

LIMELIGHT

"You Don't Know Me"

Pilot

Written by

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ACT I

OVER BLACK we hear the faint WHOOSH of an inhale, an exhale, the THROB of a heartbeat:

ZOE'S VOICE

This is it. Your entire life has come down to this moment. Everything you've worked for, everything you've dreamed.

BAM. Pharrell's *Can I Have It Like That* instrumental kicks in. A yellow-white SPOTLIGHT shoots from the upper left corner of frame landing in a round pool on the black floor twenty feet in front of us. In front of the girl whose wild head of curls we're inside. From this stage left wing, we stare at her fluorescent destiny.

GOD-LIKE MALE VOICE

NEXT!

With Kubrick-like irony, the path to the spotlight stretches. Our FEET move toward it. We look left: a silhouette of JUDGES. Could be four. Could be fifteen, it's hard to tell.

ZOE'S VOICE

What are you looking out there for?
No one can help you. You're alone in this, kid.

We look behind us to see an endless line of contestants waiting to walk this plank.

ZOE'S VOICE (CONT'D)

Asking yourself: Am I extraordinary?
Will I be remembered?

As we courageously step into the SPOTLIGHT...

ZOE'S VOICE (CONT'D)

Will they love me?

SPOTLIGHT CUTS OUT. FROM THE BLACKNESS:

ZOE'S VOICE (CONT'D)

Umm, hello?

TITLE OVER BLACK: Paige Academy of Performing Arts

CALLBACK WEEKEND, DAY 1

ZOE'S MOM (PRE-LAP)

(a shriek)
You're such a staaaaar!

FADE UP:

INT. BROOKLYN BROWNSTONE - KITCHEN - MORNING

ON ZOE GREEN's deadpan face. Eighteen, black ensemble, Elvis Costello glasses, wild head of curls. Her fingers DRUM the counter impatiently.

ZOE'S MOM (O.C.)
Your big day is here and look how beautiful you are. Isn't she gorgeous?

BRAD (O.C.)
She's a stunner.

ZOE'S MOM (O.C.)
They can't not love you.

Zoe rolls her eyes and looks over at the recipient of her mother and step-father's attention: her four-year-old half-sister CHLOE. Standing on the breakfast table in an assault of PINK from her hair ties to her tutu. Step-dad BRAD (sweat band and running shorts) feeds now screaming TWIN BABIES.

Zoe holds a mug under the coffee that's pissing out the maker, fathoming this din of activity that never has anything to do with her.

CHYRON UP: FINALIST #68, ZOE GREEN

Zoe does a caffeine shot, grabs a BACKPACK, a rolling SUITCASE. Barely audible:

ZOE
So, heading off. Biggest audition of my life. Most prestigious performing arts college in the country. Break a leg, Zoe?

CHLOE
Where's my Pop Tart?

They're clearly busy. Invisible, Zoe exits with a weak wave.

ZOE
Mom. Brad.

EXT. BROOKLYN BROWNSTONE - CONTINUOUS

Zoe chews a POP TART and rolls her suitcase CLACK, CLACK, THUD down the stairs. Hits the sidewalk, turns left, and starts up the next-door staircase. THUD, CLACK, THUD.

INT. AUERBACH BROWNSTONE - VESTIBULE - FRONT DOOR - SAME

Zoe reaches for the spare key without needing to look.

INT. AUERBACH BROWNSTONE - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Zoe closes the front door to Eddie's dad's musician pad. PHOTOS, GIG POSTERS of his father playing trumpet. EMPTY BEER BOTTLES speak to days of partying.

ZOE
Eddie! Get outta bed!

Eddie emerges with guitar, overnight bag, bed head, and an unlit joint hanging from his lips. Despite the hangover, this young R.D. Jr.-type is playful, full of life, and painfully unaware that his best friend Zoe is in love with him.

EDDIE
Ma, that you?

CHYRON UP: FINALIST #67, EDDIE AUERBACH

ZOE
(plucks and chucks his joint)
I could kill you for this.

EDDIE
What?

ZOE
(hands him a Motrin)
Encouraging my success. The only reason I agreed to go through with this is because that dream-killer Vincent Harlowe's not gonna be there this year.

EDDIE
Repeat after me. My name is Zoe Green.

ZOE
My name is Zoe Green.

EDDIE
I will feel nothing but confidence today because A) I'm exquisitely talented, B) This is all I've ever wanted...

ZOE
Did you brush your teeth with bong water?

EDDIE
And C) This school is our codependent dream. You screw this up and I'll... love you anyway, but seriously, don't ruin our future. Kidding. So serious. Your chest is comically huge for a girl your height, you know that.

She can't help but smile, then Hot Girl in panties pads from bedroom to bath.

HOT GIRL
Break a leg, Andy.

EDDIE
Eddie. Hah.

ON Zoe, heartbroken, but immediately covering:

ZOE
So your dad's on tour again, huh?

EDDIE
(throws arm around her)
Whaddya say we go meet the
competition?

DRUM BEAT HITS AND GROOVES US INTO...

INT. NYC SUBWAY @ 66th STREET - SATURDAY MORNING

CLOSE ON STICKS hitting surfaces, raw, intricate. FIND "X", XAVIER DAVIS, a 22-year-old tough-looking African American -- at the center of this foot-tapping crowd -- kicking some inspired ass on a kit of overturned BUCKETS. At his feet, a cigar box of singles and coins.

An announcement: "66th Street, Lincoln Center".

SUBWAY DOORS BANG OPEN releasing a geyser of ACTORS, DANCERS and MUSIC STUDENTS carrying black instrument cases of varying shapes and sizes.

EXT. MANHATTAN - 66TH STREET - SUBWAY ENTRANCE - MINUTES LATER

Artists emerge out the hole in the ground to Manhattan in the early summer heat.

Crossing the street, FIND Eddie, a few steps ahead of Zoe, capturing this historic moment on his video phone.

EDDIE
150 finalists left. Only 45 will be
chosen. What is Zoe Green thinking?

When a crappy DODGE VAN, not slowing in the slightest, nearly hits Zoe. She jumps out of the way.

ZOE
How could you not see me!?!?

PICK UP JAZZ BARKLEY, pretty African-American with the unmistakable TURNED-OUT FEET and sculpted body of a dancer, passing Eddie and Zoe and talking on her cell phone.

JAZZ

Ma, Ma, Ma, Ma. I know, I know, I know, I know. Because I don't get nervous. Because I've given up too many friends, boobs, and hamburgers in my life to let anything come between me and my destiny.

CHYRON UP: FINALIST #101, JASMINE BARKLEY

JAZZ (CONT'D)

(sees something)

Gotta go. Love you too.

Jazz has stopped in a crowd at the SIDE of PAPA. Outside looking in at a tall and striking BALLERINA (2nd year ballet star) spinning behind a GIANT GLASS WALL. This life-size MUSIC BOX is PAPA's open dance studio.

Jazz repeats another move the Ballerina just did, her pirouette nearly grazing KEVIN COTTON (20)...

KEVIN

This is your dance space, this is my face.

CHYRON UP: FINALIST #36, KEVIN COTTON

JAZZ

Sorry.

(re: Ballerina in box)

Do you know who you're looking at?

KEVIN

Me on the inside?

JAZZ

Tatyana Valenko -- she's the standard.

KEVIN

Don't think like that, darlin'. They haven't seen my moves yet.

Smiles, instant friendship. Kevin and Jazz walk out of frame together to REVEAL the crappy DODGE VAN still on the move.

GEORGIA (PRE-LAP)

(dreamy Southern twang)

I have arrived.

(brittle)

Will ya stop the van, I have arrived.

EXT. 66TH STREET - A BLOCK FROM PAPA

SCREECH. A package of sheer blond ambition exits the Dodge. Southern charm, whitened smile, crowded shirt, greets NYC.

CHYRON UP: FINALIST # 136, GEORGIA PEECH

Proud and trashy mom, LAREEN PEECH (40's), is at the wheel.

LAREEN
But we're a block away from the front,
Georgia.

GEORGIA
(lying)
I wanna approach it all dramatic.

LAREEN
Harlan, get your sister's baggage.

ANGLE ON a gaggle of younger SIBLINGS jammed into the vehicle.

GEORGIA
Would y'all go to the Days Inn.

Lareen whips out a pink camera. And Georgia, who's never met a lens she didn't want to fuck, relents and poses.

LAREEN
The smile that'll charm those judges!

FLASH.

INT. PAPA - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

CLOSE ON a melodramatic PHOTO of an iconic-looking thespian.
NAMEPLATE: Vincent Harlowe, Artistic Director 2000-2009. QUICK
PAN to a relatively Sears Portrait Studio shot of DAVID
LENEMAN, his NAMEPLATE held up under it by a handyman.

HANDYMAN
Just a matter of time 'til your name
was in lights, Dave!

ANGLE ON David himself (38, adorable, self-effacing-sexy),
excited for the day.

CHYRON UP: JUDGE #1, DAVID LENEMAN, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

DAVID
Well, it's my name in... some sort of
alloyed bismuth, but...
(waving own nameplate away)
Let's not jinx it. Gotta get through
this weekend!

Then the "ARTISTIC DIRECTOR" part of chyron fades.

RAFFI
(approaching)
Lotta calls, Boss!

DAVID
Don't call me that. Okay, call me that
a little.

This is RAFFI BURGOS, hot 4th year dancer. They walk the hall.
David notes he's got message slips.

DAVID (CONT'D)
What are they? Well-wishes?

RAFFI
(not quite, reading them)
Have you ever done auditions without
Vincent?

DAVID
I've got it under control.

RAFFI
Did Vincent have a breakdown?

DAVID
He just took a film role.

RAFFI
Heard anything from Vincent?

DAVID
Not for four months!

RAFFI
(his own thought)
I heard he has gonorrhoea.

DAVID
He's in character in Ghana.

They duck into...

INT. PAPA - FILM COMPOSING SOUND STAGE - CONTINUOUS

Georgia Peech's image is on a big screen. She's singing. (This
is her audition video). ROMEO (14, PAPA's music prodigy and
resident virgin) watches, awed.

RAFFI
I told you to wait for me, Romeo.

ROMEO
Contestant number #136. God, I hope
she makes it in.

DAVID
Raffi, go set up the dance studio for
Nina. Romeo, where're you supposed to
be?

ROMEO
Middle school?

David loves the kid, everyone does, but doesn't have time.

DAVID
Just... go sign in the finalists, and
convene them for my speech.

