FADE IN:

1 EXT. PENNSYLVANIA COUNTRYSIDE - LONG SHOT - DAY

of an empty stretch of land parted down the middle by railroad tracks. An Amtrak Commuter crests the horizon, heads TOWARD us. As it gets CLOSER, we GO IN TIGHTER to see --

2 FACE OF SARA JOHNSON

17, pressed at one of its windows.

3 REVERSE ANGLE - REFLECTION IN TRAIN'S WINDOW - SARA'S FACE

distant and lovely and sad. SUPERIMPOSED against an endless stream of sky and trees. The train speeds up and SARA's face flies by, disappearing FROM FRAME.
A zaftig BLACK WOMAN clumsily negotiates the aisle. Stops at the first of a few empty seats left in the car.

WOMAN
This seat taken?

ANGLE ON SARA
looking up, around. She shakes her head, clears her backpack and magazines from the seat beside her. The Woman drops down, settles in. A long silence. The Woman glances at the American Ballet magazine on Sara's lap. Tries to make conversation.

WOMAN
I love ballet. Never had the body for it. Do you dance?

Sara folds her arms, turns away mumbling under breath.

SARA
Used to.

Sara gazes out the window. The world outside begins to dissolve melting into images from another time, another place. Her eyes stare blankly OUT AT us, blinded by her memories.

2.

5 FLASHBACK - INT. AUDITORIUM - KINDERGARTEN RECITAL - DAY 5

A stage full of five-year-olds in tights and tutus. A little girl performs center stage. She's remarkably poised, remarkably good. CAMERA PANS TO the audience. A woman in an Irish clover necklace springs to her feet clapping loudly. The little girl's eyes catch the glint of the necklace's gold. Mommy. She flashes a megawatt smile, ends the dance with an unscripted bow, as we...

DISSOLVE TO:

6 INT. BALLET CLASS - EVENING (FIVE YEARS LATER)

Young Sara, lithe and earnest, dances. A budding beauty blessed with long limbs and natural grace, she makes it look easy. Gliding past the envious stares of classmates, she scans the hall for a glint of gold.
Finds it in the back of the room where her mother, Glynn, stands watching her. Their eyes connect with mutual smiles and those smiles CARRY us TO:

7    INT. SARA'S EXETER HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

A pair of flexing feet in ballet slippers on a hardwood floor. PAN UP and PULL BACK to reveal Sara at 17, dancing in the space opened up by cornered furniture and rolled up rugs. As Glynn looks on, Sara completes the routine with a pirouette. She spins out of it with a preoccupied frown on her face.

GLYNN
What's the matter? It was good.

SARA
(checks her stance in mirror)
Everybody there's going to be good, Mom. I have to be better.
(then, beginning again)
My knees still knock when I do my free form. Did you notice that?

GLYNN
I noticed that it was fine.

SARA
(escalating frustration)
It's not supposed to be fine. It's supposed to be special.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

7    CONTINUED:

SARA (CONT'D)
And it just lays there, it doesn't do anything. I bet they notice that. That it doesn't do anything. That I don't do anything special enough to get in.

GLYNN
Sara. You'll get in.
SARA
Don't lie because you love me. My free form sucks.

GLYNN
(giving up that battle)

Sara flops down on the sofa beside her. Closes her eyes. Glynn removes the clover chain from her neck, fastens it around Sara's.

GLYNN
For luck tomorrow. Not that you'll need it. You dance like an angel.

The necklace is Glynn's talisman. Sara knows what it means to her. She throws her arms around Glynn, holds onto her tightly.

SARA
I love the necklace but you're still the best luck I'll ever have.

Glynn, not one to choke up, chokes up. They cling to each other.

8 INT. AMTRAK TRAIN (MOVING) - ON SARA - DUSK (PRESENT) 8

In the blink of her eyes, the memory fades. She pulls the window shade, shifts in her seat. Her fingers travel to the clover necklace at her throat. Linger. The Woman regards her.

WOMAN
Nice... the necklace.

(CONTINUED)

4.

8 CONTINUED: 8

SARA
Oh. It's a good luck charm.
Doesn't always work.

The Woman's wearing a crucifix. She indicates it. Smiles.

WOMAN

Mine either.

---

FLASHBACK - INT./EXT. BUS/RURAL ROAD - MORNING

A sea of young white faces. A jock entertains the troops with two straws up his nose. Sara sits next to her best friend, LINDSAY, 17. Lindsay, chomping on a wad of gum, turns from the jock to Sara with a bubble in bloom, bursts it with her teeth.

LINDSAY

Wanna pray? You're leaving for Philly after first period. I won't see you. We should pray.

SARA

(stupefied)

Lindsay... no. Not here.

Lindsay grabs Sara's hand and bows her head. Sara, embarrassed, aligns her head with Lindsay's. She's praying nobody sees them.

LINDSAY

'Awesome, Father, S.J. auditions today. She's ready for them. Please make them ready for her. Even if she screws up. Thanks. Amen.'

(sure shrug; another bubble)

God's gotten me outta all kinds of shit. He oughta be able to get you into Juilliard.

---

EXT. EXETER SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL - LATER THAT MORNING

Sara exits with a bouquet of roses, takes the steps two and three at a time. Glynn's waiting in a flower van at the curb.

---

INT./EXT. FLOWER VAN (DRIVING)/RESIDENTIAL STREETS
Sara and Glynn. The back of the van is filled with flower arrangements. Glynn takes note of the roses in Sara's hand.

**GLYNN**
Where'd you get those, traitor?

**SARA**
Ellison -- Mr. Ellison. He actually told me to break a leg.

**GLYNN**
Roses from the principal, even droopy, out-of-season yellow ones, is beyond cool, kiddo. You're definitely movin' up in the world.

Sara looks through the windshield. It's starting to drizzle.

**SARA**
Know what would be great? If you didn't drop me off at the bus station. If we just kept going until we get to Philly.

**GLYNN**
Ruin everyone's Valentine's Day and not have a shop when I get back. That's your definition of great? I can see the headline now: 'Starving Artist Kills Unfit Mother.'

(gently)
Sweetheart, we talked about this. I'll get there as soon as I can.

Sara looks at her and Glynn instantly feels guilty.

**SARA**
Right. This is the hardest, most important day of my life and all you can do is get there as soon as you can. Thanks, Mom.

12   EXT. GREYHOUND BUS STATION (READING, PA) - 12
CONTINUOUS ACTION

Glynn pulls the van into the parking lot. Smiles at Sara. Sara doesn't smile back. She's too angry. Too
scared.

(CONTINUED)

6.

12 CONTINUED:

SARA
So I guess I'll see you later.

GLYNN
I won't miss your audition, Sara. I'll be there, okay? If I have to swim the Susquehanna, I'll be there.

SARA
Swim? You can't swim, Mom.

GLYNN
I'll float then.

A moment. They look at each other. Sara finally smiles. They embrace and she hops out the van. Glynn calls after her.

GLYNN
Hey... Happy Valentine's Day.

13 INT. AMTRAK TRAIN (MOVING) - ON SARA - NIGHT (PRESENT)

Feigning sleep. From the corner of her eye, she watches the Woman beside her flip through the American Ballet Magazine. We move back in time through their pages.

14 FLASHBACK - INT. UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Sara, in costume, flips through a magazine. She taps her toes, checks her watch. A phalanx of parents and dancers are clustered around a sign posted on the door: JUILLIARD SCHOOL OF DANCE AUDITIONS. Sara stares at it. Re-checks her watch. An official with a clipboard walks toward her. Where's her mother?

15 INT. UNIV. OF PENNSYLVANIA - STAGE/AUDITORIUM - MOMENTS LATER
Sara on stage. She looks past a row of Juilliard JUDGES into the audience. No glint of gold. MOZART'S "Elvira Madigan" (Andante) CUES UP. Sara begins her technical. She transforms her nervousness into a notable, powerful performance. The Judges are mutely but clearly impressed. One of them looks directly at her.

(CONTINUED)

15 CONTINUED:

JUDGE
Is there anything you'd like to share about your free form before you begin? A motif... a theme?

Sara's stomach drops to her feet. Her mother's not there and her free form sucks and she doesn't have a theme. Shit!

SARA
Well, it's um, pretty self-explanatory. The theme.

The Judges exchange a look. New MUSIC CUES UP. Some driving, CLASSICAL NUMBER. Sara tries to elevate her body above the music, but she's nervous, unsure on her feet. She keeps glancing in the back of the auditorium for Glynn. Searching for her port in the storm. Wondering where her mother is and knowing how badly she's dancing. Knowing but somehow continuing, stumbling, recovering, and finally finishing with those damned knocking knees. The Judges, eyes like stones, perfunctorily nod. Their equivalent of maybe next year. Sara chokes two words out...

SARA
Thank you.

16 INT. AUDITORIUM - BACKSTAGE

... Rushes backstage. Fighting tears, she hurries past waiting dancers angrily unhooking the clover leaf chain from her neck.

17 INT. DRESSING ROOM - DAY

Sara in street clothes. Cramming her ballet gear into a
duffle bag when the official (of the clipboard) approaches her. She touches Sara's shoulder gently. Says something we do not hear.

18 INT. OFFICE (UNIV. OF PA) - CONTINUOUS ACTION

SHOOTING THROUGH office window. A state trooper in a rain slicker offers Sara a chair. She sits. The trooper talks. As he does, dread and disbelief spread over Sara's face. She shakes her head, attempts to stand. Her legs buckle beneath her. The trooper and the official catch her as she falls.

8.

19 EXT. AMTRAK TRAIN - NIGHT (PRESENT)

A glowing moon in a clear, star-specked sky.

20 TRAIN

CHUGS toward Baltimore's Penn Station, which is visible in the f.g.

21 EXT. PENNSYLVANIA TURNPIKE - INTERCUT - MORNING

A torrential rain. A flower van -- Glynn's van -- caught in it. SHOOTING THROUGH the driver's side window, we can see Glynn's face, intense and determined, squinting through the downpour.

22 TRAIN'S WHEELS

GRINDING.

23 VAN'S WHEELS

Hydro-planing, slip-sliding.

24 TRAIN

It's SQUEAL OF BRAKES as it maneuvers into the station.

25 VAN
The SQUEAL of its BRAKES as Glynn loses control and smashes into the back of the eighteen wheeler in front of her.

26 

TRAIN

across space and time, the SOUND OF SQUEALING BRAKES commingle as the Amtrak Commuter pulls into Penn Station.

27 

INT. AMTRAK TRAIN - NIGHT

Sara. Holding her breath, clenching her fists. Waiting for the sound to stop, oblivious to the stare of the Woman beside her.

9.

28 

EXT. PENN STATION (BALTIMORE) - PLATFORM - NIGHT

ROY JOHNSON, 37, a handsome, laconic man of uncertain style, takes a last drag from his cigarette, drops and stomps it. Passengers disembark from the train. Roy searches their faces. They all look like strangers.

29 

EXT. AMTRAK TRAIN - SAME TIME

A conductor helps Sara to the platform. Steam from the train's engine is sucked into the fog. She walks through it. Sees him. They see each other. Roy weakly waves. Walks toward her. Sara watches his bow legs stiffly advance. She wants to run. Can't.

ROY

Hi.

SARA

Hi.

ROY

Have a good ride?

Sara self-consciously tucks her hair behind an ear.

SARA

Slept through most of it.

A beat. Roy looks at her.

ROY
Guess you got stuff. Baggage.

SARA
Two suitcases. One big one.

ROY
Looks like they're unloading.
-- You hungry? We can stop somewhere if you want.

SARA
I'm kinda tired.

Roy takes her backpack. They walk.

30 INT./EXT. ROY'S PICKUP/STREET - SARA AND ROY - NIGHT

A heavy silence. Roy starts to turn on the radio, stops himself. He lights a cigarette, cracks the window.

(CONTINUED)

10.

30 CONTINUED:

ROY
I didn't like leavin' you so soon after the funeral. I wouldn't have if you hadn't asked me to go. I mean, I could've hung around. Helped you say good-bye. That's what you were doin', wasn't it?

SARA
Uh-huh.

Roy takes another drag, nods thoughtfully to himself.

ROY
That's what I figured you were doin'.

Sara peers out the windshield. Baltimore City. The neighborhoods are changing. The streets are getting progressively gritty and dirty. It surprises her. It worries her. Roy worries her.

ROY
Look. Sara. I feel bad too. I mean, we both got hit by the same
bolt of lightning. You don't have to pretend this is easy.

(off nothing)
Everything's upside down right now but don't worry. We'll work this bachelor-father thing out. Hell, it ain't like we're movin' in with strangers. We got a pretty good idea about each other, right?

Sara looks askance at him, her expression indicating otherwise. A moment. Roy's too new at this to hold up both ends of the conversation. The silence deepens. Roy switches on the radio.

31 EXT. BOND STREET (SOUTH BALTIMORE) - NIGHT

Roy's truck pulls up to a string of disrepaired rowhouses with pristine white marble steps. He and Sara each lug a suitcase from the truck. Her eyes wander up and down the street. They're on the fringes of a ghetto. A few people roost on their stoops, hang on the corners. All of them have black faces.

SARA
Thought you were moving to Fells Point.

ROY
Fell through.

32 INT. ROY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The second floor of a two-story house has been turned into a one-bedroom studio. A partition separates the living area from the bedroom. Sara walks past a collection of saxophones and several framed pictures of herself. Aside from the saxophones and the pictures, there's hardly any furniture. Roy lights a cigarette.

ROY
Not much of what you're used to. But the water's hot and the fridge is full. And I made room in the closets for you. Girl's gotta have closets, right? You even get your own bed. I'll crash on the couch.
SARA
You bought a bed?

ROY
(slight bow)
Pardon me. Your own futon. Check it out. On the other side.

Suitcase in hand, Sara walks around the partition. Her "room" is an old futon, an ancient set of drawers. She stands in the middle of nothing, wanting something to do. She removes framed photos of Glynn from her backpack, places them around the room.

33 INT. ROY'S APARTMENT - LIVING AREA - MINUTES LATER

Sara walks in. Doesn't see Roy. Calls out.

SARA
Do you have a phone?

Roy emerges from the bathroom drying his hands, walks past her.

ROY
Of course I have a phone.

SARA
You didn't at the last place. The last place I saw anyway.

ROY
Things change. You've changed. You grew up on me. Overnight.

(CONTINUED)

12.

33 CONTINUED:

SARA
Over the summer. You blew me off for some gig on the road, remember?
(before he can respond)
Can I call Lindsay? Let her know I got here alright.

ROY
Are you alright, Sara?
  (off the scowl
   in her eyes)
I just wanna know how you feel.

  SARA
I feel fine. I feel like calling
Lindsay.

She's a wall. A brick wall. Roy's head aches from
knocking into it. He goes to the couch. Drops down.
Mutters at her.

  ROY
Phone's in the kitchen. Knock
yourself out.

34  INT. SARA'S ROOM/BATHROOM - LATE THAT NIGHT

Sara lying in bed... wide awake... her stiff upper lip
quivering. She slips out of bed, creeps on tiptoes into
the bathroom. Closes the door oh-so-quietly behind her.
She flips on the light, crosses to the sink, turns on
both faucets. As the water flows and the PIPES RATTLE,
the brick wall shatters. Sara crumbles to the floor.
Buries her head in her arms. Cries like a baby.

35  INT./EXT. ROY'S PICKUP (SOUTH BALTIMORE) -
    NEXT MORNING

Roy and Sara. Barreling through the south end, tongues
stuck in gear. A Pop-Tart grows cold on Sara's lap.
Then, finally.

  SARA
I can take the school bus.
Tomorrow.

  ROY
School bus? That's the other Oz,
Dorothy. Patterson kids ride the
city Metro. Or walk.

(CONTINUED)

13.

35  CONTINUED:

  SARA
Well, I know how to do both.

ROY

Not around here you don't. Not until you get the hang of things.

Sara looks out the window at a full-fledged ghetto. It's all too obvious, the hang of things. Roy glances over at her.

ROY

I called about your transcripts. You're all set. Patterson's got a pretty good Humanities program. No ballet, but we can find a studio someplace close for after school --

SARA

-- I don't think I'll have time. I have to study, I'll be busy.

Roy can hear the lie behind her words. He lights a cigarette, cracks the window. He wants to say the right thing.

ROY

Good idea. Take a break. Not too long a break though. You're a dancer. You should dance. Stay on top of your art.

SARA

Like you stay on top of yours?

ROY

Maybe I ain't playin' no grand ballrooms or fancy jazz festivals, but I'm playing.

SARA

(unconvincingly)
I didn't mean it like that.

ROY

S'alright. Hell, I wish I had half the time I wasted gettin' wasted. But those days are over. You'll see. I got my life on track.
Formidably large and surprisingly well-kept, Patterson serves the nearby, predominantly black O'Donnell Heights Projects. Kids malinger outside on the front steps and lawn.

Roy's pickup pulls in. Roy CUTS the ENGINE. Sara looks at him. Or through him. She won't let his eyes connect.

SARA
You don't have to go in with me.
Since I'm all set. I mean, I have done this before. Gone to school.
I'll be fine. I am fine. Really.

Roy regards her with weary resignation. Sara climbs out. He calls after her.

ROY
-- Pick you up. Three-thirty.

SARA
(over a shoulder)
Yeah. Sure. Whatever.

Sara moving TOWARD us PAST a floating mosaic of black faces. This is a near out-of-body experience for her. She walks like a well-rehearsed soldier in a stiff straight line to the school's entrance. It's clogged with students. Inside the doorway, two security guards flank a metal detector. When it's Sara's turn to pass through, one of the guards grabs her backpack and wordlessly begins searching it. He hands it back to her on the other side of the detector where Sara stands obtusely and mutely amazed.

THROUGH a window, Sara seated across from an ADMINISTRATOR. We PUSH IN.

ADMINISTRATOR
... It's no fun being uprooted in
the middle of your senior year.
We realize that and we'll do what
we can to help with the
transition.

