

OPENING: THE ORIGIN OF MUSIC

(Darkness. From the darkness, we hear humans from the dawn of time - scared, alone in the night. They use sound to keep others away – grunts, roars, yells. Then, one person does something amazing – he/she makes an attractive sound. He/she sings to sooth the night fears. The others like it. They gather around. They join in. The first community is formed as a chord is hit.

The lights rise on the company, each with a light in their hand, as the cacophony begins – an open testing of notes and harmonies, free flowing wherever it goes.)

MATTHEW:

Greek mythology tells us that Hermes stole fifty of Apollo’s sheep. When Apollo found out, to placate him, Hermes strung three strings across a tortoise’s shell, creating the first lyre. Its sound was so pleasing to Apollo that he traded his herd to Hermes for it. He cut a row of reeds into pan pipes, and the god’s made it for the first time.

SHAUNA:

Indian mythology claims it was brought to the Earth from Gandharva Desh, a place of celestial beings. Others believe Indian music came from the Samaveda, an ancient *Sanskrit* text. It talked of seven modes of music, with the same murchana, or modulations, as the Greeks.

KYLE:

In ancient China, Ling Lun heard 6 male phoenixes singing with 6 females. He cut stalks of bamboo to the pitches that matched these twelve birds, thus creating the twelve note system, in perfect balance with the yin and yang.

LYDIA:

The bible credits Jubal, descendent of Cain, as creating its rules, and with being the “forerunner of those who play the harp and the flute.”

ALISON:

Pythagoras wrote that there were twelve tones created by the motion of the celestial spheres, inaudible to man. He devised the harmonic ratios between pitches, and each specific ratio represented a relationship to the harmonic spheres that orbited the Earth.

FRANCK:

Others claim that it came from the whistling of reeds and the running of water. It has been organized, examined, reworked, codified, and deconstructed for over four thousand years.

SHAUNA:

But why does music exist? Why do we have this ability to sing? To built instruments? To create order to harmony?

MATTHEW:

Modern scientists theorize that songs served an evolutionary purpose: to sooth our nerves, prepare us for battle, attract the best mate, or even to just remember simple facts.

ALISON:

Others have shown that brain chemistry changes when you listen to different types of music.

KYLE:

Gift from heaven or evolutionary trump card? Who's to say?

LYDIA:

But music is a part of us. It was there as we opened our ears the first time and listened to the world around us.

FRANCK:

And it is there when we listen inwards. My name is Frankie Juste.

MATTHEW:

My name is Matthew Ellis Murphy.

SHAUNA:

My name is Shauna Miles.

KYLE:

My name is Kyle Schaefer.

LYDIA:

My name is Lydia de Medeiros.

ALISON:

My name is Ali Scaramella.

FRANCK:

These are our stories. This is our music.

(The CAST returns to the cacophony and begin to move in the space.)

THE STORY OF FRANCK

(FRANCK emerges from the cacophony singing “Stand By Me” by Ben E. King.)

FRANCK:

“When the night has come, and the land is dark
And the moon is the only light we will see
No, I won't be afraid, oh, I won't be afraid
Just as long as you stand, stand by me”

I was four years old when I heard Ben E. King's *Stand By Me* for the first time. It was the first song I clearly remember liking, and liking it because I liked it, not because someone had influenced me to like it. I guess it was the first time I was my own person, despite the pressure to be something else.

I am first generation Haitian American. I was born in L.A. – Dad's a doctor and my Mom's a nurse – but when my parents split, my mom moved us back east to Brooklyn. We eventually settled in Canarsie.

(FRANCK is surrounded by his family. They sing “Stand By Me.”)

I've got a big family, and almost all girls. I'm talking hella-girls. Four sisters: Shirley, Ashley, Katya in the middle, and Destiny's the youngest. And dozens of cousins: Theree, Valerie, Jenny and Jessie, Joanne, Nola, Cassie, Miriam, Sabrina, Christina . . .

LYDIA:

Dimex.

FRANCK:

Dimex. Mad girls. I was the first born American son in the family, so I got special treatment. I didn't have to walk for myself until I was six. Not really. But there was no reason why I was the only kid with BOTH a Sega Genesis and a Super Nintendo.

And my full name is Franck Maxim Juste Jr. My dad is Franck, so to the family, I'm Max. As my dad says:

DAD:

Max comes from the Latin: Maximus. Meaning great. Because I know you're going to do great things.

FRANCK:

And that comes with a certain pressure.

When I was in eighth grade, my friends and I were excited to finally see the new music video by the Wu Tang Clan, *Triumph*. My buddy Amro, a little red haired Egyptian kid from down the block, and I sat down together to check it out.

*(FRANCK and his friend AMRO, a little red haired Egyptian boy, sit watching the Wu Tang's "Triumph."
We see it acted out.)*

INSPECTAH DECK:

"I bomb atomically, Socrates' philosophies
and hypothesis can't define how I be droppin these
mockeries, lyrically perform armed robbery
Flee with the lottery, possibly they spotted me
Battle-scarred shogun, explosion when my pen hits
tremendous, ultra-violet shine blind forensics"

FRANCK:

(Over top of the rap.)
Yo Amro, you see this? This is sick!

AMRO:

Yeah man, this is awesome!

FRANCK:

Growing up in Brooklyn, it was easy to love rap music. It was everywhere – a product of ingenuity born on my home streets. Hip hop became a large part of my life for a number of years.

And soon enough, that song was our rally cry. My friends and I would stand in the hallway like we were our own rap crew, pretending we were the Wu Tang Clan.

Wu-

FRIENDS:

Tang!

(They chant back and forth.)

FRANCK:

Teachers looked at us like we nuts and told us to shut up. We were honors students talking smack, throwing up W's and rapping in the hallway.

"As the world turns, I spread like germs
Bless the globe with the pestilence, the hard-headed never learn
It's my testament to those burned
Play my position in the game of life, standin firm
on foreign land, jump the gun out the fryin pan, into the fire

Transform into the Ghost rider, a six-pack
and (A Streetcar Named Desire), who got my back?"

All around us was this prevailing image of men as hyper-masculine macho womanizers. Not just in the media; at home too. My dad has children from three different women. And so I emulated that, in my own way. Hell, I played football in high school, of course I fell into it. I poked fun at the weak kid in gym class. I drew graffiti on walls. I stole forties out of the corner store to drink with my friends. I got in fights.

My mom used to chastise me:

MOM:

I don't understand why you're so rebellious.

FRANCK:

I love my mom, but back in the day, she could drive me nuts. She ate straight out of the pan like it was a plate, using her hands.

MOM:

Why dirty a dish?

FRANCK:

She bought 5-gallon water cooler jugs but had no water cooler.

MOM:

We've got plenty of water, don't we?

FRANCK:

She kept a random phone receiver in the utility closet.

MOM:

You never know when you might need it!

FRANCK:

So we had our issues. And I was staying out late most nights with my friends. I was doing typical teenage shit: I mean, I could have been a worse kid, I was just being angsty without an outlet. But my mom, fed up, sent me to live with my Uncle Lionel in Philadelphia.

(STUDENT plays "Crash" by Dave Matthews. UNCLE LIONEL and CHRISTIAN appear.)

STUDENT:

"You've got your ball, you've got your chain

Tied to me, tied up so well . . . ”

Philly fucking sucked. I went to the strangest *Dawson’s Creek* style high school with this mix of middle class yuppies and down bottom trailer trash kids. I was surrounded by prep boys who would count their crack vials behind their math books before hitting the streets. I had no means of getting around, nothing to do. I was trying to learn - of all songs - *Crash* by Dave Matthews on the guitar when the World Trade Center was attacked. And worst of all, things were really rough with my uncle Lionel.

