
Senior Projects Spring 2020

Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects

Spring 2020

Pre-Professional

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Bard College

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PRE-PROFESSIONAL

SERIES BIBLE

By

Sophia Doctoroff



Serenade, George Balanchine



MY PARADISE, LOST

OR

MR. BALANCHINE'S ANGELS ARE MEAN AND I'M LUCIFER

People say George Balanchine, the father of American ballet, called his dancers his "Angels." His philosophy has become inextricable from the serious study of ballet in this country. He liked anorexic girls with long legs and small heads. I had teachers at my school, Manhattan Youth Ballet, who'd studied under him and affectionately referred to him as "Mr. B."

If you're one of very, very few, you are equipped to handle a world where this man is synonymous with God. I wasn't. Even fewer are able to handle it and stay healthy. I DEFINITELY wasn't. After I quit, I felt like my entire life had shattered. My identity was defunct. I only knew myself as a dancer, and if I couldn't be a dancer, then I didn't exist. But the truth was that if I couldn't be an angel, then I really didn't WANT to exist. I wasn't worth it.

No matter who you are, in ballet you never feel good enough. You never feel thin enough, flexible enough, or strong enough. You ARE ballet. You are a body without a soul. You exist for aesthetics. Everything is a comparison because it has to be. Which one of us fits best into the mold of this, highest of arts? Which one of us is closest to Paradise? Ballet, in its

highest form, is unfeeling. It doesn't care. It can't love. I got stuck in this infinite loop of self-hatred and darkness, and Paradise was lost. But loss is the rule of Paradise, and its price.

I loved ballet because once in a while, it made me feel beautiful, and it gave me the idea that in some way, I could do things other people couldn't. I was special.

Those moments were fleeting. Sometimes a teacher would ask me to demonstrate a sequence, and the class applauded. Or I mastered a skill I never thought I would. Or my turnout was finally perfect, after years of developing muscles normal people don't even know they have. Or I lost some weight. When I succeeded at forcing my body to do things no body was supposed to do, I WAS exceptional.

Those moments happened, it's true. But the next thing I knew, someone was yelling at me. I didn't get the part I wanted. A teacher got frustrated because I couldn't make a correction and slapped my arm. I yawned in class and was met with a five-minute targeted angry lecture in front of everyone. I gained a few pounds. And worst of all, I became invisible.

When I came to the conclusion that I had to quit to avoid suicide, I felt like I never mattered to ballet at all. Of course, that was true. But that's just the way it'll always be.



PRE-PROFESSIONAL

Sonya Sternberg, a former pre-professional ballet student, must navigate a new life and a shattered sense of self after an emotional breakdown forces her to leave the dance world in this eight-hour semi-autobiographical limited drama series. The action toggles back and forth between periods of Sonya's life: her darkly eccentric and at times endearingly quirky childhood in suburban upstate New York, her deliriously joyous year as a ballet student in New York City, her tortured teenage years, and her soul-searching time at a rural New York college.

INFLUENCES

Big Little Lies - miniseries (HBO)

Euphoria - series (HBO)

Fleabag - series (Amazon)

Black Swan - feature - Darren Aronofsky

Flesh and Bone - miniseries (Starz)

