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**Born From Love:  
The Journey of *Love Child***

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**Born From Love:**  
**The Journey of *Love Child***

**by**

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**Report**

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**Abstract**

**Born From Love:  
The Journey of *Love Child***

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“Born From Love: The Journey of *Love Child*” chronicles the development of  
Vanessa Knudsen’s script *Love Child*.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

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The University of Texas - Austin was a dream for me. In the two years prior to moving to Austin I spent most workdays alone, manning a reception desk of a lifestyle center in Minneapolis. A lifestyle center is what project developers started naming outdoor shopping centers in an effort to get rid of the 1980s stigma of the word mall. However, it was clearly a mall - an outdoor mall in one of the coldest urban centers in America. And our tiny property management office was located in a remote corner of the structure, right across from the back of the parking garage. Most of the year, you didn't dare go outside even for fresh air and the view was definitely leaving something to the imagination.

Needless to say, I had a lot of time on my hands. So, I wrote and took a screenwriting class or two at the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities that despite being a great university didn't exactly have a thriving film program - there were merely two screenwriting classes offered at the time. I took one twice simply because there was a different professor teaching the class and I wanted as much experience with the subject as possible.

It was within this office that I finished my application for UT and eventually learned of my acceptance. It was March

and there was still snow on the ground. Austin was a dream come true.

Austin offered me something I had only dreamed of while working in that tiny office: an opportunity to work towards becoming a screenwriter. For me, writing has always been a way to tell stories. To construct my observations into stories, a way to reflect about those things my mind finds funny. I had written stories for as long as I could remember. The idea that someone actually wrote the movies I saw was a pretty big realization for me. However, it would be a few years yet before I really started to explore screenwriting.

By fifteen, I knew I wanted to write movies. I didn't want to write novels. The collaborative nature of movies appealed to me. I liked the thought of actors potentially filling the roles. Likewise, dialogue has always been my favorite part of screenwriting, like a butter cream frosting on a cake. A good actor can take what's written on the page someplace better.

Likewise, a good director can do the same thing. Infuse something with a spice you never thought of. For me, a good director is probably akin to the first guy who decided to put peanut butter and jam together. Both good on their own, but together you've got a sandwich that couldn't be better.

Of course all that said, like any other screenwriter out there I believe the script is the true gold. Butter cream frosting can't save a soggy cake; stale bread won't make a good PB&J. And that is where the screenwriter comes in. To write something so good, you don't notice. You don't see the structure, the flow. It just works.

And that is exactly what I believe UT has helped provide me. Plot has always been a struggle for me. It still is. But the professors and course work at UT have helped give me the foundation to not only start addressing my struggles with plot but has also provided solutions. In my life outside of writing, I've always been a person who's needed structure. Without it, I follow any tangent that might fly into my head. I don't know why I expected my writing to be any different. My classes and experiences at UT have allowed me to let my writing shine by realizing that without a cohesive structure I was bound to repeat the same mistakes. One of the final scripts I wrote at UT, *Love Child*, is what I consider to be the best example of where I started as a screenwriter and where I am now.

## **Chapter Two: The Original**

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The first draft of *Love Child* was something I finished prior to entering the program. It was the story of a 34-year-old woman meeting her 17-year-old birth daughter for the first time since the adoption. The ages of the respective women and the title would be the only thing that would remain in the script after what was to be a drastic overhaul.

But before any overhaul could occur, I had to write the first draft.

I had started the first draft with the intention of rewriting the drama present in my own family's adoption story.

As a three-year-old a woman's swollen belly had no meaning to me. Certainly, I did not equate it with the near birth of a child. That my mother was quite slim despite the fact that I was getting a sister meant little to me. Baby. That's about the only thing a three-year-old understands. And then there she was. Shortly two weeks after my parents found out they were receiving a baby girl I was the proud older sister of a tiny new baby. Pink and beautiful with the cutest button nose you ever saw.



This was not an adoption of yesteryear. Adoption was a word used in our household. My sister knew she was adopted. I knew she was adopted. But it never really crossed my mind; she was my sister. Not my adopted sister. It wasn't until I got older that I realized for some people those two concepts did not exist within the same realm. She wasn't really my sister they would tell me, she was my adopted sister. That was different. As I got older, the implications people made bothered me more and more until I just stopped mentioning it.

The real meeting of birthmother and birth child was nothing like what was presented in my first draft of *Love Child*. Awkward, yes. But that was pretty much where the similarities ended. With the exception that my sister's birthmother did hang out with my sister and her friends while she was in town. There were a few rumors she scored them booze. Or at least paid for it. But I digress.

It was my sister's high school graduation and her birthmother wanted to be there. It was going to be a train wreck. It was. In fact, the experience was so uncomfortable I literally couldn't write about it. It was way too typical. So I decided to write the exact opposite. A story about adoption that was... nice.

When approaching *Love Child* that first time around it was almost as if I wanted to write something that addressed the ignorance I had heard from people all my life. Too many people I knew liked to blame every action my sister ever made (especially those made during the difficult adolescent years) on the fact that she was adopted. For so many people, it seemed that adoption was some type of defining word. It was as if "adopted" was the only word some people needed to understand who my sister was. Needless to say, that word was not how I defined my sister. To me, she was just my sister.

So when I set off to write a script about adoption, I wanted to write something that didn't involve dramatics. This was about healthy people who despite adoption being a part of their lives were going to be just fine.

Unfortunately, healthy people who are just fine don't really make for a page-turner. The characters lacked arcs, stakes.

Of course, to say I purposely rid my story of stakes is not true. I didn't do it on purpose. But I did it nonetheless. In an attempt to write a counterpoint to all those stories of adoptions gone wrong, I wrote the perfect adoption story (See APPENDIX A).

