THE DEBUT

by

Jesse Eisenberg

Shooting Script

OVER BLACK, a brassy alto is singing an eleven o'clock number from the musical, Nosy Neighbors.

SERENA CHERRY
And this city that never sleeps
Is beautiful at night!
And you could take the fight out of the dog,
But not this dog out of the fight!

INT. DARKENED THEATER - DAY

Spotlight on a singer, SERENA CHERRY, 60, belting this showstopper. She sparkles with charisma:

SERENA CHERRY
Cause I'll stay here forever more
And you will hear me shout
That this city may have chewed me up…
But it hasn't spit me out!

JERRY (OS)
Serena Cherry, you age backwards, I swear to god.

SERENA CHERRY
It's always great to see you, Jerry.

JERRY (OS)
We'll be in touch.

She steps off the stage and exits the theater into:

INT. LOBBY - DAY

We follow Serena Cherry as she walks through the lobby of this small community theater where auditions are being held for a musical, Nosy Neighbors. Many people are waiting to audition and they all seem to be in their early 20s.

A young woman paces humming scales, a young man practices dialogue from a scene.

We move closer and closer to find the following conversation:

A general note on the dialogue: in group scenes, like the following, the characters speak on top of each other. Mona, by contrast, speaks cautiously and with the affect of a Southern Belle.

AUDITIONING WOMAN 1
And it just makes me crazy!

AUDITIONING WOMAN 2
Well how could it not?

AUDITIONING WOMAN 1
It came down to me and MJ, who's not even a natural soprano! We were literally going back and forth, back and forth. They paired us with three Cables for chemistry—

AUDITIONING WOMAN 2
Now that would make me crazy!

AUDITIONING WOMAN 3
Oh it's designed to make you crazy!

AUDITIONING WOMAN 1
And then he didn't give me a role. Any role! You'd think the person that comes in second for a lead would at least be in the chorus—

AUDITIONING WOMAN 3
That's just cruel.

AUDITIONING WOMAN 2
No, that's just Jerry. He's brilliant but he's not here to be your friend.

We arrive at the source of the conversation — three young auditioners chatter as they flank an intensely shy MONA FRIEDMAN (50s).

AUDITIONING WOMAN 1
And what's your story? I don't think we've seen you before.

MONA
Oh, I just saw the flyer for tryouts at the market. I've never really done-

AUDITIONING WOMAN 2
You seem like a big bundle of nerves.

MONA
Oh do I? I'm sorry, I just—

AUDITIONING WOMAN 2
Are you kidding? Don’t be sorry!

AUDITIONING WOMAN 1
It’s normal to be nervous.

AUDITIONING WOMAN 2
You’re auditioning for Jerry!

MONA
Who’s Jerry?

AUDITIONING WOMAN 2
Who’s Jerry?!

AUDITIONING WOMAN 3
Basically the biggest name in New Jersey Community Theater.

Whip to see Jerry's long suffering apparatchik, SYBIL.

SYBIL
Mona Friedman! You’re up.

MONA
That’s me.

AUDITIONING WOMAN 1
Listen to me Mona: it’s good to be nervous.

AUDITIONING WOMAN 3
It means you care!

AUDITIONING WOMAN 2
All of those awful feelings you feel right now?

AUDITIONING WOMAN 1
All of the pain and the shit and the anxiety you feel?

AUDITIONING WOMAN 3
Whatever baggage you’ve been storing up your whole life?

AUDITIONING WOMAN 1
Use it!

SYBIL
Mona!

INT. THEATER - DAY

Mona stands in spotlight singing the now familiar song, “This City May Have Chewed Me Up (But It Hasn’t Spit Me Out).” Mona sings sweetly and on key but with a comically palpable lack of charisma.

MONA
In this city that never sleeps
And keeps me up at night!
And you could take the fight out of the dog,
But not this dog out of the fight!
And I’ll stay here forever more
And you will hear me shout that
This city may have chewed me up—

JERRY (OS)
(to pianist)
Okay, Marty you can stop. Thank you so much for coming in.

MONA
Are you sure? Because I didn’t get to “but it hasn’t spit me out.”

JERRY (50s) has a genial quality that belies a deep rage. He stares at her for too long a moment:

JERRY
We’ve seen enough.

EXT. THEATER - SIDEWALK - DAY

Mona exits the theater, heading toward her BMW.

It’s a small community theater, some people smoke outside, some pace nervously.

INT. UPSCALE CHINESE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Mona and her abnormally tall husband, HOWARD, are having dinner with their friends STEVE and CASSIE BRAVERMAN.

They are eating dessert.

CASSIE
This is to die for. Howard, this is absolutely to die for.

HOWARD
It sounds like I have no choice.

CASSIE
Mona, you don’t mind if I feed your husband, do you?

Cassie reaches across the table to feed Howard as Mona looks on.

HOWARD
That is pretty great, Cass.

STEVE
What about me?

CASSIE
Oh Steven, you don’t mind. You’re in love with Howard too!

STEVE
She’s right! I am! We all are. Look at the guy!

HOWARD
Hey, hey! Enough about me! We’re sick of me! Focus on someone else!

STEVE
Fine! Mona: How are you? What did you do all day?

HOWARD
The kids can drive. She doesn't do anything anymore.

They all laugh. Mona awkwardly interjects:

MONA
Today I auditioned for a musical show in town.

CASSIE
You did?

HOWARD
You did?

MONA
Yeah but it’s rinky-dink and the part is tiny. It’s this decades old little show called Nosy Neighbors about this apartment building and all the kooky people who live there.

CASSIE
Mona, look at you, full of surprises! What's your part?

MONA
Oh it's not my part, I just did the audition, Cass, and gosh, I haven't sung in front of anyone since church choir. But the role is Miss Danielle. She's the super of the building and I think it would just be such a hoot to sing again-

STEVE
Can I make a confession? I hate musicals. Really. I just hate them.

CASSIE
Steven!

STEVE
No, why do they just start singing out of nowhere? Ugh, the worst!
(flagging a waiter)
Hey, can we get another round of whatever we had before!

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mona is in her bedroom at night. She is setting her alarm clock for 8am.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Mona walks into the bathroom. Howard is on the toilet, doing a crossword. Mona stands at the door.

MONA
That was really nice tonight.

HOWARD
Hm?

MONA
I was just saying how nice it was tonight. When we were talking about the musical.

HOWARD
Can I just have two minutes to shit in peace?

MONA
I'll come back.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Mona is cooking breakfast for her abnormally tall TWINS, MATTY and MAYA.

INT. BMW - DAY

Mona drives to the grocery store, a lonely silence filling the car.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Mona is shopping for produce in a fancy little grocery store.

INT. GROCERY CHECK OUT - DAY

Mona is on line to check out, she has four items.

A man with a lot of groceries cuts in front of her.

MAN
Sorry, can I jump in front? I got a ton of stuff.

Mona nods meekly as the guy unloads a ton of stuff on the conveyor belt.

EXT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

As Mona exits the store, she passes by a bulletin board with local listings.

She sees the flyer for tryouts for Nosy Neighbors, where it says "Got A Voice?" At the bottom, there are tear-offs with the theater's telephone number.

Mona furtively removes each tear-off and crumples them into her pocket.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Mona cautiously peeks her head into the bathroom. Howard is on the toilet.

MONA
I didn't hear back from the play.

HOWARD
What?

MONA
I said I still didn't hear back from the play. If I got the part or not.

HOWARD
Okay.

EXT. HAIR SALON - DAY

Through the window of a hair salon we see Mona and Cassie sitting under hooded hair dryers.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Mona is eating dinner with Howard, at separate ends of the table. She stares at him chewing.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Later, Mona is doing the dishes. She peers into the den. Howard is watching a game on television.

MONA
Howard? I'm going to run out for a few.

HOWARD
It's ten o'clock.

MONA
Cassie wanted to talk to me about something. You know Cassie. Everything's an emergency.

HOWARD
She's a drama queen.

INT. BMW - THEATER - NIGHT

Mona is driving at night, an eerie quality in the air.

EXT. THEATER ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Mona pulls up to the theater and parks across the street in order not to be seen. She is very tense.

She watches as people start to trickle out of the theater after rehearsal.

She decides to very carefully get out of the car and approach. She looks like she's about to rob a bank.

As she crosses the street, she notices Jerry exit the theater as he says goodnight to his cast.

JERRY
You're all talentless hacks and
I'll see you tomorrow!

After the last person leaves, Mona timidly approaches Jerry.

MONA
Excuse me?

Jerry thought he was alone and is shocked but, oddly, he stifles any reaction.

JERRY
Yes?

MONA
Jerry?

JERRY
Yes?

MONA
It's me, Mona Friedman.

JERRY
I'm sorry?

MONA
I tried out for Nosy Neighbors?
For the role of Miss Danielle.

JERRY
Mm-hmm.

MONA
Is everything okay?

JERRY
Everything's great, why?

MONA
Well, no one called to tell me anything.

JERRY
What were you expecting to be told?

MONA
If I got the part. Or not.

JERRY
We've been rehearsing for weeks, Mona. If you got the part, we would have called you.

MONA
Of course.

JERRY
And if we didn’t call you, I guess you can assume you didn’t get the part.

MONA
Right.

JERRY
Right.

Jerry nods and walks back into the theater. Mona is frozen in her place.

Something overtakes her and she bangs on the glass doors. Jerry turns around and slowly walks back, opens the door:

JERRY
Yes?

MONA
Who got it?

JERRY
Who got what?

MONA
Who got Miss Danielle?

JERRY
Serena Cherry.

MONA
Who?

JERRY
Serena Cherry.

MONA
Is she…? I don't know her.

JERRY
She's from the city.

Mona nods, choked up. Jerry walks back into the theater. Mona is stuck in place, watching him disappear.

EXT. MONA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Mona is sitting in her car, paralyzed, trying not to cry.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mona is setting her alarm for 8am.

INT. BEDROOM - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

Howard is sleeping but Mona is a ball of anxiety.

Suddenly the phone is ringing from downstairs. Mona pops up.

HOWARD
(groggy)
Let it go.

MONA
(Putting on a robe)
It could be the kids.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Mona races down the stairs to get the phone.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Mona enters the kitchen and grabs the phone.

MONA
Hello?

JERRY
It's Jerry.

MONA
Excuse me?

JERRY
It’s Jerry. Is this Mona?

She snaps into it —

MONA
Yes, hi!

JERRY
I’m sorry I was curt with you this evening.
(Beat)
How are you?

MONA
I’m- I’m fine. I was just sleeping.

JERRY
I know.

MONA
Is everything okay?

JERRY
I wouldn’t be calling you in the middle of the night, Mona, if everything was okay. It’s been a very stressful few hours, to say the least.

MONA
I’m sorry to hear that.

JERRY
Thank you.
(Speaking to someone in the background)
Put it over there. *Over there Sybil!* Thank you.
(Back to mona)
Sorry about that, Mona. I’m going to have to hang up in a second.

MONA
Of course.

JERRY
Can you be at the theater at 8?

MONA
Eight in the morning?

JERRY
YES!
(beat)
Sorry, that wasn't to you, Mona, that was to Sybil, who works with me. Yes, eight in the morning. Can you be in?

MONA
Of course, Jerry. Might I ask what for?

JERRY
Serena Cherry dropped out. She said the role was too small.

MONA
Oh.

JERRY
Mona.

MONA
Yes?

JERRY
You got the part.

Click - Jerry hangs up.

Mona walks towards the stairs, in a daze.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mona heads to her alarm clock. She resets it -- for 7am.

HOWARD
Who the hell was that?

Mona turns to him with tears in her eyes:

MONA
Howard?

HOWARD
Yes?

MONA
I'M MISS DANIELLE!

LATER - MONA IN BED:

We hear a joyous piano version of *This City May Have Chewed Me Up* as we slowly push in on Mona, too giddy to sleep.

The music continues over the following:

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Mona sitting at her vanity, we can see she's singing to herself. Howard crosses in and out in a towel.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Mona is pouring coffee into a thermos. Her kids pass behind her arguing but we don't hear what they're saying.

INT. BMW - MORNING

Mona drives her car toward rehearsal. She is buzzing.

EXT. THEATER SIDEWALK - MORNING

Mona walks towards the theater and is intercepted by STEF, one of the young women from the audition.

STEF
Hi sweetheart! We met at the audition. I'm Stef!

MONA
Hi Stef, I'm Mona.

STEF
I know who you are, silly! We're all just so thrilled that you could be here. I got Girl!

MONA
I'm sorry?

STEF
I'm playing Girl in 4F! The lead!

An ACTOR passes by, heading into the theater.

ACTOR
You must be Mona! Hi!

MONA
Hi, hello!

STEF
We're gonna have so much fun together. I love your character: "Rent's due!"
(suddenly embraces Mona)
Sorry! I'm a hugger!

MONA
(Muffled in her shoulder)
Oh no, that's fine.

They head towards the theater entrance:

STEF
If I am ever too much, you just let me know! Isn't it such a beautiful morning? I also have an extra banana in case you weren't able to get anything so early- it's good to start the day with some potassium, especially because Jerry pushes us so hard during rehearsals.

Stef holds the door open for Mona who enters the main lobby. Stef runs off.

INT. THEATER LOBBY - DAY

Mona is now alone in the lobby. She holds her banana and looks around like it's the Sistine Chapel. She notices a poster of Serena Cherry as EVITA. It's mesmerizing.

