

FADE IN:

INT. STEVENSON HOUSEHOLD KITCHEN - DAY

A cup of orange juice, poured perfectly. An assortment of crackers, cheese, and apple slices, arranged just so. A hand places three oreos on the tray. Pauses. Takes one away.

This is ELLEN STEVENSON (40s, white), a mother no one can deny puts effort into her daughter. Perhaps too much effort. A YELLOW BUS rumbles up to the corner.

ELLEN
Welcome home, Sweetie!

A girl (who we can't see very well due to her oversized HOODIE) runs out of the bus, up the driveway, through the front door, and past her mother.

She's sobbing.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
Cat? Catherine?! What's wrong?

CAT
I'm fine, Mom!

This is CATHERINE "CAT" STEVENSON (12, academically smart but socially stupid), and she's not fine. Ellen tries to get a look at her face, but Cat keeps her back turned.

ELLEN
You don't sound fine.

CAT
I just said I am!

Cat throws her BACKPACK on the floor and runs upstairs. Ellen follows.

ELLEN
Is this about your first day of middle school? We can fix this, just talk to me!

Cat slams her bedroom door closed and we hear the lock click. Ellen is left talking to a door.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
Was it the teachers? The students?
I can file a complaint. I can talk to the principal.

CAT
I don't want you to talk to the
principal.

ELLEN
Then tell me what's wrong!

Cat mumbles something incoherent. Ellen puts her ear on the door.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
You have to speak a little louder,
Honey.

Ellen hears an agonized tween-age sigh before --

CAT
I was the only white kid in my
honors math class. Everyone else
was Asian.

It's time for drastic measures. Ellen takes out a KEY from her APRON POCKET and unlocks the door. Cat is on the floor, having a mental breakdown. Ellen kneels in front of her. Ellen gently takes Cat's hands away from her face revealing...

CAT IS 100% CHINESE.

ELLEN
Cat, Baby, you know you're Asian,
right?

CUT TO:

INT. STEVENSON HOUSEHOLD OFFICE - DAY

Ellen taps her PEN on a LEGAL PAD. She sits in an office chair, analyzing Cat who lays on a couch. A therapy set-up.

ELLEN
Are you sure you're feeling well
enough to answer questions?

CAT
Mooooom, I'm fine!

Ellen looks at Cat's red eyes. There are no more tears, just annoyance.

ELLEN
We'll see about that.

Cat rolls her eyes.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
So... when did you start disliking
this bubble tea drink?

CAT
I've never liked it.

ELLEN
And why would you say that? Perhaps
because it's... Asian?

CAT
I just don't like the texture of
boba. It's gummy and weird.

ELLEN
Do you consider all Asian things
gummy and weird?

CAT
Mom!

ELLEN
Answer the question!

CAT
No! Ok? It's just the boba.

ELLEN
And why would you describe it as
weird?

CAT
I don't like the feeling of balls
in my mouth. And please don't make
that a whole Freud thing.

ELLEN
Hmmm. What about the Squid Games?
Do you like the Squid Games?

Cat sits up.

CAT
Mom, this isn't helping.

ELLEN
I think it is! I'm making a lot of
progress.

Cat peers at the legal pad. There's a bunch of Asian things
connected by lines.

CAT
Why is Mao Zedong tied to anime?

ELLEN
They both display high degrees of violence.

Cat sighs.

CAT
I'm fine, Mom. I know I'm Chinese!

ELLEN
But you said --

CAT
-- I didn't mean it like that! I know I'm Asian. It's just... I'm not like Asian Asian.

ELLEN
What does that mean?

CAT
I dunno! It's complicated.

ELLEN
Well, try to explain.

CAT
It's, like, I can use chopsticks but mostly for spaghetti.

Ellen stares at her blankly.

CAT (CONT'D)
Yeah, I don't know what I'm saying, either.

ELLEN
It must have to do with your past.

Ellen stands and paces in front of a BOOKSHELF, but it's not filled with regular books. From floor to ceiling are PHOTO ALBUMS chronologically organized.

It starts with "Adopting Cat (July 2013)" and goes through each month of Cat's life: "Cat's First Christmas (Dec 2013), "Cat Starts Preschool (Sept 2017)" "Cat's Elementary Violin Competition (May 2022)."

ELLEN (CONT'D)
Oh! I see. We only have 4 albums of Lunar New Year but 13 of Christmas.

CAT
You're overanalyzing this. It's
whatever.

Ellen faces Cat.

ELLEN
It's not "whatever." It's
important! I, I failed you!

Cat realizes that now is not the time for sass.

CAT
Mom, you didn't fail me.

ELLEN
Yes I did. I fell into the trap
that all white parents do! It's in
all the books.

CAT
Mom, you tried to teach my about my
heritage. You really did. I just-
sometimes I'm not good at
listening.

ELLEN
You can't blame yourself --

CAT
-- You can't blame yourself! It's
just what it is! I'm different from
the other Asians, and that's fine.

ELLEN
I don't want you to feel left out.

CAT
I don't.

ELLEN
You were having a mental breakdown
an hour ago.

Cat embraces her mom.

CAT
I have you.

Ellen smiles, but there's still doubt in her eyes.

CAT (CONT'D)
Can I eat now? I'm starving.

ELLEN

Yeah, your snack is in the fridge.

Cat breaks the hug and leaves the room. Ellen is left alone with her thoughts. She picks up the very first photo album "Adopting Cat (July 2013)." She turns to a picture of her holding a baby Cat. She stands next to an older woman, the ORPHANAGE DIRECTOR, and beams from ear to ear.

CUT TO:

INT. CHINESE ORPHANAGE (FLASHBACK) - DAY

Ellen holds her right hand up while her left hand rests on the BIBLE. She read from a piece of paper.

ELLEN

-- And I promise to teach her about
the culture and heritage she is
leaving behind.

The orphanage director nods and hands a baby Cat over. Ellen holds her new baby tight.

END FLASHBACK

INT. STEVENSON HOUSEHOLD OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Ellen gazes at the photo with a small frown.

ELLEN

But I'm not enough.

Cat may not think of her as a bad mom, but she knows when she's failed.