

CALLBACK

Written by

Joseph S. Maxwell

ACT ONE

1 INT. COMEDY THEATER STAGE - NIGHT

1

The stage is set up for a normal improv show. MEL (late 30s, flustered) takes the stage. SHAWN (mid 20s, bright-eyed), DANNY (early 30s, chill), VIC (early 20s, focused), CASEY (early 40s, 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 improv 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]

SONG 1: ALT COMEDY THEATER

Mel, the host of the show, stands on stage and addresses the audience. Shawn stands in front of the curtain by the lobby door (stage left), along with Casey - they should both be visible to the real audience. Vic and Danny are off-stage by the bathrooms (stage right). Kieran is "in the audience" at a table by the bathrooms (stage right).

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 raises the bottle. Mel looks over and acknowledges them.

MEL (CONT'D)

*Livin' the High Life on Lorain Avenue
Every weekend night and sometimes weeknights too*

Casey walks quickly to stage right by the bathrooms. Shawn steps in front of the stage. Mel mimes a continued speech introducing the improv group.

SHAWN

*It's pretty comfortable here
Drinkin' the champagne of beers*

Shawn begins to ascend the stage, followed by Vic and Danny. They put their beer down somewhere.

SHAWN (CONT'D)

*Warm smiles on all the faces you see
But there's somewhere else you'd rather be*

Kieran and Casey sing from the wings - Shawn, Vic, Danny, and Mel sing from the stage.

ENSEMBLE

*Alt comedy theater
In a mid-size rust-belt city*

MEL

*Guaranteed at least a couple of laughs
And only sometimes out of pity*

ENSEMBLE

*Alt comedy theater
Sit back and enjoy the show*

VIC

*It's an intimate audience experience
You're probably here to see someone you know*

DANNY

Okay, can I get a suggestion of
(MORE)

DANNY (CONT'D)
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. Lots of object work - it's a Chuck E. Cheese prom. This continues until the Ensemble bridge. Kieran moves from the audience to the side of the stage (stage right), and Mel moves to the other side (stage left). Kieran watches the show while turning to the real audience to deliver the lines.

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

Mel steps forward in front of the stage (stage left) and delivers the lines to the audience.

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

Casey, from stage right, walks across the front of the stage while singing. They plant for the majority of the line deliveries.

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*

Casey begins to head toward the lobby door, and actually leaves.

CASEY (CONT'D)
If I hear them laughing through the door!

Casey slams the door in time with the song.

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

Vic and Shawn perform improv behind Danny while Danny delivers their lines.

DANNY

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

Vic and Danny perform improv behind Shawn while Shawn delivers their lines.

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*

Mel, Kieran, and Casey get on stage, and the whole group sings the final chorus.

ENSEMBLE

*Alt comedy theater
All our best bits on display
Here is where we live and we love, and we...*

Each singer sustains the "away" until the end, and then they all shout "BLACKOUT!" in time with the conclusion of the song.

SHAWN

Laugh our lives away!

MEL

Away!

DANNY

Away!

VIC

Away!

CASEY & KIERAN

Away!

... 2, 3, 4-

ENSEMBLE

Blackout!

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

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!*

Shawn and Danny are up on stage while the rest of the group sticks around on the sides. The lights change to indicate that the show has ended.

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. Though I don't think you're supposed to do that.

SHAWN
Hey, I know the rules, and therefore, I can break them. Besides, I know I'm better than you at least.

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.

Danny mimes choking someone with a silly string garrote.

MEL

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

Danny does a Godfather face and gestures Italianly.

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, mhm.

MEL

You didn't really mention being an
octopus, or being at the tailor. You
mostly 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 with improv, so I can judge you
live on stage.

SHAWN

Yes! I could finally prove I'm 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

(snidely)

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--

Kieran interrupts Shawn, looking off into the distance
dramatically.

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. You're all so wonderful.

SHAWN

I'm going to get another drink.

Casey peeks through the lobby door.

CASEY

Bar's closing!

DANNY

Aw, come on, Casey - one more?

CASEY

I am so tired. I have to go home.

SHAWN

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

DANNY

Sixth City Backgammon?

SHAWN

Sure.

DANNY

(to Mel)

Sixth City Backgammon?

(to Kieran)

Sixth City Backgammon?

MEL

I've gotta get back to my dog.

KIERAN

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. There's a "Sixth City Backgammon" sign.

SHAWN

Why is every bar in Cleveland like this now?

DANNY

I like it. Backgammon is fun.