It was a nice little story about nice people. Whether birthmother and birth daughter find peace with one another really didn't matter. With or without a relationship with one another, the reader knew both characters would be okay in the long run. The story was actually missing the one thing every story needs - drama.

My instructor suggested differentiating these two lead characters more. As it was at the time, both characters were middle-class and functioning. I told him I didn't want to play to stereotype and make the birthmother troubled and from a low-income family, the birth daughter the exact opposite. But as we spoke, the idea of flip-flopping the characters was thrown around. But that would require a page one rewrite. It didn't have to be though, I could simply refine the characters, keep the rest of the story intact. But my mind was already wandering. Reimagining.

As I thought about it more and more I realized I would literally have to start over entirely to do the script justice. There was a story to be told, I just wasn't so sure I wanted to tell it. Moreover, the thought of starting over at page one at that point was daunting. I just wasn't willing to do it. So I put the script away. I started work on another script that would become part of my application to UT.

In the meantime, I wasn't writing any more adoption scripts.  
At least not for a couple of years.

### **Chapter Three: Finding a Genre**

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Years later and at the tail end of my experience at UT, I felt I had outgrown the script. I had realized I wasn't really that talented at writing nice, responsible people. First and foremost, I was not a nice, responsible person. Not that I was a mean, irresponsible person of course. But I rarely found myself able to relate to nice, responsible people both in life or in film. My way into characters generally is understanding what it's like to mess up. To pick yourself up in order to just try and get on with it and still mess up. It's not enough to have just screwed up. Even nice, responsible people have done that. It's to have screwed up, been aware of it, and done it anyway. It was once I realized that my own mistakes had some value beyond just funny stories, I found my niche. I found what I really enjoyed writing.

I like writing funny people. Generally, the unintentionally funny. What I started discovering while writing unintentionally funny people is they often aren't nice. They're often well-meaning to a certain degree but generally their ineptitude hurts other people. That is both their redeeming strength and weakness. They're not trying to hurt you; they weren't trying to hurt anyone. And yet, they always do. And when they finally realize it, that's when they face the decision to make it right or not. That's

where the non-mean factor comes in. They'll decide to make it right and therein lays the journey of most movies.

Funny people are also as a rule are not responsible. They may be successful. But responsibility is rarely one of their top-skills. Therein lies another perfect character trait for any movie. Our protagonist is going to make decisions that always end up tripping them up on their journey. Setbacks. The movie *The Hangover* is funny for a myriad of reasons but one of those reasons lies in the fact that it is about unintentionally funny people - not nice and certainly not responsible.

With these realizations, comedy became what I wrote exclusively. Sometimes dramedy. But certainly not drama. Spending months and months with a script can be a frustrating process. Spending months and months with a terribly depressing script can be torture. I was happy to write comedy. Life can be depressing enough on its own at times; I'd rather not step into a depressing world when I open my Final Draft software.

## **Chapter Four: Reimagining - A New Treatment**

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So how did this growth and discovery of my preferred genre influence my reimagining of *Love Child*?

Well, first and foremost I stripped the story of all nice, responsible people, leaving... actually no one. The only way I could see myself writing this story was by telling the story of a birthmother and birth daughter thrown together - each jostling for their own essentially selfish goal.

As I approached writing a new treatment I first tackled the characters. I kept one sentence in mind when doing so.

"What if the Reese Witherspoon character from *Legally Blonde* met Reese Witherspoon from *Election*?" The birthmother would be a ditzy woman living with great wealth with her boyfriend. The birth daughter would be a hard-working seventeen-year-old living a blue-collar life pursuing a dream of going to business school. I used a break-up as the inciting incident. The birthmother's sudden loss of her executive boyfriend leads her to find her birth daughter, eventually using her to prove that she does indeed have depth and that he should take her back.

Likewise, the birth daughter uses her birthmother to get a free ticket across the country to attend a scholarship interview for a prestigious Ivy League school.

It was very important that these characters were no longer simply nice, responsible people but instead that each attempts to use the other for their own gain.

I also ended up pushing adoption to the background. For me, this was no longer a story about adoption but a story about redemption that just so happened to feature adoption. As soon as I stopped tying the story to my life, I was able to get back into the story. To actually get excited about it again.

I didn't write pages. It was one of the first times I had really approached a script solely from a structural standpoint. I knew this essentially was going to be an entirely different script and the only way for it to work was for me to focus on getting the structure right.

Most importantly, I knew I needed a focused midpoint. In thinking about it, I decided on the birthmother (Elisha), the birth daughter (November "Novie" Dawn), and the wealthy ex-boyfriend all having dinner together and Elisha subsequently "losing" her Novie. I felt by the midpoint a reader would need to see Elisha genuinely be not only concerned for her birth daughter but set about actually helping her, not just herself.



The only thing I had yet to define in terms of the treatment was what led up to the end of Act II. I knew it ended with Novie not getting the interview but I wasn't sure exactly how Elisha would mess it up. It went through several variations and would continue to change as I began rewriting in earnest; however, at the time I imagined Elisha attempting to try and charm Novie's interviewer leading to Novie losing the scholarship. I debated whether or not the interviewer should be an ex-boyfriend of Elisha's.

I had taken rewriting with Beau Thorne my first year at UT and upon the advice of a few in the year ahead of me I decided to once again take the screenwriting course over again. Armed with a new treatment, I decided to tackle adoption yet again.

