

BITTER SWEET SYMPHONY

The Song You Know, The Story You Don't

Written by

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PARADIGM
MGMT ENTERTAINMENT

In the 21st century, the music industry has been rocked by rights controversies involving many of the era's biggest hits – from royalty conflicts over "Blurred Lines" and "Uptown Funk" to high-stakes creative disputes over works by artists like Radiohead, Ed Sheeran, Olivia Rodrigo, Lana Del Rey, and, yes, even Taylor Swift.

But before all these battles, there was one monumental song whose creation and ensuing dispute would set the stage for all music rights conflicts to come.

This is the story of that song.

[Playlist Starts Here. Click to Follow Along.](#)

OVER BLACK:

RICHARD ASHCROFT (V.O.)
A classic song. Doesn't matter
where it comes from. Doesn't matter
how politics or fashion changes.
You'll never change a classic song.
It's timeless. And I'd do anything,
absolutely anything... to write
just one classic song that will
change the world.

The sound of DRUMS. One, two, three, four, five hits on the
snare. Two on the bass. Four on the woodblock.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - NIGHT

In a cramped and cigarette smoke filled recording studio,
DAVE WHITAKER (30s) raises a baton. A composed Englishman in
a turtleneck. Right now, his backstory doesn't matter.

Instead, pay attention to the music he's creating with the
small ORCHESTRA of MUSICIANS filling the room beneath him.

CHYRON: LONDON - 1965

The same drum pattern we just heard recurs once more. Now
BELLS join in, the low end of a GUITAR. A sparse sound.

Blank expression, Dave raises the baton again, signaling the
rest of the MUSICIANS to join in. And then... it all comes
together. Strings, woodwinds, bass guitar. The chugging 4/4
rhythm builds, creating a hypnotic, undeniable atmosphere.

Tight on the faces of Dave and other Musicians populating the
room, passion breaks through their concentration. The music
is soaring, inspiring. It's rousing, life-affirming. It's--

ALLEN KLEIN (PRE-LAP)
What the fuck am I listening to?

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Behind the soundboard in the control room, the ENGINEER turns
down the music we just heard to a FAINT HUM.

Standing behind the Engineer, we find **ALLEN KLEIN** (mid 30s)
and **ANDREW OLDHAM** (20s). Klein's American, all business,
black suit, puffs a cigar. Oldham's British, hipper, younger.

ANDREW OLDHAM
What's the problem, Allen?

ALLEN KLEIN
I thought we commissioned an album
of Rolling Stones covers.

ANDREW OLDHAM
We did.

ALLEN KLEIN
...what the fuck is this a cover of?

ANDREW OLDHAM
"The Last Time". Can't you hear it?

The Engineer raises the volume. Klein scrunches his face, has him turn it down. Walking to a WALL OF 45 RPM RECORDS, he skims through until he pulls out a single labeled "The Last Time" by the Rolling Stones. He plops it on a record player.

The song starts. Fast, short and dirty rock n' roll. And Klein is right, nothing like the cover we see being recorded. Over speakers: *"This could be the last time, this could be the--"* The vinyl scratches as Oldham lifts the needle--

ANDREW OLDHAM (CONT'D)
Okay, it's not a straightforward cover. It's more *inspired* by the original. But I'm telling you, Dave's a genius. It's unique, fresh. Totally something Brian Wilson or George Martin would do.

Realizing he's not getting through, Oldham steps closer. Motions to the Engineer to turn up the dial all the way.

ANDREW OLDHAM (CONT'D)
Seriously, Allen. Listen to this - it's *beautiful*. I know Mick and Keith'll agree.

Klein watches Dave conduct through the window. As the epic, swelling music washes over us, Klein considers it. Then--

ALLEN KLEIN
Whatever. When this fails, we can just scrap together another live album 'til the boys record again.

Oldham's disappointed. Klein stubs out his cigar, nods to the Musicians in the other room.

ALLEN KLEIN (CONT'D)
Cut them a check for the day and send them on their way.

ANDREW OLDHAM

But... Dave composed this. He
should at least get a credit.
(off Klein's steely stare)
You just said it doesn't sound like
the original...

ALLEN KLEIN

...yet it wouldn't exist *without*
the original, a song by *my clients*.

ANDREW OLDHAM

I thought it was gonna fail, huh?
So, what does it even matter?

ALLEN KLEIN

You got a lot to learn about this
industry, Oldham. Always look out
for your client's best interests...
regardless of right or wrong.

With that, Klein's out the door. Oldham sighs. We PUSH IN on
the glowing red RECORD BUTTON on the outsized sound board--

--PULLING OUT on another GLOWING RED BUTTON that reads 33
1/3. Nearby, a circular STEEL PRESS lifts, spitting out a
VINYL RECORD. Then another one. Another. CUT TO--

The vinyl up close: "DECCA RECORDS". It's placed in a sleeve
as we flip to the back, the last track reading "THE LAST
TIME" and beneath: "*PRODUCED BY ANDREW LOOG OLDHAM". CUT TO--

The front, THE ROLLING STONES SONGBOOK by THE ANDREW OLDHAM
ORCHESTRA. Pulling out, we see the album is stacked on top of
many others in the back of a TRUCK. CUT TO--

We follow the album cover as it is placed at the center of
the "NEW RELEASES" section at a RECORD STORE. The hands of a
YOUNG FAN eagerly grab the album. CUT TO--

The Young Fan listens to it on their bed. We see their
scrunched face resembles Klein's. They don't get it. CUT TO--

The Young Fan SELLS the album to a CLERK at a USED RECORD
STORE. The Clerk places the album on the rack, where--

A TIMELAPSE unfolds with the album staying put. CUSTOMERS
blaze by back and forth, their styles evolving as time moves
on quickly. The other racks fill, are depleted, fill again.

But NO ONE touches The Rolling Stones Songbook. As it fades
into obscurity, we push in closer and closer to the album
until only The Rolling Stones logo remains. FADE TO BLACK.

TITLE: BITTER SWEET SYMPHONY

INT. CONCERT VENUE - NIGHT

Back on The Rolling Stones logo. But as we pull out, we see it's now featured on a faded t-shirt. Our melodious opening music is replaced by a CACAPHONOUS MIX of PSYCHEDELIC, SWIRLING ALTERNATIVE ROCK.

Pulling out further, we see the shirt belongs to a band's LEAD SINGER. His long, unruly hair conceals his face as he slithers seductively to the music. We'll come back to him, but first, let's meet the others:

Bassist **SIMON JONES** (20s) plays a driving rhythm while drummer **PETE SALISBURY** (20s) keeps a steady, hypnotic groove.

And right now, the centerpiece of the band is guitarist **NICK McCABE** (20s). Shoulder-length, light brown hair. Calm and cool, almost unnaturally immobile as he summons a thunderous, heavenly sound from a worn Fender Stratocaster.

Simon and Pete are riveted by the noise. However, our aforementioned frontman simply stares at Nick. As he brushes dark hair from his eyes, we officially meet--

RICHARD ASHCROFT (20s). Tall, extremely thin, magnetic. Carries himself with a put-on mystique. Setting his piercing eyes on Nick soloing away stoically.

Finally, we pull out far enough to see we're in a packed, sweaty club. A banner behind our band reads "THE VERVE".

CHYRON: WIGAN, GREATER MANCHESTER - 1995

The CROWD is loving Nick's solo. Richard's eyes glint with jealousy. He brings the microphone to his mouth - a bellowing WAIL - putting the audience's attention squarely on himself.

Nick turns to watch Richard roll on the ground dramatically as he continues wailing. Though annoyed, he lets it go.

INT. CONCERT VENUE - LATER

The wild jam session comes to a conclusion as the audience applauds. The band luxuriates in the praise. The crowd chants for another song. Various titles shouted, but one stands out--

VARIOUS VOICES
"Slide Away"! Play "Slide Away"!

The band members look to each other, nodding, Nick especially satisfied. As Pete readies to count in the track, Richard cuts him off, shaking his head vigorously.

PETE SALISBURY

What?

Richard grabs a nearby acoustic guitar, strapping it on.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Let's do "History".

NICK MCCABE

No one knows that song, Richard.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

They don't know it yet.

NICK MCCABE

Why are you trying to kill the mood?

RICHARD ASHCROFT

I don't kill moods. I *create* them.

Before anyone else can interject, Richard moves to center stage, begins to strum the opening to a gentle ballad. Pete and Simon slowly join in, rolling with it. Finally, Nick sighs, reluctantly adding in his ethereal lead guitar.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)

(eyes closed, singing)

*I wander lonely streets/behind
where the old Thames does flow...*

The song is completely at odds with the loud alt rock we just heard the band play... but if you look at the audience, it's clear that it DEEPLY CONNECTS with them.

Nick looks to the faces in the crowd, unsure how to feel as they hit the soaring chorus--

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)

*I've got to tell you my tale/of how
I loved and how I failed...*

INT. CONCERT VENUE - BAR - LATER

Nick, Simon, and Pete all drink at the bar as ROADIES set the stage for the next band. The boys are ecstatic, even signing albums or shirts for some of the more excited Fans.

But in the middle of the group, Richard simply stares forward as he takes slow drags of his cigarette. No emotion.

He's nudged by **SIMON TONG** (20s), a friend of the band. Yes, there are already two Simons in this story in case you were doubting how British this group is. We'll call them JONES and TONG. Tong looks at Richard with hero worship in his eyes.

SIMON TONG

You guys were amazing. That last song... holy shit. That's going on the new record for sure, right?

RICHARD ASHCROFT

...sure.

Tong's face falls a little. Nick notices, approaching.

NICK MCCABE

Sorry, Si. Captain Rock's in one of his moods.

(leaning closer to Richard)

Why're you so gutted? You played your song, they loved it. You won.

Richard's still silent, staring intently. Another drag as we see what he's eyeing: an OASIS POSTER behind the bar.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

You know Liam and Noel sold out Manchester Arena tonight, right? They played at bloody Slane Castle last month as well.

NICK MCCABE

Christ's sake, Richard... last year I was a quantity surveyor and you were living off the dole. We're making a living in music now.

(off Richard's silence)

We may not be playing Slane Castle like Oasis, but there's no need for comparison.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

No, there *is* no comparison. They're rock stars.

NICK MCCABE

And we're not? Look around you.

The Verve undeniably has a good number of Fans at this mid-size venue, but it's not enough for Richard.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Not like Oasis. Or the Stone Roses. Or Happy Mon--

NICK MCCABE

What you're really saying is we're not from Manchester.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

I have no desire to be a Mancunian.

NICK MCCABE

We're still the biggest band Wigan ever produced.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

And *that's* enough for you? To be the biggest band in this shit town? To be another tombstone outside the city gates? Well, it ain't enough for me. I won't stop 'til we're the biggest in the whole damned world.

NICK MCCABE

You should be happy with where you are. With what you are. And look, if this is about money--

RICHARD ASHCROFT

I could give a rat's ass about money! There's more inside me, Nick. Something special. A great song... one I haven't written just yet--

A THUNDEROUS, DISTORTED GUITAR cuts them off. The audience begins to cheer as a NEW BAND immediately launches into ear shattering rock. Richard and Nick both grimace.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)

Fuck me.

Richard eyes the band's singer: JASON PIERCE aka **J. SPACEMAN** (late 20s), lead singer of The Verve-rivals SPIRITUALIZED. Spaceman and his BANDMATES sport shorter, messy hair hidden beneath dark sunglasses. A too-cool-for-school aura.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)

Anyone ever gonna tell Spaceman loud is not the same as good?

NICK MCCABE

He'd probably quit talking to us if we did. Besides... kind of rockstar, no?

Richard shares a smile with Nick before noting a new sight onstage: keyboardist **KATE RADLEY** (20s), statuesque, gorgeous.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Wha... who is that?

NICK MCCABE
Spaceman's girl. I heard he sorta
Linda McCartney-ed her into the band.

Richard can't stop staring, mesmerized by her.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
I think I'm in love.

Nick looks to Spaceman onstage, who seems completely out of it. Pale, sweaty, eyes sunken. Off Nick, worried about this.

INT. CONCERT VENUE - BACKSTAGE - LATER

Richard makes his way past writhing bodies to get to the band members of Spiritualized. He spots Spaceman, approaching.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Hey... Jason. Spaceman!

SPACEMAN
(disheveled, jittery)
Mad Dick, good to see you... even
better if you got any gak on ya.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Not... on me, nah. But listen--

SPACEMAN
(angry now)
Then fuck off, will ya.

Richard just watches Spaceman pace away, until--

KATE RADLEY (O.S.)
It's not you... he's just... in a
state at the moment.

Turning, Richard almost has an out of body experience upon seeing Kate standing close to him. Speechless for a moment.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Hey... I'm Richard.

KATE RADLEY
Yeah. I've heard. I'm Kate.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
You were amazing tonight. Miles
better than their last keyboardist.

KATE RADLEY
I liked that last song of yours.

Despite not knowing each other at all, there's vibes between these two. Clearly, Richard's feelings are reciprocated.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Did ya? It'll be on our new one.
D'you... think it'll be big?

KATE RADLEY
Uh... why not? Crowd loved it.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
But do you think it could make us
the biggest band in the world?

KATE RADLEY
(laughs, dismissive)
Uh, sure. Maybe. How should I know?

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Nah... It's not the one.
(suddenly)
I've got to get home and write a
better one.

KATE RADLEY
...what?

Turning on his heel, Richard simply walks away while Kate looks after him, dumbfounded but admittedly intrigued.

EXT. WIGAN - STREETS - NIGHT

Richard walks the Wigan streets, lost in his own world. He picks up a few STARES from random PASSERBY.

PASSERBY
Is that Mad Dick?!

He gives a small gesture acknowledging the shoutout. But right now, Richard's a man on a mission. He hums a tune to himself. As the music COMES ALIVE in his mind--

PRE-LAP: *BANG, BANG, BANG.*

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

In a budget level hotel room, Kate's eyes OPEN to the sound of KNOCKING. She looks to the clock, squinting to see it's barely nine (aka the break of dawn for rockstars). Grunts.

KATE RADLEY
Come back later, will ya?!

The knocking continues. She gets up, annoyed, quickly throwing on a robe. Grabs the door handle. As she opens it--

KATE RADLEY (CONT'D)
Didn't I ask for a late checkou--

--she's surprised to find Richard on the other end. He still wears the same clothes as last night, manic, eyes dilated.

KATE RADLEY (CONT'D)
Richard...?

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Finally. I tried practically every other room in this damn hotel.

KATE RADLEY
What are you doing here?
(staring, confused)
Did you... cut your hair?

Indeed, Richard is sporting a shorter, mid-length haircut now. That's just the type of rash decision he makes.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
I told you I'd write a better song.

KATE RADLEY
And you... already did?

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Can I play it for you?

Kate notices Richard holds a guitar case at his side.

KATE RADLEY
What... like now?

INT. HOTEL ROOM - LATER

Bathed in morning sunlight, Richard strums his acoustic. Soulfully singing his new composition: "The Drugs Don't Work".

RICHARD ASHCROFT
*All this talk of growing old/it's
getting me down my love/like a cat
in a bag, waiting to drown...*

Whether she likes it or not, Kate finds herself moved.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)
*Now the drugs don't work/they just
make me worse/but I know I'll see
your face again...*

Awkward silence fills the room as the last note dies down.
Richard looks to her expectantly, waiting. But she's quiet.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)
You gonna tell me what you think?

As Kate sits with herself, her raw emotion turns to ANGER.

KATE RADLEY
I think I need to get out of here.

She grabs her purse, rushes for the door.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Wait... what? Kate?

EXT. HOTEL - DAY

As Kate nearly sprints away from the hotel, Richard picks up
the pace to catch up. He grabs her hand, stopping her.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Look, you can tell me if it's shit.
My feelings will endure.

KATE RADLEY
Wha-- *who are you?! Christ, how did
you even know I was here?*

RICHARD ASHCROFT
If there's something I need to
know, I find it out.

KATE RADLEY
Do you not hear what an enormous
wanker you sound like all the time?

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Of course I do. I just don't care.

Kate rolls her eyes. *This guy is impossible.*

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)
So what's the problem then? The
song... made you feel all that?

KATE RADLEY
Think that much of yourself, do ya?

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Well, did it?

KATE RADLEY
God, I'm... I'm going through some
stuff, okay? I'm not gonna talk to
a complete stranger about it.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
You listen to those lyrics? I ain't
exactly a ray of sunshine. I've got
stuff. Might be able to relate.

KATE RADLEY
But *your stuff* isn't your *dad*
dying, now is it?

Richard's struck by that, looking her right in the eye.
Softening, showing us a new side of himself.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
That's... exactly what that song is
about.

KATE RADLEY
...if this is some kind of joke.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
On my life. It's not.

She's shocked, still unsure she believes him. He's VIBRATING.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)
Do you believe in destiny?

KATE RADLEY
...no.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Will you spend the day with me anyway?

KATE RADLEY
I... don't think Jason would like
that very much.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
What Spaceman don't know won't hurt
him.

KATE RADLEY
Not true. You know how sensitive he
is.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Well, so am I. And you'll break my
heart if you reject me right now.

Despite herself, Kate is tempted, charmed in spite of it all.

KATE RADLEY
I don't even know you. *Mad Dick.*

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Let's change that then.

EXT. RECORD STORE - DAY

Richard and Kate stand by a stack of RECORDS. "The Last Time" by the Rolling Stones plays. But Richard pays no attention. He flips through his stack, showing vinyl after vinyl to Kate--

RICHARD ASHCROFT
...so of course Funkadelic. Family
Stone. Smiths. Beach Boys. The
Stooges. Elvis.

