

STEP UP

"Pilot"

Episode #101

Written by

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2nd NETWORK DRAFT

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STEP UP
"Pilot"
2nd NETWORK DRAFT

CAST

JANELLE GIBSON
TAL GIBSON
UNCLE AL GIBSON
RIGO
DAVIS
ODALIE
DONDRE HALL
SAGE ODOM
COLLETTE JONES
DORRIE HALL
POPPY
KING
MARQUISE (BULLY 1)
EAST-O
TIPPY-D
ELECTRA
CAROLEE HALL
CHARLIE ROSE
KERRY
KENDRA
COUNSELOR
PRINCIPAL
OXFORD ADMINISTRATOR
DUDE 1
DUDE 2
DUDE 3
OFFICER 1
OFFICER 2
STUDENT 1
STUDENT 2
STUDENT 3
BULLY 2
BULLY 3
HALL TEACHER 1
HALL TEACHER 2
KID
GREETER
CUSTOMER
TEACHER
NEW TEACHER
GIRL

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SETS

INT.

AL'S WIGS AND WANGS
ATLANTA AIRPORT
 BAGGAGE CLAIM
 HALL
BUS
CHARLIE ROSE
CONCERT
COURTHOUSE
 COURTROOM/GALLERY
 HALLWAY
DINER
FREDERICK DOUGLASS HIGH
 CLASSROOM
 EMPTY CLASSROOM
 HALLWAY
 MEN'S ROOM
 NEW CLASSROOM
 PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE
 STORAGE CLOSET
HIGH WATER
 DANCE STUDIO
 HALLWAY
 LOBBY
 NEW DANCE STUDIO
 PERFORMANCE SPACE
 BACKSTAGE
HOMELESS SHELTER
OXFORD
POLICE HOLDING ROOM
UNCLE AL'S CAR
UNCLE AL'S HOUSE
 JANELLE'S ROOM
 KITCHEN
 LIVING ROOM
 TAL'S ROOM

EXT.

ATLANTA AIRPORT
 PARKING GARAGE
BUS STOP
DINER
FANCY DEVELOPMENT
FOOTBALL STADIUM
 THE BLEACHERS
 FOOTBALL FIELD
 VISITORS SECTION
FREDERICK DOUGLASS HIGH
HIGH WATER
 ENTRANCE
 LOADING DOCK
STREET
 V.I.P. AREA
STREET CORNER
UNCLE AL'S HOUSE

STEP UP

"Pilot"

1 EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - FOOTBALL FIELD - NIGHT 1

Crisp fall evening, you can see your breath. Under the bright lights, the stadium fills with a mostly white CROWD in flannel and Carhartt. They are buzzing with anticipation.

ANNOUNCER (O.C.)

Let's give a big Lakewood welcome
to our visitors, the Avon Eagles!

ANGLE ON: Avon's CHEERLEADERS taking the field. They snap into a tight routine, all sharp angles and big smiles.

2 EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - THE BLEACHERS - CONTINUOUS - NIGHT 2

Under the OPPOSITE BLEACHERS, the home team CHEERLEADERS huddle out of sight. Teaching them last minute moves like her life depends on it is JANELLE, biracial, 17; cooler and more confident than the others.

JANELLE

Stripper squat, SPRING, kick, fade.
No, kick, FADE!

They all do it, one frustrated girl, KERRY, is off.

KERRY

Damn. Can we just do last week's?

JANELLE

Last week's steps are late as hell,
Kerry. We might as well do Chicken
Noodle Soup. Or Gangnam Style.
(focused, not stopping)
Kick, fade, step... perfect.

Everyone on it, but Kerry falls out again, she's losing it.

KERRY

God. Why do we do this?
(points to other squad)
They do the same fight song every
week. Why can't we -

JANELLE

Because we are Lakewood. We're
dancers, not cheerleaders;

JANELLE (CONT'D)

we don't follow trends, we shut it down. And if you can't handle it, I hear drill team meets on Thursdays.

Kerry goes quiet. Everyone looks down. Janelle is a perfectionist, but she knows that was too far. She softens.

JANELLE

C'mon. I see you out here killing it all the time. You got this.

Kerry looks Janelle in the eyes. She needs to know she means it. Janelle does, hugs her, and whispers encouragement into her ear. Everyone is relieved, piles on the hug, as -

ANNOUNCER (O.C)

And now, introducing the Home Team, they are 5-0 this year, with a -

The girls are in a tight huddle now. They start jumping up and down together in a frenzy. This is their pre-game ritual:

LAKWOOD GIRLS

(a la Missy)

Love the way my ass go bum-bum-bum-bum/
Keep your eyes on my bum-bum-bum-bum/
And think you can handle this gadong-a-dong-dong-

The LIGHTS in the stadium DIM as -

ANNOUNCER (O.C.)

Here they are! YOUR LAKWOOD TROJANS!

BACK ON THE LAKWOOD GIRLS: they BREAK, amped like an Adderall bomb went off at their feet. Janelle leads them on the field like a warrior, as the lights SHOOT BACK ON.

A ROAR from the LAKWOOD FANS. They know what's coming...

OUR FIRST SET PIECE: Rihanna's PON DE REPLAY rips from the speakers and Janelle and crew tear up a sick hip hop cheer routine. Janelle shoots a smile to Kerry who is ON IT.

ON THE HOME TEAM STANDS: fans on their feet CHEERING! Janelle is right, they do shut it down. Sick moves, big stunts, and Janelle shimmers with the confidence of a tiger. You want to groove, I'ma show you how to move.

3 EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - VISITORS SECTION - CONTINUOUS - NIGHT 3

A row of working class DUDES in the VISITORS SECTION stare at Janelle, mouths on the floor.

 DUDE 1
All she needs is a pole.

 DUDE 2
I've got a pole for her.

 DUDE 3
I'd make a run at her so hard that -

 VOICE (O.C.)
- she'd crush you like a rock of
that meth you must be smoking.

The Dudes look over to see a skinny guy standing by the rail, wearing a t-shirt that says "Ban the Patriarchy" under a long trench coat. This is TAL, biracial, 17. He's watching Janelle too, with bemused pride. Dudes not sure what they just heard.

 DUDE 3
Wait, were you talking to us?

 TAL
Me? No.

The Dudes regard him.

 DUDE 1
Faggot.

Tal just rolls his eyes as -

ON THE FIELD: it's the big finale. Three cheerleaders THROW JANELLE IMPOSSIBLY HIGH IN THE AIR, where she launches into a tuck-twist move that is almost not human.

ON TAL: he puts two fingers in his mouth and lets out a WHISTLE that could shatter a polar ice cap.

ON THE FIELD: Janelle IN MID AIR smiles. Did she hear that?

ANGLE ON: two POLICE OFFICERS, walking toward the sidelines; unseen in the excitement of the performance.

ON TAL: who instantly spots the officers and becomes concerned. He has a weird spidey sense. He starts to make his way down to -

THE FIELD: where the girls wave to the crowd. Janelle's smile fades as she sees THE OFFICERS WALKING DIRECTLY TO HER.

ON TAL: now running. He gets to Janelle at the sidelines just as the officers do. She looks at them both, panicked.

OFFICER 1
Janelle? And Tal, right? Your mother has been arrested.

OFFICER 2
On a drug related charge.

Tal and Janelle look to each other - they know it's true. Janelle starts to break down.

JANELLE
How could she do this? How could she do this to us again?

Tal is upset and confused, but he has to comfort her.

TAL
It's gonna be okay, J.

OFFICER 1
You need to come with us.

Tal and Janelle follow the police officers in weary resignation. TAL SNAPS HIS FINGERS TWICE, SHE DOES THE SAME, then puts an arm around him.

(NOTE: Tal and Janelle have a secret 'language' where they communicate by snapping their fingers.)

4 MONTAGE OF EVENTS 4

POLICE HOLDING ROOM: Tal and Janelle enter. They see their shamed mom, KENDRA, white, 30's. She's in custody. Tal and Janelle have very different reactions. TAL GOES TO COMFORT HIS MOM, while JANELLE GOES OFF, SCREAMING AT HER.

COURTROOM: A JUDGE delivers sentencing to Kendra. It's bad. Kendra is led away.

GALLERY: A GUARD waits to take Tal and Janelle to say goodbye. Tal stands, moves to go, but Janelle just sits there. Tal has to yank her up.

HALLWAY: Tal goes to hug his mother while Janelle stares at the ground. Finally, she runs to them and piles on. They sob and hold each other so tight they have to be pried apart.

UNCLE AL (CONT'D)
(proudly)
And that is my spot.

