

To Grow Up

Miranda Baker

Characters:

Nicole - A witty First Nations girl who feels her emotions very deeply. Nicole carries heavy burdens on her shoulders, yet still remains good-natured and kind.

Damion - Nicole's closest friend, who is also First Nations. Although he exerts strength and sometimes aggression in public, Damion has a much more sensitive side, revealed only in private. Nicole and Damion rely heavily on each other for emotional support.

Hailey - A non-Indigenous friend of Nicole's. Hailey is a bubbly, kind-hearted friend, who on occasion tends to be naive. Despite a sheltered background, she does her best to understand the worldview of her peers.

Mrs.Stewart - A stern, but well-meaning, science teacher.

Micheal - A misguided, outspoken, teen boy who enjoys starting trouble.

Jacob - Micheal's friend, who backs him in any situation Micheal has instigated.

Damion's Father - An abusive alcoholic, who Damion struggles to love and hate at the same time.

Rebecca - Nicole's drug-addicted mother, who committed suicide when Nicole was still a pre-teen.

Ensemble - Background characters, can be anywhere in number from 3-20. Ensemble play as students, dream characters, flashback characters, etc.

(Mrs.Stewart, Jacob, Micheal, Rebecca, and Damion's Father can all be a part of the ensemble when not in a scene with their character, as long as the costumes are modified to fit in with the rest of the scene.)

Minimum Cast: 8 actors

**A note about costumes:*

While every other character may be dressed in any manner the director sees fit, NICOLE and DAMION'S costumes should be in variations of dark red and black.

Nicole's costume should be primarily dark red.
Damion's costume should be primarily black.

SCENE ONE

Lights up

Set: Bare stage.

HAILEY enters Stage R distracted by her phone. She gets to centre stage before NICOLE enters excitedly from Stage R, unnoticed by HAILEY. NICOLE runs up to her and wraps her arms around HAILEY'S waist.

Hailey: Well, hello there.

Nicole: Hello my one and true love.

Hailey: *(apathetically)* Oh dear, Damion will be so betrayed.

NICOLE hastily lets go of HAILEY'S waist, her face scrunched up in revulsion.

Nicole: Damion is not my boyfriend.

Hailey: Right, right... *(cooly)* now, a bed-friend maybe...

NICOLE smacks HAILEY.

Nicole: Oh my God, ew! That's like incest. Damion is like a brother to me.

Hailey: Then you've got a Jon Snow thing going on.

Nicole: You're disgusting.

Hailey: And you're in denial.

DAMION enters.

Hailey: Speak of the Devil and he shall appear.

Damion: *(to Hailey)* You called? *(to Nicole)* Are you giving me a ride home?

Nicole: *(sarcastically)* Well since you asked so nicely...

DAMION clasps his hands together and drops to his knees.

Damion: Please, my bestest friend in the world, who I adore and love, and have, on multiple occasions, done favours for, would you drive me home?

Nicole: *(smiling)* See? That's better.

NICOLE offers DAMION a hand to stand up. He takes it and immediately pulls her down to the ground.

Nicole: *(half-amused, half-annoyed)* Damion, stop it! I'm in a new shirt, stop!

HAILEY eventually helps pull NICOLE away. NICOLE wraps her arms around HAILEY in an exaggerated hug.

Nicole: Now I know who my true friends are.

DAMION reacts as if he's been shot, dramatically collapsing onto the ground in a sprawled out heap.

Damion: I'm hurt.

Nicole: Not as much as if you get mud all over my car. Get up!

He stays where he is.

Nicole: Get up Damion!

(beat)

Nicole: I will run over you, without hesitation. Get. Up.

DAMION says nothing but extends one hand, which NICOLE takes and struggles to pull him up with. After DAMION is standing up NICOLE begins walking towards Stage L

Damion: I call shotgun!

Nicole: *(laughing)* I'm driving, you idiot!

DAMION and HAILEY follow NICOLE to Stage L. DAMION pushes past HAILEY childishly.

Hailey: Are you ever not a child?

Damion: Are you ever any fun? ...That's a no.

Hailey: To both, apparently.

Before DAMION can reply NICOLE interjects.

Nicole: Guys! Can you get along for like five minutes?

Damion&Hailey: Probably not.

NICOLE rolls her eyes and begins to dig through her purse for her keys. She pulls out an outrageous amount of items from the purse, handing them to her friends as she goes. HAILEY and DAMION struggle to hold all the items being passed to them; the knick-knacks range from practical things like makeup or pens to comedic items such as cutlery, long phone charging wires, textbooks, or anything else the director can think of.

Hailey: Hey Mary Poppins, you find your keys yet?

NICOLE finally pulls her keys from the purse triumphantly. DAMION shakes his head fondly. He and HAILEY dump the items as best they can back into the purse. Whatever falls NICOLE and HAILEY duck down to retrieve, while DAMION wanders off Stage L.

When the two girls finally get all the items back in the bag they look around for DAMION, who is nowhere to be seen.

Nicole: Oh my god, that boy has the attention span of a goldfish hopped up on Red Bull.

NICOLE spots him backstage.

Nicole: What are you doing? Get down from there, you're going to get hurt- NO DON'T JUMP-

DAMION groans from backstage, limping back on as NICOLE and HAILEY shake their heads.

Damion: In hindsight that wasn't a good idea.

Nicole: Clearly.

HAILEY tosses a smug look at DAMION before turning back to NICOLE.

Hailey: So who'd you get assigned to for TA experience?

