THE WALLET Episode 1: MEATBALLS

by

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EXT. ONE WAY CITY STREET - DAY

A luxury car idles, driver's side to the curb.

The DRIVER's mumbled frustration drifts from the open window.

DRIVER

Okay, I can make do with a couple of hundreds?...Please?

INT. LUXURY CAR - DAY

The driver's hands paw through an empty WALLET.

DRIVER

A twenty? A ten? I'll take anything.

The hands close the wallet, then open it. Again and again.

DRIVER

Come on!...Okay, that's it.

He tosses THE WALLET out the window.

EXT. ONE WAY CITY STREET - DAY

THE WALLET flies out of the car window and heads toward...

GINA ALLEGRETTO, 34, a determined dynamo in a pants suit that flaps faster as she accelerates past the car.

The wallet SMACKS Gina's head and SPLATS onto the concrete.

GINA

What the...?

Gina bends over to see what hit her.

She's distracted by a hole worn through her left dress shoe, kind of like the hole in her right shoe.

GINA

Ah, man. Not today.

She puts them together and wiggles the toes poking out.

GINA

At least they match.

She straightens, composes herself, walks past the wallet and through the imposing doors of a bank entrance.

INT. BANK, RAY'S OFFICE - DAY

A small den of slick pretension decorated with photos, awards, and other pompous artifacts.

In the corner, clad in a cheap suit and tie, RAY FOLEY, 37, sits behind an ancient computer display on his desk. Impatient, Ray works on a tablet computer balanced in his lap. In between taps, he directs obsequious grins at...

...an even less patient man standing behind the guest chair, MR. BRAWNER, 56. Robust and burly enough to almost burst his expensive suit, Brawner edges toward the hallway door.

RAY

Hold on, Mr. Brawner.

Gina peeks in from the hallway and sees Brawner.

GINA

Are you the loan guy?

Brawner beams at his excuse to leave. Gina steps in.

GINA

Foley, right?

Brawner loses his smile to the unintended insult and nods towards Ray.

RAY

Mr. Brawner, I've got the money.

GINA

Awesome. So, I've got this great idea for a food business --

RAY

Really? Not now.

MR. BRAWNER

Foley here wants to put his money in my hedge fund.

Gina double blinks.

RAY

It's a private partnership for investors who can afford a very large minimum investment in an aggressively managed portfolio.

GINA

Aggressively managed...what now?

RAY

It involves advanced strategies like leveraged, long, short, and derivative positions.

MR. BRAWNER

(off her blank stare)
It's a bet on other investments.
And, Foley, you can't even pay the
maintenance fee, let alone --

RAY

But I've got it. See? Coming up now...

Ray shows him the tablet. GZZZZT, it craps out.

Brawner smiles at Gina. He turns and poker-faces Ray.

MR. BRAWNER

Foley, I've got people waiting.

Brawner exits into the hallway and hurries away.

Ray rushes to the door and calls after him.

RAY

Mr. Brawner, please. You understand technology. Things like this happen. It's a temporary set...back...

Ray stalks back to his desk and slams down the busted tablet.

RAY

(sarcastic)

Oh please, sit.

He scans his computer screen. He peers over it and zeroes in on the holes in her shoes.

RAY

Ms. Allegretto, may I call you Gina?
 (before she can reply)
Gina. Open toed shoes? At a loan
review?

GINA

Open toed? No, they just have...May I call you Ray?

RAY

It's against policy.

Ray gets back to his screen. Uncomfortable silence.

GINA

GINA (CONT'D)

You know, you think you'll get through college, get a job, move into a nice place. Maybe get a car and --

RAY

Gina, just your job history, okay?

GINA

I was working and going to school. Junior year, I got laid off. But I got another gig. That company went bust. So, I'm looking for work again and everyone's telling me I need more training. And I'm like, already up to my ears in school debts so --

RAY

(heard it all)

You thought you'd start your own business.

GINA

I only need two thousand.

RAY

For

(reads computer screen)
meatballs?

GINA

It's the new fast food. You know. On the street? Like hotdogs.

