

Pines of Rome

Written by

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FADE IN

DREAM - INT. LINCOLN CENTER, NEW YORK CITY - DAY (THIRTY YEARS AGO)

AVERY ANDREWS, 22, awaits her audition backstage, hidden in the dark by a curtain. She wears a man's tuxedo and her hair pulled back at the nape of her neck.

Avery stands very still and straight, gripping her baton.

STAGE HAND (O.C.)

Flemming.

Avery spits in her right hand and throws it over her left shoulder. She marches toward the waiting ORCHESTRA.

MUSICIANS shuffle music on their stands.

Five MALE JUDGES stare at clipboards from their seats in the auditorium. One stifles a yawn.

Avery takes the stand.

Her baton hits the podium sharply and she raises her arms. Each musician eyes her in anticipation.

Avery conducts MOZART'S SYMPHONY NO. 25 IN G MINOR with excitement and fervor.

The judges jolt to full attention.

Avery becomes so absorbed in the music that she literally GLOWS. Her aura pulses with the music.

The judges nod their heads in respect.

A video operator tapes the audition.

Avery ends with a flourish and spins around to face the judges. Her hair comes loose in the turn, spilling over her shoulders.

The judges' eyes widen. Their mouths hang open.

An ORCHESTRA MEMBER stands and applauds, followed by other members of the orchestra, until all are standing for her, applauding the stellar audition.

The judges ultimately stand, as well.

Avery beams.

She bows and exits, brushing past ALEXANDER ABERNATY (ALEX),

26, awaiting his audition. Alex gazes at Avery as if she is a goddess.

STAGE HAND  
(to ALEX)  
You're up.

Alex swallows, takes a deep breath, and nervously steps toward the stage.

CUT TO:

INT. ELEVATOR, NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT (PRESENT DAY)

The elevator DINGS.

Alex, now 56, opens his bloodshot eyes to his reflection in the elevator door. Alex's face is puffy and his middle is soft from too many women and too much scotch; his hair is noticeably grayer and thinner.

Alex takes a breath and wipes sweat from his face.

The elevator door opens to pandemonium.

INT. BACK HALLWAYS, LINCOLN CENTER - NIGHT

Alex disembarks from the elevator to the backstage bedlam of the NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC ten minutes prior to a performance. He scowls at the chaos.

Alex's agent, LEO CARIANI, 45, short, squat, and looking about like a mother hen, spies him entering the hallway. Leo weaves through tubas, cellos, and burly stage hands to reach Alex.

LEO  
You're late.

ALEX  
Don't start. It's been a helluva night.

LEO  
Anyone I know?

ALEX  
No. Let's get this over with.

EXT. LINCOLN CENTER GEFFEN HALL - NIGHT

AUDIENCE MEMBERS file past a sign reading "David Geffen Hall" as they enter the iconic doors of the Lincoln Center.

INT. LINCOLN CENTER GEFFEN HALL - NIGHT

Alex strains to conduct the romantic piece: RACHMANINOV, SYMPHONY NO. 2 OP. 27 III, ADAGIO: ADAGIO (IN A MAJOR).

He directs the Philharmonic, but finds that they are not following him. ORCHESTRA MEMBERS look to each other for pacing and cues, ignoring Alex. The harder he tries, the more disconnected he becomes. His frustration mounts.

Orchestra members eye each other, noticing Alex's frustration.

The audience listens with rapt attention, unaware of the struggle on stage.

INT. LINCOLN CENTER GEFFEN HALL - NIGHT

The audience stands, clapping at the end of the performance. Alex takes his bows, feigning graciousness and clutching a spray of red roses.

Alex whirls and escapes back stage.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. BACKSTAGE, LINCOLN CENTER GEFFEN HALL - NIGHT

Alex storms back stage with his red roses.

ALEX

Goddammit - where is the second viola?

Alex paces. Musicians duck their heads. Stage hands look for the second viola.

The SECOND VIOLA, a mousey-looking woman of 46, approaches Alex. Everyone around them stares at the exchange.

ALEX (CONT'D)

When you took a seat in the most prestigious philharmonic in the world, did you tell yourself you no longer needed practice?

SECOND VIOLA

All I d-d-d-d-o is practice.

ALEX  
You were late in the second  
movement, eighteenth bar.

SECOND VIOLA  
I don't think I --

ALEX  
You. Were. Late.

SECOND VIOLA  
Yes, sir.

ALEX  
Out of my sight.

Alex looks around. Everyone in his sight-line cowers.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
That goes for everyone.

Alex storms away. Musicians and stage hands avoid the  
second viola.

EXT. BAR, NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

Through the window of a trendy corner bar, Alex sits alone  
in a booth.

INT. BAR, NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

Alex sulks, sipping his scotch, neat. A bowl of edamame sits  
nearby.

Leo spies Alex through the window, and breaths a sigh of  
relief. He enters the bar and slips into the booth across  
from Alex.

LEO  
The second viola?

ALEX  
Is not fit for a high school  
musical.

LEO  
That's not what the union says.

ALEX  
She filed a grievance?

LEO  
She filed a grievance. Third one  
(MORE)

LEO (CONT'D)  
this year, Alex.

ALEX  
Bunch of second-rate musicians.

LEO  
Plus the sexual harassment charge.

ALEX  
Which is total bullshit.

Leo tries to flag down a WAITER for a drink. The waiter walks by without stopping.

LEO  
What's going on with you?

ALEX  
Me? There is nothing going on with me.

LEO  
Alex. I've been your agent almost twenty-five years. You haven't been in this much trouble since Florence.

ALEX  
I'm not in trouble.

Leo munches edamame.

LEO  
The trustees called. They want to see you on Monday.

ALEX  
God.

LEO  
You're costing them money, Alex.

ALEX  
I make them money. The Phil hasn't been this popular since Ed Sullivan.

LEO  
No one knows who Ed Sullivan is anymore. Except maybe the trustees. Which is why they most likely won't fire you.

ALEX  
Most likely?

LEO  
Most likely.

Alex notices a stunning BRUNETTE, 29, at the bar.

LEO (CONT'D)  
You'll probably get a suspension -  
couple of months to get your  
attention.

ALEX  
(eyeing the brunette)  
They have my attention alright.

LEO  
I hope they do. This is your  
career, Alex, and my livelihood.  
Alex?

Leo notices Alex and the brunette making eyes at each other.

LEO (CONT'D)  
Alex, this is serious.

ALEX  
I'm very serious, Leo.

Alex slips from the booth and saunters over to the brunette.

LEO  
Alex.

Alex whispers in the brunette's ear. They promptly leave together.

The waiter drops the check on the table for Leo.

LEO (CONT'D)  
Perfect.

INT. BEDROOM, ALEX'S APARTMENT, NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

Alex's bedroom is sleek and modern. The only personal items are celebrity photos and awards lining the walls and dresser.

Alex stands before his window overlooking Manhattan, wearing his robe and drinking another scotch. The brunette sleeps with her arms and legs splayed on his king-sized bed.

He stares at the skyline, looking old, spent, and tired.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING, NEW YORK CITY - DAY

BUSINESS WOMEN AND MEN walk past a modern office building, their images reflecting in the glass windows. Several enter and exit a revolving door.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING, NEW YORK CITY - DAY

Alex and Leo exit a conference room. A few NY PHILHARMONIC BOARD MEMBERS exit with Alex and Leo, but they do not interact.

Leo appears up-beat. Alex glowers like a little black rain cloud. They walk down the hall toward a lobby.

LEO

A six month suspension and anger management therapy. Am I good or what?

ALEX

It's mortifying.

LEO

The orchestra wanted you removed. You can thank me later. Just lay low and let the lawyers do their magic until you come back.

ALEX

How am I supposed to "lay low" in New York? I'm front page news.

Leo walks to a coffee bar in the building's lobby. LANA, the barista, attends to him.

LANA

What'll it be Mr. Carriani?

LEO

I'm feeling mocha today, Lana.

LANA

You got it.

She makes his mocha.

LEO

(to Alex)

You're still under contract during the suspension. You can't be seen

(MORE)



LEO (CONT'D)  
anywhere near a conductor's stand.

ALEX  
This is unbelievable.

LEO  
No clubs or parties. Swimming in  
women would be bad for the  
harassment charge.

ALEX  
What am I supposed to do for six  
months?

LEO  
Get some perspective.

ALEX  
What's that supposed to mean?

LANA  
Whipped cream?

LEO  
(indicating a lot)  
Oh, yeah.

Lana sprays three inches of whipped cream on the steaming  
mocha. She hands it to Leo, who exchanges it for cash. He  
waves off the change.

LEO  
Go somewhere other than New York.  
Someplace small. There's too much  
temptation here.

Leo slurps at his whipped cream.

ALEX  
I adore temptation.

LEO  
Don't think of it as punishment.  
Think of it as a six month  
sabbatical.

Leo licks the whipped cream from his lips.

ALEX  
Sabbatical. That almost sounds  
intentional - scholarly, even.

LEO

You've got people all over the world. I'm sure someone would love to have the great Alexander Abernathy in their backyard.

ALEX'S APARTMENT, NEW YORK CITY - DAY

Alex's apartment is much like his bedroom, minimalist and modern. The winter-white walls are decorated with framed programs and sheet music from concerts past. A low-backed sofa and white fur rug face a cold fireplace.

Alex sits at his stainless-steel and glass dining room table with a list of cities and names on one side of him and a cup of coffee on the other. He picks up his cell phone and dials.

SERIES OF SHOTS - ALEX MAKES HIS CASE TO HIS COLLEAGUES

-- "Martin - hey, it's Alex Abernathy."

-- (in German) "Hallo, Kristof. How are you? It's Alex Abernathy!"

-- "Hey Duncan! It's Alex from across the pond!"

-- "Mitchell - it's Alex from New York. How are things down under?"

-- (in Italian) "Ciao, Lucio. How's Milan?"

-- "I'm taking a sabbatical."

-- "Yes, six months."

-- (in French) "Oui, a sabbatical."

-- (in German) "For six months."

-- "I thought I'd pop into London."

-- "Berlin."

-- "Sydney."

-- "Paris."

-- "Chicago."

-- "Phoenix."

-- "Akron."

-- "Trenton."

-- "Boise."

SERIES OF SHOTS - ALEX MAKES EXCUSES

-- "Oh, you heard about that?"

-- "Nein, nein, nein."

-- "It's not a suspension, per se."

-- "More like a vacation."

-- "Si, si, si."

SERIES OF SHOTS - ALEX IS DISAPPOINTED

-- "Oh. Right."

-- "Sure, I understand."

-- (in German) "I'm not asking for special treatment."

-- "The union's not involved."

-- "I just thought, as a favor."

-- "Not a favor to me. A favor to you."

-- (in French) "I understand."

-- "Perhaps another time."

-- (in Portuguese) "Of course, until then."

-- "Ciao."

Alex presses the off button on his cell phone.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT, NEW YORK CITY - DAY

Alex frowns at his list of cities. All are crossed through, except for HARMON, a small college town.

Alex sighs and dials one more number.

INT. PRESIDENT'S OFFICE, SYDNOR COLLEGE, HARMON - SAME

LELAND EMBRECHTS, 60, sits behind a cherry desk reading a thesis paper. Everything about Leland is gray - his hair,

his suit, even his eyes.

Bygone Sydnor College presidents line the office walls. His window overlooks the campus quad and several ivied brick buildings.

The phone rings and Leland answers.

INTERCUT - TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

LELAND

Leland Embrechts.

ALEX

Leland. This is Alex Abernathy.  
How are you, old friend?

LELAND

Alex? It's been a long time.

ALEX

Yes, too long.

LELAND

When was the last time I saw you?

ALEX

I don't know. Four, five years  
ago?

LELAND

Right - Firebird Suite.  
Spectacular, as always. You never  
disappoint.

ALEX

Thank you, Leland. How's college?

LELAND

Good, good. Tenth year as  
president. So far, no  
impeachments.

ALEX

I was sorry to hear about Elaine.

LELAND

Yes, well. We'd been growing apart  
for years. With the kids out of  
the house, it made sense.

Alex stands and makes his way to the sofa.

ALEX

Look. I'll get to the point. I've run into a snag at the Phil.

LELAND

I set you up in that job thirty years ago. What could possibly go wrong?

ALEX

They gave me a six month suspension.

LELAND

For what?

ALEX

A few grievances from disgruntled musicians and a harassment charge from a woman who practically begged me to sleep with her.

LELAND

It certainly isn't like it used to be.

ALEX

Not even close. Anyway, I thought I'd spend the next six months lending my expertise to another orchestra and, since we go way back, I immediately thought of you.

LELAND

As a conductor?

ALEX

Well, no. I'm still under contract. But I could consult.

Leland opens his desk drawer to reveal a photo of Avery Andrews.

LELAND

I've got just the place for you.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Alex drives his Italian sports car south to his temporary home. He passes a "Welcome to Harmon" sign.

Harmon is a charming, mid-sized city with a central river, picturesque bridges, grand government buildings, quaint

parks, and an impressive skyline.

EXT. RIVER WALK, HARMON - DAY

Alex casually strolls through an outdoor venue along the Harmon's central river on a beautiful, clear day in early March. The venue bustles with HAPPY PEOPLE, shopping, eating, and exercising.

Alex speaks with Leo on his cell phone.

EXT. SIDEWALK, NEW YORK CITY - SAME

Leo walks as he talks on his cell phone on a dreary, bitter day in New York.

INTERCUT - TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

ALEX

Got the last of it moved in yesterday.

LEO

You found a furnished apartment to hold all of your stuff?

ALEX

Can you believe it? And it's got a great view of the river. I tell you, Harmon was the right choice.

Leo's expensive leather shoe lands in a large icy puddle.

LEO

Harmon was the only choice.

ALEX

I met with Leland this morning.

Leo shakes the water from his wet foot.

LEO

And?

ALEX

I begin with the Community Symphony on Monday night.

LEO

Consulting. Not conducting, right?

ALEX

Of course.

Leo dodges CHARACTER ACTORS selling photo opportunities.