Nicole: ...Mrs. Stewart.

DAMION and HAILEY grimace and hiss in apparent sympathy.

Damion: Oof. I don't even do that program and I hear that that sucks.

Nicole: So I've been told.

Hailey: I mean, she's nice enough...

Nicole: I was in her class last year, so at least we know each other... And I don't mind her, so it shouldn't be so, so bad.

Damion: You said you wanted to *end yourself* like every day last ye-

Nicole: Yes, thank you, Damion!

Hailey: You guys are such a cute couple.

Nicole&Damion: Shut up Hailey.

Blackout

END OF SCENE ONE

SCENE TWO

Lights up

Set: A classroom. A teaching podium sits Stage R, it faces centre stage. A table is set centre stage and it faces the podium.

MRS.STEWART teaches from her podium. There should be a 'lesson' prepared on coal and gas as a source of energy. This lesson will be said whenever NICOLE interacts with MRS.STEWART, and before HAILEY and NICOLE begin talking.

MICHEAL, JACOB, and at least 2 additional students sit at the table listening to the lesson. NICOLE stands upstage centre with a stack of papers, watching the lesson.

HAILEY enters Stage R and quickly crosses to NICOLE. While HAILEY and NICOLE talk, the class 'continues' in mime, indicating that they're whispering.

Hailey: This class is freakishly small, what is it?

Nicole: AP General Sciences.

Hailey: (*sarcastically*) Riveting.

Nicole: Isn't it?

Hailey: How do you have an Advanced Placement class, with *General* Sciences?

Nicole: We hazed the kids until most of them dropped out.

Hailey: Seems legit.

NICOLE snorts but quickly schools her features when MRS.STEWART looks in her direction sharply. DAMION enters from Stage R, briskly walking towards HAILEY and NICOLE.

Nicole: Oh look, everyone's coming to visit me today. You guys are going to get me in trouble; what do you want?

Hailey: Who says we want something?

Nicole: Well, you hate each other so...

Hailey: It's not that we hate each other, per se.

Damion: Well... just a friendly bit of resentment.

NICOLE gives them both a look.

Hailey: And as luck would have it, we ended up partners in Media Arts for the midterm exhibition.

Damion: And we've got a great idea-

Hailey: But we need your car.

Nicole: No way-

HAILEY and DAMION speak one after the other in rapid succession.

Damion: Before you say no-!

Hailey: You would be supporting our growing relationship.

Damion: And our education.

Hailey: Two things I know are very important to you.

Damion: And we aren't even going to be driving it.

Hailey: Just sort of... displaying it theatrically.

Damion: It's not like that piece of junk is worth much *anyways*.

Nicole: Okay, okay. No hate on the car if you want to keep getting rides from it.

Hailey & Damion: That's fair.

(Beat)

Nicole: If my car isn't brought back exactly as it was...

Hailey: Thank you, thank you, thank you!

Nicole: Now get out of here, before you get me in trouble.

Hailey: Oh please, you're so good with this class it would take nothing short of you starting a massive *fire* for you to get in trouble.

Nicole: *(Rolling her eyes)* Sure.

MRS.STEWART squints at her podium, NICOLE moves to her side, holding a pair of spectacles out. MRS.STEWART takes them and continues her lecture. MRS.STEWART

begins to look around for a pen, which NICOLE also produces. Finally, MRS.STEWART begins to look for the work, which NICOLE hands her.

Throughout this entire sequence MRS.STEWART has not looked at NICOLE, being too distracted to notice the assistance. The sequence resembles clockwork.

Mrs.Stewart: Now, let's see what's up for discussion today... "The disadvantages of non-renewable energy resources, and how it affects the world around us."

MRS. STEWART steps away from her podium with her clipboard extended out, she turns towards the (mimed) board to write at the front of the class, not realizing her clipboard is out. NICOLE ducks without missing a beat. MRS.STEWART turns back, and without looking NICOLE ducks again. MRS.STEWART knocks over her (plastic) coffee mug, which NICOLE casually catches and returns to its place. She takes the clipboard from MRS.STEWART and returns to HAILEY and DAMION's side.

Mrs.Stewart: Alright. For example, some groups of First Nations oppose the proposed pipelines because they believe it infringes on their rights.

The class murmurs for a moment before MICHEAL puts up his hand and is given the go-ahead to speak.

Micheal: Honestly though, like does it really? I don't get why everyone makes such a big deal out of that. Natives oppose literally everything, and it's not like they actually have to care; they don't work for their money.

Jacob: And it doesn't actually say they 'own the land' anywhere, so why does it matter?

This instantly catches the attention of NICOLE, HAILEY, and DAMION. The debate continues in mime as NICOLE whispers to HAILEY and exchanges a meaningful look with DAMION.

Nicole: *(Worried)* This is going to get ugly, fast.

Micheal: I'm just saying, why does it matter so much? If it was truly their land wouldn't there be like a paper that said so on it?

Mrs.Stewart: Well, that's part of the issue Micheal, most First Nations land was forcibly taken from them. In many ways, that's exactly the problem in BC, there weren't any treaties signed by the Indigenous people. That means there was no legal standing between the government taking the land and the Aboriginal people willingly letting it go.

Micheal: *(Getting more and more animated)* If it was their land they would still be living in longhouses right now. Canada wouldn't even be a first-world country! Like I get that

some of it sucked, but it helped them in the end. Like, they wouldn't be able to read or whatever without the help they got.

