

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...

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM - NIGHT

A cavernous space. No windows. Sound-proofed walls. And in the center, a DRUM SET. Seated at it, in a sweat-marked white T, eyes zeroed on his double-stroke roll, is ANDREW NEYMAN.

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. Early sixties but looks younger. Impeccably dressed -- pressed-white Oxford, slacks perfectly creased, a pair of Vertaga eyeglasses. A bit of a dandy -- and yet there's something quietly terrifying about him. 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 Neyman, sir.

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 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, and CLOSES the door. Andrew stares ahead, alone again at the drums -- and totally deflated.

It's over.

A title card:

Shaffer Conservatory of Music
Fall Semester

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

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

EXT. GROCERY STORE - NIGHT

Andrew reaches the front of a supermarket. Waits and holds the door open for a PASSERBY, then slips inside.

INT. DELI - GROCERY STORE - NIGHT

Andrew, dressed now in a deli employee's uniform, makes his way to the counter to take the next customer. It's a GIRL, about his age, big eyes and long auburn hair. Her name's NICOLE.

ANDREW

Hey.

NICOLE

(smiles)

Hey... Onions this time.

Andrew nods. Looks nervous. Starts making a sandwich -- making sure to do as good a job as possible.

INT. DELI - GROCERY STORE - LATER

Ten minutes later: Andrew's off. Heading away from the deli, uniform still on, he spots something -- Nicole, at a table alone, eating her sandwich, reading a book and taking notes.

Andrew waits. This is his chance. He takes a deep breath -- is very nervous about this -- then moseys over to her.

ANDREW

H-hey...

NICOLE
(turns)

Hey.

ANDREW
I just wanted to -- I'm Andrew.

He extends his hand. She looks. Smiles. Extends hers.

NICOLE
Nicole.

ANDREW
Cool... I figured since we... You live
around here, or...?

NICOLE
Yeah, sort of. Fordham. You?

ANDREW
I -- uh -- Shaffer Conservatory...
(she looks at him)
I play drums.

NICOLE
Like...John Bonham?

ANDREW
Like...Buddy Rich.
(realizes that sounds pretentious)
Except worse. Obviously. Like a bad
version of Buddy Rich.

NICOLE
(smiles; then--)
Maybe you shouldn't be in music school.

ANDREW
I've heard that before.

NICOLE
I'm kidding.
(Andrew laughs)
It could be worse.
(pointing to her reading: a
textbook on Heidegger)
You could be a philosophy major.

ANDREW
Ooo...

NICOLE
Yeah. Really boosted my parents' spirits.

Andrew laughs. A moment passes. Then--

ANDREW

Well... It's nice to meet you, Nicole,
and... I just -- you know -- if you ever
wanna...go...to...a concert... Or...
a...philosophy reading...

NICOLE

I'd like that.
(beat)
The concert.

ANDREW

Ok...

He turns, about to walk off--

NICOLE

I might not be back.

ANDREW

Sorry...?

NICOLE

They opened a new deli down the street,
so... This place is kind of depressing.

ANDREW

I know. It's horrible. It's really tragic.

Nicole laughs.

NICOLE

So...you might want my number.

ANDREW

(beat)
Right. Yeah. That'd be great.

Nicole smiles, jots it down, hands it to Andrew.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Ok... I'll...I'll give you a call.

Nicole nods. Smiles...

Andrew heads off. Reaches the door. Gets out of sight. His heart
is fluttering. He looks down at the number, begins to plug it
into his cell phone -- when he sees the time on the screen.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Shit.

EXT./INT. CARNEGIE HALL - LOBBY - NIGHT

The giant, iconic theater. Andrew runs like mad, deli uniform still on. Sliding a sportcoat and tie over his uniform as he hurries, Andrew makes it to the doors -- and to a 53-year-old man waiting.

This is JIM NEYMAN. Andrew's dad. Mild-mannered, soft-spoken, average in every respect. Has the eyes of a former dreamer.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Sorry...

JIM NEYMAN

(off Andrew's harried demeanor)

Don't ask me. This was your idea.

Andrew laughs, and they enter together.

INT. JUDY AND ARTHUR ZANKEL HALL - CARNEGIE HALL - NIGHT

We're inside one of Carnegie Hall's theaters. A cavernous space, with a stage speckled by lights. On it, a full JAZZ ORCHESTRA plays. A TRUMPETER's in the middle of a high-flying solo. Moments later, the reins go to the drums: a ripped, fire-eyed DRUMMER dives headfirst into a virtuosic solo...

...while, in the audience, seated next to his dad (who looks indifferent), Andrew watches. His eyes wide, his hands gripped to the edges of his seat. He looks overwhelmed. In absolute awe.

The solo continues. Builds in intensity. The strokes so delicate yet so precise, the patterns so complex yet performed so fast. A thing of real beauty...

We zero in on Andrew. Transported. On cloud nine.

The solo comes to an end, and applause swells throughout the theater. Andrew joins in, emotional. The tune finishes, and the CONDUCTOR addresses the audience--

CONDUCTOR

Ned Rizzoli on the drums. Bobby Hampton on piano. Sean Casey on trumpet.

(applause)

We'll see you back here in June for the JVC Jazz Festival. Have a good night.

More big applause -- Andrew the biggest of all.

EXT. CARNEGIE HALL - NIGHT

Andrew and his dad stand outside the theater's front steps. Andrew's talking a mile a minute, still high from the music...

ANDREW

And his roll? Single-stroke? With the bass drum in 9? Jesus. Unbelievable.

JIM NEYMAN

I liked the singer.

ANDREW

(laughs)

'Course you did.

JIM NEYMAN

Conductor seemed like kind of a jerk.

ANDREW

Well...they have to be like that. Buddy Rich tore his players' heads off. Benny Goodman too.

JIM NEYMAN

But they have such sweet names.

Andrew laughs.

JIM NEYMAN (CONT'D)

Anyway, your solos are better.

ANDREW

(rolls his eyes)

Right... The way he built it, though. Did you see that? You start small, even timid, just one drum... Then you add a layer. Then another. And you keep building and building, like colors over colors in a painting. You can conduct a whole symphony on just two drums -- and when you make it work, you've never heard anything so alive in your life. You know? It's just... I don't know...

JIM NEYMAN

Some day a 19-year-old kid'll see you play and have this same conversation with his dad.

ANDREW

Yeah, and the dad'll tell the kid his solos are better.

JIM NEYMAN

(laughs)

That's the parent syndrome.

ANDREW

Right. Let the kid be content with being mediocre.

JIM NEYMAN

So I can't tell my son he's talented?
Can't say "good job"?

ANDREW

He had me play today.

JIM NEYMAN

He...?

(then, catching on,)

And...?

Andrew shrugs. It's clear what that means.

JIM NEYMAN (CONT'D)

Well what does he know?

ANDREW

He taught that trumpeter. Sean Casey.

JIM NEYMAN

Well you still have other options.

ANDREW

Other options?

JIM NEYMAN

Columbia. You can do music afterwards.

Andrew takes this in. The mood's gotten heavier all of a sudden.

JIM NEYMAN (CONT'D)

And you know, as radical as it may sound, there are other things to life besides playing the best single-stroke roll.

ANDREW

Yeah, like playing something that's never been played before. Advancing the art form. Making an impact.

JIM NEYMAN

No, I meant like finding the best ice cream in the Village. Or, enjoying a Thursday morning at the movies. The company of a friend. That sort of thing.

A moment passes... Andrew nods.

JIM NEYMAN (CONT'D)

When you get to be my age you get perspective.

ANDREW

I don't want perspective.

Jim expected that. Has heard it before.

JIM NEYMAN

Middle age is wasted on the middle-aged.

Andrew smiles. A moment.

JIM NEYMAN (CONT'D)

Come on, you look skeletal. Burger time.

He puts his arm around Andrew's shoulder, and on that--

INT. DORM BUILDING HALLWAY - HOURS LATER

Rusty elevator doors squeak open. Andrew steps out. Three doors down, a YOUNG MAN is handing 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, picks up his pace...

INT. ANDREW'S DORMITORY - NIGHT

A single. Drumsticks and drum pads on the floor, biographies of Bach and Coltrane on the shelf, posters of Louis Armstrong and The Clash on the walls. A TV is on, some sort of music documentary. Andrew watches from his bed, as, over old images of a young boy at a drum set--

NARRATOR

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. You look at those movies when he was a kid, his arms...

Beat. Andrew takes in these last words:

TALKING HEAD #2 (O.S.) (CONT'D)
*You just can't teach that. That kind of
 genius. You either got it or you don't.*

Andrew turns off the TV. Reaches into his pocket, pulls out a slip of paper. Nicole's number. Looks at it for a moment. Then leans back and turns off his light.

WE FADE OUT.

INT. NASSAU BAND ROOM - GEHRING HALL - DAY

A room full of musicians. Mostly male, mostly first- and second-years. This is NASSAU BAND, Shaffer's lower-level jazz ensemble. 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. Name's RYAN CONNELLY.

TRUMPETER
 My man Ryan! Shit, how you feeling?

RYAN
 Stitched up at last, dude. Back to fight.

TRUMPETER
 Things were hurting with Neyman 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? Practicing that time?

ANDREW
 Yeah. All the time.

RYAN
 My man.

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

MR. KRAMER
 Morning, fellas. "Machito", bar 32.

Mr. Kramer CLAPS OFF in time -- and the band BEGINS. Mid-tempo. Ryan's confident, in control. Andrew turns pages, watches...

MR. KRAMER (CONT'D)

Nice, Ryan... Woah, trumpets. Brass again.

The rest of the band stops. To Ryan's left, a whisper--

BASSIST

Ry...

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

BASSIST (CONT'D)

Do you think he's coming in?

Fletcher peers, eyes on the band for a moment. Then he walks on.

RYAN

Not today.

INT. NASSAU BAND ROOM - GEHRING HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Rehearsal has just ended. As the MUSICIANS file out--

MR. KRAMER

Are you learning from Ryan?

ANDREW

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

MR. KRAMER

Last week was a little overwhelming for you?

ANDREW

(is that a question?)

Yes...

(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... Fletcher's never lost a competition. If it weren't for Ryan's injury he'd have been picked last year. He's a natural player.

(Andrew nods; silence; then, 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%? So I'd practice. There're some great musicians in here. You could meet a few and start a rock band.

Andrew is stung. Turns -- and glimpses a poster on the wall: a DRUMMER throwing a stick in the air mid-solo. Buff, tall...

ANDREW

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

(Kramer looks at him)

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

INT. HALLWAY - GEHRING HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Andrew exits an office, PAPERWORK in hand. He hears DRUMMING. Peeks into a PRACTICE ROOM. Inside, Ryan's playing ska drums.

Suddenly -- a shadow passes over Andrew. He spins around. FLETCHER has just passed by.

Andrew waits in place. Then heads to the STAIRS down which Fletcher has just walked. Fletcher's shadow stretches across the wall, then vanishes...

INT. BASEMENT HALLWAY - GEHRING HALL - CONTINUOUS

Andrew reaches the bottom of the stairs. Sees Fletcher slip behind a set of doors. Approaches. Peers through the pane...

He can see a full orchestra, five players smaller than Nassau. Everyone looks older. More focused. All eyes glued on Fletcher... Fletcher's right arm moves, just a hair, and the band starts: fast, dazzling. Andrew watches -- as awed as he was at Carnegie Hall...

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

...and hurries away.

INT. ANDREW'S PRACTICE ROOM - DAY

BAM-BAM. We're CLOSE on drum sticks. Andrew is teaching a NINE-YEAR-OLD BOY on a drum kit, in a cramped practice room.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Left, right, left, left...

BOY

Left, right, left, left...

ANDREW

Yeah. That's what I'm talking about.

The Boy looks up at Andrew and grins. Andrew's tender, gentle--

ANDREW (CONT'D)

And what did we say about holding the sticks?

BOY

It's all...it's all in the...the wrist...?

ANDREW

You got it, buddy. All in the wrist.

