

LIVE-IN AMERICA

by

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FADE IN

EXT. LOS ANGELES - DOWNTOWN SKYLINE - MORNING

Smog fades the view from the hills. The sun is up. Somewhere.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - FREEWAY - MORNING

Traffic is already at a standstill.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - EAST LA - MORNING

Garbage truck lumbering down a commercial street, stopping to pick up the refuse. Bleak.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - DOWNTOWN - MORNING

Homeless person pushes a shopping cart overloaded with everything he owns.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - GRAUMANN'S - MORNING

Tourists prowl the sidewalk, looking at the hands and feet imprints of the rich and famous. Taking snapshots of the wife and kids.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - DOWNTOWN - MORNING

Cop cars. Flashing lights. Gangstas getting frisked.

EXT. LOS ANGELES SUBURB STREET CORNER - MORNING

Migrant workers wait to be hired for the day.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - SUNSET BLVD. - MORNING

In the distance, the Hollywood sign through a haze of smog. Tall palm trees lining the street are motionless.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - IN THE HILLS - MORNING

A private estate guarded by ornate, wrought iron gates, beyond which perfectly manicured lawns and lush gardens are being watered by an underground sprinkler system.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - RICK BLAISE'S HOUSE - MORNING

A luxury sedan, an exotic sports car and a beaten up old Honda parked in the driveway in front of a shiny steel and glass contemporary home.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - RICK BLAISE'S HOUSE - MORNING

The clear blue water of a large swimming pool behind the house. A SPLASH. A well-tanned MAN glides gracefully under the water. He breaks the surface, takes a big breath and quickly swims a couple of laps, his muscular body churning the water with strong strokes.

As quickly as his swim began, it's over. He pulls himself from the water, grabs a towel, and walks towards the house.

INT. RICK BLAISE'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - MORNING

Towelng his hair, the swimmer slides open the glass patio door and steps into a modern kitchen. His name is RICK BLAISE and if his movie-star good looks don't suggest he actually is a movie star, a FRAMED POSTER on the wall advertising his latest movie, "Weapon of Mass Destruction" is a big clue.

Rick grabs a REMOTE and points it at a huge stainless steel fridge. The TV in the door ignites.

NEWS ANCHOR

Coming up at the top of the hour,  
you may not be drinking enough  
coffee. Plus, should Canada be the  
fifty-first state? Most Americans  
think it already is. But first,  
Tamsin Classel is here with the  
weather. Tamsin?

Rick opens the FRIDGE DOOR...

INT. RICK BLAISE'S FRIDGE - MORNING

Orange juice, kiwi-strawberry-banana with turnip juice, protein drinks, skim milk, and an assortment of low-fat no-fat yogurts, meatless lasagne and tofu fries all neatly arranged. Rick grabs the ORANGE JUICE CONTAINER and closes the door.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TAMSIN (O.S.)

It's a beautiful day out there Rod,  
and it's going to get even nicer  
whenever the smog clears.

Rick gulps orange juice directly from the container,  
finishing the contents. He tosses the empty into the  
recycling bin on his way out of the kitchen.

INT. RICK BLAISE'S HOUSE, POWDER ROOM - MORNING

RICK enters an elegant powder room near the kitchen, stopping  
for a few seconds to inspect his face in the MIRROR.  
Satisfied, he lifts the toilet seat and pees. As he flushes,  
an OPEN PURSE sitting on the toilet tank catches his  
attention. He reaches in and pulls out a bag of white powder.  
Rick sits on the toilet, opens the bag, scoops some powder  
with his fingernail and has a taste. He sighs then quickly  
stands and exits the bathroom.

INT. RICK BLAISE'S HOUSE, STAIRCASE - MORNING

RICK walks quickly up a sweeping, circular staircase.

INT. RICK BLAISE'S HOUSE, MASTER BEDROOM - MORNING

A spacious, elegantly decorated bedroom with morning sun  
trying to sneak in around the closed window blind. STELLA  
KOVACS sleeps soundly in a king-size canopy bed. The bedroom  
door opens, spilling light across the room as RICK strides  
in. He opens the blinds, replacing the dark with light and  
turns to watch her sleep. Stella is a beautiful young woman  
with fine features, pouty lips and a mane of straight, black  
hair. It seems unfair to wake her but Rick doesn't hesitate.

CLOSE IN ON STELLA

A HAND grabs her shoulder and shakes it -- hard.

MOTHER (O.S.)

(in Hungarian) C'mon! You're going  
to be late!