LIONEL:

Quit being a sissy and come on already.

FRANCK:

Lionel was the godfather to almost every child in my family but me. He was an engineer for Boeing, and he’d actually turned down several promotions to have time for his family. But when I moved in, he was going through a stressful divorce. And he turned out to be hyper-macho guy we were always trying to emulate. He showed me all the reasons never to become that kind of man. He told me on my birthday:

LIONEL:

To everyone else, your birthday is just another day, so you should stop caring.

FRANCK:

He forced me to take out my earrings and took away all my hats. And he used to call me a sissy about everything. And there was my cousin Christian, his stepson:

CHRISTIAN:

Max, wanna play Soccer Middle School?

FRANCK

Christian was mildly retarded, and obviously going to turn out to be gay, and my uncle couldn’t show a little sensitivity in how he treated either of us.

(FRANCK’S FRIENDS reappear.)

Monday through Friday were the interim periods. I waited for the weekends when Lionel would drive us up to New York. I’d pop on my headphones and ignore him until we arrived and I could see my friends. I’d go to Amro’s across the street and play playstation, go to the movies, or just skate around town. It was a relief!

MOM:

Oo, oo, Max!

FRANCK:

But my mom would hate that I would go out with them. And my mom, she can send you on a first class guilt trip.

A year or two before I went to Philly, I fell into theater. It started with *Grease*. After that, my teacher would always pull me aside a few days before the audition:

TEACHER:

Ok the auditions are Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. You come *here*. Got that?

FRANCK:

And I would go. And I would get cast. And by the time I was sixteen, I was bit.

And living in Philly, under the watchful eyes of Momma Bear and Uncle Lionel, my *only* outlet was theater. I took my first performing arts class at Chichester High. And I was preparing to audition for *Camelot*. I was ready to wreck that shit like the weak kid in gym class.

But my parents . . .

(*COUNSELOR DEMASILLA appears.*)

DEMASILLA:

Franck Juste, please report to my office.

FRANCK:

My mom, she was visiting Philly when she found out I was auditioning for the school play. She ordered my guidance counselor to keep me from auditioning. That was the only joy I could have had in that place and my Mom and Lionel were taking that away from me? I came home that day and launched an all-out-assault on both of them. I had never before used so many expletives on family members in my whole life.

MOM:

We brought you to Philly because you were acting up. You don't deserve to be in any school play!

LIONEL:

What are you going to do with acting any way? That's not a career, it's a hobby.

FRANCK:

So I was stuck. In Philly. With no outlet. How was I supposed to *not* act out? But I didn't. Instead, I wrote poetry and I buried myself in music.

(*BRENDAN, the lead singer of Incubus, sings their song "Make Yourself".*)

I had worn Incubus' *Make Yourself* CD into nothingness listening to it over and over again to keep sane. And that night, I pumped it as loud as the speakers would go, as I soaked in a bath trying to forget my anger.

(Franck is relaxing in a bathtub, but as the song builds, he gets up and joins in.)

BRENDAN/FRANCK:

“If you let them make you, they'll make you Paper-Mache
At a distance you're strong, until the wind comes
Then you'll crumble and blow away.
If you let him fuck you there will be no foreplay.
Rest assured, They'll screw you complete, Until your ass is blue and grey!
You should make amends with you,
If only for better health.
But if you really want to live,
Why not try, and Make yourself?
Make yourself!”

FRANCK:

And as I let loose, I didn't realize that my cousins were locked out downstairs, banging on the door to get in. Lionel and I ended up fighting again.

LIONEL:

That's it. This isn't gonna work. Call your mom, you're out of here now, or something is gonna happen. Either you'll be in jail or I will.

FRANCK:

He claimed to my cousins that I had run out. He tried to convince her that all I needed was a good spanking. Like I had the wherewithal to take off on my own in Philly? And like I'd let myself be spanked at 16? I was done. I worked it out with my school to take my finals early, and I got the hell out of town.

That year in Philly sucked. But it showed me a lot about who I wanted to be and what I wanted to do.

A few years later, two actors I met on the subway hooked me up with a teaching artist gig. I went from making \$5.15 an hour folding shirts to making \$35 an hour, playing a boy named David whose stepfather was abusive.

And every week we'd enter a different high school or middle school, where kids were dealing with just what I dealt with. I've always thought art isn't about education or entertainment. It's about enrichment. Here were all these young boys of color looking for a male role model, who'd seen all these blueprints of manhood. I was still close enough to their age to understand that, and I had a chance to help them figure it out.

My uncle Lionel and I are pretty cool now. I know he had the best intentions; his methods were just messed up. He took on too much responsibility. And my mom, I really do love her. But she still doesn't understand the choices I've made. Neither does my dad. Just last year, he laid out my whole future on a long car ride from Long Island:

DAD:

You can finish your degree and then you can take your LSAT's. And your cousins, they can help you. You'll go to law school, and you can get married while you're there, and when you get out, your cousins can hire you at their firm. It'll be perfect!

FRANCK:

And I don't see much of the old friends any more:

AMRO:

““I bomb atomically, Socrates' philosophies
and hypothesis can't define how I be droppin these
mockeries, lyrically perform armed robbery
Flee with the lottery, possibly they spotted me
Battle-scarred shogun, explosion when my pen hits
tremendous, ultra-violet shine blind forensics”

FRANCK:

I still see Amro. But the others, they went down paths I never wanted to take – drugs, crime, lots of things. They never really grew up. And don't get me wrong, I've very much a work in progress, and I don't know if I'll be a man until I have kids myself, but I have figured out one thing:

To the young boys out there feeling angsty, it's all right to feel emotions – it's how you handle those emotions that determines how you're treated.

(FRANCK fades into the cacophony as he raps “Triumph” with Amro.)

FRANK & AMRO:

“I inspect you, through the future see millenium
Killa B's sold fifty gold sixty platinum
Shacklin the masses with drastic rap tactics
Graphic displays melt the steel like blacksmiths
Black Wu jackets queen B's ease the guns in
Rumble with patrolmen, tear gas laced the function
Heads by the score take flight incite a war
Chicks hit the floor, diehard fans demand more”

THE STORY OF MATTHEW

(MATTHEW emerges from the cacophony singing "Perfect" by Alanis Morissette.)

MATTHEW:

"Sometimes is never quite enough
If you're flawless, then you'll win my love
Don't forget to win first place
Don't forget to keep that smile on your face."

From a young age I was acutely drawn to music. It started with the fantastical world of Mr. Rogers, and would lead to an obsession with magic straight through my teenage years. I would sing all the time as a child, and my mother, who I've known through many lives, would sing to me regularly to calm me down. But for a while – no, for a long time - I lost that magic.

Growing up in Eagan, MN, I was aware from a young age that something was different about me: I was not attracted to girls. I had even tried dating one once – a girl with the same name as my sister (a CLEAR sign) – and even had a tryst with an older girl.

(GIRL steps forward and sings a snippet from "Perfect" as MATTHEW continues to speak.)

GIRL:

"Be a good boy
Try a little harder
You've got to measure up
And make me prouder
How long before you screw it up
How many times do I have to tell you to hurry up
With everything I do for you
The least you can do is keep quiet"

MATTHEW:

But no. I was gay. But I wasn't about to come out in this *Desperate Housewives* ripoff town. So for years, I turned asexual, and stopped singing, hid behind my French horn mouthpiece, and pined for straight Christian boys until I headed off to college.

At Lawrence University in Wisconsin, I finally was in a community that could accept me for who I was. But I wasn't sure who that was yet. I entered as a French horn major, I hadn't sung since my voice changed in puberty, and I still had never touched a boy. Hell, I hadn't even touched myself. Until, on a whim, I auditioned for a production of *Children of Eden*. It was there that I met Jacob.

