

6.

Aunt Chris / Mikey / Maria

SPLIT SCENE.

Maria's house / Mikey's house.
 Maria, Mikey, and Aunt Chris / Walter and Helen.
 That same evening.

(IN MARIA'S HOUSE, Loud rocking country music – preferably old [real] country music: Johnny Cash, Hank Williams Sr., George Jones, Ernest Tubb... Wayne the Train Hancock would be fine, too. *)

AUNT CHRIS and MARIA perform a lengthy and elaborate country line dance. MIKEY watches. Despite her pregnancy, MARIA dances with agility.

After the music stops, they both sit heavily. MARIA clutches her tummy. AUNT CHRIS fires up a cigarette. Her demeanor is bone-dry.

She holds out a cigarette to MIKEY, who shakes his head "no.")

MARIA. He doesn't smoke.

AUNT CHRIS. Pieced that together, sweetheart.

MIKEY. That was um, impressive.

AUNT CHRIS. Picked up line dancing in Reno, Nevada. God DAMN that's a shithole but you gotta do something to get outta your room. I taught some routines to Maria because what the fuck's the point of doing a line dance alone? *hell's*

MARIA. Aunt Chris, do the one you got named after you.

AUNT CHRIS. Maria, I'm going to finish my cigarette. Then we'll see. So you're in Maria's class.

MIKEY. We have geometry together.

AUNT CHRIS. A subject you're basically assured never to encounter again in your lives.

MARIA. You have to know what ninety degrees means.

AUNT CHRIS. It means hot.

MARIA. The angle. Ninety degrees is a right angle.

*Please see Music Use Note on page 3.

AUNT CHRIS.

Maria, nobody likes a smartass...

Except me.

AUNT CHRIS. Sweetheart, why don't you go into the kitchen and look for some pate and shit for our guest.

MIKEY. Uh, just the pate, thanks.

AUNT CHRIS. He's funny.

MARIA. Tss. We don't have anything like that.

AUNT CHRIS. See what kind of facsimile you can come up with, baby.

(MARIA exits. AUNT CHRIS stares at MIKEY, smokes.)

AUNT CHRIS. What's your story, kiddo? You rich?

MIKEY. No.

AUNT CHRIS. Poor?

MIKEY. I don't know. Kind of.

AUNT CHRIS. What's your dad do?

MIKEY. He invents things.

AUNT CHRIS. Well he's the reason you're poor.

MIKEY. The stuff he invents is really cool.

AUNT CHRIS. Could I go into a store and buy something he made?

MIKEY. Parents are really complicated.

AUNT CHRIS. Kiddo, you're poor because your dad isn't making it, and your mom's job, whatever it happens to be, is carrying you.

MIKEY. So. So what.

AUNT CHRIS. Why don't I give you a reading.

(From a hidden place, she reveals a deck of tarot cards.)

AUNT CHRIS. Never had a reading? Tarot cards?

MIKEY. How come you want to.

AUNT CHRIS. Passes the time.

(MARIA enters.)

MARIA. I told you, we don't have anything in the... ohmygod

MARIA. That's too old to be called Mikey. I'm going to call you Michael. So, are you a junior here at glorious San Pedro High?

MIKEY. Sophomore.

MARIA. Me too. I just moved here. How is it.

MIKEY. It sucks.

MARIA. Looks it. Like a goddamn prison.

What do you do around here?

MIKEY. I don't know.

MARIA. What's your story, Michael?

MIKEY. I don't know.

MARIA. Everybody has a personal mythology. Their own symbols. You've got some story.

MIKEY. Doubt it.

MARIA. We can debate it later. Do you have a girlfriend?

MIKEY. *(an indolent bark of a laugh, then.)* No.

MARIA. Yeah, I coulda guessed that. No offense. You have a kind face. I've seen the girls around here. Snotty, right?

MIKEY. They can be pretty snuck up, yeah.

