MARRIAGE STORY

Written and Directed by Noah Baumbach
Black.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
What I love about Nicole...

INT. THEATER. MANHATTAN. DAY

Nicole, early 30’s, appears out of the dark.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
She makes people feel comfortable
about even embarrassing things.

We remain CLOSE on her face in shadow. She’s very still
and very serious.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
She really listens when someone is
talking...

EXT. FLATBUSH AVENUE, PARK SLOPE, BROOKLYN. DAY

Her coming out of a subway. A young “funny” ASPCA
solicitor stops her.

SOLICITOR
Hey, you look like you care about
animals?

NICOLE
I do.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
...sometimes she listens TOO
much, for too long-- She’s
a good citizen.

The kid launches into his pitch. She listens intently and
starts writing down her phone number.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
She always knows the right thing
to do when it comes to difficult
family shit.

INT. CHARLIE AND NICOLE’S APARTMENT. DAY

Charlie is sulking. A hand holds out a phone.

NICOLE (O.S.)
Just call him.

CHARLIE
No.

NICOLE (O.S.)
Call him.

CHARLIE
No.
NICOLE
(with real empathy)
Call him.

He reluctantly grabs the phone.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
I get stuck in my ways and she
knows when to push me and when to
leave me alone.

INT. CHARLIE AND NICOLE’S APARTMENT. ANOTHER DAY

She cuts their son, (8 years old) Henry’s hair. We see
Charlie sweeping up.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
She cuts all our hair.

Cuts Charlie’s hair. We see the kid sweeping up.

Cuts her own in the mirror. Charlie and the kid play in
the background.

She sweeps up her own hair.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
She’s always inexplicably brewing
a cup of tea that she doesn’t
drink.

INT. CHARLIE AND NICOLE’S APARTMENT. SEVERAL DAYS

A kettle whistles.

STILL LIFES of mugs of tea on window sills, bookshelves,
Henry’s toy shelf, on the floor...

All the kitchen cabinets are open. Charlie closing
drawers, picking up shoes. Charlie hitting his head on the
corner of an open cabinet.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
And it’s not easy for her to put
away a sock, or close a cabinet,
or do a dish, but she tries for
me.

A framed PHOTO of Nicole, Sandra (her mom) and Cassie (her
sister) standing in the front lawn of a Hollywood home.
Nicole is pretending to step on the reclining dog.
CHARLIE (V.O.)
Nicole grew up in LA around actors
and directors and movies and TV
and is very close to her mother,
Sandra, and, Cassie, her sister.

INT. CHARLIE AND NICOLE’S APARTMENT. ANOTHER DAY

Charlie rips open a present. It’s a trumpet.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
Nicole gives great presents. She
is a mother who plays -- really
plays -- she never steps off
playing or says it’s too much (and
it must be too much some of the
time).

EXT. PROSPECT PARK, BROOKLYN. DAY

She and Henry play in the park with Star Wars figures. The
kid makes high pitched sounds for the fights.

HENRY
Arrrh, waaa, urgh...

NICOLE                            HENRY
Arrgh--                           No, he’s dead.

NICOLE
My guy is dead?

HENRY
He’s dead but you can use this
guy.

NICOLE                            CHARLIE (V.O.)
(taking that guy)                 She’s competitive.
Arrrrhhggg--

INT. CHARLIE AND NICOLE’S APARTMENT. ANOTHER DAY

Nicole, Charlie and Henry are playing Monopoly.

NICOLE
Goddammit! I was just IN jail!

Henry and Charlie look at each other and laugh.

NICOLE
Do NOT laugh at me. I’m serious.
Do NOT LAUGH AT ME!
INT. HENRY’S ROOM. ANOTHER NIGHT

Nicole is reading to Henry in bed. She’s falling asleep while reading, but still managing to read.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
She’s a great dancer. Infectious.
She makes me wish I could dance.

INT. THEATER. NIGHT

Nicole putting on a song and getting people to dance at a cast party.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
She always says when she doesn’t know something or hasn’t read a book or seen a film or a play (whereas I fake it or say something like, “I haven’t seen it in a while.”) She keeps the fridge over-full. No one is ever hungry in our house. She can drive a stick.

INT. CHARLIE AND NICOLE’S KITCHEN. ANOTHER DAY

Charlie’s trying to open a jar of pickles. He struggles. He knocks it on a table. Grabs a dish towel and tries it that way. No luck.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
She’s amazing at opening jars because of her strong arms, which I’ve always found very sexy.

INT. CHARLIE AND NICOLE’S APARTMENT. ANOTHER DAY

On TV, a younger Nicole (acting in a movie) is part of a raucous college party.

NICOLE IN THE MOVIE
You might as well get what you paid for!

She grabs her shirt and lifts it— We PAUSE mid-lift before it comes off.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
She’s brave. After that movie, All Over The Girl, she could have stayed in LA and been a movie star, but she gave that up to do theater with me in New York.
INT. THEATER. DAY

We’re back to the first image of her face in half-shadow. Suddenly she walks forward and into a spotlight.

    CHARLIE (V.O.)
    My crazy ideas are her favorite things to figure out how to execute.

She walks across the floor and climbs (scales like a rock-face) the body of a male actor.

    CHARLIE (O.S.)
    Try it crawling but also standing.

We see that she’s on a stage, rehearsing for a play.

    CHARLIE (V.O.)
    She’s my favorite actress.

INT. THEATER. SAME DAY

CLOSE on Charlie, early 30’s, in deep thought. A warm yellow glow on his face.

    NICOLE (V.O.)
    What I love about Charlie...
    Charlie is undaunted. He never lets other people’s opinions or any set-backs keep him from what he wants to do.

INT. PIZZERIA, PARK SLOPE, BROOKLYN. DAY

Charlie eats sloppily with Henry at a pizza place. He suddenly stands up and walks around to Henry’s side. He asks Henry to raise his arms. He lifts Henry’s sweater up over his arms and turns it around to face the right way.

    NICOLE (V.O.)
    Charlie eats like he’s trying to get it over with and like there won’t be enough food for everyone. A sandwich is to be strangled while devoured. But he’s incredibly neat and I rely on him to keep things in order.

INT. CHARLIE AND NICOLE’S APARTMENT. LATE DAY

Nicole is reading in a room. All the lights go out. She looks up. Charlie is at the switch.
CHARLIE

Sorry.

NICOLE (V.O.)
He’s energy conscious.

He turns them back on.

NICOLE (V.O.)
He doesn’t look in the mirror too often. He cries easily in movies.

EXT. MOVIE THEATER. DAY

He and Henry exit a movie theater. Both of them are crying.

HENRY
I cried four times.

CHARLIE
Me too. I wonder if it was the same four.

NICOLE (V.O)
He is very self-sufficient -- he can darn a sock and cook himself dinner and iron a shirt.

INT. CHARLIE AND NICOLE’S KITCHEN. EVE

He’s cooking – it’s elaborate. There are a lot of pots, a lot of steam. Henry is “helping.”

HENRY
(holding up a knife)
The peppers are cut!

NICOLE (V.O.)
He rarely gets defeated (which I feel like I always do).

INT. CHARLIE AND NICOLE’S APARTMENT. ANOTHER DAY

Nicole is raging about something.

NICOLE (V.O.)
Charlie takes all of my moods steadily, he doesn’t give in to them or make me feel bad about them. He’s a great dresser, he never looks embarrassing which is hard for a man.
INT. TENNIS BUBBLE. DAY

Charlie is serving in a tennis game.

    NICOLE (V.O.)
    He’s very competitive.

He double faults.

    CHARLIE
    (to himself)
    Goddammit Charlie! Get it together.

INT. CHARLIE AND NICOLE’S BEDROOM. NIGHT

Henry walks into their bedroom and taps Charlie on the shoulder until he wakes up.

    HENRY
    (whispers)
    I had a bad dream.

    NICOLE (V.O.)
    He loves being a dad, he loves all the things you’re supposed to hate, like the tantrums, the waking up at night.

INT. HENRY’S ROOM. SAME

He puts Henry back to sleep. Henry doesn’t want to sleep. They compromise with Charlie sleeping on the floor. Then Henry climbing down and sleeping with him on the floor. Then Charlie slipping out and getting into the bed. Then the kid getting into the bed with him.

    NICOLE (V.O.)
    It’s almost annoying how much he likes it, but then it’s mostly nice.

INT. SUBWAY/PLATFORM. DAY

He and Henry reading on the subway. The doors close. The train lurches forward. Charlie looks up suddenly.

    NICOLE (V.O.)
    He disappears into his own world.
    He and Henry are alike in that way.

    CHARLIE
    Shit!
HENRY
What’s “shit?”

CHARLIE
That was our stop!

INT. RESTAURANT. NIGHT

NICOLE (V.O.)
He can tell people they have food
in their teeth or on their face in
a way that doesn’t make them feel
bad.

Nicole, from across a table picks something from between
her teeth, she looks back up at Charlie who is off-camera,
and smiles. It’s still there. She starts digging for it
again.

INT. THEATER OFFICE. DAY

NICOLE (V.O.)
Charlie is self-made -- his
parents -- I only met them once --
but he told me there was a lot of
alcohol and some violence in his
childhood.

Henry plays on the floor. Charlie leads a meeting with his
set decorator and Nicole and the stage manager around a big
table. They reference a model of the stage set.

NICOLE (V.O.)
He moved to New York from Indiana
with no safety net and now he’s
more a New Yorker than any New
Yorker.

INT. THEATER. ANOTHER DAY

Charlie is passing out coffees to all the actors and crew
members of their theater at the beginning of a rehearsal.
He’s gotten everyone’s drink right, and bought them all
himself.

NICOLE (V.O.)
He’s brilliant at creating family
out of whoever is around.
CHARLIE
I made sure they used the right almond milk--

NICOLE (V.O.)
With the theatre company he cast a spell that made everyone feel included. No one, not even an intern was unimportant. He could remember all the inside jokes.

CHARLIE
(handing an intern a coffee)
And where do YOU go when it’s windy?!

YOUNG INTERN
(laughing, flattered, remembering)
Oh yeah, that was funny!

INT. THEATER. PREVIOUS DAY

We return to the close-up of Charlie. He sits in the back of an empty theater taking notes, the small yellow reading light illuminating his face. He watches Nicole, in rehearsal, climb up onto the actor as she did earlier.

CHARLIE
Let’s stop there.

Nicolette, up almost atop the actor’s head, turns to him with a look that asks, “Was that OK?” Charlie nods.

INT. MEDIATOR’S OFFICE. DAY

CLOSE on a sheet of paper: We can see written everything we just heard.

MEDIATOR (O.S.)
Who wants to start?

Nicolette, no make-up, in a baggy sweatshirt and jeans, sits in a chair, not saying a word, staring at a piece of paper in her lap.

NICOLE
I’m not going to read this out loud.

MEDIATOR (O.S.)
Why is that?

NICOLE
I don’t like what I wrote.
We see now that she and Charlie are sitting in two adjacent chairs in an office on the Upper West Side. A male mediator, 50’s, in a sweater vest wearing too many rings, tightly cross-legged, facing them.

MEDIATOR
As we mediate your separation and eventual divorce, things can become quite contentious, so I like to begin with a note of positivity. For the people I work with to remember why they got married in the first place. And so, that as you come apart, you’re reminded that this is a person you had great feeling for and maybe still do in many ways--

CHARLIE
(holding up his phone)
I’ll read mine. I like what I wrote.

MEDIATOR
For it to really work, you both have to read--

NICOLE
(folding up her paper)
I’m not going to.

MEDIATOR
She always says I can’t write. But I think mine is pretty good.

OK--

MEDIATOR
Nicole, maybe you’ll change your mind once you hear Charlie’s.

NICOLE
(looking at him now)
I don’t want to hear Charlie’s.

CHARLIE
We promised to listen.

MEDIATOR
That’s right, that’s the very first step in this process.

Nicole stands up, suddenly furious.
NICOLE
  Well, I think I’ll go if you two
  are just going to sit around and
  suck each other’s dicks!

A hubbub of protests then:

INT. THEATER. NIGHT

Audience members watch, rapt. Nicole is on-stage in a red
dress. A black and white video of her face projected on
either side of her. On stage, she delivers her lines in an
almost life-less way while the video Nicole is very
animated and emotional.

Charlie sits in the back of the theatre--she can’t see his
face, but she knows where he is.

She continues speaking, looking into the audience when
several bodies approach her, turn her to her side and carry
her off like a stiff rolled-up rug.

Charlie sees her looking and is sad and disturbed and stops
writing his notes for a moment.

Behind her, a portal opens up, the stage is awash in red
light and the company members carry her through the door.

INT. RESTAURANT. NIGHT

Closing night party. The whole company is there
celebrating, this is clearly their spot. There’s a piano,
and names are pulled from a bowl and people take turns
singing. Investors mingle as well, notable for the
disobedient air of people who shouldn’t be “downtown.”

A woman, 30’s, Mary Ann, also the stage manager (we saw her
earlier in rehearsals), sits in a booth with the costume
designer, Donna, 40’s. She looks over at Charlie in a
booth in the corner, surrounded by members of the troupe.
He works on a beer and makes more notes in a book.

    MARY ANN
    Do you think I can go over there
    now?

Donna, turns and we SWING OVER to: Nicole, on the other
side of the room at a table flanked by other members of the
cast and crew.

    DONNA
    Not yet.
On Charlie’s end of the room, Frank, an older actor, carries on with Terry, a younger one.

FRANK
...Charlie gave me the note - but it’s really for you: he told me to pick up my cues.

TERRY
How is that for me?

FRANK
Acting is reacting - I’m responding to you and you’re slowing ME down.

ACTOR 3
...hey, hello, Frank - it’s closing night, you know, we’re done?!

LIGHTING TECH
...first, no, we’re moving (also doing HANDS!) to (doing some HANDS!)

TERRY
To The Broadway!

The Broadway-

FRANK
The Main Stem.

They all cheers and laugh.

ACTOR 2
...but we’ll have to restage ...it’s still a good note... it anyway!

ACTOR 1
...and you know Charlie, it’s never done, he never finishes.

ACTOR 3
We NEVER FINISH!

ACTOR 2
Love you, Charlie.

They all laugh, but they’re excited, it’s big. Charlie, still looking at his notes, reaches out and pats the actor’s leg affectionately. Terry, gets up--

TERRY
I need a cigarette.
--and makes his way across the room passing other company members and snippets of conversation.

BETH
(dramatically)
...that’s why it seems wrong to take over for Nicole - the role is hers! And what if her pilot doesn’t go, she’ll come back from LA and want the part back, right?

ACTOR 3
No, she’s done with it.

BETH
Something like 100 percent of pilots don’t get picked up.

ACTOR 4
It can’t be 100 percent. There would never be any shows.

ACTOR 5
No, but statistically, it’s true. The probability is zero. It’s one of those things.

ACTOR 3
(sadly)
No, this time it’s really over.

BETH
(to herself)
Still feels weird...

ACTOR 9
...I feel like MY parents are splitting up.

ACTOR 7
It’s always been “Charlie and Nicole.” It just doesn’t sound right any other way.

ACTOR 3
Poor Henry.

Terry passes Mary Ann and Donna who still watch Charlie.

MARY ANN
(re: Charlie)
How about now?

DONNA
I’d wait, honey.

Terry arrives at the booth at the other end of the room where Nicole and her group are camped together.
ANOTHER ACTOR
(shaking her head)
He still giving notes?

TERRY
Yep.

SET DESIGNER
(to Nicole)
You’re lucky, Nic, I wish I was
going to LA. You can have space
in LA. There’s no SPACE here.

Nicole looks across the restaurant and catches Charlie’s
eye. He mouths “hi” and she nods. Is it nice?

MARY ANN
(growing more impatient)
Now?

DONNA
Don’t do it.

Frank stands and makes a toast to Charlie and Nicole and
the move to Broadway ("The Main Stem") and how much they’ll
miss Nicole and then makes it about him returning to
Broadway with the young turks. In 1968, he was the young
turk.

FRANK
Winning your first Tony at 27--
which I did--messes with your
head. I was just a baby! Elia
Kazan came backstage on opening
night elbowing Mike Nichols into a
corner. Mike, who I later turned
down twice, a big regret of
mine...

During the speech, Mary Ann, the stage manager, suddenly
rises (we can see Donna making protestations) and makes her
approach to Charlie’s corner, whispering something in his
ear.

MARY ANN
I wanted to make sure that I have
all your notes down so I can
compile them into the master list
for when we move into the new
theater...

Nicole, clocking this, abruptly stands. Charlie sees her
rise and does the same.
INT. Q TRAIN SUBWAY

Riding home across the Manhattan Bridge. Nicole sits on the mostly empty bench gazing out the window.

Although there are available seats, Charlie stands and leans against the doors.

INT. CHARLIE AND NICOLE’S APARTMENT. NIGHT

She and Charlie enter and relieve a young babysitter who for some reason is buttoning her pants up and looks a little ashamed.

BABYSITTER
Oh hey, I didn’t expect you guys until late.

NICOLE
How’s he doing?

BABSYTTER
Good, good. He went to bed on time, no fuss. I read him some of Cricket in Times Square...
(takes them in)
God, you guys are so attractive.
(hand to mouth)
Shit, sorry. I didn’t stop that from being said.

Nicole goes back and checks on Henry--

CHARLIE (O.S.) BABYSITTER (O.S.)
Ha! No it’s okay. I’ll pay Hey, thanks! And also the you for the whole time, we travel time to Greenpoint-- decided to come home early.

She stumbles on something. It’s his little suitcase, open on the floor--toys crammed into it. He’s sleeping soundly, all twisted up in his superhero sheets. He uses a well- worn white bear as a pillow. She fixes his sheets.

The Babysitter is gone and Charlie is setting up the couch as his bed. He surveys the room while he reflexively fiddles with a small X-Acto knife on his key chain. We CUT QUICKLY between objects (the clicking sound of the knife as a soundtrack): Books, a chair, table, lamp, a TV which turns on, painting, photos... Objects from their life together. (Mugs of tea rest beside some of these objects.)

A book on a table.
Nicole retrieves the book and heads back to the bedroom. Charlie’s voice stops her:

CHARLIE
It’s not always going to be like this, it’s going to get better.

Nicole nods.

CHARLIE
If you don’t like that mediator, we’ll find another one—

NICOLE
Yeah... CHARLIE
We might not need a mediator, we’ll just split everything anyway, I don’t care—

NICOLE
Me neither— CHARLIE
You can have most of it.

We’ll get apartments near each other, make it easier for Henry—

CHARLIE
Right. NICOLE
We’ll figure it out. We want the same things.

Nicole meets Charlie’s eye. He hesitates.

CHARLIE
In the meantime, the pilot will be fun for you.

NICOLE
You don’t think it’s bad, do you?

CHARLIE
(hesitates)
I don’t ever watch TV so, you know, I can’t tell...

Nicole glances over at the TV which is on.

NICOLE
Uh huh.

CHARLIE
I told Henry I’ll come out to LA in two weeks to see him.
Nicole nods. Charlie looks down at his notebook. Looks back up at Nicole.

