*An annoying song is playing in your head. Let it become louder. Let it overtake you. Begin singing. Good. Keep singing. Dance a little. That’s it. Don’t stop. Sing. Dance. Smile. You’re at Disney’s World®.*

“A five, six, seven, eight!” Your annoying and catchy tune resumes. The actors are reanimated, singing and dancing in line. A tall, perfectly blonde, and smiling actress breaks through the ensemble. She leaps into the air and lands in a perfect split. It’s clearly not the first time she performed this. The rehearsal studio is spacious with large windows letting in just the right amount of happiness from the sun perched outside. Posters of past movies such as *Return to Camp Rock,* *Reunion at Halloweentown, Teen Beach Movie: Surf’s Up,* and of course a favorite, *Wildcats Roar Again!* line the walls. Images of past celebrities who graced those movies smile down at the smaller actors in the studio, reminding them of what it takes. Afterall, not just anyone gets to be here. You were born for it.

“Alright mouses, let’s take a break,” a voice booms. The actors immediately stop and go to their respective Minnie and Mickey Mouse break rooms.

“Mr. Ortega, do you have a second, I have a question about a dance step.”

“Of course Avery, though your split was perfect.”

“Thanks, just want to make sure I’m at my best when the President comes.”

“So smart, just like your brother.” Mr. Ortega looks at a glossy poster of a young male with a large-toothed smile. Under the poster it reads, “Jason O’Connor. *Wildcats Roar Again!* Role: Zachary Bolton.” Avery smiles up at the poster and blows her brother a kiss.

“Every time I see him, Jason sings your praises, and says how wonderful it is to work with you. I’m so glad I am now!” Avery does a little jump that makes Mr. Samuel Ortega chuckle. He was a seasoned director who worked with great actors of historic lineage such as Elizabeth Hudgens, Piero Swift, and Andrew Beiber. His great-great… grandfather directed and choreographed the original original *High School Musical,* a gem of the now distant 2000s yet its presence and success looms throughout the city, and so does the Ortega legacy.

Redirecting towards Avery Mr. Ortega asks, “What can I help you with?”

“Can you help me with the pivot turn?” Avery completes a perfect pivot turn.

“Good. Now, just get your hips into it more.” Mr. Ortega comes over to Avery. “May I?”

“Of course.” Avery continues smiling. Mr. Ortega places his hands on Avery’s hips.

“Get more into the hips. Your character is a cheerleader.” Mr. Ortega begins moving his hips and Avery follows. “There you go, you’ve got it.”

“Thanks Mr. Ortega.” Avery smiles and spins around to face the director, his hands still on her hips. Mr. Ortega returns the smile thinking, *This is not the first time, nor the last an actor will suggest sex. Since birth we’re taught to admire the Directors, Creators of the World. At least Avery is already Matched, and with a good prospect at that.*

The door opens and the rest of the actors flood in. The fifteen minute break is over. A girl with black hair looks over and sees Avery and Mr. Ortega just before the two part. She rolls her eyes.

“Let’s run through the opening number once more, then notes, then done, ok?” Mr. Ortega instructs, “We’ll end early so you’ll all get a good night’s sleep before the President comes tomorrow.” He says the word President slowly, enunciating it in his mouth as if the President himself were hearing it. Mr. Ortega has been doing this more years than he could count. And yet, he is always nervous for President’s Day. He remembers throwing up in his room when he was just a young Mickey Director on the day the President was to see his musical number. Luckily it made the cut and was chosen for *Wildcats Roar Again!* A hit of course. So many other aspiring Directing Mouses had their dreams crushed. For the actors, it's everyone's dream to begin one's career with a Disney Channel Original Movie.

Avery O’Connor looks out the window as the electromagnetic train glides from Hollywood Studios to Epcot Town. The terrain changes from tall skyscrapers and glossy buildings, to shorter, quaint, Baroque Parisian-style buildings. Avery lives in the French Quarters. Her apartment overlooks the Eiffel Tower. As she rides the imitation 19th century elevator, Avery hums the opening number. Her house welcomes her by turning on the lights and preparing her post-rehearsal tea and bath.

Just as Avery immerses herself under the pink and purple bubbles, her house announces someone was at the door.