Student 1: Dude, what happened to them isn't considered 'help.'

Student 2: Yeah, they weren't there to learn, they were there so they could be white.

Micheal: So? Now we have to pay them all our taxes for something we didn't even do.

DAMION advances forward as if to fight, NICOLE pushes him back with a shake of her head. The discussion between MICHEAL, JACOB, and MRS.STEWART continues in mime. NICOLE leads DAMION gently by the arm towards the back of the class, Stage L. HAILEY stays behind. NICOLE and DAMION stop behind the class.

Nicole: You need to go. This sucks, but you can't get into a fight over it.

Damion: (*furious*) I know... It's just-! I just wish I could go over there and-!

Nicole: I know. But it won't do anything. Look around, you start a fight and everything they are saying disappears, and you're the one getting suspended.

DAMION nods hesitantly and glares at MICHEAL and JACOB. The scene taking place bursts into sound. MICHEAL stands abruptly from his seat.

Micheal: They're basically stealing from us and they don't deserve any of it! We're the ones who pay for their welfare, and their booze, and they do absolutely nothing!

Jacob: And we learn about them all the time! We get it, we know what a residential school was, it was a school for Natives, the end.

Micheal: And then they go on, and on, and on, like it matters or something. If they really wanted 'reconciliation' and not pity, they would just move on already.

Jacob: And like, it's not like the whole residential school thing matters anymore. They're gone, it's time to forget about it. There aren't even any real Natives left, and if there are, then let's be honest... they're screwing their cousin.

DAMION launches himself at JACOB, yelling abuse. NICOLE is just barely holding him back. The STUDENTS react to his outburst, launching themselves away from the table and spreading out.

Mrs. Stewart: (*forcibly*) Alright! I think that's enough for today. Remove yourself from my class Damion, I don't want to have to call the principal to get involved in this.

DAMION stops trying to get past NICOLE but still looks livid.

Damion: Are you serious right now?

Mrs.Stewart: (*harshly*) The rest of you sit back down and finish your work.

The class does so, MRS.STEWART glances back down at her podium and begins to write.

Hailey: (*Looking at Mrs.Stewart*) Why isn't she doing anything?

Damion: (*scoffing*) Take a wild guess.

Nicole: Okay, you both need to go. Right now.

It is clear that NICOLE has been deeply affected by the events of the class. HAILEY reluctantly exits Stage R. DAMION stays, he places his hands on NICOLE'S shoulders.

Damion: You good?

Nicole: Of course.

Damion: I could still go and fight them.

Nicole: We both know that won't do anything.

Damion: Might make me feel better...

Nicole: As fighting usually does. No, she won't care why you're doing it, just that it was you. Now, you really have to go, or you'll get in trouble.

Damion: Yeah, I get it. I'm gonna go, but call me later, okay?

Nicole: Sure.

DAMION exits Stage R. NICOLE glances to the class and back to DAMION as he leaves. MRS.STEWART approaches her, good-naturedly putting a hand on NICOLE's shoulder, which she shrugs off.

Mrs.Stewart: Are you alright Nicole?

Nicole: Mhm.

NICOLE glances towards the boys as if asking a question.

Mrs.Stewart: That's a good example of a debate that needs to be more guided than free, but we know for next time.

NICOLE nods, still glancing at the boys.

Nicole: But shouldn't they-

Mrs.Stewart: The problem with Debate is that it is a place to speak opinions, yes?
Without penalty.

NICOLE gets the message, nodding her head slowly.

Nicole: In that case, I have to go.

Mrs.Stewart: Pardon? Where are you going? Nicole!?

NICOLE ignores her, exiting Stage R.

SFX: Door slamming

Blackout

END OF SCENE TWO

SCENE THREE

Lights up

Set: A bench slightly upstage on Stage L.

SFX: Rain falling in the background softly

NICOLE sits on a bench, laptop out, headphones on. She is lost to the world as she types. HAILEY enters with an umbrella and sits next to NICOLE. The two look at each other, then go back to either staring ahead or typing. NICOLE slides her headphones off her ears.

Hailey: It's raining out.

Nicole: I'd noticed.

Hailey: And it's cold as Hell out here.

Nicole: Didn't think Hell was cold.

Hailey: It will be when you get there.

NICOLE tries to laugh but it comes out flat.

Hailey: You aren't cold? Where's your rain jacket?

Nicole: I *wasn't* cold. Now I'm a bit chilled.

The two chuckle dryly.

(Beat)

Hailey: What happened in that class was really messed up.

Nicole: I knew you'd bring that up.

Hailey: Any decent person would have been upset by what happened in there. *I* was upset by it, so I can't imagine-

NICOLE stands.

Nicole: No. You can't. But I don't want your pity.

Hailey: I'm not pitying you, I'm upset. Those kids-

Nicole: Are repeating what they've learned at home.

Hailey: That's no excuse, they should have-

Nicole: (*snapping*) Well, there's a lot that 'should have' happened but didn't, okay!

(*Beat*)

Hailey: Like what?

As NICOLE speaks she gets closer and closer to tears.

Nicole: Like me! I stayed silent! I should have said something, or done something, or... I don't know... But I sat there, and I listened, and I said nothing. I heard what they were saying and I felt my heart sinking into my stomach, and I realized later that it wasn't *just* because of what they were saying, it was because I wasn't defending my culture. My whole life I've been told how important it is to stand up for yourself, because it isn't just for yourself, it's for everyone, and yet what did I do? I sat there and let them go at it. How stupid is that? So now I feel like I'm some kind of hypocrite, and I feel betrayed and stupid, and my heart is *still in my stomach* and I don't know how to get it back.

