

HIT OR STAY?

Written by

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INT. APARTMENT. CHICAGO. SPRING DAY IN 1960.

A freshly married couple moves furniture in their newly bought apartment in the heart of downtown Chicago on a warm spring day. A young man named CHARLIE, late 20s, clean-shaven, with bright blue eyes and long hair, pushes a couch against a wall with the help of his pregnant wife, RACHEL, smiley, sweet-like honey with long blonde hair, furrowed brows, and without a worry in the world.

CUT TO:

The plastic cover of a mattress is being ripped apart before the couple lies on it. Charlie carefully parts Rachel's hair and tucks a strand behind her ear. She laughs before placing Charlie's hand softly on her six-month-pregnant belly. Charlie leans over to kiss Rachel on the lips with his hand still around her stomach. The bright light from the windows illuminates Rachel's face.

CUT TO:

Charlie carries boxes filled with silverware and kitchen supplies through a doorway. He uses a box cutter to slice open one box, take the plates and bowls, and put them in a cabinet.

Meanwhile, Rachel organizes vinyl records in a milk crate. She looks over the front and back of each vinyl to alphabetically organize them by artist's name. She reviews The Velvet Underground and Nico classic banana album cover before placing it cautiously in the crate. Next up is Bob Dylan's The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan. She hesitates before putting it in the box, takes the vinyl out of the sleeve, and places it on the record player. The song: Don't Think Twice, It's Alright plays. Charlie and Rachel begin slow dancing in a nearly-filled apartment living room.

CUT TO:

EXT. ILLINOIS STATE CORRECTIONAL CENTER. FALL DAY IN 1970.

The sky is grey. The trees are naked with their leaves blowing in the wind. The streets and sidewalks are wet from rain the day before. The sounds of large metal gates and cells closing are heard from outside the prison.

INT. JAIL CELL. DAY

Charlie's flashback ends and he is alone in his empty jail cell sitting on a steel bed frame--waiting.

Charlie has spent eight long years in jail. He is now in his late-30s and has scruffy facial hair, a goatee, and exhausted eyelids, but what remains is his long brown hair. His hair, once delicately combed, is now tangled and messy.

In his cell lays a toothbrush, a photo of a pregnant Rachel in Chicago's Navy Pier, and two books on a little steel shelf. One is Time Machine by HG Wells and the other is Charlie and the Chocolate Factory by Roald Dahl.

Don't Think Twice, It's Alright fades after the second chorus.

INT. PRISON CAFETERIA. DAY

A group of men eat at a table. Charlie, his two friends named MAX and HUGO, a wise-old man nicknamed DUSTY, and three others just minding their business. Their names are THEO, JACK, and TONY. Charlie is the only one not touching his food.

HUGO

Ya aren't touching your food
Charlie. What's the matter?

DUSTY

He's tryna' save his belly for all
the delicious downtown pizza when
he gets out, aren't ya ole' timer?

CHARLIE

Something like that, ya.

HUGO

If ya aren't gonna eat your
potatoes, can I get some?

Charlie pushes his tray towards Hugo.

CHARLIE

Have at it.

MAX

(forking a potato from
the tray)
First thing you're gonna do when
you're outta here Charlie?

CHARLIE

Gonna see Rachel and my son.

DUSTY

You can't just show up empty-handed
ole' timer. You should get your
girl something special.

TONY

Yeah, like a diamond.

CHARLIE

With what money am I gonna buy a
fucking diamond with Tony?

HUGO

(with food in his mouth)
Tony, you gotta think with your
head.

TONY

(grinning)
Rob a bank.

The group laughs at Tony's sarcastic suggestion. Charlie
can't help but laugh as well.

INT. OFFICE. LATER

The PAROLE OFFICER looks over Charlie's paperwork. In fact,
his desk is filled with piles of miscellaneous paperwork
from hundreds of current and former prisoners. The PAROLE
OFFICER, JIM, sips on a cup of coffee.

JIM

What are your plans for work
Charlie?

CHARLIE

I was thinking of working in the
meat packing industry. You know
Chicago has one of the largest
meatpacking centers in the country.