## **Chapter Five: Carrying Over a Theme**

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When I brought the old *Love Child* script into my rewriting course during my last full semester at UT I was aware it had issues. Nevertheless, it helped to hear it again. Sitting in workshop, having an old script dissected was not a painful experience. Upon reflecting on my time in workshops at UT, I am happy I had written a couple of scripts prior to entering the program. Thankfully, I'd already undergone the experience of having things ripped apart. Nothing said in workshop was personal, and by the time I entered the program I was fully aware of that.

A difficult workshop is never a particularly fun experience; however, it's absolutely crucial. I'd rather hear it as hard as it needs to be said than continue in the wrong direction. In my years at UT, beyond the instructors, the workshop experience is so incredibly valuable. I cherished the time in workshop with competent, helpful readers willing to say what's not working. Further, I found my particular classmates to be particularly adept at just saying it.

Sitting in that workshop, I knew what was coming and valued everyone's opinion. But the opinions that I really wanted to hear were those I would hear in a few weeks when I pitched the new treatment I had been working on (See APPENDIX B and C).

In the meantime, I started watching those movies I could think of that prominently featured adoption and/or birthparents: *Flirting With Disaster*, *Juno*, *Then She Found Me*, and more recently *The Kids Are All Right*. Until writing this report I have rarely considered how programs such as *16 & Pregnant* or *Teen Mom* might have impacted my writing of *Love Child*. The original script was written prior to those shows being aired; however, they've certainly become prominent in the time between these drafts. For me, I suppose I always worked more off the way I had experienced adoption in my life as opposed to on a television program. I had certainly seen both programs but was never an avid viewer nor was I part of the target demographic for either show. These shows brought teen pregnancy and adoption into living rooms across the country. If anything, I felt fortunate that my new treatment was not so focused on adoption. The subject literally felt like it was everywhere by the time I was approaching the rewrite.

Nevertheless, the pitch went well. The difference in this reimagining was now there were stakes, character arcs. I remember Beau Thorne addressing that there was a noticeable difference in the room during this pitch than there had been with the original script. There was actual interest in this version of the story. I also discovered that one of my classmates had attended the University of Pennsylvania.

Helpfully, she informed that there weren't really scholarships for Penn; however, corporate businesses often offered scholarships for worthy applicants. For me, this immediately opened a new window into the end of Act II. The interviewer being a Penn employee and a former boyfriend of Elisha's never really made sense. However, if the ex-boyfriend worked as an executive in corporate America he very easily might have been an ex of Elisha's given that she only dated men with money and the potential to make a lot more of it.

In any rewrite, we were warned against the "fruitless rewrite." A fruitless rewrite being one of two extremes. The first was an entirely superficial rewrite where changes made to the original were minute and relatively insignificant. The second was a rewrite where everything was changed. As a writer it is often much more appealing to simply scrap a script and start anew. Unfortunately, it completely avoids the process of actually rewriting a script. With this new treatment, I was falling into the latter category.

Indeed, there were very few similarities between my original script and the new treatment. For me, though, I didn't consider the rewrite as I imagined it to be fruitless. The original story was about a birthmother and birth daughter reuniting, each finding acceptance and redemption. The new

version just so happened to do a better job of illustrating that journey.

For me, it might not have been a rewrite in the strictest sense of the word but rather the carrying over of a theme. In both versions, the birthmother (whether it was the put-together Meg or the out-of-control Elisha) had to revisit the past to really move into the future. What I liked about the new version was that while the old birthmother (Meg) had been aware of this, Elisha has no idea at the start of the script. In reality, people rarely do things purely to help someone else. Elisha was only going backwards to try and fix something in her present - to get her boyfriend and life back on track. It is only by going backwards that she really begins to understand how her decisions have impacted other people (namely her birth daughter Novie) and thus begins trying to set them right.

Moreover, this was the story I wanted to tell. Perhaps, it was because I understood this new character better than the old. Whatever the reason, time had brought me back to *Love Child*. I separated myself from my past desire to write something that addressed the ignorance surrounding adoption. And it was just when I thought I was finished writing something I thought stemmed from the realities of my own life that I was finally able to really infuse more of myself and my personality into what I was writing.

I could write Elisha because I understood Elisha in ways I hadn't necessarily understood Meg. While Meg had gone to college, gotten a good job and found a loving boyfriend at the age of 34, Elisha had done none of these things. While I had completed college, I certainly had not accomplished the other two. Essentially, Elisha was just much more interesting to me. Desperation makes people do crazy things. And Elisha was just that. Desperate.

## **Chapter Six: Draft Two**

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As I began this new draft, I started really exploring the characters. I envisioned Elisha Parker to be a trust-fund baby who had lost her parents early and her money later. I saw her as someone who had never lived without money, having little understanding of what to do without it. Thus, when she loses her executive boyfriend, she decides she has to do whatever it takes to get him back. Even if that means potentially ruining her birth daughter's life. This Elisha was ditzy and for all intensive purposes pretty dim-witted. But she was funny. As I worked through the draft, the way I saw Elisha would undergo an overhaul but for the moment Elisha was a dim-witted party girl trying to get a boyfriend back.

November Dawn was the new birth daughter. While Izzy had been a typical seventeen-year-old, Novie was anything but typical. As the character says at one point in the script, she's pursued one dream and one dream only since she was in the eighth grade - attending the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.

I had done a good deal of research on what school would be Novie's dream school. The appeal to Novie was that she wasn't just a girl who wanted to go to a good school. She wanted to go to the best. And the best was Wharton. I

traced Novie's desire to go to Wharton back to where she lived (Sturgis, South Dakota) and therefore back to the woman who put her there - Elisha.