NICOLE sits back down and puts her head in her hands, taking shuddering breaths. HAILEY'S hand hovers above her back as if she is unsure of what to do.

Hailey: Nicole, you're not responsible for fighting every fight that comes your way. Adults in that class said nothing. I said nothing, even though I knew it was wrong. You're allowed to be upset, but you shouldn't feel guilty.

Nicole: Don't try and make me feel better. You don't get it! And you will *never* get it! You live in your books, and all your fantasies, and you never have to worry about anything past the four walls of your nice house and perfect family. We live in reality, where this never stops, where, in one way or another, we are constantly fighting a war that we didn't start, that we were born into. You were allowed to take however long you wanted to grow up, we don't get that luxury.

HAILEY looks hurt by NICOLE's outburst but says nothing. They lapse into silence, neither of the girls looking at each other.

(*beat*)

Nicole: I'm sorry. That was uncalled for.

Hailey: No I get it, no matter how much we have in common there's always going to be that *thing* that separates us. I guess... I just don't think about it as much, I don't *have* to think about it as much. I can't imagine feeling like-

Nicole: Like what? Cause even I don't know; sometimes... I just feel so tired.

Hailey: Tired?

Nicole: Sometimes it feels like the weight of my ancestors' fight is on my shoulders, sometimes that's too much... But it's not just their fight, it's mine too, and I should be proud to fight it, I *am* proud, I've always been proud of who I am, but then today-

Hailey: But today you were tired, and hurt, and that's okay. Because tomorrow you're going to be stronger, and that is all anyone can ask of you.

NICOLE bursts into tears, HAILEY embraces her. The two cling to each other while Nicole sobs.

Fade to black

END OF SCENE THREE

SCENE FOUR

SFX: School bell ringing

Set: Bare stage.

Lights up

The hallway floods with STUDENTS, all talking and moving. NICOLE and DAMION move against the crowd. NICOLE is holding an arm full of books. As soon as the pair reach centre stage the rest of the students fall silent and still, still mouthing conversations and miming actions. The students form small clusters all around the stage.

Damion: So you're coming over later right?

Nicole: Am I?

Damion: You are now.

HAILEY catches up to the two of them from Stage L.

Hailey: Nicole! Nicole, hey! Are you sure you're okay?

Nicole: What? Oh! About yesterday! Yeah I'm good now, thanks. It just caught me off guard is all.

Damion: It's always weird when stuff like that happens at school or whatever. It's like, "Whoa, you're closer than usual, usually racist jerks are at least one crosswalk away."

NICOLE chuckles.

Nicole: That was nothing, when my mum was in school there were these assholes who always called her and her foster siblings-

BOY ONE approaches NICOLE from one of the clusters on Stage L as she says her line, carrying a coat easily recognizable as from the 70s. He shoves into her, passing her the coat. When she is shoved her books fall.

Boy One: *(Mutters)* Wagon Burners.

NICOLE puts the jacket on while saying her line, the rest of the stage freezes:

Nicole: She didn't take that at all...

Nicole *(As her mother/Rebecca)*: Hey! You want to try that again?!

Boy One: *(Turning)* Excuse me?

Nicole: What, not so tough anymore? Say it to my face if you're going to say it, jackass.

Boy One: I'm sorry, were you saying something Pocahontas?

Nicole: Excuse me?

Damion *(as Rebecca's brother)*: Rebecca, let's go. Cynthia is going to be mad if she's gotta come down again.

BOY TWO joins BOY ONE from another cluster.

Boy Two: Cynthia, is that foster mommy two or three?

The boys laugh. NICOLE lunges towards them, held back by HAILEY and DAMION.

Boy One: Ooo, kitty's got claws. I'm warning you, I don't hit girls on principle, but I'm willing to make an exception. Back off.

DAMION, HAILEY, and NICOLE begin to leave, NICOLE glares at the boys as she goes.

Boy One: Stupid Indians, they've got the right kind of idea sending them to those schools. They obviously aren't suited to this level of education.

NICOLE, DAMION, and HAILEY spin around in shock. NICOLE advances on the boys.

Nicole: Are you serious?! You want to talk about not being suited to 'this level of education'? Look in the mirror! You do nothing for yourself, you stupid, arrogant, little daddy's boy!

BOY ONE punches her. NICOLE recoils and launches herself back at the boys. The frozen clusters of teenagers burst into roars of excitement and cheers as they watch the fight. TEACHER enters. BOY TWO tries to yank NICOLE away from BOY ONE. DAMION launches himself at BOY TWO, pulling him away from NICOLE.

Teacher: Rebecca! Steven! That is enough!

TEACHER pulls NICOLE away from BOY ONE roughly. DAMION grabs HAILEY'S hand and runs into the crowd of kids. NICOLE goes to follow them, but the TEACHER grabs her arm.

Teacher: Mr.Malcom, you and Mr.Jones may go.

Nicole: But he-

Teacher: Quiet! You're in enough trouble as it is. Stupid girl, always starting trouble.

Nicole: I didn't start it! He did! He was saying-

Teacher: I said *quiet*, I don't care what he did. It was most likely in defence of *your* behaviour. This isn't a reservation, and if you insist on acting like you're on one, you should go back to where you came from.

Nicole: Excuse me? He hit me first!

Teacher: I don't care!

