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"All I Ask of You": A Feature Film

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***ALL I ASK OF YOU* FEATURE FILM**

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Abstract

All I Ask of You is a dramatic feature film script that showcases the dynamics between people who struggle with types of dementia and their friends and family. Although most stories that cover dementia focus on the victim, this story chooses to focus on the people closest to those victims. The story takes on tough decisions that those closest to the disease have to make due to the debilitating affect it has on victim. The medical community doesn't know very much about dementia. We know there is a particular dementia gene that is hereditary, but we don't know how to stop it from escalating. We know that once the disease hits a certain point, the victim becomes unable to live on her own and take care of themselves. Do we devote our lives to taking care of the only person who ever took care of us and loves us unconditionally? Do we leave them and follow our dreams when the opportunity comes to us? Is there a right decision or a right way to handle this disease?

Executive Summary

The first life-changing decision most young people deal with is... what do I do after high school? This story addresses the layers of this decision for an individual with obstacles out of her control. The dimensions of the project include a feature length film script, a treatment of the film complete with current casting choices, and the creative capstone outline that details my process. My story has evolved from its dystopian, science fiction television series roots to what is now a more realistic story for independent film. After attending the Sundance Film Festival, I realized that independent films tell the most honest and gripping stories. I wanted to write a story in a similar fashion that attacked a topic I knew well enough to write about.

The film follows my female protagonist, Charlie, in the summer after her senior year of high school. She is a talented actress and singer, and she is cast in a show at a local opera house. Charlie is very close to her single mother, Melissa, whom we find out at the beginning of the film has early onset dementia. As Charlie's summer comes to an end, and her mother's condition continues to deteriorate, she must choose whether to stay close to home, or move away to pursue her dreams on Broadway.

I attack the struggle of dementia through the eyes of a child, instead of the disease's victim. There are so many unconventional situations, and tough conversations, family members of those with dementia – which takes its most common form as Alzheimer's – will find themselves in the middle of. The story shows how the conventional roles of mother and daughter change when the disease takes hold. Additionally, the story addresses the struggle of choosing between staying and going, between chasing your dreams as a disease chases you. All of these conflicts combined have the makings of a very real, contemporary issue.

A film is an excellent way to articulate this story because it allows an audience to see the effects on all parties who come in contact with the disease. There are those who are immediately affected, the cringe-worthy antics of those who simply don't know what Charlie is struggling with, and the network of support that influences the big decisions we make when we come of age. In particular, the story centers on the first time young people come to a crossroads that has a very real impact on the rest of their lives. What do I do after high school? There is one event and conflict: Charlie's decision to stay with her mother, or her decision to follow her dreams when given an opportunity to work in New York City. A television series wouldn't do this singular coming of age story justice.

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Acknowledgements

This story would never have been told without my family and their constant support. I want to thank them for allowing me to share this story.

Chapter 1

Introduction

I always knew I wanted to be involved in the entertainment industry. While growing up, I was sure that my involvement would be in performance. I trained as an actress, singer, and dancer throughout high school. The feeling of performing in front of an audience is still absolutely unmatched, and to this day, I get an exhilarating high from it. However, I loved school. I wanted to go to college and do more than a conservatory where I trained in musical theater all day. I wanted to get a degree in a part of the industry that was slightly more practical, and stretched my intellectual muscles in other ways. That is why I chose to go the Syracuse University's S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications. I originally came into the school as a Broadcast Journalism Major, but made a much needed switch my second semester to Television, Radio, and Film. Combining that with a Drama Minor in the Visual and Performing Arts School gave me the ability to grasp the larger entertainment industry concept.

Through this education, I realized that it wasn't the entertainment industry that I loved. It was storytelling, and the simple act of sharing imaginations and interpretations of lives with other people. I realized that writing stories was the one facet of my experience here that I was missing. I decided that I wanted to write a screenplay for my TRF/Honor's Program Capstone.

Chapter 2

Life Influences

No artist creates a story out of thin air. There is always inspiration from other artists, experiences, or the unique way we all connect thoughts together differently. This story went through a series of changes before it became the story it is now. There were changes in my perspective of dementia through personal experiences with it, and new experiences in film that changed the way I wanted to tell my story.

The Sundance Film Festival and *Call Me By Your Name*

Originally, this project was supposed to be a television series about the future, but when you find that something's not working as a writer, sometimes you just have to let it go. Especially when some inspiration strikes for a more dynamic story, and one that you know you would be able to write more strongly. As a writer, seeing a film or story told in a way you admire can strike up a story inside yourself. Often times these stories come from personal experience or close contact with a subject. That is how *All I Ask of You* was born. Simply, I wanted to tell the best story I could, and it all started to take form at the Sundance Film Festival. Film festivals are rich soil for inspiration. However, it wasn't until I was chosen to go to Sundance with a couple other Newhouse and VPA Film students, that I realized how stories that tell a story the victims can't tell themselves, are the ones most worth telling.

Festivals create a home for independent films and documentaries in particular. These are films that aren't backed yet by a big studio or network, and have their own crews and budgets. Without the influence of a big name in the development and production process these films come off as much more genuine. The stories ring truer, and they have the chance to speak on subjects

that aren't easy to talk about. These stories can seem harsh or crude, or they can showcase an uplifting story you never knew existed. They approach taboo topics, and don't care if they make you uncomfortable. Independent films start conversations that don't allow their audiences to simply leave the theater and return to life as usual. This was my experience when I went to see the film *Call Me By Your Name*.

The film is based on a book by the same name. I had never heard of it beforehand, but I remember reading through the program and thinking that the synopsis sounded interesting:

Summer of 1983, Northern Italy. An American-Italian is enamored by an American student who comes to study and live with his family. Together they share an unforgettable summer full of music, food, and romance that will forever change them. (Guadagnino)

The reviews were positive, so I was excited to see it. I could never have guessed that I would be so moved by the story. It was raw and real, and made me bawl my eyes out. I continued this well into an hour after the film had ended. It taught me how gripping it is when you show the humanity of characters. People are flawed and imperfect, but gripping and relatable all the same. In order to make characters realistic and engage audiences, as screenwriters, we have to put our characters through hell. This can be a very hard concept to grasp, because writers grow affection toward their characters. We tend to like it when good things happen to them. Characters that live happily ever after, and avoid dealing with the hard stuff, are reassurances to us that our own problems will all turn out for the better, too. The problem with that concept is its lack of reality. The end of a story doesn't have to be tied up in a neat little bow. We always leave with unanswered questions, and although the story is infinite for the character, this is the only snapshot of their life we want the audience to see. And that can be nothing but a cold and harsh, reality.

Glenn Campbell: I'll Be Me

Glenn Campbell was before my time, but his story is no less impactful. Campbell was an absolutely revolutionary musician whose various talents continue to be legendary. Not only did he help country music crossover to the pop charts in the 60s, he recorded and performed with incredible talents: Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley, Blake Shelton, the Beach Boys, etc. In his heyday he was the host of a television series by his own name, and the man most current country stars say was their inspiration when they were starting out in the business. There was an especially poignant documentary done on him by James Keach when he got the diagnosis for Alzheimer's disease. The story was told in such a way that you felt like you were living his life for the hour and 44 minutes you were watching. It never gave the audience false hope, as if everything would be all right in the end. Instead, it peaked open a curtain on a lifetime of memories. We relived them with Campbell and his family, and saw how true it was when his daughter, Ashley Campbell, would give witness to the effects of his disease.

“I think that a person's life is comprised of memories, and that's exactly what this disease takes away from you.” (*Glenn Campbell: I'll Be Me*)

In its simplest form, it takes your memory. More so, it takes the memories that make up the person that you are. The bittersweet blessing with Campbell's strain of the disease was his ability to recall all of his musical ability after the diagnosis. He made his condition public while his final album was being released and a tour was in the works. His family and team decided to go through with the tour dates. Although tour was no walk in the park, he was remarkably able to recall his songs – with the help of a monitor showing lyrics – and retain his guitar skills throughout the tour. It spoke to how engrained music was in him.

Other celebrities also used this opportunity to talk about Campbell, their own experiences with dementia, and Alzheimer's disease in particular. The biggest take away from this part of the

documentary was the perspective from the family members of other individuals with the disease. All of these country stars and celebrities spoke about their experience with the disease and its effect on their lives. Each each situation was different. Although my experience with the disease didn't look exactly like Campbell's experience, this film showed that this is a disease that normalizes people. A viewer doesn't look at these individuals in the film as celebrities, they're all just people trying to work through life and find ways to help their loved ones. This film put everyone on the same playing field. No one, no matter how much money they have, can change the outcome. Not even one of the best and most beloved musicians of an era.

There was one particular scene that was done in this documentary that really honed in on the way *All I Ask of You* would be shaped. There was a personal interview with Glen Campbell's wife where she discusses how difficult the disease has been on her. She's barely holding herself together as she discusses the ways things have changed, and how much she is her husband's lifeline at times. This interview was over too quickly, and the story immediately turned its attention to the progression of the disease. There was a story there. What decisions has she had to make in order to put her life on hold for her husband? Of course, these decisions were made with love and without hesitation for her husband, but they shouldn't be diminished. There was a similar interview with Glen Campbell's daughter, Ashley. She was getting fearful of how much longer it would be before he didn't recognize her anymore. How has that fear integrated itself into her everyday life, and how has she responded to situations because of it?

All I Ask of You is the story of the people who love the victim's of this condition. This story centers on the wide range of effects it has on their decisions. For example, in the script, Charlie doesn't just deal with making doctor's appointments on a routine basis; Charlie essentially becomes her mother's chauffeur when her license is revoked. It affects her decision of

where she should go now that she has graduated. The most realistic scene to write was where Charlie forgets a line of a song she's been practicing. Everyone forgets the line of a song now and then. However, for a relative of someone with dementia this immediately triggers a paralyzing fear. Am I next? Is this the first sign that my memory is also slipping? Will I wake up tomorrow and forget what day it is? As dramatic as those conclusions might sound, for someone dealing with dementia on a daily basis those are the conclusions that will be drawn at the slightest hesitation.

Personal Experience

The true reason I wanted to write this story, and felt like I had any right at all to tell it, was because of my own experience with the dementia and early-onset. My grandmother passed away my freshman year of college due to complications from dementia and kidney failure. I watched her from the beginning of the diagnosis until the day she passed away in the hospital. It was a long and difficult process to watch, especially when I saw how it affected my grandfather, my mother, and her two sisters. It was a blessing that we all live in the same town, so we were able to be a constant presence in her life throughout the disease's course. However, it took most of the attention the family, which could have been to the detriment of my aunt. My grandmother's daughter, my mom's sister, had been showing signs of early-onset throughout the course of my grandmother's disease. I couldn't say whether or not it would have helped if we had discovered it earlier, or if my grandmother's experience overshadowed my aunt's signs. Regardless, the year after my grandmother passed away my aunt developed early-onset dementia in the form of Alzheimer's at age 49. I have seen firsthand the effects the disease has on an individual, on their family, and on the decisions those people make about the future. Every

individual with a form of dementia has a different story to tell about his or her experience... this is mine.

Chapter 3

Artistic Choices

I was both parts surprised and heartbroken at the response I got when I told people what my Capstone was about. Everyone knew someone who had experience with dementia. Everyone had a personal experience with a loved one or friend of a friend who had suffered through the disease. I had the opportunity to speak with a medical professional taking care of individuals affected by the disease everyday. However, the more I listened to other people's stories and talked to people affected by the disease, the more I realized that a medical professional was mostly unnecessary to the process. The families, sisters, brothers, wives, husbands, etc. that take care of people affected by dementia know everything there is to know about their loved one's disease. A doctor absolutely helps in diagnosis, but the truth of the matter is that the doctor doesn't know this individual. There are pills that can be taken in an effort to boost memory temporarily, but there is no cure. There is no proven way to slow down this disease. There is no way to remove the hereditary gene that triggers this disease to persist through multiple generations. It is up to the friends or family members taking care of the victims to figure out what helps. Those selfless caregivers find what makes their loved one happy and what seems to help. Unfortunately, what helps one day might throw them into a fit the next day. There is no right move, no perfect prescription, no rulebook, and no two victims of dementia are the same. How do you write about a disease that has no set guidelines?

This is why the only scene that takes place in a doctor's office in *All I Ask of You* is the opening scene. In this scene, the doctor is officially taking away Melissa's license. A doctor has a role in the large decisions of diagnosis, whether or not an individual is capable of continuing to drive, and whether or not medication has been shown to help individuals with a type of dementia

similar to the type that this person has. However, the doctor isn't there when Charlie helps her mother get a music teacher position. The doctor doesn't know what kind of pizza is Melissa's favorite. The doctor doesn't know that certain television shows, such as the Tony Awards in the beginning of the script, or the old movie in the final scene, have a way of making Melissa feel back to her old self. They help her feel comfortable. These unique preferences and quirks are how Charlie creates a safe and comfortable space for her mom. They are how she finds things Melissa can look forward to, and how she generally tries to keep her mother happy. In the end, those three things, comfort, things to look forward to, and knowing what makes a victim happy, are the only sound recommendations for treatment a doctor will give you.

Write What You Know

This is the piece of advice that every writing teacher, screenwriting professor, or storyteller will share with her protégés. When writing something you have had a personal experience with, the flow of the writing becomes especially easy. If you have lived an experience and you have a complete understanding of whom each one of your characters is, what their distinct response to your own situation becomes instinctual.

Unfortunately, the biggest challenge writers have when writing from personal experiences is their attachment to the story. Writers find themselves consciously having to remember that a particular character isn't her, or that other characters aren't people in her life. My own experience gave me the inspiration and accuracy I needed in writing about individuals struggling with dementia, however, this is not an autobiography. My characters have their own stories to tell. That means that trying to be accurate, or avoid offense to people who might have inspired certain scenes, is a waste of time. Artists get their inspiration everywhere, but it is the

combination of all of these different influences that result in their final piece. This script isn't an exact copy of any specific experience I have had. However, there wouldn't be any inspiration to pull from if this script wasn't a little piece of every experience I've had.

