Salt 'n' Pepper

By

Mal Gaff
FADE IN:

EXT. A LEAFY PATH - DAY

Twelve inches away.

DEAD SILENCE.

A foot shod in a running shoe PLUNGES in and out of the frame. Sudden sound of loud MUSIC (THEME).

PATH. ANOTHER VIEW

Blurred image of a torso flashing past.

WOODS

A girl running beneath the trees. Her willowy frame is sheathed in a stretch body-costume. She strides relentlessly forward with the bold, graceful movement of a trained athlete.

She is MOAN WILBURN (17).

MONA'S FACE AND SHOULDERS

Sweat beads her pale, lightly freckled skin. Her red hair is swept back in a long braid and her green eyes blaze with the effort of an arduous practice run.

EXT. GREENFIELD CITY STADIUM - DAY

A banner proclaims: 'GREENFIELD INVITATIONAL HIGH-SCHOOL TRACK & FIELD COMPETITION'

Athletes, Coaches, and red-jacketed Officials commingle on a field that is cluttered with athletic bags, peeled-off track suits, running shoes, and athletic-equipment.

Several events are in progress: shot-putting, long-jumping, pole-vaulting, etc.

TURNSTILE

revolves as People enter, hand tickets to Attendants, make their way to the stands.

REFRESHMENT BOOTH

dispensing food and beverage to Customers.

FIELD

Eight Girls shed their track suits, loosen up. Mona is one.
STANDS

Filled with Spectators.

A GROUP OF SPECTATORS

BOB and KATE WILBURN (40s) sit among them.

Bob is enthusiastically taking things in. Sharing his interest in the activities, Kate keenly sweeps the field with her eyes.

Around them a tumult of voices rises and falls with the accordant fortunes of the competing athletes, and the VOICE of an FEMALE ANNOUNCER over the p.a. system CALLS OUT the lane numbers and names of the eight-hundred meters’ finalists.

Bob Wilburn nudges his wife, says something to her as he points towards the field.

TRACK. THE EIGHT RUNNERS

as they step onto the track, take up their lane positions.

STARTER(O.S.)
On your marks...

View favors Mona as the Runners crouch on the blocks.

STARTER
(raises gun)
Get set...

TRACK

The Runners' haunches rise, their heads snap up. Crack of GUN as they burst off the blocks and streak towards the first turn.

SPECTATORS

Yelling and cheering for their team favorites.

A KNOT OF FEMALE STUDENTS FROM GREENFIELD GIRLS’ ACADEMY

rooting for Mona.

Among them is TWYLA HART (17), a slightly built and exquisitely beautiful Black girl whose finely chiseled features and punkish clothes evoke the image of an androgynous pixie.
RACING SEQUENCE

#1 -- Runners maintaining a quick pace around the first turn.
#2 -- Runners quicken their pace coming down the straight.
#3 -- Third-place Mona, gaining on first and second Runners.

BOB AND KATE WILBURN
rooting for Mona.

BACK TO RACING SEQUENCE

#4 -- Mona takes the lead round the final turn.
#5 -- Mona flashing past the finish line.

BOB AND KATE WILBURN
On their feet, clapping enthusiastically, hugging each other.

KNOT OF GREENFIELD ACADEMY STUDENTS
cheering.

TRACK CHUTE

Mona sprints to a stop -- she isn't even winded! She turns and jogs back up the chute, her features composed, her taut body showing no sign of the exhaustion that racks her vanquished rivals.

A KNOT OF GREENFIELD ACADEMY GIRLS

Nearby, three mid-teens Black youths, YAMMY, DONKEY BOY, and SPOOKY point out Twyla. YAMMY, who has braided corn-rows, starts slamming on her.

YAMMY
Hey, Twyla, y'look like a raisin in a rice puddin'!

TWYLA
An' you look like a brick of Sure Fire Groove in a bag of charcoal, you creep.

The Youths guffaw. Donkey Boy heckles a 2nd GREENFIELD GIRL.
DONKEY BOY
Hey, baby, gonna give me a ride
home in your daddy's limmo?

The Girl slams him.

2ND GIRL
You can ride home on one of
those big shiny roaches your
momma keeps under her kitchen
sink, slag heap.

The Black Youths howl wildly at the comeback, fall into
buffoonery among themselves, take off.

MONA
being congratulated as she jogs to a section of the infield where
COACH SUE RENWICK (30s), grinning from ear to ear, awaits her.

COACH RENWICK
Best time you've ever done!

Mona climbs into her track suit, pauses to listen as the results
are announced over the p.a. system:

ANNouncer (O.S.)
...and first place, setting a
new fastest time, Mona Wilburn
of Greenfield Girls' Academy.

Spectators applause. A VOICE: "Way t'go, Mona!", followed by a
2nd VOICE: "Yeah!".

Several Teammates pat her on the back, congratulate her. Through
it all, Mona maintains a subdued silence.

COACH RENWICK
Impressive.

Mona doesn't respond.

COACH RENWICK
Something the matter?

MONA
No.

COACH RENWICK
Sure?
Mona walks off.

**COACH RENWICK**

Don't wander off too far. Relay will be up soon.

**STADIUM PARKING LOT**

It's full. Off to one side are parked a dozen yellow school-buses.

**YAMMY, DONKEY BOY, SPOOKY**

walking along a row of cars, trying the door handles. One of the doors swings open. SPOOKY fishes out an expensive-looking leather jacket -- nice duds! -- slips it on.

A sudden LOUD VOICE: "Hey, you!"

The three Youths skedaddle.

A SECURITY GUARD looms into view, stops, looks around, whips out his radio.

**SECURITY GUARD**

Nine to Six. Parking lot. Three youths... breaking into vehicles.

He scans the lot.

**YELLOW SCHOOL BUSES**

The three Youths run into view, careen to a stop. They see:

**TWO SECURITY GUARDS**

searching between rows of cars. A VOICE crackles on a radio.

**YELLOW SCHOOL BUSES**

Spooky tries the door -- locked! Donkey Boy tries the door of a second. It opens. The three of them scramble in and close the door.
The Security Guards heave into view, stop, scope out the area.

1ST SECURITY GUARD
Lost as catshit in the dark.

2ND SECURITY GUARD
Let's check the North end.

INT. SCHOOL BUS

The three Youths are crouched down in the aisle. Spooky raises his head, looks out the window.

PARKING LOT AREA

No one in sight near the school buses.

EXT. YELLOW SCHOOL BUS

Youths hopping out of the bus, hightailing it.

STADIUM TRACK

Eight Runners stand poised at the line as another Eight Runners clutching batons shoot down the backstretch and into the curve.

MONA

waiting for the hand-off. She glances over her shoulder at the approaching Runner in her lane, breaks into a sprint, grabs the baton, and ZOOM! She's off after the five Runners ahead of her.

SPECTATORS

on their feet, cheering for their favorites.

BOB AND KATE

their hearts in their mouths...

CURVE/STRAIGHTAWAY

Mona catches four Runners, passes them.

The lead Runner barrels out of the final curve, Mona following.

Incredibly, with something still left, Mona opens up full blast down the straightaway, the veins of her neck muscles bulging. Pumping for all she's worth and to the calls and cheers of the spectators urging her on, she gains on the lead runner -- and overtakes her -- WOW!
MONA'S FACE

contorted by total physical exertion, her nostrils flared like a war horse in the heat of battle...

FINISH LINE

Wild applause as Mona flashes past! GOD, WHAT A PERFORMANCE!

BOB AND KATE

They hug in glee.

TRACK CHUTE

Mona sprints to a walk, hands on hips and gulping up deep drafts of air as she walks back up the chute.

Several other Runners stand with heads locked between their knees, gasping in complete exhaustion.

INFIELD

Greenfield Academy's athletes chant: "Gee-Gee-Cad! Gee-Gee-Cad! Gee-Gee-Cad!" as they cluster around Mona, congratulate her.

VOICE

They wanna victory lap, Mona!

ANOTHER VOICE

C'mon, Gee-Gee-Cad! Let's give 'em one!

STANDS

Spectators clapping in unison with the chant: "Gee-Gee-Cad! Gee-Gee-Cad! Gee-Gee-Cad!"

BOB AND KATE

BOB

What's "Gee-Gee-Cad!" mean?

KATE

Greenfield Girls' Academy.
Your daughter goes there.

BOB

What? Oh, yeah.
TRACK

Mona and her three relay Teammates circle the track, Spectators cheering and waving.

VIEW OF MONA'S FACE

as she chokes back a sob in reaction to the pressure she's had to put herself under to reach this moment of victory.

EXT. BLACK MERCEDES - LATE AFTERNOON

The sleek 600sl glides along a street in Greenfield's upscale district.

INT. MOVING BENZ

Bob drives. Kate sits next to him. Mona sits behind them.

    BOB
    Who's for pizza at Donelli's?

    KATE
    Sounds like a plan.

Mona, her mind on another planet, doesn't respond. Kate turns.

    KATE
    Honey?

    MONA
    Hmnn?

    KATE

Want to stop at Donelli's? For pizza?

    MONA
    Uh-unh. I smell so strong
    they'll chop me up for topping.
    I really need to shower.

INT. WILBURN HOUSE. KITCHEN - DAY

Kate is tossing a salad.

    BOB
    You ready in there?

Kate goes to the door...
KATE
(calls)
Mona! Time to eat!

EXT. PATIO

Kate appears and sets a bowl of salad on the table. Bob, cooking at the grille, burns his fingers.

BOB
Ouch!

KATE
Need some help?

BOB
Just some new fingers.

Mona appears, her hair wrapped in a towel. Bob sets down a platter of shish kabob.

KATE
Smells delicious.

BOB
Victory dinner. For our champion, here.

They munch.

BOB
(to Mona)
You looked terrific today...
(to Kate)
...didn't she?
(to Mona)
No one out there could touch you -- no one.

Mona seems detached.

BOB
Has Coach Renwick said anything to you yet about the biggie -- the All-Cities?

MONA
Uh-uh.
KATE
After her performance today, I don't think she'll need to.

BOB
(to Mona)
Don't slack off. Keep training hard. By the time the Cities rolls around you'll break all the records, I promise you.

A slight tension shows in Mona's look.

BOB
And speaking of slacking off, your ten-week math report was discouraging. What's happening?

MONA
Nothing's happening. I botched the mid-term, that's all.

BOB
I hope it won't jeopardized your straight-A's. I want to see that 4.0 stay a 4.0.

MONA
It hasn't jeopardized my A's. You make it sound as if I'm failing the class.

BOB
I'm not. I'd just like to see your A's stay A's, that's all.

KATE
Aren't you being a bit unfair? You failed math twice in high school, remember.

BOB
That's a different story. In those days a football scholarship was my priority.

KATE
She has two priorities -- academics and track. That's a pretty heavy burden, if you ask me.
BOB
So what? She'll have all her bases covered. If she doesn't get into college through one door on an athletic scholarship then she'll get in through another on an academic one.

MONA
What if I don't get in through any of those doors?

BOB
You'll just have to go in through the front door like everyone else. With a large check in your hand.

MONA
Well, at least, it's nice to know I can afford to fail.

BOB
Can you? They haven't printed the money yet that'll get you to the Nationals or the Olympic Trials. Only talent can do that.

MONA
And a lot of hard work.

KATE
Er... anyone for some pie?

MONA
No. I've tons of homework.

She rises, leaves.

KATE
Aren't you pushing her a bit hard, Bob?

BOB
She has to get used to pressure to get where she wants to go.
KATE
Where you want her to go, you mean. Ever since you were cut from the Bears' line-up twenty years ago you've been out to prove a Wilburn can still make it.

She gives him a serving of pie.

KATE
Deep down you want the glory just as ever, only now you're using your daughter to achieve it.