Suddenly, Mona is intercepted by PIOTR, a sweet 18 year old intern, with a hint of a Slavic accent.

PIOTR
Mona, hi, I'm Piotr, I'm cast assistant, which means if you need anything at all - literally anything and I've seen it all - you come to me. I see you already got a banana from Stef.

MONA
Yes, Stef -

PIOTR
Which is great because Jerry pushes so hard during rehearsals - I'm doing a coffee run in about an hour and I'll take your order - but if you need something before that, I'm here to serve.

MONA
Thank you so much, um….?

PIOTR
Piotr.

MONA
Right Piotr. I'll try to get that right.

PIOTR
Don't worry - my name's not important, Mona. Yours is.
(and he's off)

Mona doesn't know where to go. She starts walking towards the doors to the main theater, when Jerry bursts out, mid meeting with his assistant Sybil, walking quickly.

JERRY
He did Saigon in Cleveland - it was a paper mâché helicopter and looked every bit the part!

MONA
(Meekly)
Hi Jerry-

But he hasn't heard her.

JERRY
I would say put him on hold if we lose Renee, but only if he cuts his rate-

SYBIL
Not holding my breath—

Jerry and Sybil laugh, snarky, and disappear into another room.

Mona peeks her head into the theater - it's darkened with a single ghost light on stage. It seems magical. Mona is awed.

STEF (OS)
Mona?

MONA
Ah!

Mona is startled and turns to see Stef in the doorway:

STEF
Did I scare you?

MONA
Yes, but in a good way.

STEF
You are so cute, I feel like we're gonna be sisters. Come with me.

INT. WARDROBE SUITE - DAY

Stef leads Mona through wardrobe. TWISTY, young and hip, greets her.

TWISTY
Hi I'm Twisty, come in, let me take your jacket. Do you want a water?

MONA
Oh, thank you Twisty. Maybe, just to wash down my banana.

TWISTY
Stef, would you mind grabbing Mona a water so she can wash down her banana?

Stef runs to fetch a water.

TWISTY
It's so great to meet you! Miss Danielle is my favorite character in the show. Every time you say "Rent's due", I fall apart. And I'm not a laugher.

MONA
I think it's going to be a real hoot.

Stef returns with the water. Twisty grabs a bright RED JUMPSUIT and holds it up to Mona.

TWISTY
You're gonna look so beautiful in your costume.

MONA
It’s so bright!

TWISTY
We just love that you’re this bright “splash of color”! Would you mind holding it up, so I could see the fit?

Mona holds the red jumpsuit. She looks at herself in the full length mirror. She looks wonderful.

STEF
God, you are gorgeous. You’re like a doll, I swear.

TWISTY
And I think we can finally get her to wear the tool belt. Serena Cherry refused to wear the tool belt! Said it drew attention to her hips.

STEF
She was all ego. Very talented but all ego.

TWISTY
And you’re the opposite!

MONA
Well that’s me! I’ll wear anything!

Twisty grabs a tool belt, dangling with tools and keys, and attaches it to Mona.

MONA
I can’t believe I get to wear a tool belt.

STEF
Of course you get a tool belt. Miss Danielle’s the building super.

TWISTY
Miss Danielle’s a fuckin bad ass.

STEF
Mona’s a fuckin bad ass.

Mona looks at herself in the mirror with the tool belt and the red jumpsuit. Stef and Twisty step aside.

Mona nods: I am A FUCKIN BAD ASS.

EXT. THEATER - NOON

It's Lunch time. The cast and crew are at picnic style tables outside the theater, which allows us to see the beautiful garden behind the theater.

Mona sits with Stef and a bunch of other cast, including TRISH, ZACHARY, SHAUNA and ELI. They speak over each other and Mona is having a hard time following.

Piotr approaches with Mona's lunch.

PIOTR
Mona - I got your salad- they didn't have honey mustard so I threw a fit and got you like 5 different options on the side!

MONA
Well I guess I'll just have to try all five!

PIOTR
(laughing)
"Try all five"! That's funny, Mona.

Piotr exits and Mona refocuses on the table conversation:

ELI
It's all fun and games until you're at a Day's Inn sharing a room with three roller-skating chorus boys.

SHAUNA
Touché!

TRISH
(a fancy voice)
You rest your case, kind sir!

STEF
I feel like we're leaving Mona out! Mona, are we leaving you out?

MONA
Gosh, no! I love listening to you. You're all so fun and energetic.

STEF
You're very sweet Mona, but we don't leave anyone out here.

ZACHARY
We're all here because we've always felt left out.

TRISH
(dramatically)
"No one evah' loved us enough as children!!"

SHAUNA
"My parents didn't get me!"

STEF
Look around you, Mona. Every single person here couldn't get regular life right. We're all outcasts.

MONA
Hmm. Well, I personally think you're all in-casts!

They all crack up, noting how funny that was.

ZACHARY
But it's also funny because we're actually in a cast!

They laugh even more now. Mona sees Trish lean over to Stef:

TRISH
Oh Mona is funny!

STEF
I told you.

TRISH
But she's also real.

We hear a clap clap clap. Jerry is standing atop the stairs-

JERRY
Hi hi hi! No one stop eating. Actually: a few of you stop eating, you know who you are and we already fit you for your costume!
(off laughter)
I want to acknowledge the new member of our family. We lost Serena Cherry last night. This would have been her twelfth show with us. But she decided to leave for a regional production of Annie Get Your Gun.
(MORE)

JERRY (CONT'D)
Well I hope she enjoys making 250 dollars a week and living in Akron.

ELI
(Inside joke)
Now, Dolly, let's not be too hasty!

SHAUNA
(Inside joke)
Take it easy Charlie!

Light chuckles.

JERRY
But we found a great replacement, who I happen to think is going to be a lot better than Serena Cherry! And I think we're gonna need to retake our cast picture with our new MVP, Mona Friedman!

Claps for Mona.

JANE
Rent's due.

CRAIG
Rent's due, Mona!

SEVERAL OTHERS
Rent's due! Rent's due!

Mona stands up, puts her sassy hands on her hips and says:

MONA
Hey, that's my line!

Everyone laughs. Mona. Is. A. Hit.

INT. THEATER - DAY

Piotr, on a ladder, is taking a picture of the cast and crew, posed on the bare stage. We push in on Mona, standing center next to Jerry, smiling like a prom queen.

INT. BMW - NIGHT

Driving home - Mona is in heaven.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Mona's eating dinner with her freakishly tall family. They are talking about something inane and leaving Mona out.

Push in on Mona and on the secret smile growing on her face.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mona's in bed reading her script, intensely.

HOWARD (OS)
(Calling from bathroom)
Mona, you upstairs? We're outta toilet paper. Mona?!

Mona looks to the bathroom and decides to ignore him. She delves back into her script.

INT. KITCHEN - NEXT MORNING

Mona is making a coffee for herself. Her kids enter and berate her for not making breakfast but she exits, unfazed.

INT. GROCERY STORE - MORNING

Mona is in the produce aisle. She grabs a banana for potassium and keeps moving. After a moment, she walks back to the bananas and grabs thirty more.

INT. BMW - MORNING

Mona drives to the theater, the bushel of bananas jauntily sitting in the passenger seat.

INT/EXT. THEATER ENTRANCE - MORNING

Mona walks with her bananas, she notices Stef walking with Trish.

MONA
Hey ladies!
(re: bananas)
I just wanted to return the favor. I brought one for everyone in the cast and crew.
(riffing on the song:)
Yes, I have some bananas!

TRISH AND STEF
(Singing)
You have some bananas today!

They laugh. Trish holds the door open. The ladies enter -

TRISH AND STEF
Seeya Mona!/Have the most wonderful morning, Mones!

MONA
Oh you too, you two!

Piotr runs up to Mona.

PIOTR
Good morning, Mona. Can I take those bananas off your hands?

MONA
Yes, thank you. I brought a banana for everyone. You know how Jerry pushes so hard in rehearsals.

PIOTR
He sure does. I'll put them out on the table. So we're starting with the opening number today, Boy From 26D/Girl in 4F, which of course, you're in. I'll take you to the rehearsal room.

MONA
(rolling her r)
Grácias, Piotr!

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM - DAY

They enter this large rehearsal room with various colored tape on the floor to indicate where the set would go. There are some temp pieces of furniture, door frames, etc.

It's a very lively atmosphere, Marty is tooling around on piano as an electric bassist and drummer tune up.

Stef and Zachary are warming up and three ensemble actors are running their lines and stretching.

Jerry intercepts Mona -

JERRY
Hi love, come with me. You can go Peter, thank you.
(MORE)

JERRY (CONT'D)
(Calling back to Piotr)
A mocha, no milk, when you have it.

PIOTR
Mocha, no milk. Copy.

MONA
This is all just so exciting, Jerry.

JERRY
It is! Now, you'll start upstage right, which means the back of the stage on the left if you're the audience, the right if you're you, which, of course, you are.

Jerry drops her off at a chair at the back of the stage, which is marked off by tape.

JERRY
Are you feeling ready? You come in at the end of the song. Do you know the cue for your line?

MONA
Yes-yes. I do. "Won't you notice me?"

JERRY
"Won't you notice me?" Right. You'll feel it in the music, sweetheart. Break a leg.

MONA
(pretending her leg hurts)
Oh no!

JERRY
You're adorable.
(To everyone:)
Okay everyone, let's start with Act One, Scene One of Nosy Neighbors. Now it is the opening number, so feel the weight of that but without pushing. Everyone ready? Marty?

The actors get into position, Sybil dims the lights. And Marty begins playing a smooth opening riff. The ensemble members do dramatic downstage crosses as they set the scene.

ELI AS HOT DOG VENDOR
New York City.

SHAUNA AS BUSINESS WOMAN
The recent past.

CRAIG AS BUM
An apartment building, just like any other.

The song kicks in to gear as Stef steps downstage.

STEF AS GIRL IN 4F
I've seen you at the dog park,
I've seen you at the mail,
A fleeting glance, a furtive nod,
Then all my senses fail.
We're in a silent movie,
A Cloak and Dagger game,
I know your smell, I know your smile...
I just don't know your name…
You're just "the boy from 26D"
But I notice you
The boy from 26D
Yeah I notice you
The boy from 26D
Won't you notice me?

ZACHARY AS BOY FROM 26D
Well, the girl in 4F
Yeah she always seems frantic.
She's incredibly lonely and a secret romantic.
And I wish I could tell her that
I feel the same
Cause I know her well, I know her smell,
I just don't know her name!
She's the girl 4F
Does she know that I notice her?
The girl in 4F
Does she know that I notice her
The girl in 4F
Does she know? Does she notice me?

Mona watches as they sing about being noticed - we see her feel it personally.

STEF AS GIRL IN 4F

You're just "the boy from 26D"
But I notice you
The boy from 26D
Yeah I notice you
The boy from 26D
Won't you notice me?

ZACHARY AS BOY FROM 26D

She's the girl 4F does she know
that I notice her?
The girl in 4F
Does she know that I notice her
The girl in 4F
Does she know? Does she notice me?

As the music almost finishes, Mona walks down stage center and says:

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
Rent's Due!

Music finishes. Everyone waits for Jerry to comment, but Mona is ecstatic.

MONA
I thought that was just wonderful, hearing the whole thing come together! Stef, you have the most beautiful voice and Zach-

JERRY
Mona. Why are you talking to the actors?

MONA
Um...

Jerry is very serious. A pall falls over the room.

JERRY
I'm the director.

MONA
Oh my goodness, of course, Jerry.

JERRY
Stef, Zachary: I believed almost all of that.

STEF
I was pitchy on "I know your smell."

JERRY
Just a bit, I'm not worried. Mona, can you go back upstage for me? I wanna run that last moment.

MONA
Of course.

JERRY
Marty, take us to the end of the song. Everyone, let's start from the last "Girl in 4F."

Everyone gets into position, but we stay with Mona, who's now a little nervous. Marty cues up the last few lyrics and Mona steps in to do her line:

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
Rent's due.

JERRY
Okay, stop stop stop. I see what the problem is. Zach, Stef, take five but stay close. Mona, go back upstage and Marty cue her in.

Mona is even more nervous as she heads back upstage. Marty plays the last few notes and Mona hits her ending mark again:

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
Rent's due!

JERRY
Hmm.

MONA
I could try-

JERRY
No, no Mona. Just let me think. Marty, take five but don't leave.

MARTY
Copy.

JERRY
Mona. Look at me and say your line.

MONA
Rent's due.

JERRY
Again.

MONA
Rent's due?

JERRY
Say it three times in a row and don't blink.

MONA
Can I blink now before we start?

JERRY
No. Go.

MONA
(Trying not to blink)
Rent's due, rent's due, rent's due.

JERRY
No one move! Sybil: Can we fly in Miss Danielle's tool belt?

SYBIL
Flying in.

Sybil runs out of the room.

MONA
How did Serena Cherry say it?

JERRY
Let's just wait for the belt and see what happens.

They all wait. It's incredibly uncomfortable for Mona. She looks to Stef who mouths "don't worry, hon."

After a moment, Piotr runs in with Jerry's Mocha.

PIOTR
Jerry, your mocha.

JERRY
It's too late for that.

PIOTR
Of course.

Piotr exits as Twisty flies in with the belt. She fastens it to Mona.

JERRY
Okay, we're gonna take it again. Mona, go back upstage and Marty, your break is over, cue her in.

Mona is freaking out inside as she heads up to her mark. Marty plays her in and Mona walks downstage:

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
Rent's due!

