

THE DARLINGS

“PILOT”

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TOUCHSTONE TELEVISION

BERLANTI TELEVISION

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NETWORK DRAFT

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ACT ONE

We hear the first few percolating moments of "Once In A Lifetime" by Talking Heads just seconds before we...

FADE IN:

EXT. LONG ISLAND SOUND - SUNSET

...SPEEDING ALONG THE SURFACE of the COLD BLUE WATER, its pockets and patches catching the pink and purple light.

We PULL UP to find a PRIVATE BLACK HELICOPTER flying low across the water -- and **NICK GEORGE, pensive in a perfect suit**, looking out from the backseat at the world blowing by.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
(shouting over din)
Dja find what you were looking for,
Mister George?

INT. HELICOPTER - CONTINUOUS

This is the most luxuriously-appointed helicopter we've ever seen. **FREDDY, the friendly pilot**, just asked Nick a question.

FREDDY
Mister George?

NICK
(snapping out of it)
Yeah?

FREDDY
In your Dad's plane -- dja find
what you were looking for?

Nick answers as if what he'd been looking for was cancer.

NICK
Yeah, I did, Freddy. Thanks.

And as Nick turns and looks back out the window -- HAUNTED --

EXT. HELICOPTER - CONTINUOUS

-- we let the helicopter speed away, towards the Statue of Liberty -- the city of Manhattan -- and the setting sun.

EXT. PORT AUTHORITY HELIPORT - NIGHT

The helicopter lands. Nick gets out and ducks his way under the spinning rotors until he's met by **BRUNO, his DRIVER**.

BRUNO
Welcome back, Mister George.

NICK
Thanks, Bruno.

They shake hands and then head for the Heliport Building.
Nick is still DISTANT AND PREOCCUPIED -- He keeps walking.

BRUNO
Still takin' you to Pastis?

NICK
Yeah. Sorry I'm late.

BRUNO
You don't have to apologize to me,
Mister George. I'm here for you.

I/E. NICK'S TOWN CAR - LATER THAT NIGHT

Nick's UNEASY. He looks out at Ground Zero as it glides by.
It looks a lot like his life feels right now -- DEMOLISHED.

EXT. PASTIS - LATER

Nick gets out of the Town Car and enters the restaurant.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)
I was beginning to think you were
standing me up.

INT. PASTIS - LATER

Nick just sat down across from **arch Elite Magazine reporter NAOMI LEEDS (late 40's)**. Nick's demeanor is PURE GRACE -- If he's still feeling all that turmoil, it's well-hidden.

NICK
Why would I do that, Ms. Leeds?

While Naomi talks, Nick looks wisely at the WINE LIST.

NAOMI LEEDS
Oh, I don't know, Mister George --
probably for the same reason it
took your father three and a half
years to agree to sit down and do
this interview with me. Fear.

Nick smiles. The WAITER arrives. Nick hands over the list.

NICK
The Chateau Monbousquet, please.

WAITER
Of course.

The Waiter, impressed with Nick's choice, hurries away.

NAOMI LEEDS
My condolences, by the way -- on
the loss of your father.

NICK
Thank you.
(after a beat)
So, what do you want to know about
the Darlings, Ms. Leeds -- and why?

NAOMI LEEDS
Elite has a long history, as you
know, of publishing substantial
investigative pieces about the
lives of the super-rich -- the von
Bulows, the Factors, the Kennedys,
etcetera -- and the Darlings' time
has come, it's that simple.

NICK
Says who?

NAOMI LEEDS
Says me. The Darlings are the last
of a dying breed, Mister George. In
a few years, the "War on Terror"
will have escalated into a genuine
Third World War which is going to
set off an economic upheaval the
likes of which this country's never
seen. America, as we know it, is
almost over -- and the Darlings,
with their billions of dollars and
their absurdly decadent, ignorant,
insulated lifestyle ARE America.

(after a beat)
I just want to tell their story
before it's too late.

NICK
For the sake of posterity.

NAOMI LEEDS
And my career.

NICK
Your honesty's refreshing.

NAOMI LEEDS
I hope yours is, too.

She sets a RECORDER down. Nick clocks her RING (not wedding).

NAOMI LEEDS (CONT'D)
Mind if I record this conversation?

NICK
Not at all. I have nothing to hide,
and neither do the Darlings. That's
a beautiful ring, by the way.

NAOMI LEEDS
Thank you.
(hitting RECORD)
Let's start with you. How did you
come to be the family's chief
counsel -- consiglieri, if you
will? Did you always want to follow
in your father's footsteps?

NICK
Honestly?
(after a long beat)
Of course.

The pounding joy of "MR. BLUE SKY" by ELO kicks in.

INT. NICK'S CHILDHOOD DINING ROOM - NIGHT (1960'S)

PULLING BACK FROM **SEVEN-YEAR-OLD NICK** --

NICK (V.O.)
*From my point of view as a kid, my
Dad led a magical life.*

-- we see his Dad, **DEVLIN GEORGE (30'S)** and **RUTH, his MOM (30's)**, at the table.

DEVLIN
I'm gonna have to fly down to
Trinidad again this week --

RUTH
Dev, that's the third time.

DEVLIN
They've decided they want to sell
the place, Ruth -- what can I do?

Young Nick clocks Ruth's UNHAPPY SIGH.

DEVLIN (CONT'D)
And then it's straight to Paris...

NICK (V.O.)
*He was always traversing the globe
running errands for the Darlings --*

INT. NICK'S CHILDHOOD FOYER - EVENING (1960'S)

Devlin enters with suitcases to find Nick and Ruth waiting.

DEVLIN
Guess who's home?

YOUNG NICK
Daddy!

NICK (V.O.)
*...bringing home these amazing
trinkets and toys and stories...*

INT. NICK'S CHILDHOOD BEDROOM - NIGHT (1960'S)

Devlin is by Nick's bedside. An EIFFEL TOWER LAMP is on.

DEVLIN
And then the President of France
came in to say hello --

YOUNG NICK
The real President of France?

DEVLIN
Yes! Mister DeGaulle came in to say
"bon jour," because he's very happy
the Darlings are investing in his
project -- and he's the one who
gave me this lamp to give to you.

YOUNG NICK
Can I come to Paris next time?

DEVLIN
If it works out, Nicky, sure.

NICK (V.O.)
Then, when my Mom died --

INT. NICK'S CHILDHOOD HALLWAY - MORNING (1970'S)

Young Nick is walking down a hallway toward a BARELY-OPEN BATHROOM DOOR, carrying SOMETHING. WATER'S RUNNING.

YOUNG NICK
Mamma?

NICK (V.O.)
*-- since he couldn't leave me at
home with her anymore --*

YOUNG NICK
Mamma?

Young Nick opens the bathroom door slowly.

INT. PASTIS - NIGHT

The Waiter's opening and pouring the WINE for Nick to taste.

NAOMI LEEDS
So your mother died young?

NICK
Yep.

NAOMI LEEDS
How? If I can ask?

NICK
Heart attack.

Nick tastes the wine.

NAOMI LEEDS
I'm so sorry.

NICK
Thank you. It was unfortunate.
(to the Waiter)
That's great, thanks.
(to Naomi, completing his
thought)
The point is...

INT. NICK'S CHILDHOOD BATHROOM - NIGHT (1960'S)

Young Nick opens the door, holding a PAPER SNOWFLAKE --

YOUNG NICK
I made you a snowflake.

-- to find Ruth on the floor, her WRISTS SLASHED, in a rapidly widening POOL OF BLOOD.

Young Nick drops the snowflake, which falls into the blood and blooms red from the center. With TREMBLING LIP...

YOUNG NICK (CONT'D)

Mamma?

NICK (V.O.)

...that's when I really got to know the family.

INT. AIRBORNE PRIVATE JET - DAY (1960'S)

Young Nick is being walked down the aisle by Devlin. Again -- everything about the jet says CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION.

DEVLIN

Come on, let's go see the cockpit.

Young Nick's led past **Young Patrick Darling (10)**, working with his **LOVELY SPANISH TUTOR** to his right. It's DREAM-LIKE.

YOUNG PATRICK

Barcelona es la ciudad mas grande en Espana.

TUTOR

Bien, Patricio, muy bien!

YOUNG PATRICK

(exuding health)
Hi, Dutch! Hi, Nicky.

YOUNG NICK

Hi.

Young Patrick keeps talking Spanish as Young Nick advances and finds **Young Karen Darling (7)**, reading "Vogue" with her Mom, **Young Letitia Darling, a glittery beauty (40's)**.

YOUNG KAREN

I want that dress, Mommy.

YOUNG LETITIA

Well, maybe we can have Gloria make you one, if she's not too busy.