NICOLE tries to protest, only to be cut off once again. The teenagers react with 'oohs' and whispers, but no one steps up to help.

Teacher: Zip it! Now, you're going to march all the way to Principal Clements' office, right now, and he'll decide your punishment.

TEACHER begins to drag NICOLE away towards Stage R. As they reach the wing, they grab the jacket and NICOLE ducks out of it, turning towards centre. All teenagers in clusters freeze. DAMION and HAILEY emerge from the cluster and meet Nicole at centre.

Hailey: What does 'wagon burner' even mean?

Damion: Nothing good.

NICOLE bends down to pick up her books while explaining.

Nicole: It's a super outdated racial slur.

SFX: School bell ringing

The other teenagers suddenly reanimate, chatting, shouting, and moving out of the hallway.

Hailey: Huh, I've never heard it before.

Nicole: (*jokingly*) Well I hope not. C'mon, if we're late for English again we're probably going to get crucified.

Blackout

END OF SCENE FOUR

SCENE FIVE

Lights up

Set: A couch set centre stage.

DAMION and NICOLE lounge about on a couch, leaning against each other in a comfortable silence as they browse their phones.

Damion: Why didn't you call me if you were upset?

Nicole: *(looking up from her phone)* Hm?

Damion: When you were upset... why didn't you call me?

Nicole: I just wanted to be alone I guess.

Damion: Hailey knew, apparently.

NICOLE adjusts herself so she faces DAMION.

Nicole: Hailey found me, I didn't call her. You know you're the first person I call if I ever want help Dame, that's never going to change.

Damion: I know... I just wish you'd have told me you were upset.

Nicole: Despite your belief otherwise, I'm not made out of glass. I just needed to get some emotions out, you know how it is.

Damion: All too well.

NICOLE leans against his shoulder again and smiles playfully, lost in a memory.

Nicole: Do you remember when Toby Brown snapped my bra strap in fifth grade, so you beat him up under the slide?

DAMION chortles.

Damion: Yes, and you ran and got the teacher and told her he fell off the fence while climbing it.

Nicole: He got two days of detention and I got sweet, sweet revenge.

Damion: *(smirking)* He deserved it. What brought you down that memory lane?

Nicole: I was thinking about my cat.

Damion: Your cat...? Oh! Oh yeah, what was that thing's name...

Nicole&Damion: Sherbet Lemon.

Damion: No wonder it ran away, you named a black cat 'Sherbet Lemon.'

Nicole: Hey! I loved that cat, and his name.

Damion: So what about ol' Sherb made you think of Toby Brown?

Nicole: Mom was in town then, remember? And you came over after-school and told her what you did, and instead of freaking out she bought us ice cream.

Damion: Oh yeah, that was really fun.

Nicole: I got Sherbet Lemon flavour. And then like a week later Mom gave me a kitten and said he would protect me, but I needed to give him a good name, and I thought of you and Toby Brown, so I named him Sherbet Lemon.

Damion: I didn't know you named him after me, I'm honoured.

Nicole: Well don't be, he was the world's most annoying cat. Like the kid he was named after, I guess.

DAMION rolls his eyes and butts NICOLE with his shoulder. NICOLE laughs but her smile eventually fades. DAMION notices.

Damion: Hey, what's wrong?

Nicole: I was just thinking, I wonder if all my happiest memories with my mom were when she was high.

(beat)

SFX: Door opening, and then closing.

Damion: *(humourlessly)* Speaking of, look who made it home.

SFX: Glass crashing/breaking

Nicole: *(bitterly sarcastic)* Your dad sounds happy. I better go.

NICOLE stands and begins to gather her things. DAMION looks upset with his father's arrival, he won't meet NICOLE'S eyes nor has he moved since they heard him enter. NICOLE notices and stops.

Nicole: You should come over; my dad's probably chill with you crashing on the couch tonight...

Damion: Thanks, but I'm good.

Nicole: Damion, I really think-

Damion: (*snappy*) It's fine Nicole, get out of here.

Nicole: Fine, I'm going.

NICOLE begins to walk away from him but stops.

Nicole: If you know... something happens, come over. My window's always unlocked.

Damion: (*jokingly*) Which probably isn't safe.

Nicole: I'm willing to risk it. I'll see you later.

NICOLE walks towards Stage L. DAMION'S FATHER enters, also Stage L. He is disheveled, unkempt, and clearly drunk. Nicole stops when he intercepts her.

Damion's Father: Oooh, go' a girl up here Sport? I knew you were a li'l player, but doing the deed when your old man's gone? Wha's her name? Do you know it?

Damion: Dad-

DAMION'S FATHER laughs and waves DAMION off dismissively.

Nicole: (*uncomfortable*) It's Nicole, sir. You know me.

Damion's Father: Holy shit, Nicole-Rebecca's kid-Nicole?

Nicole: Mhm.

Damion's Father: You grew up pret'y! Jus' like your mother, she was always such a pret'y girl. Shame what happened-

Nicole: Thank you. I was just going, it was nice seeing you again.

DAMION looks mortified at his father's behaviour. He comes between Nicole and his father, trying to steer him back towards Stage L by the arm.

Damion: That's enough Dad, Nicole has to go. And you should probably get in the shower.

DAMION'S FATHER shoves away from DAMION'S hold, flailing his arms around drunkenly while shouting. DAMION tries to placate him, with little success.

Damion's Father: Don' be getting smart with me! You don' tell me what I should be doin'. What d'you know? Got such a mouth on you, goddamn. Kids ain't grateful for shit nowadays, stupid brat.

