

'BACKSTAGE'  
by  
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**INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY**

The school is quiet. Everything is still. Not a single mouse stirs. And then the bell goes. Almost instantly the hallway is swarmed with students, and the room erupts with chatter and laughter.

From the centre of this swarm emerges ANTHONY SHANE, an average sized comedian with shaggy brown locks and an oversized hoodie. He stumbles toward a locker on the far right of the corridor.

Struggling to open the locker, his phone begins to blare an obnoxiously loud ABBA song. He answers the call with a smile after seeing the caller ID.

ANTHONY

Hey baby. *\*listens\** Yeah, we're still on for tonight. *\*listens\** No, I didn't. I got a C at best. *\*listens\** Don't "Jesus Anthony" me, I'm trying to graduate here, not get into Harvard. *\*listens - gets cut off\** Yeah well, where I'm going I don't need those types of grades. I'd like to see you do better...

His voice fades as he closes his locker and blends back in with the crowd swarming for the doors.

Almost as soon as he's gone another appears, not only one but two of the HAYWOOD brothers, sauntering towards their adjacent lockers to dump their books inside. They are different, in every sense of the word. Where SEBASTIAN is tall, brunette and fair skinned, LIAM is short, black haired and asian.

LIAM

I failed so goddamn hard. Mom's going to kill me.

SEBASTIAN

Who fails an English test, Liam?

LIAM

Everyone except you. Sebastian the Prodigy Boy, look at him go!

SEBASTIAN

If I was a prodigy I wouldn't be in High School, I'd be in College.

LIAM

Or on one of those "Are you smarter than a smartass" game shows.

Up walks LILY GRAY, dressed to perfection and in it to win it. She's carrying flyers around.

LILY

You guys should join Student Council, we're looking for new members.

LIAM

And you should sign up for the School Play.

You can practically hear her eyes roll.

LILY

When I actually have time for your drama production, I'll think about it. Until then, the answer will still be no.

SEBASTIAN

Actually I heard they're cutting the debate club, so you'll have afternoons off now.

She shoots him a warning stare.

LILY

Why don't you sign up, Sebastian?

LIAM

He is.

SEBASTIAN

Liam's making me. I don't know how good I'll be on a stage, but he seems to think it'll be fun to order me around.

LIAM

Direct you, not order you around. Besides, it's just an audition. No certainty you'll actually get the part if Mr Peters doesn't pick you.

SEBASTIAN

See, Lily, I'm doing it, so you have to do it.

There is much angry staring from Lily, but she doesn't want to be shown up by *Sebastian* of all people, so she nods and turns to Liam.

LILY

Fine, sign me up. The day I'm outshone by your brother is the day they bury me. I'll catch you later, I've got a bus to catch.

LIAM

I'll walk you there!

SEBASTIAN

You forgot your bag you idiot!

He picks up Liam's stuff and rushes after them into the crowd.

The crowd dies down after that, the last of the students filtering out of the doors. Once again the hallways are quiet, and not a mouse stirs.

Enter CASEY COLLINS, in her army boots and leather jacket. Her headphones are over-the-top camo. Apparently the music is pretty loud, because even when she's wearing them we can hear a little bit of the music. She stops in the middle of the hallway, pushes her headphones off her ears and reads aloud from a small detention slip.

CASEY

"Dear Parent/Guardian, I regretfully inform you that Casey has been given detention yet again. As this is her fifth major offence since September, I ask that you book a meeting with me before Friday."

She chuckles, then crunches the slip up and tosses it into the nearest garbage can.

CASEY

Not like they'll bother to read it anyway.

She lifts her headphones back onto her ears and walks away, slightly dancing to the violent music.

The lighting on stage changes, transitioning to night-time then back to crisp early morning light.

**INT. SCHOOL - MORNING**

The school is nearly dead, all the students shuffle around wearing identical eight-in-the-morning faces.

Three definitive student groups can be seen, and they're all pretty much what you'd expect. In the corner near the staircase, a group of no-gooders are up to no-good.

Near the door the normal people do normal things, and at the very front stand the Drama Kids, queuing to sign up for School Play auditions.