YOUNG KAREN

(already Lolita)
Hi, Nick.

YOUNG NICK
Hi, Karen.

DEVLIN
We're going up to the cockpit.

YOUNG LETITIA
Exciting.

Letitia and Devlin exchange a look of VEILED AFFECTION.

NAOMI LEEDS (V.O.)
And the Darlings treated you well?

NICK (V.O.)
They were always very welcoming.

YOUNG BRIAN (O.C.)
Nick's not skiing with us, is he?

And there's **Young Brian Darling (5)**, sitting across from Letitia and Karen, playing with a TOY GUN.

YOUNG LETITIA
He might take a few lessons with you and Karen, don't be that way.

DEVLIN
You wanna come with me and Nicky and see the cockpit, Brian?

YOUNG BRIAN
I've seen it and I hate you.

LETITIA
(slapping his leg)
Brian!

DEVLIN
(to Letitia, grimacing)
We'll be back.

Young Brian aims the toy gun at Young Nick as they go.

YOUNG BRIAN
(silently, to Nick)
I hate you too.

Devlin and Young Nick walk on, with Nick feeling UNEASY.

NICK (V.O.)

*It was a great gift, after losing
my Mom, to have this ready-made
family to, you know, dive into.*

INT. COCKPIT - SECONDS LATER (1960'S)

Devlin and Nick enter --

DEVLIN

Nicky wanted to be up here where
the action is.

-- to find a **PILOT** in the pilot's seat --

PILOT

Hey, little fella.

-- and in the navigator's seat, **YOUNG TRIPP DARLING, the
father (40's), a brick shit-house of charm and determination.**

YOUNG TRIPP

Nicky, whaddaya think of the
Pyrenees? Pretty snazzy, huh?

Indeed, OUTSIDE THE WINDSHIELD, the jagged peaks loom.

YOUNG NICK

Yes, Mister Darling.

YOUNG TRIPP

(to Devlin, re: jet)
How does this new Lear compare to
your little puddle-jumper, Dutch?

DEVLIN

It's impressive, Tripp. Impressive.

PILOT

You fly?

DEVLIN

Just for fun -- out to our beach
place in Long Island sometimes.
(after a microbeat)
Nothing too serious.

OFF NICKY, looking at the mountains, holding Devlin's hand.

NICK (V.O.)

*As I grew up, and got to see more
of what my Dad actually did for the
Darlings on a day-to-day basis...*

EXT. CENTRAL PARK ZOO - REPTILE ROOM - DAY (1970'S)

ON TEENAGE NICK, sullenly staring JUDGMENT at something.

NICK (V.O.)
*...everything from, you know, buy-
sells to estate planning to things
like, who knows, arbitrage in the
Hong Kong market...*

TEENAGE NICK'S POV: Devlin's dealing with **YOUNG JEREMY AND JULIET**, the Darling toddler-twins, who are running around in front of the KOMODO DRAGON CAGE, attracting BAD ATTENTION.

DEVLIN
Jeremy! Juliet! Come back here!
(as if it's fun)
You wanna help me with these two,
Nicky? They're kind of a handful.

Devlin chases the SCREECHING Twins away, leaving Teenage Nick, DISAPPOINTED, face to face with the KOMODO DRAGON.

NICK (V.O.)
*Well, it just made it all that more
attractive. It was a dream job.*

INT. PASTIS - NIGHT

Naomi's sipping her wine, nursing DOUBTS about Nick's story.

NAOMI LEEDS
But after you graduated from Yale
Law, you started your own firm.

NICK
Well, I wanted to make my own way.
I'm sure you understand.

NAOMI LEEDS
I do. But you did it until just two
weeks ago, when your father died...

NICK
(briefly trapped)
Right.

NAOMI LEEDS
Why did you wait so long to work
for the Darlings, Mister George --
if it truly was your "dream job?"

NICK

Well, my Dad had it under control,
first of all. He didn't need my
help. And, secondly, I was pursuing
-- other interests.

EXT. NICK GEORGE LAW OFFICE - AFTERNOON (THREE WEEKS EARLIER)

It's a charmingly approachable office in Soho.

DAISY (PRELAP)

The Food Bank for New York called.

INT. NICK'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS (THREE WEEKS EARLIER)

Nick's in his modest bootstrap office being briefed by **DAISY (30's), his small, gum-snapping, head-setted assistant).**

DAISY

(consulting a call-sheet)
The board meeting's Monday; the
Citizens for a Car-Free Manhattan
want to know if you're taking new
clients; Lisa and Kiki are on their
way over to pick you up --
(off Nick's look)
You're going to the ballet?

NICK

(remembering)
Oh, yeah, that's tonight, good.

COLIN DAVIDSON (30's, a messy, charming lawyer), rushes in,
scarfing a HAMBURGER, carrying a BRIEFCASE and FOLDERS.

COLIN

(referring to himself)
He's back, ladies and gentlemen --
the Legal Avenger is back.

Colin plops down unceremoniously and continues eating.

DAISY

And your Dad called. He wants to
set a lunch for next week.

Everyone stops. Nick gets QUIET. EVASIVE. UNCOMFORTABLE.

NICK

I'm not gonna be able to do that.
I'm too busy next week. Sorry.

DAISY
(as usual, but sad)
Okay. I'll tell him.

NICK
Thanks, Daisy.

Daisy's PHONE RINGS and she answers it as she exits.

DAISY
(into headset)
Hello, Nick George's office, how
can he help you?

A MOMENT. Colin takes a bite and gives Nick a serious look.

COLIN
You're gonna have to sit down with
him sometime, Nick -- make peace.

NICK COLIN
Colin, don't tell me what -- It's true.

NICK
Let's talk about the orphanage.

COLIN NICK
He's the only Dad you've got. Colin! What's the decision?
(after a beat)
What did the judge say?

COLIN
(giving up)
The Sisters of Eternal Mercy can
keep their little playground.

NICK
Good.

COLIN
If they can find four million
dollars to buy it. Otherwise it's
gonna be a peep-show video-dildo-
store-Chinese-take-out emporium.

NICK
You're kidding.

COLIN
I wish I was.

NICK
Jesus. Four million?
(off Colin's nod)
Why is the world so miserable?

COLIN
I don't know, Nick. Why don't you
have lunch with your Dad?

NICK
(after a serious beat)
It's not that simple.

COLIN
There's your answer.

OFF NICK, looking back at Colin, feeling SLIGHTLY NAILED.

NAOMI LEEDS (V.O.)
So all those "other interests," all
your pro bono work fell away when
your father died? Just like that?

NICK (V.O.)
I wouldn't say "fell away..."

INT. THE MET - NIGHT (THREE WEEKS EARLIER)

Nick is sitting with **LISA, his sexy, sensible wife**, and **KIKI, their daughter (7)**, who's sitting between them.

NICK (V.O.)
I'd say it found its proper place.

ON THE STAGE: The dance of the Dying Swan.

NICK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
*I mean, look -- it's never easy to
lose a parent.*

IN THE AUDIENCE, Kiki's WEEPY-FASCINATED. Nick and Lisa
exchange a proud, loving look over Kiki's head.

NICK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
*But there was a sense of, you know,
destiny -- when the call came.*

We hear: VIBRATION. Nick pulls his PHONE out, looks. CONCERN.

INT. THE MET - LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER (THREE WEEKS EARLIER)

Nick's talking on his PHONE. We hear: THE ORCHESTRA PLAYING.

NICK

This is Nick George. Who's this?

VOICE ON PHONE

Sergeant Marcus Allen, sir, United States Coast Guard.

APPLAUSE THUNDERS from inside the theater.

NICK

What, what's happened?

VOICE ON PHONE

Your father's Cessna went down in the Long Island Sound, sir, at about ten hundred hours this morning.

ON NICK'S FACE, WE SEE: an entire city of history collapsing as AUDIENCE MEMBERS flood into the lobby from the theater.

NICK

Is he alright? He's okay?

VOICE ON PHONE

Well, we were only notified by ATC in North Haven a few hours ago -- we've been searching the area. We've recovered some small pieces of the aircraft -- nothing major -- and -- a body. I'm sorry.

Kiki, HAPPY, runs up to Nick just as this bad news lands.

KIKI

Hi, Daddy!

Lisa walks up to Nick and clocks his SHOCKED STATE.

LISA

What's wrong? What's wrong, Nick?

Nick can't get the words out just yet. Kiki takes his hand.

KIKI

It's okay, Daddy. It's just a ballet.

OFF NICK, SAD -- BREATHLESS -- REELING.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. PASTIS - LATER THAT NIGHT

Nick and Naomi's SALADS have arrived.

NAOMI LEEDS

(respectful concern)

So you don't have any idea what went wrong with your Dad's plane?

