

SECOND SON

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1. EXT. HIGH SCHOOL, ENCINO - NOON

High school lawn, lunch hour. Kids drifting toward the parking lot in twos and threes. See NICK DAWES strolling alone, lost in thought. He's seventeen. Slender, with lively playful eyes. Suddenly, he stops dead. The eyes staring now. Quiet, intent.

From Nick's POV, see BETH WINTERS. A striking, compelling beauty. Not high school flash. There's depth, intelligence and a delicate cast to her features that would set her apart in any company. Just now, she's standing at the curb, chatting with a COLLEGE GUY in a convertible. He's twenty-one, with square-cut good looks and big shoulders.

Nick just watching them from a distance. We can't read his thoughts. Then, he heads toward them. As Nick approaches, Beth is saying simply to the college man...

BETH

...because when I say no...I mean no.

She doesn't look defiant. Just quiet. Sure of herself. The guy's grin shades toward smug...

GUY

Yeh, well, that may go down with the...

But Nick has come up behind her, slipped his arm smoothly around her waist.

NICK

Hiya, sugar. Waitin' long?

She turns, sees him. Dead at his eyes, she unleashes a full-power smile that's a dazzler.

BETH

Hi babe. Too long.

She leans to give Nick a kiss on the ear. Small and hot. Turns back to the college guy...

BETH

Nice talkin' to you...

Waves the guy a toodle-oo, and takes off with Nick, arm around his waist. There's a beat, and then Nick looks back over his shoulder. Gives the guy in the convertible a little crooked smile.

They turn the corner. Out of sight now, Beth lets go of him, breaks up completely.

BETH
Oh God, I wanted to see his
face...what'd he look like...?

NICK
Sub-human. Stunned as shit.

BETH
Do the face...

Nick mugs sub-human stunned as shit. Funny and accurate. She's loving it.

BETH
You were so good. What'd you
call me..."sugar".

She cackles. His smile is easy. Does love to make her laugh.

NICK
So...wanna hang out tonight?

BETH
Got a date.

He just nods. Not totally unexpected.

NICK
Anybody I know?

She tries to keep her look playful, but there's a sheepish edge.

BETH
Mr. Subhuman-stunned-as-shit.

On his reaction...

BETH
Don't give me judgemental, here.
Been out with him twice. He's
bright...he's got some good
stuff in there. Just...gets
this goddamn cocky smile sometimes...
(cackles again)
Boy, you wiped that off...

NICK
Glad to be of use.

They're grinning at each other. Hers is real.

BETH

Hey, why don't you get a
date tonight and come along?
Really burn him...

He holds his grin in place. Then, a little shake of his head.
Just before the silence can turn awkward...

BETH

So...wanna hang out this
afternoon?

She genuinely likes him. Best buddies. He nods. Sure, why not?

BETH

I'll swing by your house.

She gives him a smile. Warm and real. Waves and heads off. As
Nick watches her go, we see his longing.

2. INT. DIAMOND REALTY, ENCINO - LATER

Real estate office. Eight desks. The place isn't big, but it's no
seedy den of losers. This is neat, efficient, and reasonably
upscale as befits Encino.

Nick straddles a turned-around chair, listening to VINCE tell stories.
Short and square and pushing sixty, Vince is the veteran of a lot of
wars.

VINCE

...So by the time the other
broker calls back...I'm
sittin' in her goddam parlor.
I get to pick the phone up...
and personally tell this
back-stabbing sonofabitch...
that I just cut his balls off
with a rusty nail file. In a
nice way.

At the next desk is PERRY. He's forty, with an angular face and
a lank shock of hair. Thin lips and a hard grin...

PERRY

See kid, that's a history lesson.
The tip-off is the word "parlor".
Nobody's had a "parlor" since
Vince made his last sale...

Nick's smiling like it's all good-natured. Vince know Perry's
bitter little edges, but he's only mildly ruffled.

VINCE

Did I hear the word "sale",
Perry? Sale as in...Fencik...the
house on Woodvale?

PERRY

You never make that sale. I
saw Mrs. Fencik...I saw her
asshole husband...and they are
leading you around by your dick.

(emphatic)

Murray Cross couldn't make that
sale.

Nick's eyes travel to the private executive office in the rear.
Through the glass, we see MURRAY CROSS on the phone. He's fifty,
with smooth good looks. Expensive, tasteful suit. Long grey
hair swept back. The silver eagle.

VINCE (V.O.)

Maybe that's because Murray the
Magnificent is not the guy who
practically has an invitation to
the daughter's bat-mitzvah.

Nick's still locked on Murray, who hangs up the receiver, ignores
all his flashing phone lights, and stands up. There's something
in the way Nick watches him. A young Arthur studying Merlin.

PERRY (V.O.)

How does somebody "practically"
have an invitation to a
bat-mitzvah?

Murray's leaving his office, heading their way. Only Nick sees.

VINCE (V.O.)

It's been discussed. It's a
discussed thing. First one
discusses...then one invites.

And now Murray's right there. As Vince and Perry turn to see
him, we can feel the unspoken deference. Murray's voice comes
low and silky...

MURRAY

S'cuse me fellas. Nick...I
forgot to get my car washed this
morning. I was wondering...

Murray's already holding out the keys, and Nick is already
jumping to his feet.

VINCE

Murray, this is Nick's day off.

Murray fixes Nick with a steady gaze. There is indeed a certain charisma about the man. His voice is gentle...

MURRAY

So how come you're here?
Nothing better to do...?

PERRY

Breaks Vince's heart if the
kid misses the Folklore Hour...

NICK

It's really OK, Mr. Cross.
Be glad to get your car.

Murray holds the look an extra fraction of a beat...

MURRAY

Don't be silly. I'll get my
own car washed.

(beat)

You stay here. Learn from
Vince.

Murray's soft smile. He moves by them and out of the office.
Even after he's gone, Nick's eyes still linger on the door.

3. INT. KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Nick enters the family kitchen. His mother, SHEILA, is up to her ass in a major cooking project. Bowls, ingredients, stuff everywhere. She is 43, sleek, well-maintained. A face that's still pretty, dominated by the same dark, dancing eyes she gave to Nick. Maybe she's a little too thin and too quick. Makes her seem even more frantic now than she probably is. Without looking up at him...

SHEILA

How was the mid-term?

Silence. She notices, but still doesn't turn.

SHEILA

Chemistry. Your one o'clock.

Oh.

NICK

That mid-term.

(beat)

That mid-term...posed no
problem of any kind.

Something ever so slightly off-center in the tone. Her antenna receives it, discards it, and moves back to whisking the sauce.

NICK

So Tommy came down early,
huh?

Stops her cold, Now she turns, eyes him narrowly. How the hell
did he know...? He gestures to all the cooking paraphernalia...

NICK

Looks like regular Thursday
dinner to me.

(worried)

Cram all that in the microwave,
can ya?

She's busted. Trying to take it gracefully. Little smile...

SHEILA

If I liked you, I'd cook for
you.

He nods. She probably would.

NICK

And where is the Incredible
Hunk?

SHEILA

Your brother is upstairs...
playing with your sister.

Now that strikes him funny. She doesn't get it. And for the
moment, neither do we.

SHEILA

Listen, one of my private
patients is going through a
little...thing, right now. And
I really need to give her extra
time.

(beat)

So could you drive Allison to
kindergym on Thursdays and dance
on Fridays? Just for awhile.

NICK

Thursday's easy. Friday...

SHEILA

'Cos then she'll have to miss
dance. And she really enjoys it.

Nick knows that. At least as well as she does.

NICK

(quietly)

I'll work it out.

4. INT. ALLISON'S BEDROOM

ALLISON sits at her tiny desk. A small, serious child of six. She's drawing a picture, and concentrating with everything she's got.

Sitting on her bed is her brother TOM. He is 21, a junior at Stanford, and indeed a hunk-and-a-half. Tall, trim athlete with dark good looks that make him seem years older. A male model with dean's list brains. Allison, however, appears to be shining him.

TOM
What're you making...?

ALLISON
A picture.

TOM
Picture of what?

ALLISON
Something.

End of the road. He's fishing around.

TOM
You still like Craig?

ALLISON
That's Greg. And I hate him.
I always hated him.

She just keeps working without missing a beat. Seven different colors of markers. Meticulous care.

TOM
Y'know, I only get down from Stanford once in awhile. Don't you want to play...?

ALLISON
Play what?

ANGLE...just outside the open door is Nick. Unseen, he's been listening. Watch him now...

TOM (V.O.)
Would you play the violin for me? Mommy says you play Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star. She says you're great.

Silence. Still holding on Nick...

TOM (V.O.)
You could show me how you
work your computer...

More silence.

TOM (V.O.)
What do you want to play...?

Nick's eyes close. Here it comes...

ANGLE...back inside the room. Allison turns around. She seems
really animated. Up for it.

ALLISON
Let's play...we're two fathers
and one mommy and nine teenagers
and four babies and sixteen
regular kids.

Stopped isn't the word for Tom.

ALLISON
You start.

A beat. Then Tom's smile. The one that ladies usually
appreciate.

TOM
Listen. I got some unpacking,
still. And then we'll do
something, OK? Be thinking
about what you want to do...

ANGLE...the doorway as Tom comes through it. Only now, Nick's
not there. Tom heads down the hall and disappears into his own
room. Now Nick steps into the hallway. Looks down the hall at
Tom's door. Then enters Allison's room.

She's sitting on the bed, where Tom had been. Quiet, but she
brightens to see Nick. He kneels at her feet. Leans into her
lap. She grabs both his ears.

NICK
OK, so you and me and the
other daddy drive all the
teenagers to the Roxy and all
the babies to kindergym and six
regular kids to Videotron and
the other ten kids to...the moon.

ALLISON
You can't drive to the moon.

He's stumped. Rolling his eyes. Desperate for an answer.

NICK
You could do it...backwards.

Wins a burst of giggles.

ALLISON
Could not!

NICK
Could too!

Grinning. Both of them. Two people who genuinely like each other.

NICK
Y'know, this game is...
hard. If you haven't had
any practice.
(gently)
Let Tommy...play something
easier. OK?

It's OK. He stands to go. Sees the picture on her desk. The one she'd been working so hard on. Picks it up. Stares.

ALLISON
It's a shark. Kissing a
watermelon.

Nick nods. Splendid rendition of the subject.

ALLISON
I made it for Tommy. But he
forgot to take it.

Nick's little smile.

NICK
He'll like it. I'll give it
to him.

5. INT. TOM'S ROOM

Tom's unpacking. Transferring creased slacks from the hanging bag to the closet. Meticulous. Hears the soft knock.

TOM
Yeh...

Nick enters. Gets the easy smile.

TOM
Hiya, stud.

And Nick sends the easy smile straight back.

NICK
Hiya, wimp.

Role reversal, their oldest joke. They seem glad to see each other. But as Nick sits on the bed, Tom turns back to his hangers. The silence falls quickly. Lingers.

NICK
So. Tell me a story.

Tom keeps working.

TOM
What story?

NICK
Your best one.

It's an off-center-question. Answer comes back slow...

TOM
Stanford...is still there. I'm
still number three quarterback
on the depth chart. Grades are
holding pretty solid...except
I might pull a B in French Lit...

Turns back. Sees Nick's blank stare.

TOM
What kinda story you want...?

NICK
I dunno. Anything this quarter
make you laugh out loud?
(beat)
Or feel sad...

Tom's turn for the blank stare.

NICK
Or horny...

Silence.

NICK
Or anything...

See Tom's impatience now. Is the kid really taunting him? An old game and Tom's not in the mood. It's a hard stare.

TOM
You ready for midterms?

NICK
No problem. Here...spot quiz.

He hands Tom the drawing Allison made. Tom stares at it.

NICK
Time's almost up.

TOM
It's an airplane. Eating a
basketball.

Nick just nods. Not half bad.

NICK
It's a shark. Without eyes.
French kissing a beige watermelon.
(beat)
Your sister made it for you.

Nick looks around the room.

NICK
You could tape it up. Maybe
over the bed.

Tom grins. Then sees that Nick is serious. Tom doesn't get it.

NICK
So she can see you really
like it.

6. INT. HALL/KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Nick skipping down the staircase. Enters the kitchen, where Sheila is still working on Tom's homecoming supper. She doesn't look up. Nick plunges his hand deep into a huge bowl of ravioli. He comes up with a slithery fistful, just as Sheila turns to him. Looking straight at her eyes, Nick calmly stuffs the entire handful into his mouth.

SHEILA
Gross.

Sounds funny coming from her. Nick grins and chews.

NICK
Needs sauce.

SHEILA
Beth came by.

Sounds like she came and left. Stops him cold.

SHEILA
She's in the basement.

7. INT. BASEMENT - AFTERNOON

Nick enters the basement, which is outfitted as a weight room. Beth is doing bench presses with a surprising amount of weight. She wears only a thin T-shirt and little running shorts. He can't not look at her body. Her eyes flick over to him.

BETH
Nice chat with Super Tom...?

He just nods. Matter-of-fact.

NICK
Intimate.

Her eyes go back to ceiling now. Working harder as her set continues. Still, we see her little smile.

BETH
I spend...four seconds...walking
through your kitchen. Your mom...
tells me his...goddam resume.

She finishes her last press. Nick helps her carefully set the barbell back on its stand. From flat on her back, she looks up at him.

BETH
Why is she always selling the
guy...?

NICK
Maybe she likes you for him.

Beth crosses her eyes. So funny and so pretty. He's just lost looking at her.

BETH
Y'know, all that stuff doesn't
make him such a hot ticket.

NICK
You know a hot ticket when you
see one.

And now her smile. The dazzler. Straight at his eyes.

BETH
Sure do.

Should he take that personally? As he fights against his excitement...

BETH
This guy I'm seeing tonight...

He tries to keep his cool. And his smile.

NICK
Mr. Sub-human etcetera...

BETH
You have to fight through
some surface shit. But he
can be funny...can be tender...
(beat)
You think Tommy's ever tender...?

Guess not. But somehow, he's not thinking of Tommy. Staring
down at her.

NICK
Funny and tender. That's hard
to find.

Said that very straight. Maybe revealing. She stares back.
Does she know what he feels? In the silence, the door opens.
Tom enters. Sees Beth.

TOM
Hey. Long time...

He sends the standard charming smile. Nothing necessarily
personal. She sends one straight back. They know how to do
this. Nick wasn't born into that club. He can only watch.

TOM
Workin' on your pecs?

She says nothing. Just keeps looking at his eyes. Her silence
isn't meant to be sexy. Just is. He's standing over her now,
behind the barbell. Checks the amount of weight. Shows her that
he's impressed.

TOM
Ready to give me a set...?

A beat. She nods. Puts her hands to the bar. Tom helps her
lift it. His voice comes softly...

TOM
Give me a good one.

Nick watching. From another planet.

8. INT. KITCHEN - DUSK

Nearly dark through the kitchen windows. Sheila is pulling the
huge dinner out of double ovens and off the range. Her husband
PETER enters. Just home from work. Sorting the mail. He's 45,
with a pleasant, easy manner. Patient smile as he watches her rush.

PETER

The doctor is in...

She's got a steaming pot in her hand. Tries to kiss him on the way by, but just misses. Airball. He follows her to the counter. When she sets the pot down, he kisses her neck. She turns. Smiles. Gives him a B+ welcome-home kiss.

PETER

Dinner with the Wagners.
Tuesday.

SHEILA

Don't tell me that stuff
when I don't have my book.

PETER

Get your book. He's the new
Chief of Medicine at Valley...
and he's coming on the Board...

Nick has appeared in the kitchen doorway, but his presence is not acknowledged. Sheila tries to remember her schedule...

SHEILA

Tuesday...

Peter is checking out the size of the impending supper...

PETER

So when did Tom get in?

Another wise guy. Sheila eyes her husband with a bit of an edge.

SHEILA

For your information, I cook
lots of nights when Tom isn't
here.

PETER

But those nights, Tom's car is
not in the driveway.

Sheila's eyes go straight to Nick. So that's how he knew. See his little crooked smile. Gotcha, mom. Just then, Tom brushes by Nick and saunters into the kitchen. All eyes reflexively turn to him. Peter's can't help but light. Special affection. Special pride.

PETER

Hey, stranger...

No handclasp. No hug. They stand out of reach, sharing a warm look.

PETER
Whatcha been doing up there...?

Tom's eyes flick to his brother. Gives Nick a private little grin...

TOM
Not much. Laughing out loud.
Feeling horny...

Little playful there. We didn't know Tom had that in him.
Peter, of course, doesn't follow.

TOM
(to Nick)
Go ahead. Tell him a story.

NICK
Well, Tommy's doin' the usual
drugs...
(beat)
...the occasional cheerleader...

But Peter has gone to Tom now. Their arms sliding around each other. Strong hug.

NICK
Faculty wives. Barnyard
animals...

Peter's not listening. Just looks at Tom...

PETER
(softly)
Well. Welcome home.

9. INT. DIAMOND REALTY - LATE AFTERNOON

End of a working day. Couple of AGENTS going home. The WOMAN nods good-bye to Nick, who passes with an armload of files.

We follow Nick toward the rear where Vince has the phone to his ear. Leaning back, one foot up on the desk. Big smile. From our angle, Perry and Nick seem the only others still in the place. They both watch Vince at work.

VINCE
Well, tomorrow would be ideal.
Then we could open escrow before
the weekend. See, that way...
(listens, nods)
You can bring the check by any
time, and I'll have the paperwork
all...

He rolls his eyes happily at Nick. The fish is jumping into the net.

VINCE

I'll see you then. And give my warmest congratulations to Mr. Fencik. Yes, ma'am. Yes, Shelley. Bye-bye now.

He slowly, exquisitely, lowers the receiver toward its cradle. As it comes to rest, he glances up to Perry with a look that says eat shit and die. Perry is underwhelmed.

PERRY

Two hunnerd dollars.

Vince's benign questioning smile.

