

CHARLES WINN SPEAKS

A Play in Three Scenes, Plus Epilogue

By C.S. Hanson

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Cast:

CHARLES 30s, male
PRISCILLA 30s, female

Settings:

- Scenes 1 and 2: Penthouse apartment, East Village, New York City.
- Scene 3: A hotel room.
- Epilogue: Hospital corridor.

Time:

The play spans the years 2005 through 2011.

Timeline details:

- Saturday, October 15, 2005: Dumped by Phoebe
- Mid-December 2005: Meets Jain
- Saturday, October 14, 2006: Marries Jain
- April 2008: Leaves Jain (divorce finalized in September 2009)
- 2008 - 2009: Economic crisis; economy tanks
- December 2009: Finds Phoebe
- Saturday, May 1, 2010: Marries Phoebe
- Thursday, October 6, 2011: First son born to Charles and Phoebe

Note regarding accent:

When the character of Charles gets flustered, the Russian accent gets heavier.

Note: These three lines are spoken in Russian:

Scene 2: (*I have no courage.*) Mne ne hvatáet smélosti.

Scene 2: (*I'm not happy.*) Neschásliv.

Epilogue: (*I do not believe in spoiling the child.*)

Ya dúmayu, shto rebyónka nelzya balovat.

Credit:

1. Scenes 1 and 2 of CHARLES WINN SPEAKS were developed thanks to a commission from America-in-Play (Lynn M. Thomson, founder and artistic director).
2. Scene I of CHARLES WINN SPEAKS was in a stage reading of "No Song, No Supper," conceived and directed by Lynn M. Thomson, America-in-Play, at Tribeca Performing Arts Center in 2008.
3. CHARLES WINN SPEAKS in one act was produced by Living Image Arts at the Lion Theatre, New York City, directed by Lynn M. Thomson, in 2009. Chris Kipiniak performed the role of Charles Winn.
4. CHARLES WINN SPEAKS, the full-length play, was developed by Living Image Arts (Peter Marsh, Artistic Director and Mia Vaculik, Executive Director). Lynn M. Thomson provided dramaturgical and directoral support.

CHARLES WINN SPEAKS

Scene 1

(The year is 2005. A dapper Charles Winn is dressed in a black leather jacket, a smart shirt, equally smart blue jeans, and loafers. He speaks with a slight accent, which at first is hard to place. Charles aims a remote at the audience, clicks a button.)

And three, two, one.

(He speaks to audience as though talking into a camera.)

What kind of an answer is no? No? That's your answer?

(He puts the remote in one pocket and pulls out a letter.)

And you write this in a letter? You tell me this, not to my face, but -- who writes letters?

(He crumples the letter in his hand, puts it back in his pocket.)

(to himself) Ah, geez, man not so direct.

(Retrieves remote, clicks to rewind.)

Three, two, one.

(He clicks remote, then puts it back in a pocket. Speaking to camera, he tries to be calm.)

I'm making this video for you and you alone sweet Phoebe.
I received your letter.

(He takes out letter, trying to
smooth it out.)

How quaint. To send a hand-written response to my . . .
easier than in person, no? Easier than texting me, no?
Okay, it's okay. It's good. And this video recording is
my response to you.

I do not accept your answer. I do not accept your answer
because, because the basis for your answer is wrong, all
wrong. My God, don't you know me? *(to himself)* Cool it,
Charles.

(to the camera/audience) I want you to know me. You know
some things about me. You know, I'm, well, I'm, look at
me. Look at me. This isn't bad. This, me, I'm a catch.
I feed you strawberries and whipped cream in bed. I move
you around the city in comfort, in an Escalade driven by a
driver who goes wherever you say. Oh Phoebe, who paints
her toenails red and wears blouses with a million tiny
buttons that drive me almost mad. When I kiss you, I kiss
you like I mean it . . . because I do . . . I do mean the
things I do, and say.

You know what I despise about hand-written letters?
There's something soul shattering about the way you curl
your "l"s. And your "m"s and "n"s, so like rounded like
the curves of your . . . If you sent an email, given me a
shout out . . . okay. But a letter? What am I supposed to
do with this? Where do I put it? So carefully selecting
your words, every word written out, underlining "not" and
"very," pressing your pen into the thick paper, as though
to - to what? - push against me? Writing, as you sat there
in your little room on Amsterdam and 83rd. Or did you
write it in the Park? That would be like you, to find a
bench near a tree.

(to himself) Okay, okay, this isn't working. Aim for
eloquence, Vlad.

(Takes out remote, goes through
the routine.)

Forget it. Rewind. From the top.

Three, two, one.

Phoebe, I love you. I love you and I'm not the shallow man
you think I am. I'm not a depraved soul. Maybe I buy you
things because I think that's what you like. And I like
how you look in little dresses - so young, so innocent,
tiny, pure. *(to himself)* Pervert.

(Again with the remote.)

Again, back, cut.

Three, two, one.

(He waves the letter.)

Got it. Read it. Change your answer. I mean, I want you to change your answer. Look at me, the real me. You call me a . . . (*looking at the letter, with incomprehension*) a city slicker? What's that? Suddenly you don't like what you see?

I stand here in my, okay, penthouse, yeah, I'm at the top. A penthouse apartment in the East Village. Everybody likes it. Except, what's this? You call it conspicuous consumption? Should I hide under my bed? You know why I buy all this stuff? The Botero sculpture? The Donald K. Sultan originals reflecting in the mirror? That rug from - wherever. I buy to impress you. It is what I think a girlfriend likes. It is what a wife would want. . . . And the sofa - man, it's so cool - and you have spent so many afternoons curled up here like you belong here. You do belong here. Yet you say not. You say this is not your world.

You feel guilty taking a bath in a marble tub on East Sixth? So your grandfather and great uncle Norman lived in a hole-in-the-wall tenement across the street and you just can't imagine - look, they moved out for something better. Maybe they'd be happy for you in this kind of - look, it's all just a creation. Worlds are created.

Like hedge funds. Just what I do in the day.
Just my job. What else would you have me do? Teach arithmetic? Oh no, my dear, we both know I do not have the patience for the classroom. And why? I like hedge funds. But you seem to want to put me in a category. Hedge fund manager. Such a bad guy? You think all the people on Wall Street are cut from the same cloth? No. That is not fair.

Do you think this is easy? You always say to me: "You are a lucky man, Charles." No. No, my lady, I am not lucky. I just like beating the average, okay? The markets are going crazy. It is fun. Like a game.

Yeah, okay, it's exciting, but still. You, us, that's what I thought was exciting, no?

My father said to me once, "I could have been a party functionary, but I chose this." He was standing in a field of barley, in Russia, on the plains, the wind blowing. Standing there in the middle of his life's work: Barley, not the kind that feeds the world. The kind that's used in breweries. The kind that keeps drunks happy. And not in the richest country in the world. No, I'm talking about farmland in Russia, the country I came from before I became a city boy, a slicker as you call me.

It is time you see the real me. I shed my Blackberry.

(He tosses the Blackberry to the side).

And who needs Bergdorfs?

(He rips off his jacket).

And the cuff links. And the shirt. Even my loafers.

This is me. This is how I come to this city of New York.

Picture: floppy hat, plaid shirt.

