

ALL AT ONCE!

Where The Noise Becomes Music

Book, Music & Lyrics by Richard Ehrlich

Based on the book GoYou! Focus Forward

EXPANDED TWO-ACT VERSION

Copyright © 2026 Richard Ehrlich

Estimated Runtime: 2h10–2h25 (with intermission)

CHARACTERS

JULES CHEN (17) — High school junior, protagonist. Soprano, G3–G5.

DEREK MARTINEZ (18) — Jules' lab partner, later boyfriend. Tenor, C3–A4.

SAM MARTINEZ (23) — Derek's brother, guidance counselor. Baritone, A2–F4.

MAYA RODRIGUEZ (35) — Graphic designer, single mother. Mezzo-soprano, B3–F5.

EMMA RODRIGUEZ (8) — Maya's daughter. Treble, C4–D5.

DR. VASQUEZ (45) — Support group facilitator. Alto, G3–D5.

MR. HENDRICKS (50s) — Chemistry teacher. Speaking role.

LINDA CHEN (42) — Jules' mother, nurse. Alto, A3–E5.

DAVID CHEN (45) — Jules' father, engineer. Bass-baritone, F2–D4.

MARCUS WILLIAMS (19) — College sophomore. Baritone, G2–E4.

INTERVIEWERS (2–3) — Speaking roles.

BOARD CHAIR PARK (50s) — Speaking role.

BOARD MEMBER TORRES (40s) — Skeptical. Speaking role.

BOARD MEMBER JOHNSON (50s) — Empathetic. Speaking role.

Ensemble: 6–8 performers (Students, Board Members, Parents, etc.)

PRODUCTION NOTES

Set Design: Moveable elements. Lighting changes carry the narrative. One chair can become a classroom, a coffee shop, a kitchen, a boardroom.

Music: Contemporary musical theater with electronic elements representing mental noise and internal states. Primarily acoustic instruments, with subtle electronic textures representing internal states.

The Vision Sequence (Act I Finale): No special effects. No fog. The transition should feel like a conversation that continues into a room Jules wasn't expecting to enter. The audience's moment of realization is the scene working correctly.

Casting: Strong young leads with both acting and vocal ability. Emma requires a mature 8–10 year old performer. Marcus must be played with restraint — his devastation lives entirely in his calm.

The spine of this show: Jules is fighting against becoming someone who arrives at herself too late. Every scene either pulls her toward compliance or toward the cost of refusing it.

ACT I — “THE PATH OF LEAST RESISTANCE”

The world keeps showing her how much easier it would be to disappear slowly.

SCENE 1

Classroom. JULES sits clearly in trouble. An elaborate atomic structure fills her notebook instead of notes. MR. HENDRICKS stands over her failed test. DEREK sits nearby, drumming his fingers.

MR. HENDRICKS

(disappointed)

D-minus, Jules. Again. Your lab work is brilliant, but tests...

JULES

(defensive)

The fluorescent lights sound like angry bees, Derek’s tapping

“Bohemian Rhapsody” on his desk, and someone’s strawberry lip gloss is making

my brain itch. The equilibrium stuff makes perfect sense, I just——

DEREK

(intrigued)

Wait, how do you know I was tapping “Bohemian Rhapsody”?

JULES

You always tap in 6/8 time when you’re nervous. Today it was definitely

“We Will Rock You” transitioning to——

MR. HENDRICKS

(cutting her off)

Jules, focus! Friday's exam determines if you pass chemistry.

(JULES stares at her notebook — atomic structure drawings instead of notes.)

JULES

(quietly)

But I am focusing. Just... differently.

(MR. HENDRICKS looks at her. She looks at her notebook. Every line on the page is a drawing. She cannot explain this. She has tried before and it comes out wrong every time. There are no words for it. There is only this.)

JULES *(sings)*

SEVENTEEN DIRECTIONS

(building)

*Every sound's a symphony playing in my head
Derek's drumming fingers, clock hands filled with dread
I can taste the anxiety floating through the air
While my brain runs seventeen directions everywhere*

*Too much noise, too much noise
Can't turn down the volume
Too much noise, too much noise
Lost inside the storm*

*But maybe seventeen directions
Is exactly where I'm meant to go
Maybe all this noise and motion
Makes a music they don't know*

ENSEMBLE

Pay attention! Sit still! What's wrong with you?

JULES

*Maybe seventeen directions is my superpower
Maybe chaos in my head is my finest hour
When you see scattered, I see patterns
When you hear noise, I hear song*

*Too much noise, too much noise
This is how I'm made
Too much noise, too much noise
I won't be afraid*

*Maybe seventeen directions is my superpower
Maybe chaos in my head is my finest hour
When you see scattered, I see patterns
When you hear noise, I hear song*

*Too much noise, too much noise
This is how I'm made
Too much noise, too much noise
I won't be afraid*

(Bell rings. Students exit. DEREK lingers.)

MR. HENDRICKS

(gently)

Jules, my daughter went through something similar. Got help.

She's thriving now. (Hands her a card) Dr. Vasquez — she runs a support

group. Might be worth checking out.

(JULES holds the card. She watches DEREK — who has picked up his pen again, tapping without realizing it. She catalogs the whole world without being asked.)

DEREK

(at the door)

Your atomic drawings are insane. In the best way. Coffee?

I can explain chemical equilibrium using music theory if you want.

JULES

(hopeful)

Music theory?

DEREK

Everything's just patterns and energy, right?

(Lights transition as they exit together.)

SCENE 2

Coffee shop. SAM studies at a corner table. MAYA sits nearby with EMMA. MARCUS sits alone at another table — organized, headphones on, highlighter moving steadily. He looks like someone who has figured it out. JULES and DEREK enter, sharing earbuds.

DEREK

——so if you think of chemical equilibrium like a song finding its key——

JULES

(excited)

Oh! Like when too much bass makes everything shift to compensate!

SAM

(looking up)

Let me guess — someone just found a way to make chemistry make sense?

DEREK

Sam, meet Jules. (To JULES) My brother, the guidance counselor who sees everything.

SAM

(closing his book)

How long have you been fighting your own brain?

JULES

(defensive)

I'm not fighting anything. I just need better focus——

MAYA

(looking up)

Sorry, couldn't help overhearing. You sound exactly like me talking

to my therapist last month. "I just need better time management" while my ADHD

brain is running five projects simultaneously and forgetting to eat.

EMMA

(matter-of-fact)

Mama's brain is like a kaleidoscope. It's pretty, but sometimes

the pieces move too fast.

JULES

That's... actually perfect.

MAYA

(to EMMA)

Show her your fidget collection, sweetheart.

(EMMA proudly displays a small bag of various fidget toys.)

EMMA

This one's for when my thoughts are bouncy. This one's for when they're sticky. And this one's for when I need to think really hard.

(JULES notices MARCUS across the room. He glances up, nods briefly — a recognition between two people who know something — then back to his highlighter. He looks like someone who has landed. Jules doesn't know yet what it cost him.)

