

REX

Written by

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INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - STAIRWELL - NIGHT

In an empty stairwell that reached up for what seemed like endless floors, ANTHONY, 23, resides at the top, looking down. His hands grip the railings as he gazes far below him, getting into character. He is practicing "Macbeth's Soliloquy" for an audition tomorrow; his biggest one yet. Attempting to recite it again, he closes his eyes and takes a deep breath. A beat. His eyes open.

ANTHONY

Is this a dagger I see before me,
the handle toward my hand?

He stops. That wasn't what he wanted. He takes a second to reset and tries again.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

Is this a dagger I-

He stops again.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

(Under his breath)

F*ck.

He sighs, standing there for a moment. Another beat. He closes his eyes again, for longer this time. He concentrates harder this time, but not in a way that causes him to become tense. Instead, it appears as if all life has been drained from him. He's empty. He can now embody the character with no distractions. As he becomes completely still, the scene becomes silent.

TRANSITION TO DRAMATIC LIGHTING

His eyes shoot open. The sound returns and he stands up straight. A beam of light shoots up the center of the room, the stairs wrapping around it. Anthony peers down at it, beginning to descend the stairs, accelerating quickly.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

(Confidently)

Is this a dagger I see before me,
the handle toward my hand? Come,
let me clutch thee. I have thee
not, and yet I see thee still. Art

thou not, fatal, vision, sensible
to feeling as to sight or at thou
but a dagger of the mind, a false
creation, proceeding from the
heat-oppressed brain?

Anthony reaches the ground floor and discovers the source of light: an imaginary dagger. He approaches it.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
I see thee yet, in form as
palpable as this which now I draw.

Anthony takes the dagger.

INT. ANTHONY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MORNING

An alarm clock reads "7:59 a.m." As the minute ends, the alarm goes off. Anthony wakes up the morning of auditions, getting out of bed hastily and rushing his morning routine. He's out the door in seconds.

INT. BUS - MORNING

Anthony rides the bus with his good friend, SEAN, 21, who is on his way to a shift at the cafe he and Anthony work at. Sean is standing casually while Anthony sits, his right foot tapping rapidly against the ground as he stares off into space. Sean notices, and tries to think of something to say.

SEAN
Are you nervous?

Anthony looks up, giving him a blank stare, as if to say, "What the f*ck kind of question is that? Of course I am."

SEAN (CONT'D)
My fault.

A beat.

SEAN (CONT'D)
So... is it like a community
theater?

Anthony doesn't like these questions. It's always the same naive person asking something that they could just look up. Most people don't understand theater, but that's the world Anthony is living in.

ANTHONY

I mean, yeah, it is. But it's big.
The biggest at that level, at least.

SEAN

So if you do a good job here, that could lead to something even bigger?

ANTHONY

Hopefully...

SEAN

Well, I believe in you. I really do.

The bus reaches Sean's stop.

ANTHONY

Thanks...

Sean hops off the bus, and Anthony goes back to staring at the floor, concentrating hard.

EXT. SIDEWALK - CONTINUOUS

Sean walks toward the cafe, catching BILL, 55, sweeping outside.

SEAN

Morning Bill!

BILL

Anthony's not with you today?

SEAN

No, he's got an audition.

BILL

An audition?

SEAN

Yeah, like at a theater.

BILL

What, like a community theater?

SEAN

Well, yeah, but it's the biggest one at that level, and it'll hopefully lead to something bigger after that.

BILL

F*ck that.

EXT. SIDEWALK - MORNING

Anthony is walking to the theater, observing the buildings he passes; he hasn't been around here before. They all look the same, except for one that's absolutely nothing like the rest. The rest are simple, but this one is way bigger, way more vibrant, almost obnoxious. Big letters on the front of it read, "REX THEATER SOCIETY." This is it. Anthony stands in front of it, taking one last deep breath before entering.

INT. THEATER - AUDIENCE - MORNING

The theater is even bigger inside, just like one on Broadway. The entrance has brought him to the back of the audience, where he can see everything in front of him. There's already a large group of people waiting near the stage. Anthony avoids them, only walking forward a couple rows and taking a seat where it seems to be most empty. He starts to settle in, observing everything going on around him, when CLINTON, 24, approaches behind him.

CLINTON

Doesn't this all feel weird to you?

Anthony turns his head.

ANTHONY

What?

CLINTON

The whole place. I mean, I've heard so much about it, but only from friends. I couldn't find anything about this online, and I've never actually been here before.

Anthony, intrigued, shifts to face Clinton more.

ANTHONY

I felt the same way walking in.
It's like it almost feels out of place.

CLINTON

Exactly!
(laughs)
At least someone gets it. I'm Clinton.

ANTHONY

Anthony.

He shakes hands with Anthony and sits with him.

CLINTON

Don't you f*cking hate these, Anthony? I mean, I love acting, but these auditions, man. All these people showing up thinking they're the next one to make it. I swear to god, at my last audition this girl was talking about how she'd end up on Broadway when she was just like every other annoying ass theater head. So when I was talking with this guy later on I mentioned to him, "Apparently that girl thinks she's making it to Broadway," and this dude replies, "Well, I think I'm making it to Broadway." What the f*ck? Like, I respect the ambition and all, but at least try to be realistic, you know?

This becomes awkward for Anthony, because he knows that, deep down, he's one of those people. Broadway is his dream.

ANTHONY

Yeah, I get that.

CLINTON

For real, man.

Just then, NELSON, 22, approaches them. He's clearly nervous, and even a little shy.

NELSON

Excuse me, do you know if we have to check in anywhere?

CLINTON

Not that I know of, no.

Nelson sits with them.

NELSON

Oh, that's good. I didn't see the directors anywhere and no one's lined up yet. There aren't any time slots to sign up for either.

CLINTON

That's another reason why this place is different. Where are the directors?

ANTHONY

Maybe we're just starting late.

CECIL, 72, is sitting a few rows in front of them, and overhears the conversation. He continues to stare straight, but decides to chime in.

CECIL

They're going to make a grand entrance.

CLINTON

Sorry?

Cecil turns around.

CECIL

The directors. They do it every time.

CLINTON

What all do you know about them?

CECIL

No one knows anything about them, truthfully. They're eccentric, and a little odd, but God are they extraordinary visionaries.

CLINTON

So you've been here awhile?

CECIL

23 shows and counting. If this 24th one works out then that will round out my 12th year.

CLINTON

Wow. How long have the directors been here?

Just then, the entire auditorium goes completely dark, and "The Phantom of the Opera" begins playing, startling everyone. A single spotlight illuminates a small boat moving slowly onto the scene as dry ice and fog pour onto the stage. It's an all out performance. Inside the boat: the performers. ALASTAIR KING, 55, stands in the boat in full costume, including the Phantom mask. JOANNE KING, 53, lies in the boat in full costume as well. They begin to sing. It's ridiculous.

JOANNE

(Singing)

In sleep he sang to me, in dreams he came. That voice which calls to me and speaks my name. And do I dream again? For now, I find The Phantom of the Opera is there inside my mind.

ALASTAIR

(Singing)

Sing once again with me, our
strange duet. My power over you
grows stronger yet. And though you
turn to me to glance behind, The
Phantom of the Opera is there
inside your mind.

The song ends abruptly after an intense crescendo. Alastair and Joanne strike a dramatic pose as the crowd erupts into applause. Even Cecil whistles for them. Anthony, Clinton, and Nelson sit in the back still, confused. The lights on the stage come on as Anthony and Joanne remove their costumes, wearing somewhat more normal clothes underneath.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)
Thank you! Thank YOU! Really, YOU!
(Pointing at people)
And YOU, and YOU, and YOU! HA!
Please, everyone come close! No
need to be shy, come all the way
up to the front!

Cecil gets up willingly. This never gets old for him. Anthony, Clinton, and Nelson follow slowly.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)
Welcome! Welcome, everyone! Today
is the big day. Today is YOUR
audition. This is about YOU. But
first, I'd like to introduce my
wife...
(To Joanne, very seriously)
My love. My porcelain doll.

A beat as Anthony cringes.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)
And YOUR choreographer!

He claps furiously and the crowd follows his lead.

JOANNE
And please give it up for the
moon, the sun and the stars, also
known as the legendary director,
Alastair King!

The crowd erupts in applause as Alastair shakes his head and waves dismissively, mouthing, "No, no, please. You're too much." But then, as the applause starts to end, he gestures subtly for more, and they began cheering again. It's a game he likes to play.