*Strange,* Avery thought, *10pm, past visiting hours.* “Minnie, who is it?” Avery asks the House.

“It’s Mr. Philip Smith.” Minnie House replies. “Should I let him in?”

“Yes, tell him to wait in the living room.” Avery quickly gets out of the bath, grabs a warm towel and runs to her bedroom as she hears the door open and Minnie House instruct Philip to stay in the living room. *Ugh! Why does he have to come now!?* Avery thought. *I already took off all my makeup, I’m wet. I look like a mess.*

“It’s beyond visiting hours, Mr. Smith.” Avery teases as she greets Philip. He is a classically handsome man with tousled yet elegant wavy dark blonde hair. He stands wearing an all black suit with a Mickey Mouse pin on the lapel.

“I couldn’t stay away from you. Got special permission.”

“Did you?” Avery comes closer to Philip until there’s no space between them. Philip embraces her.

“It gets boring watching prospective movies without you in them.” He says, dipping Avery down for an enchanted kiss.

“I’m working on that.” Avery replies.

“Maybe work a little harder. I’m itching to Produce your stardom.”

“Silly! Maybe you should leave, and let me work, instead of springing upon me a Match Visit. You know it’s frowny face to see each other too often until Celebration.”

“Let’s make it now!” Philip shouts, taking her by the waist. Avery shimmies out of his grasp and taunts him by walking away. He follows chanting the Celebration Song, “Celebration! Celebration! Oh, what Happiness!” Philip pins Avery against the large window overlooking the illuminated replica Eiffel Tower. Avery pulls him in by his tie. “Oh, what happiness,” Avery whispers in his ear. Spinning around, she pins Philip against the window. He runs his hands through her hair revealing a D logo tattoo on the nape of her neck. Just underneath the skin, a purple light glows. A large computer monitor in the Oval Office displays a young and healthy Matched couple beginning their Sleeping Beauty Session against a large glass window overlooking the Eiffel Tower.

“They’re perfect.” The President smiles at the monitor. Avery, now stripped to her Minnie Mouse print underwear, her back against the window again, kisses Philip’s neck and wryly smiles back.

A castle with a fortress complete with a mote is visible in the distance. If you squint, perhaps you’ll see the dragon. A girl dressed in all black with long black hair beckons you to follow her. She seems intriguing, so you do. You want to know what’s inside the castle, too. She’s walking up to the place where the water hits land.

“We might have to swim,” she jokes. But she seems like she’s got a plan. She is one of those people that always has a plan. You’re nervous and start humming the annoying song from before.

“Stop that! They’ll hear you!” She hisses. “Shit! Where is he?” She asks the darkness.

Then, a boat comes slinking out of the darkness. It stops. A man also dressed in black hops off. You feel as if you’ve seen him before, but can’t place it.

“I was never here.” He says.

“You’re the best, Jason O’Connor!” The black haired girl ironically cheers. The man, Jason, nods and scampers into the darkness.

“Well, what are you waiting for, Prince Charming?” She looks at you, “Get in the boat!”

You get in the boat. She follows.

The girl with the black hair quickly and silently rows. It’s an old gondola from the Venice attraction. She’s having some trouble making it go straight and not in a circle, but eventually you both arrive at the gated door. You’re surprised there’s no guards.

“Stay low, don’t look up, that’s where the cameras are,” she instructs. The two of you army crawl all the way to the back of the building. The black haired girl uses a screwdriver to open a small vent duct.

“Phew, there’s no alarms here, just as he said there wouldn’t be.” You follow her into the darkness trying not to make a sound, knowing at any time there could be an alarm or camera activated. Through the slits below your feet, a light catches your eye. You look down and shake because of how high up you are in the air duct, and you shake because of what you just saw, or think you saw. People. Fully and partially formed humans floating in a purple substance. The girl with black hair crawls back to you.

“I know,” she replies to your open mouth. “This is us. You hear that?”

You listen. It’s a tune. One you’ve never heard before, but now your attention is on it, you can’t stop it from entering your brain.