LEO  
Volunteering looks good. You're  
giving back to the community.

ALEX  
And I'm playing.

A life-sized SONIC THE HEDGEHOG, chases after Leo.

LEO  
Playing? As in an instrument?

ALEX  
Leland doesn't want the conductor  
to feel threatened. So I'm going  
in the guise of a violinist.

Leo ducks into a side street. He runs directly into a  
gaggle of GIRL SCOUTS. He lurches to avoid stepping them.

LEO  
Wait a minute. The conductor  
doesn't know you are there to  
consult?

ALEX  
The conductor would never admit he  
needs help. You know artists and  
their egos.

The Girl Scouts attack Leo. He falls into the street.

LEO  
I sure do. Speaking of which - I  
set up your anger management  
therapy.

ALEX.  
I can find my own therapist, Leo.

LEO  
You've slept with every therapist  
you've ever had.

ALEX.  
You got me a man?

Leo sits on the sidewalk. The contents of his briefcase are  
scattered. The Girl Scouts retreat and one GIRL turns and  
flips him off.

LEO  
I've only got your best interests  
at heart.

EXT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE, HARMON

RESIDENTS walk dogs and jog past a quaint late-nineteenth century house-turned-office in the historic district of Harmon.

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE, HARMON - DAY

Alex sits in a chair opposite DR. STONICH, his new therapist.

Dr. Stonich, 59, is a severe-looking, no-nonsense man, with little expression.

Though Dr. Stonich waits for Alex to speak. Alex remains silent. They say nothing to each other through the visit.

A bell DINGS. Alex bolts from the chair and out the door. Dr. Stonich writes on his note pad.

EXT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL, HARMON - NIGHT

The Symphony Hall's red brick blends into the campus of Sydnor College. Exterior lights show the antiquated building has been well-tended, with low hedges and tasteful landscaping.

INT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL - NIGHT

About fifty Harmon COMMUNITY SYMPHONY MEMBERS mill about the small, lighted stage before rehearsal. Chairs on the stage are arranged for an orchestra, with music stands for each chair. A conductor's podium faces the empty chairs.

Alex sweeps into the room, carrying his violin case. He scans for Leland.

Leland speaks with a male CLARINET PLAYER. Leland catches sight of Alex, smiles, and waves him over. Alex walks up to Leland and the clarinet player.

LELAND  
Alex. So glad you could come.

ALEX  
Of course. Of course.

Alex does not hide his disappointment



ALEX (CONT'D)  
This is. This is, uh.

LELAND  
A bit small for you, I know, but I  
think it will be a great fit.

ALEX  
I'm sure.

Leland claps his hands to bring the musicians to attention.

LELAND  
Everybody. As promised, please  
welcome New York Philharmonic's  
music director, Alexander  
Abernathy.

The Harmon Symphony Members applaud. A few cheer and  
whistle.

ALEX  
Thank you, Leland. You do me an  
honor inviting me to perform with  
your orchestra.

Alex bows to the clarinet player.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
I look forward to playing under  
your baton.

Awkward silence.

CLARINET PLAYER  
I play clarinet.

Alex looks puzzled. Leland rescues him.

LELAND  
Let me introduce you to the  
conductor of the Harmon Community  
Symphony - Avery Andrews.

AVERY ANDREWS, 52, stands in the background, wearing a sour  
look. She has deep frown lines on her angular face, but her  
eyes are large and soft. Her white-streaked hair is pulled  
back from her face accenting her flawless skin. She wears a  
neutral, tailored jacket, classic and timeless.

Alex clears his throat.

ALEX  
My apologies, maestro.

Alex bows with a flourish. Avery's expression does not change.

AVERY  
Welcome, Mr. Abernathy. We are playing Beethoven's 6th. You know it?

ALEX  
Yes, of course.

AVERY  
Good. You may take your seat with the first violins.  
(to the full orchestra)  
Tonight we begin with the second movement, Andante Molto Mosso.  
Shall we?

Avery takes her position at the podium and the Harmon Symphony Members take their seats.

Alex ambles over to the first violin section. He smiles expectantly at the FIRST SEAT VIOLIN. She uncomfortably smiles back.

AVERY (CONT'D)  
Is there anything the matter, Mr. Abernathy?

ALEX  
I believe someone is in my seat.

AVERY  
You will find your seat to the rear, Mr. Abernathy.

ALEX  
The rear?

AVERY  
Yes, behind Mrs. Mallory.

MRS. MALLORY, a chubby fifty-seven year-old cat-lover, waves at him from the eighth seat.

Alex's stunned face morphs into a slow burn. He takes the single seat behind Mrs. Mallory. Mrs. Mallory turns to him.

MRS. MALLORY  
I'm a big fan.

Alex ignores her.

Alex removes his violin, knocking over his music stand.  
Sheet music flies everywhere. Mrs. Mallory helps gather his music.

Avery observes the farce dispassionately.

AVERY  
When you are quite ready, Mr.  
Abernathy.

ALEX  
Yes. Thank you.

Alex straightens the papers, waving Mrs. Mallory off. He settles.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Ready anytime.

AVERY  
Thank you, Mr. Abernathy.

Avery raises her baton.

The Harmon Symphony Members begin the second movement of  
BEETHOVEN'S 6TH SYMPHONY.

Alex plays the wrong page. The symphony comes to a  
screeching halt.

ALEX  
Sorry. Wrong music.

AVERY  
The second movement, Mr. Abernathy.  
Page twelve.

ALEX  
Yes. I was - never mind. I've got  
it now.

AVERY  
Are you quite sure, Mr. Abernathy?

ALEX  
Yes.

AVERY  
Mrs. Mallory? Would you please  
(MORE)

AVERY (CONT'D)  
check Mr. Abernathy's music?

Mrs. Mallory turns around and thumbs through Alex's music. She rearranges a page or two and stacks them neatly on the music stand.

Mrs. Mallory scoots back around and nods to Avery.

AVERY (CONT'D)  
Thank you, Mrs. Mallory. Mr.  
Abernathy?

Alex hesitates.

ALEX  
Yes. Thank you, Mrs. Mallory.

AVERY  
We've lost ten minutes and we  
perform next month. Shall we  
begin?

Avery swishes her baton in the air. All come to attention.

Avery jumps into conducting the second movement of BEETHOVEN SYMPHONY NO.6 (PASTORAL) IN F OP.68, ANDANTE MOLTO MOSSO.

INT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL - NIGHT

Harmon Symphony Members mill about after rehearsal. A few exit. Leland approaches Alex.

LELAND  
I should have warned you.

ALEX  
You think?

LELAND  
Avery has more passion for this  
symphony than anyone I know.

ALEX  
I can't consult with that. I've  
never been spoken to by a conductor  
like that in my life.

LELAND  
With your charm, you'll win Avery  
over in no time.

Leland motions for Alex to go to Avery, who is packing up her music for the evening.

INT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL - SAME

Avery packs up her music in a tote bag. A few symphony members - GABBY, NATE, & KIM - include her in their conversation, though Avery is does not show interest.

GABBY

How long do you think he'll play with us?

NATE

I heard he was suspended for six months.

KIM

You think he'd stay with us that long, Ms. Andrews?

AVERY

I'm sure I don't know.

NATE

Who do you think he'll hook up with?

GABBY

Twenty bucks says it's Janet, the flute.

KIM

No - never hook up with a woodwind. Sloppy kissers.

GABBY

Sloppy isn't always bad.

KIM

My money's on Lisa, the French horn. Brass have stronger lips.

NATE

And better tongue control.

GABBY

What do you think, Ms. Andrews?

AVERY

I do not think about Mr. Abernathy. Good night.

Avery turns to go.

NATE

Ms. Andrews? We're going to Dot's  
Back for a drink. Wanna come?

AVERY

Thank you. I have another  
engagement this evening.

Avery leaves.

INT. HALLWAY, SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL - NIGHT

Avery strides into the hallway and toward the exit. Alex  
catches up with her.

ALEX

Mrs. Andrews?

Avery does not lose momentum.

AVERY

Ms.

ALEX

Excuse me?

EXT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL - NIGHT

Avery exits the building, with Alex one step behind.

AVERY

Ms. Andrews. I am not married.

ALEX

Right. Ms. Andrews, I was  
wondering about the seat  
assignments.

AVERY

What about them?

ALEX

Well, without putting too fine a  
point on it: Why am I last seat?

AVERY

Because I assigned you last seat.

ALEX

I understand that. I want to know  
why you assigned me last seat. You  
do know who I am, right?

Avery stops, turns to Alex.

AVERY

Yes, Mr. Abernathy, I know who you are. Harmon's not quite the outback.

ALEX

Then you know I've conducted for heads of state, Oscar legends, the President, the Queen. Even Oprah. I expected to be first chair, Ms. Andrews, if not for my skill, at least for my experience.

AVERY

I know who you are, Mr. Abernathy. I also know who you are not. You are not a long-standing member of this symphony. You are not familiar with our requirements. And you are not practiced.

ALEX

Excuse me?

AVERY

Your violin. It's in poor sound. You need more practice if you are to keep up with us.

ALEX

Keep up? With you?

AVERY

You may have been the toast of New York, Mr. Abernathy, but you are not conductor here. I am. You will stay where you are until you earn a higher placement.

ALEX

I have better things to do with my time.

AVERY

Which is why your violin suffers. Good night.

Avery turns and walks to her silver-blue, ten-year-old Volvo.

Alex remains, his mouth hanging open.

Gabby, Nate, and Kim chatter on the way to Gabby's sedan in which they carpooled.

NATE

(calling to Alex)

Mr. Abernathy? We're going out for drinks. Wanna come?

ALEX

Not particularly.

Gabby and Kim speaks loudly, so Alex will hear.

GABBY

(to Nate and Kim)

I invited Janet from flutes. Poor girl, just broke up with her boyfriend. She could use the company.

KIM

(to Nate and Gabby)

Lisa the French Horn will be there too. Did you know she's a yoga instructor?

They open the car door. Alex trots after them.

ALEX

Wait. Is Avery going?

NATE

You mean Ms. Andrews?

ALEX

Yes. Ms. Andrews.

NATE

No. She's got something else.

ALEX

Then count me in. Tell me more about the French Horn.

Kim shoots a smug smile at Gabby.

EXT. AVERY'S BUNGALOW - NIGHT

Streetlights line the small, wooded lane of a respectable, established Harmon neighborhood. Avery's two-bedroom arts and crafts bungalow sits in the middle of the block under two massive oak trees.



INT. AVERY'S BUNGALOW - NIGHT

Avery walks into the house carrying her bags and her mail.

Avery's furnishings are light and contemporary. A brightly colored Toulouse Lautrec print hangs above a refurbished antique desk, where her computer sits.

Avery places her bags by her desk and looks through her mail.

Avery steps into her open kitchen. Modern appliances accent the early-twentieth century tile on the floors and back-splash. She pours herself a glass of red wine and prepares a late dinner.

With dinner in one hand and wine in the other, Avery takes the few steps into the living room. She snuggles into a plump, cozy sofa and flips on her television to the BBC.

Avery savors every bite, alone.

EXT. PRESIDENT'S OFFICE, SYDNOR COLLEGE - DAY

Students hurry to classes outside a late-nineteenth century brick administration building on the campus of Sydnor College.

INT. PRESIDENT'S OFFICE, SYDNOR COLLEGE - DAY

AVERY

I know he's a big name.

LELAND

Big names bring in big audiences  
and big money.

AVERY

And big egos. Every person sitting  
in that orchestra has worked twice  
as hard as Alexander Abernathy ever  
has or ever will. They deserve the  
benefit of their work.

LELAND

Abernathy's name will help them get  
it. As your boss and as the  
chairman of the board, I strongly  
suggest you do this.

AVERY

Careful Leland.

LELAND  
As your friend --

Leland takes Avery into his arms and looks into her eyes.

LELAND (CONT'D)  
I promise this is in your best  
interests.

Avery looks intently into Leland's eyes.

AVERY  
Why did you invite him here?

LELAND  
His name, of course.

AVERY  
Were you hoping he'd conduct?

LELAND  
Of course not. Anyway, he can't.  
He's still under contract.

AVERY  
So you asked him.

LELAND  
It may have come up. He offered to  
consult.

AVERY  
I created this symphony from  
nothing. It's the best in the  
region. Why on earth would I need  
a consultant?

LELAND  
We need the publicity, Avery, for  
funding. You and Alex are so  
brilliant. Together, you could  
make magic, like Gilbert and  
Sullivan.

AVERY  
More like Callas and Tibaldi.

LELAND  
He just wants to play violin until  
he goes back to New York. Can't  
you please make nice?

AVERY

I'll be professional, and I expect  
the same from him.

LELAND

Just don't make him last seat,  
Okay?

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE - DAY

Alex and Dr. Stonich sit in chairs opposite each other.  
They are at a stand-off, each refusing to speak first. A  
bell DINGS. Alex bolts out of the room.

INT. SMALL SYMPHONY HALL, HARMON - EVENING REHEARSAL

Harmon Symphony Members filter in and settle in their seats.  
Alex spies LISA, holding her french horn, across the  
orchestra. She is 26 years old with pretty features and a  
wide mouth.

They smile at each other, relaying that they hooked up.

Avery stands at the podium with MICAH, a sweet, but awkward,  
15-year-old Native-American boy with braces and acne.

AVERY

While it is our policy to make  
changes to the seating hierarchy on  
the first rehearsal of the month,  
something happened this week to  
force a change.

Alex looks smug.

AVERY (CONT'D)

I spoke with Nathaniel Custalow at  
the the reservation and he agreed  
to allow his son, Micah to join the  
symphony. I am thrilled to have  
one of my star pupils playing with  
us.

Everyone applauds. Alex applauds less enthusiastically than  
the others.

AVERY (CONT'D)

Mr. Custalow, please take a seat  
with the first violins. Your  
partner is Mr. Abernathy. You may  
take the inside chair.

Alex seethes at not moving up a chair.

Micah excitedly plops into the seat next to him.

AVERY (CONT'D)  
Mr. Abernathy, please show Mr.  
Custalow the music.