When You Don't Know – Ask

Although I might have firsthand experience with dementia and early-onset Alzheimer's, I am not all knowing. I don't have all the answers, and there is plenty to gain from other pieces of art, as I mentioned previously. Writers who get information from other sources only make their stories more dynamic and more relatable for a wide range of audiences. An additional resource that has been an asset to this project is a woman named Amy Minnick. Minnick works outside of Harrisonburg, Virginia at the Bridgewater Retirement Community in the Gardner Wing. This particular wing is home to the Memory Care Unit. She is the Life Enrichment Nurse Leader in this special unit, and has a first hand account of how this disease works, as someone surrounded by dementia patients daily. Their center in particular is very resident-centered, and because she wears multiple hats, she had plenty of information to share with me. The most helpful part of our conversation came when I ran certain scenes from the script by her. I wanted to be sure that the story was relatable for other individuals affected by dementia, and not just my own experience with the disease. She confirmed that as her residents progress through the course of the disease, they tend to regress to a younger age. They have episodes where they think they are living in a different time period of their life, and sometimes don't even recognize the "old" person staring back at them in the mirror. Minnick also discussed the bouts of frustration and hostility that can come about. She and her fellow nurses have found that changing the environment, whether it's

going outside or walking down a hallway, can stop these episodes. They do lose complete knowledge of ever arguing or being resistant to a caretaker in the first place.

This conversation validated certain scenes in the script. For example, Melissa has an episode before the climax of the story. In this scene, she believes she is talking to her husband who had passed away overseas. However, it's actually just a man in uniform on the bus she's taking. Charlie attempts to help her mother settle down, but it is Melissa's best friend, Trish, who has any success at being recognized. To Melissa, she is in a time period of early motherhood, while her husband is stationed overseas. She doesn't recognize Charlie because at that point in her life, Charlie was just a baby. Trish has been around Melissa since high school, so she becomes Melissa's lifeline.

This is a sad reality for those close to dementia patients. Minnick discussed instances where patients in her unit have woken up and thought they were children again. They don't realize that the parents they are looking for passed away sometimes decades ago.

There were other resources that were closer to home, such as my mom and other relatives. I have missed some of the more recent interactions with the disease, but they have witnessed it every day. There is no one more educated on the topic of my aunt's case of early-onset than my mother, and having her read over the script for accuracy was something I was hesitant to do. It is not always an easy script to read, but it ended up being a good decision.

As an editor, she immediately picked out any potential grammar faux-pauxs. The best advice she passed along was her take on relationships between Charlie and the other adults in her life. Right before Charlie makes her decision to pursue an agent's offer to act in New York City, she has a conversation about what to do with Trish and her two best friends. Young writers tend to envision their friends giving them advice in a situation like that, however, Trish has been

around Charlie since she was a child. She acts as second mom, especially as the mother/daughter relationship between Charlie and Melissa begins to flip flop. Instead of having her two best friends advise her, the dialogue changed so that Trish is the voice of reason. Trish speaks to Charlie as if she's family, while also knowing the perspective of Melissa and what she would have wanted for Charlie before she was diagnosed with early-onset.

Conflict Drives Story

One of the most memorable classes in my time at Syracuse was "Screenwriting" with my Capstone Adviser, Professor Lani Rich. I was a little overconfident in my abilities when I came into this class. Writers tend to have so many creative ideas that they practically overflow the brain. I was very quickly knocked back down to size in the classroom. My ideas always had a beginning, but there was no point to them. There wasn't any struggle or conflict to make an audience interested. My ideas didn't have structure or even a hint of a successful arc. Ideas are the first step, but there are a lot of steps that come after that.

First, a concept comes to a writer. Sometimes it's a new world their imagination has created by looking too long and hard at a seemingly inconsequential piece of the world. Let's say you're sitting in a park one day, back against a tree trunk, simply people-watching. You begin to look at the grass. The lazy sunshine creates a dream-like quality to your gaze. A child walks by. Suddenly, you wonder what it would be like if the grass was taller than this child. No, you wonder if the child was smaller than the blade of grass. Your imagination throws out the concept of tiny people living amongst the blades of grass. Immediately you think, I'm a genius. Everyone would pay to see a movie about tiny people living amongst the blades of grass. This is the first error a writer makes. No one would see that movie. Why not? There is no *conflict*. People watch

movies because there's an event to see. Now, let's say that your main character is the queen of the little people, and the giants are threatening to mow their lawn. Now you have a conflict. Now we're interested.

In the same vein, my story was built on the idea of tough decisions young people make as they are coming of age and discovering themselves – a girl making a decision about what to do after high school. There, everyone has been there and would want to see that story! Wrong. That is the first, potentially life-altering decision young people are forced to make. And the families of the young people involved can particularly sway that decision. Audiences have seen the overbearing parent who wants to selfishly relive their childhood dreams of ivy league schools, and the pressure those young children feel. However, what if the parents weren't overbearing? What if there was only one parent, and she was extremely self-sacrificing? What if her daughter's choice wasn't affected by reliving dreams, getting a good job, or following in a parent's footsteps? What if the decision was completely affected by something neither one of them could control or change? That is where this story was born, and that something was dementia. Now we have conflict.

When editing or advising a screenplay, there are particular qualities that are necessary to giving feedback. There are specific structure guidelines that trend throughout all stories. Pillars of structure include your protagonist, the character we root for, at every step. There are several pillars in particular that we stick close to: the protagonist's "acceptance of trouble," their "midpoint," "the point of no return" for our protagonist's intended decision, our protagonist's "dark moment," "the climax," and "the resolution". Not every story includes every single one of these points, but they give writers an idea of a complete story arc to model after. Professor Rich had to remind me of these points throughout my writing and editing process. She emulated the

ideal editor. An individual giving feedback should always critique with a solution in mind, or a potential idea for changing something that doesn't work. These helpful ideas should always be overarching concepts, where the writer can take it away with her characters in the way she envisions the story. It won't be easy, but one of the best ways a writer can practice is by having to come up with creative solutions. These solutions become essential when there are any parts of their vision that don't come across clearly to an audience.

A bad habit writers get into is the habit of writing "fluff". We love to write, but sometimes we forget that everything we write has to get to a point. The best rule of thumb is to be sure that every scene you write moves your story forward. It should all point to the central conflict of the narrative. It might not be completely explicit, but it is essential to find ways to create your character's personalities, while simultaneously moving them forward toward the climax. Your audience might not know these characters, but the characters have been living their lives before we tell their story. As a writer, you must avoid too much exposition. It is assumed that they had average conversations, and went through a normal daily routine at one point, but the reason their stories are worth telling are because something or someone threw a wrench in their routine. In simplest terms, get to the good stuff.

Writer's Block

I mentioned in a previous chapter that writers have to know when a story idea just isn't working. They also have to know when that feeling of hitting a wall is actually just writer's block. This happens often with scripts. Writers will have inspiration for a scene and immediately type out dozens of pages. They will then be so pleased with themselves and their progress that they'll leave the project for a little while, awaiting another spark. These sparks of inspiration are

few and far between. This story taught me how to seriously discipline myself with scriptwriting. It might be a creative work, but that doesn't mean you can't set deadlines for yourself. In fact, you have to set deadlines for yourself. Sometimes, parking yourself in a seat and forcing yourself to write for the next three hours without stopping is necessary. This is incredibly challenging. Often times writers leave those three hours with only a few pages to show for it. However, those few pages are essential. A few pages becomes a few more, and when you make the conscious effort to write a little almost everyday, those few pages become a complete script. Even though quite a few of those scenes will eventually be scrapped, writing in those mandatory hours teach a writer what doesn't work in the story. It turns out that learning what doesn't work is half the battle on the journey to what does.

Chapter 4

Takeaways

After a script like this is finished, or simultaneously during your writing process, a screenwriter creates a lookbook. This can include a number of things. It is typically a series of pictures, photographs, drawings, and/or visuals that create the feeling your script is going for. It can include ideas for the way certain sets or locations in the script should look, who is envisioned to play each character, and other movies that give off a similar vibe to the writer's vision. Some lookbooks even feature studios and directors that they see working on the film/are already attached to the project, and how they would plan to market the film down the line.

Dealing With Dementia

Dementia is not an easy topic to deal with. No disease is. There will always be people who didn't have the same experience as you who are offended by the way you turn their pain into art. There will be medical professionals who disagree with how you portray the disease. One of the most difficult parts of this project is knowing that certain members of my family will never be able to read my first feature length film. This is definitely in their best interest, but knowing that my writing would cause them pain is not easy to stomach. However, the best stories aren't always the easiest to tell. Sometimes you have to tell them because someone else can't.

Next Steps

This would be an easily adaptable film on a number of levels. It has excellent production value, which in this case means that it can be shot relatively cheaply. First, the different settings

and locations in the script can work in almost any small town. Hopefully it is a familiar town for the director or producers, because the chances of getting shooting locations for cheap would be high. If only filmmakers could film everywhere for free, but most locations have a price. Unless you're filming on your own property or on public property, like a city street, you'll have to negotiate a contract with the property owner over the terms of a shoot. The two main locations for the film would be Charlie's house and a local theater. There would also need to be a music store and a pizza place. These are common establishments in small towns. If they weren't found in town, they are both the kind of scenes that could be shot on a manmade set environment or on a studio lot. Studios tend to have large lots that recreate the environment of a small town, along with different set warehouses where content can be filmed. The lots and warehouses are essentially blank canvases for production teams to create a location they need.

The larger dent in expenses would come with getting the rights to *Phantom of the Opera*. In the film, Charlie is cast in a professional production of the musical, and songs and scenes from the musical are performed throughout the script. As a filmmaker, you can never use someone else's content without their permission. We would have to negotiate the rights to use that content in our movie. However, collaborating with the musical could really help both the script and the musical production. The most ideal way would come through cross-promotion. There could be a marketing strategy where if you buy a ticket to go see the movie in theaters, you're also entered into a raffle to see the show on Broadway. Additionally, just by seeing the film, your interest in the musical Charlie is acting in is piqued.

To make it more worthy of a potential pitch, a script should be completely packaged. This means a lookbook that is incredibly detailed about every aspect of potential production, along with a press kit that would articulate even further the marketing ideas for the film. After a

full budget analysis was fleshed out for the script's production, and a write-up of how certain scenes could be shot was created, the final step would be pitching. Writers team up with a producer or agent who will "shop" the script for them. This refers to the process where the producer or agent sets up meetings with studios, networks, or production companies that could be interested in the script. Hopefully the writer tags along to fully explain the concept that the script aims to get across. If a writer is lucky, one of those groups decides that they want to take the risk and put money into creating her script.

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ALL I ASK OF YOU

Written by

Maggie Siciliano

INT. HOSPITAL DOCTOR'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

MELISSA, in her late 40s, early 50s, and the picture of frazzled elegance, and CHARLOTTE "CHARLIE" PARKER, a positive, intelligent-looking 18-year-old, are sitting in a patient room, waiting for the doctor to come back.

Charlie smiles at her mom and gives her hand a squeeze. Melissa's face is blank and unwavering.

DOCTOR COLLINS enters, she is a kind-looking woman over 40 years old. She sits across from them, her face frank.

DR. COLLINS

I'm sorry, Melissa, but I can't allow you to continue driving. It wouldn't be right considering the results that came back today.

MELISSA

Today's just an off-day, forgot my coffee this morning. Most days are good days, so we can give it a shot again next week.

DR. COLLINS

That's just not how this works. This is mostly done for your own safety on the road. Never to fear, though, I can give you plenty of options in the way of alternative transportation...

She continues to talk about different courses of action while Charlie's face is frozen. Melissa's face stays blank.

Interrupting.

MELISSA

Where is the bathroom?

DR. COLLINS

Um... out the door and down the hall to your right.

MELISSA

Thank you.

DR. COLLINS

Ms. Parker we should -

The door shuts behind Melissa. Charlie's gaze follows her out the door.

DR. COLLINS (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, Charlie. We had been pushing it as it is.

Charlie shakes her head.

CHARLIE
No, I knew we were. Dr. Collins... is this where the dementia starts to speed up?

DR. COLLINS
Well, Charlie, all cases are so different. I can't predict how one will turn out over the other.

CHARLIE
With all due respect, I don't care about other cases. What do the next few years look like? In your professional opinion.

Dr. Collins looks toward the door, and back at Charlie.

DR. COLLINS
She could continue like she has been for the next couple of months, next couple of years. But once it reaches this point, it's only going to escalate faster, yes.

Dr. Collins' demeanor and body language change as if she's changing out of her work clothes after a long day.

DR. COLLINS (CONT'D)
But she needs more special attention. Find ways to make events out of driving somewhere. The worst thing for her progress is to feel like a burden. She can't help it, Charlie.

Charlie drops her head. She knows this.

DR. COLLINS (CONT'D)
Do you have anyone who can help you, Charlie? You're so young, and this really is a job for a community of support -

Melissa opens the door and enters the room. Dr. Collins puts her face back on as Melissa walks back to her daughter. She begins to grab her coat and her purse.

MELISSA

So, we all good for today?

DR. COLLINS

We should probably talk a little more about options moving forward...

MELISSA

Maybe next week. Your rehearsal starts soon, right?

She looks at her daughter purposefully.

DR. COLLINS

Very well. Just check with Sarah on your way out for our available times next week.

Melissa nods, as they both head out the door.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

Charlie and Melissa walk down the hallway, and stop at the front desk on their way out.

The woman behind the desk gets off the phone as they approach.

FRONT DESK NURSE

Charlie! How's my young Christine doing? Can't wait to see you perform. I love Phantom!

Melissa smiles at her daughter with pride.

MELISSA

She gets it all from me, of course.

They laugh amicably.

FRONT DESK NURSE

So, next week, same time?

Melissa takes a pocket calendar out of her purse, and flips through the pages. It's full of Post-It notes and color-coded reminders. She glances at the day calendar next to the nurse's computer, and then flips to the week in her own book. She pencils in the appointment.

Simultaneously, Charlie is behind Melissa looking at her phone calendar.

All of her days have alerts and packed schedules. She finds the next week and types the appointment into her own calendar.

MELISSA

That should be fine.

Melissa continues looking down, as the nurse looks behind her at Charlie. Charlie nods.

FRONT DESK NURSE

Great!

Melissa looks up at her and smiles.

MELISSA

See you next week.

FRONT DESK NURSE

Have a good one you two!

Melissa begins walking out the door, as Charlie turns around, mouthing "Thank you" to the woman behind the desk. The nurse's returning smile doesn't meet her eyes.

EXT. PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

They walk toward their Jeep Cherokee, Melissa moving toward the driver's side on instinct. Charlie follows her mother. Melissa arrives at the driver side door and takes out her keys. She becomes aware of her daughter behind her. Wordlessly, she drops the keys in Charlie's hand before getting in the passenger side door. Charlie gets in the driver's seat.