MARIA. Those kind of girls always want to call some shit-bag football player their "boyfriend." Kinda guy who'll take you out, get tanked on keg beer playing quarters, then try to shove his hand up your shirt. Pathetic. You shouldn't worry about it too much. Not having a girlfriend I mean. Anybody who peaks in high school is a dismal failure, bound to be on a downward spiral for the rest of their lives. That's what my aunt says, anyway. She says that high school is the worst fucking mess anyone ever has to endure, and that every job that follows is socially simpler, so I'm just waiting it out, you know? I live with my Aunt Chris. My mom tried to kick me out when she found out I was gonna have the sprout. The pitter-patter of little feet would have put a cramp into her booze time. Aunt Chris called my mom a drunk bitch with no sense of responsibility and she said I could move in with her. So I did. Week after I

Maria / Mikey #2 UP

got there, we moved to Sacramento. Me and my mom used to live in Venice in a shithole but it was cool to be near the beach. My aunt's work takes her all over, that's why we went to Sacramento. I've been all over California: Fresno, Temecula, San Diego, San Dimas, Santa Maria, Riverside... this is a big state.

(beat)

I just change schools when we move. Swing with the changes, that's what my aunt says. That's why this dump doesn't faze me.

You don't talk much, do you?

MIKEY. I guess I'm more of a listener.

MARIA. Well, Michael, I think you're very sweet. I'm Maria.

(They nod at one another.)

MARIA. You know what I like most about you so far, Michael?

MIKEY. No.

MARIA. You haven't said a word about this. *(indicating pregnancy)* Very polite. You wouldn't believe how rude some people are when you're pregnant. They're like, "unwed teen mother...illiterate." C'est la vie. Someday you'll have a girlfriend and she's going to be very lucky, Michael, because she'll see how *tres gentil* you are.

(Little silence.)

MIKEY. Are you an actress. I mean have you ever done any acting.

MARIA. I used to act like I wasn't fucking scared of my mother's belt. *(laughs)*

MIKEY. You don't talk like other people.

MARIA. I'm not like other people. I'm two people. Isn't that amazing? I tell you, being pregnant is the most educational experience I have ever had. Science, psychology, sociology, biology, all rolled up into one event. It's rad. Are you doing anything for dinner tonight?

Helen / Walter

14.

Later that evening.
Walter's kitchen.

(WALTER sits at the kitchen table. He's still going through a cardboard box filled with files and clippings. They cover the table.)

HELEN enters. She's been crying.

WALTER looks up; returns to his box.)

HELEN. Is Mikey in his room?

WALTER. He went out.

HELEN. What? Where.

WALTER. I don't know.

HELEN. Jesus. We need to call Maria's house.

WALTER. He'll come back.

HELEN. Why are you so sure? Why would he?

WALTER. Because this is his home.

This is what we have. This family. This house. This backyard.

A place to come back to.

Are you going to leave?

HELEN. I don't know.

WALTER. How long have you had such – contempt for me?

HELEN. I don't.

I think, I'm afraid you're losing your mind.

WALTER. (a question) I'm crazy.

HELEN. I, I don't know. "Los Padres?"

(WALTER doesn't answer.)

And you're going through a box of crap... That doesn't seem normal.

WALTER. This coming from a woman who has an imaginary family!

HELEN. That's different, it's funny, it's a joke.

How did, how did you go through everything.

WALTER. I just did. I don't really know.

HELEN. Did you gamble?

WALTER. I just gave it to you. Like it was a paycheck from a job. That's all.

It wasn't that much.

HELEN. It was all we had. You must have known I would find out. What were you planning to say?

WALTER. I wasn't planning anything. I was just buying time. So I could look for opportunities. I didn't think about it.

HELEN. You didn't think about it.

WALTER. DO YOU WANT TO TALK, OR JUST POINT OUT

HOW STUPID I AM!

HELEN. I'm trying to understand!

WALTER. I was trying to do the right thing! Is it so impossible to believe that?

I mean I graduated high school, I was in the army, I created something that got me in the newspaper. How many men can say that! I did something worthwhile, something that meant something to me. I didn't think about what it would "get" me. I just made it and it worked. Does that mean I've used up my chances? In your eyes, all my options are gone!?

HELEN. No.

WALTER. I don't believe you! Everything about you says resentment!

HELEN. I just want to figure out what has happened—

WALTER. I'm telling you! I'm telling you! You're not listening! Why is it that you think your way is the right way? Automatically! Because it's yours.

HELEN. That's not what I'm saying.

WALTER. You have no respect for me! You could give a good goddamn about what I want to do!

HELEN. WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO! WHAT!

WALTER. I'M FIGURING IT OUT!

(A disheveled MIKEY enters the room, but from downstairs, not outside.)

MARIA. I guess I could tell you about this little French story, that might help. Let me get my book.