SAM

Wednesday night. Seven o'clock. Dr. Vasquez runs the group — people who think in spirals instead of straight lines. (Nodding toward MARCUS) Marcus over there just finished his first month. He'd tell you it changes things.

JULES

What kind of people?

SAM

Honest ones. Who've figured out that different doesn't mean broken.

(JULES looks at MAYA. MAYA looks at SAM. There is something between the three of them that Jules doesn't have a name for yet. SAM tries to explain it. He gets three words in and stops. Some things don't start as words.)

SAM *(sings)*

THE LEARNING CURVE

(upbeat, confident)

I used to think I was broken, tried to fix what wasn't wrong

Failed college twice before I realized I belonged

In a different kind of classroom, with a different kind of song

Now I'm here to tell you — you've been right here all along!

*This is the learning curve
Finally making sense
This is the learning curve
Trading shame for confidence*

MAYA

*Thirty-five years of wondering why I couldn't keep the pace
Running five projects, forgetting my own face
Till someone said "Your wiring's not a problem to erase"
Now I'm raising Emma knowing she belongs in any space!*

JULES

*You mean there's actually a reason that I paint until I drop?
A reason that I hyperfocus and forget to ever stop?
A reason that my mind works like a never-ending shop
Of ideas and connections that just bubble to the top?*

ALL THREE

*This is the learning curve
Better than going it alone
This is the learning curve
Finally coming home
We're not broken, we're not lacking
We're just learning how to fly
This is the learning curve
And we're finally getting high!*

*Learning curve, learning curve
Watch us rise and watch us thrive
Learning curve, learning curve
This is how we come alive!*

(Spoken over music:)

DEREK

Would you want me to come Wednesday? I don't understand it all,
but I want to learn.

JULES

(touched)

Really?

DEREK

Really.

(Lights fade as they make plans.)

SCENE 3

Two weeks later. Support group circle. DR. VASQUEZ facilitates. JULES, DEREK, MAYA, SAM, and MARCUS in folding chairs. MARCUS has a neat notebook. Jules watches him the way you watch someone who got there first.

DR. VASQUEZ

Quick re-intros — Jules, this is Marcus, a college sophomore who

joined us last month; Marcus, this is Jules, just starting with us.

DR. VASQUEZ

(direct)

Marcus, you look defeated. What happened? You seemed in a good place last week.

MARCUS

(measured)

Failed organic chemistry. Again. Even with accommodations. (Looking around) Maybe I should just accept I'm not smart enough for pre-med.

DEREK

(to the group)

I keep trying to be Jules's backup brain. Reminding her about everything, planning for her...

JULES

(sharp)

Stop! That makes me feel like a broken thing you're trying to fix.

DEREK

(defensive)

I'm just helping——

JULES

I need support, not management.

DR. VASQUEZ

(to DEREK)

What would support look like instead of management?

DEREK

(genuinely confused)

I... I don't know.

MAYA

(to DEREK)

Learn her rhythms. Notice when she's struggling before she crashes.

And remember — her chaos isn't about you.

JULES

(vulnerable)

Sometimes I feel genuinely broken. Other times everyone else seems

to move in slow motion and it's maddening.

MARCUS

(nodding)

Too much and not enough at the same time.

MARCUS

(to JULES)

How old are you?

JULES

Seventeen.

MARCUS

I spent two years hating myself before I found strategies that work.

You're figuring this out early. That's huge.

(JULES nods. She believes him. She doesn't yet see what the strategies cost.)

(A silence settles on the group. It is not empty. It is full of the thing none of them can say directly. DR. VASQUEZ waits. This is the moment the session always reaches — the one the chairs are arranged to hold.)

JULES *(sings)*

WHAT IF THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH ME?

(raw)

*What if there's nothing wrong with me?
What if this storm inside my head
Isn't damage to repair
But music waiting to be conducted?*

*What if I'm not broken, just different?
What if I'm not lacking, just learning?*

MARCUS

*(standing, contained anger)
But what if I'm just making excuses?
Nineteen years of feeling stupid
"Such potential if he'd apply himself"
Yeah, potential to disappoint everyone*

*What if the world's just not built
For minds that spiral and leap
Instead of marching in straight lines?*

MAYA

*(fierce)
What if I'm teaching Emma
To hate her own beautiful mind?
What if my struggle becomes her shame?*

DEREK

*(uncertain but committed)
I don't hear your symphonies
But I watch you create magic
What if different isn't less than?
What if I need to learn your language?*

ALL

*What if there's nothing wrong with us?
What if we're exactly what the world needs?
Different kinds of light
Different ways to see*

*The question changes everything
From broken to discovering
How to love ourselves
In a world still learning
How to love us too*

DR. VASQUEZ

(after silence)

That's the work. You're not broken, but you still have to

navigate a world designed for different minds.

MARCUS

(thoughtful)

Maybe I should switch to psychology. Help other kids who felt like I did.

DR. VASQUEZ

That's exactly why Sam's peer mentoring proposal matters so much.

SAM

The district board meets Tuesday to vote on a new Student Supports policy —

movement breaks, fidgets, extended time, quiet rooms, all of it. Public comment

is open. If voices like yours show up, it matters.

JULES

What would we say?

SAM

Just tell your truth. Show them that accommodation isn't about excuses —

it's about access.

JULES

(to the group)

My parents don't know I'm here. They think I'm studying.

*(Nobody rushes to fill that. It lands in the circle and stays there.
MARCUS looks at her. He remembers saying something very close to that
in his first session. The group knows what it means. This is the moment
someone finally stops pretending they're fine on their way here.)*

MARCUS *(sings)*

NOT ALONE ANYMORE

*Spent so many nights believing I was broken
Every mirror showed a failure looking back
But sitting in this circle, something's woken
A truth that fills the places where I lack*

ALL

*We're not alone anymore
In this wild and winding journey
Not alone anymore
When the world won't stop turning
There's a voice that says "I know this"
There's a hand that understands
Not alone anymore
We're finally where we stand*

JULES

*All my life I thought my mind was just too much
Racing thoughts that no one else could ever share
Now I see there's others with this magic touch
Who know exactly what it's like to live up there*

ALL

*We're not alone anymore
In this beautiful confusion
Not alone anymore
Past the hurt and the illusion
Finding souls who speak our language
Hearts that beat the same off-rhythm
Not alone anymore
We're learning how to live with them*

MAYA

*(bridge)
Every parent's fear is passing down their pain
But what if what we carry is a gift?*

ALL

*We're not alone anymore
In our bright and blazing glory
Not alone anymore
This is how we tell our story*

(Group embrace as lights shift.)

SCENE 4

One week later. Jules's classroom. MR. HENDRICKS returns tests. JULES sits up straight. Her notebook has actual notes today — not drawings.

MR. HENDRICKS

*(handing Jules her paper)
B-plus, Jules.*

(A beat. JULES stares at the grade. The best she has received in this class.)

MR. HENDRICKS

(pleased)

Whatever you're doing differently — keep doing it.

(Later. The Chen kitchen. LINDA is cooking — not anxiously reorganizing. Just cooking. DAVID sits at the table with a coffee. JULES enters.)

JULES

I got a B-plus on the chemistry test.