SHAWN

I think it's time to go home.

DANNY

Booooo.

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 care so much about being "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 their head because it's irrelevant where they got the promo code.

DANNY
Did you use it?

SHAWN
Yeah, yeah. 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
(MORE)

DANNY (CONT'D)
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 then somehow gain five
hundred thousand Instagram followers
overnight?

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]

SONG 2: THE BEST OF ALL TIME

Shawn sings to Danny, but also to their imagined fans. Danny reacts skeptically to what Shawn is saying. Jesse, Phyllis, Everett and Tina are in the wings behind the curtains for this. Shawn addresses the audience, starry-eyed as they imagine this vast landscape of pure adoration.

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 pretends to be their fans, a different fan for each line.

SHAWN (CONT'D)

*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 turns to Danny, pointing at them almost angrily.

SHAWN (CONT'D)

*I don't want them to love me
Unconditionally
I want rigid conditions
That I easily meet*

Shawn turns to the audience and back to the fantasy.

SHAWN (CONT'D)

*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*

Shawn reveals a sadness for the first time.

SHAWN (CONT'D)

*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 quiets down a bit.

SHAWN (CONT'D)

*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 (Jesse, Everett, Phyllis, Tina) appear from behind the curtains in the wings, and sing along with Shawn. This builds in momentum.

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*

The disembodied heads disappear.

SHAWN (CONT'D)

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

A moment of pause. Shawn weeps and chuckles, crumbling to the floor. Danny squats down and hugs them. Shawn rests their head on Danny's shoulder.

SHAWN

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

DANNY

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

Danny looks off into the distance. 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, tik tok teen) 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 nods.

PHYLLIS

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 worse than usual. We might not make it to Q4.

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?? But I love that show! HotMilkGirllie394 even reposted a clip of it on TikTok!

PHYLLIS

Even HotMilkGirllie394's millions of followers aren't enough to save us this time.

JESSE

What about our legacy shows?

PHYLLIS

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

JESSE

Oh no! Phyllis, that show was your baby.

PHYLLIS

I know, Jesse. And it was...

(wistful)

captivating, subversive, even beautiful when it started... but times have changed.

JESSE

It's true. My generation is completely times-have-changed pilled.

PHYLLIS

Whatever that means, Everett is desperate to tap into it. We need something new. They're sending the casting directors all over... Pittsburgh, Saint Louis, Quebec...

JESSE

And where are we going?

PHYLLIS

Well...

(deep sigh)

We're going to Cleveland.

JESSE

Cleveland, OHIO?

PHYLLIS

It's not my first choice, 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! There's someone out there just waiting to be discovered. Someone who can save our whole business!

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
(MORE)

PHYLLIS (CONT'D)
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]

SONG 3: CLEVELAND

Phyllis starts singing to Cleveland (looking off yonder).
Phyllis is also presenting a PowerPoint - holding a
clicker and flipping through slides.

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

Phyllis turns to Jesse, with severe determination.

PHYLLIS (CONT'D)

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

Jesse starts singing with Phyllis.

PHYLLIS & JESSE

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 and Phyllis sing to each other.

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...*

Phyllis steps forward and gets on their knees - a clear show of desperation.

PHYLLIS (CONT'D)

*Cleveland
Give me someone to believe in
Someone in whom to believe
Someone hiding up your sleeve
Save us from fiscal devastation*

Phyllis stands back up, and Jesse joins in the song.

PHYLLIS & JESSE

*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*

Key change.

PHYLLIS & JESSE (CONT'D)

*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*

Jesse drops out.

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.

DANNY
 Four.

Danny does something really stupid, and starts to giggle.

SHAWN
 (perplexed)
 Five?

Danny tries (and fails) to stifle laughter.

DANNY
 Seven!

Danny cannot hold in the laughter and fully breaks.

MEL
 (exasperated)
 Seriously, this is improv four. No breaking! And you didn't even say the right number! You're acting like level one up there. Danny, swap with Vic. Can I get a location?

DANNY
 A drawing room.

MEL
 Okay, a... "drawing" room.

Vic goes up and Danny sits down to watch. Shawn and Vic act out an intense, dark, quick scene using numbers in place of dialogue. It culminates with Vic stabbing Shawn in the back.

VIC
 One.

SHAWN
 Two.

VIC
 Three.

SHAWN
Four.

VIC
Five!

SHAWN
Six!

Vic faces Shawn with their back to the audience.

VIC
Seven!

MEL
Remember to cheat out.