ROMEO
So does this mean you're replacing
Vincent?

DAVID
No one can ever replace Vincent--

RAFFI
Guess that kills your chances with
Nina then.

DAVID
What?

RAFFI
What? She's looking fizzooin.

David, failing miserably at nonchalance, fixes his hair and
leaves the boys (and Georgia singing) and we FOLLOW him...

INT. PAPA - HALLWAYS - CONTINUOUS

Past dance classes, orchestras, a CHOIR, engineers in MIDI
studios. He stops in his tracks. Fixes his do again.

HIS POV: through a window into a DANCE STUDIO is NINA KHARI,
African-American choreographer turned actress. The love of
David's life. Talking with a very pregnant dance instructor.

DAVID
(practicing speech)
Thank you for coming. It's great to
have you back. God, I'm in love with
you.

Nina turns. Smiles when she sees him.

CHYRON UP: JUDGE #2, NINA KHARI, VISITING DANCE DIRECTOR

INT. PAPA - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

David and Nina. Complicated friendship. Sexual tension.

NINA
David. Oh. David.

She hugs him. He's tentative, then is sniffing her hair.

DAVID

Thank you for coming. It's great to have you back.

Nope. He can't do it. She grabs his arm, they walk.

NINA

Oh, stop thanking me already; contrary to the press release from my ego, Hollywood can spare me for a few days. Plus I miss...

DAVID

Yes?

NINA

Teaching. And look at you! Running the ship!

DAVID

Well, not officially. If this weekend goes smoothly, Maggie and the Board will crown me.

NINA

Well, from what I've heard your kinder, saner approach is pleasing a lot of people. Vincent would hate it. But, he's not here... Is he?

They pass a picture of Vincent as MACBETH. Vincent as HENRY VIII. Vincent as SCARFACE.

DAVID

Nope, I truly believe Vincent's annual resignation is gonna stick this time. And in his own way I think he really wants this for me.

(off her skepticism)

He hasn't called to say "I abhor what you're doing".

NINA

Or to say: David, my friend of 20 years, the saint who peeled my inebriated ass off a number of sticky floors and held me up so I could be the artist I am, good luck? This is your moment. You deserve this!?!

DAVID

Thanks, Nina, that means a lot.

NINA

Well, he's a prick, what can I say?

They stare at each other.

X's eyes find Marcel's. Two musicians sharing the audio POV of the SWISH of a turnstile, the BEEP of a swiped Metro Card, the CLINK of a coin. Then Marcel heads off without giving a dime. HIS POV: a long flight of stairs, a trek to the light.

A quiet JAPANESE GIRL in a trench coat, striped tights, and Bose headphones with homemade purple neon accents, holding a duffel and a violin case, tries to make her way up behind Marcel. Who's hobbling and slow. Stopping, gesticulating:

MARCEL (CONT'D)
Just pass me already!

FOLLOW Japanese Girl as she bounds up, looking toward the SKY.

EXT. LINCOLN CENTER - MOMENTS LATER

FROM somewhere in the sky, where immortality lives, we sail over the majesty of Lincoln Center. Toward the fulcrum of the artistic universe. The Met. The Phil. Find the Japanese Girl, a single figure, running across the courtyard to join...

Eddie, Zoe, Kevin, and Jazz who are now at PAPA's main entrance with a throng of other hopefuls. Thick anticipation.

EDDIE
So, what do you do when you realize
all you want from this life is to do
your thing, spread your wings, become
immortal?

ZOE
You do what generations of freaks and
geniuses have done before you.

Each looks up, rapt by the magnificent sight. We see the school in its entirety for the first time. It is inspiring.

KEVIN
(to self)
You come to Mecca.

JAZZ
(to self)
You come to Papa.

Raffi and Romeo BANG OPEN the doors. And the mob rushes in.

PRE-LAP A ROUND OF APPLAUSE and the announcement of: Ladies and Gentlemen, Daaavid Leneman!

INT. PAPA - MAINSTAGE - MINUTES LATER

The PAPA finalists are gathered in this gorgeous, gothic theatre. Nervous, eager, confident, nauseated as Raffi presents David to modest applause.

EDDIE
David Letterman?

DAVID
(heard this all his life)
No, *Leneman*. Welcome finalists for
PAPA's next freshman class!

Eddie hoots. The rest are too nervous to clap for themselves.

DAVID (CONT'D)
You beat out nearly 6,000 applicants
from 40 countries to pass the first
round, your video submissions cut that
number in half, Regionals, and now
you're here. Callback Weekend!

EXT. PAPA - SIDE ENTRANCE - SAME

X loiters, drum sticks in his pants waist, nervous, agitated.
He spots Prof Higgins and Marcel, toting Starbucks. They pass.

X
You never put money in my box.

MARCEL
(stops, threatened)
I'm sorry?

X
You watch me though. All the time.

MARCEL
Good story.

Prof Higgins goes nuts beneath his muzzle. Marcel rushes past.

X
Hey! I was just --

X touches his arm to stop him, Marcel flinches, drops his
coffee. And WHISTLES toward the building.

MARCEL
Emergency, Mike!

AN IMPOSING SECURITY GUARD is coming X's way. Marcel hobbles
inside. Over X's disbelieving face...

CHYRON UP: FINALIST #149, XAVIER "X" DAVIS

INT. PAPA - MAINSTAGE - SAME

David continues. Raffi and Romeo off to the side.

DAVID

Now, you may be asking yourselves: why a callback weekend? Well, this gives us ample time to detect whom of you is insane...

(audience LAUGHS)

...and would be better off in that theatre in the round with the white padded walls.

MUCH LAUGHTER. David's pleased.

ANGLE ON Georgia, entering, introducing herself around.

ROMEO

The Peech has arrived and is better in person. I repeat: the Peech is juicy.

GEORGIA

(to Japanese headphones girl)
Georgia Peech, Acting and voice.

NANAKO

(in Japanese)
Nanako Kai, violin.

DAVID

This morning is individual auditions; you'll perform your prepared pieces.

A finalist sucks on an inhaler. Another cracks her knuckles.

DAVID (CONT'D)

This afternoon are group auditions-- where we'll throw you assignments outside of your comfort zones.

Kevin notes X slipping in.

KEVIN

I'll show him a comfort zone.

DAVID

Tonight is yours to do what you will. But tomorrow are your final auditions. Your last chance to perform before we decide who is in and who is out.

PAN ACROSS finalists, excited and scared. Nanako. Kevin. Jazz. Georgia. Eddie. Zoe. X. David is moved:

DAVID (CONT'D)

You are already extraordinary, accomplished, and I am humbled to stand before you. So, go into this journey knowing this in your hearts: no matter what happens this weekend--

Crashing sounds. A stage flat shudders.

VINCENT (O.C.)
NONE OF YOU SHOULD BE HERE. For the
love of Christ.

David cringes. Knows that voice. And sure enough, VINCENT HARLOWE has crashed the party. He's larger than life, frightening and lovable, and probably gorgeous under his beat-up threads and Castaway beard growth. Think Kevin Kline.

JAZZ
Is that...?

CHYRON UP: GOD.

VINCENT
What's with the luggage? Half of you
will be gone by lunch.

DAVID
(jaws clenched)
Vincent.

X
Oh, F--

KEVIN
Oh, no.

EDDIE
Oh, yes.

NANAKO
(in Japanese)
Oh shit.

GEORGIA
Vincent Harlowe.

ZOE
Let the dream-killing begin.

Off David, Vincent's back.

END ACT I

ACT II

INT. PAPA - HALLWAY - MINUTES AFTER END ACT 1

Vincent takes stalking steps. David keeps up. They pass nervous dancers, actors, a tiny student with a giant cello.

VINCENT
Video submissions?!

DAVID
It allowed for a sweeping talent search. A lot of deserving talent can't travel for second round audi--

VINCENT
A new open dance studio?!

DAVID
Some see it as the window to the soul of this institution.

VINCENT
Yes let's attract the type of tourist one finds at the Christmas window at Macy's. Why wasn't I informed?

DAVID
YOU'VE BEEN IN THE FAR REACHES OF GHANA WITHOUT CELL PHONE OR EMAIL. AND YOU RESIGNED! Again.

VINCENT
(a certain tenderness)
You really get yourself in a lather, don't you.

David is deeply concerned, despite himself.

DAVID
Vincent, why aren't you on set right now? You'd been waiting for that role for a long time, you spent months living in character.

VINCENT
It seems my character may have slept with the director's daughter.
(on the move again)
Have you hired another Artistic Director?

DAVID
Not officially but --

VINCENT

You are my advocate and my protector.
You poor, weak bastard, help yourself.

DAVID

Actually, Vincent, if you'd read my
memos, you'd know I've been appointed
to a place of considerable authority
by Maggie and the Board --

Vincent pats David's head, hears something, shh. A dog
growling. And Nina's voice. David panics, delicate matter.

DAVID (CONT'D)

That's Professor Higgins.

VINCENT

No, it's something else; vaguely spine-
chilling and shrewish.

And Vincent turns the corner, stunned to find...

INT. PAPA - FACULTY BULLPEN - CONTINUOUS

Nina. In an age-old dispute with Marcel and his snarling dog.

MARCEL

Professor Higgins is not racist.

VINCENT

So, Hollywood hocked up its lung and
flung you eastward.

NINA

(spine stiffens, turns)
Well, if it isn't Vincent Harlowe,
dressed as his DUI photo.

Marcel pops a Tums.

INT. PAPA APARTMENTS - HALLWAY - SAME

A female DUTCH HARPIST shrieks.

HARPIST

Ik schuin geloof af dat alcoholische!

KEVIN

You said it, sister.

Jazz (sanguine) and Kevin (nervous) rush through a swarm of
frenzied finalists in this hip UWS building. Raffi's nearby,
handing out keys and SUITE ASSIGNMENTS.

RAFFI

Drink it in, people; you'd be lucky to
live here come fall.

KEVIN

I heard Vincent Harlowe cut a girl last year for mentioning spreadable cheese in her personal statement.

They arrive at room. Kevin throws down FIVE BAGS to her one.

JAZZ

Someone brought a lot of outfits.

KEVIN

Had to. Ran away to come here. Can't so much go back.

JAZZ

What...? So if you don't get into PAPA, where will you...?

As Kevin shrugs off the profound with charming lightness...

ZOE (PRE-LAP)

God, I don't belong here.

Eddie and Zoe rush down the hall past some SKINNY DANCERS.