ALASTAIR

All right, all right, thank you everyone. And I would be remiss if I failed to honor the theater itself. Where you are right now is another world. Another reality. Outside, the planet continues to rotate. But in here, you are part of something bigger. This... is REX THEATER SOCIETY.

More applause from the crowd.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

You are all here to audition for Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and I am absolutely ecstatic that the time to bring this show to life has finally come. Now, to begin the audition process, Joanne and I will head to the auditioning room which you'll find the door to just backstage. You can't miss it. We'll proceed in the order of which you are seated, stage left to right, front row to back. When you finish, you are free to go, and the next person may make their way to us. Good?

Everyone nods. Anthony, being in the back right, realizes he will be going last.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

Splendid! Everybody take a deep breath.

(Inhales)

And release.

(Beat)

"Movies will make you famous;
Television will make you rich; But
theater will make you good."

Alastair and Joanne turn swiftly and walk backstage.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)
Whenever the first of you is
ready!

CLINTON
They seem nice.
(To Cecil)
Excuse me, sir?

CECIL
Please, I'm Cecil.

CLINTON
Cecil. Have they always been like
that?

CECIL
(Laughs)
Like what?

He turns his head back to watch the stage still laughing. The laughs begin to echo in Anthony's head, and crescendo before dramatically cutting off.

INT. THEATER - AUDIENCE - MOMENTS LATER

The audience of the theater is now empty except for Anthony, who waits patiently, though intensely nervous and concentrated. Finally, Clinton emerges from backstage, and walks up the aisle, passing Anthony.

CLINTON
I'll wait for you here if you
want. Break a leg, alright?

Anthony nods, and begins the walk to the audition room. He gets up on stage and disappears into the shadows of stage left.

INT. THEATER - BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Backstage feels like a maze. It's more spacious than one would think, but incredibly dark. The only light comes from a door cracked open at the end of a long corridor. Anthony walks to it, and slowly goes inside.

INT. THEATER - AUDITION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The room is bigger inside than it seemed before entering. Still, it feels intimate with dim lighting. Alastair and Joanne sit at a table across the room, facing the door. They fail to acknowledge Anthony.

ANTHONY

Uh, hi.

Alastair slowly looks up.

ALASTAIR

(Dryly)

We're done for the day.

ANTHONY

Oh, um, I think I'm the last one anyway. I can do it quickly-

ALASTAIR

Did you not hear me?

(A beat)

Ha! No, no, no, please come in, please come in you beautiful man. Don't be shy! Tell us your name.

ANTHONY

Anthony Risk.

ALASTAIR

Ooooh, fun. And where have you come from today?

ANTHONY

About 20 minutes north of here.

ALASTAIR

Well, Anthony from 20 minutes north of here, what have you prepared for us today?

ANTHONY

It's just, uh, Macbeth's
soliloquy.

ALASTAIR

*Just Macbeth's soliloquy? Have
some confidence, Anthony! You've
come all the way here. You've
given yourself to the arts, have
you not?*

Anthony nods, and smiles a little. Alastair is a lot, but he's incredibly warm.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

So show us your might! I was
nothing, Anthony, nothing, before
I found the arts. And I know that
it's my purpose in life, but I
have a feeling deep down that it
just so happens to be yours too.
Now, whenever you're ready.

Anthony, inhales deeply, and closes his eyes. It is implied that the feeling of when he first recited it in the stairwell is returning. He exhales.

INT. THEATER - AUDIENCE - DAY

Anthony walks out onto the stage, and spots Clinton waiting by the door in the back. Though Clinton stands far away, he makes out a smile on Anthony's face. The audition went perfectly.

INT. CAFE - AFTERNOON

Anthony has gone to tell Sean and Bill about the success of the audition as the shop is closing. Anthony rants as Sean and Bill are cleaning, Sean trying to put in a little more effort to seem engaged.

ANTHONY

...And then right after I finished
he literally just looked at me and
said, "Callback." And that was
that! It was insane. I actually
still can't believe it.

BILL

So now do you get, like, paid or something?

ANTHONY

Well, no. But it's another opportunity, and really good for having on a resume, so...

SEAN

That's great, Anthony. Really, it is.

ANTHONY

Yeah. I might try to call my dad about it real quick.

Anthony turns around to make the call. He waits a few seconds, but no answer. He thinks about trying again, but instead puts the phone away and turns back around. Sean and Bill are both looking at him.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

He's busy.

(A beat.)

I think I'll get home for the night, with callbacks tomorrow...

SEAN

For sure, man. Get some rest.

Anthony exits the cafe, and Bill and Sean go back to cleaning, though they are both thinking the same thing.

INT. ANTHONY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Anthony's nightly routine. He sits on the side of his bed, seemingly meditating for a moment. He shuts off his phone and turns out the light. He lies on his back and stares at the ceiling. As he looks up, he sees a floating dagger once again. He's frozen, his gaze fixed on the ominous blade. After a moment he snaps out of it, sitting up quickly. The dagger is gone.

INT. ANTHONY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MORNING

The alarm reads "5:57 a.m." Anthony gets up quickly and turns off the alarm before it can go off. He's out the door in seconds.

INT. BUS - MORNING

Anthony is on an earlier bus by himself. He again concentrates on the floor, his foot tapping rapidly. But it's a different kind of behavior this time. It's more confident than nervous, as if he is hyping himself up. The bus arrives at the theater.

EXT. SIDEWALK - CONTINUOUS

Anthony walks rapidly up to the entrance of the theater, looking up at the sign again. With less hesitation this time, he enters quickly.

INT. THEATER - CONTINUOUS

Anthony bursts through the door to find he is the first one there. The stage lights are on, however. He walks down the aisle and up onto the stage. He paces, looking around him and making keen observations. The silence is interrupted, however, by Alastair and Joanne walking in through the main door, each carrying a coffee in their hand and Alastair with a satchel.

ALASTAIR

Ah! Anthony!

He begins to walk down the stairs.

ANTHONY

Sorry! I-

ALASTAIR

No, no, please! The stage is yours. We'll be in the back preparing.

They walk past Anthony and into the darkness.

ANTHONY

Thank you!

Anthony feels even more comfortable now, like he can actually relax. Alastair walked by so casually it almost felt like a friendship. Anthony is ready.

END OF ACT I

INT. THEATER - LATER

Everyone sits in the audience as Alastair and Joanne take the stage. It's an intense feeling. Most seem to have the same nervous look that Anthony once had before, though Anthony now sits confidently amongst them.

ALASTAIR

Ladies and gentlemen, you've made it to callbacks. The audition process can be brutal, and unforgiving, yet you have made it this far. Make it even further and you might just have a part. You're all here to prove yourselves, are you not? Then prove. Let us begin!

BEGIN MONTAGE

Alastair and Joanne sit in the center of the first row, taking notes.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

Macbeth!

An actor recites the first line of Macbeth's soliloquy onstage.

Another actor recites the same line on stage.

Nelson follows.

Then Clinton.

And finally, Anthony.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

Macduff!

An actor yells, "O' horror!"

Followed by another echoing, "Horror!"

And finally, Clinton, exclaiming "Horror!"

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)
Banquo!

An actor recites the line, "What, can the devil speak true?"

Another actor does the same.

Finally, Nelson recites it as well.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)
Take five!

END MONTAGE

INT. THEATER - BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Anthony is at the urinal as Nelson washes his hands, with Clinton leaning against a stall.

CLINTON
I honestly think that went really well.

NELSON
I felt like Mr. King was staring into my soul.

CLINTON
He probably was. That's what they do, though.

NELSON
Yeah.

CLINTON
I don't think you'll get cut though. You did good. I would just say to hold some of the pauses a bit longer.

Nelson doesn't exactly think he'd get cut either, and definitely didn't ask for notes from another actor. He's polite, though.

NELSON

Thanks.

(A beat.)

So who do you think will get cut?

CLINTON

Honestly? Cecil. The old guy we met at auditions.

NELSON

Hasn't he been in pretty much every show?

CLINTON

People grow old. He's obviously past his prime, if he ever even had one.

Anthony tries to help Nelson out a little.

ANTHONY

I thought his callback for the king wasn't bad.

Clinton pauses, not having expected Anthony to disagree with him.

CLINTON

He isn't king material. He didn't even understand the role. He was just reciting.

At that moment, another actor walks in. Anthony shrugs, and walks past Clinton. Nelson follows behind.