INT. STELLA'S BEDROOM IN HUNGARY - MORNING

A HAND shakes STELLA'S shoulder. She opens her eyes sleepily,  
then closes them again.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STELLA

(in Hungarian) Alright... just one minute.

MOTHER (O.S.)

(in Hungarian) Your father's waiting! It's almost 9 o'clock!

Stella opens her eyes and stares at the walls around her. They are covered in old movie posters, 8x10s of famous actors, assorted sports ribbons for track and field. The SOUNDS OF ACTIVITY coming from downstairs are Stella's final wake-up call. Her father's voice from downstairs...

FATHER (O.S .)

(in Hungarian) Stella! You're going to be late! Let's go! It's a long drive!

INT. STELLA'S HOUSE IN HUNGARY, LIVING ROOM - MORNING

A grey-haired OLD LADY sits in a comfy armchair looking out the front window. STELLA enters wearing fitted jeans and a flattering top. Her black hair is tied in a ponytail. She casts a loving look at NANA, her grandmother. Nana smiles warmly as Stella kneels at her grandmother's knees.

NANA

(in Hungarian) Why do you want to leave us?

STELLA

(in Hungarian) Because I want to be famous.

The old woman's hands gently cup Stella's face.

NANA

(in Hungarian) Don't forget where you came from. You are a beautiful, smart Hungarian girl. Don't be famous. Be happy.

Stella's eyes fill with tears. She kisses her grandmother on both cheeks and hugs her hard.

STELLA

(in Hungarian) Nana, one day you'll see my name all over Hungary.

EXT. STELLA'S HOUSE IN HUNGARY - DRIVEWAY - MORNING

Stella's FATHER is loading TWO LARGE SUITCASES into the family car. He sticks a HUNGARIAN FLAG DECAL on the biggest bag. Her MOTHER and two younger BROTHERS stand nearby looking quite sad. Stella grabs both of her young brothers and squeezes them tightly.

STELLA  
(in Hungarian) I'll send you some  
cool video games. Be good for mom.

Stella can hardly speak as she wipes the tears from her mother's eyes and hugs her tightly. Her mother pulls a CARD from her apron pocket and presses it into Stella's hands.

MOTHER  
(in Hungarian) Use this to call me  
when you get there, okay?

She gently pushes Stella towards the car, where her father is at the wheel.

INT. STELLA'S FATHER'S CAR - MORNING

The car drives further from the house, Stella stares out the back window, not taking her eyes off her family until they are out of sight. Then she turns to face forward and wipes the tears from her eyes, managing a sad smile.

INT. AIRLINER IN FLIGHT - AFTERNOON

With a PEOPLE magazine in her lap, STELLA is startled by the captain's ANNOUNCEMENT.

CAPTAIN (O.S.)  
Ladies and gentlemen, this is your  
captain speaking. We are in final  
approach to Los Angeles  
International. Please make sure  
your tray tables and seats are up  
and your seatbelt is fastened.

The OLDER WOMAN sitting next to Stella has pulled out a rosary and is silently praying. Stella looks out at the sprawling city below her and quickly makes a small sign of the cross on her chest.

INT. LAX, CUSTOMS AND IMMIGRATION - AFTERNOON

Standing in line, Stella's excitement is replaced with nervousness and doubt. Her eyes scan the dozens of US agents interviewing passengers. Stella looks for a friendly face. She smiles when she sees a young and handsome male agent who is smiling as a he chats with a family. Then she sees a large, scowling female agent who looks mean. When it's Stella's turn, she gets the female agent. Shit.

The agent says nothing as she grabs Stella's passport and forms.

IMMIGRATION AGENT  
(impatiently)  
This is the wrong form.

STELLA  
But they said everyone had to fill that one.

IMMIGRATION AGENT  
(handing her another form)  
What is the purpose of your visit?

STELLA  
(searching for the right words)  
Ummm.... Uhhh..

IMMIGRATION AGENT  
Business? Pleasure?

STELLA  
Yes.

IMMIGRATION AGENT  
Are you planning to work in the United States??

STELLA  
Ummm... uhhh... no... it's a vacation.

IMMIGRATION AGENT  
How long are you planning to stay?

STELLA  
Three weeks.

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The agent grunts, loudly stamps Stella's passport with a 6-month visa and throws it on the counter.

IMMIGRATION AGENT  
(she doesn't mean it)  
Have a nice day.

INT. LAX, MAIN CONCOURSE - AFTERNOON

Entering the main concourse of the airport, struggling with her two bags and backpack, Stella wades into a sea of people going this way and that way in a hurry. She is startled by a man's voice behind her.