Lastly, he holds up a copy of *HOT ROCKS 1964-1971* by *THE ROLLING STONES* with a reverence reserved for holy texts.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)
And most importantly... the greatest
rock and roll band the world has ever
seen. So there... now you have it.

KATE RADLEY
Now I have... what? I thought this
was about getting to know each other.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
It is. I am the music. The music is
me. There's nothing else to know.

KATE RADLEY
But what about what you said, about
your da--

RICHARD ASHCROFT
The song said it all.

KATE RADLEY
You don't talk about it? Pretty
tight-lipped for an "artist".

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Long time ago. Too long to hash up
now. Music does my talking for me.

KATE RADLEY
 ...is that what's behind this need
 for utter world domination then?
 Missing a bit of Daddy's love?

Richard grins, sets the record down, liking the bite on her.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 And what about yours? How long's it--

KATE RADLEY
 He's still alive. Just... sick. And
 that's all I'd like to say about it
 for now.

Richard nods, understanding.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 I get it. Because I'm an empath...
 (grabs Smiths record)
 ...like my childhood hero Morrissey.

Kate smirks. Joining, she grabs *PET SOUNDS* by *THE BEACH BOYS*--

KATE RADLEY
 And you're a lunatic with delusions
 of grandeur... like *my* childhood
 hero Brian Wilson.

Enjoying the game now, Richard grabs the *FUNKADELIC* album.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 But I still respect my forefathers.
 (picks up *THE STOOGES*)
 I'm scrappy, from the streets.
 (picks up *ELVIS*)
 I've seen my fair share of tragedy.

Once again, the last album he picks up is *THE ROLLING STONES*.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)
 And one day... I'll be the biggest
 thing in music.

Kate's attention is caught by an album deep below the others:
THE ROLLING STONES SONGBOOK by THE ANDREW OLDHAM ORCHESTRA.

KATE RADLEY
 ...what's this one say about you?

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 Hopefully nothing. You've never
 heard of the Andrew Oldham
 Orchestra, have you?

KATE RADLEY

Don't try to one-up me. I could take you on a musical history ride that would make your head spin.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

I'm not, I swear. *Nobody's* heard of 'em. Only reason I have's cause my dad used to have it around. Odd little side project the Stones management did back in the '60s.

Richard's ears perk up, finally acknowledging the song playing throughout the store. *"This could be the last time--"*

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)

Funny enough, they do a cover of this one. You gotta hear it. Beautiful stuff. But sadly, all forgotten to history now.
(thinking)
History... I will buy it actually.

KATE RADLEY

If you're *such* a fan... shouldn't you have a copy already?

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Of course I do. This one's for you.

Kate hates that she can't stop smiling, as a roughly recorded version of "The Drugs Don't Work" takes us to--

INT. RECORDING SPACE - DAY

Richard nods his head to the music, waiting eagerly for reaction from his bandmates. As the song comes to an end--

PETE SALISBURY

Captain Rock going full Britpop. Never thought I'd see the day.

SIMON JONES

That's some intense stuff, man.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

(nodding in agreement)
Shame it's too late to include it on the album--

NICK MCCABE

And where's my guitar meant to be?

RICHARD ASHCROFT
(confused, offended)
What are you on about?

NICK MCCABE
Not much room for jamming in a
sound like that.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
D'you already forget how the crowd
reacted to "History"? Maybe they
want a little less jamming from us.

NICK MCCABE
Jamming is when we're best. Coming
up with songs together. You say you
wanna be the best in the world?
That's when we're best.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
That's when *you're* best, you mean.

PETE SALISBURY
Okay, you two--

NICK MCCABE
Right. Cause *I'm* the one thinking
about myself here.

Richard stands angrily, no longer taking this.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
You think this shite's easy? I
poured my soul out. I opened a wound
in my heart for the world to see.
It's nothing to do with ego. It's
just what it takes to be great. And
maybe you don't have the stuff for
it. Hiding behind your loud guitars.

NICK MCCABE
Yeah. Loud guitars is it for me. I
don't see the problem with that.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
And that's the difference between
us. You're here to play around.
Nothing about this is play for me.

Nick just crosses his arms, at a loss. He doesn't have the
fight in him that Richard does.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)
And this...?

Richard points to the "The Drugs Don't Work" recording.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)

This is the sound that takes us
next level. You watch - "History"
is gonna be our biggest hit yet.
And we need to be ready to write
something even better. If you're
not ready for that...

Nick finally looks back at Richard, challenging him - "*Then what?*" Jones and Pete look on nervously.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)

Then I'll do it myself.

NICK MCCABE

(scoffing, shaking head)
By all bloody means, my friend.

And then Nick's out the door. Richard has little reaction.

SIMON JONES

He'll come back... right?

PETE SALISBURY

Course he will. It's too early in
our story to break up.

Ignoring them, a fiery glint appears in Richard's eye.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

(sotto)
It's not our story... It's mine.

INT. RICHARD'S APARTMENT - TIMELAPSE

A TIMELAPSE takes us through the next few weeks as Richard furiously WRITES LYRICS and PLAYS GUITAR (and GETS WASTED via WEED, ALCOHOL, NICOTINE, MDMA, ANYTHING YOU CAN THINK OF).

Kate pops in and out as they spend more time together, plenty of substances being consumed with her as well.

ALBUMS are played for inspiration, Richard voraciously devouring everything he can listen to. An enormous POSTER of The Rolling Stones looming behind him.

The sun RISES and SETS, and Richard pushes forward, intent on doing what he said he would.

As Kate and Richard lie in bed and their eyes connect, the only two people in the world, he's SEIZED by inspiration.

INT. REHEARSAL SPACE - DAY

--Richard plays what we'll come to know as "Lucky Man"--

RICHARD ASHCROFT
*I watch you look at me, watch my fever
 grow/And I know just who I am...*

--Richard plays the drum part for the song now by himself, but his timing isn't where he wants it to be.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)
 Fuck!

--Richard plays the mellow bass line, but he can feel something missing from it. It's not the sound it should be.

--Richard sits still in the space, thinking. This is not going as smoothly as he'd hoped. He reaches over and flicks on the RADIO. And as these things always go--

RADIO DJ (V.O.)
 ...next up's the latest - and if
 word on the street's true - *last*
 single from everyone's favorite
 Wiganers. It's from their new album
A Northern Soul and in classic Mad
 Dick fashion, it's got prophetic
 foreshadowing written right there
 in the title. You asked for it.
 Here's The Verve... with "History".

As "History" begins, Richard shakes his head, frustrated. His emotion builds until he can't stand it anymore, pacing across the room, and TOSSING a SNARE DRUM against the wall.

INT. BAR - SAME

Sitting alone, Nick nurses a beer, also now listening to "History" ringing out in the bar. The BARTENDER approaches.

BARTENDER
 Ain't that song yours, Nick?

NICK MCCABE
 Mine...?

Nick considers that, taking a long drink of his brew.

NICK MCCABE (CONT'D)
 Not really, nah.

EXT. RECORDING STUDIO - SAME

Outside a studio labeled "MOLES MUSIC", Kate carries her keyboard case to her car. She may not notice, but we see Spaceman despondently watch her from a second story window.

INT. KATE'S CAR - SAME

Turning the ignition, Kate's ears perk as the radio also greets her with "History". She shakes her head, amused.

INT. JONES AND PETE'S APARTMENT - SAME

Pete and both the Simons listen too. They can't hide their ecstatic reaction to hearing it on the radio. As it wraps up--

RADIO DJ (V.O.)
There you have it, as Richard Ashcroft always promised, finally a bonafide hit for The Verve, fully embracing the Britpop sound. Shame the band is now a mere reflection of the title - "History".

Jones and Pete look at each other, realization setting in.

SIMON JONES
Christ, do we have to get real person jobs...?

PETE SALISBURY
Don't talk like that.

But Pete's full of worry too. Just then-- RING! The phone.

SIMON JONES
(picking up)
Yeah?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. REHEARSAL SPACE - SAME

Richard's on the other end, smashed drum set behind him.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
It's Richard.

SIMON JONES
Richard? You've been hearing our song...? It's everywhere.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Yeah, whatever. It ain't earning us much, is it? So, listen, I've written a solo album, but I can't be fucked recording it all myself. Will you and Pete come play for me?

SIMON JONES

(hushed, to Pete)

He wants us to play on his solo album.

PETE SALISBURY

Holy shit. Thank you, God.

SIMON JONES

So, we're in then?

PETE SALISBURY

Are you daft?! Of course we're in. But don't tell him that just yet! We can't be too eager.

SIMON JONES

(back to the phone)

Okay... umm. I'll need to talk to Pete about it more, but... I think, yeah. Could be cool.

(swallowing)

Umm... are you... calling Nick too?

Richard considers that. As enticing as that sounds--

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Nah... is the other Simon there?

Jones looks back to Tong, whose eyes light up with HOPE.

INT. REHEARSAL SPACE - NIGHT

Now assembled as a new foursome, Pete, Jones, Tong, and Richard play the end of a new wailing ballad: "Sonnet".

RICHARD ASHCROFT

*Yes, there's love if you want
it/Don't sound like no sonnet...*

Richard rips his guitar off, pacing. The others wait. Then--

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)

It's missing something.

PETE SALISBURY

We've played it a hundred times.

SIMON JONES
A hundred different ways, too.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
And it's still missing something.
They all are.

Tong hangs his head, pulling his guitar off.

SIMON TONG
I'm not trying to ruin the best
thing that ever happened to me. But
let's be real... it's missing Nick.

As Tong starts for the door, Richard stops him.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Don't go anywhere.

Richard paces out of there. The others look to each other.

INT. NICK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Nick strums his guitar mindlessly. REVEAL Richard on the couch nearby, neither looking at the other.

NICK MCCABE
Came to rub it in, then?

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Sorry you can't be happy we finally
have a hit song out there.

NICK MCCABE
I know you're recording without me.
All of you. The Verve again in
everything but name.

Richard tries to swallow his pride a bit, tough for him.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
It's not The Verve without you.

NICK MCCABE
It's not The Verve then, whatever.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Not whatever. I...
(excruciating to admit)
It's not good enough.

NICK MCCABE

Are you taking the piss? Richard Ashcroft is telling me his own magnum opus isn't *good enough*?

RICHARD ASHCROFT

The songs are good, man, I stand by that. But they just don't sound--

NICK MCCABE

--like they do in your head? There's a reason we all wrote everything together before.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

You want me to beg? Get on my knees?

NICK MCCABE

You're not really asking me back, are you? Tong can play perfectly well - he taught you, didn't he?

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Nick...

But Nick's too stubborn. He's not gonna take this. He puts his guitar down, stands up, looking away.

NICK MCCABE

I've been thinking about going back to surveying actually. Maybe music's not for me after all.

Richard knows he needs to humble himself and apologize. He tries to psyche himself up, but... *he can't do it.*

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Fine then, mate.

He reveals two small white tabs of ECSTASY.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)

I came here to celebrate with you. Some thought that was.

Richard downs BOTH the tabs himself, heads for the door.

INT. REHEARSAL SPACE - LATER

Richard suddenly bursts back in, pupils fully DILATED.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Let's fucking go again.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Uncomfortable and, even worse, sober, Richard stands beside Kate. He looks up to a respectable, middle class family home.

KATE RADLEY
You alright...? It's okay if this
is hard for you...

Richard steps closer to her, arm around her.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
This isn't about me.

KATE RADLEY
....where's Richard and what've you
done with him?

INT. RADLEY FAMILY HOME - DAY

KATE'S MOTHER pours hot water into a tea cup for Richard.

KATE'S MOTHER
It's so nice to finally meet you.

Kate sits beside Richard at the small kitchen table.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
That's rubbish. But you're as
lovely as Kate described.

Kate's Mother rolls her eyes. We see where Kate gets it from.

KATE RADLEY
Is Dad awake? Can we see him?

KATE'S MOTHER
He's been very tired, love.

KATE RADLEY
I'd like Richard to meet him...

Something silent is communicated between Kate and her Mom.
This is not a typical request.

KATE'S MOTHER
...let me check on him.

As she does, Richard spots through the doorway - KATE'S FATHER in a hospital bed. Pale, sickly, weak. It strikes him.

Richard looks away, but can't help having a FLASH of HIS OWN FATHER, lifting a YOUNG RICHARD up and spinning him around.

INT. RADLEY FAMILY HOME - KATE'S FATHER'S BEDROOM - SAME

Richard and Kate sit by Kate's Father's bedside, Richard really struggling to be strong enough for this.

KATE'S FATHER
Seems my daughter has taken a
liking to you, Richard.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
First I've heard of it.

That gets a laugh. Kate appreciates it.

KATE'S FATHER
(coughs, weak)
And she says you're... a musician?

RICHARD ASHCROFT
I... do my best.

KATE RADLEY
Don't listen to this fake humility.
He's a *real* musician, Dad. Full on
famous, and all that.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Not all that. Not... yet, at least.
Trying to finish a new album.

KATE'S FATHER
Kate loves... her musicians.

Richard raises his eyebrows at Kate, who playfully shrugs.

KATE'S FATHER (CONT'D)
Could you... play me something?

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Oh, uh... I... didn't bring--

KATE RADLEY
He used to play himself.

Kate digs through the closet, coming out with an acoustic.
Richard reluctantly accepts it, pausing before starting the
opening notes of "The Drugs Don't Work". Stops himself.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
This one might be a little...
morbid, actually.

KATE'S FATHER
All the better then.

Richard looks to Kate for approval. She nods. With that, Richard continues to strum. Finally, he begins to sing, emotional. His voice CRACKS, but he pushes through--

RICHARD ASHCROFT
*Now the drugs don't work/they just
 make you worse/but I know I'll see
 your face again...*

INT. RADLEY FAMILY HOME - LATER

Richard emerges from the bathroom into the hall, drying his hands on his shirt. He stops as he hears Kate and her Mother discussing him nearby. He moves closer, keeping quiet--

KATE'S MOTHER (O.S.)
 --he seems like a very driven young
 man. But... what about Jason?
 Aren't you still seeing him?

KATE RADLEY (O.S.)
 I told you. It's complicated, Mum.
 'Cause of the band and all.

KATE'S MOTHER (O.S.)
 Jason seemed so down last time we
 saw him. I hope he's not... I just
 don't want him to fall down the
 wrong path again.

That lands on Richard. The seed of guilt firmly planted.

INT. SPACEMAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A NEEDLE enters a VEIN, pushing BROWN LIQUID inside.

Spaceman pulls the needle from his arm, exhaling pure relief. The space around him is a disorganized mess, drug paraphernalia scattered, the physical embodiment of tortured psyche. A KNOCK at the door barely grabs his attention. He struggles to stand--

Spaceman swings the door open to reveal Richard.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 How ya doing, mate?

INT. SPACEMAN'S APARTMENT - LATER

Richard sits on the couch and tries not to look too hard around the room. Even for him, this is a lot. Spaceman sits across from him, fighting against his high to stay conscious.

SPACEMAN
Checking on me? Very unlike you.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
I can be a friend when I need to.

SPACEMAN
When it *suits you*, you mean. Used to be we'd all be out together every night. Now I'm lucky to get a call returned from Captain Rock.

Richard hides how that makes him feel. Spaceman watches him taking in his apartment in silent judgment. He SPILLS--

SPACEMAN (CONT'D)
It's Kate, man...

Richard tenses. *Does he know?*

SPACEMAN (CONT'D)
I... I thought we had something. I brought her in the band and all, and she... she's amazing, that one. But I know she's seeing someone else. She denies it. Probably thinks it'll kill me. But I can feel it. I can fucking smell it on her. I can. And yeah... it *is* killing me. It...

Spaceman is not exaggerating. More specter than man. Richard knows he should tell him the truth. He readies himself.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Listen, J... About Kate--

SPACEMAN
(ignoring that, slurring)
I been hearing "History" on the radio lately. It's pretty good...

Richard looks to Spaceman, now in a full on drugged daze.

SPACEMAN (CONT'D)
But it's not that *great one* you keep threatening to unleash, is it?
(impersonating)
I'm Richard Ashcroft, and I'm gonna write the best fucking song in the world and be the biggest fucking artist of all time!

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Spot on, J.

SPACEMAN

So, you done it or what?

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Done... what?

SPACEMAN

All you been doing is recording,
right? Haven't seen you perform in
months. And The Verve's kaput. Seems
like... you're out of excuses. So you
written the great one yet... or nah?

Thoughts running behind his eyes, Richard wants to say yes.
He wants the answer to be yes. But he knows, the truth is--

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Nah... not yet, I guess.

SPACEMAN

(taking that in)

Well...

Spaceman forces himself to his feet, nearly stumbling over as
he stands up. Richard reaches out to steady him.

SPACEMAN (CONT'D)

Listen to this shite. Gonna be the
opening to our new album.

TIME CUT TO:

Richard and Spaceman stand over a record player as the
haunting Brian Wilson-esque rock symphony of Spiritualized's
"Ladies and gentlemen we are floating in space" begins.
Bells, guitar, timpani, layered voices, space sounds...

The song builds til it turns into an interpolation of Elvis's
"Can't Help Falling in Love". Richard's mouth falls open, his
eyes bulge. He's absolutely blown away by this, the feeling
he's been looking for in his own work since... forever.

Spaceman savors the look on Richard's face.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Is that... *you sampled Elvis?* How
the fuck'd you get the rights?

