

We follow, as Andrew passes a JAZZ CLUB on the next block. Suddenly -- he stops.

There, on the club's main sign, below the featured names, are these words: "Guest Performer: TERENCE FLETCHER". Andrew stays put for a second. Completely taken aback. Then he starts walking away. Then stops. Nope. Turns around...

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INT. JAZZ CLUB - MOMENTS LATER

93

...and steps inside. It's a genteel venue. On the stage, BASS, DRUMS, BONGOS -- and, at the piano, FLETCHER.

The mere sight gets Andrew's pulse racing. But he stays put. Watches... The quartet is pacing its way through **FLETCHER'S SONG IN CLUB**, and Fletcher is playing the final head. He's exceedingly delicate, gentle with each keystroke, his fingers moving like ballerinas. His playing is soft, subtle, and exquisite. He plays the melody as though moved by it.

Andrew is surprised by this... Stays in the back, behind the last table. The song comes to a close. Fletcher smiles, looks -- and then freezes. His eyes locked on Andrew. He has seen him.

Andrew blanches, takes a step back, hurries for the exit. But there's a PERSON blocking the way. Tries to squeeze through--

DRUMMER (O.S.)

That was Terence Fletcher, on the keys...

More applause. Andrew, hemmed in, keeps trying to get out--

FLETCHER

Neiman.

Andrew stops. Turns. Fletcher is standing right there. A moment of silence. Andrew is pale. But Fletcher's face is a blank.

ANDREW

...Hi...

SMASH CUT TO:

93A

INT. JAZZ CLUB - NIGHT

93A

A table in the corner. Fletcher and Andrew seated. They seem to have been sitting here in silence for some time. Two drinks stand between them. Untouched. The other band members on-stage play **JAZZ CLUB BLUES**, a new PIANIST on the keys and a SAXOPHONIST added as well. Finally--

FLETCHER

So what are you up to these days, Andrew?

ANDREW

...Oh, just...you know...various...things...

Fletcher nods. *Ok.* Andrew eyes him. Then, nervous--

ANDREW (CONT'D)

...I--I'm sorry about what happened.
(then, *should I clarify?--*)
At Dunellen.

FLETCHER

You shouldn't be. A player's got to be willing to fight.

Andrew looks at him.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

You played with a broken bone. After crashing a car. That's insane.

ANDREW

I was in a different place.

FLETCHER

Good thing you're not in that place anymore.

A beat. Then -- Fletcher seems distracted. By people CLAPPING ALONG to the band...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Have you ever noticed it's never the people with rhythm who clap along?

He starts CLAPPING loudly, in the proper tempo. Leans over to the table next to his, where a COUPLE is clapping off-beat, and starts CLAPPING in their faces. Then sits back down.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

I don't know if you know... I don't teach anymore.

ANDREW

I... I heard about that... You quit?

FLETCHER

...No, not exactly.

He looks at Andrew. A moment of tension. *Does he know...?*

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

A couple parents got a kid from Sean Casey's year... I don't know who, I think maybe a bassist... They got him to say a few things about me... That much I know...

(Andrew tries to hide his relief)

Though why anyone would have anything but honey and sugar to say about me is a mystery.

Andrew laughs. Seems the mood has lightened.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

That's a good laugh, huh?

ANDREW

Oh, no... I...I just--

FLETCHER

No, it's ok -- I know I've made some enemies. Maybe I seem to think my style is normal, but believe me, I don't.

A moment. Fletcher finally takes a sip of his drink.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

I'm conducting some, though. They're bringing back the JVC Fest this year, got me opening with a pro band in two weeks.

ANDREW

(genuinely impressed)

That's amazing.

FLETCHER

(shrugs)

It's ok...

Then, looking off for a moment--

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

The truth is I don't think people understand what it is I did at Shaffer. I wasn't there to conduct. Any idiot can move his hands and keep people in tempo. No, it's about pushing people beyond what's expected of them. And I believe that is a necessity. Because without it you're depriving the world of its next Armstrong. Its next Parker.

(pause)

Why did Charlie Parker become Charlie Parker, Andrew?

Beat. Andrew is surprised. He's told this story himself.

ANDREW

Because Jo Jones threw a cymbal at him.

FLETCHER

Exactly. Young kid, pretty good on the sax, goes up to play his solo in a cutting session, fucks up -- and Jones comes this close to slicing his head off for it. He's laughed off-stage. Cries himself to sleep that night. But the next morning, what does he do? He practices. And practices and practices. With one goal in mind: that he never ever be laughed off-stage again. A year later he goes back to the Reno, and he plays the best motherfucking solo the world had ever heard.