BUSINESS MAN (O.S.)  
(loudly)  
You're not going to get away with  
this...

Stella quickly turns to see a man talking on his cell phone as he strides by almost knocking her down.

Security officials are everywhere. The noise is a dull roar punctuated by flight boardings and parking restrictions over the PA system. Stella looks for someone she doesn't know, scanning faces, checking handheld signs of limo drivers. Then laughing to herself about thinking there'd be a limo for her.

Looking exhausted and nervous, Stella finds a relatively quiet place to put her bags down where she can watch the sea of humanity flowing passed her. Mothers with unhappy kids. Rich kids with backpacks. Celebrity wannabees in sunglasses. Business men and women. Everyone's in a hurry.

INT. LAX, MAIN CONCOURSE - NEWSSTAND - AFTERNOON

Stella pays the Hispanic clerk for a Coke and a Hollywood Life magazine.

CLERK  
(in Spanish) Hey cutie! How're you  
doing today?

STELLA  
(confused)  
Excuse me?

CLERK  
Sorry... Is that all?



INT. LAX, MAIN CONCOURSE - AFTERNOON

Stella finds an empty seat, drops her two bags, positioning one so the Hungarian flag sticker is visible to all. She opens her Coke and watches the people.

As the time passes, Stella is fascinated by the sea of humanity...

A glamorous woman with entourage, trailed by paparazzi.

A group of athletic looking young guys carrying duffle bags.

A gaggle of blue-haired old ladies dressed way too young for their ages.

A punky looking band carrying guitar cases.

Three cans of Coke sit empty on the floor under Stella's seat -- along with a now well thumbed and creased Hollywood Life magazine. Stella's feet are propped up on her two bags as she sleeps in her seat.

DOLORES (O.S.)  
Stella? Stella Kovacs?

Stella's eyes pop open and standing on the other side of her bags is Dolores, a young, dark-haired, plain-looking woman in jeans and a t-shirt who is gently shaking Stella's foot.

DOLORES (cont'd)  
Are you Stella Kovacs from  
Mateszalka?

Stella sits up quickly and goes to stand, knocking one of her bags into Dolores and then kicking her empty Coke cans with a clatter into the airport concourse.

STELLA  
Yes... Yes...

Dolores smiles warmly and extends her right hand, which Stella tentatively takes.

DOLORES  
I'm Dolores from the agency...  
well, I'm from Debrecen. But I'm  
working at the agency.

(CONTINUED)

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STELLA  
(still trying to wake up)  
Hi.

DOLORES  
I'm so sorry we are so late but  
Gabor had to make a few stops on  
the way. He's outside and he hates  
to wait... c'mon!

EXT. LAX - RAMP OUTSIDE OF CONCOURSE - AFTERNOON

Standing on the pavement on the driver's side of his big white Mercedes, Gabor, a tall, rough-looking but handsome man around 40, is arguing loudly with an airport security cop.

GABOR  
C'mon! I'm waiting for my  
grandmother. She can't walk very  
far. Gimme a break!

COP  
Sir, you cannot stop and wait here.  
You must keep your vehicle moving

GABOR  
(removing his sunglasses)  
No, no, no, no, no... That's no  
good. She's expecting me to be  
right here. She'll get lost. Help  
me out!

COP  
Move your vehicle, sir.  
(into his radio)  
I need some assistance on the ramp.

Stella and Dolores struggle to get the two heavy bags to the curb.

DOLORES  
(to Gabor)  
Gabor, this is Stella Kovacs.

Gabor doesn't even look at the two women as he leans into the driver's side of the car and pops the trunk.

GABOR  
Yeah, whatever. Just get in the  
fucking car before this moron has a  
coronary.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Gabor gets in the car, leaving Stella and Dolores to heave the bags into the trunk.

INT. GABOR'S MOVING CAR - AFTERNOON

Gabor is talking on his cell phone as Dolores, in the front, and Stella, in the back, chat.

GABOR  
 (into his cell phone)  
 Hello Mrs. Morris it's Gabor Szabo  
 from the agency. How are you?

DOLORES  
 (to Stella)  
 It's a long flight, isn't it?

STELLA  
 I was sleep...

GABOR  
 (very warm and friendly)  
 Great! Well, I have some good news  
 for you, I've got someone who will  
 be just perfect for your kids.

Gabor half turns to Stella and covers the cell phone mouthpiece.

GABOR (cont'd)  
 (to Stella, rudely)  
 You speak English?