NICOLE
Yes?

CHARLIE
Nothing.

Nicole turns, and then turns back.

NICOLE
I can tell you want to give me a note.

CHARLIE
No, I don’t... Yeah, I mean, yes I do. But I guess, I guess it doesn’t matter now. You won’t be with the show anymore. It’s stupid.

NICOLE
(knowing him well)
You’re not going to be able to go to sleep until you tell me.

CHARLIE
Maybe not.

NICOLE
Okay then.

CHARLIE
Well, yes, okay, but just because saying it out loud might help me remember it for later.

NICOLE
Sure.

CHARLIE
(reading) --okay--

NICOLE

So - there were two things - I thought your posture at the top of scene seven was still too dignified...

CHARLIE
--and then at the end, I could tell that you were pushing for the emotion--
NICOLE
--you know I can’t cry on stage
and I know you don’t like when I
fake it, but I thought maybe it
would come tonight. But it
didn’t...

He flips through the notebook. Silence.

CHARLIE
That’s all I had. Thanks for
indulging me.

NICOLE
Goodnight Charlie.

She starts crying as soon as she turns away from him. We
MOVE with her as she cries through the apartment to their
bedroom. She trips briefly on one of her suitcases also
lying on the floor open and half-packed. She removes her
shoes, but not her clothes, and gets into bed, crying.

Fade to Black.

A curtain flies open revealing a rich blue sky and swaying
palm trees. The light is painfully bright. We hear a
female voice lightly singing:

VOICE
“This is the day, this is the
day...”

INT. NICOLE’S CHILDHOOD BEDROOM, LOS ANGELES. MORNING

Nicole opens her eyes which are crusted with mascara and
tears. Her mother, Sandra, 60’s, violently opens the
curtains, loudly closes drawers and doors.

We’re in LA.

SANDRA
(singing)
“That the Lord has made, that the
Lord has made...”

Nicole rolls over. Henry, yawning, lies next to her in the
bed.

SANDRA
(singing)
“Let us rejoice, let us rejoice.
And be glad in it and be glad in
it...”
This is her childhood bedroom in her mom’s house. There are old magazines (Cosmo, Seventeen, Teen Vogue, Maxim) with photos of Nicole. An MTV Best Kiss award. There is “Teenage Nicole” and “Adult Nicole” all mashed up together, and both Nicole’s are messy.

Nicole presses her face into the pillow.

NICOLE 
HENRY
Mom... (tired)  G-ma summer is for relaxing.

SANDRA  
(to Henry)  
You can’t make home too nice, otherwise your children will never leave--

Nicole whispers to Henry.

NICOLE
What do you want to do today?

HENRY  
NICOLE  (nuzzling him)  Me too.

SANDRA  
(listening in)  
No relaxing! Nicole has a hair and make-up test and Henry, we got you into Fairy Camp with the cousins.

HENRY
I hate Fairy Camp.

SANDRA
Cassie says everyone likes Fairy Camp and I think this is true.

Sandra kisses Henry on the head.

SANDRA
Henry, go make your mom some coffee like I taught you--

HENRY
Mom, wait till you taste my coffee.

Henry walks off, hair sticking up. Sandra fluffs the pillows, retrieving Henry’s white bear.
SANDRA
Do you always sleep together? Even in New York?

NICOLE
It’s just for now, while we go through this transition. Shit, don’t tell Charlie when he gets here -- he hates co-sleeping.

Nicolle climbs out of bed. Her pillow is stained with black eye make-up.

SANDRA
Well, I have to say, I agree with Charlie.

NICOLE
Surprise, surprise.

Nicolle walks toward the bathroom, Sandra behind her--

SANDRA   NICOLE
It’s as if you’ve exploded (looking at her phone) into this room. Jesus, it’s early.

--and into the bathroom, her mother follows her inside.

NICOLE
I can do this part alone?

SANDRA
That’s fine. I won’t look.

Sandra leans against the sink, Nicolle shrugs and lets her -- how can she stop her now?

SANDRA
As long as you’re in my house, wake up is at 6:30 AM. And until you know what you want to do, we’re going to do what I like to do.

NICOLE
I can’t just go from what Charlie wanted to do to what you want to do.

Nicolle finishes, flushes and starts washing her hands.
SANDRA
Even though I’m sixty-four and have a dead gay husband, I manage
to get up everyday and live my life and feel pretty good about
myself so maybe your Mom knows a thing or two.

Nicole heads out of the room and down the main staircase.
Her mom following her, of course.

SANDRA                 NICOLE
You know what I would do?     (no idea)
About what?

SANDRA
When Charlie gets here, I would whisk him off to Palm Springs?
That’s what your father and I did whenever we hit a speed bump--

NICOLE                SANDRA
Didn’t you walk in on Dad       And I always regretted
blowing the porter in Palm getting so upset about it.
Springs?

NICOLE
Charlie and I are getting a divorce, Mom. There’s nothing for
us in Palm Springs.

SANDRA
(suddenly angry)
YOU NEED TO WASH YOUR FACE BEFORE
YOU GO TO SLEEP.

They both enter the kitchen. Henry has made a giant mess
with the coffee, and he’s trying to press down on a French Press coffee maker.

HENRY
When Daddy gets here maybe we can all go on the Jaws ride--

NICOLE                 HENRY
Yeah--               (accommodating)
Or I can go once with you and once with Daddy because I wouldn’t mind going twice anyway--
SANDRA
(to Henry)
Did you know Universal
studios is where I did my
first screen test--

Henry presents his mom a cup of coffee.

NICOLE
On the plane, I re-read the pilot
as if I were Charlie reading it
and I started to think it’s just
bad.

SANDRA
My agent says it’s “one to watch.”

She sips her coffee.

NICOLE
(to Henry)
This coffee IS good. Thank you.
(to Sandra)
What if Charlie’s on Broadway with
the play I brought him—which I
originated and I’m just doing bad
TV.

SANDRA
It doesn’t matter. Everyone is
only impressed when they see
someone on TV.

INT/EXT. TV STUDIO. DAY

FEMALE PRODUCER (O.S.)
She’s beautiful.

Nicole is standing in front of a camera in a
hair/makeup/wardrobe test. She’s barefoot in a nightgown
with some kind of red mask being applied to her face. We
hear voices (that she can’t) murmuring near the monitor.

Nicole holds what looks like a blue, foam football and
stares combatively at the camera. Hands enter frame,
adjusting her hair, swapping out the masks.

DIRECTOR (O.S.)
Where’s she been for the past ten
years?

MALE PRODUCER (O.S.)
FEMALE PRODUCER (O.S.)
Doing weird theater in New York.
She looks great.
NICOLE
Can I say something?

No one answers. We hear bits of side-conversations about a book club book they’re all reading.

MALE PRODUCER (O.S.)
Downtown shit. I saw one. It rained on stage.

DP (O.S.)
Plays make me uncomfortable. 

MALE PRODUCER (O.S.)
It was good. Edgy.
Directed by her husband.
Supposedly very controlling.

DP (O.S.)
The live aspect--

FEMALE PRODUCER (O.S.)
We’re lucky to have her.

DIRECTOR (O.S.)
I’m surprised she said yes. 

FEMALE PRODUCER (O.S.)
We can thank her divorce.

EFFECTS GUY (O.S.)
Can she move her hand? It’s going to be hard to roto the hair in on the baby around her fingers--

MALE PRODUCER (O.S.)
(aloud to Nicole)
Can you move your hand further down the baby?

NICOLE
What do you mean? Like down here?

DIRECTOR (O.S.)
Off his head entirely--

NICOLE
I’d need to support his head.

DIRECTOR (O.S.)
No, no, support the head, of course, just try to do it from the shoulders?

She hesitantly slides her hand down the blue football.

DIRECTOR (O.S.)
Perfect.

NICOLE
I can’t hold a baby like this.
FEMALE PRODUCER (O.S.)
She's right, that's going to look weird.

EFFECTS GUY (O.S.)
Just so you know, we can TOTALLY do it, it's just going to take time and money and mean less hair.

A handsome, bearded and tatted grip, 30's, Pablo, enters frame with a white bounce board, holding it up to her.

GRIP
So we can see your pretty face.
And not ours.

NICOLE
Ha. You should have seen me before the plants invaded.

GRIP
I say that with respect. I was raised by two mothers. Can you lower the board please, Pablo?

The grip lowers the bounce board then raises it directly in front of Nicole's face, then lowers it, being cute.

GRIP
Here? How 'bout here?

Nicole smiles. A hand removes her mask and applies another.

GRIP
How about now?

MALE PRODUCER (O.S.)
Why is there always a flirty grip.

Pablo finally places the board in the proper position.

GRIP
(to the DP off-camera)
That better, boss?

MAKE-UP ARTIST (O.S.)
I can do ANYTHING you want, but we'll need to have her two hours before call every day we work with the plants--

Someone walks through the shot carrying an enormous plant arm.

NICOLE
(louder)
Can I say something?

FEMALE PRODUCER (O.S.)
Hold on. (to Nicole)
What honey?
NICOLE
She has to know how to hold a baby. Later after she kills Donny, she becomes this sort of earth mother for the plant community and that won’t make sense if we think she’s a bad mother to her own kid.

MAKE-UP ARTIST (O.S.)        DIRECTOR (O.S.)
She kills Donny?                That’s a secret. We didn’t give the crew those pages.

NICOLE
You don’t want her to appear unsympathetic this early in the show, do you?

MAKE-UP ARTIST (O.S.)        FEMALE PRODUCER (O.S.)
Does Donny know?               She’s right.

NICOLE
Also, why does she kill Donny anyway?

INT./EXT. SOUNDSTAGE. LATER
Nicole marches across the soundstage, still in the nightgown, now wearing Uggs, followed by the male (Dennis) and female (Carol) producers, both 50’s. He wears all denim. She’s in fitted jeans, and a white blazer. There’s also a cadre of hair and make-up and wardrobe people.

MALE PRODUCER
Must be nice to get out of New York. Our daughter, Mia is at NYU living in a shoe box--

NICOLE
Well, I’m from out here--        MALE PRODUCER
She’s says it went up to a hundred and four the other day--

FEMALE PRODUCER
We’re just so excited to have you. (nods)       NICOLE
I’m excited to be here --

MALE PRODUCER
We’re going for an early aughts aesthetic — so having your presence nails that.

MAKE-UP ARTIST
What signifies early aughts?
They go outside, the bright LA light hitting their eyes. Everyone puts on sunglasses.

**FEMALE PRODUCER**
Into The Girl was on TV--

**NICOLE** (correcting her) **FEMALE PRODUCER**
All Over-- --or streaming or something
and you are fucking HOT in
that movie.

**MALE PRODUCER**
Carol-- **FEMALE PRODUCER**
Fuck it, I speak my mind!

**MALE PRODUCER**
We’re not allowing our son to see it.

**FEMALE PRODUCER**
Because you show your tits.

**MALE PRODUCER**
Carol-- **NICOLE**
Yeah.

**MALE PRODUCER**
This is Carter Mitchum, he’s a
futurist at UCLA who’s consulting
on all the environmental stuff for
the show.

Carter, 30’s, has been politely following behind. He reaches forward to shake her hand.

**MALE PRODUCER**
You know, so it’s accurate.

**CARTER**
Nice to meet you. **NICOLE**
So, is it?

**CARTER**
What? **NICOLE**
Accurate?

**CARTER**
So far none of it.

Nicole laughs. She’s handed another nightgown by the wardrobe assistant. “For when you’re on the mother ship.”

**MALE PRODUCER**
This pilot WILL go. Get ready to
move back to LA!
FEMALE PRODUCER
And listen: everything you were
saying back there was absolutely
right--

MALE PRODUCER
Except no one knows we’re
killing Donny. Including
Donny.

FEMALE PRODUCER
If she’s a bad mom, we’ll
lose the audience.

NICOLE
Oh...good, you know, I just
thought-

FEMALE PRODUCER
Let us know if you’d like to be
part of our writer’s room -- I bet
you’d be really helpful.

NICOLE
(surprises herself even)
Or I could direct? Sorry, maybe
that sounds crazy.

FEMALE PRODUCER
No, yeah... Do you have a reel?

NICOLE
No, because I’ve never done it. I
mean, I watched my husband do it
for years...
(quietly)
Almost ex-husband? What’s the
opposite of fiance?

FEMALE PRODUCER
(taking her in)
We’ll talk to your agents about
it.

NICOLE
At our theater, I always wanted to
direct and Charlie would say
something like “The next one!”
But he was always the director and
there never was a next one.
(contradicting herself)
But I don’t know, maybe there
would have been if we stayed
married. You know, I don’t know.

Nicole turns away, embarrassed. The Female Producer has
been watching her, while the Male Producer is just texting
like a motherfucker.
INT. NICOLE’S TRAILER

Nicole enters the cramped space and realizes the Female Producer is right behind her. Nicole tries to busy herself.

FEMALE PRODUCER
(takes out her phone)
I’m going to give you a number.

NICOLE
Oh...OK. Is it a therapist? I have a therapist. Well, she’s my mom’s therapist. We share her.

FEMALE PRODUCER
She’s a lawyer, she represented me when I left Dennis.

NICOLE FEMALE PRODUCER
(re: the male producer) Since 2013.
You and Dennis are divorced?

NICOLE
And you still work together? That’s nice.

FEMALE PRODUCER
Oh, no, he’s a fucking cocksucker. Nora got me half of this project in the settlement.

NICOLE
We talked about doing it without lawyers.

FEMALE PRODUCER
You think that, but you won’t...
NICOLE
My sister made me meet a bunch of them already, I just HATED them.

FEMALE PRODUCER
(with certitude)
Call Nora. She saved my life.

NORA (V.O.)
I’m sorry I look so schleppy.

INT. NORA FANSHAW’S OFFICE. DAY

Nora Fanshaw, 40’s, looks amazing and elegant. Today she is in tight designer jeans, a YSL blazer, red pumps and full make-up.
Nicole, in old jeans and a button-down, sits on a comfortable, stylish couch, a Moroccan rug on the floor—in an office that looks like a suite at a W Hotel. A sheepskin throw, fresh flowers on the coffee table.

NORA
I had an event at my kid’s school.

Nicole grows suddenly self-conscious about what she’s wearing.

NORA
Let me get this out of the way, I think you’re a wonderful actress.

NICOLE
Thank you.

NORA
I loved All Over The Girl but the theater stuff too.

NICOLE
(can’t help but be pleased)
You’ve seen the theater stuff?

NORA
I was in New York last year for my book -- which, remind me to give you a copy -- and my publisher took me.

NICOLE
Oh...great. Thank you. Fantastic. You’re awesome.

NICOLE
(almost apologetically)
Charlie directed it.

NORA
I know. He’s very talented.

NICOLE
He is. They’re moving it to Broadway. Without me of course.

NORA
He was lucky to have you. While I’m making a show about a plant invasion.
NORA
(really asking the question)
How are you doing?

Having been asked that question at that moment in that way, does something to her. Tears run down Nicole’s cheeks.

NORA
Oh, honey.

Nora kicks off her shoes and tucks them under her feet. She rises, grabs a box of tissues and curls up next to Nicole on the couch.

Nicole takes a tissue and she and Nora meet eyes. It feels intimate and safe.

NORA
You take some breaths. And while you do, I’m going to tell you about myself.

She texts something to someone and then very deliberately puts her phone down on the table. Nora puts her hand on Nicole’s leg. She talks to her like a good girlfriend.

NORA
If you should choose to hire me, I will work tirelessly for you and am always available by phone or text, EXCEPT when I’m with my kids. I insist on doing drop-off and pick-up at school every day.

NICOLE
(likes this)
Oh, I understand.

An assistant enters with a tray that has green tea and cookies. Nicole starts eating the cookies, Nora does not.

NORA
I’ve been through this myself so I know how it feels.

NICOLE
(hopeful)
You do?

NORA
Yes. I have a kid from my ex who was a narcissistic artist and verbally abusive. I’m now with a great boyfriend, who lives in Malibu.
NICOLE
Oh, good.
  (hesitates)
But Charlie’s not terrible.

NORA
No, of course not, but they ravish you with attention in the beginning and then once we have babies, we become the mom and they get sick of us.

Nicole nods.

NORA
Where do you want live now, doll?

NICOLE
(takes a breath)
Well, I’m here now, obviously, and I don’t know if this show will be picked up, but... it feels like home... it is home. It’s the only home I’ve known without Charlie.

NORA
You want to stay here.

Nicole likes hearing this affirmation, but then hesitates.

NICOLE
Charlie won’t want to do that. He hates LA.

NORA
We’re interested in what YOU want to do. Sounds to me like you did your time in New York. He can do some time here, no?

NICOLE
(nods)
He always said we would, but we never did.

NORA
How old is your son?

NICOLE
Henry is eight. He likes LA, but I don’t know if it’s fair to him...
NORA
It sounds like a wonderful
childhood to me: the first half
New York and the second half in
LA.

NICOLE
(to herself)
The second half...

Nora processes this.

NORA
I want you to listen to me, what
you’re doing is an act of HOPE.
Do you understand that?

NICOLE
(suddenly meaning it)
Yes.

NICOLE
I do.

NORA
And this, right now, is the
worst time. It will only
get better. Wasn’t it Tom
Petty who said the waiting
is the hardest part?

NICOLE
I don’t know.

NORA
I represented his wife in
their divorce, I got her
half of that song.

NICOLE
Oh, I don’t want money or
anything, he doesn’t have money
anyway, he puts it all back into
the theater— I used to think he
gave TOO much away. I just want
it to be over.

NORA
Of course you do. But we can do
both.

NICOLE
I just worry... You know we
weren’t going to even use lawyers
so... I don’t want to be too
aggressive. I’d like to stay
friends.
NORA
Don’t worry, we’ll do it as gently as possible.
(beat)
Now, can you tell me a little bit more about what’s going on?
Because part of what we’re going to do together is tell your STORY.

Nicole wipes her eyes for the millionth time. She stands and grabs a tissue from the table. She takes a deep breath.

NICOLE
It’s difficult to articulate. Sorry. It’s like I know why I’m doing this but I don’t know too. It’s not as simple as not being in love anymore.

NORA (O.S.)
I understand. Why don’t you start at the beginning, wherever that is for you.

And Nicole begins. As she talks she finds her voice and gains momentum and she starts to feel better, the tears start to dry up and she becomes more powerful, more herself.

NICOLE
Well, I was engaged to Ben, you know, and living in LA and I felt like “Yes, I want to make movies and marry Ben” - Jesus I was only nineteen or twenty, I’ve never felt older in my whole life - But if I was honest with myself, there was a small part of me that felt dead, or dead-ish, but you tell yourself “no one is perfect, no relationship is perfect.”
(realizing)
Boy, this tea is delicious.

NORA
Isn’t it? It’s the Manuka honey.

NICOLE
Anyway, you were asking about Charlie. So yes, so I was happy with Ben, but aware of the deadness.