Al pulls into a sketchy STOREFRONT. The sign reads AL'S WIGS AND WANGS. Janelle and Tal stare, trying to figure it out.

JANELLE
"Al's Wigs And Wangs"?

UNCLE AL
Voted Best Lemon Pepper Wet Wings.
2003 and 2007.

JANELLE
But . . .

Tal squints to read a handwritten sign taped to the door.

TAL
"Wigs around back."

UNCLE AL
Hell yeah. It's important to have
two revenue streams, 'cause you
never know when these white folks
gonna try to take one from ya.

Uncle Al sits up as a late model LAMBO parks next to them. Two intimidating MEN get out. The driver, EAST-O, 30's, stretches and pats the gun in his pants. Janelle and Tal's eyes go wide.

Al immediately pulls out. As he does -

UNCLE AL
One more thing. If you ever see
that car or that man in your
vicinity - change your vicinity
immediately. Hear me?

Janelle and Tal's eyes go even wider. Uncle Al notices that Tal is staring back at East-O and the beautiful Lambo.

UNCLE AL
A, what the hell are you doin'?

Tal's head jerks back to Uncle Al.

UNCLE AL
Hey man, this ain't Ohio. We don't
check out nothing around here. No
staring, no gawking, no gazing.
(definitive)

UNCLE AL (CONT'D)
We got strip clubs for that.
(warning)
You get caught looking at the wrong
thing and it might be the last
thing you ever see.

Tal, freaked, SNAPS HIS FINGERS TWICE (oh shit), Janelle
SNAPS BACK ONCE (right?).

9 EXT. UNCLE AL'S HOUSE - DAY 9

Tal, Janelle, and Uncle Al are getting their bags out of the
car. A neighbor, DORRIE HALL, 14, is doing tricks on his bike
in the driveway. He stops to admire Janelle.

DORRIE
Oooh-wee. What do we have here?

UNCLE AL
This is my nephew, Tal, and my
niece, Janelle. They're gonna be
crashing for a while.

DORRIE
Whatever. If this girl was related
to you she'd be ugly.
(to Janelle)
Name's Dorrie. Anything you need,
holla at'cha boy, 'cause I run this
town.

UNCLE AL
(bemused)
Good to know. Now run your ass out
of my yard.

DORRIE
(shaking his head)
Haters, man.

Dorrie is off as his mom, CAROLEE, 40's, busybody, comes out.

CAROLEE
Oh my god. Look at them. They're
beautiful. And twins? You didn't
tell me they were twins.

UNCLE AL
Yeah, and they're hungry too. You
wanna fix us, I mean them,
something to eat?

CAROLEE

No, but they can come to church with me this Sunday. Matter of fact, I'm on my way to Bible Study right now if y'all wanna -

Uncle Al pushes Tal and Janelle through the front door as Carolee continues with her invitation. He stops and takes a last minute LOOK AT HER ASS as he hustles them inside.

10 INT. UNCLE AL'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS - DAY 10

Uncle Al quickly locks the door behind him, saved from Church Lady yet again.

UNCLE AL

Damn! That was close.

Tal and Janelle haul their bags into Uncle Al's small but perfectly neat house. Uncle Al gestures for them to sit.

UNCLE AL

Now I know y'all are here under turbulent circumstances, and we don't know each other so well, but family is family so I couldn't let y'all go into foster care.

Janelle and Tal sit awkwardly, vulnerable in a new place.

UNCLE AL

We all know your mama and daddy had troubles. And real talk, I regret that I couldn't do more to help them. So I decided to help you. Part of that is running a tight ship. So rule number one: You do your homework every night, you stay out of trouble, and you graduate. Education is important. Clear?

They nod.

UNCLE AL

And since I believe that idle hands are the devil's playground, ain't gonna be no idling around here. You go to school, you do your after school activity, and in your free time, every week, you gotta take a shift or two.

Blank looks from Janelle and Tal.

UNCLE AL

At the wing shop. Y'all are gonna learn the value of a dollar and how to properly season and flash fry.

Tal tries to process this. Janelle looks horrified.

JANELLE

We have to work at Al's Wigs and Wangs?

UNCLE AL

Yeah, you can thank me later, 'cause jobs are hard to come by around here. So that's it. That's the plan. Take your school seriously, bust your ass at the wing shop, and mind ya business. And one more thing.

Uncle Al stands, walks over, stands directly above them.

UNCLE AL

You may have noticed I didn't say anything about no drugs, because I'm hoping that's self-explanatory. Besides, if y'all are doing things right you won't have time for no drugs, anyway. Are we clear?

Janelle and Tal stare, guilty of a crime they didn't commit.

UNCLE AL

You do all that? You've got a home here. And if you don't?
(lighter)
Well, that ain't gonna happen. Let me show you around.

Uncle Al opens the door to the 'guest bedroom.' Broken workout equipment surrounds a newly added bed adorned with a horrid bedspread and cutesy pillows from Marshall's.

UNCLE AL

So, Janelle, this is gonna be your room. I spent all week making it right for a young lady.

Janelle and Tal are speechless.

UNCLE AL
I installed that ceiling fan just
for you.
(proudly)
Smell that Febreeze?

12 INT. UNCLE AL'S HOUSE - TAL'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS - DAY 12

Uncle Al moves to open the door of another room.

UNCLE AL
And this is gonna be your
headquarters, pimpin'. No ladies
allowed, ya hear? I know a playa
when I see one.

Tal can't believe he just heard this, as Uncle Al reveals a
man cave completely devoted to the Atlanta Falcons.

UNCLE AL
Do what you need to make it your
own. Just don't touch any of my
Falcons stuff.

Tal's look says, "That's impossible."

UNCLE AL
Now get some rest, because y'all
got school in the morning.

Janelle and Tal stare at each other. Holy fuck.

13 INT. UNCLE AL'S HOUSE - JANELLE'S ROOM - NIGHT 13

Janelle is in mid-rant, and Tal is MID-STRETCH. His ballet-
trained leg is extended as high as his head. He will change
to equally mind-blowing ballet positions throughout scene.

JANELLE
He's out of his goddamn mind.

TAL
Foster care.

JANELLE
How are we supposed to keep up our
dancing and go to school and work?
This was not the plan.

JANELLE (CONT'D)

We're supposed to get good enough to go to New York and make it. This has been the plan since we were like ten.

TAL

Foster care with 300 pounds of house dress reeking of Vagisil and twenty new brothers and sisters.

JANELLE

How can you joke at a time like this?

Tal is exasperated.

TAL

What the hell do you want me to do?

JANELLE

Be as upset as I am!

Janelle's voice breaks. She starts crying.

JANELLE

We did everything right. Our mom was an addict and we basically raised ourselves. You are practically a straight-A student, I'm the god damn cheer captain! I worked hard for that. And now? Mom's in jail.

She looks around.

JANELLE

We're in this weird house, in this scary place -

TAL

We just have to survive here, just one year -

JANELLE

Survive? That's our new plan?

Tal utters the truth that terrifies them both the most:

TAL

We get split up in foster care.

Now she's really crying. He walks over to her, puts his arms around her, he knows how to make her smile.

13

TAL

Look, he's just putting some fear in us. Our parents did fuck up. I bet we were conceived on a layaway sofa with a bag of china while Nelly was gettin' all 'hot in here.'

JANELLE

That story is so romantic. I could hear it over and over.

TAL

All he wants is for us to stay out of trouble. If we're busy with activities, we'll have no time to be wingin' it. The plan isn't dead. It just took a detour, Okay?

She nods, calmed for now.

14

INT. FREDERICK DOUGLASS HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

14

An overwhelmed Tal and Janelle are led by a kind but exhausted COUNSELOR into halls TEEMING with KIDS.

There is no Carhartt or Hollister here, and Janelle and Tal are feeling very 'Ohio.' The Atlanta teens have an edgier style and a swag that feels a tad less than inviting.

Janelle is self conscious in her cool-in-Ohio Tiffany & Co. Initial Necklace, while Tal, in a "Los Pollos Hermanos" t-shirt, still sports his vintage trench coat, which is a bit odd for the seventy degree day.

Students make judgemental jokes as they pass by.

STUDENT 1

New kids.

STUDENT 3

They look like they're half-white.

STUDENT 2

Well, then they need to let the other half do their styling. 'Cause they look like Drake and Steph Curry had a baby in the middle of Ross.

The students laugh as they walk off. Janelle stands there, stunned. She's used to being the 'cool girl.' Tal looks like he landed in another world.

TAL

I suddenly feel the need to step
our "black game" up a little bit.

