

# THE SON

Screenplay

by

Florian Zeller

and

Christopher Hampton

A woman's VOICE, singing a lullaby

"THE SON"

1 INT. PETER & BETH'S APARTMENT, THEO'S ROOM DAY 1

A multi-colored mobile turns above a cradle.

BETH watches the baby sleeping. She's smiling.

Suddenly, PETER appears in the doorway. He watches BETH and their baby, THEO.

BETH realizes PETER is there.

2 INT. PETER & BETH'S APARTMENT, KITCHEN DAY 2

PETER takes a bottle of white wine out of the fridge. BETH appears. She comes from THEO's bedroom.

BETH

So?

PETER doesn't answer right away, letting the suspense build.

BETH (CONT'D)

Tell me.

PETER

I'm seeing him in two weeks.

BETH

In DC?

PETER nods.

BETH (CONT'D)

If anyone had told me that one day you'd go into politics... I'd never have had a baby with you!

PETER smiles.

PETER

I'm not even sure if I'm going to accept, Beth.

BETH

I hope you don't have plans to go live down there... because I may as well warn you right now... the man who can make me leave New York...

PETER

... hasn't been born, I know.

2

BETH smiles. PETER goes to embrace her, but her cellphone rings.

BETH  
I need to take this...

She picks up, gesturing to PETER to indicate she'll be no more than five minutes, then moves away in the direction of their bedroom.

BETH (CONT'D)  
Mom, yes... Sorry, I didn't have time to call you back...

PETER's on his own. He pours himself a glass of wine. At the same time, he calls a number on his phone.

PETER  
Hi Jessica, it's me. Could you send me the Jackson file? Doesn't seem to be in my emails and I need to look at it this evening.

Suddenly, the bell rings. PETER's surprised.

PETER (CONT'D)  
Good. Thanks. See you tomorrow.

3 INT. PETER & BETH'S APARTMENT, DOOR/LANDING DAY 3

Peter goes to open the door. It's KATE.

PETER  
What are you doing here?

KATE  
We need to talk.

Instead of letting KATE in, he goes out on to the hallway with her.

PETER  
You can't just show up here with no warning...

KATE  
I... I tried to call I don't know how many times, but you never pick up.

PETER  
What's the problem?

KATE  
It's Nicholas.

3

PETER  
Has something happened?

KATE  
Yes.

She hesitates, lost in emotion, as if she doesn't know where to begin. This seems to irritate PETER.

PETER  
Well : tell me.

PETER glances discreetly back through the door to check that BETH is not listening in on them. KATE notices.

KATE  
Am I bothering you?

PETER  
What?

KATE  
This is your son I'm talking about!  
Shouldn't you be just a little bit  
concerned...

PETER  
Of course I'm concerned! Why are  
you saying that?

KATE controls herself, tries to keep calm and carries on with her account.

PETER (CONT'D)  
What's going on?

KATE  
This afternoon, I... They called me  
in. The school. Just now. To see  
the principal. So he could tell me  
what was going on. And that's when  
I found out Nicholas hasn't been to  
school for almost a month.

PETER  
What?

KATE  
I'm telling you. For weeks now he's  
been pretending... Every morning.

PETER  
What are you talking about?

KATE  
I'm explaining to you and I...

PETER

Back up a minute... He hasn't been to school for almost a month? And all this time, you never noticed anything? How is that possible?

KATE

He headed out every morning with his bag and everything he needed for the day as if nothing was wrong. Except he didn't go there.

PETER

And the school...

KATE

Seems they sent me a bunch of emails, but I never got them...

PETER

But... What was he doing? I mean, all day... Where did he go?

KATE

I don't know. He barely even answers my questions anymore...

PETER is having difficulty grasping this. What's going on?

KATE (CONT'D)

I'm so worried about him, Peter.

Suddenly, BETH appears in the doorway. PETER's embarrassed, as if caught in a compromising situation.

BETH

What's going on?

PETER

Ah, Beth... Yes, I'm... Kate's here to talk to me about Nicholas. We've just found out he hasn't been going to school, and...

KATE

It's not only that, Peter. He's not well.

A slight feeling of discomfort.

KATE (CONT'D)

You need to speak to him. I can't deal with it any more. He needs you, Peter. You can't abandon him.

PETER

I'm not abandoning him! Why do you keep saying these things?

KATE

The other day, I asked him to... I can't even remember what... to take his plate out or something... and he looked at me with such... with such hatred. I thought he was going to...

PETER

To what?

KATE

He scares me, okay?

This admission sends chills down his spine.

PETER

I'll go see him tomorrow. I'll swing by at the end of the day.

KATE

Thanks.

KATE makes an affectionate gesture to thank him. It's enough to make PETER feel embarrassed in front of BETH. KATE notices.

In the distance, the baby starts crying; and BETH, after a slight annoyed hesitation, goes off to look after him.

PETER and KATE remain on the landing. An intimate moment between them.

KATE (CONT'D)

He was such a sweet kid, so wonderful... Do you remember? I don't know what's happened... But something has. He's changed.

PETER wants to reassure her.

PETER

Come on. Don't worry. It will all get back to normal.

KATE

I don't know.

PETER

Yes, it will. Don't worry... I'm here.

3

KATE

No, that's it. You're not here any more.

4

INT. LAW OFFICE, PETER'S OFFICE DAY

4

PETER sits in his office facing two CLIENTS who are talking to him about the case they're involved in. PETER is acknowledging everything they say. He gives them a big smile.

PETER

Great. Listen, I think I have all the information I need for now. I'll call Jeffrey and see if we can get them to move.

CLIENT 1

Perfect.

PETER stands up, to put an end to the meeting.

CLIENT 2

Thank you.

5

INT. LAW OFFICE, ELEVATOR DAY

5

PETER is with the same two CLIENTS. Professional handshakes in front of the elevator.

PETER

I'll get back to you as soon as it's done.

His clients go into the elevator. Peter looks at his watch. It is time to go and see NICHOLAS.

6

EXT. KATE'S APARTMENT BUILDING DAY

6

ESTABLISHING SHOT of the building in Brooklyn where KATE lives with NICHOLAS.

A yellow taxi pulls up. PETER gets out, takes a deep breath to gather his courage and disappears into the building.

7

INT. KATE'S APARTMENT DAY

7

NICHOLAS opens the door. He's 17. He's surprised to see his father.

NICHOLAS

What are you doing here?

7

PETER  
Is it all right? Am I disturbing  
you?

NICHOLAS shrugs, by way of saying "no". PETER steps in.

PETER (CONT'D)  
How are you?

NICHOLAS  
O.K.

PETER  
I came by because... I wanted to  
talk to you. You have a couple of  
minutes?

NICHOLAS  
Sure.

NICHOLAS reluctantly goes to the living room. He knows what his father is going to say to him. PETER closes the door behind him and joins NICHOLAS in the living room.

NICHOLAS is already on the sofa, biting his nails.

PETER  
Your mother told me you haven't  
been going to school... What's  
going on?

NICHOLAS  
Nothing.

PETER  
Don't say "nothing". Explain it to  
me.

Pause. NICHOLAS doesn't answer. PETER sits down opposite him.

PETER (CONT'D)  
Listen... I know you're having a  
hard time at the moment... And I  
know you're mad at me... But that's  
not a reason for us not to talk to  
each other... Why have you stopped  
going to school?

NICHOLAS  
Don't know.

PETER  
You don't know?

NICHOLAS shakes his head.

7

PETER (CONT'D)  
There must be a reason...

NICHOLAS shrugs.

PETER (CONT'D)  
You can't decide to suddenly stop  
going to school. It's not an  
option.

Pause.

PETER (CONT'D)  
Do you hear what I'm saying?

NICHOLAS  
Yes.

PETER  
Are you having problems?

NICHOLAS sighs.

PETER (CONT'D)  
Why are you sighing?

NICHOLAS  
No reason.

PETER  
There's got to be a reason. Tell  
me...

NICHOLAS  
I don't want to talk about it.

He gets up and heads for his bedroom.

As he does so, PETER's cellphone rings. He sends the call to voicemail.

PETER sits on his own for a moment wondering how to deal with this situation.

Then he sets off for NICHOLAS's bedroom.

8

INT. KATE'S APARTMENT, NICHOLAS'S BEDROOM DAY

8

NICHOLAS is sitting on his bed. He looks vulnerable. PETER appears in the doorway.

PETER  
Nicholas, I can't help you if you  
won't tell me anything.

8

PETER has a discreet look round NICHOLAS's bedroom, which he hasn't seen for some time.

PETER (CONT'D)  
What were you doing? All those days... Where did you go?

NICHOLAS  
I walked.

PETER  
You walked?

NICHOLAS nods.

PETER (CONT'D)  
On your own?

NICHOLAS  
Yes.

PETER  
In the street?

NICHOLAS  
Or in the park...

PETER  
But, why? Nicholas? You think that's acceptable? And with your SATs coming up, as well!

NICHOLAS still doesn't say anything.

PETER (CONT'D)  
And stop biting your nails! You'll make them bleed...

NICHOLAS takes his hand away from his mouth.

PETER (CONT'D)  
You realize the school is talking about expelling you?

NICHOLAS  
I wasn't feeling well. Going for walks was the only thing that relaxed me.

PETER  
Why weren't you feeling well?

No answer. PETER comes and sits down next to him on the bed.

PETER (CONT'D)  
Nicholas, talk to me...

He makes an affectionate gesture towards NICHOLAS.

PETER (CONT'D)

Your mom's at the end of her rope, you know that? She wants to send you to boarding school. Is that what you want?

NICHOLAS

No.

PETER

So? You have to do something! You can't just let things go like this...

It's clear that the mention of boarding school has shaken NICHOLAS. He stands up and moves away from the bed.

NICHOLAS

I can't deal with any of it.

PETER

What makes you say that? Has something happened at school?

NICHOLAS

No.

PETER

Or outside of school?... We can talk to one another, you know.

NICHOLAS

It's not that. It's...

PETER

Yes?

NICHOLAS

I don't know how to describe it.

PETER

Tell me in your own words.

NICHOLAS hesitates. He turns toward his dad.

NICHOLAS

It's life, it's weighing me down.

PETER seems moved by this confession, made with a disarming sincerity.

PETER

What is it about life that isn't working for you?

NICHOLAS

I don't know. I want something to change, but I don't know what. That's why... I've been telling myself that... maybe...

NICHOLAS is hesitating.

PETER

Tell me.

NICHOLAS

I'd like to live with you.

PETER is caught completely off-guard.

PETER

With me... you mean...

NICHOLAS

I can't go on here. Because I know I could get out of this. But not here. Not on my own. It's too difficult...

PETER

Yes, but...

NICHOLAS

Me and Mom, we're not getting along. She can't deal with me anymore... I know she can't. And I'd like to live with my little brother...

PETER

Yes.

NICHOLAS

If you send me to boarding school, I'll go crazy.

PETER

Of course you won't.

NICHOLAS

Yes, I will, I'm telling you. My head feels like it's exploding.

PETER

Hey... Come here.

PETER takes him in his arms. NICHOLAS seems very fragile, close to tears.

8

NICHOLAS

Sometimes I feel as if I am going  
crazy, Dad.

Disarming sincerity. PETER hugs him closer.

PETER

What are you talking about?

NICHOLAS

I'm telling you. I don't know  
what's happening to me.

NICHOLAS weeps, like a small child. PETER is unsettled, but  
tries to comfort him.

PETER

Come on... Don't worry, sweetheart.  
We'll work it out. O.K.? Trust me.

9

INT. TAXI DAY

9

PETER is in a taxi. He's looking out of the window. He hadn't  
imagined that things were going so badly for his son.

Finally he makes a call on his cellphone. He reaches KATE's  
voicemail.

PETER

Hello, it's me. I've just spoken to  
him. I... Call me back when you get  
this message.

10

INT. PETER &amp; BETH'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN NIGHT 10

BETH is cleaning out THEO's bottle. She looks unresponsive  
and her back is turned to PETER.

PETER

Why are you taking it like this?

BETH

Taking it like what?

Pause.

PETER

He can stay in the room in back.

BETH

And what about school?

PETER

We'll figure something out. There must be a school that would take him mid-semester. Don't you think?

BETH

I'm sure.

She goes to the fridge. He follows her.

PETER

You've only known him for two years and I can see that... I mean, I know you have a negative impression of him... After everything that happened...

BETH raises her eyebrows.

PETER (CONT'D)

But he hasn't always been like that. When he was younger, he was so...

He breaks off suddenly. BETH turns back to him.

PETER (CONT'D)

When I went to see him just now... he had, I don't know, marks.

BETH

Marks? You mean...

PETER

Little scars all up his arm... As if he'd been...

He makes a gesture to illustrate the idea of cutting himself.

PETER (CONT'D)

It upset me so much. My little boy...

BETH makes an affectionate gesture.

BETH

Hey...

PETER

And it's true, you're right, I feel guilty! I can't pretend I'm not responsible for the situation. I left, Beth. I left.

BETH

It... It's not your fault if he isn't well.

10

PETER shrugs, as if to say "I'm not so sure."

BETH (CONT'D)

He's just going through a difficult time...

PETER

Anyway, I don't think I have a choice. I can't just give up on him.

BETH

I understand. Don't worry.

He smiles at her, grateful. He has a tender gesture for her to thank her.

BETH (CONT'D)

And maybe you should speak to your doctor. About the scars...

PETER

I know.

11 INT. PETER & BETH'S APARTMENT, NICHOLAS'S BEDROOM DAY 11

BETH is making the bed. She's trying to arrange things to make the room a little more welcoming. She is with Theo.

Suddenly, a bird crashes against the window. She gives a cry of surprise. The baby cries. She consoles him, staring at the window as if it was a bad omen.

12 INT. KATE'S APARTMENT, NICHOLAS'S BEDROOM DAY 12

NICHOLAS finishes packing. KATE arrives.

KATE

Are you ready? You...

NICHOLAS

Yes.

KATE

Would you...?

NICHOLAS

No. Thanks.

He leaves the room. His mother follows him towards the front door.

13

13

INT. KATE'S APARTMENT, KITCHEN/HALLWAY DAY

13

They're trying to find the right words, but neither of them seems able to. Overlapping dialogue.

KATE

So, you...

NICHOLAS

Yes.

KATE

And don't forget, you... I mean you know you can always...

NICHOLAS

I know. Thanks, Mom.

KATE

Any time you like. Because...

NICHOLAS

But don't...

KATE

No, I know. I know what you mean, don't worry.

Pause.

NICHOLAS

All right.

KATE

Yes.

She embraces him clumsily.

KATE (CONT'D)

And call me.

He leaves.

KATE (CONT'D)

No, wait...

KATE rushes over to the kitchen. NICHOLAS waits for her out in the hallway. She reappears almost immediately and hands him a Tupperware box.

KATE (CONT'D)

Here, I almost forgot.

NICHOLAS

What?...

13

KATE  
Banana bread.

NICHOLAS  
Thanks, Mom.

KATE waves to him one last time before he disappears.