Andrew smiles. Nods. Finally -- unlike his uncles, his cousins, even his father -- someone who gets it.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Now imagine if Jones had just patted young Charlie on the head and said "Good job." Charlie would've said to himself, "Well, shit, I did do a good job," and that'd be that. No Bird. Tragedy, right? Except that's just what people today want. The Shaffer Conservatories of the world, they want sugar. You don't even say "cutting session" anymore, do you? No, you say "jam session". What the fuck kind of word is that? Jam session? It's a cutting session, Andrew, this isn't fucking Smucker's. It's about weeding out the best from the worst so that the worst become better than the best.

(beat)

I mean look around you. \$25 drinks, mood lighting, a little shrimp cocktail to go with your Coltrane. And people wonder why jazz is dying.

(then,)

Take it from me, and every Starbucks jazz album only proves my point. There are no two words more harmful in the entire English language than "good job".

Beat. He leans back. Lets his words linger. Andrew thinks...

ANDREW

But do you think there's a line? You know -- where you discourage the next Charlie Parker from becoming Charlie Parker?

FLETCHER

No. Because the next Charlie Parker would never be discouraged.

Andrew takes this in. A moment...

ANDREW

...And you? Are you back to playing now?

FLETCHER

Not really. Here and there... The playing never interested me. I never wanted to be Charlie Parker. I wanted to be the man who made Charlie Parker. The man who discovered some scrawny kid, pushed him, prodded him, shaped him into something great -- and then said to the world, "Check this out. The best motherfucking solo you've ever heard."

ANDREW

Who's your Charlie Parker, then?
(hesitant)
Sean Casey...?

The name hits Fletcher. Fletcher looks at Andrew -- who immediately regrets bringing that name up. Why? Because, even after everything, the sight of Fletcher hurting affects him...

FLETCHER

Sean... Sean was a sweet kid... And with all those idiots saying "This isn't for you", Sean did something great. Very few people ever get that chance...

He pauses. Looks off. Looks at the musicians on-stage...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

But no... Not Sean Casey.
(then, as he thinks about this,)
The truth is I don't know if I ever had a Charlie Parker...
(and then,)
But I tried. And that's more than most people can say, Andrew. I tried. And even if I never find one, I will never apologize for trying.

He's silent. A look of disappointment.

Then, he points to the PIANIST on-stage...

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

He's a beautiful player, isn't he?

ANDREW

Yeah...

Fletcher nods. His thoughts drifting again. A moment passes.

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EXT. JAZZ CLUB - NIGHT

94

Andrew and Fletcher exit. They stand for a second. Look at one another. An awkward silence.

ANDREW

Nice seeing you...

Fletcher nods. Beat. Andrew turns, about to head off, when--

FLETCHER

Look. I don't know how you'll take this.
That band I'm leading for JVC -- our
drummer isn't cutting it.

(Andrew looks at him blankly...)

Do you understand...?

ANDREW

No...

FLETCHER

I'm using the Studio Band playlist.
"Whiplash", "Caravan". I need a
replacement who already knows those
charts inside out.

Andrew looks at him. You can't be serious...

ANDREW

(trying to gather his thoughts)

Wh-- what -- what about Ryan Connolly...?

FLETCHER

What about him? All he was was your
incentive.

ANDREW

...And...and Tanner??

FLETCHER

He switched to pre-med.

(and with a hint of a smile)

I think he got discouraged.

Andrew is speechless now. *Is this really happening?*

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

We're rehearsing next Tuesday. Why don't you take the weekend to think about it?

Andrew takes it all in. WE PUSH in on him, processing... And, slowly but surely, his shock and uncertainty harden before our eyes -- into resolution... *This is something to seize on.*

ANDREW

I don't need to.

95

INT. ANDREW'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DAY

95

BLACK -- then light floods in. Andrew has just opened his closet doors. In a stack, gathering dust, are his OLD DRUMS... Andrew looks at them -- heart swelling, nerves racing...

CUT TO:

95A

INT. ANDREW'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

95A

Andrew setting the DRUMS up... Newly energized, a speed in his movements we haven't seen since Dunellen...

CUT TO:

95B

INT. ANDREW'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

95B

Andrew practicing. You can tell he's been here for hours already. Sweat runs in rivulets down his cheeks, wetting the drum heads. His eyes are wide, glowing, focused...

He's back to the life...

96

INT. JUDY AND ARTHUR ZANKEL HALL - NIGHT

96

An empty theater. It's one of Carnegie Hall's theaters -- bigger and far sleeker than any of the theaters Studio Band played. Ceiling decked with lights, capacity 1200. On the stage, rehearsing, is a JAZZ ORCHESTRA.

Similar set-up to Studio Band, the PLAYERS all young pros -- except, of course, Andrew, the youngest of all.