ZOE (CONT'D)

Will you look at these fanatics? I was the only one in the bathroom not puking voluntarily.

EDDIE

You're this freaked about Vincent Harlowe? Come on-- he comes in all psycho bushman, keeps us reacting. It's life, it's raw --

ZOE

It's astonishing how you get off on just about anything.

When Georgia walks by on her cell phone. Zoe notes Eddie noticing her and dies a little inside.

GEORGIA

Harlan, put momma on the phone! No, I haven't won yet.

STAY WITH Georgia as she turns into...

INT. PAPA APARTMENTS - GEORGIA AND NANA KO'S ROOM

Where Nanako lays out various pairs of headphones on her bed.

GEORGIA

(in phone)

You're not coming over here. No, you'll go to Applebee's and see Xanadu

(MORE)

GEORGIA (CONT'D)
like I told you. Okay. I gotta go
now. Turnin off my phone.
(does, looks at Nanako)
My family is so...
(a dirty word)
Supportive.

Nanako stares at her blankly.

GEORGIA (CONT'D)
You probably have really strict,
discipline-oriented parents.
(getting nothing)
You speak English?

RAFFI (O.C.)
This is it! Individuals in ten!

Off the barely managed hysteria...

INT. PAPA - MAINSTAGE - MINUTES LATER

CHYRON UP: INDIVIDUAL AUDITIONS

Bustling faculty sets up. Poor David is in the middle of Nina and Vincent. Marcel, Prof. Higgins, and Pregnant Instructor BECCA SHEPARD wait as professionally as they can.

VINCENT
So let me review this tawdry turn of
events. I, the heart, liver, and
kidneys of this institution take leave
for mere moments and Tyler Perry's
Lilith Sternin suddenly thinks she's
qualified for my job?

NINA
(graceful, calm)
I am not here for your job.

DAVID
She's not here for your-- Look, Becca
Sheperd is like twelve months pregnant-

BECCA
(to Vincent)
Not yours.

Vincent nods, good news.

DAVID
-- and needed to be covered. And...I'm
the...one who's...

VINCENT
You're in charge...?

DAVID

Yeah.

Silence. Vincent smiles enigmatically. Nina, wanting an aside:

NINA

Vincent, can I...?

He stares at her, not moving.

NINA (CONT'D)

Can you. Here. Come here.

(he follows, quietly:)

Don't look over there, but picture him in your mind. The best friend you have? The man who's basically been your co-director at this school without title or just compensation all these years? Who shivers in your shadow and acts like it's a pleasant 70 degrees?

VINCENT

Should I be picturing Marcel?

NINA

When you left, a big opportunity opened up for David. Why are you back anyway?

VINCENT

Why are you back anyway.

NINA

Because while we all know that you couldn't run this weekend without David's organization and heart, unfortunately Maggie and the Board feared he couldn't run it without the qualities you bring.

VINCENT

And what would those be?

He moves toward her tenderly. She hates that she's disarmed.

NINA

The... debatable charisma the patrons love to throw money at. David needed some "star power" this weekend... I answered the call.

VINCENT

(sincere)

It's surprisingly good to see you.

NINA
(touched)
Thank you.

VINCENT
You look dusty, dry, and old.

NINA
(storming off)
I don't need this.

DAVID
Nina, don't go!

VINCENT
Ah yes. As usual, walk out on us!

NINA
I never walked out on any --

VINCENT
Disappear from our marriage without so much as a word.

NINA
Oh there were words! You just couldn't hear them with Tawny Simm's inner thighs suctioned to your ears!

MARCEL
(tapping his watch at Nina)
Ah excuse me but I think you know a dancer can't stay perpetually warm...
(to Vincent)
Or if you like... an oboist's mouth can't stay perpetually supple. Let's show the auditioners some respect...?

INT. PAPA - WAITING AREA - SAME

Packed with finalists. Tense, emotional. Musicians practice fingering on their instruments, dancers re-wrap their feet.

Kevin and Jazz stretch next to Zoe, who sits next to Eddie who strums a guitar, singing softly (a sexy David Cook voice) and looking irritatingly not-nervous. Georgia does a downward, then upward dog and is face to face with Eddie.

GEORGIA
Georgia Peech, Acting and Voice.

EDDIE
Eddie Auerbach, Acting and Voice.

ZOE
(ahem)
Yeah, I'm Acting too, Zoe Green,
howyadoin.

GEORGIA
(to Zoe, sweetly)
Well, I'm blond-genuie, you're quirky
character. Not my competition so I
don't have to hate you!

ZOE
(under her breath)
Can I keep my options open?

INT. PAPA - MAINSTAGE - SAME

The faculty can't settle. Nina and David are in whispering
cahoots. And Vincent doesn't like it.

NINA
You're too good to him.

DAVID
(loaded)
I think you know why.

VINCENT
(bellowing to the rafters)
I'd love it if you were ready!

But Raffi has already appeared on stage, presenting...

RAFFI
This is Jasmine Barkley.

From Jazz's POV, the nutjobs we've been experiencing have
disappeared. In their place: an austere, imposing panel.
Prof. Higgins, Marcel, Vincent, David, and Nina sit an
intimidating distance from the stage.

VINCENT
Hello, Ms. Barkley.

JAZZ
(confident)
Hello there.

VINCENT
This is David Leneman, whom you might
recall from his cuddly welcome speech.

DAVID
Hi.

VINCENT

This is our Director of Music, Marcel DuPuis.

MARCEL

Pleasure.

VINCENT

His dog, Professor Higgins.
(gesturing behind him)
Various indispensable faculty whom you either will or won't get to know over the next four years.

Nina waits for an introduction.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Oh, and this is our interim Dance Director, Nina Khari.

She fixes on the legendary Nina, and the ever-confident Jazz suddenly finds herself paralyzed. The panel waits, awkward...

VINCENT (CONT'D)

She won a Clio for a Boniva commercial...?

JAZZ

(nearly choking)
I know who she is. I just didn't expect her to be here.

NINA

Whenever you're ready, Jasmine...

ON Jazz, breathing labored, to herself:

JAZZ

Come on, come on, hold it together.

As her panic escalates, the frenetic *Flight of the Bumblebees* plays OVER a fast-paced MONTAGE of tiring auditions.

- Nanako plays the violin piece. Marcel smiles. Vincent scratches his beard wildly.

- Kevin leaps. Vincent cuts his beard with a scissor.

- Quiet and tense room, except for a BUZZING sound.

MARCEL

Do you have to do that right now?

Vincent has an electric NORELCO to his cheek. When X enters.

ROMEO

This is Xavier 'X' Davis...?

ON Marcel, stunned to see him. Horrified to see him. The young man he flinched at and called security on. X smiles, waves.

X
How's it goin'.

MARCEL
Good God, what did I do?

NINA
What's wrong?

She's the LAST person he can tell. He sinks in his seat. Prof. Higgins starts growling. Marcel sinks lower. Sotto:

VINCENT
This finalist has no recommendations.

NINA
Since when do you value what other people think?

Vincent smiles at her. She knows him well.

X
Before I get started I wanted to apologize. I'm self-taught so the only rec I could get my hands on was from an old English teacher.

VINCENT
Do you not know one credible musician?

X
Well, I tried to ask this concert pianist who sees me play every day, but I...chickened out.

Marcel realizes that was him; feels like bigoted shit.

MARCEL
I know him. I'll do it. He's good. I vouch.

VINCENT
I've never heard you speak in so few syllables. Are you having a stroke? Is he having a stroke?

MARCEL
Just let the man play!

Silence. X settles at his kit. Does amazing jazz brushwork. And his voice -- like Donny Hathaway -- comes rolling on out. Off Marcel, moved by his talent; and the panel, impressed.

INT. PAPA - WAITING AREA - MINUTES LATER

X bursts in, triumphant. Past Romeo.

ROMEO
How'd you do? I've seen you in the
subway; I think you're frickin
awesome.

X
You someone's son?

ROMEO
I'm a second-year.

X
A little genius guy.

ROMEO
Oh my glistening goddess.

ANGLE ON TATYANA VALENKO (ballerina from Act I) striding past,
leaning over a water fountain. Romeo's horny and nervous.

ROMEO (CONT'D)
Tatyana Valenko. Perfect. Russian.
Princess. Lives with these rich
patrons of the arts. The NYC Ballet is
holding a spot for her.

X
Introduce me.

ROMEO
I don't speak to her. Nobody speaks
to her.

X winks at Romeo, approaches her, starts singing the intro to
Pharrell and Justin's jaunty, sexy *Senorita*.

X
Ladies and Gentleman, hah, it's my
pleasure to introduce to you...

Tatyana looks down her nose, walks off. He calls after her.

X (CONT'D)
When I get in, you're gonna have to
deal with me.

Romeo smiles. X his new hero.

INT. PAPA - MAINSTAGE - SAME

- Georgia sings and dances Britney's *Womanizer*. She's a
ferocious, talented animal. Raffi fumbles a clipboard.

MARCEL

This girl would eat her young for a bit part on Hee Haw.

DAVID

Is that show even on anymore?

VINCENT

I'd like to see her range.

The panel looks at him: Don't even think about it.

- FINALIST #2 (GRANT JOHNSON) does some astounding hip-hop Yo-Yo gymnastics. The panelists are floored.

EDDIE (PRE-LAP)

And... monologue.

- LAUGHTER, applause. Eddie bows to a smitten panel. Except:

VINCENT

Your father is Elias Auerbach? The accomplished jazz musician.

EDDIE

Playing the country's finest upholstered sewers.

Marcel, David, and Nina laugh. Vincent's inscrutable.

VINCENT

I saw you play trumpet with him a year ago at the Regency. You were better than him even then.

EDDIE

Aww, Vin. I'm trying to distinguish myself as an actor and you're bringing up my Daddy issues? Hardly makes me a stand-out in a theatre department.

The panel laughs. Off Vincent, out-charmed and one-upped.

INT. PAPA - WAITING AREA - MOMENTS LATER

Zoe sees Eddie, high from his audition, stopping to talk to Georgia and her relentless body. Kevin's in Zoe's ear.

KEVIN

I wouldn't worry about her.

ZOE

What?

KEVIN

Your boyfriend's an actor right?

ZOE

Oh, Eddie's not my boyfriend. We're childhood friends, neighbors, theatre camp dorks... why shouldn't I worry about her?

KEVIN

By and large men in the acting division end up sleeping with women in the dance division.

ZOE

Better bodies?

KEVIN

Better odds.

PRE-LAP UPROARIOUS LAUGHTER.