WE CUT TO: The Boy's MOTHER hands Andrew some cash. To her son--

MOTHER

You have fun today?

(the Boy nods vigorously; she turns)

Thanks, Andrew. Next week?

ANDREW

You bet.

(to the Boy, as they walk off)

Remember that paradiddle!

A moment later, Andrew is alone. He looks back at the drums...

CUT TO: 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. 400. Resumes playing. Tries to keep up. Resets the metronome to 410. Can't keep up at all now. Struggling, sweating, hands blistering, when --

CRAAACK. Andrew's right drumstick SNAPS IN HALF.

He stops. Spent. 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"...

CUT TO: A CD slides into a player. The title: "BUDDY RICH: LIVE AT JVC NEW YORK". Andrew skips ahead to the third track. Immediately, drums start. Another double-time swing. Only this one is insanely fast. Probably 430 or so.

Andrew listens. Looks up again at the poster. Shakes his head and, resolved, turns off the CD.

INT. HALLWAY - GEHRING HALL - DAY

Andrew is almost at an office door, a filled-out TRANSFER APPLICATION in his hand, when--

ASSISTANT

Andrew Neyman?

ANDREW

...Yes?

ASSISTANT

Dr. Fletcher would like to see you.

On Andrew: *What?*

INT. HALLWAY / INT. FLETCHER'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Andrew knocks on an oak-wood door. He's bewildered, *why am I h--*

FLETCHER (O.S.)

Come in.

Andrew does. Seated at a mahogany desk is Fletcher.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Hey, Andrew! I guess Sophie found you?

ANDREW

(he remembers my first name?)

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

FLETCHER

Take a seat, take a seat. I like to chat with students coming in and going out. I hear you're going out?

Andrew sits. Surprised by the warmth in Fletcher's voice...

ANDREW

Oh. Yes. Transferring. To Columbia.

FLETCHER

Terrific. Columbia's a terrific school. Mazel tov. Did something precipitate this? Sorry if I'm prying, I ask as a favor to Pence.

ANDREW

Oh, that's fine. I just decided that...
Drumming... Music...

(then, this is hard)

...I -- I just don't think I have it.
It's not for me.

FLETCHER

(knows what Andrew means)

Good. Brava. Too many students clamp down on their "pursuits" like leeches. Hobbies they picked up in their teens, and for what? Teeny-bopper years are when kids pick up things for all the wrong reasons. Like syphilis. Am I right?

ANDREW

(startled)

Uh... Yes...

(then,)

I mean, well, I was a little younger than my teens when I started drums, but--

FLETCHER

What were you then? Thirteen? Twelve?

ANDREW

Six.

FLETCHER

Oh. Well, kids start biking when they're six, doesn't mean they're Lance Armstrong. 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.
Always necessary. 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 (CONT'D)

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

ANDREW

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.
I'm sure you'll find your calling as well.
(a moment; then--)
How about your dad? What does he do?

ANDREW

...He's a...he's a teacher.

FLETCHER

Which university?

ANDREW

Pennington High School. But he writes
books on the side.

FLETCHER

Anything I might've read?

ANDREW

...Probably not.

FLETCHER

And your mom?

ANDREW

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

FLETCHER

I'm sorry to hear that. Well, your dad then -- make sure you follow his advice. I'm sure he knows how to pursue a dream.

Silence again. Andrew's eyes drift to the PHOTOS on Fletcher's wall. The Studio Band with Wynton Marsalis. Fletcher at the JVC Jazz Festival. One jazz luminary after another. The most prestigious concert halls, the most legendary stages...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

(rising and ushering Andrew up)
I guess that's it, then. Any questions?

ANDREW

(trying to collect his thoughts)
...Well... So... I guess you're still looking for Studio Band players...?

FLETCHER

Some, yes. But it's no cakewalk. Most kids here can't last. You know the folks who say greatness is something you're born with? People who throw the word "natural" around? I call them the birthers. 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, goes on dates, asks "Do you want to be involved in this experiment with me?" Finds one who says yes. 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.

(takes a breath, smiles)

Now, I don't mean everyone has "it". Only that, you really don't know 'til you've been conditioned.

Then, leading Andrew to the door--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Which is why I'm sure you'll be great at whatever you set your mind to at Columbia. They're top-notch conditioners. It was a pleasure chatting, Andrew, now--

ANDREW

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

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

I know but -- I -- 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, standing in the hall.
A spark has been lit.

INT. NASSAU BAND ROOM - GEHRING HALL - DAY

Andrew plays the drums with Nassau Band. Keeps missing hits.

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 surveys the band with his eyes, then motions to Kramer to step aside. Without a word, Kramer gets up, cedes his seat and music to Fletcher. Andrew, like all the other players, is dead-still, eyes glued on Fletcher's every move...

FLETCHER

Trumpets.

TRUMPETERS ready their horns, Fletcher's eyes now on them.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Bars 36 to 38. Down the line. 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 plays
three notes--)

Next. One-two--

(THIRD TRUMPETER misses his
cue)

Next. One-two--

(FOURTH TRUMPETER, shaking,
gets out a single note)

Next. One-two--

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

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Trombones. Bars 21 to 23. Four-and--

(FIRST TROMBONIST's still
scrambling to find the right
page)

Next. Four-and--

(SECOND TROMBONIST plays,
makes it through both bars)

Good. Four-and--

(BASS TROMBONIST starts, only
a single note before--)

Saxes. 48 to 50. "And" of one. And-one--

(SOPRANO SAX gets through one bar)

Next--

But before he even counts off, he notices the TENOR SAXOPHONIST's fingering. All he needs to know. He points to the BARITONE--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Next. And-one--

(BARITONE makes it through)

Good.

Beat. Fletcher looks over the band, the trembling players...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Drums. 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.
(turns back to the rest of
the band and points--)
You and you. Come with me.

The BARITONE SAX and SECOND TROMBONIST get up and follow Fletcher out to the hall. Andrew slides back to his regular seat. Ryan cracks his knuckles. Waits...

Then -- the two players return inside, holding ORANGE PAPER SLIPS.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Drums.

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

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Other drums.

Ryan freezes. Andrew, eyes wide -- *is this really happening?* -- rises and approaches the door...

INT. HALLWAY - GEHRING HALL - CONTINUOUS

Just outside, Fletcher hands Andrew an orange paper slip.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Give this to Admin for rescheduling. We
meet 5am to 1pm every day. Room B16.

And with that, he WALKS AWAY.

INT. NASSAU BAND ROOM - GEHRING HALL - CONTINUOUS

In a daze, Andrew drifts back into the band room. Kramer looks at him.

Andrew answers the look with a defiant smile. Vindicated.

MR. KRAMER

Ok fellas, let's...let's take "Avalon"...

He claps off. Ryan plays. 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...

INT. DEAN'S OFFICE - DONAN HALL - DAY

JEREMY PENCE, Shaffer Dean, signs a form for Andrew.

PENCE

You're part of a great tradition now. The top orchestras are always on the look-out for Fletcher's newest picks.

ANDREW

I know, I'm -- I'm so... Do you know him well?

PENCE

Well? I've known Julian since he was a kid. Our dads were in the Philharmonic together.

ANDREW

...I thought his dad was in insurance.

PENCE

Insurance?

ANDREW

(did I get it wrong?)
Never...never mind...

PENCE

Take this to Danielle next door and you're set. Anything else?

ANDREW

No. Thank you. Thank you so much.

INT. ANDREW'S DORMITORY - EARLY MORNING

Andrew's asleep. His arm hits his night stand -- WAKING him up. His eyes open. He looks at his alarm clock. 5:17.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Shi--

He busts out of bed, trips on the comforter, staggers up...

EXT. DORMITORY BUILDING / NEW YORK STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Dashes across the green...

It's still pitch black outside, the city cold and menacing. He turns a corner, reaches GEHRING HALL...

INT. LOBBY / BASEMENT HALLWAY - GEHRING HALL - CONTINUOUS

...runs to the STAIRS -- and SLIPS. Falls full-throttle down a whole flight, hands smacking against the tile. Rises, sore, and keeps running. Reaches ROOM B16 -- pushes open the doors--

--only to find the room EMPTY. No one is there. Andrew steps back. Checks his watch: 5:33. *Did he miss them...?*

JANITOR (O.S.)

Can I help you?

Andrew spins around. A JANITOR has exited the adjacent room.

ANDREW

Uh... Dr. Fletcher... The Studio Band...?

JANITOR

Yeah? They meet at 9.

ANDREW

But I thought -- he said 5am...

JANITOR

Building's closed at 5am.

The JANITOR walks off. Andrew looks at the empty band room...

INT. STUDIO BAND ROOM - GEHRING HALL - MORNING

Andrew sits behind the drum throne. A clock on the wall reads: 8:57. Dead-tired, he almost nods off -- when the DOOR opens--

STUDENTS

She told me to pull out, then wet the whole fucking bed. / No, serious??

The STUDENTS see Andrew. Stop. They're big guys, macho.

STUDENT

Who are you?

ANDREW

I -- I'm the--

Another DOOR opens. MORE PLAYERS file in. These are the CORE MEMBERS of Studio Band -- Shaffer's cream of the crop. Mostly third- and fourth-years. Then ALTERNATES, first- and second-years. Among these, Andrew sees the two players from Nassau.

So they weren't told to come at 5am...

One of the older guys heads to the drums: CARL TANNER, 22.

CARL

Are you the new alternate?

ANDREW

Ye-- yeah... My name's Andrew Neyman...

CARL

Tune the set to a B-flat. Then you'll turn my pages during rehearsal.

He turns back around to fish through his music. Andrew, nervous, takes a seat at the drums and pulls out a drum key.

ANDREW

Could I -- could I have a beefl--
(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. Carl gets on the drums.

CLARINETIST

Milk the cunt!!

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

CARL

(explaining to Andrew--)
Middle C.

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

He approaches the drums. Seems to be approaching Andrew. Andrew puts on a smile, about to say "Hi"...but Fletcher looks at him blankly. Doesn't even seem to recognize him. Walks right past, picks up the trash can behind, and wheels it to the front of the room.

FLETCHER

Down the line.

He starts pointing at the SAXES. Each plays a middle C. The slightest movement of Fletcher's finger indicates who plays when. Next it's the TROMBONES' turn. Then the TRUMPETS'.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Someone here's out of tune. Who?
(no answer)

I'll give you a hint. It's a trombone.

Still nothing. He fixes his glare on the TROMBONISTS.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

None of you dickwads knows who it is?

Andrew looks up. Startled. But no one else here seems surprised.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Down the line.

Each TROMBONIST plays a middle C. Silence. Fletcher waits... Then, the red-curly-haired BASS TROMBONIST raises his hand--

BASS TROMBONIST

Is it me...?

FLETCHER

Well, no, it's not, Napoleon Dynamite, but thanks for playing.

(looks at the other two players)

We're down to you two. Still no idea?

(nothing)

Let's consider the odds. Who do we guess?

Beat. One of the two is fat. Oddly-shaped head, been picked on his whole life. GERRY METZ. Nervous, he raises his hand...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

That's right, Elmer Fudd. Now are you sharp or are you flat?

GERRY

...Sharp...?

FLETCHER

Have you ever looked in a mirror and noticed your head is concave? Most heads are convex. Yours you could take a shit in. How many people have taken shits in your head?

GERRY

Flat...?

FLETCHER

Excellent. Now do we think we can lay off the Twinkies and learn how to tune?

Gerry nods. Fixes his trombone. Andrew just stares. Shocked.

And then Fletcher SMILES -- and he's switched to warm and cuddly.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

We've got newbies here today, people.

Thompson, Galipova, and Neyman...

Aren't they cute? Nineteen-year-olds...

(chuckles throughout the room)

(MORE)

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Tria's pissed, she thought she'd bagged herself an under-age.

Laughter. AMY TRIA, clarinet, one of only two females here, nods.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Tria, Neyman did want to give you a reach-around, he just couldn't reach.

AMY

That's ok, he was practicing for you.

More laughter. Fletcher's face opens up in an ear-to-ear grin. He's having fun. Andrew nervously laughs along.

