

NICOLE: I shouldn't put you on the spot but... Glen said how you bought this house from your parents at an inflated price after you landed a lucrative position so they could move to a Florida retirement community.

BILL: I helped out. Least I could do.

NICOLE: Is it true you give large sums to charity?

BILL: Wouldn't say "large sums." I sponsor needy families in Central America through this organization run by nuns of the Dominican order. Whenever I can, I fly down—get my hands dirty—helping out.

NICOLE: And the rent money and part of your paycheck?

BILL: The rent and whatever royalties I get from the song. It's a great cause. I get real satisfaction knowing—

NICOLE: Touches me, in a nice way.

BILL: You know, we're always looking to attract more lay people—especially young women—like yourself—to work with teenage girls who don't have positive role models to look up to. If you're interested, I'd be more than happy to provide you with all the details. *(Silence.)* Think about it. Let me leave you my business card. *(He removes a card from his wallet and with a pen from his shirt pocket, writes his number on the back and hands it to her.)* The number on the back—that's my home phone. Need anything...something goes wrong with the house—whatever—don't hesitate...please. *(She places it on the table without looking at it.)*

BILL: *(After a long beat.)* How's he treating you?

NICOLE: Treating me—WHO?

BILL: Glen—your boyfriend—is he good to you?

NICOLE: Excuse me?

BILL: Is he, you know, treating you the way—

NICOLE: Meaning...how's JACK treating me on my "extended summer vacation"?

BILL: *(With an ironic smile,)* You could put it that way.

NICOLE: I'm a big girl, Mr. McGowan, responsible for her own actions as I believe I've already communicated to you—and "YOU KNOW" it's not flattering to be patronized—thank you!

BILL: Come, come now, Nicole.

NICOLE: First, you almost barge in and find me with nothing on. Even if it IS your house, one should at the very least–

BILL: I believe I already apologized for not knocking.

NICOLE: THEN, you use disparaging terms like “shackin’ up.” And refer to Glen as JACK...implying only God knows...

BILL: We’re all grown ups.

NICOLE: *(A beat.)* Evidently, I gave you the wrong impression. *(Her eyes begin to tear up as she turns her back to him.)* Your words and that smirk on your face say as much.

BILL: Maybe Nicole is reading too much into this. *(However, BILL hears her sniffles and his expression dramatically changes.)*

NICOLE: *(She turns to face him and wipes her tears away while forcing a smile.)* I have some chores of my own to tend to.

BILL: *(He waits a long beat. Then says, apologetically,)* Well, I’m sorry if I gave YOU the wrong impression.

NICOLE: Perhaps you should leave, Mr. McGowan.

BILL: I really didn’t mean to–

NICOLE: LEAVE! ...Please. *(She turns her back to him and sobs loudly. After a moment of awkward hesitation BILL begins to walk toward the coat rack before she says, apologetically, entreatingly,)* WAIT! On second thought, I will take you up on that lunch date. Unless you have better things to do than caretake a cranky child.

BILL: Are you all right?

NICOLE: I HAVEN'T EATEN! Please, sir.

BILL: You said you didn't eat breakfast.

NICOLE: Didn't eat dinner either. Truth be told, we're STONE-BROKE'n' there's nothing in the refrigerator—EVER!

BILL: Well, get dressed 'n' we'll head out. —Could go for something myself. Why I offered.

NICOLE: I was ashamed to 'fess up. Why I lashed out... INEXCUSABLE! It is I who must apologize.

BILL: You were right—I was out of line, myself. Anyway, you looked like you could use a meal, so...

NICOLE: You were concerned about me.

BILL: Ol' fashioned Irish hospitality. AND you were twenty short—and the refrigerator IS empty. Though I will replace it before that family moves in... But I shouldn't be a "male chauvinist." —Familiarity breeds contempt.

NICOLE: It's NOT—'cause you were right! He takes what little money to buy guitar strings and equipment.

BILL: Without a record label, Nicole, it's an expensive trade.

NICOLE: SO IS MARIJUANA! *(A beat.)* EVERY night he drags home these freaky lookin' Greenwich Village gnomes. They sit around 'n' chain smoke pot 'n' cigarettes which irritates my lungs—'n' BLAST their guitars—the big ones with the humbuckers—which are considerably louder—through the Marshalls. In vain I put the pillow over my head, and when I

tell him I need my sleep, he screams, “Shut up, Nicole, you little fuckin’ slut.” Some men are nice drunks... Even he calls me the c-word. THAT’S how I’m treated!

BILL: That kind of language is never called for.

NICOLE: He gets me drunk, then belittles me before them.

BILL: Leave him.

NICOLE: I can’t.

BILL: Why not?

NICOLE: I’m afraid.

BILL: Afraid of what?

NICOLE: ...He scares me!

BILL: Has he threatened you?

NICOLE: ...Yes!

BILL: Honestly, Nicole, Glen has his faults—God knows we ALL do—but I’ve never known him to be that obnoxious—even when drunk—‘n’ especially with women. And we’ve “tied a few on” together in mixed company, believe me. (*A beat.*) If it’s really that bad, and you want, I suppose I could mention something when I see him.

