

Oscar's stuffed ears wiggle. It amuses Appoline.

OSCAR
Where are we?

APPOLINE
A girl's orphanage.

OSCAR
What's that?

APPOLINE
A place where children wait to find
a family.

OSCAR
Where's yours? Family?

APPOLINE
Dunno. The orphanage has always
been my home.
(pets ears)
What about you, do you have a
rabbit hutch somewhere?

OSCAR
Hilarious. The only memory I have
is of my parents telling me bedtime
stories. Then, as if by magic, I
found myself stuck in the trunk.

APPOLINE
What do they look like?

Oscar grapples with forming a picture but fails.

OSCAR
I don't remember...

For a moment, they silently dwell in their own sad thoughts.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
I have an idea.

Appoline perks up in anticipation.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Let's make a promise to each other here and now. You help me find my family and I'll help you find one.

Hesitant at first, she holds out a hand to shake.

APPOLINE

I promise.

OSCAR

It looks like I can't move anything except for my ears.

The fluffy ears move in all directions.

Appoline shakes his rabbit foot.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

I think Mom would be cross with me about my manners. What's your name?

APPOLINE

My name is Appoline.

LATER

Appoline slumbers with Oscar at the foot of the bed. His COUGHS and shivers stir her.

She sits up and leans over him.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

Are you okay? What's wrong?

OSCAR

I'm very c-c-cold.

Appoline scratches her head before taking him with her.

She lies down and squeezes him tightly against her.

APPOLINE

Let's join the kingdom of dreams together.

OSCAR

The first to dream wins.

Together, they drift off to the kingdom of dreams.

INT. DORMITORY - MORNING

Oscar yawns, Appoline stretches. He sounds much better.

OSCAR
It's breakfast ti --

Appoline gags Oscar with a hand over his mouth.

APPOLINE
(whispers)
Shhh! What if someone hears you?

She removes the hand,

OSCAR
CAN ANYONE HEAR ME?

Appoline cringes.

She reads the room. Girls immersed in morning routines: hair brushing; making beds; the Twins trying to do theirs.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
You're the only one that hears me.
How lucky!

Appoline steals another wary look. She's reassured.

Nelly, already dressed and polished, slinks by Appoline.

NELLY
(loud)
Oh, baby Appoline still needs a
Doudou to sleep. So cute. You
fracture me.

The other Girls GIGGLE.

Lilly hides a stuffed animal behind her back.

NELLY (CONT'D)
Ready for your favorite class?

Nelly swaggers out.

OSCAR
What a germ. She wants a fight. You
should give it to her. Don't let
her treat you like that.

APPOLINE

Don't worry. I'm used to it. I need to get ready before Ma'am comes looking for us. We don't want that.

Appoline brushes her hair.

OSCAR

Uh...

APPOLINE

Yes?

Oscar beams a puppy dog look that could melt a cold heart.

OSCAR

I'll be bored here by myself.

APPOLINE

You want me to bring you to class?

OSCAR

Why not?

APPOLINE

Hmm... Okay, why not. But only if you do not bother me during school.

Janice lurks behind her. Appoline swivels.

JANICE

Who are you talking to?

APPOLINE

Janice, you startled me. To myself. What d'ya think? To the rabbit?

Janice shrugs it off.

Appoline lifts her backpack and beelines for the door.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Appoline tries a halfhearted stab at following the arithmetic lesson. Oscar's head peeks out of Appoline's backpack.

MA'AM

6 times 6?

Girls raise their hands to answer. Nelly the highest.

OSCAR

36!

Surprised, Appoline smirks.

MA'AM
7 times 7?

OSCAR
Multiple of seven, easy! 49!

Appoline chuckles.

APPOLINE
Shhhh!

MA'AM
What's so funny Appoline? The multiplication tables are not a strength. You should take the class seriously. What's 8 times 8?

OSCAR
I got it. 64. Piece of cake.

Appoline lays out her tongue to fake she's calculating.

APPOLINE
64, Ma'am.

MA'AM
Correct. Very good.

Nelly glares with suspicion and sniffs at Appoline.

INT. CORRIDOR - LATER

Appoline walks among a pack of Girls.

Oscar guards from the backpack.

OSCAR
From now on, four eyes are better than two.

Appoline remains mute. Oscar's enjoys the situation. He speaks in a sincere, regal voice,

OSCAR (CONT'D)
I am your loyal knight, Princess Appoline. I will crush anyone who tries to get in your way. I'll huff and puff like a big bad rabbit.

Oscar HUFFS and PUFFS. Appoline chokes back a smile.

He glimpses a pull down attic door in the ceiling.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
What's up there? Do you know?

Appoline looks up.

APPOLINE
No, it's forbidden to go up there,
and it's probably haunted.

OSCAR
Aren't you curious? Or maybe you're
a scaredy cat.

APPOLINE
There are two places I'll never go.
The attic and the forbidden cellar.

Suddenly, Nelly blocks her path.

NELLY
I heard you were talking to
yourself. Why are you talking to
yourself? Flipped your lid?

Appoline's smile disappears. Nelly pushes her.

APPOLINE
Stop it!

NELLY
Or what? Are you going to cry? Boo
hoo. Boo hoo.

Nelly rubs her eyes and BABY CRIES. She points at Oscar.

NELLY (CONT'D)
That stinky rabbit? I knew you were
weird, but this weird? You've got
to get rid of it or the others will
start asking questions!

OSCAR
Careful I bi --

Nelly yanks Oscar by his long ears.

APPOLINE
Give him back right now!

OSCAR
Aaaaah. Help. I'm getting dizzy.

Malicious Nelly rubs it in. She holds Oscar high.

NELLY

Well. Want it? Take it.

Appoline jumps. Too short to reach.

Nelly continues to tease Appoline. They near a dusty door with a SIGN: "NO ADMITTANCE STAFF ONLY".

NELLY (CONT'D)

I have a fabulous idea.

Nelly flicks the handle.

APPOLINE

No! Not the cellar. We're not allowed in there.

OSCAR

Huh? What's in the cellar?

The door SQUEAKS as Nelly pivots it open.

INT. CELLAR - CONTINUOUS

Spooky. Totally black except for the light from the corridor.

Appoline trembles with fear.

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

SCARY NOISES emanate from the basement. The shiver in a chill.

Nelly swings Oscar at the entrance.

NELLY

I'm gonna throw your honey bunny down in three...

APPOLINE

Please. Stop.

NELLY

...two... one...

MA'AM (O.S.)

What's all the commotion?

Nelly SLAMS the cellar door and chucks Oscar in a trash can.

Ma'am catches up with the Group.

MA'AM (CONT'D)
Come, girls. Spelling lessons a-w-a-i-t. What does that spell?

NELLY
Await, Ma'am.

A Cheshire Cat grin on her face, Nelly skips after Ma'am.

Red-faced, Appoline rescues Oscar from the trash. His fur is sticky. He SNEEZES.

APPOLINE
You okay?

OSCAR
I'm going bananas.

Appoline cans a banana peel stuck to his fur.

INT. MAIN DOOR - DAY

Ma'am discovers AGATHE (8) waiting at the front door. Agathe is the obvious product of privilege yet in total denial of her dreadful circumstance.

She trudges in with a suitcase in one hand and "Miss Dolly," a porcelain doll, in the other.

MA'AM
You must be Agathe.

AGATHE
Indeed I am. Hello.

Agathe curtsies.

AGATHE (CONT'D)
Miss Dolly also bids you hello.

MA'AM
Hello to you too, Miss Dolly. I welcome you both.

Appoline arrives at Ma'am's side.

MA'AM (CONT'D)
Appoline. Right on time.

Appoline waves a friendly hello to the new Girl.

MA'AM (CONT'D)

Let me introduce you to Agathe. Do you remember the special mission I talked to you about? I'm counting on you to guide Agathe.

APPOLINE

Hello, Agathe. My name is Appoline. I'm sure you'll like it here with all the other girls.

Appoline's smile is kind and accepting.

Oscar fixes on creepy Miss Dolly.

OSCAR

What's with the doll? It's ugly.

Agathe hands her suitcase to Appoline as if she were a bellboy at a posh hotel. Appoline notices but schlepps it anyway.

AGATHE

Miss Dolly and I would like to see our room now. We are très fatiguée.

Appoline contains an eye roll.

MA'AM

We will take good care of you during your stay.

AGATHE

It shan't be long. Ma Ma will come to retrieve us. Post haste.

Ma'am and Appoline share a compassionate, knowing look.

APPOLINE

Come on, let's have a look around. I'll show you your space and help you put your things away, then we can have lunch and get to know each other better.

Agathe nods and follows Appoline under Ma'am's tender eyes.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Appoline on kitchen duty. She scrubs dishes with a big brush in a sink full of suds.

Oscar rests behind her on a prep table.

OSCAR
Why is Nelly a wet blanket?

APPOLINE
She's been a drip since the first day she arrived. Ages now.
(beat)
It gets worse every time she isn't adopted on Parents' Night.

OSCAR
Is she jealous because you're closer to Ma'am than her?

APPOLINE
She maybe right but she loves us all. All I want is to be friends with everyone. And find a family too but I'm afraid to leave Ma'am all alone.

OSCAR
Well, I'm gonna keep an eyeball on her. Tomorrow we'll start a search for your new family.

APPOLINE
A real knight.

Appoline rinses plates. Oscar sniffs. His whiskers quiver.

OSCAR
What stinks?

Appoline laughs and nods: "It's you."

APPOLINE
Since the trash can.

Appoline looks at the soapy sink water. Her smile turns mischievous. It doesn't get past Oscar.

OSCAR
That's not a tickle. Wait. What's with the smile?

Appoline douses Oscar with water.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
Aaaaaah! It's coooold.

APPOLINE
Don't be a chicken. Bawk, bawk.

She hovers him over the sink.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)
Bath time, bunny.

OSCAR
No. I don't want a bath.

Appoline brandishes the soapy brush.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
Nooooo! Not the brush.

She starts with his back.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
Aaaaaah. Ooooooh. That's good.

APPOLINE
See?

OSCAR
More to the left. Hmmm. To the right now.

His ears and whiskers move in sync with the brush.

Soapy water splashes from the sink.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
Yes, right there. Great. Don't forget my paws too.

Appoline enjoys fulfilling the requests.

Soap flies to form a bubble mustache over Appoline's lips and what looks like a pirate hat on Oscar's head.

Water and suds slosh all over the floor.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
Surrender or I'll cut out ye gizzard with me hook. Arrrr.

APPOLINE
Never, Captain Bunny.

Ma'am observes unnoticed. She enjoys Appoline's play.

Appoline grips a dirty plate she uses as a shield.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)
You're going to end up in a stew.

Ma'am shakes her head and smiles before interrupting.

MA'AM
HMMMM, hMMMM.

Appoline turns. Appoline can't hide a smile when she wipes the foam mustache away.

OSCAR
Game over.

MA'AM
May I ask what you're doing?

APPOLINE
My rabbit stunk. I just wanted to wash him.

MA'AM
And flood the floor. You didn't finish cleaning all the plates.

APPOLINE
Guess it got a little out of hand.

OSCAR
Now we'll never know how the high sea adventure ends.