INT. THEATER - AUDIENCE - CONTINUOUS

Anthony and Nelson walk back to their seats, and are encountered by MARJORIE, 25. She walks right up to them, full of energy.

MARJORIE

Can I just say that you KILLED that monologue? My jaw literally DROPPED, and everyone around me was like, "oh my god, he's SO good."

ANTHONY

Uh, thanks.

MARJORIE

I'm Marjorie. Excited to play Lady Macbeth with you!

(Laughs)

I'm joking, I'm joking. Everyone did a great job, but, you know, there's honestly less competition than I thought there would be. But anything could happen!

ANTHONY

I'm Anthony.

MARJORIE

Oh, I know. I think everyone knows.

Just then, Anthony notices NICOLE, 23, across the theater. She's preparing by herself, but something about her catches his eye.

MARJORIE

(To Nelson)

And, sorry, who are you again?

NELSON

Oh, uh, Nelson.

MARJORIE

Nelson! Yeah, you were good too!

(Beat)

Well, I'll see you later, Anthony.
Gotta go get ready!

Anthony's focus on Nicole is broken by Marjorie. He nods at her, still glancing at Nicole, though.

ALASTAIR

Places, everyone! We'll now call
for Lady Macduff!

Anthony snaps out of it and walks back to his seat with Nelson. Clinton joins them.

INT. THEATER - MOMENTS LATER

Marjorie recites her callback. It's obnoxious.

MARJORIE

And pall thee in the dunkest smoke
of hell, that my keen knife see
not the wound it makes, nor heaven
peep throug the blanket of the
dark, to cry 'Hold! hold!'

The audience erupts in applause.

ALASTAIR

Marvelous! Marvelous, Marjorie.

Ah! Marvelous Marjorie! Haha.

(A beat.)

Next!

Onto the stage walks Nicole, calm and collected. Everyone goes quiet as she prepares herself.

ALASTAIR

Ah, yes, Nicole. Whenever you're
ready, dear.

A beat as Nicole takes her time.

NICOLE

The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of
Duncan
Under my battlements. Come, you
spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts,
unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the
toe top-full
Of direst cruelty! make thick my
blood;

Stop up the access and passage to
remorse,
That no compunctionous visitings of
nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep
peace between
The effect and it! Come to my
woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you
murdering ministers,
Wherever in your sightless
substances
You wait on nature's mischief!
Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunkest smoke
of hell,
That my keen knife see not the
wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket
of the dark,
To cry 'Hold, hold!'

There's a moment of silence when she finishes. Everyone is stunned. After a few seconds, the crowd bursts into applause and cheering as Nicole quietly takes her seat.

INT. THEATER - LATER

Callbacks have nearly concluded. Alastair takes the stage now to make a farewell address. Get ready.

ALASTAIR
Everybody take a deep breath in...
now let it out... good.
(A beat)
Theater. Art's most intricate
medium. The telling of a story,
real or fiction, long or short.
The creation of a setting, whether
that be one room or the whole
world. Whatever the parameters, it
all takes place on the stage. The
stage is a world of its own. Do
not forget what I'm telling you.
This is your world. Follow your
passion. Follow your heart. Now...

take a deep breath in. Let it out.
There.

(Another beat)
The cast list will be posted in
two weeks exactly on the doors of
the main entrance. Good day.

He exits offstage abruptly. Joanne, still in her seat,
stands up and faces everyone.

JOANNE
Thank you all so much for coming!

Everyone gets up to leave, mumbling to each other.

CLINTON
(To Anthony)
What is this, high school?
Shouldn't they call us?

Nelson shrugs. Cecil walks by them on his way out.

CLINTON
Hey, Cecil. Have they always
released the cast that way?

CECIL
In what way?

CLINTON
I don't know, I thought they'd
call. They don't even have a
website. It seems unprofessional.

CECIL
Yet you heard of this place
regardless, and came all the way
in for an audition?
(A beat)
Don't doubt the King's reputation.

Cecil exits. Clinton continues ranting to Nelson as his
voice fades out. Anthony watches in the direction Cecil
went, thinking to himself. The place may feel off, but he's
made it this far. If he's in, there's no turning back.

INT. ANTHONY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MORNING

Two weeks later. One more alarm. Anthony wakes. He gets out of bed, ready.

INT. BUS - DAY

One more time, Anthony takes the bus. This is a very quick moment, similar to the last one, but this time he's standing.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Anthony approaches the theater steadily. He spots the list posted on the door. The theater is closed, and no one is around. He gathers the courage to look. The list reads as follows:

Macbeth - Anthony Risk
Lady Macbeth - Nicole Bailey
Macduff - Clinton Hall
Banquo - Nelson Hayes
King Duncan - Cecil Collier
First Witch - Amanda Leanord
Second Witch - Sophia Banks
Third Witch - Marjorie Cameron
Malcolm - William Gordon
Donalbain - Martin Watson
Lennox - Luke Barnes
Ross - Kevin Dunn

Anthony is shocked. Despite being incredibly prepared, this is still his first big role, and he cannot believe it. Just as he notices Nicole's name under his, he hears a voice behind him.

NICOLE
Congratulations.

Anthony turns to see her smiling softly at him.

ANTHONY
Thanks, you too!

NICOLE
Your friend might not be too
happy, though.

Anthony looks back at the cast list, and notices that Clinton is the role of Macduff.

ANTHONY

Clinton? He got a lead. Why wouldn't he be?

NICOLE

He wanted Macbeth. You could tell he thought he was going to get it too.

ANTHONY

Oh.

He looks at the cast list again, noticing Cecil as Duncan and Marjorie as the second witch.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

He also thought Cecil would get cut.

NICOLE

The old guy?

ANTHONY

Yeah.

NICOLE

Maybe he should be directing instead of acting. Except I don't think I'd trust him putting on a show.

Anthony laughs.

ANTHONY

Maybe if he did it with Marjorie. They could be like Alastair and Joanne.

Nicole laughs.

NICOLE

Oh, Marjorie will be pissed. I don't think she likes me either.

ANTHONY

To be fair, I don't think anyone likes her.

They both laugh.

NICOLE

Well, I'll see you at rehearsal.

She walks off. Anthony yells after her.

ANTHONY

Bye!

He's left there with a feeling of genuine happiness, the kind he hasn't felt in a long time. He can relax a little now. It might be a rocky rehearsal process based on the people and the theater itself, but who cares. For now, Anthony can be proud. If only for a little.

INT. ANTHONY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Anthony decides again to call his father, hoping to tell him about getting the lead. He doesn't pick up, but Anthony decides this time to leave a voice message.

ANTHONY

Uh, hey, Dad. Listen, I did another audition, but at a really prestigious company this time. It's called Rex. Rex Theater Society. Basically, I got called back for Macbeth, and then I got the part, so... this one is big. It'll be good, so... I thought I'd let you know.

(Beat)

Love you.

He sends the voice message and falls back onto his bed.

INT. THEATER - STAGE - MORNING

The first rehearsal. All of the actors have gathered on the stage and are conversing eagerly with one another in that is stereotypical of dramatic high school theater kids. Marjorie is on the verge of tears. When Anthony walks on

stage, all eyes are on him. Many go up to congratulate him, but then Clinton brushes past him...

CLINTON
Congrats, Anthony.

ANTHONY
Hey, you too man!

CLINTON
Yep.

Nelson joins Anthony.

ANTHONY
You see that?

NELSON
I think he's just getting into character.

ANTHONY
Already?

NELSON
I guess. Some people are that committed.

Just then, Alastair emerges from backstage.

ALASTAIR
Goooooood moooooooorniiiiing!

People immediately start clapping obnoxiously.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)
Please, please, my darlings, sit.
Sit on the floor. Get comfortable.

Alastair waits until everyone is seated and silent.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)
Ladies and gentlemen, please put your hands together for the cast of *Macbeth*!

The company erupts into applause again. It's a bit much.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

Let me say, and I mean this... this may have just been the hardest show to cast. I mean, my god, look at the talent! It could have gone any way, really. But please, be proud of yourself, and be kind to yourself. Theater is difficult. When I took over this company, it was an absolute mess. No professionalism. No organization. But I made it into something special because I cared, and if you care as much as I, you can make something special too. Now, I'm supposed to spend the first rehearsal blabbering and blabbering about procedure, and safety, and whatnot. But I don't think of myself to be loquacious in the least.