FLETCHER

Thompson and Galipova. Sounds like a pair of gay spies. You a double agent, Thompson?
(THOMPSON smiles)

I mean do you take it in front and from behind?

Beat. Thompson goes visibly uneasy. Fletcher grins some more.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Alright, gang, "Whiplash". Or, as Thompson refers to it, "My Latest Trick".
(the players get out the chart)
We'll run it through once, then at 10 we'll have the newbies sit in.

Andrew goes cold. Looks at the clock. 9:27.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Six-two-two-seven-two-two--

The band BEGINS. The chart's named "Whiplash" for a reason. It's fast, frenetic, 7/9 time. This fast, with this many polyrhythms, that's impossibly hard.

CARL

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. Six-two-two-seven-two-two--

Fletcher paces back and forth, eyeing players as they play...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Late... Hemiola there... G of C, not D...

He's got fox's ears, hawk's eyes. Every sinew of his body is focused. Andrew watches, awed, scared. Eyes the clock. SOUND FADES OUT as the MINUTE HAND ticks forward... 9:30.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Stop!

SOUND BACK IN as the band comes to a halt. Andrew looks up. Fletcher has moved up to the FOURTH TRUMPETER. Soft, coiled--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Have you ever sucked off a horse?

FOURTH TRUMPETER

Wh--what...?

FLETCHER

I asked you a question. Have you ever sucked off a horse?

FOURTH TRUMPETER

I... No...

FLETCHER

Are you calling me a liar?

FOURTH TRUMPETER

No...

FLETCHER

Well I say you're calling me a liar. What do you say to that?

FOURTH TRUMPETER

I'm n-- I'm not calling you a liar.

FLETCHER

Why do you keep contradicting me?

FOURTH TRUMPETER

I'm not contradicting you.

FLETCHER

You just did. Now answer the question.

FOURTH TRUMPETER

...Which question...?

FLETCHER

Are you getting semantic with me? Are you Bill fucking Clinton?

FOURTH TRUMPETER

I...

FLETCHER

Have you ever sucked off a horse???

FOURTH TRUMPETER

I have never sucked off a horse.

FLETCHER

Then why do you blow your horn as though it's a horse's cock??

(pointing to the mouthpiece)

Focus your lips in. Buzz them. Armature. Quit that absurd puffed-cheek nonsense, you are not Dizzy Gillespie and you are not the Horse Whisperer. Got it?

The TRUMPETER nods. Fletcher turns to the rest of the band.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

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

(silence)

Ok. Maybe a moth flew in my ear. Bar 63.

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

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

No, I guess my ears are clean because somebody is most definitely out of tune. 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 don't know you're out of tune -- which I am afraid is even worse.

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

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Saxes.

(they play, he cuts them off)

Trumpets.

(they play, he cuts them off)

Trombones.

(they play, he cuts them off)

He's here.

Fletcher points at the TROMBONISTS. Silence. Even softer--

FLETCHER (CONT' (CONT'D)
Tell me it's not you, Elmer Fudd.

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

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
It's ok. Play.

Gerry does so. Fletcher stops him. Leans in. Again the whisper--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Do you think you're out of tune?

Gerry, terrified, looks down at the floor.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
There're no Butterfingers down there. Look at me. Do you think you're out of tune?

GERRY
...Y--yes...

FLETCHER
Then why the FUCK didn't you say it?!?

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)
Stein, you're third trombone. I've been carrying your fat ass for too long, Metz. I will not let you cost us a competition because your mind's on a fucking Happy Meal and not on pitch. Please leave.

Still trembling, and almost in tears, Gerry picks up his trombone and walks to the door. Andrew, panic increasing by the second, watches...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
For the record, Metz wasn't out of tune. You were, Wallach. But Metz didn't know it. And that's bad enough.

Andrew looks at the clock. 9:39.

And just then, Fletcher's eyes start to roam. *Please don't land on me*, Andrew seems to be thinking. They land on Andrew.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Ten-minute break. When we get back --
newbies are on.

INT. BASEMENT HALLWAY - GEHRING HALL - MOMENTS LATER

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

ANDREW

Six-two-two-seven-two-two--

He scribbles on the page, trying to compute the patterns: " $7/9 + 7/4 = 7/18$ ". " $1/64 \times 7/9$ "... Meanwhile, down the hall--

CORE PLAYERS

Stein won't last a week. He doesn't have the lips. / Fudd lasted longer than he should have...

A few more CORE PLAYERS pass Andrew. He looks up at them. They're tall, built. Next to them Andrew looks like a scrawny teen. They don't even look at him as they walk by...

Just then -- a FINGER taps Andrew's shoulder. He jumps, looks up.

FLETCHER

May I please speak with you for a second?

INT. FLETCHER'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Andrew's pulse is racing. Fletcher eases the door shut and -- earnestly, back to the warm tone he displayed days ago --

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

How're you feeling, Andrew?

ANDREW

Great... I'm...I'm feeling...great...

FLETCHER

Be honest with me. Are you a little shaken up?

ANDREW

...No, I--

FLETCHER

Yes you are, come on...

ANDREW

Well, I -- I guess a little--

FLETCHER

(laughing, grinning)
Be *honest*, Andrew...

ANDREW
 (managing to laugh in return)
 Yeah, I guess I am...

Fletcher laughs harder, eyes bright -- then, suddenly ice-cold--

FLETCHER
 Then cut it out.

Beat. A tense silence. Then -- Fletcher resumes laughing.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
 I got you... Didn't I? Didn't I?

ANDREW
 (an awkward laugh)
 Yeah... You got me...

FLETCHER
 Listen, Andrew.
 (puts his arm around his shoulder)
 I know what you saw out there is worrying you. But there's a difference. This is your first day. Metz had been dragging mud for two years. And you know what? He'll trudge it out in Nassau for a few months, and then I'll probably invite him back.

Andrew looks up at Fletcher. Didn't realize this.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
 Besides, you're no Elmer Fudd. I can see it in your eyes. I saw it three weeks ago in the practice room -- in your hands, the way your feet moved. You're listening to the right people, Andrew.
 (then,)
 Buddy Rich, right...?

Andrew's eyes open up. Feeling better all of a sudden--

ANDREW
 Yeah... Buddy Rich.

FLETCHER
 I sat next to his hi-hat in '83, you know. That hat was always moving. Just punctuating -- a comma here, a period there. Like Fred Astaire's feet.

ANDREW
 (smiles; knows what Fletcher means)
 I would've loved to see Buddy play...

FLETCHER

Well you just focus on what's around you. Tanner's a good model, he's been drumming since he was three. He's a real clock. And next month competition season starts. That's a good learning opportunity.

(then, leaning in--)

Now I'm going to have you play out there, Andrew. The key is -- relax. Don't worry about the numbers or what the other players think. You are here for a reason.

(Andrew nods)

Go on. Say it.

ANDREW

I'm here for a reason.

FLETCHER

Good. Now have fun. My wife always told me it should be fun. This. What we do. "Otherwise," she used to say to me, "what do you do it for?"

Andrew looks at him.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Ok...?

Beat. And, finally, Andrew nods.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Ok. Let's go make some music.

INT. STUDIO BAND ROOM - GEHRING HALL - MOMENTS LATER

The players are taking their seats. Slowly, Andrew walks in. Eyes the DRUMS. Takes a deep breath.

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

ANDREW

Five-two-two-six-two-two-seven-two-two--

Muttering, Andrew sits on the throne. Feels too high, exposed above the rest of the band. Adjusts his seat. Now he's too low. Looks at his hands. They're slick with sweat. Tries to rub the sweat off on his seat. A squeaking noise. Tries his sweater. The sweat won't come off...

As the band tunes, WE FADE OUT ALL SOUND -- except for Andrew's breathing, and what sounds like a bass drum... Thumping...

His heartbeat.

FLETCHER

Alright, gang.

Andrew looks up. Clutches his sticks. He can barely hold onto them, his hands are so wet.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

"Whiplash". But slow. Start it off easy.

Fletcher eyes Andrew. Nods as though to ask: "Ok?" That one look eases Andrew's nerves.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Let's have fun with this. No, Tria, not that kind of fun.

The PLAYERS laugh. Andrew joins in.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Now, newbies, just do your best.

Andrew looks at the music. Counts in his head. *I can do this...* Fletcher CLAPS the band off. Mid-tempo, far easier than before.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Very nice, Neyman. Let's see some fills.

Andrew fills, rolling down the toms. Fletcher grins.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Nice!

Andrew 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, you were a hair off there, Neyman. No worries, let's take it from 46.

(claps, Andrew starts, then--)

Ah -- that's not quite my tempo, Neyman.

(claps, Andrew starts again)

One-and-two-and--

Fletcher waves. Andrew looks at his music. Realizes his error.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

You want to set that hit up. Ok?

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

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Sorry, that's not quite my tempo.

He claps off. Stops the band again, only seconds later.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

And on 53. Another hit. The "and" of one.

On Andrew. Nods. Flustered. *Get it together...* Starts again.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

54. Hit on two. And you're dragging.

Andrew nods. Worried now. Fletcher claps. Waves to stop again.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

You're rushing.

(claps; stops the band seconds later)

You're dragging.

(about to clap again, when he eyes
Andrew's arms)

Right hand should be at the snare, ok?

You need to set up the hit.

(Andrew moves his hand)

No, sorry, your *right* hand.

Then he claps. Andrew plays. 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 HURDLES 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 threw a chair
at your head, Neyman?

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, veins set to BURST--

FLETCHER
Start counting.

ANDREW
Five-two-two-six-two-two...

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
R--r-rushing...

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 I was dragging?

ANDREW

D-dragging...

FLETCHER

So you do know the difference. If you dare to sabotage my band I will gut you like a fucking pig. I can stand drummers who are as dumb as you, as pasty as you, as small-dicked and bad-breath'd and Daddy's-girl-pathetic as you, but do you know what I cannot stand?

(Andrew's cheeks are red,
eyes about to water...)

Answer the fucking question, Neyman!!

ANDREW

I -- I don't know--

FLETCHER

Rushers and draggers, Neyman! 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--

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 H. 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 that?

ANDREW

A half-note...

FLETCHER

And that?

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! One-two--

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

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

This is not your toy fucking drum set, Neyman -- play it louder!!

(Andrew does so)

Now answer my question -- and I swear to God if you get it wrong I will permanently fuck you up -- 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??

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

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

You must be upset. Are you upset??

ANDREW

N--no...

FLETCHER

You're not upset? 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.

ANDREW

I am upset...

FLETCHER

Say it louder.

(Andrew hesitates, so, SCREAMING--)

LOUDER!!!

ANDREW

I am upset!

FLETCHER

LOUDER!!!!!!

ANDREW

I am upset!!

FLETCHER

You are a worthless friendless dickless
shit-cake who doesn't know a flam from a
rim shot, whose Mommy ran out on Daddy
once she realized he wasn't Ernest fucking
Hemingway, and who's now weeping and
slobbering over my drum kit like a fucking
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, balling,
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, Neyman.
(then, turning to the band,)
"Whiplash". Once more from the top.

He claps the band off. Barely notices the other ALTERNATES, still playing. The clock reads 10:44. As for Andrew, he just sits behind Carl -- dazed, red-faced, and utterly gutted.

His first day of Studio Band is over.

EXT. GEHRING HALL - DAY

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.

INT. ANDREW'S DORMITORY - DAY

Andrew is curled in the corner, choked up, phone to his ear.

JIM NEYMAN (O.S.)

What's wrong? What's wrong, Andrew?

ANDREW

(between tears)
He ripped me apart...

JIM NEYMAN (O.S.)

*The hell is this asshole doing teaching??
You should complain--*

ANDREW

No... He...he makes great players. No one would complain...

JIM NEYMAN (O.S.)

*I thought you were close to transferring.
That's what you told me.*

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 stack of BUDDY RICH CD's...

ANDREW
 (almost to himself)
 ...I thought he liked my playing.

JIM NEYMAN (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...*

JIM NEYMAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Andrew?

