

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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# The Sugarland Express (1974)

Steven Spielberg

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## OVER VIEW

*Auteur* Stephen Spielberg's work spans many genres. While he is most famous for blockbuster films such as *Jaws* (1975), *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), and *Jurassic Park* (1993), each of which has a firm foothold in horror and science fiction, his filmography also reveals a deep commitment to asking questions about history and humanity. Spielberg's diverse collection of work has been widely recognized as pioneering, frequently engaging with unexplored themes and techniques that have earned him a reputation as an innovator and master artist. He has been awarded three Academy Awards, the AFI Life Achievement Award, and the Presidential Medal of Freedom. His films have likewise collectively placed him at the top of the list of the most profitable film directors in history.

*Film* *The Sugarland Express*, one of Spielberg's earliest films, demonstrates an interest in themes and techniques that reappear in the director's later movies. This film follows a collection of outcasts as they push against systems of power. As the story unfolds, none of the characters rests in the simple category of "good" or "bad"; instead, Spielberg takes care to demonstrate that people on both sides of a power dynamic are richly complicated. *The Sugarland Express* features many signatures that are recognizable as hallmarks of Spielberg's craft, such as the wide and chaotic crowd shot, the presence of children disrupting systems of control, and the car chase.

*Background* *The Sugarland Express* is based on a slow-motion car chase that took place across the state of Texas in May of 1969. The movie's main characters, Lou Jean and Clovis, are based on Ila Fae Dent and Robert Dent, who kidnapped Trooper Kenneth Crone and were pursued by police on their way to Wheelock, Texas. Robert Dent was killed at the end of the pursuit and Ila Fae died in 1992. While Spielberg took many creative liberties with the storyline, he was eager to recreate the live news clips that followed the pursuit. As such, Spielberg shot the film in many of the same locations as the real-life story in Texas. This film also marks Spielberg's first musical collaboration with John Williams, who went on to score all but five of Spielberg's feature films. \

## SYNOPSIS

This story begins with Lou Jean Poplin, recently released from a women's prison, traveling by bus and by foot to visit her husband, Clovis Poplin, at his low-security prison. Lou Jean is frantic and tells Clovis that, despite her best efforts, the state of Texas is refusing to give her back custody of their infant child, Langston. Though Clovis is only four months from being released, Lou Jean convinces him to sneak out of the prison with her so that they can together get their child back from his foster family.

Thinking that Lou Jean and Clovis are a friend of their son, an older couple give the pair a ride away from the prison. However, when a highway patrolman – Maxwell Slide - stops the old couple for driving too slowly, Lou Jean panics and steals the car, leading Slide on an extended chase. When Lou Jean crashes the car, she tricks Slide into giving up his gun and she and Clovis take him hostage. The couple steals Slide's patrol car and continues their journey to Sugar Land, Texas, where their child is living.

When the police discover that Slide has been taken hostage, Captain Tanner, a respected leader in the police community, begins a low-speed chase. Tanner develops a soft spot for Lou Jean as he watches her over a period of days and refuses to use violence to stop the couple. Instead, Tanner enables the couple to journey on to Sugar Land, all the while attempting to persuade them to give themselves up. Lou Jean, Clovis, and Slide develop a friendship over the journey; however, in the end, both Tanner and Slide are

unable to sway Clovis. As a result, Clovis is shot outside the foster home, where his child lives, and dies of his wounds. Lou Jean is arrested.

## MAJOR CHARACTERS

<b>Lou Jean Poplin</b>	A young mother who tries to get her son back
<b>Clovis Poplin</b>	Lou Jean's husband
<b>Maxwell Slide</b>	A young patrolman kidnapped by Lou Jean and Clovis
<b>Captain Tanner</b>	A police captain who leads the chase for Lou Jean and Clovis

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

### Lou Jean

Lou Jean's role in the story is that of a determined mother. It is her unceasing desire to get her child back that drives the action of the film. She is the one who persuades Clovis to leave jail, kidnap Slide, and push on to Sugar Land – all in an attempt to get Langston back.

*Charming* – Although Lou Jean is poor, unskilled, and ignorant, she is beautiful and charming. She is aware of this and uses her beauty and her charm to persuade the men in the film to do as she wishes. Lou Jean's beauty and charm convince Clovis to escape prison, persuade Slide that she is a "good woman," and even make Tanner hesitate to use violence to stop her.

*Temperamental* – Although Lou Jean is sweet when she gets her way, she loses her temper and becomes violent and hostile when she does not. We see this in particular in the scene where Lou Jean attempts to tell Clovis that she has to use the bathroom. She begins by sweetly calling him "honey" and attempting to get his attention. However, the scene ends with Lou Jean sharply yelling that she's "gotta pee." She also turns harshly on Clovis when he hesitates to break the law to get their baby back.

*Impulsive* – While Lou Jean does know that she wants her baby, she has no other decided plans in her life. The film makes it clear that Lou Jean is a failed beautician and that she and Clovis do not have a steady home for their child; indeed, the child was taken into foster care in the first place because both of his parents were incarcerated. Lou Jean wishes to be a good mother to Langston, but she acts on impulse. For instance, when Lou Jean grabs Slide's gun and tosses it to Clovis, it is not a premeditated act. Instead, Lou Jean happens to feel the gun with her fingers when Slide lifts her from the crashed car and Lou Jean impulsively acts upon the opportunity without considering the consequences.

### Clovis

Clovis is a character who is largely ruled by Lou Jean. He is not a particularly clever man, and while he seems content to serve the rest of his prison sentence in peace, he easily gives in to Lou Jean when she begs him to escape. Although he is weak-willed, Clovis does have moments when he realizes that he has made the wrong choice. However, in each of those moments, Lou Jean persuades him to do as she wishes.

