

EVERYTHING WORKS

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CAST

NICKY WHEELER - 50's. She used to be funny. She might be still. Never the glamour girl from acting class. Diligent in preparation. Confident in herself. After twenty plus years, a Writer/Director/Actor set to shoot her fifth feature film. Successful, maybe not commercially. Resourceful. A problem-solver. Tough. Has strung together a career mixing her work with a bonafide talent for helping the careers and projects of others. Her first project: Eddie Charles.

EDDIE CHARLES - 50's. After a reoccurring role on a successful Sitcom twenty years ago, has become a theater actor's theater actor. The consummate professional. Broadway to Off to Off-Off to Out Of Town to bit TV/film parts. Never crossed over to major success or status, but always working. Handsome enough, he exudes the charm of a New Yorker from a bygone era. As Manhattan changes, he's lived in the same Village apartment for decades. He's done alright by maintaining supreme focus of his singular pursuit.

TIFF GLENN - 20's. Attended a top drama school, landed a role on Broadway. Rebuffs her current ingénue status. A natural talent, a student of the craft. Keenly observant. Little regard for what's expected and less for what's accepted. This Too-Much young woman straddles her entitled upbringing and the real choices of adulthood.

ANNETTE LOY - 70's. A life on the stage. Not as settled as she would have wished to be at her age. Lots of loose-ends and a daily dose of chaos, much of it her own doing. Forever chasing that Next Gig. Theater. TV. Small film roles. Readings. Understudying. Given her experience and career, peace of mind runs counter to the life she's lived.

DIRECTOR/STAGE MANAGER/YOUNG ACTOR - Collection Off-Stage Voices from a stage production in rehearsal at the Upstate Theater.

SETTINGS

EDDIE'S Greenwich Village Apartment, NYC - A Third-floor walk-up one-bedroom. An apartment forever on the verge of disappearing yet remains.

UPSTATE THEATER, GREEN ROOM - An Upstate theater's one room large enough for actors to congregate between scenes.

SETTINGS NOTES

Eddie's Village apartment based on any number of Brownstone Rowhouses between Greenwich Street and Greenwich Avenue; buildings whose stoops have been home to generations of brown-bagged beer drinkers. An interior of old plaster lath walls and big windows. Three versions of the apartment, two transformations, as simply rendered as possible.

Act One, Scene One, Eddie's apartment: 1990's. Recently purchased, it is not the apartment of a mid-20's guy scraping by. Even with its limited square footage, the apartment represents a step up. Eddie not so flush with cash to properly furnish it. Yet. At this point, Eddie has only been a New Yorker for a couple years. His apartment ownership coincides with the dawn of double-decker tourist buses and Magnolia Bakery fanaticism.

Act One, Scene Two. Twenty-five plus years later. Far from bare, the apartment at its peak. The space used efficiently. Well-loved, well-lived in, it is the apartment of a single man who knows exactly what he needs to be as comfortable as possible. The space defines Eddie, most obviously by the decades' worth of play posters and photos that cover the walls.

Act Three, Scene One, Eddie's apartment Post Fire. While not entirely engulfed in flames, the apartment suffers severe damage. Up Stage kitchen area ruined. The apartment's most dominant feature from Act One, Scene Two, Eddie's collection of play posters, mostly gone with a few remaining posters either on the floor or the walls.

* Act One, Scene One, Eddie's apartment possesses that one THING analogous to its young owner: Potential. It is a space to grow into. It is the space to create a life. By Act Three, Scene One the fire-ravaged apartment feels small, confining, limiting, an apartment no one would choose to live in all these years.

* Act One, Scene One on stage would be the ideal, but set twenty-five years ago it could be filmed and then projected? This might relieve production of the burden of turning set around too quickly. Filmed/taped Act One, Scene One could look like a Multi-Camera Sitcom of the era. Using the stage where the production takes place, Eddie's apartment as if a Hollywood sound-stage. Multi-camera edits and cuts could set style, tone, before opening on same Set in Scene Two. *"Filmed in front of a live audience..."* Or a laugh-track?

PRODUCTION NOTE

As a Working Actor for close to thirty years, EDDIE CHARLES is a pro. Still, it is possible, not required, that EDDIE CHARLES was "type cast" as a young actor. Eddie drawn from a diverse number of working actors over, some of them "non-traditional" and some more typical of a 1990's sitcom. For whatever reason, Eddie was not the standard male star of a Network Sitcom from that era. Eddie was, however, perfect in his Reoccurring role. Eddie made the most of it. Over the years, unapologetic of his Sitcom notoriety, he has taken it as far as he could. Now, with age, experience, and in a changed casting landscape, Eddie still has not broken through entirely, but more than content with his career.

Music

Music suggestions meant to set a particular time and place. The same music may demonstrate either an inability to move on from the music of the era or an inability to move on from the era of that music.

LUNA "Tiger Lily" "California(All The Way)", "Great Jones Street." Guided By Voices "Expecting Brainchild", "Motor Away", anything from *Alien Lanes*. Oasis' "Rock'n' Roll Star", R.E.M. "What's the Frequency, Kenneth", SpaceHog "Cruel To Be Kind", Urge Overkill "Sister Havana." "Dakota", Stereophonics. "Don't Change" INXS "D'You Know What I Mean" Oasis David Bowie's "New Killer Star" should find a suitable place.

ACT ONE, SCENE 1.

EDDIE'S VILLAGE APARTMENT.

1990's.

One-Bedroom, Third-floor walk-up.

It's not a huge space. It would be, however, a big step-up for anyone recently living on the cheap and with roommates.

Up-Stage Right/Center, the kitchen area. Sink, small refrigerator and stove-top. Formica counters with toaster. Windows look out to a modest view of the Village and maybe even the Hudson River.

Up-Stage Left, the bedroom with its door closed.

Down from Bedroom, Left Center, the front door.

Down Stage Center/Right, the living area. A mix of odd furniture. A futon couch, a big comfy chair, a not-so comfy beanbag. The dining table doesn't look solid nor sturdy.

A wobbly shelf system with television and a Radio/CD boombox. The album "Bewitched" by LUNA has been playing all night. "Tiger Lily" on.

Apartment walls, those visible, in desperate need for paint. One dominate wall Up-Stage Center between kitchen area and bedroom.

There is a single play production poster hanging on that wall. "The Seagull" complete with a hopelessly dramatic design. The poster held in place with tape.

An old hand-clock above the kitchen sink reads: 9:50.

Around the apartment, signs of last night's pre-bar gathering. Empty glasses and beer bottles scattered around the room like prizes from an Easter Egg Hunt.

Morning sun seeps in from unseen downstage windows that look out to a Village Street.

Front door opens.

NICKY, 20's, peeks her head into the apartment. Hearing music, she expects to find someone, sees no one. She tentatively enters.

It's a lazy summer morning in New York City. Nicky's countenance as bright, as cheerful, as carefree the day. At this particular moment, she embodies all it means to be Young In Manhattan.

Nicky lingers at the doorway. Even though she possess a key, Nicky tentative to arrive unannounced. She lingers at the doorway, a genuine sense of wonder being here. This apartment represents a life milestone passed, an achievement.

Nicky wears whatever workout clothes she owns, but is clearly not a Workout Girl. With a gym bag slung over a shoulder, Nicky also carries a wrapped poster under one arm, four coffees in cardboard tray and a bag of bagels. It's a wonder she's made it this far without dropping something.

Nicky closes the apartment door, pockets her key, and enters.

With this, the deft and able physical comedy skills of the actor on display.

Nicky glances back, notices the closed bedroom door.

There's no reason to bother the occupant. She scans the apartment, the mess from last night. She shakes her head in a disgusted, yet delighted disappointment.

Carrying all she arrived with, Nicky ready to set out breakfast. She proceeds to downstage table. Before she can put the coffee tray down, she notices the table needs to be cleared and wiped. *What is that on there??* With only one good hand, she attempts to clean. Futile. She abandons the poster against the futon. About to set the tray down, Nicky remembers just how unsteady table waiting for her is. She taps on it first. Table wobbles. *Whatever went on here last night, even the table is hungover.*

When Nicky moves a bottle from the table, everything on the table shifts. When she puts the bottle back, balance is restored.

The task before Nicky is to counter-balance what she takes off the table with what she puts on. Each move requires a response. After a bit of thrust and parry, Nicky successfully removes what was on the table with a single coffee and bagel at a time. She then takes beer bottles and glasses to the kitchen sink.

At the back counter, a carton of milk/whatever awaits. For reasons known only to her, Nicky gives the carton a sniff. It's not pleasant. Yet just to be sure she sniffs again. *It's AWFUL!* Nicky pours the contents down the sink.

Afraid what olfactory horrors may still be lurking, Nicky gathers all bottles and glasses from around the room, pours them into the sink, gagging as she does. That's all the cleaning she'll do for now.

Nicky returns to the table with a paper towel, wipes it down.

She takes a seat and immediately places her hand into another strange sticky mess. She gets up, washes her hand, returns to the table with another paper towel. She starts to wipe down the table again only to upset the balance. As the table lists, sets to tip over with bagel and coffee on top, Nicky deftly uses every limb, even a foot to keep all from spilling.

As frustrating as this could be, Nicky bemused by the ridiculousness of the situation. She embraces the challenge, carries on, and makes peace with the table. It stays upright.

Having reached détente with her foe, Nicky nonchalantly guzzles a waiting coffee in a single gulp -

NICKY

(miming)

SHIT, THAT WAS F ING HOT!!!

Nicky regroups. More casual, genteel even, she sips her next coffee as if at Princeton lawn party. This isn't her thing. She spills coffee down the front of her shirt. Pantomiming a guttural wail from deep inside, Nicky dries herself off, looks at her ruined gym shirt. Breakfast is over.

Nicky checks the bedroom. Door still closed. She unwraps the rectangular parcel: A framed play poster: "*Watch Out! There are Llamas.*" Nicky scans the apartment walls to find a suitable spot to hang it. Near "*The Seagull*" most appropriate. She puts the poster down, retrieves her gym bag.

Ever resourceful and prepared, Nicky produces a small hammer and hanging bracket.

About to pound a nail into the wall, she realizes the plaster wall will break apart if she does. Nicky goes back to her gym bag and pulls out a battery-powered drill - because all young women in NYC during the 1990's carry battery powered drills in their gym bag.

Nicky takes time to select the right drill bit. When ready, she drills and the morning's quiet undone by the sound. It only lasts a couple of seconds. Nicky freezes, waits. No noise from the bedroom. She sets the bracket with a screw, then hangs "*Watch Out! There are Llamas!*"

More than a little pleased with herself, Nicky steps back to view it.

Bedroom door opens.

EDDIE CHARLES, mid-20's, t-shirt and pajama bottoms. Groggy, hung-over, a casual handsomeness without being a 501 Jeans Model. He closes the bedroom door, walks over next to Nicky. She inserts a ready cup of coffee into his hand. They inspect the poster on the wall, sip coffee. It's hardly the Met, but both take their time.

NICKY

In the grand scheme of the things -

EDDIE

The walls need to be painted.

NICKY

Right. Color?

EDDIE

Off-salmon.

NICKY

Off-salmon??

EDDIE

It's a color. I think.

NICKY

Sounds like a sick fish. Sick Fish On The Wall. Do you want that? You do get great natural light in here.

EDDIE

Had time to notice?

NICKY

I did. At that window. You know, if you were a floor lower, those double-decker buses could look right in.

EDDIE

I'll keep the blinds closed. ... Should I be here?

NICKY

Is this an Existential query?

EDDIE

Here. The Village. I keep thinking I should have bought that place on the upper East Side.

NICKY

Live here first. See for yourself.

EDDIE

... Keep this color?

NICKY

Something similar. You'll need a primer first.

EDDIE

That's a hassle.

NICKY

Hides the stains. All those Bohemian Beatnik Hippie stains. If you're going to do it, do it right.

EDDIE

Ceiling will be tough.

NICKY

Two stepladders and a two-by-eight between. Gives you a platform for painting up high.

EDDIE

Huh? Okay. That'll work.

NICKY

Whatever the color, it doesn't have to be permanent.

EDDIE

Nothing ever is.

NICKY

Oooh. So deep. In a couple years, try something new.

EDDIE

You have me living here long enough to paint again??
(back to the new poster)

.... Why that?

NICKY

Why not?

EDDIE

A hundred reasons.

NICKY

You've been in two plays.

EDDIE

I'd like to think I'll do more.

NICKY

When you do, hang them on the wall. Right now, as of today, you have two plays on your resume. "*Watch Out! There are Llamas*", is one. These are the facts. See? There's your name. Eddie Charles. Even if you wanted to forget it, you cannot.

EDDIE

No one else needs to know.

NICKY

But you will. A play about llamas attacking people is forever a part of who you are and who you become as an actor. Embrace it.

From her backpack, Nicky produces a big bulky BetaCam BCT-60MLa tape.

NICKY

Also for you.

EDDIE

What? I'm the one who just got back. I should be handing you gifts.

NICKY

I cut the first season together. Your scenes only.

EDDIE

You didn't need to do that.

NICKY

There aren't many scenes.

EDDIE

It's not a big part.

NICKY

But it's a good reel. Altogether. Maybe it's my editing, but each scene is better than anything you ever did in class.