RAY

Right. Even if you had the next McDonald's, with your credit --

GINA

I know, I know, but, see, I've got my family recipe and people love it and I will do whatever it takes to --

RAY

Gina, you obviously don't understand financial instruments.

Gina, frustrated, stands.

GINA

Well, guess I'll get me one of those.

EXT. ONE WAY CITY STREET - DAY

Gina charges away from her embarrassment and frustration. She slips on THE WALLET and falls onto the sidewalk.

Gina grabs it and raises her arm to hurl the rotten cherry on her awful day. Stops. Clutches it like a life preserver.

She opens it. Empty.

GINA

No money. No plastic. Not even an ID. Of course.

Ganstas approach. She pockets the wallet and scrams.

EXT. URBAN PARK PAVILION - DAY

Gina, catching her breath after her escape, wanders through the kids, tweens, and teens that run, bike, scooter, and skateboard in and around the stone and timber structure.

A hotdog cart near one of the pillars catches Gina's eye. The sign on the side reads: BEN'S DOGS.

Absently, she reaches into her pocket. She feels the wallet. And something else. Gina pulls it out. A five peeks out.

With a how'd-I-miss-that frown, Gina strolls to the cart.

The vendor, BEN DARSEK, 34, pops open the steamer.

BEN

Get you something?

He's not bad looking. Gina beams for the first time today.

GINA

Chicago dog and a pop.

She notices him staring at the holes in her shoes.

GINA

They're opened toed.

BEN

Sure. Chips with that?

Gina eyes the five. Face scrunches as she adds in her head.

BEN

On me.

GINA

Thanks.

EXT. PARK BENCH - DAY

Gina flips through a castoff newspaper while she savors her last bite of hotdog.

Still hungry, she opens the wallet. Empty. She tosses the wallet onto the newspaper. Above where it lands, she sees an ad: Connie's - SHOES - \$50.

She opens the wallet and discovers a ten and two twenties.

Clutching the wallet, she walks slowly, then faster.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - LOBBY - DAY

Gina's fast walking feet, now in NEW SHOES, carry her in.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING, MANAGER'S OFFICE - DAY

Silhouetted by the glow of the security video display on his shabby desk, the MANAGER sits and flips through receipts.

On the screen, Gina races through the lobby to the stairs.

Her movement catches his eye.

MANAGER

Gina!

He shoots out of his chair and bolts out the door.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING, HALLWAY - DAY

Breathless, Gina races out of the stairwell.

The manager's footsteps and angry voice echo behind her.

MANAGER

Don't make me call the cops!

INT. GINA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Gina charges in, slams the door, and locks it.

MANAGER (O.S.)

Gina, I was just kidding about the cops. Open the door. Be reasonable.

She hears the manager fiddle with his keys. She scans the bare apartment for something to block the door and sees...

...a lone painting on the wall...a few candles here and there...a twin size mattress on the floor.

The manager pounds the door.

MANAGER (O.S.)

You can't hide in there forever!

Gina pushes sideways into the door, pressing the wallet into her hip. She feels it bulge. She opens the wallet and finds a wad of hundreds. Amazed, she fan counts it. She unlocks the door. The manager yanks it open.

MANAGER

Gina, I'm going to have to ask you --

Gina hands him the cash. Stunned, he lets her pass.

GINA

Lock up, will you? I've got to go pick up a few things.

INT. BIG BOX STORE - NIGHT

Gina takes the last of the office equipment out of her cart and places it on the counter with the rest of her stuff.

A CLERK rings it up. Gina pulls out the wallet. Nothing.

GINA

Probably don't really need these.

She shoves a stapler and printer back.

The clerk subtracts them out and glances at...

...the long line of customers that's getting longer.

Gina opens the wallet. She shoves back a few more items.

GINA

Try it again.

Checks the wallet. Still empty.

She shoves back everything but a phone and laptop. GRUMBLES from the line. The clerk rings it up.

CHA-CHING. \$1,452.00 on the cash register readout.

Gina braces. Opens the wallet. Money, so much money.

She hands it all to the clerk, exactly \$1,452.00.

MERCHANDISE RETURN COUNTER

Ray lays his dead tablet on the counter. Irritated, he turns his head to find a clerk to berate. He pivots to look in the other direction and sees...