A kind COUNSELOR arrives, hands them slips of paper.

COUNSELOR

Here is your schedule. Tal, right?
And here is yours, Janelle.

TAL

Thank you. Do you have a list of
after school activities?

JANELLE

Cheerleading?

COUNSELOR

No, I'm afraid the Cheer squad was
selected last spring.

JANELLE

Any kind of dance?

The Counselor shakes her head.

TAL

Video?
(no)
Art? Printmaking? Kabuki?

JANELLE

(under breath)
Kabuki isn't stepping up our black
game.

The Counselor smiles. These are kids you want to have. But she is well aware she doesn't have what they need.

COUNSELOR

We haven't had arts funding for a
while now. Any interest in chess
team? Robotics club?

Registering their dismay -

COUNSELOR

Let me think.
(idea)

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)

Hey, the Zion Redeemers Youth for Christ Power Players are right next door, and they do a highly moving Last Supper dinner theater!

Fan-tastic. A BELL RINGS. They mumble thanks, move on.

COUNSELOR

(calling after)

They also teach praise dancing, if you supply your own turtleneck and face-paint.

They walk down the hall, trying to absorb this new reality. Janelle is looking for her class.

JANELLE

Which activity is going to keep you out of the wing shop? Praise dancing or chess club?

(finds it)

This is me. Good luck.

TAL

Yup.

Janelle ducks into class, Tal moves on through the bustling hallways. His spidey sense kicks in again: he glances behind him, even before he hears -

BULLY 1

This motherfucker looks like he's got a Netflix Password. Hey, yo, what is it?

Tal walks faster shuffling books.

BULLY 1

Hey, lone wolf shooter!

Tal looks down at his schedule. Where the fuck is his class?

TAL

(mumbling)

Why do all bullies have the same ten talking points?

He stuffs his schedule in his book. The Bullies get closer.

BULLY 2

(re: the book)

Is that your antichrist manifesto?

Tal, annoyed, too loud this time -

TAL
That would be 'anarchist,' genius.
But congratulations on the three
syllable word.

The Bullies FREEZE. They are truly dangerous and this is NOT Ohio. Bully 1 shoves a finger into Tal's back.

Tal reflexively spins around and Bully 1 shoves him into the wall. He PUSHES BACK AS -

TWO HALL TEACHERS appear.

HALL TEACHER 1
All of you! Stop!

The Bullies RUN, Tal tries to get a swing off as they go.

HALL TEACHER 2
What kind of fool ARE you?

15 INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY - LATER 15

A miserable Tal sits across from a PRINCIPAL. REVEAL UNCLE AL, in his apron, sitting next to him. NOT happy.

PRINCIPAL
If you can reinforce this message
at home, it would be helpful. We
have zero tolerance for fighting in
school.

UNCLE AL
Oh, it'll be reinforced, all right.

PRINCIPAL
I hope you have a better day
tomorrow, Tal.

The Principal moves to go. When she's gone, Al goes off.

UNCLE AL
I just dropped you off an hour ago!
What part of the game is this?

Tal knows this is bad, he's truly upset.

TAL
I'm sorry. Please. This won't
happen again.

UNCLE AL

Damn right you're sorry. And you're crazy too. I should've known something was off soon as I saw that damn trench coat, but I was trying to be open-minded.

Uncle Al looks at the miserable kid, who looks something like the brother he lost a long time ago. Relents.

UNCLE AL

Look, I'ma tell you this one more time. In order for this to work you've gotta focus on school and stay out of trouble, okay?

Tal can only nod. Uncle Al stands to go.

UNCLE AL

Let's get to work.

TAL

Huh?

UNCLE AL

Hey, you can either season some wings, braid some wigs, or bag some wings. I really don't care. But between gas money, and me taking off from work, you owe me a shift.

16 INT. AL'S WIGS AND WANGS - DAY - LATER

16

Tal is miserable. Now that he doesn't have to cheer Janelle up, it's all over his face. He is dredging raw chicken through seasoning as Al fries. He looks up when DONDRE, 21, easy going with an infectious smile, enters. Al brightens.

UNCLE AL

Hey there, Dondre. Meet my nephew Tal.

DONDRE

(to Al)

Family from Ohio, right?

(to Tal)

How ya doin'?

Tal stares at the hot guy, suddenly tongue tied.

UNCLE AL

Dondre is Dorrie's brother. He's
our neighbor.

Hot guy is the NEIGHBOR? Tal wishes like hell his hands
weren't covered in chicken and spices. Al takes the order.

UNCLE AL

Twelve regular?

Dondre nods, Al puts the wings in a styrofoam cup.

UNCLE AL

What 'cha drinking?

DONDRE

Coke.

UNCLE AL

What kind?

DONDRE

Mountain Dew.

UNCLE AL

I'll have to get some from the
back.

Al goes, Tal looks baffled.

TAL

Mountain Dew . . . Coke?

Dondre laughs.

DONDRE

Yeah, it's a southern thing. We
call everything a coke.

TAL

That makes total sense.

(not. then -)

I'm never going to get used to it
here.

Dondre clocks Tal's misery.

DONDRE

Hey, now, it's not so bad. And it
sounds like things were kinda tough
in Ohio, too.

Tal just stares. That's just great. Dondre knows his whole business. It's awkward.

Dondre feels bad, then reaches into his pocket, hands Tal a FLYER. Tal takes it with flour all over his hands, reads.

DONDRE

Come tonight. I got a party business, some music and dancing and cold beverages. The whole neighborhood shows up.

TAL

(reading)
Twenty dollars, thirty V.I.P.

DONDRE

My treat. Just ask for Dondre.

Tal is stunned. He's the weird guy who is always made fun of, and now hot guy is inviting him to a PARTY?

TAL

Can I bring my sister?

DONDRE

Sure thing.
(under breath)
And maybe we keep this from the uncle, Ohio?

A nickname! Dondre gave him a nickname. Tal will take this to the afterlife. He smiles as Al returns, hands Dondre a Mountain Dew.

17 EXT. STREET - NIGHT 17

Tal leads a concerned Janelle down the street.

JANELLE

Since when do you want to go to a party?

TAL

Since our hot neighbor gave me a secret invite and a V.I.P. pass.

JANELLE

(re his sexuality)
Is he on team T or J?

TAL

He gave me the pass.

They turn a corner, then SEE -

A STREET party in a parking lot.

A D.J. spins, EVERYONE is moving, and the dancing is sick.

Both Janelle and Tal can't take their eyes off the scene. It's sexy and cool and a little dangerous, far over their seventeen-year-old heads, and out of their suburban league.

ANGLE ON: East-O's LAMBO pulling in, East-O getting out.

JANELLE

Here comes trouble.

TAL

Trouble drives a damn nice whip.

JANELLE

Where's your boy?

ON: EAST-O, making his way right to Dondre. They chat, out of earshot.

TAL

Chatting with Trouble.

JANELLE

Are you serious?

ON: East-O moving on; Dondre sees Tal, comes right up to him.

DONDRE

Hey, Ohio!

And then he sees JANELLE. He seems riveted.

DONDRE

This must be the sister.

He takes Janelle's hand in his. Doesn't let go.

DONDRE

Name's Dondre. Glad you guys could make it.

Tal suddenly feels invisible. Dondre is definitely Team J.

DONDRE

I promised you V.I.P and V.I.P you
will get.

Dondre, drinking and dancing, moves them through the crowd,
fist bumping along the way. Everyone seems to know him, and
like him. They arrive in the -

18 V.I.P. AREA 18

Where the "super cool" kids are. RIGO, 18, large and very
much in charge, KING, 21, Asian, in a wheelchair, and POPPY,
19, a big-boned, bad-ass sexy powerhouse, are the stars here.
They are freestyling, surrounded by about 75 PARTYGOERS
looking at them like they are celebrities.

Janelle and Tal check it out - these kids are not much older
than they are but THEY ARE INSANELY GOOD.

Rigo, King and Poppy all take turns to spit verse over the
beats pumping from Rigo's cool old school car, with its own
trunk full of ice and champagne.

As they each go in turn, they dance -- so small, so precise,
and so fresh. There is freaking greatness in every contained
gesture, just chillin' in the parking lot. The audience hangs
on their every move.

Janelle is mesmerized. She thought she was the shit back
home? These kids are already full-fledged artists. For the
first time Janelle looks insecure.

Rigo closes it with bravado and the sickest dancing of all.