*Directionless* – Throughout the film, Clovis seems to live very much in the moment. He does not seem to miss Lou Jean or his child while he is in prison; instead, he is surprised to see Lou Jean when she visits and does not notice that the child is not with her. When he leaves the prison, Clovis easily falls into the identity of a criminal when Lou Jean prompts him to do so. However, as he becomes closer to Slide, Clovis asks him about the possibility of becoming a patrolman. All this indicates that Clovis is a character with very little self-direction.

*Hesitant* – While Lou Jean is continually determined to move forward with their plan, Clovis hesitates at every turn. It is not that he has a different perspective that allows him to critique Lou Jean; instead, he simply seems unwilling to boldly move forward as she does. Clovis is willing to listen to many different perspectives on what his best next move is; however, he always seems to follow Lou Jean simply because she is the loudest and most insistent, not because she is the most logical or wise.

### Slide

Maxwell Slide is a rule-driven individual who finds contentment in systems of power. Several times throughout the film he directly quotes laws and numbered shorthand that the police use to describe criminals. His memorization of these facts, and his reliance on them, suggest that law and order is comforting to him. Slide's trust in the law is shaken by his experiences with Lou Jean and Clovis, who demonstrate to him that there's a bit of fun in being a rule-breaker and that the result of the law – in this case, Clovis' death – is not always a comfort.

*Self-Regulated* – Slide likes to stick to the rules and enjoys his career as a trooper. He is kind and easy-going with the people whom he arrests, though he holds them strictly to the rules. He likes to keep himself and his car neat and according to regulations. For instance, when the chaotic Lou Jean and Clovis enter his car, he begs them not to harm his police radio because the price to replace it will come out of his pay.

*Withdrawn* – Even though his kidnapping is a public spectacle, Slide never speaks with his own family or friends within the film. Instead, he dedicates himself fully to his job as if he does not have a personal life. When the passionate Lou Jean asks him if he has a girl, Slide replies, "Of course I do," but he is unable to give any further details, suggesting either that he was lying or the girlfriend is not very important to him. Lou Jean and Clovis open a great deal of doors for Slide emotionally, allowing him to reconsider the strict confines to which he holds himself.

### **Captain Tanner**

Tanner has built a career as a patrolman and is someone on whom other characters rely. His story begins when he is called out of court and asked to take over the pursuit of Lou Jean and Clovis because he is the only one capable of handling it. While Tanner is an excellent cop, he does not wield his power recklessly and instead seeks to be as fair as he can.

*Empathetic* – While Tanner is strict and follows the rules, he immediately develops a fondness for Lou Jean. We see this begin when she writes "hi" on the foggy back window of the stolen patrol car and Tanner smiles and nods to her. From this moment forward, Tanner is caught up in Clovis and Lou Jean's humanity, doing everything he can to keep them from the violent ends to which they eventually drive themselves. Tanner's grief at the end of the film is evident; he regrets that he was unable to save Clovis.

*Just* – While Tanner could be accused of being soft-hearted, he keeps his men under strict orders. We see Tanner's fairness come through when he takes his revenge on the vigilantes, who nearly kill not only Lou Jean and Clovis but also Slide. When Tanner learns that the vigilantes were not properly registered, Tanner angrily empties their gun and smashes the lights on their car before ordering them to be arrested. Here, Tanner demonstrates that his true priority is with those persons who show the most humanity: he would rather support the young mother seeking her child, even though she's a criminal, than the men who hunt other humans for sport.

## **THEMES**

### **SOCIETY**

**Law** - Lou Jean and Clovis do not have a great deal of concern for the laws that govern their state and nation. While Tanner and Slide begin the film with a great deal of respect for laws and rules that keep people in order, Lou Jean and Clovis are from the start marked as minor criminals who have flouted the law and, as a result, go to prison. However, Spielberg is careful to demonstrate that Lou Jean's disregard for the law is not a result of a criminal mind or motive. While convincing Clovis to escape from his low-security prison, Lou Jean explains that she tried to go through all of the proper methods to regain custody of Langston and that she was unable to navigate the system. This suggests that while Lou Jean tried to be a good citizen, the law ultimately failed her and took her child away. While Slide and Tanner, likewise, begin the film as characters who work hard to follow the law, they both find exceptions to the rules when they feel that the law does not appropriately fit the situation. For instance, Tanner continually bends the rules for Lou Jean and Clovis because he believes them to be naïve "kids" and does not want to see them shot, as the law suggests they should be. Slide, at the end of the film, reiterates this point, saying to Tanner that while Clovis pointed a gun at him during their journey, Clovis never intended to use it. This suggests Slide's newfound conviction that the lawful result of the chase – Clovis' death – was too harsh for the crime. *The*

*Sugarland Express* thus offers a critique of a black-and-white conception of the law, suggesting that human experiences do not always fit that duality.

**Crime** Like the film's position on family, its portrayal of crime refuses to present a clear picture of what crime is and how it should be punished. While Lou Jean and Clovis repeatedly break the law, Captain Tanner and Slide take extreme measures to keep the criminals safe. Although Tanner consults with sharpshooters, who say that they can stop the police chase early on if Tanner will simply allow them to "take the shot," killing Clovis and posing no risk to the captured Slide, Tanner does not let them take it. In this refusal, the film emphasizes the humanity of both the criminal and the police in a hard situation like this. Clovis and Lou Jean are a likable, foolish young couple and Captain Tanner has a great deal of empathy, not wanting to see them hurt. When Clovis does die of a police-inflicted wound at the end of the film, Tanner and Slide are shown to be devastated, suggesting that the execution of justice – especially when pushed to its extremes - hurts not only the criminal but those who are required to enforce justice as well.