SPACEMAN

Haven't yet. Easier to ask
forgiveness than permission, right?

Richard takes that in. And as the song continues, his skin is
CRAWLING with artistic jealousy. He can't be here anymore.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Glad you're well, J. I've gotta go.

SPACEMAN
Wait, you want...?

Spaceman holds up a spoon and syringe. Richard knows he should be intervening here. He came here to be a friend. But--

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Nah... I've... got my own to do.

INT. RICHARD'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

ECSTASY pops into Richard's mouth. LIQUOR chases it.

Richard paces the length of his apartment, hands through his hair, desperately filled with wanting. *Seething*. He rushes over to his records, pouring through, looking for something. Anything. Flipping past dozens, he finally grabs--

--the Andrew Oldham Orchestra LP from our opening. Eagerly putting it on, the first track "Blue Turns to Grey" begins. Almost immediately, Richard shakes his head. He picks up the record, looks at the track list, flips it over, starts again.

"As Tears Go By" gets a few more seconds before he stops it, skips ahead carefully to the final track, *the one we know*. And now, the opening notes of the "The Last Time" ring out through the apartment. RICHARD IMMEDIATELY SHIFTS.

As the song goes on, he closes his eyes, moving to the music, hearing *something* in it. Something MORE than what's there.

He begins to HUM a MELODY TO HIMSELF. In his mind and on the stereo, the song builds and builds.

FLASHES of his Father overcome Richard again. Then--

Richard freezes. His eyes BURST OPEN. He hums the melody louder once more. A MANIC SMILE spreads over his face.

He's got it. His great song.

THIS IS IT. *The artistic breakthrough he's been waiting for his entire life.*

INT. STUDIO - VOCAL BOOTH - LATER

Richard wears headphones in a VOCAL BOOTH. He has a quickly scribbled sheet of lyrics in front of him... which are written beneath a title: "BITTER SWEET SYMPHONY".

The music we heard from the Andrew Oldham version of "Last Time" continues... but this time far grander. INTERCUT WITH:

INT. STUDIO - RECORDING SPACE - LATER

Both Simons and Pete play along with the track, adding more of a ROCK EDGE. The drums pummeling, making the song sound even bigger yet. But it's still not the song we know until--

INT. STUDIO - RECORDING SPACE - LATER

An EPIC, INSTANTLY CATCHY VIOLIN REFRAIN is laid over. Like a smaller version of our intro, STRING PLAYERS crowd together in the space, adding yet another layer of majesty. Finally--

INT. STUDIO - VOCAL BOOTH - LATER

--we're back with Richard in the vocal booth. He looks to the lyric sheet once more. He closes his eyes, summons PASSION, and begins to deliver the monumental opening statement:

RICHARD ASHCROFT
*CAUSE IT'S A BITTER SWEET SYMPHONY,
 THAT'S LIFE/TRYING TO MAKE ENDS
 MEET, YOU'RE A SLAVE TO MONEY THEN
 YOU DIE...*

CHYRON: LONDON - 1996

INT. STUDIO - MIXING ROOM - LATER

The Simons, Pete, and two Recording Engineers sit at the mixing board, listening to the nearly-finished product.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (V.O.)
*I'LL TAKE YOU DOWN THE ONLY ROAD
 I'VE EVER BEEN DOWN...*

The combination of the bold opening lyrics and Richard's effortless delivery sends a chill throughout the room.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (V.O.)
*YOU KNOW THE ONE THAT TAKES YOU TO
 THE PLACES WHERE ALL THE VEINS
 MEET, YEAH...*

Finally we see Richard, awash with emotion as he hears his own BOOMING CHORUS.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (V.O.)
*BUT I'M A MILLION DIFFERENT PEOPLE
 FROM ONE DAY TO THE NEXT/I CAN'T
 CHANGE, MY MOLD, NO NO NO...*

The band members and Engineers are changed by what they're hearing. It's THE SONG... and they all know it.

It reaches its conclusion, fading out, and we're left in a hushed room. No one sure what to say. But Richard can read the room perfectly. And he knows... *he's done it.*

Pulling out further, we see also listening to the track is **JAZZ SUMMERS** (early 50s), the band's stylish, thin, slight manager. More silence, until--

JAZZ SUMMERS
 Well... if no one else is going to
 say it, I guess it'll be me. I
 mean... holy shit, gentlemen.

SIMON TONG
 I'll second that.

JAZZ SUMMERS
 Brilliant performance... brilliant
 song. Even the title... "Bitter
 Sweet Symphony". Everything just...
fucking brilliant.

Richard could be glowing with ego here, but instead, he's misty-eyed. He wipes a tear away before anyone can see.

JAZZ SUMMERS (CONT'D)
 Are you sure you want to release
 this under your own name, Richard?
 It's... too big to be just you.
 (still processing)
 It could be the biggest thing since
 "Smells Like Teen Spirit"...

Richard considers Jazz's words. Maybe it *is* bigger than him. But then he shakes that away, putting up faux-principles--

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 Yeah, well... we all talked, didn't
 we? It isn't The Verve without Nick.

JAZZ SUMMERS
 No. I suppose it's not.
 (scratching head)
 And I'm sorry... this uses a Stones
 sample? Why don't I recognize it?

RICHARD ASHCROFT
It's not the actual Stones. It's a
cover of "The Last Time".

JAZZ SUMMERS
...but it sounds absolutely nothing
like "The Last Time".

RICHARD ASHCROFT
All the better for us.

JAZZ SUMMERS
And you... cleared this sample?

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Course not. That's a manager's job.

Jazz sits on the edge of the mixing board, thinking on that.

JAZZ SUMMERS
Well, thank God it's not the *actual*
Stones song. Their manager - Allen
Klein - what a right fucking prick
he is. I'm sure he'd be more than
happy to tell us to fuck off. He
broke up The Beatles, you know?

PETE SALISBURY
It's five notes. How hard can it be?

SIMON TONG
You've got to clear this one, Jazz.
It's... this song's the greatest
thing Richard's ever done, mate.

That affirmation deeply gets to Richard. Feeling magnanimous,
he decides to share the love a bit.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Nah, Si. It's the greatest thing
we've ever done.

Richard looks around the room, generosity overcoming him.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)
And Jazz is right. It *should* be a
Verve track. Fuck, it *is* The Verve.
So... who's gonna get Nick over
here to finish this thing?

SIMON JONES
Sorry... haven't you two written
each other off?

Richard stands, vibrating again with pure energy.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
You go tell him then, that I'm
about to make do on my promise...
Tell him we're about to be the
biggest band in the fucking world.

The DING of an entry bell takes us to--

INT. PAWN SHOP - DAY

In hardscrabble Wigan, Nick anxiously taps the glass case of a pawn shop counter. A PAWNBROKER (40s) surveys a beautiful, faded 1959 FENDER JAZZMASTER. A piece of music lore.

But the Pawnbroker just shrugs.

PAWNBROKER
I'll give you five-hundred.

NICK MCCABE
You're joking...? The case alone is
worth more than that.

PAWNBROKER
Ain't I seen you around with that
band? What're you doing here? My son
said you got a song on the radio.

NICK MCCABE
Yeah. Well... it was our last one.
Music industry's shit.

As the Pawnbroker looks over the guitar--

PAWNBROKER
Pawn industry's not much better.
So... five-hundred?

It pains Nick that he's actually tempted to say yes. He thinks it over, until-- DING. Tong stands in the doorway.

SIMON TONG
Nick. What the fuck are you doing?

NICK MCCABE
Tong... how did you know I was he--

SIMON TONG
Your mum told me. You're not actually
doing what I think you are...?

NICK MCCABE
Real life calls, mate.

SIMON TONG
Nah, Nick... not yet.

Tong RIPS the Jazzmaster from the Pawnbroker's hands.

INT. STUDIO - MIXING ROOM - LATER

Nick listens as "Bitter Sweet Symphony" blares over the speakers. The two Simons and Jazz stand nearby. Richard is also in the room, but he and Nick resist making eye contact.

The song nears its end, all the layers and layers of music washing over Nick. Richard's voice wails on the track.

Nick bites his cheek. The music is undeniable. It finishes, and silence again returns to the room. Nick hides hurt--

NICK MCCABE
Do you even need me back?

Richard's ego flares up for a moment before he stops it.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Song's not done. And it never will
be if you don't lay your stuff down.

NICK MCCABE
So what then... a farewell single
and part ways again?

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Fuck no. Got a whole album waiting
for you. Calling it *Urban Hymns*.

NICK MCCABE
Glad you got everyone's input there.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
You know it's a good title, Nick.

Nick slightly laughs, but can't deny the truth there. Still--

NICK MCCABE
I don't know if I could look myself
in the mirror performing under the
"Richard Ashcroft" banner.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Let's get the band back together
then.

NICK MCCABE
I can't let you kick Tong out now.
It'd kill him.

Tong's eyes widen at the thought. It definitely *would*.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Nah. Tong's in. You're in. We're all
in. We're The Verve... the new and
everlasting. The eternal.

NICK MCCABE
(mocking)
Ahh, my Messiah.

That doesn't bother Richard. He outstretches his hand. Nick
stares at it a beat, but he can't help it. He wants this.

NICK MCCABE (CONT'D)
Fuck me.

INT. STUDIO - RECORDING SPACE - LATER

Headphones on, nearly-departed Jazzmaster strapped to him,
Nick creates an OCEAN of shimmering guitar. We faintly hear
the track beneath his headphones.

Nick looks up through the window to see a BEAMING Richard,
hands clasped in PRAISE. Nick tries to feel good about this.

INT. STUDIO - RECORDING SPACE - LATER

The Recording Engineer fiddles with the settings on Nick's
Mesa/Boogie amplifier. Over his headphones, we hear he's at
the tail end of adding lead guitar to "The Drugs Don't Work".

Through the window, we see Richard with his eyes closed,
completely mesmerized by what Nick is laying down.

But the Engineer notices a slight look of consternation on
Nick's face. The song ends, Richard shoots another thumbs up.

ENGINEER
You don't like that one?

NICK MCCABE
What do you mean...? It's great.

ENGINEER
It's just, what... not really you?

Not wanting to agree, Nick shrugs away the sentiment.

NICK MCCABE
I was wrong about "History"... I
don't wanna be wrong again.

Nick winces as Richard's voice comes over the headphones--

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Ay, Nick. We're going for a drive.

INT./EXT. - CAR/LONDON STREETS - DAY

A typically grey London Saturday. Richard drives a nondescript sedan as Nick sits shotgun. The Simons and Pete cram together in the back. Holding up a blank CD, Richard smiles.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
First master of "Bitter Sweet".
Figured we should listen
together... like old times.

There is a palpable excitement in the car. Richard pops the CD in the drive. Everyone's ears perk up as the song builds.

While the rest of the band exude smiles, Richard is dead serious as he takes the car through London's busy streets. He looks out to the throngs of PEDESTRIANS, time slowing.

NICK MCCABE
My guitar's a bit low in the mix.

Richard pays that no mind, still focused outside. TIME CUT TO--
The song fades out as Richard tightly grips the wheel.

SIMON JONES
Well... that's gonna make a hell of
a start to the album, boys.

SCHRR! Richard quickly brakes as he pulls to the side of the road. His mind is heavy. The others look to him, confused.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Nah... it's too good for that. *They*
need more than that.

NICK MCCABE
They... who?

RICHARD ASHCROFT
(pointing outside)
Them! The downtrodden wasting their
lives away walking to their shit
jobs every day for a measly fucking
pound. This...
(MORE)

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)

This is gonna mean something to them. To everyone. It's the modern day blues is what it is.

(intense)

We need to scrap the album.

NICK/PETE/JONES/TONG

What? What are you talking about--

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Everything but "Bitter Sweet" has to go. Start fresh.

NICK MCCABE

Richard... the label would kill us. And the rest of the album is good. Trust me. I'd love to tell you it isn't. But it's great. It is.

(off Richard's silence)

Listen to me... you wanna speak to the people? You already have... You just need to trust what you created. You need to trust *us*. You've never had any problem opening yourself up in a song, but with us... you're a closed book. You've got to stop that.

Off Richard, not wanting to look too hard at that analysis.

EXT. RICHMOND PARK - DAY

London skyline in the distance, we're now in the middle of the rolling greenery of a city park. Richard, Nick, Pete, and both Simons all sit, looking pensively into the distance.

The SNAP, SNAP of a camera draws our attention to a small PHOTOGRAPHY CREW. The Lead Photographer gets closer.

LEAD PHOTOGRAPHER

Ahh, yes. Keep that pose.

PETE SALISBURY

How exactly is this communicating the whole *Urban Hymns* thing, Rich?

RICHARD ASHCROFT

It's not communicating anything. It's like Nick said: songs're gonna speak for themselves this time.

Richard slightly turns back to lock eyes with Nick for a moment as the Photographer snaps more pics. There's a quiet respect exchanged between them.

On Nick's face, we can see this is profoundly meaningful to him. It's like this time... things might really be different.

Richard quickly surveys the rest of the band. Something on his mind. He points to the Photographer's ASSISTANT, who wears a stylish (for the time) white BUCKET HAT.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)

Ay. I like that hat.

(pointing to self)

Would you mind?

The Assistant locks eyes with the Photographer, who silently encourages them to acquiesce to Richard's demands.

ASSISTANT

Uhh, sure. Of course.

As Richard is given the hat, he puts it on, adjusts. He looks into the reflection of the large CAMERA LENS.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Brilliant. That looks good, yeah?

Not waiting for a response, Richard puts on more of a pose. Nick watches him, something twisting on his face. He looks to his bandmates, none of them wearing hats. It's like Richard has to stand apart from them... however he can.

LEAD PHOTOGRAPHER (O.S.)

Nick... you're staring right at
Richard. Look off yonder like the
rest of your mates.

Nick apologetically nods, hiding any discomfort, as he does what the Photographer asks. SNAP--

INT. TAXI - EVENING

Tight on a STILL FRAME of the band in the park. A prototype for the ALBUM COVER. A FINGER taps the picture repeatedly.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (O.S.)

I'm telling you. This is the one.

CHYRON: LONDON - 1997

Pete, Nick and Richard sit in the back of a Wigan taxi making way through traffic. Pete holds a stack of other prototypes, all variations of the same image. As he flips through--

PETE SALISBURY
 Thought I saw some other good ones...
 (off Richard's glare)
 ...but I'm sure you're right.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 Whatd'you think, Nick?

Nick doesn't look at the images, instead he's focused on the prototype of the LINER NOTES.

PETE SALISBURY (O.S.)
 I can't believe they're dropping
 the single so long before the rest
 of the album...

RICHARD ASHCROFT (O.S.)
 It's called building anticipation.
 It's a good thing, means the song
 really is as good as we know it is.

Nick eyes the top of the tracklist, where it reads: "*All songs written by Richard Ashcroft, except where noted.*"

Nick scans down, asterisks by ONLY THREE TRACKS: "The Rolling People", "Catching the Butterfly" and "Neon Wilderness".

RICHARD ASHCROFT (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Nick? You fucking nodding off on us?

NICK MCCABE
 (speaking up, to Driver)
 Sorry... could you pull over here?

The CAB DRIVER eyes Nick in the rearview, complying.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 What are you doing?

As the car comes to a stop--

NICK MCCABE
 I just, uh... I gotta walk from here.

Grabbing the handle, Nick exits the car--

EXT. WIGAN - STREETS - CONTINUOUS

The cab zooms off again as Nick stares after it. Realizing things will be a *different* type of different than he thought.

As he walks down the street alone, the now familiar notes of "Bitter Sweet Symphony" underscore the scene--

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

--playing on dingy speakers in a modest living room. Richard, Kate next to him, waits for reaction from the other two in the room - LOUISE (50s), his conservative mother, and DOUG (50s), his visibly more eccentric stepfather.

KATE RADLEY

Well... Richard's too nervous to ask, so I will. What did you think?

LOUISE

I... don't even know what to say.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Is that... good then...?

DOUG

Good is not the question.

Long pause as Doug measures his next words.

DOUG (CONT'D)

You've manifested *greatness* here, Richard. Just like we always talked about. *This*... this song is the potential that has long been waiting for you to find it.

(placing hand on Louise)

Your father'd be beyond proud.

Kate studies Richard's happiness, a bigger elation than he's had from any other compliments. *This* was the confirmation he'd been needing. But it only lasts a fleeting moment until--

LOUISE

Speaking of - your dad's birthday's next week. I was wondering if you were coming with me to the cemet--

RICHARD ASHCROFT

I'll be back in London by then, Mum.

Louise forces a nod. It clearly hurts her that Richard won't go. Above the fireplace behind her is a photo of a younger her, beside Younger Richard and his BIOLOGICAL FATHER.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)

You really don't have anything to say about the song? Just that you... don't know what to say? It's my best work, Ma. Everyone says. I finally wrote that great one inside of me.

Doug looks to Louise, sensing her hurt and speaking for her--

DOUG

It's hard for your mum to put her emotions in words. But remember...

(intense)

...the greatest satisfaction for your creation comes from within.

Doug speaks with an esoteric, spacey air.

DOUG (CONT'D)

This is just the start. Because a song like that... must've come from true belief in oneself. And if you have that, Richard... then you can write *a hundred more great songs*.

Richard takes that in, almost surprised, like he thought this one song was his ultimate destiny.

DOUG (CONT'D)

This song is proof there really is nothing stopping you from being the biggest band in the world. There's nothing stopping you from *anything*. In all honesty, right now, you could jump out the window this second and fly off into the clouds to leave us all behind. You still believe that, don't you?