INT. PAPA - MAINSTAGE - LATER

The panel is crying they're laughing so hard.

- Zoe (in wig and costume) finishes a rendition of Lucille Ball's: Vitavegamin. She is facile, funny, utterly committed.

ZOE

Vita.. vetee... vee ...meany-miny-momy. Tastes just like candy.

Applause. She bows, then...

VINCENT

Why may I ask did you do this piece?

Uh-oh. And as herself, Zoe shrinks before our very eyes.

ZOE

Lucy's kind of an idol. Everyone said she'd never make it as a performer.

(deeply felt)

She said once: I'm not funny. What I am is brave.

ON Zoe's face, not feeling so brave, we END MONTAGE.

INT. PAPA - LADIES ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Zoe, frustrated with herself, takes off her stupid, stupid wig in the mirror. SOBBING comes from a stall. Zoe edges over.

ZOE

You all right in there?

JAZZ

Yeah, I'm fine.

ZOE

Well, I'm Zoe. And these are my feet.
Come find them if you need me.

JAZZ

Thanks.

Zoe hesitates, then leaves. Jazz comes out, steadies herself, absolutely wrecked. What the hell is going on with her?

INT. PAPA - HALLWAY - SAME

David replaces Vincent's lit cigarette with a pencil to chew on. Vincent looks at Nina and pregnant Becca down the hall.

VINCENT

I'll get out of your way.
(off David)

The Board's got this weekend set up as
a kind of an audition for you, right?
I'll help you make it through, then
get out of your way.

DAVID

(sounds too easy, but)
Thank you.

VINCENT

Sure. So you last saw Nina, when?

DAVID

Uhh...three years ago, same as you.

VINCENT

Well, is she with someone?

DAVID

How would I know, Vincent?

VINCENT

She cries on your shoulder. That's
your role in this twisted trinity.

DAVID

Well, why do you even care?

VINCENT

I think I want her back.

Off David, all his plans unravelling.

END ACT II

ACT III

As Ian Brown's "My Star" starts to PLAY...

TITLE OVER BLACK: FIRST CUTS.

INT. PAPA - MEN'S LOCKER ROOM - DAY

CLOSE ON a gnarly purple WOUND. Kevin's behind a locker in a corner, shooting cortisone into this ankle injury. Another dancer, GIOVANNI (noshing on fruit), winces on his behalf.

GIOVANNI

Oww, baby, Jeese. Don't look like no dance injury.

KEVIN

Advice? Don't insist on dressing as Ariel for Halloween when you live on the iron range in Minnesota.

Giovanni looks sad for him, gets it. When...

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK!! Jazz pops head in (not seeing injury).

JAZZ

Kevin, first round cuts are starting!

Off Kevin and everyone: shit!

INT. PAPA APARTMENTS - ZOE AND EDDIE'S ROOM - DAY

Half-eaten sandwich next to her, Zoe looks through an iPHOTO ALBUM, chronicling a lifetime of her in PLAYS. She's always a CHORUS MEMBER. HOLD ON a photo of her: 6, heavy stage make-up, a WIDE SMILE, holding a bouquet, HER FATHER'S arm around her.

She smiles sadly. KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK!!

EDDIE (O.C.)

Zoe, they're announcing cuts!

Off Zoe, shit!

INT. PAPA - DAVID'S OFFICE - SAME

David's at his computer, doing last-minute edits on a film reel of NINA. On his desk are photos of her at various points in her career. He's put love into this project.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK!!

DAVID

In a minute!

ROMEO
(popping in)
Cuts are starting.

DAVID
Okay.
(then)
WHAT? What cuts?!

Off David, shit!

INT. PAPA - MAINSTAGE - MINUTES LATER

All 150 finalists are gathered on stage, like a massive Chorus Line, facing their fates with anxiety and an every-man-for-himself air. Vincent holds some letter-sized envelopes.

VINCENT
If your envelope contains an assignment you'll move onto Round 2. If it does not, another school will be looking forward to having you.

Nina and Marcel (with Raffi) start to pass theirs out. Finalists tear them open, jump for joy, or run off crying. FIND Zoe, Eddie, and Georgia as the herd starts to THIN.

EDDIE
This is brutal.

Vincent hands one to Georgia, she tears it open.

GEORGIA
Streetcar! Named Desire, right?

ZOE
Here's one for Twitter: It seems that Georgia is doing Tennessee.

EDDIE
(opening his envelope)
Yes! Streetcar. Peech's partner.

Vincent clocks Zoe's reaction to this, and hands her an envelope. Eddie crosses his fingers. Zoe can't bring herself to open it. Georgia admits, sincerely:

GEORGIA
I'm afraid, too. That you're gonna be cut. I'm very empathetic, that's why I'm such a good actress. But, I think you'll make it.

ZOE
Thanks, Georgia.

Zoe opens. Jumps for JOY! Wow. She really does want this.

EDDIE

You got an assignment!

ZOE

One of my favorite movies! I can do scenes from this in my sleep!

They hug tight. Georgia watches, finding herself jealous.

KEVIN (O.C.)

Thank you, Jesus, Moses, Buddha...

FIND Kevin with his good news. Jazz opens hers. Sighs. Runs off crying. Kevin follows her into THE WINGS.

KEVIN (CONT'D)

Oh, honey. Oh, no. You got cut?

JAZZ

No.

KEVIN

Then what the hell is wrong with you?

JAZZ

I'm weak. I hate that I'm so weak. I hate that I want her approval.

KEVIN

Nina? Yeah, a legendary trail blazer like her. I see how you're too special to want that from her.

(off her smile)

We're in, Barkley!

NANAKO (O.C.)

(in Japanese)

Thank you.

FIND Nanako bowing to Marcel next to X, who waits nervously in this much diminished crowd. Only about 100 people left.

MARCEL

And... Xavier Davis.

X looks up. The moment of truth. He opens it. His face falls. David comes running in. WTF? Grabs Vincent.

DAVID

No cuts were supposed to happen until the end of the day.

VINCENT

You insisted on having a private lunch, what was I to do?

DAVID

The kids will be calling their
parents, the parents will be calling
Maggie and the Board --

Romeo enters, with foreboding.

ROMEO

Dave? Mr. Harlowe? Maggie is here.

INT. PAPA - VINCENT'S OFFICE - SECONDS LATER

The back of a dramatic Elizabethan HEADPIECE turns around to reveal the Queen herself: powdered face, jewels, an elaborate neck ruff. She presents her hand so Vincent and David can kiss her ring. This is MAGGIE. A Dame in her own mind. Renowned thespian and vociferous member of PAPA's Board.

VINCENT

Was there a sale at Neiman's?

MAGGIE

I'm on break from rehearsal across the street. I wasn't about to shed thirty pounds of skirt just to put it right back on again.

(with innuendo)

Unless of course, you boys are feeling frisky.

Maggie's a horny old broad.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

So, Vincent I see you've made your most unprofessional re-entry into the Earth's atmosphere. What happened? Scrape rock bottom?

VINCENT

No, I haven't had a drink in months.

DAVID

His character had a mai tai yesterday, but...

Vincent looks at him, touche. Maggie suddenly swats Vincent.

VINCENT

Ow.

MAGGIE

I'll have you know, in what could have been your disastrous absence, David has made some wonderful strides here at PAPA -- setting a tone of order, sobriety, sanity.

David's feeling pretty vindicated. She considers them.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
We'll deal with this after callback weekend; please behave at the fundraiser tonight.

VINCENT
What fundraiser tonight?

DAVID
I -- it slipped my mind.

MAGGIE
The one David put together.

VINCENT
All right. What do I have to do this time?

MAGGIE
Bathe. Shave. Bring condoms. It's not about you. We're honoring the lovely Nina Khari tonight.

Vincent looks at David, left out, if not betrayed...

INT. PAPA - HALLWAY - MINUTES LATER

The two men walk.

DAVID
You really don't have to come.

VINCENT
And miss your quinceanera?

They enter a door, slamming it behind them.

CHYRON UP: GROUP AUDITIONS

INT. PAPA - VINCENT HARLOWE 99 SEAT THEATRE - GROUP AUDITIONS

Eddie, smoldering with carnal desire, takes off his shirt. His arms are strong. His stomach taut. Georgia plays demure, lying on a twin bed, showing some leg, more leg, protesting.

ANGLE ON the audience of acting students watching them do *Streetcar*. Fanning themselves. Girls whisper.

Vincent sees Zoe, looking down, upset. David to Vincent:

DAVID
He's pretty great for no prep time.

VINCENT
(rolling his eyes)
He didn't have to take off his shirt.
(getting up)
I think I'll check on dance auditions.

Off David, damn it, watching him go...

INT. PAPA - DANCE HALL - SAME

Jazz and Kevin (and other dancers) are paired up, watching a group perform for Nina. Jazz eyes Nina. Becca's off to side.

KEVIN
You all right, Barkley?

JAZZ
Never better.

KEVIN
Damn I hope that baby's worth it.
(off Jazz)
Becca Sheperd. Her skin stretched like an old piece of gum in the prime of her dancing years.

JAZZ
She can come back if she wants. People do it. Nina did it.
(off him)
It's probably just a rumor.

KEVIN
Nina Khari has a kid?

JAZZ
She gave it up. And six weeks later, she was on stage dancing Giselle.

KEVIN
Vicious ambitious.

NINA
I need to see more sweat!

INT. PAPA - MUSIC ROOM - LATER

CLOSE ON an envelope. X stares at its contents.

X
So my assignment is to play this at the fundraiser tonight?

MARCEL
Yes, it's an honor.

ROMEO

It is. I played it my audition year.
Wore a tux, a woman named Bitsy gave
me Dewar's; it was fun.

Romeo hands out music to other finalists, and as Marcel turns away, X decides to follow. Privately:

X

You don't have to do this, you know...
I forgive you.

MARCEL

Forgive me for what?

X stares at Marcel. Has the man really moved past their earlier incident? As Marcel heads away, the hard truth:

X

I'll need time; I can't sight read.

MARCEL

That will make being a professional
musician quite difficult.

X nods sadly, thinks this is the end for him.

MARCEL (CONT'D)

Go to studio 40 now. Take the
afternoon to learn it. Borrow a tux
from wardrobe, and do not be late.

Romeo gives X a thumbs up. Off X, relieved but intimidated.

INT. PAPA - DANCE HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Jazz, Kevin and dancers mark a Fosse piece Nina and Raffi demonstrate. Raffi has a smoke and Nina has a hat -- sexy.