He points to the music without a glance at Micah.

MICAH  
(to Alex)  
You're that conductor, right? From  
New York?

ALEX  
Yes.

Alex notices JANET, the flute, smiling at him. Janet is 30,  
soft and flowing, with big eyes and a pouty mouth.

MICAH  
I saw you on PBS when I was  
thirteen. I only saw the first  
half, because my dad wanted to  
watch Duck Dynasty. You were  
awesome.

Alex motions to Janet to meet up after rehearsal.

MICAH (CONT'D)  
Can get a selfie with you after?

A rubber band shoots out of Micah's mouth and into Alex's  
face. It lands on Alex's sweater.

Janet giggles.

MICAH (CONT'D)  
Sorry. They do that sometimes.

Alex plucks the rubber band from his sweater and holds it  
out for Micah.

ALEX  
Of course they do.

Micah scoops up the band and puts it back in his mouth.

EXT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL - NIGHT

After rehearsal Avery stands by the curb, waiting for her  
ride. Alex argues his case.

ALEX  
This is not what I expected.

AVERY

You are no longer last seat, Mr. Abernathy.

ALEX

I'm still in the back with the neophytes.

AVERY

The back is where you are best suited.

ALEX

It's only natural you feel threatened.

AVERY

Threatened?

ALEX

By me. Suppressing my talent hurts the orchestra. You have to think of more than your ego.

AVERY

My ego?

ALEX

What I said.

AVERY

Mr. Abernathy, in my orchestra, there is more to seat placement than how well you play. Seniority, giving back to the community, dedication to practice, teamwork - all are equally as important as skill. You have a long way to go on all fronts.

ALEX

Are you telling me - that I lack skill?

Janet struts by, dissing Alex.

AVERY

You were flat in Allegro two.

ALEX

What?

AVERY

F minor has a lot of flats. It doesn't need another.

ALEX

I most certainly was not flat.

AVERY

I suggest more practice.

ALEX

You must have heard Sitting Bull next to me. He was flatter than his head.

Avery's cool exterior cracks and she flashes anger at Alex's bigotry.

AVERY

I know what Micah was playing. You were flat. And if you ever use a racist term in my presence again, you will pack up your violin and leave.

ALEX

You can't get rid of me. Your puny little, two-bit symphony needs my name.

AVERY

Not that badly.

ALEX

What will tubby Mrs. Mallory do if the symphony goes bye-bye? Sit at home, alone, every Monday night, spooning cookie dough into her gargantuan mouth; unable to flap her flabby arms in the eighth seat?

AVERY

Mrs. Mallory wasn't flat.

Alex becomes apoplectic.

Leland's car pulls up for Avery. She gets in and they drive off.

ALEX

That explains everything.

EXT. ALEX'S APARTMENT BUILDING, HARMON - NIGHT

A former warehouse, Alex's apartment building is a high-end, urban condo with a stunning view of the river. The exposed, century-old brick mixes with new construction to bring a balance of antique and contemporary.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT, HARMON - NIGHT

Alex fumes about Avery. He paces around his pre-furnished, river-front apartment.

The pre-fab decor is straight out of Bed, Bath, and Beyond: impersonal, reproduced art found in every model home. A large, metal, geometrically-shaped wall hanging decorates one wall. The furniture sports durable fabric in earth tones. Central to the living room and the bedroom are large windows with wide and sumptuous views of the James River.

A visiting Leo listens patiently.

ALEX

Flat. She had the unmitigated gall to call me flat.

LEO

Perhaps you were flat.

ALEX

I am never flat. Did I every tell you what my instructor at the London Conservatory told me?

LEO

That you have perfect pitch.

ALEX

(overlapping)

I have perfect pitch.

Alex scowls at Leo.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Exactly. I was not flat.

Leo hops up.

LEO

Now that's settled, perhaps a late dinner? I'm starved and there's this gastropub around the corner that was written up in "Foodie."

Alex continues ranting.

ALEX  
She's sleeping with him, you know.

LEO  
Who is sleeping with whom?

ALEX  
Avery. Sleeping with Leland.

LEO  
So?

ALEX  
They're in cahoots.

Leo sits again and pulls out his cell phone.

LEO  
I'm calling for food.

ALEX  
It's discrimination, pure and simple.

LEO  
I'm pretty sure that's not true.

ALEX  
She's a man-hater, a fem-nazi. The way she wags that baton at me - it's phallic. Avery Andrews is discriminating against me because I'm famous, I'm successful, and I'm a man.

LEO  
And those things may have prejudiced her against you.

ALEX  
Exactly.

LEO  
But discrimination, I think, is more systemic.

Alex looks at Leo like he's lost his mind.

LEO (CONT'D)  
In the grander scheme of things.

ALEX  
Your words make no sense.



LEO  
Look, you don't like being there  
and you don't like Avery. Why  
don't you just quit?

ALEX  
Leland asked me to stay.

LEO  
How is it you owe him?

ALEX  
He got me the audition at the Phil.  
They weren't going to see me  
because of what happened in Miami.

LEO  
Ah, yes. Gizelle.

ALEX  
I was only twenty-five, and she  
looked much older than seventeen.  
Leland went to bat for me. He sat  
on the selection panel.

LEO  
That's a secret panel, Alex.

ALEX  
I asked and he told me. I was so  
young - and suddenly I was  
conducting the best orchestra in  
the world. D.C. and London tried  
to woo me.

LEO  
You told me.

ALEX  
But nothing compares to the Phil.  
That one audition put me where I am  
today.

LEO  
Exiled to the to the hamlet of  
Harmon, playing ninth chair in a  
community orchestra, and suspended  
from the New York Philharmonic for  
inappropriate behavior. Alex - you  
tried and it didn't work out.  
We'll find another city. Leland  
will understand. Now, let's go

(MORE)

LEO (CONT'D)

eat.

Leo stands, again.

ALEX

She said I was flat.

LEO

The gastropub has a bruschetta with sautéed kale, pine nuts and goat cheese. I want it in my mouth, now.

ALEX

Will you just listen and tell me what you think?

LEO

Fine. But supper after, capiche?

Leo sits, again. Alex takes out his violin and his music.

ALEX

Sure, sure. This is the beginning of Allegro two.

Leo nods and Alex begins to play.

He is flat.

Alex stops, looks at the violin, tunes it, and plays again.

Once again, he is flat.

Alex retunes the violin.

Leo starts to speak. Alex shushes him.

Alex reverently places the violin beneath his chin. With tremendous concentration, he draws the bow across the strings once more.

He is flat once more.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Son of a bitch.

LEO

You're flat.

ALEX

I'm flat.

Leo sighs.

LEO  
Do you have any take-out menus?

ALEX  
Top drawer, credenza.

Leo shuffles over to the credenza and pulls out a menu.

LEO  
Thanks. Want something?

ALEX  
No. I'll be in my room.

Alex shuts himself into his bedroom.

Off camera, Alex practices the same music over and over. He is flat each time.

Leo holds a menu in his hand. He dials his cell phone, wincing at the flat music coming from the bedroom.

LEO  
Delivery.  
(pause)  
You don't happen have bruschetta,  
do you?  
(reveals the Chinese menu  
in his hand)  
Right. Then I'll take the number  
three with fried rice and two egg  
rolls.

MONTAGE - ALEX REHEARSES AND IGNORES THERAPY

-- INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT - DAY -- Alex practices his violin, curses, resumes practice.

-- INT. DR. STONICH'S OFFICE - DAY -- Alex and Dr. Stonich sit silently.

-- INT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL - NIGHT -- Alex is frustrated as he rehearses with the orchestra.

-- INT. DR. STONICH'S OFFICE - DAY -- Dr. Stonich and Alex stare at each other.

-- INT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL - NIGHT -- Mrs. Mallory attempts to help Alex. He ignores her.

-- INT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL - NIGHT -- Micah seeks help from Alex. Alex ignores him.

-- INT. DR. STONICH'S OFFICE - DAY -- Alex bolts from his seat and out the door.

INT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL - NIGHT

The Harmon Symphony rehearses the final ALLEGRETTO of BEETHOVEN'S 6TH SYMPHONY.

Micah struggles with the fingering on his violin.

The music ends. Avery addresses the orchestra.

AVERY

I need more strength from the horns on the last flourish. And cellos, bring it down a bit - smooth and melodic. We'll take a short break before doing it again. Be back here in five.

Alex makes eyes at Janet the flute. He walks toward her.

AVERY (CONT'D)

Mr. Abernathy, may I speak with you?

Alex abandons Janet and jogs over to Avery.

ALEX

Yes, Ms. Andrews.

AVERY

The concert is in two weeks and Micah is still not ready. One of the responsibilities of our orchestra members is to mentor the seat below you. I would like you to give him some pointers as well as some encouragement.

ALEX

Of course. Anything else?

AVERY

No. That is all.

ALEX

Not even about being flat?

AVERY

Other than to say you are no longer flat?

Alex swells with pride.

ALEX  
Precisely.

AVERY  
Congratulations, Mr. Abernathy, on  
not being flat. You may take your  
break now.

Alex smiles like an angelic child, hoping for a treat.  
Avery notices that he remains.

AVERY (CONT'D)  
Yes, Mr. Abernathy?

ALEX  
It's the beginning of the month.

AVERY  
So it is.

ALEX  
May I move up?

AVERY  
No, Mr. Abernathy, you may not.

ALEX  
But I practiced.

AVERY  
As you should each day. There is  
still teamwork, dedication, service  
to the community. You aren't  
following Mrs. Mallory, and Micah  
needs your help.

ALEX  
If I help Micah, will you move me  
up?

AVERY  
You do not receive kudos for  
fulfilling your responsibilities,  
Mr. Abernathy.

ALEX  
I can play circles around your  
first chair.

AVERY  
Take your break, Mr. Abernathy.

ALEX  
This is bullshit.

AVERY  
Three minutes and counting.

Alex stomps out of the rehearsal hall.

EXT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL - NIGHT

Alex bursts out of the rehearsal hall. He screams to the sky.

A few smokers jump at the intrusion. They ditch their cigarettes, and quickly slip back into the rehearsal hall.

Alex comes to a realization. He marches back through the doors.

INT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL - NIGHT

Alex sits in his seat, holding himself like a snake about to strike.

AVERY  
Let's take it from Allegro one,  
24th bar.

Avery taps her baton.

Alex raises his violin with vengeance.

Alex plays with the orchestra, then he takes over the piece, showing off, playing louder and faster than everyone around him.

Avery tries to rein Alex in. The harder she pushes, the faster and louder he plays.

Harmon Symphony Members stop playing one by one, until Avery only conducts Alex.

The piece ends. The battle is a draw.

AVERY (CONT'D)  
Mr. Abernathy. The hallway. Now.

Alex struts behind Avery to the hallway.

INT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Avery and Alex burst into the hallway. Avery turns on Alex.

AVERY  
What was that?

ALEX  
I told you I could play circles  
around her.

AVERY  
I've not asked you to play circles  
around the first chair. I've asked  
you to play ninth chair. Is that  
too difficult for you?

ALEX  
You are wasting my talent.

AVERY  
Mr. Abernathy, when you ran the New  
York Philharmonic, who chose the  
seats?

ALEX  
I did.

AVERY  
Did anyone complain?

ALEX  
They knew better.

AVERY  
You see my point?

ALEX  
Leland asked me to help you.

AVERY  
If I need your advice, I'll ask for  
it. Until then, in my music hall,  
you are the ninth seat out of ten.  
Pull that stunt again, and you'll  
be out on your ass.

ALEX  
You need me.

AVERY  
If you wanted to leave, you would  
have done so by now. For reasons I  
cannot fathom, you stay. It would  
seem I have the upper hand, Mr.  
Abernathy.

Alex fumes.

AVERY (CONT'D)  
You will go back in there and play  
your part.

ALEX  
As you wish. Ms. Andrews.

Alex tromps back to the rehearsal. Avery marches behind him.

INT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL, - NIGHT

Avery strides to the podium.

Alex slumps in his seat.

Micah leans over to him.

MICAH  
Mr. Abernathy?

ALEX  
Yes?

MICAH  
I was wondering about the last  
movement, page ten? I can't seem  
to get the fingering. Could you  
help me?

ALEX  
Fine.

Alex blows through the fingering so fast Micah can't keep up.

MICAH  
I'm sorry. I didn't quite catch  
it.

ALEX  
For God's sake, Micah. Watch this  
time.

Alex again plays too quickly.

Micah shrinks back.

MICAH  
Thank you, Mr. Abernathy.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT, HARMON - NIGHT



Alex sips scotch on his balcony overlooking the river. He speaks with Leo by phone.

INT. LEO'S APARTMENT, NYC - SAME

Leo sits up in his cozy bed. An abandoned novel lays beside him.

INTERCUT - TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

ALEX

She's drunk with power, like  
Boones' Farm Wine.

LEO

Maybe you came on too strong.

ALEX

She's overwhelmed by my reputation.

LEO

You said she was good.

ALEX

She's got chops. How she gets that  
sound from this group is beyond me.

LEO

Then she's probably not  
overwhelmed. She's probably  
annoyed.

ALEX

Sometimes my natural confidence can  
be off-putting.

LEO

Yes. It can. How's therapy going?

ALEX

It's going.

LEO

You're not going to tell me?

ALEX

Tell you what? We sit and look at  
each other for forty-five minutes.

LEO

You have to say something, Alex.  
That's how therapy works.

ALEX

I'll be damned if I make the first move. Wait - that gives me an idea.

LEO

What kind of maladjusted idea could come from this?

ALEX

I do have a certain way with the ladies.

LEO

Alex, no.

ALEX

As a peace offering - nothing sleazy, I promise. In the meanwhile, I want you to do something for me.

LEO

What?

ALEX

Find out what you can about Avery Andrews. There has to be something out there - she's too good. I want to know why she's in this backwater. Dig up whatever you can.

LEO

Why?

ALEX

Bargaining purposes, Leo. See you at the concert Sunday?

LEO

I'll be there.

