

THE COMPANY

"Little Miss Lovely"

by

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TEASER

FADE IN:

INT. GARRETON ACADEMY - HALLWAY - DAY

A brightly coloured banner reads, "COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER WEEK".

Moving BENEATH this, we find the hallway bustling with activity as STUDENTS crowd around various stalls.

We find VI MORGAN and SHANE EVANS as they weave their way through the crowd. Vi eyes each stall with interest.

VI

I just think it might be kind of cool, that's all.

SHANE

But Vi, you help people every day.

VI

Because I have to. Volunteering is different.

Shane watches as a TEACHER marches a SLACKER STUDENT over to a table for the Red Cross.

SHANE

It's not real volunteering when it's compulsory.

Still walking, Vi tears her eyes away from the stalls. She frowns.

VI

Okay, what's up?

Shane shrugs.

VI (CONT'D)

Oh my God. You're being all emo because Gwen doesn't know you exist, right?

SHANE

How'd you know?

VI

I'm very observant.

WHAM! She slams her hip into a table corner. Vi grimaces in pain as Shane guffaws. She glares at him.

VI (CONT'D)

Shut up.

GWEN HART - who stands by the table Vi just walked into - turns around. Concern is etched on her face.

GWEN

Gosh, what was -- Vi? Hey, ouch.
That must have hurt.

Shane is caught between laughter and shock at Gwen's sudden appearance. He starts to choke, his face red.

Gwen thumps him on the back.

GWEN (CONT'D)

That's what you get for laughing
at your friend, Evans.

Amused, Vi glances from Gwen to Shane. Shane is quickly recovering but his face still glows crimson.

VI

Thanks Gwen.

(beat)

I think I'm going to, uh, hobble
over there now. See you guys
later.

She smiles and slips away, rubbing her sore hip.

A beat.

SHANE

Gwen. Hi. How are you?

Gwen gives him a friendly smile and turns back to the volunteer stall. She picks up a pamphlet.

GWEN

I'm very well, thank you.

(beat)

I'm thinking about signing up,
actually. What about you?

SHANE

Uh... What?

She nods to the stall.

SHANE (CONT'D)

Oh, yeah. Me too!

Gwen puts down the pamphlet and pulls a clipboard towards her. She scribbles her name at the bottom of the sign up sheet.

GWEN

Great! We can be volunteer
buddies.

She hands the clipboard to Shane. He absentmindedly signs his name, not taking his eyes off her.

SHANE

That would be great. I'd love to be your buddy.

Shane holds out the clipboard. NIKO SHELBY, stepping up behind Gwen, reaches his arm over her and takes it.

He quickly glances over it before kissing Gwen on the cheek, obnoxiously chewing gum at the same time.

NIKO

Hey, babe.

GWEN

Niko! Want to sign up?

NIKO

Nah. Don't have to do any of this volunteer crap this year. Got a free pass coz of being soccer captain and everything.

He tosses the clipboard onto the table. Takes Gwen's hand.

NIKO (CONT'D)

C'mon, we're gonna see how many jellybeans Marco can put up his nose.

He starts to pull her away. Gwen throws Shane an apologetic smile.

GWEN

See you later, Shane.

Shane is crestfallen - unable to speak. Finally, Gwen and Niko are out of sight.

There's a long beat.

SHANE

(calling)
Bye, buddy!

Too little. Too late.

INT. GARRETON ACADEMY - HALLWAY - MEANWHILE

Further away, Vi browses a row of stalls. She passes ones advertising positions at the ANIMAL SHELTER, SOUP KITCHEN, DAY-CARE CENTRE and the JUNIOR POLICE FORCE.

At this one, there's a life size cardboard cutout of a tough looking COP. He holds a stop sign across his chest that reads, "HELP STOP CRIME".

Vi ignores this and turns to the other side of the hallway. She faces a stall looking for mentors in Garreton's "LITTLE MISS LOVELY PAGEANT".

VI

Yeah, right.

She turns around again. The cardboard Cop now holds a stop sign that reads, "SIGN UP".

Vi looks skeptical and glances back at the Little Miss Lovely stall. Surely he can't mean that?

She looks back to the Cop. He wears a tiara. His stop sign is replaced with a bouquet of flowers and his eyes water with tears of joy.

Vi raises an eyebrow.

VI (CONT'D)

You've gotta be kidding me.

She glances around. No one else can see this absurd change.

Vi sighs. She turns back to the pageant stall and sourly drags the sign up sheet towards her. She leans down, writing her name.

VI (CONT'D)

I guess it won't be so bad.

BIANCA (O.S.)

Excuse you.

As Vi straightens up, BIANCA PARRY pushes past her and writes her name on the sign up sheet as well.

When she's done, she looks Vi dead in the eyes and moves off.

Vi turns back to the Cop. His stern cardboard face is back to normal.

As she walks past, she punches the cutout which topples to the ground.

CUT TO BLACK:

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

INT. THE COMPANY - CONTROL CENTRE - DAY

Like always, the room is busy with EMPLOYEES and whirring computers.

Vi trails after JENNA COOKE like a lost puppy as the older woman moves swiftly around the room.

VI

I think there's something wrong with your magic super computer.

JENNA

That's silly. Everything's fine.

VI

Then how do you explain me getting a Sign when I don't even have an assignment? Seriously, you should get this thing checked.

She kicks at the back of a computer desk. The EMPLOYEE behind it peers over the top, glaring.

Jenna flashes him a smile and grabs Vi's arm, dragging her away.

JENNA

Look, Vi. This place is strange. Not everything can be explained.

They reach the staircase leading up onto the control centre's observation deck.

Vi pulls away from Jenna and grabs onto the railing, swinging herself childishly back and forth.

VI

More like nothing can be explained. This building? It doesn't exist. Commuting to work means catching an elevator and some big nothing seems to just decide when we should help people. And even that isn't consistent.

(beat)

How am I supposed to do an assignment if I don't have an assignment or... you know what I mean.

She stops swinging, wraps her arms around the railing and places her chin down onto it.

Jenna sighs and puts her hands on her hips.

JENNA

Vi -- Oh!

Jenna pats her jacket pocket and pulls out a slip of paper. She unfolds it. Glances at it.

There's an awkward beat. She sheepishly hands the paper to Vi.

JENNA (CONT'D)

Sorry. It's been really busy around here lately.

Vi doesn't look impressed as she takes her assignment.

VI

(reading)

Ava Booth.

(then)

Right. That's more like it.

JENNA

I said I was sorry.

VI

Yeah, I know. I don't mean to be a brat.

JENNA

You're a teenager. It sort of comes with the territory.

They share a smile.

Vi steps away from the stair railing and they start to walk again - slower this time, with Vi matching Jenna's pace.

VI

So, you were saying it's been busy?

JENNA

The search hasn't been going well.

VI

You mean for this... Crenshaw guy? The one who helped my Dad with the book?

JENNA

Yes.

Out of the corner of her eye, she glances at Vi.

JENNA (CONT'D)

(cautious)

It seems the name just isn't enough. Sure, there are some generalised matches but nobody that we can definitively link to the Company. It seems without further evidence, we're going to spend the next few months aimlessly --

VI

Jenna...

Vi slows to a stop. Jenna looks at her innocently.

VI (CONT'D)

(sighs)

I'll see what I can do.

Jenna smiles, grateful.

EXT. MORGAN RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Establishing shot.

INT. MORGAN RESIDENCE - PETER'S STUDY - NIGHT

A SHADOW prowls around the darkened room.

There's a THUMP and the Shadow hisses in pain, hopping up and down on one foot.

CLICK!

The room is illuminated. CAM MORGAN stands in the doorway, his hand on the light switch.

Vi turns, frozen with one foot in the air.

There's a long beat.

Vi lowers her foot and calmly walks out of the room, stepping around Cam.

INT. MORGAN RESIDENCE - FRONT HALL - NIGHT

Vi walks down the hallway. Coming around the foot of the stairs, she moves up them.

Cam follows.

INT. MORGAN RESIDENCE - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Vi enters quietly. Cam steps into the doorway behind her. He watches her curiously.

Vi ignores him, although she knows he's there, and starts sifting through the dresser drawers. Finding nothing, she kneels and checks under the bed.

Cam moves further into the room and spreads open the closet. He begins looking, shoving aside clothes to peer at the junk nestled in the back.

Vi, noticing the sound of movement, rocks back on her heels.

VI
You don't even know what I'm
looking for.

Closing the closet, Cam turns to her.

CAM
Do you?

Vi gets back on her stomach, peering under the bed. Cam climbs onto the bed and Vi sits up quickly.

VI
(horrified)
Cam! Shoes!

He gives her an "Are you serious?" look as he kicks aside the pillows.

VI (CONT'D)
Yeah. Right. Sorry.

Vi stands and moves to the bedside table, piled with novels - reading glasses sit on top.

Cam runs his fingers behind the bed head.

Vi picks up the reading glasses - Peter's - and smiles softly.

She moves to put them back and her fingers brush the cover of the book on top of the pile. She pulls her hand away. Her fingers are covered in dust.