**Violence** Alongside the theme of regret, the question of violence and police brutality is prominent in this film. In many ways, the film is about attempting to delay or prevent violence: Captain Tanner allows Lou Jean and Clovis to drive hundreds of miles across the state of Texas, leaving in their wake thousands of dollars' worth of damages, in an attempt to avoid violent action against them. At every turn, Tanner encourages Clovis and Lou Jean to give themselves up and allow themselves to face a non-violent system of justice. However, when they continually refuse and insist that they be given back their child, the result is the use of violence: Clovis is shot in the stomach and eventually bleeds out, dying in his attempt to cross the border into Mexico. A great deal of time and money could have been saved if Tanner had simply allowed the sharpshooters to "take out" Clovis early in the film when they had the opportunity. As Tanner chose to extend the chase to allow Clovis and Lou Jean further opportunity to surrender, the film allows the viewer to consider to what extent steps should be taken to avoid lethal police violence. Interestingly, there are several car crashes in the film that surely would have resulted in severe injury or death to the police who rode in the cars; however, the film does not suggest that any deaths besides Clovis' resulted from the slow-speed chase.

## RELATIONSHIPS

**Family** As Clovis and Lou Jean are willing to break many laws to regain custody of their child, parental rights are a central issue in this film. Lou Jean is a passionate mother, determined that her child belongs with her and that the people who are currently fostering him are not his family. While Clovis is a largely apathetic father – he does not at first notice that Lou Jean has not brought the baby with her to the prison to visit – Langston is Lou Jean's central focus. Throughout the film, many people support Lou Jean's claim, including many who gather around the stolen patrol car to give Lou Jean and Clovis presents. One woman in particular emphasizes to Lou Jean that the baby is *hers* and she should not let anyone take him from her. Captain Tanner likewise seems to have a soft spot for Lou Jean because she is a young mother. While many support Lou Jean, the film does not flinch from demonstrating how Lou Jean and Clovis may be unable to provide a safe and enriching home for their son. Langston's foster family is likewise eager to keep the child, stating clearly that the state of Texas allowed them to adopt Langston. This film allows viewers to consider many questions about the nature of family and paternal rights, but it does not take a strong stance on whether or not biology is the most important factor in parenting a child.

**Friendship** A great deal of unlikely friendships develop throughout this film. The most unlikely of these is that between Slide and the couple that kidnaps him. The most obvious obstacle to this friendship is the fact that Slide is held in the car at gunpoint and against his will for hundreds of miles. He is also a quiet, strict young man who enjoys the security of an ordered life and following the rules. This is very different from Lou Jean, who is passionate and impulsive, and Clovis, who is undisciplined and flighty. However, as the miles pass, Slide comes to see that Lou Jean is a good woman who truly cares about her child. He also has several conversations with Clovis, whom he continually attempts to convince to surrender. By the end of the film, Lou Jean, Clovis, and Slide genuinely enjoy each other's company, singing together, showing pictures of their loved ones, and exchanging contact information so that they can stay in touch after the chase is over. The message the film carries about friendship is clear: even in extreme circumstances, strange friendships can result when people take the time to truly see the best in one another.

**Love** Lou Jean and Clovis are a married pair, but the love that they have for each other is not particularly romantic. For instance, Lou Jean does not visit Clovis in prison because she loves and misses him. Instead, she goes to the jail in order to break Clovis out so that he can help her get Langston out of foster care. Further, the love between Lou Jean and Clovis is frequently unhealthy and destructive. The pair fight throughout the film with Lou Jean in particular hitting Clovis and verbally abusing him. While Clovis' dedication to Lou Jean is clear, the film does not portray their romantic connection as a driving force of the story. Instead, this film marks the love a mother has for her child as the most powerful kind of love. Lou Jean's love for Langston and her desire to get him back is the reason why the chase starts and continues. The most dramatic portrayal of the power of a mother's love for her child is when the stolen police cruiser is parked outside the foster family's house, and Clovis, worried that the police will arrest or kill him, says that he does not want to get out of the car. Lou Jean yells and insists that Clovis go, suggesting that she is willing to risk Clovis' death if it means that she can have her child back.

## **PSYCHOLOGY**

**Regret** Captain Tanner is the character that best represents the theme of regret in the film. He is the eldest of the four main characters and throughout the film continually comments on the youth of Lou Jean, Clovis, and Slide, calling them "kids." While he gives Lou Jean and Clovis every opportunity to turn themselves in rather than face violence, in the end, Tanner is forced to allow the sharpshooters to take the shot that ends Clovis' life. Tanner's regret and sadness are clear on his face throughout the second half of the film, suggesting that he is aware that the extended car chase will have a bitter end. This film has a complicated portrayal of regret, suggesting not that the characters wish that they had made different decisions, but instead that those in power seem to regret the fact that justice had to be enacted on those who did not fully deserve such a violent end. Slide likewise participates in this kind of regret. The film ends with a shot of him standing by the river at sunset, sadly regretting his failure to persuade Clovis to turn himself in before getting shot. Again, it is not that Slide wishes he had taken a different action, but rather that he was disappointed in a result over which he had no true control. Interestingly, neither Clovis nor Lou Jean demonstrate this kind of regret.

**Self-delusion** Throughout the film, Lou Jean and Clovis have opportunities to reconsider their actions and realize that the state was not going to easily let them regain custody of their child. However, despite the odds, Lou Jean and Clovis persist, demanding that their child be returned to them. The film at no point suggests that Lou Jean and Clovis are particularly clever; however, there are moments when it is clear that they wonder whether their plan will work or if they are deluding themselves. The most prominent of these moments is when Lou Jean and Clovis are in the caravan for the night, laughing hysterically with each other and watching cartoons. There are moments when the smiles fall from their faces as they realize that their plan can never work, but neither says the truth to the other. Instead, they support each other's delusions and press forward with their doomed plan. There are also moments when Clovis has doubts about the plan and tries to express them, but when he does, Lou Jean abuses him verbally and physically and insists that they must get their baby. As regaining custody of their baby is the most important thing to Lou Jean, it seems that she is willing to be self-delusional at all costs. In the end, her delusions payoff: she does indeed get Langston back, even though the price she pays is Clovis' life.