PERRY

Two hunnerd says you never close Fencik. I saw those people.

Vince just shakes his head. Ye of little faith.

VINCE

I just closed her, schmuck. But...I'll take your money.

Perry looks to Nick.

PERRY

Now this is gonna be your first lesson in the business, kid. When you...

VOICE

Perry...

Our angle broadens to reveal MURRAY. Sitting at the last desk. Stack of ledgers before him. With one quiet word, all eyes have turned to him. He speaks to Perry as if they're alone in the room...

MURRAY

Sometime...I'd like to hear you talking about all the units you're going to sell. Like I know you can.

(beat)

'Cos hearing all the time...about the units somebody else isn't going to sell...makes you sound like such a loser.

Very quiet now. Very quiet.

MURRAY

And I know...you're a better
man than that.

His eyes turn to Vince. Smile of admiration.

MURRAY

Way to go, Killer.

As he looks to Nick now, Murray's head gestures toward Vince...

MURRAY

Every move...an oil painting.

10. INT. LIVING ROOM - SUNSET

We hadn't realized the house was quite this grand. The living
room is spacious and expensively appointed. Only a touch
sterile. Through the glass, a large pool. A green hill.
Perfect sunset in a perfect world.

Sheila sits on a bar stool. The silence is instantly ominous.
She's watching Peter as he mixes himself a drink. As she stares
at him, we feel her tension. As he adds his vermouth, we feel
his. He caps the bottle. Adds his ice. Stares into the glass.

PETER

You think it's drugs?

SHEILA

I wish it were. You could
make it through Med School
on drugs.

But nobody's laughing. He looks at her.

PETER

You cancel tonight?

SHEILA

Of course I fucking cancelled
Stan and Joanie.

That was loud and sharp. Makes the following silence all the
deeper.

SHEILA

I see these stories every day.
Christ, I'm working with two
different mothers in my group...

(beat)

Once this kind of thing happens...
the kid never really comes back.

He holds the eye contact. Takes the first sip of his drink. His voice is almost too quiet. Too controlled.

PETER

I mean, you're giving up on him.
You haven't even talked to him...

SHEILA

Yeh, well where is he? I don't
know where he is. I'm his mother
and I don't...know where he is.

His hands are turning his glass. Hers are twisting together in her lap. A long beat.

PETER

We get busy. We lose contact.
Maybe this will help...all of us...
do something about that.

SHEILA

So it's all for the fucking
best, huh? Boy am I glad we got
that figured out!

Glaring at him in the silence.

SHEILA

Can I see you get a little scared
here? Just flat...raw...

PETER

(interrupts)

Save it.

Very strong there. Didn't think he could do that. Cools her down a little. It's a different silence now. We see the feeling come up to her eyes.

SHEILA

See, we don't know this kid, now.
Doesn't that terrify you? One
phone call and...

(beat)

And these kids can do that. They
go away. Inside. To places...

PETER

No. He's my son. And I know
him. He couldn't get so far
away...that I couldn't find him.

She hears the loyalty in that. Lets it reach her. The moment holds. An uneasy truce between them.

PETER
(very quietly)
I'll talk to him.

11. INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Sheila is methodically stacking dinner dishes into the dishwasher. Allison sits at the table, folding cloth napkins into her version of an exquisitely neat pile. The child is glum. The mother lost in thought.

Hear the front door. Footsteps. Nick appears, still wearing his jacket. Sheila's stare is level and alerting.

NICK
I called, didn't I? I said I was gonna miss dinner...

ALLISON
Nicky, Mommy won't let me help...

SHEILA
Where'd you call from?

Her voice is real calm. He doesn't know what this is.

NICK
A phone. A pay phone.

ALLISON
Folding things is not helping...

Mother and son, staring at each other. Allison can't seem to get anyone to understand...

ALLISON
Nicky lets me stack the glasses.
And I never break any!

Sheila's eyes simply won't let him off the hook.

SHEILA
You father wants to see you.

12. INT. PETER'S STUDY - NIGHT

Paneled study. Books line the walls. Medical texts dominate, but we can also see the remnants of a more eclectic youth. Peter sits at a large desk, writing. On the shelf above, texts on dermatology. Two bear his name. On the desk, a large illuminated cube, representing a cross-section of layers of human skin.

Nick enters. Peter reacts but doesn't look up.

NICK
Mom said you wanted, uh...

Peter turns to see his son. Studies the boy evenly. Then...

PETER
How was school today?

NICK
Nothing special.

PETER
How was school today?

Silence now.

PETER
What? You figured nobody was
ever going to call us?

NICK
(quietly)
No.

Nick can't really look at his father's eyes just now. He goes to a bookcase. Mementos. Photographs. Peter talks to his back...

PETER
You go to your eight o'clock. And
your nine o'clock. Why? 'Cos
Beth Winters is in those classes?

Two photos on the shelf. Nick's own. A sterile, smiling
yearbook portrait.

PETER (V.O.)
Three months. Where do you go...?

The other photo is Peter and Tom together. Standing in a small
boat. Laughing. Tom holding up a big writhing fish.

NICK
I got a job.

Nick takes the photo into his hands.

NICK
What is this thing anyway...a
bass?

PETER
Turn around.

That tone again. The one we didn't know Peter had. Half a beat. Nick sets the photo down. Turns.

PETER

Last year...you went from a 3.6 to a 2.8.

Nick tries the crooked smile...

NICK

But who's counting.

PETER

Everybody.

Said very simply. Whatever Nick feels about this man, in this moment he's so sorry to have hurt him. That's what we hear now. Not fear. Not guilt. Sadness.

NICK

The job I had Christmas. I sorta... stayed with it.

Disbelief. Raw. Complete.

PETER

You're going to fail...four classes. Because you're a gofer in a...real estate office?

NICK

I didn't plan this. I'm quitting school because...I like this job. I'm good at it.

(beat)

I knew how you'd feel. So. Hard to talk about.

Now, Peter's first emotion. Sadness to match his son's.

PETER

We never...lied to each other.

Almost a plea. For confirmation. Nick's voice comes back softly...but very real.

NICK

Sure we did.

13. INT. NICK'S ROOM - NIGHT

Nick's room. Inner sanctum. Track lighting and huge wall posters. Rio. Galapagos tortoise. John Coltrane. John Lennon. Calvin Klein underwear ad. There's a hatrack, with a dozen crazy hats. There's a wall full of sound equipment. But no sound.

Nick sits at his desk. Staring at a wall. He's wearing a knit ski hat rolled down over his ears. Absolute silence. Thoughts racing behind his eyes. We hear a KNOCKING at his door. He doesn't react.

The door opens. Sheila enters. Stares at his back.

SHEILA

Nick?

No response. She goes to him. Peeks around at his face. Seeing her now, he smiles. She stares at him. Realizes. YANKS the hat off his head, revealing the EARPHONES. Now we see the wire leading down to the cassette player. She PULLS the plug and the player BLASTS JUJU MUSIC at an incredible volume.

Sheila is startled and freaked. She picks up the player and HURLS IT at the wall. It CRASHES HORRIBLY, but keeps right on playing. Seems louder than ever. Nick gets up. Walks calmly over to the player. Shuts it off.

Staring at each other now. A long beat.

NICK

Lots of rich people...didn't go to college. Lots of...happy people, too.

SHEILA

What happened to being a doctor? Like your father.

NICK

A doctor like my father. I never wanted that.

SHEILA

Why didn't you come to me? So sure I wouldn't understand.

NICK

Imagine that.

(beat)

And look how great you're understanding right now. Makes me feel pretty foolish.

SHEILA

How come you're not little anymore? So I could beat the shit out of you?

NICK
You never did that.

Tears are welling in her eyes.

SHEILA
You never...shoplifted a candy bar. Or blamed some other kid for something you did...

NICK
...and I never lied to you. This must all be pretty disillusioning.

SHEILA
Would it make any difference...if I begged you?

He hears her pain. Drops the sarcasm.

NICK
It's just...a different way. It isn't your way...or dad's. Or Tom's. I just want...something else.

SHEILA
Condos. You went from wanting to be a center fielder...to a doctor...to a zen monk...back to a doctor...to selling condos. That's quite an evolution.

Silence. She's not even scratching the surface. Helpless.

SHEILA
Something else. What does that mean? Tell me. And I'll really listen.

Maybe she means that.

NICK
I see how you're doing it. I see how Tommy's doing it. And I want out. And I got out. And I'm staying out.

SHEILA
And where is out?

And now he smiles at her. The first time. A gentle smile.

NICK
I don't know. But you can come visit.

He kisses her on the cheek. Hold on her, as he walks out the door, closing it softly behind him.

14. INT. DIAMOND REALTY - NOON

Tail end of the lunch hour. Place seems empty. A WOMAN enters. Well-dressed. Mid-thirties. Hard as her jewelry. She looks around uncertainly. The only occupied desk has Nick behind it, marking up listings.

WOMAN

Pardon me, son. Is Mr. Spoletto at lunch?

NICK

Yes, ma'am. Vince should be back around two-thirty.

WOMAN

Well...my name is Shelley Fencik. This is a little awkward, but... can you tell him that my husband and I have, uh...

The silence hangs there. Nick waits patiently.

MRS. FENCIK

...decided against the house. It's a bit more than we...

Nick just nods.

NICK

The one on Woodvale. You bid four-seventy-five.

She's a little taken back that he knows that. Even more by Nick's widening grin.

NICK

This is fantastic. If Vince wanted to send you some roses, what's your favorite color?

MRS. FENCIK

Roses.

NICK

You like yellow? I like yellow.

MRS. FENCIK

Why would he...send me flowers?

NICK

Well, you just made him an extra...
three grand. See, there was this
couple in last night. Got their
name somewhere...

(rummaging)

They were...Iranian, I think.
You wouldn't believe the outfit this
girl has on. And she's like half
his age. And she has her hands all
over him. Anyway, they offered
Vince five and a quarter. In cash,
yet. All cash. But he thought
you'd closed on the place. So...

Nick comes up with a scrap of paper...

NICK

Jahanara. That's it. Reza Jahanara...
nine-nine-four...

He grabs a phone. Starts to punch out a number...

MRS. FENCIK

Excuse me.

He holds up one finger. Keeps dialing.

NICK

Be right with you.

MRS. FENCIK

Are you calling those people?
Because my husband and I haven't
even finished thinking about...

NICK

Don't be stupid. Once you start
reaching out of your price range,
you always end up regrett...

(smiles into phone)

Mrs. Jahanara? Nicolas Dawes, here.
Yes, with Vince Spoletto's office.
Listen, I think we have...

MRS. FENCIK

Excuse me, young man. But that
house is gold.

Nick looks up to her eyes. His smile fades. She means business.

ANGLE...LATER. Mrs. Fencik leaving. Closing her purse on the
way out the door. Nick just sits there, turning her check slowly
in his fingers. Then, his small smile. He turns now, and is
STARTLED to see...MURRAY. Standing alone in the back of the
empty room. It's a long beat.

MURRAY
Jahanara. Very authentic.

NICK
He's our roto-rooter guy.
(beat)
Well, they're not all rich.

Murray's smile. Guess they're not. Staring at Nick so intently.

NICK
Vince doesn't have to...hear
about any of...

Little shake of Murray's head. No. Vince doesn't.

15. EXT. CHIN CHIN RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Restaurant overlooking Hollywood. A million kids everywhere. Through the glass, we see Nick and Beth at the take-out counter. They're passing back containers of food to the rest of their crowd.

ANGLE...follow them through the jammed parking lot. Everyone chattering, laughing, bumping against each other. Beth holding onto Nick's arm as they weave through the parked cars.

ANGLE...row of parked cars at the lip of the hill. The lights of the city below. The kids all sit on the hoods of their cars, passing food back and forth to each other. Car radios all tuned to the same station, and all BLASTING far too loud for us to make out the conversations.

Nick and Beth, on the hood of a white convertible, in the center of the pack. Nick is having a great time. But as he's joking with the couple on the next hood, we see Beth watching him closely. Something clearly on her mind.

16. EXT. NICK'S HOUSE - LATE

The white convertible pulls up to Nick's house. Beth's driving. It's her car. He opens his door. Turns to say goodnight. But...

BETH
All those things you were
saying to everybody. About
next year...Winter Carnival...
(beat)
Why did you say those things?

He doesn't understand. Or hopes he doesn't. Her eyes stay right on him. Direct. Unblinking.

BETH
Your mom called me.

Oh.

NICK
She likes to be constructive.
In a crisis.

BETH
She thinks I have influence
over you. She wants me to talk
you out of this.

NICK
Boy. Would the Beaver's mom
do that? I mean...call Lumpy?
No offense.

BETH
You're quitting school.

Yes, he is.

NICK
Has a nice...assertive ring to
it. Quitting. Dumping out.
Sounds like such a...positive
choice of alternative life style...

BETH
Becoming a Zen monk is an
alternative life style. Selling
condos is not.

NICK
Condos. Ok, my mother did call
you. Look. There is something
to be said for real life. For
real people out earning a living...
by their wits...every moment a
fresh, actually-lived, experience.
As opposed to staying on a twenty-year
school track, from which you immediately
transfer to a forty-year career track...
without ever once making a fool of
yourself, taking a genuine risk, or
otherwise simulating a pulse.

Silence.

BETH
Yes.

NICK
Yes, what?

BETH
Yes, you're right. I've often
thought that.

He's staring at her.

NICK
No shit.

BETH
So do I?

NICK
Do you what?

BETH
Have influence over you.

She says it so straight, he has to answer...

NICK
Yes. You do.

BETH
(quietly)
Then don't do this. It's a
mistake.

A held beat. Then, he gets out of the car. Closes the door
softly. Stares at her.

NICK
Well. Goodnight.

She just nods. He doesn't want to look away. But he doesn't
know what more to tell her. At last, he turns and heads for his
door. She sits motionless, watching him go.

17. INT. BASEMENT - DAY

Tom on the bench, pressing a lot of weight. Nick standing,
watching, eating an orange. No sound but Tom's sharply focused
breathing. Finally...

NICK
You haven't said anything.

Tom speaks evenly, in rhythm with his movements...

TOM
About what?

NICK
Toxic waste disposal. Don't
gimme 'about what?' Talk to me.
Risk a hernia here.

No response. Tom just keeps pumping.

NICK

Someday, you're gonna be an overpaid lawyer. You may have to talk somebody out of something. Practice.

TOM

First day...Harvard Law School...
I hear the professor says...
(Rocky Balboa voice)
...don't ask no fuckin' question...
if you don't want to hear the answer.

NICK

What if I want to hear...how you feel about this.

Tom looks over. Hard and flat. Finishes one last press. Then settles the bar back on its stand. He sits up now. Sweating. Stares at Nick. Then, Tom stands. Walks slowly to him. Funny look in Tom's eye. Almost menacing. Reaches out and PUSHES Nick's chest with his fingertips. Hard. Nick stumbles back a step.

NICK

Hey!

Same hard smile. Tom GRABS Nick's shirt and THROWS him against the wall. Nick puts up his hands, but Tom is way too strong. Holds him. SLAMS him back to the wall. As Nick takes a breath...

TOM

Shut up. Here comes the answer.

Hands pinning Nick against the wall...

TOM

When you're twenty...you'll have a hustle going...and money in your pocket. And you'll look at all those...you'd call 'em sheep...over there in college...plodding along. And you'll laugh your ass off.

Tom's eyes are really burning. They hold Nick strong enough. The hands aren't needed now, and they come away.

TOM

Now you're thirty. Looking sideways at those guys. And you're worried. But still lying to yourself. Telling yourself you did it right.

(beat)

You know what it's going to feel like at forty? And fifty? And sixty?

One finger now. Right in the center of Nick's chest.

TOM

You go down that road...you
can't get back. And you pay.
And you pay. And your wife pays.
And your kids pay. And you never
stop paying for that one...fucking...
minute. When you had all the answers.
And the rules...didn't apply to you.

One last held beat...and Tom is gone. Hold on Nick. Hear the
door SLAM.

18. INT. DOCTOR'S WAITING ROOM - DAY

Pediatrician's waiting room. Jam-packed with coughing, sneezing
kids. Harried mothers. Worn-out toys and books that can't begin
to stem the tide of childhood impatience. Nick sits on a chair.
Allison in his lap.

ALLISON

Why does everybody hate you?

NICK

They don't.

ALLISON

They do.

NICK

You're part of everybody. And you
don't.

That's true. But it's not what she meant. She looks around the
room. Hears the assortment of disgusting snarfles and other zoo
noises.

ALLISON

When you're a baby doctor, I
won't have to come here. I'll
come to you.

NICK

It's not a baby doctor. A pediatrician
takes care of kids. All kids. And
it's what I used to want to be.

She looks at him. Worried.

ALLISON

Not now?

He shakes his head. No. Not now.

ALLISON
So...you'll just take care of me.
'Cos I'm your sister.

He stares at her. A long beat. And then he smiles.

NICK
We'll...take care of each other.
OK?

But something in his voice isn't right. She feels that.

NICK
That be OK?

Hold on Allison. Wondering if it will.

19. INT. PSYCHOLOGIST'S OFFICE - DAY

Peter, Sheila, Nick. Sitting with DR. GOLDEN. She's young, plump, with a voice unnervingly quiet. She seems to be always nodding supportively. Even when there's nothing to support.

DR. GOLDEN
(to Nick)
So...Tommy sounds like...an
extraordinary young man. Must
have been...quite a load...being
his kid brother...

A long silence.

DR. GOLDEN
...I'd suspect. I think I'd
find it hard...

NICK
Funny. I never had any resentment
toward Tommy. Just...

She waits. Nodding supportively. But nothing comes. So finally...

DR. GOLDEN
Just...

NICK
Well, it's this feeling. When
he's around. Just...sometimes.
I never talk about it.

She waits again.

DR. GOLDEN
Would you like to...talk about
it now?

Slightly strange look begins to come over Nick. Quiet. Furtive.