Boyhood - feature - Richard Linklater

Mirror - feature - Andrei Tarkovsky



Andrei Tarkovsky, *Mirror*, 1975

THEMES

loneliness

fantasy vs. reality

jealousy

self-hatred

mental illness, addiction, and self-harm

relationships

healing

destruction

broken dreams

the nature of beauty

perfection

sex

trauma

obsession

COLOR SCHEME

MOTIFS

Water

roses

grey days

rain

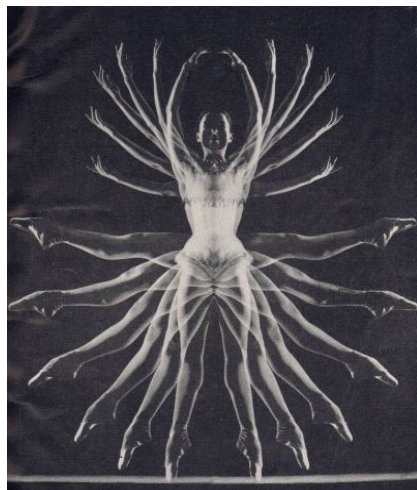
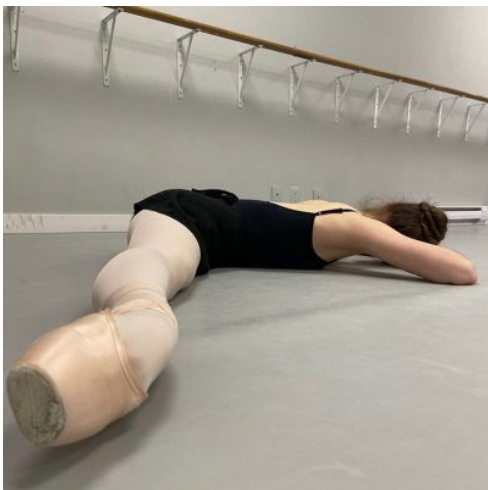
snow

ballet

the human body

mirrors

blood



2013. INT. MANHATTAN ACADEMY OF BALLET THEATER - NIGHT

TEASER:

A moment of silence in the black box theater, and...

The first chords of TCHAIKOVSKY'S SERENADE FOR STRINGS IN C MAJOR burst into being at fortissimo.

According to GEORGE BALANCHINE'S CHOREOGRAPHY, the curtain opens on TEENAGE FEMALE BALLET DANCERS on stage in formation, all wearing the classic BLUE CALF-LENGTH TULLE COSTUMES. They stand with their hands up, as if shielding their faces from the moonlight.

The movement begins against an ethereal blue backdrop. Only their arms move, all together, slowly, the very picture of serenity, femininity, and sublime beauty.

Perfectly in sync, their hands come to rest by their brows.

A motionless moment, and their feet turn from parallel to first position. Their heads are bowed, epitomizing the demure old-world feminine.

In fifth position, they raise their heads and look towards the ceiling, opening their arms and chests to the divine. It's an image reminiscent of crucifixion.

Here, we begin a series of INTERCUTS (Tchaikovsky heard throughout) with a BLUE ROOM that matches the background of the stage, but like a place in a dream or fantasy. The next, more sprightly phrase of the music begins, and right after the battement:

-BLUE ROOM: C.U.on SMALL STRIPS OF BLUE TULLE - same as the dancers' costumes - as they float languidly from the top of the blue frame and past the bottom, disappearing.

- SERENADE: The Dancers jump and twirl into the first formation change.

- BLUE ROOM: The STRIPS float, and we start to hear the snip...snip...snip... OF SCISSORS over the music.
- SERENADE: In swirls of blue tulle, the Dancers sway and float like angels.
- BLUE ROOM: The strips fall into a pile on a studio-like floor, but we still don't see where they're coming from.
- SERENADE: The girls rise and fall, onto pointe, off of pointe, leaning, swaying, like they're being pulled by some invisible force.
- BLUE ROOM: A drop of BLOOD falls onto the pile in slow motion and we watch as it splashes, sending little droplets flying...
- SERENADE: The Dancers run to a corner of the stage, then move four at a time into formation, their bodies creating perfect geometrical shapes and patterns.
- BLUE ROOM; INSERT: Female HANDS and ARMS, the hands cutting strips of the TULLE from a copy of the COSTUME the dancers are wearing on stage. The pieces fall as she cuts them off.
- SERENADE: The formation changes again and the Dancers link their waify arms at the elbow.
- BLUE ROOM: The girl's hands continue to snip away at the costume, less and less of it remaining intact.
- SERENADE: Through the formations, a SOLOIST leaps onto the stage in a series of grand jetes.
- BLUE ROOM: We hover over SONYA, 15, long brown hair, 5'7 or so. She cuts the costume, looking down at it, thus we can't see her face.
- SERENADE: The other Dancers go into a reprise of the soloist's leaps following one another around the stage.

