

THE UNBEARABLE WEIGHT OF
MASSIVE TALENT

Written by

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EXT. SUNSET TOWER HOTEL - MORNING

NICOLAS CAGE is drinking a cappuccino high up on the balcony overlooking the city. The movie star sparkle lurks in there somewhere, but he looks like he needs this coffee. He needs... something.

Brings the cup to his lips. Tastes it. Little milk mustache as he looks out at the city. Then, curiously...

NIC
(in a heavy Boston accent)
It's a foregone conclusion, Jimmy.

He starts to smile. A big, charismatic grin.

INT. THE FOUR SEASONS RESTAURANT - DAY

Nic's having lunch with QUENTIN TARANTINO. He's barely touched his salad. Excited.

NIC
...that's exactly what I love about it. It manages to be simultaneously cerebral and thought-provoking, but also, like, I want to know what happens. Have you ever seen Manckiewicz's House of Strangers...

QUENTIN
I restored the print.

NIC
Of course you did.
(then)
And that's what this script reminded me of. The power struggle. The fight for relevance. It's...

QUENTIN
King Lear. King Lear. NIC (CONT'D)

They take a second. This is good.

NIC (CONT'D)
And, look, if you're worried about the accent, I can do the accent. I've been working on it all week. It's not a problem.

QUENTIN
I'm not worried, Nic. I've always admired your acting.

Nic can't help himself. Doesn't want to say it, but-

NIC
Like in what?

QUENTIN
What?

NIC
No, nothing. Sorry.
(then)
Just like in what movies
specifically?

QUENTIN
(slightly confused)
Vampire's Kiss. Wild at Heart.

NIC
Quentin. I'm kidding.

He wasn't.

QUENTIN
Oh. Shit. That was good. Okay. You
got me.

NIC
Anyway, this is... this is the role
of a lifetime. You know that.
That's why you're making it. And I
just...I'd love to be a part of it.

EXT. FOUR SEASONS HOTEL - VALET STAND - DAY

At the valet stand. Quentin's car pulls up.

QUENTIN
Well, we're still figuring things
out on our end, but I'll be in
touch in a couple days.

NIC
Well, if you have any other
questions for me, or want to talk
or, y'know, if you want me to
read...

QUENTIN
Nic, come on, I would never ask you
to read.

NIC
 (laughs)
 Yeah, no, I'm not gonna read.

Quentin's car pulls up.

QUENTIN
 This is me.

NIC
 You want me to read.

QUENTIN
 I don't.

NIC
 Yeah. Course not. Ha. Look forward
 to hearing from you.
 (a beat, then...)
 You know what? I'm gonna read.

As Quentin goes to get in the back, he freezes.

NIC (CONT'D)
 (thick Boston accent)
 It's a foregone conclusion, Jimmy.
 It takes thirteen milliseconds for
 the human brain to send a message
 to the body. So by the time your
 bullets hit me, my cerebral cortex
 will have transmitted a signal to
 the seventeen healthy muscles that
 operate my trigger finger.

Quentin is bewildered, looks around. People gathering. Nic is gathering steam.

QUENTIN
 (quietly)
 Nic, you don't have to---

NIC
 And before your asshole has had a
 chance to pucker up, your medulla
 oblongata will be splattered on the
 fucking wall behind you. And if
 that's the last thing I accomplish
 on this beautiful green earth,
 well, then...
 (moving closer to Quentin)
 WHAT A WAY TO FUCKING GO.

A long BEAT.

NIC (CONT'D)
I can do another scene if you want.

INT. NIC'S CAR - DAY

Nick is driving along. No radio, just the sounds of Los Angeles. Distant music from car stereos. A weather report. Old billboards and their sun-drenched sadness.

In the reflection of his sunglasses, curiously, a man is sitting in the passenger seat. Flowing, shoulder length hair. Leather jacket over a white t-shirt. Brash and cocky as he lights up a cigarette. He's...

YOUNG NIC CAGE. Con Air-era Cage.

YOUNG NIC
Damn, man.

Nic takes off his sunglasses. Looks over at YOUNG NIC, who is smoking.

NIC
That was good, right? It felt good.

YOUNG NIC
You just went for it.

NIC
I went for it.

YOUNG NIC
And Manciewicz? Incredible pull.

NIC
I know, that just popped into my head. Just like...thank you "head."

YOUNG NIC
(inhaling)
I'm happy for you, man. Because, honestly...
(exhaling)
...you really need this.

A beat.

NIC
Sorry, what's that supposed to mean?

YOUNG NIC

What? You get it. This could be a game changer.

NIC

Uhhh, I don't need a game changer.

YOUNG NIC

Oh yeah? Okay, sure.

NIC

Okay. Yeah, I hear your tone. But I'm not gonna be baited into this. By you. I mean, if it happens, it happens. If not... I'll just keep working. It's what I do.

YOUNG NIC

Uhh, yeah, I've noticed.

NIC

Humphrey Bogart made like a hundred movies.

YOUNG NIC

Great, here we go with Bogart. I'm just saying you could be a little more strategic. Make movie star choices...

Young Nic exhales.

NIC

Can you open a window or something?

YOUNG NIC

It's like Miles Davis said, man... "sometimes it's the notes you don't play."

NIC

Miles Davis was a heroin addict. And you know what? I'm happy when I'm working. I'm an actor!

YOUNG NIC

No! You're a fucking movie star!
(then, pointing at Nic
with his cigarette)
And you should never forget it.

This lands with Nic. He looks away...

NIC

I'm not interested in being a movie star. In being a "celebrity." And, you know what man? I don't need this.

When he looks back... Young Nic is gone.

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE - DAY

Nic is on a couch in a THERAPIST'S modern office.

NIC

I need this. This could be, I don't know, like a game changer for me.

THERAPIST

So, you're not happy with how your career is going? You seem to be working all the time.

NIC

I mean, why is everyone-- Bogart made like a hundred films.

THERAPIST

Okay, then what's this actually about? You're worried that you've lost some of your ability... your talent as an actor?

NIC

Or people have lost their ability to recognize it, which is arguably more terrifying.

THERAPIST

(not buying it)
Mmmm hmmm. Well, it certainly sounds like you have a lot of anxiety around the issue.

NIC

And if I'm being honest, the tools are sharper than ever. I feel like I'm doing great work.

THERAPIST

Okay, so how do you think your relationship with your work affects your relationship with your daughter? Let's bring Addy into this, shall we...

We REVEAL young ADDY CAGE, 15, in FAMILY THERAPY with her father. She's in jeans and a t-shirt. Old Chuck Taylors and an LA attitude. She's sitting there reading her phone at the other end of the couch.

NIC

Yeah, definitely, but can I just keep going on this for a minute.

ADDY

(staring at phone)
Please, by all means...

NIC

I just feel like we're making real progress.

THERAPIST

Addy, how has your Dad's anxiety over his career affected you?

ADDY

I mean, his work is pretty much the only thing we talk about.

NIC

So are we officially moving off of me? Off the Tarantino thing?

ADDY

That or he makes me watch old movies and then "discuss" them, which is actually just him lecturing me for, like, two hours.

NIC

God forbid you see a great film.

ADDY

(thinking)
I mean, the other day my friend Lizzie was over and he forced us to watch "Viva Los Angeles"--

NIC

Viva Las Vegas.
(to therapist)
See what I'm dealing with?

ADDY

And then he started pretending I was Ann Margaret and he was dancing and moving his hips all weird and like, serenading me.

Nic is dumbfounded.

NIC

I was just being funny. You didn't think it was funny?

ADDY

It was so embarrassing. You never think about how other people feel.

THERAPIST

Nic, do you think about how other people feel?

ADDY

Is that a real question? What do you think he's gonna say?

NIC

Addy. She's just trying to help.

ADDY

Help who? Help you? Because it's not helping. She doesn't tell you the truth. You live in this weird bubble where no one ever tells you the truth. And you don't notice or care...

She stands up and grabs her bag...

ADDY (CONT'D)

...because all you think about is you.

INT. NIC'S CAR - DAY

Nic is driving with Addy in shotgun. Her weekend duffle bag jostles around on the back seat.

NIC

Look, hon. I'm sorry, okay? I know I'm been working a lot and we haven't gotten to spend a lot of time together and...

Addy's texting and not really looking at him.

ADDY

(texting)

It's fine. We don't need to talk about it.

NIC

But I heard what you said in there. And you're right, okay? I have been selfish. So this weekend's gonna be all about you.

Addy looks up at him.

NIC (CONT'D)

So here's what I'm thinking. I'm thinking Chinese to start. Genghis Cohen. You love that place. Wait, are you still a vegetarian?

ADDY

No, I'm not. But--

NIC

(getting excited)

Okay, good. Then we start with the pork dumplings. Maybe a lo mein. Then the Peking duck. You used to love that. Remember? You make the little tacos? Anyway, then we can head to the New Beverly. They're playing The Island of Dr. Caligari. I know you're, like, super visual - and this German Expressionist stuff - I just think it's really gonna shape your palate-

ADDY

Katie is coming to get me from the hotel at six.

A long beat.

NIC

Oh.

ADDY

Sorry. It's just... we had plans.

NIC

No, hon. It's okay. Don't... Don't be sorry.

They drive in silence for a second.

NIC (CONT'D)

But if you girls need a ride-

ADDY

She'll be in an uber, so I'll just get in with her.

NIC

Cool cool, yeah. Whatever's easiest. And I have a bunch of stuff that I should get done anyway, so...

INT. SUNSET TOWER HOTEL - NIGHT

Nic is lying on the hotel bed, eating Chinese takeout, alone. He takes out his phone, starts looking through his contacts.

We do a SERIES OF QUICK CUTS as Nic calls some old friends and tries to make plans.

NIC

Hey buddy, how are ya? Been a while yeah. What're you, uh...what're you up to tonight? You're in New York? Cool.

CUT TO:

* Nic's in the bathroom.

NIC (CONT'D)

No, no, no everything's fine, I was just seeing what you were up to tonight. Want to hit Dr. Caligari at the New Bev. Maybe grab a bite after?

(beat)

You had twins? When?

CUT TO:

* Nic is sitting on the balcony wall. Los Angeles behind him.

NIC (CONT'D)

Remember that bar we used to go to on Sunset? Let's go hit it. See what's happening. I don't know. Have some fun.

(then)

It's a what? What the hell is a "We Work?"

CUT TO:

* Nic is pacing.

NIC (CONT'D)
 Hey, it's Nic.
 (beat)
 Cage.

Nic stops. Catches a glimpse of himself in the mirror.

NIC (CONT'D)
 Want to see a flick? Dr. Caligari's
 playing at the New Bev. 10PM.
 (beat)
 Oh, you're shooting?
 (beat)
 Cool. Yeah, I'm...shooting tonight
 too. I forgot. So tonight's bad for
 me as well.

He takes a deep breath. Stares at himself. Closely. Music
 swells as we...

SLAM CUT TO:

* Nic laying on the bed, eating Chinese takeout. He's
 watching The Island of Dr. Caligari on his laptop, which is
 perched on his chest. He drops some chicken.

NIC (CONT'D)
 Shit.

He wipes it off his computer right onto the bedspread.

NIC (CONT'D)
 Shit.

He looks over at Addy's made up bed in the corner of the
 room. Checks his watch. Sighs.

INT. NIC'S CAR - DAY

Nic's dropping Addy off at her mother's. Addy's getting out
 of the car.

ADDY
 Bye, Dad.

NIC
 Okay, hun. Love you.

But she's already on the way up to the house as OLIVIA, his
 ex-wife, leans in the door.

OLIVIA
 How'd it go?

NIC

I don't know, Liv. When I originally suggested the therapy - it seemed like a good idea. But now it just seems like..I don't know. Like a license to kill.

OLIVIA

Well, how was the weekend?

NIC

I mean, I tried to take her to eat Chinese and to see Dr. Caligari at the New Beverly.

OLIVIA

You tried to take her to a sixty year old film?

NIC

I tried to take her to a *classic*.

OLIVIA

But it's something YOU like. Nic, you can't keep trying to mold our daughter into someone you want to hang out with.

A beat.

NIC

But she's never read Jane Austen. She's never even seen Casablanca -- She thought Humphrey Bogart was a porn star.

Olivia's about to go off--

OLIVIA

That's the --Wait, really?

NIC

Uh huh.

OLIVIA

That's disappointing.

NIC

A *porn star*.

Raises his eyebrows at her.

NIC (CONT'D)

Bogart.

OLIVIA

Look, she's at a really critical stage. And she needs to know that you're going to be there for her no matter what she's into. Because honestly...

Nic subtly looks at his phone. It's his AGENT. ON SCREEN:
Spoke to Tarantino. Loved you. Got a good feeling.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

...if you don't fix this soon, it's going to stay broken for a very, very long time and why the FUCK are you smiling?

NIC

I'm not.

OLIVIA

You are.

Nic tries not to smile.

NIC

Nuh uh.

He's smiling.

NIC (CONT'D)

Okay. Okay. I'm up for a role. Definitely can't say for who... it's Taranti--

OLIVIA

Just do me a favor, okay? Just make it to her birthday this year.

NIC CAGE

Definitely. Definitely.

She turns and walks back up to the house.

OLIVIA

(calling out)
It's Thursday.

NIC

I know!

Nic picks up his phone as he starts driving away.

NIC (CONT'D)
Let's get a salad. I've got some questions.

INT. SUNSET TOWER - DAY

Nic is having lunch with his agent, PATRICK FINK. An Old school agent in suit.

NIC
...and Quentin knows I've been working on the accent, right? I mean, the character's from the South Shore, so the accent really resonates in the throat. Less nasal. Much more glottal.

PATRICK
(no idea)
That sounds right.

NIC
But maybe we email him that?

PATRICK
Email him what?

NIC
I don't know. Fuck. I just really want this.

PATRICK
Nic. Just sit tight and let it play out.

NIC
I know. I know. It's just... this is the role of a lifetime.

PATRICK
I hear you. And I don't want to get ahead of myself here, but I got a good feeling about this one.
(then)
In the meantime, I got another offer. Came down the pike this morning.

NIC
Yeah?

PATRICK
Million bucks.

NIC
When it rains it pours. Oscar bait?

PATRICK
You head down to Mexico.

NIC
Love it there. Killer role?

Patrick leans in.

PATRICK
It's to attend a wealthy Mexican gentleman's 45th birthday party.

A long beat.

NIC
Patrick, what in the FUCK are you talking about?

PATRICK
Million bucks, Nic. Five days. It's the easiest role ever. You go to this guy's birthday. You be Nic Cage. You just play yourself.

NIC
I would never do that.

PATRICK
It's an interim gig. Go tell some stories, make 'em laugh, and-

NIC
What, like, like I'm some sort of fucking circus performer? Like a trained seal-

Patrick takes a breath.

