

WHIPLASH

by

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BLACK...

We hear a HIT. A drumstick against a drum head. Crisp, sharp.

Then a second hit. Then a third and a fourth. The hits growing so fast they start to blur together. Like gunfire...

1 **INT. NASSAU BAND REHEARSAL STUDIO - GEHRING HALL - NIGHT** 1

A cavernous space. Sound-proofed walls. And in the center, a DRUM SET. Seated at it, in a sweat-marked white T, eyes zeroed on his single-stroke roll, is ANDREW NEIMAN.

He's 19, slight, honors-student-skinny -- except for his arms, which have been built from years and years of drumming.

Suddenly -- a MAN enters the practice room. Stopping, rising--

ANDREW

Sorry... I'm -- I'm sorry--

MAN

It's ok. Stay there.

The MAN steps forward, removes his coat. He's tall. Late fifties. Black T-shirt, black slacks, black shoes. We'll know him as FLETCHER.

The room is silent now. And then, softly, as he's one of those people whose whisper can scare the crap out of you--

FLETCHER

What's your name?

ANDREW

Andrew Neiman, sir.

(It's pronounced "Nayman".)

FLETCHER

What year are you?

ANDREW

I'm a first-year, sir.

FLETCHER

You know who I am?

ANDREW

Yes...

FLETCHER

You know what I do?

ANDREW

Yes...

FLETCHER

So you know I'm looking for players.

ANDREW

Yes...

FLETCHER

Then why did you stop playing?

Beat. Andrew nods, smiles. He gets it. Summons up all his remaining energy and resumes playing, trying to really show off this time. Rolls, fills, speedy stick-work. He finishes.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Did I say to start playing again?

Andrew looks at him.

ANDREW

I thought--

(then, blanching,)

I'm sorry, I misun--

FLETCHER

I asked you why you stopped playing. Your version of an answer was to turn into a wind-up drummer monkey.

ANDREW

I'm sorry -- I--I stopped playing becau--

FLETCHER

Show me your rudiments.

Andrew nods. Plays one rudiment after another: double-stroke roll, paradiddle, ratamacue, flam, flamadiddle.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Uh-huh. Double-time swing.

Fletcher begins clapping his hand in time. Fast. Andrew plays.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

No. Double-time. Double it. Bop-bop-bop-bop-bop-bop-bop-bop-bop-bop.

Andrew tries doubling the tempo. But he can't. Fletcher STOPS CLAPPING. The sign of death.

Andrew keeps playing, eyes shut... Then -- he hears the door CLOSE. He stops, and looks up. Fletcher has left the room.

A moment later -- the door OPENS. It's Fletcher. Andrew's eyes widen. Maybe it's not over...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Woopsy-daisy. Forgot my coat.

Fletcher grabs it, steps back out, CLOSES the door. Andrew stares ahead, alone again at the drums -- and totally deflated.

It's over.

WIDE SHOT of the band room as Andrew slowly rises. A title card:

Shaffer Conservatory of Music
Fall Semester

2 **EXT. NEW YORK STREET - SHAFFER CONSERVATORY - NIGHT** 2

Andrew exits, hurries off. Pasted onto his overloaded backpack are patches, buttons, names: *Krupa. Roach. Buddy Rich...*

The buildings of midtown New York loom over him like giants -- immense, forbidding...

3 **INT. MOVIE THEATER - LOBBY - NIGHT** 3

A quiet two-screen theater. Andrew buys concessions. The GIRL at the counter is about his age. She's pretty, but doesn't really know it. More to the point, she doesn't seem to care. Her name is NICOLE.

NICOLE
Swedish fish?

ANDREW
Nah, not this time, thanks...

Andrew and Nicole exchange smiles. He takes his items -- popcorn, Raisinets, two sodas -- and heads off. Peers back at Nicole. She's staring into space. She looks suddenly lonely.

Andrew takes in the sight. You can tell he's attracted to her -- but he's too nervous to do anything. A beat later, he enters the theater.

4 **INT. MOVIE THEATER - MOMENTS LATER** 4

Andrew spots a 53-year-old man seated near the front. This is his dad -- JIM. Mild-mannered, soft-spoken, average in every respect. Has the eyes of a former dreamer.

A smile between the two of them. Andrew hands his dad the Raisinets, hands him the drink. Routine. The movie hasn't started yet. As they exchange items--

JIM
You ok?

ANDREW
Sure...

A beat.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
He had me play today.

JIM
And?

Andrew shrugs. It's clear what that means.

JIM (CONT'D)
You still have other options.

ANDREW
What do you mean?

JIM
It's good to be open-minded. When I was your age I thought I'd have a book deal at 23. Then that changed to 30. Then 40.

ANDREW
Right... And that didn't upset you?

Jim shrugs, keeps his eyes down. He has a tendency to look down when talking. The lights dim. The previews begin.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
I mean, it has to do something to you.

JIM
(another shrug)
I don't know. Why? It's just life.
(pause)
There's other things to care about.
Friends. Romance...

Andrew takes it in. Especially the last part.

JIM (CONT'D)
At my age you get perspective.

ANDREW
I don't want perspective.

Jim smiles. A moment.

Just then a MOVIEGOER squeezes into the row to head to a seat further down -- and bumps against Jim and his bucket of popcorn.

JIM NEYMAN

Sorry.

The Moviegoer doesn't say a word. Andrew watches. Takes it in.

5

OMITTED

5

6

INT. DORMITORY - HALLWAY - HOURS LATER

6

Rusty elevator doors squeak open. Andrew steps out -- into a grimy, green-walled hallway.

Dim lights, loud MUSIC blaring from behind a door. A thudding party beat...

At the end of the hall -- where the music is coming from -- a few PARTYGOERS mingle by a door. The door opens. A YOUNG MAN hands a SECOND YOUNG MAN a wad of cash in exchange for a Zip-lock bag of PILLS. The SECOND YOUNG MAN eyes Andrew.

Andrew turns away, heads left -- to his own door. Hurriedly opens it and slips inside.

7

INT. DORMITORY - ANDREW'S ROOM - NIGHT

7

A single. Drumsticks and drum pads scattered, biographies of Bach and Coltrane on the shelf, posters of Louis Armstrong and Charlie Parker on the walls. A TV is on, some sort of music documentary. Andrew watches from his bed -- as, over **OLD AUDIO OF DRUMMING** and old stills of a boy at a drum set --

NARRATOR (V.O.)

By the age of ten, Traps the Boy Wonder was wowing crowds all over America. By his teens, Buddy Rich was well on his way to becoming the stuff of legend.

TALKING HEAD #1

Like any truly great player, Buddy seemed to have been born with music in his blood. He grasped it intuitively, in a way you and I just can't.

TALKING HEAD #2

You check out the old stuff, man. You look at those movies when he was a kid, his arms...

Beat. Andrew takes it all in -- especially these words:

TALKING HEAD #2 (O.S.) (CONT'D)

You just can't teach that. That kind of genius.

(pause)

You either got it or you don't.

Andrew turns off the TV. We hear the party beat continuing outside, muffled. He leans back and switches off his light.

WE FADE OUT.

8

INT. GEHRING HALL - NASSAU BAND ROOM - DAY

8

The same room we saw Andrew practicing in at night -- only now it's full of musicians. Mostly male, mostly first- and second-years. This is NASSAU BAND, one of Shaffer's lower-level jazz ensembles. Because it's Shaffer, the players are still first-rate. A few third-years are here, too -- including a red-head drummer with the body of a linebacker. RYAN CONNOLLY.

Andrew looks up -- in time to see Ryan with a GIRL by the doorway. Ryan's girlfriend is gorgeous -- tall, all curves. Ryan lets his hand slide down her shoulder. Andrew watches...

The GIRL waves bye to Ryan as he heads in. He's all macho confidence.

TRUMPETER

My man Ry! Shit, how you feeling?

RYAN

Stitched up at last, dude.

TRUMPETER

Things were hurting with Neiman on the kit--

Ryan taps him to stop. Andrew is within earshot -- and has heard. Beat. Ryan moves over to Andrew, sits down at the set.

RYAN

You have a good weekend, bro?

ANDREW

Yeah. Definitely. Really good.

RYAN

Don't worry about Greg. He's a dick.

Andrew nods. Admires Ryan. Seems more diminutive now than ever.

RYAN (CONT'D)

You been practicing?

ANDREW

Yeah. All the time.

RYAN

My man.

Then -- the Nassau Band conductor appears: RON KRAMER.

MR. KRAMER

Morning, fellas. "Billie's In", bar 8.

Mr. Kramer CLAPS OFF in time -- and the band begins playing **FIRST NASSAU BAND REHEARSAL CHART**. Mid-tempo. Ryan's confident, in control. Andrew turns his pages, watches...

MR. KRAMER (CONT'D)

Nice, Ryan... Woah, trumpets.

TRUMPETER #2

Yeah, yeah - sorry about that one.

**

**

MR. KRAMER

Just brass again.

**

**

To Ryan's left, a whisper--

**

TRUMPETER

Ry...

Ryan turns. Visible as a silhouette through the frosted glass of the main door...is FLETCHER. Andrew turns and looks as well. Tenses up.

Fletcher lingers outside. Then he walks on. Ryan turns back to the Trumpeter.

RYAN

Not today.

9

INT. GEHRING HALL - NASSAU BAND ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

9

Rehearsal has ended. The MUSICIANS have just filed out -- except for Andrew, who's hanging back...

MR. KRAMER

Are you learning from Ryan?

ANDREW

Yeah... He's been great to me.

MR. KRAMER

Last week was a little overwhelming for you?

ANDREW

(is that a question?)

Yeah...

(then, hesitant,)

I wonder...what you think about my progress?

MR. KRAMER

Your progress?

ANDREW

I just... I'm...practicing hard and...

MR. KRAMER

Andrew -- you've got a good attitude. You
always arrive on time.

Andrew nods. Waiting.

MR. KRAMER (CONT'D)

Yeah. Ok?

ANDREW

(beat)

Ok... Do you think... I know Fletcher's looking for players...for Studio Band...

MR. KRAMER

Yeah, Andrew... Lincoln Center looks out for Fletcher's top players. If it weren't for Ryan's injury he'd have been in Studio Band last year. He's a natural player.

Andrew takes this in. Nods.

ANDREW

Ok.

MR. KRAMER

(this is awkward)

Look... I'm going to be candid. 90% of our players will never make it into the Lincoln Centers or the Collectives. The question is -- who's in that 10%?

A beat.

MR. KRAMER (CONT'D)

So I'd practice. You could start a rock band.

Andrew takes it in. The implication is clear.

He turns -- and glimpses a poster on the wall: a DRUMMER throwing a stick in the air mid-solo. Buff. Confident. The opposite of him.

ANDREW

I...I have one more question...

(Kramer looks at him)

...Do you know what the process for transferring is?

10 **OMITTED** 10

11 **INT. GEHRING HALL - BASEMENT HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS** 11

Andrew walks down a hallway. A piece of paper in his hand.
It's a TRANSFER APPLICATION...

He notices as two attractive female students pass him. **

STUDENT #1 **

At least you didn't embarrass yourself
like what's-his-face. **

STUDENT #2 **

That was truly pathetic. **

As he continues walking, he hears music. Stops. Approaches. **
Looks.

11A **INT. GEHRING HALL - STUDIO BAND ROOM - CONTINUOUS** 11A

Through the pane of glass, Andrew can see a FULL ORCHESTRA.
Everyone looks older than in Nassau. More focused. All eyes
glued on Fletcher as he assumes his position...

Fletcher's right arm moves, just a hair, and the band starts:
fast, dazzling. Andrew watches -- in awe. The band's playing
STUDIO BAND EAVESDROP CHART, and the sound is so full, so
precise, so commanding. Nothing like Nassau.

And suddenly -- Fletcher TURNS AROUND. His eyes meet Andrew's.
Andrew ducks out of view -- shit --

-- and hurries away.

12 **INT. ANDREW'S PRACTICE ROOM - A FEW HOURS LATER** 12

Andrew practices like mad, trying to nail a double-time swing.
To his left a digital METRONOME blinks. The time set: 380.
Andrew stops. Resets the metronome. 390. Resumes playing.
Tries to keep up. Resets the metronome to 400. Can't keep up
at all now. Struggling, sweating, hands blistering, when --

CRAAACK. Andrew's right drumstick SNAPS IN HALF.

He stops. Spent. Looks at his hand, sweating and throbbing from
the blisters.

Looks back at the metronome. Still beeping away. He turns it off.

Glances up ahead at a poster -- of BUDDY RICH hunched over a drum

kit, mid-solo -- tacked to the wall.

Stares at the image. Then looks down -- at the PAPERWORK we saw earlier. The heading: "APPLICATION TO TRANSFER"...

12A

INT. ANDREW'S PRACTICE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

12A

A CD slides into a player. The title: "**BUDDY RICH: BIRDLAND**". Andrew skips ahead to the third track. Immediately, drums start. Another double-time swing. Only this one is insanely fast. Even faster than Andrew was going.

Andrew listens. Looks at his drum kit. Thinks. Makes a decision. Turns the CD off.

13

INT. MOVIE THEATER - LOBBY - AFTERNOON

13

The same movie theater as before. Andrew marches in. Has one goal and one goal only now.

Walks up to Nicole at the counter. Takes a deep breath, and--

ANDREW

Hey -- look -- I -- I don't know how to say this -- I see you in here all the time and -- I was just wondering --
(stops, collects himself,)
-- if you'd want to get a bite to eat with me.

Beat. Nicole just looks at him. Andrew can't believe he said what he just said. Feels like a creep. Instantly regrets it.

NICOLE

Please get away from me.

ANDREW

I'm so sorry, I -- I didn't mea--

NICOLE

I'm kidding.

She smiles. Beat. Andrew manages a nervous laugh.

NICOLE (CONT'D)

That your dad you always come in with?

ANDREW

(discombobulated, trying to keep up--)
Kind of bobs up and down when he walks?
That's him.

NICOLE

(laughs; then,)
Andrew, right? I'm Nicole.

ANDREW

Nice to meet you, Nicole...

NICOLE

Monday I get off at seven.

ANDREW

Monday. Ok. Great. I'll be here Monday.

A moment -- an awkward silence -- then Andrew turns -- and, in a daze, realizing what's just happened, his spirits suddenly starting to soar -- he glides off.

14 **INT. GEHRING HALL - LOBBY OUTSIDE DEAN'S OFFICE - DAY** 14

The next morning. Andrew, still riding high, is seated in a lobby outside the DEAN'S OFFICE. In his hand -- a FILLED-OUT TRANSFER APPLICATION.

ASSISTANT

Andrew Neiman?

(Andrew turns)

Dr. Fletcher would like to see you.

ANDREW

Oh. Ok...

Andrew's thoughts are elsewhere. Distracted -- not sure what this is about but doesn't really care -- he dutifully follows...

15 **INT. GEHRING HALL - FLETCHER'S OFFICE - DAY** 15

BLACK. We hear knocking.

FLETCHER (O.S.)

Come in.

A door opens -- the black gives way -- and we see, seated at a polished mahogany desk, Fletcher. He looks as imposing -- and as well-dressed -- as ever.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Hey, Andrew! I guess Sophie found you?

Andrew is taken aback. Fletcher remembers his first name?

ANDREW

Yes... I'm... I--

FLETCHER

Come in, come in, close the door...

Fletcher rises to greet Andrew, as Andrew closes the door.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

I like to chat with students coming in and going out. I hear you're going out?

Andrew looks surprised by the warmth in Fletcher's voice.

ANDREW

Yes. Transferring. To Columbia.

FLETCHER

Terrific. Columbia's a terrific school. Did something precipitate this?

ANDREW

I just decided to...
(not sure how to say it)
...to try out some other things. Not focus only on drums. You know?

Beat. Fletcher looks at him. Is he upset? Dismayed?

FLETCHER

Bravo.
(as he starts to head back toward his desk--)
Too many students clamp down on their "pursuits" like leeches.
(sits atop his desk)
Hobbies they picked up in their teens, and for what? Take a seat.

ANDREW

(starts heading to a couch)
Uh... Yeah.. I mean, I --
(passes by a "1st Place Prize" plaque on a coffee-table)
-- I was a little younger than my teens when I started drums, but--

FLETCHER

What were you then? Twelve?

ANDREW

Six.

FLETCHER

Oh. Well, kids start swimming when they're six, doesn't mean they're Michael Phelps. It's a hobby, never anything you consider going all the way with. Am I right?

ANDREW

Definitely. I mean -- well -- for a time, I thought I'd go all the way -- but, yeah--

FLETCHER

Well, kids want anything. I wanted to be a nanny. Thank God those I trusted talked me out of it. Good to listen to advice.

ANDREW

Yes, I've done that, you're right, it's--

FLETCHER

--good to get outside perspectives. So long as they don't have ulterior motives, I'd listen to what the people you trust tell you.