At the head of them all is LIAM HAYWOOD, trying and mostly failing to coordinate the monsters that are drama students.

LIAM

Alright guys is that everyone signed up?  
Auditions are tomorrow afternoon, 3:30,  
don't be late. And have a monologue  
prepared!

The drama kids disperse, in the midst of them ANTHONY SHANE. He saunters down the hall, straight past the no-gooders. He is promptly hit on the back of the head with a paper ball. Their snickers remind him of hyenas, the annoying scavengers of the school halls.

Anthony turns around, smiling falsely but hugely, and walks right into the middle of their crowd.

ANTHONY

*(heavy sarcasm)*

How's everyone doing today? Good? Yeah?  
It's been a good day? How many heads you  
guys pushed down toilets this week? Ten?  
Fifteen?

MARK FUTTER takes a step forward, trying to come head-to-head with Anthony. Unfortunately, his head is a full foot below Anthony's, so this proves difficult for them both.

ANTHONY

Oh hi Mark, didn't see you there. I keep  
forgetting to look down when I'm looking  
for you.

MARK

Listen, new kid, how many times do I have  
to tell you to stay away from us.

ANTHONY

Sorry, I don't take orders from anyone under 5'2".

MARK

My father could have you kicked out of this place before you could blink, smartass. Think about that the next time you wanna talk down to me.

ANTHONY

If you don't want me talking down to you, you should find a chair to stand on.

Mark makes an over-the-top lunge towards Anthony, and two of the bigger boys in the group hold him back, or at least pretend to. Anthony laughs and turns to go, a hop in his step.

Further down the hall a group of girls enter the hallway, walking right up to LILY GRAY, standing with Liam. The central one, ASHLEY FUTTER, leads them.

Her smile flashes, the white of her teeth reminding Lily of a crocodile; wide and misleading.

ASHLEY

Lily! Hey!

LILY

Oh, hi Ashley...

ASHLEY

I heard you're running for head of the council this year.

LILY

Yeah, I thought it was around time. Plus, It'll look good on my university applications.

ASHLEY

*(venomous)*

Oh, well just to let you know, I'm running too. So if you know what's best for you, I'd give up.

LILY

Afraid you'll lose to me, Ashley?

ASHLEY

I have never lost to you, Gray, and I'm  
not about to start.

The girls march away, Ashley flinging her hair furiously over her shoulder.  
Lily turns back to Liam.

LILY

She's such a-

TRRIIIINNNNGG - the school bell blares.

She picks up her bags and walks with Liam to a classroom, joining the throng  
of students filtering through the halls into classes.

The lights transition once again, along with the sped-up tick-tick-tick-tick  
of a clock.

**INT. SCHOOL - DAY**

Another day has passed in this jungle that we call High School.

Kids line up to enter a classroom on the left, though the line isn't that  
long.

At a desk in the classroom sits LIAM HAYWOOD, his head in his hands. Beside  
him sits Mr Peters, the drama teacher. He sits upright in his chair, his head  
resting delicately on his hands, and wearing a cardigan with more colours in  
it than there are in the rainbow. If Mr Peters was an animal, he'd be a  
peacock. A slightly insane peacock.

He addresses the kid in front of him and Liam.

MR PETERS

EXCELLENT! THAT'S THE KIND OF TALENT WE'RE  
LOOKING FOR HERE!

LIAM

No, Mr Peters, we're not looking for that  
kind of talent.

MR PETERS

But he can shoot milk through his NOSE!!

LIAM

Alright, next please.

MR PETERS

Alright kid, it's your play I guess. All  
I'm saying is, I would pay to watch that.

Liam plants his face in his hands again, as the next nervous kid shuffles in.

It's LILY GRAY, looking pristine as ever.

MR PETERS

Please state your name and grade for the director.

LILY

Uh, Lily Gray, grade twelve.

LIAM

*(overeager)*

Yeah, I think Lily would be great for this part Mr Peters, she's got the build for it and -

MR PETERS

How about we let her audition first, before we give her the part?

LIAM

Oh, right.

They both sit back and wait for her to begin.