KATE  
Love you.

Then she shuts her front door. She stays where she is, leaning against the door. That's it, her son has gone. The apartment suddenly seems very empty.

14

INT. PETER & BETH'S APARTMENT, BATHROOM - NIGHT

14

It's late. NICHOLAS turns on the tap. He's about to brush his teeth. PETER knocks at the door.

PETER  
Hi...I just wanted to check you  
have everything you need...

NICHOLAS  
I do, thanks.

PETER  
You found the towel Beth left out  
for you ?

NICHOLAS  
Yes.

PETER smiles at him.

PETER  
Good. I'll leave you. I'm heading  
to bed.

He comes closer, with an affectionate gesture.

PETER (CONT'D)  
I'm so happy you're here. I've  
missed spending time with you.

NICHOLAS  
How about Beth? Did she really  
agree to my moving in?

PETER  
Obviously, Nicholas. We're very  
pleased you're here, both of us.  
It's your home as well, you know.  
NICHOLAS smiles.

14

PETER (CONT'D)  
Come on...you should get to  
bed...it's late.

NICHOLAS  
Yes.

PETER holds out his fist for a fist-bump, which surprises NICHOLAS. This is an old ritual they haven't practised for a couple of years... NICHOLAS grins at PETER and bumps fists with him.

PETER  
Good night...

NICHOLAS  
'Night, Dad.

PETER leaves the room.

NICHOLAS is on his own. He looks at himself in the mirror. He smiles.

15 INT. PETER & BETH'S APARTMENT, BATHROOM DAY 15

PETER's taking a cold shower.

16 INT. PETER & BETH'S APARTMENT, DRESSING ROOM DAY 16

PETER puts his shirt on.

17 INT. PETER & BETH'S APARTMENT, KITCHEN DAY 17

PETER fixes himself a coffee, trying not to make any noise. It's very early.

Suddenly, NICHOLAS appears in his doorway.

NICHOLAS  
Hi...

PETER  
Up already? Your mother said you  
never got up before noon...

NICHOLAS shrugs.

PETER (CONT'D)  
You want something? A coffee?

NICHOLAS shakes his head.

17

PETER (CONT'D)

You don't have anything in the  
morning?

PETER goes over to him, ruffles his hair and passes him into  
the living-room to collect the files he's left on the sofa.

18

18

INT. PETER &amp; BETH'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM DAY

18

NICHOLAS joins him.

NICHOLAS  
Are you leaving?

PETER  
Yes. Why?

NICHOLAS  
No, it's just... About this school... The one you told me about... Thing is, I don't know if I feel right about going there.

PETER turns towards him.

PETER  
Sorry?

NICHOLAS  
I thought about it all night... Everyone's going to wonder why I'm showing up like this, in the middle of the year...

PETER  
So?

NICHOLAS  
I'm going to get a lot of weird looks...

PETER makes an effort to be positive.

PETER  
No you're not, of course you're not... Someone who arrives in the middle of a year, they'll be interested in you... They'll wonder who you are, where you came from...

NICHOLAS  
Exactly. I don't want to have to answer a lot of questions.

PETER  
Listen, Nicholas, you're not the first person to change schools in the middle of a year... I understand it might make you a bit anxious, but that's the way things are. And I spoke to the principal again yesterday, she's really happy to have you.

18

PETER thinks he's dealt with the subject. As far as he's concerned, there's nothing to discuss. He puts on this coat.

NICHOLAS

I know, but I was thinking... I was wondering if it would maybe be better to start again in September with less pressure and...

PETER interrupts him.

PETER

You're going back on Monday, Nicholas. We've already discussed this. It's not negotiable.

PETER goes back to the kitchen to finish gathering up what he needs to take in for work and to drink a last sip of his coffee.

NICHOLAS looks demoralized. He starts biting his nails again. PETER notices.

PETER (CONT'D)

What are you so worried about?  
It'll be fine.

NICHOLAS

I don't know.

PETER

Of course it will! You're a very bright kid, Nicholas. With a bit of work, you'll have no difficulty catching up. Trust me.

NICHOLAS seems far from reassured.

PETER (CONT'D)

You've been depressed. It can happen to anyone. But now it's time to make a new start. That's why you're going back to school on Monday. Do you understand?

NICHOLAS doesn't answer.

PETER (CONT'D)

Nicholas, do you understand?

NICHOLAS

Yes.

Pause.

PETER

Sure you don't want any breakfast?

18

NICHOLAS  
No. Thanks.

NICHOLAS starts heading back to his room.

PETER  
Where are you going?

NICHOLAS  
Back to bed.

PETER is disconcerted. But, just before disappearing into his bedroom, NICHOLAS turns back to him.

NICHOLAS (CONT'D)  
Dad?

PETER  
Yes?

NICHOLAS  
Thanks for everything you're doing  
for me.

19 EXT. NEW YORK STREETS DAY 19

Establishing shot. Buildings in NYC.

20 INT. LAW OFFICE, ELEVATOR DAY 20

PETER is in the elevator, going up to his office. He's surrounded by EXECUTIVES. Everyone is glued to his cellphone, except for PETER, who seems lost in thought.

21 INT. LAW OFFICE, PETER'S OFFICE DAY 21

PETER's at his desk. He picks up his phone and calls his doctor.

PETER  
Doctor Collins... Hello, it's Peter  
Miller... Sorry to call you on your  
cell, but I wanted to talk to you  
about my son, Nicholas... I think  
he needs to see a therapist... And  
I thought you'd know someone  
good...

Somebody knocks at his door. PETER turns and sees ANDREW, one of the Vice Presidents in his company. PETER winds up his call.

PETER (CONT'D)  
So if you could call me back...  
Thanks a lot.

He hangs up.

ANDREW  
Am I disturbing you?

PETER  
No, please, come in...

ANDREW takes his time; he seems to be beating around the bush.

ANDREW  
Tell me... am I right you're  
thinking of going to DC soon?

PETER  
News travels fast.

ANDREW  
They say he's going to run in the  
Primaries, is that true?

PETER gives him a knowing smile.

ANDREW (CONT'D)  
What exactly is he offering you? To  
be part of his campaign team?

PETER  
He hasn't said anything specific.

ANDREW tips his chin, as if to say "congratulations, good for you". PETER permits himself a dazzling, almost child-like smile.

ANDREW  
Probably take up a lot of your  
time.

PETER acknowledges this. It's clear this is exactly what's worrying him.

ANDREW (CONT'D)  
If he gets to be President, I'm  
sure you're not going to forget the  
people who've always believed in  
you!

Clearly, ANDREW is referring to himself.

21

ANDREW (CONT'D)

O.K., I'll let you do your work.  
Will you come and see me when you  
know more?

PETER

Of course.

ANDREW'S on the way out, but turns in the doorway.

ANDREW

Everything ok at home?

He's harking back to the last part of PETER'S phone  
conversation, which he's overheard.

PETER

What? Yes, yes.

ANDREW

That's good.

22

INT. TRAIN DAY (MUSIC)

22

PETER is on a train. He's on his way to Washington and he's  
working on a file. Suddenly he lifts his head...

He turns to look out at the passing countryside. The sun on  
his face...

23

INT. HIGH SCHOOL, HIGH-SCHOOL CORRIDOR / CLASSROOM DAY 23  
(MUSIC CONTINUES)

The PRINCIPAL'S SECRETARY knocks on the door. Clearly,  
NICHOLAS is feeling sick with nerves.

They go into the classroom.

SECRETARY

I'm just interrupting you for a  
minute to introduce Nicholas, who's  
joining us today. I know you'll all  
give him a warm welcome.

TEACHER

Hello, Nicholas.

NICHOLAS responds with a nod.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

I'm Mr. Yen, I'll be teaching you  
History. Welcome! Find a seat. And  
come see me when class is over, so  
I can bring you up to date to where  
we are right now. O.K.?

23

SECRETARY

Great. I'll leave you to it.

NICHOLAS looks for an empty place. He goes to sit down without daring to look around him. The lesson restarts.

24 INT. KATE'S OFFICE DAY (MUSIC CONTINUES) 24

KATE is working. One of her colleagues, SOPHIA, is with her. Suddenly her head comes up. She is thinking about Nicholas. As if she could feel his anxiety.

The CAMERA ALTERNATES between PETER, KATE and NICHOLAS.

25 INT. BRIAN'S OFFICE, WASHINGTON D.C. DAY 25

PETER's lost in thought. He's sitting in the waiting area opposite BRIAN's office. He has an I.D. badge around his neck.

A MAN passes him.

MAN

Hey, man! How's it going?

PETER snaps out of his reverie.

PETER

Fine, and you?

They shake hands.

MAN

Meeting the boss?

PETER

Yes.

MAN

You're in luck, he's in a good mood today. You still in New York?

PETER

Still in New York.

MAN

How's your dad? I heard he had a little health problem?

PETER looks surprised.

PETER

Huh? Yes, well, not really, everything's fine. Thanks.

25

MAN

Good. We haven't seen him for a long time... Say hi to him from me, will you?

PETER

Sure.

MAN

See you.

PETER raises a hand and the MAN moves off. PETER seems troubled by what's been said. It's apparent that he's no longer really in contact with his father.

The big door leading to BRIAN's office opens and one of the Senator's ASSISTANTS appears.

ASSISTANT

We're ready for you. This way.

PETER gets up and steps into the office.

The CAMERA stays outside the office and the door, closing behind PETER, shuts us out of the meeting. We just have time to hear, off-screen, the Senator's first remarks:

BRIAN (O.S.)

Ah, Peter! How are you? Good of you to come and see us... Make yourself comfortable. Let me introduce you to...

26 EXT. NEW YORK STREETS DAY 26

NICHOLAS is walking in streets, coming back from school. He passes in front of an art gallery. His attention is drawn to a black painting.

27 INT. WASHINGTON STATION DAY 27

PETER is sitting on the concourse at the station, waiting for his train. He has his cellphone pressed to his ear and is leaving a voicemail for NICHOLAS.

PETER

Nicholas, hi, it's me. Just wanted to know how it went for you today... Call me back. Love you.

He hangs up and sits for a minute, pensive. He looks quite cheerful, evidently the meeting with the Senator has gone well.

27

Then he checks the contact list on his phone... He stops at "Dad". He hovers over the call button for a moment, eventually changes his mind.

28 INT. PETER &amp; BETH'S APARTMENT, KITCHEN/CORRIDOR DAY 28

BETH is preparing breakfast and Theo's bottle at the same time.

BETH  
Nicholas? Are you ready? It's time  
to go. Nicholas?

She goes to NICHOLAS's door and knocks.

BETH (CONT'D)  
I've made you coffee... You just  
about have time to drink it...  
Nicholas? You're going to be late.

She knocks on the door.

29 INT. PETER &amp; BETH'S APARTMENT, NICHOLAS'S BEDROOM DAY 29

NICHOLAS is sitting on his bed. He's fully dressed. BETH's VOICE can be heard through the door.

BETH (V.O.)  
Nicholas, I must have called you at  
least ten times... We can't do this  
every morning. Do you hear me?

30 INT. PETER &amp; BETH'S APARTMENT, CORRIDOR DAY 30

BETH's still at the door.

BETH  
Nicholas!

Suddenly, the door is flung open and NICHOLAS appears, holding his bag.

BETH (CONT'D)  
Why don't you answer me?

NICHOLAS  
I do answer you.

BETH  
It's time. You have to go.

NICHOLAS  
I know.

31

31 INT. PETER &amp; BETH'S APARTMENT, KITCHEN/LIVING ROOM DAY 31

BETH is in the kitchen, preparing the coffee and Theo's bottle - while NICOLAS is gathering his things in the living-room.

BETH

Theo didn't wake you up last night?

NICOLAS

No.

BETH

You're lucky. Same thing with your dad, nothing wakes him up. That expression: "sleeping like a baby"... It's a joke. "Sleeping like a man" would be more like it.

NICOLAS

Where is he?

BETH

He already left. He had a very early meeting this morning.

She goes to the living room with the coffee.

BETH (CONT'D)

Here's your coffee. You have just enough time to drink it.

She notices that NICOLAS has his head in his hands.

BETH (CONT'D)

What's the matter?

He doesn't answer. BETH goes to him.

BETH (CONT'D)

Nicholas? What's the matter with you?

NICOLAS

Nothing.

BETH

Are you in pain?

He doesn't answer.

BETH (CONT'D)

Are you unhappy? Why are you unhappy?

NICOLAS

I don't know.

BETH

You don't know? Does this happen often, that you start crying like this for no reason?

She approaches him gently.

BETH (CONT'D)

Mm?

NICHOLAS

I'm not crying.

BETH is confused. She doesn't know what to do. She puts an arm round him.

NICHOLAS (CONT'D)

Anyway, I have to go.

He stands and picks up his bag. Before leaving the apartment, he comes back to her.

NICHOLAS (CONT'D)

Can I ask you a question?

BETH

Sure.

NICHOLAS

When you met my dad... Did you know he was married?

BETH

I...

NICHOLAS

Did you?

BETH

Yes. But he said right away that...

NICHOLAS

That what?

BETH

Maybe it's better if you talk to him about this...

NICHOLAS

You know, when he left, my mom took it... really hard. She really suffered. And she never stopped saying terrible things about him... And the whole time I still worshipped him. It was like being chopped in half.

31

BETH puts a hand on his shoulder to comfort him.

BETH  
I understand. It's not an easy situation.

NICHOLAS  
And it didn't stop you?

BETH  
Sorry?

NICHOLAS  
When you met him, the fact you knew he was married and already had a son, it didn't stop you?

She takes her hand away.

BETH  
I... what do you want me to say, Nicholas?

NICHOLAS  
Nothing. You're right. I don't know why I'm asking you. It's stupid.

BETH  
No, it's not stupid. It's just...

NICHOLAS  
Anyway, I have to go. See you later.

He leaves the room. BETH finds herself alone, disconcerted.

BETH  
See you later...

32

EXT. NEW YORK STREET DAY

32

NICHOLAS walks down the road. He's wearing his headphones. Music.

He goes down to the subway and disappears.

We hear the message that KATE is leaving on his phone.

KATE (V.O.)  
Nicholas, it's me again...

33

INT. KATE'S OFFICE DAY (MUSIC CONTINUES)

33

KATE's at her desk. She's an architect. She is on the phone.

33

KATE

I just felt like giving you a hug.  
Hope everything's all right with  
you... I was hoping we might be  
able to get together one day, when  
you have some time. Call me back...  
Miss You

She hangs up. Then she decides to make another call on her  
cellphone.

34 INT. LAW OFFICE, MEETING ROOM DAY (MUSIC CONTINUES) 34

PETER's in a meeting in the conference room with three of his  
colleagues. His phone goes and he checks it, frowns and sends  
it to voicemail, with no lapse in his professional attention.

ANDREW

If we can prove to them they should  
never have made the first move, it  
starts to look possible... it's all  
a matter of the balance of power.

A YOUNG MAN knocks at the door.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Yes?

The YOUNG MAN comes in. He's wearing a velvet jacket.