NICK

Just this feeling that I'd like
to...go for his eyes. You know.
With my fingers. Just...go for his
eyes.

(beat)

But I never do it.

Said so straight it produces a frozen moment. The doctor stops
nodding.

SHEILA

This is Nick being funny.

Oh. The doctor hadn't been quite sure.

DR. GOLDEN

(to Nick)

You don't feel...receptive. To
the counselling process.

NICK

Well, I hate to throw around technical
jargon, but...this is a crock.

DR. GOLDEN

A crock.

NICK

I don't have a problem. My folks
don't either. Unless wishing your
kid was somebody else is a problem.

He looks over at Sheila. She doesn't seem angry. Actually, her
look is loving. But worried. He turns to Peter now...

NICK

Lakers and Knicks on TV. Can we
go home?

Peter's smile is warm and real. But he says nothing. It's very
quiet now.

DR. GOLDEN

When talk turns to Tommy...do
you usually like to...talk about
something else?

Nick's eyes glaze over.

20. INT. MURRAY'S OFFICE - DAY

Murray working in his inner office. Looks up. Smiles to see Nick standing there. The kid looks a little nervous.

MURRAY
What's up?

NICK
Mr. Cross...I, uh...I want a job.
I mean a real job.

Murray studies him for a beat.

MURRAY
Sit down. Please.

Nick does. Heart really pounding.

MURRAY
You want to sell.

NICK
I want to sell for you.

The distinction is not lost on Murray. Or unappreciated.

MURRAY
You'd have to pass an exam.

NICK
I've taken two courses. I can
pass it right now.

MURRAY
Real Estate Board says...you
have to be eighteen.

NICK
So I'm eighteen.

Murray smiles. Friendly smile.

MURRAY
If I'm countersigning the
application, I'll need some I.D.

NICK
Whatever you need, you got.

Murray leans back now. Just as pleasant, but the eyes have sharpened a little.

MURRAY
Why? This is a hard...scuffling...
unappetizing sort of business.

NICK
Not the way you do it.

Murray's smile turns wry.

MURRAY
When you sell a salesman, kid,
you have to smile. Let the irony
show. Or he'll think you're a
dummy.

NICK
(dead straight)
I meant what I said. I picked
you out. You're the man I want
to learn from.

MURRAY
You think you're worth my time?

NICK
Well...you could start me off on
the Jahanara account.

And Murray's smile softens. He does like this boy.

MURRAY
Yeh. S'pose I could.

21. EXT. TIRE SHOP - DAY

Huge, open-air tire place. Incredible din. Tom's car is up on
the rack. He's watching four new tires go on. As he turns, he
sees Nick walking toward him across the asphalt. Nick's little
wave. As he reaches Tom...

TOM
Hiya stud.

NICK
Hiya wimp.

That was the easy part. They stand now. Nick starts to speak,
but stops as he hears a BLAST from an impact wrench. Then...

NICK
Mom said you'd be gone by dinner.

TOM
Yeh. I was gonna drop by your...
place of business and, uh...say g'bye.

Real uneasy now. Shifting their weight from one foot to the
other. Nick squints up at Tom's car.

NICK
Whattya gettin'? Michelins?

TOM
Nah. El Cheapos.

NICK
Life on the edge.

Tom nods. Life on the edge. Somehow, in all the racket, they've created their own awkward silence.

NICK
So...y'know, have a good quarter...
and...

TOM
Yeh. I'm sorry. About the other
day.

Tom's looking down at his cowboy boots now. Then, back up.
Right at Nick's eyes.

TOM
I sorta...lost it.

NICK
Don't be sorry. I took it...
I took it friendly.

Tom's smile now. Almost shy. He's glad.

NICK
So. I'll see ya...

Tom just nods. They exchange identical waves. Nick turns away.
Heads off. Tom watching him go.

22. INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Nick's stacking dinner dishes in the washer. Peter's reading the paper, burnt-out from a demanding day. Turns pages mechanically, oblivious to his son's tension across the room. Sheila enters, carrying her coat and purse.

SHEILA
(to Nick)
Your sister needs her night-night
story.

Without waiting for a response, she turns to Peter...

SHEILA
You're going like that...?

PETER
Going...?

SHEILA
West Valley Association? Big
fight over the shopping mall?
Chance to chew out your
neighbors?

He sends a blank look.

SHEILA
We discussed it at dinner.
Remember dinner? Pork? Broccoli?

PETER
You said you were going.

SHEILA
I'm not going alone. This has
been in your book for a week.

NICK
Uh, guys...

They look at him.

NICK
I'm not...sleeping here tonight.

SHEILA
Well this is a funny time to
tell us. Who's staying with
Allison?

But something in Nick's manner is disquieting. They've both
picked it up.

NICK
The thing is...I'm not sleeping
here...anymore.

Silence. Very deep, very fast.

NICK
I got a place in West Hollywood.
It's over a dance studio. It's
like a...loft. Like living in
Soho.

PETER
Soho?

SHEILA
It's in New York.
(to Nick)
West Hollywood, huh?

PETER

Nick. What makes you think
we're just going to...let you
do this?

SHEILA

What makes you think we can
stop him?

(to Nick)

That's the whole point. Isn't it.

Looking at each other. Small shake of his head. No, it isn't.

SHEILA

So this is 'out'. Can I still...
come visit?

He nods. Looks to Peter...

NICK

You too.

Peter thinks that over. His eyes fill now. Staring across the
silence at his son. Then...

PETER

Maybe Sunday morning...I could
help you move.

23. INT. ALLISON'S ROOM - LATER

Allison in bed. The book is open on her lap, but she's staring
at her brother. She's holding her stuffed koala. Very tight.

ALLISON

It's because...everybody hates
you?

NICK

Nobody hates me. It's because I'm
big. When you're big...you'll do
this too.

Allison reflects on that.

ALLISON

Are you bigger than yesterday?

He just smiles. The sweetest, saddest smile. He really loves
her.

ALLISON

Will you be here in the morning?
When I wake up?

He has to shake his head. No. He won't.

NICK
. I'm getting off work tomorrow.
Special. Drive you to dance.

ALLISON
Every Friday?

Guess not.

ALLISON
Every Friday but one?

He takes her hand. Kisses it. This is very hard for him.

NICK
I'm gonna come see you. And
take you around. And you'll
have dinner at my place. And
you can load the glasses in the
washer. Every time.

And that brings her smile. A sunburst.

ALLISON
And I won't break any.

No. He guesses she won't.

24. INT. NICK'S LOFT - VERY LATE

Darkened room. Hear a key turning. Nick enters, snapping on the light to reveal...the LOFT. Huge and bare. Four peeling walls. Wooden floors. A counter with a hotplate. A battered fridge. A single bulb dangles from the ceiling.

Nick stands, surveying the depressing emptiness. The only sound is traffic below the far window. He drops his bedroll. His backpack. Still holding a grocery sack and a ghetto blaster, he goes to the counter. Sets down the blaster and turns on a cassette of John Coltrane. Eerie, dissonant music fills the loft.

Turns to the fridge now. Opens it to find the horrid remains of items left by a tenant from some prior century. Closes the door. Pulls a carton of milk out of the grocery sack. Stares at it. Opens the fridge again. Stares in. Can't do it. Closes the door. Opens the milk carton. Deep breath. Tries to CHUG the whole quart right on the spot. Great try, but he comes up choking. Milk running down his face and shirt. Stares at the carton now like a pole vaulter at a fallen crossbar.

He pulls a bag of potato chips from the grocery sack. Rips it open with his teeth. Takes the chips, the blaster and the rest of the milk across the loft to the window.

Nick looks down at the neon of adult bookstores. Late night action. He takes a gentle swig from the milk carton. The Coltrane has changed now. Something wistful. Haunting. He reaches down and shuts it off. The silence is glaring. Nick stares, mesmerized, at the street. He begins to slowly eat the chips. One at a time.

25. INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

Nick wheeling a shopping cart along the aisles. There's a woman's purse resting in the cart's babyseat, but no woman in sight. He's loading the cart expertly as he goes. Canned chili. Canned hash. Canned everything. Five bags of chips. Frozen pizza. Frozen egg rolls. Frozen anything. More chips.

Suddenly, his cart STOPS. He stumbles from the jolt. The hand holding it belongs to Beth. So does the hard stare. She starts putting an armload of stuff into his cart. Meat. Vegetables. Eggs. Just glaring at him like he's the Northern Hemisphere's prime asshole.

26. INT. SHOPPING MALL - DAY

Nick and Beth strolling together along the upper level of a bustling mall. She turns to look at a window display. When she turns back, he's GONE. She looks around. Disappeared. It isn't possible.

ANGLE...an eight-foot gleaming PYTHON. Slithers toward us and straight up the side of his glass cage. Pull back now to see Nick. Eye to eye with the big fella. The staring match continues. Beth arrives at his side. Without looking up...

NICK
I think I'm in love.

27. INT. NICK'S LOFT - NIGHT

CU of the python. Same cage, but we now see it's filled with little plastic toys, plus a large rubber rat, fangs bared, all of which the snake ignores. Taped to the glass is a sign: HI. I'M RUDY.

At the counter, Beth stands over a wok, stir-frying a bunch of stuff as Nick watches. It looks pretty good.

NICK
Course...the real pros use
sesame oil.

She doesn't bother to turn.

BETH

Let me guess. This public service announcement provided by...Mr. Murray Cross.

How did she know that? She turns off the wok. Starts to spoon the food onto plates.

NICK

Well. Yeh.

She turns to him. Hands him both plates. Her smile is pretty and only slightly annoyed.

BETH

Multi-faceted guy. Apparently. Since all I've heard today is Murray's views on when to roll over a C.D., where to find the really good chili dogs, and how read between the lines of a movie review. Milk or Coke?

NICK

Beer.

She opens the fridge. Clean now and fully stocked. Peers in...

BETH

So what would Murray do in a spot like this? Amstel light? Stroh's? Hell no. He'd go for it.

She reaches for two bottles of Guinness stout. Shakes her head...

BETH

Murray the Mentor.

He's pissed. Stares at her back. Then turns and takes the plates to the center of the room. There's a cloth spread on the floor and dinner places set with glasses and candlesticks. Not much furniture yet. A mattress. The stereo. One big soft chair with a lamp. All the wall posters. And, of course, the hatrack.

He sits cross-legged at his place on the floor. Begins to light the candles. Beth joins him. Kneeling. Reaching to pour their beers.

NICK

See, when you meet him...

BETH

I don't care to meet him. I don't care how much he made last year. Or where he gets his suits tailored. Or what car he drives.

NICK

You're just pissed 'cos you
cancelled a real date to cook
for me.

She gives him a flat look. Then uses chopsticks to taste her
food.

NICK

Well, didn't you? And aren't
you pissed?

BETH

I did. And I am. And that's
not why. Can we drop it?

NICK

Rather fight.

She studies him for a beat.

BETH

Look, you're...an intelligent
person. A feeling, caring person.
Your life should...mean something.

Silence.

BETH

Now you can't answer that with some
crap about how shallow everybody
else is. That doesn't cut it.

She looks around at the room.

BETH

What...you're playing house, here?
Dinner party in a place of your
own. You know why I'm here tonight?

He takes a breath. Saves the wise answer. Swallows it.

BETH

Because you looked...and sounded...
so god-damn lonely...it was
heartbreaking.

Her eyes are filling now. The deeper she feels it, the tougher
it is for him.

BETH

Nick, this isn't fun here. You're
lost. This isn't right.

And now her tone is so purely loving that he can't handle it at all.

NICK
(quietly)

If this is such a...unhealthy situation. I guess you're not really helping me by...participating in it, huh?

Staring at him now. Nothing she can say. She stands slowly, holding the eye contact. Looking down at him.

BETH
See you around.

Hold on Nick as she leaves. Her footfalls. Slow at first. Then quicker. The door opens and closes. He's sitting in silence now. Staring at the candle flame.

28. INT. DIAMOND REALTY - DAY

Panning slowly through the office. Every agent on the phone or with a client. The place is busy. Pass Vince and Perry, each on a call and working hard.

At a desk behind them, we see Nick. Sportcoat and tie. Little MR. DAWES nameplate on a desktop as cluttered as the rest of them. But Nick is quiet. Motionless. He seems to be staring at Vince. Picks up a pencil now, jotting on a notepad: PROGRESSIVE. Stares at it reflectively as his phone rings. Lifts the receiver...

NICK
Sure. Be right in.

Nick rises slowly, still thinking about something. Then goes to Murray's office. Knocks. Enters. Murray has charts and maps and papers spread over his desk. He looks up with a smile, which fades slightly as he studies Nick...

MURRAY
You OK?

Nick nods. Fine. Steps around the desk to look at the maps. Murray's eyes linger on the kid for a beat. Something.

MURRAY
Meadow Green. Fifty-five units. Each with 1.4 acres of ground. Build the homes in... these four styles here...

Shows Nick the artist's drawings. Four styles of rustic woodsy homes. Modest but appealing.

MURRAY

Now it's way the hell up north of San Fernando...a big drive into the city. But...it's green and lush...and that's a lot of land around your home for \$127,500.

NICK

So how does the developer come out?

MURRAY

Like a bandit. His cost is only ninety thou a unit. It's real pretty out there. You're going to like it.

NICK

Me? I thought nobody sold Meadow Green but you.

MURRAY

Now it's nobody but us.

He sends Nick an easy smile, but his eyes are still watchful...

MURRAY

You've been chewing on something since you walked in here...

Nick stares at him.

NICK

What do you know about an outfit called Progressive Realty?

Murray's smile slips away unobtrusively.

MURRAY

Why do you ask?

NICK

Well...Vince was closing in on a sale this morning. Commercial property in Studio City. Some other broker slipped in...stole his client right out from under him. Vince went, y'know...berserk. But then when he heard it was this Progressive Realty...all the wind came out of him. Just mumbled something about...life's too short... get him next time...

Murray just nods. Seems like he understands completely.

MURRAY

You like to...watch people.

Said as a quiet compliment.

NICK

So. What did I see?

MURRAY

Progressive is run by a man named Sal Gione. He's a member of the Calzano Family.

On Nick's blank stare, Murray's smile returns...

MURRAY

That's not family like in Bill Cosby. It's Family...like in Don Corleone.

Holy shit.

MURRAY

Life is short. No sense making it any shorter.

29. EXT. MEADOW GREEN DEVELOPMENT - DAY

Murray is walking on a grassy knoll with MR. BENSON, a tall, rangy man of well past seventy. The pale blue eyes are alert. The rolled-up sleeves reveal strong forearms, and the large calloused hands of a worker. As they come to the rim of the knoll, we see that Nick has been trailing a small but discreet distance behind.

MURRAY

See, then your property line on the south would end...there. Those trees.

Benson nods. Stands with his hands in his pockets. Murray smiles into the breeze. Seems completely comfortable in the silence.

BENSON

Well, it's a lovely spot. And a fair deal. As I said, just have to decide whether the price is...

Quiet. Then...

MURRAY

...within your range. Sure. Well, I must tell you...I'd hate to see you overextend yourself, Mr. Benson. I really would. Y'know, there's always another nice property'll come on the market. Patience pays. Always does.

The old man sends a leathery grin.

BENSON

You're the damnedest salesman I ever saw. You been telling me not to buy this property...one way and another...for over an hour. What's the matter? Don't like old folks?

Murray's answering smile is very small and very warm.

MURRAY

Actually...I'm kinda partial to 'em.

Benson nods. Maybe he is at that.

BENSON

Well, you don't get rid of me so easy. Think I could take one more trip out here? Say...Thursday?

MURRAY

Be my pleasure.

30. INT. MURRAY'S CAR - LATER

Nick's watching Murray drive. Murray's smile is a little wistful. Shakes his head.

MURRAY

'Fraid not. I'd drop down five for him. Even ten. But he'll never come close. My guess is, that old guy tops out at...oh, ninety-five thousand.

NICK

How can you tell?

MURRAY

Body language mostly. His eyes want it. Bad. They want to stare down off that hill. From a porch. But his muscles...hands...shoulders...tight.

Glances over at Nick for a second. Judges whether the kid is getting any of this. Back to the road.

MURRAY

See, your body knows the real you. Better than your mind does. Your mind's always hopeful. Maybe I'll bargain this young fella down ten. Then fifteen. Then twenty. Then maybe I can swing it. But his body knows. His gut. His throat. They know. He can't make it.

Silence now.

NICK
So...why are you going out there
Thursday?

MURRAY
I'm not. ~~You~~ are. He likes you.
Looks over at Nick. And grins...

MURRAY
Why go? Because he's old. And he
deserves a little respect. And...
and...

(beat)
...I've been known to be wrong.

31. INT. DAWES DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Nick, Sheila, Peter and Allison. Eating dinner. No sound but
the silverware. It's a silence in which only Allison is
comfortable. Therefore, only she feels free to break it...

ALLISON
(to Nick)
What's a 'con'?

Strange question.

NICK
A prisoner. Why?

ALLISON
No. It's about smelling.

Nick looks at her. Baffled.

ALLISON
Smelling is a con. It's what you
do now.

He really has to think for a beat. Gets it.

NICK
Selling. Selling is a con.

His eyes go straight up to Sheila. His look is accusatory. She
smiles...

SHEILA
Thanks for the vote of confidence.
Actually, it was your father.

He turns to see Peter's steady gaze. Dad's not smiling at all.

PETER

Your Aunt Paula is having us
over a week from Sunday. She
wants to know if you're coming...

Nick thinks a beat. His voice comes quietly...

NICK

Selling is about...understanding
people. Who they are. Who they
want to be. What they need to...
feel.

Peter's listening. More than that, Nick can't judge.

NICK

You like to believe your buyer
comes away...feeling better.
About himself. We could all use
a little of that.

Peter stares, unblinking. Then, his eyes flick to Allison.

PETER

A 'con'...means a trick. And
not a nice one.