INT. CAR - AFTERNOON

Charlie and Melissa are both looking at their laps.

MELISSA

You can't be late for rehearsal.
You need to make a good impression.

Charlie doesn't move.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

Charlie.

CHARLIE

Can we talk about this?

There is pause.

MELISSA
Please just drive.

Charlie takes a deep breath before putting the key in the ignition and driving away.

INT. NIACC PERFORMING ARTS CENTER- EVENING

Charlie is singing "Think of Me" in rehearsal on stage as COLETTE BARNES, a 60-year old music director with beaded glasses and a severe look, watches her intensely from the pit.

CHARLIE (SINGING)
*Think of me, thinking of me waking,
silent and resigned, imagine me,
trying too hard, to put you from my*
-

COLETTE
No, no stop! Charlotte, have you been listening to any of my direction? Maybe if you weren't late to rehearsal - again - you would be on the same page as the rest of the cast. That's it for today everyone! See you bright and early tomorrow morning.

Charlie's head drops as she heads off stage.

COLETTE (CONT'D)
You are not everyone, Charlotte.

She pops her head up, and scurries to the edge of stage to Colette.

COLETTE (CONT'D)
Charlie... where are your dynamics?
The entire song sounds like flat line.

CHARLIE
I was trying to focus more on the emotional side this time.

COLETTE
Emotions come later. First let's try singing the song.

CHARLIE
But-

COLETTE

You were given this part for a reason. We could have picked someone with experience, but James wanted to embody all that Christine is. Your head's somewhere else, and you're showing up late to my rehearsals. Now, the show isn't for another few weeks, but at this rate, you need months. Show me that we didn't make the wrong choice.

Charlie nods solemnly as she walks back stage. Colette turns on her heel, and walks toward the conductor, who has been eavesdropping.

CONDUCTOR

You and I both know that's the best she's done all week.

COLETTE

She doesn't need compliments. I know what I'm doing.

INT. NIACC PERFORMING ARTS CENTER BACKSTAGE COSTUME ROOM - EVENING

Charlie stands over ANGELICA "ANGE" CARRIER, whose wise eyes are hidden by wide rimmed glasses. She is petite, hispanic, with a quirky sense of style, and her dark hair is piled on top of her head, held in place by a pair of small knitting needles. She is hunched over a sewing machine, working on the hem of a dress, surrounded by different patterns.

CHARLIE

She doesn't even acknowledge that I'm trying! Do you know how hard that song is to sing?

Ange continues sewing.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

And it's not my fault I'm late! Mom had another doctor's appointment. How was I supposed to know her license would be taken away, and I'd have to drop her at home before rehearsal?

Charlie groans, and plops down in the seat across from her best friend. Ange looks up for the first time.

ANGE

They took away her license?

Charlie nods. Ange sits back in her seat.

ANGE (CONT'D)

Shit.

Charlie fiddles with the edges of dress that Ange is working on.

CHARLIE

It's fine. It won't be that different. Plus, Trish is always a big help.

ANGE

Yeah, sure, but she's got her own little family now.

CHARLIE

It's okay, we'll figure it out.

Ange stops sewing.

ANGE

Charlie... just tell them what's going on with your mom.

Charlie's head turns to her sharply.

CHARLIE

I don't need a hand out.

Ange looks like she's about to say something, but stops herself.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Still seeing you later?

ANGE

Yeah, I've just got to finish this up, and I'll head over.

CHARLIE

Perfect, okay see ya!

ANGE

Don't forget to remind Carter....

CHARLIE

One of these days, that boy won't need us as 2nd mothers.

ANGE

Ha. That day is not today.

Charlie rolls her eyes and heads out the door.

INT. NIACC PERFORMING ARTS CENTER BACKSTAGE - EVENING

Charlie walks down the hallways of dressing rooms and storage, where set pieces and props litter the floor and walls. Everyone walking has a mission and ignores Charlie's presence. She gives them a wide berth as she heads to the scene shop.

INT. NIACC PERFORMING ARTS CENTER SCENE SHOP - EVENING

CARTER RHETT, a tall lanky kid with long hair tied back into a bun, is in deep conversation with the set director, a burly middle-aged man with saw dust everywhere, including his beard. Carter dresses like a hipster, with a young face, but carries himself as though he wants to be older than he is.

Charlie waits by the door as they finish their work on a large sketch. The set director leaves on his own mission, nodding at Charlie as he passes through the doorway. Carter looks up at her.

CARTER

What'd I do now? We're in the middle of the last piece of the day.

CHARLIE

Oh waa. I'm just here to remind you about tonight.

CARTER

Tonight.

CHARLIE

Carterrrrr.

CARTER

Your house. Friends dinner. Like every Sunday ever. Do you guys really think so little of me?

CHARLIE

Considering you've missed the past four because you "were in the middle of a masterpiece,"... I'm gonna go with yes.

He smiles and winks at her. She ignores this.

CARTER
No more inspiration... I promise.

CHARLIE
Yeah, okay Picasso.

CARTER
I think I want to go by Williams,
too.

CHARLIE
Huh?

CARTER
Like Tennessee Williams. My writing
is taking off now too, you know.

CHARLIE
Bye, Carter.

Carter laughs as she leaves the room.

INT. BOSTON OPERA HOUSE BACKSTAGE DRESSING ROOMS- EVENING

Charlie is putting her script and score into her bag, and packing up for the day. LIAM CHANDLER, a charming 21-year-old student from NYU, peaks around the corner to stand in the doorway. He is the stage manager, and carries around an enormous binder under his arm.

LIAM
Charlotte?

Charlie jumps as her head swings around.

CHARLIE
Ah, hi. Sorry, I was in my own
world for a second there.

LIAM
No worries, I'm just getting the
tickets orders from cast members.

Charlie's photo dings with a new message coming up from "Mom". Momentarily distracted, Charlie groans. Liam hesitates.

LIAM (CONT'D)
I can come back tomorrow if this
isn't a good time?

CHARLIE

Oh, no, sorry. Just something at home. You were saying...

LIAM

Tickets. How many do you need for the run? We're giving everyone four maximum.

Charlie's phone dings again, and she glances at it before answering.

CHARLIE

Two. Just two tickets for me would be great.

LIAM

Great!

Liam takes out the binder to write down her order.

LIAM (CONT'D)

A different last name?

Charlie notices that he's closed the binder.

CHARLIE

Won't they just be under my name?

LIAM

Yes.

He grins. Her phone dings once more. She reaches for it, and his grin falls.

CHARLIE

One is a different last name, yes.

LIAM

Ah, I see.

Liam makes his way to the door.

CHARLIE

But it's my godmother.

He turns over his shoulder before leaving.

LIAM

Noted.

Charlie finally opens her phone revealing the text messages from her mom.

[Note: Text messages are in italics]

MELISSA (TEXT)
Where are the keys?

MELISSA (TEXT) (CONT'D)
Will you be home soon?

MELISSA (TEXT) (CONT'D)
Charlie?

Charlie sighs deeply, and calls her mom. It rings three times before getting to voicemail without an answer. Charlie grabs her bag and hurries out of the room.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHARLIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Charlie grabs her bag and groceries out of the car and hauls them up the front steps. She reaches for the front door, but it's locked. She begins ringing the doorbell fiercely.

MELISSA (O.C.)
I'm coming, I'm coming!

The door flies open, and Melissa sing songs.

MELISSA (CONT'D)
She's hooome!

CHARLIE
A little bit of help, please.

MELISSA
Oh, yes.

She grabs the other half of the bags, and brings them into the house. Charlie follows.

INT. CHARLIE'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

MELISSA
What's the damage?

Charlie holds up a frozen pizza box in each hand.

MELISSA (CONT'D)
Tell me there's pepperoni hidden in another bag.

CHARLIE

Yes, yes, I didn't forget. Let's get these in the oven so they're ready when everyone gets here.

Melissa checks the boxes and pops a couple of them in.

MELISSA

Who's coming tonight?

CHARLIE

Ange, Carter if he doesn't decide to change the world, and Trish!

MELISSA

Oh, I hope she brings the baby.

CHARLIE

Mom, Willa is not a baby anymore.

MELISSA

She's the youngest we've got. So she's the baby.

Charlie shakes her head.

The doorbell rings, and Charlie runs to get it.

INT. CHARLIE'S FOYER - NIGHT

She opens it and Ange is there with Carter.

CHARLIE

Lacking inspiration for an excuse?

CARTER

She made me carpool.

CHARLIE

Why didn't I think of that?
Brilliant.

Ange smirks as they enter the house.

CARTER

Ugh, Ms. P what is that incredible smell?

CHARLIE

You know damn well she didn't cook anything.

INT. CHARLIE'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Carter, Ange, and Charlie head into the kitchen.

CARTER

But it's the way she makes it happen... no one puts a frozen pizza in the oven quite like you Ms. P.

Carter swoops down to kiss Melissa on the cheek, Ange and Charlie roll their eyes. This is obviously a running joke.

MELISSA

Good to see someone around here appreciates my cooking!

Melissa begins to grab paper plates and utensils from the cupboards.

Charlie runs and hops over the back of the couch. She gets comfortable in front of the TV as Ange and Carter follow suit on either side of her.

The living room is connected to the kitchen, so people from each room have the ability to continue conversations with one another.

INT. CHARLIE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The living room is homey, with different jazz and music-related artwork littering the walls. There is a fire place with a mantle full of pictures. There are several of Charlie, Melissa, and their friends. In the center, there is a framed picture of a striking man in uniform. The camera pans and focuses on this picture in particular.

Charlie grabs the remote and turns on the television. The E! Red Carpet Show is on.

CARTER

Ugh, do we always have to watch the pre-show stuff?

Ange and Charlie shove him from either side.

CHARLIE

Of course! It's half the fun.

Carter grumbles as Charlie and Ange stare at celebrities walking the carpet.

ANGE

How does Audra McDonald always look like an angel?

MELISSA (O.C.)

Have you heard her sing? I'm pretty sure she is one? Do you kids want anything to drink?

CARTER

A cold beer would be awesome.

MELISSA (O.C.)

Water it is!

The doorbell rings again. Charlie jumps off the couch.

CHARLIE

I got it!

INT. CHARLIE'S FOYER - NIGHT

TRISH CUMMINGS, a woman in her early 40s, in incredible physical shape, with a young child on her hip, pushes the door open before Charlie can get to it.

TRISH

Hellooooo Parkers!

CHARLIE

Well, let yourself in why don't you?

TRISH

That's what I did, isn't it, smartass?

CHARLIE

Trish!

Charlie points at WILLA CUMMINGS, wide-eyed and curious, who's sitting on her hip.

TRISH

Ah, she's used to it, doesn't even listen to me anymore.

CHARLIE

Aren't godmothers supposed to nice?

TRISH

Not yours.

Trish struts passed her into the kitchen.

INT. CHARLIE'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Melissa squeals.

MELISSA

Who's my favorite munchkin! And
you've gotten so big!

Melissa reaches for Willa, who immediately reaches back.
Trish passes off her child and takes charge of pizza duty as
the oven timer goes off.

TRISH

I'm starting to think she likes her
better.

CHARLIE

Never.

Charlie laughs, receiving a playful slap from her godmother.
She starts to help move the food to the living room.

TRISH

How was the appointment today,
Melissa?

Melissa ignores her, deeply concentrated on Willa. Trish
looks up to Charlie. Charlie walks toward the fridge, putting
some space between her and her mother. Trish follows. Melissa
stays utterly focused on Willa throughout their conversation.

CHARLIE

They took away her license today.

Trish's sassy facade is wiped away by concern.

TRISH

How's she taking it?

CHARLIE

She won't talk to me about it. Do
you think you could-

ANGE (O.C.)

You're missing all the good
dresses, Charlie!

Trish gives Charlie a squeeze and nods. Charlie moves away
from the fridge.

CHARLIE

Don't mind me, just preparing YOUR dinner, lazy butt.

Melissa and Willa are now sitting on the floor of the kitchen exchanging whispers.

TRISH

Seriously. It's like I'm not even here.

Trish and Charlie giggle as they bring the pizzas, plates, and utensils into the living room.

INT. CHARLIE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Charlie and Trish begin to lay out their food spread on the coffee table in front of the television. Carter and Ange pounce on the food.

TRISH

Do they feed you guys at rehearsal?

Charlie joins their caveman antics, loading up a plate high with slices.

TRISH (CONT'D)

You all have worms.

Melissa enters the room holding hands with Willa. Trish settles into an armchair and her daughter lets go, running to jump onto her mother's lap.

TRISH (CONT'D)

So now that I have food, you remember, huh?

Her daughter giggles, nuzzling into the side of her neck. Melissa sits down next to her own daughter on the couch.

MELISSA

What are we watching tonight?

CHARLIE

MOM. Red carpet. Tony Awards.

Melissa laughs.

MELISSA

Charlie, it was a joke. I haven't lost it completely yet. Any dresses we like?

MONTAGE

- Ange and Charlie squeal, pointing at the screen, ending in a fit of giggles.

- Willa makes her way over to Carter, looking up at him adoringly. He winks at her and she jumps up into his lap. When he looks back up at the TV, she steals a bite of his pizza.

- Melissa and Trish talk amongst themselves, as the kids faces are glued to the screen.

- Charlie's head rests on her mother's shoulder. Willa is back in her mother's lap half asleep as Trish plays with her hair. Ange and Carter are in a heated debate over one of the awards.

INT. CHARLIE'S FOYER - NIGHT

Melissa walks Trish, who carries a knocked out Willa on her hip, to the door.

MELISSA

So I'll be seeing you tomorrow?

TRISH

Tuesday yoga, so the day after.

MELISSA

Right, right. Bye, love.

Melissa kisses Willa on the top of the head, and then her friend on the cheek.

TRISH

Goodnight, guys!

Carter, Ange, and Charlie can be heard talking animatedly from the next room. There is no response and Trish rolls her eyes.

TRISH (CONT'D)

Tuesday.

MELISSA

Tuesday!

Trish heads out the door.

INT. CHARLIE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Melissa walks into the living room behind the couch.

MELISSA

It's past this old lady's bedtime.
Don't be up too late, okay? You've
got rehearsal early.

CHARLIE

Okayyyy, goodnight mom.

CARTER

Night Ms. P!