(Her parents look up. The relief on their faces is immediate and total. It is exactly the relief she has been waiting to give them. It should feel good. It does feel good. She holds that thought.)

LINDA

(setting down her spoon)

Jules. That's wonderful.

DAVID

(crossing to her)

Come here. *(A hug.)* We knew you could do it.

(Later. Jules and DEREK walk home. He holds her hand. She notices he is not anxious tonight. He is relaxed. He is this way because she was easier today.)

DEREK

You seem... lighter.

JULES

(beat)

Is that good?

DEREK

(squeezing her hand)

Yeah. It's good.

(JULES says nothing. She files this away with everything else she files away.)

*(She stops walking. She turns something over. Derek is still talking.
She is not listening. She is calculating. Something has just occurred to her
she doesn't yet have words for.)*

JULES

(half to herself)

If I just...

DEREK

What?

JULES

Nothing. Never mind.

(She starts walking again. He takes her hand. She lets him.)

JULES *(sings)*

ALMOST WORKS

JULES

I said the right thing

At the right time

Kept it inside

Kept it in line

Teacher smiled and said my name

In a voice that didn't sound like blame

It almost works

It almost works

*Mom didn't flinch when I walked in
Dad asked how my day had been
Derek said I seemed lighter*

*And for a minute I could just —
Exist*

*It almost works
It almost works*

*I keep it steady
I keep it small
Nothing too loud
Nothing at all*

*Nothing that spills
Nothing that shows*

*It almost works
Almost works, almost works*

*It almost works
Almost works, almost works*

*For a minute I could breathe
Without the noise beneath my feet
For a minute I could just be
Someone they could read*

*It almost works
Almost works, almost works*

*I can feel everything
Lining in place*

*It almost works
Almost works, almost works*

*I can feel something
Smoothing away*

*I can feel it
Holding me still*

*I can feel it
Bending my will*

*I keep it steady
I keep it small
Nothing too loud
Nothing at all*

*It almost works
Almost works, almost works*

*It almost works
Almost works, almost works*

*If I stay here
If I don't move
If I don't reach
For something new*

*If I don't open
Anything wide
If I don't let
Anything rise*

*It almost works
Almost works, almost works*

*I can feel it
Holding me still*

*It almost works
Almost works, almost works*

*I can feel it
Bending my will*

*For a minute I can breathe
For a minute I can stay
For a minute everything*

Does exactly what they say

*For a minute I can be
Someone easy to believe*

*It almost works
Almost works, almost works*

*It almost works
Almost works, almost works*

*I keep it steady
I keep it small
Nothing too loud
Nothing at all*

It almost works

*And maybe
That's
Right*

(Lights fade on Jules holding her B-plus test. She looks satisfied.)

SCENE 5

Coffee shop. JULES and DEREK at their usual table. He brought her coffee exactly the way she likes it. This scene is warm — the discomfort in it is the discomfort of love that is genuine and imperfect simultaneously.

DEREK

You've been different this week.

JULES

(beat)
Different how?

DEREK

Like... you're here. More here. Usually you're here and also three other places at the same time. But this week it's just... you. In the room.

JULES

Is that better?

DEREK

(quickly)

Yeah. (Then, softer) I mean — I love watching your brain. The way you notice everything. The atomic drawings. The way you knew I was tapping Bohemian Rhapsody. That's you. That's who you are. I love that.

JULES

But.

DEREK

There's no but.

JULES

Derek.

DEREK

(honest)

When things are calmer... it's easier to be around you. Not because I want you to be different. Because I get scared sometimes that I'm not —

enough. That you're in seventeen places and I only exist in one of them.

(A silence.)

JULES

I don't know how to be in just one place.

DEREK

I know. (Beat) I'm not asking you to be.

(They sit with this. Neither of them knows what to do with it yet.)

SCENE 6

College library. MARCUS at a carrel, working. This scene is slightly clinical — Marcus describes his interior from a distance. He does not perform emotion here. He reports. There is something more frightening about managed than broken.

JULES finds him. He looks tired in a way that has nothing to do with studying.

JULES

Sam said you come here most days.

MARCUS

(closing his book)

Easier to concentrate here. No one knows me.

JULES

You always look so... organized. At group.

MARCUS

I learned to look organized. It's different.

JULES

What's different about it?

MARCUS

Looking organized means other people stop asking questions. Being organized means... (he stops) I don't actually know what that feels like anymore.

JULES

But you're doing so well. You have strategies, you're switching to psych, you're co-facilitating the campus group——

MARCUS

(quietly)

Can I tell you something I don't say in group?

JULES

Yeah.

MARCUS

I can't remember the last time I felt like myself. (Beat) I've been in college two years. I know how to make the grades work. I know how to sit in a meeting and seem present. I say all the right things about embracing your neurodivergent brain and I cannot remember the last time I was actually

inside my own life.

JULES

(quietly)

What do you mean, inside your own life?

MARCUS

Like — there. Like what you do. When you draw the atomic structures instead of taking notes and you're just... in it. Completely in it. I used to do that.

I trained myself out of it because the world worked better when I managed it.

(Beat) And now it's just... managed.

(A long silence.)

JULES

Are you okay?

MARCUS

(wry)

I'm fine. *(Beat)* That's the thing. I'm completely fine. I just don't

know if fine is enough. *(More precisely)* I don't miss it anymore. The noise,

the chaos, all of it. I trained myself not to miss it. *(Directly)* That's

the part that scares me.

(Lights shift. Jules walks home alone, thinking.)

SCENE 7

The Chen kitchen. LINDA aggressively organizing already-clean counters. DAVID sits with Jules's report card. JULES enters with the mail.

JULES

(excited)

I got an interview for State's art program! They only interview
thirty students for the scholarship——

LINDA

(not looking up)

That's nice, sweetheart. Sit down. We need to discuss your grades.

DAVID

(reading report card)

Still a C-plus in chemistry — even after the B-plus. D in calculus.

Incomplete in English.

JULES

(defensive)

I'm using accommodations now. Mrs. Patterson said my writing shows
real insight when I have extra time——

LINDA

(exploding)

Accommodations won't exist when you're an adult! The real world
doesn't give participation trophies!

DAVID

(quieter)

Jules, we want to support you. But we also need you to be realistic about what your future looks like.

JULES

What does my future look like? To you?

(A silence. Her parents don't have an answer that isn't painful.)

LINDA

(breaking)

Because if your brain really works differently — then we missed it.

Seventeen years of missing it. What kind of parents does that make us?

JULES

(fierce)

Parents who are failing me now by making this about your guilt

instead of my future.

(Silence. Nobody leaves. Nobody resolves anything. JULES goes to her room. LINDA and DAVID sit alone with their guilt, their fear, their love, and the terrible weight of not knowing which one of those things to trust.)

LINDA

(to DAVID)

What if we really did miss it? What if we made it worse?

DAVID

(slumping)

What if we still are?

(Lights fade on the kitchen. Jules in her room. The house quiet around its fractures.)

SCENE 8

A week passes. We see it in fragments — brief and wordless.