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

SHAWN
Eight!

VIC
Nine.

Vic stabs Shawn in the back.

SHAWN
(through tears)
Ten.

Shawn falls over fake dead, and Vic sits there still. After a second, Mel starts clapping weakly, and Danny sort of does too.

MEL
Thank you, thank you.

Mel checks their watch.

MEL
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
Why does Vic end up killing you in like every scene you guys do?

SHAWN
Hmm. I don't know!

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

MEL

One last thing: someone from Chuckle Plus is going to be here this weekend holding 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 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.

VIC

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 even remotely 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 put up that
says "AUDITIONS THIS WEEKEND"?

SHAWN

Yes. I've gotta get ready. 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]

SONG 4: THIS COULD BE IT

This is a montage song with a lot of action. Shawn, Vic, Danny, and Kieran are all on stage the whole time, doing various things. It starts with each character pacing and thinking, quietly but frenetically.

SHAWN (whispered)
This could be it

KIERAN (whispered)
This could be it

VIC (whispered)
This could be it

DANNY (whispered)
This could be it

SHAWN (whispered)
This could be it

Shawn steps forward as the rest of the characters drift into the background. Kieran, Vic, and Danny start preparing for the audition.

KIERAN (whispered)
This could be it

VIC (whispered)
This could be it

DANNY (whispered)
This could be it

Shawn starts singing with confidence and determination.

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*

Shawn sings the last line nervously.

SHAWN (CONT'D)
I hope they'll think that I'm the best

Vic steps forward, and Shawn steps back, pulling out a notebook and starting to write.

DANNY & KIERAN
This could be it

VIC
I've got a character up here

Vic points at their head.

VIC (CONT'D)

*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*

Everyone faces the audience and sings.

DANNY & KIERAN

This could be it

VIC

Been waiting my whole life for something like this

SHAWN

Somebody to tell me this is why you exist

VIC

This is my shot, and I know I can't miss

DANNY & KIERAN

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

SHAWN & VIC

This could be it

Shawn, Vic, and Kieran go back to preparing - acting things out, practicing character bits, etc.

DANNY

*I've got some accents sure to please
Oui mon fran-sez, eel-ay tray bien!
I say ze french, zey smell like cheese
But it's cool 'cause I'm a quarter french*

SHAWN & VIC

This could be it

Shawn, Vic, and Danny are continuing to prepare - but turn to face the audience whenever they whisper their ensemble lines.

KIERAN

I've got a notebook full of bits

Kieran pulls out a little notebook.

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

Kieran punches the air in front of them.

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

KIERAN
It's strong enough to knock 'em 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

Vic, Kieran, and Danny fade into the background. Shawn steps forward. A spotlight shines on Shawn (first spotlight of the show!)

SHAWN (CONT'D)
And what if this is it?
What if this is all there is?
I think this might be it

Shawn steps back, everyone else steps forward.

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.

(MORE)

SHAWN
*They said I was gifted
 when I was a kid / then
 after 14 I don't know what
 I did / I wanna be great, I
 don't wanna be mid*

DANNY & KIERAN
*Been waiting my whole life
 for something like this /
 somebody to tell me this is
 why I exist / this is my
 shot and I know I can't
 miss*

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 continue their preparations.

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.

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

Must be because there's 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, and a FREE top-of-the-line art 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. You know, Lake Erie might be a freshwater lake, but the people of Cleveland...

(back to chipper)

They're salt 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

It's hard to keep my expectations high.

Phyllis rubs their forehead to show that they are 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 and Danny 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 their 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 their little 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 insz-jullt-tree!

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. Vic and Shawn converse with each other by the wings. Kieran continues to tell jokes, without actually speaking. They also start putting on a pair of sunglasses and take out a mobility cane.

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

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

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

Phyllis and Jesse cringe.

SHAWN
Okay, that one was bad.

Kieran just stands there for a moment.

VIC
What are they doing now? Why are
they just standing there?

PHYLLIS
Is... that all?

KIERAN
Oh, yes, sorry!

Kieran runs off-stage. Phyllis starts writing down some
notes.

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

DANNY
Oh come on. They were 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.

Danny does a salute. 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.

Vic steps into character, and grabs the mic.

VIC (CONT'D)
(Canadianly)
Hey there, hoser. I'm gonna make you
an offer you can't refuse, eh? No
worries if you want to refuse it
though.