(She starts to exit, turns.)

MARIA. You're like the hardest worker my aunt has ever had.

MIKEY. Really?

MARIA. In Sacramento she had like 6 people working out of the basement and I don't think that all of them put together made what you're making.

MIKEY. How's your...

MARIA. The baby? No kicking yet this morning. *Pas de problem.*

MIKEY. Are you getting nervous?

MARIA. No. This is what I'm made for. I'm built to be a baby machine. Think about it, there's ancient shit going on here.

MIKEY. I guess, right.

(As MARIA exits...)

MARIA. God. I can't believe you get here so early, you're obsessed.

(She exits, passing AUNT CHRIS, who might touch her cheek.)

AUNT CHRIS. *(re: the check she's holding)* This going to get you into trouble?

MIKEY. No. No way.

AUNT CHRIS. Okay. Here you go. Fifty-nine thousand four hundred dollars and change.

MIKEY. Man.

AUNT CHRIS. I'll confirm this week's orders by Wednesday, go to the bank, and make the deposit. You give good phone, kiddo.

MIKEY. *(staring at the check)* Thanks.

AUNT CHRIS. *(pointedly)* Look at that, you've still got an hour before school.

(She exits. He dials, looking at his check.)

8.

Walter's bedroom.

Same morning.

(PETTIT walks the wire. He strolls, he sits, he walks and looks at the birds in the sky.)

WALTER irons a tie. He glances up at Pettit, watches him *on the wire.*)

PETTIT'S VOICE

Here is why I don't use a net.

One. It has never crossed my mind.

Two. The man who falls off a wire gets what he deserves.

Three. There is freedom in solitude.

Do you know how you are going to die?

I will be walking on a wire, just like always, an ordinary day, and I will begin to walk up the inclined wire, up, up, walking effortlessly. And I will walk into the clouds. And then I will be gone.

(WALTER begins to iron a \$20 bill. He holds it up, lights it on fire. He watches the bill burn, then drops it, stepping on the ashes. After a moment, he drops to his knees to clean it up.)

HELEN enters, also getting dressed.

Soon after Helen enters, PETTIT is gone.)

HELEN. It starts this week. Cards. "Family newsletters." Catalogs catalogs catalogs. From now through January, people are gift wrapping phone books or bricks.

WALTER. They're mailing presents.

HELEN. Bags of dry cement. Blocks of Italian marble. Rocks. No one ever stops to think, "Someone has to walk five blocks with this stupid oversized package."

What are you doing?

WALTER. Dropped some change.

HELEN. You look nice today. *(checks her watch)* The traffic's going to be hell for you.

HELEN. (*calling out the door a last time*) Mikey! Don't be late!

(*She exits. MIKEY enters, goes for the cereal.*)

MIKEY. Hey Dad.

WALTER. Mikey. You ready for the big day? Sophomore year. Not the low man on the totem pole anymore.

MIKEY. School sucks.

Dad, did you like school when you were my age?

WALTER. (*reading*) Mm?

MIKEY. When you were fifteen. Did you like school.

WALTER. I doubt it. But I was thinking about other things.

MIKEY. The war.

WALTER. Yeah.

MIKEY. Did you get a medal in Vietnam?

WALTER. Nope. I was a grunt. Listened to other people tell me what to do for the whole tour.

MIKEY. I should work. Make some bank.

WALTER. Listen, you've got the rest of your life to get some "job." Don't tie yourself down. Be free!

MIKEY. Yeah, free to go to school. Which sucks.

WALTER. Holy cow. Now this is interesting. Would you look at that!

(*He shows MIKEY the front page.*)

MIKEY. Some guy on a dightrope.

WALTER. That's Philippe Petit. Greatest wire walker alive.

He is walking up a wire that goes from the ground up to the Eiffel Tower. Inclined! He is 2,000 feet above the ground! Can you imagine what he feels like! Jesus.

MIKEY. Does he have a net?

WALTER. He never uses a net.

MIKEY. That seems kind of stupid.

WALTER. He walked between the *Twin Towers* in New York City back in the '70s. I saved the clippings. He's never done anything but walk the wire.

MIKEY. I bet he thought that school sucked too.

WALTER. He's doing exactly what he wants to be doing. You can tell from the picture. Take a look at that wire – he

does the rigging *himself*. He doesn't have a bunch of strangers just string it up – he measures the wire, he tightens it – you see those? – those are cavalenti. They anchor the wire. (*in an exaggerated French accent*) "Mon dieu!"