Doug has an almost shamanistic level of influence to him, his words touching Richard deeply. Kate studies this curiously.

DOUG (CONT'D)

But if you're *not* going to fly away from here... then you must not rest until you've manifested your words to life - *that The Verve is the biggest band on this Earth*.

This washes over Richard. He looks to Louise, still silent.

EXT. LOUISE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Richard exhales a thick plume of cigarette smoke into the damp, cloudy night. Kate lights her own.

KATE RADLEY

What's the matter? Your stepdad basically declared you the second coming of Jesus in there.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 (smirks)
 You saying he's wrong?

KATE RADLEY
 Least I see where all this really
 comes from now. I just hope you
 know... you don't actually have to
 be the biggest band in the world.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 What's that? Jealousy, I hear?

KATE RADLEY
 Richard, come on... this pressure
 you put on yourself - that he puts
 on you - it's not healthy.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 You afraid I'm gonna blow J out of
 the water with this one? Cause I'm
 afraid I've got news for you: I am.

Kate crosses her arms, scrunches her face.

KATE RADLEY
 You realize by saying you'll blow
 Jason out of the water, you're
 saying you'll blow Spiritualized
 out of the water, meaning you'll
 blow... me out of the water? Our
 album's gonna be mega too, y'know?

Seeing the look in Kate's eye, Richard softens.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 I didn't mean it like that, love...
 Besides, you're not recording with
 them right now, so I figured--

KATE RADLEY
 Just because we're having a moment
 doesn't mean... it's not my band.
 I'm all over that record. The one
 you're talking about like it's shit.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 Yeah, alright. You're right. And I'm
 sure it'll be a monster, it will.
 (can't help himself)
 "Bitter Sweet" is still gonna blow
 "Ladies and gentlemen" away though.

Kate shakes her head, can't stop from lightly laughing.

KATE RADLEY

You might actually be right at that one. You know Jason had to remove the Elvis sample? Had to rebuild the whole song basically.

That catches Richard completely off guard. He seizes up.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

What...? But he said it was easier to ask forgiveness than permission--

KATE RADLEY

Well... didn't work this time.
(sensing his fear)
But you cleared your sample, right?

RICHARD ASHCROFT

...it's only five notes.

KATE RADLEY

Ours was only fourteen words.

Off Richard, spiraling.

EXT. DECCA RECORDS - DAY

The band's manager, Jazz, looking dapper as ever, stands on a trash-strewn London street. He looks at a two story brown and blue building. SIGN out front: "DECCA RECORDS". The opening drum pattern to Andrew Oldham's "The Last Time" begins as--

INT. DECCA RECORDS - OFFICE - DAY

"The Last Time" plays on a BOOMBOX in front of Jazz. A stuffy EXECUTIVE (60s) puffs away at his pipe while listening.

EXECUTIVE

As I said, I'm familiar with the Andrew Oldham Orchestra.

JAZZ SUMMERS

It just helps to hear it again to--

EXECUTIVE

Can we please get on with this?

Taken aback by his bluntness, Jazz nervously pops a CD out of a jewel case with the preliminary *Urban Hymns* artwork on it. Placing the CD on the tray, Jazz presses play.

JAZZ SUMMERS

Here it is.

"Bitter Sweet Symphony" begins, building and building with its subtle string opening. Executive scrunches his face.

EXECUTIVE

I'm not exactly hearing the sample.

JAZZ SUMMERS

Just wait.

Then the song fully KICKS IN on the boombox. And hearing them back-to-back, it's undeniable where the sample is. The Executive raises an eyebrow, intrigued.

But as Richard's voice comes over the song, we now clearly hear that this is *also* totally a creation of The Verve. The Executive can't help from nodding along with the beat.

EXECUTIVE

It's certainly... grandiose.

Seeing the *Urban Hymns* case, the Executive motions for it.

EXECUTIVE (CONT'D)

Can I see that?

Flipping it over, the Executive reads the tracklist, first up--

EXECUTIVE (CONT'D)

"Bitter Sweet Symphony"? This one?
You're starting off the album...
with a track you haven't cleared?

Jazz shrugs, apologetically smiles - "Whoops."

EXECUTIVE (CONT'D)

We could have you by the balls.

JAZZ SUMMERS

I really wish you wouldn't.

Flipping the case back to the front, the Executive smiles.

EXECUTIVE

Oh, "The Verve"? The same band that
used to be just... "Verve"?

JAZZ SUMMERS

(perking up)
You're familiar?

EXECUTIVE

Only that our distribution arm,
Verve Records, were the ones that
forced them to change their name.

JAZZ SUMMERS

(face falling)

So you've... screwed them over once
before, you're saying?

The Executive stares back, waiting to speak.

EXECUTIVE

Look... the song's good. And Andrew
Oldham's made us *fuck all* the last
thirty-two years.

Jazz's eyes widen, hope springing.

EXECUTIVE (CONT'D)

So, if you and the band are willing
to part with a small, *reasonable*
cut of the song proceeds... then I
believe we might be able to make
ourselves an arrangement.

Jazz exhibits the ultimate professionalism as he reaches his
hand for a shake. The Executive may not notice, but Jazz is
doing everything he can to not explode. Just as they shake--

EXT. DECCA RECORDS - DAY

Bursting out the front doors, Jazz makes it just far enough
away from the office windows to yell--

JAZZ SUMMERS

FUCK... YES!

The power of Jazz's voice SHOOTs us up into the sky, floating
among the CLOUDS, soaring as--

MUSIC JOURNALIST (V.O.)

"Bitter Sweet Symphony", a new
single from The Verve, who we all
thought were done and dusted--

BBC ANCHOR (V.O.)

"Bitter Sweet Symphony", you heard
this one?

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

The Verve are back, and people are
absolutely loving this track--

We DESCEND slowly, now back in Wigan, making our way down to--

INT. NICK'S APARTMENT - DAY

--where all five members of the band are watching BBC on TV.

BBC ANCHOR (ON TV)
This song is *everywhere*. I have a
genuine question now we've all heard
it a thousand times: *Did The Verve*
write the best song of the decade?

CHEERS erupt as the band members high five and hug.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Spaceman's gonna shit himself. The
definitive album of 1997. *Us*.

PETE SALISBURY
Spiritualized never had a chance.

SIMON JONES
All they got now's a fit keyboard
player Mad Dick is sweet on.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Don't know what you mean.

SIMON TONG
Come on, Rich. We saw you eyeing her.

Richard's buzz ends as he steps toward Tong, too aggressive.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Shut your mouth with that. Radley's
in Spiritualized. She's Spaceman's
girl. I got nothing with her.

Awkward as they all stare at Richard. He clears his throat.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)
Important thing is - The Verve just
put out the song of the decade.

The others go back to relishing that, but Nick just watches
Richard, knowing there's something there he's not saying.

INT. ABKCO OFFICES - DAY

A RECORD SPINS. THE NEEDLE DROPS. And out comes the opening
NOTES of "Bitter Sweet Symphony". We pan up on a young RECORD
EXECUTIVE, **SOPHIE PORTER**, early 30s, nodding to the song.

SOPHIE PORTER
You really don't hear it?

Sophie waits for a reaction, looking across at-- ALLEN KLEIN, the amusical suit from our opening, now 30 years older... and 30 years angrier. He's baffled.

ALLEN KLEIN
Fucking what, Sophie? What am I supposed to be hearing?

Sophie slides over - *THE ANDREW OLDHAM RECORD*.

EXT. BAR - NIGHT

Richard exits a crowded bar, cigarette out. Soon as he lights--

JAZZ SUMMERS (O.S.)
Fuck, thank God!

--Jazz comes rushing in. Richard smirks at him.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
What is it now? Shattered another record? Nominated for another award? Album pre-sales too high?

JAZZ SUMMERS
Shut up. Listen to me, we need to go to New York right now--

RICHARD ASHCROFT
New York?

JAZZ SUMMERS
Are the others inside?

RICHARD ASHCROFT
What's this about, Jazz?

JAZZ SUMMERS
...the sample.

Richard straightens up, serious now.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Don't need the others then. Let's go.

INT. PLANE - NIGHT

Staring out the window, Richard watches the lights of England fade away into the darkness.

And as he looks ahead, toward America, he sees the draw of much bigger, brighter lights.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - MORNING

Richard looks up at the mesmerizing city, excited to be here, no matter the reason. His reverie's interrupted by--

JAZZ SUMMERS (O.S.)
Let's go, Richard.

INT. ABKCO OFFICES - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

A poorly lit, drab conference room is a stark contrast to the wonder of the city. Richard and Jazz sit, anxiously waiting. Richard eyes the ABKCO logo on the wall. Then, finally--

ALLEN KLEIN (O.S.)
Musical virtuoso Richard
Ashcroft... here in my office?

In the doorway is Allen Klein, big fat smile on his face. Richard stands, pleased to be recognized.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Right you are.

ALLEN KLEIN
(mimicking)
Right you are.
(normal)
God, I love that accent. So fun.

Allen shuts the door, takes a seat at the head of the table.

ALLEN KLEIN (CONT'D)
I hate that we're here right now.
Trust me when I say I never want to
do anything to hurt such a... *young*
and... *naïve* talent like yourself.

Richard narrows his eyes.

ALLEN KLEIN (CONT'D)
But the fact is, Richard... you
used something that doesn't belong
to you.

Before Richard can speak, Jazz raises his hand, halting him.

JAZZ SUMMERS

If I may... we cleared the sample,
Mr. Klein. I'm not really sure
legally what the issue is here.

ALLEN KLEIN

Yet you flew all the way to New
York to speak to me?

JAZZ SUMMERS

As a... courtesy.

ALLEN KLEIN

Awful long way to come for courtesy.

He lets silence set for a beat. Richard fights to stay quiet.

ALLEN KLEIN (CONT'D)

Look, you may have cleared the
sample with The Andrew Oldham
Orchestra and Decca Records. But
you did *not* clear it with my label,
ABKCO Records... and you *most*
certainly didn't clear it with The
Rolling Stones.

Richard can't stay silent any longer--

RICHARD ASHCROFT

We didn't use The Rolling Stones!

ALLEN KLEIN

But you did, because you used a
cover. You made a copy... of a copy.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

It's hardly even a cover. You know
well as I do that song sounds
nothing like "The Last Time".

ALLEN KLEIN

Hmm, I disagree. Perhaps my musical
ear is better attuned than yours.
But that's not what matters. What
matters is how a court sees it. And
God, those courts... they really
take their time, don't they? Time
where your single would be
pulled... where your album couldn't
be released in its current form.

Richard nearly turns white, battling himself not to show it.

JAZZ SUMMERS
 Okay, Mr. Klein, let's--

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 Out with it! What do you want, eh?!

JAZZ SUMMERS
 Richard...

ALLEN KLEIN
 Cutting right to the chase, I like it. Maybe you've got the spirit for this business, after all.

Richard just glares at him.

ALLEN KLEIN (CONT'D)
 The Rolling Stones will be so kind as to approve your use of their material in exchange for a mere percentage of the song's profits. As is just and fair - your song *wouldn't exist* without theirs.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 Fine. We already gave Andrew Oldham a piece anyway. And when "Bitter Sweet Symphony" comes out here in the States, it's gonna be such a smash, I won't even miss the change taken out of my fat pocket.

Jazz pulls Richard toward him, hushed--

JAZZ SUMMERS
 Richard, stop it. What about the others? They need to be consulted.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 And why's that? Their names anywhere on the songwriting credits?
 (back to Klein)
 Ten percent should be plenty for you. Quite generous, in my opinion.

Allen nods to himself, faux-considering.

ALLEN KLEIN
 Ten... Yeah. Ten... doesn't feel like quite enough. Mick and Keith... they'll be expecting more.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
There's absolutely no way Mick and Keith are involved in this little shakedown of yours.

Silent, Allen simply smiles back.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)
Fine, fifteen'll do then. Done.

Richard stands, beyond ready to be out of here.

ALLEN KLEIN
Fifty? Yeah, that does sound good.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Fifteen I said, you crook.

ALLEN KLEIN
Crook? Watch your mouth there, boy.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
What else would you call someone resorting to extortion like this? And for nothing? You should be ashamed.

ALLEN KLEIN
Fucking ashamed? *I* should be?!
You're the one who stole from the greatest band who ever was. You couldn't write something great on your own, so you took it from them. Cause you're not really a rockstar, are you? You just play at it.

Allen stands calmly, adjusting his blazer.

ALLEN KLEIN (CONT'D)
Now: you're gonna give The Rolling Stones *fifty* percent of the profits on your little song, because that is exactly what they deserve for what you have done to them.

Richard is doing everything in his power not to leap across the table and strangle Klein.

ALLEN KLEIN (CONT'D)
And if you don't... that song will never be heard again, and you'll go back to whatever village you came from and be a bricklayer or a bum or whatever you were before this. Whichever you choose...
(MORE)

ALLEN KLEIN (CONT'D)

Doesn't make a whole fuck of a difference to me. Either way, everyone will know not to do what you so arrogantly, stupidly did.

Allen doesn't wait for an answer, leaving Richard and Jazz alone to stew in silence. *What the hell was that?*

WALTER STERN (PRE-LAP)

So, we'll have Richard walk down the street pushing past people, not deviating from his course, not paying them any mind. Rising above the confines of society as he sings those beautiful lyrics of his.

EXT. WIGAN - STREETS - DAY

Music video director WALTER STERN, 30s, wearing all black, talks with the band. A FILM CREW waits behind Walter.

NICK MCCABE

Right... and the rest of us?

Richard nudges Nick, low--

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Walter's last video won an NME. Maybe we should listen to him?

NICK MCCABE

No surprise you like the idea of being center of the world.

SIMON JONES

It... would be nice to be in our own video, Richard.

WALTER STERN

Alright, how about the other band members join Richard as he goes then?

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Hold on, Walter. I don't want to disturb your vision. This video is the most important thing we've done.

PETE SALISBURY

Not as important as stroking Mad Dick's ego.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

It wasn't even my idea!

WALTER STERN

Okay, let's start out with Richard as planned, and then you guys join him *at the end*. Ashcroft is singing it, but he can't really do it without the other ones, can he?

Nick just shrugs - "*Whatever*". He watches Richard and Walter go off to start shooting.

NICK MCCABE

"*The other ones*". Eh, boys?

Pete and the Simons look to Nick, and for the first time - it's clear, they're now on HIS side.

EXT. WIGAN - STREETS - EVENING

The Crew packs up, shoot over. As the band waits for Richard to finish talking to Walter, Jazz arrives, apprehensive.

JAZZ SUMMERS

Hey, guys, how's everyone feeling?

NICK MCCABE

What, cause of the video hijacking? It's bollocks, but that's Richard.

JAZZ SUMMERS

The video-- what? No, I meant the... Richard talked to you about our... trip to New York, yeah?

Nick narrows his eyes, the others confused as well.

NICK MCCABE

What's this now?

JAZZ SUMMERS

Ah, shit. I've put my foot in it.

Just then, Richard walks up, slapping Jazz on the back.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Jazz, you missed an epic shoot. Gonna be a big hit, that.

NICK MCCABE

What's this trip to New York?

Richard freezes, caught. He plays it off. Offers a shrug.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Oh. Yeah... fucking music business
stabbing us in the back again.

PETE SALISBURY

What's he talking about, Jazz?!

JAZZ SUMMERS

Uh, well, Richard and I had to go
speak with Allen Klein, the manager
for The Rolling Sto--

NICK MCCABE

We know who Allen Klein is! Why did
you have to meet with him? I
thought we cleared everything.

Richard postures, not going to admit anything's wrong.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Rich asshole saw a chance to take
his cut. Happens every day.

SIMON JONES

What cut?

Richard doesn't like the guff from someone not named Nick.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

What's it to you? I'm the one wrote
the song, I'm the one getting it
out the ass.

NICK MCCABE

I know you forget this, Richard,
but we're a group. It does actually
affect all of us... not to mention
we *all* recorded that song.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

I don't know why you all're so
miffed. We were in the muck, I fixed
it. You should be thanking me.

NICK MCCABE

Fuck. I knew it. We shoulda dropped
the song off the album.

Richard won't take that, getting in Nick's face.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

That song IS the album. It's
nothing without it. So Allen Klein
can take his fifty percent--

NICK MCCABE
FIFTY PERCENT?!

PETE SALISBURY
Oh... goddamn, Richard--

RICHARD ASHCROFT
There was no choice!

JAZZ SUMMERS
I know it's tough to hear, but there
wasn't, guys. We did what we had to.

NICK MCCABE
No more of this shit, Dick. I'm
serious. This is exactly what I'm
talking about - you'll put all your
darkest feelings in a song but you
won't tell your own bandmates what
the fuck is going on. This secret
shit starts up and I'm done. You
tell us what the hell is going on
at all times, starting NOW.

Taking it for once, Richard nods, raising his right hand.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Next time something important
happens, I will tell you...

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Standing beside Kate at the altar, Richard smiles wide. The
only others in attendance are their PARENTS. As Richard
slides Kate's ring onto her finger--

INT. ARENA - GREEN ROOM - EVENING

The band is backstage in a big fancy green room, waiting on
Richard. He finally rushes in, still grinning huge.

NICK MCCABE
Jesus, where you been?

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Nowhere, sorry. I'm here.

PETE SALISBURY
You see the people out there?

Richard opens the door a crack, sticking his head around the
corner to see-- AN ENORMOUS CROWD waiting impatiently.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
All here for us... This is just the
beginning, boys.