She rises, moves behind him, puts her arms around his neck.

KATE
Let Mona find her own way at her own pace. She has a good home. Common sense. Brains. And two parents who love her. What can go so terribly wrong?

EXT. GREENFIELD ACADEMY. ATHLETIC FIELD – DAY

A dozen-or-so Students are in running-gear, training.

Mona is among them, doing stag leaps. Coach Renwick, timing-watch in hand, approaches, says something to her.

Mona steps onto the track, crouches, bursts off in a speed practice.

TRACK

Mona flashes past the Coach, who punches the watch. In the curve, Mona winds down to a controlled gait.

EXT. GYM

Mona heading towards it.

INT. GYM. LOCKER ROOM

Faint sound of pulsating MUSIC penetrates into the locker room.

Intense chatter all around amid a racket of opening and closing lockers. Students come and go, change into or out of athletic clothes.
Mona enters. She heads towards her locker, opens it, grabs her track suit, slips into it. Someone shouts out something. Everyone laughs.

**EXT. ACADEMY BIKE-PORT**

Students recovering their bikes, riding off.

Mona, athletic bag slung over her shoulder and wearing her backpack on her chest, climbs onto her bike, pedals off.

**INT. GREENFIELD ACADEMY. CLASSROOM - MORNING**

Students are dressed uniformly. They listen as the teacher, MISS BRILL (50s) paces slowly back and forth, explaining details of an assignment.

A straight-laced spinsterish woman, she's a walking advertisement for those teachers who are remorseless enemies of sloth and carelessness. Words fly out of her mouth like stone-flakes chipped off a granite block.

MISS BRILL

*Before starting on your essay, you must submit an outline of the ideas you will establish in it.*

MONA

listening attentively, scribbling notes.

**BACK TO SCENE**

MISS BRILL

*Keep in mind the importance of logical paragraph development.*

She stops abruptly and looks across the room.

**VIEW OF A BLACK STUDENT**

It is Twyla. She sits gazing out the window, her chin cupped in one hand and the fingers of the other tapping out a silent rhythmic beat on the desktop.

Although wearing a school uniform, her individualistically arranged clothes and hairstyle sets her apart from the rest of her conservatively dressed classmates.
BACK TO SCENE

MISS BRILL
Twyla, perhaps you can tell us of a useful way to arrange paragraphs.

VIEW OF TWYLA
Snaps to, a confused look on her face.

TWYLA
Uh? What?

STUDENTS
They laugh. Miss Brill shushes them.

VIEW OF TWYLA
She shows a nervous embarrassment.

BACK TO SCENE

MISS BRILL
(to Twyla)
Should I repeat the question?

Mona jumps to Twyla's rescue.

MONA
By using good transitions.

Miss Brill glances at Mona in the manner of a hunter whose quarry has just been rescued by an interfering animal-rights' advocate.

Twyla shoots Mona a "Phew! Thanks for getting me outta that one!" look.

EXT. ACADEMY GYM - AFTERNOON

While walking past an open door of the gym, Mona hears the pulsating beat of MUSIC. She stops to peer in.

INT. GYM
A troupe of dancing Students rehearsing. One of them is Twyla.
INT. GYM DOOR

Loud MUSIC as Mona stands in the doorway watching the Dancers.

INT. GYM. LOCKER ROOM

As Mona dresses in her track gear, a faint, throbbing beat of MUSIC coming through the wall. She tries a few dance steps in imitation of the dancing troupe. Coach Renwick appears, startling her.

    COACH RENWICK
    Okay, Mona! Let's go!

ATHLETIC FIELD

ATHLETES busy at working out.

Mona appears, walks to the edge of the infield, stretches, does a couple of knee bends.

She steps onto the track, does a few practice starts on blocks, shakes off, looks towards the gym.

INT. GYM

Deafening sound of MUSIC as Twyla practices to a POPULAR SONG, her small physical frame interacting with dazzling virtuosity to the beat.

TRACK

Mona hurtling out of the curve and shooting down the backstretch.

VIEW OF MONA

Her cheeks are distended with water, forcing her to inhale and exhale through her nostrils.

TRACK/FIELD

She winds down to a controlled gait, spits out the water, sucks in a few deep breaths, and steps onto the field.

    COACH RENWICK
    You were tightening up. Stay loose. Relax the shoulders.

A slight look of exasperation creases Mona’s face.
INT. CLASSROOM - MORNING

Miss Brill at a computer demonstrates an essay-outline format while Students watch the procedure on a large monitor.

She turns to face the class. She notices Twyla, whose head is resting on the desk.

MISS BRILL
Is that your most responsive attitude to the lesson this morning, Twyla?

Twyla raises her head. Her face has a peakish look.

TWYLA
I... don't feel good.

MISS BRILL
Then you had better visit the Health Office, hadn't you.

Twyla sluggishly rises.

Mona watches as Twyla leaves the room, and then glances at the backpack under Twyla's desk.

INT. HEALTH OFFICE

Twyla sits propped against a pillow on a cot.

Mona appears, carrying Twyla's backpack.

MONA
Hi...

TWYLA
...Hi

MONA
How are you feeling?

TWYLA
Better, I guess.

Mona sets down Twyla's backpack.

MONA
You left it in class.
TWYLA
Oh. Thanks.

MONA
Waiting to go home?

TWYLA
I'll be okay after a while.

MONA
Why don't you just go home?

TWYLA
I'd miss dance practice.

MONA
You're supposed to be sick.

TWYLA
I'm a little tired, that's all. I'll be okay after lunch.

Mona dips into her own backpack, pulls a binder from it, and tears out a page that she puts on the cot.

MONA
Today's notes. I don't need them. I kind of already know what Miss Brill was talking about.

TWYLA
Wish I did. Thanks.

Mona starts to leave.

TWYLA
Oh, and another thanks...

Mona shoots her a "For what?" look.

TWYLA
...for rescuing me from Old Witch's clutches the other day. I was totally out of it.

MONA
Yeah, I saw you needed help.
TWYLA
You can say that again. You could be talking to a frog right now.

MONA
Croak, croak... bye.

TWYLA
Croak...

Mona leaves, Twyla bites her lip, closes her eyes.

EXT. ATHLETIC FIELD - LATE AFTERNOON

Mona doing a practice workout -- stag leaps alternating with trail-leg drills -- in a half-hearted way. She heaves out in an exasperated manner, as if to say: "God, I don't want to be doing this at all today..."

She looks towards the gym. Then, picking up her water bottle, she walks off.

Coach Renwick watches as Mona heads off the field.

INT. GYM

Troupe dancing to MUSIC so loud it's peeling paint off the walls.

Mona enters, hunkers down on a tumble mat, watches the action. This is better than track training any day!

The teacher IRMA AVELAR (30s) directs the Dancers. She shows a passionate love for dance and enthusiastically works to teach her students the discipline of the art.

GROUP OF DANCERS

Twyla leads it, the MUSIC ENDS and the group relaxes.

Twyla glances across the floor, sees Mona, grins broadly at her. WHAT A GORGEOUS SMILE! Mona beams in kindred spirit.

MS. AVELAR
Some of you still need to pay more attention to blocking -- Anna, Ginger, Michelle, you guys especially. We'll continue working on that next week.
The Students burst into chatter as they head out of the gym. Mona rises, walks over to Twyla.

TWYLA
Hey there.

MONA
You sure recovered!

TWYLA
(under her breath)
Yeah, right.

MONA
I love the way you dance. You make it look so easy.

TWYLA
I guess it is. For me.

Effortlessly she glides through a series of ballet moves.

TWYLA
Technique is what's important. It comes with practice, practice, and more practice. I suppose it's the same in track, huh?

She does a couple more steps in slow, unfolding movements. The teacher appears at the doorway, claps for their attention.

MS. AVELAR
Let's go, ladies. I'm locking up in a few minutes.
(stares at Mona)
Aren't you Mona Wilburn?

Mona smiles affirmatively.

TWYLA
Gee, famous and not even eighteen yet.

MS. AVELAR
So what's Greenfield's star athlete doing at my dance class?

MONA
I came to watch.
MS. AVELAR
Oh, did you now. Well, I'm about to close up the gym.

TWYLA
Bye, Ms. Avelar.

MONA
(to Ms. Avelar)
Bye.

MS. AVELAR
Bye girls.

EXT. STREET. BUS STOP - AFTERNOON

Mona on her bicycle sits leaning against the bus pole. Twyla stands next to her, headphones around her neck.

MONA
When did you start dancing?

TWYLA
As far back as I can remember. My gramma said I was born dancing.

She puts the headphones on her ears.

TWYLA
You want to know why I love it?
It gives me -- I dunno -- just a fantastic feeling inside that...

She poises, jams on a button and -- BOOM! -- breaks into dance at the sound of MUSIC.

TWYLA
(loudly)
...overcomes my whole body!

MUSIC STOPS.

MONA
I'd give ANYTHING to dance like that!

TWYLA
You can.
MONA
Thanks, but I don't think so.

TWYLA
Sure you can. You only need the okay from yourself.

MONA
Well, yes. But what about the preparation -- the hours of practicing and rehearsing -- and the dedication?

TWYLA
What about it? With all the track-training you do, you can already eat nails. Want to know something?

MONA
What?

TWYLA
I'd change places with you any day.

MONA
Yeah, right.

TWYLA
Really. You're tall and thin, with long arms and legs, like a dancer should be. Me? I have a body like a shrimp.

Her face shadows over.

TWYLA
I even have...

MONA
...have what?

A slight, sad smile changes Twyla's downcast look.

TWYLA
It doesn't matter... hey, here's my bus.

STREET - ANOTHER VIEW

A bus approaches.
Mona waits at her locker. Twyla shows up.

MONA
Hi. How are you?
Twyla camps it up as a vampire...

TWYLA
Aaaarrgggh!

...lurching at Mona and mock-biting her on the neck.

VIEW OF MONA’S FACE
as she experiences the heady pleasure of Twyla’s mouth on her neck.

CLASSEROOM
A laughing Mona and Twyla enter.

CLASSEROOM - LATER
Students work busily at their desks.

VIEW OF MONA
as she writes. She looks across the room at Twyla.

VIEW OF TWYLA
She is drawing in her notebook. Miss Brill approaches Twyla's desk from behind.

MISS BRILL
It is your writing skills I am interested in seeing you develop in this class, not your artistic ones -- laudable as they may be.

Twyla tears the page out of her notebook, crumples it up. The BELL rings.

CLASSEROOM
Students gather up their stuff and begin leaving.

MISS BRILL
(to Twyla)
I would like to have a further word with you, Twyla

Twyla glances at Mona, rolls her eyes up with a "Now what've I done?" look as Mona drifts out of the door.
MISS BRILL
You failed to submit your monthly journal. It was due last week. May I know why?

Twyla fidgets uneasily.

TWYLA
I... didn't have time to bring it up to date.

MISS BRILL
You also didn't submit your essay outline.

Twyla remains silent.

MISS BRILL
You attend the Academy by the grace of community organizations that donate money so that underprivileged students may receive the kind of education denied them elsewhere. There are other disadvantaged students, I'm sure, who would like to fill your shoes.

Twyla wants to dig a hole and crawl in it!

MISS BRILL
Now, when can I expect your work?

TWYLA
At the end of the week.

MISS BRILL
Then do have it on my desk by Friday. You will, of course, be docked points for being late.

HALL/STAIRS

Mona stands waiting as Twyla emerges from the classroom.

MONA
What did she want?

TWYLA
To know why I didn't hand in my journal and outline.
TWYLA (CONT’D)
What with being sick and having
dance practice and being on the
Revue committee, I hardly have
time for anything!

They make their way along the crowded hall.

MONA
D’you have practice today?

TWYLA
I have practice EVERY day.