KEVIN

You kinda oversold that last one.

JAZZ

I know. I've got to relax.

NINA

Fosse introduced many things to
choreography -- a sexual quality that
no one had ever seen on stage before.

Just then Vincent enters. The students notice him, Nina doesn't. To everyone: shhhh. They hang on his every move.

Vincent surreptitiously taps Raffi out, puts the cigarette in his own mouth and steps behind Nina. His body presses against hers. His hand slides to her stomach. A finger traces its way slowly down her arm. His lips hover close to her neck.

Nina knows it's him. Knows his smell, the feel of his body. They both know she can't betray feeling, which makes this private yet public dance that much sexier and infuriating. As they dance, she fights the weakness in her knees with:

NINA (CONT'D)

Much of his movement consisted of simple walks, and turned in lunges... which came from Fosse's own lack of turn out.

She turns into him, draws a finger slowly down his face. Her lips a breath from his... she takes the cigarette from mouth, holds it in her fingers. Vincent whispers in her ear.

VINCENT

Suddenly you have time to be in NY?

NINA

My movie schedule's lightened up.

VINCENT

Eddie Murphy decide to play his own wife?

A hand on a thigh, and...

NINA

And a long drawn out shoulder.

VINCENT

Something is calling you back here. You can't quite put your finger on it.

Nina leans into Vincent, a slow, sensual lift...

VINCENT (CONT'D)

That's the thing about regret. The pain of grief and the powerlessness of confusion all rolled into one cunning little emotion.

She tries to cover, but he faces her and sees into her soul.

NINA

Leaving you is not the regret.

(to class)

All right people, I think you get the gist. First group!

Not believing her, Vincent leaves with a satisfied smile. Jazz and Kevin take the floor. But Nina's distracted. Jazz adds an extra move to get attention. A pronounced hip thrust.

RAFFI

I like her passion.

NINA

So would a pole at Crazy Horse. She's trying too hard.

But, just then Jazz arches her back too much in a lift throwing Kevin's balance. She lands on his bad ankle hard. His YELP of intense pain stops the room cold.

Nina approaches Kevin on the floor, Jazz right beside him.

JAZZ

I'm so sorry.

KEVIN

(in agony)
I'm totally fine.

NINA

This an old injury?

KEVIN

If I stay off it a couple hours, I'll be fine.

Nina glares at Jazz. Then looks at Raffi.

NINA

Take him to clinic.
(to Kevin, hating it)
You're done for today.

JAZZ

But it was my fault. Nina, please!
Don't take this from him yet!

Nina (and the whole room) is stopped by her words, her intensity. Something makes Nina look away.

NINA

Everyone back to work! And watch your lines, people!

As Raffi helps Kevin off, every soul is aware of how tenuous the hold on the dream really is. Off Jazz, and Nina, shaken.

INT. PAPA - VINCENT HARLOWE 99 SEAT THEATRE

Zoe's on stage alone, holding SHEET MUSIC. The Acting finalists, Vincent, David, watch. Barely audible:

ZOE

I'm sorry. I don't sing.

VINCENT

What's that?

ZOE

I didn't expect to do the song.
I don't really have a voice.

VINCENT

The most compelling singers are
actresses first. You an actress?

ZOE

(clears her throat)
"Another bride, another groom..."

The class laughs, enjoying her overt style. One would think
this is a successful performance on some level until...

VINCENT

You're doing a character. Again. I'd
like to see you please.

ZOE

(struggles, then)
Another bri-- I'm sorry.

VINCENT

Eddie, get up there.

Zoe is distressed as Eddie joins her. And Vincent's not
yelling. His tone is insightful, and thus more exposing.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Just talk to him. Connect to your
desire.

EDDIE

Give her a break, man.

VINCENT

You're just a tool in this, Eddie.
(turns back to Zoe)
Do you feel invisible in your life?

We know she does, but doesn't have the heart to say it.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Somehow missed, passed over?

ZOE

I know what invisible means.

VINCENT

Well it must be the way you want it.
Because you're certainly not claiming
anything.

Off Zoe, near tears, mortified.

INT. PAPA - HALLWAY - LATER

Zoe walks, Eddie and Georgia trying to catch up. Georgia is genuinely trying to help. Which makes this hurt more.

GEORGIA
What an a-hole.

ZOE
Rather not do an autopsy of my humiliation right now.

GEORGIA
It's not a part you would play anyway.

ZOE
What?

GEORGIA
Michelle Pfeiffer...?

Ouch. Zoe heads off; Eddie cues Georgia to hang back.

EDDIE
Zoe, come on. You've got to let this stuff roll off your back.

ZOE
Roll off my back?! God, everything is so easy for you. You're fearless and careless and everything just works out. I'll play trumpet, no I'll be an actor, you know what: I'll be a rock star. And you can, because you're amazing. At all of it. Interchangeable talents, interchangeable people.

EDDIE
What does that mean?

Zoe has turned, sobered to see: a Cut List. And finalists peeling off from it.

CHYRON: 100 (99, 98, quickly descending) finalists left...

Zoe can't bear to look. Eddie checks for them.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
We're still in.

She avoids a hug, confused by her feelings. Eddie is taken aback. X does a fist pump. Nanako gives an almost undetectable victory jump. Jazz sighs -- on her phone.

JAZZ
You're ankle above your heart, Kevin? Cause, baby, you're not cut.

And as the last of the kids fall away, Georgia is left at the board. She smiles cordially at a finalist and heads off.

EXT. LINCOLN CENTER - FOUNTAIN - DAY

Georgia BANGS out the doors into the open, on her cell.

GEORGIA
Harlan, git Mama, I've got news.

Georgia's smile suddenly fades and the tears come.

GEORGIA (CONT'D)
Mama, it's over. Don't tell the kids,
okay? Just please, don't tell anyone.
I'm sorry. I got cut.

END ACT III

ACT IV

TITLE OVER BLACK: THE OFF NIGHT

INT. HOTEL ROOM - TIMES SQUARE - AN HOUR AFTER END ACT III

The theme song from *Entertainment Tonight* plays in the b.g. Six kids ranging from ages three to sixteen eat, play, argue. Lareen gets a soda from the cooler and walks it over to Georgia, who sits, crushed, in front of the TV. A little boy in the tiniest wife-beater you've ever seen screams.

LAREEN
Harlan, be quiet, your sister's tryin'
to watch the news.

Georgia doesn't blink. Lareen crouches down next to her daughter. Takes a sexpot headshot and places it next to a more serious, respectable one. Gently pushing the sexy shot:

LAREEN (CONT'D)
I told you to use this one. You sure
you did everything you could?

Georgia looks at her.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - FUNDRAISER - EVENING

The magical beauty of Central Park in summer. Twinkling lights. Twinkling piano music. Twinkling people. Gorgeous overblown B&W photos of Nina as a young dancer, a choreographer, on a Hollywood red carpet. Each like a Chanel ad.

NY's cultured elite sip champagne. Bloomberg is charmed by Tatyana Valenko, ethereal and gorgeous in her black tie gown.

BLOOMBERG
I hear you're PAPA's poster-woman.

TATYANA
Yes, is true. I am on poster.

A BURST OF LAUGHTER takes us over to... the bar where David, dashing in his tux, holds court with BOARD MEMBERS, PATRONS.

BOARD MEMBER
David, you've put together a gorgeous
and lucrative evening.

DAVID
Well, my thanks goes to all you
patrons, without whom PAPA would be...
a rolling stone.
(silence)
PAPA don't preach...?

MAGGIE

You're adorable. Listen, Davey.

(pulls him aside)

I know this was to be your debut, but the Board feels if Vincent shows up, he should do Nina's honors tonight.

DAVID

What? No, it's -- an involved presentation, it's not --

MAGGIE

They were married. They had sex. The crowd loves that shit.

Crushed, David watches Maggie walk off past X. Who's just arrived and looks sharp.

X snakes through the cocktail hour, seeking the source of the beautiful piano music we hear. Much like how Marcel found X in the subway, X finds Marcel, playing a grand piano. But there's no appreciative crowd. Everyone but X is taking the music for granted. Marcel sees X. Waves him over.

MARCEL

Important people to meet here. Whatever happens.

X

Not so much to talk to them about.

MARCEL

Why do you think I'm sitting here?

X smiles. Marcel's a decent guy. Romeo approaches.

ROMEO

Looking good. So, where's Tatyana?

X

Umm, I don't know.

ROMEO

But, you're accompanying her, right?

X

Are you asking me if she's my date?

ROMEO

No, you're playing the piece she's dancing.

News to X... he looks around. He sees her. She sees him. Both pretty gorgeous. Chemistry. Then she crinkles her nose.

INT. PAPA APARTMENTS - ZOE AND EDDIE'S ROOM

Zoe sits at an upright piano in their living room, playing chords, practicing singing. Soft. Unsure.

ZOE

"You give your hand to me. And then you say hello. Hello. And then you say hello... No you don't know me."

Nanako comes in. Acting upset. And acting badly.

NANAKO

Eddie's on the roof! He's in trouble!

ZOE

(considers her, then)
Tell Eddie some of us need to prepare for finals. Wait, you speak English?

NANAKO

Please don't tell Georgia.

ZOE

Wasn't she cut?

NANAKO

Guess it hasn't sunk in.

They exchange a smile as Nanako heads off.

EXT. PAPA APARTMENTS - ROOFTOP - MOMENTS LATER

Nanako emerges onto the roof, where a live version of Chemical Brothers *Galvanize* plays loudly at this impromptu pre-final roof party. Musicians jam and dancers follow each other's lead against the backdrop of a fantastic skyline. Nanako snakes her way to Eddie, who tends bar, a lit joint attached to his lips. A nerdy, tipsy BARITONE horn player toasts him.

BARITONE

This party? Great idea, Eddie. I am from Yemen, but you are my Mayor.

EDDIE

Break a leg tomorrow, Moha.
(seeing Nanako)
She didn't come up? Did you act like I really needed her?

NANAKO

Sorry guy.

Eddie is a bit unearthed. Considers himself without Zoe. As we PULL BACK from this sweaty sexy hip-hop celebration...

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - FUNDRAISER - EVENING

Nina enters, looking absolutely stunning. And absolutely awed by what David has put together in her honor. She looks at the B&W photos of herself. Both moved and embarrassed.

Across the room, David has honed in on her. WITH HIM as he wills her to look up, and when her ravishing eyes meet his, it's that moment. The one that speeds the heart.