MA'AM
I'll wash it. You can have it back tomorrow morning. Just like new.

Reluctant, Oscar and Appoline seek comfort in each other's eyes. Ma'am inspects the drenched wet rabbit in a piercing and curious up/down gaze.

APPOLINE
But...

OSCAR
I don't want to. I want to stay with you.

MA'AM
Come on, finish up. I'll come by later and kiss you good night.

Chagrined, Appoline scrubs dishes. She tracks Oscar until he disappears from sight.

INT. DORMITORY - NIGHT

Missing Oscar, Appoline puts pen to notebook. In the neighboring bed, Agathe brushes Miss Dolly's hair.

AGATHE

I recommend a good night's sleep,
Miss Dolly. We need to be fresh for
Ma Ma when she arrives.

APPOLINE

What's Ma Ma's name?

AGATHE

Well, Ma Ma. How bourgeois.

APPOLINE

Your name is Agathe. What's hers?
She must have a name.

AGATHE

No. I don't think so.

Appoline lets it go.

AGATHE (CONT'D)

What are you writing? In the
notebook?

APPOLINE

Oh, this? Stories I dream up.

Agathe settles in bed and lays the doll next to her.

AGATHE

Would you tell me one?

APPOLINE

It's time to sleep. Another night.

AGATHE

Good night, Appoline. Good night,
Miss Dolly!

APPOLINE

And a good night to you both.

Sad Appoline cuddles a pillow. She finds a rabbit hair and it lifts her spirits. She grins.

INT. MA'AM'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Clean but soaking wet, Oscar plops on Ma'am's dresser.

On a wall, dozens of newspaper articles about adopted Girls: weddings, college graduations, promotions, doctors, lawyers.

Below, picture of unadopted orphanage Girls. The first, Appoline.

Ma'am removes a thumbtack securing Lola's picture. Before she files it, Ma'am studies Lola's face and waxes nostalgic.

In a never-ending cycle, she affixes Agathe in Lola's spot.

Oscar contemplates her with pity in his eyes.

OSCAR

You're looking for your family too.

Ma'am studies Oscar. Probing to unlock his mysteries.

MA'AM

I don't know what power you have over Appoline, but I approve.

Ma'am strokes Oscar - childlike and soft.

INT. DORMITORY - NIGHT

Appoline wakes easy, opens eyes.

Oscar shivers at her feet, clean but with frizzled fur.

OSCAR

Let's not make baths a regular thing.

Appoline hugs him so tightly.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Aaaaargh! You're choking me. I'm happy to see you too.

Feeling secure, she lays Oscar next to her under the blanket.

They spirit off to the land of Nod.

LATER

OSCAR'S SPIRIT, a vaporous and transparent form of the Boy, rises from Rabbit and floats to the ceiling.

He witnesses Appoline slumber and dream with Rabbit close by.

Reality distorts, walls fade, floor softens, and the ceiling transforms into a fresco—cloudy sky over a child's bedroom.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. OSCAR'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Hovering at the ceiling, Oscar's Spirit looks down on himself in a cozy bed with the Stuffed Rabbit at his side.

OSCAR'S MOTHER, beautiful and well-bred, softly tucks him in. His FATHER, strong and handsome, acts out a pirate story in animated gestures.

Oscar's eyes glisten.

Oscar's Spirit lingers over a dresser.

INSERT - FAMILY PHOTOGRAPH

Oscar, Parents, and Grandmother in brightly colored attire.

BACK

The soft voice of Oscar's Mother starts to sing.

OSCAR'S MOTHER

Once upon Doudou,
A sweet word for my best friend,
His name is Doudou,
I know you're here till the end.

OSCAR

Forever, you and me,
Oath of eternity,
Promised, sworn, spat!

OSCAR'S MOTHER

Promised, sworn, spat!

OSCAR'S FATHER

Promised, sworn, spat!

Oscar hugs his stuffed animal as his parents kiss him on the forehead.

They blow kisses as they leave and switch off lights. A warm night-light burns.

The bedroom saturates in a fog-like haze.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DORMITORY - NIGHT

The Stuffed Rabbit lies awake next to Appoline. A tear falls from its eye.

A full Moon glimmers in the window.

INT. DORMITORY - DAY

In the bed, Appoline and Oscar pore over every page in the newspaper.

OSCAR
Does it say they're looking for me?

APPOLINE
I can't find anything...

Appoline turns page after page under Oscar's hopeful look.
The last page. Appoline closes the newspaper.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)
Not a single word.

OSCAR
I don't understand.

Appoline bestows a warm embrace.

APPOLINE
Don't give up. We'll find them. We
made a promise.

She hugs Oscar tighter.

INT. GAME ROOM - LATER

Appoline plays a board game with Abby, Lilly and Savannah.
Lilly cups the dice in her hands.

Oscar, intent on the game.

APPOLINE
Roll a six, you win. I heard if you
blow on the dice it's good luck.

Lilly blows on the dice, rolls. Savannah claps for Lilly.

OSCAR
This is too tense for me.

The dice settles on 4.

Abby sticks her tongue out at the grumbling Lilly.

ABBY

Awww, you lost, sis. Too bad.

The door opens. All the Girls stop what they're doing when Ma'am enters. There is someone behind her --

LOLA.

Reading in one corner, Lilly wonders aloud.

LILLY

What's Lola doing here?

SAVANNAH

(happy)

She came to visit us, silly.

Lola has no smile for them. She avoids contact with the Girl's questioning eyes.

No one knows the truth... except veterans Appoline and Nelly who exchange a look.

Without a sound, Lola muddles past Nelly.

NELLY

Wise up. Her new parents didn't want her anymore.

CAROLINE

They can't do that!

NELLY

They do anything they want to us.

Upset, Appoline sighs. Resigned to the reality.

OSCAR

How can someone take a child into their home and then abandon them?

SAVANNAH

(to the Girls)

Wait on the game, I'm gonna say hi.

Either clueless or in denial, Savannah runs to Lola with her favorite snow globe.

SAVANNAH (CONT'D)

I'm glad you're back Lola.

Lola shoves her favorite snow globe back in Savannah's hand.

LOLA
I don't want it.

SAVANNAH
But... it's your favorite.

Lola snaps and hurls the globe across the room.

The snow globe explodes. Shards of delicate glass, oily liquid and plastic snowflakes litter the floor.

The other Girls watch in amazement.

MA'AM
It's all right, darling. You'll
always have a family with us.

Calmly, Ma'am drops a gentle hand on Lola's shoulder.

A heavy weight lifts. Lilly and Abby embrace Lola tightly, promising never to let go. Even Nelly smiles, her face warm. Appoline, Oscar, and Ma'am join the circle of love and acceptance.

INT. AUDITORIUM - BALCONY - NIGHT

Appoline and Oscar look over the dark Parents' Night stage.

APPLAUSE. APPLAUSE. APPLAUSE.

A spotlight flicks on to illuminate the stage.

Expectant Couples in the dark scrutinize the scene.

LILLY AND ABBY

burst onto the stage and move like starlets on the red carpet.

OSCAR
Is this a fashion show?

Appoline laughs, happy to share Parents' Night with someone.

APPOLINE
They're here to find a girl.

Appoline points at the farmers George and Mary.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)
See them? With the muddy boots?

They look weary from too many Parents' Night disappointments.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

They've been here so many nights,
and yet they always leave alone.

OSCAR

What's the deal? How come you're
not on stage if you want a family?

APPOLINE

I never asked for a chance. I can't
just abandon Ma'am. She's always
been there for me.

Oscar peruses the Couples downstairs.

OSCAR

Ma'am might be sad for a little
while when you leave, but sooner or
later she'll be proud. Couples will
fight over you. I'm sure.

GEORGE AND MARY

examine the balcony. And Appoline.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

See.

Curious, Appoline meets George and Mary's gaze, then quickly
hides behind Oscar with a shy smile.

INT. DORMITORY - NIGHT

Appoline and Oscar admire the crescent Moon in the window.

APPOLINE

What if I get adopted and the same
thing that happened to Lola happens
to me?

OSCAR

One chance in a gazillion. Think
about going to a real school and
learning all about writing. I'm
pretty sure you'll make a lot of
friends, and maybe fall in love
with a boy.

APPOLINE

Ewww! Boys, don't be a silly bunny. Maybe my family is here. I have a lot of friends. Here.

OSCAR

Yeah, a girl who talks to a creepy doll.

APPOLINE

I talk to a stuffed rabbit, so...

Appoline prods him with gentleness.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

Do you have any memories that come back to you?

OSCAR

I think I saw them in a dream last time. My parents...

APPOLINE

That's wonderful! It means we might be able to find them again soon.

OSCAR

I think there's a new adventure waiting for us behind that window. A new family for you, and mine to find.

APPOLINE

A family...
(contemplates)
...I don't know if I deserve one.

OSCAR

Nonsense! I dare you to do something.

APPOLINE

I'll win. You know that, right?

OSCAR

I challenge you to be on stage at the next Parents' Night.

At first dismissive, Appoline considers the idea.

APPOLINE

Give me the night to think about it.

OSCAR

You know... As much as I miss my family, I've found a new one.

Puzzled, Appoline muses: "Who?"

OSCAR (CONT'D)

I'm talking about you.

Appoline smiles. A pleased and silly smile.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

You make me feel like home.

Oscar's sentiment touches her heart so deeply she cannot speak. Appoline arranges Oscar's head against hers.

APPOLINE

You are my home too.

LATER

Appoline and Oscar sleep under the blanket.

A tiny SHADOW grows bigger as it closes on Appoline's bed.

A mysterious hand plucks Oscar from under the covers, vanishing into darkness. A rabbitnapping.

Sleeping like a log, Appoline dreams, unaware of the rabbitnapping.

INT. DORMITORY - MORNING

Her hair a mess, Appoline wakes and automatically stretches.

APPOLINE

What a great night's sleep.

No Oscar.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

Come out, come out, wherever you are.

Appoline searches the blanket. Not under the pillow either.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

(quietly)

Oscar! It's not funny.

Frantic, Appoline checks under the mattress and bed. In her trunk. Nada.

She desperately eyes the room - top to bottom.

Nelly tortures the twins by confiscating their toys.

Determined, Appoline faces down Nelly.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)
 What did you do to Oscar?
 (backpedal)
 Not Os... my Doudou?!

NELLY
 Well, well. Good morning to you,
 too. Oscar, what a funny name for a
 rabbit!

Nelly gives back the toys to the twins who can play again.

APPOLINE
 You're from nowheresville, Nelly.
 Give him back to me. Right now.

Nelly recoils from Appoline's anger.

NELLY
 What's the matter, the favourite? I
 don't have your grumpy rabbit.

Appoline shakes her head in disbelief.

NELLY (CONT'D)
 Did you check the kitchen? Maybe
 Oscar stew is on the menu tonight.

Pushed too far, Appoline shoves Nelly as hard as she can.
 Nelly tumbles back and sprawls on the floor.

MA'AM (O.S.)
 What's going on in here?

Ma'am spots Nelly on the floor. Appoline shudders with anger.

NELLY
 (whines)
 It's her. She pushed me.

Ma'am and the other Girls register surprise at mild-mannered Appoline. A few Girls smirk at bully Nelly getting some of her own medicine.

