

Fresh!

Synopsis

The show begins on move-in day at New York University, on an overheated summer afternoon. Michael, a quirky yet endearing incoming freshman, stands on line with the other new arrivals, waiting to be let into the dormitory. Together, Michael and his fellow students experience the many bizarre tribulations of starting college (Track 1 – “Living in NYC”). After arriving in his room, Michael meets his roommate Mathew, a thinks-he’s-black Californian with a passionate distaste for musical theater, which happens to be Michael’s chosen field (Track 2 – “I Hate Musicals”). The new roommates are soon joined by their suitemates: Evan, an aspiring drug dealer, and Josh, his bouncy but masculine roommate.

After settling in, Michael finds himself overwhelmed by the many strangers that surround him (Track 3 – “The Face of a Stranger”). He tries to establish contact with a girl he “met” on Facebook, but is rejected. After expressing his profound desire for new and meaningful connections, a knock at the door announces the arrival of Melanie, a kind and charming girl from next door. The two get along well, and make plans to get together again soon.

Classes begin, and Michael quickly learns that he enjoys certain subjects and professors much more than others (Track 4 – “I’m Afraid of Virginia Woolf”). Here, Michael meets Professor Grey, who makes a very positive impression during his first “Creativity” class. After class, Michael tells the professor that he would like to write a musical for his final project, but that he doesn’t have any ideas for what to write about; Professor Grey advises Michael to observe the world around him for inspiration.

Back in the dorm room, Michael and Mathew realize that they have much more in common than either would have guessed, and exchange stories of lost love (Track 5 – “When I Looked into the Mirror”). Michael talks about his best friend from high school, Jamie, and how their attempt to build a more romantic relationship led to her desertion. The boys are soon joined by Melanie, who shares her own story. As she and Michael walk alone together, Melanie reveals that she has been a victim of sexual abuse. Melanie thanks Michael for being supportive and non-judgmental, and then coaxes him to reveal his own secret: that he has an increasingly debilitating physical illness. After providing him with potent words of encouragement and understanding, Melanie suddenly realizes that there is somewhere she needs to be.

Alone in his room, Michael attempts to write a song when Jamie enters the room in the form of a memory, and teases him for working too hard. Reluctantly, Michael enters the memory, and together they relive the moment when they first decided to become romantically involved (Track 6 - “Are We Worth That?”). The memory fades, and Michael succumbs to an attack of his illness. Once he has recovered, Michael travels home for a chaotic Thanksgiving dinner with his family (Track 7 – “Thanksgiving Night”).

After returning to school, Michael's roommate and suitemates convince him to accompany them to a trendy New York dance club. After gaining entry to the club (Track 8 – "Intro to The Dance Club"), Michael proves himself quite the killjoy, and chooses to sit at the bar rather than join the crowd (Track 9 – "The Dance Club"). Melanie finds him there, and Michael buys her some food which she gives away while his back is turned. Finally, Melanie convinces Michael to get up and enjoy himself; as the act draws to a close, Michael joins the crowd energetically and enthusiastically. Michael smiles triumphantly, then staggers slightly before collapsing to the floor.

Act Two begins (Track 10 – "Act II Overture") over winter break, when a doctor tells Michael that he has a connective tissue disorder with symptoms that will worsen over time. Unsure of how to process this information, Michael returns to his old high school, where he is greeted enthusiastically by a handful of old friends. As Michael exits the room, Jamie enters to an explosion of sound from her excited base of admirers, all of whom have seen ads for a new movie she is in. Gratified, Jamie professes her affection for her newly-acquired fame to her attentive audience (Track 11 – "Here I Am"). The room freezes as Michael reenters the room and makes eye contact with Jamie. Jamie then regains her composure, and continues to sign autographs and pose for pictures while Michael looks on longingly (Track 12 – "When I Looked into the Mirror (Reprise)").