PATRICK
Nic, I got a call from your business manager, Kenny. You've been living in this hotel for over a year.

NIC
Year and a half. Like a king.

Nic smiles. Patrick doesn't.

NIC (CONT'D)

Patrick, relax. It's good for them to have a celebrity living here. They don't even charge me.

PATRICK

You owe them six hundred thousand dollars. They sent the bills to Kenny.

A long beat.

NIC

That's disappointing.

PATRICK

And then he told me...
(looking around, quietly)
He told me you've also got some substantial tax debts, and with the divorce and some of your spending habits-

NIC

Stop. Just stop. You know I'm going to deal with all that, Patrick. I will. But I get this role and everything changes, okay? Then I'm back.

(beat)

Not that I went anywhere.

Nic stands up, chucks his napkin on the table.

NIC (CONT'D)

Gonna head to Santa Barbara for a few days. Put this accent on its feet.

Off Nic's look, we CUT TO:

EXT. PCH - MORNING

Nic rides his motorcycle up the PCH. He listens to a Boston accent tape inside his helmet as he passes a sign for Santa Barbara.

ACCENT COACH (V.O.)

Foregone.

NIC

Foregone.

ACCENT COACH (V.O.)
Conclusion.

NIC
Conclusion.

ACCENT COACH (V.O.)
Foregone conclusion.

NIC
Foregone conclusion.

INT. PUBLIC BATHROOM - DAY

Nic enters and locks the door. He takes a few items out of a bag. A pair of thick rimmed glasses. A dad hat and pea coat. He looks at himself in the mirror. He doesn't look like Nic.

EXT. OCEAN/BOAT - DAY

Nic slowly walks to the railing as the boat cruises out of the harbor. An WOMAN and her young child are there. Nic talks in a thick, Boston accent.

NIC
How ahh yas?

She smiles.

NIC (CONT'D)
Said we might see some whales, but
it's not a foregone conclusion.
(then)
I'm not from around here but where
I'm from they got whale watching
too. In my hometown.

He smiles back at the woman.

NIC (CONT'D)
Any idea where that is?

WOMAN
No...I, uh...sorry.

NIC
Shot in the dark. Any idea?
(a beat, then)
Please just say a city.

WOMAN
Boston?

Nic smiles...

NIC
Close. Framingham.

His phone rings.

NIC (CONT'D)
(turning away)
Hello.

OLIVIA (O.S.)
You're late.

NIC
To what?

OLIVIA (O.S.)
To our daughter's birthday party
and-

EXT. PCH - DAY

Nic is speeding, twisting the throttle on the Ducati as he weaves through traffic. He's clearly late.

INT. OLIVIA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Nic pulls up on the bike. Olivia clocks his arrival from a front window of the house. As he approaches the house, he gets a call. It's Patrick.

NIC
(answering)
Patrick. Tell me there's news...

Olivia comes out of the house.

OLIVIA
Nic, are you kidding me?!

NIC
One second, Liv. Please.
(then, into phone)
You talked to Tarantino?

PATRICK (O.S.)
Can you hear me?

NIC
(getting excited)
I can, yeah.

PATRICK

Spoke to Tarantino, and he loves you, but he ultimately went in a different direction for the role...

On Nic, devastated... Closes his eyes. Slowly exhales as he hangs up. Olivia is right in front of him.

OLIVIA (O.C.)

You're two hours late. I mean, it's the one thing--you know what? Just go...

She goes to walk back inside.

NIC

I got in an accident on the bike. I'm a little shaken up, okay?

Olivia turns.

OLIVIA

(softens)

You...got in an accident? Are you okay? What happened?

NIC

Yeah. This idiot blindsided me. I was turning left, and-

She rushes over.

OLIVIA

Are you hurt? Do you need to go to a hospital?

A beat.

NIC

I wasn't in an accident. I don't know why I said that. I'm sorry.

Olivia just stares at him in disbelief.

INT. OLIVIA'S KITCHEN

No one's in here. Nic opens a cupboard, grabs a bottle of Vodka and pours himself a drink.

MUFFLED CROWD (O.S.)

Happy Birthday to you...

Nic slams the drink. Pours another.

INT. OLIVIA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

Large room, filled with people. A baby grand piano in the corner. Olivia walks in with a cake. Everyone is singing.

EVERYONE
Happy birthday to you...Happy
birthday dear Addy...

In the background, we see Nic walk in. He's got a good buzz going. A man on the outside looking in.

EVERYONE (CONT'D)
Happy birthday to you....

NIC
Alright, everybody! Come on. Gather
round the piano. Here we go.

Olivia swoops in.

OLIVIA
Nic what are you doing?

NIC
Giving my daughter her birthday
present.

ADDY
Mom, please--

OLIVIA
Nic--

NIC
Five minutes. Just five minutes.

MOMENTS LATER

Nic is at the piano. Cocktail perched on the lid. He's in performance mode. Playing the piano softly. Setting a mood.

NIC (CONT'D)
When she was nine years old, my
daughter and I took our first trip
together. Drove overnight, straight
across the desert to the grand
canyon - and when the sun came up,
we pulled over to the side of the
road, she leaned her head on my
shoulder... and we just watched.

Olivia allow herself a smile.

NIC (CONT'D)

That was one of the happiest moments of my life.

(then)

There was a song playing faintly in the background from the radio. And it always makes me think of you...the most incredible human being I've ever met. So, happy birthday, baby. Here goes...

Nic begins playing more loudly. Clears his throat. It's "November Rain" by Gun's N' Roses.

NIC (CONT'D)

When I look into your eyes/I can see a love restrained/But darlin' when I hold you/Don't you know I feel the same...

Nic stops down...He's starting to get emotional:

NIC (CONT'D)

I'm just so excited to see what you're going to do with your life. Be a scientist, the governor, a rich divorce attorney...I just wouldn't recommend a life in the arts. Especially given all the talent you have, and how often real talent is unappreciated and overlooked in this shithole town.

OLIVIA

Okay, thank you, Nic--

Nic starts back up, sings louder.

NIC

If we could take the time/To lay it on the line/I could rest my head/Just knowin' that you were mine/All mine...

He screws up on the piano.

NIC (CONT'D)

Goddamnit. Sorry. One sec.

(starting up, again)

If we could take the time/To lay it on the line/I could rest my head...

Screws up again.

NIC (CONT'D)
 Fuck! I'm sorry. Nobody move. I'm just, I'm not having the best day, so sorry...

ADDY
 Dad, it's fine. Really. *Stop.*

OLIVIA
 Okay Nic, thank you--

NIC
(through tears)
So if...you want to love me...then darlin' don't refrain. Or I'll end just end up walking... in that c-c-c-cold No-no-november ra-

He hits the wrong chord.

CUT TO:

EXT. OLIVIA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Nic sits next to Addy. He's drinking a coffee.

NIC
 I'm so sorry, Adds.

ADDY
 It's fine.

NIC
 Oh, I almost forgot. I got you this...

He takes a necklace out of his pocket.

NIC (CONT'D)
 I remember you said you liked it in a magazine. I don't know. If you don't like it-

ADDY
 No. I like it. Thank you.

A long silence...

ADDY (CONT'D)
 Hey dad?

NIC
 Yeah.

ADDY
Are you okay?

Nic takes a long sip.

NIC
(covering)
Of course I'm okay. You don't have
to worry about me, Adds. Ever.

Olivia appears at the door.

OLIVIA
Nic, I'll give you a ride home.

INT. OLIVIA'S CAR - NIGHT

They cruise down Sunset Blvd. The bright lights flicker off
Nic's face. Nic, trying to sober up, sips coffee...

NIC
It's just hard, Liv.

Olivia nods.

NIC (CONT'D)
When she was little she, like,
loved everything I did. And now...
I don't know.

OLIVIA
You guys will find a rhythm. You'll
just have to work at it.

She pulls up in front of Sunset Tower.

NIC
You remember when we used to just
lie on the living room floor in the
New York place? And just talk for
hours? Was so easy...

Olivia takes a second.

OLIVIA
I'm gonna say something I'm not
sure I should...

NIC
(hopeful)
Say it.

OLIVIA
I need you...

NIC
Yeah?

OLIVIA
I need you to get your shit
together, because Addy needs her
Dad. She doesn't need... this guy.

Nic is crestfallen. Off his look we CUT TO:

EXT. SUNSET BLVD - NIGHT

Nic watches Olivia drive away. He takes a deep breath.

YOUNG NIC (O.S.)
(laughing)
Damn.

Nic turns to see Young Nic standing next to him.

YOUNG NIC (CONT'D)
That was hard to watch. Because a
little part of you thought you were
about to get laid. Am I right?

NIC
Okay, you know what? I'm not in the
mood for this right now, so...

Nic starts to walk away. Young Nic follows.

INT. SUNSET TOWER / ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

Nic walks in followed by Young Nic.

YOUNG NIC
Oh what? You're upset because she
said you're a shitty dad?

NIC
She didn't say that.

YOUNG NIC
Come on. You bought them a
beautiful home in Brentwood.
Private schools. Tennis lessons.
You sent the fucking dog to the
Mayo clinic.

NIC
But maybe I could have been, like,
more present or whatever.

YOUNG NIC
Bullshit!

The elevator door opens...

INT. SUNSET TOWER / HALLWAY

Nic comes around the corner followed by Young Nic...

NIC
Maybe I was being selfish.
Traveling so much. Maybe I should
have worked less--

YOUNG NIC
Hide not your talents. They for use
were made. What's a sundial in the
shade? Benjamin Franklin.

NIC
I don't even know what that means.

YOUNG NIC
It means you can't deny the world
your talent. That would be selfish.
Addy wouldn't want that.

Nic nods. Considering...

NIC
I don't know. You think so?

As he tries his key in the door. It blinks RED.

NIC (CONT'D)
Goddamnit.

Swipes. It blinks RED again.

NIC (CONT'D)
Oh no. Please don't do this to me.
(tries it again)
Fuck.
(then)
FUCK!

A guest pops his head out. Young Nic is gone.

GUEST
Everything okay?

NIC
Wasn't me, I don't know.

Nic sighs and slumps down on the floor. He takes out his phone and dials.

NIC (CONT'D)
Patrick. That Mexico thing?
(beat)
I'll take it.

INT. PRIVATE PLANE - DAY

Nic, hungover, is watching a small TV on the jet.

ANCHOR
...as Mexican presidential
candidate and media titan Marcos
Lopez's daughter was kidnapped late
this morning...

A FLIGHT ATTENDANT smiles as she hands Nic another gin and tonic. He hands her an empty.

NIC
Thank you.
(then)
Hey, do you know the gentleman who
owns this plane?

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
I'm sorry. Unfortunately we're not
at liberty to discuss our clients.

NIC
Of course. I'm just headed to his
birthday party. Curious what he's
like.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
You're going to his birthday party,
but you... don't know him?

NIC
Well, he's paying me.
(off her look)
Yeah, the whole thing is pretty
sad.
(then)
For him.

The plane suddenly takes a HARD RIGHT TURN. She almost falls.

NIC (CONT'D)

You okay?

She nods as Nic helps her up.

CAPTAIN (O.S.)

We're encountering a little electrical problem. Gonna stay low and look for a place to put her down nearby. Might be a little bumpy til we get on the ground. Sit tight...

The plane bounces a little in the turbulence. The Flight Attendant straps in.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Are you okay?

Nic puts on his sunglasses.

NIC

Is anyone?

EXT. SMALL, RUNDOWN AIRFIELD - DAY

Nic is standing outside the plane on a dusty small runway talking on his phone. A black SUV pulls up and a casually dressed MEXICAN MAN steps out, approaches Nic.

NIC

(on phone)

Yeah, the plane had a little trouble. But I'm meeting the driver now.

Nic hands the man his duffel.

NIC (CONT'D)

(pointing to phone)

Sorry. It's my agent. Gotta take this.

The Man nods as he throws the bags into the back of a black SUV, then holds the back door open for Nic.

INT. VAN/EXT. MEXICAN JUNGLE

Nic sits in the back, still talking on the phone.

NIC

Hey what do we know about this guy anyway? He just some sad, weird loser?

PATRICK

Allan did some research.
(yelling to his assistant)
Allan, what's this guy do?

The van moves through the gates of a compound. Two armed GUARDS are outside with semi automatic rifles.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

(to Nic)

He owns orange groves or something. You're fine. It's not like he's gonna want you to suck his dick or, like, fuck his wife or something-

NIC

People ask that more than you think. For me to do that kind of stuff or whatever.

Inside the sprawling walled compound, we see a number of Spanish style houses. The van stops in a carport area.

INT./EXT. MEXICAN COMPOUND - CARPORT

The Driver gets the duffle out of the back, and brings it around to Nic.

MAN

Senor Nic. Your bag, sir.

Nic cradles the phone on his shoulder as he gets out his wallet to tip the Man. Looks in it, then puts it away.

NIC

Thanks. Thank you. Hey, can I ask you a question? The guy who owns the house...

MAN

Javi.

NIC

Yeah. Javi. Is Javi gonna want me to, you know...?

MAN

I'm not sure that I understand what-

NIC

(into phone)

Hey can I call you back?

(then)

Look man, if this Javi guy is gonna want me to suck his dick, or fuck his wife, or watch me watch him fuck his wife. That's a no go. That's no bueno. You understand?

MAN

That's not why you're--

NIC

Sounds crazy, right? But people ask that way more than you'd think. For me to do that stuff. And this Javi guy--

MAN

I am Javi.

A longer beat. Extends his hand.

NIC

Nic Cage.

Javi smiles.

JAVI

I would have introduced myself earlier but I didn't want to interrupt you.

NIC

Yeah, no, of course. And for the record, not that many people want me to, y'know, suck their--

JAVI

I wouldn't think so.

An awkward beat.

JAVI (CONT'D)

Look, I know this is all pretty strange. For me too. But I just want you to enjoy yourself. Have fun. There's a swimming pool, stables if you like to ride...My house, as they say, is your house.

NIC

Terrific.

JAVI

Carlos will show you to your room.
Welcome to Mexico, Mr. Cage...

Javi smiles and walks off as CARLOS DIAZ, a burly security guard in khakis and a linen shirt - a gun on his belt, grabs Nic's bag.

EXT. NIC'S ROOM

Carlos drops Nic's bag in front of his door.

NIC

Thank you.

CARLOS

Not a problem, sir. But I will need you to sign this. It's an NDA.

Carlos produces a piece of paper...

NIC

Oh yeah, I don't sign things. You can send it to my lawyer.

CARLOS

Well, I need you to sign it because you're not permitted to talk about anything that happens here.

NIC

Trust me, that's not gonna be a problem.

CARLOS

Sir, please, just sign the contract.

NIC

I'm not doing it.

CARLOS

It's my job, man.