JIM

My cousin actually works down
there. He's the assistant to Scott
Bruer. You know of Scott Bruer?

CHARLIE

No.

JIM

Scott is the chief Vice President
of Meatpackers Co. in the Union
Stock Yard.

(MORE)

JIM (CONT'D)

My cousin Bill could maybe help you out Charlie. What do you think of that?

CHARLIE

Any help I could get would be great. I appreciate that Jim.

JIM

Mr. Wilks. You're not on a first name basis Charlie. If I do help you out, you better not fuck me.

CHARLIE

And why would I do that? I'm not the same man I was eight years ago Mr. Wilks. I'm trying to get my old life back. Trying to make things right.

JIM

Sadly, Charlie. That's something you can never do.

CHARLIE

What do you suggest?

JIM

I suggest you contact my cousin Bill. I'll call him later today and tell him a little about you. He'll give you a call and hopefully help you out. But, if you get the job and start going down the wrong path, conning, stealing, your gonna create a lot of problems for me. And guess what? You'll wind up right back here.

CHARLIE

That won't happen. So, what's the plan for me and you?

JIM

Weekly check-ins. It may be a call or it may be a visit. Depending on my schedule.

(MORE)

JIM (CONT'D)

I'll ask how your doing, how work is going, what relationships you're having to make sure you're not gonna flip into someone you used to be.

EXT. HOUSE. EVENING

Charlie arrives with flowers to the house of his wife and son. He walks up the crooked stairs and rings the doorbell. He holds his book of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory for his son.

Charlie's son STAN walks to the door. The doorframe and screen separate them.

Charlie is in awe of his son's presence. Stan, unknowingly stands before his father.

STAN

Who are you?

CHARLIE

I'm--I'm here to see you. I've been away for a while and now I'm here--

Rachel arrives at the door and is in shock. She hasn't seen Charlie in nearly a decade and now he's standing on her doorstep. She delicately moves Stan away from the door.

RACHEL

Charlie--

CHARLIE

Rachel. My god you look beautiful.

Rachel scans Charlie's face; his tangled hair and exhausted eyes.

RACHEL

You look--You look tired.
(she chuckles)
What are you doing here?

Charlie hands her flowers.

CHARLIE

I came to see you and my--my favorite eight year old.

STAN

I'm nine-and-a-half.

CHARLIE

Nine-and-a-half, wow, you're almost 10! Time has really slipped away. I thought I'd cook dinner for you guys. I'd really like to see you.

INT. HOUSE KITCHEN. NIGHT

Charlie cooks spaghetti and meatballs for Rachel and Stan. Stan sets the table and Rachel cautiously watches Charlie from the dinner table.

CUT TO:

Charlie, Rachel, and Stan sit around the dinner table. Charlie serves both of them their food out of a giant bowl of spaghetti.

STAN

So where were you?

CHARLIE

Where was I? Good question.
(trying to think of an
answer)
I was--

RACHEL

Charlie was away.

STAN

That's why you look like a caveman?
You've been away for so long?

CHARLIE

(Charlie laughs)
Exactly, that's why I look like a
caveman.

Moment of hesitation. Charlie doesn't know what to say.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

What's it like to be the man of the
house Stan?

RACHEL

He's been the best boy. Does all
his homework and chores.

Helps out when momma needs something. He's a good reader too.

CHARLIE

That's why I brought a book for you
Stan: Charlie and the Chocolate
Factory.

STAN

Momma already read me that book.

CHARLIE

Momma already read you that book,
huh? There are plenty of others
that momma may not have read to you
yet like Fantastic Mr. Fox. Maybe I
can read it to you sometime?

STAN

Yeah--maybe.

This line breaks Charlie's heart. He realizes what impact
his absence had on his family.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM. LATER

Charlie stands by the bedroom door while Rachel sits on her
bed. There is a haunting silence in the air.

RACHEL

You know what the worst part of it
all is Charlie? It's not you being
a criminal, it's not you being a
liar. It's that your son--Stan--
doesn't even know you're his
father.

CHARLIE

Nothing breaks my heart more than
knowing how much pain I put you
through--what I put Stan through.
All those years being locked up--I
focused on returning to the man I
was.