RIGO

R-I-G- Oh no! It's the flyest
artist alive, I'm higher than
water/ My moves flawless you're
shit wack, head back to "Lame
Nigga" headquarters/ Got the whole
city on my shit, they love me like
MJ/ Make stacks with my craft,
ain't even signed a deal, like "how
sway?"/ My blueprint real simple,
take over and colonize/ relocate,
wear my flag, bless my crown and
get your prize.

The CROWD ooh's, ahhhh's and CHEERS. Rigo takes it all in.
Tal and Janelle haven't seen anything like this before.

The impromptu performance ends, the crowd starts to break up. Janelle just stares at Rigo. She has never seen someone close to her age with that kind of confidence. Rigo, tired from his performance, pours some champagne from the trunk of his car into his glass, downs it.

Rigo looks up, sees Janelle staring. Makes eye contact. He picks up the champagne bottle, swaggers over to her with it in hand.

RIGO
Want some?

JANELLE
I'm okay.

RIGO
Nah, you're better than okay.

Janelle blushes. Tal watches this from a few feet away.

A hip-hop song with a sensual feel starts to play. Rigo stares at Janelle, and he at her. It seems like Janelle and Rigo are the only people at this party right now.

Rigo gets closer to Janelle and dances with her. Others start dancing around them, but Janelle is in her own world. She's feeling him and his moves. They groove together. They're in sync. It gets hotter. And steamier. Little bump, little grind. She hasn't danced like this with a man one time in her whole Ohio life. Then...

Poppy grabs Rigo by the shoulder. Turning him around.

POPPY
(to Rigo)
I see you're making new friends.

Poppy is none too pleased. Rigo is unfazed.

RIGO
I'm just having a good time.

Poppy then gives Janelle, who is surprised by Poppy's interruption, a death stare.

POPPY
You must be confused, boo. Up in here trying to dance with my man.

Janelle steps back.

POPPY

I don't know what you think you're doing with him and that non-existent ass of yours. Oh, and your step and locks need work.

Rigo looks amused and unsurprised, he starts dancing with Poppy. She dances provocatively with him and gives everyone at the party a show.

Janelle wants to die as a crowd circles, and cheers them on. Rigo, the consummate performer, plays along. As Poppy and Rigo tear it up -

RIGO

Why you always think I'm doin' something?

POPPY

Cause you are.

She shoots Janelle another death glare. Janelle feels like an idiot. Tal is right there.

TAL

Come on, let's go.

She can't get away fast enough as they hear -

DONDRE (O.S.)

Damn, Rigo.
(joking)
Your dancin' is gettin' kind of good.

RIGO (O.S.)

Whatever, man.

KING (O.S.)

Yo 'Dre, you got to get your ass to High Water to audition this week.

Janelle freezes, turns. Then desperately turns to a KID standing beside her.

JANELLE

High Water - Sage Odom's High Water is here?

KID

Yeah. He grew up a few blocks from here.

Janelle's mind is reeling. She pulls a confused Tal away.

JANELLE

They are talking about Sage Odom!
They are talking about High Water!
It's here. It's HERE.

TAL

What is High Water?

JANELLE

It's Sage Odom's artists
collective, I knew it was near
Atlanta... but it's right here.

This means nothing to Tal, but Janelle is on fire.

JANELLE

What are you waiting for? Let's go.

19 INT. UNCLE AL'S HOUSE - JANELLE'S ROOM - DAY 19

Janelle is up early researching Sage Odom and High Water.

ON THE SCREEN: SAGE ODOM getting a degree from Oxford.

OXFORD ADMINISTRATOR

For his body of music, dance, and
performance, and for his
entrepreneurial spirit bringing
justice to fashion and art, we
offer this honorary degree to
Atlanta's own, Sage Francis Odom.

ON A NEW CHANNEL: SAGE ODOM LIVE IN CONCERT

Sage is floating from the sky in a SPACESUIT, the whole room
twinkles with stars and constellations. The AUDIENCE is on
their feet, his BACK UP DANCERS on stage bust it out; and
Sage, even in the damn suit and on the wire is RIGHT IN STEP,
commanding every eye on him. He is fucking GOOD.

ON A NEW CHANNEL: Sage interviewed by CHARLIE ROSE.

SAGE

I just don't understand the
American educational system.

19

SAGE (CONT'D)

We're teaching children facts to take tests to get into college that puts them in a life of debt that they have to take jobs they hate for twenty years to repay. It's anti human, anti artist, anti life.

CHARLIE ROSE

Your school is for low income kids in your old neighborhood, but it's really kind of an experiment -

SAGE

High Water most emphatically is not a "school." It's an immersive apprentice experience where young artists learn what they need to hone their passion and make it PAY. Nobody teaches that but me. Art is a commodity, plain and simple. We treat it like a pipe dream, but it is America's most lucrative export -

ON THE SCREEN: THE WEB PAGE FOR "HIGH WATER"

Janelle scrolls through pictures of the incredibly cool school: FASHION, ART, VIDEO, TECH, and finally DANCE. She can't take it any more, takes the tablet and runs to -

20

INT. UNCLE AL'S HOUSE - TAL'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS - DAY

20

Tal, asleep under an Atlanta Falcons quilt, is awakened by Janelle's intense energy plopping beside him.

JANELLE

They take writers, directors, performance artists, singers, designers and THIS WEEK they are auditioning dancers. THIS WEEK! We've got to go!

She shoves the tablet under his nose. Tal sits up, reads.

TAL

"Dancers should have a street or contemporary sensibility." I'm a ballet dancer.

JANELLE

I know that, but -

TAL

I have never auditioned for anything in my life. You know that. I'm terrified to dance in front of other people. I'm not about to grand jeté turn into a place that doesn't even want me.

JANELLE

High Water is here. They are auditioning dancers THIS WEEK.

Nothing from Tal.

JANELLE

Don't you get it? Maybe it all happened for a reason!

And now he's CONCERNED.

TAL

You think there's a good "reason" Mom relapsed and went to jail and we ended up here?

Janelle stands. She's excited, frustrated, everything.

JANELLE

I'm not saying that. I'm saying, I don't know what I'm saying. Can't I be excited about something?!

TAL

J, these people are the best of the best. It looks like Sage Odom plucks kids out of that place to actually work with him. Professionally.

He lays back down, closes his eyes.

JANELLE

You know I have to at least try, right?

Tal's eyes open.

TAL

Yeah, I know.
(sitting up)
But good luck convincing Uncle Al.

JANELLE

Even he has to see what a huge opportunity this is.

She's already running out the door. Tal wipes his eyes, gets out of bed, wanders to his window, looks out.

THERE'S DONDRE ON THE STREET, fucked up, just coming home from his night out. Tal watches Dondre sing and dance up his driveway, wishing he had that kind of carefree confidence.

As his eyes linger, suddenly THE DOOR FLIES OPEN.

JANELLE

Come on!

Tal jumps, embarrassed, then PISSED.

TAL

Damn it, have you heard of privacy?

JANELLE

Excuse me, Mr. Robot, I didn't know you're working for the N.S.A.

INT. UNCLE AL'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY - LATER

Janelle tries to convince Uncle Al, while Tal makes toast.

UNCLE AL

No diploma? What good is it if you don't get no diploma?

JANELLE

High Water is pre professional, it prepares you to make a living as an artist.

UNCLE AL

The only thing that prepares you for making a living as an artist is winning the lottery.

JANELLE

You want me out of trouble? This is it. I'll be dancing all day long and studying at night.

(quickly)

And I'll work! Every weekend! Please!

UNCLE AL

You think hangin' all day with rappers and what not will keep you out of trouble? That's an interesting notion.

JANELLE

Successful rappers! Businessmen! Just like you. Come on, Uncle Al, please. I need your approval, the process starts today.

UNCLE AL

Much like "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire," that would be my final answer.

Janelle wants to scream with frustration as Al leaves the room.

22 EXT. STREET CORNER - DAY - LATER

22

Tal and Janelle stand at the bus stop. He turns to her.

TAL

Please don't do this.

JANELLE

I will hate myself for the rest of my life if I don't do this.

TAL

If this backfires and we get split up I'll hate you for the rest of your life too. We had a plan -

JANELLE

- This IS the plan! Don't you see it? We wanted to get to New York to dance, to be famous. Who is more famous than Sage Odom?

TAL

Uncle Al could really throw us out -

JANELLE

- He's not gonna. I only need his approval if I get in. Even you said it, what are the odds of that? Just cover for me one day.

Tal considers.

TAL

Stay away from the cute boy. And if you see the mean girl, run like hell. And remember, we get a phone call with mom tonight at seven, so don't be late.

She gives him a hug.

TAL

Kill it.

JANELLE

Thank you.

The bus is pulling up.