Andrew nods. But that phrase seems to echo. *Ulterior motives...*

Fletcher hops down from the desk and makes his way to the couch.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

So what's the passion you've chosen to pursue at Columbia, then?

ANDREW

(as Fletcher takes a seat next to him)

Oh... Well... I'm not...not really sure. It's not a specific thing I have in mind.

FLETCHER

Ah. Well that's ok. You're young. Most people, it takes years for them to find their calling. My father, for instance -- he had no idea what he wanted at your age. He tried a lot of things, a little bit of this, a little bit of that. Took him years before he realized his dream was insurance. That was his passion. The cubicle, the coffee breaks, the dry wall.

He lets this simmer for a beat. Then--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

I'm sure you'll find your calling as well.

He rises back up. A moment of silence.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

I guess that's it, then. Any questions?

He notices Andrew looking at a photo on the wall.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

That's Sean Casey. Graduated three years ago. Now he's first trumpet at Lincoln Center.

(heading toward the door--)

He came a long way.

ANDREW

(trying to collect his thoughts
as he rises)

...So -- are you -- still looking for
Studio Band players then...?

FLETCHER

(turning around to face Andrew)

Some, yes. But it's no cakewalk. Most kids here can't last. Laszlo Polgar, Hungarian psychologist, declares in 1967 that talent is all about conditioning. Says he can make his kids, whoever they are, the best in the world at something. What that something is he'll decide. He's a lousy chess player but he picks chess because it's objective. Goes around looking for a wife, finds one who agrees to his experiment. Starts having kids: Susan, Sofia and Judit. Gets them practicing before they can even talk. These weren't kids who were sitting and smelling the roses. These were kids who were going to leave an actual mark on the world. Who was the top female player by 1984? Susan. Who played the eight-straight-wins "Miracle of Rome" in 1989? Sofia. And who is universally considered the greatest female chess player of all time? Judit.

He takes a breath. Smiles. We linger for a second on Andrew, standing in place, taking it all in. Andrew's eyes quickly drift to the photos behind Fletcher -- the images on the walls... The Studio Band with Wynton Marsalis. Fletcher at the JVC Jazz Festival. One jazz luminary after another...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Which is why I'm sure you'll be great at whatever you set your mind to at Columbia.

(puts his arm around Andrew, starts
escorting him toward the door--)

It was a pleasure chatting, Andrew, now--

ANDREW

I just -- one thing first -- I mean -- I'm not entirely sure I'm transferring yet...

FLETCHER

Well that's worrisome. I'm sure you had good reason to make your decision.

ANDREW

I -- just might give it some more time--

FLETCHER

No need to do that. First instincts are best.

ANDREW

My first instinct...is not to transfer...

FLETCHER

I'm not sure your first instinct is right, then. Why don't you give it some more thought, and in the meantime...

(reaches the door; about to close--)

...make sure your double-time swing is ready by Monday's Nassau Band.

He closes the door. WE LINGER on Andrew. A spark has been lit.

16

INT. GEHRING HALL - NASSAU BAND ROOM - NIGHT

16

Andrew plays the drums with Nassau Band. Keeps missing hits. The song's **SECOND NASSAU BAND REHEARSAL CHART (ANDREW)**.

MR. KRAMER

Alright, that's... That's enough of that. Back to just the core, please.

MUSICIANS trade places. As Ryan trades with Andrew, he turns--

RYAN

Dude -- what've you been practicing?

Just then, the DOOR SWINGS OPEN -- and in steps FLETCHER. All eyes go to him. All talking ceases. Absolute silence, save for Fletcher's footsteps. Andrew waits. Heart pounding...

Fletcher arrives at the head of the band -- as Kramer silently and meekly retreats. Fletcher props up the music stand to his height, looks down at the sheet music, runs his finger down it to find the spot he wants... Andrew, like all the other players, is dead-still, eyes glued on Fletcher's every move...

Fletcher looks up, surveys the band with his eyes. Then, raising his hand--

FLETCHER

Down the line.

Instruments SNAP upward with military precision. No one wants to miss a beat.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Trumpets. Bars 36 to 38. One-two--

The TRUMPETER on the right starts playing. Five notes before Fletcher cuts him off with the slightest flick of his hand.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Next. One-two--
(the SECOND TRUMPETER misses
his cue)
Next. One-two--

Nothing. Fletcher looks up. There are no more trumpeters. He looks over at Kramer: "*Are you serious?*"

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Trombone. Bars 21 to 23. Four-and--
(TROMBONIST is scrambling to
find the right page)
Saxes. 48 to 50. "And" of one. And-one--
(ALTO SAX gets through one bar)
Next--

Before he even counts off, he notices the TENOR SAX'S fingering -- all he needs to know.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Drums.

We get a split-second glimpse of the TENOR SAXOPHONIST, wondering what just happened -- before we CUT to the drums, Ryan at the ready.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Double-time swing.

Ryan takes a breath. Fletcher CLAPS him off. Ryan plays.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Thank you. You. Behind.

Palms sweaty, Andrew takes Ryan's place. Trains his eyes on Fletcher's hands. Deep breath. Fletcher CLAPS, and Andrew begins -- trying to get the motion right, trying to stay in time--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Thank you. Bass. Five bars of "Donna
Lee".

We STAY ON Andrew as the BASSIST plays; Andrew slides off the drums and back to his regular seat.

FLETCHER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 (to Bassist)
 Thank you.

We CUT back to Fletcher. He looks over the band once more. We see the MUSICIANS' faces -- scared, but hopeful. Then--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
 Drums. Come with me.

Ryan's heart starts speeding. His excitement visible, he--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
 Other drums.

Ryan freezes. Andrew is stuck in place for a moment. Then, eyes wide -- *is this really happening?* -- he rises and approaches the doorway... There, Fletcher hands him an ORANGE PAPER SLIP.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
 Give this to Admin for rescheduling. We meet 6am to 1pm every day. Room B16.

And with that, he EXITS.

In a daze, Andrew drifts back toward the band. Kramer looks at him. Andrew answers the look with a defiant smile. Vindicated.

MR. KRAMER
 Ok fellas, let's...let's take it back from the top..

He claps off. The band plays **SECOND NASSAU BAND REHEARSAL CHART (RYAN)**. Andrew pretends not to notice Ryan's eyeing him in shock. Just sits down, lets it all settle.

And -- ever so slowly -- Andrew's face dissolves into a GRIN...

17

INT. PIZZERIA - NIGHT

17

NICOLE
 This is a nice place.

We're at a cheap pizzeria now. Nicole is seated, two half-eaten slices of pepperoni in front of her. An old jazz track is playing -- **PIZZERIA CHART**.

Seated across from Nicole is Andrew -- echoes of the earlier grin still on his face, a brightness in his eyes.

ANDREW
 Yeah, I come here a lot.

Beat. Then -- clicking back to reality -- *this is not a nice place, did I fuck up?* --

ANDREW (CONT'D)

They have good music, so I -- it's not just the food...

(points, re: the tune)

This is Jackie Hill, "When I Wake", July 17th, 1938, Bob Ellis on drums.

NICOLE

Are you trying to impress me?

ANDREW

No -- sorry -- I didn't mean -- they have like -- ten songs they loop through. They're always playing the same thing.

NICOLE

And you know the dates to all ten?

ANDREW

...Yeah.

Nicole smiles. A moment. Andrew fidgets. Nervous.

NICOLE

You know every time I saw you in the theater you always had your eyes pointed to the floor.

ANDREW

Really?

NICOLE

Like you were fascinated by the soda stains on the carpet.

ANDREW

My dad tells me I have a problem making eye contact.

NICOLE

My parents like to criticize me too. When I was growing up my mom told me my chin was too big and that that's why guys wouldn't like me. 'Cause my dad had cursed me with a big chin.

ANDREW

What?

NICOLE

Yeah, it's -- look --
(she turns, points her chin up)
It's Jay Leno.

Andrew laughs. Nicole looks prettier to him than ever.

NICOLE (CONT'D)

She keeps asking me if I have a boyfriend
yet, and then blames it on the chin.

ANDREW

She sounds insane.

NICOLE

She wanted to be an actress when she was
my age.

ANDREW

And you? What do you do?

NICOLE

Other than serving you popcorn?

ANDREW

What do you want to do with your life?

NICOLE

(thinks; wasn't prepared for
a question that direct)
I go to Fordham... I'm not sure...

ANDREW

What's your major?

NICOLE

I don't have one yet.

ANDREW

Well what did you come here to study?

NICOLE

I just came here for a general education.

ANDREW

Right, but you picked Fordham for a
reason. Why Fordham?

NICOLE

I applied to a bunch of schools, Fordham let me in. Why'd you pick Shaffer?

ANDREW

It's the best music school in the country.

Beat. Nicole shrugs.

NICOLE

Well Fordham was Fordham.

A moment.

NICOLE (CONT'D)

I don't love it there to be honest...

ANDREW

No?

NICOLE

I mean -- the people there... I don't think they like me. I'm from Arizona and -- I don't know, I think they see it in me.

A beat. Andrew thinks about this, then--

ANDREW

I don't like the people at Shaffer either. But I think it just takes time... Things change, you know.

NICOLE

I know.

(then, opening up more than she expected, more fragility in her voice now)

I feel homesick sometimes. You know? I hate how people in college pretend they never feel homesick. Or maybe I'm literally the only one, but... I don't think so.

A moment of silence. She looks at Andrew. He looks at her.

ANDREW

I know exactly how you feel.

(then, he smiles)

I still go to the movies with my dad.

Nicole nods. Smiles back. Andrew said it playfully, but she can tell he also meant it to reach out to her.

She scoots her legs. Her knee happens to touch Andrew's. He notices. So does she. They look at each other.

NICOLE

...I like this song.

ANDREW

Yeah -- this part is great -- here --

Nicole smiles. Looks at Andrew. He looks back. Their knees stay still, just barely touching.

And, on this moment, just as the song ends --

18 **INT. DORMITORY - ANDREW'S ROOM - PRE-DAWN** 18

Andrew's in bed -- fast asleep. Seems stress-free for once -- his body totally relaxed, his mind deep in a dream. His arm hits his night stand -- WAKING him up. His eyes open. He looks at his alarm clock. It reads: 5:17.

ANDREW

Shi--

18A **INT. DORMITORY - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER** 18A

Andrew bursts out of his room and RACES down the hall.

19 **EXT. DORMITORY - NEW YORK STREET - MOMENTS LATER** 19

Andrew DASHES across the green. It's still pitch black outside, the city cold and menacing.

20 **INT. GEHRING HALL - STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS** 20

Andrew busts inside, runs down the STAIRWELL -- and SLIPS. Falls full-throttle down a whole flight, hands smacking against the tile. Rises, sore, and keeps running.

20A **INT. GEHRING HALL - BASEMENT HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS** 20A

Andrew reaches ROOM B16 -- pushes open the doors--

20B **INT. GEHRING HALL - STUDIO BAND ROOM - CONTINUOUS** 20B

--only to find the room EMPTY. No one is there. Andrew checks the time on his phone: 5:33. *Did he miss them...?*

20C **INT. GEHRING HALL - BASEMENT HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS** 20C

Andrew steps back into the hallway. Spots a SIGN-UP SHEET at the door. Looks at it. Sees the words "STUDIO BAND" scrolled down for each day. The listed start-time: "9AM".

21 **INT. GEHRING HALL - STUDIO BAND ROOM - MORNING** 21

Andrew sits on the drum throne. A clock on the wall reads: 8:57. He's dozed off, is out cold. His hand, cut from his fall down the stairs, rests against the snare drum.

Suddenly -- the DOOR opens --

SAXOPHONIST #2

She told me to pull out, then wet the whole fucking bed.

SAXOPHONIST

No, serious??

Andrew shoots up. Surges to his feet. The SAXOPHONISTS don't pay him any attention. They're big guys, macho. Another DOOR opens. MORE PLAYERS...

These are the CORE MEMBERS of Studio Band -- Shaffer's cream of the crop. Mostly third- and fourth-years. All male. A few ALTERNATES follow, first- and second-years.

Andrew watches as the PLAYERS buzz their mouthpieces, whip open their folders, pull out their instruments. A flurry of chatter and activity...

One of the CORE MEMBERS heads to the drums: CARL TANNER, 22. Andrew sees him, and--

CARL

You the new alternate?

ANDREW

Yeah -- I'm -- Andrew Neiman...

CARL

(couldn't care less about his name)
Tune the set to a B-flat. Then you'll turn my pages during rehearsal.

Andrew, nervous, sits back down at the drums and--

ANDREW
 (to the PIANIST)
 Excuse me?
 (no answer)
 Um -- sorry -- excuse me?
 (the Pianist looks at him)
 Could I have a B-flat please?

The Pianist plays a B-flat. Andrew tunes. By now the room is filled: TRUMPETS, TROMBONES, SAXES.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
 (to the Pianist)
 Excuse me -- could I maybe have ano--

But Carl has already risen. Ushers Andrew back up. Sits down at the drums, as Andrew sits down by the music stand.

SAXOPHONIST #2
 Milk the cunt!!

The PIANIST plays a middle C, and the players start tuning to it.

Andrew watches, listens -- the sea of sounds building, the clock on the wall ticking, until -- it hits 9:00.

THE DOOR BURSTS OPEN. Fletcher marches in, carrying a stack of sheet music. Sudden tension -- and utter silence.

Fletcher sets his music down. Stares at the band. Dead-serious, silently judging. A moment passes...

Then -- he SMILES. He's switched all of a sudden to warm and cuddly.

FLETCHER
 We've got a squeaker today, people.
 Neiman.
 (he pronounces it "Neeman")
 Nineteen years old. Isn't he cute?

Laughs throughout the room. We can overhear a few snickers:

PLAYERS (O.S.)
Neee-man...

Andrew looks. Fletcher keeps his smile up... And then--

FLETCHER
 Alright, gang. "Whiplash".

The players get out the chart. Andrew catches a glimpse -- a messy clutter of notes and time signatures...

Fletcher raises his hand. Total silence. Then -- the slightest move of Fletcher's finger, and the band begins **WHIPLASH STUDIO BAND REHEARSAL CARL #1**. The chart's named "Whiplash" for a reason. It's fast, frenetic, 7/4 time. This fast, with this many polyrhythms, it's impossibly hard.

CARL

Page... Page...

Andrew turns the page. Carl glares. Shouldn't have had to tell him to turn it. But Andrew can't follow. The band's too fast..

FLETCHER

Stop. You. Barker.

(pointing to the THIRD
TRUMPETER'S horn)

That is not your boyfriend's dick. Do not come early. Moving ahead. Bar 93.

The players flip their sheet music. Andrew catches a glimpse of a TROMBONIST ejecting the spit from his horn. A puddle has formed by his feet.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Five-six-seven--

The band plays **WHIPLASH STUDIO BAND REHEARSAL CARL #2**. Intense, visceral. Fletcher paces back and forth, eyeing players as they play. He's got fox's ears, hawk's eyes. Every sinew of his body is focused. Andrew watches, awed, scared, completely overwhelmed.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Stop!

The band comes to a halt.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Now this one upsets me. We have an out-of-tune player. Before I go any further, does that player want to do the right thing and reveal himself?

(silence)

Ok. Maybe a bug flew in my ear. Bar 115.
Five-six-and--

He cues the BAND with his hand, then cuts them off.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

No, I guess my ears are clean because we most definitely have an out-of-tune player. Whoever it is, this is your last chance.

(paces back and forth, slowly)

Either you know you are out of tune, and are therefore deliberately sabotaging my band; or you do not know you're out of tune -- which I'm afraid is even worse.

Nothing. The players avert his gaze. All terrified...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Reeds. Five-six-and--

(they play, he cuts them off)

Bones. Five-six-and--

(they play, he cuts them off)

Ahhhh, he's here.

Silence. He eyes the TROMBONISTS. Lands on one, METZ. Overweight. Been picked on his whole life.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Tell me it's not you, Elmer Fudd.

Metz sits there, trembling. On the brink of tears.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

It's ok. Play.

(Metz does so, Fletcher stops him, leans in, whispers--)

Do you think you're out of tune?

Metz, terrified, looks down at the floor.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

There's no fucking Mars Bar down there. Look at me. Do you think you're out of tune?

METZ

...Y--yes...

FLETCHER

Then why the FUCK didn't you say so?!?

Silence. It's the first time we've heard Fletcher really SHOUT. His voice is booming, louder than one would have thought. Then--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

I've been carrying your fat ass for too long, Metz.

(MORE)

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

I will not let you cost us a competition because your mind's on a fucking Happy Meal and not on pitch. Stein, congratulations, you are now fourth-chair trombone. Metz -- get the fuck out.

Still trembling, tears bubbling out, Metz picks up his trombone and walks to the door. Andrew watches -- shocked.

Once the door closes--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

For the record, Metz was not out of tune. You were, Wallach. But Metz didn't know it. And that's bad enough.