NIC

Look, I've honestly signed some pretty terrible contracts in Mexico over the years, and-

CARLOS

Jesus, you don't have to be a... whatever.

(then, in Spanish)

(MORE)

CARLOS (CONT'D)

Fucking Hollywood asshole. I don't like you. I don't like your face. And I don't like your fucking movies.

Nic just stares at him a beat, then...

NIC

(sadly, in Spanish)

Well you're not alone on that one.

And Nic shuts the door.

INT. NIC'S ROOM

Nic puts his bag down. Looks like a very nice, Spanish style hotel room. A welcome package sits on a small desk. A bottle of wine. Various snacks. Like a wedding. Nic picks up a greeting card attached to the wine. He reads aloud.

NIC

"Hello Nic Cage."

Nic turns it over. That's it. He goes over and collapses on the bed. He pulls the covers over him. And turns on his side, and finds himself looking up at...

A big Hollywood MOVIE POSTER with Nic's face, dead center.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Well, how was he?

Nic stares at the poster, a pained expression on his face...

JAVI (O.S.)

He was incredible.

INT. JAVI'S MANSION / BEDROOM

A room resembling a library. A bunch of monitors on a desk. Javi's talking to GABRIELA RODRIGUEZ, the dark haired, very focused, head of his various companies. She sits at the desk as Javi perches on the side, talking excitedly.

JAVI (CONT'D)

Incredible, but also like super cool. A little taller in person than I had imagined because they say actors are pretty short.

GABRIELA

But he wasn't short?

JAVI

No. He was, like, just right.

GABRIELA

So what did you guys talk about?

JAVI

All kinds of stuff. I mean, not that much. He was on the phone the entire time. So we didn't, like, "talk", but we definitely communicated. Not with words. Or looks. But there was a vibe.

GABRIELA

I've never seen you this excited. You're honestly glowing.

JAVI

I'm not THAT excited.

GABRIELA

You look like you're pregnant.
(then, handing him papers)
Hey, I need you to sign off on these before I forget... We're selling some farm equipment, and moving money out of corn futures because of the drought-

JAVI

Gabi. Stop. You know that I don't understand any of this.

GABRIELA

I know you don't.

JAVI

Then why do you insist on asking me? You're in charge.

GABRIELA

I guess I just like hearing you say you don't understand.

JAVI

(smiling)
I'm sure you do...

She gets up to leave...

GABRIELA

So...did you get a chance to tell Mr. Cage you're a writer? That you have some ideas-

JAVI

Gaby, come on. Look who we're talking about here. It's not realistic.

She looks at him skeptically.

JAVI (CONT'D)

What? That's not why I asked him to come here.

GABRIELA

Oh come on. Your whole life you've wanted to make movies. I know how much this means to you.

They share a long moment...

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

And there's nothing sadder than a crazy old man babbling incoherently about the time he almost asked Nic Cage to read his script.

Javi laughs, as she grabs her papers back. And walks out...

EXT. JAVI'S COMPOUND / POOL - NEXT DAY

Nic, in sunglasses, is lounging hard on a wooden pool chair. Still in the bathrobe and bathing suit. Javi, Gabriela and LUCAS (DESCRIBE) enter. Javi nervously walks up, and lays down on the chaise next to Nic. They look out over a large untamed jungle.

JAVI

Hi.

NIC

Hey.

Beat.

JAVI

Cool, so...

A longer beat. Javi think he hears something.

JAVI (CONT'D)

Huh?

NIC

What?

JAVI

No. Thought you said something.
Never mind.

(then)

I want to introduce you to my
business partner Gabriela and my
cousin Lucas.

Gabriela and Lucas approach.

GABRIELA

Mr. Cage, we're so excited to have
you here.

LUCAS

Damn. A million bucks just to show
up and drink by the pool. I want
your job.

Nic smiles wryly.

JAVI

So... what're you working on next?

NIC

That's honestly like the worst
thing you could ask an actor.

JAVI

Oh, yeah. No. I've very sorry--

NIC

But it's fine, since I'm no longer
an actor.

JAVI

What?

NIC

I've done everything I set out to
do acting wise, you know? Time for
a new challenge. Time for something
that scares me.

JAVI

So what are you going to do?

NIC

I think I want to build furniture.
Work with my hands, y'know? Chairs.
Bookcases. Maybe a table. No!
Wait. Not chairs. I don't love
chairs.

GABRIELA

My uncle makes furniture in Mexico
City. Beautiful stuff. Gorgeous
wood and natural rivets.

NIC

What a life.

GABRIELA

He apprenticed with my grandfather
for twenty five years before
feeling comfortable enough to go
out on his own.

(then, realizing)

Not that...

NIC

Yeah, no. Some things take...
longer for certain people.

Some uncomfortable shifting.

NIC (CONT'D)

Not that he's not truly skilled.

LUCAS

He's truly skilled.

NIC

Well, maybe I could visit his shop,
or--

GABRIELA

The prolonged exposure to the
furniture stain left him
permanently brain damaged.
Unfortunately.

A long beat.

JAVI

So tell us about making the Rock.

GABRIELA

You and Sean Connery were so good
together.

NIC

Sean's the best. Yeah, that was a long time ago.

LUCAS

It was a very long time ago. Bet you wish you were still making movies like that.

What the fuck is this guy's problem? Nic stands up, still holding his drink.

NIC

Okay, well...
(to Gabriela)
It was nice meeting you.

Nic heads off, carrying a bottle of tequila.

JAVI

Mr. Cage, wait, I'm sorry, he didn't mean it like that...

But Nic walks off.

JAVI (CONT'D)

Mr. Cage?

EXT. JAVI'S COMPOUND / LONG LAWN - NIGHT

Nic is passed out on the lawn. An empty tequila bottle next to him. The sprinklers start to come on.

OFF NIC'S FACE, starting to get wet, Javi walking towards him. Javi picks Nic up, holding him draped across his arms, and begins to carry Nic towards the house.

INT. JAVI'S COMPOUND / NIC'S ROOM - NIGHT

Javi lays Nic down on his bed. Starts to take his shoes off. Nic stirs...his eyes flutter open.

NIC

Hey Jav, you ever feel like the best day of your life has already happened? Like, the best day you're ever going to have...

JAVI

I think you have a lot of great days ahead of you, Nic Cage.

NIC
 (covering)
 What? No, I know. I was talking
 about you.

JAVI
 Oh, well...I don't know. I guess-
 He realizes Nic's eyes are closed.

JAVI (CONT'D)
 Nic?
 Nothing, as we CUT TO:

INT. JAVI'S MANSION / SCREENING ROOM

Javi is watching the Nic Cage film, "Captain Corelli's
 Mandolin" in his private theater. He's silently mouthing
 along to the words. Gabriela comes and sits next to him.

GABRIELA
 You okay?

JAVI
 I'm fine. But Nic's in a pretty
 dark place, emotionally.
 (then)
 I mean, he can't quit acting. Look
 at this...

Javi gestures to a scene where Captain Corelli tenderly
 strums the mandolin...

GABRIELA
 Well, maybe he just needs to reset.
 Remember what he loves about it.

Javi considers.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)
 You could take him to the ruins.
 That always seems to work for you.

JAVI
 Yeah, maybe he'd like that. I'll go
 first thing.

INT. NIC'S ROOM - THE NEXT DAY

We're on Nic as he sleeps hard. We hear a knock on his door.
 Nic keeps sleeping. We hear several more knocks.

Nic doesn't flinch. We hear the door unlock. And open. Footsteps. We stay with Nic, until he slowly comes to, rubbing his head and neck. He suddenly realizes someone's there.

NIC
WHOA! Hello?

It's Gabriela. And she doesn't look happy.

GABRIELA
I'm sorry to wake you. But it's nearly 4pm, and-

NIC
I'm sorry, do you need something?

GABRIELA
Yes, Mr. Cage. Mr. Gutierrez has been waiting all day for you to wake up so he can take you on a trip to the Mayan ruins.

NIC
Yeah, can you let Javi know I'm not gonna make that?

He goes back underneath the covers.

NIC (CONT'D)
(from under the covers)
Thank you.

She rips them off.

GABRIELA
(gets intense)
Mr. Cage. I believe you've been more than fairly compensated for your time here. So if Mr. Gutierrez wants to drive out to the temples, you're going to get out of bed and join him. And you're going to enjoy it. Do I make myself clear?

Off Gabriela...

INT. JAVI'S JEEP - DUSK

Nic rides in the open top jeep next to Javi. He looks fucking miserable.

JAVI
Gabriela said you were very excited
to see the temple.

Nic forces a wry smile.

NIC
Big time.

A long moment.

JAVI
I don't think you should quit
acting.

NIC
Yeah, well, I appreciate your
concern, but-- Hey, so how far are
these temples? It's starting to
rain.

JAVI
If you quit now, you'll regret it
forever. Because you have a gift,
Nic. A gift from God or the
universe or whatever--

NIC
Is there a top for this jeep? I
mean, it's really coming down--

JAVI
For crissakes, Nic Cage! You love
acting! You love playing make
believe! And as your friend, I
won't stand by while you--

NIC
Dude! Stop! You're paying me to be
here, okay? You don't know me,
we're not friends, and you
definitely don't know what the fuck
will make me happy!

Nic is breathing hard. Staring at Javi as this lands.

NIC (CONT'D)
But I do. Furniture.

Javi, exasperated, SLAMS his foot on the brake. The Jeep
skids to a stop in the now pouring rain. Javi jumps out,
grabs his backpack, and takes off running.

NIC (CONT'D)
Jesus. What are you doing?

JAVI
We're on the run, Nic.

NIC
From what?

Javi takes off running. Nic looks around. No one there.

NIC (CONT'D)
Where are you going? Javi! JAVI!

By now it's dark. And actually scary. Nic, not wanting to be left alone, jumps out of the car. In the distance he sees Javi's flashlight. Nic starts running after him.

NIC (CONT'D)
Will you just stop for a second and-

LIGHTNING crackles through the air. DEEP THUNDER FOLLOWS.

NIC (CONT'D)
HOLY SHIT.

JAVI
Faster!

Nic has no choice. He keeps running. And running. Chasing after Javi. Finally he moves through some thick bushes and finds Javi at the edge of a CLIFF.

EXT. MEXICAN JUNGLE / CLIFF - NIGHT

Nic, breathing heavily, lays into Javi...

NIC
Okay, man. You're need to tell me right now what the hell is going on, or I'm getting my shit and going back to LA. I don't care about your birthday or--

LIGHTNING strikes again. Startles them. Javi is clearly "acting." He's trying to get Nic to play along...

JAVI
(overacting)
They're coming! And when they do, that'll be it for us. Adios. Finito. Bye bye.

NIC

What? Why are you talking like that??

JAVI

The General is coming! He forbade his daughter Matilda - I called her Maddy - he forbade us to see each other. But we defied him. And now he wants to END MY LIFE.

Nic looks around. There's obviously no one there.

NIC

Oh, okay. Great. I get what you're doing. A little Stanislavski acting thing? Well you can stop now.

JAVI

(undeterred)

These people, they're not like you and I. They smell blood? They come running. We have to jump.

The rain BARRELS down on Javi. He's backlit at the edge of the cliff. He looks completely unhinged as he starts stripping down.

NIC

Come on, man. Just stop. I want to go back to the house and--

JAVI

THEY WILL FUCKING KILL YOU. And I can't let that happen. Come on! They're almost to the edge of the jungle! I can hear them!

Nic looks back at the jungle. Takes a deep breath. Closes his eyes. And when he turns back to Javi, Nic has transformed.

He is **MOVIE STAR NIC CAGE**.

NIC

(intense)

Just tell me one thing...do you love her?

JAVI

(begins smiling)

I've always loved her.

Nic starts stripping down.

NIC
Then that means getting you out of
here alive. We have to jump.

JAVI
You serious?

NIC
They're at the edge of the jungle!

JAVI
(calmly)
Let's do this.

They run and LEAP through the air just as LIGHTNING HITS THE
EDGE OF THE CLIFF. They hit the water. When Nic surfaces,
looks up the charred rock.

NIC
HOLY SHIT! We almost died. Right
there, Javi. We actually almost
died right up there!

JAVI
But look at the bright side, Mr.
Cage...
(whispering)
We got away.

A moment, then Nic just starts LAUGHING.

EXT. JUNGLE / CLIFF SIDE

The rain has passed. Nic and Javi lie under the stars on
smoking a joint.

NIC
You're crazy man. I like that about
you.

Javi smiles as he takes a hit of the joint, passes to Nic.

NIC (CONT'D)
You know, my daughter would love it
out here. Would be good for us.
(then)
Fuck this is good weed.

JAVI
Are you guys close?

NIC

She's sixteen. It's impossible to be close with a sixteen year old girl.

(then)

But if I'm honest, it's not all her fault, you know?

JAVI

(trying to sympathize)

Right, right.

NIC

I just never thought I'd be a dad. Wasn't part of the plan. But when I met Olivia, my ex, on the set of "Windtalkers."

JAVI

Beautiful film.

NIC

Underrated, for sure. She was the makeup artist. She was fun, smart, beautiful. I mean, we were super similar.

JAVI

Sounds like it.

NIC

Eleven months later Addy was born. And I wouldn't change that for the world, but it's just...

(then)

What about you? Ever been married?

JAVI

No. There was...is one girl. But it's not in the cards for us.

(changing the subject)

So, what's your favorite movie?

NIC

That's a ridiculous question.

INT. JAVI'S JEEP - NIGHT

Nic and Javi ride in the jeep.

NIC

Hundred plus years of rich cinema history. You can't limit it to one.

Nic takes another hit.

JAVI
Top three?

NIC
(holding in the weed)
Fuck off. Top five.

JAVI
Do you like horror?

NIC
(exhaling)
Are you kidding me?

JAVI
Wait. I have to show you something
back at the house.

Nic exhales as we CUT TO:

INT. JAVI'S COMPOUND - THE GREAT ROOM

They wander through a large movie memorabilia collection. Large glass cases with stars outfits, props, and other awesome memorabilia line the hallway. Nic's in heaven.

NIC
Holy shit. The original poster for Tenebre?! Argento's camera work is astounding. And are those Bogart's shoes from Casablanca?

Javi nods.

JAVI
But wait til you see my...
(also bad French)
Piece d'resistance.

NIC
(getting excited)
Something from Chaplin maybe? No,
you seem more like a Keaton guy-

They stop at a glass case.

NIC (CONT'D)
What the fuck?

And we see a wax Nic Cage holding the beautiful, golden guns from Face/Off in a shooter's pose.

The entire thing is treated with reverence inside a museum quality glass case. A case of gold bullets is artfully displayed below...

JAVI

Too much? I'm sorry if--

NIC

No. I love it.