Back to Nick now. Peter's tension fades. The anger becomes pain
again. The voice softens. Tries to reach out...

PETER

Your mother says...it's your life.
But it doesn't feel that way. It
feels like...our life.

(beat)

It feels like...something happened
to our life. And nobody got to...
talk it over first. You did it.
And we're supposed to...accept.

NICK

(softly)

No. You're not supposed to do
anything.

Just hangs there. Deep breath.

NICK

And...I'll think about Aunt
Paula...

32. EXT. MEADOW GREEN - DAY

Same grassy knoll. Nick alone with Mr. Benson. Walking slow,
talking careful.

BENSON

Course, when the city grows out this way...start clogging up again. Place'll lose some of its character, maybe.

Wind's a little stronger today. Benson seems to like it. The old man's eyes are taking in all the surrounding terrain. Nick watches him do that.

NICK

Well, as the city comes a little closer...one thing's sure...the value of this place is going to skyrocket.

(beat)

Become quite an estate. For your grandchildren.

Benson sends Nick a flat look.

BENSON

Never did like those kids.

And now Nick sees the twinkle.

NICK

Like I said. Build up your estate...then cut 'em off without a dime. Now that's satisfaction.

Wins a tight grin. The old guy really likes him.

BENSON

You're not related to that other fella, are you? Mr. Cross.

NICK

No. Why?

BENSON

I don't know. Something.

33. EXT. MURRAY'S BACKYARD - SUNSET

Prime lot atop Mulholland Drive. Redwood and used brick deck. Sparkling pool and spa. View of the city, the valley and the sunset.

Nick sits alone on a lounge. Staring into distance. There is a beat before Murray appears, handing Nick a drink. Murray settles down. They share the view in silence.

NICK

So beautiful up here.

MURRAY

This time of day. Y'know, I
bought the place eleven years
ago. After the divorce.

That brings Nick's eyes around. Murray's smile is quiet.
Self-mocking...

MURRAY

When I saw this deck...the spa...
all I could see was...all the
tail I was going to get up here.
That's actually why I bought the
house. Can you believe it?

(beat)

I was just turning forty.

Murray looks off down the hill. Nick watches him remember.

MURRAY

And I did that. Four, five months.
All...young girls. Early twenties.
And the part I remember is...how
much hard work it all was. And
all the...talking I had to do. To
them. To me.

Looks back at Nick now.

MURRAY

But this is a good place to be
alone. Have a drink. Read a
book. This time of day.

Something in his tone. More than openness. An acknowledgement
of equality between them. It makes the silence very easy.

MURRAY

Jesus, I sound like my father.
He used to sit me down. Tell me
these...stories. What he'd lived
through. There was nothing in them
I could really learn from. But he
thought they were...gold, you
know. Gems.

Shakes his head.

MURRAY

Funny part was...so did I. I
thought he was a God. Knew the
world. And he would take all
this time...teaching me. I was
honored. Whatever he said, I'd
store away. Try to use.

NICK
It's nice.

Murray's glance questions that.

NICK
Nice to feel that way. About
your father.

Ah.

MURRAY
Well. It's good to love your
father. But...reverence is
dangerous. Old guys are just guys.
Like you. Experience helps with
some things...but usually it only
helps the guy who lived through it.
Not the guy he tells it to.

Murray's smile now. Very gentle.

MURRAY
Most of the important decisions...
come from inside you. And guys
my age...we're just better at
looking wise.

Murray reaches out. Clicks Nick's glass.

MURRAY
Happy days.

They each take a sip. Turn now. Watch the sunset.

NICK
You have kids.

MURRAY
In Chicago. My boy's away at
Amherst, tho. Going to be a
molecular biologist. He's a
good-looking kid. Funny. Sweet
nature. Good to his momma.
(smiles)
He's a good kid.

Nick looks over at Murray's profile.

NICK
Just the one?

MURRAY
No. Two daughters. Younger.

NICK
That's great.

MURRAY
Really is. Actually...I was trying
for a second son. Never knew...
what to do with little girls.

And now Murray's remembering that.

NICK
Little girls are the best. They're
amazing.

Murray nods. Absently. Takes a deep hit on his drink.

MURRAY
Davey's flying in. August. You
guys'll hit it off. Genuinely
funny kid. I'm going to take
him fishing down at Cabo.

NICK
You see your girls?

Little hitch...

MURRAY
Sure. One of 'em.

And that makes Murray's face grow quiet. Nick just watching.

NICK
Really kind of you to have me up.

Murray turns now. Looks at Nick, as if he's really focusing on
him.

MURRAY
(softly)
My pleasure.

And now the smile returns.

MURRAY
So. Steaks. You ever grill yours
with blue cheese and whiskey...?

34. INT. NICK'S LOFT - EARLY MORNING

Nick is sound asleep on his air mattress. Really dead. Hear a
BUZZING sound. It repeats. Nick stirs. The BUZZ again. Still
asleep, Nick swats feebly at an imaginary mosquito. Now the
buzzing continues, causing Nick to finally awaken.

He stumbles through the loft, which is now filled with all Nick's
worldly goods. Bicycle. Stacks of records on the floor. He
threads his way through a maze of cardboard boxes filled with
clothes, books and odd items. As the BUZZER CONTINUES, Nick
reaches the front door. Throws it open...

TOM
Hiya stud.

Tom has a hanging bag over one shoulder, carry-all in his hand. He grins into Nick's blank expression.

TOM
I'm your brother. I came to visit.

NICK
In the middle of the night?

TOM
This stuff is daylight. It's customary at eight o'clock.

Eight o'clock. Nick can barely register any of this. He turns around slowly. Gestures for Tom to follow him in. They pick their way through the mine field of stuff. Nick grabs himself a hunk of floor. Tom lays his bag down carefully before doing the same. Sees Nick yawn.

TOM
Big Friday night?

NICK
My boss had me over. Drank armagnac til three in the morning.
(glances at Tom's bags)
You moving in?

TOM
Mom and Dad don't know I'm in town.

Nick finds that a little interesting.

TOM
I just wanted to see you. Spend some time.

NICK
Talk about life, huh?

Said a little sharply. Stops Tom for a beat. Then he shrugs...

TOM
Maybe bounce you off a couple of walls.

Lightens things up. At least a little.

TOM
Been a lot of years since we...
spent any time. Which is my fault.

Ah. Nick understands now.

NICK
If only my big brother had taken
the time to straighten me out. I
wouldn't be in this mess.

TOM
That's not what I meant.

NICK
No. It's what you feel. Like
you're the center of the fucking
world. And my whole maladjusted,
thwarted development revolves around
you.

(beat)
So you come down here for a fucking
weekend to make it right.

Staring at each other. And then Nick smiles. Almost gentle.

NICK
When I think about it...it's
kinda sweet. But very dumb.

TOM
I just wanted us to...talk.

Nick settles back. Gets comfortable.

NICK
OK. Talk.

Really staring at each other now. Hard and straight. Tom trying
to figure which way to go. Then...

TOM
(deadpan)
How 'bout those Dodgers, huh?

Wins a smile. A real one.

NICK
And Congress, eh? Buncha wacky
guys...

And now Tom's grinning back.

TOM
See, now I feel better...and you
feel better...

NICK
Why do I have this sudden impulse
to go back to high school?

Beaming at each other. A moment of connection we haven't seen
before.

TOM
Let's get outta here and...do some
bonding stuff.

35. EXT. FISHING BARGE DECK - MORNING

Small barge bobbing in the sunlit Pacific. Three guys at the rail with lines in the water, bellies out to here, and a professional glaze to their eyes. They've done this before.

Pan to the far rail. Nick and Tom alone. Gazing out at their lines as if hypnotized. Hoisting their beers in unpremeditated unison. They do look oddly identical, except Nick's sweatshirt says RAEWAY STATE PRISON instead of STANFORD.

Nick drains his beer. Leans his fishing pole against the rail. As he turns to toss the can away, he looks across at the fat guys. One of them takes an empty can, puts the top against his side, just under the armpit. Raises his arm. Brings it down suddenly, CRUSHING the can end-to-end into a flattened disk. Nick is stupefied. The fat guy now takes his buddy's empty can. As he prepares for a repeat, Nick taps Tom, and they both watch the show. Truly amazing.

NICK
(murmurs)
Belushi lives.

TOM
Aluminum. Probably real easy.

Nick just nods numbly.

NICK
Sure looks easy.

We can hear in both voices that the guys are slightly blitzed. Nick stares at his empty. Meditates on the challenge.

TOM
I think you'd have a happier
experience if you just ate some
live bait.

NICK
Ten bucks?

TOM
Fifty.

Nick looks up. Tom's little smile. Long as we're betting. Nick nods. Puts the can in position. Raises his arm. Closes his eyes. Frozen. Tom waiting.

NICK

See, this is very Zen. You just...
disappear into the moment.

Suddenly, Nick BRINGS HIS ARM DOWN as hard as he can. Nothing happens. At least to the can. Nick's face registers the most astounding pain ever experienced by a mammal. Tom studies the silent agony.

TOM

I like how you disappeared. That
was good.

He gently takes the can. Starts to position it under his own arm.

NICK

Sure. After I got it started.

Tom drops the can. Picks up his own. Holding eye contact with Nick, he pours the rest of the beer over the side. Puts the can in position. Still holding eye contact he...BRINGS HIS ARM DOWN sharply. CRUSHES the can flat. No change in Tom's expression. Then, his little smile. Nick nods...

NICK

The pain is incredible, right?

Tom points to Nick's fishing pole, which is jiggling from a strike.

TOM

You got a bite there...

The pole is really jumping now...

NICK

I'm not touching that til you
say the word excruciating.

TOM

(admits)

I may black out.

Nick thought so. Turns to GRAB his pole, just before it's pulled over the side.

36. INT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Warehouse party. Dim lighting, pulsing music, smokes and drinks. College age and slightly older. Upscale crowd. Find Nick and Tom in a corner...

TOM

Because I saw her watching. And
the way she was watching.

Nick shrugs.

NICK
She was watching you.

TOM
Bullshit she was watching me.

That gets Nick a little anxious. It's a kind of tension we haven't seen before.

NICK
So why do it this way?

TOM
Because I've forgotten more about women than you'll ever know.

NICK
Is that supposed to be good?

TOM
I think it's supposed to be good.
Those two, OK?

From their POV, two WOMEN. They range from sensational to better.

TOM (V.O.)
Now when I leave you alone...
you gotta hold 'em for two,
three minutes.

NICK (V.O.)
No problem.

Back to the guys now. Watching the two women...

TOM
But they have to be laughing and...
charmed by the little fella. Can
you give me witty? Can you give me
adorable? Can you give me some
sense from fifty feet that these
women might attack your body with
their mouths...?

Nick weighs the question gravely.

NICK
Yeh. I can do that.

They move in. As we watch from a distance, Tom takes the lead. Seeing him, the ladies are definitely interested. He introduces Nick, who makes everyone LAUGH MOS.

Tom excuses himself for a moment. Goes to the bar, plunks down a bill, and pulls four beer bottles out of an ice tub. On his way back, however, Tom's route bumps him into another couple. The college guy we know as Mr. Subhuman. His date is BETH. She looks up. Slightly too surprised.

TOM
Well, hello.

Beth only smiles. Half-power and really lovely.

BETH
Tom Dawes...Sandy Harris.
Stanford and S.C.

Sandy holds out a hand, but Tom's are filled with bottles. Sandy's look is a bit protective. Tom's eyes turn back to Beth.

TOM
You look great.

By habit and design, the compliment goes unacknowledged.

BETH
Down for the weekend?

He nods. Light smile in place.

BETH
Everyone well? Your...family?

Nods again, but he's already backing away.

TOM
Folks are fine. Say hi to yours,
huh? Nice to meet you, Stan.

Before Sandy can correct him, Tom is gone. Beth watches him cross the room. Sees Nick alone with the two beauties, who do indeed seem charmed by the little fella. Tom joins them now. As he hands around the beers, Nick makes them all LAUGH again, and the blonde lightly rests her hand on Nick's arm.

Back to Beth now. Nodding at Sandy's words, but watching the blonde and Nick with appraising eyes.

37. INT. AIRPORT BAR - DUSK

Two brothers in a cocktail lounge. Feet up. Staring out at the runway. Sipping their drinks. Very quiet. Then...

NICK
Only a few minutes left. No
commercial...?

Looks over at his brother. Tom just smiles.

TOM
Which one you want to hear?

NICK
I just mean...we can talk about
school. If you want.

Ah.

TOM
Who you need to convince...me?
Or you.

Clear that Tom hasn't softened on this. Nick studies him for a beat.

NICK
Look. If we don't choose our lives.
For ourselves. Then we're living
somebody else's life. And there's
no excuse for that.
(beat)
For what? To be...successful?

Tom just meets his eyes.

TOM
(very quietly)
To be happy.
(beat)
Since you bring it up.

Something strong and compelling in the way he said that.

NICK
Why should we be afraid?
To do what we want.

TOM
Because it doesn't work. That's
the only reason. Otherwise, it'd
be a great idea.

Tom drains his drink. All of it. In one swallow.

TOM
Actions have consequences, kid.
Those rules do apply. That's why
they call 'em rules.

Smiles now. Voice comes softly...

TOM
I know. It sucks.

He looks at his watch. Time to go. Stands slowly.

TOM
Don't forget what I told you.
About her.

NICK
Why would I want to call her anyway?

TOM
Because she's all you think about.
But don't do it. You can only
change things...by changing things.

Nick doesn't know about that. Really torn. He stands now. For a long beat, the awkwardness overtakes them again.

NICK
Well. Thanks for coming.

Tom picks up his bags.

TOM
Don't do anything I wouldn't do.
(beat)
Anything else, anyway.

A held moment. Nick reaches out. Slides his arms around his brother. Tom hugs him back, bags and all. Nick steps back...

NICK
This was good. Another seventeen
years...we'll do it again.

And Tom nods. Maybe they will.

38. EXT. MEADOW GREEN - DAY

Grassy spot. Clump of oak trees. Lovely setting. In the distance, model homes, and the knoll where Nick stood with old Mr. Benson.

Pan to the foot of a large oak. MRS RUIZ stands with her DAUGHTER. The mother is 27, dressed simply and conservatively. Very pretty. The little girl is six, and points up into the branches. Dangling from a limb, are the legs of her nine-year-old BROTHER. Mrs. Ruiz reaches up. Playfully swats the boy's foot. He giggles and kicks at her aimlessly.

ANGLE...Nick standing with CARLOS RUIZ, who watches his family across the grass. He is 28, slender, wearing a dark suit and tie. As Nick speaks, he watches the man's profile. The intense black eyes.

NICK
That would make the monthly...
about nine hundred dollars.

Nick sees Ruiz computing. Can't stretch it. Nick's eyes follow his now, to the family. This man wants that tree for his boy to climb.

NICK

I don't mean to be selling here...
but the key thing is the appreciation.
I could pull computer figures for you.
Developments like this where the
equity increased thirty percent, forty
percent. In two or three years.

Ruiz is nodding. But his eyes are still on his family. And more pained than ever. Nick stays on him. Gently.

NICK

Boy, I don't know where I could
invest my money at a return like
that.

Lets it sit for a beat...

NICK

Then when you're ready to trade up.
To the home you'll live in for the
rest of your life. Why, you got
something to trade up with.

Ruiz never looks at him.

RUIZ

My wife is...

And Nick is silent. Waiting.

RUIZ

Nine hundred dollars. My wife
feels strongly that, uh...

(beat)

And we have...many expenses. Her
father is old and sick. And I
carry a great deal of life insurance...

NICK

Well, your family needs that, don't
they.

Ruiz nods absently.

NICK

Maybe I should pull those computer
figures. For you and your wife.
No harm in just...looking at them.

A beat. And Ruiz nods again. No harm in looking.

39. INT. NICK'S LOFT - NIGHT

A beat-up portable dishwasher. Being filled by small hands. A salad plate. A larger plate. Pull back to see Allison going carefully about her task.

On the counter, remnants of dinner for two. Nick is at the fridge, pulling out dessert. Huge bowls of butterscotch pudding. He gets out the Redi-Whip. As he shakes it up, the phone RINGS. Loud. He ignores it. Squirts a mountain of cream on one pudding, as the phone RINGS AGAIN.

ALLISON
Nicky. The phone's ringing.

NICK
Maybe it's for you.

She gives him a look. He's so dumb. She picks up the phone...

ALLISON
This is Nicky's house, hello.
(listens)
Oh, hi. Yes. Fine. How are you?

Nick looks up. Maybe it is for her. She turns to him...

ALLISON
It's for you.

As he brings the receiver to his ear, a silken voice flows through...

BETH (V.O.)
Heavy date, huh?

And hearing the voice, it takes a beat to get his heart started.

NICK
My favorite.

There's a silence already. He's almost holding his breath. Then...

BETH (V.O.)
So. You still mad at me?

NICK
Why would you think I was mad?

BETH (V.O.)
You kicked me out of your apartment.
And you never called.

NICK
Oh. That. Uh...I'm not mad. Just
been...real busy.

Silence again. He lets it hang there, but he's tense enough to snap. Then...

BETH (V.O.)
Your job going well...?

NICK
It's fine. It's a job.

BETH (V.O.)
You seeing anybody?

He closes his eyes. He liked the way that sounded.

NICK
Nothing serious.

Hang in there. Don't say anything. Don't say anything...

BETH (V.O.)
Well. Don't want to keep you
from your date...

NICK
Right. We got a pound of butterscotch
pudding here. Some G-rated videos.
Your basic evening of cheap thrills.

BETH (V.O.)
I'll let you get to it. Uh...
good-night.

NICK
Good-night.

As he hangs up the receiver, we pull back to see Allison, now
loading glassware in the dishwasher. Nick is just staring into
space. Suddenly, a CRASH, as Allison drops one.

ALLISON
Rats!

But Nick never hears.

40. INT. MURRAY'S OFFICE - DUSK

It's after hours. Murray stares at Nick across the desk.