“The tune of the next generation,” the girl with black hair answers. “We had our own tune that’s in us since Creation. That’s why we’re able to sing without thinking when finally asked. We’ve been singing the same songs since Meiosis.” At that moment, the girl with the black hair finds a loose board and begins to open it. It’s right over a large tub containing the same purple liquid of the semi-people.

“You up for a jump?” She asks with a mischievous smile. You nod.

“Wait!” You grab her, “What’s the game plan once we’re down?”

“This time, just pictures, get the word out.”

“But we already knew no one gives birth anymore –”

She cuts you off, “That’s just the half of it.” With that, the girl with black hair jumps down into the basin, and you, holding your breath, follow her.

Wrong move. With that, the alarms go off. Guards from every corner with robot dogs emerge, yelling, “Code Rapunzel, code Rapunzel!” You don’t know how much longer you can hold your breath. You look at the girl with black hair and she’s looking out watching the guards. She signals you to get out of the tank.” “I’ll follow,” she mouths.

You grip your way up out of the tank, and look back to make sure the captain of this dead-man’s operation is following you. She is. With both of you out, there’s no time to breathe as a guard spots you. The girl with the black hair starts running, and you do too.

“You two, stop!” The guard yells.

The girl with the black hair stops, but not because of the guard. She’s looking at something. You think, *this is not the time for sentimentality or to have ethical dilemmas!* The girl with the black hair is staring at a tank with two small forming humans. They look like twins. The plaque below reads: Mrs. Avery O’Connor-Smith, twins. Singing idols.

“Why’d you stop? He’s after us!” You look at the girl with black hair. She snaps back.

“Uh, just weird, ya know.”

“Something special about this tank?”

“Nope! Let’s go.” And with that she’s off, running. You have to sprint to catch up with her.

You can’t believe you made it out of the people factory, into the boat, and across the water all without being caught. *Almost too good to be true,* you think, *as if they wanted us to be able to escape.*

“Hey!” You yell at the girl with black hair as both of you are safely across the water. “I just did all that with you, and I didn’t even catch your name.”

“Name’s Meg. “You?”

You say your name.

“Welcome to the Grumpy Opposition.”

Avery O’Connor is up early practicing her number. Today is President’s Day, and everything must be perfectly perfect.

“Your breakfast, Avery.” Minnie House announces, lifting up a purple fruit smoothie.

“Make it to go, I’m going to be early today to stretch and check in with teammates.”

“As you wish.” Minnie House replies, retracting the smoothie and bringing it back up in a travel tumbler.

Arriving at the studio, Avery finishes her smoothie and begins to stretch as the other mouses file in.

Mr. Ortega stands in front of the group. “Alright,” he begins. “Today’s the day. I know we’re all nervous, hey, I’m even nervous and I’ve been doing this for a while. But, put your best foot forward and give it all you got. You were born for this. Time to show it.”

The mouses cheer and get in formation as the President enters with Secret Service and assistants. Mr. Ortega speaks briefly to the President and pulls up a chair for the Commander In Chief.

“A five, six, seven, eight!”

Of course the number is executed flawlessly. The President claps. “That was wonderful, just wonderful! I say this every year, but I think we’re making better talent with each coming movie season!”

“Let’s take a break!” Mr. Ortega shouts over the chatter.

“Avery O’Connor, can I talk to you?” The President asks, his voice calm and yet it pierces through the noise. Avery walks over to him.

“It’s an honor to meet you, Mr. President.” Avery says.

“It’s my pleasure to meet you, Ms. O’Connor. You are quite the powerhouse out there. I see a bright future for you.” The President’s assistant hands him a tablet. “And, I see you are already Matched with, ah, Mr. Philip Smith, Producer. What a wonderful Match. Are you happy, Avery?” The President asks.

“I couldn’t be happier!” Avery exclaims.

“Perfect!”

“It’s just so amazing to be able to be in the room where so many great mouses rehearsed, and to follow in the footsteps of my brother, Jason.” Avery replies.

“Ah, yes,” The President smiles and gives his assistant a look. Well, I must be going, and you must get back to practicing. Break a leg, as they say?” And with that, the President was gone.

Avery is on top of the world! She’s just about to call Philip and tell him how great President’s Day went when there was a knock on the door, and then an alarm and red lights.