(then)

You know those are real guns right?
Custom Springfield armory-

JAVI

1911-Als. Made specifically for the
film.

Nic smiles. Likes this.

NIC

We had extensive weapons training
on that one. Shooting. Fighting.
You know I can disarm a man trying
to rob me in milliseconds?

JAVI

That's so cool. It's one of my
favorite films of all time.

NIC

Top five?

JAVI

Top *three*.

NIC

Well that's just stupid.

(then)

What're the other two?

INT. JAVI'S MANSION - VARIOUS LOCATIONS

A couple bottles of wine on the floor. Nic and Javi are eating chips and guac. The fire roars in the background. Javi looks pained.

JAVI

Umm...The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari.

Nic stops. Almost smiles. Finally.

NIC

Wow. Two for two.

JAVI

Thank you.

NIC

Okay let's see if you can run the table here. Last one is...

Javi's thinking hard.

JAVI

Paddington 2.

NIC

WHAT?! Paddington 2 is in your top three of all time?

JAVI

I cried though the entire thing. It made me want to be a better man.

NIC

Bullshit!

LATER

They're watching Paddington 2. Nic has tears in his eyes.

NIC (CONT'D)

This is incredible.

Javi is crying too.

JAVI

I fucking told you.

NIC

Pass me the wine.

LATER

Nic is showing Javi how to disarm a man.

NIC (CONT'D)

Don't be scared. Hold the gun up to my head.

JAVI

I'm pretty drunk.

NIC

Doesn't matter. Because in a high pressure situation, I can just do... this.

Nic very quickly fucks up the disarm. The gun falls to the ground. Tries it one more time. Fucks it up.

NIC (CONT'D)

I think you're holding the gun wrong or something. Whatever.

LATER

They continue to drink.

JAVI

So...you ever written anything?

NIC

Like a screenplay? No.

(then)

Actually, yes. But more with my acting than with words. Most times you can say way more with a look than with just like, stupid dialogue written by some depressed fucking slob in Los Angeles.

JAVI

That look you did in Wild at Heart at the end of the-

NIC

Opening scene? After he's killed the guy...

JAVI

And Sailor Ripley looks up at the girl. Points. Crazy look on his face. That honestly said more than any line of dialogue ever could.

NIC

I fucking love that you get that!

Javi is beaming.

NIC (CONT'D)

Hey, what do you think I should do next? Like as a fan, what would you want to see?

JAVI

Honestly, you should do some more character work. Turn in a couple great performances in an ensemble, you know?

NIC

Yeah.

JAVI

Remind people of how great you are.
But like in a subtle way.

(then)

Hey, didn't want to tell you this
before, but I've actually written a
few screenplays myself, and one in
particular--

NIC

I'd love to read it.

JAVI

Are you serious?

NIC

I'll read it right now. Do you have
a hard copy?

JAVI

(getting nervous)

I don't.

NIC

Email it.

JAVI

There are a few tweaks I need to
make. I want you to have the best
draft.

NIC

I'm used to reading works in
progress.

JAVI

Dude stop pressuring me!

Nic realizes something.

NIC

Ohhh. Okay. How long you been
working on this thing?

JAVI

Four, five years. Maybe six all
together.

(off Nic's look)

The third act isn't finished.

NIC

It's not finished because you know that as soon as it is, you'll have to put it out there. And that terrifies you, because you'll face rejection. And that hurts. Hurts deep down in here.

He points to Javi's chest.

NIC (CONT'D)

The question is, do you have the courage to keep going? To keep writing? To walk through the fire? Because that's what being a writer is. But you're not a writer yet, are you? You're just a liar.

Javi looks crushed. He gets up off the floor.

NIC (CONT'D)

Whatever, though. Being a writer fucking sucks anyway.

(then)

Hey, should we go into town and get a mezcal?

JAVI

Aaah, y'know I think I'm gonna call it a night.

NIC

Yeah, yeah. Okay. Me too.

EXT. MEXICAN ROAD - NIGHT

Nic walks down the side of the road, when he hears something.

YOUNG NIC

Wow. You really gave it to that guy.

NIC

You think it was too harsh? I was just trying to be honest with him.

YOUNG NIC

It was brutal. I mean, just tell him what he wants to hear. The guy's got nothing else going for him.

NIC

I think he's alright. He's got good taste in movies. And he had some good ideas about my career.

YOUNG NIC

Yeah?

NIC

Yeah. I think it might be a good idea to take a couple cool, smaller roles. Do some challenging character work.

YOUNG NIC

Interesting. So like... the gay uncle in the next Duplass Brothers movie kind of thing?

NIC

Exactly--

SLAP! Young Nic open hand slaps Nic across the face. Nic screams.

YOUNG NIC

What the fuck are you talking about?

NIC

(re: his lip)
Jesus Christ, I'm bleeding.

YOUNG NIC

We haven't worked for thirty years so you can be 7th on the call sheet for some goddamn student film!

NIC

I think it's a good idea--

SLAP! He hits him again.

YOUNG NIC

(softens a little)
Listen to me. You are Nicolas Fucking Cage. You are a once in a generation talent.

Young Nic takes Nic's face in his hands.

YOUNG NIC (CONT'D)

Addy doesn't need a goddamn struggling artist for a father.
(MORE)

YOUNG NIC (CONT'D)

She needs you to be a star. You'll get the next role. I promise. And then we'll start climbing our way back up.

NIC

Not that we went anywhere.

YOUNG NIC (CONT'D)

Not that we went anywhere.

YOUNG NIC (CONT'D)

You trust me, right?

NIC

Yeah. Yeah.

YOUNG NIC

I love you, baby.

Young Nic takes his face, kisses him on the cheek, as a LONE CAR approaches headed into town. Nic waves it down. It's a PICKUP TRUCK.

NIC

(approaching)

Amigo. ¿Vas a la ciudad?

The DRIVER turns around. Waves him into the back. Another MAN sits in the back with a blanket around his shoulders.

INT. MEXICAN PICKUP TRUCK

Nic settles back into his seat. He looks over at a weary, overweight man who looks like he's had just about enough. This is IRVING DUQUESNE.

IRVING

How're you liking Mexico?

NIC

Honestly, I'm having a great time.

IRVING

Where are you staying?

NIC

Oh, with a friend. Beautiful spread. Nice little working vacation. You're American?

MAN

And what does this friend do for a living?

NIC

Something with fruit. I don't know.
I'm sorry who are you?

The pickup truck takes a HARD right turn and speeds up. Nic is on alert.

NIC (CONT'D)

Hey, hold on. What the fuck is happening here? Can you slow down a little bit?

But the Driver doesn't slow down. Nic looks at the Man.

IRVING

Nic. I need you to listen to me very carefully. My name is Irving Duquesne. And for the last 7 years I've been living in a slum outside of Tijuana, mining my contacts, looking for a way to take down an organization that makes an estimated 32 billion dollars a year and is responsible for more than 80 percent of the cocaine that enters the United States. One organization linked to more than sixteen thousand murders in the last ten years alone.

Nic goes to talk. Irving holds up his hand.

IRVING (CONT'D)

And I'm getting nowhere, until one day, out of the blue, I see a wire from a Cayman bank account linked to El Dios Rojo - a known psychopath, a mass murderer, and one of the most dangerous men in the entire world. A man believed to pull the strings for the exact organization I've been trying to destroy. A man who sits at the top of the Juarez Cartel. A wire from that man went into the bank account of none other than actor Nicolas fucking Cage. A wire from a man you've come to know only...as Mr. Javier Gutierrez.

A long, LONG beat.

NIC

Javi?

IRVING

Yes.

NIC

Wait. Like, *Javi Javi*? I honestly don't think we're talking about the same Javi.

Irving grabs an ipad from a knapsack and gives it to Nic.

IRVING

Here he is with the head of the Colombian cartel. Next one with the head of security for the Juarez. With a reported liaison from Chicago, the main distribution hub in the US. Nic, why do you think your plane diverted mid flight to a shitty, off the grid airfield?

NIC

They said electrical problems.

IRVING

Or was it because our guys were tracking that plane in conjunction with the Mexican government?

Nic, resigned, hands the ipad back. He's seen enough.

NIC

So what do you want from me?

IRVING

The Mexican presidential election is in two weeks. President Chavez, who is cartel friendly, is running against media baron Marcos Lopez.

NIC

So the United States supports Lopez.

IRVING

Exactly. Now Lopez's daughter was kidnapped in the middle of the night last week from a Vanderbilt University dorm. It's a blatant effort to force Lopez out of the race. And we believe one man is responsible - Mr. Javier Gutierrez.

NIC

And you guys at the CIA think I'm the only chance you have to get the daughter back?

IRVING

Well, no. Of course not. We're working this from a million different angles, but you are uniquely positioned to gather intel from the inside. Intel that is, at this very moment... extremely valuable to the US government.

NIC

You want me to spy on Javi?

(then)

I wouldn't know the first thing about how to do this.

IRVING

We'd be there every step of the way to support you. Your safety is of great concern to us.

NIC

I'm sorry, Irving. But I can't do it. I have a family-

Irving takes the ipad and pulls up a video. There's a girl in a small, dirty room, sobbing.

IRVING

They sent this to us yesterday as proof she's alive.

This hits Nic hard.

IRVING (CONT'D)

You've got a daughter about that age right?

NIC

Yeah, but... I don't know that--

IRVING

How do you think it's gonna feel, huh? Knowing you could have helped, but selfishly chose not to? You want to carry that around the rest of your life? That kind of guilt?

(MORE)

IRVING (CONT'D)

Because I promise you, every time you see your daughter, you'll think about this little girl buried in a ditch somewhere. And it will fucking haunt you to the day you die.

A long beat.

NIC

Jesus Christ, Irv.

Irving just stares at him. Nic takes a deep breath.

NIC (CONT'D)

Okay. Fine.

(then)

Just tell me the plan.

Irving knocks on the cab window twice. The pickup truck slows down, and begins to make a U-turn.

EXT. JAVI'S COMPOUND - NIGHT

Party in full swing. People begin to sit down at an elaborate dinner table. Waiters in tuxedos buzz around...

IRVING (V.O.)

During his birthday party, your best window to get away will be at dinner. The moment it's served...

EXT. JAVI'S MANSION

As plates are put onto the tables, Nic stands up. Mouths "excuse me."

IRVING (V.O.)

...you excuse yourself. Say you're headed to the bathroom.

EXT. JAVI'S COMPOUND WALL - NIGHT

Nic watches the people at the party in the distance, then makes his move to the back of Javi's mansion.

IRVING (V.O.)

Once you're in, we believe there's a secure computer system in his personal office.

Nic pulls out a gadget and attaches it to his phone. A high tech gadget analyzes the lock on a back door, then picks it. Nic slips inside.

EXT. JAVI'S MANSION

At the dinner table, Javi calls Carlos over.

JAVI

Carlos. My eyes are going. I can't read my speech off my phone. Print a copy off the computer in my bedroom. Thank you.

Carlos nods, heads off...

INT. JAVI'S MANSION - NIGHT

Nic creeps into the master bedroom. Through an open door, he sees a book lined office with a computer...

IRVING (V.O.)

A computer technician we were monitoring installed a computer in an office just off the master bedroom.

INT. JAVI'S OFFICE - SAME

Nic crouches in front of the computer on the desk.

IRVING (V.O.)

We'll need you to insert a drive into the machine, and run an operation to download its entire contents.

Nic struggles trying to fit the drive in the computer. Finally gets it in. Hitting keys. Not working. Tries again.

NIC

Come on... one more time.

OUTSIDE THE HOUSE Carlos walks toward the front door.

IN JAVI'S OFFICE Nic holds his breath. Starting to sweat.

ON SCREEN: The contents of Javi's computer start downloading. A progress report shows up. 1%...5%... Nic exhales.

OUTSIDE THE HOUSE Carlos opens the front door. As the door SLAMS.

IN JAVI'S OFFICE Nic's ears perk up.

NIC (CONT'D)

Fuck.

Nic hears footsteps on the tile. He immediately runs for the bedroom door - the only entrance to the office. He very quietly shuts the bedroom door. And turns the lock.

Seconds later. The DOORKNOB jiggles.

CARLOS (O.S.)

Hello? Someone in there?

IN JAVI'S OFFICE Nic looks at the computer. 60%...65%...

NIC

(quietly)

Hurry up!

Nic opens the window, looking for an alternate way out. It's a long way down. 85%...90%... The doorknob jiggles again.

NIC (CONT'D)

Come on. Come on. Come on.

ON CARLOS as he KICKS OPEN THE BEDROOM DOOR.

ON NIC in the office, now frantic. ON screen: 100%. Nic silently removes the drive. Puts in his jacket.

ON CARLOS as he walks through the bedroom. He enters the office, weapon drawn...

But no one is there. He walks over to the open window.

OUTSIDE THE WINDOW Nic drops down from a hanging, vine covered trellis. Pins himself up against the wall. Carlos at the window above him.

CARLOS

Hello?

Nic holds his breath. Finally, the window SHUTS. Nic lets out a sigh of relief, as we CUT TO:

EXT. JAVI'S MANSION / PARTY - LATER

Javi, mid speech...

JAVI
 (in Spanish)
 So once again, I thank all of you
 for being here...but before I let
 you eat that delicious flan...

People laugh.

JAVI (CONT'D)
 (In English)
 I'd like to thank someone very
 special to me - my guest of honor,
 Mr. Nicolas Cage, say hello Nic...

Nic, guilty look on his face...

NIC
 Hi. Everyone. Hello.

JAVI
 Why is he here? Well, he doesn't
 know this yet, but...
 (taking a deep breath)
 A few years ago, my relationship
 with my father had deteriorated to
 the point where we were no longer
 speaking. He could be extremely
 difficult, and to be fair, maybe
 I'm not much better.

People laugh.

JAVI (CONT'D)
 But when he got sick, I realized I
 couldn't lose him before we
 repaired our broken relationship. I
 knew we needed to find some common
 ground, but I didn't know how. And
 as my father got sicker and sicker,
 I got more and more depressed. And
 then, one day, as he lay dying in
 the bed next to me, it just
 happened. It was a miracle. I
 looked up and saw...

Everyone leans forward.

JAVI (CONT'D)
 High up on a tiny hospital TV,
 Showtime was playing Guarding Tess.

People are slightly confused. Nic is not.

JAVI (CONT'D)

We disagreed about literally everything when he was alive. Except for that movie. We both loved it. And we'd quote it back and forth all day long after that. Only later, after he passed, did I realize that my father was Tess, and I was Doug Chesnic, the Secret Service agent taking care of him. That's the power of the characters you play, Nic Cage.

(then, sincere.)

And for a long time, in front of the people I love most, on behalf of my father and I, I want to thank you.

Nic is moved. Almost to tears...

NIC

You don't know how much that means to hear you say that.