(Awkward beat)

In any sense, it would be boring. And we're all adults. So, instead, let's all loosen up a little, shall we. Please, stand! This is going to be a brief meditation session for you to connect your mind, body, and soul. Really it's meant to help get you in character.

Everyone stands, going along with Alastair's agenda, questioning nothing.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

Please, now, everyone stand up straight, feet shoulder-width apart, and a slight bend in the knees.

He waits for everyone to get in position.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

When you're ready, please close your eyes. Now, bring your hands together and raise them to the sky. As high as you can!

The company follows.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

Finally, when you're ready, let go and bend forward, allowing your arms to fall to the floor. You're like a rag doll now.

Anthony has taken what Alastair said about getting into character very seriously. There is an intense moment now where Anthony seems hypnotized. His mind is so far gone that it is in another world; the world of the character he is about to embody. Alastair's voice echoes in his head...

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

Detach from your old self. Your spirit should be lost. Lost until it finds the theater. Look for the theater in your mind. See it. Go to it. Become the theater.

Anthony feels paralyzed. It's almost overwhelming, this simple meditation. His thoughts begin to race, faster and faster. Suddenly, he is empty.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

And up!

Anthony snaps out of it. He looks around. Everyone looks as if they are just waking up from a dream.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

Well, I hope that got our creative juices flowing. Without further ado, then, let us begin.

This is a unique moment where voices overlap, reciting lines from various scenes as Alastair's eyes dart around, intensely. We pull back from his face, slowly, and tilt up toward a light above him until it whitens the frame, the shot becoming increasingly more intense. Then...

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

Stop!

The cast becomes tense. Everything was going smoothly, but Alastair seems upset all of a sudden. His mood seems to have shifted instantly.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

Nelson. Look at me.

Alastair removes his glasses.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

(Stern)

You're supposed to be a warning to Macbeth. You're warning him, Nelson, but I'm not seeing that. You're not giving anything. Now, repeat what I say back to myself: The instruments of darkness tell us truths to betray's in deepest consequence.

Nelson glances at his script. Alastair skipped over a line. It's supposed to be "The instruments of darkness tell us truths, win us with honest trifles, to betray's in deepest consequence." He hesitates, deciding if he should say the line correctly or if he should strictly repeat Alastair.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

Nelson!

NELSON

The instruments of darkness tell us truths... win us with honest trifles, to betray's in deepest consequence.

Alastair corrects him, not entirely realizing that Nelson included the missing phrase, but more so because it didn't sound like him.

ALASTAIR

No. The instruments of darkness tell us truths to betray's in deepest consequence.

Round two. Should Nelson concede?

NELSON

The instruments of darkness tell
us truths... win us with honest
trifles, to betray's in deepest
consequence.

Alastair notices this time.

ALASTAIR

I'm sorry, what did you just say?

NELSON

(Stuttering)

Um, it was just that- "win us with
honest trifles."

ALASTAIR

"Win us with honest trifles?"

NELSON

Yes, I think maybe you just
might've looked over it.

Alastair hastily picks up his script and scans the lines on that page. He sees the line and pauses, looking stunned. He looks back up at Nelson, flustered.

ALASTAIR

So you think it's okay to
disregard a director's
instructions?

NELSON

No, I-

ALASTAIR

The DIRECTOR'S instructions?

NELSON

No, it's just I saw the line and
I-

ALASTAIR

But I didn't tell you to say it,
did I?

NELSON

I'm sorry, I just- I didn't know
you wanted me to skip it-

ALASTAIR

Nelson, do I look like I have time
for a slow f*ck like you to be
carrying a lead role? Don't make
me rethink this.

CLINTON

You didn't tell him to skip it.

A beat. Alastair is taken aback.

CLINTON (CONT'D)

He was just reading from the
script.

ALASTAIR

You too, huh Clit?

CLINTON

(Under his breath)

Clinton-

ALASTAIR

And how about the rest of you? You
all think you know how to do this
better than me?

Silence.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

If you can't take any criticism,
then you might as well leave now.
This is a professional
environment. Nothing less. I
expect more from you all moving
forward. We're done for today.

Alastair promptly exits. The company is left confused, but
they slowly start to file out. Nelson rushes past everyone,
embarrassed, but Anthony follows him.

EXT. SIDEWALK - MOMENTS LATER

ANTHONY

Nelson!

Nelson keeps walking, discouraged, but Anthony catches up and walks with him.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

Nelson, are you good?

NELSON

Hey Anthony.

ANTHONY

Hi. Look, you didn't do anything wrong back there-

NELSON

I know, I know. Thanks.

ANTHONY

I mean that was just unfair, the way he spoke-

NELSON

Really. I'm good. I'm just going home.

Anthony stops walking. He happens to be near the door of a small restaurant.

ANTHONY

You're not going to want to come back to rehearsal if you're discouraged.

Nelson stops walking and looks back at him.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

Come on.

He walks in the restaurant. Nelson follows him.

INT. RESTAURANT - AFTERNOON

Anthony and Nelson sit in a booth, each sipping coffee.

NELSON

Part of me, I guess, thinks that I'm overreacting. I mean, directors are supposed to be harsh sometimes. I just didn't think it'd be that bad on the first day.

ANTHONY

The whole thing has felt off so far. Even since auditions. Everything just seems unfamiliar.

NELSON

Exactly, and I don't get it. Maybe we all just haven't gotten to know each other yet, but it still feels off. It's like I can't remember how I ended up here in the first place.

ANTHONY

I genuinely can't remember how I heard of Rex. I just knew it was supposed to be a good company.

NELSON

Same here.

ANTHONY

Hey, what do you think about Clinton?

NELSON

I don't know. He stood up for me a little back there, but.. he just kind of seems like a d*ck.

Anthony laughs.

ANTHONY

I think they all are.

NELSON

Yeah. I'm just hoping things smooth over.

ANTHONY

I'm sure they will...

INT. THEATER - STAGE- MORNING

ALASTAIR

AGAIN!

No, Alastair is just a dick. He's impatient, rude, and demanding. Everyone is tense.

FIRST WITCH

All hail, Macbeth. Hail to thee,
Thane of Glamis.

ALASTAIR

(Sighs)

Fine.

SECOND WITCH

All hail, Macbeth. Hail to thee,
Thane of Cawdor.

ALASTAIR

(Under his breath)

Oh my god.

Now it's Marjorie's line. She hesitates.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

Marjorie?

MARJORIE

(Shakily)

All hail, Macbeth...

ALASTAIR

Yes?

She has no idea what she is supposed to say, and is about to break.

MARJORIE

(Panicking)

I'm sorry, I don't know.

Anthony is in this scene too. He's been watching this unfold and is preparing for another episode from Alastair.

ANTHONY
(Under his breath)
F*ck.

Alastair puts down his script and removes his glasses. He's stern.

ALASTAIR
Marjorie.

Her head is down, and she's on the verge of tears.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)
Marjorie!

MARJORIE
Yes?

ALASTAIR
It's okay.

A beat. It's okay? People are shocked, especially Nelson. Alastair directs himself to everyone now.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)
Right? My friends, we are not perfect. That's what a rehearsal is for! It's a process. We learn. We grow. And Marjorie? I think you're doing just splendidly.

MARJORIE
Oh, thank you!

ALASTAIR
No really, you're perfect. You've just got to remember those words!

She laughs obnoxiously, acting flattered. Nelson is a little pissed now.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)
Alright, everyone. Why don't we take five?

INT. THEATER - BACKSTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Anthony and Nelson stand together, away from the rest of the company. They try to keep their voices low.

NELSON

So what the f*ck was that?

ANTHONY

I don't know.

NELSON

He just hates me then?

ANTHONY

No, of course not. He probably just has favorites or something. I don't know.

Clinton approaches them.

CLINTON

This guy is a piece of sh*t.

ANTHONY

I know. But, I don't know, maybe he was just stressed yesterday because it was the first rehearsal. Maybe if he was nice to Marjorie he'll be nice to everyone else now.

CLINTON

(Scoffs)

Even then he's a sh*t director. He doesn't know what the f*ck he's doing.

NELSON

You aren't helping.

A beat.

CLINTON

Am I wrong? I only stood up for you yesterday because Alastair f*cked up. You delivered it lazily.

ANTHONY

Alright dude.

CLINTON

What? You're the f*cking lead and
you've hardly done anything.

ANTHONY

Well I still got it over you.

ALASTAIR (O.S.)

Everybody, please, rejoin!

