

SAVE THE LAST DANCE

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FADE IN:

1 EXT. PENNSYLVANIA COUNTRYSIDE - LONG SHOT - DAY 1

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 2

17, pressed at one of its windows.

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

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.

4 INT. AMTRAK TRAIN - MOVING - DUSK 4

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.

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) 6

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 7

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:

7

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)

I've got something for you. Come on. Sit. Mouth closed, eyes shut. No pouting. No peeking.

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)

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.

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

9

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.

10 EXT. EXETER SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL - LATER THAT MORNING

10

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.

11 INT./EXT. FLOWER VAN (DRIVING)/RESIDENTIAL STREETS 11

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) - CONTINUOUS ACTION 12

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

(CONTINUED)

12 CONTINUED:

12

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) 13

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 14

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 15

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:

15

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

17

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

18

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.

- 19 EXT. AMTRAK TRAIN - NIGHT (PRESENT) 19
A glowing moon in a clear, star-specked sky.
- 20 TRAIN 20
CHUGS toward Baltimore's Penn Station, which is visible in the f.g.
- 21 EXT. PENNSYLVANIA TURNPIKE - INTERCUT - MORNING 21
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 22
GRINDING.
- 23 VAN'S WHEELS 23
Hydro-planing, slip-sliding.
- 24 TRAIN 24
It's SQUEAL OF BRAKES as it maneuvers into the station.
- 25 VAN 25
The SQUEAL of its BRAKES as Glynn loses control and smashes into the back of the eighteen wheeler in front of her.
- 26 TRAIN 26
across space and time, the SOUND OF SQUEALING BRAKES commingle as the Amtrak Commuter pulls into Penn Station.
- 27 INT. AMTRAK TRAIN - NIGHT 27
Sara. Holding her breath, clenching her fists. Waiting for the sound to stop, oblivious to the stare of the Woman beside her.

28 EXT. PENN STATION (BALTIMORE) - PLATFORM - NIGHT 28

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 29

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 30

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

(CONTINUED)

30 CONTINUED:

30

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

31

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

32

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

33

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)

33 CONTINUED:

33

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

34

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

35

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)

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. The pain too. 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.

36 EXT. PATTERSON HIGH SCHOOL (SOUTH BALTIMORE) - MORNING 36

Formidably large and surprisingly well-kept, Patterson serves the nearby, predominantly black O'Donnell Heights Projects. Kids mangle outside on the front steps and lawn.

37 FROM ANOTHER ANGLE - PARKING LOT 37

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.

38 EXT./INT. PATTERSON HIGH - MORNING 38

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.

39 INT. ADMINISTRATION BUILDING - MORNING 39

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)

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: 40

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 41

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.

42 ANOTHER CORRIDOR 42

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.

43 INT. JURASINSKI'S CLASSROOM - MORNING 43

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)

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)

43 CONTINUED:

43

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

Lots of people like who? You? Hello. Didn't think so.

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)

- 45 CONTINUED: 45
- 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 46
- Two tables pushed together. Full.
- 47 NERD TABLE 47
- Barely, pathetically populated but surprisingly diverse.
- 48 HIP-HOP TABLE 48
- Loud, overflowing, fun. King Patrick and his loyal subjects horse around.
- 49 POPULAR TABLE 49
- 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 51
- 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.

52 ANGLE ON SARA

52

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

53

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.

SARA

God! Thank you!

(CONTINUED)

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)

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)

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.
Once and done. Over. Out. 'Bye.

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)

54 CONTINUED:

54

PATRICK

You up for some hoops after school? Break your free-throw back in. Chump the chumps like we used to.

MALAKAI

Up for it? Hell-the-fuck yeah, man. Let's do it.

55 EXT. PATTERSON HIGH - THAT DAY (AFTER SCHOOL)

55

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

56

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

57

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)

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.

58 INT. ROY'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - SARA - LATER 58

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 59

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 60

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 61

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.

(CONTINUED)

61 CONTINUED:

61

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

What problems? You goin' to
college. Doctor college after
that. You large, man.

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.

62 INT./EXT CITY BUS/BALTIMORE STREETS - MORNING

62

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

63

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

64 INT. HALLWAY NEAR ENTRANCE (PATTERSON HIGH) - 64
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 65

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 (C₂H₆O₂) 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.

66 INT. CHEMISTRY LAB - MINUTES LATER 66

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)

66 CONTINUED: 66

Hill's tone is searing. He turns to Sara. She's trying to say something but the words won't come out. Hill regards her wearily, then walks off pushing the curious class back to their stations. Sara looks at Patrick, weakly mouths "thanks."