MURRAY
You really want advice?

He really does.

MURRAY
OK. She knows.

Nick doesn't understand.

MURRAY

She knows you want her. She's
always known. Beautiful women...
they know.

He's right. Dead right. Nick sags a little.

NICK

So she never let on because...
what? She didn't want to
humiliate me...

MURRAY

You're missing something here.
This girl hung out with you every
day. She wanted to be with you.

NICK

Pals.

But Murray shakes his head. Real slow.

MURRAY

No beautiful woman wants to be
around a guy with a crush. Not
all the time. It's too uncomfortable.
Unless. Unless maybe she feels
something too.

Sends a chill straight through the kid.

NICK

Then why wouldn't she...

MURRAY

...let you know? Because you felt
too strong. If she let things
change...sooner or later she'd lose
you completely. And she didn't want
that. She likes you, Nick.

NICK

Likes me.

MURRAY

And maybe a little more. Maybe
that's why she was so careful on
the phone. If it was all platonic,
she'd just say let's hang out. Now,
wouldn't she?

But Murray's eyes are looking past Nick now. The boy turns to
see in the doorway...

PETER

'Scuse me..

Murray's already rising. Pleasant smile. Nick stands, belatedly.

NICK
Uh, Dad, this is Murray Cross...

MURRAY
Doctor. A pleasure.

As they shake hands, there's a tension in Peter he can't completely hide.

PETER
It's Peter. We've...heard so much about you, it's, uh...

MURRAY
...nice to put a face with the name.

Peter just nods. As if it's nice. An extra beat of silence.

MURRAY
You've raised quite a man here...

Peter's eyes flick to his son.

PETER
He's a good boy. We're very proud.
(back to Murray)
We're sort of late for the Laker game. Hope I haven't interrupted something.

Murray turns the easy smile to Nick...

MURRAY
Nothing we can't finish tomorrow.

41. INT. PETER'S CAR - NIGHT

Peter and Nick driving back from the game. Very quiet in the car. They glide past Diamond Realty. Turn the corner. A lone car parked on the sidestreet. Old green Alfa. Peter pulls up behind and parks. They sit. Looking straight ahead.

PETER
How's the Alfa?

NICK
OK. Eats oil.

Quiet again.

NICK
Good game.

PETER
124 to 102. Real cliff-hanger.

NICK
Well. Good guys won.

They look at each other.

PETER
(quietly)
Yeh. I oughta stop taking that
for granted.

They're still looking at each other.

PETER
So. We talked about the hospital...
and Allison's cartwheel...and the
new sushi place on White Oak. And
now we've talked about the game.

NICK
And the Alfa.

Peter nods. And the Alfa.

NICK
Things at the office are fine.

Silence turns from awkward to near-hurtful.

NICK
I'm sorry. There's just been
something on my mind all day...

PETER
Care to talk about it?

Apparently not.

PETER
Anything to do with...what you
and Murray were discussing? When
I walked in. Seemed...pretty deep.

Nick tries a tired smile.

NICK
Girl trouble. Someday I'll give
you the whole boring story...

And Peter nods again. That would be nice. Someday.

PETER
I love you.

Half a beat. Peter reaches over. Kisses his son's cheek. Nick
kisses back.

NICK
Me too. G'night.

He's out of the car. Shuts the door. Hold on Peter.

40. EXT. BETH'S FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

Nick stands waiting at a door. Coat and tie. Best we've seen him look. The door opens now. Beth. Something extra tonight. Make-up, attitude. Something. Her smile is pure dazzling light...

BETH
Hiya stranger.

Nick's smile. Friendly and small.

BETH
Where we goin'?

NICK
Thought maybe we'd cruise Ventura.
Look at the chicks.

Said very straight. She nods back.

BETH
I could do that.

43. EXT. BEACHFRONT, VENICE - NIGHT

Nick and Beth are standing at a beachfront counter. Eating big messy burritos. It's a warm evening, and Venice nightlife, from freaks to yups, flows around them. Beth takes it all in. Wrinkles her nose.

NICK
You don't like the place I took you.

Actually, she seems comfortable here.

BETH
I like the place you took me.

NICK
No, you don't. You did this...

He imitates her nose-wrinkle. She smiles.

BETH
I thought you'd take me to some private club or something. Where Murray's a member. Try to impress me.

That puts a hitch in his answer...

NICK

Why would I want to do that?

She shrugs prettily. Delicately pokes a chunk of burrito into her mouth. She looks up to see him staring at her. Through her mouthful...

BETH

What?

NICK

I was just...noticing.

She doesn't ask what. Keeps chewing. And watching him.

NICK

The way you eat. Your fingers.
Your mouth. You just do everything...
like a woman.

(beat)

Like a...beautiful woman.

Her smile comes a fraction late. The candle power dimmed just a shade. Her eyes flutter back down. She concentrates on pulling off another hunk of burrito.

LATER...empty sand at the water's edge. The lights of the beachfront in the distance. Surf is the only sound, and it's coming in.

Pan up a lifeguard station to the platform. Nick and Beth sit. Staring at the sea. Very quiet. Very comfortable. Finally...

BETH

It's nice...

He looks at her. Watches her staring out.

BETH

It's nice to sit. And be quiet.
And not be alone.

(beat)

I like how you sit with me.

She looks over at him. Feelings behind her eyes that he can only wonder at.

BETH

I saw you...every day. For so
long. And then...I didn't see
you at all...

Her eyes are moving across his face. What is she trying to tell him? Her voice comes softly...

BETH
I just wanted you to know. That
I missed you.

No smile. Nothing to lessen the impact of those words. In the silence, he leans toward her. His hand slides up behind her head. Gently he brings her mouth to his. His kiss is loving and tender. She lets it happen. But does not return it.

He pulls back. Stares at her eyes. They are filled. On the edge of tears...

BETH
It's late...

44. EXT. BETH'S FRONT DOOR - LATER

Nick stands numbly, as Beth searches for her key. She's a little shaken still. Fumbles, frustrated. Finds it. Doesn't look up. Key into lock. Turn it. And now, look back to Nick. His face breaks her heart. She reaches out, squeezes his hand.

BETH
I'm sorry.

She reaches up. Kisses him on the cheek. She means it to be comforting, but it's a bad decision. She sees that now.

BETH
I'll call you and...we'll do
something. OK?

He nods. It's OK.

BETH
Good-night.

A beat. And the door closes behind her. He stands for a moment. Then turns. Walks slowly toward his car.

45. INT. DIAMOND REALTY - DAY

Three salesmen, sitting around talking. Peers. Working out a question of strategy...

PERRY
Investment. That's the word you
stick with. Every extra mortgage
dollar is creating a financial future...

Pan around to Vince. Feet up. Thinking hard.

VINCE
That's in there. But lean on
the class thing. Hard-working
Chicano reaches out, sacrifices.
Dares. And moves up. All sub-text,
of course.

Pan finally to Nick. The others awaiting his call.

NICK
I think...I think it's about...
that little boy.

46. INT. RUIZ KITCHEN - NIGHT

CU on a handsome black-eyed boy. Dressed in his best. Fidgeting
only slightly at the table. Picking at his food.

RUIZ (V.O.)
You know, we read those computer
reports and...I had them analyzed by
someone at my office...

See the table now. Ruiz. Both children. The wife standing over
Nick, placing an extra helping on his plate. He smiles up at her
in gratitude.

NICK
And...?

RUIZ
And...there is something in what
you say. But...there is also...

As his voice trails off, Mrs. Ruiz takes her seat. She looks
Nick square in the eye...

MRS. RUIZ
...the question of risk.

Her smile. Very pretty. Very strong.

MRS. RUIZ
I'm not a gambler, Mr. Dawes. I
like to hold on to what I've worked
for.

Nick nods. He understands.

NICK
And you have such a lovely home
here. Warm and comfortable. Easily
seems the nicest in the neighborhood.
(beat)
You must be very proud of that.

Her nod is tight-lipped. It is the nicest in the neighborhood. And his point has registered. He gestures to his plate.

NICK

The veal is wonderful. You know, we talk about money and risk and... around and around. And sometimes we lose track of...simpler things. Like...

And Nick looks across the table at the little boy. And smiles. The boy shyly smiles back.

NICK

...where we want our families to grow up.

47. INT. CHASEN'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Murray and Nick in a prominent booth. The buzz of a full house. Captains scuttling about. Sommelier making the rounds. Nick takes it in...

NICK

I feel guilty. Everywhere we go, you're always picking up a tab.

Murray studies him for a moment.

MURRAY

I understand...I really do. When I was your age, I hated feeling like a freeloader.

(beat)

You want to pick one up? You can get this one.

Nick's face stands still.

MURRAY

If you want to.

Nick nods. Cool as a moose.

NICK

Sure. My pleasure.

MURRAY

That's very generous. You want another gin?

Half a beat before Nick nods. Murray catches the captain's eye. Indicates one more round. Looks back at the kid...

MURRAY

You OK?

NICK
I just, uh...you think I could
maybe...borrow some...

MURRAY
...cash? Say, you'll never guess
who stopped in today while you were
taking your sister to gym-for-tots,
or whatever that...

NICK
Kindergym.

MURRAY
Yeh. Kindergym. Mr. and Mrs. Ruiz.
They came by. Nice people.

Yes, they are. Nick isn't breathing. Tries to gauge Murray's
thoughts, but Murray is inscrutable. Finally...

NICK
So...?

MURRAY
Oh. Well...they said they'd thought
all night and...the mortgage was...
a little out of reach.

The kid begins to die behind his eyes.

MURRAY
So I figure...what if I say I got
a bid from this Iranian couple?
Jahanara.

Silence again. Nick can't take it.

NICK
Did it work?

MURRAY
No.

Nick is frozen solid.

MURRAY
Because I never had to try it.

And from his inside pocket, Murray pulls a very thick envelope.
The bills he withdraws are all hundreds...

MURRAY
It is my pleasure at this time to
present you with these striking
replicas of the likeness of Mr. Benjamin
Franklin...

He fans the hundreds out. Nick's eyes widen as the table turns green.

MURRAY
...forty-six of them.

When Nick can bring his eyes back up to Murray, he sees a father's pride.

MURRAY
(softly)
Want to make that gin a double?

48. INT. NICK'S LOFT - NIGHT

Nick enters the darkened loft. Flicks on the light. It is very late and he is very tired. As he passes the glass case of Rudy the python, he stops. Reaches into his pocket. Pulls out all the hundreds. Throws one into Rudy. What the hell.

Continues on to his bedside now. Stares at the bills in his hand. Then tosses them down next to the telephone answering machine. The machine is lit with the red number "1". He sees it now. Presses the button. Hear the tape rewind. Then...

BETH (V.O.)
Hi. This is me. If you want
to hang out tomorrow night...so
do I.

(beat)
Call me.

The sound of a disconnect. The sound of electronic beeps. But Nick just stares at the machine. Keeps staring. His finger slowly reaches. Hits the rewind again...

BETH (V.O.)
Hi. This is me...

49. EXT. MELROSE AVENUE - NIGHT

Beth and Nick strolling side by side. Close. But not touching. She stops at a window. The store is THE LAST WOUND-UP. Behind the glass is an amazing array of wind-up toys. Every era, every description. Beth is hooked.

50. INT. LAST WOUND-UP

Nick is wandering through the store, drinking it in. Wind-up bands, bears, soldiers. He stops at a huge wind-up gorilla, wearing a sign that says PLEASE DO NOT TOUCH ME. Nick leans over. Kisses the gorilla on the nose.

ANGLE...Beth staring at a tiny antique ballerina. Only a few inches high, the figure pirouettes delicately across her own tiny stage. Intricate. Exquisite. In its base, the gentle tinkle of a music box. Beth is transfixed. Pull back to see Nick watching her profile. Finally she says simply...

BETH
Two hundred dollars.

Oh.

51. EXT. LAUREL CANYON - LATER

Beth and Nick walk through an area called the "rain forest". Trees, vines, waterfalls. An eerie glow as moonlight seems to illuminate the foliage. As they stroll, she's watching him. He seems lost in thought.

BETH
You all right?

He looks at her. Shy grin. Little nod.

BETH
Can we talk about it?

NICK
I don't know. Depends how we do it.

They walk on.

NICK
I know you feel embarrassed. And you feel sorry for me. And somehow ...you still like me.

BETH
One out of three.

Her smile is playful. Fades now into something caring...

BETH
It's something that just... happened.

NICK
No. Something like that doesn't just happen. It comes out of...
(beat)

Oh. I forgot...

He reaches into the pocket of his jacket. And pulls out...the BALLERINA. She's astonished to see it. He turns it in his hand. Winds the tiny key ...

NICK

See, if you push this lever here...
It's a different dance.

He puts it into her hands. She watches and listens to the music. As it ends, the dancer makes a graceful little bow. Beth's still staring. Can't believe he bought this for her. Then...

BETH

Comes out of what?

He doesn't understand.

BETH

The kiss. You kissed me. You
said...it comes out of...

He stares so deeply. How can he ever say this?

NICK

Sometimes...you'd look at me. In
a certain way. Or touch me. Just...
for a second. But I'd...remember all
those seconds. And what I...

(beat)

...wanted them to be.

Silence now. Not a breath. Not a whisper.

NICK

And I thought...maybe there aren't
always these...real clear ways.
That a girl...likes someone.

Looking at her eyes. Watching them begin to fill.

NICK

Maybe sometimes...it's all one
big confused...'like'. With
everything mixed together. Even...

(long beat)

Pretty...dumb, huh?

She tries to draw a breath. And it's very hard.

BETH

(softly)

Maybe not.

She touches his face. She reaches her mouth to his and kisses him. Lovingly. Perfectly. Even...even a little hunger. And when she pulls back, her voice is almost a whisper...

BETH

Why did you have to be...so
god-damn smart...?

52. INT. NICK'S LOFT -LATER

Candlelight. Flickering by a mattress. In the moving shadows, two people. Slowly, tenderly, undoing each other's clothes. She kisses his chest. Looks up at him...

BETH

This is an awful mistake...

He nods.

NICK

I know. I just feel sick about it.

Makes her grin. Somehow, there's a trace of sadness with it.

BETH

I mean...when it's all over...we're going to lose each other.

Stares at her in the silence.

NICK

You're right. Let's forget the whole thing.

He lifts her up into his arms. His little smile. Her smile back. And then a deep, longing kiss that never ends.

DISSOLVE TO LATER... The candlelight much dimmer now. Nick and Beth make love. Lost in each other.

54. INT. DIAMOND REALTY - MORNING

Nick enters the office. Everyone else is already working. He saunters up the aisle. Just a shade jaunty beneath the cool. Nobody even looks up. Past Perry and Vince. And into Murray's office. Murray looks up.

MURRAY

Gee, it's nice of you to stop in. Being a Monday and all. So soon after the weekend...

(smiles)

So...how ~~was~~ the weekend?

Nick fights to play it down...

NICK

Weekend was good.

MURRAY

(quietly)

Hallelujah.

The kid can't help but grin.

MURRAY

Don't tell me how right I was.
Just name the first daughter Murray.

And Nick nods. Likes the sound of that.

NICK

Listen. Remember old Mr. Benson?

Murray does.

NICK

Well, you were right about something
else. He calls me yesterday. With
an offer. Ninety-two five. Can
you believe it?

(beat)

He's only thirty-five thousand short,
so I...

But Murray's face has grown very quiet.

MURRAY

Close it.

Nick can't believe he heard that.

NICK

Murray, the cost is ninety. The
developer will go ape-shit.

MURRAY

The developer has...changed his
game plan. We're to sell the rest
of these lots right now. Best
available price.

Nick just absorbs that.

NICK

Any notion why?

Murray's little shrug.

MURRAY

Maybe he needs his capital for some
other deal. Happens sometimes.
Anyway...we have to get our tails
in gear. Can I count on you?

Despite the shrug, Murray does seem under pressure.

NICK

You know you can.

54. INT. DELI - NOON

Nick and Vince. Pastrami and cream soda. Vince eyes the kid as he works on a mouthful. When he's done chewing...

VINCE
So he never told you.

Provocative.

NICK
You mean, you know why the developer's in a hurry?

Vince shakes his head. Takes another bite.

VINCE
I only know one thing about Meadow Green. And he doesn't know I know it.

(grins)
Murray is the developer. He owns the thing.

Nick is stunned. Takes him a beat.

NICK
Is that even...legal?

VINCE
Technically. If you do it right. Pretty sleazy tho. Buyers reveal stuff to a broker that they wouldn't to a principal. And...it's unfair to our other listings, 'cos Murray's pushing his product first...

But Vince stops now. Sees how hard this has hit the kid. Smiles gently...

VINCE
What? Because he lied to you? A salesman begins his day... 'good morning,' he lied.

But Nick isn't smiling. Vince goes back to the sandwich...

VINCE
Everybody in your life will lie to you. At one time or another. Everybody. Except me.

55. EXT. DIAMOND REALTY - LATE NIGHT

Nick stands outside the door of the darkened office. Very late. Very still. No cars on the street. He finds the key. Slips it into the lock.

He looks down now to see a STRAY DOG, big and woolly, licking at his feet. Reaches to scratch the dog's neck. The dog looks up at Nick with big dark eyes and then...GROWLS, deep in his throat. Nick just nods.

NICK

Ok. Forget the T-bone. The life of ease as my constant companion...

Nick turns the key now. The door opens, and Nick steps inside. Flicks on the light. Across the floor, we see a thin red electric eye beam. Nick turns directly to a key pad on the wall next to him. Stares for a beat. Then begins to punch out the code...

NICK

Seven...three...five...

Suddenly, a SIREN WHOOPS. Terrifying. Nick WHEELS around to see...the DOG. Sitting in the path of the beam. Scratching. The SIREN KEEPS SCREAMING...

NICK

Shit!