Music ends. It's dead silent as we wait for Jerry's decision.

JERRY
Mona: you're going to wear that belt for the rest of the day. Everybody take ten.

EXT. THEATER ALLEY - DAY

Mona bursts out of the theater, hyperventilating and still wearing the tool belt. She sees Stef smoking a cigarette and rushes over.

MONA
Stef. I'm mortified, I'm galled, I'm-I'm just spinning. He hates me.
(Near tears)
Oh Stefanie!

STEF
Mona. Calm down. Do you want a smoke?

MONA
Oh gosh, I couldn't possibly.

STEF
It'll calm your nerves.

MONA
M-M- Maybe I'll just hold one, if you don't mind?

Stef gives Mona a cigarette. Mona holds it like a smoker for the rest of the scene, occasionally bringing it to her mouth.

MONA
I'm just in an absolute tizzy. I've never been so humiliated. I'm awful, I'm just awful. Stef!

STEF
Mona! Stop it. You are not awful. You are wonderful and gorgeous and funny and great in every way.

MONA
Tell that to Jerry.

STEF
Jerry already knows that.

MONA
Is that why he basically tore me a new behind-hole in front of every body?

STEF
Yes! Mona. That's what Jerry does. He's testing you.

MONA
Testing me?

STEF
Of course. He tests all of us.

Mona takes a puff of the unlit cigarette, calming.

MONA
Really?

STEF
That's what rehearsals are for! You want to do everything *wrong* in rehearsal so that you can do everything *right* in front of an audience. Jerry is going to test you and push you and drag you through the shit and the mud and you have to be ready to take those tests and wade through that shit because when you finally get to opening night- Mona when you finally get to opening night and those lights are shining on that gorgeous face of yours, you're going to knock those fuckers on their asses!

Mona sniffle laughs, calming down.

STEF
Mona: You are exactly where you should be. And I am so goddamn proud of you.

Stef stubs out her cigarette and Mona does the same.

STEF
Now gimme a hug, you little freak.

Mona embraces Stef and hugs her super tight.

INT. UPSCALE CHINESE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Mona and Howard with Cassie and Steve. Everyone is talking over each other. Mona's distracted. After a moment of chatter, Mona interrupts:

MONA
Excuse me. (louder) excuse me, everyone. Steve, Howard, excuse me?

Everyone turns to Mona.

MONA
I'm sorry to have interrupted your conversation, I just wanted to mention that you might notice that I'm not my usual self tonight.

CASSIE
Is everything ok, Mona?

MONA
Today was the second day of rehearsal for Nosy Neighbors, the provocative musical I'm doing, and I'm being tested by Jerry the director. I'm being tested and it's my job to pass those tests. I'm being dragged through the shit and the mud it's my job to wade through that shit and mud because on opening night, when those lights are on me, I'm going to shine. In short: I'm exactly where I should be.

There's a weird silence at the table.

Mona nods, satisfied.

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

Mid rehearsal, Trish and Stef on the rehearsal stage.

TRISH AS YOUNG MOM WITH STROLLER
So how do you like the big apple?

STEF AS GIRL IN 4F
Big apple? More like big apple circus. Seems like every guy I meet is a clown.

TRISH AS YOUNG MOM WITH STROLLER
Or a trapeze artist?

STEF AS GIRL IN 4F
If you mean a trapeze CON artist, then I'll have to agree with you.

CUE: NEEDLE IN A HAYSTACK

TRISH AS YOUNG MOM WITH STROLLER
Listen sister. I was born and bred on this little patch of dirt we call the city. And let me give you some advice:
(sung)
Well you seem like a sweet little hayseed
You've come out east and you ain't turnin' back…
Cause I see you're a diamond in the rough
But finding a good guy in town...
Is like a needle in a haaaay stack.

Piano vamps under dialogue:

STEF AS GIRL IN 4F
But you seem to have found true love. After all, you're a new mom.

TRISH AS YOUNG MOM WITH STROLLER
Well, it didn't happen overnight, I'll tell you that much. Listen here:
When I was just a pretty young thing (ha!)
I'd meet a cad but I'd cut 'em some slack.
Then I got wise and changed the agenda….
Cause findin' a good guy in town?

STEF AS GIRL IN 4F
Is like a needle in a hay stack?

TRISH AS YOUNG MOM WITH STROLLER
That's it! You got it.

STEF AS GIRL IN 4F
Every guy in Ohio was friendly….
No rat race to chase 'em down,
A cat and mouse game just wasn't on the table…
But there aren't any gentlemen Buckeyes… In this town!

JERRY
Okay okay okay, stop right there. Marty, cut it.

Everyone is quiet. Mona watches Jerry carefully, terrified he's going to yell.

JERRY
Listen to me: every. single. thing. you are both doing. Is perfect.

Stef and Trish smile, relieved. Mona is shocked/jealous.

JERRY
But I'm just a little worried because I can't seem to find Stef and Trish anywhere! Sybil, did you kidnap Trish and Stef and dump their limp bodies into a trash chute? Because all I saw on stage were Girl In 4F and Young Mom With Stroller. I was transported. That's what the theater can do.
(is he eyeing mona?)
That's what the theater *should* do.
(to the group)
No one cares about the story! No one cares what you say on that stage, they just want to see you FEEL something. It tickles that gross little part of us that wants to spy, that wants to eavesdrop, that wants to drill a hole in our neighbor's bathroom to watch them defecate. THAT is theater. And that's what Trish and Stef were doing.

Jerry eerily eyes Mona, who takes this in.

JERRY
Okay! Let's take it back to- To wherever you want! It's all dynamite!

As they continue to rehearse Needle in Haystack, Piotr taps Mona on the shoulder and whispers:

PIOTR
Mona, you have your one-on-one with Marty for your big song.

MONA
Oh, is that now?

Mona grabs her bag and follows Piotr as they head toward the door.

MONA
Gosh, I'm a nervous wreck.

PIOTR
Don't be. Marty's amazing, he's a big teddy bear.

MONA
Was Serena Cherry a very good singer?

PIOTR
Mona, don't compare yourself to anyone else. *You're* Miss Danielle, it's *your* performance. But yes, Serena is a once-in-a-generation talent.

INT. LOBBY - DAY

They arrive at Marty, sitting behind his piano.

MARTY
There's Miss Danielle!

MONA
Hi Marty, it's such an honor to be able to work with you one on one.

MARTY
You don't have to do all that with me, I'm not Jerry! Now, I got you a tea, it's lemon honey ginger.

Mona turns to Piotr and mouths, "He's amazing!" Piotr winks, "told ya," and exits.

MARTY
I've been hearing such great things about you.

MONA
Oh, have you?

MARTY
Of course, you're part of the family. Now let's hear those pipes.

Marty begins playing.

MARTY
This City May Have Chewed Me Up (But It Hasn't Spit Me Out)! And:

Mona sings in the same way she auditioned, in key but a palpable lack of charisma.

MONA
Twenty-Two, Studio Apartment
Six flights up, a futon on the floor
The rent is cheap 'cause the bathtub's in the kitchen (Ha.)
I wanna leave but somehow I want more

Marty vamps so he can talk with Mona.

MARTY
Mona, you said you used to sing in a choir?

MONA
Yes, til I was thirteen.

MARTY
Great, but remember, you're not in a choir now. You're a character, you're Miss Danielle.

MONA
(same affect)
Twenty-nine, married to a dentist
Local boy, from New York
His parents love me, but he loves the hygienist
And now I'm stuck with a bad pre-nup divorce

MARTY
Try moving around a little bit. Loosen up.

Mona awkwardly moves her arms but her acting remains the same.

MONA
In this city that never sleeps
And keeps me up at night-

MARTY
Miss Danielle!

MONA
And they've tried to kick me outta here
But I still cling on tight
Cause I have been to hell and back
But you'll still hear me tout
That this city may have chewed me up,

MARTY
Come on Choir Girl!

MONA
But it hasn't spit me out...

MARTY
Okay, let's stop there for today. I think I have enough to report back to Jerry.

MONA
What are you going to report?

MARTY
Mona, come on, that's between me and Jerry.

MONA
I'm sorry, Marty, I didn't mean to overstep my boundary.

MARTY
You did nothing of the sort.
(now firmly)
But there is a process.

EXT. THEATER - LUNCHTIME

Mona is sitting amongst her giddy friends at the lunch table, but she is paralyzed and unable to eat.

She is laser focused on Marty, who crosses past Jerry. Mona's heart skips a beat.

STEF
Mona, you okay, sweetie?

MONA
Yes, of course. Just a little distracted. You were amazing in rehearsal, Stef. You too Trish. You were both so wonderful. I felt like I was watching your characters.

Mona returns to spying on Marty as he crosses back towards Jerry! She can't take it. Marty approaches Jerry and pulls him aside. Jerry nods, in a serious way and looks back towards Mona, who quickly averts her eyes.

MONA
Stef! Marty is telling Jerry how awful I was in my one-on-one.

STEF
Honey, they're not talking about you.

MONA
I really think they are.

STEF
You're being paranoid, sweetie.

JERRY CLAPS THREE TIMES:

JERRY
Hi hi hi! I have great news. Everyone can take the rest of the day off except Mona, who's going to be staying late to work with me on the main stage.

Mona's stomach drops.

JERRY
So I guess it's great news for everyone except Mona.

Mona looks to Stef, who seems worried for the first time.

INT. WOMEN'S BATHROOM - DAY

We hear the happy chatter of two actresses washing their hands by the sinks.

We push past them to see, under the stall, Mona is kneeling over a toilet. She waits for the women to leave and then RETCHES--

INT. THEATER - STAGE - DAY

Mona is sitting alone in this vast space, barely breathing.

Jerry finally enters.

JERRY
Mona.

MONA
Yes.

JERRY
Why are you sitting?

MONA
Because I was waiting?

JERRY
Waiting for what?

MONA
Waiting for you?

JERRY
Did I keep you waiting?

MONA
I don't know. I mean, I wasn't blaming you, I was just-

JERRY
Stand up.

Mona stands and Jerry takes her seat.

JERRY
Mona, I'm not gonna sugar coat this because I respect you too much-

MONA
Oh thank you Jerry, I respect you too much too-

JERRY
But it's not going well. And I need to know if I have to make a change.

MONA
Oh Jerry, please don't make a change-

JERRY
Which will be very difficult at this late stage as you're the only other person who auditioned for Miss Danielle.

MONA
I am?

JERRY
Theater is a young person's game, Mona.

MONA
Jerry, please don't make a change, please don't make a change-

JERRY
We're going to do a little exercise. Sybil!

Sybil enters holding a single envelope. She hands it to Jerry.

JERRY
Thank you. Leave the room but not the building.

SYBIL
Copy.

JERRY
Mona. In this envelope is my rent. I want you to walk back five paces and face me. And I want you to get me to give you my rent.

MONA
Is it your rent, Jerry, or are you a character too?

JERRY
I'm me.

MONA
And am I me?

JERRY
No! You're Miss Danielle. You're always Miss Danielle.

MONA
That’s what I thought, I was just a little confused because you said you were playing you-

JERRY
Mona, stop talking. Get my rent.

MONA
Okay.

Mona takes a deep breath and steels herself and approaches Jerry.

MONA
Jerry, hello. I’m Miss Danielle, the building super. Your rent is due.

JERRY
What? What’s going on? I don’t know you!

MONA
I’m Miss Danielle, the building super, I’ve been working in this building for a long time and I’m good at my job and I wear a tool belt and your rent is due.

JERRY
I don’t need to hear your whole life story, Mona.

MONA
Right sorry.

JERRY
Don’t apologize.

MONA
Right. Jerry, the rent’s due.

JERRY
Nope. Not payin it.

MONA
But the rent is due.

JERRY
I don’t really think you want the rent.

MONA
But I do want the rent! The rent is due!

JERRY
Okay, you know what? I want you to stop saying your lines from the script.

MONA
What should I say instead?

JERRY
Anything but the word “Rent” and the word “due.” Come on. Get me to give you this envelope.

MONA
Okay. Jerry, the money’s due.

JERRY
You said “due”.

MONA
Sorry - the rent is needed.

JERRY
You said rent.

MONA
Ach! The money is needed.

JERRY
Good. For what?

MONA
For the building owner.

JERRY
Why do you care about the building owner, Miss Danielle?

MONA
Because he owns the building. And I collect the rent. That’s the way it works. That’s my job.

JERRY
Oh come on Miss Danielle. You don’t really care about the job. What do YOU care about? WHO do you care about?

MONA
Um, uh... my husband. I need the money for my husband.

JERRY
Miss Danielle is divorced.

MONA
Right! My EX husband! I need the money for my EX-

JERRY
No you don't. You don't give a shit about that bastard. He left you high and dry, Miss Danielle.

MONA
He did?

JERRY
He fucked your best friend right behind your back?

MONA
(horrified)
He did?! WHY?!

JERRY
I don't know, Miss Danielle! **IT'S YOUR LIFE!!** WHY DID HE DO THAT? WHY DID HE FUCK HER?!

MONA
I don't know!! It was awful, Jerry!

JERRY
SO WHY DO YOU NEED THE RENT?

MONA
CERTAINLY NOT FOR THAT SNAKE!

JERRY
THEN WHY DO YOU NEED THE MONEY?

MONA
I NEED IT FOR **ME!** I NEED IT TO LIVE!

JERRY
AND WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF YOU LOST YOUR JOB?

