

SIDETRACKED

Written by
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A 17-minute film
Presentation Pilot to a 12-episode series, *Sidetracked*

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FADE IN:

INT. RESTAURANT ALBANY NY - DAY

MARI, 21, freckles across her nose and cheeks, athletic build, cute, wipes the last of 15 tables in a shotgun style bar with Boston ferns hanging from the ceiling.

The bartender, GINO, 45, pale, black hair, skinny, wipes down the bar. Gino tries not to look at Mari's chest. Her nipples stand up against her bra and white silk blouse. She notices his glance, reaches an arm across to shield herself, wipes a table.

The knee-length black skirt slit opens to reveal her thigh. She snatches at the skirt edges, tries to cover up.

GINO

Busy lunch shift today. You got your bike? It's raining.

MARI

I'll get wet. Not the first time.

She sits on a barstool. Gino hands her a shot of bourbon. She grins, downs it, concentrates, counts out her tips. A radio plays news.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Experts debate what Reaganomics will mean as President Reagan signed major tax cut legislation today..

SUE, 50s, the only customer left in the restaurant, slumps at a table, a large empty wine glass in her hands, stares morosely at glass, dark hair, glasses, wears a black pencil skirt and pink blouse, cut medium low, HUGE shoulder pads.

GINO

(to Mari)

Good haul?

MARI

Gotta pull in \$100 a week.

GINO.

That covers tuition?

MARI

I got a teaching assistantship.

Sue perks up, listens to their conversation, gets up.

GINO
Smart kid. Still with the mystery
boyfriend in Colorado?

MARI
Jack -- hates being tied down.
Hates Albany.

Sue staggers to the bar, her ankle turns on her heels, the
shoulder pads are lopsided.

GINO
(to Mari)
What's not to like?

Sue bellys up to the bar.

SUE
(slurs)
Albany is one of the ten bottom
places on earth. Blighted
neighborhoods, boarded up
buildings, eviscer..
(stumbles on word)
Evicerrrr-a-ted downtown, muggers
in every alley. A political machine
sheister mayor for forty years.

Gino comes around the bar while she talks, takes her elbow,
guides her toward the door. Sue waggles her finger at Mari.

SUE
Your boyfriend is right, dearie...

MARI
Mari...

SUE
Stay away from this town. It's
dis... diss.. .ease.

She stumbles. Gino catches her. Sue looks into Gino's eyes.

SUE
You're cute. How about you and me
blow this popsicle stand?

GINO
I said no yesterday, Sue. And it's
no today. Back to the office now.

Sue tries to straighten up, bumps her HUGE shoulder pads
against Gino. She grabs the pads, straightens them.

SUE

(loudly)

I look like a goddamn football player. The great 1980s, time of women's liberation..ss, my ass.

Sue warms and starts girating her hips to a 1982 jingle from an Enjoili perfume commercial.

SUE

I can bring home the bacon, fry it up in a pan...

Gino opens the door, ushers Sue out.

OUTSIDE

Sue appears in the front three pane window, open on both sides, cups her hands, peers in as big glasses.

SUE

(yells)

...and never, never let you forget you're a man.

Sue pushes her chest against the middle glass, cleavage shows.

INSIDE

GINO

See ya Monday, Sue.

Gino grins at Mari, whips the dish towel from his shoulder, holds it in front of Sue's chest in the window. Mari laughs, shakes her head. Gino drops the towel. Sue is gone.

Gino comes back to the bar. The radio plays Between the Sheets, the Isely Brothers.

MARI

Jack's mother in North Carolina kicked him out when he was 16, sent him here to be with his drunk father.

Gino pulls out a pouch, lines up white powder on the bar.

MARI

Jack worked his way through community college, pulled his father out of every bar in town.

GINO
We all got a story.

Gino snorts a line. Mari puts a dollar bill on her pile, stops, looks dreamy.

MARI
He's amazing. He jumped through an open window into French class, dropped a violet on my desk.

GINO
Give me a break.

MARI
We hitchhiked to Aspen, lived in a tent.

GINO
Very responsible.

MARI
He's an entrepreneur. Started a business taking ski photos of kids. I worked in a book store.

GINO
Why did the happy couple break up?

MARI
I came back east for graduate school. He stayed.

GINO
That works for you?

MARI
I don't know.

Mari counts the last one dollar into a pile, stacks quarters.

MARI
Made it.

She grabs her jean jacket from a coat hook.

Gino lays out another line.

GINO
Want some?

MARI

(pulls jacket tight)
 Nah. See ya next week, Gino. Don't
 party too hard this weekend.

Gino gives her a wave, stoops over to snort up his snow. She takes off out the back door.