NICK

Not really. It was some sort of equipment malfunction, I suppose. It wasn't pilot error -- he flew almost every weekend. We have a beach place in Sag Harbor. He liked to get away there, clear his head.

(after a beat)

It was just -- unfortunate.

NAOMI LEEDS

I really am so sorry.

(after a beat)

So after that you just stepped in? Took up where your Dad left off?

NICK

Well, not really. It was a little more complicated than that.

INT. DINING ROOM - NICK AND LISA'S - NIGHT (2 WEEKS EARLIER)

Nick's dressed impeccably in a DARK SUIT, sitting at a table set for three: PASTRIES, O.J., BACON, COFFEE. He's NUMB.

NICK (V.O.)

As usual in life, it took a while for the future to -- show itself.

We hear FOOTSTEPS. Into the room walks Lisa in a NIGHTIE. She looks at the breakfast spread like it's a crime scene.

LISA

Did you do all this?

NICK

Yeah.

She walks over to him, stands by him. He wraps an arm around her from where he sits, she puts her arms around his head.

LISA

Nick, it's five-fifteen.

NICK
I've been up since three.

LISA
(after a beat)
Do you wanna talk?
(off Nick's silence)
He's your Dad, Nick. Even if things
weren't perfect -- you're allowed
to miss him. You kinda have to.

NICK
(still bottled up)
I know. I'll get around to it.
(sincerely)
Thanks.

Lisa accepts this. FOOTSTEPS. Kiki enters in PAJAMAS, sleepy.

KIKI
It's not time to go to Grandpa's
fyoonderal yet, is it?

LISA
No, baby. Daddy couldn't sleep.

OFF THIS HOPPER PAINTING, from across the apartment.

EXT. STREET - LATER THAT DAY (TWO WEEKS EARLIER)

Nick, Lisa, and Kiki walk down the street and begin to snake
through the frayed edges of a **MASSIVE CROWD OF GAWKERS**.

KIKI
Are all these people here to see
Grandpa, Daddy?

NICK
I'm not sure...

They push their way forward until they're stopped by a **COP**.

NICK (CONT'D)
Can we get through, please?

COP
Who are you -- Justin Timberlake or
K-Fed? I've heard 'em all.

NICK
It's my Dad's funeral.

COP

It's everybody's Dad's funeral
today, buddy. Wait your turn.

Nick looks over the crowd and sees SOMETHING.

NICK

(to Lisa)
Oh, God. Here they come.

KIKI

Who is it, Daddy?
(as Nick picks her up)
Who is it?

NICK

It's Grandpa's friends, honey.
(after a resigned sigh)
It's the Darlings.

Led Zep's "Kashmir" kicks in: The sound of COLD MODERNITY.

EXT. LARGE EPISCOPAL CHURCH - CONTINUOUS (TWO WEEKS EARLIER)

IN SOME SEMI-SLO-MO SEASICK DREAM, a CHAIN OF LIMOS pulls up
in front of the church, met by an OCEAN OF **REPORTERS** AND
POPPING FLASH BULBS -- SUNGLASSED, Olympian, they disembark.

TRIPP AND LETITIA DARLING, older and wiser, exit their limo.
Letitia seems daunted, but Tripp takes her hand in his.

TRIPP

Come on, Tish, you can do this.

AT ANOTHER LIMO, **KAREN DARLING (30's, elegant and sexy)** and
FREDDY (late 20's, a scheming dope) get out.

REPORTER #1

Freddy, how's it feel to leave the
P-G-A tour to be Mr. Karen Darling?

KAREN

Don't answer, baby, they're idiots.

REPORTERS (O.C.)

Senator Darling! Senator Darling!

AT THE NEXT LIMO, **SEN. PATRICK DARLING (40's, handsome and
commanding)** AND **HIS FAMILY (wife, 2 kids)** debark --

REPORTER #1

Is your proposal for a pullout --

PATRICK

Please guys, no politics -- It's a bad day -- bad for everybody --

AT THE NEXT LIMO, **JULIET DARLING (20's, Paris Hilton-esque)** steps out and the CROWD ROARS!

REPORTER #2

Juliet, how are rehearsals going for "Wait Until Dark"?

JULIET

Well, it's really gross acting blind, but I'm having a great time!

FROM ANOTHER LIMO crawls **JEREMY DARLING (20'S, a wastrel)** in SHADES and a rumpled suit, SMOKING. VERY HUNG-OVER.

JEREMY

(to the reporters)

Hey guys -- how ya doin' -- nice to see ya -- keep up the good work.

He follows Juliet up the GUARD-LINED staircase, past Patrick, who's been stopped by **REPORTER #3.**

JULIET

Whenja get in from Tahiti?

JEREMY

Thirty minutes and six Red Bulls ago. Kelly Slater says hi.

JULIET

Hi, Kelly.

Jeremy flicks his CIGARETTE into the crowd which scatters, shocked-dazzled, and he and Juliet disappear into the church.

BACK ON THE STEPS: Patrick's dealing with REPORTER #3.

REPORTER #3

Well, Senator, certain highly influential bloggers inside the Beltway have made reference to sexual improprieties --

PATRICK

Listen, it takes up enough of my time dealing with reputable media, if I start responding to every blogger with a wild imagination --

NICK (O.C.)
Patrick! Patrick!

PATRICK
You'll have to excuse me, sorry.
(seeing Nick)
Nick!

Patrick rushes down the stairs to where Nick's still waiting.

PATRICK (CONT'D)
Nick, what are you doing down here?
(to the Cop)
It's okay, Officer, he's with us.

COP
Oh, I'm sorry, Senator.
(to Nick, snobby)
Go ahead, sir.

PATRICK
(leading the way)
What a terrible day, huh?

NICK
(grateful, resentful)
Yeah. It's pretty rotten.

INT. CHURCH - FOYER - MOMENTS LATER (TWO WEEKS EARLIER)

Just after Patrick's greeted by the **EPISCOPAL PRIEST**, Nick and his family walk up and Nick shakes hands with him.

PRIEST
Welcome.

NICK
Thanks.

PRIEST
Your father was a good man.

NICK
Thank you for saying so.

PRIEST
Even if he did insert himself a
little too avidly into the family.

NICK
Excuse me?

PRIEST

Well, that was his job, wasn't it,
Nick? To make money?
(off Nick's shock)
That's what you lawyers do, right?

NICK

Brian, y'know --

PRIEST

(making fake peace)
I'm sorry, Nick, you're right.
Let's not fight. Not today.

We just met **REV. BRIAN DARLING (30's, a pale, sour prick)**.

NICK

(moving on, sotto)
Dickweed.

Brian greets Kiki and Lisa with a tone of GENUINE SYMPATHY.

BRIAN

Hi. I'm so sorry for your loss.

KIKI

Thank you.

INT. EPISCOPAL CHURCH - SANCTUARY - LATER (TWO WEEKS EARLIER)

Nick is finishing his eulogy in front of the PACKED HOUSE. We see MANY FAMOUS PEOPLE in the pews. RESPECTFUL. QUITE BORED.

NICK

"Every man's death diminishes me,
because I am involved in mankind.
Therefore, never send to know for
whom the bell tolls -- it tolls for
thee."

(refusing to feel)

My Dad was more involved in mankind
than anyone I know. That's what
I'll remember most. That's why I'll
always hear the bells.

There's a dead silence that feels VERY ANTICLIMACTIC. Nick,
unmoved himself, steps down and joins Lisa and Kiki.

LISA

(too comforting)
Nice job, honey. Nice job.

Patrick ascends to the pulpit. Clears his throat. A BEAT.

PATRICK

"Dutch" George wasn't my Dad.
(choking up)
But he was like a Dad to me.

People around Nick start SNIFFLING. What the hell...?

PATRICK (CONT'D)

He taught me how to ride a bike.
How to fly-fish. He helped me pass
the New York Bar. No small feat.
(off charmed laughs)
It was many a time I brought a
dilemma to my father, a great man
in his own right, and he would
offer opinions, but he would always
say, when he was done, "Ask Dutch."
Because Dutch was so much more than
our lawyer. He was our conscience,
our confidant -- our friend.
(starting to cry)
Thank you, Nick, for sharing your
Dad's life with us. We couldn't
have done it without him.

OFF NICK, while Patrick cries, still unwilling to feel.

EXT. THE IMPERIAL - NIGHT (TEN DAYS EARLIER)

The Darlings' extravagant Upper East Side MANSION.

TRIPP (O.S.)

Dutch has been gone almost two
weeks now, Nicky...

INT. IMPERIAL DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS (TEN DAYS EARLIER)

Nick and Tripp are sitting across from each other in a vast
room fit for an emperor. **A SERVANT** decants Chateau Petrus.