MONA
I WOULD FIND ANOTHER ONE!

JERRY
NO YOU WOULDN'T.

MONA
NO I WOULDN'T. I'D LOSE MY MONEY AND THEN MY APARTMENT!

JERRY
AND WHERE WOULD YOU LIVE?

MONA
I DON'T KNOW!

JERRY
HOW WOULD YOU EAT?!

MONA
I WOULD BE HUNGRY, I GUESS, JERRY!

JERRY
WHAT WOULD THAT FEEL LIKE?!

MONA
IT WOULD HURT IN MY STOMACH!

JERRY
WHERE?

MONA
RIGHT HERE AT THE BOTTOM OF MY STOMACH! AND I WOULD CRY, JERRY, BECAUSE IT HURT SO MUCH. I WOULD JUST CRY BECAUSE MY HUSBAND FUCKED MY BEST FRIEND CASSIE BRAVERMAN BEHIND MY BACK AND I STOOD BY AND SAID NOTHING BECAUSE I'M SO STUPID AND QUIET AND WEAK AND NO ONE EVER LISTENS TO ME. AND IF I LOSE MY JOB, I'LL BE OUT ON THE STREET AND I'LL BE HUNGRY, JERRY, AND I'LL CRY AND I'LL MOVE UNDER A BRIDGE -- OH JERRY THIS IS ALL SO TERRIBLE TO THINK ABOUT!!! --

JERRY
KEEP GOING!

MONA
BUT IT HURTS!

JERRY
GOOD! IT SHOULD KILL YOU!

MONA
AND I'LL BE LIVING UNDER A BRIDGE AND I'LL EAT RATS - I'LL COOK RATS ON A FIRE IN A GARBAGE CAN --- AND I'LL SPEND MY DAY HUNTING FOR RATS, SWEET LITTLE RATS, WHO ARE ALSO HUNGRY BUT THEY HAVE DISEASES SO NO ONE LOVES THEM. AND THEY HAVE *PLAGUE*, JERRY, THEY HAVE *PLAGUE* BUT I'LL TRAP THEM AND EAT THEM ANYWAY BECAUSE THE WORLD DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE. AND THEN I'LL GET PLAGUE TOO! I'LL GET PLAGUE TOO AND MY SWEET TINY BODY WILL SLOWLY ROT AND DIE FROM PLAGUE AND HUNGER AND LONELINESS AND TERROR AND GRIEF!
(suddenly steels herself)
AND IT'S ALL BECAUSE OF YOU JERRY. IT'S BECAUSE OF YOU. BECAUSE I ASKED YOU FOR THE GODDAMN RENT AND YOU JUST SAT THERE LIKE AN ANGRY TROLL WHO LORDS YOUR POWER OVER EVERYONE BECAUSE YOU'RE A SAD PATHETIC ASSHOLE AND IF YOU DON'T GIVE ME THAT FUCKING RENT, I WILL FUCKING TRAP YOU AND EAT YOUR STUPID PLAGUE BODY LIMB FROM LIMB. SO YOU GIVE ME THAT RENT. JERRY. YOU GIVE ME THAT FUCKING RENT RIGHT NOW. JERRY YOU MOTHERFUCKING ASSSHIT FUCKERFACE PISSMAN YOU GIVE ME THAT RENT RIGHT NOW BECAUSE THE **MOTHERFUCKING RENT IS MOTHERFUCKING DUE!!!!**

Pause. And then, very simply, Jerry hands Mona the envelope.

INT. MONA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Mona enters her house. She looks like someone coming back from war. She's groggy and spent and can barely stand up. She walks past her family, who are watching TV.

HOWARD
Hey honey, did you make dinner?

MONA
I can't eat.

HOWARD
All right, we'll order in.

Mona heads to the stairs.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mona walks to her bed, goes under the covers in her clothes. She closes her eyes.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

An hour later, Mona wakes up. She is in a complete daze.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Mona walks downstairs.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Mona fills up a glass of water and drinks it over the sink.

She refills her glass and walks toward the stairs. She passes her family, who are eating in the dining room-

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Mona peeks in to see her husband and children wearing lobster bibs and eating a big lobster dinner.

MATTY
Hey Mom, Dad got us lobster!

MAYA
Can you bring us some more melted butter?

MATTY
Yeah, Maya drank the whole thing!

MAYA
I didn't drink it you piece of shit!

MONA
I'm going back to sleep.

Mona walks back to the stairs.

MATTY (OS)
Hey Mom! Dad's letting us drink wine!

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mona walks back to bed and goes under her covers, still fully dressed. She closes her eyes.

EXT. THEATER - STREET - EARLY MORNING

Mona is sleeping in her car outside the theater, her head smushed up against the window.

On the seat next to her is a new huge bushel of bananas.

Mona wakes up. She looks around, unsure of how she got here.

INT. THEATER - MORNING

Mona enters the theater, with a newfound confidence.

She is intercepted by Piotr.

PIOTR
Mona, good morning.

MONA
And to you, Piotr.

PIOTR
You're starting in rehearsal, Jerry wants to run through a few Act 1 scenes before lunch.

MONA
That'll be fine. Act One could use some massaging.
(all business)
And I'm going to need my tool belt and a mocha, no milk.

PIOTR
(surprised by her confidence)
Copy that.

Stef runs over-

STEF
Honey I was thinking about you all night. How'd it go yesterday with Jerry?

MONA
Oh Stef, it was amazing! You should have seen me: I was so intense and screaming so loudly: It was like I was finally, actually, completely Miss Danielle.

ABRUPT CUT TO:

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM - DAY

Cast and crew gearing up to do a scene:

JERRY
Okay, this is Act 2, Scene 1. Miss Danielle visits Barnaby because his toilet's backed up. Whenever you're ready, kids.

Mona, in her tool belt and holding a plunger, knocks on a fake door frame. TODD, playing Barnaby, answers.

TODD AS BARNABY
Hi, thank you for coming on such short notice, Miss Danielle.

Mona acts like she did yesterday with Jerry, screaming and seething and brash, even though the scene is casual.

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
WHAT SEEMS TO BE THE PROBLEM, BARNABY?!

Todd looks out at Jerry, like 'what the fuck was that'?

TODD
Is that how she's gonna— Should I-

JERRY
Everything's fine. Play through it.

TODD
She's shouting in my face.

JERRY
It's part of her process, keep going.

TODD
Okay...
(as Barnaby)
Yeah, my toilet's backed up.

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
I'M REALLY SORRY TO HEAR THAT BARNABY!

TODD AS BARNABY
Well, it's not the only thing that's backed up in here. I haven't been on a date in a year.

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
I'M AFRAID I ONLY FIX TOILETS BARNABY! HA HA!

CUE: ALL BACKED UP

Marty plays the opening chords of ALL BACKED UP.

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
I'LL GIVE IT THE ONCE OVER!!!

Mona exits to the 'bathroom' as Todd begins singing:

TODD AS BARNABY
I gotta be up front:
Everything's backed up!
I gotta be upfront:
All I got's bad luck!
Because in this old building,
Nothin's getting newer
Yeah, this old building:
It smells like a sewer to me…

Mona re-enters:

TODD AS BARNABY
How'd it go Miss Danielle?

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
TOILET'S ALL FIXED, BARNABY.

TODD AS BARNABY
Let me know if you ever find a cure for a broken heart.

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
IF I FIND THE CURE FOR A BROKEN HEART, I WOULDN'T BE WORKIN AT THIS DUMP!

Mona 'exits' Barnaby's apartment. Todd eyes Mona like she's fucking crazy and goes back to the song…

TODD AS BARNABY
I gotta be upfront
Everything's a little tricky.
I'll be blunt:
All I want's a little quickie...

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM - LATER

JERRY
Okay, end of Act One, Miss Danielle spots Girl In 4F at the mail.

STEF AS GIRL IN 4F
(to herself)
The mail is so funny. All these little secrets wrapped up in tiny packages.

Mona enters:

STEF AS GIRL IN 4F
Oh, hey Miss Danielle.

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
HEY 4F!!

Stef is shocked but pushes through to be polite.

STEF AS GIRL IN 4F
I know I'm a few days late on the rent. Can I get the usual "Miss Danielle extension"?

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
IF YOU DON'T GIVE ME THAT RENT, I'M GOING TO BE KICKED OUT OF MY APARTMENT AND I'M GOING TO HAVE TO MOVE ONTO THE STREET AND EAT A RAT.

STEF AS GIRL IN 4F
(what the fuck?)
Uh, Jerry?

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
AND IT'LL ALL BE YOUR FAULT, GIRL IN 4F, ALL YOUR FAULT.

JERRY
Yeah- Mona, I love that you're exploring the scene, but try sticking to the lines.

MONA
Copy that. ‘The Bible’.

JERRY
This show has been produced for twenty years and the writers are dead, so no changes.

MONA
Note received and thank you.

Mona exits the ‘mail area.’ Zachary as Boy from 26D enters, balancing a dozen bowler hats. He drops them by Stef. This is their characters’ meet cute.

ZACHARY AS BOY FROM 26D
Whoops! My bowler hats!

STEF AS GIRL IN 4F
Looks like you bowled a *strike*... right onto the floor!

ZACHARY AS BOY FROM 26D
I hope you don’t mind *sparing* a minute to help me clean up.

STEF AS GIRL IN 4F
Lest they wind up in the *gutter*, you mean?

They both laugh cutely. We push in on Mona watching them, exhilarated to be part of this amazing show.

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM - DAY

Later in rehearsal. Mona, Stef and Zachary are on stage with Jerry, running through the penultimate scene.

ZACHARY AS BOY FROM 26D
But Miss Danielle, this is where we first met! Where I clumsily dropped my hats...

STEF AS GIRL IN 4F
Right into my heart!

ZACHARY AS BOY FROM 26D
Now all we need from you, Miss Danielle, is to sign this contract stating that we can live together.

STEF AS GIRL IN 4F
Our future is in your hands...

Mona grabs the contract and signs it and shouts:

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
LOVE IS LOVE! LET WEDDING BELLS CHIME!

Marty plays The Wedding March as the ensemble enters the stage with benches to make a “church.” It’s a big to-do.

JERRY
(talking over the music)
And this is when our Church set flies in from the rafters - our stained glass wall, our dais, our altar!

CUE: ONE BEDROOM, TWO HEARTS

PRIEST
(singing)
Do you take this girl from 4F to be your wife?
And do you take this boy from 26D for life?

Mona, who’s not in this scene, stands off stage with Jerry, watching the finale and speaking quietly together.

Jerry has a glint in his eye. They both watch the scene:

JERRY
You know, when I first read this scene, I cried.

MONA
Did you?

JERRY
Because you know they need each other. But it’s more than that. You know that the world will be a little bit better if they were together. You know that in some cosmic way, YOUR life will be a little better if these two people found each other.

MONA
That’s beautiful Jerry.

JERRY
And it’s my job to make sure that an audience has that feeling too.
(MORE)

JERRY (CONT'D)
You go through months of meetings, castings, building sets, selling tickets all so that an audience has that same private feeling I first had when I read it. To try to share that secret catch in my throat with an audience, night after night. That's my job.

MONA
Jerry, I think you're doing a wonderful job.

They watch silently as the wedding scene continues:

ZACHARY AS BOY FROM 26D/STEF AS GIRL IN 4F
One bedroom, two hearts.
One bedroom, two hearts.
And it's love-controlled, as we behold the start of something beautiful.

MONA
Hey Jerry?

JERRY
Yes, honey?

MONA
Am I doing a good job now?

JERRY
Not now, sweetie, no.

MONA
I thought you might say that.

JERRY
Right now, you're an open wound, you're a beast. I punctured you and your guts and your blood and your bile are gushing out.

MONA
Oh, Jerry, it doesn't sound good when you put it that way.

JERRY
But I needed to know how far you would go. I needed to know you could lose yourself before you found Miss Danielle. And now we're gonna build you back up, Mona.
(MORE)

JERRY (CONT'D)
You are going to find the reality of Miss Danielle. You are going to think what she thinks, wear what she wears, eat what she eats, shit what she shits. Mona, I knocked you off the goddamn wall and you are lying in pieces all over the ground. But we are going to put Humpty Dumpty back together again. And, Mona, when we do that, you are going to be dynamite, baby!

Mona and Jerry watch the ensemble sing the finale. It's magical.

ENSEMBLE
And it's love-controlled,
as we behold the start of something beautiful...

INT. THEATER LOBBY - NIGHT

Mona, wearing her tool-belt, is packing up for the night when Jerry approaches.

JERRY
Hey, kid.
(Mona turns)
What are you doing tonight?

MONA
My twins are having a graduation party. I should probably head home-

JERRY
Would they miss you if you weren't there?

Mona thinks...

INT. MONA'S BMW - NIGHT

Mona sits shotgun as Jerry drives.

JERRY
When was the last time you were in a real city?

MONA
Well, Jerry, I grew up going into St. Louis every weekend.

JERRY
Did you?

MONA
Oh, yes. My mother and father and I would go out for these fancy dinners in town. Well actually mother and father would go to dinner and I would wait outside for them to finish.

JERRY
They made you wait outside?

MONA
Of course! I was just a child. If they were going to a sporting event or a party or a dinner, I would wait outside for them. But it was great for me because I would get to meet all these wonderful little dogs, who were also waiting for their owners.

Mona smiles at the memory of the dogs, Jerry looks horrified.

EXT. URBAN AREA - NIGHT

Jerry parks on the street of this urban neighborhood. It's a semi-run down area, with liquor stores and tenement houses.