Vi looks disheartened.

CAM
Uh... Vi?

Vi looks up at him. With some effort, Cam pulls a raggedy notebook from it's hiding place - jammed behind the bed head.

It's almost like a revered, sacred object. Neither of them can tear their eyes away.

INT. THE COMPANY - BENSON'S OFFICE - NIGHT

ALISTAIR BENSON sits behind his desk. He flips casually through the worn notebook.

ANDREW FRIAR and Jenna stand across from him.

Benson reaches the last page. He closes the notebook and tosses it down onto the desk.

JENNA

Sir?

BENSON

Well, they're definitely Peter Morgan's original notes.

Andrew sits down.

ANDREW

And here I was thinking it was the eighth Harry Potter.

He reaches across the desk and picks up the notebook.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Does it say who this Crenshaw guy is?

As he opens it, Jenna snatches it away.

JENNA

He could be a she, you know.

ANDREW

Yeah, yeah. And girl serial killers never get caught, I know.

BENSON

It says nothing.

A long beat.

JENNA

(stunned)
How could it say...

BENSON

Nothing.

He stands.

BENSON (CONT'D)
We need Vi.

ANDREW
Should I get copyright for that
idea because I've been saying
that for --

JENNA
She's on an assignment.

Benson frowns. He isn't happy to hear this.

JENNA (CONT'D)
Sorry.

She smiles - attempting to be cheerful - and holds out the notebook to him.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - LOBBY - NIGHT

Vi, looking considerably overwhelmed, stands alone by the entrance.

People swarm around her. Mostly, they are GIRLS (aged 6-10) and their PARENTS or HANDLERS.

Vi takes a deep breath and walks nervously over to the reception desk.

The man behind it, DAMON (22), is busy. He types at a computer, takes calls and sifts through paperwork. Simple enough tasks but he makes it look like life-or-death stuff.

Damon carries a squawking walkie-talkie at his belt and wears a yellow and blue employees shirt.

VI
Um, hi. I'm Violet --

Damon holds up a finger and grabs a RINGING PHONE.

DAMON
(into phone)
Garreton Event Centre. This is
Damon speaking. Hold please.

As he does this, Vi studies him. He has a plastic C-3PO wrist watch.

While talking on the phone, he fiddles with a Luke Skywalker figurine, partially hidden behind a desk plant. Vi tries to pretend that this isn't amusing.

He presses a button on the phone and hangs up. Another phone starts RINGING.

Damon ignores it and starts to type. Vi waits. A beat.

DAMON (CONT'D)
Yes, Violet?

VI
Oh. I... I'm from Garretton Acad --

Damon points to a bulletin board on the wall.

DAMON
Little Miss Lovely volunteers
have already been assigned a girl
to mentor. List is over there.

He peels off a "Hi! My Name Is..." sticker and thrusts it at her.

DAMON (CONT'D)
Write your name on here and wait
by the auditorium doors for
orientation.

Vi takes the sticker.

VI
Um, thanks.

Damon is already on the phone.

DAMON
(into phone)
Garretton Event Centre. This is
Damon speaking. Hold please.

Vi, throwing him one last look, moves off.

INT. GARRETTON EVENT CENTRE - LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

Vi, scribbling her name on the name tag, steps up to the roster posted on the wall.

She moves her finger down, searching for her name. Finding it, she moves across. The name of her girl is Xanthe Ogden.

VI
What?

She scours the rest of the board. She finds Ava Booth. Trailing her finger back, she finds Ava's mentor.

VI (CONT'D)
(glowering)
Bianca Parry.
(MORE)

VI (CONT'D)

(beat)
Wonderful.

She steps back and crosses her arms. She notices that she still holds a pen. She smiles.

INT. THE COMPANY - BENSON'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Andrew sits in a chair in the corner, laptop balanced on his knee.

Jenna is in Benson's chair, shoes kicked off and feet up on the desk. Luckily Benson isn't here at the moment.

She flips through a few pages in the notebook. Sighs in boredom.

Andrew looks up, eyes scanning her bare legs. He catches himself, coughs and sits a little straighter. His fingers flex over the keyboard.

ANDREW
So, what else does it say?

JENNA
A few pages of plot ideas. Some character profiles...

ANDREW
Anyone we know?

Jenna runs her finger down the page. Smiles.

JENNA
You'll like this one.
(reads)
The boss. Enigmatic, perplexing and dictator-like. Probably has all the answers but doesn't like anyone enough to share. He --

BENSON (O.S.)
-- Enters the room with an air of surprise.

Benson calmly walks into the room. KOU YIMOU trails behind him.

Jenna blushes furiously and snaps the notebook closed.

BENSON (CONT'D)
With a curious gaze, he surveys his employee's current choice of seating.

A beat. Jenna throws her legs down and scoops up her shoes. Moving quickly, she steps away from Benson's desk.

Andrew looks straight down at the laptop, clenching his jaw in an attempt to stop laughing.

JENNA
(mumbles)
Sorry, sir.

She holds out the notebook and Benson waves her to Kou.

BENSON
Never mind.

He moves past them, sitting down. Kou takes the notebook, giving Jenna a grateful nod. He leans against the wall and starts to read.

BENSON (CONT'D)
So, you've found nothing of use?

JENNA
Um, well, not... not exactly.
We've just...

She lets out a breath, giving up. She sits down next to Andrew. He chuckles. She elbows him in the side.

ANDREW
Nope. Nothing. I mean, Crenshaw's mentioned but in more a "got to ask W. R. about those crazy elevators". Not really so much with the physical description.
(then)
We're probably lucky Peter remembered how to spell his name properly.

KOU
He didn't.

Andrew, Jenna and Benson look to Kou who's still staring intently down at the notebook.

BENSON
Kou?

Kou moves to the desk and places the notebook down.

KOU
Well, he did but...

He grabs a piece of paper and a pen. He scribbles something.

KOU (CONT'D)
This is the letter "C".

He holds up the paper. It is indeed the letter "C".

ANDREW

Is today's episode also brought
to us by the number seven?

KOU

And this is how Peter Morgan
writes the letter "G".

He scribbles something else. Holds it up. It's scrawled and
messy and could be either a "C" or a "G".

JENNA

So he...

Andrew laughs.

ANDREW

You're telling us that Peter
Morgan can't read his own
handwriting?

BENSON

Andrew, look up W. R. Grenshaw.

Andrew immediately steps back to his laptop. Types
something in. Moments later...

ANDREW

Uh... Guys...

BENSON

Did you find him?

ANDREW

Yeah.

BENSON

And? Who is he?

ANDREW

Well... W. R. Grenshaw was sort
of... the original name for
Wilhelm Garretton.

(beat)

And, I mean, it's been a long
time since I did year ten history
but I'm pretty sure Wilhelm
Garretton sort of... founded our
town.

Off their stunned silence, cut to:

INT. EVENT CENTRE - AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Once again, Vi looks lost and out of place.

She stands about halfway down the centre aisle of the room while across the stage and down the aisles, young GIRLS are being paired with their MENTORS.

WOMAN (O.S.)
Excuse me. Violet?

Vi looks around. A WOMAN (30s, nicely dressed) clambers down the row of seats towards her.

VI
I'm Violet.

She looks down, motions to her name tag.

VI (CONT'D)
Well, yeah.

As the Woman reaches the aisle, she puts out her hand. Vi goes to shake it.

The Woman, holding the hand of a tomboy-ish GIRL, thrusts the girl's hand into Vi's. The girl has a dirt smear across one cheek.

VI (CONT'D)
Um...

WOMAN
I'm Gardenia Booth. This is Ava.

MRS. BOOTH rustles around in her purse while AVA (10), blinks up at Vi.

She pulls out a packet of wet-wipes. She bends down and starts to wipe Ava's face.

AVA
(whining)
Muu-uum.

MRS. BOOTH
I wouldn't have to if you stopped crawling around everywhere, Ava.

Ava pulls her hand away from Vi and jerks away from her mother. She stuffs both her hands into her pockets.

AVA
I don't wanna do this. Can't I just --

MRS. BOOTH
No, Ava. This is supposed to be fun, remember?

She scrunches the used wet-wipe back into her purse and turns to Vi, shaking her head.

MRS. BOOTH (CONT'D)
 But this one's idea of fun is climbing around in trees and poking things with sticks. I had to practically drag her out of the car.
 (beat; cheerful)
 Well, good luck.

She smiles down at Ava and smooths her hair.

MRS. BOOTH (CONT'D)
 Be good, sweetie.

Ava moves her head away. Mrs. Booth looks hurt for a moment before plastering on a smile and walking away.

Vi watches after her for a moment. Then, she looks around the hall at the other Mentors. They all seem to be "bonding" with their contestants.

VI
 Okay, Ava. I guess we should...

She looks back to Ava. She's gone.

VI (CONT'D)
 ... Run away.
 (beat)
 Good idea.

She sighs and walks up the aisle, looking around for the girl.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Vi weaves her way across the floor, stepping around various Mentors and their Contestants as they get to know each other.

Then, she appears to find who she's looking for.

VI
 Penny!