When I arrive at JFK, I get my boots polished. Take a bus to Manhattan. And my first stop is a bar near Grand Central. I'll never forget. The end of the work day. The markets have closed. I sit up to the bar. Everybody is talking about Wall Street. I am not a shy man. Why not buy everyone a round of beer? The price is more than expected, but so what? I want to make friends. I want my new friends to know that my papa grows barley that makes beer. This country, this fine America, wants to know my story. These people respect the plight of the farmer.

I am bragging, talking like big man. Big man with polished boots. "Call me Vlad." (*mispronouncing his name*) They say, "Vloud? Vlade? Vloyd?" I talk of Russia and its history with farming. Tsarist Russia used to feed the world. Russian farmers were almost as respected as much as bankers. Almost. I tell my new American friends how bad the times were, that after the collapse of the USSR, farmers starved.

I have five-hundred cash in my pocket and I am having a good time until I begin to see no one was buying beer for me. The bartender, he tells me I might want to move on. I see now he was trying to help me.

These sophisticated Americans, they were not listening as much as laughing. Quietly laughing. And not really looking.

It was my first lesson. If you're new in this town, you better start talking about something other than the farm.

I barely knew hedge fund from hedge hog. That was ten years ago. Look at me now. I drink green apple martinis - appletinis - and look at my designer kitchen, God damn it.

You say I am too "eager to acquire a wife." The way I acquire my other possessions. Who knows in this world? I could lose it all. Would you like me better - a poorer rich man?

A man like me? That man? (*pointing to the jacket and shirt on the floor*) He can probably acquire six wives. He can acquire the pretty model who bought apartment below me who looks at me in elevator. I look at her and I see stop sign. I don't want her. I want one wife and I know who.

You don't want to be an acquisition? How about this: You acquire me. Yes. That's it. Now I put the pressure on. I squeeze into your little room on Upper West Side. Throw all those pretty pillows off the bed and make room for me. I move in. I keep you warm. I serve you bread and cook you soup and we eat by candle light, every night. Bohemian, huh? We live the way I live in days before I get the job at Merrill, before I discover hedge funds.

I warn you: I am not a lucky man. I am smart and fast and I compete. Who am I competing with, Phoebe? Tolstoy, yes? You forget your new translation of "War and Peace" - I find it under my bed. Why do you read it? I don't read it. I have nothing to say about Tolstoy.

But what I am saying: It is time.

The boy who spent his summers planting and harvesting barley, the boy who learned his math and English so good he could some day work in America, that's the boy who wants to marry a girl named Phoebe from Syracuse who moved to New York City to shed her skin too.

You see? A city slicker is always from somewhere else. You, too. From upstate. Only, you didn't change your name. I went from Vlad to Charles. And I gave myself the last name of Winn. With two "n"s, like in winner.

Mrs. Charles Winn, won't you be? Please? Yes, yes. You will, I know you will. Because now you know me, all of me.

END OF SCENE I

Scene 2

(The year is 2008. The setting is the penthouse apartment of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Winn in the East Village in New York City.)

CHARLES

(Charles emphatically speaks into his cell phone:)

Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yeeeeeeessssssssss.

(Charles hangs up, slams the cell phone onto a table surface. He speaks directly at, not into, the cell phone.)

No.

No.

No juicer. No blender. No special ingredients.

(Charles pours himself a whiskey, drinks. He sits, puts a bowl of chocolate-covered pretzels in his lap. He digs into the pretzels. He does not eat. He dumps the pretzels on the floor. The cell phone rings. The land line telephone rings. He is a man who is being hounded and he can't figure out whether to laugh or cry or blow up. He unplugs the phone. He turns off the cell phone. He takes a notepad and tries to write a letter.)

(He opens his bag and starts going through it. He tosses clothing aside. Charles opens a bag, pulls out a mini-camera. This he does with a sense of new inspiration, a sort of energy taking over. He turns on the camera and speaks into it:)

Hello my beautiful wife,

You will be home soon. Hurry home. I am being very destructive.

I am crossing things off the list you left for me. Item number 12: Learn the mini-cam. Ha! You think I need to practice? I have been watching you all week. This is easy. Digital. Three years ago? *(to himself)* No. No. No. *(to the camera)* This little thing? Like a toy, so easy, friendly. Does not take three hours of hard labor. *(regarding the camera)* You have done well in selecting it. You are excited for our trip.

My giraffe, with the long legs, we are off to Italy. Come home before I throw more shirts out of the bag. Why do you buy these things for me? You like to dress me.

Oh, the things you have been calling about? No good. I do not see the logic in taking the juicer and the blender to Italy. There is plenty of food in Italy. We will eat figs and cheese and macaroni and fish. And we will cover ourselves in olive oil. Yes. Yes. You would like that? Then get home before I burst.

Okay, okay, I know you like your smoothies with all the added nutrients and protein fillers and the energy boosters. Trust me, you do not need any more energy.

Now, hurry home. Hurry before I make a recording. (*to himself*) That would be a disaster. Delete file.

(Charles pushes delete and turns off camera. Then he turns it back on, aims it at objects as he talks.)

No, no. Let's practice the close-up. Ha! Look at the progress I have made since you left for your appointment. I stopped snacking, as you wished. You do not like my blubber, so I have thrown away the chocolate-covered pretzels.

(Charles points the camera at clothes on the floor.)

You will not like this. I am not Ralph Lauren. I am Charles Winn. Ah, but I do like the cashmere socks.

(Charles deletes the file, sets camera aside, puts the clothes back in the luggage. He takes another drink. He takes clothes out of luggage. He turns the camera on himself and records:)

Jain:

I am not so sure about this trip.

(Charles turns off the camera, tries to write a letter. Not succeeding, he turns the camera on.)

Jain:

In less than an hour, we will be in a car heading to JFK. You will be home shortly. You will be blond, very blond, after getting highlights. Ah, Frederick Fekkai, he is working on you now and I am, what am I doing?

I have been thinking about landing in Rome. I cannot --

I know, I know, the trip, it is all planned. Meticulous planning - that is what you are very good at. All the details down to the toenail clipper and file, because you despise how fast my toenails grow and you do not want me to scratch at your beautiful long legs.

Oh giraffe. You know I call you that as a sign of affection. You know this, correct?

Why am I unable to land in Rome? Because we will return. And when we return, it will be the same. More of the same, will it not? I will work and you will, what? Redecorate? Again? It has been two years since we married, and you are constantly searching, searching, for how do you say? - ah, yes, to make the right statement.

"Does the starburst mirror make the right statement?" you ask. *(as if answering her question)* "Whatever you think, my dear." And then the mirror goes to storage. Sorry, I have been drinking, so I sound very Russian right now. When I am sober, I will sound American again.

(He drinks.)

Once I received a letter.

(He deletes the file, turns
off the camera.)

Ah, geez, Vlad, it is past history.

(He looks at his luggage. He
returns to the camera. He
grabs paper and writes
"REWARD for watching." He
turns on the camera.)

Hello, dear wife:

(holds up the paper) You see? There will be a reward for
watching. I will think of something. Jain, do nothing but
watch this. The driver will wait.

Do not think there was a robbery. No. Okay, so there are
pretzels on the floor. The shirts. I am done packing.
And so are you.

You are going on this trip. I am not. Take another. Your
sister. A girlfriend. I cannot land in Rome.

Is that harsh? Would you rather have a letter?

(to camera) I tried to write you a letter. Do you know
how hard it is to -- ? No one writes letters. Well, maybe
the people with deep souls, maybe those people write
letters. I got as far as "Dear."

