

MISSING

**EXT. MOUNTAIN HIGHWAY - DAY**

A moving van with a rental logo and a peeling decal of Mt. Rushmore on the side struggles up a winding two-lane highway. A string of cars follows, waiting for a chance to pass.

**INT. MOVING VAN - DAY**

DAVID KENYON (30s) is behind the wheel - grim, a single father, widowed six months ago and still reeling from it.

His children, ELISE (5) and SARA (9), sit beside him. Elise absently fingers a well-worn doll in her lap. Sara stares out the window at passing trees.

COUNTRY MUSIC strains through a tinny speaker. A muted CAR HORN sounds from behind.

David glances in the filmy side-mirror, sees a blue BMW tailgating. Curves ahead, and no place to pull over.

The BMW flashes its lights.

DAVID

Oh, come on.

He steps harder on the gas, but it doesn't help. The engine KNOCKS. He sighs.

At a wide spot in the road, David pulls onto the shoulder.

The BMW guns it, shoots past with a long BLAST of its horn.

David waves.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

A dusty brown pickup passes, and a mini-van loaded with kids.

Ahead, a bright-colored BILLBOARD depicting a joust - two knights charging on horseback, out-sized grinning damsels in the background.

The tag line reads:

**"BRIDGEWATER RENAISSANCE FAIRE!!"**

**"LET US TAKE CHARGE FOR A WHILE!"**

David glances sideways at the still-grim girls. If they saw the billboard, they don't show it.

**EXT. BRIDGEWATER, MAIN STREET - DAY**

A rural town, population 4450. Heraldic banners and colorful pennants decorate the utility poles. A huge parade banner spans the street:

**BRIDGEWATER RENAISSANCE FAIRE****AUGUST 18 - SEPTEMBER 2****38 YEARS OF FAMILY FUN!**

JOHN ALDER carries a roll-up of fliers along a crowded sidewalk, past tourist traps with window art touting Renaissance Faire sweatshirts, "Dragon Dogs," crappy castle snow-globes. People in medieval outfits dot the crowd.

He stops at a utility pole, rolls off a photocopies handbill, and tapes it up.

**"MISSING"**

Below the headline, a photo shows a young mother seated with two children, one about four, the other an infant. Below that, sketches of what the kids might look like now.

They look almost exactly like Sara and Elise Kenyon.

Alder looks back down the street. Every pole has a handbill.

**EXT. SERVICE STATION - DAY**

An oiled dirt gas station lot on the northern outskirts of CONNOR, population 1100 - Bridgewater's poor cousin, a former mill town scratching by on the tourist spillover.

David shakes his head while he talks into a cell phone.

DAVID  
(into phone)  
Yes. No. No, Mom, I have enough  
money.

He leans against the utility pole, kneading his temples.

DAVID (CONT'D)  
(into phone)  
I know I sound tired. I am tired.

He glances out at the moving van. The two girls stare back like war refugees.

DAVID (CONT'D)  
 (into phone)  
 We're all tired.

A semi blows by. David turns from the trailing dust cloud and switches the phone to his other ear.

DAVID (CONT'D)  
 (into phone)  
 What? I didn't hear that last part.

He winces.

DAVID (CONT'D)  
 (into phone)  
 Yes, of course, they miss her. God,  
 Mom, how could they...

His voice falters, trails off. He squeezes his eyes closed.

DAVID (CONT'D)  
 (into phone)  
 Yes, yeah. I'm still here.

He looks across the highway through a greasy glass panel, sees the grungy PALMS MOTOR COURT buried in shade, the parking lot almost empty.

Even though the park is five miles away, a cracked marquee touts in a random mix of red and black letters:

**"SPECIAL FAIRE RATES!!"**

The "S's" are dollar signs.

David glances again at the van.

The girls wear blank, emotionless expressions.

DAVID (CONT'D)  
 (into phone)  
 Mom, would it be okay if we got  
 there Thursday instead? I think we  
 might take an extra day here.

David slips the phone in his breast pocket.