RACHEL

I thought the man you were was
kind, handsome, daring, romantic.
But you conned your way into
stealing money from my father
through one of your schemes. That's
the man I married. I married into
one of your cons.

CHARLIE

I married you because you are the most special human being I know. I knew what kind of mother you would be to our child. I knew what kind of wife you would be. It all worked out.

RACHEL

Worked out for who? You?! My father died of a heart attack because of the bankruptcy you put him in. You allowed my son to grow up with no financial security. My father left us with NOTHING, because of YOU!

CHARLIE

I don't know what to say Rachel. Whatever I say will never express how sorry I am.

RACHEL

You spent nearly a decade in prison and you couldn't even come up with one sentence to say you're sorry, huh?

Charlie doesn't know how to respond.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

What did you think about while you were in there?

CHARLIE

I thought about getting back to you--to my family.

RACHEL

So, you were focused on the future, not the past. Do you have any regrets?

Hesitation.

CHARLIE

Of course I do Rachel.

RACHEL

And what's your biggest regret?

CHARLIE

Stan growing up without his father.

RACHEL

You don't regret me and your son
living with nothing? You don't
regret what you did to cause that?

CHARLIE

Yes, Rachel, I do.

RACHEL

I don't want to hear you lies!

CHARLIE

I'm not lying. Not about this.

RACHEL

(a tear rolls down her
eye)

I don't even know what to believe
anymore. I guess you were the same
man I married, I was just stupid
enough to believe you loved me.

CHARLIE

I do love you. I love Stan too.

RACHEL

He doesn't know who you are! How
could you love him!

CHARLIE

Because he's my son.

RACHEL

No, he's *my* son. You're just a
visitor---a stranger in this house.

CHARLIE

Rachel--

RACHEL

Charlie--please leave. I don't want
to see you again.

CHARLIE

Please don't do this to me.

RACHEL

Do this to you!? You did this to
me--to your son. You've done enough
to destroy our lives. Please leave
my house.

Without another word, Charlie walks out of the bedroom with his head down. Before he exits the house for good, he takes one last look at Stan, who is sleeping, through a slightly open doorway. Charlie leaves.

The song Back to Black by Amy Winehouse plays.

INT. BUS. LATER

Charlie rides in a nearly empty bus with his head softly pressed against the window with a view of downtown Chicago being lit up by the beautiful city skyline lights.

EXT. CHICAGO STREETS. LATER

Charlie walks in the wind through sidewalks covered in fallen leaves. We don't know where he is headed but he looks determined to get there.

He arrives at a phone booth and hesitates before dialing.

He removes a piece of paper from his coat pocket and dials the number of Jim's cousin Bill. No answer. Charlie hangs up the phone and impulsively starts dialing a different number of his criminal friend Vic.

VIC
Hello?

CHARLIE
It's me, Vic.

VIC
Charlie?

CHARLIE
Ya

VIC
You're out? When'd you get out?

CHARLIE
Doesn't matter. Can I ask a favor?

VIC
Shoot.

CHARLIE
Can I come over?

VIC
Is everything alright?

CHARLIE

I think it would be easier if I come over to your place and talk about it? Can I do that?

VIC

Are you in trouble, Charlie?

CHARLIE

No, nothing like that. I just want to talk to you. Are you still on 111 Erie?

VIC

You're not being followed are you?

CHARLIE

No, of course not. I just have an idea you might be interested in.

INT./EXT. VIC'S APARTMENT. ALMOST MIDNIGHT

VIC, his roommate JEFF, and Charlie sit around a circular dining table. The apartment is dark, the only lighting in the room sits above the table in which they are talking.

CHARLIE

We're going to hit Rosies Diamond Store on Chicago Avenue at 9am. Right when they open. You got a pen and paper?

Jeff grabs a pen from the coffee table and finds an empty pizza box in the kitchen. He hands them to Charlie.

Charlie draws a box on the bottom of the pizza box.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Vic, at 9:05am you're going to pick us up on the corner of Chicago and Madison. We're only going to be in there for five minutes so we need to make every moment count. Grab as much jewelry as you can. Watches, diamond necklaces especially.