MONA
Would the teacher mind if I
sat in again to watch?

TWYLA
Ms. Avelar? No way. She's cool.
signaling over her shoulder with her thumb.

TWYLA
Not like Old Witch back there.
But what about your track
practice?

MONA
I can skip it today.

INT. GYM - LATER
Students stand watching as Ms. Avelar demonstrates a routine.
Mona enters. Twyla waves to her.
Ms. Avelar finishes the series of moves and calls on Twyla to try
them. Twyla executes the moves flawlessly.

MS. AVELAR
Okay, everyone, let's all try it
out together.

Students take up their positions behind Twyla.

MS. AVELAR
Ready...
She glances over her shoulder, nods to someone... MUSIC explodes, galvanizing the Dancers into movement.

Halfway through the routine Twyla seems to lose the beat. She wobbles and falls sprawling on the floor. MUSIC stops. Twyla is helped to her feet. She's a bit groggy.

MS. AVELAR (to Twyla)
You okay?

Twyla nods. Ms. Avelar signals and the MUSIC begins. Twyla picks up the moves, but her performance has lost its edge.

Ms. Avelar shows concern, signals for the MUSIC to stop.

VIEW OF TWYLA
Her face strained, fatigued.

BACK TO SCENE

MS. AVELAR (to Twyla)
You sure you're okay?

TWYLA
I... just lost my timing.

MS. AVELAR
I don't know -- I think you’d better call it a day.

EXT. STREET. BUS STOP.

Mona and Twyla wait as a bus draws to a stop. Its door swings open.

MONA
I'm going with you.

TWYLA
I'm okay. You don't have to.

MONA
I don't mind. Honest.

DRIVER
You ladies gettin' on or are you gonna stand there yakkin' all day?
Mona prods Twyla onto the bus, climbs in behind her. Twyla flashes her permit.

    TWYLA
    (to Mona)
    Look. You don't have to.

Mona drops coins into the box.

    MONA
    Shush.

INT. MOVING BUS.

    MONA
    How come I have to pay and you get to ride free?

Twyla mimics Miss Brill as they slide onto a seat.

    TWYLA
    Because, Miss Wilburn, you are not an underprivileged minority student.

    MONA
    Oh, give me a break.

TRAVELING SEQUENCE

#1 -- Bus traveling along a suburban street.

#2 -- Bus waiting at a railway junction.

#3 -- Bus traveling through an industrial site.

#4 -- Bus traveling past a row of shabby stores.

#5 -- Bus stopping on an urban street.

EXT. STREET

Mona and Twyla getting off the bus. Mona looks around, visibly shocked at the surrounding squalor. They walk.

    MONA
    You live HERE?

    TWYLA
    Me and my honey-brother, plus my gramma. Crummy, huh?
MONA
What about your parents?

TWYLA
My daddy took off. Years ago. My mom passed away after my brother Vermice was born.

They disappear round a corner.

EXT. ANOTHER STREET

VERMICE (14) is pulling a cart filled with bulging plastic bags. The three Punks -- Yammy, Donkey-Boy, and Spooky, who wears his newly ‘acquired’ leather jacket -- watch as he approaches.

YAMMY
Hey, you still pickin' up them nasty old cans from the trash?

Spooky kicks at a bag. Crushed cans spill out.

Vermice chests him.

VERMICE
What you think you doin', man?

DONKEY BOY
Oooh, Vermice be bad today.

SPOOKY
Yeah, badass, what y'gonna do? Kick some butt?

The Punks start pushing Vermice about.

Mona and Twyla appear.

TWYLA
Those damn punks!

Twyla rushes to help Vermice.

YAMMY
Here come Twyla. To protect her little brother.

TWYLA
Get your hands off him!
She breaks in among them, pulls Vermice clear. Vermice still tries to get at the Punks.

VERMICE
(to Yammy)
I don't need no help.

TWYLA
(to Vermice)
Shut your mouth! Pick up your stuff and go on home.

DONKEY BOY
Better listen to your little big sister, Vermice, or she'll be slappin' you.

TWYLA
(to Donkey Boy)
Listen, fool, I'll slap you if you don't leave him alone.

DONKEY BOY
Slap me, baby. I been a bad boy.

He turns around, drops his pants, bends over. The other two Punks break into guffaws. Yammy looks at Mona.

YAMMY
Hey, who this white bitch?

He approaches Mona.

YAMMY
What you be doin' here, baby? Come to pick up on some dusky dudes?

The Punks surround Mona.

SPOOKY
Yeah! And some quality shit, too. Them folks don't get no good stuff in Northside.

Twyla pushes the Punks away from Mona.

TWYLA
Shut your big black mouth!
DONKEY BOY
What y'gonna do, bitch, smack him too?

An unmarked patrol car slides to a stop at the curb and two Black Cops in street clothes jump out. They are DETECTIVES LIEUTENANT FRANK "BONES" SKELTON and his partner SERGEANT AL BEANNE.

BONES
What's goin' down here?
(to Yammy)
You makin' trouble again?

YAMMY
I ain't makin' no trouble.

TWYLA
You liar! You were messing with my brother!

Beanne pushes Yammy against the wall.

BEANNE
What you been told 'bout that stuff?

SPOOKY
We ain't done nothin', man. She lying out that crack in her face.

BONES
Shut your hole, before I put a crack in your head.

He fixes all the Punks with a stare meaner than a pit bull's at a dog fight.

BONES
I ain't talking to none of you no more. If I catch you doing stuff like this again, I'll bust your butts and take 'em for a ride. You hear?

The Punks drift off. Beanne turns to Mona.

BEANNE
What are you doing around here?

MONA
I-
TWYLA
She's with me. Can't you see?

BONES
(to Mona)
Let me give you a bit of advice. Next time, stay in your own neighborhood.

TWYLA
This isn't a foreign country.

BEANNE
It is for people like her. The sooner she learns it, the better off she's gonna be.

The Cops walk back to their car, climb in, drive off.

EXT. TWYLA'S HOUSE

Mona and Twyla arrive at a run-down wood-framed house. Weeds choke the dried-up garden. Holes puncture the screen door. A couch, its guts spilling out, sits on the porch.

Mona grimaces at the sight, and Twyla acknowledges her look.

TWYLA
Yeah, I know.

MONA
Sorry.

TWYLA
We're not rich... like some folks.

MONA
I didn't mean it like that. Anyway, we're not rich.

TWYLA
Forget it.

INT. HOUSE. LIVING ROOM

The Girls enter. Twyla tosses her backpack onto a chair, heads into the kitchen.

TWYLA
Wanna Diet Pepsi?
MONA
No thanks. I'd better be getting back.

She looks around the room, which is in general disarray. Baskets of laundry stand ranged against a wall. An unplugged iron sits on an ironing board.

Twyla appears, sipping a Pepsi.

TWYLA
Stay a little while.

MONA
I can't. I have to pick up my bike at school.

GRAMMA (70s) enters through the open front door, lugging a two-wheeled cart with grocery bags in it.

A careworn woman, her rounded shoulders indicate a life spent in poverty and toil. Her face registers a look almost of shock when she sees Mona.

GRAMMA
(to Mona)
Who're you?

TWYLA
A friend. From school.

GRAMMA
(to Mona)
Don't never see your kinda folks around here.

MONA
I was seeing Twyla home. She wasn't feeling good.

GRAMMA
(to Twyla)
What I tell you this morning? Stay home, I told you. If you listen to me just once, it might do you some good.

Gramma wheels the grocery cart into the kitchen.

TWYLA
I didn't want to miss dance class.
KITCHEN

GRAMMA
You'll be dancin' right into your grave if you don't start listening to what you're told.

Twyla appears.

GRAMMA
Where's your brother?

TWYLA
Out back, I guess. Those three punks were messin’ with him again.

GRAMMA
I’ve a mind to go in that police station... tell them about it.

TWYLA
You already said you were going to do it.

GRAMMA
I know, I know. Things keep slipping out my mind.

Mona appears in the doorway.

MONA
I'd better be getting back.
(to Gramma)
Nice meeting you.

TWYLA
I'll walk you to the bus stop.

GRAMMA
No you won't. Vermice!
(Vermice appears)
Go walk this girl to the bus stop. And pick up Mrs. Shoup's stuff on your way back.

TWYLA
(to Mona)
See you in school tomorrow. Thanks for coming home with me.
INT. WILBURN HOUSE. KITCHEN - EARLY EVENING

Kate is fixing dinner. A DOOR closes somewhere.

KATE
Mona? Is that you?

MONA
Yeah, Mom.

She sweeps in.

KATE
You're late. Been at the track that long?

MONA
I was seeing a friend home from school. She wasn't feeling too good.

KATE
Shouldn't that be her parents' job?

MONA
She doesn't have any. She lives with her grandma, who doesn't get around too well.

KATE
Where does your friend live?

MONA
Southside.

KATE
Southside? You went to Southside alone?

MONA
I told you. I was seeing a friend home.

KATE
But you had to come home by yourself.

MONA
Mom, it was alright. Her brother walked me to the bus stop.
KATE
How old is he?

MONA
Thirteen or fourteen.

KATE
Oh, that’s certainly reassuring.

MONA
Mom, can I bring my friend home sometime?

KATE
Of course you can, honey.

Mona grins a "Thanks, Mom!" and disappears from the kitchen.

KATE
(calling)
But don't say anything to your father about being in Southside. He'll have a conniption.

Mona pokes her head around the door.

MONA
Gotchya!

WILBURN HOUSE. DINING ROOM - EVENING

Twyla is having dinner with the Wilburns.

KATE
(to Twyla)
Mona told me you are one of the Academy's scholarship girls?

Twyla glances at Mona, who fidgets uncomfortably.

TWYLA
She prepared you, huh?

Mona wants to cringe.

TWYLA
They give a scholarship each year to a minority student. I guess I got lucky.
KATE
I'm sure you earned it.

BOB
I played football in college on a scholarship. Let's face it, life's a struggle. Some people jump right in, kicking and fighting, and come out on top. Others hold back and end up at the bottom of the pile.

Mona glances at Twyla, rolls up her eyes in a "Geez, not another lecture!" kind of look.

BOB
The competitive spirit in humans is what raises us above all the other animals.

MONA
I don't want to spend my life scratching and clawing just to get to the top. I want to live a normal person's life.

BOB
Ha!

He looks at Twyla.

BOB
That coming from a champion athlete and honor student!
(to Mona)
Millions of people live normal lives. It's those who rise above everyone else that really count.
(to Twyla)
What d'you say?

TWYLA
People who rise above poverty and unlucky circumstances are the real winners. They're the real champions.

Mona gives her a thumbs-up.

KATE
What a wonderful point of view.
KATE (CONT’D)
The world certainly needs more of that kind of attitude.

BOB
Well... er, yeah, sure.
(to Mona)
Anyway, as I was saying, you fight to get to the top and keep on fighting to stay there. It's like that for me... it's like that for your mother-

KATE
Well... you’ll have to count me out of the conversation...
(rising)
...though I would like to think I'm one of the normal ones.

MONA
(to Bob)
See! You're outnumbered. By normal people.

Exasperated, Bob throws up his hands, rises.

BOB
I give up.

MONA
Ignominious defeat, huh?

BOB
Nothing of the kind. Purely a legitimate exit. I've got some paperwork to do.

MONA
S-u-r-e... coward.

Bob leaves.

TWYLA
(to Kate)
Thanks for dinner, Mrs. Wilburn
(pats stomach)
Good job Mona’s a runner, what with all that wonderful food.

Mona and Twyla rise, start pitching in with the dishes.
KATE
Leave those alone. Go and
have some fun, the two of you.

MONA'S BEDROOM

The spacious room resembles a large den. Trophies and sports
photographs fill a shelf. Mona and Twyla enter. Twyla's
eyes sweep the room.