“UNIDENTIFIABLE PERSON, CODE WOLF!” Minnie House screeches.

“What is the matter?” Avery asks, yelling above the noise. “Stop that!” Minnie House stops the noise but keeps the red flashing lights. “Show me what’s outside,” Avery commands. She looks at the screen.

“Stupid house, that’s not an ‘unidentifiable person.’ Let her in.” Reluctantly the door swings open.

“Meg.” Avery stands awkwardly.

“Avery.” Meg replies.

“What do you want?” Avery demands.

“Can’t I just come see a friend?”

Avery laughed. “A friend? Megara, we haven’t been friends since we lived together in the Minnie Club House.”

“But clearly you remember that time, don’t you?” Megara inquires, closing the space between her and Avery. Avery spins on her heels and walks to the kitchen. She gets out a smoothie from the fridge.

“Smoothie?” Avery asks. “I can have the House make one. You still like banana?”

“I stopped drinking those long ago once I realized what was put in them.”

“Oh Meg, you and your conspiracy theories again!”

“They’re not theories, they’re true!” Meg stomps over and slams the fridge. “In that smoothie you’re drinking, your Minnie House puts sedatives in it that keep you ‘happy’ and ‘docile.’ This world that we live in breeds people to be predestined for certain jobs and a certain social status. We have no true control over our lives. We –”

Avery cuts her off. “Of course I remember.”

“What?” Meg says, confused.

“Of course I remember. I remember it all. The time in the Club House, the time in Aspen.”

“When we were snowed in. So we,” Meg takes a step toward Avery once more. “Got creative with hot chocolate.”

Just then Avery notices how illusive and intriguing Meg looks. The house’s red lights glow on Meg’s face. Meg notices Avery soften. She steps closer and kisses Avery on the neck, right where she remembered Avery liked. Avery sighs and Meg senses it is not a sigh of pleasure but a sigh of sadness with a hint of defeat. Avery puts her arm around Meg’s neck, and pulls it back in shock.

“You’re bleeding!” Avery looks at her hand with blood as if she’s never seen blood. Running to the sink, Avery demands, “Disinfectant!” The sink disinfects Avery’s hand.

Meg turns around proudly and says, “I ripped out the chip, see? That’s why your House couldn’t identify me.”

“How?”

“One of the newcomers, I can’t remember their name, starts with a Y, helped me.”

“You shouldn’t do such things.” Avery instructs. “The chips are for our safety, security, and health.” Those are the exact words of the Disney Government.

“Fuck that!” Meg comes in closer again and takes Avery by the waist. “They killed your brother. You’re still gonna be loyal to them?”

With that, Avery pushes Meg away harder this time and steps out of the kitchen. “Don’t you dare say such things. He’s filming a show down in Mexico and there’s bad internet service.”

“You believe that?” Meg asks.

“I think it’s time you go,” Avery replies. Just then, there are sirens in the distance. “Look, perfect timing.” Avery sneers.

“You called the feds on me?”

“The House does it automatically when there’s an intruder alert.”

“I better get going then, shouldn’t I?” Not waiting for a reply, Meg was out the door.

The doorbell rings. Avery opens it.

“Was someone here?” The Knight Police ask.

“No,” Avery responds. “It was nobody.” She closes the door.

Avery looks in the mirror holding back tears. She smiles at her reflection, willing herself Happiness. Resolutely, she picks up her phone. “Philip, I need you.”

“Um, is ev–

“My House will let you in. Come to the bedroom.” She hangs up, takes the last sip of her smoothie, and proceeds to the bedroom.

“Celebration! Celebration! Oh, what Happiness!” The crowd chanted. Avery’s Celebration Day went magically and without a hitch, just as she imagined. Philip was absolutely charming. The President came. And yet, on her wedding night, the most magical night of the Matches’ lives, Avery couldn’t stop thinking about Megara.

“Avery O’Connor, the Doctor is ready.” The Minnie nurse says, leading Avery to a large room.

“Avery.” The Doctor says. He is a round man, with a white beard and spectacles. His white lab coat has a Mickey Mouse pin on the lapel. He smiles at her. “Avery, you came in today for something I don’t take lightly. Tell me why.”