Mona looks around, nervous but excited, still in her tool-belt.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Mona stays close to Jerry as they walk down the block.

JERRY
I want you to feel everything, take in the sounds, the smells.

MONA
It sounds loud and smells like garbage.

JERRY
To *Mona* it sounds loud and smells like garbage. But what does *Miss Danielle* hear?

MONA
She hears -

JERRY
"*I* hear"--

MONA
I hear... I hear the sounds of danger, of life, of activity.

JERRY
Good.

MONA
And I smell garbage put out on the street for garbage day.

JERRY
Keep going.

MONA
(a slight Boston accent)
It's old cans of fish, it's soured milk, it's pickles and knishes and everything that makes this city smell like home.

JERRY
Wonderful, Mona. And I notice you were doing a little accent there?

MONA
Is that okay? I just felt overtaken by the place.

JERRY
Is it a Boston thing?

MONA
I'm not sure.

JERRY
All right, keep it for now.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

They turn the corner onto a residential city block.

JERRY
This is exactly the kind of street from our show. Miss Danielle would come home to one of these ratty apartments every night.
(MORE)

JERRY (CONT'D)
She'd grab the filthiest bottle of booze, shell some peanuts and drink herself into oblivion.

MONA
She's so tragic.

JERRY
"*I'm* so tragic-"

MONA
Right, sorry. "I'm so tragic."

JERRY
Mona, I need you to get into one of these buildings now.

MONA
How the heck am I supposed to do that?

JERRY
Follow me:

Jerry approaches the intercom system, with 30 buttons for the various apartments.

JERRY
Call one of the apartments.

MONA
Which one?

JERRY
You're the building super.

Mona nervously presses a button. She waits. No response.

MONA
They might be at supper.

JERRY
Try another.

Mona tries another button. Nothing.

MONA
It's probably not a good time.

Jerry walks over and presses all 30 buttons at once.

MONA
Jerry!

JERRY
Somebody's gotta be home.

A MAN picks up.

MAN ON INTERCOM
Yeah? Who is it?

Mona is frozen. Jerry mouths: MISS DANIELLE.

MONA
Uh, yes, hi, sorry for bothering you around suppertime but this is Miss Danielle, the building super. I need to get into your apartment.

TENANT (O.S.)
Where's Manny?

Mona looks at Jerry who shrugs, like "make something up!"

MONA
Manny's on vacation. And he's very sick. He has traveller's diarrhea.

Mona winces at her dumb line. Then: the door buzzes.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT

Mona enters this dingy walk-up. She looks around like a kid in a shitty candy store. Jerry follows.

They pass the mailroom area.

MONA
Jerry! It's a real mail room! Like my scene with Stef!

They pass a door:

MONA
And this is where Barnaby would live! So funny!

JERRY
Stay in character, Miss Danielle.

Mona shuts up and heads towards the stairs. Jerry follows. As they walk up the stairs:

MONA
How do we know which apartment he's in?

TENANT (O.S.)
Hello?

Mona looks up to see, at the top floor of the walk-up, an OAFISH MAN sticking his head over the railing.

TENANT
You comin' up?

Mona and Jerry begin trudging up the five flights of stairs.

MOMENTS LATER

Mona arrives at the top of the stairs, exhausted. The tenant is waiting in the hallway.

MONA
Hi, yes, as I mentioned on the intercom, I'm Miss Danielle, the building super.

TENANT
Manny's the building super.

MONA
Manny is very sick on vacation. I already told you that. Now your toilet is severely backed up and I need to use my plunger to fix it.

TENANT
Nothing's wrong with my toilet.

Suddenly, Jerry appears, really out of breath.

TENANT
And who the hell is this?

MONA
This is Jerry, he's my supervisor while Manny is on vacation.

JERRY
How's that toilet lookin' Miss Danielle?

MONA
Not good, I'm afraid.

JERRY
We talkin a code blue?

MONA
Or worse. I might need back up.

TENANT
My toilet's fine! What the hell is this? I'm gonna call Manny--

Mona steps up --

MONA
You can go ahead and ruin Manny's vacation while he's in the hospital or you can let me inside your apartment before you make one wrong flush and your bathroom looks like the bottom of the Hudson River after Labor Day.

The Tenant eyes her and then moves aside, letting her in. As she enters, she looks back to Jerry, who's poker faced.

INT. DINGY APARTMENT - NIGHT

Mona enters this dingy apartment and looks around. She is equal parts terrified and elated as she inspects the place.

She walks into his gross bathroom.

She looks into his toilet which is caked with urine stains. She takes her plunger out and puts it into the bowl. She realizes she's never used a plunger before. She kind of rubs the plunger around the rim of the toilet. She tries on a few Miss Danielle lines:

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
Ooh we got a major clog over here. Might have to replace the big pipe.

As she continues to experiment, she hears Jerry arguing with some guys in the hallway!

JERRY (OS)
Miss Danielle! Miss Danielle!

Mona grabs her plunger and runs back into the hallway to see Jerry standing there with the tenant and another guy (MANNY).

MANNY
Who the fuck are you?

JERRY
Miss Danielle! It's a miracle! Manny's back!

Mona's eyes widen!

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Mona and Jerry rush out of the building, barely catching their breath.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

They turn the corner and hustle down another block.

INT. MONA'S BMW - NIGHT

They speed back to the theater, windows open, wind rustling their hair.

MONA
Jerry I felt like I was going to die in there!

JERRY
Yes, but you didn't! Want a smoke?

MONA
Absolutely.

Jerry takes a cigarette and hands the pack to Mona, who also takes a cigarette.

Jerry lights his own cigarette and holds it out for Mona:

MONA
Oh, no thanks, I'm good.

Jerry doesn't regard this oddity. Mona pretends to smoke throughout the scene.

JERRY
What else did you learn tonight? What did you learn about Miss Danielle?

MONA
It was curious. I noticed that when I was playing Miss Danielle, I could do or say anything and I felt confident. But when I went back to Mona, I felt scared.

JERRY
Very good, keep going.

MONA
It’s like I was wearing a mask, you know? Like a mask of Miss Danielle.

JERRY
And what did the mask of Miss Danielle feel like?

MONA
It felt like... control. It felt like I could do anything, say anything. I felt... useful.

JERRY
And what does the Mona mask feel like?

MONA
Well, Jerry, Mona’s a real person, she’s not a mask.

JERRY
Of course she is. Everyone is.

MONA
Hmm. I guess the Mona mask is...
(a few puffs)
Scared. Scared she’s going to get yelled at. Scared she’s going to say the wrong thing. Scared to tell people how she’s feeling. Scared to tell people that they hurt her so much when they yell at her or ignore her or don’t hug her when she comes home or tell her she did a good job or that she’s a nice friend or that she works hard to make sure everyone around her is happy even when she’s crying inside.

Jerry looks at her.

JERRY
That mask sounds exhausting.

EXT. THEATER ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Jerry pulls up to the theater and they sit there in the car, a calm sweetness in the air.

MONA
So is there a Jerry mask?

JERRY
Of course there is sweetheart.

Jerry winks at her and exits the car.

Mona gets out of the car to move to the driver's seat. She notices that Jerry is walking around to the back of the theater. That's curious.

Mona gets in her car and pulls out. In her rearview, she notices a LIGHT turn on in a space above the theater. Hmm.

EXT. MONA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Mona enters the house, still in her tool-belt. Her kids are having a party, loud and lively. She approaches a teenager:

MONA
(shouting over the music)
Do you know where my children are?

TEENAGER
(shouting over the music)
No!

Mona walks through the house and sees her daughter, Maya, talking to a group of friends. Mona pushes through the group, who all stare at her.

She walks up to her daughter and gives her a big hug.

EXT. PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Mona finds Matty on the porch, laughing and passing a joint to a buddy.

She approaches him and gives him a big hug from behind.

INT. MONA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mona enters her bedroom. Howard is watching a game on the TV. Mona closes her eyes, smells him and asks:

MONA
Do you know my smell?

HOWARD
Huh?

MONA
It’s something from the musical.
Do you know my smell?

HOWARD
(trying to watch tv)
I don’t know. Just take a shower.

Mona calmly walks to her closet.

INT. MONA’S CLOSET - NIGHT

Mona grabs a small duffle from a top shelf. She takes down a few blouses, but they don’t feel right.

She opens drawer and pulls out some jeans and t-shirts.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Mona loads toiletries into her duffle.

She stares at the toilet. She takes the plunger off her tool belt.

Mona swirls her plunger around the toilet, as she did in the dingy apartment, growing more assured.

INT. MONA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Mona descends the stairs with her duffle. The party is still in full swing. She notices some party detritus on a table, including an open pack of cigarettes.

INT. MONA’S BMW - NIGHT

Mona is driving with the window down, smoking an unlit cigarette.

EXT. URBAN AREA - NIGHT

Mona pulls her car into the urban neighborhood from earlier.

She takes two bananas from her bushel and exits the car.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Mona, still in her tool belt and holding the bananas, is walking through this rough area. Unlike earlier, there's an emptier, scarier feeling in the air.

Mona notices a run-down hotel, it's neon light buzzing loudly.

INT. SLEAZY MOTEL - NIGHT

Mona enters the lobby of this flophouse. A gross MAN sits behind a plexiglass booth. She works up the courage and:

MONA
Hello, do you have any rooms available for the night?

MOTEL MAN
The whole night?

MONA
Yes, please.

INT. SLEAZY MOTEL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Mona walks down this creepy hallway, key in hand. She hears unnerving sounds coming from behind the other doors; fighting, sex, pained moaning, etc.

She finds her room.

INT. SLEAZY MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Mona enters her sleazy room. It's a tiny, faded green and yellow space with a simple wire bed, yellowed sheets. It seems like it's out of a 1940's noir.

Mona sits on the bed, assessing her situation.

She hears loud, muffled banging coming from the hallway. A moment of panic overtakes her but she takes a deep breath.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - TWENTY MINUTES LATER

Mona has pushed the bed next to the window, which she's cracked open.

She is smoking (unlit) out the window, going over her script and eating her bananas for dinner.

After a moment, she hears a dripping sound. Drip Drip Drip.

She turns in her bed, trying to ignore it. But it persists. Mona searches for the source of the dripping. She realizes it's coming from the bathroom.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mona enters the bathroom and notices that the sink is leaking. She gets an idea.

Mona retrieves her tool belt and looks for the appropriate tool.

Minutes later, Mona lies under the sink, affixes a wrench to a pipe and twists. The dripping becomes a steady stream.

MONA
Shit-

Mona turns the wrench the other direction. The water returns to dripping.

She finds a different, smaller pipe and chooses a smaller wrench. She twists it and miraculously, the dripping stops.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Mona sleeps soundly in this gross bed.

EXT. MOTEL - MORNING

Mona exits the motel with her suitcase, well rested.

EXT. STREET - MORNING

Mona approaches her parked car. As she nears it, she sees that one of the back windows has been smashed.

There is glass all over the back seat.

She briefly looks at her tool belt, seeing if there's any way to fix this.

Mona gets into her car and sees her radio has been stolen. Her bananas, curiously, have gone untouched.

INT. BMW - MORNING

Mona drives to rehearsal, the broken glass rattling in the back seat.

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM - DAY

The cast and crew are sitting around the rehearsal room. Mona stands off to the side, waiting.

JERRY
We're gonna start today with Miss Danielle's big number. We might have to run it a few times, so let's all settle in and be respectful to the performer. We all know what it feels like to sing our big song, all alone, in front of everyone for the very first time. It's harrowing.

We see the cast is nervous for Mona and expecting the worst. Stef cringes and squeezes Zach's arm.

Marty begins playing the opening chords of "This City May Have Chewed Me Up (But It Hasn't Spit Me Out)". Mona enters holding a suitcase.

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
I'm sick and tired of this godforsaken city. It's time for me to move on, to settle down, live the quiet life. No one would even notice I've gone.

Mona is wonderfully simple and real and assured. Jerry is impressed. He looks to Sybil who raises an eyebrow.

Mona dramatically walks downstage and sets her suitcase down.

Mona begins singing.

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
Twenty-Two, Studio Apartment
Six flights up, a futon on the floor
The rent is cheap 'cause the bathtub's in the kitchen (Ha.)
I wanna leave but somehow I want more...

She is lovely: pure but charismatic, intentional but emotional.

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
Of this city that never sleeps
And keeps me up at night
In my rat-infested grungy hole
Inside this urban blight
And though this broad may cry inside
You'll never see me pout
Cause this city may have chewed me up
But it hasn't spit me out!

Marty cuts the song and everyone bursts into applause.

Mona snaps out of character and looks around the room, freaked out. She looks to Stef who gives her a big thumbs up and then to Jerry who nods, assuringly.

Jerry hushes the applause:

JERRY
Okay, okay, everyone settle down. Just one question: Sybil, did aliens land on earth, smash Mona Friedman's skull with a crowbar and replace her brain with Miss Danielle?

There is some laughter.

JERRY
I believed every second of that. How do you feel sweetheart?

MONA
Um, I don't know. Was I good?

JERRY
No. You were excellent.

MONA
I felt like I didn't know what was happening to me.

Some affectionate chuckles from around the room.

JERRY
Because you gave yourself over to Miss Danielle's reality. You became a vessel for her. Now you'll just keep digging into the truth of who this woman is, keep finding her reality and trust that it's inside of you.

Mona nods.