INT. VARIOUS CONCERT VENUES - MONTAGE

The Verve play to HUGE, SOLD OUT SHOWS around the UK. One after the other, each one bigger than the last.

We hold a moment on Richard taking an outdoor stage with the rest of the band in front of a CROWD of COUNTLESS THOUSANDS.

CHYRON: WIGAN, HAIGH HALL

The band is treated like conquering heroes by their hometown. Richard HYPES the crowd into a frenzy.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
THIS IS MUSIC!

INT. VARIOUS TALK SHOW STUDIOS - MONTAGE

The Verve are interviewed MOS by excited HOSTS and JOURNALISTS. As always, Richard hogs the spotlight, talking by far the most, Nick just sulking behind him.

INT. RECORD STORE - MONTAGE

In a TIMELAPSE, STACKS and STACKS of copies of *Urban Hymns* are refilled as fast as they're purchased. RAVENOUS FANS can't get enough of this record.

INT. VARIOUS GREEN ROOMS - MONTAGE

Post-show tired, The Verve lounge in nicer and nicer green rooms, DRUGS being done in each and every one.

The tables hold stacks of magazines, sporting headlines like:
-"'BITTER SWEET SYMPHONY' IS ROLLING STONE'S #1 SINGLE OF '97"
-"THE VERVE'S 'THE DRUGS DON'T WORK' DEBUTS AT NUMBER ONE"
-"'URBAN HYMNS' DETHRONES OASIS FOR TOP SPOT"

That last one puts a real smile on Richard's face.

INT. ARENA - GREEN ROOM - NIGHT

In yet another green room, sweaty and exhausted from the show, the band DRINKS and SMOKES. Jazz arrives, applauding.

JAZZ SUMMERS
Amazing show again...

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Not exactly our best. Crowd
certainly didn't seem to expect
that much psychedelic riffing.

Instantly annoyed, Nick rolls his eyes.

NICK MCCABE
What's the point of a show if it
sounds exactly like the record?

RICHARD ASHCROFT
But that's literally the point.
They're just here to see us do it.

JAZZ SUMMERS
Guys! It was great. C'mon.

Pete, Tong, and Jones just drink, too tired to pick a side.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Why're you dancing around like
that, Jazz? Something to say?

Jazz sits, opening a binder and flipping through.

JAZZ SUMMERS
How about... an actual bonafide
tour... of America?

That summons a mythic level of excitement from the band.

JAZZ SUMMERS (CONT'D)
We're talking for real this time.
Not Lollapalooza parking lots in
forty degrees. America loves *Urban*
Hymns. They love... you.

They look to each other and all practically jump for joy,
exhaustion forgotten. Cheers abound. Richard paces to Jazz,
looking over his shoulder now at what's next on the agenda--

RICHARD ASHCROFT
And what's all this? McDonald's?
Nike? Columbia Pictures...?

JAZZ SUMMERS
(grinning, dramatic)
Those... are all brands that want
to use "Bitter Sweet Symphony".

Richard immediately shakes his head, disgusted.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Come off it. We ain't sellouts.
Especially to sweat shop employers.

JAZZ SUMMERS
Richard. We're talking serious
money here. Maybe even enough to
temper your integrity a bit.

NICK MCCABE
Yeah, serious money The Stones get
half of.

Ignoring, Rich turns to the others, head cocked. Waiting for
them to weigh in. Though tempted, they share a look, sighing.

SIMON TONG
Sorry, Jazz. Much as I wouldn't mind
a free Big Mac or two, Mad Dick's
got it right on this one.

NICK MCCABE
We always said no selling out.

Jazz rolls his eyes. "*Artists*". He flips to his next page,
one more thing to discuss.

JAZZ SUMMERS
Okay... what about the cover... of
Rolling Stone? Is that selling out?

Whoa. That is the most shocking one yet. Richard is on
another planet with excitement.

SIMON JONES
About time a "Rolling Stone cover"
wasn't about to fuck us over.

But even that can't get Richard down. They've really made it.

INT. ABKCO OFFICES - ALLEN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

CLOSE ON: The BILLBOARD HOT 100 list for the week: "Bitter
Sweet Symphony" sitting at 12. PULL OUT to see Allen Klein
looking at this in his dark office, no emotion.

The executive who first alerted him about "Bitter Sweet
Symphony", Sophie, pokes her head in the door.

SOPHIE PORTER
You need anything before I go?

ALLEN KLEIN

Yeah, actually. Can you explain this to me?

Sophie steps in as Allen grumpily slides the paper over. She analyzes it, confused at what he's looking for from her.

SOPHIE PORTER

Looks to be proof we were right to pursue royalties from The Verve.

(off his lingering anger)

And... it also means more money for you. Which is a good thing. *Right?*

ALLEN KLEIN

Wrong. What *don't* you see on that list?

SOPHIE PORTER

I... don't know. Is there something I should be looking for...?

ALLEN KLEIN

How about The Rolling Fucking Stones? You see them anywhere?

SOPHIE PORTER

Allen, the Stones just had an album debut at number two last year.

ALLEN KLEIN

And every song on it's already vanished off the Hot 100. Yet "Bitter Sweet" is still right fucking there, isn't it? And *no one* even knows where the damn song came from... all cause of *our shit deal*.

SOPHIE PORTER

Shit deal...? We got The Stones the most favorable resolution to a creative dispute I've ever heard of, financially speaking.

ALLEN KLEIN

But they deserve better... they deserve protection. Justice.

Sophie takes a moment, sitting down across from Allen.

SOPHIE PORTER

Sir... you already got them *more* than enough justice.

ALLEN KLEIN

Without credit for the song... we don't control it. You get that, right? I hear they're rejecting licensing offers. Who knows how much money's been left on the table?

SOPHIE PORTER

I don't understand: Do you want to do right by The Rolling Stones... or do you want to control the song?

Allen stares back, seeming to label the question ridiculous.

SOPHIE PORTER (CONT'D)

Samples have existed since the dawn of recorded music, Allen. There's an established way of dealing with these things. Throwing a wrench into that... it'd cause chaos.

ALLEN KLEIN

So what's next then...? Fucking Snoop Doggy Dogg loops the first verse of "Sympathy for the Devil" and grunts over it a few times and claims it as his own?

SOPHIE PORTER

That's... a bit diminishing, Allen. Creativity thrives on inspiration.

ALLEN KLEIN

This is a surprisingly noble stance to take considering you're the one who first alerted me to this issue.

Sophie processes what Allen just said, a twinge of GUILT. After a moment, she stands, sliding the paper back to him.

SOPHIE PORTER

My advice... pray the song keeps climbing the charts and go on laughing your way to the bank.

As she leaves, Allen spins toward the window, gazing at the endless Manhattan skyline.

PHOTOGRAPHER (PRE-LAP)

Alright now get a little closer in.

INT. PHOTO STUDIO - DAY

The band has their photo taken for Rolling Stone, all doing their best to look detached cool. The PHOTOGRAPHER snaps one.

ROLLING STONE PHOTOGRAPHER
Cool, cool. Let's try some solo
shots now. We can start with...
(pretending to consider)
...Richard.

The other guys step out, Nick most reluctantly. He watches, irritated, as Richard hams it up for his solo shots.

NICK MCCABE
I wonder which bloody shot they'll
use on the cover...

SIMON JONES
Least it'll still say The Verve.

Nick shakes his head. That's not good enough for him. Just then, Tong rushes up to them, face pale.

SIMON TONG
...a PA just handed me this.

They gather to look at THE SUN, a British tabloid featuring a giant photo of Richard and Kate: "Bitter Sweet... Matrimony?" The guys are stunned, if not even a little hurt.

PETE SALISBURY
...he fucking didn't.

SIMON TONG
Spaceman might really kill him. Or
himself. Maybe both.

Nick just glares at Richard, still mugging it for the camera.

NICK MCCABE
So much for no more secrets...

INT. PHOTO STUDIO - LATER

SNAP. Richard gets one last photo taken--

ROLLING STONE PHOTOGRAPHER
You're a natural. Something tells
me I'd still be taking your pic
even if you weren't a singer.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
I won't disagree with that.

As Richard steps off, he realizes his bandmates are all gone.
He just shrugs, unbothered, reaching for his bag.

JAZZ SUMMERS (O.S.)
Richard?

Richard turns to see Jazz, stricken.

JAZZ SUMMERS (CONT'D)
There's been some news...

RICHARD ASHCROFT
What now? Walmart or some shit?

It takes Jazz a moment to get it out.

JAZZ SUMMERS
Allen Klein called again.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
(laughing to himself)
What does that cowfucker want now?

Jazz grabs Richard's arm, trying to get through to him.

JAZZ SUMMERS
Richard... he wants more.

EXT. LEGAL OFFICES - LONDON - DAY

The streets are slick with rain as a suited Richard steps out of a black town car. He has a large leather SATCHEL over his shoulder, a BRIEFCASE in one hand.

Looking toward the entrance of the Canary Wharf legal offices, Richard locks eyes with Allen Klein.

Klein smokes a cigarette, surrounded by other Suits. There's much unspoken animosity between these two. They simply stare at each other, neither willing to give in.

Finally, Klein offers a threatening smile as he STOMPS out his cigarette. Turning his back, he heads inside. Battle about to begin.

Before Richard can follow, a car drives by BLARING "Bitter Sweet Symphony". It grabs his attention, freezing him.

Looking to the car, Richard sees it's a beat-up piece of shit. The DRIVER wears a construction uniform. He belts out the song with abandon, oblivious to Richard's presence--

DRIVER
(muffled)
*I'll take you down the only road
I've ever been down!*

Richard takes a deep breath, remembering how important this song is to him... and how much he has to lose. He hardens, ready to do this.

INT. LEGAL OFFICES - LONDON - DAY

Richard, with just Jazz at his side, stares across an enormous oak table at the TEAM OF LAWYERS all dressing him down. Klein sits square in the middle of them.

The room completely dwarfs Klein's NYC office. It's visibly clear how much of a David vs. Goliath position Richard's in. Finally breaking the silence, a Lawyer clears his throat.

LAWYER #1
Mr. Ashcroft... just to be clear,
you've chosen not to have a lawyer
present today?

Richard bites his cheek, trying to compose himself. Trying to rid himself of enough anger to speak. Jazz steps in.

JAZZ SUMMERS
Richard... decided we will be
handling this ourselves.

LAWYER #1
Okay... well, your manager Mr.
Summers said you had something you
wanted to say on your behalf?

Richard still can't bring himself to speak yet.

LAWYER #2
...Mr. Ashcroft?

Jazz nudges Richard, giving him an encouraging nod.

JAZZ SUMMERS
Come on, Richard. Like we said.

Rather than speak, Richard reaches into his satchel, pulling out a MINI RECORD PLAYER. Some Lawyers raise eyebrows.

Paying no mind, he pops open his suitcase next. Reaching inside, he pulls out several VINYL RECORDS.

ALLEN KLEIN

Jesus... what kind of dog and pony show are you about to give us--

JAZZ SUMMERS

Mr. Klein.

ALLEN KLEIN

I thought the boy was just going to state his case. I didn't know he brought fucking props--

RICHARD ASHCROFT

I am stating my case.

Richard picks up one of the records, revealing it to be a Rolling Stones album titled *Singles - 1963-1965*. He places it on the record player, cuing up "The Last Time".

For the first time we hear the entirety of the first verse and chorus of The Rolling Stones version of "The Last Time". Listening close after hearing "Bitter Sweet" so many times now, it's truly clear they sound NOTHING alike.

Still, there's a deeper point to this.

MICK JAGGER (ON RECORD)

WELL THIS COULD BE THE LAST TIME/
THIS COULD BE THE LAST TIME/MAY BE
THE LAST TIME/I DON'T KNOW...

The Lawyers and Klein all blankly stare as the music plays. Richard stops the track after the chorus.

ALLEN KLEIN

So... what's your point? That it doesn't sound like "Bitter Sweet Symphony", is that it? Because I've got news for you, Richard--

RICHARD ASHCROFT

It doesn't sound like it. But that's not my point right now.

Holding up the record cover, Richard points to the title.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)

(dripping with disdain)
You mind reading this, Mr. Klein?

ALLEN KLEIN
 (rolling his eyes)
 "The Rolling Stones... Singles 1963
 to 1965".

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 So you can read? What a surprise.

LAWYER #3
 Let's try to keep the personal
 insults to a minimum.

Richard ignores that as he grabs another record. Holding it up, he reveals it as This May Be My Last Time by The Staple Singers. He places it on the record player, cuing it up.

As it starts, we hear that it's an old time folk gospel song. The record quality isn't high, but it screams authenticity. As the song continues, we hear a trio of African-American soul singers harmonizing the following lines--

STAPLE SINGERS (ON RECORD)
*This may/This may be my last
 time/This may be the last time
 children/This may be my last time/MAY
BE MY LAST TIME/I DON'T KNOW...*

Not only are they the SAME LYRICS as The Rolling Stones song, the MELODY itself is nearly identical. Some of the Lawyers shift uncomfortably. Richard picks up the record, reading--

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 Oh yeah... and what's that say?
 "Recorded in 1954".
 (proud of himself)
 You going to tell me The Stones
 never heard this track? Because I'm
 willing to bet they did. In fact...
 you might even say their song
 wouldn't exist without *this one*.

ALLEN KLEIN
 I didn't realize you were legally
 authorized to litigate on behalf of
 The Staple Singers.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 You said I made a copy of a copy.
 But turns out... it was actually a
 copy of a copy of a copy. At what
 point is that just a different
 song? Mick and Keith ain't given
 any profits to The Staple Singers
 after all, have they?

ALLEN KLEIN

Maybe they would've had to if The Staple Singers had me. But they didn't, and here we are.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

So, to be clear, you're saying it's perfectly acceptable for The Rolling Stones to rip off little known Black artists from the American South... but unacceptable for someone else to be *influenced* by a cover of one of their songs?

ALLEN KLEIN

But you weren't *influenced* by it, Richard, you fucking stole it!

LAWYER #2

(huffing)

Allen, control yourself.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

How can I have *stolen* from them when I negotiated the rights to use the cover?! And I don't care how many times I need to say it: a cover that sounds nothing like the original!

ALLEN KLEIN

Oh, but that's where you're wrong. And today... I can prove it.

Klein looks to the LAST LAWYER at the end of the table.

LAWYER #4

Hello, Mr. Ashcroft. I am actually the resident musicologist on the panel... And unfortunately it's my responsibility to refute your claims today. You see...

The Lawyer pulls out a BULKY LAPTOP and starts up a file that begins to play The Rolling Stones version of "The Last Time".

LAWYER #4 (CONT'D)

While it may be difficult to pinpoint at first, the orchestral rendition of "The Last Time" arranged and recorded by Mr. David Whitaker and Mr. Andrew Oldham is in fact very much based on the original... just in a notably different time signature.

The recording of "The Last Time" SLOWS DOWN, playing at half speed. And if you listen closely, you can INDEED hear the basic sonic elements of the orchestral version of the song.

On Richard and Jazz's faces, it's painfully clear they're beginning to recognize the resemblance as well.

LAWYER #4 (CONT'D)

More importantly, however, is the song's lyrical melody.

On the laptop, Mick Jagger's voice comes onto the track, also slowed considerably.

MICK JAGGER (ON RECORD)

I've told you once, I've told you twice...

LAWYER #4

You see, this melody in its slowed form constitutes the basis for the primary melodic phrasing of the Andrew Oldham Orchestra's cover...

The file now plays the orchestral cover, and it is true... there's a strong similarity in the lead string melody. Richard's face further twists, fear emerging.

LAWYER #4 (CONT'D)

...which appears to be what you based your lead vocal melody of the song "Bitter Sweet Symphony" upon, perhaps even subconsciously.

The file plays the first verse of "Bitter Sweet Symphony". Finally, it's clear how it all connects. It's a bit of a stretch, but it's all there to hear. The file stops. Silence.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

This is just what you do, huh? Dave Whitaker orchestrated the Andrew Oldham version... and all he got for it was a single day's pay. Well...

(MORE)

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)

You've already got half my song.
What else do you even want? You
gonna force me to license it to
fucking burger commercials?

ALLEN KLEIN

Richard... the deal we made for
half the song came about *before*
these new facts came to light--

RICHARD ASHCROFT

What *new* facts? The song hasn't
changed.

ALLEN KLEIN

--meaning it was a deal made in bad
faith on your part. A huge
violation of the substantial favor
The Rolling Stones did you by
letting you use their creation.

Jazz stares at Allen with pure hatred. Allen takes a sip of
water, savoring the moment before delivering his next blow.

ALLEN KLEIN (CONT'D)

As a result... we demand 100% of
the royalties for "Bitter Sweet
Symphony"...

Off Jazz and Richard, stupefied by that. But Allen's now
ready to deliver the real haymaker.

ALLEN KLEIN (CONT'D)

...and for sole songwriting credits
to be awarded to Mick Jagger and
Keith Richards.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Sole songwriting credits?! So...
you're saying my contribution, my
band's contribution to the song...
was nothing?! Mick and Keith wrote
the lyrics, did they? They recorded
every instrumental we painstakingly
laid down?!

ALLEN KLEIN

Your "contribution", as you call
it, was built upon a foundation of
lies and deceit. And it's time the
credits reflect that.

Jazz is unable to stop Richard as he leaps to his feet.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 Jesus Christ, even if this was a
 straight cover of "The Last Time" I
 would still get *something* from it.