(CONTINUED)

15.

39  CONTINUED:
39

There's a KNOCK at door. MRS. GWYNN, the Guidance
Counselor, steps in. The Administrator introduces her to
Sara. Sara regards Mrs. Gwynn with polite petulance.

MRS. GWYNN
Any questions? Concerns?

SARA
About school? No. Not really.

MRS. GWYNN
Not even about Baltimore?

SARA
I'm not gonna be here that long.
Besides, it's just a city, right?

Mrs. Gwynn looks at her squarely. But the brick wall
doesn't move an inch. Sara feels too safe behind it.

40  INT. HALLWAY - MORNING
40

Clutching new textbooks, Sara starts down the hallway.
She's hoping nothing in her face reveals the rising panic
in her heart. She's surrounded. Alone. Every inch of
her feels afraid.

SARA'S POV

as she MOVES FORWARD. A crush of KIDS -- mostly black
with a sprinkling of white and Latino faces thrown in.
Kids like her. Only they don't dress like her. They
dress like commercials for Tommy Hilfiger and Calvin
Klein. And they definitely don't sound like her...

TEENAGER #1

Yo, man, check it, the
muthafuckers wasn't playin', they was jackin'. Ten rides in five days. For real.

TEENAGER #2
Fools got caught for real too.
Ten years in five days. Stall that shit!

Sara walks on, taking this netherworld in, eavesdropping on other conversations. It's not just the words. It's how they say them: Loud. Matter-of-fact. Cool. A cooler cool. Like they breathe static electricity.

(CONTINUED)

40   CONTINUED:
That's it! The entire student body is energized. Sara's thoughts are jolted by two black girls squeezing by. One clips Sara's elbow as she passes, knocking it against a locker. They keep going as if they don't see her. No one seems to see her. Welcome to mass avoidance at Patterson High.

41   AT SARA'S LOCKER    - LATER
Sara's back is to a black girl striding purposefully toward her. CHENILLE -- tall, pretty, with about a million braids in her hair -- swoops Sara's backpack from the floor. Thrusts it at her.

CHENILLE
That's how easy it is to give to charity around here. Don't put your shit on the floor.

SARA
(cautions a smile)
Thanks.

She closes her locker, starts to say something else. She's eager to make a friend. One friend. But Chenille's gone.
Sara memorizes the schedule of classes in her hand. She passes a clutch of students who surround a kid in the middle like a horseshoe. Sara gets a fleeting glimpse of him.

SARA'S POV - PATRICK REYNOLDS

Eye candy: Tall. Dark. Heartbreakingly handsome. If Patterson were a monarchy, Patrick would be king. He sure holds court like one, turning on his dazzling smile and abundant charm for the crowd. One gets the sense that the All-American Home Boy is almost as enraptured with himself as the sycophants around him.

INT. JURASINSKI'S CLASSROOM - MORNING

The room's seen better days. Probably better teachers too. MR. JURASINSKI looks out at his American Literature class and sees nothing but tenure.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JURASINSKI

In Cold Blood represents a turning point in our country's literature.
Take the cap off and tell me why that is, Mr. Ricard.

WIDER to include the class. FAVOR "SNOOKIE" RICARD. We recognize him from the hallway kids wrapped up in Patrick. Snookie, a flagrant Patrick wannabe, sits next to him now. He removes his baseball cap. Thoughtfully twirls it on a finger. He truly believes he's being profound.

SNOOKIE

Gay rights. That Compote dude who wrote it? Sweet tooth. Straight-up fag, Mr. J.

JURASINSKI
Thank you, Mr. Ricard. Your genius grant is in the mail. Anyone else?

No volunteers. Jurasinski looks for someone to put on the spot. Sees the new girl in a back corner. Johnson. He gets into her line of sight. The class shifts in their seats, peeping her.

**JURASINSKI**

Ms... Johnson. You can catch up later. If this is over your head.

Everyone looks at her. The way kids look at new kids.

**SARA**

It's a non-fiction novel. The first of its kind. Capote mixed true events with things he couldn't know, so he made them up.

A small murmur goes up. Over this, the voice of a dissenter.

**PATRICK (O.S.)**

White folks back then felt safe. Capote scared 'em. He took hard core crime out the ghetto and dropped it in America's back yard. That's what makes the book special.

(CONTINUED)

---

Sara cranes to see him. God. It's pretty-boy. He's sitting on the other side of the classroom. Looking... pretty. Looking at her. He has nice eyes. Not that she noticed.

**SARA**

Yeah. That is part of it.

**PATRICK**

That's all of it. Capote wasn't first. Richard Wright and James Baldwin did the same thing.
Wasn't nobody tryin' to read them though.

SARA
Lots of people read them.

A defensive save. Patrick sees right through it.

PATRICK

SNOOKIE
Mr. J.! Girl needs to bone up. Give her a pass to the lib'ary.

The room erupts in laughter.

ON SARA
flushed in the face. Embarrassed. Pissed.

ANGLE WIDENS as Jurasinski quiets the class. Then.

JURASINSKI
She can have your pass, Mr. Ricard. Since you obviously never use it.

44 INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE OF CAFETERIA - NOON
44
Lunchtime. PICK UP Sara among a cattle drive of boisterous students.

45 CAFETERIA - FOOD LINE - LATER
45
Hundreds of voices unleashed in pure, unadulterated teenage cacophony. Sara's in a queue of kids, working her way down the line.

(CONTINUED)

19.

45 CONTINUED:
She's as invisible and anonymous as ever. CAMERA TRACKS
her FROM the line, TO the cashier, INTO the heart of the dining hall. She stands with a food tray, looking for a place to sit.

HER POV

Table cliques of the cafeteria.

SERIES OF SWEEPING SHOTS

46 JOCK TABLE

Two tables pushed together. Full.

47 NERD TABLE

Barely, pathetically populated but surprisingly diverse.

48 HIP-HOP TABLE

Loud, overflowing, fun. King Patrick and his loyal subjects horse around.

49 POPULAR TABLE

Over which a glacial beauty we will come to know as NIKKI DAVIS presides. Girls only.

50 WHITE TABLE

Notable for its glaring absence of color. A girl we will come to know as TONI sits there.

And then PUSHING IN ON --

51 CHENILLE'S TABLE

She's there with a group of girls who eschew pretense. They, like Chenille, are rugged and regular. They know who they are.

END OF SERIES OF SWEEPING SHOTS.
eyeing Chenille's table. Screwing up courage as she approaches it. She gets there but two black girls are faster. They sit down in the only empty seats. Sara backs off, invisible again.

ON CHENILLE
glimpsing Sara from the corner of her eye as Sara walks away.

53 AT NERDS' TABLE - LATER

Time has passed. The cafeteria is half as full, half as noisy. Sara sits among the NERDS, a friendly if verbose group. She's trying to eat but a snooze button is talking her to death...

WONK
... I know you're new to the table, but think about it. We're the Y2K generation and nobody takes us seriously. We don't take ourselves seriously. Just look around. Half the student body is D.O.A. -- and that's from the neck up, Clara.

SARA
Sara. It's Sara.

CHENILLE (O.S.)
Yeah. It's Sara. And you're boring her from the ears down.

Sara looks up, surprised to see Chenille standing there. She flashes a knowing smile at her, indicates Sara's tray.

CHENILLE
You finished?

Sara leaps up with a quick, grateful nod. Beats a hasty retreat from the table. As she and Chenille walk through the cafeteria, Sara shudders with relief. She feels rescued.
(CONTINUED)

21.

53 CONTINUED:

53

CHENILLE

(laughs)
Gotta watch where you sit, girl.
And it's Chenille. But you're
still welcome. Let's catch some
air before the bell rings.

54 EXT. QUAD - MOMENTS LATER

54

Sara follows Chenille into the "QUAD," four squared off
sections outside the cafeteria. There are a few dry-
rotted picnic tables scattered around. Other kids -- and
they run the gamut -- are seen in clots, sneaking
smokes... horsing around... making out.

SARA'S POV - KIDS OF QUAD

And OVER the sound of HIP-HOP MUSIC, a pair of feet.
Moving. Dancing. CAMERA PANS UP to reveal Nikki. She's
demonstrating some moves to the girls from the popular
table. Nikki's dancing her ass off, showing off.

BACK TO SCENE

SARA

What's it called? What she's
doing?

CHENILLE

A dance.

SARA

(a look; knows that)
No, I mean... the step, the...

She trails off as she catches someone in the corner of
her eye. She turns away from Chenille, gradually
focusing on --
PATRICK

playing cards with Snookie at one of the picnic tables. He glances up to see Sara. Glowering at him. He grins.

Sara rolls her eyes, turns away. Mutters loudly to herself.

SARA

Asshole.

(CONTINUED)

22.

(54 CONTINUED: 54)

CHENILLE

Asshole beaucoup. In this crowd, you gotta be more specific.

SARA

(covertly indicates Patrick)

He's in one of my classes. Thinks he's so... smart. So cute.

CHENILLE

I don't know about cute but he is smart. Real smart. Real trip, too.

SARA

So you know him?

CHENILLE

Patrick Reynolds? Hell yeah, I know him. He's my brother.

Chenille waits for Sara to swallow her tongue. Enjoys a laugh.

ANGLE SHIFTS TO PATRICK

as Nikki approaches him. Sexy, standoffish and conceited, she's the stuff of wet dreams and futile longing. She sits down next to Patrick. Close to him. Snookie watches her, much amused.

NIKKI
You comin' tonight?

Patrick keeps playing his hand. Responds very coolly.

**PATRICK**

Gotta work.

**NIKKI**

You already skipped three meetings.

(as he's ignoring her)

Is it because of me? Everybody on the committee thinks it's because of me. Us.

(infuriated by his silence)

Look, Patrick. Regardless.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

54  CONTINUED:  54

**NIKKI (CONT'D)**

You're in charge of the music.

I'm in charge of the prom. So show up. Don't make me fire your ass.

Fighting words. Snookie holds his breath. Patrick throws out a card, turns slowly to Nikki with a withering stare in his eyes.

**PATRICK**

You already fired my ass, Nikki.


She stalks off. Snookie oogles her departure, peers at Patrick, about to say something. Patrick cuts him off, indicates cards.

**PATRICK**

Hit me and shut the hell up.

**SNOOKIE**

I'ma shut up... after I say it been real frigid 'round here since y'all broke up. 'Specially since she broke up with you. That was
harsh, way she canceled your ass
like a stamp for that Howard U
dude. But their shit's over. Now
might be the time to forget
mistakes that was made. Shoot.
You been with the girl since ninth
grade.

PATRICK
Why you sweatin' me, Snookie?

SNOOKIE
(pounding his heart)
'Cause I'm about you, man. I want
a happy ending. Aww, shit. Tuck
an' duck. Here he comes. The
hood of the 'hood, up to no good.

THEIR POV

MALAKAI RHINEHART, 17, heading toward them. Powerfully
built and edgy with insolence, Malakai is like a tightly-
wound coil -- you never know when he's going to snap.
ANGLE WIDENS and we see Patrick is happy to see him. He
and Malakai grin at each other. Knock handshakes.

(CONTINUED)

MALAKAI
Medicine man...

SNOOKIE
(interjecting himself)
Did I tell you, Malakai, man, how
chill it is to have you back?
We ain't been bad without cha.

MALAKAI
Shut the fuck up and step your
lame ass off, Snookie. You heard
me. Space.

Snookie haughtily, comedically obliges.        A moment.

PATRICK
What happened to you at lunch,
MAN?

MALAKAI

Business.

Short-hand. Patrick understands it, nods. Malakai slips the cigarette from behind his ear, openly lights and starts smoking it. CAMERA TRACKS them walking back toward Patterson.

PATRICK

So you're hangin' in, man? Feelin' strong about being back?

MALAKAI

Not at this motherfucker. Out a week and where am I? Fucking home sweet high school. Jail away from jail. You can have it.

PATRICK

You gonna stay though. Right?

MALAKAI

Judge says it's school or JuVee and I sure as hell ain't goin' back there. Shit. I never knew a year could be such a long time.

A flash of commiseration, of guilt, crosses Patrick's face. They're at the doors now. Most of the kids have gone. Malakai puts his cigarette out on the floor as they step in.

(CONTINUED)
Sara exits with Chenille. A CAR HORN starts to blare. Both of them ignore it. But it goes on like a musical number. Sara gets a sinking feeling that drops like a stone when she looks across the street. Roy's parked at the curb, waiting for her. She rolls her eyes and he HONKS AGAIN. Then he waves at her. Waves! Chenille looks at Sara. Then at Roy.

CHENILLE
That's your old man? Now he's cute.

SARA
He's embarrassing.

CHENILLE
(laughs)
Yeah. He is. For you.

56 INT./EXT. ROY'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS ACTION

Sara climbs in, slams the door. Roy looks over at her, unaware of how annoyed she is with him. She's a clenched fist inside.

ROY
How'd it go?

SARA
Fine.
(as he pulls off)
Tomorrow I catch the bus.

57 INT. ROY'S APARTMENT - SARA'S "ROOM" - NIGHT

Sara's moving the partition around, trying to make her room more like a room. Trying to build another wall between her and Roy.

(CONTINUED)

26.

57 CONTINUED:

57

ROY (O.S.)
Hey, Sara. C'mere a minute.
Sara lets out a heavy sigh. What does he want?

SARA
What?

ROY (O.S.)
Just come here.

She walks into the kitchen. Roy's in front of the open freezer door. Grinning from ear to ear. He motions her over. Sara crosses to the freezer. Looks inside.

INSERT - INSIDE FREEZER

It's full of frozen dinners. They're in unruly, lopsided stacks.

BACK TO SCENE

Roy regards her expectantly.

ROY
Hungry and Healthys. I asked at the market. They're the best.
So. What do you feel like?
(whimsically)
Lamb Chop Suey? Tropical Tuna? Primavera Paradise?

SARA
I had a big lunch.

Roy, deflated, closes the freezer door, trails her into the living area. Sara's clenching again. There's no escaping him.

ROY
What do you wanna do? You wanna hang out with me? Go to my gig. You can if you want.

SARA
It's a school night, Roy.

ROY
Right. School night. Got it.

27.
Roy's gone. Sara takes her first good look around. A mess. It drives home where she is. What she's lost. It's overwhelming.

59 INT. ROY'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - CLOSE ON EMPTY T.V. DINNER TRAY - NIGHT

An empty beer bottle, one askew kitchen chair. Vestiges of Roy's meal. ANGLE WIDENS as Sara enters. She opens the freezer to unearth a dinner and starts an avalanche of falling food. A box of Sugar Puffs cereal lands at her feet. Something else out of place. She picks it up, jams everything back into the freezer. Slams the door shut.

SHOCK CUT TO:

60 SARA

in a whirlwind, cleaning the apartment. Wall to wall. Scrubbing away what's churned up inside. The dervish ends in her "room," where she finishes unpacking. Several layers into a suitcase, she comes to her ballet shoes. The sight hits her like a slap in the face. Sara stares at the shoes until her eyes blur. Then she snatches them up and entombs them deep inside her closet.

61 EXT. O'DONNELL HEIGHTS PUBLIC HOUSING PROJECTS - MORNING

Patrick, Chenille, Snookie straggle through the dreary jungle of concrete lawns and blighted high rises on the way to school. It's quiet now but the scars of past battles, like the bombed out police substation on one of its corners, are evident everywhere.

SNOOKIE
I need a date --

CHENILLE
Why? Your hand busy?

SNOOKIE
-- For the prom. And if it wasn't for that kinda undue attitude, you could be the lucky girl, Chenille. My personal prom queen. I can see us now.
CHENILLE
You must be lookin' in your dreams.

Snookie glances at Patrick. He's somewhere else.

SNOOKIE
Help me, man. Defend me.

PATRICK
I got my own problems, Snook.

SNOOKIE

PATRICK
I ain't gonna be doctor nothin' if I don't get in and I'm not in 'til I get my letter.

CHENILLE
It's in the mail, Patrick. Okay?

SNOOKIE
(wishfully thinking)
I probably coulda been a doctor too. If I hadn't got left back that time.

CHENILLE
That time? What? Fifth and sixth grade don't count?

Patrick finally laughs. Then his face changes. Becomes serious. He hops a low wall, keeps in stride above them. They continue on like this, the ruins of their world in the b.g. behind them.

INT./EXT CITY BUS/BALTIMORE STREETS - MORNING

The bus is crammed with kids. Sara, seated by a window, doesn't bother looking out. Inside's more interesting.
The kids cut up. Singing, rapping, and jousting with each other. Some even manage to read. Sara watches with immunity. She's invisible to them.

63  EXT. BUS STOP (NEAR PATTERSON HIGH) - MORNING

Sara alights just as Patrick, Chenille, and Snookie walk past. Patrick's the only one to see her and their eyes briefly connect.

29.

64  INT. HALLWAY NEAR ENTRANCE (PATTERSON HIGH) - CONTINUOUS ACTION

Patrick and Chenille pass through metal detectors, watch Snookie clown his way through. The security guard shakes his head. All three begin to walk. Snookie, bobbing and jiving, doesn't see Mrs. Gwynn coming up from behind. Her voice stops him cold.

MRS. GWYNN
(as Patrick and Chenille look on)
Light on your feet? Good. Be sure they dance into my office next week.

She moseys on. Snookie regards Patrick's smile, shakes his head.

65  INT. CHEMISTRY LAB - LATER THAT MORNING

The class has donned lab coats and is ready to begin when Sarah rushes in. She tries to slink into a seat. The teacher, MR. HILL, gives her a disapproving look, points at one of several formulas (C2,H6,O2) on the blackboard. Sara just looks at him.

MR. HILL
We're cooking today, Ms. Johnson. This is your first lab. You'll need a partner. Mr. Reynolds -- Patrick -- will show you the ropes.

Patrick bounces a smile off unsettled Sara. This should be fun.
The class, in safety goggles and gloves, has partnered up.

ANGLE ON SARA AND PATRICK

He's holding two vials. Sara picks up a beaker. Stares at the blackboard. She has no idea -- and no intention of admitting it.

