

Call back

Written by

Joseph S. Maxwell

ACT ONE

1 INT. COMEDY THEATER STAGE - NIGHT

1

The stage is set up for a normal improv show. There is a spotlight shining on the main microphone. MEL (early 40s, flustered) takes the stage. SHAWN (mid 20s, bright-eyed), DANNY (early 30s, chill), VIC (early 20s, focused), other IMPROVISERS (varied), CASEY (late 30s, tired), and KIERAN (late teens, excited) are standing in the audience area.

MEL

Good evening everybody! Thanks so much for coming out to our humble little theater on this beautiful Cleveland night. We have a great show coming up for you, but first, I have to go over some housekeeping items. Please silence your cell phones and refrain from flash photography (unless something really funny happens). Uh, make sure to clap and laugh if the show is good - actually you should do that even if you don't think it's good (it will make them feel better). You all know all this stuff. Bathrooms are to your left, and the bar is to your right.

SONG 1: ALT COMEDY THEATER

MEL (CONT'D)

Get a drink at the bar
The bartender knows your order by heart

Casey hands an ice-cold Miller High Life to Shawn, who takes a sip.

MEL (CONT'D)

Living the high life on Lorain Avenue
Every weekend night and sometimes weeknights too

SHAWN

It's pretty comfortable here
Drinkin' the champagne of beers
Warm smiles on all the faces you see
But there's somewhere else you'd rather be

Shawn, Vic, Danny, and the other improvisers take the stage. Mel hops off.

ENSEMBLE

Al t comedy theater
 In a mi d-size rust-belt city
 Guaranteed at least a couple of
 laughs
 And only sometimes out of pity
 Al t comedy theater
 Sit back and enjoy the show
 It's an intimate audience
 experience
 You're probably here to see someone
 you know

DANNY

Okay, can I get a suggestion of
 something you WOULDN'T wear to the
 Prom?

KIERAN

Pi neappl e!

DANNY

Al right, I think heard "Chuck E.
 Cheese costume."

The performers start pantomiming an over-the-top improv scene.

KIERAN

I'm a Level One improv student
 And I think this is really good

MEL

I'm their Level Three improv
 teacher
 And they aren't sweeping scenes as
 quickly as they should!

CASEY

I've seen so many shows that I
 don't even know
 How to tell what's good anymore
 Standup, improv, and sketch, must
 be funny, I guess
 If I hear them laughing through the
 door!

Casey runs off through the door back to the bar area.

ENSEMBLE

Our stakes are low
 Our crowds are small
 We do our best
 And laugh through it all

DANNY

Alt comedy theater
In a mid-size rust belt city
Everyone knows everyone
Our community is itty bitty

SHAWN

Alt comedy theater
It's not the place you really wanna
be
If you long for something bigger
If you're anything like me

ENSEMBLE

Alt comedy theater
All our best bits on display
Here is where we live and we love,
and
We laugh our lives away

ENSEMBLE (CONT'D)

BLACKOUT!

Lights black out in time with the music as the song ends.
Mel comes back on stage and the house lights come up.

MEL

And that's our show! Go to our
website "altcomedy.biz" for
information about all our upcoming
shows and workshops. And please hang
out and grab another drink. Have a
good night!

Light music starts playing and there is chatter in the
crowd. People mingle on the stage, including Shawn and
Danny.

DANNY

Hey, great set.

SHAWN

Thanks, you too.

DANNY

Really solid object work. I mean I
truly believed there was a trash can
with a flip lid out there.

SHAWN

Yeah? I wasn't sure if anyone got
that.

DANNY

Well it helped that you said it out
loud.

SHAWN

Hey, I know the rules, and
therefore, I can break them

DANNY

You are really good at that.

SHAWN

Good at what, you mean?

DANNY

You are good at not being
conventionally good.

SHAWN

Not sure if that's a compliment or
not, but I'll take it. At least I
know I'm better than you.

Shawn looks over at Mel and grabs their attention.

SHAWN (CONT'D)

Right Mel?

MEL

What's that?

SHAWN

I'm better than Danny at improv,
right?

MEL

Oh, come on, guys. It's not about
better or worse. You're both great.
I did have some notes though...

DANNY

Okay, let's hear them

MEL

I just think you can do more to
ground your characters. For example,
the scene where...

Mel checks their notes.

MEL (CONT'D)

You were a capo in the clown mob?

DANNY

Right! With the silly string
garrote.

MEL

Yeah. That was fun, but I wanted you
to get to the emotional truth of the
scene.

DANNY

You didn't like the red nose?

MEL

Listen. A clown nose dyed red from the blood of your enemies is funny. I just didn't see the why behind it.

DANNY

I was a harlequin mobster! What more could I have said?

MEL

I would have liked to see a little more humanity.

DANNY

Alright, note taken. That's fair.

MEL

Now Shawn...

SHAWN

What? I am always extremely human and emotional.

MEL

Um right. Maybe sometimes... too much? Like the scene where...

MEL checks their notes again.

MEL (CONT'D)

You were an octopus at the tailor.

SHAWN

Right, classic.

MEL

You could have joked about eight-legged clothing, or ink stained underwear, or anything else, but you mainly talked about your fraught relationship with your mother?

SHAWN

Yeah I thought that was funny.

MEL

Right, but maybe you could have leaned into the comedy a bit more.

SHAWN

Okay I disagree but thank you.

Mel runs their hand through their hair frustratedly.

MEL

You people...

Mel gets a far-off look in their eye.

MEL

Actually... show idea. American Idol but improv, so I can judge you live on stage.

DANNY

That sounds like a dangerous idea...

SHAWN

Yeah, because I would win for sure. Right Mel? Because I'm better at improv than Danny?

MEL

You both have your strengths.

SHAWN

I knew I was your favorite.

DANNY

Careful there, Shawn. Your "Former Gifted Kid" syndrome is showing.

Vic struts past them

DANNY (CONT'D)

And hey, speaking of former gifted kids. Great job tonight, Vic.

VIC

(sneaky)

I do the best I can with what I'm given.

SHAWN

What's that supposed to mean?

VIC

Oh, nothing. We can talk about it later.

SHAWN

(to Mel)

Any notes for Vic?

MEL

Um.. just a general note... really funny overall, but you could be a more supportive scene partner in some situations.

VIC
Well, maybe these two could support
me a bit more.

MEL
Yes, more support is always good.

VIC
I gotta go.

Vic walks off-stage in a huff.

DANNY
I swear, that kid is the most
serious comedian I have ever met.

MEL
Is that a bad thing?

DANNY
No. I don't know

Kieran sheepishly approaches the stage.

KIERAN
Hi, I'm Kieran. I just wanted to say
you are amazing, that was so funny.

DANNY
Why thank you! I don't think I've
seen you around before, you taking a
class or something?

KIERAN
Yep, just about to finish Level One.
I started doing stand-up way back
when (almost six months ago), but I
LOVE improv.

SHAWN
Well you're in the right place.
Everybody here does every type of
comedy.

DANNY
Stick with improv though, it's the
best. And hopefully we'll see you up
here someday.

KIERAN
That would be an honor.

SHAWN
It's really not th-

KEIRAN
To grace this stage... that would be
a dream come true.

SHAWN
I feel like you should set your
sights a little higher.

KEIRAN
Oh, I don't know I think this is
great. You're all so wonderful.

SHAWN
I'm going to get another drink.

Casey peeks through the lobby door.

CASEY
Bar's closing! Don't make me
literally kick you out.

SHAWN
And I guess I'll be getting that
drink somewhere else.

DANNY
Sixth City Backgammon?

SHAWN
Sure.

DANNY
(to Mel)
Sixth City Backgammon?
(to Keiran)
Sixth City Backgammon?

MEL
I've gotta go home.

KEIRAN
Me too.

DANNY
Well, let's go, Shawn.

All exit.

2 INT. SIXTH CITY BACKGAMMON - NIGHT

2

Later that night. Shawn and Danny are sitting and playing
backgammon at a table, empty glasses on either side.

SHAWN
Why do we always end up at bars like
this?

DANNY
I like it. Backgammon is fun.

SHAWN
I think it's time to go home.

DANNY
Aw, come on! It's no fun without you here.

Shawn looks extremely sad.

DANNY (CONT'D)
Hey, you alright?

SHAWN
I'm fine.

DANNY
Then why do you look utterly devastated right now?

SHAWN
No, I'm good.

DANNY
You had a good show, you made fifteen whole dollars, and you beat me at backgammon like five times. It's been a fun night!

SHAWN
A good show. Not a great show.

DANNY
It was good! It was really good!

SHAWN
But it wasn't great. I could have been better.

DANNY
Why do you want to be great?

SHAWN
I don't want to be great. I HAVE to be great.

DANNY
Okay, why do you HAVE to be great?

SHAWN
(hesitant)
I can't--

Danny comes over to Shawn's side of the table and kneels down next to them.

DANNY (CONT'D)
You gotta learn to love yourself
more. If you could see yourself
through my eyes--

SHAWN
I don't care. That's not going to
make me any better at comedy.

DANNY
That's not the point! Don't you want
to be happier?