DAMION'S FATHER goes to shove DAMION again, but NICOLE intercepts and pulls DAMION away. DAMION'S FATHER catches her wrist, jerking her backwards before releasing her. DAMION shoves him backwards, getting in his face.

Damion: Don't touch her!

Damion's Father: Calm down you little spastic. Christ, can't do anything anymore without you mouthing off about this or that!

Nicole: I'm just going to go...

NICOLE hurries off Stage L, momentarily stopping the boys' fight. DAMION and DAMION'S FATHER continue to fight in raised voices, overtop the sound of the door shutting.

SFX: Door slamming

Blackout

END OF SCENE FIVE

SCENE SIX

The following sequence takes place within a dream.

Set: Couch set centre stage.

NICOLE stands upstage centre, looking straight out at the audience with a blank look on her face. She turns her head slowly to the downstage left corner, a woman (REBECCA) enters and stands, facing NICOLE. NICOLE'S facial expression changes to happiness. She runs to REBECCA and hugs her tightly, the two stand there and rock back and forth gently.

Rebecca: Shhhhh, everything is alright.

Nicole: Mom... Why did you leave?

Rebecca: Sweetheart, you know why.

The lights change to red.

POLICEMEN enter, grabbing NICOLE by the arms gently at first, then firmer as she begins to struggle. REBECCA turns away from NICOLE, who is beginning to shout in panic. The POLICEMEN talk over her as if she weren't there.

Policeman 1: Poor thing, we just got her to calm down.

Policeman 2: Always a shame when they drag their kids into this.

Policeman 1: We should get the kid out of here, she hasn't said a thing since she stopped screaming.

Policeman 1: Call CPS, looks like she's going into an emergency home.

Nicole is taken offstage, Stage R.

The lights fade before quickly coming back up to REBECCA'S form, collapsed, downstage left.

NICOLE reenters calmly, a backpack over her shoulders. She sees her mother and walks slowly towards her.

Nicole: Mom?

(beat)

Nicole: Mom, what's wrong? Mom!

NICOLE rushes to REBECCA, sinking down to her knees and shaking her. NICOLE is growing more and more hysterical.

Nicole: Mom! What did you do?

NICOLE finds an empty pill bottle near her mother, she screams and throws it away like it had burned her hand.

Nicole: Help! Help me! Somebody! Mom!

Lights fade to black

NICOLE continues to scream and yell throughout the blackout. REBECCA exits. DAMION enters. NICOLE lays down on the couch like one would when sleeping. She yells once more before being 'woken up.'

Nicole: Please!

End of dream sequence.

Snap to lights up

NICOLE gasps in surprise, her limbs jerk as she wakes up. DAMION squats by her shoulders, having just shaken her awake.

Damion: Hey, it's just me. You were having a dream.

NICOLE sits up and composes herself. She makes room for DAMION on the couch sleepily. He sits next to her, trying to angle his face away from her eye-line.

Nicole: Thanks.

Damion: No problem. (*guiltily*) Did it have anything to do with what happened at my house?

Nicole: No.

Damion: I'm so sorry about my dad, he hasn't been home in a few days, I didn't know he was coming back today.

Nicole: Hey, that's not your fault. It wasn't even him, it was just... my mum; he mentioned her, and it's getting kind of close to the anniversary, and it was just a bad combination.

DAMION groans and puts his head in his hands heavily.

Nicole: Again, it's not your fault. Now let me see.

Damion: See what?

Nicole: What you're obviously trying to hide from me... How bad is it?

NICOLE tries to get a look at his face, but DAMION moves so it isn't visible to her. His face should not be completely visible to the audience either, whether it be through the use of a hood, cap, or the actor's movements.

Damion: Not that bad, he was drunk and got pissed off, it was really just one lucky hit.

NICOLE grabs his shoulder and pulls him so he's facing her, she recoils when she sees his face. Tenderly, she touches his eye, causing DAMION to flinch backwards and hiss in pain. DAMION is now sporting a prominent black eye.

Nicole: You're lying. It looks pretty bad, Damion...

Damion: Well it looks worse than it is because I can hardly feel it. It's the ones that don't show up right away that hurt like Hell.

Nicole: He's such a-

Damion: He's drunk-

Nicole: That isn't an excuse-

DAMION and NICOLE'S voices quickly raise, their argument fuelled by frustrations and pent up emotions.

Damion: You know what it's like living with someone who went into the system.

Nicole: Everyone has their shit to deal with, it doesn't mean they're excused from their actions!

Damion: You think I don't know that?

Nicole: Well you clearly don't! It's been years and you haven't said anything yet!

DAMION stands up aggressively and starts to pace.

Damion: You think I don't hate him when he's like that? Of course I do! But he's still *my dad*, and I still want to live with him, not some stranger-!

Nicole: My mom-!

Damion: Your mom didn't even know your name half the time Nicole, the other half she wasn't even here!

NICOLE'S eyes widen and she deflates, obviously very hurt by his comment. DAMION also loses his momentum and sits back down heavily.

Damion: Shit, I'm sorry. I'm so, so sorry. I'm-I'm going to go.

DAMION walks away towards Stage L, obviously in pain. Just before DAMION exits NICOLE stands up.

Nicole: Wait.

He stops and turns towards her.

Nicole: Where are you going?

DAMION shrugs. NICOLE sighs and gestures for him to come back towards her. DAMION slowly makes his way back to the couch.