**INT. BRIDGEWATER DINER - DAY**

The RATTLE of dishes and silverware. Tourist CHATTER. Alder sits in a booth, stares at one of the handbills while his coffee goes cold.

A WAITRESS approaches with a half-full pot, stops, sees the woman in the handbill over Alder's shoulder.

WAITRESS  
She run off on you?

From outside, the sunlight GLARES OFF a chrome bumper. Alder squints at the flash of light, stares dumbly.

The waitress points at the age-enhanced drawings.

WAITRESS (CONT'D)  
Long time ago, looks like.

ALDER  
Yeah. A long time ago.

The waitress gives him an awkward smile. Lifts the pot.

WAITRESS  
Refill?

ALDER  
I thought I'd take some of these up to the Faire.

WAITRESS  
Sure, I guess. If they'll let you put 'em up.

She tops up his cup.

ALDER  
She lived there. In Bridgewater, I mean, not at the Faire. Helped out when she was home from college.

Her smile fades. More conversation than she signed on for.

WAITRESS  
Uh-huh.

ALDER  
Joanne Alder. Well, it would've been Brody then. Maybe you...?

But she's already moved off.

**INT. PALMS MOTOR COURT, LOBBY - DAY**

David enters the reception area. Frayed rugs, log walls, dusty taxidermy animals on equally dusty shelves. A dog-eared display of last year's Renaissance Faire brochures.

A SALLOW CLERK with nicotine-stained fingers returns David's smile something less than warmly.

SALLOW CLERK  
You here for the Faire?

DAVID  
Yes.

SALLOW CLERK  
One room, one night, I s'pose.

DAVID  
Please. Two beds.

The clerk raises an eyebrow.

David points over his shoulder.

DAVID (CONT'D)  
Two kids in the truck.

The clerk looks past David, eyes the moving van.

SALLOW CLERK  
Forty-five bucks. Or I can bring in  
a roll-away for another five.

DAVID  
No, that's okay.

SALLOW CLERK  
Suit yourself.

David slides a credit card across the desk.

DAVID  
Let's see if this one works.

**INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY**

A small room made even smaller by its cheap furniture. Ratty chenille bedspreads over lumpy mattresses. A mangy stuffed fox with needle sharp teeth gazes down from a shelf.

Elise edges past it, dragging her doll by the arm.

David enters carrying two small suitcases. He puts the bags down and hooks the room key onto his key ring. He surveys the room, pastes on a weak smile.

DAVID  
This isn't so bad.

As he plugs his cell phone into a charger, he notices Sara's frown. His smile wilts.

DAVID (CONT'D)  
C'mon, Sara. Don't start, please.  
It's only for one night.

Sara turns away and starts to unpack.

Elise climbs on the bed. The springs GROAN.

ELISE  
Yeah, c'mon, Sara. It's only for  
one night.

Sara shoots her a look, exasperated, but there's love in it.

ELISE (CONT'D)  
An' then we'll get to stay at  
Grandma's.

Elise tries on a hopeful look, and Sara is almost infected with it.

ELISE (CONT'D)  
We're gonna have our own room an'  
everything.

Sara blinks. Her look turns sour.

SARA  
Wait. "Stay?"

She wheels on David for confirmation.

SARA (CONT'D)  
We're going to stay at Grandma's?

David squirms under her gaze, shifts his eyes away.

SARA (CONT'D)  
Oh, my God. You're going to leave  
us there.

ELISE  
What?

Elise's eyes grow big.

SARA  
You're going to run away!

ELISE  
You're going to run away?!

She's on the edge of a meltdown, but David moves quickly, kneels, gathers her in.

DAVID

No, honey. I'm not. No, no. I'm not going to run away. I'm not.

Elise shudders in his embrace.

DAVID (CONT'D)

You're just going to stay at Grandma's a little while, until I can get a good job.

He pats her back, casts a hopeless look at Sara, who rolls her eyes and stifles a sneer.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Then we'll be together again. Forever and ever.