SHAWN
I'd rather hate myself and be great
than love myself and be mid.

Danny stands back up, exasperated.

DANNY
Oof, that is not healthy Shawn. Did
you get that promo code for
BetterHelp I sent you?

SHAWN
The one you got from the Slugslop
Fatboys Podcast?

Danny shakes his head because it's irrelevant where he got
the promo code.

DANNY
Did you use it?

SHAWN
Yeah. I did a live messaging
session.

DANNY
How did it go?

SHAWN
Apparently I'm supposed to have
gratitude for my stupid wonderful
intricate life.

DANNY
That sounds reasonable.

SHAWN
I have gratitude! I do! I just... I
want more. I wanted tonight to be
better.

Danny begins to pace around the stage while Shawn
continues to sit there.

DANNY

What did you expect? That you'd have a performance so earth-shatteringly good that by the end, in hysterical fits of laughter, the entire audience would give you a ten minute standing ovation?

SHAWN

I mean...

DANNY

That they would tell all their friends, including everyone you went to high school with, that you are spectacular and fabulous and terrific beyond measure? And that you would gain five hundred thousand Instagram followers overnight because someone had secretly recorded your set and posted it to Reels and it went viral?

SHAWN

That would be cool.

DANNY

And that that would, in turn, lead to a lifelong career in entertainment more successful than that of Taylor Swift and Beyoncé combined? Is that what you expected? Is it?!

SHAWN

I mean, kinda, yeah. Some little part of me always expects that.

DANNY

Exactly that, all that that I just said?

SHAWN

Something like that. Something unfathomably, impossibly good.

Shawn stands up.

SHAWN (CONT'D)

That's what I want.

DANNY

Oh, Shawn.

SONG 2: THE BEST OF ALL TIME

SHAWN

I require
 Universal acclaim
 Unbelievable fortune
 And indescribable fame
 Stadiums full of people
 Cheering and chanting my name
 All around the world
 I want to hear them all proclaim
 Shawn, we adore you
 Shawn, we'd do anything for you
 Shawn, we would never ignore you
 Shawn, you're the best of all time
 I don't want them to love me
 Unconditionally
 I want rigid conditions
 That I easily meet
 I want them to know me
 Complete and totally
 And seeing me entirely
 I want them to decree
 Shawn, we adore you
 Shawn, we'd do anything for you
 Shawn, we would never ignore you
 Shawn, you're the best of all time
 I know that I am not deserving of
 their love
 But I'm pining for it every day
 And even though I know I'll never
 be enough
 I still hope someday they will say
 Shawn, we adore you
 Shawn, we'd do anything for you
 Shawn, we would never ignore you
 Shawn, you're the best of all time

Disembodied heads appear and join in the chorus.

ENSEMBLE

Shawn, we adore you
 Shawn, we'd do anything for you
 Shawn, we would never ignore you
 Shawn, you're the best of all time

SHAWN

Shawn, you're the best of all...

A moment of pause. Shawn weeps softly, crumbling to the floor. Danny squats down and hugs them

SHAWN

Crying in a backgammon bar. Not a good look, huh?

DANNY

Don't worry. I've cried in worse places.

Fade out.

3 INT. HOLLYWOOD OFFICE - DAY

3

There are palm trees through the window outside. The office is adorned with comedy show posters and plants. Phyllis (30s, businessy) is pacing around the room talking on the phone. JESSE (20s, businessy) sits at a desk and stays quiet.

PHYLLIS

(on phone)

Alright, but--

Yes, I know and I will, I just--

You don't think we can find that here in L.A.?

(deep breath)

Okay. I understand.

Phyllis hangs up the phone.

JESSE

Bad news?

PHYLLIS

Is there any other kind?

JESSE

We're not...

PHYLLIS

No, no. Not yet.

JESSE

What is it then?

PHYLLIS

Well, you know how we have quarterly viewership targets?

JESSE

And how we always fall short of them by a large margin?

PHYLLIS

Right. Well, last quarter... let's just say it's looking worse than usual. It's looking existentially bad.

JESSE

As in...

PHYLLIS

As in this company may cease to exist if we don't do something before Q3.

JESSE

No! A streaming service exclusively for comedy nerds is an evergreen business model! Chuckle Plus can never die.

PHYLLIS

I'm afraid it might. Our show where dogs re-enact current events has not been well received.

JESSE

The Puppy Post?? I love that show! HotMilkGirlie394 even reposted a clip of it on TikTok!

PHYLLIS

It wasn't enough. It's failing. And I was the one who gave it the green light.

JESSE

What about our legacy shows?

PHYLLIS

Improvised City Council is steady, but... Naked Millionaire has been slipping.

JESSE

Oh no! That show was your baby.

PHYLLIS

I know Jesse. And it was...
(wistful)
captivating, subversive, even beautiful when it started... but times have changed. We need to do what's best for the business.

JESSE

So what are we going to do?

PHYLLIS

We need something big. Everett wants us to cast a wider net, so to speak.

JESSE

So what are we looking for?

PHYLLIS

Literally anything. If it's comedy, we gotta see it. All the casting directors are going all over the country for this. We have to find someone really spectacular. And if we don't...

JESSE

Then. . .

PHYLLIS

Yep.

JESSE

So where are we going?

PHYLLIS

Well. . .

(deep sigh)

We're going to Cleveland.

JESSE

Cleveland, OHIO?

PHYLLIS

Apparently Everett has some connection. I know it doesn't sound good on paper, but. . . I believe in us. We were born to do this.

Jesse looks hesitant.

JESSE

I mean, I think I was born to make viral YouTube Shorts about the emergent psychology of earthworms, but. . .

PHYLLIS

But nothing! We have a chance here to do something truly special. To discover someone with the power to turn our little online video outfit into a juggernaut of entertainment. To finally achieve the success in business for which I. . . for which we have been striving.

JESSE

And we're going to find that someone in Cleveland?

PHYLLIS

At least we're not going to Youngstown.

JESSE

Hey! My glue-addicted step-cousin is from Youngstown.

PHYLLIS

Yes, Jesse. Everyone has a glue-addicted step-cousin from
(MORE)

PHYLLIS (CONT'D)
 Youngstown. Cleveland is different.
 Cleveland... rocks! Drew Carey!

JESSE
 (nodding)
 Drew Carey. I guess the Mistake on
 the Lake's not so bad.

PHYLLIS
 It's our only hope. If we don't find
 someone there... that's it for us.

SONG 3: CLEVELAND

PHYLLIS (CONT'D)
 Cleveland
 Give me something to believe in
 Something in which to believe
 Something hiding up your sleeve
 Save us from fiscal devastation
 Cleveland
 I need a superstar next season
 You can give me what I need
 I want so badly to succeed
 And Cleveland, you can be the
 reason
 I've gotta find
 A diamond in the rough
 Any neighborhood will do
 West Park, Tremont, or Hough
 They tell me that in Cleveland you
 Have got to be tough
 So I know there must be someone
 there
 Who's got the right stuff

ENSEMBLE
 In Cleveland
 Protect our service from deletion
 Qui bi got it pretty quick
 And we know Seeso couldn't stick
 But maybe we can keep on streamin'
 If we go to Cleveland
 Even though we might be freezin'
 Amidst the potholes and the ice
 We'll find a Great Lakes paradise
 From which we'll pull our next
 sensation

JESSE
 We'll find someone hot
 Like a river on fire

PHYLLIS
 Someone to make the ladies laugh
 And all the boys perspire

JESSE
Someone with pure midwestern charm

PHYLLIS
And also cutting satire

JESSE
Someone to take our lowly ratings
And make them higher

PHYLLIS
Not sure if I know
Exactly why-oh
But I know I-oh
I just have to fly-oh
Straight to Ohio
And more specifically...
Cleveland
Give me someone to believe in
Someone in whom to believe
Someone hiding up your sleeve
Save us from fiscal devastation

ENSEMBLE
Oh, Cleveland
We need a superstar next season
You can give us what we need
We want so badly to succeed
And Cleveland, you can be the
reason
It's Cleveland
And the Greater Cleveland region
Gave us Big Chuck and Lil' John
Travis Kelce and LeBron
I just need one more great
comedian
I'm begging you
Cleveland
Best location in the nation

PHYLLIS
You're my last and only shot
Please tell me that you've got
Someone to lead us to salvation
Someone from Cleveland

PHYLLIS (CONT'D)
Pack your bags, Jesse. The forest
city awaits.

4 INT. COMEDY THEATER CLASS SPACE - DAY

4

Back in Cleveland, this time in a rehearsal/class space. An improv class is taking place, led by Mel. Vic is present. There are notebooks and bags on the floor. Danny and Shawn are acting out a scene in the stage area. Danny

melodramatically crawls around on all fours, trying (and failing) to stifle laughter.

MEL

(exasperated)

Seriously, this is improv four. No breaking! You're acting like level one up there. Danny, swap with Vic. Your new location is... uh... a drawing room

Vic goes up and Danny sits down to watch. Shawn centers himself. Vic sits down facing away from Shawn and leafs through an imaginary book.

VI C

One.

SHAWN

Two.