EXT. MARI'S STUDENT APARTMENT - DAY

In the rain, Mari peddles hard down the street. She's soaked. She hears guitar playing and singing. She approaches her dumpy apartment building that sags to the right with a covered front porch that sags to the left.

JACK, sits on the steps. He's 24, trim hair cut, lithe strong body. A full pack and soft guitar case sit next to him.

JACK

You've got me movin', a weavin' a
 groovin'. I'm flipping just like a
 flop. You've got me goin, a
 whirlin' around now. I'm giddy just
 like a top. Mari, I love you so, if
 you could only know.

She dumps her bike at the foot of the stairs of a dumpy apartment building, charges up the steps. Jack drops the guitar.

She throws herself into his arms. He catches her, kisses her.

Mari pulls away, wrinkles her nose.

MARI

Did you bring a skunk with you?

JACK

My pack.
 (kisses Mari)
 Got sprayed.
 (kisses her again)
 When I got out after my last hitch.

He kicks the pack away from them, grabs Mari again.

EXT. ALBANY PARK - NIGHT

Jack and Mari lie on a blanket, look at bright stars. Mari shivers. Jack wraps the blanket tightly around her, holds her to warm her up.

JACK
Where could we go together?

MARI
My Master's Degree is here.

JACK
I won't live in upstate New York.

MARI
Just a year for my school?

JACK
There's someplace better, like
Aspen. And Cannes. France was
amazing.

MARI
We know what happened in Aspen. And
I was an intern in Cannes for a
year and you visited. Big deal. It
wasn't settled, secure.

JACK
But so cool. We windsurfed the
Mediterranean. We went to the film
festival.

He sighs with pleasure. His arm is under Mari's head. He strokes her hair.

JACK
We could go to Burlington.

MARI
Why?

JACK
It's beautiful, happening, like the
West, like the coast of France.

MARI
What about my scholarship?

JACK
You can transfer to the University
of Vermont.

Mari draws away.

MARI
What normal thing would you do?

ACK
I got an idea.

MARI
Why doesn't this surprise me?

JACK
I'd start a windsurfing school on
Lake Champlain. It could catch on.

MARI
You took one lesson. How can you
teach?

JACK
I'll get a book from the library.

MARI
And the wolf carries you on his
back to the lake and teaches you to
sail. When you get tossed from the
board in high winds and drown
because you don't know what you are
doing, the wolf brings the water of
life to restore you.

JACK
What are you talking about?

MARI
Tsarevich Ivan in a Russian
fairytale I read as a kid. Ivan
captures the golden firebird and
wins the princess.

JACK
You are the Princess and your name
is Arwen, half-elfin daughter of
Elrond, and Evening Star, the most
beautiful of the high elves of
Middle Earth. You give up
immortality to be with me.

Jack strokes Mari's face. She snuggles in again.

MARI
I don't want to be away from you.

JACK
Me either you.

MARI
If only I knew what to do.

JACK
 Follow your heart.
 (chants a sing-song rhyme)
 I love you and I hope you love me
 too...

MARI
 (chants back)
 I do. I do. And I hope you love me
 too...

JACK
 (continues the chant)
 I do. I do. And I hope you...

INT. PROFESSOR'S OFFICE - SUNY ALBANY - DAY

DR. KANE, 60s, bald, slight-build, academic, stoops over papers. Mari walks in.

DR. KANE
 Mari, all registered for fall?
 Second year students get a raise.

Mari steps back, twists her hands.

MARI
 I, uh, I'm not staying, Dr. Kane...

Kane jerks upright, anger flushes his face.

DR. KANE
 Young lady, it's too late to pull
 out. We'll lose your Fall stipend.

MARI
 I'm in love. I have dreams. I..

DR. KANE
 (throws up his hands)
 Love! Dreams! Education lasts.

Mari slowly steps backward toward the door.

MARI
 I'm sorry, Dr. Kane. I apologize...

DR. KANE
 You're throwing away a chance. You
 could be a professor.

MARI

I don't want to be a professor. I want an exciting life, in a beautiful place.

She slams the door on the way out.

EXT. NEW YORK CONNECTOR HWY 279 - DAY

Jack and Mari stand at the base of the interstate ramp where cars pass. A road sign reads, LEAVING THE EMPIRE STATE.

She wears a large back pack, jean shorts, t-shirt, bandana, hiking boots. Jack has the same gear and his guitar. They look alike. Spring leaves open on the trees.

JACK

We're good. Great traffic.

Jack drops his pack on the roadside. Mari does the same. Jack sticks out his thumb. Mari does too.

JACK

Stay behind me a little. We don't want any crazy guy picking us up because he's looking for a girl.

Mari steps behind him, sticks her thumb high above his.

MARI

I feel like a second class citizen.

JACK

I know more about hitchhiking than you do, so just go along, OK?