I once thought very badly of someone who did not have the courage to speak to me in person. I thought, how small of her. Now I see, it is not so easy to say certain things, things of the heart. No wonder she wrote a letter and disappeared.

I lack courage to speak to you in person.

(In RUSSIAN: I have no courage.) Mne ne hvatáet smélosti.

You will not like what I am trying to say. You do like this digital device. This is what you like. I must keep going. There will be one take.

Maybe I should have started like this:

My beautiful wife:

How are you today? Sitting like a pretty flower, watching this recording. If you are trying to pack the blender, no. Put it down. Otherwise, you will not get the reward.

Oh, my prett . . . beautiful flower. . . . This is how I view you, like a flower. When we are in noisy restaurant, it does not matter that I cannot hear you talking . . . talking . . . talking. I can enjoy the view: A talking flower.

You talk me into everything. But you will not talk me out of what I have to say to you today.

Are you reaching for the juicer? No. No, my dear. C'mon, there is food in Rome, Florence, and Venice.

And do not start stretching. Why do you think I call you giraffe? It is not nice, when I try to talk to you and suddenly your limbs reach to the ceiling and your long legs fly to the sides. And if you are not stretching or talking, talking over my words, then you are taking away my bowl of snacks. There is nothing wrong with pretzels and peanuts and chocolate-covered almonds. We can afford to eat, and yet you insist on eating like a rabbit? You despise my blubber. I know you do.

(to himself) Stick to the point . . .

(to camera) We have had many fine days. Days when I would speak of . . . whatever . . . and you would laugh. And then I would laugh. We laughed. And then we didn't. Fine days. And that is what makes this so difficult.

I sometimes wonder if I am disappearing. Two years of marriage. I no longer feel excited - about anything. And, now today, predictably, you will return, blond, very blond, and beautiful, always beautiful. And then the world will change.

Let me say this: Do not cancel the trip. And do not go alone. Have a friend join you. Even if the friend must fly tomorrow. It is most important that you leave New York. Today. As planned. Do not walk these New York streets.

When there is a shift -- the city, the city you think you love, it becomes very different. It is not so warm, not so embracing. It feels cold and broken. The places, our places - the bistro that stays open all night, where all the cool people have their after-parties, and you have spotted so many celebrities there - oh, giraffe, you always find the best places.

And I have always followed along. Not today. Now, you must take my advice. You must fly away. Isn't it better to be in a foreign country when everything in your own life becomes foreign?

Have you ever had a serious break-up, Jain? I think not. I, I have had --

(He puts his head down.)

I will go. I will go on this trip. All will be well.

(He turns off the tape. He scoops up the pretzels. He stuffs his shirts into his suitcase. He returns to the chair. He drinks.)

(He drinks more. He dumps the pretzels back on the floor. He rips open his suitcase and tosses sweaters, shirts and polo shirts aside. He starts the camera.)

My dear giraffe:

We are about to take a wonderful trip. This leads me to ask questions. About life. About the world.

How did we come to be? I saw you. You saw me. In elevator. You are model, or so I thought. You live in the downstairs apartment. You say, "my apartment." Later, I find out you stay in a friend's apartment. It's okay. You were very friendly. And, what was it? The talk of water pressure? That brought us together? You asked how the pressure was in my shower? Yours is not so strong. I had been wandering in a daze, for maybe three months, and it was . . . a delightful conversation, this talk of water pressure.

It wasn't really about the water pressure, was it, Jain? It's okay. We get together, we fool around, we get married. Happened fast. No matter. It was very nice.

Three years ago. The markets were booming. And yet, I was feeling like a foolish man. You made me feel good about myself again. We were like two interlocking puzzle pieces. We fit. I followed your lead.

Look at all we have. Jain, you took to this position - it is like a job, is it not? Mrs. Charles Winn - like you were meant for this your whole life.

(He drinks.)

There are things I fear you do not know about me. Do you know that my stomach hurts? Yes, Jain, my stomach hurts because I do not like the clothes you pack for me. I like the cashmere socks. But I am not Ralph Lauren. I am Charles Winn.

Charles Winn, as in -- ? I am no winner. What is the prize? A storage locker full of secrets? Oh. You do not - well, it is not something you need to . . . Storage locker? Yes. Yes. For my Botero sculpture? For the paintings by that artist I used to like. I miss my things. There. I said it. I do not like saying that, because that means things are important. Where did all this stuff come from? I am not as high minded as the person who rejects the conspicuous consumption of - ah, no matter, that is someone else. That is not you, giraffe. You do not have a problem with all this.

Nice, nice how you hire decorator to redecorate. I recognize my address, but I do not know who I am.

And now you want a pony? Excuse me, a horse. We live in the East Village, Jain. Yes, there is a stable out on -- Of course, you will have your pony and all the riding gear you need. Would you like a herd of cattle too? That was unfair.

This is not about a pony.

(He turns away, hesitates, then goes back to camera.)

So what is this about? I cannot start again. I cannot fall into the same trap as --

Okay, first the things I like about you and there are many.

Aside from your beauty . . . you have unique ability to have fun. At boring dinner parties, you never stop smiling. How do you do that?

America! Where we pay one-thousand dollars a seat for charity dinner but we do not talk about the charity. I have earned the right to sit there and be dull. But not you Jain. You are excellent wife. No doubt, you will do this job again. You will not be single for long. Oh, did I not say? I am leaving you.

(pause)

Now you are throwing pillows at me. Don't throw pillows at monitor. Don't hurt the screen. Here, I throw the pillow at myself. See?

(Charles batters himself with
a pillow.)

Bad Charles, bad Charles. Oh no. You are mad I abuse the
pretty precious silk pillow with the special fringe? How
much did this cost? Five-hundred dollars?

Are you crying? By now, the pretty flower must be crying.

(He drinks.)

I am sorry. I cannot land in Rome, because if I land in
Rome and take another trip, we will return home and thirty
years will go by. In a flash. I think so.

And I will hear three times a week times thirty years the
same story of why you changed the spelling of your name.
Very interesting, how you discovered the Jains of India and
they just spoke to you. And to honor the great tradition
of the believers of peace, you changed your name to
J-A-I-N. Jain, dharma Jain, it is a bit silly, but who am
I to criticize? Charles Winn, as in winner? I am repulsed
by my own sense of myself.

I did set out to make an acquisition. How could you say
"no" to that diamond I put on your finger during that
vacation in the tropics? St. Somewhere. St. John?

You have made us a beautiful home. All your little Buddha
figures. Buddha with the fat stomach. Give him a
smoothie.

Jain, I have slept well here. Yet, I do not see the point. You gave me a little bookcase for my books. I do not read those books. I do not want to be reminded of - those books. I saw a pretty girl, in the park, reading Balzac - maybe in the original French - and I wanted to talk to her about Balzac, but I have nothing to say.

What do we have to say? Why must I hear, ten times a day, "Charles, I adore you, but --." Always a "but" and then a long list of -

It is difficult to say the things I need to say. Hedge funds are easy compared to --. But you do not like when I say hedge funds. "Finance," you prefer "finance." I say dirty word: Hedge funds. Because I like hedge funds. It is what I like most in life. Because it is so easy. The market keeps percolating and I am a genius? Hardly.

I made a mistake, Jain. You, as lovely as a flower, you are the acquisition. I am drinking whiskey and I am regretting my acquisition.