NICOLE: If you’re up to it...

BILL: (*BILL starts to say something, and then hesitates a beat before saying,*) As a rule, ANY man threatens—or puts his hands on you—call the police. My uncle’s Captain of the 27th Precinct—down at the end of Bainbridge. Simmons—mention my name—say you’re a friend. Hate to see young women exploited...or anyone.

NICOLE: I appreciate it.

BILL: If he gets on your nerves again, pack up a night bag and sleep someplace else. He'll get the message.

NICOLE: Any suggestions?

BILL: I realize you're far from home, but do you know ANYONE who—

NICOLE: I would've left already!

BILL: After the tour—did you plan on living with him or going home...or...?

NICOLE: BIG mistake! I moved out of my sorority house for the spring semester to live with him.

BILL: Look, in about a week you'll be out of here 'n' heading back to California on the tour bus, right? (*She nods.*) So, why not just phone your parents to wire you some money? Pack your bags 'n' move back today—before Glen returns. I'll straighten it out with him. (*A beat.*) Hit those books—complete your education—get that career back on track. —Two birds with one stone! There's a Western Union on Grand Concourse—half-mile... We'll swing by, then head right out to LaGuardia or Kennedy—right over the Triborough. I could even drive you to the Port Authority downtown. Fordham Road west—past University Avenue—grab the Major Deegan to the Cross Bronx then right down the West Side Highway. Better yet—avoid any construction back-up from the G.W.—past Dyckman Street there's a—

NICOLE: I can't ask them for money.

BILL: Why not?

NICOLE: After the bitter incriminations—after you renounce ALL they stand for. You can NEVER go back home! —Credo of Woodstock.

BILL: (*Laughing.*) That's ridiculous! They'll forgive you, despite whatever it is you've done...or IMAGINED you've—

NICOLE: FORGIVENESS? We wouldn't touch the topic with a ten foot pole. When dinner was served, the servants had to telephone me from the other side of the estate. I honestly can't recall my father OR my mother ever even being in my room for a heart-to-heart like we're having. Both were private people who taught us that any display of emotion was a sign of bad breeding. —UNFORGIVENESS! (*A beat, then says, apologetically,*) I'm sorry—no right to burden you with my craziness. — Been MORE than gracious.

BILL: Don't be so hard on yourself. —In the mean-time, let's go grab a bite and talk some more over lunch. We can even get it to go 'n' come back here? Feel better after a meal...'n' then you can decide.

NICOLE: Mind if we stay—speak some more here, Bill?

BILL: —If you prefer.

NICOLE: It's a liberating feeling—to unburden your sins—if I may put it that way—to a kind person who won't take advantage.

BILL: —Yes, it is.

NICOLE: Very emotional—why I like to hug. Making up for parental deprivation.

BILL: (*Shyly,*) Excuse my acting “patriarchal,” Nicole, but you're a young...and...obviously intelligent...and...very attractive young woman. —Not just my opinion... So, you should—think about—being more careful. Not me...but...some men...you know...might get the wrong impression.

NICOLE: You're not like that—thank you. (*She hugs him and he hugs her back.*)

BILL: (*BILL gently pulls away from her and indicates the SL chair.*) Have a seat. There's a “sin” or two I might as well unburden myself. (*A beat. NICOLE sits down.*) I started a cover band with some guys on campus—good enough to play the campus rathskeller and some local clubs—how I met Glen...immediate connection. Struck up a friendship—jammed a bit and one day sat down ‘n’ wrote “Take It or Leave It.” AMAZING! Didn't think I had it in me. Then he asked if I wanted to join Trigger and go on tour. I said YES! Who doesn't want to be in a real rock band...like the Beatles? Kid from the Bronx. ...Ran the idea past my father—a New York City fire chief. CHRIST! What the hell was I thinking? California air—or something you put in the water went straight to my head... Leave school and put a career on hold, PLUS expose yourself to that mess in Vietnam. ...Contrary to stereotype, not all Irish Catholics have large families. Still, the poor man broke his back all his life to keep my grandparents out of the nursing home ‘n’ pay off the mortgage on this place. Not one sick day in all those years...always managed to keep good food on the table. AND he was helping me pay my tuition. ...Anyway, to make a long story short, one night, not long after, I got a call from Glen. Got pulled over for driving drunk—police found half a joint in the ashtray. Locked him up to “set an example.” I put up five hundred for bail ‘n’ he put up his beloved Martin for collateral. Next morning I phoned my father, who contacted my uncle—captain I mentioned. Made a few calls—charges were dropped. (*A beat.*) The long arm of Tammany Hall—like some tortured soul revisiting the scene of the crime.

NICOLE: Do you still have the Martin?

BILL: Instead of taking back the money and giving him the guitar, I kept the guitar and gave him the cash.

NICOLE: May I ask why?

BILL: The band wasn't signed and the idea, which was mine, seemed tempting. Needed the money. Soon regretted it. Over the years, he's made me offers...

NICOLE: Not for all the tea in China. A thousand times, NO! It's evil in his hands but in yours it's at least something good.