He gives her an uncharacteristically courageous wink and she smiles, more girlish than we've seen. She mouths, meaning it:

NINA

I don't deserve this.

DAVID

Yes you do.

And, as if this moment were years in the making, they start to move to each other, but a crowd flows between them toward...

Harlowe. Vincent Harlowe. Old movie star looks and tux minus the tie charm. And the clean-shaven face ain't so bad either. David's heart sinks. Of course he showed up.

David and Nina are stuck on the two opposing banks of this river. A stance they know all too well...

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - FUNDRAISER

X and Tatyana set up on a small elegant stage. As Marcel glad-hands interested patrons, Tatyana notices X is nervous.

X

Why didn't we practice together?

TATYANA

I have danced this million times. You could be anyone playing.

X

You've got a real gift, you know that?

TATYANA

You do not need to worry.

X looks at her -- does she feel bad? Is she being kind?

TATYANA (CONT'D)

You will not get in for your music. You will get in for your story. Subway Guy.
(off him)

They change your life and feel good for themselves.

X
I'll get in because I'm talented.

TATYANA
(with sensitivity)
Would be agony not knowing, yes?

MARCEL
So you kids ready?

Off X, surely rattled...

DAVID (PRE-LAP)
Shot of courage, please?

WITH David, currently bonding with the bartender.

BARTENDER
Kind?

DAVID
(I don't know, uhh...)
Goldschalager.

BARTENDER
What, do you have to do, make a speech
or something?

Hah! David does another shot.

KEVIN (PRE-LAP)
My fairy tale had a much better ending
than this.

EXT. PAPA APARTMENTS - ROOFTOP

Kevin's ankle is raised. Jazz ices it. Feeds him a cocktail.

KEVIN
And I was definitely wearing a much
better outfit.

JAZZ
Maybe tomorrow you can dance on it.

KEVIN
My ankle is the size of your ass.

JAZZ
Oh, God, I'm so sorry. I'd give you
mine if I could.

KEVIN
No, you wouldn't. A of all -- we just
met. B of all -- you need this for
yourself too badly.
(then overcome)
(MORE)

KEVIN (CONT'D)

I thought I was done with this feeling.

JAZZ

What?

KEVIN

Being broken.

Off Jazz, her heart aching for him, then watching the hip-hop a few yards away...

JAZZ

I have an idea.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - FUNDRAISER - NIGHT

FIND Georgia at the WELCOME TABLE, looking sexy and stunning. What the hell's she doing here? She points to Raffi.

GEORGIA

Well, I should be on the list. There he is. Sorry I'm late, hon.

RAFFI

(confused but thrilled)
Ahh, sure, not a problem.

Unseen, they pass Vincent, standing with Nina and Maggie.
ANGLE ON David, now wasted, at the bar.

DAVID

I was going to tell her with this elaborate show how much I see her, celebrate her. In front of these people, so she couldn't run away.

BARTENDER

That's kinda creepy.

DAVID

But then he glides in here and all the panties get wet. I can wet the panties, I'm just more stealth. My MO? Get to know me, underestimate me, then a couple years later I go in for the kill.

BARTENDER

Why don't you just do it anyway?

David looks at Vincent, who's taking leave for a smoke.

DAVID

Why? Guilt.

INT./EXT. CENTRAL PARK - FUNDRAISER

WITH X and Tatyana. She dancing, he's playing. Beautifully. Confidently. At home with the music. The crowd is gripped, mesmerized. Marcel, to the side, beaming. As X finishes his last gorgeous flourish and Tatyana hits her final pose... The crowd ERUPTS with BRAVOS! X takes it in. Feels pretty good.

PATRON

He's quite a find.

MARCEL

Tomorrow Avery Fisher Hall! And yesterday he was in the subway playing buckets. Can you believe it?

X, having heard this, is stung. Tatyana gives him a look: I told you so. X excuses himself as gracefully as he can.

X

I should be practicing for my final tomorrow.

MARCEL

Oh, I -- really? All right then.

X walks off. Marcel watches, confused. Tatyana watches, too. And Raffi walks up with two drinks.

RAFFI

Has anyone seen Georgia?

INT./EXT. CENTRAL PARK - FUNDRAISER

Vincent stands looking at a huge B&W of himself as Hamlet, Nina as Ophelia. He has her by the wrists and she's falling to her knees in heartbreak and confusion. He's nostalgic...

When a delicate female HAND is suddenly on his arm. He looks to find Georgia with a voice as sultry as her dress.

GEORGIA

I wanted to make sure you knew how much getting into PAPA means to me.

VINCENT

Oh, you.

GEORGIA

Anyone who knows me would tell you I'd do anything to get another shot.

And she slips something in his hand.

VINCENT

A gift card?

GEORGIA

Hotel key.

VINCENT

(he considers her)

You have a hunger that could take you
a long way past any of these people.

GEORGIA

I know.

As she leans in to kiss him, he tells her gently, paternally:

VINCENT

I didn't cut you because I doubt your
passion. I cut you because you played
Blanche DuBois like you were
auditioning for a beer commercial.
Look, I'm sure it's all you've ever
known, tragically, it's not your
fault. But to make it at PAPA, you
need... more than this.

Vincent compassionately places the key card back in her hand
as we ANGLE ON David, seeing this from the doorway. Doesn't
look good. Vincent sees David, disgusted, emboldened. Off
Vincent: Great. Just what I need.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - FUNDRAISER - MINUTES LATER

The next part of the program. The lights are low, the guests
seated, watching a video of Nina at dancing at 17. Awws from
the crowd. She's a child. Just a child. The title on the
video: GISELLE, 1990. (The ballet Jazz was talking about.)

Nina watches backstage, haunted and moved. David finds her.

NINA

Where did you find this?

DAVID

Screw guilt. Nina, I love you.

NINA

What? Are you drunk?

DAVID

Had a coupla shots, yes. But what
matters is I love you. The last time I
said that you were sucking on my
fingers so perhaps you didn't believe
me. And your response was to leave
town the next day --

NINA

I didn't leave you, I left Vincent --

DAVID

It's easier to say that. To say our relationship is some kind of run-off from Vincent drama. And maybe it started that way, but there's depth here.

(she can't deny it)

What we did was wrong. It remains the best and worst moment of my life. But it doesn't mean we're wrong.

Secrets between them. He touches her face, her hair.

DAVID (CONT'D)

I'm 38 years old; it might have taken a quart of thick liquor to do it, but I figured it was time.

And he kisses her. Tender and deep. She kisses him back. Senses something. Turn to see Vincent standing there. With a handheld microphone. And a wounded expression.

NINA

Vincent --

DAVID

Vincent. Let's talk about this --

VINCENT

So you finally took pity on him. Well, the show must go on.

And Vincent walks on stage to a round of applause. David and Nina exchange a look -- will Vincent control himself?

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Ladies and Gentleman, we are whore tonight to honor...

David hits the stage, trying to get the mike. Vincent evades him like a monkey in the middle. Nina covers her eyes. Maggie and the audience, on the edge of their seats.

DAVID

Vincent, don't ruin this please--

VINCENT

But don't we all want a chance to get inside Nina Khari?

BAM. In a spastic move, David punches Vincent in the face. GASPS from the crowd. They tumble gracelessly to the floor. Vincent is shocked, amused, impressed. David holds his hand, in a lot of pain. Nina has run on stage. Maggie doesn't know whether to laugh or cry. So much for order, sobriety, and sanity. A FLASHBULB POPS, and off this scandal, we...

END ACT IV

ACT V

TITLE OVER BLACK: THE FINALS

INT. PAPA - MAINSTAGE - FINAL AUDITIONS

CHYRON UP: FINAL AUDITIONS. 60 finalists left...

Maggie stands center stage.

MAGGIE

Hi, I'm Maggie Rhodes and I'll be performing a piece from what the fuck happened last night?

CAMERA SPINS AROUND to find a sorry looking *Fight Club* panel of judges: Vincent with a Little Rascals shiner; David, hand in a cast; Nina, eyes swollen from crying; and Marcel, hobbling in late with his muzzled sidekick.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

While the evening had a kind of *Deadwood* charm to it, it hardly befitted the prestige of this fine institution. The Board is clamoring for a sap to sop up the blood.

NINA

I'll sop. It's my fault. When I leave, things will level out.

MAGGIE

And when will that be?

NINA

Tomorrow.

David looks at her. Tomorrow? He guesses that's his answer. Vincent is surprised, too. Maggie looks at David, loaded:

MAGGIE

So, everything will go back to the way it was then...

David is devastated. Nina and Vincent are sorry.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Let's get started.

INT. PAPA - WAITING AREA - FINAL AUDITIONS

The last men and women standing, spanning all disciplines, are in stone cold silence. Too nervous to breathe today - the final finals. X paces. Jazz smiles at Kevin -- they seem to have a plan. Nanako meditates in her headphones. Zoe tries to stay focused, but can't find Eddie.

Raffi and Romeo tip-toe around, handing out flyers.

RAFFI
Cabaret tonight. Upperclassmen throw
the party, you let off the steam.

ROMEO
Perform what you want, say goodbye.
Well, that's sad and not helping.
Sorry. Break a leg.

ZOE
Have you seen Eddie? No?

EXT. PAPA APARTMENTS - ROOFTOP - MINUTES LATER

Eddie's among last night's party detritus, passed out. Clearly
he slept here last night. Zoe wakes him, helps him up.

ZOE
Eddie. Jesus, Eddie.

EDDIE
Zo. I knew you'd come.

ZOE
It's final auditions. What the hell
are you doing?

EDDIE
I was thinking last night. What if we
don't both make it in.

ZOE
Whatever happens we'll always be
friends. Come on.

He stops her, serious. Slurring a bit.

EDDIE
No. That can't happen. This was our
dream together. We were nine years
old and we were sitting on the stoop
while my mom was inside dying of
cancer, and you held my hand, and we
made a pact.

Zoe is moved, fights vulnerability.

ZOE
My dad walked out like two weeks
before, so I was very big on contracts
at the time.

EDDIE
I'm not Fearless Guy. I mean I can be
Fearless Guy because I've got a
(MORE)

EDDIE (CONT'D)
center. A constant. You.
(off her emotion)
You're my family, Zo. You know, you're
my sister.

Off Zoe, wishing that this love could be enough.

INT. PAPA - MAINSTAGE - MINUTES LATER

Kevin limps out -- his left ankle wrapped. Jazz limps out --
her left ankle wrapped. What's going on here?