JERRY
Well, I don't know about anyone else, but I don't think we need to run that number again!

SYBIL
Okay, everyone set up for Act 2, Scene 1, Mona visits Barnaby because his toilet's backed up.

The cast and crew begin setting up for the Barnaby scene.

Stef approaches Mona.

STEF
Can I just give you the biggest hug?
(hugs her tightly)
You are an absolute star, do you know that?

MONA
Oh, stop it 4F, you are!

Stef is briefly startled by Mona calling her 4F.

SYBIL
Okay, we're set for the Barnaby scene. Places, actors!

Mona leaves Stef and sets up at the fake door to make her entrance. She knocks on the door.

Just as we saw last time, Todd, playing Barnaby, answers.

TODD AS BARNABY
Hi, thank you for coming on such short notice, Miss Danielle.

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
What seems to be the problem Barnaby?

TODD AS BARNABY
Yeah, my toilet's backed up.

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
I'm really sorry to hear that, Barnaby.

TODD AS BARNABY
It's not the only thing that's backed up in here. I haven't been on a date in a year.

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
I'm afraid I only fix toilets, Barnaby. Ha ha.

CUE: ALL BACKED UP

Marty plays the opening chords of ALL BACKED UP.

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
I'll give it the once over.

Mona exits to the 'bathroom' as Todd begins singing:

TODD AS BARNABY
I gotta be up front:
Everything's backed up!
I gotta be upfront:
All I got's bad luck!
Because in this old building,
Nothin's getting newer
Yeah, this old building:
It smells like a sewer to me...

Mona re-enters:

TODD AS BARNABY
How'd it go Miss Danielle?

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
Toilet's all fixed, Barnaby.

TODD AS BARNABY
Let me know if you ever find a cure for a broken heart.

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
If I find a cure for a broken heart, I wouldn't be workin--

But Mona suddenly stops talking, something feeling off. The music is still vamping.

MONA
Jerry, I think I need more time in the bathroom.

JERRY
(can't hear her over the music)
What?

The next verse kicks in as Mona runs up to Jerry.

TODD AS BARNABY
I gotta be upfront
Everything's a little tricky.
I'll be blunt:
All I want's a little quickie...

MONA
Jerry, I gotta have more time in that bathroom. It's gonna take me a lot longer to fix that toilet. Just to diagnose the impediment could take hours.

Todd can't focus and stops singing:

TODD
Sorry, is there something wrong?

MONA
Yeah, we're just trying to figure out why I come out of the bathroom so quickly.

TODD
Uh, cause it's in the script?

MONA
It just doesn't feel real for me. I've worked with toilets, they're messy, intricate machines.

TODD
Sorry, I didn't realize we were suddenly doing the show in real time.

JERRY
Okay, why don't we imagine that Miss Danielle takes a quick look at the toilet and realizes that nothing's wrong?

MONA
We could. But Barnaby's a successful entrepreneur. Isn't that going to make him look a little dumb?

TODD
I don't give a shit how it makes me look, I just wanna finish my song.

Jerry claps three times and they all turn to him:

JERRY
Okay, calm down, tomorrow is tech and we open the next day. So I'd like to spend the rest of the day working on the finale. We'll start with Boy and Girl asking Miss Danielle to sign the contract and roll right into it.

The cast ad libs, "Thank you Jerry"--

SYBIL (PRE-LAP)
Act two, scene 7, Mona sweeping the mail room, 4F and 26D enter --

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM - AFTERNOON

Mona is sweeping on stage as Zach and Stef enter:

ZACHARY AS BOY FROM 26D
Miss Danielle! I'm so glad we found you! Can you please sign the contract stating that Girl in 4F and I could live together?

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
(amazing acting)
I just don't know, 26D. If I sign that contract, I could lose my job.

ZACHARY AS BOY FROM 26D
But Miss Danielle, this is where we first met! Where I clumsily dropped my hats...

STEF AS GIRL IN 4F
Right into my heart!

ZACHARY AS BOY FROM 26D
Now all we need from you, Miss Danielle, is to sign this contract stating that we can live together.

STEF AS GIRL FROM 4F
Our future is in your hands...

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
(amazing acting)
Love is love. Let Wedding Bells Chime!

Marty starts playing Wedding March as the ensemble moves in with their benches. But something feels wrong to Mona:

MONA
Jerry, Jerry. I'm so sorry, could we just pause for a second? Marty: take five!

The cast pauses, Marty stops playing.

Mona runs over to Jerry and speaks in hushed tones. Everyone respectfully waits.

MONA
Jerry, I'm just having a little trouble with this scene, I'm so sorry.

JERRY
Don't apologize, but we do have to move into the finale soon. What's going on?

MONA
So I tell 26D that I could lose my job but then two seconds later, I agree to sign the contract. Doesn't that seem strange?

JERRY
How so?

MONA
Jerry, we talked about this. If I lose my job, I'll be out on the street, living under a bridge and eating a small rat. Why do I so quickly agree to something that would ruin my life?

JERRY
Well, I think Miss Danielle real-
(corrects himself)
I think *YOU* realize that these kids have true love and--

MONA
True love or not, it still feels like I'm signing my own death warrant. "Let Wedding Bells chime?" I mean, Jerry, I would never say that.

Mona realizes that everyone is waiting for her. She turns to the ensemble.

MONA
I'm so sorry everyone. I don't mean to hold anything up. I just- 26D, what if you forge my signature on the contract so I have some plausible deniability?

ZACHARY
What the fuck?

Mona runs into the center of the stage -

MONA
Or what if Girl in 4F goes to the owners and gets a notarized letter? This way, everything would be above board-

JERRY
Mona, we're not doing that-

MONA
But Jerry, that's what would really happen. That's what the truth would be. The truth is messy and complicated and doesn't always end with happily ever after! That's *theater* Jerry!

JERRY
Mona, I understand your concern but we cannot change the script.

MONA
Okay. So what are we changing?

Mona looks around the room. No one's on her side.

EXT. THEATER - NIGHT

Mona exits the theater after rehearsal. She's stressed and smoking an unlit cigarette.

She arrives at her car as Stef approaches.

STEF
Got a second?

MONA
Um, yeah, sure.

Stef lights up her own cigarette. They stand against Mona's car.

STEF
You know, I was just thinking about my first show. I was playing Tuptim in King and I. It was another Jerry show and a gorgeous production. But two days before we opened, I was struck with the terrifying thought that I was playing my character entirely wrong.
So I started demanding that the director switch my song with the King's song because I felt my character would have "coveted the throne." And I turned the play upside down, scrambled everything, all because I was just a little nervous. Do you see what I'm getting at here, honey?

MONA
I think I do.

STEF
Good.

MONA
And I agree. We probably shouldn't spend any time together outside the play. Just to maintain the reality of the super-tenant relationship.

Mona stubs her cigarette and gets in her car.

Mona starts her car but looks back to the theater:

She sees the same mysterious light in the space above the theater flick on. She stares at it.

EXT. URBAN AREA - NIGHT

Mona parks her car on the street near the motel. She reaches across to take some bananas but they're brown and gross.

INT. MOTEL - NIGHT

Mona climbs the stairs, holding two gross bananas. She tosses them in the trash.

But she's still hungry. She looks towards the check-in area. Mona approaches the counter.

MONA
Hello, good evening. Do you sell any food here?

MOTEL MAN
Peanuts.

He throws a bag of peanuts onto the counter. Mona points to a scary looking stack of alcohol bottles, labeled "Monkey Blood."

MONA
I'll also take a bottle of the Monkey Blood.

He places it on the counter.

MONA
And a pack of cigarettes.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Mona is back at her motel, shelling and eating her peanuts, swigging the Monkey Blood and pretend smoking out the window.

She's going over her script, frustratedly.

Suddenly, she hears the clanking of tools in the distance.

Mona approaches her door and looks through the peephole:

She sees the hotel's maintenance man, WES, putting his tools and filthy mop bucket back into a closet.

Mona waits for him to leave and then sneaks out of her room.

INT. MOTEL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Mona approaches the Janitor's closet. She makes sure no one's looking and then tries to open it. But it's locked.

Without hesitation, Mona takes the crowbar off her tool belt and pries open the door.

INT. JANITOR'S CLOSET - NIGHT

Mona enters this dirty, greasy, sloppy closet. To her, it is Emerald City. She is awed.

Mona gently presses the arm of the industrial mop bucket like she's touching a Faberge egg.

Mona sees the janitor's boiler suit - rough, greasy and torn. She checks the name on the patch- "Wes."

Then, she spies the holy grail:

Wes' tool belt. It's got everything. It makes her tool belt look like a toy. She stares at it with drunken adoration.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Mona is now fully dressed in Wes' boiler suit and wearing his deluxe tool belt. She is going over her script and drinking and muttering to herself:

MONA
Let wedding bells chime. Let wedding bells chime.

She is frustrated that she still can't find the reality of the line.

Mona hears a buzzing coming from the bathroom. She heads into the bathroom, still clutching her liquor bottle.

A lamp, which is plugged into the wall near the shower, is buzzing.

Mona tightens the bulb but it continues surging. She unplugs the lamp and uses her flashlight to inspect the outlet.

She takes a swig of her liquor.

But now the shower starts dripping. She takes out her big wrench and precariously balances on the shower to tighten the shower head, cradling the flashlight in her neck.

The dripping stops.

Mona returns to the outlet. She notices one of the plugs is a little bent so she uses the wet wrench to straighten out the plug. She plugs the now-wet plug into the wall.

Some sparks fly out at her! She jumps back.

MONA
My Goodness!

She catches her breath and takes a sip of liquor.

She pulls out the plug, inspects it again. When she plugs it back in, the shower head begins SPRAYING water everywhere.

The water hits the outlet and a HUGE FIRE BALL shoots out, blasting Mona in the face!

MONA
AHHH!

Mona is being electrocuted! Her whole body shakes!

EXT. MOTEL - NIGHT

The lights of the entire motel, and its neon sign, go out.

INT. MOTEL - MORNING

The next morning. Mona wakes and we finally get a clear view of her:

Half of her hair has burned off and her eyebrows are missing.

Mona stumbles around the room, a little hungover. She enters the bathroom but we stay outside and hear:

MONA (OS)
(Seeing herself in the mirror)
AHHHHHHH-

EXT. STREET - MORNING

Mona runs to her car. She notices that the other back seat window has been bashed in but there’s no time.

INT. BMW - MORNING

Mona speeds through town, looking crazed.

EXT. THEATER - MORNING

She pulls up to the theater entrance and jumps out of her running car. She opens the theater door - Piotr is there.

MONA
Piotr! You need to tell Jerry that I'm running late for Tech Rehearsal!

PIOTR
My god, Mona! Are you okay?

EXT. SALON - MORNING

Mona pulls up to her old hair salon. She approaches the salon just as CASSIE walks out!

CASSIE
Mona?

MONA
(trying to be normal)
Cassie! Hey girl!

CASSIE
Mona are you okay? What happened to you?

MONA
Oh, just a dumb little accident. You know how clumsy I can be.

CASSIE
Do you need to go to the hospital?

MONA
Oh don't be such a drama queen, Cass, I'm fine! I just need a little zhuzh, you know.

Mona touches her hair and some of it ashes out.

CASSIE
How have you been? I feel like I haven't seen you in a while.

MONA
Yeah, I've just been super busy.

CASSIE
With the musical thing?

MONA
Yeah that, and just busy work, you know. Little fixes, some rewiring, you plug the wrong lamp in and all the power in the hotel goes out. You know.

CASSIE
Sure. Well, it was good to see you.

MONA
You too Cassie! You too! Tell Howard I said hi!

EXT. THEATER ENTRANCE - DAY

Mona walks towards the theater, we follow her from behind as she enters.

INT. THEATER LOBBY - DAY

We follow Mona from behind as Piotr approaches, harried. He clocks her new appearance, which we still haven't seen, but hides his shock.

PIOTR
Mona, thank god. You're just in time for your first cue. They're doing Boy In 26D/Girl from 4F and if we rush back you'll make your entrance. Just follow me.

MONA
Of course, thank you Piotr, I'm so excited to finally be on the stage.

INT. BACKSTAGE / STAGE - DAY

Piotr takes her through the catacombs of backstage.

They arrive in the wings, off stage. From behind Mona, we see, on stage, Zach and Stef singing the end of their song:

STEF AS GIRL IN 4F

You're just "the boy from 26D"
But I notice you
The boy from 26D
Yeah I notice you
The boy from 26D
Won't you notice me?

ZACHARY AS BOY FROM 26D

She's the girl 4F does she know that I notice her?
The girl in 4F
Does she know that I notice her
The girl in 4F
Does she know? Does she notice me?

Mona takes a deep breath and makes her entrance:

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
Rent's due!

The music ends and we finally see Mona: The salon has turned her remaining hair into a pathetic bob and painted fake eyebrows on her face.

The music ends and the actors are staring at her. No one moves. We hear Jerry speak over the 'god-mic'.

JERRY
Okay, hold there. Mona, what the hell happened to you?

MONA
(squinting to find him)
Jerry? Is that you? Where are you?

JERRY
I'm at the back of the house, Mona.

MONA
Do you want me to come back there so we could chat?

JERRY
No, no. Don't come back here. What happened to your face and hair?

MONA
Well, it was all very fortuitous really. Last night, I was doing some handiwork around the building - the wiring is a thousand years old and was shoddily installed - and I burned my hair and eyebrows off, which is what would actually happen to me. Isn't it just great?