ANGE

Sweet dreams!

Melissa exits the room. Charlie waits until she can hear the
bedroom door close.

CHARLIE

Guys, what am I gonna do without
you here for Sunday dinners?

CARTER

We've got a whole summer of Sunday
dinners.

ANGE

I still say you should've accepted
NYU's letter.

CHARLIE

Honestly, I feel sick just talking
about this.

CARTER

Charlie, you're not stuck here.

CHARLIE

Ha. Yeah, okay.

CARTER

You've got options.

CHARLIE

Uh huh, like what?

ANGE

Have you reached out to her brother
at all?

CHARLIE

We barely hear from them since they moved out down south. Plus, he just remarried, and she has kids. There's no way they'll come back to help. They were never that close growing up anyway.

CARTER

What about the money from your dad? Could that go to getting help?

CHARLIE

No way. That's emergency only.

Ange mumbles.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

What? I should just leave her here?

ANGE

She wouldn't want to hold you back.

CHARLIE

Ange, I can't even tell you the last time she went grocery shopping, or went to an appointment without me reminding her, or did her laundry.

There's the sound of door opening and closing upstairs. The three of them pause. Charlie glances up the stairs. The door opens and closes again. They whisper.

CARTER

But Charlie, you're performing with professionals. No one our age does that without previous experience. You're wasting that gift by staying here.

CHARLIE

That's just the thing. Now that she doesn't have a car, I don't even know if the show's feasible.

CARTER

Stop it.

ANGE

No way, Charlie.

CHARLIE

I've already shown up late, and had to take off a half a dozen days for her appointments.

CARTER

Dude this isn't something you can casually drop.

ANGE

And how could even consider it? You love it! Plus opportunities like that never come around out here.

CHARLIE

I know. Look, I don't want to talk about it anymore.

Ange and Carter exchange frustrated glances, but Ange gives her friend a squeeze.

ANGE

How are things going with set construction?

Ange turns to Carter, who begins to answer, while Charlie stares off, not hearing a word.

CUT TO:

INT. NIACC PERFORMING ARTS CENTER - MORNING

Ange, Carter, and Charlie enter the back of the auditorium and walk down the aisles. They're talking over one another about a controversial win the night before. The rest of the cast and crew are just beginning to arrive to work for the day.

JAMES HOWARD, the director of the show, a man over 50 years-old wearing all black, is talking animatedly to BRUCE TUCKER, an agent from New York City that is all business.

JAMES

Ah, there she is!

James gestures to Charlie whose head pops up from the conversation with her friends.

CHARLIE

Me?

James waves her over. Charlie looks back at her friends who shrug, and she rushes over to the two men.

JAMES

Bruce Tucker, this is our young Christine. Charlie, Bruce works in New York for an agency that's looking for fresh young talent.

Bruce extends his hand and Charlie reaches to shake it.

BRUCE

Great to meet you, Charlie. James has told me so much about you.

CHARLIE

Wow. Yeah, I mean yes, it's so great to meet you as well.

BRUCE

I was hoping to -

Charlie's phone begins to ring loudly. She glances at the screen. The call is from her mom.

James huffs, bringing her attention back to the conversation at hand.

CHARLIE

I'm so sorry, but I really need to take this. Family emergency.

Bruce's mouth is agape, as Charlie speed walks up the aisle and answers her phone.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Hey, mom, this really isn't a good time. Can I call you back in just a few minutes?

There is heavy breathing heard from the other line.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Mom?

When Melissa finally speaks, her voice is quivering.

MELISSA (V.O.)

Charlie... I'm not sure where I am.

Beat.

CHARLIE

What do you mean?

MELISSA (V.O.)
 Well I left for my walk this
 morning like I usually do. And...
 well I think I'm lost.

CHARLIE
 Did you take a wrong turn?

MELISSA (V.O.)
 I don't think so.

Melissa is beginning waver, as though she is starting to cry.

CHARLIE
 It's fine, mom. It's fine. What do
 you see?

MELISSA (V.O.)
 Um, I uh, I think it's a church?

CHARLIE
 Okay, good, that's good. What's the
 name of the church?

MELISSA (V.O.)
 I don't know.

Charlie balls up a fist at her side before relaxing her hand.

CHARLIE
 That's alright, is there a sign in
 front of it at all?

MELISSA
 Yes.

CHARLIE
 Tell me what it says.

Carter and Ange are watching this unfold from the front of
 the auditorium, looking between the pair of men and Charlie.
 Charlie runs her hand through her hair. She hangs up the
 phone and walks back down the aisle.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
 I'm so sorry to do this, but
 there's something I need to take
 care of. It won't take long. I hope
 to talk more with you Mr. Tucker.
 Again, I'm sorry to cut our
 introduction short.

James and Bruce's faces are blank as Charlie turns to run up the aisle waving off her friends questioning glances.

CUT TO:

EXT. MASON CITY CHURCH - MORNING

Melissa is sitting on the steps of the church, elbows on knees, and chin in her hands. Charlie's jeep slowly pulls up in front of the church. Melissa's face is blank.

Charlie steps out of the car and makes her way up the stairs to sit next to her mother. Her head falls on her mother's shoulder, as she wraps an arm around her waist. Melissa continues to look forward blankly as a tear falls down her cheek.

MELISSA

I didn't make you late for rehearsal, did I?

CHARLIE

We hadn't even started yet.

They sit in silence for a beat. Melissa whispers.

MELISSA

I'm sorry.

CHARLIE

Nothing to be sorry for.

She gives her mother a squeeze.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Let's get out of here, yeah?

Melissa gives a sound between a laugh and a groan.

MELISSA

Absolutely.

They walk down the steps and into the car.

CUT TO:

INT. CHARLIE'S CAR - MORNING

The windows are down and "You Make Me Feel So Young" by Frank Sinatra is blaring from the car speakers. Melissa and Charlie are belting out the words along with him.

CUT TO:

INT. NIACC PERFORMING ARTS CENTER REHEARSAL ROOM - NIGHT

Charlie is standing by the piano performing "All I Ask of You" with the accompanist, while Colette watches her.

COLETTE

More! Think of what you're saying!
Enough. Stop, stop.

She waves her hand to cut of the accompanist who sighs and turns back the music a few pages. This isn't the first time they've stopped.

COLETTE (CONT'D)

What are you singing, Charlotte?
What are the lyrics here that you
just said?

Charlie takes a deep breath and lets it out.

CHARLIE

"All I want is freedom, A world
with no more night; And you, always
beside me, To hold me and to hide
me."

COLETTE

What does that mean to you?

CHARLIE

Uh, that she loves Raoul and wants
to be with him?

Colette groans.

COLETTE

It's so much more than that.
Christine has always been alone,
and here is someone who is telling
her that she doesn't have to be! He
is setting her free, and promising
to be her comfort and lover always.
He's promising to take away her
pain, her fears. Do you see it? How
do I pull it out of you?

(MORE)

COLETTE (CONT'D)

I need to see it Charlotte. If I don't believe it, the audience sure as hell won't.

Charlie looks close to tears, but she grits her teeth. Colette points at the accompanist.

COLETTE (CONT'D)

Again.

Suddenly there's a knock at the rehearsal room's door, and Liam enters, leafing through his binder. He feels the tension in the room and looks up from his notes.

COLETTE (CONT'D)

What?!

LIAM

Ah, well James had some notes for the cast and wanted me to pass along a copy to you. There are a couple for Charlotte, too. He just let everyone go for the day....

COLETTE

We're not leaving here, until Charlotte can grasp this song.

CHARLIE

But-

Colette silences her with a sharp look.

LIAM

Ooohhkay. I'll leave them in your office.

Liam turns quickly to leave the room. Colette closes her eyes, rubbing the bridge of her nose.

COLETTE

Wait! Wait. Maybe you can be of some help here.

LIAM

Huh?

CHARLIE

What?

Colette snaps open her eyes.

COLETTE

I need you to be present, and since our Raoul is out sick today, Liam will have to do.

LIAM

I don't sing....

COLETTE

And you don't need to. She'll sing the duet parts, I just need her to have a man to sing to.

CHARLIE

Mrs. Barnes, I'm sorry, but I really can't stay late, I have to -

COLETTE

Do this right, and you won't have to.

Charlie's face is the color of a tomato. Liam raises his eyebrows and looks between the two of them.

LIAM

Okay, where do you want me?

COLETTE

In front of her will do quite nicely.

Liam crosses the room until he is a foot or two in front of where Charlie is standing. She is speechless, but sets her jaw and stands up a little straighter.

COLETTE (CONT'D)

Now remember. He is offering to save you from your loneliness, and take away your fear. To love you, and be your light.

Liam's eyes go wide, before he winks at her. Charlie holds back a laugh and rolls her eyes.

She closes her eyes breathing deeply. Colette points at the accompanist who starts to play the introduction. Charlie opens her eyes, and begins to sing. Her tone is perfect, but she is avoiding eye contact.

CHARLIE (SINGING)

*Say you love me every waking
moment, turn my head with talk of
summertime,*

COLETTE

Look at him, Charlotte. Ask him!

Liam looks at her curiously, as her eyes travel up his chest, up his cheeks, and into his eyes.

CHARLIE (SINGING)

*Say you need me with you now and
always, promise me that all you say
is true, that's all I ask of you,*

She starts out coy, with a shy smile. He returns it. He acts as though he's going to lip-sync and she giggles, but immediately returns to her character. Their eyes train on each other while Charlie sings the Raoul part.

CHARLIE (SINGING) (CONT'D)

*Let me be your shelter, let me be
your light, you're safe, no one
will find you, your fears are far
behind you.*

Charlie's eyes close slowly.

CHARLIE (SINGING) (CONT'D)

*All I want is freedom, a world with
no more night,*

She turns her gaze back to Liam, who is lost in her performance.

CHARLIE (SINGING) (CONT'D)

*And you, always beside me, to hold
me and to hide me.*

Colette cuts off the accompanist and begins to clap enthusiastically.

COLETTE

*Yes! Yes, my dear, yes. That. That
is what you will do every night you
perform. Give me that, and you will
break every heart in that room.*

Charlie is unable to contain her grin. Liam watches her enchanted.

COLETTE (CONT'D)

*Now go, go, to wherever you're
always off to. I'll give you your
notes tomorrow, let's end on a
positive one.*

Charlie grabs her bag before she can be told otherwise and heads for the door. Liam follows her out.

INT. NIACC PERFORMING ARTS CENTER - NIGHT

They walk through the hallways toward the entrance of the theater.

LIAM

That was... wow.

CHARLIE

You think?

He nods.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Damn that felt good. That's why I do this, I mean... what a rush. I don't think Colette has ever been that happy with me. I mean we know it won't last, but... and I knew it, while it was happening. It was just...

Charlie is in her own world.

LIAM

You should give this a real shot. Are you headed to the city after this show?

Charlie's phone begins to ding, and she is brought back to reality.

CHARLIE

Huh?

LIAM

To audition? Not that you'll necessarily need to. I mean, with all the agents coming, I'm sure you'll have plenty of offers for shows after this.

CHARLIE

Shut up. You're kidding.

Liam shrugs.

LIAM

Just calling it like I see it.

Charlie's phone dings again. She stops and begins digging through her bag.

Liam keeps walking and then realizes that Charlie is stopped behind him.

LIAM (CONT'D)
See ya tomorrow, Charlotte.

Charlie finally finds her phone and reads the screen, as Liam is walking away. Suddenly, her head perks up.

CHARLIE
You can just call me Ch-
Liam is already gone.
Charlie groans.

EXT. NIACCA PERFORMING ARTS CENTER - EVENING

Charlie walks to her car. She tosses her bag into the back seat.

INT. CHARLIE'S CAR - EVENING

Charlie sits in the front seat scrolling through her text message alerts, all from her mom.

MELISSA (TEXT)
*I need to be at the store tomorrow
at 8PM, will you be out of
rehearsal by then?*

MELISSA (TEXT)(CONT'D)
*I signed up to help out, I really
need to be there.*

MELISSA (TEXT)(CONT'D)
Should I ask Trish?

Charlie sighs deeply before putting the car into drive.

EXT. CAT'S JAZZ SHOP - EVENING

Charlie's car pulls up to the parking lot in front of the store. The store's sign features a gaudy orange cat playing the piano.

She gets out of the car, slamming the door, and jogs up to the shop door.

INT. CAT'S JAZZ SHOP - EVENING

The store is alive with color. Each wall has a different mural of old jazz and funk legends. Immediately to the left is a check out counter. The counter is a glass case that is full of little jazz/funk trinkets: picks, unique drum sticks, figurines for your car's dashboard, etc. Beyond it are rows of records and sheet music. The book cases are full of scores from different musicals and films. To the right are instruments of every shape and size. In the back of the store is a small stage with tables gathered in front of it. There is also a door labeled "Practice Rooms". There are twinkling lights set up around the store, along with random cat art amongst the ordered chaos.

There are some customers in the back, thumbing through records. Behind the counter stands CAT TYLER, the owner of the store. She is in her late 40s, early 50s, with dark leathery skin, and dreadlocks.

CAT

Charlie!

Her voice has a slight rasp, and she rushes around the counter to pull Charlie into a tight hug. Charlie returns it.

CHARLIE

Hey Cat.

CAT

It's been ages, babe. Everything okay?

CHARLIE

Um yeah, I was just coming by to see if you'd sent out another flyer or email about a show... lessons?

CAT

Ah, just a second, let me check.

Cat scoots around the counter and taps her computer. She does a quick once-over glance at the page before looking back up at Charlie.

CAT (CONT'D)

Nope, just an email about the new instrument shipment.

Charlie grips the edge of the counter, and lets out a sigh.

CHARLIE

Any idea why mom told me she was volunteering for you tomorrow night?

CAT

Oh, huh.

CHARLIE

It's fine, I'll talk to her.

CAT

Wait, Charlie, we did discuss a while back the possibility for her to get back into teaching lessons. Maybe the email triggered it?

CHARLIE

Maybe? Yeah. Thanks for checking, Cat.

CAT

Anytime!

Charlie turns to head out the door.

CAT (CONT'D)

Wait, Charlie. I mean, we could always use an extra teacher, you think that's something she'd be interested in?

CHARLIE

Seriously?

CAT

Of course. I mean it's been on the table since you got into high school, but I think she just didn't want to miss anything of yours.

Charlie's shoulders relax.

