

Pilot

by

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deTour

COLD OPEN

EXT. CAMPUS OUAD - DAY

A bicycle sprocket is WHIRRING and WHEEZING as we cruise over walkways and grass. Behind the handlebars, and enjoying the picturesque scenery of the storied TATE UNIVERSITY CAMPUS, is MICHAEL STURGES, 32, charming, funny, creative, persistent, and perpetually optimistic.

The school's iconic CLOCK TOWER chimes nine o'clock and the campus turns into a frenetic rush toward the classrooms. But not for Michael. He is carefree and oblivious to the mayhem.

EXT. LECTURE HALL - DAY

Michael CLICKS a combination lock to his tire in the bike rack. He pauses, taking in the majesty of the building before heading up the stairs.

EXT. LECTURE HALL DOOR - DAY

He arrives at the door and pulls the handle. The door won't budge. Tries again. It's locked. He POUNDS on the door. (Remember this sound; oddly, it will be important later.) After a second, a small VIEWING SLIDER opens, not unlike the door at the entrance to the Emerald City in "The Wizard of Oz." Inside, we see the face of PROFESSOR AUGUST ZARING, Tate's most respected and feared instructor.

PROFESSOR ZARING Class starts at nine.

Michael checks his watch, which he realizes, he doesn't have.

MICHAEL

It feels pretty nine o'clocky to me.

PROFESSOR ZARING

There is no such thing as "nine o'clocky." There is, however, a "9:06," which by any definition, is NOT nine. Now stop pounding on my door.

Zaring slams the slider shut. Michael waits, stunned for a moment, then pounds again. The slider opens once more.

MICHAEL

Listen, this is totally my bad. I got sidetracked at that giant circular cork board filled with ads. Did you know there's this guy named Rick who will massage you for twenty bucks an hour? How reasonable is that?

(no response)

(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D) Speaking of reasonable, your unbending, totalitarian thing is kind of badass. So I apologize. Won't happen again.

PROFESSOR ZARING
It's so sad you believe there's
going to be a next time.

The slider snaps shut. Now Michael is a little rattled. But he still pounds again. This time, we see the eyes of GABRIELLE DE LA CRUZ, Zaring's 28 year-old overworked T.A. She's pretty and Latina and has the appropriate attitude of someone who works for a monster.

MICHAEL Is there, like, a special knock to get the other guy?

GABRIELLE
I'm the T.A. I'm perfectly
qualified to not let you in.
Professor Zaring is now teaching
his class. You know, the one that
starts at 9. This is for you.

She passes a SMALL PAPER through the slider. He looks at it.

MICHAEL
Is this a "do-you-like-me-yes-or-no-check-a-box" situation?

GABRIELLE
It's a Class Drop Slip. Professor
Zaring asked me to give it to you.
Fill it out by Wednesday and you'll
get your fees back.

MICHAEL
What if instead I sneak into the class through an open window? Not the one you're looking through, obviously, that's too small.

GABRIELLE
Listen, this isn't some online
junior college. You have no idea
what you've gotten yourself into.

She closes the slider. Michael can't help it. Once more he pounds. This time, he tries going sincere.

MICHAEL
Professor Zaring is the reason I chose this school. Can you just tell him that? I'm a huge fan of his book.

GABRIELLE
Oh, sure, let me interrupt his
lecture for that.
(MORE)

GABRIELLE (CONT'D) I wanna get this right, you said "BIG FAN" and you read his book? Like, the WHOLE thing?

MICHAEL Actually, I believe I said "huge" fan, and the truth is I put my entire life on hold to come here, this class is the keystone to my plan.

GABRIELLE This sounds a bit like a coming of age story.

MICHAEL I think I can see the similarities between my life and "The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants." You know, minus the pants. And the traveling. So, yes, I guess there's a coming of age element.

GABRIELLE Then it looks like you're about ten years late for that as well.

The slider closes. For good now. And for the first time since he could remember, Michael Sturges has been turned away at a door.

EXT. LECTURE HALL - DAY

Unusually rejected, Michael walks down the stairs. Starts to unlock his bike. The combination doesn't work. He gets into a small tussle with the bike, which is not leaving this rack. He tries PRYING the tire off the rim when he is turned around by the boomer HGH-aided voice of an enormous scholarship athlete, JONAH.

JONAH

What the hell are you doing with my

MICHAEL Sorry, bud, this is MY bike and my combination won't work so if you'd just back off I could show you --(looks at bike) --holy crap, this is NOT my bike. Mystery solved.

He stands up and Jonah moves in closer.

JONAH What are you, a crackhead? You come down to the college and try to steal bikes for fun?

MICHAEL You've obviously never stolen a bike. It's not that fun. (MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Swiping skateboards, however-(Jonah reaches out and
grabs his neck)

Okay, I'm a student.

JONAH

A student? You're, like, 80.

Just as Jonah is about to squeeze, a CAR HORN turns them both around.

DOMINIC

Michael! What are you doing?

Jonah stops and looks back. We see DOMINIC, 32, African-American, serious, perpetually panicked, in a suit, getting out of a limousine.

DOMINIC (CONT'D)
Rolling Stone isn't gonna be happy
if we're late and I really need
this story to be a love letter.

JONAH

(confused) Who the hell is that?

MICHAEL

My manager.

(turns to Dominic)
Dude, what did I say? No more limos. I'm a student now.

DOMINIC

This is a town car.

MICHAEL

(turns to Jonah)

Would you consider that a limo? Be honest.

DOMINIC

That guy is trying to strangle you, he doesn't get a vote.

JONAH

Hold on, that limo is for YOU?

MICHAEL

A-ha. Even HE thinks it's a limo.

DOMINIC

Just get in the car. You can ride in the front if it makes you feel any better but I'm not gonna let you drive again.

Now completely confused, Jonah lets go. The bewildered jock is finally able to formulate a question

JONAH

Who ARE you?