NELLY (CONT'D)
 Just because she lost her rabbit
 plush. What a baby. Get with it.

Ma'am has a cross look for Appoline. She's in big trouble.

MA'AM

(sternly)

Doudou or no Doudou, you're not allowed to push the other girls around. You don't have the right to hit other girls. None of you do. Understood?

Nelly sports a sarcastic grin.

Appoline's chin trembles. Defeated, she drags to her bed where Agathe offers comfort.

AGATHE

He couldn't have gotten far. I'm sure you'll find it. Right, Miss Dolly?

(Dolly "answers")

Miss Dolly believes so too and wants to help.

Appoline is in a deep, inescapable funk. She doesn't answer. Agathe puts a hand on her shoulder.

APPOLINE

Leave me alone.

Upset by the harsh snub, Agathe returns to her bed.

AGATHE

(to Miss Dolly)

No. She doesn't want our help.

Appoline turns face down to cry in her pillow.

INT. MA'AM'S OFFICE - DAY

Appoline's arm crosses her chest to grip a shoulder.

Ma'am has an air of concern.

MA'AM

You haven't done any work in a week. I'm worried about you.

APPOLINE

I don't feel well.

MA'AM

Is this still about your Doudou?

APPOLINE

It's not just a Doudou to me. He's my friend.

MA'AM

Is it? He's just a cuddly toy.

APPOLINE

What do you know?

Ma'am's face reveals surprise. She doesn't know how to react but moves forward with her plan.

MA'AM

I have a surprise for you. Close your eyes.

Not in the mood, Appoline still plays the game. She opens her eyes to a brown stuffed teddy bear in her hands.

APPOLINE

This isn't my Doudou.

MA'AM

It wants to be your friend. Pet it. See how soft it is.

Ma'am strokes the teddy bear's belly.

APPOLINE

I don't want it.

MA'AM

Stop acting like a child.

APPOLINE

Stop acting like my mother.

Appoline tosses the teddy as she storms from the office.

INT. DORMITORY - NIGHT

Savannah is crying under her blanket.

Appoline is tired and irritated. Mad, she stands and walks to Savannah's bed.

Seeing her sad, Appoline sits next to her.

APPOLINE

Why are you always crying at night?

SAVANNAH

Because Poppa is not here to tell me goodbye. He left you know...

Savannah raises her eyes to the sky.

SAVANNAH (CONT'D)

I can't see him anymore. I want to be in the sky with him.

APPOLINE

What if I told you a secret?

Savannah wipes a tear.

SAVANNAH

A secret? I love secrets.

Appoline holds Savannah a tissue.

APPOLINE

What if I told you that you can become any animal you want the day you reach the sky.

Savannah loudly BLOWS her nose.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

Do you have any idea what your Poppa picked?

SAVANNAH

A giraffe!

APPOLINE

A giraffe?

SAVANNAH

Yes! He was the tallest Poppa ever so he could always keep an eye on me no matter where I was.

Savannah yawns as Appoline finishes tucking her in.

APPOLINE

This is an excellent choice. Time to sleep for baby giraffe now.

INT. DORMITORY - MORNING

Self absorbed, Appoline dresses. She ignores the Girls.

One of her shoelaces is untied and made her fall.

NELLY
Call it karma!

On the ground, biting the dust, she spots one of Oscar's white hairs.

Hopeful the trail leads to Oscar, Appoline crawls on hands and knees through the dormitory. She finds a second. A third and fourth under the twins's beds. She scours the dorm end to end.

JANICE
Lose something, Appoline?

Totally focused on the quest, Appoline doesn't hear Caroline.

The trail of hairs end at the door. Appoline startles at the sight of Ma'am's feet in the doorway.

MA'AM
Good morning, my favorite girls. I hope you had a good night's sleep. Are you ready for some history?

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

On the blackboard, "HISTORY" scrawled in chalk. Ma'am free draws a map below it.

At her desk, antsy Appoline fidgets and can't stop looking at the door. She COUGHS. Then she clears her throat exaggeratedly.

The Girls GIGGLE and look askance at her. Appoline COUGHS louder and louder. Ma'am stops drawing.

MA'AM
You okay, Appoline?

APPOLINE
Oh, my throat really hurts, Ma'am. And my belly... it's spinning like a washing machine!

MA'AM
Very well, Appoline, you can leave the lesson for a while. I'll come and see you later to make sure you're all right.

Overplaying the role of sick kid, Appoline limps out to --

INT. THE DORMITORY - CONTINUOUS

Appoline roots through Nelly's belongings searching for Oscar. She opens Nelly's trunk, looks in her bed. No Oscar.

Under the pillow, Appoline discovers a picture of Nelly as a baby in the arms of her mother.

At the door, Appoline combs for new hairs on the floor, past the door and into the --

CORRIDOR

Bingo! A new one.

Appoline moves like a bloodhound on a scent. She tracks to one last hair. She examines the area. No more in evidence.

Out of ideas, she looks up. Her eyes widen at the attic door. She pushes a chair to stand on to reach the rope. She yanks, a ladder falls.

INT. MA'AM'S ATTIC STORAGE ROOM

A cramped room with a bunk, white cradle, and other furniture in urgent need of dusting. A skylight displays an azure sky.

Appoline browses a pile of yellowed newspaper articles. She marvels at orphanage Girls who made new lives.

There are drawings of happy families by children of grateful former orphans. A few have TEXT: "Thank you, Ma'am".

A SNIFFLE from a closet. Appoline's ears perk up.

APPOLINE
Oscar? Is that you?

She jerks open the closet door.

The room light awakens sleeping Oscar.

OSCAR
Appoline. You found me.

A huge smile on Appoline's face as she and Oscar reunite.

APPOLINE
You didn't think I was going to
abandon you?

OSCAR
I missed you so much.

Appoline squeezes his face tightly to her heart. Oscar's ears twitch and move with excitement.

APPOLINE

How did you get here? It's Nelly!
I'm sure of it!

Oscar hesitates, then releases the revelation with a sigh.

OSCAR

It was... It was Ma'am who kidnapped
me, Appoline.

Appoline, speechless, absorbs the news.

APPOLINE

Why, Oscar? Why did she do it?

Oscar lifts his ears in a shrug toward the ceiling.

Appoline snoops around for more clues. She opens every
drawers and closet doors of the room. Now opening a trunk.

Inside the dusty trunk, travel postcards, a romantic book, a
flower bracelet, a wedding ring, and a photo album.

Appoline turns the album to the first page revealing a --

FAMILY PICTURE

Parents and a tall, skinny Little Girl with wild hair. The
picture lacks joy.

Appoline frowns, closely inspects the photo.

She points at the Little Girl.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

Ma'am?

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK SEQUENCE - MA'AM

EXT. FAMILY HOUSE - GARDEN - DAY

MA'AM'S FATHER, with unkempt hair, and tall, skinny MOTHER
prod MA'AM (8) on how to pose for a photo.

MA'AM'S MOTHER

Stand up straight. It's very
important for a family portrait.
Everything must be perfect.

Mother smooths Ma'am's dress, pushes hair out of her face.

MA'AM'S FATHER

Pay attention to what your mother is saying. Good posture is essential in life.

A photographer snaps the picture.

FLASH!

INT. FAMILY HOUSE - DAY

MONTAGE - MA'AM'S CHILDHOOD

> At ten, Ma'am learns to sew with her mother, every stitch precise.

MA'AM'S MOTHER

My dear, a lady knows how to sew her own clothes gracefully.

> The following year, Ma'am sets the table under her mother's watchful eye.

MA'AM'S MOTHER (CONT'D)

Setting the table is an art. Guests should feel pampered from the moment they sit down.

> At twelve, Ma'am learns to do her hair elegantly. Her mother teaches her how to make a perfect bun.

MA'AM'S MOTHER (CONT'D)

A lady must always have immaculate hair, my dear.

> At thirteen, Ma'am writes a handwritten letter, her mother correcting.

MA'AM'S MOTHER (CONT'D)

Correspondence is an art. Your letters should reflect your grace and education.

> At fourteen, Ma'am takes dance lessons from her father in the living room.

MA'AM'S FATHER

You must be light as a feather and follow the rhythm of the music with grace.

> Now a young woman, Ma'am sits in front of her parents.

MA'AM'S MOTHER

We're preparing you for a bright future, dear.

MA'AM'S FATHER

You're ready for this. We believe in you.

MA'AM'S MOTHER

We've dreamt of traveling for so long, along with your father. Today, you've grown enough for us to entrust you with taking care of the house.

> At the door, Ma'am's Parents lug packed suitcases.

Ma'am smiles but tears linger as her parents leave for their journey.

> Every month, a new traveling postcard arrives at the door.

Watching from the window, Ma'am eagerly awaits her parents' return. Seasons change, but the waiting persists.

END MONTAGE

EXT. PARK - DAY

On a bench, MA'AM (20s) reads a book.

A CHARMING MAN (20s) in a sporty hat perches next to her. Destiny's cosmic tumblers align. He removes the identical book from his pocket.

They trade shy looks.

INT. BALLROOM - DAY

They dance slowly, face to face.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

They bounce down church steps to a shower of rice.

BACK TO:

INT. MA'AM'S ATTIC STORAGE ROOM - PRESENT

Appoline touches with one finger Ma'am's wedding dress.

OSCAR

Ma'am was so pretty. Look at her!

Appoline rediscovers Ma'am, her eyes analyzing every details.
She turns another page.

CUT TO:

INT. MA'AM'S HOME - BABY'S ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Ma'am and her Charming Husband build a cradle.

With deep love in their eyes, they look at the finished cradle and hold hands.

INT. PEDIATRICIAN'S OFFICE - DAY

The Pediatrician delivers bad news in a head shake: "No."

Ma'am is devastated. She reaches for comfort in her Husband's hand. He withdraws both physically and emotionally.

INT. MA'AM'S HOME - HALLWAY - DAY

Suitcase in hand, Ma'am's husband opens the front door. Ma'am lowers to her knees and begs.

Grief-stricken, he throws her an accusatory glance, and with a SLAM, he's gone.

Ma'am falls to the floor and weeps.

BACK TO:

INT. MA'AM'S ATTIC STORAGE ROOM - PRESENT

Appoline and Oscar stares at the cradle behind them.

Appoline takes Oscar's fluffy hand into hers before turning a new page.

CUT TO:

INT. MA'AM'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Ma'am touches her barren belly. She's out of smiles.

A KNOCK at the door distracts Ma'am from her misery.

EXT. PORCH - NIGHT

Raining cats and dogs. Is it a kid's joke? Nobody's there. About to step back inside, she hears a BABY CRYING.

Ma'am spots a wicker basket with pink blanket in it. She moves the blanket aside to find a precious BABY GIRL

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Ma'am rocks the Baby Girl.

The Baby laughs and drools all at once. Ma'am beams at her.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Ma'am feeds Baby Girl and prompts her to talk.

MA'AM
Say "Mommy." Come on, "Mommy."

Baby Girl babbles in baby talk.

MA'AM (CONT'D)
Momm -- yyy.

The Baby Girl gurgles and returns gibberish.

