

THE LAST SINGLE MAN

Original Screenplay

by Marc Serhan

Rough/First Draft

17 Stuyvesant Street, New York, NY 10003

646-662-3465

marcseran@hotmail.com

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EXT. BLYTHEVILLE ELEMENTARY / SCHOOLYARD - DAY

CHILDREN, a diverse group aged 5 to 12, play across the playground, laughing and shouting. Some chase each other in a game of tag, others huddle around a hopscotch grid.

A GROUP OF BOYS spins a blindfolded girl, LILY, three times. She staggers, giggles escaping her.

BOY #1

Go, Lily! Who's your pick today?

Lily reaches out, her hand landing on a boy, TOMMY. The group erupts in cheers.

CHILDREN

(chant in unison)

Soul-mates! Soul-mates! Soul-mates!

BOY #1

(solemn)

Now, you're soulmates. That means you have to stick together all the time, even when napping.

Off to the side, a teacher, MS. HARPER, mid-30s, watches.

Nearby, YOUNG MARA and YOUNG CHARLIE, both around 10, stand slightly apart from the rest, in the shade of an old oak tree, awkwardly holding hands.

The BELL rings the end of the recess. The couple starts walking side by side, trying to mimic the way adults hold waists. Suddenly, Mara halts, causing Charlie to stop.

She stares at him, thoughtful, then frowns and slightly bites her lip, grappling with an internal conflict.

MARA

I don't want you to be my soulmate anymore.

She lets go of him and runs to integrate her class line.

Charlie watches, stunned. A moment, then he wipes a tear from his cheek with the back of his hand.

Ms. Harper notices him standing behind, alone in the middle of the schoolyard, his mouth agape.

MS. HARPER

Charlie! Hurry up! Come on!

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. BLYTHEVILLE - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

- * Quaint, flower-lined streets
- * Storefronts and homes, each meticulously cared for
- * Gardens bursting with color
- * A banner across the main street announces an upcoming 'Summer Soulmate Festival'
- * Couples of various ages and backgrounds stroll leisurely through the town. Some holding hands or waists, older couples walk arm-in-arm
- * The local bookstore, 'Becker's Books,' where CHARLIE BECKER, 30s, arranges books in the window

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - DAY

The town square is a hive of activity as TOWNSPEOPLE joyfully arrange booths with vibrant banners and decorations.

MARA JENNINGS, 30s, lively and friendly, oversees the setting up of a food stand, her laughter ringing clear as she directs teenagers hanging garlands of flowers and lights.

MARA
(calling out)
Careful with those lights, Jamie!

ELI TURNER, 40s, the charismatic mayor, checks off items on a clipboard, engaging warmly with the Townsfolk. He stops to help an COUPLE of seniors arrange a photo booth, complete with props and a banner reading: 'Capture Your Soulmate Moments!'

BOOTH OWNER
Thank you, Mr. Mayor! I can't wait to
see all the new soulmates declaring
this year.

Children chase each other around the central fountain surrounded by young couples tossing coins in, making wishes.

INT. BECKER'S BOOKS - MORNING

Charlie pulls out a feather duster and begins dusting shelves, moving methodically through the aisles.

He is interrupted by the DOORBELL announcing a customer.

CHARLIE

Morning, Mrs. Gilroy. The new romance novels came in. I put some aside for you.

MRS. GILROY, 60s, a spry woman with a twinkle in her eye, claps her hands delightedly.

MRS. GILROY

Oh, Charlie, you know me too well! I so love love stories.

Charlie nods, compassionate, and watches her shuffle towards the counter, smiles then follows her.

A young couple, DEMI and JOSH, around sixteen or so, enters the shop, laughing quietly. They approach Charlie who looks at them surprised to see them holding hands.

DEMI

Hey, Charlie.

CHARLIE

Hey, Demi and Josh! What's with the hand-holding?

DEMI

We both decided to be soulmates. We'll declare at this year's festival.

Charlie looks at them, considering, then he nods.

CHARLIE

Hope you know what you're doing. Congratulations.

JOSH

Aw, Charlie, don't be a downer.

MRS. GILROY

Congratulations, love birds.

DEMI

(to Charlie)

And we want to gift each other a book for the occasion. What do you suggest?

Charlie points to a book with a cheesy cover displayed on the counter: 'Let it be you'.

CHARLIE

Since you're into epic love stories, this one's a good-read. Just got it in this week.

INT. BECKER'S BOOKS - EVENING

Charlie is meticulously rearranging a display at the front of the bookstore. The shelves are filled with literature on love and romance, echoing the town's obsession with soulmates. Inside, Turner meanders, pretending to browse books.