(MORE)
NICOLE (CONT'D)
And then I went to New York to meet a director for a space movie, but one where they take space seriously. Sex trafficking in space. It was political, or they wanted us to think it was. It was actually just fulfilling the same need certain fucked up porn does. Anyway, while I was there, the producer invited me to a play. It was in someone’s living room with all the lights on and like nothing I’d ever seen before. A strange, surreal dystopian story. So well acted and one of the actors was this big shaggy bear who played all his lines looking directly at me which I knew couldn’t be really the case, but it felt that way, and of course later I learned that it was.
(also realizing)
The cookies are really great too.

NORA (O.S.)
I’ll give you some to take home.

NICOLE
Afterwards, I was introduced to the cast and this bear turned out to also be the director. He didn’t really know who I was— or he did, or he figured it out later— and that was it. He started talking to me. And I talked back— and the dead part wasn’t dead, it was just in a coma. And it was better than sex, the talking. Although the sex was also like the talking... everything is like everything in a relationship, do you find that? ... We spent the whole night and next day together, and I just... never left. And to be honest, all the problems were there in the beginning, too. I just went along with him in his life because it felt so damn good to feel myself alive. In the beginning I was the actress, the star, so that felt like something. People came to see me, at first.
(MORE)
NICOLE (CONT'D)
But then the farther away I got from that and the more the theatre company got acclaim, I had less and less weight. I became “Who?” “Oh you remember, that actress who was in that thing that time.” And he was the draw. And that would have been fine, but...I got smaller. I realized that I didn’t really ever come alive for myself, I was just feeding his aliveness. He was so smart and creative, it didn’t matter. I would tell him things at home, in private, and then they would work their way into public conversation, into his work and for a while that felt like enough. I was just so flattered that someone like him would find an idea of mine worth using or a comment of mine worth repeating. And then I got pregnant. And I thought “having a baby will be ours, really ours, and it will also really be mine” and he was so excited. And it was nice for a while. But kids...they belong to themselves. Like the instant they leave your body, it’s just a process of going away from you. And I didn’t belong to myself. It was stupid stuff and big stuff-- All of the furniture in our house was his taste. I wasn’t even sure what my taste was anymore because I’d never been asked to use it. I didn’t even pick our apartment, I just moved into his. I made noises about wanting to move back to LA, but it came to nothing. We’d come here on holidays because he liked my family, but whenever I suggested we do a year or something, he’d put me off. It would be so weird if he had turned to me and said “And what do you want to do today?” I watched that long documentary about George Harrison and I thought “just own it, own it like George Harrison’s wife. Being a wife and mother is enough.” And then I realized I couldn’t remember her name.

(MORE)
NICOLE (CONT’D)
So this pilot came along, and it shot in LA and it paid so much and it was like there was a little life-line thrown to me “Here is a bit of earth that’s yours.” And I was embarrassed about it in front of him, but also, it felt like “this is who I am, this is what I’m worth and it’s stupid, but at least it’s mine.” And if he had taken me in a big hug and said “Baby, I’m so excited for your adventure and of course I want you to have your own piece of earth” then we might not be getting divorced. But he made fun of it. And was jealous, like he is. BUT then he realized about the money and told me I could funnel it back into the theatre company. And that’s when I realized that he truly didn’t see me. He didn’t see me as something separate from him. And I asked him to say my phone number. And he didn’t know it. So I left.

Nora wipes a ink-stained tear from Nicole’s cheek and hugs her.

NICOLE
(realizing she forgot to include)
I think Charlie also slept with Mary Ann, the stage manager.

NORA
(fierce)
That fucking asshole.

INT. SANDRA’S HOUSE, LOS ANGELES. EVENING

Cassie husband, Sam and their kids, Jules and Molly, play Monopoly with Henry in the den. Henry has trouble reading the Chance card. Sam helps him with it.

JULES
You should buy everything.

HENRY
But I want to keep my money.
INT. SANDRA’S KITCHEN. SAME

CLOSE on a manilla envelope with Charlie’s name on it and Nora’s firm’s address in the corner. Cassie, 30’s, Nicole and Sandra are preparing. They’re all drinking wine and drinking it too fast.

NICOLE
So, Cassie, you’re going to hand him the envelope--

CASSIE
Why do I have to do it?

SANDRA
Because Nicole is very good at getting people to do things for her--

NICOLE
That’s not what this is--

SANDRA
I wiped her butt until she was nine years old. She’s very seductive that way.

NICOLE
No. Mom. Legally I can’t be the one who serves him.

SANDRA
But still this is true what I’m saying.

CASSIE
(nervous now)
Do I have to actually hand him the envelope?

NICOLE
Yes, but I’m going to tell him in advance that they’re divorce papers. Nora says it doesn’t have to be so formal.

(suddenly nervous)
Where’s Henry?

Nicole finishes what’s in her glass and pours herself more.

CASSIE
He’s in the living room playing with Jules and Molly.

NICOLE
Let’s get them upstairs. So, I’ll tell Charlie what’s happening and Cassie, you can then hand him the envelope--
CASSIE          SANDRA
OK, I just get nervous--     (nervously)
Can you un-serve?

NICOLE
What do you mean, like take it
back?

SANDRA
Yeah.

NICOLE
(getting anxious)
I think so.

CASSIE          SANDRA
You should check.     In case we change our minds.

NICOLE
I’m not going to change my mind.

CASSIE          SANDRA
I know, but maybe just to     Or we all just feel too bad
know in case I do something   for him.
wrong--

NICOLE
Now you’re both just making ME
feel bad about it, OK.

CASSIE          SANDRA
Sorry...     Sorry. I’m     We all are. And we LOVE
nervous.       nervous.     Charlie.

NICOLE
(with more power now)
You have to STOP loving him, Mom.
You can’t be his friend anymore.

SANDRA
Charlie and I have our own
relationship independent of your
marriage just like I’m friends
with Cassie’s ex, Jeff--

CASSIE
(news to her)
Are you still seeing Jeff?!

SANDRA
(shrugs)
An occasional lunch.
CASSIE
I can’t believe you!

SANDRA
He still wants his camera back by the way.

NICOLE
(getting emotional, but staying strong)
Listen, nothing can be independent of our marriage right now. I can’t believe I have to explain this to you. Just be on MY side, OK?

SANDRA
OK.

CASSIE
And stop seeing JEFF!

NICOLE
Cassie, you’re the server.

CASSIE
Just let me practice a few times. I was never a good auditioner.

SANDRA
You wanted it too badly.

NICOLE
It’s not an audition.

SANDRA
I’ll play Charlie.

CASSIE
It’s just my palms are so perspired.

SANDRA
Sweetie, you’re blotting the envelope. Maybe Nicole should play you.

CASSIE
Did you really just say that???

NICOLE
We don’t need to practice it. It’s not a performance!

Sandra is working on opening a bottle of wine.

NICOLE
Did we finish the other one already?
CASSIE
(with dead certainty)
Oh, yeah.

Outside, a car door closes, they all jump. Cassie even screams. Nicole snaps into action.

NICOLE
OK, let me get it. You both go in the other room. Cassie, make sure Henry goes upstairs with Jules and Molly.

CASSIE
Happening now.

Cassie and Sandra disperse. Nicole goes to the door. Sandra reappears from another entrance.

NICOLE
Mom!

SANDRA
I’m getting my wine.

She grabs her glass and scurries away as Cassie reenters.

NICOLE
What?!

CASSIE
Henry’s pooping in the bathroom downstairs.

NICOLE
Can we transfer him to the upstairs one?

CASSIE
I think it’s mid-poop.

NICOLE
OK, grab him when he comes out. (Cassie nods and starts to leave) Cassie!

CASSIE
What?!

NICOLE
(re: Nora’s legal document)
(MORE)
NICOLE (CONT'D)
I’m putting the envelope here by
the toaster.

CASSIE
Copy you.

Cassie hurries out of the room. The back door opens,
Charlie enters in a whirl. He kisses Nicole on the lips,
heading into a spare bedroom.

CHARLIE
Hey-- Where’s Henry?

NICOLE
He’s pooping.

CHARLIE
Hi Henry!

He dumps his bags on the floor. She watches through the
doorway.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
Does this couch still open?

He reappears, squeezing past her into the kitchen.

CHARLIE
(excited)
I got off the plane to a text--
But don’t tell anyone yet, it’s
still a secret.

NICOLE
OK--

He goes straight to the refrigerator, passing the manila
envelope next to the toaster. He turns to Nicole, unable
to contain his excitement.

CHARLIE
I won a MacArthur grant.

NICOLE
Oh, Charlie, that’s so great.
Congratulations!

She hugs him, truly happy for him.

CHARLIE
Thank you.

NICOLE
(so pleased)
I’ll say it because you
can’t, it’s the genius
grant. You’re a genius.
CHARLIE
(bashful, but beaming)  I’m really happy for you.
Well...

You deserve it--

CHARLIE
It’s yours too. We did all of
this together.

NICOLE
Well, thank you, but it’s yours,
Charlie, enjoy it.

CHARLIE
I’m starving--

Charlie removes a roasted chicken from the refrigerator.

CHARLIE
It’s good money, and they parse it
out over five years, but it means
I can keep everyone in the theater
company employed, pay my credit
card debt and--

NICOLE
(eyes on the envelope)
It’s so great.

CHARLIE
Of course I went instantly to,
“it’s all down hill from here.”
Now my first Broadway play HAS to
fail--

NICOLE
No!

We just started rehearsals
again...I don’t know...

You always don’t know at
this point and then it gets
there--

CHARLIE
Do I? Cause I don’t remember.

NICOLE
I know, but it’s true. It’ll be
great.

CHARLIE
(smiles)
OK. I hope you’re right.
Everyone says, Hi.
NICOLE
Tell them Hi. I miss everyone.

CHARLIE
Well, you'll see them when you come back--

NICOLE
A MacArthur, Broadway, it's so exciting. Congratulations, Charlie.

He picks at the chicken with his hands, licking his fingers. Nicole takes a breath, wanting to acknowledge the envelope sitting now to Charlie's right and all that's about to happen.

CHARLIE
Which bathroom?

NICOLE
What?

CHARLIE
Is he pooping?

NICOLE
Oh...downstairs.

He starts off. She follows him into the other room.

CHARLIE
Your mom home?

NICOLE
Yeah, she's upstairs--

He knocks on the bathroom door.

CHARLIE
Hey, how's it going?

HENRY (O.S.)
Nothing yet.

CHARLIE
It's me.

HENRY (O.S.)
I know.

CHARLIE
I just got here.

HENRY (O.S.)
Hi.

CHARLIE
I brought you something.
HENRY (O.S.)
Yay. Mom is giving me a present too.

CHARLIE
Why?

HENRY (O.S.)
For pooping.

CHARLIE
Oh...
(pause)
I love you.

HENRY (O.S.)
I love you.

Charlie reenters the kitchen. Nicole trailing.

CHARLIE
I don’t think we should reward him for pooping anymore.

NICOLE
I know, but he holds it in, it’s getting on a week...

Sandra pokes her head in.

SANDRA
Hey there, Charlie-bird.

CHARLIE
(smiling)
G-ma!

Sandra kisses him on the lips. He lifts her up. Nicole watches impatiently.

SANDRA
Don’t, I’m so heavy!

CHARLIE
You’re light as a feather.

SANDRA
Oh, God, I’m so HUGE! You didn’t respond to my last email!

SANDRA
Your emails are so articulate, I get intimidated!
NICOLE                               SANDRA
Mom, can you help with—              Now, I’m going to lift YOU!
She wraps her arms around him and he pretends to be lifted.

NICOLE                               MOM!

SANDRA                               NICOLE
What?                                  Upstairs—

SANDRA
Oh...
(to Charlie)
I’m going to go write you back now.

Sandra reluctantly leaves as Cassie enters.

CASSIE                               CHARLIE
Hey, Charlie.                        Cassie, I like your haircut.

CASSIE
(disarmed)
Oh, thanks.

HENRY (O.S.)
Mom!

SANDRA (O.S.)
Henry’s calling you, Nicole!

NICOLE                               CHARLIE
I hear him!                          What’s going on, Henry?!

HENRY (O.S.)
Can you have Mom come?

CHARLIE
He wants you—

Nicolé and Cassie look at one another.

NICOLE
(mouths)
Wait for me—

Charlie continues to eat (and mangle) his chicken. Cassie stands in front of him awkwardly. She collects her things, holds a pie tin, on top of a script. She’s red faced and blushing, and shaking from nerves.

CHARLIE
What kind of pie is that?
CASSIE
(for some reason that stumped her)
It’s...
(long pause, as if trying to recall a line in a play)
Pecan.

CHARLIE
Did you make it?

CASSIE
I don’t know. No! It’s store bought. You know Joan’s on Third?

CHARLIE
Oh, yeah, that’s good, right?

CASSIE
What? The store? Yeah! Jules and Molly love it.

CHARLIE
(re: her nerves)
Are you OK?

CASSIE
Yes. I’m just HOT.

CHARLIE
I’ll pour you some water.
(he does)
Nicole says you’re doing a play?

CASSIE
(happy to be asked)
I think you’d like it! It’s a great unproduced play by this really interesting British writer.

CHARLIE
So you do an English accent?

CASSIE
Yeah, it’s more Northern England.

CHARLIE
Oh, what does that sound like?

CASSIE
Ya want a cup of tea, do ya?
CHARLIE
Oh, right. Good.
(doing an OK English
accent)
Oh, thank you, missus. What is--

Charlie’s gaze goes down to the counter. The legal
envelope lies there. Cassie sees him seeing this.

CHARLIE
What’s this?

CASSIE
 stil trying British)
It’s a manilla envelope, love.
(shakes her head)
Can I start over?

CHARLIE
It has my name on it.

He picks it up. She lunges forward and violently grabs it
out of his hands. She hesitates and then formally hands it
back to him.

CASSIE
Oh Jesus, sorry. You’re served.
Sorry.

Nicole reenters. She sees Charlie holding the envelope.

NICOLE
(to Cassie)
What did you do?

CASSIE
Nothing. I don’t know. I can’t
lie. You’re being served. You
guys are getting divorced. I
don’t know. I’m sorry.

She runs out of the room. Nicole looks at Charlie.

NICOLE
I was going to warn you. So it
didn’t become a thing.

Charlie stares at the envelope. And then:

NICOLE
I’m sorry.
CHARLIE
(eyes on the envelope)
I feel like I’m in a dream.

NICOLE
We don’t have a marriage anymore.

Charlie looks up at her.

NICOLE
I know you don’t want the
disruption, but you don’t want to
be married. Not really.

CHARLIE
(holding up the envelope)
But I don’t want THIS.

NICOLE
Well, what did you expect was
going to happen?

CHARLIE
I don’t know... I guess I didn’t
think it through. But I thought
we agreed--

Nicolé gets out a bottle of whiskey and pours two drinks.
She places one on the counter in front of him.

CHARLIE
We weren’t going to use lawyers.

NICOLE
I want a... I don’t know,
I’m trying to say this as
undramatically as possible.
I want an ENTIRELY different
kind of life.

CHARLIE
Let’s wait until you finish this
pilot and come back to New York
and... Let’s figure it out there,
at home. Together.

NICOLE
Nora is known for being really fair-

CHARLIE
We don’t need to do this
with envelopes and...

CHARLIE
(holding up the envelope)
This is Nora?

NICOLE
Yeah. She’s great. I feel like
we could be friends with her.
CHARLIE
Why do I feel like that won’t happen...

NICOLE
It’s a formality and you don’t have to respond right away.

CHARLIE
(suddenly) Why...why did Cassie have a pie?

NICOLE
The pie was hers. The pie wasn’t part of it.

CHARLIE
Are you sure?

NICOLE
Yeah, I mean, what would the pie have to do with anything?

CHARLIE
I don’t know, it somehow makes it worse.

NICOLE
Sorry. The pie was just a pie.

CHARLIE
So, what... What do I do?

NICOLE
You get a lawyer too.

INT. NICOLE’S ROOM AT SANDRA’S

Charlie and Nicole lie in bed together on either side of Henry. Charlie is reading Stuart Little. They get to the end. Both Charlie and Nicole wipe tears from their eyes.

NICOLE
I forgot it ended that way.

CHARLIE
Yeah. Wow. Stuart really over-reacted, didn’t you think?

HENRY
He was upset about his boat.

Charlie kisses Henry on the head.

HENRY
Dad, you go away-- Mom, you stay--

NICOLE
But Daddy, just got here--
CHARLIE
It’s OK. I love you.

HENRY
(picking up his Dad’s
disappointment)
But you can come back and wake me
up and read to me later, Daddy.
OK?

CHARLIE
OK.

Charlie gets up and walks outside the door. We STAY with
Nicole and Henry.

HENRY
(whispers)
Will you come sleep in my bed
later?

NICOLE
(whispering)
Yes.

We CUT TO Charlie standing outside the door and for the
first time shift to HIS perspective. He hears their
whispers. A door squeak grabs Charlie’s attention. Sandra
peeks out from her room.

SANDRA
(whispers, shaking her
fists)
Hang in there, Charlie-bird.

CHARLIE
(whispers)
Thanks G-ma.

Sandra shuts her door. He looks at the family photos on
the hallway wall. Sandra younger on a TV show, being
directed by Roberto, a handsome curly haired man with big
glasses. Nicole and Cassie as kids.

A framed image from a New York Times article on Charlie and
Nicole. They pose, looking great, standing apart on the
stage of the theater. Titled: Scenes From A Marriage.

Nicole comes back out. She sees Charlie looking at the
photo. She hesitates.

NICOLE
He’s in a Mommy phase right now.
CHARLIE
It’s OK.

They both head down the stairs. Nicole sways for a second and clutches a bannister. Charlie takes her arm.

NICOLE
Sorry, I think I drank too much wine--

CHARLIE
I can imagine. Stressful And didn’t eat dinner-- time.

NICOLE
Ha, yeah... I hope Henry didn’t notice.

CHARLIE
I’m sure he didn’t.

NICOLE
Now that I’m a parent I realize my parents were probably drunk all the time with me.

CHARLIE
Yeah.

NICOLE
Sorry again.

CHARLIE
Thanks.

NICOLE
Where are you staying?

CHARLIE
Oh, um...I hadn’t...I guess I’ll...

He puts on his jacket, and leaves the room--

NICOLE
There’s a new hotel over on Highland that’s supposedly not too expensive and pretty nice.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
Oh...OK...I’ll check it out.

NICOLE
Again, that’s great about the MacArthur.

Charlie reappears clutching his bag.
CHARLIE
Thanks.

They half-hug strangely, he holding his bag in one hand, she holding the legal envelope.

He heads for the door.

NICOLE
Charlie?

CHARLIE
(turning hopefully)
Yeah?

Nicolle hands him the envelope with the divorce papers.

CHARLIE
Thanks.

Charlie flips off all the lights in the room. Leaving Nicolle in darkness.

A VOICE (V.O.)
Fuck.

INT. JAY MAROTTA’S LAW OFFICE. DAY

Charlie sits across from a lawyer, 50’s, a strong, husky silver-haired man in a suit. This is Jay Marotta. The office is nothing like Nora’s -- sleek, corporate, tough. There are photos of Jay playing sports.

