## The One-Liner

A music professor comes to terms with his son's death and, with the help of a new student, rediscovers his passion for music and for life.

# The Background

ROBERT WALSH, 40s, reserved and soft spoken, handles himself with a quiet grace, is a passionate cellist and Juilliard professor and the father of his own musical protégé. On the way to the world premiere of Robert's new piece (a duet with his son, NICK WALSH, 18) the pair is caught in a grisly accident where Nick dies.

## The Premise

It's *Mr. Holland's Opus* meets *August Rush*—a character-driven drama set in the pulsating enigma of modern day New York City. Picking up five years after the accident, Robert has lost all sense of passion and all sense of life. He has become an empty shell of his former self. Though still teaching at Juilliard, it seems every other aspect of his life has changed. Robert refuses to grant his separated wife a divorce and appears determined to put the pieces of his life back together. When a brilliant new student, ALEXIA SLOANE, 19, New York City guttersnipe, shows up, Robert's world is turned upside down again.

Forced to work together, the opinionated pair often end up at odds with each another until Alexia starts to fill the gaping hole in Robert's heart that held a place for his son. His relationship with Alexia blossoms and inspires him to start playing again. Robert soon decides to premiere the duet he wrote for his son with Alexia. As Robert continues to tries to recreate his former life, Alexia becomes increasingly concerned with her role as a replacement for Nick, especially as she is also dealing with her own burgeoning romantic feelings for Robert.

## The Nemesis

Robert has a few nemeses, himself included. Aside from Robert's mental state being a true threat, there is also Alexia who poses as the villain. While Alexia does warm to Robert, she holds a dark secret that could destroy everything. Robert's estranged wife, MICHELLE WALSH, 40s, also proves to be a hazard to the happiness that Robert so desperately seeks. Finally, Robert's boss, JONATHAN RAILTON, 50s, the cold and uncaring head of the department, jeopardizes Robert's career.

# The Hero and the Twist

Robert Walsh is a talented musician and professor of music at the renowned Juilliard School. His life and spirit are broken after the death of his son. His world crumbles, and he must learn

how to stand on his own two feet again. The problem is that everything he's doing to make himself happier is either very self-destructive and extremely psychologically damaging or will end up leaving him more broken than he was before.

## The Beats

### The Accident

- 1. Bronxville, NY. NICK WALSH, 18, stands in front of a mirror in his room, nervous. Two pieces of paper are in his hands as he stares unseeing into the mirror. He hides the papers before his father enters.
- 2. ROBERT WALSH, 40s, a soft-spoken musician, reassures Nick that everything is going to be okay.
- 3. In the car on the way to the city, the two discuss the upcoming concert when they are blindsided.
- 4. The car flips, leaving the pair in a mess of shattered glass and blood. Feeling blood on his forehead, Robert checks on Nick only to find that Nick is dead.

#### The Funeral

- 5. MICHELLE WALSH, 40s, normally held-together, falls apart in the arms of her husband during Nick's funeral.
- 6. Rain pours down on them, which fades to—

#### Five Years Later

- 7. New York. Water pelts Robert in the shower, spiraling down the drain.
- 8. Robert no longer has any zeal. It seems as though he's just going through the motions, living in a daze. His lessons go on in a strained voice as if each word is cutting him on its way out of his mouth.
- 9. He goes home to an empty house and an empty bed, barely surviving, depending on antidepressants and the will to not die. Collecting dust in Robert's study is a cello and a set of unsigned divorce papers.

### A New Student Arrives

10. Robert literally runs into a student, ALEXIA SLOANE, 19, on his way to a rehearsal.

After their brief and unpleasant interlude, he goes on his way.

- 11. Partway through the rehearsal, Alexia enters the rehearsal space. Robert finishes the piece before confronting Alexia and her presence in his classroom.
- 12. Alexia explains that Robert's boss, JONATHAN RAILTON, 50s, cold and uncaring, sent her to see Robert and schedule lessons with him.

# A Superior Request

- 13. Robert storms into Jonathan's office asking why Alexia was sent to him for lessons.
- 14. Jonathan explains that Alexia is a unique case, and he believes that Robert would work well with her because there was something about her that reminded him of Nick.
- 15. Jonathan asks nicely if Robert can find a way to fit Alexia into his lesson schedule, and Robert obliges him.