CHARLIE

Right. Well, my life's kind of overrun by rehearsals, so I'm sure she'd love it.

CAT

Perfect. I'll set her up with some of our afternoon clients.

CHARLIE

Great, text me whenever you want her to start?

CAT

You got it. Good to see you Charlie! Don't be such a stranger. You know, Jack and I already have our tickets for next month.

CHARLIE

You, too, Cat. Excited for you guys to see it! I'll catch you later.

CAT

See ya, babe.

Charlie heads out the door, the bell attached to the door ringing on her exit.

INT. CHARLIE'S HOUSE - EVENING

Charlie closes the front door, and drops her things at her feet.

MELISSA (SINGSONG)

Can it be? Can it be Christine?

A grin escapes Charlie's lips, as Melissa rounds the corner to grab her into a hug.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

How was rehearsal today?

CHARLIE

Rough. And then not so rough.

MELISSA

Did that Colette give you crap again?

CHARLIE

Does she ever not?

MELISSA

Want me to take care of her?

Melissa wiggles her eyebrows. Charlie throws an arm around her mother's waist as they head into the kitchen.

INT. CHARLIE'S KITCHEN - EVENING

CHARLIE

Hmm, she had a rare moment of kindness today, so I'll get back to you on that.

MELISSA

You just let me know. I know people.

Charlie hops up on the kitchen counter.

CHARLIE

What are we feeling for dinner tonight?

MELISSA

There are leftovers for you to reheat, I'm headed to work on some music.

CHARLIE

Thank you! Oh wait, speaking of that -

MELISSA

I already called Trish, she's giving me a ride to the show tomorrow.

CHARLIE

Wait, no there isn't a show, Mom.

MELISSA

Honey, I'm on their email list. I'm going tomorrow to help out.

CHARLIE

Can I see the email?

MELISSA

I signed up for the shift. I'm not going back on it, I might be their only volunteer.

CHARLIE

Can I just see it, Mom?

Melissa sighs, eyebrows furrowed.

MELISSA

It's up.

Melissa points at the computer at the desk in the kitchen, and leaves the room, walking up the stairs.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

Look, I'm going to work on my piece.

Charlie walks over and sits down. She opens the email that reads, "New shipment of instruments! Tomorrow, June 8th, don't miss out!"

CUT TO:

INT. CHARLIE'S HOUSE MUSIC ROOM - EVENING

Melissa is at work composing at the piano bench. She looks up as Charlie enters.

CHARLIE

I just got off the phone with Cat. She was wondering if you'd be game to start teaching some lessons at the store?

MELISSA

Okay.

CHARLIE

She said since you're doing that, they don't need any volunteers.

MELISSA

Okay.

Melissa goes back to composing. Charlie watches her mother, and then moves to close the door.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

Oh, Charlie?

CHARLIE

Yeah?

MELISSA

How was rehearsal today?

CHARLIE

It was good, mom.

MELISSA

Good.

Melissa smiles at her daughter, and then turns back to the piano.

Charlie grips the door a little tighter than before, and shuts it behind her.

CUT TO:

INT. CHARLIE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ange sits on the couch, and has her laptop attached to a speaker. Charlie is standing in front of her with her score and script tossed on the chair next to her.

ANGE

Charlie, you've done this like a dozen times. You sound fine. You're going to exhaust your voice.

Charlie shakes her head.

CHARLIE

Just one more time, okay? "Think of Me" opens the show, and Colette still doesn't think I have it.

ANGE

I thought you were spouting two seconds ago about her turn around?

CHARLIE

Different song, Ange. Please, just one more time. Just the second half even.

ANGE

And then we go to the movies. Our available times are narrowing by the minute.

CHARLIE

Yep, promise.

Charlie closes her eyes, and Ange presses play on the speakers. An instrumental version of "Think of Me" plays through them. Ange watches with a notebook and pen in hand for any notes or critiques (but it is blank).

CHARLIE (SINGING) (CONT'D)
*Think of all the things we've
shared and seen, don't think about
the things which might have been-*

Charlie's brows furrow together before her eyes suddenly go wide. She breaks character, while Ange watches her curiously.

ANGE
What's the matter?

CHARLIE
I forgot the words.

Charlie is pale and frozen for a moment before springing to action. She begins walking toward the laptop, then stops herself. Ange pauses the music. Charlie looks around, searching, before her eyes land on the script and score on the armchair. She zeros in, grabs the score, and begins flipping through it wildly.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
How did I forget the words? I've
been singing this over and over
for... but then maybe I zoned
out... I never zone out. What are
the freaking lyrics?!

She finally reaches the page she's looking for.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Okay yeah, "Think of me, think of
me waking, silent and resigned"...
"imagine me trying too hard, to put
you from my mind". Ha. That would
be the lyric.

She is shaking slightly as she sits down.

ANGE
Stop it.

CHARLIE
Stop what?

ANGE
I know what you're thinking. You
just overworked yourself. You look
like you've barely been sleeping.
Everyone messes up or forgets a
lyric now and again.

CHARLIE
Not me.

ANGE

Charlie.

The air goes out of Charlie and she melts back into the chair with a sigh. Ange reaches out and rubs Charlie's knee.

ANGE (CONT'D)

I'm serious. Stop thinking on it.
There's no point.

Charlie is distractedly playing with the loose string on the edge of the couch.

CHARLIE

Mhm.

ANGE

Okay enough practice and wallowing,
let's go.

Charlie hesitates.

ANGE (CONT'D)

Candy on me.

Ange grins widely, and Charlie mirrors it with one of her own.

CHARLIE

Popcorn, too?

ANGE

Don't push it.

Charlie laughs. They both grab their things and head out the door.

CUT TO:

INT. CHARLIE'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Charlie is standing in front the desk in the kitchen. She is writing on a white board calendar on the wall.

On the kitchen counter sits a half eaten bagel and fruit, with a large bowl mug of coffee.

In a tin on the wall next to the white board are different colored Expo markers. Charlie has color coded the entire calendar according to what is planned for it, and has crossed off the days leading up until the present. Beneath the calendar there is open white space for notes.

She has written in big black letters: **Reminders for Today.**
Underneath she is writing: **Piano Lessons at 12:15PM.**

Melissa makes her way down the stairs in a bathrobe and slippers, and heads straight for the coffee pot.

CHARLIE

Mom! Aren't you super excited for later? I can't wait to hear about how the lessons go.

Melissa flinches, her face slightly scrunching up.

MELISSA

How did I give birth to a morning person?

Charlie laughs, placing the marker back in the tin, and going back to her food.

CHARLIE

Since when did you start sleeping in?

MELISSA

I earned it. All of your wailing nights as a baby caught up to me. Plus, since when is sleeping in 8AM?

She winks at her daughter.

CHARLIE

Crap! It's already 8AM? I'm going to be late for rehearsal again.

MELISSA

Again?

Charlie grabs her water bottle of the counter and sticks it into her backpack resting in the chair of desk. She adds her score to it and a pen from the desktop.

CHARLIE

So I'll be back around noon or so for your lessons, okay?

MELISSA

Yes, I know, I know. Tell Ange and Carter hello.

CHARLIE

Will do!

MELISSA

And don't forget to ask if they're making DVDs of the performances!

CHARLIE

Got it, Mom.

Charlie grabs the car keys on the counter, and kisses her mother on the cheek.

MELISSA

Have a good day sweetie.

CHARLIE

You too.

Charlie slips her backpack over her shoulder, and heads out the front door.

CUT TO:

INT. NIACC PERFORMING ARTS CENTER - MORNING

Charlie sits on the edge of the stage, as Director James Howard speaks to her from the floor.

JAMES

Now, I don't like the movement that's happening during "Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again". That should be a stand-and-deliver-type number.

Charlie nods, writing down notes in her script.

JAMES (CONT'D)

The songs are continuing to sound stronger, but Colette still wants to meet with you this afternoon.

Charlie's eyes roll back into her head, as her director looks back down at the notes he's written for her.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Also, what's your motivation for ripping the Phantom's mask off?

CHARLIE

Um... well-

JAMES

Yeah, that's what I thought. Whatever it is, forget it. Patrick?

PATRICK, a tall and demanding-looking man in his 40s, with a deep and resonant voice, swivels his head toward them from the back of the stage where he's been talking to one of the other female actresses. He jogs over to them.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Can I get you to walk through the lair scene with Charlie real quick? Where she wakes up and surprises you by slipping off the mask?

PATRICK

Absolutely.

JAMES

Now Charlie, remember, you are thankful toward him, so it needs to lose some of its viciousness. He taught you to sing. Show curiosity, not vengeance.

PATRICK

Yeah, Charlie, just love me, would you?

Charlie grins, their playfulness is familiar.

CHARLIE

Maybe don't kidnap me, yeah?

PATRICK

I just couldn't help myself.

Charlie and Patrick head to their spots on stage.

JAMES

Ciara? Can we get some instrumental?

CIARA, a pianist in her late 20s/early 30s, looks up from where she's been scrolling through her phone at the piano bench. She puts down the phone, and flips through the score, finding what she's looking for, and placing her hands on the keys.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Start on the bed asleep while Patrick's fiddling with the music box.

Charlie takes her place asleep on the bed in the half-build lair set. The Phantom pretends to open a music box as Ciara begins to play.

Charlie moves through the actions of sneaking behind the Phantom, and lifting off the mask in an "ah ha!" moment.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Stop! No, less discovery. This man is a mystery to you. Almost spiritual and angelic in a way. You are curious, but it's all trance-like, you see?

CHARLIE

I'm mesmerized?

JAMES

Exactly. You're still in the same state you were when he took you here.

CHARLIE

Got it.

They reset the scene, and James nods at Ciara.

This time Charlie awakes as if she's not fully out of whichever dream she had. She is drawn to the Phantom as the music box plays. She approaches him tentatively, but almost magnetized as she gently slips the mask aside.

JAMES

Yes! Yes yes, that's exactly what we're going for.

They break character and Patrick grins, offering her his fist to pound.

Charlie returns to the edge of the stage and begins to write in her notebook.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Thanks Patrick.

Patrick nods as he heads back to the women backstage. James meets Charlie where she sits.

JAMES (CONT'D)

And Charlie?

She finishes what she's writing before looking up from her script.

JAMES (CONT'D)

You're doing great. Keep it up at dress rehearsal next week, and who knows what could happen come showtime?

A wide smile stretches across Charlie's face.

CHARLIE

Really? I mean, thank you, Mr. Howard.

He chuckles.

JAMES

Just don't let up now, we're in the home stretch.

Charlie continues to blush, and she nods.

CHARLIE

Absolutely, sir.

He packs up his binder.

JAMES

Now grab your lunch break, and I'll see you this afternoon.

He taps the edge of the stage, and turns around. He moves to talk to Liam who is coming out of the door on the wing.

Charlie hops off the edge of the stage and grabs her backpack in the front row of the audience. She swings it over her shoulder, heading up the aisle.

James begins to speak to Liam, but he holds up his hand. He skirts around the director, jogging after Charlie with his binder in hand.

LIAM

Hey, Charlie!

She slows down, looking over her shoulder as he catches up to her.

CHARLIE

Hey, Liam. What's up?

He matches her strides up the aisle.

LIAM

Do you have lunch plans today? I was thinking we could grab some together.

Charlie's face falls.

CHARLIE

Oh. I would, but I have this thing today.

LIAM

Oh. Okay. How about tomorrow?

CHARLIE

Huh, yeah, it's kind of everyday.

She winces.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

Liam stops walking.

LIAM

Got it, no worries.

He begins to walk away. She hesitates before grabbing his arm.

CHARLIE

Wait, no, it's not what you think. It's just a family thing.

He raises his eyebrows.

LIAM

Family thing, huh?

CHARLIE

Yes. How about dinner after rehearsal one night?

He looks down momentarily at his phone.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Tomorrow. Dinner tomorrow?

He puts it back on top of the binders in his hand. She smiles shyly at him. He returns it.

LIAM

Sweet, want to just go from rehearsal?

CHARLIE

I actually have to take care of something at home right after.

LIAM

Family stuff?

CHARLIE

Ha. Yes, but I could give you my address and you could pick me up instead?

LIAM

I could do that.

Charlie leans toward him, and he fidgets unsure. She reaches toward him and grabs his phone from between his chest and the binders. She blushes as she adds her contact info to his phone. She returns it to him.

CHARLIE

There.

LIAM

Perfect. See you tomorrow.

CHARLIE

Mhm.

He walks back down the aisle and she watches him go. She does a pleased little wiggle before turning and walking back up the aisle to the door at the back of the theater with a goofy smile.

INT. CAT'S JAZZ SHOP MUSIC PRACTICE ROOM - AFTERNOON

Melissa sits in a chair next the piano bench in a small practice room that is absolutely bursting with color. She follows in the music closely, as a MIDDLE SCHOOL CHILD, plays the last few bars of "Rhapsody in Blue". As soon as he finishes, Melissa smiles broadly. The child quickly looks at her for approval.

MELISSA

That was excellent! Very impressive. I think we can shorten the amount of theory work you've been assigned, and give you some more challenging pieces to practice.

CHILD

Awesome! Does that mean I can start to do some improv, too?

MELISSA

Slow down there, Herbie Hancock. One step at a time.

CHILD

Pleeeeeease.

MELISSA

Show me you can do both?

CHILD

Yes! Thank you, Ms. Melissa!

He grabs his sheet music and shoves it in his piano bag, before heading out the door.

MELISSA

See you next week!

The door slams, and she chuckles to herself. She begins to write in her notebook under **Friday, July 5th - Lesson #1** when there's another knock on the door.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

Just a minute!

She finishes what she's writing before looking up at the door.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

Come on in!

A YOUNG GIRL, approximately 8 years old, with twin french braids in her hair and an eager expression, drags her piano bag in to the room and heaves it up on the piano bench. She lets out a puff of air.

GIRL

Hi, I'm Sarah.

She thrusts her hand out to Melissa, who raises her eyebrows, before taking the hand and shaking it.

SARAH

I usually take lessons from Cat, but I couldn't go tomorrow because of it's my birthday. So, I'm here with you.

MELISSA

Well happy early birthday Sarah!
How about you take out what you've
been working on so far.

Sarah nods enthusiastically, before diving her hand into her piano bag and taking out her piece.

SARAH

Okay, so I've been working on "Take Five", but I can't get the timing on this one part. I've counted it out on the page, and I keep practicing. I can't get it.