Gina heading his way pushing a cart with boxes in it.

As she passes, Ray hurries to block her.

RAY

Not so broke, Ms. Allegretto?

GINA

Hello, Ray. Maybe I found one of your fancy...

Shoves her cart at him.

GINA

...financial instruments.

He hops out of the way. Perplexed, he watches her exit.

INT. GINA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Morning sun filters through the blinds onto the lone painting.

Gina, now in casual wear and her new shoes, sits on her mattress, mobile phone to her ear, laptop open. She listens to ON-HOLD MUSIC. TECH SUPPORT picks up.

TECH SUPPORT (V.O.)

Your account's still good.

GINA

Awesome! I got one more question.

TECH SUPPORT (V.O.)

Yes, you still get ten free gigs.

GINA

No, it's about... If you found something really valuable, but, like you couldn't explain it, would you talk to anyone about it?

TECH SUPPORT (V.O.)

Lady, I just work here.

GINA

Sounds a little nuts, I know, but -- (CLICK)

Fine. I was hungry anyway.

She grabs her jacket, shoves the wallet in the pocket, and opens the apartment door.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Gina strides out of the entrance and down the street.

Ray sneaks out from behind a bush and follows her.

EXT. URBAN PARK PAVILION, HOTDOG CART - DAY

Feigning nonchalance, Gina meanders toward the hotdog cart.

Ben, busy with customers, doesn't see her, but...

...Ray, hiding behind a pillar does.

As she passes Ray, she pulls the wallet from her jacket and opens it.

Ray sees that it is empty. Totally.

Gina, bummed, stows the wallet and does a one-eighty.

Ben sees her lovely backside and grins.

BEN

Hey, open toes. Got new shoes, eh?

Embarrassed yet pleased, Gina turns and strolls to the cart.

Ray slips behind another pillar to get closer.

BEN

What can I get for you?

GINA

Nothing. Not right now.

BEN

What? I saw you eat yesterday. You loved it.

GINA

Look, ah. It's Ben right?

Pleased to be remembered, he smiles and nods.

GINA

Ben, I'm broke, okay? Totally busted.

BEN

So you blew it all on the shoes. You...They look good, though.

Not sure how to respond, she forces a smile.

BEN

Tell you what. I can take the hit. Let me fix you a chili dog.

GINA

GINA (CONT'D)

Your hotdogs are good. They're great. I should go.

BEN

You wanna give me something for it? Tell me your name.

The forced smile becomes real.

Ben places a hotdog in a paper tray.

She starts to speak.

BEN

But, it's gotta be your real name.

He lays on the chili and cheese.

GINA

Oh, you've done this before.

BEN

Well...

He lays the hotdog tray on the cart in front of her.

She pulls the wallet from her purse and opens it to reveal...chili dog money. She hands him the cash.

Stunned and confused, Ray stares at the wallet.

BEN

So now you're not going to tell me?

GINA

Gina. Gina Allegretto.

She grabs the dog and bites it.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Gina and Ben stroll to the entrance walkway.

GINA

...and then he says, you just don't understand financial instruments.

BEN

Jerk. This meatball thing. You should do that. I could help you.

GINA

I kind of want to --

BEN

-- do it on your own. I get it.

GINA

It's not that. It's just...there's some stuff I gotta figure out first.

She walks to the door.

BEN

Okay, then. When you get it all figured out...

She smiles and waves to him. She turns and goes in.

Ben, a bit disappointed, but hopeful, ambles down the street.

INT. GINA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The glow of city lights filters through the blinds.

Gina perches on her mattress, laptop in her lap, typing and scrolling.

On the screen, articles about money and magic flip by.

GINA

Magic wallets...lamps, beans? No. Charms, horseshoes, wands. Wallets, wealth, treasure, gold...No, money, focus on money. Cash maybe...?

She lays the wallet on the floor and stands.

She crosses her arms and aims a genie nod at it.

Gina peeks into the wallet. Nothing.

She gathers candles from around the room and lights them.

She does a sign of the cross, kneels and prays. Does a full bow with her forehead to the floor.

Gina throws up hand signs, gestures, full body contortions which leads to...