He cocks his head to one side. He squints an eye, chucks her under the chin, slips into mock-gangster.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Hey, I bet youse don know why we stopped at dis par-tic-u-lar location, do ya, Goilly?

Elise tries to smile, but the scare is still raw.

ELISE

Huh uhn.

DAVID

You ain't got no clue what's just down da road?

Elise shakes her head.

David casts glances over one shoulder, then the other, speaks from behind his hand in a stagey whisper:

DAVID (CONT'D)

It's da Renaissance Faih.

Elise tips her head in confusion.

David slips a brochure from his back pocket and holds it up.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Dey got princesses dere. Dozens of 'em. Da real ting, too.

It takes a second, then Elise holds her hands over her mouth, turns to Sara.

DAVID (CONT'D)  
So, listen heah, kiddo. You betteh  
get yahself washed up, 'cause da  
Renaissance Express is leavin' dis  
dump in fifteen minutes.

He thumbs an imaginary smudge from Elise's cheek, ruffles her hair, sends her off almost dancing into the bathroom.

He watches her go. His smile fades. He pivots on one knee.

DAVID (CONT'D)  
Sara, please, she's only five. You  
can't scare her like that.

SARA  
What difference does it make? Mom's  
dead. You don't want us.

DAVID  
No, honey, I told you...

She raises her small hand, cuts him off. What she says next, she says like it's been building in her for a long time.

SARA  
You can tell her whatever you want,  
like you always do. She's just a  
little kid. But, I know better.  
Ever since mom died, you-

DAVID  
Sara-

SARA  
You won't find a job.

DAVID  
Sara, please. I'm doing everything  
I can.

Sara stares at him, determined not to cry over this.

SARA  
It's okay. Grandma's nice, I guess.  
An' me and Elise got each other.

She nails him with a teary glare.

SARA (CONT'D)  
Maybe we don't need you.

**INT. RENAISSANCE FAIRE, PUBLIC AFFAIRS TENT - DAY**

Waning sunlight streams through the tent opening. The floor is matted, dry grass. CROWD NOISES filter in from outside.

Alder sits at a folding table, a stack of fliers in his lap, as he looks down at a creased piece of construction paper with the hand-printed name "W. Roberson, Dir."

ROBERSON (O.S.)

I sympathize with you, Mr. Alder.

Alder looks across the table at ROBERSON himself: over-weight and over-tan, dressed in a Robin Hood costume, complete with ill-advised tights.

ROBERSON (CONT'D)

But as I believe I told you last year, Faire policy simply does not permit private postings. Nothing about that has changed.

ALDER

She used to work here.

ROBERSON

Um? Yes, well, I mean where would we draw the line. Missing pets? Garage sales? I'm sure you can appreciate...

ALDER

This isn't some lost cockatoo. These are my children.

ROBERSON

I realize that, but our policy... I'm sorry. My hands are tied.

Roberson flashes a funeral director's smile and settles back in his folding chair, hands tented on the table top.

Alder rises, gathers up the fliers. He looks down at Roberson's hands.

ALDER

They don't look tied.

**I/E. MOVING VAN - DAY**

Almost dusk, a low-volume COUNTRY WESTERN SONG on the radio.

Elise's hands fly as she finishes a story.

ELISE

... and that's how Rory and his  
friends the Magic Mice tricked evil  
King Carl into the Weezer-Beezer  
Cave and saved the kingdom.

Elise grins and gives David a showy "ta-da" gesture.

David smiles, but it's wistful, pained.

DAVID

Wow! Did you make all that up?

SARA

It's *Rory Lionheart and the Kingdom  
Crusade*.

David looks puzzled.

SARA (CONT'D)

Her favorite book.

DAVID

Oh.

The street widens. Seedy strip malls, a gouged lot with a for  
sale sign jammed in the middle.

The street takes a 90-degree right turn. David spins the  
steering wheel, straightens onto DUNLAP PARK HIGHWAY, a long  
ribbon curving all the way up to the park.

As they watch, the night lights of the Renaissance Faire  
blink on and light up the distant hilltop.