EDDIE

I get the laughs, the punch line, or am the punch line.

NICKY

It takes someone delivering the line for it to work. I bet they keep building your character, adding dialogue. Best of all? That's high-end Beta. You'll have that tape for years.

EDDIE

How will I watch it??

NICKY

Oh....I guess I can transfer it to DVD.

EDDIE

You don't have to.

NICKY

No, no. If I'm going to lay out money I don't have to buy an Avid machine, I'm going to learn to how to use an Avid machine. ... I put the original audition on there. The one we made. Now, on a single reel you have our audition and then your first season. A Before and After success story.

EDDIE

You should start charging people for video reels.

NICKY

That's a good idea. ... Are you coming back to class?

EDDIE

Class?? Why?

NICKY

There's always more to learn.

EDDIE

Learn while doing. I'm making real money now.

NICKY

So?

EDDIE

So how many people in class can say that? Why subject myself to a "Brick" Character Interview with twenty people waiting for me to screw up. It's that Scha - den - Sigmund Freud - thing.

Schadenfreude. NICKY

In English? EDDIE

Epicaricacy. NICKY

What you said. EDDIE

NICKY
You're right. Some people in class do hold it against you.
Don't go back to class.

EDDIE
I won't. While we're at it, can I refused the llamas?

NICKY
No one can refuse the llamas.

EDDIE
Fine. Coffee from down the street?

NICKY
It's a great spot, huh? Not like you can find good coffee on
every corner in New York City.

Eddie goes to the table and takes a
bagel. The tippy table stays
upright. Somehow the laws of
balance don't apply to him.

Confounded by this, Nicky has to
inspect the table anew. The moment
she touches it, the table not just
falls over, but breaks into a
hundred pieces.

EDDIE
I needed a new table anyway.

NICKY
Sorry. You really don't like the poster?

EDDIE
Feels like you're trying to knock me down a peg or two.

NICKY
How??

EDDIE

Same as people from class. You don't want me to forget when I was doing crappy plays like that?

NICKY

Who says you're done doing crappy plays like that?

EDDIE

I do.

NICKY

Then why buy an apartment here? You could have stayed in LA.

EDDIE

Sitcom shoots for so many months. I hate the sun. I hate dry air. I hate driving. I'd rather be here.

NICKY

Amen. I mean, I'll go. If LA wants me, I'll go, but only then. The poster is just a poster, Eddie. If you're feeling defensive or guilty about success, that's your problem.

EDDIE

I don't feel guilty.

NICKY

From this point forward, foot on the gas, don't let up. That means take the good with the not-so good. Chekhov and Llamas. See? That's the reason for the poster. The good and not-so-good? That's a career. ... You think I would fill your walls just to undermine you? You think I'm capable of such an asteism?

EDDIE

I believe you're capable of using the word.

NICKY

Eddie?? Come on. What's wrong?

EDDIE

You.

NICKY

What??

EDDIE

You've always been Ms Perfectly Calculated Career. The color headshot. Updating your resume daily. Worrying about the fucking font.

NICKY

I have. I attempt to take some of the guesswork out of this "career" - if I can call it that.

EDDIE

And it was your audition.

NICKY

It was.

EDDIE

I wouldn't have gotten a sniff at that audition my own. I do the tape with you, for you, and they call me back. I got lucky.

NICKY

You did. A couple years studying, two plays, and you book a sitcom. It doesn't usually happen like that.

EDDIE

I've been told. It's not like it's even a main character.

NICKY

It's a reoccurring character on this season's new hit sitcom. You're paid enough to afford this apartment.

EDDIE

Not in full. I have a mortgage to pay off.

NICKY

Boo-fucking-hoo. Leave the llamas on the wall, walk around your new apartment, have a coffee, and say THANK YOU.

EDDIE

Thank you, Nick.

NICKY

You're welcome. ... I did buy the camera and editing equipment to help my own career.

EDDIE

And now you regret helping me.

NICKY

No. Helping you, working with you, assisting, whatever you call it, that's been as gratifying as anything I've done.

EDDIE

Did I need help?

NICKY

On your own you were destined for a Dude-And-Bro Behavior Acting Group.

EDDIE

Come one, Come All to the Dude and Bro Acting Troupe. Every scene an exhibition of emotional baggage in physical form.

NICKY

(as acting Bro)

"Dude, I don't know why I'm in this scene, but look at how my character walks."

EDDIE

Should I put *Scarface* posters up?

NICKY

No one likes mob movies. We "appreciate" them. ... Your first day in class, I thought, "Here's someone who hasn't been spoiled by undergrad Drama." From class we do *The Seagull*. From *Seagull*, you do "*Watch out! There are llamas.*" And now a sitcom. You've cleared the first hurdle! That's hardest one to get over. Llamas to Sitcom. Let me enjoy my part in it. The audition, that reel, all those panicked phone calls you made before you started shooting. Let's celebrate. I hate that I'm thinking it, but brunch?? Is it too early for champagne?

Nicky plops down in the horribly uncomfortable beanbag. She stands.

NICKY

(sniffs)

Get rid of that.

EDDIE

Maybe after next season I can buy real furniture.

NICKY

One season at a time.

EDDIE

Right. Right. Sorry.

NICKY

Nothing lasts, Eddie. No part. No show. But, you'll have this apartment forever! This is it!

EDDIE

I can't imagine this is it.

An awkward moment. Nicky poised to leap into Eddie's arms while he shoots an obvious glance to the closed bedroom door.

NICKY

Oh god.... There's someone in the bedroom?

EDDIE

Nicky -

NICKY

No, no. I'm sorry. Here I am prancing around like a horny rabbit - ... Alexandria?? She in there? You can't resist taller than you and blonde, can you? Who can??

EDDIE

I didn't think -

NICKY

No. Me. I didn't think - me - I didn't think. Ms Perfectly Calculated Career doesn't think outside her perfectly calculated trajectory. That's - damn it, Eddie.

EDDIE

Nicky.

NICKY

Nope. Uh-uh. I'm going to clear the slate. Start over. Try again. Okay. We're here. We're having coffee. Bagels. You need a new table. Nothing more. So, dear friend, Eddie, now that you're between *sitcom seasons* and Scandinavian limbs, what are you doing for the next few weeks?

EDDIE

A crappy little play.

NICKY

You said you were done with crappy little plays.

EDDIE

I'm under contract, but I wanted to do something. The play doesn't interfere. I didn't even have to audition. They just offered it. Say YES to everything, right?

NICKY

Career-wise? Yes. Nordic Bush? Well... Hell with this. Take your key. You don't need me walking in unexpected.

EDDIE

I like that you have a key.

NICKY

Yeah, well, I'm not sure I like it. Poster looks good. Leave it up? It's not *The Seagull*, but it never tried to be.

Nicky leaves her key on a table by the front door. She EXITS.

Eddie goes to the door, locks it. He takes Nicky's key, puts it on a hook near the door for later. Eddie crosses into the bedroom.

The landline telephone rings.
Eddie returns, half-dressed in
workout clothes, answers.

EDDIE

(on phone)

Boogie! How you livin'? ... Yeah, I'm ready. ... Crunch in
twenty? What about the Hudson first? I'm back and all I
want to see is the city from river to river. ... Run first?
Good. Run, a light set afterwards? ... How you feeling? ...
No, no. I feel great, ah, somewhat. Nicky was here. ...
Yeah, that sucked. ... Last night? I came home. ... Alone.
Why is that hard to believe?? Pier 45 in fifteen? ... I know
it's nasty down there, but it's a nice morning.

Eddie turns on music as he
stretches for his run. Loud GUIDED
BY VOICES "*Expecting Brainchild.*"

The bedroom door remains open.
It's clear no one is in there.

LIGHTS DIM. A
SINGLE SPOT ON NEWLY
PLACED PLAY POSTER
SLOWLY FADES OUT.

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO.

EDDIE'S VILLAGE APARTMENT.

25+ YEARS LATER.

A meticulous spiffiness to the apartment now. Everything clear, cleaned, clutter-free. An intentional asceticism. A space well lived-in, well loved. Home.

Dramatically revealed at LIGHTS UP: Every bit of wall space on Up Stage wall and Sides now adorned with Play Posters and photos from all sorts of productions. Broadway, Off-Broadway, Chicago, Boston, theaters in-between.

The walls have been painted, maybe more than once. After replacing original appliances, things like the refrigerator and oven show their age. Fairly new items on the kitchen counter: a coffee maker, grinder, microwave, toaster oven.

The front door a different color. More locks added. There's an umbrella stand with a collection of umbrellas that would make an English gentleman proud.

Down Stage, the living area up to date. A solid dining table pre-set with napkins laid out. A suitable couch. A television, sound system, electric piano. A retro Bar Cart modestly filled.

By itself, an expensive, Mid-century modern armchair with ottoman sits like a Captain's Command Chair. A reading light behind it and a side table next to it. The side table lined with remotes for TV and music, a laptop computer, reading glasses. Eddie spends a lot of time here.

At the back wall, an old hand-clock above the kitchen sink reads: 2:43.

Apartment door opens. EDDIE
CHARLES, 50's, enters. He wears a casual suit, his uniform. He wears a suit regularly because he knows how to wear a suit regularly. He sets his umbrella/walking stick in the holder by the door.

Eddie holds open the door for TIFF, mid-20's. She's dressed up, more expensively hip than dressy.

EDDIE

Three keys. I only use two. There's a dead bolt on the top. Locks are like tree-rings. You know how old an apartment is by the number of locks.

TIFF

Are there always people drinking on the front stoop?

EDDIE

It's a rite of passage.

TIFF

I was hoping there'd be a doorman.

EDDIE

It's a safer neighborhood than it used to be. Not that it wasn't safe. I've known plenty of single women who've lived in this building.

TIFF

You don't say??

Eddie allows Tiff to roam. She goes to the windows, looks out.

TIFF

You have a view!?!? ... Of rooftops.

EDDIE

And a sliver of river. If you lean. There was a time when rooftops were the cherished view of the city. Any city. It's not quite Montmartre out there, but it is New York. Hopper's New York. Orange hued buildings, mud colored eaves, metal venting, chimneys, looming water towers.

TIFF

What's with the foggy window?

EDDIE

Age. Double-paned. A cracked seal. You get used to it.

TIFF

Or you get new windows.

EDDIE

I've priced it out. Not worth it. Every new building around here, and there are many, must have some epic view from multiple windows. That's what people pay for: visual affirmation. The higher up you go, the more people outside who can see you inside, the more status. Six floors up? Some vertiginous view of the river? When I look out that window, I want to know I'm part of the city, not above it. It's getting to be *Blade Runner* out there. Stacked Neon. When buildings like this disappear, you'll never see them again.

TIFF

Let's hope. ... How many feet? Square feet. The apartment.

EDDIE

Do you need to know that??

TIFF

Just curious.

EDDIE

I'm sure I have it here. Somewhere. Do you cook?

TIFF

Not really.

EDDIE

Great. Menus by the phone. Or walk outside. Within five minutes, there's anything you want. Great cafe down the block. I consider it an extension of the apartment. You can disappear in there.

TIFF

Even you?

EDDIE

Yes. It's less a respect for privacy than my waning notoriety.

TIFF

Oh come on. You're still in syndication. And now streaming.

EDDIE

Streaming. The sound of Bar-hoppers on weekends. If you do cook, the pilot light sometimes goes out.

TIFF

Pilot light??

EDDIE

It's the flame, on the stove top??? Forget it. There are phone numbers on the fridge. If there's a problem, you call.

TIFF

Is there problem?

EDDIE

I'm just saying, if there's a problem, you call.

TIFF

My dad is pretty handy. Speaking of the fridge??

EDDIE

It's got some life to it yet.

TIFF

Dishwasher?

EDDIE

Two hands.

TIFF

Something you could put in if you wanted?

EDDIE

For the convenience of a dishwasher, you'd have to take this old plaster down to the studs, update the risers. Too much work. Washing dishes by hand is more efficient. That's been proven. Somewhere. Maybe Denmark? ...

Tiff investigates the neat and orderly cupboard and shelves.

TIFF

You are the model of abstemious living.

EDDIE

I have good barware. Whisky tumblers. Collins. Coupés. A variety of wine glasses. I like entertaining. Cocktails, not dinner. People enjoy coming here for drinks before hitting the neighborhood. Decades of Village myths and legends live outside that door. Have a party. A small one.

TIFF

I can make popcorn. Was the microwave a splurge, Mr Deckhard?

EDDIE

Blade Runner. Points for you. I was afraid you didn't get the reference.

TIFF

My dad loves it.

EDDIE

Right. ... From this apartment you can walk anywhere.

TIFF

Why would I walk?

EDDIE

Because. Because walking allows you to see the city, to experience it, to be part of it.

TIFF

Sidewalks are crowded. Or pissed on.

EDDIE

And only getting worse. When you walk, zig and zag instead of follow the grid. Pick the right street. Greenwich. Street or Avenue. Crosby and its old cobblestones was my favorite. Broadway above Fourteenth is still good.

TIFF

I think my phone has an APP.

EDDIE

If you can't walk, subways are around the corner.

TIFF

I can get a car.

EDDIE

Car? No. Subways are the city's veins. Xylem and Phloem.

