

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 is sharply focused, wearing a man's tuxedo and hair pulled back at the nape of her neck.

Avery grips her baton, all muscles tensed.

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 THWACKS the podium and she raises her arms. Each musician eyes her in anticipation.

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

The judges jolt to full attention.

Avery's aura pulses with the music. She literally GLOWS with passion.

The judges nod their heads in respect.

A video operator tapes the audition.

Avery sweeps the final notes 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 at the sight of a warrior-woman conductor.

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

The judges then stand, reluctant to show their hand.

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 hard, takes a deep, shaky breath, and 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 puffy reflection in the elevator door. Alex's 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 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 romance piece: RACHMANINOV, SYMPHONY NO. 2 OP. 27 III, ADAGIO: ADAGIO (IN A MAJOR).

He strains to direct the Philharmonic. 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 cringe at Alex's frustration.

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

INT. LINCOLN CENTER GEFFEN HALL - NIGHT

The auditorium rises for a standing ovation. Alex takes his bows, feigning graciousness and clutching a spray of red roses.

He 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 in the vicinity watches with anguished curiosity, as if spectators at a public hanging.

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. The Second Viola slinks from the hall.

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
this year, Alex.

ALEX
Bunch of second-rate musicians.

LEO
Plus the sexual harassment charge.

ALEX
Which is total bullshit.

Leo catches sight of the WAITER heading his way. He waves
his hand to flag him. 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
(MORE)

LEO (CONT'D)
likely won't fire you.

ALEX
Most likely?

LEO
Most likely.

Alex's eyes hone in on 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 catches Alex making eyes at the brunette.

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 make for the door.

The waiter zooms by and drops the check in front of Leo.

LEO (CONT'D)
Perfect.

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

Alex's bedroom is sleek and modern. Celebrity photos and awards line the walls and dresser. No family photos or personal touches adorn the room.

Alex stands before a glittering Manhattan skyline through

the window, wearing his robe and drinking another scotch. The brunette sleeps with her arms and legs splayed on his king-sized bed.

He stares at bright lights, looking old, spent, and tired.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING, NEW YORK CITY - DAY

BUSINESS WOMEN AND MEN bustle 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

A few NY PHILHARMONIC BOARD MEMBERS exit a conference room, chatting MOS amongst themselves.

Alex and Leo step out. 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 bellies up 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 whips up his mocha.

LEO
(to Alex)
You're still under contract during
the suspension. You can't be seen
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 a tower 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 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. He sits between a list of cities and names on one side and a cup of coffee on the other.

Alex 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 LOSES HIS CASE

-- "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 hits 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, 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 meanders about the room.

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.

He charming, mid-sized city with an impressive skyline. Alex passes a central river, picturesque bridges, grand government buildings, and quaint parks.

EXT. RIVER WALK, HARMON - DAY

Alex 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 into his cell phone on a dreary, noxious 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 nearly trips over a gaggle
of GIRL SCOUTS. He lurches to avoid 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, pushing him 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. Papers from his open briefcase

flutter around.

The Girl Scouts retreat, high-fiving each other for smashing the patriarchy. 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.

Dr. Stonich waits for Alex to speak. Alex remains silent.

The stand-off reaches a breaking point, but then -

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 ornamental trees.

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 accentuating 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 maintains her expression.

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
 Behind Mrs. Mallory.

MRS. MALLORY, a chubby fifty-seven year-old cat-lover, waves at Alex 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. He removes his violin.

Alex bumps his instrument into his music stand, toppling it. Sheet music flies everywhere. Mrs. Mallory flutters about, helping Alex 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, causing cacophony. 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
check Mr. Abernathy's music?

Alex glowers as Mrs. Mallory turns around and thumbs through his music, avoiding Alex's eyes. She rearranges a page or two and stacks them neatly on his 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, as she gathers her music to leave.

INT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL - SAME

Avery packs her music into a tote bag.

A few symphony members - GABBY, NATE, & KIM - include her in their conversation, though Avery 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 maintains her 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 on her heel 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.

NATE
 (calling to Alex)
 Mr. Abernathy? We're going out for
 drinks. Wanna come?

ALEX
 Not particularly.