MIKEY. (*laughs*)

WALTER. Mikey. I know high school hasn't been fun for you...

MIKEY. It sucks.

WALTER. I know, but there isn't an alternative.

MIKEY. I could drop out.

WALTER. You're not going to drop out. It'll get better. It will.

MIKEY. I want to be good at something. I'm not good at anything. I want to be good at something, like you were.

(*micro beat*)

WALTER. When you get home after school, you can help me work on this prototype. (*increased enthusiasm*) A motorized paraglider. A paramotor. (*referring to sketches*) You've got your parachute here – you've got a power* fan to catch the thermal wind –

*MIKEY. Dad. Dad.

WALTER. You want to try it on real quick?

MIKEY. Dad – there's already a motorized glider. I saw it on TV. These guys are flying across America, they're setting a record for a ton of money. They're called ultralites.

WALTER. "Ultralites," huh.

MIKEY. The gliders are *bikes*, you ride with a parachute on your *back* and then you turn it on and you shoot up into the air. It's crazy.

Probably you have to get a patent or something.

WALTER. Well I was going to once the thing was – I just didn't, it didn't occur to me to do it this early in the process.

– well goddamn.

MIKEY. Right.

MARIA. Can I ask you a question.

MIKEY. Sure.

MARIA. Are you a virgin.

MIKEY. Tss. NO.

MARIA. You can tell me.

MIKEY. I *would* tell you. I'm not.

MARIA. You're not.

MIKEY. No.

MARIA. You've had sex with someone.

MIKEY. Yes.

MARIA. Who?

MIKEY. Don't *laugh* at me.

MARIA. I'm not laughing. Michael. I just want to know: who?

MIKEY. You don't know her.

MARIA. So fine, tell me who.

MIKEY. This girl.

MARIA. Are you in the CIA? Is she in the witness protection plan? "This girl." What the fuck, Michael. Tell me.

Who'd you have sex with? Just say it.

MIKEY. Why don't you say who *you* had sex with.

(Pause.)

MARIA. Okay.

MIKEY. I'm sorry.

MARIA. I'll tell you.

MIKEY. I shouldn't have said that.

MARIA. I just said I'll tell you.

MIKEY. You don't have to.

MARIA. I *know* I don't have to! I'm *pregnant*, Michael, I'm not *porrkain*. I'm not going to break because you asked who the baby's father is.

My mom thought it was *her* gross boyfriend. That's what she was *afraid* of.

That's why she kicked me out.

(MIKEY looks at her.)

MARIA. It wasn't him.

MIKEY. That's good.

MARIA. There was this person at school. My old school.

This guy. "Jared."

He was a senior. He played tennis. He was going to go to some Ivy League college on scholarship. Pretty much a Ken doll who could walk and talk and drive. And play tennis.

Anyway, I was a freshman. And like, everyone was looking at me all the time. Because of the girls. It was crazy. One day, I'm some low-rent nobody who wears clothes from T.J. Maxx, the next day, I'm like Ms. *Popularity*. With the guys.

I knew I was going to lose it eventually, right. The question was, how? Like my mom? She had her story, she told it endlessly, how she got nailed in the back of a *truck* and the guy spit on her afterwards. It was her anthem. "Give it away, see what it gets you." And I was thinking, not me. I can *choose* how it happens. I can write my own story. It's going to happen, so I'm going to figure out the best way. So I chose. I looked around at all the girls who wouldn't give me the time of day, and I thought, who do *you* want? And they all wanted Jared. That's who I picked. Weird that it was so easy.

So, "Jared and Me." We did it. A lot. We'd go different places. Sometimes hotels. Sometimes his house. He was nice. That was unexpected. He talked to me like an actual human being. Treated me like a precious object, at least when we were alone. I thought, oh, I chose *right*. It was - fun. Then I missed my period. I wasn't like, the bad cop of contraception and neither was he.

MIKEY. Where is he now?

MARIA. (*shrugging*) College I guess...

MIKEY. Does he know?

MARIA. Yeah, I told him. He completely flipped, and then I said Jared don't *worry* about it, I wouldn't fuck up your shiny golden future, no one will ever know it was you. He was like, *really*? And I said, hey, my body, my