And then -- he looks straight at Andrew.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Alright, take ten. When we get back -- the squeaker's on.

Andrew's face goes ghost-white.

22

INT. GEHRING HALL - BASEMENT HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

22

Andrew sits in the corner of the hall, the "WHIPLASH" sheet music in his hand. Tries desperately to count the beats...

ANDREW

Five-six-seven... Six-two-two-five...

He scribbles on the page, trying to compute the patterns: "7/9 + 7/4 = 7/18". "1/64 X 7/9"... We see feet pass by, and hear--

STUDIO CORE MEMBER #1

**

Stein won't last a week. He doesn't have the lips.

**

STUDIO CORE MEMBER #2

**

Fudd lasted longer than he should have...

STUDIO CORE MEMBER #3

**

Maybe if he spent half the time practicing that he does to polishing off cheeseburgers...

**

**

**

STUDIO CORE MEMBER #4

**

(laughs)

**

You got that right.

**

Andrew's eyes follow the PLAYERS. They're tall, built. Next to them Andrew feels like a scrawny teen.

Just then -- a PAIR OF DRESS SHOES reach Andrew's side. Startled, Andrew looks up. It's Fletcher. Andrew scrambles to his feet, as Fletcher puts his arm over him and -- earnestly, back to the warm tone he displayed days ago --

FLETCHER

(walking Andrew down the hall)

Listen, Andrew. I know what you saw in there is worrying you, but there's a big difference. This is your first day.

(MORE)

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Metz had been dragging mud for two years.
(comes to a stop, looks straight
at Andrew--)

Besides, you're no Elmer Fudd. This is a
huge opportunity for you. You know that,
right?

ANDREW

Yeah...

FLETCHER

Your parents musicians?

ANDREW

No, not really...

FLETCHER

What do they do?

ANDREW

Well, my dad's a writer.

FLETCHER

What's he written?

ANDREW

Well he's...I guess he's mainly a
teacher.

FLETCHER

College?

ANDREW

Pennington High.

FLETCHER

And your mom?

ANDREW

I don't know... She left when I was a
baby.

FLETCHER

So no musicians in the family.

ANDREW

...No, I guess not...

FLETCHER

Well, you've just got to listen to the
greats then. Jo Jones, Buddy Rich. You
know, Charlie Parker became "Bird"
because Jones threw a cymbal at his head.
(MORE)

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
You see what I'm saying?
(Andrew nods)
(MORE)

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

The key is -- relax. Don't worry about the numbers or what the other players think. You're here for a reason. You believe that, don't you?

(Andrew nods)

Say it.

ANDREW

I'm here for a reason.

FLETCHER

Good.

A beat. And, finally--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Now have fun.

He pats Andrew on the back -- then promptly walks off.

23

INT. STUDIO BAND ROOM - GEHRING HALL - MOMENTS LATER

23

The players are taking their seats. Slowly, Andrew walks in. Eyes the DRUMS. Takes a deep breath. *He can do this...*

Carl is seated in the alternate's seat. The drum throne is empty. Just waiting for Andrew...

Andrew sits down. WE MOVE IN CLOSER ON HIM -- as he adjusts his seat, lays his music out, gets his sticks ready...

FLETCHER (O.S.)

Alright, gang.

Andrew looks up. Fletcher has just entered.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

"Whiplash".

Fletcher eyes Andrew.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Neiman -- just do your best.

Andrew nods. Looks at the music. Counts in his head. *He's ready...*

Fletcher CLAPS the band off. **WHIPLASH STUDIO BAND REHEARSAL ANDREW #1**, mid-tempo, far easier than before. Andrew's doing well. Fletcher nods, smiles--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Let's see some fills.

Andrew fills, rolling down the toms. Fletcher grins.

Andrew, seeing Fletcher's grin, can't help but smile. Getting into it now. The whole BAND building, his drumming growing more intense. He fills again.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Snap! We've got Buddy Rich here.

Andrew grins. Fills again. Accenting, playing a counter-rhythm. When he trips up. Comes in a hair late.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
(waving the band to stop)
Ok, little trouble there. No problem.
Let's pick it up from 17.

Fletcher claps. Andrew plays **WHIPLASH STUDIO BAND REHEARSAL ANDREW #2**. Fletcher waves him to stop again.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Not my tempo. Ok?

Fletcher claps again. Then another wave for Andrew to stop.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Downbeat on 18. Ok?

He's still soft, calm, warm. He claps again. Then, stopping--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
The "and" of 4. Bar 17, the "and" of 4.

He claps off. Stops Andrew again, only seconds later.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
17, the "and" of 4. Ok? And you're rushing a little...

Andrew nods. Getting nervous now... Fletcher claps again. Stops again.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Not quite my tempo. All good, here we go.

He's about to clap off when, out of nerves, Andrew hits his bass drum early.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
No -- ready?

Fletcher claps. Stops Andrew yet again.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Sorry, you're -- you're dragging a little now.

(Andrew tries to pull his seat up, getting anxious, flustered)

All set?

Andrew nods. *Get it together...* Fletcher claps. Stops.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

You're rushing.

Claps again. Stops again.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Dragging.

Claps again. Andrew plays **WHIPLASH STUDIO BAND REHEARSAL ANDREW #3**, expecting another stop -- but it doesn't come. Fletcher nods, as though now satisfied, then slowly turns around. Puts his hand on a spare chair. Looks like he's about to sit down, when...

...like a flash of lightning he WHIPS up the chair and HURLS it straight at Andrew's head.

Andrew DUCKS, as the chair CATCHES the top of the bass drum, almost toppling it over. An EAR-PIERCING CLANG OF CYMBALS, as Andrew's sticks go flying and the chair hits the floor.

Then -- total silence in the room. Andrew is shell-shocked, beyond shaken, *what in the fuck just happened???*...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

(as though discussing the weather)

Why do you suppose I just hurled a chair at your head, Neiman?

ANDREW

I... I... I d--don't kn--

FLETCHER

Yes, you do.

ANDREW

I... The...the tempo...

FLETCHER

Were you rushing or were you dragging?

ANDREW

I... I don't... I don't--

Fletcher BOUNDS up to him, almost RUNNING -- suddenly beast-like, terrifying, veins set to BURST--

FLETCHER

Start counting.

ANDREW

(like a deer in the headlights)
...Five-six-seven--

FLETCHER

In four, damnit!

ANDREW

One-two-three-four...

Fletcher SLAPS Andrew on his left cheek. Then--

FLETCHER

Keep counting!!

ANDREW

One-two--
(another slap)
--three--
(a third slap)
--four--

FLETCHER

Was I rushing or I was dragging?

ANDREW

I -- I don't -- I don't know--

FLETCHER

Start counting again.

ANDREW

One-two--
(a slap on his left cheek)
--three-four-o--
(another slap)
--ne-two-three--

FLETCHER

Was I rushing or was I dragging?

ANDREW

R--rushing...

FLETCHER

So you do know the difference! If you dare to sabotage my band I will fuck you like a pig.

(MORE)

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Now are you a rusher, are you a dragger,
or are you going to be ON MY FUCKING
TIME?!?

This is a new Fletcher we're seeing. An animal. But no one
but Andrew seems surprised--

ANDREW

I--I'm gonna be on your time...

FLETCHER

(flips over a new sheet of
music, points to the top)
What does this say?

ANDREW

260... Quarter note 260...

FLETCHER

Count a 260.

ANDREW

O-one-two-three-four...

FLETCHER

Jesus fucking Christ -- I didn't know
they allowed retards into Shaffer! Do you
expect me to believe you can't read
tempo? Can you even read music???
(points back to the music)
What the fuck is this?

ANDREW

A half-note...

FLETCHER

And this?

ANDREW

A--a dotted sixteenth...

FLETCHER

Sight-read this measure.

ANDREW

Bop-bop-ba-bop-ba--

FLETCHER

What are you, in a fucking a capella
group?? Play the goddamn set!!

Andrew plays the measure on the drums. Shaking, terrified...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Now answer my question -- were you
rushing or were you dragging?
(because Andrew hesitates--)

ANSWER!!!!

ANDREW

R--r--r--rushing...

FLETCHER

Dear God, is that a tear in your eye? Are
you one of those single-tear people? Do I
look like a double fucking rainbow to
you??

Andrew tries to hide his tear, mortified, wipes it, cowers--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

You must be upset. Are you upset??

ANDREW

N--no...

FLETCHER

Oh so you don't give a shit about any of
this?

ANDREW

No, I -- I do give a sh--

FLETCHER

So are you upset? Yes or fucking no.

ANDREW

Yes...

FLETCHER

You are upset...

ANDREW

I am upset...

FLETCHER

Say it so the rest of the band can hear you.

ANDREW

I am upset...

FLETCHER

Louder.

ANDREW

I am upset!

FLETCHER

LOUDER!!!!!!

ANDREW

I am upset!!!

FLETCHER

You are a worthless friendless faggot-lipped little piece of shit, whose Mommy ran out on Daddy once she realized he wasn't Eugene O'Neill, and who's now weeping and slobbering over my drum kit like a fifteen-year-old girl -- so for the last father-fucking time, **SAY IT LOUDER!!!**

ANDREW

(tears pouring out now)

I AM UPSET!!!!!!

Then -- silence. Andrew hunches over the drum set, shaking, face awash in tears. The other PLAYERS just stare...

FLETCHER

Carl...

Carl silently switches places with Andrew at the set.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Start practicing harder, Neiman.

(then, turning to the band,)

"Whiplash". Once more from the top.

He claps the band off. As for Andrew, he just sits behind Carl -- dazed, red-faced, and utterly gutted.

His first day of Studio Band is over.

24

INT. GEHRING HALL - BASEMENT HALLWAY - DAY

24

Andrew exits. Trying to hold it all in. Then--

RYAN

Hey, bro.

He sees Ryan, a few yards away. Andrew hides his face, hides the TEARS that are starting to spill out uncontrollably...

RYAN (CONT'D)

I never said congrats, man. Congra--

...and RUNS like hell.

25

INT. DORMITORY - ANDREW'S ROOM - DUSK

25

Andrew is curled in the corner, crying. We linger here.
Then, his PHONE rings. He looks at it. Hesitates...

ANDREW

...Hello...?

JIM (O.S.)

You didn't show.

And, finally, breaking down, can't hold it in any longer--

ANDREW

He ripped me apart...

JIM (O.S.)

...Who?

(then,)

*That asshole? You told me you were
transferring...*

Andrew looks at his desk. There, atop a pile of papers, is his TRANSFER APPLICATION. All filled out. Ready to go. Next to it, a BUDDY RICH CD...

ANDREW

(almost to himself)

...I thought he liked my playing.

JIM (O.S.)

*Who cares what he likes? Who is he to you?
When I started writing plenty of people
tried to put me down. You ignore them.*

Andrew is silent. *When I started writing...*

Those words seem to have the opposite effect Jim intended.

ANDREW

When you started writing...

JIM (O.S.)

Why don't you come home tonight?

ANDREW

No, I -- I have to practice...

JIM (O.S.)

No, you have to take it easy.

ANDREW

I need to go now...

JIM (O.S.)

Andrew--

ANDREW

I have to go... Sorry. I'll call you later.

He hangs up. Rises. Wipes his reddened eyes. And exits his dorm.

PRE-LAP KNOCKING --

FLETCHER (PRE-LAP)

Yes?

26 **INT. GEHRING HALL - STUDIO BAND ROOM - FLETCHER'S OFFICE - DAY**

Andrew steps into Fletcher's office. Before Fletcher can say a word--

ANDREW

I'm sorry to interrupt you. I just want to tell you -- I'm so thankful to have been accepted into Studio Band. And I'm going to make sure I don't disappoint you.

Fletcher, seated at his desk, just looks at Andrew. Andrew nods, turns around. Marches back down the hall -- as PERCUSSION begins... WE FOLLOW HIM, sticking close to his face, the resolve now in his eyes. Something has changed.

PERCUSSION grows louder and, as we move, hurdles us back...

...to FLETCHER'S OFFICE. And to Fletcher, peeking out through his doorway now. Fletcher smiles...

27 **INT. ANDREW'S PRACTICE ROOM - DAY**

27

Andrew sits at his drum set, furiously practicing...

And just like that, moving fast, **DRUM PATTERN FOR MONTAGE** carrying us, we're--

28 **INT. GEHRING HALL OFFICE ROOM - DAY**

28

CLOSE ON Andrew's hand, Xerox-ing pages of music. The titles: "WHIPLASH", "ALEPH NULL", "EASY SIX"... Pages dense with notes...

- 29 **EXT. NEW YORK STREET - SHAFFER CONSERVATORY - EVENING** 29
- Fletcher steps outside. It's drizzling a bit. He slowly unfolds an umbrella. Passes by a few other FACULTY MEMBERS on his way to the sidewalk. Keeps walking. The DRUMMING continues...
- 30 **INT. DORMITORY - ANDREW'S ROOM - EVENING** 30
- Andrew pulls the MATTRESS off his bed, drags it to the door with his ALARM CLOCK. Heaves both out to the hallway...
- 31 **INT. SUBWAY - NIGHT** 31
- Fletcher is seated, squished in between commuters, towered over by other travelers. Looks diminutive in this setting...
- 32 **EXT. NEW YORK SIDE STREET - NIGHT** 32
- Andrew marches down a side-street, wolfing down a McDonald's burger for dinner, earphones plugged into a METRONOME...
- 33 **INT. ANDREW'S PRACTICE ROOM - NIGHT** 33
- Andrew lifts a 50-lb weight with his right arm. Then a 75-lb. Then picks his stick up and plays his double-time swing...
- 34 **EXT. FLETCHER'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT** 34
- Fletcher reaches a nondescript high-rise. With his folded-up umbrella, his head hanging low, and the careful delicacy with which he opens the door, he looks here like nothing so much as a quiet, everyday man...
- 35 **INT. ANDREW'S PRACTICE ROOM - NIGHT** 35
- Andrew sleeps, earphones still in and metronome still on. He's on the MATTRESS he brought down from his dorm, the ALARM CLOCK by his side. Next to it, a suitcase of clothes. Above, the poster of Buddy Rich. It's as though he's moved in.
- 36 **INT. FLETCHER'S APARTMENT - DINING ROOM - NIGHT** 36
- Fletcher sets the table for dinner. He has nice porcelain plates, and a glass of red wine. But the meal? A frozen ready-made steak and vegetables. On the wall, a photo. In it, a younger Fletcher, and a WOMAN, and a NINE-YEAR-OLD GIRL. All smiles...

37 **INT. ANDREW'S PRACTICE ROOM - MORNING** 37

Andrew rises from the same mattress and slides onto his drum seat. Starts playing, hands dotted with blisters, eyes crusty with sand. The METRONOME still on...

...because it was never turned off.

CUT TO: Rides furiously, trying to beat his double-time swing... The METRONOME reading 380... His muscles exhausted...

CUT TO: The METRONOME adjusted up to 390... Blisters tearing...

CUT TO: 400.. Hands bleeding now, blood smearing the sticks...

CUT TO: 405... The METRONOME going crazy now... The DRUMMING so fast it's a wash, a wall of sound, blood on the cymbal--

38 **INT. FLETCHER'S APARTMENT - DINING ROOM - NIGHT** 38

Silence. Fletcher finishes his meal. Puts the dishes away. Sits down on a couch. Still alone.

The apartment, like his office, is small but elegant. Pictures of icons on the walls. Monk. Holiday. Coltrane...

Fletcher reaches into a stack of LP's: Chopin, Ravel... Pulls one out with the most delicate touch, as though he were handling a newborn. Sets it on a record player by his side.

A scratch, a hiss, and then --

-- **FLETCHER'S SONG.** Melancholy, lovelorn...

Fletcher just sits and listens, barely moves -- but you can tell the music now playing means everything to him...

A moment, and then...

39 **INT. DUNELLEN AUDITORIUM - STAGE - EVENING** 39

Wild, feverish, absurdly fast BIG BAND JAZZ. We're on-stage. An orchestra about the size of Studio Band is in full swing, reaching the end of **RIVAL OVERBROOK BAND CHART.**

The band FINISHES. No applause. A card:

First Competition of the Winter Season

40

INT. DUNELLEN AUDITORIUM - GREEN ROOM - HALLWAY - MOMENTS BEFORE

The RIVAL PLAYERS quickly shuffle into the green room, past Andrew, who watches, awed. A VOICE--

TECHNICIAN (O.S.)

Terry!

Andrew turns, glimpses a CORRIDOR through the doorway. Out in the corridor, he sees a TECHNICIAN welcome Fletcher. In the Technician's arms, a FOUR-YEAR-OLD GIRL -- the Technician's daughter --

FLETCHER

Mike!

(and, to the girl,)

I'm so sorry, can I have your autograph?

(she blushes, shakes her head)

Are you playing an instrument yet?

TECHNICIAN

She started piano this week.

FLETCHER

Ooo, I need pianists!