ALLEN KLEIN
 But it isn't a cover, is it?! It's
 a forgery.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 You act like I've done some sort of
 grave wrong to The Rolling Stones?!
 That song was languishing in
 cobwebs in crumbling record stores
 until I transformed it into a
 masterpiece... and now it's making
millions! You should be kissing my
 feet.

(desperation taking over)
 You've got to let me at least talk
 to Mick and Keith. I know I can
 explain it to them. There's no way
 they've authorized this.

ALLEN KLEIN
 They've authorized *me*, Richard.

Those words strike Richard. He can't accept it.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 I'll never agree to this. I'd die
 before I do.

ALLEN KLEIN
 Fine then. You'll just have to take
 the whole *Urban Hymns* album out of
 stores right when it's at the top
 of the charts. And by the time the
 legal system is done with this...
 no one will care about you or
 "your" shitty song ever again!

That's it. Richard can't let this man speak again. He lunges
 forward, GRABBING HIM by the shirt.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 You shut your bloody fucking mouth!
 No one is ever going to forget this
 song. You hear me?! Ever!

Jazz desperately tries to get Richard off Allen while the
 Lawyers scatter in pandemonium.

JAZZ SUMMERS
Let go, Richard. He's not worth it!

ALLEN KLEIN
Someone call security!

RICHARD ASHCROFT
I'll end you, you fucking prick!
You will not take this from me!

TWO SECURITY OFFICERS come into the room, finally prying Richard off Klein. He's still frothing with rage.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)
Millions of dollars, we're talking here! That's what you're stealing from me, you robber baron.

Klein adjusts his suit, acting like nothing happened.

ALLEN KLEIN
I don't know what you're so mad about. Thought you didn't care about finances? "You're a slave to money, then you die." Isn't that how you so contemptuously put it?

As the Security Officers drag Richard away, Allen grins--

ALLEN KLEIN (CONT'D)
Look on the bright side, Richard. Now you won't have to be a slave anymore... *'cause you're not gonna have a dollar to your name.*

Jazz looks at Klein like he is Satan himself. Total disbelief. He turns and runs after Richard.

EXT. LEGAL OFFICES - LONDON - MOMENTS LATER

THROWN out the doors, Richard tries to catch his breath, hands above his head. Jazz quickly appears.

JAZZ SUMMERS
Richard--

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Don't! And don't you tell anyone else about this.

JAZZ SUMMERS
They have to know. Nick is gonna--

RICHARD ASHCROFT
I don't care what Nick will do!
This is *my* problem.

Jazz hangs his head, wondering why he deals with this.

JAZZ SUMMERS
But, it's just... after that stuff
with you and Kate--

RICHARD ASHCROFT
What? I've told you: I've got
nothing to do with her.

JAZZ SUMMERS
Richard... we've seen the tabloids.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
What're you on about...?

Jazz just stares back, shaking his head. Eyes bulging,
Richard rushes down the street to the nearest NEWSTAND,
seeing the same *Sun* headline the others saw.

Grabbing the paper, Richard crushes it between his hands. He
tosses it down, stomps on it.

NEWSTAND GUY
Hey! What the hell are you doin--

Jazz catches up to Richard, winded.

JAZZ SUMMERS
You can't keep everything secret,
Richard. Isn't that what being an
artist is? Opening yourself up?

Richard takes a breath, considering that. But ultimately--

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Shut up. Shut up about all of that
in there. About me and Kate. About
everything. Just... shut up.

And Jazz watches as Richard paces off, totally alone.

INT. LIMOUSINE - EVENING

Allen sits alone in the back of the car, approaching a
PRIVATE AIRWAY. His cell phone RINGS. He sighs, annoyed.

ALLEN KLEIN
Yes, Sophie...?

SOPHIE PORTER (ON PHONE)
Did I actually hear right? You're...
taking *the whole thing*?

ALLEN KLEIN
It's what had to be done.

SOPHIE PORTER (ON PHONE)
But it didn't! This isn't the way
to do business...

ALLEN KLEIN
I'm supposed to apologize for
getting my clients credit for the
song *they* wrote?

SOPHIE PORTER (ON PHONE)
...you're not serious, Allen?

ALLEN KLEIN
I have a flight to catch. And I
think you should revert to calling
me *Mr. Klein*.
(one more thing)
Thanks though, you know I couldn't
have done this without you.

CLICK. Allen hangs up. Pleased with himself.

EXT. 9:30 CLUB - NIGHT

MOBS of FANS wait outside the revered venue, where a sign
reads: "THE VERVE U.S. TOUR STARTS HERE".

CHYRON: WASHINGTON DC - 1997

INT. 9:30 CLUB - GREEN ROOM - SAME

Waiting, the band sits in the green room. Not looking at each
other, even as a joint is passed around between them.

JAZZ SUMMERS
Come on, lads! I get it. There's
shit happening. But we're here. In
the capitol of America. The
country's ours for the taking.

The pep talk fails to enliven the group. The bright lights
are there but the luster's gone.

SIMON JONES
Didn't wanna bring the wife, Rich?

Richard just ignores him, popping a tab of ecstasy.

NICK MCCABE

Nah, he's gotta keep it all locked up, Si. The mysterious artist is not for us mere mortals to understand.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

(sarcastic, mostly)

Finally, you're getting it...

NICK MCCABE

Are you really not even gonna apologize? Were you ever gonna tell us about her? We're all friends with Jason, you know? Hell, some of us are even friends with Kate now!

Not wanting to acknowledge the truth there, Richard doesn't even look at Nick. Just heads for the door.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Time to go on.

INT. 9:30 CLUB - STAGE - LATER

On stage, Richard's still who he was always meant to be. Practically flying right off into the sky, like Doug said.

The others keep their cool too, rocking along like nothing's wrong to one of *Urban Hymns'* great deep cuts. But it doesn't matter. Because as they finish up the song, the crowd begins--

CROWD

"Bitter Sweet Symphony"! "Bitter Sweet Symphony"...

The band all look to each other, unsure. Nick covers his mic.

NICK MCCABE

We agreed to keep that off the set list tonight. Expand the yanks' perceptions of us...

RICHARD ASHCROFT

It's the only one they want, Nick. What are we to do?

Shrugging, Richard grabs the mic, persona back on--

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)

Alright, you want it so bad... we'll give it to you.

Richard nods to Pete, who reluctantly starts up the pre-recorded BACKING TRACK to the song to HUGE CHEERS.

INT. IRVING PLAZA - NIGHT - MONTAGE

At another sold out show, another performance of "Bitter Sweet Symphony" unfolds to the rapt audience.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
*Cause it's a bitter sweet symphony,
 that's life...*

CHYRON: NEW YORK

Nick nearly grimaces as his guitar is drowned out by the sea of chanting coming back in his direction.

INT. IRVING PLAZA - GREEN ROOM - MONTAGE

MOS, Nick and Richard are at each other's throats in an all out screaming, shoving match. Chaos as the others watch, alongside dozens of INDUSTRY TYPES and HANGER ONS.

INT. AVALON - NIGHT - MONTAGE

More EXUBERANT CROWDS belt along with the song in unison.

CROWD
*...trying to make ends meet, you're
 a slave to money then you die.*

CHYRON: BOSTON

INT. AVALON - GREEN ROOM - MONTAGE

More MOS fighting, Pete and Jones involved as Tong watches.

INT. ST. ANDREW'S HALL - NIGHT - MONTAGE

The CROWD with the same message every time.

CROWD
We want "Bitter Sweet"!

CHYRON: DETROIT

On stage, even Richard now is getting a bit annoyed by the repetitive request. But he does his best to hide it.

INT. ST. ANDREW'S HALL - NIGHT - MONTAGE

The backstage fighting's getting more violent. The area is more packed than before, but the band doesn't care. BOTTLES are thrown. SHOVING ensues. Even Tong's involved now.

QUICK SHOTS of the REST OF THE TOUR:

As these same occurrences continue in--

- CHICAGO - SEATTLE - LOS ANGELES - SAN FRANCISCO -

INT. PATRIOT CENTER - GREEN ROOM - END MONTAGE

Absolutely drained from the tour, Richard collapses into the green room couch. Tong, Jones, and Pete share a joint amidst the revelry unfolding around them.

SIMON JONES

Hey, Rich, I know things've been...

(clearing throat)

Just, with the tour wrapping and all,
we're gonna get a drink, celebrate.

Just the boys. Like old times.

(extending olive branch)

You in...?

Richard thinks that over, almost touched, but--

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Nah. I think it's time for me to
rest up from all this.

Despite what he just said, Richard SNORTS a line in front of them. The band barely holds back disappointment.

SIMON TONG

Suit yourself, mate.

They're off. A moment later, Nick enters, eyeing Richard.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

What're you mugging me for?

Silently, Nick tosses a MAGAZINE at Richard. The cover's got a picture of the full band, but unfortunately it's also got the headline: "DID THE VERVE STEAL THEIR BIGGEST HIT?"

NICK MCCABE

Of course *this* is the one time they
include all our faces.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Don't tell me you're gonna get on me about this again now. I'm sick of your yelling.

NICK MCCABE

So am I. Doesn't do shit to get through your thick head anyway. Just wanted you to know it's out there: Allen Klein's taking *half the money* out our pockets. And everyone's wondering... *did Richard Ashcroft actually write his great song?*

Nick knows that was cruel. Almost feels bad, until--

RICHARD ASHCROFT

He's not taking money out of *our* pockets, though, is he?

NICK MCCABE

He's taking a piece of album sales. Wasn't that part of the deal? That's my money too, Dick. Last I checked, I'm *still* writer on some of those songs - and I've barely seen any money from it.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

You're co-writer, actually.
(deeply annoyed)
What do you care anyway? Once it's all sorted, it'll still be a hell of a lot more than we were making before, which you were perfectly fine with back then. Besides, you checked the NME noms? We're on fucking fire. Yet you're squabbling about setlists and... and I don't even know what--

NICK MCCABE

Wow. We could get a whole stupid award? Won't that make it all better?

Realizing he's being petty, Nick stops himself. Serious now.

NICK MCCABE (CONT'D)

I don't know if this ever occurred to you, Richard... but we would've been happy for you. About Kate, I mean. You could've told us. We woulda been there. We *shoulda* been there.

(MORE)

NICK MCCABE (CONT'D)
 We're supposed to be bandmates. Mates
 is right in the fucking name.

But Richard still says nothing. He wants to. But doesn't.

NICK MCCABE (CONT'D)
 (sighs, turns to leave)
 See you on the next tour, I guess.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Cocaine is snorted through a dollar bill as Richard stands upright quickly, feeling the high. Kate sits behind him, studying him, as the TV plays idly in the background.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 It's like they don't even care that
 I got us here, ya know? I get no
 respect from them.

KATE RADLEY
 Right. But... do you give them any
 back though?

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 (ignoring that)
 I mean, we're platinum, we did a
 tour of the United Fucking States,
 nominated for NMEs out the ass.
 What the hell else do they want?

Something else's on Kate's mind and even Richard can tell.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)
 Sorry, I shouldn't be... I didn't
 mean to be raw about the NME thing.
 (encouraging)
 Regardless of what's going on,
you're still nominated for those
 NMEs too. You said it yourself,
 you're all over that record. It's
 is as much yours as it is
 Spaceman's. Hell, the first words
 spoken on the damn album came out
 of *your* mouth, didn't they?

KATE RADLEY
 Yeah, I know, I just... I'd
 rather... still be in the band.

Looking at her, Richard is sympathetic. Even a little guilty.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
It's my fault.

Kate looks at Richard, as much as she might want to blame--

KATE RADLEY
Getting married was my idea, too.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Spaceman's a real bellend letting
you go. Guess you were right about
him after all... too sensitive.

Richard sits on the bed, pulling her down with him.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)
I just hope your consolation prize
is enough.

He tickles her, getting on top of her. She laughs, the
slightest bit of cheering up before trying to push him off.

KATE RADLEY
Off me, you big lug.

But Richard leans down, looking in her eyes.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Never. I will never be off Kate
Radley. Not ever.

He kisses her. She kisses him back. As he looks at her--

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)
You know, sometimes, I really do
feel like my stepdad says, like I
could just *fly up into the clouds*
and never come back if I wanted.

KATE RADLEY
I almost believe you. I just hope
you remember to kiss me goodbye.

That freezes Richard. He moves his face closer to Kate's.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
You think I'd leave you behind?
Where'd I even go without you?

KATE RADLEY
You'd be hopeless. No one else can
wrangle that massive ego of yours.

Richard smiles. He knows it's true. But the moment shifts as Richard's attention is diverted when he hears behind him--

TV ANCHOR (O.S.)
...earlier today, Rolling Stones' iconic guitarist Keith Richards was finally asked directly about the situation with The Verve, and here's what he had to say about it.

Richard whips around, focus now FULLY on the TV.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 Here we go. Time for a bit of truth. Justice. Keef's gotta be on my side. He knows how music's made.

ON THE TV SCREEN, Keith takes a long time to summon words.

KEITH RICHARDS (ON TV)
...look, I'm out of whack here. This is serious lawyer stuff.

Twisting his face, this isn't what Richard expected.

KEITH RICHARDS (ON TV) (CONT'D)
But if The Verve can write a better song... they can keep the money.

That last line lands like a BOMB. Richard's face falls, DEVASTATED. Kate turns the TV off, thinking of what to say.

KATE RADLEY
 Babe... just... forget him.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 Forget the greatest guitarist of the greatest band to ever walk the earth?! Forget him denigrating me on TV for the whole world to see?

KATE RADLEY
 Yes. Forget him.

A million emotions pass through Richard, until--

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 No. *FUCK HIM*. The Stones stole that song in the first place. Bastards.

KATE RADLEY

Remember what else Doug said. You already wrote one massive worldwide hit. That means you can write a thousand more. Maybe it's time to--

But the thought of writing a new song, one even greater and more glorious than "Bitter Sweet Symphony", fills Richard with existential panic. He stands, pacing, moving on to--

RICHARD ASHCROFT

The NMEs. That's the real ticket. Every great British artist has won Album of the Year. The Stones can take all our damn money. They can take the song. But they can't take the whole of *Urban Hymns*. They can't take its legend. And we're gonna win that award, dammit.

Kate exhales. There's nothing else to say beyond--

KATE RADLEY

I hope you do, love...
(conflicted)
...I really do.

INT. RICHARD'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Looking at himself in the mirror, Richard pulls on a long TRENCHCOAT. Assessing.

KATE RADLEY (O.S.)

You look great. Very punk.

He turns to Kate, stunning in a subtle pink dress.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

More importantly, look at you there. *NMEs* aren't gonna know what hit 'em with the pair of us.
(kissing her)
Have to admit, it is nice being able to go out in public together.

They admire themselves in the mirror together, a perfect fit.

KATE RADLEY

Just... came at a hefty price.
(swallowing her feelings)
By the way, something came for you.

Kate extends an envelope with the ABKCO LOGO on it. Upon seeing it, Richard RIPS IT OPEN. Inside is a copy of a CONTRACT to license "Bitter Sweet Symphony".

RICHARD ASHCROFT
*Nike?! Son of a bitch. He's really
 selling out to sweatshops already.*

In the envelope, Richard also finds a NOTE attached to a check: "*Thought you deserved something for your trouble - Allen*". Looking at the check, it's for a mere \$1,000.

Richard shakes his head, turning red. Trying not to let this throw him, he TEARS the contract up. Kate extends her hand--

KATE RADLEY
 Like we said. Fuck them, right?

RICHARD ASHCROFT
*Tonight's what this was all about
 anyway. The actual art. The music.
 This song... was for the people.
 And tonight... they award us.*

Richard reaches into his pocket, quick pop of MDMA--

INT. BRIXTON ACADEMY - NIGHT

The sound of CAMERAS SHUTTERING and CLINKING GLASSES. The CROWD is filled with MID 90s MUSIC HEAVYHITTERS and their extensive ENTOURAGES. This year, the likes of PRODIGY, OASIS, ELASTICA - alongside The Verve and, of course, *Spiritualized*.

CHYRON: LONDON - 1998

Kate sits at a table with Spaceman and the others, very awkwardly keeps to herself. Richard's with the rest of The Verve at their table. He looks over to check she's alright.

LIGHTS FADE and exuberant British comedian of the age, EDDIE IZZARD, takes the stage to LOUD APPLAUSE.

EDDIE IZZARD
*Welcome to the glorious 1998 NME
 Awards. I'm your presenter, Eddie
 Izzard. We've got plenty of music
 legends in the house tonight. Though
 seems many of the real ones were too
 busy to come. Guess we'll see you
 next year, Beck and Radiohead?*

Some light LAUGHTER at that as Richard decides whether or not to be offended.

EDDIE IZZARD (CONT'D)
 But not to worry, we do have *The Sensational Verve* here tonight.
 What a year they've had.

That gets a smile as the attention and lights all come to their table. Izzard grins wickedly, setting up--

EDDIE IZZARD (CONT'D)
 ...guess we can only get the bands
 who can't write their own songs.

GUFFAWS RING OUT all around Richard, nearly splitting his head. That one definitely offends. The other guys force laughs. Kate looks over, knowing that's gotta kill him.

EDDIE IZZARD (CONT'D)
 Alright, enough jokes now. First
 award of the night's gonna be, you
 guessed it, the most important one -
Dickhead of the Year.

On Richard as he tries to keep himself unflappable.

TIME CUT:

Later in the night, Eddie's back presenting another.
 Richard's still holding it together best he can.

EDDIE IZZARD (CONT'D)
 Time for Best Music Video. And the
 winner is...