Back to Black fades.

VIC

I want to be in there with you. Have Jeff pick us up.

CHARLIE
Are you sure Vic?

VIC
Yes. Jeff pick us up.

CHARLIE
Can I rely on you Jeff? 9:05, not a second later.

JEFF
Yeah, but why just five minutes?

CHARLIE
(Charlie draws out the
plan with street names
on the paper)
One minute to announce the robbery
and make sure nobody does a damn
thing. Three minutes to collect as
much as we can. One minute to
leave. The nearest police station
is on Huron and that street is
going to be jammed at 9 o'clock in
the morning so it's going to be
almost impossible for the cops to
get to the store in less than five
minutes. Within that time frame, we
go in, collect, get out. You got
that?

JEFF
Ya.

VIC
Ya.

VIC (CONT'D)
How much money you think we'll
collect Charlie?

CHARLIE
I don't know, it depends on how
much we grab. Roughly, we could
collect between 10-15 grand each.

VIC
Are you sure roughly 10 grand is
worth the risk? You can go back to
jail Charlie.

CHARLIE
10 grand for five risky minutes
where I know what I'm doing. I'll
take that in a heartbeat.

Vic and Jeff have a look of anticipatory excitement and elation at the potential earnings. But, a hesitation and concern washes over Vic.

EXT. CHICAGO STREETS. 9:00 AM

The car drops Vic and Charlie off at the corner of Chicago and Madison and they walk to Rosies Diamond Store.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
Not a second later, you understand?
You blink once and we'll be out.

JEFF (V.O.)
I'll be there.

VIC (V.O.)
Charlie, why are you doing this?

CHARLIE (V.O.)
I gotta get something that belongs
to me and this is how.

Before entering the store, Vic and Charlie put on dark ski masks, grab crowbars from their duffle bags, and get their guns ready to fire at a moments notice.

The open the doors to the store.

INT. ROSIES DIAMOND STORE. 9:00 AM

CHARLIE
This is a robbery! Get the fuck on
the ground!

VIC
If you move once inch, I'll blow
your head off.

The store is filled with panicked workers and customers who all get on the ground.

They take their crowbars and smash them into the glass boxes containing jewelry, watches, bracelets, and necklaces. The guns are still pointed at the crowd. Glass shatters and goes all over. Workers and customers scream in fear.

CHARLIE
Shut the fuck up! No screaming.

A worker gets up and runs toward the landline. Vic shoots at his feet--missing. He takes another shot at the telephone, breaking it. More people scream and yell.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

We don't want any of you to get hurt, but if you don't do exactly what we say, I can't promise that nobody gets shot.

VIC

Don't try to be a hero.

As Charlie continues smashing the glass boxes and taking valuables, Vic approaches the worker who tried to call the police. He walks over to him, towering over his body and bends down to whisper in his ear.

VIC (CONT'D)

You try something stupid like that again and I'll break your fucking hands.

Vic takes the butt of his gun and hits the worker in the face. Blood spills from his head and nose. The man starts to cry.

Vic breaks more glass boxes with his crowbar and stuffs jewelry in the bag.

Charlie watches Vic's brutality in full force. When a woman tries to escape and Vic throws his crowbar across the store, striking her in the back of the head. She collapses. A pool of blood forms around her head and reaches the customers feet.

CHARLIE

It's time to go.

Charlie puts his gun and crowbar in the bag. Vic and Charlie grab the duffle bags and leave the store.

EXT. CHICAGO STREETS. 9:05 AM

Charlie and Vic quickly walk to the pick up corner and removes his ski mask. The car pulls up and they gets in.

CHARLIE

Go!

JEFF

How'd you do?

CHARLIE
Jeff, keep driving.

Before Jeff can turn the corner, two police cars show up and block their path.

JEFF
Shit! What do I do?

CHARLIE
Put the car in reverse.

Jeff puts the car in reverse but another police car shows up behind them.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Keep reversing.

Jeff puts the car in park and he gets out running.

One of the police cars stop Jeff in his tracks, two cops come out and start firing. A bullet hits him in the leg and another in the head--he falls down. Vic also gets out of the car and begins firing back at the cops, hitting one in the shoulder. Another cop fired back at Vic--killing him.