ANDREW
 Did...did you hear back...for your book?

JIM NEYMAN (O.S.)
My book? Yeah...why?

ANDREW
 What'd they say?

JIM NEYMAN (O.S.)
*Just...you know, it wasn't for them, but
 whatever...*

Andrew takes this in. Expected it... Has heard it before...

JIM NEYMAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
*The point is -- you don't pay any
 attention to the trash talk. Ever.*

But something has clicked in Andrew.

ANDREW
 I'm sorry, I -- I should practice.

JIM NEYMAN (O.S.)
Andrew--

ANDREW
 I have to go... Sorry...
 (then,)
 I'll call you later.

He hangs up. Rises. Wipes his eyes some more. Exits.

INT. GEHRING HALL LOWER LEVEL / FLETCHER'S OFFICE - DAY

Andrew knocks on FLETCHER'S OFFICE door. Determined.

FLETCHER (O.S.)
 Yes?

Andrew takes a breath, opens. 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. Who smiles...

INT. ANDREW'S PRACTICE ROOM - DAY

Andrew sits at his drum set, furiously practicing, counting:

ANDREW (CONT'D)

One-two-three-four, one-two-three-four...

And just like that, moving fast, the rhythm carrying us, we're--

INT. KINKO'S - DAY

Andrew at a Xerox, copying pages of music. The titles: "WHIPLASH", "CHEROKEE", "CARAVAN"... Pages dense with notes...

ANDREW (V.O.)

One-two-three-four, one-two-three-four...

EXT. GEHRING HALL - EVENING

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. The DRUMMING continues...

FACULTY MEMBER

Hello, hello, Julian.

Fletcher smiles and waves, then turns the other way. Careful, polite -- but it's clear he'd rather be left alone...

INT. ANDREW'S DORMITORY - EVENING

Andrew pulls the MATTRESS off his bed, drags it to the door with his ALARM CLOCK. Heaves both out to the hallway...

ANDREW (V.O.)

One-two-three-four, one-two-three-four...

INT. DELI - GROCERY STORE - NIGHT

Andrew sets his uniform on the counter, shakes his head while his BOSS glares. Waves bye and walks off, doesn't care...

ANDREW (V.O.)

One-two-three-four, one-two-three-four...

INT. SUBWAY - NIGHT

Fletcher is seated, squished in between commuters, towered over by other travelers. An ELDERLY WOMAN comes aboard. Looks for a seat. Without a word, Fletcher rises and offers his. The Woman smiles to him and sits.

INT. NEW YORK STREET - NIGHT

Andrew marches down a side-street, wolfing down a McDonald's burger for dinner, earphones plugged into a METRONOME...

ANDREW (V.O.)

One-two-three-four, one-two-three-four...

INT. ANDREW'S PRACTICE ROOM - NIGHT

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...

ANDREW (V.O.)

One-two-three-four, one-two-three-four...

EXT. FLETCHER'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Fletcher reaches a modest ten-story. Lower East Side, leafy street. With his folded-up umbrella, his head hanging low, and the careful delicacy with which he opens the door, he looks like nothing so much as a quiet, everyday man...

INT. FLETCHER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Fletcher prepares himself dinner. He has nice porcelain plates, and a glass of red wine. But the meal? Annie's Mac and Cheese. On the nearest wall, a photo hangs. In it, a younger Fletcher, and a WOMAN, and a NINE-YEAR-OLD GIRL. All smiles...

INT. ANDREW'S PRACTICE ROOM - NIGHT

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.

ANDREW (V.O.)

One-two-three-four, one-two-three-four...

INT. ANDREW'S PRACTICE ROOM - MORNING

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: Andrew reads music... Memorizing...

CUT TO: Rides furiously, trying to beat his double-time swing... The METRONOME reading 405... His muscles exhausted...

CUT TO: The double-time swing again... METRONOME at 410...

ANDREW (V.O.)

One...

The METRONOME adjusted up to 412... A few blisters tearing...

ANDREW (V.O.)

Two...

414... Hands bleeding now, blood smearing the sticks...

ANDREW (V.O.)

Three...

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

ANDREW (V.O.)

Four.

INT. LIVING ROOM - FLETCHER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Silence. Fletcher sits on a couch in his apartment. Still alone.

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

Then, emerging from the quiet -- soft, faint -- we can make out a scratchy old 30's recording. The VOICE of Bessie Smith crackling, as a muted trumpet gently murmurs behind her. It's "St. Louis Blues", and Smith sings of her love lost...

The song is coming from a record player on the table next to Fletcher. Next to the player a stack of other LP's: Chopin, Ravel, Bach. Fletcher just sits and listens, barely moves -- but you can tell the music now playing means everything to him...

The number finishes, and, with the most delicate touch, as though he were handling a newborn, Fletcher lifts up the needle and turns the record player off. Stares into space...

Silence once again.

INT. AUDITORIUM / STAGE - NIGHT

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

The band FINISHES. No applause. A card:

Overbrook College
First Competition of the Winter Season

INT. BACKSTAGE / GREEN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Through the crack of a doorway, Andrew watches the band, awed. The RIVAL PLAYERS quickly shuffle off-stage. A VOICE--

TECHNICIAN (O.S.)

The legend is back!

Andrew turns, moves to another door. Out in the HALL, he sees an OVERBROOK TECHNICIAN welcome Fletcher. In the Technician's arms, a THREE-YEAR-OLD GIRL -- the Technician's daughter--

FLETCHER

Mikey!

(and, to the girl,)

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

(she blushes, shakes her head)

Are you playing an instrument, sweetie?

TECHNICIAN

She just started piano this week.

FLETCHER

Ooo, I need pianists!

(to the girl)

What do you say you give it a couple weeks and then come play with me?

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 plants a gentle kiss on the top of the girl's head, then heads toward the door.

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)

G Lydian.

(they play the Lydian scale)

D Lydian Augmented.

(they play it)

Double it.

(they play it double-time)

Get your music. "Caravan" 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, Yawheh, and Bhuvaneshwari that I will go on a killing spree and massacre the family and extended family of the person responsible. That alright with you, girls?

PLAYERS

Yes.

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

FLETCHER

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

The STAGEHAND nods, slinks away. Fletcher addresses his band--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Stage right. In order. Now.

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

That means you too, Mini-Me.

INT. AUDITORIUM / STAGE - CONTINUOUS

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, opens it to "Caravan".

FLETCHER

Time. Instruments.

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

ANNOUNCEMENT (V.O.)

The Shaffer Conservatory Studio Band...

Andrew, behind Carl, eyes the audience. Darkened, fingers visible here and there. A few already taking notes. Fletcher raises an arm. All eyes on his HAND...

And then -- the slightest move of his 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. A big brassy sound. Fletcher eyes the trumpet section. One of the TRUMPETERS plays a four-bar solo. He's the one Fletcher accused of "sucking off a horse". Now his armature is perfect. Fletcher nods, satisfied.

CARL

Page.

(Andrew snaps to it, turns the page)

Damnit...

Fletcher eyes Carl. Still conducting, he approaches, whispers--

FLETCHER

Get it together, Tanner, I swear to God.

The music BUILDS and we're--

INT. BACKSTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

The performance over, the PLAYERS trickle into the GREEN ROOM.

CARL

(pissed, handing Andrew the folder)

Hold onto this for the second set.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Andrew plugs in for a can of Coke at a vending machine.

Sets his MUSIC FOLDER down on a chair. Then overhears TALKING...

VOICE

That's what I heard...

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

PIANIST

Do you think he'll make a complaint?

BARITONE 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.

He spins around. 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. No. You're joking. Tell me you are.

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--)
 Neyman lost my folder.

PLAYER
 Are you 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??

INT. BACKSTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

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

CARL
 We have an issue.

FLETCHER
 Now is not the time.

CARL
 I gave Neyman the folder. Neyman lost it.
 Fletcher looks at Andrew. *This is a joke, right?*

FLETCHER
 Neyman lost it.

CARL
 Yes.

FLETCHER
 The folder is YOUR fucking responsibility, Tanner! You give a retard a calculator and he'll try to turn his TV on with it. You give Neyman your folder and you get what you get. 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, Neyman. And I hope you've
improved since last month's rehearsal. I
am not about to start losing now.

Then, looks at Carl once more. Closes his eyes. Opens them.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

You know what I just did, Tanner? I just swore
an oath to God, Yawheh, and Bhuvaneshwari. I
think you know what it was.

(and to the rest of the band--)

ON-STAGE!!

INT. AUDITORIUM / STAGE - MOMENTS LATER

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 one wild-card. Andrew rubs the sweat from his palms. *This is it, this is it--*

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. A surging 7/9.

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 now.

The number builds some more. A final flurry of brass patterns, the pianist ripping across the keys, the whole machine punching its way to the finish line. The end.

Andrew melts into his seat. He made it through.

Fletcher gestures for the band to exit stage right -- as a STAGE HAND appears, carrying a red folder. Going up to Carl--

STAGE HAND

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

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

INT. AUDITORIUM / STAGE - HOURS LATER

HEAD JUDGE

First place. Shaffer Conservatory.

Applause. Fletcher summons his PLAYERS with him to the stage. The JUDGE shakes his hand, shows him to the mic. Fletcher hesitantly takes it, his PLAYERS assembled behind him -- Andrew included...

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)

(MORE)

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

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 my dad 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.

(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 the band.

INT. STUDIO BAND ROOM - GEHRING HALL - DAY

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 Neyman's pages.

Then he claps the band off. Andrew plays, still shocked. This is as clear a verdict of his playing at Overbrook as he'll ever get.

He's the new core drummer.

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Andrew watches a MOVIE on his iPhone: 70's footage of a white-haired DRUMMER, a face we've seen before... Buddy Rich. Andrew smiles. Relaxed. Proud. Voicemail pops up. He listens--

CARL (O.S.)

*Neyman... 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. DELETES the voicemail. Restarts his movie.

INT. KITCHEN - JIM NEYMAN'S HOUSE - NEW JERSEY - NIGHT

JIM NEYMAN grabs a platter from the stove. Andrew's by his side.

JIM NEYMAN

So you like him more now? The band teacher?

ANDREW

(off a subtle coldness in Jim's voice)
He's a conductor.
(then, a smile,)
I think he likes me more now.

JIM NEYMAN

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

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

ANDREW

Yes...

JIM NEYMAN

(nods)
Grab the shakers please.

INT. DINING ROOM - JIM NEYMAN'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Seven people seated at the table: Jim and Andrew, Andrew's two uncles, FRANK and STEPHEN, two aunts, NELLY and EMMA, and 18-year-old cousin DUSTIN. Loud, overlapping chatter--

UNCLE FRANK
Until they push Dawson to starter, they're dead to me.

DUSTIN
We debated Forrest Hills last week, but not at Forrest Hills.

AUNT EMMA
And Andrew's drumming is going well...

UNCLE FRANK
Right. How's the 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 at once from Andrew to him.

UNCLE STEPHEN
Well, well, well -- Tom Brady graces us with his presence.

TRAVIS
Sorry I'm late.

UNCLE FRANK
Too many ESPN interviews, Trav?

AUNT EMMA
Mr. MVP. Did you hear, Jim?

UNCLE FRANK
They named Trav here the season's MVP. Soon we'll be selling his autograph on eBay.

JIM NEYMAN
That's incredible, Travis!

AUNT NELLY
Mr. MVP pro-football-destined Travis, Dustin heading up Model UN, soon-to-be-Rhodes-Scholar or who knows what, Jim with his books... I mean, the talent at this table -- it's stunning.

Beat. Then--

AUNT NELLY (CONT'D)

And Andrew. With his drumming.

UNCLE STEPHEN

Yeah, you said that was going ok, Andrew?

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

So is this that band camp thing?

ANDREW

It's called a music school, actually.

DUSTIN

"This one time, in band camp"...

UNCLE FRANK

Does the studio help get you a job?

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

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 looks again at his dad. Why isn't he defending him...?

AUNT NELLY

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

Mr. All-Star himself! On your way to the pros. That's what I'm talking about.