PATRICK
(very casually)
That's too big.

She glints at him, grits through her teeth.

(CONTINUED)

SARA
I know it's too big.

She puts the beaker down. Picks up a vial. Flips through her textbook. Her eyes shift from it to the blackboard, trying to make a connection. She settles on one. Picks up a vial of powder. Patrick grabs her hand, leans over and whispers.

PATRICK
I wouldn't do that if I were you.

SARA
(yanks her hand back)
Who died and made you teacher?

Patrick pulls back, looks at her. He can't believe she dissed him. A small smile forms on his face. Sara turns away from it, goes back to her vials. Patrick slides to the farthest end of the table. Watches her consternation with bemusement.

PATRICK
Know the difference between ethyl glycol and methyl acetate? Both got three elements, two parts the same. It's that first part, C2
versus C3. C3 could blow a vial right out a person's hand.

Sara thinks he's messing with her. But then the contents of the beaker begin to ominously bubble. Panicked, she drops the vial into their sink. It instantly goes up in smoke. Some of the liquid splashes on Sara's lab coat. Patrick grabs a wet towel, quickly wipes it off. The class stops cold. Hill rushes up to them. Once he's sure Sara's fine, he looks sternly at Patrick.

MR. HILL

What happened? Everybody back in your seats!

Patrick stares at Sara. Her face is red. She's biting her lip.

PATRICK

I misread the component.

MR. HILL

(even more angry now)

You? You misread a component. Don't give me that, Patrick. You were screwin' around!

(Continued)

INT. GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

Over the sound of GRUNTING... OPEN CLOSE ON a girl's plump ass. Squirming in too-tight gym shorts that hug the cheeks. ANGLE WIDENS to reveal a stout white girl on a balance beam. Trying to get her legs to stand up on it. Hanging on for dear life. From somewhere around her, a WHISTLE BLOWS.

TEACHER (O.S.)
Alright, Ms. Diggs. Time!

WIDEN to see the teacher and her class (FAVOR Sara, Chenille, and Nikki). Amid snickers, the stout girl ("DIGGY") slides off the beam, walks past the teacher with her head demurely cast down. Clearing the teacher, Diggy pivots around, both middle fingers in the air. Gives up the double bird with much attitude. The class loves it. Cheers it. Until the teacher swerves around.

67 SERIES OF CLOSE CUTS

67

Chenille on balance beam.  competent but average.


... And then TIGHTER STILL on Sara. Tentatively approaching the balance beam. Mindful of all the eyes on her, all the bated breaths. All waiting to see the new girl fall on her ass. Sara swings herself onto the beam with aplomb. Her legs and body are strong, supple, pliable rubber bands. She flounces across it on her tiptoes. Does a flawless split. Hops off. Looks out.

SARA'S POV - TEACHER AND CLASS


68 PATTERSON HIGH - END OF SCHOOL THAT DAY

68

Sara. Heading down the steps with other students. Chenille and Diggy break through the logjam, catch up to her.

(CONTINUED)

68 CONTINUED:

68

CHENILLE

Girl, how you get your legs to twist like that?

DIGGY
(wildly gesticulating)
Yeah. What was all that double-jointed cheerleader shit?

CHENILLE
This is Diggy. Thinks she's down.

DIGGY
Egg-cuse me? I am down.

CHENILLE
So, Sara. What's up with that?

SARA
(awkwardly)
Nothing's up with it. I used to kind of dance. Ballet. Mostly.

Chenille makes an impressed face. Regards Sara curiously.

CHENILLE
You should hit Feetz with us tomorrow night. It's a club. Sorta members only.

DIGGY
Un-der-ground.

SARA
I don't know...

CHENILLE
Come on and hang out. Snook dee's sometime. He can get you in.
(yelling)
Yo, Snook

Sara sees Snookie... then Patrick... loping her way. She steels herself. He's going to say something, crack some joke about her nearly blowing him up. But Patrick just stares at her with a twinkle in his eyes. A nice twinkle. Sara's not entirely immune to it. Chenille breaks their eye play, pushes Patrick aside. She grabs Snookie's arm, indicates Sara.

(CONTINUED)

(continued)
CHENILLE
She needs to get hooked up for Feetz. All the way up. Sara, give Snook twenty dollars.

SARA
For what?

SNOOKIE
I.D. Eye-dee. How you think you gettin' in? On your looks?
(rolling his eyes) Chenille, your girl is weak. Shit. I got my rep to watch. I can't just be gettin' any green in.

Sara glares. Regards Snookie with a sweeping scowl.

SARA
Look closer. And if I still look green, I think maybe you should wipe the crust from your eyes.

Snookie's jaw drops. Patrick cracks up. Diggy too. Chenille's stays on point. She's about solving the problem.

CHENILLE
You gonna pay the man or what?

SNOOKIE
She ain't got it. Look at her. Loud-talkin' me and broke as a damn promise.

Sara, put on the spot, pulls out the money. Snookie snatches it.

SARA
I don't even know where it is.

CHENILLE
So we'll hook up at my house. Go together. I will have your I.D.

Snookie shrugs affirmatively. Patrick looks directly at Sara. The twinkle in his eye is gone, replaced by fair warning.

PATRICK
Feetz ain't no square dance.

SARA
That's okay. I dance in circles. Probably around you.

INT. ROY'S APARTMENT - SARA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Roy walks in to see Sara on the futon in her pajamas reading a book. She's got a head full of rollers.

ROY
I'm splittin'.
(as she barely looks up)
Whatcha readin'?

SARA
Chemistry.

ROY
You're takin' chemistry?

SARA
Right now it's taking me.

ROY
Give yourself some time. Well. See ya in the mornin'. Maybe I'll call between sets.

Sara really looks up. Gives him an angelic, sluggish shrug.

SARA
I'll be asleep.

He leaves. As soon as Sara hears the front DOOR CLOSE, she jumps up, strips down to bra and panties, races to the closet. One hand rips the rollers from her hair, the other rips through outfits. She's frantic and unsure about choosing the right one.

EXT. "BLACK" STREET (SOUTH BALTIMORE) - NIGHT

Sara. In a skin-tight miniskirt and a bolero jacket. Looking more eighties than nineties, more cute than cool. She walks with tentative, jittery purpose down this poverty stricken street. Doesn't meet anyone's eye. But can feel the eyes on her. She keeps going. She's walked
too far to turn back.

71 EXT. O'DONNELL HEIGHTS PROJECTS - SARA - NIGHT

Approaching the malignant edifices as the Heights begin to come to life... or death, depending how luck's running. Sara walks into this world of shadows and despite a trepidation, finds something fascinating about the possibility of real danger.

35.

72 EXT./INT. REYNOLDS APARTMENT/HALLWAY - NIGHT

Chenille triple unlocks the door, lets Sara in. Sara's surprised -- the apartment is surprisingly quaint and extremely neat. It looks a helluva lot better than Roy's place. Chenille is dressed in hugely baggy military-style pants and a tube top with a form-fitting, short-cut leather coat over it. Sara takes it in.

SARA
Cool outfit.

CHENILLE
Slammin'. Slammin' outfit.

SARA
... I look okay?

Chenille gives her the once over. Decides to lie.

CHENILLE
Yeah. You look okay.

(then)

Moma Dean. I'm leavin'.

FROM ANOTHER ANGLE

GRANDMOMMA DEAN enters with a toddler ("CHRISTOPHER") in her arms. She sports snow white, waist-length dreads and she's wearing a dashiki loungar. Despite her white locks, she doesn't look old enough to be a grandmother. She hands Christopher to Chenille. Inspects Sara. Her eyes are open, kind.

CHENILLE
(fussing over
Christopher)

Grandmom, Sara. Sara, Grandmom.
Also known as Momma Dean. And hands here is Christopher.

SARA
Hi.

MOMMA DEAN
Hello. Now don't get him all riled up, Chenille. I want to get some sleep tonight.

Chenille kisses Christopher, hands him off to Momma Dean. They exit. Sara looks tentatively at Chenille.

SARA
Is that... is he... yours?

CHENILLE
He sure ain't Momma Dean's.

73 INT./EXT. CAB/STREET (MOVING) - SARA AND CHENILLE - NIGHT

They've been talking. Well, Chenille has. Sara's been listening. Intently. Liking this confidence they're sharing.

CHENILLE
... He'll be one in July. Best mistake I ever made. Kenny -- Christopher's father -- he's the worst. Triflin'. Okay?

74 EXT. 6TH AND BROADWAY (EAST BALTIMORE) - NIGHT

A curbed cab. Sara and Chenille get out. Chenille digs into her pocketbook, hands Sara her I.D. PUSH IN ON photo of obese white girl with an untamed trailer trash perm. Sara's eyes go wide.

SARA
Chenille. She's ugly. She's fat!

CHENILLE
She's twenty-one too. I ain't got all night. Let's hop.

SARA
Wait. I have to ask you
something.
(hard for her)
Do I really look alright?

An unspoken thing passes between them. Chenille suddenly whips off her coat. Gestures at Sara with her head.

**CHENILLE**

Gimme that '89 Madonna shit. Your jacket. Give it here.

Sara takes off the bolero. Chenille ties it around her own neck, then yanks Sara's miniskirt down around her hips. Sara's torso is clad in a long-sleeved cotton tee. Chenille frowns at it.

**SARA**

It's from the GAP.

**CHENILLE**

It's country. You look country in it. Take it off.

**SARA**

I'm not walking in there in my bra.

(Continued)

Chenille thrusts her leather coat at her. Sara can't believe what she's doing, getting (un)dressed on a public street! She pulls off the tee, slips on Chenille's coat. Buttons it as far as the buttons go. Looks down. Half her chest is exposed.

**EXT. ALLEY (EAST BALTIMORE) - SARA AND CHENILLE - NIGHT**

Gaining on what looks like an abandoned warehouse. Chenille snorts at the roped off queue of kids waiting to get inside.

**CHENILLE**

Rope dopes. C'mon.

She leads Sara to the door of FEETZ. The Sumo-sized MAN guarding it knows Chenille, digs her. His grin exposes gold-capped teeth.
DOORMAN
Chenille. Lookin' fine. As always.

CHENILLE
Too fine to stand in line?

The Man grins, opens the rope, lets them in -- "in" being just inside the front door. A BOUNCER there collects the $10.00 cover charge. Checks their I.D. He hands Sara's back with a smirk.

BOUNCER
Changed your hair.

He waves a metal detector over their bodies, nods to yet another bouncer who escorts Sara and Chenille through yet another door.

76 ANOTHER ANGLE

They march a short distance to an old elevator where a group of kids wait. Bouncer #2 engages the elevator. Everyone piles in.

77 INT. ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS ACTION

Sara holds onto her stomach as the CREAKY ELEVATOR descends and the MUSIC below rises. The elevator's vibrating with music.

(CONTINUED)

38.

77 CONTINUED:

SARA
(an inside to Chenille)
Can't get much more underground than this.

78 INT. FEETZ CLUB - CONTINUOUS ACTION

A smoky hole in the wall, filled to the brim with kids. Mostly black kids with a few whites and Latinos melting in. They share a common goal: To clog the dance floor, flaunt their outfits and get nasty with the music of the
masters: Tupac Shakur, NAS, Lauryn Hill, Puff Daddy, etc. Here, the boundaries of dirty dancing are pushed, from erotic to vulgar; loving to lascivious.

**ANOTHER ANGLE**

Sara and Chenille. Sara's excited. She loves that she has to shout to be head over the music.

**CHENILLE**

Let's get our table 'fore it gets crashed and I hafta hurt somebody.

Sara's bewildered. She doesn't see any tables. She follows Chenille to the back of FEETZ. Sees six or seven tables. All of them have reserved signs. Most of them are filled.

**SARA**

What are you, some kind of V.I.P.?

Chenille indicates the deejay booth. Snookie's in it.

**CHENILLE**

Snook hooks me up whenever he dees.

They walk past a SLACKER in lycra pants and a big Army shirt. He licks his tongue at Chenille, grabs at her protruding butt. She swirls around, grabs his crotch hard enough to get his attention. The Slacker is squirming in her clutch.

**SLACKER**

Aw'right, aw'right. You got it.

**CHENILLE**

Got what?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

78 CONTINUED:

78

**CHENILLE (CONT'D)**

(as he can't think of anything but the squeeze on his balls)
The right to walk past your greasy, tickle dick self without your paws on my ass? 'S'that how I got it?

Chenille bobs her head right in his face. Sara can't believe it. A few people have stopped and are looking. The Slacker nods hastily. Chenille releases him, gently smooths out his shirt.

CHENILLE
That's how I thought I had it.
(a fly wave)
See ya.

She and Sara continue on to back-of-the-club tables. Stop at a reserved one. An adjacent table sports Nikki, her three girl crew... and Diggy. All nurse drinks. Nikki snake-eyes Sara.

NIKKI
What is up with this place? Seems like they're lettin' anybody in.

CHENILLE
Yeah. And they started with you.

The three girls and Diggy snicker. Nikki gives Chenille a look. Turns back to Sara with a snide smirk. Points out her crew.

NIKKI
I'm Nikki. Alyssa. Jasmin. Tiff'nee. You know Diggy, right, Marsha?

SARA
Sara. It's Sara. And I know you. We have a class together.

NIKKI
That don't mean you know me.

CHENILLE
Quit it, Nikki.

NIKKI
Quit what? I ain't walkin' on eggshells just 'cause you brought the Brady Bunch to the Negro Club.

(CONTINUED)
SARA
(kiss-my-ass polite)
Maybe you came to the wrong spot, Nikki. I'm pretty sure this one doesn't have any Negroes.

Chenille cracks up mainly to back Sara up. Nikki glowers at her.

NIKKI
I'm pretty sure you came with one.

CHENILLE
Oh, no. Uh-uh, wench. You did not just call me a Negro.

As Chenille bucks, Diggy springs up from her seat, runs her arm in the space between Chenille and Nikki like a referee.

DIGGY
Alright, y'all. Chill.

NIKKI
Tell her to chill. She always got somethin' to say.

CHENILLE
I can say a lot more. Keep runnin' your mouth, Nikki. I'll lay all your shit bare.

Whatever shit it is, Nikki's not taking any chances. She ejects herself from the table, walks off. The three girls scoot loyally after her. Diggy gets up. Sits down with the

flow. That's why she always fits in.

DIGGY
Why you burn her like that?

CHENILLE
'Cause I can't stand her ass and the way she played my brother. I need a drink, Sara. Let's walk.
Patrick and Malakai enter with two high school dropouts we will learn are ARVEL and LIP. Females flock to flirt with Patrick and Malakai, who both swell like sponges, soaking up the attention.

Chenille pushes her way to the bar, tugging Sara along. A tall, angular twenty-something MAN on the far side of the bar sees her. She sees him. Sucks her teeth, nudges Sara.

**CHENILLE**

That's him. Comin' over. Kenny?

Don't look.

So of course Sara does. She makes a silly face at Chenille as Kenny sidles up to her. Chenille rolls her eyes half-heartedly.

**KENNY (MAN)**

What's up?

**CHENILLE**

Where's my money, Kenny?

**KENNY**

I'm a little short this week. Don't jump off. It's comin'.

**CHENILLE**

It's comin'? No. You lyin'.

**KENNY**

Lemme rap to you about the situation on the dance floor.

She shakes her head firmly but her eyes do tell. She's in love with him. Enough to let him whisper in her ear, sweet-talk her away from the bar. Before she's swallowed up by the crowd, Chenille turns back to Sara, shouts:

**CHENILLE**

Rum and Coke. No ice. Hook me up.
splitting off from Malakai and a girl clinging to him. He's walking through when Nikki appears from nowhere, grabs his arm.

NIKKI
Let's dance.

PATRICK
(pulling away)
Let's not.

(CONTINUED)

80 CONTINUED:

NIKKI
Oh? It's gonna be like that.

PATRICK
How'd you think it was gonna be? That you was gonna drop me and pick me up whenever you felt like it?

NIKKI
It ain't all that serious, Patrick.

PATRICK
It ain't anymore, Nikki. Not to me.

He walks off. CAMERA TRACKS him going deep inside the club. He wants a drink. He's almost at the bar when he sees Chenille on the dance floor with Kenny. She shrugs a smile, then cocks her head over at the bar. Toward Sara. The look is like, help me out. Don't let me leave her hangin'. Patrick rolls his eyes as he glances at Sara, before he really sees her. She looks fly. Hugely fly. He ambles up as she shouts into the bartender's ear.

SARA
Rum and Coke, straight up. And a beer. I don't care. Anything.
PATRICK (O.S.)

Bad choice.  'Anything.'

The closeness of his voice startles her. She turns into his smile. That cocksure, leave'em-weak-in-the-knees smile.

SARA

It's just a beer.

PATRICK

Then it should be the best beer. You'd know that if you really drank.

Sara's knees straighten, her spine stiffens. The asshole's back.

SARA

Whatever.

PATRICK

What's that mean? Whatever.

(SContinued)

80

SARA

Whatever you want it to mean. You're the whiz kid, right? You know everything.

PATRICK

(chuckles at this, at her)

Not everything. Like I don't know why we're standin' still.

(closer with a teasing whisper)

I'm supposed to be dizzy by now. Remember? From all those circles you danced around me.

Sara leans against the bar. The knees are going again.

SARA

I don't feel like dancing.
PATRICK
But you do know how...?

SARA
Would I be here if I didn't?

PATRICK
... Let's do it then. C'mon.

He coaxes her onto the dance floor. PARLIAMENT'S funk classic "Flashlight" is playing. The dance crowd is robustly singing the refrain to the song. There's a party on the floor. FAVOR Sara and Patrick, facing each other. He's moving already. She starts to dance, stiffly, tentatively. Patrick smiles at her. Shakes his head. He grabs her hands, swings them in time to the music.

PATRICK
Now move your hips. Not so fast.
(as Sara looks lost)
Sara! Just like our hands.
(singing, in sync with the crowd)
'Flashlight! Neon light! Stop light! Everybody got a little light under the sun.'