She takes a deep breath, only shaking slightly, and begins:

LILY

Yea, for these laws were not ordained of Zeus,  
And she who sits enthroned with gods below,  
Justice, enacted not these human laws.  
Nor did I deem that thou, a mortal man,  
Could'st by a breath annul and override  
The immutable unwritten laws of Heaven.  
They were not born today nor yesterday;  
They die not; and none knoweth whence they sprang.  
I was not like, who feared no mortal's frown,  
To disobey these laws and so provoke  
The wrath of Heaven. I knew that I must die,  
E'en hadst thou not proclaimed it; and if death  
Is thereby hastened, I shall count it gain.  
For death is gain to him whose life, like mine,  
Is full of misery. Thus my lot appears  
Not sad, but blissful; for had I endured  
To leave my mother's son unburied there,  
I should have grieved with reason, but not now.  
And if in this thou judgest me a fool,  
Methinks the judge of folly's not acquit.

*(A little background on the piece above; This is from the play Antigone, which is an ancient Greek play by Sophocles. In this play, Antigone is a powerful, defiant female character who stands up for her own morals, even overriding the orders of her King to do so.)*

Nobody moves when she's done. The first to speak is Liam, quickly recovering himself and closing his gaping mouth.

LIAM

That was perfectly recited, Lily, well done. Better than the movie quotes and self-written monologues we've been listening to all day.

MR PETERS

I don't know, the snorting milk was pretty cool...

LIAM

That wasn't acting, Mr Peters.

Lily smiles and leaves through the door at the wave of Mr Peters, and in comes SEBASTIAN HAYWOOD.

Liam's smile doubles in size.

LIAM

Sebastian! See, I told you he'd come.

MR PETERS

Now let's see if he has half the talent you say he does.

LIAM

Do the Romeo thing, that's your best.

Sebastian starts immediately, but shakily. He stumbles over words at first, but gains more confidence as he carries on.

SEBASTIAN

But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?  
It is the East, and Juliet is the sun!  
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,  
Who is already sick and pale with grief  
That thou her maid art far more fair than she.  
Be not her maid, since she is envious.  
Her vestal livery is but sick and green,  
And none but fools do wear it. Cast it off.  
It is my lady; O, it is my love!

O that she knew she were!  
She speaks, yet she says nothing. What of that?  
Her eye discourses; I will answer it.  
I am too bold; 'tis not to me she speaks.  
Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,  
Having some business, do entreat her eyes  
To twinkle in their spheres till they return.  
What if her eyes were there, they in her head?  
The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars  
As daylight doth a lamp; her eyes in heaven  
Would through the airy region stream so bright  
That birds would sing and think it were not night.  
See how she leans her cheek upon her hand!  
O that I were a glove upon that hand,  
That I might touch that cheek!

He seems sheepish as he comes out of character, but Liam is smiling, and turns to Mr Peters expectantly.

MR PETERS

Okay, that was good, I'll give it to you.

LIAM

I told you, and I'm never wrong.

Sebastian leaves the room, waving sheepishly to his brother as he goes. Liam turns to Mr Peters.

LIAM

Well that's all of them, and I've only seen three people worth having, myself excluded.

MR PETERS

And your play has how many main characters?

LIAM

Five at the very least.

While the two ponder this conundrum, CASEY COLLINS enters, looking annoyed and bored.

CASEY

I'm here for detention.

Mr Peters gives Liam a sly smile and stands to walk over to Casey.

MR PETERS

I've got a better idea. You're in my drama class, you're a pretty good actress for your age, right?

CASEY

I guess...

MR PETERS

So how about I let you out of detention, if you audition right now for the school play.

They both stare at her, and she looks between them both, a deer caught in the headlights.

Then she shrugs, and throws her backpack to the ground.

CASEY

Sure, if it'll get me out of detention. What do I do?

LIAM

Well it was meant to be a monologue, but I doubt you have one prepared..

MR PETERS

Just say whatever you've got memorised, Casey. Song lyrics, an old story, anything. And give it feeling.

She takes the centre of the room, and Mr Peters leans against the doorframe to watch her.