Nick TEARS through the office, trying frantically to open locked desks as the SIREN CONTINUES. Finds an open one. Rummages like crazy. Pulls out a tiny key. RACES across the room toward the control box, nearly tripping over the dog on the way...

NICK

(to dog)

Asshole.

As the dog watches, Nick somehow gets the box open. Switches off the lever, and the SIREN STOPS. Dead silence. Just Nick's gasping to catch his breath. The dog gives Nick a flat look. One more particularly gross round of scratching. Stretches out. Closes his eyes.

LATER...outside again. A squad car pulls up with the headlights off. Two POLICEMEN get out of the car. Carefully approach the door. Dim light coming from inside. One tries the door handle carefully. It's open. A glance at each other, and they...BURST IN, guns drawn...

OFFICER

POLICE!

Nick sits at his desk, feet up. Reading by the light of a desk lamp. His faithful dog lying at his feet.

Nick and the dog both look up at the cops. Then at each other...

NICK

(to dog)

We stick by our story...we'll be all right.

56. INT. NICK'S LOFT - EVENING

Nick enters the loft, juggling a briefcase and a bag of groceries. He backs in, shuts the door. Turns and...

SHEILA
Don't tell me. Potato chips...
corn chips...dead mice. For
the snake.

She's standing at his refrigerator. Stocking it with two bags of groceries. He's just a little surprised to see her. It shows.

SHEILA
If you don't want me in here...why
did you give me a key?

NICK
You begged.

Oh yeh.

SHEILA
Well. Welcome home. Nice day
at the office?

He goes to the counter. Sets his bag next to hers. Kisses her. They exchange smiles. And begin to examine each other's grocery bags. Silent rummaging for a beat. Then...

NICK
Where's the chips?

SHEILA
Where's the mice?

They keep rummaging...

NICK
This is all very nutritious. I'll
keep it around, so the fridge looks
good when my mom comes to...

SHEILA
...snoop. Hey, when did you start
using Colgate? You hate the stuff...

She's pulled out a tube of toothpaste. He has no immediate answer. As he draws a breath, we hear a key fumbling at the door. Nick and Sheila turn to see...BETH, edging backwards through the door, juggling two bags of groceries...

BETH
Honey, they were all out of...

But by now she's turned. Stopped cold. Bags in her arms. See the keys dangling from her fingers. Sheila looks from the keys to Nick...

NICK
She begged too.

Sheila's eyes go straight to Beth. Beth sucks it up. Sends a brave smile...

BETH
Hi, Mrs. Dawes. Good to see you.

Beth crosses the room. Puts the grocery bags onto a very full counter. She meets Nick's eyes. Then reaches up, and kisses him. Full on the mouth.

BETH
Hi, honey. Good day at the office?

He looks at her with more love than he's felt for anything in his life. Sheila takes it all in. Then peeks into Beth's grocery bags. Likes what she sees there.

BETH
Mrs. Dawes...can you stay for dinner?

Sheila turns. Her eyes are filled. Staring at Beth with a warmth that is heartfelt and moving.

SHEILA
No. I really can't.

She goes to Beth. Puts her arms around her. Hugs her tight. Real tight. Pulls away, shoots Nick a dry look, and heads for the door. As she reaches it, she turns back...

SHEILA
I forgot to tell you...I kissed off my asshole patient. So I'll be driving Allison on Thursdays again. And, uh...you kids have a nice evening.

A held beat. And she's out the door.

57. INT. NICK'S LOFT - LATER

The candlelight again. Nick and Beth sitting in bed. Xeroxed pages spread across their laps. We see these are copies of telephone message slips.

NICK
On Friday, this guy Renko calls Murray five times. From Sacramento. See...all marked urgent. By Monday, Murray's dumping lots at cost.

BETH
Sounds air-tight to me.

He looks at her. She's far too amused.

NICK
So I call the number...and Renko
turns out to work for some
Assemblyman.

BETH
Look. You want to go off to
Sacramento. Get laid or whatever.
You don't have to run this number
on me...

NICK
You wanna get serious?

She's playing with his hair.

BETH
No. I wanna get laid. Or
whatever.

She takes his hand. Starts kissing his fingers. One at a time.

NICK
I sold these lots to people. Good
people. People who can't afford to
get screwed.

She nods. She's got it now.

BETH
Some guy calls your boss five times.
Suddenly, good people can afford to
buy homes. This looks like a job
for the Lone Ranger.
(beat)
Now that I've got it straight...can
we screw?

She lays back. Her look goes from adorable to delicious.

BETH
I don't really want to. I just
figured it would make your whole
year to hear me say it.

It does. He stares down at her. Then...her SQUEAL as he jumps
on her bones.

58. EXT. SACRAMENTO - DAY

Aerial view of Sacramento. The State Capitol, ringed by public
buildings.

59. INT. AIRPORT - DAY

Businessmen, politicians, filing down a jetway. Through the crowd, we catch a glimpse of Nick in the middle of the pack. As he reaches us, the crowd parts to reveal BETH next to him, holding tight to his arm. They pass us now. Nick stops to drink from a fountain.

As Beth waits, an attractive YOUNG MAN in a dark suit stops to ask her something. Sends her a smile that is charming and more. Whatever he says, turns Beth's stare cold. Nick returns. He and Beth slip their arms around each other. As they head off, the guy is staring after them. Beth's hand slides down Nick's back. Grabs his ass.

60. INT. STATE LIBRARY - DAY

View from high above the floor of California's massive State Library. We can make out Nick at a reference desk far below. He is given a stack of volumes. Lugs them through card catalogues to a table where Beth sits, several open books before her.

ANGLE...close on them now. As Nick drops his stack onto the table, she's already pointing to a page...

BETH

OK, these are minutes of some subcommittee meeting about water. Renko's boss was in this meeting. All last Friday.

NICK

What was he doing?

BETH

He was trying to get a rider attached to some water bill. About a canal project in Gordon... wherever that is. He was fighting like crazy...look, 'expletive deleted'...and here...and here...

NICK

And...

BETH

He lost. Two to one.

61. INT. DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES - DAY

Nick and Beth coming at us down a long corridor. They reach a door. DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES. EVAN MCCOY, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR. Nick takes her hand, and they enter.

62. INT. MCCOY'S OFFICE - DAY

MCCOY sits behind his desk. He's 50. Big and wide, with a smooth, handsome face. Above the friendly smile are small sharp eyes. They study closely.

McCOY

And what is it, Mr. Osbourne, that
I can do for you and your bride?

Reverse angle reveals Nick and Beth, sitting side by side. She holds his hand in her lap. They seem young and shy and very much in love.

NICK

Well...Sandra and I...we've taken
our wedding gifts...and our savings.
And...we bought a home.

BETH

Meadow Green. It's a development.
North of San Fernando.

Nick seems hesitant now. Almost afraid to say it...

NICK

Someone...

BETH

A friend of Daddy's...

NICK

...told us about this water canal
project. Somewhere called...Gordon.
He thought it could...hurt Meadow
Green somehow.

BETH

Maybe flood it all over. Or
something.

McCoy seems amused.

McCOY

Well, I testified before a
subcommittee on this very project
last Friday. Now...flooding anything
ma'am, is a waste of water. We like
to think we don't do too much of that.

Nick nods. Still seems anxious.

NICK

Since we haven't closed escrow yet.
We just thought we'd...check things
out...

BETH

It's every penny we have in the world.
And borrowed. From Daddy...

She sends a smile that would melt an Ice Age, let alone a heart. McCoy pulls his bulk out of his chair. Goes to a detailed wall map of Southern California. Nick and Beth join him. McCoy points to the map.

McCOY
Gordon...is over here. Now where
is this...Meadow Green, hmh?

And Nick points. Really doesn't look very close to Gordon. But McCoy's face grows very still. Nick and Beth look at each other. McCoy clears his throat...

McCOY
Well. I don't think you folks
need to worry about any flood...

63. EXT. DRIVING RANGE - DAY

Murray lined up carefully. Addressing a golf ball with his driver. Concentrating. Backswing. SWINGS the club through the ball, which rockets into space.

Pull back now, to see that we are on a driving range. As Murray follows the flight of his ball, Nick sits on the grass behind him. The ball lands. Murray seems disappointed.

MURRAY
Yeh. Go on.

NICK
So...in a year or two...

Murray's teeing up his next ball.

MURRAY
...maybe less.

NICK
...somebody closes a valve in
Gordon...and Meadow Green turns
into a desert.

MURRAY
Goddam shame. 'Scuse me, willya...?

Once again, Murray WHACKS the ball down range. As it lands...

MURRAY
Three guys in a room...vote down
one little rider...to one little
bill...and those chips do fall
where they may.

As Murray reaches for another ball...

NICK
Murray.

And something in the boy's voice makes Murray turn.

NICK

We have to give these people
back their money.

(beat)

And we can't sell any more lots.

Murray stares at the kid. Slowly now, he sits on the grass.
Keeps staring at Nick. The look isn't angry. Just strong.

MURRAY

Y'know, I haven't given you a lot
of lessons. In life, I mean. I'm
not your poppa. It's not my place.

Murray's smile. Not easy this time. Small and very real. He
does like this boy.

MURRAY

You're the kind of man...wants
to take care of others. And you
should. When you can.

When you can. The words hang there between them.

MURRAY

But sometimes...through nobody's
fault...those chips are going to
fall. On someone else. Or on you.

Deep breath. It's a strange smile now. Honest. And sad.

MURRAY

So this lesson in life...which is
so hurtful to learn...is that when
it comes down to you or them...

(beat)

...you have to come first.

He sees the boy's reaction. His voice is gentle now...

MURRAY

And it is hurtful. We don't want
to...see ourselves that way. But
it is real. And it is...what has
to be. And for a good person...
which you are...it's the hardest
part of growing up.

Silence now. Watching Nick. Waiting.

NICK

It's fraud, Murray. I'll tell if
I have to.

But Murray never blinks.

MURRAY

Fraud...is a lie. Some lies are little. A boy forging I.D. Falsifying his age.

And now the voice is the saddest of all...

MURRAY

Some lies are bigger. A man claiming...proving...that a boy was his partner. In a scheme to sell worthless land.

He gives that a moment to sink in. Then he stands.

MURRAY

Chips fall on parents too. People who love us. And they change everyone's lives...for a real long time.

Turns his back. Looks through his golf bag for a certain club...

MURRAY

If you didn't feel the shock...and the anger...I wouldn't respect you. Now you go home...and think about what's real.

Turns back to Nick. No smile. Nothing phony. Affection.

MURRAY

Personally...I hope I see you at nine o'clock. Ready for work.

64. EXT. LOS ANGELES ZOO - LATE AFTERNOON

Nick standing. Staring at something. Lost in thought. Pan down to Allison at his side. She's staring too. Equally reflective. Snap to reverse angle. A giant ORANGUTAN. Staring back at them across an open pit. Same thoughtful gaze.

LOUDSPEAKER (V.O.)

Attention. Attention. The zoo will close in fifteen minutes.

Allison can't take her eyes from the ape...

ALLISON

What's he thinking?

Nick mulls that over.

NICK

He's thinking about you. What it'd be like to come home with you. Live in the yard. Play tea party...

She looks up at Nick...

ALLISON
Does he like me?

Nick looks from the orangutan to her and back. Concludes...

NICK
Yeh. He really does.

That's good. She likes him too.

NICK
Be right back...

As he leaves Allison at the rail, his eyes are troubled. They carry a weight that is striking. Beth is standing nearby, eating peanuts from a bag, watching a gorilla sleep. Reaching her, his anxiety slips below the surface...

NICK
Time to stop having fun.

She nods. Fine by her.

BETH
I'll drop Allison at your folks'.
On my way home.

Home? He didn't expect that.

BETH
I have to study for finals.

Great.

BETH
I'll miss you. I'm stimulated by
intercourse with the criminal mind.

Criminal mind. He can barely manage a smile. And seeing this...

BETH
(softly)
No brainstorm yet?

Shakes his head. We see the helplessness now. A lost boy. Small once again. She snuggles up close. Her voice is warm but very strong...

BETH
Don't give up. If you nailed me...
you can do anything.

She kisses him. Heads off to collect Allison. Hold on him now. Watching her go.

65. INT. NICK'S LOFT - NIGHT

Door opens into the darkened loft. Nick enters and stands in silhouette. A held beat of absolute weariness. He flicks on the light. And stops dead.

Across the room is TOM. Cross-legged on the floor. Staring blankly into distance. He's taken Rudy from his cage, and the big snake is crawling slowly across Tom's lap. The tableau is so bizarre, that for an instant it seems comical. As if maybe he's drunk. Then, as Tom's empty eyes register on us...chilling.

NICK

Tommy...?

Tom turns slowly. And nods to Nick. As if confirming his identity. Again, almost funny. But eerie underneath. A surreal quality in the air.

NICK

How did you get in here?

TOM

The super.

(beat)

I lied. I said I was your brother.

Tom's voice is unnatural. The timbre, the cadence...

TOM

I always wanted to be your brother.
And now it's, uh...

Everything stops. His words. His face. His breath. Nick is really scared. He goes to Tom. Lifts the snake from his lap.

NICK

Why'd you take Rudy out?

TOM

I was hoping he'd eat me.

(looks at Nick)

They eat cows, right?

Nick just staring at him.

NICK

Bigger ones do. I think.

Tom nods. Yeh. Probably bigger ones. Nick sets Rudy gently in his case.

NICK

Tommy, what happened?

Tom ignores that.

TOM
How are things?

Nick thinks that over. Kneels down in front of his brother.
Maybe this is a way to reach him...

NICK
I'm in trouble, Tommy. I'm
trapped in something I...

Nick has stopped because tears are slowly running down Tom's
face. But Tom doesn't seem to notice them.

TOM
I just...ran out of time. There
was Spring, uh...football practice.
And all the extra shit for the
Rhodes committee...Fulbright people...
(beat)
And...the classes. Had to hold the
four-point. Had to do it. It all...
hinged on that.

NICK
All what?

Tom looks at him now. Uncomprehending that Nick could even ask
such a question.

NICK
Do Mom and Dad...

TOM
Finals won't be over for two weeks.
So...I have to hide out here. For
two weeks. OK?

NICK
You...dropped out of school?

TOM
Not exactly.

And the words chill straight to the bone. Tom's smile now.
Seems innocent enough. Rather puzzled.

TOM
You know, I didn't really lose track
of it. All year long...I thought
about it. And I just...
(beat)
But I never lost track of it.

NICK
(gently)
Track of what?

TOM
The paper. On Rimbaud. The one
I plagiarized.

And with that, Tom's shoulders ease. He seems nearly himself again. As he stares at Nick in the silence, the pain comes up to his eyes...

TOM
The...Honor Code Committee. They
threw me out. In a year...I can
reapply.

He chuckles on that last part. As if a priceless crystal had shattered. And someone had offered him a tube of glue. When the smile fades, his tears begin. Not crazy ones this time. Very real. Almost can't hear the voice...

TOM
You'll tell Dad for me.

Nick reaches out. Joins his hands behind Tom's neck. Draws his brother toward him.

NICK
We'll figure it out. We'll make
it be all right.

Staring at each other. Eyes locked...

NICK
OK. I lied.

And in spite of himself, Tom smiles. His world is still in pieces. But he's no longer alone.

LATER...dead of night. Tom curled on the floor, asleep. His head in Nick's lap. But Nick is wide awake. Eyes staring. Not smiling anymore.

MORNING...Nick stretched out on the floor. Asleep. Tom appears with two cups of coffee. Kneels. Gently shakes his brother. Nick's eyes come open. Blink awake.

TOM
Trapped. By what...?

Doesn't register.

TOM
You said you were in trouble.
(beat)
Wanna...kick it around?

Nick's turn to have his eyes fill. He nods. Wants very much to kick it around.

66. EXT. NICK'S ROOF - MORNING

From a distance, we see Nick and Tom on the tar paper roof. Tom sits in a folding chair. Tossing a ball in the air. Nick's chair is empty as he paces. Animated. Talking MOS.

Finally, he sits. Tom stands. His turn. Starts to pace and talk just as compulsively as Nick. Tosses Nick the "ball" now. It's an orange, which Nick begins to peel and eat as he listens to his brother.

67. EXT. POINSETTIA PARK - MIDDAY

The talk has moved. They're strolling though the local version of Needle Park. Lost in their conversation, oblivious to the rough trade on the benches, under the trees, asleep on the grass.

The path curves. As they pass two figures, money has just changed hands. The seller casts a narrow eye at Nick, who waves cheerily. They walk on, the strategy session continuing as they pass a couple in a sleeping bag.

68. EXT. ENCINO PARK - AFTERNOON

A park. But very different. Green and manicured and safe. A world away. The world of rich people. No mommies here. Only nannies, chattering with each other on benches, as children play on swings and slides and jungle gyms.

Standing by a water fountain is Nick. Watching the kids play. Intently. Catcher in the rye. Right behind him, we see that Beth has now joined the committee, and is in a heated discussion with Tom.

A small boy approaches the fountain. Tries to get a drink, but he's too little. Without seeming to notice him, or missing a beat, Beth lifts the kid in one arm and turns the water on. Keeps talking to Tom as the child drinks.

69. EXT. NIKE BASE PLATFORM - NIGHT

A concrete tower rising four stories above the hills overlooking the Valley. We rise with it, to a large concrete platform at the top.

Alone in the dark, looking out at the lights, are three figures. Ringed by fast food wrappers and empty beer cans. Tom sits at the edge of the platform. Behind him, Nick is stretched out. Head resting in Beth's lap. She's gently playing with his hair. It's very quiet. Then...

BETH
You're really going to do this.

He thinks that over.

NICK
Remember in Ghostbusters? At the end? When they were going to try this insane, suicidal thing? But it was the only thing they could think of? So Bill Murray says... I love this plan...I'm proud to be a part of it...

Smiles up at Beth. She looks pretty worried.

NICK
Some guys study Rommel...Patton...
(taps his temple)
...Dan Aykroyd.

Her look is loving. And still worried.