JAVI

Bet you never knew Doug Chesnic could mean so much to someone...

Nic wipes his eyes.

NIC

Welllllll, no. I did.

(then)

I mean, I knew Doug was a great character. I knew that.

JAVI

Yeah, yeah. Of course.

NIC

But at the same time, I like that you recognized what I brought to the role.

JAVI

Uh huh.

NIC

Because it wasn't all on the page, so to speak. A lot of that - most of it - was in the performance. So, that's cool.

JAVI

It was extraordinary.

NIC

I'm so happy it helped you. And
your father. May he rest in peace.

Nic picks up a champagne glass. Holds it up, as we CUT TO:

INT. OLD SHED - DAY

Nic sits waiting as the Irving analyzes the data. Nic talks to him, but he's not really listening.

NIC

It just didn't feel great.
Betraying Javi like that.

IRVING

I know this was hard on you.

NIC

(not really listening)
But what's crazy is I could
definitely see myself doing more of
this. Particularly if the money was
right-

IRVING

Well, good. Because we need you to
stay at his place for a while
longer.

NIC

(very scared)
What? No, no, no that's...no. Fuck!
I mean, this wasn't part of the
deal--

IRVING

Deal's changed. I need a couple
more days to finish analyzing this
stuff...

NIC

Okay, very cool but I'm supposed to
be on a plane home in five hours.

IRVING

And you're five million dollars in
debt to the US government. You help
us, Nic, and the Attorney General
is prepared to erase it.

Nic thinks this over.

NIC
And if I don't?

IRVING
Then given your current financial situation, you're probably looking at a long stint in a federal penitentiary. I like you Nic. And I didn't want to put you in this position. But the guys upstairs are offering you - and your family - a damn good deal here.

Nic looks up at Irving. He knows what he has to do.

NIC
Well we'll have to invent a reason for me to stay, won't we?

Irving nods.

INT. JAVI'S MANSION - NIGHT

Nic and Javi are having dinner. Javi has a black moleskine notebook.

NIC
...I just have a feeling we can really knock something out of the park.

JAVI
This is... you have no idea how honored I am. Writing a movie with you, it's....

NIC
No, it's gonna be great. We'll build this thing from the ground up.

JAVI
I love it.

NIC
But if we're gonna do it, we should get on the same page.

JAVI
Yes. Of course.

NIC
I think the film should be
completely character driven.

JAVI
Definitely. I agree.

NIC
Something that doesn't rely on
special effects. Or big explosions.

JAVI
It has to be nuanced.

NIC
And work on multiple levels.

JAVI
It should be completely about the
performances.

NIC
Fuck yes. Man, this is gonna be
good.

A long beat as they both take a sip of wine.

NIC (CONT'D)
So...what is it?

JAVI
I don't know.

A long beat. They think.

JAVI (CONT'D)
Maybe it's just about... this.

NIC
This?

JAVI
You and I. A movie about us. Our
relationship. I mean, you coming
down here for my birthday party.
Two guys who don't yet realize they
need each other.

Off Nic, considering.

10 MINUTES LATER

Nic is pouring some wine. They've started drinking.

NIC
Right, right...
(then)
The word "genius" gets thrown
around a lot, so I'm thinking of my
character as more of a
misunderstood genius.

JAVI
Okay. So still a genius, though?

NIC
Yeah. Misunderstood one.

JAVI
Got it.

Writing it down.

NIC
At this point, he's being slightly
overlooked by Hollywood. Which
sucks because his tools are sharper
than ever. Almost too sharp. But he
needs the right role. The right
opportunity.

JAVI
Right, totally... but maybe he also
needs to fix his relationship with
his daughter. Just to keep the
stakes more personal.

NIC
Yes, definitely... but that's not
his main problem. His main problem
is he's not getting the right
chances.

JAVI
Yup, love that... but maybe once he
fixes his relationship with his
family, then the roles start to
come because--

NIC
Right, that's perfect. But I think
it's actually the other way around.
If he just gets the right role,
then everything else in his life
will get fixed. Right?

Javi can see Nic's not budging on this.

JAVI

Okay, okay. So, maybe my character is secretly in love with a co-worker, but he can't act on it because--

NIC

I'm sorry. Can we keep going on my character for a bit? I just felt like we were getting on a roll.

JAVI

Oh, yeah. Of course.

NIC

And he probably speaks a couple languages. Maybe three. Or, if he's a real man of the world, maybe five is better.

10 MIN LATER

NIC (CONT'D)

Actually, I think five IS better. It gives my character pathos. And it's something I can really latch onto.

JAVI

Speaking of, I was thinking... maybe my character has some sort of big painful secret.

NIC

Yeah, maybe.

JAVI

(getting excited)

And it torments him. He's lived a life of denial and anguish. He longs for some kind of inner peace. And always has.

NIC

That's cool. But I guess if we're doing secrets, then... just for symmetry's sake, maybe both characters should have one?

JAVI

Right, right. Yeah. So each character is lying to the other? That kinda what you're thinking?

NIC

Yeah. But, like, if it ends up being too much or whatever, we could just make it my character. And that would probably work just as well. Maybe even better.

INT. NIC'S BEDROOM - LATER

Nic is sitting next to the running shower in his room. He's on the phone with Irving.

NIC

It's actually been...amazing. I know it wasn't the plan, but, I mean, Irv... this could be a viable project. An awards play.

IRVING

Sure, but--

NIC

Granted, we still need to figure out act three, but the movie totally works.

IRVING

Nic--

NIC

And I know Javi has his issues, but my god, he has an unbelievably intuitive sense for story--

IRVING

He kidnapped a 16 year old girl! And every day that passes, the likelihood goes up that girl is going to be murdered by Javi or one of his men.

NIC

Okay. Okay. Jesus. What do you want me to do?

IRVING

We're figuring out an actionable plan, but in the meantime, you're going to add a plot line to the movie...

NIC

That could be tough. It's just more of a character study at the moment--

IRVING

(ignoring)

A plot line where your daughter - with whom you have a pretty screwed up relationship - comes to visit you in Mexico, and is immediately kidnapped. That way you can ask Javi where he might "theoretically" hold a hostage.

NIC

I get what you're going for, here. But do really expect that to work?

IRVING

Get him talking. Maybe he slips up. Reveals something. It's worth a shot.

NIC

Irv, this is a small, grounded, adult drama about two tough, beautiful, sensitive men and their unlikely friendship. They're kind of, like, dueling Christ figures. Or maybe just my character is a Christ figure, we still have to figure that out, but we can't have a kidnapping. If I bring this into the mix, he's gonna know something's up. Javi's a real hardliner when it comes to "tone."

Irving starts to lose it.

IRVING

Jesus fucking Christ!
(then, calming down)
You know what, Nic...

Irving thinks for a beat, realizes Nic's weakness...

IRVING (CONT'D)

I just think a kidnapping could give the movie a wider appeal. I mean, it's pretty tough to find an audience these days, right?

Nic considers.

NIC

Unless you're, like, the Hunger Games or whatever.

IRVING

Doesn't sound like this is that.

NIC

No. This is an intelligent, mature, film for grown ups.

IRVING

Now, personally, I want smart, character driven adult dramas about real life. Real people. But, the reality is -- I'm not most people.

NIC

You certainly are not.

IRVING

And I just think most people need a bit of a hook. Just to get them in the theater.

NIC

Right. You just need to get them in the theater.

IRVING

Gotta get them in the theater. And for that, you need a trailer moment. You know what I'm thinking?

INT. JAVI'S MANSION

Nic paces, a little nervously, while Javi lays on his back on the floor.

JAVI

Hold on, hold on. Your daughter gets kidnapped?

NIC

Uh huh. It's a trailer moment.

JAVI

But who kidnaps her?

NIC

I don't know. Bad guys. It'll give our characters something to fight for. They put their lives on the line to save the daughter, and become better men for it. It's classic.

JAVI

It feels like a completely different movie.

NIC

No. It's the same movie. Now it just has a big hook.

JAVI

The relationship IS the hook. This is a character piece about a man in turmoil.

NIC

This is an adult drama with a mid level budget. And it's tough to find an audience for that kind of film. Just walk down the road with me on this.

JAVI

Oh, okay. You wanna walk down this road? Fine. So what is it? A cartel kidnaps the girl?

NIC

That's good. But where would they even take her?

JAVI

I don't know. Does it matter? A warehouse they control by the port city.

NIC

Ohh, yeah. A warehouse. I love that.

JAVI

And then what? Act three is all about saving her?

NIC

Solves our act three problems. And what's more primal than a man trying to save his daughter?!

JAVI

I don't know. Maybe a movie I haven't seen a thousand times before?!

Javi comes very close to Nic.

JAVI (CONT'D)

Enough of this bullshit. Time for you to come clean, Nic. Tell me why you're really pitching this.

NIC

What? I, I told you why.

JAVI

This time you're the liar, Nic Cage.

Nic, backing away. Javi follows, aggressive.

JAVI (CONT'D)

And you can't lie to me anymore.

NIC

(terrified)
I'm, I'm not...

JAVI

DON'T FUCKING LIE TO ME! I know the real reason you keep talking about the kidnapped girl...

NIC

Oh, fuck.
(then, pleading)
Javi, look. I'm not sure--

JAVI

You feel guilty about your relationship with your own daughter.

Color comes back into Nic's face...

NIC

Oh my god. Yes. A thousand times yes.

JAVI

You feel guilty about how much you've been there. About what kind of father you've been.

(MORE)

JAVI (CONT'D)

And you want to write about those feelings. That's normal for an artist.

NIC

I struggle with it daily.

JAVI

You're blocked. Creatively. And if we don't figure out a way to deal with this, with your family... then I truly fear that you will keep pitching this sickening Hollywood bullshit.

NIC

You're right. You're one hundred percent right.

JAVI

This is a story about a man learning to become a better man. A transformation. That's the Nic Cage I want to know. And that's the movie I want to see.

Off Nic's face, we CUT TO:

INT. JAVI'S COMPOUND / NIC'S ROOM

Nic is on the phone Irving...

NIC

Javi HATED the kidnapping idea.

IRVING

Oh yeah?

NIC

Like really hated it. End of the day, he's right. It doesn't work. The movie is a full on character piece. Like a tour de force awards grab for an actor, and--

IRVING

There is no FUCKING movie! There is a young girl named Maria in the custody of the goddamned cartel!
(composing himself)
You have a daughter right?

NIC
Yeah, but listen...

IRVING
Well let's just pretend for a second that it was her in there. Scared for her life.

NIC
First of all, I'd never let that happen. Second of all, Javi told me he'd keep the girl in a warehouse by the port.

IRVING
What? Why didn't you tell me that up front?

NIC
Because I think secretly you know this could be a good movie. There could be a real win for both of us here.

IRVING
I have to go.

NIC
Okay, fine. Whatever. But we're not doing the change in the script-

CLICK. Irving's gone.

INT. JAVI'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Javi is on the phone. He looks pained.

JAVI
Uh huh. Uh huh. Fuel up the jet.
(then)
As much as I hate to say it. Nic Cage is...he's a dead man.

Javi rubs his forehead, and off his conflicted look...

INT. JAVI'S COMPOUND / NIC'S ROOM - NEXT MORNING

Nic casually wakes up. He fishes around under his pillow and finds the CIA phone. 28 missed calls. It's RINGING.

NIC
Irv- What's going on?

IRVING

Nic. I was checking out a location from your intel. And I picked up a tail.

NIC

A tail?

IRVING

But if they've made me...they've likely made you. Nic, we can no longer guarantee your safety and the faster you get out of there--

Nic jumps out of bed, starts throwing on clothes. He shoves some of his things in his pockets.

NIC

Shit. Okay, okay.

IRVING

Have you spoken to your family?

NIC

My family? No? Why?

IRVING

The cartels have been know to move on family members. We have our people on the way to safeguard your wife and daughter.

NIC

Fuck, Irving?! Addy and Olivia? You better make sure--

IRVING

Nic. Stay calm and meet me at the safe location. Sending to you now.

(then)

You'll get through this.

Nic hangs up, freaking out. Takes a breath. Composing himself. Then, ready to go, he swings open the door, and runs right into Javi.

NIC

Jesus Christ! You scared the shit out of me.

JAVI

I'm sorry. But I need you to come with me. It will be quick. I promise.

NIC
Like, right now? You know, because-

SLAM CUT TO:

INT. JAVI'S MANSION / HALLWAY

Nic and Javi walk side by side, not saying a word. At the double doors leading to the living room, Javi stops Nic.

NIC
Please, please, can we just talk about this--

JAVI
Nic, I'm sorry I have to take this step.

NIC
You don't though. You really don't.

JAVI
No. This is the only option.

NIC
Then can you just send a message to my family? Tell them that I love them.

Javi nods, pushes the door open. Addy and Olivia are standing there. Carlos looms in the background, carrying his rifle.

JAVI
Tell them yourself.

ADDY
Dad! Are you okay?

OLIVIA
Nic! What's going on? Your friend called us last night. Said you were in such bad shape that you couldn't talk.

NIC
He did?

Nic looks at Javi, who shrugs.

NIC (CONT'D)
One sec, Liv.

Nic pulls Javi aside.

NIC (CONT'D)

(whispering)

You want to deal with me, Javi, you deal with me. But please, I'm begging you, just keep my family out of it.

JAVI

Unfortunately I can't do that. You've left me no choice.

They stare each other down as Addy chimes in.

ADDY

Are you dying, Dad?

JAVI

He is. Creatively.

(beat)

Now physically, he's tremendous. Probably outlive us all.

ADDY

Wait. So you're not dying?

NIC

No, no, of course not. I'm fine. Everything's fine.

OLIVIA

(re: Javi)

So he lied to us? I want on the next goddamn plane out of here.

JAVI

Look, I'm sorry for misleading you. But I have come to care deeply for your ex-husband. We're working on a project together - a beautiful character driven adult drama - but he has so many unresolved issues with the two of you that it's beginning to bleed into our work. In a negative way.

A beat.

OLIVIA

Have you guys lost your fucking minds?

JAVI

He has a lot of regrets. About the type of father he's been.

(MORE)

JAVI (CONT'D)

About the type of husband he was.
Just have lunch with us and let him
say what he needs to say.

(then)

Don't you think that's a great
idea, Nic?

Nic doesn't break eye contact with Javi.

NIC

Lunch is a wonderful idea. And then
afterwards, they can get on the
plane back to Los Angeles, right
Jav?

JAVI

As long as you're open and honest
with them. I don't see any reason
why not.

Nic, satisfied, turns to Olivia and Addy.

NIC

Come on, guys. Have a little food.
Let me say my piece, and then we'll
get you out of here. What do you
say?

Off Nic's forced smile...