67 INT. GYMNASIUM - NIGHT 67

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.

Nikki on balance beam. Agile. Self-assured. Good.

... 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

Reacting with shock and surprise. Awed. Except for Nikki. She stands there with her arms folded. Simmering. Envious.

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)

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)

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.

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

69

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.

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

70

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

71

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.

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 lounge. 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
handsome 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 73
- 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 74

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)

74 CONTINUED: 74

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.

75 EXT. ALLEY (EAST BALTIMORE) - SARA AND CHENILLE - NIGHT 75

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 76

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 77

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

(CONTINUED)

77 CONTINUED:

77

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

78 INT. FEETZ CLUB - CONTINUOUS ACTION

78

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)

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
at Sara's and Chenille's table. Diggy goes 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.

80 INT. FEETZ - BAR - SAME TIME

80

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.

ON PATRICK

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)

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.

(CONTINUED)

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)

80 CONTINUED:

80

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)

81 CONTINUED:

81

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

82

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?

(CONTINUED)

82 CONTINUED:

82

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.

83 EXT. FEETZ - FRONT ENTRANCE - NIGHT

83

Distant WAIL of SIRENS as Feetz begins to empty out. Kids converge on the sidewalks. PICK UP Sara, Chenille and Diggy. Waiting and watching for Patrick. Diggy looks at them.

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.

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

84

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 protest)
Come on, Braveheart.

85 EXT. STREET - SARA AND PATRICK - NIGHT

85

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

PATRICK

What?

SARA

(caught)
What?

(CONTINUED)

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)

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 CONTINUED:

85

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)

86 CONTINUED:

86

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.

87 INT. RECORD STORE (EAST POINT MALL) - DAY

87

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:

87

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

88

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)

88 CONTINUED:

88

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

89

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)

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.

- 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 93
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 94
The hair on his head stands up. His body deflates instantly.
- 95 INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER 95
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)

95 CONTINUED:

95

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

96

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.

97 INT./EXT. CAR WASH - DAY

97

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)

97 CONTINUED:

97

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.

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

98

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.

99 INT. GUIDANCE COUNSELOR'S OFFICE - DAY

99

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)

99 CONTINUED: 99

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

BEGIN MONTAGE

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

100 SNOOKIE 100

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

101 SPACED-OUT STUDENT 101

SPACED-OUT STUDENT
Career? That the same as a
job...?

102 DIGGY 102

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...

103 SERIOUS STUDENT 103

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

104 TONI 104

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

105 CHENILLE 105

CHENILLE
Beauty school.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

105 CONTINUED:

105

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...

106 MALAKAI

106

MALAKAI

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

107 NIKKI

107

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.

108 MONTAGE ENDS WITH SARA

108

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)

108 CONTINUED:

108

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

109

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.

(CONTINUED)

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.

She stops. Regards him. He stops. Regards her. Stalemate.

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

A releve. Over ice. With a twist.

(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

110

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:

110

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

111

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)

111 CONTINUED:

111

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

112

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:

112

Sara ventures carefully forward to the edge of the stall's open door. She cranes her neck trying to see without being seen.

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

113

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

114

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)

114 CONTINUED:

114

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.

115 EXT. PARK - SARA AND PATRICK - LATER

115

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)

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: 115

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 116

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, bussing Momma Dean's cheek 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.

117 INT./EXT. CITY BUS (MOVING) - SARA AND PATRICK - NIGHT 117

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.

(CONTINUED)

117 CONTINUED:

117

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.

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

118

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)

118 CONTINUED: 118

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 119

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 120

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.

121 EXT. STREET (SOMEWHERE IN BALTIMORE) - NIGHT

121

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)

121 CONTINUED:

121

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

122

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

123

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.

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

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

125

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

(CONTINUED)

- 125 CONTINUED: 125
- As she tries to complete the arabesque, the backward-most leg buckles. She steadies herself. Starts over.
- SARA - IN VARIOUS STAGES OF GETTING BUSY
- 126 PATTERSON FOOTBALL FIELD 126
- Hip-hop hybrid with Patrick.
- 127 DANCE STUDIO 127
- In class. Struggling to keep up.
- 128 STREET 128
- On way to and from bus stop. Practicing as she walks.
- 129 DANCE STUDIO 129
- Alone with her instructor. Looking good.
- 130 DANCE STUDIO - LATER 130
- Alone with her instructor. Looking better.
- 131 ROY'S BATHROOM 131
- Soaking and tending her bleeding feet.
- MONTAGE ENDS.
- 132 INT. ROY'S APARTMENT - LIVING AREA 132
- 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)

132 CONTINUED:

132

ROY

Let's 'skip'?