TWYLA
Wow! Wish my room was like
this. Can you believe it? Me
and my brother have to sleep
in bunk beds in the same room.

She falls spread-eagled on the bed. Mona sorts through some
CDs.

TWYLA
Your dad's something else.

MONA
Don't mind him. He's not that
bad. Except when he's riding
his hobbyhorse.

TWYLA
What's a hobby-horse?

MONA
When he talks about success.
Being a winner. Coming out on
top. All that stuff.

TWYLA
Like getting straight A's, huh?

MONA
Yeah. It'll damage his ego if
I don't get one in math.

TWYLA
And you don't have one, right?

MONA
An A?
TWYLA
An ego.

MONA
Of course I've got an ego. Everyone’s got an ego.

TWYLA
You wouldn't think so, the way you talk.

MONA
What's that supposed to mean?

TWYLA
Sometimes you have to please yourself before you can please others. What if you brought a guy home your dad didn't like? Would you give him up just to please your father?

MONA
'Course I wouldn't. Let’s just drop the subject. All I want to do right now is listen to this.

She pops in a CD and starts weaving around the room to the MUSIC.

Twyla gets off the bed and joins her. For a few moments they dance together, and then Mona sits on the bed to watch Twyla.

The MUSIC stops.

MONA
I've never seen anyone dance like that. You really love it, don't you.

TWYLA
It's as though I can feel the space all around, inviting me to use it... to melt into it... to become part of it. Space scares people so much they want to block it out... fill it with... oh, I dunno... with stuff.

She does a slow pirouette.
TWYLA
It's as if it shouts, "Here I am! Don't block me out -- use me!

She does a barred turn and glides across the floor.

TWYLA
It's filled with, oh, millions of invisible shapes, all just waiting to be copied by the human body. And afterwards -- God! It feels so good. As if I'd been born all over again.

MONA
Wish I could feel that way.

TWYLA
You don't get that kind of feeling? When you win a race?

VIEW OF SHELF
Trophies, newspaper clippings, assorted pictures of Mona winning races at different venues.

MONA (O.S.)
Sometimes I don't win. The feeling's awful then. Not just for me but for everyone -- my dad, my coach, the school, everyone.

Slight pause, then...

BACK TO SCENE

TWYLA
Look. Why don't you ask Ms. Avelar if you can join the dance class?

MONA
What? With homework and track practice? I couldn't. Where would I get the time?

TWYLA
Just change some things around a bit. You'll find it.
MONA
It's my brain we're talking about... it's not easily converted.

TWYLA
Aw, c'mon.

MONA
I'll think about it.

TWYLA
Great! Imagine. We could be a team. What would we call ourselves?

As if in introducing a stage act, Mona sweeps wide her arms and says in her best M.C. voice:

MONA
Introducing the world famous dancers -- Salt 'n' Pepper!

Twyla squeals with delight, and then falls silent.

MONA
What's the matter?

A beat, a flicker of hesitation, and Twyla brushes aside the question.

TWYLA
Nothing. Forget it.

She puts another CD into the player, turns up the volume, starts dancing to the beat of the hard, driving MUSIC.

Kate enters, presses her fingers to her ears. The two Girls stop dancing. Mona turns the MUSIC volume down.

MONA
Sorry, Mom.

KATE
Thanks, honey. Your father's complaining.
(to Twyla)
You're quite a dancer.
Twyla smiles. She begins to sway, and then falls against the dresser.

MONA
Twyla! What's the matter?

INT. TRAVELING BENZ - NIGHT

Bob is driving. He glances over his shoulder at Twyla, whose head rests on Mona's shoulder.

BOB
(to Twyla)
How are you feeling?

TWYLA
( feebly )
Okay...

EXT. TWYLA'S HOUSE

The Benz pulls up outside. Mona helps Twyla out and walks with her to the front door. They disappear inside the house.

STREET

Who should come shuffling down the street just then but the three Punks. They approach the Benz, stare through the window.

INT. BENZ

Bob calmly and steadfastly meets their stares.

STREET

SPOOKY
He be waitin' on Twyla.

DONKEY BOY
Bitch got herself a rich white dude.

YAMMY
Maybe he waitin' for her old washerwoman granny.

SPOOKY
Or Vermice, the little fag.
Guffawing, they start rocking the car. Confrontation time! Bob slides out of the Benz.

    BOB
    You fellas got a problem
    with my property?

    YAMMY
    Most likely stole it.

    BOB
    Your momma didn't raise me.

Yammy plunges his hand into his jacket pocket. Bob kicks him in the crotch and Yammy crumples up.

Spooky whips out a jackknife but Bob swiftly cuts him down with a throat chop.

Donkey Boy thinks better of joining in the fray, backs off.

    BOB
    You've got two seconds to get
    outta here. The three of you.

The Punks scurry off.

Bob picks up the knife, snaps the blade on the pavement, throws away the pieces. He climbs back in the car.

Mona comes out of the house, Vermice hurriedly following.

INT. BENZ

Mona opens the car door, slips into the seat.

Vermice is glimpsed through the window, running down the street.

    BOB
    How is she?

    MONA
    I don't know. Her brother's
    gone to call an ambulance.

    BOB
    Why didn't you ask me, for
    heaven's sake? I could have
    called on my cell.
MONA
It was so fast I wasn’t thinking.

Bob starts the car.

BOB
Probably stomach cramps. When we get home, remind me to talk to your mother about her cooking.

Mona looks at her father as the car glides off, a flicker of irritation creasing her face.

BOB
What a godawful neighborhood.

INT. GREENFIELD ACADEMY. HALL - DAY

An indecipherable babble of voices fills the hall as Students make their way to class.

Mona double-Os the sea of faces. Where's Twyla? She spots Coach Renwick, who is walking along the hall with a Colleague.

Trying to duck the Coach, Mona dives for her locker and starts rummaging about in it. Too late! The Coach spots her.

COACH RENWICK
(to Colleague)
I'll see you at lunch.

She approaches Mona.

COACH RENWICK
Hi there.

MONA
Hi.

COACH RENWICK
Where've you been? You haven't shown up for practice in a while.

MONA
I've been kind of busy.

COACH RENWICK
I guess so. Is something the matter?
MONA
No...

A flicker of hesitation, and then she fibs.

MONA
I've been concentrating on my math a bit more. I'm really behind.

COACH RENWICK
Okay. Will you make it today?

MONA
I'll try.

COACH RENWICK
The Cities'll be up before you know it. It's the biggie. I want you ready.

P.A. VOICE (interrupting) "Class will start in one minute."

Students scramble, lockers slam shut.

MONA
I... have to get to class.

She disappears along the hall.

CLASSROOM

Students trickle in -- Mona among them. She glances at Twyla's desk. Empty!

MISS BRILL
I have finished reading your outlines. Most were very good and contained a lot of topics for exploration-

The door swings open and Twyla enters. She crosses to her desk, sits. Miss Brill stares at her coldly.

MISS BRILL
(to Twyla)
You have not only incurred further absences, Twyla, but you have also returned in a conspicuously tardy manner.
Dead silence in the room.

VIEW OF TWYLA

fidgeting uncomfortably.

BACK TO SCENE

MISS BRILL
And while I'm on the subject of tardiness, you submitted your outline unacceptably late.

VIEW OF MONA

Looks uneasy and troubled at Twyla's discomfort.

BACK TO SCENE

MISS BRILL
Punctuality, it seems, isn't one of your more engaging habits.

Hurt and humiliated, Twyla jumps up from her desk and runs out of the room.

Mona gets up and hurries out in pursuit of Twyla, leaving the teacher and the students staring in astonishment.

HALL

Mona shoots a look up and down the hall -- no Twyla! She darts to a window, stares out.

INT. VIEW OF CAMPUS FROM WINDOW

No one is in sight.

CAMPUS

Mona running across it. She stops, glances towards a partially open door in the auditorium, heads towards it.

INT. AUDITORIUM

Unlit.

MONA (O.S.)
Twyla? Twyla?
Mona appears out of the darkness, walks down an aisle.

MONA
Twyla? Are you there?

STAGE

A cone of brilliantly colored light instantly bathes Twyla, who stands poised at center-stage. Aggressive, pounding MUSIC shatters the silence. Twyla starts to dance.

The expression of her movements -- the savage and exciting contortions and steps -- simulate the deep hurt she has just experienced.

Then, as if by magic, Mona also appears onstage and she too dances.

The two of them jump, leap, spring here and there over the stage in a synchronize duet.

The MUSIC stops and Twyla sinks down.

TWYLA
I can't take it anymore... school... Old Witch... life.

MONA
Don't say that. I know how you feel. About school. About Miss Brill. About everything.

TWYLA
No, you don't. You don't know what it's like having to walk into class each day, knowing the teacher hates you.

MONA
She doesn't hate you, Twyla.

TWYLA
Yes, she does. The way she looks at me. The way she speaks to me. And in front of the whole class, too!

MONA
Stop thinking like that.
TWYLA
You don't feel it the way I do.
It's as if I was dirt.

She lays her face on Mona's shoulder, cries.

Mona puts her arms around Twyla, kisses her.

MONA
Oh, don't cry, Twyla. I hate to see you like this.

TWYLA
I'm scared.

MONA
Of what? I ran out of class too, remember. We'll both face the music. The two of us. Together.

TWYLA
That's not what I'm scared of. It's... it's...

MONA
It's what?

Twyla straightens herself, crosses her legs, dabs at her eyes.

TWYLA
Oh, nothing.

Forcing a chuckle.

TWYLA
I'm just feeling a bit dramatic right now, that's all.

Switching to her usual buoyant self.

TWYLA
Let's cut the rest of the day. We can go to the park. Feed the ducks. Something.

MONA
We're in enough trouble already. That'll just make it worse.
TWYLA
(rising)
So what? I don't care. Come on. What d'you say?

Not so sure, Mona offers a shaky smile -- and then jumps up.

MONA
Okay. I'm with you. But wait! What about our stuff? It's still in the class.

TWYLA
Old Witch'll take care of it. In fact, she can keep mine... for the rest of her crummy old life!

EXT. PARK - DAY
Mona and Twyla are throwing popcorn to ducks on a pond.

An unkempt, stubble-faced OLD MAN shuffles past. He stops and stares at them, catching Mona's eye. She nudges Twyla.

MONA
That man is staring at us.

Twyla boldly looks over at him.

TWYLA
(to Old Man)
Excuse me, but do we look like pole-dancers or something?

MONA
Ssssh! He'll come over!

TWYLA
He'd better not. I'll crack him on the head with one of those big ol' rocks.

MONA
Let's get out of here.

TWYLA
Yeah. Before the creep's eyes start to bleed.

They scatter their popcorn on the water, walk away.
PARK. ANOTHER AREA

Mona and Twyla, walking through a flower garden.

    TWYLA
    Sometimes I think you and me are
two sides of a coin.

    MONA
    Which side are you?

    TWYLA
    Dunno. It's a plugged nickel.
You still thinking of trying out
for dance?

    MONA
    I don't know.

    TWYLA
    C'mon. Ask Ms. Avelar... huh?
Tomorrow.

    MONA
    Uh. Maybe.

They hear a CAT mewing, stop short.

    TWYLA
    Listen! Do you hear that?

They look around. Mona elbows Twyla, points at a tree.

    MONA
    Look, over there! In that tree.

VIEW OF TREE

A CAT crouches on a bough.

BACK TO SCENE

    TWYLA
    Oh, yeah, I see it. Poor kitty!

They walk to the tree, stare up at the Cat.

    TWYLA
    It can't get down.
CAT’S P.O.V.
as Mona and Twyla stare up at it.

BACK TO SCENE
Twyla looks around, spots a wooden bench.