ANDREW

It's Division III.

Everyone at the table looks at him -- 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)

Do you have a girlfriend, Andy?

ANDREW

No.

UNCLE FRANK

Friends?

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.

UNCLE FRANK

Dying broke, drunk, and full of heroin at 40 would not be my idea of success.

ANDREW

I'd rather die broke and drunk at 40 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.

UNCLE FRANK

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

ANDREW

Tweedle-Dee and Tweedle-Dum are not barometers by which I measure myself.

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 NEYMAN

And from Lincoln Center?

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

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

ANDREW

In 1967, Laszlo Polgar, who has barely ever played chess in his life, says he can guarantee his kids will be the best in the world at it. Wants to prove talent is just about conditioning, about hours spent. "If I pick painting, it's a matter of taste," he says. "Whereas chess is objective." He finds a wife and goes about having three kids: Susan first, then Sofia, then Judit. Gets them practicing for hours and hours before they can even talk. Lo and behold, twenty years later, Susan is the top female player in the world, Sofia wins one of the greatest matches in chess history, and little Judit is 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

(after a moment)

So not only do you want to die at 40, 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.

INT. STUDIO BAND ROOM - GEHRING HALL - DAY

We're back at Shaffer. Studio Band rehearsal, Andrew at the drums. Fletcher cues a fermata, as the band finishes a 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, when--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Neyman. Stay a bit, ok?

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

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

(closing the doors)

Look at the chart. See the tempo?

ANDREW

Quarter note equals 400...

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. Blank-faced--

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, if you don't mind.

It takes a moment for Andrew to register. Before he can even ask "Who?"--

RYAN (O.S.)

Am I late?

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

FLETCHER

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

RYAN

Yep, Nassau Band. Hey, Andrew...

He extends his hand as he sits next to Andrew. He's all smiles. But Andrew is mortified. Can barely conceal his anxiety -- and his anger. Shakes Ryan's hand, but doesn't look him in the eye.

FLETCHER

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

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

--but we've got the Dunnellen 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". "FREQUENT FLYER".

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, Neyman. Now, all I want to do is test out the part. Neyman, 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. "400". Another breath. *Ok... I've got this...* Fletcher CLAPS. Andrew BEGINS. Riding as hard and fast as--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

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

ANDREW

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

FLETCHER

Let's see if Connelly 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)

Connelly -- 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. Coiled--

FLETCHER
Connelly, the chart's yours. See you
both tonight at 9.
(answering the phone)
Morning, Julian Fletcher speaking...

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

RYAN
How you been, bro?

Andrew looks at Ryan. *What?*

RYAN (CONT'D)
I think it was the injury that kept me out
last time. My arm was still weak. But damn,
I am psyched to be joining you guys.

Andrew just stares. Ryan seems earnest, making conversation --
but Andrew is incensed. He rises, marches to the OFFICE...

INT. FLETCHER'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

...bursts in and closes the door behind him. Fletcher's at
his desk and has just finished his call. As Fletcher gets up--

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 his 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.

Fletcher turns and sits back at his desk. Puts his hand to his forehead, as though exhausted. A moment passes. Andrew takes a step back. Opens the door. Exits...

INT. GEHRING HALL - LOWER LEVEL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Andrew busts out of the STUDIO BAND ROOM. Eyes burning. Beyond determined. One thought and one thought only: Get that part back.

RYAN

(exiting the band room from behind)

Bro! Want to grab lunch?

But Andrew doesn't answer. Just keeps walking.

INT. ANDREW'S PRACTICE ROOM - DAY

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

ANDREW

Come on... Come on...

Then, finally, frenzied, tired, SHOUTING at himself...

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Come on you fucking piece of shit... Come on!!! COME ON!!!!

INT. HALLWAY - ANDREW'S DORMITORY BUILDING - NIGHT

Andrew exits his dorm, out of sorts. Sees his NEIGHBOR down the hall, again making what seems to be a drug deal. Looks, then hurries off...

EXT. SUBWAY STATION - NIGHT

Andrew nears the station, a take-out dinner under his arm, when--

VOICE

Hey!

Andrew turns. Startled. It's NICOLE. The girl from the deli.

ANDREW

(needs to keep going)

Hi...

NICOLE

I thought that was you.

ANDREW

Yeah... How are you?

NICOLE

Good. You -- look a little stressed...

ANDREW

Oh. No. I'm not.

NICOLE

Ok... Well I'll let you be -- and actually, now that I ran into you -- if you still wanted to do a concert, or show, or something -- I'm around this weekend.

ANDREW

Oh. Cool. Yeah, this weekend's pretty busy.

Nicole takes this in. Andrew seems to have changed. He's cold...

NICOLE

Oh. Ok. Well, cool, some other time...

ANDREW

Yeah, I'm pretty busy in general.

Beat. Nicole gets the hint. You can see the embarrassment sinking in.

NICOLE

Ok. Well...take care...

ANDREW

(curt)

Yep, you too.

They go their separate ways. Andrew looks back for a second, watches Nicole walk off -- and disappear into the night. He thinks for a moment... Then focuses and continues on his way.

INT. STUDIO BAND ROOM - GEHRING HALL - NIGHT

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 Connelly.

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 "Mood Indigo", 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 he was no good. They 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... And I put him in Studio Band, and we worked together for three years, and when he graduated, the Dave Holland Big Band made him third trumpet. 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 he saw at Carnegie Hall... 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, finally--)
 "Frequent Flyer". From the top.

The PLAYERS open their folders, pick up their instruments. Fletcher waits. Hesitates again... Then -- CLAPS. The band STARTS. Fast, squealing -- but Fletcher waves to Ryan to stop.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
 No, that's...that's not quite right,
 Connelly... Sorry...

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

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
 I... I want to try Neyman on this... Ok?

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

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
 Maybe...maybe now's the time for Neyman
 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 his voice now. The stammering fading away. 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, Connelly.

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 and--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
 Which it just might. Neyman.

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 and--

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. Connelly. You first. Get on the kit.

INT. LOWER LEVEL HALLWAY - GEHRING HALL - LATER

PLAYERS mull through the hall, stretching. A few yawns. Two more PLAYERS emerge from the band room. 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.) (CONT'D)
Motherfucking cocksucking FAGGOT!! Is--

INT. STUDIO BAND ROOM - GEHRING HALL - NIGHT

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
--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 Sinead O'Connor concert, Tanner.
(MORE)

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

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. Staggeres 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.

INT. BATHROOM - LATER

More PLAYERS flow into the bathroom. Rinsing faces, dead-tired--

FOURTH TRUMPETER

Fucking A, man... I want to go home...

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

PLAYERS on the front steps. One smokes. One looks at his watch. The street is quiet. It is very late...

INT. STUDIO BAND ROOM - GEHRING HALL - NIGHT

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
 (didn't hear)
 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 HURDLES 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, Neyman. You earned the part.

He turns to the rest of the band. Most of the PLAYERS have returned to their seats by now.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Ok. Now we can begin.

The clock: 2:00.

INT. GEHRING HALL - NIGHT

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

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

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Sleep tomorrow, Dunnellen Sunday. Leave at least five hours from New York. Call-time is 5pm sharp, follow the signs to Stage 1. 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...

INT. HALLWAY - ANDREW'S DORMITORY BUILDING - DAY

Andrew POUNDING on a door. It opens -- to reveal his NEIGHBOR.

ANDREW

I need some of your stuff.

NEIGHBOR

What? Who are you?

ANDREW

You know who I am. Andrew Neyman. First-year. Down the hall. I need something for panic and I need something to keep my right arm moving without tiring out.

The Neighbor just looks at him. Wary.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

I know you give shit out. Tanner, Connelly -- I know they came to you.

Silence. Andrew stays still. The Neighbor can tell he's serious.

NEIGHBOR

It's 500.

BUS DRIVER (V.O.)

Next stop Dunnellen. Two hours.

INT. BUS - DAY

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 and metronome on, counting through "Frequent Flyer"... And, peeking just out of his jacket pocket...

...a bottle of unmarked PILLS.

The DRIVER glances at his mirror. Other PASSENGERS start to turn. *Who is this lunatic...?* We MOVE IN CLOSER on Andrew, poring over the music, louder and louder--

ANDREW (CONT'D)

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

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

EXT. BUS - DAY

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 watch, approaches the DRIVER...

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Do you know how much longer it will be?
Because I need to be in Dunnellen by 3:30--

DRIVER

New bus is on its way. 45 minutes.

ANDREW

But how will we get there by 3:30 then?

DRIVER

Well, you'll be hitting rush hour now,
so...I'd say it'll be closer to 5.

Andrew blanches. *Fuck...*

EXT. BUS STOP - DUNNELLEN - EVENING

A nondescript Jersey town. The NEW BUS comes to a stop, setting down passengers on Dunnellen's Main Street. Andrew bolts off and hurries to the corner, 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 cabs after 5 on Sunday.

ANDREW

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

PASSERBY

They got a car rental. Five blocks down.

ANDREW

Which way??

The Passerby points -- and Andrew starts RUNNING.

EXT. CAR RENTAL AGENCY - MOMENTS LATER

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 (CONT'D)

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

A MAN appears behind the door. Opens it. Calm, friendly--

MAN

Come on in... Last car of the day.

INT. CAR RENTAL AGENCY - MOMENTS LATER

Andrew finishes signing paperwork...

The MAN motions him forward, and Andrew hurries after, grabbing his MUSIC FOLDER and BACKPACK from the nearest chair. WE DRIFT back...

...to the STICK BAG left on the chair.

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

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... His cell rings--

ANDREW

Hello??

BASSIST (O.S.)

Neyman, where the fuck are you? Call-time was 5. Fletcher's livid.

ANDREW

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

BASSIST (O.S.)

We're on stage in twenty--

ANDREW

I know, I'm almost ther--

BASSIST (O.S.)

--and Fletcher's got Connelly 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 hangs up. Throws the phone against his seat. Starts up the car. BOLTS out of the lot, tires SCREECHING...

INT. PERFORMING ARTS CENTER - GREEN ROOM - DAY

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. Connelly'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, I have the sticks--

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, Neyman.

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. You and that double-time swing you somehow knew I'd ask for. The folder you somehow "accidentally" lost.

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

ANDREW

The family business you somehow joined.

Fletcher, surprised, takes a moment. Nods. Then--

FLETCHER

Ok, Neyman. You think you know me? A couple visits to my office and you think you can sight-read me?

ANDREW

Yes.

FLETCHER

Then let's play a game: 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 will send you back to Nassau Band to turn pages until you graduate or drop out.

(MORE)

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

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 stands his ground:

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.

EXT. PERFORMING ARTS CENTER / INT. CAR - DAY

The squealing of tires. Andrew's RENTAL CAR smacks asphalt. The car's clock reads: 5:20...

INT. CAR / CAR RENTAL AGENCY - DAY

5:28. Andrew dashes out, races into the rental agency. They're still open... Grabs the STICK BAG...

INT. CAR - DAY

Andrew on the road, speeding like a demon, the GPS on. Looks at the clock. 5:32. Whips out his cell. Dials...

ANDREW

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

BASSIST (O.S.)

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

BASSIST (O.S.)

Are you driving?

ANDREW

No..

The GPS BEEPS for the turn.

BASSIST (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, changing lanes... The clock turns 5:33...

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

The car reaching a TRAFFIC LIGHT...

YELLOW gives way to RED -- 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 the windshield -- bleeding, battered, out of it... The car 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 -- **CRAAAAACK** -- 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, he 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?? 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 -- 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...

EXT./INT. PERFORMING ARTS CENTER / GREEN ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

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...

Busts inside. Eyes scanning. Hears the sounds of TUNING...

INT. AUDITORIUM - MOMENTS LATER

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: "FREQUENT FLYER"... 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 unmarked bottle of pills. Almost drops it. Leans down, pops a pill, out of sight.

ANNOUNCEMENT

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 the chart 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 PLAYERS 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. SECURITY GUARDS rush 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:

Dunnellen University
Final Competition of the Winter Season

INT. DEAN'S OFFICE - DONAN HALL - DAY

A quiet office, a quiet February day. We're back at Shaffer.