Vic slams the invisible book shut and stands up. Shawn twists an imaginary ring on their finger. Vic turns to face Shawn.

VI C

Three.

SHAWN

Four.

Vic throws the book down.

VI C

Five!

Shawn looks at the book on the floor, and starts rifling through imaginary drawers, pulling things out and throwing them around.

SHAWN

Six!

Vic faces Shawn with their back to the audience of other class students.

VI C

Seven!

MEL

Remember to cheat out.

Vic adjusts to face the audience, while still looking at Shawn.

SHAWN

Eight!

They rush toward each other, their faces separated by barely an inch of air. They hold the position, gazing into each other's eyes with intensity. After a few seconds, they turn away from each other in perfect synchronization. Vic slumps to the floor, facing away from Shawn, and begins to weep.

VIC

Nine.

Shawn unsheaths a giant imaginary sword, then kneels down next to Vic and mimes stabbing them in the back emotionally.

SHAWN

(through tears)

Ten.

Vic falls over fake dead, and Shawn sits there still. After a second, Mel starts clapping weakly, and the rest of the students sort of do too.

MEL

Alright, thank you, thank you. So what do we think was going on in that scene?

SHAWN

I was thinking "Scorned Lover Gets Revenge."

VIC

I thought we were brothers.

DANNY

Maybe both.

VIC

Gross.

Mel takes a look at their watch.

MEL

Well, on that note, class is over! The next class will be here any minute so we gotta get outta here. See you all next week, great job today everyone.

The improv students start to pack up their belongings and start to chatter.

DANNY

Your scenes with Vic always seem to get so dark. What's up with that? You... you good?

SHAWN

Yeah I'm fine. It's just that my philosophy is that good comedy should not be funny.

DANNY

I think that's just straight up incorrect.

SHAWN

No, you see, it's absurd, and it is humorous, but not-- I can't explain it.

Danny, Shawn, and Vic head for the door. Kieran enters, ready for class.

MEL

One last thing: someone from Chuckle Plus is going to be here this weekend holding local auditions for a new show

KIERAN

Oh my God.

VIC

THE Chuckle Plus?

MEL

The one and only Chuckle Plus. They must've heard we've got talent here in Cleveland.

SHAWN

(dreamily)

Yeah. Yeah...

MEL

I don't really get all of their shows, but...

DANNY

Chuckle Plus is great! They have a show where they give someone a makeover and then make them freestyle rap.

MEL

People do seem to like them

KIERAN

More like love them

MEL

I guess we could start doing some
(MORE)

MEL (CONT'D)
 shows like that. What about...
 improvised... slam poetry...
 cosplay...

DANNY
 We should probably leave that sort
 of thing to Chuckle Plus. They do it
 up well over there.

SHAWN
 Danny's right, Chuckle Plus is
 great.

VI C
 I love Chuckle Plus.

KIERAN
 I have a parasocial relationship
 with every cast member.

DANNY
 Well hey, maybe you'll get to have a
 regular-social relationship with
 them now!

SHAWN
 What are they looking for?

MEL
 It's sounds like they'll take
 anything adjacent to comedy.
 Characters, impressions, performance
 art, mime stuff... they seem pretty
 desperate.

Mel starts putting up a sign on the class bulletin board.

SHAWN
 Oh wow

DANNY
 Wow

KIERAN
 Wow

VI C
 Wow

SHAWN
 This... this is a sign.

DANNY
 You mean the sign Mel's putting up
 that says "AUDITIONS THIS WEEKEND"?

SHAWN

Yes. I've gotta get ready.

DANNY

What are you thinking?

SHAWN

Maybe a quick character scene? Or I could improvise something?

VIC

A fully improvised audition could be impressive.

DANNY

I don't know. You are such a fantastic writer. I think you should prepare a little bit.

SHAWN

Thanks, you're right. I don't want to mess this up. This could be my destiny.

VIC

This could be my destiny.

DANNY

Heck, I'll throw my hat in the ring.

KIERAN

This... this could be it.

SONG 4: THIS COULD BE IT

ENSEMBLE

(whispered)

This could be it
This could be it
This could be it
This could be it
This could be it
This could be it
This could be it
This could be it
This could be it

SHAWN

I've gotta show them what I've got
I'm gonna write a brand new sketch
And when they witness what I've wrought
I hope they'll think that I'm the best

ENSEMBLE

This could be it

VIC

I've got a character up here
 That's sure to sweep them off their
 feet
 I'm gonna have my dream career
 I don't care who I have to beat

ENSEMBLE

This could be it
 Been waiting my whole life for
 something like this
 Somebody to tell me this is why you
 exist
 This is my shot, and I know I can't
 miss
 This could be it

SHAWN

This could finally open the door

VIC

To my big break and to so much
 more

KIERAN

I'm gonna leave it all on the
 floor

ENSEMBLE

This could be it

DANNY

I've got some accents sure to
 please
 Oui mon francais, il est tres bien
 I say ze french, zey smell like
 cheese
 But it's cool 'cause I'm a quarter
 french

ENSEMBLE

This could be it

KIERAN

I've got a notebook full of bits

ENSEMBLE

(whispered)

This could be it
 This could be it

KIERAN

One joke I'm really psyched about

ENSEMBLE
 (whispered)
 This could be it
 This could be it

KIERAN
 I'm hoping when the punchline hits

ENSEMBLE
 (whispered)
 This could be it
 This could be it

KIERAN
 It's strong enough to knock them
 out

ENSEMBLE
 This could be it
 Been waiting my whole life for
 something like this
 Somebody to tell me this is why you
 exist
 This is my shot and I know I can't
 miss
 This could be it

SHAWN
 They said I was gifted when I was a
 kid
 Then after fourteen, I don't know
 what I did
 I wanna be great, I don't wanna be
 mid
 This could be it
 And what if this is it?
 What if this is all there is?
 I think this might be it

ENSEMBLE
 This could be it
 Been waiting my whole life for
 something like this
 Somebody to tell me this is why you
 exist
 This is my shot and I know I can't
 miss
 This could be it

Ensemble repeats the chorus while Shawn and Vic sing their
 previous choruses.

SHAWN
 They said I was gifted
 when I was a kid
 Then after fourteen, I
 (MORE)

VIC
 This could finally open
 the door
 To my big break and to so
 (MORE)

SHAWN (CONT'D)
 don't know what I did
 I wanna be great, I don't
 wanna be mid

VIC (CONT'D)
 much more
 I'm gonna leave it all on
 the floor

ENSEMBLE
 This could be it!

After the song, everybody scatters with gusto - ready to go home and prepare for the auditions.

5 INT. COMEDY THEATER STAGE - DAY

5

It's the big audition day. Mel enters, leading Phyllis and Jesse behind.

MEL
 (overly chipper)
 You get in okay? How was the flight?

PHYLLIS
 (flat, down-to-business)
 It was fine.

They approach the stage and Mel gestures grandly.

MEL
 And here's the stage. Anything I can do to help? Anything you need?

PHYLLIS
 We've got it from here.

MEL
 You sure? Coffee, Kirkland-brand sparkling water, anything? Anyone have any dietary restrictions?

JESSE
 Oh, actually I am doing the 15 Musketeers diet.

MEL
 Ooh, sounds fancy! Is that an L.A. thing?

PHYLLIS
 It's not fancy. It just means they eat nothing but 3 Musketeers bars.

JESSE
 I have to eat exactly five per day.

MEL
 Well, we don't have 3 Musketeers, but we do have Milky Way bars if that works!

JESSE

No, not at all. It's fine, I have my own supply.

Jesse pulls out a bag with like twenty 3 Musketeers bars in it.

MEL

Well I'm happy to run out and grab more! Or pick up something else for lunch, or do your laundry, or help you with your taxes...

PHYLLIS

We're good, thank you.

MEL

Great! I'll be right over here if you need anything. The performers should be arriving any minute.

Mel hops to the side of the stage and starts fiddling with a laptop.

PHYLLIS

(quietly to Jesse)

Is everyone in the midwest this over-the-top nice?

Phyllis and Jesse begin to setup their table and camera.

JESSE

All I know is, Uber is very cheap here.

PHYLLIS

It's cheap for a reason, Jesse. I grew up in a town like this. Nothing to do, nothing going on.

Mel turns to look at them on the stage.

MEL

Actually, there's a ton of stuff to do here! In Cleveland, we've got world-class experiences without the world-class ego.

PHYLLIS

What's that?

MEL

With three major sports teams, the second-largest theater district in the country, a Big Five orchestra, and a FREE top-of-the-line art

(MORE)

MEL (CONT'D)
 museum it's harder to find things
 not to do!

PHYLLIS
 Are you just reciting copy from the
 Cleveland tourism website?

MEL
 Not at all! This is all from the
 heart. If there's one thing to love
 about Cleveland, it's...
 (tearing up)
 the authenticity of our people.
 Folks are salt of the earth here.
 (back to chipper)
 Actually, Lake Erie is a
 freshwater lake, so... fresh of
 the earth! This is THE LAND!

JESSE
 People from Cleveland really have a
 lot to say about Cleveland, don't
 they?

MEL
 Just speaking my truth. Okay, I'll
 let you get back to setting up. I'll
 just... wait in the lobby.

