

THREE TOO MANY

Written by

Sarah Schmeits

**An anxious young woman grapples with three imaginary characters in
the face of a looming deadline.**

FADE IN:

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

BAM! A stall door swings shut. A pair of TATTERED SHOES settle on the tiles.

BA-DUM... BA-DUM... BA-DUM...

PHOEBE (20) sits hunched on the toilet, staring in despair at her phone. She looks like the sort of girl who's put together all the time, whose outfits are well-planned and whose planner is filled to the brim. The signs of wear-and-tear in her clothing indicate financial difficulty.

BA-DUM... BA-DUM... BA-DUM...

She's tense. Overwhelmed. She puts away the phone, and is clearly trying to calm herself. She breathes in... and out...

We hear THE BATHROOM DOOR OPEN. Someone walks in. The sound of Phoebe's breathing hushes. A pair of OXFORD SHOES appear before the stall she's hiding in.

These belong to WILHELMINA (65), an old **friend** of Phoebe's, stern and Sam-Spade-esque. We do not see her; only her shoes.

WILHELMINA (O.C.)

Five minutes.

She leaves. Phoebe's breathing stays contained and slow until she hears THE DOOR SHUT. Still hunched and curled up, she takes a moment to compose herself. Then she slowly gets up and leaves the stall.

Phoebe tiptoes to the row of sinks lining the wall. She washes and dries her hands, and stares at her haggard reflection in the mirror.

PHOEBE

Don't be a coward.

A FLASH in the corner of her vision. She spins-- no, nothing.

She turns back to the mirror. Wham, bam- finger guns!

PHOEBE (CONT'D)

Stupid. Ridiculous. Ok. Ok.

She leaves the bathroom and steps out into-

INT. HALLWAY - CONT.

The hallway is mundane and cold and seems to go on forever. It's too empty. Quiet, too- but Phoebe seems to take comfort in this, standing there alone.

She glances over at a door a little further down the hallway. She makes no moves towards it. Instead, she lets her eyes drift across the dull, strange paintings that line the walls, across the gently flickering overhead lights.

THE BUZZ OF A PHONE interrupts her silent musings. She pulls out her phone. Upon seeing the caller ID, she freezes. She lets it buzz out.

The door opens. CLARK (18) peaks out- a brash, apple-cheeked girl. She waves enthusiastically when she sees Phoebe.

CLARK

Hey, Phoebe! Ready to start?

PHOEBE

Yeah... yeah.

INT. ROOM - NIGHT

Phoebe walks into the room like a defendant before her jury. Wilhelmina and Clark sit around a table, along with KAY (33), the last member of the gang. She's suave, effortlessly beautiful, but also harsh and demanding.

KAY

Thank you for showing up, Phoebe.
We're glad you're here.

Phoebe takes a seat, but does not respond.

KAY (CONT'D)

You could have dressed up, maybe.
Mm. Anyways, now that our esteemed
guest has arrived, we can finally-

CLARK

What were you doing in the
bathroom?

KAY

Clark, can we stay on topic--

WILHELMINA

What do you think she was doing in
the bathroom, kid?

Phoebe is used to this chaos. She takes it all in with a strained dignity.

PHOEBE

Forget the bathroom, Clark. I was just being stupid.

KAY

Everyone, please! Phoebe, need I remind you why you're here? The review with your advisor is in three days. Your scholarship hinges on the success of the piece we're about to review. You ought to be taking this more seriously.

That quiets down the table. Something in Phoebe's expression closes up, and she seems to shrink in her seat. Then she pushes herself up, a fragile mask of confidence in place.

PHOEBE

Yeah. I know. Sorry.

KAY

Excellent. Now that we're all on the same page, let's begin looking at- ah, *The Bartender*.

The three judging characters suddenly lift up papers and tap them on the desk in unison. Phoebe watches, apprehensive.

CLARK

Do I go first?

WILHELMINA

Just spit it out, kid.

CLARK

Ok, ok. I think it's boring.

Phoebe laughs thinly.

KAY

Clark, be more specific.

CLARK

Well, I just feel like not a lot happens. You've got this girl, a bartender- which is pretty awesome, by the way- but she doesn't get to do anything. Like, she wants to, but she doesn't. So, kinda boring.

(sheepish)

Sorry.

WILHELMINA

That's the problem with bartenders in stories. They're only there to listen to the customer's blues. They don't make good leading players. Who do they go to when they're down on their luck? Who knows.