PENNY MORGAN stands with a confident looking blonde girl - KELLY. They're both currently with their mobile phones out, thumbs dancing across the keys.

PENNY
 What do you want, freak? I'm busy.

VI
I lost my kid.

Penny lowers her phone and shares a look with Kelly.

PENNY
See, what did I tell you, Kelly?
She's hopeless.

Vi folds her arms over her chest defensively.

VI
If you're not going to help me --

PENNY
I'm not.

VI
Fine.

She walks away. Penny rolls her eyes and turns back to Kelly but the girl is swiftly heading for the door.

PENNY
Hang on! Where are you going? I'm
supposed to be mentoring you!

Kelly pauses.

KELLY
Don't worry. I've done hundreds
of these things.

Holds up her mobile phone.

KELLY (CONT'D)
Text me when something
interesting happens, kay?

And she's off, leaving Penny alone and a little stunned.

EXT. GARRETON MANSION - NIGHT

The place is huge. More luxurious than even Bianca's house.

Andrew and Kou step up to the front door.

ANDREW
You know, I'm an impulsive guy.
When I go into things, I
generally don't have a plan. But,
this entire lack of a plan thing
that we have going on? Insane.
Just saying it. Just putting it
out there.
(beat)
Seriously, Kou.
(MORE)

ANDREW (CONT'D)

What are we supposed to say? "Hi, Mr. Garreton. You wouldn't happen to be using the name of your famous ancestor while you share the secrets of the undead CIA, would you?"

Kou presses the doorbell and the SOUND echoes throughout the house.

KOU

We don't even know if any of the Garreton family have connections to the Company.

ANDREW

Then what are we doing here?

KOU

Starting at square one.

The door opens. MRS. GARRETON stands in the doorway, draped in jewelry and an elegant silk robe.

MRS. GARRETON

No thank you. We're Catholic.

She goes to close the door but Kou steps forward slightly.

KOU

Mrs. Garreton, my name is Kou Yimou. This is my associate, Andrew Friar. We're reporters for the Garreton Herald.

MRS. GARRETON

Reporters. You're doing a story? On... what, exactly?

KOU

Well, on your family. That is, if you'll agree to an interview.

She considers this for a moment.

MRS. GARRETON

Well... I suppose it is about time we appeared in something other than the social pages.

She swings the door open wider. Turning, she moves off into the house.

Andrew looks to Kou who motions him inside. As they enter:

ANDREW

Nice.

KOU
It's a gift.

Kou closes the door after them.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Vi walks across the stage, still looking around for Ava.

She spots another girl - LIZA - quietly crying by the side of the stage. No one seems to be taking care of her.

Vi approaches tentatively.

VI
Um... Hi.

Liza looks up at her, eyes huge and glistening with tears.

VI (CONT'D)
Are you... lost?

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)
Morgan!

Vi whirls around to see DIANA CROSS stalking across the stage towards her.

VI
(shocked)
Diana?

DIANA
No, it's Jennifer Hawkins.

Vi leans in closer and lowers her voice.

VI
Are you here for an assignment?

DIANA
You think I don't have a life?

VI
So, you're --

DIANA
I always volunteer for Little Miss Lovely, Vi. Every year. It's my thing.

She turns to Liza.

DIANA (CONT'D)
(sharp)
Liza! Stop crying. Winners don't cry. Come on, let's go practice.

She holds out her hand. Liza doesn't move. Diana snaps her fingers impatiently. Liza takes her hand and they walk off.

VI

(under her breath)

Might wanna find a new thing.

Vi turns, walking down the short flight of steps to the auditorium floor.

Reaching the bottom, she finds Damon - with Ava in tow - moving swiftly along the front row of seats.

Damon stops at Vi and thrusts Ava's hand into hers.

DAMON

Found her hiding in one of the back rooms. You'd better keep an eye on her.

(beat)

Not everyone is cut out for the pageant world.

He leaves.

Vi looks down at Ava who's staring intently down at her foot as she shakes it - watching her loose shoelaces flopping around.

Vi sighs.

CUT TO BLACK:

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

EXT. GARRETON MANSION - NIGHT

The windows glow with golden light, filtering out onto the mossy green of the lawns. Picture perfect.

The sounds of CLINKING SILVERWARE and LIGHT CLASSICAL MUSIC bring us into...

INT. GARRETON MANSION - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

It's dinner time. Mrs. Garreton sits at the head of a long dining table. Kou and Andrew sit to one side of her, facing the doorway.

KOU

It's very kind of you to ask us to stay for dinner, Mrs. Garreton.

MRS. GARRETON

It's my pleasure. With Mr. Garreton away on business, this big house can be somewhat lonesome.

She takes a sip of wine.

A young woman enters the room, weighed down with shopping bags from expensive boutiques.

DOMINIQUE GARRETON (20) is a gorgeous, waif-like girl with a constant mischievous twinkle in her eye.

DOMINIQUE

Mother, I know I'm late for dinner but -- Oh.

She notices Andrew and Kou.

DOMINIQUE (CONT'D)

Hello.

She drops her bags to the floor and slips into a chair across the table. Kou stands as she does this, Andrew awkwardly following suit.

MRS. GARRETON

Dear, these are reporters from the paper.
(to Andrew and Kou)
This is my daughter, Dominique.

As the boys sit down again:

KOU
Nice to meet you.

DOMINIQUE
The pleasure's all mine.

But her eyes are fixed firmly on Andrew.

He smiles nervously. Lifting his glass, he gulps down his wine.

INT. GARRETON MANSION - HALLWAY - LATER

Andrew walks down the elegant hallway. The walls are lined with family portraits. His eyes are peeled for anything suspicious.

He glances behind a thick velvet curtain but only finds a window.

DOMINIQUE (O.S.)
Looking for something?

Andrew jumps, startled, and turns around. Dominique stands in a doorway, a smile on her lips.

ANDREW
I was just --

In a slow, sultry walk, she moves towards him.

DOMINIQUE
I don't care.

ANDREW
Oh.

She's right up close to him now. Studying him.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
S-so, Miss Garreton --

DOMINIQUE
Call me Dominique.
(beat)
Wanna go for a walk?

Andrew glances over her shoulder.

ANDREW
Shouldn't we get back to the table?

Dominique takes his hand and turns. They begin walking down the rest of the hallway.

DOMINIQUE

Don't worry. Mum's on her fourth glass. She'll be gushing on about the economy - which she knows nothing about. We won't be missed.

Andrew looks down. She's still holding his hand. He takes a deep breath. Nods to the portraits.

ANDREW

Are these of your family?

DOMINIQUE

Yes. Going back for generations.

ANDREW

Up to... er... Wilhelm Garretton?

DOMINIQUE

He's up there somewhere.

(beat)

Why are you so interested?

ANDREW

I'm writing an article.

DOMINIQUE

Oh. Yeah.

She smiles.

DOMINIQUE (CONT'D)

What are you going to write about me?

Andrew stops walking. He pulls his hand away.

ANDREW

Look, Dominique...

DOMINIQUE

(innocent)

Yes, Andrew?

ANDREW

I'm sure you're a very nice girl but --

From somewhere in the house, someone starts playing the PIANO. Badly.

Dominique sighs.

DOMINIQUE

And that's the fifth glass right there.

She turns, heading back down the hallway.

DOMINIQUE (CONT'D)
I'd better lock the wine cellar.

At the doorway, she glances back at him.

DOMINIQUE (CONT'D)
Oh, by the way? I am a nice girl.
Most of the time.

She smiles then ducks out, into the other room. Andrew lets out a breath.

He starts to follow her. When he reaches the doorway, something catches his eye at the end of the hallway.

A small, two person elevator.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - LOBBY - DAY

Vi enters, dragging her feet.

Ava sits on a bench by the wall, looking glum. Vi approaches.

Vi sighs and sits down beside her.

AVA
Where have you been? Every one else is already practicing with their mentors.

Vi looks at her blankly.

AVA (CONT'D)
The talent section? It's today!

VI
You're a little more enthusiastic about this than I thought you would be.

AVA
I need you to help me get out of it.

Vi blinks in surprise.

VI
What?

AVA
Look, I know you don't want to do this either. Let's just... I don't know... leave.

VI

Ava...

Ava frowns, crossing her arms.

AVA

Fine. But you're not making me get on stage.

A beat. Vi studies her stern, determined face.

VI

You're... you're afraid, aren't you? Is that it?

AVA

What? No.

VI

It's okay to be nervous about going on stage. I think everyone is.

Ava's eyes flick to Kelly. She stands across the room, bouncing and twirling around - performing to strangers.

AVA

She's not.

VI

Well, you're not her.
(beat)
Come on.

She stands, taking Ava's hand.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - AUDITORIUM - DAY

It's empty. Everyone's backstage or out in the lobby.

Vi walks up the short flight of stairs, stepping onto the stage. She turns to Ava, still in the aisle.

VI

See? It's not so bad.

AVA

But that's because there's no one here.

FOOTSTEPS sound from the wings. Ava gasps and ducks amongst the rows of chairs.

VI

Ava!