Mel leaves.

JESSE
 Okay I don't know what all that was
 about, but I do know you shouldn't
 give up on Cleveland yet.

PHYLLIS
 I guess you're right. Can't lose the
 faith. I just do not have high
 expectations for this day.

Phyllis rubs her forehead to show that she is tired. They
 finish setting up.

JESSE
 Well, that's the key to happiness,
 right?

PHYLLIS
 Huh?

JESSE
 Low expectations, the--

PHYLLIS
(shouting)
Alright, bring 'em in!

Kieran, Vic, Shawn, Danny, and other improvisers enter and stand off to the side of the stage.

PHYLLIS (CONT'D)
Let's get through this as quickly as possible. You each have five minutes. Up first is...

Phyllis looks at her notebook.

PHYLLIS (CONT'D)
Kieran Allen-Johnson.

KIERAN
Wish me luck, guys!

Danny gives Kieran a big thumbs up as they step on stage.

PHYLLIS
Let's see it.

KIERAN
These are some jokes I wrote.

They pull out a notebook and read from it directly.

KIERAN (CONT'D)
What was the cat doing in the bag in the first place?

No reaction.

KIERAN (CONT'D)
If you add insult to injury you get insult.

No reaction, but Kieran continues unfazed.

KIERAN (CONT'D)
If you had a bookstore that was also a farm for exclusively female cattle, it would be called Barns and No Bull.

Again, no reaction. Kieran has put on a pair of sunglasses and taken out a mobility cane.

KIERAN (CONT'D)
I'm a duck hunter. Whenever I go hunting, everybody has to duck!

Cringes from the audience. Kieran stands there.

PHYLLIS
Is that all?

KIERAN
Oh, yes, sorry!

Kieran runs off-stage. Phyllis writes notes in their notebook. Vic and Shawn stand on the side of the stage.

VIC
How many more of these do we have to take?

SHAWN
I don't know I didn't think that was so bad.

VIC
The one where they pretended to be a low vision person?? That is not okay.

SHAWN
Okay, that was problematic, but they can learn!

VIC
Well, the good news is I'll have no problem beating this sorry excuse for a comic.

DANNY
Oh come on. You should be more supportive, they're new. They're trying their best.

VIC
Their best is awful. I am so much better.

SHAWN
Why not just be the best you can be?

DANNY
Yeah, like the US Army.

Shawn ignores Danny and continues talking to Vic.

SHAWN
Why do you have to belittle others?

VIC
Comedy's a competition, Shawn.

Phyllis has finished taking notes.

PHYLLIS

Next up, we have... Vic Nixon.

Vic steps up to the stage.

PHYLLIS (CONT'D)

What have you got for us, Vic?

VIC

This is a character called Canadian Gangster.

SONG 5: COMEDY'S A COMPETITION

ENSEMBLE

Comedy's a competition
Comedy's a competition
Comedy's a competition
Comedy's a competition

VIC

I was raised in this
Watchin' Whose Line from birth
You could search
Every corner of the earth
You won't find anybody
Who's as funny as me
Not in L.A., not in Chicago
Not in N.Y.C.
I'm puttin' C.L.E.
On the M.A.P.
All around the globe
Three hundred sixty degrees
Fahrenheit, I could scorch y'all
With all this heat
This is the roast of everybody
And I'm the emcee

ENSEMBLE

Comedy's a competition
Comedy's a competition
Comedy's a competition
Comedy's a competition

VIC

Comedy's a competition
And I'm winnin'
Comedy's a competition
And I'm winnin'
Comedy's a competition
And I'm winnin'
Comedy's a competition
And I'm winnin'
I can make you laugh
Even if you're anhedonic
Just me on the mic
(MORE)

VIC (CONT'D)

But I still sound symphonically
Orchestrating punchlines
Like a joke philharmonic
Words from every angle
Like it's stereophonic
When I say I'm laconic
You know I'm being ironic
I'm verbose and sardonic
Make Einstein look moronic
I am chronically iconic
And quicker than supersonic
Need a tonic, 'cause I'm an
Iller killer than the bubonic
Plague

Vic pauses, seemingly rethinking.

VIC (CONT'D)

Maybe all of this is just a defense
mechanism
Maybe deep down inside I yearn for
recognition
Because my dad never loved me
without condition
Maybe that's the source of all of
my ambition
And maybe comedy could be more to
me
Like community instead of rivalry
Maybe I should change my position

Vic's demeanor changes back to how it was before.

VIC (CONT'D)

Just kiddin'

ENSEMBLE

Comedy's a competition

VIC

And I'm winnin'

ENSEMBLE

Comedy's a competition

VIC

Since the beginnin'

ENSEMBLE

Comedy's a competition

VIC

I keep 'em grinnin'

ENSEMBLE

Comedy's a competition

VIC
Never lost, I'm always winnin

ENSEMBLE
Comedy's a competition
And I'm winnin'
Comedy's a competition
And I'm winnin'
Comedy's a competition
And I'm winnin'
Comedy's a competition

VIC
And I'm winnin'

Phyllis applauds enthusiastically.

PHYLLIS
Wonderful! I loved the bit about
the crooked mounties. Thank you.

JESSE
Not too bad, huh?

PHYLLIS
Not too bad.

Phyllis takes some quick notes.

PHYLLIS (CONT'D)
Next is... Shawn Carpenter.

Vic steps off stage as Shawn steps up.

VIC
See if you can top that.

Shawn looks distressed. They nervously turn to face
Phyllis and Jesse.

SHAWN
(Italianly)
Oh, mamma mia, the meat-a-ball! I--

Shawn cuts off.

SHAWN (CONT'D)
(normal)
I-- okay, I can't do this. New plan.
I'm going to improvise something
based on Vic's audition.

Phyllis looks exhausted.

PHYLLIS
Wonderful. Improvis always good.
Let's hear it.

SONG 6: COMEDY'S A COMPETITION (REPRISE)

SHAWN

Comedy's a competition
I guess I compete against myself
But now I'm here at this audition
Wishin' I could be somebody else
I'm just trying to be
A better version of me
I have low self-esteem
But I'm in therapy

SHAWN (CONT'D)

Oh, it's comedy
Self-deprecating comedy
Self-doubtulating comedy
This is humiliating
comedy

ENSEMBLE

Comedy
Comedy
Comedy
Comedy

SHAWN (CONT'D)

I'm not conventionally funny
That's what they tell me all the
time
They also say I'm not
conventionally attractive
Which seems irrelevant but I guess
it's fine
I don't want to be conventional
I want to be multi-dimensional
I wanna get weirdly emotional
And maybe start to cry
Is this still...

SHAWN (CONT'D)

Comedy?
Yeah, it's just
reprehensible comedy
It's just inaccessible
comedy
Deeply personal comedy,
you see

ENSEMBLE

Comedy
Comedy
Comedy
Comedy

SHAWN (CONT'D)

I don't want to compete
I just want to connect

ENSEMBLE

I don't want to compete
I just want to connect

SHAWN

I don't want to compete
I just want to connect

ENSEMBLE

I don't want to compete
I just want to connect

SHAWN

I don't want to compete
I just want to connect

ENSEMBLE

I don't want to compete
I just want to connect

SHAWN

I don't want to compete
I just want to connect

PHYLLIS

I don't want to compete
I just want to connect

SHAWN

I just want to connect

Phyllis stands up, moved by the performance. Shawn starts to go sing again, but realizes Phyllis is singing and stops.

PHYLLIS

Comedy's a competition
For me, it's been reduced to
nothing more
I used to laugh with reckless
abandon
Now I'm taking notes and keeping
score
How I yearn to return
To the way I was before
When I'd L. O. L. and R. O. T. F. L.
That stands for rolling on the
floor
Laughing at...

PHYLLIS (CONT' D)

Comedy
Oh, any sort of comedy
I was in love with comedy
Bring me back to comedy

ENSEMBLE

Comedy
Comedy
Comedy
Comedy

PHYLLIS (CONT' D)

Comedy
Any sort of comedy
I was in love with comedy
Bring me back to comedy

SHAWN

Oh it's comedy
I want to touch the deeply
absurd
Doing comedy
Like no one's ever heard
Oh it's comedy
To be alive with love and
mirth
I need comedy

SHAWN (CONT' D)
 Your laughter's my self-worth
 Oh, comedy

Shawn floats off stage.

JESSE
 Wow I have never seen Phyllis do
 anything like that before.

VIC
 (through grit teeth)
 Good job.

PHYLLIS
 Bravo, bravo, bravo. Wow I truly
 cannot believe I was so emotionally
 moved by a scene with a moose in the
 mafia. Okay, next... Danny
 Bernadakis.

Danny steps up to the stage.

DANNY
 This is a character called Boston
 Mark.

DANNY (CONT' D)
 (Bostonly)
 Hey, kid! How's your mum? You got
 your Dunkies? How about them Sox?
 Tom Brady. Tom Brady. Tom Brady.

Phyllis is laughing heartily, her heart opened by Shawn's
 performance. Danny's audition continues and fades out.