Gabby and Kim speak in clear voices, 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 doors. Alex trots after them.

ALEX
 Wait. Is Avery going?

NATE
 You mean Ms. Andrews?

ALEX
 Yes. Ms. Andrews.

NATE
 No. She never comes.

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 visibly relaxes as she enters her home, carrying her bags and her mail.

Her 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 sorts her mail.

She 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 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.

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 searches 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 another stand-off, each refusing to speak first.

A bell DINGS. Alex bolts from 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 with minimal enthusiasm.

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. He's been gamed. No first 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 spies 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 reattaches it to his braces.

EXT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL - NIGHT

After rehearsal, Avery waits by the curb 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. She flashes righteous anger.

AVERY

Use a racist term in my presence again, and you will pack your violin and leave. I know what Micah was playing. You. Were. Flat.

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 steps 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 creating a balance of antique and contemporary.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT, HARMON - NIGHT

Alex paces his apartment, fuming about Avery.

The furnished decor is straight out of Bed, Bath, and Beyond: impersonal, reproduced art and chunky furniture found in every model home. A large, metal, geometrical wall hanging decorates one wall. The furniture sports durable fabric in earth tones. Central to the living room and bedroom are large windows with wide and sumptuous views of the 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 his rant.

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. He 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

(MORE)

LEO (CONT'D)

tried and it didn't work out.
We'll find another city. Leland
will understand. Now, let's go
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, once more. Alex lifts his violin.

ALEX

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

Leo nods and Alex pulls the bow across the strings.

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.

Through the bedroom door, Leo hears Alex practice the same music over and over. He is flat each time.

Leo holds the menu and dials his cell phone, wincing at the musical missteps wafting from the bedroom.

LEO
Delivery.
(pause)
You don't happen have bruschetta,
do you?

Leo reveals a Chinese menu in his hand.

LEO (CONT'D)
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 rehearses with the orchestra. His frustration mounts

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

-- INT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL - NIGHT -- Mrs. Mallory offers 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. She invites him over with a smile and he makes his move.

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 (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 leaves in a huff.

EXT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL - NIGHT

Alex bursts out of the 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 gets an idea. He marches back through the doors.

INT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL - NIGHT

Alex sits in his seat 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 begins 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.

Avery walks to the door and Alex struts behind her.

INT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Avery bursts into the hallway with Alex close behind.

Avery whirls 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
(MORE)

AVERY (CONT'D)

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 stage. Avery marches behind him.

INT. SYDNOR SYMPHONY HALL, - CONTINUOUS

Avery strides to the podium.

Alex plops in his seat and slumps. 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, too ashamed to ask again.

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 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 gothic 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 steps toward 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. That's who.

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, Darcy.

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

AVERY
Not anymore.

Alex sweeps into the suite.

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 filled with piles of papers, sheet music, and 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 maintains silence. 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?

Alex stakes his claim, sits, and cozies himself in the office chair.

Avery remains standing.

ALEX

What is it you do here, 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 rank it that way.

ALEX

Why would someone of your considerable talent stay here when you could do 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 doesn't budge.

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 shoots daggers with her eyes.

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 assesses Alex. A small cold grin touches the corners of her mouth. She eases around her desk toward Alex.

He opens his arms, preparing for victory.

Avery denies him. She brushes past Alex, and 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

Avery ushers Alex from her office. Alex looks confused.

Avery spies MISS WALLINGFORD, a plain, wide-eyed 18 year-old student, waiting 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 chops vegetables with a vengeance as she and Leland prepare a stir fry together.

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, anymore. 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 know music could do that. My hands

(MORE)

AVERY (CONT'D)

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.

ALEX

Did you say something?

DR. STONICH

No.

ALEX

I thought --

DR. STONICH

I cleared my throat.

ALEX

Oh.

Dr. Stonich scratches 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

Alex's eyes glaze over as Lillian chatters.

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 stops - 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 crowded departure gate waiting for his flight. A LARGE WOMAN sits on one side of him, asleep. Other PASSENGERS shuffle by, bumping 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 snoozing 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 snuggles her head into 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 cuddles into Alex's lap, taking 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 nestles deeper into Leo's neck.

