

BERT (CONT'D)  
 Nora, is there a spare office,  
 where Charlie and I could sidebar?

INT. SMALLER CONFERENCE ROOM

A small, windowless, bare impersonal room with a table, a phone, some left-out coffee cups and a plate with crumbs.

BERT  
 (a bit overwhelmed)  
 Nora's a very good lawyer.

CHARLIE  
 Uh huh.

BERT  
 (impressed)  
 Tough, right?

CHARLIE  
 Yeah.

BERT  
 And you're in a bind because  
 you've shown that you're willing  
 to fly out here and rent an  
 apartment to see your son--

CHARLIE  
 You told me to do that!

BERT  
 I know that.

CHARLIE  
 And I'm doing that because I  
 want to see my kid. Not to  
 set a precedent.

BERT  
 Yes, but unfortunately you are  
 setting a precedent. And a judge  
 may look at it that way.

CHARLIE  
 What's the alternative? I stay in  
 New York and never come out here?

BERT  
 No, because then it will look to  
 the court like you don't care  
 about seeing your son.

CHARLIE  
 Court or no court, stop saying  
 court and then never court!

BERT  
 Well, the way this is going, we  
 might have to go to court.

CHARLIE

Are you aware how maddening you sound?

BERT

I am. And I know it seems unfair. But imagine if you were a poor mother abandoned by her husband who refuses to pay anything. That's what the system is trying to protect people from.

Charlie nods.

BERT

Listen, if I were representing you--

CHARLIE

You are representing me.

BERT

Right, no, of course. I don't see a judge moving this child from LA-- I think we try to settle today--

CHARLIE

Settle meaning... what?

BERT

She gets LA, but--

CHARLIE

(upset)

No, Bert... just NO. I mean, we have to win this?

BERT

Remember, the win is what's best for Henry. And if you guys go to court, he'll get pulled into it.

CHARLIE

If he stays out here and I stay in New York, that's just, then I won't, I'll never get to really be his parent again.

BERT

It'll be different.

CHARLIE

It won't exist!

BERT

Maybe you move here. You heard what Amir said about the space.

CHARLIE

Fuck the space, Bert. FUCK THE SPACE.

BERT

I'll do whatever you want me to do, but this is my advice. I've seen these things go on and on and the burden of these battles is immeasurable. I had a client get colon cancer and die before he and his wife came to agreement.

CHARLIE

What about filing in New York?

BERT

It's too late and even if you did, I don't think it would matter. They're being reasonable financially. You're lucky they're not asking for half of your grant money--

CHARLIE

She wouldn't do that. She knows, I put all that money back in my theater.

BERT

If this continues, she might.

CHARLIE

The actors and crew all rely on that money, they have families and--  
- A court would never agree with this, right?

BERT

Whether they do or not, it'll cost you half your grant money anyway to go to court and prove it.

Charlie deflates.

CHARLIE

I feel like a criminal.

BERT

But you didn't commit any crime.

CHARLIE

It doesn't feel that way.

BERT

If we give on LA right now and try to make the best deal possible, I think we can get her to give on some other fronts.

CHARLIE

There are no other fronts. This is the thing.

(suddenly emotional)

He needs to know that I fought for him.

BERT

He'll know.

CHARLIE

(dismayed)

I should never have let her come out here with Henry.

BERT

If it wasn't LA and New York it would be something else. You'd be fighting over a house or school district or... It's like the joke about the woman at the hairdresser who's going to Rome--

CHARLIE

I don't--

BERT

A woman is at her hairdresser's and she says, "Oh, I'm going to Rome on holiday" and the hairdresser says--

Charlie stares at the clock on the wall.

BERT

"What airline are you taking?" And she says, "Al Italia." And he says, "Oh that's the worst airline I've--"

He continues the joke as Charlie observes the second hand moving around the circle. Finally:

CHARLIE

I'm sorry, Bert, but am I paying for this joke?

Bert hesitates.

BERT

No matter what happens here, it's temporary. He's growing up, he's going to have opinions on the subject. Time is on your side, Charlie. Maybe he'll do college on the East Coast.

CUT TO: Henry's face. He's talking animatedly about how much money he has in his piggybank.

HENRY

I have my quarters and dimes at Daddy's, but I'm keeping my dollars and my one twenty with you, OK?

Charlie watches him.

INT. CHARLIE'S RENTAL APARTMENT. EVENING

Nicole's face is on the computer screen in front of Henry. He's doing Face Time with her.

The place is small and mostly bare with furniture that came with it.

CLOSE: A bill from Bert's firm for 25 thousand dollars. Charlie sits at a table with a stack of bills, legal letters, and a checkbook open. He hesitates.

NICOLE (O.S.)

Goddamn it.

HENRY

What's goddamn it?

NICOLE

Did you lose power where you are?

HENRY

Dad, did we lose power?!

CHARLIE

(looking up)

No.

NICOLE

It's back on now. There are rolling blackouts in the hills but now the gate won't close.

HENRY

Her gate won't close!