Growing up in Omaha, Nebraska by the time I reached thirteen I wanted to leave. I was so jealous of people who lived in places like Chicago, Los Angeles, or New York. Hell, I was jealous of people who lived in Kansas City. I wanted to reflect that feeling in Novie. A kid who wants to get out of South Dakota, who wants desperately to be success and works towards that by pursuing the dream of Wharton.

I landed on Wharton when researching business schools. It wasn't Harvard, Yale or Princeton. It was better and to be honest I didn't feel like it was as much a part of everyday language. Everyone knows Harvard. I wasn't so sure everyone knew Wharton. At least I didn't. However, I also wasn't interested in business school.

By far the biggest difference in this new draft was the loss of the adopted mother. Donna had been the perfect adopted mother. At first taking out the adopted mother was simply the easy way out. The complexity of the relationship between these three women was literally too difficult for me to write. But I also began to realize leaving in the adopted mother also took the script in a direction I didn't want it to go. Namely, melodrama. So I decided to forgo



having the adopted mother in this new version and didn't look back.

Neither Elisha nor Novie had surviving mothers in the new draft. I felt that made it more necessary for them to bond, the stakes of them actually successfully building a relationship were crucial. Here were two people missing that mother-daughter connection who suddenly had the opportunity to build a new one.

I chose to keep the weekend timeline used in the original script as well. I felt it was easier to manage and was more believable that a birthmother and birth daughter would spend a limited amount of time together upon first meeting. While, of course, it was unbelievable that they would be going across country together for Novie to attend an interview, I hoped I would be able to address that lack of believability with another draft.

I had been hesitant to write another road movie before going ahead with this draft. In my time at UT, I had already worked on one road movie, as one classmate had commented maybe I should go for range, not do another road movie so quickly. I considered, gave it some time, and then decided I wanted to tell this story.

I kept two movies in mind when writing this weekend road movie: *Planes, Trains, and Automobiles* and *Tommy Boy*. They happened to be two movies I had grown up with and, although my tone wasn't entirely similar, I felt they were almost more valuable than other movies I had looked at featuring adoption. *Planes, Trains, and Automobiles* specifically taught me the importance of using as many modes of transportation as possible. I had also learned in the last road trip movie I had written that transportation by plane needed to be cut out as soon as possible. It simply makes it too easy for characters to get where they need to go. If a character needs to have stumbles on their journey, shutting the door on air travel does just that.

In the treatment I had the plane grounded in Chicago due to bad weather; however by the time I got to pages I wanted something slightly more story based. With that in mind, I had Elisha make a bad joke about a bomb on a plane. It worked to get them grounded in Chicago as well as banned from airline travel for a period of time. Thus, leading to travel by Greyhound. As was pointed out though this had also happened in *Due Date* and by the time I finished the course something similar had happened yet again in *Bridesmaids*. Further, it made Elisha look too dumb, too foolish. Sure, she was a ditz but this just made her seem ridiculous. Everyone knows not to make a joke about a bomb

on a plane. It was another thing I would have to fix for the next draft.

Looking back at the treatments and blueprints I had created for this script it's interesting to see where things started and where they are currently.

The Act II break stayed much the same but there was an entire sequence meant to show Elisha and Novie "bonding" in Chicago. It stayed in this draft in a somewhat abbreviated fashion. However, as I realized how important it was to show exactly how broke Elisha was, the more I realized a sequence of her and Novie gallivanting through Chicago (all the while with a pressing timeline of the interview looming) was not believable nor needed. As I continued to think about it I also felt it no longer fit in the script. Showing Elisha's glamorous life in Chicago just didn't fit with someone who needed this to work. Couldn't she just return to her glamorous life? Rely on some old friends while she got back on her feet. I didn't want to present that option for Elisha. Her ex-boyfriend needed to be her last opportunity.

Finally there was Act III to wrestle with. I believe its incredibly important to know what your ending is before you start writing. Screenwriting is just too precise to write without knowing where you're headed. Sure, you can come

across it organically if you want to spend one hundred some odd pages writing a script just to find your ending, but that first rewrite is going to be extensive to say the least.

However,—I had an ending in mind that I ended up not using exactly as planned. I was actually writing towards one of my biggest pet peeves. When the majority of a movie takes place in an abbreviated period of time, I like it to be wrapped up in a similarly short time period. Thus, when Act III involves the characters each going off and sorting out their issues I tend to get annoyed. Thus, when I had written in treatment form that Elisha spends months trying to come up with money for Novie to attend Wharton, I wasn't happy with it. I couldn't decide if Elisha was able to get Novie the money or not. One treatment had her failing, while another had her getting it and Novie turning it down because she had a scholarship interview for the next school year at the University of Virginia. Neither ending was satisfying to me.

At the time though, I had to write my final pages. I couldn't sit around and wait for some better idea to come. So I just wrote it. I felt Elisha was a character that had defined herself by her things, her possessions. For Elisha to truly let go of the past, she needed to get rid of the labels, the designers, and the things that she had once cherished so much. Even as the script sits now, it's still

rickety. As Stuart Kelban and many others have asked, "Why doesn't she just sell the stuff earlier?" I like the idea of Elisha selling her possessions with the help of the one person who can really do it best - Novie. But I know it still needs a lot of work.

At the time I wrote it though I liked it so much more than the way I had envisioned it during the treatment process. I liked it because it no longer kept the two characters apart; instead, they finally had to work together to make things happen. It also kept the timeline short. No one had to go off for months to figure things out or try and redeem themselves. At least my biggest pet peeve was now out of the script.

That draft ended with Elisha and Novie starting to sell Elisha's possessions but the big note on the ending was that there was absolutely no way I could end the movie there. We had to see Elisha sell everything as well as Novie at Wharton. It was expected and necessary. I agreed. But the class was finished and I had summer school as well as my thesis to contend with.