An associate, 30’s, Ted, a younger jock, sits at an adjacent table, taking notes.

CHARLIE
What?

JAY MAROTTA
(to the associate)
She’s being represented by Nora.

Ted nods, knowingly.

CHARLIE
She’s supposedly very fair?

JAY MAROTTA
Here’s the fact Jack: I charge 950 dollars an hour, Ted is 400, so if you have a stupid question, call Ted.

JAY MAROTTA
To start we’ll need a twenty-five thousand dollar retainer--

CHARLIE
Oh, that’s more than I can--

TED 
JAY SILVERMAN
And all your financials. Which runs anywhere from ten
We’ll need to do a forensic to twenty thousand dollars.
accounting.

CHARLIE
(sweating)
But if we can all agree right away, it shouldn’t get too bad, right?

JAY MAROTTA
(not responding)
You were married here, in LA?

CHARLIE 
JAY SILVERMAN
Yes, because her mom and And your son was born out
sister are out here and I’m here?
not close with my family and
so we just did it here...

CHARLIE
Yes, because again her family was
out here and I’m not--

JAY MAROTTA
So you got married here, your kid
was born here and she served you here?

CHARLIE
Yeah. But we LIVED in New York.
(pause)
Why? Is there a problem?

TED
We’re going to have to reshape the narrative.

JAY MAROTTA
If you’re serious about having
your child in New York, this is
what I would suggest, you take the
kid, did you say his name is Fred--
CHARLIE
Henry.

JAY MAROTTA
--Henry? Why did I think Fred.

TED
I have a kid named Fred.

JAY MAROTTA
--you take Henry to New York with you right now. Then we file an action in New York. Make it a New York case--

TED
We need to make an argument that you’re a New York based family.

CHARLIE
Well, we ARE.

JAY MAROTTA
Otherwise, you’ll probably never see your kid outside of LA again.

CHARLIE
(shocked)
Really? No.

JAY MAROTTA
It’s very difficult to convince the courts to MOVE a kid. As soon as you let your wife and child leave New York, you made life very difficult for yourself.

CHARLIE
Yeah, but as I said, we are a New York family, that’s just a fact. She’s here temporarily.

JAY MAROTTA
(leading question)
Then why do you think she served you out here?

Jay and the associate exchange a meaningful glance.

CHARLIE
I don’t... know. But, Henry wants to go back to New York, he tells me--

JAY MAROTTA
Don’t quote your kid. He’s just telling you what you want to hear. Trust me, he’s telling her the opposite.

Jay looks back at the papers.
JAY MAROTTA
What’s Exit Goat?

CHARLIE
Exit Ghost. It’s the name of my theater company.

JAY MAROTTA
You’re a director?

CHARLIE                JAY MAROTTA
Theater director, yeah. Anything I’ve seen?

CHARLIE
I don’t know. What have you seen?

Silence.

CHARLIE
Our production of Electra is moving to Broadway which is exciting--

JAY MAROTTA
We have to make sure that money is protected.

CHARLIE
I mean, it’s theater, so it’s not a lot of money. I basically put whatever money I make back in the theater.

JAY MAROTTA
I wonder--
(looks at Ted)
Do WE ask for support?

TED                CHARLIE
Interesting-- From Nicole? I’m not going to do that--

JAY MAROTTA
Does your wife’s family have money?

CHARLIE
Her mother has some from her TV career and her father died--

JAY MAROTTA                TED
We could say we don’t want her mother to see the kid, but could pay your legal fees draw HER into the case. too.
CHARLIE
(can’t believe his ears)
No. I’m very close to her mom.
Nicole’s family has been my family-
-
JAY MAROTTA
That’s going to change and I
suggest you get used to that.
(to Ted)
We should hire a private
investigator--

CHARLIE
Really? I mean...REALLY?

JAY MAROTTA
We need to look for ways we
can show she’s a bad mother.

CHARLIE
But she’s not.

JAY MAROTTA
Your wife do drugs or
anything? Coke?

CHARLIE
Not in any real way--

JAY MAROTTA
We’re not going to win if she’s a
perfect mom.

CHARLIE
(hesitates)
She was addicted to Tums for a
while.

Jay stares at him.

CHARLIE
It wasn’t nothing. She was up to
a tube a day.

JAY MAROTTA
Have you noticed anyone following
YOU?

CHARLIE
No!

JAY MAROTTA
Keep an eye out. California’s a
no-fault state so even if you’re
fucking around it wouldn’t matter,
but, it doesn’t look good--
(stands)
(MORE)
JAY MAROTTA (CONT'D)
You need to be prepared for the
fact that Nora’s going to portray
you as a neglectful, absent,
father.

CHARLIE
But I’m not--

JAY MAROTTA
You live in New York,
consumed with your work, she
and the kid are out here,
struggling. Nora will use
that strategy, I’m sure of
it.

CHARLIE
She’s not going to LIE.

JAY MAROTTA
Listen, if we start from a place
of reasonable and they start from
a place of crazy when we settle,
we’ll be somewhere between
reasonable and crazy.

TED
Which is STILL crazy.

JAY MAROTTA
Half of crazy is crazy.

CHARLIE
Uh huh.

TED
You know what people say, criminal
lawyers see bad people at their
best, divorce lawyers see good
people at their worst.

JAY MAROTTA
You’ll end up hating me and Ted
before it’s all over just because
of what we represent in your life.

CHARLIE
I’m sure you’re right.

Charlie looks like he’ll pass out.

CHARLIE
Maybe I didn’t explain this
well. We’re friendly, we’re
fine, we’re just trying to
figure this out--

JAY SILVERMAN
So, tell me the story again,
you came out to see your kid
and she served you? What a
bitch.
CHARLIE
She’s not a bitch... thanks, but
this isn’t... we’re doing it a
different way. And I can’t even
close afford this... I’ve got to
get back to New York. I have a
Broadway play in rehearsals--

Charlie stands.

Fade to Black.

INT. BROADWAY REHEARSAL SPACE, NEW YORK. DAY

Actors are mingling, stretching, in a mostly white room in
midtown. Different color tape on the floor indicates the
set. Various conversations are going on at once including
Frank telling another anecdote from his younger days.

FRANK
She was Rosalind and I was
Jaques. Nobody knew her
then --

BETH
Do you think it’s OK that
I’m doing the laughing fit
that way. Nicole did it
more like --
  (she laughs strangely)
I’m doing it--
  (laughs her way)
And I don’t want to imitate
her--

ACTOR 3
You’re making it your own.

FRANK
Complete unknown. And I was
the hot shit you know, young
and very sexy with this
great head of hair.

BETH
I just so appreciate that
Charlie gave me this
opportunity. Or maybe I
should thank Nicole.

TERRY
I heard Nicole’s pilot went to
series so she’s staying in LA.

ACTOR 2
And they put Henry in school out
there.

ACTOR 4
Is Charlie moving there too?

BETH
Not Charlie.

ACTOR
He won’t abandon us.
TERRY
And you can’t do theater in LA.

They all laugh.

ACTOR 5
Charlie said she and Henry are coming back to New York once she finishes filming her show.

ACTOR 1
I wouldn’t be so sure.

ACTOR 5
She was never going to stay in New York. That was obvious.

ACTOR 2
She was probably planning this move all along.

ACTOR 5
When she sees an opportunity, believe me, she takes it.

ACTOR
Well, LA is nice. The space.

FRANK
And you know it’s “The Park” and all that, and Joey Papp was directing, and she just glided on stage... we were cats in heat.

ACTOR 3
Charlie HATES LA.

All of their attention eventually drifts toward Frank for the big finish.

FRANK
Miss future four time Oscar winner sucking my...

The door swings open and Charlie enters. He’s immediately swarmed by the costume designer and props guy who is showing him different items to approve.

Charlie puts his things down on a white folding table.

CHARLIE
Nobody come too close, I think I got Donna’s cold.

DONNA
Sorry Charlie.

Terry and other actors approach him.
CHARLIE
Just a heads up, I’m waiting for a
Skype call from Henry so I might
have to step out--

Everyone very understandingly says “Of course.” “Say Hi
from us” etc. Frank puts his arm around Charlie.

FRANK
What you’re going through now is
going to be horrible. BUT it will
be over.

CHARLIE
Thanks, Frank.

FRANK
Another thing.

CHARLIE
Yes?

FRANK
Fuck as many people as you can
right now. Women, men...

The Costume Designer, Donna, holds up a brown suit, hat,
goggles and white gauze and a small Frankenstein outfit.

COSTUME DESIGNER
You might need help wrapping
some of the gauze, it needs
to stay tight.

SET DESIGNER
I’m confused. What scene is the
Invisible Man outfit for?

CHARLIE
No, that’s my Halloween costume.
And the Frankenstein is for Henry.

All the actors surround him, approving of the outfits.
“Aww!” “So cute!” “Frankenstein and the Invisible Man!”

CHARLIE
He’s coming here this
weekend and we’re going to
trick or treat in the Slope
and whatever--

CHARLIE
Perfect.

MARY ANN
Can I talk to you?

CHARLIE
Yeah, over--
Charlie and Mary Ann duck into the hallway. The crew
clocks this and makes knowing eye contact with one another.

INT. REHEARSAL SPACE HALLWAY. SAME

Mary Ann hands him a stack of papers and an old scuffed up
book.

MARY ANN
I typed up the notes from the last
two rehearsals and here’s the
blueprints--

CHARLIE
(pleased)
Where’d you find it?

MARY ANN
--from the original layout
of the Broadway theater--

CHARLIE
The library. Duh.

MARY ANN
Ha!

CHARLIE
(sweetly)
Can I come over tonight?

MARY ANN
(pause)
Mary Ann, it’s too hard now...I
just can’t be with anyone right
now.

CHARLIE
We did it when you were married,
when we shouldn’t have done it.
Now, that you’re not married, um,
shouldn’t we be doing it?

MARY ANN
I’m not not married...yet.

CHARLIE
You’re torturing yourself.

His phone is ringing.

CHARLIE
Just make sure everything doesn’t
go to hell here. I’m relying on
you, OK?

MARY ANN
Fine.

CHARLIE
Thanks.
He kisses her on the head. She flushes, rebuffed.

CHARLIE
Hold on, let me--

MARY ANN
I wish you’d accept generosity better.

CHARLIE
(hesitates after this remark and answers the phone)
Hello?

Charlie pushes open the fire exit doors--

INT. STAIRWELL. SAME

NORA
Is this Charlie Barber?

CHARLIE
Yes.

NORA
Hi, this is Nora Fanshaw, I represent your wife, Nicole Barber.

CHARLIE
Hi.

NORA
Do you have an attorney yet?

CHARLIE
No.

NORA
OK, then it’s OK for me to talk to you directly. OK?

CHARLIE
OK.

NORA
I’m calling because we haven’t received a response to our filing.

The set designer, Agnes, opens the door to the stairwell and holds up two photos of stools. Charlie points at one of them. The designer nods.
CHARLIE
Yeah, I’ve been rehearsing this
play and flying back and forth to
LA--

NORA
You’re going to need to file your
response.

Now she holds up two images of phones. An old style one
from the 30’s and a rotary from the 70’s.

CHARLIE
Nicole said there was no rush.

He points at the rotary. She nods gratefully and hurries
back inside.

NORA
It’s been more than thirty days
since you were served. By law
you’re meant to respond within
thirty days.

CHARLIE          NORA
I didn’t like the first        It says that very clearly on
lawyer I met.                the document you were given.

CHARLIE
But I thought that’s just what it
says...we weren’t going to even do
it with lawyers--

Charlie absent-mindedly fiddles with the X-Acto knife on
his key chain, opening and closing it. Frank pokes his
head in.

FRANK
Charlie, I’m thinking I shouldn’t
tuck in the shirt?

CHARLIE          FRANK
(holding up a finger to    --it keeps coming out during
say “hold on”)         the love scene--
Nicole said I could take my
time--

NORA
And we’ve let you take your
time...

CHARLIE          FRANK
What love scene?          When I hug Beth.
CHARLIE
You don’t hug Beth.

FRANK
It’s something I’m trying.

NORA
If you don’t file your response we’re going to file a request for default judgement against you. (to Frank)

CHARLIE
You can’t just tuck it in tighter or get Donna to safety pin it?

FRANK
(admitting)
I also have a thing about tucking in things--

Charlie indicates for Frank to come forward. He tucks it in for him.

FRANK
It’s a hold-over from Charlie?

NORA
childhood. Insecurities about my figure.

CHARLIE
Yes, sorry--

Frank looks at his reflection in the glass of a fire extinguisher. He does his “handsome” face. He pantomimes hugging someone. Charlie starts walking down the stairs.

CHARLIE
A default judgement. What does that mean?

NORA
We’ll be able to lay claim to whatever we want.

CHARLIE
What do you mean? Whatever you want of what?

NORA
Your apartment, your things--well, everything you own.

CHARLIE
She and I already discussed this, we don’t own that much stuff, she can have pretty much whatever she--
NORA
And it means, we’ll set the number
for child support at its highest
level and claim full custody of
your child...

CHARLIE
(alarmed)
Full custody? I mean, that’s not
even--

Charlie opens an Emergency Exit door and emerges into--

TIMES SQUARE

Chaotic city SOUNDS and vibrating video screens.

NORA
This is what the law says.

CHARLIE
Nicole’s not going to do that. I
mean...she won’t.

NORA
No, Charlie, I represent Nicole
and she’s aware of everything I’m
saying to you.

CHARLIE
I just spoke to her this morning.

NORA
Well, I spoke to her five minutes
before I got on this call.

Silence.

CHARLIE
Um, OK, what do I do?

NORA
You need to get a lawyer and
respond immediately. Nicole wants
to do this amicably but you’re
leaving us no other option,
Charlie.

CHARLIE
I’ll get a lawyer. Can I get a
lawyer here?

NORA
I don’t know where “here” is.
CHARLIE
New York.

NORA
That’s what all that honking is!
No, you’ll have to come to LA and meet people in LA.

CHARLIE
I’m rehearsing a--

NORA
If you don’t respond in Los Angeles by Friday, you’ll leave us no choice.

LONG DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. RENTAL CAR AREA, LAX AIRPORT. DAY

A plane flies over palm trees and strip malls. We MOVE down to find: Charlie, dressed in a black coat and black jeans, wandering around aimlessly in a parking lot.

INT. RENTAL CAR. DAY

Charlie drives, fiddling with the air conditioning to no apparent success. He looks uncomfortable and hot. The sun suddenly blinds him through the windshield.

CHARLIE
(squinting)
Ugh, I can’t see..
(pause)
And I’m still driving.

EXT. SANDRA’S HOUSE, WEST HOLLYWOOD, LOS ANGELES, DAY

Henry comes running out. He wears shorts and high socks. Charlie opens his arms but doesn’t get a hug as Henry is on to other things.

HENRY
Me and Mommy are in the middle of a Super Secret Treasure Hunt--

CHARLIE
What are you wearing?

Nicole follows. Her hair has been dyed blonde.

NICOLE
I thought the plane landed at ten.

CHARLIE
It did. HENRY
Sock pants!
CHARLIE
What are sock pants?

NICOLE
He doesn’t like the breeze on his legs--

CHARLIE  NICOLE
There are long pants--               He dressed himself.

CHARLIE
Can I talk to you--

HENRY  NICOLE
Why don’t we ever do a                It’s almost noon.
treasure hunt?

CHARLIE
(aside to Henry)
We got to get going--

HENRY
I’m not done searching for my
money!

CHARLIE  HENRY
(to Nicole)                         No talking alone.
Can I talk to you for a
minute?  Henry, can you wait
a minute--

CHARLIE
Just one bit of talking alone and
then I’ll be right there--

He walks Nicole over away from the car and Henry.

CHARLIE
I got a call from your lawyer.
She said you’d take everything and
custody and 

everything if I didn’t respond.

NICOLE  CHARLIE
That’s how lawyers talk--        Yeah, but she’s saying
things I don’t think you
mean--

NICOLE
It’s better if we just let the
lawyers do this--
CHARLIE
We said we’d figure this out together.

Henry starts running back to the house.

CHARLIE
Henry, we need to get going--

NICOLE                HENRY
Have you gotten a lawyer   I don’t want to go now. yet?

CHARLIE
That’s what I’m here to do.

Charlie opens the car door.

CHARLIE
Come on, Henry, I’m in a rush--
(to Nicole)
And I looked Nora up. She’s fancy. We...you can’t afford her.

NICOLE
She said she’d make it work--

CHARLIE (shouting)   HENRY
I have three more clues! Henry!

CHARLIE
(to Nicole)
Why did you start a treasure hunt or whatever so close to my arrival?

NICOLE
You were late, we were killing time.

HENRY
I’m going to be rich!

NICOLE
(aloud)
We can finish the treasure hunt later. Go with Daddy now, it’ll be FUN.
(loud whisper)
I’ll have a present for you when you get back as a reward--
CHARLIE
(glares at Nicole)
He’s not going to the dentist.

NICOLE
I’m trying to help--
HENRY
I’m staying here.

Henry grabs hold of his Mom.

NICOLE
(laughs)
OK--

Charlie gently takes Henry’s arm.

CHARLIE
Come on--

Henry yanks it back. Charlie pulls again on Henry who is clutching his Mom.

CHARLIE
Henry--
NICOLE
You have a booster?

This tug of war feels ridiculous and Charlie lets go.

CHARLIE
I have a booster.

Nicole looks at the car-seat in the back of the car.

NICOLE
It’s not in.

CHARLIE
What’s not in?
NICOLE
The seat. It’s not connected.

Charlie leans in. The car-seat isn’t connected to anything. Charlie and Nicole, both crouched closely together in the back seat, share a small laugh.

CHARLIE
I asked the rental company to install it.

NICOLE
I think they can’t for liability reasons--

CHARLIE
NICOLE
Do you know how these things- Let me do it--
Henry itches his nose as he watches his parents struggle with the booster seat.

NICOLE
No, you have to--

CHARLIE
There should be a clip thing, a thing to clip on to.

NICOLE
Here, you have dig--

CHARLIE
Ow, fuck.

HENRY
Why “fuck?”

NICOLE
You OK?

CHARLIE
Something’s sharp--

Charlie gets out, he’s sweating and his hand is bleeding.

HENRY
Can’t I stay with Mom?

CHARLIE
No--

HENRY
Why not?

CHARLIE
Henry, get in the fucking car!

Henry laughs uncomfortably and then reluctantly climbs in.

CHARLIE
(defeated)
I’m sorry, but Jesus, get in the fucking car.

INT. RENTAL CAR. DAY

Charlie drives. He sucks on his hand which is bleeding looks at all the billboards on the strip. Henry sits in the back.

HENRY
How do you spell Lego Bionicles?
CHARLIE
That’s two words. What does Lego start with?

HENRY
Just tell me.

CHARLIE
Don’t you want to learn it?

HENRY
No, it’s on the box anyway. L.

HENRY
Then what?

CHARLIE
E. You know, everyone at the theater says Hi.

HENRY
Hi. Then what?

CHARLIE
A “ggh” sound. Are you excited for Halloween?