CASEY

"It was a dark and rainy night. And this old lady who had a passion for jigsaw puzzles sat by herself in her house at her table to complete a new jigsaw puzzle. As she pieced the puzzle together, she realized to her astonishment that the image that was formed was her very own room, and the figure in the center of the puzzle, as she completed it, was herself. And with trembling hands she placed the last four pieces and stared in horror at the face of the demented madman at the window. The last thing that this old lady

ever heard was the sound of breaking glass."

*(This is a monologue, albeit a short one, taken from Dead Poets Society. The character who says it is Neil Perry, a character with an unhappy home life who feels like his entire life is an act meant to please others.)*

Mr Peters unhooks himself from the wall and walks over to Liam.

MR PETERS

That was good. Better than the milk guy.

LIAM

Yeah it really was. She's excellent! And she had that memorised?

MR PETERS

I guess so. Thanks Casey, see you tomorrow.

She walks out, grabbing her bag on the way.

The lights dim on Mr Peters and Liam packing their things away, and we fade to a blackout.

**INT. THEATRE - DAY**

LIAM HAYWOOD paces the room, all anxiety and nerves. He's speaking to himself, his hands running through his hair.

LIAM

Alright Liam, this is the first rehearsal. The first ever rehearsal. No big deal. It'll go okay. Just because you've got less than two weeks to rehearse this all... yeah, it'll be fine.

He sounds less than convinced.

The first person to arrive, surprisingly, is CASEY. She edges into the room, looking more unsure than we've ever seen her before.

CASEY

This is rehearsals?

LIAM

Yeah! You're the first to arrive. Just put your stuff over there, Sebastian and Lily should be here any minute now.

Right on cue, SEBASTIAN walks in and flings his bag to the side, nearly hitting Casey in the face. Right behind him is LILY, who chooses to place her bag down gently. She gives Casey a polite smile, which is barely returned. Casey is preoccupied, her gaze fixed on Liam and Sebastian, who have started to perform an elaborate handshake. It looks like the sort of handshake that takes too much effort and planning to be convenient.

LILY

They've always been like that.

CASEY

Are they best friends?

LILY

Brothers, actually. Liam was adopted because the Hawthorn's thought they couldn't have kids. They filed the adoption papers and then Mrs Hawthorn found out she was pregnant. Liam and Sebastian were born on the same day, so we call them twins.

CASEY

And you've known them how long?

LILY

I'd say since we were all around five or six, that's when I moved here. Sebastian's like my brother, honestly.

She takes a moment and looks at Casey, sensing her apprehension.

LILY

And when did you get here?

CASEY

I moved here around a year ago.

LILY

Your parents get work here?

CASEY

No, uh, I got transferred here, to another foster home....

LILY

Oh. Sorry... I didn't know.

CASEY

Don't worry about it.

LILY

I'm Lily Gray.

She sticks out her hand for Casey to shake. Casey takes it uncertainly.

CASEY

I'm Casey Collins.

Just then ANTHONY SHANE walks in, teeth glittering, hair shining and confidence booming.

ANTHONY

And I am Anthony Shane, debonair comedian  
of Sherman High. Pleasure to meet you all.

Liam and Sebastian have walked over to greet Anthony, and Liam takes the lead again.

LIAM

Okay, so we're all here now. Let's - and  
don't hate me for doing this - go around  
and introduce ourselves. Tell us your name  
and something... surprising about you.

He looks at Sebastian expectantly.

Sebastian does not disappoint.

SEBASTIAN

Hi, my name is Sebastian Haywood and I can  
individually control my toes.

LILY

You should see it it's disgust-

LIAM

Let's keep it moving guys, Lily you next.

LILY

Hi, my name is Lily Gray and I... watch  
Hannah Montana religiously.

CASEY

I'm Casey Collins and I love Shakespeare.

ANTHONY

Anthony Shane, collector of plastic spoons.

LIAM

And I am Liam Haywood, and I enjoy painting and opera music.

Everyone seems more relaxed, and so Liam plunges into the rehearsal. He goes to his backpack to fetch a pile of papers.

LIAM

Alright guys, so here's your scripts, all polished and done.

SEBASTIAN

That's a lot of paper... how long do we have to rehearse?