INT. AVERY'S OUTER OFFICE, SYDNOR COLLEGE - DAY

Avery's college intern, LILLIAN, 21, reads a novel at her desk. Lillian is blond and curvy, romantic and flirty.

Avery rushes past Lillian into her office.

LILLIAN

Ms. Andrews?

Avery steps back into the suite.

AVERY

I have exactly ten minutes to eat a Luna bar before my afternoon consult.

LILLIAN

Mr. Abernathy's been calling this morning. A lot.

AVERY

Please tell Mr. Abernathy that I will call him this afternoon.

LILLIAN

He wants a face to face.

AVERY

Out of the question. I'm ass to eyeball all day.

LILLIAN

Oh.

AVERY

What did you tell him?

LILLIAN

I may have told him when your class ended? Ma'am?

AVERY

He's on his way over?

LILLIAN

He's on his way over. I'm sorry. He was just so insistent.

AVERY

That's one way to describe him.

LILLIAN

He's like a force of nature. The way he plays the violin - with such power and pain and conviction.

Avery sorts through the mail.

AVERY

Yes. Conviction and pain.

LILLIAN

He's like Mr. Darcy - you know,  
from Pride and Prejudice - deep and  
dark and brooding.

AVERY

A word of advice, Lillian:  
Brooding is boring. Still waters  
do not run deep - they're stagnant.

LILLIAN

You sound just like Elizabeth  
Bennett - all proud and prejudiced.

AVERY

I assure you that I am no Elizabeth  
Bennett, and I am much too old to  
be enamored by the likes of Mr.  
Darcy.

LILLIAN

I'm in love with Mr. Darcy. I just  
want to pry him open like an  
oyster.

AVERY

To find what? There's no pearl  
there. There's only more darkness  
and brooding. No thank you.

LILLIAN

But if it's love, it's worth it.

AVERY

Hardly.

Avery goes to her office, then turns back to Lillian.

AVERY (CONT'D)

Who do you think is blamed when Mr.  
Darcy doesn't peel back the layers  
of his cold, cold heart? Elizabeth  
Bennett is blamed.

No. Give me an accessible,  
fun-loving man any day of the week.  
We'll laugh and dance and make  
merry, while forty-two-year-old  
Elizabeth Bennett, spent from  
having twelve children, mourns her  
wasted life with that  
stick-in-the-mud, Mr. Darcy.

LILLIAN  
Don't you think we all want to be  
discovered a little?

AVERY  
Not anymore.

Alex sweeps into the outer office.

ALEX  
Ms. Andrews.

AVERY  
Mr. Darcy - I mean - Mr. Abernathy.

Lillian smiles at the mistake, then turns a seductive gaze to Alex.

Alex does not notice Lillian at all.

Avery ushers Alex into her office. She closes the door.

INT. AVERY'S OFFICE - DAY

Avery briskly steps into her cramped office. Music and symphony awards crowd a small parcel of wall space and the top of a filing cabinet. The remainder of the space is taken up with papers, sheet music, and stacks of books. Her desk sits in the middle of the office, facing the door, like an eye in the middle of a hurricane.

Avery steps behind her desk and remains standing.

AVERY  
I haven't much time, Mr. Abernathy.  
What can I do for you?

ALEX  
I believe we got off on the wrong  
foot.

AVERY  
We?

ALEX  
Yes. I feel that we've  
misunderstood each other and I'd  
like to be the first to make  
amends.

Alex steps toward the desk with a sincere look on his face.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Let me take you to dinner.

AVERY  
No, thank you, Mr. Abernathy.

ALEX  
Please call me Alex. I want to bridge this gap between us and become friends.

AVERY  
My answer was no.

ALEX  
Perhaps I misunderstood your relationship with Leland. Are you dating? Exclusively?

AVERY  
My relationship with Leland is private.

ALEX  
You're a modern woman, Avery. I see no ring.

Avery is silent. Alex smiles.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Then dinner? With me. There's a gastropub near my flat that has an excellent bruschetta.

AVERY  
No, Mr. Abernathy.

ALEX  
I don't understand.

AVERY  
I do not wish to go out with you.

ALEX  
You are permitted to date other men?

AVERY  
That implies I need permission.

ALEX  
Leland is your boss.

AVERY

My relationship with Leland is none of your concern. I date whom I wish and I do not wish to date you.

ALEX

Oh. I see. You know, society is much more progressive now than it was. If you prefer women, you needn't wear Leland like a beard.

Avery bristles.

AVERY

Mr. Abernathy.

ALEX

I find girl on girl very exciting.

AVERY

Were I a lesbian, Mr. Abernathy, my sexual preference would not be for your benefit. No dinner. Are we finished here?

Alex sits and cozies himself in the office chair.

Avery remains standing.

ALEX

What is it you do at the college, Avery?

AVERY

I head the music department. And I prefer we use formal names.

ALEX

At a college known best for it's business school?

AVERY

Some publications have ranked it that way.

ALEX

Why would someone of your considerable talent stay here when you could be doing so much more elsewhere?

AVERY

I make an impact here.

ALEX  
Ah, yes - the Community Symphony.

AVERY  
And I teach lessons at the  
reservation. What is it you want,  
Mr. Abernathy?

Alex stands and leans toward Avery.

ALEX  
I want to know why you are so  
bitter.

AVERY  
Bitter?

ALEX  
You have an edge sharper than a  
razor.

AVERY  
You aren't very good at making  
amends, are you, Mr. Abernathy?

Alex leans across the desk, inching closer to Avery.

ALEX  
I see you for what you are, dear  
girl. You long to shine like star,  
but you've given up hope that  
anyone will notice you. I noticed  
you, Avery.

Anchored to her spot, Avery leans into Alex. She holds an  
icy stare.

AVERY  
Ms. Andrews.

Alex inches his face closer. Avery remains stationary and  
stoic.

Eyeball to eyeball, Alex scrutinizes Avery's face.

ALEX  
You know, with a little lipstick  
and a brush of mascara, you could  
rule the world, or at least your  
corner of it.

Avery scowls.



ALEX  
And for the love of God, smile.

AVERY  
What did you say?

ALEX  
You'd be a lot prettier and more  
appealing if you soften your tone  
and showed off those pearly whites.

Avery slowly eases around her desk and toward Alex.

Alex prepares himself for victory.

Avery denies him the victory, brushes past Alex, then opens  
the door to dismiss him.

AVERY  
I am not here to decorate your  
world, Mr. Abernathy. Good day.

INT. AVERY'S OUTER OFFICE - DAY

Alex scuttles out of Avery's office.

Avery follows. She spies MISS WALLINGFORD, a plain, 18  
year-old student with wide eyes, waiting in the outer office  
for her consult with Avery.

AVERY  
Miss Wallingford. Please come in.

Miss Wallingford scurries in the office. The door closes  
with a bang.

Alex notices Lillian for the first time.

ALEX  
That went well.

LILLIAN  
She gets like that sometimes.

ALEX  
You mean, there are times when  
she's not like that?

LILLIAN  
I guess you just bring out the bad  
in her.

Alex glides toward Lillian.

ALEX

Perhaps I can do the same for you.

Lillian smiles and bats her eyes.

INT. AVERY'S BUNGALOW - NIGHT

Avery and Leland prepare a stir fry together. Avery chops the vegetables with a vengeance.

AVERY

Soften my tone. Wear lipstick.  
Look pretty. Not competent. Not  
intelligent. Pretty. He actually  
told me to smile. Why don't I get  
out the apron and pearls while I'm  
at it.

LELAND

You are pretty when you smile.

AVERY

What?

LELAND

I like your smile.

AVERY

That's not the point, Leland. I  
shouldn't have to play girlie-girl  
to do my job. How on earth does  
being "sweet" make me a better  
musician?

LELAND

You are a well respected musician,  
Avery, but you could try scaling it  
down a bit with Alex.

AVERY

I'm not going to placate some  
over-sensitive diva simply because  
his feelings are hurt.

LELAND

It's not just Alex. Sometimes, and  
I only say this now because we're  
talking about it, but sometimes you  
can be a bit brusque.

AVERY

Brusque?

LELAND

A little.

AVERY

When Alexander Abernathy dressed down the entire Philharmonic flute section in front of an audience - What was that? Strong leadership skills? Behavior we expect from quirky creative types?

LELAND

Of course not.

AVERY

He didn't lose his job. No one called him "brusque." No - he got an invitation to the White House.

LELAND

Avery.

AVERY

Why do I have to couch my direction with saccharine just so someone will listen to me?

LELAND

You don't. I love you just as you are.

Avery turns away.

LELAND (CONT'D)

You know I love you.

Big, painful pause.

AVERY

Why do you say that when you know I can't? We have an agreement.

LELAND

A fella can still hope.

AVERY

Leland.

LELAND

I know. Married to your work.

Avery changes the subject.

AVERY  
You owe me for Alex Abernathy.

LELAND  
I'll make it up to you. This weekend?

AVERY  
Can't. Final rehearsal's on Saturday.

LELAND  
Friday night?

AVERY  
I have other plans.

LELAND  
Oh. Right.

Uncomfortable silence.

LELAND (CONT'D)  
Have you begun the Chopin?

AVERY  
We're not doing Chopin. I changed my mind. We're doing "Pines of Rome."

LELAND  
That's ambitious.

AVERY  
We have the fullest sound we've ever had.

LELAND  
Chopin would be a whole lot easier.

Avery weighs telling Leland.

AVERY  
Pines made me want to be a conductor.

LELAND  
I see.

AVERY  
I was fifteen. "Pines of Rome" washed over me in colors and images I'd never felt before. I didn't  
(MORE)

AVERY (CONT'D)

know music could do that. My hands began to move, without me telling them to. It was like I became part of the music, riding on top of it, telling the notes where to go. I can't fully explain it, but I knew, that very moment, I was a conductor.

Leland takes her in his arms.

LELAND

Then you shall have your Pines.

AVERY

I shall.

They kiss.

LELAND

I wonder what piece inspired Alex to conduct?

AVERY

Probably a piece of ass.

INT. DR. STONICH'S OFFICE - DAY

Alex slumps in a chair opposite Dr. Stonich.

Dr. Stonich clears his throat.

Alex straightens up.

ALEX

Did you say something?

DR. STONICH

No.

ALEX

I thought --

DR. STONICH

I cleared my throat.

ALEX

Oh.

Dr. Stonich writes on his note pad.

They resume an uncomfortable silence.

EXT. RESTAURANT, HARMON - NIGHT

Alex and Lillian sit at a table near a window in a small, downtown restaurant. They sip wine and munch bruschetta in their cozy nook.

INT. RESTAURANT, HARMON - NIGHT

Lillian chatters as Alex's eyes glaze over.

LILLIAN

He won't take her calls and she's too embarrassed to drop by, 'cause what if she finds him with someone else, or what if he's got a serious girlfriend and she destroys his life and he commits suicide or something. So I told her, "Next time you borrow my clothes, make sure you walk out of his place with them the next morning." I'm never going to see my suede skirt again.

Alex's cell phone rings. He looks.

ALEX

It's Leo, I've got to take this.

Alex answers the phone.

He looks wide-eyed at Lillian.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Wait - what? She left his flat without a skirt?

Lillian stands and gives Alex a quick kiss. She motions that she's going to the lady's room.

INT. AIRPORT, NEW YORK CITY - SAME

Leo sits at a very crowded departure gate waiting for his flight to be announced. A LARGE WOMAN sits on one side of him, asleep. Other PASSENGERS shuffle by and bump into his luggage as he speaks with Alex.

INTERCUT - TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

LEO

Who left without a skirt?

ALEX

Lillian's friend - Jolene or Jolinda, or something.

LEO  
Date?

ALEX  
Yes.

LEO  
Age?

ALEX  
Twenty-one.

LEO  
Thank, God. Hair?

ALEX  
Blonde.

LEO  
Stacked?

ALEX  
Of course.

LEO  
Conversation?

ALEX  
Minimal.

LEO  
Damn. A pretty girl you don't have  
to talk to.

A LARGE MAN takes a seat next to Leo, crowding him against  
the sleeping Large Woman.

ALEX  
This isn't a cancellation call, I  
hope.

LEO  
Afraid so. Bentley had a bender  
and I'm on watch before the concert  
Sunday night. I board for Chicago  
any minute.

ALEX  
I wanted you to see the old  
battle-ax in action. Did you find  
out any more about her?

Avery sashays past the restaurant window on the arm of

ANOTHER MAN. She throws her head back in laughter.

Alex catches her out of the corner of his eye. He cranes his neck to get a better look.

LEO

There's not much online apart from her school bio. She's been there for twenty-five years, but before that, nothing. I'll ask around Chicago this weekend.

The Large Woman snorts and lays her head on Leo's shoulder.

ALEX

Good, good. Whatever you can find.

LEO

I've got more news, Alex.

ALEX

What?

LEO

The trustees want you to do the final concert this season.

ALEX

How did that happen?

LEO

There was a small uproar among the season ticket holders. They demanded their money back if you weren't conducting.

ALEX

My people love me. I return victorious.

LEO

No. You don't. The public may love you but the orchestra still hates you. They threatened to walk. So the trustees cut a deal: You come back only one day a week to direct the orchestra. All other rehearsal time will be with one of the assistants.

ALEX

That's ludicrous.



LEO  
They need the musicians and they  
need the revenue. This way they  
get both.

ALEX  
And if I don't play along?

LEO  
They'll drop you like a hot bag of  
shit, fending for yourself in  
court.

Lillian returns from the lady's room.

ALEX  
They wouldn't.

LEO  
They would. You're hurting their  
reputation with the patrons, Alex.  
Concert's at the beginning of June.

Lillian snuggles onto Alex's lap. She takes selfies with  
him.

ALEX  
What's the music, again?

LEO  
"At the Movies with John Williams."

ALEX  
(not enthused)  
Right.

The airport intercom announces boarding for Leo's flight.

LEO  
That's the flight. I've got to go.  
I'll call you on Monday with the  
specifics.

ALEX  
Alright. Ta.

Alex hangs up.

Everyone but Leo stands to board the flight. The Large  
Woman snuggles into him.