JAZZ
This is to make up for yesterday's
mistakes. It's called: *It'll Heal*.

Nina and the panel are intrigued, including Maggie, who's
sitting in. Jazz and Kevin take positions.

A beat pulses from the speakers. A hip-hop tune plays and the
dancers come alive, moving like synchronized broken birds. It
is brilliant, how they incorporate the ankles' weakness into
really cool moves. The dance celebrates imperfection and the
ability to be free and soaring still. The panel is blown away.

NINA
When did you choreograph this?

KEVIN
Jazz did it. Last night. Brilliant.

MARCEL
Well, that was really wonderful.

ANGLE ON the stage. X is now bowing. The panel is impressed.

X
Thank you very much.

VINCENT
Thank you, Mr. Davis. So, before you
go is there anything you'd like to
tell us about yourself?

X
Why's that?

VINCENT
Ahh, sometimes when there's a choice
between two equally talented people,
the personal picture helps the weaker
judges to decide.

The panel rolls their eyes. X thinks about it. Wants to get
in but has his pride. Everyone's poised to be moved.

X

I would like to say my parents would be proud of me if I made it in here. But my pops is gone. And my mom's on crack most of the time. I work the buckets instead of going to school to bring home money to feed my two little sisters, seeing as what my brother makes doesn't cover rent. But my grandma, who's been holding on just to see this day, will die happy knowing I have a way to escape from the gangs.

Marcel is teary. Vincent is skeptical.

VINCENT

Is that true?

X lets the frustration of these days, of this life out with:

X

No. But I think it's what you want to hear.

And X walks out. Vincent looks at a horrified Marcel: "WTF?"

INT. PAPA - HALLWAY - FINAL AUDITIONS

Marcel hobbles as fast as he can after X.

MARCEL

Do you expect me to catch you?

(X stops)

You could've picked any subway to play, but you picked Lincoln Center.

X

I don't want to be here as that story.

ANGLE ON Tatyana, down the hall, listening.

MARCEL

Whose story do you want, mine? Do you think people aren't more impressed by how masterfully I play after I've doddered onto that stage? I can't control how exactly people appreciate me. I don't do it for them anyway.

Marcel, hoping this is enough, starts to walk away, then:

MARCEL (CONT'D)

The other day.

(re: cane and leg)

I've had experiences in my life that have left me...reactive. So, I'm sorry.

And he means it, and hobbles away. X catches sight of Tatyana. She's about to speak when he turns and heads off.

INT. PAPA - MAINSTAGE - LATER

Zoe finishes a song with a lack of inspiration.

ZOE
You don't knoo-ooo-oo-ow-ow me-eee.

The panel looks underwhelmed. Vincent is the "dad is disappointed in you" kind of silent. In her heart, she feels it -- she's history. And her SPOTLIGHT CUTS OUT.

INT. PAPA - WAITING AREA - MOMENTS LATER

Eddie waits, attacks Zoe when she comes out.

EDDIE
So? How'd it go, baby?

Zoe looks at him, doesn't want to hold him back, so lies:

ZOE
Awesome. Great. Now go make it happen.

He heads in, pumped. Off Zoe's act of love...

INT. PAPA - MAINSTAGE - HOURS LATER

Empty stage.

VINCENT
So who the hell is next?

When Georgia walks out with no make-up, hair back, in a high-necked period dress borrowed from PAPA.

GEORGIA
Lady MacBeth, sir.

Panel halts. Looks at her, at each other. The sheer balls. Eddie watches from the wings, intrigued and floored.

GEORGIA (CONT'D)
I drove fifteen hours to participate in the culmination of a lifetime of practice and dreaming. I was told by Mr. Leneman in my callback letter that y'all were looking forward to spending the weekend with me. Getting to know me. Seeing how I took to critique. I did not receive such critique until after I was cut, and therefore could not redeem myself. Please do not make me get back on that road without the chance to --

VINCENT
Continue. Lady MacBeth.

MAGGIE
Oh, I like her.

GEORGIA
"Come, you spirits that tend on mortal
thoughts, unsex me here..."

Off Eddie and the panel, moved and pleasantly surprised.

INT. PAPA - FACULTY BULLPEN - LATER

Nina, Marcel, David, and Vincent. Takeout containers
everywhere. David holds up Eddie's picture.

DAVID
Last but not least, I think we're all
agreed on Eddie.

VINCENT
Yeah, cut him.

MARCEL
What?

NINA
Are you kidding?

VINCENT
He's uncommitted, solipsistic...

MARCEL
Fantastically talented.

VINCENT
Sliding by on charm and bad behavior --

DAVID
So he's not going to get in because
you're self-loathing.

Marcel pops a Tums. Vincent looks at David, Nina, Marcel.

NINA
He's a little you.

MARCEL
He might as well pay you a royalty
every time he farts.

DAVID
Vincent, when you're wrong, you're so
wrong. If this kid doesn't get in, you
can run this school without me.

Vincent, Marcel, and Nina are surprised by this.

NINA
For my division, I'm down to Jazz
Barkley and Kevin Cotton. One space
left.

MARCEL
(suddenly faklemt)
Didn't she choreograph that stirring
piece about...broken birds...

NINA
(pats Marcel, then)
I think Kevin is more... ready. More
mature. She's got... a lot to prove.

DAVID
But what about his injury?

VINCENT
(to Nina)
You don't need me for this. Have a
good flight.

She looks at him, after everything...that's it? And he goes.

INT. NIGHTCLUB - CABARET NIGHT

A theatrical, sexy Cotton Club feel. Raffi and Romeo greet
PAPA hopefuls. Kevin, Jazz, with Eddie, who's making a toast.

EDDIE
To the most talented frickin' group of
people I've ever encountered. We may
never see each other again, so...
let's do things we'll regret!

CHEERS and swigs.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
And now the brilliant and mysterious
Nanako Kai!

BAM. The party explodes. Nanako spins The Avalanches's STAY
ANOTHER SEASON mixed with Eric B & Rakim's PAID IN FULL.
Lights bounce. The finalists dance with hot, sweaty abandon.

Jazz dances with Kevin, now on crutches.

KEVIN
You hear Nina's not staying? Leaving
tomorrow.

JAZZ
(upset)
What?

FIND Eddie and Georgia dancing close.

EDDIE
Georgia Peech, what you did today was
pretty damn impressive.

GEORGIA
Yeah, if it worked.

EDDIE
You know it doesn't matter.

She smiles; his approval means a lot to her in this moment.

GEORGIA
So where's Zoe?

INT. NIGHTCLUB - LADIES ROOM

Music pumps outside. Zoe waves her hands in front of the automatic faucet. Nothing. Waves again, nothing. She can't believe this. Another girl steps to a faucet and water shoots out. Zoe moves to that faucet. This one won't recognize her as a human being either! Zoe laughs through her tears and looks at herself in the mirror. Thinking of Vincent's words about "claiming" her life... she bucks up and heads out.

INT. NIGHTCLUB - HALLWAY

Zoe finds Romeo. Whispers something. What's she up to?

INT. PAPA - FACULTY BULLPEN - LATER

David and Nina alone.

NINA
I need some peace in my life, you
know? I'm too old for this French
farce bullshit. He's tethered to this
place, we both know that. I've
managed to make a life in LA --

DAVID
I don't want to discuss the nuances,
Nina. There's one simple answer I
need to hear.
(not angry)
Go.

Sad, she starts to go, then:

NINA
You're gonna stay here and stick it
out with him?

DAVID

If it weren't for Vincent, I'd still be assistant stage managing Kabuki theatre in Armonk.

NINA

You're a talented producer, anyone would have seen that.

DAVID

But, he did.

NINA

(the bittersweet truth)
I know. He discovered me, too.

They share a look, and she goes...

INT. NIGHTCLUB -- CABARET NIGHT

Vincent covertly sips scotch at the bar. Looks over. Sees Eddie. In the same posture. Same drink. Little him. Vincent crinkles his nose. Eddie looks up at him.

EDDIE

You're not supposed to be --

Vincent: shhh. Eddie winks. Vincent rolls his eyes.

ZOE (O.C.)

I think I'm the last song of the night. I'm Zoe Green.

Vincent and Eddie look over. Zoe on stage, at the mic, tentative. Romeo's on the piano. She tells him which key.

Romeo plays. Zoe starts: "You Don't Know Me."

ZOE (CONT'D)

You give your hand to me. And then you say hello.

The kids are talking and laughing, not really paying attention. Vincent is curious. She stops.

ZOE (CONT'D)

Can I get a spotlight, please?

BOOM. And it's on. And as her hair comes down, and her lips near the mic, we feel something special is about to happen.

She starts again, and the voice that comes out of her is soulful, connected, extraordinary. Eddie moves from the bar to get a better look. Georgia and the others can't tear their eyes from her. Is that Zoe Green? She sings:

ZOE (CONT'D)

You give your hand to me, and then you
say hello, and I can hardly speak, my
heart is beating so. And you will
never know, the one who loves you so,
no you don't know me...

She finds the courage to look at Eddie...and as her truth starts to dawn on him and as her song falls on our characters with deep individual meaning...

ON Jazz, thinking of Nina, tearing up.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Nina sits in this room, feeling homeless and alone.

EXT. NYC STREET - MINUTES LATER

Tatyana enters at a tony Park Avenue building. She's rushing in, late. Is greeted by a doorman.

INT. NYC SUBWAY @ 66th STREET - NIGHT

Nearly empty. X plays his buckets for two lovers who aren't even listening.

INT. PARK AVE APARTMENT - ELEVATOR - MOMENTS LATER

Tatyana removes her wrap. The elevator doors open...

INT. PARK AVE APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

She tiptoes into this grand penthouse, into the kitchen, when:

MRS. BARTHOLOMEW (O.C.)

Do you know what time it is?

Tatyana demurs, turns to her patroness.

MRS. BARTHOLOMEW (CONT'D)

I won't have the other servants doing
your chores.

TATYANA

I'm sorry, Mrs. It won't happen again.

Tatyana takes an apron from the pantry, puts it on over her beautiful dress. Off our princess, toiling...

INT. PAPA - FACULTY BULLPEN - SAME

David looks at an old photo of him, Vincent, Nina. Happy. From a simpler time.

INT. NIGHTCLUB - CABARET NIGHT

Zoe is singing directly to Eddie, who is unable to deal with what he's seeing. How this changes everything. He takes a drink. Zoe's eyes are closed now, and she's singing for herself. Georgia is touched, threatened, goes out for air...