YOUNG MAN

Excuse me. Is this what you were  
looking for?

ANDREW

Ah, excellent...

The YOUNG MAN approaches, nodding respectfully to PETER.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Was it in the archives? Great job!

YOUNG MAN

Anything else you need...

ANDREW

Thanks very much.

The YOUNG MAN nods again as he leaves and steps out of the  
room. ANDREW's reading the file.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

This is going to be very useful...

PETER

Who was that?

34

ANDREW

Who?

PETER indicates the YOUNG MAN who's just left the room.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

He's the new intern. French. Very smart. Why?

PETER

No reason.

PETER continues to watch him through the glass wall of the conference room.

35 INT. PETER & BETH'S APARTMENT, THEO'S ROOM DAY 35

NICHOLAS is alone in his little brother's bedroom. He is looking for something. Then, he takes a small teddy bear out of Theo's bed, sits on the chair and smells the teddy.

36 INT. LAW OFFICE, CORRIDOR/FOYER/ELEVATOR DAY 36

PETER's on his way out of the office. He's listening to his voicemails, in this case from KATE.

KATE (V.O.)

Peter, hey, it's me... Sorry to bother you... But I haven't heard at all from Nicholas... I leave him messages, but he never calls back... I... well, I need you to tell me how it's all going... Could we talk?

Listening to his message, PETER passes a number of his COLLEAGUES in the corridor, greeting them distractedly. He's slightly put out by KATE's message.

He's in front of the elevator now. The YOUNG MAN appears with an armful of files. PETER smiles at him. They wait for the elevator, standing next to one another.

PETER

Nice jacket.

YOUNG MAN

Thanks.

The elevator doors open. PETER gestures to him to step in first. He follows him in. The doors close.

37

37 INT. KATE'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM DAY 37

KATE is looking at herself in the mirror. She's getting dressed for a rendez-vous. She's suddenly dissatisfied with her blouse. She takes another one from her wardrobe and looks at herself in the mirror again.

38 INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE DAY 38

NICHOLAS sits facing the THERAPIST and his dog.

THERAPIST

So, everything's going well at your new school?

NICHOLAS shrugs apathetically.

NICHOLAS

It's O.K.

Pause. NICHOLAS realizes the therapist is waiting for more.

THERAPIST

You said you don't feel very close to people your age?

NICHOLAS

No.

THERAPIST

Why is that?

NICHOLAS

I just think they're stupid. All they care about is having fun and partying... I'm not interested in any of that.

THERAPIST

So what are you interested in?

NICHOLAS smiles. Strangely, the therapist looks like his dog.

THERAPIST (CONT'D)

What?

NICHOLAS

Nothing. Anyway, things are better now.

THERAPIST

You don't like being this age?

NICHOLAS

I liked it better when I was a kid.

38

THERAPIST  
When you were a kid?

NICHOLAS nods. Brief pause.

THERAPIST (CONT'D)  
You mean... When your parents were  
still together?

NICHOLAS raises his eyes to look at the THERAPIST, disturbed by what he's said. He shrugs, as if to say "no, that's not really it". Even so, he's still thinking about it.

39 EXT. NEW YORK STREET, RESTAURANT DAY 39

PETER crosses the road and goes into the restaurant.

40 INT. RESTAURANT DAY 40

A WAITER shows PETER the room at the back, empty except for KATE, who sits at a table. She's wearing the blouse she picked out earlier. He joins her.

PETER  
Sorry I'm late, I...

KATE  
No problem. I know how busy you  
are. Especially right now, I hear.

PETER  
Yes...

The WAITER approaches the table.

WAITER  
What would you like?

PETER looks questioningly at KATE.

KATE  
I don't know. How about you?

PETER  
Sparkling water, please.

KATE  
I'll have a martini.

This makes PETER smile.

PETER  
In that case, two martinis.

WAITER

Two martinis coming up!

The WAITER leaves.

KATE

So? How's it going?

PETER

Listen, it's going well. He's started at his new school... He says he likes it.

KATE

Well, that's great.

PETER

I mean, I had to lean on him a little at the beginning... But he's feeling better now. I honestly think he's on his way.

KATE

And has he been able to tell you what happened at the last school?

PETER

No. He doesn't say much.

KATE

I don't understand where this sadness comes from...

PETER

He's a teenager, Kate. Have you ever seen a teenager radiating happiness?

KATE

It's not just that. He's different from the others.

PETER

What makes you say that?

KATE doesn't know. She shrugs.

PETER (CONT'D)

If you ask me, he's been disappointed in love...

KATE seems surprised. Strangely, she'd never considered this possibility.

KATE

It's possible. He's so romantic.

PETER

Yes.

KATE

Guess where he gets that from...

Moment of embarrassment.

The WAITER arrives with the drinks. The WAITER puts the drinks on the table.

WAITER

There we are.

PETER

Thanks.

The WAITER moves off. KATE makes to clink glasses. Then she drinks.

KATE

And what about...?

Pause.

PETER

Beth?

KATE

Yes. How's she taking it?

Pause.

KATE (CONT'D)

You can tell me, you know.

PETER

To start with, she was a bit...

KATE

Hostile, I imagine.

PETER

No, not really. Maybe a bit unsettled. What with the baby... She's already pretty tired. And she hadn't been expecting to be living with a teenager right off the bat...

KATE

I can understand.

PETER

But all in all, it's going pretty well.

KATE

He's not making life difficult for her?

PETER

No. He's behaving himself. He's making an effort. And he likes living with his little brother...

KATE

Great.

PETER

Yes. I think that side of things is going to work.

Suddenly, KATE's cheerful façade begins to crumble.

PETER (CONT'D)

Kate? What's the matter?

KATE

Nothing. Sorry.

PETER

I'm sorry if... I didn't mean to upset you.

KATE

I know.

She seems almost overwhelmed with sorrow.

KATE (CONT'D)

I feel... I feel like a complete failure.

PETER

What are you talking about? Kate? You're not a failure in any way.

KATE

Sorry. It's just... I never imagined he'd leave home. Him too. And go live with you.

PETER

Me neither, you know? He's the one who asked me.

KATE

So the whole problem started with me!

PETER

Of course it didn't...

KATE

Yes! If he doesn't want to live with me any more! And when I call him, he doesn't even pick up.

PETER

You have to give it some time.

She reaches for her handbag and brings out a handkerchief.

KATE

I'm so sorry.

She also takes a photo out of her handbag.

KATE (CONT'D)

A few days ago, I found this photo of him, look... When we took that trip to Corsica... Remember?

PETER nods.

KATE (CONT'D)

Every time I look at it, I'm devastated. We rented that little sailboat... Remember?

PETER

Yes. Of course.

He takes the photo and studies it carefully.

KATE

That's the summer you were teaching him to swim... His face is so open... Like a little sunbeam. Actually, I remembered that's what I used to call him in those days: "My little sunbeam".

PETER

Yes.

KATE

"My little sunbeam"... When you think about it, at that time, there was so much joy in our family. I don't know what happened...

PETER

Come on...

KATE

I loved him so much, you know.

PETER

I know.

40

KATE

And you... I loved you so much,  
Peter. If you knew how much I loved  
you...

She smiles, holding back her tears.

PETER

Come on, don't be upset. You're a  
wonderful mother. It's not your  
fault if... He's going through a  
rough patch, but soon everything  
will be back to normal.

KATE shakes her head, as if she has a presentiment that all  
this will end badly.

PETER (CONT'D)

Yes, it will! Believe me, Kate.  
Everything will be fine.

She tries to smile at him, but it's a sad smile, bathed in  
tears.

41 EXT. NEW YORK STREET DAY 41

PETER's walking through the streets to recover from the  
assault on his feelings.

He stops in front of the display window of a jewelry store.

42 INT. PETER & BETH'S APARTMENT NIGHT 42

PETER opens a bottle of wine and picks out two glasses. He  
puts everything on the table in front of the sofa.

Then, conspicuously, he sets a little box down beside the  
glasses. He's pouring wine into the glasses as BETH appears.  
She's just been putting THEO to bed.

PETER

All right?

BETH

Yes. Finally...

PETER

He's taken his time.

BETH

Yes. I practically fell asleep  
myself.

He hands her a glass of wine.

BETH (CONT'D)

Oh, that's nice...

She sits next to him and kisses him on the cheek.

PETER

Had a good day?

BETH

Nothing special. Went to the pediatrician. Otherwise, we stayed home. What about you?

PETER smiles.

BETH (CONT'D)

What is it?

PETER

Me?

BETH

Yes. Why are you looking so...?

PETER

What?

BETH

Smug.

He smiles again. He indicates the little box he's put in front of her.

BETH (CONT'D)

What's that?

She opens the box. It's earrings.

BETH (CONT'D)

Is this your way of saying sorry?

PETER

It's to thank you.

BETH

What for?

PETER

You know very well.

BETH

They're pretty...

PETER

You know, I'm well aware... I mean, I'm really grateful for how you've handled all this.

42

BETH

Yes, that's what I said. It's your way of saying sorry.

PETER

What I mean is.. I'm lucky you're here.

BETH kisses him.

BETH

Yes, because you're not here much. You're at work all the time.

They're very close on the sofa. At the same time, NICHOLAS comes out of his room.

43

INT. PETER & BETH'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM NIGHT 43

NICHOLAS

Dad? Can I talk to you for a minute?

PETER starts and withdraws from BETH.

PETER

Yes, of course.

NICHOLAS senses he's interrupted them.

NICHOLAS

But I'm disturbing you, aren't I?

He stands up.

PETER

No, no, not at all. Tell me.

NICHOLAS

It's nothing urgent. I just wanted to ask your advice. It can wait... Will you come and see me... afterwards?

PETER

Right.

NICHOLAS

Great. Thanks.

NICHOLAS goes back to his room.

44

44 INT. PETER &amp; BETH'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM NIGHT 44

PETER

Anyway, he looks better, don't you think? He told me he got an A today in math.

BETH

Did he?

PETER

Yes. I'm really pleased. I think he's starting to regain his self-confidence. And he tells me he's been invited to a party.

BETH

That's good.

PETER

Yes. It worries me he's on his own all the time...

BETH

Anyway, it went well.

PETER

What?

BETH

The pediatrician, with Theo.

PETER

Oh? What did she say?

BETH

Same as you... that it's just a "passing phase", that soon he'll be sleeping through... All right. As long as the phase is still going on, I'm going to cook dinner, before I fall asleep right here on the couch.

She goes to the kitchen.

45 INT. PETER &amp; BETH'S APARTMENT, KITCHEN/DINING ROOM NIGHT 45

BETH is taking the plates out. PETER joins her. He seems to be searching for the best way to broach a difficult subject.

PETER

There's something else I wanted to talk to you about... Let me do that.

He takes the plates. But he's obviously concentrating on what it is he wants to say to her...

BETH

What?

PETER

That week we planned to spend on the Cape...

BETH turns round immediately.

BETH

You want to cancel it?

PETER

No, I don't want to cancel it. But I'm thinking... Might not be the best moment.

BETH says nothing.

PETER (CONT'D)

He's just started back to school... And I'm not sure we should be leaving him here on his own.

BETH

Why don't we take him with us?

PETER

He skipped school for weeks, I don't think I should suggest taking him away...

She takes the plates from Peter's hands and goes to the dining-room to put them on the dinner-table. PETER follows her and helps her.

PETER (CONT'D)

I know you're disappointed. But I don't think I have a choice.

BETH

I understand.

PETER

He needs people around him, you know. It's a decisive moment and...

BETH

Peter, I said I understand. It's not a problem. Let's cancel our trip. It's really not important.

PETER

Are you sure?

45

BETH

Yes.

She goes back to the kitchen to take the glasses. PETER follows her. She seems quite closed off from him.

PETER

You're upset with me...

BETH

No, it's just I hadn't imagined things turning out like this.

She goes back to the dinning-room.

46

INT. LAW OFFICE, PETER'S OFFICE DAY

46

PETER's sitting at his desk, pensive, then dials a number. He goes through to voicemail.

PETER

Hello... It's me. I... We haven't spoken for a long time.... I... I hear you've had a... what's the expression? A health problem. I was calling to see how you are. And to tell you... I'm going to be in Washington in a couple of weeks... I thought maybe we could meet... Let me know. Call me.

He hangs up.

47

INT. CLOTHES SHOP DAY

47

NICHOLAS is wearing a jacket and looking at himself in the mirror, dubiously, but enthusiastically encouraged by PETER. The jacket is similar to the one worn by ANDREW's intern.

PETER

Well?

NICHOLAS

I'm not sure.

PETER

It suits you.

NICHOLAS

It's nice of you, but...

PETER

What?

47

NICHOLAS

I'm not sure people my age wear jackets...

PETER

Are you kidding? Everyone's wearing them now.

NICHOLAS

Really?

PETER

Yes! It really suits you. It's french.

PETER seems full of conviction. NICHOLAS looks at himself in the mirror.

48

EXT. NEW YORK STREET DAY

48

They walk down the street, away from the shop. NICHOLAS is wearing the jacket. PETER looks pleased.

PETER

Look at you ! You ought to wear it to that party... When is it again? Saturday, isn't it?

NICHOLAS

You know, I'm not even sure I'm going...

PETER

Why not? You have to go! It's important to see people...

NICHOLAS seems unconvinced. He shrugs.

NICHOLAS

I don't even know how to dance.

PETER stops walking.

PETER

Ah, so that's the problem...

He smiles. NICHOLAS doesn't understand.

NICHOLAS

What?

49

INT. PETER &amp; BETH'S APARTMENT DAY

49

PETER and NICHOLAS step into the apartment.

PETER  
We're home!

BETH appears.

BETH  
Sh... Theo's still asleep...

PETER  
Sorry.

BETH  
Where've you been?

PETER  
You have to teach him to dance...

He turns towards NICHOLAS.

PETER (CONT'D)  
She's the best dancer I know!

BETH  
Me?

PETER nods.

BETH (CONT'D)  
Very funny.

It's obviously not true.

BETH (CONT'D)  
The way you dance, you have the  
nerve to criticize me?

NICHOLAS  
Why? Isn't he a good dancer?

BETH  
Let's just say he has his own  
style.

PETER sits.

PETER  
My unique style.

BETH  
Did you know we met at a wedding?

PETER is embarrassed that she's referred to their meeting in  
front of NICHOLAS.

PETER  
Beth...

BETH

Everyone was dancing and that was my first sight of your father... He was on the floor, doing his famous hip-sway.

NICHOLAS

His what?

BETH stops dead. She can't get over it.

BETH

You don't know his famous hip-sway?

NICHOLAS

No.

PETER

Beth... Better you just teach him to dance. He's going to a party!

BETH

Watch.

She goes to shut the door to the corridor and takes her cellphone.

PETER

What are you doing?

She gets some music on the speaker. Maybe "Happy" by Pharrell Williams.

BETH

Come on, Peter! Aren't you going to show us?

PETER

Is this really a good idea?

BETH nods, pretending to be annoyed.

PETER (CONT'D)

I'm afraid to wake Theo!