INT. RESTAURANT, HARMON - NIGHT

Lillian remains in Alex's lap, cuddling. Alex assesses her. He turns her face toward his and plants a deep, passionate kiss.

Lillian's face lights up.

LILLIAN  
Wanna skip dinner?

ALEX  
More than anything.

They stand and sprint out the door.

DREAM - INT. LINCOLN CENTER, NEW YORK CITY - DAY (THIRTY YEARS AGO)

The young Alex gazes, wide-eyed, as the younger Avery brushing by him.

STAGE HAND  
(to Alex)  
You're up.

The Alex swallows, takes a deep breath, and nervously walks toward the stage.

He steps into the blinding stage lights.

CUT TO:

INT. ALEX'S BEDROOM, HARMON - NIGHT (PRESENT DAY)

Alex wakes in a sweat. Lillian lies next to him.

Alex stumbles out of bed and into the living room.

A panic attack washes over him. Alex shakes with fear and frustration.

INT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL - NIGHT

Harmon Community Symphony Members packs up their instruments and music at the end of rehearsal.

Avery motions to Alex.

AVERY  
Mr. Abernathy. May I have a word?

ALEX  
Of course, Ms. Andrews.

Alex comes to Avery. Avery acquiesces.

AVERY

Your performance was much better today. The violins sounded almost as one.

ALEX

Thank you, Ms. Andrews.

AVERY

I also appreciate the work you've done with Micah.

Alex looks away.

ALEX

Of course. He's very dedicated. He'll be playing for New York by the time he graduates.

AVERY

I'm afraid that won't be the case, Mr. Abernathy. Micah told me this morning he's leaving the symphony after tomorrow's concert.

Avery packs up her music and notes in her tote bag.

ALEX

What? Why?

AVERY

He brought home a "C" on his interim. His parents are very strict about grades.

ALEX

But he loves the symphony - and he's really not terrible at all.

AVERY

Micah's father is training Micah in the family's contracting business. Between helping his family, going to school, and taking violin, something had to give.

ALEX

Perhaps he could cut back working for his father?

AVERY

I doubt his father would let him do that. He wants Micah to be an

(MORE)

AVERY (CONT'D)

engineer. I could almost accept that, if it was something Micah wanted.

ALEX

What if I speak with his father tomorrow after the concert?

AVERY

He won't be at the concert, Mr. Abernathy. I've invited him several times. The symphony is not his cup of tea.

ALEX

So, I'm last chair again.

Avery looks at Alex pointedly.

AVERY

Yes, it does. It also means I need to reevaluate the music for June.

ALEX

What's the music?

AVERY

I hoped for "Pines of Rome."

ALEX

And with Micah gone.

AVERY

It wouldn't sound right.

Alex's face brightens with a devious smile.

ALEX

How about something light, like "A Night at the Movies with John Williams."

AVERY

Oh. God, no.

ALEX

Williams is very popular.

AVERY

So are deep-fried Twinkies. I'll have to go with Chopin. We have a good pianist at the school.

ALEX  
Which piece?

AVERY  
Concerto number one. Why?

ALEX  
Just curious. Well, see you tomorrow.

AVERY  
1:00 pm sharp.

Alex hastens out of earshot. He dials Leo on his cell phone, as he walks toward the exit.

ALEX  
Leo, tell them I'll do the concert, but only if we change it to "The Pines of Rome."

EXT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL - NIGHT

Alex has a spring in his step as he walks out of the building.

ALEX  
I don't care if the marketing has gone out. That's my offer. Make the change and I'll be there.

A pick-up truck with a side door that says "Custalow & Sons Electrical" idles by the curb. Alex spies Micah putting his bag into the back of the truck.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Gotta run.

Alex hangs up and calls out.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Micah's dad.

MR. CUSTALOW, a gruff-looking construction worker in his 40's, sees Alex jogging to his window.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Mister -

MR. CUSTALOW  
Custalow. Who are you?

ALEX  
I'm Alexander Abernathy, conductor  
for the New York Philharmonic. I'd  
love to have a word with you about  
your son.

EXT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL - DAY

Avery pulls her Volvo into the empty parking lot, arriving  
much earlier than the Harmon Community Symphony.

Music bag in hand, she exits her car and strides across the  
empty parking lot into Sydnor Symphony Hall.

INT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL -DAY

MONTAGE - AVERY'S PRE-CONCERT RITUAL

-- On stage -- Avery aligns chairs and music stands  
precisely.

-- At podium -- Avery arranges her music.

-- At podium -- Avery conducts an imaginary orchestra. The  
hall is silent, except for the swishing of Avery's baton.

-- Auditorium -- Avery checks each row, removing trash and  
lowering the seats.

-- Front of auditorium -- Avery straightens the programs.

-- Front of auditorium -- Avery surveys the auditorium.  
She spits in her right hand and throws it over her left  
shoulder. She turns and leaves.

EXT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL -DAY

TIME LAPSE

Automobiles fill the parking lot around Avery's car. Harmon  
Symphony Members and AUDIENCE MEMBERS enter the building.

INT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL - DAY

On stage, the Harmon Community Symphony tunes up.

From the balcony, Lillian operates a video camera, recording  
the concert.

Leland sits in the auditorium, beaming at the full house.

Mr. Custalow sits uncomfortably in a seat too small for him,  
waiting for the concert to begin. His wife, MRS. CUSTALOW,  
42, takes his hand and give him an endearing smile.

Avery strides to the podium and bows to the audience. They applaud. She turns to the Community Symphony.

MONTAGE - BEETHOVEN'S 6TH SYMPHONY

- Avery conducts with strength and passion.
- Alex concentrates on the music and plays well with the other violins as if they are a solid team.
- Alex watches Avery for cues and follows Mrs. Mallory's lead.
- Micah performs the challenging fingering with some difficulty. Alex give him a grin and a nod as they continue playing.
- Video camera RECORDS Avery and Alex.
- Mr. Custalow taps along to the music.
- Mrs. Custalow's eyes brim with tears of pride and joy.
- Leland listens deeply.
- Concert ends. Thunderous applause. Bows taken.

INT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Audience Members pack the hallway, congratulating the members of Harmon Community Symphony.

Alex chats MOS with the Custalow family. Micah wears an enormous grin.

Avery carries a bouquet of flowers in her arms.

Micah sees her and works his way through the crowd toward her.

MICAH

Ms. Andrews!

Avery stops and turns toward Micah.

MICAH (CONT'D)

Guess what? Mr. Abernathy talked with my dad and as long as I pull my grades up before the final report card, I can stay.

AVERY

He did? How?

MICAH

He talked to him last night. Alex  
Abernathy talked to my dad about  
me. Isn't that great?

Avery pastes a large smile on her face, for Micah's sake.

AVERY

Yes. Yes, of course. We're so  
glad to have you back.

Micah hugs an unhuggable Avery, then runs back to his  
family.

Alex saunters over to her, full of himself.

ALEX

I suppose Micah told you.

AVERY

Yes. Congratulations.

ALEX

You just have to know how to talk  
to people.

Avery looks down.

AVERY

Thank you for doing that.

ALEX

It was nothing. So now we do  
"Pines of Rome?"

AVERY

Yes. Excuse me.

Avery beelines away from the crowd and Alex Abernathy.

INT. AVERY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Avery bursts into her office, tears flowing down her cheeks.  
She beats the flowers over her desk, repeatedly, while  
cursing under her breath. She collapses, exhausted, into  
her office chair.

Avery surveys her meager office. She grabs a tissue, wipes  
her eyes and nose. Avery then stands, straightens her  
clothing, puts on her brave face, and marches out the door.

INT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Half the crowd has gone, leaving a few FAMILY and FRIENDS to



chat MOS with the Harmon Symphony Members.

Avery enters the hallway, alone. She scans the crowd.

Gabby, Nate, and Kim laugh at a joke MOS. Another orchestra member, Karen, calls out to the trio.

KAREN

Hey, where are we going?

NATE

Lulu's on Eighteenth.

KAREN

Save me a place.

Avery hangs back, so not to be seen.

Mrs. Mallory walks up beside her, startling Avery.

MRS. MALLORY

Ms. Andrews? You coming out with us?

AVERY

No, Mrs. Mallory. Thank you. I have another engagement.

MRS. MALLORY

Too bad. See you tomorrow night.

AVERY

Yes. Good night.

Mrs. Mallory leaves Avery standing alone in corner of the hallway.

MONTAGE - AVERY'S POST-CONCERT RITUAL - DAY

-- INT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL -- Avery folds and stores chairs and music stands.

-- INT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL -- Avery gathers programs and trash littering the seats. She throws them in the garbage.

-- INT. AVERY'S OFFICE -- Avery collects the remnants of the ruined bouquet on the floor.

-- INT. AVERY'S OFFICE -- Avery files music.

-- EXT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL - Avery locks up the building as the sun is setting.

-- EXT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL - Avery walks through the

empty parking lot to her car, gets in, and drives away.

INT. AVERY'S BUNGALOW - NIGHT

Avery moves food around on her plate without eating. The BBC plays on the television in the background.

Avery turns off the television. She takes out music for "The Pines of Rome" and places it next to her plate.

As she eats, she silently conducts "Pines" with her fork and knife.

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE - DAY

Alex sits across from Dr. Stonich.

Dr. Stonich sits still and attentive, but Alex looks as if he wants to speak. Alex's eyes are soft and reflective.

Dr. Stonich notices the change. Alex gives Dr. Stonich a small smile. Dr. Stonich observes.

ALEX

Good weekend. You?

DR. STONICH

Yes. It was good.

They return to a contented silence.

EXT. CHICAGO AIRPORT - DAY

An airplane lands at the O'Hare International Airport in Chicago.

INT. CHICAGO AIRPORT - DAY

Leo sits in the terminal, waiting to board his return flight to New York.

He watches the VIDEO from Sunday's concert on his laptop as he speaks with Alex by phone.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT, HARMON - SAME

Alex relaxes in his living room with a cup of coffee.

INTERCUT - TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

LEO

Wow. She's really good.

ALEX

Yes. If you can look past that enormous ego.

LEO

You should talk.

ALEX

I'm not nearly the megalomaniac she is.

LEO

We trashed six months of marketing, Alex.

ALEX

"Pines of Rome" is better.

LEO

John Williams sells tickets.

ALEX

"Pines of Rome" is a challenge.

LEO

A challenge to fill the seats. Alex, people bought season tickets thinking they were going to hear Star Wars and Indiana Jones.

Leo clicks on the link to the Harmon Community Symphony web site.

ALEX

I am the reason they bought season tickets, and I choose "Pines of Rome." It's wholesome - it nourishes the mind.

Leo sees the Harmon Community Symphony web announcement:  
"June Concert: 'Pines of Rome.'"

LEO

(overlapping)

Wait a minute.

ALEX

Like broccoli for the brain.

LEO

You little sneak. Harmon is doing "Pines of Rome."

ALEX  
Really?

LEO  
Cheater.

ALEX  
I prefer "collaborator."

LEO  
You're gonna take her hard work and  
use it as your own.

ALEX  
The arts community borrows ideas  
all the time.

LEO  
Blackguard.

ALEX  
It's the best I can do, Leo. I've  
had a breakthrough.

LEO  
Dr. Stonich working out?

ALEX  
Yes, actually. His sessions have  
been beyond enlightening.

LEO  
What did he say?

ALEX  
Absolutely nothing.

LEO  
What?

ALEX  
We've spoken five words to each  
other, but the silence has been  
riveting.

LEO  
At two hundred and fifty bucks an  
hour, it had better be mind  
blowing.

ALEX  
I'm burned out, Leo. I might have  
had enough leftover for John  
(MORE)

ALEX (CONT'D)

Williams, but even then I'd be phoning it in.

LEO

Then let's do Williams.

ALEX

You don't understand. I'm excited to play "Pines of Rome," not conduct it.

LEO

What has Avery Andrews done to you?

ALEX

Ignored me. Exasperated me. Insulted me. Pissed me off to no end. And with any luck - she'll inspire me.

LEO

You have to tell her.

ALEX

And be thrown out? Not on your life.

LEO

It's unethical.

ALEX

All's fair in love and war.

LEO

This is neither.

ALEX

It's both. It's art. What about Chicago?

Leo goes back to the video of Avery conducting.

LEO

No one knows her name, which is kind of crazy after seeing her conduct. Someone that good, you'd remember.

ALEX

I want to know how Avery ended up in Harmon.

LEO  
I'll circulate the video to a few friends.

ALEX  
Thank you, Leo. Rehearsal on Wednesdays?

LEO  
Yes - full day. Assistants have the rest of the week. Send your notes as soon as you can.

ALEX  
As soon as I get them from Frau Conductor.

LEO  
If seventy-five percent of my salary didn't come from you, I'd have a hard time sleeping over this.

INT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL - NIGHT

Avery barely restrains her excitement as she hands out "PINES OF ROME" to the Harmon Community Symphony. The musicians look at the music with skepticism.

Leland sits to the side, observing.

AVERY  
This is "The Pines of Rome."

CELLIST  
This is six months' work.

TRUMPET PLAYER  
My fingers are cramping already.

AVERY  
I have every faith you can do this.

OBOE PLAYER  
Glad you do. I'm agnostic.

Everyone laughs. Avery smirks.

AVERY  
It's the beginning of the month.  
Mr. Watson, please move to the second chair. Ms. Thalhimer, the third chair. Mrs. Rhodes, the  
(MORE)

AVERY (CONT'D)

first chair. And Mr. Abernathy,  
the eighth chair.

Surprised and honored, Alex stands. Mrs. Mallory bows and offers him her chair. She moves to the ninth chair.

AVERY (CONT'D)

Take your positions. Let's begin  
with the last movement, The Appian  
Way.

MONTAGE - FIRST REHEARSAL FOR PINES OF ROME

- The trumpets enter on the wrong note.
- The violas can't keep up with percussion.
- The woodwinds get lost and the music grinds to a halt. The woodwinds shuffle their music around.
- Avery takes a calming breath and begins again.
- Janet the flute and Lisa the french horn become frustrated with their mistakes.
- Alex observes the orchestra's poor performance.
- The entire orchestra plays discordantly and jumbled.
- Leland grimaces.
- Avery brings the entire orchestra to full stop. She hangs her head.