Anthony and Clinton stare at each other for a moment. Then the three of them walk back, and Clinton diverging from them on the way.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

Thank you, everyone. Just gather around. I think we've made a good bit of progress, so we're going to wrap it up a little early again.

Most of the company seems pretty relaxed, happy even.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

But before we bid farewell, I want you all to bear with my chattering for just a moment more. Joanne! If you wouldn't mind...

Joanne emerges from backstage wheeling out a small platform with a slim post supported on it. At the top of the post is a light bulb which gives off a soft glow once Joanne plugs the cord into the back wall. It's kind of pathetic, but seemingly comforting.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

I feel that now is as good a time as any to introduce you all to something I like to call... "The Ghost Light." For centuries, it's been tradition for theaters to keep a source of light in the theater, mainly for safety overnight. But here, at least, it means more than that. I always

like to say that within that light
resides the spirits of all the
past shows held in this theater.
And that way, they're always with
us. They never leave.

There's prolonged silence as Alastair has spoken from the heart, and it felt powerful to everyone there. Suddenly, he snaps out of it, refraining from becoming emotional.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

Just a couple of quick things
before we go. These first couple
of rehearsals have been light, of
course, but as we proceed please
be sure you're getting enough
rest, maintaining hygiene and
practicing, practicing,
practicing! Okay? Right then.
Tomorrow's rehearsal will be
slightly extended... and lines for
Act I will be due for the
runthrough.

Anthony is immediately shocked. He looks over at Nelson to see an expression that matches his own. He finds Clinton across the stage and notices his disbelief as well.
Everyone is afraid again, all of a sudden. Afraid to speak up. That is, except for Marjorie.

MARJORIE

Um, Mr. King?

ALASTAIR

Yes, Marjorie.

MARJORIE

It's only the third rehearsal
tomorrow. Won't it be kind of
difficult for everyone to have
their lines memorized?

ALASTAIR

(Sternly)

No. You're professionals.

(Beat)

Act I. Tomorrow. Be prepared.

He walks swiftly off stage once again, leaving the company alone. Anthony begins to panic in his head. He's the lead. Nicole, who he hasn't seen in awhile, comes up to him.

NICOLE

So that's kind of insane.

ANTHONY

I need to go.

NICOLE

Wait-

Anthony exits the theater quickly.

EXT. SIDEWALK - CONTINUOUS

Anthony immediately begins practicing whatever he can remember, while simultaneously pulling out his phone.

ANTHONY

Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more...

He frantically calls work.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

By Sinel's death I know I am Thane of Glamis.

The phone rings.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

But how- but how of- f*ck!

BILL (O.S.)

Anthony!

ANTHONY

I can't come in tomorrow.

BILL (O.S.)

You can and you are, because Leo already called out and we're gonna be flooded. F*cking Leo.

ANTHONY
No, you don't understand.

BILL (O.S.)
I'm sorry, Tony. I've already let you off a bunch for these auditions. I can't keep doing that. I know you can't lose this job either.

ANTHONY
Fine! Okay- just- fine!

He hangs up and continues muttering to himself.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more...

INT. ANTHONY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MORNING

Anthony's alarm wakes him at 4:30 a.m. He gets up immediately.

INT. ANTHONY'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Anthony rushes through his kitchen, packing his bag and heading out the door without stopping to eat. He continues his practice.

ANTHONY
If it were done when 'tis done,
then 'twere well it were done
quickly.

INT. CAFE - MORNING

Anthony is working his shift with Sean and Bill. He's cleaning off a counter with his back to the register.

ANTHONY
(Under his breath)
If the assassination could trammel
up the consequence...

A CUSTOMER, 57, at the register tries to get his attention.

CUSTOMER

Excuse me?

Anthony doesn't hear.

ANTHONY

...and catch, with his surcease,
success, that but this blow might
be the be-all and the end-all
here...

CUSTOMER

Sir? Excuse me?

ANTHONY

...but here, upon this bank and
shoal of time-

CUSTOMER

Hey!

Anthony finally notices, but Sean rushes to the customer before he can say anything.

SEAN

So sorry ma'am, what can I get
you?

Bill walks by Anthony.

BILL

Get it together, man.

Anthony stays quiet.

INT. THEATER - STAGE - MORNING

Anthony walks into rehearsal, stressed to the point where his mind is gone.

FADE AUDIO

BEGIN MONTAGE

The rehearsal. Lines are forgotten constantly. We see different actors' lips moving, but only strange, echoing noises come out. The only voice truly heard is Alastair's.

ALASTAIR
(Echoing)
Again!

This odd sequence intensifies to a point of overwhelming noise and echoes, and then silence.

INT. THEATER - STAGE - LATER

ALASTAIR
Clinton. Nelson. Anthony. Stay.
Everyone else, you are dismissed.

Everyone exits the theater, leaving the three actors with Alastair, who stares them down. After a moment, he walks swiftly backstage, leaving them alone onstage.

CLINTON
This is f*cking insane.

Anthony and Nelson may not be fond of Clinton, but they can agree with him on that.

ANTHONY
What the hell is he doing?

CLINTON
Probably brandishing his knife, I
don't know.

NELSON
What are we supposed to do then?

Blackout. The entire theater is dark.

ANTHONY
F*ck.

Just then we hear a light turn on, and the left side of the front of the stage is illuminated by a narrow spotlight. We hear a second one turn on, spotting the right side. Finally one in the middle. The three actors, unable to see anything else, walk toward the light. Nelson takes the right,

Clinton the left, and Anthony the middle. As soon as they each take a light, they become entranced by the bulb as Alastair's voice rings in their heads.

ALASTAIR (O.S.)

When Shakespeare died, the tomb in which he resided became inscribed with a curse. Are you familiar?

Silence.

ALASTAIR (O.S.) (CONT'D)

"Good friend for Jesus sake
forbeare, To dig the dust enclosed
here. Blessed be the man that
spares these stones, And cursed be
he that moves my bones."

Silence again.

ALASTAIR (O.S.) (CONT'D)

You're going to curse this
theater.

The three actors breathe heavily, frightened and unable to move. A small lamp clicks on in the light booth, illuminating Alastair in a pit of darkness far, far away from the stage.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

(Changing subjects)

Any explanation for today's
incessant faults?

(Beat)

Don't be shy! You're actors.
You're theatrical. Expressive.

CLINTON

(Hesitant)

You gave us too much.

ALASTAIR

I what?

CLINTON

You gave us too much to memorize.

ALASTAIR

Did I? Well, I suppose it might have been too much for you, seeing as you can never even remember when to shut your mouth.

(To Anthony and Nelson)

And you two?

ANTHONY

We're leads?

ALASTAIR

You're leads?

ANTHONY

Right. We're leads, so we have to remember more lines.

ALASTAIR

Wrong. You're leads, so you should

be able to remember more lines.

It's not a chore.

NELSON

It was still too much.

ALASTAIR

(Scoffs)

"Too much." Well then, do you know what my saying is for getting over small snags like this? "Repetition is the mother of learning." Isn't it? That's all we have to do, really. Repeat. Anthony, say a line.

ANTHONY

(Head down)

Is this a dagger I see-

ALASTAIR

Of course you picked that f*cking line. Well, it's far from perfect anyway. So...

Alastair stops being playful with his remarks and becomes intensely focused all of a sudden.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

Again.

They've heard him say "Again" about a thousand times before, but it feels different here. Almost scarier.

ANTHONY

Is this a dag-

ALASTAIR

Look into the eye.

ANTHONY

(Looking up slightly)

What?

ALASTAIR

The eye. You'll find it in the light.

Anthony, unsure of what Alastair means, looks up slowly until he's blinded by the spotlight. Refusing to look away, however, he becomes entranced by it.

BEGIN MONTAGE

Similar to the first montage, faded audio of lines echoing rings throughout the scene, except this time we actually see the actors and the amount of pressure they are under. It's way scarier. Technically, you hear heavy breathing and shuffling more than their words. Alastair continues to shout "Again!" His voice grows louder and louder and the lights flash faster and faster until the intensity of the montage reaches a climax...

ALASTAIR

(Yelling)

What did you say about me backstage?

ANTHONY

What?

ALASTAIR

What did you dare say about me at yesterday's rehearsal?

ANTHONY
What are you talking about?

ALASTAIR
You are going to curse this
theater!

Everything goes dark and silent. Faintly, there is heavy breathing. And then...

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)
Go home.

