INT. APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The living room is completely dark and quiet. A CLINK, like keys on lock. The door unlatches and light from the hallway enters the room.

A woman enters. LYDIA, mid-30's, attractive, professional, walks quietly into the kitchen.

INT. APARTMENT, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

She opens the fridge, looks around, closes it, opens the pantry, pulls out a bottle of wine.

INT. APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM

She glides across the room, a glass of red wine in her hands. She stops by the coffee table and grabs a magazine from under it.

INT. APARTMENT, BOYS' ROOM

She opens the door, clicks on the light. Immediately, two boys sit up from their beds and start growling. She clicks the lights back off.

INTRO

Lydia sits on one end of the couch. Chum sits on the couch's arm, Mutt sits happily on the floor.

The professor shuffles slowly from his room, still in pajamas.

LYDIA

Well, no... I'm not your mother... I'm just the professor's wife.

CHUM

I don't understand.

The professor turns the corner and the scene is revealed to him.

PROFESSOR

Lydia?

She turns to face him.

LYDIA Oh, hello Winston. We need to talk.

PROFESSOR Boys go to your room.

CHUM & MUTT

Aw...

The boys leave.

PROFESSOR So... Lydia, you're back.

LYDIA Such a lovely greeting.

PROFESSOR I'm sorry but four years of "hey, how's the wife?" "I have no idea" gets a little repetitive.

LYDIA And what have you been up to in the last four years?

PROFESSOR Well, I'm still teaching at the university if that's what you're asking. LYDIA

That's not what I'm asking.

She gestures toward the corner of the room, where two pairs of eyes are peeking around the corner.

PROFESSOR

Oh... them.

LYDIA Boys, do you know where you came from?

MUTT Well, a mommy and a daddy fall in love, and then they make special with their babymak...

CHUM (interrupting) That's not what she's asking, poobrain.

MUTT I'm not a poobrain, you're a poobrain.

CHUM Dad got us from the shelter.

INT. DOG SHELTER - THE PAST

A slightly younger professor walks down a row of dog cages, accompanied by a SHELTER WORKER. They stop at the cage of dog chum and mutt.

PROFESSOR Aw, look at these two.

SHELTER WORKER If you're interested, you should know that these two won't go without each other. They're brothers.

PROFESSOR

Really?

INT. APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUED FROM BEFORE Lydia opens some space up on the couch.

LYDIA I'm amazed that you remember that. How was life in the shelter?

MUTT It was great, we had our own cages and we got kibble everyday...

PROFESSOR (interrupting) You know, Lydia, it is four AM on a school night. I really think the boys should be getting back to bed.

LYDIA I suppose you're right, Winston.

She stands and grabs the wine bottle on the table. She uncorks it and dumps the remainder of her glass back into it.

LYDIA (CONT'D) I got what I came for anyway.

She opens the door and turns around.

LYDIA (CONT'D) Oh, Winston, I almost forgot. I've opened up a new office in town. You should stop by sometime.

She slips a card on top of the tv set. As she does, she notices a dog bone stuck behind the tv.

She turns back to question it, but is faced with a tableau of the Professor, arms around his two sons, spurning them both to wave her off with big smiles.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Ta.

She disappears out the door. The Professor relaxes.

MUTT Is that our mommy?

PROFESSOR

No.

CHUM But she's your wife, right?

PROFESSOR

Well... yes.

MUTT

Did you get a divorce?

PROFESSOR

No.

CHUM

Why not?

PROFESSOR Sometimes a mommy and a daddy...

He stops and thinks.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D) You know, you really shouldn't have been talking to her, boys?

MUTT

Huh?

PROFESSOR Boys, sit down.

The boys sit on the floor and stare readily up at the Professor.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D) Who knows what a stranger is?

They both raise their hands.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D)

Chum.

CHUM A stranger is a person that you don't know.

PROFESSOR Right, and you should never NEVER talk to strangers.

MUTT But then how do you meet new people?

PROFESSOR You have to be introduced by a grown up that you already know.

CHUM But what about... PROFESSOR (interrupting) No! Talking to strangers is bad. NEVER talk to strangers, not even if they claim to be my wife. Now off to bed without dessert.