BETH shakes her head, still feigning annoyance.

NICHOLAS

Come on, Dad!

PETER

All right. At your own risk. You asked for it!

He gets up and starts dancing to the music. BETH and NICHOLAS burst out laughing.

BETH  
You see why I instantly fell in  
love with him...

NICHOLAS  
Who wouldn't...?

PETER  
I know, I'm irresistible.

PETER exaggerates his movements to make them laugh more.

BETH  
When he starts, everyone else stops  
dancing. He can't help drawing  
attention to himself.

NICHOLAS  
How do you do it?

PETER  
No idea.

NICHOLAS laughs.

PETER (CONT'D)  
Come on. I'll show you. Look...  
Like this... See?

PETER demonstrates the basics of the famous "hip-sway".  
NICHOLAS is trying to follow.

NICHOLAS  
Like this?

BETH  
Oh! No! Not another one?

PETER  
That's it! That's all you need for  
your party!

BETH  
Peter, no!

PETER  
Yes! You'll knock 'em dead! Look at  
him move! There, that's my son!

BETH laughs and decides to come and dance with them. A joyous  
moment of dancing. Little by little, PETER and BETH move  
closer to one another, leaving NICHOLAS to dance on his own.

Suddenly, NICHOLAS breaks off and stops moving. Something has  
totally taken over his thoughts. An intense sadness seems to  
engulf him. He heads towards his room, leaving the others in  
the middle of their dance.

49

PETER (CONT'D)

Nicolas?

BETH goes to turn off the music.

BETH

What's the matter with him?

PETER

I don't know.

BETH

Did we say something?

PETER goes over to NICOLAS's room.

50

EXT. RIVER BANK DAY

50

PETER runs along the river. He stops, out of breath, at the end of one of the piers. He looks at the city, the seagulls, the sun dancing on the water. A moment of tranquillity and beauty.

Suddenly, his cellphone rings.

PETER

Hello?

51

INT. PETER &amp; BETH'S APARTMENT, DINNING ROOM DAY

51

BETH's sitting at the dinning table. She's holding Theo. There's a knife on the table. PETER is facing her.

BETH

It was under his mattress.

PETER sighs deeply.

BETH (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I thought I'd better tell you.

PETER

You think he's still...?

He points at his fore-arm to indicate the cutting.

PETER (CONT'D)

I don't understand. Why does he do it? I thought... he seems to be doing well, doesn't he?

BETH shrugs.

51

PETER (CONT'D)

He's going to school. He's smiling.  
He's... he's better!

BETH

Yes.

PETER

So? Why is he doing this?

BETH

The simplest thing would be to talk  
to him about it. Don't you think?  
And maybe to his therapist...

He tries to smile in response.

BETH (CONT'D)

Ok.

She stands up.

PETER

Going out?

She goes towards the stroller.

BETH

Yes. Get some of that sun. Aren't  
we, little guy?

She puts Theo in the stroller. She can see how worried PETER  
is.

BETH (CONT'D)

Come on, don't worry. He's probably  
still a bit fragile. But you're  
right, he is better, thanks to  
everything you're doing for him.

PETER

Do you think so?

He wants her to say "yes".

52

INT. PETER & BETH'S APARTMENT, BATHROOM DAY

52

PETER's taking a shower, after his run. He's completely lost  
in his thoughts.

53

INT. PETER & BETH'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM DAY

53

PETER's finished getting dressed.

54

54 INT. PETER &amp; BETH'S APARTMENT, KITCHEN DAY 54

PETER is in the kitchen. He is preparing a tea. It's brewing.

He sees the kitchen knives and decides to hide them.

Suddenly, the sound of the front door.

55 INT. PETER &amp; BETH'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM DAY 55

PETER  
Where've you been?

NICHOLAS  
Why?

He takes in his father's expression.

NICHOLAS (CONT'D)  
Is there a problem?

PETER  
Yes.

Pause.

PETER (CONT'D)  
Why have you hidden a knife under  
your mattress?

NICHOLAS  
What?

PETER  
There was a knife under your  
mattress. You know about this? What  
was it doing there?

NICHOLAS  
Nothing.

PETER  
What do you mean, "nothing"?

NICHOLAS  
It's just there. In case.

PETER  
In case of what? What are you  
talking about?

NICHOLAS  
I don't know. If there was a break-  
in...

55

Pause. PETER takes a deep breath. He's not at all convinced by NICHOLAS's explanation.

PETER  
Show me your arm.

NICHOLAS  
What?

PETER tries to be as firm as possible.

PETER  
Show me your arm.

NICHOLAS  
No.

PETER moves towards him and grabs hold of his arm. NICHOLAS tries to stop him.

NICHOLAS (CONT'D)  
Leave me alone.

NICHOLAS gets further away, but PETER sees that there are recent scars.

PETER  
Nicholas...

Pause. PETER is clearly destabilized by the vision of the scars.

PETER (CONT'D)  
Why do you do this?

NICHOLAS shrugs.

PETER (CONT'D)  
I don't want you to hurt yourself.  
Do you understand me?

NICHOLAS  
I don't hurt myself.

PETER  
Look at these scars? That's what I call hurting yourself.

NICHOLAS  
It's the opposite.

PETER  
What do you mean, the opposite?

NICHOLAS  
Nothing.

PETER  
No, explain it to me.

No answer. PETER raises his voice.

PETER (CONT'D)  
Explain it to me, Nicholas!

NICHOLAS is honestly struggling for an explanation.

NICHOLAS  
It... it relieves me.

PETER  
Relieves you of what?

Again, NICHOLAS shrugs. But PETER wants an answer.

PETER (CONT'D)  
It relieves you of what, Nicholas?

NICHOLAS  
When I'm in pain... it's a way to  
channel the pain...

PETER  
But what pain? Nicholas! A way to  
channel what pain?

NICHOLAS lowers his eyes. Still no answer. PETER tries to  
calm down and pull himself together.

PETER (CONT'D)  
I don't want you to do this any  
more. I'm forbidding you to do  
this. Is that clear?

No answer.

PETER (CONT'D)  
Is that clear?

NICHOLAS  
Yes.

PETER  
There are some things in life you  
just don't do.

NICHOLAS  
Was it Beth who found it?

PETER  
Doesn't matter.

NICHOLAS

What's she doing searching through my stuff?

PETER

She's not searching through your stuff! She was kind enough to make your bed. Since you never make it yourself!

NICHOLAS sighs.

PETER (CONT'D)

Well, Nicholas, you took a knife out of the kitchen to...

NICHOLAS

No. At first, I just wanted to have something to defend myself.

PETER

Defend yourself? Defend yourself from what? What are you talking about? You realize this makes no sense at all?

NICHOLAS

Well, you have a gun.

PETER

What?

NICHOLAS

In the laundry room, behind the closet, there's a gun.

PETER

Huh? Yes, but that's... That's different. It's... it was a gift.

NICHOLAS

Who gave you a gun?

PETER clearly doesn't want to go into the details, but he feels obliged to offer some explanation.

PETER

My father. A long time ago. He loved hunting... It's a hunting rifle. See... It's not there so I can "defend myself"...

NICHOLAS

Why did he give you a hunting rifle?

PETER

To... He must have thought I'd like it... That it was something we could do together... That... But, you know, I never used it. I hate hunting. And everything that goes along with it.

NICHOLAS

So why do you keep it?

PETER

Nicholas... This is not what we are talking about.

PETER attempts to calm down and change his approach.

PETER (CONT'D)

I don't understand why you are doing this kind of thing.

NICHOLAS

I know.

PETER

What happened at your last school? This might be the time to tell me about it, don't you think?

No answer.

PETER (CONT'D)

Because something must have happened... Otherwise...

NICHOLAS doesn't answer.

PETER (CONT'D)

If you don't want to talk to me... I hope you talk to your therapist about it?

Pause.

PETER (CONT'D)

This is important, Nicholas.

NICHOLAS seems to say "yes" with his head. PETER approaches his son. He gently takes his arm and looks at his scars.

PETER (CONT'D)

I'm going to get you some disinfectant.

NICHOLAS

No, no... It's just scratches.

55

PETER makes an affectionate gesture.

PETER

You know, when you hurt yourself...  
it's as if you were doing it to me.

NICHOLAS

And when you hurt Mom... you were  
doing it to me.

PETER is caught off-guard and doesn't know what to say.  
NICHOLAS goes, leaving PETER alone with his guilt.

56

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, WASHINGTON D.C. DAY

56

Several people mill about in a conference room. Suddenly,  
BRIAN walks into the room.

BRIAN

Hi, everybody!

Right away, he takes his place at the long table. Everyone  
follows suit.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Sit down. Thanks, everybody, for  
being here... We have the pick of  
the bunch with us today. Steven...

An aside to an assistant.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Could you bring me a coffee?

He turns back to the gathering.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Good. We have a lot to get through,  
and as time is limited, we may as  
well start with the bottom line:  
Any of you planning to sleep during  
the next six months?

Smiles all round.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Nobody? Great. In that case, let's  
get going...

PETER's listening somewhat distractedly. He seems to be  
elsewhere. He's looking out of the window.

57

57 EXT. CORSICA DAY (FLASHBACK)

57

PETER's steering a small boat along the coast of Corsica, with KATE and YOUNG NICHOLAS, who's 6. He's wearing armbands, as he doesn't yet know how to swim. As for KATE, she's wearing a large sun-hat, which she's holding on with one hand so it doesn't blow away. Feeling of wind, waves and freedom.

YOUNG NICHOLAS  
Daddy... are there whales around here?

PETER  
Whales?

YOUNG NICHOLAS  
Yes.

PETER smiles.

PETER  
No, I don't think so.

YOUNG NICHOLAS  
And dolphins?

PETER  
Dolphins, yes. You see them sometimes.

YOUNG NICHOLAS cups a hand over his eyes and examines the horizon. This makes KATE smile. She looks lovingly at PETER.

Suddenly, KATE's hat blows off and falls into the sea.

KATE  
Ah!

YOUNG NICHOLAS shouts:

YOUNG NICHOLAS  
Daddy! Daddy!

He points to the floating hat.

PETER  
What?

YOUNG NICHOLAS  
There! There!

PETER  
Have you seen a dolphin?

YOUNG NICHOLAS  
No! Look!

57

KATE

My hat!

PETER laughs at the general air of panic.

KATE (CONT'D)

Why are you laughing? You need to fish it out! Peter!

YOUNG NICHOLAS

Quick! Daddy! Quick... It's going to sink!

58

EXT. CORSICA DAY (FLASHBACK)

58

The boat has tacked around and is slowly gaining on the hat. PETER's leaning out, trying to reach it with a pole.

He gives it to NICHOLAS.

KATE

It's soaked through...

YOUNG NICHOLAS puts it on his head and clownishly imitates his mother.

YOUNG NICHOLAS

Look at me... This is Mom...

This makes PETER laugh. KATE tickles NICHOLAS.

59

INT. PETER &amp; BETH'S APARTMENT, KITCHEN DAY

59

NICHOLAS opens the fridge. He's looking for something to eat. He can't find anything. Basically, he doesn't know what he wants. He closes the door of the fridge.

60

INT. PETER &amp; BETH'S APARTMENT, THEO'S ROOM DAY

60

NICHOLAS passes in front of the open door to THEO's bedroom. BETH is stretched out on the floor. THEO is on his playmat.

NICHOLAS stops in the doorway.

BETH

Hey... What are you up to?

NICHOLAS

Nothing. I'm having trouble working. What about you?

BETH

We're playing.

60

NICHOLAS looks at his little brother and smiles. He goes to sit down beside them. He seems melancholy.

BETH (CONT'D)

Still thinking about that girl?

NICHOLAS is surprised. How does she know? BETH feels the need to explain.

BETH (CONT'D)

Your dad told me... I mean, he told me you'd finally explained to him what happened... At your old school...

NICHOLAS

What did he tell you?

BETH

Nothing. He just said... I mean, that you'd had this girlfriend and that you'd broken up.

NICHOLAS lowers his eyes.

BETH (CONT'D)

Don't worry. In the end we forget these things.

He smiles at her, a touch sadly. Then he stretches out alongside his little brother.

NICHOLAS

You know, I meant to say... I know you... I mean, you didn't choose to live with me... And I... I do, I appreciate the fact you... That you weren't against my moving in here.

BETH

Why should I be against it? You're Theo's brother. So it's your home too.

NICHOLAS smiles. Unreadable smile.

61

EXT. WASHINGTON D.C. HOUSE DAY

61

The taxi pulls up in front of a large house in a suburb of Washington.

PETER looks at the house, which he hasn't seen for many years.

He pays and gets out of the taxi.

62

62

EXT. WASHINGTON D.C. HOUSE DAY

62

PETER rings the bell. He seems on edge. The door is opened by ANTHONY, 83.

ANTHONY  
You're early.

PETER  
Hello, Dad.

ANTHONY  
Come in.

PETER does so.

63

INT. WASHINGTON D.C. HOUSE, HALLWAY/OFFICE DAY

63

PETER follows ANTHONY, who's heading for his den or office.

ANTHONY  
Something to drink?

PETER  
Why not?

ANTHONY's already pouring two whiskies. PETER steps into the office behind him. He's re-experiencing the very particular atmosphere of this house, and especially this office. There are several hunting trophies on the wall, illustrating one of ANTHONY's passions. There are also a number of photos of ANTHONY with various politicians, including George W. Bush. He's clearly had an A-list career in Washington.

ANTHONY turns to PETER and hands him a glass.

ANTHONY  
So? To what do I owe the honor of this surprise visit?

PETER  
I... No particular reason... I... I was passing through D.C. I wanted to see how you were doing.

ANTHONY is looking at him suspiciously. He doesn't appear to believe there's any action without ulterior motives.

ANTHONY  
Don't listen to the rumors about my health. There's nothing wrong. Just a minor complaint. I've never been fitter!

PETER  
Well, good.

63

ANTHONY

Maria's prepared a little dinner  
for us. Cheers... Duck, how does  
that sound?

PETER acknowledges this and takes a mouthful of his drink.  
Clearly, he has some difficulty knowing how to behave in his  
father's company.

64 INT. PETER &amp; BETH'S APARTMENT, NICHOLAS'S BEDROOM DAY 64

NICHOLAS is bare-chested. He's looking for a sweat-shirt  
among his things. He can't find it.

65 INT. PETER &amp; BETH'S APARTMENT, LAUNDRY ROOM DAY 65

NICHOLAS looks in the linen-basket to see if he can find his  
sweat-shirt.

The washing machine is on.

66 INT. WASHINGTON D.C. HOUSE, DINING ROOM DAY 66

They're in the middle of dinner. ANTHONY's in full flow.  
PETER listens politely, dispassionate, as if he's heard all  
this a hundred times before.

ANTHONY

No, the problem these days is that  
people are scared of everything.  
Just look around you! A bunch of  
sniveling cowards. Nobody ever  
wants to take any kind of a risk.  
That's why the West isn't going to  
last much longer. I've been saying  
it for years and the facts are  
beginning to bear me out. If you're  
looking for energy, courage and  
enterprise, I'm sorry to say this,  
you have to go to Asia... In the  
coming decades, it won't be  
Washington, it'll be Beijing.