HENRY
J?

CHARLIE
Then what?

HENRY
An “O” sound.

CHARLIE
Are you excited for Halloween?

HENRY
I brought both our costumes.

HENRY
I’m going to go as a store-bought ninja.

CHARLIE
But we agreed, I had Donna make you a Frankenstein.

HENRY
I don’t want to be a Frankenstein anymore.
CHARLIE
Are you sure, maybe just look at it? It’s awesome. We’ll be Frankenstein and the Invisible Man!

HENRY
Mom bought me a ninja costume which is better because it costs more.

CHARLIE
Technically, the Frankenstein costs more when you factor in Donna’s time and the materials--

HENRY
The cousins are also going to be ninjas.

CHARLIE
(frustrated)
But Henry, we went through all this trouble--
(catching himself)
OK, whatever you want...

EXT./INT. PARKING ENTRANCE
Charlie lowers the window and stretches his arm out to push the button to get the ticket, but he’s not pulled in close enough. He has to open the door, unbuckle himself, and step out to push it.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING LOBBY
A wide white space flanked by windows. Charlie, still sucking on his hand, carries two travel bags and he and Henry, having checked in, head toward the elevator bank.

CHARLIE
(in the middle of a previous conversation)
I’ve been here...

HENRY
...and so I’m not comfortable leaving the bags in a car where I’ve given the key to someone I don’t know--

CHARLIE
It’s an office building so you’ve been to places like this before.

INT. LAW OFFICE
Charlie approaches the receptionist.
HENRY
I remember those fish.

CHARLIE
A lot of fish look the same.

The receptionist looks up.

RECEPTIONIST
Can I help you--

CHARLIE (to the kid)
I’m Charlie Barber, I have a one thirty with Dan Cohen.

RECEPTIONIST
Oh, hi. Where’s your little man?

HENRY
I don’t have it this time. I keep my skeletons at my mom’s.

Charlie looks at Henry strangely and back at the receptionist. She scrolls on her computer and frowns.

RECEPTIONIST
OK... Oh, OK... I’m sorry, we tried to reach you, Mr. Cohen wanted me to apologize. He can’t see you because apparently your wife already met with him on the 7th of August about representation...

CHARLIE
But she hired somebody else, uh, Nora...

RECEPTIONIST
Fanshaw? But unfortunately because she consulted with Mr. Cohen already, he’s legally barred from representing you.

CHARLIE
Oh... Really? (to Henry)

RECEPTIONIST
Shoulde we feed the fish?

She rises and leads Henry over to the tank.

RECEPTIONIST
It happens all the time. If you have a ticket I can validate your parking.
Charlie searches for his ticket. He gets blood from his hand on the loose bills and receipts in his pocket.

RECEPTIONIST
It’s common that people meet with as many lawyers as possible so that their spouse has limited options.

CHARLIE
I don’t think she would have done it deliberately.

RECEPTIONIST
You’d be surprised.

CHARLIE
Did you go to a lot of offices with your mom?

HENRY
Not so many. Like eleven.

EXT. MINI-MALL/FAST FOOD RESTAURANT

In harsh sunlight, Charlie heads for his parked car, on the phone, pulling a rolling bag and hauling a duffel. Henry trails behind him, carrying Charlie’s lap-top bag and eating a hamburger over a paper bag.

HENRY
I don’t think anyone would have stealed the bags, Daddy.

CHARLIE
(into the phone)
I need somebody TODAY. If I don’t respond by tomorrow, she said I could lose custody? I didn’t know who else to call... There’s got to be someone she didn’t meet.

VOICE
(loud whisper)
She’d kill me if she knew we were talking.

CHARLIE
VOICE
I know. I really appreciate it. It’s high alert over here. It.
INT. SANDRA’S HOUSE, BATHROOM, LOS ANGELES. INTERCUT

Sandra, her head in a scarf, and tinted blue glasses on, runs the shower to drown out her conversation and talks in a whisper. She flips through an old address book.

SANDRA
OK, I have a name for you. Bert Spitz. He was the entertainment lawyer at Roberto’s agency, and for years, he negotiated all of Robbie’s Dynasty and Falcon Crest deals. He kind of got pushed into retirement a few years ago and he went into family law.

HENRY
(reading a billboard)
“They’re out for bl-ode.”

CHARLIE HENRY
It’s a double “O”. What Blo-oode? sound is that?

CHARLIE
Blood. You’re getting good at reading.

HENRY
“They’re out for blood.”

Charlie and Henry approach the car in the parking lot.

SANDRA
I called him and he can see you today at 4.

CHARLIE
Great!

SANDRA
And he should be more affordable.

Charlie opens the back door and indicates for Henry to go in. Henry drops his burger on the pavement.

HENRY
Oh, shit.

CHARLIE HENRY
Thank you G-ma. Thank you. Dad!

Sandra now lies on the tile floor looking under the bathroom door to see if someone is listening.
SANDRA
We never had this conversation, Charlie-bird.

CHARLIE
Got it! I love you.

NICOLE (O.S.) SANDRA
Mom?! I have to go--

Sandra hangs up.

HENRY
I need a new burger.

CHARLIE
Why?

HENRY
Because you made us carry your bags into the restaurant, I dropped it.

Charlie picks up the burger and wipes it off.

CHARLIE
(handing it back)
It’s fine, get in the car.

HENRY
Why did you take me today if you couldn’t hang out with me?

CHARLIE
Because I’ve been away and want to see you.

EXT. ALLEY BEHIND HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD. DAY


BERT (V.O.)
Getting a divorce with a kid can be one of the hardest things you’ll ever do. It’s like a death without a body.
INT. BERT SPITZ'S LAW OFFICE. DAY

A man, late 60's, in slacks and a tweed jacket, takes a pill from a container and swallows it with a glass of water. This is Bert Spitz. A grizzled cat wheezes in a corner on a stained pillow.

BERT
I know, personally I've been there four different times.

CHARLIE
You've been divorced four times?

BERT
I've been married four times. Three divorces. This last one will stick God willing.

Charlie nods as Bert sits across from him.

BERT
That's why I graduated into family law. To help people survive this painful time.
(leans forward)
Here's how I see it: If we get bogged down in who did this and that and "I don't want to pay the two dollars" it'll just cost you more money and time and emotional stress, and you'll probably end up with the same result anyway.

CHARLIE
Right. I mean, I agree with that philosophy. She does too, I'm sure.

BERT
And I always go with the truth wherever that takes us. Most people in this business make up the truth to get to where they need to go.

BERT
You're just transactions to them. I like to think of you as people.

CHARLIE
Oh. OK. Good.

BERT
And not just you, her too.
CHARLIE

Yes.

BERT

It can be an ugly process.
But I believe it also
doesn’t have to be terrible.

CHARLIE

I’m glad to hear you say that.
Um, I’d love to keep expenses down
as much as possible.

BERT

Of course you do. I charge 450 an
hour and I’ll need a ten thousand
dollar retainer to start.

CHARLIE

Maybe this is a stupid question,
but is there any way to do this on
a budget?

BERT

This is the budget version.

CHARLIE

(swallows)
I’ll see if I can get an advance
on the Broadway transfer...

BERT

And keep in mind, you’ll have to
pay for her lawyer.

CHARLIE

Oh... I didn’t... What?

BERT

Or at least part of her. It
doesn’t make sense, does it? The
reason you’re doing this is
because you love your kid and in
doing so you’re draining money
from your kid’s education.

CHARLIE

It seems ridiculous.

BERT

Oh, it is.

Bert shuffles through the papers in front of him.
BERT
We’ll have to respond right away.
(re: the papers)
Your son is in school out here?

CHARLIE
Temporarily. We agreed. Her pilot went to series and I wanted to accommodate her as she’s often felt we do things on my terms.

BERT
Be a better husband in divorce.

CHARLIE
I guess something like that. But we live in New York.

BERT
(putting on his glasses)
With your kid in school here, the court may see it otherwise.

CHARLIE
(alarmed)
Will we go to court?

BERT
No no no, we don’t want to go to court, the California courts are a disaster -- it’s just how we have to think about it.
(looks back at the papers)
I’m not sure these are my glasses.
(removes them, stands)
Where are you living when you’re out here?

CHARLIE
BERT
I’m in a hotel right now-- Hotel doesn’t look good.

CHARLIE
To who?

BERT
The court.

CHARLIE
You just said we weren’t going to go to court.
BERT
Of course, of course. We prepare
to go to court hoping that we
don’t go to court.

CHARLIE
OK.

BERT
You should get a place in LA. And
get a place NEAR her. That will
look better for custody reasons.

CHARLIE
She’s in West Hollywood. That’ll
be expensive. I guess I could
rent our New York apartment.

BERT
Don’t rent it, you need to
continue to prove New York
residence--

CHARLIE
(not sure what he’s
going to do)
OK.

BERT
And of course getting a
place in LA, doesn’t make it
look like you all live in
New York, does it?

CHARLIE
So...
(hesitates)
What do I do?

BERT
I recommend you try to spend as
much time with your child as
possible. Many people fight to
get the time and then they don’t
even use it. They just want to
win.

Bert leaves his office and disappears down a hallway.
Charlie follows.

CHARLIE
This shouldn’t be that
complicated, right? I mean, we’re
a New York family. I think it’s
all pretty straight-forward.
Right?
Charlie finds Bert in a kitchen area. The old cat following them. Bert opens an old fridge and takes out some of kind of meat and rice in a tupperware container.

BERT
I hope so, yes. I see no reason--you both love your son, you respect each other--why this shouldn’t be relatively pain-free?

CHARLIE
(pleased)
Right.

Bert gathers plastic silverware from a drawer and heads through another doorway into an outer office/waiting area. Charlie hesitates and follows.

Henry looks at a magazine on the floor with Bert’s associate, Nell, 30’s.

BERT
(handing Nell his glasses)
I think you have my glasses--

She takes off hers and they swap. She nods.

NELL
That makes sense.

CHARLIE
(to Henry)
What have you been doing?

NELL
We were talking about money. And I was reading this magazine.

CHARLIE
(looking)
You were reading California Lawyer?

HENRY
Uh uh.

CHARLIE
OK, I’m almost done.

Henry pets the old cat.
BERT
I wouldn’t expect too much from that cat.

Charlie follows Bert back to the kitchen.

BERT
I want you to know that eventually this will all be over and whatever we win or lose, it’ll be the two of you having to figure this out together.

CHARLIE
(moved)
Thank you. You’re the first person in this process who has spoken to me like a human.

Bert, tears in his eyes, hugs Charlie.

BERT
You remind me of myself, on my second marriage.

HENRY (V.O.)
Mommy!

INT. SANDRA’S HOUSE, LOS ANGELES

Henry runs in and hugs Nicole. Charlie stands in the doorway, he holds the Frankenstein Halloween costume. The place is decorated warmly for the holiday and delicious-looking food is being prepared by a house-keeper.

NICOLE
Did you have fun with Daddy?

HENRY
We drove around to offices.

NICOLE
Do you want to try on your ninja costume? It’s on your bed!

HENRY
Yeah!

Henry runs upstairs.

CHARLIE
You know I had Donna build him this whole Frankenstein thing with the plugs and --
NICOLE
The cousins are ninjas so he wanted to do that too.

CHARLIE
But he and I had decided together--

NICOLE
I can’t make him be Frankenstein.

CHARLIE
I’m not asking you to. But maybe you could help me out a little. I’ll leave the Frankenstein here and maybe you can nudge him in that direction--

NICOLE
I’ll try.

CHARLIE
What’s the...did you dye your hair again? Is that for your show?

NICOLE
No, this is me. It was this way when I saw you before.

CHARLIE
I know, but I didn’t say anything then.

NICOLE
You don’t like it? CHARLIE
No, I guess...it’s fine. Is it shorter? I prefer it long, but...

NICOLE
(laughs bitterly)
I’m sorry, it’s just -- absurd.

CHARLIE
Is everything OK?

NICOLE
Yeah, why? CHARLIE
You seem...I don’t know like something is--

NICOLE
Everything’s fine.

CHARLIE
OK.

Charlie peers over her shoulder again at the warm living room. Nicole stands as a sort of barrier.
CHARLIE
OK, I’m going to check in at the hotel, but should be able to get to you guys by five, five thirty. We’ll go trick or treating from there--

NICOLE
Um, we’re going to go to Cassie’s in Pasadena.

CHARLIE
Cassie lives in Pasadena now?

NICOLE
And trick-or-treating with the cousins.

Yeah, she and Sam moved a couple of months ago.

CHARLIE
OK. I don’t really know Pasadena. I’ll figure it out. What’s the address? I’ll text Sam.

NICOLE
And because my mom is looking forward to this and Cassie and Sam are--

CHARLIE
Wait until you see my costume.

NICOLE
Are mad--

CHARLIE
Mad at who?

NICOLE
You.

CHARLIE
Cassie and Sam?

NICOLE
You can understand that.

--so I think we should probably do separate Halloweens--

CHARLIE
But if you’re OK with it, then shouldn’t they be OK with it--

NICOLE
Let’s just do it this way. Do you not want me there this time. OK?
NICOLE
(hesitates)
No, I’m fine with it.

CHARLIE
OK.

NICOLE
It’ll be nice for him, he’ll get two Halloweens.

CHARLIE
What am I going to do with him for second Halloween? Walk around Sunset Boulevard?

NICOLE
Maybe the hotel has something? Or you can drive to another neighborhood?

INT. HOTEL ROOM. NIGHT

Charlie, wrapped in gauze, in a brown suit sleeps slumped over on the couch. The TV is on. The hat in his lap. A beer and a crinkled candy wrapper from the mini-bar on the coffee table.

The doorbell rings. He startles awake.

He puts on the hat, checks himself in the mirror, straightens his goggles and gauze and opens the door.

Nicole is dressed in a peach suit and her hair in a sort of pompadour a la David Bowie. Henry dawdles behind her, in the hallway. His ninja mask is askew and his costume hanging partly off. Charlie, ignoring Nicole, greets Henry.

CHARLIE
(muffled by the gauze)
OK! Ready for Halloween!

NICOLE
(re: Charlie’s costume)
Wow. Elaborate.

Charlie adjusts his goggles.

NICOLE
(to Henry)
Sweetheart, don’t forget your jacket. It’s getting colder.

Henry passes by both of them and into the room. Charlie parts the gauze over his mouth so he can talk easier.
CHARLIE
(calls to Henry)
You ready to go back out?

NICOLE
He has to pee.

HENRY
No, I don’t.

NICOLE
(to Charlie)
He does.

She hands Charlie Henry’s backpack.

NICOLE
Some of his men and Bear Bear are
in there— You can keep this Bear
Bear because I got another one—

CHARLIE
Does he know that there are two
Bear Bears?

NICOLE
Yes, it was his idea—

HENRY (O.S.)
I have LA Bear Bear and New
York Bear Bear—

Charlie regards Nicole.

CHARLIE
Station to Station?

NICOLE
Let’s Dance.
(waving)
OK, bye Henry. Have a great
Halloween with Daddy.
(to Charlie)
Have fun.

Charlie nods coldly and closes the door.

HENRY
(re: the hotel room)
This is a nice house.

Henry turns his plastic jack o’ lantern over and dumps all
his candy on the floor. He lies down and starts sorting
it.
CHARLIE
(forcing enthusiasm)
Go pee and then we’re going back out!

HENRY
I’m too tired!

CHARLIE
GO pee and then we’re going to go
drive to Halloween!

INT. CHARLIE’S RENTAL CAR

Charlie, wiping moisture off the windshield, cranes his neck, trying to see out the glass.

CHARLIE
This block looks promising— I wish Halloween was over.

HENRY
But I like that we’re sitting right now. I like to sit.

CHARLIE
That’s true, Los Angeles does have sitting going for it.

HENRY
I think that’s why I like Los Angeles better.

CHARLIE
Because you get to sit? And because I like my friends here better.

CHARLIE
That’s not true. What about Horatio and Poppy and--

HENRY
Horatio doesn’t like me anymore and I don’t like Poppy. Here I have Axel. Axel is hilarious. And my family is here. Besides you.
EXT. SUNSET BLVD

Cars rush by. The Invisible Man and a ninja in a parka hold hands looking for an opening to cross.

They dart across the street.

They trudge up a steep curvy street behind Sunset.

They stand outside a house. They ring and wait. Nobody answers.

HENRY
Everyone’s asleep.

INT. PINK DOT

They approach the convenience store counter. Henry’s mask is coming off at this point.

CHARLIE
Say it.

HENRY
I don’t want to.

CHARLIE
Trick or treat.

The seventeen year old clerk looks around and hands them some junk.

INT. CHARLIE’S RENTAL CAR

Charlie drives. Henry is falling asleep in the backseat.

INT. HOTEL ROOM. NIGHT

They both exhaustedly enter. Henry turns his plastic jack o’ lantern over and a couple of things trickle out. Something lands with a thud. Charlie picks it up.

CHARLIE
Who gave you a lighter?

HENRY
(holding his fly)
I have to pee.

Henry goes into the bathroom to pee. Charlie gets a beer.

CHARLIE
I’m going to have to go back to New York on Monday.
Henry comes back out.

CHARLIE
Did you flush?

Henry goes back in and does. Comes back out.

CHARLIE
Wash your hands.

Henry returns to the bathroom. Charlie hears the water run and then he reappears.

CHARLIE
Did you hear me? I have to go back to New York.

Henry gathers some of his toys.

HENRY
(playmg with his men)
Aah, watch out... BSSSHH! “I’m falling.” “I’ll catch you.” BOOM. “You didn’t catch me.”

CHARLIE
OK?

HENRY
Why aren’t you here more?

CHARLIE
I have to work. You know my play is opening on Broadway.

HENRY
Is it because you don’t want to be near mom?

CHARLIE
No-- You know, like we’ve talked about, we’ve decided not to be together no matter where we are. But we both want to be with you.

HENRY
But you’re not near me if you’re in New York.

CHARLIE
(clarifying)
Well, we all still live in New York.
HENRY
Yeah. But I go to school here.

CHARLIE
Just for right now. Like that
time we were in Copenhagen for my
play. Remember all those kids in
buckets?

HENRY
I like my school here and Mom says
we can stay here if we want.

Charlie freezes.

CHARLIE
What do you mean...She said that?

HENRY
Yeah.

CUT TO: Henry is asleep in the king size bed in Charlie’s
room with his bear as a pillow. Charlie turns out the
light and adjusts the covers. He watches Henry for a beat
and kisses him on the cheek.

NICOLE (V.O.)
Hello?

EXT. HOTEL BALCONY. NIGHT

Charlie steps out onto the small concrete balcony attached
to his room. He’s on the phone.

CHARLIE
Are you moving out here?

EXT. HOLLYWOOD HALLOWEEN PARTY. INTERCUT

We see now: Nicole stands out by a pool on the phone.
She’s still dressed as David Bowie. Agents, the ex-husband
and wife producers from her show, actors, all in costume,
mingle inside and out.

NICOLE
(pause)
Did you find a lawyer?

CHARLIE
Yes. Henry says you’re moving
here???