The screen FREEZES. And the entire sequence REWINDS. Back to the class door, the bike racing across quad. Time is going backward so fast we can barely see any images. Ending up months earlier, amidst the hustle and bustle backstage at

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN

where Michael is in the corner of a dressing room on his laptop filling out a UNIVERSITY APPLICATION. As this goes on, we hear Michael's voice dictating his ADMISSION ESSAY. It's all very John Hughes...

MICHAEL (V.O.)
Dear Tate University Admissions
Office: My name is Michael
Sturges...

We look at his i.d. THAT IS NOT HIS NAME. His legal name actually reads SKYE HORIZON STURGES.

MICHAEL (V.O.)
...at least my stage name is.

WE DISSOLVE TO A TRANQUIL MASSACHUSETTS COUNTRYSIDE

MICHAEL (V.O.)
I had what Joaquin Phoenix would consider a normal upbringing.

We see YOUNG MICHAEL, 8, leading a COMMUNITY COW by a rope past a row of cross-legged American hippies in deep meditation on the halcyon fields of a New England ashram.

MICHAEL (V.O.)
My mother was a nurturing, positive force who never let me forget that I could do anything.

As he passes, his MOTHER, eyes closed, deep in meditation, gives him a tiny THUMBS UP. Her eyes remain closed.

MICHAEL (V.O.) Which is how I now find myself the front man and singer-songwriter of the alternative rock band, Modern Dukes...

We see modern Michael ON STAGE. He is an electric and exciting performer. The band is impressive, but at the moment, Michael seems a bit discontent.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

Over the past decade, we have had a decent amount of success...

We reveal the crowd, which is HUGE.

MICHAEL (V.O.)
This experience has allowed me to see many parts of the world...

INT. VAN - NIGHT

We are inside a van. Michael is crammed inside with the rest of the BAND. The van door SLIDES open and we see a SLIVER of the back of a music venue...

MICHAEL (V.O.)

Tondon...

Different van. They are sitting in almost the same position. The door opens, a different roadie opens the van door and we see a sliver of another venue...

MICHAEL (V.O.)

Rio...

Another van. Same positioning.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

Russia...

The van door slides open and a massive SNOWSTORM blows into the van. The to frostbite. The door is hurriedly CLOSED before anyone succumbs

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Michael, alone in a hotel room with his guitar and notebook. Blank music sheets in front of him.

MICHAEL (V.O.)
During this time, I have been hard at work composing songs for our next album.

He has scratched out a full sheet of chord progressions and lyrics. As he FINISHES playing his newly-completed composition, he grabs a pen, as if to make a minor addition. He clicks the pen and CROSSES the ENTIRE THING OUT. We pull back to see about thirty other MUSIC SHEETS, all crossed out in the same way.

MICHAEL

The truth is, I'm at a bit of a creative impasse. And it's not for lack of trying to connect with my

We see several quick shots of Michael with his guitar, attempting to write: first sitting atop the platform of the Eiffel Tower. Then, on an airboat through the Everglades. Finally, on a conveyer belt in the Nabisco factory. Each time, Dominic is in the background, facilitating each "experience" with some sort of location representative.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
I hope I haven't hit a wall.
Being a storyteller, I don't seem
to have any more real stories to
tell...

WE SEE AN ONLINE NEWS STORY WHICH READS "MODERN DUKES DEMO SESSIONS LEAKED TO INTERNET" We speed ramp down to the COMMENTS SECTION where we see flashes of collective negativity, starting with "THE PERFECT BALANCE OF OUT OF TOUCH AND OVERAMBITIOUS" (the kindest reaction) to "I STOLE THIS AND I STILL WANT MY MONEY BACK." The final comment on the page, is simply this

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
I have come to realize that my time in the band has not made me the complete person I hoped to be.

On the street, Michael stops at a trash dumpster and EMPTIES the music sheets into the trash. He turns and looks across the street. He sees the campus entrance to TATE UNIVERSITY. Idyllic from this vantage point. Students walk, laugh, share ideas.

MICHAEL (V.O.)
There is a hole in my life experience and development. I had missed the time where one can experiment and fail without consequence... college.

Michael is filled with excitement. He rushes through the campus as it sleeps, stopping at the book store window, where he spies "The Balance of Language" by August Zaring.

INT. BACKSTAGE -NIGHT

He is relaying his decision to his bandmates.

MICHAEL (V.O.)
The band, though surprised by my decision, has been supportive.

The DRUMMER, hearing the news, slings a CRASH CYMBAL at him like Oddjob in "Goldfinger." Although it fails to decapitate him, it stays lodged in the aging drywall of the green room.

INT. MANAGEMENT OFFICE - DAY

He is now telling the news to Dominic.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

As has our manager.

We see Dominic is literally CRYING, begging him not to do this.

DOMINIC

Why don't I just slash my wrists and cut out the middle man?
(Michael is taken aback)
I'm sorry, that was unfair. But, seriously, you're killing me.
Literally. Figuratively.
Spiritually.

MICHAEL IS STRUMMING HIS GUITAR IN A DARK DIMLY-LIT TUNNEL

MICHAEL (V.O.)
The truth is, despite my best efforts to inspire creativity, I haven't written a song in over a year.

Shards of sunlight start to hit him, he quickly puts the guitar away and then covers it with a plastic tarp. We pull back to reveal he is in a log flume, going over the drop of Splash Mountain.

MICHAEL (V.O.)
In the end, I only hope to utilize my brain to its full potential...

Now at the bottom, he wipes off the guitar and strums... the sound coming out of it is the loud blast of A LIMOUSINE HORN.

DOMINIC (O.S.)

Let's go!

And we are jolted back to...

EXT. LECTURE HALL - DAY

Dominic leaning on the limo's horn. Michael turns to the athlete, and puts a hand on his shoulder.

MICHAEL

Can we pick this up later? From what I've seen in movies, getting harassed by jocks is an essential part of the college experience.

(he gives Jonah a hug)
Follow me on Twitter and I'll hit you back.

Jonah just stares as Michael rushes back to the limo, like nothing just happened.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
I would have made that class, Dom, if I had my dorm room already.