MELISSA

That's a very tough piece, Sarah. It's natural to hit some bumps in the road.

SARAH

Can you play these bars for me?

Sarah points to a chunk of bars in the middle of the page.

MELISSA

Of course. Scooch over would ya.

Sarah slides down to the far end of the bench. Melissa replaces her in front of the piano.

Melissa places her fingers on the keys, about to begin playing. She never presses a key. She stares at the bars in front of her, and then down at the keys, and back at the notes. Sarah is doing the same: looking at her, the notes, and her fingers, waiting for her to begin. Her vision begins to blur as her eyes swim with tears.

SARAH

Ms. Melissa?

CUT TO:

INT. CHARLIE'S LIVING ROOM - EVENING

The front door slams, as Charlie rushes into the living room.

CHARLIE

I'm sorry, I came as soon as
rehearsal -

She comes up short as she sees the scene in the living room. The only light in the room comes from the remains of the sunset outside their front window. Melissa sits on the couch, her arms holding tucked up legs, in a sort of upright fetal position. She gaze is unwavering and focused straight forward.

Charlie sets down her backpack, and makes her way over to her mother. She slides her feet under the bridge of her mother's knees, and wraps her arms around her, laying her head on her shoulder. Melissa's eyes, slightly red and swollen, begin to well up.

MELISSA

It had to take music? Greedy bitch.

Charlie looks up at her mother. Her mother waits a few moments before looking down at her daughter.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

So much for teaching, huh?

Beat.

CHARLIE

You don't know that it's completely gone. It could have just been another spell.

Melissa's smile looks more like a grimace through tears.

MELISSA

Mhm. That's true.

Charlie's head returns to her mother's shoulder, and Melissa's gaze returns out the window.

The remaining light quickly disappears and it is night.

Charlie is seemingly napping on her mother's shoulder, when the ring of a doorbell shakes them both out of their spell.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

Are you expecting someone?

Charlie's eyes flash wide open, and she scurries out from under her mother.

CHARLIE

Liam. The stage manager for Phantom... he was going to take me to dinner.

Melissa's face lights up, as Charlie hops off the couch, but hesitates between staying and leaving.

MELISSA

Aw, honey!

The doorbell rings again.

CHARLIE

No, no I'll just tell him something came up. We can raincheck this.

MELISSA

What? Why?

Charlie looks guiltily at her mother.

CHARLIE

It's been a long day, I feel like we need a night at home together.

Melissa narrows her eyes before setting her face and beelining out of the room to the front door.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Wait, mom -

EXT. CHARLIE'S FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

Liam is rocking back and forth on his toes and heels. He starts to reach for the doorbell for a third time, but hesitates. He looks back at his car. The front door swings open. He whips his head back around and becomes face to face with Melissa.

MELISSA

Hi there! You must be Liam.

She opens her arms and pulls him into an awkwardly stiff hug. She pulls back, smiling widely. He begins to relax and smiles back. Charlie peeks out from behind her mother.

LIAM

That's me. Ms. Parker?

MELISSA

Oh, please call me Melissa.

CHARLIE

Hi Liam.

She steps out from behind her mother.

LIAM
Hey, Charlie.

They look at each other for a moment before Melissa steps back into the house.

MELISSA
Have fun you two!

CHARLIE
But mom, didn't you want to -

MELISSA
Nope! All taken care of.

She smiles, and gives her daughter a little push before shutting the front door.

CHARLIE
Welp.

Charlie takes a glance at the closed door, and then looks back at Liam.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
So where are we headed?

CUT TO:

INT. GODFATHER'S PIZZA - NIGHT

Charlie and Liam are sitting at a small wooden top table in iron chairs, both working on a pizza. Charlie is laughing at something Liam has said.

LIAM
No, seriously. Like some of them look like they've seen a ghost while they sing. I don't know when opera turned into a study in fight or flight indecision.

Charlie continues to laugh, shaking her head.

CHARLIE
The wide-eyed belt is not super appealing to watch, I know. But they're hella talented.

LIAM
Yes. But so are you, and I don't see any terror when you're up there.

CHARLIE

Oh yeah?

LIAM

Yeah.

CHARLIE

Then I hide it well.

LIAM

Very. So what's the dream? Your own record? Starring role in a movie?

CHARLIE

This, actually.

LIAM

More.

Charlie puts down her pizza, and leans in slightly.

CHARLIE

Well not here, necessarily, but being on stage.

LIAM

So, Broadway?

Charlie's face lights up. She nods vigorously.

CHARLIE

Mhm. That's all there's ever been since I was little. I've visited New York a couple times. It's just... it's everything. The excitement, the noise, the people. Shows eight times a week. Rapid costume changes. Company dance numbers. Those lights. There's no other place to do what I want to do.

LIAM

So is that where you're headed after this?

Charlie looks down at her pizza. She picks it up, as if she's speaking to it.

CHARLIE

It's complicated.

She takes a bite, and looks back at Liam.

LIAM

I mean, I'd say you were a shoo-in. There are plenty of schools up there.

CHARLIE

I actually got in to Tisch at NYU.

LIAM

You're kidding. You know that's where I'm studying right?

CHARLIE

Wait, seriously? I thought you were staff at the Opera House?

LIAM

Ha, I wish. My dad is friends with James, and helped me set this up for the summer. Like an internship, but way better.

CHARLIE

Oh you must love living up there.

LIAM

I do. And you would, too! Did you put down a deposit there?

CHARLIE

No, I actually committed to Boston Conservatory.

LIAM

Ah. I mean great school and all, but... don't you want to be where the action happens? You wouldn't even need to study anymore. With this on your resume, you could move up there and start auditioning. Get a waitressing job. You've got the chops.

Charlie's gaze moves to the window.

CHARLIE

I will. One day. Absolutely.

LIAM

Why can't one day be now?

Charlie returns to the present. And smiles.

CHARLIE

Tell me more about NYU! I assume
you're studying stage management?

Liam pauses, but lets it go.

MONTAGE

- Liam explains something with large hand gestures to Charlie who is fully engaged.

- Charlie imitates the suave attempts of one of the male actors in the show, cracking Liam up.

- Charlie's face is serious and focused on playing with the straw in her water glass. Liam simply watches her.

CUT TO:

INT. LIAM'S CAR - NIGHT

Liam is parked outside of Charlie's house. Liam's eyes focus on his hands on the wheel. Charlie's are on her hands fidgeting with the keys in her lap.

CHARLIE

Well, I had a really great time.

LIAM

Me too. We should do it again
sometime.

Charlie looks at him to find that he is also looking at her.

CHARLIE

Yeah?

LIAM

Yeah.

CHARLIE

I'd like that. See you at dress
rehearsal Monday?

LIAM

Yes you will.

Beat. Charlie gets out of the car and walks up to her door. He waits until she unlocks it to start his car. She waves, and shuts the door behind her. He waves back and pulls away.

CUT TO:

INT. NIACC PERFORMING ARTS CENTER - EVENING

The cast of *Phantom of the Opera* rushes around backstage. Ange is in a dressing room with Charlie, getting her into her first costume of the show. She helps with her hair, as Charlie does her own make up in front of large mirror with fat, white lightbulbs resting at the top of it. Other women in the show are also chatting as they get ready for the dress rehearsal.

Liam peeks around the corner of the dressing room door. He wears all black, and is equipped with a headset. Most of the actresses turn to face him.

LIAM

Ten minutes until curtain, ladies.
Let's get moving.

The women go back to their mirrors with a slightly crazed air.

Liam is all business as his eyes search the room until he makes eye contact with Charlie. He winks at her. She rolls her eyes, but can't help the smile that reaches her face. He leaves the room.

Ange puts the finishing touches of hairspray on Charlie's curls as she comes back to earth. She begins putting on lipstick, but still can't help smiling.

Ange and Charlie's eyes meet in the mirror. Ange raises her eyebrows at her friend.

CHARLIE

Stop, I'm trying to get in
character Ange.

Ange shakes her head and wraps her arms around her friend. Their heads are side by side as they look in the mirror.

ANGE

Girl, we open this Friday.

Charlie shakes her head in disbelief.

CHARLIE

It went by so fast.

ANGE

You're ready, though.

CHARLIE

Want to tell Colette that?

ANGE

But you said you had a break
through with her!

CHARLIE

It was short-lived.

Charlie gets up from her chair and looks at herself one last time in the mirror. Ange all but pushes her out of the dressing room.

ANGE

Break a leg!

CUT TO:

INT. NIACC PERFORMING ARTS CENTER BACKSTAGE - EVENING

Liam is sitting in the wings on his headset, watching Charlie sing "Think of Me". Other actors are waiting offstage. He is completely entranced.

MONTAGE

- Charlie is doing a quick change with Ange's help.
- Liam is talking furiously into his headset as actors stand in the dark.
- Carter watches the scene of the Phantom in his boat as fog rolls onto the stage. He is sitting next to the director.
- The lighting director shines a light from above onto Charlie and the actor playing Raoul.
- A backstage hand pulls on the ropes to close the curtain.
- The Phantom sings to Christine.
- The entire cast comes on stage for bows.

INT. PERFORMING ARTS CENTER - NIGHT

The cast sits spread out all over the stage. Charlie, Ange and Carter are huddled on one of the set pieces looking thoroughly exhausted. Ange sits leaning against Carter, while Charlie has her head in Ange's lap. Director James Howard stands up addressing them.

JAMES

Wow. What a lot of progress since
last week gang.

(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)

I was getting nervous there for a bit. There were a couple hiccups again with lighting cues, but I think we've discussed them with the crew. Those should be buttoned up by opening tomorrow. Liam will send out the final calls for tomorrow. Now, I've got notes for some of you, and so does Colette. Sam, Charlie, Adrian, and Sarah... see me before you go.

Colette steps up to replace James and addresses the cast.

COLETTE

The ensemble numbers sound wonderful, but sopranos I need you to remember to open up your sound. You're starting to sound like a troop of whistlers. I need to meet with Charlie. The rest of you can go.

Charlie turns her head upward with big eyes at both of her friends. Ange gives her a forced smile. Carter whispers.

CARTER

Someone's in trouble....

Charlie tenses and sits up.

CHARLIE

Shut up, Carter.

The cast is released and Charlie makes her way over to the orchestra pit where Colette is waiting for her.

INT. NIACC PERFORMING ARTS CENTER ORCHESTRA PIT - CONTINUOUS

COLETTE

I wanted to discuss something with you about opening weekend.

Colette gestures to James, who finishes up a conversation with another actor and jogs down to meet the two of them.

JAMES

What've we covered?

COLETTE

Nothing yet, I was waiting for you.

JAMES

Right. So, Charlie, we wanted to give you a heads up. Plan to stick around after the shows on opening weekend, there are some people we'd like to introduce you to.

COLETTE

We're telling you now in case you have other plans. These people you will meet are worth canceling for.

Charlie is momentarily speechless.

JAMES

Other than that, you can talk to Liam about your stage notes, I handed them off to him. Nice work tonight, Friday will be here before you know it.

CHARLIE

Thank you! Thank you so much. I look forward to it.

COLETTE

As you should.

With a knowing look at Charlie, and a brief nod at Colette, James pivots off to another cast member.

COLETTE (CONT'D)

There's a slow but steady improvement you've got going on your songs. Let's kick that work into high gear these last few days. And I'd like you staying after rehearsal tomorrow to work on "Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again". It's lagging. This is the home stretch, Charlie. Time to put up or shut up.

CHARLIE

Yes, ma'am.

Colette narrows her eyes at Charlie before whisking away.

Once she is out of earshot, Charlie lets out an audible breath she's been holding.

Ange and Carter make their way over to where she is standing in the pit.

CARTER

So...?

Beat.

CARTER (CONT'D)

They're kicking you out? Getting a new Christine? No worries you gave it a good shot.

Ange gives him a minute, but forceful, shove into a herd of music stands which he barely manages to avoid knocking down.

Ange hides her laugh before refocusing on Charlie who is pleasantly amused by the two.

ANGE

Nothing that bad, right?

CHARLIE

Nothing bad at all.

Carter has rejoined their huddle.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

They want me to stick around nights after the opening shows. To meet people.

CARTER

What kind of people?

CHARLIE

I don't know! People!

CARTER

Sick.

CHARLIE

No, really. They didn't tell me who, they essentially told me it would be silly to miss the introductions.

ANGE

Of course.

CHARLIE

Or as Colette translated, "if you have plans, cancel them."

CARTER

I'm sure she did.

ANGE
That's so exciting!

Charlie looks down, her head elsewhere.

CHARLIE
Yeah.

CARTER
I bet it's one of those big agent
guys. Or that one dude you bailed
on.

ANGE
Carter.

Charlie's snaps out her daydream to glare at him.

CARTER
What? You did.

CHARLIE
Thanks for the reminder.

ANGE
I'm sure these are new people.
Great people. Potential
connections.

CARTER
New Yorkers.

CHARLIE
Maybe. Look, I've got to grab my
notes from Liam, and then I'm
headed home. I promised mom I'd
bring home Chinese.

ANGE
Again? Didn't she ask for
that like every night this
weekend?

CARTER
From Liaaaaam, huh?

Charlie looks at both of them and shrugs.

CHARLIE
I'll see you tomorrow okay?

ANGE
Okay, let me know if you need
anything. Don't forget you come in
early tomorrow to repair that
second costume!

Carter makes kissing noises as Charlie walks away. She throws him a glare over her shoulder.

INT. NIACC PERFORMING ARTS CENTER BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Liam is talking into his headset. He sits on a stool behind a podium in one of the stage wings.

LIAM

No, her spotlight starts as soon as she begins to sing. Yes. Yes. No, it only opens up full stage until that last stanza in the music.

He fidgets unconsciously as he writes in his large black binder on the podium.

LIAM (CONT'D)

No script? You should always have one up there. Well find someone who does, find the last stanza in the song, and that's when you'll bring up the lights. Fine. Yeah, I'll come up there in a second.

Charlie skips up behind him.

CHARLIE

Hi there.

He jumps slightly, but relaxes when he sees her.

LIAM

Hey you. What's up?

CHARLIE

James said to grab my notes from you?

LIAM

Oh yeah, that was mostly lighting. The only thing I have for you, is that you leave the mask with the Phantom instead of throwing it. That way he can leave it when he disappears.

CHARLIE

Oh yeah, of course. So I'm good to go?

LIAM

Yep. And I'm stuck here for the duration.