TAL

Aren't you going to wish me luck? I'm on buffalo sauce duty tonight and failure could crush my spirit.

She smiles. Her bus comes; she moves to go on. At the top step, she turns, looks at him. A weird, tender moment; the first time they might literally be going in different directions. Then she boards.

Tal SNAPS HIS FINGERS THREE TIMES (I-love-you), but she doesn't hear or return the gesture. The bus pulls off, leaving him standing there.

23 EXT. HIGH WATER - DAY 23

Janelle exits the bus, stares at a giant old warehouse with a giant silver glyph on the side.

Her eyes wide, she walks slowly to the entrance.

24 EXT. FREDERICK DOUGLASS HIGH - DAY 24

Tal looks at his school, big sigh, then walks inside.

25 INT. HIGH WATER - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS - DAY 25

As Janelle enters the lobby, she sees a place tricked out with glass walls and floors - hundreds of fucking cool, super diverse people, making all kinds of art happen.

She sees an ORIENTATION TABLE and approaches a GREETER.

GREETER

Are you here for the dance program orientation?

JANELLE

Yes. Janelle Gibson.

GREETER

Okay, Janelle, your online registration is complete. Let's see... you're underage. We need parent paperwork -

JANELLE

My guardian is almost done with it.

GREETER

Good, so today we'll have a tour of High Water, followed by a showcase by our current students. Tomorrow starts the audition process, and your paperwork has to be complete. Can you step over there with our fellow applicants?

Janelle looks at a large group of aspiring DANCERS; she finds her way next to DAVIS, 18, sensitive pretty boy a la Drake, and ODALIE, 19, intense and focused, but cool.

JANELLE

(under breath)

This is insane.

The cute Davis heard her.

DAVIS

Right? I'd kill to meet Sage Odom someday. A chance to learn from him? It's unreal.

JANELLE

I just found out about the auditions yesterday.

ODALIE

Really? I've been rehearsing for a year.

She realizes how that sounds.

ODALIE

I'm so sorry, I didn't mean -

ELECTRA (CONT'D)

Designers learn the basics of creating costumes for all kinds of performance, as well as clothes for retail, clothes that reinforce a brand of an artist, clothes that present a point of view.

Janelle salivating, can't help it.

JANELLE

(whispering)

Did you see those leather coats?

ODALIE

So hot. And the boots?

Davis smiles as the girls wax on. The tour passes a room filled with EDITING, STORY BOARDS, COMPUTER SIMULATION.

ELECTRA

The videography program focuses on direction and editing, for use in everything from movies to videos to commercials to the web. You'll be relying on the students in this department to help you create dance and performance videos with you to reinforce your web presence.

Now Davis is excited.

DAVIS

That is so dope.

Janelle is staring at the hot Davis, so is Odalie. They catch each other in the act, and smile at each other, busted.

The tour reaches four gorgeous DANCE STUDIOS. Wood floors, light filled. Video, playback, wires and mats for big stunts.

ELECTRA

And as you are all applying for the dance program, you'll spend most of your time here. As do I - I am on the dance faculty.

All the dancers stand up straighter, as she leads them through the gorgeous STUDIOS.

ELECTRA

As Dance students, you'll spend the mornings going through the rigorous core training program with myself and the rest of the staff. Afternoons are spent innovating and creating content with fellow students. You might use the directing department to showcase yourself in a dance video, and the fashion students might need you to model and support their work. It's very much give and take, which makes getting along with others a real asset. Divas can get into real trouble here.

The dancers look around in awe.

ELECTRA

Okay everyone, let's get to the performance space, the showcase is about to start.

28 INT. HIGH WATER - PERFORMANCE SPACE - DAY 28

They all sit in the audience of a huge performance space. About 200 chairs surround a stage, the ceiling is three floors high. Janelle, Davis, and Odalie sit together, buzzing with anticipation.

SUDDENLY THE ROOM GOES DARK.

SET PIECE: THE MOST INSANELY CHOREOGRAPHED YET. LIGHTS, EFFECTS, OTHERWORLDLY MUSIC. IT STARTS WITH -

LIVE DRUMBEATS, SURROUNDING THE AUDIENCE. In one corner, TIMPANI, in one corner, SNARE DRUM, in one corner, MARACAS, one by one until the whole space is filled.

It's a cacophony, chaos, unnerving, but then they all slowly SYNCH UP, a few at a time INTO HEARTBEATS.

ON THE BLACK STAGE

LIGHTS SLOWLY ILLUMINATE Rigo, Poppy, and OTHERS, with King as the D.J., as they create dance versions of HUMAN HEARTS. Blood pumping, chambers bulging, hearts in love, hearts in fear, hearts meeting each other, changing, interacting, it is STUNNING.

ON JANELLE: her eyes dart between Rigo and Poppy, the leads, wrapped up in each other, their chemistry is palpable. She's enthralled, but there is a bit of desperation on her face.

29 EXT. HIGH WATER - LOADING DOCK - DAY 29

A sleek BMW X5M pulls into a private entrance.

SECURITY meets the car. Out comes the hyper cool SAGE ODOM himself, 30's, black, powerful. Star power pumps from his entire body. He throws on his \$500 sunglasses, and with his ENTOURAGE behind him, cruises into -

30 INT. HIGH WATER - PERFORMANCE SPACE - CONTINUOUS - DAY 30

The performance is reaching a CRESCENDO

ANGLE ON: SAGE, entering back stage, watching this performance in the wings, impressed, thoughtful.

BACK ON - THE PERFORMANCE ENDING - it is achingly moving, FIVE DANCERS CREATE EACH HEART, SOME ARE IN LOVE, SOME EXPLODING, SOME ARE DYING. Video scenes of the people who own these hearts flash on the walls, the DRUMS GET LOUDER, then SOFTER, as RIGO AND POPPY'S TWO HEARTS BECOME ONE.

ON THE AUDIENCE: UP ON THEIR FEET, cheering, blown away.

ON THE STAGE: A jacked Rigo and Poppy take the final bow.

Poppy's EYES SUDDENLY REST ON JANELLE IN THE AUDIENCE. DEATH GLARE that says, "Seriously, you are back in my face?"

ON JANELLE: Noticing, totally freaked out.

ON KING: off stage, watching Rigo and Poppy get all the applause, his expression unreadable, but his eyes on Poppy.

The dancers exit, and a very polished and proud COLLETTE JONES, 30's, takes the stage to welcome the aspiring students.

COLLETTE

I am Collette Jones, the head of High Water. We believe in the value of gifts here, and the power of hard work. Most importantly, we believe in collaboration. But this is not just a school of dancing or singing, creation or performance.

COLLETTE (CONT'D)

This is an institution purposed to develop and sharpen your gifts- (re: this room) -in here so that you can be an instrument of change- (re: to the outside world) -out there. Any questions?

Odalie raises her hand confidently.

ODALIE

How often is Sage Odom here? Do we ever perform for him in person?

Chuckles from former students, but the hopefuls want to know.

COLLETTE

We get that question a lot. While High Water is definitely Sage's vision, he is a very busy man so his time is limited. Next question.

SAGE (O.C.)

That's not necessarily true.

The crowd erupts as SAGE ODOM HIMSELF steps out of the wings, takes the stage. Collette is clearly surprised.

ON JANELLE, DAVIS and ODALIE: all freaking out!

BACK ON THE STAGE -

SAGE

I mean, you're right about the time being limited part, but I'm never too busy for this.

Sage BUSTS OUT A LITTLE SICK DANCE MOVE, and the room erupts in CHEERS. Collette, slightly annoyed, gives Sage the mic.

SAGE

You know, I'm asked all the time if this is some kind of vanity project. The people that took the arts out of your schools, who don't want you to have any art centers or after school programs, the people that keep you dumb by keeping bullshit music and reality shows in constant rotation, those people want to know if this is a vanity project for Sage Odom. Hell no. My mission is to bring art back to everybody. You are artists.

SAGE (CONT'D)

And if America ain't smart enough to invest in you, then I will. Not just with dollars, but with passion.

All the students murmur with excitement.

SAGE

So, you damn right I'm gonna be around this semester. In fact, I've decided to turn my participation with High Water up a notch. I will now be here as often as possible. Students I find special, I will personally select to work with me. Students I find lacking, I will personally walk out the door so somebody more deserving can fill that space.

(boldly)

'Cause I don't know what you all came here to do, but I'm here to make art, change the world, and do this thing called life.

(over it)

Enough talk. We got work to do.

Sage gives Collette the mic. She looks at him with a "Really?" expression, but he's serious, exits the stage. He's set the tone.