DOMINIC
I'll get Randa to finalize the paperwork and have you the keys by noon.

 $$\operatorname{\textsc{MICHAEL}}$$ Okay, but from there on out, I do all this on my own.

DOMINIC Suit yourself. Oh, I need your lunch order...

MICHAEL
I'll have a chicken salad sandwich,
thanks-- wait, no! I will get
something on my own.

As they hop into the limo and drive off, we hear...

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Where do I go to get moneý?

END OF COLD OPEN

ACT ONE

EXT. TATE UNIVERSITY PARKING LOT - DAY

As the sun sets, Dominic is unloading Michael's belongings from the back of his car to help him move into the dorm. The BOXES are professionally tagged: MICHAEL - DORM ESSENTIALS.

DOMINIC

--Tupac, Selena, John Lennon--

MICHAEL

If I promise not to get murdered, will you stop with this list? You're now just listing people who've been shot.

DOMINIC

<u>Musicians</u> who've been shot. College is a very dangerous place.

MICHAEL

DOMINIC

I'm just saying, Taylor Swift swears by hers.

MICHAEL

Stop worrying. Everything is going to be fine.

DOMINIC

You got kicked out of your first class.

MICHAEL

Technically, you can't get kicked out if they never opened the door.

They arrive at the front door of the dorm building. Michael grabs the box from Dominic's hands.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

And I will get back in. Or die trying. Just kidding.

He turns and leaves Dom at the door.

INT. DORM HALLWAY - NIGHT

Michael, brimming with anticipation, bounces out of the elevator to find that the floor is COMPLETELY SILENT. His suitcase SQUEAKS and it reverberates down the hallway like an atom bomb. Students are holed up in their rooms. A wall sign lists the floor rules: NO PARTIES. NO ALCOHOL, etc. He sets his bags down and stands for a moment before he realizes he has no idea where to go.

Suddenly, a girl bounds down the hall, ANNIKA, Asian, 19, a sunny but driven ball of energy and seemingly the most self-realized SOPHOMORE in the history of the University.

ANNIKA

Michael? Annika Plum, the RA.

MICHAEL

Was there recently a death in here?

ANNIKA

We drew the quiet dorm. And yes, there was a suicide last month, and our floor might be haunted, but it hasn't really spoiled the vibe. Come on, I have three minutes free, let's get you set up.

They start toward her office before she stops to point out that Michael left his bags in the middle of the hallway.

ANNIKA (CONT'D)
Did you need help with those or something?

Michael, never having to carry his own bags, grabs his stuff and follows.

INT. RA OFFICE - NIGHT

She piles a handful of items on top of his welcome packet.

ANNIKA

This is your key. A terrifying pamphlet about bed bugs. And a Myers-Briggs psychometric personality test. It boils down your personality to an acronym based on the four basic personality functions. It's fun.

MICHAEL

(he hands the test back) Myers-Briggs? Nope.

ANNIKA

Nope? I give it to everybody. It's not just for my benefit. It lets you know everything you need to know about yourself.

(MORE)

ANNIKA (CONT'D) What job you're right for. What you want in life.

MICHAEL

Oh, I know what it is. I've been scrutinized and eviscerated by people all over the world. Once, by a guy on the International Space Station. So, I'm a little immune to analysis. And I know what I want in life.

ANNIKA

You're in your thirties and you're moving into a dorm, I have to imagine there are a few question marks.

MICHAEL

Touche. What did it say about you?

ANNIKA

I'm the RA. I don't have to MyersBriggs myself.
 (Michael waits)
Fine. I'll do it if you do.
 (takes the test back)

Let's meet your floor mates.

INT. DORM HALLWAY - NIGHT

They walk. Every door is either closed or mostly closed.

ANNIKA

These people don't come out much so I'm kinda limited to nicknames.

(points at the first door)
That's Midnight Pooper, which is self-explanatory.

(across the hall)

(across the hall)
"Roid Rage" or "Perfect Arms" I
haven't locked one down on him.
I'm very torn.

(another door)
"50 Shades." The sock literally
never comes off the door.

(next two doors)
Asian Jesus. "Guy-Who-Thinks-WeDon't-Know-He-Lets-In-The-FeralCats."

(stops)
That room is yours, your roommate is a female British exchange student on a boobs scholarship.
Just kidding, that always makes me laugh.

MICHAEL

Didn't Tate got all their boobs scholarships taken away for NCAA violations?

Annika smiles. She can work with this guy.

ANNIKA

Your roommate's a guy, he changes his major every semester and the only time we ever talked was when I had to ask him not to fly his drone in the hallway. Seems sweet, though.

(keeps walking)
And then down here at the end of the hall... this room's mine.

INT. ANNIKA'S DORM ROOM - NIGHT

He looks in. Annika's wall is decorated with a wall length "life map" of every class she's going to take.

ANNIKA

Impressive, right? It's my TIMELINE. It has every class I'm going to take and what my expected grade should be, graduation date, job interview wish list and my anticipated second year median salary when I set up my psychiatry practice...

(whispers) \$169,479. That number, of course, assumes an inflation rate of .8% and gas rebounding.

She looks at him, he's a little disturbed.

ANNIKA (CONT'D)
Our dorm too weird for you?

MICHAEL

You have foosball and a vending machine that sells Chick-O-Sticks, so I feel like we have some good clay to work with.

ANNIKA

(points to the giant plaque of house rules)
Good. Because we're not allowed to have parties. Or overnight guests.

MICHAEL

No overnights? What about "50 Shades?"

ANNIKA

He works bankers hours.

INT. DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Michael walks into his room. It's small, but fully loaded. New microwave and a brand new acoustic guitar with a note from Dominic: IN CASE YOU GET INSPIRED.

A text comes in: GET MY GIFT? Michael sits down and texts back: I'M GIVING IT TO THE FIRST HOMELESS PERSON I FIND.