STELLA  
 Yes, I can speak...

GABOR  
 (cutting her off and  
 getting back on the cell  
 phone)  
 Oh yes, she's very experienced.  
 She's trained as an early childhood  
 educator and she's been here for 3  
 years.

STELLA  
 (confused)  
 No... I don't have that...

Gabor signals her to be quiet.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GABOR  
(on the cell phone)  
Certainly, Mrs. Morris. I'll have  
her there tomorrow. No, I thank  
you! Have a great day!

He folds up his cell phone and Stella leans forward.

STELLA  
Gabor, I don't have that kind of  
training.

Gabor reopens his cell phone and dials.

GABOR  
You wanna work here?... uh...  
(to Dolores)  
What's her name?

STELLA  
Stella. Stella Kovacs.

GABOR  
(his call is connected)  
Yeah... give me Jimmy.

Stella looks over at Dolores, who shrugs with a sympathetic smile of helplessness. Stella sits back, looking out the window, her face angry.

EXT. LA - SUBURBAN STREET - AFTERNOON

A poor neighbourhood. Shabby, rundown houses ringed by rusted Frost fencing showing large gaps. Kids play in yards, on the curbs and on the street. Gabor's big white Mercedes races down the street way too fast.

INT. GABOR'S MOVING CAR - AFTERNOON

Gabor is talking on the cell phone and casually steering with one hand.

GABOR  
(into the cell phone)  
No, ee had a deal... (beat) I don't  
care how much fucking money it cost  
you!

(CONTINUED)

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Through the windshield a little girl has lost control of her bike with training wheels and she is rolling into the street. Stella and Dolores see her at the same time and sit forward.

STELLA & DOLORES  
(panicked)  
Gabor!

EXT. LA - SUBURBAN STREET - AFTERNOON

Gabor casually shifts the wheel and the white Mercedes just misses the girl but she is so frightened by the close call she falls hard onto the pavement. Gabor pulls his car over to the curb and stops. Stella and Dolores leap from the car and run back to the little girl as Gabor calmly walks up the path towards the house. He is still talking on the cell phone. Stella is the first to get to the little girl, who is crying very hard.

STELLA  
(helping the girl up)  
Oh my god! Are you alright? Let me see your knees.

The girl's knees are badly scraped and bleeding. Stella tries to brush the gravel off the wounds but the girl screams in pain. She picks up the girl and walks towards the house.

Gabor sees what Stella is doing, pulls his cell phone away from his ear and stops walking.

GABOR  
What are you doing?

STELLA  
She needs some soap and water and a bandage.

GABOR  
Are you her mother?

STELLA  
I just want to help...

GABOR  
You wanna help her? Tell her to stay off the fucking street. She's not coming in here.

INT. GABOR'S HOUSE - HALLWAY NEAR THE BEDROOMS - AFTERNOON

The inside is dark and dingy. Dolores and Stella drag the heavy bags down a dark hallway and into a bedroom. There are 4 dirty mattresses on the floor. Stella looks across the hall into another room across the hall and sees 4 more filthy mattresses. She is disgusted and defeated. What has she done?

STELLA  
(to Dolores)  
Where's the bathroom?

INT. GABOR'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - AFTERNOON

In the dingy bathroom, whatever remaining tiles still attached to the walls are cracked, the shelves are empty, the mirror is broken and discoloured, the bathtub is dirty. Stella looks into the toilet and flushes it with disgust. She stares into the stained mirror.

STELLA  
(quietly to herself)  
(in Hungarian) What have I done?

A soft knock on the bathroom door.

DOLORES (O.S.)  
Stella? You okay?

STELLA  
Yeah. Give me a minute.

INT. GABOR'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Stella enters the bedroom and sees Dolores has placed her bags next to one of the mattresses.

DOLORES  
(cheerfully)  
This one's near the window so you can get a breeze at night. It's right next to mine... we can talk when we can't sleep.

Stella is about to speak when Gabor walks in and throws some papers on Stella's mattress.

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CONTINUED:

GABOR

Okay, here's how it works. First, the rules: never answer the phone, no showers before I get up, don't talk to the neighbours, buy your own food and drinks. Okay? I get you live-in work and you give me your first 5 week's pay for your food and accommodations. Got it?

Stella looks at him in shock.

STELLA

You get the first five weeks?

GABOR

Yeah. And I need your passport for the insurance.

STELLA

(surprised)

What insurance?

GABOR

To insure I get my money... your first five weeks.