STEF
Mona, what building were you in?

JERRY
And what the hell are you wearing? You're supposed to be in costume.

MONA
Well that was the other great thing that happened last night. I was able to pry open the door of a real super's closet and I found this incredible suit. Isn't it just perfect?

JERRY
No, it's not perfect. It's drab and hideous. Miss Danielle is supposed to have a splash of color. That's why we had you in the red jumpsuit.

MONA
Oh, Jerry, I would never wear that thing. It would get sullied on my first job.

JERRY
Fine, moving on. Act 1, Scene 2, on the Bowery.

The stage hands begin moving scenery but Mona stays put:

MONA
And Jer? Do you still think I should still say "Rent's due"? Is that really binding? Wouldn't they get an invoice?

JERRY
Moving on!

Mona walks backstage and Piotr receives her:

PIOTR
I'm going to show you to your dressing room. You have a few minutes to rest before your next cue.

MONA
This is all so exciting.

INT. BACKSTAGE HALLWAYS - DAY

Piotr leads her through various narrow tunnels to arrive at her dressing room - it says “Miss Danielle” on the door.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - DAY

Mona opens the door - it’s a tiny room and there’s a little desk with the traditional vanity mirror. Mona takes in the room and sits down at the mirror. She stares at herself, taking in how she’s changed.

Suddenly, costume designer Twisty enters with Mona’s bright red jumpsuit.

TWISTY
Just dropping off the final costume. Jerry’s so happy with it - Kiki did a marathon tailoring last night. You’re going to look gorgeous.

MONA
Thank you so much sweetheart, but you can take that back with you.

TWISTY
Sorry?

MONA
You see the mistake you’ve made, Twisty, is that you’re aiming for ‘gorgeous’ and I’m aiming for reality.

Twisty stares at her-

SYBIL (PRE-LAP)
Act 1, Scene 3, Miss Danielle spots Girl In 4F at the mail.

INT. STAGE - DAY

It’s later in rehearsal and Stef is in the mail room.

STEF AS GIRL IN 4F
The mail is so funny. All these little secrets wrapped up in tiny packages.

It’s time for Mona’s entrance but she doesn’t appear.

A window on the set of the mail room gets lodged open and Mona climbs through it to make her entrance. She is lugging a large garbage bag.

Stef is disoriented but tries to play through it.

STEF AS GIRL IN 4F
Oh hey, Miss Danielle.

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
Hey 4F.

STEF AS GIRL IN 4F
I know I'm a few days late on the rent. Can I get the usual "Miss Danielle extension"?

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
Of course, hon. Have a great day.

Mona climbs back out through the window. Zachary as Boy from 26D enters, balancing a dozen bowler hats. But Jerry stops them:

JERRY
Okay, pause. Miss Danielle come back on stage.

Mona casually walks back on stage, not through the window.

MONA
Yeah, Jer?

JERRY
Why did you come through a window?

MONA
Well, it's scripted that I enter from the hallway, but I was thinking that this scene probably takes place mid-day when I'd be outside hauling the trash. That's why I brought in the garbage bag.

JERRY
Well I found it very distracting.

MONA
In a good way?

JERRY
No, in a bad way. Keep your original entrance.

MONA
Ugh, fine.

JERRY
Don’t give me lip Mona.

SYBIL (PRE-LAP)
Miss Danielle’s song!

INT. STAGE - LATER

Mona enters to the opening chords of “This City May Have Chewed Me Up.”

Mona begins her song but is singing very quietly:

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
Twenty-Two, Studio Apartment
Six flights up, a futon on the floor
The rent is cheap 'cause the bathtub’s in the kitchen (Ha.)-

JERRY
Can’t hear you!

MONA
I know. I’m marking it.

JERRY
Why?

MONA
Because I’m saving myself for tomorrow, for opening night.

JERRY
But I need to hear it now.

MONA
Sorry, Jer. I can’t do that.
(still singing quietly)
In this city,
That never sleeps
And keeps me up at night...

INT. STAGE - LATER

Mona is now backstage, ready to make an entrance. She’s trying to psyche herself up.

MONA
(to herself)
Let wedding bells chime. Let wedding bells chime.

SYBIL
Okay. Act two, scene 7, Mona sweeping the mail room.

Mona takes a deep breath and enters with a broom. Lights up as Zach and Stef enter:

ZACHARY AS BOY FROM 26D
Miss Danielle! I'm so glad we found you! Can you please sign the contract stating that Girl in 4F and I could live together?

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
I just don't know, 26D. If I sign that contract, I could lose my job.

ZACHARY AS BOY FROM 26D
But Miss Danielle, this is where we first met! Where I clumsily dropped my hats...

STEF AS GIRL IN 4F
Right into my heart!

ZACHARY AS BOY FROM 26D
Now all we need from you, Miss Danielle, is to sign this contract stating that we can live together.

STEF AS GIRL IN 4F
Our future is in your hands...

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
I'm sorry, but I can't do that. I have too much at stake.

JERRY (OS)
That's not your line Miss Danielle!

Mona turns back to Girl and Boy and says:

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
I cannot go back to a life on the streets, I've worked too hard for that.

ZACHARY
Jesus Christ!

JERRY
Say the fucking line, Miss Danielle!

STEF
Mona, please say the line.

Mona takes a deep breath and turns to Stef and Zach:

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
4F, if you can get me a notarized letter from management by tomorrow--

JERRY
Okay, that is it!

MONA
Jerry, I can't say the line!!!

JERRY
You are fucking everything up!

MONA
Really?! Because I feel like I'm the only one who really cares about the reality of this show! Does no one else care about getting this right?!

JERRY
That's it! Everyone out of the theater!

The house lights come on and Jerry walks down to the stage, still speaking into the god-mic, menacing.

JERRY
Everyone out of the theater and everyone off the stage!

People start to clear out of the theater, scared. Mona, Stef and Zach head off stage.

JERRY
Except for you, Miss Danielle. You will not move.

Everyone clears out and Jerry walks to the lip of the stage to berate Mona.

JERRY
I have had it with your bullshit! What the fuck do you think you're doing up there?

Mona is scared silent.

JERRY
We are opening tomorrow night! And you are treating this process like it's some sort of little game for you to play now that your children are leaving you and your husband doesn't even notice you exist!

MONA
Jerry, please, that's so cruel.

JERRY
But it's true! You're pathetic!

MONA
Jerry, Jerry- this whole time, you've been telling me to dig deep, to find the truth of Miss Danielle. So WHY would I sign that contract?! Why would I do such a foolish thing?

JERRY
BECAUSE IT'S IN THE FUCKING SCRIPT, MISS DANIELLE. BECAUSE IT IS IN THE FUCKING SCRIPT. THAT'S WHY YOU DO IT. THAT'S WHY YOU DO ANYTHING ON THAT STAGE. BECAUSE SOMEONE WROTE IT DOWN AND NOW IT IS IN THE FUCKING SCRIPT.

MONA
But Jerry-

JERRY
NO! You don't get to talk anymore.

Jerry starts walking back to the upstairs booth.

JERRY
The only words you will say on that stage are the words that are in the script.

MONA
Come on Jerry-

JERRY
Come on Jerry is not in the script, Miss Danielle! You don't get to say *Come on Jerry* when you're on the stage! Do you understand me?

Mona stammers, panicking and at a loss.

Suddenly, the house lights go off one by one. Boom. Boom. Boom. Boom.

Mona is on stage in the dark, scared.

Then, suddenly, a blinding spotlight hits Mona.

Jerry is controlling it and talking into the god mic. Mona is terrified as she squints into the light.

JERRY
(thundering)
I am your god, do you understand me?

Mona nods, scared.

JERRY
Walk to stage right.

Mona moves to the right, now in darkness.

JERRY
You only exist when I decide you exist!

Jerry shines the light on her.

JERRY
Now stage left! Go! Go Miss Danielle! GO! Run!

She hustles over to stage left, now in the dark.

JERRY
You see? You no longer exist. How does that feel? How does that feel to not exist?

MONA
It feels scary, Jerry!

JERRY
That’s right, it’s fucking scary to not exist, isn’t it?

Throughout the next speech, Jerry narrows the spotlight til it becomes tight on Mona’s face.

JERRY
You have become the worst thing there is in the theater.
(MORE)

JERRY (CONT'D)
You manipulate every one to suit your little whims. You blame the script when you can't figure out what to do. You are a small part of this show but you act like you're the only person who exists, who has needs, who wants to be great. And the worst part about people like you is that you all hide behind the word 'artist.' You call yourself an artist when all you really are is a common schoolyard bully. Now get off my stage.

Spotlight abruptly shuts off on Mona.

INT. BMW - NIGHT

Mona drives back to her hotel, sobbing.

INT. MOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT

Mona is buying her alcohol, peanuts and cigarettes.

INT. SLEAZY MOTEL - NIGHT

Mona enters the sleazy motel. She begins walking upstairs, to her room when she hears some men shouting:

MOTEL MAN
I can't believe this fuckin shit!

MOTEL PLUMBER
Somebody must have been fuckin with the pipes.

MOTEL MAN
Who would do that? Who would fuck with pipes at a motel?!

Mona nears her room and realizes the shouting is coming from her room. The door is ajar and Mona could see that handymen are standing in her flooded room. She hides in the shadows:

MOTEL PLUMBER
An animal, that's who! Whoever did this is an animal!

MOTEL MAN
If I find out who was staying here, I'm gonna fuckin kill 'em.

Mona is petrified and sneaks back downstairs.

MOTEL PLUMBER (OS)
Yeah, and they also stole Wes'
jacket and tool belt!

Mona, who's wearing Wes' full outfit, races out of the motel.

INT. URBAN AREA - NIGHT

She's now on the street, with nowhere to go.

She walks back to her car.

When she arrives at her car, she notices that the back windshield has now been smashed as well.

She's a wreck.

INT. BMW - NIGHT

Mona drives, slugging from the Monkey Blood. The wind is now rushing through her open car.

EXT. MONA'S OLD STREET - NIGHT

Mona drives down her old block, looking at all the fancy houses and the world she's left. She parks the car in front of her house and takes it in, her wheels spinning.

She drives off.

EXT. CHINESE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Mona pulls up to the familiar Chinese restaurant and gets out of the car. She approaches and looks through the restaurant window to see Howard, Cassie and Steve, drinking and laughing.

Mona takes a swig of monkey blood when she hears a quiet whimper.

She looks over her shoulder to see a dog leashed to a pole.

Pull back wide to see Mona, stuck outside the restaurant with a dog, just like in her childhood story.

INT. CHINESE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Mona enters the restaurant, now walking the dog on the leash.

Everyone stares at this crazy woman with a dog as she approaches her friends' table.

MONA
Don't worry - I'm not staying.

Mona swigs the rest of Howard's of drink.

MONA
I just wanted to let you know that you don't have to come to the show tomorrow.

STEVE
What?

HOWARD
Mona, where have you been?

CASSIE
What did I tell you guys?

MONA
The show opens tomorrow but I don't know if I'm gonna be in it so you can just give your tickets away.

STEVE
Mona, we don't have any tickets.

MONA
You don't?

CASSIE
I didn't even know it was on now!

MONA
Howard?

HOWARD
I don't have tickets, Mona.

MONA
What about the kids?

HOWARD
The kids are out of town-

She's gutted, tries to save face:

MONA
Well, good. Good. Because I'm probably not going to be in it anyway!

She stares at them a beat, trying not to cry and also wanting to tell them:

MONA
You're all very exhausting people to me.
And actually you can't come because... it's sold out! The entire run is sold out!

Mona starts heading out, trying to hide her emotions. She turns back to say:

MONA
All three performances are completely sold out!

As she's about to exit, a PATRON stands up:

PATRON
Hey, that's my dog.

Mona hands the guy his dog and walks out, alone and rejected.

INT. BMW - MINUTES LATER

Mona is driving, swigging from the bottle.

INT / EXT. BMW - THEATER - NIGHT

Mona parks at the theater. It's completely empty.

She gets out of her car, opens the backdoor and climbs in:

Mona lays down on the backseat of her car, on top of tons of shattered glass. She gently swipes some of it to the floor and settles in to sleep for the night.

Just as she's about to close her eyes, she notices the light in the space above the theater flick on. She's curious.

EXT. BACK OF THEATER - NIGHT

Mona sneaks around to the back of the theater, where there's a little, shitty door. She easily pries it open.

INT. BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Mona walks around the backstage of the completely darkened theater. It's eerie.

She finds herself in the wings and sees a ghost light on stage - the only source of light.

She approaches the ghost light and stares into it.

She then looks into the house, seeing all the empty, intimidating seats. She shivers at the thought of standing up here, in front of an audience tomorrow.

Mona then hears a very very soft version of her song, This City May Have Chewed Me Up, being played on piano. It almost seems like it's playing inside her head.

She sways to the familiar tune, eyes closed.

But now the song plays a wrong note. She opens her eyes. The song resumes but plays another wrong note and goes back a few bars and begins playing again.

Mona looks around - where is the music coming from? Mona walks backstage and the music increases in volume. She walks towards a ladder and music increases again.

Mona climbs the ladder as the music gets louder.

At the top of the ladder is a scary catwalk. Mona decides to cross the catwalk and as she does, the music feels more present.

At the end of the catwalk she sees a little light protruding under a tiny door in the wall.