6 INT. COMEDY THEATER LOBBY - DAY

6

Casey, Mel, and Kieran are hanging out in the lobby.

MEL
 So you literally just google the
 word "news" to get your news?

CASEY
 I cannot think of a better way.

KIERAN
 There are only better ways. You
 know Google has a news tab, right?

CASEY
 I don't know that doesn't feel
 right.

MEL
 Just download any app.

CASEY

Eh. I don't care enough about the news.

KIERAN

Wait, let me see that.

Kieran grabs Casey's phone.

KIERAN (CONT'D)

You just google the word "weather" to get your weather?

Casey grabs their phone back.

CASEY

It works for me!

KIERAN

No wonder you never know what's going on.

MEL

That gives me an idea for a show... Improv based on people's search history.

KIERAN

Oh, that's good. I would see that for sure.

CASEY

As long as you don't use mine.

Kieran pulls out their phone and begins to check it.

CASEY (CONT'D)

I don't need to be on blast like that. I search for some pretty out-there stuff.

Kieran's eyes widen.

KIERAN

Hold on. Guys. Guys. I just got an email from Chuckle Plus.

MEL

Ooh, what does it say?

KIERAN

I... didn't get it.

CASEY

Tough luck, kid. You're young though, you'll have plenty more chances.

KIERAN

Sure, I... I gotta go.

They hold back tears as they exit.

MEL

Oof. That first big rejection always hurts, doesn't it.

CASEY

Sure does. They all do. Until they don't.

MEL

Here's to that.

Mel and Casey clink their bottles.

MEL (CONT'D)

Anyway, another show pitch - drunk improv. What do you--

Danny and Shawn enter, continuing a conversation.

SHAWN

No way. 150 gallons of breastmilk?

DANNY

I'm telling you. At least 150 gallons. Every day. And it's like toothpaste. Hey Casey. Hey Mel.

Everybody greets each other.

CASEY

So, did you check your emails? Kieran just got one from Chuckle Plus.

Shawn's face is flush with excitement and nervousness. They shakily pull out their phone.

SHAWN

Oh my God.

DANNY

What is it?

SHAWN

I got a callback.

DANNY

That's great!

MEL

Congratulations.

CASEY
We should celebrate! I'll google
"pizza."

SHAWN
Yeah, I... I can't do it.

Danny checks his phone as well, and sees that he also got a callback.

DANNY
Why not? I'll be there. Look at
this!

Danny shows Shawn his phone.

SHAWN
It's, uh... I can't miss my cousin's
briss.

DANNY
Isn't your whole family Catholic?

SHAWN
Yeah... it's a Catholic briss...

DANNY
I know your family. None of your
cousins are younger than 15.

SHAWN
Yeah he's actually... just getting
it touched up...

DANNY
Shawn, Shawn, Shawn. Stop making
excuses.

MEL
This is a once-in-a-lifetime
opportunity, Shawn.

SHAWN
A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to
get my dreams crushed, maybe. I
can't keep getting my hopes up. The
CEO of Chuckle Plus is not going to
understand me. I'm too weird.

MEL
You're unique!

SHAWN
I'll just embarrass myself and it
will all be for nothing.

CASEY

Okay, worst case, yes. It goes
terribly, terribly wrong.

DANNY

Sure.

CASEY

Like, really horrendously,
tragically wrong.

DANNY

Okay, that's enough. Even if it does
go terribly, terribly wrong. It's
worth it to try.

SHAWN

I can't do this.

DANNY

Listen. If anyone can do this, it's
you.

SONG 7: IF ANYONE CAN DO THIS

DANNY (CONT'D)

I don't know what's gonna happen
This could be a huge mistake
But if you wanna live like you were
meant to live
It's a mistake you've gotta make
There's something special inside
you
You've gotta give it all you've got
to get it out
You might not be sure that you're
the one for this
But me, I have no doubt
Me, I have no doubt
If anyone can do this it's you
If anyone can do this it's you
If anyone can do this it's you
If anyone can do this it's you
It's you
I don't know what's gonna happen
But whatever does, you've gotta let
it
And if you have faith without
expectation
I know for sure you won't regret
it
You gotta show them exactly who you
are
I'm telling you, this is your time
to shine
You've gotta be vulnerable, if you
(MORE)

DANNY (CONT' D)
 wanna be the best
 You've gotta put yourself on the
 line
 You've gotta put yourself on the
 line
 I know you're scared
 But I know you're strong
 And I'll be right there
 With you all along
 I know it's hard
 What you've gotta do
 But believe me when I say
 If anyone can do this it's you
 If anyone can do this it's you
 If anyone can do this it's you
 If anyone can do this it's you

ENSEMBLE
 If anyone can do this it's you
 If anyone can do this it's you
 If anyone can do this it's you
 If anyone can do this it's you

DANNY
 It's you

SHAWN
 Alright, I guess I have to do this.

DANNY
 That's the spirit.

Shawn and Danny hug.

7 EXT. STREET OUTSIDE THE THEATER - DAY

7

Vic is alone, pacing back and forth outside the theater,
 nervously pacing back and forth, refreshing their phone.

VIC
 Come on, come on... I'm outside, I
 should have service!

They refresh their phone again, and see a new email
 appear. They quickly scan it.

VIC (CONT' D)
 Yes! I knew it. Yes, yes, yes!

They continue pacing, now more excited.

VIC (CONT' D)
 Okay. I got this. Smooth sailing
 from here. As long as... well,
 there's really only one person who
 (MORE)

VI C (CONT' D)
 could beat me. If they don't make
 it, I'll be good. If they do... I'll
 figure it out. I just really hope
 they didn't give a callback to...

Shawn comes out onto the street. Vic's demeanor changes to
 an overly-exuberant facade of friendliness.

VI C (CONT' D)
 Shawn! Hey buddy.

SHAWN
 Hey Vic. What are you doing out
 here?

VI C
 Oh, you know me. Just here early for
 the show tonight. Punctuality! My
 only vice.

SHAWN
 Oh yeah. Mine's ice cream

VI C
 Hahaha, you're so funny.

SHAWN
 Thanks. Hey, speaking of that... did
 you hear from Chuckle Plus?

VI C
 Oh, of course! I did get one. And,
 you...?

SHAWN
 Yep, somehow I did.

Vic's facade of joy breaks a little bit.

VI C
 And you're planning to go?

SHAWN
 Danny convinced me.

VI C
 Oh, wonderful! Hey, I've got an
 idea. Let me book our flight. I'm a
 rewards member for every airline, I
 can get us a great deal.

SHAWN
 Yeah, I guess that could--

VIC
We can sit together! It will be so fun!

SHAWN
Alright, sure.

VIC
Great. I'll do it right now. You can pay me back whenever.

SHAWN
Okay, I guess that's...

Vic pulls out their phone again and quickly taps away at a flight booking website.

VIC
Done! I just forwarded you the confirmation email.

Shawn pulls out their phone to check.

SHAWN
That was really fast.

VIC
That's my other vice.

SHAWN
Ha, yeah. Well, thanks. What a whirlwind. How much was--

VIC
Oh, don't worry about it. We'll sort all that out later. You just get ready for the big audition.

SHAWN
Yeah, you too!

VIC
May the best comedian win.

SHAWN
Right.

Shawn departs, leaving Vic alone on stage again. Vic sneers menacingly, and begins to laugh. They put their fingers together like Mr. Burns.

VIC
Yes, yes. The "best" comedian. Ha ha ha. I'll make sure there's only one "best" comedian. Ha ha ha.

SONG 8: BAD BAD BADDIE

VIC (CONT'D)

Comedy's a competition
 And I'm a villain
 I'm gonna do whatever it takes
 To stay winnin'
 I might do something nice
 But it's all just an act
 When you turn around
 You'll get stabbed in the back
 I'm a bad bad bad
 Bad baddie
 I'm a bad bad bad
 Bad baddie
 Who's your dad dad dad
 Who's your daddy?
 I'm a bad bad bad
 Bad baddie
 I'm a cartoon villain
 Cruella De Vil
 Make a coat out of you
 On stage when I kill
 I'm so Divine
 I inspired a sea witch
 I'm Ursula, baby
 And I'm leavin' you speechless
 Call me a Captain
 'Cause you're gonna get hooked
 Maleficently
 You're about to get cooked
 Need a round of applause
 Make way for Jafar
 You're gonna get the claws
 If you're messin' with Scar
 I'm a bad bad bad
 Bad baddie
 I'm a bad bad bad
 Bad baddie
 Who's your dad dad dad
 Dad daddy?
 I'm a bad bad bad
 Bad baddie
 I'm gonna be on top
 Get out of my way
 No one's gonna stop me
 From having my day
 I'll get what I want
 No matter the cost
 If you're up against me
 You've already lost
 I'll dupe and I'll con
 I'll trick and I'll cheat
 I'm not above treachery
 Fraud or deceit
 I'll beat anybody
 Do what I've gotta do
 Even if I

(MORE)

VIC (CONT'D)

Have to sabotage you
 I'm a bad bad bad
 Bad baddie
 I'm a bad bad bad
 Bad baddie
 Who's your dad dad dad
 Who's your daddy?
 I'm a bad bad bad
 Bad baddie
 I refuse to lose
 Under any circumstance
 I'll eliminate each threat
 No one else will stand a chance
 I'm a bad bad bad
 Bad baddie
 Oh, I'm a bad bad bad
 Bad baddie
 I said who's your dad dad dad
 Who's your daddy?
 I'm a bad bad bad
 Bad baddie
 Ha ha ha ha, ha ha ha ha, ha ha ha

Vic takes out their phone, dials it, and puts it to their ear.