(JACOB enters.)

JACOB:

Hey. So, uh . . . would you maybe like to . . .

MATTHEW:

Jacob was sweet. He was a talented actor, singer and director. A few years older than me. I learned through my friends that he wanted to date me. And even though I was still straight, I somehow went on a date with him. And then another.

And waking up next to him the following day, I was gay at last. Cue much making up for lost time. I have never experienced warmth like that. Jacob was willing to open up his arms and be everything to me. He could understand the damage I'd done to myself with all those years of isolation. He helped me find a truer form of myself. It was so freeing. I started to sing again. We acted in *The Tempest* together. He was so outspokenly in love with me. And I was in love with the fact that he loved me.

(MATTHEW lies awake in JACOB'S arms, listening to Enya's "The Lady of Shallots", sung by a WOMAN.)

I remember lying awake listening to Jake's special sleep mix, the grating sound of Enya keeping me awake. It should have been a sign.

Jake graduated as I was truly finding my feet at Lawrence. I was blossoming quickly into a very social person, and finding more interests and honing new skills. But he grew more pouty and closed off. He got a job at Lawrence to stay close, but he was in a different world. Whenever I talked about the good stuff happening in my life:

JACOB:

(In a super whiny voice.)

Oh, it sounds like you're having such a good time, and doing so well. Sweetheart, I am just so happy for you. Just wish I could be there.

MATTHEW:

And after a year of that, I knew I needed to take some time outside of Appelton, WI. And so I kissed Jake goodbye and headed to, of all places to feel like a free gay man, Dublin Ireland.

(CAST sings "Lily the Pink" by the Irish Rovers. Among them are CAOILFHIONN, DERMID, CHRIS and PHOEBE.)

CAST:

"We'll drink a drink a drink
To Lily the pink the pink the pink
The savior of [the savior of] the human race.

She invented medicinal compound.
Most efficacious in every case.”

MATTHEW:

My Irish grandfather had invested me with a love of Irish culture and music. As I child, we would dance around the living room to The Irish Rover’s greatest hits. And now, I was spending 6 months away from Jacob, surrounded by socially repressed alcoholics, to study at the Gaiety School of Acting.

I discovered new means of training, like improv. Devising. Things that every working actor actually knows and I didn’t. I took a voice class. And I met some of the most colorful characters ever:

(CAOILFHIONN shows MATTHEW a sheet of paper with her name on it.)

CAOILFHIONN:

It’s spelt like tis.

MATTHEW:

Uh, Kelfion?

CAOILFHIONN:

Not even close. But good try.

MATTHEW:

Caoilfhionn was my one lesbian friend. She dated two girls in the time I knew her, both of whom were straight before and after they met her. Then there was Dermid. Dermid had the best worst pick up line ever:

DERMID:

(Extremely drunk.)

You’re . . . you’re like me prized heffer. You’re like me calf. I wanna ride ya. I wanna ride ya like me prize heffer.

MATTHEW:

Chris was my best Irish friend. I’d have sleepovers at his place and make tremendous breakfasts, and talk like I could not talk to any other Irishman, gay or straight.

And then there was Phoebe, who loved Chris, and drank herself stupid watching him date my American classmates.

And then there was Antoinette, and . . .

(MATTHEW lists a never-ending litany of folks. They each step forward.)

And of course, there was Nolan.

(NOLAN appears.)

NOLAN:

You know what I enjoy? Just being naked. Not like sexual nudity. But like, platonic nudity. You know? Just being naked.

MATTHEW:

Nolan was my roommate at the Gaiety School. We had become very close. We both had strained relationships with stateside gentlemen, and we both had an unspoken attraction to each other. Or perhaps we weren't attracted to each other so much as there we were with the right set of circumstances, and the right things bothering us back across the Ocean. I was already ready to do something crazy – to punch someone, or do lots of drugs, or just have sex with random people.

I liked being naked too. And I didn't mean anything sexual about it. So we created naked time – every night, when we were settled in for the evening, we would simply take off our clothes. After a few weeks, we got used to that. So we tried adding massage.

(HEDWIG sings "The Origin of Love" from Hedwig and the Angry Inch as MATTHEW and NOLAN pantomime a sensual massage.)

HEDWIG:

“When the earth was still flat,
And the clouds made of fire,
And mountains stretched up to the sky,
Sometimes higher,
Folks roamed the earth
Like big rolling kegs.
They had two sets of arms.
They had two sets of legs.
They had two faces peering
Out of one giant head
So they could watch all around them
As they talked; while they read.
And they never knew nothing of love.
It was before the origin of love.”

NOLAN:

Oh my god. . . . Please don't tell my boyfriend about that.

MATTHEW:

Like I would ever have the time or inclination. And nothing actually happened. But it was done.

The next night, still feeling awkward about our close, but non-sexual contact, we sat down with friends to watch *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. It was my first time.

“Ooooo, the Origin of Love.”

And after everyone left, Nolan got high.

NOLAN:

You know what fucking pisses me off about you, Matt?

(WOMEN sing from “Perfect” as NOLAN yells at MATTHEW.)

WOMEN:

“I’ll live for you
I’ll make you what I never was
If you’re the best, then maybe so am I
Compared to him compared to her
I’m doing this for your own damn good
You’ll make up for what I blew
What’s the problem? Why are you crying?”

MATTHEW:

(Overtop of the song.)

And he proceeded to yell at me about everything that had happened the night before, blaming me for everything. I realized then that Jake had left me devastated because I was still tied to him. I was in Ireland still wanting to get further away. I was filling up all my time and leaving him the scraps. So Nolan yelled, and I took it in, and then he disappeared for three days.

Still reeling from the aftermath of that night, I took a trip to the Aron Islands. And escaping the 12 petulant hungry classmates that had followed me, I took a bike down a quiet farm path, and then cut across open fields towards the sound of water.

(MATTHEW stands on a cliff as water rages below him.)

I found myself alone on a set of 300 foot cliffs, overlooking the ocean. I climbed down, took my clothes off once again and sank into the freezing water, and listening to the pounding waves, gazing at the sky, feeling the wind blowing over me, I found myself mumbling a song that has stuck with me ever since:

“And then fire shot down from the sky in bolts

Like shining blades of a knife.
And it ripped right through the flesh
Of the children of the sun and the moon and the earth.
And some Indian god sewed the wound up into a hole,
Pulled it round to our belly to remind us of the price we pay.
And Osiris and the gods of the Nile gathered up a big storm
To blow a hurricane, so scatter us away,
In a flood of wind and rain, and a sea of tidal waves,
To wash us all away.”

It was the beginning of my journey to find my own music. The music I had lost so many years ago when the magic faded. When I thought something was wrong with me.

The years that followed that trip would not prove easy. Even though I knew I was in it for the wrong reasons, Jacob and I would take two more years to finally end our relationship.

JACOB:

Well, my hands are tied, because I really don't want to be alone for these last four months that I'm here.

MATTHEW:

We shared a bed for four loveless months. I had a lot soul searching left to do. I came to believe I would never fall in love.

(A NEW MAN appears in front of MATTHEW.)

It would take me coming here, after graduate school, after rediscovering my voice, after finding music that I truly loved and expressed me, to truly try again.

(The CAST joins MATTHEW in song as he takes the NEW MAN'S hand and fades into the cacophony.)