TIFF

Subways are gross. A month ago, I saw a guy in a trench coat exposing himself. Who knew that was still a thing?

EDDIE

The owners of trench coats everywhere.

TIFF

I hope you're kidding.

EDDIE

Put one on. A latent impulse stirs.

TIFF

I have a car. I'd like to bring it into town.

EDDIE

Parking around here can be tricky.

TIFF

Oh. Okay. Maybe a lot. Don't you own a car?

EDDIE

I rent when needed. Train to the airport. Better deals out there.

TIFF

I don't know anyone who doesn't own a car.

EDDIE

Those people do not live in the city.

Tiff enters the bathroom, returns.

TIFF

That's a decent bathroom.

EDDIE

I did the tile work.

Down Stage, Tiff notices the table.

TIFF

Folded napkins? For me?

EDDIE

I like having a set table when I come home.

TIFF

It is clean in here.

EDDIE

I'd say being tidy has something to do with my age but that would mean bringing up my age.

Tiff plops down on the couch.

TIFF

This is a nice couch.

EDDIE

When I find furniture that fits the apartment, I don't hesitate. Couch is four years old. Table and chairs, a Jersey outlet six years ago. The television? New. You can't watch sports on an old television anymore.

TIFF

You don't strike me as a sports guy.

EDDIE

I put on baseball - for company. ... The sound system will sync with the television when you hit -

Eddie finds a remote, hits a few buttons. A clean, rich sound from his speakers, *"What's the Frequency, Kenneth?"* blasts. Eddie skips the song which turns into Charlie Parker, which sounds too old. He skips again to Oasis' *"Rock'N'Roll Star."* He gives up, turns music OFF.

TIFF

Now that you've played me some music, are you going to show me the bedroom?

EDDIE

At least let me offer you a drink.

TIFF

I thought you'd never ask.

Eddie goes to the bar-cart, mixes a cocktail.

Tiff, more exhausted than she realized, sinks into the couch.

TIFF

Is that really the time??

EDDIE

That's a Closing Night party for you.

TIFF

How are you clear-headed? You had a drink in hand all night.

EDDIE

Two Drinks. One for you. One for everyone else. Drink the first fast, get a little tipsy, toe the line. The other? One sip, get a new one. If you can't manage your drinking, you'll never get used to these hours.

TIFF

Feels dangerous getting used to these hours.

EDDIE

This is the road you're on, sister.

TIFF

I supposed.

Nicky stands as Eddie hands her a cocktail.

To closing night. EDDIE

To closing night. TIFF

To a good run. EDDIE

To sipping a cocktail at three in the morning. TIFF

To walking City streets after midnight. To the dome of the Paramount Building. To the Owls in Herald Square and their glowing eyes. Cheers. EDDIE

Cheers. TIFF

... Care to partake in my Closing Night Ritual? EDDIE

I thought I already was. TIFF

Every Closing Night I come home, pour a good drink, sit in that chair, and preserve twenty special moments from the production that was. EDDIE

Like pressing leaves in a book? TIFF

Precisely like. There's a bad actor-ly habit of looking ahead, moving on to the next gig without properly acknowledging what was. When a show is good, press it to memory. EDDIE

You bought a chair for that? TIFF

Why be comfortable for it? It's a mental exercise. A bit demanding even. You have to re-imagine the stage, the scene, picture how it all played out when it worked best. Sometimes I'll grab my script and look over old notes, write in the margins; why a line hit, got a laugh... Sit. EDDIE

Tiff sits in the Command Chair.

TIFF

I don't feel awash in recall. Maybe I'm not doing it right?
... Actually, if I sit now, I'm down for the night.

Tiff stands, stiff legged.

TIFF

Three flights of stairs didn't help. How many blocks did we walk?

EDDIE

Forty. Or so.

TIFF

That's thirty too many. It was fun. For a bit. It was fun until we passed that pile of garbage by the casting agency. All those actors. Faces trapped in clear recycle bags.

EDDIE

General Zod in the Phantom Zone.

TIFF

I'm not sure who that is.

EDDIE

Ask your father.

TIFF

All that time choosing a headshot, crafting a resume, only to end up on the sidewalk.

Tiff begins a tour of the posters.

TIFF

It's a nice thought. Your seated ritual. Still, how can you forget the plays you've been in? Look at these....

(as she tours)

I can pay, you know? For staying here.

EDDIE

No charge. I like having someone I know here when I'm away.

TIFF

Up to you.

(looking at photos)

Look at that. That's you. You must have been young.

EDDIE

I was young.

TIFF

You look good. ... Wow. All this nostalgia.

EDDIE

I abhor nostalgia.

TIFF

Says the man with his walls covered in memories.

EDDIE

That's where I've been. Besides, it gives other people something to talk about.

TIFF

Are you running a museum? How many people come through here? Maybe I shouldn't ask... And there's - my goodness. You worked with HER? ... Sean's a wee little man, isn't he? ...*"Watch Out. There are Llamas."*?? ... If I ever get my caricature in the *New Yorker*, I'll quit. ...You were in this?

EDDIE

Understudy. Never poo-poo a paycheck. You saw that play???

TIFF

I was in grade school. My mother wanted to see it. The bathtub scene. She brought opera glasses. ... Oh my legs. Do you really walk home every night?

EDDIE

When you put more of yourself into a show, you'll need it.

TIFF

Gee, thanks.

EDDIE

No offense. A show like ours? The commitment at night? You're in low simmer all day, conserving energy. The show demands much from you, feels great when it's over, but skip the celebrating, the drinking and eating afterwards. Get a workout, clear your heard. I know actors who go to the gym. One guy, this crazy Cuban, he'll swim a mile. Me? I like a good walk. Next big show, find what works for you.

TIFF

Not sure I'll be doing Broadway any time soon.

EDDIE

Sure you will. No matter how often you hear about the death of Broadway, there will be shows like ours, in a theater like that, with real crowds who love it. You'll see.

TIFF

I'll see. ... Was it really a good run??

EDDIE

You couldn't tell?

TIFF

I never felt as connected to the play as you.

EDDIE

There are no small parts only -

TIFF

Please don't!

EDDIE

You were capably on stage every night.

TIFF

I got naked every night.

EDDIE

That's hardly all you did.

TIFF

Simulated cunninglingus.

EDDIE

"Capably and convincingly executed."

TIFF

Twenty minutes on stage, half of them clothed, but no reviewer could resist that.

EDDIE

It's a pretty select group of women who've been naked in a play of David's.

TIFF

I bet there's a club I can join. I'm the only reason the banker-frat boy crowd will remember an Olivier Award winning play.

EDDIE

The theater does need banker money.

TIFF

Excellent drink. ... Did you know there were private Tech Days for me? The question was How Much was Too Much and if Too Much should they filter the lights or dye me.

EDDIE

And???

TIFF

After much technical consideration, I play very well to the back of the house *au naturale*. Cheers.

Tiff nails her drink, continues to browse the walls.

TIFF

I hope I do more theater. Sort of. At some point. ... *The Seagull*. Ugh. I hate *The Seagull*. ... OH crap. I didn't think to grab a show poster.

EDDIE

Go back to the theater tomorrow.

TIFF

Think they'll let me in?

EDDIE

Yes.

TIFF

Good. ... No family photos??

EDDIE

There are a few. My parents were more impressed with the sitcom. I have an older sister. Five kids. They're not ready for the theater, definitely not your scenes. ... Up there are my other families.

TIFF

All these people? You buy into that Actors as Gypsies crap? Moving from one group to the next?

EDDIE

You get cast with a group, you do your work, you move on. Like high school or college.

TIFF

I still have friends from high school and from college.

EDDIE

You won't.

TIFF

Why not?

EDDIE

Different agendas, different milestones, different goals. Soon you'll be the single girl at weddings. The "actress" they all feel sorry for yet try to push on groomsmen.

TIFF

They do that now. I've literally been up at the alter, waiting for the bride, and having to tell some drunk shit in a tux I wasn't going to blow him. Sorry. Good drink. ... We're friends?

EDDIE

We are.

TIFF

Good. You know, I never got-off being naked on stage.

EDDIE

That's not the way it was written.

TIFF

What I enjoyed most about our show? Rehearsal. Does that sound strange? I loved watching you and Melissa and Peter work, figure stuff out.

EDDIE

Sign of a Good Run. Sign of a good actress. It's not always like this. Some shows you'll hate. Sometimes the play isn't what you thought or the people are assholes or the whole experience is a drag.

TIFF

Then you quit.

EDDIE

What??? No. That's when you show up.

TIFF

Why? Quit, move on.

EDDIE

You cannot give yourself an OUT. Ever. If an OUT exists, you'll always be tempted to use that OUT.

TIFF

Even when it isn't the best show in the world?

EDDIE

Especially when it isn't the best show in the world. If you give yourself an OUT, you give yourself a reason to not commit. If you don't commit, you don't risk. If you don't risk there's no payoff. Risk is the only thing we control. We can't control the outcome, but we can control our effort. Risk takes effort. Risk is scary, but if you don't risk, you don't achieve anything. If you don't feel like you've accomplished something every night, why do it?? No performance is the same, no night is same, each production is different, but when it's good, when all the pieces are in place, you can nail it to the floor, leave something worthy of being watched. Sounds pretentious. Ours is a singular pursuit. You can't share that experience with anyone, no matter how many posters you put up. Take pride in what you do every night and it will stay with you. Our show was good.

TIFF

And now becomes a poster on a wall of posters.

EDDIE

Did they teach the reality of this life at that ridiculously expensive college of yours? Did Arkadina live a wonderful life? Trigorin? Nina?

TIFF

Nina should have quit. That's *The Seagull's* tragedy.

EDDIE

Not the boy shooting himself?

TIFF

That's hilarious. He keeps shooting himself and he keeps missing, from point blank.

EDDIE

What about Nina?

TIFF

Given the mental state of her boyfriend, the asshole Trigorin, and the horrendous role model Arkadina is, we're supposed to be happy for Nina at the end? No way. I wrote my senior thesis on this. Chekov's *Seagull* to Coleridge's *Albatross*. Coleridge's albatross is marriage. Chekov's seagull? Nina's career choice.

EDDIE

Maybe at sixty Nina will be happy.

TIFF

And maybe she'll meet up with H.G. Wells and fly to the moon. ... I'll never be in this many plays.

EDDIE

Any play would be lucky to have you.

TIFF

Thank you. I do take it seriously. I do. Maybe I'll take it more seriously when I'm not so aware of the theater's air conditioning. ... I've had people from school come see me, tell me how well I did, how lucky I am. What am I supposed to feel lucky about? The paycheck? My Equity Card? Maybe if I had a bigger part -

EDDIE

All those plays?? I was lead in a handful.

TIFF

Why shouldn't you be the lead??

EDDIE

Every time out?

TIFF

Why not? Everyone remembers you from television. Not the stars, not the Friends. Everyone remembers you.

EDDIE

It's not as if you ask for the part you want.

TIFF

Then why do it? Had you been one of the stars, you'd have a house in LA.

EDDIE

Maybe I never wanted a house in LA. Do you know how many people I came up with who don't have this? Most of them hit their thirties, tucked their tails between their legs, and got out of town. I'm still here. Star. Co-star.

TIFF

Sorry. I get it.

EDDIE

You don't get it until you do it. Your parents have money?

TIFF

Something like that. ...

Tiff goes, peeks into the bedroom.

TIFF

... Wealthy or not, people my age don't find apartments in the city anymore. Definitely not down here. The Village is like an archeological dig. A beer at White Horse the equivalent of Nefertiti's tomb. ... Are you still going to let me stay here?

EDDIE

Is it up to your standards?

TIFF

I'm sorry. At that ridiculously expensive college? We were spoiled. I'll admit it. The amenities were spectacular, the food was great, and we were in the middle of the city. And now? Now there's the prospect of never living in the city again.

EDDIE

Moneyed or not, it's a struggle, Tiff.

TIFF

Struggle shouldn't be a prerequisite.

EDDIE

It's the difference between walking streets or getting a cab.

TIFF

Pitch the virtue of Struggle, Hesiod's *Strife*, all you want, but that's not you. You didn't spend your twenties subsisting on cans of tuna or delivering newspapers. You landed a sitcom at twenty-five and you work all the time.

EDDIE

I work all the time because nothing is beneath me.

TIFF

And I've been naked on stage every night for the last four months. I'm not against doing the work. I'm not. But I don't want some blood-pact commitment thing either. I have family. I have friends. I like my life. Come July, I like going to Southhampton.

EDDIE

Every summer I do theater upstate.

TIFF

You're do it because you're a pro.

EDDIE

I'm a pro because I do it. Do you see the difference? You know what your ridiculously expensive college in no way prepared you for? A career. My sitcom was a lifetime ago.

TIFF

My lifetime ago.

EDDIE

Thank you. You're right. I never struggled. I never had a job other than acting. I work. I keep working so that I work. If you're not prepared to do that, you shouldn't do it. And a lot of people who come here shouldn't do this. But you should, Tiff. Put your head down and you go.

TIFF

And what will I miss?