STELLA

(angry)

In Budapest they said I already paid for everything... food, a place to stay...

GABOR

(impatient)

This is LA, not Budapest, okay? You don't like it? Call a cab and go home. There's lots more like you.

Stella's anger is visible in her face and her body language. She starts to talk but Gabor cuts her off.

GABOR (cont'd)

Your first interview is tomorrow. Remember, you've been here for three years. Tell them you can start right away. But first, I need your passport.

Stella hesitates, but finally pulls her passport from her bag and hands it to Gabor. His cell phone rings and he walks out as he answers, speaking loudly.

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GABOR (cont'd)  
 (into the cell phone)  
 Yeah. (beat) No, not today! (beat)  
 Next week, for fuck's sake! Yeah,  
 yeah... I'm sending someone to get  
 it. Don't worry.

Stella turns to Dolores, who wears that same sympathetic,  
 embarrassed smile from before.

STELLA  
 What is this? The agency said  
 everything was covered.

DOLORES  
 (resigned)  
 Gabor says the agency is cheating  
 him, so we have to make up the  
 difference.  
 (cheering up)  
 But at least you got your first  
 interview! That's cool, huh?

INT. MORRIS'S HOME - MORNING

Stella admires the opulent decor of the enormous living room  
 from her perch on the edge of a large couch. She looks as  
 small as she feels. Huge paintings hang on every wall. Giant  
 displays of fresh flowers colour the room. Stella stiffens  
 when she here's a man's voice.

ROBERT MORRIS (O.S.)  
 (loudly)  
 I would never agreed to that,  
 Arthur! (beat) I don't care what  
 you tell them. (beat) Oh c'mon!  
 That's a fair offer and they know  
 it. (beat) No it's not!

Robert Morris enters the living room holding a portable  
 phone. He takes one look at Stella...

ROBERT MORRIS (cont'd)  
 I gotta go. (beat) Yeah, speak to  
 you later.

He turns off the phone and walks over to Stella, extending  
 his right hand.

ROBERT MORRIS (cont'd)  
 Hi, I'm Robert Morris.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

STELLA  
(taking his hand)  
Stella Kovacs.

Robert Morris continues shaking her hand a little too long, his eyes focused on Stella's chest.

ROBERT MORRIS  
Very nice to meet you Stella.

ELLEN MORRIS (O.S.)  
Ahem...

Robert drops Stella's hand and turns to see his wife, Ellen Morris, a mid-fortyish woman with beautifully styled, but dyed, blonde hair, standing in the doorway. She is wearing an expensive, dark blue skirt suit and she doesn't look happy.

ROBERT MORRIS  
Honey, this is Stella.

ELLEN MORRIS  
(coldly)  
I know. (beat) Aren't you seeing patients this morning?

ROBERT MORRIS  
(enthusiastic)  
I've got some time to join you.

Ellen takes a seat on the couch opposite Stella, while Robert settles into a plush wingback chair next to her. His eyes are devouring Stella. Ellen's eyes are on Robert as she talks to Stella.

ELLEN MORRIS  
So, Stella, they tell me you have been in America for three years. What have you been doing?

Stella pauses, thinking hard about the question.

STELLA  
(cheerfully)  
Well, I have been studying early childhood education...

## EXT. RODEO DRIVE - AFTERNOON

Stella is smiling as she window shops. The boutiques are fabulous and she is captivated by the gorgeous dresses, shoes and bags in the windows.

In front of the Gucci store, she has to stop as a beautiful woman in a great outfit and sunglasses exits, followed by an assistant carrying several shopping bags. Stella watches in awe as the two women load the bags and themselves into a large black limousine.

## INT. SHOE STORE - AFTERNOON

Stella is admiring a lovely pair of tan, high heeled slingbacks. She kicks off her own shoes and slips the heels on. A bored looking sales clerk approaches, giving Stella the once over with disdain.

CLERK  
(snobbily)  
Can I help you?

Stella is admiring the shoes in a mirror.

STELLA  
I'm just looking.

CLERK  
They're Jimmy Choo's. \$1299.

## INT. STARBUCKS - AFTERNOON

Stella sips a tall latté as she stands at a payphone. She pulls the phone card her mother gave her and slides it through the reader. After many rings.

STELLA  
(in Hungarian) Hi mom, it's me.  
(beat) Good! It's so great here.  
(beat) Yeah, I had an interview this morning. And I sent my application for a film school here in Los Angeles. (beat) I don't know. (beat) Oh yeah! The people here are so nice. (beat) I miss you, too.

(CONTINUED)