CUT TO:

INT. JAVI'S MANSION - DINING ROOM

Nic, Olivia, Javi and Addy all eat. Silence, then...

JAVI

So, Nic, is there something you
want to say?

NIC

Ummm, yeah. There is. I want to
apologize. To both of you.
(to Addy and Olivia)
I mean, from the beginning I never
felt prepared to be a father. It
just never came easy to me, you
know, the way it did for you, Liv.
I mean, maybe I could have tried
harder. Maybe I could have been
home more. Like for dinner once in
a while. Maybe I could have taken
more jobs in LA.

Olivia and Addy are listening, intently.

NIC (CONT'D)

But here's what I always come back to. Would either of you have really wanted me to hold myself back? As an actor? As an artist? I could never ask you to do that. It's not who you are.

A long beat.

JAVI

Wow. That was fucking pathetic.

Addy starts laughing.

ADDY

Nice, man. That's all time.

JAVI

Honestly, I'm speechless.

OLIVIA

Oh, you're just not used to him yet.

ADDY

That's pretty much par for the course.

Nic is not loving this. Interjects--

NIC

Look, maybe we just focus on the good times we did have, okay? Build on that moving forward. Addy, that trip we took across the desert? When we stayed in those cabins out there? I think about that all the time. It was one of the best moments we ever shared.

Nic takes out his wallet.

NIC (CONT'D)

And I didn't tell you this on your birthday, but I keep this polaroid in my wallet. Just to remind me...

Nic hands it to Addy. The photo is of Nic and her sitting on the steps of a house in the desert.

ADDY

The polaroid is a nice touch. It must help make you feel better.

NIC

What?

ADDY

Proof of the one time you were actually there.

NIC

Addy--

ADDY

(ignores him)

The thing is, I was so young I barely even remember it. I don't remember sitting by the side of the road. I don't remember sitting on your lap and watching the sun rise. And I definitely don't remember that stupid song that was playing on the radio.

(getting emotional)

You know some dads go on trips with their daughters every year? Crazy right? I mean, we've taken one trip in ten years, and you want me to sit here and talk about a three day trip from a decade ago like you're father of the fucking year.

NIC

I... I always had to shoot.

ADDY

No. You didn't have to. You had a choice. And you chose your job over me.

Beat. Nic looks devastated.

JAVI

Jesus. Wow. Okay yeah, we may have more work than I realized.

(then)

But this is good. A good first step.

Javi's phone buzzes. He looks at it. Stands up.

JAVI (CONT'D)

Now if you'll excuse me, I have to take care of something but I'll be back shortly. This was good.

As Javi leaves he gives Nic a pat on the back. Nic watches him go, then:

NIC

(manic)

Okay, Addy, I'm sorry that you feel that way, and I will do everything I can to make it up to you, but right now, I need you guys to just sit tight and we're gonna get you back to LA. Everything's gonna be fine.

Nic takes out his phone and begins to dial.

NIC (CONT'D)

Everything. Is gonna. Be fine.

OLIVIA

Umm, what's going on, Nic? You seem a little on edge.

NIC

What? No. I'm good. Just need to make a quick call. Gimme a sec okay?

Nic puts the phone to his ear, and turns away, running his hand through his hair.

NIC (CONT'D)

(to himself)

Come on, Irving. Pick up.

INT. JAVI'S COMPOUND / JAVI'S HOUSE

Javi walks in to find Lucas standing there. Carlos is standing nearby. Javi nods to him. He doesn't nod back.

JAVI

Lucas. What was so urgent that you came all the way down here?

LUCAS

I had some news that I couldn't say over the phone... I'm going to execute a deal with Hector Selada.

JAVI

The head of the Sinaloa Cartel? I thought he was dead.

LUCAS

No one's seen him in years, but apparently he's still calling the shots. It's in our best interests to merge our operations when Ramirez is re-elected.

JAVI

You're the boss. It's your call.
(then, realizing)
Oh my god. You took Marcos Lopez's daughter.

Lucas ignores him, comes over very close to Javi.

LUCAS

But I can't do a deal with a rival cartel if I'm being betrayed.

JAVI

What? Who's betraying you?

Off Lucas' face, dead serious...

INT. JAVI'S DINING ROOM

Nic is on his CIA phone. Olivia and Addy wait nearby, out of earshot. Olivia's watching him intently.

NIC

(whisper yelling)
Irving! Where are you?

IRVING

Stay calm, Nic. We're working on an extraction plan.

NIC

He brought my wife and daughter down to the *fucking* house. My family!

IRVING

Shit.

NIC

Don't say "shit." Just get us out of here!

IRVING

We can't mobilize an operation in time.

NIC

Then what do I do? What am I supposed to do?

Irving takes a deep breath.

IRVING

I would never ask you to do this ordinarily, Nic. And I know you don't have the necessary training. But there is one other option we have to safeguard your family. Do you have access to a weapon?

NIC

You want me to... kill Javi?

IRVING

It's the safest way out. For all of you.

Nic nods and hangs up the phone just as Olivia comes over.

NIC

Good news. We'll get you out of here within the hour.

OLIVIA

Nic. Can I talk to you for a second?

Olivia takes him aside.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

I've known you for fifteen years. I know when you're nervous. And I know when you're lying. And right now, you're both.

NIC

Okay, I'm gonna tell you something, but you can't freak out.

(deep breath)

I'm working for the CIA.

Long beat.

OLIVIA

Are you having a nervous breakdown?

NIC

I promise you, I'm not. They wanted some information on some of Javi's business dealings. So I've been helping them because they were like, impressed with some of my previous training or whatever. Point is, I need an hour to get the final piece of information, and when I get back, all of us will go back to Los Angeles. Together. Okay?

OLIVIA

(stunned)

Wow. Um, okay. I don't even know what to say.

NIC

Don't say anything. Just take Addy back to my room. Don't talk to anyone. And don't go anywhere. One hour. I promise.

Off Nic's look...

INT. JAVI'S HOUSE / LIVING ROOM

Lucas continues talking with Javi.

LUCAS

You've very smart, Javi. Incredibly charming. You always were. But you also like to see the good in people. And that can leave you vulnerable.

JAVI

Who is betraying us?!

LUCAS

Your friend Mr. Cage is working for the US government.

JAVI

Bullshit.

Lucas throws the folder down in Javi's lap. Javi looks at the pictures of Nic meeting with Irving.

LUCAS

I had Carlos trail him.

Javi looks over at Carlos. He can't look at Javi.

JAVI
You work for Lucas?

LUCAS
Everyone down here works for me.
Except for your friend Mr. Cage.

Lucas pulls out a pistol. Points it at Javi's head.

LUCAS (CONT'D)
And I think you knew about it.

JAVI
What? Lucas, please. I had no idea.

Lucas SLAPS him. Hard. Javi takes it.

LUCAS
Get on your knees. Face the wall.

JAVI
Lucas-

LUCAS
NOW!

Javi gets on his knees.

LUCAS (CONT'D)
I know you think I'm disgusting.
You think I'm a monster. But you
take my money, cousin. You take
this house. You take, take, take,
while I do all the FUCKING work.

JAVI
Please! DON'T DO THIS, LUCAS!! I
DIDN'T KNOW!

Javi closes his eyes. Lucas cocks the gun. A LONG MOMENT.
Lucas lowers the gun. Kneels down in front of Javi.

LUCAS
I believe you, cousin.

Lucas hands Javi the gun.

LUCAS (CONT'D)
But you know what you have to do.

Off Javi's face... BADASS MUSIC KICKS IN...

EXT. JAVI'S DRIVEWAY

In glorious SLOW MOTION... Nic walks across the driveway, jacket flowing in the wind. Javi, equally badass, adjusts the PISTOL tucked in his back waistband. They meet in the middle.

NIC

Hey.

JAVI

(awkwardly)

Hello.

A long beat. They feel each other out.

NIC

So, I'm sorry about lunch.

JAVI

No, I should have asked you before bringing them down. And I've been thinking about it. Maybe the kidnapping can work. Our movie would start out as a beautiful character piece, and slowly change into a more thrilling, action driven--

NIC

Hollywood blockbuster.

(realizing)

Then there's something for everyone.

JAVI

Wanna go for a drive out to the cliffs? Clear our heads and think through the third act...

NIC

That's perfect.

INT. JAVI'S JEEP - DAY

Nic and Javi drive in silence. They look at each other. There's an overwhelming sadness.

JAVI

So... how does it end? How does it all end?

NIC
I don't know. I guess I just want
everyone to... be okay.

JAVI
Yeah. Me too. But that doesn't feel
real does it?

They arrive at the trail leading to the cliffs. Javi parks
the Jeep. They sit there. Neither of them wants to get out.

NIC
Guess we should go.

JAVI
Yeah.

A long moment.

NIC
You don't have any weed, do you?

TIME CUT TO:

INT. JAVI'S JEEP - MOMENTS LATER

They're finishing smoking a joint.

NIC
I'm glad we did this.

JAVI
Me too.

They sit there for a beat, then...

NIC
You don't have any food do you?

TIME CUT TO:

Nic and Javi pass an apple back and forth.

NIC (CONT'D)
Mackintosh?

JAVI
Honey crisp.

NIC
Really?

TIME CUT TO:

Nic and Javi, still sitting in the Jeep, looking out at the forest. Neither wants to get out. Stalling.

JAVI
Guess we should go.

NIC
Yeah.

Nic slowly looks down, looking for something, anything...

NIC (CONT'D)
Are those new shoes?

JAVI
These? No, I've had these.

NIC
Hmmm. I guess I just haven't seen 'em before.

JAVI
I don't wear them that much. I'm not sure they're really "me."

NIC
What? I think they look great. They're totally you. I love them.

JAVI
You wanna try them on? I think they might look better on you.

Nic and Javi AWKWARDLY exchange shoes in the JEEP.

JAVI (CONT'D)
Oh wow. Those look incredible on you.

NIC
You think?
(then)
Because I like how those look on you.

JAVI
They fit really well.

NIC
Do you want to trade?

JAVI
Like permanently?

Nic nods, excitedly.

JAVI (CONT'D)
Okay.

NIC
Cool.

A beat.

NIC (CONT'D)
I just wanted to say, that I'm,
like, really glad I got to meet
you. You're the kind of friend I
could not for like five years, not
really even talk, and then pick
right up where we left off.

JAVI
I totally agree. It's just...

JAVI (CONT'D) NIC
Easy. Easy.

JAVI (CONT'D)
It's time to figure out how this
ends.

NIC
Let's do it.

Nic takes a deep breath, and OPENS HIS DOOR.

EXT. FOREST - MOMENTS LATER

They're walking along. Silently. Palpably tense. Nic is in front of Javi.

JAVI
Nic, I meant what I said back
there.

NIC
Oh man. Me too.

JAVI
Which is why this really hurts.

NIC
What?

Nic turns around and is looking straight down the barrel of Javi's gun.

NIC (CONT'D)

Whoa. Okay. Okay. Fucking Javi. You brought me out here to kill me?

JAVI

I'm sorry, Nic.

NIC

I'm sorry too. But you pull that trigger...and we both die.

REVEAL Nic has the two golden guns from Face/Off at his waist, pointed at up at Javi's head.

JAVI

Wait you were gonna kill me? And are those my golden guns?!

NIC

Looks like we both had a little secret.

JAVI

Why the fuck would you kill me?

NIC

What? You're the head of the cartel, and-

JAVI

My cousin Lucas is the head of the cartel! He's the boss.

NIC

But the CIA said you ran it.

JAVI

The whole world thinks I run it! When my father died, Lucas took over the cartel. He forced me to act as the figurehead. I'm just a puppet.

NIC

But you take his money!

JAVI

You don't leave the cartel, Nic. You and anyone you care about is in constant danger. Why do you think I can't be with Gabriela?

NIC

Wait. You're into Gabriela?

JAVI

Are you fucking kidding me? We can't be together because that would put a target on her back! Did you seriously not realize that we liked each other? You're in the CIA!

NIC

I'm not in the CIA! I was forced to help them out. For money. I'm an actor, Javi. You know that! The only organization I'm a part of is the Screen Actors Guild of America.

(then)

And AFTRA. But fuck AFTRA. It's more of a theater thing. Whatever. Just put your fucking gun down!

They have their guns pointed at one another. It starts to rain.

JAVI

No WAY. You go first!

NIC

No way I'm going first! This is so fucked!

JAVI

I don't want to kill you!

NIC

You're like the last person I want to kill!

JAVI

I FUCKING LOVE YOU!

NIC

I LOVE YOU!

BANG! BANG! Shots ring out, one barely grazing Nic's shoulder. Javi ducks down.

NIC (CONT'D)

Who is that?

JAVI

The Cartel. My cousin must have assumed I wouldn't kill you.

NIC
What do we do?

EXT. MEXICAN JUNGLE - DAY

Nic and Javi run through the woods. It's now a torrential downpour.

JAVI
Faster, Nic! They're coming.

NIC
I'm trying. Your shoes aren't good for running! There's no ankle support!

They burst through the clearing and are at the edge of the cliff. They hesitate for a second. They hear MEN'S VOICES coming closer...

NIC (CONT'D)
We have to get to Olivia and Addy.

JAVI
I've got another Jeep hidden about a mile down the shore.

NIC
Let's do this.

And they run and jump off the cliff, just like at the beginning. And as they hit the water, we CUT TO:

EXT. SMALL JUNGLE SHED - DAY

Javi pulls open the camouflaged door. They get in. Nic, in the driver's seat, starts it up.

EXT. JUNGLE ROAD

Javi and Nic speed along the road back to Javi's compound. As they crest a hill, Javi slams on the brakes. It skids to a halt right before it hits Olivia, who is with Gabriela, tears streaming down her face.

NIC
Liv?

OLIVIA
THEY TOOK HER, NIC. THEY TOOK ADDY!

Motorcycles can be heard in the distance.

NIC

What? Oh my god.

JAVI

We need to go now! There are more soldiers coming!

OLIVIA

I'm not getting in the car with you! Either of you!

NIC

Please, Olivia! Just get in the car. We'll find Addy!

Gabriela turns to Olivia.

GABRIELA

They have your daughter Olivia, and there's nothing we can do about it if you don't get in the car. Trust me.

INT. JAVI'S JEEP

As it speeds away from the site. Olivia is shotgun. Nic grabs her hand.

OLIVIA

We have to go to the police. We need help.

JAVI

The police are in Lucas' pocket. We can't do that.

OLIVIA

The US Embassy? The army? Someone. (starting to lose it)
We can't do this alone! We need help here!

Nic fumbles with his phone... dials.

NIC

Irving, my CIA contact. If anyone can help us in this situation, it's Irving. He'll know what to do.

Nic is calling on SPEAKER. Irving picks up.

IRVING

Nic.

NIC

They have my daughter!

IRVING (V.O.)