TRIPP

I can't tell you the depth of the
loss. Letitia's still a mess.

The Servant pours Tripp a splash, which Tripp slides to Nick.

TRIPP (CONT'D)

You taste it. You're the expert.

NICK

I'm not an expert, it's a hobby.

TRIPP

Come on. Give it a shot.

Nick tastes the wine.

NICK

(to the Servant)

It's amazing.

Tripp gives a nod to the Servant, who pours.

NICK (CONT'D)

(to the Servant)

You should try it, too.

SERVANT

(with no intention)

Thank you, sir, I'll be sure to.

The Servant clears out, off Tripp's look. A MOMENT PASSES.

NICK

So. What's up, Tripp?

TRIPP

Bottom line? I need your help.

NICK

With what?

TRIPP

The family, Nicky. It's a wild animal. It can't be tamed. It can only be managed and maintained. Protected from itself. You know what I'm saying. It's what your Dad did for us. Better than anyone.

(after a beat)

Of course, I've contemplated inviting some hotshot in to take the reins. But no one seems right.

(after a beat)

I considered Johnnie Cochran.

NICK

He's dead, Tripp.

TRIPP

Yeah. I found out. He was a bit of a grandstander, anyway. Loudmouth.

(after a beat)

Spoke with Bill Clinton.

NICK

You asked Bill Clinton if he wanted
to represent the family?

TRIPP

I took my shot. You know me, Nicky.
I put it out there. Thing is...
(after a beat)
You're the guy.

Nick had figured this might be coming.

NICK

Tripp, I'm honored you think so.

TRIPP

(amiably)
Go ahead. Get it over with.

Nick takes A BEAT, and then gets SERIOUS.

NICK

Well, in all honesty, what Patrick
said at the funeral was right. I
did share my Dad with you guys --
because I had to -- and I didn't
like it. I won't do that to Kiki.
(after a beat)
Representing your family is a full-
time job. It's ten full-time jobs.

TRIPP

You wanna be a good Dad.

NICK

I do.

TRIPP

And so did Dutch. And look at you,
Nicky. You're a successful lawyer --
wine expert -- and best of all, ya
got a moral center. So, you tell
me, who did wrong? If I had one kid
like you, I'd be a made man.

NICK

Tripp -- I just don't think it's --

TRIPP

(brass tacks)

Nicky, I'll give you five million dollars a year -- on top of what we'll pay you -- to do all your good works around town, all your charitable projects. You keep your practice, keep everybody on the payroll, keep everything as is.

NICK

(astounded)

Why would you do that?

TRIPP

Because I miss your Dad, Nicky. I miss having that solid citizen by my side to tell me which way is up.

(after a beat)

And I trustcha.

Nick hears all this. It's tempting. He's ALMOST CONVINCED.

NICK

I'd have to do it my way.

TRIPP

Of course, what man wouldn't?

NICK

I'd wanna keep regular hours.

TRIPP

I hear ya, loud and clear --

NICK

And I'd want to be able to say no if I ever felt I was participating in anything questionable.

TRIPP

Nick, no one forces your hand. I mean it. No one.

NICK

(after a long beat)

Ten million.

TRIPP

(he was expecting this)

Done.

OFF NICK, almost smiling, having made the Faustian bargain.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

EXT. PASTIS - LATER THAT NIGHT (RAIN)

THUNDER CRASHES. It's POURING RAIN.

NAOMI LEEDS

It's a bit of a Faustian bargain,
though, isn't it, Mister George?

INT. PASTIS - CONTINUOUS

Nick and Naomi are having their MAIN COURSES.

NICK

How do you mean?

NAOMI LEEDS

You take the Darlings' money and
spread it all over New York like
Robin Hood, while meanwhile you
cover up all their quiet little
sins and grease the legal wheels
for the million different ways they
take advantage of people all over
the world with their businesses?
(off Nick's innocent look)
My God, you're good!

NICK

What are you talking about?

NAOMI LEEDS

You just looked at me like I was
speaking Norwegian or something! As
if doing anything unsavory or
compromising for the Darlings --

NICK

Ms. Leeds, I'll admit I've only
been working for the Darlings a few
days. There may be skeletons in the
closet I don't know about. Every
family has them.

(a pause for effect)

But so far, they've been nothing
but gracious, and my work for them
hasn't amounted to much more than
pushing paper. And pretty harmless
paper, at that. It's no big story.

THUNDER CRASHES OUTSIDE -- the lights in Pastis FLICKER.

NAOMI LEEDS

Tell me about your first day then.
Tell me about the paper you pushed.

NICK

(after a beat)
Where do you get a ring like that?

NAOMI LEEDS

An antique dealer in Union Square.

NICK

My wife would love it.

NAOMI LEEDS

(reclaiming the floor)
Tell me about your first day.

NICK

Well. It was pretty uneventful,
except that it ended with a party.

INT. BEDROOM - NICK AND LISA'S - DAY (SEVEN DAYS EARLIER)

Nick and Lisa are asleep. The DIGITAL CLOCK reads: **6:04**.

NICK (V.O.)

I got a call from Jeremy at ten.

The PHONE RINGS. Nick wakes up and answers it.

NICK (CONT'D)

Hello?

Intercut as necessary with:

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Jeremy, ELATED, is on the toilet, pants down, WHISPERING.

JEREMY

Hey, Nick, it's me.

NICK

Me who?

JEREMY

Germs. Jeremy Darling.

Nick sits up in bed, BLEARY.

NICK

Oh. Can you call me later, Jeremy?

Jeremy begins URINATING. Nick hears the sound.

NICK (CONT'D)
Where are you?

JEREMY
I'm at Ethan Hawke's place in
Chelsea. Nick, I just won a yacht!

NICK
Congratulations.

JEREMY
I've never won anything in my life,
Nick! Ever! I just won a yacht!

NICK
Winning's a good feeling.

JEREMY
It's tits, are you kidding me?

Jeremy stands up, pulls his pants up and flushes.

NICK
So what do you need, Jeremy?
Besides, maybe, toilet paper.

JEREMY
Well, this guy Francois I won it
from, he says the title's on the
yacht in some drawer in the kitchen
or something? And I can just take
it? Is it really that simple?

NICK
It's here in New York?

JEREMY
Yeah, it's docked at Chelsea Piers.

NICK
And where's it registered?

JEREMY
I don't know, France, probably?
Germany? One of those countries.
This is why I need help, Nick.

NICK
Look, go get the title and bring it
to my office later, we'll make sure
everything's -- shipshape.

JEREMY

You're tits, Nick. Thanks.

NICK

You're welcome.

Nick hangs up -- shakes his head -- and can't help but smile.

INT. NICK'S LAW OFFICE - DAY (SEVEN DAYS EARLIER)

Nick's walking through the office with Daisy.

NICK (V.O.)

*After that, I had a brief meeting
with Karen Darling about the family
foundation, which she runs.*

Nick hands Daisy his CELL PHONE. He seems SLIGHTLY HARRIED.

NICK (CONT'D)

Can you program some rings into
this phone for me, please? I need
to know which of these people is
calling before I pick up.

(after a beat)

And don't let me forget, I gotta
get Kiki after school.

DAISY

You got it, Chief.

(into her headset)

Hello, Nick George's office, how
can he help you?

INT. NICK'S OFFICE - SECONDS LATER (SEVEN DAYS EARLIER)

Nick walks in to find Karen and Freddy waiting for him.

NAOMI LEEDS (V.O.)

*Karen's about to get married for
the -- fourth time?*

NICK (V.O.)

Third. But this guy seems right.

NICK (CONT'D)

Sorry I'm late, guys. I got trapped
on a call with your brother Brian.

KAREN

Little Miss Sunshine? What about?

Nick opens a FOLDER, removes some FORMS in summary fashion.

NICK

Oh, God, I don't know, he wants my help getting some parishioner's kid into the Maple Brook School -- ?

(sitting down)

I told him it wasn't in my job description.

KAREN

Good for you, Nick. Daddy told me you weren't gonna baby us.

NICK

That's the plan. So...

(re: the folder)

Before we dive into this -- you have a check for me?

KAREN

The family foundation does, yes.

She puts an ENVELOPE on Nick's desk.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Four million dollars.

(after a beat)

Daddy thought maybe the Sisters could name the playground after Dutch? As a gesture, you know.

NICK

That's very kind. I'll mention it.

Nick and Karen exchange a look and Nick sets the check aside.

KAREN

(to Freddy)

Nick and I were sweethearts once.

FREDDY

Really...?

KAREN

He deflowered me.

FREDDY

(trying to be gracious)

That's -- great.