The music's beginning to feel good to Sara. Patrick lets go of her hands. Starts to dance. Sara watches him intensely, her body follows his stiffly. Patrick's a good teacher. He leads without leaving her. Whenever she misses a complicated move, he smoothly segues into another less-complicated one.

(CONTINUED)

Sara begins to pick-up on Patrick's rhythm. Her eyes never wander from his. And then she starts to feel something else. They both do. A rising beat. A quickening heart. And not from the dancing. She smiles bashfully at him. Patrick suddenly grabs her around the waist, pulls her to him in a sexy spoon dance. All Sara can do is try to keep up and hang on.

FROM ANOTHER ANGLE

Nikki avidly watching Sara and Patrick with Jasmin and
Tiff'ny.

**JASMIN**

She's all up in your nut, Nikki...
Oh, that's right. It ain't your nut anymore.

**NIKKI**

It is if I want it to be. He is if I want him to be. That bitch ain't got shit on me.

The girls regard her in conspicuous, dubious silence. Nikki maintains her cool but inside her pride is pricking.

---

81 **INT. FEETZ - SAME TIME**  81

Malakai and the clinging girl nuzzle in a back corner. She licks his ear, whispers into it. Malakai laughs. Then his expression abruptly darkens. A storm cloud comes over it. He gets up.

**MALAKAI'S POV - WALKING TOWARD**

... two dealers a few feet away. They're talking to an Asian guy with a multi-colored Mohawk. One slips Mohawk a packet of coke, the other takes his money. WIDER as Malakai reaches the dealers. He doesn't explain, doesn't complain. He just starts swinging.

**SARA AND PATRICK**

The MUSIC changes and their dance ends. They stand there for a moment, a little caught up in each other. A little unsure of the moment. And then there's a scream! Several of them actually. Patrick reacts to it instinctively. Looking around. In a small pocket of the club he sees Malakai.

(Continued)

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81 **CONTINUED:**

**PATRICK'S POV - MALAKAI**
in full fisticuffs with the two dealers. Holding his own.

ON PATRICK

leaving Sara, slicing through a clot of looky-loos until he reaches Malakai. He jumps into the fray.

INT. FEETZ - FIGHT - PATRICK AND MALAKAI

A thick crowd around them, proceed to beat the living shit out of the two dealers.

ANGLE ON SARA AND CHENILLE

wrangling their way to the front line of the crowd, Diggy not far behind them. Sara looks on, dumbfounded and dazzled by what she sees, which is --

PATRICK

pummeling his dealer into cowering submission. Only then does he look over at Malakai who, eyes engorged with rage, is standing over his opponent, kicking and stomping him with no signs of letting up. Patrick can see Malakai's too far gone for talk. He rushes him from behind, nearly lifts Malakai off his feet to swing him away from the dealer's writhing body on the floor.

82  EXT. FEETZ - OUTSIDE VESTIBULE - CONTINUOUS ACTION

The exit door bursts open and Patrick and Malakai tumble out. Patrick bends over, cups his knees as he catches his breath.

PATRICK
Man, what the hell are you doin'? Tryin' to get sent back up?

MALAKAI
They the ones tryin' shit. Comin' here. Squarin' off in my shit.

PATRICK
You couldn't let it slide?
MALAKAI
Let it slide tonight, they come
back strong tomorrow. You know
that.

PATRICK
Malakai, you fuck up parole, you
ain't gonna back to JuVee.
Eighteen and up, that's Jessup.
Hardcore lockdown. You want that?

MALAKAI
(regards him coldly)
I want what was mine. Feetz is my
spot. I'ma do business here just
like I did before. Like we did
before. And if I gotta stomp some
niggers in my way, so be it.

An uncertain but tense moment. Patrick tries to salvage it.

PATRICK
Well, you definitely got the
stompin' part down.

They look at each other. Share a small laugh.

MALAKAI
We fucked those fools up for sure.

PATRICK
(crossing to exit door)
For damn sure, man.

Patrick finds the door locked. He and Malakai hoist themselves over a high, wrought iron fence. Disappear behind it.

EXT. FEETZ - FRONT ENTRANCE - NIGHT

DIGGY
It's about to get real out here.
Cops and shit. I'm gone.

She leaves. Chenille spots Patrick. Not too worse for the wear. She smiles with relief. Then Sara sees him. She smiles too.

47.

84 EXT. STREET (O'DONNELL HEIGHTS) - NIGHT

Sara, Patrick and Chenille. Walking home. Chenille's preaching to Patrick. He's not in the mood.

CHENILLE
... Yeah, I'ma tell you. Tell you like I keep tellin' you, Patrick. You need to let Malakai alone. Let him handle his own shit before he drags you down in it.

PATRICK
Chenille. I heard you the first five hundred times.

They round a corner bordering the Heights. Stop in front of it. Chenille, disconcerted with Patrick, looks dourly at Sara.

CHENILLE
I'll see you Monday.
(to Patrick, like an order)
He'll walk you.

As much as this makes sense, it still takes Patrick by surprise. Sara sees it in his face, regards Chenille with a false bravado.

SARA
It's just a few blocks. It's okay.

CHENILLE
No, it's not okay. Would you tell the girl it ain't okay?

PATRICK
It's not okay, okay?
(before she can
Come on, Braveheart.

85  

EXT. STREET - SARA AND PATRICK - NIGHT

walking. Sara keeps stealing glances of him. Or so she thinks.

PATRICK

What?

SARA

(caught)

What?

(CONTINUED)

48.

85  CONTINUED:

48

PATRICK

Why you keep lookin' at me?

SARA

I have to look somewhere. The streets are deserted. Might as well look at you.

PATRICK

That's not why. You wanna know somethin'. Ask somethin'.

SARA

It's not a question. It's the way you were beating that kid up. You looked so mad.

PATRICK

I was mad and he wasn't no kid. But you're from the suburb Mars, right? Folks don't fight there.

SARA

Not like that.

(some kind of wonder)

You were really kicking his ass.

It's not funny, the look on her face. But Patrick
laughs.

**SARA**

Are you laughing at me?

Dropping the smile, Patrick shakes his head. Looks at her.

**PATRICK**

My friend was in trouble.

**SARA**

Maybe he's my question. Your friend. Chenille doesn't like him.

**PATRICK**

She likes him. It don't stop her from trippin' off him now and then. But Malakai's good people. We go back. Way back. You know, like they say, through thick and thin.

(beat)

So, how'd you like Feetz?

(CONTINUED)

85

CONTINUED:

85

**SARA**

It was great.

**PATRICK**

Once you got used to the music.

**SARA**

It wasn't the music I wasn't used to. I mean, it's not the first time I heard hip-hop, Patrick.

**PATRICK**

Uh-huh. Bet you listen to it all the time.

Patrick regards her with a sly, knowing smile. His stare is significant, unsettling. Sara's face flushes. She turns from him, hoping he didn't see it.
SARA
Not all the time. But a lot.

PATRICK
We gettin' any closer to your crib or should we stop for food and water?

Sara snaps out of it. Looks around. Shit. First the flush and now this. She looks at him. She could kick herself.

SARA
We passed it.

PATRICK
You passed it.

A look. They double back to her front door. Pause on the stoop.

SARA
Thanks for walking me.

PATRICK
No problem.

SARA
So. I'll see ya.

PATRICK
Is that 'see ya' like gee-whiz, had a great time, can't wait to see you again?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

85
85

CONTINUED:

PATRICK (CONT'D)
Or is it like 'see ya,' I'll bust a cap in your ass if you ever darken my doorstep again?

He makes it impossible not to smile. So damned charming.

SARA
I haven't said gee-whiz since I
was six. But I really had a great
time... okay?

  PATRICK

  Okay.

She enters the rowhouse. Patrick waits until the lights
go on inside before he turns around and starts home.

86   INT. ROY'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NEXT MORNING
86

Roy's making breakfast when Sara straggles in. She peers
at the stove. Scrambled eggs and bacon. Toast too! A
first for him.

  ROY
  Figured I'd put a little marrow in
  your bones. Siddown, siddown.
  (she slumps in chair)
  You gettin' along at school?
  Makin' friends...?
  (as she nods robotically)
  ... See any of 'em last night?

He slides a plate in front of her. Stands there holding
his.

  ROY
  I came home on my break.

  SARA

  Oh.

The succinct sneer in her voice gets to Roy. He snaps at
her.

  ROY
  ... Oh? Jesus! You're hard!
  Look. You're seventeen. If you
  wanna go out, go out. But don't
  lie to me. On top of everything
  else, don't make me worry like
  that about you.

  (MORE)

  (CONTINUED)

  51.
ROY (CONT'D)
(after long moment)
I didn't mean to yell.
(sits down; trying like hell)
So how are the eggs? They good?

Sara takes a small, tasteless sample, nods. They eat in silence. Then Sara looks over at him with genuine if detached remorse.

SARA
You're right. I should've said something. I'm sorry.

Roy exhales. Finally, a chink in the brick wall.

ROY
What're you gonna do today? Anything special?

SARA
Nope. Nothing special.

A track from TOP DOGG BLARES from invisible SPEAKERS. All of the store's many customers are teenage kids. Snookie, in sunglasses and a reversed baseball cap, clerks behind the counter. He's ringing up (and trying to rap to) a fly girl when Patrick walks in, overhears the overture.

SNOOKIE
... How you know I can't do nothin' for you? I'm the hardest workin' man in showbizness, girl. C'mon. Let me be the bomb in your shell.

The fly girl rolls her eyes. Takes her bag. Leaves. Patrick looks at Snookie, wryly shakes his head.

PATRICK
You do the shit to yourself, man. The bomb in your shell?
SNOOKIE
That was black magic, Patrick.
It's gonna work one of these days.

He reaches behind the counter, hands Patrick a Jay-Z C.D.

(CONTINUED)

87 CONTINUED:

SNOOKIE
Last one on the rack. I snatched it up for you. Rang it up on my discount.

PATRICK
(what Snookie's waiting for)
Thank you, Snookie.

SNOOKIE
(as Patrick pays him)
You workin' or what, man?

PATRICK
On my way. Soon as I get outta here...

As he says this, his eyes wander around the store. And he sees her in the stacks. Sara.

88 INT. RECORD STORE - HIP-HOP SECTION - MOMENTS LATER

Sara with a bunch of C.D.'s. She juggles them in one hand, flips through Hip-Hop C.D.'s with another. She looks up to see Patrick standing beside her. He takes in the C.D.'s. Grins at her.

PATRICK
Throwin' a party?

There's no wiggle room but Sara wiggles anyway.

SARA
Just adding to my collection. I heard some stuff I didn't have last night.

PATRICK
(that twinkle in his eyes)
Well, you were fly anyway. Last night. Dancin', I mean.

**SARA**
Not as fly as you.

**PATRICK**
(half-serious)
Nobody's as fly as me.

(Continued)

**SARA**
(dead-serious)
Not yet anyway.

Patrick laughs. Looks at her. Sara looks back at him. They're staring at each other.

**PATRICK**
Maybe we could hook up later. After school or somethin'. Work on some of your moves. If you want.

**SARA**
Okay. Sure.

Patrick nods affirmatively. Starts to leave. Turns back, indicates her stack of C.D.'s.

**PATRICK**
By the way, Hammer's pretty much played out.

**SARA**
(convincing lie)
Not to me.

**89** INT. ROY'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Sara's on the phone, unwrapping one of those T.V. dinners.
SARA
(into phone)
It was so... slamming, Lindsay. The dancing! I'm going again. What? No, I haven't seen anybody get shot yet. God, I didn't move to Bosnia.

90 INT. PATTERSON HIGH - HALLWAY - MORNING
90

A fight. Two black girls having at it. It's a ferocious match. Hair pulling, spit flying, punches landed, clothes torn apart.

ANGLE ON SARA

as she crowns the corner, comes to a bottleneck of students. It's like the nose bleed section of Caesar's Palace. The far hallway is the ring. Sara cranes her neck to see the action.

(CONTINUED)

54.

90 CONTINUED:
90

ANGLE WIDENS as a security guard earns his hazard pay. He separates the two girls who are still swinging at each other. He throws one into a corner, hurls the other in an opposite corner.

ON SARA

as a WHITE GIRL standing next to her shakes her head lamentably.

SARA

What happened?

The White Girl studies Sara's suburban clothes and fresh-scrubbed face. Thinks she found a kindred spirit.

TONY (WHITE GIRL)

We freed the slaves and didn't teach them no manners. (before Sara can react) You're Sara, right?
(as Sara warily nods)
Toni. I was gonna introduce myself before but you're always with that crowd. You know. Chenille, her girls, that identity crisis Diggy.

Sara looks at Toni. Getting it. Getting her. The expression on her face closes off. Toni, too dense to read it, keeps talking.

TONI
(brightly)
We should hang out sometime, Sara. The two of us. Whenever you decide to lose the tan?

Her inference clear, Toni flashes a brilliant smile, happily walks off. Sara shakes her head to herself. What an idiot.

As Sara continues down the hall, a P.A. address comes on.

P.A. ADDRESS (V.O.)
Seniors, a reminder before you rise up and change the world. Mrs. Gwynn is holding all diplomas hostage in her office. Her only demand is the pleasure of your company for career D-Day. Be there.

Sara enters her classroom, a bunch of kids in front of and behind her.

55.

91   EXT./INT. STREET/ROY'S ROWHOUSE (SO. BALTIMORE) - DAY
91

Sara walks up the street (passing many black people), sees Roys' pickup. Shit. He's home.

92   CAMERA TRACKS
92

Sara as she enters their rowhouse, walks up a flight of stairs to their apartment. There's a JAZZ INSTRUMENTAL FAINTLY coming from it. And another NOISE. Foreign and yet familiar. Like grunting... but not. Sara unlocks the door. Opens it.
93  SARA'S POV - LIVING ROOM

Her father's fucking somebody! On the couch. Half on it anyway. In broad daylight! The whore underneath him is moaning. Jesus!

ANGLE WIDENS as Sara turns away from the spectacle. Reaches for Roy's sax. She blows the longest, shrillest note known to mankind.

94  ON ROY

The hair on his head stands up. His body deflates instantly.

95  INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Sara sits at the table. Roy enters in a wrinkled T-shirt and battered jeans. His embarrassment is naked.

    ROY
    I don't know what to say. I don't.

    SARA
    How 'bout fuck it? Or should I say fuck her? It's a fuck-fest, Roy.

    ROY
    Don't talk to me like that, Sara. (beat)
    I thought you were goin' to your friend's house after school.
    Obviously, you changed your mind.
    So I'm sorry. Alright?

    SARA
    Sorry you got caught.

    (CONTINUED)
ROY

Sorry I got... observed

The "whore" with the Hich C is RHONDA. She stands between the living area and the kitchen entrance now. Sara tries not to look at her. Can't help it. She has to see the whore. Not bad looking, in a washed out, bottle blonde barfly kind of way.

RHONDA

Don't be mad at him. It's my fault. I'm real sorry, honey.

ROY

It's nobody's 'fault.' It's over. Let it be over. We're all adults.

Sara glares at him. The disingenuous Rhonda jumps in.

RHONDA

I think he means you know about sex. That we have it and he likes it. Isn't that what you mean, Roy?

Sara looks at her. Bats her eyes. Hard.

SARA

Really? How often do you have it?

RHONDA

Things been kind of slow since you got here. Once upon a time we were real rabbits, weren't we, Roy?

Verbal quicksand. Roy can feel himself sinking.

ROY

Rhonda. Shut up. Please.

96 INT. SARA'S ROOM - NOT MUCH LATER

OPEN CLOSE ON a framed photo of Glynn and Sara (in full ballet costume). Embracing. Happy. PULL BACK to see Sara. Sitting on the edge of her futon, holding Glynn's clover leaf necklace and staring at her mother's face. Lost. Lonely. Missing her. She kisses the lucky charm, smiles at Glynn, slips the necklace on.
Patrick, in coveralls, slouches over a mechanic's station studying. A few workers mill about, waiting for the next car on a slow day. A BMW with tinted windows peels into the lot on two wheels. Patrick looks up as Malakai and a tall, wiry, nattily dressed man get out.

**PATRICK**

I got it.

He exits into the lot. Approaches Malakai and the man ("TUTE").

**MALAKAI**

Medicine Man. You know Tute.

Tute takes in Patrick. Looks around. Snickers derisively.

**TUTE**

You call this a job, man?

**PATRICK**

Actually, I call it a car wash. The work I do, yeah, that's a job.

Malakai lets out a nervous laugh. Tute doesn't crack a smile.

**TUTE**

I need some sticks. Watch my ride, Malakai.

Tute enters the cashier's office. Patrick looks at Malakai.

**PATRICK**

You hangin' with him now? Think that's a good idea, 'Kai?

**MALAKAI**

You got a better one?

**PATRICK**

You could try layin' all this shit off for awhile. Give yourself a chance on the other side.

**MALAKAI**
What other side?

PATRICK
You know what I mean. It ain't like you don't have good sense.

(CONTINUED)

MALAKAI
I got sense enough to know who I am, what I can do and where I can do it. I ain't like you. People don't just up and hand me shit.

Tute emerges from cashier's office lighting a cigarette from a fresh pack. He blows a plume of smoke into the air, regards Patrick.

TUTE
We ain't here for our health. You workin', then work.
(throws Patrick car keys)
And don't forget the rims.

INT. REYNOLDS' APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - LATE THAT NIGHT

Patrick, still in work coveralls, enters. First thing he does is pick up a stack of mail. Tracking him into kitchen as he crosses to refrigerator, takes out a plate Momma Dean's left for him. He sits down at the table, takes a breath, begins shifting through the mail. His face registers disappointment. Nothing. Again.

INT. GUIDANCE COUNSELOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Patrick sits across from Mrs. Gwynn, the reality check of Patterson High.