CHARLIE

Thanks again for dinner the other night, I really enjoyed it.

LIAM

Me too. Once this opening craziness dies down a bit, I'm taking you out again.

CHARLIE

I'll hold you to that.

LIAM

I'd be disappointed if you didn't.

CUT TO:

INT. CHARLIE'S KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Melissa is in the kitchen making a sandwich as Charlie runs down the stairs. Melissa is in a bathrobe, with a towel on her head, humming to herself. Charlie is dressed in sweats, but has a face full of make up and hair curled. She fills up her water bottle in a rush.

Melissa sees her daughter's face.

MELISSA

What's the occasion?

Charlie is consumed with her task.

CHARLIE

The show tonight, mom.

MELISSA

Well of course, but don't they do make up when you get there?

CHARLIE

Trying to stay ahead of the game, they'll touch things up there.

Charlie rummages through her bag, not finding what she's looking for, her head pops up as she scans the kitchen.

MELISSA

You know your outfit is a little contradicting right now.

Charlie locates her binder and script on the chair that's tucked into the kitchen table and zones in on it.

CHARLIE

Well, yeah, I brought a dress to change into afterward.

Charlie grabs them and shoves them into her bag.

MELISSA

After what?

Charlie looks around to see if she's missing anything else before grabbing the car keys.

CHARLIE

The show.

She finally settles her glances and makes eye contact with her mother, who is looking at her blankly. Charlie tries to keep her cool.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Phantom of the Opera, Mom. We're opening tonight. The show I've been preparing for this summer...

A few beats pass.

MELISSA

Of course. You're going to be wonderful, sweetie.

Charlie deflates slightly. She walks over her mother, who stands in the middle of the kitchen.

CHARLIE

I'm sorry. I'm just nervous. Trish is going to come by to pick you up at 7PM. That's not for another hour and a half, though, so you've got time.

Melissa nods. Charlie hugs her mother.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I love you, mom.

MELISSA

I love you, too, Charlie. So much. You're going to be brilliant.

Charlie releases the hug.

CHARLIE

Thanks mom.

Beat.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Now, I've got to head out. I'll see you afterward?

MELISSA

Of course! Break a leg!

Charlie heads out the kitchen and the door slams.

INT. NIACC PERFORMING ARTS CENTER BACKSTAGE - EVENING

The dressing rooms are a frenzy as actors get ready for the show. Women are running back and forth between make up and costumes, half dressed in corsets and hoop skirts. Charlie sits utterly still in her chair in front of the mirror. She is in full make up, hair done, and full costume. She is absentmindedly fidgeting with the sleeve hem of her dress.

Liam knocks on the door even though it's wide open. He is dressed in all black and looks down at his watch.

LIAM

Ten minutes ladies!

CROWD

Ten minutes?!/Shit./Ah!

Charlie stays in her trance-like state, focused on herself in the mirror.

Liam sees she's unmoved.

LIAM

Charlie?

She stirs and turns over her shoulder.

CHARLIE

Huh?

LIAM

Ten minutes until showtime.

CHARLIE

Oh! Thank you.

She turns back around toward the mirror. He hesitates as if he is about to say something to her. He doesn't, and heads back out the door.

EXT. CHARLIE'S HOUSE - EVENING

Trish is dressed nicely, and is waiting outside Charlie's front door. She rings the doorbell, but no one answers. She tries knocking, and rings it a couple more times. Nothing.

She reaches beneath the potted plant outside the door and grabs the key that's there. She opens the front door.

INT. CHARLIE'S HOUSE FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Trish steps into the foyer, reaching for a light switch. The house is completely dark.

INT. CHARLIE'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Trish walks into the living room.

TRISH
Hello? Melissa?

She looks around for any sign of Melissa's presence.

INT. CHARLIE'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

She walks into the kitchen. Nothing is out of place. She looks at the calendar on the wall where "Phantom of the Opera" is written in all caps. Beneath it is written "7PM Trish picks up"

TRISH
Melissa?

She walks up the stairs.

INT. CHARLIE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Trish walks up the stairs to the second floor of the house.

INT. MELISSA'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Trish peeks her head into Melissa's room. There are several dresses flung across the bed, and the closet is wide open. The room is otherwise empty.

INT. CHARLIE'S HOUSE MUSIC ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Trish looks into the music room, but this room is also empty. She takes out her phone and calls Melissa in her contacts.

She leaves the music room.

INT. CHARLIE'S HOUSE HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Trish listens to the phone ring as she checks in the remaining doors on the second floor.

She heads down the stairs and begins to hear the beginnings of a voicemail ending with a beep.

INT. CHARLIE'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

TRISH

Hey Melissa, it's Trish. Where are you? I'm at the house to pick you up for the show. Please give me a call back as soon as you get this.

Trish takes one more look around the kitchen before leaving the room. The door slams.

CUT TO:

INT. NIACC PERFORMING ARTS CENTER - EVENING

Charlie's phone begins to ring in her bag, bringing her fully out of her state. She sees her Mom's contact pop up on her phone.

Liam knocks on the dressing room door again. She hesitates, listening to what he says.

LIAM

Alright ladies, final call. Head to your starting spots, let's do this thing!

Liam leaves. Charlie's phone continues to ring. She looks down at it and then back at herself in the mirror, lecturing herself.

CHARLIE (WHISPERING)

Trish has it covered tonight.

She presses "ignore".

Ange walks by the door and sees Charlie still backstage.

ANGE

Charlie!

CHARLIE

I know, I'm coming, I'm coming.

Charlie shoves her phone down in her bag, and hops out of her chair. She rushes to the door, frazzled.

Ange stops her in the doorway. Holding her hands between them.

ANGE

Hey.

Charlie pauses and looks at her friend.

ANGE (CONT'D)

You're gonna kill it. Tonight is about you. Go show that crowd what you do best.

Charlie lets out a deep breath.

CHARLIE

Thank you.

They smile at each other, rushing out doorway and toward the stage.

INT. NIACC PERFORMING ARTS CENTER - NIGHT

There is a full house in the theater. People are bustling around as they settle into their seats. The pit orchestra is warming up and beginning to tune their instruments, giving people an extra panic to get seated.

James Howard and Colette Barnes are seated in the center orchestra section, on the aisle. There is an empty seat on the other side of James.

James stands up, scanning the room. He spots who he's looking for, agent Bruce Tucker is also scanning the room at the back door of the theater. James begins waving his hand in Bruce's direction until Bruce sees him.

Bruce makes his way down to where they are seated and climbs over the two of them to the empty seat.

JAMES

You made it! Glad you could.

BRUCE

Me too. My flight got pushed up, so I'm headed back to New York tomorrow morning, but you made such a fuss...

He elbows James good-naturedly and they both chuckle.

JAMES

You won't be disappointed. I think she's exactly what you're looking for.

BRUCE

Well the out-of-town tryouts aren't even supposed to start until next month in Denver.

JAMES

Never hurts to get a head start.

BRUCE

I just hope you're not wasting my time, James. She didn't seem all that serious last time we talked. Tried to talk.

The lights in the opera house begin to dim, and a hush falls over the audience.

JAMES

Just watch.

The overture begins to wash over the crowd.

INT. NIACC PERFORMING ARTS CENTER BACKSTAGE RIGHT -
CONTINUOUS

Charlie stands back stage with the other cast and crew, a silent, excited tension among them as the overture begins.

Liam stands at his podium with his headset, mentally preparing himself as he scans the open pages of his binder.

He looks over and gets Charlie's attention. She walks a few steps toward him, leaning in so that he can whisper.

LIAM (WHISPERING)

Pulled some strings... as I can...

He winks at her. She rolls her eyes. He smiles.

LIAM (CONT'D)
And got your family the best seats
in the house. Middle of the row,
center orchestra.

Charlie comes up short.

CHARLIE
Seriously?

LIAM
Opening night. Go crush it.

She smiles.

CHARLIE (MOUTHING)
Thank you.

She steps away from him and toward the edge of the curtain.
She closes her eyes, taking a deep breath. The curtains open,
and the lights go up.

CUT TO:

INT. NIACC PERFORMING ARTS CENTER STAGE - NIGHT

The stage is set in the Phantom's underground realm. Charlie
and the ACTOR playing the Phantom cross the stage in a little
canoe, needing to cross a subterranean lake to get to his
lair.

Charlie is completely in character, with a voice like velvet.

CHARLIE (SINGING)
*In sleep he sang to me, in dreams
he came. That voice which calls to
me, and speaks my name. And do I
dream again? For now I find... The
Phantom of the Opera is there,
inside my mind.*

As the music breaks for the Phantom to prepare to sing his
part, Charlie subtly looks out into the audience at the
center of the orchestra section. There are two empty seats.

CUT TO:

INT. TRISH'S CAR - NIGHT

Trish is driving through the Parker's neighborhood with the
windows down, scanning the side walks.

The bluetooth in her car calls Melissa again. The voicemail picks up.

TRISH

Damnit Melissa. Where are you?

She pulls over the car. Dropping her head in her hands.

TRISH (CONT'D)

Think, Trish. Think. Where would she go?

CUT TO:

INT. NIACC PERFORMING ARTS CENTER STAGE - NIGHT

Charlie and the Phantom are in his underground lair.

PHANTOM

Sing, my angel of music!

Charlie begins to do the operatic runs at the height of the song.

CHARLIE

Ah, ah ah, ah ah, ah ah, ah!

CUT TO:

EXT. CAT'S JAZZ SHOP PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Trish pulls up to the store, but all the lights are out, and the parking lot is empty.

CUT TO:

EXT. NIACC PERFORMING ARTS CENTER - NIGHT

Trish finds parking outside the theater, and rushes in the doors.

INT. NIACC PERFORMING ARTS CENTER - CONTINUOUS

The orchestra is playing the final song, and the cast is coming on for bows. The audience applauds enthusiastically.

Charlie walks out from the wings to center stage to bow, and her applause is thunderous. The audience jumps to their feet in a standing ovation.

Trish slips in the back door, and joins their applause. She is on the verge of tears.

Colette is beaming with pride, staring up at her protegee.

James gives a side-eyed glance to Bruce, who raises his eyebrows at his friend. He shrugs, nodding as a way of conceding. James gives an I-told-you-so smirk.

The other stars continue their bows, and the cast joins in for one altogether.

CUT TO:

INT. NIACC PERFORMING ARTS CENTER BACKSTAGE DRESSING ROOMS-NIGHT

Charlie is still in full make up, but has changed out of her costume and into a simple sundress. She has let out her hair so it's in loose curls down her back.

Her phone beeps loudly in her bag. She reaches frantically for her phone having forgot about it in the rush of the performing. She sees five missed calls from her mom, ten unread text messages from Trish, and one voicemail. She unlocks her phone.

There is a knock on the door, and she jumps, dropping her phone and spinning around.

James stands in the doorway with Bruce.

JAMES

Sorry Charlie! Didn't mean to startle you. You remember Bruce, right?

Charlie bends down to grab her phone from the ground, and smiles at the two men.

CHARLIE

Yes, sorry. Hello, Mr. Tucker, how are you?

She reaches out her hand for him to shake. He takes it, and smiles at her warmly.

BRUCE

I'm well. Quite a show you put on up there tonight.

Charlie glances down at her phone, and turns it over in her hands.

CHARLIE

Thank you! And thank you so much for coming.

BRUCE

Almost didn't make it, but definitely glad I did. I'd love to talk to you about a potential opportunity. Walk with me?

He gestures outside the door. Charlie hesitates. She looks at her phone, and then at her director who stands behind Bruce. James' eyes are wide and he is nodding at her.

She puts her phone back in her bag, and looks back to Bruce.

CHARLIE

Absolutely. Let's do it.

He leads her out the door.

BRUCE

Now, I work for a company in New York, and we're helping some musicals in development with their casting...

CUT TO:

INT. NIACC PERFORMING ARTS CENTER - NIGHT

The doors leading to backstage continue to open and close as actors leave. Trish waits near the front of the audience by the doors, making as though she's going to get up every time a brunette actress opens the door.

Finally, Ange and Carter walk out together all smiles and Trish pops up.

TRISH

Have you seen Charlie? Is she coming out?

Ange and Carter exchange glances.

ANGE

I think she's talking to a friend of the director.

TRISH

Melissa's missing.

ANGE
What do you mean missing?

CARTER
What?!

TRISH
I mean, I went to pick her up and she wasn't at the house. I drove through the neighborhood at least a dozen times, I've called everyone I could think of, I went to Cat's, I checked the bus stops. She won't answer her phone.

The door from backstage opens up and Charlie walks out with Bruce and James. Charlie sees her friends, reading their anxious faces and immediately starts to walk toward them. She stops, remembering her company. Turning, she extends a hand to Bruce.

CHARLIE
It was so great to meet you! And thank you.

BRUCE
Please, think about the offer.

He hands her his card, and she sticks it in her bag. Trish, Ange, and Carter wait on the periphery, hearing every word.

BRUCE (CONT'D)
But don't think too hard. I need your answer before I get on the plane tonight. If you're not serious... It might not be the project for you.

Her smile doesn't reach her eyes as they nod. Bruce throws an arm around James as they walk away.

BRUCE (CONT'D)
Looks like I owe you a drink.

They walk through the aisles toward the doors of the theater. Trish has a pained look on her face as she rushes to Charlie.

TRISH
Charlie, have you heard from your mother at all?

CHARLIE

I haven't been able to check my phone yet, but I think she left me a voicemail. What's going on? And where were you guys?

TRISH

I went to pick her up tonight, and she wasn't there.

CHARLIE

What the hell, there were reminders up every-

Charlie looks frazzled as she starts rummaging through her bag.

TRISH

I've been all the usual places. I've tried calling. I don't know where else to look. I think we need to call it in this time.

CHARLIE

No. No we're not doing that again. I can turn on the Find My iPhone.

ANGE

If she hasn't been answering, do you think she has her phone?

She tosses the bag on the ground, and sits beside it. Pulling out the occupants: a make up bag, clothes, a brush, Bruce's card, etc.

CHARLIE

She definitely has her phone, she just... sometimes she accidentally turns the sound off, or forgets how to unlock it... where the hell is my phone?!

CARTER

Wait, what did the voicemail say.

Charlie glares.

CHARLIE

That's what I'm trying to - ah ha!

Charlie locates her phone and dials the voicemail. She puts it on speaker.

Melissa's voice is shaky and muffled. There are lots of voices in the background.