NICK

Karen. Freddy, I'm sorry --

KAREN

What, Nick? It's just the truth.

A MOMENT PASSES while Freddy and Nick deal with the TENSION.

NICK

Uh, I've got your guys' pre-nup here to sign, if you're ready?

FREDDY

(still annoyed)
Yeah. Let's do that.

OFF NICK, eyeing Karen like an explosive while Freddy signs.

INT. NICK'S LAW OFFICE - LATER (SEVEN DAYS EARLIER)

Nick and Daisy see Karen and Freddy out the front door.

KAREN

Are you coming to Mommy and Daddy's anniversary party tonight?

NICK

Wouldn't miss it. Bye, Freddy!

He shuts the door. Whew. THROUGH THE WINDOW, we can see Freddy starting an intense argument as they walk away.

DAISY

She's still in love with you, huh?

NICK

Daisy, if you ever say that again --

DAISY

Here's your phone. Armed and ready.

Just as she hands it to Nick, it rings: "**ODE TO JOY**."

NICK

(already annoyed)
Lemme guess. Brian?

DAISY

Amen.

NICK

(answering the phone)
Brian, I told you already -- I'm not going to Maple Brook School.

EXT. MAPLE BROOK SCHOOL - MORNING (SEVEN DAYS EARLIER)

Establishing. It's a VERY DISTINGUISHED-LOOKING ACADEMY.

NICK (O.S.)
Twenty thousand dollars.

INT. MAPLE BROOK ADMISSIONS OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Nick is standing across a desk from **PETER CARLETON (40'S, the priggish Director of Admissions)**, who's seated.

CARLETON
Mr. George, Maple Brook's well-endowed. We don't need your money.

NICK
Forty thousand. Just let him in.

CARLETON
I'm calling security.

NICK
Look, I'm sure you have kids here -- famous kids, rich kids -- who perform far below the level this little guy, whoever he is, could --

CARLETON
Mister George --

NICK
Fifty thousand --

CARLETON
Mister George. If the child was a Darling legally, there wouldn't be a question. He'd come for free.
(after a beat)
Believe me, we know how much the Darling name would mean on our school stationery, but...
(off Nick's bafflement)
As long as Reverend Darling refuses to claim the boy legally as his son, there's no place for him here.

Nick is UTTERLY ASTOUNDED.

NICK
The kid we're talking about --
(after a long beat)
-- is Brian's?

CARLETON
He didn't tell you?

WTF? Just then, Nick's CELL PHONE RINGS: "**Hollaback Girl.**"

NICK
(patience tried)
Pardon me one second.

CARLETON
Take all the time in the world,
Mister George. As far as I'm
concerned, we're done.

NICK
(answering the phone)
Hey Juliet, what's up?

I/E. NICK'S TOWN CAR - DAY (SEVEN DAYS EARLIER)

Nick's gliding, COMPLETELY ZONKED, uptown. Bruno's driving.

BRUNO
How ya enjoying your first day
working for the family?

NICK
It's an education.

BRUNO
Your Dad, he had patience. Man. He
put up with crap woulda killed me.

NICK
What was his secret?

BRUNO
Ya know? I think he liked 'em.

NICK
Well, that would help, wouldn't it.

INT. BOOTH THEATER - DAY (SEVEN DAYS EARLIER)

ON THE SET, CLOSE ON NICK, PULLING BACK...

JULIET
(terribly upset)
If I'm so "terrible," Declan
McDoorknob, why didja cast me?

REVEAL JULIET, **DECLAN MACANDREWS (30'S, Scots, chubby)** and
the **CAST OF "WAIT UNTIL DARK"** -- including **BILL PULLMAN**.

DECLAN

I toldjee, ye wee turd, because
your Da's financin' tha whole
predooction! Don'chee see the looks
on e-eryone's moogs while you squi'
and squaw' your wheay through the
lines, ye dodgy wee twig -- or are
ye blind as well? Yer a nightmeer!

Juliet turns, IN TEARS, to Nick. She's like a four-year-old.

JULIET
Daddy paid for this?

NICK
Uhhhh -- I'm not sure -- I --

JULIET
I didn't earn the part?

NICK
Juliet, there's lots of ways to --

Juliet RUNS OFFSTAGE, SOBBING...

JULIET
I wish I was DEAD!

NICK
...earn the part.
(to Declan, sharply)
What the hell went wrong?

DECLAN
She stepped onto the steege, that's
what wint wrong! She couldn't act
'er wheay oot of a pay-er bahg,
mate, let alone a pleay! Ah QUIT!

Declan storms away. A BEAT. Bill Pullman saunters up to Nick.

BILL PULLMAN
She, uh -- she isn't good.

Nick's PHONE RINGS: "Born To Be Wild." He looks at it.

NICK
God help me.

EXT. YACHT - CHELSEA PIERS - DAY (SEVEN DAYS EARLIER)

Nick is dealing with **OFFICER PANTANGELI (50'S, a clean-shaven globe)**, and Jeremy while, in the B.G., a **CREW OF LIBERIANS** in MATCHING SAILOR OUTFITS waits patiently.

NICK
Officer, he won this yacht in a
poker game less than a day ago --

PANTANGELI
(brandishing the title)
His name's on the title, Shyster.

NICK
Yeah, but look.
(pointing it out)
He just penciled it in.

PANTANGELI
I don't care if he drew it with his
little peepee in the snow, we're
taking him in. Not a single one of
these little fellas has papers.

NICK
But he has nothing to do with these
little fellas -- tell him, Jeremy!

JEREMY
He doesn't believe me, Nick.

THE CREW
Cap'n Jerry O-K!
(thumbs up)
O-K Cap'n Jerry!

NICK
Did you teach them how to do that?

JEREMY
Yeah! I was just having fun!

PANTANGELI
Get him outta here.

Jeremy is dragged away by **TWO ARRESTING OFFICERS.**

JEREMY
You gotta bail me out, Nick. If I'm
not at the party Dad'll kill me!

NICK
I'll be right there, Jeremy, don't
worry. I'll be -- right there.

Suddenly, Nick's CELL PHONE RINGS again: **"THE BLUE DANUBE."**

NICK (CONT'D)
(GOD FUCKING) DAMN IT!

PANTANGELI
Whatsa matter?

NICK
I forgot to pick up my daughter.

EXT. CHELSEA POLICE STATION - TWILIGHT (SEVEN DAYS EARLIER)

CHAOS. Nick's on the steps with Jeremy, looking CONTRITE by his side, addressing a mob of **REPORTERS AND PHOTOGRAPHERS**.

NICK
(very anxious to leave)
This is a massive misunderstanding,
and I'm certain when the smoke
clears it will be seen that my
client is completely innocent of
all the charges against him. Now if
you'll please excuse us --

Nick and Jeremy head down the stairs, THROUGH THE CROWD.

REPORTER #1
Is it true you won the yacht in a
poker game, Jeremy?

JEREMY
Yeah, from some German guy.

NICK
French!

REPORTER #2
Jeremy, how long have you
been smuggling people into
the country?

NICK
Don't answer that.

REPORTER #3
Is it true you were planning to
harvest their organs?

NICK
Y'know? That's dumb! Don't say
things like that! Jesus!

Nick reaches up and puts his hand over OUR CAMERA LENS...

NICK (CONT'D)
No further questions!

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

EXT. NICK'S TOWN CAR - NIGHT (SEVEN DAYS EARLIER)

It's gliding up 8th Avenue.

JEREMY

Dad's gonna kill me.

NICK

He's not gonna kill you.

INT. NICK'S TOWN CAR - CONTINUOUS (SEVEN DAYS EARLIER)

Jeremy's DESPONDENT and unloading on Nick -- while he does ORIGAMI with SHINY PAPER on a SMALL PULL-OUT TABLE.

JEREMY

Then he'll have me killed.

NICK

I'll explain what happened.

JEREMY

It won't do any good. He thinks I'm a loser. And he's right, I mean -- look at me. I can't even win a yacht without getting arrested. I have the worst life in the world.

NICK

(losing patience)
Jeremy...

JEREMY

What? I do, Nick, I have the --

NICK

Jeremy, shut the hell up!

JEREMY

Why are you yelling at ME?

NICK

Oh, I don't know, maybe because you have all the money you'll ever need, Jeremy! Maybe because you'll never have to work a day in your whole damn life! You're insane!

(after a beat)

There are people starving in this world, right this very minute, are you aware of that?

JEREMY
(still folding paper)
Yeah... go on...

NICK
There are people who want to work
and can't get jobs, people who
can't feed their kids, who have to
put their kids to bed hungry every
night! Life, for most people on
this planet, is a living hell! Your
life is not the worst life in the
world by any stretch of the
imagination! ANY!
(off Jeremy's look)
WHAT?