Andrew, a cast on his hand, sits across from DEAN PENCE. In front of him, a document and a pen. Pence stares him down.

Beat. Andrew picks up the pen -- and SIGNS the document.

EXT. ANDREW'S DORMITORY BUILDING - DAY

Snow on the ground. Andrew steps out, shivering, dragging two SUITCASES behind him. Loads them into the back of a CAB.

He takes a moment. Looks both ways -- as though looking at the campus for the last time. Utter resignation on his face. His cast has been replaced by a bandage. Time has passed...

WOMAN

Andrew Neyman?

Andrew turns. A WOMAN, 45, business suit, has approached.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Are you Andrew Neyman?

(he only nods)

If I could ask for a moment of your time...

She displays a CARD: "RACHEL BORNHOLDT. Moseley, Cronin &--"

ANDREW

I'm not interested.

RACHEL BORNHOLDT

It concerns Julian Fletcher.

Beat. Andrew looks at her. And, a moment later, we're...

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - MOSELEY, CRONIN & JACOBS - DAY

Andrew sits at a long table, flanked by two PARALEGALS. Seated across are RACHEL BORNHOLDT and NATHAN ROARKE, 58.

RACHEL BORNHOLDT (CONT'D)
Does this come as a surprise?

ANDREW
...I don't know how to answer that.

NATHAN ROARKE
It was what you did at Dunnellen that got our interest, Andrew.

Andrew looks at Roarke. Not sure what that means...

RACHEL BORNHOLDT
Does the name Sean Casey mean anything to you?

Andrew turns to her. A moment. Warily, he nods.

RACHEL BORNHOLDT (CONT'D)
So you know of his death? Last month, he wrote his mother a suicide note, then drove his car off a cliff-side road.

ANDREW
What does that have to do with me?

RACHEL BORNHOLDT
Sean suffered from anxiety and depression. His mother, Samantha Casey, claims that this started during his years in the Shaffer Conservatory Studio Band.

ANDREW
Anxiety and depression are genetic.

RACHEL BORNHOLDT
Not entirely. Especially considering Fletcher's classroom tactics. And the fact that Sean Casey mentioned Fletcher in his note.

Andrew looks at her. She knows he's surprised. Beat.

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 Julian 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. But if they think we have a case like this and can take it to court, they'll have no choice but to let him go before we do.

(then, leaning in,)

What really happened at Dunnellen, Andrew? Because it is my suspicion that the wrong person was removed from Shaffer.

Beat. Andrew doesn't answer. Still keeping his distance...

RACHEL BORNHOLDT (CONT'D)

Well... The Caseys and I have found that getting players to talk about Studio Band is like getting a CIA agent to open up. You guys are all walls. Which makes sense.

(then,)

But Fletcher hung you out to dry. So answer me this: Did you ever hear him use discriminatory language? Did he inflict emotional harm? Did he ever hit you?

Andrew is silent. Looks at Rachel. Then at Roarke. We're...

INT. ANDREW'S DORMITORY - A FEW DAYS EARLIER

...back in the dorm, where Andrew has not yet packed a thing. He looks around, lets his eyes take in one item at a time: A drum pad on the floor. A metronome. The DOCUMENT he signed in the DEAN'S office. A DVD. He slides that into his laptop...

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 NEYMAN--

JIM NEYMAN (O.S.)

Woooo-hoooo!!!

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

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - MOSELEY, CRONIN & JACOBS - DAY

Silence. We're back to the present, back in the legal office.

ANDREW

If I say he hit me...and said things that were... -- then what...?

NATHAN ROARKE

This would not be a deposition. The goal is to convince the Conservatory, not a courtroom. Therefore, if you were to agree to speak to Shaffer Hall, we could ensure your testimony remain anonymous.

INT. ANDREW'S DORMITORY - A FEW DAYS EARLIER

The home video finishes... The computer screen freezes on the image of the young boy at the drum... And Andrew, eyes on the screen, STARTS TO CRY...

ANDREW (V.O.)

So...Fletcher wouldn't...?

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - MOSELEY, CRONIN & JACOBS - DAY

RACHEL BORNHOLDT

He would never know it was you who spoke up. Correct.

Andrew is silent for a moment. Looks at the glass of water in front of him. Untouched. Takes a sip. He's nervous...

ANDREW

And if I agree...
(he hesitates, then,)
...what happens to him?

RACHEL BORNHOLDT

The Conservatory will want to do anything to prevent this from going to court. We present a case to them. We say we're prepared to go all the way. What will make our case is a recent student speaking out to the kind of behavior that could have precipitated Sean Casey's death. With that, Shaffer will have no other option but to let Fletcher go.

Andrew takes this in. Shakes his head.

ANDREW

I can't do that.

RACHEL BORNHOLDT
 And let another Sean Casey happen?
 (leaning in again--)
 Andrew. Couldn't that have been you?

INT. ANDREW'S DORMITORY / HALLWAY - A FEW DAYS EARLIER

Andrew rises, face still awash in tears. Pulls out the DVD -- SNAPS IT IN HALF -- dumps the pieces in the trash. WE HEAR his and Bornholdt's VOICES--

ANDREW (V.O.)
 Fletcher pushes people. That's it.

RACHEL BORNHOLDT (V.O.)
 Why?

Andrew grabs the drum pad, metronome. Dumps them in the trash.

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

Andrew yanks up the trash bag. Ties it. Exits. WE FOLLOW...

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - MOSELEY, CRONIN & JACOBS - DAY

ANDREW
 ...So they can be great.

RACHEL BORNHOLDT
 And whatever he did to you is justified
 on those grounds? "So they can be great"?

Andrew doesn't have a response. He looks away, looks down.

RACHEL BORNHOLDT (CONT'D)
 What good is being "great" if you're so
 miserable you drive your car off a cliff?

Again, Andrew doesn't answer... But then...finally...after a long moment...his eyes seem to change. The uncertainty in his face giving way. A look of real resolution taking over. And on that look, we're...

INT. ANDREW'S PRACTICE ROOM - A FEW DAYS EARLIER

...as Andrew bursts in. Beelines toward his DRUM SET. Starts breaking it down. First the cymbals come off, then the pedals, then the toms.

That same look of resolution -- and, bubbling up underneath now, anger... Andrew tears at the drums as though attacking them, pulling them apart almost viciously, one part after another... Then the Buddy Rich POSTER... He rips it to shreds...

RACHEL BORNHOLDT (V.O.)
 You can make a real impact here, Andrew.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - MOSELEY, CRONIN & JACOBS - DAY

ANDREW
 ...And all I'd have to do is tell them
 what he did...?

A moment. Then Bornholdt just nods.

INT. GARBAGE ROOM - A FEW DAYS EARLIER

Andrew THROWS trash bags into the dump... Then SLIDES the DRUM PARTS to the side, next to the recycling bins... The toms, the snare, the cymbals, the bass... No hesitation... Finally -- he SWITCHES OFF THE LIGHT. Steps out into the BASEMENT HALLWAY. Eyes his PRACTICE ROOM -- now empty. Panting, he takes a moment. Sits down on the floor. Leans back, closes his eyes, and takes a deep breath out...

It's done.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - MOSELEY, CRONIN & JACOBS - DAY

Another moment. And then, soft, still torn, but ready to commit--

ANDREW (CONT'D)
 Ok. I'll do it.

AND WE FADE OUT.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Andrew... Hand healed... Clad in a shirt and tie... Some time has passed, and at this moment he's being shown around an office building. A swank law office: Perry and Schwartz. His SUPERVISOR leads the way.

SUPERVISOR
 (looking at papers)
 Pennington High, right? Top honors.

ANDREW
 (smiles)
 Yeah... And the hope is...Columbia in the fall...

SUPERVISOR
 I'll put in a word with Admissions. Do well here and there'll be a job waiting for you when you graduate.

Andrew nods. Takes it in.

ANDREW
 (the words rote, memorized)
 Thank you. Thank you so much for this
 opportunity.

The Supervisor smiles. Heads off.

INT. LAUNDROMAT - DAY

Andrew sits at a laundromat. Eyes drifting off into space.

EXT. NEW YORK STREET - DAY

He carries laundry. It's SUMMER. Tube tops and short shorts everywhere. He passes by a row of signs plastered on a wall: "JVC JAZZ FESTIVAL May 21-29". He avoids looking.

Passes a COUPLE kissing on a bench. Passes a STREET PERFORMER banging on overturned garbage cans. Approaches an APARTMENT BUILDING. We're in the Lower East Side -- far, far away from Shaffer...

INT. ANDREW'S APARTMENT - DAY

He enters. His dad is inside, sliding groceries into the fridge.

JIM NEYMAN
 Hey, buddy. You about ready?

Andrew sets down the laundry. Nods. And on that--

INT. MOVIE THEATER - DAY

Andrew and Jim sit side by side in a darkened theater, while a movie plays. "Amadeus"...

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. Beat...

EXT. MOVIE THEATER - EVENING

Father and son exit. Jim looks at Andrew, and--

JIM NEYMAN (CONT'D)
 "Dr. No" next week. Or concert?

ANDREW
 (shrugs)
 Either.

JIM NEYMAN
 You doing ok...?

ANDREW
 (hesitant, unsure what to say)
 Yeah... Sorry, I'm just... Yeah.

JIM NEYMAN
 Internship going well?

ANDREW
 Yeah...

JIM NEYMAN
 (beat)
 Ok. I stacked your pantry with Gushers.

Andrew manages a smile. A moment passes between them.

ANDREW
 Thanks, Dad...

Beat. Silence...

EXT. NEW YORK STREET - NIGHT

Andrew walks alone, eating a slice of pizza. Eats slowly, not very hungry. Is about to pass by a JAZZ CLUB when -- he stops.

There, on the main sign, below the featured names, are these words: "And Special Guest Performer: JULIAN FLETCHER".

Andrew stays put for a second. Completely taken aback. Then he starts walking away. Then stops. Nope. Turns around, heads back toward the club's door. Nervously opens it...

INT. JAZZ CLUB - MOMENTS LATER

...and steps inside. A modest venue, pools of light at the bar and stage, waiters passing around menus. On the stage, SAXOPHONE, GUITAR, DRUMS -- and, at the piano, FLETCHER.

The mere sight gets Andrew's pulse racing. But he stays put. Watches... The quintet is pacing its way through "Blue Bossa", and Fletcher is taking the final solo. He's exceedingly delicate, gentle with each keystroke, his fingers moving like ballerinas. His playing is soft, subtle, and exquisite.

Andrew is surprised by this... Stays in the back, behind the last table. The SAXOPHONIST launches in, and the song comes to a close. Polite applause. 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 mass of people blocking the way. Tries to squeeze through--

SAXOPHONIST (O.S.)

That was Julian Fletcher, on the keys...

More applause. Andrew, hemmed in, keeps trying to get out--

FLETCHER

Neyman.

Andrew stops. Turns. Fletcher is standing right there.

A moment of silence. Andrew is pale. But -- Fletcher's face doesn't read anger. In fact, it doesn't read much of anything.

ANDREW

...Hi...

SMASH CUT TO: 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. Finally--

FLETCHER

So what are you up to these days, Andrew?

ANDREW (CONT'D)

...Oh, just...various...things...

Fletcher nods. *Ok.* Andrew eyes him. Then, scared, stammering--

ANDREW (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I'm sorry about what happened.
(then, *should I clarify?--*)
...At Dunnellen.

FLETCHER

Don't be. A player's got to be willing to fight.

Andrew looks at him. Maybe Fletcher isn't angry...

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.

ANDREW

I was awful to people... I don't know...

But Fletcher's already distracted -- by people CLAPPING ALONG to the band.

FLETCHER

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)

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.

(looks at Andrew)

Well, not any idiot.

(MORE)

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

(Andrew smiles, another laugh)
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. Three years later he goes back to the Savoy, 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.