MRS. GWYNN
Maybe you think it's enough to have the grades, get a full
scholarship. But it isn't, Patrick. Georgetown makes mulch of students like you every semester. You have to be ready to change. Change friends. Lifestyle. Your entire point of view. What I'm saying is, options won't matter if you don't keep a clean nose to the grindstone.

PATRICK
(looks her right in the eye)
I know that, Mrs. Gwynn.

The unflappable Patrick. He doesn't fool Mrs. Gwynn.

(CONTINUED)

MRS. GWYNN
Knowing's easy. Doing is hard.

BEGIN MONTAGE

in which a series of STUDENTS parade in front of Mrs. Gwynn.

SNOOKIE

Me? I wanna operate on cars. Some place fly like the Kentucky Derby. -- Ah-ha! Joke on you...

SPACED-OUT STUDENT

Career? That the same as a job...?
DIGGY
A Rock-n-Rap club in L.A. I'm gonna put a tattoo parlor on the roof. Soon as I find some investors...

SERIOUS STUDENT
I want to be a lawyer, but I believe in God so I'm not sure about it...

TONI
I'm moving to Idaho. I hate it here.

CHENILLE
Beauty school.

CHENILLE (CONT'D)
I'm a year behind 'cause of my baby, but I'm gonna work during the day, go to school at night. That's my plan anyway...

MALAKAI
Plans? Yeah. I plan not to be poor. Next question...

NIKKI

I get into U.M.B.C., financial aid, everything...

MRS. GWYNN

Do I detect a 'but'?

Nikki folds her arms, regards her obdurately.

MRS. GWYNN

I know you're -- how do you put it? -- Large here, Nikki. You enjoy that and it's fine for now. I guess. But you can't live your life like a popularity contest.

MONTAGE ENDS WITH SARA

walking in. Sitting down.

SARA

I don't think it's realistic, what you're asking. Things happen. Things change. And the changes change you. What's the point of plans?

MRS. GWYNN

To have a sense of direction.

SARA

You can't direct destiny.

(CONTINUED)

61.

CONTINUED:

MRS. GWYNN

(fingering Sara's papers)
I see here that you trained for Juilliard, that you auditioned.

SARA
That was a long time ago.

MRS. GWYNN
It was three months ago, Sara.
(the brick wall)
Well, if you're not going to pursue dance, what are you going to do?

SARA
(hadn't thought about it)
I don't know. Take a year off. Work. Go to college later on.

MRS. GWYNN
Be careful with later on, Sara. It's a slippery slope. Sometimes you can run right on top of it and it never catches up with you.

109 EXT. O’DONNELL HEIGHTS - ROOFTOP - LATE DAY
A low sun over the cityscape of Baltimore. PUSH IN ON Patrick and Sara, two dots that grow larger. He CLICKS ON a BOOM-BOX resting on the roof's ledge. A hip-hop track BLASTS.

PATRICK
Feel the groove. Don't let the music mess with you.

He starts to move with the music. Sara tries to emulate him. They dance throughout the conversation.

SARA
Did you always want to be a doctor?

PATRICK
Who said I wanna be a doctor?

SARA
Chenille. Everybody.

He cinches her waist, pushes in her ass.
PATRICK
Keep it tight. Watch your butt.

SARA
What kind of doctor do you want to be?

PATRICK
Pediatrics. I like kids. Come on, stay with me. You're slackin'.

SARA
Do you have any? Kids.

PATRICK
No. Do you?

SARA
I wasn't being smart, Patrick.

PATRICK
Wouldn't be the first time.


SARA
Screw you. I'm brilliant.

He goes into a spin, a half-split, comes out of it swaggering and half-stepping around her. Sara gives him an impish look. Rises up on full pointe, turns out her legs and lifts one of them in a spiral just below his head. It happens in two blinks. So fast Patrick thinks it was a mirage. He stares at her, dumbfounded. Sara smiles. The look on his face is worth the pain in her joints. She blows some stray hair out of her face, puts her hands on her hips. Looks appropriately hapless.

SARA
I didn't get it. That thing you just did. Show me again?
PATRICK
What was that shit you just did?

He mimes the move -- badly. Sara can't help it. She laughs.

SARA

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

109 CONTINUED:

109

SARA (CONT'D)
(succumbs to his bewilderment)
Ballet. I used to dance, Patrick.

PATRICK
You used to dance?

SARA
Uh-huh. Used to as in don't any more. And don't ask me why.

She sounds suddenly defensive. Patrick's suddenly intrigued.

PATRICK
Why not?

SARA
Because I don't want to talk about it.

PATRICK
That's why you brought it up. Did that whole relieve thing. 'Cause you don't wanna talk about it?

SARA
Because it's not a big deal. Can we just concentrate on this?

PATRICK
Yeah, we can concentrate.
(a beat; goading her
a little)
But I think it is a big deal.
Whatever it is you don't wanna
talk about.

Sara shakes her head adamantly. He nods his head
emphatically. Another stalemate. They dance coyly,
seductively around it.

110  INT. ROY'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Sara. Doing stretching exercises as she talks on the
phone.

LINDSAY (V.O.)
(over phone)
I'm still gonna pray for you.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

110  CONTINUED:

LINDSAY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Jesus, Sara, you're in the
freaking ghetto. Forget the
riots. How are you supposed to
meet anybody?

Sara slides down the wall, hugs her knees.

SARA
(into phone)
I have met somebody. Sort of. I
think. I mean, there's this
guy...

111  INT. REYNOLDS' APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM/CHENILLE'S
   BEDROOM - NIGHT

Patrick enters to hear CHRISTOPHER SCREAMING his lungs
out. He passes down the hall to Chenille's room to find
Christopher squirming in Kenny's arms. Kenny doesn't
know what to do.
PATRICK
(walking in)
What y'all doin' to my nephew?

Patrick takes Christopher, holds him and consoles him until he settles down. Patrick pointedly hands the baby to Chenille, glares accusingly at her and Kenny as he quits the room. Kenny regards his son haplessly. Looks at Chenille.

KENNY
Why's he do that?

CHENILLE
He's a baby. They cry.

KENNY
He was screaming, Chenille.

CHENILLE
He don't know you, Kenny.

KENNY
I'm his father. He knows me.
    (meaning now)
    ... What should I do?

CHENILLE
Come around more often.

(CONTINUED)

KENNY
See? I can't talk to you.

CHENILLE
And I can't depend on you! Am I askin' you to do anything for him you ain't supposed to do?

KENNY
You don't ask, Chenille. You make demands. You want money, you --

CHENILLE
-- I want you to pick up some of
the slack. You always have an excuse.

KENNY
It's not like that. I get tied up.

CHENILLE
You wanna talk about tied up? Try gettin' up in the middle of the night to change diapers and give him bottles or stayin' up with him when he's sick and havin' to drag your ass to school the next day.

KENNY
Look. I'm doin' the best I can.

CHENILLE
It ain't good enough, Kenny!

112 INT. PATTERSON HIGH - GIRLS' LAVATORY - MORNING

Dripping, out-of-order faucets, graffiti-laced stalls, litter-strewn floors are underscored by the spooky flicker of fluorescent lights. Sara walks in. The bathroom appears to be empty. She's about to enter a stall when she hears the murmur of a voice. A guy's voice. Then a girl's whimper. She eases forward a bit.

GIRL (O.S.)
I don't get paid 'til next week.

MALE (O.S.)
Boo the fuck hoo. You can't put my bizness up your nose on no layaway plan. C'mon now. You know what you gotta do.

(Continued)

112 CONTINUED:

Sara ventures carefully forward to the edge of the stall's open door. She cranes her neck trying to see without being sen.
HER POV - STALL

A GIRL is seated on the toilet. A man straddles her, his crotch in her face. The Girl sees Sara. Something in her face gives this away. The "man" glances out past his shoulder. He looks right down our throat straight into Sara's eyes. Malakai.

ON SARA

SARA

What are you doing?

Malakai backs up. The Girl jumps up, runs out the lavatory. Malakai zips up his pants. Sara's frozen, staring at him.

MALAKAI

You didn't see nothin', you don't say nothin'. Not unless you want a taste for yourself. And that can be arranged.

He leaves. Sara waits a moment. Exits.

113 HALLWAY

She sees Mr. Hill, starts to move for him. Someone grabs her arm from behind. She turns, startled, a little afraid. It's the Girl from the stall. She looks Sara in the eye. Shakes her head. Don't. Mr. Hill walks by them unbeckoned.

114 EXT. INNER HARBOR (DOWNTOWN BALTIMORE) - PARK - DAY

A perfect day. CAMERA PANS FROM the waterfront TO the bustling crowds of the inner harbor, then to a park across from this where Sara and Patrick are practicing. HIP-HOP MUSIC softly PLAYS from Patrick's BOOM-BOX. Sara watches his face as they dance.

PATRICK

Didn't you like it when you 'used' to dance?

(CONTINUED)
SARA
Yeah I liked it. I was gonna go to Juilliard. That school fucked up my entire life. It's a long story.

PATRICK
Let me guess. You don't wanna talk about it.

Sara looks at him. A soft smile is all she offers up.

EXT. PARK - SARA AND PATRICK - LATER

They lay on their bellies in the grass. Close to each other.

PATRICK
I stole a bike here once.

SARA
Why'd you do that?

PATRICK
'Cause I didn't have one.

SARA
That's a good reason.

PATRICK
I used to do wild shit like that.

SARA
You and Malakai?

PATRICK
Yep. Most of the time.

SARA
I don't get you guys. You seem so... different.

PATRICK
We're not.
SARA
Maybe you weren't then but you are now. You said you changed.

PATRICK
Doesn't make me different from him. Not the way you think it does.

(CONTINUED)

SARA
I think Malakai's scary. And I know you're not.

PATRICK
(taking mild umbrage)
What you mean by scary? 'Kai's tough. He has to be. He still got a good heart. I know.

Sara stares at the ground, struggling to tell him what she saw.

SARA
Patrick.

PATRICK
Let me finish. Me and him got into some shit awhile back. Real bad shit. We held up a gas station off 95. I bailed the ride -- jumped out the car. 'Kai kept goin', got caught.

(pauses)
I knew what he was gonna do that night. Knew the car was hot. I woulda been guilty as him if they had caught me, if Malakai had served my name up. But he didn't.

SARA
That means you owe him something?

PATRICK
He did his time plus most of mine.
I owe him that.

**SARA**
No matter how much he messes up?

**PATRICK**
We all mess up. Maybe Malakai gave up. But he's still m'boy and he still got a chance. I ain't just gonna cross him completely off and be like everybody else.

He looks at her and she doesn't have the heart -- or the nerve -- to tell him. A long moment. She plucks a dandelion from the grass, twirls it thoughtfully in her fingers.

(CONTINUED)

115. **CONTINUED:**

115

**SARA**
I stole a hat once. When I was twelve. My mom found it under my mattress, made me take it back.

**PATRICK**
Gangsta' Sara. Stole a hat. Call the F.B.I.

She looks at him. Smiles. Twirls the dandelion under his nose.

**SARA**
You gonna turn me in?

**PATRICK**
I think I'll wait for you to surrender.

(pauses)
Were you tight with your mom, Sara? I mean, y'all get along and shit?

**SARA**
(guardedly)
Yeah...tight... got along and shit

**PATRICK**
So she meant something to you.  
How come you never talk about her?

SARA  
There's nothing to say.

PATRICK  
(studying her face)  
Know why there's nothing to say?  
Because you don't talk about her.  
You won't talk about her.

SARA  
I'm sorry she's dead. God! What  
do you want me to do? Run through  
the streets screaming?

PATRICK  
Why not?  If it helps.

SARA  
(tersely)  
Well, it won't. So drop it.

PATRICK  
And you call Malakai scary.

(CONTINUED)

115 CONTINUED:

She looks at him. Patrick grins. Sara knocks her legs  
against his. He knocks his legs back. A silly moment.  
But it transcends the tension and creates a sweet truce  
between them.

116 INT. PATRICK'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Momma Dean's fixing dinner. Patrick enters with the mail  
in his teeth, a load of books in his arms. He dumps the  
books on the counter, busses Momma Dean's check on the  
way to the 'fridge.

MOMMA DEAN  
I know you're not puttin' those  
dirty hands inside my  
refrigerator.
Patrick backs up to the sink. Washes his hands. Impishly dries them on her apron. He sits, begins sifting through the mail. Momma Dean pulls an envelope from her pocket. Waves it at him.

MOMMA DEAN
This what you're lookin' for?

Chenille appears in the doorway. Patrick takes the letter. He's almost afraid to open it. But he does. And as he reads the letter, a slyly relieved smile spreads across his face. He tosses the letter in the air. Grabs Chenille and Momma Dean. And the three of them jump up and down together with joy.

INT./EXT. CITY BUS (MOVING) - SARA AND PATRICK - NIGHT

Dressed to the nines. They look happy and relaxed, more so than we've ever seen. They sit close to each other. Very close.

SARA
Are you gonna tell me where we're going?
(as he grins, shakes his head)
Why is the surprise for me? You're the one with something to celebrate.

PATRICK
We can celebrate together.

(continues)

CONTINUED:

She looks at him. Can't find any words. So she just goes into her evening bag and pulls out a small box. She hands it to him, a little nervous about how it will be received.

SARA
I wanted to get you something and I couldn't figure out what. It's not much but I hope you like it.
Patrick opens the box. Removes a key chain. It's engraved with the medical emblem (snake & staff, etc.). He regards her, touched.

**PATRICK**

I like it. I love it. Thank you.

**SARA**

Wait. There's more.

She leans in, turns the key chain over in his hand. The back side of it is engraved with the words, "PATRICK REYNOLDS, M.D." Patrick locks eyes with Sara, lifts her hand to his lips. Kisses it softly. The gesture is succinct but alluring and, for a brief moment, they're the only two people in the world.

**INT./EXT. CITY BUS - SARA AND PATRICK - LATER**

The bus makes a stop and an older white woman gets on. Sits across from Sara and Patrick who have moved even closer to each other. Patrick's arm is around Sara's shoulder. He whispers something in Sara's ear. She laughs and looks up to see the white woman staring at them with a muted but obvious repugnance. Watching the woman from the corner of her eye, Sara drapes her arms around Patrick's neck, nuzzles at his ear. Patrick's eyes widen. Sara, playing this for all it's worth, folds one of her legs between his and whispers:

**SARA**

We have an audience. Work with me.

**PATRICK**

(nonplussed)

Work with you?

**SARA**

(sotto voce, through her teeth)

Grab something.

(CONTINUED)
He grabs her ass -- what else is there? -- runs his hand along her side. The white woman, thoroughly disgusted, gets up and moves to the back of the bus. Patrick and Sara look at each other, burst out laughing.

119  EXT. BALTIMORE HALL - NIGHT

The equivalent of D.C.'s Kennedy Center, the hall is awash in lights and activity. Men and women are donned in formal attire. Parking valets hover on the sidewalks waiting for cars. Into this, Sara and Patrick walk. She looks at the crowd, then sees the overhead banner -- "Boston Ballet, A Command Performance." Sara's heart stops. Her feet freeze. Patrick looks at her. She looks positively catatonic.

PATRICK
Surprise... Sara?

SARA
(quietly urgent)
I can't. I can't go in.

PATRICK
(doesn't understand)
You have to go in. This is where I'm bringing you. The ballet.

SARA
(beside herself)
I know, but --

PATRICK
(crestfallen)
But what?

Sara looks at him, feeling bad. Feeling stupid for ruining the evening. She bites her lip, shakes her head ("but nothing"). Patrick takes her and they go in.

120  INT. BALTIMORE HALL - AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Sara and Patrick watch the Boston Company perform Igor Stravinsky's "Scenes De Ballet" as choreographed by Christopher Wheeldon. They're both enraptured. But while Patrick keeps sneaking excited glimpses of Sara, her eyes remain fixed on the dancers, the dance. She is utterly, totally engaged and amazed. The yearning that never really left her returns to tug at her heart and project her soul onto the stage.
EXT. STREET (SOMEBEHERE IN BALTIMORE) - NIGHT

Post-ballet, Sara and Patrick walk. She's quiet, introspective. Patrick's at a loss. He can't decipher her mood and, which is more, he's disappointed by it.

PATRICK
I thought you would like it.

SARA
I did.

PATRICK
You ain't actin' like you did.

She looks over at him, tries to smile.

SARA
I'm sorry.

They come to a small, secluded bridge. Sara sits down on the edge of it. Patrick follows suit. A long moment.

SARA
I don't want you to think I didn't have a good time tonight, Patrick. I did. But ballet isn't a part of my life anymore.

PATRICK
Why not? What happened? You just woke up one day and decided to waste your talent.

SARA
(without rancor)
How do you know I have talent? Because I did some stupid leg trick.

PATRICK
I saw the look on your face when you did it, Sara. The same look I saw tonight. Goofy happy. So if you're gonna tell me somethin' about not dancing, at least tell me somethin' real.
A long, difficult moment wherein Sara attempts to find the words, face the pain that comes with them. Finally, she looks at him.

**SARA**

Maybe I don't want it to be real.

(continued)

She stares out at the water, the moon reflected off of it. It's hard to reconcile that beauty and the turmoil she's feeling. But she goes on.

**SARA**

What I want is to wake up and see my mom. For things to go back to the way they were. When they made sense. When my life made sense.

(because)

And it's all my fault. She got scraped off the highway for me, for my fucking audition. She was rushing. It was raining. It was raining...

(a torrent)

... But she promised to be there. I made her promise. And then I didn't wait for her. I should have but they called my name and I didn't say anything. I just went out and danced. I was mad. I needed her and she wasn't there.

She buries her face in her hands, breaking down, racked with tears and guilt. Patrick puts his arms around her.

**SARA**

(inconsolable)

She was dying while I was dancing and I was mad at her and I'm sorry. I'm sorry...

**PATRICK**

It's not your fault it rained or she died. Or that you danced. That's what you were there for. Your mom would've expected you to
do what you did.

Sara, choking on tears, regards him forlornly.