EDDIE

You'll never know. This is a self-indulgent pursuit. Accept that. Enjoy that. Resist the urge to see what everyone else is doing. Make peace with your solipsism. The sitcom gave me momentum but the sitcom ended. Had I hesitated, swerved to grab a piece of the normal life, I would have been done. I watched real professionals take time to get a "normal" life. Some went back to school. Some got married. Some bought a house. The career passed them by. Work. That's all you can do. Work, bust your ass every time out.

TIFF

And going up-state to do Beckett or a French farce is going to take care of the rest?

EDDIE

Probably not. No one cares for Beckett these days. We do new plays. We're doing one this summer.

TIFF

I can stay in the city and get more professional traction posting a fifteen minute video. ... What did you miss out on? After all this head-down single-mindedness, you must look back and think you missed something.

EDDIE

I missed out on plenty. Experiences. Experiences outside those experiences I've pressed to memory. ... Big, malignant spats of emotion, charging back and forth with someone I love dearly but can never say properly. Engaging in real drama, the source of all we do. Nasty arguments. Paltry excuses. Reasons to justify our inadequacies. All that stuff that puts us up here. ... What do I have? I have Home Depot. ...

At some point, possibly very early on during Eddie's monologue, TIFF interrupts him.

EDDIE

I was at Home Depot. I hate Home Depot. I hate that my weekends are not complete until I go to Home Depot. I hate walking into Home Depot with a hundred other guys my age who are all there to do the same thing: Round out their weekend with some stupid home project. You go early, walk the aisles, find what you need, drive back home, get half-way through the project, and you realize you're missing something. A screw. A bracket. So you go back to Home Depot and by the time you find that screw or bracket or pipe fitting, the day is over, your weekend is over. And you feel old, older than you are. ... But the thing about Home Depot is that they play good music. It's like Home Depot knows how crappy it is to be my age and stuck in Home Depot on the weekend so Home Depot plays music guys were listening to twenty years ago when we didn't go to Home Depot on weekends. One time, I'm at Home Depot and there's this song I haven't in ages. It's a song I never liked back when it was popular because it was POPULAR, you know? I am listening to that song as if for the first time and I am loving it. It's Pop and Rocking and the more I listen, I'm floored with the guitar solo. I don't care about the weekend project anymore. I'm on a quest. I rush home, ignore the family, and get online. I find a live version from the Meadowlands and there she is, the guitar player I lost contact with years ago. New Music Cafe. A band we saw time and time again. Nothing about it so spectacular, but it was our scene, our night, our time in New York, and we'd be at the Cafe so often the band knew us. End of the night, the band would come off stage and we'd all end up at a bar on White Street.

EDDIE (cont.)
And one night, finally, that guitar player and I stood face to face, and she wrote her phone number down on the back of a ticket stub....

TIFF slaps a movie poster.

EDDIE
 You saw that movie??? No one saw that movie.

TIFF
 I loved you in that movie.

EDDIE
 I wasn't the Star, was I?

TIFF
 Depends who's watching. You should have tried this sooner.

EDDIE
 What?

TIFF
 Bringing me back to your apartment.

EDDIE
 People talk.

TIFF
 For all they know we left *Un, Deux, Trois* at the same time. IF they do know, I'm only here to take care of your apartment...

TIFF heads into the bedroom.

Eddie turns on music. Guided By Voices "*Motor Away*." He celebrates the moment. It's good to be Eddie Charles. Yet Eddie Charles is bound to his Closing Night Ritual. Eddie pours a bourbon, takes a seat in his Command chair. He picks up a much weathered copy of his script from the play that just closed. He thumbs through the pages, reflects on a Good Run. He closes his eyes, smiles at a memory, writes down a note in the margin of the script.

He may well fall asleep here.

BLACKOUT.

END OF ACT ONE.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE.

UPSTATE THEATER, THE GREEN ROOM

Several Weeks LATER.

Actor's Green Room at an Upstate NY theater. Given the modest size of the dressing rooms, the Green Room the only place for actors to hang out.

At back wall, a long table with coffee Pod system, humidifier, a half-refrigerator. A hanging rack for costumes. A couch. A table with two chairs.

Extreme Downstage, a make-up table and unseen mirror which allows actors to sit, adjust make-up, fittings, etc, all while looking out.

NICKY, early 50's, ENTERS.

She looks around. *Is this the right room??* Nicky mid-conversation with cellphone to her ear.

NICKY

(on cell)

....All I'm asking is you give it a chance. ... I'm not wasting anyone's time or anyone's money if I'm doing what's right. Everything else is in place. I wouldn't make a decision like this if -

DIRECTOR (OFFSTAGE)

Quiet backstage.

NICKY

- We can talk later? Okay?? I don't know yet.

Just Off, ANNETTE's booming voice.

ANNETTE (OFF)

(muffled rage)

I've been patient. My job, as far as I've ever understood it, is to read, memorize, and say what's ON THE PAGE. I can't do that job if I don't know what lines proceed mine because that asshole isn't "feeling it." Every day he's either ad-libbing or paraphrasing.

ANNETTE (OFF) (cont.)
 If he's dyslexic, now would be a good time to tell me. If he's high all the time and you're not going to address it, I'll call a union rep.

Annette ENTERS, sees Nicky.

Nicky, a deer in headlights,
 pockets her cellphone.

Anette backs out of the Green Room,
 Reenters.

ANNETTE
 One of us is in the wrong room.

NICKY
 It's me.

ANNETTE
 Oh good. Senile free another day. Hooray for me.

Annette proceeds to the Downstage
 table and chair in front of the
 mirror.

ANNETTE
 Senile-free and baggy as can be. ... God, I look awful. ...
 Was that you talking back here?

NICKY
 Sorry.

ANNETTE
 Don't be. Gave us a good point to break.

NICKY
 I was looking for Eddie.

ANNETTE
 Eddie?? Oh. Eddie. Yes. Eddie. You know Eddie. I know
 that. It's not his scene. Were you watching?

NICKY
 What?

ANNETTE
 The scene. On Stage. Were you watching?

NICKY
 No. I was - the other day, I was walking by the theater and
 I saw Eddie's name on the poster so I -

ANNETTE

Okay, okay, okay. Don't need your life story. I was curious is all.

NICKY

About?

ANNETTE

(whispers)

If this play is any good.

NICKY

I didn't hear enough... Is it?

ANNETTE

What?

NICKY

Any good?

ANNETTE

I'm asking.

NICKY

I wasn't watching. Or listening.

In an effort to decompress, Annette shoots atomized liquid into her mouth. Nicky watches.

ANNETTE

THC. A. THC-A. Not heated. No psychedelic effects. That I can detect. Definitely not the HIGH I remember. But it helps. No needless tension. ... I liked the play when I read it. I took the job because I liked what I read. And now I don't know. The writer feels obligated to change things. I'm not sure she should. It's her play. Nothing pops out of anyone's head fully written, fully anything. She's allowed to figure stuff out. On her own. Or with us. But right now, she's overthinking, second guessing. And this young man I'm on stage with? She hasn't heard a damn word she's written so how can she know if she needs to make changes? ... Wait. You're not a new character, are you? Are you replacing me???

NICKY

I don't think I could play the mother.

ANNETTE

I'm playing the grandmother, dear. There is no mother. At least not yet. New part? Is that you? Oh, don't tell me. I'd rather be surprised. ... It's a good play. I think. Damn. I need to talk to Eddie.

Me too.

NICKY

He'll be here soon.

ANNETTE

Okay. ... I don't need to be in here.

NICKY

Oh, don't worry. It's the only room we have.

ANNETTE

You don't have a dressing room?

NICKY

A phone booth. I farted two days ago and still can't return.

ANNETTE

I should go.

NICKY

Stay. It's not like I'm going to memorize lines -
 (loudly for Director off)
 BECAUSE I DON'T KNOW WHAT LINES WE ARE USING.
 (back to Nicky)
 ... Do you know this kid?

Annette points to her script

ANNETTE

Apparently all he's done is Improv in Chicago.

NICKY

Improv in Chicago is the new Actors Studio.

ANNETTE

Is it? Oh. You're kidding. That's funny. You're funny.

NICKY

I used to be.

ANNETTE

You stopped being funny? No one stops. They just stop trying. You were very funny when we worked together.

NICKY

I was playing Nina.

ANNETTE

Nina is hilarious.

NICKY

No. Nina is -

ANNETTE

Exactly what you did with her.

NICKY

... Are you making fun of me?

ANNETTE

What? No. Do you think I'd do that?

NICKY

Well, yes, I just - Annette, to this day, you were the single most terrifying person I've ever worked with.

ANNETTE

Was I?

NICKY

Every night I was petrified. I could never say a line right.

ANNETTE

Oh. Sorry. I may have been a little intense back then. Now I have my spray. ... I was intense. Too intense. That's an actor in their forties for you. At that age there's the realization you've done it so long, there's no going back. So you press on, intensely.

NICKY

I got a bit more aggressive in my forties too.

ANNETTE

See? But it sort of worked?

NICKY

What?

ANNETTE

My Arkadina to your Nina? I was supposed to freak you out and make you nervous, right?? Wink-wink.

NICKY

OH. I guess. I never thought of it.

ANNETTE

It was No Holds Barred as far as I was concerned. That was the first time I played Arkadina. It pisses you off. You're not a Nina anymore. Christ, I'd love to play Arkadina now. ... You were funny. That bit you did with your hands? You did it every night. Every night it was hilarious. Do you know how hard that is? To do something consistently funny? Every night I watched and every night I laughed.

NICKY

I don't remember you laughing. EVER.

ANNETTE

I did. Trust me. Funny is tough. You were funny. ... Oh. Hey. I liked your movie.

NICKY

You did??

ANNETTE

It was cute. And funny. A good movie. Wrote. Directed. Starred. That's a lot to do.

NICKY

Back then no one would even audition me for a lead part.

ANNETTE

I get it. Control the board as often as you can.

NICKY

... What didn't you like?

ANNETTE

Hmm?

NICKY

About the movie. I'm sure you didn't like everything.

ANNETTE

Oh come on. That was ages ago.

NICKY

What didn't you like?

ANNETTE

Well... I didn't care for that first generation of digital film. Never looked right to me. The tracking? The colors? Images either looked blown out or cold and sometimes both. Maybe that was just Danish actors. I believed in it. The technology. I believed in the technology as long as it wasn't a shortcut. Too often it was. No one has to be David Lean out of the gate, but I didn't appreciate when young directors didn't bother to learn basics, like framing or editing. "It's digital. We can do what we want." Not true. Honest collaboration. It's what separates artistic endeavor from masturbation.

NICKY

Unless you're really good at masturbation.

ANNETTE

See? Funny. You were not one of those careless directors.

NICKY

Thank you.

ANNETTE

I didn't believe you were gay.

NICKY

What??

ANNETTE

In the movie. I didn't believe your character was gay.

NICKY

That was sort of a big part of the movie.

ANNETTE

Was it??

NICKY

It was THE big part of the movie.

ANNETTE

But it didn't feel that way. It wasn't an awakening. It was circumstance. All the men in her life were pigs. A surfeit of pigs may make some women gay, but not in my experience. In my experience, we dress up and sashay down to the sty for a buffet of affirmation and attention with our asses in the air day after day after day.

NICKY

So you didn't like the movie?

ANNETTE

I did like it. I liked the first hour - forty minutes. Those scenes snapped. I was hooked. And then, well, you became this damsel in distress. You were strapped to the train tracks, a suicide jumper on some lesbian ledge.

NICKY

"One step closer and I'm going down - on this woman."

ANNETTE

HA! YES! See? That's funny. Take Two:

NICKY

"One step closer and I'll be so far down this woman's pants I will untie her shoes."

ANNETTE

Yes, yes. Time to re-shoot! ... Your co-star was sexy. Hot box of bacon. I'm sure two women fondling each other brought in a good number of male eyeballs. But I never believed your relationship because it seemed your character didn't believe in the relationship. Sure enough, by the end of the movie, she's having coffee with some mysterious man in a cafe and they just "click.".... Sorry.

NICKY

No, no. That's all fair. ... I'm shooting a new movie.

ANNETTE

Good for you. Time for a second.

NICKY

It's my fifth.

ANNETTE

Fifth movie? Really??? You've made four movies?? How did I miss that? Write, direct, star?

NICKY

Yes.

ANNETTE

Well, you're a regular - I won't use his name. I did three of his movies. Until recently it was great to say that you were in one.... Your fifth?? Not that digital crap?

NICKY

It looks a lot better these days, but no. Film.

ANNETTE

Where are you shooting this movie?

NICKY

Here.

ANNETTE

This town? What's here?

NICKY

Everything. I like college towns. A college town is a perpetual cross-roads of youth, potential, optimism, and disappointment.

ANNETTE

So, what's this film about? If you can tell.

NICKY

Young woman. Fired by the CIA. She wasn't a good spy. Now she's back in her college town. Married, hating it.

ANNETTE

So, it's a thriller??

NICKY

A comedy.

ANNETTE

But you're not funny anymore.

NICKY

I'm -

ANNETTE

I'm kidding. It's funny? I hear CIA and espionage and I fear you're stepping into foreign policy and what's wrong with the Powers That Be movie.

NICKY

It's a comedy. It's funny. I hope.

ANNETTE

Good. That's what was missing in your lesbian movie. You got gay and every frame after your very countenance morphed.

