

CALLBACK: An Original Comedy Musical

Written by

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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

*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)

*Livin' 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

*Alt comedy theater
In a mid-size rust-belt city
Guaranteed at least a couple of
laughs
And only sometimes out of pity
Alt 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

Pineapple!

DANNY

*Alright, 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, well, I don't like to give
feedback off-the-cuff like this. And
really, it's completely subjective.

SHAWN

But...?

MEL

Well, you're certainly more
unique...

SHAWN

And...?

MEL

I guess in a non-traditional way...

SHAWN

Right.

MEL

Sure, you're better than Danny.

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

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. I gotta go.

Vic walks off-stage.

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-

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

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

KIERAN
Oh, I don't know, I think this is
great.

SHAWN
I'm going to get another drink.

Shawn departs. Chatter continues, time passes. The night goes on.

2 INT. COMEDY THEATER STAGE - NIGHT

2

Later that very night. The stage is empty except for Shawn (sitting on a chair) and Danny. Casey peeks through the lobby door.

CASEY

Hey guys, last call before I kick you outta here.

DANNY

Yeah, we're about to get going. Come on, Shawn.

Shawn stumbles a little bit trying to stand up.

SHAWN

I don't - you know what -

DANNY

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, it was a fun night!

Shawn sits back down.

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

Come on, don't give me that.

Danny gets down on a knee to be at Shawn's level.

DANNY (CONT'D)
You gotta learn to love yourself
more.

SHAWN
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, and Danny comforts them. Casey opens the door again.

CASEY

Alright, you really gotta go. I want to go home.

DANNY

Give us a minute!

3 INT. HOLLYWOOD OFFICE - DAY

3

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--

No, of course not. I just think--

(deep breath)

Okay. I understand.

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. Unless we do something bold. 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 TikToks 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.

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 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

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
 Quibi 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

Pack your bags, Jesse. The forest
city awaits.

4 INT. COMEDY THEATER CLASS SPACE - DAY

4

Back in Cleveland. An improv class is taking place, led by Mel. Danny, Shawn, Vic, and some other improvisers are present. Some of them have notebooks and pens. Other notebooks and bags are on the floor.

MEL

Two more up. Your location is...
uh... a drawing room.

Shawn and Vic take the stage. Vic sits down facing away from Shawn and leafs through an imaginary book.

VIC

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.

VIC

Three.

SHAWN

Four.

Vic throws the book down.

VIC

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.

VIC

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 is on the other side, about to enter.

MEL

One last thing: someone from Chuckle Plus is going to be here this weekend holding local auditions. They're casting some new show, I don't know much about it.

Vic turns to face Mel.

VIC

Wait. *THE* Chuckle Plus?

MEL

The one and only Chuckle Plus.

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.

VIC

Wow.

SHAWN

This... this is a sign.

DANNY

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

SHAWN

Yes. Do you think they'd be up for a totally improvised audition?

DANNY

You might want to prepare a little.

VIC

I don't know. A fully improvised audition could be impressive.

DANNY

You should write something down.

SHAWN

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*

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 gonna knock 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
 (MORE)

SHAWN (CONT'D)

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
 don't know what I did
 I wanna be great, I don't
 wanna be mid*

VIC

*This could finally open
 the door
 To my big break and to so
 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

You get in okay? How was the flight?

JESSE

Oh, not so bad, it was--

PHYLLIS

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 got it from here.

MEL

You sure? Coffee, Kirkland-brand sparkling water, anything?

PHYLLIS

We're good.

MEL

Great! I'll be in the lobby if you need anything. The performers should be arriving any minute.

Mel exits to the lobby.

PHYLLIS

Is everyone in the midwest this obnoxiously nice?

JESSE

I like it.

Phyllis and Jesse begin to setup their table and camera.

JESSE (CONT'D)

And Uber is so cheap here!

PHYLLIS

It's cheap for a reason, Jesse. I really do not have high expectations for this day.

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

JESSE
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 insjultury.

No reaction, but Kieran continues unfazed.

KIERAN (CONT'D)
If you had a bookstore that was also
(MORE)

KIERAN (CONT'D)
a farm for exclusively female
cattle, it would be called Barns and
No Bull.

Again, no reaction. Kieran continues telling jokes while
Vic and Shawn have a side conversation.

VIC
How much more of this do we have to
take?

SHAWN
I don't know, I think these are kind
of funny.

Keiran has put on a pair of sunglasses and taken out a
mobility cane.

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

SHAWN
Okay that one was bad.

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 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.

Kieran concludes the act with a bow, and scampers off
stage.

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... me.

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'
 Comede-comedy's a competition
 And I'm winnin'
 Comede-comedy's a competition
 And I'm winnin'
 I can make you laugh
 Even if you're anhedonic
 Just me on the mic
 But I still sound symphonic
 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
 (MORE)

VIC (CONT'D)
*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! Thank you. 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. Improv is 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. 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
Show pitch. 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 open it! Too scared.

CASEY
Come on, open it.

KIERAN
Okay.

Kieran closes their eyes and takes a deep breath. They squint open one eye. They begin frantically reading the email, their expression slowly turning into a frown.

MEL
Bad news?

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, 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.

SHAWN
You have got to stop spending all
your time on whale fact TikTok.

DANNY
TikTok? No. I get all my whale facts
from "whalefacts.org".

SHAWN
Yeah I guess that tracks. Hey Casey.
Hey Mel.

Everybody greets each other.

CASEY
So, did you check your emails?

SHAWN
Emails?

MEL
Kieran just got an email 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
Well deserved.

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

MEL
Why not?

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

DANNY
Yeah, why not? I'll be there. Look
at this!