MELISSA (V.O.)

Hi Charlie, honey. I'm so sorry, but I went to meet Trish at the bus stop and it seems she was running late. I don't know if she's going to make it on time, it's already 7:30, but don't worry, I'm on my way. I love you lots, break a leg!

CHARLIE

Okay, I'll start with the T stops on the way to the theater.

Ange looks at Carter, who nods.

ANGE

And we'll do the ones that go toward your house's stop.

CHARLIE

No, look you guys should -

CARTER

Don't. We'll call you if we find her.

CHARLIE

Thank you.

TRISH

And I'm with you, babe.

Charlie nods, throwing everything she sees back into her bag, and they all exit the theater.

INT. MASON CITY, IOWA BUS - NIGHT

An odd mix of characters litter the bus. From the homeless woman sleeping against the window, to the scantily clad girls headed out for the night, to the businessmen and women back after late hours.

The bus comes to a stop and the doors open. Ange and Carter step in and start moving through the car. The bus starts moving as they continue to search.

EXT. A BUS STOP - CONTINUOUS

A bus comes to a stop and the doors open. Trish and Charlie exit the bus. Trish scans the landing. Charlie's phone buzzes. She checks it.

TRISH

They have any luck?

CHARLIE

No.

Across the landing, another bus is coming in. Charlie beelines for it, and Trish follows. They hop on the next bus.

INT. THE BUS - CONTINUOUS

Trish immediately moves to the right and begins moving down the car in search of Melissa. Charlie goes left.

The once quiet car starts to come alive with noise. A man in an Army Combat Uniform with a large duffel stands frozen in the middle of the aisle. A woman is hidden behind him, but has begun to yell.

MELISSA

It's been a year, Michael! A fucking year! You said six months. You haven't even held your baby girl.

The man looks baffled and tries to shuffle to a seat. He reveals Melissa. Trish's head swivels to the action on the train, and Charlie begins to approach her mother cautiously.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

But I have! I haven't stopped holding her. I haven't slept in weeks. She never stops crying. She knows someone's missing.

MAN

I'm sorry, I think you have the wrong-

MELISSA

We made this beautiful creature together... and I've never felt more alone. I don't know what I'm doing, Michael. I don't know what I'm doing.

Charlie moves to console her mother, but her mother pushes her away and sits next to the man in uniform. She puts her elbows on her knees, and drops her head in her hands, shaking.

Charlie moves to put a hand on her mother's shoulder, but when her mother looks up at her, there is no recognition on her face. Trish comes up behind Charlie, and gently removes her hand. Trish kneels down next to Melissa, and Melissa sees her for the first time. She drops her hands and grasps Trish's.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

I don't know what I'm doing.

TRISH

That's why you've got me.

Melissa chuckles through her emotion. Charlie watches the two of them helplessly.

MELISSA

I haven't heard from him in weeks.

TRISH

That's happened before.

MELISSA

I just keep waiting for the doorbell to ring and men in uniform to-

TRISH

Stop.

MELISSA

No, Trish, I have a bad feeling in my gut. I don't... I don't know if he's ever coming back.

Tears well in Trish's eyes.

TRISH

He'll be back, Melissa. If there is one thing I know, it's that he would never choose to leave his girls.

MELISSA

That's just it. I don't think he gets to have a choice.

TRISH

Don't think like that. Don't you
have a baby to get home to?

Melissa nods, letting Trish help her to her feet. They walk toward the doors of the bus, as Charlie stands as if stuck to the floor. Her head whips to the door, coming back to herself. She mouths "so sorry" to the man on the bus, who gestures back to her sympathetically. She follows them off the bus.

CUT TO:

INT. CHARLIE'S UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Charlie peeks into her mother's bedroom before slowly closing the door behind her.

INT. CHARLIE'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Trish, Ange, and Carter all sit on the couch together hashing out the night over a pizza as Charlie slowly makes her way down the stairs.

CARTER

There she is! Star of the evening!

CHARLIE

Huh?

CARTER (SINGING)

Can it be? Can it be Christine?

Off key. Charlie plops on the couch with them, and grabs a slice.

TRISH

Please stop before you hurt
yourself.

CHARLIE

It feels like the show happened
days ago.

ANGE

Wait, what did the New York guy
say?

TRISH

New York guy?

CHARLIE

It's nothing.

CARTER

Oh yeah, she didn't tell you? The director got his New York friend to come see the show, and they like our Charlie.

Trish raises her eyebrows at Charlie. Charlie glares at Carter.

TRISH

Doesn't sound like nothing. What did he want?

CHARLIE

He, um. Well he wants to bring me onto a project his company is working on.

TRISH

What kind of project?

CHARLIE

He casts developing musicals, and they're looking for talent.

TRISH

"Bring me on to a project." You mean cast you in a Broadway musical?!

CHARLIE

Woah, wait, no. There's no way of knowing if it'll make it to Broadway. Most developing musicals start Off-Broadway and work their way up, or stay there.

TRISH

Still! Charlie, that's a huge break.

CARTER

Shit. That's wild.

ANGE

Wait, which musical? Do they already have you in mind for a part?

CARTER

Yeah, which one?

TRISH
Would we know it?

Charlie, looks like she's about to burst of excitement, But is trying to hide it.

CHARLIE
Okay, I'm not supposed to say...
but I'm going kind of crazy over
here.

Beat.

CARTER
Well get on with it!

Charlie laughs, surprising herself.

CHARLIE
Frozen.

Carter, Ange, and Trish all look confused for a second before there is an explosion.

Ange claps her hands together, squealing.

CARTER
They want you to be a fucking
Disney princess?

TRISH
You're kidding, Charlie?!

Charlie covers her face behind her hands.

CHARLIE
I don't think I believed it until I
just said it out loud. But yeah.
They think I should be up for Ana
or Elsa.

CARTER
Which one?

ANGE
Does it matter? Charlie that's
incredible! Congratulations!

TRISH
I'm so proud of you, kid. When does
it start?

A thick silence suddenly fills the room.

CHARLIE

I have to let him know by tonight.
His flight leaves in a few hours
actually.

TRISH

Tonight?

CHARLIE

Yeah.

ANGE

What are you doing? Call him!

CHARLIE

It's not that simple.

Charlie glances toward the stairs.

CARTER

Oh.

CHARLIE

Yeah.

There is a moment where nobody says anything, and then Ange reaches out and puts her hand on Charlie's knee.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

She didn't even recognize me
tonight.

CARTER

What do you mean?

CHARLIE

When we were on the bus. And she
had her episode.

TRISH

This is how it happens, Charlie.
And it's only going to happen more.

CHARLIE

But what do I do when it happens
again? She looked right through me.
I'm her daughter. And didn't know
who I was. How do I help her?

TRISH

By doing exactly what you've been
doing.

CHARLIE

But I don't want to do exactly what I've been doing, I want to go! I want to take the part.

ANGE

She would never want you to say no because of her.

CHARLIE

That doesn't mean I can afford to go.

CARTER

Well this sucks.

Beat.

TRISH

What about your dad's fund?

CHARLIE

No.

CARTER

I told you.

CHARLIE

And I told you, emergency only.

ANGE

Wouldn't you say this qualifies?

TRISH

Hear me out. He saved enough money to get you through college, and help set you up afterward. Not to mention those savings bonds from your grandmother tucked away in some file cabinet... there's enough for in-home help.

CHARLIE

But what about living in New York? And commuting? That's a fortune.

TRISH

Charlie, they aren't going to get you to act for free. And I'm sure your director has friends in NYC who could use a roommate until you can get on your feet.

Charlie looks at her hands, deep in thought.

TRISH (CONT'D)

What I'm saying, is it's doable.

She drops her head so that her hands are holding it up.

CHARLIE

I just wish I could take her with me.

TRISH

You know as well as I do that it would be worse to move her. An unfamiliar place? New doctors? That's the last thing she needs.

ANGE

Plus you can always visit.

CARTER

And there's such a thing as FaceTime, dude.

Charlie's hands wipe down her face.

CHARLIE

She gave up the band. She gave up a life. She gave everything. And as soon as I get the chance, when she needs me the most, I bolt? And the worst part is, I think I already decided a long time ago.

ANGE

You aren't bolting Charlie. This is about you and your life. This could change everything.

TRISH

It makes you human.

Charlie shakes her head. She stands and walks to the fire place where there are pictures of her growing up. She turns around, and there are tears in her eyes.

CHARLIE

I really want it. More than I've ever wanted anything.

Beat.

CARTER

Then call the damn guy! This is your moment Charlie, take it.

A slow smile creeps up on Charlie's face. She dives for her bag and starts to dig through it. Initially she is excited, but it begins to fade as the contents are emptied and no card appears.

CHARLIE
Shit. Shit shit shit.

ANGE
What?

CHARLIE
His card! I can't find his card.

TRISH
Well where did you put it?

CHARLIE
I tossed it in my bag before we went to find Mom.

Realization dawns on Ange's face, followed soon after my Charlie's.

ANGE
But you were taking all that stuff out of your bag when -

CHARLIE
I was trying to find my phone. Shit! It must've come out with everything.

TRISH
Wait, just call your director, he's gotta have his number.

Charlie picks up her phone, calling her director, but it immediately goes to voicemail.

CHARLIE
It's 2017... who turns off their phone?

TRISH
Maybe you could go back to the theater and -

CHARLIE
No, they would've closed everything by now.

CARTER
Well...

CHARLIE
Oh, what now, Carter?

TRISH
I mean there is only one airport
nearby...

CHARLIE
Go to the airport?

Carter shrugs.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
I can't just...

She looks at Ange who's giving her a slow smile.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
He would think that I'm-

TRISH
Serious about it?

Charlie taps her foot, looking around the room at the
expectant.

CHARLIE
I can't believe I'm doing this.

CUT TO:

INT. CHARLIE'S CAR - NIGHT

Music blaring, hands gripping the wheel, Charlie drives to
the airport. She is constantly checking the clock on the
dash.

CUT TO:

INT. CHARLIE'S CAR - NIGHT

Charlie pulls up outside the airport.

EXT. MASON CITY AIRPORT - CONTINUOUS

Charlie hops out of the car and runs to the entrance.

INT. AIRPORT - CONTINUOUS

The airport is dead quiet in the wee hours of the morning. Charlie looks at all of the different airline stations, and the one escalator leading to security. She checks the departure board. She heaves a sigh, and parks herself on a bench next to the escalator. She checks the big clock across from her and settles in.

CUT TO:

INT. AIRPORT - EARLY MORNING

First light is starting to show itself outside the windows of the airport. The occupants are half asleep, but Charlie stays wide awake on her bench. As soon as she catches sight of Bruce bringing his suitcase through the automatic doors, she rushes up to him.

CHARLIE

Mr. Tucker!

Bruce Tucker still looks half asleep himself, and is slow to speak.

Charlie thrusts out her hand for him to shake. She is jittery and talking over herself.

BRUCE

Charlie?

CHARLIE

I know it must look a little funny, me showing up at the airport like this.

He raises his eyebrows at her, echoing this question.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

You see, I lost your card when rummaging through my bag to find - nevermind. I came here because I want to accept your offer.

BRUCE

You do?

CHARLIE

Yes. I would love to come and work with you in New York after the show.

BRUCE

And you've discussed this with your parents?

CHARLIE

I'm 18.

He comes up short at her answer.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

This is what I've decided. And I'm willing to work for it. What do you need me to do?

Beat.

BRUCE

Well there's quite a bit of paperwork we need to go over.

Charlie starts to nod enthusiastically.

BRUCE (CONT'D)

And lots of details to go over. We'd need to talk about your representation, and the terms of your contract.

CHARLIE

Absolutely.

BRUCE

I'll have to talk with everyone when I get back to the city. Let's plan to have you Skype in this Monday? We'll talk it all out then.

CHARLIE

Perfect. Yes, thank you so much Mr. Tucker.

BRUCE

Really great to meet you, Charlie. I look forward to having you along for this project.

CHARLIE

Me too, thank you again.

Charlie reaches out to shake his hand again. He returns it, and reaches in his pocket for his business card.

BRUCE

Try to hang on to it this time,
huh?

She takes the card and watches Bruce as he walks away. She slowly backs out of the airport lobby and through the automatic doors.

EXT. AIRPORT - CONTINUOUS

Once the doors close, she stands letting it sink in. All of sudden she spins around herself, squealing, before covering her mouth with both hands. Wide eyed, she sees the doors open for another airport goer. Beyond the doors, Bruce has looked back at the noise and shakes his head in amusement.

Charlie collects herself and runs to her car.

CUT TO:

INT. CHARLIE'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

There are two suitcases by the front door, and Charlie sets her purse down next to them. Melissa is watching an old movie on the TV. Charlie looks around the room, mentally checking things off. Her gaze lands on her mom, and she walks over to curl up next to her on the couch. With her head on her shoulder, they watch together.

Time passes.

The doorbell rings. Charlie gets off the couch to get it. A stay-at-home NURSE is on the other side of the door.

CHARLIE

Hi there!

She lets her in.

NURSE

Hi there! Great to see you again.

CHARLIE

You too.

Charlie hands her a packet of information.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Here's everything we discussed. But please, don't hesitate to call me at ANYTIME if you have any questions. I can be available whenever.

NURSE

I'm sure we'll get along just fine, right Melissa?

Melissa's head pops up from the TV for the first time.

MELISSA

Where are you headed, sweetheart?

CHARLIE

Ange and Carter are picking me up to go to the airport.

MELISSA

AH! Did you hear that?

Talking to the nurse.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

My Charlie's going to be a big star. Name in lights. The whole shabang.

NURSE

I don't doubt it!

A car horn beeps from outside. Charlie looks out the window, seeing Ange and Carter are waiting for her.

Charlie goes over to her mother and pulls her in for a hug.

CHARLIE

I love you so much.

MELISSA

I love you, too. Don't forget to call as soon as you get there!

Charlie nods, unable to speak. She gets up off of the couch and makes her way to her suitcases. The nurse smiles at her and joins Melissa on the couch. Charlie watches the two of them watching for a moment before opening the front door.

EXT. CHARLIE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ange and Carter are whooping and hollering as they come to help her with her suitcases. They talk animatedly, but Charlie doesn't hear them. They head back to the car with her suitcases as she turns to lock the door. She pauses, her forehead pressed against the door as she takes a moment. She turns the key, and the door locks.

FADE TO BLACK.

(CONT'D)