A state trooper cruiser approaches, pulls over into the breakdown lane near the couple.

JACK

Uh oh. Let me handle this.

An OFFICER gets out, approaches.

MARI

Are we illegal?

JACK

Not now, Mari.

MARI

I wish I could say not now...

JACK
Be quiet. Please.

Jack steps in front of Mari. Mari peeks out from behind.

MARI
(mumbles)
..and somebody would listen.

OFFICER
Where are you kids going?

JACK
Burlington, Vermont, Officer.

The officer takes his sunglasses off, stares at them through beady eyes.

OFFICER
You can't hitchhike on the highway.

Mari peaks out from behind Jack, stares at the officer's handcuffs and gun that hang from his belt.

MARI
Will we get arrested?

Jack gives her a shush motion.

JACK
Officer, we just finished college
and want to get jobs.

OFFICER
Get in the car.

Mari's eyes fly wide. She nudges Jack with her elbow. Jack reaches his arms wide to shield her.

OFFICER
I'll take you over to Route 7. You
can hitch from there.

Jack heaves a sigh of relief. Mari brightens.

EXT. ROUTE 7 - DAY

Jack and Mari get out of the trooper's car onto the two lane road. A road sign reads - WELCOME TO VERMONT. Jack comes to the driver's window.

JACK
Thanks, Officer.

OFFICER

(smiling)

I got a kid your age. Good luck.

The officer takes off. Jack and Mari set their packs at the side of the road. A car approaches, they stick out their thumbs. The car passes.

MARI

Tell me story.

JACK

Not that again.

MARI

Come on.

JACK

I don't want you to get bored with my repertoire.

MARI

I'll never get bored.

JACK

You've heard all my stuff.

MARI

I like that you took care of those young kids in the Uhaul full of beer. Shows your soft side.

JACK

No soft side.

MARI

Can't fool me. Come on, play the game.

JACK

OK. Pick a state.

MARI

Utah.

JACK

Hitched from California into Utah and got stuck. No rides. Had to hop a train...

EXT. ROUTE 7 - LATER

Mari sits on the side of the road, listens, pulls apart a daisy. Pulled apart daisies are piled at her feet.

JACK

After the cops let me go, the Coors Truck kids picked me up.

MARI

Have you hitched all the states?

JACK

Most of 'em.

MARI

You're amazing.

JACK

Just average.

MARI

How many miles?

JACK

No idea.

MARI

How many times across the U.S.?

JACK

You ask too many questions.

MARI

Humor me.

JACK

Six or so.

MARI

Down and back to Florida and New Orleans, right?

She counts on her fingers.

MARI

(mumbles)

Six times across U.S. Florida, New Orleans...

(brightly looks up)

35,000 miles. Have you read Kerouac?

JACK

Of course. He had it easy, drove a car. He tripped out, thought men were all good. I saw a lot on the road that didn't look so good.

MARI

Does that make you cynical?

JACK

More questions.

MARI

Just tell me.

JACK

I relate more to Steinbeck characters. They set out from a bad situation to find something better.

MARI

Did you find a something better?

JACK

I must have. I'm with you.

MARI

You just love life, no matter how desperate it is.

JACK

Ok. Enough. How about your hitch trips?

MARI

You're like Lazarus Long.

JACK

You read Heinlein? Enough already. How many miles?

MARI

(counts fingers, mumbles)
To Virginia and back, across New York state, around Europe, out west with you.

(looks unimpressed)
Maybe 3,000. Nothing

JACK

No. You are so smart. And you hitchhike.

He reaches out to touch her cheek.

JACK
You come like a man.

MARI
I go after what I want.

JACK
You make great campfire meals.

MARI
I get hungry.

They kiss. Mari sits on the road, leans against her pack, draws her knees to her chin.

MARI
Someday I'll write a book about
your hitchhiking stories.

JACK
Yah, you'll have editor meetings in
New York City. I'll come see from
my sailboat after a trip around the
world.

MARI
I'll buy a hotel room for us, get
you a suit for my press conference.

JACK
No hotel! No suit!

They laugh. Jack takes his guitar out of the soft case, tunes, strums, starts a tune, sings Carolina in the Pines.

Mari starts dancing, hair flying.

JACK
She came to me, said she knew me,
said she'd known me a long time,
and she talked trails we walked up
far above the timber line. From
that night on, I knew I'd write
songs with Carolina in the Pines.

He stops playing, looks down the road at a oncoming van.

JACK
Give' em the vibe.

He sets down the guitar, sticks out his thumb. Mari sticks out her thumb.

INT. VAN - DAY

They crowd three in the front seat. Jack is in the middle. A beagle, SPIKE, sits on Mari's lap. The back of the van is full of electrical equipment.

RALPH

Sorry about the mess.