Do not think I will not suffer. The news will travel. From me to my mother and father, to my cousins in Moscow, to cousin Julia in San Francisco, to Russian friends who moved to Philadelphia.

It will go something like this:

"How is Vlad?"

"You didn't hear?"

"No."

"He got divorced."

"No!"

"Many bad things happened."

"No!"

"First he changed his name."

"I know."

"And then he made his money."

"I heard."

"And then he got married. But not to a Russian."

"No."

"To an American. A model."

"No!"

"He could have married a Russian."

"Yes."

"Now he is divorced."

"Yes?"

"Yes."

"What else?"

"He will probably lose all his money."

"Yes?"

"Yes."

My father will suffer. There is a grief in failure of this kind. And some day, when I go back, he will ask, "Why did you marry in the first place?"

I blame America. This culture, this America, we are meant to acquire. For American business man, at the top of success - the height of success, top of ladder? A beautiful woman.

I fell victim to America. Success. Bloat. Too much of everything. I made it. And there you were. And it seemed I should marry you: A desired woman.

You are Mrs. Charles Winn. Is it so great? Maybe you feel nothing and that is why you want a pony? Do you have regrets? What do we ever talk about, Jain? You do not care for stories from my country. I beg you to read Tolstoy. Read Tolstoy and know my people.

Maybe you do not want to know Russia, because you know there are Russians who come here and, they do okay, but they do not make it into our circles.

I am good in math, but I fail at what matters the most. At this news, my father will cry.

I am making you cry. Jain with the smile. My giraffe with the long slender legs.

This will stop your crying: Did you know I once kissed your friend? I feel very bad. The cripple. Sorry, the disabled girlfriend, before the surgery, what is her name? She could not dance. She walked with a cane. Maybe now she is better?

She was fascinated with Russia, wanted to know what I thought of Putin. Would he clean up the criminal element? Does he run a paternalistic country? I laughed so hard. Russia does not need a father. I was laughing not at her questions, so innocent, I was laughing because I felt dead. It is a terrible thing to laugh at your own country. I had become a rich American laughing at Russia.

Priscilla - ah yes, that's the girl - Priscilla wobbled into the kitchen to get more wine. This was Park Slope, her apartment. You had the problem with the contact lens. You were in the bathroom. I followed her, the girl who wanted to know about Putin. And I kissed her. I kissed your friend while you were in the bathroom. She was as startled as I. It was not smooth on my part. And she tried to hop away, like a bird.

And then she lost her balance and I caught her and apologized in a whisper and she asked "why?" and I said (*In RUSSIAN, I'm not happy.*) Neschásliv. "I'm not happy." And I walked out to the apartment and took the stairs and got to the street for air.

The last few months, Jain, I wanted to kiss every woman I ran into. But I did not kiss another. I slept badly. And I kept thinking of the girl, how she disappeared, changed her number.

Oh. The girl.

I do not speak of Priscilla. Before you. Another girl.
But I did not see her. I let her be.

And yet, I had a photograph. Her photo. For this you will
hate me.

I commissioned ten artists. To one, I say, "Paint her.
What you see." To another, "Paint her sexy." To another:
"Paint her as you would paint a monster." "Paint her as a
nightmare." "Paint her lost in a forest." "Paint her as a
last memory, the finest memory, an angel." I gave each
artist 10 thousand cash. Same photo. To the street
artists, it was a lot. To the commercial artists, it was
just right. To one or two, it wasn't the money that
mattered - it was the pursuit, the challenge. And now, now
I have a storage room filled with paintings. I cannot bear
to look at these paintings.

I am ruining our life. You are crying.

I have been in your place. I have been left behind.

I remember, when it hit me, one night - after delivering a
videotape - I cannot go into that - I made the driver hand
it to her, as I crouched in the front seat of the SUV -
does not matter - and I knew she . . . it's too hard to
say. I knew it was over.

I came home and went to bed and tried to sleep and that is when the large salty tears landed on my cheeks and rolled down my face. Like boyhood tears, but I was no longer a boy. I was supposed to be a man, but it hurt very much.

For many nights, I would hold the book she left behind.

Now, it is like I carry an invisible suitcase everywhere I go. Full of all the little moments with the girl.

I'm sorry, Jain. I thought it was over.

Try to forget me. Do whatever it takes. Forget.

That is it. That is all.

No. No.

I want to say: Thank you, giraffe, for showing me the ocean and for driving a car with skill. And so fast, Jain, you are fast. Thank you for teaching me new words, like "bliss." I never used the word until I met you. I remember saying, "this is bliss." I remember how good it felt to buy you pretty things and watch you jump for joy.

Joy. . . . I am such a screw up.

Call a lawyer. . . . Go to Italy. . . . The reward?
Easy. The apartment. It is yours.

In Russia, there is a famous Soviet saying: "The future is certain, it is the past that keeps on changing."

(Lights out.)

END OF SCENE 2

SCENE 3

(The year is 2009. The setting: An executive suite in an upscale hotel. There is a big table with a laptop and four monitors. Charles is dressed in business attire. Priscilla wears something fun and sexy, including stiletto heels - a look she pulls off with ease.)

PRISCILLA

(looking around the room) It's huge.

CHARLES

For business. Wherever I go, I say executive suite, and it's something like this.

PRISCILLA.

I have to admit, when you said "meet me in my -"

CHARLES

Ah, how inappropriate. I apologize.

PRISCILLA

It's okay. I totally get it.

CHARLES

Very functional.

PRISCILLA

Not to get personal, but where's the bed?

CHARLES

Hiding in the other room. It's huge.

PRISCILLA

Really?

CHARLES

Well, too big for me.

PRISCILLA

Oh, so you're traveling alone?

CHARLES

Unless there is someone hiding under the bed. Do you want to check?

PRISCILLA

Oh Charles, you dog.

CHARLES

I know. I am a very bad dog sometimes.

PRISCILLA

Hey, well, I'm sure you have lots of meetings scheduled, so we should probably -

CHARLES

Meetings? I don't have meetings. I never have meetings.

PRISCILLA

But I thought you were traveling on --.

CHARLES

Business? No. I just travel. I could be anywhere, as long as there is wireless. I sit here and keep my eye on markets all over the world. Instantaneous transactions. (*Snaps his fingers.*) Like that. And then, Priscilla, I wander the streets and hope for a surprise.

PRISCILLA

Surprise!

CHARLES

Yes, a very nice surprise.

PRISCILLA

Well, I did email you. And you sent me your itinerary.

CHARLES

Still, a coincidence that your trip coincided with my --

PRISCILLA

Thanks for agreeing to a meeting. I appreciate --

CHARLES

The last time I saw you -

PRISCILLA

My apartment. Park Slope. Yeah. When you and Jain -
yeah. Or, wait, was that what you were thinking of?

CHARLES

Of course it was. Do you think memories are so easily
vanished? If they were, I would be a new man.

PRISCILLA

So, anyway, I brought some photographs.

CHARLES

But first, how are you? Look at you. You were going to
have surgery, no? Or was there a miracle?

PRISCILLA

A miracle? Hardly. Three bunion surgeries and I'm finally
back in my stilettos.

CHARLES

You certainly are.

PRISCILLA

Bunion surgery is very tricky. I mean, when Brad botched
the first two, I didn't really blame him. We were, you
know, going out. Maybe that's the lesson here: never date
your podiatrist.