INT. RESTAURANT, HARMON - NIGHT

Lillian buries herself deeper into Alex's lap. He assesses

her. Turning her face toward his, Alex plants a deep, passionate kiss.

Lillian's face lights up.

LILLIAN
Wanna skip dinner?

ALEX
More than anything.

They sprint out the door.

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

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

STAGE HAND
(to Alex)
You're up.

Alex swallows, takes a deep breath, and walks to the stage.

His upper lip glistens with perspiration as he steps into the blinding 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. Tears well in his eyes as 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. She 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, almost abashed.

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 gathers her music and notes into 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 strains not to roll her eyes.

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.

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 with
precision.

-- 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 seats.

-- Front of auditorium -- Avery straightens a stack of
programs.

-- Front of auditorium -- Avery surveys the auditorium.
She spits in her right hand and throws it over her left
shoulder, then 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 shifts and wriggles in a seat too small for
him, as he waits for the concert to begin. His wife, MRS.
CUSTALOW, 42, takes his hand, giving 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 an encouraging nod as they soldier forward.
- 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 - DAY

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 - DAY

Avery rushes into her office, tears flowing down her cheeks.

She beats the flowers over her desk, repeatedly, while
cursing under her breath. Petals burst from the bouquet,
scattering through the air, landing in her hair and on the
stacks of papers and books that line the floor.

She collapses, exhausted, into her chair, sobbing.

When the tears subside, Avery composes herself. She surveys
her meager office, then grabs a tissue and wipes her eyes.

She 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 remaining 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 alone standing in 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 scattered throughout the office.

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

-- EXT. SYDNOR SYMPHONEY 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. Her television plays the BBC 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 remains still and attentive, but Alex is contemplative. His 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 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
(MORE)

ALEX (CONT'D)

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 keeps a constrained 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

(MORE)

AVERY (CONT'D)

 second chair. Ms. Thalhimer, the
 third chair. Mrs. Rhodes, the
 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. Relieved, she goes to him.

Leland stands to give her a kiss, but Avery spies 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)
Mansplain away, Mr. Abernathy.

 ALEX
I don't understand that term.

 AVERY
Enlighten me, if you can.

 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

(MORE)

AVERY (CONT'D)

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 makes copious 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 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 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

(MORE)

ALEX (CONT'D)

hard.

With all the innuendo of a middle-school boy, he says -

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 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 stops for him.

AVERY
Yes, Mr. Abernathy. Is 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
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 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 a juicy story 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 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 across the table to Alex.

Alex studies the list of competitions.

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 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 --

ALEX

Abernathy.

The judge raises his eye brows expectantly.

ALEX (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 romance 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 purses her lips in 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
 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 theme to "Indiana Jones."

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. Not 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.
Her face falls with the blow of betrayal.

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 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, his agitation building like a fury.

Leland stands.

LELAND
Alex! Stop.

Alex stops, standing poised, ready to tear the office apart.

Leland slumps, defeated. He reaches into a closed credenza behind his chair and pulls out the TAPE. A faded sharp label with "Avery Flemming, 1989," still adheres to the spine.

Leland holds the tape close, then places it on his desk.

LELAND (CONT'D)
Avery can never know. You'll be ruined if it gets out. We all
(MORE)

LELAND (CONT'D)

will.

Alex snatches 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 freezes, suddenly aware of what is playing. 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 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 crumples down onto 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 other half have one foot in the grave. The statute of limitations ran out.

AVERY

The tape.

Still watching her, Leland backs 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 returned 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 on 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

(MORE)

AVERY (CONT'D)

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 comes 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. Cariani. 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

It's twilight as lights blink on 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 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

(MORE)

ALEX (CONT'D)

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 into 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 seats and ascend the stage.

STAGE HANDS place extra chairs in the orchestra.

The Harmon Symphony Members find their orchestra 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.
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)
That's 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 and composes herself.

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 Avery GLOW. He stares in adoration.

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

INT. LINCOLN CENTER GEFFEN HALL - NIGHT

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

The audience erupts 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 click 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 steps 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, unable to unload 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 arm-load of 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 new friend.

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

AVERY

This is my private cell number.

Avery takes the mass of 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.