Vi scurries after her. She gets out of sight just as Diana and Liza enter.

DIANA
Okay, Liza. I'm serious this time. If you don't get this right then --

LIZA
I want to go home.

DIANA
Well you can't go home.

Liza lets out a sob and runs off stage.

DIANA (CONT'D)
Yeah, alright. Go and cry. I'm sure that'll solve everything!

She sighs. Then, glances around the empty stage. She turns to face the empty seats, pulls back her shoulders and smiles.

She raises her hands, sculpting them to hold an invisible trophy.

DIANA (CONT'D)
(teary)
I'd like to thank the Academy. My peers. My fans. Thank you. Thank you so much.

Dropping her arms, she takes a moment. Then:

DIANA (CONT'D)
Liza!

Diana stalks off stage - following the direction Liza ran. After she leaves, Vi and Ava sit up.

AVA
She reminds me of my mum.

Vi laughs. Ava joins in.

INT. RETIREMENT HOME - RECEPTION - DAY

Shane enters. About a dozen Garreton Academy STUDENTS stand around the room, talking and laughing together.

He spots Gwen, standing with her friends. He makes his way over - about to reach out and tap her on the shoulder when...

... A middle-aged, stern looking SUPERVISOR steps out from behind the reception desk, clipboard in hand.

SUPERVISOR
Attention, please!

The room quiets down.

SUPERVISOR (CONT'D)
Welcome to the Garretton
retirement home. I'll be
splitting you up into pairs and
then assigning you to your job
for the day. Listen for your
name. Henry Parker and Julia
Hills. Sarah McCarthy and Rachel
Cole. Shane Evans and...

Shane leans forward in anticipation.

INT. RETIREMENT HOME - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

An irritated Shane walks quickly down the hallway. ERIN
FOWLER jogs to catch up.

ERIN
Hey, Shane. Wait up.

SHANE
(muttered)
You wait up.

He storms through the double doors at the end of the
hallway. Erin stops walking. A beat.

ERIN
Um... Okay...

Shaking his head in confusion, Erin slowly follows.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - AUDITORIUM - DAY

It's dark. The AUDIENCE APPLAUDS as the MC, a polished guy
in his thirties with a wide, toothy smile, raises a
microphone to his mouth.

MC
Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to
the talent portion of this week
long extravaganza. You've been
introduced to our lovely ladies,
now let's see what makes them so
special!

As Vi watches from the darkened wings of the stage, we
proceed with a series of INTERCUT SCENES.

- XANTHE, a nervous ten-year-old, walks centre stage. She
lifts a violin to her shoulder and begins to play. The
MUSIC becomes our soundtrack for the following...

- Liza, wearing a pale pink tutu, begins to dance. She's good but on a jump, she lands awkwardly - stumbling to the side. She sways of a moment, her smile faltering, but then she continues as if nothing had happened.

- Kelly, dressed in a striped leotard, is doing a gymnastics routine. She waves a ribbon in the air, prancing around the stage like a gazelle. But, like Liza, something goes wrong. Kelly steps on the end of her ribbon. As she pulls it up, the stick shoots out of her hand and CLATTERS to the floor.

Enraged, Kelly picks up the ribbon and hurls it to the ground. She storms off stage - right in the middle of the routine.

- Back to Xanthe, she finishes her musical piece. The audience APPLAUDS wildly. Her performance was perfect.

MC (CONT'D)

And now please welcome, Ava
Booth!

Ava slowly walks into the spotlight. She turns to the audience. Takes a deep breath and...

... Sprints right off stage again.

Ava barrels past Vi. Concerned, Vi follows.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - BACK ROOM - DAY

Ava sits at the table, with her face hidden in her folded arms. She's sobbing. Terribly distraught.

Vi enters cautiously, closing the door behind her. She's unsure of what to do.

VI

Um... Ava? Are you... okay?

Ava continues to cry. Vi grabs a box of tissues off the shelf and crosses to the table. She sits down next to Ava, handing her a tissue.

VI (CONT'D)

It wasn't so bad.

Ava lifts her head.

AVA

Are you kidding? They all think
I'm pathetic.

VI

They don't.

AVA
I won't win.

VI
Not like you care, right? You
don't even want to be here.
(beat)
You know... I never even asked...
What's your talent?

AVA
I sing.

VI
Seriously?

AVA
Yeah. So?

VI
No, I just... So, singing, huh?
Cool. Can I see?
(beat)
Or... hear?

Ava bites her lip.

VI (CONT'D)
It's just me.

A beat. Vi turns her chair around so her back faces Ava.
She sits down again.

Ava hides a small smile. She takes a deep breath and starts
to sing softly. We recognise it as Kelly Clarkson's
"Breakaway".

AVA
(singing)
*Grew up in a small town / And
when the rain would fall down /
I'd just stare out my window /
Dreaming of what could be / And
if I'd end up happy / I would
pray / I would --*

The door bursts open. Damon enters.

DAMON
What are you doing in here? This
is the judges' room. It's off
limits!

Vi and Ava stand quickly.

VI
Sorry. We didn't know.

Damon stands by the door. Waiting. A beat.

VI (CONT'D)

Oh, right!

She and Ava exit. Damon throws a last look around the room before exiting and closing the door.

INT. THE COMPANY - RECEPTION - DAY

The elevator CHIMES and the doors open. Andrew and Kou step out, into the reception office.

ANDREW

All I'm saying is, I don't think the Garreton angle is a lost cause.

KOU

They know nothing.

ANDREW

How can you tell?

They turn the corner.

INT. THE COMPANY - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Still walking.

KOU

Because I'm observant.

ANDREW

Then what am I?

They stop outside the break room. Andrew rests his palm on the door, about to enter, when he stops.

Through the window in the door, he sees Jenna sitting at the table. She sips a cup of tea and stares off into space.

KOU

She's very pretty, isn't she?

Shocked, Andrew whirls around. Indignation flashes across his face.

ANDREW

What? Kou, I have no idea --

KOU

Dominique Garreton.

Andrew snaps his mouth shut.

KOU (CONT'D)

But she's --

ANDREW

A total gold mine of information,
Kou. Vital... cherry scented lip-
gloss information.

Kou sighs, shaking his head.

KOU

Fine. I'll swing by the records
department. Maybe one of the
Garreton's has been involved in
an assignment. You stay on
Dominique.

Andrew smirks.

KOU (CONT'D)

Oh, dear God.

He continues down the hall, leaving Andrew by the break
room.

INT. THE COMPANY - BREAK ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Andrew enters, chuckling to himself. Jenna looks up.

JENNA

What's so funny?

Andrew shakes his head as he nears the kitchen bench.

ANDREW

Oh, nothing.

He takes a cookie out of a jar. Takes a bite.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

How's everything going?

JENNA

Good. I think.

Andrew gives her a questioning look.

JENNA (CONT'D)

Benson's in a, hopefully, final
meeting with the Head Office Rep.
You know, assure him that
everything's under control and
we've got some strong leads in
the investigation.

ANDREW

But we do, right? We've deduced that Crenshaw is Grenshaw who is really Garreton which puts us...

JENNA

Back around where we started.

Finishing his cookie, Andrew brushes off his hands. He sits down at the table and leans forward in earnest.

ANDREW

Listen, Jenna. I really think these Garreton's are the key. I mean, I've already got an in with Dominique. She knows something, I'm positive.

Jenna looks unconvinced.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Fine? You want proof? They've got an elevator in their house!

JENNA

All that proves is that they're rich and lazy.

A beat. Jenna looks down at her cup of tea. Begins tracing her fingers along the rim of the cup.

JENNA (CONT'D)

So, this, uh, Dominique...

ANDREW

Yeah?

JENNA

What sort of... in do you have, exactly?

She looks at him, eyes wide - innocently curious.

ANDREW

(proud)
Well, she sort of...
(awkward)
... has a crush on me.

Jenna leans back in her chair.

JENNA

Oh.

She tightens her grip on her tea cup.

JENNA (CONT'D)
Do you think it's really wise to
be manipulating her like this?

Andrew frowns, suddenly defensive.

ANDREW
Who said I'm manipulating her?

JENNA
Well, I just assumed --

ANDREW
That I was using her? God, Jenna.
What kind of guy do you think I
am?

Jenna's stunned, unable to reply.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Did it ever occur to you that I
had feelings for her?

Jenna scoffs.

JENNA
Feelings? Please! You've known
this girl for, what, half an
hour? And you're planning the
wedding already?

Andrew stands.

ANDREW
Maybe I am. And I guess you're
not invited.

Jenna stands as well.

JENNA
Well, I wouldn't want to come
anyway.

ANDREW
Fine!

JENNA
Fine!

Andrew storms out of the room. Jenna, breathing hard, takes
a moment. Then...

JENNA (CONT'D)
(confused)
What is wrong with me?

She slowly sits back down.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - AUDITORIUM - DAY

Vi and Ava sneak in the back. They stand in shadow, watching as the MC walks on stage.

MC

The judges' have submitted their scores. I have in my hands the name of the girl with the highest score - and therefore the winner - of this round. Can I have a drum roll, please?