“Last time I saw you
We had just split in two.
You were looking at me.
I was looking at you.
You had a way so familiar,
But I could not recognize,
Cause you had blood on your face;
I had blood in my eyes.
But I could swear by your expression
That the pain down in your soul
Was the same as the one down in mine.
That's the pain,

Cuts a straight line
Down through the heart;
We called it love.”
So we wrapped our arms around each other,
Trying to shove ourselves back together.
We were making love, making love.
It was a cold dark evening, such a long time ago,
When by the mighty hand of Jove,
It was the sad story
How we became lonely two-legged creatures,
It's the story of the origin of love.
That's the origin of love.”

THE STORY OF SHAUNA

(SHAUNA emerges from the cacophony singing Bruce Springsteen's "Growin' Up.")

SHAUNA:

"Well I stood stone-like at midnight, suspended in my masquerade
And I combed my hair till it was just right and commanded the night brigade
I was open to pain and crossed by the rain and I walked on a crooked crutch
I strolled all alone thru the fall out zone, came out with my soul untouched"

(SHAUNA's MOM appears. Her cousin MALIK, 13, sits off to the side doing homework.)

A few weeks ago, I was helping my mom overhaul one of the unfinished bedrooms upstairs in our house on Long Island. My 13 year old cousin Malik, who we've been co-raising for the last 6 years, was downstairs doing his homework while my mom and I rolled out layer, upon layer...upon layer of primer.

MOM:

You know, we wouldn't have to do all this primer if you and Malik hadn't gone crazy on these walls.

SHAUNA:

Underneath all that primer, you can see just the barest glimpses of something that used to be there. It's something kind of long story, but here we go.

First, something you should understand about me: I often track time based on my weight. At virtually any moment in my life, I can pretty much tell you what I weighed. For example, one of my earliest musical memories was when I was about 5, and weighed 60 or 70 lbs--still on the "lighter side," if you will. My favorite song growing up, "Let's Hear It for the Boy" was on the radio in the car.

(Cast sings Deniece Williams' "Let's Hear It For the Boy.")

As it played, we drove past this woman with these huge boobs. And I thought to myself, "I want those someday." Be careful what you wish for, kids. . .

(She gestures to her chest.)

When I was 225 pounds, I graduated from Boston University's School for the Arts, and came back home to New York to pursue my dream as an actor. I found a job working nights at a call center. That's where I met Marty Carroll.

(MARTY appears and sits to interview SHAUNA.)

Marty was twelve years older than me. He was the Director of the telemarketing department. When he sat down to interview me . . . Now I'm not one of those people who's like "From the first time I saw him..."

But... from the first time I met Marty, I knew I was in trouble. I said something – for the life of me I cannot remember what, exactly – but I said something that made him laugh; like a good, hearty from-the-gut laugh. I didn't know it then, but he did not give those up very easily. It should have been a sign.

I still had a boyfriend that I'd been with for 3 years, all thru college. Michael. But I knew that wasn't going to last, even before Marty entered the picture.

Marty and I would talk for hours after work, about everything—politics, religion—our mutual passion for music. He turned me on to Bruce Springsteen and I impressed him with knowledge and love of The Beatles. We talked about my pilgrimage to Liverpool--

MARTY:

How does a young girl like you know so much about the Beatles?

SHAUNA:

Yeah, most people where I grew up—they never saw that one coming: a 22 year old black girl--into The Beatles & classic rock, but I was. And so was he.

And so we would talk. And I love to talk. Talking is easily my biggest turn on. And Marty—well, that was one of things he did best. And he was so self aware, and intuitive; the way other people are good with math, Marty could read people.

That first summer came and went. I lost a couple pounds. 210.

September 11, 2001. We peered, in unparalleled disbelief, out of the floor to ceiling windows at the top the Hofstra University Library. 20 miles west of us, the world was being torn asunder, irrevocably altered. And in the chaotic, earthquake like aftermath of that day, after 2 months of mutual, non-committal nebulosity, I suddenly knew what I needed. I knew what I wanted.

And from that day on, we were together.

(Shauna sings "Dig A Pony," by The Beatles)

"All I want is you
Everything has got to be just like you want it to...
Because..."

And The Lord thought, it was good. And for a while it really, really was. We became wrapped up in each other in a way that was so intense and visceral and heavenly. Marty would write these poems – but he

hated calling them that: they were *songs*—and he would ask me to critique them. He genuinely respected my creativity and opinion. And he loved singing to me. But I hated singing for him.

MARTY:

If I had a voice like yours, Mrs. Carroll, I would be singing all the time.

SHAUNA:

And he would always do *that*--call me: Mrs. Carroll.

But it wasn't all wine and roses. There were difficulties. At first, my mother didn't accept him.

MOM:

Who is this old man pouncing on my young daughter?!

SHAUNA:

But I convinced her she just needed to trust me. Then there was Marty's family. They never really accepted me—correction---they never actually *knew* about me. Plus, our living situations made it hard to see each other regularly.

The biggest challenge though was Marty's health. He suffered from POTS: Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome. When most people stand up, their autonomic nervous system regulates the body so blood doesn't rush to your feet and you don't pass out. Marty's autonomic nervous system had other ideas. His POTS kept him laid up for much of the first two years of our relationship.

(Cast begins singing Del Amitri's "Long Way Down.")

Instead of a typical couple's existence: date nights, or going to the city on a Saturday, we would spend hours everyday on the phone and then, 2 or 3 times a month, we'd rent a room at the Holiday Inn and spend the weekend together, holding each other. And having lots of sex.

"It's been a long way down
From what I was then, to what I'm now
I was up there, and baby you were proud
It's been a long way down."

He was incredibly supportive of my career, more than anyone I had ever known. He also tried—in his own way—to encourage me to continue my perpetual and often futile attempts to lose weight.

MARTY:

I think you're beautiful. But, *they* are gonna want you to be thinner...

SHAUNA:

“They:” the “industry” at large. He felt very strongly that, fair or unfair, I would be hindered by my plus sized status. It was all for the good of my career. But...I also became acutely aware that there was a part of him—even though he never admitted it—that also wanted a thinner, trophy-esque version of me

Time passed. I made more headway on the scale. 190. He began to emerge from his cocoon of illness.

Hey. Happy Anniversary. Four years. What do you think about when you think about that?

MARTY:

I think about how I’m afraid I’ll get sick again.

SHAUNA:

And that’s when I realized that Marty never had any forward momentum in his thoughts. He was incapable of existing beyond his fears of relapsing. There was no us in his future plans.

MARTY:

I love you the way you are, but they want you to be thinner.

SHAUNA:

And then there was still *that!* Absolutely convinced now that *HE* wanted me thinner too and despite what was quickly becoming a losing battle, I became certain that if I could just hit 135 pounds, *everything* would happen. And he’d love me enough to *want* a future.

At first, in the melee of our changing relationship, I actually gained weight. Like 35 pounds. And to him, that was a sign that I wasn’t working on us. I felt big, fat, ugly, too black, fat, ugly, unlovable, ugly, ugly and fat. I had angry workouts, pity party workouts and everything in between. From the early euphoria to the eventual deterioration of our relationship, my weight fluctuated almost 100 fucking pounds. Insane. Ridiculous. Pathetic.

Finally, when I was 165 pounds, I called Marty at work:

I’m unhappy. I’m just unhappy. What can we do about this?

MARTY:

I don’t think this is going to work.

SHAUNA:

Now I am the type of person, when I want something, it’s not even a question of revving myself up. I want it, I fucking get it. And despite the fact that we’d somehow become broken, I wanted to work on it, figure things out. I was in this thing for the long haul. But he –

YOU don't think this is going to work?! *I* was here for you when no one else gave a shit. And you're not even gonna try? You're not even gonna fight for this? Seriously?!

(Silence from MARTY.)