- BLUE ROOM: The last snip - the TAG from the costume. It says "L". Sonya cuts it in half and lets both halves fall into the pile with the rest of the dismembered garment. Bodies in a mass grave.

- SERENADE: A climactic moment - all of the themes seen previously return in an overwhelming frenzy.

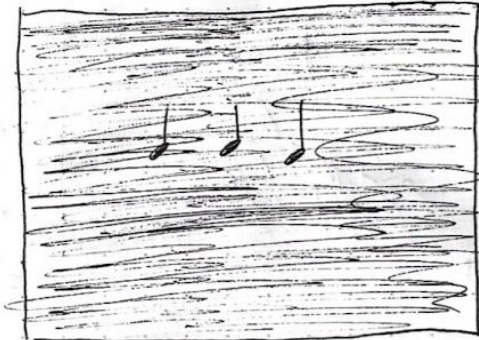
- BLUE ROOM: As Sonya looks upward to the hovering CAMERA, the opening of Tchaikovsky's piece returns in an accosting recapitulation. The SCISSORS fall from her hand and clatter to the floor beside the pile of tulle strips. She closes her eyes.

Cut to black, beat.

A blank MIRROR fills the frame, shatters, and explodes.

TITLE: PRE-PROFESSIONAL.

TEASER STORYBOARD



(BLACK)



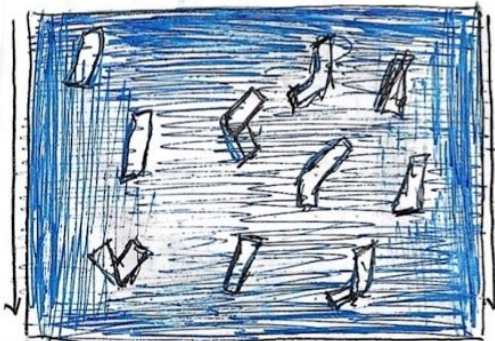
LIGHTS COME UP



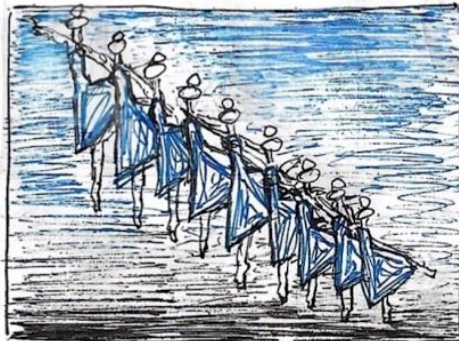
CHOREO STARTS SWIRLS OF BLUE TULLE



(...)