SARA
That's what makes it so bad. She always did what was right for me. I wanted to be a prima ballerina -- had to be. Even if it took most of our money, all of her spare time. I didn't care. It was my stupid dream and it killed her. All she wanted was for it to come true.

(CONTINUED)

75.

121 CONTINUED:

PATRICK
You still got whatever you had when your mom was alive, Sara. She wouldn't want you to give up.

Sara swipes at her face, looks up at him, still crying.

SARA
I know... but she... I just don't think I can do it without her.

PATRICK
(holding her)
Do you want to do it, Sara? I mean you. Do you want Juilliard?

SARA
Yeah. I do.

PATRICK
Then it's on you to make the dream come true.

SARA
Yeah. For my mom.

PATRICK
For her. For you.

122 EXT. ROY'S APARTMENT/STREET - THAT NIGHT
Patrick walks Sara to the front door. They pause on the stoop. Neither of them wants the night to end.

SARA
See you tomorrow?

A rhetorical question under the circumstances. Patrick regards her tenderly, moves her hair from her eyes. Stares deeply into them. Sara smiles wanly, certain she looks like shit. But it doesn't matter. The moment has named itself. And so, with more certainty than passion, they kiss.

123 INT. SARA'S ROOM - NIGHT

CAMERA PANS the room, PICKING UP small touches from Sara's past life, her previous bedroom -- more on display than we've seen before. HOLD ON closet door. A beat before Sara emerges from behind it, ballet slippers in hand. She takes a deep breath. Slides them on. Peers down at her feet. Wiggles them. Nothing magical or mystical but simply wonderful. Gleefully wonderful. Like the end of a long day's journey to home.

76.

124 EXT. INNER HARBOR COMPLEX   (DOWNTOWN BALTIMORE) - DAY

Sara and Patrick negotiate the heavy pedestrian traffic, exit the complex. He leads her to a mall of trees and bike paths.

PATRICK
Lemme see that move you did. That cute leg relieve thing.
(as she shakes her head)
Come on, Sara.

SARA
(hates to admit this)
It hurts! I'm out of shape and it hurts. Okay? Satisfied?

PATRICK
(admiring her)
That's what you call outta shape, what's it take to get you in shape?
SARA

Practice.

PATRICK

This is the perfect spot for that. You can run around and I can sit under the trees and watch you.

SARA

I don't get in shape like that. But it's still a good spot. (diffidently) I got my application for Juilliard. Just in time too. They're holding auditions in Baltimore next month.

PATRICK

That's great!

She looks at him, shakes her head. Not that great.

SARA

I'll never be ready in a month.

PATRICK

Sara, you puttin' the mojo on yourself.

(CONTINUED)

124 CONTINUED:

124

SARA

(a smile in spite of herself)

Mojo?

PATRICK

Negative shit. White folks call it karma. The bad kind.

SARA

You don't understand. Ballet takes a lot of time, a lot of preparation. I used to practice two, three hours every day. I'm so far behind...
... And unsure and afraid. Which Patrick can sense. But he won't let her go there or stay there. He's firm, matter-of-fact.

**PATRICK**

Quit whinin' and catch up then.

**SARA**

It's not as easy as that. My free form still sucks. It's still the weakest part of my routine. That hasn't changed.

**PATRICK**

So I'll help you with it.

**SARA**

You will?

**PATRICK**

(surprised that she's surprised)

Yeah. I'll help you. Tell me what you need to do and let's get busy.

**MONTAGE SEQUENCE**

**BEGINS OVER THEME MUSIC.**

125  **INT. ROY'S APARTMENT - SARA'S ROOM - NIGHT**

Sara in the mirror dressed in leotards and tights. She bends forward from the hip, extends a leg, a corresponding arm.

(Continued)

78.

125  **CONTINUED:**

As she tries to complete the arabesque, the backward-most leg buckles. She steadies herself. Starts over.

**SARA - IN VARIOUS STAGES OF GETTING BUSY**
PATTERSON FOOTBALL FIELD

Hip-hop hybrid with Patrick.

DANCE STUDIO

In class. Struggling to keep up.

STREET

On way to and from bus stop. Practicing as she walks.

DANCE STUDIO

Alone with her instructor. Looking good.

DANCE STUDIO - LATER

Alone with her instructor. Looking better.

ROY'S BATHROOM

Soaking and tending her bleeding feet.

MONTAGE ENDS.

INT. ROY'S APARTMENT - LIVING AREA

OPEN CLOSE ON a black hand shaking a white one. PULL BACK to reveal Patrick and Roy. Sara enters looking striking, pretty, very down. Chenille's influence is written all over her makeup and her clothes. Overlooking Roy, she blithely tags Patrick.

SARA

Let's skip.
(cursory, to Roy)

Later.
They leave. Roy stands in the middle of the room, dumbfounded.

(Continued)

ROY

Let's 'skip'?
(mumbling to himself)
Three months and she's skipping?

INT. FEETZ - BAR - NIGHT

Usual suspects, usual music. Patrick hands Sara a call-brand beer. Leans in with his drink, openly and contently with her.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Nikki and her crew (Jasmin, Tiff'nee, Alyssa). Nikki hasn't seen Patrick and Sara. She's showing her crew a dance.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Chenille, Diggy and another black girl. Fraternizing.

ANOTHER ANGLE - DEEJAY BOOTH

A chrome-domed deejay with a Barry White baritone bellows into his mike as he changes the music.

DEEJAY

Master P with the 'Ghetto D'.
Showmesomethin', showmesomethin',
give up that cruel. Eyes on you!

WIDER as the dance floor swells with kids. PICK UP Sara and Patrick among them. She looks at him nervously. He smiles.
PATRICK
Nobody's watchin' you but me.

A gallant lie. Sara tries to believe it. They dance. Practice has made her near perfect. Their movements are ambitious, nimble, better than anyone else on the floor. They move so well together that Snookie, dancing nearby, starts chanting:

SNOOKIE
Go, Patrick! Go, Patrick!

(CONTINUED)

133 CONTINUED:

FROM ANOTHER ANGLE OF DANCE FLOOR

Diggy. Jiggling and wildly gyrating. Chiming in --

DIGGY
Go, Sara! Go, Sara!

PATRICK AND SARA

building up a sweat; confidently dancing at fever pitch.

DEEJAY (V.O.)
Everybody have funk, funk, funk!

134 INT. FEETZ - DANCE FLOOR

Sara and Patrick, still going at it. Snookie, Diggy and others prance around them like backup dancers.

ANOTHER ANGLE - NIKKI

standing with her crew dourly observing Patrick and Sara.

NIKKI
Watch me squash their shit. Hard.

ON NIKKI
Shoving, pushing, and barging her way up to Patrick. Without preamble or regard for Sara, she starts dancing with him. Patrick looks at Sara but he's somehow dancing with Nikki. Sara retreats with daggers in her eyes. Pissed.

PATRICK (AND NIKKI)
unresponsive as she grinds her body into his, raw and wild.

SARA
standing where she can see but can't be seen from the dance floor. From a curtain of kids, Malakai suddenly appears at her side. Sara can't move. She's boxed in. Malakai indicates Nikki and Patrick with slick satisfaction, whispers derisively:

(CONTINUED)

MALAKAI
You ain't never gonna look as good as she does with him. That's oil. You're milk. Ain't no point in tryin' to mix.

He evaporates into the crowd. Sara stands there.

PATRICK AND NIKKI
as a SLOW DANCE BEGINS. Nikki starts to press herself against Patrick. Patrick holds her off with both arms. Walks away.

WIDER ANGLE – DANCE FLOOR – FAVOR PATRICK
moving toward Sara.

A stark, apologetic expression on his face. He takes her hand. Sara fiercely jerks away. Patrick grabs her hand again, more emphatically this time. But Sara won't budge from the spot where she's standing. So Patrick slides
his arms around her, holds her without moving. They remain like this for a moment or two until they slowly begin to dance. We PUSH IN ON them in this little space. Patrick's lips brush Sara's ear.

Patrick...?  
Sara...?  
What?  
I'm sorry.

ANGLE PAST THEM ON MALAKAI

slow dancing with his flavor of the night. Eyes on Sara and Patrick. Both underwhelmed and resentful of what he sees.

INT. ROY'S ROWHOUSE - HALLWAY/FRONT DOOR - THAT NIGHT

Sara unlocks the door. She and Patrick enter. She turns on the lights. Looks at him. Answers the unspoken question.

(CONTINUED)

82.

CONTINUED:

Sara's in D.C. Blues Alley. He'll be gone all night.

Patrick sits down on the sofa. Sara crosses to the STEREO, turns it ON. A SAX SOLO begins playing.

Sara's demo. The only one he ever cut. Kinda grows on you.

A beat. Somewhere between five seconds and forever. Then:

Sara's in D.C. Blues Alley. He'll be gone all night.

Wanna see my room?
Patrick looks at her, nods. He gets up, follows Sara behind the partition into her "room." They stand there for a moment. He cups her face with his hands. Kisses her. They begin to take off each other's clothes, alternately sure and fumbling; a bit awkward, a bit urgent. Sara unzips Patrick's pants, catches something other than his clothes. Patrick winces in pain. She looks at him with an embarrassed grimace. Says this very low.

SARA

Sorry...

They kiss again, stumble backward to her futon. Fall down upon it and begin to make love.

136 INT. PATTERSON HIGH - HALLWAY - PATRICK AND SARA -
136 DAY

CAMERA TRACKS them as they walk down the hall hand-in-hand, sometimes exchanging greetings with other students. They are officially a couple and they appear to be in love. At the door to Sara's next class, Patrick busses her lips before she enters.

137 INT. SARA'S CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS ACTION
137

No teacher is present. The class files in. Toni drops down in a chair beside Sara. She leans over in a conspiratorial whisper.

TONI

Whatever you do, don't fuck him.

(CONTINUED)

83.

137 CONTINUED:
137

SARA

Excuse me?

TONI

'Hit it and quit it,' that's their motto.
Whose motto?

TONI
Black guys. Everybody knows that.

The teacher walks in. Sara quickly whispers back to Toni.

SARA
Don't forget, they all have big dicks and beat their wives. Everybody knows that too.

INT. RIB JOINT (SOMEWHERE IN BALTIMORE) - NIGHT

Malakai, along with Snooki and two brain donors, ARVEL and LIP, eat at a booth. Patrick strolls in gritty from work. Tired from work. He slides in next to Malakai. The mood is light, jovial.

ARVEL
You smell, boy.

PATRICK
How can a piece of shit tell?

The table cracks up.

MALAKAI
You been scarce lately, man. Where you been?

ARVEL
Somewhere dreamin' of a White Christmas...

LIP
... And Christmas ain't even for 'nother six months.

SNOOKIE
Lip. It's a so-to-speak thang, you ignorant fuck.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
SNOOKIE (CONT'D)
(looks at Patrick)
So. So to speak? Whassup.

PATRICK
(snatching up one of
his ribs)
Back out my business, boy.

MALAKAI
(watching Patrick
keenly)
You tappin' that white girl, man?
(half joking)
That's why you ain't got time for
your boyz no more, you too busy
frontin’. Too busy snowflakin’.

Patrick lifts one of Malakai’s ribs, responds coolly.

PATRICK
How am I frontin’, ’Kai? I made
time for this bullshit, didn't I?

LIP
Aww, man. You busted. That's why
your jaws are gettin' so tight.

SNOOKIE
You the one need his jaws
tightened with your pork-ass
instigatin' self.

ARVEL
(re: Patrick's roving
fingers)
Order somethin', Patrick. This
ain't no goddamn soup line.

Patrick grabs some of Arvel's fries, chews them in his
face.

PATRICK
Y'all hangin' tonight or what?

MALAKAI
We thinkin' about slidin' through
that new rec center opened up on
the Eastside. You ridin'?

PATRICK
Eastside? That's the wrong side.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

138 CONTINUED:

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PATRICK (CONT'D)
I ain't messin' with those fools
over there. You know how they
are.

MALAKAI
I ain't pressed. I got my own
shit.

Shorthand. The table stops. Malakai glances around,
lifts his shirt to expose a gun. Patrick stares at
Malakai with disbelief.

MALAKAI
What you think? I'ma keep walkin'
around waitin' for some chump to
cap me? I'ma protect myself.

PATRICK
That ain't protection. It's an
excuse for some unnecessary
mayhem.

MALAKAI
Ain't nothin' unnecessary 'bout
it. Shit. Mayhem and madness.
That's a black man's life.

PATRICK
How you know? You ain't tried
nothing else. Now you sittin' up
here strapped for no good reason.
You askin' for trouble, Malakai.
(as Malakai laughs)
You think this shit's funny?

Snookie shifts uncomfortably. Arvel and Lip look at
Malakai. Malakai looks at Patrick, coldly drops his
smile.

MALAKAI
I think it's funny you think it ain't necessary. You act like you don't know where you are no more, Patrick, and whassup out there for anybody who ain't you. Maybe that's what happens when a white girl goes to your head.

LIP
-- Or gives you some.

(CONTINUED)

PATRICK
Fuck you, Lip.

(looks at Malakai)
I know what's out there. I also know you can get past it. But that ain't gonna happen, 'Kai, long as you keep gettin' in your own way.

ARVEL
(peacemaker)
Aw'ight. Y'all said what you had to say. We back to bein' boyz. Patrick. Chill. Have some ribs.

INT. ROY'S ROWHOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT
Sara and Patrick, post-coital. She's in her robe. He's dressed but they're fooling around as they fix sandwiches. Patrick drops down in a chair. Sara drops down on his lap.

PATRICK
What's your favorite flower?

SARA
I don't have a favorite.

PATRICK
Yeah, but if you did...

SARA
I dunno. Maybe cymbidiums -- orchids. They're sort of showboaty but they're pretty.

PATRICK
What's your favorite color?

SARA
Agua.

PATRICK
What's your second favorite color?

SARA
Mmm. Mauve.

PATRICK
You're makin' this real hard, Sara. Those ain't exactly tuxedo colors.

(CONTINUED)

Sara swings her legs around, facing him, straddling him.

SARA
Nut. What are you talking about?

PATRICK
I was tryin' to get around to askin' you somethin' but since I'm some sorta nut, you probably wouldn't wanna go to prom with me...

She throws her arms around his neck, kissing him. Patrick slides his hands under her robe, cups her breasts. Sara responds to him. They are too engrossed in this intimacy to hear the FRONT DOOR OPENING, to see Roy until he walks in and sees them. Sara leaps up, closes her robe. Patrick doesn't know what to do. He's caught. Straight up. Red-handed. Roy's eyes dart between them, settle on and slice into Patrick.
ROY
Patrick -- it is Patrick, isn't it?
(a small awkward nod)
Well, I think you were just leavin'.

Patrick stands up. Sara grabs his arm defiantly, holds him back.

SARA
Why does he have to leave? We're all adults. Right?

ROY
He either leaves or I throw his ass out. Your call, Sara.

Patrick jerks his arm free from Sara, grabs his jacket off the back of his chair. He back-talks Roy as he passes him.

PATRICK
Chill, man. I'm goin'. You don't have to come off with all 'at.

ROY
Who the hell are you to tell me how to come off? You're in my house alone with my daughter.

(CONTINUED)

It takes everything Patrick has to keep walking until he's out the door. It slams behind him. Sara marches up to Roy, furious.

SARA
I hate being your daughter. You ruin everything.

She tries to stomp off. Roy kicks a chair in her path. Snarls.

ROY
Siddown.
(not a request; an
order; as she sits)
It's a free country, you can hate me. Ain't like that's exactly
news. But disrespectin' me,
that's where the road ends, Sara.
I don't want him up here again. I
mean it.

SARA
You mean it because he's black.

ROY
Don't start that bullshit!

SARA
Why's it bullshit? Because you
hang with black guys and play jazz
and have the hots for Angela
Bassett?

ROY
Because he was in my house with
his hands all over my daughter!

SARA
Keep telling yourself that. Just
don't expect me to believe it. I
saw how you looked at him. But
you didn't see him. Well, for
your information, he's a straight-
A student with more heart and guts
than you'll ever have!

ROY
Yeah? Well, when are you gonna
have the guts to say what you
really want to say to me, Sara?

(CONTINUED)
back. So don't talk to me about guts.

Not quite the truth, but near enough to sting. It quiets Roy down. He regards her with regret and guilt.

ROY
Sounds like you have it all figured out.

SARA
I have you figured out. You think you can make up all the time you missed, all the things you didn't do? You can't! I'm here because I have to be and it's a goddamned nightmare.

ROY
Well, you might as well wake up and get used to it, Sara, because that's the way things are sometimes, the way life is.

SARA
How the hell would you know? You've been asleep for the past thirty-seven years!

Now she does storm off. This time Roy lets her. He can't find the words to deny what she's said.

140 EXT. PATTERSON HIGH - QUAD OUTSIDE CAFETERIA - DAY

A break between classes draws the requisite claques and cliques. Sara and Patrick huddle over a chemistry book, attentive to each other. Nikki stands off watching both of them. Malakai saunters up to her smoking a joint. Hazily indicates Patrick and Sara.

MALAKAI
The 'Love Boat.'

NIKKI
Love shit. That bitch is tap-dancin' on my last nerve.

(CONTINUED)
MALAKAI
Looks like she's tap-dancing on your last boyfriend. She got it like that? Naw. Never mind. Stall it. I ain't heard shit.

NIKKI
Stall what? What you hear?

MALAKAI
Some trash she's talkin'. About you.

NIKKI
About me?

MALAKAI
Yeah. How you ain't all 'at since Patrick's takin' her to the prom. (in for the kill) I am a little bit... chagrined though, Nikki. You lettin' some white ho' show you up like that.

He regards her with bemused pity. Nikki, with all her inner outrage, manages to salvage her pride. She sneers in his face.

NIKKI
Fuck you, Malakai. Fuck her too.

MALAKAI
(gaily, a she sails off) Ain't no need in fuckin' me... stuck up, bitch... I'm on your side

Patrick drinks at a water fountain. Looks up. Malakai's standing there. There's still some tension between them.