NICOLE
Have your lawyer call Nora.
Charlie clicks his portable X-Acto knife in and out.

CHARLIE
I want to talk about it as us.

NICOLE
Who the fuck is “us?”

CHARLIE
Let’s just get in a room, YOU and ME, that’s what we always said we’d do.

NICOLE
My lawyers wouldn’t let me sign anything.

CHARLIE
It’s not up to them. It’s up to us. It’s OUR divorce.

NICOLE
They say I could later sue them for malpractice.

CHARLIE
(frustrated and growing angry)
What am I walking into?

NICOLE
What are you walking into?!

CHARLIE
Yes! What the fuck is going on?

NICOLE
I read your fucking emails, CHARLIE. I read them all.

CHARLIE
When? I don’t know. Recently!

NICOLE
You are a FUCKING LIAR. You... Shit. I fucked Mary Ann.

CHARLIE
(weakly)
It was after I was sleeping on the couch.

Some guests glance over at Nicole who is now shouting.
NICOLE
And all this bullshit about
working on us or whatever, you
know what— I HAVE been working,
I’ve BEEN DOING THE WORK. ALONE.

CHARLIE
How did you read my emails?

NICOLE                     CHARLIE
I HACKED INTO YOUR ACCOUNT    I think that’s illegal.
YOU DUMB FUCK.

NICOLE                     CHARLIE
About a week ago. So don’t     How do you even know how to
give me this shit about       do something like that?
being surprised about LA.
Surprise! I have opinions.
Surprise! I want things that
aren’t what you want because
SURPRISE YOU WERE FUCKING
ANOTHER LADY.

CHARLIE
I think you’re conflating two
different things. Mary Ann has
nothing to do with LA.

NICOLE
I’m conflating, motherfucker.
Watch me conflate!

She hangs up and visibly stamps her foot.

PABLO (O.S.)
Did you just stamp your foot?

NICOLE
I don’t think I’ve ever done that
before. I’m sorry I’m just so
ANGRY.

She’s handed a drink by Pablo, the tatted grip from her
show. He wears a tight black T-shirt with a ratty flannel
thrown over it and black jeans.

PABLO
You look like you needed one.

NICOLE
I do. Thanks.
PABLO
You know the Japanese are making really interesting tequila right now.

NICOLE
(distracted)
That’s exciting, I guess.

PABLO
What are you so angry about?

NICOLE
Ugh, my fucking ex-husband. I spend so much time feeling guilty, but he’s so self-absorbed it’s pointless. It’s a game I’m playing with myself.

PABLO
(shaking her hand) NIcole
You held the bounce board! Oh, hey, Pablo. We met at the--

PABLO
The flirty grip!

INT. PABLO’S GRIP TRUCK
They’re making out in the front seat.

NICOLE
Here’s what I want you to only do, OK?

PABLO
What? NICOLE
I want you to finger me.

PABLO
What?

NICOLE
Just finger me.

PABLO
OK.

NICOLE
That’s all we’re going to do, OK? Just fingering. I’m changing my whole fucking life.

Fade to Black.
NORA (V.O.)
Nicole and Charlie’s son, Henry, was born here in Los Angeles and currently attends Laurel Elementary in Laurel Canyon--

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, CENTURY CITY, LA. DAY

CLOSE on Nicole.

NORA (O.S.)
--and Nicole works in Hollywood on her show while also maintaining a full schedule as a mother with classes of swim, art, gym and music as well as play groups.

And then CUT TO Charlie, in a dark wool suit, who sweats.

NORA (O.S.)
Nicole is Henry’s primary custodial parent and to the extent that Charlie would like to exercise his custodial time, he should be making efforts to visit Henry here in California.

And now INTERCUT between their two faces as if they’re having a conversation, though neither of them opens their mouth. They both listen to their representatives, sometimes with emotion, other times anger, disbelief, and self-consciousness. They occasionally look at their hands or jot down a note.

BERT (O.S.)
Nora, you seem to be ignoring the fact that they lived in New York for ten years--

NORA (O.S.)
My client worked in New York, for several years--that’s true. But Nicole was born and bred right here in LA. She and Charlie would come here most holidays and summers to spend time with her family who all live here. She and Charlie were married here, would you like to see the photos?

We CUT WIDE.

The room has big windows with views of other surrounding glass offices.
Nicole sits next to Nora who looks amazing in an expensive, fitted power suit and heels. Behind them sits, Amir, Nora’s associate.

**BERT**
- I don’t need to see the photos--
- Although I’m sure they both look beautiful--

Bert grins at Charlie who seems to be sweating through his wool blazer. They sit across the wide table. Bert’s associate Nell behind them in a chair by the window.

**BERT**
- It’s my client’s expectation that after this TV show is completed, the parties will move back to New York where they currently keep an apartment--

**NORA**
- And it’s my understanding that Charlie PROMISED Nicole that they would spend more time in LA during the marriage but because of Charlie’s insistence that his work keep them in New York, Nicole ended up staying much longer than she ever anticipated. In fact, a few years ago, Charlie was offered a residency at the Geffen Playhouse that would have taken his work and family to LA for a year and he turned it down knowing full well that this was Nicole’s desire.

**BERT**
- He wanted to maintain consistency for his family and his child.

**NORA**
- Was this the same consistency he wanted to maintain when they went to Copenhagen for six months so he could direct a play?

An assistant has her head in the door trying to get Amir’s attention.
NORA
So, while I understand that
CHARLIE lives in New York and when
it’s convenient for his work
schedule, flies out here to see
his son—

BERT
He flies out here every chance he gets at great expense--

NORA (looking at Charlie)
I don’t see any reason you can’t be out here full-time.

Amir acknowledges the anxious assistant and interrupts.

AMIR
Oh... Sorry. Do we want to contemplate lunch—I’ll order now so it’ll come when we’re all hungry?

BERT
Good idea.

AMIR
Everyone good with Manny’s?

BERT
I love Manny’s.

AMIR (to Charlie)
Have you had Manny’s?

Charlie is taken aback, unsure how to process this question. He shakes his head.

NORA
You’ll love it, just really yummy salads and sandwiches.

CHARLIE
(nods)
Great.

Amir passes out menus. Orders are made, Bert specifying no butter or cream. It gets to Charlie, he’s unsure.

CHARLIE
(re: the menu)
Hmm, I don’t know-- Sorry...

NICOLE
(reflexively)
Charlie will have the greek salad.

CHARLIE
OK. But with olive oil and lemon instead of the greek dressing, and I’ll get the Chinese chicken salad.
Charlie nods, satisfied. Amir writes down the orders and hands them to an associate who exits. Nora gets up to pour herself and Nicole more coffee.

NORA
Congratulations, Charlie, on your
grant, Nicole told me.

CHARLIE
(can’t help but smile) He’s a genius.

BERT
Thank you.


CHARLIE
Oh, thanks.

NORA
I told Nicole, I LOVED your play.
You are one smart cookie. I’d
love to get inside your brain!

CHARLIE
Thanks.

NORA
There was that one moment when you
smell the toast.
(to Amir)
Smell! It was literally my
favorite thing I saw that year.
Truly genius.

BERT
(to Charlie)
I was sorry to hear it closed on
Broadway.

CHARLIE
(to himself)
They couldn’t smell the toast.

Charlie looks at Bert, like why bring that up?

BERT
It’s very competitive, I imagine.

Charlie nods. Nora places the coffee in front of Charlie.

CHARLIE
Thanks.
NORA
(launching back in)
Now, whenever Charlie is in LA, Nicole, of course, agrees that it will best for Henry to see each
parent equally--
(to Charlie)
It’s nice out here, Charlie. You should give it a chance.

AMIR
Yeah, and the space -- you can’t beat it.

BERT
I love it too, but all of our personal feelings about the two cities aside, we don’t share your assertion that the couple is an LA based family. It was very clearly their deal that they would go back to New York after Nicole finished her show.

NORA
I’m not aware of any deal.

CHARLIE
(can’t help himself)
I didn’t get it in writing.

NORA
Charlie, is this like the deal you made that you and Nicole would spend more time in LA during the marriage?

CHARLIE
(flustered)
We didn’t have a deal. It was something we discussed...but...

NORA
So, it’s a deal when it’s something you want, but it’s a discussion when Nicole wants it?

Silence.

BERT
Sidebar!
(putting his hand on Charlie’s arm)
(MORE)
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  CHARLIE
I know that.  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                     CHARLIE
He’ll know.                  (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                     BERT
I don’t--                   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!
EXT. NICOLE’S NEW HOUSE, ECHO PARK. NIGHT

Nicole stands outside in the dark. The gate is wide open. Charlie appears from the shadows holding Henry’s hand.

Henry runs and hugs his mom.

CHARLIE
You tried all the--

NICOLE
I tried everything.

HENRY
Can I look at my room?

NICOLE
Of course.

Henry runs inside. They remain outside.

NICOLE
I’m sorry I made you come out--

CHARLIE
It’s fine--

NICOLE
It’s just--

CHARLIE
You don’t want your gate open.

NICOLE
Right.

CHARLIE
There should be a panel or something either inside or--

She stands in the threshold, blocking his path. She points toward a white box amongst trees in the yard.

NICOLE
I think this is something--

He steps over some bushes and inspects the alarm system.

CHARLIE
It’s a cute house.

NICOLE
(pleased)

CHARLIE
I mean, from what I can see. Thanks.

NICOLE
You’re getting shaggy.
CHARLIE
Yeah, I have to find a haircutter.

NICOLE
(pause)
Do you want me to cut it?

CHARLIE
(hesitates)
OK.

NICOLE
I’ll get scissors.

EXT. NICOLE’S PORCH

Charlie, shirtless, a towel around his shoulders, sits very still on a chair. Nicole cuts his hair. The porch light illuminating.

NICOLE
Close your eyes.

Charlie does.

CLOSE on the scissors snipping across his shut eyes.

EXT. NICOLE’S NEW PLACE. ECHO PARK, LA. NIGHT

Nicole carries the sleeping Henry. They both smile at the sweetness. Henry stirs.

NICOLE
He’s out. Maybe he should stay here tonight--

CHARLIE
It’s my night.

She nods and hands him to Charlie.

CUT TO: Charlie and a tired Henry pull on the gate. Nicole helps, dragging from the other side. It starts to close. They yank it shut, closing her in and them out. We CUT QUICKLY between them both just as it closes. We stay with her.

Fade to Black.

The sound of a couple loudly arguing in Spanish.
INT. LOS ANGELES COURTHOUSE, HALLWAY. MORNING

A man and woman are shouting at each other. The lawyers trying to separate them. Various benches are filled with the other divorcing couples, men and women sitting apart from one another with their individual representatives.

In their midst, Nora and Nicole sit on a bench in the wide, dingy hallway. Amir sorts through documents nearby.

NORA
I think we’re mostly finished. Bert and I hammered out ninety-percent of the details, there’s a couple minor things hanging that should be easy and then the judge will make your divorce official.

NICOLE
OK, good--

NORA
I hear the tracking for your show is off the chain--

NICOLE
Oh, I don’t even know what that means, but good I guess--

NORA
I made sure the date of separation came AFTER the pilot pick-up to protect that money--
   (suddenly)
   Fuck me.

NICOLE
What?

She follows Nora’s gaze to Jay Marotta who marches down the hallway, conferring with Charlie.

JAY MAROTTA
It’s not television. It’s not a wise judge played by a great character actor. These are just people open to manipulation like anyone else. You think it’s justice, but it’s not.

NICOLE
Who is that?
NORA
Charlie shouldn’t have done this.

NICOLE
What do you mean? Where’s Bert?

NORA
It means everything we’ve agreed upon is now off the table.

Jay and Charlie take a bench a ways away. Jay says Hi to some other lawyers.

NICOLE
But, we’ve got LA, right--

NORA
Not with Jay Marotta representing him. This is a street fight now. And I’m going to have to ask for things we wouldn’t normally ask for. We’ll need as much leverage as possible to negotiate with.

Nora rises with a pinched smile--

NORA
This system rewards bad behavior.

--and greets Jay.

Nicole looks over at Charlie who doesn’t meet her eye.

INT. COURT ROOM. DAY

The low hum of a copier machine and periodic mouse-clicks from a computer.

JAY MAROTTA
A little history.

Jay speaks in front of the judge who clearly has a bad cold. Charlie sits at the end of the table with Ted, the associate. Nicole is at the corresponding end of an adjacent table next to Nora and Amir.

JAY MAROTTA
Ten years ago, Charlie takes a risk when he first hires Nicole as an actress in his play in New York City.

(MORE)
JAY MAROTTA (CONT'D)
He’s a well regarded, up and
coming director of the avant garde
and she’s known as the girl in
that college sex movie who takes
her top off.

NORA
My client will not be slut-
shamed for an artistic
choice.

JAY MAROTTA
Ten years on and many
prestigious theater roles
later, she’s become an
actress of great
credibility. And because of
this credibility, she’s
offered a lead roll on a
major television show. This
new opportunity in her life
is thanks to Charlie. Your
honor, I don’t see why we
should be paying any support
money at this point. In
fact, Charlie should be
entitled to half of her TV
salary, present and future
earnings on the show.

Nora takes a moment.

NORA
Charlie has just received
the enormous sum of six
hundred and fifty thousand
dollars in the form of a
MacArthur grant for the
theater work he has
conducted during the
marriage.

JAY MAROTTA
Of which he gets in 125
thousand installments over
five years, money that is
used to employ actors and
crew members and to pay back
debts he’s accumulated with
his theater company that
stars his wife.

NORA
By Jay’s same logic, this is work
that Nicole contributed to in
numerous ways. Not only did she
give up a lucrative and successful
career in movies to perform in his
little theater, she also supplied
Charlie with a loan early on to
help out.

JAY
Which he paid back--

NORA
She lent her name to the
marquee and was the
principle reason people came
to the theater.
JAY
That may have been true ten years ago—

That may have been true ten years ago—

NORA
She, in turn, helped establish Charlie’s reputation.

JAY MAROTTA
I don’t see how you can claim that she gets half a grant dedicated to his genius.

NORA
He became a genius during the course of the marriage.

JAY MAROTTA
Oh, come on, Nora.

JAY MAROTTA
That’s something people say when they win awards.

NORA
No, he was implying what was true: his genius was an intangible asset built during the marriage.

Charlie and Nicole both stare at the floor.
JAY MAROTTA
Nora, I like how you refer to Charlie’s theater as a ramshackled downtown dump when you’re arguing custody, but when you want more money, Charlie’s a big rich genius Broadway director. You can’t have it both ways.

NORA
Why not? And whether you think it’s fair or not, Jay, the first monetary installment from the MacArthur grant was then put in a joint marital account and thus became community property so this and any further installments should be split between the parties.

Jay whispers to Charlie.

JAY MAROTTA
Fuck. You shouldn’t have put that money in the joint account.

CHARLIE
There’s not going to be anything left anyway, I’m using it all to divorce her...

Jay turns back to Nora.

JAY MAROTTA
Nora, I have to say your account of this marriage takes place in an alternate reality. By suddenly MOVING to LA, and insisting on an LA residence, Nicole is withholding Henry, alienating him from his father. This has turned Charlie’s world upside down. It amounts to an ambush.

NORA
Withholding, Jay? Really? Alienating. Those are fighting words and it is simply false and does nothing to further our settlement. Your recap of this situation is outrageous.

(MORE)
NORA (CONT'D)
And although California is, without doubt, a no-fault state, it does bear mentioning in the accurate recap of this situation that Charlie had had extramarital affairs--

CHARLIE
AN extramarital affair.

Nora turns and stares at Charlie.

NORA
Do you really want me to go there?

JAY MAROTTA
Let’s go there. Nicole has admitted to HACKING Charlie’s computer and reading his emails.

Nora turns to Nicole who shrugs. Jay stands.

JAY MAROTTA
Which if proven is a felony. And Nora, I don’t think you’ll be happy if I start to ask Nicole about her alcohol consumption in the evenings--

NICOLE
What?

JAY MAROTTA
She confided in Charlie one night recently, having just carried Henry to bed, that she was having trouble standing while walking down the staircase. From what I understand this was not an isolated event. You let me know, Nora, otherwise we’ll go there as needed.

Jay sits back down. Nicole stares at Charlie who looks humiliated.

NORA
Charlie, can I ask you: How can you expect to have more time with Henry when you don’t exercise the time you have AND exercise it responsibly.

(MORE)
NORA (CONT'D)
On a recent visit to Los Angeles, after failing to text, call or communicate in any way, shape or form, Charlie finally arrived two hours late to pick up Henry at Nicole's mother's house. At that point the car seat which he assured Nicole had been professionally installed was clearly not even belted in, just sitting on the back seat.

Jay turns to Charlie.

JAY MAROTTA
You have to buckle the seat in, man, it's the law.

CHARLIE
I know that. I thought the car rental place did it.

JAY MAROTTA
They can't do it, it's a liability--

CHARLIE
I know that NOW! Once we discovered that, we fixed it.

The judge wipes his runny nose and interrupts--

JUDGE
(to Jay and Nora)
Counsel, you can see my courtroom is full and there are people who don't have the resources your clients have. And I'm fairly certain you haven't exhausted in good faith the arguments in the case of this child. In the meantime, we'll keep the status quo. This remains an LA family for the time being.

Charlie's face drops.

JUDGE
I took over this department recently and am still becoming acquainted with the cases so I'm going to appoint an expert evaluator who knows much more about young children than I do. Once the evaluation is done we'll modify the orders where necessary.

CUT TO: A door opens revealing Nicole. She smiles politely.
NICOLE
Hey.

INT. CHARLIE’S RENTAL APARTMENT. DAY

Charlie, somewhat formally, ushers her in.

CHARLIE
Where’s Henry?

NICOLE
He’s with Cassie and her kids at Laser Tag.

CHARLIE
You want something to drink?
I have unfiltered tap water, beer and some juice boxes.

NICOLE
I’ll have a juice box.

He goes into the kitchen. She looks at his rental place. It makes her sad.

NICOLE
You don’t have anything on the walls.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
I don’t have anything to put on them except Henry’s art which is being framed.

NICOLE
I can give you some things, you know until you get some stuff...
How about that great picture of Henry on the Staten Island Ferry--

CHARLIE (O.S.)
Aren’t you in that one?

NICOLE
Oh, right, I guess I am. (shrugs)
I guess you can cut me out?

CHARLIE (O.S.)
Oh, I’m going to have to leave a day early to go to New York on the 22nd so I was wondering if I could take Henry that Friday--

NICOLE
The 22nd? So, that’s the 21st?
We have plans actually. We’re going to this thing at LACMA with the cousins--
He reappears and hands her a juice box.

CHARLIE	NICOLE
But could you change it so I	It’s only that night. He’s
can take him--	looking forward to it.

CHARLIE
Really?

NICOLE
It’s my night, Charlie, we
negotiated it.

CHARLIE	NICOLE
(coldly)	I mean...what?
OK. Fine.

CHARLIE
No, I’m just asking you to be
flexible--

NICOLE
I AM flexible. You come in and
out and I adjust based on your
schedule. This one night we
happen to have to have tickets to
a thing. I mean...