Nicole: You can stay, even though that was a real jerk thing to say.

Damion: I'm sorry, that was really shitty of me.

Nicole: But you're right; she didn't know my name half the time, or she was gone. So I know *exactly* how it feels to hate and love a parent at the same time. So, I think if there's anybody who has the *right* to talk to you about this, it's me.

Damion: You're right, I'm sorry. But I can't tell... he's my dad.

NICOLE sighs and nods, resigned. She motions for DAMION to join her on the couch, he lowers himself onto the couch stiffly.

(beat)

Nicole: Your dad thinks I'm pretty.

Damion: That's another thing he shouldn't have said. I mean, he isn't *wrong*, but it wasn't cool for him to say it.

Nicole: Do you remember what my mom said? About when men started to call me pretty?

Damion: ...Yes, I do. That'd you'd be safer if you kept yourself ugly.

Nicole: You know why she said it, right?

Damion: I guessed.

Nicole: She said it because she grew up pretty, and I reminded her of herself. She grew up pretty... and one of her foster dads made sure she knew it.

DAMION winces.

Nicole: Yet, I've never feared men. I understand why I should, but I never felt that kind of fear, not like my mom did. I think, that, in part, that's because of you. We've always looked out for each other, haven't we?

Damion: Yeah, we have.

Nicole: *(softly)* You've been climbing into my window for ten years now, that's ten years I've had to watch him do this to you. Ten years I've done nothing to help you and hated myself for it.

DAMION wraps an arm around her.

Damion: What are you talking about? You're the reason I've been able to survive the past ten years in that house. A couple more months, and you and I are out of here, for good.

Nicole: But we're never not going to be messed up, are we?

(beat)

Damion: I don't think so.

(beat)

Fade to black

END OF SCENE SIX

SCENE SEVEN

Lights up

Set: Stage R is bare. Stage L there are two chairs beside each other, facing the audience.

SFX: School bell ringing

DAMION and HAILEY enter from opposite sides of the stage, HAILEY acknowledges DAMION but DAMION does his best to ignore HAILEY, turning and walking in the opposite direction.

Hailey: Hey, rude much? I'm trying to talk to you.

DAMION sighs and turns around to face her.

Damion: What do you want?

Hailey: Oh Jesus, what happened to your eye?

Damion: This is why we now have a rule that Nicole has to duct tape the remote to her hand when we play Wii.

HAILEY cringes.

Hailey: Ouch. Okay, you get a free pass for being a jerk, just this once though.

Damion: I'm touched. What do you want?

Hailey: Chill. I wanted to talk to you about Nicole...

Damion: *(sighing)* What about her?

Hailey: Well c'mon, you've got to know what's wrong with her, you two are with each other *all the time*.

Damion: Nicole's business is none of *your* business.

Hailey: But it is yours?

Damion: Yes, Hailey, it is. Because we've known each other our entire lives, and I was there for her when she needed it.

Hailey: Well I'm trying to be there for her too, but she won't tell me what's wrong.

Damion: Then take a hint, she doesn't want to tell you.

DAMION starts to walk away from HAILEY.

Hailey: Look, I get that we aren't friends, but Nicole *is* my friend. And I can't stand seeing her look so... numb. So please, just tell me and I'll leave it alone.

DAMION stops walking, turns to face HAILEY and walks back towards her determinately.

Damion: Fine. But if this ever gets told to anyone else I will end you. Understood?

HAILEY nods quickly with widened eyes.

Damion: *(sighing)* Follow me.

Stage R lights dim as DAMION pulls HAILEY towards Stage L.

Damion: Nicole doesn't like talking about it, so don't bring up her mom with her, okay?

Hailey: But she already told me her mom died a few years ago.

Damion: Did she tell you that her mom killed herself? And that it was Nicole who found her?

HAILEY covers her mouth in shock, shaking her head "no."

Damion: Yeah. So don't bring her up for a while.

Hailey: Do they know why she- Was there anything that would have-

Damion: If you're asking about a note, no, there wasn't one left. But, I mean, it's not hard to guess; Rebecca had a hard life.

Hailey: Nicole never said anything...

Damion: Why would she?

DAMION sighs and slumps down into a chair.

A voice recording plays of the following dialogue:

Nicole: *(crying)* Damion you need to come over. Please, just- I need you to come over, right now. Oh my God...

Damion: Nicole? Nicole? What's wrong? Nicole?!

End of voice of recording

Damion: Her mom was in and out of her life like a revolving door. She'd pack up and leave after a few weeks, sometimes without warning. Nicole was always so devastated when she'd go... After Rebecca killed herself Nicole couldn't really get closure because her mom left her so often she half-expected her to come back eventually. She constantly had to remind herself that, this time, Rebecca was never coming back.

Hailey: That's awful.

Damion: Yeah, well, not as uncommon as you might think. Rebecca was never a mother anyways, not that I'd ever say that to Nicole. But, back when *my* mom was around she would actually take care of me, and not the other way around... Don't get me wrong, I loved Rebecca, but I don't think she was really ready to be a mother when she got pregnant with Nicole. It's been Nicole's dad that's taken care of her all her life.

Hailey: Were you there when Nicole found her mom... like that?

Damion: No, but I was there for the aftermath...

NICOLE enters frantically from Stage R. The lights come up on Stage R and dim on Stage L. DAMION meets NICOLE on Stage R, equally frantic. HAILEY stays Stage L.

Damion: Nicole!