...a spasm of wild and crazy dancing.

LATER

The last candle winks out.

The laptop rests on a corner of the mattress. The web page on the screen reads: Mental Health Hotline - We Understand.

Near the laptop, Gina sits and talks on her phone to a CRISIS COUNSELOR.

GINA

(wearily)

Yes, it's leather. How many times you gonna ask me that?

CRISIS COUNSELOR (V.O.)

Gina, it's a process. So, this leather wallet gave you money to buy shoes. Let me ask, were they leather too?

GINA

Yeah, but what does that have to do with the money?

CRISIS COUNSELOR (V.O.)

You spend a lot of time with leather items don't you Gina?

GINA

Sorry. You crossed the creepy line.

Gina hits the OFF button. Recovers.

Holds the wallet near her mouth and speaks quietly.

GINA

Okay, if you can hear me, text me.

(blank phone screen)

Or an email's good.

(still blank)

I know what it is. I'm such a piggy. Thanks for buying me all this stuff!

Gina peers at the wallet, her phone, her computer. Nothing.

GINA

(puppy talk)

Who's the best wallet ever? You are.

Yes, you are. Yes, you are.

Gina lays the wallet down. She stands and paces around it.

GINA

What are the rules? Are you empty for real now? Do you, like, recharge over night? Where did you come from?

She checks windows and corners for mics and cameras.

GINA

(at the walls)

Am I being punked?

Gina, defeated, flops onto the mattress.

GINA

Like I know anybody who has that kind of money.

(at the wallet)
What the hell do you want?

INT. GINA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Gina wakes up and sees the wallet next to her. She grabs it and opens it. Empty.

GINA

Fun's fun, but I need some real money.

She sits up, grabs her phone, and calls number after number.

GINA

Hello Ms. Cullen...This is...Yes, I sent my resume in last week and...Oh. Thanks.

(another number)

Good morning Mr. Kelm. This is Gina Allegretto...Yes, for the assistant...and there are no other...Thanks for you time.

(another)

Hello Mr. Raymos. Your website had a position in...None at all? So, when do you think you might be hiring?

Gina's frustration builds as the calls meld into an incoherent torrent of words finishing with...

GINA

INT. GINA'S KITCHEN AREA - DAY

The wallet seems very small, sitting by itself on the vast expanse of the Formica counter.

Beyond the forlorn wallet, Gina grabs a mixing bowl from the sparsely populated shelves and sets in on the counter.

She inspects the almost empty refrigerator and the frozen wasteland of its freezer.

Gina peers into her bedroom. Her open laptop looms large.

GINA

You know what? This time? Y'all can wait for me.

She grabs the wallet and gives it a what-the-hell look.

GTNA

You up for shopping?

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Gina dashes out the door and heads down the street.

Ray peeks from behind a bush and follows her.

She looks back. He ducks into a storefront.

She continues. He peeks out and follows her.

INT. BIG BOX STORE - DAY

Ray peeks around the end cap of the meat aisle and sees...

... Gina balance three packages of Italian sausage on one hand and hold the wallet in the other.

She looks in his direction. He hops back out of sight.

A FEMALE SHOPPER rounds the corner behind Gina.

GINA

(to the wallet)

Is three too many?

The shopper hears Gina and steals a furtive glance as Gina places the packages into her cart.

GINA

(to the wallet)

Okay then, give me a sign.

Gina looks up and sees the shopper.

Confused but game, the shopper flashes her the Horns Sign.

Gina, abashed, timidly returns the sign and turns away.

Ray peeks around the end cap again and sees...

...Gina open the wallet and stare into its empty folds.

GINA

I need that sausage. What do you know about meatballs anyway?

Gina shoves the wallet in her pocket and rolls her cart down the aisle. Ray, eyes on the wallet, follows Gina to the...

CHECKOUT LINE

Ray sees Gina in line and hurries to get in behind her.

A LARGE GUY steps into line first. Ray leans around him. The guy looks annoyed. Ray ignores him to watch Gina open the wallet. As Ray can see, it's empty.

Gina steps up to...the same clerk as before. Both bummed.

CLERK

So, are we playing chicken again?

Gina gives a weak grin.