BETH
And Murray Cross is going to believe you just...rolled over.

TOM
Nick'll show up tomorrow. He'll say...Murray, you were right. It hurt, but...maybe I grew up a little.
(beat)
Older people like to be quoted.

Nick is just staring at Beth. His fingertips touch her face.

NICK
(softly)
When we crash...in flames...nothing in this plan...can get us in worse trouble...than we're already in.

Her turn to think it over. Reluctantly nods. It probably can't.

70. INT. NICK'S LOFT - LATER

The door opens. All three enter. Late. Tired. As she's pulling off her jacket...

BETH
How soon do we start?

NICK
Few days. We have to get the extra phone in here...

Tom has already crossed to the air mattress. Plops down. starts to take off his shoes.

TOM
This has been...one of the longest
days of my...

Catches a flat, hard look from Beth. Doesn't compute for a beat. Then it does. Holding her eyes...

TOM
...and I need a long walk alone
somewhere. For maybe an hour...?

BETH
Two.

He nods. Two. Puts his shoes back on. Heads for the door. On the way, softly slams his brother five. At the door, Beth stops him. Stares up at him.

BETH
(softly)
Thanks for helping us.

He draws a breath to answer. Then, what the hell. Just smiles. She leans up and gives him a very sweet kiss.

BETH
Good-night.

He strokes her hair gently. Looks back at his brother. A family of three. He's out the door and gone.

71. EXT. DIAMOND REALTY PARKING LOT - MORNING

Murray's Mercedes pulls into its spot. He gets out. Juggles a briefcase, some rolled up maps and charts...

NICK (V.O.)
Give you a hand?

Murray turns to see Nick's little smile. Makes Murray smile back.

MURRAY
I don't know. You still work here?

Nick walks up to him. Meets his eyes.

NICK
Hope so.

Murray's grin widens. He's really glad. Nick takes half the stuff from his arms.

NICK

Sorry that...sometimes I'm still
a kid.

MURRAY

(softly)

Yeh, well...sorry I'm not.

A shared look. And they head off side-by-side.

72. EXT. PROGRESSIVE REALTY - DAY

Car pulling up to a large well-appointed real estate office.
Large silver letters: PROGRESSIVE REALTY. Smaller gold ones:
SALVATORE GIONE, PRESIDENT.

Out of the car steps Tom. He wears a moustache and a neat
pin-stripe suit. Flashy shoes. He looks years older. And
terrific. Enters the building.

73. INT. PROGRESSIVE REALTY

Big and lush and surprisingly tasteful. There is, however, a
large map of Sicily, plus some exquisite travel posters. The man
does favor his homeland. There is also a portrait of Gione
himself. Out silver-foxes Murray. Distinguished, suave, and
utterly handsome.

Tom is sitting at the desk of an attractive young woman.

WOMAN

And how may we help you, Mr. Tracante?

TOM

I'm acquiring some property. I'll be
conducting the negotiations myself...
but I'll need the services of a
reputable broker to finalize the
paperwork and details. I would, of
course, pay full commission.

(beat)

Friends in New Jersey...recommended
your company.

The woman smiles prettily. Pulls out a client card...

WOMAN

Well, we're very pleased they did.
Perhaps we can begin by filling
out one of these...

Tom smiles the easy smile. Devastating as ever. And pulls out a
pen...

74. INT. DIAMOND REALTY - DAY

Nick behind his desk, on the phone. As he speaks, we take his POV to see Tom, in his new persona, enter. Tom heads up the aisle, straight toward us, but stops just in front of us at Vince's desk. They speak in low tones. Then, Vince accompanies Tom to Murray's office.

As they enter, Murray looks up. Smiles.

VINCE

Murray, this is Mr. Dominic Tracante. He's interested in some of the lots in Meadow Green. Mr. Tracante, Murray Cross.

Vince leaves as Murray grasps Tom's hand. They sit.

MURRAY

Well, Meadow Green is a development that's very close to my heart, Mr.... Tracante, is it? Which lots are you interested in?

TOM

All of them. All thirty-six you haven't sold.

Stops Murray about as dead as we've ever seen. Tom's manner is calm, reserved. But all business.

TOM

My information puts the asking price of each unit at \$127,500. Is that correct?

Staring at this young man. Murray nods.

TOM

So...four million six. How soon can the papers be drawn?

Silence. Tom waits.

MURRAY

Uh...young man, I...

TOM

I'm older than I look, Mr. Cross. And some of my...partners are even older.

(beat)

We can arrange terms convenient to your client. We could even... pay in cash. If you like.

That really stops him.

MURRAY

Cash.

TOM

Yes. It's green. It's used occasionally in financial transactions. Instead of checks or credit cards.

(beat)

Do we have a deal?

Murray staring at him. Who is this guy?

MURRAY

I'll talk to my client. He may... want some background. On you and your...partners.

Tom smiles. Stands. Pulls out an elegant leather billfold. Extracts a business card. Hands it toward Murray.

TOM

I'm catching a flight back to New Jersey for a day or so. My office can get you whatever you need.

(beat)

By the way. My brokers are Progressive Realty. They're right down Ventura here...

And the light goes on for Murray...voice very quiet now...

MURRAY

Yes, of course. It's an outstanding company.

Tom thrusts out his hand.

TOM

My people would like to close within forty-eight hours.

(on the handclasp)

Pleasure, Mr. Cross.

Tom leaves. Murray watches through the glass as Tom heads down the aisle. Tom stops at Vince's desk. Thanks him for his help. Shakes his hand. And then walks out of the place.

Murray's just sitting now. Staring at the card. Taps it on the desk. Reaches for his phone. Punches out the number...

75. INT. NICK'S LOFT - DAY

Beth sitting alone on the floor. Studying for finals. In front of her is the new phone. It RINGS. She looks at it. Waits three rings. Lifts the receiver.

BETH
Tracante Enterprises, may I help
you?

Intercut Murray at his desk. Continue cutting back and forth...

MURRAY
Yes, I'd like to leave a message for
Mr. Dominic Tracante...

BETH
Mr. Tracante is on his way to the
East Coast...what is this regarding,
please?

MURRAY
Well, it's regarding a development
called Meadow Green...

BETH
Oh, yes. Mr. Tracante is partnered
in that transaction with one of his
in-laws. You could contact Mr. Gione
directly, if you wish. That number
is...

But Murray's face is very still.

MURRAY
Thank you. I already have it.

Slowly now, he hangs up the phone.

76. INT. NICK'S LOFT - NIGHT

Close on Beth, stir-frying supper in the wok. Bigger batch this
time. She's cooking for three.

Across the room, Tom has his shirt off. Nick is attaching
something to Tom's body with adhesive tape.

TOM
Y'know, this is gonna kill me when
you pull it off. And you have to
do it all over in the morning...

NICK
Gotta see if it works. You wouldn't
write a paper without research, would ya?

Tom shoots him a look. Nick ignores it. Finishes.

NICK
OK. Voice-activated.

He presses a button on the thing. Gestures for Tom to start.
Tom walks around the room. Stretching. Twisting his body to
test the adhesive. Then...smiles at Beth...

TOM
Thing I like about your woman, Nick,
is the way she moves. When she's
walkin' slow, she gets a hitch in
that underfed little bottom...

BETH
Underfed?

They're grinning. Nick steps over. Pushes a button. Hear...

BETH (V.O.)
Underfed?

Bingo.

77. INT. MURRAY'S OFFICE - DAY

Tom across the desk. Murray spreads his hands. A little uneasy.

MURRAY
Not sure how to tell you this,
Mr. Tracante. I, uh...spoke with
the developer. And, he...doesn't
want to sell.

Tom retains his composure, but his eyes sharpen.

TOM
Two days ago...those lots were on
the market. I make a good faith
offer. Suddenly, they're not for
sale. Why?

A little steel in the spine of that one.

MURRAY
You made an offer. It was rejected.

TOM
At the asking price? On all the lots?
(beat)
You wouldn't have used our good
faith offer...to get a higher price
elsewhere...?

Murray's throat is drying fast.

MURRAY
No. I don't work that way.

TOM
Well, then can I assure my partners
that these lots are simply...off
the market? We won't check up and
find you're still selling them, will
we?

No real way out of that one.

MURRAY
(quietly)
We're still selling them.

TOM
But not to me. Should I take
that...personally?

Silence now. Staring at each other.

TOM
Why, Mr. Cross? Why won't you sell
these lots to me?

A long beat. Then...

MURRAY
It was my client's decision. I
don't have an answer.

TOM
Then fucking ~~get~~ one!

Murray is frozen by the sudden rage. Slowly now, Tom rises from his seat. Leans across the desk. His voice is quiet and horribly cold.

TOM
I was raised, Mr. Cross, to respect
older people. But I have a partner
who's not about to get jerked off
by some sleazy putz in a pinkie ring.

Leans forward a few more inches. Voice drops still lower.

TOM
Thursday morning. Ten o'clock.
You get...the papers...ready.

Tom straightens slowly. Holding the eye contact, he smoothes out his jacket. Walks to the door. Turns back.

TOM
Have a nice day.

78. INT./EXT. CAR WASH - DAY

Murray's Mercedes. Gleaming, spotless. Rolls down the track and into a needless shower of water and soap. Through the glass, Nick and Murray are watching. Nick's wolfing down a submarine sandwich. Murray just holds his. Untouched. As close to quiet panic as he's ever been.

Reverse angle. With Nick and Murray as they watch. Through a mouthful...

NICK
You can't sell those lots to the
Mafia.

MURRAY
Thanks for the tip.

Nick shrugs, as if he doesn't see the problem...

NICK
So tell him the truth. Tell
him what you're doing...

Murray turns to him. The kid must be crazy.

MURRAY
You tell that...to those people...
you don't know how they'll use it.
They'd own you for life.

Nick freezes. One argument he hadn't thought of. Close on him
now. Stopped dead.

MURRAY (V.O.)
Well, we've got til Thursday.
Maybe...we'll think of something.

Hold on Nick. He's trying.

79. INT. NICK'S LOFT - DAY

Sheila alone in the loft. Defrosting Nick's refrigerator. Water
boiling. Fridge dripping. Ice pick and hammer. The whole shot.
She wipes her brow, muttering under her breath. Attacks the
iceberg once more as...the phone RINGS.

ANGLE...the new phone. Sitting next to the answering machine. A
second ring. A third. Then, the machine clicks in. We hear
Beth's professional secretary voice...

BETH (V.O.)
Thank you for calling. You have
reached...

But a hand SNATCHES up the receiver, and the tape stops with a
SQUAWK.

SHEILA
Hello?

She listens.

SHEILA
There's no one here by that name.
You must have...

Stops. Listens. Peers at the number on the phone.

SHEILA

Well, you've dialed correctly.
But someone's given you a wrong...
(listens, irritated)
No, you couldn't have used it
before. This is the Nicolas Dawes
residence, a private residence,
not a...

(beat)

Because I'm his mother.

On her dry grin of triumph, we CUT TO...

80. INT. MURRAY'S OFFICE - DAY

Murray with the phone to his ear. His face very still.

MURRAY

My mistake, ma'am. Sorry to
have disturbed you.

Hangs up the phone. Stares through the glass. Sees Nick, hard
at work. Murray just can't believe this. Then, he can. Shakes
his head. A little smile that reminds us of Nick's. He stands
now. Out of his office and over to Nick's desk.

As Nick looks up, Murray's grin has vanished. Seems a worried
man once again. Tries now to force a pleasant smile...

MURRAY

We haven't grilled a whiskey steak
in awhile. You busy tonight?

NICK

Sorry. Having dinner at my Mom's.

Murray understands.

MURRAY

Maybe you could stop up for a
drink on your way. Think I'm on
to something that might...solve
our problem.

Something in the way he said that. Nick nods. But as Murray
heads back to his office, Nick is watching him go. And wondering.

81. INT. MURRAY'S LANAI - EARLY EVENING

Pool table. Balls clicking softly. Rolling. Beyond the table,
we see the spa, the deck, the Valley. Still daylight in the
early summer evening.

Murray steps into frame. Sizing up his next shot. Takes a hit
from his drink. Staring at the table...

MURRAY

We tell him...it's all about money. Once our client heard somebody wanted all the lots... he realized they must be worth more than he'd figured.

Leans over the table now.

MURRAY

So...the price has gone up a little.

Strokes off the shot.

MURRAY

Say to...\$150,000 a unit.

Nick. Watching the ball roll in.

MURRAY

That's an extra...eight hundred grand. He'll walk out the door. End of problem.

NICK

He'll also be...pretty pissed off.

Murray nods. Probably will.

MURRAY

But...it's business. Gione understands business. And anyway...it was our client's call. Your shot...

Nick steps to the table. Starts to line up his shot.

NICK

What if he says he'll pay it?

MURRAY

Got one more wrinkle. We tell him our client insists on the standard eleven page contract. With no changes. Nobody would sign it that way.

(beat)

And...we insist that Gione sign it personally. In triplicate. Before we sign.

Nick leans over. Draws his stick hand back...

NICK

You're gonna tell him that.

MURRAY

No. You are.

Miscue. The ball SQUIRTS off the stick, hopping off the table. Murray shoots him a curious little smile. Bends slowly to pick up the ball.

MURRAY

You deliver the contracts to Signore Tracante. You say...signed by Gione... no changes...by Thursday morning. Take it or leave it.

Murray puts down the ball. Takes another hit on the drink while he studies his shot. Nick's just watching him.

NICK

What if...what if they don't walk?
What if...Gione signs?

MURRAY

Can't happen.

NICK

But if it did.

Murray leans over his shot...

MURRAY

Then I'd have to tell them the truth. That I can't sell them the lots because they're worthless.

Rams his last ball home. Looks up to Nick with a smile...

MURRAY

Time for another game...?

82. EXT. DAWES' ROOF - SUNSET

View from above of the Dawes living room. Three ladies on a rug. Watching TV. Sheila sits with Allison cuddled in her lap. Beth sprawls beside them. A threesome that seems very comfortable together.

Pull back to reveal that our view has been through a skylight. Nick is kneeling on the roof. Caulking the borders of the plastic bubble with a putty knife.

PETER (V.O.)

Hear anything from your brother?

See Peter now. Sitting to one side. Keeping Nick company. But Nick doesn't look up.

NICK

Should I?

PETER
We haven't either. Thought he
might call after the French Lit
final. That was the big one.

NICK
Meaning...the one where he might
not pull an "A".

Edge to his voice. Small but clear. Peter studies him...

PETER
What's your point?

Nick turns to him. Deciding whether to say it.

NICK
What's expected of Tom is...
pretty unrealistic.

Peter wondering now. Where's this coming from?

PETER
Well...he always seems to deliver.

Nick just staring at him. Turns away. Goes back to his work.

PETER
Your brother's never ducked the
pressure in his life. He creates
his own. That's how he achieves.
That's how...everyone achieves.
(beat)
Your brother...

Nick turns sharply...

NICK
You can call him Tom, OK? I
know he's my brother. Why do
you always say, 'your brother'?

Peter absorbs his son's heat. Voice is quiet...

PETER
S'pose you tell me.

NICK
Because you want me to...use
him as a model.

PETER
You could do worse. Your brother
is...

NICK
...perfect. You're thinking...
perfect. But you shouldn't think
that. He's not perfect. No one is.

A held beat of silence.

PETER
No one said he was.

Peter stands slowly. Stares down at Nick. Walks to the ladder
at the edge of the roof. As he starts down...

PETER
I'll tell you one thing...

Looks back at his son. As hard a look as we've ever seen from
him...

PETER
Attacking your brother...isn't
going to solve your problems.

83. INT. NICK'S LOFT - NIGHT

Nick sits at a table. Contracts in front of him. Tom is on his
feet. Anxious. From the bathroom, we can hear the shower
running.

TOM
So if it's no big deal...why did
you wait til Beth took a shower?

Busted. We can see it.

NICK
S'pose you tell me.

TOM
Because you haven't told her.
Because this way...she's not
guilty.

(beat)
I, of course, have the honor of
full disclosure.

NICK
It's a little hard to keep it
from you. You have to throw the
damn thing on his desk.

TOM
Yeh, the word isn't 'thing'. The
word is 'forgery'. They don't put
you away twenty years for committing
'thing'.

Both grinning now...

NICK

All they're gonna get you for is overreacting. Fucking crybaby, my own brother...one little felony, you're hyperventilating.

TOM

Sure...Mr. Clemency over here. Judge's pet. You're a minor and a wimp. You'll throw yourself on the mercy of the court as an infant... I'll be making little ones out of big ones.

(beat)

Not to mention...major felonies are specifically on the checklist of the Honor Code Committee...

And that stops the momentum. Things sober up a little. Then a lot.

NICK

(quietly)

Lucky thing...you don't want to go back.

TOM

Lucky thing.

A long beat. Nick reaches for the contracts...

NICK

Well. On with the Crime of the Century...

(as he signs)

Sal...vatore...Gi...one.

The kidding is over. Tom can scarcely believe they're actually doing this. As Nick signs the next one...

TOM

What are the odds Murray calls our bluff?

NICK

Million to one.

TOM

Not good enough. These are our lives you're putting on the line here. For what? A bunch of...

NICK

...strangers. An old man. A young couple.

Heartfelt. And Tom hears it. Hears what it means to this kid brother of his.

NICK
These people...could lose everything.
And all they have...is us. Strangers.
(beat)
And we could let them go. And we'd
never see them.

It's very quiet now.

NICK
Like we used to do...with each
other, huh?

Nick's little smile. Older than we've ever seen it.

NICK
(softly)
Actions have consequences.

He holds his pen poised above the last contract. Tom's eyes have filled. He nods his head once. Go for it. A held moment between them now. Hear a door open...

Beth in her robe. Hair wet and clinging. She looks very beautiful. And somewhat puzzled by these two brothers who are just staring at each other.

BETH
Can I make anyone some tea?

But no one looks at her.

BETH
Have you boys been playing nice?

