

Synopsis
of
ANGEL

Fourteen-year-old ALY BARRETT and her ten-year-old brother, MARKIE, are putting their things in backpacks for school in the tiny bedroom they share in a cramped welfare tenement apartment in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Aly is singing along with a CD when T.J., their defeated mother's abusive, out-of-work boyfriend, bursts in yelling at Aly about her singing disrupting his watching TV. When Markie stands up for his sister and T.J. threatens to hit him, Aly blocks his way and she's bruised as he grabs and slaps her. Their mother, KAREN, finally gets him out of the room, placating him by saying the children will be good, as if they did something wrong.

Walking Markie to his school bus, Aly in another school, she takes Markie in the local convenience store of MR. RODRIQUEZ to buy Markie his lunch. As she pays with her scant change, Mr. Rodriguez asks Aly what she's getting for lunch and she claims she isn't hungry. When he tells her to go get something for herself, she tells him she has no more money. He makes her get a lunch for herself along with chocolate milks and healthy deserts for her and Markie, and when she tells him she'll pay him when she has money, he gives her back the change she gave him and tells them they don't need money in his store, Aly having to swallow her tears before she's able to thank him.

Aly's bruises are noticed at school by her gym teacher who knows that she and her brother had been in foster homes before. Aly lies about how she got the bruises, determined she and Markie never be split up again, the teacher unconvinced by her story.

Walking home from school, Aly hears a twenty-three-year-old musician, TODD, playing in his upstairs window on an alley and impulsively she sings along. Astonished by her voice, Todd tries to get downstairs to meet her, but Aly runs off to the one place of peace and beauty in her life, a graveyard between her run-down neighborhood and the stately homes beyond. She visits with her best friend Amelia, an angel statue at the grave of a girl who died three years earlier when just Aly's age. Aly tells Amelia she doesn't know what came over her to sing loudly like that to the boy's music, but he seemed to like it and she loves singing, lying back to sing for Amelia, her beautiful voice filling the sky.

Her singing carries over into the opening of the next scene where Todd meets his band and tells them of the wondrous singing of the young girl who vanished, the most beautiful he's ever heard, maybe the most beautiful anyone's ever heard, determined to discover who she is.

Aly comes home to have T.J. yell at her about the authorities coming to investigate them and she's alarmed he may attack her again, her mother intervening. Aly tells Markie they have to lie about what happened so they're not split up. He doesn't like it but will do it.

Like catching a mouse with cheese, Todd plays again from his window at the same time of day that Aly appeared. Passing by, Aly hears his playing and almost walks on, but she can't resist, singing along again. Using a tape recorder to make her think he's still playing, Todd rushes down and surprises her, exclaiming over her voice. He walks with her, saying her voice can make her rich and famous, but she won't give him much more info than her first name though she does explain she sings show tunes because her mother loves musical movies, fleeing again when he goes into Mr. Rodriguez's store to get a pen and paper to give her his number.

Aly finds LINDA from Human Services at their apartment investigating her bruises, Aly repeating her lies about how it happened, Linda not convinced either. Worrying with Markie about what might happen, she begins singing along to a song with lyrics that suddenly make her think perhaps things can be better.

She gathers her courage and seeks out Todd who's thrilled to see her and puts her at ease. Her singing captivates him as he plays and records her, the scene dissolving into Aly, beautiful in her gown, singing with an orchestra in a concert hall to a packed house, apparently just her dream. He tells her he'll play the tape for his professor at the Music Institute, a power in the music industry who he's sure will want to meet her.

Aly goes back up through the scraggly woods to the graveyard to tell Amelia all about these good things happening for her. Mr. Rodriguez and his wife, tending the grave of a relative, find her singing to Amelia and give her a ride home, buying sandwiches on the way for her and Markie.

Todd's professor, BRIAN, a mature, wealthy man with many connections in the music world, is amazed by the tape of Aly's singing and says he'll take it with him on his trip to Disney in Hollywood to play it for them.

Aly comes home with the sandwiches from Mr. Rodriguez and T.J. yells at her about the investigation continuing as if it's her fault. Her mother insists she keep lying about what happened which disgusts Aly though she'll do it to keep her and Markie together. When her mother tells her things will get better, Aly says they might, that it was good she loved those movies, her mother not knowing what she means.

Without telling anyone in her family, Aly does her first live event with Todd and his band at a small club and everyone realizes they're hearing a voice for the ages.

Just as things are looking up in her secret career, T.J. and Karen spirit them all away to a trailer in the country to avoid the authorities. Todd desperately tries to locate them without success, meeting Linda Weston at the apartment as she's also looking for them.