(to the girl)

What do you say, you ready for Carnegie Hall?

The Technician smiles again, looks at the girl. She hides her face in his chest, embarrassed. He and Fletcher laugh.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Alright, alright.

(looking up at her dad)

Great to see you, Mike.

He leans in. They hug.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

See you after the show! Cheers!

He steps in, closes the door and addresses his PLAYERS, who are busy sanding their hands, buzzing their lips, preparing:

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Ok, you fucking cocksuckers. E Dorian.

(the non-percussion players lift their instruments)

Hurry the fuck up!! E Dorian.

(they play the Dorian scale)

Double it.

(they play it double-time)

(MORE)

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

G Lydian.

(they play the Lydian scale)

D Lydian Augmented.

(they play it)

Double it.

(they play it double-time)

Get your music. "Irene" only for Set 1.

Rhythm section out first. Tanner, the kit is a tonal catastrophe. Get it in tune.

Rhythm and soloists, we're augmenting the dominant in measure 45. Everyone else sharp the nine at bar 106. Got it?

(beat)

Now remember. Lincoln Center and its ilk use these competitions to decide who they want. And I am not about to have my record in that department stained by a bunch of sour-note flexible-tempo flatter-than-their-girlfriends dipshits. And another thing...

(he holds up a music folder)

...if I ever see one of these lying about unattended to again, I swear to God I will stop being so polite. That alright with you, ladies?

PLAYERS

Yes.

A STAGEHAND approaches Fletcher, about to speak to him--

FLETCHER

(almost matter-of-fact)

Get the fuck out of my sight before I demolish you.

The STAGE HAND nods, slinks away. Fletcher addresses his band--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Stage right. In order. Now.

(turns to the STAGE HAND --
who's short and plump)

That means you too, Mini-Me.

41

INT. DUNELLEN AUDITORIUM - STAGE - CONTINUOUS

41

Studio Band goes on-stage. Carl hurries to the DRUMS, tunes them.

CARL

Stick bag.

Andrew hands Carl the stick bag. Raises the music stand, props the MUSIC FOLDER onto it--

CARL (CONT'D)

Hurry up.

ANNOUNCEMENT (V.O.)

The Shaffer Conservatory Studio Band...

CARL

Hurry up.

--and opens it to **OVERBROOK COMPETITION CHART**.

Fletcher appears. Raises his hand.

Everyone raises their instruments. Sits still. Waiting...

A *cough* is heard. Fletcher looks to his right. The players stay still. No sign of whom it came from...

And then -- the slightest move of Fletcher's index finger. So subtle you need absolute focus to even notice it. That's the count-off. Miss it and you've blown it for everyone.

The BAND LAUNCHES. Quiet at first, then a big brassy sound. Andrew watches Carl's playing. Taps along on his knees.

CARL (CONT'D)

Page.

(Andrew snaps to it, turns the page)

Damnit...

Still conducting, Fletcher approaches, whispers--

FLETCHER

Get it together, Tanner, I swear to God.

Heads back to his position, glaring at Carl. Pissed at Andrew, Carl plays. The music BUILDS and we're--

42 **INT. DUNELLEN AUDITORIUM - GREEN ROOM - MOMENTS LATER** 42

The performance over, the PLAYERS trickle BACKSTAGE.

CARL

(handing Andrew the folder, still pissed)

Hold onto this for the second set.

43 **INT. DUNELLEN AUDITORIUM - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER** 43

Andrew plugs in for a can of Coke at a vending machine. Sets his MUSIC FOLDER down on a chair. Keeps his eyes on it.

Then -- he overhears TALKING...

TRUMPETER #1
That's what I heard...

Andrew turns. Creeps around the corner. Sees a trio of fellow Studio Band PLAYERS, all core, chatting. They don't see him...

TRUMPETER #2
Do you think he'll make a complaint?

SAXOPHONIST
He wants a career. Long as Fletcher stays, Fudd could get placed back in. Why would he jeopardize that?

Andrew leans in to hear more, but before he can get a read--

CARL
I need to look at the music.

Carl is inches from his face. Andrew turns to the chair -- but the folder is gone. His eyes go wide. No...

CARL (CONT'D)
Can I have it?

ANDREW
Yeah, of course. I'm...

CARL
Why isn't it on you?

ANDREW
It is, I--

CARL
I don't see it.

ANDREW
(realizing he can't hide this)
Fuck... I -- I think I fucked up...

CARL
No. You're joking.

ANDREW
I swear to God, I had it on that chair--

CARL
Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh my God. How could you be so fucking stupid?!?

ANDREW
(shaking, doesn't know what to do)
A... A janitor... Maybe a janitor took--

CARL
Find the fucking chart!!
(turns, grabs a passing player--)
Neiman lost my folder.

SAXOPHONIST
Serious? Fletcher's going to flip.

And just like that -- a VOICE booms down the hall--

FLETCHER (O.S.)
Drums!! Where the hell is Tanner??

44

INT. DUNELLEN AUDITORIUM - GREEN ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

44

Carl, terrified, Andrew behind him, addresses Fletcher--

CARL
We have an issue.

FLETCHER
Now is not the time.

CARL
I gave Neiman the folder. Neiman lost it.

Fletcher looks at Andrew. *This is a joke, right?*

FLETCHER
Neiman lost it.

CARL
Yes.

FLETCHER
The folder is YOUR fucking responsibility, Tanner! You should have known not to give Neiman your folder. You give a retard a calculator and he'll try to turn his TV on with it. Now get your ass on-stage before I--

CARL
I can't...

FLETCHER
Can't what?

CARL
(doesn't want to have to say this--)
I -- I can't go on-stage... I don't know the charts by heart...

FLETCHER
Come again, darling?

CARL
You know this... I have -- I need the music,
my memory -- it's, it needs visual cues--

FLETCHER
Visual cues??

CARL
--it's a medical conditio--

FLETCHER
A medical condition? What are you,
Sanjay Gupta?? Play the fucking music!!

CARL
I can't.

ANDREW
I can.

Fletcher and Carl both look at him. Neither was expecting him
to chime in. Andrew seems almost as surprised...

FLETCHER
You know "Whiplash" by heart?

ANDREW
Yes. Every measure. Every note.

Quickly realizing this is now his only option--

FLETCHER
You'd better pray your memory doesn't
fail you, Neiman. And I hope you've
improved since last month's rehearsal. I
am not about to start losing now.

Then, to the rest of the band--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
ON-FUCKING-STAGE!!

45

INT. DUNELLEN AUDITORIUM - STAGE - MOMENTS LATER

45

The PLAYERS in their places. And there, on the set,
overwhelmed, trying to make this one shot count -- is Andrew.

ANNOUNCEMENT
*With their second selection, the Shaffer
Conservatory Studio Band.*

Fletcher faces the band. Zeroes in on Andrew. The wild-card. Andrew rubs the sweat from his palms. *This is it, this is it...* Adjusts the drums, tightens the snares. Carl sitting behind him, burning holes with his eyes...

ANDREW

Five-two-two-six-two-two... Six-two-two...

Fletcher raises his arm. Hand suspended in air, finger waiting to move... Andrew locks eyes on it. Heart pounding now...

And -- the finger moves. The band begins **WHIPLASH OVERBROOK**. A surging 7/4. Andrew seems caught off-guard at first. Struggles to keep up. Then reaches the right speed -- and stays there. Fletcher keeps his eye on him, waiting for him to fuck up...

But Andrew doesn't. He gets the first hit. Awkward, but in time. Then the second hit -- also graceless, but on target.

And here comes the key moment. Fletcher turns his attention to the trumpets -- and away from Andrew.

Barely believing his luck, Andrew plays another bar. Still Fletcher doesn't look at him. He's focused on other players.

The number builds some more. And--

HEAD JUDGE (PRE-LAP)

First place. Shaffer Conservatory.

46

INT. DUNELLEN AUDITORIUM - STAGE - HOURS LATER

46

Applause. Fletcher summons his PLAYERS to the stage. The JUDGE hands him the microphone. Fletcher takes it, hesitantly. His band behind him -- including Andrew...

FLETCHER

I'm...supposed to say a few words but...
it's these kids who should be speaking...

(turning to his band, earnestly)

You earned this, gang.

(beat, turns to the audience)

You know... When I was a kid, I saw God. Or as some people know him, Charlie Parker. My dad snuck me out of school so we could make the drive into Chicago. It was a bar so he had to sneak me in, hidden under his coat. I didn't know where in the hell I was. I was all of seven. But then, by the time I was on my third Shirley Temple, this nice-looking man went up on-stage and started playing. And I've never been the same since.

(MORE)

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
 (turning again to his band)
 You guys mean the world to me, you know...
 (back to the audience)
 I think of them like they were my own kids.
 Treat them that way, too. Treat 'em like my
 dad treated me. Meaning I terrorize them.
 (laughter, and to the band,)
 But it's true, gang. You're my family...

Something about how Fletcher says this suggests he means it...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
 Thank you. Thank you so much.

He wavers. Then steps aside and exits with his band.

46A **INT. DUNELLEN AUDITORIUM - STAGE - WINGS - CONTINUOUS** 46A

The STAGE HAND appears, carrying a red folder. Going up to Carl and Andrew--

STAGE HAND
 This yours? I think a janitor threw it in
 the trash by accident.

Carl looks. It's his MUSIC FOLDER. He looks behind at Andrew.

47 **INT. STUDIO BAND ROOM - GEHRING HALL - DAY** 47

A new day of rehearsal. Andrew enters the room, passes the piano--

PIANIST
 Don't you go taking my folder...

Andrew looks at him. Wary, he makes his way to the drums...and to Carl. Reaches in to help Carl adjust the cymbals when--

CARL
 Do not touch the set.

Andrew stops. Just then -- the DOOR OPENS, and Fletcher enters.

FLETCHER
 "Cherokee".
 (looks at Carl)
 What are you doing?

No answer. Carl, seated at the set, is visibly confused.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
 Core only today, I can't waste time
 with alternates.

Carl stays still. *What...?* Andrew looks just as shocked.

But Fletcher keeps on staring. He's dead-serious. Finally, Carl slides off, stunned, as Andrew takes his place... And, calmly tossing this off even though he knows how much it hurts--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Tanner, make sure to turn Neiman's pages.

Then he raises his hand. Andrew holds his sticks, still shocked. This is as clear a verdict of his playing at Overbrook as he'll ever get.

He's the new core drummer.

Fletcher CLAPS the band off, and before we hear any music we're--

48

INT. ROAD TO NEW JERSEY - BUS - DAY

48

Andrew watches a VIDEO on his iPhone... It's 70's footage and audio of a grey-haired DRUMMER, a face we've seen before... BUDDY RICH. Andrew smiles. Relaxed. Proud.

A bubble pops up: "1 NEW VOICEMAIL, 1 NEW TEXT MESSAGE".

Andrew opens the text. The name on it: "NICOLE". It reads:

"You free Thursday?"

Andrew is about to answer. Hesitates. Plays the voicemail.

CARL (O.S.)

Neiman... You lost that folder on purpose. You knew I didn't know the chart by heart... Answer me... I've been core for two years. I've been drumming since I was three. I earned my spot you asshole--

Andrew hangs up. Looks back at the text message. Considering again...

Then he just resumes watching the video.

49

INT. NEW JERSEY - JIM'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - EVENING

49

Jim grabs a platter from the stove, Andrew by his side.

JIM

How's it going in Studio Band?

ANDREW

Good. I think he likes me more now.

JIM

His opinion means a lot to you, doesn't it?

Jim looks at Andrew. Almost accusatory. A moment...

ANDREW

Yeah...

JIM

Grab the shakers please.

50

INT. JIM'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

50

Seven people seated at the table: Jim and Andrew, Andrew's uncle FRANK, aunt EMMA, and 18-year-old cousin DUSTIN. To Jim--

UNCLE FRANK

Jimbo -- overcooked!

(to Emma, laughing re: the meat)

I can barely chew this thing.

Jim laughs along. Andrew watches. There's an undercurrent to the joking. The power dynamic between the brothers is clear.

UNCLE FRANK (CONT'D)

He just laughs.

Jim keeps laughing.

AUNT EMMA

And how's your drumming going, Andy?

Andrew, put on the spot, hesitates. But then, excited--

ANDREW

Well... Actually, it's...it's going really well. I'm now the core drum--

The door OPENS. In steps TRAVIS, another cousin, 21, football player, real looker. All eyes swerve in an instant from Andrew to him.

UNCLE FRANK

Well, well, well -- Tom Brady!

TRAVIS

Sorry I'm late.

AUNT EMMA

Did you hear, Jimmy?

UNCLE FRANK

They named Trav the season's MVP.

JIM

That's incredible, Tra--

AUNT EMMA

(interrupting)

And Dustin heading up Model UN, soon-to-be-Rhodes-Scholar or who knows what, Jim "Teacher of the Year"... I mean, the talent at this table -- it's stunning.

Beat. Then--

AUNT EMMA (CONT'D)

And Andrew. With his drumming.

UNCLE FRANK

Yeah, you said that was going ok, Andy?

ANDREW

(a little peeved,)

It's going spectacularly well, actually. I'm...I'm in Shaffer's top jazz orchestra, it's the best in the country -- and I was just made a core member.

(there's no reaction)

...Which means I play in competitions. I'm one of the youngest they have.

TRAVIS

How do they know who wins in a music competition? Isn't it subjective?

ANDREW

...No, not really.

UNCLE FRANK

Does the studio help get you a job?

ANDREW

It's...it's not a studio, that's just the name of the ensemble... And yes, it's a big step forward in my career.

UNCLE FRANK

I'm just curious how you make your money as a drummer. After graduating.

Andrew glances at his dad. Wondering if maybe he'll chime in in defense... But no. His dad stays meek and quiet.

AUNT EMMA

I saw a TV commercial for credit reports where a young man was playing the drums. You could do that.

ANDREW

Yes, or the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra. But the credit reports gig is a wonderful backup.

UNCLE FRANK

(missing Andrew's sarcasm)

Well I'm glad you have it figured out. It's a nasty business, I'm sure.

(to Travis)

Oh, you gotta tell them about your game last week. I'd say you lived up to your title.

TRAVIS

43-yard touchdown to win it.

UNCLE FRANK

That's what I'm talking about! On your way to the pros.

ANDREW

It's Division III.

Everyone at the table looks at Andrew -- including his dad.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

He plays for Carleton. It's Division III. It's not even Division II.

(silence, shock around the table)

The tilapia is delicious, by the way.

UNCLE FRANK

(I'll get you back for that)

You got a lot of friends, Andy?

ANDREW

Not really.

UNCLE FRANK

And why's that?

ANDREW

I don't see the use.

UNCLE FRANK

Well who will you play with otherwise?
Who'll give you your break? Lennon and
McCartney were school buddies, am I right?

ANDREW

Charlie Parker didn't know anyone 'til Jo
Jones threw a cymbal at his head.

UNCLE FRANK

And that's your idea of success, then?

ANDREW

Becoming the greatest musician of the
twentieth century would be anyone's idea
of success.

JIM

Dying broke, drunk, and full of heroin at
34 would not be my idea of success.

Andrew turns and looks at his dad. Can't believe he joined in.

ANDREW

(to his dad)

I'd rather die broke and drunk at 34 and
have people at a dinner table somewhere
talk about it than die rich and sober at
90 and have no one remember me.

UNCLE FRANK

Ah, but friends remember you. That's the
whole point.

ANDREW

No, none of us were Charlie Parker's
friends. That's the whole point.

UNCLE FRANK

Well there's such a thing as feeling
loved and included.

ANDREW

I prefer to feel hated and cast out. It
gives me purpose.

JIM

That's ridiculous. You don't mean that.

UNCLE FRANK

Travis and Dustin have plenty of friends,
and I'd say they have plenty of purpose.

ANDREW

You're right, they'll make great School Board presidents.

DUSTIN

Oh -- so, that's what this is all about -- you think you're better than us?

ANDREW

You catch on quick. You must be in Model UN.

TRAVIS

Well I've got a reply for you, Andrew. You think Carleton football's a joke?

(Andrew only nods)

Come play with us.

ANDREW

Four words you will never hear from the NFL.

AUNT EMMA

Who wants dessert?

JIM

And from Lincoln Center?

A moment of silence. Andrew looks at his dad, and his dad just looks right back... A simmering anger in his eyes, Andrew turns to the others, and, slowly--

ANDREW

In 1967 a scientist named Laszlo Polgar decides to prove talent isn't about what you're born with but about conditioning. Has three kids, Susan, Sophia and Judit, and gets them practicing chess for hours and hours before they can even talk. Fifteen years later Susan and Sophia are the two top female players in the world, and Judit's on her way to entering the history books as the greatest female chess master of all time.

Silence once again. Andrew glances at his dad, and delivers back that same accusatory look he saw in the kitchen...

UNCLE FRANK

So not only do you want to die at 34, broke, drunk, and addicted to heroin, but you also wish you were a lab rat.