I know. I know. I'm sending an address. Get here as soon as you can.

NIC

What do they want with Addy?

IRVING

She's being used to put pressure on the US government. The Cartel told Mexican and US authorities that unless Marcos Lopez drops out of the election, at exactly 12:30pm tomorrow... they'll execute both girls on a live stream.

Nic looks at Olivia, who covers her mouth...

NIC

Oh my god. You have to get him to drop out, right? You're gonna get him to drop out?!

IRVING

Just get here as soon as you can.

CLICK. Irving hangs up.

EXT. MEXICAN TOWN / ALLEY - NIGHT

They creep along side of a building on the edge of a jungle.

NIC

Shhhh.

Nic pulls out his gun and he pushes the door open.

Irving is slumped on the floor. A BULLET HOLE in his forehead.

The reality of the situation hits Nic. Starting to unravel...

NIC (CONT'D)

Irv... I thought. I thought he'd be able to help. I don't...

JAVI

We have to go. Now. They could still be in the area.

OLIVIA

Where? What do we do? Who're we supposed to call?!

GABRIELA

There's no one to call. But we have to move.

NIC

There's got to be someone! I mean, Javi you have to help us here. You got us into this!

JAVI

What do you want me to say? Huh? That I fucked up?! I fucked up, okay?! But we will get your daughter back. But right now, we have to go.

This sinks in...

JAVI (CONT'D)

Come on. I've got a place...

EXT. SAFEHOUSE - NIGHT

The Jeep pulls into a small, rundown, jungle house...

INT. SAFEHOUSE - NIGHT

Sparsely furnished. A balcony off the back. Nic is pacing while Javi, Gabriela and Olivia sit on the couch, watching.

JAVI

The compound's a fortress. If there's a way in, my cousin has thought of it.

NIC

But you said there were tunnels?

JAVI

There are. But they have a series of metal doors that only open from the inside. Even if there weren't armed guards, it would take weeks to get through them.

OLIVIA

Well, what're we supposed to do, then? Huh? This psychopath is going to kill our daughter in twelve hours, so don't tell me it's impossible. Okay? Just think a little fucking harder about how we're gonna get in there and stop them.

A moment.

JAVI

We're gonna walk right in through the front gate.

NIC

Okay, cool. Very, like, dramatic answer, but how's that going to work?

JAVI

My cousin is trying to cut a deal with Hector Selada - the head of the rival Sinaloa Cartel.

GABRIELA

Hector Selada? No one's seen him in 15 years.

JAVI

Exactly. And since no one's seen him, no one knows exactly what he looks like. I'm thinking that with a little prosthetic and some makeup...

He looks at Nic.

NIC

That I could play Hector.

JAVI

You were looking for the role of a lifetime...

Nic nods.

JAVI (CONT'D)

Olivia, Nic said you were a make up artist when you met. Here's a picture of Hector Selada.

Javi holds out an old picture on her phone.

OLIVIA

Oh wow. That wouldn't be easy. But I guess we could mix up a homemade latex...

MUSIC KICKS IN:

***IN A MAKEUP CHAIR** - Time lapse. Olivia is mixing a solution in a bowl. It's goopy as she starts to apply it to Nic's face...

OLIVIA (V.O.)

We'll adjust the cheekbones and nose. And then I'll need as much foundation as we can get our hands on...

***SITTING ACROSS FROM JAVI** - In chairs, facing each other. Nic speaks Spanish with Javi. It's not bad.

JAVI (V.O.)

We can help you get the accent down.

***IN A MAKEUP CHAIR** - Time lapse. Nic is starting to look like a different person.

***IN THE ROOM** - Nic walks with a slight gait. Comes over and looks at a video on Javi's phone of Hector Selada.

NIC (V.O.)

I'll need to study his little quirks. His mannerisms. The way he carries himself. His gait.

IN THE MAKEUP CHAIR - Nic is really transforming...

ON THE KITCHEN TABLE - Gabriella lays out a drawing she's made with Javi.

GABRIELA (V.O.)

I can walk you through the floor plan of the main structure within the compound. Establish where Addy might be. And how to get out.

Javi points to a X marked "Tunnel."

***IN THE MAKEUP CHAIR** - Olivia finishes Nic's makeup. Nic is transformed. We hang on his face for a beat. Then the chair swings around. The transformation is remarkable. Javi and Gabriela are on the bed.

NIC
How do I look?

GABRIELA
Wow, that's amazing...

JAVI
It could actually work.

OLIVIA
The only problem is, it's not gonna hold up too long in the heat before it starts breaking down...

INT. AIRBNB - LATER

Javi is sitting on the bed staring at a picture on his phone of himself and Lucas. Gabriela comes in and sits next to him.

GABRIELA
You think this is gonna work?

Javi shrugs, "Best we got."

GABRIELA (CONT'D)
Yeah.

Beat.

JAVI
I'm such a fucking coward.

GABRIELA
Javi--

JAVI
No. I never stood up to him. I just looked away and took his money while he killed people, and--

GABRIELA
He's an evil man, Javi. And you had the misfortune of being born into his family.

JAVI
But I didn't do anything. Okay? I could have stopped him. We could have been together if-

GABRIELA
If what?

JAVI

If I walked in there and put a bullet in his head. I don't know. There were things I could have done. And I did nothing.

They stare at each other...

GABRIELA

You did what most people would do.

...Javi knows that's true. And it kills him...

EXT. AIRBNB / BALCONY - NIGHT

Olivia is outside on the balcony. Nic comes out...

NIC

Hey, I was looking at this picture of Hector, and I think we need a little more in the cheek--

OLIVIA

I'm coming with you.

NIC

What? No, Liv...I got us into this.

OLIVIA

And I'm gonna help get her out.

NIC

I'm sorry, Olivia. I'm sorry.

He goes to hug her.

OLIVIA

Don't touch me. This has nothing to do with you. I'm doing this for her.

Olivia walks back inside and slams the door. Nic turns and looks out into the dark jungle. The lights that illuminate the deck suddenly die. Blackness all around.

Two floodlights click on, as if on a black box stage. Nic sits on a crate, while Young Nic stands next to him. Both illuminated.

YOUNG NIC

Wow. This is pretty fucked up. How you holding up?

NIC

I'm a goddamn wreck. How do you think I am?

(then)

But I know that every thing I've done in my life has led to this moment. And-

YOUNG NIC

You don't have to do this.

Nic looks up at Young Nic.

NIC

What?

YOUNG NIC

You don't have to do this.

Young Nic pulls Nic into a hug.

NIC

But there's no one else-

YOUNG NIC

You don't have to do this.

Nic pushes him away.

NIC

Stop saying that. I have to!

YOUNG NIC

He's a lunatic--

NIC

He's just a guy-

YOUNG NIC

And a killer.

NIC

I HAVE TO DO THIS!

YOUNG NIC

HOW DOES YOU BEING DEAD HELP YOUR DAUGHTER?!

A long beat as this sinks in.

YOUNG NIC (CONT'D)

I love you, dude. And I've ALWAYS looked out for you...

(definitively)

(MORE)

YOUNG NIC (CONT'D)
 But this isn't a role. And you're
 not a hero. You're a guy who's
 about to get us killed.

This lands with Nic. Young Nic walks away.

NIC
 Wait. Don't walk away. We need to
 figure this out. HEY!

But Young Nic is gone. The lights click off and Nic is back
 on the deck. Off his uncertainty, we CUT TO:

EXT. JUAREZ CARTEL COMPOUND - DAY

Lucas watches as two pickup trucks acting as a makeshift gate
 part, revealing Nic and his wife who are being patted down by
 guards. Nic steps inside the gate.

(Following scene is spoken entirely in Spanish...)

NIC AS HECTOR
 Lucas Gutierrez. How are you my
 friend?

We're following Lucas as he moves quickly down a dusty road
 toward Nic. A switchblade flicks open in his hand.

NIC AS HECTOR (CONT'D)
 I'd like to introduce my wife.
 She's from Santa Barbara.

Lucas doesn't stop moving, just kicks Nic's leg dropping him
 to his knees, grabs Nic around the head and starts to CUT OFF
 HIS EAR.

NIC AS HECTOR (CONT'D)
 WHAT THE FUCK???

LUCAS
 You think I'm fucking stupid? Huh,
 Hector? Huh? You think you're just
 gonna walk in here after 15 years
 and kill me you motherfucker??

NIC AS HECTOR
 HE'S CUTTING MY FUCKING EAR OFF.

Olivia is STUNNED. Frozen.

LUCAS
 Who are you working for? Three
 seconds.

NIC AS HECTOR
IT'S JUST ME!

LUCAS
Two.

NIC AS HECTOR
I PROMISE YOU! HELP!

Lucas pivots, moves the knife to Nic's throat. Looks directly at Olivia.

LUCAS
YOU THINK SHE CAN HELP YOU, HECTOR?

Olivia, panic in her eyes, then...

OLIVIA
(calmly)
Go ahead.

A long beat.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
We call the shots. Both of us. You kill him, our business proposition still stands. You kill me, you're only hurting yourself.

LUCAS
You don't think I'll kill him?!

Lucas moves the knife, drawing blood. Olivia crouches down and looks Lucas directly in the eye.

OLIVIA
A real man wouldn't sit here talking about it. It would already be done. So no, I don't think you'll do it. But I am wondering why the FUCK you think you can intimidate me.

Lucas suddenly pulls the knife back, and Nic slumps forward. Lucas smiles.

LUCAS
Show them to a room. And it is good to see you, Hector. Been far too long.

Lucas puts the knife in his cargo pocket, and walks away as we CUT TO:

INT. JUAREZ CARTEL COMPOUND / GUEST ROOM

Nic and Olivia's bags are dropped off in a nicely furnished guest room. They shut the door...

NIC AS HECTOR

Oh my god. How does my ear look? He almost cut off my ear!

OLIVIA

It's 12:15 Nic. We have to go.

NIC AS HECTOR

I know. But it hurts. Does it need stitches? Just take a look.

Olivia is looking at the map and out the window.

OLIVIA

I think that's the building over there.

NIC AS HECTOR

Oh fuck, I think I've lost the hearing in that ear. I can't hear shit. Say something in my ear.

She leans over to Nic's ear.

OLIVIA

Let's fucking go.

A beat.

NIC AS HECTOR

My ear's actually fine.

EXT. JUAREZ CARTEL COMPOUND BUILDING - DAY

Nic as Hector and Olivia wait until two cartel guys exit a door. As the door is closing, Nic runs out and grabs it. Olivia follows as they slip inside.

INT. BASEMENT HALLWAY

Nic and Olivia come down to a long hallway with lots of doors. They whisper to each other. Nic is studying his map.

OLIVIA

Come on.

NIC AS HECTOR
There's supposed to be a door here.
Where's the door?

She grabs the map.

OLIVIA
Shit. It's one floor down.

INT. STAIRWELL

Nic and Olivia race down the stairs. As they reach the bottom a Cartel Soldier opens the door. He sees them and Nic, without missing a beat, LEVELS the guy with a right cross. He's knocked out. Nic shakes his hand. Stifles a yell.

Olivia grabs the guy's gun and chucks it to Nic. And they move through the door.

INT. HALLWAY

They look down the hallway. No one coming. A closed door...

NIC AS HECTOR
That's the door.

They run down the hallway, take a deep breath, and move through the door, Nic first, holding up the gun.

INT. ROOM

Total blackness...

NIC
(whispering)
Get the light.

Olivia finds the switch and turns it on... AND THERE'S NOTHING THERE.

They look at each other. Oh shit.

CARLOS
Don't fucking move, Hector. Drop
the gun.

Carlos, gun trained on Nic. Nic closes his eyes. And drops the gun on the floor.

CARLOS (CONT'D)
Come with me.

INT. DIFFERENT HALLWAY

Carlos knocks on a door, and is let inside by a Cartel Soldier. He ushers Nic as Hector and Olivia in.

INT. BASEMENT HOLDING CELL

Nic and Olivia walk in to Lucas holding a gun. Addy and MARIA LOPEZ, the Presidential Candidate's daughter, are bound and gagged, on their knees in front of him. There are bright, hot lights and a video setup for the execution.

CARLOS

I found them down the hall. He had a gun. Something isn't right.

LUCAS

A gun? Okay, Hector. What's the deal, my man? You got a fucking problem you like to tell me about?

Nic is starting to sweat under the lights. Olivia sees his face starting to run.

NIC AS HECTOR

I was beginning to think you didn't have the girl. And since our deal is based on Lopez dropping out...

LUCAS

He'll drop out.

NIC AS HECTOR

Well he hasn't done it yet! So how are you gonna guarantee it?

CARLOS

Fuck this guy!

LUCAS

Carlos!

CARLOS

I'm telling you, something isn't right.

LUCAS

Then go check the perimeter.

Carlos, in a huff, walks off... Lucas turns to Nic.

LUCAS (CONT'D)
 You know if we're gonna be in
 business together, Hector, you're
 gonna need to trust me.

He comes over closer to Nic. He sees Nic's face coming off.

LUCAS (CONT'D)
 What the fuck-

NIC AS HECTOR
 What the fuck what?

LUCAS
 Your face...

He reaches over to grab a bit of Nic's face and Nic immediately grabs Lucas' gun, wraps him around the neck, and points the gun at Lucas' head in front of Olivia and the girls. All the Soldiers immediately draw their weapons.

NIC AS HECTOR
 (in English)
 ANYBODY MOVES, AND I BLOW HIS HEAD
 OFF. DON'T. FUCKING. MOVE.
 (then, to Olivia)
 Liv, take the girls and go.

Nic rips the rest of the prosthetics off his own face.

LUCAS
 Oh my god... Nic Fucking Cage.

Olivia and the girls move out of the doorway behind Nic. Olivia stops...

OLIVIA
 What's your plan here, Nic?

NIC AS HECTOR
 My plan is you and the girls get
 out of here alive.

Addy is removing her gag as Olivia is pulling her away.

OLIVIA
 Let's go, Ads. We have to go.

ADDY
 We can't. Not without Dad!

NIC AS HECTOR
 I'll be okay, honey! I love you
 very much. Now go with your mother.
 NOW!

A Cartel Soldier moves. Nic cocks the gun.

NIC AS HECTOR (CONT'D)
 Don't even think about it.

EXT. CARTEL COMPOUND

Carlos is exiting the compound, automatic rifle around his shoulder. He's pissed off...

INT. CARTEL TUNNEL

Olivia, Addy and Maria are climbing down into a drug tunnel. They hit the ground.

OLIVIA
 This way.

They both help Maria, who is very weak.

EXT. JUAREZ CARTEL COMPOUND / TUNNEL EXIT

Olivia opens the gate from the inside. Javi helps pull open a large metal gate as Olivia, Addy and Maria exit the tunnel.

JAVI
 Let's get you two in the Jeep.
 Where's Nic?