## **Chapter Seven: Character**

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I met with my supervisor Richard Lewis at the beginning of the summer to discuss which script I wanted to work on as my final script. There were several to choose from in various phases of disrepair. I chose *Famous Exes*, a rock and roll script about the ex-wife of a rock star that I had worked with both Lewis and Thorne during my first year at UT.

However, as the summer progressed I realized the script needed a completely new structure. Essentially, between an internship, summer school, and working, I just didn't have time to do the script justice. But there was still *Love Child*. I knew there was good stuff there, the structure was okay, and it could be molded into a good spec script with some work.

So *Love Child* it was. First and foremost, I felt I needed to reevaluate the character of Elisha Parker (See APPENDIX D).

My original conception of Elisha was that she grew up with money. I considered her to be from Dallas money. To have been allowed to live in luxury her entire life. She was a party girl who flitted from guy to guy until she realized she had nothing left and became desperate to get her ex-boyfriend back. She was selfish but not unkind. I had

decided that she had purposely given her child to a family without money because she wanted her child to have a chance and the only way she felt that would happen would be if it had to work for things in the ways she never had. It worked. Kind of.

But as Richard Lewis noted, Elisha simply came across too dumb. And that's when I realized I was doing a disservice to the story by letting Elisha seem so unaware of the world around her. So I began to rethink her. I knew I wanted it to be more clear that she was going to find her birth daughter to get her boyfriend back. The second draft had made it seem as if she was trying to help Novie while doing something for herself. I wanted the manipulative side of Elisha to come out. As I kept thinking about Elisha, I started to think more and more about where she was from. I knew I didn't want her to be from money anymore or a big city. My white board I was using for notes had one question on it for a short time. Where is Elisha from?

And then I realized there was only one place Elisha could be from.

Detroit.

That one word helped me to completely rethink Elisha. She wasn't some rich girl who'd had everything handed to her and

for the first time had to actually work for something. She was a poor girl from Detroit who remade herself after giving her daughter up for adoption. As the story progressed I wanted the reader to see more and more of Elisha's ditzy persona fading and that girl from Detroit coming more into view.

I knew Elisha also had to be much more motivated in getting Clint back and when the opportunity finally presented itself, I needed her to do anything to get herself there. Even if that meant giving the rental car a flat tire or purposely causing Novie and her to miss their flight. I wanted to Elisha not only to be desperate this time around but determined.



## **Chapter Eight: Draft Three**

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With a better idea of who Elisha was, I was ready to tackle draft three of *Love Child*. First and foremost, I needed to make the break up between Clint and Elisha more devastating as well as make it apparent how much Elisha valued the relationship. The more devastating the break up, the more a reader might be able to follow Elisha when she decides to try and resurrect the relationship by nearly ruining her birth daughter's life. It was a lot to ask a reader to accept so the first act was crucial.

I certainly think I came closer in draft three than I had with the first rewrite; however, more can be done in another rewrite. Further, as this rewrite greatly expanded Act I it started to feel more necessary to establish the adoption element earlier in the story. It is another issue to tackle in the next rewrite.

There were a few other big issues that also needed to be addressed in the first act of this rewrite. First Mark, Novie's adopted father, needed to put up more of a fight both at the sight of Elisha in the first place as well as letting her go with Elisha.

Admittedly, I have problems with this part as well. I tried to use the logic that Novie is nearly eighteen and a very

determined young lady. I decided that it would only work if Novie saw Elisha's Mercedes rental car and decided to jump on the chance to use Elisha to get to her interview. Only Novie could convince her father to let her go, not Elisha. But I did not make Elisha to be privy to the conversation. Throughout the script, I tried to keep the point of view always Elisha's. Later when Novie disappears, we have to take her word (alongside Elisha) that she was really at a Barnes and Noble all that time.

Another big change I wanted to make in this draft was the idea that both women were using one another. Elisha is technically the adult and should know better, but Novie's right there with her. I wanted Elisha and Novie to blend. For their flaws to be similar despite how different they might be.

For both characters it is their selfishness, their single-mindedness that is their downfall. While Novie was still a teenager I felt that she would follow her goal of Wharton and eventually business success to the detriment of her life overall. Elisha's desire to not be a poor girl from Detroit led her to seek so much in things and men, forever searching for the next thing that she literally forgot who she was. I liked the idea that, for both characters, their success in their pursuits was due to their ambition. I imagined that without Elisha coming into her life, Novie would go down a

similar path. She would no doubt be a success, but her personal life would forever suffer if she continued to be so single-minded in her pursuits.

In the first act though neither woman knows that they have something to learn from one another, both seeing the other as a mere opportunity. A means to an end. Upon finding out that Novie needs to be taken to this interview across the country, Elisha strikes a deal. She would take Novie to her interview as long as Novie promised to meet her ex-boyfriend with her in Chicago, thus proving to him that she would indeed make a good mate. This deal did not exist in the previous draft, but I felt it worked much better. It gave each character a more distinct arc. I could also show Elisha's manipulative side with this deal. She was no longer quite so dim-witted; in fact, I hoped the dimwit routine was becoming more clear as a façade Elisha had worn for a long time. Perhaps her methods weren't the greatest but as it became clear that a meeting with the ex-boyfriend could only happen prior to Novie's interview, Elisha manipulates the situation to get her and Novie in Chicago without Novie's consent or knowledge and possibly even risking Novie's interview.