But he never had, had he? Fought for anything? Not with his family, not with anything . . . And I? . . . I was living my life, devising actions, building pieces of my identity as some sort of referendum on something. On a relationship, on someone else's idea of what I should be. On *my own* distorted idea of what I should be. And the real, confusing bitch of it all was: Marty really was my soulmate. I had never had emotions hurt so physically before that day.

(SHAUNA sits and starts to drive.)

Driving in the rain a few days later, a funeral dirge came on my iPod; a slow, somber march on the organ; and then the guitar kicked in, and Jeff Buckley's voice came soaring out of my speakers.

(A MAN sings Jeff Buckley's "Lover, You Should've Come Over." SHAUNA listens.)

MAN:

"Looking out the door I see the rain fall upon the funeral mourners
Parading in a wake of sad relations as their shoes fill up with water
Maybe I'm too young to keep good love from going wrong
But tonight, you're on my mind so you never know

Broken down and hungry for your love with no way to feed it
Where are you tonight? Child, you know how much I need it.
Too young to hold on and too old to just break free and run."

SHAUNA:

And that song, *Lover You Should've Come Over*, entered me, and became a key which turned my insides. All of my mania seemed wrapped up in those notes. And I pulled my car off the road and broke.

That night I went home; I grabbed some paint and slipped into that unfinished room upstairs...

(SHAUNA paints as she sings.)

SHAUNA:

"Sometimes a man gets carried away,
When he feels like he should be having his fun
Much too blind to see the damage he's done
Sometimes a man must awake to find that, really,
He has no-one...

So I'll wait for you... And I'll burn
Will I ever see your sweet return?
Oh, will I ever learn?
Oh, Lover, you should've come over
Cause it's not too late."

(MALIK, seven years old, enters.)

MALIK:

Shauna, what did you do?

SHAUNA:

Nothing, buddy. You wanna paint with me?

(MALIK considers, and then joins her.)

Five years later, still not 135 pounds, my mom and I finished that last coat of primer.

MOM:

You know, we wouldn't have to do all this primer if you and Malik hadn't gone crazy on these walls.

SHAUNA:

It didn't look very good, by the way. My soul on those walls? I never had any skills as a visual artist.

But you can see under those layers of harsh white that something happened there. And it goes beyond Marty and the many, many ways that we created and desecrated each other. It's me. It's this shattered yet persistent hope that "If I just hit this number on the scale, everything will be perfect. I will have love. I will have fortune and fame." How so much of my life has hinged on that one thought and how much I fucking hate that.

That room is a fitting reminder of where I am – right now even-- still working to move on, but knowing those thoughts will always be there. Somewhere.

But that song remains a key. For when I need to get inside myself, and be opened.

(SHAUNA sings as she fades back into the cacophony.)

"Yes, and I feel too young to hold on
I'm much too old to break free and run
Too deaf, dumb, and blind
To see the damage I've done
Sweet lover, you should've come over
'Cause it's not too late."

THE STORY OF KYLE

(From the cacophony, KYLE emerges singing "Close to Me" by The Cure.)

KYLE:

"I've waited hours for this
I've made myself so sick
I wish I'd stayed asleep today
I never thought this day would end
I never thought tonight could ever be
This close to me."

(KYLE is joined by his MOM, DAD, and JESS.)

A few months back, I sat down to dinner with my parents and my girlfriend Jess. I think Jess is the first girlfriend of mine they've ever liked. Huh. I've never called her my girlfriend until right now. After the meal, my dad, a scientist, the brainy one who dances in his underwear to *1776*, sidled up to me, looked the other way, and gave me his classic sideways hug, a little too strong.

DAD:

I'm proud of ya, son.

KYLE:

And my mom, who was always the passionate one in the family, said straight to Jess:

MOM:

We just love you Jess. You're so much better than his past girlfriends. You've gotten better every time. Every one we meet has just gotten better and better.

KYLE:

I'm new to New York City. And I'm a serial monogamist, so I've never really done that whole New York datey thing. Growing up in Tulsa Oklahoma, my negative self esteem taught me: "I'm never gonna get a girlfriend."

So of course by the time I got to college at the University of Evansville – that's in Evansville Indiana – I developed a cluster of female friends. I would have crushes on them, but they were *just* friends. It was the opposite of friends with benefits. It was like all the annoying parts about having a bunch of girlfriends – all the responsibility and having to call them and all that stuff – without ANY of the benefits. I went through my entire freshman year with a chorus of women saying:

(A throng of women envelopes KYLE.)

GIRLS:

You didn't have lunch with me this week but you had lunch with Courtney! Why did you have lunch with Ashley but not tell Lisa?! I am so upset with you! If you don't know what you did wrong, then you don't deserve to know!

(MIA emerges and the din stops.)

MIA:

That doesn't make sense.

KYLE:

That didn't make sense to me either! So when I met Mia, and all of a sudden I no longer had to explain myself seven times, I felt I had found someone kind of special.

Mia lived down the hall from me. We met in the final weeks of freshmen year. She was obsessed with *Fraggle Rock*, which I found cute, and she had a wicked sexy drive, which I found fascinating. Most of all, I liked spending time with her because she wasn't like other girls. She understood LOGIC. Yeah, so we had our thing, and then:

MIA:

You're going away for the summer. Are we done, or . . . Cuz we can either like make this a thing – I mean we just started and the timing is shitty or whatever – or we can cut it off and see what happens next year.

KYLE:

I think we should do more of *that*.

And that was that. Mia and I were done. And I went off the next day to spend my summer at Hope Summer Rep Theater in Holland, Michigan.

(The cast sings part of "Close to Me." We see the characters KYLE is about to describe: JEFFREY and LIZ.)

CAST:

"But if I had your faith
Then I could make it safe and clean
If only I was sure
That my head on the door was a dream"

KYLE:

Holland Michigan – 98% Dutch. A tulip festival every year, and more people named Von Something than anywhere else in the country. And I was working in the theater, doing what I loved every day for \$75 a

week. I survived on a steady diet of Ramen, hot dogs and Miller High Life. We slept on the shore of Lake Michigan at night, and lived the dream by day.

There were a lot of characters at Hope Summer Rep. There was Jeffrey, who drank straight Bombay Sapphire.

JEFFREY:

Hey Kyle, do you know what the first rule of orgies is? Never say no. You know what the second rule of orgies is? Never say-

KYLE:

And there was Liz, from the costume shop, who had warded off the strange masturbating man the summer before.

LIZ:

Uh, sir, I'm gonna have to call the cops now if you don't put that away.

KYLE:

I would still marry her to this day.

But the girl of my summer was Claire.

(CLAIRE appears, looking angelic. She sings "How Lovely to Be a Woman" from Bye, Bye, Birdie)

Claire was the perfect Kim Macafee in *Bye, Bye, Birdie*. She was a tight bodied blond: short, super cute, spunky, with an adorable voice and a laugh that-

CLAIRE:

(Like the sound of a gull dying in midair.)

Nehhehehehehehe!

KYLE:

Anyway, she had a real sense of who she was. She drove a red pickup truck like she'd always wanted, loved country music like Kenny Chesny and Travis Trit, was obsessed with *Finding Nemo*, and had an appetite for Taco Bell.

(KYLE and CLAIRE sit in her truck. They eat Taco Bell.)

I remember driving with Claire in her pickup to the local Taco Bell. And this tiny girl, half my size, would just PUT. AWAY. SOME TACO BELL.

CLAIRE:

Pass the hot sauce. I'm taking this to the face.

KYLE:

And I thought it was so fascinating.

It was there on those trips that Claire and I hit it off. Before we knew it, but after everyone observed it, we were together. We would drive around and listen to Sufjian Steven's *Greetings From Michigan*, and the latest from Nora Jones. It became *our* music. Cuz . . . I didn't like country.