INT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL - NIGHT

Post-rehearsal, Avery jams her music and notes into her tote bag.

Leland offers her a hug. Avery shakes it off.

AVERY

I need a drink. Now.

EXT. UPSCALE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Avery walks into an upscale, downtown restaurant. Twinkle lights glitter in the window, reflecting off the bright interior. PATRONS sip wine and cocktails at tables lining a large picture window.

INT. UPSCALE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Avery steps into the restaurant. She sees Leland sitting in

a booth, facing her. She goes to him.

Leland stands to give her a kiss, but Avery sees Alex sitting in the same booth. She freezes and the kiss is lost.

AVERY  
What is he doing here?

ALEX  
I come in peace.

Avery remains standing.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Please sit. I'd hate for you to stand on my account.

Avery hesitates, then sits. Three drinks sweat on the table.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
We took the liberty of ordering for you. Gin and tonic, right?

AVERY  
(to Leland)  
Hendricks?

LELAND  
Of course.

Avery sips her gin and tonic.

LELAND (CONT'D)  
I invited Alex because I thought he might have some insight into what happened tonight.

AVERY  
A consultation?

LELAND  
He's conducted Pines before.  
There's no shame in collaborating a tiny bit with one of the world's most famous conductors.

AVERY  
Okay.

Avery turns her steely gaze to Alex.



AVERY (CONT'D)  
Enlighten me, Mr. Abernathy.

ALEX  
Pines is a difficult piece, Ms. Andrews, and you have a volunteer orchestra. Perhaps you should lower your expectations.

AVERY  
I see. What else?

ALEX  
We need more musicians. Our current horns and strings cannot carry this.

LELAND  
Maybe extra credit for your students?

AVERY  
Fine. What else?

ALEX  
Should I tell her my secret, Leland?

LELAND  
It's your secret, Alex.

Alex looks as if he's about to burst. Avery gives Alex a blank look.

AVERY  
What secret, Mr. Abernathy?

ALEX  
The secret to my success as a conductor. The one interpretation I use for all classical, baroque, and modern music.

AVERY  
What could that possibly be?

ALEX  
I've never told this to anyone. But I'm telling you.

AVERY  
Sometime before the next ice age, I hope.

Alex hold on to the anticipation a moment longer.

ALEX

My secret is sex, Ms. Andrews.  
Sex.

AVERY

Excuse me?

ALEX

It's all sex. The sound, the rhythm, the booming, the blowing horns, the back and forth of the bow, the pounding drums and exploding tympani, the spit and sweat and bloody fingers. It's all about sex.

AVERY

That's it? Sex.

ALEX

Sex.

AVERY

How utterly unoriginal.

Avery looks away.

ALEX

Sex is humanity's driving force.

AVERY

Oh, God. Freud.

ALEX

What's wrong with Freud?

LELAND

I think he means finding more passion within the piece.

ALEX

No, I mean sex.

AVERY

I am passionate about this piece.  
Leland.

ALEX

Specifically, the act of sex.

AVERY

For this he is considered the best  
in the world?

LELAND

It's worked so far. Maybe adding a  
little more sex to "Pines" isn't a  
bad thing.

AVERY

The first movement describes  
children at play, Leland.

ALEX

We are born sexual beings, Ms.  
Andrews. Remember Freud.

AVERY

I am a Jungian, Mr. Abernathy.

ALEX

If Jungian means prude, I would  
agree.

Avery pulls a full stop. She zeroes in on him.

AVERY

You think I'm a prude because I  
expect music to inspire more than a  
romp in the back seat?

ALEX

I think you are afraid of sex.

Leland draws a breath. Avery's eyes narrow.

LELAND

You don't want to go there, Alex.

ALEX

I most certainly do.

AVERY

Alright, Mr. Abernathy. If sex is  
the theme for all music, describe  
to me in orchestral terms, a  
woman's orgasm.

ALEX & LELAND

(together)

What?

AVERY

Moments ago, you described a man's climax - booming and blowing and back and forth. If music is sex then it should include a woman's experience as well, don't you think?

Alex and Leland gape, unable to speak.

AVERY (CONT'D)

You do know there is a difference? Right?

ALEX

Obviously.

AVERY

Shall I describe it for you? The taunt plucking of strings, tonguing the mouthpiece on a slide trombone, valves opening and closing, piccolo trilling, pulsing waves of crescendo and decrescendo, until finally the crash of cymbals, a tambourine shudders and shakes, and the soft tinkling of chimes.

Alex and Leland swallow hard.

AVERY (CONT'D)

I am hardly a prude, Mr. Abernathy. Music is more than fucking around. Anyone can do that. Really good music transcends mortality. It lifts us into a different plane of existence. We hear the voice of God.

ALEX

You've heard the voice of God?

AVERY

Haven't you?

Avery downs her drink and leaves.

INT. AVERY'S BUNGALOW - NIGHT

MONTAGE - AVERY WORKS ON "PINES OF ROME"

-- Kitchen -- Avery furiously makes notes on her copy of "Pines of Rome."

-- Kitchen -- Avery pours several cups of tea.

-- Living room -- Avery conducts an imaginary orchestra, stopping in frustration.

-- Living room -- Avery stares at the ceiling in despair.

-- Living room -- Avery sits up with an inspiration. She scribbles notes on the music.

-- Bedroom -- Avery sleeps in bed, with "Pines of Rome" scattered around her.

INT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL - NIGHT

SYDNOR COLLEGE MUSICIANS stand in front of the Harmon Community Symphony.

Avery taps her baton to get everyone's attention.

AVERY

After last week's dismal rehearsal,  
I looked again at "Pines of Rome."  
Someone recently pointed out to me  
that we are a small, volunteer  
orchestra, and perhaps I expect too  
much from you. This is an  
auspicious piece. It requires hard  
work, dedication, and the knowledge  
that we might fail.

But what if we succeed?

You are a stellar orchestra, and  
this music is worthy of your best.  
I expect nothing less from myself,  
and I expect nothing less from you.

With that in mind, I've invited  
students from the Sydnor College  
music department to play with us  
and support us in this noble  
endeavor. With their help, we will  
make Ottorino Respighi proud.  
Please welcome them.

Harmon Community Symphony Members applaud, some with their  
instruments. The Sydnor College Musicians sit with the  
Symphony, and become the combined Harmon Community Symphony.

AVERY (CONT'D)

Prepare yourselves. We begin with  
(MORE)

AVERY (CONT'D)  
the first movement.

MONTAGE: REHEARSING "PINES OF ROME" IN HARMON

-- Harmon Community Symphony plays "Pines of Rome" in fits and starts.

-- Avery offers direction to the Harmon Symphony:  
"Lightly, lightly." "Give me more gusto." "Not angry, but strong and confident." "Mournful, but with a sense of hope." "It's a military march, not a dirge."

-- Slowly, the orchestra plays the right notes together, so that it sounds like a melody.

-- Harmon Symphony Musicians smile and offer high-fives as they improve.

-- Alex laughs and banters MOS with Mrs. Mallory and Micah.

EXT. LINCOLN CENTER, NEW YORK CITY - DAY

An early-spring sun shines brightly on the campus of the Lincoln Center.

INT. LINCOLN CENTER REHEARSAL HALL - DAY

MONTAGE: REHEARSING "PINES OF ROME" IN NYC

-- New York Philharmonic rehearses "Pines of Rome."

-- Alex offers Avery's direction to the New York Philharmonic: "Lightly, lightly." "Give me more gusto." "Not angry, but strong and confident." "Mournful, but with a sense of hope." "It's a military march, not a dirge."

-- Leo shakes his head from backstage.

INT. LINCOLN CENTER REHEARSAL HALL - DAY

Alex conducts the New York Philharmonic in the fourth movement, "The Appian Way."

A TIMPANI PLAYER beats his drum with gusto. Alex stops the Philharmonic.

ALEX  
No, no. You're driving a bit too hard.

TIMPANI PLAYER  
The harder the better, right?

ALEX

No. Try nuancing it a bit.

TIMPANI PLAYER

Nuancing? The timpani?

ALEX

Yes. Stroke the drumheads, like a woman's breasts, willing them to rise to you.

The timpani player looks at Alex like he's crazy.

ALEX (CONT'D)

I know. Just do it.

EXT. MICAH'S HOUSE - DAY

Avery walks up a gravel driveway to a modest ranch house in one of the counties surrounding Harmon. The "Custalow & Son's Electrical" pick-up truck sits in the driveway, in front of an open garage. Various tools lie on the ground near the truck.

INT. MICAH'S HOUSE - DAY

Micah practices violin in the sun room as Alex listens. The room is small, but clean, with a view of crocuses and tulips in the backyard. Alex sits on a second-hand sofa, while Micah sits in an unmatched chair.

Micah plays from "Villa Borghese," the first movement of "Pines of Rome." He finishes with a flourish.

ALEX

Excellent. We'll get you to New York yet.

MICAH

I've been practicing that fingering you showed me. Remember? Beethoven? Wanna see?

ALEX

(a la Pat Benatar)

Hit me with your best shot.

MICAH

Huh?

ALEX

It's a song.

MICAH

When?

A doorbell rings. Mrs. Custalow walks by the sun room to answer the door.

ALEX

Long ago, apparently.  
Show me.

Micah performs the fingering almost perfectly. Mrs. Custalow walks back by the sun room. Alex readjusts Micah's hands.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Now try.

Avery strides into the room and stops short, seeing Alex.

AVERY

What are you doing here?

MICAH

Oh, hey Ms. Andrews. Mr. Abernathy was just helping me with some fingering.

Alex smiles at his own good deed.

AVERY

Really?

Mrs. Custalow hollers from the kitchen.

MRS. CUSTALOW (O.S.)

Micah. It's about to rain. You need to bring in the tools.

MICAH

Shoot.  
(to his mother)  
I'll be right there.  
(to Avery and Alex)  
Back in a minute.

Micah runs out.

Avery sits next to Alex on the sofa. They avoid looking at each other.

ALEX

I thought last rehearsal went well.



AVERY  
Must we make small talk?

ALEX  
No. We can sit in dreadful  
silence.

AVERY  
Thank you.

Dreadful silence ensues.

ALEX  
Why are you here?

AVERY  
I teach Micah every Saturday.

ALEX  
No. In Harmon. Conducting  
volunteers. Teaching college, for  
Christ's sake.

AVERY  
Why do you want to know?

ALEX  
It pains me to say this, but,  
you're good. Why aren't you in  
London or Chicago?

AVERY  
Or New York?

ALEX  
Yes. Surely you auditioned.

AVERY  
I did. No one would have me.

ALEX  
That can't be. Even if it were a  
personality issue, which is  
entirely possible, any orchestra  
would overlook that in lieu of your  
obvious talent.

AVERY  
Dozens of auditions - no job to  
show for it. Clearly my talent  
wasn't enough.

ALEX

So?

AVERY

I ended up working at a dry cleaner. Then Leland called. He saw one of my audition tapes and offered me a job. That was twenty-five years ago.

ALEX

You haven't auditioned in twenty-five years?

AVERY

No.

ALEX

I know people. I can get you an audition.

AVERY

Thank you, Mr. Abernathy, but no. I'm doing good work here.

ALEX

Think of how much more you could do, how many more Micahs you could help.

AVERY

I have tenure, Mr. Abernathy.

ALEX

But what if you succeed?

Avery's eyes glisten. She holds her emotion in check.

AVERY

No. Thank you, Mr. Abernathy.

Micah breezes in. A few raindrops speckle his shirt.

MICAH

Just in time.

Micah plops down and picks up his violin. Alex rises.

ALEX

Good show. I'll leave you to your lesson. It was nice speaking with you, Ms. Andrews.

AVERY  
And you, Mr. Abernathy.

Alex shows himself out.

MICAH  
He's kind of nice, once you get to  
know him.

AVERY  
There's always a catch.

Avery offers Micah a small smile.

AVERY (CONT'D)  
It was good of him to help you.  
Now, where did we leave off last  
week?

DREAM - INT. LINCOLN CENTER - DAY (THIRTY YEARS AGO)

A younger Alex turns toward the judges. His breath quickens  
and his forehead breaks out in sweat.

He shades his eyes against the stage lights, looking into  
the audience. The judges look back with bland expressions.

Alex pivots to the orchestra. Musicians raise their faces,  
awaiting his signal. Panic fills the young man's eyes.

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE - DAY (PRESENT DAY)

Alex blinks away the daydream. He and Dr. Stonich sit  
quietly.

ALEX  
I lost my love for conducting.

DR. STONICH  
Is that why you are angry?

ALEX  
It was.

DR. STONICH  
And now?

ALEX  
I love the violin.

DR. STONICH  
What else?

ALEX  
I don't know.

They resume their silence.

INT. SYDNOR COLLEGE HALLWAY - DAY

Avery hurries to class, carrying her music bag and loose sheet music. Alex runs after her.

ALEX  
Ms. Andrews! Ms. Andrews!

Seeing that Alex looks stressed, Avery turns and steps toward him.

AVERY  
Yes, Mr. Abernathy. Is there something wrong?

ALEX  
Yes. The second movement of Pines. Why are you bringing in the trumpet solo so strong?

Avery sighs in relief.

AVERY  
I thought there was an emergency, Mr. Abernathy. I am headed to class.

ALEX  
This is an emergency. I need to know. I'm going to D.C. tonight. To see a friend.

AVERY  
You don't play the trumpet, Mr. Abernathy. I see no reason for this conversation.

ALEX  
I believe in teamwork. The the trumpet solo affects the entire orchestra. So how can I prepare without knowing?

Avery acquiesces.

AVERY  
"Catacombs" has a complicated mood, Mr. Abernathy. Can it wait until  
(MORE)

AVERY (CONT'D)  
tomorrow?

ALEX  
No. I leave in an hour and I'm not  
back until late tomorrow night. I  
want to practice.