He snaps his fingers toward the floorboards. Spike gets down. Ralph eyes Mari's bare legs in jean shorts, raises his eyebrows.

RALPH

Summer is crazy with construction.

JACK

Where are they building?

RALPH

Up by the border. Montrealers want vacation homes. The problem is finding an employee to speak Frog.

Spike leans against Mari's bare legs. She rubs his ears. The dog buries his head in Mari's crotch.

MARI

I took business French.

Ralph glances at Mari and Spike, nudges Jack with his elbow.

RALPH

Sometimes it pays to be a dog, huh?

Ralph laughs. Jack takes off the blue bandana from around his neck, covers Mari's legs.

MARI

(butts in)

I could translate for Canadians.

Jack puts his fingers to his lips to shush Mari.

RALPH

(ignores Mari)

What's your job experience, kid?

Mari leans forward, pushes Jack back against the seat.

MARI

(loudly)

I've taught high school, waited tables, and worked in a book store.

Besides cleaning houses,
babysitting and grocery store
cashier since I was ten. And you're
a male chau...

JACK
(desperate to stop her)
...shoving aside the competition,
good job...

Ralph slams on the brakes, veers to the side of the road.

RALPH
If you're so independent, lit'l
lady, you can walk to Burlington.

Jack looks astonished at Mari, pushes her out the door.

JACK
No problem, Ralph...

They scramble out the door, hold their gear, as Ralph roars
off.

JACK
I told you to stop. You were
annoying him.

MARI
He's a male chauvinist...

JACK
...so what. It was a ride. You're
supposed to get along with the
driver no matter what.

MARI
...pig!

Mari struggles to get her pack on. A car approaches. Jack
sticks out his thumb. The car passes.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Mari wipes beads of sweat from her glass of strawberry
daiquiri, picks up her straw wrapped in paper. Jack has a
shot of bourbon and a beer. Fleetwood Mac sounds from the
speaker.

STEVIE NICKS VOICE
Oh, mirror in the sky, what is
love?

Can the child within my heart rise
above? Can I sail through the
changin' ocean tides? Can I handle
the seasons of my life?

JACK
I earned this.

MARI
We got another ride.

JACK
Yah, after we walked for five
miles.

MARI
It wasn't my fault he wouldn't
listen to me.

JACK
The dog liked your attention.

Mari blows her straw paper, hits him in the face.

MARI
Jack, that's a terrible thing to
say. It's such a man's world.

JACK
Never stopped you.

MARI
I want times to change.

JACK
Change 'em.

MARI
Not 'til I get some food and sleep.

JACK
We can get restaurant jobs tomorrow
and eat on shift. Now we find a
place to camp.

Jack gets up. Mari digs in her pcket, dumps a crumpled dollar
on the table.

JACK
We need that for coffee.

Mari scoops it back up, drops a quarter, walks next to Jack
toward the door.

JACK
You still got that \$400 tax return
check?

MARI
I'm saving it.

JACK
We can buy a used Jap truck and
live in it at the beach for the
summer.

MARI
That's not normal, Jack. We can use
the \$400 for rent.

JACK
If we buy the truck, we have wheels
and a place to live.

EXT. WATERFRONT - NIGHT

The Lake Champlain lakeshore near the city is deserted with
railroad tracks snaking between rundown industrial buildings.
Old tires and junk cars litter the area.

Jack and Mari arrive at an open patch of grass, spread out
their sleeping bags. Jack strips down to a T-shirt. Mari
pulls off her jeans and top, stands in a tight black tank.

Jack takes Mari gently in his arms. She wraps her arms around
his lower waist.

Jack lays Mari lovingly on the sleeping bags, strips off his
T-shirt, kisses her. She removes her tank. The moon and
starlight shine on their bodies, arms and legs wrapped around
each other. They move together in lovemaking.

EXT. WATERFRONT - NIGHT MOMENTS LATER

Jack and Mari lie curled together, one sleeping bag over
them. He caresses her head. The moon shows on their faces.
Waves lap at the shore.

Mari looks wide-eyed at the stars. Jack's eyes close, his
fingers gently stroke her face.

JACK
(drowsy)
My girl.

His fingers slip down off her face. As he rolls away, he pulls the sleeping bag off Mari's bare body. She pulls back at the edges, shivers, looks worriedly at a star.

MARI
I'm hungry.

Jack snuffles, mostly asleep.

MARI
(mimics)
Not now, Mari.

She taps her fingers on the sleeping bag over her chest.

MARI
Love is easier in books. Jane Austen characters always got what they wanted.

She nudges Jack. He groans.

MARI
I can't stop thinking about my master's program.

Jack's breath is even and light.

MARI
What if my credits don't transfer?

He doesn't answer.

MARI
Is this my life I'm living? Or yours?

FADE OUT.