A pre-recorded DRUM ROLL sounds from the speakers. The MC slowly opens an envelope.

AVA

Who do you think it'll be?

VI

Xanthe. She's the only one who didn't mess up.

(beat)

No offense.

MC

Kelly Richmond!

Amid confused but supportive APPLAUSE, Kelly rushes on stage. She bows - sporting a huge grin.

Ava looks up at Vi. Vi just shrugs, equally as surprised.

CUT TO BLACK:

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

INT. MORGAN RESIDENCE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Vi enters, yawning. She's dressed in pajamas, her hair is uncombed and tangled.

Penny sits at the kitchen table. She's all showered and made up, with a laptop in front of her.

As Vi takes a glass out of the cupboard:

VI
Morning, Covergirl.

PENNY
(without looking up)
Morning, dogbreath.

Vi frowns.

VI
(muttered)
But mine wasn't mean.

She turns to the fridge to get a carton of orange juice. Penny continues to type on the laptop.

Vi glances at the digital clock on the microwave. It's 7:42.

VI (CONT'D)
What could be so important for you to sacrifice your precious beauty sleep? The next round isn't til noon.

PENNY
I'm prepping for today's Q&A, and Kelly will be here in a sec.

VI
Overachiever much?

Vi sits down at the table, glass of juice in hand. She tries to sneak a peek at what Penny's working on but Penny turns the laptop out of view.

VI (CONT'D)
(hinting)
So, Penny, weird about your girl winning the talent show despite totally tripping over herself, huh?

PENNY

Stark contrast to your girl's
stunning performance art piece.
What was the title? "I'm a Loser
Cry Baby Who Couldn't Win Third
Prize at a Dog Show"?

VI

Come on, Penny. You saw Xanthe's
performance. It was perfect. And
even you have to admit Kelly kind
of self-destructed on stage.

PENNY

I know what you're doing, you
know.

Vi knits her eyebrows together, confused.

PENNY (CONT'D)

Get jealous all you want, but I'm
not going to let you sabotage
this for me.

Vi, realising she's not wanted, gets up to leave. As she
exits, however, she pauses in the doorway.

VI

(thinking)
Sabotage, huh?

Penny just levels a glare at her. Vi ducks out of the room.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - BACKSTAGE - DAY

Vi stands talking to Diana, who is looking at her like
she's crazy.

DIANA

Let me get this straight - you
think Kelly and your sister are
bribing the judges so Kelly can
win?

Vi nods.

DIANA (CONT'D)

How crazy is your sister,
exactly? This isn't America's
Next Top Model.

VI

(shrugs)
Penny likes winning.

PENNY

Apparently.

VI

It's not like you can talk,
considering you've done
everything short of threaten your
girl's life if she doesn't win.

Diana sighs, rubbing her forehead.

DIANA

Look, Vi, I've done this before.
To a newbie like yourself I
probably seem intense, but I know
that once Liza stops worrying
about every little thing, she'll
be unstoppable.

(beat)

The confidence that she'll get
from this - from me, it's gonna
help her a lot when she's out in
the rest of the world.

VI

(surprised)

That's... actually not evil at
all.

Diana smiles, almost sincerely.

DIANA

Besides, if you see it that way,
it's a lot easier to accept the
fact that your girl doesn't have
a chance.

Vi stutters, taken aback.

VI

Well, she... she doesn't even
want to win.

DIANA

But you're not disagreeing.

VI

Yeah, but... So what if Ava's not
going to win? It's Little Miss
Lovely. I seriously doubt this is
going to be the highlight of her
life.

DIANA

And if it is?

VI

Kid probably needs lots of
therapy.

She laughs, stepping around Diana. She freezes.

Ava stands behind Diana, holding two vending machine sandwiches. Tears in her eyes, she turns and runs off.

VI (CONT'D)
Oh, man... Ava! Wait!

She runs after her. Diana moves to follow. Then:

DIANA
(shrugs)
Eh. Whatever.

She walks off in the opposite direction.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - HALLWAY - DAY

Vi tears past Mrs. Booth and another woman, MRS. RICHMOND. Recognising her, Mrs. Booth turns.

MRS. BOOTH
Violet?

Vi skids to a stop.

MRS. BOOTH (CONT'D)
This is Mrs. Richmond.

MRS. RICHMOND
(proud)
Kelly's mum.

MRS. BOOTH
We were just discussing something
and I was wondering, which do you
think is more important - voice
or movement?

VI
What?

MRS. RICHMOND
Movement, of course. Anyone can
sing nowadays. Lip-syncing being
back in and everything.

Mrs. Richmond smiles coldly.

MRS. RICHMOND (CONT'D)
I would have thought your
daughter could have used a
backing tape yesterday, Gardenia.

Mrs. Booth blushes, embarrassed.

MRS. BOOTH

(to Vi)

Yes, well, which do you think the judges value more?

Vi just looks at her as if she's sprouted rabbit ears.

VI

I can't even -- Who cares?

Mrs. Richmond gasps.

VI (CONT'D)

Did you even see Ava? She ran past you, crying.

(beat)

And you don't even care.

Vi continues on, leaving Mrs. Booth to think over her words.

EXT. RIVERSIDE - DAY

Andrew and Dominique walk along the edge of the river, a picturesque landscape behind them.

Dominique rushes ahead to the small wooden bridge across the river. She hops up and sits on one side of the railings. Andrew sits across from her.

ANDREW

So... An elevator in your house? Seriously?

DOMINIQUE

We do have six floors. Besides, mum just loves that "whooshing" feeling.

They share a smile.

DOMINIQUE (CONT'D)

What about you?

Before he can speak, she raises a finger.

DOMINIQUE (CONT'D)

And none of that "I ask the questions" stuff, mister. This isn't an official interview or anything.

Andrew shakes his head at her quite accurate assumption.

ANDREW

Not much to tell. Lived in Garreton my whole life.

(MORE)

ANDREW (CONT'D)

I've got two parents, two siblings, probably about a hundred embarrassing baby pictures. Not that interesting.

DOMINIQUE

Brothers or sisters?

ANDREW

Two sisters.

(beat)

Actually, it's funny. My dad always used to joke that I'd be the only one to make something of myself. You know, have a real future. My sisters, they were pretty headstrong. Did whatever they wanted. They weren't interested in "normal". According to my dad, I was going to be normal. I had to.

(beat; sad)

Guess it didn't turn out that way, huh?

Dominique giggles. She hops off the bridge railing.

DOMINIQUE

What are you talking about, silly? Being a reporter is very normal. Boring, almost.

A beat. Andrew blinks.

ANDREW

Oh, uh, yeah.

DOMINIQUE

But, I hope there are still some deep dark secrets buried away in there somewhere.

ANDREW

What? Why?

DOMINIQUE

I can't be the only one with secrets. It's not fun.

ANDREW

You have secrets?

Dominique smiles and nods, stepping closer to him.

DOMINIQUE

A big one.

Andrew perks up.

ANDREW
(interested)
Really?

She steps forward slowly, until their faces are barely an inch from one another.

DOMINIQUE
I kind of have a crush on you.

He grins a little.

ANDREW
Sorry, that wasn't so much a secret.

DOMINIQUE
I guess I haven't been subtle.
Still, saying it means I can do this...

Before he can react, Dominique reaches out and pulls him in for a KISS.

After a couple moments, she pulls back - very pleased with herself.

DOMINIQUE (CONT'D)
Come with me to the Little Miss
Lovely pageant.

Andrew raises an eyebrow.

DOMINIQUE (CONT'D)
It's this dinky little thing my
family's got tickets to. We're
Garreton's.

She adopts a upper-class English accent.

DOMINIQUE (CONT'D)
It's expected of us.

ANDREW
(happy)
Well, I'm not exactly in a
position to refuse.

He leans forward and gives her another kiss, a bit deeper than the first. She pulls back, smiles.

DOMINIQUE
It's a date.

She turns to go but pauses and looks back at him. She reaches out a hand.

DOMINIQUE (CONT'D)

Coming?

He grins and bounds after her.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - HALLWAY - LATER

Vi enters the hallway where Penny stands alone, texting into her phone. She looks up at Vi and smiles maliciously.

PENNY

Lost your kid again?

VI

Shut it.

PENNY

Don't worry, you already missed the Q&A, and Kelly totally rocked it.

Penny, smug, walks past Vi and around the corner.

PENNY (CONT'D)

(without looking back)

The judges are submitting the scores as we speak, Vi. It's over.

She's gone - but Vi is paused in thought.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - JUDGES' ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Vi enters, immediately spotting Ava at the table. Ava wipes her eyes and stands.

VI

Hey.

Ava looks down at the ground.

AVA

Hey.

VI

We'd better --

Outside the door, CHATTER and FOOTSTEPS inform that they're about to have some company.

Vi looks around and spies a door. She points.

VI (CONT'D)

(whispered)

Go!

Vi grabs the sandwiches - abandoned on the table - and turns. She stops. Ava has opened the door. It's a closet, not a way out.

The other door starts to open. Vi pushes Ava gently into the closet and follows, closing the door after herself.