The backing track starts playing. Phyllis and Jesse smile. Vic continues to perform the "Canadian Gangster" character but without sound while the ensemble repeats the "comedy's a competition" line for the first four times. Vic breaks out of the character to start rapping. The lighting changes as well to indicate that this is not literally what Vic is saying.

[SONG 5: COMEDY'S A COMPETITION]

SONG 5: COMEDY'S A COMPETITION

Vic has the mic for this, which is necessary because part of the song has **autotune**. Phyllis and Jesse are behind a table on the side of the stage, watching Vic perform the whole time. Vic cheats out and performs for the audience. Phyllis, Jesse, and other characters in the wings say the Ensemble parts - just the "Comedy's a competition" line.

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*

VIC & ENSEMBLE

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

Ensemble continues saying "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')*

VIC (CONT'D)

*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 iller killer than the
bubonic*

Plague

Vic pauses, seemingly rethinking. The **autotune** turns on. Vic sings oohs and ahhs into the microphone.

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. The **autotune** turns off.

VIC (CONT'D)

Just kiddin'

Ensemble continues saying the "Comedy's a competition" line.

VIC

*Comedy's a competition
And I'm winnin'
Comedy's a competition
Since the beginnin'*

*Comedy's a competition
I keep 'em grinnin'
Comedy's a competition
Never lost, I'm always 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'
Comedy's a competition*

The ensemble cuts out for the last line.

VIC (CONT'D)

And I'm winnin'

Vic bows. 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. Improv is always good.
Let's hear it.

Shawn mimes moose antlers and, in a very serious and unsilly manner, becomes the character of a Mafia Moose. Phyllis and Jesse start to laugh. The music begins, and Shawn breaks out of the Mafia Moose character to start singing. The lighting changes as well to indicate that this is not literally what Shawn is saying.

[SONG 6: COMEDY'S A COMPETITION (REPRISE)]

SONG 6: COMEDY'S A COMPETITION (REPRISE)

Shawn has the mic - necessary because it's **autotuned**.
Phyllis and Jesse are still behind the table. There are
notebooks on the table. Shawn cheats out to perform for
the audience. The ensemble is again Phyllis and Jesse and
anyone from the wings, mostly just saying the word
"Comedy" this time.

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*

Ensemble says "comedy" along with Shawn.

SHAWN (CONT'D)

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

*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*

Ensemble once again says "comedy" with Shawn.

SHAWN (CONT'D)

*Is this still comedy?
Yeah, it's just reprehensible comedy
It's just inaccessible comedy
Deeply personal comedy
You see*

I don't wanna compete, I just wanna connect

ENSEMBLE

I don't wanna compete, I just wanna connect

SHAWN

I don't wanna compete, I just wanna connect

ENSEMBLE

I don't wanna compete, I just wanna connect

SHAWN

I don't wanna compete, I just wanna connect

ENSEMBLE

I don't wanna compete, I just wanna connect

SHAWN

I don't wanna compete, I just wanna connect

ENSEMBLE

I don't wanna compete, I just wanna connect

PHYLLIS

I just wanna 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

Shawn hands the mic to Phyllis.

PHYLLIS (CONT'D)

*For me, it's been reduced to nothing more
I used to laugh with reckless abandon
Now I'm taking notes and keeping score*

Phyllis throws the notebooks to the floor, and steps out from behind the table to sing to the audience.

PHYLLIS (CONT'D)

*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...*

The ensemble (Shawn, Jesse, and people in the wings) sing "comedy" in the background.

PHYLLIS (CONT'D)

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

As Shawn sings again, Phyllis repeats the previous lines and the rest of the ensemble sings "comedy."

SHAWN

*Oh it's comedy
I wanna touch the deeply absurd*
(MORE)

SHAWN (CONT'D)
Doing comedy
Like no one's ever heard

Oh it's comedy
To be alive with love and mirth
I need comedy
Your laughter's my self-worth

Just Shawn for the last line.

SHAWN (CONT'D)
Oh, comedy

Shawn bows. Phyllis is back in their seat and applauds.

JESSE
 Wow. I have never seen Phyllis react
 like that to a performance.

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, their 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.

Kieran pulls out their phone and begins to check it.

CASEY

As long as you don't use mine.

Kieran's eyes widen.

KIERAN

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

MEL

And?

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.

CASEY
Oof. I remember when I used to feel
things.

MEL
(pensive)
Yeah.
(over it)
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
You guys 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!

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

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

Danny checks their phone as well, and sees that they also
got a callback.

DANNY
Why not? I'll be there. Look, I got
one too!

