

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

CHARLIE GARCIA, mid-20s, in a pair of jeans and a t-shirt, stands at a pump next to a Prius with a discolored hood and a missing side mirror. The casino-filled Las Vegas skyline stretches into the air behind him.

Gas nozzle in one hand, Charlie swipes his card in the card reader with the other. A message pops up on the screen on the pump: "Declined - Please see clerk".

CHARLIE
Goddamn it.

CLERK (O.S.)
Hey!

Charlie looks up to see a teenage boy in tight jeans and a long-tailed t-shirt, just outside the sliding doors at the front of the gas station. He's got a 12-pack of beer in his arms, one of which is being held by the store CLERK.

The TEENAGER is doing his level best to look innocent, though the Clerk, a stout 30-something with a patchy goatee, doesn't look convinced.

CLERK
Where do you think you're going?

TEENAGER
Let me go!

CLERK
Just as soon the cops get here.

Charlie puts the nozzle back in the gas pump, and heads towards the clerk and the teenager.

TEENAGER
My Mom's gonna beat me! I didn't even want the beer.

The teenager sets the 12-pack down quickly. His eyes well up.

CLERK
Didn't want it, my ass.

CHARLIE
Hey. What's going on here?

CLERK
Shoplifter. Just a kid trying to
steal some beer.

Charlie looks at the kid.

CHARLIE
Didn't you say you didn't want it?

The kid looks from the Clerk to Charlie.

TEENAGER
Yeah. I wasn't going to steal
anything.

CHARLIE
Did you open it? Damage it?

The kid is confused.

TEENAGER
No...?

CHARLIE
(to the Clerk)
Doesn't sound like shoplifting to me.
Gotta have an "intent to deprive."

The Clerk glares at him.

CLERK
You a lawyer?

CHARLIE
C'mon. He didn't break the law.

The Clerk scrutinizes Charlie, then shakes his head.

CLERK
We'll let the cops decide.

The kid stops struggling against the clerk, and drops his
gaze to the ground. Charlie glances at him, then pulls out
his wallet.

CHARLIE
What'd the beer cost?

CLERK
\$13.74. With tax.

Charlie hands him a \$20.

CHARLIE
Can you let him go?

The Clerk looks from Charlie to the kid and back. He drops the kid's arm, then takes the money.

CHARLIE (cont'd)
And can I get my change?

The Clerk starts to say something, then shakes his head, and heads into the store. The teenager watches him go.

TEENAGER
Thanks. My Mom really would beat my
ass.

Charlie grins.

CHARLIE
You're welcome. Shoplifting shouldn't
be a beatable offense.

The two stand there for a moment, then the kid pipes up.

TEENAGER
You, uh, going to keep that beer?

He nods towards the 12 pack still sitting on the curb.
Charlie eyes him.

CHARLIE
How old are you?

TEENAGER
17.

CHARLIE
I thought you didn't want it.

TEENAGER
It's yours. Keep it.

He starts to leave. Charlie rolls his eyes.

CHARLIE
Hey.

The teenager turns back.

CHARLIE (cont'd)
Take it.

The teenager pauses, staring at Charlie. Finally, he snatches the beer and takes off. The Clerk returns and hands Charlie his change. Charlie fishes out a \$5. He hands it back.

CHARLIE (cont'd)
 Sorry, I forgot. Can I get \$5 on pump
 8?

The Clerk smirks.

CLERK
 Sure.

He heads back into the store.

BZZZT!

Charlie pulls out his phone and sees an email icon in the notification bar. Charlie swipes down to see the sender. It's the Nevada State Bar. Charlie's attention is immediately re-focused. Very tentatively, he opens the email. At the top, it reads

"Congratulations! You have officially passed
 the Nevada Bar Exam."

Charlie lets out a loud WHOOP. He looks around excitedly. He sees the teenager is just barely in sight down the block. Charlie calls to him.

CHARLIE
 Hey! Hey, can I get one of those
 beers?

EXT. CHARLIE'S DAD'S APARTMENT - DAY

Charlie pulls into a parking spot in his battered Prius. He gets out and takes in the even more battered apartment complex. Charlie's DAD stands in the desert landscaping staring at his phone. He's middle-aged, about a head taller than Charlie, and wearing a Hawaiian shirt.

CHARLIE
 Dad! You ready or what?

Dad doesn't look up.

DAD
 I'm checking the lines. Just a
 minute.

Charlie shakes his head.

CHARLIE
You don't have any money.

DAD
I'm not betting. I want to know how
busy work's going to be tonight.

CHARLIE
It's the Atlantis. It's not going to
be busy.

Dad puts his phone away.

DAD
Just full of positive thoughts,
aren't you?

INT. CHARLIE'S CAR - DAY

Charlie and Dad sit in silence, listening to the obnoxious squeal of Charlie's loose air conditioning belt. Charlie reaches out and turns the A/C off. Now the two are sitting in silence, sweating.

Charlie takes a deep breath, then pipes up.

CHARLIE
I passed.

Dad glances out the window.