The panel of four JUDGES enter followed by an ASSISTANT.

They each hand their scorecards to the Assistant who sits down on a couch - calculator and pen in hand.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - CLOSET - MOMENTS LATER

Vi and Ava stand. Illuminated only by the light coming through the slats in the door.

They listen the MUFFLED VOICES of the judges in the room. Chairs SCRAPE on the floor. Someone OPENS a window. They make COFFEE.

Vi sighs. Ava slowly sinks to the floor, sitting cross legged. Vi follows suit, moving awkwardly in the cramped space.

Now both on the floor, Vi hands Ava a sandwich. When they speak, they talk in hushed tones.

AVA

Thanks.

A beat.

VI

Ava, I'm sorry about what I said.

AVA

No, you're right. I don't even want to do the stupid pageant.

(beat)

I know my mum just wants what's best for me. She knows I love singing. She always says that stage fright kills careers, and she's right. I need to grow up.

She shrugs, suddenly very small.

AVA (CONT'D)

It's just hard.

Vi looks contemplative.

VI

It's alright to be scared sometimes, Ava.

(MORE)

VI (CONT'D)

I know you weren't afraid to sing for me, though, and if we got you up there enough times, you'd be amazing.

Ava nods. Vi takes a bite of her sandwich and frowns, handing it over to Ava.

VI (CONT'D)

Chicken salad's yours.

Ava chuckles quietly at Vi's mistake. The two girls move closer to sit side by side, eating their sandwiches.

EXT. RETIREMENT HOME - AFTERNOON

Shane and Erin wash windows, a bucket of soapy water in between them. They work silently.

Gwen exits the building, pushing a WOMAN IN A WHEELCHAIR.

GWEN

Hey, guys.

ERIN

Hey.

Shane, looking dumbstruck, just smiles and squeezes the sponge in midair - sending soapy water cascading onto Erin's shoes.

ERIN (CONT'D)

Dude, watch it!

Shane continues to stare at Gwen as she moves further down the path. She stops by the street, puts the breaks on the Woman's wheelchair, and comes around to speak to her.

Erin looks from Shane to Gwen and back again.

ERIN (CONT'D)

Don't even think about it.

Shane looks over to see Erin that has caught him.

SHANE

And why not? Give me one good reason.

ERIN

Niko Shelby.

SHANE

I said one.

ERIN

You said one reason, not one word, genius.

(MORE)

ERIN (CONT'D)

(beat)

Shane, he'd kill you. I've gotten a good look at the guy's muscles in the shower room and --

Shane stifles a laugh. Erin narrows his eyes.

ERIN (CONT'D)

Fine. Be twelve. All I'm saying is that he's a friend of mine and I've seen him send more than one guy to the nurse's office for even looking at Gwen the wrong way.

SHANE

As if Gwen would put up with that.

ERIN

Who said she knows about it?

Shane laughs bitterly, shaking his head.

SHANE

You and your friends, mate.

ERIN

What's that supposed to mean?

A beat. Shane drops his sponge, taking a few steps away from the window.

ERIN (CONT'D)

(warning)

Shane, no.

Throwing a defiant smirk at Erin, Shane turns and walks down to the street.

SHANE

Gwen!

Gwen turns in his direction. Waves. As Shane continues over, the Woman in the wheelchair looks up at Gwen.

WOMAN

Is this the boyfriend you were telling me about?

GWEN

No, that's Shane. He's just a --

Shane arrives.

SHANE

I like you.

Silence. Gwen's confused. She laughs a little.

GWEN
Well, I like...
(beat; realising)
Oh.

Shane gulps - suddenly terrified. This is the point of no return.

SHANE
I've kept quiet about it because
it'd be complicated and you're
all boyfriended up, but, hey, I'm
taking my shot.
(beat)
And, I mean, be honest - Niko's
pretty much a meathead, right?

Gwen is stuck for a response. That's alright, because a FIST collides with Shane's cheek and sends him flying to the ground.

GWEN
Niko!

It is indeed Niko, who is looking down at Shane, seriously pissed.

NIKO
Not cool, Evans. Seriously not
cool.

Shane clambers to his feet, rubbing his cheek. Niko pulls back his arm again but Erin springs between them.

Niko doesn't even try to weave past him, just angles his shoulders down and runs - collecting Erin in his attempt to get to Shane.

Shane falls into the row of hedges by the footpath, Erin goes toppling in beside him.

Erin's up almost immediately as Shane flounders in the springy leaves. Niko reaches down, grabbing his shirt.

GWEN
Niko! Stop!

Erin yanks Niko's arm back - and it collides with his own face. Erin stumbles back, blood dripping from his lip.

Niko, feeling the impact, turns.

ERIN
Let it go, man.

Niko looks back at Shane with pure hate in his eyes. He turns swiftly, walking back to Gwen.

NIKO
(to Gwen)
You ready to go?

Gwen blinks in shock.

GWEN
Dora wanted to meet you.

The Woman in the wheelchair waves sweetly. Niko, taking a last disgusted look at Shane, stalks off.

WOMAN
He's lovely.

Erin, wiping at his lip, turns back to Shane. He offers him his other hand.

Shane ignores him, pulling himself up instead. Once he's on his feet, he hurries past the group - back into the building.

Gwen watches him, pained.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - CLOSET - NIGHT

Vi and Ava doze against each other. The sound of a DOOR CLOSING in the other room wakes Vi.

She shakes Ava awake.

VI
(whispered)
I think they're gone.

They stay still for a moment - listening. There's nothing.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - JUDGES' ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The closet door opens. Vi and Ava step out, only to see...

... Mrs. Richmond standing over the table, the results envelope in front of her and a pen in her hand!

She looks up - shocked at the appearance of the girls.

Vi throws Ava a look. Not even needing to be told, Ava makes a break for the door. She yanks it open to reveal Damon on the other side.

He sighs.

DAMON
Guys, for the last time --

VI

(interrupts)

Mrs. Richmond was cheating!

(beat)

I think. I mean... She's got a pen and is all lean-y and I'm pretty sure that's the card that guy with the microphone reads the winner's name from. But, whatever, I could be wrong.

She puts her hand up beside her face, shielding her mouth from Mrs. Richmond's sight. She shakes her head.

VI (CONT'D)

(to Damon; mouths)

I'm not wrong!

Damon looks over the whole situation, then looks down at Ava and smiles.

DAMON

I guess we'd better go report this, huh?

Ava nods. Damon looks to Vi.

DAMON (CONT'D)

Keep her here while I deal with this, alright?

Vi nods. So does Mrs. Richmond.

Damon and Ava exit, closing the door behind them. Vi, smiling smugly, turns to Mrs. Richmond.

VI

Well, I guess someone's learned a valuable lesson today --

Mrs. Richmond pushes Vi backwards. She goes reeling back into the closet - tumbling into the shelves.

Mrs. Richmond slams the door closed. She presses her back against it, scouring the room for something to barricade the door.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - CLOSET - CONTINUOUS

Vi slowly gets to her feet, rubbing her sore shoulder.

VI

(calling)

What are you doing? Are you crazy? Security'll be here in like a minute!

She starts to open the door...

INT. EVENT CENTRE - JUDGE'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

... But Mrs. Richmond slides a filing cabinet in front of it - snapping the door shut!

She smiles, leaning close to the door so Vi can hear her.

MRS. RICHMOND
Damon isn't reporting me, Violet.
Why would he turn in his own
mother?

INT. EVENT CENTRE - CLOSET - CONTINUOUS

Vi reacts to this, realising what danger Ava is in.

MRS. RICHMOND (O.S.)
(muffled)
I'll come back and deal with you
once my Kelly has won.

There's the sound of a door OPENING and CLOSING. Mrs. Richmond has left.

Vi leaps forward and starts pounding on the door.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - JUDGES' ROOM - SAME

The THUMPING sounds weak and pitiful in the empty room. No one is there to save her.

CUT TO BLACK:

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

INT. EVENT CENTRE - STAGE WING - NIGHT

A black-clad female STAGE MANAGER with a clipboard and headset nears a group of Contestants and their Mentors.

STAGE MANAGER

Okay, kiddies. This is it. Dance finale is in ten minutes and then the judges announce the winner.

She eyes the Mentors in particular.

STAGE MANAGER (CONT'D)

That's ten minutes.

As she walks away, we find Bianca and Xanthe in the group. Xanthe begins to hyperventilate.

BIANCA

Hey, it's okay. You'll be fine. You did great in all the rehearsals.

Xanthe shakes her head furiously.

BIANCA (CONT'D)

Xanthe...

(beat)

I don't... I don't know if I'm a very good mentor. I honestly don't know what I'm good at. But you, Xanthe, are good at this.

(beat)

Even if you can't see it or the judges can't. I can.

Xanthe's breathing slows. She smiles a little.

STAGE MANAGER

(calling)

Violet Morgan? Ava Booth? Has anybody seen Violet or Ava?

Bianca looks up and around, eyes landing on the frazzled Stage Manager. She sighs.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - HALLWAY - LATER

Bianca walks slowly down the hall, peering into doorways.