As he finishes his reply, he hears a RUSTLING outside. Suddenly, a HAND becomes visible reaching onto the open window frame. The hand just holds there. Straining. Almost as expressive as Thing in the original Addams Family, the hand begins to SHAKE. One FINGER becomes dislodged and then another, popping off in succession, until just an overwhelmed PINKIE remains. The pinkie gives way and we hear the sound of a BODY landing in a hedge and a small comical "oof."

Michael sets down his phone but before he can get up-- the hand returns. This time, quickly joined by ANOTHER HAND. Michael comes to the window. Looks down and sees WALTER, sweet natured, brilliant, and not bad looking for a genius, hanging from the frame.

WALTER
I drastically overestimated my climbing ability. A little help?

MICHAEL
That depends. Are you my roommate, or just someone majoring in Home Invasion?

As Walter starts to answer, he LOSES HIS GRIP. Michael DIVES halfway out the window and barely catches him. He pulls him into the room and looks out, a CAMPUS SECURITY CAR ZOOMS ACROSS THE GRASS and slides to a stop in front of the building. An OFFICER jumps out, clearly looking for Walter.

MICHAEL (CONT'D) Well, somebody's had a night.

WALTER
I might've just caused the evacuation of the library when I dismantled the security system. No malice. Just intellectual curiosity.

MICHAEL You can do that?

WALTER
I don't like to brag but I am on the autism spectrum.

Walter starts frantically looking for a place to hide.

MICHAEL Let's think this through. Did anyone actually see you do it?

WALTER
No. And is it possible for you to dial down the eye contact?

Michael is amused by Walter. Suddenly, there is a LOUD POUNDING on the door.

MICHAEL

Get under your comforter and act like you haven't been vaccinated for the measles. If you could punch yourself in the face, the red eyes would really sell it.

Michael grabs the handle to the door. Standing there is the HEAD CAMPUS SECURITY GUARD, who looks at Walter, in bed.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

He was here all night. Hé had a cold. He never left.

The campus security guard is left speechless by Michael's certainty. He looks closer at him.

CAMPUS SECURITY GUARD

Aren't you--?

MICHAEL

Yes, I am. Have a guitar pick.

He hands him a pick from his pocket. Then closes the door with authority. He turns to Walter, smiles.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

You hungry?

INT. ALUMNI CLUB - NIGHT

Michael and Walter sit in the middle of the older benefactors and regents and stuffy suited members of the alumni club. Walter is nervously looking around.

MICHAEL

So Zaring's T.A. has this really nice mouth but it's saying really mean things and I'm kinda torn—are you okay?

WALTER

We're not supposed to be in here. There's a reason this is called the ALUMNI club.

MICHAEL

We ARE alumni. We're just super early. And Yelp was crazy about their ginger kombucha. So, calm down, Walter, nobody's noticed.

WALTER

That's because you took us in through the kitchen.

A WAITER arrives. Nametag: MONTY.

WAITER

We have some specials. The first is a tomato crab bisque...

Suddenly, a tough and slightly intense girl, LILLY, appears from behind a pillar.

LILLY

(to waiter)

He can't have the crab.

WALTER

Who's that?

MICHAEL

My stalker. Hey, Lilly.

LILLY

How many times do we have to go through this? Stalker is a borderline racist term. It's superfan.

WALTER

You have a stalker?

MICHAEL

It's not as fun as it sounds. Like any relationship, it takes work. She's tough but harmless. I think the term is "fun-violent."

(turns to her)
Lilly, we're dealing with a little
crisis here...

LILLY

(she turns to the waiter)
He's allergic to the shellfish.
He's also lactose-intolerant, so
can you do the green onion mashed
potatoes but with soy instead--?

MICHAEL

(stops her)
Okay, first of all, that sounds delicious. Secondly, you've got to go. Walter here just told me that the class I got kicked out of is the prerequisite for all my other classes.

LILLY

That's why it's called HUMANITIES CORE, Michael. Without that class, you'll be dropped from English 529, World Lit, and Contemporary Media.

WALTER

How does she know all that --?

LILLY

Please. The registrar's office has a terrible firewall.

The waiter looks on in confusion as Lilly takes a seat.

WAITER

I'm sorry, is she eating with you?

LILLY

I would love to. But I need to go off-menu. I am a strict hotdogaterian, which means I only eat meat of undetermined origin because it's less sad that way.

MICHAEL

Not now, Lilly. I've got to work out a way to get back in my class.

LILLY

Just let your legal guys handle it.

MICHAEL

You're right. I could easily put Dominic on it-- no, wait! I will see Zaring tomorrow. I need to keep my first day as positive as possible.

Suddenly, they are interrupted by Annika, outside, spotting them in the glass window. When she sees Michael...

ANNIKA

WHY DID YOU MAKE ME TAKE THAT TEST?!?

Michael sees Annika outside, panicked, clutching a Myers-Briggs test. He turns to the waiter.

MICHAEL

Monty, do you mind if that borderline hysterical girl outside joins us?

ANNIKA

It says I'm not supposed to be a psychiatrist!!

She runs off. Michael gets up, turns to the waiter.

MICHAEL

I suspected this might happen.
(as he goes after her)
And Monty, I would LOVE a tea when you get a chance.

INT. ANNIKA'S DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Michael knocks.

MICHAEL

Annika? I have to admit I feel responsible for this and I'm hoping you can move past it.

He opens the door to find she is COMPLETELY DISMANTLING her life plan board.

> MICHAEL (CONT'D) Okay, not moving past it at all. Let's think this through, is there any way we can blame your parents for this?

> > ANNIKA

I'm two years into a degree program with no idea what I really want to do.

Michael grabs her board and starts reassembling it as she fights him for control of the pieces. A spirited life-board tug-of-war ensues. He finally wrests it away from her.

MICHAEL

Look, I'm not used to giving advice, I'm more used to ignoring it. But you can't come to college with locked plan. And if I had to take a wild guess, I would say your problem is right there.