DAD
Not yet. I go to the Smith's on
Flamingo.

CHARLIE
The bar, Dad. I passed the bar. I'm a
lawyer now.

DAD
Oh.

They sit silent for a moment.

CHARLIE
Thanks for the support.

Dad shrugs.

DAD

I guess that would probably help you get into med school.

CHARLIE

You're funny.

DAD

Doctors help people. I thought that was something you were interested in.

CHARLIE

I'm going to be a public defender. Helping people is in the job description.

DAD

Before or after the part about letting them stay in jail?

CHARLIE

Not every defense attorney is an asshole. We've been through this.

DAD

I was wondering why you brought it up again.

Charlie grits his teeth.

CHARLIE

I don't know. I thought maybe you'd be proud of me.

Dad gives him a look.

DAD

Sure. Good job, son.

Dad reclines his seat and closes his eyes. Charlie starts to say something, then stops himself. He turns the A/C back on, and the two resume driving in silence.

INT. PUBLIC DEFENDERS OFFICE - DAY

Charlie, now wearing a second hand suit, sits in a drab government office. He's talking with a middle-aged man in a plain beige button-down and a tan tie, the public defender Team Chief, ROGER.

CHARLIE

The cops, the DAs, the Judges, they're all cogs in a system that doesn't care. And people that aren't really bad at heart get ground down by them.

Roger nods.

CHARLIE (cont'd)

Those people deserve justice. I dream about going to bed at night knowing that it's my job to get it for them. The Public Defenders' Office needs me. You need me.

(beat)

Respectfully.

Roger looks at him over tented fingers, then nods knowingly.

ROGER

You might be right.

INT. PUBLIC DEFENDERS OFFICE LOBBY - DAY

Charlie and Roger exit the Team Chief's office.

ROGER

I'll be honest: a lot of qualified candidates put in for this spot. But I've got a good feeling about you. We'll be in touch.

He shakes Charlie's hand whole-heartedly, then glances at a very pretty young woman about Charlie's age standing near the reception desk.

ROGER (cont'd)

Megan?

YOUNG WOMAN

That's me.

Charlie heads for the door. On the way, his phone buzzes. He checks it. It's a text from "Asshole Landlord." It reads:

You're two months behind. Consider this your official notice.

Charlie sighs, and leaves.

Still in the lobby, Roger shakes the Young Woman's hand.

TEAM CHIEF
C'mon in. That's a lovely suit.

Roger leers at the Young Woman's ass as he leads her into his office.

INT. THE GOBI - DAY

A dive bar with a desert theme, the Gobi looks like it was built with a layer of scum over every surface. A life-size stuffed camel stands in the corner near the entrance, sporting patchy fur and the work of amateur graffiti artists.

Behind the bar, an elaborate but clearly homemade mural of sand dunes fills the wall. The bar is peopled with a handful of pool-playing/lounging college kids just a few years younger than Charlie.

Charlie sits at the bar, still in his suit. The bartender, RAY, a handsome, rough-around-the edges woman in her 40s sets a pair of shots in front of him.

RAY
Never heard of someone celebrating an eviction notice.

Charlies scoffs and holds up his phone. The notification tray shows an unopened email.

CHARLIE
The PDs got back to me right after the interview. That's a good sign, Ray. I'm gonna change the world.

RAY
The homeless public defender. Sounds noble.

CHARLIE
I'm not getting evicted. There's a grace period.
(beat)
Do a shot with me. Celebrate. Might be the last time I'm ever in here.

Ray reaches for one of the shots.

CHARLIE (cont'd)
Wait! I've got to actually open it.

Charlie does his best impression of a drumroll, then opens the email. His face immediately falls.

CHARLIE (cont'd)
You've got to be fucking...

Ray tosses her shot back.

RAY
Condolences.

She leaves to help another customer. Charlie's stares at the email. It's from the Public Defenders Office. The opening line reads: "We regret to inform you."

CUT TO:

INT. THE GOBI - NIGHT

Charlie throws back a shot. It's only about his tenth.

In the intervening hours, loud pop music and tipsy college students have filled the bar. Charlie holds his empty glass up to the light and peers through it.

Through the bottom of the glass, he sees a man in his late 30s wearing a rumpled suit and a tie that's barely tied. He's sitting by himself at a line of slot machines idly hitting the "spin" button and drinking a beer.

As Charlie watches, a twenty-something couple walk up to the slot machines. The YOUNG MAN is in clearly unwashed clothes and the YOUNG WOMAN has a pregnancy bulge. The Young Man says something to the MAN IN THE SUIT and gestures at the Pregnant Woman's bulge. The Man in the Suit shakes his head.

The Young Man then points at an empty chair at the machine next to the Man in the Suit. The Man in the Suit spins his stool sideways, and puts his feet up on the empty chair. He leans back in his chair, and goes back to playing his machine.

Charlie sets his glass down and rises from his bar stool with purpose.

Ray, in the process of clocking out, notices him.

RAY
Where you going, Charlie?

CHARLIE
Asshole patrol.