CHARLES

Or, never do surgery on your girlfriend.

PRISCILLA

Ha. Well, no worries there. He moved. To the west coast.
Redondo Beach.

CHARLES

And this is why you travel, no?

PRISCILLA

I don't know, maybe, yeah, well, my firm is going under, so
I thought I should take a trip before we all get axed.
Charles, maybe we should --

(Priscilla puts photographs
on the table.)

CHARLES

Get down to business?

PRISCILLA

Take a look. Or as we like to say: "Take a second look."
A building in the East Village that we feel has incredible
beauty and charm, but there's no real historic value, so no
way it's going to get landmark status. There are already
developers interested, and you know what that means.

CHARLES

(looking at photos) I, uh, I know this building.

PRISCILLA

Really? Wow.

CHARLES

East Sixth Street.

PRISCILLA

It's a little wobbly, but we feel the façade is worth
saving.

CHARLES

Do you know its history?

PRISCILLA

History? Oh, yeah, we've got someone working on that.
Thing is, if a developer gets this property, it'll be torn
down in a nano-second and some banal excuse for
architecture will go up instead.

CHARLES

Do you think this building can be saved?

PRISCILLA

If we can get the attention of the mayor, yeah.

CHARLES

And what can the mayor do for you?

PRISCILLA

He can stop giving incentives to developers that knock down gorgeous old buildings.

CHARLES

The economy is very bad right now. All over the world, there is great unbalance. I'm sure the mayor has his reasons for giving incentives to -

PRISCILLA

Do you know anyone in the mayor's office?

CHARLES

I am sorry. No. It is a very bad time to be asking for contributions.

PRISCILLA

But the economy is going to improve.

CHARLES

Ah, the optimistic American.

PRISCILLA

Well it better. Everything better improve.

CHARLES

Yes. Yes. Look at you. Already, I see great improvement.

PRISCILLA

This isn't about me.

CHARLES

Then why are you here?

PRISCILLA

The building, of course. Preservation. Actually, I'm not so sure. Now that I'm here, I walk around and I feel so foreign. We're in a foreign country, so I guess that makes sense. But I didn't think it would feel so foreign, traveling to this city, here, alone, just me, you know?

CHARLES

New York started feeling foreign to me. It did not feel like home. Now I go from city to city. The plane circles. I want to land. But where is home? Moscow?

PRISCILLA

When I'm at home, in New York, I just fill my life with distractions, you know? These boards. I'm on three nonprofits, and I can really run a board meeting, you know?

CHARLES

Would you like a drink?

PRISCILLA

No, thanks, just tell me that the economy, that all this downhill nonsense, is going to turn around. You're "the predictor," the guy who gets it right.

CHARLES

Ah, a journalist gives me a label. That's too easy. No, no, Priscilla. I am no predictor. I am a gambler. Hedge funds are like rolling dice. It is fun to win, but these days, more often than not, there is not so much fun.

PRISCILLA

But you won big time.

CHARLES

Not necessarily.

PRISCILLA

Charles? You won. I know you did. Big time.

CHARLES

When I decided to short those mortgage-backed securities - do you think I could have predicted that the bubble would burst?

PRISCILLA

Yes.

CHARLES

You think it was foresight?

PRISCILLA

Wasn't it?

CHARLES

It was my mood, Priscilla. I was in a lousy mood, in a - what do you call it - a frame of mind that made me think that bubbles, bubbles burst when you least expect it.

(Charles pours two glasses of vodka.)

PRISCILLA

Well that's for sure. You want to know how Brad broke up with me? How I found out he was moving to the other side of the country? A text message. Yeah, he texted me. Not to my face. Not even a voicemail. And I loved his voice.

CHARLES

This will help.

(Charles hands vodka to Priscilla, who waves it away.)

PRISCILLA

It's better for me to just stay busy, distracted.

CHARLES

In this past year, I have traveled to so many cities in so many countries, I have lost count.

PRISCILLA

I started making hors d'oeuvres. I am the queen of hors d'oeuvres.

CHARLES

In Buenos Aires, in Beijing, I try to find new faces, but there are no new faces.

PRISCILLA

I started making my own mayo. Who does that?

CHARLES

I keep seeing the same old faces wherever I go. Except you! Familiar, yet new.

PRISCILLA

Hellman's is perfectly good, but I make my own.

CHARLES

My family says come home.

PRISCILLA

My family is mad at me that Brad moved to California. It wasn't my decision.

CHARLES

I ask myself what is the purpose of all this?

PRISCILLA

Good question. Do you know how many cocktail parties I've thrown in the last three months?

CHARLES

The other day, I walked side by side with an ancient China man. He had a pole resting across his back, balancing large bags of whatever. I felt empty, next to a man with such obvious purpose.

PRISCILLA

When you're in love, everything feels perfectly purposeful. You saw an ancient China man?

CHARLES

There are billions of people in China. And the government tries to strangle the hedge fund guy with its tight regulations.

PRISCILLA

Why do you keep talking about China?

CHARLES

Because everybody is talking about China.

PRISCILLA

I'm not.

(Charles offers Priscilla a drink, which she does not take.)

CHARLES

Maybe you want to talk about Putin?

PRISCILLA

Putin?

CHARLES

You had questions, remember?

PRISCILLA

The building. We should talk about the building.

CHARLES

But now I am at liberty to tell you everything.

PRISCILLA

I'm still friends with Jain.

CHARLES

Good for you.

PRISCILLA

Actually, I never see her. I don't know why I said that.

CHARLES

Because the past is never very far away.

PRISCILLA

So, um, you're divorced, right?

CHARLES

At some point the plane has to land.

PRISCILLA

What does that mean, the plane has to -- ?

CHARLES

It means I'm glad you're here. You appear like a miracle. The cripple has healed.

PRISCILLA

Cripple?

CHARLES

That was bad. I did not mean -

PRISCILLA

Charles, it was just a bunion problem.

CHARLES

I don't know. It's China. It is so different from -

PRISCILLA

Forget China. I have to ask: Are you eating?

CHARLES

I don't know.

PRISCILLA

That's what I thought. You look thin.

CHARLES

It's because I put on this suit. I wanted to look nice for you.

PRISCILLA

Order some food. Call room service.

CHARLES

I prefer to drink. But not alone.

PRISCILLA

Pick up the phone and order.

CHARLES

There is Toblerone in the mini-bar.

PRISCILLA

Now, Charles, now.

CHARLES

No, Patricia, it is best to drink.

PRISCILLA

Patricia? Who's Patricia?

CHARLES

I am sorry. The office manager. She is always telling me what to do.

PRISCILLA

Well good for her. Now pick up the phone and order.

(Charles picks up the hotel
phone and orders.)

CHARLES

(into the phone) Charles Winn. Room number? There is no number. I am at the top. The Executive Suite. I can't find the menu.

PRISCILLA

Oh just something, anything, an entrée.

CHARLES

(into the phone) Send me the biggest dinner.

PRISCILLA

If we were in my apartment, I could make you such a meal.

CHARLES

(into the phone) Anything. Everything. Whatever. Surprise me. Yes, yes. The biggest platter. *(hangs up the phone.)* There. Satisfied, Priscilla?

PRISCILLA

Shall we "take a second look?"

CHARLES

No. No more pictures. I know what you want.

PRISCILLA

What? What do I want?

CHARLES

You have convinced me.

(Charles writes a check.)