INT. THEATER - BACKSTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

In complete darkness, Anthony, Clinton, and Nelson run backstage, desperately looking for the exit. They stumble over themselves and miscellaneous objects, moving down halls and taking any turn they can find.

EXT. BACK ALLEY - NIGHT

Clinton, who takes the lead, bursts through a door which brings them to a dimly lit back alley. The three actors finally halt, panting and hunched over.

CLINTON
F*ck! What the f*ck was that?

ANTHONY
"What the f*ck was that?" That was f*cking psychotic! He's psychotic!

CLINTON
Someone call the police.

NELSON
What are they gonna do? What are we even supposed to tell them?

CLINTON
That we got f*cking hypnotized?
Held hostage? I don't know just f*cking call them!

ANTHONY

Wait!

Anthony thinks hard for a moment. Nelson reaches for his phone in his pocket but pauses.

ANTHONY

Nelson is right. We can't prove anything. Don't call.

CLINTON

We're just gonna let that all slide then?

ANTHONY

No, but... we should at least wait.
Because I-

He hesitates.

CLINTON

Can't what?

He can't decide whether he should say it or not, but it comes out anyway.

ANTHONY

I can't lose this role.

CLINTON

(In disbelief)

You're not serious. So which is it? We can't prove anything or you're too f*cking prideful to think rationally?

ANTHONY

We're putting on a good show. And we haven't been harmed. He's just a tough director. That's all it is! That was all so we could improve!

Nelson shakes his head and proceeds to take out his phone to call the police. As the screen lights up, he notices the time: 11:51 p.m.

CLINTON

Are you insane? You would go
through all that again to keep a
role you can't even play well?

Anthony charges at him, pinning him against a wall.

NELSON
Hey!

Nelson, not having yelled before, startles them. They both stop. Nelson turns his phone screen to them.

NELSON (CONT'D)
How long were we in there?

Clinton looks up and notices the sky is pitch black. He pushes Anthony off him and walks away from the wall to get a better look.

CLINTON
What the f*ck? No. No, that was a
sh*t show, but it wasn't more than
an hour.

ANTHONY
It felt like seconds to me.

NELSON
I thought we just did lines.

ANTHONY
We did.

CLINTON
Well, what scenes did you do?

ANTHONY
I did...

He can't remember. None of them can.

CLINTON
I'm calling the f*cking police.

He pulls out his phone.

ANTHONY

No!

Anthony charges at him again, and now they're actually fighting. Nelson tries to break them up, but gets shoved off. Clinton is able to defend himself, getting Anthony off him and hitting him to the ground. He then runs off up the alley. Anthony gets up slowly, looks at Nelson, and makes his way down the other way, leaving Nelson by himself.

EXT. SIDEWALK - MOMENTS LATER

Nelson has emerged from the alley, walking steadily down the street, his arms crossed and held close to his chest. He walks by the restaurant that he and Anthony went into before. As he glanced through the window, he noticed someone familiar at the bar. It's Cecil. Nelson stops, watching him for a moment, and makes a decision.

INT. RESTAURANT - BAR - MOMENTS LATER

Nelson approaches Cecil, who notices him without turning around.

CECIL
Good evening, Nelson.

He's not the same, effervescent guy he was at the theater earlier on. He's calm with a hint of sadness. He's more real.

NELSON
Hi.

CECIL
Won't you sit?

Nelson sits rather hastily. He's clearly nervous, but determined to get answers. He doesn't hesitate.

NELSON
What the hell is up with that theater?

CECIL

You've just finished your extended rehearsal, haven't you?

NELSON

Sure, yeah. "Extended." So, that happens a lot then?

CECIL

It's happened before. Not a lot. Not frequently.

NELSON

Has it happened to you?

Cecil smiles softly.

CECIL

You should be asking why it happens.

NELSON

It's only my third day. You're the one who's done a million shows with this guy, and you're telling me he's never pulled something like that on you?

No reply.

NELSON (CONT'D)

(Sighs)

Why does it happen?

CECIL

It would appear that he's fearful.

NELSON

Of what?

CECIL

Of power. At least, the power he doesn't have.

NELSON

(Remembering)

When he was making us rehearse our lines, he asked what we said about him yesterday.

CECIL

Of course he did. Why wouldn't he?

NELSON

Well, I don't think we said anything egregious.

CECIL

It doesn't matter what you said. It matters that he couldn't hear it.

NELSON

Oh.

CECIL

You see, power consumes people. You can see it in the show we're putting on now. Eventually, you have to ask yourself, "What does it mean to be a king?"

Nelson lets that sit for a minute, then remembers something else.

NELSON

He said something else at the beginning... and the end.

CECIL

Yes?

NELSON

He said we were going to curse the theater.

CECIL

Ah, Shakespeare's curse. Don't disturb his grave.

NELSON

Right, so, what does he mean by "the theater?"

CECIL

He's only scaring you. There's a myth about a basement under the stage. Remember the spirits from the ghost light? It's like heaven. For those who showed up; did what they were supposed to. The basement is for those who are overly passionate, and eventually discouraged. Their bodies sleep there, not quite dead, not quite alive.

NELSON

That's weird.

CECIL

(Chuckles)

Again, it's pretend. But it does bring up another vital question: At what point does it become too much?

NELSON

Too much?

CECIL

Too much. At what point does acting consume you? To the point where you've become the character you embody? Theater, for me, is fun. It's an escape. That isn't the case for us all, though. Some take it so seriously they've forgotten who they are. And for what? At the community level? What is theater, Nelson? We're not engineers or doctors making a difference in the world. We're actors. And yes, we're telling a story, and we're moving people with our stories, but the lights, the costumes, the stage... It's all made up.

His voice echoes...

CECIL (CONT'D)
None of it's real.

CUT TO BLACK:

END OF ACT II

TEXT OVER BLACK

7 Weeks Later

EXT. THEATER ENTRANCE - AFTERNOON

Anthony stands outside in front of the theater before rehearsal starts. It's the final dress rehearsal, and though it's been less than two months, Anthony looks aged. He's been overworked, and furthermore, he's overworked himself. He's on the phone with Bill.

ANTHONY
There's nothing I can do. This is
more important right now.

BILL (O.S.)
More important? A f*cking musical
is more important than making a
living?

ANTHONY
It's a play.

BILL (O.S.)
Sean, you hearing this?

A beat as Bill hands the phone to Sean, explaining what's happening.

BILL (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(Faintly)
Talk to him. He's insane.

SEAN (O.S.)
Okay, yeah, just- Anthony? Just
try to make a compromise, alright?
We need you-

ANTHONY

I quit.

BILL (O.S.)

What'd he say?

SEAN (O.S.)

He said he quit.

BILL (O.S.)

What? No, Anthony.

(Taking the phone back)

No, you're not. That's
unprofessional and you can't just-

Anthony hangs up. He stands there for a moment, staring coldly down at his phone. Nicole comes outside one of the main doors and sees him. She approaches, a little less patient than she has been in the past.

NICOLE

There you are. What are you doing?

ANTHONY

Not now.

NICOLE

Rude. I need to ask you about our
scene where-

Anthony turns around and goes inside. Nicole follows him.

INT. THEATER - AUDIENCE - CONTINUOUS

NICOLE (CONT'D)

Hey! Anthony, this is the final
rehearsal. I don't care if you
don't like me, but...

Her voice is overcome by Alastair screaming at an ensemble actor, JUSTIN, 26, on the stage. He gets right in his face.

INT. THEATER - STAGE - CONTINUOUS

ALASTAIR

You think I have time for
something like this? You think you

can approach me, ill-prepared, no costume, asking about a goddamn transition just to humiliate me in front of my company? In my theater? Our tech crew has just arrived to set up. Can't you see at all that there are more significant events taking place?

Justin is silent. He keeps his head down.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

Look at me. Do you think I'd ever let anyone ruin something this close to opening night?

JUSTIN

No.

ALASTAIR

And do you think I'd ever let anyone, particularly from the ensemble, tell me how to run my show?

JUSTIN

No.

ALASTAIR

And lastly, do you think someone as insignificant yet disrupting as you should continue to be part of this production after what's just occurred?

Justin looks up in disbelief.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

You're gone. Okay? Gone! You'll find an exit backstage, just get the f*ck out, now!

Justin exits, hurriedly and completely discouraged. Anthony and Nicole have just walked on stage from the audience. Alastair looks at Anthony, disgusted.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

Sit down, Anthony. You're late and
you look terrible.