#### Dissonance

- 16. Robert and Alexia have their first lesson. They learn that they clash both in personality and style.
- 17. Alexia is set in her ways and doesn't seem to want to learn the proper way of doing things.
- 18. Robert is also set in his ways and refuses to budge on his traditional sense of teaching and playing.
- 19. Alexia challenges Robert to show her how it's done if his way is so much better than hers, but Robert refuses. Alexia calls him out on the fact that he's a music teacher, but he won't play. Claims that he must not have been very good.
- 20. She pushes enough buttons that eventually Robert blows up and they get in a big fight.

### An Ultimatum

- 21. Yet again, Robert finds himself in Jonathan's office, though this time it is with conviction that Robert refuses to work with Alexia.
- 22. Jonathan presents him with an ultimatum: either work with Alexia or don't work at Juilliard. Robert questions Jonathan on what grounds he would be fired, and Jonathan

unsympathetically pulls out a performance clause in Robert's contract.

# Choices, Choices

- 23. Robert pays a visit to his best friend, COOPER KAPLAN, 40s, devilishly handsome, in search of advice on what to do.
- 24. Cooper tells him to train the girl and that it isn't worth losing a job over. He also asks if there was any attraction.
- 25. Robert inquires why Cooper never comes to see him anymore. After getting sufficiently awkward, Cooper admits that he's been waiting for Robert to come to him.
- 26. Cooper mentions the anniversary party that Michelle is throwing for Cooper and his wife.

### Second Chances

- 27. Robert has decided to go through the lessons with Alexia, and while she is no less surly this time around, they both have resigned themselves to their fates.
- 28. Robert decides to check to see where Alexia is at musically and is both stunned and appalled to find how well she plays for how little she seems to know about music.
- 29. Alexia snaps moodily about how she doesn't need to read music, her music comes from within.

# Cordially Invited

30. Arriving home from a long day of lessons, Robert finds that he has received an official invitation to the party for Cooper and is surprised to see that it was addressed by Michelle.

# Ex Marks the Spot

- 31. Robert shows up at Michelle's art gallery requesting an audience with her. The receptionist is snippy with him, but he eventually gets in.
- 32. Robert wonders what Michelle meant by personally sending him an invitation, but Michelle warns him to not read into it.
- 33. When it seems that Robert is just using the invitation as an opportunity to gauge Michelle's feelings toward him and the idea of reconciling, Michelle blatantly refuses him,

telling him to move on.

### Third Time's a Charm?

- 34. The lessons don't seem to be getting any better as Alexia's New York City attitude gets in the way of her showing any respect for Robert or his teaching methods.
- 35. Robert refuses to show her respect because of it, resulting in a fight that breaks out over bowing positions.

# Playing Nice

- 36. Worn out, Robert returns home to find Michelle sitting on the front stoop.
- 37. Michelle explains that she would like to reconsider giving their marriage a second try, though doesn't really explain why.
- 38. Robert invites her in and they share a slightly awkward, but nice, dinner.
- 39. At the end of the evening, neither of them seem sure of what should happen. Michelle eventually leaves for her New York apartment, despite Robert's invitation to stay the night.

## Similar Heritage

- 40. Robert seems happier at the next lesson, but his mood is fouled by Alexia's less than enthusiastic attitude.
- 41. Alexia does something rude, and Robert makes an offhand comment about her upbringing and what her parents taught her. Alexia reveals that she is an orphan.
- 42. Empathizing, Robert reveals that he too was an orphan. Alexia admits that she already knew that about him.
- 43. The pair begins to bond over their similar heritage and, instead of working against each other, start working together like allies.

## Playing Again

- 44. As time goes on, Robert starts to find himself inspired by Alexia's playing and soon dusts off his cello.
- 45. The first time, he plays only a few screeching notes before Robert sets it down.

46. He continues to play as he works with Alexia.

### The Duet

- 47. One day, he comes into a practice with Alexia only to find that Alexia has started playing without him. She's playing Nick's part in the duet that he wrote for them.
- 48. Robert flips out and scares Alexia off.
- 49. That night at home, Robert sits down and plays a portion of his own part of the duet and comes to the realization that he wants to play the piece.
- 50. The next practice, he asks Alexia if she would play the duet with him to kick off her recital at the end of the semester.