MARIA appears. She's serving the food. She offers PETER a  
second helping.

PETER

No, thank you, Maria. It was  
delicious.

MARIA

My pleasure.

She smiles. She moves towards ANTHONY.

ANTHONY

No, thanks.

MARIA leaves the room. ANTHONY pushes his plate away.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

So, what about you? Tell me... I thought you hated DC. What are you doing in this neck of the woods?

PETER

I had a meeting with Brian Hammer.

ANTHONY

Oh?

It seems the referencing of the Senator has some positive effect on ANTHONY. PETER senses this. He derives a strange kind of pride from his desire to impress him.

PETER

He's going to stand in the Primaries.

ANTHONY

Yes, I know.

PETER

And he wants me to help him with his campaign.

ANTHONY

He's offered to take you on his team?

PETER

Yes.

ANTHONY inclines his head to convey "well done, bravo". All the same he seems dubious, knowing his son has always felt ambivalent about politics. Above all, this Senator is not in ANTHONY's party.

PETER (CONT'D)

But I haven't decided if I'm going to accept.

ANTHONY

Why not?

PETER

The problem is, it'll take too much of my time...

ANTHONY

So?

PETER

So it's complicated.

ANTHONY

What's complicated about it?

PETER

It's not a very good time. Nicholas is going through a difficult spell... He's seventeen. He's come to live with me and... He's improving, but I think he's still fragile. I wouldn't want to be away just when...

ANTHONY has started to laugh quietly, which stops PETER short in mid-explanation.

PETER (CONT'D)

What?

ANTHONY

Is this why you came to see me? To tell me what a good dad you are?

PETER

No, I...

ANTHONY

Obviously, it is! You came to show me irrefutable proof of your moral superiority. It's true, isn't it? You came to demonstrate to me that you, you can give up your ambitions to look after your son. As opposed to me, is that it?

PETER

Not at all, you...

ANTHONY

Are you still at it? Really? Blaming me for what happened more than forty years ago. Trying to show me what a model dad you are? What do you want? Applause?

PETER

It's funny you should say that because... The other day... I was thinking again about... The time... When I was Nicholas's age... That's right...

ANTHONY

See.

66

PETER

Mom was ill. I went to see her in the hospital every day after school and sat with her... You never showed up. You were traveling all the time.

ANTHONY

I was working.

PETER

But the week before... Before she died, I ran into Tom... He told me he'd had dinner with you the night before... I didn't even know you were in town. You didn't think it was worth telling us or coming to see her...

ANTHONY

Listen, if it suits you, I can easily take on the role of monster. And bow before your perfection. Yes, you suffered so much! Yes, your daddy wasn't nice to you! Or to your momma! Fine. So what? Don't you think it's time you started growing up? Because, believe me, it's pathetic watching a man of fifty chained to the teenager he once was! If you want my advice, get over it! Get over it, for God's sake!

67

INT. PETER &amp; BETH'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM NIGHT

67

PETER opens his eyes. It's the middle of the night. THEO is crying. It takes PETER a few seconds to remember where he is. He turns to BETH.

BETH

It's ok, I'll go...

She gets up and goes to give THEO his bottle.

PETER stays in bed but doesn't close his eyes.

68

INT. PETER &amp; BETH'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM DAY

68

Saturday evening. BETH is getting ready to go out. They're having dinner with friends this evening. PETER seems remote.

BETH

All right?

68

PETER nods.

BETH (CONT'D)  
Is it a drag going out?

PETER  
No. On the contrary.

He smiles at her and steps into the living-room.

69

INT. PETER & BETH'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM DAY 69

NICHOLAS is watching a cartoon on the T.V. It's a cartoon he knows from childhood. He seems to be enjoying watching it again. He laughs as he eats a bowl of cereal.

PETER watches him for a moment, strangely moved by him. He comes to sit down beside him.

PETER  
You eating cereal?

NICHOLAS  
Yes.

PETER  
Wouldn't you like to do something more exciting...? I don't know, it's Saturday night.

NICHOLAS  
So?

PETER  
Wouldn't you like to see a movie?  
Or meet your friends?

NICHOLAS  
I don't have any friends.

PETER  
Why say that?

NICHOLAS  
Because it's the truth.

PETER sits.

PETER  
You used to have... Michael. You used to see him a lot... And what about that party you told me about?

NICHOLAS  
All right. Dad.

69

PETER

What?

NICHOLAS

Can you stop now?

Pause. PETER watches the cartoon for a while. NICHOLAS laughs, which makes PETER smile.

PETER takes some cereal from the bowl, throws it in the air and catches it in his mouth. They laugh.

70

INT. PETER &amp; BETH'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM DAY 70

BETH appears while they are laughing. She looks in the room for her earrings.

BETH

You haven't seen my earrings, have you? I had them in my hand just now... And they've disappeared...

PETER

Have you looked in the bathroom?

BETH

I've looked everywhere. I don't understand it. I'm losing it.

PETER's cellphone rings.

PETER

Ah, just a minute... Hello? Yes... Yes?

He moves away, out of the room.

BETH

You haven't seen them?

NICHOLAS

What?

BETH

My mother-of-pearl earrings. The ones your father gave me... They were here somewhere a minute ago...

She sounds almost suspicious.

NICHOLAS

No.

NICHOLAS turns off the T.V. and gets up, as if he were trying to avoid the conversation.

70

BETH  
I keep losing things.

NICHOLAS is watching her from a distance.

NICHOLAS  
You changed your dress? That one looks good on you.

BETH  
Well, thank you, that's sweet of you.

NICHOLAS  
No, it's true. You look beautiful. Where are you going?

BETH puts her hair up, looking at herself in the mirror.

BETH  
Nowhere special. Dinner with some friends. Frank, do you know him?

NICHOLAS  
No.

BETH  
I say "nowhere special", but in fact it is pretty special. It's practically the first time we've gone out since Theo was born... A word of advice, if you want to go on having a life, don't have a kid!

NICHOLAS looks at her uncomprehendingly.

BETH (CONT'D)  
I'm joking.

71 INT. PETER & BETH'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN DAY 71

PETER is back in the living-room.

PETER  
All right. Bad news... Sarah's stood us up.

BETH  
What?

PETER  
She just called.

BETH  
What, just now? At the last minute?

PETER

She has a fever... I'm sorry.

NICHOLAS

Who's Sarah?

PETER

The sitter.

BETH

Should I call Jenny?

PETER

I already did. She's not free.

BETH

Great. The one time we were able to go out...

PETER

What should I do? Call Frank?  
Cancel?

NICHOLAS

You want me to look after him?

PETER

You... You think you could handle it?

NICHOLAS

Yes. If it would help...

PETER turns to BETH.

PETER

What do you...?

BETH

No. It's kind of you, but...

PETER

Why not?

BETH

It's really sweet of you, but I think it's better if...

PETER

Are you sure? Because...

BETH

Yes, I'm sure. Call Frank. We'd better cancel.

NICHOLAS

Ok, whatever.

71

NICHOLAS leaves, somewhat disappointed. PETER looks daggers at BETH.

BETH

What?

PETER indicates "nothing".

BETH (CONT'D)

Why are you looking at me like that?

PETER

Why do you think? He made a kind suggestion... I don't know why you refused...

BETH

You don't?

PETER

No. He's his little brother. He can look after him.

BETH

I'm just not sure. He's only a baby and...

PETER

And what? You always see things in such a dark light.

BETH

Better to see things in a dark light than not to see them at all!

PETER

What do you mean?

BETH

Nothing.

She goes toward the kitchen. He follows her.

PETER

Yes, tell me... What am I not seeing?

BETH

Forget it.

PETER

You really believe Nicholas is not capable of looking after his little brother when he's asleep?

BETH

He's... You know very well. He's been depressed. He's still unstable. He's even... I'm sorry if this shocks you... But I'm not trusting my son to...

PETER

To...?

At this moment, NICHOLAS appears in the doorway. He's holding the earrings in his hand. But PETER and BETH aren't aware of his presence.

PETER (CONT'D)

Go on, say it! You're not trusting your son to...

BETH

Stop it!

PETER

Say it.

BETH

He's weird. Don't say he isn't. In fact, he's really weird. The look in his eyes, it's worrying sometimes... He... I mean, let's face it, why can't you see what's there in front of you, he's not right in the head!

Suddenly, BETH becomes aware of NICHOLAS. PETER, seeing BETH's aghast expression, turns and also sees NICHOLAS, who has clearly heard the whole conversation.

PETER

Nicholas... You... What are you...?

NICHOLAS doesn't move.

PETER (CONT'D)

We didn't mean... We were just disappointed we couldn't go out tonight... It's nothing to do with you...

NICHOLAS puts the earrings down on the table.

NICHOLAS

They were out in the hallway.

Then he heads for his room.

PETER

Nicholas...

71

PETER aims a black look at BETH. Then he goes to find NICHOLAS. We stay with BETH.

72

EXT. NEW YORK STREET DAY

72

NICHOLAS walks. He looks tense. Music.

73

INT. KATE'S APARTMENT DAY

73

KATE is coming back from work. She takes off her coat and goes toward her bedroom.

Suddenly, NICHOLAS appears in the doorway of his room. Oddly, KATE starts.

KATE

Nicholas? What are you doing here?  
I mean... You... Are you all right?

74

INT. KATE'S APARTMENT, KITCHEN/DINING ROOM DAY

74

NICHOLAS is sitting at the dinner table. KATE comes from the kitchen with a glass of milk, which NICHOLAS doesn't touch.

KATE

Your dad told me you were happy at  
your new school. Aren't you?

NICHOLAS nods, but not very enthusiastically.

KATE (CONT'D)

Huh? And he told me everything was  
going ok for you at his place...

NICHOLAS

I hoped...

He can't finish his sentence.

NICHOLAS (CONT'D)

But in the end, there's no room for  
me. They find me disturbing more  
than anything else. And he puts so  
much pressure on me.

KATE

Your dad?

NICHOLAS

He doesn't realize it, but he never  
stops talking to me about my school  
work. As if that's all there was to  
life...

KATE

It's normal. He worries about you.

NICHOLAS

No, he doesn't give a shit about me! I mean, about who I really am. He just wants me to succeed like him. The way he has. But I have no desire to be a law student or to become a lawyer. It doesn't interest me.

KATE

You used to dream about being a writer. Are you still writing?

NICHOLAS shrugs.

KATE (CONT'D)

You remind me of my brother. Both of you are artists.

NICHOLAS

I never said that. Anyway, he went into insurance. So thanks for the comparison!

KATE

I always thought he could have done great things. If he'd persevered... And so could you.

NICHOLAS

Anyway, I'm not feeling good over there. I'd rather come back and live here...

KATE tries very hard to conceal her pleasure.

NICHOLAS (CONT'D)

I don't think I'll ever be up to standard.

KATE

What are you talking about? Your father wants the best for you, Nicholas. He loves you. He believes in you. It's just you're very different... And I suspect that at the moment he's also under a lot of pressure. All this business with the Primaries, don't you think?

NICHOLAS shrugs.

KATE (CONT'D)

It's important to him, you know.  
He's been dreaming about doing this  
for years...

NICHOLAS moves away.

NICHOLAS

It's not just that...

NICHOLAS hesitates to confide in her further. KATE pushes him to do so.

NICHOLAS (CONT'D)

I'm not well, Mom.

KATE

Your dad told me you'd broken up  
with a girl.

NICHOLAS

Yes, I know, that's what I told  
him. He didn't understand what was  
wrong. He needed a rational  
explanation. You know what he's  
like... So I told him what he  
wanted to hear. But I never even  
went out with that girl... It's  
just...

His mother looks at him questioningly.

NICHOLAS (CONT'D)

It's just that I'm not made like  
other people. Sometimes I feel I'm  
not made for this life. I can't  
deal with any of it. Even so, I  
try, every day, with all my  
strength, but I can't deal with it.  
I'm in pain, all the time. And I'm  
tired. I'm tired of being in pain.

NICHOLAS weeps.

KATE

Nicholas...

She takes him in her arms.

NICHOLAS

I want it to end, Mom.

KATE is extremely upset.

KATE

Don't say that, my love. You have  
so much ahead of you.

(MORE)

74

KATE (CONT'D)

You have your whole life... So  
don't say that, my little sunbeam.  
Don't say that to your mom.

She caresses him, maternally. He closes his eyes.

75

INT. KATE'S APARTMENT, KITCHEN DAY

75

KATE's in her kitchen, a glass of wine in front of her. She decides to call PETER. She goes through to voicemail.

KATE

Peter, it's me... I just spoke to  
Nicholas. He came by and... Could  
you call me back?

She hangs up. She drinks a mouthful of wine.

76

EXT. PARK BENCH DAY

76

BETH's sitting on a bench. It's sunny. She's talking to her friend JULIA.

JULIA

I know it isn't easy, day after  
day. But you'll see, as soon as you  
get back to work, it'll get easier.

BETH

I hope so.

JULIA

Yes, it will. I remember, it was  
the exact same with Josh... And  
then, gradually...

Suddenly, BETH sees a figure in the distance who looks like NICHOLAS.

JULIA (CONT'D)

What? Who's that?

BETH

Nobody.

The distant figure disappears behind a tree. BETH's on her feet. She could have sworn it was NICHOLAS.

77

INT. PETER &amp; BETH'S APARTMENT DAY

77

NICHOLAS opens the front door. PETER's in the living-room, on the phone. NICHOLAS nods to him and heads for his room.

PETER  
O.K., I'll call you back. I'll call  
you later.

He hangs up.

PETER (CONT'D)  
Nicholas!

NICHOLAS  
Yes?

PETER  
Could you come here for a couple of  
minutes? I'd like to talk to you.

NICHOLAS  
What is it?

PETER  
Sit down.

NICHOLAS rolls his eyes. He sits down. Pause.

PETER (CONT'D)  
We need to talk.

NICHOLAS  
What about?

PETER  
About your school.

Pause.

PETER (CONT'D)  
What's going on?

NICHOLAS  
Nothing special. Why?

PETER  
Nothing special?

NICHOLAS  
No.

PETER is trying to restrain himself.

PETER  
Today you had your practice test,  
right?

NICHOLAS  
Yes.

77

PETER  
How did it go?

NICHOLAS  
Well, I think.

PETER  
Good.

PETER stares at NICHOLAS to see if he'll lower his guard, but NICHOLAS seems completely sincere. This astonishes PETER.

PETER (CONT'D)  
Only, you see, this afternoon, Beth went to the park. And she saw you. I don't know what you were doing, but in any case you weren't at school... So I'm going to ask you one last time and this time I want an answer... What's going on?

NICHOLAS lowers his eyes.

PETER (CONT'D)  
You've started to skip classes again, is that it?

NICHOLAS  
No.

PETER  
Then why weren't you in school today?

NICHOLAS  
Why did she tell you that?

PETER  
That's not the problem.