Danny shows Shawn their phone.

SHAWN
Yay! But, 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. What happened to "I want to
be the very best like no one ever
was?"

SHAWN
But what if...
(sigh)
what if I can never be the best?
What if it all goes wrong?

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. You owe it to yourself to try.

Shawn thinks for a moment.

SHAWN

You're right. I'm gonna do it.

DANNY

Yeah!

Shawn and Danny high five.

7 EXT. STREET OUTSIDE THE THEATER - DAY

7

Vic is alone, pacing back and forth outside the theater, 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 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.

VIC (CONT'D)

Shawn! Hey buddy.

SHAWN

Hey Vic. What are you doing out here? We're all hanging out inside.

VIC

Oh, you know me. Just uh... here early for my show. Punctuality! My only vice.

SHAWN

Oh yeah. Mine's ice cream.

VIC

Hahaha, you're so funny.

SHAWN

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

VIC

Oh, uh, yeah! I did get one. And, you...?

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 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 7: BAD BAD BADDIE]

SONG 7: BAD BAD BADDIE

Vic is alone on stage for this. There are some tempo changes. Also, Vic should be snapping during the verses - the ensemble can join that as well.

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*

Start speeding up.

VIC (CONT'D)

*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 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*

This part is the same tempo but the singing is slower, less frantic, more deliberate. Snapping is on the downbeat for this part, but switches back to the syncopated snaps for the final chorus.

VIC (CONT'D)

*I refuse to lose
Under any circumstance
I'll eliminate each threat
No one else will stand a chance*

Switch back to the syncopated snaps.

*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
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)

(spoken)

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!

(singing)

*I'm a bad, bad, bad, bad baddie! 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. I.D. and boarding pass.

SHAWN

Sure thing!

Shawn takes out their I.D. 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--

TINA

I'm sorry. Next!

SHAWN

Wait, can I -- get another ticket?

TINA

You can try customer service. But good luck finding another flight to L.A.X. this weekend.

SHAWN

Okay, can you--

TINA

Next!

SHAWN

No, no, this cannot be happening. I HAVE to be there today, I--

TINA

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

Shawn's frustration bubbles over. Midwest emo music begins part way through their rant. Tina just looks at Shawn uncaringly the whole time.

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-- every time I get my hopes up, and think I am worthy of anything good in my life, there's always something reminding me that I don't deserve anything good-- 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? I have been trying so hard, and I just--

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

[SONG 8: I'M SO TIRED]

SONG 8: I'M SO TIRED

Shawn sings to Tina, and also to the universe.

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*

SHAWN & TINA

*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, powerful but childish), 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? Cleveland has talent.

PHYLLIS
You were right, Everett. 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.

Vic departs. Phyllis is still a little distraught.

EVERETT
Just send in the next one.

Jesse walks over to stage right, and calls through the door.

JESSE
Alright, next up! Blake, from Saint Louis.

EVERETT
Just "Blake"?

JESSE
All it says is "Blake".

BLAKE (early 20s, extremely handsome) enters on all fours, wearing dog ears.

JESSE (CONT'D)
Okay, just slate your...

BLAKE
Woof! Woof!

Blake dances around as a dog a little bit, then gets up on two legs - becoming the character of dog owner. They wag their finger sternly at the dog character. They then get back down on all fours and do the dog thing again.

EVERETT
Alright, I think we've seen enough.

JESSE
You can go now.

Blake wimpers sadly, then crawls off the stage (still in dog character).

EVERETT
Oof. That one was rough.

PHYLLIS
I don't know, I think they had a
unique perspective, and they--

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.
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.

PHYLLIS
They were up there doing their best.
How can we reduce a human being to
criteria like that?

EVERETT
That's like our whole thing. You've
been doing it for years!

PHYLLIS
I know, but...

EVERETT
That's showbiz, baby.

PHYLLIS
That's showbiz.

[SONG 9: THAT'S SHOWBIZ]

SONG 9: THAT'S SHOWBIZ

Phyllis begins to sing to the audience. Theoretically, this is most "show-y" number of the show.

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 or something.

PHYLLIS (CONT'D)

*We crush their aspirations into smithereens
That's showbiz*

When the bass drops, the lights go crazy. Phyllis does jazz hands and other dramatic showy gestures. There are sequins perhaps.

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 wanna 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!

Everyone harmonizes on the last note to form a triad chord.

ENSEMBLE
That's showbiz

Fade out.