He points to the dorm RULES on the wall: NO OVERNIGHT GUESTS. NO PARTIES. DO NOT DISMANTLE CARBON MONOXIDE ALARMS.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
You follow every single one of them. Without fail. You see what I mean? Throw a party. Trash a carbon monoxide detector. Have an overnight guest. Maybe one leads into the other, I don't know.

Annika stops, thinks about this. It hits home.

ANNIKA

You're right. Rebellion stage. necessary. If I have to, I quit school. Worse comes to worst, I can hike the Pacific Crest Trail, get addicted to heroin--

MICHAEL

Okay, I need to stop you there, not because I'm disinterested but because I don't want you to spoil the end of that movie.

ANNIKA

We're having a party. Bring anyone you'd like. Except Midnight Pooper. You know what? Her, too.

MICHAEL

Midnight Pooper is a girl?

INT. DORM HALLWAY- NIGHT

Michael starts back toward the alumni club, feeling good. He turns to find a YOUNG GUY in a courier outfit smiling at him.

COURIER

Michael Sturges? It's so cool you're here.

MICHAEL

Thanks, man. I got kicked out of the class that is the prereq for all my others but other than that, it's been cake.

He sees the guy has a sheet of paper and is nervous.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Did you want me to sign something for you? I can't sign butts any more. It's a long story, but who knew you could get Hep C from a Sharpie?

The guy has a clipboard at the ready. Michael is surprised by the formality.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

What is this?

COURIER

Just a cease and desist order.

I'm sorry, I wasn't supposed to read it. But on a personal note, I can't believe the record company can sue you for going to college.

Michael looks at the sheet. Holy shit.

COURIER (CONT'D)

So, you gonna audition for the campus a capella group, or what?

Michael's PHONE BUZZES. It's a text from Dominic, who writes in all caps: WE'RE GETTING SUED?

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

EXT. UNIVERSITY QUAD - DAY

Michael walks across campus with a panicked Dominic, who is carrying Michael's recording contract. Michael is customarily unfazed.

MICHAEL

Please. There can't be a "no college" clause in my contract.

DOMINIC

There is pretty much everything else. They can sue us. And we will lose. So let's pack this college thing up and walk away with our tails between our legs like men do.

MICHAEL

What do I always say?

DOMINIC

Don't make me repeat it.

MICHAEL

Come on.

DOMINIC

You say "no worry."

MICHAEL

Isn't that an amazing phrase?

DOMINIC

It's borderline dumb and grammatically vague but, yes, it suits you.

Michael stops at the door.

MICHAEL

I got kicked out of a class for being late and do I roll up in a ball and start crying? No, I don't. I am going right back in to see my professor and prove that I am worthy of this class. Wish me luck. Actually, don't. I don't need it.

He turns and grabs the door handle. It's locked. He looks at the clock on the wall: 9:01. Crap.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Can you order me a watch? Like a really accurate one?

EXT. UNIVERSITY QUAD - DAY

Michael is sitting on the grass. He is typing away feverishly on his laptop. He looks up and sees Gabrielle, Professor Zaring's T.A. He quickly stands and races after her.

MICHAEL

It's me. Hey.

No reaction. He uses his hands to frame his face like the SLIDER in the door.

GABRIELLE

I know who you are. And I know WHO you are.

MICHAEL

Thanks.

GABRIELLE

Why would you assume that's a compliment?

MICHAEL

It usually is. Could you do me a favor?

GABRIELLE

Listen, I'm gonna spare you the whole "you come into this school on an act of whimsy" speech. I'm not going to use the terms "making a mockery" or "special treatment" or mention those of us who have had to struggle to earn the right to be here or the deserving students you're supplanting by being here.

MICHAEL

First of all, I'd like to thank you for not using those phrases. But, let me assure you, like all those ladies on The Bachelor, I am here for "the right reasons." And I just want to be like anyone else.

A STUDENT FAN jumps in front of her, qushes at Michael.

Can I get a picture with you?

MICHAEL

Of course. Get the clock tower in the background. And if you tweet this, hashtag it #GETTIN'BACKINZARING'SCLASS, all caps, so it pops...
 (turns to Gabrielle) Wanna be in the picture?

She walks away. He quickly poses and chases after her.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Could you just get me in to talk to
Professor Zaring? I would do
anything for you. In Fact, I
probably would have done anything
for you anyway, I have a terrible
weakness for girls with glasses and
then you're a Ph.D. student, so
like, forget about it, right...?

GABRIELLE

I need to stop you. This act probably kills with the fangirls and the interns down at Radio Disney, so please keep it fresh for them. Bottom line, you've missed both classes this week. No one's ever gotten back in after that.

MICHAEL
Okay, on ONE level that makes it
more exciting. But on another, it
is simply not fair. I am in the
middle of composing a very strongly
worded complaint. And if forced
to, I will send it to my faculty
advisor. I have one of those,
right?

GABRIELLE
You do. And I would LOVE to see
you do that. Are we done?

MICHAEL
Almost. There's also a party in my
dorm. Should be huge. The girl
throwing it is super organized.

INT. UNIVERSITY OFFICES - DAY

Michael signs in at the front desk. A perpetually bored SECRETARY named TRUDY sits behind the desk.

MICHAEL

I'm here to see my faculty advisor. I have a complaint here that I wrote, without any assistance from my legal team. Just so you know, Trudy, I didn't want to have to do this. Have a guitar pick.

The SECRETARY takes the complaint. Leaves the pick.

SECRETARY
I don't care what anybody's reasons are for anything. Wait here.

INT. FACULTY ADVISOR'S OFFICE - DAY

He is led down the hall to the office at the end. Inside, he finds his faculty advisor waiting. In a moment of horrifying revelation we see his advisor is... PROFESSOR ZARING, and he is holding Michael's complaint in his hand.

PROFESSOR ZARING
This is surprisingly descriptive,
I've never been characterized as a
'tyrannizer' before.

Michael starts to explain but the door is closed on his face. A faint LOCKING sound is heard.