Again, I wanted to get the air travel out of the way early. I had decided not to use the bomb joke anymore both for believability and given that it had been used prominently in

several recent movies as previously noted. Instead, I remembered a time when I had flown when recovering from a cold. The pain of my eardrum nearly bursting on the plane was so intense I started to have an immediate panic attack. I didn't want the same histrionics on the plane, but I thought I could perhaps use the incident as both a way for Elisha to eventually show some care for Novie as well as shutting down air travel until Novie's ear infection cleared up.

Another issue that needed to be tackled in this new draft was the adoption itself. I had skated past it in the previous draft, not necessarily intentionally but because my pages kept changing and I wasn't sure entirely where to put it with an ever-changing script. In this rewrite, I settled on the scene when Elisha and Novie travel from Chicago to Philadelphia. Originally, they had taken a Greyhound but there's nothing too cinematic about a Greyhound. I had forgotten my *Planes, Trains and Automobiles* lesson. When one mode of transportation isn't working for you, choose another.

A train seemed much more cinematic. After a little research I found there was a train from Chicago to Pittsburgh and then to Philadelphia. I decided Amtrak didn't know what they were doing and created a route straight from Chicago to Philadelphia. It was in this time that I wanted Elisha to

talk about the pregnancy and the adoption. I also wanted her to reveal she was from Detroit. That she understood a little of what it felt like to grow up someplace you didn't want to be. I also wanted Elisha to really open up here. She needed to tell the truth about the adoption, not to sugar coat it. I didn't want her to say she had placed Novie for adoption because she wanted Novie to have a better life than she could have provided as a seventeen-year-old mother, I wanted her to say that she didn't want that life for herself. To me, it was honest and a little bit heartbreaking. But I felt that at that moment the reader needed to see Elisha stripped down. Without designer clothes or a ditzy demeanor as a cover-up, I felt this honesty would help the Act II break. It was important that Novie did not ask about the adoption however, that she merely listened. I knew that I wanted Novie to only speak about the adoption when she finally breaks down. Until then, she needed to maintain her distance from it.

Todd Ferguson has always been an issue for me. He was Novie's interviewer who also happened to be an ex-boyfriend of Elisha. In this first draft, it didn't work. Todd came out of nowhere and then took one look at Elisha and not only denied Novie the fellowship, denied her the interview outright. As Richard Lewis noted, it was not only highly unprofessional but largely unbelievable.

As I worked on this draft I continued to think about it. It had been suggested that it would work better if it were a direct result of Elisha's actions at present, not in the past.

I agreed with both opinions. And with this draft I decided to do a bit of both. I felt so much of the script was about Elisha's past that I wanted to incorporate it into her low point. Somehow there needed to be a realization for Elisha that her decisions and past relationships (whether with her birth daughter or an ex-boyfriend) had ramifications. So I let Todd still be an ex-boyfriend that Elisha had screwed over. But he does not discover that Elisha is there or that she is Novie's birthmother until the end of his interview with Novie.

Novie doesn't knock it out of the park in her interview either. She's really just a kid who's out of South Dakota and suddenly thrust into something that she's wanted but is not mature enough for quite yet, despite all her preparation. For the first time, Novie's really truly human. She's not the perfect interviewee.

In order to make Elisha's mistake a current action, I decided that she needed to go after Todd. To try and somehow beg and plead for Novie to get the fellowship, to allow Todd to decide that this was some cynical ploy by both

Elisha and Novie to capitalize on Elisha's old boyfriend to get Novie into school. This way Elisha's mistake could be tied both to her past and her present. For Novie, the betrayal of Elisha once again messing up could also be tied to both the past and the present. Here is where Novie could finally address the adoption and her pain over it. For Novie, it would appear that Elisha gave her up to better her (Elisha's) own life and she only reappeared in Novie's life to once again fix her own. Finally, the Act II break was closer to working.

Then, came Act III. Much stayed the same as in the previous draft. Whether or not it works is still up for debate and will likely change or alter in another draft. At the moment, the biggest addition was finally seeing Novie at Wharton. I had toyed around with altering the ending to show that Novie had decided not to go to Wharton but the University of South Dakota and work with Elisha to build a business acquiring and selling quality second hand goods. But the more I thought about it, the more confusing and complicated it seemed to get. Finally, I decided it was just adding way too much weight to the end of the story.

Rather, I preferred giving Novie her dream. Wharton was just too important to the character. I wanted her to have it. What I did find in this musing though was Elisha attending school. It was brought up by Elisha's sister at

the beginning of the script but I'd never thought much about it until the end. Elisha had always liked South Dakota and after addressing her past, she was ready to start anew. Why not put the girl in school? So, I decided to let Elisha start over. Life rarely lets us truly start over but this was a movie. I wanted to give Elisha the chance to start over. For there to be the opportunity for Elisha to have a real future, not as someone's girlfriend, not as a woman in expensive clothes, but as a real, genuine person. Thus, Elisha ends up seeking an education at the University of South Dakota. I wasn't entirely sure how she managed to get in but I figured Novie would have had a large part in it.



## **Chapter Nine: Future Drafts**

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Without a doubt in my mind I know I'm headed for another draft of *Love Child*. There is still a lot to be fixed, a lot to be worked out but I know I'm in a better place with this past draft.

Overall, I feel that the script needs to be tightened. I also need to figure out exactly how to incorporate the adoption into the first few pages so the reader knows what they're in for. Further, I'd really like to work a little more on the first act. Richard Lewis made a really interesting suggestion of showing Elisha out in the world, at a party perhaps to really show rather than tell us who Elisha is. I think this could be a much stronger opening, to show us exactly what her ex-boyfriend is addressing in the break-up scene. Just a moment of actually seeing her out there, in a world she's desperately trying to cling to.