JEREMY
(after a beat)
Nothing. You wouldn't understand.
(after a beat, sullenly)
Here.

Jeremy sets a PERFECT ORIGAMI FROG on the tabletop.

JEREMY (CONT'D)
Give that to Kiki. Tell her I'm
sorry I made you late.

Nick stares at the FROG and gets grudgingly interested.

NICK
Where'd you learn how to do that?

JEREMY
My coke dealer.

NICK
(simple resignation)
Of course. Why even ask?

LISA (PRELAP)
Hi!

INT. THE IMPERIAL BALLROOM - NIGHT (SEVEN DAYS EARLIER)

Nick has just arrived and Lisa, gorgeous in a SEXY GOWN, is
standing with Tripp and Letitia, drinking CHAMPAGNE.

The chandelier-dripping room is FILLED WITH 200 GUESTS --
FAMOUS FACES -- and everything is SILVER AND GOLD. A SMALL
ORCHESTRA plays on a STAGE at the end of the room.

NICK
(giving Lisa a kiss)
Sorry I'm late.

LISA
It's totally alright.

NICK
And I'm sorry about Kiki.

LISA
Don't worry about it, I got her,
she was fine.
(resuming play)
Tripp and Letitia are telling me
stories about when you were little.

Nick grabs a CHAMPAGNE FLUTE from a passing tray.

NICK
Nothing too embarrassing, I hope.

LISA
Not at all, it's wonderful, I'm
getting all sorts of insights...

LETITIA
I was just about to tell Lisa,
Nick, about the time you came to
Karen's birthday party -- you must
have been eight or nine -- ?

NICK
(already embarrassed)
Oh, now, see, don't -- don't --

TRIPP
Oh, let her tell it, Nicky --

LISA
(to Letitia)
Tell me, say it, I want to know!

LETITIA
Well. We had the party up at our
lake place upstate -- Valhalla --

TRIPP
We'll have you guys up there next
summer -- Kiki can bring friends --

LETITIA
-- and Tripp had Doug Henning
flown in from Vegas to do magic for
the kids -- there were hot air
balloon rides -- ponies --

NICK

Fifty cakes.

LETITIA

And when it came time to leave, we couldn't find Nicky. Everyone looked everywhere -- he'd vanished. For two hours we searched for him.

LISA

Where was he?

Tripp smiles across the story at Nick, who sorta smiles back.

LETITIA

The wine cellar. He was down there, sobbing. He didn't want to go home.

LISA

(maternal sympathy)
Oh my God. You poor thing.

LETITIA

But Dutch was so good with you, Nick -- the way he carried you to the car -- wasn't he, Tripp, wasn't he great with him?

TRIPP

He was a good father. Nicky and I talked about it the other night.

LETITIA

(getting emotional)
I mean, how many men do we know, really, that could have raised a child alone like that, and so well?
(after a beat)
He was such a good man.

Letitia fights back TEARS. Tripp puts an arm around her.

TRIPP

(to Nick and Lisa)
It's still a little tough around here. You know how it is.

OFF NICK, noting the unexpected depth of Letitia's sadness.

INT. BALLROOM - ANOTHER AREA - LATER (SEVEN DAYS EARLIER)

Patrick introduces **RUDY GUILIANI** to **MARY (40's)**, his wife.

PATRICK

I don't know if you've ever met my wife, Rudy. Mary, Rudolph Giuliani.

RUDY

(shaking her hand)
It's a pleasure.

PATRICK

So. Tell us. Are you gonna run?

RUDY

Oh, gosh, I don't know, Pat, you know, I've thought about it, but -- I'd miss New York so much.

PATRICK

I know how you feel. Washington is, uh -- how did Mark Twain put it? "A town of southern efficiency..."

RUDY

"And northern charm." Exactly. It's exactly backwards of what you want.

Patrick notices something TROUBLING across the room.

PATRICK'S POV: An **EXTREMELY SEXY WOMAN** has just come in.

RUDY (CONT'D)

I may change my mind, you know, who knows, if John doesn't run, but --

PATRICK

Would you two excuse me one moment?

RUDY

Of course. Do your thing.

Patrick rushes away. Rudy watches him go, ADMIRING him.

RUDY (CONT'D)

He's the one who should run.

MARY

He's been talking about it. He met with Howard Dean last week.

INT. ANOTHER AREA - SECONDS LATER (SEVEN DAYS EARLIER)

Patrick, masking his ANXIETY, walks up to the SEXY WOMAN.

PATRICK

Hi.

SEXY WOMAN

Hi.

Boy, her voice is REALLY LOW. She's a TRANSVESTITE. Patrick leads her semi-gently into a nearby ALCOVE.

PATRICK

What the hell are you doing here?

SEXY WOMAN

(sweet sincerity)

I missed you.

PATRICK

How'd you get in?

SEXY WOMAN

Feminine wiles.

Patrick feels CORNERED. The ORCHESTRA STOPS.

PATRICK

Look. Go to the Park Regency, get a suite. I'll come after the party.

SEXY WOMAN

(after a slow smile)

Oh yes you will.

She kisses Patrick and exits, leaving Pat FREAKED.

TRIPP (PRELAP)

Thank you all for coming.

INT. BALLROOM - ON THE STAGE - CONTINUOUS (SEVEN DAYS EARLIER)

Tripp's at the MICROPHONE with Letitia by his side.

TRIPP

This is a very special night.

APPLAUSE. FIND NICK AND LISA in the crowd. Lisa's having fun. **A WAITER** walks up and quietly hands Nick A SMALL ENVELOPE.

TRIPP (O.S.) (CONT'D)

And it's a very special gift to have you all here. A blessing.

Nick opens the envelope and pulls out a CARD. It's Patrick's SENATORIAL BUSINESS CARD. Huh?

TRIPP (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Y'know, the day I met Tish Van
Kirk, forty years ago, I told my
roommate at Yale that I was the
luckiest guy in the whole world.

Nick turns the card over -- handwritten on the back is:

MEET ME IN THE LIBRARY NOW -- CODE PINK!!!

Nick looks around for the waiter who delivered the message.

TRIPP (CONT'D)
Standing up here tonight, though, I
realize I didn't even know what
lucky was back then. Because it
just gets better and better.

INT. IMPERIAL - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER (SEVEN DAYS EARLIER)

Nick is walking, ENVELOPE IN HAND, and is passed by Freddy,
going the other way, looking BALEFUL. They briefly lock eyes.

After Freddy disappears down the staircase, Nick hears CRYING
coming from behind a BARELY-OPEN DOOR. He looks in.

It's KAREN, standing alone in the middle of a WHITE BEDROOM,
looking like a stunning statue in her DEEP RED GOWN.

KAREN
Nick...
(pulling herself together)
What are you doing up here?

NICK
Looking for Pat.

Nick steps into the room.

NICK (CONT'D)
He sent me this -- thing --
(thinking better of it)
He wants to meet me in the library.

KAREN
That's one floor up now. Mommy
remodeled last year. Remember?

NICK
Uh, not really, I guess.

Nick approaches Karen like a land mine.

NICK (CONT'D)
Are you alright?

KAREN
Yeah, I'm fine.
(starting to cry)
I'm fine.

NICK
What's going on?

KAREN
Freddy... and me...
(after a beat)
I don't know, Nick, I don't know, I
pick these guys -- It's so hard.

NICK
What's so hard? He seems okay.
Better than the last one.

KAREN
All they see is the money, Nick!
All they see is my name and my
money. No one sees me.

NICK
I can't imagine that's true.

KAREN
You can't imagine it because you'd
never be that way.
(after a beat)
I think you're the only guy I've
been with who ever really saw me --
you know? Just me.

Nick looks at Karen with PITY and RESTRAINED DESIRE.

NICK
Look, I don't know what just
happened with Freddy and I don't
want to -- it's your business and
his. But Karen...
(after a beat)
If you don't wanna marry him,
don't. Life is short and -- and you
really deserve to be loved. You do.

KAREN
Thank you for saying so. Thank you.

Karen touches Nick's face and then kisses him on the cheek.

KAREN (CONT'D)

You're sweet.

With her cheek on Nick's, Karen lingers just a little bit longer than the gesture actually requires -- and Nick stays.

LISA (O.C.)

Nick?

Nick turns to see Lisa in the doorway. OH SHIT. She saw that kiss -- and she's not happy about it.

LISA (CONT'D)

Patrick's looking for you.

(to Karen)

Sorry to interrupt.

Lisa walks swiftly away. Nick gives Karen a look.

NICK

Excuse me. Lisa. Lisa!

EXT. THE IMPERIAL - NIGHT - LATER (SEVEN DAYS EARLIER)

Nick has just RUN outside. He questions the **VALETS**.