VIC (CONT'D)

Hi, I recently booked two tickets
 for a flight, and I'd like to cancel
 one of them Ha ha ha. No sorry I'm
 just laughing maniacally. Ha ha ha
 ha-- yes I'll hold. Ha ha ha ha ha!

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

8 INT. AIRPORT - DAY

8

It's early in the morning at the airport. TI NA (older, severe) sits at a boarding pass booth while Shawn waits in line.

TI NA

Next.

Shawn approaches.

SHAWN

Hi! Beautiful morning, huh?

TI NA

I.D. and boarding pass.

SHAWN

Sure thing!

Shawn takes out their I.D. and their phone with the boarding pass. Tina scans it.

TI NA

It's not going through.

SHAWN

What's that? Oh, let me turn my brightness up...

TI NA

It's not your brightness. Your ticket was cancelled.

SHAWN

It was-- what? No.

TI NA

I'm sorry. Next!

SHAWN

Wait, I--

Tina looks at him stone-faced.

SHAWN (CONT'D)

Can I get another ticket?

TI NA

You can try customer service. But good luck finding another flight to LAX this weekend.

SHAWN

Okay, can you just--

TINA

Next!

SHAWN

Please, just-- I need to get there today, they're not going to hold my spot--

TINA

That is not my problem. This line's gotta keep moving. Next!

Shawn's frustration bubbles over. Midwest emo music begins as he rants.

SHAWN

Please just have one tiny modicum of empathy for me here!

TINA

Excuse me?

SHAWN

I'm sorry, I know I'm sure your job is a lot and I don't mean to take my frustration out on you but can you just feel something, can you try to understand! This is the most pivotal moment of my life and I'm just so-- it's like I'm on a rollercoaster, I get my hopes up and believe for a second that something good is going to come along, and then it never does because I'm never good enough, I'll never be worthy of anything good, I never should've-- and you are so mad at me just for existing, and again, I know this does not look like a fun job and I'm sure emotional labor is draining but do you see that I'm another person here, my whole life I have been trying to express myself and connect and relate and I just never can, and you will never understand me, and I just--

Shawn begins to sing, and Tina looks even more exhausted.

SONG 9: I'M SO TIRED

SHAWN (CONT'D)

I don't think I can do this
I can't do this anymore
All the times I've been through
this

(MORE)

SHAWN (CONT'D)

What am I doing it for?
 I'm so tired
 I'm so tired
 I'm so tired
 I'm so tired
 Existing is so exhausting
 Why do I have to be me?
 I don't know why I keep trying
 I'll never be who I want to be

TINA

I understand what you're saying
 I'm tired all of the time
 But you're not really helping
 When you hold up my line

ENSEMBLE

I'm so tired
 I'm so tired
 I'm so tired
 I'm so tired

SHAWN

I just want to be free from all
 identity

By the end of the song, Tina has been moved (ever so slightly).

TINA

I'm sorry, honey. Next!

9 INT. HOLLYWOOD OFFICE - DAY

9

Vic is on the makeshift stage, just finishing up an audition in front of EVERETT (40s, gravitous), Phyllis, and Jesse.

VIC

This is my destiny
 They'll be obsessed with me
 If you're in the same room as me
 You're blessed to be
 No one can jest like me
 There's no one left to see
 You can forget about the rest
 Because the best is me
 I'm the best

Vic bows. Everett applauds enthusiastically.

EVERETT

Splendid. Really, really good.
 (to Phyllis)
 See? I told you Cleveland had
 talent.

PHYLLIS
You were right. Just wait. You can
go now Vic.

EVERETT
We'll be in touch.

VIC
Thank you so much, it was a
privilege.

Vic slowly starts to walk away, but lingers in the room

PHYLLIS
Okay, our next performer... ah yes.
Shawn.

Phyllis smiles widely.

PHYLLIS (CONT'D)
(to Jesse)
Can you--

JESSE
Yes, well - apparently Shawn isn't
here yet.

Vic sneers.

VIC
Oh, yes, unfortunate. I think there
might have been some sort of mix-up
with the airline.

PHYLLIS
Oh, no. I really think... well...
shoot.

EVERETT
We're on a schedule here. If Shawn
couldn't be here on time, that's it.

PHYLLIS
Well, maybe...

EVERETT
No second chances. Besides, we have
an... excellent pool of candidates
already.

Everett winks at Vic.

PHYLLIS
Of course.

Vic is still standing there, kind of awkwardly smiling and
trying to not seem evil.

PHYLLIS (CONT'D)
 Okay, seriously Vic, you can go now

10 INT. COMEDY THEATER LOBBY - DAY

10

Danny is hanging out at the theater, and Shawn enters.

DANNY
 Shawny! Back from LA already? I was
 just getting ready to leave.

SHAWN
 I never left.

DANNY
 What happened?

SHAWN
 My plane ticket was cancelled
 somehow

DANNY
 You think Vic--

SHAWN
 I don't know It doesn't matter.
 Nothing matters.

DANNY
 Well can you reschedule? Get another
 flight?

SHAWN
 No flights. No rescheduling. This
 was it.

Danny sighs. There is a moment of pause between them

DANNY
 Take mine.

SHAWN
 You want me to--?

DANNY
 Take my slot. Take my plane ticket.

SHAWN
 Danny. I can't do that. What about
 you?

DANNY
 (wistful)
 I was never...
 (accepting)
 I'm good here. This is where I
 belong. And you...

Danny looks at Shawn, feeling a strange cocktail of emotions - love, fear, pride, longing, confusion.

SHAWN
I'm nothing.

DANNY
(quietly)
You're everything.

SHAWN
What was that?

DANNY
You're everything to me.

SHAWN
Danny, shut up. Don't say that. I'm not anything to anyone.

DANNY
(exasperated)
Shawn, you shut up. Listen.

SONG 10: THE BEST OF ALL TIME (REPRISE)

DANNY (CONT'D)
Shawn, you have got
To build some self-worth of your
own
I've been trying to help you
But I can't do it alone
No one else gives you your value
You've gotta find it within
So I'll just say this once
And then I won't say it again
Shawn, I adore you
Shawn, I'd do anything for you
Shawn, I put no one before you
Shawn, you're the best of all time

SHAWN
You really think that?

DANNY
I know you're at least the best
friend of all time.

SHAWN
Oh, Danny, no, you are.

DANNY
You are.

SHAWN
You are.

DANNY

Okay we don't have time for this.
My-- your flight leaves in forty
minutes! You have to go. Now!

Shawn kisses Danny on the cheek and runs off.

11 INT. HOLLYWOOD OFFICE - DAY

11

Phyllis, Jesse, and Everett are watching the end of
another audition. BLAKE (early 20s, extremely handsome,
with dog ears) is on all fours.

BLAKE

Woof! Woof!

Blake takes off the dog ears and stands up (playing
another character).

BLAKE

Alright, Chester, one last time.

Blake pretends to put a record on a record player. Dance
music plays. Blake gets back down on all fours, puts on
the dog ears, and starts to dance as a dog. They do this
for approximately ten seconds before being interrupted.

JESSE

Okay, that's your time. Thank you!

Blake crawls off stage, still as a dog.

EVERETT

Oof. That one was rough.

PHYLLIS

I don't know I thought it was--

EVERETT

Of course you liked it. But it
wasn't marketable.

Phyllis completes Everett's sentence.

PHYLLIS

Marketable, I know I know

EVERETT

We need people who are TikTokable.
Right, Jesse?

JESSE

Yes. Our performers have to have the
precisely perfect amount of
brainrot. The dog person either
didn't have enough or they had way
too much.

EVERETT

Exactly. We need people like... what was that one named? Vic?

PHYLLIS

Vic Nixon.

EVERETT

Right! People like Vic. You should be ecstatic! Vic was your pick!

PHYLLIS

Vic was one of my picks.

EVERETT

You did it! Vic could be the savior this company needs, and you found them. Isn't that what you wanted?

PHYLLIS

That's what I thought, but... what about the art? What about truly, deeply moving performances? When did it become all about the business? Show business, it's... Jesse, help me out here, how did I articulate this?

Jesse checks their notes.

JESSE

Right. You said "We toil at the mercy of..."

PHYLLIS

Oh yeah. I remember.

SONG 11: THAT'S SHOWBIZ

PHYLLIS (CONT'D)

We toil at the mercy of this
merciless machine
The almighty dollar, the all-holy
green
Creating "content" for a four point
five inch screen
With an aspect ratio of nine by
sixteen
All these poor saps come to L.A. to
chase their dreams
They pour their hearts out on the
stage just to be seen
But if the market finds no value in
them to redeem

The lights go out when the music goes out. Phyllis changes into a glamorous costume with a sparkly top hat.