## SCENES

**Visitation** A bus arrives at a desolate crossroads in the middle of Texas. A young blonde woman, Lou Jean Poplin, gets off the bus and carries two large bags down a long road to a pre-release detainment center that is part of the Texas Department of Justice. There, she meets with a guard who tells her the rules of the low-security detainment center, in which her husband is imprisoned. The security guard informs Lou Jean that as this is a pre-release facility, the rules are pretty lax and that she and her husband are allowed to show affection.



**Lou Jean and Clovis** Lou Jean reunites with her husband, Clovis, who is very excited to see her. Lou Jean gets angry with Clovis and tells him she is leaving him because he failed to notice that she arrived alone and did not bring their infant son with her. She reveals that the child, Langston, was taken away to a foster home while she was in a women's prison. She attempted to get him back from welfare but struggled to manage the paperwork, so she was unable to regain custody. Lou Jean cries and says she wants her baby back from Sugar Land.



**Escape** Lou Jean convinces Clovis to escape from the prison with her so that they can go together to get their baby back. They go to a bathroom, where Lou Jean reveals that she's wearing two sets of clothing so that he can change and sneak out of the facility with her. Clovis is anxious, but Lou Jean gives him an ultimatum and he leaves the facility at her side dressed as a civilian. The two convince an elderly couple to give them a ride to New Frankfort, where Lou Jean says they are headed.



**Highway Patrol** The narrative focuses now on Maxwell Slide, a highway patrolman who is escorting Buster, wanted for a misdemeanor, to the police station. Slide and Buster find themselves in a long line of honking traffic, which stands out as odd on the otherwise vacant Texas highway. At the front of the line is the car in which Lou Jean and Clovis have caught a ride and which is struggling along, though the driver does not seem to notice. Slide drives up to the slow car and pulls them over.



**Pulled Over** Lou Jean and Clovis wait in the car while Slide lectures the slow-driving old man and gives him a written warning. When Slide moves forward to the car to inspect a safety sticker, Lou Jean panics and climbs into the front seat and drives off with the car. Leaving the old couple standing alone by the side of the road, Slide calls for backup and gives chase. Lou Jean proves an erratic driver, evading Slide by driving recklessly through traffic and nearly crashing several times and causing a great deal of chaos.



**Off the Road** The car chase extends until Lou Jean drives off the road and into the woods, crashing into some bushes. Seeing that Clovis and Lou Jean may be hurt, Slide calls for backup before approaching the car. While Clovis climbs out and sits defeated by the car, Slide moves to the front seat, where Lou Jean moans and begs for help. Slide carries her out of the car, but when she is in his arms she unhooks his gun and tosses it to Clovis. Lou Jean and Clovis hold Slide up and force him back to the car, where they make him drive while they point the gun at him. Buster is left behind in the woods; happy, he shouts "god bless you!" as he runs away.





**Kidnapping** Clovis and Lou Jean argue and speak over each other while Lou Jean gives Slide instructions on how to get to Sugar Land. The cops investigate the scene of the car crash and one cop discovers the old couple still standing by the side of the road and figures out that the perpetrators of the crash scene have kidnapped Slide. A chase begins. The cop, driving fast, finds Slide's car and attempts to stop the kidnapping.



**Captain Tanner** When the Highway Patrol realizes that one of their own has been taken, they pull their top man – Captain Tanner – out of court to take control of the situation. He instantly orders a roadblock and many more patrol cars join the hunt. A roadblock sets up far down the road from Lou Jean, Clovis, and Slide. A news van sets up beside the roadblock. Captain Tanner pulls up alongside Slide's patrol car. When Clovis takes the radio from Slide and suggests that Slide will be shot if they continue with the roadblock, Captain Tanner calls off the roadblock. Slide's patrol car moves forward toward Sugar Land.



**A Growing Tail** Even though Lou Jean and Clovis make it through the roadblock safely, they are still chased by an increasingly long tail of police officers. The news van likewise joins the chase. A patrol also arrives at the place where the baby, Langston, has been adopted, letting Langston's new parents know that his biological parents are coming for him. Slide's patrol car abruptly runs out of gas and though Clovis originally loses his temper, he obliges Captain Tanner to use his car to push Slide's to the next filling station. While Captain Tanner rides close behind Slide's car, he and Lou Jean make eye contact. She writes "hi" on the fogged glass of the back window and he smiles, nodding to her.



**The Filling Station** Lou Jean, Clovis, and Slide pull up to the filling station with a long line of police cars behind them. Clovis encourages Lou Jean to use the bathroom, but she insists that she does not have to. The gas station attendant fills up the car and tells Slide the price of the gas, asking, "What in the world is going on around here?" Slide declines to say anything in response, handing the attendant a yellow chit which he can turn in to the state to be compensated for the price of the gas. Although the attendant insists that they only accept cash, Slide drives away. Then, all the police in the line hastily pull into the station, filling up their cars and handing the attendant similar yellow chits. When the police leave, the news station interviews the agent about what he thinks about serving gas to escaped felons.