CHUM & MUTT

Aw...

They stand and drag themselves off to their rooms.

INT. MISS CRASS'S CLASS - MORNING

The boys walk into the classroom and hang their backpacks up in the cabinet.

CHUM You know what I realized? That woman last night could've been a burger. She might've burgered all our stuff.

MUTT We got lucky, but we'll never let that happen again.

MR. LYDON, tall, skinny, early 30s, enters the classroom, holding a clipboard and some books.

The boys eyeball him strangely, but proceed to their desks.

MUTT (CONT'D) (quietly) Who is that?

CHUM I don't know...

MR. LYDON Kids, let's all sit down at your desks. Miss Crass is out sick today, so I'll be your sub, Mr. Lydon.

CHUM It's a stranger.

GABY You guys, be quiet. If we're not good for the sub, Miss Lucy will be super angry. MUTT That's a stranger.

MR. LYDON I'm gonna be going around and taking role, so please have your homework out so I can check it.

GABY Well, I'm not gonna get in trouble for talking, I'm gonna be good today.

She turns away from them and sits quietly with her hands in her lap and her homework squarely in front of her.

Mr. Lydon stands over them.

MR. LYDON Um... Mutt... do you have your homework ready?

Mutt jumps up from his desk.

MUTT You're a stranger. We're not supposed to talk to you.

MR. LYDON No, it's ok, I'm just a sub... Your teacher is gone...

MUTT I don't wanna hear it, stranger.

Chum jumps up and joins in too.

CHUM Yeah, leave him alone, stranger. Get outta here.

MR. LYDON Please, sit down...

MUTT

Stranger!

CHUM

Stranger!

INT. MISS CRASS'S CLASS - LATER

Principal Dee Williams pulls Mutt off Mr. Lydon and drags him out to the hall where Chum waits.

PRINCIPAL DEE WILLIAMS I'm so sorry about this. I'll call their father right away.

INT. COLLIEWOOD ELEMENTARY, HALL - CONTINUOUS

He kneels before the two boys.

PRINCIPAL DEE WILLIAMS Now why would you two do something like that?

MUTT He's a stranger.

PRINCIPAL DEE WILLIAMS Well, come with me. We'll sort this out with your father.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

Principal Dee Williams sits at his desk, dialing a phone. The boys sit on the couch across from his, slightly ashamed.

> PRINCIPAL DEE WILLIAMS Professor Rayburn... this is Principal Dee Williams with Colliewood Elementary... there's no easy way to say this: your sons attacked a substitute today. We'd like you to come pick them up.

The response on the other line puts a confused look on the Principal's face.

PRINCIPAL DEE WILLIAMS (CONT'D) Just sit tight, boys.

INT. APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM

INTERTITLE: A few minutes before...

A KNOCK on the door. The professor walks over and answers it, revealing Lydia.

PROFESSOR

Well, nice of you to knock this time. What can I help you with?

LYDIA Winston, we need to talk about these two kids of yours.

PROFESSOR

Um... Sure. What do you want to talk about. They're in school, they're doing very well.

LYDIA

Did you adopt two sons to get back at me? Or to fill some sort of void?

PROFESSOR Oh, don't be ridiculous...

LYDIA

When you're lonely, you don't adopt a child, you get a goldfish or a dog or something...

PROFESSOR You know I've always loved children.

TIYDTA

You HATE children! That was one of the terms of our convenient marriage, is that we never ever have children in our home.

PROFESSOR

Look, I have to go.

LYDIA

Where? You don't know how to handle confrontation either. That's why you just make up excuses to leave whenever...

The professor's cell phone RINGS.

PROFESSOR

Hello...

A smile grows on his face.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D) Oh, thank God. I'll be right there!

He hangs up his phone and slyly turns to Lydia.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D) That was the school. The boys are in trouble. I have to go.

INT. APARTMENT COMPLEX, HALLWAY

The professor scoots Lydia into the hall and locks the door behind him.

PROFESSOR Well, it was nice to see you, but I have to take care of my delinquent children.

Lydia pouts as the Professor dances down the hall and skips down a staircase.