TURNER

Don't you think it's something else
how everyone in Blytheville has their
soulmate. It's like magic!

Charlie smiles politely, adjusting the books on a shelf slightly more than necessary to hide his discomfort.

CHARLIE

(nodding, reserved)

Yeah, it's quite a thing. Keeps the
town busy, that's for sure.

Turner picks up a book from the display, flips through it absentmindedly.

TURNER

Guess it's just a matter of time till
you find yours, huh? Can't be the
last single man in town forever!

Charlie forces a small laugh, but keeps his focus on the books, his movements careful and deliberate.

CHARLIE

(more to himself)

Maybe some of us are better off alone.

Turner, missing Charlie's line, places the book back on the shelf and moves towards the door, still smiling.

TURNER

Well, when you do find her, I'd be
deeply honored to officiate that
wedding!

On his way out, Turner runs into Mara who's coming in, hyper, clutching a bundle of rolled drawing papers.

MARA

Hello, Eli. Shopping for books?

TURNER

Nah, just looking. Listen, I was
meaning to come see you about that
buffet for my meeting with those
investors. How's tomorrow sound?

MARA

Sure. Drop by anytime, I'll be there all day.

Mara strides straight to the counter, her energy and humor at odds with the subdued ambiance. Charlie joins her.

MARA (CONT'D)

Charlie! I've got some ideas for the café and your window. We're going to make it look magical!

Charlie's smile sticks, hardly masking a hint of reservation.

CHARLIE

Sounds good, Mara. What's the plan?

Mara unrolls a set of sketches over the counter. The designs are vibrant and celebratory, clearly meant to draw attention.

MARA

Look, we'll have matching themes – fairy lights, floral garlands, and maybe some vintage posters. It'll draw the crowd right in!

CHARLIE

These look great, Mara. What's another word for 'festive'?

MARA

Peppy!

She laughs at her own quip, but quickly picks up on Charlie's lack of enthusiasm.

MARA (CONT'D)

Come on, cheer up!

CHARLIE

It's okay, really.

MARA

You don't have to do this if it's too much. I know how you feel about this festival thing... about the whole soulmate thing, actually.

CHARLIE

(meaning it)

No, it's okay. It's good for business... Let's do it.

Mara beams and gives him a quick, appreciative hug.

MARA
It'll be fun, Charles. Just like old
times, huh?

Charlie returns the hug.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - DAY

A group of SCHOOL CHILDREN, under the guidance of Ms. Harper, now in her 50s, set up an art display. The display, themed 'Electing Your Other Half,' is joyous and full of color.

Ms. Harper, enthusiastic, helps the children arrange their artwork – paintings and collages depicting pairs of animals and abstract representations of soulmates.

MS. HARPER
Great job, everyone!

She turns to some parents gathered around.

MS. HARPER (CONT'D)
This project was all about what makes
someone a perfect match. It could be
anything they feel in their heart,
and they all did great!

Charlie walks by, holding a paper bag. He sits on a bench and watches the children, sparkling with pride, show off their work to each other.

Charlie's eyes are caught by a particularly striking piece – a painting of two puzzle pieces fitting perfectly together.

A GIRL, about eight, notices him looking and approaches.

LITTLE GIRL
I made that! Do you like it?
(*pointing at her painting*)
This is me, and that's my soulmate.
We're going to fit just like that!

Charlie smile, fishing out a sandwich from his bag.

CHARLIE
It's very beautiful. Well done! Good
luck with your dreams, kid.

The little girl runs back to her friends.

Charlie's smile fades slightly as he gazes at the artwork. He observes the children and their parents, all caught up in discussions about the children's creations.

His gaze shifts to the park, then he takes a bite of his sandwich, clad in indifference.

EXT. BECKER'S BOOKS - EARLY MORNING

The first light of day illuminates the façade of 'Becker's Books.' The streets are still quiet at this early hour.

INT./EXT. BECKER'S BOOKS - CONTINUOUS

Charlie unlocks the door and steps into the bookstore. He walks over to the back, flicks on the lights, and starts a coffee maker. As the coffee brews, Charlie picks up a book, flips through it.

The COFFEE MAKER beeps. Charlie puts the book down, blasé, pours himself a cup and leans on the counter.

He notices a shelf with books askew by the shop window, walks to it, thoughtful, almost distant.

OUTSIDE - CONTINUOUS

Through the window, Charlie, framed by rows of romance novels, tidies up the shelf, alone in the empty shop. He looks isolated, a solitary figure in his own story.