    TWYLA
    Look. We can use that bench.  
    Come on. Help me with it.

CLUMP OF BUSHES
The Old Man stands hidden behind it, watching.

MONA AND TWYLA
carrying the bench and upending it against the tree.

CAT’S P.O.V.
looking down at the girls as Twyla helps Mona climb up on the 
upended bench.

Mona doesn't notice the Old Man as he approaches the tree and 
takes up a position behind an unsuspecting Twyla.

TREE
Mona s-t-r-e-t-ch-e-s mightily and scoops the cat out of the 
tree, revealing an ample view of her calves and thighs.

    MONA
    There, kitty...

She turns to hand-off the cat to Twyla... freezes.

    MONA
    Ohmygod!

Twyla taking the cat.

    TWYLA
    What's the matter?

She turns her head and sees the Old Man staring up at Mona.

VIEW OF MAN’S FACE
His eyes rolling.
BACK TO SCENE

Mona jumps off the bench.

MONA, TWYLA, OLD MAN

Twyla swivels around to face the Old Man, who looks at the cat and then at Mona.

OLD MAN
Nice little pussy.

Twyla tightens her grip on the Cat's neck...

TWYLA
Here's some pussy... in your face!

...and thrusts the animal into the Old Man's face.

The Cat hisses ferociously, violently claws at the Old Man.

OLD MAN
Aaarrrggh!

MONA
Twyla!

The Cat squirms out of Twyla's hands and darts away.

The Old Man staggers backwards, clasping his eyes. Blood trickles through his fingers.

MONA
Omygod! Look what you've done!

They turn and run, leaving the Old Man groaning in pain.

EXT. GREENFIELD ACADEMY. ATHLETIC FIELD - AFTERNOON

Student athletes training. Coach Renwick appears, looks around the field, calls out to the Runners pacing it down the stretch.

COACH RENWICK
Anyone seen Mona?

EXT. INDUSTRIAL AREA. STREET - AFTERNOON.

Mona and Twyla, eating yogurt cones while walking.
MONA
The cat really hurt that man.

TWYLA
So what? Serves the pervert right.

MONA
He'll probably be walking around blind for the rest of his life. Like Oedipus.

They walk off.

TWYLA
Who's Oedipus?

MONA
(voice fading)
Some blind guy. In ancient Greece.

TWYLA
(voice fading further)
Was he a perv, too?

MONA
(voice, almost indistinct)
Sort of.

MONA AND TWYLA'S P.O.V
The three Punks appear.

MONA AND TWYLA
They freeze.

TWYLA
Whoa! The Creeps!

STREET
The Girls turn, head off in another direction. Too late!

REVERSE VIEW
as the Punks spot them.
DONKEY BOY
Hey, look! Twyla and that white bitch!

YAMMY
Let's get 'em!

They charge after Mona and Twyla.

MONA AND TWYLA
Twyla looks over her shoulder, elbows Mona.

TWYLA
Outta here!

Dumping their yogurt cones, they take off.

Passersby dodge out of the way, turn, stare after them. (They do the same as the Punks storm past.)

CHASE SEQUENCE
#1 -- Mona and Twyla high-tailing it down the street.
#2 -- Punks racing across the street after them.
#3 -- Mona and Twyla cutting down an alley.
#4 -- Punks tearing down the alley in pursuit.
#5 -- Mona and Twyla dashing across a vacant lot.

EXT. BUILDING WITH CHAIN-LINK FENCE AND YARD
A sign on a wall reads: "Greenfield Package Supply Co." Mona and Twyla scramble over the fence, the Punks at their heels.

MONA AND TWYLA
as they spot a fire hose attached to the wall of the building.

FIRE HOSE
Two pairs of hands plunge into view. One pair grabs the hose, the other twists open the water valve.

YARD
Mona and Twyla, fighting to control the gushing hose, aim the powerful jet of water at the Punks and knock them off the fence.
Mona and Twyla heave the hose away and dash for a door in the building.

The drenched Punks climb over the fence but are held at bay by the fire hose swirling unremittingly.

INT. INDUSTRIAL BUILDING

A loud hum of MACHINERY as Mona and Twyla creep along an aisle between rows of wooden pallets that are stacked high with goods and material.

They duck at the occasional sight of Workers driving forklifts to and fro along the aisles.

INT. DOOR

as the Punks come through it into the building. After hanging back a second to scope the place out, they creep further inside.

CAVERNOUS ROOM

From an opening in the ceiling hang gigantic elongated canvass bags that reach almost to the floor and have levers attached to nozzles at the bottom.

MONA AND TWYLA SNEAKING INTO THE ROOM.

They stare up at the huge bags.

    TWYLA
    Wow!

    MONA
    What are THEY?

    TWYLA
    Monster condoms!

They turn, see the Punks.

PUNKS' P.O.V.

Mona and Twyla -- scared stiff!

MONA AND TWYLA'S P.O.V.

The grinning Punks, menacingly advancing.

    DONKEY BOY
    Gotchya, bitches!
CAVERNOUS ROOM

As the Punks advance towards Mona and Twyla, Twyla spies a steel ladder that leads up to a catwalk, nudge Mona.

In a flash the Girls make a bee-line for it, pulling open the control levers that activate the chutes on the bags.

Styrofoam peanuts gush out of the chute spouts, deluging the Punks.

CATWALK

Mona and Twyla scramble up a ladder to it -- safe! -- peer down.

CAVERNOUS ROOM

The Punks are floundering about in a sea of styrofoam peanuts. A WORKER appears, sees the Punks being slowly buried by the stuff.

    WORKER
    Aw, shit!
    (turns, shouts)
    Hey, Emilio! Amir! Come see what some sons-a-bitches gone an' done!

Several WORKERS rush into the room, stare at the sight, wade into the popcorn.

    WORKER
    (to Spooky)
    You're gonna pick up every piece of this stuff, you sonovabitch! You and your friends!

CATWALK

As Mona and Twyla escape through a door at the end of it.

EXT. INDUSTRIAL BUILDING

Mona and Twyla come pelting round the corner, stop to regain their breath, burst into laughter, high-five each other, and run off out of sight.

INT. WILBURN HOUSE. DINING ROOM - EVENING

Bob and Kate are having dinner. Bob is anxious, fretful.
BOB
Where is she?

KATE
Still at practice, I suppose. I sent a message to her iPhone.

BOB
But it's after six.

KATE
Stop worrying. She's a grown girl and old enough to look after herself. Have some strudel.

BOB
I don't want any strudel. I'm trying to lose ten pounds, remember? I just want to know where my daughter's got to.

KATE
Getting upset won't bring her home any sooner.

A DOOR bangs.

BOB
Who says it won't?

Mona drifts in.

MONA
Hi.

BOB
Where've you been?

A flicker of hesitation, and then she lies.

MONA
School.

BOB
Really? Do you know that Coach Renwick called? She's concerned about your training... said you haven't been showing up.
MONA
I went to watch Twyla at dance practice a couple times, that’s all.

BOB
What about track? The All-Cities is just around the corner and you're supposed to be training for it, remember? What’s got into you?

MONA
Nothing's gotten into me. I've missed a few training sessions, that's all. I’ll be ready for the Cities. Just stop worrying about it.

BOB
I don't want you just to be ready for the Cities -- I want you to WIN the Cities!

MONA
Will you stop going on all the time about winning! I'm sick of hearing it! Some things are just as important in life as winning, you know!

She storms out. Bob rises to follow, but Kate stops him.

KATE
(rising)
No, Bob. Leave her alone.

BOB
Dammit. It's that friend of hers -- that Twyla girl.

KATE
Why are you blaming Twyla?

BOB
Ever since our daughter became involved with the girl, she's let her training slide. It's not a healthy relationship.
KATE
It's a different relationship she's involved in, not an unhealthy one. I think I can understand my daughter’s emotional needs. Interfering at this stage will only make things worse. Okay?

He rakes his hand through his hair, sits down.

KATE
So stop worrying about her. And stop worrying about your weight, at least for today. Here, have some strudel.

He grabs the dish, piles his plate high.

INT. GREENFIELD ACADEMY. SCHOOL OFFICE - MORNING

Mona enters. A SECRETARY pauses at her work.

SECRETARY
Mona?

MONA
Yes.

SECRETARY
The Headmistress will see you in a moment.

Mona takes a seat, waits.

A few moments later, Twyla comes out of the Headmistress' office. She shoots Mona a "Phew I'm glad that's over!" look.

SECRETARY
(to Mona)
You may go in now.

HEADMISTRESS' OFFICE

The HEADMISTRESS is busily writing something. Mona appears in the open doorway, knocks.

HEADMISTRESS
Ah, Mona. Come in. Sit down.

She reaches for a folder, opens it.
HEADMISTRESS
Yesterday afternoon Miss Brill reported that you and Twyla left her class without permission.

Mona remains silent. The Headmistress scrutinizes her.

HEADMISTRESS
Did you and Twyla leave class?

MONA
Yes.

HEADMISTRESS
Also, the daily attendance report indicates you incurred unverified absences from your classes during the rest of the day.

Mona remains silent.

HEADMISTRESS
Did both of you go off campus?

MONA
Yes.

HEADMISTRESS
Let me say I'm both surprised and dismayed by your actions. I would not have thought it possible that one of the most gifted students at the Academy should conduct herself in such an irresponsible manner.

Mona contritely averts her eyes.

HEADMISTRESS
Because Miss Brill informs me that the standard of your work may suffer if you and Twyla were to remain together, I have given instructions for Twyla to be placed in another English class.

MONA
I'm sorry I behaved irresponsibly. It won't happen again.
HEADMISTRESS
I'm glad to hear it. I must tell you, however, that I shall notify your parents about the matter.

MONA
Is it really necessary?

HEADMISTRESS
Yes, it is. Absolutely so. I have no more to say. You may return to class.

INT. AUDITORIUM/STAGE

Students work at a bank of lights on a catwalk above the stage. Ms. Avelar and TWO STUDENTS sit in the auditorium, watching the stage as a series of flats light up in glowing colored radiance.

1ST STUDENT
That's it.

MS. AVELAR
I think you're right. Let's go with it, then.

STUDENT
(shouts)
Hold that setup, Paula!

2ND STUDENT
I'll go check the number for the cue sheet.

She jumps up and runs off as Mona and Twyla enter from the foyer. Mona wears her track suit.

TWYLA
I don't care whose class she puts me in. Nowhere on the planet could be as bad as Old Witch's dungeon.

They approach Ms. Avelar.

TWYLA
Hi, Ms. Avelar

MS. AVELAR
Hi, there.
TWYLA
Do you remember Mona?

MS. AVELAR
Of course I do.

She turns to Mona

MS. AVELAR
I forgot to tell you then how impressed I was by your terrific performance at last month's Invitational.

MONA
Thanks.

TWYLA
Ms. Avelar? Is there room for one more in the dance class? Mona would really like to join.

MS. AVELAR
The class is full. You know that.

TWYLA
P-l-e-a-s-e, just one more?

MS. AVELAR
(to Mona)
Dancing requires just as much dedication as athletics.

MONA
I know.

MS. AVELAR
Well. Let's see what you can do.

With a nod of her head she signifies the control room to Twyla, who heads off towards it, and then indicates the stage to Mona.

MS. AVELAR
All yours.

Mona steps up on the apron, takes center stage, waits nervously.

CONTROL ROOM

Twyla bounds in.
AUDITORIUM/STAGE

Slight beat as Mona waits... and then hard, driving MUSIC blasts the walls of the auditorium. Mona dances awkwardly and self-consciously, Ms. Avelar watching the movements.

MS. AVELAR
Don't be tense. Loosen up.

Mona's body gradually attunes itself to the pulsating rhythm of the MUSIC and she begins dancing in a more composed way.