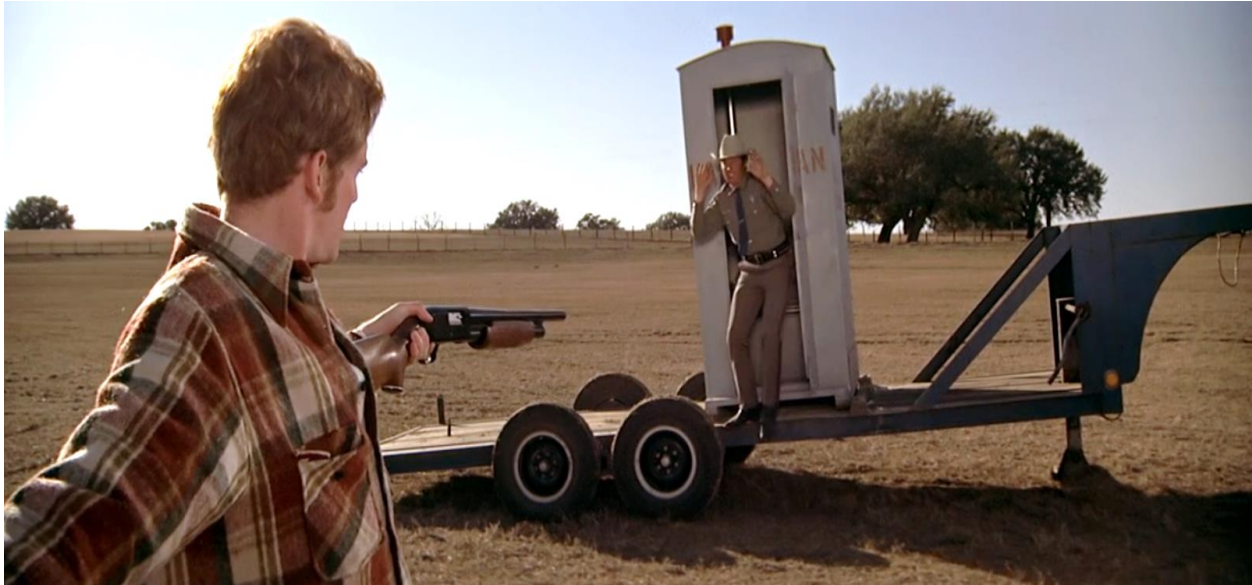
**On the Radio** Lou Jean turns the radio on and she, Clovis, and Slide hear news stations covering their story for the first time. Lou Jean is devastated to hear herself described as an “unemployed beautician” and cries, saying that the news presents her an unfit mother. The news says that Lou Jean and Clovis are on their way to Sugar Land to protest the fact that their son was not released to Lou Jean upon her release from jail. Tension increases in the car as Slide tells Clovis he is a fool for escaping from jail when his sentence was so nearly finished. Clovis and Lou Jean fight, and Slide offers to counsel them, saying his job has trained him for it.



**The Chase Grows** The news continues to detail the chase and more officers join the growing tail. The narration shifts to cover two patrolmen who have recently had their cars freshly updated, including flashy green paint jobs. They listen to the details of the case and decide to join in. While looking through a catalog of things that she can get with her Texas Gold tickets – stolen from the filling stations—Lou Jean realizes that she has to go to the bathroom and tries to get Clovis' attention so that he can come up with a solution.



**Bathroom Stop** The police arrange for a truck to bring a portable bathroom, a “handy-can,” into the middle of a field. Captain Tanner listens to one of his policemen list Clovis’ and Lou Jean’s criminal offenses and, upon hearing that none of the offenses are violent, sighs and says, “Ah shoot, they’re nothing but a couple of kids.” Clovis holds Slide at gunpoint while Lou Jean dashes for the handy-can. When she gets close, he calls for her to stop and threatens to shoot into the handy-can without opening the door. Hearing this, the police officer hiding inside comes out with his hands raised. Once he is clear, Lou Jean dashes for the port-a-potty and relieves herself.



**New Family** A news crew arrives at the baby Langston’s foster parents’ house, eager to interview them regarding their opinions on the baby’s parents’ pursuit. Langston’s foster mother insists that she loves the child but, beyond this, she does not provide many details about what she thinks or feels about Lou Jean and Clovis coming for the child. The press gets several photographs of the Langston crying in his foster parents’ arms. Lou Jean, Clovis, and Slide continue driving and stop at a drive-through chicken restaurant to get a meal. As they pass through the town, the police are surprised and a little unsettled to see that a crowd has gathered to watch Clovis and Lou Jean pass through.



### Take Him Out

While the criminals stop for dinner, Captain Tanner meets with a pair of sharpshooters who begin to persuade him that they can shoot through the window of the car and “take him out,” meaning Clovis. Tanner asks if they can guarantee that they won’t hit Slide, and the shooters assure him that they can. Tanner pauses for a moment and then asks what they would do about “the girl,” his voice softer and reflecting his fondness for the young mother. Tanner looks displeased when the shooters say, “Same thing, Captain. She’ll be dead before the sound gets to them.”