The aspiring students are thrilled, the current ones are terrified.

Collette quickly gets back to it.

COLLETTE

So thank you all for coming. I'm looking at approximately 200 dancers today. You will all join our classes tomorrow for our first cuts, about half of you will survive, and about thirty will eventually become students at High Water. Good luck.

ON Janelle, Davis and Odalie - stunned.

BACK ON COLETTE: she follows Sage...

TAL
(confused)
But they're wings. Those are the
arm parts, right?

CUSTOMER
(offended)
What, you gettin' smart?! You got
an attitude?!

TAL
No, I -

CUSTOMER
A folk, where yo manager at? Can I
get some real help out here, before
I Yelp-trash this bitch?

Uncle Al steps in, shaking his head, annoyed.

UNCLE AL
Tal, take out the garbage. What's
your order, sir?

Tal gathers the greasy overflowing garbage as -

CUSTOMER
I want six buffalo-dry. Six nuclear-
wet. And what them Cajun-jerked
hittin' for?

An emotionally drained Tal takes the garbage to the dumpster.
This has clearly been the worst day ever. He glances over the
dumpster to see East-O's Lambo parked behind it.

ANGLE ON: EAST-O, with none other than - THE BULLY THAT
TAUNTED TAL AT SCHOOL. And the Bully has a name...

EAST-O
So Marquise, word on the street is
you've got the block pumpin'
somethin' serious out here.

MARQUISE
Hell yeah. You know how we do.

EAST-O

I see. I'm talkin' 'bout you got it moving so hard that people are comin' up to me like, "East-O, you need to put ole boy to work." Which is confusing as hell, because I thought you already worked for me.

MARQUISE realizes he's just been found out, starts to tremble.

ANGLE ON TAL: He can't believe what he's seeing.

BACK TO -

EAST-O

But then I find out that you've got a little side hustle goin' on that you ain't even told ya boy about. Now how you think that makes me feel?

Marquise is dripping with fear.

EAST-O

(snaps)

Man, I asked you a fuckin' question!

East-O smacks his back hand against Marquise's face. We see the look of sheer terror in his suddenly very 17-year-old eyes. Then, East-O does it again and again.

BACK ON - TAL, RIVETED. This is EXACTLY what Uncle Al warned him not to do, but he couldn't look away now if he wanted to.

BEHIND THE DUMPSTER -

MARQUISE

I'm sorry! I was -

EAST-O

Shut up!

East-O begins to rough the kid up some more; jacking him up against another car in the parking lot. That's when the humiliated Marquise looks up and sees...

TAL STARING.

ON MARQUISE: Even in his pain, his eyes glint with the shame of his beat down being witnessed - by none other than Tal.

ON TAL: Rube that he is, he knows this is really fucking bad.

OUT OF NOWHERE: A HAND grabs Tal's shoulder - it's UNCLE AL pulling him back.

UNCLE AL
Boy, get'cho ass in here!

34 INT. AL'S WIGS AND WANGS - AFTERNOON 34

Uncle Al, dragging Tal in, going off.

UNCLE AL
(furious)
Are you crazy?! Didn't I tell you
this ain't Ohio?! You see something
going down; you look the other way!

TAL
Yes, sir.

Uncle Al is suddenly very emotional. We have never seen him like this, and get the sense he's talking about more than Tal here.

UNCLE AL
(choking back)
I got one goddamn job! Keeping you
alive! One goddamn job. Damn you!

Tal is stunned at Uncle Al's sudden, visceral reaction.

TAL
(small voice)
I'm sorry.

Uncle Al regroups, quickly shrugs off this outburst like it never happened, disappears back into his old scruffy self.

UNCLE AL
Damn... I ain't been a parent for
fifteen minutes and I'm already
sick of this shit. You're lucky
your sister is taking this
seriously. She's saving your ass.

He walks out. Tal feels totally hollow.

35

INT. DINER - DAY

35

A neighborhood joint held up by bacon grease and coffee grinds. Charming 'cause it ain't trying to be fancy.

Janelle and Odalie share easy conversation that comes when you talk about a shared passion; as Davis checks out the well-stocked JUKEBOX right next to them.

JANELLE

The whole showcase thing was next level.

ODALIE

We have to be as good as every dancer on that stage today.

Their conversation stops. That's sobering. Then -

DAVIS

...Sylvia Striplin, Nona Gaye --
Jimmy Castor? I have never seen
Jimmy Castor in a jukebox.

He pulls out a crumpled single, selects a cool old '70's soul tune with a mid-tempo beat, joins the girls sharing fries.

ODALIE

You listen to this old stuff?

DAVIS

My pop had a sick vinyl collection.
Used to put on records Sunday
mornings. It was like... church.

JANELLE

(feeling the beats)
You should have us over some time.
Maybe we'll get the spirit.

DAVIS

I would, but... we lost the
records. In a move.

Davis looks as though he's going to say more. He doesn't.

ODALIE

You seriously like this? It reminds
me of my grampa.

(then)

Should I get an order of the
catfish nuggets? My treat.

DAVIS

I still can't get over Sage Odom.

JANELLE

I thought I was going to faint.

DAVIS

He could be off in Hollywood, or Paris, or whatever. It's amazing that he spends time with people like us. People from his hood, who don't have anything.

JANELLE

It's easy to forget people who started off where you did when you're a superstar.

Odalie, maybe a bit too fast -

ODALIE

Nobody wants catfish nuggets? I'm starving.

JANELLE

I've never had one.

DAVIS

Seriously? No catfish nuggets?

ODALIE

You haven't lived.
(re; the song)
What's this one?

DAVIS

Love Sign. Miss Nona Gaye.

JANELLE

I dig it.

There's a growing camaraderie here. Janelle feels confident enough to test the waters:

JANELLE

I used a lot of old music for inspiration back home. When I choreographed routines.

ODALIE

(impressed)
You choreographed? What, like for a company?

JANELLE

Like... for cheerleading. Don't laugh, okay. I mean, I know some people don't think -

DAVIS

I knew it. There's this thing, when you walk -

Odalie seems to play it as a joke, but there's a slight tinge of curiosity and jealousy beneath the surface.

ODALIE

You've been watching her walk?

Janelle blushes; did I make a mistake in opening up to them?

JANELLE

Don't judge.

DAVIS

Nobody's judging. It's a... You have confidence, that's all.

Janelle looks to Odalie, who's eyeballing her seriously.

JANELLE

I actually took a lot of classes, too, since I was like eight.

ODALIE

I have mad respect. I do. If you led your squad, it means you know what it is to work. I'm going to order you some catfish.

Janelle grabs her wallet to pay, but Odalie has hers out.

ODALIE

I want to pay for this because I want to make a proposition. Look - I know we just met. But getting into High Water is tough.

(to Davis)

You're an individual kind of cat. You got your own flavor.

(to Janelle)

You've got drive written all over you.

(serious)

And I think being the best means working with the best.

ODALIE (CONT'D)

So maybe we look out for each other at auditions, okay? Push each other. I know it's a long shot, but... I've got a feeling that together, we're what's next.

Davis considers. He looks to Janelle.

JANELLE

Well then, let's be next.

DAVIS

A'ight.

ODALIE

All right. Be right back.

Davis gets up so she can go order. As he sits back down he sees A HUNDRED DOLLAR BILL lying there, on Odalie's side of the booth. It must have fallen out of her purse.

Davis' eyes dart as he considers the bill. A sadness flickers across his face. It morphs to a look of resolution that says what he's about to do next is not greed... but need. He slips the \$100 into his pocket, as -

DAVIS

So tell me about Ohio.

Janelle grins, thrilled to be making friends already.

36 EXT. DINER - DAY - LATER 36

Janelle, Odalie and Davis exit the diner and say goodbye. Big hugs. All for one and one for all. They split in different directions.