Elise beams.

**EXT. RENAISSANCE FAIRE - NIGHT**

Alder moves through the crowd, among open Medieval tents like  
a displaced person, the roll of fliers still in his fist -  
past a HARLEQUIN working a cheap carnival ride, Henry VIII  
hawking cotton candy, a BARD plucking a mandolin.

A girl SHRIEKS.

Alder whips his head in her direction, exhales when he sees  
her brother chasing her with a rubber snake.

He scans the joyful crowds, the kids. His face begins to lose  
composure. A moan begins in his chest, cut off when...

... a BIG MAN with a CHILD tucked under his arm bumps Alder hard from behind.

Alder staggers, almost falls.

The Big Man blinks his panicked eyes, spins, disappears into the crowd.

As Alder regains his feet, a WOMAN races past, dragging a four-year-old. Two PRE-TEENS in tears trail them.

Alder turns and stares dumbly after them. He sniffs the air. His eyes go wide.

ALDER

Oh, God.

He wheels, finds the CROWD in full flight. As they flow around him, he pushes his way through, rounds a bend, stops.

Half the tents are already in flames.

An African-American park worker in soot-smudged yellow coveralls stands beside Alder - both of them stunned by the nightmare. Her NAME BADGE identifies her as "RAY."

Fire shoots skyward as the canvas roof of the ring toss goes up. Rows of cheap stuffed toys awash in flame. Acetate fur. Plastic eyes.

The fliers slip from Alder's hand. The faces of his children scatter, drawn toward the fire by the fierce back draft.

**EXT. DUNLAP PARK HIGHWAY - NIGHT**

The van passes a large canvas sign strung between two trees announcing:

**RENAISSANCE FAIRE**

**OVERFLOW PARKING**

**500 FEET**

The oncoming traffic is thick.

The Renaissance Faire twinkles behind the trees.

**I/E. DUNLAP PARK, BACK ENTRANCE - NIGHT**

Cars streams from the outbound lane.

David looks at them in confusion as he signals and starts into the turn...

...when a silver Honda blasts at them in the entrance lane.

David wrenches the wheel, barely avoids a collision, as the Honda's HORN blares, fades.

Sara is thrown against the door.

David slams on the brake. The van slides to an angled stop across the lane that leads to the parking lot.

In the lull, David tries to catch his breath. Elise stares at him, wide-eyed in the dashboard glow.

                          DAVID  
          Are you okay?

She blinks, nods.

                          DAVID (CONT'D)  
          Sara?

Sara sits upright, rubs her arm, winces privately.

                          SARA  
          Yes.

                          DAVID  
          You sure?

                          SARA  
          Yes, I said.

                          DAVID  
          Okay, then. Okay. Okay.

He turns the wheel, completes the turn.

Once they're inside, the gridlock is self-evident. The outbound traffic is a solid line of HONKING cars. Ahead, more jam in from the sides, clogging the way.

                          DAVID (CONT'D)  
          Something's wrong.

David edges the van up.

Beyond the small formal lot, five acres of cars spread across an open field of dried grass below the park. From here, they can see the hilltop.

People stream down winding paths, spill into the lot, make for their cars.

The park above is lit in some places, blacked out in others. Emergency flashers throw a red strobe against the white tents. The sky is unreal.

David sits back in the seat.

SARA

What is it?

DAVID

Fire.

After a beat, David puts the truck in gear. He pulls into the first section with enough room for him to begin a T-turn.

ELISE

Wait! We're leaving?!

He stops the truck.

DAVID

Honey, the park is closed.

ELISE

Daddy, you should help.

DAVID

No, bad idea, Little Guy.

She looks up at him with child eyes.

ELISE

But you were a fireman.

SARA

No he wasn't.

For a moment, David looks like he's been gut punched. He knows it's a test.

He surveys the parking lot, the park, the Faire - finds they're at least two hundred yards from any danger. He grimaces and puts the van in park.

DAVID

I'm only going to go in and look around.

The kids stare at him. Sara's arm is around Elise's shoulder.