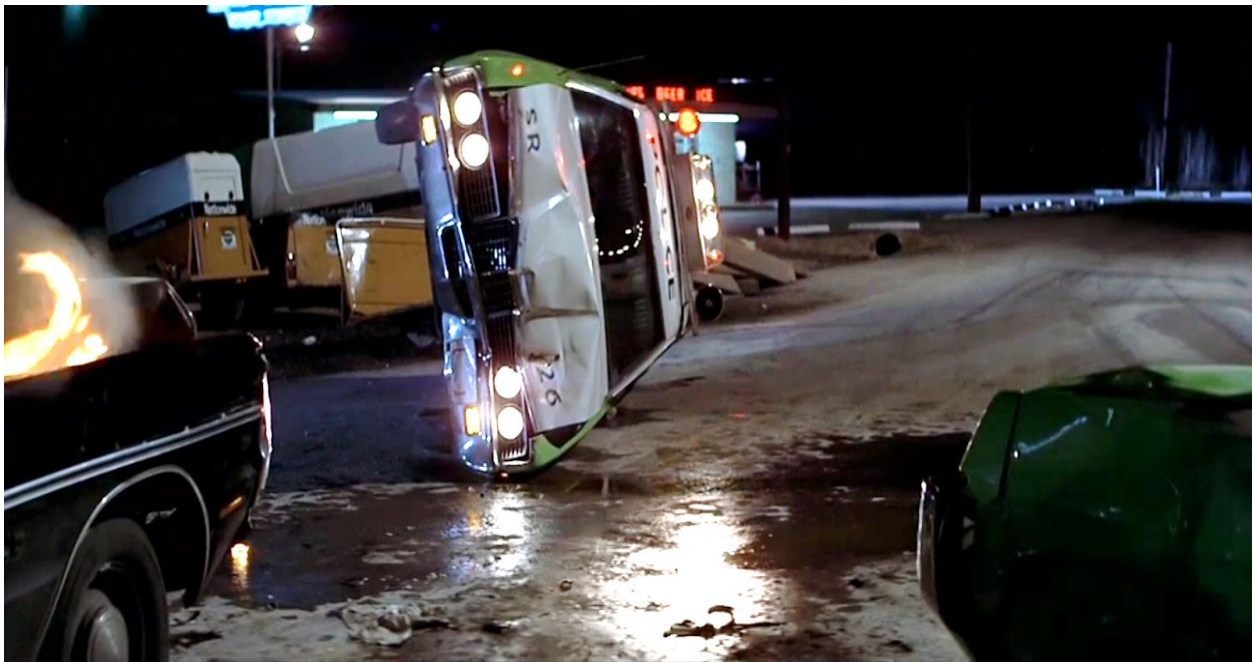
**Dinner** Night falls and Slide, Lou Jean, and Clovis share a dinner of fried chicken. Slide seems hesitant to eat at first, but eventually eats heartily. The sharpshooter sets up down the road from the restaurant, taking aim at the car. While they say that they are 90% sure that they can eliminate Clovis, Captain Tanner says that it is too dark and does not permit them to shoot. One of his officers counters this decision, saying they should take that chance, but Tanner says that 90% isn’t good enough and that they have a long road to Sugar Land which will present more opportunities. He informs the police officer that in eighteen years on the force he’s never had to kill anyone and he would like to keep it that way.



**A Promise** The chase continues into the night with the two patrol men in the green cars making their way towards the police tail in pursuit, hoping to join in. At least fifty cars are in pursuit now. As they drive through towns, increasingly large crowds gather to wave to Lou Jean and Clovis. Clovis speaks to Captain Tanner over the radio. Tanner urges Clovis to trust him and Clovis asks if Tanner will let him go free. Tanner says he can't do that, but promises to go easy on Lou Jean and says he'll do what he can to help her get her baby back.



**A Trap** Unbeknownst to Tanner, two cops set up a trap and burst out from behind a gas station, seeking to hit Slide's patrol car as it passes. Slide turns to evade the car and succeeds; the car hits Captain Tanner's instead and causes a pile-up of police cars. This allows Slide's patrol car to escape unfollowed for a short time. Some of the worst damage is done to the two brand-new green patrol cars.



**Stop for the Night** Tanner, displeased at the rogue cops who caused a great deal of damage, calls for increased manpower on the scene but insists that he know everyone who is called in. He likewise calls for a helicopter, which searches for any sign of the convicts, whom they cannot find as Clovis and Lou Jean cleverly hide the patrol car in the middle of a used car lot. They handcuff Slide in the back of the car and retreat to a caravan for the night to rest. Slide calls for help, but he is trapped and the car is parked in too remote a spot for anyone to hear.



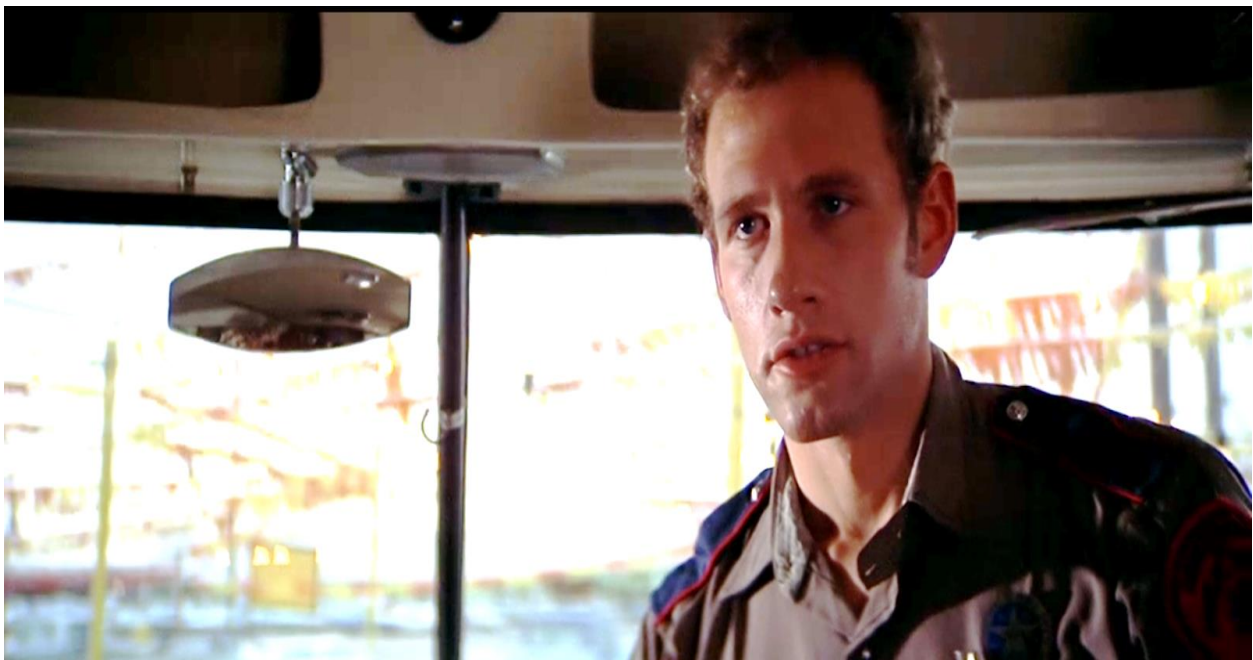
**Lou Jean's Father** The police discover the identity of Lou Jean's father and have him flown in by helicopter to speak to her via radio. Captain Tanner hopes that hearing her father's words will persuade Lou Jean to stop the case. However, Lou Jean's father is harsh and cruel, saying over the radio that she's "no good" and that if he had a gun he would shoot her and "that trash [she] married." Lou Jean is not in the car while her father talks; however, Slide hears what he has to say. Lou Jean checks on Slide while her father is speaking, but he asks her to turn off the radio before she can hear anything. Slide's sorrowful face implies that he does not want Lou Jean to hear what her father has to say, even if it could result in his rescue. Slide tells her he thinks she's a good woman who just took a wrong turn in life.