She watches him disappear from sight.

She pulls out her cell phone.

LYDIA

Samantha?

SAMANTHA (O.S.) (filtered) Yes?

LYDIA Cancel whatever appointments I have for the day. I need to take care of something.

SAMANTHA (O.S.) Yes ma'am.

INT. PROFESSOR'S CAR

The boys pile in the backseat.

MUTT No school! Woo hoo!

CHUM I kinda like school. MUTT Yeah, but the teacher wasn't even there.

PROFESSOR Boys, we need to talk.

CHUM Don't worry, Dad, we took care of that stranger.

MUTT Yeah, we showed him real good.

PROFESSOR That's the thing though, that wasn't a stranger.

CHUM What do you mean?

PROFESSOR

That was a substitute. Your teacher was gone, so that man was watching her class for her. Like a babysitter.

MUTT A babysitter?

PROFESSOR

Remember the time when I accidentally started a fire at my lab, and I had to go put it out. Mr. Daggers from downstairs babysat you.

MUTT But we know Mr. Dragon. He arrested me.

CHUM

So... if someone puts you in their car and takes you to a room to talk to you... that's ok?

PROFESSOR

I think we're getting a little off topic here... Look. There's going to be a sub tomorrow, a different one. Be nice to whoever it is, ok?

MUTT But what if it's another stranger? PROFESSOR Well, it's going to be someone you've never met before, but be nice to that person, ok?

The boys sit silent, trying to go over this new information in their heads.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D)

0k?

CHUM Sure, dad.

MUTT Yeah, we'll be nice.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX

Lydia's car (a dark, shiny luxury sedan) pulls up onto the curb across from the Professor's apartment.

The window smoothly glides down as Lydia produces a large telephoto lens camera and puts it up to her eye.

Zooming in on the professor's balcony, she sees a pile of squeaky toys. SNAP.

She cranks the film and puts the camera to her eye again. Dog kennels. SNAP.

LYDIA (to herself) Dog kennels?

She puts the camera up one more time to see the closed-in face of Detective Daggers.

DAGGERS Can I help you, ma'am?

INTERMISSION: Ad for SWAT BOT, disciplines your dog so you don't have to.

INT. DAGGERS'S APARTMENT

Daggers leads Lydia into an apartment shaped like the professor's, but furnished much differently.

DAGGERS

I gotta be honest, I'm a little relieved to find out that you were doing... what you were doing.

He pulls out an album and puts it on the table.

DAGGERS (CONT'D) I've been keeping an eye on the Professor for a few months now, on a loan from child protective services.

LYDIA

I thought you worked for the police force.

DAGGERS

Well... There wasn't much to do after the litter ring turned out to be bogus.

LYDIA

So what do you know?

He pulls out a stack of folders and drops them next to the album.

DAGGERS

Nothing. Straight adoption. Their parents gave them up when they were babies.

LYDIA

Babies... but who raised them? He didn't have those boys four years ago. They're at least eight or nine.

DAGGERS

Supposedly they were at the shelter... here, this is the number for the place. I doubt they'll tell you more than they told me.

Daggers hands Lydia a card: BEAGLE BAY SHELTER FOR THE LOST. She takes it and puts it in her purse.

DAGGERS (CONT'D) Look, I can get you any information you want, but my superiors won't be happy if I put too much time into it.

LYDIA I'll let you know if I find anything.

DAGGERS By the way, have you seen that crazy looking thing in his kitchen? I'd give good money to find out what the hell that thing's for.

INT. APARTMENT, KITCHEN - FLASHBACK TO PREVIOUS NIGHT

Lydia opens the refrigerator. She digs through it, tossing aside petri dishes marked with names of diseases. She finds the bottle of wine and rises. Behind her, the light from the fridge casts on the Professor's laser.

She looks at it for a second, then refocuses her attention on the wine.

INT. DAGGERS'S APARTMENT - CONTINUED FROM BEFORE

Back in Dagger's space. Lydia is somehow holding the wine bottle still.

LYDIA You know, I think I might have an idea.

INT. PROFESSOR'S CAR

The professor pulls up to the school. He turns to the boys in his backseat.