(MORE)

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

(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

(considers this; then--)

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,)

(MORE)

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

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 for a moment. A look of disappointment...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

I'm conducting some, though. They got me opening the JVC with a big band in two weeks.

ANDREW

That's great...

Fletcher nods. His thoughts drifting again. A moment of silence.

EXT. JAZZ CLUB - NIGHT

Patrons exit, Andrew and Fletcher included. They stand for a moment. Look at one another. An awkward silence.

FLETCHER

Take care.

He turns to head off, when, nervous, hesitant, but hoping--

ANDREW

Are you...playing more here at all...?

Beat. Fletcher looks back at Andrew. Seems surprised.

FLETCHER

No.

Andrew nods. Looks down at the ground. About to turn--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

I'm having a little gathering next Friday. Some friends, family... Would... would you like to come...?

Andrew is shocked. Has no idea what to say.

ANDREW

I -- I wouldn't want to impose...

FLETCHER

No imposition.

Beat. Andrew remains stunned. And, on that note, we're--

EXT. NEW YORK STREET - DAY

--outside, a bright May day, Andrew in a hurry. He's carrying a bottle of wine. Reaches a doorway. Buzzes...

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

He steps out of an ELEVATOR, walks down the hall. Then -- he hears what sounds like PARTY CHATTER. Multiple VOICES, laughter, the clinking of glasses. It's coming from behind the door to his right. Suddenly nervous, he approaches, reaches out, gets ready, about to KNOCK when--

--the next door down OPENS UP. Fletcher sticks his head out--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Andrew.

(Andrew turns, surprised)

Come on in.

Andrew takes a moment. Walks up to him and steps in.

INT. FLETCHER'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Andrew closes the door behind him, as Fletcher picks up his land-line. Seems he was in the middle of a call...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Yeah... No, no -- I -- you should get well... It's no problem.

(then, before hanging up,)

Take care.

Andrew looks at him, then around. The place is empty. A table is decked out with crackers and glasses. But no people.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

It's...it's a slightly smaller gathering than I expected...

Andrew nods. Silence. Fletcher stands there, as though lost, and, finally--

ANDREW

I -- I brought wine.

FLETCHER

Oh, thank you... Just...just set it down there... Would you like some cheese and crackers?

Andrew wants to say "no", but he smiles and helps himself to be polite. His eyes drift. Pictures on the walls.

He notices the one we saw earlier... Fletcher with a WOMAN and a GIRL. His wife and daughter...? Then, on the nearest counter, a similar image. Fletcher with the same GIRL, at a piano...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
 (as though beckoning Andrew
 away from that photo--)
 That's me and Wayne Shorter there.

He's pointing to a picture on the opposite wall. A young Fletcher -- 20's, handsome, almost innocent-looking -- smiling at another piano, WAYNE SHORTER leaning on his shoulder.

ANDREW
 Wow...

FLETCHER
 Yeah... And that's me with Bud Powell.

He points to another picture, as though insecure. Andrew looks.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
 That was a great show.
 (then, soft, hesitant,)
 He died two weeks after that was taken,
 though.

Andrew turns to him. Fletcher hesitates again. Then...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
 So many of those guys... Too much
 drugs... So stupid.
 (almost to himself it seems,)
 Such a waste.

A moment of silence. Andrew turns, then turns back.

ANDREW
 Could I... Could I use your bathroom?

FLETCHER
 Down the hall.

INT. HALLWAY / ROOM - FLETCHER'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Andrew appears. Reaches the BATHROOM, about to step in -- when he notices another door, opened wide... He looks through. Sees something...

Slowly, he STEPS THROUGH THE DOORWAY... WE FOLLOW HIM INTO THE ROOM, without seeing what it is that's beckoning him...

He moves steadily, quietly, edging his way past a PIANO... Then stops. And, finally, we see what it is he's looking at...

A DRUM SET. Low-end Yamaha, with dust-coated cymbals and a two-tom rack. Andrew looks at it. It seems he hasn't even looked at a drum set in some time...

Beat. He nears the drum throne. Sits down. A pair of sticks lie atop the floor tom, as though begging to be held. Andrew eyes them. Feels his foot against the kick pedal, his palm against the snare head. Picks up the sticks...

Takes a moment. Then -- gently hits the ride. Lets it ring. Waits. Breathes in. Then begins playing a soft swing, when--

--he SEES Fletcher at the door. Dropping the sticks--

ANDREW

I'm -- I'm so sorry--

FLETCHER

Stay there.

Fletcher, not a trace of anger in his voice, walks to the PIANO. And, without another word, BEGINS TO PLAY.

Andrew, caught off-guard, hesitates... Unsure what to do... He picks the sticks back up, and, tentatively at first, then with more confidence, begins PLAYING ALONG. Fletcher smiles, launches into a rendition of "Mood Indigo".

The two seem to feel each other out on their respective instruments. With no words, no tension, it's a moment of real, simple connection. Just two musicians making music...

Fletcher performs a final arpeggio. Andrew caps it off with a roll. The song finished, the two eye each other. Silence...

ANDREW

I...I didn't know you had a drum kit...

FLETCHER

Sure. I've had that since '03. You remember your first kit?

ANDREW

It was my birthday. My dad bought it.

FLETCHER

Your dad?

ANDREW

He thought it'd be a hobby. But...it wasn't. While the other kids played outside, I played the drums. They listened to Top 40, I listened to Chick Webb.

FLETCHER

Yeah. I listened to Art Tatum, the other kids listened to the Beatles. "Ob-La-Di Ob-La-Da". Fucking children's music. They bullied me for it, but who knows where they are now.

(then he leans in)

Remember the day you first came into my office, Andrew...?

(Andrew, surprised by the question, nods)

I wasn't just screwing with you. This life isn't for everyone.

Beat. Andrew nods again. Fletcher's right...

ANDREW

I know...

FLETCHER

Look. I don't know how you'll take this. This band I'm leading for JVC -- our drummer isn't cutting it.

(Andrew looks at him blankly...)

Do you understand where I'm going with this...?

ANDREW

No...

FLETCHER

I'm using the Studio Band playlist. "Whiplash", "Frequent Flyer". Show's on Friday and 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 Connelly...?

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... A moment -- and, finally--

ANDREW

I don't need to.

INT. OFFICE FLOOR - PERRY AND SCHWARTZ - DAY

Barely holding in his anger--

SUPERVISOR

What are you talking about?

ANDREW

(excited, proud)

It's just that week. I'm -- I'm actually playing at the JVC Jazz Festival, so rehearsal and practicing's going to--

SUPERVISOR

That's not how it works here, Andrew. I took you on despite your little Shaffer mishap. You don't get to just walk out on a week's work.

(then, the epitome of
condescending:)

This is the real world.

Beat. Andrew is silent for a second. Then, completely calm--

ANDREW

Fine. I quit.

SUPERVISOR

Come again?

ANDREW

I quit.

Andrew turns, starts to head away--

EMPLOYER

Excuse m-- *What?*

(Andrew stops, turns)

Do you have any idea what you're doing?
To any hope of a career?

ANDREW

Yes.

(then, poised and confident,)
And if I don't fuck up Sunday, I'll have
exactly the career I want.

And with that, Andrew turns back around and walks off.

INT. DRUM SHOP - DAY

Andrew hands his CREDIT CARD to a DRUM SHOP EMPLOYEE.

INT. ANDREW'S APARTMENT - DAY

Andrew practices on a NEW DRUM SET. You can tell he's been here for hours. Sweat runs in rivulets down his cheeks, wetting the drum heads. *He's back to the life...*

INT. JUDY AND ARTHUR ZANKEL HALL - NIGHT

An empty theater. We recognize it... 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 600. 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", and the band sounds tight. It reaches 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,)

Neyman.

(Andrew turns)

Good job.

Andrew takes this in. The latest in a long line of surprises...

INT. BACKSTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

The PLAYERS pack up. Andrew, trying to work past his shyness--

ANDREW

Hope that was ok.

BASSIST

Yeah. You sounded good.

ANDREW

Thanks.

(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...

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Andrew exits Carnegie Hall, sliding his sticks into his backpack. The last of the musicians to exit. Then, all of a sudden, he slows to a stop. Thinking. Looks at his sticks. Reaches deeper into his backpack. His mouth curls into a slight smile...

Something has just occurred to him.

He pulls out a piece of paper from his pack. We recognize it. The slip of paper on which Nicole wrote her number... Andrew looks at it. Thinks some more. Hesitating. A bit nervous -- but excited. Finally, he pulls out his phone and dials. We hear ringing, and then, after a few seconds -- a VOICE:

NICOLE (O.S.)
Hello?

ANDREW
(heart beating now, it's been
so long)
Hey... It's...it's Andrew.
(silence on the other end)
Um... From...the deli...?

NICOLE (O.S.)
Oh. Hey.

ANDREW
Look, I just wanted to say -- I'm sorry if I acted...if I was rude or...cold before. And I'm -- I thought I'd give you a call because -- it's a crazy idea, maybe, but we said we'd do a concert together, and I'm actually going to be playing a concert this weekend, it's the JVC Jazz Festival -- and -- and I'm playing the drums, and -- yeah, I don't know, you could come, and then we could, you know, get a drink afterwards. Something like that...

NICOLE (O.S.)
 (beat; then--)
Yeah... I -- I don't think I can.

ANDREW
 ...Ok.

NICOLE (O.S.)
I'm seeing someone now, so...

ANDREW
 Oh. Cool. Well, that's great.

NICOLE (O.S.)
Yeah... But -- good luck.

ANDREW
 Thank you. So I'll uh -- I'll talk to you later, then.

NICOLE (O.S.)
Ok. Bye, Andrew...

He hangs up. You can see it in his eyes -- real disappointment. It's as though he's hurt, and *surprised* that he's hurt.

He looks back down at the slip of paper. Crumples it up and throws it into the trash. Then slides on his headphones -- and starts playing his usual METRONOME TRACK as he marches off...

FLETCHER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Fletcher sits on his couch, holding a glass of ice water. We can hear, softly playing, his LP of "St. Louis Blues"... He closes his eyes. Lets the song flow over him... The tune finishes. He opens his eyes, and, ever so gently, lifts the needle and props it up.

Silence.

ANDREW (V.O.)
 One-two-three-four...

INT. ANDREW'S APARTMENT - DAY

The sounds of DRUMMING... Getting louder and faster, carrying us through what follows...

First we see Andrew standing in the middle of his room. 100% focused. 100% determined. Nothing else matters now. He eyes a set of things in front of him. A suit laid out. A stick bag and tool kit. Photocopied sheet music. His backpack. We...

CUT TO: Andrew pops two pills... Downs them with sink water.

CUT TO: Andrew slides into his slacks. Buttons his white button-down. Slides on his black jacket. Ties his tie...

ANDREW (V.O.)
One-two-three-four, one-two-three-four...

INT. FLETCHER'S APARTMENT - DAY

Fletcher slips into his own suit. Black tie and a red cummerbund. Like an old-school band conductor...

He straightens his tie. De-lints the suit. He's tidy, über-careful. Grabs a music folder and heads to the door.

ANDREW (V.O.)
One-two-three-four, one-two-three-four...

INT. ANDREW'S APARTMENT - DAY

Andrew checks his stick bag. Five pairs of sticks. One pair of brushes. One pair of mallets. Three drum keys. We...

CUT TO: Andrew slides the pill container into his stick bag. Pulls out a sheath of Band-Aids. Applies ointment to his hands, dries them down, then wraps each finger in a Band-Aid.

ANDREW (V.O.)
One-two-three-four, one-two-three-four...

EXT. STREET - DAY

Fletcher ignores several passing CABS, enters a SUBWAY STATION...

ANDREW (V.O.)
One-two-three-four, one-two-three-four...

EXT. STREET - DAY

Andrew emerges from a SUBWAY STATION. Murmuring to himself, tapping on his knees. The clock's ticking...

ANDREW (V.O.)
One-two-three-four, one-two-three-four...

INT. SUBWAY - DAY

Fletcher on the subway. Once again, he looks far more diminutive in these surroundings than when leading a band...