LIAM

Just under two weeks. We'll have rehearsals here everyday after school until then, and if we work really hard, it should be fine.

ANTHONY

Well let's get started then.

LIAM

Okay, lets all just do a readthrough of the play first. Follow me everyone.

They all snatch their bags on their way off stage, following Liam's lead. The lights fade to a near blackout.

**INT. THEATRE - DAY**

The lights come back up, and we watch the five of them drift into the room, placing their bags on the side like always, taking their seats in the centre of the stage, on top of prop boxes and the stage floor and a lonely chair, etc.

SEBASTIAN and CASEY are running lines together, while LIAM is helping ANTHONY and LILY plot out a scene.

Sebastian calls out to the other three.

SEBASTIAN

Hey guys, I'm going out to get something to drink. You guys want anything?

Anthony tosses him a toonie.

ANTHONY

Whatever doesn't look like it'll eat my  
stomach lining.

Sebastian leaves, and the rest of them settle together to take a break,  
unconsciously forming a semi-circle.

LILY

Seems like things are going pretty fast... I  
mean we've only been working on this for  
like a week, right?

CASEY

Yeah, a week gone and a week to go.

LILY

You think it'll be ready by then?

LIAM

Are you doubting my abilities, Lily?

LILY

Of course not.

Sebastian walks back in, tossing an ice tea to Anthony. Anthony catches it and  
sits down on a table. Sebastian tries to open the drink, but is unable to, for  
some reason.

CASEY

Here, let me.

She gets up and crosses to him, taking the can out of his hands as he smirks  
at her, and she opens it with relative ease. She takes a sip before handing it  
back to him. She doesn't cross back over to her side of the room.

LIAM

Well all we really have to do is practise  
now, and Lily, you need to get your lines  
down....

LILY

Yeah, I'll know them by tomorrow, sorry.  
My mom's just kind of... crazy, about all my  
school work and my marks and all my

extracurriculars.... She just doesn't think this is worth it.

SEBASTIAN

Because it's a drama thing?

LILY

Well, you know my mom.

LIAM

If I had a dollar for every time your mother tried to get me to drop out of drama, maybe I could afford to go to Film School.

ANTHONY

Yeah well, nobody's parents are perfect. Except maybe yours.

He motions to Liam and Sebastian.  
They share a look.

LIAM

Nobody's home life is perfect, Ant.

He becomes awkwardly quiet, and Sebastian gives a giant sigh to break the silence.

SEBASTIAN

Our parents fight a lot. About basically everything. But mostly about us.

CASEY

Why would they fight about you guys?

LIAM

Because my dad thinks that they should have withdrawn the adoption papers when my mom got pregnant with Sebastian.

SEBASTIAN

They've been arguing about it behind our backs for basically forever. But Liam's my brother. And Liam's my mom's son. Nobody is going anywhere.

Everyone gets quiet again.

ANTHONY

At least your mom loves you.

LIAM

Yours doesn't?

ANTHONY

It's not that she doesn't love me... I think she just wishes I was different.

LILY

How do you know?

ANTHONY

Oh, little things. Small comments, gestures. She'll put on a smile in front of Jason and then at the dinner table she'll say something like "Oh it's such a pity you two will never give me any grandchildren." ... and I just feel like a disappointment.

CASEY

You can't be a disappointment just because you're being yourself. And besides, you love Jason don't you?

ANTHONY

We've only been dating for three months, but yes, I love him.

CASEY

Then that's good enough for now, isn't it?

ANTHONY

Yeah, it is.

LILY

Your mom will come around.

Sebastian turns to Casey, smiling with one side of his mouth.

SEBASTIAN

So you're a romantic?

CASEY

What gives you that idea?

She's blushing, you can tell.

SEBASTIAN

You just told Ant that being in love is enough. Sounds like something a romantic would say.

CASEY

Not that I would know anything about love, really. (*laughing nervously*) Not the romantic kind anyway.

SEBASTIAN

Maybe I could change that....

She blushes a lot. Lily and Liam laugh at them, but gently.

LILY

Since when did your brother get smoother than you?

LIAM

It's really not hard to be smoother than me, Lily.