CLASSROOM: Jules takes notes in rows. The drawings stay inside her head. MR. HENDRICKS nods approvingly. She notes his approval. She files it.

HOME: Dinner. Jules answers questions in complete sentences. LINDA pours more water into Jules's glass without being asked. It is a small tenderness.

SUPPORT GROUP: Jules sits in the circle but she is quieter than usual. DR. VASQUEZ notices. MARCUS catches her eye and she looks away.

WITH DEREK: Easy evening. His hand in hers. She can feel him relaxing beside her. It is warm. It is not nothing.

End of week. Jules at her desk. Homework done. Room tidy. House quiet. Her parents are sleeping — not anxious. She holds all of this: the praise, the ease, the relief on everyone's faces.

Something should feel like relief. She waits for it.

The lights shift — not dramatically. The way late afternoon becomes early evening without you noticing.

SCENE 9

Jules's bedroom, continuous. She is still at her desk.

A dinner table has materialized in the same space — not replacing the room, continuing it. Warmer lighting. Four people seated. Wine glasses. Candles. Quiet laughter. At the head of the table:

OLDER JULES — forty years from now. Composed. Well-dressed. At ease. She does not look unhappy. She looks exactly like someone who figured it out.

GUEST 1

You've built such a beautiful life.

OLDER JULES

(warmly)

We've been lucky.

GUEST 2

Luck had nothing to do with it. She's always been so disciplined.

OLDER JULES

You learn what works.

GUEST 1

Do you still paint? I remember you used to paint everything.

OLDER JULES

(the same warm smile)

Oh — I haven't had time for that in years.

*(Nobody at the table thinks this is sad. Nobody reacts. Something fell away.
Older Jules picks up her wine glass and the conversation moves on.)*

GUEST 2

(raising a glass)

To figuring it out.

(Everyone drinks. Older Jules drinks. She smiles. She thanks them.)

(Young Jules watches from her desk across the room.)

*And then — just long enough to register —
Older Jules's eyes drift.*

*Not dramatically. Not visibly to the guests.
Just... slightly off. Like she's somewhere else.*

She is not sad. She is not aware.

YOUNG JULES / OLDER JULES (*sings*)

NOT YET / RIGHT HERE

YOUNG JULES

(quietly, almost to herself)

This works

This is easier

The room gets quieter

When I walk in

Quieter is fine

Quieter is fine

They smile more

They worry less

I can feel the difference

In a room

Different is fine

Different is fine

I'm still in here

I'm still me

I just learned

What they can see

This is fine

This is fine

OLDER JULES

(composed, at the dinner table)

*It all worked out
It really did
You find the rhythm
That they need*

*And rhythm is good
Rhythm is good*

*You learn to focus
You learn what stays
You learn to leave
The rest away*

*And leaving is good
Leaving is good*

*I'm still in here
I'm still me*

Mostly

(The melody begins to pull apart.)

YOUNG JULES

*Not yet
Not yet
I haven't chosen
Anything yet*

*There's still time
There's still time*

OLDER JULES

*(not hearing her)
You get used to it
You really do
The noise fades out
And so do you*

And fading is good

Fading is good

YOUNG JULES

What's fading

What's gone

What did you leave

To carry on

You don't feel it

Not at first

It doesn't break

It doesn't hurt

It just gets quieter

Every day

YOUNG JULES

Not yet

Not yet

I'm still right here

I'm still me

Not yet

Not yet

OLDER JULES

You get used to it

You learn to stay

Inside the version

That works this way

You won't notice

When it's gone

YOUNG JULES

No

OLDER JULES

Not yet

YOUNG JULES

You won't even

OLDER JULES

No

YOUNG JULES

Not yet

OLDER JULES

You get used to

YOUNG JULES

No

Not yet

(The two melodies collide. Neither wins. The music stops holding them together.)

(Silence.)

(Young Jules stares at Older Jules. The guests are mid-laugh, frozen. Older Jules still smiling, frozen. Except her eyes. Still drifting.)

YOUNG JULES

(almost spoken, barely a sound)
When did I stop being in the room?

(The lights go out — not a dramatic blackout. More like a light being switched off in a house. Quiet.)

(The final image holds four full seconds in darkness before anything changes.)

END OF ACT I

INTERMISSION

ACT II — “THE COST OF CHOOSING YOURSELF”

She chooses the harder path. Now she has to survive it.

SCENE 10

Dawn. Jules’s room. She has been awake. She sits at her desk with a blank piece of paper. Not homework. Just paper.

She picks up a pen and draws a single atomic structure — the elaborate, branching, beautiful kind. She looks at it.

This is the choice. She didn’t make it dramatically. She made it quietly, in the middle of the night, alone.

JULES (*sings*)

NOW THERE'S NO GOING BACK

JULES

I didn’t plan this

I didn’t wait

I felt it shift

And I stepped through anyway

I saw the version

I almost became

Standing there

With my name

And something in me

Wouldn’t stay

Now there’s no going back

No returning to the track

Now there's no going back

*I know what follows
I'm not blind
The room will turn
They'll change their minds*

*The praise will soften
Then divide
And I will feel it
From inside*

*But I am done
With almost me
Done negotiating
What I keep*

*Done being careful
Done being small
Done making sense
To them at all*

*Now there's no going back
No returning to the track
Now there's no going back*

*I saw her sitting
Calm and still
Answering questions
That she didn't feel*

*I saw her smiling
Just enough
To pass for present
To pass for good*

*And no one noticed
What was gone
Because nothing
Looked wrong*

I won't disappear

*In plain sight
I won't trade truth
For something right*

*I won't become
A version they
Can organize
And explain*

*Now there's no going back
No returning to the track
Now there's no going back*

*It won't be simple
It won't be clean
It won't be anything
In between*

*It will be louder
It will be mine
It will take time
It will take time*

*Now there's no going back
And I don't want to*

*Now there's no going back
And I don't want to*

I am still here

(She holds the atomic drawing. She puts it on the wall.)

SCENE 11

*A series of confrontations, rapid and accumulating. Not separate scenes.
One continuous pressure.*

CLASSROOM:

MR. HENDRICKS

(returning a test)

C-minus, Jules. You were doing so well. What happened?

(Jules says nothing. She is back. All the way back.)

HOME: That evening.

LINDA

(finding Jules's room in its natural state)

Jules. We had a good week.

What is happening?

JULES

I'm working.

LINDA

(frightened)

This looks like you giving up.

JULES

(evenly)

I know.

(LINDA leaves. The door doesn't slam.)

WITH DEREK:

DEREK

The week before was good. Wasn't it good?

JULES

It wasn't me.

DEREK

(beat)

Okay.

(He leaves. The distance is not a fight. Something more uncomfortable.)

(Then — all at once.)

THE PRESSURE CANON: What follows is 60–90 seconds of overlapping vocal pressure. Not a full song. A layered sequence. The voices do not acknowledge each other. They are the simultaneous reality of what choosing yourself costs when you live inside other people’s lives.

Each voice uses a melodic fragment from their associated song. Underscoring: the Control Melody from “Almost Works,” fragmenting.