STRIPS OF BLUE TULLE FLOAT DOWN



♪

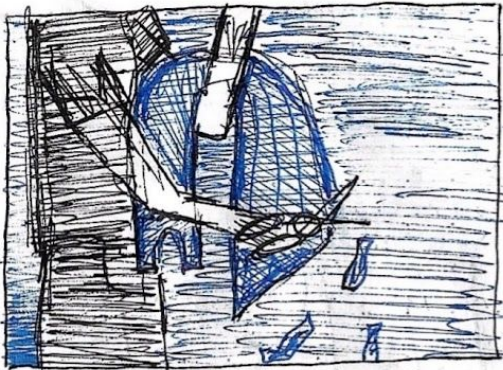


FLOAT, FLOAT, SNIP, SNIP, SNIP

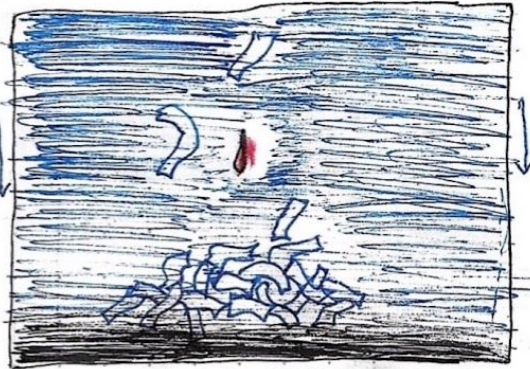


SNIP, SNIP, SNIP

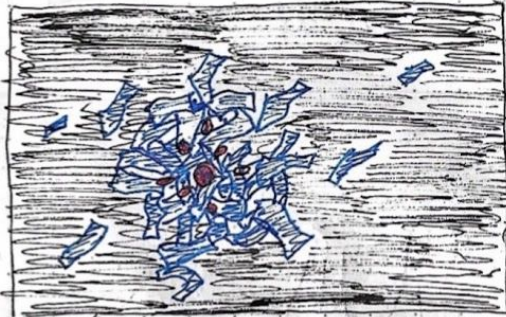
INTERCUTS



CUTTING UP COSTUME -
DON'T SEE FACE



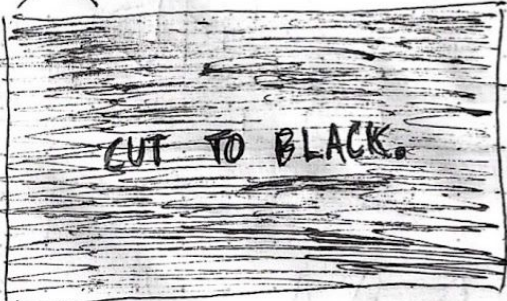
BLOOD + TULLE FALL INTO TULLE PILE



FILE FROM ABOVE: BLOOD FALLS IN,
SPLASHES - SLOW MOTION



SEE HER FROM ABOVE; SHE
HOLDS THE COSTUME; SCISSORS FALL;
WE SEE THE PILE OF TULLE AROUND
HER FEET; SHE THROWS HER HEAD
BACK; CLOSES HER EYES.



CUT TO BLACK.

PILOT SUMMARY

We open on the Manhattan Academy of Ballet spring Gala, 2013. Sonya is not present in the performance. Instead, we see her cutting up the costume she was supposed to wear for it, for Balanchine's *Serenade*.

In 2012, Sonya goes to say goodbye to her dance teachers - she is leaving their studio to go to a pre-professional ballet school in New York City.

Throughout the episode, we toggle between:

- her first days/weeks at MAB, where she has partnering class for the first time and is thrilled by her partner Sam's touch.
- Sonya as a child. She starts at a new school. We learn of her parents' complex feelings about her, and about themselves. Her mother gets a DWI. Her parents sign for a divorce.
- Her first days of tenth grade, right after she quits. We see she's very depressed, and we watch her cut herself. She meets a new friend named Hana. We start getting to know her sister Samira, who is coping with her family's issues in her own way.
- Sonya's sophomore year of college, where we see her insecurity around being a virgin and her budding addiction to cigarettes and weed. We meet her group of friends.
- Her return to ballet class in her senior year of college - this is not its own timeline, more like a series of short ballet scenes that stand parallel to the ones in the ballet timeline, and collide with the college timeline near the end of the series.

We end on Sonya in her sophomore year, pulling her first pair of pointe shoes out of a hiding place and putting them on. She falls asleep wearing them.

CHRONOLOGICAL SERIES ARCS

CHILDHOOD:

Sonya starts at Montessori school. Her parents divorce and her mother must move to a trailer park. She and Samira split their time equally between their parents' houses. At 6, she sees her first ballet and enters first grade. Her parents sign her up for ballet class. She is gifted academically, but has a hard time making friends both at school and at the studio. In fifth grade, she meets Ariane and Michelle. The three become best friends. Ariane bullies her. Zoya's trailer burns down and they move into a nice apartment. When Sonya starts middle school, her disgust with herself starts growing exponentially. Ariane tells her they're no longer friends. She is alone and pours her heart into dance. She starts auditioning for ballet summer intensives and eventually gets into a few. She goes to one in Pennsylvania in the summer of 2012.