(To all)

Notes!

CECIL

(To Nelson)

Off to a wonderful start.

Anthony sits down, embarrassed. Clinton, who seems to be better off, smirks at the situation. He's had to cope with being a secondary lead this whole time, but he's enjoying watching Anthony fall apart.

ALASTAIR

Let's make this quick. I don't want to keep our tech team waiting and you all should have perfected the show by now. So...

He pulls out a small piece of paper.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

My three witches, space yourselves more in the opening scene. Anthony, more confidence when you come on. You're dragging it, and I don't care if you're exhausted.

Clinton almost smiles, but Alastair immediately looks at him, as if he noticed.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

Clinton. Scene one-

BEGIN MONTAGE

The familiar, eerie tone returns, almost as a jumpscare this time. Alastair goes scene by scene, ridiculing Clinton's acting. "Quicker. Slower" It's come out of nowhere. "More right. More left." He's critiquing things that almost shouldn't matter. Eventually, he drops the piece of paper and seemingly speaks from the heart. "When you come on stage, the scene dies." Now, he's gotten in Clinton's head. The scene intensifies, then we snap out of it.

END MONTAGE

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)
Is that clear?

Clinton is in shock, but subtly nods.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)
We'll begin in five. Places!

Everyone jumps up and rushes to get ready. Anthony watches Clinton, deciding if he should try to talk to him. Clinton walks off stage and disappears.

INT. THEATER - BACKSTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Clinton storms through the labyrinth of halls, trying to find his way back to the alley from weeks ago. He stumbles into an open space with stacks of wood and small set pieces. Clinton stops to look around, figuring out where he is. He hears a crunch behind him, and turns around to see a tech member sitting on a low stack of planks, staring at him while eating a bag of chips. Clinton stares back, and the tech member gets up and leaves. Now, alone, Clinton ventures further back into the scene shop, making it to a back wall where he finds a small table, and on it, a framed picture of Alastair. The part of the wall that the table is positioned against is covered by a canvas. Clinton stares at the picture, and suddenly decides to stomp the table in an attempt to break it. Instead, the table gets pushed through the canvas and therefore through a gaping hole in the wall. Clinton loses his balance and falls through the hole as well, crashing down a hidden flight of stairs and onto a cold wooden floor with concrete walls.

CLINTON
F*ck!

He groans trying to stand up again. Once he does, a long corridor lies ahead of him, dimly lit by torches attached to the walls. Under the torches lie a series of shelves, holding small props such as jars, knives, and other miscellaneous objects. They all look ominous, dangerous even, and concerningly authentic. He hears a grunt in the darkness. After looking back at the stairs, he walks further down the hallway. He stops when he sees a shadow moving in the distance, but after a moment it's gone, and

he proceeds. The indistinct sounds grow louder and Clinton moves closer. He starts to walk faster. Suddenly, someone appears from a doorway on Clinton's left, running into him. They both gasp. As Clinton gets his bearings, he sees the person's face. It's Joanne. She shoves him, trying to run past, but trips and knocks over a jar on one of the shelves. She recovers and continues running back toward the stairs, leaving Clinton alone in the dark corridor. He looks down at the broken jar on the floor. Small spheres that were once in the jar are scattered across the floor now. Clinton picks one up, observing its silky texture and white color. He rotates the ball in his hand to see all the sides, and is shocked when he turns the ball to reveal that it's an eye. Clinton tenses up. The eyeball seems to glow. Clinton has become possessed. The moment intensifies and Clinton drops the eye, falling backward.

INT. THEATER - STAGE - MOMENTS LATER

ALASTAIR

Action!

The lights come up. The runthrough begins.

INT. THEATER - BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Dramatically, perhaps in slow motion, Clinton emerges from the labyrinth, walking confidently. He's no longer himself, though he appears the same to everyone else. He walks past everyone backstage, getting to his place. Marjorie watches him as he walks past.

INT. THEATER - STAGE - NIGHT

After the runthrough, everyone has just about left except for Marjorie. She watches the last people exit through the main door, then look around the stage. She hasn't seen Clinton leave yet. After waiting a moment, she gives up and descends into the audience.

INT. THEATER - AUDIENCE - CONTINUOUS

Marjorie is walking up one of the aisles now heading toward the main door. Just as she reaches for it, something jumps at her, and the scene ends abruptly.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Anthony stands at the top of the stairwell one last time. He calls his dad again. This time he picks up.

ANTHONY

Dad? Hey! Hi. Thanks for picking up.

(Beat)

Yeah, I'm just getting ready for tomorrow.

(Beat)

For the show, yeah. It's opening night. Hey, are you able to make it, by the way?

(Beat)

Yeah. No, yeah, of course. No worries. Thanks though. I'll talk to you later.

(Beat)

Yep. Love you. Bye.

He hangs up. After a moment, Anthony takes a deep breath and begins his monologue, descending the steps.

ANTHONY

Is this a dagger I see before me,
the handle toward my hand? Come,
let me clutch thee. I have thee
not, and yet I see thee still. Art
thou not, fatal, vision, sensible
to feeling as to sight or at thou
but a dagger of the mind, a false
creation, proceeding from the
heat-oppressed brain? I see thee
yet, in form as palpable as this
which now I-

Moving rapidly down the final stretch of stairs, Anthony reaches out for an imaginary dagger, loses balance, and falls the rest of the way down. He lies at the bottom on his back, staring up.

CUT TO BLACK

END OF ACT II

INT. THEATER - OFFICE - EVENING

OVER BLACK

Alastair recites The Lord's Prayer in Latin.

CUT TO:

Alastair in his office, his eyes closed and his head tilted up slightly. He finishes the prayer, levels his head, and opens his eyes. The moment intensifies, but is cut off by a knocking at the door.

ALASTAIR

Come in.

Joanne enters quietly.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

My love.

JOANNE

Alastair. You've done it again.

ALASTAIR

It appears I have. Another production, another success.

They hold each other's hands, growing closer. Joanne pauses.

JOANNE

There's something I wanted to tell you. I wanted to let you rest last night but-

ALASTAIR

Oh, darling, I'm sorry but I've just prayed. I'm in the moment. Can't it wait?

JOANNE

I'm not entirely sure that it should-

ALASTAIR

Whatever it is, it can't outweigh
the importance of this show, can
it?

No response.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

Good.

(Deep breath)

It's time.

INT. THEATER - STAGE - EVENING

Anthony sits onstage as the rest of the company warms up in small groups around him. He still looks terrible. This, conflated with him getting into character, erases his identity. He's no longer Anthony. Nicole approaches with not much respect left for him.

NICOLE

Hey.

ANTHONY

Hey...

NICOLE

Are you... okay?

ANTHONY

Yup.

NICOLE

Okay, it's just... it's opening
night. Pretty big deal.

ANTHONY

I know.

NICOLE

(Flustered)

Okay, I guess I'll just say it
then: Are you f*cking ready or
not? Because you've been so
self-absorbed this whole time that
you just ignore me every time I

try to talk to you. It's to the point where we have almost no chemistry on stage, so I'm asking you, are you f*cking ready for opening night?

People stop what they're doing and look over. Anthony is still sitting, gazing off.

ANTHONY

Yup.

NICOLE

(Scoffs)

Alright. Did something happen?
Outside of here? Work?

ANTHONY

I quit.

NICOLE

Oh, great, so this is your whole life now?

ANTHONY

Maybe.

NICOLE

And do you think you're just so amazing as the lead of this show?
Do you think you're a legend?

Anthony looks up at her, seemingly dead inside with no emotion.

ANTHONY

Yes.

NICOLE

F*ck you.

She storms off backstage. Anthony continues to sit there. Nelson and Cecil are standing together once again. Nelson turns to him to see his reaction.

INT. THEATER - BACKSTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Nicole makes her way backstage now, not knowing where to go. She pushes through the door Anthony, Clinton, and Nelson once burst through.

EXT. BACK ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Nicole arrives outside and stops, looking around. She turns around to go back inside but the door has locked.

INT. THEATER - STAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Nelson still stands with Cecil. He finally decides to say something.

NELSON

I don't know how I feel anymore.

CECIL

What might you mean?

NELSON

Well, we all just saw Nicole leave. There's a start.

CECIL

I'm sure it's nothing.

NELSON

Okay, look at Anthony. He looks dead. And where are Clinton and Marjorie? I haven't seen them at all yet!

CECIL

Nelson, Nelson. Are you feeling alright?