10 INT. COMEDY THEATER LOBBY - DAY

10

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

DANNY
Shawny! Back from L.A. already? I
was just getting ready to go.

SHAWN
I never left.

DANNY
What happened?

SHAWN
My plane ticket was cancelled
somehow.

DANNY
Can you reschedule? Get another
flight?

SHAWN
No flights. No rescheduling. This is
it.

Shawn sighs and looks down. They almost start to cry.
There is a moment of pause as Danny gathers their
thoughts.

DANNY
No.

Shawn looks up at Danny.

DANNY (CONT'D)
This is NOT it. Take mine.

SHAWN
What? 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...

SHAWN
I don't deserve this.

DANNY
You do. I know you.

SHAWN
Yeah, I know you too, we've been
friends for a while now, I mean--

DANNY
No, listen. I know you.

SHAWN
You-- what? I--

DANNY
I know you. What you did at that
audition... you have to show them
what I've seen.

SHAWN
Even if I did... they're not gonna
like me enough.

Danny pauses for a moment, swallows their frustration, and leads into the song with intense emotion -- anger & adoration.

[SONG 10: THE BEST OF ALL TIME (REPRISE)]

SONG 10: THE BEST OF ALL TIME (REPRISE)

Danny sings directly to Shawn.

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 looks at Danny expectantly.

DANNY (CONT'D)

Now go!

Shawn nods, kisses Danny on the cheek, and runs off.

11 INT. HOLLYWOOD OFFICE - DAY

11

It's the end of the day. Everett, Phyllis, and Jesse are starting to pack up.

EVERETT

We should just call it a day. No use waiting.

PHYLLIS

I suppose you're right. We--

Shawn bursts through the door.

SHAWN

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

Everett looks down at the folder in front of them.

EVERETT

Are you Danny? You don't look like...

PHYLLIS

No, this is Shawn.

SHAWN

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

EVERETT
I'm sorry, 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 and slate with your
(MORE)

JESSE (CONT'D)

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've Got The
Giggles 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, 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

(MORE)

SHAWN (CONT'D)

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
And Also The Priest Is Starting To
Look Pretty Angry 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 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 And He Thinks About All The
Other Comedians They've Already Seen
Who Are Probably Funnier And More
Marketable Than Him, And He Knows He
Might Not Be Good Enough, But He
Realizes That He's... Content,
Because He's Not Doing This For
Them, He's Doing It For Himself, And
His Friends, And All He Really Wants
To Do Is Put This On Stage, To Give
People A Chance To See It, To Make
Them Understand, To Make... Them...

[SONG 11: LAUGH & LIVE & LOVE]

SONG 11: LIVE & LAUGH & LOVE

Shawn sings to the audience - the real audience. Phyllis, Jesse, and Everett sit quietly and watch.

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 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"

Right after Shawn finishes singing, Jesse marks with the clapboard thing.

JESSE

Marker.

The music continues. Shawn looks down for a second, then mimes being trapped in a box in a funny but serious way. The music concludes, and Shawn steps out of character. Everett stands up and looks at Phyllis.

12 INT. COMEDY THEATER STAGE - NIGHT

12

Transition to ten years later. There could be some sort of interlude that indicates time passing and things happening. There is a calendar that says the year "2035" 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! It's only been what, ten
years since I moved to L.A., right?

Kieran thinks for a moment.

KIERAN

I guess it has. I've been a fan of
yours ever since your Chuckle Plus
debut. *Melonchol-medy* is still one
of my favorite shows.

SHAWN

Aww, thanks. So, what, am I here
early? Where is everybody?

KIERAN

They'll be here. You know, 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 ever.

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, have you heard from Vic at all?

CASEY
Vic? They are SO cancelled. Which
means they host a very successful
stand-up podcast.

SHAWN

Well, all the best to 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 just pitched a new show with Phyllis 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.
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 12: ALT COMEDY THEATER (REPRISE)]

SONG 12: ALT COMEDY THEATER (REPRISE)

This song begins the same way the opener does, with just one person on stage (though it is Kieran this time). Everyone else should be close to the stage.

KIERAN

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

Just off-stage but visible, Casey hands a Miller High Life to Shawn.

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.

EVERYBODY

*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*

EVERYBODY

*Alt comedy theater
Live, love, and laughing, we agree*

SHAWN

*The only place you really wanna be
If you're anything like me!*

DANNY

Like me!

CASEY

Like me!

KIERAN

Like me!

ALL THE REST
Like me!

2, 3, 4...

EVERYBODY
CALLBACK!

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

THE END