PRISCILLA

I've barely started my pitch.

CHARLES

It's okay. I've heard the stories. Immigrants. Rats. Infestation. I am writing a check.

PRISCILLA

I haven't even started on the levels of giving.

CHARLES

Who cares? I saw the photo. Like a memory pushing against me. A pretty girl pointing out the contrast between my life and the life of that building. Except, tell me something: If America believes in the past, why doesn't it take measures to preserve it? Why does it let scumbags like me buy expensive apartments in modern atrocities that drive out these old tenements?

PRISCILLA

Wait. Is this about Jain? I feel like I'm in the middle of someone else's argument.

CHARLES

This is not about Jain. Developers are powerful. Good luck.

(Charles hands Priscilla a check.)

PRISCILLA

(regarding the check) Oh my --. This is bigger than "Angel," our highest category. It's like "God" or something.

CHARLES

I used to have more.

PRISCILLA

Why would you --?

CHARLES

Because you are here. Because I can. Because I never really liked looking at those people who lived in the walk-up across the street. And now? Maybe it wouldn't be such a bad place to call home.

PRISCILLA

I'm a bit overwhelmed.

CHARLES

Say you will drink with me. Say you will have dinner with me.

PRISCILLA

I don't know what to say.

CHARLES

Say you are happy.

PRISCILLA

Charles, I'm, I'm, I'm -

CHARLES

Priscilla, say it. You are ---

PRISCILLA

-- happy. This will make a lot of people happy.

CHARLES

I don't care about those people. You are the reason I do this.

PRISCILLA

Charles. Really?

CHARLES

Priscilla. Yes. Need I say more?

PRISCILLA

I don't think so.

CHARLES

Good. Come here.

(They are about to kiss when Priscilla's cell phone vibrates and she reacts to it.)

PRISCILLA

Ah! I'm vibrating. I mean, my phone. Sorry. Do you mind?

CHARLES

Please. Go ahead.

PRISCILLA

In case it's important.

CHARLES

Of course.

PRISCILLA

(checking her cell phone) I don't believe this. He texted me. It's him. It's him.

(Priscilla gulps her drink.)

CHARLES

Him? Who?

PRISCILLA

Brad. Who else? He says he misses me . . . and wants me to move to California. Do you believe this?

CHARLES

I don't know what to believe.

PRISCILLA

Neither do I. Move to California? I haven't heard from the guy in two months. What should I do?

CHARLES

Keep drinking.

PRISCILLA

I don't drink straight vodka.

CHARLES

It is like water.

(Charles pours more vodka and they both continue drinking.)

PRISCILLA

A text message. Why can't he pick up the phone?

CHARLES

It is not always so easy.

PRISCILLA

I can't stand this. I hate men. What am I going to say?

CHARLES

What is the rush?

PRISCILLA

Right. Right. There's no reason to react. I have to clear my mind. I need a distraction. Oh God, I know I'm going to regret this.

(Priscilla kisses Charles.)

CHARLES

No regrets.

(Charles kisses Priscilla.
She turns away.)

PRISCILLA

What are you doing? He's waiting for my reply.

CHARLES

I thought you wanted a distraction.

PRISCILLA

I have to figure out what to say.

CHARLES

You don't have to do anything you don't want to do.

PRISCILLA

Then what am I doing in a hotel room with you?

CHARLES

We are friends.

PRISCILLA

I was friends with your ex-wife.

CHARLES

We are meeting about the charity.

PRISCILLA

Why does it feel like everything is on the line? Like this is going to determine my life?

CHARLES

Drink.

(Priscilla drinks.)

PRISCILLA

I can't just pick up and move. Can I? That's impulsive.

CHARLES

Drink.

PRISCILLA

If you believe that men are like buses, another one always comes along.

CHARLES

Men are like buses?

PRISCILLA

That's what my mother always said. She hated all my boyfriends. What should I do?

CHARLES

Why do you keep looking at me? I am no expert.

PRISCILLA

But you're a guy. And you're here. And it's a text message, so a response is required pretty soon. You have to help me. Don't say what you think I want to hear. I need a man's perspective. Charles? Charles. I came all the way over here to discuss a pathetic little building --

CHARLES

And I gave you what you wanted.

PRISCILLA

Oh, and now you're miffed because I'm not giving you what you wanted? . . . Sorry. I didn't expect him to text.

CHARLES

Okay. Enough.

PRISCILLA

You want me to leave? Maybe I should.

CHARLES

No. Stay. We will get down to business. What is your strategy?

PRISCILLA

I don't have a strategy.

CHARLES

What is it you wish for?

PRISCILLA

I wish to understand what's in this man's head.

CHARLES

No. No. You cannot understand his mind. You must first understand your own. If you do that, then you can win the battle.

PRISCILLA

Battle? This isn't war. It's my life.

CHARLES

I can only speak from experience.

PRISCILLA

This is not helpful.

(Priscilla and Charles kiss.)

PRISCILLA

Actually, that was very helpful. I should start with how I feel. Let me just say . . . I feel entirely natural when I'm with him. Like SO myself.

(Priscilla and Charles kiss.)

PRISCILLA

Peaceful, like the world is peaceful even though we know it's not.

(Priscilla and Charles kiss.)

PRISCILLA

After I met Brad, I was suddenly walking around without stumbling and falling down.

CHARLES

Is that unusual for you?

PRISCILLA

I constantly trip over my own feet. I once carried a big bunch of forsythia out of a flower shop and fell right on top of it. I would have broken my nose except the branches supported me. I guess I'm not very practical. I run errands in my Manolo Blahniks. I've had so many near misses. But then I meet Brad, and I stop falling. Other than "in love." Oh, I did step on a nail, but that's a whole different category. We started dating and I felt so so so -

CHARLES

I've heard enough.

PRISCILLA

Have you ever felt so so so in love that --?

CHARLES

Enough.

PRISCILLA

I'm sorry. You were married. That was insensitive. You know this feeling.

CHARLES

A long time ago. Before Jain.

PRISCILLA

What?

(Charles grabs the photos.)

CHARLES

This. This. It does not matter.

PRISCILLA

What?

CHARLES

I don't want to talk about it.

PRISCILLA

What is it?

CHARLES

She chose not to be with me.

PRISCILLA

And it broke your heart.

CHARLES

It does not matter.

PRISCILLA

Yes it does. Why do you think I'm so scared?

CHARLES

I was arrogant. You have a real chance.

PRISCILLA

Don't forget he dumped me.

CHARLES

He wants you back. If someone gave me the green light, I would not hesitate.

PRISCILLA

Someone? Who? I want to know who.

CHARLES

I don't know.

PRISCILLA

Do you ever Google her? . . . You do, don't you?

CHARLES

Why do you ask me these things? . . . She did not give me another chance. I made a video recording. I stripped down to my -

PRISCILLA

Oh my God. You got totally naked and made a complete fool of - ?

CHARLES

Stop. This is not about me. It is about you. And you need to stop spinning like a top. If this man, this Brad, is important to you, do not be like the close-minded girl.

PRISCILLA

You still think about her, I can tell. Why don't you just friend her on Facebook and see what happens?

CHARLES

What is the problem with walking around with a pretty girl in your head? End of story.

PRISCILLA

Here I thought you were such a smart man.

CHARLES

I am not so smart. Last year, my mother said, come home. I could not bring myself to face my family. I was certain my father would see divorce as my big failure.