LILY

I don't know, I always thought you were pretty smooth...

Anthony jumps down from where he's sitting, picks up his script and hits Sebastian playfully on the head with it.

ANTHONY

Come on, let's get this down before rehearsals end.

CASEY

Anyone else feel like a change of scenery?

LIAM

Yes! Let's go to the Commons.

They all pick up their scripts and things and file out of the room, Sebastian and Casey lingering behind the others.

The lights transition again, two days have gone by.

**INT. THEATRE - DAY**

Music begins to play from backstage, and SEBASTIAN comes out of the wings, dancing like nobody's watching. But someone is watching. LILY looks up from her books to stare at him, suppressing giggles as he spins and twirls.

SEBASTIAN

*(singing)*

My heart could take a chance but my two  
feet can't find a way  
You think that I could muster up a little  
soft shoe gentle sway  
But I don't feel like dancin', no sir, no  
dancin' today!

LILY

*(laughing)*

Did you find Anthony's playlist or  
something?

Sebastian turns to her and runs in her direction. He slides to a stop in front of her and grabs her hand, making her dance with him. She starts laughing as he flings her around. He's a terrible dancer, but you can tell she's not much better.

They stop when Lily trips and falls, giggling, to the theatre floor.

LILY

Sebastian, I've never seen you this happy.  
What's going on?

SEBASTIAN

She said yes!! SHE SAID YES, Lily!

LILY

Who?

SEBASTIAN

Casey Collins! I'm going out with Casey  
Collins!

They start to laugh and then ANTHONY walks in, motioning to the speakers.

ANTHONY

Who raided my playlist, man? This is  
great!

LIAM also enters, carrying drinks for everyone and precariously setting them down on the table. CASEY enters last, her hands full of paper.

LIAM

Hey, so everyone's here now. Alright guys it's two days 'till the show. We're doing well, everyone knows their lines, we've got everything plotted. We're going to do a complete runthrough of the entire show later, but for now, Casey's got some posters for us to put up.

ANTHONY

Can we run the lights really quickly, Liam?

LIAM

Sure, I'll get Lily to help with that as well.

He turns to Lily, and her phone blares. Everyone gets quiet, and she answers it.

LILY

Hey mom. (*listens*) Yeah, I'm still at practice. (*listens, getting upset*) What? I know it's late, but I told you that the show's in two days! I can't, not now! (*listens, is sad and defeated*) Yes. Alright. I'll be right there.

Everyone is silent as she hangs up. She just stands there, looking despondently at the sleek silver phone in her hands.

LIAM

What happened? You have to go home early?

LILY

I have to quit the play. My mom said she doesn't want it affecting my grades at all, and because I got a C on that math test on Friday, I'm not allowed to be in the play.

ANTHONY

But there's no time to drop out, can't you tell her that?

SEBASTIAN

Her mom doesn't really listen....

Lily walks to gather up her things, and Liam follows her, speaking to her quietly.

Casey turns to Sebastian.

CASEY

What now?

SEBASTIAN

Now we call in someone else, I guess. The show must go on, though I don't know how polished it's going to be without Lily.

Focus shifts to Lily and Liam, whispering to one another as she gathers her things from the table.

LILY

I'm really sorry...

LIAM

It's alright, I know how your mom can be.

LILY

Everything is going to fall apart, and it'll be my fault. I promise I'm not going to stop trying to convince her. I just wish she understood... I don't want to be an accountant like my dad, or a CEO like her. I don't want to be stuck in an office all day every day. I want to be with exciting people, doing exciting things. That's part of the reason I like being your friend, because I wanted to be a part of the drama crowd, and meet them and see what it was like.

LIAM

And you're an excellent actress, Lily. You've just gotta get her to see that.

LILY

I was hoping she'd see that on Friday night.

She leans against the table, hands splayed, head down. Liam covers her hand with his, and their heads touch.

LIAM

Even if she never sees it, I do. (*motions to the others with his head*) They do. We all see it.

LILY

I should go...

She breathes a heavy sigh and lifts her head, but keeps her hand in his.

LIAM

I'll walk you home.

She lifts walks towards the door, her hand still in Liam's, and he picks up her bag on their way out.

