

CHARLIE COUNSELOR

Written By

Mike Felix

SUPERIMPOSE: The relationship between husband and wife should be one of closest friends.

- Bhimrao R. Ambedkar

1. INT. THE BARAKA HOME - DAY

An hour hand of an exquisite clock slips to mark nine a.m.

BEN BARAKA (40) and BEATRICE BARAKA (35), a couple, are sitting far apart in a three seater couch in a pristine well organized house.

They are both looking at opposite directions from each other. Neither is thrilled.

Ben - worn out, frustrated and at wit's end - looks at the clock. He shakes his head then looks at Beatrice.

Beatrice - sad and dilapidated - turns and looks at him. Her eyes are all soggy. She winces.

They stand up and head into the study room.

Ben and Beatrice sit on separate chairs.

CHARLIE (15) - in a suit with a tie not tied properly and wearing glasses - is sitting on a chair directly facing Ben and Beatrice. He holds a notebook on his lap.

He stares at them with unblinking eyes. He's static just like a statue.

A tense beat.

He smiles at them anxiously.

CHARLIE

Dearly beloved, we're gathered here
to celebrate the...

BEATRICE

No. That's not how it is supposed
to start...

Charlie lifts his index finger as he softly shushes her.

CHARLIE

I'm in charge here. I decide how it
starts.

BEATRICE

You know what? I don't think this
was a good idea.

BEN

I agree.

BEATRICE

See?

BEN

It's a great idea.

Beatrice looks at him loathly.

BEATRICE

Oh, fuck you Ben!

Ben scoffs - eyebrows furrowed.

BEN

(to Charlie)

You see what I'm dealing with.

CHARLIE

You know what, let's take a deep breath before we start.

Charlie exhales deeply.

CHARLIE

Now, some ground rules. As you can see I'm still not of age so no profanity at all costs, and no talking unless I allow you to. Am I clear?

Ben and Beatrice nod simultaneously.

CHARLIE

I said, am I clear?

BEN

Yes Charlie.

BEATRICE

Yes Charlie.

CHARLIE

Okay. So how long have you two been married?

BEN

Fourteen years.

Beatrice turns and looks at Ben spitefully.

BEATRICE

Fifteen years.

BEN

Fifteen, give or take?

Charlie nods as he scribbles on his notebook.

CHARLIE
So, when did it all start?
(to Ben)
Let's start with you.

Ben sighs.

BEN
It all started when I got a new job. I don't know how or why but Beatrice felt like I betrayed our business but the truth is our business was failing, we were making losses after losses and sooner or later we were going to shut down.

BEATRICE
No weren't, we still had a chance to save it.

CHARLIE
(to Beatrice)
You'll have your chance.
(to Ben)
Go on.

Beatrice looks down.

BEN
I didn't betray our business I just wanted to provide for my family in the best way possible. I just wanted my family to have a good life.

Ben sulks.

CHARLIE
Is that all?

Ben nods.

CHARLIE
(to Beatrice)
Your turn.

Beatrice looks up. A solitary tear trickles down her cheek. She wipes it.

BEATRICE
It all started two years ago when Ben got that job. Soon after that, he was different, our family was different and it was like he was never there.
(MORE)

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

It started by him missing dinner,
then coming home late and later
onwards he didn't even come home
for two to three days. At first I
thought he was cheating on me...

Ben's eyes grow wide.

BEN

You thought I was cheating on you.
I would never do that.

BEATRICE

I know.

BEN

Then why would you even assume that
I was cheating on you.

BEATRICE

I don't know. What else did you
want me to think?

Ben looks away.

Charlie whimpers softly. He tries to hold back the tears
welled up in his eyes.

BEATRICE

Are you okay?

BEN

You know we don't have to do this.

BEATRICE

Or maybe we could do it some other
time.

Charlie sighs.

CHARLIE

No, I'm alright. I just got a
little emotional and I apologize.

BEATRICE

You don't have to apologize.

CHARLIE

No, I do because. I'm the counselor
and I should be apathetic.

BEN

So, should we go on or what?

CHARLIE

Yes, let's continue. So where were
we...?

Charlie peruses through his notebook.

CHARLIE

Okay.

(beat)

I have some questions for both of you. Please answer them honestly.

Ben and Beatrice nod.

CHARLIE

In your own words how can you describe your happiness in this marriage?

BEATRICE

I am not very happy.

BEN

Me, I don't know if I'm happy or not and I don't even know how I can make her happy. I've tried everything and nothing is working.

Charlie sighs. He looks down.

CHARLIE

What about your children?

Ben and Beatrice eyes grow wide.

BEN

(stuttering)

What about them?

Silence. Charlie looks up. He stares at them but he can't hold the stare. He shies away. So he looks down at his notebook.

BEATRICE

Yes, what about them?

CHARLIE

Do you think they're happy with all the fights in your marriage?

Tense beat.