ANDREW (V.O.)
One-two-three-four, one-two-three-four...

EXT. STREET - DAY

Back to Andrew... Still walking, still obsessively murmuring...

ANDREW (V.O.)
One-two-three-four, one-two-three-four...

He checks his watch, picks up speed, almost breaks into a jog...

ANDREW (V.O.)
One...

Turns a corner...

ANDREW (V.O.)
Two...

Crosses the street...

ANDREW (V.O.)
Three...

And, as the DRUMMING CUTS OUT, comes to a sudden stop.

ANDREW (V.O.)
Four.

He's standing right in front of CARNEGIE HALL. A giant banner hangs above the main steps: "JVC IN NYC: JAZZ!" Already a crowd is gathering outside the main entrance... Reporters, wealthy patrons, agents and bandleaders and A&R's and New York's upper-crust... But, keeping out of sight --

-- is Fletcher. Strolling up the side-steps around the corner, hidden from the crowd. Andrew sees him. Then follows.

INT. BACKSTAGE - JUDY AND ARTHUR ZANKEL HALL - TWO HOURS LATER

The scene is more or less what we saw before Studio Band competitions -- only taken to eleven. A rush of MUSICIANS, STAGE HANDS, ASSISTANTS and TECHNICIANS decking backstage, streaming past Andrew. It's a mad-house, cacophonous...

A swell of TUNING as TRUMPETERS, TROMBONISTS and SAXOPHONISTS join in. Andrew stands back. Checks his watch again. 7:28. *It's almost time...*

FLETCHER
Alright, gang, listen up! 15 seconds to get into places. For those of you who are new to this, it's very simple: do well tonight, and the world will open up for you.

(MORE)

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

The folks out there, they make a phone call and you're a Lincoln Center core. Or a Blue Note signee. Or an EMC client. Drop the ball, and I'd suggest switching disciplines -- because the other thing about those cats is they never forget.

Andrew takes this in. Beat. A STAGEHAND appears, waves. Time.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

On that note -- break a leg.

The PLAYERS proceed on-stage. Andrew, shorter than most of them, towered over by a few, takes a deep breath, tries to keep his cool, and, counting in his head, walks forward.

Suddenly -- an arm on his shoulder:

JIM NEYMAN

Andrew.

Andrew spins around. Shocked to see his dad.

ANDREW

What -- what are you doing here--???

JIM NEYMAN

I heard what happened.

Thinking fast, Andrew looks both ways, takes his dad aside, tries to find a spot, just around the nearest corner, to speak to him (more or less) in private... Hushed tone--

ANDREW

What are you talking about?

JIM NEYMAN

I heard what happened at Perry and Schwartz. Heard where you were.

ANDREW

What does that matter?

JIM NEYMAN

They're very confused. I'm confused.

ANDREW

There's nothing to be confused about. I quit.

JIM NEYMAN

Why would you do that...?

(Andrew turns, wants to walk away -- but Jim grabs his arm--)

(MORE)

JIM NEYMAN (CONT'D)

I called every teacher and every lawyer I ever knew to get you that internship.

ANDREW

I can't talk right now.

JIM NEYMAN

(pissed, pointing--)

I thought you were done with this guy.

Andrew tries to pull away -- but Jim keeps latching on--

JIM NEYMAN (CONT'D)

Andrew... I'm not going to let you hurt yourself again...

(Andrew keeps pulling away; finally, forcefully, doesn't want to say this but feels compelled--)

You know as well as I do this isn't for you.

Beat. Andrew freezes. Turns. Looks into his father's eyes. Cold.

ANDREW

Unfortunately that's not your call to make.

He then pulls his arm free. Steps back. And--

ANDREW (CONT'D)

It'll be a good show. I promise.

--at which point he turns and heads to the stage entrance. Jim is left standing there, speechless.

INT. STAGE - JUDY AND ARTHUR ZANKEL HALL - CONTINUOUS

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. 600 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, discretely--

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

Shhh. It's too late for that, Andrew. I can connect dots. It had to be you.

(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 "Upswing".

ON ANDREW. *What?*

Andrew turns to his left and catches a glimpse of the BASSIST's sheet music. Written on the top: "UPSWING". He turns right, sees the PIANIST'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 the chart. Horns blasting, saxes wailing -- fast, furious, half-Latin and half-swing. Andrew has no choice but to play -- and pray that he keeps it in control.

His eyes lock on the BASSIST's sheet music next to him -- trying to use it to follow along. Training his ears to stay on target... But soon enough -- utter chaos. He misses a hit. Misses another. And another. He's driving blind.

PLAYERS eye him... You can almost hear MURMURS in the audience, rising in volume... And, through it all, Fletcher seems serene.

BASSIST
(clenched teeth to Andrew)
The fuck?! Come on...

Andrew, almost crying, tries to fix things -- but he can't. The band reaches a rest. Out to sea, he keeps playing. Abruptly stops, realizing he's fucked up again. The band comes back in, ahead of him. He follows, but too late.

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. Then the band switches time signature. And Andrew realizes he is playing the wrong time signature. Every beat he hits is now off. Every single one.

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 -- and at last the chart is done.

And now -- the deafening silence.

No applause.

Andrew sits at his set, on the brink of weeping. Fletcher stays still. Looks at Andrew. On Fletcher's face, the look of a victor -- the guy who is finally tasting his revenge. 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 Neyman, standing in the very back, by the doors... Mortified, heading for the hall...

BACK ON-STAGE: Fletcher bows, then sashays back to the drum set. To Andrew, with a grin--

FLETCHER
I guess I was wrong. You don't have it.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Jim Neyman running now... Down the hall... Toward the entrance to backstage... Pushing his way past TECHNICIANS...

INT. STAGE - JUDY AND ARTHUR ZANKEL HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Andrew is still in his seat. Shaking... Crushed... Tears stinging his cheeks...

He sees the other MUSICIANS glaring at him, infuriated... Feels the lights burning down on him. Feeling dizzy, he staggers up...

...and retreats to the back of the stage. Out of the audience's view -- about to just go, leave this all behind once and for all...

Then he sees -- around the corner of the backstage entryway --
-- his father.

Jim has just arrived at the entryway. Looks at Andrew. Hurries toward the stage. Is going to put an end to this.

Andrew looks at his father for a moment, approaching. And then, something seems to click inside... Andrew's tears stop flowing. His eyes start to narrow. His muscles tighten.

ON JIM NEYMAN: Dead-set, has almost reached the stage...

ON ANDREW: His desperation giving way to something else now... Does not want to let this be the end...

ON JIM NEYMAN: He's almost there... Only feet away... When --
-- a pair of TECHNICIANS move to block his way.

They're not about to let some crazy audience member get on-stage.

TECHNICIAN
Sir, you can't come back
here--

JIM NEYMAN
My son -- I need to get my
son--

TECHNICIAN
This is players-only, sir--

JIM NEYMAN
That man is out of control,
he's a fucking psycho--

TECHNICIAN
(pushing him back)
Ok, sir, let's calm down--

Jim, frantic, can't get past them, cries out to Andrew:

JIM NEYMAN
Andrew!!

The TECHNICIANS turn to see to whom Jim is shouting. See Andrew, standing there and staring. Will he respond?

A fleeting moment of silence. Andrew is still. His eyes frozen -- as though it has just dawned on him.

TECHNICIAN

Do you know this man?

Still Andrew doesn't answer. Just stares. And then -- finally -- calmly turns his back to his father and heads to the stage.

Jim goes wide-eyed. Stricken.

JIM NEYMAN

Andrew!!!

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 almost surprised that he's back -- but pleased: *This will be fun...*

But Andrew doesn't look scared anymore. Instead, his eyes are glassy, hollowed out -- and hungry... Real rage... He's a machine now. And this will not be the end.

FLETCHER

(to the audience)

Thank you... Our final number is called "Frequent Flyer". I hope you like it.

But then, before Fletcher can even turn back around -- let alone cue the band -- Andrew launches into a double-time swing.

Alone, just hi-hat, his stick beating away at the two cymbals, 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.

Fletcher glares at him. 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.

Fletcher can't believe it. *What???*

Realizing he too has no choice, he 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, plays the opening patterns, Andrew matching them beat for beat.

Fletcher edges toward Andrew. His back turned to the audience -- only Andrew can see his face -- he leans in and, furious--

FLETCHER

I will gouge out your eyes you mother-fucker.

--but Andrew promptly DROWNS HIM OUT with a crash cymbal hit. It's another "fuck you".

The band roars into overdrive, the brass blasting away, Andrew giving everything he's got. Fletcher, as though pushed away, inches back toward the piano, finally speechless...

Thinking, he turns to the audience. Tries to keep cool. Tries to look like he's still in control. Turns back to the band. Resumes conducting. Eyes Andrew -- trying to scare him with his glare. But Andrew just keeps looking straight back. Cold. Unfazed. Unafraid.

A machine.

SOLOS begin... GUITAR is up first... WE MOVE IN CLOSE to Andrew... Sweat seeping through his suit, drenching his button-down underneath... He's not about to give up...

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, breathes, and--

SUDDENLY EVERYTHING GOES SLOW: Silence, except for the hits of Andrew's sticks, the tips moving through the air at a fraction of their actual speed... Suspended, graceful, like a ballerina's arms... A tip hits the snare... Another hits the ride... Everything coordinated, everything in synch... The whole apparatus just working... Andrew takes another breath, wide-eyed now, and--

WE'RE BACK UP TO SPEED. Frenzied, the band like a race-horse... WE PULL BACK and take in Andrew's entire body... 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... And his face now says one thing and one thing only: This is playing he has never seen before.

The rage in his eyes is still there, but he's frozen in place... He can barely even keep his attention on the band and his conducting... Everything is pointed at Andrew...

The TRUMPET starts trading fours. A four-bar horn solo, a four-bar drum solo. Four more bars horn, four more bars drums. And Andrew makes of each solo 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 stays put... Watches... Turns an inch toward the AUDIENCE... And we -- and he -- see something extraordinary out there, just barely visible in the darkness...

AUDIENCE MEMBERS turning to each other... A line-up of suit-and-tie spectators whipping out phones or pads... A few hurrying out, as though in a mad rush, making frantic calls...

Other people we recognize. Old Studio Band PLAYERS: Driscoll, Tria, Wallach. All stunned. And, seated off to the side, Ryan and Carl. Seething.

More people crowding INTO THE THEATER as, out in the hall...

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

...Jim Neyman watches through the opened backstage doors, helpless. He sees 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 TECHNICIANS steps forward from the edge of the stage. He looks at Jim Neyman -- and closes the doors, blocking Jim's view.

INT. STAGE - JUDY AND ARTHUR ZANKEL HALL - CONTINUOUS

The number is at a peak...

And Fletcher, like so many, is just watching Andrew... Ceding control to him... 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 dazed it seems, 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 turns to him. Bewildered. But Andrew just keeps staring forward, his sticks beating out rudiments on his snare, slow, then fast, then faster. Still confident. Still in control. Fletcher goes up to him--

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...

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...

He keeps his eyes closed... Feeling his way through this... Shooting back into the double-time... But trying to go even faster than before... Not 400... Not 410... Trying, trying, trying to reach that mythical place, the place where only the greats live... 420... 425... Even 430...

Fletcher stands still... His eyes widening... He's no longer infuriated... He's no longer even thinking of revenge or comeuppance... 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, choking the cymbal...

But just then -- 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...

Finally -- the RINGING subsides, as though banished. And now, when Andrew opens his eyes again, standing before him, leaning over the drum set, is Fletcher. For almost the first time on-stage not cursing or snarling at Andrew, but instead--

FLETCHER

Take it back to the snare...

Andrew nods. It's a good idea. He moves back to the snare...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Keep the hi-hat going...

(Andrew does as suggested)

Now slow down... Go to clean snare hits...

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)

Now build that into a roll...

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 with that power-house sound -- the utmost control, the highest speed...

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. Then CYMBALS... The ride first... Then the crash... The bass drum and hi-hat joining in, every part of the set joining in, every limb, every component, everything building up, up, up...

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