Exasperated, Ma'am sighs. Then,

BABY GIRL
Maaaaaa'am.

Ma'am corrects with a smile.

MA'AM
No. Momm... yyy.

BABY GIRL
Maaaaaa'am.

The Baby Girl claps her hands. Ma'am surrenders to the name.

INT. PORCH - DAY

Older now, the Baby crawls on all fours and pulls a doll.

Ma'am letters a big wooden SIGN: "ORPHANAGE FOR GIRLS."

One last finishing touch. Ma'am sets the Baby's palm in a tray of violet paint and adds her print to the sign.

EXT. ORPHANAGE - DAY

Her former home repurposed, the sign hangs over the entrance.

On the porch, Ma'am holds the Baby.

FLASH!

END FLASHBACK SEQUENCE

INT. MA'AM'S ATTIC STORAGE ROOM - DAY

INSERT - PHOTO ALBUM

The photo of Ma'am holding the Baby with CAPTION: "APPOLINE"

BACK

OSCAR

It's you!

Appoline's eyes glaze. Tears stream down her cheeks.

MA'AM (O.S.)

Appoline?

Ma'am climbs up to join her.

Appoline embraces her with every ounce of her strength. A bit shocked, Ma'am wraps her arms around Appoline too.

MA'AM (CONT'D)

You're not mad at me?

APPOLINE

No. Not anymore.

Ma'am kneels down to look Appoline in the eye.

MA'AM

I've been selfish wanting to keep you all to myself. I heard your wish to find a family.

(MORE)

MA'AM (CONT'D)

I thought without your Doudou you might not want to leave until you found it. Please forgive me. I'm sorry.

APPOLINE

I didn't know.

Appoline looks deep into Ma'am's eyes.

MA'AM

I know you have to leave. I cannot make your dreams come true. One day, you'll come back to read your stories to the girls. The greatest gift you can give me is to have your voice heard around the world.

Appoline's eyes soften and fill with a new inner glow.

MA'AM (CONT'D)

If you're ready for a new home, I'll present you at tomorrow's Parents' Night.

INT. DORMITORY - NIGHT

Oscar beside her, confident and proud Appoline looks over her reflection in a full length-mirror.

OSCAR

Don't worry, you're ready! You're ready! Remember, if a couple doesn't pick you today, they will choose you next time.

Behind them, Agathe prepares an imaginary bottle for Miss Dolly. She pretend-drops milk on her arm to test the temperature.

Appoline sidles up to Agathe who fakes not seeing her.

AGATHE

Miss Dolly, I'll always be your best friend. I'll never leave you for anyone else.

Appoline winces at a message meant for her.

APPOLINE

I'm so sorry. I haven't been a good friend lately. Can you forgive me? How is Miss Dolly today?

AGATHE

Her Ma Ma misses her. She hopes she
didn't forget her.

Appoline masks pity for Agathe in a reassuring nod. Agathe
sees through the ruse.

AGATHE (CONT'D)

Comfort Miss Dolly instead of me.
She's the one who's unhappy.

Appoline hugs the ugly doll.

AGATHE (CONT'D)

Okay... I guess I can forgive you
if your rabbit invites Miss Dolly
to tea.

OSCAR

Absolutely not! She'll eat me
alive!

APPOLINE

It's a great idea! Do you want to
help me get ready for Parents'
Night?

INT. CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Dressed in her most beautiful dress, Appoline jumps around
excited, psyching up for the night.

OSCAR

Let's find you a family.

Oscar stands on her shoulders, quietly curious. As they
approach the grand room, a desperate scream echoes through
the orphanage walls.

GIRL'S VOICE (O.S.)

HELP!

Appoline follows the cry to the open --

CELLAR DOOR

The voice seems to lift from the dark basement.

GIRL'S VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

HELP ME!

Brave Appoline scrambles to the forbidden cellar door.

APPOLINE
Who's there?

OSCAR
I have a bad feeling.

Suddenly, a hand pushes her from behind, inside the --

INT. CELLAR - CONTINUOUS

The door SLAMS followed by the sound of DOUBLE LOCKING.

In total darkness, Appoline panics and POUNDS the door with all her strength. Oscar peers through the --

KEYHOLE

He sees Nelly's curly blond hair.

She deposits the key in her left pocket.

OSCAR
Nelly...

APPOLINE
Please, Nelly. Don't do this!

Appoline POUNDS harder and harder.

POV KEYHOLE, FROM THE CORRIDOR

Nelly peeps in.

NELLY
You'll never get out of here before
me, not after all the time I've
spent here.

Nelly leans close to the keyhole,

NELLY (CONT'D)
(whispers)
You've been achin' for a breakin'.
I hope you and the furball aren't
afraid of rats with red eyes and
sharp, sharp teeth.

Nelly chuckles and skips away.

A rat SQUEAKS.

APPOLINE
Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!

OSCAR
Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!

INT. AUDITORIUM - SAME

Backstage, Ma'am can't pinpoint Appoline. She glances around the curtain to the balcony. No Appoline.

Expectant Couples wait. Front and center, Mary and George in matching checkered shirts.

Nelly joins the rest of the adoption candidates behind the curtain. As usual, the Girls, in beautiful dresses, cluck nervously.

A big round of APPLAUSE.

INT. CELLAR - SAME

BANGS on the door mix with distant APPLAUSE.

APPOLINE

Is anybody there? Please? Help!

OSCAR

Of all the nights for Nelly to wig out?!

Appoline tires. Her POUNDS weaken.

APPOLINE

I'll never find a family.

OSCAR

Stay strong. Keep at it.

INT. AUDITORIUM - SAME

Ma'am requested Agathe to come to her.

MA'AM

Can you look after Appoline? She might be having second thoughts.

AGATHE

Of course, she wouldn't miss it for the world.

Agathe carries Miss Dolly, prepared to search for her friend.

INT. CORRIDOR - SAME

Agathe walks in the corridor.

AGATHE
 Appoline? Appoline? Where are you?
 It's almost your turn.

BANGS come from afar. A bit scared, Agathe tentatively approaches in their direction.

APPOLINE (O.S.)
 Anyone?

Agathe arrives at the CELLAR DOOR and puts an ear against it.

AGATHE
 Appoline? Is that you?

APPOLINE (O.S.)
 Agathe! Thank God! Nelly locked us
 in!

Agathe pulls on the double locked-door.

APPOLINE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 You have to help us!

AGATHE
 Where's the key?

OSCAR (O.S.)
 Nelly has it. Left pocket.

APPOLINE (O.S.)
 It's in Nelly's left pocket. Bring
 it to me so I'll can make Parents'
 Night.

Agathe balls a fist to steel herself and help a friend.

INT. AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Savannah wipes her nose, flees stage to make way for Janice.

Nelly waits for her turn. She's up next.

Quiet as a church mouse, Agathe prowls to Nelly. A forgetful pickpocket, her hand waffles between left and right pocket. She chooses the right.

Wrong pocket. Nelly swivels around.

NELLY
 What do you think you're doing, you
 little monster?

Busted in the act, Agathe freezes.

The audience CLAPS.

MA'AM (O.S.)
Next, the vivacious Nelly.

Nelly hears her name, turns to the stage. Agathe strikes like a cobra and rips off the key.

Nelly moves threateningly toward Agathe.

Ma'am beckons with a finger. After throwing a furious look at Agathe, Nelly plasters on a megawatt smile, troops on stage.

Agathe sticks her tongue out at Nelly and bolts to the --

INT. CORRIDOR - SAME

When the door opens, Appoline and Oscar look worse for wear.

AGATHE
Quick. You don't have much time.

Appoline moves like the wind with Oscar in her arms.

INT. AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

The last girls: Abby and Lilly.

They jump rope, but their feet get snared. Falling on their faces, they crawl off the stage, attempting to disentangle.

MA'AM
That was tonight's last girls.

She checks the balcony. Empty.

The Couples' polite CLAPS become APPLAUSE.

APPOLINE (O.S.)
Wait!

Ma'am turns around. Appoline and Oscar, just in time. Ma'am gives consent with a delighted smile.

MA'AM
Not just yet, we have one last
surprise for you.
(waves her on)
Come on.

Ma'am moves aside for Appoline who stops in a halo of light. She can barely make out faces in the Crowd in front of her.

Ma'am finds a quiet corner away from the Girls and wipes a tear from her cheek.

APPOLINE

Hello. My name is Appoline.

The room is quiet. Couples wait for Appoline to strut her stuff. She displays Oscar to the Crowd.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

And him? He's my Doudou, Oscar.

Couples WHISPER. Not what they were expecting.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

He's like my guardian angel, my big brother, the one who never left me.

OSCAR

But... what are you doing?

APPOLINE

(looks at Oscar)

Shush!

The Couples LAUGH.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

He's the one who dared me to be here tonight. We're looking for a family to adopt both of us.

WHISPERS again run through the Crowd.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

I'm not perfect. I make mistakes, and I'm scared of everything.

OSCAR

Especially rats with sharp teeth.

Behind the curtain, Ma'am admires her protégé.

APPOLINE

I mess up multiplication tables, and I'm too clumsy to be a gymnast.

(peers out)

I do make up stories. I want to go to school and become a great writer one day. If you'd like, I'll tell you a story.

Appoline opens her notebook and swallows a big breath.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

Once upon a time, you were so kind
and true. You opened your arms and
made us smile. Like cast-off
flowers, you helped us thrive. You
always held your head high and had
a magical story when we were ready
to give up. Hands-on hearts, you
knocked our fears down to size.

You can hear a pin drop. Couples hang on every word.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

You gave us values to be true and
fought for our rights to ensue. I
couldn't ever repay you, but still,
I am a small child unafraid to
live. A little girl unafraid to
fly. No thanks I could ever say
would do my heart justice this day.

(bows)

Words to describe you don't exist:
forever in my life, you'll always
shine. You and only you.

Her head held high, Ma'am weeps.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

Thank you so much for this precious
moment with you.

The Girls join the Couples in APPLAUSE. Mary and George are
the first to stand. Everyone rises in a THUNDEROUS ovation.

A SHORT TIME LATER

Two couples remain.

Oscar and Appoline cool their heels behind the curtain.

OSCAR

You were incredible, a real
surprise.

APPOLINE

Thanks to you.

OSCAR

The story was so beautiful.

APPOLINE

I hope the next one will be too.

OSCAR

No doubt.

Ma'am kneels to Appoline's eye level, and takes her hands.

MA'AM

I have good news for you. You see those two couples?

Ma'am points to city dwellers PHILIP and NANCY JONES (40s) and farm dwellers Mary and George.

MA'AM (CONT'D)

Nancy and Philip and George and Mary are very interested in giving you a home.

OSCAR

So cool.

APPOLINE

(dumbstruck)

But... on my first Parents' Night? How am I supposed to choose?

MA'AM

Everything will be fine. This is what you wanted. If you want to go to a good school, it's better to live in a city than a farm.

Mary and George's warm faces are sharp contrast to the stiff Philip and Nancy who sport blank looks and stand motionless.

APPOLINE

Can I talk to them before I decide?

MA'AM

Of course, let me introduce you.

Philip and Nancy are well dressed, proud and look educated. He uses a cane. She positions behind him.

