

## Logline

ACCIDENTAL TRIO (indie drama) In late 1970s New York, a cult-figure punk rocker—the estranged daughter of a famous civil rights attorney—learns of his unexpected death and abruptly quits the music scene in grief. Slowly she finds solace in music again, via the beautiful upright bass she has inherited from him. She’s helped by a mysteriously accomplished old woman pianist next door and a trumpet player who’s been stalking her.

## Treatment (still in progress)

### Act One

Downtown NYC, late 1970s.

RACHEL K, a black (biracial) punk singer/bassist with a rabid cult following, is chatting with a fangirl, OONA, between sets at a downtown club (think CBGB). Oona says something lustful about the drummer and Rachel drops the friendly facade. “He’s not available.” Later that night, Rachel and the drummer (known only as UZI) return to her apartment. They drink, snort coke, and start having sex. Rachel’s headboard is banging lightly against the wall and then suddenly they’re hearing a much louder banging--hitting exactly on the “upbeats” between the headboard bangs--coming from the apartment next door. Drummer says “Doesn’t that Nazi bitch ever sleep?” They’re laughing when the phone rings. Rachel picks up, says, “What’s up, Aaron,” listens for a while. Her eyes goes wide with bewilderment. “WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?” [CUT TO BLACK]

[Days later.] A memorial service at a very large Unitarian meeting house, packed with people of all races, classes, and ages. The deceased is GERALD KLEIN, Rachel’s father. He was a (white, Jewish) civil rights and defense attorney Rachel shows up late to the memorial and stays in the back, trying not to be seen. (She looks terrible. A TV news crew recognizes her and approach with the camera. She tells them to fuck off. The moment airs on local news.

[Flashbacks reveal:] Gerald had become famous (infamous) in the 60s working together with Rachel’s (black) mother, an activist and feminist writer. After her mother’s early death from cancer, Rachel learned her father had “sold out” to become a defense attorney to certain high-paying clients while continuing to present the public image of a do-gooder. Feeling that her father had betrayed his values and her mother’s memory, she had estranged herself.

[Few weeks after memorial] Rachel’s apartment has become a chaos of empty booze bottles, drug paraphernalia, and unwashed clothing. She drags herself out from under a pile of random crap on her bed and rushes to get ready for a gig. Onstage she’s considerably less energetic than before. She drops her mic and leaves the stage mid-song to head to the bar for another drink. In the background, Uzi starts to follow her but

is stalled by Oona. Rachel heads back to the bathroom and finds Oona giving Uzi a blowjob. She throw her drink at them and storms out of the club.

[Next morning] Rachel is at her bathroom mirror taking off her heavy makeup. (We see her sweet, unadorned face for the first time.) She has unplugged the phone. She starts picking up clothes and trash, and soon she's in a whirlwind of activity. The apartment is soon clean and organized. Her buzzer rings; she lets in AARON, her older stepbrother (Gerald's son from an earlier marriage; white, 45-ish, expensively dressed--another lawyer) with his two tall, gangly teen sons. He is the executor of Gerald's estate. He and her nephews have brought not only a six-figure settlement check--which Rachel almost refuses as "capitalist blood money"--but several crates of Gerald's old jazz records, boxes of old movies on VHS tape, and a massive upright bass. As Aaron and the boys are leaving, they and Rachel encounter MYSTERIOUS NEIGHBOR in the hallway. It's the old white lady who sometimes bangs on Rachel's wall. She gives them a look somewhere between imperious and terrified, then slams the door.

FLASHBACK to Rachel's childhood, when Gerald and her mother would host raucous jam sessions in their Brooklyn apartment. Rachel's mother is singing with them but has to sit down halfway through a song--first indication of her illness.

[Some time later] At the mailbox, Rachel gets her monthly copy of a local punk zine and the cover story is "WHERE THE FUCK IS RACHEL K?????" In the apartment, Rachel listens to and deletes several messages on her answering machine from Uzi, begging her to return his calls, come back to the band, etc. She ignores them. [MONTAGE] Goes running. Cooks herself healthy meals. Works shifts at a local bodega. Spends time watching old screwball comedies on the VCR. Watches the nightly news.

Through some of this activity she notices a YOUNG GUY (later known as FAREED) who seems to be stalking her around her neighborhood. Vaguely Middle Eastern, olive skin and wiry dark hair, short but muscular, wearing very plain and non-trendy clothing, looking a little "bridge & tunnel" rather than downtown-ish. He's always got a plaster cast on his hand and forearm and a trumpet case strapped across his body. The third time Rachel notices him, she approaches him and starts yelling. She is almost a foot taller than him. "Are you here to rat me out to the Voice or do you just wanna fuck?" He cowers, blanches, stutters. She pulls a Sharpie marker out of her bag and scribbles her autograph on his arm cast. "There, happy? Now get the fuck away from me." She runs off.