School resumes, and Michael is welcomed home by Mathew and Melanie. Michael gives Melanie a box of cookies as a present, which she throws out upon leaving the room. Michael is then approached online by a mysterious girl who reveals deep feelings for him (Track 13 – "I've Got A Crush On You"). Although delighted by the attention, Michael's euphoria is abruptly halted when he realizes that he is speaking not to a mysterious girl, but rather a gay male named "Fatty" McGee, who was inspired to write to Michael after discovering Michael's Facebook profile, which had apparently been altered by Mathew and Josh to include such interests as "men" and "sex with guys." Michael consoles the guy, and then confronts the hysterically-laughing Mathew and Josh, whom he is unsuccessful at staying mad at. Michael's laughter soon turns to physical anguish as he experiences the worst attack he has had so far; Mathew runs to get Melanie, who comforts Michael through the worst of the episode.

As Michael's symptoms increase in severity and consistency, he grows increasingly frustrated and hostile. Melanie comes to cheer him up, who rebuffs her for the box of cookies that he discovered in the trash can. Melanie admits that she is anorexic, and this admission temporarily breaks Michael's spell of self-absorption. As the two talk, they realize that what they both want more than anything in the world is to feel understood by another person. The conversation culminates in a long kiss. The two then go for a walk by the Hudson, where each professes what they see in one another (Track 14 – "Forever Starts Right Now"). In what seems to be a repeating pattern, Melanie announces that she has somewhere to be, and leaves.

Meanwhile, Evan hosts a substance abuse party in the dorm room (Track 15 - "Drugs, Drugs, Drugs"). Michael returns to the dorm, passing Melanie on the way; she brushes him off and leaves him to his paranoid suspicions (Track 16 – "Cryptic Words").

Michael goes up to his room alone, and rails against both Melanie and Jamie to Mathew. Mathew points out the dangerous nature of drawing parallels between relationships, and suggests that perhaps Michael's memory is somewhat less than objective when it comes to Jamie. Cursing Mathew, Michael storms from the room.

Distraught, Michael finds Melanie on the street and pleads for her to help him. Melanie reasserts that she is running late, but refuses to tell Michael where she is going. Michael loses his temper and announces the end of their relationship (Track 17 – “Run Away Lover”). Melanie tries her best to remain patient and understanding, but finally reaches her limit as well. The two angrily part ways.

Michael walks the streets, finally collapsing in tears, physically and emotionally broken (Track 18 – “After Runaway Lover”). As he loses all hope, a sign lights up behind him bearing the words “Healing Hearts.” Michael enters the building, where he is greeted by Sylvia, a kind woman leading a support group for people with serious illnesses. As Sylvia speaks to the group, a latecomer arrives – Melanie. Across the aisle, Michael and Melanie gaze at one another as equals.

Walking through Washington Square Park, Melanie tells Michael that she had her first heart attack at age fourteen, brought on by the anorexia. She apologizes for not telling Michael, but insists it was because she didn't want him to think that she was weak. Michael tells Melanie that she is the strongest person he has ever met, and apologizes for his behavior, and for thinking that he understood a situation that was far beyond his grasp. She responds by telling him that his own relationship to his illness, and his persistence to keep going regardless of his physical limitations, has inspired her not to be ashamed of her own situation. Melanie then tells Michael her thoughts on how one can best learn to cope with such monumental struggles: by consistently performing even the smallest acts of kindness, one can find, if not healing, then at least peace (Track 19 – “Every Smile”). Michael realizes that in her words lie the epiphany required to end his musical, but knows that there is one thing he must do first.

In a coffee shop, Michael sits with Jamie, and the two discuss what happened between them (Track 20 – “Do You Remember”). Gradually, Michael recalls his own part in the deterioration of their relationship, and each apologizes for wounding the other.

Michael returns to school for one last night-on-the-town at a restaurant, where he and his friends celebrate the end of freshman year. Michael apologizes to Mathew, and reflects on his growth over the past year (Track 21 – “Living in NYC (Reprise)”). Michael then joins the party, where everyone prepares with glee for the horror and excitement that the rest of college and life have in store for them (Track 22 – “Generation”).