PHILIP

Hello, Miss Appoline.

NANCY

You're very pretty.

INTERCUT - MARY AND GEORGE

MARY

Your story was amazing.

GEORGE

What a gift you have.

PHILIP

We'd love for you to live with us.

NANCY

We have a beautiful home with a big garden.

PHILIP

And a dog.

GEORGE

You'll never get bored at our place. We have a cozy farm just outside the city. It's the biggest around with lots of land. Between rabbits, pigs and cows there is a lot to do.

MARY

I know we're far from everything, but we have a cozy room waiting for you and Oscar.

NANCY

School is very close to our home, and there is a library just down the street.

Philip turns the charm up to max volume.

PHILIP

We even have a typewriter just for you.

END INTERCUT

Ma'am leaves the Couples, takes Appoline aside. Appoline is face to face with Ma'am.

MA'AM

So, what's it to be? The city or the country?

Appoline is more confused than ever.

MA'AM (CONT'D)

The Joneses seem to have a comfortable situation and will offer you the rare opportunity to go to a great school to realize your dream.

(MORE)

MA'AM (CONT'D)

The city offers many opportunities for discovery and learning. On the farm, you won't have the same chance. You'd be stuck far from the city, busy taking care of the animals.

APPOLINE

Mary and George are so kind and welcoming. I feel I could learn so much from them.

OSCAR

Appoline... If I want to find my parents, I don't think it will be in the countryside. Don't forget our promise.

Appoline gives a compassionate look to her friend.

APPOLINE

You're right. We have to stick together, and if the Joneses are the best chance of realizing our dreams, then that's where we'll go.

MA'AM

You've made a wise and courageous decision. The Joneses are an excellent choice for you and Oscar. Mary and George also understand that you must follow your dreams. Life is full of surprises, my child.

On these last words, Ma'am leaves the room.

APPOLINE

Together, Oscar, we'll live our great adventure, and we'll find your parents.

Behind, in a corner, Nelly sits with head in hands, crying her heart out.

Appoline hesitates for a second.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

Nelly? What's going on?

NELLY

Rub salt in the wound, why don't you.

APPOLINE

Don't be sad. Your day'll come.

NELLY

Why are you being nice to me? I don't deserve it. Not after the dirty tricks I pulled.

Appoline offers Nelly a Kleenex. She HONKS her nose.

APPOLINE

It's okay. We're in this together. We all want a family. I don't want to fight with you anymore.

NELLY

I always looked up to you.

APPOLINE

Me?

NELLY

You're blind to your strength. Look at you, next to the fool I am who decided to make your life miserable. You owe me nothing but a knuckle sandwich.

Appoline reflects on Nelly's words.

NELLY (CONT'D)

Every girl dreams of getting out of this place. Except you. Now it's different and you're not scared. No one wants me. Not my mother, not my father. No family after years of trying real hard. I'm Mickey Mouse.
(looks down)
Ma'am has a soft spot in her heart for you.

APPOLINE

Ma'am loves every one of us.

Appoline presents a photo to Nelly.

INSERT - PHOTO

Ma'am and four-year-old Nelly on the day she arrived at the orphanage. It resembles the picture of Nelly and her mother.

BACK

Nelly's eyes twinkle. Reassured, she laughs through tears.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

We are all Ma'am's children. Keep
this under your pillow so you never
forget.

INT. DORMITORY - NIGHT

Appoline rediscovers every corner of the dormitory one last
time. She lies in her bed, occupied for twelve years. Full of
hope, she peacefully drifts to sleep, clutching to Oscar.

Quiet. Full Moon in the window.

Oscar's Spirit soars from the Stuffed Rabbit to the ceiling.

Foggy haze obscures the room.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. OSCAR'S ROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Oscar's Spirit looks down at his bedtime. In his pajamas, his
Father and Mother tuck in him.

OSCAR'S FATHER

Good night, bunny.

OSCAR'S MOTHER

We won't be late. Promise.

OSCAR

I don't want Mrs. Wilson. I want
Grandma!

OSCAR'S FATHER

You know Grandma is away for a
little while. Don't worry. You
won't even notice we're gone.

Dad lays the Stuffed Rabbit in Oscar's arms.

OSCAR'S FATHER (CONT'D)

Doudou is here to protect you. At
all costs.

OSCAR'S MOTHER

That's right. Sleep and dream. The
next thing you know it'll be
morning and we'll be right here.

Oscar sulks for a moment but accepts their promise.

Mother kisses his forehead.

OSCAR'S FATHER
We love you.

On the way out, they shut the door halfway, kill the light.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DORMITORY - MORNING

Appoline packs. She takes a nostalgic last look around.

OSCAR
Don't forget your notebook.

Appoline nods to Oscar, slips the notebook in her suitcase.

Agathe mopes.

AGATHE
Who do I talk to now? Please don't
let me alone.

Appoline pinches Agathe's cheeks.

APPOLINE
I'm sure Ma Ma didn't forget you.
Who could forget that cute face.

AGATHE
What if she did forget?

APPOLINE
You have a new family here until
you're ready to leave. Just like
me.

AGATHE
Maybe we could be real sisters. In
the same family.

APPOLINE
Not up to me, but it's a great
idea.

AGATHE
You'll miss Miss Dolly a lot, too.

OSCAR
I know someone I won't miss.

Agathe and Appoline embrace, a final hug.

INT. HALLWAY - MORNING

Girls position in two neat lines to honor Appoline. She treads between the lines and waves good byes, throws kisses.

The entire orphanage assembles: Caroline and Lola, crying Savannah, Janice. Every last girl.

Nelly smiles small as Appoline passes. Appoline winks at her.

The Twins push and shove to be the first one to give Appoline drawings they made for her. Appoline takes them and kisses their foreheads in thanks.

Lola pauses Appoline's last orphanage walk.

LOLA

Take care, Appoline. The music box helped me a lot when I was sad.

Lola offers the music box to Appoline.

LOLA (CONT'D)

Just in case you need it.

APPOLINE

Keep it. I've got everything I need to get me through.

Appoline looks at Oscar.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

(re: Lola)

I hope you find your beautiful smile again.

Ma'am waits at the doorway. She helps Appoline with her coat.

Appoline latches onto Ma'am's waist.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

Thank you... for everything.

MA'AM

You don't have to thank me. Thank you. If you have any problems, I put paper in your suitcase. Write often. Know you will always have a special place in our hearts. Go and write your own story now.

Tears flow from Appoline.

MA'AM (CONT'D)
 (to Oscar)
 Take good care of her.

OSCAR
 Count on me.

APPOLINE
 Goodbye.

Ma'am opens the door. The Jones wait at their car.

The Girls perform a symphony of crying, hoots and applause.

GIRLS
 Goodbye, Appoline. We love you.

EXT. ORPHANAGE - CONTINUOUS

Appoline takes small, cautious steps to her new Parents.

She turns back to share a final moment with Ma'am.

NANCY (O.S.)
 Hello, Miss Appoline.

APPOLINE
 Hello.

Philip lifts Appoline's suitcase as she slides into the car.

The car starts. Appoline pushes her nose to the window and waves. Ma'am waves back.

The car rumbles off. The orphanage recedes in the distance.

EXT. JONES' HOUSE - DAY

A rundown neighborhood of identical three-story row houses.

The car parks in front of a lie: a bland, gray structure with chain-link fence ringing a joyless garden thick with weeds.

NANCY
 Your new home. Isn't it lovely?

Guarded, Appoline holds Oscar as she opens the car door.

OSCAR
 Lovely? It's a dump.

A Pit Bull shocks Appoline. It leaps and snaps a few inches from her face... thanks to a short leash.

PHILIP

Don't be afraid. He's not mean.

Philip pokes the dog with his cane. The dog WHIMPERS.

OSCAR

Not mean? Not mean? It near took a bite out of us. Bad dog!

They sidestep the snarling Pit Bull to enter the house.

INT. JONES' LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A typical living room with prominent armchair in the middle is a dirty mess. Philip sweeps his arm,

PHILIP

The cozy living room.

Lost in thought, it doesn't register with Appoline.

NANCY

(enthused)

Would you like to see your room? I hope you like it!

INT. STAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Philip nods at stairs to the third floor.

PHILIP

Our bedroom is upstairs. You are forbidden to go up there. Savvy?

Appoline gapes at the stairs and agrees in a nod.

Nancy and Philip lead her to --

INT. APPOLINE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

More prison cell than girl's frilly bedroom: gray, tiny, stuffy, windowless, small bed with thin, hard mattress.

A noisy wall clock TICK TOCKS.

PHILIP

It's small but cozy.

OSCAR

Not even a window to climb out of.

Appoline checks out her new digs.

An old dusty typewriter gives Appoline her first smile of the day.

NANCY

Dinner is in an hour. Settle in.
We'll be waiting for you.

Appoline nods: "Okay."

Philip and Nancy waddle out.

OSCAR

What's for dinner? Bread and water?

Appoline sits with Oscar in front of the typewriter. She pushes the keys D-O-U-D-O-U.

INT. JONES' KITCHEN - NIGHT

Nancy slaves over a stove while Philip waits at the table.

The Jones' sophisticated veneer in suit and dress has disappeared. In street clothes, they are dull average.

OSCAR

I'm starving.

Appoline enters and stands by for a cue. Philip points his chin at a chair.

She takes the seat and plops Oscar on her lap.

Nancy slides an unappetizing soup tureen onto the table and ladles three steaming bowls.

PHILIP

First rule of the house: you have
to clean your plate before leaving
the table.

OSCAR

It's a bowl, not a plate.

Appoline studies the soup with a jaundiced eye.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

None for me, thanks, but bon
appétit!

Appoline forces down a spoonful and pretends it's delicious.

PHILIP

Second house rule is you have to help wash dishes. Tomorrow you'll help Mrs. Jones with chores. Savvy?

Appoline nods in agreement. Nancy half-smiles at her.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

You have plenty of time for your writing. You know, books can make a lot of money.

APPOLINE

I do not write for money, I'm just a child.

PHILIP

Well, you need to practice, savvy? Five pages a day if you want to have food on your plate.

OSCAR

It's a bowl!

NANCY

Besides, I'm sure it will be easy for you with all that inspiration.

APPOLINE

Easy-peasy!

INT. APPOLINE'S BEDROOM - LATER

The Pit's BARKS pierce the night. Wind HOWLS outside.

Uneasy in this strange place, Oscar and Appoline lie awake.

APPOLINE

Do you think Ma'am misses me?

OSCAR

Of course. She'll never forget you. How could she?

APPOLINE

We should write her a nice letter in the morning.

OSCAR

Great idea!

Entwined, they close their eyes to the night.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
First to reach the stars wins!

MUCH LATER

Oscar's Spirit is back again as the scene,

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. OSCAR'S ROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

A hand rouses snoozing Oscar. Snatched from dreamland, his sluggish eyelids open.

OSCAR
You were right. It went so fast.

What's this? It's not Father and Mother. It's baby-sitter and neighbor, MRS. WILSON, a portly woman in glasses.

MRS. WILSON
Oscar? I'm sorry to wake you.

OSCAR
Where's Mummy and Daddy?

An ominous presence hangs behind Mrs Wilson - a TALL MAN clad in black. He steps around Mrs. Wilson.