Andrew says nothing. Rises, plate in hand. Walks to the door--

DUSTIN

Enjoy band camp.

ANDREW

Enjoy pretending you're an ambassador.

--and swings it shut behind him.

51

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

51

ANDREW

Ok, I'm going to just lay it out. This is why I don't think we should be together.

We're back in the city, at a coffee shop. Andrew is seated across from Nicole, who just looks at him. Clearly she did not think this is how the conversation would begin.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

I've thought about this a lot. If we're together this is what's going to happen. I'm going to keep pursuing what I'm pursuing, and it's going to take up more and more of my time. You're going to see me less and less. When you do, I'll be distracted, I'll be upset, I'll be playing things in my mind. And you're going to just grow to resent me. At a certain point, you'll tell me to ease up on the drumming, to spend more time with you. And I won't be able to. And I'll start to resent you for even asking me that. I'll feel like you're dragging me down, you'll feel like you don't matter -- and before long, we'll hate each other. So I think we should just cut it off now, cleanly, for those reasons.

A beat. Nicole is silent. Finally, Andrew adds--

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Because I want to be great.

NICOLE

And you're not.

ANDREW

I want to be one of the greats.

NICOLE

And I would stop you from doing that.

ANDREW

Yes.

NICOLE

You know I would stop you from doing that. You know that for a fact.

ANDREW

Yes.

NICOLE

And I would barely see you anyway.

ANDREW

That's right.

NICOLE

And when I did see you, you would treat me like shit, because I'm some girl who doesn't know what she wants, and you have a path, and you're going to be great, and I'm going to be forgotten, and therefore you won't be able to give me the time of day because you have bigger things to pursue.

ANDREW

That's right. That's exactly my point.

Beat.

NICOLE

You're right. We should not be dating.

She gets up.

ANDREW

I'm glad we had this talk.

NICOLE

Me too.

With that, she turns and leaves. We linger on Andrew, the look on his face... *Did I just fuck up...? No, I'm good.*

52

INT. GEHRING HALL - STUDIO BAND ROOM - DAY

52

A BLAST of music. Horns squealing, cymbals swelling.

It's another Studio Band rehearsal. Andrew's at the drums, playing well. Fletcher cues a fermata, and the band finishes **STUDIO BAND REHEARSAL AFTER-BREAKUP CHART.**

FLETCHER

Alright, gang. Pick up the new chart by the door. Rehearsal tonight starts at 9. You have 'til then to learn it.

PLAYERS head out. Andrew grabs his copy of the chart -- it's called "CARAVAN" -- when--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Neiman. Stay a bit, ok?

Andrew nods. Carl, at the door, glares at him. Then slinks off.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

(approaching, pointing to the chart)
Look at this. See the tempo?

ANDREW

Quarter note 330...

FLETCHER

That's a double-time swing. That's what got you in here, isn't it?

ANDREW

I guess so...

Fletcher grins. Then -- the smile fades.

FLETCHER

Now, just as was the case with you, I stumbled on a kid practicing his double-time swing the other night. I'd like to give him a shot.

Before Andrew can register, let alone ask "Who?"--

RYAN (O.S.)

Am I late?

Fletcher and Andrew turn to the door. RYAN CONNOLLY is here.

FLETCHER

Perfect timing! Join us, Connolly.
(Ryan heads over, smiling)
You two know each other, don't you?

RYAN

Yep, Nassau Band. 'Sup, Andrew...

Ryan is all smiles. But Andrew is mortified. Can barely conceal his anxiety -- and his anger.

FLETCHER

Now, Connolly, I've made Andrew a temporary core--

(Andrew's eyes shoot up at the word "temporary")

--but we've got the competition this weekend and I want to make sure the new chart's in good shape.

Ryan nods, reaches into his backpack. And, to Andrew's shock, pulls out the "new chart". **CARAVAN.**

RYAN

This one, right?

Andrew's wide-eyed. *When did he get the chart?*

FLETCHER

(as though he can read his mind)

I gave it to him this morning, Neiman. Now, all I want to do is test out the part. Neiman, if you wouldn't mind, could we take it from the top with just you?

Andrew tries to keep calm. Goes to the drums, lays out the chart.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Don't worry, I don't care about hits. That'll be tonight. For now, just tempo.

Andrew nods. Takes a deep breath. Looks at the tempo notation. "330". Another breath. *Ok... I've got this...* Fletcher CLAPS. Andrew BEGINS.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

No... That's not quite my tempo...

ANDREW

I'm -- I'm sorry -- I'll--

FLETCHER

Let's see if Connolly can do it, ok?

Beat. Andrew looks at Ryan. Heart pounding, he switches with him. Fletcher CLAPS. Ryan BEGINS. And he plays perfectly.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Connolly -- that was excellent. See, this is the beauty of Studio Band. You come in an alternate -- but a minute later, you could be the new core.

Andrew's eyes widen again.

ANDREW

You're not serious.

Fletcher looks at Andrew -- as though shocked Andrew talked back. A moment of silence. Then -- *BZZZZZ*. Fletcher's cell.

FLETCHER

Connolly, the chart's yours. See you both tonight at 9.

(answering the phone)

Hi, this is Terence...

He heads to his OFFICE. Andrew is still. *What just happened...?*

RYAN

How you been, bro?

(Andrew looks at Ryan)

I think it was the injury that kept me out last time. But I'm fuckin' stoked to be joining you guys now.

Andrew just stares. Ryan seems earnest -- but Andrew is incensed.

RYAN (CONT'D)

(mistaking Andrew's look for anxiety)

Don't worry about Fletch, either. My granddad knew his dad from the Philharmonic when Fletcher was trying to break in. He's more bark than bite.

Andrew's eyes really widen now: What the fuck is going on?

He gets up, marches to Fletcher's door, and--

53

INT. GEHRING HALL - FLETCHER'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

53

--BURSTS in. Fletcher's just finished his call.

FLETCHER

What are--?

ANDREW

I need to talk to you.

FLETCHER

Now is not the time, I swear to God--

ANDREW

I can play that part, you know I can--

FLETCHER

I said NOT NOW!!!

There's more desperation in Fletcher's voice than anger. And Andrew notices something else: Fletcher's eyes are watering... Andrew is silent. He's never seen Fletcher like this.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
 (softly, as though close to crying)
 You want the part? Then...earn it.

A moment passes.

54 **INT. GEHRING HALL - STUDIO BAND ROOM - CONTINUOUS** 54

Andrew busts back through the STUDIO BAND ROOM. Eyes burning. One thought and one thought only: Get that part back.

RYAN
 Bro! Wanna grab lunch?

But Andrew doesn't answer. Just keeps walking.

54A **INT. DORMITORY - BASEMENT BATHROOM - DAY** 54A

Andrew pours ice into a sink. Turns on the faucet. Dips a big glass jug in and collects ice water.

55 **INT. ANDREW'S PRACTICE ROOM - DAY** 55

Andrew practices the part... He's pushing, giving it his all... "CARAVAN" on his stand, scribbled over with pencil markings: "forte", "triplets!", "hemiola 1-3", "don't slow down!"

ANDREW
 Come on... Come on...

He stops. His hand throbbing from blisters. He dips it by his side -- into the jug of ICE WATER. Clenches. Blood clouds the water.

He resumes playing -- frenzied, exhausted. Fucks up, screams out--

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Fuck!!!!

Starts pounding his stick against the drum-head. Then his hand. Pounding harder and harder, once, twice, three times, four times. Hand bleeding more, the drum-skin giving way, finally tearing and breaking.

He STARTS PLAYING again, fed up, enraged, SHOUTING at himself--

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Come on you fucking piece of shit... Come on!!! COME ON!!!!

56 INT. SUBWAY - NIGHT

56

A crowded subway car. Andrew is seated, poring over his sheet music, running through the beats in his head...

57 INT. GEHRING HALL - STUDIO BAND ROOM - NIGHT

57

The PLAYERS sit silently. Ryan on the drum throne, Carl and Andrew behind him -- Carl still humiliated, Andrew 100% focused. The clock reads: 9:00. Not a word in the room.

Fletcher emerges. A CD PLAYER in his hand. He plugs it in.

FLETCHER

Ok... Um...

For the first time ever, he seems uneasy, unsure what to say.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

We...we have a new player. Ryan Connolly.

Ryan nods, waves to the other PLAYERS. Chipper--

RYAN

Sup, dudes.

Andrew glares at him. Seething now. But, continuing, softly--

FLETCHER

But I...if you could just...put your instruments down... Just for a second...

He turns to the CD player. Turns it on. A big-band ballad swells. A muted trumpet takes the lead. It's **CASEY'S SONG**, and it's a tender sound, full of melancholy...

For a few seconds, Fletcher doesn't say a word. His thoughts seem to be drifting. Then, hesitant, as the music plays...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Six years ago...I saw a kid practicing scales in a band room here. He'd started at Shaffer with a lot of hope, but the truth was he'd barely squeaked in and he was struggling. Everyone on the faculty told him: "This isn't for you." But they didn't see what I saw...

(his voice croaking again,
emotional,)

...this...this scared, skinny kid cursing himself 'cause he couldn't get his scales right... I saw a drive in him...

(MORE)

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

And I put him in Studio Band, and we worked together for three years, and when he graduated, Marsalis made him third trumpet at Lincoln Center. A year later, he was first. That's who you're hearing now.

(then,)

His name was Sean Casey.

The name catches Andrew's attention. The trumpeter Fletcher mentioned to him... And the word "was"...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

I found out this morning...that Sean died. He died in a car accident yesterday...

(takes a moment, is having trouble speaking)

I just wanted you guys to know that...

He was... Sean was a...

(and, almost dissolving into tears on these next words)

...beautiful player...

(breathes in, collects himself)

I just thought you all should know.

Beat. He leans back down and turns off the CD. Silence.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

(another moment; then, still shaky--)

"Caravan". From bar 142, please.

The PLAYERS open their folders, pick up their instruments. Fletcher waits. Hesitates again... Then -- CLAPS. Just drums, bass and trombone play the trombone solo section of **CARAVAN STUDIO BAND REHEARSAL**. Fast, precise -- but Fletcher waves to Ryan to stop.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

No, that's...that's not quite right, Connolly... Sorry...

Andrew's eyes instantly fill with hope. *Is this his chance?*

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

I... I want to try Neiman on this... Ok?

Ryan nods, slowly slides off -- as Andrew quickly gets on. Clutches his sticks tight. *This is it...* Fletcher's still shaky--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Maybe...maybe now's the time for Neiman to earn the part...

Beat. He CLAPS off, Andrew starts, and, only ONE SECOND later--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

No, I guess not. Tanner.

An anger is creeping into Fletcher's voice now. The stammering fading away, bit by bit. Dismayed, Andrew gets off, Carl gets on, Fletcher CLAPS him off -- and then, SLAMMING his fist down on his table, the barely suppressed grief giving way now to terrifying, full-out rage--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Mother-FUCKER!!!

Carl JUMPS. The band goes silent. Fletcher glares at his drummers, eyes so heated they could burn holes into you.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Get your ass back on the kit, Connolly.

Ryan does. The other players are still. Real fear in the room...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

I will find my tempo out of one of you faggots if it takes me all goddamned night.

His tone is vicious, his eyes still watery. He CLAPS, stops--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Which it just might. Neiman.

Andrew gets on. His hands are shaking. Fletcher CLAPS, stops--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Not my tempo. Switch.

Carl gets back on. Fletcher CLAPS, stops yet again--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Not my FUCKING tempo!!!!

He turns to the rest of the band. Rubs his eyes, breathes, and then, trying to keep calm but his face already beet-red...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Ok... Sorry about this, gang, hate to put you through it. But rest your arms, put aside your instruments, if you need to take a dump do it now, 'cause I am going to go for as long as it takes until I find a drummer who can play in time.

(to the drummers--)

You hear me talking, cocksuckers? You'd better start shitting me perfect 400's. Connolly. You first. Get on the kit.

58 INT. GEHRING HALL - BASEMENT HALLWAY - LATER 58

PLAYERS mull through the hall, stretching. A few yawns. You can tell these guys have been here for hours already... And through the wall, the kind of screaming that shakes you to your core:

FLETCHER (O.S.)
Motherfucking COCKSUCKER!!! Is--

59 INT. GEHRING HALL - STUDIO BAND ROOM - NIGHT 59

FLETCHER
--that the fastest you can go?? It is no
fucking wonder Mommy ran out on you, you
worthless acne-scarred fetal-position
Hymie fuck. GET OFF!!!

Andrew -- whole body shaking, had been playing for half an hour straight -- gets off the kit, struggling for breath, hands coated with torn blisters and blood. Fletcher's rage is unlike anything we've seen from him: pained, vengeful...

Carl gets on the kit. Fletcher CLAPS. The clock: 11:06.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Well what do we have here? Gay Pride
himself. This is not a Sinéad O'Connor
concert, Tanner. I am sorry to inform you
we will not be serving Baked Alaska and
Cosmopolitans tonight. Now why don't you
try playing faster than you give fucking
hand jobs?? One! One! One! One! OFF THE
FUCKING KIT!!!

Carl stops. Staggers back, dazed, as Ryan moves up and begins.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Now we got ourselves our mick fucking paddy-
cracker. Did you know you look like a
fucking leprechaun? I think I'll call you
Flannery.

60 INT. GEHRING HALL - BATHROOM - NIGHT 60

PLAYERS rinse their faces. One looks at his watch, dead-tired. It's very late...

61 INT. GEHRING HALL - STUDIO BAND ROOM - NIGHT 61

Some players have now returned to their seats.

FLETCHER

Switch!

Carl stops playing. Almost falls as he gets off the kit. Ryan takes his place -- just as worn out. As soon as he sits down at the set he has to bend down to catch his breath.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

It is not Saint fucking Patrick's Day, Flannery, there is not a pot of gold under your fucking seat. Play.

Fletcher CLAPS. Ryan plays, muscles cramping, can't keep up--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Switch!

Ryan stops, gasping. Fletcher's eyes land...

...ON ANDREW. Face awash in sweat, hair dripping, muscles throbbing, wrists red, hands caked in blood, T-shirt clinging to his chest. *This is it...*

ANDREW

(muttering to himself as he gets on the kit)

Come on... Come on you fuck...

FLETCHER

Let's see if we can finally bring this home.

He CLAPS. Andrew begins.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Don't slow down.

Andrew tries, the tempo slips... So fast, so loud...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Speed up! God-fucking-damnit I said SPEED UP!!!

Andrew's arms are moving as fast as they possibly can, his feet like triggers -- and his ears start RINGING now, the RINGING cutting and almost drowning out the other sounds...

Fletcher, fire-eyed, turns around and goes into the nearest CLOSET. Emerges with a COWBELL and a STICK. Comes closer and BANGS ON IT in time. The SOUND slices through the RINGING, startles Andrew, this stick whacking down inches from his head--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Don't stop!!

Andrew doesn't stop. Manages to glare forward, with what almost seems like hatred in his tired, blood-shot eyes...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Faster!... Faster!!

(Andrew speeds up)

Do it! Do it! Do it! Do it! Do it! Do it!

One! One! One! One! One! One! One! One!

Andrew slips, almost loses the beat. Fletcher GRABS the FLOOR TOM DRUM and HURLS it through the air, against the nearest wall. It RAMS into the concrete, handles buckling. But Andrew stays focused. Doesn't cry.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

KEEP PLAYING!!

Andrew does. Fletcher raises the COWBELL now, about to STRIKE Andrew across the head, looks like a fucking madman -- but still Andrew does not cry -- as Fletcher BELLOWS--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

KEEP PLAYING!!!

Andrew keeps playing.

Fletcher stands still. Stares at him. Circles the drum set like a predatory beast, ready to strike at any instant.

Then -- he steps back. Drops the cowbell and stick. Andrew is still playing, going like an automaton. No tears. Finally, Fletcher silently raises his hand, and, with just a slight wave, gestures for Andrew to stop.

Andrew does. Nearly collapses over the set.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Congratulations, Neiman. You earned the part.

He turns to the rest of the band.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Ok. Now we can begin.

The clock: 2:00.

It's 3:30am. The PLAYERS stagger out of the building. Zombies.

Andrew appears, red-eyed, past exhaustion. Fletcher emerges last.

FLETCHER

5pm call tomorrow. Leave at least two hours from New York this time. Save your travel receipts. Or don't, I don't give a fuck.

He then walks off. Andrew watches him leave. And, as we zero in on Andrew's eyes...

...we see that something fundamental has changed.

He looks like a completely different person now. 100% hollowed out.

BUS DRIVER (PRE-LAP)

Next stop Dunellen. Two hours.

63

OMITTED

63

64

INT. ROAD TO DUNELLEN - GREYHOUND BUS - DAY

64

We're on a Greyhound, packed. Another VOICE in the back...

ANDREW

Bop-ba-d-d-da-bop... Bada-bop-bop-bop...