PRISCILLA

Lots of people get divorced.

CHARLES

You do not know my family. I used to hear my father say, I do not believe in spoiling the child. He did not spoil me. I spoiled myself. He tried to teach me, but I thought I knew everything. I never said to my father, "thank you."

PRISCILLA

You should tell him.

CHARLES

It is too late. I got the call - "father is dead." My sister's voice. I think I dropped the phone. And I shout, "What did you say? This can't be true." But it was true. I did not go home as often as I should have. I needed to visit my father and I did not. He never got to meet the girl. The girl who spoke of that building and I did not listen.

PRISCILLA

I'm sorry.

CHARLES

Too late for me. But not for you.

PRISCILLA

Thank you, Charles, but I don't know. I want to see him, but I've gotta take this slowly.

CHARLES

Slowly? No. No good. Negotiate. Be very specific. What do you want? Marriage? A house? Children? Cars? Sailboats? Jewelry? Fur coats? A pony?

PRISCILLA

I don't want a pony.

CHARLES

But you want all the rest. Good.

PRISCILLA

Wait. No. I want a man who accepts me, well, as a klutz who wears Jimmy Choos even on errands. And just because he's a podiatrist doesn't mean I'm ever going to wear arch supports. I want children. I want to live in a glass house where we all run around naked because we feel so natural and free.

CHARLES

Very good.

PRISCILLA

I can't send all that in a text message.

CHARLES

True. . . . Do this: Write "I accept your proposal."

PRISCILLA

He didn't propose.

CHARLES

Trust me.

(Priscilla texts: I accept
your proposal.)

PRISCILLA

I can't send this.

CHARLES

Send. Send.

(Priscilla sends the text
message.)

PRISCILLA

Oh no. What did I do? "I accept your proposal?" He'll never write me back. It's over.

CHARLES

Round one has begun.

PRISCILLA

Round one? This isn't a sporting event. You are a moron. Why did I ever listen to you?

CHARLES

I advised you well. You'll see.

PRISCILLA

What do you know anyway? Look at your track record.

CHARLES

Yes, an awful track record. But I understand business.

PRISCILLA

He's not a businessman. He's a surgeon.

CHARLES

Nobody knows how to play these games.

PRISCILLA

I don't want to play games.

CHARLES

It is best to distract ourselves.

(Charles kisses Priscilla.)

PRISCILLA

I just told you I'm in love with Brad, and you're -

CHARLES

You want me to stop?

PRISCILLA

Don't stop until he texts me.

CHARLES

That's the spirit.

(They kiss.)

PRISCILLA

Why hasn't he responded?

CHARLES

He is thinking.

PRISCILLA

Wait, why am I even listening to you? Jain said you broke up with her by leaving a DVD. Who does that?

CHARLES

I have no courage.

PRISCILLA

Why should a person need so much courage? We're talking about love.

CHARLES

Come here.

PRISCILLA

No. No. You're confusing me. I need to talk to a girlfriend.

CHARLES

No. They give the worst advice.

PRISCILLA

What time is it in New York? Okay, there's time. I'm calling . . . who am I calling? Who can talk me through this?

CHARLES

What? You don't like me anymore?

(Priscilla begins to text a friend.)

CHARLES

You're going to sit and text a girlfriend? That's no fun. At least put her on Skype so I can see her.

PRISCILLA

Wait, you Skype?

CHARLES

Everybody Skypes.

PRISCILLA

Great. I'll tell her to get on.

(Priscilla sends a text.)

CHARLES

What's her name? I want to meet her.

PRISCILLA

She's my fundraising chair, so behave. Actually, she'll be thrilled with the check. *(regarding the computer)* Get this going, would you?

(Charles sets up Priscilla at the computer.)

CHARLES

Sometimes, when I Skype with my partners back in New York, I sit here in a shirt and tie. And then, when we are done talking, I stand back and I tell them, take a closer look.

PRISCILLA

Almost like "take a second look."

CHARLES

Yes, but, it is me. A full body shot and I am in my underwear. And they holler the worst insults.

PRISCILLA

(to the monitor) Where is she?

(The buzzer rings with room service. Charles gets the door, while Priscilla makes contact via Skype.)

PRISCILLA

(to the monitor) There you are. Hey!

(There is a garbled sound from the monitor.)

PRISCILLA

(to the monitor) I'm having a little trouble hearing you. Can you hear me?

(There is a garbled sound.)

PRISCILLA

(to the monitor) You're nodding yes. . . . Well, as long as you can hear me: I just landed a major donation. Hedge fund guy, of course. This trip was so worth it.

(Charles wheels in a cart with a covered silver platter.)

PRISCILLA

(to Charles) Come on, get in front of the web cam. Meet my colleague back in New York. She's writing up the history of the building, by the way. *(to the monitor)* And so, let me introduce Mr. Charles Winn.

(Charles uncovers the dinner platter and stares at it.)

CHARLES

Wait a minute. We are not in China.

PRISCILLA

Charles? *(to the monitor)* His dinner just arrived.

CHARLES

Sweden. Hello, Sweden. Now I remember.

PRISCILLA

(to the monitor) Sorry. Hold on. I think he thought we were in China.

(There is a garbled sound.)

PRISCILLA

(to Charles) She's trying to say something. Can you get this working? Is there something wrong with the mic?

CHARLES

Herring and cheese and dark bread. This is my kind of food.

PRISCILLA

(To Charles) Didn't you know we're in Stockholm? *(to the monitor)* I think he was starving. I made him order room service. Doesn't matter. I need to talk to you. I got a text message from Brad.

CHARLES

Suddenly I am starving.

PRISCILLA

(to the monitor) He wants me to move to California. I still can't hear you. The guy I used to date - Brad - you know. He ruined my feet. Well, they were bad in the first place, but he botched two surgeries and when he finally got it right, his ego was so shot he actually moved to the other coast but he - what? Anyway, what am I supposed to do? Just drop everything and go to California?

CHARLES

(to Priscilla) Yes. Go. Go.

PRISCILLA

(to the monitor) So Charles makes me send this message that says "I accept your proposal." Is that dumb or what?

CHARLES

You have talked of nothing but the surgeon since you arrived. I know what it is like, to spend your days and nights thinking of nothing but the one you love. It is agony.

PRISCILLA

(to both Charles and the monitor) Agony? Try five years of match.com and chemistry.com and e-friggin harmony. And then I meet Brad. At an event. In person. And it's great. And I step on a nail. He takes me to the ER. It's just the best - believe me, it's the best. And we go out, and it's like, so, well, everything. So easy. Then he disappears. And I can't get him out of my head.

CHARLES

When you love someone, you see them everywhere. This food is very good.

PRISCILLA

(to the monitor) Listen to him. Like he's some expert.
(to Charles) What do you know? You're just a guy.

CHARLES

If you do not go to him, another five years will go by.
And you may never get another chance. Take a risk,
Priscilla, or you will be sorry. Mmmmmm. This food.

PRISCILLA

(to Charles) Why am I even discussing this with you? And
what is wrong with your computer?

CHARLES

I have the latest version of everything. Her bit rate is
probably different. She needs to upgrade.

PRISCILLA

Oh that is so helpful. (to the monitor) Do you believe
this? I'm sorry. Hey, did I even introduce you two?

CHARLES

Hold on, Priscilla. I am trying to be helpful. The plane
cannot circle forever. It has to land.