MUSIC UP: FRANK OCEAN'S "SWEET LIFE"

37 MONTAGE: 37

- JANELLE WALKS TO THE BUS STOP, AMAZED. *The best song wasn't the single, but you weren't either.*

- ODALIE TURNS A CORNER, GETS PICKED UP BY AN UBER. WHAT'S UP WITH THAT? *The water's blue, swallow the pill.*

- DAVIS WALKING DOWN A GRIM, GRIM STREET. *Keepin' it surreal, not sugar-free, My TV ain't HD.*

- JANELLE STARES OUT THE WINDOW OF THE CITY BUS. *The sweet life, sweet life, the sweet, sweet, sweet, sweet life.*

- THE UBER DROPS ODALIE OFF AT A MERCEDES CONVERTIBLE. SHE GETS IN, TURNS THE IGNITION. THIS WOMAN IS CLEARLY NOT WHO SHE IS PRETENDING TO BE. *You've had a housekeeper since you were born, the sunshine always kept you warm.*

- DAVIS ENTERS A HOMELESS SHELTER; GETS A TOWEL AND A PILLOW FROM THE DESK. *But this neighborhood is gettin' trippier every day.*

- ODALIE PULLS OFF THE FREEWAY INTO A FANCY DEVELOPMENT. *So why see the world, when you got the beach, Don't know why see the world, when you got the beach.*

- JANELLE WALKING THREE FEET ABOVE THE GROUND TO UNCLE AL'S HOUSE. *The sweet life, sweet life, the sweet, sweet life.*

38 INT. UNCLE AL'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING 38

Tal, fighting back tears, on the phone call with Kendra. He keeps looking at the door for Janelle, but she isn't there.

TAL

Mom, you can make it through this.
Just focus on our next call.

A pause, as Kendra replies with something we can't hear.

TAL

Of course Janelle will be on next time - she wanted to skip the orientation to talk to you, but I was the one who wouldn't let her. Yeah, I'll wish her luck.

(ON PHONE: BEEP BEEP BEEP)

There's the fucking beeps, time's almost up, I LOVE, I MEAN WE LOVE -

CLICK. They are cut off before he can finish. He hangs up, devastated. Janelle bounces in on cloud-High Water.

JANELLE

Tal - you will not believe my day, I have to get into this place. It's insane, the people are so passionate and cool. It's like a playground -

She clocks Tal's face.

JANELLE

What is it?

TAL

You missed our call with Mom.

JANELLE

Oh shit.

Tal is annoyed, jealous, hurt. He is wearing the weight of a shit day at school, a shit time slinging wings, the wrath of Uncle Al and the real terror of being seen by Marquise. He's got nothing for his best friend right now.

TAL

Don't pretend you suddenly care.

Janelle reacts, stung.

JANELLE

Of course I do -

TAL

And don't worry, I lied for you.

JANELLE

You didn't have to lie, I just forgot.

(off his look)

I'm so sorry, Tal.

TAL

They're going hard on her. Three years. No good behavior. It'll be that long before she's even up for parole.

Janelle isn't as devastated as Tal was expecting her to be. Tal is pissed. He looks away.

TAL

Have you even thought about what it must be like in there for her?

JANELLE

Of course, but we need to think about you and me. We're the one's taking care of us. And you said yourself, Atlanta has a lot of good things going -

TAL

Maybe. For you. It sounds like you've landed in sparkle heaven. But you know what it has going for me? A shitty school, a wing store, and an uncle who is keeping me, quite literally, IN THE FUCKING CLOSET.

JANELLE

And what? I'm not allowed to be hopeful? Even just a little? Because you're miserable? You know what? You've always been miserable!

That was too far. It lands. And he's going to lob one back.

TAL

No. What you're not allowed to be is so damn selfish. That's not just *mom's thing*, you know.

They both go silent. They've just stepped over lines and said things they can't buy back. Tal moves past her to go.

39 INT. UNCLE AL'S HOUSE - TAL'S ROOM - NIGHT 39

Tal lies in bed in the dark, lonely and miserable. He SEES THE LIGHTS go on in the room in the house across the street. He sits up, takes notice.

IT'S DONDRE, in his bedroom, getting dressed to go out. Music is cranking from his room and Dondre starts to dance. Smooth, cool, precise.

Tal gets out of bed, moves closer to the window. Then, Dondre starts to turn it up a notch - wilder, sexier, his moves are not human. Tal can't take his eyes off of him.

Dondre dances with his whole being, instinctively, without thought. All of a sudden, Tal is interested in street dance. And he is interested in Dondre.

He instinctively starts mimicking the moves. At first he's not great, but he's a quick study. He does them right along with Dondre, right back at him.

Dondre can't see Tal, he thinks he's dancing a solo... while Tal, fixated on Dondre, is doing a duet. It's the first time Tal has been lit up by anything since he got here. Dondre electrifies him, he's in the grip of him, when -

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Dondre hits his lights, to BLACK, walks out the door. Leaving Tal standing, breathless.

40 INT. UNCLE AL'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING 40

Tal is getting juice, as Janelle bounds happily down the stairs. Uncle Al listens to ATLANTA FALCONS RADIO.

JANELLE

See you at school, Tal. I have an early club meeting.

Tal shoots her daggers. How the fuck dare she?

UNCLE AL

Keepin' busy. Good girl.

41 EXT. UNCLE AL'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS - MORNING 41

Janelle bites her lip as she walks down the street. She's bummed about her fight with Tal, the breeze was all an act.

42 INT. HIGH WATER - DANCE STUDIO - DAY 42

Several STUDENTS are stretching and warming up in their dancing gear. Janelle stretches on the floor alone. She's trying to focus, but still bothered by her fight with Tal.

RIGO (O.C.)

You ready to do your thing, Ms. Janelle?

Janelle looks up to see Rigo standing there. She's shocked that he's speaking to her.

JANELLE

You remembered my name?

RIGO

Name-tag.

Embarrassed, Janelle realizes she's wearing a name-tag.

RIGO

(amused)

You nervous?

JANELLE

(unconvincing)

Not really. Just had a bad morning.

RIGO

Oh, good.
(checking her out)
'Cause I can take one look at you
and tell that you have absolutely
nothing to worry about... Unlike my
man over there.

Janelle looks over at a clumsy looking dancer who's obviously
a nervous wreck.

RIGO

He should be gettin' his bus-pass
ready right now. But I don't think
you're gonna have that problem.

Janelle can't help but smile and ease up. The other students
LOOK OVER. Notice Rigo talking to Janelle. They are jealous.

RIGO

Just remember, with Tippy-D, it's
all about attitude. And as long as
you don't remix Electra's steps,
you'll be straight.

JANELLE

Thanks.

RIGO

And if you need anything else
around here, just holler at me.
Name's Ri-

JANELLE

Rigo. I know.

RIGO

(impressed)
Wow, looks and brains. See? I told
you; nothing to worry about.

Rigo walks off. Janelle's flattered and amazed, she needed
this to get her head off Tal and in the game.

REVEAL King and Poppy have been watching this exchange.

KING

Damn. He doesn't miss a beat.
(to Poppy; concerned)
You okay?

POPPY

Yeah. We're broke up for real this time. He says I'm too jealous. Says if I just let him do his thing, we'd be all good. But that shit ain't happening. I need to start looking out for myself.

KING

Well he's gotta keep his head straight this year. With Sage on the scene, we've got to up our game. Shit just got real. No guarantees.

POPPY

(cryptically)
For anybody.

44 INT. FREDERICK DOUGLASS HIGH - HALLWAY - DAY 44

Tal moves through the halls stealthily, looking everywhere for Marquise. Not there. Relieved, he slips into his class.

45 INT. HIGH WATER - DANCE STUDIO - DAY - LATER 45

TIPPY-D, 20's, stands in front of the group. Janelle, in her dance gear, can see Davis, behind her in just a t-shirt and sweats, and Odalie, all tricked out right in front.

The room BUZZING WITH NERVES.

TIPPY-D

I am Tippy-D, the head of the dance program at High Water. Welcome to part one of our audition process. This afternoon we will be taking you through a regular H-Dub series of classes. You will be observed by myself, the rest of the dance faculty, and Collette Jones. At any point, you might be tapped by one of us, taking you out of contention. Am I clear?

ON JANELLE: Focused, nodding.

TIPPY-D

We call today the "Suicide Squeeze." Dancers that survive this brutal first round will continue this week for the compulsory and freestyle audition rounds.

Tippy-D starts the class, everyone digs in to stay with his every move. First, it's a fairly simple step series. Then, he moves on, adding pop n' locks. Everybody is with him so far. Tippy-D smiles. It's a good group.

46 INT. FREDERICK DOUGLASS HIGH - CLASSROOM - DAY 46

A TEACHER droning on in front of a white board.

TEACHER

Our process is identical here. It is to get rid of this side of the equation, 50 cosign negative seven. How do we do that?
(drawing circles, arrows)
Do we move this over here?

Tal is trying to focus, barely successful. He's miserable about his fight with Janelle too. He sneaks out his phone, types: "WANT YOU TO KILL IT. CALL ME WHEN YOU KNOW."

TEACHER

Tal? You'll find we have a very strict no phone policy here. Next time I see that phone it's mine. Which is bully for me, because I believe your phone would be an upgrade. Are we clear?