Danny shows Shawn his phone.

SHAWN
That's... yay!

CASEY
Congrats, Danny. It'll be great, the
two of you out there in Hollyworld.
You gotta go, Shawn.

SHAWN
I'm not sure. I really can't miss
another day of work.

DANNY

Work shmurk. What happened to "I wanna be the very best like no one ever was?"

SHAWN

That was just a pipe dream. This is real. I can't afford an actual plane ticket.

MEL

This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, Shawn. You gotta do it.

CASEY

Trust me. This is rare.

SHAWN

They probably just sent this email to me by accident.

DANNY

Again with this. You saw how Phyllis reacted to your performance. They want you.

SHAWN

No, it was too weird and not funny enough. She liked it, but I don't think the CEO of Chuckle Plus is going to like it. 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

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
 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

It's you DANNY

SHAWN
Alright, I guess I have to do this.

DANNY
That's the spirit.

7 INT. COMEDY THEATER STAGE - NIGHT

7

Vic is alone on stage, nervously pacing back and forth, refreshing their phone.

VIC
Come on, come on...

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 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 enters. Vic's demeanor changes to an overly-exuberant facade of friendliness.

VIC (CONT'D)
Shawn! Hey buddy.

SHAWN
Hey Vic. You're here early.

VIC
Oh, you know me. Punctuality is my only vice.

SHAWN
Oh yeah. Mine's ice cream.

VIC
Hahaha, you're so funny.

SHAWN
Thanks. Hey, speaking of that, did you...

VIC
Did I what?

SHAWN

Chuckle Plus callbacks. Did you...

VIC

Oh, of course! Yes, I just got the email. And I'm sure you got one too?

SHAWN

Yep, somehow I did.

Vic's facade of joy breaks a little bit.

VIC

And you're planning to go?

SHAWN

Danny convinced me.

VIC

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

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

(MORE)

VIC (CONT'D)

Do what I've gotta do
Even if I
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
Ha ha ha ha ha ha!

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

VIC
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. TINA (older, severe) sits at a boarding pass booth while Shawn waits in line.

TINA

Next.

Shawn approaches.

SHAWN

Hi! Beautiful morning, huh?

TINA

I.D. and boarding pass.

SHAWN

Sure thing!

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

TINA

It's not going through.

SHAWN

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

TINA

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

SHAWN

It was-- what? No.

TINA

I'm sorry. Next!

SHAWN

Wait, I--

Tina looks at him stone-faced.

SHAWN (CONT'D)

Can I get another ticket?

TINA

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! Sometimes it feels like the entire universe is against me, this is the most pivotal moment of my life and I'm just so-- it's like I'm on a rollercoaster and I have whiplash and I-- 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

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

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.

DANNY

Take mine.

SHAWN

What?

DANNY

Take my slot. Take my plane ticket.

SHAWN

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

DANNY

I don't need it. I'm happy here. Besides, they don't really want someone like me.

SHAWN

But if I go, and I don't get it... I don't want to throw away your shot.

DANNY

It doesn't matter if you don't get it. Don't do it for them. Do it for you. You've got something here.

SHAWN

No, I'm the--

DANNY

No! Listen.

SONG 10: THE BEST OF ALL TIME (REPRISE)

DANNY

*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 don't know, but you're 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!

11 INT. HOLLYWOOD OFFICE - DAY

11

Everett, Phyllis, and Jesse are hanging out in between auditions.

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 complete's Everett's sentence.

PHYLLIS
Marketable, I know. I know.

EVERETT
We need people who are TikTokable.
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

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

PHYLLIS

Oh yeah. I remember.

SONG 11: THAT'S SHOWBIZ

PHYLLIS

*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*

(MORE)

EVERETT (CONT'D)
*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 waiting.

PHYLLIS

I suppose you're right. We--

Shawn bursts through the door, chest heaving.

SHAWN

I'm here... to audition... for
Chuckle Plus.

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

I think this will be better than
Family Feud.

EVERETT

Unlikely, but okay. 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

(MORE)

SHAWN (CONT'D)

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
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

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
 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.

VIC

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.

DANNY

Way to go!

MEL

I knew you could do it.

CASEY

Good job, kid.

VIC

Well, I guess... the best. Comedian. Won. But this isn't over.

SHAWN

I hope not.

Vic storms off, sad and angry.

MEL

Well this is wonderful. We have to celebrate! When do you leave?

SHAWN

Tomorrow. They want me back tomorrow.

MEL

I guess we have to celebrate tonight then!

DANNY

Amazing. Incredible. Fabulous.

CASEY

I've been saving this...

Casey pulls out a Miller High Life Champagne Bottle.

MEL

Crack open that bubbly!

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 to Hollyville, 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 in
Cleveland?

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 here?

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. 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

That's one thing about Cleveland
 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

Shawn looks shocked, but Casey reassures them.

CASEY (CONT'D)

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 Cleveland
 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've come and
 gone
 That's one thing about Cleveland
 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. 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

Man, I forgot how obnoxiously nice
everyone is here.

Vic enters.

SHAWN (CONT'D)

Well, almost everyone.

Shawn nods respectfully.

SHAWN (CONT'D)

Vic.

VIC

Shawn.

Danny enters.

DANNY

Well, well, well, if it isn't the
EGO kid.

SHAWN

I'll nab that Tony one day. Full
EGOT status, coming soon.

DANNY

I'm sure you will.

SHAWN

It's the hardest one.

DANNY

Sure, the hardest one.

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 (REPRISE)

KIERAN

*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.

KIERAN (CONT'D)

*Livin' the High Life on Lorain
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