

THROUGH THE FIRE

Written by

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Inspired by

A True Story

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OVER BLACK:

A cracked windshield forms as we hear the sounds of a major CAR CRASH and a WOMAN'S HEAVY BREATHING.

INT/EXT. 1989 VM VANAGON CAMPER - GOLDEN HOUR (NOT MOVING)

Through a cracked windshield: **ZOE** (28) watches a dented Tesla parked ahead on the emergency lane of the 101 freeway.

Her phone screen illuminates: "6:10 PM - SARAH'S DANCE RECITAL (*in 20 minutes*)".

ZOE (V.O.)
Seven hundred and thirty-two days
since I last missed something
important. Since I promised her -
promised myself - that wouldn't
happen again.

DYLAN (40) - pressed khakis, contained rage - gets out the Tesla.

Zoe exits the van, insurance card ready.

ZOE (V.O.)
The thing about men like him - you
learn to read them early. The
carefully pressed clothes. That
particular way of walking. How they
make themselves bigger in the
doorway.

INT/EXT. DYLAN'S TESLA - GOLDEN HOUR (NOT MOVING)

Dylan towers over Zoe. She meets his eyes, steady.

ZOE (V.O.)
Three feet. That's the sweet spot.
Close enough to seem cooperative.
Far enough to run if needed.

He moves closer. She steps back, the distance precise. Card extended, hand steady. Through her eyes: his phone, slow, deliberate, photographing her insurance card.

Smoke curls from beneath her van's hood. Zoe notices it first - genuine fear on her face.

ZOE (V.O.)

My whole life going up in smoke,
and I'm standing here playing nice
with another man who thinks he owns
the air I breathe.

Dylan's mouth moves, a twist of male anger. No sound reaches her. He doesn't notice the smoke until she interrupts him and points it out.

QUICK CUTS: Dylan turns. Tesla door slams. He's gone. Her face hardens, facing the smoke.

INT. ZOE'S VAN - DRIVER'S SEAT DOOR - GOLDEN HOUR

Rush of heat as she climbs into the burning van -- she sees a fire burning in her car engine.

She takes out a photo from the glovebox - herself watching her daughter, SARAH (5), blowing out the candles on a birthday cake.

Suddenly, the wind snatches it out of her hand and out the open passenger window. She runs after it, but it's no use.

ZOE (V.O.)

One day a week. Four precious hours
where I get to be her mom again.
Where I try to prove... But here I
am. Another recital I'll miss.
Another reason for the courts to
say he was right about me.

EXT. BACK OF ZOE'S VAN - GOLDEN HOUR

The open back hutch reveals her methodically organized home - carpet, bed, storage. Flames lick at the carpet, the bed. She grabs a plastic bin of clothes. She coughs, backs away.

EXT. SIDE OF THE ROAD - NIGHT

Perched on the clothes bin, Zoe watches her home burn. Just the bin, backpack. Firetruck sirens SCREAM closer.

LATER

Van's skeleton - beyond recognition, steaming. Firefighters hose down the ashes.

EXT. WOODLAND HILLS STREET CORNER - SIDEWALK - NIGHT

Graffiti wall at Zoe's back. Phone scrolls to a contact named "ASSHOLE". Her thumb trembles over dial - stop, stop, stop - then presses. A man picks up - this is CALEB (28).

CALEB (ON PHONE)
Yeah? What is it, Zoe? It's late.

ZOE (INTO PHONE)
Victory and Fallbrook. Uh...could you get here? ...Please?

A heavy sigh.

LATER

She waits - each second feels like forever...until Caleb's car pulls up to the curb.

INT/EXT. CALEB'S CAR - NIGHT (MOVING)

In the back seat sleeps SARAH (now 7) - small and quiet in the back seat, Hello Kitty plush, dance costume hint beneath her coat. Mid-conversation, whispering:

CALEB (O.S.)
You always do this shit. It's midnight. She has school tomorrow.

ZOE
Hey, can we just...not do this right now? Please? Not in front of Sarah.

Zoe in the passenger seat. Caleb a shadow. Sarah's reflection in the mirror - blank eyes. A BUMP in the road causes Sarah to wake up.

CALEB (O.S.)
There's no bumps in the road if she was home, sound asleep.

Sarah's eyes meet hers in the mirror, then flick away. Zoe's trembling hands reach for the LEGO set in her backpack.

CALEB (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(sighs performatively)
This again, huh? Gotta buy your way back in, I guess.

Shoulders tense, but Zoe ignores his glare.

ZOE
(to Sarah)
Look what I got for you.

SARAH
Oh. Wow, you got it.

ZOE
Just like the one in your dance. I
heard it was beautiful.

Sarah takes the set, hesitating as she glances at her father.

SARAH
...Thanks, Mom.

ZOE
I'm--I'm so sorry I missed it,
Sarah.

SARAH
It's okay. Dad filmed it.

CALEB (O.S.)
(under his breath)
Someone had to.

Silence, heavy. Zoe's hands clench, then release. Caleb checks his phone.

ZOE (V.O.)
How do you tell your kid that
everything you built to prove you
were stable enough, safe enough,
mother enough - just went up in
flames?

Through the windshield: Streetlights strobe across Zoe's face as the car passes them, each flash revealing more of her composure crumbling, until:

FADE TO BLACK.