She nears the judges' room. Door closed. She almost passes it when a muffled BANGING catches her attention.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - JUDGES' ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The door opens. Bianca enters, looking around.

BIANCA

Vi? You'd better get your butt moving. You're not going to ruin this for everyone else by --

The room is empty but the BANGING continues, louder this time. Bianca eyes the filing cabinet in front of the closet door.

She hurries forward and, with some effort, pushes it aside. She opens the closet door and Vi comes tumbling out, breathing hard.

BIANCA (CONT'D)

Vi! What the hell are you doing?

VI

I was... We were... It's hard to explain. But...

She stops.

VI (CONT'D)

Did you just rescue me?

BIANCA

Not on purpose.

VI

Look, I have to find Ava. She's in trouble.

Bianca suddenly looks concerned.

BIANCA

What can I do?

Vi reaches over to the table, grabbing the stack of score cards on top. She holds them out to Bianca.

VI

You're good at math, right?

INT. EVENT CENTRE - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Vi runs, weaving through the fray of PEOPLE. She stops and whirls around - looking in all directions.

Two CENTRE EMPLOYEES pass by her. They carry a rolled up length of material between them.

One stumbles, dropping it. The material unrolls, revealing itself to be a banner. The text across it reads...

"Garreton's Little Miss Lovely Pageant sponsored by COVERT CO. WALKIE-TALKIES". Underneath this, there's a cartoon of a little girl speaking into a walkie-talkie. The speech bubble coming from her reads, "Just take it, already!".

Vi stares at this - dumbfounded. One of the Centre Employees steps in front of her, sighing in frustration.

He bends down and starts to roll up the banner. Giving Vi a clear shot of the walkie-talkie on his belt.

Quick as lightning, she darts forward and snatches it off.

CENTRE EMPLOYEE

Hey!

But Vi's already disappeared into the crowd.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - BACKSTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Vi ducks behind a curtain, finding herself in a vacant change room. She presses a button on the walkie-talkie and winces at the FEEDBACK that screeches from it.

VI

(into walkie-talkie)

Can anyone hear me? Has anyone seen Damon?

She waits. Nothing.

VI (CONT'D)

(into walkie-talkie)

Hello?

AVA (O.S.)

(filtered)

Vi?

Vi's eyes light up. She brings the walkie-talkie closer to her ear.

VI

(into walkie-talkie)

Ava? Are you okay? Where are you?

AVA (O.S.)

(filtered)

I'm in a car. In the boot. His walkie-talkie thing fell in with me.

VI

(into walkie-talkie)

Hang on. I'll be right there.

She runs out of the change room. A moment later, the curtain for the next room over opens and Kelly peers out.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Mrs. Garreton, Dominique and Andrew are shown to their seats by an USHER.

As they sit down, Dominique places her hand on Andrew's. He looks down at their hands as she traces her thumb over the back of his.

Looking up, he notices her watching him. He smiles.

ANDREW

Hi.

Dominique giggles.

DOMINIQUE

Hi.

Andrew glances past her. There's an empty seat beside her with a "RESERVED" sign on it.

ANDREW

Are we expecting someone?

Dominique glances over at the seat.

DOMINIQUE

Just my boyfriend.

(beat)

And he's late, as usual.

Andrew laughs, a little nervously.

ANDREW

You're kidding, right?

Dominique raises her eyebrows.

DOMINIQUE

What do you mean?

He pulls her hand away from hers. Good timing, too, because DOMINIQUE'S BOYFRIEND - a tall, glorious Greek God of a man - towers over them just at that moment.

DOMINIQUE'S BOYFRIEND

Hi, sweetie.

Dominique's face lights up and she jumps to her feet, kissing him. Mrs. Garreton sniffs in disapproval.

MRS. GARRETON
Dominique! Restrain yourself, for
goodness sake.

Andrew stands.

ANDREW
I, ah... excuse me for a sec.

He pushes past Dominique and her Boyfriend. Once he's in
the aisle, Andrew hurries up towards the door.

DOMINIQUE'S BOYFRIEND
Who was that?

Dominique shakes her head as she takes his hand, pulling
him down into the seat beside her.

The lights in the auditorium go down and MUSIC starts to
play. The AUDIENCE applauds as the show begins.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

Andrew paces, his mobile phone pressed to his ear.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. JENNA'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Jenna stands by the microwave, watching a frozen dinner
rotate slowly.

Her mobile phone starts to RING. Without tearing her eyes
from the food, she reaches for where it sits on the bench
and answers it.

JENNA
(into phone)
Hello?

ANDREW
I really messed up.

Jenna, suddenly invested in the conversation, turns away
from the microwave.

JENNA
Andrew? What happened? Is
everything --

ANDREW
I thought I was getting somewhere
but she was... I feel so stupid
because I... I got angry at you
for... And it wasn't even your...

Jenna laughs, trying to cheer him up.

JENNA

God, Andrew, it sounds like you're trying to apologise or something.

ANDREW

(quickly)

Oh. Well, I'm not. That was the furthest thing from my...

Seriously, I don't need to...

(beat)

Do I?

JENNA

You tell me.

Andrew sighs. He looks around and adjusts his collar - suddenly looking self-conscious in the crowd of people.

ANDREW

Look, I'm going to swing by the Garreton's again. Take one last look around while they're at the pageant. But it looks like a lost cause.

(beat)

Sorry for calling.

JENNA

It's okay.

There's a beat. Andrew opens his mouth to say more. Jenna waits expectantly.

Andrew hangs up. Jenna's microwave BEEPS.

END INTERCUT:

INT. EVENT CENTRE - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Andrew tucks his mobile phone away and sets off across the lobby towards a side door.

Behind him, Vi crosses the room - hurrying for the main entrance.

EXT. EVENT CENTRE - CAR PARK - NIGHT

Vi's talking into the walkie-talkie as she runs. She cranes her neck to scan the rows of cars.

VI

(into walkie-talkie)

You said it was blue, right?

AVA (O.S.)
 (filtered)
 Maybe black.

VI
 (into walkie-talkie)
 Ava!

AVA (O.S.)
 (filtered)
 It was dark!

Frustrated, Vi lowers the walkie-talkie. She closes her eyes.

VI
 Come on! Just give me a Sign!

Snapping her eyes open, she is poised - ready to strike.

ANGLE ON CAR

It's dark blue. A bumper sticker reads, "My other car is a Millennium Falcon".

BACK TO VI

She smiles.

VI (CONT'D)
 (looking up)
 You don't get credit for that one.

Jogging over to the car, she bangs on the closed boot.

VI (CONT'D)
 Ava! Are you in there?

AVA (O.S.)
 (faint)
 Vi! You found me!

Vi grins.

VI
 Hang on, I'll get you out.

She goes to open it. It's locked. She rolls her eyes.

VI (CONT'D)
 (to herself)
 Right, Vi. And what were you expecting?

MRS. RICHMOND (O.S.)
 Ponies and marshmallows, perhaps?

Vi turns. Mrs. Richmond and Damon stand behind her.

MRS. RICHMOND (CONT'D)

This is a children's beauty pageant, dear. It's serious business.

VI

How'd you know where I was?

Damon steps forward and snatches the walkie-talkie away from Vi.

DAMON

They're all tuned to the same frequency. Everyone caught the radio play.

VI

(hopeful)

No one happened to be overly concerned, right? Decided to call the cops?

Damon smiles, shaking his head. He clips the walkie-talkie to his belt. He pulls a set of car keys from his pocket and starts tossing them in the air, catching them as they come down.

MRS. RICHMOND

The finale's about to start. Everyone's a little busy right now.

Damon tosses the keys up but they are caught in mid air by...

... Diana!

Mrs. Richmond, Damon and Vi stare at her in shock. They each are frozen - waiting for Diana to speak.

But she doesn't. She merely presses the remote control attached to the keys. The car's central locking BEEPS.

Vi flings the boot open. Ava sits up, her eyes wide and grease smudged across her face. Vi helps her climb out.

Diana hands the keys back to Damon. She turns to Vi.

DIANA

Are you going to run now, or what?

Vi and Ava take off towards the event centre.

MRS. RICHMOND
(to Damon)
Damon, stop them!

He reaches out for Diana but she kicks him in the shin - hard. YELPING, Damon reels back. He hops on one foot, clutching his injured leg.

MRS. RICHMOND (CONT'D)
Oh for God's sake, I'll do it myself.

She starts to move after Vi and Ava but Diana steps in her way.

MRS. RICHMOND (CONT'D)
You. Move.

Diana smiles sweetly. She holds up her hand, makes a fist and pulls her arm back.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - LOBBY - NIGHT

Vi and Ava run into the room. It's practically empty. An Usher is closing the door to the auditorium.

VI
Come on!

Vi grabs Ava's hand and the pair make a dash for the auditorium. They manage to duck inside just before the door closes.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

The place is dark as, on stage, the GIRLS walk out to uplifting MUSIC - lining up across the platform.

AVA
Vi, what are we doing?

Behind them, the door opens. As light floods in, Vi pulls Ava down - flattening themselves against the wall.