**In the caravan** Clovis and Lou Jean share a quiet moment in the caravan, which they find very impressive. They laugh together a little hysterically, their faces at turns thrilled and devastated. It is clear that they don't know what the future holds for them. Lou Jean goes to bed and Clovis joins her. Together, they watch Looney Toons, which is projected on the screen of a drive-through theatre nearby. They laugh, but Clovis' face falls when they see the cartoon characters meeting dark and violent ends.



**Vigilante Justice** At dawn the next morning, two men and a teenage boy start out in a station wagon, intending to join the effort to capture Lou Jean and Clovis. While their car has police lights on top, their suburban home and family car suggest that they are vigilantes. Tanner and his police fail to locate Clovis and Lou Jean overnight. Clovis brings Slide into the caravan so that he can use the bathroom and shave. They have a heart-to-heart and apologize for the mean things they said to each other. Slide encourages Clovis to give himself in, saying things will go easier on him if he does.





**Shootout** The vigilante team spot Lou Jean in the used car parking lot and park next door. Lou Jean re-enters the caravan, declaring that they'll take it instead of the patrol car. Slide teaches Clovis how to hot-wire the vehicle; however, since they drained the battery overnight, it will not start. When the three go out to check the battery, the vigilantes arrange themselves in the lot next door and begin to shoot. A reckless shootout ensues. Slide takes the opportunity to attempt an escape but Clovis recaptures him. The three end up back in the patrol car and call Captain Tanner for help.



**The Chase Resumes** The long line of police cars arrives at the used car lot and Tanner stops the vigilantes. Clovis uses the bullhorn feature on the patrol car's radio to propose a deal to Tanner: if they simply let him and Lou Jean get to Sugar Land to claim their baby, they'll let Slide go. Slide gets onto the bullhorn and encourages Tanner to end the situation now. Tanner, however, encourages the gathered cops to back off and agrees to Clovis' deal. Slide pulls the patrol car back on the road and the police train continues. A hesitant cop asks Tanner if he's going to let Lou Jean and Clovis have the baby; Tanner replies, "I don't see how we can."



**Smashing the Car** Tanner confronts the vigilantes. When he hears that they are not at all police reserves, as they have been pretending to be, he empties the bullets from their rifle and uses the gun to smash the lights on their car. He then has them arrested. Meanwhile, police arrive at the home of Langston's foster parents, informing them that they are there not to take the baby away, but to keep him safe. Langston's foster mother pauses and then moves a breakable vase.



**Growing Closer** Slide allows Clovis to drive the car and the three sing together. Slide teaches Clovis better methods for driving the car and Lou Jean shows him pictures of baby Langston. Slide tells Lou Jean about his loved ones, suggesting that the three are growing closer as friends and allies. As the trio drives, they meet an increasing number of people along the road and in the towns through which they drive which suggests that they have people who support them on their mission to get their son back.



**Fans** When they stop at a gas station, fans swarm the car, eager to give gifts to show their support for Lou Jean as the biological mother of baby Langston. When a fan takes a Polaroid picture of Lou Jean, she sees that she does not look her best and asks a woman to bring her a variety of beauty supplies. Captain Tanner tells another police captain to divert Slide's patrol car around the next town to avoid this kind of scene. Many of the fans who gathered around the gas station join the parade of cars, following behind.



**Sharpshooters at Home** The sharpshooters arrive at the home of baby Langston's foster parents. They clear the house of any breakable items and ask the foster mother if she is expecting any deliveries. The foster father, with Langston in his arms, walks to his gun collection and selects one, handing it to a police officer and saying "I know you're not going to let me shoot the son of a bitch, but at least you can use my rifle."



**Arrival in Town** Lou Jean does her hair and makeup in the car. A news rig pulls up alongside Slide's patrol car to perform an interview while they drive. Tanner, incensed, shoots the news van's tires out, causing them to crash. Tanner instructs Slide to go around the final town before Sugar Town, but all three decide to drive through the town. There, they are greeted by a huge crowd of people, including a marching band. Clovis and Lou Jean receive more gifts, including a piglet with a bow around its neck. Lou Jean screams with pleasure.



**To the Courthouse** As the patrol car exits the town, Clovis looks increasingly worried. A huge line of police cars now follows along with a massive number of civilian vehicles behind them. Baby Langston and his foster family leave their home in a police vehicle. The gathered press asks where they're going and the police say that the transfer of the baby will occur at the courthouse. One suspicious journalist stays behind and the police invite him to come inside for his safety.