Charlie gets into the drivers seat, starts reversing and smashes into a police car, banging his head against the steering wheel. Blood gushes from his forehead. Four police officers get out of their cars and surround Charlie. He knows it's over for him.

COP #1
Turn off the vehicle and throw the keys out the window. Slowly get out of the car.

INT. POLICE CAR. LATER

Charlie sits in the back of the cop car with his head pressed against the window. Although his plan went horribly wrong, killing two of his friends, he is at peace.

INT. COURT. DAY

Charlie stands before the judge as he reads him his sentence. The court room is empty besides Rachel and Stan who sit in the back. Charlie stands stoic with his eyes looking directly at the judge. His hands in handcuffs.

JUDGE

Item one on the calendar. November 10th 1970. Charlie Wexler versus the state of Illinois. Charlie Wexler has been found guilty of one count of larceny with possession of stolen goods worth approximately 35 thousand, and smashing a police vehicle injuring a police officer. I've carefully reviewed Mr. Wexler's history of theft, conning, carjackings, etc and you obviously didn't learn from your mistakes. Thus, I sentence you to 30 years in prison with the possibility of parole after 15 years.

A security guard takes Charlie by the arm to escort him out of the courtroom. As he walks, Charlie turns to face his family. He gives one simple head nod to Rachel before exiting. He knows this is most likely the final time he will see his family.

INT. JAIL. AFTERNOON

Charlie enters prison with handcuffs still on. He stands in a single file line with the other criminals waiting to be handed their prison uniforms. It's his turn in the front of the line and an officer hands him his blue jumpsuit to put on.

OFFICER

Welcome back.

CUT TO:

INT. JAIL CELL. LATER

Charlie sits alone in his cell with his back against the concrete walls. He stares blankly at the steel bars of the cell. This is where he belongs.

The steel gate opens and Charlie walks out, escorted by an officer.

INT. OFFICE. LATER

Charlie once again meets with the parole officer, Jim.

JIM

What did I tell you?

Charlie doesn't answer.

JIM (CONT'D)

I gave you an opportunity and you know what you did, don't you? It's almost like you wanted to come back here. Obviously, Charlie--you and me know it--you belong in here forever. Your two friends are dead because of a decision you made. And you wanted to make things right.

CHARLIE

Make things right.

JIM

Yeah, that's what you said, only two days ago. That's how long it took you to make another terrible decision that ruined your life, ruined your family's life two times over.

CHARLIE

You don't need to rub it in. I know what I did.

JIM

I don't think you do.

INT. JAIL. AFTERNOON

Charlie sits at a table with his friends Max, Hugo, Theo, Jack, and Tony playing blackjack. Charlie is the dealer.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

I ruined my family's life once before. I did enough damage to last a lifetime. I'm in here so they don't have to see me again.

JIM (V.O.)

Just know what you did. I'll see you in 15 years to see if you've changed. The fucked up thing is Charlie, I may be replaced by someone younger and better looking than me when that time comes. You may not see me ever again.

CHARLIE

Where's Dusty?

Everyone around the table glanced at each other. They look upset.

HUGO
Dusty passed away yesterday.
Stroke.

CHARLIE
(sadness passes over
Charlie's face)
I was gone 48 hours and Dusty died?
Hit or stay?

THEO
Why'd you go and do something
stupid like rob a jewelry store
Charlie?

CHARLIE
What is it--hit or stay?

THEO
Stay.

MAX
What's the answer Charlie?

CHARLIE
I wanted to come back and see my
friends. I thought you idiots would
be happy about that. Didn't you
miss me?

MAX
Dusty was real sad when you left.

CHARLIE
Hit or stay Max?

MAX
Hit.

Charlie hands Max a card. It's an eight. He busts out.

CHARLIE
Bust.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Jack?

JACK
Hit me.

Charlie deals Jack a card. It's a 2. He has 20.

CHARLIE
Hugo?

HUGO
Stay.

Charlie deals a card to himself. It's a queen. He has an ace and a queen. Blackjack.

CUT TO BLACK.