No answer. But she smiles. Somehow she knows they've been playing very nice indeed.

84. INT. DIAMOND REALTY - DAY

Tom enters the office. Strides up the aisle, carrying an attache case. All the brokers are at their desks, except for Nick, whose desk is conspicuously empty. Tom continues to Murray's office. Knocks. Enters.

Nick is standing at Murray's shoulder, as they review a file. Murray looks up, regarding Tom with what appears to be considerable surprise. Seeing this, Tom smiles...

TOM
I believe we said ten o'clock.

Murray nods slowly. As if trying to figure this out.

MURRAY
Uh, Mr. Tracante, this is my
associate, Nick Dawes...

Tom and Nick shake hands. Meet each other's eyes.

TOM

Pleasure.

NICK

Hiya.

Tom sets the attache case on Murray's desk. Snaps it open...

MURRAY

You have the, uh...?

Murray looks on in amazement as Tom pulls out the contracts and tosses them on the desk. Murray stares at them. Up to Tom. Back to the papers.

TOM

(quietly)

The signature is on page eleven.

Murray sends one more look. Is this for real? Then, turns to the page. Sure enough. Stares at the signature. Then looks up to Tom and...SMILES.

MURRAY

Well. Where's my pen?

Nick and Tom FREEZE SOLID. Murray is cheerily rummaging on his desk, looking for that pen. Can't find it. Turns to Nick...

MURRAY

Got a pen?

Little hitch before Nick can say...

NICK

A pen. As in...a pen to sign a contract.

Murray nods.

MURRAY

That's it. Got one?

NICK

Think maybe you wanna...read the contract first? It's customary.

MURRAY

But it's our standard form.

NICK

Unless he's changed it.

(to Tom)

Any changes...?

Tom shrugs.

TOM

Maybe one.

Nick doesn't like the sound of that. Murray doesn't seem troubled. He slides the contracts over to Nick. As Nick starts to flip through the pages, Murray turns his easy smile straight at Tom. Holds his eyes. Steady, unblinking. And then...

NICK

(softly)

Ho-ly shit...

Murray turns to Nick...

MURRAY

Problem?

Nick shoots a thin but murderous glance at Tom. Turns the contract around for Murray to examine.

NICK

Nothing major. They just...cut the price in half. From 150 a unit...down to 75.

Murray checks. Sure enough. Turns a flat look up to Tom...

MURRAY

Care to explain this?

Tom spreads his hands.

TOM

Couple days pass. Circumstances change. We revised our offer.

Murray just stares at him. A very long beat.

TOM

Take it or leave it.

Murray keeps staring. Then...turns to Nick...

MURRAY

Got that pen?

Nick cannot believe his ears. Slowly...

NICK

Murray. You can't sell at 75. Your cost is 90.

Murray doesn't blink.

MURRAY

Life...is a compromise.

He holds out his hand. Nick fumbles in his pocket. Comes up with a pen. Hands it over. Murray turns to the signature page. Nick and Tom steal a look at each other. This isn't happening.

Just as Murray's pen is poised to sign...he stops. Thinks. Looks up to Tom.

MURRAY

Y'know, if I signed this...I'd lose half a million dollars.

A frozen beat...

MURRAY

Aw, what the hell...

And to the boys' horror...Murray SIGNS the contracts.

MURRAY

So one for me. And this one you can give to Mr. Gione. And this one goes off to the county recorder...

He puts Tom's copy in the attache case for him. Closes it. Stands.

MURRAY

So we'll expect Mr. Gione's deposit of...\$270,000...within three days.

Hands Tom's attache case to him. Tom stands. Smooths out his jacket. Quick glance at Nick. No help there. Back to Murray...

TOM

No problem.

Back over to Nick...

TOM

Pleasure workin' with ya.

Goes to the door. Turns back. Takes a breath, but...

MURRAY

Have a nice day.

Tom just nods. Out the door. Nick and Murray watch him walk down the aisle and out of the building.

Nick turns to Murray now. Incredulous.

NICK

How could you sell...those lots... to the Mafia?

MURRAY

I didn't.

Murray just shakes his head.

MURRAY

I checked that kid out. I wasn't
born yesterday, y'know.

Nick isn't even breathing. Holds it together.

NICK

So...who is he?

Murray's little smile. An extra fraction of a beat.

MURRAY

I don't know. But he doesn't know
Sal Gione from Dom DeLuise.

(beat)

Can you believe this kid? He
forged the name of a Mafia Don!

Very grim smile.

MURRAY

This is the kid who called me a
putz in a pinkie ring.

Murray leans back. Savoring his revenge.

MURRAY

In three days...when I don't get
Gione's check...I get to decide
whether I turn this punk over to
the D.A....or the Calzano Family.

(grins)

Hell. Why not both?

He looks to Nick for approval. Nick can only nod. Hell. Why
not both.

85. INT. PROGRESSIVE REALTY - DAY

Tea. Being poured from an elegant silver service. Poured by a
handsome white-haired lady, who smiles and hands the cup
to...SALVATORE GIONE. He is 60. Elegant, distinguished...
Smiles at his secretary with liquid charm. She leaves. He sips
his tea in silence. Staring across his desk.

GIONE

You're sure...we can't get you
something?

Nick. On a sofa across the room. Scared silly beneath a thin
surface of calm. He seems very small now.

NICK

No thank you, sir. It's very...
kind of you to see me.

Gione smiles.

GIONE
Well, the phrase...'tragic
misunderstanding'...aroused my...
curiosity.

Gione sips his tea. And waits. Nick tries to clear his throat.
Not real easy.

 NICK
Sir. I have a friend. He's...my
age. Through a series of...well,
circumstances he, uh...pretended to
be the friend of...a very powerful
man.

 (beat)
Now he's about to do something...
even more foolish.

 GIONE
Foolish.

 NICK
He may...sign the name...of this
very powerful man. To a document.

Oh. Gione sips his tea.

 GIONE
Tell your friend...not to do it.

 NICK
He's very desperate.

Gione nods. No doubt.

 GIONE
 (quietly)
He'll be more so.

There's a spine to the voice that stops Nick's heart. Almost
can't get the words out...

 NICK
He's a...sweet boy. Innocent and...
he's just...very good. You'd really
like him.

 GIONE
But then...what has any of this to
do with me?

Silence. Gione stands now. He's very tall. Walks around his
desk. Sits up on the corner nearest Nick. Studies him for a
long beat.

GIONE

Tell you something about...powerful men. They understand the...errors of youth. They do. And...they like to forgive.

(beat)

When they can.

When they can.

GIONE

But powerful men...have to answer to...even more powerful men. Men who maintain their positions by...commanding respect.

He's not smiling any more.

GIONE

Here's how they do that. When someone treats them with...disrespect...there are consequences.

He looks at Nick's expression...

GIONE

Sure we can't get you something? Maybe a beer.

Nick manages to shake his head. Gione shrugs.

GIONE

Well. If an exception is made for...one act of disrespect...this may tempt others. Accordingly...the safest policy is...consistency.

And now, Gione smiles. Open. Almost friendly.

GIONE

(gently)

Be a friend to your friend. Stop him.

86. INT. MURRAY'S OFFICE - DAY

Murray stands at his coffee-maker, pouring some reheated brew into a styrofoam cup. Fumbles with the packet of non-dairy whitener. Spills some. As he turns back to his desk, bringing the coffee to his lips, he STOPS DEAD...

Coffee sloshes from the cup and neatly splats on his desk. Murray is staring directly into the level gaze of...

GIONE

My apologies. I seem to have...startled you.

Murray just puts down the cup. His eyes are a little wide.

 GIONE
We haven't met. I am Salvatore
Gione.

From the look of things, Murray knew it wasn't Dom DeLuise.

 MURRAY
What...can I do for you?

 GIONE
You have a boy working here. His
name is Dawes. Will you call him
in, please?

Things get very quiet. Murray punches up the number.

 MURRAY
Nick. You...wanna come in for a minute?

Hangs up the phone. Silence. Until Nick enters. As he does, he
and Gione look at each other. Then, Gione turns his eyes to
Murray...

 GIONE
Nicolas came to me. Yesterday. He
brought with him...this contract.

Gione pulls out the contract. Tosses it lightly onto Murray's
desk. Murray stares at it.

 GIONE
It has two names on it, Mr. Cross.
Two signatures. Yours. And mine.

The voice is softly resonant. And thoroughly chilling.

 GIONE
I was raised, Mr. Cross...to believe
that a signature on a contract...is
a promise. And that the purity of a
man's word...is his most...cherished...
possession.

 (beat)
Do you agree?

 MURRAY
Well, I...

The interruption comes softly, but with undeniable force.

 GIONE
Do you agree?

And Murray...nods his head.

GIONE

Good. And so here is the deposit.
Honoring my obligation to you.

Gione takes the check from his pocket. Lays it neatly on the desk. Murray is, in a word, speechless. A long beat.

MURRAY

Mr. Gione, I...I can't take your money.

Gione just raises a patrician brow...

MURRAY

This boy was...only playing a...
trick on me. And so...I played
one on him.

Gione's smile. Very thin. Very hard to read.

GIONE

A trick? With a man's name.
On a contract.

But Murray stands his ground. Meets Gione's eyes.

MURRAY

He meant it...in a good cause. To
help...other people. He's a good
boy. And...he'll be a fine man.

(beat)

Please...forgive us. And...take
back your money. The land is
worthless.

Murray picks up the check. Holds it out toward Gione. But Gione makes no move to take it.

GIONE

Pick up that phone. Call Sacramento.
You'll find a certain...legislative
oversight...is about to be corrected.

(beat)

So keep the check, Mr. Cross. Because...
I'm keeping the land.

He watches the ton of bricks crash onto Murray. Watches with the cool detachment of a surgeon. Turns now. Walks to the door. Turns back...

GIONE

By the way. You'll find that check
surprisingly large. That's because
Nicolas here negotiated a...precondition
with me.

(beat)

He made me raise the price to 90
thousand a unit. Your cost, I believe.

Watches Murray's color return. A man snatched back from the grave. Gione turns to Nick now. And smiles. A smile men reserve for their peers.

GIONE
(softly)

Nice touch, that.

He goes through the door. And in the silence that follows, Nick and Murray are alone. A long look, and Nick puts his hand on the door to leave. But then he turns back...

NICK

So...thanks.

Opens the door. Nothing more to say. Through the door and gone.

87. INT. PETER'S STUDY - NIGHT

Peter enters his study...and stops. There, at Peter's desk, is NICK. He sits, leafing through one of Peter's textbooks. Peter stares at his son's back...

PETER

Didn't know you were coming over...

Nick turns around. His little smile.

NICK

I snuck in. I'm getting real sneaky these days...

And Peter smiles back. Very glad to see him.

NICK

Sorry. I've got your chair...

He starts to rise, but Peter holds up his hand.

PETER

You look good there. Textbook and all. The doctor is in.

Peter pulls over a small chair. Straddles it backwards, resting his arms and chin on the back of the chair.

PETER

I'm sorry about the other night.
On the roof.

NICK

Don't be. I'm not.

Nick is fingering the illuminated plastic cube. The colored tiers representing layers of skin. Looking at it. Turns it in his hand...

NICK
Why...dermatology?

PETER
Why not? Everybody's gotta be
someplace.

Nick nods absently. Still staring at the cube.

NICK
When I was little...I thought...
my daddy is a doctor. You know.
Save lives...

PETER
I've saved lives.

Nick turns to him. Direct. Unblinking.

PETER
I know. I write textbooks. I sit
on boards. I make money.

It's a long look. There's a great sadness in Nick's eyes.

NICK
Why do we do...what we do to ourselves
...about our fathers? All you guys are
just...ordinary guys.

He tries to smile. But not very hard.

NICK
I guess...when we learn you...we're
little. And you're big. And somehow...
you stay that way.

Peter thinks that over. Draws a breath...

PETER
Well. I'm not a surgeon. And I'm not
in cardiology. But most kids...they
want to compete with their old man.
Top him.

Shakes his head. Sadness now to match his son's.

PETER
Why didn't you take that disillusionment...
and become...Albert-Fucking-Schweitzer...?
God knows you had the stuff to do it.

Silence. Eyes locked.

PETER

Because very young...you pulled out of the competition. A competition you figured you could never win. only...it wasn't competition...with me.

(beat)

That guy who was big...when you were little. And stayed that way. That was Tommy, wasn't it?

Both of them. Eyes glistening. And Nick nods...

NICK

He was that guy...for me.

(beat)

But you were that guy...for him.

On the edge of tears now. No way back.

NICK

Dad. Tommy's been kicked out of school. For cheating.

A sledge hammer blow. Peter's lips part. No breath comes.

NICK

...because he didn't know who he was. Or what he was supposed to be.

Nick is crying. We just can't hear it.

NICK

We built our family around this whole... lie. All of us. Who he was. Who I was. And we'd never say it...Tommy is this, and Nicky is not. But we felt it. And we lived by it. And we made it come true. Only...we didn't.

We can hear it now. And he has to choke it back. Best he can.

NICK

He's a good guy, my brother. And I just wish you knew him. And I just wish...you knew me.

88. INT. NICK'S LOFT - LATER

Tom alone. Kneeling by Rudy's cage. Peering in. We hear the door open. Tom doesn't turn...

TOM

You ever notice Rudy after he eats...?

As he hears Nick approach, he's still studying the python...

TOM

He gets this...glazed look in his eye. And it's almost like he's...

Kneeling down next to Tom. Staring at the snake. Only it isn't Nick...

PETER

Like he's what...?

Tom is frozen now. Staring at his father's profile. A long beat.

TOM

(softly)

...like he's smiling.

And Peter nods. Yep. Like he's smiling. Slowly, Tom turns his eyes back to Rudy. Two men on their knees. Side by side. If it were church, they'd be praying. Then...

PETER

So Nick tells me...Tom's not going back. Can't face it. Gonna... move on.

So much emotion. Too much emotion. Tom hears his father struggle through it...

PETER

So I say to Nick...well, maybe that's for the best. Go out. In the world. Find himself...

Shaking his head. Fighting back the tears with all he's got.

PETER

But your brother, see. Your brother says to me...bullshit. Bullshit, he says. Bullshit.

Turns to his son. Tears are just streaming.

PETER

That's what he said.

That's what he said. Tom sees the love. Sees everything.

PETER

And he's a hell of a man...your brother. And if you let him down... I'll beat the living crap out of you. OK?

And through his own tears, Tom nods back to his father. That's OK.

89. INT. NICK'S LOFT - DAY

Nick answers his door to find...Beth. Juggling two cardboard boxes. He takes them from her. She stands there in her tank top and cut-offs. Beaming at him. After all this time, it's still hard for him to take his eyes off her. He looks down at the things in the box.

BETH

Just stuff. So I'll have some stuff here. OK?

He nods. Plenty OK. She follows him in. He sets the boxes on the floor. Then sits down next to them. Looks up at her.

NICK

Would you date a guy...if he was just a wimp going to summer school?

BETH

Date him? Hell, I'd live with him.

He's grinning back. Like she made a joke. But as her smile fades a little...maybe it's something more. She's staring at him now. Lowers herself to the floor. Just in front of him.

BETH

My folks are going to Portugal and France. For a month.

Got real quiet. Real fast.

BETH

I told my Mom...don't bother calling me at home.

Well. It's on the table. He loves her so goddam much.

BETH

She's not...completely OK with it. She's not like Sheila.

His little smile.

NICK

Sheila has sons. I hear it's different.

She reaches out. Smooths his hair back.

BETH

My folks know that we...that we love each other.

And that stops her. Eyes moving over his face now...

BETH
That's...what it is, right? Loving
each other?

He brings her to him. The softest kiss.

NICK
(quietly)
That's what it is.

She seems glad to have that said.

BETH
When they come back...I'll sit down
with them. And we'll...work it out
somehow. So that they'll be OK...
and you and I can...be together.

Something in his eyes now. She sees it.

BETH
What?

NICK
Well. Tommy's going to get a job
down here. Til he can reapply to
Stanford.

(beat)
We sorta talked about...living
together. He could buy the food.
I could eat it.

She tries to smile. He sees straight through it. He pulls her
into his lap. Wrapping her legs around his waist...

NICK
So you know what that means...

BETH
What?

NICK
We need a two-bedroom place.

And slowly, her smile builds to dazzling light. Yeh. Guess they
do.

90. EXT. FISHING BARGE - DAY

Same barge, bobbing in the same ocean. The three guys at the
rail are different, but the bellies and the beer look the same.

Pan to the far rail. Two brothers. Lines in the water. Gazing
out to sea. Hoisting their beers in unpremeditated unison.
They've had several. They look identical except that Nick's
sweatshirt says YALE. Tom's, JOLIET CORRECTIONAL FACILITY.

TOM
You ever think about being an old
guy? I mean...a really old guy.

Nick mulls that over.

NICK
Constantly.

TOM
Me too. So...what do you think?

NICK
I think it's hard to pee.

TOM
I mean us. Where are we gonna be.
What's it look like.

Oh. That. Nick takes another hit on the beer. Stares out to
sea with the exaggerated concentration of the somewhat blitzed.
Concludes...

NICK
Beats the shit outta me.

TOM
I think it's you...and me...and
Beth...and some other woman...who's
just like Beth...only much better
looking...

Nick nods. So far so good.

TOM
...and eighteen kids and five dogs...on
a farm in the South of France. Or maybe
Ireland.

Our POV begins to rise now...

NICK
Where's Allison?

We're rising higher and higher...

TOM
She's one of the kids.

Still higher. Circling the boat. Can only hear them now...

NICK (V.O.)
She'll be old, Bozo. When you're a
hundred-twelve she'll be ninety-seven.

Must have stopped him for a beat.

TOM (V.O.)

She'll still be short, right?
She's very short...

Even the voices have faded now. Just a barge way down below us.
A dot in the endless ocean...as we...

FADE TO BLACK. ROLL END CREDITS.