[Some time later] Dad's upright bass has been sitting in a corner of the living room, ignored. Rachel notices dust and starts cleaning it. Then holds it up, tries the strings, twists the tuning pegs. Tries strings again. Breaks a fingernail, painfully. Cuts all her fingernails and gets back to the bass. Slowly starts making music come out. More time passes. Gerald's old records are now strewn across the coffee table and couch. Rachel's become good enough to play bass along with some of them. One day she's playing a simple Bb blues against a metronome. Through the wall comes the sound of a piano 'comping along. Rachel stops playing. The piano keeps going. Rachel picks up again at the next measure. They are playing together through the wall.

Rachel puts down the bass and opens her front door. MYSTERIOUS NEIGHBOR is at the door, staring at her with the same grim, imperious look as before. In a thick Germanic accent she commands: "Bring the bass in here." [FADE TO BLACK]

[Scenes of Rachel and neighbor, known only as ANNA, playing together in the old woman's apartment. Anna, still gruff and reticent, doesn't speak about anything but the music itself. She is apparently an expert improviser--sounds as good as anybody playing on Gerald's classic Blue Note records. After a few failed attempts at getting more biographical info out of Anna, Rachel stops trying. There are pictures on the wall, of Anna and a group of female factory workers. All date from the 1940s through the 1960s. In many photos the women are posed in front of various munitions-manufacturing machines or out in front of huge warehouse bays. Rachel assumes Anna must have been a Rosie-the-Riveter type in her youth. One photo was taken inside of a cafeteria, with a Christmas tree in the background, Anna at a piano, and all the other women wearing holiday finery and holding up choral music folders.

Rachel's and Anna's apartments are on the first floor. Their music escapes out Anna's barred but open windows into the street. One afternoon FAREED, loitering on the sidewalk, hears their playing. We see his cast is off now. Inside, Rachel and Anna are struck when they hear the sound of a trumpet player joining their song--from out on the sidewalk. Rachel rushes to the window. "YOU!?!?!?" Before Rachel can object, Anna has shouted through the window bars and invited Fareed in to play--actually, she *commands* him to join them.

[Change of seasons. Months have passed.] Rachel, Anna, and Fareed now sound locked in together, like a genuine jazz trio. After one rehearsal, Rachel invites Fareed into her apartment--subtle indication that they are now a couple. Fareed shows up one evening with information about a public jam session. Anna says she will accompany them but is unwilling to play in public. The three of them take the subway uptown, Anna wearing an old-fashioned Sunday hat with a black veil that obscures her face.

At the club, Rachel and Fareed are made to wait a long time--after all the known players--before being allowed up to play. This being a man's world, all eyes are on Fareed. He acquits himself admirably on two tunes and gets a nice round of applause. Rachel's back there holding down the groove, solidly, with a big and unfussy sound. During her first solo, the bandleader ignores her and starts talking loudly to the saxophonist. During the second song, the leader doesn't give Rachel a solo.

Meanwhile far back in the audience, Anna is doing her best to be both supportive and inconspicuous. An elderly black man (later known as LAWRENCE) is staring at her from another table. He approaches. "Klara? Klara Frankl? It's you, isn't it?"

Anna, terrified, flees from the club. Fareed sees and runs after her. Rachel tries to leave, as well, but is stopped by a man near the front of the audience. "NOT INTERESTED!" Rachel yells, but he blocks her way and says, "You don't understand. Take my card. I got jobs and I need a new bassist who doesn't bullshit."

Outside the club, Fareed and Lawrence are crouched over Anna, who has fallen and hurt herself badly. Fareed yells at Rachel: “Go call an ambulance!” The old man is leaning over and whispering, “Klara, I’m so sorry, I didn’t mean to scare you, where have you been, girl?”

## Act Two

[Set in Austria, late 1930s, and then NYC. Anna’s backstory. She was born Klara Anna Frankl, the only daughter of moderately wealthy Viennese Jews. Her grandparents on both sides had been successful merchants, her parents’ generation tended toward the law and journalism (think Stefan Zweig), and she and her cousins were encouraged to be artists. Klara’s parents were tracking her to be a concert pianist. Despite her terror of being onstage, she had genuine talent, not only as a technician but as a budding composer. Just prior to Anschluss, they sent her to live with extended family in Manhattan to continue her studies at Juilliard.

She instead falls in with a crowd of black jazz musicians and a European heiress who serves as den mother (loosely based on Barroness Nica.) While in the US she learns that her parents have been killed and the family home, with all its treasures and memories, has been looted. Despondent, she drops out of school but continues to play with the jazz crowd. Among them is a talented young saxophonist with whom Klara begins a very chaste romance. We recognize him as the young Lawrence.