PROFESSOR Remember what I said.

MUTT Be nice to strangers.

PROFESSOR

The sub.

CHUM The sub is a stranger. The Professor collapses in exhaustion.

PROFESSOR You know what? That's good enough for today. We'll talk more about this after school.

The boys jump out of the car.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D) Bye! Yeesh...

EXT. COLLIEWOOD ELEMENTARY, PLAYGROUND

The two boys stand on the blacktop, bouncing a ball between each other.

CHUM Our sub is nice. I feel bad about attacking the other one now.

MUTT Yeah, dad was right. Strangers are nice people.

CHUM Not strangers, subs.

MUTT Right, subs.

HOBO (O.S.) Psst. Hey boys.

The boys turn to see a HOBO, raggedy looking, standing in a bush nearby. They approach him.

HOBO (CONT'D) Hey boys, come over here, check this out.

MUTT Wait... are you a stranger... or a sub?

HOBO Um... a sub.

CHUM & MUTT

Oh, ok.

INT. PROFESSOR'S CLASSROOM

The professor stands in front of a massive equation on the wall, he gestures to it.

PROFESSOR And if you just plug in the equation, we get a simple answer of four...

His voice drops off as he looks at the board, confounded.

JAMIE Uh... Professor?

The Professor turns to Jamie, her hand is raised.

PROFESSOR

Yes?

JAMIE I think you were supposed to subtract the two variables, not add them.

He quickly looks over the board and jumps into action with an eraser, wiping off a sign and replacing it.

PROFESSOR A ha! Good work, now... oh wait, here's another... and here.

He wipes off more instances of his mistake, stops, looks at the board, erases half of it.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D) Now, let's...

His cellphone begins ringing on his desk.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D) One second.

He picks up the phone and answers it.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Principal Dee Williams sits at his desk, ear to the phone. He looks dodgingly up at the hobo standing in one corner, the two boys sitting on the bench in the other. PRINCIPAL DEE WILLIAMS Professor... your sons invited a homeless man into their classroom today.

INTERCUTTING:

INT. PROFESSOR'S CLASSROOM

The professor stands, confounded. Jamie gives him a look. He nods in affirmation and starts waving his students off.

> PROFESSOR I can't believe this. I'm so sorry.

PRINCIPAL DEE WILLIAMS That's... more of an appropriate response. Can you make it down here again?

PROFESSOR Yes, I'll be right there.

He hangs up his phone and gathers his papers together. He looks up to address the exiting class.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D) Well, I think we've sorted out this well enough... just solve it on your own, bring it to the next class.

He looks back at the board, it's mostly smeared chalk and a few numbers written out.

INT. PROFESSOR'S CLASSROOM, BACK - CONTINUOUS

Bruce shoves things into his backpack and slings it over his shoulder.

TYLER Dude, you coming to the game tonight?

BRUCE No, dude, they banned beer at the stadium after someone vomited on the scoreboard. We got a keg instead. TYLER Dude, sweet. See you at your place.

EXT. COLLEGE UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

Bruce exits the science building and starts walking down the street, typing on his cellphone as he walks.

He bumps into a few people, but remains fixated on his phone.

He walks straight into Detective Daggers, who stands steadily with his arm holding Bruce in place. Bruce's legs keep walking, he remains eyeing his phone.

> DAGGERS Are you... (looks at a paper) Bruce Salado?

BRUCE Yeah, dude, what's this about?

He wrestles away from his grasp, still texting.

Daggers shoves his badge into Bruce's view. His eyes immediately catch the badge and follow it as Daggers brings it up to his face.

DAGGERS

We need to talk.

He opens the back door on his car and gestures for Bruce to enter. Bruce grudingly obliges.

BRUCE Look, dude, if this is about the scoreboard, I swear it's not my puke. But I can give you names.

INT. DAGGERS'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

The door closes on Bruce. Daggers plops into the front seat.

DAGGERS Just shut up.

EXT. COLLEGE UNIVERSITY CAMPUS - CONTINUOUS

The car takes off.

Lydia sits across the table from Bruce. Her manner is partseductive, part-interrogative.

LYDIA

So... Bruce? What can you tell me about Professor Rayburn's research?