EXT. BLYTHEVILLE - DAY

A sleek, modern car drives into Main Street.

ASHLEY WARD, mid-30s, sharp-eyed and focused, sits behind the wheel, scanning with curiosity and skepticism the crowd moving through the street.

BRIAN, early 30s, her cameraman, is in the passenger seat, camera in hand, filming the activity outside.

His camera captures couples holding hands or waists and Townsfolk in mid-preparation for the festival, all exuding happiness and excitement.

ASHLEY

Can you believe this? They all look like they're sewed to each other.

(she scoffs)

Capture everything. Couples, banners, decorations...

Brian nods, panning the camera to a YOUNG COUPLE hanging up a banner reading 'Welcome to the Soulmate Festival.' The couple notices the camera, waves, and smiles broadly.

BRIAN

This place really sells the whole
soul-mating thing hard, huh?

ASHLEY

(dryly)

Yeah, they're all in on the soulmate
myth. — I feel like I've stepped into
a romance novel.

Ashley parks the car near the town square. She steps out, takes in her surroundings with a journalist's eye. Her stance is confident, despite a hint of alienation in her demeanor.

Brian follows, continuing to film as they walk towards the entrance to the square. On the way, he can't help but turn around to ogle at a woman passing by.

Ashley observes a group of SENIORS dancing to no music. Brian catches up, still filming.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

Ain't that pretty! My oh my! That
picture's too perfect to be true.

(a beat)

So, where do we find our 'Single Man'
anomaly, you think?

BRIAN

(lowering his camera)

Townhall. We have to let them know
we're here, anyway.

INT. TOWNHALL / TURNER'S OFFICE - EVENING

The office is neat, lined with photos of Blytheville and plaques of community service.

Turner stands, glowing with pride, addressing Brian's camera. A banner promoting the Soulmate Festival hangs above him.

TURNER

...the festival's our town's heart
and soul! This year's edition will be
even more memorable!

He points at a schedule of festivities sitting on an easel.

TURNER (CONT'D)
We've got dancing, storytelling, and,
of course, the highlight of the event
— the declaration ceremony!

ASHLEY (O.S.)
Could you briefly explain that? — The
declaration ceremony?

TURNER
A man or a woman, over 16, elects
their soulmate. That's it. They're
paired hopefully for life.

Ashley, standing by Brian and his camera, smiles, skeptical.

ASHLEY
For life? What if it doesn't work?

TURNER
They make it work. We have widows and
widowers, young singles... no
divorcees.

Ashley ticks at Turner's affirmation.

ASHLEY
Actually, you do have one single man,
don't you?

TURNER
Oh, yes, that's true. He's the
exception but we all hope he'll join
the herd soon.

He laughs nervously, turns to Ashley.

TURNER (CONT'D)
We're working on it.
(to camera)
Our festival is a mirror of our
values — love, unity, and destiny!
Blytheville's the town of soulmates,
and we're proud of it!

INT. BECKER'S BOOKS - DAY

The DOORBELL chimes as Ashley steps into the quiet, orderly shop. She takes in the cozy ambiance before spotting Charlie behind the counter, busy sorting books.

She extends a hand and approaches him with a professional yet open demeanor.

ASHLEY

Mr. Becker? Ashley Ward. I'm working on a piece about Blytheville and the Soulmate tradition. I'm told this is the best place to get information on the town's history.

Charlie, slightly caught off guard, shakes her hand.

CHARLIE

Welcome to Blytheville. What exactly are you looking to find out?

ASHLEY

Anything that might give me an insight into Blytheville's obsession with soulmates. It's quite the phenomenon!

Charlie's expression tightens subtly, a flicker of discomfort crossing his features before he composes himself.

CHARLIE

May you now release my hand?

Ashley, mortified, realizes they are still holding hands.

ASHLEY

Oh, my God. I didn't realize.

Their hands slowly separate, almost reluctantly. There's an unspoken chemistry, an initial spark that they both subtly acknowledge but choose to ignore.

CHARLIE

Well, you might find our local history section helpful. It's over there.

He gestures towards an area of the store. Ashley moves away, but turns briskly back to him.

ASHLEY

Mr. Becker, would it be alright with you if I interviewed you regarding your celibacy?

CHARLIE

Celibacy? Oh, my! I'll give it to you right now: I'm not celibate, I'm single. I don't buy into all this nonsense they've turned into a tradition. That's all there is to say. Now, if you'll excuse me.

He wheels away, leaving Ashley standing there, perplexed.