“THE COST” — Underscored Pressure Sequence

MR. HENDRICKS

(from classroom, disappointed)

You were doing so well —

You were doing so well —

What happened?

LINDA

(from home, frightened)

We had a good week

We had a good week

What is happening?

(Both simultaneously — they don’t hear each other:)

MR. HENDRICKS

You were doing so well —

LINDA

We had a good week —

DEREK

(from outside, confused)

The week before was good —

Wasn't it good —

(All three, overlapping, building:)

MR. HENDRICKS

What happened — what happened —

LINDA

What is happening — what is happening —

DEREK

Wasn't it good — wasn't it —

(The three voices peak — then cut. Silence.)

(JULES, alone. Underneath her: the Choice melody, one phrase, then gone.)

JULES

(to herself)

It wasn't me.

(She picks up her phone. Derek's name. She types: "Can you come get me.

I'll go back to how things were.")

She reads it. Reads it again. Deletes it.

Phone face-down on the bed.)

SCENE 12

SAM's apartment. Jules arrives — not fleeing a fight. She has walked here with a purpose. She is not the person who was here before. She is choosing.

SAM

What happened?

JULES

I had a good week. A really good week. And I looked at it and knew

I couldn't keep going that direction. (Beat) I don't know if I did the right thing.

SAM

(sitting across from her)

Tell me what the wrong thing would have looked like.

JULES

I can't explain it. I just — I saw something. And I couldn't un-see it.

And now my parents are scared and Derek is quiet and I'm back to being

too much and——

SAM

(quietly)

Jules. Does choosing yourself feel like the right thing?

JULES

(long pause)

Yes. (Then, honest) And it's terrible.

SAM

That's how you know it's real.

JULES (*sings*)

CHOSEN FAMILY

(Jules is not fleeing. She is choosing. The difference transforms the song entirely.)

JULES

(heartbroken, gathering strength)
I thought that home meant love you didn't earn
That family meant they'd never let you go
But some doors don't know how to stay open
Sometimes love means letting people know
That you can't give them the version
They decided you should be

SAM

(taking her hand)
I choose your lightning mind
I choose your restless heart
I choose the girl who sees the world
In seventeen directions
This is chosen family
Love that stays when things get hard
Chosen family
You don't have to play a part

JULES

Done shrinking down to pocket size
Done dulling all my shine
Done waiting for their blessing
What's mine has always been mine

BOTH

*This is chosen family
Hearts that see you as you are
Chosen family
Love that isn't very far
When you're ready to be free
And brave enough to choose
The love that doesn't change you*

JULES

*(decided)
This is chosen family
And I refuse to lose*

(SAM holds this with her.)

(Jules pulls on her jacket. Sam watches her go. At the door, she pauses — checks her phone. A text from Derek: “Can we talk?” She reads it. Pockets the phone without answering. Walks.)

SCENE 13

A park bench, early evening. DEREK is already here. He has been here for a while. Two coffees sit on the bench beside him — he brought one for her. He is not checking his phone. He is just waiting.

JULES comes around the corner and stops. This is not a coincidence. He knew she walked this way. She knew he would be here. A long beat. She crosses and sits. Takes the coffee.

DEREK

I've been rehearsing this for two days.

JULES

How's it going?

DEREK

(small)

I keep getting to the end and not knowing what I'm asking for.

JULES

Then don't ask. Just say it.

Can I say something true?

JULES

Yes.

DEREK

I love you. And I don't always know how to love you when you're all of yourself.

(A silence. This lands. Jules holds it.)

JULES

I know.

DEREK

Not because you're too much. Because I don't always meet you there. I can't always hear what you hear. I can't always keep up with where you are. And I've been making that your problem by being relieved when you're smaller.

JULES

(quietly)

You're the first person who ever noticed I was tapping Bohemian

Rhapsody. (Beat) You notice things. In your own way.

DEREK

Not the way you need.

JULES

Maybe not. Or maybe — I don't want you to be someone you're not so I can be someone I am. That's not a relationship. That's both of us losing.

DEREK

(long beat)

So what do we do?

(JULES doesn't answer. She waits. This is his question, not hers.)

DEREK

(to himself as much as to her)

I keep trying to describe what I love about

you. And I keep catching myself describing the version of you that's easier

to be around. And then I feel like a terrible person. And then I wonder——

(He can't finish it. The thought breaks. A long, quiet beat.)

(He stands. Not leaving — just needing to stand.)

DEREK *(sings)*

ALL OF YOU

(warm, specific)

I love the way you map the world

Before you even know you're doing it

I love the way your mind arrives somewhere

Three steps ahead of everyone

*The way you knew my rhythm
Before I knew it too
The atomic structures in the margins
That mattered more than notes*

*And I wonder sometimes
If what I'm describing
Is you
Or the version of you
That fits inside my understanding*

*I want to love all of you
Not just the parts that fit inside my world
I want to love all of you
The noise and the seventeen directions*

*I'm standing at the edge of all of you
And I won't pretend that's simple
I want to love all of you
I'm just not sure I know how yet*

*(key shifts — more honest now)
I love the quieter evenings
And that's not about you*

*Because what I love is the relief
And the relief is about me
Not about you*

*And you deserve someone whose love
Doesn't come with a preference
For which version shows up*

*I want to be that person
I think I could become that person
But right now I'm just
Trying to say this out loud*

*I want to love all of you
Not just the parts that fit inside my world
I want to love all of you*

The noise and the seventeen directions

*I'm standing at the edge of all of you
And I won't pretend that's simple
I want to love all of you
I'm just not sure I know how yet*

*(the turn)
Maybe this is what it is
To love someone for real
Not the version you can manage
But the whole, overwhelming signal*

*Maybe love isn't knowing how
Maybe love is saying
I don't know how
And staying anyway*

*(same words — different meaning now)
I want to love all of you
I'm learning what that means
I want to love all of you
Through every seventeen directions*

*I'm standing at the edge of all of you
And I'm choosing not to step back
I want to love all of you
I'm just learning how*

*(He sits back down. He doesn't reach for her. He just stays.
Her phone buzzes on the bench between them. She glances at it — a text. She shows it to
Derek without explanation. He reads it. Nods. She stands, touches his shoulder once, and
goes. He watches her leave. He finishes his coffee.)*

SCENE 14

*The school guidance office. SAM at his desk. The PRINCIPAL stands across
from him — not a villain. A bureaucrat with real concerns.*

PRINCIPAL

(not unkindly)

Sam, the board vote is Tuesday. We need to present a united

front. The superintendent is concerned about the scope of the proposal.

SAM

The scope is what makes it work. Watered-down accommodations don't

accommodate anyone.

PRINCIPAL

You're a first-year counselor. There will be other battles. Choose them carefully.

SAM

(beat)

Is that a warning?

PRINCIPAL

(carefully)

It's advice. The kind I wish someone had given me.

(The principal leaves. SAM sits alone with the advice. He picks up his phone.)

SAM

(into phone)

The board meeting is Tuesday. I need you there. Bring whoever

will come. (Beat) I'm not backing down.

(He hangs up.)