AVERY  
You practice while "visiting" your  
friend?

ALEX  
Diligence is the better part of  
valor.

AVERY  
I believe that's "discretion."

ALEX  
Can we talk about it tonight? I'll  
give you a call.

AVERY  
And your friend?

ALEX  
She's not that kind of friend.  
What's your cell?

AVERY  
No.

ALEX  
No?

AVERY  
I do not give my personal number to  
professional acquaintances.

ALEX  
Professional acquaintance? I  
thought we -

Avery checks her watch.

AVERY  
Were what, Mr. Abernathy?

ALEX  
Nothing.

AVERY  
If you need to speak with me, make  
(MORE)

AVERY (CONT'D)

an appointment with Lillian. I  
advise not mentioning your  
"friend."

ALEX

But Ms. Andrews.

AVERY

I must be in class, Mr. Abernathy.  
Good day.

INT. LINCOLN CENTER REHEARSAL HALL - NIGHT

Alex packs up his music after rehearsal. He spies Leo  
sitting along the wall.

Leo looks like the cat who ate the canary.

ALEX

You found something?

Leo's teeth gleam with something juicy to tell.

INT. BAR, NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

Leo and Alex huddle in their booth, drinking scotch and  
munching edamame.

ALEX

She auditioned for the Phil?

LEO

She auditioned against you at the  
Phil.

ALEX

What?

LEO

Thirty years ago. You competed for  
the same job.

ALEX

And I won. Against Avery Andrews.  
I. Won.

LEO

She contested it.

ALEX

What?

LEO

She filed a gender bias complaint  
(MORE)

LEO (CONT'D)

with the union, claiming she gave  
the better audition.

ALEX

Please.

LEO

It's possible, Alex. She won not  
only every competition in her  
region, she won some pretty  
prestigious international  
competitions as well.

Leo slides a print-out of Avery's awards across the table to  
Alex.

Alex studies the list.

ALEX

So why isn't she in San Francisco  
or Vienna?

LEO

The complaint ruined her. She was  
black listed. She auditioned  
everywhere after New York. I mean  
everywhere. No one would hire her.  
So she took the job at the college.  
She's been there ever since.

ALEX

Did you find the tape?

LEO

No and that's the weird thing.  
They usually keep them for a couple  
of years, but every audition tape  
from every candidate that year was  
destroyed right after you were  
awarded the job.

ALEX

I'd give good money for that tape,  
Leo.

LEO

I offered. No luck. Tapes are  
gone.

Leo grabs a handful of edamame.

LEO (CONT'D)

She changed her name to Andrews  
(MORE)

LEO (CONT'D)  
after all the bad publicity. You  
auditioned against Avery Flemming.

ALEX  
Avery Flemming.

Alex gets a far-away look on his face.

LEO  
You're crushing on her. I can see  
it in your face.

ALEX  
Please, Leo. She's old.

LEO  
She's four years younger than you.

ALEX  
Exactly.

DREAM - INT. LINCOLN CENTER - DAY (THIRTY YEARS AGO)

Younger Alex nervously walks to the podium as the orchestra  
take out his audition piece.

The orchestra members place the "Indiana Jones Theme" by  
John Williams on their music stands and roll their eyes.

Alex swallows, then raises his baton. He begins.

The orchestra starts badly. They do not play together and  
Alex cannot control them. The audition is a jumbled mess.

Alex brings everything to a stop. He turns to address the  
judges.

ALEX  
Excuse me.

JUDGE #1  
Yes? Mister?

YOUNG MAN  
Abernathy.

The judge raises his eye brows expectantly.

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)  
May I begin again?

The judges looks at his fellow judges. He sighs and  
concedes.



JUDGE #1

Proceed.

Alex turns back to the orchestra. He breathes deeply and begins again. This time, he takes control of the musicians and they follow his lead. The theme to "Indiana Jones" echoes through the Symphony Hall.

The judges take notes.

CUT TO:

INT. ALEX'S BEDROOM, HARMON - DAY (PRESENT DAY)

An alarm sounds and Alex awakes from his dream.

He regains his bearings and rolls out of bed.

INT. AVERY'S OUTER OFFICE - DAY

Lillian reads a novel at her desk. Avery peeks out of her office.

AVERY

Lillian, is Mr. Abernathy here,  
yet?

LILLIAN

No ma'am. He texted he's on his  
way.

AVERY

Send him in the moment he arrives.

LILLIAN

Yes, ma'am.

INT. AVERY'S OFFICE - DAY

Lillian escorts Alex into Avery's office. She lays a  
passionate, albeit proprietary, kiss on Alex's mouth.

Avery does not hide her distaste.

Lillian winks and waves goodbye to Alex. She sashays out.

AVERY

Please be seated, Mr. Abernathy.

Alex takes his seat.

AVERY (CONT'D)

Before we begin our discussion on  
the Catacombs, would you mind

(MORE)

AVERY (CONT'D)  
explaining this?

Avery produces the New York Philharmonic flyer, advertising "The Pines of Rome" conducted by Alexander Abernathy.

ALEX  
Isn't that a coincidence? How did you get that?

AVERY  
I subscribe, Mr. Abernathy. My season tickets say "A Night at the Movies with John Williams."

ALEX  
John wasn't available in June.

AVERY  
I let you into my symphony. I put up with your arrogance, your neediness, your trite advice. And you steal from me?

ALEX  
It's more like a collaboration.

AVERY  
You are a thief and a lout.

ALEX  
That's going a bit far, don't you think? Ms. Flemming?

Avery blanches.

AVERY  
How do you know that name?

ALEX  
Avery Flemming, a conductor wannabe who auditioned for the New York Philharmonic thirty years ago - against me.

Avery jumps up and heads toward the door.

AVERY  
Leave, Mr. Abernathy.

Alex blocks her.

ALEX  
You hate me, Ms. Flemming.

AVERY  
That is no longer my name.

ALEX  
Because I won.

AVERY  
Remove your plagiarizing ass from  
my office.

ALEX  
Because I am everything you're not.

AVERY  
I said get out.

ALEX  
Because I was better than you.

Avery's eyes bore into Alex. She explodes.

AVERY  
You were not better than me. Not  
that day, nor any day since.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK - INT. LINCOLN CENTER - DAY (THIRTY YEARS AGO)

A young Avery watches from the balcony as Alex poorly  
conducts the orchestra. The orchestra plays the theme to  
"Indiana Jones" off tempo and not together.

Avery sees the judges shake their heads. She smiles  
triumphantly.

CUT TO:

INT. AVERY'S OFFICE - DAY (PRESENT DAY)

Avery's eyes shine.

AVERY  
I saw you fail. I won that  
audition.

ALEX  
Don't you wish that were true.

AVERY  
You were a complete disaster.

ALEX  
I got the position, though? Not  
(MORE)

ALEX (CONT'D)

you.

AVERY

You smug, little, pompous, baton monkey.

ALEX

(overlapping)

You jealous, dried-up, condescending old hack.

Caught up in the moment, Alex plants his mouth on Avery's.

She wrenches herself away, noisily knocking over a stack of books.

AVERY

What the hell was that?

ALEX

I don't know, but it was amazing.

Alex swoops in for another kiss.

Avery dodges him. She counters around her desk.

Alex corners her.

AVERY

Mr. Abernathy. Do not attempt that again.

Alex plunges forward.

Avery ducks under his arm to get away.

ALEX

Oh, God, you're sexy when you run away.

Avery backs into her desk. Alex pounces.

AVERY

Mr. Abernathy! Stop!

Alex freezes, caught in Avery's eyes. He recognizes something distant, he but can't place it.

Their faces are but a hair's breadth away from each other.

Realization washes over Alex: Avery is the Woman Who Glowed.

Lillian peeks in.

LILLIAN  
Is everything okay?

Lillian finds Avery and Alex in a compromising position.  
The interruption jogs Alex from his stupor.

AVERY  
Lillian. Thank, God. Get off of  
me, you dolt.

Avery shoves Alex off of her. She reaches for the phone.  
Lillian runs off, hurt and angry.

Alex cannot keep his eyes off of Avery. She dials the  
phone.

AVERY (CONT'D)  
Leland Embrechts, please.  
(pause)  
Then interrupt him. This is  
urgent.

Avery notices Alex still in her office.

AVERY (CONT'D)  
(to Alex)  
I'll not lose my intern on your  
account. Go after her.

Alex goes.

AVERY (CONT'D)  
(into phone)  
Leland.

INT. LELAND'S OFFICE - DAY

Leland talks on the phone while Alex sulks in the chair  
opposite him.

Leland looks sternly at Alex.

LELAND  
(into phone)  
Yes, I'll tell him. We'll get that  
to you this afternoon. Thanks,  
Bob.

Leland hangs up.

LELAND (CONT'D)  
That was our lawyer. We can  
(MORE)

LELAND (CONT'D)  
probably reconcile this without too  
much trouble.

ALEX  
You didn't tell me she auditioned.

LELAND  
Where?

ALEX  
New York Philharmonic. Thirty  
years ago. With me.

Leland hesitates.

LELAND  
It wasn't information I could  
divulge, Alex. What does it  
matter? You got the job. She  
didn't. End of story.

ALEX  
You were on the audition committee.

LELAND  
Which is our little secret, right?

Alex stands and moves in closer to Leland.

ALEX  
Why did you invite me here, Leland?

LELAND  
To get your groove back.

ALEX  
And Avery?

LELAND  
You wouldn't play for less than the  
best.

ALEX  
Better than me?

LELAND  
What?

ALEX  
You were there, Leland. Was she  
better?

Leland looks at Alex for a long moment.

LELAND

Yes. She was miles above you.

ALEX

She was the one, wasn't she? Just before me?

LELAND

Yes.

ALEX

She was glowing. You saw it?

LELAND

She was radiant.

ALEX

I saw her. She was - there was this....

Alex indicates an aura, but stops when he sees that Leland does not know what he is talking about.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Where is the tape?

LELAND

All the tapes were destroyed.

ALEX

Like hell. Where is it?

Alex pulls down books and papers from Leland's shelves, searching for the tape. Leland stands.

LELAND

Alex! Stop.

Alex stops. He is poised, ready to tear the office apart.

Leland slumps, defeated. He reaches into a closed credenza behind his chair and pulls out the TAPE. On it's spine it says "Avery Flemming, 1989." He holds it close, then places it on his desk.

LELAND (CONT'D)

Avery can never know. You'll be ruined if it gets out. We all will.

Alex picks up the tape and exits.

INT. AUDIO/VISUAL ROOM, SYDNOR COLLEGE - DAY

Alex watches the tape of Avery's audition on a TV monitor in a darkened room.

He looks longingly at the youthful Avery conducting the philharmonic.

AVERY (O.S.)  
Ryan sent for me about the video  
from the last concert.

CLERK (O.S.)  
Right through there, Ms. Andrews.

Avery steps through the door to discover Alex.

AVERY  
Mr. Abernathy. I made it perfectly  
clear -

Avery stops, seeing herself on the screen. She glides toward the monitor, drawn by the image of her memory.

Alex watches Avery's eyes. Avery touches the screen.

ALEX  
I remember like it was yesterday.  
You were glowing.

AVERY  
Where did you get this?

ALEX  
Leland.

Avery shoots a look at Alex. She rushes out.

INT. AVERY'S BUNGALOW - DAY

Avery stares out a window into her back yard. Trees and flowers are in full bloom. The sun gleams on the white and pink petals.

Her cell phone rings. The display says "Leland." She blinks back tears and lets it ring through.

The phone rings again. It is Leland, again.

She turns off the phone and drops it on her desk.

EXT. AVERY'S BUNGALOW - NIGHT

Leland pounds on Avery's front door.



LELAND  
C'mon, Avery! Let me in!  
Let's talk about this.  
It's not what you think.

Avery pulls the door open, startling Leland. She turns back into the house, abandoning Leland at the open door.

INT. AVERY'S BUNGALOW - NIGHT

Leland shuffles into the house and closes the door. He follows Avery to the living room.

She wheels on him.

AVERY  
I've called my lawyer. You have exactly two minutes to tell me why this isn't what I think.

LELAND  
Why would you want a lawyer?

AVERY  
One minute, forty-five seconds.

LELAND  
Okay, okay. There were reasons you weren't chosen.

AVERY  
I was better. Say it.

LELAND  
Avery.

AVERY  
Say it.

LELAND  
You were better.

AVERY  
Why didn't you pick me?

Leland steps closer to Avery.

LELAND  
It wasn't on me, Avery. It was the board.

Avery counters backward away from Leland.

AVERY

You were on the board. Why?

LELAND

It came down to you and Alex. I thought he'd be disqualified because of that business in Miami.

AVERY

But?

Leland sits on Avery's sofa.

LELAND

You've got to remember, it was thirty years ago. We had a lot of older musicians in the orchestra. The board didn't think they'd follow you.

AVERY

Why?

LELAND

They were from another generation. They didn't want a woman conductor. They threatened to walk rather than let you lead the Phil.

AVERY

Did it ever occur to you that if the board stood behind me, those neanderthals would have learned to accept me? I needed a team of warriors, Leland, not a bunch of cowards.

LELAND

I tried.

Avery comes around to face Leland.

AVERY

You did not try. You did what you do at every faculty meeting. You rolled over and gave into whatever they wanted.

Leland stands.

LELAND

There's nothing you can do about it now. Half of them are dead and the  
(MORE)

LELAND (CONT'D)

other half have one foot in the grave. The statute of limitations ran out.

AVERY

The tape.

Still watching her, Leland walks away from Avery.

LELAND

A copy must have been lost in my files. I didn't find it until a couple of years ago.

AVERY

They said every tape was destroyed.

LELAND

It got lost.

Avery has an "aha" moment.

AVERY

You had two tapes. One from the selection committee and one from the board. You only turned in one.

LELAND

It was lost.

AVERY

You knew I needed that tape and you kept it from me. Why?

Leland looks at her with mournful eyes. Realization dawns in Avery's face.

AVERY (CONT'D)

Oh, God. Oh, my God.