NICKY

I didn't want it to seem frivolous.

ANNETTE

But you went cliché instead. Gay men are funny. Gay women are serious. If you're funny, be funny. There's enough super shitty stuff happening in the world.

NICKY

We need to do our part.

ANNETTE

What part? Is it your responsibility?? Save the big issues for the David Halberstam's of the world. I like a paycheck any way I can get it, but I resent getting sucked into the "Important" projects posing and pandering. There was a stretch where every reading I did was a play about Bosnia. The Danube still flows but you wouldn't know it these days. Those same writers found something else "important" to write about. And what about all those plays from the terrorists' side of things? Were you around for that? Three thousand people dead - forget it. Things don't have to be serious to be effective.

NICKY

Things should be about something.

ANNETTE

If they're well written, they're about everything. I'll let you in on the most basic singularity that binds us all.

Annette stares into the make-up mirror. Nicky stares into the same "mirror" at her. Annette's face blank. Nicky watches, waits...

ANNETTE

... I'm dying.

What??

NICKY

I'm dying.

ANNETTE

Oh my god?? I didn't know. I'm sorry -

NICKY

No, just - look at me.

ANNETTE

Okay???

NICKY

.... I'm dying.

ANNETTE

How long have you been sick? Are you going to die in here??!

NICKY

No, no, no. Stop. Nicky. Can you see it?

ANNETTE

What??? Is it that mole?? Under your eye??

NICKY

NO! (Christ, I hope not.) The most undeniable fact as I sit here right now, with you, in this theater, as the day passes, is that I'm dying.

ANNETTE

... I guess.

NICKY

It's true. Say it.

ANNETTE

Say what?

NICKY

"You're dying."

ANNETTE

No.

NICKY

"Annette, you're old and you're dying."

ANNETTE

No.

NICKY

ANNETTE

Too Taboo? And yet it's the truth. A truth you can't admit.

NICKY

Annette, you're old and you're dying.

ANNETTE

Oh, my god, I can't believe you just said that.

NICKY

I'm sorry, I'm sorry -

ANNETTE

HA! You don't have to be my age for that to sink it. It's the same for you. It's the same for you thirty years ago.

NICKY

That's just needlessly - it undercuts everything else.

ANNETTE

Exactly. It does undercut everything else. IF we let it. I'm not saying there's no time for righting wrongs and helping others but there's always time for comedy.

NICKY

So, everyone should play for laughs and that will cure our country's ills?

ANNETTE

Oh god no. I for one can do without this deluge of prepackaged suit-wearing comedians telling us how funny they are. We're not allowed to judge for ourselves anymore, are we? No. Instead, turn on the television and we get a bunch of self important pricks down our throats.

NICKY

Maybe you can rephrase that??

ANNETTE

Smug dudes and vulgar women who try to out-dude the dudes or the niche comedians who we're told are funny but are mostly celebrated for being "brave." I don't need brave from my comedians. Are you May and Nichols funny or Natty Bumppo brave? Pick one. ... You know what I caught myself doing after fifty years?

NICKY

Can anyone "catch" themselves after fifty years??

ANNETTE

I read the newspaper. Every morning. The entire thing. The first two hours of my day. A voracious newspaper appetite coupled with some idiotic belief that it was up to me to read up the evils in the world and dispense my wisdom unto others.

ANNETTE (cont.)

All I did was read the newspaper, yet somehow I obtained a clarity no one else had. I did that for decades. I started every day sad, mad, agitated, overly righteous. And for what? I couldn't fix a damn thing in my house. My cat had worms. I missed a car payment. But fuck me, was I worried about Bosnia.

She grabs a newspaper.

ANNETTE

Ooh, did you see this? College town newspaper. This is great. "*The Dean of Advice and Counseling's death has been confirmed a suicide.*" Now that's funny.

NICKY

I guess.

ANNETTE

Maybe a little dark. ... The point is, that if and when you are capable of it, which YOU my dear are, make people laugh. This newspaper did so unintentionally but I'll take it. A good laugh is the self-cleanse no enema can compete with.

NICKY

I'll consider my life a success if I never compete with an enema.

ANNETTE

Funny is funny. Not everyone is or has to be. It's that whole *Sullivan's Travels* sort of thing. Where are the Joel McCray's when you need them?

EDDIE (OFF)

Someone call for tall and handsome?

Eddie ENTERS. He's hardly Joel McCray but hams it up for Annette's benefit. Until he sees Nicky.

EDDIE

Oh. Hi.

NICKY

Hi....

ANNETTE

See, Nicky? That line right there. That could have been funny, but you got serious.

Expecting nothing but laughs,
Annette realizes this is awkward.

ANNETTE

(to Eddie)

You weren't expecting her??

EDDIE

I haven't seen her in years. Hi, I'm Eddie Charles.

NICKY

Not so funny.

ANNETTE

And she knows funny. I'm going for lunch. Eddie, bring you back something?

EDDIE

Here.

He hands her money.

ANNETTE

No, no, no. I don't need your money -

EDDIE

Just take it. I want the #4 and a coconut water and a coffee. Okay? Take it.

ANNETTE

Fine.

EDDIE

Rehearsal went well?

ANNETTE

I have no idea.

Annette EXITS.

Eddie waits, then checks to the doorway to be sure Annette is gone.

EDDIE

You and Annette in the same room? How was that???

NICKY

Terrifying.

EDDIE

Did she get you with the "I'm Dying" thing.

NICKY

Is that a thing??

EDDIE

It's something. ... Our Arkadina.

EDDIE

Busy is good. Busy is my chosen state. Still assisting others? Moving careers along?

NICKY

I do what I can. Script consultant. Executive producer. Whatever pays. It usually does.

EDDIE

So what are you doing here??

NICKY

... I just got to town. Walked by the theater, saw your name. Lots of photos of you in the lobby. Like a timeline.

EDDIE

I'm here every summer. I'm on the board now.

NICKY

The artistic director? Is that Missy from class???

EDDIE

Melissa now. She worked here one summer, convinced me to come up the next. She fell in love.

NICKY

And you kept working with her? That doesn't sound like you.

EDDIE

She fell in love with the area. Gave up city life, stopped using her stage name, took a job at the college. She became artistic director three years ago. She knows enough actors to bring in a name or two per season.

NICKY

And you two...?

EDDIE

She's married. Just barely made it.

NICKY

What does that mean?

EDDIE

She wanted to be married by thirty-five.

NICKY

You had to be elsewhere that year.

EDDIE

Classics Professor. I'm happy for her. For them.

NICKY

And yet you fear for them?

EDDIE

Nope. They got over the hump. Wedding didn't look desperate. There's that undeniable point when it's too late, you know? I've seen people, you've seen people, they hit their thirties and a patch of adversity and suddenly the boat is sinking. Marriage somehow equals buoyancy. It's not like all the other craziness disappears. Guy or girl. You see them out with the fiancée and there's a moment when you know they're not being the person you know them to be and they know you know and over a plastered on demented smile their eyes scream out, "Don't screw this up for me, please play along."

NICKY

Maybe they were waiting for the right person?

EDDIE

Waiting is for buses. Or cable repair. People, someone you marry? That should be different. It worked for Missy -

NICKY

Melissa.

EDDIE

Right. Her husband wants to open a brewery. What's cooler than a brewery?

NICKY

A lot of things. ... I saw you did a Soap for a while?

EDDIE

Not a bad couple of years

NICKY

How did they get rid of you?

EDDIE

Car accident. Off screen.

NICKY

They never do it to you on screen.

STAGE MANAGER (OFFSTAGE)

Eddie, ten minutes. Eddie, ten minutes.

EDDIE

So much for lunch I guess. Good to see you, Nick. If you're around later, we can talk?

NICKY

I'm shooting a movie here.

EDDIE

Oh. That's you? I saw camera trucks. Figured it was college kids.

NICKY

I'd like you to take a part.

EDDIE

Nick?? I'm doing this play and -

NICKY

You can still do the play. We'll shoot around your schedule. Promise. It's a nice part, small part, fun part. Easy for you to do both. You're the super spy-protector guy.

EDDIE

What the hell is that?

NICKY

The lead, she's a spy, Ex-spy. She comes back to her college town after botching an assignment and she gets in trouble.

EDDIE

Is this a movie were the lead has to rejoin a sorority to prove she was way cooler than anyone thought she was?

NICKY

It's not.

EDDIE

Good. And this super spy-protector guy?

NICKY

He's the mysterious figure in the shadows.

EDDIE

That would be welcomed. I'm always the boring father-coach-uncle-boss.

NICKY

People our age don't have interesting lives. Want the part?

EDDIE

Someone quit?

NICKY

I need to fire someone.

EDDIE

Who?

NICKY

If the part is too much I can move Max over and you can play the creepy professor.

EDDIE
You still work with Max?

NICKY
We've remained friends.

EDDIE
Who do you need to fire??

NICKY
Neal.

EDDIE
Oh. OH. You and Neal are - ???

NICKY
Are NOT.

EDDIE
Okay. You and Neal have been together -

NICKY
Long enough for this to be the natural progression of things.

EDDIE
Is it that he's ten years younger?

NICKY
That hadn't been an issue before.

EDDIE
Until he became famous?

NICKY
We were doing fine.

EDDIE
Never the hint of marriage?

NICKY
Never discussed.

EDDIE
Convenient. For him.

NICKY
For us both. I wasn't burdened being the older wife and in the eyes of the public, Neal remained a Hollywood bachelor. And being that I was on his arm for a growing number of Premieres, he got wonderful press for being "true" to me.

EDDIE
Which made him more popular.

NICKY

Of course.

EDDIE

So, what did it? Ended it? Last Straw??

NICKY

Puppet fur.

EDDIE

What?

NICKY

We both flew from LA a couple days ago. I came here. He stopped in New York. A children's show. Doesn't pay but you don't say NO to a children's show. Not when there are puppets. When he got up here, unpacked, I found puppet fur.

EDDIE

Those puppeteers do get close.

NICKY

... It should have ended a couple years ago. Neal should have ended it. I did so much damn work, bringing him up, putting him in front of my agents. This too is up to me? Can you imagine? I end the relationship and it will only up his Q-Rating. Some mean older woman dumped him. ... I've tried to be subtle. Last year, I told him, Buy a house. Put your money somewhere safe.

EDDIE

You do have a knack for managing someone else's career.

NICKY

And he bought a house too. He makes that sort of money. But he didn't move in. Too afraid to be on his own. He's on a different film every month and when he's back he says all the right things.

EDDIE

Until a Puppeteer puts a hand on his ass?

NICKY

I'd like to send him back to LA if only clear his stuff out of my house. By the time I get home, that will be that. Is that good enough for you?

EDDIE

Plenty. ... Okay.

Nicky lost in thought as she attempts to figure a multitude of things out: locations, shooting schedule changes, and now leaving her boyfriend.

... Nick? Nicky???

EDDIE

What?

NICKY

I'll do it.

EDDIE

Are you sure?

NICKY

Are you sure?

EDDIE

I am sure. Yes. This is great. Thank you.

NICKY

One condition.

EDDIE

Okay?

NICKY

A part for Annette.

EDDIE

Really?

NICKY

A part with lines. So she can qualify for insurance.

EDDIE

I can do that.

NICKY

Good. Then let's make a movie. Your movie. Max can figure out which part he wants.

EDDIE

Max will be the professor. He's got the creepy thing down.

NICKY

You two dated, didn't you? How creepy we talking?

EDDIE

We're done here. I'll leave you to your rehearsal.

Nicky gets up, readies to leave.

NICKY

That was - easier than expected.

EDDIE

Was it?

NICKY

(a slow build)

Having not spoken to you in years? Yes, it was. Good. Great. The whirlwind has subsided. I have order again. I know how to proceed. Everything before the first day of shooting is nuts. Everything supposed to be figured out and yet you know it won't be. Dealing with Neal didn't help. I'll be in touch with your agent. You're making minimum. Everyone makes minimum and -

As she's building to a frantic state, Eddie rests hands on Nicky's shoulders.

EDDIE

Hey, hey, hey. I get it. Okay? Try to relax.

NICKY

Relax? I don't get to relax for a couple months. I marked it down on my calendar.

EDDIE

Relax with me. ... Ain't this neat?

NICKY

What?

EDDIE

Us. Together. After all this time.

Eddie kisses her cheek, and then kisses her for real. This becomes one of those overly aggressive kissing moments where clothes might very well fly off on their own.

STAGE MANAGER (OFFSTAGE)

Eddie, to stage. Eddie, to stage.

Lights Dim, the sound of sirens.

FADE TO BLACK.

Flashing Lights of Firetrucks and the sound of sirens continue.....

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE.

EDDIE'S VILLAGE APARTMENT

A DAY LATER.

Fire has scorched Eddie's apartment. Police tape inside the doorway has been pushed through like a marathon finish line.

UPSTAGE kitchen area has seen most of the damage. The oven and refrigerator in ruins, doors of each hang open.

DOWNSTAGE, less damage. The couch and chairs still intact. Heat from the fire has ruined the television, stereo, speakers.