The clerk rings up the sausage ingredients.

CHA-CHING. The total comes up.

Ray leans in closer. Large guy gets angrier.

Gina takes a breath. She opens the wallet. Stunned smile.

Gina pulls cash out of the wallet and hands it to the clerk.

RAY

(to large guy)
Did you see that? It was - (off his glower)
Guess not.

Giddy with the possibilities, Gina rolls her cart out.

Ray bolts from the line, giddy with his own possibilities.

INT. MR. BRAWNER'S LIMO - DAY

CHARLIE, the chauffeur smiles as Mr. Brawner slides into the back seat, a cluttered yet elegant mobile office.

Brawner reaches for the door handle.

MR. BRAWNER

Charlie, I've got a lunch at --

Ray leans in through the open door.

RAY

Hello Mr. Brawner.

Charlie snaps his head around, body on high alert.

Brawner returns a don't-bother head shake.

MR. BRAWNER

I thought we settled this.

RAY

Mr. Brawner, I know you're smart enough to change your mind if there's new information.

MR. BRAWNER

Make it quick. And it better not be that you got a new tablet.

RAY

I have an investment partner.

MR. BRAWNER

I guess it's too much to ask that it be someone I've actually heard of.

RAY

It's more of a...he prefers to remain anonymous.

MR. BRAWNER

So I should roll the dice on two unknowns instead of one?

Brawner sees Charlie point to his watch.

MR. BRAWNER

You really want to do this? Fine.

Brawner rummages through a file case and pulls out a contract.

Ray, eager, watches as Brawner writes in a few items.

Brawner hands Ray the contract. Ray scans it.

RAY

Mr. Brawner, I'm sure this is the start of a...

Brawner hands Ray a pen. He signs and hands back the contract.

RAY

... mutually beneficial relationship.

MR. BRAWNER

Right. You've got a month.

INT. GINA'S KITCHEN AREA - DAY

Tongs nudge meatballs around the pan of sizzling olive oil.

Immersed in the aroma, Gina aims her voice heavenward.

GINA

I know, Ma. I should'a put in veal. But nobody eats that anymore.

She plucks meatball. Blows, bites, and savors it.

GINA

And they taste just fine.

INT. GINA'S KITCHEN AREA - LATER

On the counter, steam rises from meatballs cooling in an aluminum foil food container.

Tongs drop the last meatball drops into the container.

Gina pushes the lid onto the container, admires it, and places it on a stack of two other sealed containers.

She looks past the containers.

Again, the open laptop in her bedroom looms large.

GINA

Better get back to it.

Gina wipes her hands on a towel and heads to the bedroom.

INT. GINA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Gina sits on the mattress and faces a half-written cover letter on her laptop. She talks her way through writing it.

GINA

Your factory could use a self-starter like me...No...I'm a hard worker and learn fast. Yikes...I love...I love...I love...assembling the same thing over and over in factories with no windows. I love sitting in tiny cubes filling in forms that make no sense. I love that you lay me off every time the market drops. Cripes!

Gina gazes at the containers of meatballs on the counter. She stands and marches to the kitchen.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Ray peeks around a corner and sees Gina fly out the door carrying a covered foil pan.

He follows her down the street.

EXT. URBAN PARK PAVILION, HOTDOG CART - DAY

Ray watches Gina set the foil pan on Ben's hotdog cart.

Gina hands Ben a meatball on a toothpick.

GINA

You'll love it. You'll love yourself for eating it.

He takes a bite. Savors it. Wolfs down the rest.

A REGULAR CUSTOMER steps up to the cart.

REGULAR CUSTOMER

So Ben, selling meatballs now?

Gina and Ben exchange what-the and why-not looks.

BEN

Ah, yeah. How many you want? (sotto voce to Gina)
You got more of these?

EXT. URBAN PARK PAVILION, HOTDOG CART - DAY

Gina lugs the foil pans of meatballs to the hotdog cart.

From around a corner, Ray watches them load meatballs into the cart and sees the line of eager customers get longer.

The first in line, a SKATEBOARDER, 15, steps up.

SKATEBOARDER

Meatballs. Indeed. Load me up.