PHYLLIS (CONT' D)
 We crush their aspirations into
 smithereens
 That's showbiz

When the bass drops, a strobe starts. Phyllis does jazz hands and other dramatic showy gestures.

PHYLLIS (CONT' D)
 That's showbiz
 All I know is
 That's showbiz

Back to a sort of normal stage.

JESSE
 I moved here thinking I would find
 my perfect niche
 This job's alright, but it doesn't
 scratch that itch
 I'm not fulfilled, but I guess that
 I'm content
 It's not my calling, but I've gotta
 pay the rent

PHYLLIS
 That's showbiz

EVERETT
 Some say I only care about the
 bottom line
 But I'm just trying to keep this
 company alive
 If we want to keep making shows,
 our business has to thrive
 If we don't make money, we won't
 survive

The strobe is back.

ENSEMBLE
 That's showbiz
 That's showbiz
 All I know is
 That's showbiz

Additional lights flash on the stage.

ENSEMBLE (CONT' D)
 That's showbiz

PHYLLIS
 They turned comedy
 Into a commodity

ENSEMBLE
 That's showbiz

PHYLLIS
I don't think it oughta be
But it isn't up to me

ENSEMBLE
All I know is

PHYLLIS
Art is more than just a byproduct
of business

ENSEMBLE
That's showbiz

PHYLLIS
Somebody save me from this
industry!

ENSEMBLE
That's showbiz

EVERETT
That is showbiz, you know It's not
called "showcharity" is it?

PHYLLIS
No.

EVERETT
Vic is the best for business. For
someone to beat Vic, their
performance would have to be...
metamorphic.

PHYLLIS
You're right. It's not going to
happen.

12 INT. AIRPORT - DAY

12

Tina is in the TSA check-in booth. Shawn enters.

TINA
You again? My luck.

SHAWN
I triple checked this time. My
friend transferred their ticket to
me. My boarding pass is all good to
go.

Shawn hands over the boarding pass/phone and ID.

TINA
It's not scanning.

Shawn panics for a second.

SHAWN
No, no, um... check the
brightness...

Shawn grabs the phone and turns the brightness up.

TINA
Alright, it went through. You're all
set.

SHAWN
Phew I was about to have a heart
attack.

Tina is still mostly stone-faced, but has a glint of
lightheartedness.

TINA
As long as I don't have to listen to
another rant from you.

SHAWN
Oh, I really am so sorry about that,
really, I...

TINA
It's alright. Go get 'em honey.

SHAWN
Thanks. Thank you.

Shawn rushes off onto the jetway.

13 INT. HOLLYWOOD OFFICE - DAY

13

Everett, Phyllis, and Jesse are waiting for Danny to show
up. They're sitting behind the audition desk with some
papers on it.

EVERETT
~~We~~ should just call it a day. No use
wait~~ing~~ing.

PHYLLIS
I suppose you're right. ~~We~~--

Shawn bursts through the door, chest heaving.

SHAWN
I'm here... to auditi~~on~~on... for
Chuckl~~e~~e Pl~~us~~us.

Everett looks down at the folder in front of him

EVERETT
Are you Danny? You don't look like--

PHYLLIS
No, this is Shawn.

SHAWN
Please, I... just... elevator...
broken... stairs? ... please...

EVERETT
I don't have time for this. We
already found our guy. I want to go
home. Family Feud is on in five
minutes.

SHAWN
I need to do this. Please.

Shawn looks at Phyllis.

PHYLLIS
(to Everett)
Please. This could be the one.

EVERETT
Alright, but this better be good.
And QUICK. I will NOT miss Family
Feud.

PHYLLIS
Can't you just stream it on-demand?

EVERETT
I like to watch it live.

PHYLLIS
But isn't it just reruns at this
point?

EVERETT
I like to watch the reruns live.

JESSE
Have you seen those TikToks with the
hamsters dressed as Steve Harvey?

EVERETT
No, but that sounds adorable. You
know Steve Harvey is from
Cleveland.

JESSE
No way! Cleveland really does have
some--

PHYLLIS
Okay, shouldn't we...?

EVERETT

Right! Let's get a move on.

Jesse sets up the camera to make sure it's ready to record the audition.

JESSE

Just go ahead slate with your name and what you'll be performing for us.

Shawn takes a deep breath and calms down a bit. As they speak, a spotlight begins to appear and the rest of the stage fades into darkness. Music begins softly and builds until the singing starts.

SHAWN

My name is Shawn Carpenter, and I'll be... I'll be doing a character called...

Shawn takes a deep breath.

SHAWN (CONT'D)

"Guy Who Just Flew For Several Hours On A Spirit Airlines Flight And Then Sprinted Up Seventeen Flights Of Stairs To Get To A Callback For What Could Be His Big Break But He's Super Nervous And Worried That His Bit Will Be Too Experimental And He's Kind Of Generally Overwhelmed By Emotion As He Attempts To Separate Himself From His Hopelessly Fragile Ego And Reconnect To The Joy He Initially Sought To Bring Through His Performance, Trying To Recapture That Feeling, That Feeling Of Pure Comedy Brought About From The Purest Form Of Love, Grief, Like That Barenaked Ladies Song That Has That Line About Laughing At A Funeral, That Feeling When You Can't Keep The Giggles In Your Mouth Because Your Brother Just Accidentally Drank Holy Water And You're Supposed To Be Sad Because Your Dad Just Died But You And Your Brother Can't Stop Giggling And Your Mom Gives You A Stern Look But You Can Tell She's Fighting Back A Smile Too And You See The Whole Pew Trying To Hold It In, Your Sister And Your Nephews And Your Uncle And Everybody Even Your Sister-In-Law Who Is Known For Her Severe Demeanor And You Think About

(MORE)

SHAWN (CONT' D)

Your Dad And You Know You're
 Supposed To Be Sad And You ARE Sad
 But Somehow The Sadness Makes It
 Even Funnier And Now You're Fully
 Cracking Up And You're Crying, Not
 In Spite Of The Laughter But Because
 Of It, Because The Funniness Makes
 It Even Sadder Because You Know He
 Would Have Found It Funny Too And
 You Think About All The Years You
 Had With Him That Seemed To Go By In
 An Instant, In One Single Instant,
 And You Miss Him And You Love Him
 But Also The Priest Looks Kind Of
 Mad So You're Really Trying To Keep
 It Together But It's Just So Funny
 Because It Comes From The Deepest
 Part Of You That Feeling, That Is
 The Feeling That This Poor Guy Is
 Somehow Going To Try To Bring To His
 Audition, And He's Looking At The
 Panel With Their Cold Business Faces
 And He Thinks About All The Other
 Comedians They've Already Seen Who
 Are Probably Funnier Than Him And He
 Just Wants To Express All Of This,
 Somehow Make Them Understand,
 Somehow Make Them Feel This Feeling,
 Somehow Make... Them..

SONG 12: LIVE & LAUGH & LOVE

SHAWN (CONT' D)

Laugh a little more
 Louder than before
 Saddled by the weight of time
 progressing
 Every stupid moment is a blessing
 Funny 'cause it's true
 All there is to do
 In the face of existential
 nonsense
 Is to sop it up before it's gone
 and...
 Laugh and live and love
 All of the above
 Feel as deep as feelings can be
 feeling
 Feel it from the floor up to the
 ceiling
 Love and live and laugh
 Half and half and half
 Greater than the sum of each
 component
 Somewhere in the sum of every
 (MORE)

SHAWN (CONT' D)

moment
 There's an experience he's
 desperate to explain
 It's more than one small dumb
 audition can contain
 It's everything, it's life, it's
 silly, it's profound
 In grave absurdity, there's meaning
 to be found
 Reaching out his hand
 Hopes they understand
 He is not expecting adulation
 All he really wants to do is make
 them..
 Laugh and maybe cry
 Both at the same time
 He has got to make it happen some
 way
 Also he's a mime and so he can't
 say
 Words

JESSE

Marker.

The music continues. Shawn looks down for a second, then looks up and just shrugs and does an Urkel "Did I Do That?" type of silly expression. The music concludes, and Shawn steps out of character. Everett stands up and looks at Phyllis.

14 INT. COMEDY THEATER LOBBY - NIGHT

14

Danny, Casey, Mel and Vic are chatting. Mel is facing away from the entrance.

DANNY

So his first name has always been
 Michael?

MEL

Michael Caine? Yes! What else would
 it have been?

DANNY

I don't know it feels like it used
 to be something else.

CASEY

You're messing with us.

VIC

No way you are actually this dumb.

DANNY

No, I just--

Shawn enters looking glum Casey, Danny, and Vic stop talking.

MEL
He has been Michael Caine since at least the 60s! He's--

Mel sees the looks on their faces.

MEL (CONT'D)
What?

Mel turns around.

MEL (CONT'D)
Oh, hi Shawn.

SHAWN
Hey Mel. Casey. Danny.

Shawn pauses for a moment.

SHAWN (CONT'D)
Vic.

VI C
Shawn, listen, I--

SHAWN
It's alright. It's alright. You were right. Comedy is a competition.

Another dramatic pause.