INT. DORM HALLWAY - NIGHT

Michael walks in, as low as we've seen him, but not yet out. The hall is lined with party decorations. But the floor is EMPTY. An embarrassing excess of Costco bulk food uneaten.

INT. MICHAEL'S DORM ROOM - NIGHT

He finds Walter, holed up in the room. Next to him is a bag of sixty dinner rolls.

WALTER
Can you get me some ham or something?

MICHAEL There's nobody out there.

WALTER
Listen, the first time I went out
there, I asked someone their
gender. I can't be trusted with my
instincts.

(holds up bag of rolls)
Then, as you can see, I panicked.
Also, Asian Jesus ate all the
pastrami.

MICHAEL
You can't be THAT uncomfortable
talking to people.

WALTER
I think it's a product of my nearest sibling being 31 years older than me. My parents still contend I wasn't a mistake.
Anyway, I like people. I'm great with hellos. It's just follow-up questions. They are my Vietnam.

MICHAEL
Listen, I don't think you have to worry. Nobody's going to show up.
(he catches himself)
(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Oh, crap. Nobody is going to show up.

He looks down the hall and sees Annika peer out of her room, looking in vain for guests to arrive, heartbroken. Michael thinks.

INT. RECORD LABEL OFFICE - NIGHT

Dominic is seated at a table with label LAWYERS. He sneaks away from a conference room and answers his phone. Along the hallway are Gold Records.

MICHAEL

(on phone) I want to put on an event. And I'm doing it all myself. I just need phone numbers: Donnie and our lighting guys, the Kona Brewing rep who sponsored the last tour, Moby's new cell--

DOMINIC

This is what I was hoping for, Michael. Would this be like a concert event?

MICHAEL

No, it's a floor party for my dorm.

DOMINIC

Oh my God! No!

MICHAEL

Don't worry, I got this covered. Do you remember that guy who gets those inflatable landing pads so we can jump off the roof?

Michael suddenly has an epiphany. He pulls out his phone. And Tweets. The Tweet sets off an alert on Dom's phone.

DOMINIC

Holy crap! Delete that. You just invited two million people to your dorm.

MICHAEL

Most of them are not gonna come on this short of notice.

DOMINIC

You gave out your address! Why didn't you just write, "please come murder me" at the end?

MICHAEL

First of all, that would have been too many characters. Now repeat after me... no worry.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. DORM HALLWAY - LATER

The hallway is packed. Smoke and dizzying light effects make it somewhat magical. An amazing party is happening. THE FLOOR HAS COME TO LIFE. The recluses and the cool kids have all come out, except, thankfully, Midnight Pooper. Michael has inadvertently created the kind of college experience he initially envisioned. He walks Walter through the crowd.

MICHAEL

Baby steps. Just say hi to someone. Anyone.

WALTER

Got it.

Suddenly, Michael is hugged by a grateful Annika. Walter immediately steps backward into the men's room and out of view. Michael looks back, incredulous.

MICHAEL

You KNOW her.

Annika takes his hand.

ANNIKA

Look what you did! Nobody could have done this for me.

They walk past the rooms, now springing with life. Every door is open. Except Fifty Shades. There's another sock on the doorknob. Michael and Annika pass a room and two FERAL CATS quickly spring out the window.

ANNIKA (CONT'D)

I have a confession.

INT. ANNIKA'S DORM ROOM - NIGHT

She pulls him into her room. Is this going to get awkward?

ANNIKA

I Googled you today. You're famous.

MICHAEL

Yeah. And, thankfully, not "Dateline" famous.

ANNIKA

Then I listened to your music on Pandora. Awesome.

MICHAEL

Thank you. They also have these things called CDs.

ANNIKA And then_I checked out those leaked They're... not awesome. demos.

MICHAEL

That seemed to be the consensus. was just... looking for something more, you know?

ANNIKA

I guess so. It just seemed like, all of a sudden you weren't having any fun. My Dad used to say "sometimes you can try too hard."

She kisses him on the cheek and bounds off to the party as Michael processes what might have been the clearest feedback he's gotten in years.

EXT. DORM HALLWAY - DAY

Michael walks out. Outside the door, is Walter, trying to fit in. He is frozen.

MICHAEL

I'm going to guess that you've hit a wall?

WALTER

I want this. So much. It's just there's a lot of girls here and stuff and I have a very thin skin.

MICHAEL

Walter, you're a generous, well-intentioned guy with shockingly good hair for someone with such a high I.Q. That's more than enough.

Michael smiles. Takes him by the arm. Leads him down the hall. Walter tries to be cool but it's killing him.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Of course it's terrifying, but only
for an instant. Be patient. Be kind. These things don't happen immediately.

Michael opens their room door. Inside, there is a NAKED GIRL in Michael's bed.

NAKED GIRL

Hello, Michael.

Michael abruptly shuts the door. Looks at Walter.

MICHAEL

Okay, sometimes they do happen immediately. Let me handle this.

He walks in and closes the door as an awestruck Walter waits slack jawed in the hallway. A PARTYGOER walks by.

WALTER

Dude, I just hit the roommate lottery.

The partygoer turns and Walter sees this is NOT a GUY.

WALTER (CONT'D)

Dammit.

SECONDS LATER

Naked girl comes out, fully clothed. Walter looks at Michael, as if the world just ended.

WALTER (CONT'D)

You sent her away??!?!?

MICHAEL

Blindly hooking up with a stranger is embarrassing for all parties involved. I learned that the hard way... repeatedly.

WALTER

YOU SENT HER AWAY?!? There was a naked girl in our room and you asked her to put on clothes! Listen, Michael, I don't need a lot of things, but in the future, I would just like a vote.

Michael takes a deep breath.

MICHAEL

About that. Listen, there may not be a future. I impulsively wrote some things that went directly to Professor Zaring and I'm pretty sure I am not getting back in my Core class. I'm out of options, and for the first time in my life, I can't skate by on enthusiasm, or the strategically utilized help of people on my payroll.

Annika overhears and approaches.

