

NEXT DOOR - Family Scenes - Part 2

In play, not film script format

From Series Pilot Episode: 'BORN IN A BOX'

written by

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TIME PERIOD & LOCATION: RICHMOND, CA (1972)

CHARACTERS:

MAX (8) – a light-skinned Black girl with a slight figure buzzing with uncontrollable energy. She wears faded, too-short Scooby-Doo pajamas. Her multiple braids with colorful barrettes are frizzy at the roots where the straightening's grown out.

MOTHER (30s) – a light-skinned Black woman with a slight, graceful build. She exudes effortless elegance, even in her bargain-rack conservative attire: a fancy blouse with a loosely hanging bowtie and a long skirt.

CHARLIE (13) – a tall, big-boned, dark-skinned Black girl, physically years ahead of her age. Her innocent face clashes with a body she doesn't know how to live in yet. She wears faded, too-short jeans and a T-shirt. Her frizzing, straightened hair is yanked into a tight bun. She is constantly pushing up the heavy black-rimmed glasses that are too big for her face. Max refers to the glasses when she calls Charlie 'four eyes'.

SPOILER: Towards the end of the season, when the girls are being chased, Charlie's glasses get shatter. Max learns then that the glasses were not real -- just something Charlie found and chose to wear as a kind of disguise. They made her feel a little wiser, more protected, than she actually is.

SETTING: A narrow, bare-bones kitchen in a modest, aging townhouse. In the corner is a small nook with a folding table and mismatched chairs.

Shortly after the time in the Opening Family Scene.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Max and Charlie are alone.

Charlie is cleaning up the fast food wrappings on the table.

Max is admiring the new black and white saddle shoes she wears.

MAX

This has been the best day ever!
Like to the max!

CHARLIE

(pushing up her glasses,
blurts out)
(MORE)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Mom shouldn't have bought you those shoes!

MAX

Charlie, why don't you like me being happy! Just 'cause you don't have friends and are four-eyes, don't mean I gotta be miserable too!

CHARLIE

(sighing)

Max, I wish you could have new shoes and new clothes....

(quietly)

For me too....

(angrily)

But we don't have the money, can't you understand?

MAX

You're not the mother, Charlie. What do you know?!

Just then, their mother reenters the room

MAX (CONT'D)

(switching to cheerful for her mom)

This has been the best day ever!

MOTHER

(sighing, to herself)

Umph.....like life is so simple.

(business-like to Max)

Now to bed! I expect you to be fully engaged in school tomorrow. No excuses Maxine.

(gripping Max's shoulders)

I expect you to become someone, you understand?

MAX

I know who I wanna be! I'm gonna be a famous chef like the **Galloping Gourmet**! I'm going to travel all over the world by airplane and even horse, and eat strange things and meet all kinds of people!

MOTHER

(smiling)

I'm sure you will.

(MORE)

MOTHER (CONT'D)

And I can tell you, with certainty
-- those people are going to love
you.

MAX

You're the best mom ever!
(hugging her while
sneaking a glance up)
Can we get the white shoe polish
too? That's what you have to do,
polish them hard. Then they'll
always look new. I promise.

MOTHER

(sighing)
Okay. Now to bed.

MAX

Willya come up and read me some
more of **Ramona The Pest**?!

MOTHER

Yes, my little pest!

Happily Max dances out the room.

Charlie is at the counter making a bologna sandwich on white
bread with a squirt of mustard to put in the battered Scooby-
Doo lunch pail.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Charlie, Charlie! I look at you,
and you're not a child anymore! You
might just be thirteen -- but no
one would ever know.

It's not just you being big -- it's
you being soooo responsible. You
don't know how much you impress me!

CHARLIE

(smiling, wanting more)
Really?

MOTHER

(suddenly deflated and
less prim)
You could stick a fork in me! I'm
so tired....I did one year of
college! No one else in my family
ever did....Never thought I'd be
cleaning toilets....

(MORE)

MOTHER (CONT'D)

But Charlie, you're so smart,
you're going to get scholarships.
(almost accusing her)

You're just good at everything in
school, aren't you.

(staring curiously at
Charlie)

What are you going to be Charlie?

CHARLIE

(confused, hopeful)

I dunno....

MOTHER

(mutters, with sudden
disdain)

But then sometimes...you remind me
of my family. They were big strong
people too. They rode hard and put
up wet...

(frustrated)

Stop pushing those glasses up
Charlie! You know how unbecoming
those are. But you will be you....

CHARLIE

Mom, we ever going to meet your
family? Please...

MOTHER

(annoyed)

What did I tell you? I wanted to
be my own leader and not follow
their ways. I couldn't take their
shadow anymore.

I didn't care if there'd always be
'pork chops and potatoes' on the
table -- I wanted magic. I still
know it's in me.

CHARLIE

We don't have to stay. Just to
meet them...

MOTHER

(sighing)

Sometimes you're like that annoying
drip after the rain, just won't
stop.

(forceful)

What'd I tell ya, Charlie. That's
another lifetime. It's dead. Now
quit being ugly and troubling me!

(MORE)

MOTHER (CONT'D)

(forcing a smile)

Not when things are going to be better. I'm never gonna put on a cleaner's outfit ever again. I quit that old job.

CHARLIE

What do you mean?!

MOTHER

(proudly)

I'm starting a new job tomorrow.

CHARLIE

(surprised)

What kinda job?

MOTHER

(exhausted again)

I'll tell you tomorrow, sweetie.
I need some rest now.

Mother leaves the room. Charlie stares after her.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When Charlie and Max are alone, what concerns does Charlie share with Max? How does Max respond?
2. Do you think the Mother has played any part in the tensions between the two sisters? How?
3. As Max says, Charlie is not the Mother -- but in what ways does Charlie act like a mother?
4. What is the difference in what the Mother expects of Charlie and what she expects of Max?
5. Do you think it makes a difference if you're the oldest child versus the youngest?
6. Do you think the Mother tries to manipulate Max? If so, how and why? Does Max try to manipulate her mother? How?
7. What stage of life is Charlie at? Is it difficult? Why?
8. When the Mother is alone with Charlie, does she talk differently then when Max is there? How?
9. From what is said, describe the Mother's background.

10. Mom says "They rode hard and put up wet." What do you think that means.
11. When does the Mother get annoyed with Charlie? Do you think the mother's reactions are justified?
12. What are the Mother's ambitions or wants? What are Charlie's? What are Max's?
13. How does the Mother surprise Charlie? How do you think Charlie feels about that surprise? Why?
14. How would you describe communications within the family?
15. Did the interaction between the family members remind you of anything in your own life or what you've witnessed with others?

1970s QUESTIONS

1. To capture a historical period in a film, it's important to show the culture of the time. What "70s" elements do you notice – like clothing, music, objects, behavior, technology, household items, language, or social norms – that help make the period feel real?

(NOTE: This isn't the full script. The descriptions have been heavily edited, and the complete film script is rich with many more details from the 1970s.)

2. The story is set in 1972. In 1973, the Supreme Court made a landmark ruling that was overturned in 2022. Which case was it?
3. In 1972, before that ruling, how might the laws and social attitudes have affected the mother's choices?