LELAND

I fell in love with you the moment you walked across that stage. I couldn't give them the tape. And I couldn't give it to you.

AVERY

You were married, Leland. You had kids, for Christ's sake.

LELAND

I watched it a thousand times. I couldn't let it go.

AVERY  
I feel sick.

LELAND  
You should have never filed the complaint.

AVERY  
I was justified in filing that complaint.

LELAND  
You were up against the entire music industry, Avery. It was naïve.

AVERY  
Clearly. Now get out.

Leland comes to her. She pushes him away.

LELAND  
No. I am still in love with you.

AVERY  
You and the rest of those spineless assholes dragged me through the mud. I couldn't get an audition anywhere.

Leland continues to reach for her.

LELAND  
You are everything to me. I love you so much.

Avery shoves him, then puts her face in his.

AVERY  
I changed my name, Leland. Tell me again how much you love me.

LELAND  
I brought you here because I love you. I gave you a job and an orchestra.

AVERY  
Am I supposed to thank you? You ruined me. Then, you set me up to keep me here like some doll in a glass case. And I let you. I wasted my talent on you.

LELAND

It wasn't a waste. Look at all  
you've done.

AVERY

My resignation will be on your desk  
tomorrow morning.

LELAND

No.

Avery blows past Leland and yanks open the front door for  
him to leave.

AVERY

We're done.

Leland walks to her.

LELAND

You can't resign with two weeks  
left in the semester. You're still  
under contract.

Leland steps out the door and turns to Avery.

AVERY

When my lawyers get through with  
you, my contract will be the least  
of your worries.

LELAND

But the concert, Avery. The "Pines  
of Rome."

AVERY

The "Pines of Rome" is a lie.

Avery slams the door in Leland's face.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT, HARMON - NIGHT

SERIES OF SHOTS - ALEX GETS AN IDEA

-- Alex paces through his apartment.

-- Alex watches the tape of Avery's audition again.

-- Alex picks up the phone, then puts it down again.

-- Alex tries to practice his violin, but he can't  
concentrate.

-- Alex's tired eyes scan the river view from his window.

-- Alex's eyes widen and brighten with an idea.

-- Alex picks up his cell phone and calls Leo.

ALEX

Leo. I need you to do something  
for me.

INT. LEO'S APARTMENT, NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

MONTAGE: LEO CALLS HARMON COMMUNITY SYMPHONY

-- Leo places calls to Mrs. Mallory, Micah, Lisa the french  
horn, Janet the flute, Gabby, Nate, Kim, and other members  
of the Harmon Symphony Orchestra.

-- The Harmon Symphony Members listen to Leo's proposition  
and nod in agreement.

INT. AVERY'S OFFICE - DAY

Avery packs up music, books, and memorabilia from  
twenty-five years teaching at Sydnor College. Boxes litter  
the floor in various states of fullness.

The intercom BUZZES. Avery ignores it.

It BUZZES again, more insistently. Avery answers it.

AVERY

The office is closed.

LEO (O.S.)

Is this Avery Andrews?

AVERY

Yes. Who is this?

LEO (O.S.)

Leo Cariani, Alex Abernathy's  
agent.

AVERY

Mr. Cariani, I don't wish to see  
anyone.

LEO (O.S.)

I can't leave until I talk with  
you.

AVERY

Is Mr. Abernathy with you?

LEO (O.S.)

No.

AVERY

You may come in, briefly. I'm in 104.

Avery BUZZES Leo in. Avery continues to pack.

Leo steps into her office.

AVERY

As you can see Mr. Cariani, I have a lot of work here, so please make this quick.

LEO

It's good to finally meet you, Ms. Andrews. Alex told me a lot about you.

AVERY

Mr. Abernathy told me nothing of you, Mr. Cariani. Brevity, please.

Leo smiles at Avery's brusque demeanor.

LEO

Right. Sorry. Alex invited the entire Community Symphony to New York to see his last concert.

AVERY

Last concert?

LEO

Yes. He's retiring after this season.

AVERY

That was sudden.

LEO

It was. I sent invitations to all the Harmon musicians, but since you are no longer the conductor, I wanted to make sure you got the invitation, personally.

AVERY

Did Mr. Abernathy put you up to this?

LEO

No. He doesn't know I'm here. He said you were fond of this piece.

Avery holds up the NY Philharmonic flyer.

AVERY

The "Pines of Rome?"

LEO

That wasn't my idea.

AVERY

I have no doubt.

LEO

Will you come? The Harmon show is cancelled. You have no concert to run.

AVERY

I don't think so, Mr. Cariani. I need to find a job.

LEO

Of course. If you change your mind, I'll leave these comps for you.

Leo lays tickets on her desk.

LEO (CONT'D)

"Pines of Rome" would be a nice send off, don't you think?

AVERY

Thank you, Mr. Cariari. And please give my thanks to Mr. Abernathy for his thoughtfulness.

LEO

I will. It was a pleasure, Ms. Andrews.

Leo shows himself out.

Avery stares at the tickets.

EXT. LINCOLN CENTER, NEW YORK CITY- NIGHT

The sun has just gone down as the lights are coming up throughout New York City, twinkling and casting a glow on the streets and buildings.



INT. LINCOLN CENTER GEFFEN HALL - NIGHT

The Harmon Community Symphony Members bustle and chat while seated in the Lincoln Center's Geffen Hall. Mr. and Mrs. Custalow join Micah in the seats.

EXT. LINCOLN CENTER, NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

Avery crosses the street to the Lincoln Center. She slips into the building alone.

INT. LINCOLN CENTER LOBBY - NIGHT

A GREETER scans Avery's ticket.

Avery proceeds to the balcony stairs.

The greeter texts Leo's cell phone: "She's here."

INT. BACKSTAGE, LINCOLN CENTER GEFFEN HALL - NIGHT

Leo reads the text and smiles.

Alex paces in the wings. He looks up at Leo.

Leo gives a thumbs up.

INT. LINCOLN CENTER GEFFEN HALL - NIGHT

Avery finds her seat in the balcony. It is the same balcony from which she spied Alex's audition thirty years ago.

The New York Philharmonic tunes up.

Lillian watches a monitor in the audio/visual booth, where technicians broadcast the concert for television.

Lights dim and a spotlight follows Alexander Abernathy to center stage. He carries a baton.

The crowd applauds. Alex takes several bows. The applause subsides and Alex addresses his fans.

ALEX

Thank you all for coming to  
Ottorino Respighi's, "The Pines of  
Rome."

More applause.

ALEX (CONT'D)

This is my final performance as  
conductor with the New York  
Philharmonic. Despite any rumors

(MORE)

ALEX (CONT'D)

you may have heard, I consider it an honor and a privilege to have graced this stage.

I was granted this opportunity thirty years ago, when I auditioned and joined the symphony as guest conductor. From there, well, my career and my many exploits have been dutifully recorded by most media outlets.

The audience laughs.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Suffice it to say that I would not be here now, were it not for winning that one audition.

Alex surveys the audience.

ALEX (CONT'D)

But, perhaps my big break wasn't mine after all. There was another conductor at the audition who shone more than I. She still does, with a talent and an integrity far surpassing my own.

Avery becomes very still. Her breath quickens.

ALEX (CONT'D)

The governing board of the Phil chose me, even with my obvious faults and my tremendous ego, because thirty years ago, the men that ran the Philharmonic feared that a woman could not lead their orchestra in the same way a man could.

And they were right. She would have been different - wonderfully different. During the last three decades I took the New York Philharmonic to new heights. But I know without a doubt, had that conductor taken her rightful place here, this company would have soared beyond even my own dreams.

Avery's eyes glisten.

The past cannot be changed. We  
cannot make right this wrong, but  
we can offer a modicum of justice.  
I call to the stage, Ms. Avery  
Andrews.

A spotlight finds a shocked Avery in the balcony. She  
squints against the harsh light.

The audience looks up at her.

Harmon Symphony Members begin the applause. Other AUDIENCE  
MEMBERS join in as the applause builds until it is a roar.

Avery stands and makes her way to the stage.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Would the guest musicians please  
take their seats?

Members of the Harmon Community Symphony rise from their  
places in the auditorium and ascend the stage.

STAGE HANDS place extra chairs in the orchestra.

The Harmon Symphony Members find their seats and their  
instruments.

Avery steps onto the stage. She is bathed in light.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Ladies and gentlemen, may I  
introduce Maestro Avery Andrews,  
conductor of the Harmon Community  
Symphony, head of the Department of  
Music at Sydnor College, and music  
teacher extraordinaire. The woman  
who is better than I in every way,  
and your conductor for tonight's  
performance.

Avery turns to Alex, eyes wide with surprise. The audience  
applauds.

Alex whispers in Avery's ear.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
You've prepared your whole life for  
this. You can do it.

AVERY  
Of course I can do it, Mr.  
(MORE)

AVERY (CONT'D)

Abernathy. I'm just momentarily  
overwhelmed.

Alex bows to Avery, presenting his baton. Avery accepts it.

Alex addresses the audience for a final time.

ALEX

Please welcome to our stage the  
Harmon Community Symphony.

More applause as Alex marches to the violin section.

The NEW YORK CONCERT MASTER (First Chair Violin) stands,  
respectfully, to offer Alex his seat. Alex waves him off.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Don't be silly.

Alex points to a lower seat.

ALEX (CONT'D)

This is my seat. I earned it.

Alex takes his place with the Harmon Symphony Members.

Avery climbs the dais and takes her position at the music  
stand.

She surveys the mixed orchestra. Familiar faces mingle with  
the best musicians in the world.

Avery breathes it in. She glances at the music and gathers  
her courage. Then she spits in her hand and throws it over  
her shoulder.

MONTAGE - PINES OF ROME PERFORMANCE

-- The orchestra opens with "The Pines of Villa Borghese."

-- Each orchestra member concentrates on playing the music.

-- A trumpet player performs the mournful trumpet solo in  
"Pines near a Catacomb."

-- Avery conducts with her full body. Sweat drips from her  
brow.

-- Alex regards Avery with deep respect. His eyes glimmer.

-- An AUDIO/VISUAL TECH plays the nightingale recording at  
the end of "Pines of the Janiculum."

-- The orchestra eases into "Pines of the Appian Way,"

driving the climax over the edge.

-- Avery immerses herself in the music. She looks as if she could fly on the sound.

-- Music swells. Avery glows as she did in her audition thirty years ago. Only Alex sees it.

-- Avery brings the powerful music in the final movement to a head.

INT. LINCOLN CENTER GEFFEN HALL - NIGHT

The Pines of Rome ends - the last note reverberates through the auditorium like a titan's final heartbeat.

The audience stands in thunderous applause.

Avery whips around. An aura pulses around her. She bows, victorious. Alex cannot take his eyes from her.

TV cameras capture everything. Photographers snap photos, fans tweet, reporters write on laptops, all praising the name of Avery Andrews.

A stage hand comes to Avery with a spray of roses. Another stage hand follows with more flowers, and then another. Avery takes one more bow, then walks backstage.

INT. LINCOLN CENTER GREEN ROOM - NIGHT

Avery opens the door to a messy green room. All the tables and counters are littered with flowers, instruments, and music. Avery carries an arm-load of flowers and her purse, with no place to put them.

Outside the door, throngs of people clamor for her.

She closes the door and takes a moment to collect herself.

Alex steps forward from the corner of the green room.

ALEX

It's madness isn't it?

Alex startles Avery.

ALEX (CONT'D)

I used to sneak in here after concerts to catch my breath. I thought you might do the same.

AVERY

Yes.

ALEX

Breathe while you can. The executive director and all his minions will be in here momentarily to congratulate you.

AVERY

They offered me a job, with the touring symphony.

ALEX

Smart. Good PR. And, may I say, an excellent choice.

Awkward silence.

AVERY

I don't know what to say to you.

ALEX

Whatever you do, please don't thank me. I don't deserve that. This was merely a peace offering in a war I didn't realize I was fighting.

AVERY

What will you do now?

ALEX

Go back to Harmon. Play the violin. Turns out I like it.

AVERY

The symphony needs a conductor.

ALEX

And I will help them find one. But it won't be me.

AVERY

I pity the poor conductor who waves a baton at you.

ALEX

I promise to be gentle.

CROWD NOISE surges behind the door. Avery turns toward the sound.

AVERY

I seem to have fallen through a rabbit hole. I know how to conduct, but I don't know anything about all this.

ALEX

I'm not the best example of good public relations, so my advice is to get a stellar agent. I hear Leo is looking for new talent.

AVERY

I'll speak with him.

Another awkward pause.

Avery starts to say something, but the CROWD NOISE swells again, breaking the moment. They both turn to the noise.

ALEX

I hear them coming. Brace yourself.

Avery turns suddenly to Alex.

AVERY

Mr. Abernathy. Should you find you need advice on the symphony, or the violin, or if you simply wish to chat, you may call me.

Alex looks at her softly and smiles.

AVERY (CONT'D)

I hope I'm not being too presumptuous.

ALEX

Not at all.

AVERY

Let me find my card. Here.

Avery hands Alex the flowers.

She opens her purse, rifles through it, and pulls out a card and a pen.

Avery looks around unsuccessfully for a surface on which to write. Alex bends over and offers his back.

Avery places the card on Alex's back and writes her number.

They look like two awkward teenagers discovering a friend in each other.

Avery finishes writing and Alex straightens up. She offers him the card.

AVERY

This is my private cell number.

Avery takes the flowers and Alex takes the card.

AVERY (CONT'D)

I'll be traveling a lot. It's the best way to reach me.

ALEX

Thank you, Ms. Andrews.

AVERY

You are welcome, Mr. Abernathy.

They hold each other's gaze a moment longer than necessary.

The door bursts open.

ADMINISTRATORS of the New York Philharmonic pour into the green room. They talk rapidly, overlapping, calling Avery's name. Contracts and pens are passed around the room.

Pandemonium continues outside the door.

Alex bows to Avery, surrendering the moment to her.

She nods to his bow, then shifts her focus to the people talking with her.

Alex slips out and walks through the crowd anonymously.

FADE OUT

THE END.