ANNIKA

You're ineligible for your classes?

WALTER

It's too bad you couldn't just talk to Zaring and reason with him at the dinner tonight.

MICHAEL

Dinner? Why didn't you tell me about this? I can totally talk to him there.

Suddenly, Walter gets very nervous.

WALTER

You're not really invited.

MICHAEL

I like to think I'm welcome everywhere. Let's go.

ANNIKA

I'm coming, too.

MICHAEL

No. This is your party.

ANNIKA

But you're my friend.

Michael smiles. And the two of them grab a hesitant Walter and yank him out of the room.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. CARLYLE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Michael's excitement is now crushed, as they stare up at a sign "RESTAURANT CLOSED-PRIVATE EVENT." A banner hangs overhead "WELCOME TATE PROFESSORS."

ANNIKA

You said he was at dinner.

WALTER

I said he was at THE dinner. It's the same thing.

ANNIKA

No, it's not.

Michael looks at the front door. A CHECK-IN TABLE is set up where SECURITY checks invitations before letting anyone inside.

MICHAEL

There's a phrase for this situation, it goes like this: NO WORRY.

ANNIKA

I don't think that's a phrase.

MICHAEL

Just come on. I taught Walter a little trick at the alumni club.

ALLEY BEHIND RESTAURANT

They slip into the alley. Michael feeling triumphant, looks at the two of them. Walter turns to leave.

WALTER

I don't want to do this again.
I've already almost been arrested once this week.

MICHAEL

But that was your fault, This is mine. I believe that gives you immunity under the law. Come on, Walter, tonight you become a man.

He pulls on the kitchen door. Locked. Damn.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Do they lock EVERYTHING in this town?

He pauses, looking up at the second floor.

EXT. RESTAURANT WINDOW - NIGHT

Annika tries to steady a wobbly Walter as he attempts to give a boost to Michael to the upstairs window. It's not going well.

WALTER

Painted shut.

MICHAEL

No worry.

WALTER

She's right, that saying is missing an "s" or something.

He stops talking as a window SHATTERS into a million pieces.

RESTAURANT BACK DOOR

Michael comes around and lets Walter and Annika in. They walk through the back as Michael strategizes.

MICHAEL

Hopefully he has an empty seat at his table, I'll sit down with him and really win him over. There's a great passage about perseverance from his book--

Michael stops in his tracks. Standing there, now inside as well, is Lilly.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
How the hell did YOU get inside?

LILLY

Michael, if you're going to insult my abilities, I'm just going to move on to Jason Mraz. Now go fix this mess you've gotten yourself into.

They push on to the main dining room. Michael freezes.

INT. MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

This isn't just a dinner. This is a formal presentation. A stage with seats alongside a podium where THE DEAN is speaking to the faculty in the audience. There's no empty chair next to Zaring because he's seated on a dais.

MICHAEL

How long do you think I have to jump on stage between presenters?

WALTER

Why would you ever do that?

MICHAEL

Are you kidding? A stage, a mic. No worry.

Suddenly, rushing through the venue, clipboard in hand, Gabrielle, Professor Zaring's assistant.

GABRIELLE

Oh my God. What are you doing?

MICHAEL

It's called a Hail Mary. I'm at my best when I don't think things through.

GABRIELLE

Why did you have to have your career crisis at my school? Couldn't you have just done the normal thing and become a judge on a singing competition show?

As the Dean finishes up and leaves the dais to polite applause, Michael sees the empty podium and makes a break for it. He grabs the microphone and looks at the joyless crowd.

MICHAEL

How's everybody doing tonight?

Not great, apparently. Zaring grimaces, seeing Michael.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
My name is Michael Sturges. student. I'm also a recording artist. I'm a writer, a performer, the front man for a band called Modern Dukes.

(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I don't want to sound like Robin Thicke, but I've sold two million records in the last five years.

WALTER (O.S.)

No way!!

From the wings, we see Walter realize for the first time that his roommate is a bona fide rock star. He can't contain himself.

WALTER (CONT'D)

The whole naked girl in our room makes so much more sense now.

Michael continues at the podium playing to the crowd, which is slowly becoming wrapped up in his words.

MICHAEL

...my point is, I could probably be anywhere right now. Belize is nice. There's a new Harry Potter ride in Orlando. But I chose here. I chose Tate. I wanted this.

Walter is buzzing. He has so many questions in his head.

WALTER

(loud whisper)
Who do you know in 'One Direction?'

MICHAEL

After high school I kinda accidentally got successful. I saw the world, I experienced everything a person could hope to experience. Metaphorically, I built a house. But, I did not have a foundation. On a related note, I once did a reality show with Ty Pennington and built a house WITH a foundation.

WALTER

Is Colbie Caillat mean?

MICHAEL

(he looks at Annika)
But tonight, I did something for somebody else, which I realize I haven't done in the past few years. And none of my borderline-selfless actions would have crossed my mind without the real and wonderful people I've met in just one day on your campus.

The crowd is really drawn in. And in a few short moments, we see the magic that is Michael Sturges. He moves people.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

But I can't do anything without being let in the Humanities Core. (MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
And for that, I am at your mercy,
Professor Zaring. I may suck with
rules and structure and I might
have accidentally dented your car
out front, that's all on me. But I
did get a watch.

(he holds it up)
On my own. Well, Amazon. I got
the Prime. It got here in, like,
four hours. I don't know how they
do it. By the way, have you guys
seen Transparent? It's incredible.

(collects himself)
Professor, I don't know what your decision will be, but it was your book and your words that gave me the strength to come back, and do the work I should have done in the first place to deserve the success I've had. I will be there tomorrow, outside your class, on time, and ready. I just need an open door.

Some applause starts. And then swells. Gabrielle can't help herself, she lets out a little smile. Michael sees her and she quickly averts her eyes before giving any hint of approval. Michael turns his gaze to Zaring in the crowd. And just as Michael makes eye contact, he is promptly TACKLED by the security guard.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

EXT. LECTURE HALL - DAY

As the students race in through the door, Walter and Annika walk him to the door.