BILL: Why I kept it. Punishment until he gets his life together. ...Whatever THAT means. (*He ponders for a beat.*) We're both only children AND the same age—so I've looked upon Glen as something more—like the brother I never had—to serve as a kind a moral anchor for these “turbulent times.” Another terrible habit I can't shake... I thought VERY seriously about entering the priesthood. Catholic elementary then Xavier Prep—a scholastic boot camp for boys run by Jesuits. My father wanted me to attend Fordham—Jesuit University down the hill—next logical step—but I needed something—ANYTHING—different.

NICOLE: Is there...no one special in your life? A girlfriend?

BILL: (*Silence.*) Might as well have become a priest—my life is no different, really.

NICOLE: You're the “leave it” and he's the “take it” of “Take It or Leave It.” Opposites attracting, like John Lennon and what's-his-name—the cute one?

BILL: Paul McCartney.

NICOLE: Yes, exactly!

BILL: I DID leave it! Never attempted to write another song or perform in public. Bill, the stereotypical, deadpan engineer, lives vicariously through Glen—the artist rebel—my alter ego. Always figured vice versa. VERY naive assumption. ...Sees me coming—he *suddenly* runs! (*They share a moment of understanding.*) Poor bastard just wants his guitar back.

NICOLE: (*A beat.*) May I confess something else, Bill?

BILL: Of course.

NICOLE: Not really twenty-one.

BILL: —Oh.

NICOLE: Really nineteen.

BILL: You seem young.

NICOLE: Barely nineteen. I'm a senior 'cause I entered college very early—on account of private schools and tutors and not ever working a day in my life. Took me when I was barely legal. Virgin...raised on strict abstinence. Never even been kissed. Father wanted to hire an international assassin, so I ran away with him. Said he loved me—that I was the only thing that kept him alive. He was everything my family and upbringing weren't. I was ripe to reject the servant-prepared meals. Sign of the times. At first, it was electric like reveling in sin and decadence is. We bounced up and down the West Coast before heading east. That's when I began to tire, 'cause I saw what that life is really like. The drugs, promiscuity, and disease—fist-fights when the clubs won't pay...like in *The Blue Angel*—'N' the toll it takes on the fairer sex...not knowing where your next meal is...clothes, torn 'n' frayed. For a time, my parents would wire money to hold us over... He IS a substitute father. That's my sin! And I've been in therapy all my life, practically. Now I can't leave him... A sick and abusive relationship... 'N' one day on a rock tour he'll tire and leave me for someone younger and more beautiful on account of a lack of sleep and proper nutrition and turn me out the bus to fend for myself and...and force me to give myself to strange men to eat. Deranged sex perverts! *(She buries her head in her hands and sobs uncontrollably. He walks over to her and they automatically embrace. BILL says, compassionately,)*

BILL: Hey...come on, now. —Make yourself sick—it'll work out. Really not that big a deal.

NICOLE: I want to be home—in my bed—cuddlin' my teddy bears—with Maggie the Cat next to me.

BILL: We'll get you home to your little kitty, don't worry.

NICOLE: NO! It's better if you don't speak with Glen about—

BILL: I meant, me 'n' you.

NICOLE: But we mustn't let on or he'll leave in the middle of the night.

BILL: You can stay here 'til I get you reunited with your parents—like I said, only takes a phone call.

NICOLE: And if he throws me overboard for spite?

BILL: Call collect from wherever you're stranded and I'll get you a bus ticket home...or you can come here.

NICOLE: That family's moving in, you said.

BILL: There'll be a roof over your head, rest assured.

NICOLE: Promise you won't take advantage?

BILL: No, Nicole, I won't take ad—

NICOLE: I'm sorry—it's all one knows with older men. They crave your youth.

BILL: —I'm not like that.

NICOLE: I'm glad, 'cause I need a good man who will make sure I'm safe 'n' taken care of, the way a young woman should be, so she'll grow up to live a clean existence. Does that sound stupid?

BILL: People only make it sound that way. It's what we all want.

NICOLE: OH! Here we are sleeping together in your family's house. You disapprove—obviously. ...I'm not bad. —Think I'm a bad girl, Bill?

BILL: *(He takes a deep breath, as if to count to ten, while he mulls over a thought.)* You're a good kid...in WAY over her head. And scared 'cause you, like an entire generation, have purchased a bill of goods. ...Shaking, poor thing.

NICOLE: From fear—plus hungry and tired. I feel better in the arms of a man I know won't hurt me. Hold me some more, Bill.

BILL: *(Holding her off.)* Let's eighty-six the hugging, young lady, and get you some food. 'N' you really ought to put something on—middle of January. Weatherman said it won't get out of the teens. No wonder...

NICOLE: What my father would tell the servants to say. So sweet. So important to depend upon the kindness of strangers. What am I saying? Feel as though I've known you for ever and ever and... *(She runs over to the pillow and takes out her bra. Turning her back to him, she lowers her slip and puts it on.)* Strap me up, please—will ya, Bill?

BILL: Sure... *(A bit tongue-in-cheek—to create a bit of emotional distance.)* Well, we certainly have come a long way real fast, haven't we, Nicole?