Tal nods, chagrined.

47 INT. HIGH WATER - DANCE STUDIO - DAY - LATER 47

Tippy-D is finishing the class. HALF THE STUDENTS ARE GONE. Janelle, Davis and Odalie, sweating, digging in.

TIPPY-D

Nice work. You've got twenty minutes until the last class.

The group, relieved, goes to get their towels and bags. Odalie joins Davis and Janelle.

DAVIS

I was in the back, I saw it all.
You guys were really tight.

Janelle and Odalie are relieved, Janelle looks at Davis with hope. Much like Kerry needed her, she needs this.

JANELLE

Really?

DAVIS

Yeah, you're great. Two of the
best. Both of you.

They get their gear, we follow them to the -

48 HALLWAY 48

DAVIS

I'd kill for some Gatorade.

In front of them, CURRENT STUDENTS, all GIRLS, dressed with effortless sophistication.

GIRL

Did you see her? She threw her head
around like a cheerleader.

Janelle, paranoid that they are talking about her, deflates. Odalie notices, gives Janelle's hand a SQUEEZE.

49 INT. FREDERICK DOUGLASS HIGH - NEW CLASSROOM - DAY - LATER 49

Tal in a new class, with a NEW TEACHER.

NEW TEACHER

Can you guess what I'm referring
to? No? Saliva. It's 98 percent
water, but it's that two percent
that makes it such a fascinating
substance.

Tal touches the phone in his pocket, he needs to know how Janelle is doing. He raises his hand; New Teacher nods.

TAL

Can I have a bathroom pass?

ELECTRA
Quit the chatter! Get in place.

Collette and SAGE ODOM HIMSELF enter the studio. Everyone
FREAKS at the sight of him.

They are going to FUCKING DANCE FOR SAGE ODOM. You can feel
the energy tweak out of control. This is it. Do or die.

53 INT. FREDERICK DOUGLASS HIGH - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS - DAY 53

Tal exits the bathroom, checks his phone one more time.

TAL
Come on, Janelle, I'm dying here.

Nothing. He moves to go back to class; looks out both
directions: the hallway is eerily empty. That should be good.
But it feels bad...

Tal takes off down the hallway.

He hears footsteps, and instinctively, moves a little faster.
He hears footsteps behind him. Then a voice. IT'S MARQUISE.

MARQUISE
Think you know somethin'?

Tal turns around, desperate.

TAL
I don't know anything. Didn't see
anything.

MARQUISE
Doesn't matter what you saw, you
ain't in the game, you don't know
shit and you ain't important.
You're like an insect.

Tal's face goes desperate as they are joined by the other two
bullies.

BULLY 3
Look who it is.

BULLY 2
There's the fool in skinny jeans.
Thinks he's Pharrell.

BULLY 3
You skinny as hell. You anorexic?

BULLY 2
(laughing)
Nah, he starving himself to fit
into that new dress he's been
wantin.

MARQUISE
Let's get the little bitch.

Tal, terrified, TAKES OFF down the hallway! The Bullies
sprint after him in pursuit.

Music up BIG - Tupac's "Holler If Ya Hear Me" kicks in and
the driving beat carries us over to:

54 INT. HIGH WATER - NEW DANCE STUDIO - CONTINUOUS - DAY 54

Tupac PUMPS! Janelle and the other students all launch into
their BIG DANCE AUDITION. The hard RAP beat is driving, and
the competition is fierce, as they all DANCE THEIR ASSES OFF.

Sage is a brutal taskmaster. With Collette trailing behind
him, he moves down the rows tapping students right and left.

SAGE
(to one)
No.

SAGE
(to another)
No.

SAGE
(yet another)
Seriously with that elbow? No!

Collette is also relentless, pats a TALL DANCER on the
shoulder.

COLLETTE
You're done.

Janelle digs in harder, TWISTING, TURNING, trying to stay on
beat as she watches Sage and Collette slowly make their way
towards her.

55 EXT. FREDERICK DOUGLASS HIGH - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS - DAY 55

Tal turns a corner, then another. The Bullies are GAINING on
him. He's lost and starting to fully panic. He sees a door
and desperately dives through it into...

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An EMPTY classroom.

TAL
Fuck!

56 INT. HIGH WATER - NEW DANCE STUDIO - CONTINUOUS - DAY 56

Dancers continue to drop like flies. Collette and Sage are almost on top of Janelle, Odalie, and Davis now.

ODALIE
(under her breath)
Three more down. Damn!

Davis POURS IT ON, dancing with a natural ease and charm, it's impossible not to love him. Odalie SPINS like a top, focused as a goddamn machine. Janelle struggles to keep up, nerves written all over her face, as we bounce to...

57 INT. FREDERICK DOUGLASS HIGH - EMPTY CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS 57

CLOSE ON: Tal. A FIST crashes HARD into his frightened face. Blood and spittle fly from his mouth as he hits the floor.

MARQUISE
I'll teach you to run from us when
I call you, motherfucker!

58 INT. HIGH WATER - NEW DANCE STUDIO - CONTINUOUS - DAY 58

The DANCE reaches its fever pitch. Tupac's aggressive lyrics underscore the increasing body count as the students who remain PUT IN ALL THEY'VE GOT, trying desperately to survive the cut.

Collette and Sage are on top of Janelle now. They look to each other. Agreement. Collette is about to tap Janelle -

59 INT. FREDERICK DOUGLASS HIGH - EMPTY CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS 59

Another fist PUNCH rains down on Tal. His face bloody, he's fully crying now.

TAL
Please...

60 INT. HIGH WATER - NEW DANCE STUDIO - CONTINUOUS - DAY 60

TIGHT ON JANELLE - she SENSES Collette's arm extending TOWARD her. Her face turns to grit. FUCK THAT! She is not going down! She digs in, twisting away from the arm and throwing down an AMAZING BACK-FLIP-TWIST that surprises even Sage (it's a signature Janelle move we saw in the amazing dance number at the opening of the pilot).

61 INT. FREDERICK DOUGLASS HIGH - EMPTY CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS 61

Tal is curled up in a ball now as all the Bullies administer a brutal BEAT DOWN. It's hard to watch. This is serious shit.

62 INT. HIGH WATER - NEW DANCE STUDIO - CONTINUOUS - DAY 62

Brimming now with new-found confidence, Janelle rifles through another series of DOPE MOVES.

ANGLE ON: SAGE. He sees Janelle's determination. He reaches out and lowers Collette's arm. They watch Janelle, impressed. It's agreed. They move on.

JANELLE, ODALIE, AND DAVIS DANCE WITH JOY - they are all safe!

63 INT. FREDERICK DOUGLASS HIGH - EMPTY CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS 63

The blows continue to rain down on Tal. It's savage and cruel. Suddenly Marquise stops, smiles.

MARQUISE

Hold up! Hold up! Damn G, the insect is losing his shit!

They stop their kicking. MUSIC ENDS. Silence.

The Bullies look down at Tal. He's peed his pants. It's god awful humiliating. Shame is written all over his bloody face.

BULLY 2

Well, it ain't his shit, thank god.

Marquise and the Bullies grab Tal and hurl him into a storage closet. The lock SLAMS SHUT, sealing him inside.

64 INT. FREDERICK DOUGLASS HIGH - STORAGE CLOSET - CONTINUOUS 64

It's dark. The only sound is Tal's SOBBING.

RIGO

I no longer have a girlfriend. And I have a feeling you and I will shut this place down together next year.

Time and space stop in that moment. Janelle is uncharacteristically flustered. HER PHONE IS BUZZING. She barely notices. It's the incoming call from Tal.

RIGO

What do you say...?

68 INT. FREDERICK DOUGLASS HIGH - STORAGE CLOSET - CONTINUOUS 68

Soft light from the phone illuminates Tal's bloodied face.

TAL

Please pick up... Please pick up...

69 EXT. HIGH WATER - ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS - DAY 69

Janelle is intrigued by Rigo, but her phone keeps BUZZING...

RIGO

You need to get that?

Janelle looks down at her phone. HITS IGNORE.

JANELLE

No. That would be great. I'd love for you to show me around.

He smiles. It's on. Just then, the Lambo we recognize as East-O's pulls up in the parking lot. East-O is inside and he gestures to Rigo. Rigo waves back, then turns and shoots Janelle a sexy smile.

RIGO

That's my dad. Let's go.

Holy shit, East-O is Rigo's dad! Janelle considers this, Uncle Al's warning ringing in the back of her head, then...

JANELLE

Sure...

And as Janelle falls in step with Rigo and heads towards the Lambo, we...

FADE TO BLACK.