Vincent is deliciously smug -- knew he was right about Zoe. And as she sings her last feeling phrase...

ZOE

No, you don't know me.

Her peers erupt with applause. They cheer for her, and for what they see of themselves in her triumphant moment.

Zoe's smile is stunning, wide open and grateful. Her eyes find Eddie. He's cheering, but can't acknowledge the song was for him. It's too much. Before Zoe can feel let down, she catches sight of Vincent, smiling with approval. This unlikely connection fills her with joy. Zoe blows a self-conscious kiss to the crowd... over whistles and ENCORES.

EXT. NIGHTCLUB - MOMENTS LATER

Eddie comes out, overwhelmed. To find Georgia.

GEORGIA

You lost or something?

EDDIE

I've got to get out of here.

GEORGIA

I know the feeling.

He moves to her. Searches her eyes. And kisses her. Off Georgia and Eddie, full of confusion and desire...

END OF ACT V

ACT VI

TITLE OVER BLACK: THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

INT. PAPA - MAINSTAGE - MONDAY MORNING

Could be Port Authority. Students line up with their bags, turning in their room keys and checking out. Eddie's next up.

RAFFI

Hey! How about Zoe last night, huh?

EDDIE

Amazing. So did she check out yet?

RAFFI

Yeah, she was here awhile ago. Is this number the right one?

EDDIE

That or my cell.

RAFFI

Good luck. I hope you make it in.

INT. NINA'S HOTEL - MORNING

Door open, Nina waits for a bellhop, packs the last of her stuff. Feeling sad and empty, teary. Jazz appears at the door.

JAZZ

Ms. Khari?

NINA

This is highly inappropriate, Jasmine. If you'd like to discuss your status you can make an appointment with Mr. Harlowe, he'd be happy to review.

But, Jazz just stands there.

NINA (CONT'D)

The decisions have already been made.

JAZZ

I don't want anything from you. I just wanted to say hello... before you left again.

(beat, then)

I got your letters. The agency gave them to me in this... unbelievable stack when I turned eighteen.

Nina looks at her, for perhaps the first time. And the feeling floods her.

NINA

Oh, my God.

JAZZ

I wanted to wait 'til certain things were in place. You know: This is who I am. This is what I've done...

Nina can't find words. Love, shame, relief wells in her eyes.

JAZZ (CONT'D)

I didn't expect you to be here this weekend of course.

NINA

No, of course.

Jazz is softening, more than she expected or wants.

JAZZ

See, I needed to audition for PAPA without your help. I really didn't want to need anything from you.

NINA

I understand. Jasmine?

Her name out of Nina's mouth is profound for them both.

NINA (CONT'D)

You are a lovely dancer.

Jazz wipes an unwanted tear. Off mother and daughter...

INT. PAPA - OFFICES - JUDGMENT DAY - MORNING

David enters, cast on hand, to find Vincent already there.

DAVID

You're here early.

So much between these men. Will they talk about it?

VINCENT

How's your hand?

DAVID

Itches.

Vincent throws him a chopstick. David goes itch-fishing.

VINCENT

So, I had a good talk with Maggie this morning. I assured her you've gotten into a program and you won't be such a destructive force here anymore.

He puts a NAMEPLATE down in front of him: DAVID LENEMAN, CO-DIRECTOR. David wants to be grateful, but can't yet...

DAVID
About this weekend --

VINCENT
No need to apologize.

DAVID
Just tell me this. Did you come rushing back because you didn't think I could do it? Or because you wanted to see Nina?

Vincent looks his longtime friend in the eye. This is hard:

VINCENT
I screwed up the first good film job I've had in years. I screwed up, David. And then I came home.

David nods. That's all that will be said about that.

DAVID
(picking up paper)
So should we make these calls?

VINCENT
What do you mean, "we"?

And thus begins a montage, in which we see:

INT. BROOKLYN BROWNSTONE - MOMENTS LATER

Zoe is at the breakfast table with her mom and Brad, Chloe and the twins. The phone rings. Brad answers it.

BRAD
Yello. Zoe. Some guy named Vincent Harlowe?

She gets up, looks at her mom, who crosses her fingers. Zoe's surprised by this. She takes the phone, holds it to her heart. One more moment. Closes her eyes; then:

ZOE
This is Zoe Green.

INT. AUERBACH BROWNSTONE - SAME

Eddie watches his father ELIAS take a call.

ELIAS
David Letterman?

EDDIE
(getting up)
I got it, Dad. Dave? Uh-huh...?

INT. DODGE VAN - MOMENTS LATER

Georgia and her family are heading back home. Talking at each other, eating chips. Georgia looks tired and out of place.

LAREEN
Y'all keep it clean back there; we've got a long drive.

Georgia's cell rings. Everyone's quiet, nervous. She answers.

SISTER
It's the call, it's the call!

GEORGIA
This is Georgia. Uh-huh. Okay.

Tears start to well in Georgia's eyes. Her brothers and sisters sink for her. Lareen stops the van.

GEORGIA (CONT'D)
Thank you, Mr. Harlowe.

LAREEN
What he say?

GEORGIA
COME TO PAPA!!!

Georgia's family goes nuts, screaming: COME TO PAPA!!!

EXT. NYC CAFE - MINUTES LATER

Kevin sits with all his bags, drinking tea from a huge to-go cup and eating a banana. His phone BUZZES on the table. He's too nervous. Hands it to a random girl next to him.

KEVIN
Can you take this call for me?

PRE-LAP a landline RINGING...

INT. JAZZ'S SUBURBAN HOUSE - SAME

...and RINGING as we PAN ACROSS a row of happy pictures of Jazz as a baby, a teenager, with her adoptive parents. Answering machine picks up: "You have reached the Barkleys."

INT. TENEMENT - MORNING

The phone RINGS in X's shitty apartment. His mom, half-conscious. The place feels like the sob story he said wasn't true. X answers, listens. Overwhelmed.

X

Thank you. Cool. Thanks so much.

He goes to the window, looks out at the city that awaits him. Off his triumphant smile and the hope of a better life, we...

FADE OUT.

FADE UP ON: **THREE MONTHS LATER.**

EXT. PAPA - MORNING

VINCENT (O.S.)

Some people say they are born artists.
They are wrong.

INT. PAPA - MAINSTAGE - MORNING

Vincent is giving the welcoming speech to the forty-five new freshman, whose faces we do not yet see.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

You are no more born an artist than
you are born a doctor or a lawyer. It
requires discipline, sacrifice.

INT. PAPA - DANCE STUDIO - MORNING

The room is empty. Sunlight beams in. Nanako Kai enters with her bags, her violin, her headphones. She lets out a short SCREAM of wild joy, and pulls it back into her tiny body.

She takes out her violin and takes a deep breath. And when her bow meets her strings, she plays the beginning strains of The Verve's "Bittersweet Symphony". The perfectly rich and inspiring backdrop of hope and excitement for a new beginning, with a tinge of melancholy of the past PLAYS OVER...

The incoming class trickles in. One by one, students join -- playing instruments, dancing sequences, singing out.

X walks in, gives a wave to Nanako, who nods: look behind you. He turns to find Tatyana.

TATYANA

You came. Okay good.

As she walks away, ON X -- well this should be interesting. He takes his sticks from his waist... joins in, starts drumming.

Eddie arrives. Made it! High-fives X, and joins in on vocals.

Their Bittersweet Symphony continues to play OVER...

INT. PAPA APARTMENTS - ZOE'S ROOM - MORNING

Zoe arrives with her suitcases. She's made it in! Half of the room is swathed in PINK. She sees Georgia hanging her stuff in the closet. Oh, shit. Zoe checks her room assignment. You've gotta be kidding me. Georgia turns and sees Zoe in the doorway. You've gotta be kidding me.

INT. PAPA - MAINSTAGE - MORNING

VINCENT

You will turn yourselves inside out and explode all you think you know about yourselves for this path you've chosen. You will risk your ego every day, twenty times a day, and that's a profound kind of courage.

INT. PAPA - DANCE STUDIO

Zoe arrives. Awed by the group. This is so frickin' cool. Georgia strides in past. They both start to sing. Zoe in full voice. She locks eyes with Eddie. And they hug. Georgia looks at them. Perhaps jealous...? As the music continues...

EXT. PAPA - MORNING

Jazz and Kevin walk together toward the school.

JAZZ

New York's the place to be, right?

KEVIN

You know it.
(hugging her tight)
Drinks later?

We now see Jazz is dressed in waitress black and whites. She points to a restaurant across the street. She didn't make it. He blows her a kiss. Off Jazz, as he heads toward her dream.

JAZZ

My shift ends at four.

VINCENT (O.S.)

Your friends and family will ask you: wouldn't getting discovered on YouTube or on a reality show be easier? Why not skip all this?

INT. PAPA - DANCE STUDIO

Kevin enters, joins the blissful symphony.

VINCENT (O.S.)

And you'll answer: because this is not a passing whim. This is my life's ambition. When you put it that way fifteen minutes hardly seems enough.

INT. PAPA MAINSTAGE - MORNING

AS WE PAN ACROSS THE FACES we've come to hope for - X, Eddie, Zoe, Georgia, Nanako, Kevin, and others...

VINCENT (CONT'D)

In our time here together? You will fall in and out of love, betray each other, inspire each other, need each other more desperately than you ever thought possible. And you will bring it all with you on stage together -- and create something brilliant...

As WE CROSS FADE to....

INT. PAPA - DANCE STUDIO - MORNING

The Bittersweet Symphony kicks up into a rapturous swing.

INT. PAPA BULLPEN - MORNING

Vincent, David, and Marcel sit in quiet contrast. Nina appears in the doorway. Professor Higgins barks.

NINA

I've made a mistake. And I need to be here to make it right.

David and Vincent look at each other -- she's back?

INT. PAPA - REHEARSAL ROOM - MORNING

CHYRON UP: PAPA Class of 2012...

We PULL BACK ON this magnificent symphony -- this vibrant celebration of the heart, the work, and the passion that defines this place and time in their lives, until we are...

EXT. PAPA - CONTINUOUS

Looking in through the GIANT GLASS WALL, into the MUSIC BOX from ACT I, at our future stars. A crowd is slowly gathering.

We PULL farther and farther away, watching them dance, sing, play and we mix with the ordinary people and the foot traffic.

We notice Jazz, heartbroken... walking on by.

Her cell rings. CALLER ID: NINA KHARI. She lets it go.

FADE OUT.

END OF PILOT