Richard moves toward the edge of his seat, fists clamped.

EDDIE IZZARD (CONT'D)
 Well, I saw this coming so you
 probably did too: The Verve with
"Bitter Sweet Symphony"!

With those words, the whole night is turned around. Richard leaps to his feet excitedly. He even manages to HUG NICK on his way to the stage.

Kate applauds from her table. Spaceman politely does as well.

Standing up there in front of everyone, lights in his eyes, AWARD thrust into his hand, Richard's on his way back. This was what he was waiting for, what he deserves--

INT. BRIXTON ACADEMY - BACKSTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Award still in hand, Richard may or may not do a quick BUMP outside of the periphery of any onlookers.

INT. BRIXTON ACADEMY - LATER

Back in their seats, Richard is alive with energy as--

EDDIE IZZARD (O.S.)
And best single... *again* it's the
damn Verve with "Bitter Sweet
Symphony".

Richard's back on his feet again, elated.

INT. BRIXTON ACADEMY - BACKSTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Juggling both awards, another possible BUMP.

INT. BRIXTON ACADEMY - LATER

EDDIE IZZARD
Best Band... yeah, there you have
it. *The Verve!*

Racing for the stage, Richard crowds the microphone, eyes dilated, a bit manic if we're honest--

RICHARD ASHCROFT
It's important for us to thank those
took the time to vote for us. This
song is for you. All of this... is
for the people. And no one - *no one* -
can ever take that away.
(too intense)
They *will not* take it away.

Pete, Nick, both Simons look at Richard, concern growing.

INT. BRIXTON ACADEMY - BACKSTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Awards in hand. Okay, he's definitely doing a BUMP here.

INT. BRIXTON ACADEMY - LATER

Richard's a true livewire now, barely able to sit still in his seat. The others try to ignore his bouncing about as Kate looks over at him, starting to worry what he'll do next.

EDDIE IZZARD
 And for the final award of the
 night... we of course have the big
 one: Best Album.

Richard SLAMS his hand into the table way too hard--

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 This is it, boys. Time to solidify
 our legend. A full sweep.

Eddie slowly opens the envelope. As he reads the text, a
 smirk appears on his face. It betrays a hint of surprise.

EDDIE IZZARD
 Nice one. I've got to say I agree
 with this here. The winner is...

Richard readies himself to stand again, HUGE GRIN spreading.

EDDIE IZZARD (CONT'D)
 "Ladies and gentleman we are
 floating in space"... Spiritualized
 takes it!

The grin disappears instantly. Richard IN SHOCK.

SPACEMAN (O.S.)
 Is someone taking the piss...?

Urged to his feet, Spaceman is aflutter. He heads to the
 stage as Kate awkwardly follows. She looks to Richard's
 table, locking eyes with him. He's still stunned, unable to
 bring himself to even send her an encouraging smile.

He looks to his three awards, then to Nick politely clapping.
 A look of total disdain crosses his face.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 You serious, mate...?

NICK MCCABE
 We all won, Richard. Plenty to go
 around. Be happy for your wife...

Richard looks to Spaceman onstage, then to Kate beside him.
 Knowing he HAS to do it, Richard finally begins to CLAP. But
 a single look at his face tells us it's KILLING him.

And Kate can see it too, irritation rising within her.

INT. BRIXTON ACADEMY - BACKSTAGE - LATER

Show over, heading off toward the afterparty, Richard and the others are hounded by REPORTERS and CAMERAS. They keep their heads down, avoiding them.

REPORTER #1
Mad Dick?! Kerrang Magazine
here--

REPORTER #2
You have any words for Allen
Klei--

REPORTER #3
Richard, you've got to tell us -
what do you think of what Keith
Richards said about the lawsuit?

Richard STOPS in his TRACKS. Nick sees that look in his eye, he grabs his arm, stopping him.

NICK MCCABE
 Don't get mixed up in this shit.

But Richard can't help himself, PACING over to the camera--

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 You wanna know what I think...
 (directly into camera)
I think "Bitter Sweet Symphony" is
the best song Jagger and Richards
have written in twenty years.

That sends a SHOCKWAVE through the British music press in the room. Still embittered, Mad Dick simply continues on his way.

INT. BRIXTON ACADEMY - AFTERPARTY - LATER

Richard drinks miserably with the others and Kate at the NME afterparty. All the Attendees now mingle together. Kate looks to Richard, sloppy beyond measure.

KATE RADLEY
 Maybe we should go home.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 And leave the afterparty?

KATE RADLEY
 Richard...

But before she can push harder, appearing from the crowd is Spaceman, Best Album award in hand.

SPACEMAN

Ay... The Verve. You all did very well tonight. Congrats.

Richard eyes Spaceman suspiciously. *Why's he being nice?*

SPACEMAN (CONT'D)

Just a shame you couldn't snag top prize like Kate and me though. Almost like people only care about one of your songs.

(can't help himself)

The one that's not even yours.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Get off it, you prick. It *is* mine.

(off Nick's look)

Ours.

SPACEMAN

You finally wrote your great one and turns out... not even yours.

Kate sees Rich's temper rising, grabs his hand. Admonishing.

KATE RADLEY

Richard, just leave it. Let's go.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

(ignoring her)

Fuck off, Jason. First off, "The Drugs Don't Work" also went number one here. And secondly, you did the exact same shit as me. You just didn't get *fucked* like we did.

Kate exhales, knowing this will only get worse.

SPACEMAN

You make a good point. I actually make money off my shit.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

You don't make millions.

SPACEMAN

True. But I didn't give away every penny of my biggest hit either.

Pete's getting annoyed, finally has to jump in.

PETE SALISBURY

It's *fifty* percent of every penny for your information, Jason.

Spaceman is taken aback by that. As is Kate.

SPACEMAN
Oh God, you don't even know...

NICK MCCABE
Don't even know what?

SPACEMAN
Fuck. You may have almost killed me, Richard, but... I'm not gonna take any joy in breaking this news.

Richard lets Kate's hand go, turning on her.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
You told him?

KATE RADLEY
(brow furrowing)
I didn't know you were keeping it some big secret from everyone! *What the fuck, Richard?*

SIMON JONES
Rich... what's he talking about? What else was even left to give away?

Richard's silence says it all. A conflicted yet satisfied Spaceman backs out of the argument he inadvertently started.

NICK MCCABE
Richard, no. Please.
(words catching)
Was it really... *all of it?*

RICHARD ASHCROFT
(exhales)
He was gonna pull the album from stores. What else was I to do?

GASPS. The Simons and Pete look to each other, astonished.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)
Si, come on. You understand.

SIMON JONES
Nah, mate. I don't think I'll ever understand you...

PETE SALISBURY
This is gonna eat even further into our album profits.
(MORE)

PETE SALISBURY (CONT'D)

Fuck, are we gonna make *anything* when it's all said and done?

Richard turns to Tong, his one true fanboy, his last hope.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Tong. You get it, don't you? I had no choice.

Tong just shakes his head, tearful. As those three walk off--

NICK MCCABE

You just had to do your own thing, huh...? Write Richard Ashcroft's one great song? And look what it's gotten us. Fuck all.

Richard holds up his three trophies angrily.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

You call this *fuck all*?! And you know, I don't see Nick McCabe's endless fucking guitar solos at the top of the charts. I don't see bloody America itself chanting for that. They chant for *me*, for *my* album, for my song--

NICK MCCABE

And now it's not even yours a little bit. I guess, legally speaking... it never was. So, what now?

Richard wonders too what's next. Looking to Kate, remembering--

RICHARD ASHCROFT

I'll write another one then.

NICK MCCABE

Another one like *that*? We've never had another song like that one. It's-- it's not us.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Yeah, it's better than us! It's ME!

Nick lets that sit in the air. He nods.

NICK MCCABE

You can shout that from the rooftops all you like, but in name, in money... in *fucking public opinion*, it's just not true, man.

Richard can't take that. Kate pulls on his arm, knowing she's the only possible one who could stop this.

KATE RADLEY

Please, Richard, look at me! Let's just go home and--

RICHARD ASHCROFT

(ignoring her yet again)
It's more than you've ever done, McCabe. You've never written anything like that, with that much power, that's touched that many people. And truth is, you never will. And you know it. And that's why you hate me so much, why you do all this. Because the only credits you do have on *Urban Hymns* are the ones I deigned myself to give you. Because you know, in your heart, when it comes down to it... *I'm just better than you.*

BAM! Like lightning, Nick's fist CONNECTS with Richard's jaw. Richard's hand goes to his face, stunned Nick really did that.

NICK MCCABE

I'm fucking done with you, Rich! We all are. Me, Pete, Jazz, both Simons. Kate too, if she's got any sense about her. It's over, man. You've fucked it too many times.
(anger turns to sadness)
You were always so set on being "the biggest band in the world". Why couldn't you just be happy enough being The Verve? That's all we ever wanted. We were happy with it.
(truly hurt)
Why weren't you?

And Nick walks off for the last time. Kate comes closer, touches Richard's chin, analyzing. But he moves away, not wanting comfort. She shakes her head, beyond irritated.

KATE RADLEY

Okay. I'm done. *Goodnight, Richard.* I'm gonna go celebrate MY accomplishment. Maybe you can figure out how to ever be happy for someone other than yourself.

Off Richard, watching her leave. Now he's really fucked it.

INT. RICHARD'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Richard lies in bed, bruise on his chin, wide awake, staring at the wall. BEEP--

JAZZ SUMMERS (VOICEMAIL)
Richard, get up and call me back. I know what happened after the NMEs, but there's still more shows to play. You do not want venues suing you on top of everyone else...

INT. RICHARD'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Another night, Richard still hasn't moved. BEEP--

JAZZ SUMMERS (VOICEMAIL)
Richard... fucking Andrew Oldham's filed a lawsuit now too. The prick's going around saying you think you wrote something you didn't. We have real shit to talk about. Call me!

INT. RICHARD'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Richard literally can't move. BEEP--

JAZZ SUMMERS (VOICEMAIL)
Richard... forget everything else for a second: *Slane Castle*. That's how big you are right now. Slane. Fucking. Castle. I don't care what you have going on with the guys... Are you really gonna let Allen Klein stop you from playing this?

BEEP. Richard blinks, and then finally, he GETS UP.

EXT. SLANE CASTLE - NIGHT

LIGHTS shine up on a MAJESTIC CASTLE nestled into the Irish countryside. As we pull back from it, we see--

--a STAGE and beyond it TENS OF THOUSANDS OF FANS CHEER as the MANIC STREET PREACHERS finish up their own hit song "If You Tolerate This Your Children Will Be Next".

JAMES BRADFELD
Next up, we've got a real treat for you. In just a few minutes...
THE... FUCKING... VERVE!

The Crowd goes absolutely APESHIT as we cut to--

INT. SLANE CASTLE - SAME

Inside the castle walls, the Simons, Pete, Nick, and Jazz are anxious, waiting.

PETE SALISBURY

What do we do if he doesn't show?

Before they can think, a completely LOADED Richard stands in the doorway. They breathe a fractured sigh of relief... despite not *really* wanting to be around him. Silence.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

(slurring)

So what we got after this, Jazz?

JAZZ SUMMERS

This is the last show on the books.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

This is it?

JAZZ SUMMERS

For now... yeah.

Richard looks around the room, reading between the lines there. A tense gaze is exchanged between all.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Right... *for now*.

EXT. SLANE CASTLE - MOMENTS LATER

Taking the stage, The Verve are welcomed to DEAFENING CHEERS. Richard soaks it in as the others ready their instruments. He looks back to them. Buried emotions. Finally, still slurring--

RICHARD ASHCROFT

How are you, Ireland?!

SCREAMS are returned to him. A serious look overtakes him.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)

*This is a song th-- that they say
has been stolen...*

Richard's lost in it all. The rest of the band waits for him to continue, wondering if he even will.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)
 ...not by us, it isn't. Anyway,
 this is a song for-- the people.
 It's modern day blues. This is
 "Bitter Sweet Symphony"...

The audience completely EXPLODES as the opening strings kick in. Moments later, the band joins in. The sound is bigger than ever. And so is the crowd watching.

The band should be at the absolute height of euphoria. But on the faces of each member, only one thing is clear:

IT'S OVER.

Richard brings the microphone to his mouth, almost in tears.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)
*Cause it's a bitter sweet symphony,
 that's life/trying to make ends
 meet, you're a slave to money then
 you die...*

As the crowd chants along with every word, we see Richard's face morph from one of grief... to unbridled ANGER.

The music begins to fade away, replaced by a thudding, ominous ELECTRONIC BEAT--

EXT. WIGAN - STREETS - DAY

Richard paces the rainy streets of Wigan, sans umbrella. He ignores the looks of every Pedestrian who eyes him. Again, channeling the "Bitter Sweet" music video.

CHYRON - WIGAN, 1999

Passing a newsstand, the HEADLINES cry out: *"The Verve Call It Quits... Again", "Bittersweet Success as The Verve Split", "Verve Break Up for Second, and Likely Final, Time".*

Richard pays no mind, charging forward and not caring who he bumps into, even as various Passerby snap pictures of him.

INT. RICHARD'S APARTMENT - DAY

The electronic beat plays on. Opening the door to a MOUNTAIN OF MAIL, Richard is immediately annoyed.

He quickly scans over everything, virtually all LEGAL MAIL of some sort. Rubs his temples, headache forming... until he spots a LETTER FROM THE ACADEMY OF RECORDING ARTS.

Opening it, we see what he does: "...Academy of Recording Arts Proudly Presents this Grammy Nomination to THE VERVE for Best Rock Performance for "Bitter Sweet Symphony". Richard could almost cry, his whole mood turns around until--

--beneath it: "...written by Mick Jagger & Keith Richards"

Now he could *really* almost cry. Trying to move on, he flips through the rest of the mail until he reaches the last piece, an unsealed letter simply labeled "Richard". Tearing it open:

KATE RADLEY (V.O.)
Rich, I'm going home for a bit.
Need to sort things out... and
think about us. Please don't call.

And that is what officially sends him overboard. Richard crumbles the letter. He looks to his ANSWERING MACHINE, a red button indicating MANY MESSAGES.

As he spirals, the frantic electronic beat rises along with his emotion. Just as Richard POUNDS his fist against the machine, the music fully breaks out, along with--

JAZZ SUMMERS (VOICEMAIL)
*Richard, these lawsuits aren't just
going to go away by ignoring them--*

INT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT - MONTAGE

A sweaty Richard DANCES WILDLY at a packed rave. Onstage, electronic duo THE CHEMICAL BROTHERS spins their paranoia-soaked Big Beat hit "Setting Sun".

Richard's attention is grabbed by two YOUNG RAVERS in front of him who yell to each other over the music.

RAVER #1
...this right here is the future!
Rock n' Roll, Britpop, Songwriters,
all that shite is done.

RAVER #2
Shitpop's more like it. But hey...
they still got Noel Gallagher
singing on the track...

RAVER #1
...that's just what they needed to
transition the sheep shaggers to
the new era!

Richard's dilated eyes widen further. Over the speakers--

NOEL GALLAGHER (V.O.)
 (singing, distorted)
*You're the devil in me I brought in
 from the cold/Said your body was
 young but your mind was very old--*

The sound of Noel's voice coupled with what Richard's just heard sends him one step closer to oblivion--

LAWYER #5 (VOICEMAIL)
*Mr. Ashcroft, I'm calling again on
 behalf of my client David Whitaker--*

INT. WAREHOUSE BATHROOM - NIGHT - MONTAGE

Richard looks at himself in the filthy bathroom mirror as "Setting Sun" literally VIBRATES through the walls. Unable to stand it, he POPS a tab of MDMA.

SPACEMAN (VOICEMAIL)
*It's Jason. Look, Richard, I've
 heard from Kate. Even after
 everything, I thought it only right
 I check on you like you did for me--*

The SOUND of the answering machine SMASHING tells us that'll be the last message. Richard has a meltdown to attend to.

INT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT - MONTAGE

More unhinged, Richard absolutely LOSES IT on the dance floor. Going way too hard, absolutely killing the mood. He doesn't see it, but a BOUNCER is headed right toward him.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT - MONTAGE

Song still erupting, Richard is violently THROWN OUT of the warehouse into the wet night.

BOUNCER
*How about you go somewhere more
 your scene, Captain Rock?!*

Richard stands, sends a vulgar gesture right back.

INT. PUB - NIGHT - MONTAGE

A sloppy Richard pounds a pint, gestures for another. As an excited BARGOER approaches--

BARGOER

Holy shit! Richard Ashcroft? You're not serious about breaking up the band again, are you?

Richard SHOVES the Bargoer away, not caring what they think.

"Setting Sun" briefly fades away as Richard's ears PERK UP to a different sound. He turns to a TELEVISION in the corner, where a COMMERCIAL is accompanied by "Bitter Sweet Symphony".

Richard's grip on his pint tightens as the commercial displays NIKE'S ICONIC LOGO.

Furious, he HURLS the glass at the television. "Setting Sun" comes roaring back as the screen shatters and PANDEMONIUM unleashes throughout the bar.

Two BOUNCERS instantly grab Richard by the shoulders.

EXT. PUB - NIGHT - MONTAGE

Richard's AGAIN thrown out into the desolate night. Not ready for his night of chaos and debauchery to end, Richard pops another MDMA tab as the music builds even louder.

But then, just as quickly, it quiets once more, because Richard is hearing again -- "Bitter Sweet Symphony". This time, coming out of a nearby luxury car stopped at a light.