BEN

I think that they understand that there comes a time in a couple's life where things just hit a snag but eventually things will work out.

BEATRICE

That's it. You think this is just a snag. Our kids haven't eaten on the same table with you for months, they haven't seen you in weeks and even if we sum up the number of hours they've seen you since this year started it won't even amount to a week.

Ben grins. He bites down his teeth as he slowly breaks down in tears. He sniffles.

BEN

You think I want that. You think I don't know that. I do.

(beat)

But every time I think about it, I remind myself that I'm doing it for them, for you, for our family. You think I like tiring myself, going to that job that I hate so much. I'm doing my level best so that our kids get the best education there is, I'm doing it so that you don't have to work anymore and I'm doing so that as a family we will always have a roof over our heads. But if that's the problem, then I'll quit the job and be a lazy husband just as you want.

BEATRICE

No, I don't want that. I appreciate what you're doing to our family but I just want you to remember that we are family and recently it seems like you've forgotten that.

BEN

When did I ever forget that?

BEATRICE

When you quit the family business and decided to take that job.

BEN

So should I quit my job and come back to the family business?

BEATRICE

No, don't do that.

BEN

Then I don't understand what you want.

BEATRICE

What do I want?

BEN

Yes, what do you want?

BEATRICE

I want you to be the husband that I married. I want you to be the father that our children once knew and loved. I just want you to be there. Always. Like you used to.

BEN

I've always been the good husband that you married. I've always been an exceptional father to our children and each time I wasn't, I know that I tried my level best. When really needed I've always been there and I know I'm not perfect, but who is?

A long beat...then, Charlie nods.

CHARLIE

Can you describe how you first met?

Beatrice smiles broadly. She can't hide the elation in her teary face.

BEATRICE

It was the most exciting day of my life. I know people always talk about love at first sight but they're never really sure but for me I was 1000% sure. It was truly love at first.

Charlie smirks.

Ben tries to smile but he just can't.

CHARLIE

So how did it really happen?

BEATRICE

It's actually a really funny story.

CHARLIE

Really?

Ben finally manages to chuckle softly.

BEATRICE

Yeah. So, I was sitting at this cafe minding my own business then this crazy guy comes to me and tells me all about a business proposal. At first I thought it was as scam but the funny thing was that I've always thought about that same business idea. I felt like he read my mind. I don't know what it was but when I looked at this guy's face, when I looked at my Ben's face, I knew that I could trust him. That guy was the best version of the Ben that I married but this Ben that is sitting right here next to me, I don't even know if I can trust him if he says he remembers the day we first met.

Furrows start to manifest on Ben's forehead.

BEN

You really think I'd ever forget that day. You think I'd forget your garlic breath.

They all laugh.

CHARLIE

She had garlic breath?

BEATRICE

It was just a phase, nothing serious.

BEN

Oh, it was serious. I remember I had to buy her bubblegum.

CHARLIE

Bubblegum?

They sigh.

BEN

It's not just that son. That day, your mother saved me. I was at the end of the line called hope. I was almost giving up until I met your mom and she listened to me. That was more than what anyone had done for me in months and I would never forget that even if I was forced to.

Ben and Beatrice look at each other. They sob lightly then smile at each other.

Charlie looks at them. He smiles too.

CHARLIE

Mom? Dad? Are you guys going to get a divorce?

BEATRICE

No.

BEN

No.

BEATRICE

We wouldn't do that for you guys. We're a family and whatever happens, come rain come sunshine we will always and forever be a family that we are. We may hit some bumps along the way but that's what family is and it's getting through those bumps that makes us even stronger.

BEN

Yeah. Son, I know your mom and I may have our problems but we always get through them and despite that painful fact you have to know that we will always be there for you and your siblings.

Ben stretches out his hand towards Beatrice. She reaches for his hand. They hold hands.

BEN

We love you, your brother and sister more than anything in the world.

CHARLIE

Do you love mum?

BEN

I love your mom more than life itself and every day I love her more and more than I could imagine.

Charlie grins.

CHARLIE

You love her even more than me?

Ben chuckles lightly.

BEN

Well, pretty much but I love you both equally and I know that recently I haven't been there to show it but I promise that from now on everything's going to change. I know work is important and all but the most important thing in anyone's life is family and I don't know how I forgot that but the good thing is I will never forget it again.

CHARLIE

What about you mom? Do you love dad?

BEATRICE

The love I have for your father cannot be put into words. It's immeasurable. It's eternal.

They smile.

Charlie looks at his wrist watch.

CHARLIE

Well folks, that's all the time we have for today.

Ben and Beatrice stand up. They hug.

CHARLIE

So our next session is next week, same time, same place.

Ben and Beatrice nods.

Charlie stands up. He joins them in their embrace.

Ben heads to the study table. He picks a framed picture from the table and shows it to Beatrice and Charlie.

It's a family picture of The Baraka family; Ben, Beatrice Charlie and his two young siblings.