It's Andrew. Hunched over sheet music, earphones on, counting aloud through "CARAVAN". And, by his side -- a Zip-lock bag of PILLS. Just like the ones we saw exchanged at the party outside his dorm...

PASSENGERS look at him. *Who is this lunatic...?*

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Bop-bada-bop... Ba-da-bop-ba-d-d-d-da-bop...

And suddenly -- A JOLT. The bus ROCKS to the side, lights go out, the wheels SCREECH to an abrupt stop. Andrew removes his earphones.

65 **EXT. ROAD TO DUNELLEN - GREYHOUND BUS - DAY** 65

The side of the road. Andrew and the other PASSENGERS stand outside, waiting, the BUS's right tire blown, a rod lodged into its side. Andrew checks his phone for the time. *Fuck...*

66 **EXT. DUNELLEN - BUS STOP - DAY** 66

A nondescript Jersey town. A NEW BUS comes to a stop, setting down passengers on Dunellen's Main Street. Andrew bolts off, carrying his stick bag and music folder. Looks around. Perplexed. Grabs a PASSERBY--

ANDREW

Do you know where all the cabs are? They said there were cabs here, that's what I--

PASSERBY

No, you gotta call the cabs. Takes half an hour notice.

ANDREW

What? Well is there a -- another bus or--

PASSERBY

They got a car rental down on Pine.

ANDREW

Which way??

The Passerby points -- and Andrew starts RUNNING.

67 **EXT. CAR RENTAL AGENCY - MOMENTS LATER** 67

Five blocks later -- Andrew dashes across a patch of grass, reaches a door, grabs the handle. The door won't open. He goes white. Sees the HOURS sign. Eyes scroll down. Starts POUNDING--

ANDREW

You're still open! You're still open!

A MAN appears. Gestures for Andrew to calm down. Opens up.

68 INT. CAR RENTAL AGENCY - MOMENTS LATER 68

Andrew finishes signing paperwork. Grabs his MUSIC FOLDER and BACKPACK from the nearest chair, hurries off. WE DRIFT back...
...to the STICK BAG left on the chair.

69 EXT/INT. CAR RENTAL AGENCY - RENTAL CAR - MOMENTS LATER 69

Andrew RUNS like mad across a small LOT. Reaches a CAR, opens up and jumps in. Plugs an address into the GPS. The estimated time: 9 minutes. The clock: 3:02... He floors it.

69A INT. DUNELLEN STREET - RENTAL CAR - CONTINUOUS 69A

Andrew drives fast. His cell rings--

ANDREW

Hello??

PIANIST (O.S.)

Neiman, where the fuck are you? Call-time was 5.

ANDREW

I'm sorry -- I'm on my way. I'm almost--

PIANIST (O.S.)

We're on stage in twenty--

ANDREW

I know, I'm almost ther--

PIANIST (O.S.)

--and Fletcher's got Connolly warming up in case you don't show.

ANDREW

God-fucking-damnit, I SAID I was on my way, you tell the redhead I'm **ON MY FUCKING WAY!!**

He throws the phone against his seat.

69B EXT. DUNELLEN AUDITORIUM - MOMENTS LATER 69B

Andrew pulls up.

70

INT. DUNELLEN AUDITORIUM - GREEN ROOM - DAY

70

Andrew arrives, panting. Fletcher glares, the band behind him--

FLETCHER

Glad you could work us into your schedule, darling.

ANDREW

I'm here. I'm ready to play.

FLETCHER

Too late. Connolly's playing.

Andrew looks over to his left -- to Ryan.

ANDREW

Like fucking hell he is.

Fletcher looks at him. Stunned. The PLAYERS also look shocked.

FLETCHER

Come again?

ANDREW

It's my part.

FLETCHER

Actually it's my part. I decide who I lend it to.

ANDREW

I have the folder--

FLETCHER

I see the folder for a change, but I don't see the sticks.

Andrew is about to counter -- when he looks down. Looks back. Thinks. Realizes... Skin paling, his heart racing...

ANDREW

They're -- they're in the car, I just have to grab them--

FLETCHER

Nope. I'm warming the band up now.

ANDREW

I'll use Ryan's sticks.

FLETCHER

You lost the part, Neiman.

ANDREW

No I didn't!! You can't do this!

FLETCHER

I CAN'T?!?

He marches toward Andrew. Looms over him, seems about to hit him.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

When did you become an authority on what I can or cannot do you weepy-willow shitsack?

ANDREW

When I earned that part.

FLETCHER

Earned? You've never earned a thing. The only reason you're a fucking core is because you misplaced a folder. The only reason you're in Studio Band is because I told you what I'd be asking for in Nassau.

ANDREW

Bullshit. I'm in Studio Band because--

RYAN

Why don't you back off, bro?

ANDREW

Fuck you, Johnny Utah. Turn my pages.

FLETCHER

You realize I can cut you anytime I feel.

ANDREW

You would've cut me by now.

FLETCHER

Try me you weasel. At 5:30, that's in eleven minutes, my band is on-stage. You're not there with your own sticks, or you show up and make a single mistake -- a single one -- and I'll send you back to Nassau Band to turn pages until you graduate or drop out. For extra kicks, I'll spread the word on just how you became a Studio Band core, and by the time my sewing circle is done you'll make your dad look like a success story.

(lets that linger, then,)

Or I can give "Johnny Utah" the part and we'll leave it at that. Your choice.

Beat. Andrew catches sight of Carl, standing in the back, watching -- and almost smiling. He turns back to Fletcher--

ANDREW

It's my part. I'll be on the stage.

FLETCHER

That's 10 minutes 50 seconds left, you pathetic pansy-ass fruit-fuck.

Andrew turns. Bumps into Ryan, PUSHES him out of the way, RUNS.

70A **EXT/INT. DUNELLEN AUDITORIUM - RENTAL CAR - MOMENTS LATER** 70A

Andrew drives away. The clock changes from 5:20 to 5:21.

70B **EXT/INT. CAR RENTAL AGENCY - RENTAL CAR - DAY** 70B

Andrew pulls up at the rental agency. The clock changes from 5:27 to 5:28.

71 **INT. CAR RENTAL AGENCY - MOMENTS LATER** 71

Andrew races into the rental agency. They're still open... Grabs the STICK BAG...

71A **EXT. CAR RENTAL AGENCY - MOMENTS LATER** 71A

Andrew runs to his car and peels off.

72 **INT. DUNELLEN STREET - CAR - MOMENTS LATER** 72

Andrew on the road, speeding like a demon, the GPS on. Looks at the clock. 5:30. Then 5:31. Whips out his cell. Dials...

ANDREW

It's Neiman... Tell Fletcher I'm coming.

PIANIST (O.S.)

What the fuck is taking so long?? They're moving on-stage now.

ANDREW

There was -- there was a problem with the lock on my car. It's solved and I'm coming.

GPS VOICE

Left turn up ahead.

Andrew looks at the GPS. Fuck. Tries to switch it off.

PIANIST (O.S.)
Are you driving?

ANDREW
No..

The GPS BEEPS for the turn.

PIANIST (O.S.)
What was that?

ANDREW
Tell Fletcher I'm coming or I'll rip out your fucking eyes.

He hangs up. Enraged. Slams down on the gas, engine roaring...

PICKING UP SPEED... The GPS says "2 minutes" left... The clock turns 5:32...

The speedometer SHOOTING UP... UP... UP...

The car reaching a STOP SIGN...but Andrew keeps going, not looking...

His car SPEEDING UP and SPEEDING UP until it's--

--SLAMMED INTO.

Glass flying everywhere, everything going so fast, as though the vehicle had just been whipped up by a tornado...

The car **FLIPS**, 180, the top crunching down like paper, Andrew spun around and shoved up against it -- bleeding, battered--

72A

INT/EXT. DUNELLEN STREET - CRASHED RENTAL CAR - CONTINUOUS

--until the car comes to a stop, upside down. Glass and blood.

Silence.

Andrew takes a moment to understand what has just happened. Gasping for breath, he yanks himself up -- but finds his LEFT HAND is caught under the steering wheel. He yanks, pulls at it. It won't budge. Smoke and exhaust fumes billow up...

He tugs and tugs and pulls and -- finally -- **CRAAAACK** -- the bone of his index finger **SNAPS**. The most painful sound you can imagine. He **SCREAMS** in agony. **YANKS** back, staggering...

His hand is free. Bone broken, bleeding profusely.

Andrew crawls out of the car... Rises to his feet... Dizzy, the world spinning... The TRUCK DRIVER who rammed into him is running over--

TRUCK DRIVER

Are you ok???

ANDREW

I -- I need -- I -- my -- my sticks...

He turns back to the car. Bends down to reach back in...

TRUCK DRIVER

No -- stay away from the car, it's not sa--

Andrew blocks him out. Reaches with his right hand -- the working one -- and goes for the STICK BAG, sandwiched between the caved-in top and the seat. Groaning in pain as he reaches... Gets it.

TRUCK DRIVER (CONT'D)

I'm calling 9-1-1, you're going to be ok--

ANDREW

I -- I have to -- I have to go, it's -- it's three more blocks--

TRUCK DRIVER

(holding him back)

Sir, you don't have to go anywhere--

ANDREW

Get your hands off me!!!

He yanks free from the Driver's grasp and starts RUNNING...

73

I/E. DUNELLEN AUDITORIUM - LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

73

Still running, has been running for three blocks... Out of breath, even dizzy than before... Reaches the front green, face coated in sweat, and hand drenched in blood... Almost collapses... A couple of PASSERSBY see him, shocked--

PASSERBY

Jesus Christ...

--but he either doesn't notice or doesn't care. He's dead-set, tunnel vision, only cares about the goal: Get on-stage...

Andrew busts inside. Eyes scanning. Hears the sound of TUNING...

73A OMITTED

73A

74 **INT. DUNELLEN AUDITORIUM - STAGE - MOMENTS LATER**

74

Dashes in from backstage. The PLAYERS have taken their places, finished tuning, are about to perform. Andrew sees Fletcher. Fletcher sees him. Hiding his arm behind his stick bag--

ANDREW

I'm here. I'm here. I'm here.

Doesn't even wait for Fletcher's answer, goes straight to the set where Ryan is seated. Nothing is going to stop him now--

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Get off. Get off the fucking set.

Ryan looks at Fletcher. Fletcher waits -- then nods, almost smiling. Seems he's having fun with this. Ryan slides off, pissed, and takes a seat next to Carl. Andrew takes his place.

His left hand still hidden, Andrew props up his music and pulls out a pair of sticks. Tries to hold his left stick properly -- but it keeps giving way. With his index finger broken, it's impossible to keep the stick steady...

He looks at the music: "Caravan"... Looks back at his hand... Tries to move his left fingers, mimicking the stick patterns... Just up ahead -- Fletcher. Animal intensity...

Andrew closes his eyes... Tries to block out the anxiety... The pain... The stress that just keeps mounting and mounting... Gropes inside his STICK BAG. Pulls out his bag of pills. Drops it. Pills scatter. Picks a pill up, pops it, out of sight.

ANNOUNCEMENT (V.O.)

The Shaffer Conservatory Studio Band...

Fletcher raises his hand, ready to cue... Andrew tries to get his breathing under control... Ryan and Carl lean forward... Ryan catches a glimpse of Andrew's left hand, just as...

...Fletcher's finger MOVES.

THE BAND IS OFF. It explodes into **CARAVAN DUNELLEN** at lightning-speed.

But Andrew is already in trouble... Blood getting on the snare... Ears starting to RING... Left hand barely keeping up... The whole thing slowly slipping away from him...

He closes his eyes. Mouths: "Come on come on come on..."

A big FILL coming up. He needs both his hands. Launches into it -- and his left stick CATCHES the edge of a stand...

...AND GOES FLYING. Falling and sliding under the hi-hat pedal.

ANDREW
(still riding with his right hand)
Stick...

Carl stays still. Andrew looks at him. But Carl won't move.

Panicked, Andrew turns, eyes his old Nassau Band peer -- Ryan.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Ryan... Stick...

Ryan hesitates. Doesn't want to think of himself as a saboteur. But he looks at Carl, Carl looks back at him...and right then and there he makes his choice.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Please...

Neither Carl nor Ryan moves.

Andrew, thinking fast, eyes the fallen stick. Trying as hard as he can to keep that tempo going with his right hand, he slides down the left side of his body, stretching his arm as far as it can go... His broken finger grazing the stick... Grabbing hold...

Pulls up -- and -- another CRAAAAAACK as his finger is caught against the hi-hat pedal and the bone is bent 90 degrees. He GASPS, almost cries out in pain. Has to hold it in.

Pulls himself back up to the set -- and there, looming over him already, is Fletcher. Eyes fiery--

FLETCHER
The fuck are you doing...???

Andrew keeps playing. But the PAIN is harder and harder to ignore. His snare drum completely smeared in red now, his stick stained, his whole arm shaking. And that RINGING -- just growing and growing, drowning out everything else...

He looks at the SHEET MUSIC, suddenly lost... The horns blast out a hit -- but Andrew isn't on it. *Fuck*. Launches into another fill -- and hits the crash at the wrong time.

Fletcher stares at him. The look says it all: *it's over*. But Andrew keeps fighting. Another missed hit, then a missed time-signature change, the beat falling apart beneath his feet. Total chaos, and then, finally, the sign of death -- Andrew STOPS.

Almost immediately, the rest of the band grinds to a halt. It's a horrible sound, like a car screeching, nails on a chalkboard.

Fletcher stands in place, eyes on Andrew. In fact, all eyes are on Andrew. The theater is dead-silent. Disbelief everywhere.

Calmly, Fletcher approaches Andrew and whispers one last thing:

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

You're done.

Then he turns around. Andrew start shaking, his eyes brimming -- and, suddenly, something takes over inside. Almost despite himself, he RISES -- and **KICKS OVER THE DRUMS**.

Cymbals CRASH to the wooden stage-floor like bombs. Andrew CHARGES forward -- and, just as Fletcher turns to him, **TACKLES the man to the ground...**

Andrew goes absolutely batshit crazy on Fletcher, murder in his eyes... Raises his fists, about to POUND into Fletcher's face, when SECURITY GUARDS yank him off, pulling him away in a flash...

Torn from his target, Andrew breaks down into TEARS. Everything inside him spilling out like water. Fletcher, stunned but uninjured, gets back on his feet. His shirt drips with blood -- not his own, but Andrew's. A SECURITY GUARD rushes onto the scene, and Andrew, kicking and screaming, is DRAGGED OFF...

We linger inside the theater. A hush over the audience, the players and their instruments. And then, a card:

Final Competition of the Winter Season

75	OMITTED	75
76	OMITTED	76
78	INT. ANDREW'S DORMITORY - DAY	78

Andrew stands alone in his dorm. Staring into space. A bandage on his hand. Time has passed...

Lets his eyes take in one item at a time: A drum pad on the floor. A metronome. A DISMISSAL LETTER... He's been expelled from Shaffer.

A DVD. He slides that into his laptop, sits down slowly...

A HOME VIDEO begins: a smiling EIGHT-YEAR-OLD BOY at a DRUM... It's ANDREW... Innocent, bright-eyed, having a blast...

EIGHT-YEAR-OLD ANDREW
...and this is my pa-ra-did-dle...

He plays a paradiddle on the drum: left-right-left-left.
 A CHEER off-camera, a voice we recognize -- his father, JIM--

JIM (O.S.)
Woooo-hoooo!!!

EIGHT-YEAR-OLD ANDREW glows. And our Andrew, hurting, tearing up, watches...

Pulls the DVD out. SNAPS it in half. Tosses the halves in the trash. Slides the drum pad and metronome into the trash as well. Ties the trash bag and pulls it out.

83

INT. ANDREW'S PRACTICE ROOM - DAY

83

Andrew busts in, starts breaking his drums down. First the cymbals come off, then the pedals, then the toms...

A look of resolution on his face -- and, bubbling up, anger... He tears at the drums as though attacking them, pulls them apart almost viciously, one part after another... Then the Buddy Rich POSTER -- which he rips to shreds...

84

INT. HALLWAY - ANDREW'S PRACTICE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

84

Andrew THROWS trash bags into a garbage can... Heads back and eyes his PRACTICE ROOM -- now empty. He takes a moment. Sits down on the hallway floor, the drum parts stacked to the side. Leans back, closes his eyes, and takes a deep breath out...

It's done.

He pulls out his cell. A beat. Then--

ANDREW
 Ok... Where do you want me to meet you?

77 OMITTED

77

77A **INT. HOTEL LOBBY - BAR - LATER THAT DAY**

77A

RACHEL BORNHOLDT -- lawyer, elegantly dressed -- sits across from Andrew, Jim to the side. There's a glass of white wine for Jim, a club soda for Rachel, and an untouched water for Andrew.

A moment of silence. Finally--

RACHEL BORNHOLDT

Andrew...?