In the next draft I also intend to make the timeline more apparent. I had it in mind when writing this past draft; however, I feel like it could be ratcheted up especially towards the end of Act II.

*Love Child* was not a straightforward, simple journey; instead, it reminds me of where I started as a screenwriter and where I am today. It reminds me that I can keep

improving; with the lessons and education I have gained at UT, progress now feels like a draft away.

I stepped into the program knowing I wanted to be a screenwriter; leaving I feel like I now have the tools to actually do it. I have learned so much in the program and am so thankful for the guidance from all the gifted instructors UT has to offer. It's been a long two years, but they are two years in which I have not only grown as a person but more importantly as a writer. I will always think back fondly on the time I spent at UT.

## **APPENDIX A:**

### *Love Child* **Brief Outline**

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Seventeen-year-old ISABEL “IZZY” FELD wanted to meet her birthmother a few years back. Today, she’s not so sure. But she’s meeting her nonetheless. Thirty-four-year-old MEG SILER has a successful life in Chicago – great job, loving boyfriend, and one big secret. She’s about to have a child and before she can decide how she feels about it, she has got to meet the one she put up for adoption seventeen years ago.

Izzy’s got a decent boyfriend, great parents and a loyal best-friend CASSIE. She’s also got a bad boy crush SHANE.

When Izzy and Meg finally meet, though, everything changes. It’s awkward, unknown. But Meg is determined to bond with her birth daughter, to prove to herself that she could make a good mother.

Meg decides that bonding is going to occur anyway possible and ends up joining Izzy and Cassie for a night out. But it seems like Cassie ends up bonding with Meg more than Izzy. The night out involves house parties and crushes; Meg helps Izzy finally talk to her crush Shane.

Meanwhile, Izzy’s adopted mother DONNA has to wait and see how the night goes. A onetime hippie, Donna’s nerves on this new relationship are evident but she takes it in stride.

But when Meg and Izzy finally talk about the adoption, both women break. For Izzy, it's too much learning about these birthparents she had built up to be cooler than they could ever live up to. For Meg, it's too much to not be able to live up to those expectations.

But when mom Donna and Meg's boyfriend EZRA both step back into the picture, both Izzy and Meg and finally able to reach some sort of peace. After a long night each are able to move on, having finally forged a new sort of relationship. Not quite mother-daughter, but something different.

Izzy finally goes for the bad boy, who turns out not to be so bad after all. And Meg moves forward with her pregnancy, finally having made peace with the past and ready for the future.

## **APPENDIX B:**

### *Love Child* Rewrite Short Treatment

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Thirty-four-year-old Elisha York lives in a gorgeous Chicago penthouse and lives off a seemingly never-ending trust fund. Treating life as one long party, Elisha is left high and dry when her executive boyfriend decides to drop his “party” girlfriend in order to vie for CEO at his company. Suddenly alone, Elisha runs home to Highland Park, Texas to stay in her sister’s guest house. Her sister, both a wife and mother of three, chastises Elisha that the party ended five years ago. Escaping into daytime TV, Elisha sees a talk show about adopted children and “the void” they can experience. Instantly, Elisha decides the only way set her life right is to find the daughter she put up for adoption seventeen years ago.

November Dawn was born neither in November nor at dawn, but her adopted mother was a sport and kept the name anyway. At seventeen, Novie has one desire in life – to escape her hometown of Sturgis, South Dakota to attend Wharton, “the only business school that matters.” Accepted, there’s only one problem – her father’s limited income mean her only hope for actually attending rests in landing the ever illusive full-ride scholarship.

When Elisha appears on Novie’s doorstep to “fill the void,” Novie assures her there’s no void to be filled and her busy October calendar couldn’t possibly absorb bonding time with a birthmother. But when Elisha offers to take Novie to Wharton to interview for the scholarship. Novie changes her tune. Agreeing to the trip only on the condition no bonding will take place, Novie and Elisha set off across the state to Sioux Falls for the next available flight to Philadelphia.

After a long and awkward drive through South Dakota, Elisha and Novie board a flight to Philadelphia only to be grounded in Chicago by bad weather. In Chicago, Elisha insists on going downtown and sneaking Novie into a club, but when the plan goes awry and the two are separated, Elisha ends up searching half of Chicago for Novie. Upon finding her safe and sound, Elisha realizes that losing her birth daughter within a week of meeting her is a new low, even for her. Resolute to becoming a responsible adult, Elisha sets her sights on getting Novie the scholarship.

After the debacle in Chicago, Novie forgoes all unnecessary conversation or connecting to focus on her scholarship interview. Once at Wharton, a practiced and poised Novie is ready to give the interview of her life. But when the interviewer turns out to be an ex-beau of Elisha's things take a sharp turn. A postponed interview and a long weekend for Elisha to mess it up, Novie's impatience turns to anger when she and Elisha have a fight. Upset at the turn of events, Elisha promises to sweep her ex-beau off his feet and win Novie the scholarship through any means necessary.

However, the interviewer remembers a little too much about the past and the date goes disastrously. Expecting Elisha's failure, Novie gives the interview of her life only to find it's too little too late as Elisha's jilted ex awards the scholarship to another candidate.

Devastated, Novie swallows her pride and asks Elisha to pay for her to go to Wharton. Elisha reveals her lifestyle has drained her trust-fund to next to nothing and she has nothing

to give. Heart-broken, Elisha returns to Texas and Novie to Sturgis where she is comforted by her father.

In Texas, Elisha desperately tries to find funds for Novie with no success while Novie enrolls in South Dakota State University. Eight months later, Elisha reappears with a painting worth the cost of four years at Wharton. Novie turns it down, admitting she got a scholarship of her own accord for the following school year. But before Elisha can leave, Novie offers to help Elisha get a real job. Elisha accepts.