NELSON

Everything has just felt off. From the start. Now I just feel afraid.

CECIL

Don't be. You're a talented actor, Nelson, and a wonderful person. I don't know how many more shows I have left, but it doesn't matter. I've met you, and that's an honor.

Nelson relaxes and smiles at him. Cecil puts a hand on his shoulder, reassuring him. Just then, Alastair marches on stage, rubbing his hands together. Joanne is at his side.

ALASTAIR

Alright! Alright, alright,
alright! Everyone! Gather!

What's left of the company comes to surround him, and he immediately notices something is off.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

Where's Nicole?

Silence.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

Marjorie?

Silence.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

Clinton?

Silence.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

(Muttering)

So help me God if they aren't just
getting ready.

(Projecting)

Rex! You're here! You've made it
to your opening night!

Everyone engages in a round of applause.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)

Yes! Yes, yes...

Alastair's voice trails off as he notices a figure emerge from backstage. It's Clinton. He stands behind the crowd. The actors follow Alastair's gaze and start to notice Clinton, one by one. They part so that nothing stands in between Clinton and Alastair. Clinton looks different. Especially his eyes. They're gray. Joanne backs up, frightened.

ALASTAIR (CONT'D)
Clinton? How considerate of you to
join us.

CLINTON
I'm not here for you.

ALASTAIR
Oh? What for then?

CLINTON
The theater. Rex.

**INTERCUT - INT. THEATER - STAGE/ INT. THEATER - FLY -
CONTINUOUS**

A ladder begins to rattle softly as a figure ascends it.

ALASTAIR
That's enough, Clinton. We've got
a show to put on.

CLINTON
Not tonight.

The figure makes it to a platform about thirty feet in the air. It comes into view now: Marjorie. Her eyes are gray too. She's possessed as well. She pulls out a knife and begins cutting a rope that appears to be part of a pulley system.

ALASTAIR
And what could you possibly mean
by that-

ANTHONY
Just f*ck off, Clinton.

Clinton stares at him, unbothered. Up on the platform, Marjorie continues cutting, thinning the rope more every second.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
Can you just take this seriously?

CLINTON

I don't need to listen to you.
You're no king.

The rope is about to snap.

ALASTAIR
(Angrily)

Well, I am. I've built this company from the ground up. I'm not about to have it ruined by anyone. Do you hear me? I'm a king! It's in my f*cking name!

The rope snaps. The pulley moves rapidly. An entire bar of lights flies upward and crashes into the high ceiling. Alastair looks up to see the whole thing falling toward him. He dives forward as it crashes down on Joanne, killing her. Alastair survives, but his leg is crushed under the bar. He lies on his stomach. Clinton approaches him, pulls out a knife, and stabs him three times in the back. He then lifts up his head and slits his throat. The company dissolves into chaos. Everyone starts screaming, but before they can run the theater goes dark except for a spotlight which appears on Clinton. Everyone stops and watches him in shock.

CLINTON

Rex. What you're witnessing now is power. Authority. Alastair King was insolent and inept. He had no place here.

A small fire has sparked from one of the lights shattering on the wooden stage. It grows slowly. Anthony steps forward, ready to act. Nelson runs up to him.

NELSON
Anthony, no.

Anthony charges at Clinton. They end up on the floor, fighting for Clinton's knife. Anthony knocks it out of Clinton's hand, and it ends up a few feet away. Nelson runs up to intervene. Clinton turns his upper body and grabs Nelson's face with his hand. Nelson stumbles back.

CECIL
Nelson!

Nelson straightens his posture. As Cecil reaches for him, Nelson turns around abruptly, eyes gray, and stabs Cecil in the heart with Clinton's knife which he's secretly picked up. Cecil falls to the floor. Nelson stares down at him. His eyes clear up. He's back to normal but realizes what he's just done. He drops the knife. The company breaks into screams again, but before they can run this time, the spotlight that was on Clinton moves toward them, growing large enough to put light on everyone. Just like when Anthony, Clinton, and Nelson were held back, they all freeze. Nelson ducks under the light and runs off stage right. Anthony kicks Clinton off of him and runs off stage left, looking for the exit to the alley he once ended up in. Clinton picks up his knife again and runs after Anthony.

INT. THEATER - STAGE RIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Nelson moves as fast as he can through a new part of the labyrinth backstage. He's looking for an exit, but can't find anything. He's hopeless and about to break down. Finally, he stumbles into a dimly lit room. As he stops to get himself together, he looks up to see that room is actually quite large, but empty. Empty except for the ghost light, which shines in the middle of vast space.

INT. THEATER - STAGE LEFT - MOMENTS LATER

Clinton is chasing after Anthony with his knife, hollering at him.

CLINTON

You're nothing, Anthony! You'll never be king. You'll never be Macbeth!

Anthony makes it to the scene shop that Clinton once wandered into.

INT. THEATER - STAGE RIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Nelson walks slowly toward the ghost light. It shines brighter as he gets closer. Brighter. Closer. Brighter. Closer. The light blinds everything in a great flash, then shuts off. When the light is gone, so is Nelson.

INT. THEATER - STAGE LEFT - MOMENTS LATER

Anthony spots the hole in the wall and enters it quickly. Clinton arrives, only to see that Anthony has left. He knows where he went, though, and he's satisfied with that. He turns to walk back the way he came.

INT. THEATER - BASEMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Anthony gets to the bottom of the stairs, and stops to catch his breath. He's exhausted, and has nothing left in him. No drive, no spirit. Nothing. He gives up. He lets the torches lead him down the hall. He can barely walk at this point. Nevertheless, he arrives at the doorway Joanne once came out of, and as he tries to take a step forward, he falls down a second flight of stairs, landing on a cold, concrete floor. He looks up to see an array of dark figures doing the rag doll pose from Alastair's meditation. Except these figures are spiritless, asleep, to the point of seeming lifeless. In a way, they are.

INTERCUT - INT. THEATER - BASEMENT/ INT. THEATER - STAGE - NIGHT

In the world above, Clinton walks confidently back onto the stage.

Below, Anthony crawls toward the bodies.

Above, the company still stands under the spotlight, staring at Clinton with wide eyes.

Below, the bodies of past actors whose souls have left them sit silently with no eyes.

Above, Clinton walks back to where he killed Alastair, standing in front of his new company, beaming with pride. The entire bar of lights has been engulfed in flames, and the stage around it is starting to burn too. It's hot, but that doesn't matter. Clinton stands with the hotness behind him. Nothing can stop him.

Below, Anthony crawls to the front of the array, seeing that a spot is left open for him. The room is dark and cold, but that doesn't matter. Anthony gets onto his feet and faces back toward the stairs like the rest of the

bodies. He closes his eyes, and lets his body fall into position to match the rest. Nothing can bring him back.

CUT TO BLACK

THE END

Note

There is nothing quite like the art of theater. It truly is beautiful, and has never failed to impress me. Even when I think I may not find what I'm about to see very interesting, I get chills the moment the show starts. As I've grown, however, and become more involved with theater itself, I've been able to see it through a different lens. The messy parts of it, the behind the scenes, the things no one talks about. As I thought to myself further, I began to question what it really was. The idea of people dressing up in costume, pretending to be someone else, and reciting words became foreign to me. Doing lights for my high school theater company enhanced this perspective. I was not on stage, but in the audience, and could observe their mannerisms. Over years, it was as if I understood less and less what was going on. The actors speak, the audience laughs. The actors speak, the audience claps. And then everyone goes home.

In the past year, I witnessed more ego than I ever had before in the world of theater, and thought to reflect upon a new concept: power. Can even just a little power change someone that much? This idea of a horror story about a theater that I had had for years now was starting to form more clearly. As much as I love theater, I've observed countless individuals with a relentless desire for power, attention, and success. It's pathetic. But it helped me realize that theater, nor anything else, should consume my life entirely. The idea for this story eventually became less about the logistics of theater, and more about those who let it consume them. The Alastair's who are overcome by pride. The Clinton's who desire power more than anything else. The Anthony's who push themselves so hard they discourage themselves severely. Of course, this is a dramatic idea that I was hesitant to put onto paper. But its chaos, messiness, and insanity is symbolic of some of the things I've seen, and more than anything, I wanted to stay true to myself in whatever I ended up writing. I'll never stop loving theater, no matter what. But I'll never

quite understand it either. My name is Peter Milburn, and this is my first screenplay: *Rex*.

Final Thoughts