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

133 INT. FEETZ - BAR - NIGHT

133

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:

133

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

134

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)

134 CONTINUED:

134

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...?

SARA

What?

PATRICK

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.

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

135

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

(CONTINUED)

135 CONTINUED:

135

SARA
He'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
Roy's demo. The only one he ever
cut. Kinda grows on you.

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

SARA
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 - DAY 136

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)

137 CONTINUED:

137

SARA

Excuse me?

TONI

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

SARA

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.

138 INT. RIB JOINT (SOMEWHERE IN BALTIMORE) - NIGHT

138

Malakai, along with Snookie 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)

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)

138 CONTINUED:

138

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.

139 INT. ROY'S ROWHOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

139

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 show-boaty 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)

139 CONTINUED:

139

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)

139 CONTINUED:

139

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)

139 CONTINUED:

139

SARA

(screaming at him)

Want me to say it? You were a piece of shit husband and you're a piece of shit father! You were never there for Mom or for me. You took off and never looked 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

140

A break between classes draws the requisite cliques 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)

140 CONTINUED:

140

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

141 INT. PATTERSON HIGH - HALLWAY - DAY

141

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)

- 141 CONTINUED: 141
- PATRICK
- I got study hall. Don't matter
anyway. Not with those suckers.
I'll be back before the bell
rings.
- They walk off together and, after a few steps, begin
dribbling imaginary balls down the hall.
- 142 INT. GYM (PATTERSON) - DAY 142
- 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.
- 143 EXT. DRUID HILL PLAYGROUND - BASKETBALL COURT 143
- 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:
- 144 INT. PATTERSON HIGH - GYM 144
- 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 145
- 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 146
- Sara jumps up, shoves Nikki back. And the fight is on.

147 EXT. DRUID HILL - BASKETBALL COURT 147

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 148

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 149

A car speeds off. Patrick raises up, looks around. Malakai nods. He's okay. Snookie's crawling to the exit, snot-nosed and crying. He's okay. Then they see Arvel. Sprawled on the ground. Covered in blood. He seems lifeless.

150 INT. MRS. GWYNN'S OFFICE - SARA AND NIKKI - DAY 150

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 152

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)

152 CONTINUED:

152

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

153

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

154

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)

154 CONTINUED:

154

DIONDRE

There she go. Gimme my two dollars.

Patrick pays him. Diondre darts out. Patrick walks up to Nikki. Nikki clenches, tries to dismiss him with a backhanded wave.

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)

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 155

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 from 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.

156 INT. FREE CLINIC (SOUTH BALTIMORE) - DAY 156

The lowest common denominator for misery.

(CONTINUED)

156 CONTINUED:

156

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)

156 CONTINUED:

156

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

157

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)

157 CONTINUED:

157

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.

158 EXT. STREET - SARA AND PATRICK - NIGHT

158

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

159

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)

159 CONTINUED:

159

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)

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:

159

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!

160 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.

161 INT. PATTERSON HIGH - SARA'S LOCKER/HALLWAY - 161
 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:

(CONTINUED)

161 CONTINUED:

161

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.

162 INT. PATTERSON HIGH - HALLWAY/CAFETERIA - DAY

162

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...

163 INT. CAFETERIA - CONTINUOUS ACTION

163

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 164

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 165

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)

165 CONTINUED:

165

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 166

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)

166 CONTINUED:

166

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.

167 EXT. PLAYGROUND (O'DONNELL HEIGHTS PARK) - DAY

167

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)

167 CONTINUED:

167

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

168

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)

168 CONTINUED:

168

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.

169 EXT. BALTIMORE SCHOOL OF PERFORMING ARTS - ESTABLISHING SHOT - SATURDAY EVENING 169

of the building, the downtown skyline, etc.

170 INT. BALTIMORE SCHOOL OF PERFORMING ARTS - AUDITORIUM - SAME TIME 170

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 171

Warming up, other dancers, all in costume, around her. Her eyes wander from the clock to the stage door.

(CONTINUED)

171 CONTINUED:

171

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

172

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

173

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)

176 CONTINUED:

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)

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)

176 CONTINUED:

176

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.

STERN 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.

STERN 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)

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 puffs 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