“I’m tormented by memories that do not serve me. Memories I shouldn’t – I don’t want to have. I read you can make them disappear.” Avery pleads. She’s on the brink of crying, but doesn’t in fear that she’ll mess up her makeup in public. Instead, she smiles back at the doctor.

“Well, you’re not wrong. But, normally I don’t see civilians.” The Doctor says. “Given your status, you were able to book an appointment with me. Lay back on the table. I’ll attach this cord to your Chip. You might feel a slight pinch as it connects, but don’t be alarmed. Then, you might feel a tugging sensation in your brain. Only for a second, as the procedure is done while you’re sleeping. Any questions?” Avery shakes her head.

“Bring to mind those memories.” The Doctor instructs.

Avery closes her eyes. She thinks about the first time she met Meg, the parties in the Minnie Club House, imagining the future as they become celebrities, and that sensational night in Aspen.

“Why!” The Doctor exclaims, looking at the monitor. “These are happy memories! Why would you ever want to get rid of these?”

A tear runs down Avery’s cheek. “Make me devoted to my Husband.”

“As you wish,” the Doctor replies. “Count back from ten, and you’ll fall asleep. When you wake up, you’ll believe you just happened to fall asleep during a routine check up. Philip will be here when you wake up.”

“You mustn't tell him!”

“He’ll never know.”

Avery falls asleep as the Doctor plugs in the program. The memories whizz by. Any traces of Megara are gone. The machine stops. It’s done. The Doctor solemnly looks over at sleeping Avery. He leaves the room. Philip comes to pick up Avery. The Doctor returns to the room to clean up. Waiting at the door is a girl dressed in black with long black hair. The Doctor recognizes her. He gives her a sad smile.

“She did it?” The girl asks.

“She just left an hour ago, Megara.” The Doctor replies. As Megara turns to leave, the Doctor adds, “The memories are still on the monitor. There’s nothing criminal to document so they will be deleted. But, if you want…” The doctor gestures into the room. Megara follows.

Megara looks at the memories on the screen depicting genuinely happy young people who think their whole lives are ahead of them. Megara begins to cry.

“You and her were truly happy.” The Doctor stated. For he has lived a long time, and has seen a lot of unhappy people. “The memories were stubborn.” The doctor recounts, “They did not want to leave. I didn’t want to do it either, but the patient insisted.” The Doctor pauses. “I invented this machine to do good. To help people. And now, Disney wishes to use this machine to, to…”

“To make people like her.” Megara finishes.

“You have half an hour, then you must leave.” The Doctor instructs. “You must never see her, you understand? Memories can be erased, but the mind has a way of holding on to things. New connections can be made with a simple encounter.”

“Thank you.” Megara replies.

A tall, perfectly blonde, and smiling actress stands next to her Husband and the President on the Cinderella balcony at the center of town. You’re in the back standing next to a girl with black hair. She’s hiding in the crowd; her hood is up. You notice a Mickey Reporter on the balcony approach the blonde. “Well, Mrs. Avery O’Connor-Smith, how does it feel to be a married woman, with your first movie out, *Bring it On: Cheer On!* and twins on the way! All of your dreams are coming true!” The Mickey Reporter exclaims.

“Yes, they certainly are!”

“And Mr. Smith, how do you feel? You produced the movie, you’re married to a gorgeous woman, who you got to watch kiss another girl in the movie, ha! Anything to say?”

Mr. Philip Smith chuckles. “It was quite, sexy, may I say, to see that last kiss on camera. But, all joking aside, yes, this is absolutely amazing. I couldn’t have imagined anything better. We’re both so happy aren’t we?” Philip looks to Avery. Avery smiles and looks out to the crowd. She catches your eye and smiles at you, scanning the crowd like a true princess, and then her eye lands on the black haired girl next to you. Avery’s smile falters for a second. Something crosses her face. You’ve seen it on people before. It’s as if a memory is not quite there, but the ghosts remain. Avery quickly replaces the smile on her face.

“I couldn’t be happier!” Avery replies. You notice her smile is large, but behind it is nothing.

(Please turn the page for more happiness!)

*A new annoying song is in your head. Sing! Be Happy! This is Disney’s World®*