SCENE 15

Support group room, before the meeting. MARCUS alone, early. He sits in the circle of empty chairs. Not waiting for anyone. Just sitting in the quiet he has made for himself.

MARCUS

(to himself, quietly)

I used to know what this felt like.

(He doesn't finish the thought. He opens his notebook. Closes it.)

(DR. VASQUEZ passes the doorway, sees him, pauses.)

DR. VASQUEZ

Early today.

MARCUS

Couldn't sleep.

(She nods. She doesn't push. She continues on. MARCUS sits alone.)

(He picks up his pen. Sets it down. Picks it up again. He is trying to remember what it felt like to just start something — without the plan, without the system, without the checklist. He cannot.

(He puts the pen down. He doesn't pick it up again.)

MARCUS *(sings)*

without it

how to live

I learned

Somewhere along the way

(hold)

permission

needed

That never

I want the part of me

To hold together

I didn't have

I want the thing

I didn't avoid

I want the risk

Before the noise

I want the sound

Or built to last

If it was right

That didn't ask

I want the part

They understand

Not the man

Not the plan

Not the version

And I want it back

I was in it

(beat)

I was in it

Or what it meant

Of how it looked

Not aware

Not performing

I was there

I remember

Just to stay

And not reduce it

I couldn't name

To trust the thing

To move before I stopped myself

I remember how it felt

I lost it

Somewhere along the way

They would get

I made it something

I made it fit

I made it smaller

I gave it up to keep my place

Somewhere along the way

I traded something I can't replace

Somewhere along the way

But it wasn't me

(beat)

They could see

In a version

I got good at being here

I got clear

I got better

That would last

Make it something

Every moment

Learned to smooth out

Before anyone could ask

How to answer

Then I learned

I was in it

Didn't need to understand

Didn't name it

And I didn't hold it

(beat)

was mine

It just—

To be right

It didn't ask me

It wasn't bright

It wasn't loud

To make it true

Without the need

Without the proof

Without the map

I moved through

There was a way

Before I knew

I used to know

SOMEWHERE ALONG THE WAY

(Silence. MARCUS sits in the empty chairs. He does not move to lock up.)

(DR. VASQUEZ appears in the doorway. She heard. She doesn't say anything for a moment. She just stands there.)

DR. VASQUEZ

(quietly)

You could have told us that in group.

MARCUS

(a beat)

I know.

DR. VASQUEZ

Why didn't you?

MARCUS

Because in group I know what to say next. (Beat) Out here I don't.

*(She nods. She leaves him with that. He sits a moment longer.
Then he picks up his bag. He goes to meet the meeting.)*

SCENE 16

The support group room, after a meeting. Chairs still in the circle, people gone. MARCUS and JULES remain. DR. VASQUEZ has left.

DR. VASQUEZ

(from offstage)

Don't forget to lock up, Marcus.

MARCUS

(calling back)

Got it.

(A silence. He doesn't move to lock up.)

JULES

You okay?

MARCUS

I got an interview. For a graduate program in clinical psychology.

They want someone to help develop an ADHD support curriculum. It's exactly what I said I wanted.

JULES

That's amazing. Right?

MARCUS

(long beat)

My girlfriend asked me last week when I'm going to stop performing
and just be a person. (Pause) I told her I didn't know what she meant.

JULES

Do you?

MARCUS

Yeah. I know exactly what she meant.

*(He stands. Goes to the center of the circle of empty chairs. He is not
talking to Jules. He is talking to every version of himself that learned to be fine.)*

MARCUS *(sings)*

And I'm gone

(beat)

I worked

(very quiet)

It worked

(quiet)

It worked

(final — band cuts, just voice)

now

feel it

don't I

So why

(beat — smile gone)

Now

Is perfect

Everything

And take a bow

Raise a glass

Oh, it worked

And it worked

This life

Until it fit

Everything

To redesign

Before I learned

That was mine

There was something

(beat)

I could show

Didn't turn into a version

Or make it better

Didn't shape

I didn't measure

Once

There was something

(bridge — no more charm, just clarity)

What remains

(quiet)

What remains

(beat — music thins)

Piece by piece

You constructed

In the life

And you're standing

When there's no one left to please

When it's done

When it's quiet

(beat)

But tell me—

Like the sheet

Exactly

Looks

When the ending

That's the word they all repeat

Yes, it worked

And it worked

(beat — still smiling, but now hollow)

I removed what interfered

I defined it

I refined it

I cut anything unclear

I cut feeling

I cut corners

Between the lines

Look at how he disappears

(beat — darker undercurrent begins)

Look at how it all aligns”

He’s done it right

“Look at him

(lean in — ironic charm)

That anyone could point to

Toward a life

I kept moving

I kept everything in view

I kept score

I kept time

Exactly as it should have been

Rehearsed

Every moment

Every line delivered clean

Oh, it worked

And it worked

(beat — slightly brighter, still “on”)

End up somewhere I might dread

I would never

I made certain

I was everything they said

I was clever

I was careful

Just a well-appointed pace

No defiance

No surprises

Every piece fell right in place

Can't deny it

It worked

(light swing — almost charming, smiling through it)

IT WORKED

(Silence.)

(MARCUS doesn't move to lock up. A long beat. Then —)

MARCUS

(to Jules, simply)

Go do whatever you're going to do. While you still

remember what it sounds like in there. (He taps his chest — once,

quietly.) Before you learn not to miss it.

(He picks up his bag. He locks the door. Jules walks out into the hallway. She does not look back. He doesn't watch her go.)

SCENE 17

Art studio. Three INTERVIEWERS at a table. Jules's portfolio spread before them. She walks in. She does not adjust herself before entering. She is the same person inside the room that she was outside it.

INTERVIEWER 1

(cold)

Ms. Chen, your portfolio is... unconventional. This piece —

what exactly are we looking at?

JULES

“Hyperfocus Storm.” It shows what my brain looks like when I’m completely absorbed in creating. Each color represents a different thought stream.

INTERVIEWER 2

(skeptical)

It appears quite chaotic. Our program demands structure, discipline——

JULES

You see chaos because you don’t understand how my mind works. But this painting took sixteen hours of sustained focus. Just because my process looks different doesn’t mean it’s undisciplined.

INTERVIEWER 3

(dismissive)

Our students need to handle intense pressure——

JULES

(interrupting)

When I care about something — really care — I disappear into it.

Time stops. I work until I collapse because I forget my body needs food.

If that’s not intense focus, what is?

(She unveils “Seventeen Directions” — a stunning multimedia work.)

JULES

This represents simultaneous thought streams. Most people see noise.

I see music waiting to be conducted.