PRISCILLA

(to Charles) What is it with your stupid metaphors?

CHARLES

The truck may never pull up again.

PRISCILLA

(to Charles) I'm not a transportation expert.

CHARLES

Do not be like me. A zombie who doesn't even know the city
he's in. Of course I have not Googled the girl. It would
be torture.

PRISCILLA

(to Charles) He still hasn't texted me back. I'll never
hear from him again.

CHARLES

This is why you should drink.

PRISCILLA

(to Charles) I am so depressed.

CHARLES

No. Do not be melancholy. If you do not speak, you regret. And sometimes if you speak, you still regret.

PRISCILLA

(to Charles) That is a very flawed approach. I should never drink vodka.

CHARLES

Always drink vodka.

PRISCILLA

Ah. I'm vibrating. Is it him? He texted me. I don't dare look.

CHARLES

Look. Look. Read the message.

(Priscilla reads her text message.)

PRISCILLA

Oh my God. He says - he says everything. Everything I could possibly want to hear. Oh Charles, oh Phoebe. Charles, get over here and introduce yourself, even if she's all garbled.

(Charles goes to the monitor.)

CHARLES

(to the monitor) It is you.

PRISCILLA

(to Charles and the monitor) He loves me? He actually wrote those words.

CHARLES

(to the monitor) I have waited so long.

PRISCILLA

(to Charles and the monitor) He wants to marry me? I mean, it's all here on this little phone.

CHARLES

(to the monitor) I am speechless.

PRISCILLA

Phoebe, I'm moving to California. Charles, I'm moving to California.

CHARLES

I do not know what to say.

PRISCILLA

(to Charles) You have been so helpful.

CHARLES

(to the monitor) I have never forgotten you.

PRISCILLA

Did I introduce you two?

CHARLES

(to the monitor) I want to be back on the street where a vendor from Senegal sold me a pair of sunglasses in front of an old building in the East Village, and I put them on the face of the girl that I loved.

PRISCILLA

I need a flight out of here as soon as possible. I can't wait to tell my family. I think they actually like Brad better than they like me.

CHARLES

(to the monitor) I have never forgotten that old building.

PRISCILLA

(moves Charles to the side and speaks to the monitor) Do you have any idea how much I love modern buildings? I'm so tired of old things in New York. I'm going to live in a glass house. Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make you cry.

CHARLES

(to the monitor) Don't cry. Don't cry. Are you crying because -- ? . . . What? What?

(There is a garbled sound.)

PRISCILLA

Oh.

CHARLES

(to Priscilla) Did she just say --?

PRISCILLA

(to Charles) "I love you."

CHARLES

(to the monitor) I have waited so long.

PRISCILLA

(becoming aware of the situation) Oh. *(getting it)* Oh.

(Priscilla slips out.)

CHARLES

What have you to say?

END OF SCENE 3

THE EPILOGUE

(Two years later -- 2011.
Setting: a hospital
corridor. Charles Winn
enters, moves some chairs
around, and creates a sense
of privacy for himself. He
looks at photos on his
SmartPhone. He smiles,
chuckles, beams. He fiddles
with the SmartPhone and
begins to record a podcast.)

CHARLES

Hello. This is Charles Winn. It is 3:26 a.m. on October
the sixth. The year is two-thousand eleven. I am making a
. . . I do not know what to say to you.

This is the voice of Charles Winn. You are sleeping. The
nurse kicked me out.

Who can sleep? I have already taken dozens of pictures of
you. I have sent them around the world. I have made calls
to Syracuse and Moscow. San Francisco. Philadelphia. I
would make more calls but people are sleeping.

I do not know what to say.

I will never know what to say to you. It's all so new.
You are new. Brand new. To me. To your mother. Your
mother. Yes, your mother. She sleeps and I take a break.
We are both exhausted. You have been here less than six
hours and already we are . . . we are . . . everything.

Since you began growing, developing, getting ready to appear, I have not stopped thinking of you. There are so many things I want to say. This may be the only time I will get to say, I don't know, certain things. Once we leave this place, we'll be off and running.

It will pass too fast. I want to hold on to time, to hold on to you. And so I make this podcast -- for you and you alone. I speak to you while I can, before you are climbing the birch tree in our back yard and chasing . . . I get ahead of myself.

Let me start with right now. You have all your toes and fingers. I counted. The nurse counted. I made the doctor count. The ears are good. The lungs are strong. I heard you cry. This is all good, very good. You are already getting an A.

Little fellow. Boy. Son. I do not know what to say.

You are my son. You will always be my son. I am your father. I will always be your father. You do not have a name. Your mother will pick the name. When she wakes. There is a list. There are five names on the list. I predict you will get one of the top three.

If it were my decision, I would name you Roger. It's a good name. Roger. Roger. No one names their kid Roger. It is not even on the list.

Your mother will decide. She knows best.

For now, I will call you Roger.

Roger, son, let me tell you about your mother. She is beautiful. In every way. You will see.

When I first fell in love with your mother, she rejected me. I had lessons to learn and so did she - that is how she sums it up.

It seemed our paths would never converge. But some years later -- agonizing years - we got a second chance. I cannot explain. Roger, be brave. That's all I can say.

Lessons. Math will be easy for you. And fun. Will it? It should be. English too.

Do not be a selfish boor. I used to be a hot shot. Do not be a hot shot. I guess it's okay, if you are, but you're never as hot as you think you are.

Do not change your name. Do not change it to Roger even though we both know it is a great name.

Do whatever your mother tells you to do. It will be my responsibility to say no. "No, Roger, I said no." Once in a while I will say yes. For a whole day . . . on your birthday . . . every October the fifth, I will say yes all day long.

I want you to be a good boy. Always call your mother. I want you to meet a nice girl. I want you to have a family.

If you do not want a family, bring your children to me and I will be the family. There is nothing like it, this family. It is everything. How do I know? I'm so experienced? Six hours of being a family? It is everything.

And yet we treat it like nothing. We do not call as often as we should.

The point is: Do not be lazy. Visit your parents once in a while, okay?

No, no. Do not feel guilty over me, my boy. Visit your mother. She is the important one. You must think of her always. Me? I don't know. Do this: Just get on a plane once in a while. Fly to see the old man.

We are getting ahead of ourselves.

My voice will be in your head for a long time. I hear my father's voice and it is like this:

(in RUSSIAN) Ya dúmayu, shto rebyónka nelzya balovat.
I do not believe in spoiling the child. . . .

And your mother's voice? It will always be in your head. Soft and steady. Full of encouragement. Something I've learned: She sounds like a dreamer, but she means what she says. Does not mean she cannot change her mind, but you must believe her when she speaks.

I should end. No. Wait. You must know this: You're not like everyone else or anyone else. Your blood is Russian and a lot of other things. I don't like to be nationalistic, but Russia is a great country.

You were born in America. I don't like to be nationalistic, but America is a great country. Someday I take you to the Russian Bath on the Lower East Side.

What else?

Copy your mother in everything. She is very sensible. Although, she's very indecisive. It will take her ten days to pick your name. I predict she will change her mind twice before she decides. Maybe there's still a chance for Roger.

There's the nurse. Gotta go. On your birthday, I'm going to hide your presents all around the house. Don't worry, you'll find them. You'll get your wishes. Not all of them. You'll make mistakes. And sometimes life will be . . .

Roger, I've done some dumb things in my life. But the best? The best is you.

THE END