KAY

She doesn't get to go on an emotional journey. She's static. That sort of thing doesn't work for a short story, not even for an essay or a poem. She has to go somewhere.

PHOEBE

But the point is that she doesn't go anywhere. She's stuck.

Phoebe's phone starts BUZZING, again. She ignores it.

WILHELMINA

Yeah. But she can still change while stuck in one place. How does this bartender broad move on?

PHOEBE

Move on? What do you mean?

WILHELMINA

You'd know what I mean better than I'd know.

(nodding at the phone)

You gonna answer that?

Phoebe doesn't respond. Kay studies her.

PHOEBE

She wants to leave, but she's trapped by responsibility. You can't just say she should leave her family.

KAY

Phoebe, she isn't real. Don't get attached to her personality or morals. You're in control, not the characters. My point is, in school and life, you can't tell a story without it containing a journey, a change. Can't make an omelet without breaking a few eggs.

PHOEBE

(after a pause)

Do you remember when she meets the traveler and talks about how she has to be content with her life?

KAY

Something about the burden of life--

PHOEBE

"The burden of living here was enough. The joys and pains of everyday life, of everyday events, brought her enough trouble."

KAY

(sarcastic)

Good for her.

PHOEBE

It just feels- wrong, to push her into motion.

CLARK

But then she doesn't do anything.

Phoebe, agitated, sweating, breathes rhythmically and deep, like she did in the bathroom. She slowly gets up from her chair as Kay speaks, and heads for the door.

KAY

You really-- Where are you going.

PHOEBE

I don't know. Out. It's like an oven in here. I need to think.

She puts her hand on the handle and turns it- but it's locked. Suddenly she's back in her chair, breathing heavy, eyes darting around the room like a trapped animal.

KAY

Are you going to run away, Phoebe?
Gonna cry while your family goes bankrupt trying to put you and your brother through school?

Phoebe shudders. She leans forward, puts her head between her knees, staring blankly beneath the table. We see KAY'S SHOES: designer, elegant.

CLARK

She's doing her best.

WILHELMINA

(to Clark)

Best ain't enough, kid. It's our job to push her.

(to Phoebe)

Still, it ain't a bad story.

KAY

The review is in three days. All she has is a story that goes nowhere. A coward's story.

PHOEBE

But it's not... I'm not a...

Her phone BUZZES again. The sound is somehow LOUDER than the arguing voices above her. The caller ID reads **Paul**.

KAY

What? Not a coward? Prove it.

The phone continues to BUZZ, and the others speak in the background. Phoebe stares at it, breathing heavily. Can she-?

PHOEBE

I don't need to prove it to you.

She accepts the call. The voices immediately cut off.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)

Hey, Paul. Sorry, I was... busy. Is Dad-?

She's wiping tears away by rubbing her free hand across her eyes. Whatever he says makes her laugh wetly in relief.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)

Thank god. I'm sorry I wasn't...
What? No, I'm... well, I-

She brings her head back above the table. The room is empty.

PHOEBE (CONT'D)

I'll be fine. I'll be ok. Um, do you have time to talk?

She quietly laughs at something he says, and leaves the room.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Phoebe waits in a less-dreadful hallway. She's less anxious, more put together. The shadows under her eyes have retreated.

PROFESSOR GRANT (48), blunt but fair, emerges from her office.

PROFESSOR GRANT
Hi, Phoebe. Let's take this outside. It gets so stuffy in here- the AC never works. Besides, this shouldn't take long.

EXT. WALKWAY - DAY

Phoebe watches Professor Grant with an anticipatory face.

PROFESSOR GRANT
I didn't like your story much.

Phoebe's face crumples in a second- then just as quickly, she composes herself.

PHOEBE
So, my scholarship isn't approved.

PROFESSOR GRANT
What? No, of course it's approved. You're an excellent writer.

PHOEBE
But you didn't like my writing.

PROFESSOR GRANT
I didn't like the story. Your voice, however, is clearly defined. The piece is well-thought out, and your descriptions are grounded.

PHOEBE
Oh. What can I change, then?

PROFESSOR GRANT
Let your character change. You've always had trouble with that.

PHOEBE
I was kind of worried about that.

PROFESSOR GRANT
Hopefully not too worried.

A million emotions flash through Phoebe's eyes.

PHOEBE
Not at all.