(CLAIRE sings Nora Jones' "Humble Me.")

CLAIRE:

"You humble me Lord
You humble me Lord
I'm on my knees empty
You humble me Lord
You humble me Lord
So please, please, please forgive me "

KYLE:

Claire had just broken up with her boyfriend back at school. He would call her and make her cry and I would be there to make her feel better and to tell her to "Fuck that guy!"

We were really becoming an item. We were hot and heavy. I was super happy with her. But Sufjian Stevens says in his song about Holland, MI, things will be over before they start. He was right. Late in the summer, Mia came to visit.

(MIA appears.)

I thought she had come to visit all of her friends from Evansville who were spending their summer in Holland, including her college roommate. But -

MIA:

Hey, I'm gonna stay with you, ok?

KYLE:

I was 20 years old at the time. I thought, I had a plethora of female friends who would stay over all the time. Mia and I are done. What harm could this do?

But I was a 20 year old man at the time. I also thought, I could two-time this and probably get away with it.

MIA:

What the fuck!!

KYLE:

Mia caught me in bed with Claire after the party. After I had sort of ganked with her earlier.

(Mayhem ensues as CLAIRE rushes away redressing and crying. MIA attacks KYLE and spouts expletives. It bleeds into the party happening outside.)

LIZ:

Dude, fuck that.

(JEREMY just nods his approval. The Cast starts to sing a piece of "Humble Me.")

CAST:

"What do you say
When it's all gone away?
Baby I didn't mean to hurt you
Truth spoke in whispers will tear you apart
No matter how hard you resist it
It never rains when you want it to"

KYLE:

I spent several weeks in the cow pasture. Just self flagellating. I was too much of a coward to face Claire. Finally, she had the maturity to get me to talk.

CLAIRE:

Why?

KYLE:

And a 90 minute torrent of melodrama flowed from my mouth. Only two important things were said in that entire time:

(KYLE starts rolling around on the floor.)

I wanted so many things! I wanted you to meet my parents. And we were going to go to dinner, and . . .

(He rolls some more.)

I was gonna write a country song for you, because I know you love country music. But now you'll never want to hear it. And, oh god!

(Rolls some more. CLAIRE stops him.)

CLAIRE:

Well, if you write me a country song, I'll go to dinner with your parents.

KYLE:

I spent three days not sleeping to write her the best country song ever. In the middle of my ordeal, I would twist my ankle during strike. I never went to the hospital. It was my penance. I had to write her song.

Finally, three days later, hobbling, sleep deprived, completely insane on the hope of redemption, I returned to her.

(KYLE stumbles to CLAIRE, guitar in hand.)

CLAIRE:

You really should get that looked at.

KYLE:

No, no. I'm ok. I'm ok.

(He sings his country song.)

"I wanna smile, but I'm out of luck
Cuz I did not see your pickup truck
Things like that make me wanna make up
Things like this that make me miss
The times we shared, the way we kissed
Things like this that make me wanna make up

So I'll try and write a country song for you
About how I will always long for you
And though I tried, I still did wrong to you
And I can't dry my tears off these photographs of you.

The train screams by at half past four
I pace across my bedroom floor
I just can't sleep when I think of how I lost you
I see you laugh in that photograph
My favorite one wearing your red hat
And I wanna cry cuz I know I lost my Nemo"

And then . . . in true *Bye, Bye, Birdie* style, I tried to pin her.

CLAIRE:

Eeeeh

KYLE:

She went back to her old boyfriend as soon as she got back to school. I think she misunderstood what I meant by “Fuck that guy.”

The names in this story have been changed to protect the innocent. Because they are.

Now that I’m older, I see things more clearly. I used to think Mia was logical *and* psychopathic, but she was just into me and I was too naïve to understand that. And while I hated losing Claire at the time, she and I were actually a terrible match for each other. I confused fascination for love, and newness with progression. The whole story is pretty embarrassing and funny now, but I still can’t hear a lot of songs without feeling bad about what I did.

So maybe, five years later, yeah, my folks were right. I am getting better and better every time.

(KYLE sings as he rejoins the cacophony.)

So I’ll try and write a country song for you
About how I will always long for you
And though I tried, I still did wrong to you
And I can’t dry my tears off these photographs of you.

THE STORY OF LYDIA

(From the cacophony, LYDIA emerges singing “Poor Unfortunate Soul” from The Little Mermaid.)

LYDIA:

“Poor unfortunate souls
In pain, in need
This one longing to be thinner
That one wants to get the girl
And do I help them?
Yes, indeed.”

When I was a little girl, my sisters and I would play *The Little Mermaid*.

(Her sisters, MAURA and DANIELLE, step forward. DANIELLE sings Ariel’s signature trill.)

Every time, we would have a sing off to decide who would get to play Ariel. My older sister, Danielle, would be the judge, and surprisingly enough, she picked herself every time. My little sister Maura would be cast as Flounder, her best friend fish, and I had to be Ursula, the fat ugly octopus Sea-Witch. I still know the lyrics to that song. It was one of many silly songs my sisters and I used to always sing.

I love my family. There are not enough words in the English language to express all I have inside for them. I am a product of my family. And they are so entwined with my soul that to remove one is to crumble my foundation.

I grew up in Texas, the middle daughter of a Brazilian man and a Californian woman. My mother is a former hippy – she still hates makeup, combing her hair, or wearing clothes that match, but she’s now a really conservative and sometimes stressed out hippy. My father has a motto:

(Lydia’s FATHER steps forward.)

FATHER:

(A heavy Brazilian accent.)

If I eat, I die. If I don’t eat, I die. So . . . I’m gonna eat.

LYDIA:

He used to warn me about the crocodiles that lived in our back creek. He assured me that if one ever attacked me-

FATHER:

I will jump on him and put my arm around him and strangle him and kill him like Tarzan!

LYDIA:

My older sister Danielle was my exact opposite – short, exotic, extremely shy. The only thing we have in common are our huge breasts.

My younger sister – Maura – she was the baby. The beautiful daughter. With a laugh and a giggle that could transform the atmosphere of the room. And she had the most gorgeous voice.

Years later, my family spent our summer vacation with our neighbors at their beach house. At one point, the neighbors' kid Michael locked us out, and Maura, now ten, climbed through an open window and began to wrestle with him.

(MAURA wrestles with MICHAEL, the kid from next door. She flirtatiously shoots taunts at him.)

Maura made several really funny comments, and I realized for the first time that my little sister was her own person. And I liked her. Instead of my little sister dying to be my friend, I – the girl who once had imaginary friends to compensate for her lack of real ones – found myself dying to be hers.

(MAURA sings "Tomorrow" from Annie, only as "To Maura.")

And we were. We became very close. We would walk around on family vacations inside my father's giant Arrows hockey jacket as a lumbering monster. We fished in the back crick with our father. We'd get in trouble for holding singing lessons in the back row of Church. We were always doing something ridiculous.

(Brazilian beat begins.)

And she was always, always funny! For many years she and I had a running gag about our breasts.

MAURA:

I cannot wait to see you and your breasts, and to touch them. They are just so bouncy and bubbly!

LYDIA:

One time we found a Brazilian Carnival downtown, and when the rest of us were crowded at a table, Maura jumped up and started dancing with the hot Brazilian men. And before we knew it, there we were, three sisters, dancing till our feet were sore, Maura screaming:

MAURA:

SHAKE IT LYDIA!!! COME ON DANIELLE!!! LETS SHOW THEM WHAT AMERICA MEETS BRAZIL CAN JIGGLE LIKE!!!

(The three sisters dance like mad for a hot second.)