Everything changes when a drunken T.J. throws Markie, breaking his arm and threatening to beat him further, only to have Aly clobber T.J. and escape with Markie in the car of T.J.'s brother. A neighbor sees the ruckus and the young girl driving away with her injured and crying brother, and calls the police.

Aly, driving for the first time, so carefully and slowly, stops on the highway for the police car that comes up behind them and tells the trooper what's happened, the trooper telling them they got the call and help is already on the way. When he asks Aly if she's okay, the pain she's been holding back for so long bursts in a flood of tears, Aly clinging to the trooper who holds and comforts her, saying, "You're safe now. Don't cry. You're safe. You're safe."

Aly, Todd and Linda from Human Services visit Markie recovering in the hospital, Todd glad that Aly and Markie have escaped their dangerous home life. He tells her that Brian played the tape for Disney who was enthusiastic and Brian wants her to make an audition tape and she's on her way to fame and wealth. Aly says she'd like to repay people who were kind to her including Mr. Rodriguez, mentioning how he drove her home from her friend's Amelia's and bought her and Markie sandwiches. Still, Aly is a bit despondent as she and Markie have been split up, Aly in a group home with other girls, Markie in another house. Aly doubts that at their ages they'll ever get foster parents to keep them together.

Brian and Todd make the audition video of Aly, her singing staggering them.

Todd is turned down as a foster parent and goes to Aly's group home to tell her, meeting her new friend, DANI, Aly unsurprised by his bad news.

Brian asks his wife, PAULINE, about taking in Aly and Markie. But Pauline is still grieving over the death of their young daughter three years earlier and feels scared about making herself vulnerable again, telling her husband, "If we had children here, I'd be terrified every moment." He asks that she consider it.

As Todd and Brian are in New York getting a top agent to agree to sign Aly, she sneaks out of her group home and gets Markie from his house and they run away, Aly telling Markie her unlikely plan to get them to Orlando, Florida, with money Dani has given her. Markie hopes they can go to Disneyland, but Aly knows it's going to be hard.

Todd and Brian hear the news of their disappearance and rush back, finding that a suspicious bus clerk wrecked Aly's plan to get to Florida. They start searching desperately and learn from Mr. Rodriguez that the friend Amelia who Aly mentioned to Todd is actually an angel statue at the grave of a young girl in the local cemetery. Brian nearly collapses, realizing that Aly's friend Amelia is his young daughter who died. They don't find the children at Amelia's grave, Todd asking Brian if he needs a moment alone. But Brian looks about and says, "Her refuge was this graveyard – her best friend a stone statue. I want to find this living angel."

As they're about to leave to continue their search, they suddenly hear Aly's beautiful singing and follow her voice to where she and Markie are camped in the nearby woods.

Aly is resigned to her and Markie going back to their separate foster homes, calling it jail, but Brian makes a private call before he drives everyone to his nearby house. His wife Pauline greets the children and, getting down before them and holding their hands, explains

that when they're comfortable with it, ready and it feels natural, "I want you to call me Mom – because this is your new home. You're going to live here with us until you go off to college."

The children are stunned and Aly is apprehensive, asking if they're sure, Pauline saying, "We couldn't be surer. You both are home right now, together, for as long as you need us – forever, I hope." Markie tells his sister, "Oh, Aly. You did it," and they hug. In the next instant, Aly gives Pauline her life back by truly hugging her and calling her Mom. Pauline holds her so tightly Aly has to bite her lip. Markie exclaims "This is better than Florida!" making them all laugh and embrace.

What appeared to be just a hopeful dream when Aly first sang for Todd has come true. Aly is beautiful in a gorgeous gown, singing on an elaborately dressed stage with a full orchestra that includes Todd playing guitar, finishing with a flourish to receive an enthusiastic standing ovation in the packed concert hall, Aly charmingly acknowledging everyone. Clapping wildly from front center are those who helped Aly reach her new life: her powerful New York agent; Linda from Human Services; Pauline and Brian flanking Markie in a suit and tie; her friend Dani from the group home who helped her sneak away; and Mrs. and Mr. Rodriguez. Aly blows Markie a kiss then looks over at Todd who looks at her wistfully thinking of all that's happened, Aly having to bow to the audience to cover her emotion.

Returning to their home, before they get out of the car, Pauline tells the children that they've hired a new housekeeper who will live with them if Aly and Markie approve of her. They find waiting for them their mother Karen with a much improved appearance. She cries as she holds her children and apologizes. Finally, Aly kisses Pauline, Brian and Todd, thanks

them all with gratitude, and says, "I'm happy, truly happy. And when I'm happy..." She sings, "more beautifully than anyone has ever sung."