The collection of memorabilia, the posters and photos that covered the walls of the apartment mostly gone. Decades-worth of play posters and photographs singed, reduced, scattered on the floor. In spots, outlines from the burnt and fallen poster frames have left a clear, clean wall behind it. Of the posters that remain, some still legible.

EDDIE emerges from the bedroom with a basket of salvaged clothes. As he enters, it's as if seeing the apartment for the first time. Part of him still believes he'll be able to clean up the mess by moving a cup or closing the refrigerator door. The reality sinks in. After a futile, fruitless minute, Eddie succumbs to the fact that his apartment has been destroyed.

He picks up the basket of clothes and dumps the clothes into a pile downstage. He sits on his couch, begins to sift through what can be saved and what cannot.

Front door opens.

NICKY tentatively pushes through the door, squeezes inside past the Yellow tape. Once again she carries a bag of bagels and a tray of coffees.

Once inside, Nicky considers how she might help. She finds a poster and frame reasonably intact on the floor. She dusts it off, attempts to hang it back on the wall. The wire in back doesn't hold. Nicky goes through a bit of repair work, adjusts the nail in the wall. Satisfied, she hangs the play poster, studies it for a moment, happy with her effort.

All at once not only does the poster fall to the floor, but most of the wall lands at her feet.

EDDIE

... That coffee for me?

NICKY

Sorry. Yes. Who knew that cafe would still be around? I mentioned the fire was yours. Free croissants. Yay.

EDDIE

The value of being a loyal customer all these years. ... I tried to have a drink. All the booze evaporated. I didn't know that could happen.

NICKY

You weren't good in chemistry, were you? I could get a bottle? We could call it brunch, unless you're still opposed I am?

EDDIE

Until I die.

NICKY

... Find much?

EDDIE

The bedroom was okay. The closet intact. Apparently, I own a lot of suits. Could never say No to the Warehouse sale.

NICKY

And I thought you only went there to watch models undress in the aisles.

EDDIE

Those were good days.

What can I do??

EDDIE

Not much. I need to leave this until the insurance people come by. After that, there's a crew to haul debris away.

NICKY

We could mark what's still good with a Sharpie? I'm sure I have one in my bag.

Nicky has a task and immediately starts to pick up items. One photo catches her eye.

NICKY

Oh. Is this - this is your dad??

EDDIE

He still sees a show every now and then.

NICKY

That's nice. Doesn't give you guilt for no kids?

EDDIE

My sister has enough kids for both of us. Her husband sneezed and she'd get pregnant. ... Dad's just - coasting. Without mom. On one hand, it's wonderful to have been so in love. On the other, he's limping to the finish. Christ, I never wanted that.

NICKY

To be hopelessly in love?

EDDIE

Isn't "love" just Nostalgia?

NICKY

Oh, Eddie.

EDDIE

It's survival instinct. Affirmation. What makes you feel best while the world comes at you? You conjure up LOVE, the safety, the security of it. You build it into something else, a mound, a simulacrum, something that may or may not have anything to do with who that other person is or was? It's all a self-serving creation.

Nicky wishes she had more to do.
Eventually stops doing anything.

NICKY

What's next? After insurance?

EDDIE

Gut the place. Renovate. These walls have to go. No fixing that old plaster.

NICKY

That'll take a while.

EDDIE

Luckily, I'm out of town doing a show.

NICKY

You're going back to the play??

EDDIE

I told them I needed two days.

NICKY

How responsible of you. ... Anyone you can stay with? Here in town?

EDDIE

There's no one left. I knew that, I think. Still, I walked in this morning, saw the damage, and the first thing I did was pick up the phone like there was someone around the corner I could call. ... It used to feel like that. The City. Someone close-by. Jerry Mac lived off Ninth. To me, that area of Chelsea was "where Jerry Mac lived." Boogie lived on Second and Twelfth. The Chief on Mercer and Houston. Frenchie lived on Waverley and Sixth. The City never seemed too huge, too crowded because this was where my friends lived. Everyone was just a subway ride away. Remember the Mayor of Forty-Third Street? No matter when you were walking around there, you'd see him. He'd see you. He'd be locked in some animated conversation with someone else, but he'd spot you, drag you into the conversation and you'd be stuck on that corner for an hour. ... He developed dementia. Just like that. I don't remember when he left. One day he was just gone. ... In my mind *everyone* is still here. They're not. I never took the time to watch them leave. Glad I didn't.

Nicky considers approaching Eddie
but gives him space.

NICKY

Was it nice?

EDDIE

What?

NICKY

The apartment. I wondered how it turned out, what you'd do.

EDDIE

It has looked better.

NICKY

... We helped you move in. Me and that friend of yours, Boogie. We showed up ready to work and there was nothing to move. All you had were garbage bags of clothes. A CD player. Some books. No furniture. You didn't own a dresser. We piled clothes on the floor and drank beer on top of them.

EDDIE

You said, "You'll never have so little again." ... But look. That is no longer the case. Here's a new pile of clothes.

The posters intrigue Nicky most.

NICKY

Did you put all your play posters on the walls?

EDDIE

I developed a debilitating superstition about it. Every poster had to go up. Some stayed up. Others swapped out to make room.

NICKY

Amazing. You went the wrong way, Eddie. In the new golden age of television you became a theater actor. ...

Nicky finds a burnt, yet legible poster.

NICKY

Oh, Eddie! The *Llamas*? I'm touched. *Llamas* made it. *The Seagull* did not. Who would have bet llamas over seagulls?

EDDIE

The llamas.

NICKY

You just wait. Someone will revive it. The llamas time has come! ... I did another production of *Seagull*. May have been the last play I did...

Nicky attempts to get close to Eddie, wants to be close -

EDDIE

You didn't need to come here.

NICKY

Oh. No. Of course. It's not - it's no big deal. It's just, considering you rang my bell the other night, a bell very much in need of ringing, it was the least I could do.

Eddie more distracted by what he's finding.

NICKY

... Film stuff. That's why I'm here. In the city. Needed a new camera. When you do low budget, you can't go bossing people around. Anymore.

EDDIE

Anymore?

NICKY

I used to do that. A lot. All the time. ... My first film? Queen Of Bitches. I convinced myself it was my right as director to be as shitty as I needed to be. I mean, I was the reason all those people were assembled, right? I was the reason they all had jobs that day. If I needed to blow off some steam, it was more or less my right to do so. ... So many people hated me after that first film. Make that, Everyone hated me. All those phony "friendships" from acting class. Each of them sure I'd hand them a part. Just like that. I bust my ass and they're handed a role? Fuck that. In the end, you can't cast everyone, so in the end I didn't cast anyone. Probably the reason I moved to West Coast. THE reason I moved to West Coast. I figured it was more acceptable out there. The self-absorbed, solipsistic self. I started meeting new people, hanging out with them not to make new friends, but to find out who they knew. And then behind their back I'd make friends with those other people to find out who they knew... It worked. That's basically how I made my second and third movie. You can see who I had met and was hanging out with at the time. Small time TV actors in movie two became more notable actors by movie four.

EDDIE

So what's changed?

NICKY

Nothing. Everything. Neal. Maybe. Thinking that after a decade of skipping from person to person I could slow it down, stop being such a jerk.

EDDIE

Ever think Neal did what you were doing?

NICKY

Absolutely. I told him to. I just didn't think - dumb. ... I'm more in touch with the ogre within these days.

NICKY (cont.)

I try to follow the Mike Nichols' "no asshole" rule. I'm usually good about it.

EDDIE

Usually?

NICKY

Oh, god, Eddie. I got pissed off at some PA yesterday. I couldn't get the shot I wanted and no one else was thinking. All these boobs standing around like zombies. Fuck. It was awful. I could see myself doing it, hear what I was saying, but I couldn't stop. I'm - embarrassed.

EDDIE

Make it up to them.

NICKY

I did. Sort of. I will. Do better. I thought it best I got away for the day. I called the theater for you. They told me you had left, what had happened. I didn't have your cell. ... I used to the phone number here. For the longest time I had. Each year I'd get a new address book, and each year you had a spot. "EDDIE." Under E. Not C for "CHARLES." E. I called once, to check in, to see how you were. *"The number you have dialed is not in service...please check the number and try again...."* Bit of a shock. Eventually someone told me you were still here. I was glad.

Eddie continues to go through clothes. Nicky looks for ways to connect.

NICKY

... I parked Uptown. Near the camera place. Took the subway. Out on Seventh. One more summer morning like it used to be. Warm sun. Skinny trees with huge leaves stuck in sidewalks. Street cleaners humming. Smell of bodega bread and spilt beer on the streets. Pull that string, right? Lasted ten seconds. Wave of people hit me. The city's demise equal parts Gentrification and Brunchification. I like to pretend ours was the Last Great Era. I know it wasn't. If Fitzgerald could bitch about his *Lost City* in the '30's, how can we??

EDDIE

... I'll be back for you film.

NICKY

There's more going on than my film.

EDDIE

Not for you.

NICKY

Well, yes. It is a bit heady. The whole process.

EDDIE

All that comes with it? Queen of Bitches??

NICKY

Absolutely. I love putting a project together. The exhilaration of a new idea, writing it down, imagining voices, seeing all that talent assemble. That's everything. First day of shooting it all changes. Every day during a shoot I vomit at dawn.

EDDIE

I saw that movie. World War Two. Bogart. *"They Vomit At Dawn."*

NICKY

I don't mind puking. Makes it real. And it's as close to Morning Sickness as I'm going to get.

EDDIE

(digging through debris)

Somewhere, in here, that Beta tape you gave me. I added to it. An Indie film. All downtown. A tracking shot of me riding a bike over the Brooklyn Bridge. Me in the Meat Packing District before the Bistros. One day, I thought, I'm going to watch that tape and it will be awesome. ...

Eddie finds the ruined beta tape,
tosses it aside.

NICKY

You can't get this stuff back, Eddie.

EDDIE

Guess not. ... It's a small apartment? With all the stuff gone?

NICKY

Maybe it's not great for you to be here? Insurance company. Clean up crew. Let them do this. I can drive you back? Come get the camera with me. I could use a hand.

EDDIE

I'm going to spend the night here.

NICKY

Really??

EDDIE

It'll be fine. Like I just moved in. ... We got lucky, huh?

NICKY

What??

EDDIE

All these years and to still be able to do what we do? We're lucky. The vomit? That's proof. Commitment, how much it means to you. We are alone to do our thing.

NICKY

Alone? I'm in the process of breaking up with Neal -

EDDIE

You don't seem too devastated by it.

NICKY

Eddie, I don't think it's -

EDDIE

It's an annoyance, that's all. Do your thing, Nick. That's everything. That Singular Pursuit. That focus other people don't have. That's not a bad thing. Look at this apartment. If I had taken a moment away from doing my thing, looked around, the size of this place should have freaked me out a decade ago. It never did. This was success, Nick. Proof I'd done it right. Because all along, from before I moved to the City and even once I got here, there were those so sure who I was supposed to be. But we didn't listen, Nick. We're still doing it. All those people disappeared, we're still able to do our thing.

NICKY

You're right. ... We're lucky.

Nicky gets up, starts to the apartment door. She pauses, takes a moment to look around again.

NICKY

This Is It.

EDDIE

What?

NICKY

When you gave me that key, there wasn't a day I didn't stop by. Every morning I'd walk in and every morning I'd think that: *This Is It*. I had no reason to think that. Good-god such certainty, such clarity. ... I'd take the subway over in the morning, buy coffee, and I'd sit. Right there. There was a glorious sliver of sunlight through that window back then. I'd set my face into the sun and close my eyes and repeat, *This is it*. ... I was in love, Eddie. I never pushed it. I never had to. I had a key. All that uncertainty, the anxiety that came with those years.

NICKY (cont.)

School debt and parent expectations, and no one was hiring me. None of it was easy. But for a while I had a key and it was the first time in my life I was sure of myself. It changed me forever. You got the sitcom and I saw what I could do and what I was good at. And to my surprise, even when I didn't have that key, I still had that confidence. ... Some part of me always needed to champion some other person. It took the attention off me. ... Look at that cozy corner of the apartment. All that worry spent there. Crying crying crying. Nothing from back then is remotely as complicated as my life is today. But wouldn't you know it? Today I walk in, see this place, and there's that old Warmth again.

EDDIE

Might be Residual heat from the fire.

NICKY

That's funny. ... I've got to go get a camera.

Nicky waits as long as possible for a response but then EXITS.

After a while, Eddie plops down in the pile clothes as he did the first day he moved in.

Nicky has left him a beer in the bag. He opens it, drinks.

BLACKOUT.

ACT THREE, SCENE 2.

UPSTATE THEATER, THE GREEN ROOM

A couple days later

Chaos on stage. A roar from what sounds like a car engine. There's the screeching of tires.

Angry conversing as actors and director stop and restart a scene.

Annette screams "LINE?"

All at once, EDDIE Enters the Green Room with TIFF hot at his heels.

Eddie late for rehearsal, frazzled, puts down his bag, attempts to get ready to Go On.

Tiff ragged in cut-off jeans, sneakers and dirty t-shirt. Her hair a frizzy mess. She's nursing bug bites and general itchiness from the woods.

EDDIE

I cannot do this right now.

TIFF

Then when?

EDDIE

Later. If ever.

TIFF

I've got no where else to be.

EDDIE

That's your fault.