TALL MAN
Oscar. Sorry to wake you like this,
but you have to come with me.

In a daze, Oscar sits up, clutches the Stuffed Rabbit.

OSCAR
No! I want Mummy and Daddy.

MRS. WILSON
Calm down. He doesn't want to hurt
you. He has to take care of you for
a little while.

Oscar's mind races. He looks for escape from the nightmare. The door. But Mrs. Wilson and the Tall Man block his path.

TALL MAN
You're too young to understand,
but...

Oscar's not buying whatever they're selling.

He leaps from bed with Rabbit, bullets between them. They grab at him but he gives them the slip and disappears.

MRS. WILSON
OSCAR! Come back here this instant.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

In his PJs, Oscar barrels from the house. Determined, the frigid pre-dawn does not deter him.

A misty haze blurs the street.

END FLASHBACK

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. APPOLINE'S BEDROOM - SUNRISE

Oscar's Spirit returns to Rabbit as the sun starts to rise.

MORNING

Appoline has the tired look of fitful sleep. She looks around to get her bearings in the new surroundings.

She recovers as Oscar awakes in a yawn.

OSCAR
How was your first night of sleep?
Not bad, right?

APPOLINE
I almost missed Nelly's snoring.

Now sitting cross-legged on the bed, Appoline writes a letter. Oscar lies next to her.

OSCAR
Can I sign with my left rabbit
feet? It brings luck.

Appoline signs the letter, seals it with Oscar's feet.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

Appoline advances to Philip in the armchair as he reads the newspaper.

APPOLINE
Good morning.

PHILIP
We're early risers. Remember that
in the future.

In apron, Nancy greets her.

NANCY
Appoline. Have a good night's
sleep?

Appoline lies in a broad smile.

APPOLINE
I wrote a letter to the orphanage.
Will you mail it, please?

PHILIP
Uh? Well, yeah. Give it here.

Appoline hands over the envelope.

Philip shoves a broom at her.

PHILIP (CONT'D)
Sweep the kitchen floor. After it's
spotless, you can have breakfast.
Savvy?

Appoline steps off on task.

INT. JONES'S KITCHEN - EVENING

They sit around the table. Oscar is with Appoline.

The atmosphere is thick as molasses.

Nancy breaks the icy silence,

NANCY
(to Appoline)
Enjoying yourself?

APPOLINE
Oh, yes. Certainly.

OSCAR
Liar.

She devours a spoonful of soup to prove her joy with them.

PHILIP
Have you written your five pages
today?

Appoline with her chin high up,

APPOLINE
Even six!

Appoline holds the pages to Philip who carefully examine them.

PHILIP
This is actually very good.

Philip rubs his hands together.

NANCY
(proud)
You deserve an extra ladleful of soup!

Nancy is generous and fills Appoline's bowl to his limit. Oscar is retching at the soup.

APPOLINE
When can I start going to school?

Philip SLURPS.

PHILIP
School doesn't start before a month.

INT. APPOLINE'S ROOM - DAY

She draws a calendar in her --

NOTEBOOK: "30 DAYS TO SCHOOL"

Appoline crosses out in red the first calendar day.

OSCAR
Twenty-nine left!

SERIES OF SHOTS - APPOLINE'S COUNTDOWN TO SCHOOL

- > She mops the kitchen floor until it gleams with Nancy.
- > Now typing her five pages a day.
- > Soup time, Philip holds Appoline last pages.
- > CALENDAR: A red cross through 24 days before school.
- > Appoline hands Philip a letter to post.

- > Appoline watches Kids play outside the living room window.
- > Nancy ladles green soup. More pages.
- > Exhausted, Appoline drops to her bed near Oscar.
- > Days pass in sunrises and sunsets.
- > CLICKETY-CLACK, Appoline's fingers dance on the typewriter.
- > Appoline crosses off another day in the CALENDAR.
- > She slides a letter to Philip.
- > Appoline dusts the stairs.
- > Soup, soup and more soup, greener and greener.
- > CALENDAR: A red cross through 7 days before school.

INT. JONES' LIVING ROOM - DAY

Appoline pushes a broom across the floor. She sweeps close to the front door. There's no key. She turns the doorknob.

Locked.

PHILIP (O.S.)
What are you up to?

Philip looms behind her. Surprised, Appoline twirls around.

APPOLINE
Me? Sweeping. Like you told me.

PHILIP
This is a dangerous neighborhood.
We lock the doors so we don't get
robbed.

Appoline shakes her head in accord, continues sweeping.

APPOLINE
Any mail today?

PHILIP
Nothing for you.

Appoline's head and shoulders drop in disappointment.

KITCHEN

Appoline puts the broom away. She jiggles the knob on the outside door. Locked.

ON THE STAIRS

Now dusting every step, Appoline slowly climbs.

She pauses outside her second-floor bedroom. With curiosity, her eyes follow the steps up. She scales them to the --

FORBIDDEN THIRD FLOOR

Appoline peers through the keyhole of Nancy and Philip's bedroom. It's furnished with the expected bed and dresser.

There's also a window wide open.

INT. APPOLINE'S ROOM - LATER

Laying down on the floor, Appoline writes a new letter.

APPOLINE

I think Ma'am has forgotten all about us.

OSCAR

Don't say that! It's not possible.

APPOLINE

Why don't I get any letters then?

OSCAR

I'm sure the mailman is too afraid of that Pit Bull in front of the house to try to get to the letterbox.

Appoline smiles weakly.

Now in front of the typewriter, Appoline is ready for her daily pages.

An hour later. The page is still blank. Not a single word.

Appoline gasps with disappointment.

INT. JONES' KITCHEN - NIGHT

Philip taps his fingers against the table.

PHILIP

Where are your pages?

Appoline lowers her eyes to Oscar.

APPOLINE

I was not inspired today. I'm sorry. It's not easy to write every day.

NANCY

It's ok--

PHILIP

No, it's absolutely not okay! We said five pages a day, not zero! Just sit down and write, it's not that complicated!

OSCAR

You do it!

Philip glares at Nancy and prevents her to fill Appoline's bowl.

PHILIP

I wasn't joking, no dinner for you young lady.

Crestfallen, Appoline lays down the spoon.

APPOLINE

But...

Philip's tone veers sharp,

PHILIP

No ifs ands or buts about it.

Philip furrows his brow at Oscar.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

The stuffed rabbit doesn't belong at the table. Leave it in your room from now on. Savvy?

Appoline is stunned. Even Oscar is tongue-tied. They both cast their eyes on the table.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

If you want to go to school, you'll have to finish the story. And if you can't even be bothered to do that, then maybe school's not for you.

The icy silence again descends.

INT. APPOLINE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Appoline stares at the ceiling with a blank stare.

APPOLINE

Not what I'd hoped for in a family.
Where are the lullabies, Oscar?
Where are the bedtime stories?

OSCAR

They are tough cookies, but I'm
sure they want what's best for you.
We have a roof over our heads, and
we have each other.

Appoline shrugs her shoulders.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

School will begin anytime soon now!
You only have to finish up your
story.

Appoline snuggles Oscar.

APPOLINE

Thank you but, I don't know the end
yet.

Weary from the stressful day, Appoline drops off.

EVEN LATER

A LOUD ARGUMENT downstairs shocks Appoline awake.

She shakes Oscar.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

Oscar, wake up.

No answer. She shakes again.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

Oscar.

Nothing.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

Please, Oscar. Wake up.

The Stuffed Rabbit is just that - a lifeless toy.

Philip's VOICE gets stronger.

Appoline comes to the door, opens it carefully.

INT. STAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Appoline discretely descends two steps.

PHILIP (O.S.)

You know, we can become rich thanks
to this girl!

Appoline snoops at them between the balusters.

From behind, Philip stands in front of the chimney. Nancy is next to him.

NANCY

We can't do that to her. It's not
why we adopted her.

PHILIP

Stop your nonsense two minutes. You
were the one wanting a better house
and a better life! This is our
chance to get everything we've
always wanted!

Philip finally turns around, revealing letters in his hands.

PHILIP (CONT'D)

They will never know as long as
they don't receive her letters.
Savvy?

Appoline goes completely still.

NANCY

What if they come check on her?

PHILIP

Don't worry, I've taken care of
everything. I imitated her
handwriting and send a letter
myself to her Ma'am.

Philip drops Appoline's letters into the fire.

The Jones' faces are illuminated by the flames. Behind them,
Appoline disappears from the balusters.

INT. APPOLINE'S ROOM - MORNING

Appoline is already awake as she stares at Oscar.

Oscar opens his eyes accompanied by a yawn.

APPOLINE

Where were you last night?!

Oscar, clueless.

OSCAR

Hello to you too sunshine!

APPOLINE

I was scared. I tried waking you.
You left me all alone.

OSCAR

(confused)

I was here. I am here. What
happened?

Appoline searches her words.

APPOLINE

My... My letters... They never made
it to the mailbox.

OSCAR

Uh? What?

APPOLINE

He burned them all.

Oscar's ears fold in discontentment.

OSCAR

But why?

APPOLINE

Clear as a bell. They want to keep
me prisoner to write books and make
money for them!

OSCAR

I'm pretty sure it's not legal.

The floor CREAKS outside the door.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Shhh. Someone's there.

They wait in silence.

NANCY (O.S.)

Appoline, time to wake up.

OSCAR

Think she heard us?

APPOLINE
I'm coming.

OSCAR
I'm coming with you.

INT. JONES' KITCHEN - NIGHT

Appoline serves soup before sitting down.

Nancy puts a present in front of Appoline.

APPOLINE
(surprised)
Is that for me?

Nancy approves with a smile.

OSCAR
It could be a trap. Be careful.

Appoline unwraps the gift.

A lovely pencil case.

NANCY
It was mine when I was just about
your age.

APPOLINE
Thank you very much.

PHILIP
But she never had an inch of your
talent, so this will be more useful
for you. Now, give me your pages.

Appoline holds him blank pages.

PHILIP (CONT'D)
Are you playing with me?

APPOLINE
I can't write anymore.

Philip notices Oscar once more on her lap.

PHILIP
Why do you have that stupid stuffed
rabbit? I told you to leave it in
your room.

Appoline holds her head high, ignores him.

NANCY

It's a harmless stuffed animal...

PHILIP

She's not a kid anymore. Time to grow up. She wants to go to school? Better off she doesn't. The kids will make fun of her.

OSCAR

I don't like where this is going.

PHILIP

You haven't finished writing your story yet, so I guess we'll have to wait until next year to enrol you in school.

APPOLINE

No! You have no right!

Philip slams his fist on the table.

PHILIP

Or what? You belong to us now, you have no say in the matter. Savvy?

Shaking, Appoline bounds out with Oscar.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Appoline cries into her pillow. Oscar lies behind her.

OSCAR

Don't cry.

APPOLINE

We're prisoners of this monster. We can't stay here any longer.

OSCAR

Don't worry! We're going to plan the greatest escape of all.

Appoline turns to question Oscar.

APPOLINE

(sobs)

Just how do we do that?

OSCAR

If only there was a window like any other room!.

Oscar gazes around the room for a weak link to exploit.