She carefully approaches this magic door. She presses on it and it gently opens and Mona sees inside the door:

INT. STAGE ATTIC - NIGHT

It looks like a very simple apartment has been set up in this cramped attic. She looks around the room - a bed, a hot plate, a rickety little shower over a simple basin....

...And JERRY, his back to us, playing an old piano.

Mona crawls through the tiny door and stands timidly over him as he softly plays her song.

JERRY
You found me.

MONA
I didn't have anywhere else to go.

JERRY
None of us did.

MONA
Do you live here?

JERRY
This is the only place I can live, Mona.

MONA
I understand.

JERRY
I remember your audition. I remember hating you.

MONA
Jerry.

JERRY
I remember you accosting me in the parking lot, demanding to know why we didn't call you back.

MONA
I'm sorry I did that.

JERRY
And I remember seeing you rehearse. Seeing how mediocre you were, seeing how out of place you were, seeing how arrogant you were to think you could stand on that stage without having ever done a show in your life. And the more I watched you, the more I hated you.

MONA
Jerry, that's not very nice to say.

JERRY
And I tortured you and I broke you down and I felt nothing for you. And I didn't know why. I didn't know why until tonight.
(beat)
You know, I used to be an actor.

MONA
I didn't know that, Jerry.

JERRY
I played Matt in The Fantasticks in the 80s, I toured with Pal Joey. And then I got older and things got harder and roles got smaller and I gave up.

MONA
I'm sorry to hear that.

JERRY
So when you walked into that audition, with no experience and expected to be in the show? When you stayed in the show even though I was tormenting you, even though you didn't belong, even though you were completely lifeless on stage? When you decided to ruin your life to understand your thankless, tertiary character?
Mona, when I saw you up there tonight, seeing how much you cared, fighting me tooth and nail to make sure every moment on that stage felt real and special and justified... I just thought, "I wish that was me."

MONA
But Jerry, you're the director. You've taught me everything. We all respect you so much.

JERRY
Yeah, but I'll never be up there, with you. That's where everyone really wants to be, Mona. Center stage.

Mona nods, understanding the weight of Jerry's emotions.

MONA
Jerry?

JERRY
Yes, honey?

MONA
Could we just talk about the ending scene? About me signing the contract? Just one more time?

Jerry gently turns to her.

JERRY
No. We don't need to talk about anything. We open tomorrow. My job is done. You'll do what you need to do.

INT. BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Mona walks backstage. She is exhausted. She finds her dressing room.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Mona enters her dressing room and stares at her red jumpsuit. She touches it gently, thinking very hard.

INT/EXT. THEATER - THE NEXT NIGHT

There is a shift to a lighter, more straightforward tone as we see a montage of all the people who work on the show quietly behind the scenes.

-A young woman stands on a ladder under the marquee, putting up the letters to spell, "OPENING NIGHT."

-Someone pops popcorn from a machine behind the concession stand.

-It is now nighttime and the audience is filing in. We see them get their tickets, buy snacks, enter the theater and take their seats. There's a wonderful buzz in the air.

INT. THEATER - OPENING OF THE SHOW - NIGHT

The lights in the theater go dark...

Marty enters and walks to the pit. He receives a light applause and politely nods.

Now we hear the opening chords of the musical. The ensemble members do their dramatic downstage crosses:

ELI AS HOT DOG VENDOR
New York City.

SHAUNA AS BUSINESS WOMAN
The recent past.

CRAIG AS BUM
An apartment building like any other.

The song kicks in to gear as Stef steps downstage and sings.

STEF AS GIRL IN 4F
I've seen you at the dog park...

We are viewing the show from the audience, who are just enthralled.

STEF AS GIRL IN 4F
The boy from 26D
Yeah I notice you
The boy from 26D
Won't you notice me?

ZACHARY AS BOY FROM 26D
The girl in 4F
Does she know that I notice her?
The girl in 4F
Does she know? Does she notice me?

As the music almost finishes, Mona enters...

She is wearing her red jumpsuit, but she has clearly distressed it - it's torn and dirtied and real. She walks to her spot and says:

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
Your invoices are in the mail. But while I have you here: Rent's due!

Mona has found a way to satisfy the show's and her own needs.

Marty plays the final chords and the audience applauds like crazy. Mona is agog, a new feeling for her.

INT. THEATER -"STRANGERS"- LATER IN THE SHOW

Shauna and Todd are singing an anthemic song, *Aren't We Still Strangers?* The audience is rapt.

SHAUNA
A stranger's a person you pass on the street,
The prickly kind you avoid!

TODD AS BARNABY
A stranger's a person you just have to meet,
So why does she seem paranoid?

SHAUNA
And isn't it strange,
How time has rearranged us,
Though you're in my bed,
Aren't we still strangers?

TODD AS BARNABY
And isn't it great,
How time has rearranged us,
Cause I'm in your bed,
And we're not strangers anymore!

INT. THEATER - "BLACKOUT" - LATER IN THE SHOW

The full ensemble is doing a big musical number called "Blackout", which is about a Blackout in the apartment building. The only light comes from the flashlights. It's styled and fun:

ENSEMBLE
A Blackout,
A Blackout,
A New York City Blackout.
Get some candles!
It's widespread.

ELI AS IRRITATED TENANT
Would someone please call damn Con Ed?!

ENSEMBLE
A Blackout,
A Blackout!
There's secrets in a blackout.
With truths revealed and truths untold...

ELI AS IRRITATED TENANT
Just turn 'em on, it's getting old!

The audience is laughing!

INT. THEATER - "MAIL ROOM" - LATER IN THE SHOW

It's the scene in the mail room with Stef:

STEF AS GIRL IN 4F
The mail is so funny. All these little secrets wrapped up in tiny packages.

Mona enters the stage from the hallway, but she's dragging the garbage bag.

STEF AS GIRL IN 4F
Oh hey, Miss Danielle.

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
Hey 4F.

STEF AS GIRL IN 4F
I know I'm a few days late on the rent. Can I get the usual "Miss Danielle extension"?

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
Of course, hon. Have a great day.

Mona walks to the window, opens it and tosses the garbage bag out the window. Then she walks offstage, passing Zach with his bowler hats.

INT. THEATER - "ALL BACKED UP" - LATER IN THE SHOW

It's Mona's scene with Barnaby, who's mid song:

TODD AS BARNABY
Because in this old building,
Nothing's gettin newer,
Yeah, this old building,
It smells like a sewer to me...

Mona enters:

TODD AS BARNABY
How'd it go Miss Danielle?

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
Toilet's all fixed, Barnaby. There was actually nothing wrong with it but it makes sense that you wouldn't know that because you spend so much time as a successful entrepreneur.

Todd rolls his eyes but plows ahead:

TODD AS BARNABY
Let me know if you ever find a cure for a broken heart.

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
If I find a cure for a broken heart, I wouldn't be workin in this dump!

Mona's joke kills!

INT. THEATER - "THIS CITY" - LATER IN THE SHOW

It’s Mona’s big song, she is bursting with energy. It’s an astounding performance! She has mucus running down her nose, like she’s been crying during it.

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
This city may have chewed me up,
It may have chewed me,
Yes the city may have chewed me up,
But it hasn’t spit me-
I’ve been trying to leave for years,
But I’ve been caught in a stop loss.
Cause life handed me a big rotten apple,
But I made rotten apple,
Made big rotten apple sauce!
(spoken)
Oh who am I kidding. For all it’s craziness, I belong to this crazy city. And this city’s just crazy enough to belong to me!
And the city that never sleeps is beautiful at night!
And you could take the fight out of the dog,
But not this dog out of the fight!
And I’ll stay here forever more
And you will hear me shout
That this city may have chewed me up…
But it hasn’t spit me out!

The audience bursts into applause. Mona is out of breath and drenched in sweat.

She walks offstage, catching her breath.

Stef steps up to Mona, gently grabbing her hand.

STEF
How do you feel honey?

MONA
Like I can’t remember anything that just happened.

STEF
Isn’t that great?

Mona nods. Stef squeezes Mona’s hand -

STEF
The wedding scene's coming up.

MONA
I know.

STEF
Are you gonna say the line?
(Mona can't respond)
Your line is the cue for the wedding scene. If you don't say the line, we can't do the scene.

Mona nods, she understands.

STEF
And I love that scene.

SYBIL (OS)
Places for the big finale. Miss Danielle sweeping the mail room-

STEF
Okay - it's places. I love you.

Stef darts off.

SYBIL (OS)
Cue lights! Enter Miss Danielle!

Sybil hands her a broom and Mona steels herself and heads onstage:

When the applause dies down, Mona starts sweeping.

Stef and Zach enter. It's the big scene!

ZACHARY AS BOY FROM 26D
Miss Danielle! I'm so glad we found you! Can you please sign the contract stating that Girl in 4F and I could live together?

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
I just don't know, 26D. If I sign that contract, I could lose my job.

ZACHARY AS BOY FROM 26D
But Miss Danielle, this is where we first met! Where I clumsily dropped my hats...

STEF AS GIRL IN 4F
Right into my heart!

ZACHARY AS BOY FROM 26D
Now all we need from you, Miss Danielle, is to sign this contract stating that we can live together.

STEF AS GIRL IN 4F
Our future is in your hands...

Mona is frozen. A long pause. *Will she or won't she say the line?*

We suddenly cut out from the POV of the audience and onto the stage. Mona looks woozy, exhausted and soaked in sweat. She looks at Zach, who eyes her, begging her to say the line.

She looks at Stef, who winks back at her, like "Whatever you do is okay, my love."

ZACHARY AS BOY FROM 26D
Our future is in YOUR HANDS, Miss Danielle.

Mona looks like she's going to faint. She suddenly turns to them and says:

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
I'm just a small part of this building. Everyone who lives here has their own story, even if they never tell it to you.

She turns to the audience and says:

MONA AS MISS DANIELLE
Love is love! Let Wedding Bells Chime.

AND THEN SHE FAINTS ON STAGE!

The audience stands up and applauds, thinking it was just part of this amazing show.

Under the applause, Zach and Stef run to her.

ZACHARY
Jesus, Mona? Mona!

STEF
Mona! Are you okay? Mona wake up!

Wedding March begins to play and the big church set begins to descend as Zach and Stef drag Mona off stage.

They drag Mona to the wings as the show continues on stage and the ensemble enters holding pews.

Mona stirs awake, very groggy and out of it.

STEF
Are you okay?
(calls out)
Piotr! Sybil! Help!

Piotr runs over with a water and forces the straw in her mouth!

PIOTR
(to Zach/Stef)
You go back on stage. I got this!

Stef kisses Mona on the head.

STEF
You're a star!

Sybil runs over hurriedly peeling an orange.

SYBIL
Mona! You look so pale. When was the last time you ate anything?

MONA
(groggily)
I've only had peanuts and Monkey Blood for the past few days.

SYBIL
Don't worry. We're gonna get you some real food, okay?

MONA
Okay.

SYBIL
Come here, sweetheart.

Piotr and Sybil cradle Mona on the floor as the show continues on stage. It's quiet for a moment. And then:

SERENA CHERRY
Mona.

Mona looks around for the voice, Sybil and Piotr don't hear it.

SERENA CHERRY
Mona. Look up.

Mona looks up. Serena Cherry is above her, glowing, almost an apparition.

MONA
Serena Cherry?

SERENA CHERRY
Yes, Mona it's me. You were superb out there tonight.

MONA
I was?

SERENA CHERRY
I believed every single second.

MONA
You did?

Mona wants to cry - it's all so overwhelming.

SERENA CHERRY
You did it Mona. You really did it. WELCOME HOME SWEETHEART!

Mona is weeping. She has never felt so warm, so happy, so loved, so safe...

She looks to the stage to see the ensemble dancing around Stef, the wedding scene that Mona allowed to happen:

ENSEMBLE
And it's love controlled as you behold the start
Of something beautiful...
Love controlled as you behold the start...
And we notice you!

We pull back on the image:

Piotr and Sybil hold Mona, whose body is draped over them. Serena peacefully keeps watch.

It looks like Michelangelo's Pieta. BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. SMALL APARTMENT - DAY

Close on a poster of NOSY NEIGHBORS. Someone crosses in front of it.

We pull back to see that we're in a very dated, small apartment.

This is Mona's new place and a far cry from her stylish suburban home. It is clear she lives alone.

Mona enters the tiny kitchen, which hasn't been updated in 30 years. She looks healthy, her hair and eyebrows have grown back in and she has a nice pep in her step as she makes a tea in an old kettle. She is humming a tune as she crosses in and out...

EXT. MONA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Mona, holding a thermos, descends the outside staircase of her rickety apartment building. She is holding her sheet music.

EXT. BUSY STREET - DAY

Mona walks down the sidewalk of a busy street.

EXT. THEATER - STREET - DAY

Mona walks towards the theater. It seems crowded today.

INT. THEATER LOBBY - DAY

Mona enters the lobby of the theater. Just like our opening scene, it's the day of an audition. Young people stretch and do scales, run through their lines.

Mona walks to a chair in the corner and takes a seat, calm and focused.

SYBIL
Mona Friedman. You're up.

Mona nods to Sybil and stands up.

INT. STAGE - DAY

And we end where we began, inside the theater, on stage.

Mona stands, center stage. She looks to Marty, on piano, and nods professionally. Then faces front:

MONA
Hi, I’m Mona Friedman, auditioning for the role of Aunt Suzanne.

Cut to a close up of Jerry, watching her from the audience:

JERRY
Whenever you’re ready.

Marty’s music starts...

Mona takes a deep breath... And we CUT TO BLACK.