CONTROL ROOM

Twyla, beaming, gives Mona a thumbs up through the window.

AUDITORIUM/STAGE

MUSIC stops. Mona jumps off the stage. Twyla appears.

MS. AVELAR
You need to manage creatively all that raw energy you've got stored up -- how to use it more efficiently. Being an athlete, you know what I'm talking about.

TWYLA
Does it mean she can join?

MS. AVELAR
I suppose we can make room for one more.

TWYLA
Whoopee!

She and Mona embrace.

MONA
Thank you, Ms. Avelar.

MS. AVELAR
I'm wondering what Coach Renwick will say when she finds out you're riding two horses.

TWYLA
(to Mona)
I can ride one of them for ya.
Slapping her flank, she trots a few steps as if in riding a pony.

INT. WILBURN HOUSE. KITCHEN - LATE AFTERNOON

Mona, her mind far away, is helping her mother to prepare dinner.

KATE
Penny for your thoughts.

MONA
Hmm?

KATE
What are you thinking about?

MONA
I've decided I don't want to go to college.

KATE
Oh?

MONA
What I really want is to go to a performing-arts school. To study dance.

KATE
When did that idea crop up?

MONA
I've been thinking about it for a while.

KATE
What about all the training you've done? You've a golden opportunity for scholarships to several fine colleges.

MONA
It's not what I want anymore. I want to go to a good school of dance somewhere. Like in New York or Chicago.

KATE
It's not as simple as that. Those schools take only the best, and you've no background in the performing arts.
MONA
I know. But if I don’t try...
If I don’t take a chance... I’ll
never find out whether or not
I’m good enough.

KATE
Well, I will say, I admire
your determination. But you
know how your father will
react when you tell him.

MONA
I'll have to face up to him,
that's all. You've always told
me that if a person thinks
she's made the right decision,
she should see it through.

KATE
Absolutely. But only if she's
thought about the consequences
if it's the wrong one.

MONA
I have thought about it. A lot.
It's what I want to do more than
anything else in the world...
(embracing Kate)
...and your being my mom gives me
the strength I'll need to fight
the battles that lie ahead.

INT. ACADEMY. CAFETERIA - DAY

Din of chatter and laughter as Students eat at tables.

Mona walks into view carrying a lunch-tray. She stops, eyeballs
the room.

Spying Twyla she makes her way between the tables and sits down
next to her friend.

MONA
Hi there.

Twyla stares at Mona's tray, pulls a face.

TWYLA
Tuna? Again?
MONA
What'samatter? I smell like it?

TWYLA
Give it time.

MONA
So... stop complaining.
(munches)
How's your new English class?

TWYLA
Miss Anjian's? Sure beats Old Witch's.

MONA
Not as hard, huh?

TWYLA
What can I say? English is English -- everyone who reads and writes the stuff hates it.

MONA
A noun by any other name is still a noun, right?

TWYLA
Yeah. And tuna by any other name still stinks, right?

Mona looks at her half-eaten sandwich...

MONA
Right!

...and jabs it in Twyla's face.

TWYLA
Aghhh!

INT. GYM. DANCE SEQUENCE. SERIES OF QUICK VIEWS. (DIFFERENT DAYS)
(In each view we see Mona practicing REALLY HARD!)

#1 -- Mona and Twyla practicing together.

#2 -- Mona and Twyla practicing with Group.

#3 -- Mona practicing alone.
ANOTHER VIEW (CONTINUATION OF DANCE SEQUENCE #3)

MUSIC stops. Mona slips off her bandanna, mops her face and neck with it.

She relaxes with Twyla, who has suddenly begun to look unwell.

MONA
You alright?

TWYLA
(tenuous)
Uh... yeah.

MS. AVELAR
Okay, ladies. That's it. See you on Tuesday.

Students begin drifting towards the door. Ms. Avelar walks past Mona and Twyla.

MS. AVELAR
Well done, Mona.

GYM DOOR

Two STUDENTS approach the door. One shoots a look at Mona.

1ST STUDENT
Who's she trying to impress?

2ND STUDENT
Everyone, if you ask me.

MONA AND TWYLA

TWYLA
I'm not sure I can make it to watch you run at the Cities next week. I feel like I'm in for another bout.

MONA
It's okay. I wish you had a cell. Then at least I could call you.

TWYLA
It's on the list. When I get rich and famous.
EXT. GREENFIELD CITY STADIUM. TRACK & FIELD - DAY

A banner proclaims "ALL CITIES TRACK & FIELD COMPETITION". Athletes and Coaches dressed in variegated track-suits commingle with Officials on the field.

The long-jump event is in progress. A VOICE over the p.a. system: "Last call for women's sixteen-hundred- meters final."

SPECTATORS

Among them are Bob and Kate, looking on keenly.

TRACK

Eight Runners climb out of their track-suits, loosen up. They take up their positions. Mona is in the third lane.

STARTER (O.S.)
On your marks...

The Spectators fall quiet.

STARTER (O.S.)
...get set!

At the crack of a GUN the Runners burst off.

SPECTATORS

Rooting for their favorites.

RACING SEQUENCE

(Rooting growing louder at each sequence.)

#1 -- Runners bunching together on the first lap.
#2 -- Runners stringing out on the second lap.
#3 -- Mona taking up the lead on the third lap.
#4 -- Mona increasing her lead on the final lap.

VIEW OF BOB & KATE

Cheering enthusiastically.
TRACK SIDELINES

Coach Renwick urging Mona on.

VIEW OF MONA

arms cleaving aside the air, her legs burning up the tartan track. Victory is within her grasp -- then suddenly...

TRACK

Mona's pace slackens. A Runner catches her, sweeps past, followed by another, and yet another, and even another -- SHE'S THROWING AWAY THE RACE!

FINISH LINE

Spectators roar as the Winner flashes across the line.

MONA

her face a tranquil mask of indifference as she crosses the line.

BOB AND KATE

Bob's face, creased in dismay and disbelief. What in hell happened! Kate looks at him, squeezes his arm.

TRACK CHUTE

The Runners canter to a stop, bend, breathe deeply -- all except Mona, who walks straight to the sidelines.

SIDELINE

Coach Renwick watches Mona untie and kick off her track shoes.

COACH RENWICK

(sardonically)

Congratulations.

Mona shrugs off the comment.

MONA

Wasn't my day.

COACH RENNWICK

It was your day all right. Your name was written all over it. You just didn't want to read what it said.

Raking up her stuff Mona disappears among the Officials and Competitors, leaving her Coach staring after her. Another Greenfield Academy Athlete appears and stares after her, too.
INT. MOVING BENZ - AFTERNOON

with Bob, Kate, and Mona inside. Bob strikes the steering wheel with the heels of his hands.

BOB
You could've won that race. It was in the palm of your hands and you threw it away. Why, for God's sake?

MONA
It's not there anymore... the urge to win... the desire for everyone’s recognition... even the need for your approval and your respect and your love, Dad.

BOB
Everyone's got to strive at winning something. If you lose the urge to win -- to beat the competition -- then you lose the edge. Not only in sports but in school. In business. In life. It's the same wherever you go.

MONA
Is that why there are so many unhappy people in the world? Because only a few can win? Because everyone else has to fail or lose?

BOB
You don't understand. You just don't understand.

MONA
I do, Dad. It's only... I don't believe in it anymore, that's all. Don't YOU understand?

INT. WILBURN HOUSE. FRONT DOOR/ HALL - AFTERNOON

Bob, Kate, and Mona enter. Mona heads upstairs with her stuff. Bob checks the mail chute.
LIVING ROOM

Bob walks in, skimming through the mail. He looks quizzically at an envelope, opens it, reads...

BOB

Damn!

HALL

Bob appears, looks up the stairs.

BOB

(calls)

Mona!

MONA (O.S.)

What?

BOB

Come down here! Right now! I want a word with you, Miss Independent America!

LIVING ROOM

Bob enters, followed by Mona.

MONA

What's the matter?

Bob hands her the letter.

BOB

Explanation, if you please?

Mona reads.

MONA

I skipped a couple of classes, that's all.

BOB

Oh, you just skipped a couple of classes, huh?

MONA

I needed some time to myself. It's no big thing.
BOB
It isn't? Well that's not the reason we're forking out big bucks to send you to the Academy!

He takes back the letter.

BOB
And what about the girl who ditched with you? She needed some time to herself as well, huh? Let me guess -- Twyla, right?

MONA
She needed me. I really had to be with her.

BOB
You sure know how to pick your friends. From now on you don't associate with her anymore, understand?

MONA
I can't do that! She's my best friend!

Kate enters.

KATE
What's all the fuss about?

Bob waves the letter at her.

BOB
This!
(gives Kate the letter)
A letter saying our daughter ditched classes for a day and disappeared off campus.

KATE
Oh, Mona...

MONA
It wasn't the whole day.
BOB
I don't care if it was only part of one. You don't ditch class! You don't ditch school! Got it?

Mona is about to stalk out of the room.

BOB
And dump that so-called friend of yours.

Mona
No way! I'm not giving up my best friend just because you don't like her.

BOB
Best friend? You don't know the meaning of the words. Best friends don't bring you trouble.
(takes letter)
That girl has nothing going for her. I mean -- look at where she lives, for God's sake! Punks on every corner.

Mona
It's not Twyla's fault she lives where she does.

Kate
This argument is not getting anyone anywhere.

Boo
I'm trying to tell her she doesn't know enough about the world -- or at least the people in it -- to make the best judgment.

Mona
That's not fair. And it's not true.

Boo
You've been fed, sheltered, provided for, and taken care of all your life. You haven't had to make a decision about anything.
MONA
Maybe I have lived sheltered life, but give me credit for some of the choices I've made. And as for making my own decisions, I've just made the biggest one of my whole life.

She strides to the door, turns.

MONA
I'm not going to college. I'm finally going to use some of the initiative you're always talking about and do something I want to do. I'm going to be a dancer.

Bob can hardly hold it in!

BOB
A dancer! What the hell are you talking about? You're an athlete. A track champion. You can represent your country in the Olympics, dammit. That's how good you are.

MONA
I don't want to represent my country. I want to represent myself... as a dancer.

BOB
Hogwash!

He turns to Kate, who has been calmly listening to both sides.

BOB
She wants to throw away everything she's achieved -- in school, on track -- on a wacky idea of being a dancer! Can you imagine? The whole idea is crazy.

MONA
It's not crazy!
BOB
(to Mona)
Listen, no one's ever been good at growing anything in the moonlight. Not even California governors. Don't you understand?

MONA
I want to do what'll make me happy, not successful. Don't YOU understand?

KATE
The best thing to do right now is to let the pot simmer and see what rises to the top.

Mona stalks out... and then quickly reappears.

MONA
Mom? I need to use your car.

BOB
No! You're grounded!

Mona storms out.

BOB
Dancer, my foot. The whole thing's ridiculous.

KATE
She wants to put into practice what you've been preaching to her all her life. You can't blame her for that, can you?

MONA'S BEDROOM
as she rifles through a stack of Cds. Picking one out, she throws it in a drawstring backpack along with her iPhone and hightails it from the room.

EXT. WILBURN HOUSE. FRONT PATIO AND GARDEN
Kate is pointing out to Bob a crack in a huge flower pot that stands amid masses of colorful blooms. Mona, peddling upright on her bike, zips down the driveway.
BOB
Wha--hey! Where're you going? You're grounded, remember?

He steps in some dog-poop, does a couple of hops on one foot.

BOB
Damn dogs!

EXT. SOUTHSIDE. TWYLA'S HOUSE

Mona jumps off her bike, knocks at the front door. Twyla opens it...

TWYLA
(surprised)
Well, hi...

...lets Mona in.