BRUCE

Heh... not much.

LYDIA There's been talk about diseases... Cystic Fibrosis... Down Syndrome... what do these have in common?

BRUCE Um... they're all diseases.

LYDIA I just said... are you or aren't you in Professor Rayburn's class?

BRUCE Look, lady, I'm a law student. The Professor's Genetics class is just an elective.

She jumps onto the desk, leaning over him.

LYDIA But you're IN the class. You have to know something. What do you do in class?

BRUCE I dunno... I just do homework for other classes while he messes around with his laser.

LYDIA

Laser?

BRUCE It's supposed to cure cancer or something...

LYDIA

With a laser?

She moves away from the table and stands off to the side, pinching her forehead with her fingers.

LYDIA (CONT'D) Genetic diseases... in matured cells. He couldn't just cure the disease, the body would already be damaged.

BRUCE

Can I go? I've been pretty hungover all day, and I gotta get some rest before we watch the basketball game tonight.

She looks over to Detective Daggers in the corner and nods. He moves toward Bruce.

DAGGERS Come on, I'll take you back.

They exit the room.

BRUCE (O.S.) Hey, can I get a note for class?

Lydia pulls something from her pocket. It's the card for the Shelter.

EXT. ALLEY

The professor pulls next to an alley. The hobo gets out. The boys wave him goodbye.

The professor drives away quickly.

INT. PROFESSOR'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

The professor drives, not looking to the backseat.

It's a silent drive thus far.

MUTT We did good, huh Dad?

PROFESSOR No... no you didn't... THAT was a stranger.

CHUM But he seemed so nice.

PROFESSOR He could have been dangerous. What makes you think he was nice? MUTT Well, he sure smelled nice.

The professor cringes.

PROFESSOR

Well, just remember that the next time a man approaches you from a bush, he's a stranger.

CHUM

What if a sub comes out of a bush.

PROFESSOR

He wouldn't.

CHUM But what if he does?

MUTT How will we know the difference?

PROFESSOR Ok... what was different between the sub and the stranger?

MUTT Stranger smelled nice.

CHUM Oh, the stranger had a beard!

MUTT

So, strangers smell nice and have beards.

CHUM And subs wear glasses and are sweaty.

The professor's car comes to an abrupt stop.

PROFESSOR No! No NO no No No...

As he objects, he hits his head on the steering wheel.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D) Boys, let's make a side-stop. The professor paces around the room, flailing his arms, expressing all the emotion he can.

PROFESSOR I just don't know if I can do it anymore. I thought I could, but nothing I do seems to be right.

He lies down on a psychiatrist's chair and stares at the ceiling.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D) Nothing seems clear to me right now.

Lydia sits behind her desk, studiously.

LYDIA Let me see what you drew.

The professor grabs a piece of paper. He flips it to reveal a picture of himself, shrugging.

LYDIA (CONT'D) You seem confused.

The professor jumps up in his seat.

PROFESSOR I said that!

LYDIA

Winston, calm down. I'm a CHILD psychiatrist. I'm not really certified to handle your problems. But I might be able to help you with your kids.

He sits back down.

LYDIA (CONT'D) Now, what do you need help with?

PROFESSOR You name it. Potty training, manners, they wander off, they put everything in their mouths...

Lydia eyeballs the clock.

LYDIA What's the problem today?

PROFESSOR

Strangers. They attacked a substitute. And then they invited a homeless man into their classroom.

LYDIA

I think the problem here is that you're trying to hard to tell them WHAT to do and not explaining WHY it is they should do it.

PROFESSOR What does that mean?

LYDIA You spend a lot of time avoiding your real problems. Try opening up to them.

Her view grazes upon the reports she got from Daggers. Her tone changes.

LYDIA (CONT'D) Why don't you try opening up to me, first? Let's talk about adopting your sons.

The professor rises, staring into space, not paying attention.

PROFESSOR No, you're right, open up! That's it. I mean, it's worth a shot!

LYDIA

Winston, wait.

The Professor dashes out of the office. As the door closes, Lydia watches Mutt walk up to the smiling figure of the professor, who takes him into his arms.