NICHOLAS  
Yes, it is the problem! She wants to turn us against one another.

PETER  
No, the problem is you're lying to me, Nicholas!

Pause.

PETER (CONT'D)  
Why weren't you at school today?  
I'm listening.

NICHOLAS  
I didn't feel good. I... I couldn't bring myself to go.  
(MORE)

77

NICHOLAS (CONT'D)

I'm under too much pressure because of this test and I... I'm sorry.

PETER

You're sorry?

PETER cannot believe Nicholas has the nerve to lie to his face. He goes to sit down. He seems crushed by the situation. Pause. He tries to stay calm.

PETER (CONT'D)

I called the school. I called them. And you know what they told me? They told me you'd never been back there.

NICHOLAS doesn't dare look his father in the eye.

PETER (CONT'D)

They told me you were there on the first day, last month, and afterwards you never came back. Never. Not once! It seems they got an email from me, saying we'd decided to send you back to your old school.

NICHOLAS says nothing.

PETER (CONT'D)

Nothing to say?

Pause.

PETER (CONT'D)

So you've become a world-class hacker, am I right?

PETER gets up.

PETER (CONT'D)

When I think you had the balls to tell me you were getting As and being invited to parties and... The whole time, you were lying to me!

PETER starts pacing up and down.

PETER (CONT'D)

What have you been doing all these days? Going for walks? Is that it? You...

PETER seems more and more at a loss.

PETER (CONT'D)

We give you a chance to climb back up and what do you do? You do the exact same thing. You lie to everybody. You...

He can't think of what else to say.

PETER (CONT'D)

Explain it to me! What's going on? Are you on drugs?

NICHOLAS smiles.

PETER (CONT'D)

Then explain it to me! I don't know what else to do with you, I'm telling you straight, I just don't know. I've tried to listen to you, to be there for you, to give you strength and confidence, but obviously none of that's any use!

Pause. But PETER now can't stop himself. NICHOLAS bites his nails.

PETER (CONT'D)

You think you can live your life like that? Just doing whatever the hell you feel like? Getting out of school, never taking any responsibility, refusing to grow up! What do you want?

At this point, NICHOLAS raises his eyes and, from now on, stares fixedly and as if defiantly at PETER.

PETER (CONT'D)

What are you going to do with your life? If you're not doing anything? Tell me, what's going to become of you?

No answer.

PETER (CONT'D)

Naturally, you have no answer.

PETER notices NICHOLAS's fixed stare.

PETER (CONT'D)

And stop staring at me like that. What's the idea? Are you trying to intimidate me? That's not going to work, I can tell you right away. Not with me.

(MORE)

77

PETER (CONT'D)

All right, I'm going to explain to you how it's going to be. Starting tomorrow, whether you like it or not, you're going back to school. Is that clear?

NICHOLAS

No.

PETER

Sorry?

NICHOLAS gets up.

NICHOLAS

I'm saying no, I will not go back to school.

NICHOLAS tries to go back to his room, but PETER blocks his way.

PETER

When I was your age, my mother was sick, I wasn't seeing my father any more, I had money problems, but I fought on! I fought on, and believe me, most days it was no joke ! And what's happened to you? What is there in your life that's so dramatic you're not able to go to school like everybody else? Answer me!

NICHOLAS

I can't deal with it.

PETER

I don't even understand what that means. You can't deal with what?

NICHOLAS

Living! I can't deal with living. And it's your fault!

PETER

Sorry?

NICHOLAS

If I'm like this, it's your fault!

PETER

What have I done? What's my fault?

NICHOLAS

You disgust me.

PETER

What did you say?

NICHOLAS

You make all these big speeches about life and work, then you abandon us as if we were pieces of shit!

PETER

What?

NICHOLAS

You think you always do the right thing, but right from the beginning you've basically just been an asshole.

PETER

Take back what you just said. Nicholas, do you hear me? Take back what you just said, now!

NICHOLAS

Asshole!

PETER

Me, an asshole? Me?

NICHOLAS tries to leave, but PETER is holding him back.

PETER (CONT'D)

Haven't I always done everything for you? I stayed with your mom all those years for your sake... So why are you saying this? Why?

NICHOLAS tries to struggle free, but PETER holds on to him.

NICHOLAS

Let me go.

PETER

Tell me why? Is it because I fell in love with another woman? Is that my crime?

PETER's in tears, and he shakes his son more and more violently. He's desperate.

NICHOLAS

Stop it...

77

PETER

How is it any of your business? I  
have the right to reinvent my life!  
Fuck. It's my life! You hear me?  
It's my life!

NICHOLAS falls on the floor. He is terrified. Like a 6-year-old.

PETER is wracked with the emotions he's just expressed and the violence which has swept over him. Pause.

PETER reaches for NICHOLAS's shoulder, as if to pacify him.

PETER (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Nicholas. I... I don't  
know what just happened.

He wants to help him get up, but NICHOLAS snatches his hand violently away and heads for the front door.

PETER (CONT'D)

Nicholas?

NICHOLAS doesn't turn back.

PETER (CONT'D)

Nicholas, please...

NICHOLAS leaves.

78

EXT. NEW YORK STREET DAY

78

Several SHOTS of the city. It's raining. The sun has disappeared.

79

INT. KATE'S OFFICE DAY

79

KATE's in her office talking to two of her colleagues, MARY and SOPHIA.

MARY

So when did you last speak to her?

SOPHIA

Last week! And this morning she  
tells me she's going back to live  
in L.A....

KATE's cellphone rings. She answers, moving away a little as MARY and SOPHIA continue their conversation.

KATE

Hello? Yes...

79

MARY

Doesn't surprise me about her.  
She's not at all an East Coast type  
of person.

KATE

What?

Her colleagues turn towards her.

KATE (CONT'D)

Where?

She takes a bit of paper from her desk and nervously  
scribbles something down.

KATE (CONT'D)

I'm on my way.

She leaves the office in a panic, without even looking at her  
colleagues.

80 INT. KATE'S OFFICE, ELEVATOR DAY 80

She presses anxiously on the elevator button.

KATE

Come on...

Finally the doors open and KATE throws herself into the  
elevator.

She closes her eyes and her lips move in what looks like a  
silent prayer...

81 INT. HOSPITAL, RECEPTION CORRIDOR DAY 81

KATE walks down a corridor. She heads for reception at full  
speed.

82 INT. HOSPITAL, WAITING ROOM CORRIDOR DAY 82

KATE walks down a corridor, trying to orient herself in the  
hospital.

83 INT. HOSPITAL, WAITING ROOM DAY 83

KATE arrives in front of a small waiting room. PETER's  
sitting in there. He gets up when he sees her.

PETER

Kate!

She rushes towards him.

KATE  
Where is he?

PETER  
They're with him. Don't worry.

KATE  
How is he? Have they told you anything?

PETER  
They found him in time.  
Everything's going to be all right.

KATE  
My God... what happened?

PETER  
The doctor's coming to see us.  
They'll explain. Don't worry.

KATE  
My little boy...

PETER  
Come on...

KATE  
But what happened? What did he do it with?

PETER  
A razor.

KATE  
It's my fault. He told me.... He came to see me. And he... He told me he was not feeling good. But I didn't think he would... I thought...

PETER  
Kate, please. Calm down.  
Everything's fine.

KATE  
No, everything is not fine! How can you say that? And why doesn't he have an electric razor?

PETER tries to take her in his arms to calm her down.

PETER  
Come on... Calm down. It's no use getting so upset... Please, Kate.

She makes an effort to calm down. They sit down. A little way off, an elderly woman is watching them, interested and curious.

KATE

How long do we have to wait? How long have you been here?

PETER

Half an hour. They told me they'd be out to see us soon.

KATE

But what happened?

PETER has trouble answering.

PETER

I wasn't there. I was working. It was Beth who found him. In the bathroom. He'd just...

PETER is having trouble containing his emotion.

PETER (CONT'D)

We were lucky. The ambulance arrived very quickly.

He buries his face in his hands, racked with guilt.

PETER (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I wanted so much to help him... And then in the end...

Suddenly, the EMERGENCY ROOM PSYCHIATRIST appears. KATE gets up as soon as she sees her.

PETER (CONT'D)

Ah, doctor...

E.R. PSYCHIATRIST

Good afternoon. I'm Dr. Leiner. I'm looking after your son.

She shakes KATE's hand.

KATE

Where's Nicholas?

E.R. PSYCHIATRIST

Don't worry. He's resting. He's no longer in danger, I assure you.

KATE

Can we see him?

83

E.R. PSYCHIATRIST  
Some of our medical team are still  
meeting with him. So let's give  
them a little space for a moment...  
In the meantime, I'd like to  
discuss the situation with you.

She motions to invite them into her office.

84

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE DAY

84

KATE and PETER step into the office.

E.R. PSYCHIATRIST  
Please sit down...

KATE  
What's happening?

E.R. PSYCHIATRIST  
Your son was treated very quickly.  
And the cut wasn't too deep. It  
should heal well.

KATE  
You're absolutely sure of that?

E.R. PSYCHIATRIST  
Yes. Trust me.

KATE  
Thank God...

KATE sits down.

E.R. PSYCHIATRIST  
But we need to make some  
decisions... I've talked to him a  
little.

KATE  
What did he say?

E.R. PSYCHIATRIST  
He seems frustrated to have woken  
up here. Which is very common in  
this sort of case...

PETER  
Has he said anything? About what  
caused him to...

E.R. PSYCHIATRIST  
You know, we're very used to these  
situations.

(MORE)

E.R. PSYCHIATRIST (CONT'D)

And I think it could be important for Nicholas to spend some time under observation.

KATE

Under observation?

PETER

You mean...

E.R. PSYCHIATRIST

I just checked and there is a vacancy in our facility.

KATE

What ? I mean... You just told us he wasn't in danger.

E.R. PSYCHIATRIST

What we want is for him to acquire an awareness of what he's done. His tendency at the moment is to minimize it somewhat, which seems to me dangerous. We wouldn't want him to try it again.

PETER

But how long would he need to stay?

E.R. PSYCHIATRIST

What's important is for us to be able to monitor and treat him. Then there'll be regular meetings with the In-Patient Psychiatrist and Nicholas, so we can all assess his progress...

KATE

This is a nightmare.

E.R. PSYCHIATRIST

Don't worry, he won't be on his own. We have a whole department that specializes in treating young people and adolescents.... So there'll be a medical team as well as the other patients. There are all kinds of activities for them to be involved in and Nicholas will be under very close supervision.

KATE

I'd like to see him, doctor.

A MALE NURSE knocks and puts his head round the door.

84

E.R. PSYCHIATRIST  
Please excuse me for a minute.

She moves away, exchanging a few words with the NURSE in the corridor. PETER and KATE remain silent, absorbing the shock. PETER takes KATE's hand.

The PSYCHIATRIST comes back to them.

E.R. PSYCHIATRIST (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry, I'm needed upstairs. A social worker will be in to help you with the paperwork for Nicholas to be admitted. They can answer any further questions at this stage. All right?

PETER and KATE don't know how to respond.

E.R. PSYCHIATRIST (CONT'D)  
Please don't worry, finally he's in very good hands.

85 INT. PETER & BETH'S APARTMENT DAY 85

BETH is waiting for PETER to come back

The door opens. PETER appears, but remains on the threshold

They exchange a pregnant look. She's aware of PETER's suffering.

86 INT. PETER & BETH'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM NIGHT 86

The middle of the night. BETH is asleep. PETER is sitting on the edge of the bed. He can't sleep.

87 EXT. CORSICA DAY (FLASHBACK) 87

PETER and YOUNG NICHOLAS are crouching on the beach, gathering pebbles.

YOUNG NICHOLAS points out a black pebble, stained with little yellow marks.

YOUNG NICHOLAS  
What about that one?

PETER studies it carefully.

PETER  
That's a "constellation". It's like you can see stars in it.

YOUNG NICHOLAS  
Is it rare?

PETER  
Pretty rare.

YOUNG NICHOLAS  
And that one?

YOUNG NICHOLAS points out another pebble. PETER looks at it carefully.

PETER  
That one? That's a "Saturn". See,  
it has like rings round it...

Suddenly, KATE's voice is heard in the distance.

KATE  
Peter!

PETER sees her. She's wearing her big hat. She's aboard the sailboat, anchored a few meters out from the beach. She's waiting for them and waves to them.

PETER  
Ah, I think Mom's getting  
impatient... Shall we go back?

YOUNG NICHOLAS  
Wait, Daddy.

YOUNG NICHOLAS hands him one of his armbands, which has deflated, for him to blow up. PETER breathes into it...

PETER  
Ah... It's split...

YOUNG NICHOLAS  
What are we going to do?

PETER  
We'll have to swim...

YOUNG NICHOLAS  
I can't! I'm only six and a half!

This makes PETER smile.

PETER  
You're right. Just exactly the  
right time to learn. Come on...

PETER starts walking towards the sea. Then he turns back. YOUNG NICHOLAS hasn't moved an inch. He'd like to, but he's scared. PETER softens and reaches out a hand.

87

PETER (CONT'D)  
Come on, shrimp...

88 INT. LAW OFFICE, PETER'S OFFICE DAY 88

PETER's sitting in his office. He's pensive, not focusing on his work.

VOICE  
So what have you decided?

PETER realizes JESSICA is standing in front of him with his schedule for the week.

PETER  
Mm?

JESSICA  
Should I move them to Monday morning? Depends what time you're expecting to leave for DC...

PETER  
Next Monday? No, I can't. I... I'm going to have to... I mean, I'm going to have to stay in New York.

JESSICA  
O.K. So I'll cancel Washington? Should I let them know.

PETER  
I'd like you to. Thanks.

JESSICA finds this decision surprising. She knows it's an important meeting. But she knows not to insist and smiles kindly at him.

89 INT. KATE'S APARTMENT, NICHOLAS'S BEDROOM DAY 89

KATE is sitting on NICHOLAS's bed. She's holding her cellphone. Eventually, she decides to call PETER.

In the following conversation, the CAMERA ALTERNATES between PETER and KATE.

90 INT. PETER'S OFFICE/KATE'S APARTMENT DAY 90

PETER's working. He answers the phone.

KATE  
Hey... It's me. Can we talk?

PETER

Sure. Everything alright?

KATE

I've just had a call from Dr Harris, and... I wanted to discuss it with you.

PETER

Is there a problem?

KATE

He thinks it might be better if we didn't go and see Nicholas for a few days.

PETER

What?

He stands.

KATE

I know. But it seems Nicholas is having some trouble accepting the treatment. They've had long discussions with him to try to understand why he... Seems he's talking a lot about the divorce, about your new life, about the tension between us... And he thinks, Dr Harris thinks, it might help them if we left them in peace for a few days...

Pause. PETER turns towards the big bay window and contemplates the cityscape.

KATE (CONT'D)

Are you there?

PETER

Yes.

KATE

He says it would help give everyone a bit of perspective... take some pressure off...

PETER

He can't stop us seeing Nicholas!

