

HANDLE WITH CARE

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. ROAD TO PODGORICA, SERBIA - MORNING

A poorly maintained stretch of asphalt bordered by trees. A flock of finches flee ahead of a low rumble and the grinding of gears.

INT. PANEL TRUCK: MOVING

DIMITRI, late-twenties, short hair, clean cut, sits behind the wheel. Beside him is his sister, TATIANA (early 20s), pretty, slender. She's wearing a blouse and short skirt.

Tatiana moves rhythmically to Serbian pop music playing on the radio, turns it up. He abruptly switches it off; wipes his forehead with a damp cloth.

DIMITRI (in serbo-croatian)
It's hot. I have a headache.

TATIANA
What do you want me to do about it?

She reaches for the radio. He slaps her hand away.

TATIANA
Owww!

Dimitri taps the gas gauge with his index finger.

DIMITRI
We're low on gas. Is there money?

Tatiana shakes her head, pats her flat tummy.

TATIANA
Breakfast.

DIMITRI
Tatiana! You eat too much!

Tatiana looks at Dimitri's developing paunch.

TATIANA
So who's fat? Not me!

DIMITRI
My wife's pregnant. I'm eating for two.

He gets a look of disbelief.

DIMITRI
It's a sympathy diet!

Tatiana spots a trailer truck parked up ahead near a roadside diner.

TATIANA
Stop! Stop!

DIMITRI
No. It's too risky.

TATIANA
Dimitri, do you want to get to town or not?!

EXT. PARKING LOT: ROADSIDE CAFE

Tatiana climbs out, musses her hair, picks up some dirt and tosses it on her clothes. She runs a dirty finger along her cheek, checks the effect in the side view mirror.

DIMITRI
It's good enough. Hurry!

TWO MEN, middle-aged truckers, are engaged in a conversation by the front of their rig. Tatiana sashays past their vehicle on her way to the Café.

They stop talking and watch her as she stumbles on the gravel in her high heels.

Tatiana bends over, removes one shoe, shakes a pebble out as she wobbles precariously on one foot.

FIRST MAN
I bet she falls over.

SECOND MAN
If she does, I'm helping her up.

She slips her shoe on, continues walking.

FIRST MAN
Hey! You!

She turns, looks around, places one hand on her chest in a "who, me?" gesture. The Truckers approach.

FIRST MAN
My friend and I couldn't help noticing...

TATIANA
Yes?

SECOND MAN
How far are you going?

TATIANA
Hmmm...not as far as you think.

FIRST MAN
Do you want a lift?

TATIANA
I'm thirsty.

She fans her face in exaggerated fashion.

INT. ROADSIDE CAFÉ

Tatiana devours a piece of cake and drinks a soda as the two men look on curiously.

In the b.g., as seen through the Café's plate glass window, Dimitri siphons gas from their trailer truck directly into the tank of his panel truck.

The hose slips out, spilling gas on the ground. Dimitri scrambles to replace it. Tatiana sees this and GROANS.

The men look at her questioningly. She smiles.

TATIANA
Ummm...hmmm!... Good!

The WAITRESS puts another slice in front of Tatiana.

A few moments later, Dimitri roars up in his truck, HONKS.

TATIANA
Ummm...my boyfriend! Thanks for the cake!

She stuffs the last of the cake into her mouth, grabs her soda, runs out the door. The truckers exchange a look.

EXT. PARKING LOT

The truckers step outside: watch the panel truck pull away. They're miffed. The Second Man sniffs the air.

SECOND MAN
Her boyfriend...

FIRST MAN

Thanks for the cake, she says....

SECOND MAN

I smell gas.

INT. RIG: STATIONARY

The truck starts, lurches forward several meters, then stalls.

The First Man tries to start it again, but the cylinders won't fire. He looks at the fuel gauge, CURSES.

INT. PANEL TRUCK: MOVING

Dimitri hands her the damp cloth...

DIMITRI

Here.

...and takes a swig from the soft drink bottle as she wipes the dirt from her face.

DIMITRI

Nice work, little sister. This is going to be our lucky day.

She takes the bottle back. He gives her a nasty look.

TATIANA

I need fluids!

DIMITRI

You're not pregnant, are you?

TATIANA

How am I supposed to get pregnant?
I practically live in this truck.

DIMITRI

Just keep it that way. Maybe they don't let you go to America if you're pregnant.

(in english)

You've been practicing english?

TATIANA (serbo-croatian)

You promised me books.

DIMITRI

They're expensive. I couldn't get any this time.

TATIANA (in english)
I see word, I no forget.

Dimitri shakes his head in wonderment.

DIMITRI
You never forget anything. I wish
I had your brains, but me, I got
stuck with the looks and charm.

He grins. Tatiana LAUGHS, punches his shoulder playfully.

DIMITRI
When we get to America, I want a
Mercedes, too.

EXT. BEACH: SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA - DAY

EMMA (9), cute, with big, thoughtful eyes, LAUGHING.

NICK CANADAY (30), in his bathing trunks and a T-shirt,
good physique, strolls with his daughter. He gently parts
the hair on the back of her head, peers.

NICK
How's your head?

EMMA
It's okay.

NICK
Race you to the pier.

EMMA
I don't want to.

NICK
Why not?

EMMA
Let's go back.

NICK
All right.

Nick turns. Emma LAUGHS: takes off running toward the pier.

NICK
Hey!

Nick chases her, but lets Emma reach the pier first.

EMMA
I win!

Nick gently tackles her. She SHRIEKS in mock terror.

NICK
No cheating!

Emma's mood changes. Nick notices and sits up.

EMMA
Is that why you and mom are
getting a divorce? Because of that
man mommy knows?

Nick sits down in the sand. Emma sits beside him.

NICK
It's more complicated than that.

EMMA
Can't you just...just...you know.

NICK
What?

EMMA
Never mind.

Nick kisses her forehead.

EMMA
Want to go for a swim?

NICK
The water's cold, Emma.

EMMA
Race ya!

They jump up, bolt for the surf.

EXT. BEACH ROAD - SAME DAY

A van, moving slowly toward the pier, is being followed by
a sheriff's car.

INT. VAN: MOVING

TERRY CANADAY (30), anxious, is behind the wheel. She sees
Nick and Emma splashing in the surf.

EXT. OCEAN

Emma dog-paddles. Nick swims over to her.

NICK
Are you getting tired?

EMMA
Unh uh.

NICK
I'll swim back with you.

EMMA
No...I'm strong enough. I can do
it on my own.

NICK
You sure?

EMMA
I've been practicing in our pool.

NICK
I'll watch you.

Emma nods, turns and swims to shore.

EXT. BEACH

As Emma steps out of the water a MALE and a FEMALE SHERIFF,
approach her. Terry runs by them and snatches up Emma.

EXT. OCEAN

Nick kicks for shore.

EXT. BEACH

Terry and the Female Sheriff lead Emma away. Nick charges
out of the surf. Emma keeps looking over her shoulder.

NICK
Hey! What's going on?!

SHERIFF
Nick Canaday?

Hands him a court order.

SHERIFF
Lay a hand on that girl again and
I'll come around personally.

Nick reads a restraining order as the Sheriff walks back to
his car.

Nick looks up to see Terry helping Emma into the van.

NICK

Emma!

Terry slams the door, jumps behind the wheel and drives off.

Nick is impotent to do anything but watch the departing van, Emma's face pressed up against the glass.