MALAKAI
Yo. Me and the boyz fixin' to shoot some hoops. Us against Druid Hill. If you interested.
PATRICK
Druid Hill? Hell yeah.

MALAKAI
Gotta skip last period.

(CONTINUED)

They walk off together and, after a few steps, begin dribbling imaginary balls down the hall.

INT. GYM (PATTERSON) - DAY

A girls' basketball game in progress. Sara's playing defense. She's on Nikki's team. She blocks a shot but Chenille, on the opposing team, gets it on the rebound. Basket. Nikki shoots Sara a murderous look. Stupid, uncoordinated bitch.

EXT. DRUID HILL PLAYGROUND - BASKETBALL COURT

A four-on-four game in progress. Patrick, Malakai, Snookie and Arvel versus the Druid Hill Two Deuces. An unseen BOOM BOX BLASTS the music of JAY-Z throughout. Patrick has the ball. He passes it to Malakai. They AD-LIB insults to the Two Deuces. This is heaven for them. Talking shit and playing ball. The best time.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. PATTERSON HIGH - GYM

Sara takes her defensive position against an opposing player, successfully blocks the shot, tries to slam the ball to Nikki. It clips Nikki's head, bounces out of bounds. Nikki, her dignity stunned, her patience out, walks up to Sara, shoves her to the floor. Sara looks up at her as some disembodied voice calls out:
FEMALE VOICE
Don't start nothin', won't be nothin'! Stay down, girl!

145 EXT. DRUID HILL - BASKETBALL COURT
Malakai dribbles the ball around one of the Two Deuces, skies it. Misses the hoop. Patrick rebounds. Passes it back to 'Kai. He takes the shot. Makes it. Patrick and Arvel strut victoriously.

146 INT. PATTERSON HIGH - GYM
Sara jumps up, shoves Nikki back. And the fight is on.

147 EXT. DRUID HILL - BASKETBALL COURT
As the dejected Deuces look on, Malakai high-fives Patrick and Snookie. Arvel's moving into their circle when SHOTS RING OUT. Everybody on the court instantly dives to the ground for cover.

148 INT. PATTERSON HIGH - GYM
Sara and Nikki tumble to the gym floor. The surprise is Sara. She matches Nikki blow for blow. It's a punishing fight for both of them and it only ends when the gym teacher separates them.

149 EXT. DRUID HILL - BASKETBALL COURT

150 INT. MRS. GWYNN'S OFFICE - SARA AND NIKKI - DAY
In adjacent chairs across from Mrs. Gwynn's empty one.
NIKKI
(a hiss, under her breath)
It ain't over, bitch.

SARA
Over? I don't even know why it started... bitch. And don't say it's about Patrick because it's not. It's not about him.

NIKKI
No. It's about you. White girls like you. Creepin' up, takin' our men. The whole world ain't enough. You gotta conquer ours too.

SARA
I like him, he likes me. And if you don't like that, screw you.

Mrs. Gwynn walks in. Sits down. Looks reproachfully at them.

MRS. GWYNN
Girls. I think you need to talk.

151 INT. ROY'S APARTMENT - LIVING AREA/SARA'S ROOM - DAY
151
Roy's tuning his sax when Sara enters. Her face is a mess. Yet she drifts by, bruised and bent over, as if this were the norm. Roy does a double-take.

ROY
What the hell happened to you?

SARA
I got suspended. Two days.

She straggles into her room. Roy follows her to the futon.

ROY
For what? Fighting?
(as she nods like "no shit Sherlock")
Why were you fighting, Sara?
SARA
(sardonically)
I'm not sure. I think it's some kind of black female thing.

He sits down beside her, instinctively reaches out to touch her face, assess the damage. Sara sharply flinches away. But Roy persists and after a moment, she lets him minister to her.

152 INT. REYNOLDS' APARTMENT - KITCHEN - EVENING

Patrick walks in, Arvel's dried blood stained into his clothes. Chenille's cooking with a sound-asleep Christopher slung over her shoulder. She and Patrick regard each other morosely.

CHENILLE
How's Arvel?

Patrick slumps down at the kitchen table. He's barely audible.

PATRICK
Pretty bad.
(almost to himself)
Can't even play a got-damned game of ball no more.

Chenille comes up behind him. Squeezes, pats his shoulder.

(CONTINUED)

94.

152 CONTINUED:

CHENILLE
You see Sara? She alright?
(as he looks up with a question mark)
You didn't hear? Nikki jumped off at her in gym. It was fierce...

Given the day, this is the straw on Patrick's back. He bolts from the table and on his way out nearly bumps
heads with Kenny.

153 INT. ROY'S ROWHOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Patrick RINGS the DOORBELL. Sara opens the door slightly, just enough for Patrick to see her face. It pisses him off.

PATRICK

Shit!

SARA

It's alright. I'm okay.

Roy appears in the space behind her, looking out. Sara can feel his presence. Her eyes implore Patrick.

SARA

Look. It's not a good time.
(gently shutting the door)
I'll see you later... I'm okay.

154 INT. LAUNDROMAT (SOUTHEAST BALTIMORE) - EARLY EVENING

The laundromat is empty but for a few customers and Nikki. She's loading clothes from two large baskets into washers when her brother DIONDRE, 10, races in. He's grinning from ear-to-ear.

NIKKI

Diondre, what your butt doin' here?

DIONDRE
(a taunting twist)
I can go where I want. You the one on punishment.

Nikki swings a wet shirt with no intention of hitting him. She looks up. Patrick's standing in the doorway. Diondre runs up to him, holds out the palm of his hand.

(CONTINUED)

95.
DIONDRE
There she go. Gimme my two dollars.


NIKKI
Whatever it is, I don't wanna hear it.

Patrick leans up against a washing machine and for a long moment just looks at her. The walk there has composed his emotions.

PATRICK
I thought you had somethin' to say to me.

NIKKI
You thought wrong.

An old black woman is avidly, openly watchin' them. Patrick indicates a bench on the other side of the laundromat. Nikki petulantly follows him there. They sit. Patrick looks at her.

PATRICK
Somethin' must be on your mind for you to get up in Sara's face, start all this drama. What you tryin' to prove, Nikki?

NIKKI
You're the one tryin' to prove something. Stuck up in her shit like she's somethin' special.

PATRICK
What if she is? What's it to you? You didn't see me trippin' off that Howard dude and I could have. I coulda tripped hard, Nikki.

NIKKI
That was different.

PATRICK
How you gonna call it different?

She stands up. Looks down at him. Raises her voice.

(CONTINUED)

96.

154 CONTINUED:

NIKKI
Because she's white and he ain't.
And don't sit there like you don't
know what I'm talkin' about,
Patrick.

PATRICK
(glaring at her)
You don't even know what you're
talkin' about, Nikki.

NIKKI
I don't? Y'all black men, soon as
you even think about goin'
someplace good, first thing you do
is find a white girl to take with
you.

OLD WOMAN (O.S.)
Uh-huh.

Patrick glares in the Old Woman's direction, then back at
Nikki.

PATRICK
I thought I was goin' someplace
good with you. You the one called
me off. But you ain't tryin' to
remember that. Now you mad. Why?
Because she's white and I like
her? I'm with her.

NIKKI
Please. You're with her because
she's white. That's what sets me
off.

PATRICK
(exasperated)
It ain't got no business settin'
you off! Me and her ain't got
nothin' to do with you and what
you think. So keep your hands off
her and that shit to yourself.

Nikki folds her arms across her chest, looks at him
defiantly.

NIKKI
I don't think it, I know it. But
you go ahead, deny it. That's
what y'all always do.

She turns on her heels, goes back to her machine.
Patrick rises, sees the old woman glinting at him. He
holds her hateful stare for a moment, then walks out.

155 INT. REYNOLDS' APARTMENT - CHENILLE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Chenille and Kenny. In the middle of a contentious
moment. He tries to give her some money. She snatches
it out of his hand. Kenny looks at her. He's hurt.
Chenille's too mad to see it.

CHENILLE
What? I'm supposed to get excited because you decided to skate by
and drop a dollar on the dresser?

KENNY
It's more than a dollar. And it's all I got.
(beat)
I got laid off rom B.W.I.,
Chenille. I been workin' part-
time. Money's tight. You know
how you are about money. That's
way I haven't been coming around.

Chenille stares at him for a long moment. Her voice is low.

CHENILLE
Money ain't got nothin' to do with it, Kenny. You don't come around
because you don't feel like comin' around. You don't want the
responsibility of comin' around. As long as you out there and I'm
in here, you know your son's being taken care of. You ain't got no
worries when it comes to him.

KENNY
And you don't have no feelings when it comes to me. All you do is bitch and complain about what I don't do. I get sick of that.

CHENILLE
Be sick of it. You ain't got to see me to see your son.

KENNY
I'll be sure to keep that in mind.

He leaves. Chenille stands there, mad at him. Mad at herself.

INT. FREE CLINIC (SOUTH BALTIMORE) - DAY

The lowest common denominator for misery.

(CONTINUED)

98.

CONTINUED:

The room is filled with young women, most them black, and children of all ages. They are piled up like cars on a freeway, waiting to be seen. The noise level is at a peak when Chenille and Sara walk in. Chenille's carrying a fussy Christopher, his diaper bag and her backpack. Sara, wanting to be helpful, reaches for Christopher.

SARA
Want me to take him?

Chenille shakes her head. Walks to reception to sign herself in. Sara takes in the faces of girls younger than herself, the grime and gloom of the room. It's incomprehensible that this is a place where sick children are brought to get well. Chenille finishes at the desk. Returns to Sara. They cross to a corner of the clinic where they sit -- on the floor. Chenille indicates the receptionist bitterly.

CHENILLE
That wench. You gotta stand over
her to make sure she puts your name on the damn list. Triflin' bitch.

Chenille starts to change Christopher's diaper. He starts to wail and flail. Chenille can't placate him. One of his kicks connects with Chenille's open backpack, sends books and papers flying. Sara can see the veins stand up on Chenille's neck.

SARA
I'll get 'em.

She does. Chenille's finally got control of Christopher but he's still crying. Chenille slips off his dirty diaper. When Sara hands her a clean one, Chenille regards her strangely, as if just remembering that she's there.

CHENILLE
So your old man flipped about the fight.
(with some animus)
Probably thinks it's all Patrick's fault.

SARA
No. I explained about Nikki.

CHENILLE
Right. You put it all on her. None of it's on you.

(CONTINUED)

SARA
She started it, Chenille. She wanted to start it. I told you what she said.

Chenille flashes a look, finishes up with Christopher. She picks him up, puts a bottle in his mouth. Cradles him.

CHENILLE
Maybe she didn't have no business gettin' in your face. But she had
a reason to say what she said.

A reason? Sara studies her, trying to fathom the remark.

SARA
So you agree with her? You think I don't belong with Patrick.

CHENILLE
What I think don't matter. But you and him act like it don't bother people that you're together. Like it don't hurt people to see.

SARA
(her Irish up)
We like each other. What is the big fucking deal? It's him and me. Not us and other 'people.'

The white girl with the rose-colored reasoning. Chenille glares at Sara, her voice designed to snatch the blinders off.

CHENILLE
Black people, Sara. Black women.
(passionately)
Patrick's about somethin'. He's smart. He's motivated. He's for real. He ain't gonna make no babies and not take care of 'em or run the streets, fuck up his life. He's gonna do somethin' with himself. Here you come, white and right, and you take one of the few decent men left after jail, drugs and drive-bys. That's what Nikki meant about you up in our world.

Sara sits there, stupefied. Understanding. Not understanding.

(CONTINUED)

100.

156 CONTINUED:

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SARA
There's only one world, Chenille.
(pauses)
I thought we were friends. Guess I was wrong.

She gets up, walks out. Something in Chenille wants to call after her, but she's too miserable, too torn up inside to do it.

157 INT. FEETZ - BAR - NIGHT

Patrick and Malakai nurse drinks. The MUSIC fails to move them. They have too much on their minds. Malakai fires up a cigarette.

MALAKAI
So what you gonna do?

PATRICK
How many times you gonna ask me that?

MALAKAI
It's payback time. Either you down or you ain't. Either you m'boy or you not. Simple as that.

Patrick takes a long moment. The choice is simple. It's the decision that's complicated. He downs his drink. Hedges.

PATRICK
Even if I did ride, you ain't got nobody but Lip and Lip will get a nigger's ass killed. Quick.

MALAKAI
Eastside ain't got no firepower.
I got some shit, man. AK-47. We go in, get out with one spray down.

Just then Snookie and Sara walk toward them from the dance floor. Something in their faces unsettles Sara but Snookie, oblivious, dances up to the bar, snapping his fingers and bobbing his head.

SNOOKIE
You see us, Patrick?

(CONTINUED)
MALAKAI
(a storm warning)
You see us, man? We're rappin'.

Snookie rebuffs him, keeps talking to Patrick...

SNOOKIE
Me and Sara lit it up! Y-e-o-w!

... bumps his butt against Sarah's hip, does a very ungainly half split. Sara and Patrick exchange smiles. Malakai isn't amused. He flattens Snookie's ass with the business end of his foot. Snookie sprawls flat on his face to the floor. Now Malakai's amused. Sara looks at Patrick. Patrick scowls at Malakai.

PATRICK
That shit ain't funny.

SNOOKIE
(springing up)
Damn right it ain't funny.

MALAKAI
I thought you liked it down there.
That's your specialty, ain't it?
Crawling?

SNOOKIE
That was a reflex action, man.
And you just plain rude and wrong to bring the shit up in mixed company.

Sara's not quite sure what they're alluding to but she doesn't want the displeasure of Malakai's company. She taps Patrick.

SARA
I gotta get home. Ready?

Malakai's eyes slice into her. First Snookie, now this bitch. Steppin' all over his conversation with Patrick.

MALAKAI
No, he ain't ready. He's talkin'.
To me. A-B conversation. Gotta
go? C yourself the fuck home.

SARA
(a real reflex action)
Fuck you.

Malakai lunges for her. The move is so swift and sudden
Patrick overturns his stool to dive between them. He
sweeps Sara behind him, into the path of a startled
Snookie. Stands there nose-to-nose with Malakai, staring
him down, furious with him.

PATRICK
Have you lost your motherfuckin'
MIND, man? Huh? Have you!

Sara, frightened and frozen, doesn't know what to do.
Snookie's voice weakly creaks out. He's trying to rise
to the occasion.

SNOOKIE
Patrick, man, c'mon.

But Malakai and Patrick stay where they stand. Too close
for comfort. Both in the danger zone. Malakai regards
Patrick with a combination of cruel anger and deep,
genuine hurt.

MALAKAI
You take that bitch's back and
won't even cover mine?

PATRICK
'Cause you wrong, Malakai!

MALAKAI
No! You wrong. You BEEN wrong.
You ain't worth shit no more.
(venomously)
Get out my face, and take that ho
with you.

Patrick bucks up. Sara walks over to him, gently
clutches his sleeve. It's no easier to turn away from
Malakai than it is to walk away from a lifetime of
friendship. But Patrick does. With Sara holding onto
his arm, at his side, he turns and walks away.
walking. A heavy silence. Sara looks over at him. Patrick doesn't say anything. But after a moment, he reaches down and takes her hand and they walk on like this together.

OVER MUSIC (e.g. BUSTA RHYMES' "Dangerous.")

159 INT. DANCE STUDIO - SARA AND PATRICK - MORNING

Practice her free form, a hip-hop ballet hybrid. They're both tired, irritable, beaten down. They've been there awhile. Sara makes a misstep. Patrick stops. Cold. Sara grits on him.

(CONTINUED)

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159 CONTINUED:

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SARA
We should keep going.

PATRICK
You messed up.

SARA
I know I messed up. I'll get it right the next time.

PATRICK
No. You gonna get it right now so you can do it perfect next time.

She glares at him, exasperated. So many things bottled up.

SARA
I can't work like this. I can't dance like this.

PATRICK
Like what?

SARA
Like this. You dictating to me.

He crosses the room, CUTS OFF the MUSIC. Looks at her. Sara walks over to a window seat near him. Flops down.
PATRICK
What's wrong, Sara?

SARA
Nothing's wrong.
( except)
I can't figure things out.

PATRICK
What things? The audition? You ain't got nothin' to worry about.
I told you. I'll be there.

SARA
Things, Patrick. Things between us. Things between us and them.

PATRICK
I didn't know there was a 'them.'

SARA
Well, open your pretty brown eyes, look the hell around.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

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159 CONTINUED:

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SARA (CONT'D)
(he's so nonplussed)
Everything's screwed up. Nobody wants to see us together, not even Chenille. I don't know why they feel that way. How can I know? Maybe they have a point, Patrick.

PATRICK
They only got a point if you believe they got a point, Sara.

She looks at him... and loves him... and doesn't know what to do.

SARA
I'm just saying that we should think about this, that's all.
PATRICK  
That's a fuckin' 'nough.

SARA  
Why are you getting mad?

PATRICK  
Because I like to think for myself, run my own life, and I thought you did too.

Sara looks at him. Now she's getting mad.

SARA  
You're never gonna run your own life as long as you keep running back to Malakai every time he fucks up or fucks you over.

She's crossed the line. But Patrick responds so deliberately, so calmly prosaic, that she doesn't immediately realize it...

PATRICK  
First of all, Malakai ain't never fucked me over. Second of all, you don't know him, Sara, what he been through. Matter of fact, you don't know shit about none of it. So don't come off to me like you do.

(CONTINUED)

159  CONTINUED:

SARA  
I know he's lost, Patrick! Everybody but you can see that. And if you keep reaching back for him, you're gonna wind up lost too.

... until he erupts.

PATRICK  
Who the fuck are you to say he's lost? Malakai had my back when you were busy gee-whizzin' in the
woods with your backward-ass, redneck friends.

SARA
They weren't rednecks!

Patrick yanks his boombox off the floor, glares at her.

PATRICK
You know what? The hell with you.