MICHAEL

You think he's gonna let me back

WALTER

Not a chance. But what a speech that was. My roommate is a rock star. I am going to build on last night, Michael. I am going to make friends.

A girl STUDENT, heading toward the door, tries to squeeze by Walter.

STUDENT

Excuse me.

Walter immediately turns and RUNS. Annika gives Michael a hug. And pushes him toward Zaring's door.

MICHAEL

Listen, I hope that party didn't get you in trouble last night.

ANNIKA
It did. I got fired. I learned that "No Worry" only works if you're a rock star.

MICHAEL

I could always call someone, straighten it out for you.

ANNIKA

No, no... I'm undeclared now. feel alright about it. (she turns to go, then stops)

....but just out of curiosity, who would you call?

She shakes it off and leaves. Michael tentatively walks in. As he gets inside the lecture hall for the first time, he finds Zaring is waiting on the other side of the door. Zaring looks at his watch: it's 8:59. As Michael steps toward the auditorium, Zaring stops him.

PROFESSOR ZARING

Not so fast.

Michael thinks this is definitely the end but then Zaring's watch hits nine and we see Zaring CLICK the door LOCKED with Michael inside. Then, surprisingly, Zaring's demeanor changes.

PROFESSOR ZARING (CONT'D) Much of the staff was intoxicated last night so I'm discounting their applause. But you do possess passion. So, there must be SOMETHING to you.

MICHAEL Should we hug? This feels like a hug. A European man-kiss on the cheeks seems like overkill.

Zaring looks at Gabrielle.

PROFESSOR ZARING Give us a minute. Get the class started.

Before she leaves, she whispers to Michael.

GABRIELLE
Listen, I might have smiled against
my own will last night. Don't read
anything into it.

She heads to the front. Michael is nervous. Zaring pulls him away as the class takes their seats and lowers his voice.

PROFESSOR ZARING
I have spent thirty years
cultivating a culture. Of fear
mostly. Not by design. But by
accident. Anyway, it suits me.
It's useful.

MICHAEL Fear. Useful. Got it.

PROFESSOR ZARING
At university, it's indispensable.
But... once upon a time I was a
jazz fusionist myself. I chose
academia. Perhaps academia chose
me. In quieter moments, one
entertains the notions of "what
if?" These aspirations, they fade,
but they never completely
disappear. And then YOU walk
through my door... do you see where
I'm going?

Michael smiles.

MICHAEL I think I know what you mean.

PROFESSOR ZARING
Good. This is my tape. It's a six
song demo. I like to think it's
well-produced. Perhaps you would
listen to it and see fit to move it
on to the proper place.

MICHAEL

I'm sorry, is my getting in the class contingent on--

PROFESSOR ZARING

(looks at his watch)

Well, look at the time. See you in class.

He leaves. Michael considers the 30 year-old demo tape in his hand and wonders if he just agreed to get it to his label in exchange for remaining in the class. Regardless, it's a dilemma for another day. Today, he's back in.

INT. MICHAEL'S DORM ROOM - NIGHT

As the day winds down, Michael, a hint of satisfaction on his face, finds himself alone in his dorm room. He looks up from his textbook at the guitar, untouched since it arrived. He tentatively picks it up and starts to play. A progression comes to him. It's nice.

He closes his eyes. A rhythm mixes in and we see a flashback image-- the churning of the SPROCKET of the BIKE as he rode to class. A THUMPING BASS BEAT fills the bottom end and we see it's the EXACT RHYTHM of Michael pounding on the door before seeing that he'd been purposefully locked out.

A lyrical line fits perfectly into the meter and key of the song, it's ANNIKA telling him "sometimes you can try too hard." All of these elements are working together in perfect harmony, before our eyes we are seeing life turn into music. The sound is filling the entire dorm floor on a quiet Tuesday night.

FROM HER ROOM

Annika hears Michael playing and comes into the hallway to listen. Outside his door, she finds Walter, already waiting and listening, not wanting to interrupt.

IN THE DORM PARKING LOT

Dominic is getting out of his car trying to calm down the legal team from the record label.

DOMINIC

I am fully aware he signed a contract, I understand your side. Look, I left a perfectly good job at Roth for this. He's my friend, so you haven't been through half of what I've been through. This whole college endeavor is ridiculous, I agree...

BUT INSIDE THE DORM ROOM

Michael plays on. Words are winding around each other, twisting into melody, the strumming gets louder.

For the first time, our core group is experiencing Michael's gift in action. To them, it is a revelation.

We track through the open window as the music seems to spill into the quad. And it is there we find Lilly, lurking in the hedge, listening.

WE NOW FIND DOMINIC

walking on the pathway to the dorm. From there, he hears the guitar playing in the distance and stops in his tracks. He knows who this is. He abruptly forgets the legal threats being blasted through his phone and listens. Like the others, he is swept in. It's becoming a community experience.

INSIDE

Michael backs up, restarts another stream of consciousness set of lyrics and it all starts to fall together. The playing is more assured. The joy of creating is turning him into something larger than life.

Outside, Dominic is jolted back to reality by the irritated voices on his phone. Hearing this song, even in its rawest form, he is emboldened and changes his position.

DOMINIC (CONT'D)
Actually... Michael Sturges doesn't
just have the potential to make
good songs; he has the talent to be
the voice of a generation. And he
will find his way, no matter how
misguided the journey. He knows
what he's doing, so leave us alone.
We're staying the course.

He hangs up, his face a mix of fear and excitement.

And now, we're back on Michael, completely locked in on this new composition.

DOMINIC ENTERS THE DORM HALLWAY

He sees the crowd gathered around Michael's door. He immediately snatches the SOCK off Fifty Shades' doorknob. And puts it on Michael's.

INSIDE

Everything is working. And just as the song builds toward a soaring chorus... Michael stops.

MICHAEL

Nah.

He sets the guitar down and goes back to his textbook. Our cast returns to their business. And we fade out.