CHARLIE
It’s not only this one night, but
fine...

She opens the straw, and uses it to puncture the hole and
sips the drink.

NICOLE
Henry’s teacher wants to meet with
us.

CHARLIE
You mean his LA teacher--

NICOLE	CHARLIE
Can you respond to the email	Yeah, I’ve been distracted.
so we can set a time?

NICOLE
I understand. They just want to
rule out everything, you know,
with his reading.

CHARLIE
I think he’s just over-anxious. I
think he wants it so much.
NICOLE
I know, he quits too easily if things aren’t easy for him. You know, he’s like us, he’s stubborn.

CHARLIE
They said he’s off the charts in math.

NICOLE
He’s still a lousy Monopoly player because he tries to save all his money.

Charlie laughs. Nicole smiles.

NICOLE
So... I thought we should talk.

CHARLIE
Uh huh.

NICOLE
I feel like maybe things have gone too far.

CHARLIE
Uh huh.

NICOLE
I mean, my mom has taken out a loan against the house to help me pay Nora-

CHARLIE
I thought I pay Nora.

NICOLE
You pay thirty percent of Nora.

CHARLIE
Well, I’m going broke too if that’s any help. I’ve just agreed to direct two shitty plays and we can forget putting anything away for Henry’s college.

NICOLE
(trying not to take the bait)
It’s just that... up until now we’ve been able to keep Henry at least somewhat removed. And this will change that.

CHARLIE
Uh huh.

NICOLE
And we have to protect him.

CHARLIE
I agree.
NICOLE
Nora says the evaluator will come into our homes. She’ll interview Henry in addition to us, our family, friends, enemies... And then she’ll observe us with him, how we are as parents.

CHARLIE
Sounds awful.

NICOLE
I know! I feel like if anyone observed me on any given day as a mom, I’d never get custody.
(pause)
That was a joke.

CHARLIE
I know. I feel the same way.

NICOLE
(smiles)
Right. So, maybe we can figure something out between us--

CHARLIE
You’ll remember I said this to you at the beginning.

NICOLE
I know you did, but these are different circumstances--

CHARLIE
I was anticipating these circumstances--

NICOLE
Mm hm. Anyway... Shall we try this?

CHARLIE
(pause)
OK.

There’s a long silence. They both laugh.

CHARLIE
I don’t know how to start...

NICOLE
Do you understand why I want to stay in LA?

CHARLIE
No.
NICOLE
Well, that’s not...Charlie, that’s not a useful way for us to start--

CHARLIE
I don’t understand it.

NICOLE
You don’t remember promising that we could do time out here?

CHARLIE
We discussed things. We were married, we said things. We talked about moving to Europe, about getting a sideboard or what do you call it, a credenza, to fill that empty space behind the couch. We never did any of it.

NICOLE
And you turned down that residency at the Geffen that would have brought us here and--

CHARLIE
It wasn’t something I wanted. We had a great theater company and a great life where we were.

NICOLE
You call that a great life.

CHARLIE
You know what I mean.

NICOLE
Me discovering you’re fucking Mary Ann--

CHARLIE
Don’t pretend you’re not capable of deception. You left Ben for ME.

CHARLIE
I don’t mean we had a great marriage. I mean, life in Brooklyn... Professionally. I don’t know. Honestly I never considered anything different.

NICOLE
Well, that’s the problem isn’t it? I was your wife, you should have considered my happiness too.

CHARLIE
Come on! You WERE happy. You’ve just decided you weren’t now--
NICOLE
(not taking the bait)
So, OK, let’s... I work here now.
My family is here.

CHARLIE
And I agreed to put Henry in
school here because your show went
to series. I did that KNOWING
that when you were done shooting,
he would come back to New York...

NICOLE
Honey, we never said that. That
might have been your assumption,
but we never expressly said
that...

CHARLIE             NICOLE
We did say it.           When did we say it?

CHARLIE
I don’t know when we said it, but
we said it!

NICOLE               CHARLIE
I thought--(remembering something)
We said it that time on the
phone--

NICOLE
Let me finish. Honey--
(hesitates, angry at
herself)
Sorry, I keep saying THAT.
(resumes)
I thought...that if Henry was
happy out here and my show
continued, that we might do LA for
a while.

CHARLIE
I was not privy to that thought
process.

NICOLE
The only reason we didn’t live
here was because you can’t imagine
desires other than your own unless
they’re forced on you.
CHARLIE
OK, you wish you hadn’t married me, you wish you’d had a different life. But this is what happened.

NICOLE
(trying to stay calm)
So what do we do?

CHARLIE
I don’t know.

NICOLE
Nora says there’s no coming back from this.

CHARLIE
Fuck Nora. I hate fucking Nora telling me I always lived in LA even though I never lived in LA. How could you have her say those things about me?

NICOLE
Jay said them about me too!
(hesitates)
You shouldn’t have fired Bert.

CHARLIE
I needed my own asshole!

NICOLE
Let’s both agree both of our lawyers have said shitty stuff about both of us--

CHARLIE
Nora was worse.

NICOLE
Jay called me an alcoholic! You pulled the rug out from under me and you’re putting me through hell--

NICOLE
You put me through hell during the marriage!

CHARLIE
Is that what that was? Hell?

NICOLE
And now you’re going to put Henry through this horrible thing so you can yet again get what you want.
CHARLIE
It’s not what I want...I mean, it’s what I want, but it’s what was...WAS...what’s best for him.

NICOLE
I was wondering when you’d get around to Henry and what HE actually wants.

CHARLIE
Oh, fuck off--

NICOLE
No, YOU fuck off. If you listened to your son, or anyone, he’d tell you he’d rather live here.

CHARLIE
Stop putting your feelings about me onto Henry.

NICOLE
He tells me he likes it here better.

CHARLIE
He tells you because he knows it’s what you want to HEAR!

NICOLE
He tells me you’re on the phone all the time. You don’t even play with him.

CHARLIE
Because I’m going through a divorce in LA and trying to direct a play in New York. WANT.

NICOLE
You’re fighting for something you don’t even WANT.

CHARLIE
Which closed because I wasn’t THERE! That was a HUGE opportunity for me. For the theater. And I let everyone down.

NICOLE
You’re being so much like your father.

CHARLIE
DO NOT compare me to my father.

NICOLE
I didn’t compare you. I said you were acting like him.
CHARLIE
You’re exactly like your mother!
Everything you complain about her,
you’re doing. You’re suffocating
Henry.

NICOLE
First of all, I love my
mother, she was a great
mother!

CHARLIE
I’m just repeating what
you’ve told me--

NICOLE
Secondly, how dare you compare my
mothering to my mother? I might
be like my father, but I’m NOT
like my mother.

CHARLIE
You ARE! And you’re like my
father. You’re also like MY
mother. You’re all the bad things
about all of these people. But
mostly your mother. When we would
lie in bed together, sometimes I
would look at you and see HER and
just feel so GROSS.

NICOLE
I felt repulsed when you touched
me.

CHARLIE
You’re a slob. I made all
the beds, closed all the
cabinets, picked up after
you like an infant--

NICOLE
The thought of having sex
with you makes me want to
peel my skin off.

CHARLIE
You’ll never be happy. In LA or
anywhere. You’ll think you found
some better, opposite guy than me
and in a few years you’ll rebel
against him because you need to
have your VOICE. But you don’t
WANT a voice. You just want to
fucking complain about not having
a VOICE.

NICOLE
I think of being married to you
and that woman is a stranger to
me.
CHARLIE  
You’ve regressed. You’ve gone back to your life before you met me. It’s pathetic.

NICOLE  
People used to say to me that you were too selfish to be a great artist. I used to defend you. But they’re absolutely right.

CHARLIE  
All your best acting is behind you. You’re back to being a HACK.

NICOLE  
You want to present yourself as a victim because it’s a good legal strategy, FINE. But you and I both know you CHOSE this life. You wanted it until you didn’t.

Nicole is silent.

CHARLIE  
You USED me so you could get out of LA.

NICOLE  
I didn’t use you--

CHARLIE  
You did and then you BLAMED me for it. You always made me aware of what I was doing wrong, how I was falling short.

CHARLIE  
Life with you was JOYLESS.

NICOLE  
So you had to fuck someone else? How could you?

CHARLIE  
You shouldn’t be upset that I fucked her, you should be upset that I had a laugh with her.

NICOLE  
Do you love her?
CHARLIE
No! But she didn’t hate me. You hated me.

NICOLE
You hated ME. You fucked someone we worked with.

CHARLIE
You stopped having sex with me in the last year. I never cheated on you.

NICOLE
That was cheating on me.

CHARLIE
But there’s so much I could have done. I was a director in my 20’s who came from nothing and was suddenly on the cover of fucking Time Out New York. I was hot shit—and I wanted to fuck EVERYBODY and I didn’t. And I loved you and didn’t want to lose you...and I’m in my twenties and I didn’t want to lose that too. And you wanted SO much so fast...I didn’t even want to get married...and fuck it, there’s so much I DIDN’T do.

NICOLE
Well, thanks for that.

CHARLIE
You’re welcome. You’re...welcome.

Nicole stamps her feet and shakes her fists like a child having a tantrum.

NICOLE
I can’t believe I have to know you FOREVER!

CHARLIE
You’re fucking insane!

Charlie raises his arm and punches the wall. The cheap dry-wall cracks and chips.

CHARLIE
And you’re fucking winning.
NICOLE
Are you kidding? I wanted to be
married. I’d ALREADY LOST.
(sadly)
You didn’t love me as much as I
loved you.

CHARLIE
(pause)
What does that have to do with LA?

Nicole stares at him, incredulous.

CHARLIE
What?

NICOLE
You’re so merged with your
own selfishness that you
don’t even identify it as
selfishness anymore. YOU’RE
SUCH A DICK.

CHARLIE
Every day I wake up and hope
you’re dead-- Dead like--

And then Charlie starts crying.

CHARLIE
(through tears)
If I could guarantee Henry would
be OK, I’d hope you get an illness
and then get hit by a car and DIE.

He sinks down, weeping. All this vitriol has taken its
toll. Nicole watches, taken aback. She walks over and
gently puts her hand on his shoulder. He shakes and cries.

NICOLE
I know.

Finally, he looks up at her.

CHARLIE
I’m sorry.

NICOLE
Me too.

SET DESIGNER (V.O.)
Try the chair by the window...
INT. CHARLIE'S RENTAL. DAY

Charlie gets a delivery of rental plates, glasses, furniture, plants. He stands on his balcony directing the delivery men.

Charlie set-decorates his rental. He Skypes with Agnes, his set designer from the theater. Holding out the computer to show her the apartment.

He buys a stack of board games with Henry.

He and Henry get Henry’s drawings at framer.

They hang the art-work.

HENRY
Why do we have so many plants all of a sudden?

CHARLIE
We’ll have to return some of this stuff so don’t get too used to it.

HENRY
My mom is the last person to turn into a plant on her show.

CHARLIE
Yeah?

HENRY
(nervously touching a fern)
I find plants kind of scary.

CHARLIE
These plants are good guys.
(hesitates)
Hey, tomorrow this woman is going to come and visit us and be with us while we eat dinner.

HENRY
Is it your girlfriend?

CHARLIE
No, no...

HENRY
Mommy’s boyfriend?
CHARLIE
No, why...does Mommy have a boyfriend?

HENRY
I don’t know. Does she?

CHARLIE
I don’t know.

HENRY
I don’t know. Why is someone watching us eat dinner?

CHARLIE
I know, it’s weird. It’s just something we have to do which has to do with Mommy and me figuring out everything...and how we’re going to be and...you know?

HENRY
Will you read to me?

Charlie and Henry lie down on the floor against the blank wall and Charlie starts reading to him.

EVALUATOR (V.O.)
Any history of domestic violence?

INT. OFFICE. DAY

We STAY on Nicole who sits facing an unseen evaluator.

NICOLE
Oh... No. You mean coming from me? No. Not coming from him either...

EVALUATOR (O.S.)
Have you been to prison?

NICOLE
Yes, actually. Well, not prison. Jail. But it was deliberate.

EVALUATOR (O.S.)
OK.

NICOLE
I was demonstrating as part of a Grandmothers for Peace rally. I was with my mom, but she didn’t go to jail.

(MORE)
NICOLE (CONT'D)
(laughs, remembering)
Somehow she avoided that part.
But I did.

EVALUATOR (O.S.)
Do you use drugs or alcohol?

NICOLE
I drink alcohol.

EVALUATOR (O.S.)
How much alcohol do you drink?

NICOLE
I don’t know. Glass of wine with
dinner. Sometimes more?

EVALUATOR (O.S.)
How much more?

NICOLE
Well, sometimes, a few... I
sometimes split a bottle of wine
with someone?

EVALUATOR (O.S.)
OK. Who do you split it
with?

NICOLE
I mean, if I’m having dinner
with someone and we order a
bottle of wine.

EVALUATOR (O.S.)
OK.

NICOLE
You know, like if you’re at
a restaurant and you say,
“Should we go by the glass
or get a bottle?”

EVALUATOR (O.S.)
You get a bottle.

NICOLE
Sometimes! Sometimes I go by the
glass. You know, it depends...
(hesitates)
Do you mean drugs ever? I have
done drugs. In college. I don’t
do it regularly.

EVALUATOR (O.S.)
Anything since you’ve been a
mother?

NICOLE
Pot a few times. Coke once at a
party. But Henry wasn’t with me.
Silence.

EVALUATOR (O.S.)
What would you say are your strengths as a parent?

NICOLE
I listen. I play. I put in the time. I love taking care of him, watching him grow up... Sometimes it’s true what they say about it goes so fast, but sometimes it’s not. Sometimes it goes too slow, honestly...

EVALUATOR (O.S.)
What are your weaknesses?

NICOLE
I’m too precise. I care too much.

EVALUATOR (O.S.)
Are those weaknesses?

NICOLE
(smiles)
Maybe not.
(thinks)
You know what, he can be an asshole and I can get really pissed off. I’ll call him on being an asshole and--

NORA (O.S.)
I’m going to stop you there.

Nora stands up from behind the female associate who is doing the practice interview with Nicole. We’re in Nora’s office.

NORA
Don’t ever say that. People don’t accept a mother who drinks too much wine and yells at her child and calls him an asshole. I get it. I do it too.

While she talks she also texts and addresses emails on her phone.
NORA
We can accept an imperfect Dad. Let’s face it, the idea of a good father was only invented like 30 years ago. Before that fathers were expected to be silent and absent and unreliable and selfish and we can all say that we want them to be different but on some basic level we ACCEPT them, we LOVE them for their fallibilities. But people absolutely DON’T accept those same failings in mothers.

(building up steam)
We don't accept it structurally and we don't accept it spiritually because the basis of our Judeo-Christian Whatever is Mary Mother of Jesus and she’s PERFECT. She’s a virgin who gives birth, unwaveringly supports her child, and holds his dead body when he’s gone. But the Dad isn’t there. He didn’t even do the fucking because God’s in heaven. God is the father and God didn’t show up so you have to be perfect and Charlie can be a fuck up and it doesn't matter. You’ll always be held to a different, higher standard and it’s FUCKED up, but that’s the way it is.

INT. CHARLIE'S RENTAL APARTMENT. EVENING

Charlie is cooking an elaborate dinner. The bell rings. He takes a deep breath.

He glances into Henry’s room. He’s playing by himself on the floor.

He walks through the set-decorated living room which looks relatively homely, full of warmth and board games and pictures of Charlie and Henry.

Charlie opens the door. A diminutive woman with frizzy hair is staring at the door across the hall. She startles, turns around and smiles and puts out her hand.

EVALUATOR
I think I rang the wrong bell.
Nancy Katz.
CHARLIE
(shaking)
Hi, I’m Charlie Barber. Nancy, can I get you anything?

EVALUATOR
Oh, I’m easy. A glass of water?


CHARLIE
It’s a new apartment.

Charlie and Nancy take their drinks to the dining room table.

CHARLIE
Shall we go in here?

EVALUATOR
Sure. What’s a day like for the two of you here?

CHARLIE
Well, if he has school, I take him there, of course and pick him up, assuming I can do both.

EVALUATOR
What prevents you from picking him up?

CHARLIE
Um, you know, work. I’m preparing a play I’m directing in a few months.

EVALUATOR
Oh, what is that?

CHARLIE
Kasimir and Karoline by Odon von Horvath? We’re doing it at the Barrow in New York.

EVALUATOR
So, you have to be away?
CHARLIE
Yes. Recently, since Nicole has been working on this show in LA, I come back and forth a lot.

EVALUATOR
That sounds difficult.

CHARLIE
It is. And expensive. I’ll try to take him with me some of the time, but Nicole doesn’t like for him to fly so much.

EVALUATOR
That can be hard on a child. All that recycled air.

CHARLIE
(hesitates)
Well, he’s sturdy.

EVALUATOR
Some parents won’t take their kids to a restaurant because of these super bugs.

CHARLIE
Uh huh. (looking at her notes)
I notice on one visit to Los Angeles, you came on a Sunday and left on a Thursday. Why not stay for a weekend?

CHARLIE
Oh... on that time, I had tech for Electra back in New York.

EVALUATOR
What’s that?

CHARLIE
It was my Broadway debut. I don’t know what tech is.

CHARLIE
It’s the technical part of the production. You figure out the lights and--

EVALUATOR
(moving forward) And what’s a weekend day like?
CHARLIE
(still explaining) Monday is our day off in theater--
CHARLIE
(disclosing his mouth is dry)
Well, out here he has basketball on Saturday at 12, 11, I’m sorry and so we go there.
(swallowing)
And then afterwards, maybe we’ll get lunch somewhere and then if there’s a movie to see...

EVALUATOR
Does he like basketball?

CHARLIE
He does. His coach, um, Rick says he’s a good dribbler and I’ve seen that...

EVALUATOR
Uh huh.

CHARLIE
Ron. I’m sorry. His coach’s name is Ron. Rick’s his dentist in New York.

The evaluator writes something in her book.

CHARLIE
Well, you know our home home was...is in New York. That’s where we live and--

EVALUATOR
New York is a long way from here.

CHARLIE
We like it because we can walk.

EVALUATOR
You can walk here.

CHARLIE
Not really.

EVALUATOR
And the space.

Charlie nods.

CUT TO: HENRY’S ROOM

Henry plays on the floor. The evaluator sits in a chair.
EVALUATOR
Do you like your school?

HENRY
I love it.

EVALUATOR
What’s your favorite part about it?

HENRY
I don’t know. Maybe gym.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
You like math--

HENRY
Math is boring.

Charlie enters and hands Henry a plate with cut-up apple. Henry takes it.

HENRY
Thanks.

CHARLIE
You’re welcome. But you’re getting really good at it.

HENRY
No.

CHARLIE
Well, you are, but...

Charlie exits.

EVALUATOR
What do you and your Dad like to do together?

HENRY
When I’m at my Dad’s we sometimes watch a movie or build a Lego or something. My Dad’s a great Lego builder.

Nancy smiles.