**Road Block** Captain Tanner blocks the road so that the police and the gathered civilians cannot pass, allowing Slide, Lou Jean, and Clovis to go into Sugar Land alone. The trio stop their patrol car and exchange contact information as if they are now close friends. Tanner contacts them on the radio and begs Clovis to get out of the car and surrender because he might not be able to keep his word. Clovis insists he is happy with the deal they made, refusing to surrender. Tanner, sighing, says that the child is at the home of his foster parents and that they should go there.



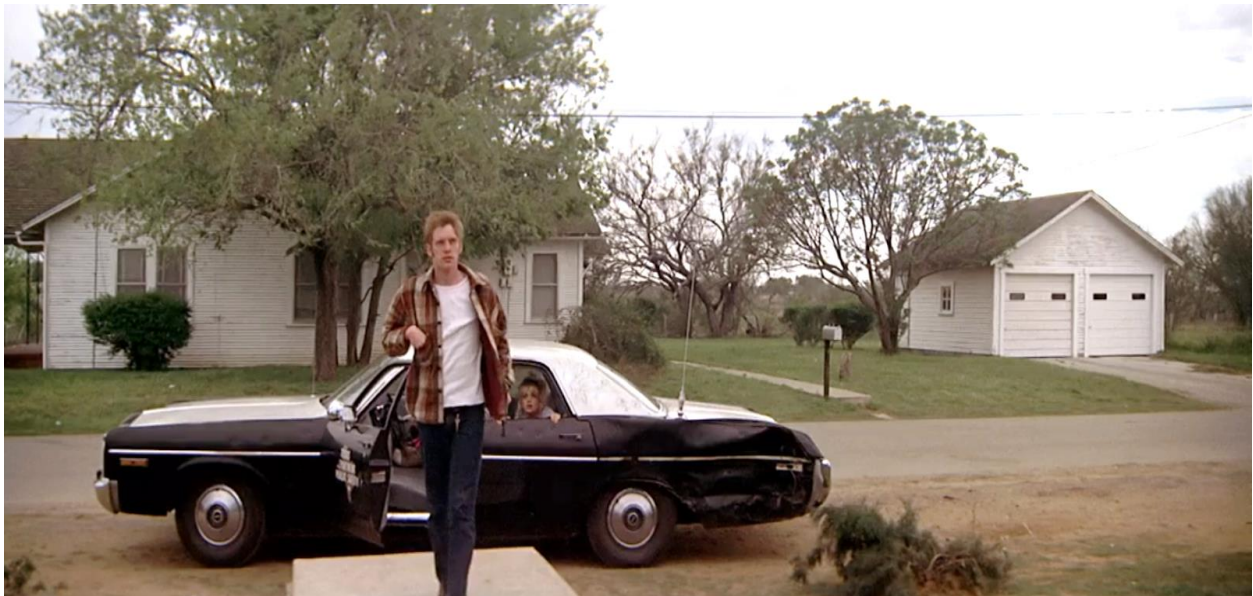
**Mexico** The trio drives on. Tanner asks Clovis what their plans are once they get the baby. Clovis says that, as they are not far from Mexico, he intends to take his family there. Tanner does not reply, sighing deeply as a police hearse pulls up behind him. Tanner waves the hearse forward and drops his radio. He is upset about the end to which this pursuit is heading. The sharpshooters set up in the house, taking aim at the patrol car as it drives down the road.



**Arrival** – Slide’s patrol car arrives at the foster home but Slide is anxious, saying that everything looks wrong. Slide encourages Clovis to keep driving, which he does. Lou Jean yells at them to stop but Slide points out that the streets are empty, which is strange. The patrol car pulls slowly to the front of the house and stops. Slide begs Clovis to give him the gun back and quit, saying that the child is not inside the house. Clovis orders Slide to get out of the car, but Slide says he will not do it.



**Lou Jean’s Panic** Clovis looks at the house and notices that it is too quiet and all the blinds are drawn. He whispers, “Oh god, it’s true. He ain’t in there.” Panicked, Lou Jean leans out of the car window and screams her baby’s name. Clovis attempts to pull her back into the car, but Lou Jean shouts that she can hear the baby. When Clovis attempts to calm her, she hits him and insists that Clovis go get Langston, saying that if Clovis doesn’t she will. Clovis, wanting to protect Lou Jean, slowly gets out of the car. Slide tells Lou Jean to get down as Clovis walks towards the house.



**Get Down** The sniper inside the house whispers that he will take the girl. In the car, Slide again shouts for Lou Jean to get down. She leans out of the car and screams Clovis' name, but Slide throws himself on top of her and pulls her down. The sniper curses Slide and turns his attention instead to Clovis, who is spooked and turns back towards the car. The sniper says, "I can get him but it won't be clean." A shot is fired and Clovis is hit in the stomach.



**Final Chase** The patrol car peels away from the house and the sharpshooters reveal themselves, shooting after the car and knocking out its back window. The patrol car escapes, revealing Clovis in the driver's seat, though he drives woozily. Slide begs Clovis to pull over so he can inspect his stomach wound; Lou Jean sits defeated and silent in the back of the car. The line of police cars continues to pursue the patrol car. Slide attempts to bandage Clovis' wound as Lou Jean, coming back to herself, begins to throw things out of the police car, including the guns that Clovis used to hold Slide hostage for the entire ride.



**Border Patrol** Slide's patrol car reaches a final roadblock at the border to Mexico, where their car is shot at several times. The car comes to a rest halfway across the Rio Grande, suggesting that Clovis and Lou Jean came very close to escape. Slide climbs out of the car and stands still. Police and Border Patrol agents move around him and find Clovis dead in the driver's seat. Lou Jean sits devastated and silent in the back seat. Tanner meets Slide, who is crouched by the edge of the river, and gives him back his gun. Words move across the screen, informing the viewer that Lou Jean served fifteen months in prison and regained custody of Langston. The film then says that both currently live in West Texas.