KATE

He's asking, not demanding. There's still our meeting on Monday, to take stock, but in the meantime, he'd like us to...

90

Pause.

KATE (CONT'D)  
 I know it's difficult. For me, as well, you know... But maybe we ought to trust them... Don't you think?

Pause.

KATE (CONT'D)  
 Peter?

Pause.

KATE (CONT'D)  
 Peter?

PETER stares into the void, dazed and crushed by guilt and grief.

91 INT. LAW OFFICE, PETER'S OFFICE, ELEVATOR DAY 91

PETER in the elevator. Doors are closing on him.

92 INT. PETER & BETH'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM DAY 92

It is morning. BETH is packing. She's holding THEO. She looks sad.

93 INT. PETER & BETH'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM DAY 93

CLOSE-UP of PETER. He's lost in thought. He doesn't look as if he's slept much. BETH appears. There's a palpable tension between them.

PETER  
 Ready?

BETH  
 Yes.

PETER  
 What time's the plane?

BETH  
 I've called a cab. It'll be here in five minutes.

PETER  
 I'll help you down with the suitcase.

BETH

No, no. It's O.K.

She crosses the room giving him a black look and goes to collect the stroller. She puts THEO in it.

PETER

Listen, I'm sorry about last night... I guess I had a bit too much to drink...

BETH

I don't understand why we have to fight like that...

PETER

I know. It's my fault. I'm sorry.

He gets closer and makes an affectionate gesture.

BETH

Why can't you come with us?

PETER

I'm sorry, Beth, I can't. I don't feel like going to the beach, knowing he's in there...

BETH

Just for two days... You look terrible. There's nothing for you to do here.

PETER

I can't...

BETH

When is he coming out?

PETER

I don't know. I'll know more on Monday.

BETH

And then?

Brief pause. PETER doesn't have an answer. He goes to the window.

BETH (CONT'D)

Why are you refusing to let him go back to his mom's? I mean, if that's what he wants...

PETER

I didn't say I was refusing. It's just... it won't solve the problem.

(MORE)

93

PETER (CONT'D)

And then, I don't know... After everything that's happened... It would be such a failure...

BETH

For him or for you?

Pause.

PETER

I hope I can be a better father to Theo.

BETH

Stop all this, Peter! You're a very good father.

PETER raises his eyebrows. He's not convinced. He looks out of the window.

PETER

What makes me sad is to have to play a part I hate with everything in me. These last few weeks, I keep catching myself saying things... Exactly the same things my father used to say to me when I was young... Things which made me genuinely hate him. And now it's my turn. Makes me think I've wound up being just like him.

BETH

What kind of things?

PETER

"What are you going to do with your life?" or "When I was your age I did this or I did that" or "What are we going to do with you?" If you knew how ashamed it makes me feel...

BETH receives a text.

BETH

Right. We have to go.

He turns towards her.

PETER

Before you do, tell me you forgive me for yesterday.

BETH

I'd really like us to stop fighting like that.

PETER

Me too.

BETH

These last weeks have been really...

PETER

I know.

BETH

No, you don't know! You're not here. You're working all day, but I'm here, on my own, and...

PETER

No, you're not on your own.

BETH

Yes, I am! And I'm tired. And there's Theo as well. Your other son. And he needs you too...

PETER

Beth, please. Let's not start again.

Pause. BETH tries to calm down.

BETH

All right. I'll call you when we get there, O.K.?

BETH goes to fetch her suitcase. He catches her hand as she passes. She gives him a sad smile and frees herself.

PETER approaches the stroller. He smiles at THEO. Then he picks him up.

PETER

Come on, little man. Give me a hug... I'm not going to see you for a week. And I'm going to miss you.

He hugs him very tight.

PETER (CONT'D)

You're going to discover the sea... You'll see how big and beautiful it is... I'm sorry I can't be with you... I really have to stay here... Do you understand? But you'll tell me all about it, O.K? You'll tell me, little man?

BETH looks at them for a moment, fond and melancholy.

95

95

EXT. NEW YORK STREET, HOSPITAL DAY

95

Establishing shot of the hospital.

96

OMITTED

96

97

INT. HOSPITAL, MEETING ROOM DAY

97

PETER and KATE sit in the meeting-room, where several different-colored chairs have been arranged in a circle.

Suddenly, a MALE NURSE and NICHOLAS appear.

PETER and KATE stand. NICHOLAS throws himself into his mother's arms.

NICHOLAS

Mom!

KATE

Sweetheart...

PETER joins them.

NICHOLAS

I've missed you so much!

KATE

We've missed you.

NICHOLAS

I feel like I haven't seen you for months.

PETER

We're here now. We're here.

All three of them embrace. The NURSE interrupts their reunion.

NURSE

Nicholas? I'm going to leave you alone with your Mom and Dad for five minutes, like you asked me to... And while that's happening, I'm going to look for the doctor.

NICHOLAS nods.

NURSE (CONT'D)

Ok?

NICHOLAS

Yes.

The NURSE goes out.

PETER

How are you?

NICHOLAS starts talking fast, as if he only has a few minutes to explain the situation to them.

NICHOLAS

It's horrible. You have to get me out of here...

PETER

Don't worry...

NICHOLAS

You absolutely have to get me out of here. Promise me?

KATE

What's wrong?

NICHOLAS

It's been terrible, Mom. The worst week of my life. I'm too sensitive for a place like this... I swear to you, it's hell. You can't leave me in hell.

PETER

That's what we're here for, to discuss it with the doctor.

NICHOLAS

He's an asshole. He doesn't understand anything. He stuffs me full of medication, but he doesn't understand anything about what's going on in my head. He thinks I'm ill. He told me I was going to have to stay here for weeks and weeks... But I'm telling you, I can't, I won't be able to take it... I'll crack up... You know what I'm like... I'm not just saying these things... I feel much worse here than I do at home... I need you. You have to take me back home. Please, Dad, please, Mom, I'm begging you.

PETER and KATE are unsettled by NICHOLAS's nervous state.

PETER

Calm down, son. We'll talk to the doctor.

97

KATE  
We're here. We're with you,  
sweetheart...

NICHOLAS smiles.

NICHOLAS  
I'm so happy to see you.

The DOCTOR knocks on the door and comes in, followed by the NURSE.

98

INT. HOSPITAL, MEETING ROOM DAY

98

DOCTOR  
Hi, good afternoon...

KATE  
Hello, Doctor Harris.

They shake hands.

DOCTOR  
Ok... Why don't we all sit down ?  
Sit by me, please, Nicholas.

This places NICHOLAS opposite rather than next to his parents.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)  
I'm going to ask Michael, who's  
been looking after Nicholas, to sit  
in with us, if you don't mind...

The NURSE closes the door and comes to sit close to NICHOLAS.  
NICHOLAS starts biting his nails.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)  
Great. Now... I guess Nicholas has  
told you he wants to leave the  
hospital...

PETER  
Yes.

DOCTOR  
Yeah, he's said that to me too. I  
understand these last few days have  
been tough on him.

KATE  
They really have been, why is that?

DOCTOR  
We often get this reaction during  
the first week.

NICHOLAS

I don't want to stay here.

DOCTOR

I understand you want to go home, Nicholas. I really do. But it's not something I'd be able to recommend.

NICHOLAS turns to his parents.

NICHOLAS

You see...

PETER

Why not?

DOCTOR

Nicholas is suffering from acute depression. I think it would be safer for him to stay in the hospital.

NICHOLAS

No. I'm better. I just want to come back home. There isn't going to be a problem. I promise.

DOCTOR

I know that's what you believe, Nicholas, but in my experience...

NICHOLAS stands up. The NURSE also stands up, as if prepared to contain an outbreak of violence on NICHOLAS's part.

NICHOLAS

You see, he knows how I'm feeling better than I do!

PETER

Calm down, Nicholas.

NICHOLAS

I am calm. It's this moron who doesn't understand anything.

KATE

Nicholas, please.

Nicholas sits down. So does the nurse. Tense pause.

PETER

What do you suggest?

DOCTOR

Essentially, we just need some more time.

(MORE)

98

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Suicidal impulses : they're really  
difficult to identify, even for the  
patient.

(MORE)

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

But we can't pretend they don't exist. Second attempts are very common...

NICHOLAS is shaking his head. As far as he is concerned, the DOCTOR is completely missing the point.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

I think Nicholas is still suffering from a certain disconnect from reality, which is causing him all kinds of anxieties. Which we can treat. We just have to stabilize him first - and then we can start thinking about when we can let him go.

KATE

And when will that be?

NICHOLAS turns to his mother, imploring her:

NICHOLAS

Mom...

DOCTOR

See, Nicholas, right now you need looking after. You need the whole medical team, doctors, therapists and project supervisors...

NICHOLAS

You think you're going to cure me with a pottery class?

DOCTOR

It contributes to the process, yes.

NICHOLAS

It's a bunch of crap!

KATE

Nicholas! Calm down, please.

PETER

Maybe it's for your own good if...

NICHOLAS

My own good?

NICHOLAS tries to calm down. He knows he has to change his approach in order to convince his parents.

NICHOLAS (CONT'D)

How can I get better if I'm surrounded by people who are much sicker than I am?

(MORE)

NICHOLAS (CONT'D)

I've been thinking about this, you know... About my life... All these hours doing nothing... And I'm not the same any more... I've grown up all of a sudden. I've understood about things... Things I won't do any more...

NICHOLAS puts all his energy into trying to be convincing in front of his parents.

NICHOLAS (CONT'D)

Being here has been like an electric shock. And now, I feel I'm ready to return to normal life. I feel I can go back to school... I feel it! You got to trust me. You got to take me out of here. Otherwise, I'm going under. I mean it. I can't take this...

KATE looks at PETER. Does he feel like she feels? NICHOLAS senses his father may also be changing his mind.

NICHOLAS (CONT'D)

Dad... You understand me, I know you do. You always have. But here, they don't. I'm begging you, Dad. Don't abandon me.

Pause. PETER looks at KATE ; then, he turns to the DOCTOR.

PETER

What would be the procedure for taking him out?

NICHOLAS smiles, profoundly relieved.

The DOCTOR, for his part, seems rather annoyed.

DOCTOR

As long as he's under-age, Nicholas is your responsibility. And this is your decision. But please listen very seriously to what I'm telling you : your son is not in a state to leave here. All you have to do is sign the papers and he can go home... But it's my professional opinion, you'd be taking a genuine risk.

NICHOLAS

What risk?

DOCTOR

A risk I'd never take with my own son...

NICHOLAS is becoming increasingly nervous, as he sees his parents may be changing sides.

NICHOLAS

You can't force me to stay here!

DOCTOR

Well, you know, technically, I could. But I'd have to get a judge to agree and I really don't want to have to do that. I'd rather help your parents to make the right decision.

NICHOLAS

Dad... Mom...

DOCTOR

Believe me, I know this isn't easy for you. Especially here in front of your son... But Nicholas needs treatment. And that's not part of your role, as parents. It's a job for a psychiatrist.

NICHOLAS

Dad, I'm not ill...

DOCTOR

If we make the right decision together, Nicholas will be able to come back to you soon in much better health and lead a normal life. But make no mistake. The stakes couldn't be higher.

NICHOLAS

Mom... I want to go home.

KATE

I know, sweetheart, I... Peter? What should...? Say something.

NICHOLAS

Don't leave me here... I'm begging you. I need you...

DOCTOR

OK.

NICHOLAS

I swear to you I understand now.  
You have to give me a second  
chance. It was a cry for help...  
I'm sorry about it with all my  
heart... I needed you to understand  
my pain... But I'll never do it  
again. I swear to you...

DOCTOR

I think your parents have heard  
your arguments, Nicholas.

NICHOLAS

Please...

DOCTOR

Now, I'm going to have to ask you  
to make a decision.

PETER

Now?

DOCTOR

Yes. Nicholas has to understand  
that you support the medical team.

NICHOLAS

Dad...

PETER still doesn't say anything; he's tortured by this  
impossible decision.

DOCTOR

Don't feel guilty... This is not  
about how much you love your son.  
It's about protecting him. In these  
circumstances, love is not enough.  
Love will not be enough.

NICHOLAS

Dad...

DOCTOR

It's lunchtime, Nicholas. Michael's  
going to take you up to the  
cafeteria.

The NURSE stands up.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

But first I think it's important  
your parents make their decision in  
front of you. It'll help you accept  
your treatment.

NICHOLAS

Mom?

Brief pause. She looks at PETER.

NICHOLAS (CONT'D)

Dad, take me home. I'm begging you,  
Dad...

PETER closes his eyes. He's made his decision. He finally brings himself to express it.

PETER

I'm sorry, Nicholas.

NICHOLAS jumps up, full of pain and rebelliousness.

NICHOLAS

No, Dad! You can't do that to me!  
Not you! Dad! Not you!

The NURSE is trying to control him. The lines may overlap.

NURSE

Nicholas!

NICHOLAS pushes the NURSE away, violently.

NICHOLAS

What did I ever do to you?

The NURSE tries again to control him.

NURSE

Just calm down!

The NURSE tries to lead NICHOLAS away, but he's struggling.

NICHOLAS

Don't touch me! Dad!

DOCTOR

Nicholas, calm down!

KATE

Peter, do something!

PETER

Just a minute!

NICHOLAS

Dad, help!

DOCTOR

Nicholas... Say goodbye to your  
parents.

98

MICHAEL is trying to lead NICHOLAS out of the room.

NURSE  
Calm down! Please!

PETER  
Nicholas!

NICHOLAS  
Dad!

NURSE  
Careful! You'll hurt yourself.

DOCTOR  
Calm down, Nicholas.

NICHOLAS  
Help!

KATE  
Peter...

PETER  
Stop, you're hurting him!

DOCTOR  
Please, Mr. Miller!

NICHOLAS  
Mom! Dad!

NURSE  
Come on, please, come with me!

NICHOLAS  
Dad!

The NURSE leads NICHOLAS away by force and makes him leave the room.

NURSE  
Come on!

KATE and PETER are paralyzed with suffering.

NICHOLAS  
Dad! Dad! Dad!

99

INT. HOSPITAL, FOYER DAY

99

PETER and KATE are leaving the hospital in silence. Suddenly, PETER stops. KATE takes a few more steps before realizing that PETER is rooted to the spot.

99

She turns back to him and looks at him questioningly. They're incapable of leaving their child "in hell". At the same moment, they both seem to share the same conclusion.

100 INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE DAY 100

PETER signs the papers under the resigned eye of the DOCTOR. KATE takes his hand.

101 INT. TAXI DAY 101

PETER and KATE are in a taxi with NICHOLAS. He's rested his head on his mother's shoulder, like a child. He's smiling as KATE runs a hand through his hair. Everyone looks extremely relieved, though still in shock.

102 INT. PETER & BETH'S APARTMENT, KITCHEN DAY 102

NICHOLAS is on his own in the kitchen. He puts the kettle on and starts methodically preparing tea.

103 INT. PETER & BETH'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM DAY 103

PETER

All right?

KATE

I hope we made the right decision.

PETER lowers his voice so as not to be heard by NICHOLAS.