#### Back in the Game

- 51. After 23 years of marriage, Robert finds himself back in the game, ironically courting his wife. They do things like going out to dinner and seeing movies.
- 52. They seem to be falling back in love. Slowly, a few of Michelle's things find their way back into the house.
- 53. Robert stops taking his antidepressants, happy with his life for the first time in five years.
- 54. Neither of them acknowledges their history. Neither of them ever brings up Nick.
- 55. Michelle and Robert decide to attend/host the anniversary party together as a couple once more.

# A Concert to Prepare for

- 56. Robert and Alexia prepare for the concert. Their lessons turn from educational to practicing for the recital—practicing the duet.
- 57. They are meshing well and playing well together. They are able to laugh and be free with one another.
- 58. Alexia allows Robert to teach her some new tricks.
- 59. Robert also allows Alexia to teach him some different methods and to step a little outside his comfort zone.

60. Robert invites Alexia to the party, as he has already started to consider her a substitute child. Alexia happily accepts the invitation, not precisely knowing what she was getting herself into.

## An Anniversary to Remember

- 61. Robert shows up at the party with both Michelle and Alexia on his arms, which creates a bit of a stir.
- 62. Cooper gives him grief about Alexia again and inquires if there is anything romantic going on, which Robert vehemently denies. He informs Cooper that if anything he sees her as a daughter, not a lover.
- 63. Though Robert and Michelle look happy together, it is obvious to many of the people in attendance, Alexia included, that they don't love each other and are only together out of denial over what had happened.
- 64. Alexia catches herself staring at Robert with less-than-appropriate thoughts going through her mind. Cooper catches her watching Robert and confesses his own misgivings about Robert's marriage, which only serves to spur Alexia's feelings.

## The "Perfect" Family

- 65. Cooper and his wife GWEN KAPLAN, 40s, share their party with their two lovely children, who are both around Alexia's age and seem to be the picture perfect image of what a family is supposed to be.
- 66. Michelle and Robert barely conceal their jealousy over the wonderful lives their friends lead, and it only reminds them of how truly messed up their own situation is.

# The Wrong Name

- 67. While Alexia is in bed with her boyfriend, she utters Robert's name.
- 68. Her boyfriend gets upset, assuming that she's cheating on him, and breaks up with her.

## The Good Son

69. Robert goes into Nick's room for the first time in a long time. He settles down on the bed, but something crinkles under the pillow. Robert pulls out two pieces of paper from under the pillow. One is an acceptance letter to Juilliard, the other an acceptance letter to UCLA.

70. Robert remembers back to an argument he had with Nick, not long before the accident about where he was going to school. Nick wanted to give up on his music to pursue marine biology, but Robert refused, claiming that it would be a waste of Nick's talent.

#### Lament and Guilt

- 71. Alexia mentions to Robert that she thought he seemed sort of sad at the party.
- 72. Robert tells Alexia about what happened with Nick, attempting to convey how much he misses his son.
- 73. Alexia seems guilty about something but doesn't say anything about it.

#### Sealed with a Kiss

- 74. That night, Alexia writes a letter in her dorm, addressed to her parents. One can infer from the letter that she ran away from home a number of years ago and is not an orphan.
- 75. Alexia asks her friend EMILY COOKE, 19, sweet and outspoken, to send the letter after Alexia has left for Thanksgiving.
- 76. Not realizing what it was, Emily sends it from New York, not thinking twice about it.

### Being Realistic

- 77. Cooper and Robert have another one of their chats, and Cooper confronts Robert about being realistic in his expectations about his relationship with Michelle.
- 78. Robert writes off Cooper when he tells Robert of Alexia's feelings for him.

## Can't Stop the Music

- 79. Robert surprises Michelle by taking her to a classical concert thinking that she will enjoy it because she used to love classical music.
- 80. Michelle can't handle the classical music after what happened to Nick and storms out, saying that she doesn't know if she can keep doing this.