JULES (*sings*)

HYPERFOCUS MAGIC

*(She is not performing. She is simply in it.)
The world fades out, the noise goes quiet
My hands know what they need to do
Colors call and shapes start shifting
Time stops when I'm breaking through*

*Watch me disappear completely
Into something being born
This is where I come alive
This is what I was made for*

*Every line has its own purpose
Every shadow tells a story
What you see as scattered madness
I see blazing into glory*

*This is hyperfocus magic
When my mind becomes a flame
Hours vanish, world goes silent
Nothing left but me and making*

*Red for the anger that won't settle
Blue for the sadness that won't leave
Gold for the moment when it all makes sense
Green for the hope I now believe*

*Layer over layer over layer
Building something no one's seen
This is hyperfocus magic
This is where I reign as queen*

(key change — just true)
Now you see what I've been trying
To explain to all of you
What looks broken from the outside
Is exactly what I do

This is hyperfocus magic
My superpower set free
When you stop trying to fix me
Look what I create when I'm me

(She steps back. The artwork is revealed. The interviewers look at it.
What they think is genuinely uncertain. Jules does not try to read them.

INTERVIEWER 1

(long beat)
That's... extraordinary.

INTERVIEWER 3

We'll be in touch by Friday.

(Jules nods. She picks up her bag. She walks out.)

SCENE 18

District School Board. Public Comment on Agenda Item 6B. Parents, students, teachers pack the room. MR. HENDRICKS at the back. JULES, SAM, MAYA, EMMA, and MARCUS face the board.

BOARD CHAIR PARK

We're here to take public comment on Agenda Item 6B — Classroom

Supports and Accommodations — and to consider Mr. Martinez's peer-mentoring pilot.

BOARD MEMBER TORRES

(aggressive)

How will this program not just enable students

to make excuses for poor performance?

PARENT IN AUDIENCE

(standing)

My tax dollars shouldn't coddle kids who won't try!

EMMA

(before anyone can stop her)

Can I tell you about my brain?

BOARD MEMBER JOHNSON

(softening)

Of course, sweetheart.

EMMA

My brain is like a kaleidoscope. It sees pretty patterns all at once,

but sometimes it's hard to focus on just one. My old teacher thought that

was bad. But my new teacher gives me fidget toys and lets me wiggle, and now

I listen so much better. I'm not broken. I just need different things.

BOARD MEMBER JOHNSON

(curious)

What else helps you learn?

EMMA

When teachers know I'm not being naughty on purpose. Like how Sofia needs glasses to see the board, I need movement breaks to help my brain settle down.

(A PARENT near the back raises a hand. BOARD MEMBER TORRES nods to them. Two more parents stand. Then three. They are organized. They came prepared. They have talked about this in parking lots and group chats and kitchen tables. This is not a mob. This is a position.)

PARENT IN AUDIENCE 2

(measured, not angry)
With respect — I'd like to say

something on behalf of several of us here tonight.

(BOARD MEMBER TORRES leans forward slightly. The room shifts.)

(What begins as a prepared statement becomes, in the way these things do, something larger than any one person's words.)

BOARD MEMBER TORRES / PARENT COALITION (sings)

FAIR ISN'T EQUAL

*We understand there's struggle
We're not without compassion
But fairness means one standard
Applied without exception*

*If some kids get more time
Then some kids get less chance
That's not accommodation
That's shifting the balance*

*Fair isn't equal
We know what that means
But equal isn't always fair
At least that's how it seems*

*When my child works harder
But stands in the same place
What do I tell my child
When effort is erased?*

*Fair isn't equal
But someone has to explain
Who changes and who stays*

*We've seen the best intentions
Lower what gets asked
We've watched accommodations
Turn finish lines to half*

*And call it preparation
For a world beyond these walls
But who will be there for them
When nobody calls
"Take your time" at all?*

*We're not trying to be cruel
We're trying to prepare them
For a world that will not bend
The way this room has bent*

*Fair isn't equal
We know what that means
But equal isn't always fair
But now we're being asked*

*To tell our kids that effort
And outcome aren't the same
To watch them do everything right
And still be told to wait*

*Fair isn't equal
But someone has to explain
If the rules keep changing
Who are we protecting?
And who takes the blame?*

Who changes

And who stays

BOARD MEMBER TORRES

(checking the clock, to the room)

We vote in eleven minutes.

Whatever is said between now and then is what goes into the record.

Choose carefully.

*(The weight of the room shifts. Eleven minutes. SAM looks at Jules.
Jules looks at the board. This is the moment. Not the speech she prepared.
The one she has to give now.)*

*(The room is hers. Not because she was louder. Because she chose not
to answer the skeptic, and the room felt that choice.)*

JULES *(sings)*

ALL AT ONCE!

(An urgent declaration in the middle of a fight not yet won.)

(urgent, not performed)

You want to know what it's really like

Inside a mind like mine?

Imagine seventeen radio stations

Playing different songs at the same time

All at once I'm hearing every whisper

All at once my mind's a storm I can't shut out

But in that storm I see patterns you miss

While you see chaos, I see possibility

We are the kids who think outside every box

We are the ones who find keys to every lock

All at once we're asking for space to be ourselves

All at once we're proving we don't need your help

To be fixed or cured or normalized

Just understood and seen

(BOARD MEMBER TORRES calls for a procedural vote — the music continues.)

ALL AT ONCE! COMPANY

ALL AT ONCE! ALL AT ONCE!

DIFFERENT MINDS, SAME DREAMS!

ALL AT ONCE! ALL AT ONCE!

NOTHING'S BROKEN AS IT SEEMS!

Stop trying to fix us, start trying to see

ALL AT ONCE WE'RE SHOWING WHO WE'RE MEANT TO BE!

JULES

All at once I'm hearing every whisper

All at once my mind's a storm I can't shut out

But in that storm I see patterns you miss

While you see chaos — I see possibility

ALL AT ONCE! ALL AT ONCE! ALL AT ONCE!

DIFFERENT MINDS, SAME DREAMS!

(Tense silence. The song ends. The vote is still happening.)

BOARD MEMBER JOHNSON

I move to approve a six-month pilot program.

BOARD MEMBER TORRES

I move to table the item.

BOARD CHAIR PARK

Motion to table fails, 3 to 4. Returning to the main motion.

(A long beat.)

BOARD CHAIR PARK

On the pilot program — four in favor, three opposed. Motion carries.

(Muted celebration. MR. HENDRICKS, from the back: quietly nods.)

SCENE 19

Hallway outside the boardroom. JULES and MARCUS. The celebration is inside.

JULES

What if I was wrong? About all of it.

MARCUS

(beat)

Wrong about what?

JULES

About choosing the harder way. My parents are still scared. Derek and I are — whatever we are. I still don't know about the scholarship. And I just sang a song at a school board meeting in front of strangers.

MARCUS

(small smile)

The last one you definitely did.

JULES

Was that crazy?

MARCUS

Yes. (Beat) Did it feel like you?

JULES

(pause)

Yes.

MARCUS

Then you weren't wrong.

(A silence. Jules nods. It doesn't fix everything. But it settles one thing.)

SCENE 20

FIRST: Inside the boardroom. SAM announces the pilot program launches in three weeks. A quiet round of congratulations. DR. VASQUEZ squeezes Sam's arm. Maya whispers something to Emma who nods very seriously.

SECOND: DEREK appears in the doorway. He has walked here from Jules's house. He is holding an envelope.

DEREK

This came. I went by your house. Your mom... (He holds out the envelope.)