Richard stumbles closer, aghast to see three WELL-SUITED MEN inside. Not at all the audience he intended it for.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

No...

WELL-SUITED MAN #1

(noticing him)

What're you doing?

Richard leans through the window, SHUTTING OFF the stereo system and allowing "Setting Sun" to come back.

WELL-SUITED MAN #2

What the-- you serious, lad?

RICHARD ASHCROFT

That song... is not for you.

The three Men exchange confused glances as Richard rushes away, desperately looking for anywhere to escape the song that is now haunting him, landing on--

INT. THEATER - NIGHT - MONTAGE

An even sloppier Richard sits in the back of a crowded movie theater. He smokes a cigarette, more relaxed, laughing inappropriately as THEATREGOERS look back, annoyed. Some might even recognize him, but they're still pissed.

THEATREGOER #1
Seriously?! Do you mind?!

RICHARD ASHCROFT
What?! Don't tell me you're
actually enjoying this garbage--

On the silver screen, the ending of the movie *CRUEL INTENTIONS* is unfolding, actresses Sarah Michelle Gellar and Selma Blair in a stand off at a funeral.

One more time, "Setting Sun" fades away as the film's closing MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT begins to play.

You guessed it... Hell, it might even be why you know "Bitter Sweet Symphony" to begin with.

Richard's eyes pop, his face taut. It's like he's seen a ghost. He literally can't escape his own creation.

But before he can even think of making yet another scene, SECURITY walks the aisle in his direction. As "Setting Sun" definitively returns, Richard DARTS out.

EXT. WIGAN - STREETS - NIGHT - MONTAGE

Richard drinks in public as the night turns into a BLUR.

INT. CLUB - NIGHT

Dancing again with abandon, Richard SCREAMS into the night.

EXT. WIGAN - STREETS - NIGHT - MONTAGE

Just like in the video, Richard walks the streets, BUMPING into more Pedestrians with no regard, FULLY PAST THE EDGE.

EXT. WIGAN CEMETERY - NIGHT - END MONTAGE

The song finally collapses as a drunk and high Richard comes to a stumbling fall outside of a place he's been avoiding for years: WIGAN CEMETERY.

Richard still processes what he's seeing, unable to talk. He forces himself to sit up.

FRANK ASHCROFT (CONT'D)
Christ, you look worse than me...
which is saying a lot, considering
I'm... y'know, dead.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
I... I don't understand.

FRANK ASHCROFT
You're the one who's consumed the
north of England's entire drug
supply for the month in one night.
You tell me what this is.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
It's... it's a horror show is what
it is. The fucking song. It won't
leave me alone.

For the first time, Richard lets out the tears he's been holding in almost his entire life. Frank kneels to him.

FRANK ASHCROFT
Oh, son...

RICHARD ASHCROFT
I'm sorry, Dad. God, I'm--

FRANK ASHCROFT
And what do you have to be sorry
for? I mean, outside of
embarrassing the Ashcroft name to
hell and back tonight, that is.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
I failed at what I promised you.

FRANK ASHCROFT
What you promised me...?

RICHARD ASHCROFT
The last time I was here. I told
you... I swore I'd be the biggest
in the world. That I'd write that
great song inside of me... the one
that would honor you.

Richard continues to let the emotion out. Frank puts his hand on his son's shoulder.

FRANK ASHCROFT

Hey... but you did write that great one, didn't ya? No matter what, no one can take away that you did it.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

I should have everything I've ever wanted now. Instead, I've been fucked six ways to Sunday, and all I want... is to just lay down here and die.

FRANK ASHCROFT

No, you don't. Trust me on that one.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Song's not even mine, y'know? Not according to the rest of the bloody world. It's just... someone else's.

FRANK ASHCROFT

Just cause the song originated from somewhere else... doesn't mean it's not yours too. I created you, Rich - does that mean you're solely *mine*?

RICHARD ASHCROFT

You don't get it. They're actually saying I had nothing to do with the damn song, Dad. Nothing.

FRANK ASHCROFT

But you know that's not true--

RICHARD ASHCROFT

What if it is? What if... I really did convince myself I wrote something that I just... didn't? What way would that be to honor you?

FRANK ASHCROFT

Son. You already "honored me" by giving me the best days of my life. Being your dad... was more than enough for me to take with me to where I am now. That's what life is really about, isn't it? Isn't *that* what that song says, after all?

Richard shrugs, no words left.

FRANK ASHCROFT (CONT'D)

And for fuck's sake, why would everyone under the sun be suing you... if the song wasn't *yours*?

On Richard as that settles in.

FRANK ASHCROFT (CONT'D)
You did what you set out to do,
Rich. The Verve were the biggest
thing in the world... even if it
was just for one song.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
But I thought... I'd at least get
to enjoy it when it happened.

FRANK ASHCROFT
Yeah, well, doesn't always happen
that way, does it? But now you've
done it, it's time for you to find
the next goal... whatever that is.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
But... I don't know what it is.

FRANK ASHCROFT
You've got no choice but to figure
it out.

Frank turns his flashlight on once more, shining it back in
Richard's face, blinding him again.

FRANK ASHCROFT (O.S.) (CONT'D)
And for God's sake, son, make it
right with the rest of the boys. If
not now... then at some point.

Frank's silhouette begins to back away from Richard.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Wait! Where are you going?

FRANK ASHCROFT (O.S.)
I can't answer that. No one can...
Goodbye, Richard.

The light becomes ever more intense as--

KATE RADLEY (V.O.)
Richard...
(louder)
RICHARD!

EXT. WIGAN CEMETERY - DAY

Richard blinks his eyes to life in the blinding sunshine.
It's morning now. And yes, he still looks like total shit.

KATE RADLEY

Richard, wake up, dammit! Do you
want to get bloody arrested?

He's stunned to see Kate by his side, nearly as stunned as he
was to see his dead father.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Kate... are you...
(words catching)
...please tell me this is real. You
are actually here, right?

KATE RADLEY

I am. But are you? You look like
shit.

Kate's anger lightly subsides as she looks to the GRAVE
MARKING near Richard: "*Here lies Frank Ashcroft...*"

KATE RADLEY (CONT'D)

Do we need to go to the hospital or
somethi--

RICHARD ASHCROFT

How... did you know I was here?

KATE RADLEY

You left me like ten completely
unhinged messages about it.
(off Rich's embarrassment)
Had quite the night, did we?

RICHARD ASHCROFT

(rubbing head)
Feels like we'll have quite the
morning as well.

Richard takes a breath, awkwardness in the air.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Kate. For everything.

KATE RADLEY

Richard... you know it's not the
guys' fault what happened, right?
And it's certainly not *mine* either.

Though silent, we see Richard does know that.

KATE RADLEY (CONT'D)

What Klein did... the way that
felt...

(MORE)

KATE RADLEY (CONT'D)

You think it's all that different from the way *they* felt when you broke up the band? *Again?*

(fighting tears)

You think it's that different from how I felt when Jason kicked me out? I don't blame you for it, but still, you and me... it's the reason I'm out. For fuck's sake, you think I wanted to leave the band that had the *real* definitive album of 1997?

(touching his face)

I've been right here, feeling all the same things as you. And you won't let me in. The only thing you ever let in... is the damn music.

Sun shining behind her head, Kate is literally glowing in front of him. And Richard realizes - *he knows what's next.*

RICHARD ASHCROFT

It's time I change that. Time I focus on what's next. And for me... the only thing next is *you.*

Kate looks to him, wanting to believe his words.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)

Last night was... something's different in me now, Kate. I swear. You don't have to believe me yet. I wouldn't. But I'll prove to you what I'm saying is true. All I ask is: *Will you give me the chance to?*

KATE RADLEY

(measuring words)

Unfortunately for me... I don't think I have a choice. Because no matter how hard I try, I... I'll never be off Richard Ashcroft.

Fighting to his feet, Richard reaches for her hand. His eyes misty, a deep gratitude for her coursing through him.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

...you know, now that *neither of us* has a band anymore, maybe we could... create something together.

Kate stares back. Her eyes water.

KATE RADLEY
 Maybe... we already did.

Richard's not thick enough to miss that.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 Oh, my God. You're serious?

Kate softly touches her stomach, simply nodding. Richard is completely overwhelmed with emotion.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)
 Fuck me. I really *do* need to get myself in order, don't I?

KATE RADLEY
 Look where we are, Richard. Do I really need to answer that?

RICHARD ASHCROFT
 Will you... help me?

Before Kate can answer, Richard summons the words he has NEVER been able to say in his entire life.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)
 I can't do it without you.
 (swallowing all his pride)
I can't do it by myself.

Kate looks deep into his eyes, emotional at that. She pulls him into her, holding him close.

INT. ABKCO OFFICES - EVENING

At her desk, Sophie's got large headphones on, mouthing the words to "Lucky Man" as she puts her things into a BOX.

As Allen exits his office, he freezes at the sight.

ALLEN KLEIN
 The fuck is all this?

Sophie pulls her headphones off, continuing with her box.

SOPHIE PORTER
 You don't know "Lucky Man"? Y'know "Bitter Sweet" isn't the only good song on *Urban Hymns*. These guys are, like... actually really great. Incredible, even.

ALLEN KLEIN

I'm talking about *the box*. What are you doing?

SOPHIE PORTER

Right, that. Well - you've inspired me, Mr. Klein. I'm going back to school. Pivoting to *music law*.

For the first time, Allen's speechless. Sophie finishes up, popping her headphones in the box last.

SOPHIE PORTER (CONT'D)

That way, next time you do something like you did to The Verve... I'll be sitting on the *other side of the table* from you.

Last thing on her desk: an ENVELOPE. She hands it to him.

Allen watches the door shut behind Sophie, looking down to the envelope addressed to him, originating from WIGAN. He opens it to find inside the CHECK he sent to Richard. And scrawled across it in big block letters: "FUCK YOU".

As we take in Allen's ever-dissatisfied mug, we FADE TO--

EXT. WIGAN - DAY

A cab pushes through traffic down a busy Wigan street. In the back of it, we find--

INT. CAB - CONTINUOUS

--Richard, SHORN BLEACH-BLONDE HAIR, older than we last saw.

CHYRON: WIGAN - 2007

The CAB DRIVER tries not to glance in the rearview mirror as he drives, but he clearly recognizes Richard, excited.

Richard doesn't notice, just looking out at the PEOPLE, the fellow Wiganers he's always written his songs for.

CAB DRIVER

Sorry, you're... are you Richard Ashcroft?

Richard assesses the guy, debating whether to be truthful.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

...yeah. You caught me.

CAB DRIVER

Fuck me. Richard Ashcroft in my cab.
Sorry to bother you like, but man...
I love your music.

Richard smiles, accepting that in stride--

CAB DRIVER (CONT'D)

Storm in Heaven. Northern Soul. Urban Hymns. Hell, I even love your solo stuff.

--until he hears that.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Even my solo stuff?

CAB DRIVER

I didn't mean it like that. I practically got *Keys to the World* memorized. But there was just something so special you did with The Verve, man. You boys... were the real deal. Meant a lot to us.

Richard lets it slide, quietly agreeing with the Cab Driver.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Yeah. We weren't bad, were we?

CAB DRIVER

I'm sure you know there's rumors about... you all getting back together. You think it'll happen?

Turning away, Richard looks out the window again. He smirks.

RICHARD ASHCROFT

Didn't you hear what I said last year...? *Be more likely to get all four Beatles back onstage together.*

The Cab Driver shakes his head, disappointed. Before he can say more, Richard's phone BEEPS - a text from KATE with a photo of her and their YOUNG SONS making a meal together.

Richard grins at the shot, turns his attention to the window.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)

It's this one right here.

INT. REHEARSAL SPACE - DAY

Looking around the same space where he created *Urban Hymns*, it all looks so different to Richard now. More corporate, less creative. The times and how they change things.

SIMON TONG (O.S.)
You're shitting me? Is that really
Mad Dick himself...?

Richard turns to see Simon Tong, also older, more mature. He's got his guitar case at his side.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
You look good, Tong.

PETE SALISBURY (O.S.)
He's still the ugly Simon though.

They turn to see Jones and Pete, who laughs.

SIMON TONG
Easy to be the better looking Pete
when there's only one of you.

As the four of them stand together, an awkward silence takes hold. No one is sure where to take this next.

PETE SALISBURY
...shame what happened to Nick, eh?

The foursome each exchange serious glances, until--

NICK MCCABE (O.S.)
Seriously, I gain less than a stone
and you assholes won't ever let me
forget it.

Laughter breaks out as we see Nick standing in the doorway.

NICK MCCABE (CONT'D)
You know we could barely afford to
eat when we were a band.

As the laughter dies down, there's a loaded look exchanged between Nick and Richard. The others wait to see what will happen. Awkward silence fills the room.

NICK MCCABE (CONT'D)
Well... here we are. I thought
Richard Ashcroft said he could do
it all alone.

RICHARD ASHCROFT
Two platinum solo albums say I did.

Nick and Richard stare each other down.

NICK MCCABE
I hate to break it to you, Rich,
but I ain't written any material
for this meeting here. Not sure
where we should even start.

Richard takes a step toward him, an olive branch--

RICHARD ASHCROFT
What do you say... we just jam,
then? Like the old days.
(right at Nick)
We were always best that way.
Weren't we?

Off that, A NEW SOUND begins as we FADE TO--

EXT. GLASTONBURY - NIGHT

--A CROWD OF A HUNDRED THOUSAND absolutely VIBRATES to a
newly-reunited The Verve's single: "Love is Noise".

CHYRON: GLASTONBURY - 2008

Onstage, the band is ROCKING. Richard, like when we met him,
slithers around the space. Nick, as always, remains still as
a statue. Together, they reach the final chorus--

RICHARD ASHCROFT
*Love is noise, love is pain/Love is
these blues that I'm singing again...*

As the song finishes, a DEAFENING CHEER rises out from the
crowd. Richard exhales. He takes a moment to look at each
band member, saving Nick for last.

There's a lot of pain still between these two. Years of
regret and hurt feelings and arguments and fractured egos.
But here they are together, for the world to see.

Richard raises the microphone, addressing the audience.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)
You know... It's a struggle. Life's
a struggle. Monday morning may be a
struggle for a lot of you. Working
for a job you despise. Working for
a bastard you despise.
(MORE)

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)
 (stressing)
 A slave to money... then we die.

The audience reacts with ECSTATIC CHEERS, knowing what they're about to hear. The opening strings to the song that's defined Richard's entire life begin to play.

But the strings are alone, the band not joining in just yet. The anticipation builds with each repeated measure.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)
 You may not be surprised to hear
 there was a time I hated this song.
 After all the shit we went through
 cause of it. All the accusations
 leveled at me cause of it...

He looks back to Nick once more, who finally lets his distorted guitar SQUEAL, adding even further to the anticipation. He and Richard even manage to share a smile.

RICHARD ASHCROFT (CONT'D)
 But then I remembered, that
regardless of who wrote it...
 (looking back to crowd)
...it's still one of the best songs
ever fucking written.

And with that, the band FINALLY, FULLY KICKS INTO THE DRIVING RHYTHM OF "BITTER SWEET SYMPHONY". The crowd ROARS. The song sparkles with an electric energy we haven't heard before.

For once, everything is right in Richard's life. He outstretches his arms, looking to the cloudy sky above--

--and his body ASCENDS OFF THE STAGE. He's FLYING, just like his stepdad Doug said he would. He soars higher and higher over the crowd, arms open as the music continues.

ONSCREEN TEXT: *"Following a series of triumphant reunion shows, The Verve released another album, FORTH, in 2008."*

As Richard continues upward, FLOATING INTO THE CLOUDS--

--we CUT TO the same arduous process of PRESSING A VINYL we saw in our opening. This one reads FORTH by The Verve.

ONSCREEN TEXT: *"They broke up for the third time in 2009. They have not reunited since."*

A STACK of FORTH vinyls are placed on a record store shelf. Just like the Andrew Oldham Orchestra record before it, it disappears into the ether, people passing over it. Sadly, it was not The Verve's biggest success.

ONSCREEN TEXT: "Allen Klein passed away the following year at the age of 77, leaving behind a legacy of lawsuits in the music world that have only become more common today."

Back with the other Band Members on stage, fully engaged with the music. Fully alive. CU on each one as--

ONSCREEN TEXT: "Simon Tong, Simon Jones, and Pete Salisbury have gone on to play for various other groups, including Gorillaz and Black Rebel Motorcycle Club."

As we focus on Nick--

ONSCREEN TEXT: "Nick McCabe has continued to record with assorted musical projects. He has also continued to feud with Richard in the press since The Verve's last breakup. But he has never gone back to surveying."

Back with Richard in the sky--

ONSCREEN TEXT: "Richard Ashcroft has released six albums under his own name. Two have gone platinum in the UK."

He closes his eyes. At peace, possibly the first time ever.

ONSCREEN TEXT: "He and Kate are still married. They record music together and have two children."

Richard slowly brings the microphone back to his mouth--

ONSCREEN TEXT: "The 'Bitter Sweet Symphony' saga redefined the music industry, prompting artists and producers to navigate the complexities of sampling with greater caution."

--preparing to sing like never before.

ONSCREEN TEXT: "In April 2019, Mick Jagger and Keith Richards shocked the music world by returning all publishing rights and songwriting credits for 'Bitter Sweet Symphony' to Richard Ashcroft.

They offered no explanation for their decision.

As the history books and legal records will now forever show...

Richard wrote his great one after all."

As Richard begins to belt out the legendary opening refrain--

THE END