APPOLINE

I may have a solution, but you're not going to like it

OSCAR

You piqued my curiosity. I'm all ears.

APPOLINE

All the doors are locked, but there's a window... in their bedroom!

OSCAR

Are you screwy? They're sleeping in this room. We'll never be able to get out without waking them up.

APPOLINE

It's the only way out.

Appoline begins tossing items into a suitcase.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

(whispering)

We'll be fine. We just have to be quiet.

Oscar shakes his head, worried.

OSCAR

And end up like soldiers who flew on a secret mission and never came back.

But Appoline is resolute.

APPOLINE

We have to try. There's no turning back now. We'll leave at midnight.

She closes the suitcase and slips her notebook into her pocket, ready to for their greatest getaway.

OSCAR

Alright, midnight it is.

THE CLOCK - 11:58 PM

Appoline is ready with backpack and suitcase in hand. Oscar's ears poke from the backpack.

She rises with second, maybe third, thoughts.

APPOLINE

What if the plan fails? If we get caught? We have this one chance.

OSCAR

What if we make it? A break for freedom. I trust you. Besides, what's the worst that could happen? Grounded and no green soup? Yech!

Amped by Oscar's pep talk, Appoline moves to the door ready to go over the wall - their great escape.

INT. STAIRS - MIDNIGHT

Dark. Appoline uses a hand against the wall to guide her up the stairs. One step, a second, third...

Ascending to --

THE THIRD FLOOR HALLWAY

The bedroom door is ajar. Appoline sneaks a look-see.

A streak of outside light filter into the room.

SNORES inside. Appoline pushes the door open, with care.

INT. JONES' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

They sleep like the dead. Philip SAWS LOGS. Next to him, Nancy wears earplugs.

So far so good.

The window is on the far side of the bed.

Appoline steps in syncopation with the rhythm of Philip's SNORES. Oscar's fur stands on end when the snoring stops.

Appoline freezes.

OSCAR

Please, don't wake up. Please don't wake up.

Philip shifts position to face the window.

Beads of sweat break out on Appoline's forehead.

SNORES rev up again. Appoline breathes again. She keeps moving to the window a mere few feet away now.

At the window, Oscar's fur again stands on end.

A breeze flutters the drapes when Appoline opens the window. Philip tosses but remains dead-to-the-world asleep.

The night is eerily quiet.

Appoline lays the suitcase down. She uses it as a step to climb up and reach the windowsill.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
Permission to proceed.

Appoline shimmies through the window and onto the roof.

Oscar no longer has eyes on what's happening in the bedroom.

Appoline reaches for the suitcase.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
Make it snappy.

The suitcase is a few inches out of Appoline's reach. She stretches with great effort, grabs the strap.

The SNORING stops.

Appoline lifts her head. Reflected in the window, Philip awakens and stands, angry and menacing.

PHILIP
Silly girl!

Panicked, Appoline abandons the suitcase, rushes to the roof.

PHILIP (CONT'D)
I'll show you what I'm made of.

Philip finds his cane and limps to the door. Nancy awakens.

NANCY
Let her go!

Philip ignores his spouse and leaves the room in a hurry.

EXT. JONES' HOUSE - ROOF - CONTINUOUS

Disoriented, Appoline looks to left then right.

OSCAR
To the right. A gutter.

Appoline follows his directions, swerves to the gutter.

APPOLINE
Good idea, Oscar.

Frightened but determined, Appoline embraces the gutter and slides down. It's a long way down for a small Girl.

The backpack catches on a gutter support brace. Oscar's foot flops out.

INT. STAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Furious, Philip races downstairs, flings open the front door.

EXT. JONES' HOUSE - GARDEN - CONTINUOUS

As Appoline slides down...

OSCAR
Uh oh...

APPOLINE
What's with the "uh oh?"

OSCAR
We forgot one tiny detail.

Appoline looks below.

A touch curious, the Pit Bull sizes up the odd scene with cold, cruel eyes. Is this dog food?

The Pit BARKS on the run to the gutter. Gooey saliva flies from its yapping mouth.

APPOLINE
THE DOG!!!

OSCAR (CONT'D)
THE DOG!!!

Appoline's feet reach terra firma.

The Dog PANTS at full bore.

Philip arrives.

PHILIP
(to the dog)
That's it, sic her. Good dog. Sic.

Appoline hustles like the Devil is on her tail. She nears the chain-link fence between the Jones' house and their neighbor.

She hurdles the fence as the Pit closes for the kill.

OSCAR

Quick. He's on top of us and looks hungry.

About to cross over to safety, the Dog jumps with wide-open mouth and chomps at the backpack.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!

The Dog falls to the ground on the Jones side.

PHILIP

Get bent. You're a good for nothing, worthless girl. Savvy?

Appoline hops down on the other side of the fence. She doesn't let up running until she's a few blocks away.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

Far enough away to rest for a minute, winded Appoline doubles over and puts hands to knees.

The Pit BARKS in the distance.

APPOLINE

Oscar, we did it. We did it.

Appoline slips the backpack off to celebrate with Oscar.

She finds a foot is gone, chomped off.

Oscar's weak and ill. Appoline is stunned.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

That mutt...

Appoline examines Oscar.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

Does it hurt?

She uses a wrist bracelet as tourniquet around his foot.

OSCAR

I feel kinda funny.

APPOLINE
You're going to be okay.

OSCAR
I-- I-- I'm fine...

Oscar passes out. His head drops onto Appoline's shoulder.

EXT. TOWN - STREET - NIGHT

Appoline wanders deserted streets. Only a few street lights brighten her course.

She holds Oscar close to her heart and hunkers down on a street corner. Her eyelids flutter with exhaustion.

Nearby, the bell tower TOLLS.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK - OSCAR'S FINAL BREATH

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Oscar struggles to open his eyes.

OSCAR
Appoline... I'm so cold.

Oscar's vision clears, revealing himself tightly clutching Doudou beneath the bell tower.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
(to his other self)
You can't stay here! It's too cold
outside! Go back home!

His doppelganger doesn't hear a thing.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
Don't fall asleep! Wake up!

The ominous BELLS TOLL twelve times. Midnight.

A melodious voice echoes, unforgettable to a child. Oscar turns, falling to his knees.

OSCAR'S MOTHER
Oscar.

His father appears in his turn.

OSCAR'S FATHER
How about a new story, bunny?

They are not in their human form either, but like Oscar, they are ghosts.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. TOWN - STREET - DAWN

The rising sun's yellow-orange sunbeams light up Appoline's face.

She rouses Oscar.

APPOLINE
Oscar?

After a moment, his whiskers twitch a little.

OSCAR
(weak)
Still kickin'.

Relieved, a smile returns to Appoline's face.

APPOLINE
I was afraid of losing you.

Appoline squeezes him a little tighter.

ACROSS THE STREET

A blue house with big wooden door under a SIGN: "GRANDMA'S TOYS AND DOLL HOSPITAL".

APPOLINE (CONT'D)
Look!

Oscar faints.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)
Don't worry, I'll get help!

Appoline hurries across the street to --

EXT. GRANDMA'S TOYS AND DOLL HOSPITAL - CONTINUOUS

In the window, Appoline spies stuffed animals of every type and size amid enchanting decor.

Cotton stuffing bleeds from Oscar's missing foot.

APPOLINE

Oh no. No, no, no!

Appoline KNOCKS on the door. No answer. LOUDER.

The big door swings opens. Appoline holds a hand up to bright light, and wrinkles her nose at the smell of strong perfume.

Grandma appears from a smoky pink cloud.

GRANDMA

Hello? Hello?

Tall Grandma looks over Appoline's head.

APPOLINE

Uh... down here.

Grandma finds her.

GRANDMA

Oh my. This head is still in the clouds. Oh my.

Grandma appraises Appoline with an all overlook.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

What can I do for you, darling?

Appoline shows her the cotton stuffing spilling from Oscar.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

Good heavens! What happened to this poor squirrel?

APPOLINE

Rabbit.

GRANDMA

Where are my specs? Blind as a bat without them.

(beckons)

Come in.

Appoline follows the Grandma into --

INT. GRANDMA'S TOYS AND DOLL HOSPITAL - CONTINUOUS

The place looks magical - silky-furred stuffed animals, bright-eyed and immortal, scatter around, each with its personality and secrets.

Grandma lays Oscar on a round wood table.

APPOLINE

A big bad dog did this to... my
Doudou.

Like a surgeon, Grandma slips into gloves.

GRANDMA

It's a most precious gift then. I'm
going to do everything in my power
to fix it.

Oscar is fast asleep.

Grandma slips on a pair of magnifying glasses and tends to
Oscar's wound.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

This is going to take time so get
cozy, sweetie. Hot chocolate is
almost ready. With marshmallows if
you like.

Grandma opens a cabinet overflowing with colorful vials, baby
heads, eyes, arms, legs, wigs - the ultimate toy repair kit.

Grandma wields a small cylindrical tube. A marshmallow drops
from the tube into Appoline's hot chocolate.

Appoline is enthralled.

The tube fills with sky blue fluid. Grandma draws near Oscar.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

It's funny. I have the strangest
feeling I know this stuffed rabbit
from somewhere. But my memory is
like Swiss cheese these days.

A blue drop falls on Oscar's belly and magically evaporates.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

Now, rabbit won't wake up.

APPOLINE

He's been asleep for a long time.

GRANDMA

We don't want him waking while I
put in stitches.

APPOLINE

Good idea. He's afraid of needles.

GRANDMA
Everybody is, my dear.

Grandma wears a flowery lab coat with a stuffed animal poking from every pocket. The inner pockets hold fur and fabrics.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)
Have any preference for your
Doudou? A new color? Royal blue
perhaps? It would be perfect.

APPOLINE
Blue? I don't know.

GRANDMA
Let me think... I have an elastic
foot I could glue on him. You could
hang him anywhere from now on.

Grandma plays yo-yo with the elastic foot.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)
What would you like?

APPOLINE
It's tempting...

Appoline's mind is made up but she pretends to consider.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)
Thank you. I'd like him just like
he was before.

GRANDMA
Super duper!

Grandma grumbles.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)
(to herself)
Always the same thing. Always the
same Doudou. Never any changes.

Appoline overhears, snickers.

LATER

Grandma wheels Oscar from a cloud of smoke. Oscar is all better. Appoline's eyes widen.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)
Abracadabra. Shoot, I forgot my top
hat.

APPOLINE

Whoa! You really are a magician.

Grandma removes her gloves and disappears for a moment.

Oscar wakes up. His ears wiggle.

OSCAR

What happened? Where am I? Am I
dead?

Appoline enters his line of vision.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Appoline, it's you.

APPOLINE

You didn't think I was going to
abandon you?

OSCAR

That's the second time you told me
that.

Appoline holds Oscar in front of a mirror.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Wow! Brand new. Like we never even
heard of that mutt.

With teary eyes, Appoline and Oscar grin at each other in the
mirror, happy to be together again.

Grandma reappears in the mirror behind them.

It's Oscar's first look at her. He's astounded.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Grandma?

(blinks)

I must be dreaming. That's my
grandma!

Appoline is mute.

GRANDMA

Make sure to take care of him.
You're lucky to have found each
other. There are plenty of boys and
girls looking for a Doudou to guide
them.