INT. HOUSE. BEDROOM

Mona slips off her backpack, takes a CD from it and hands it to Twyla.

MONA
Here.

TWYLA
Oh, cool. You found it.

She shoves the CD into a player. Mellow MUSIC fills the room. Swaying back and forth, Twyla closes her eyes in silent enjoyment.

TWYLA
God, I love this!

Mona folds her arms tightly around Twyla's waist from behind, kisses her cheek, moves with her.

Vermice comes in, stares at them. Twyla opens her eyes, throws her hands on her hips, and drops into Black dialect.

TWYLA
What you doin' standin' there starin' with them big ol' licorice-button eyes, fool? Go an' recycle all them bags you got filled up out back. And give Gramma some of that money you get.
Vermice makes himself scarce.

**TWYLA**
That boy is slowly getting rich. Fifty-two dollars he got last week. Even the homeless are getting on his butt, saying he's taking away their livelihood.

**MONA**
When do you think you'll be back at school?

Twyla, looking tired, shrugs.

**TWYLA**
I have to go back in the hospital for more tests next week.
(dejectedly)
If I'm not back at school by the end of it, Ms. Avelar will have to choose another lead for the Revue.

Gramma enters through the front door, puts down a bundle.

**GRAMMA**
Ooooh, the devil's weight off my arm.
(to Twyla)
Child... what you doin' out your bed?

**TWYLA**
Mona came. Can't you see?

**GRAMMA**
Well, she won't be coming for long if you don't stay in bed restin' like the doctor told you.

**MONA**
(to Twyla)
I've got to be going anyway.

**TWYLA**
Thanks for coming... and the CD.

**EXT. TWYLA'S HOUSE**
From the doorway Twyla watches as Mona hops on her bike.
TWYLA
You rode that bike all the way across town?

MONA
My dad's mad at me.
(pedaling off)
Wouldn't let me use my mom's car.

EXT. Ghetto Street

Mona slows on her bike at a stop sign. The three Punks spring out of nowhere.

With Mona still on the bike, they grab the handlebars and pull both the bike and Mona into an alley.

EXT. ALLEY.

The Punks half push, half drag Mona off her bike.

SPOOKY
Whoooa! This bitch wild!

YAMMY
We gonna teach your white ass that no bitch gonna make fools outta us Smoky Joes.

They pin her arms, search her backpack.

STREET

An unmarked police car approaches the alley.

REVERSE VIEW - WITHIN MOVING CAR

Bones and Beanne spot Mona's bike lying inside the alley.

ALLEY ENTRANCE

The patrol car stops. Beanne and Bones get out. Beanne picks up the bike. Bones enters the alley.

ALLEY

Yammy tries to grope Mona as Donkey Boy plays with her iPhone.
VIEW OF BONES

walking along the alley.

BACK TO SCENE

Spooky, standing lookout, sees Bones.

        SPOOKY
        P-u-l-i-c-e!

The Punks flee down the alley, Donkey Boy ditching the iPhone.

Bones reaches a badly shaken Mona, who's trying to pull herself together. Beanne appears, wheeling Mona's bike.

        BONES
        Stay right there. Don't move.
        This time we're gonna nail them hoodlums.

The Cops take off after the Punks. As soon as Bones and Beanne disappear, Mona retrieves her iPhone, jumps on her bike, and rides off.

EXT. YARD. REAR OF PROCESSING PLANT

The Punks run into view, skid to a stop, duck out of sight when they see three WORKERS come out of a rear door. Each Worker is pushing a wheeled trash bin.

In the yard are three dumpsters. One of them is a larger-size one that stands separate from the other two. Painted on the front of it is a logo of a smiling pink pig’s head and words underneath it in the same color reading, ‘Harry’s Happy Hogs!’

The two Workers dump the trash-bins into it.

VIEW INSIDE GREEN DUMPSTER

It's full of produce trimmings.

BACK TO SCENE

The three Punks dash to the green dumpster, climb into it.

Bones and Beanne appear, look around. Sound of an approaching TRASH TRUCK. The two Cops walk up to the two smaller dumpsters. Bones looks in one and Beanne looks in the other.
A trash truck with a grinning pig’s head emblazoned on its door roars into the yard, heads towards the larger dumpster.

INT. MOVING TRASH TRUCK. DRIVER'S P.O.V

He hits the brakes as the startled Bones and Beanne swivel around and leap out of the way.

VIEW OF DRIVER

        DRIVER
        Shit!

He sticks his head out of the window.

        DRIVER
        You guys keep outta the way!

YARD

Beanne flashes his badge.

        BEANNE
        Police!

        DRIVER
        Whatsamatta? Don't the city pay you enough? You gotta scavenge for your eats like you homeless or something?

        BONES
        Shut your trap, or I'll bust you for pollution.

        DRIVER
        This truck's been certified!

        BONES
        I'm talking about your mouth.

The truck draws forward and its lifting-forks slot into place underneath the dumpster.

INT. STATIONARY TRASH TRUCK

The trash Driver pulls at a lever. The truck's engine roars as the dumpster is lifted into the air and its contents emptied into the packer body.
YARD

Sudden loud yelling:

YAMMY(O.S.)
Ahh!

DONKET BOY(O.S.)
Hey, man!

SPOOKY(O.S.)
Lemme outta here!

BONES AND BEANNE

They look at each other.

YARD

The Driver jumps out of the cab and starts climbing up the ladder on the truck's packer-body.

INSIDE TRUCK'S PACKER BODY

The Punks floundering about among the produce trimmings and other waste foodstuff.

The trash Driver's head and shoulders appear over the rim of the packer body.

DRIVER
What the...!

YARD

Bones and Beanne are looking up at the Driver, who turns and looks down at the Cops as the faces of the dismal-looking Punks appear at the rim of the hopper.

DRIVER
Someone threwed away three of your bros!

BEANNE
Ain't my brothers. My momma never slept in no jungle.

A SOUTHSIDE STREET.

Mona on her bike. She weaves in and out of traffic, pedaling as fast as she can to get the hell out of Southside.
BACK TO VIEW

The Punks are stretched up against a wall while Beanne frisks them. A raspberry HONK as the trash truck pulls away.

BONES
Up yours, too.
(into radio)
Three suspects apprehended.
Assault. Location-

A SOUTHSIDE STREET CORNER

A police car making a sudden U-turn.

ALLEY ENTRANCE

Beanne watches over the three Punks, who are cuffed.

BONES
Oh, man. Where did she go?

BEANNE
Beats the hell outta me.

The Punks smile knowingly at each other, as if in saying: "Wow, cool! We be home now!"

INT. ACADEMY. GYM - DAY

Loud MUSIC as Ms. Avelar walks among a dozen-or-so practicing Dancers. Mona is one of them. Other Students sit watching.

MS. AVELAR
Good. Very good.
(to a Student)
Keep your eyes straight ahead.
(to another)
Think of your space boundary.
Stay within it.

VIEW FAVORING MONA

Mona's once-taut reflexes and the strong musculature of her athletic frame have become smoothed into the supple body of an accomplished dancer.

Ms. Avelar approaches, stops, watches her.
A STUDENT darts a look at a SECOND STUDENT.

1ST STUDENT
Why does she always get the praise!

2ND STUDENT
Yeah. Miss Hinkie Pinkie.

1ST STUDENT
Greenfield Road Runner, you mean.

A Student Messenger appears, hands Ms. Avelar a note. She reads it, slips it into her pocket.

MUSIC stops. A few students grab towels, wipe off. Others mill about, chattering.

Mona does some slow stretches.

MS. AVELAR
Okay, ladies. That's it. See you tomorrow.

Students begin drifting out of the gym -- that is, all save Mona, who is still wiping off.

Ms. Avelar approaches Mona.

MS. AVELAR
The Counselor's Office sent me a note saying Twyla's in hospital.

MONA
I know. She told me she had to go in for some tests. She should be back soon.

MS. AVELAR
I'm afraid not. Her grandmother has withdrawn her from school.

MONA
She has? That's awful. I didn't know Twyla was so sick.

MS. AVELAR
We need a replacement for the lead. Want to try out for it?
MONA
I'm not sure I can. I think it would be better if you picked someone else to do it.

MS. AVELAR
Let me tell you something. You have a lot of talent. Don't waste the opportunity to show it for the want of taking a chance.

She starts walking away, turns...

MS. AVELAR
Think it over. I'm going to schedule the try-outs for next week.

EXT. WILBURN HOUSE. GARDEN - AFTERNOON
Kate is cutting flowers. From within the house...

MONA(O.S.)
Mom?

KATE
Out here.

Mona appears.

MONA
Can I use the car?

KATE
To go where?

MONA
To see Twyla. She's in the hospital.

KATE
What happened?

MONA
I don't know. I have to go see her. To find out.

KATE
I'll put some flowers in a vase for you to take.
KATE (CONT’D)
Don't be too long. Your father and I are going out this evening.

MONA
I won't, Mom. Thanks.

EXT. HOSPITAL. PARKING LOT - LATE AFTERNOON

An SUV slides into a parking space. Mona gets out, retrieves a vase of flowers and a package from the rear of it.

INT. HOSPITAL LOBBY

Mona enters, crosses to the Information counter.

CLERK
How may I help you?

MONA
I'm visiting a patient. Her name is Twyla Hart. Can you tell me what room she's in?

The Clerk punches the name into a computer.

CLERK
Room three-twenty-four.

MONA
Thanks.

She heads towards the elevator, presses a button, waits.

The elevator door opens and a TEENAGE BOY hurriedly steps out, knocking Mona's package from her hand. He picks it up and gives it to her.

BOY
Sorry.

He stares at her as she gets into the elevator.

HOSPITAL ROOM

Twyla lies propped up on pillows. Her thin arms rest limply in her lap.

Mona's pokes her head around the door...
MONA
(entering)
Tah-dah!

TWYLA
(feebly)
Hey there.

MONA
Whatcha doin'??

TWYLA
Trying hard not to show I'm having a bitchin' time.

MONA
As usual... slumming.

TWYLA
I wish.

MONA
My mom sent you these.

She puts the vase of flowers on the bedside table.

MONA
And I brought you this.

She hands the package to Twyla, who unwraps it. It's a bear. Forcing a smile, Twyla cuddles it.

TWYLA
C-u-t-e. Thanks. And for the flowers.

Mona sits on the edge of the bed.

MONA
How d'you feel?

TWYLA
Really weak. I couldn't even sit up this morning to eat breakfast. The nurse had to raise the bed. I feel like a baby.

MONA
Did they say what's wrong with you, big baby?
TWYLA
Pernicious anemia.

MONA
Sounds awful. Hope I never get it.

TWYLA
Not this kind, you won't.

MONA
What d'you mean?

Twyla steers away from the subject.

TWYLA
Your brains. You've got too many. I used to stare at you sometimes in Old Witch's class, wishing I could be as smart as you.

MONA
And I used to stare at you in the gym, wishing I could dance like you.

TWYLA
You're getting there.

A beat, and then...

MONA
Is it true you're not coming back to school?

TWYLA
Uh-huh. I have to stay in here for a while.

Another beat...

TWYLA
Why don't you ask Ms. Avelar if you can take my place as lead in the Revue?

MONA
She already asked me to try out for it.
TWYLA
She did?

MONA
I told her I didn't want to.
Not when it's really your part.

TWYLA
You shouldn't let that bother you. Remember once when I said we were like different sides of the same coin? It'll be like I'm up there with you on the stage.

MONA
I have to think it over.

A NURSE enters, checks Twyla’s vitals, writes something on a whiteboard, clicks the information into the computer at the wall.

MONA
Well... I'd better be getting back. My mom and dad are going out tonight.

She hugs Twyla, kisses her.

MONA
Don't spend your whole life in here, huh.