PETER

He said it was a cry for help... We have to trust him. That's important.

KATE

Yes...

PETER

And if he doesn't improve over the next few days, we can always take him back. But in the meantime, he's better off here.

She smiles at him. Nicholas appears.

NICHOLAS

It's ready in one minute...

He leaves the room toward the corridor.

KATE

How do you see things? I mean...  
Down the line...

PETER stands and has a look towards the corridor to check where Nicholas went to.

PETER

Seems a little optimistic to hope he'll go back to school... It's May already... If you ask me, the best thing would be for him to get his strength back and quietly start again next school year...

KATE

But what's he going to do all day?  
He can't be left on his own.

He sits in front of her.

PETER

Maybe... he could go back to live with you, if this is what he wants... And during the day, I could take him to the office. To work. I mean, as an intern.

We hear the sound of the kettle from the kitchen, underlining NICHOLAS's absence.

KATE

You think that would interest him?

PETER

In any case, he'd learn a few new things. And I'd be there.

KATE

With all the work you have going on?

Nicholas reappears from the corridor and goes to the kitchen.

PETER

I'm going to turn down Brian's offer.

KATE

Seriously?

PETER

Yes. I don't give a shit about politics! I want to concentrate on what really counts. And for me, what really counts is to be here for Nicholas.

103

KATE's looking at him.

104

INT. PETER & BETH'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM DAY

104

NICHOLAS steps into the living-room carrying a tray.

NICHOLAS

Here we are...

PETER

Thanks.

KATE notices there are only two cups.

KATE

Aren't you joining us?

NICHOLAS

No, I made myself a coffee. I needed to wake up. Sugar?

KATE

No, thanks.

NICHOLAS

Dad?

PETER shakes his head.

KATE

How are you feeling?

NICHOLAS

So happy to be here. With you.

PETER

So are we.

KATE

Peter, you'll have to give me his prescription.

PETER stands and goes toward his coat to take the prescription.

KATE (CONT'D)

Then I can go and pick up his medication. I was thinking of going to a movie... If you want we could go together?

NICHOLAS

Why not? But I'd like to take a shower first. The ones in there were so dirty...

104

PETER gets closer and gives KATE the prescription.

NICHOLAS (CONT'D)

I've been dreaming about having a shower all week. If that's alright.

PETER

Yes. Sure.

KATE laughs.

NICHOLAS

What?

PETER starts laughing as well.

NICHOLAS (CONT'D)

Why are you laughing? I smell bad, is that it?

PETER

No, no...

NICHOLAS watches them laughing. He looks happy. Pause.

NICHOLAS

I like seeing you together. It's been a long time. I mean, since the three of us were all together...

KATE

That's true.

NICHOLAS

It's like the good old days...

A moment of hiatus, inhibited, but also pleasurable. They're all together at last. Is this what NICHOLAS has been trying to achieve from the start?

NICHOLAS (CONT'D)

Right. I'll take a shower...

NICHOLAS stands.

KATE

See you soon. I'll wait for you.

NICHOLAS is about to leave, but he turns back to them.

NICHOLAS

I just wanted to say... I'm really sorry about everything... I know you don't deserve it. I'd like to ask you to forgive me. And I wanted to tell you that I love you.

PETER

And we love you. Go on, off you go.  
We'll be waiting for you.

NICHOLAS smiles at them and leaves.

PETER and KATE look at each other. They're sharing the same feeling: they've rediscovered the sweet and grateful child they knew for years. KATE smiles.

KATE

How about that?

PETER raises his eyes to the skies, as if to say "tell me about it".

He sits close to her.

KATE (CONT'D)

If you're not doing anything today,  
why don't you come to the movie  
with us? I'm sure it would make  
Nicholas happy...

PETER

I don't know. What were you  
planning to see?

KATE

You remember the time... we used to  
go to the movies in the middle of  
the afternoon... We used to tell  
everyone we had very important  
meetings and then we'd secretly  
meet at the Angelika...

PETER

Yes.

KATE

I used to love that. It felt like  
playing hookey...

The memory makes PETER smile.

KATE (CONT'D)

It was so long ago.

Pause.

KATE (CONT'D)

Go on... Come with us.

She moves closer to him. It's years since they've been so close to one another.

104

KATE (CONT'D)  
Come with us today...

PETER's on the verge of agreeing. KATE's voice is almost a whisper.

KATE (CONT'D)  
Don't you want to?

Pause. PETER is about to answer...

Suddenly, there's a detonation. They have a fraction of a second of dread before they react. And they throw themselves towards the laundry room.

105

INT. PETER & BETH'S APARTMENT, CORRIDOR DAY 105

The CAMERA keeps its distance. The inside of the laundry room is not visible.

PETER arrives at the doorway to the laundry room : it's clear his son is on the floor. He is gripped with dread. A vision of horror. KATE throws herself into the laundry room and drops to the floor to try to revive him.

Their voices are almost covered by calm MUSIC which seems to play against the panic and horror of the scene: possibly Fauré's "*Pie Jesu*".

KATE  
Nicholas! Nicholas! No, oh no... Oh  
no... Nicholas...

KATE screams at PETER to go and find some help.

KATE (CONT'D)  
Call somebody... Peter!

PETER goes running off to find his cellphone.

KATE (CONT'D)  
Quick! Hurry up! Oh, my God... My  
God, no... Not my little boy...  
Peter!

PETER returns at once, his phone stuck to his ear, waiting for the emergency services to answer. General air of panic.

KATE (CONT'D)  
Nicholas... Open your eyes... Here.  
Stay with me...

106

106 EXT. CORSICA DAY (FLASHBACK)

106

As the MUSIC continues, we are back in the South of France. PETER and YOUNG NICHOLAS are in the sea, a few feet from the beach. PETER is teaching NICHOLAS to swim.

PETER

Look... like this... watch how I do it...

PETER shows him the arm movements above the water and YOUNG NICHOLAS imitates him.

PETER (CONT'D)

Like this... That's it... You're in your depth. Don't worry. Stretch out. That's it. Like that... Look, I'm holding you. Nothing to be afraid of. That's it. And now, do the movements... Like I showed you. Go on... Great! Again... Again... Terrific. And now come to me! Come on! Come to me...

PETER's moving backwards as YOUNG NICHOLAS comes closer. YOUNG NICHOLAS is watching him intently. You can feel the magnitude of the effort he's making to reach PETER. It's in his father's eyes that he's finding the necessary strength for this attempt.

PETER (CONT'D)

Come on.. Come on... That's it, there you are! Terrific! Well done! Well done!

YOUNG NICHOLAS

Daddy...

PETER

Go on, keep going... Keep going.

YOUNG NICHOLAS

Daddy... I'm swimming...

PETER

Go on, keep going. Well done, what a big boy...

YOUNG NICHOLAS

I'm swimming, Daddy...

Now YOUNG NICHOLAS reaches his father, who takes him in his arms and utters a cry of victory.

107

107 EXT. CORSICA DAY (FLASHBACK)

107

Now PETER and YOUNG NICHOLAS are swimming together, one in front of the other, towards the boat. KATE is watching the spectacle, slightly anxiously.

KATE

Be careful!

PETER

Nearly there...

YOUNG NICHOLAS

Daddy... Wait... I can't do it any more...

PETER waits for him. YOUNG NICHOLAS clings on to his shoulders. PETER continues swimming towards the boat. YOUNG NICHOLAS, stuck on to him, lets himself be carried. He closes his eyes, his face resting on his father's shoulder.

FADE TO BLACK. The MUSIC ends.

108 INT. PETER &amp; BETH'S NEW APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM DAY 108

Three years later. PETER is dressing the table. He stops. He takes a deep breath. BETH appears.

BETH

All right?

PETER

Yes.

BETH

I just have time to give Theo his bath.

PETER

You want me to do it?

BETH

No, no, I'll take care of it.

She calls out to THEO, who's no doubt playing in his room.

BETH (CONT'D)

Theo? Bath-time!

She turns back to PETER.

BETH (CONT'D)

Are you pleased they're coming to dinner?

108

PETER

Very pleased. What about you?

BETH

Have you noticed? Look what I found.

She shows him her earrings, the ones PETER gave her years ago.

PETER

Ah...

BETH

I thought they'd go well with my dress.

PETER smiles at her.

BETH (CONT'D)

Right. See you in a minute. Can I leave the rest to you?

PETER nods. She goes off to THEO's room.

BETH (CONT'D)

Theo? Are you ready?

109 INT. PETER & BETH'S NEW APARTMENT, KITCHEN DAY 109

PETER opens a bottle of wine. He opens the oven to check on the roast chicken. He goes back to the dining room.

110 INT. PETER & BETH'S NEW APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM DAY 110

PETER puts the bottle of wine on the dining-room table, which is set for four people. He puts some music on in anticipation of the guests' arrival and has a look through the window.

Suddenly, the bell rings. PETER's surprised. He checks his watch. They're early. He goes to open the door. It's NICHOLAS.

He's now 21. He's made an obvious effort to look presentable, he's wearing a jacket. A radiant maturity flows from him, as if all his ghosts have been left behind. Immediately, PETER is smiling at him.

PETER

Here already?

NICHOLAS

Sorry, I'm a bit early.

110

PETER

Come in... come in... Are you on your own?

NICHOLAS

She's on her way. She had to go see her mother first...

PETER

No problem. Come in.

He embraces him.

PETER (CONT'D)

How are you? You look well!

NICHOLAS

Very good thanks. What about you?

PETER

You got back this morning?

NICHOLAS

Yes. It's been months since I set foot in New York. I was starting to miss it.

PETER

How's Toronto? All going well?

NICHOLAS

Great. I love the city. You know I've decided to move in with Lena. Did Mom tell you?

PETER

Oh, really?

NICHOLAS

We already spend every evening either at her place or at mine... So...

PETER

Congratulations! That's good news!

NICHOLAS

Yes, I'm looking forward to introducing her to you, you know...

PETER

And I'm looking forward to meeting her. After all this time you've been telling me about her...

NICHOLAS

You'll see, she's wonderful. I'm crazy about her. How's Theo? Is he here?

PETER

He's just having his bath.

NICHOLAS

We got him a gift. But Lena wants to give it to him...

PETER

That's nice.

NICHOLAS seems hesitant.

NICHOLAS

I have a gift for you too.

PETER

For me?

NICHOLAS

Actually, it's more something I wanted to tell you about...

Pause. PETER looks slightly anxious. NICHOLAS bursts out laughing.

NICHOLAS (CONT'D)

You should see your face! Don't worry! I'm not here to tell you I'm going to be a father!

PETER

Never crossed my mind...

NICHOLAS

No, it's something more... Something about me that I wanted you to be the first to know.

PETER

Tell me.

NICHOLAS

All right. You know, besides going to college, there was always something else I loved: writing. And recently, I've spent some time... Especially since I've been living in Toronto. Everything seems easier for me up there. In short...

He hands him a book.

110

NICHOLAS (CONT'D)

Here it is.

PETER

What's this?

NICHOLAS

My first novel.

PETER is stunned.

PETER

It... you wrote this?

NICHOLAS

I didn't want to tell anyone about it, out of superstition. But now it actually exists... I wanted you to be the first person to have it.

PETER reads out the title.

PETER

"Death Can Wait". Fantastic. When's it coming out?

NICHOLAS

In two months. And if you open it, you'll see it's dedicated to you.

PETER opens the book and confirms that it is in fact dedicated: "For my father. For everything he's done for me."

PETER doesn't say anything, but it's clear he's swept with strong emotions.

NICHOLAS (CONT'D)

So of course it talks a bit about what you already know... All those really tough years for you and Mom... But at least it's ended well!

PETER and NICHOLAS smile at one another.

NICHOLAS (CONT'D)

I wanted you to be the first person to have it, because I know that if it wasn't for you, I couldn't have...

PETER is overwhelmed, but he's trying not to show it.

PETER

I'm so proud of you. My big boy.  
I'm so proud of you.

NICHOLAS

Better wait till you've read it...  
You might not like it.

PETER

I know you. I know it'll be  
beautiful. And really, what I want  
to tell you is I'm so proud of  
you...

PETER looks at the young man NICHOLAS has become with pride  
and emotion. He's trying to stop himself from crying.

NICHOLAS

Now, you're not going to start  
crying...

PETER

No, sorry...

PETER hugs him tightly. This goes on for some time.

NICHOLAS

Now, we just have to hope it'll be  
a success!

PETER

Of course it'll be a success!

NICHOLAS

Right. You don't mind if I go give  
Theo a hug? I've missed him a lot,  
as well...

PETER

Yes, yes, of course... He'll be  
happy to see you. He's always  
talking about his big brother.

NICHOLAS smiles at him. But PETER holds him close for a few  
more seconds.

PETER (CONT'D)

He's in the bathroom.

NICHOLAS sets off for the bathroom to give his little brother  
a hug. Suddenly, BETH appears from the kitchen. She looks  
troubled.

BETH

Peter?

But PETER doesn't answer. He's watching NICHOLAS, who turns  
back to him, just before leaving the room. They exchange a  
look heavy with meaning and ambiguity. What are they trying  
to say to one another?

110

BETH (CONT'D)

What are you doing? Peter?

BETH doesn't understand. NICHOLAS is invisible to her.

BETH (CONT'D)

Are you... Are you talking to yourself?

NICHOLAS smiles one final smile at his father, leaves the room and disappears into the corridor. PETER's on his own. BETH watches him, worried.

BETH (CONT'D)

Peter? What's the matter with you?

He lowers his eyes, full of pain. He begins to sob. BETH comes over to him.

BETH (CONT'D)

Were you thinking about Nicholas?

PETER nods.

BETH (CONT'D)

Come on...

PETER

I should have paid more attention to him...

BETH

Peter... You did everything that was humanly possible...

PETER shakes his head.

BETH (CONT'D)

Yes, you did. You have nothing to blame yourself for. Come on, please...

PETER

I was trying to think... He had so much talent... He was so intelligent... And so sensitive...

BETH

Yes...

PETER

He could have done so many beautiful things with his life.

BETH

Come on...

110

PETER begins weeping hot tears.

PETER

I should have... I could have... It  
is all my fault.

His body is racked with sobs of remorse and pain. BETH takes him in her arms.

BETH

You did the best you could, Peter.

His tears flow even more strongly.

PETER

It's all my fault...

BETH

Come on, calm down... I know it's  
hard, but life goes on... There's  
Theo. And me, I'm here as well. Mm?  
And this evening, we have friends  
coming for dinner... Even if it's  
hard, even if it hurts, life goes  
on, Peter. Life has to go on.

PETER

No. It doesn't go on. It can't go  
on.

BETH

Come on... Ssh... Come here. Mm?  
Come to me. Calm down, my love.  
Calm down. Ssh... And think about  
your little boy. He'll be four  
soon. Think about him. And  
everything will be all right. Do  
you understand me? Everything will  
be all right.

She cradles him, as one would a child, and, little by little, his grief is calmed. PETER is in BETH's arms. He doesn't move.

Silence.

THE END