Damon and Mrs. Richmond enter, looking around. Mrs. Richmond holds a handkerchief to her bleeding nose.

Vi starts to move, leading Ava along the back wall. They stay low as they reach the opposite wall and start down the aisle - heading for the door backstage.

The MUSIC swells and SPOTLIGHTS roam the audience, swooping over Vi and Ava. Vi freezes.

Damon spots them, pointing them out to his mother.

VI

Crap!

AVA

Crap!

VI

Don't swear.

They run.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - STAGE WING - MOMENTS LATER

Vi and Ava dash through the dimly lit area. They make it to the edge of the stage, the heavy curtains hiding them from the audience.

The stage goes dark. The MUSIC fades away and the audience CLAPS wildly.

Mrs. Richmond and Damon run up the stairs. They move slowly towards Vi and Ava menacingly.

From the stage, "What I Like About You" by Lillix starts to play.

The lights go up and the Contestants begin to dance in formation - it's the big finale.

Vi looks back to Ava, grasping her shoulders.

VI

Go.

AVA

What?

Vi nods to the stage.

AVA (CONT'D)

No! I-I can't! I... I'm scared.

VI

Are you serious? You were just kidnapped and locked in the boot of a car. This is nothing!

She smiles. Ava takes a deep breath. She turns, facing the stage and runs.

She falls into step with the other girls. Kelly sees this and her winning smile falters a little.

Damon starts forward quickly but Mrs. Richmond grabs his arm.

MRS. RICHMOND

No! We can't ruin this for Kelly.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - STAGE - NIGHT

On stage, Ava's anxious grimace starts to become a smile as she feels the music.

The group parts, forming a clear space down the middle. Girls pair up, walking down the centre and striking a pose at the end.

Ava ends up walking down with Kelly.

At they reach the edge of the stage, Kelly throws her hair back, putting a hand on her hip. Ava crosses her eyes and sticks out her tongue at the audience who LAUGH.

The table of Judges also seem amused.

Moving back with the rest of the girls, the song reaches its climax. They finish - arms in the air, huge smiles on their faces.

The audience explodes into APPLAUSE.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - STAGE WING - NIGHT

Vi grins from the side of the stage, clapping.

The MC moves swiftly past her, adjusting his tie. He holds an envelope.

Bianca appears beside Vi.

BIANCA

How did it look?

Vi's a little surprised at her sincere line of questioning.

VI

Great.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. EVENT CENTRE - STAGE - NIGHT

As the MC takes centre stage, the Contestants file back into one line.

MC

Ladies and gentlemen, wasn't that just fantastic? I think our young ladies deserve another round of applause!

He starts it off, the audience following suit.

MC (CONT'D)

Now, this is the moment you've all been waiting for. Our judges have chosen a winner. But, really, aren't they all winners? Sure, there's just one crown but we have enough complimentary gift baskets for everybody.

He waits for applause. There is none. He opens the envelope.

MC (CONT'D)

I suppose I'll get right to it, then. The winner is...

A DRUM ROLL starts up. Mrs. Richmond and Damon wait in anticipation. Vi closes her eyes and crosses her fingers.

On the stage, Kelly steps forward.

MC (CONT'D)

Xanthe Odgen!

Kelly, Mrs. Richmond and Damon are horrified.

Xanthe, eyes wide in astonishment, doesn't move. Over the APPLAUSE:

XANTHE

What?

Ava grins, gently pushing her forward. Xanthe walks to centre stage.

Vi blinks.

VI

Huh...

She turns to Bianca who looks surprisingly laid back about the whole thing.

BIANCA

What?

VI

I know she was the best at the talent show but I honestly didn't think the rest of her scores would've added up like that.

BIANCA

And that's why you're not in advanced maths.

Bianca narrows her eyes, preparing for a fight. There's a beat.

Vi smiles.

VI

I guess you're right.

Bianca's a little shocked. She takes a moment, confused, and turns back to look out on the stage.

INT. RETIREMENT HOME - STORE ROOM - NIGHT

Shane and Erin stand back to back in the tiny room, searching the dusty shelves in front of them.

Erin, craning his neck up, takes a small step back and knocks into Shane. Shane lets out a frustrated sigh.

ERIN

(mumbled)

Sorry.

No reply.

ERIN (CONT'D)

Shane, I said --

SHANE

Can we just find the movies,
choose one and get out of here?

Erin nods. Looks back to the shelf. A few moments pass.

ERIN

Hey, I think I found it.

He drags a cardboard box off the shelf. It's stuffed full of DVDs and aging VHS tapes.

Shane grabs it from him and plonks it down on the floor. He sits down beside it.

Erin follows and watches Shane as he digs through the box.

ERIN (CONT'D)

You're not going to apologize?

SHANE

For what?

Erin gestures to his busted lip.

ERIN

Uh, hello?!

SHANE

Hey, I didn't punch you.

ERIN

But it's your fault!

(beat)

Is this... about Vi?

SHANE

No.

ERIN

Oh. Because that's all we really have in common. I mean --

SHANE

Of course, it's about Vi, bloody hell! You really are thick, you know that?

ERIN

Whoa, hey, I'm sorry if I'm not as intuitive as everyone seems to think I am. If Vi has a problem with me, I'm sure she'd bring it up.

SHANE

That's just it. She thinks you're perfect!

ERIN

Well then what's the freaking problem?

SHANE

But you're not, though, are you?

ERIN

Evans, what the hell are you going --

SHANE

The other week, all those things you were saying about girls... How it's so easy to get them to do anything just as long as you keep playing the nice guy?

A beat. Erin lets out a breath. Runs a hand through his hair.

ERIN

Oh, Jesus...

SHANE

You think I like someone like you dating my best friend? Thinking you can pull that crap on her?

ERIN

Shane, I can explain.

Shane grabs a DVD from the box and stands, kicking the box under the shelf.

SHANE

Save it for someone who cares.

He steps around Erin and moves for the door. Erin stands.

ERIN

But you do care. You care so much that you're willing to show From Dusk till Dawn to a retirement home because you can't stand being in the same room as me any more.

SHANE

What?

Erin nods to the DVD in Shane's hand. It is the Robert Rodriguez film, "From Dusk Till Dawn".

SHANE (CONT'D)

Do you think they'll like it?

ERIN

Kidnapping, murder, vampire strippers and non-stop swearing? Yeah, Shane, they'll love it.

SHANE

It is a pretty awesome movie.

ERIN

Have you seen the behind-the-scenes doco?

SHANE

Yeah, I've got it at home. Found it for, like, four bucks at Blockbuster.

There's a long beat.

ERIN

Sometimes I forget that we're not friends. And I just... I talk like I have to with my other friends.

(MORE)

ERIN (CONT'D)

The guys on the soccer team, you know? But it's not really me. I didn't mean what I said.

Shane takes this in. Nods. He studies the DVD.

SHANE

Do you think they'll kick us out if we play this?

ERIN

Probably.

SHANE

Sweet.

He turns and exits. Erin laughs, and then follows.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - STAGE WING - NIGHT

Two ASSISTANTS walk past Vi, carrying a bouquet of flowers and a tiara.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - STAGE - NIGHT

One Assistant places the tiara on Xanthe's head, the other hands her the flowers.

In the line of other Contestants, Kelly's face turns bright red with anger.

With a SCREAM, she launches forward - making a grab for the tiara. The MC wrestles with her, trying to pull her off of Xanthe.

BANG! Confetti explodes from somewhere up above and comes raining down on the stage.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - STAGE WING - CONTINUOUS

Embarrassed, Mrs. Richmond and Damon turn, trying to slink away.

Diana stands behind them, flanked by two SECURITY GUARDS.

INT. EVENT CENTRE - STAGE - MEANWHILE

MUSIC CUE: "Flying High" by Jem

In SLOW MOTION, Xanthe and Kelly continue to fight for the crown through the storm of confetti.

Ava, not caring about them, waves to Mrs. Booth in the audience who wipes away a tear.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ANDREW'S APARTMENT - ROOF TOP - NIGHT

Andrew's face is blank as he stares out over the glittering city.

We PULL BACK to find that he is sitting in one of two beach chairs.

Behind him, Vi appears in the stairwell doorway. She holds two full cocktail glasses, orange wedges on the rims.

Concentrating, she walks over to Andrew and awkwardly sits down in the empty chair.

She hands him a drink. He's about to take a sip.

VI

Oh, wait.

She hands her glass to Andrew. Digs in her pocket and produces two pink paper umbrellas. Dropping them into the drinks, she takes hers back.

She waits for him to drink but he doesn't. He stares down into the glass, playing with the umbrella.

VI (CONT'D)

They'll probably be better once I
learn how to make 'em with
alcohol.

Andrew smiles half-heartedly. He looks up at the view again. Vi does as well.

ANDREW

I always imagined that Garretton
started out right, you know? With
people who were good.

(beat)

I liked thinking that this place
meant something. And if I lived
here... then I meant something.

Vi looks saddened. Andrew shrugs.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Here's to meaning something.

He CLINKS his glass against hers.

As they both take slow, contemplative sips, we...

FADE OUT.

END OF EPISODE