LYDIA:

Oh my. You had to have been there. And my baby sister drunk? Or the time she got my mom drunk on Christmas morning? Don't even get me started . . .

I was the first to move away and go to college. And at 5 am the day after I graduated from Wheaton College, I packed up my car and headed for New York City.

I had been thrown into my actual, actual life. School was over, and I was waiting for life to take off. It didn't. Instead of becoming the actress my whole family knew and hoped I'd be, I became a waitress and a babysitter. I went back to school at Circle in the Square. I found a fiancée.

And all the while I didn't call. I didn't write. I was too busy. My family fell into the margins of my life and became a part of the background noise.

(A guitar kicks in as MAURA reappears.)

But Maura came to visit me, and I still remember the two of us jamming out to our favorite song – one we'd learned in Brazil during one of our many visits there:

(LYDIA and MAURA rock out to "Ana Julia" by Los Hermanos. RODOLFO, Lydia's very metro and pompous boyfriend, appears.)

LYDIA/MAURA:

"Oh Ana Juliaaaaaaaa!
Oh Ana Juliaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!"

RODOLFO:

What the hell is this?

LYDIA:

My boyfriend Rodolfo thought it was a stupid song, but it was ours. And we acted out the parts, standing on my bed, proclaiming our worthiness to our love in melodramatic Portuguese.

(RODOLFO looks on in disgust as LYDIA and MAURA get completely ridiculous.)

LYDIA/MAURA:

"Sei que voc no quer mais o meu amor
Sei que voc j no gosta de mim
Eu sei que eu no sou quem voc sempre sonhou
Mas vou reconquistar o seu amor todo pra mim

Oh Anna Julia

Oh Anna Julia
Oh Anna Julia
Oh Anna Julia, Julia, Julia”

It was fun. Whenever we heard it, Maura and I would lose control. I loved her.

Soon after, as she was nearing her own graduation as a vocal performance major, Maura became sick. The doctors found Toby, her first tumor, buried in her stomach. Maura was diagnosed with cancer, a form of sarcoma so rare they dubbed it Maura’s Cancer.

I almost moved home. I asked her if she wanted me to:

MAURA:

Lydia, of course I want you here, but I know you love acting. I want you to live your life, Lydia. Just because mine has stopped temporarily doesn’t mean that yours has to.

LYDIA:

And so I stayed in New York. And I continued my training. And I got busier. And Maura just got sicker. Come Christmas, she was looking worse. And she didn’t want to dwell on it, and she didn’t want to make it a deal, but in a fleeting moment she said to me:

MAURA:

You know I wish you would come home.

LYDIA:

But I just had to finish school first. I had to have my final showcase. I had to make them all proud.

Maura was supposed to come to my final showcase that April. Only my dad came. Afterwards he told me:

FATHER:

Lydia, the doctor tells me I need to bring you home.

LYDIA:

Maura’s kidneys had shut down. She was dying. I rushed back to Houston, sprinted into the ICU and yelled “Maura!” only attracting an on-duty nurse with the same name.

DANIELLE:

Lydia! This is an ICU! Keep it down!

LYDIA:

I cried as I walked in, discovering my baby sister yellow eyed and swollen with excess water. Maura just said:

MAURA:

You see? I told you when Lydia arrived she was going to cause a scene.

LYDIA:

Our family slept at the hospital – hiding in corners, because we weren't supposed to be there. Her friends organized a special graduation ceremony in her room, to ensure all her hard work through the chemo did not go to waste.

In the final day before she slipped into a coma, her friends had gathered around her – the best singers in the best voice programs – to perform requests for her. Amidst these talents, she turned to me:

MAURA:

Lydia, sing that *Little Mermaid* song you always used to sing.

LYDIA:

And so I did. I sang "Poor Unfortunate Soul" as I had so many times in the past. But where Ariel comes in, the part that Danielle had sung all those times before, Maura sang it this time – in a broken voice barely able to be heard.

(MAURA sings Ariel's signature melody.)

She always had the best voice in the family. She gloated that she would soon be singing with the best choir in the world.

Maura was cremated. In the end, she burned the cancer like she had always dreamed. We spread her ashes around the world. I got married two months later in a daze. I went back to New York and to being a waitress and a babysitter, still waiting for life to begin, even as my baby sister's had ended.

(A man and woman sing "The Fear You Won't Fall" by Joshua Radin.)

SINGERS:

"It hasn't felt like this before
It hasn't felt like home before you

And I know it's easy to say but it's harder to feel this way
And I miss you more than I should
Than I thought I could
I can't get my mind off of you

And I hate the phone but I wish you'd call
Thought being alone was better than
Was better than

And I know it's easy to say but it's harder to feel this way
And I miss you more than I should
Than I thought I could
I can't get my mind off of you
Can't get my mind off of you"

(Overtop, we see the images LYDIA describes in the next section.)

When I first heard Maura was sick, I pictured my family as a classic American portrait, standing tall together against the disease. Now, when I close my eyes, I see my family huddled together over Maura's body, and I am outstretched, kneeling at a distance, trying to reach them and shelter them from the cold.

When I was a little girl I always had to sing Ursula. But now the song I want to sing is Ariel's, as she's on the beach, looking at Prince Eric. Only I want to sing it to Maura:

"What would I give to live where you are?
What would I pay to stay here beside you?
What would I give to see you smiling at me?
Whether we walk,
Whether we run,
If we could stay all day in the sun
Just you and me
And I could be
Part of your world."

Because I can't. Yet. I wish for that day. Death sometimes doesn't seem like such a bad thing; I'd get to see my sister again. But my family has suffered enough.

Now I call my parents every day. I write my sister every week. I love my family. There are not enough words in both English and Portuguese to express all I have inside for them. I am a product of my family. And they are so entwined with my soul that to remove one is to crumble my foundation. And I will never take them for granted again.

(The cast supports LYDIA as she sings.)

LYDIA:

"I don't know when, I don't know how
But I know something's starting right now
Watch and you'll see,
Someday I'll be part of your world!

THE STORY OF ALISON

(ALISON emerges from the cacophony, and sings “Two Points for Honesty” by Guster.)

ALISON:

“I want to be where I've never been before
I want to be there and then I'd understand
Know I'm right and do it right, could I get to be like that
I'll know what I don't know with nothing more to gain”

When I was a little girl, I was a neurotic mess. I was a giant hypochondriac. I was terrified of AIDS. I washed my hands until they bled. And very specifically, my fear was geared towards my mother. From a very young age, I always felt as though there was a threat upon the table. And I was right.

I grew up in North Haven, CT, the daughter of two teachers, in a small starter home sharing a bedroom with my older sister, with my brother Robbie down the hall. My family was and is a huge part of my life. When I think of home back then, it's at the center of everything - large Italian meals, lots of laughter, and late nights just talking together. My father is the one man I trust more than anyone. If zombies were to attack us tonight, I would be following my dad.

And my mom. She was one of the happiest people I ever met – gentle, maternal, affectionate, always satisfied with other people's victories more than her own. She loved us unconditionally but always knew how to be a tough cookie.

When I was nine years old, she was diagnosed with breast cancer. From then on, I was constantly worried that something was going to happen to her. When I was in high school, sleeping over with my friends in high school, I would suddenly panic and need to call her.

(ALISON'S MOM answers the phone.)

MOM:

Ali? It's 11 pm? Is everything all right?

ALISON:

Yeah, I just have a stomach ache. I think I'm gonna come home.

I just wanted to make sure she was all right. I lived my life with that constant impossibility looming.

(A boy plays a section of “Lullaby” by Billy Joel. He is MARK, her boyfriend. ALISON's MOM slowly lies down. ALISON speaks over the song.)