Grandma hugs Appoline and Oscar.

OSCAR
She smells exactly like I remember.

GRANDMA
What is the name of your Doudou?

OSCAR
It's me. Oscar. Tell her.

APPOLINE
Oscar...

Grandma pulls away from them, looks at Oscar.

GRANDMA
Oscar. That's odd. My grandson had
the same name.

Grandma scratches her head, memories coming back.

APPOLINE
What happened to him?

GRANDMA
The poor child. His parents were
tragically taken one winter night.
My little Oscar ran away before I
could pick him up. I searched for
days, weeks, but never found him.

Grandma chokes back tears of the painful memory. A tear gets
away to drop on Oscar's fur.

OSCAR
I shouldn't have run away. I'm so
sorry. Tell her I love her.

Appoline takes a moment to form how to realize Oscar's wish.

APPOLINE
I'm sure wherever he is, he's sorry
for what happened, and misses you a
lot. I'll bet he loves you with all
his heart.

GRANDMA
I love him too.

Grandma gazes lovingly at Oscar, as if seeing through his
stuffed animal costume.

EXT. GRANDMA'S TOYS AND DOLL HOSPITAL - DAY

Grandma and Appoline wave goodbye.

As Appoline walks away, Oscar looks at Grandma one last time.

EXT. COUNTY ROAD - DAY

The border between urban and suburban.

Appoline and Oscar turn in all directions.

APPOLINE

Now what?

OSCAR

We're way too far from the orphanage.

APPOLINE

And Ma'am never got my letters.

A tractor chugs past them. Appoline's eyes light up.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

Have the same idea as me?

OSCAR

Not this time.

APPOLINE

The farmers. The ones who wanted to adopt us. They can't live very far from here. They said they have the biggest farm around.

OSCAR

How do we find them?

Appoline runs after the tractor.

APPOLINE

Excuse me, sir. Sir?

A TRACTOR DRIVING FARMER, chews on straw. He stops.

TRACTOR DRIVING FARMER

Hey, kiddo. What can I do ya for?
Lost?

LATER - ON THE TRACTOR

Appoline and Oscar bounce along. They inhale the fresh air and marvel at beautiful landscape and nature passing by.

EXT. GEORGE AND MARY'S FARM - DAY

The tractor stops at the entrance to the farm. Appoline thanks the Tractor Driver and hurries through the gate.

TRACTOR DRIVING FARMER
Well, here we are. It's the nicest
farm around, just like I told you.

With Oscar on her shoulder, Appoline walks along a tree and flower-lined path.

APPOLINE
It's so beautiful.

Happy and excited, she runs on a path that seems to never end.

In the distance, Mary plants seeds, George chops wood. They turn to see Appoline run to them.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)
Remember me?

They are pleasantly surprised by her unexpected appearance.

MARY
Of course. Appoline.

GEORGE
What a wonderful surprise. How did
you get here?

APPOLINE
That's a long story.

MARY
Another one to share with us. You
can tell it over lunch. We were
just about to sit for it.
(pets Oscar)
I'm sure Oscar is hungry too.

Oscar is faraway, detached, since learning his Parents' fate.

INT. FARMHOUSE DINING ROOM - DAY

A rustic room set with a glorious spread of turkey and all the fixins'. Enough food for weeks.

Appoline gnaws a turkey leg.

APPOLINE

...and just like that, the Pit bull
jumped on us and bit Oscar's leg!

MARY

We've got to call the police! These
people shouldn't be allowed to
adopt children!

GEORGE

We'll make sure we report them!

Appoline hands them an envelope with the address of the Jones
house.

APPOLINE

It was Oscar's idea!

INT. APPOLINE'S ROOM - LATER

Spacious and full of light. Desk and lots of toys. A picture
window offers a panoramic view of the farm.

She drops her jacket on a soft bed.

Her beloved notebook is the only possession left to her.

EXT. FARM'S GARDEN - DAY

Appoline plays Red Light, Green Light with her new Parents.

From Appoline's window, Oscar watches their horseplay.

INT. APPOLINE'S NEW ROOM - DAY

At her desk, Appoline composes a letter.

APPOLINE (V.O.)

I miss you all. I'll visit soon.
Everything is wonderful. Don't
worry about me. I'm fine now.

EXT. DAIRY BARN - DAY

George instructs Appoline on how to milk a cow.

APPOLINE

Yuck. Disgusting.

George chuckles.

GEORGE
We're expecting a litter any time.

APPOLINE
Can't wait to meet the babies.

Appoline glows with true happiness.

INT. APPOLINE'S NEW ROOM - DAY

The window is wide open as day surrenders to night. A plump Moon rises full and orange on the horizon.

In bed, Appoline reads a letter from Ma'am.

At the window, Oscar drinks in the sunset.

She wears a worried look.

APPOLINE
Is everything okay, Oscar?

OSCAR
Hunky-dory.

APPOLINE
We tell each other everything. Do you miss the orphanage? I do. Mom and Dad promised we can make the scene for an afternoon. Soonest.

OSCAR
That's the most.

Appoline goes to him.

APPOLINE
Is it your family? I'm very sorry for what happened to your parents. They must miss you a lot.

Appoline carries Oscar back to the bed.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)
I'm here for you.

A pregnant moment passes.

OSCAR
I'm going away soon.

APPOLINE

What? To where?

OSCAR

I suppose you already know, but I'm no ordinary boy. For the past few weeks, I've been having strange dreams about being outside the doudou.

APPOLINE

What do you mean?

OSCAR

Like a ghost. I could see you sleeping with the doudou before I discovered memories of my old life.

(wrinkles nose)

I couldn't figure it out, but I think I finally did.

APPOLINE

I don't get you.

OSCAR

You found a family, Appoline. It's time for me to go back to mine.

APPOLINE

Stay. Don't go. Don't leave me now.

OSCAR

We made a promise. Let's keep it.

(moves ears)

You're my best friend. I was very lucky to find you, and I'll always be grateful to you for hearing my voice and saving me.

APPOLINE

Stop saying that! I'll stay awake all night so you can't leave without me.

Appoline crosses her arms, defiant and determined.

LATER

She neither blinks nor takes her gaze off Oscar.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

Are you asleep? Are you asleep?
Huh? Are you asleep?

OSCAR

No.

EVEN LATER

Still awake, she gently nudges Oscar.

APPOLINE

And now?

OSCAR

Still no.

Appoline stifles a yawn, rubs her sleepy eyes.

APPOLINE

I hope you're not counting sheep.

OSCAR

What sheep?

APPOLINE

You know very well.

Appoline fights the Sandman but her heavy eyes shut.

MUCH LATER

Appoline's eyes spring open.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

Are you sleeping, Oscar?

OSCAR (O.S.)

No. Not anymore.

The voice isn't from Doudou.

Jolted, she sits up in the bed, shakes the Stuffed Rabbit.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

I'm here...

Appoline turns to see Oscar's Spirit floating at the ceiling. Her jaw drops at her first glimpse of Oscar as a little boy.

APPOLINE

Oscar?

OSCAR

It's time.

The Spirit floats across the room.

APPOLINE

You, you're a...

Appoline's hand passes through Oscar's as she reaches for it.

OSCAR

You'll always have Doudou to protect you. A small piece of me will always be there.

Oscar points to Appoline's heart.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

We're family, after all.

Oscar's body ascends.

APPOLINE

I'll miss you so much.

Oscar's Spirit glides to the open window. His face beams with love and affection for Appoline.

OSCAR

Better get busy on all those books you're going to write. Children all over the world are waiting for you to help them make their dreams come true.

(bows)

Sweet Appoline, I'll never know how to thank you. Words to describe you don't exist.

Appoline weeps with joy.

She follows Oscar's Spirit to the window.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

You and only you.

Before Oscar's Spirit moves through the window, he holds out his hand. Appoline too. For a split second, they feel each other's hands; a bridge between spirit and physical worlds.

Overcome by a hundred different emotions, Appoline fixates on Oscar's Spirit soaring higher and higher into the starry sky en route for a happy reunion with Mummy and Daddy.

His Spirit becomes a point of light in the heavens.

Overcome, Appoline collapses on the bed.

A stuffed animal again, Doudou's blue eyes are lifeless and black. There are no freckles on his hairy cheeks.

PRECOCIOUS GIRL (V.O.)
Is that the end?

INT. ORPHANAGE - DORMITORY - DAY (FLASHFORWARD)

Twenty years have passed. The dorm hasn't changed at all.

A group of Orphan Girls sit in a semicircle around a WOMAN.

PRECOCIOUS GIRL
She never saw Oscar again?

The woman is APPOLINE (30). She holds a book, recounting Oscar's story to a captivated audience of orphan girls. Doudou rests on her knees.

APPOLINE
He's with me every single day.

Appoline considers Doudou.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)
I've never forgotten Oscar, he gave me the strength to find a family but also to discover myself. He was a pure soul, a sad boy, and the kindest person I've ever known. He was my guardian angel.

A wall adorned with newspaper articles and vibrant photos:

MONTAGE PHOTOS OF THE GIRLS' POST-ORPHANAGE LIVES

> The twins' dazzling circus performances, leaping through hoops and twirling on aerial silks.

> Janice's journey, from the orphanage to her wedding day and, finally, surrounded of her big family.

> Newspaper clippings highlight Savannah's wildlife, accompanied by poignant photos of her rescuing endangered giraffes.

> Lola's successful snow globe store. Articles commend her thriving business.

> Nelly's journey, from the orphanage to a new family before becoming a proud mathematician teacher. Then, a radiant Nelly, proudly displaying her baby bump next to her husband.

> The emotional reunion between Agathe and her returning mother. Delightful snapshots showcase Doudou and Miss Dolly engaged in frequent tea sessions.

> Lastly, a double-page spread announces Appoline's novel, "Doudou," The photo captures her with the stuffed rabbit, ready to share their story with the world.

END MONTAGE

Appoline flips to the last page of the book.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

We don't choose our families, but we can choose who will be part of our lives. And Oscar will always be part of mine.

The girls listen attentively, admiring Appoline.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

Family isn't just about people with the same blood in their veins. True friends can be as dear and as close as any relative. The world is full of humans, each with their own story and all with love to give.

Appoline pets Doudou and invites the other girls with a hand gesture to do the same.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

Everyone has the right to choose the family they want. The bonds you build with those around you are far more powerful. We're all capable of creating our own families and connecting with each other on a much deeper level.

In back, an admiring MA'AM with wild gray hair listens.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

But, never forget where you come from. Carry this memory with you wherever life takes you. Always remember the bonds you share and the love you have for each other.

Every girl tenderly strokes Doudou, showing respect.

APPOLINE (CONT'D)

Go now, fly out into the world and choose your family.

(MORE)

APPOLINE (CONT'D)
Find the people who will love and
accept you, wherever you come from.

As the girls leave the room, Appoline and Ma'am watch, proud of the impact they've had.

A smile lingers on Appoline's lips as she closes the book.

CLOSE UP to the cover of the book entitled "DOUDOU" with the white plush rabbit with blue eyes, a light inside his belly.

The light gets stronger and stronger, bathing Appoline's face in a magical glow.

THE END