The door shuts.

Lydia rifles through the reports on her desk and releases a pensive SIGH. She picks them up and tosses them at a wastebasket. A little card falls out.

Lydia pushes her chair toward the card. Leans over, picks it up.

INSERT: Beagle Bay Shelter for the Lost.

EXT. BEAGLE BAY SHELTER FOR THE LOST

Lydia looks at the card and compares it to the dilapidated building in front of her.

INT. BEAGLE BAY SHELTER FOR THE LOST

A BING. Lydia walks into the waiting room. Strange BARKS can be heard in the background. At the front desk, the RECEPTIONIST talks on the phone, very tired looking.

Lydia approaches the counter and wipes away the dust covering it. Not dust, hair.

The receptionist hangs up the phone and looks Lydia over.

RECEPTIONIST Can I help you?

LYDIA Yes, I'd like to ask about some boys who was adopted from here a few years ago.

RECEPTIONIST Sorry ma'am, no refunds.

Another BING. SOMEBODY enters through the front door, being dragged by a dog.

SOMEBODY Hey, Midge. Got another one here.

RECEPTIONIST Take 'er on back.

Lydia stops him.

LYDIA What a pretty dog. What's her name?

She bends over and starts petting the dog. It licks her hand.

SOMEBODY HER name is Starshine.

The dog drags him off, into the hallway and out of sight. Lydia straightens up and looks back at the receptionist.

> LYDIA This is a dog shelter.

The receptionist blows a bubble while nodding an affirmation. The bubble is covered in hair.

EXT. BEAGLE BAY SHELTER FOR THE LOST

Lydia walks back to her car... slowly mulling over the facts in her head. Her face brightens as the solution pops into her head.

INT. APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM

A KNOCK. The door is opened to reveal Lydia's smiling face. The professor stares back, confused.

> LYDIA You accidentally turned your pet dogs into human boys.

The professor's expression softens.

PROFESSOR Yes! Oh it feels so good to tell someone... How did you find out?

LYDIA It was something I heard as you were leaving yesterday that tipped me off.

INT. LYDIA'S OFFICE - EARLIER

The professor exits into the hall. The door closes behind him as Mutt begins running toward him.

MUTT

Dad!

PROFESSOR (0.S.)

What?

MUTT (O.S.) I made poop. You put it in a bag now, right? That's the deal isn't it?

PROFESSOR (O.S.) Oh God, where?

MUTT (O.S.) In the toilet. PROFESSOR (O.S.) Well, just flush it.

MUTT (O.S.) What about the bag?

PROFESSOR (0.S.) You're not a dog anymore... humans flush it.

MUTT (O.S.) Oh, right, I forgot.

INT. APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUED FROM BEFORE

The professor pinches his forehead with his fingers.

PROFESSOR Actually... he had missed. Ugh.

He turns back to Lydia.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D) So what now? Are you gonna tell everyone? Turn me in as some sort of unethical mad scientist?

LYDIA

Well... I know you didn't do it on purpose. And to be honest, as a child psychologist, I'm very interested in them as subjects.

PROFESSOR

Subjects?

LYDIA

I don't want to cut them open... I just want to get to know them. Gimme some alone time with them once a week, and I'll keep your little secret.

A CRASH. Chum runs out of the bathroom, followed by puddles of water.

CHUM Come quick! We found out how to make the shower faster. But it doesn't stop now.

PROFESSOR Sounds great! You can start now. The professor grabs a jacket and disappears out the door. Lydia takes off after him.

LYDIA In my office... I'm not a babysitter! Winston!

END CREDITS

INT. COLLIEWOOD ELEMENTARY, HALL

Principal Dee Williams stands before the two boys, rubbing his eyes.

PRINCIPAL DEE WILLIAMS Boys, what have we been telling you about talking to strangers?

CHUM Don't talk to strangers.

MUTT

Right. But we already met Jim John yesterday, and he introduced us to Limbo, who introduced us to Scram. See? They're not strangers anymore.

As he talks, the camera pulls back to reveal the line of hobos behind the boys.

HOBO Do you mind if I use your bathroom? Hadn't had a bath in a while.