NICOLE sees DAMION and runs to him, crying. They meet and throw their arms around each other.

Nicole: *(sobbing)* Damion! She-my mom- she, oh my God... I wasn't home. Why wasn't I home? I should've come home earlier!

Damion: Shhh, it's okay. I know what happened, it's okay. It's not your fault.

They lower themselves to the ground together. NICOLE continues to cry while DAMION looks shell-shocked himself.

Nicole: They aren't letting me go with my dad.

Damion: What? Why?

Nicole: They said something about, about needing to test him for drugs and alcohol or something, and then a social worker has to come and check he's a good guardian. My dad doesn't drink, I told them he doesn't, so why do they have to do that? I just want to go home...

POLICEMAN enters Stage R. He approaches DAMION and NICOLE.

Policeman: Sweetie, I need you to come with me. We're going to find you a place to sleep tonight.

NICOLE holds onto DAMION tighter, shaking her head.

Nicole: No! Where's my dad? I want my dad!

Policeman: He can't see you yet. Now come on, we need to go now.

Damion: Could you give us a minute? Jesus Christ, she just lost her mom.

POLICEMAN takes NICOLE'S arm and pulls her up firmly but not harshly. NICOLE shrieks, DAMION stands up angrily.

Damion: What the Hell, man! She needs her family right now, Jesus Christ!

Policeman: I'm sorry, I really am. But we need to get to the station.

NICOLE and the POLICEMAN exit Stage R, POLICEMAN'S hand on NICOLE'S back as he leads her out. Stage R lights dim as Stage L lights come up. DAMION resumes his position on the chair.

Hailey: Shit. That's terrible, why couldn't she just go home?

Damion: Racism isn't just people yelling mean things, Hailey. It hides.

Hailey: It must have been so scary...

Damion: It was, for everyone. A tragedy too, Rebecca wasn't even thirty yet, she was young.

Hailey: So was Nicole.

Damion: Yeah, so was Nicole. We were all too young to grow up.

Blackout

END OF SCENE SEVEN

SCENE EIGHT

SFX: Light fall of rain

Set: A bench slightly upstage on Stage L

NICOLE sits on the bench gazing into the distance. DAMION enters and approaches her casually.

Damion: Hey, what are you thinking about?

Nicole: Everything and nothing.

DAMION sits beside her.

Damion: If “everything and nothing” had a shape, what would it be?

Nicole: Angry.

Damion: Angry at what?

NICOLE leans her head against his shoulder.

Nicole: The world, those boys, Mrs. Stewart, your dad, my mum...

Damion: It's been a rough couple of days.

Nicole: Yeah, it has. God, was the thing in the science class really just three days ago?

Damion: Time flies when people are awful. Hey, at least you're feeling something.

Nicole: I'm feeling too much.

Damion: So what do you need?

Nicole: Frankly, I need a drink.

DAMION and NICOLE laugh.

Damion: Look at us, we're not so bad. I think considering everything, we turned out pretty good.

Nicole: You're one suspension from being expelled, and I'm an emotional wreck, but yeah, all things considered, we're decent.

DAMION stands and pulls NICOLE up with him, so that the pair are standing face to face.

Damion: What are you talking about? You're a genius! Like, a serious nerd.

NICOLE laughs and smacks him.

Nicole: And *you're* the best friend anyone could have ever asked for. Your cooking..., less great, verging on poison, but oh well.

Damion: Um false, my cooking is amazing; the last batch of *Hamburger Helper* was almost edible.

They laugh.

Damion: My awful cooking aside, we're going to be okay. We've got futures, and we've got each other. That's enough for me.

Nicole: We'll figure it out.

Damion: Exactly.

Nicole: Having a plan before we graduate is probably smarter, but who needs planning?

Damion: We'll just wing it. What's the worst that can happen?

NICOLE and DAMION laugh and hug each other. As they retreat from the embrace they stop and stare at each other for a prolonged moment.

NICOLE and DAMION kiss.

NICOLE pulls away.

Damion: I'm sorry, was that-

Nicole: Shut up. No, it was good, all good. It's just that, everything and nothing is still on my mind... I need to do something about it. *We* need to do something about it.

Damion: We can't fix the world.

Nicole: No, but we'll sure as Hell give it everything we got.

Blackout

END OF SCENE EIGHT

SCENE NINE

Lights up

Set: Mrs.Stewart's podium is set Stage R on a diagonal. Stage L is bare.

MRS.STEWART stands at her podium, prepping her next lesson. A GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR (MR.WHITE) stands Stage L, leafing through a folder. NICOLE enters Stage R at the exact same time DAMION enters Stage L.

Nicole: Mrs.Stewart?

Damion: Mr.White?

MR.WHITE and MRS.STEWART look up.

Mrs.Stewart: Nicole! It's good to see you.

Mr.White: What can I do for you, Damion?

NICOLE and DAMION look at each other, almost as if they can see each other despite being in different locations. They steel themselves and continue at the same time.

Nicole&Damion: I need to talk to you about something.

Mrs.Stewart: Yes?

Mr.White: Of course, what's up?

Nicole: It's about that debate last week, it did upset me.

Damion: Um, it's about home...

Lights begin to fade

Nicole: The things that were being said crossed a line...

Damion: Sometimes when my dad's had too many he can get kind of violent...

MRS.STEWART and MR.WHITE freeze. NICOLE and DAMION look at each other again, they nod once in support. Slowly, they turn to face the audience, and nod once at them.

Blackout

END OF PLAY