OLIVIA
 (out of breath)
 He's got a gun on Lucas... bought
 us some time. But there's others.
 About seven others.

JAVI
 He'll never make it out of there
 alive.

Olivia looks at Javi. He realizes what Nic did...

INT. JUAREZ CARTEL COMPOUND / HOLDING CELL

Nic still has the gun on Lucas.

LUCAS

Here's what I know, Nic Cage. I've got seven guys with guns pointed directly at your head, and that means you're not getting out of here alive.

NIC AS HECTOR

And here's what I know, Lucas.

(takes a beat, centers)

It takes thirteen milliseconds for the human brain to send a message to the body. So by the time your bullets hit me, my cerebral cortex will have transmitted a signal to the seventeen healthy muscles that operate my trigger finger.

Lucas' hand creeps down to the pocket where he put his knife. Nic doesn't notice, because he's deep in the speech.

NIC AS HECTOR (CONT'D)

And before your asshole has had a chance to pucker up, your medulla oblongata will be splattered on the fucking wall behind you. And if that's the last thing I accomplish on this beautiful green earth, well, then... WHAT A WAY TO FUCKING GO.

Lucas suddenly grabs his knife, flicks it open and SLAMS it into Nic's leg. Nic goes down.

NIC AS HECTOR (CONT'D)

Ahhhhhh. Shit.

Lucas grabs the gun, and jumps on top of Nic, the gun to Nic's forehead.

LUCAS

There he is! There he fucking is!
American Hero. Nicolas Cage!

As Lucas is about to pull the trigger, Nic turns to the side, and sees Young Nic on the floor staring back at him.

YOUNG NIC

Well... you did it.

NIC

I did what I came to do. I got my daughter out.

YOUNG NIC
 You got us killed you fucking
 idiot! I tried to help you, but you
 wouldn't listen. Now get up!

Suddenly the POV swings around and Nic and Young Nic are standing, facing each other in a fantasy sequence inside Nic's head--

INT. FACE/OFF - HALL OF MIRRORS

But a German Expressionist version of the Face/Off mirror scene. It's the angular, tilted, Cabinet of Dr. Caligari meets 90's action version. Visceral, but not quite real...

Nic draws a gun from his belt. Almost surprised he has it...

NIC
 You're not here to help me.

YOUNG NIC
 What're you doing?! Put the gun
 down.

Nic starts following Young Nic. An intensity we haven't seen.

NIC
 You were never here to help me.

YOUNG NIC
 I've always looked out for you.
 Always.

NIC
 No. NO NO NO NO NO.

YOUNG NIC
 Yes. We can get you out of this. We
 just need a plan. You have the
 training...

Nic wavers. Young Nic sees this and comes out from behind a mirror. He slowly approaches Nic, arms out.

YOUNG NIC (CONT'D)
 I'm not gonna hurt you. And you're
 not gonna hurt me. Just put the gun
 down, and we focus on getting you
 out of here.

Nic nods.

YOUNG NIC (CONT'D)

I love you. You know I love you.

Young Nic suddenly lunges forward, punches Nic in the face. The gun falls, skidding across the floor. They fight and wrestle in a brutal fashion. Both clamoring for the gun.

NIC

You're a liar. You don't care about me. You only care about you. You're selfish and arrogant and just, like, a total fucking dick.

YOUNG NIC

What? I'm a dick? I'm the only thing that's keeping you alive!

Nic slams a fist into Young Nic, who falls back. Nic grabs the gun, turns and shoots. Young Nic dives behind a mirror. Nic follows, shooting. Mirrors shatter.

Young Nic runs directly THROUGH A MIRROR. On the other side, there's a warehouse district. He jumps on a (strangely) idling Ducati motorcycle. Nic runs through sees a waiting grey Mustang Fastback. He jumps in, jams the gas and we're...

EXT. GONE IN 60 SECONDS SEAPORT - DAY

Still in the Caligari-esque, expressionistic sets... But this time, a car chase, Gone in 60 Seconds style. Nic is gaining on Young Nic in traffic. Suddenly next to each other.

YOUNG NIC

You're hysterical right now! You're not thinking clearly!

They weave and dodge oncoming traffic. Then back together...

NIC

This is the clearest I've ever been!

Nic swerves into Young Nic, dropping the motorcycle on it's side. Young Nic skids and SLAMS into a wall.

Nic skids the Mustang to a stop, grabs his gun, and exits. Young Nic is limping away. Nic shoots, but Young Nic has disappeared around a corner. Nic runs to catch up. He sees a LONE HOTEL ROOM DOOR.

INT. LEAVING LAS VEGAS HOTEL ROOM

Nic enters the fun house version of the hotel room from Leaving Las Vegas. Alcohol strewn about everywhere. Young Nic sits on the bed, nursing his leg.

YOUNG NIC

Don't do this. I'm the only friend
you've got in this world.

NIC

Friend?

YOUNG NIC

I always--

NIC

Shut the fuck up.

(then)

For the past twenty years, you made
me think the most important thing
in the world was... being you. With
your cool hair. Your cool jacket.
And that cool fucking attitude.

Nic paces...

NIC (CONT'D)

But here's what I've come to
realize: I don't like you. In fact,
I think you might be mentally ill.
You're a small man ruled by fear.
And that fear has turned you into
the biggest, most selfish coward
I've ever met. You're chasing a
moment in time, man. But the chase
is over...

Nic cocks the gun.

YOUNG NIC

So this is it, huh? This is where
it ends for you?

NIC

No. This is where it ends for you.

Nic fires off a couple rounds. But they DO NOTHING to Young Nic. Young Nic laughs maniacally.

YOUNG NIC

You can't let me go, you fucking
coward! Because you're too scared
to be alone.

(MORE)

YOUNG NIC (CONT'D)

To do this on your own. Because the
greatest trick I've ever pulled...
is that I'm you.

Nic's distress turns to... a smile.

And he TURNS THE GUN ON HIMSELF.

YOUNG NIC (CONT'D)

No!!!!!!!!!!

Nic pulls the trigger. AND WE'RE BACK IN....

EXT. JUAREZ CARTEL COMPOUND - DAY

Nic's eyes SLAM open as he EXECUTES A PERFECT GUN DISARM,
shooting Lucas in the shoulder. Nic jumps up. Cartel
Soldiers aim, Nic in their sights.

Nic's face: PANIC. About to be gunned down when...

Javi comes racing around the corner, gun drawn. Bullets
flying. A couple Soldiers go down or dive for cover.

JAVI

Nic! Let's go!

Javi grabs Nic and pulls him to his feet. He catches Lucas's
eye. Rage

LUCAS

You motherfuc--

INT. JUAREZ CARTEL COMPOUND BASEMENT / HALLWAY

Javi and Nic speed down the hallway. Soldiers come into the
hallway, firing. They turn the corner just in time.

EXT. JUAREZ CARTEL COMPOUND - DAY

Addy, Gabriela, Olivia, Maria - who is lying down on the
floor in the back seat - are in the Jeep. Gabriela starts it,
then checks her watch.

GABRIELA

We have to go now.

ADDY

We're not going without my dad.

GABRIELA

I don't want to leave Javi either.
But the cartel finds us...

OLIVIA

One more minute.

They all stare at the tunnel exit. We're pushing on their hopeful faces, when-

CARLOS

Hands in the air. All of you.

It's Carlos. Slowly approaching, gun aimed at the women. They all slowly raise their hands.

GABRIELA

Carlos, please. You do not want to do this. Javi has been nothing but nice to you. And your family.

Carlos slowly approaches the back of the Jeep.

CARLOS

Javi is nothing. He's weak...
(into walkie talkie)
I've got them. By the tunnel.

Maria stirs in the back seat. Gabriela catches her eye. Glances at the shifter. Maria grabs the stick shift. Gabriela jams the gas.

The Jeep slams into the Carlos, knocking him off his feet.

GABRIELA

Where is he?

ADDY

Behind us!

GABRIELA

Where?

Carlos pops up. His arm is broken.

CARLOS

(dazed)
You fucking... bitches. You're dead. All of you!!

He goes to fire his automatic rifle. BOOM. Carlos drops. Shot in the back. As he falls, we see Nic aiming his gun. Javi at his side. Zoom in on Nic...

NIC
 Sorry I'm late. Now let's get the
 fuck out of Mexico.

EXT. MEXICAN DESERT - DAY

Hot sun. A hill of dirt and sand. An engine howls. A cloud of dust. Then, the Jeep sails into the air, landing in a plume of sand. Tires screaming and clawing for traction as Nic wails on the accelerator as we find...

About TEN OTHER CARTEL PICKUPS giving chase. Men with guns dangling like evil ornaments.

INT. JAVI'S JEEP

Nic drives. Olivia's shotgun. Javi is in the back with Addy and Maria and Gabriela. Flying down little jungle roads...

NIC
 Everybody okay?!
 (looking back at Addy)
 It's just really really great to
 have you back. That's all. I missed
 you. I missed the shit out of you.

ADDY
 Just watch the road, dad!

NIC
 Okay, honey. No problem.

Addy SMILES as bullet rips through the glass windshield. Nic pushes the windscreen down flat. Gabriela is using a pocket knife and a lighter to cauterize the wound.

JAVI
 Ahhhgggh.

GABRIELA
 Stop screaming you baby.

OLIVIA
 They're getting closer...

NIC
 This thing doesn't go any faster!

Javi grabs the Cartel Soldier's automatic rifle.

JAVI

Let me out of the jeep! I can slow them down.

NIC

No fucking way!

JAVI

We're two kilometers from the border. We only have two guns. If I slow them down, you can make it.

NIC

Javi, I can get us there, and then we'll get you to a real doctor. Like at Cedars. I can see if Cohen is available. You'll love him. Actually, he goes to Italy in the summers. Whatever.

Javi jumps out of the moving jeep, slamming into the dirt, rolling.

NIC (CONT'D)

Javi!!!

Nic STOMPS on the brakes. The Jeep comes to a stop.

JAVI

I won't have any kind of real life if I don't stand up to my cousin. I need this, Nic. Now go.

NIC

Javi-

JAVI

GO!!

Nic jams the gas. The Jeep speeds off. And as clears frame, Gabriela is standing there holding the remaining pistol. Her dress blows in the wind. Dust swirls around. She looks beautiful.

JAVI (CONT'D)

You stayed.

GABRIELA

Of course I stayed.

She runs over and KISSES JAVI. And as the WAILING guitar solo from NOVEMBER RAIN hits...

Javi and Gabriela face the approaching convoy, and start firing round after round in glorious slow motion. A couple cartel trucks veer off the road and crash.

IN A CARTEL TRUCK Lucas is shooting back. JAVI IS HIT. He crumples to the ground and rolls off the side of the road as the remaining trucks roar past. Gabriela runs to his side...

IN NIC'S JEEP Nic slams the Jeep into fifth and jams the accelerator.

NIC

Get down! Everyone down! They might fire on us...

EXT. UNITED STATES BORDER

An BORDER PATROL GUARD with a gun stands in front of a wooden barrier. He waves at Nic to slow down. His waving gets more and more frantic.

Lucas' truck is the only one left. Gaining on the Jeep.

Finally, the Border Patrol Guard dives out of the way as Nic's truck barrels through the wooden divider, blowing out a tire and slamming into an embankment on the other side.

We're tight on Nic. Hunched over the wheel. Bleeding. Barely conscious. Suddenly, Lucas, heavily bleeding himself, grabs Nic around the neck and drags him out of the Jeep.

The Border Patrol have drawn their weapons. Lucas puts his back against the Jeep, uses Nic as a shield.

LUCAS

Come near me and I'll shoot him.
I'm going to make my way back
across the border.

Addy grabs the blade Gabriela was using to get the bullet out of Javi's shoulder, stands up in the back of the Jeep, and slams it into Lucas' back. Lucas falls and lands hard on the ground. Nic looks back at Addy and Olivia.

Except it's NOT OLIVIA AND ADDY. It's Naomi Watts. And a young actress. "Addy" hugs her dad.

OLIVIA

We made it.

NIC

All of us.

ADDY
I love you, daddy.

We realize we're watching the movie version of their adventure. Credits begin to roll.

ON SCREEN: A FILM BY: QUENTIN TARANTINO

And we PULL OUT we find Nic in the audience, wearing a suit. Handsome. Put together. Back in the fucking saddle. He looks over at real Addy and Olivia.

ADDY (CONT'D)
(mocking)
I love you daddy??

Nic shrugs.

NIC
(mouthing)
I don't know. Javi wrote it.

EXT. PREMIERE - NIGHT

Nic is swarmed by reporters.

REPORTER
Your performance was extraordinary.
How much of this was based on your
real experience? What actually
happened down there?

NIC
Well, you know, sometimes you get
an opportunity to be a real life
hero---

Nic sees Olivia and Addy waving at him.

NIC (CONT'D)
You get the, uh..

OLIVIA
(mouthing)
Stay. Have fun.

And they leave.

NIC
You get the opportunity to be a
real life hero. And you know what,
excuse me...

And Nic heads for the door after his family.

INT. OLIVIA'S HOUSE / LIVING ROOM

Nic, Olivia and Addy are lying on the living room floor. A fire burns in the background....

OLIVIA
You sure you didn't want to stay?

NIC
I never liked doing press. You know that. Those people are vultures.

ADDY
Who chose Naomi Watts to play mom?

NIC
I don't know. Doesn't really do your mother justice, though. Do you think?

OLIVIA
Oh come on. She's Naomi Watts. She's one of the most beautiful women in the world.

NIC
So are you, Liv.

ADDY
Eww. Dad, stop hitting on mom.

NIC
I'm not "hitting on" her. It's just, as an actor, I'm always searching for the truth. And that's the truth.

ADDY
Gross. I can't watch this.

Addy gets up and leaves as Nic sits up. Olivia sits up too. They face each other.

NIC
I should get going.

OLIVIA
Yeah.
(then)
Tonight was nice.

Nic nods. And off them staring at each other....

INT. SUNSET TOWER - NIGHT

Nic walks in. The man at the FRONT DESK waves.

FRONT DESK
Welcome home, Mr. Cage.

He smiles.

INT. SUNSET TOWER / NIC'S ROOM - NIGHT

Nic walks out on the balcony. Looking out over the lights of the city. He gets a call. Smiles while looking at it.

NIC
(into phone)
Hello?

JAVI
Niccccc Caggggeeeeeee!!

NIC
Javi!

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Javi sits on a beach somewhere next to Gabriela.

JAVI
How did it go? We got a hit on our hands or what, baby?

INT. SUNSET TOWER / NIC'S ROOM - NIGHT

Nic smiles...

NIC
Well, seems like...

CLOSE on Nic's face, just like in the beginning.

NIC (CONT'D)
...a foregone conclusion.