SEBASTIAN

No rehearsals today, guys.

Casey and Anthony leave, and he follows, looking despondently around the theatre before walking offstage.

**INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY**

LIAM enters the hallway, his face drained of colour, his shoulders hunched and defeated. He looks up from the floor to stare at the group of giggling girls, and in the centre of them, ASHLEY FUTTER.

ANTHONY gets up from his seat on the floor and walks over to Liam.

ANTHONY

So you're going to ask her now?

LIAM

Yup. The sooner the better I guess.

ANTHONY

Remind me again why we have to ask *Ashley* of all people?

LIAM

Because Mr Peters named her as Lily's second. Apparently he thinks she's the best shot we've got.

ANTHONY

But she doesn't know the lines. She doesn't even know the character.

LIAM

It's her or we don't perform. And I really want this to be performed. I worked for half a year on the script. For me, this thing is my first step into the directing world, and the acting world.

ANTHONY

Yeah, I get that. Well, good luck I guess.

LIAM

Thanks. God knows I'll need it.

Anthony watches him walk towards the girls. They stop giggling just long enough to stare at him disapprovingly.

LIAM

Ashley, can we talk?

ASHLEY

Sure, go ahead.

He pauses for a minute and looks around at the gossip-hungry eyes of the other girls, then back to Ashley.

ASHLEY

Well? Spit it out, Liam, I don't have all day.

LIAM

Lily can't be in the play anymore, so Mr Peters said that you should take over for her.

ASHLEY

Obviously, I'm going to do it. Who do I play?

Liam hold out a script to her.

LIAM

The first character listed there.

Ashley looks horrified reading the description.

ASHLEY

"She is short, nerdy and good at all her classes. She wears glasses and dresses modestly."

Who do you think I am? This isn't me at all!

LIAM

Yes, Ashley, that's called acting.

Ashley screams at him in anger, and he backs away.

LIAM

Just, be at practise today after school. Don't be late, and try to learn your lines before then. Unless you want us to find someone else....

ASHLEY

No! I'll be in your play. There must be some sacrifices made when we're trying to gain fame, I guess.

LIAM

*(under his breath)*

Like my sanity.

*(to her)*

Good. Then be there.

He walks back to Anthony, rolling his eyes and shaking his head. Both of them walk away, out of the hallway.

SEBASTIAN and CASEY enter from the other side. They pause at his locker to talk.

CASEY

How'd you know I like sushi?

SEBASTIAN

I didn't, I just thought it was a nice place.

CASEY

Well it was excellent. Thank you.

He picks up her hand and kisses the back of it. He doesn't let it go.

CASEY

And *I'm* the romantic.

They laugh and she moves over so her can open his locker. From behind them MR PETERS enters, as eccentric as ever. Ashley runs up to him, stopping him to talk.

ASHLEY

Thanks for getting me into the play, Mr Peters.

MR PETERS

Oh... well it wasn't as if I had a choice in the matter, after Miss Gray left so suddenly.

ASHLEY

And I'm sure I can get my dad to pull some strings to get you that promotion?

Mr Peters walks away without saying anything to her, and she smugly returns to her group.

Sebastian turns to Casey.

SEBASTIAN

Typical Ashley Futter, weaseling her way into anything she wants.

CASEY

Let's go before I do something I'll regret.

They walk off.

The bell rings, and everybody files off the stage, rather loudly. Then, when there's silence, Liam pokes his head out of a classroom door and checks the hallway for teachers. He steps out and takes his phone from his pocket. He quickly dials a number and puts it to his ear.

LIAM

Hi Mrs Gray, this is Liam. (*listens*) I'm alright thanks, I was just calling about Lily. She's not at school today. (*listens*) She's sick? She looked fine yesterday... (*listens*) Oh, I see. About the play, we're having trouble getting someone to cover for her... (*listens*) Yes I know theatre is a risky career choice Mrs Gray but maybe it's what'll make Lily happy. (*listens*)

Isn't there anything I could do to get her back in? *(listens)* Alright, well, thanks for your time. Yeah, see you around Mrs Gray.

He sighs and heads back into class, kicking the edge of the lockers on the way.