### Foul Moods

81. Robert arrives at the next rehearsal in a foul mood over what is going on with

Michelle, but Alexia doesn't want to take his crap.

- 82. Robert keeps treating her like a child—like his child—and she snaps at him, exclaiming that she is not his daughter and she doesn't appreciate being treated as though she is.
- 83. Robert tries to explain that, since she's even younger than his son, it just sort of feels right to have her fill in that space. She gets frustrated and runs out on him.

# Plea Bargain

- 84. Even worse off than before, Robert ends up going to a bar and getting fairly drunk before returning home late in the evening, only to find Michelle waiting for him.
- 85. She explains that she can't be with Robert. There's just too much history and too many bad memories that she can't deal with. Robert accuses her of trying to erase her life with him, and she doesn't deny it.
- 86. She practically begs him to just sign the divorce papers so they can both move on with their lives.

#### Dissonance Redux

- 87. More upset than before, Robert shows up to rehearsal in a state that is less than sober and seems intent on ruining whatever semblance of happiness he had been able to accrue over the past few months.
- 88. He verbally attacks Alexia, calling her ungrateful, as he wanted to give her a family and thought she would understand that.
- 89. Alexia almost slips and tells him the truth but is upset enough over his accusations that she ends up leaving before she ruins everything.

## An Unexpected Meeting

- 90. After storming out on Robert for the second time, Alexia makes her way to the subway to get away from school for a little bit. However, she quickly encounters another problem: her mother is on the train with her.
- 91. Alexia tries to ignore her mother's attempts to get her attention, but the woman makes her way over to Alexia.

### Gone

92. Robert starts to slowly lose it as he beings to realize that Alexia has gone missing a week before the concert.

### Alternative Solutions

- 93. Jonathan tells Robert to begin practicing the duet with another of his students, since the performance has already been heavily advertised and the tickets have sold out.
- 94. Robert works with the other student, but he is a very classical performer and isn't able to convey the same energy that Alexia did.

#### So Perfect

- 95. Robert complains to Cooper about Alexia's absence and Michelle's adamant refusal to see or talk to him until the divorce papers are signed.
- 96. Cooper mentions something about how other people have problems too, and Robert nastily strikes back at him about how Cooper has the perfect family and shouldn't complain.
- 97. They get in a fight, and Robert leaves.

## A Familial Truth

- 98. The night of the concert, Alexia shows up backstage and accidentally lets slip that the reason for her absence was that she ran into her mother.
- 99. A big fight breaks out as Robert realizes that Alexia has been lying to him the whole time and is not, in fact, an orphan at all.
- 100. Alexia comes clean about her past.

# The Last Goodbye

- 101. After they both calm down a little bit, Robert apologizes for the things he said to her before she left and explained that it was because he was coming to terms with the fact that his marriage was over.
- 102. Alexia confesses her feelings for Robert by kissing him, and Robert explains to her that he had meant what he said about her being like a daughter.
- 103. Overcoming her embarrassment, she chooses to go on stage with him.

# Something to Remember Me By

- 104. Robert seemed mostly okay before stepping onstage. However, once under the lights, Robert starts getting incredibly anxious.
- 105. He sits down before they begin playing, but flashes of the night Nick keep coming to him, and before he knows it he's stuck in the nightmare of holding onto his dead son's bleeding body.
- 106. Robert snaps out of it to find himself on the floor in tears and can't continue with the performance.

# Coming Clean

- 107. Robert puts in his resignation, and Jonathan comes clean about the performance clause not existing.
- 108. Cooper reconciles with Robert, making sure that he's leaving for the right reasons.

# Moving On

- 109. Robert moves out of his house, boxing up Nick's possessions, taking only his acceptance letters and his cello.
- 110. He moves into a modest apartment in New York City.
- 111. Robert ends up signing the divorce papers and receives a thank you note from Michelle.
- 112. He begins teaching lessons again, but privately.

## Park Performance

- 113. In the spring, Robert goes out to a park and plays some music. When he gets to the duet, he starts playing his part, his eyes falling closed as he does so.
- 114. Partway through, another cello jumps in, playing the other part.
- 115. Surprised, Robert opens his eyes to find Alexia is playing with him.
- 116. They smile at each other and nod in understanding and forgiveness.