Mom beat the cancer once, but it returned so slowly, that by the time we caught it, it was too late. And after 9 years of fighting, she passed away right as I graduated high school. That day I had feared for so long had finally come. Life for me has a clear division between the before and after of that moment. It was the day I felt I lost my home. Since then, I've been adjusting my trajectory.

DAD:

Alison, you may find that now, you have a different and closer relationship to your mother.

ALISON:

I thought that could not be further from the truth.

(MARK finishes playing.)

My boyfriend Mark played her favorite song, Lullaby by Billy Joel, at her funeral. We had been dating for over two years. When my mom got sick again, he helped pull me back up – he and his family became a source of stability. But by the time she passed away, our relationship had begun to slide. I wanted to hold him tighter, because I needed him. But how could he possibly support me in something he couldn't comprehend at 18? He was pushing me away, ready for college.

MARK:

I got into NYU.

ALISON:

And with everything that was going on, I couldn't really be bothered with figuring out college. But Greg was ready to move on. We'd always been even, and now he had New York City over me.

I think we should break up now. I don't know if I'll be able to handle it if we wait until we leave for school.

MARK:

Ok, I think you're right.

ALISON:

No! Wait! I can't. I can't.

He was kind enough, mature enough, to end things there, even though I couldn't stand to lose two people at once. He was childish enough, cruel enough, to continue sleeping with me until we both left.

(A piano plays "Chelsea" by Counting Crows. ALISON sings.)

"Never go to New York City these days.
Something 'bout the buildings in Chelsea that kills me.

Maybe in a month or two,
Maybe when things are different for me,
Maybe when things are different for you.
All of this shit just sticks in my head.

Somehow in those final months, my family had gotten me to apply to Connecticut College, about an hour away from home. My mother had always hoped I'd go there. And so I did.

"There's anything different these days
The light in her eyes goes out
I never had light in my eyes anyway
Maybe things are different these days"

I have never liked starting something new. When I arrived, I felt like everybody could see the sign on my forehead saying "DEAD MOM. WARNING. FUCKED UP." I cried for days. I tried opening up to people:

Yeah, I lost my mother a few months ago. To cancer.

PERSON:

Oh. Whoa. Wow. I'm sorry.

ALISON:

No, no. That's ok. I'm fine. Don't worry about it.

Nobody knew what to say, and how could I blame them? There was nothing to say. They didn't know her. They didn't know me with her in my life.

That first semester proved very hard. I was still clinging to Mark, and he was growing distant. I was constantly calling my dad, trying to escape the chaos of school, but he was growing distant. I tried to figure out why.

(MARK appears.)

MARK:

Alison, I'm seeing someone else.

(ALISON lets loose a barrage of terrible oaths. DAD appears.)

DAD:

Alison, I'm seeing someone else.

ALISON:

And . . . well . . . I never felt so disappointed in my life.

(She and the men in her life sing Guster's "Two Points For Honesty.")

ALISON, DAD, MARK:

"And all the people who've seen it all before
And all the people who really understand
Know they're right, and have done it right, could I get to be like that
I'll know what I don't know, it's harder everyday
Can't lift a finger, can't hurt a fly, I've found I always move too slowly
One thing's for certain, I'm insecure
I never knew till someone told me that....
If that's all you will be, you'll be a waste of time
You've dreamed a thousand dreams, none seem to stick in your mind
Two points for honesty
It must make you sad to know that nobody cares at all"

ALISON:

It had only been four months. I still needed to be mourning her, but suddenly the world had continued to spin and my father had gotten back on it. He was so lost in his new relationship. He talked about my mother as though they'd divorced. It was like he'd betrayed her. She deserved better than to be forgotten so soon after a lifetime of devotion. There became this huge divide in our family between his new happiness and our needs, try as we might to be happy for him.

I felt so angry and alone. I felt orphaned. And now I was in a place where nobody had ever known me before that loss, and how much it had affected me.

But time passed, and almost imperceptibly, something happened: Connecticut College proved to be everything that I needed it to be. I had been performing a capella since I was 14, and I had joined an all-female group on campus. I got back into theater. I got into dancing. And in all those places, I found a community I felt a part of.

At one a capella event, I saw a boy across the way.

(TOM appears. He says hello as "Into the Mystic" by Van Morrison kicks in behind them.)

"Ooooo. I want *that* one."

TOM:

Hi. I'm Tom.

ALISON:

We talked at a Halloween party until 5 am. Tom was going through a rough time with his own mother, but his experience made him more self-assured and honest in who he was. When I was ready, we started dating.

In our early days, Tom would sit and just listen to me recount every minute detail of those final days before she passed away. I just needed to verbalize them. He helped me understand that I would never lose those memories, and that made me feel closer to her.

ALISON, TOM:

"We were born before the wind
Also younger than the sun
Ere the bonnie boat was won as we sailed into the mystic
Hark, now hear the sailors cry
Smell the sea and feel the sky
Let your soul and spirit fly into the mystic"

(MOM re-appears. The sound of a Tibetan singing bowl.)

ALISON:

That's not to say my mother was gone from my life. I would have dreams about her. Sometimes they were so real and amazing; I could smell her and hug her and tell her how much I missed her, say goodbye in a way I couldn't when she passed.

"I dream I'm in New York City some nights.
And angels float down from all the buildings.
Somethin' 'bout an angel that just kills me."

Other times they were strange twisted dreams that left me confused whether she was visiting me or if I was just messed up.

(ALISON's best friend, CHEO, appears. A guitar plays "Into The Mystic" under the following.)

And in the fall of 2006, I went abroad to study at BADA. Once again, I went kicking and screaming. But being there, with my best friend Cheo, surviving as a small fish in a big pond began to open my eyes to something. There was a bigger world out there, and I was but a small part of it.

(CHEO hands ALISON backpack.)

My mother had been a French and Italian teacher, and my father had bought a family trip to Paris for her birthday, which we never got to take. So in the middle of our program, Cheo and I headed off to Venice, Milan, Rome, Florence, ending with a four day visit to Paris.

Here I was on that trip she never got to take, with my best friend, absorbing the world that I knew she always wanted me to see. I thought about how different this trip could have been with her there, and finally I knew what my dad was talking about all those years ago. I did feel close to her in a way that I never knew I could. Even though she'd never know me as anything other than a self-centered 18-year-old, I could imagine what our relationship could have become. That was something I'd never dared to do before.

For three years I had felt like a walking disaster. But I returned to school that fall feeling for the first time like an adult, who could handle what had been thrust upon her. Being so far away from home gave me the first bit of understanding that home was where you make it.

I have a much better relationship with my father now. We talk several times a week. And last year, he sold our house in North Haven to move in with his new wife. It was one of the hardest things I've ever done, leaving that house and the memories of her. But at the same time it was a mausoleum, a time capsule for a person I no longer was.

I don't know if she's with me. I don't know if I will ever see her again. My boyfriend asks:

TOM:

Why aren't you comfortable saying you don't believe in God?

ALISON:

I guess it's that I don't want to live my life thinking that way; that there's no possibility of ever seeing her again. And while my journey is far from over, and I do feel this great void in me deep in my heart, there is a comfort in seeing that life goes on; that these are the memories that make my life, and you don't get them any other way. And that yes, I am ok, and I am capable of being happy. That's what she would have wanted for me more than anything.

The pain, while not what it once was, is something I'm grateful for – it lets me know that within me this incredible woman lives on, and I live my life to make her proud. And one day, I hope be the mother she was to me, and to live on in my own children long after I am gone.

(CAST sings "Lullaby.")

CAST:

Goodnight my angel now it's time to dream
And dream how wonderful your life will be
Someday your child will cry and if you sing this lullaby
Then in your heart there will always be a part of me