Sara yells after him. Her VOICE ECHOES in the empty studio.

SARA
The hell with you too!

EXT. PATTERSON HIGH - HALLWAY OUTSIDE SARA'S CLASSROOM - 160 DAY

Sara exits, looking pretty much like she feels. Like shit. She walks a few paces. Sees Patrick. Their eyes connect for a brief, awful moment before they continue on their respective ways.

INT. PATTERSON HIGH - SARA'S LOCKER/HALLWAY - LATER THAT DAY

Sara's at her locker. Patrick walks up to her. She looks at him, tries to smile past the dour expression on his face.

SARA
Hi.

Patrick doesn't say anything at first. But then:

(PARTIAL PAGE)

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CONTINUED:

PATRICK
Thought you might need this on Saturday. I ain't gonna be able to make it.
He hands her an audio cassette of her free form music. Sara gazes at it, then up at him, understanding what this means. She won't let him see how it shatters her. He hesitates, as if he wants to say something else. But Sara turns her back on him and Patrick walks away.

**ANOTHER ANGLE - TONI**

approaching Sara's locker. Having seen the encounter between Patrick and Sara, she's as smug and overbearing as ever.

**TONI**

Lovers' quarrel? You're better off. That menace to society would've broken your heart and spent all your money in a news flash. Trust me on that, Sara.

Sara stares at her, uncomprehending at first. She resists the urge to slap the smile off Toni's face. She gets in it instead.

**SARA**

Toni, listen carefully. You're a simple bitch and you don't have any friends, black or white, because nobody likes a fucking asshole.

She storms off leaving Toni, for once, speechless.

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**INT. PATTERSON HIGH - HALLWAY/CAFETERIA - DAY**

Sara. Caught up in a throng of kids and somehow very separate from them. The walls have been transformed into veritable billboards for the senior prom -- decorations are everywhere. Sara continues down the hallway almost aimlessly into the...

**INT. CAFETERIA - CONTINUOUS ACTION**

Sara. Carrying a food tray, eyes searching for a place to sit. She picks up Chenille and her girls at one table... Nikki and her crew at another... Patrick and Snookie... and, finally, Toni. Sara dumps her food into a trash can, walks out.
164 INT. DANCE STUDIO - DAY

Sara. Alone. She pushes the tape from Patrick into an ancient recorder. The MUSIC COMES ON. She takes to the floor. Her face is like a pinched nerve. She wants to cry. She tries to dance.

165 INT. SARA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Sara's on the futon, flipping through a photo album. Pictures of her and Glynn. Roy knocks on the partition. Waits a beat before he comes in. He looks at Sara. She keeps flipping.

ROY
I was wondering... how long you plan on hating me? Maybe I'm an optimist but I hope there's some kind of timetable.
(this raises a small smile)
Well, I don't wanna bug you. I just came in to say good luck.

Sara regards him quizzically. Roy goes to her dresser, picks up an envelope from Juilliard.

ROY
I saw the return address. Got curious. It was open. I read it. I know I shouldn't have but at least now I have an excuse to tell you how proud I am of you, Sara.

SARA
(quietly miserable)
I was gonna tell you about the audition, Roy. I meant to.

She's clutching the photo album. Roy sits down next to her.

ROY
Tomorrow's the big day?

SARA
Uh-huh. The big day.

ROY
You bummed out about it?
(as she shakes her head)
You're a worse liar than I am father.

(CONTINUED)

SARA
You're not so bad.
(close to a confession)
I didn't give you much to work with. It's not like I've been the perfect daughter.

ROY
Well, it ain't like I deserve a perfect daughter. I screwed up. Did everything in a hurry and still thought I had all the time in the world. To be in love with your mother. Be a father to you. But time flies. You look up one day and all you got to show for yourself is a pretty little girl who hates your guts and won't talk to you because too much time went by.

Sara's eyes well up. Before she can stop herself, she's crying.

SARA
I don't hate you. I miss her. I miss Mom...
(as Roy takes her in his arms, tries to console her)
... Patrick's pissed at me. I'm pissed at him. He's not coming tomorrow and I want him there and
I don't know what to do.

Sara draws back from Roy, wipes her tears. Collects herself.

**ROY**

You want him there. I understand that. But whatever he brings to the table, Patrick can't dance for you, Sara. You're the bottom line out there. This is your chance to be the dancer Juilliard came to see.

**SARA**

I wanted somebody there who loves me.

Roy regards her softly, significantly, the irony implicit.

(Continued)

109.

165 CONTINUED:

**ROY**

I love you.

Sara looks up. For the first time in her life, she believes him.

166 INT. HOSPITAL - I.C.U. WAITING ROOM/CORRIDOR - EVENING

Patrick's bouncing on his knees, speaking to Arvel's parents, who are clearly stricken. Arvel's father, stoic, holds his wife's hand. Arvel's mother kneads a Kleenex, her face etched with tears. Patrick hugs her. Stands up to see Malakai frozen in the doorway, put off by the palpable grief. Patrick crosses over to him. They retreat quietly into the corridor, their concern for Arvel a shaky ground for conciliation.

**MALAKAI**

Why his mom's cryin' like that? Arvel's gonna make it, right? That what's his nurse said. She told me herself, 'Your friend's
gonna make it.' Did that bitch lie to me! Talk to me, Patrick! Is he gone?

Patrick steers Malakai away from the waiting room, backs him against a wall and, in a gentle but firm way, holds him there.

**PATRICK**

They just got bad news, man. They don't need to hear it again.

*(trying to be strong; faltering)*

Arvel's fightin'. He's gonna pull through. Thing is, when he does, they don't think... he ain't... shit. Arvel ain't gonna walk again.

In that moment, whatever's left of Malakai's soul crumbles. He looks at Patrick with aggrieved disbelief and then a building anger. A stronger man would probably cry.

Patrick eases his grip. Malakai straightens his body, cocks his head slightly. Studies Patrick in this crooked, derisive way.

**MALAKAI**

I got a good reason now, man?

*(MORE)*

*(CONTINUED)*

110.

166 **CONTINUED:**

**MALAKAI (CONT'D)**

*(off Patrick's silence)*

Aw'ight, college boy. You do what you think is the right thing. I'ma do what I know is the only thing.

He starts to walk off, doesn't get far before Patrick calls out.

**PATRICK**

Malakai...

*(a fleeting hesitation)*
... When it's on, I'll be there.

EXT. PLAYGROUND (O’DONNELL HEIGHTS PARK) - DAY

Groups of children scatter around worn-out playground equipment. The gleeful squeal of them is everywhere. Patrick guides Christopher down a slide; Chenille catches him at the bottom. Christopher can't get enough of this ride and Patrick and Chenille repeat the routine throughout their conversation.

CHENILLE
Why you so quiet?
(off Patrick's
brooding look)
Patrick Reynolds ain't got nothin' to say? That’s a first.
(catches her son with a whee!; then)
You know how I go off on folks sometimes. I mean it and then I don't mean it. Like what I said to Sara. Guess she told you.

PATRICK
(monotone)
I don't care what you said, Chenille.

CHENILLE
Patrick. Your ass is on your back and your lips are on the ground. You care, baby brother. And not just about what I said.
(as he looks at her)
You seriously like Sara. She got a serious jones for you. Am I lyin'?

(CONTINUED)

111.

CONTINUED:

PATRICK
It's besides the point. Whatever point it is you tryin' to make.
CHENILLE
I'm sayin' you can't help who you love, Patrick. At least you found somebody who loves you back.

Patrick regards Chenille impassively. Hands Christopher to her.

PATRICK
I gotta go.

CHENILLE
To where? To who? Malakai?
(sucks her teeth)
You ain't through with that fool yet.

PATRICK
He's not a fool, Chenille.

CHENILLE
No. You know what? You're the fool, Patrick. You think you let Malakai down and all you did was try to pull yourself up. Ain't no blame or shame in that.

PATRICK
(very low; a broken smile)
I still gotta go. Check you later.

Holding Christopher, Chenille watches Patrick walk out of the playground. Disappear. She and Christopher move on to a seesaw. Chenille bobs him up and down on one end of it. She's snuggling in Christopher's face when the other end suddenly drops to the ground. Chenille looks up. Sees Kenny.

168 EXT. PLAYGROUND - SWINGS - CHENILLE AND KENNY - LATER

They're side by side on swings. Christopher's nestled against Kenny's chest, soundly snoozing. They slowly swing throughout.

KENNY
It cut me, what you said.

(CONTINUED)
CHENILLE
(means this)
I shouldn't have... I was trippin'.

KENNY
You always trip. I'm used to that. Besides, you were right. You were wrong, too. So was I. I need to do better. Ain't no doubt about that.

CHENILLE
I know I come down on you hard about money, but I would rather you spend the time. Seriously.

KENNY
(jokingly)
So you don't want any money?

CHENILLE
I didn't say all that.

He smiles. Gently rubs Christopher's brow. Looks at her. Chenille smiles at him.

KENNY
I love my son, Chenille. You know that, don't you?

CHENILLE
Yeah. I always knew that.

EXT. BALTIMORE SCHOOL OF PERFORMING ARTS - ESTABLISHING

SHOT - SATURDAY EVENING

of the building, the downtown skyline, etc.

INT. BALTIMORE SCHOOL OF PERFORMING ARTS - AUDITORIUM -

SAME TIME
The house lights are on. Several seats in the front row are taken up by judges for Juilliard. Further back are the families and friends of other dancers. PUSH IN and FAVOR Roy among them.

171 INT. BACKSTAGE AREA - SARA

Warming up, other dancers, all in costume, around her. Her eyes wander from the clock to the stage door.

(CONTINUED)

113.

171 CONTINUED:

A sign on it reads: "JUILLIARD SCHOOL OF DANCE - BALTIMORE AUDITIONS." She stares at it, fingers the clover leaf necklace with an unsettling sense of deja vu.

ANGLE - WOMAN

with a PINCE-NEZ with a clipboard, navigating among the dancers with a clipboard. She calls out:

PINCE-NEZ

Johnson. Sara Johnson...

172 EXT. STREET (O'DONNELL HEIGHTS) - NIGHT

Patrick's waiting on the sidewalk. Malakai pulls up in Tute's BMW. Lip's in the backseat. Patrick gets into the car. It takes off down the street.

173 EXT./INT. STREET - BMW - DRIVING - NIGHT

RAP MUSIC blasts ON the RADIO. No one in the car is saying anything. Malakai has a "40" between his legs. He sips from it, passes it to Patrick. Patrick takes a short swig, passes it back to Lip. As he does this, a set of keys fall out of his jacket into his lap. Patrick picks them up. Looks at the key chain, his present from Sara. He looks at Malakai.

PATRICK

Pull over.

(as Malakai glances at
him, not understanding)
This ain't helpin' nobody, 'Kai.
I'm out. I mean it. Stop the car.

LIP
Awww, shit.       Here we go.

MALAKAI
(furious)
What you mean you out? You think
I'ma let your punk ass bail on me
again?

Patrick starts to open the door. Malakai speeds up. The
CAR CAREENS down the street, SQUEALS around corners.
Finally comes to a red light. Stops. Patrick starts to
open the door. Malakai grabs him by the jacket. Pulls
his gun. Patrick looks at Malakai and now he sees him.
Sees that he's lost and desperate... and dangerous.

(CONTINUED)

173   CONTINUED:
173

PATRICK
What you gonna do, 'Kai? You
gonna shoot me? Go ahead! You'll
have to!

LIP
Let him out!   We don't need him.

MALAKAI
Shut the fuck up.

Patrick jerks himself loose. Opens the door. Malakai
cocks the gun. Patrick's face flinches at the sound of
it. He can feel it trained on his back as he gets out
the car. But Malakai can't do it. Wouldn't do it. He
takes off like a bat out of hell.

174   EXT. STREET
174

Patrick heads down the street. As he walks, he can hear
the sound of GUNFIRE behind him, and then the sound like
an EXPLOSION. A CAR HORN goes off in a persistent drone.
Patrick stops. Stands there for a moment. Then he's walking again. Without looking back. And then he's running away from the mayhem behind him.

175  EXT. STREET - SAME TIME
175

The BMW's tangled around a street lamp. Inside Malakai slumps over the steering wheel, a bullet through his head.

176  INT. BALTIMORE SCHOOL OF PERFORMING ARTS - AUDITORIUM - NIGHT
176

Pince-Nez leads Sara to the stage. Announces her.

Sara walks onstage.

She nods down at the judges, looks out into the audience. Her eyes anxiously search for Patrick... hoping. Her MUSIC begins.

Grieg's Peer Gynt (Morning). Sara starts to sway, moving like an angel through the soft cloud of this music. Her line, proportion and balance are impeccable.

(CONTINUED)

115.

176  CONTINUED: 176
176

Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake (Tanz der Schwane) begins and Sara slowly blossoms, opening herself up to the music like a flower. She completes every turn and twist and leap with confidence, energy and persuasion. She is doing what a dancer should do -- engaging the audience, igniting their imagination, drawing them in.

ANGLE - JUDGES

perking up, taking notes, attentive to her.

SARA

finishes with a flawless arabesque. Looks out.
REVERSE ANGLE - JUDGES

One of the more imperious-appearing JUDGES removes his glasses, speaks to her. Sara's still trying to catch her breath.

STERN JUDGE
You prepared a free-form?

SARA
Yes... sir... they have... my music.

JUDGE
Does it have a theme?

SARA
Yes. Emo...
(clears her throat)
Emotion.

The Judge turns around, shouts to someone we can't see:

STERN JUDGE
Cue Johnson's music.

MUSIC UP: A remix of hip-hop (e.g., LAURYN'S HILL'S doo wop; NAS'S "We Will Survive" and JAY Z's latest) and snatches of CLASSICAL.

SARA
stands there. Doesn't move. Can't. She finally walks up to the edge of the stage. Looks down at the judges, her eyes filled with trepidation. Her voice is a shaky whisper.

(CONTINUED)

116.

176  CONTINUED:

176

SARA
I'm sorry. I wasn't ready. Can you start it over again?

REVERSE ANGLE
The Judge waving off the MUSIC. It STOPS. He regards Sara impatiently.

**STERN JUDGE**

Are you ready now?

Before she can respond, Patrick's voice booms from the back of the auditorium.

**PATRICK (O.S.)**

Yes, sir. She's ready.

ANGLE WIDENS to reveal him coming forward. Rushing for the stage. He pauses at the apron of it. Looks up at Sara. She peers down at him, astounded. Shaken. He smiles at her. She smiles back. Patrick's eyes softly take her in.

**PATRICK**

You can do it.

(because)

Ain't nobody watchin' you but me.

Sara's eyes focus on him. She nods. Turns to the judges.

**SARA**

I'm ready.

As her MUSIC cues up, Patrick slowly backs away from the stage.

Sara begins to dance.

She starts out strong and gets stronger. Every emotion she feels, every experience she's had, comes to life in a way that we've never seen before, not even when she was practicing with Patrick. Her body has finally found a way to get inside this kind of music, to elevate its meaning and transform her dance.

The MUSIC ENDS. The lights go up.

Sara stands in the middle of the stage breathless, sweating. She lifts her head slowly and the ANGLE WIDENS to reveal --

(CONTINUED)
Patrick letting out a giant whoop...

The judges react and the audience gasps...

... as he bounds onto the stage and...

Roy jumps to his feet. Proudly and loudly clapping. Just like Glynn.

ANGLE - SARA

overwhelmed beyond belief. Patrick's coming toward her. She flies into his arms, free and happy, overjoyed. But the triumph of her performance and the sheer bliss of the moment are transcended by something deeper and clearer, which is her love for Patrick.

JUDGES

struggling to maintain their and the proceeding's decorum, since the audience, caught up in the throes of this excitement, has begun to loudly, enthusiastically react.

STERNE JUDGE

Ladies and gentlemen, please!
(to Patrick)
Young man! Get off the stage.

WIDER to reveal the room.

Patrick hugging Sara, looks down at the judges.

PATRICK

All due respect, if ya'll don't let this girl in, you're crazy!

Sara pulls Patrick back. Walks alone to the edge of the stage, composed and professional again. She regards the judges with a beaming resolve and a ballerina's curtsy, then simply says:

SARA

Thank you. Very much.

STERNE JUDGE

Ms. Johnson!
Sara stops. Turns back to him. The Judge smiles.

**STERN JUDGE**

I can't say this on the record -- yet. But welcome to Juilliard.

(CONTINUED)

118.

176 CONTINUED:

176

**SARA'S FACE**

lovely and radiant as it breaks into a cheek-to-cheek smile. WIDER as she walks slowly, deliberately back to Patrick. Stops. Looks at him. Just looks. And then she throws her arms around his neck, kissing and hugging him. Emotional. Patrick swings her into the air, twirls her around and around, as we:

DISSOLVE TO:

177 INT. HOTEL BALLROOM - SENIOR PROM - NIGHT

177

OVER SLOW MUSIC (possible theme song):

Sara (in a gown) and Patrick (in a tux). Dancing (as if they had danced from the last FRAME INTO this one). They are beautiful.

WIDER to reveal the entire dance floor...

And we see that it's the senior prom.

The room's dressed up like a dreamy, futuristic romantic illusion. The ceiling's ablaze with tiny, star-like lights; under them large poufs of cotton clouds hang. Glittering, mirrored balls dangle over the main floor.

Seniors dance in traditional and cutting edge tuxes and mouth-watering, eye-popping versions of dresses and gowns. CAMERA PANS the floor, PICKING UP:

A surprisingly dashing Snookie and the fly girl. As they dance, he bravely but rather too abruptly dips her...

Diggy (in a glitter tuxedo and spiked hair) and her date...
Nikki with whom we shall perceive to be the Howard University guy. In any event, he looks slightly bored.

Chenille with Kenny, smiles at Sara as she and Patrick dance by.

CAMERA FAVORS and PUSHES IN ON...

Sara and Patrick. Gazing at each other. The SONG ENDS with them in each other's arms.

FADE OUT.

THE END