TWYLA
I'll try not to.
(pats bear)
Thanks again for Li’l Sis. She'll keep me company.

Mona leaves. Twyla closes her eyes, winces inwardly in silent anguish.

HOSPITAL HALL

Mona bumps into Gramma and Vermice.

MONA
Oh, hi. I've just been to see Twyla.

GRAMMA
You better not come no more.
MONA

Why not?

GRAMMA

It'll be too hard on you. It's goin' to be too hard on everyone.

Mona senses something is wrong.

MONA

What do you mean?

She glances back along the hall towards Twyla's room. A note of urgency reflects in her voice as...

MONA

What's really wrong with Twyla?

GRAMMA

She's got the devil's disease.

MONA

What's the devil's disease?

GRAMMA

The kind white folks don't get.

Mona screws up her eyes questioningly, and then it dawns on her.

MONA

Oh, no. Oh, please... no.

GRAMMA

No use upsettin' yourself. We done enough of that already. Best act like you never heard nothin' about it.

She and Vermice walk off towards Twyla' room, leaving Mona rooted to the spot.

EXT. WILBURN HOUSE. GARDEN - EVENING

Mona lies dejectedly in a hammock. Her father appears.

BOB

You look happy. What's the matter?

MONA

Nothing.
BOB
After seventeen years, do you think I don't know when something is bothering my daughter?

MONA
I don't want to talk about it.

BOB
Fine. I'll leave you alone to your thoughts. Your mom and I are off now. You know where we'll be.

Over his shoulder as he walks off...

BOB
Don't try solving the world's problems all by yourself. It takes at least two -- even if one's a dog.

Mona continues staring dejectedly into the deepening intensity of shadow pervading the evening sky.

EXT. GREENFIELD ACADEMY. QUAD - DAY

It is recess and Students sit on the grass, eating snacks. Mona is among them.

Ms. Avelar comes into view. Mona rises to intercept her.

MONA
Ms. Avelar?

MS. AVELAR
Hi, Mona. Where've you been? I haven't seen you in a few days.

MONA
Just around. I wanted to ask ... have you finished the try-outs for the lead in the Revue?

MS. AVELAR
Yes. Why didn't you show up?

MONA
It didn't feel right. I couldn't stop thinking of Twyla.
MS. AVELAR
I can understand your feelings. Actually, I haven't decided yet on who's the right one to do it.

Sensing Mona's purpose...

MS. AVELAR
So you'd better meet me after school in the auditorium and be ready to show me that I was right about what I told you.

INT. AUDITORIUM/STAGE

The houselights dimly illuminate the auditorium and stage. A DOOR bangs shut in the foyer.

Mona and Ms. Avelar appear. Mona wears a leotard.

MS. AVELAR
Ready?

MONA
Yes.

MS. AVELAR
Then let's do it.

Ms. Avelar heads for the control-room.

Mona walks down the aisle to the foot of the stage, steps up onto the apron, takes a position center-stage.

She loosens up, inhales deeply a couple of times.

INT. CONTROL-ROOM

In the dim red glow of the room, Ms. Avelar snaps a switch on the lighting panel.

Through the widow, Mona is suddenly bathed in light.

VIEW OF AUDIO SYSTEM

A CD being inserted, a button being pressed, and then...

STAGE

...an explosion of high-energy MUSIC shatters the stillness.
As if she'd been jolted by an electric charge, Mona is galvanized into action. With dazzling virtuosity she executes an astonishing range of precisely choreographed moves. She dances with a fierce intensity. Nothing she has done before compares with it!

CONTROL ROOM

MS. AVELAR
Yes! YES! Y-E-S!

INT. WILBURN HOUSE. MONA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mona is asleep. Somewhere in the house a TELEPHONE faintly rings. Moments later, the door opens and a plank of light falls across Mona's face. Her mother enters. Mona stirs.

MONA
What's the matter?

KATE
Twyla's brother just called from the hospital.

Mona quickly sits up, stares.

KATE
You'd better hurry.

INT. SUV - NIGHT

Mona sits next to Kate, who is driving.

EXT. HOSPITAL. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The SUV enters the parking lot.

INT. HOSPITAL. LOBBY

Mona and Kate crossing the lobby.

KATE
I'll wait for you.

Mona wastes no time in heading for the elevator.

EXT. ELEVATOR

Mona pushes a button and anxiously waits for the door to open. The wait seems eternal!
INT. ELEVATOR

The door opens. Mona enters, jabs at a button, waits -- the door closes as if powered by a half-drained battery.

MONA
Oooohhhh!

EXT. ELEVATOR. UPPER FLOOR

Mona emerges from the elevator and hurries along the hallway.

NURSES' STATION

Mona approaches the duty NURSE.

NURSE
Can I help you?

MONA
Room three-twenty-four...

NURSE
Three-twenty-four is unoccupied.

MONA
But I just got a phone call...

NURSE
She’s been moved to ICU. Fourth floor.

Mona scurries back to the elevator.

HALL. INTENSIVE CARE UNITS

A despondent Vermice is leaning against a wall outside one of the rooms. Mona approaches, looks at him apprehensively.

They both go in the room.

INTENSIVE CARE UNIT

Gramma sits in a chair at Twyla's bedside. Mona enters.

VIEW OF TWYLA

Her face is gaunt and wasted, her body invaded by tubes -- one of which is inserted in her nose and kept in place with a sticky plaster.
BACK TO SCENE

Mona crosses to the bed and stares down at Twyla, clasps her friend's hand.

MONA
It's me... Mona.

Twyla doesn't respond. Mona sits on the bed.

MONA
Please get well. Oh, Twyla, there's so much we have to do together. We're a team -- remember? -- Salt 'n' Pepper.

TWYLAA'S FACE

Although she's near death, her face muscles seem to indicate she senses a presence.

MONA AND TWYLA

MONA
We're going to dance together in the biggest revue in the world, you and me, just like you said.

Twyla's eyes open slightly... she faintly smiles... and then her face muscles slacken.

Mona embraces her.

MONA
Twyla... don't die... please... you're my best friend... my best friend in the whole world... I love you, Twyla... so much.

ROOM

Vermice, quietly crying.

Gramma rises, separates the sobbing Mona from Twyla.

GRAMMA
No more use in that now. Best just to let her rest in peace.

Picking up L’il Sis from off the bed, she gives it to Mona.
GRAMMA
She wanted you to have it.

A NURSE enters, looks at Twyla, and then turns to Gramma.

NURSE
I've called the doctor.

A DOCTOR enters.

Mona goes over to Vermice, puts an arm around his shoulder, quietly cries along with him.

HOSPITAL LOBBY

Kate sits waiting. The elevator door opens. Mona steps out. She is crying.

Kate rises and goes up to Mona and, sensing something is terribly wrong, puts an arm around her daughter and leads her towards the exit doors.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

It is raining. Mona stands with Gramma and Vermice amid a small group of MOURNERS who are gathered beneath a canopy near an open grave. A MINISTER is intoning a prayer.

MINISTER
"Earth to Earth... ashes to ashes. The Lord giveth life and the Lord taketh away life...."

VIEW OF MONA

staring in grief at a flower-draped casket.

INT. WILBURN HOUSE. MONA'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Mona sits by the rain-flecked window, staring out. She holds a white orchid in her hand. Nestled in her arm is L'il Sis.

CEMETERY - EVENING

It is raining. Flowers cover an unmarked grave.

INT. WILBURN HOUSE. MONA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The room is in darkness. Mona lies in bed asleep, still clutching the orchid. L'il Sis sits propped up on the pillow.
Sound of RAIN pattering on the window panes.

MONA'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Kate enters. She draws apart the curtains and opens the window. Sunlight and BIRDSONG fill the room.

MONA

Her eyes blink open.

KATE

Storm's over. A new day.

Mona regards the orchid in her hand, lightly brushes it against her lips, smiles at L'il Sis.

MONA

Mom, how do you preserve a flower?

INT. MOVING BENZ - EVENING

Mona rides with her parents. Her face is confident, relaxed.

EXT. GREENFIELD ACADEMY. AUDITORIUM - EVENING

Above the wide doors hangs a banner that reads: 'GREENFIELD GIRLS' ACADEMY MUSICAL REVUE.'

A line of PARENTS and STUDENTS moves slowly forward as people hand tickets to a couple of uniformed STUDENTS. A festive air prevails all along the queue.

Mona, Kate, and Bob approach, stop. Kate looks at Mona, smiles.

KATE

Good luck.

Mona hugs her.

MONA

Thanks, Mom.

BOB

Same here.

Mona and her father look at one another for a moment, embrace. Mona's eyes are teary.
BOB
Go on, before you choke up and ruin the whole show.

INT. AUDITORIUM. DRESSING ROOM

The dance Troupe changing into costume, chattering and laughing. Mona is engaged in small talk with another Student. What they are saying cannot be heard above the din and tumult of voices.

AUDITORIUM

Air of excited expectancy among the Audience.

WING

Ms. Avelar checks the time -- 6:59 -- and reaches for a telephone on the wall.

CONTROL ROOM

TWO STUDENTS sit at the lighting panel. The PHONE buzzes. One of them picks up the receiver, listens, glances at the clock.

1ST STUDENT
Yeah, we're ready.

She hangs up, waits for a second, and then turns to the other Student...

1ST STUDENT
Okay?

2ND STUDENT
Okay.

1ST STUDENT
Let's dim them.

The 2nd Student turns to a panel, slowly pulls down several switches.

AUDITORIUM

The house lights dim and a hush falls over the audience.

BOB AND KATE

They look at each other. Kate squeezes Bob's hand.
STAGE

A sudden brilliance of colored light bathes a group of Dancers, and then a sound of wall-shattering MUSIC as they start to dance.

MUSICAL SEQUENCE

#1 -- Four Dancers performing with streamers.

#2 -- Six Dancers performing under luminescent silk-sheets.

#3 -- Soloist performing an adagio.

STAGE

Total darkness. And then a cone of light illuminates a single Dancer -- Mona. She breaks into movement at the sound of hard, driving MUSIC. Her dazzling choreography and vigorous energy is awesome. WOW -- CAN THIS GIRL DANCE!

One by one in quick succession the other Dancers join Mona onstage until the entire troupe is dancing in a frenzy of twirling, coordinated movement. The finale STUNS US!

The MUSIC stops and for a moment there is total silence, as though the Audience wants to savor the excitement for one lingering moment, and then thunderous APPLAUSE.

The Dancers synchronically bow in appreciation of the wild acclaim of the audience. Mona steps forward.

VIEW OF MONA

Beaming radiantly in the knowledge that she has finally found the self-esteem she has so long sought after.

VIEW OF GRAMMA AND VERMICE.

GRAMMA

(nudges Vermice)

Go on... what you waitin' for!

BACK TO SCENE

The Audience falls silent, their eyes follow Vermice as he steps into the aisle and walks down it, clutching a bouquet of flowers.

STAGE APRON

Vermice stops, shyly presents the bouquet to Mona. The Audience applauds. She blows Vermice a kiss.
FOYER

as People stream out towards the exit. Among them are Kate, Bob, Gramma, and Vermice. They stop near the exit doors, wait.

Mona appears, embraces each of them.

An AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMAN, whose bearing and attire clearly show her professional pedigree, approaches, smiles at Mona, gives her a card.

WOMAN
I'm with the Ohio Conservatory of Music and Dance. Please contact me.

She leaves.

BOB
This calls for a celebration!

He looks from Mona to Kate.

MONA
Donelli's...

KATE
Donelli's...

BOB
Okay!

He turns to Mona.

BOB
But for you, no pasta or pizza. You're still in training, remember -- to be a dancer!

The Five of them burst into laughter and walk out of the exit into the darkness of the evening.

FADE OUT.

THE END