BALLET:

This timeline begins when Sonya returns from Pennsylvania, and only lasts from August to May. She and her parents go to the old studio to say goodbye to her teachers, and she auditions for schools in the city for the next academic year. She has bad auditions, and she has good ones. She gets into MAB, so she takes the train to the city alone daily from September to May. Sonya gives up everything else in her life for the sake of her ballet dream. She falls in love with her partner, Sam. One day, she catches two other students having sex and is confused about how she feels. She starts to really think about sex for the first time. Her love for Sam turns out to be unrequited. The pressure of the ballet world starts to weigh on her. She starts crying on the train every day and feels that her identity is dissolving. Eventually, she reaches the breaking point. She has a mental breakdown and Zoya decides that she must pull her daughter out of MAB for her own safety. Broken, Sonya falls into a deep, dark, terrifying depression and starts cutting herself. Her mother sends her to therapy.

TEEN YEARS :

Sonya starts tenth grade with no friends and no prospects. She is still massively depressed and other mental health issues begin to emerge. She meets a new friend. She has a series of very intense crushes on boys at school. None of them like her back. She has to watch Hana, now her best friend, fall in love. Hana details to Sonya all her new romantic and sexual adventures, which sends Sonya into more and more of a tailspin. Hana and Sonya discover that they're seeing the same therapist. Sonya's need to be someone's favorite overpowers her, and her relationships with both Hana and her therapist fall apart. She is, yet again, alone. She and Samira move into Zoya's apartment full-time because they cannot continue to live with Levi after he hits Sonya and tears up her favorite book. Sonya steadily loses contact with him. Samira gets a boyfriend and explores alcohol and drugs. Sonya is jealous and spends the rest of high school barely scraping by. She gets into college and must leave home before she is ready or well.

COLLEGE :

Sophomore year, Sonya has a friend group. They're not great, but they're something. She develops one of her infamous crushes on one of the boys. She is so insecure about still being a virgin that her friend Anya convinces her to get on Tinder. Sonya loses her virginity to a one-time hookup who ghosts her. She gets addicted to sexting and has sex with nineteen Tinder guys, all of whom she falls in love with and none of whom ever really contact her again. One of them rapes her. She realizes she would do anything to be loved. Sonya's friend Cailey makes out with Sonya's crush in front of her face and as a result of the ensuing drama, the group falls apart. Sonya reconnects with Hana and falls in love with Hana's friend Jack. She becomes estranged from her mother and sister because of a series of mental health episodes involving them, one taking place at Niagara Falls. Anya stops being her friend when Sonya has a similar episode during a fight and says some terrible things. Sonya is left alone again and her issues with abandonment take her over. She takes a semester off from college and lives with Jack. He has mental

health issues that echo hers, and he, parallel to Levi, rips her favorite book to shreds.



Fleabag, 2016

Sonya runs to Levi's house, ironically having nowhere else to go. They slowly begin to reconnect. Eventually, they learn to have a different kind of relationship. She returns to college with Levi's support. She meets new friends. She enrolls in a ballet class. Ballet helps, and she is able to rekindle her relationships with Zoya and Samira. Sonya and Jack realize they never stopped loving each other and get back together. They move to Toronto. Hand in hand, they stand on the banks of Lake Ontario looking out at the water, and Sonya is at peace at last. She learns to see ballet and herself in a new light. She starts to heal, and begins to understand what love and beauty truly are.

SUPPORTING CHARACTER SUBPLOTS

Samira's life is shown in sharp contrast to Sonya's. She gets a boyfriend and experiments with drugs and alcohol before anyone even offers Sonya any. She has to take care of Zoya when she passes out drunk on the couch and Sonya is away at school. When she gets to college in New York, she immediately falls in love with someone new. She deals with the emotional residue of having been forgotten by her parents when Sonya fell apart.

Levi's story has a lot to do with his relationship with Sonya, but it's also about him grappling with his own past trauma, i.e. his divorce, failures, and his parents' early demise. He has many complexes that he would never admit to, and he is never able to give his daughters what they need. When they leave to live with their mother, he is distraught, though he never shows it outwardly. He genuinely loves his daughters, but he can never seem to get it right.