Gina piles meatballs onto a paper plate and hands it to him.

Ray gets into the line and watches...

...the skateboarder bite into a meatball.

SKATEBOARDER

Now that is magic.

Gina, nervous, touches the pocket bulging with the wallet.

GINA

No. No magic. Really.

Skateboarder hands Gina a twenty.

GINA

Got anything smaller? I just got started. Don't have much change.

Ray scurries up behind the skateboarder.

BEN

It's cool. I've got --

RAY

Maybe you should check that wallet.

GINA

(to Ray)

You gonna buy a few balls or do I bust yours?

Ben, eyes on Ray, hands the skateboarder change.

RAY

Just want to talk business.

Skateboarder rolls away. Gina scowls at Ray.

RAY

Later then.

Ray backs off and melts into the crowd.

BEN

What kind of business?

GINA

You know. You start making money. They all want a piece.

At a mad pace, they dish out meatballs and rake in cash.

INT. RAY'S CAR - NIGHT

Ray leans from the driver's seat to get a better look at Gina and Ben closing down for the day.

EXT. URBAN PARK PAVILION, HOTDOG CART - NIGHT

Gina stacks her empty containers. Ben folds up the cart.

GINA

That was...fun. Thanks.

BEN

You're coming back tomorrow, right?

GINA

Uh, yeah. Yeah, guess so.

She heads home. Ben rolls his cart in the other direction.

INT. RAY'S CAR - NIGHT

Ray revs up the engine and follows Gina.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Dog tired, Gina finds her key and opens the windowed door.

Ray sneaks out of the shadows and grabs her arm. She breaks the hold, charges through the door, and slams it.

GINA

(muffled by door)

Back off! I'll call the cops.

Raises her phone to show him she's ready to call.

RAY

Go ahead. And while you're at it, explain that wallet to them. Yeah, I saw it. Empty, and then you pull money out of it.

Gina taps nine...one...

RAY

Or, how about if I get the IRS sniffing around your precious wallet?

Gina stops tapping.

GINA

Go sniff...yourself!

RAY

Who do think they'll believe, Gina? A deadbeat like you? They don't let you keep wallets in jail.

Gina, defeated, opens the door. She pulls out the wallet.

GINA

You get this? You leave me alone. No squealing to the IRS or anybody.

RAY

Deal.

He takes the wallet and strokes it. Creepy.

RAY

Nowadays wealth is a number in a computer. A number that can be tracked. But this? Cash.

(MORE)

RAY (CONT'D)

No work or worry. No saving, accounting, or taxes. I can finally be the money man!

Gina, scared by his wild behavior, backs away.

EXT. BANK PARKING LOT - DAY

SUPER: A MONTH LATER

Gina and Ben dole out meatballs to a long line of customers.

The sign on Ben's cart now reads: Gina's Meatballs.

Ray, terrified, sprints toward them.

Racing after him, Mr. Brawner.

RAY

You gotta help me!

BEN

Gina, what the hell?

Terrified, Ray waves the wallet around and babbles.

RAY

I signed a contract for his hedge fund. But this blasted wallet won't work! He's gonna jail me for fraud! I'll give it back! Just help --

Brawner grabs Ray by the arm.

GINA

I don't need it.

She nods toward the long line of eager customers.

BEN

(to Gina)

What's he talking about?

GINA

That stuff I had to work out? I think it's worked out.

MR. BRAWNER

Foley, I'm calling the authorities.

RAY

Wait! Wait. She can fix this.

(to Gina)

Just tell me how it works.

GINA

Don't know.

She leans in close to tell her secret.

GINA

But I think it's for making meatballs, not money.

RAY

Meatballs? Yeah, that's it! Make
stuff. Do something!
 (to Brawner)
I'll just take this wallet and --

Brawner wrestles the wallet from Ray.

BRAWNER

That's enough crazy for today.

Brawner throws the wallet into the bushes.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

The wallet pops out on the other side of the bushes, lands on dusty concrete, and gets kicked around by passing feet.

The SKATEBOARDER rolls onto it, stalls, and falls.

He shakes off the pain and picks up the wallet.

FADE TO BLACK:

SKATEBOARDER (O.S.)

What the...?