SHAWN (CONT'D)
And I won.

DANNY
You mean you--

SHAWN
I got it.

Danny, Mel, and Casey cheer.

MEL
Yay!

DANNY
I knew you could do it.

CASEY
Good job, kid.

VI C
Well, I guess... the best. Comedian.
Won.

Vic storms off, sad and angry.

CASEY
What was...

SHAWN
I'll tell you about it later.

MEL
Well this is just wonderful. When do you leave?

SHAWN
Tomorrow They want me back tomorrow

Danny projects happiness for Shawn, but a glint of mourning peeks through his expression.

DANNY
Amazing. Incredible. Fabulous.

CASEY
This calls for something more special than our typical fare.

SHAWN
What, are you gonna google "champagne"?

CASEY
Don't need to. I've been saving this...

Casey pulls out a Miller High Life Champagne Bottle, which is a real thing that really exists.

MEL
Crack it open!

Casey passes out champagne flutes and pops the bottle. Shawn grabs a glass and holds it up for Casey to fill.

CASEY
Okay, first, one condition. When you get back there, you've gotta say hi to Everett for me.

SHAWN
Sure.

Casey pours the glass, and continues to pour the rest of the glasses while talking. No one drinks yet.

DANNY
What, you know him?

CASEY

Sure. ~~We~~ grew up together.

MEL

~~Wait~~, Everett Barrington grew up around here?

CASEY

North Collinwood, born and raised.

MEL

I feel like I should have known that.

CASEY

Why else you think Chuckle Plus would have held auditions in Cleveland of all places?

MEL

I don't know I thought someone there just really liked Mr. Hero.

DANNY

So what happened? You still stay in touch?

CASEY

Now and then, not too often. ~~We're~~ Facebook friends. But after high school he got out of Ohio as fast as he could.

SHAWN

That's kind of... sad.

CASEY

It is sad. But it's alright. Things change. People leave all the time.

SHAWN

Why did he leave?

CASEY

Folks with big ambitions don't tend to stick around here long. And, well... now you're one of those folks.

There is a moment of pause, everyone reflecting on the time they've shared.

DANNY

Okay, can we drink now?

MEL

One more thing. A toast. Casey?

They all raise their glasses.

CASEY

Okay. To my big brother George. The richest man in town.

MEL

Come on, do a real one.

CASEY

Alright, alright. To those who leave. And to those who stay.

Everybody clinks glasses.

SONG 13: LEAVIN' CLEVELAND

CASEY (CONT' D)

That's one thing about Clevel and
 Everybody's always leavin'
 Somewhere better to go
 Tryna get away from the snow
 It's hard to say goodbye
 Always feels a little like death
 I know you're still alive
 We're just gonna miss you after
 you've left
 You've gotta go spread your wings
 And fly from the midwest
 You've always been a fledgling
 Now it's time to be full-fledged
 That's one thing about Clevel and
 Everybody's always leavin'
 Somewhere better to go
 Tryna get away from the snow
 You've got big dreams to follow
 And I hope they all come true
 Just remember us when you're
 famous
 We won't forget about you
 Lookin' back on all the laughs
 Makes it harder to be movin' on
 You never know you're livin' in the
 good ol' days
 Until the good ol' days are gone
 That's one thing about Clevel and
 Everybody's always leavin'
 Somewhere better to go
 Tryna get away from the snow

SHAWN

Well, speaking of leaving... I gotta go pack. I'll see you all around.

DANNY

Make us proud, Shawn.

SHAWN
I'll do my best.

Everybody waves as Shawn exits.

15 INT. COMEDY THEATER STAGE - NIGHT

15

Ten years later. There is a calendar that says the year "2034" or whatever. The stage is decorated for Christmas - it's a "Home for the Holidays" type of show Kieran is setting things up. Shawn enters.

KIERAN
Oh my God. Shawn Carpenter! THE Shawn Carpenter!

SHAWN
Hey Kieran.

KIERAN
Oh my God. You remember me!

SHAWN
Of course. What, am I here early?
Where is everybody?

KIERAN
They'll be here. Wow I wasn't sure if you'd actually show!

SHAWN
I wouldn't miss it. How are the classes coming?

KIERAN
Well, I'm up to level four now.. and I LOVE teaching.

SHAWN
You always had the relentless enthusiasm for it.

Mel enters.

MEL
Hey, Shawn! I guess I should act starstruck.

SHAWN
Nah, you taught me everything I know

MEL
And yet, you didn't thank me during your Oscars speech.

SHAWN
You got your thanks during my
Grammys speech.

MEL
Pshh. Grammys.

Casey enters.

CASEY
Shawn!

SHAWN
Hey, Case.

CASEY
Hey, big star like you, you want a
drink on the house?

SHAWN
Sure. What can I get?

CASEY
Anything you like! As long as you
still like High Life.

SHAWN
Sure, I do.

CASEY
Coming right up.

Casey goes back to the bar area.

SHAWN
The place is looking great, Mel.
Better than I remember.

MEL
Thanks. It's a labor of love.

Casey returns with a High Life and hands it to Shawn.

CASEY
Here ya go, kid.

SHAWN
Perfect. Hey, you happen to know
what the Cavs score is?

CASEY
Give me one second.

Casey pulls out their phone. Shawn looks over at it.

SHAWN

You just googled the word
"basketball" didn't you?

CASEY

Look, it knows exactly what I mean!
Cavs are up 49 to 40. See, it works
for me!

SHAWN

Love it. Some things never change.

MEL

It sure is great having you back in
town. You know this gives me an
idea...

SHAWN

Another show pitch?

MEL

Yeah! A "Cleveland Homecoming" type
of show where folks who have left us
come back and perform here again.

KIERAN

Mel, that is literally what
tonight's show is.

CASEY

You've officially come full circle
and pitched every single possible
show

MEL

There will always be more shows to
pitch. What about... a show where
a... lizard... uh...

SHAWN

I've missed you guys.

MEL

We've missed you too.

SHAWN

Hey, Vic's not coming, are they?

CASEY

Vic? That jerkbag is not welcome
here ever again after what they did
to you.

SHAWN

It's okay. I've forgiven them

CASEY

Still nice as ever. Guess you can take the kid out of the midwest, but you can't take the midwest out of the kid, huh?

SHAWN

Oh, that reminds me. I actually just pitched a show with Phyllis. It's called Midwest Battle Rap. It's sort of like a reverse battle, where--

MEL

Where instead of insults they compliment each other?

SHAWN

That's it!

MEL

I had the exact same idea.

CASEY

You did.

MEL

I was this close to getting it produced too. Well, now it'll get to shine with you as the star!

SHAWN

I'm not a star. I'm the same person I always was. Just got some perspective. All thanks to...

Shawn looks off into the distance and sees Danny. Danny hops onto the stage.

MEL

Hey, Danny!

DANNY

(to Shawn)

Well, well, well. If it isn't the prodigal non-binary child.

SHAWN

Well, well, well. If it isn't the non-prodigal slightly older child.

DANNY

I don't think you know what "prodigal" means.

SHAWN

I don't think it means anything.
(MORE)

SHAWN (CONT' D)
It's like one of those made-up words.

DANNY
Sure, one of those made-up words.

SHAWN
Hi Danny.

DANNY
Hi Shawn.

Danny and Shawn hug.

SHAWN
It's good to be back. So, how've things--

KIERAN
Alright, come on. Show's starting. Get off!

Everybody jumps off to the side of the stage, except for Kieran. A spotlight shines on the main microphone.

KIERAN (CONT' D)
Good evening everybody! Thanks so much for coming out tonight. Couple of housekeeping items... please silence your cell phones and refrain from flash photography (unless something really funny happens).

SHAWN
(whispered to Danny)
That bit's still in the intro script, huh?

DANNY
I know, sad, right?

SHAWN
No. I love it.

KIERAN
Bathrooms are to your left, and the bar is to your right.

SONG 14: ALT COMEDY THEATER (REPRI SE)

KIERAN (CONT' D)
Get a drink at the bar
The bartender knows your order by heart
Livin' the High Life on Lorain
(MORE)

KIERAN (CONT' D)

Avenue
Every weekend night and sometimes
weeknights too

Shawn jumps up on stage.

SHAWN

I feel at home when I'm here
Drinkin' the champagne of beers
All my old friends welcoming me
And there's nowhere else I'd rather
be

Every cast member gets up on stage.

ENSEMBLE

Alt comedy theater
In a mid-size rust-belt city
Guaranteed a whole boatload of
laughs
If you're here, you'll be feeling
giddy
Alt comedy theater
We hope you enjoyed the show

DANNY

And raise your hand if there's
someone up here
In the cast whom you personally
know

SHAWN

Alt comedy theater
The only place you really
wanna be

ENSEMBLE

Alt comedy theater
Live, love, and laugh our
lives away

SHAWN (CONT' D)

If you're anything, if you're
anything
If you're a-ny-thing like me!

DANNY

Like me!

CASEY

Like me!

ENSEMBLE

Like me!

ENSEMBLE (CONT' D)

CALLBACK!

At the end of the song, the ensemble shouts "CALLBACK!"
and the lights black out in time.

THE END