TIFF

No, that's yours.

EDDIE

You can't - look - You've been through something. An event. I don't think it's PTSD, but you're not in a good place. Get settled.

TIFF

And where should I do that?? I drove four hours this morning. Can we just go over -

EDDIE

It's not worth discussing.

TIFF

If you're going to dismiss everything -

EDDIE

I'm not dismissing anything if I'm not actively listening.

TIFF

This is happening.

From off-stage, a plea from the play's director.

DIRECTOR (OFFSTAGE)

Quiet.

Eddie and Tiff attempt to be respectful of rehearsal.

ON STAGE, a car engine starts and revs. It masks the noise from OFF and they are more free to talk.

TIFF

... It's a fair offer.

EDDIE

How is it FAIR?

ON STAGE, the screeching of tires as the "car" peels out and races down the street.

TIFF

Fair requires a competent understanding of what is being offered. Listen to what's being offered before you render it fair or not.

EDDIE

Who the hell are you???

TIFF

I'm not taking advantage of you. Fair is an amicable agreement between two parties.

*More action and noise from stage.
And then the car engine, tires,
all of it abruptly stops just as
Eddie delivers his line.*

EDDIE

No fucking way!

DIRECTOR (OFFSTAGE)

Oh my god! We are still rehearsing!

ANNETTE (OFFSTAGE)

That's not true. We are apparently writing a new play.

DIRECTOR (OFFSTAGE)

Annette?!

ANNETTE (OFFSTAGE)

I have six different versions of this scene in my head.

YOUNG ACTOR (OFFSTAGE)

And none of them work!!

ANNETTE (OFFSTAGE)

*Of course it works! There are cars and engines and tires and
it still WORKS if you make it work!!*

DIRECTOR (OFFSTAGE)

Let's take a break.

*Cast and crew take a break.
Muffled, heated voices ensue.*

*A few moments later, ANNETTE bursts
into the Green Room. Exasperated
by the rehearsal, she enters to
find Tiff with Eddie.*

ANNETTE

Oh good christ. ... Eddie? At your age??

EDDIE

She was just leaving.

TIFF

Not yet. Soon. Promise. I don't know what it is, but I
cannot handle the smell of backstage.

DIRECTOR (OFFSTAGE)

Is Eddie here?? Eddie, to stage please...

EDDIE

Gladly.

(to Tiff)

EDDIE (cont.)

You? Vampire outside the house. Vampire can't come in unless you invite her. YOU're the vampire. You're not invited!

Eddie Exits.

Annette not sure what to do with Tiff. Tiff, worked up, not sure what she's supposed to do either.

Annette heads down to the make-up table, looks into the mirror, checks her makeup.

ANNETTE

'Tis the anxiety of an actress.

TIFF

What is?

ANNETTE

The smell of backstage.

TIFF

Who said I was an actress?

ANNETTE

Honey, I've met a few.

TIFF

I prefer not to be labeled.

ANNETTE

Oh right. Your generation. Nothing defines you. Except being undefined. Which if you haven't noticed yet is a great way to sell your generation something.

TIFF

You can't comment on someone else like that.

ANNETTE

By our very nature, that's what humans do. It's how we survive. We recognize a threat.

TIFF

I'm not a threat.

ANNETTE

And you're not an vampire either. As for "actress", it's simple deduction. How could you hate the smell of backstage unless you've been backstage before? You could be some sort of theater groupie, for which I'm sorry, but my guess would be actress.

TIFF
I don't want to be here...

ANNETTE
I didn't invite you.

TIFF
(ponders)
... Wow. I said it. I meant it.

ANNETTE
What?

TIFF
I am an actress.

ANNETTE
That's what I said.

TIFF
I don't want to be here.

ANNETTE
Dear??

TIFF
I'll be thirty in a couple of years.

ANNETTE
Poor thing.

TIFF
Why should I wait?

ANNETTE
To leave? Fine by me. I've got to figure out my hair. No one else is going to help me.

NICKY ENTERS.

The women all surprised to see each other. ...

ANNETTE
Of our three, I believe I'm the only one meant to be here.

NICKY
Can we talk?

ANNETTE
Me or her?

NICKY
I don't know who she is.

Tiff. TIFF

That's Tiff. ANNETTE

I need to make changes. NICKY

You too? ANNETTE

I think so. NICKY

Do I still have a part?? ANNETTE

Quiet, please. DIRECTOR (OFFSTAGE)

Yes. You have a part. NICKY

That's a relief. ANNETTE

On Stage, the sound of car engine starting up again. Slow revving grows louder and louder.

I'm retiring. TIFF

From what? NICKY

TIFF
From this. Theater. Acting. All of it. I'm done. I just made the decision. It feels good. I'm at peace with it.

NICKY
(to Annette)
This sounds important. You two can talk. I should go -

ANNETTE
We weren't having a conversation. She's pissed off at the world.

NICKY
What's going on? You look a fright. What are you doing here?

TIFF

I just went AWOL from an actors' retreat.

ANNETTE

Honey, do they know you're gone? Theater people in the woods? They'll overreact if they can't find you. Think you were eaten by a bear.

TIFF

Screw them. Gives them something productive to do today. What a big waste of time. Thirty actors, directors, writers in the woods. I thought we'd read new work, make pour-over coffee, bond over coffee, create a community, our Provincetown. Instead, it was crappy cabins, spiders, black flies, people making out, pot smoking, and Simon Says. Simon Fucking Says. What am I ten? Everyone just so happy to be there. I wanted to vomit. Look at me? I haven't had a decent shower in days. How was I supposed to put up with that??

ANNETTE

You smile until your mouth hurts and agree to everything.

TIFF

I do NOT agree to everything.

ANNETTE

That sounds like you. And I don't even know you.

NICKY

You go to make connections.

TIFF

I thought I didn't have to do that anymore.

ANNETTE

How old are you??

NICKY

It's not for everyone.

TIFF

No. It's not. Did you ever go?

NICKY

No one ever asked me.

TIFF

(to Annette)

What about you?

ANNETTE

Guilty.

NICKY

The whole Make Connections thing is a choice.

NICKY

Then what's an audition for?

NICKY

It's just - it's the other crap you have to do.

TIFF

Well I've had enough. Dipshit managers who insist the only way to make industry connections is to go to the bars industry people go to. Managers call their Agent and Producer Bros, tell them a bunch of young women will be at such and such bar. Fish in a barrel. Sacrifice for Mighty Kong. And because this at a bar, everything is fair game, consensual. ... *Sure he grabbed my boob, but hey, I got the audition. ...*

NICKY

(to Annette)

What is going on here???

ANNETTE

I don't feel like I was part of it.

(to Tiff)

You do look a fright, dear. Take a seat, relax.

NICKY

I need to keep moving. Absorb the disquieting air. I know what I need to do.

ANNETTE

Shower? Just saying. ... Did you climb a Pine tree or step in bear crap?

NICKY

(to Tiff)

Are you okay?

TIFF

I'm fine. I'm me. I like a challenge. That's what theater school was. A challenge. I held my own. And now after that prestigious school, after being naked on Broadway, I wake up in the woods with some overly giddy Simon Says whistle-blowing casting director sleeping next to be.

NICKY

If you've had a bad experience, maybe -

TIFF

But was it a bad experience? Actor retreats, meeting agents at a bar, it's all acceptable behavior, isn't it?

NICKY

That's not true.

ANNETTE

It's mostly true. I'm not often involved in these conversations.

TIFF

Because no one wants to sleep with you. Sorry. No offense.

ANNETTE

Some taken. When we were coming up, the line told to me was, "Make them want to fuck you." That was your first meeting, your audition, every time in front of a camera or on stage.

TIFF

And that is just so inexcusably wrong.

ANNETTE

It was a line....

NICKY

If something happened on this retreat -

TIFF

Nothing happened. I don't think. Bong hits. Agave. Shit. You know what it was? The equivalent of an embarrassing college road trip. Someone got too high, too drunk, got naked, got touched by someone else. ... What I can't stand is the subtle and not so subtle crap we're meant to accept and put up with. That's what pisses me off. And I'm pissed off at both of you.

ANNETTE

What did we do?

TIFF

You're hypocrites.

NICKY

Hey. You've got no right -

TIFF

I grew up listening to this myth, the golden fleece of female exceptionalism and empowerment and time after time it proves false.

(to Nicky)

I have a cousin on Wall Street. College jock. Smart. Tough. First few months at work, her boss slapped her ass to say good job. The lesson? She says she'll never walk around a man's desk again.

(to Anette)

And I can't even comment on "make them want to fuck you", but it speaks volumes to the rules you lived by.

TIFF (cont.)

Oh and while we're at it, I hate that *I'm Getting My Act Together And Taking It On The Road* bullshit.

ANNETTE

We didn't create all this.

NICKY

And lashing out won't help.

TIFF

Why not? I find that what's acceptable and what's not a bit too subjective for me. It's the rock singer you know is a leach but there's always, always some twit wearing glitter makeup at the foot of the stage waiting for him to recognize her. It's the slimy troll of a director walking around Lincoln Center hitting on as many woman as possible. Like I didn't deal with him. "Hey, if you can stop me in traffic, think what you can do on screen??" Every woman will say how pathetic that is, but eight out of twenty love the compliment, and four out of those eight call his phone number and his odds just get better and better.

ANNETTE

Don't toss us under that bus.

TIFF

That bus is gone, ladies. You know, I keep waiting for all this mystical feminine wisdom to be passed down like some artifact from Themiscyra. Nothing. So I trust my instincts. How is it neither of you figured out what most guys are about? Business guys, teachers, actors, most guys simply want to live their college lives over and over and over. College was nirvana. Sure they had some commitments, work to do, grades to make, maybe a sport to play, but end of the week, there was always a kegger and chicks and that life was great. Most guys carry that mentality with them. Wherever they go. Let me do my thing. Let me do my work. Chicks. Beer. Sports. It shapes the world we live in. Hey. I've got a play. We open on the Dudes sitting around a table at one of those stupid sports bars where the girls walk around with their tits hanging out. "Hey," the First Dude says, "You know what we need to do? We need to change the narrative." Second Dude agrees. "Instead of our club being about guys looking up at a set of tits, we promote that places like this, the whole strip club experience, is about women looking down. Huh??" "Yeah. And we act all feeble and shit, right? We're just dudes. We're helpless to your tits and ass. Please forgive us." "Right, right, right. We'll call it Empowerment." First Dude says, "And because we're EMPOWERING women, not exploiting, it will be the New Normal." "What's New Normal?" On a class trip, some Seventh Grade girl sees porn star billboards in Times Square, thinks that's normal. "And Sports Bars? Peace of cake."

TIFF (cont.)

We'll put in stripper poles, convince them stripper poles are a workout!!" HAAHAHAHAHA "And just remember, if and when they speak up, all you have to say is, '*Baby, there's nothing more empowering than having a bunch of drunks staring up your ass.*'" "Okay. I can say that. But we still get to drink beer and stare up their ass, right?" "Fuck yeah."

NICKY

Cute. Silly. Might get redundant.

TIFF

It is redundant. It's been redundant.

ANNETTE

I can't speak for Nicky. It would be nice to say we were all looking out for each other, advancing a common cause. But I am tired of either being to blame for what was, or to blame for not doing enough. That some young actress was coerced into a backstage blowjob did happen. It's happening right now at the Booth. And at the same time, women who played the Make Them Want To Fuck You game better than I did went go on to bigger and better things. We were not a generation of whores any more than Davies and Winters. Pick your road, Tiff. Don't question mine. If I feel remorse for anything it's believing my path was the same for the next woman. I knew it wasn't. I knew what I needed to keep going: Discovery. Adventure. And a shitload of outright lies. "This next job is going to be the BIG one." But there's magic on the other side of not knowing. When you can admit doubt, you're free to discover. I'd love to tell you the thrill of being twenty-five and walking home with a man I didn't know, but I can't do that anymore. The world is too fucked up. Maybe it is more dangerous now and maybe those days are gone. I have memories I'd rather not be castigated and vilified for. But I wouldn't trade them for the world.

TIFF

... I don't know if I believe any of that.

ANNETTE

Then do, dear, rewrite my life. Just wait until I'm dead.

NICKY

Tiff, you should step out for a while, clear your head.

TIFF

The moment I step out, I'm never stepping foot in a theater again.

ANNETTE

I'll get the door.

NICKY

Are you okay?? Tiff? Seriously. Are you alright??

TIFF

...none of it was a mistake.

NICKY

None of what?

TIFF

The time I've spent doing this. Tuition. Groping woodsmen. Maybe that's what it took to know this isn't for me. ... It's been a long week. First the fire, then that stupid retreat -

NICKY

Oh. Wait. You're Eddie's lodger???

TIFF

Yes. I was until his apartment burnt down.

ANNETTE

Interesting.

Noise from the stage, big and dramatic with an immediate intensity as a car speeds off.

NICKY

(genuinely interested)

... What are you rehearsing???

ANNETTE

It's a car chase.

TIFF

On stage??

ANNETTE

You'd be surprised.

(to Nicky)

... Your film, Nicky? Whatever you need to do.

NICKY

Thank you. I'll have new pages tomorrow. They're actually old pages.

ANNETTE

I don't understand.