NICK

Did a woman just leave here? Long hair -- black gown -- pissed?

VALET #1

I don't know, man, I just got back from the structure.

NICK

(to another valet)

Did you see a woman? Dark hair?

The Rev. Brian Darling comes outside.

BRIAN

Nick, wait a minute --

NICK

What?

(realizing who it is)

Brian, I really can't deal with you right now, okay? Trust me!

BRIAN

What the hell happened at Maple Brook? I just got a call from my parishioner, they won't let him in?

NICK

Brian, I just told you, I can't deal with this right now!

BRIAN

But you can take our family's money and show up here like you belong? You're on the clock, Nick, answer my (fucking) question!

Nick considers bringing up the truth -- then walks away.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Where do you think you're going?

NICK

I quit. I QUIT!

BRIAN

Good! Good riddance! I tried for years to get Dad to pick that leech, your father, off his ass!

Nick stops -- OH FUCK, THAT WAS THE WRONG THING TO SAY --

BRIAN (CONT'D)

We're better off without you!

Nick turns and runs at Brian -- who runs inside -- SCREAMING!

BRIAN (CONT'D)

DON'T HIT THE FACE, NOT THE FACE!

INT. THE IMPERIAL - FOYER - CONTINUOUS (SEVEN DAYS EARLIER)

Nick tackles Brian. They crash to the floor. Nick POUNDS HIM.

NICK

Don't you EVER -- EVER -- talk like that about my father, you little sonofabitch! Understand me? EVER!

A CROWD pours in, SPECKLED WITH NOTABLES, from every direction, including Tripp, Jeremy, Patrick, Letitia...

TRIPP

What the hell's going on here?

BRIAN

(from under Nick)
He started it! I didn't do anything, Dad, he started it!

We hear **A SHRILL SCREAM** from above! Everyone looks up to see Karen appear, **FREAKED OUT**, at the top of the staircase.

KAREN
Get a doctor! Get a doctor!

TRIPP
What's the matter?

KAREN
It's Juliet! GET A DOCTOR!

INT. IMPERIAL - JULIET'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (SEVEN DAYS EARLIER)

Juliet's asleep. Karen and Letitia are by her side. A **DOCTOR** (60'S, Freudian), holding a VIAL, talks to Tripp and Nick.

DOCTOR
She took somewhere between five and ten, considering when this was filled. But she expelled quite a few of them into the pillow. I think she'll be fine. She just needs some rest. I'll see her for her regular appointment next week. In the meantime, Tripp, really, call if you need anything.

TRIPP
Thanks, Doc.

The Doctor exits. Tripp and Nick look at Juliet in bed.

TRIPP (CONT'D)
Do you have any idea why she'd do this, Nicky? Any clue?

NICK
Yeah. I do. She found out you financed the show.

TRIPP
Oh, Jesus.

NICK
She quit -- then the director quit. I was gonna tell you, but I thought I'd wait until after the party.

TRIPP
You can get him back on board, though, right?

NICK

Who?

TRIPP

The Scotsman. What? It's gonna take money? Fine. What doesn't?

OFF NICK, searching for the words -- trying to say them --

NAOMI LEEDS (PRELAP)

So you quit.

INT. PASTIS - LATER (THE PRESENT)

THUNDER CRASHES. Nick and Naomi are having dessert. The tenor of the conversation indicates Nick's been LYING HIS ASS OFF.

NAOMI LEEDS

Just like that.

NICK

Yep. I told him I couldn't do it.

NAOMI LEEDS

But why? I don't get it. It was an easy day, no heavy legal lifting. You went to a party. You were following in your Dad's footsteps, doing your "dream job." Why quit?

NICK

Honestly? After all those years of doing pro bono work, it was all too easy. It was all too perfect.

A MOMENT PASSES. Naomi smiles with a sense of CONQUEST.

NAOMI LEEDS

You know, Mister George? Your story is what sounds too easy. Your story is what sounds too perfect.

NICK

It's what happened.

NAOMI LEEDS

No, it's not. For one thing, you haven't mentioned Jeremy's arrest for human trafficking, an arrest that was conveniently deleted from the precinct's logbook, thanks to you, but about which one honest cop kindly had the balls to inform me.

(MORE)

NAOMI LEEDS (CONT'D)

(off Nick's look)

And -- you haven't mentioned how Juliet O-D'd, a little detail several guests at that absurdly expensive party were happy to provide me with long before I sat down across from you tonight.

(off Nick's look)

See, Mister George, you can sit there and smile all you want and make life with the Darlings seem like a walk in the clouds...

(after a beat)

But that doesn't change the simple fact that you -- are not telling -- the truth.

NICK

(after a long beat)

Well. If you really want to talk about "the truth," Ms. Leeds...

NAOMI LEEDS

Yes, Mister George?

Now Nick smiles -- and hits PAUSE on the DIGITAL RECORDER.

NICK

Why don't you tell me where you really got that ring?

Naomi didn't see that coming. She TAKES A BEAT to regroup. And we go OFF NICK, knowing he just played his trump card.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

INT. PASTIS - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS (RAIN)

We're right where we left Nick and Naomi. Naomi's UNNERVED.

NAOMI LEEDS

What do you mean, where I "really"
got the ring?

NICK

Exactly that. Where did you get it?

LIGHTNING AND THUNDER CRASHES. The lights GO OUT.

NAOMI LEEDS

(after a beat)

I told you, Mister George -- an
antique dealer in Union Square.

NICK

But that ring --

A WAITER walks over and lights a CANDLE.

NICK (CONT'D)

Thank you --

(continuing)

That ring was designed in 1922 by a
jeweler at Cartier expressly for
Tillie Kemper Van Kirk -- the
mother of Letitia Van Kirk Darling.

Naomi takes A BEAT and then AMIABLY cops to the story.

NAOMI LEEDS

Alright, you caught me, Mister
George. Bravo. I have an ongoing
obsession with the Darlings that's
maybe gone just a little beyond the
limits of strict journalistic
integrity. I saw the ring at
auction, I liked it, I bought it.

(after a beat)

Okay?

NICK

Okay.

NAOMI LEEDS

Now how about you tell me why
you're here representing the
Darlings tonight, since the last
thing you told me was you quit.

Nick has something ELSE to say. But he bides his time.

NICK

Okay. After I told Tripp that I quit, I left the party...

EXT. CENTRAL PARK WEST - NIGHT (SEVEN DAYS EARLIER)

Nick's just walking uphill from the TUNNEL near W. 80th, to the sound of MANY BEEPING CAR HORNS.

NICK (V.O.)

*And I walked home through the park.
And when I hit Central Park West, I saw the damnedest thing.*

Nick crests the hill and sees SOMETHING.

NICK (CONT'D)

Holy crap.

There, IN THE MIDDLE OF AN INTERSECTION, surrounded by JAMMED TRAFFIC and TERRIFIED ONLOOKERS -- is a KOMODO DRAGON.

It's stalking around, hissing: A veritable DINOSAUR.

Nick walks closer and steps up beside a **CABBIE (East Indian, 20's, with turban and beard.)**

NICK (CONT'D)

What's going on?

CABBIE

It must have escaped from the zoo.

NICK

How?

CABBIE

I have no idea. The police say Animal Control is on the way.

NICK

And they'll take it back?

CABBIE

Perhaps. They may have to kill it.

ONLOOKERS SCREAM when the dragon takes a few steps closer.

CABBIE (CONT'D)

The sad part is, he's the one that's scared. You know?

(MORE)

CABBIE (CONT'D)
(after a beat)
All these lights, all this sound.
(after a beat)
He's the one that's scared.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. CENTRAL PARK ZOO - REPTILE ROOM (1970'S)

That moment Nick watched Devlin struggling with the Twins.

DEVLIN
You wanna help me with these two,
Nicky? They're kind of a handful.

ON NICK'S SULLEN FACE, watching his Dad run off after the screeching Twins -- judging his Dad. FEELING DESERTED...

Facing the KOMODO DRAGON in the cage...

EXT. CENTRAL PARK WEST - NIGHT (SEVEN DAYS EARLIER)

Nick's still entranced by the encircled KOMODO DRAGON.

NICK
(like a ghost)
I am, aren't I...

CABBIE
Pardon me?

NICK
We're all scared. All of us.
(after a beat)
Even the Darlings.

OFF NICK, having his sad, Salinger-esque epiphany.

NAOMI LEEDS (V.O.)
And that's what changed your mind?

INT. PASTIS - NIGHT

It's still a CANDLE-LIT situation.

NICK
Honestly? Yeah.
(after a beat)
Looking at that pathetic helpless creature, flailing around in the street like that, I realized -- Tripp was right. The family is a wild animal. And they do need me.