Andrew remains silent for a moment. Then--

ANDREW

When did you contact my dad?

JIM

They just called me this week, Andr--

RACHEL BORNHOLDT

(interrupting)

Does the name Sean Casey mean anything to you?

Andrew looks back at Rachel. A moment. Warily, he nods.

RACHEL BORNHOLDT (CONT'D)

So you know of his death? Last month he hung himself in his apartment.

Andrew takes this in. *Fletcher had said it was a car accident...*

ANDREW

What does that have to do with me?

RACHEL BORNHOLDT

Sean suffered from anxiety and depression. His mother claims this started during his time as Fletcher's student.

Andrew looks at her. Rachel can tell he's surprised.

A moment passes.

RACHEL BORNHOLDT (CONT'D)

Now, the Caseys aren't wealthy. They don't want to file suit.

ANDREW

Then what do they want?

RACHEL BORNHOLDT

To make sure Terence Fletcher is never allowed to do this to another student.

ANDREW

He didn't do anything.

RACHEL BORNHOLDT

So President Kohn and Dean Pence will tell you. To them, Fletcher is Shaffer.

(MORE)

RACHEL BORNHOLDT (CONT'D)
But if they think we have a case like this
and can win in court, they'll have no
choice but to let him go before we do.

Beat. Andrew looks at her. Then at his dad.

ANDREW
Well, I have nothing to say.

Jim leans forward now, taking the initiative--

JIM
Andrew... It's over, ok...? He's out of
your life. Why let him get away with what
he did to you?

He eyes Rachel. *Ok...? Was that the right thing to say...?*

Andrew stays silent.

RACHEL BORNHOLDT
Would you characterize his conduct as
extreme, Andrew? Did he ever intentionally
inflict emotional distress?

Still Andrew doesn't respond. Feels his dad's stare on
him as well now.

RACHEL BORNHOLDT (CONT'D)
(trying to persuade--)
This would not be a public hearing, you
know... Fletcher would never know it was
you who spoke up.

Andrew looks at the glass of water in front of him. Untouched.

ANDREW
...What would happen to him?

RACHEL BORNHOLDT
Shaffer will do anything to prevent this
from going to court. Yours won't be the
first complaint, but I think it'll tip
the balance. You're recent.

ANDREW
You tried other students?

RACHEL BORNHOLDT
Some -- but you guys are walls.

ANDREW
And you thought I'd talk.

RACHEL BORNHOLDT

You have nothing to gain from Fletcher anymore.

A beat. Andrew turns his eyes to his dad. Anger in his gaze--

ANDREW

Why did you do this...?

Jim seems taken aback. Flustered for a second. Then--

JIM

You think I was going to let him put my son through hell and walk off scot-free?

Andrew turns away. Jim can see the hurt on his son's face. The sense of betrayal. Worried, trying to reach out--

JIM (CONT'D)

Don't you know I would never let that happen, Andrew? That there's nothing in the world more important to me than you?
(beat; Andrew evades his gaze)
Don't you know that?

A moment. Andrew looks at his dad again.

Then he stares ahead. WE PUSH in on him, slowly -- as he drifts deeper into thought, trying to sort through it all...

RACHEL BORNHOLDT (O.S.)

...Andrew?

Andrew can barely hear her...

Defeated, his soul split in two... Finally -- he gives up.

ANDREW

Just tell me what to say.

WE FADE OUT.

79 OMITTED

79

80 OMITTED

80

81 OMITTED

81

85 OMITTED 85

86 **EXT. NEW YORK STREET - BILLBOARD STREET - LATE AFTERNOON** 86

Summer in New York. Tube tops, street performers, sunshine.

Andrew, hand healed, carries laundry. Looks up and sees a huge sign: "BACK IN NYC! JVC JAZZ FESTIVAL June 21-29". We're in the Lower East Side -- far, far away from Shaffer...

87 **INT. ANDREW'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON** 87

A new apartment. Andrew's dad is already inside, sliding groceries into the fridge when Andrew enters.

JIM

Hey, buddy. You ready?

88 **INT. ANDREW'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON** 88

Blinds closed, as Andrew and Jim sit and watch "North by Northwest" on TV. We PAN from a few college applications on a table, past the walls -- no decorations at all -- to Andrew and Jim seated.

We linger on Andrew's face. There's a sadness in his eyes. He looks tired, even after months, and resigned.

Jim laughs at a line in the movie. Glances over at his son, wants to see if he's enjoying himself. Hands him some popcorn. A beat.

89 **INT. ANDREW'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - EVENING** 89

Father and son stand by the doorway, Jim about to exit--

JIM

"Dr. No" next week. Or whatever's playing on 86th...?

ANDREW

...I'd rather do it here.

JIM

Ok. I stacked your pantry with Gushers.

Andrew manages a smile. A moment passes between them.

ANDREW

Thanks, Dad...

Jim exits. Andrew hangs back. A moment...

Then, Andrew glances down at his phone. Scrolls to a specific number: "NICOLE".

He looks at it. Thinking. Finger hovering over it...

Then, too scared, he pulls back. Pockets the phone.

90 **INT. SANDWICH SHOP - DAY** 90

Andrew makes a ham sandwich, employee's apron on. Hands it silently to a CUSTOMER.

91 **INT. JIM'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY** 91

Uncle Frank, Jim, and Travis sit on the couch watching a hockey game on TV. They laugh and cheer, as Andrew sits off to the side, also watching -- his mind far away.

92 **EXT. NEW YORK STREET - JAZZ CLUB - NIGHT** 92

Andrew walks alone, eating a slice of pizza. Crosses by a STREET PERFORMER -- a man drumming away on a row of buckets. Doesn't watch, just keeps walking.

We follow, as Andrew passes a JAZZ CLUB on the next block. Suddenly -- he stops.

There, on the club's main sign, below the featured names, are these words: "Guest Performer: TERENCE FLETCHER". Andrew stays put for a second. Completely taken aback. Then he starts walking away. Then stops. Nope. Turns around...

93

INT. JAZZ CLUB - MOMENTS LATER

93

...and steps inside. It's a genteel venue. On the stage, BASS, DRUMS, BONGOS -- and, at the piano, FLETCHER.

The mere sight gets Andrew's pulse racing. But he stays put. Watches... The quartet is pacing its way through **FLETCHER'S SONG IN CLUB**, and Fletcher is playing the final head. He's exceedingly delicate, gentle with each keystroke, his fingers moving like ballerinas. His playing is soft, subtle, and exquisite. He plays the melody as though moved by it.

Andrew is surprised by this... Stays in the back, behind the last table. The song comes to a close. Fletcher smiles, looks -- and then freezes. His eyes locked on Andrew. He has seen him.

Andrew blanches, takes a step back, hurries for the exit. But there's a PERSON blocking the way. Tries to squeeze through--

DRUMMER (O.S.)

That was Terence Fletcher, on the keys...

More applause. Andrew, hemmed in, keeps trying to get out--

FLETCHER

Neiman.

Andrew stops. Turns. Fletcher is standing right there. A moment of silence. Andrew is pale. But Fletcher's face is a blank.

ANDREW

...Hi...

SMASH CUT TO:

93A

INT. JAZZ CLUB - NIGHT

93A

A table in the corner. Fletcher and Andrew seated. They seem to have been sitting here in silence for some time. Two drinks stand between them. Untouched. The other band members on-stage play **JAZZ CLUB BLUES**, a new PIANIST on the keys and a SAXOPHONIST added as well. Finally--

FLETCHER

So what are you up to these days, Andrew?

ANDREW

...Oh, just...you know...various...things...

Fletcher nods. *Ok*. Andrew eyes him. Then, nervous--

ANDREW (CONT'D)

...I--I'm sorry about what happened.
(then, *should I clarify?--*)
At Dunellen.

FLETCHER

You shouldn't be. A player's got to be willing to fight.

Andrew looks at him.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

You played with a broken bone. After crashing a car. That's insane.

ANDREW

I was in a different place.

FLETCHER

Good thing you're not in that place anymore.

A beat. Then -- Fletcher seems distracted. By people CLAPPING ALONG to the band...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Have you ever noticed it's never the people with rhythm who clap along?

He starts CLAPPING loudly, in the proper tempo. Leans over to the table next to his, where a COUPLE is clapping off-beat, and starts CLAPPING in their faces. Then sits back down.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

I don't know if you know... I don't teach anymore.

ANDREW

I... I heard about that... You quit?

FLETCHER

...No, not exactly.

He looks at Andrew. A moment of tension. *Does he know...?*

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

A couple parents got a kid from Sean Casey's year... I don't know who, I think maybe a bassist... They got him to say a few things about me... That much I know...

(Andrew tries to hide his relief)

Though why anyone would have anything but honey and sugar to say about me is a mystery.

Andrew laughs. Seems the mood has lightened.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

That's a good laugh, huh?

ANDREW

Oh, no... I...I just--

FLETCHER

No, it's ok -- I know I've made some enemies. Maybe I seem to think my style is normal, but believe me, I don't.

A moment. Fletcher finally takes a sip of his drink.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

I'm conducting some, though. They're bringing back the JVC Fest this year, got me opening with a pro band in two weeks.

ANDREW

(genuinely impressed)

That's amazing.

FLETCHER

(shrugs)

It's ok...

Then, looking off for a moment--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

The truth is I don't think people understand what it is I did at Shaffer. I wasn't there to conduct. Any idiot can move his hands and keep people in tempo. No, it's about pushing people beyond what's expected of them. And I believe that is a necessity. Because without it you're depriving the world of its next Armstrong. Its next Parker.

(pause)

Why did Charlie Parker become Charlie Parker, Andrew?

Beat. Andrew is surprised. He's told this story himself.

ANDREW

Because Jo Jones threw a cymbal at him.

FLETCHER

Exactly. Young kid, pretty good on the sax, goes up to play his solo in a cutting session, fucks up -- and Jones comes this close to slicing his head off for it. He's laughed off-stage. Cries himself to sleep that night. But the next morning, what does he do? He practices. And practices and practices. With one goal in mind: that he never ever be laughed off-stage again. A year later he goes back to the Reno, and he plays the best motherfucking solo the world had ever heard.

Andrew smiles. Nods. Finally -- unlike his uncles, his cousins, even his father -- someone who gets it.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Now imagine if Jones had just patted young Charlie on the head and said "Good job." Charlie would've said to himself, "Well, shit, I did do a good job," and that'd be that. No Bird. Tragedy, right? Except that's just what people today want. The Shaffer Conservatories of the world, they want sugar. You don't even say "cutting session" anymore, do you? No, you say "jam session". What the fuck kind of word is that? Jam session? It's a cutting session, Andrew, this isn't fucking Smucker's. It's about weeding out the best from the worst so that the worst become better than the best.

(beat)

I mean look around you. \$25 drinks, mood lighting, a little shrimp cocktail to go with your Coltrane. And people wonder why jazz is dying.

(then,)

Take it from me, and every Starbucks jazz album only proves my point. There are no two words more harmful in the entire English language than "good job".

Beat. He leans back. Lets his words linger. Andrew thinks...

ANDREW

But do you think there's a line? You know -- where you discourage the next Charlie Parker from becoming Charlie Parker?

FLETCHER

No. Because the next Charlie Parker would never be discouraged.

Andrew takes this in. A moment...

ANDREW

...And you? Are you back to playing now?

FLETCHER

Not really. Here and there... The playing never interested me. I never wanted to be Charlie Parker. I wanted to be the man who made Charlie Parker. The man who discovered some scrawny kid, pushed him, prodded him, shaped him into something great -- and then said to the world, "Check this out. The best motherfucking solo you've ever heard."

ANDREW

Who's your Charlie Parker, then?
(hesitant)
Sean Casey...?

The name hits Fletcher. Fletcher looks at Andrew -- who immediately regrets bringing that name up. Why? Because, even after everything, the sight of Fletcher hurting affects him...

FLETCHER

Sean... Sean was a sweet kid... And with all those idiots saying "This isn't for you", Sean did something great. Very few people ever get that chance...

He pauses. Looks off. Looks at the musicians on-stage...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

But no... Not Sean Casey.

(then, as he thinks about this,)

The truth is I don't know if I ever had a Charlie Parker...

(and then,)

But I tried. And that's more than most people can say, Andrew. I tried. And even if I never find one, I will never apologize for trying.

He's silent. A look of disappointment.

Then, he points to the PIANIST on-stage...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

He's a beautiful player, isn't he?

ANDREW

Yeah...

Fletcher nods. His thoughts drifting again. A moment passes.

94

EXT. JAZZ CLUB - NIGHT

94

Andrew and Fletcher exit. They stand for a second. Look at one another. An awkward silence.

ANDREW

Nice seeing you...

Fletcher nods. Beat. Andrew turns, about to head off, when--

FLETCHER

Look. I don't know how you'll take this.
That band I'm leading for JVC -- our
drummer isn't cutting it.

(Andrew looks at him blankly...)

Do you understand...?

ANDREW

No...

FLETCHER

I'm using the Studio Band playlist.
"Whiplash", "Caravan". I need a
replacement who already knows those
charts inside out.

Andrew looks at him. You can't be serious...

ANDREW

(trying to gather his thoughts)

Wh-- what -- what about Ryan Connolly...?

FLETCHER

What about him? All he was was your
incentive.

ANDREW

...And...and Tanner??

FLETCHER

He switched to pre-med.
 (and with a hint of a smile)
 I think he got discouraged.

Andrew is speechless now. *Is this really happening?*

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

We're rehearsing next Tuesday. Why don't
 you take the weekend to think about it?

Andrew takes it all in. WE PUSH in on him, processing... And,
 slowly but surely, his shock and uncertainty harden before our
 eyes -- into resolution... *This is something to seize on.*

ANDREW

I don't need to.

95 **INT. ANDREW'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DAY** 95

BLACK -- then light floods in. Andrew has just opened his
 closet doors. In a stack, gathering dust, are his OLD DRUMS...
 Andrew looks at them -- heart swelling, nerves racing...

CUT TO:

95A **INT. ANDREW'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER** 95A

Andrew setting the DRUMS up... Newly energized, a speed
 in his movements we haven't seen since Dunellen...

CUT TO:

95B **INT. ANDREW'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - EVENING** 95B

Andrew practicing. You can tell he's been here for hours
 already. Sweat runs in rivulets down his cheeks, wetting the
 drum heads. His eyes are wide, glowing, focused...

He's back to the life...

96 **INT. JUDY AND ARTHUR ZANKEL HALL - NIGHT** 96

An empty theater. It's one of Carnegie Hall's theaters --
 bigger and far sleeker than any of the theaters Studio Band
 played. Ceiling decked with lights, capacity 1200. On the
 stage, rehearsing, is a JAZZ ORCHESTRA.

Similar set-up to Studio Band, the PLAYERS all young pros --
 except, of course, Andrew, the youngest of all.

The chart is **WHIPLASH JVC REHEARSAL**, and the band sounds tight.

The players reach the end -- and Fletcher looks at his watch.
Composed, even mild.

FLETCHER

Rest up, gang. Call-time Sunday is 6.

(and, as he heads off,)

Andrew.

(Andrew turns)

Good job.

Andrew takes this in. The latest in a long line of surprises...

The PLAYERS pack up. Andrew, trying to work past his shyness--

ANDREW

Hope that was ok.

BASSIST

Yeah. You sounded good.

ANDREW

Thanks. You too.

(then,)

Is there...anything you worked out with the previous guy that I should know?

BASSIST

Previous guy?

ANDREW

The previous drummer.

The BASSIST looks at him: *What?*

BASSIST

Last week we rehearsed without drums.
You're the only drummer we've ever had.

Beat. He walks off. Andrew stands there. Confused...

97

OMITTED

97

98

INT. ANDREW'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - HOURS LATER

98

Andrew enters. Eyes his drums. Then -- he has a thought.

He pulls out his phone. Hesitates. Nervous -- but excited now. He dials. We hear ringing, he feels his heart thumping, he nods to himself, starts walking forward, breathes in, and then, after a few seconds --

NICOLE (O.S.)

Hello?

ANDREW

(pacing, stomach clenching, it's
been so long--)

Hey... It's...it's Andrew.

Silence on the other end. Then--

NICOLE (O.S.)

Oh. Hey.

ANDREW

I -- I just figured I'd call -- it's been
forever, and I... I'm really sorry about
how I... I'm just so sorry... How I
acted... You know...

(a beat; she doesn't respond;
he sits down, trying to get
the words out--)

And I -- I didn't know if you knew -- I'm
playing JVC this weekend... Maybe you'd
like to come? We could grab pizza afterward
and complain about our schools again...

He chuckles. Then waits. Beat.

NICOLE (O.S.)

JV?

ANDREW

Uh -- no, JVC. It's a jazz festival.

NICOLE (O.S.)

Oh. Yeah.

Another beat. Then--

NICOLE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

When is it?

ANDREW

It's next Friday.

NICOLE (O.S.)