NICKY

I may ask you to stay in town? After this play ends. We have a block of rooms at the hotel.

ANNETTE

I'm along for the ride. ... Don't stress out, Nicky.

NICKY

What?

ANNETTE

We have this one in some sort of career-ending tailspin. And the last three weeks I've watched a young writer trying to be what everyone wants her to be, write what they want her to write. Do your thing, Nicky. Everything works.

NICKY

What does?

ANNETTE

Everything.

DIRECTOR (OFFSTAGE)

Annette, to the stage. Annette, to the stage.

ANNETTE

That's me.

(To Tiff)

Vampire? You've made a real break-through today. I should bill you for the therapy session.

TIFF

I'm sorry. ... I do love your work.

ANNETTE

Oh. I didn't know you had any idea who I was. *WAS*. Such an awful way to put it. Anyway, thank you. All I ever try to do is pay the rent. ... I trust you'll figure it out.

TIFF

I have.

DIRECTOR (OFFSTAGE)

Annette, to the stage. Please.....

ANNETTE

On my way....

Annette exits.

Tiff and Nicky.

TIFF

I like your movies.

NICKY

Are they funny enough?

TIFF

Do they have to be?

NICKY

For some people. Are you and Eddie?

TIFF

Me?? Eddie? No. I was staying at his apartment while he was up here.

NICKY

Fire. Must have been tough.

TIFF

Life and death. Front door was hot. I stepped in anyway. For a second. A wall of flame. It came right at me. ... I keep thinking about it. Seeing it. I keep thinking, what if I hadn't gone out that night?

NICKY

You'd been able to put out the fire?

TIFF

I'm not responsible!

NICKY

I don't know what happened.

TIFF

Oven. Wall outlet. No smoke alarms. I could have died.

NICKY

We're all dying.

TIFF

What?? ... Eddie's liable.

NICKY

Wait? Are you suing him??

TIFF

It won't come to that.

NICKY

You're suing Eddie for letting you stay in his apartment?

TIFF

For letting me stay in an apartment that wasn't safe. It's not my plan to sue. It's my father's. It won't come to that.

NICKY

Why not?

TIFF

We've offered to buy his apartment. Instead of suing.

NICKY

Does Eddie know this?

TIFF

He doesn't want to talk about it.

NICKY

You'll either sue him or you'll buy his apartment out from under him. Why would he want to talk about it?

TIFF

Minus the damage and the cost of renovation, my dad made a fair offer.

NICKY

That apartment has been the most consistent thing in his life for the last twenty-five years.

TIFF

And that's sad. I'm sorry. It is. Who lives in one place that long? He bought that apartment for less than what I paid for college. He's had a full life there. And wouldn't you say his career is his most consistent thing? ... He can take the money and never do a play again. He'd be a fool not to. My father knows how to do these things. Has a team, they do this all the time.

NICKY

Buy property, renovate it, sell it?

TIFF

I'll live there a couple of years first. Maybe.

NICKY

I don't want to listen to this.

TIFF

That's the way the city works. Someone has to get out for other people to get in.

NICKY

Like a lifeboat?

TIFF

There's only so much space. You know him well?

NICKY

Eddie? Sure. Maybe. I don't know.

TIFF

Tell him to call me.

NICKY

This isn't my responsibility.

TIFF

I can't wait any longer. I feel gross. And I stink. I'm starting to break out. Allergy. Hives. Backwoods. Backstage. Who knows. I am done, I am done, I am done. Feels good to say that. I'm going to drive home, and tomorrow I'll sit on the beach and shred my resumes and photos. ... I may just - go watch this car chase first.

Tiff EXITS.

The ACTION on stage ramps up once again, heightens with noise of the car chase and lights flashing.

Nicky sits, waits, but reconsiders her being there. She EXITS.

AFTER THE INTENSITY on stage reaches a peak, the car chase scene ends.

DIRECTOR (OFFSTAGE)

Awesome. Great job. And that's the afternoon. We will reconvene in two hours for a Full Run-Through. Thank you.

Eddie and Annette ENTER.

Both exhausted yet energized by the scene they were part of.

Eddie utterly relieved to see Tiff is not.

ANNETTE

Supper? Ed? Something light?

EDDIE

Yes. Should we invite our little Constan-TINA? That scene? Who knew?! She should hear that from us.

ANNETTE

I haven't been able to get near her today. She's in the back jotting down notes. She may have just written that scene.

EDDIE

Well then, maybe we should let her be.

ANNETTE

"New Forms", huh?

EDDIE

What?

ANNETTE

Oh come on, Treplev. *"We need new forms..."*

EDDIE

Oh. Yeah. Sure. You think she's onto a new form?

ANNETTE

She doesn't strike me as the type to be different on purpose. This is just HER, I guess. And so introverted.

EDDIE

She's a twenty-four year old writer.

ANNETTE

Yes, yes. Goes without saying. I'm not sure of her process.

EDDIE

I don't think she has one yet.

ANNETTE

What doesn't help is that shit Jeremy.

EDDIE

He wants to add something.

ANNETTE

Say the damn line! If present, if fully invested, anything written works. Every time! Brando doesn't grab the mitten because he's got nothing else to do. He's committed to the character, the scene, his co-star, and what looks random, works because he's committed. Jeremy doesn't know that. Jeremy thinks he needs to find the random. Like it's his job to come up with something spontaneous every time he walks on stage. No one can do that. He doesn't trust what he's saying because he's not invested. The scenes are there. His intention isn't. Christ, I've seen enough nerves. I've seen panic. I've seen the soul of an actor take flight while on stage. They've brought nothing to the stage and spend the scene staring into the rafters. It's the first and only lesson: No matter what's written, everything works. Find your place. Stand tall. Engage. Commit. Listen. Deliver the line. Everything Works.

EDDIE

... Tell Jeremy at dinner.

ANNETTE

What?

EDDIE

Everything Works. I already invited him.

ANNETTE

You shit.

EDDIE

Forget our writer. She's a smart cookie. You could really help Jeremy.

ANNETTE

He doesn't want to listen to me. Does he? Besides, it's easier to have a jerk in the cast. Allows everyone to lash out now and then.

EDDIE

I'll pay for dinner.

ANNETTE

Eddie, you can't keep paying for me.

EDDIE

Then don't eat a lot. You intimidate the crap out of Jeremy, but I know he's trying. He might be decent. Or maybe he won't. But we need to pull him in instead of push him away.

ANNETTE

... I am hungry. Fine. Car chase was good??

EDDIE

It was.

ANNETTE

Look at you. Eddie Charles. Our theater general rallying the troops.

EDDIE

I'm never a better version of myself than when I'm busy. Burnt apartment and all, this is where I need to be. The play. The film. This is perfect.

ANNETTE

Good for you.

EDDIE

Get a table? I'll be right there.

Annette Exits.

Eddie frees himself of props and costume, gets ready to go. Deep breath, big smile, pure enthusiasm and enjoyment.

Nicky Re-Enters.

NICKY

Hey. Bad time?

EDDIE
We just finished. Going to grab dinner. Run-through later.

NICKY
I saw Annette. I saw that lodger of yours.

EDDIE
She still here??

NICKY
She asked you to call her.

EDDIE
She tell you about suing me?

NICKY
She did.

EDDIE
Can you believe that?? Suing me.

NICKY
Sounds like her father would rather buy your place instead.

EDDIE
I know! Can't even wrap my head around that. Think about it, Nick. If I leave, who of us can afford New York anymore?

NICKY
Not me. And I've tried. ... She did seem genuinely freaked out by the fire. The fire and some Actor Retreat.

EDDIE
The retreat was her idea. I told her not to go. The fire? Maybe she and her dad pull cons like this all the time.

NICKY
She set fire to your apartment so she could buy it?

EDDIE
Who knows...

NICKY
No working smoke alarms?? I'm no judge but maybe you should settle.

EDDIE
Those alarms are supposed to be a ten-year thing. Maybe I'm a couple years off. Places like that apartment don't exist anymore.

NICKY
Neither do people like us. ... How's the play?

EDDIE

We turned a corner. Last week, we were on the verge of blowing up. Now? I'm psyched for the run-through.

NICKY

Good to hear.

EDDIE

You always hope to get there, you know? Some shows simmer. Some never progress. Some plays are the same thing from Day One until it closes. This? This is building. Pretty exciting.

NICKY

Great. After this? What's next? Where are you going to stay?

EDDIE

Well, the apartment will be off limits, for a while. And I - well, I don't want to talk about it yet. I mean, I shouldn't.... *The Lion In Winter!* In Boston. Maybe. I just heard about it. Someone dropped out. I've worked with the director and at that theater and they want to talk and - I don't want to look ahead, but I could literally go right from this play into that. Look at that? Lightning in my hands. I hate being this excited, but Henry II?? I finally get to do it.

NICKY

You'll be great.

EDDIE

Yeah, I will. I hope. I shouldn't - if Boston doesn't work out, maybe I can head to LA. It was easier when there was a "Pilot Season." I could plan my year around that. Oh, and you - your movie. I'm still in for that. Even with Boston, I can probably figure it out.

Nicky digests his response.

NICKY

Eddie, I need to change things.

EDDIE

I got those changes. They are right - here? See?

Eddie does in fact have pages of Nicky's film script with him.

EDDIE

I will read these. Tonight. For sure.

NICKY

I need to make other changes.

EDDIE

I'll adjust.

NICKY

I lose significant production money if Neal isn't involved.

EDDIE

It's your movie.

NICKY

It is. My pitch to that streaming service, APP, network, channel, whatever they call themselves this week, it included Neal. They expect Neal to be involved.

EDDIE

He's already back to LA.

NICKY

We were told -

EDDIE

"We?"

NICKY

We have the same agents. Originally, they were my agents and then Neal charmed his way into their offices - anyway... Our agents think it's best to get the film shot before we split.

EDDIE

Even if he's doinking puppets?

NICKY

AS he's doinking puppets for all I care. Why ruin the film?

EDDIE

Bringing me on is ruining the film??

NICKY

I should have thought it through. Part of the budget was Neal. IS Neal. He knows he's a draw and there's some degree of guilt in his participation. He owes me a lot for the last eight years. Why not use that to my advantage? And his buddy arrives next week for a cameo. People like when those two are on screen. And they are funny. And they work for minimum. His buddy doesn't show up if Neal's not here.

EDDIE

So are you going to do it?

NICKY

What?

EDDIE

Fire me?

NICKY

Eddie...

EDDIE

Come on. You have to do this. I mean, it makes sense. But you still have to do it.

NICKY

... Eddie, I need to let you go.

EDDIE

Even if it's not great for you.

NICKY

It's not great for me. Making all these changes again. But it's not heartbreak. I was over the boyfriend Neal a year ago. It's best I put the actor Neal back in the film.

EDDIE

Got it. You've got my blessing. I thought I was overdue for a good film part, but I get it.

NICKY

I know this isn't fair to you but it's not fair to a lot of people if we shut down because I run out of money.

EDDIE

Annette needs this film.

NICKY

One of many. She'll be fine. ... Will you be fine??

EDDIE

I still have this play.

NICKY

And Henry II?

EDDIE

Don't jinx me.

NICKY

Sorry. Sorry. I hate telling you this. Now.

EDDIE

You did a good job.

NICKY

I mean after the fire. After the other night...? It caught me by surprise and I'm not sure what I was expecting. People don't have nights like we had after thirty years, do they?

EDDIE

Unless they're married.

NICKY
Are you going to marry me, Eddie?

EDDIE
No.

NICKY
I wasn't asking -

EDDIE
It'd be nice.

NICKY
... What??

EDDIE
To look up. Look up and not care. Foot on the gas, don't let up. Didn't you say that?

NICKY
I did.

EDDIE
It's a nice thought, Nick. It really is. That's about as much as I can say. ... I'm good at this. Being here. I wasn't good back when. I really wasn't. It took your help. And I still never expected to be good. It took a couple decades, real work, work to the exclusion of so many other things. But I'm still doing it. I'm going to keep doing it.

NICKY
You should. ... I am sorry about your apartment. Can I offer some advice?

EDDIE
You always do.

NICKY
Sell. Don't grow grey in a city that doesn't care for you. If it's not Tiff taking that place from under you, it will be someone else. Fresh start. A new day for Eddie Charles?? ... Thank you for understanding about the film.

EDDIE
Everything Works.

Nicky comes over, hugs him,
squeezes as tight as she can.

NICKY
We did alright.

EDDIE
..... *"You know, I hope we never die."*

NICKY

"I hope so too."

EDDIE

"Do you think there's any chance of it?!"

Nicky exits the Green Room.

Eddie not ready to leave yet. He takes a seat downstage. Deep sigh, the last few days descend upon him.

Eddie digs deep for whatever he uses to keep going. After a moment, he picks up Nicky's script, a film he's no longer a part of. He thumbs through script pages.

At the Green Room doorway, Nicky returns. She sticks her head in, sees Eddie reading the script.

Eddie does not notice Nicky. He's focused on the pages. He takes out a pen, writes a note in the margins. He frantically scribbles something, then mouths the line again. He smiles.

EDDIE

(mumbling, but audible)

Yes, yes, yes. That's funny. That works. That works, that works.....

LIGHTS DIM.

END OF PLAY