**APPENDIX C :**

ACT 1	ACT 2	ACT 3
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REEL 1: Meet Elisha	REEL 2: Meet Novie	REEL 3: Roadtrip to Sioux Falls	REEL 4: Fly Away	REEL 5: New Low	REEL 6: Wharton	REEL 7: Money	REEL 8: Future
<p>Elisha gets dumped, leaves Chicago</p> <p>Runs to her sister's home in TX</p> <p>"The party ended five years ago" – get your life together</p> <p><b>INCITING INCIDENT:</b> Elisha sees a talk show about adopted children and "the void" they feel...</p>	<p>Elisha shows up on her birth daughter's (Novie's) doorstep</p> <p>Novie wants nothing to do with Elisha</p> <p>Awkward dinner w/ Novie's dad and Elisha, Wharton scholarship interview brought up</p> <p><b>ACT I BREAK:</b> Elisha offers to take, penniless Novie agrees</p>	<p>Learning about Elisha, learning about Novie</p> <p>Why SD? Elisha went to Sturgis once, thought it seemed fun... Novie fumes</p> <p>Dynamic being set... Elisha constantly trying, Novie constantly pushing her away</p> <p>Arrive in Sioux Falls, board flight to Philadelphia</p>	<p>Flight grounded in Chicago</p> <p>Elisha's old stomping grounds, convinces Novie to make the most of the lost day... Ferris Bueller style</p> <p>Novie starting to possibly warm up to Elisha</p> <p>Elisha sneaks Novie into a club to try and get some fun in her life... goes horribly</p> <p><b>MIDPOINT:</b> Elisha loses Novie in Chicago</p>	<p>Elisha finds Novie... who's beyond pissed at being lost</p> <p>Enduring silent treatment, Elisha resolves to get Novie the scholarship</p> <p>Novie practices for interview</p> <p>Elisha begs, steals, and borrows to get Novie to Wharton in time... success!</p>	<p>Interviewer is an ex of Elisha's</p> <p>Elisha flirts, ends up annoying</p> <p>Novie does perfect, denied the scholarship b/c interviewer dislikes Elisha</p> <p>Novie's furious, resorts to asking Elisha for the \$ for school</p> <p>Elisha reveals she's broke</p> <p><b>ACT II BREAK:</b> Heartbroken Elisha returns to TX, Novie to Sturgis</p>	<p>Elisha turned down for loan</p> <p>Novie won't answer her calls, texts, letters</p> <p>Elisha tries to find \$, sells belongings, clothes</p> <p>Elisha returns to Sturgis...</p> <p><b>CLIMAX:</b> Elisha offers Novie all the \$ she has to pay for Wharton</p>	<p>Novie softens but doesn't want the \$ – she's got another scholarship interview at UVA</p> <p>But Novie still needs a chaperone... she asks Elisha</p>



## **APPENDIX D:**

### *Love Child* Rewrite Character Descriptions

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**ELISHA PARKER** comes from a lower middle-class family in Detroit, Michigan. Her mother died when she was a young teen. She was raised by her father and her older sister. Rebellious and playful, Elisha never took life too seriously. Until her unexpected pregnancy with a boyfriend at the age of seventeen, Elisha never really thought a lot about her future. Faced with the idea of becoming a young mother though, Elisha suddenly started to think. She wanted a life. Parties and champagne, not a spit cloth and baby bottles. So she arranged to give her daughter up.

Elisha never had a positive relationship with her own strict and often demanding old-school mother. With this in mind, she knew she wanted her own child to go to the type of mother she never had – loving, kind, and supportive. She found this woman in Diane Anderson alongside her husband Mark. Elisha had a baby girl who she named November Dawn despite the fact that her daughter was born neither in November nor at Dawn. She just liked the name.

She met the birthparents prior to the birth, liked them, and didn't look back once the adoption was final. Elisha took a leap and moved to Chicago, slowly working her way up the social ladder. Finding wealth and glamour, Elisha left the Detroit girl behind.

Elisha transformed herself into the girl everyone wanted to be with and wanted to be. But now at 34, Elisha is now a longtime party girl, having rested on good looks and a fun personality to score a string of boyfriends throughout the years. When her last boyfriend dumps her telling her she's not serious enough, doesn't have the depth to be the wife of an executive she's suddenly not only faced with the idea of being single but of who she is without money and a man.

**NOVEMBER “NOVIE” DAWN ANDERSON** is from a blue-collar family in Sturgis, South Dakota. Her mother died when she was three. For most of her life it has been just her and her machinist father Mark. Serious and studious, Novie knew from a young age that the thing she desired more than anything else was to be a success in life. And for her that success that meant someday standing atop the corporate world as a businesswoman.

To that end, Novie started researching business schools in a career class in middle school. Discovering that the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania was generally either the first or second business school of mention, that was where she would go. There was only one problem and that was the cost of attendance. Again, Novie got to work and discovered a fellowship provided by corporate sponsors that would allow a few select applicants to attend Wharton.

Single-minded in her goal to both leave South Dakota as well as for business success, Novie has rarely had many friends in school and certainly no boyfriends. Instead, she's spent her time joining clubs and doing activities that look good on college applications.

Novie has never allowed herself to think much about her birthmother or the events of her adoption. Losing her mother at such a young age has made her less sensitive than perhaps other girls her age. Underneath it all though, Novie has missed what so many of her classmates have – a mom. Adding to the complexity, Novie feels her adopted mother was her mother and forming a relationship with her birthmother could be considered disrespectful to her mother’s memory.