A prominent critic and promoter, HAROLD STONE, hears Klara playing and promises and gets her a record deal. After the album release party, Stone corners her, first suggestively, then with increasing menace. She refuses his advances; he rapes her. In the aftermath she flees the scene entirely, leaves the comfortable Upper West Side home of her relatives, finds an apartment in Brooklyn and gets a factory job. One day she picks up a newspaper and finds Stone’s huffily diminishing review.] **PROBLEM HERE: she is too much the innocent victim...there has to be something she has done actively to hurt someone...maybe her parents actually did NOT want her to leave them or to pursue music?**

## Act Three

[Back to NYC present day] Anna is in a leg cast and Rachel is helping her out--cooking and cleaning for her, playing DJ, etc. On painkillers, Anna is a bit more conversational but still not very forthcoming. One afternoon, Lawrence shows up for a visit. Anna is polite but insists he has her mistaken with someone else. On his way out, Rachel accompanies him into the hallway, where he tells her: “I don’t care what she says, that woman is Klara Frankl. I’m so glad she’s alright. I’ll respect her privacy. But that piano in the living room seals the deal.”

[MONTAGE, WITH OBVIOUS SEASONAL CHANGES--MONTHS ARE PASSING]  
Rachel visits several used record shops and rifles through the jazz racks. She stops when she finds a cover shot of a young woman sitting at a piano. INTRODUCING THE KLARA FRANKL TRIO. Anna.

As she's leaving, elated with her newfound knowledge, she sees a poster on the wall promoting a new record on a small but famous punk label. UZI AND THE GRENADES. It's her old boyfriend. She goes to the right rack and grabs the record. Looks at the song list. "MOTHERFUCKER!!!!!"

Back at home she's on the phone with Aaron, yelling. "Those were my fucking songs! I wrote every fucking one of them!" Fareed comes over with flowers and a bottle of wine. "Fuck that!" Rachel yells, then grabs him, drags him out the door, hails a cab. At 4<sup>th</sup> Street and The Bowery, she fights past a huge line to get into the club. Without makeup or stage clothes, she is only recognized by one person who calls out "Is that Rachel K? Oh my god!" Inside she stomps toward Uzi, who's at the bar with Fangirl. He's got his arm draped over her shoulder and right down her shirt, while he flirts outrageously with the bartender. (Fangirl looks trapped and miserable.) Rachel screams at him. "YOU FUCKING THIEF!" He counters, "FUCK YOU, RACHEL, YOU DISAPPEARED, WE LOST GIGS AND MONEY, DID YOU EVEN FUCKING CARE?"

Daytime in her apartment. Aaron is on her couch, explaining that without any real proof of authorship, there's nothing she can do about Uzi's record. Fareed enters with his own key. Aaron takes one look and yells: "YOU??? What the fuck are you doing here?" Aaron turns to Rachel. "Why is he here? Don't you know? This is the asshole who killed Dad! WHY ARE YOU HERE?" Fareed instantly begins weeping, begging Rachel to listen. There was a reason he'd been stalking her: to find a way to apologize. Bewildered, she kicks everybody out of her apartment. [FADE TO BLACK]

Fareed backstory--he was driving the car that killed Gerald--that's why his arm was broken. In the aftermath, he got the somewhat twisted idea that he needed to go apologize in person to the famous daughter Rachel K. That's why he was following her around, although once their musical and romantic bond started to build up, he had decided not to say anything. [PROBLEM HERE: need to suggest a fuller backstory for him. Was he fighting with his family? Is that why he rushed out with the car and ended up hitting Gerald?]

Denouement--still TBD but it needs to bring the 3 of them back together quietly in Rachel's apartment. At first she's alone watching old videotape of her father being interviewed on TV. He is speaking eloquently and passionately about crime, injustice, life's unfairness, but also of forgiveness and forbearance. Fareed knocks and this time Rachel says "Use your key." We see Rachel is still full of rage and defiance, but softening a bit as she listens. Her father speaks about our flaws and the way we hurt people, and how we deserve love anyway. As audience, we don't have to believe him--it's fine if he seems full of crap. Maybe his interviewer asks cynical questions with which we identify. And yet, Gerald's words have a kind of hopeful resonance anyway. We see Rachel with

tears streaming down her face for the very first time. She lets Fareed approach her and gingerly take her hand. He has left the door open, so Anna enters on crutches and stands a few feet behind them, watching and listening. Her face, too, is a mix of rage and grief. Her eyes narrow at Gerald's hopeless idealism, but then they grow just the slightest bit wet at the corner. [SCREEN GOES BLACK]