The lights fade down slowly, and then there is silence. All of a sudden we hear a crowd murmur, and the curtain is closed. The lights come back up.

**INT. GRAND THEATRE - EVENING**

SEBASTIAN, CASEY, ANTHONY and ASHLEY all stand in front of the curtain. They're fidgeting, whispering amongst themselves.

ASHLEY

Where is Liam? Wasn't he supposed to be here fifteen minutes ago? Honestly, I question the professionalism of this entire play.

ANTHONY

What would you know of professionalism? You screamed and cried yesterday when Liam told you that you were going to play the nerdy girl.

ASHLEY

Because what if people *actually* think that's how I am? It would be devastating! I wouldn't expect you to understand, you're a nobody.

SEBASTIAN

He's not a nobody to us. Watch your mouth.

ASHLEY

Or what? You'll kick me out of the play? We're on in ten minutes and your pretty girl bestie won't be here to save the day.

LIAM walks in, looking stressed and very sweaty. He's mumbling to himself, and pulling cards out of his pockets to read from them and then shoving them back in.

Sebastian walks up to him and takes the cards from his hands, and looks him in the eyes.

SEBASTIAN

You'll be fine, Liam. Everybody knows their lines, even if Ashley is a little wobbly. But they know she's a stand-in. It'll be fine.

LIAM

I've got to introduce the play, and Lily hasn't said anything to me since Wednesday. She wasn't even at school yesterday or today.

SEBASTIAN

Is she okay?

LIAM

I don't know...

LILY walks in from behind them, tapping Liam on the shoulder so that he turns.

LILY

I'm fine. I had to sneak out of the house to be here, so let's do it.

Ashley steps forward and almost shoves Lily.

ASHLEY

What are you doing here?

LILY

Playing my part. Thanks for keeping things running, but I've got it from here.

The sound of a crowd raises, and Liam gives Ashley a look.

LIAM

It's alright Ashley, we've got it. Have a seat in the audience.

She huffs, but storms offstage anyway. Sebastian and Casey come to hug Lily.

CASEY

I told you she wouldn't miss it.

SEBASTIAN

That's more faith than I had.

Anthony peeks through the curtains, and comes back with his face in shock.

ANTHONY

My mom's out there. With Jason's mom.  
They've never met before. She never wanted  
to meet his parents...

He sticks his head back out. Then comes back.

ANTHONY

They're laughing. They're actually  
laughing. Maybe this will actually work  
out.

LILY

Told you she'd come around, Ant.

Sebastian puts his head out and scans the crowd.

SEBASTIAN

Oh my god, Liam!

Liam moves the curtain aside for a few seconds, finds what Sebastian is  
looking at and comes back with a smile on his face.

LIAM

I thought he wouldn't come.

SEBASTIAN

Of course he came. You're his son, and  
this is your play. It is weird though,  
I'll admit. He doesn't come to my science  
fairs.

LIAM

That's because you're the only nerd in the  
family who enjoys that stuff.

Casey pulls her head back from the curtain too.

CASEY

Guys my foster parents are out there! Oh  
god...

She seems doubly nervous.

SEBASTIAN

Everyone relax, we've got this.

The crowd silences. A voice comes over the speakers.

VOICE

Ladies and Gentlemen, here to present the first play to you is director and playwright, Liam Haywood.

Sebastian pats Liam's shoulder.

SEBASTIAN

Good luck.

ANTHONY

You're gonna kill it, man.

Lily leans up on her toes and kisses him on the cheek, squeezing his hand when she comes back down. He smiles wide, and walks off. The others hurry off in the opposite direction.

The curtains open, and Liam is standing there, in front of the other curtains. The crowd is clapping, and then it goes silent.

Liam takes a breath, and steps forward.

LIAM

This is a play about some kids. Some very different kids, who go to the same high school. It's a play about how they meet, and how they come to know one another. It's also a play about problems. A play about relationships. A play about love. It's a play about a lot of things. But all in all, it's a play about us. Ladies and Gentlemen, I present to you: Backstage.

The curtain opens, and the lights blackout on the hallway scene from the beginning.

THE END