(JULES takes it. The room goes quiet without anyone asking it to. She reads. Her face changes — not dramatically. Just changes.)

JULES

(voice breaking)

"We are pleased to offer you a full scholarship... your

unconventional perspective and demonstrated ability to sustain intensive creative

work makes you exactly what we're looking for."

(MAYA laughs — surprised out of her. MARCUS exhales. SAM closes his eyes for a moment. EMMA reaches for Jules's hand.)

MAYA

You did it.

SAM

You fought for yourself and won.

EMMA

Can you teach other kids to paint like their brains?

JULES

(laughing through tears)

Yes, Emma. Exactly.

SAM

(to Marcus)

Psych orientation is next week, right?

MARCUS

(something unlocked in him)

Already registered. And Dr. Vasquez and I are

talking about co-facilitating a campus group next semester. (A real smile —

one Jules hasn't seen from him before.) Something to look forward to.

MAYA

(to Emma, kneeling)

Still want to help me design that fidget toolkit line?

EMMA

(excited)

Can we call it “Kaleidoscope Tools”?

MAYA

(smiling)

Perfect.

SAM

The pilot program launches in three weeks. (To the group) We actually did this.

MR. HENDRICKS

(from the back, moved)

Lab policy update starts Monday. Fidgets welcome.

DEREK

(to Jules, quietly)

We start visiting schools next month, right?

JULES

If they’ll let a freshman with a lightning mind help.

(DEREK looks at her. The distance from earlier is still there. But so is he. He takes her hand. She lets him. They don’t resolve. They continue.)

SCENE 21

Later. The room has emptied. LINDA and DAVID CHEN enter quietly. They were at the back. Jules didn't know they were there.

JULES

(turning, surprised)
Mom. Dad.

LINDA

We saw the meeting announcement. We came. (Beat) We sat in the back.

We heard everything.

(A silence. Her parents heard their daughter tell the truth about her life to strangers. They heard her be herself completely. They heard her win.)

DAVID

(humble)
We've been fighting against you instead of for you.

LINDA

(quietly)
You were in that room. The whole time. Watching you up there —
you were completely in that room. I don't think I've ever seen you
so completely in a room before.

JULES

(cautious hope)
It'll take time. And you'll have to listen even when you
don't understand.

LINDA

(taking her hand)

We're ready to try. Really try.

(Not a resolution. A beginning. Jules holds her mother's hand. She doesn't fill the silence. She lets it be what it is.)

SCENE 22

The stage settles into its final arrangement. Everyone who has mattered is here.

FULL COMPANY *(sings)*

WHERE THE NOISE BECOMES MUSIC

(gentle, earned — not triumphant)

Where the noise becomes music

Where the scattered finds its song

Where the different find their voices

That were strong all along

JULES

(solo, reflective)

In the space between silence and overwhelming sound

That's where I learned to listen

That's where I was found

MAYA

Not in spite of how we're wired

SAM

But because of how we're made

ALL

*Where the noise becomes music
Where the chaos finds its beat
Where the symphony of difference
Makes the harmony complete*

JULES

*(to the audience)
Listen for the music in the noise you can't understand
We're not asking you to hear it
Just to let us take the stand*

*Where the noise becomes music
That's where we belong
Where the noise becomes music
That's our freedom song*

(Final tableau: JULES center stage, surrounded by biological and chosen family.

MARCUS stands slightly apart — present, but at the edge of the circle, not yet fully inside it. He is someone who heard something tonight that he had stopped letting himself hear.

Her parents stand together, slightly behind. Also beginning.

DEREK is there. His hand is in hers. He is looking at her the way someone looks at a person they love and are still learning how to love fully. Not gone. Still here. Still learning.

Underneath: a fragment of the 'Almost Works' melody, very softly — but transformed. Resolved upward into the Choice melody. Then gone.)

JULES

*(quietly)
I'm still in the room.*

(Final blackout.)

END OF PLAY

MUSICAL NUMBERS

ACT I — THE PATH OF LEAST RESISTANCE

1. “Seventeen Directions” Jules 2:45
2. “The Learning Curve” Sam, Maya, Jules 2:30
3. “What If There’s Nothing Wrong With Me?” Jules, Marcus, Maya, Derek 3:15
4. “Not Alone Anymore” Full Group 2:30
5. “Almost Works” * Jules 3:00
6. “Not Yet / Right Here” * Jules, Older Jules 4:30

ACT I RUNNING TIME: approximately 65 minutes

ACT II — THE COST OF CHOOSING YOURSELF

7. “Now There’s No Going Back” * Jules 3:30
8. “The Cost” * Company (pressure canon) 1:30
9. “Chosen Family” Jules, Sam 2:30
10. “All of You” * Derek 3:45
11. “Somewhere Along the Way” * Marcus 3:45
12. “It Worked” * Marcus 4:00
13. “Hyperfocus Magic” Jules 2:30
14. “Fair Isn’t Equal” * Board/Opposition/Jules 3:30
15. “All At Once!” Full Company 3:30
16. “Where The Noise Becomes Music” Full Company 2:30

ACT II RUNNING TIME: approximately 75 minutes

TOTAL RUNNING TIME: approximately 2h20–2h30 with intermission

COMPOSER'S NOTE: THE THREE MELODIC THREADS

This score is built on three melodic ideas that share DNA. They should be composed to echo each other deliberately — not as obvious reprises, but as underground connections the audience feels before they consciously hear.

THREAD ONE: THE CONTROL MELODY

Source: “Almost Works”

Character: Smooth. Resolved. Slightly too neat. The melody of compliance — the sound of things working when Jules holds herself smaller. It must sound genuinely pleasant. The danger must sound like relief.

- “Almost Works” (full statement)
- “Not Yet / Right Here” (restated by Young Jules, then echoed hollow by Older Jules forty years later)

THREAD TWO: THE FRACTURE MELODY

Source: “Not Yet / Right Here”

Character: The Control Melody pulling apart. Same notes. Different truth.

- “Not Yet / Right Here” Sections 3 and 4 (two timelines splitting)
 - Underscoring beneath the vision sequence (very quiet)
 - One bar under Marcus’s “I used to hear a frequency” — then silence

THREAD THREE: THE CHOICE MELODY

Source: “Now There’s No Going Back”

Character: Thread One rewritten in minor — then resolved upward differently. Not smooth. Earned. Jules singing against the Control Melody.

- “Now There’s No Going Back” (full statement)
- Final chorus of “All At Once!” (buried in Jules’s harmony)
- “Where The Noise Becomes Music” bridge (last time — resolved, final)
- Transformed fragment under the final tableau

A NOTE ON DEREK’S MELODY:

“All of You” shares one specific interval with “Seventeen Directions.” Not the same melody. The same reaching gesture. Jules’s song reaches up and outward into chaos. Derek’s reaches toward her and stops just short. The audience will not identify this consciously. They will feel that these two people are trying to find the same music from different sides of it.

NOTE ON RESTRAINT:

These connections should never be announced. They exist in the score the way memory exists in a person — present, shaping everything, invisible until the moment you suddenly hear exactly where you've been all along.