*Ok... I don't know, I'll check with my
boyfriend.*

Beat. WE CUT to a CLOSE-UP of Andrew as he takes this in. You
can tell -- the word hits him hard.

ANDREW

...Got it.
 (silence; then--)
 Well... Cool. Maybe I'll see you there.

NICOLE (O.S.)

Yeah, I'll check. I don't think he likes jazz though. I'll check.

ANDREW

Cool... Thanks.

Nicole hangs up. You can see it in Andrew's eyes -- real disappointment. Real hurt. And surprise at how hurt he feels.

He eyes his drums again. Sits down at them --

-- and STARTS PRACTICING LIKE MAD. Pouring his anger, his hurt, into his playing.

The SOUNDS of FURIOUS DRUMMING build, continuing through the following--

99 OMITTED 99

100 OMITTED 100

100A OMITTED 100A

100B **INT. ANDREW'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DAY** 100B

Andrew sliding into his slacks. Buttons his white button-down. Slides on his black jacket. Ties his tie...

106

INT. ZANKEL HALL - STAGE - CONTINUOUS

106

The stage is decked in blue lights. The instruments gleam. Beyond it, a yawning expanse of black. The audience... And a hush, an undercurrent of murmurs and whispers gathering steam, as each PLAYER takes to the stage, one by one...

Then -- APPLAUSE. 1200 people's worth of applause. Fletcher appears, taking his spot, smiling. The applause swells up.

And then -- Fletcher turns around to face Andrew. He stares at him for what seems like a full minute. Comes up to him, making as though helping him position a microphone over the drum kit, and, leaning in, quietly, discreetly, menacingly--

FLETCHER

It was you.

The lights shift. Blue to bright, harsh, near-blinding yellow. It's showtime. Andrew is completely still.

ANDREW

...Was...was me what...?

FLETCHER

(then, leaning in even closer,)

Why do you think I invited you here? I've known it was you all along.

Beat. He lets it sink in. Retreats to his spot, smiling at Andrew. Then, off Andrew's paralyzed stare, he turns to the audience. They APPLAUD. A few seconds later...silence. Then--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. We're going to start things off with an old favorite of mine.

Andrew, his heart in his throat, looks at his sheet music. "WHIPLASH". Holds his sticks tight, but his hands are now slippery with sweat... Fletcher waits. More silence...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

It's called "Upswingin'".

ON ANDREW. *What?*

Andrew turns to his left and catches a glimpse of the SAXOPHONISTS' sheet music. Written on the top: "UPSWINGIN'". He turns right, sees the BASSIST's music. Ditto. He looks ahead. And there's Fletcher -- staring right back at him. And smiling.

Andrew turns around. Has to stop this. Can't ruin it for the other PLAYERS -- but Fletcher has already raised his hand for the cue. Andrew rises from his seat -- when the BASSIST glares at him: *What are you doing?* And just then -- within that same split-second --

-- Fletcher's index finger bends down.

The cue.

The BAND EXPLODES into **UPSWINGIN'**. Horns blasting, saxes wailing -- fast, furious, half-Latin and half-swing. Andrew doesn't even play at first -- doesn't want to destroy this. But glares quickly follow, and he has no choice...

He plays. Trains his ears to try to stay on target... But the time signature is impossible to get a firm grip on... He misses a fill... Then the time signature changes... He can't keep up... Then the band gives way to rubato piano... He stops late... Then the band surges back in... He comes in late... He's driving completely blind.

BASSIST
(clenched teeth to Andrew)
The fuck?! Come on...

Andrew, desperate, tries to fix things -- but he can't. Sliding further and further behind. PLAYERS eying him. You can almost hear MURMURS in the audience, rising in volume... And, through it all, Fletcher seems serene.

Andrew misses yet another break, and--

BASSIST (CONT'D)
Are you fucking kidding me?

This hits Andrew like a knife. Tears well up in his eyes. This performance is already so far beyond saving...

Another missed hit. More MURMURS in the audience, louder and louder now, as the number veers, swerves, and sloppily staggers to its close... A swell of horns, a misplaced crash of cymbals, what seems like a fermata... Andrew stops -- just as the band RESUMES. And just as Andrew resumes -- the band STOPS.

Andrew's playing alone. He quickly moves to silence his drums. The chart is done.

And now -- the deafening silence.

No applause. Just the sound softly rippling and settling from Andrew's last cymbal hit...

Andrew sits at his set, in tears. Fletcher stays still. Looks at Andrew. On Fletcher's face, the look of a victor... As he turns back to the audience we hear...

...a smattering of polite, muted applause trickling throughout the theater. Quiet, half-hearted, pitiful.

No one here has ever seen a disaster quite like that before.

IN THE AUDIENCE

We see Jim, standing in the very back, by the doors... Mortified, heading for the hall...

ON STAGE

Fletcher sashays back to the drum set. To Andrew, with a grin--

FLETCHER
I guess you don't have it.

Andrew is still in his seat. Tears stinging his cheeks...

BASSIST
Didn't you get the fucking chart?

Andrew looks at the Bassist. Realizes what Fletcher did... Sees the other MUSICIANS glaring at him, infuriated...

IN THE AUDIENCE

Andrew feels the AUDIENCE staring at him -- can almost make out their faces as the stage lights begin to DIM...

Seated in one of the front rows -- is NICOLE. We see that next to her, holding her hand, is a YOUNG MAN...

ON STAGE

Feeling CRUSHED, HUMILIATED, NAUSEATED, Andrew staggers up...

...and RETREATS to the back of the stage. Out of the audience's view -- about to leave this all behind once and for all...

107

INT. ZANKEL HALL - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

107

Jim running... Down the hall... Toward the entrance to backstage...

108

INT. ZANKEL HALL - STAGE - CONTINUOUS

108

Back to Andrew... Retreating BACKSTAGE...

...when he sees -- around the corner of the backstage entrance --
-- his father.

IN THE WINGS

Jim has just arrived at the entryway. Looks at Andrew. Hurries toward him. Is going to put an end to this. Andrew looks at his dad for a moment, approaching. Jim reaches him --

-- and HUGS him.

JIM

I love you. I'm so sorry this is
happening to you.

Andrew looks at his dad. Something seems to click inside him at that instant.

He pulls back. The desperation in his eyes giving way to something else. Jim watches Andrew as Andrew steps backward, before...

...a pair of STAGE HANDS arrive.

STAGE HAND

Sir, you can't be here--

JIM

Yes I can, I'm taking him with me--

STAGE HAND

(to Andrew)

You know each other?

Andrew is silent for a moment. Still. As though it has just dawned on him.

He takes in the sight -- his dad, dwarfed by the Stage Hands, reaching out to him. Jim has never looked quite so small to his son, quite so pathetic, as at this moment.

A beat. More silence. And then --

ANDREW

No.

Jim goes wide-eyed. Utterly shocked. Andrew steps further back, as the STAGE HANDS move to pull Jim away--

STAGE HAND

Alright, sir, that's enough--

JIM

My -- my son -- I need to get my son--

STAGE HAND

Let's calm down--

JIM

(frantic now--)

Andrew!!

Andrew calmly turns his back to his father and coldly heads to the stage.

JIM (CONT'D)

Andrew!!!**ON STAGE**

Andrew grabs new sticks, makes as though he was just switching pairs and never leaving, and, ignoring his father's calls from behind -- trains his eyes back on Fletcher.

Fletcher looks at Andrew. Seems pleased: *This will be fun...*

But Andrew doesn't look scared anymore. Instead, his eyes are glassy, hollowed out -- and hungry... There's a rage in them that we haven't seen before... *This will not be the end...*

FLETCHER

(to the audience)

Thank you... For our final number we're bringing it back to Ellington. This is "Caravan".

But then, before Fletcher can even turn back around -- let alone cue the band -- Andrew launches into a double-time Latin.

Alone, his stick beating away at the ride cymbal, setting the tempo for the rest of the band. Everyone looks at him. *What the fuck...?* He has started on his own, before any cue, beating the drums as though vengefully.

Fletcher glares at him. *Who the fuck do you think you are?* But Andrew just keeps playing. Knows exactly what he's doing and is not about to be stopped. Building in his eyes -- that same coiled rage... To the BASSIST--

ANDREW

Follow me on four.

The BASSIST has no choice. Andrew nods in time as a count-off, and the BASSIST joins in. Now we've got the bass and drums playing, laying out the beat. Andrew looks back at Fletcher. Drills into him with his eyes -- the kind of look Fletcher has so often given him. And, subtly, so that only Fletcher can see it, Andrew mouths out two words:

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Fuck. You.

It hits Fletcher. Realizing he too has no choice, Fletcher eyes the rest of the band. Raises his hands, re-assuming control -- or trying to make *as though* he has control -- and cues them in. The BAND begins **CARAVAN PLUS DRUM SOLO CARNEGIE HALL**, plays the opening patterns, Andrew matching them beat for beat.

Fletcher then edges toward Andrew. His back turned to the audience, only Andrew can see his face, he leans in and--

FLETCHER

I will gouge out your eyes you motherfucker.

--but Andrew promptly DROWNS HIM OUT with a crash cymbal hit. Another "fuck you". Fletcher's words only seem to strengthen him.

The band roars into overdrive, the brass blasting away, Andrew giving everything he's got. Fletcher steps back. Andrew just keeps looking straight ahead at him. Unafraid now. **A machine.**

SOLOS begin... TROMBONE is up first... WE MOVE IN CLOSE to Andrew... He looks at his right arm... It's still going... He himself seems surprised. He takes a chance -- plays a tricky fill. Nails it. Goes again -- the off-beat hi-hat accent that tripped him up in his first Studio Band rehearsal. Nails it.

The audience is silent... No murmurs this time... Back to Andrew... WE DRIFT DOWN TO HIS FEET... His right foot feathering the bass drum so fast all we can see is a blur...

WE DRIFT BACK UP... His left hand... Notes popping on the snare, the toms... Both his arms battered but utterly determined, as though with minds of their own... He breathes, breathes, beating against his fears, his doubts...

He's in control, pouring himself into his drums -- and it's a sight to behold. Like a master dancer, movements so fast yet precise, brash yet elegant... Violent, frenetic playing, but there's something gorgeous about it...

WE DRIFT TO FLETCHER... Still glaring at Andrew -- but his face now says one thing and one thing only: This is playing he has never seen before.

The brass starts giving way to drum breaks... And Andrew makes of each break a stunner... His double-stroke rolls rip-roaring across the toms, his feet and legs switching rhythms, meters, tempos, then careening back into place... All limbs moving in a sustained frenzy, sweat splashing, mouth open, eyes blazing, the whole set vibrating, then shaking, looks like it's about to explode...

Fletcher turns an inch toward the AUDIENCE... Sees them transfixed...

AT THE LOBBY DOORS

...Jim watches through the opened lobby doors...

ON STAGE

The number is at a peak... And Fletcher, like so many, is now just watching Andrew... The band nears the coda... The melody, the rat-a-tat-tat patterns, the squealing horns and growling saxes... The drums pushing it all forward...

Fletcher almost smiles. *Was this his plan all along...?*

He moves his arms, conducting again... The band reaches the final bar... The final note... He raises his hands... Sustains the note... Swings his arm down... A BLAST of horns. And the band is finished.

Except, that is, for the drums. Andrew's still playing, launching into an extended solo...

Fletcher looks at him. Confused now. Goes up to the drums--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Andrew -- Andrew--

ANDREW

(over his playing)

I'll cue the band... Wait for my cue...

There's nothing more Fletcher can do. Andrew's playing grows louder, more involved, all four limbs joining in, the sound growing bigger and bigger... He has effectively taken over the stage -- and all the other PLAYERS can do is watch... He is the bandleader.

Andrew looks ahead... Past Fletcher... To the darkness... To the audience... He leans forward, closes his eyes, dives in...

Sticks whirling, arms and legs belting and hammering, his head bobbing up and down, his back arched... Keeps the rudiments going on his left hand... Adds one ingredient, then another... Then a third, then a fourth...

Keeps adding and building and piling on, beyond anything he's ever attempted... Going absolutely batshit-insane on the kit, sweat flying, hands blurring, drums trembling...

AT THE LOBBY DOORS

Jim watches Andrew -- crazed, exhausted, looks like he's pushing himself past what is safe -- and knows there is no longer anything he can do about it.

He has lost.

And then -- one of the USHERS steps forward from the edge of the stage. He looks at Jim -- and closes the doors, blocking Jim's view.

We linger on Jim for a moment -- behind the closed door, in silence.

ON STAGE

Back to Andrew -- at the height of intensity... Keeps his eyes closed... Feeling his way through this... Shooting back into the double-time... But trying to go even faster than before... Not 330... Not even 400... Trying, trying, trying to reach that mythical place, the place where only the greats live... 410... 420... Even 430...

Fletcher stands still... His eyes widening... He's no longer calculating... Not even thinking... He's just awed.

Murmurs throughout the AUDIENCE... Audible, even over the roar of the drum set... They can't believe it...

435 now... 440... 443...

Which means those sticks are moving faster than a tennis ball shot across a court... Faster than Andrew has ever moved...

Faster...faster...and, finally...

...450.

Andrew OPENS HIS EYES... He's in disbelief. The stage is his. He owns it. He breaks back into snare-based patterns, rolling around the toms, the cymbals...

Fletcher is floored. Turns, sees something extraordinary out there, just visible in the darkness of the theater...

IN THE AUDIENCE

AUDIENCE MEMBERS turning to each other... A line-up of suit-and-tie spectators whipping out phones or pads...

MANAGERS, JOURNALISTS, A&R EXECS, BANDLEADERS... A few hurrying out, as though in a mad rush, making frantic calls... More people peering INTO THE THEATER through glass doors...

ON STAGE

We TURN BACK to Andrew -- his ears start RINGING... The NOISE grows with each hit, drowning out all the other noises... Andrew clenches his jaw, closes his eyes again, keeps playing, tries to ignore it... Plays harder, louder, pounding away...

Andrew's kick drum starts to slide from the power of his playing... His sheet music falls off its stand... His crash cymbal almost falls over -- but a HAND reaches in to steady it.

It's Fletcher. Leaning over the drum set now -- and, for almost the first time on-stage, not cursing or snarling at Andrew, but instead--

FLETCHER

Take it back to the snare...

Andrew considers this. It's a good idea. He moves back to the snare...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Slow...

(Andrew does as suggested)

Single-stroke...

Andrew nods again... Slowly simmers the beat down... Lets his hi-hat hang open for a moment... Everything goes quiet...

Silence for a second... You can feel the hush, the anticipation, that indescribable electricity in the air...

Fletcher looks at Andrew, looks at his sticks, face brimming with hope now... Andrew begins a series of slow, clean snare hits... Right stroke, left stroke, right, left...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Up... Up...

Andrew nods... Ever so gradually builds up the pace... Right, left, right, left... Builds up the pace some more... Right, left, right, left... Keeps going... Speeds up more, a hair at a time... Right, left... Speeds up more.. Right, left...

Fletcher stands there, nodding, focused, like a coach at the critical moment. Waves his hand, pushing Andrew on...

Andrew builds the tempo more, right, left, right, left, the strokes blurring into each other, the whole thing sounding like the fire of a machine gun, like what we heard in the beginning... Right-left-right-left-right-left...

And, before we know it, we can no longer make out the individual strokes. They're so fast that all we can hear is a single SOUND, sustained and growing in volume...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Come on... Come on...

Andrew, goaded on, builds the volume. His single-stroke roll swelling, taking over the entire theater...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Come on...!! Come on!!!

Andrew builds it further... Going beyond what even he'd planned for himself -- his arms like machines, the single-stroke roll building steam and power and pinning the audience in their seats... Fletcher raising his hands, beckoning Andrew forward... He and the drummer working together, player and conductor, competitor and coach...

Andrew moves to the toms, then back to the snare, then back. The bass drum and hi-hat next, every part of the set joining in, every limb, every component, everything building up, up, up...

It's unlike anything we've ever seen... Andrew tearing a hole through the stage, his heartbeat racing, the sweat pouring from him like a waterfall, blood gushing from his hands and staining the cymbals and drum-heads... Everything a BLUR...

Then -- a BLAST OF SEPARATED SNARE HITS -- and then -- Andrew CHOKES the crash cymbal. A second of pure silence.

Fletcher looks at Andrew. Andrew looks at Fletcher. And then -- Fletcher turns to the band, raises his hand...

...and CUES THE FINAL NOTE.

The whole band roars it out, horns hitting their highest C's, and Andrew rolling around his drum set like a madman, cymbals and snare and toms and the entire apparatus about to burst, as WE DIVE IN CLOSE TO HIM, his instrument, his sticks, his face, all sweat and eyes about to pop, the next Buddy Rich, the next Charlie Parker -- Fletcher's only Charlie Parker -- decking the stage with a climactic crash of cymbals right as, on that very last hit of hits, we--

SMASH CUT TO BLACK.

THE END