NAOMI LEEDS

And the fact that he offered to pay you millions of dollars had nothing to do with your decision to stay?

NICK

The money's nice. It's nice to be able to provide for my family -- but trust me -- it's not that simple.

INT. NICK AND LISA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT (SEVEN DAYS EARLIER)

Nick is fighting with Lisa in the LIVING ROOM.

NICK

It wasn't a kiss like that!

LISA

Then what was it? I know you two had a thing once! What was it?

NICK

She was upset about Freddy and I said some things to be nice, she was just -- it was friendly!

LISA

It looked like a lot more than friendly! If this is what working for the family's going to mean, that I have to lose you to her --

NICK

She's about to get married!

LISA

Yeah, well, that means a lot!

Just then, Nick's CELL PHONE RINGS: "Pretty Woman."

NICK

I'm sorry. I have to take this.

LISA

Why? Who is it? Whose ring is that?

NICK

It's -- Karen's -- but -- it's not what you think --

(as Lisa walks away)

It's Daisy's idea of a joke --

LISA

You make me sick! Sick!

NICK
Lisa, you don't understand!
(answering phone, tense)
Hey Karen, I can't talk now --

KAREN (O.C.)
(on phone, scared)
We have to, Nick. We have to.

INT. PASTIS - NIGHT

Dinner's over. The WAITER passes by.

NAOMI LEEDS
Could we get the check, please?

As the Waiter heads away, Naomi sets her PURSE on the table.

NICK
(re: the check)
I can get this.

NAOMI LEEDS
I'm sure you can, but then I'd owe
you, Mister George. And considering
what I'm about to do to you and
those helpless reptiles you've
chosen to adore...
(after a beat)
...it just wouldn't be right.

She pulls out her CREDIT CARD.

NICK
Can I see that a second?

NAOMI LEEDS
Sure.

She hands it over quizzically -- he looks -- hands it back.

NICK
So you legally changed your name.

NAOMI LEEDS
(after a beat)
What are you talking about?

NICK
That ring on your finger was never
for sale. At any auction, anywhere.

NAOMI LEEDS

Yes it was -- I bought it --

NICK

Tillie Kemper Van Kirk gave it to her daughter Letitia on Letitia's sixteenth birthday in 1957. And Letitia left that ring in a velvet bag on the steps of the orphanage of the Sisters of Eternal Mercy along with a baby girl one summer night in 1962 because she'd made a mistake with some boy, and Tripp Darling had just announced his intention to ask for her hand in marriage -- and she wasn't going to let anything -- anything -- keep that from happening.

NAOMI LEEDS

(almost trembling)

How do you know all this?

NICK

I know all this because Letitia had a copy of the ring made when she had her second daughter -- the one everyone thinks is her first.

INT. IMPERIAL BEDROOM - NIGHT (SEVEN DAYS EARLIER)

That moment when Karen touched Nick's face...

KAREN

Thank you for saying that.

And there -- on her hand -- is AN IDENTICAL RING.

INT. PASTIS - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

NICK

And she's been wearing it ever since her sixteenth birthday.

(after a beat)

You're not Naomi Leeds. You're the lost, orphaned daughter of Letitia Van Kirk -- Darling.

END OF ACT FIVE

ACT SIX

INT. PASTIS - NIGHT (RAIN)

Naomi is TENSELY signing the charge slip by CANDLELIGHT.

NICK

At least you were honest about one thing tonight. Your interest in the Darlings is more than journalistic.

NAOMI LEEDS

(hard, tight)

The Darlings stole my life.

NICK

You've stolen your own life. By pretending to be someone you're not; by devoting your time to revenge and spite, you've wasted the only life you'll ever get.

(after a beat)

It's sad. It's really sad.

(after a beat)

Don't write this story. Let it go.

NAOMI LEEDS

No.

NICK

Let me bring you to Letitia --

NAOMI LEEDS

NO! I don't want to meet her.

The LIGHTS bolt back on with an AUDIBLE SOUND. Naomi stands.

NAOMI LEEDS (CONT'D)

Here's how it's gonna be.

(she blows out the candle)

I don't care if you do know who I really am. You can discredit me all day long. The facts are the facts.

NICK

I wasn't planning --

NAOMI LEEDS

Don't lie to me. You obviously came here tonight prepared to blackmail me. I'm sure you'll try when the time comes. And it will. Go for it.

(after a beat)

(MORE)

NAOMI LEEDS (CONT'D)

I'm gonna write this story, with or without your help. And after that, Mister George, I'm gonna write a book, and then a movie, maybe even a TV show! I'll do whatever it takes to show the world these people are poison.

(after a beat)

I'm going to take the Darlings down, Mister George. And I'm going to take you down with them...

(after a beat)

...if they don't get you first.

(after a beat)

Goodbye.

Naomi walks away, leaving Nick sitting there. REMEMBERING...

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - MIDNIGHT (SEVEN DAYS EARLIER)

Nick and Karen are walking by THE RESERVOIR.

NICK

So -- help me understand this.

KAREN

I run the family's foundation.

NICK

I know, you gave me the check --

KAREN

And the way it usually works is just like that -- family members fill out requisition forms and I send out the checks.

NICK

And so what does this have to do --

KAREN

Freddy asked me for a hundred thousand dollars tonight at the party. He wants to join some golf club in Dallas.

NICK

That's why you two were fighting.

KAREN

Yeah. That's why. Anyway, I went to the office to write him the check.

NICK

And?

KAREN

I saw something lying on my desk.

NICK

What?

KAREN

The last gift Brian requisitioned from the foundation was for this guy, Fred Exley. Brian said he was a family man who came into the church one day, down on his luck, and needed to cover some debts. I sent him \$10,000 three months ago.

NICK

And you just got another requisition from Brian...

KAREN

Yes, for the same guy -- only this time for \$90,000, Nick.

NICK

What's it for?

KAREN

I don't know, but I looked him up.
(after a beat)
He's an airplane mechanic.

NICK

(unimaginable)
You think Brian was involved somehow in my Dad's death?

KAREN

I don't know!

NICK

But that's -- I mean, I know he didn't like him, but why would he want him dead?

KAREN

For the only real reason there is -- your Mom and my Dad had an affair for the past forty years!
(after a beat)
Maybe Brian wasn't happy about it.

Nick stops walking, as if A GRAND PIANO just landed on him.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Oh my God, Nick.

(after a beat)

Oh my God. I thought you knew.

OFF NICK'S TOTALLY BLOWN AWAY EXPRESSION...

EXT. LONG ISLAND SOUND - DAY (EARLIER PRESENT DAY)

ON CHURNING WHITE WATER -- as SOMETHING rises to the surface.

ON DECK: Nick's in his PERFECT SUIT, standing on a LARGE COAST GUARD BOAT. **CREW MEMBERS** are manning a LARGE WINCH that's raising -- here it comes -- THE CESSNA'S FUSELAGE.

OFF NICK, watching it hanging in mid-air: He already knows.

INT. AIRPLANE HANGAR - DAY (LATER PRESENT DAY)

Nick is gathered with COAST GUARD OFFICERS and POLICE around the wrecked fuselage. **DETECTIVE ANGELA ADAMS (30's, tough)** -- and we'll be seeing more of her as things unfold -- walks up to Nick after examining the fuselage with the TEAM.

NICK

Well?

ANGELA ADAMS

It could have been explosives.

(after a beat)

To be honest, it's not crystal-clear.

But given the paper trail you described and the -- situation -- as far as motive is concerned...

(after a beat)

We could get a warrant for this Exley guy and see where it leads.

(after a beat)

But that's up to you. I'll tell you this, given the players, you'd have a hell of a time keeping it outta the papers. It's your call.

NICK

(after a long beat)

I'll be in touch.

The first notes of "Once In A Lifetime" kick in...

EXT. NORTH HAVEN AIRPORT - DAY (MOMENTS LATER)

Nick's BLACK HELICOPTER takes off with Nick in it.

SONG

"And you may find yourself living
in a shotgun shack..."

INT. HELICOPTER - MOMENTS LATER

Nick is sitting there, looking out at the receding land --
the hangar where his father's plane is sitting -- his past.

SONG

"And you may find yourself in
another part of the world..."

He reaches in his jacket and pulls out: the ORIGAMI FROG. He
looks at it a moment.

SONG (CONT'D)

"With a beautiful house, and a
beautiful wife."

He puts it gently into his shirt pocket. It's for Kiki.

SONG (CONT'D)

"And you may ask yourself: Well,
how did I get here?"

And we PULL BACK and let Nick and his story head back for the
CITY IN THE DISTANCE where it's all going to happen: N.Y.C.

END OF PILOT