HALLWAY

Charlie listening at the door, smiles.
EVALUATOR (O.S.)
And at your mom’s?

HENRY (O.S.)
At home, I have most of my toys
and--

Charlie bristles at the word “home” used to describe Nicole’s.

HENRY’S ROOM

HENRY
--there’s a pool and I have a tree-
house and jungle gym. We play
lots of games. We have Super
Secret Treasure Hunt which is
really fun.

CUT TO: KITCHEN

Charlie is making ground meat and potatoes and spinach. He has a lot of burners going at once, making a mess.

CHARLIE
Sweetheart, do you want to help me
set the table.

HENRY (O.S.)
Do I have to?

CHARLIE
Just come in here and grab a plate
and--

HENRY (O.S.)
I’m playing.

CHARLIE
Henry!

HENRY’S ROOM

Henry plays with his men on the floor. The evaluator sits in a chair nearby.

HENRY
(grudgingly)
O-K.

Henry gets off his chair and goes into--

KITCHEN
CHARLIE
Why are you being like this?

HENRY
What?

CHARLIE
If I ask you to help out, help out.

HENRY
(eating something from the pan)
What is this?

CHARLIE
It’s special meal.

HENRY
What are the green things? There aren’t green things in special meal.

CHARLIE
It’s just a garnish.

HENRY
Here, I’ll take it off.

HENRY
I don’t want to eat anything it touched.

CHARLIE
It doesn’t change the taste of anything.

HENRY
I might want to be a vegetarian. Mom’s a vegetarian.

CHARLIE
Is she a vegetarian now?

HENRY
Yeah.

CHARLIE
(prickly)
Well, then you should like garnish. It’s all garnish, vegetarianism.
Charlie looks over. Nancy stands, watching, in the threshold of the kitchen.

EVALUATOR
I’m done with my water.

She returns her water to the sink.

DINING AREA

Charlie and Henry eat. Nancy sits with them.

CHARLIE
You sure you don’t want anything?

EVALUATOR
No, I’m fine, thank you.

They eat in silence. The evaluator observing.

HENRY
Do the thing with the knife.

CHARLIE
No...I’m not...no.

HENRY
Come on!

CHARLIE
It’s not a dinner thing.

Silence.

CHARLIE
It’s not an anytime thing.

EVALUATOR
What’s the thing with the knife?

HENRY
It’s hilarious.

CHARLIE
No...it’s dumb. I have a small knife on my keychain. Which is only for adults. I do a thing with it sometimes...

HENRY
You said I could get a knife.
CHARLIE
A jack-knife, yeah. When you’re older.

HENRY
Like ten.

CHARLIE
No, like twenty.

HENRY
Yeah.

Charlie watches the evaluator’s face closely, trying to discern something, anything.

LIVING ROOM

Charlie and Henry do his homework. Henry is sounding out a word.

HENRY
Dime, rime, lime, pime, sime--

CHARLIE
Honey, stop guessing. You’re so close, stay with it.

HENRY
(lying on his back)
Ugh, I don’t want to do it.

CHARLIE
What’s the first letter?

HENRY
I don’t want to do it. Can I do the iPad?

CHARLIE
No. Just look, what’s the first letter?

HENRY
I don’t want to.

CHARRLIE
It’s a T. What sound does T make.

HENRY
(pause)
Tuh.

CHARLIE
Right and then just do the rest of it.
HENRY
Dime.

CHARLIE
No! You have “Tuh” and “ime.”
What is that?

Henry takes a piece of tape and puts it on his mouth.

CHARLIE
Time. It’s time.

He looks at the evaluator. She nods. Henry rolls over onto his front, playing dead.

CHARLIE
You’ll see, honey, one day it’s just going to click and you’ll be able to read everything.

HENRY
(through the tape)
I need a break. Can I play in my room?

CHARLIE
Sure.

Charlie tries to kiss him on lips. Henry gives him his head. Charlie kisses the top of his head. Henry runs out.

Nancy is looking at the crack in the wall from Charlie’s punch. Charlie clocks this. Silence.

CHARLIE
Do you ever observe married people?

EVALUATOR
No, why would I?

CHARLIE
I was kidding.

EVALUATOR
Oh.

Silence.

CHARLIE
The knife thing is, I carry this knife on my keychain which his mother got me actually--
He takes out his key-ring and shows her the X-Acto knife.

CHARLIE
--and I’d do this thing for his mom--

He clicks open the knife.

CHARLIE
Where I pretend to cut myself, but
I retract the blade--

He pantomimes cutting his arm.

CHARLIE
But I don’t do it with him...

The evaluator stares at Charlie with horror. Charlie hesitates and follows her gaze. Dark red blood streams down his arm.

CHARLIE
Oh...that’s fine.

It’s really bleeding. He covers it with his hand, the blood spreading between his fingers.

EVALUATOR
Are you OK?

CHARLIE
(casually)
Yeah, I must not have retracted the blade all the way.

EVALUATOR
Do you need--

Blood is getting over everything. He lowers the sleeve on his oxford shirt to cover the wound. Red blots immediately soak through the cotton.

CHARLIE
Yeah...yeah. No! I’m fine.
(smiles at her and crosses his legs)
What else can I tell you?

EVALUATOR
I think I have enough.

CHARLIE
(again trying to talk casually)
You got enough?
EVALUATOR
(winces)
Are you sure you’re OK?

CHARLIE
Totally. I’m fine.

Silence.

EVALUATOR
Well, I’ll leave you guys for tonight.

CHARLIE
Oh, OK...

EVALUATOR
I’ll be in touch if I have further questions.

She stands and gathers her things while Charlie grabs her coat from a chair and holds it out to her, his left shirt arm growing crimson. She takes it, trying to avoid the blood.

EVALUATOR
Thanks.

She climbs into her coat, Charlie nominally helping out with his good arm, and moves toward the door.

EVALUATOR
Thank you for the water.

CHARLIE
Oh, yeah, sure.

EVALUATOR
You’re sure you’re OK?

CHARLIE
(too loud)
Yeah!

EVALUATOR
Bye bye.

CHARLIE
Bye.

She tries to open the door, but it’s locked. She turns a bolt and another latch but it still won’t open.
CHARLIE
Oh, let me--

Charlie rushes over and undoes the bolt. She tries to get out of the way of the blood, while he reaches his long arms around her to do this, putting them both in a strangely intimate proximity. He pulls and it won’t open.

CHARLIE
I think you turned--

He does the latch and finally it opens.

CHARLIE
Sorry.

She flushes and smiles awkwardly and slips out, closing the door behind her.

Charlie runs into the kitchen, swaying, leaning against the wall for support. His shirt is now soaked in blood. He rolls up his sleeve, and runs cold water on his arm. He winces. Watery blood fills up the pots and pans in the sink mixing with whatever bits of remaining food.

He finds a small box of band-aids in the cupboard and opens about seven of them and tries to cover up the wound. But it’s still really bleeding. He wraps his arm in paper towels, sweat now sliding down his face and soaking his armpits. He drops to the kitchen floor and lies down on his back in exhaustion and pain.

Two small bare feet step over him and pad over to the refrigerator.

HENRY
Dad, are you OK?

CHARLIE
Yeah, I’m just tired.

Charlie rolls over onto his arm, hiding it from Henry. The sound of milk being poured into a glass. Then the feet re-approach and step back over Charlie. Little drips of milk whiten the floor.

HENRY
(sleepily)
Dad, did she like us?

CHARLIE
(from the floor)
Yeah, she thought we were great.
Fade to Black.

INT. NICOLE’S NEW PLACE. ECHO PARK, LA. DAY

Cassie, Sandra and Nicole sing “You Could Drive a Person Crazy” from the musical, Company -- The tight harmonies are sung a capella, and there are dance moves to go along with it.

The group of people watching includes kids and an agent, cast and crew from her show and family -- it’s a housewarming party.

(The house looks very different from the home she shared with Charlie. More color, more patterns, more hippy-dippy, more lamps, more her. It’s how she likes it.)

They finish their song and everyone applauds, kind of to be polite, but also because it was seriously, strangely great.

INT. NICOLE’S KITCHEN. LATER

Nora pops the cork on a big bottle of Cristal.

Nicole is getting food together for the guests, pulling saran wrap off platters. She leaves cabinet doors open which she maneuvers around. Kids run through the room playing. Guests enter to grab drinks, etc.

    NORA
    I want your mom!

    NICOLE
    Oh really? Yeah--

Nora makes a heart symbol with her hands and leaps up on the kitchen counter, swinging her feet and drinking champagne like a teenager.

    NORA
    So, because Charlie dropped his claim to New York, we’re mostly done. Jay’s lost interest and Ted, his associate, is doing the paper work.

    NICOLE
    And we’re not taking any money, right?
NORA
We withdrew the claim for the
MacArthur, which I think we could
have gotten by the way, and
they’re not asking for any of the
show.

NICOLE
(clinking glasses)
OK, good. Thank you for
everything, Nora

NORA
You’re welcome, doll.
(pause)
And when Charlie’s in LA, I got
the custody breakdown to be 55/45,
so you’ll have Henry one extra day
every two weeks...

NICOLE
I thought we made it equal.

NORA
I tweaked it at the last minute.
I just didn’t want him to be able
to say he got 50/50.

NICOLE
But I don’t-- Bragging to his friends.

NICOLE
--want to do that.

NORA
Take it! You won.

NICOLE
(sadly)
Uh huh.

INT. NICOLE’S KITCHEN, LA. DAY
CLOSE on Nicole writing her signature. She uses the last
name (her maiden name) Ryder.

NORE sits at her kitchen table in LA.

INT. CHARLIE AND NICOLE’S APARTMENT, NEW YORK. DAY
CLOSE on Charlie writing his signature.

Charlie sits on the floor of his half-empty apartment.
EXT. FLATBUSH AVENUE, BROOKLYN. DAY

An ASPCA guy approaches him smiling.

    ASPCA GUY
          You look like a guy who really
          cares about animals--

    CHARLIE
          Nope.

EXT. LAUNDROMAT, BROOKLYN. DAY

He watches a mother and father with a young baby in the stroller.

INT. BARBER SHOP, BROOKLYN. DAY

Charlie sits in a barber’s chair getting a haircut.

INT. RESTAURANT. NIGHT

Charlie enters the same restaurant we saw everyone at for the closing night party so many months before.

He sees Mary Ann and Terry and a couple of other actors. A piano player, actors singing, performing.

He joins his old group. The gang is happy to see him. He opens a tab at the bar for everyone.

They all sit at a booth, having been drinking for a while now.

    CHARLIE
          ...and the couch was technically
          hers pre-marriage, but, I mean, it
          was OUR couch, it’s not like I was
          going to BUY another couch but
          then when it comes time to split,
          it’s suddenly HER couch and I have
          no couch and-- I’m sitting on the
          floor is the short version.
          (waves his hand)
          I’m sorry. This is all so self-
          pitying and boring.

    TERRY
          Oh, no, no, sounds really tough.

    CHARLIE
          No, it’s all stupid. I’m sorry.

    MARY ANN
          (pointedly)
          No, it’s sad.
The piano player plays the opening notes of a song. Charlie recognizes it.

CHARLIE
“Someone to hold you too close...”

He gets up and walks to the piano.

People know who he is, and are intrigued to see what he’s going to do.

Sings “Being Alive” from Company. It’s sloppy, but surprisingly emotional and comes from a deep place. And in the end is beautiful.

Fade to Black.

EXT./INT. SANDRA’S HOUSE, WEST HOLLYWOOD, LOS ANGELES. DAY

Charlie gets out of his rental car.

He knocks on the back door. No answer. He apprehensively opens the screen door to the kitchen. Food is on the stove. Music plays. It’s warm and welcoming.

But Charlie remains in the threshold.

CHARLIE
Hello?

He hears laughter from the other rooms. And then Henry shouting excitedly.

CHARLIE
Hello?

Suddenly Carter runs, breathlessly, into the kitchen. He clutches a ray gun.

CARTER
You’ll never take me!

He sees Charlie and hesitates.

CHARLIE
Hi. Sorry, the door was open.

Carter puts his finger up to his lips.

CARTER
Shhh.

CHARLIE
Oh...OK.
The electronic sound of something bad happening. Carter’s been hit in laser tag. Sandra runs in holding a gun.

SANDRA
I got you!

She hesitates when she sees Charlie.

SANDRA
Charlie, hi.

She comes forward and hugs him. It isn’t cold particularly, but it isn’t what it was. Carter extends his hand.

CARTER
Carter.

CHARLIE
Charlie.

CARTER
Nicole’s still at work.

Silence. Then Henry enters.

CHARLIE
Hi.

HENRY
Hi.

CHARLIE
Can I get a hug?


CUT TO: Charlie, Sandra and Carter talk at the dining room table. Nicole arrives from filming her show. Carter rises, they kiss.

CARTER
How’d it go?

NICOLE
Good. Donny’s dead now. I shot the scene where he merges with the ficus.

Charlie grins.

CARTER
She got an Emmy nomination!
CHARLIE
She’s a great actress.

NICOLE
No, for directing!

Charlie nods, a bit stunned.

CHARLIE
Congratulations.

NICOLE
I love it. Now I know what you were so obsessed with all the time.

(moving)
We should get ready!

(to Charlie)
We’re the Beatles.

Everyone clomps upstairs. Charlie follows.

CHARLIE
I didn’t really get a costume together.

CARTER
You can be George Martin.

CHARLIE
I don’t need to be anything.

CARTER
You got to be something--

NICOLE
At least a ghost! I’ll get you a sheet--

Sandra and Carter hurry into different rooms, getting ready. Nicole enters into the bathroom.

NICOLE (O.S.)
We should leave soon! I’m saying that as much for me as anyone else.

CHARLIE
I wanted to tell you, I took a residency at UCLA. I’m going to direct two plays in rep at Red Cat.

Nicole reenters holding a sheet.

NICOLE
Oh...
CHARLIE
So, I’ll be here for a while.

NICOLE
That’s great.

But something strikes her as sad about it too.

CHARLIE
You OK?

NICOLE
Yeah. It’s only good.

Sandra calls her for help with her costume. Nicole hands Charlie the sheet and goes into the next room. Charlie, alone, inspects the sheet. He notices the photos on the wall have been swapped out with different ones. He hears:

HENRY (O.S.)
“Charlie is...in...cr...” -- something -- “neat and I re-ly on him to keep things in or-der. He’s energy con...” -- I don’t know what that word is --

Charlie drifts towards Henry’s room.

Henry, legs dangling off his bed, reads from a crinkled loose leaf paper.

CHARLIE
You’re getting so good at reading.
   (beat)
What is that?

HENRY
“He doesn’t look in the mirror too of-ten. He cries eas-ily in movies...”

Charlie hesitates and sits next to Henry on the bed.

HENRY
“He is very self-suf--”

CHARLIE
Self-sufficient.

HENRY
“--he can dar-n a sock--”
CHARLIE
That means sew, like a hole-- "--and cook himself dinner and ir--"

CHARLIE
Break it into two parts.

HENRY
Ur. On.

CHARLIE
Not "ur" but "ire"

HENRY
Ire. On.

CHARLIE
Iron.

HENRY
"--a shirt. He rarely gets defeated (which I fell...feel like I always do). Charlie takes all of my moods stead-ily, he doesn’t give in to them or make me feel bad about them. He’s a great dress-er, he never looks em--" I don’t know this one...

CHARLIE
Embarrassing.

Nicole appears in the doorway.

HENRY
"--embarrassing wh-ich is hard for a man." You read it now...

He hands it to Charlie. Charlie reads:

CHARLIE
"He loves being a dad, he loves all the things you’re supposed to hate, like the tantrums, the waking up at night-- He disappears into his own world. He and Henry are alike in that way. He can tell people they have food in their teeth or on their face in a way that doesn’t make them feel bad. Charlie is self-made -- his parents -- I only met them once -- but he told me there was-- (MORE)
CHARLIE (CONT'D)
(Charlie skips ahead for Henry’s benefit)
He’s brilliant at creating family out of whoever is around. With the theatre company he cast a spell that made everyone feel included. No one, not even an intern was unimportant.”

HENRY
What’s an intern?

CHARLIE
Like a helper. But who isn’t paid.

HENRY
Why aren’t they paid?

CHARLIE
They’re young. They’re learning... I don’t know, maybe if they do a good job, they get paid later?

HENRY
OK. Keep going.

CHARLIE
“He could remember all the inside jokes. He’s extremely organized and thorough. He’s very clear about what he wants unlike me who can’t always tell. I fell in love with him two seconds after I saw him and I’ll never stop loving him...”

Charlie hesitates. He swallows. He’s crying.

CHARLIE
“...even though it doesn’t make sense anymore.”

EXT. PASADENA RESIDENTIAL STREETS, LA, LATE DAY

Henry, Nicole, Carter, Sandra are dressed as the Beatles from Sgt. Pepper. Carter is Paul. Henry is Ringo. Nicole is John. Sandra is George. Charlie’s a ghost. They’re joined by Cassie and Sam and their kids, also dressed up.

The kids run from house to house trick-or-treating.

The adults linger and talk casually.
Henry, exhausted, is having trouble keeping his eyes open. Nicole regards him. Charlie, his sheet on his arm now, is saying goodbye to the family as Sandra takes off with Cassie and Sam. He shakes Carter’s hand, it’s friendly. Nicole hesitates then approaches Charlie.

NICOLE
We were going to bring him to dinner, but he’s wiped out. Do you want to take him?

CHARLIE
(taken aback)
It’s your night...

NICOLE
I know.

CHARLIE
Yeah.

NICOLE
OK, good.

CHARLIE
I’ll drop him back in the morning?

NICOLE
Yeah, just text when you’re up and we’ll figure it out.

NICOLE
(leaning down to Henry)
You’re going to go with your Dad, OK?

HENRY
OK.

The boy wraps his arms around his Dad’s neck and Charlie lifts him.

NICOLE
I love you, sweetheart.

HENRY
I love you.

She kisses Henry’s face which rests on Charlie’s shoulder and for a moment all three of their heads are nestled close together. Then Nicole releases.

Charlie, holding Henry, advances toward his parked car. Nicole watches.

NICOLE
Wait--
Charlie hesitates as Nicole hurries after him. She kneels down in the middle of the street.

CLOSE: Charlie’s laces spill out on the pavement.
She tugs on one which he’s stepping on. She taps his calf.

    NICOLE
    Can you--

He lifts up his foot so she can retrieve the lace.

She ties his sneaker. Charlie watches.

    CHARLIE
    (smiles)
    Thanks.

She nods. He hikes Henry up tighter in his arms and continues toward his car. Nicole and Carter get in their parked Subaru in the foreground.

The Subaru drives toward us and off-camera and then reappears heading away from us now. As they pass Charlie and Henry, an arm waves out the window. Charlie raises his hand back.

Nicole’s car heads into the distance. Charlie stops at his rental and digs for the keys in his pocket. Henry holds on.

All of them, Nicole and Charlie and Henry, are now recessed into the landscape. The light iswaning. We hold on the wide tableau of the LA street and finally cut to black.

End.