Zoya's story is also very intertwined with Sonya's. Her drama centers around always having to be a fighter, and then getting emotionally exhausted time and time again. After the divorce, she raises the girls practically single-handedly, and simultaneously has to deal with her mother living with them (a fraught relationship), recovering from alcoholism, a full-time job, and studying for a degree in psychoanalysis. Just when she thinks she can relax, Sonya has her breakdown, and she feels like the whole thing starts all over again, and she relapses.

LOCATIONS

LEVI' S HOUSE:

This place is chaos. Everyone and everything that lives here is broken. Levi doesn't care, or doesn't notice. A lot of what Sonya remembers of this house is cutting herself in her room as a teenager. Being in the living room and watching as her father tore her favorite book to shreds in a fit of rage, standing in front of her as he hit her in the face. She remembers sitting on the couch and watching the myriad flies buzzing around the windowsill, and then Levi presenting her with a book called "This Is Why You're Fat." She and Samira both remember how dark it was and how it smelled, and how embarrassed it made them. They remember looking at their father at the dinner table, eating pizza alone on Sunday nights while they ate on the couch in front of the TV, and feeling like they were watching an elderly person eating alone inside of a McDonald's.

ZOYA' S TRAILER:

Sonya, Samira, and Zoya weren't unhappy in that little trailer. Sonya only realized it might be embarrassing when she was ten, and she called where they lived a "trailer park" in front of her rich uncle. He replied with, "we call them mobile homes." She wondered what the difference was. After that she tried not to call it a "trailer park" again. Their trailer burned down when Sonya was in fifth grade. They were all sad, but Zoya managed to get a nice apartment. But really, none of them had minded living there. It was nice.

J&V DANCE ARTS CENTER:

This was the place where Sonya and Samira did (most of) their growing up. It was a shabby little place, covered in flaking red and white paint that the girls would pick off while they sat on the front stoop waiting for their father. They viewed Virginia and Joseph as life coaches, or a second set of parents...and sometimes a first set of parents. Lots of times, Samira felt closer to Virginia than she did to Zoya, and Sonya felt closer to Joseph than she did to Levi. Levi was constantly late picking

the girls up from class, and even though it was inconvenient, and they were getting old, Virginia and Joseph stayed late - sometimes by as much as an hour - waiting with them until he finally arrived. They never got angry at the girls, although often when they got home they'd muse and worry about what was going on in that house. It's too bad they were pretty shitty dance teachers. When Sonya was in the city, she'd think a lot about how much she regretted going to V&J. For a while, she even blamed the failure of her career on Virginia.

MANHATTAN ACADEMY OF BALLET:

Sonya spent the happiest few months of her life here. During those few months, she was thinner than she'd ever been, and she loved it. She loved the wide open studios, the brightness, the sturdy barres, the calming blue paint on the walls, and the boys, all of which J&V's had been missing. She was independent for the first time in her life. She was enamored by her teachers, friends, and most of all Sam, her pas de deux partner. As spring approached though, she found she couldn't stop crying, and the beauty and color drained out of it all. Sometimes she'd still find hints of it in certain places, like when she was sewing a new pair of pointe shoes, or when they started learning the choreography for Balanchine's Serenade. She never even got to perform it.

ZOYA'S CONDO APARTMENT:

Zoya kept a clean house. She knew what it was like living at Levi's and that she had to show her daughters how to live for real. She always said that upon coming home from Levi's, Sonya and Samira were like animals. No manners, no discipline. They disagreed, and didn't like hearing her say that. But, sooner or later they learned that she was right, and decided to live with Zoya full-time.

SONYA'S VARIOUS DORM ROOMS:

It was always important to Sonya to make things her own, to leave her mark on things. Her Detritus Jar was always pride of place, and there were always lots of posters and pictures hung on the walls, which she didn't like to see blank. She always

brought her favorite books, every crease in their spines put there by her. She didn't like buying used books. She liked knowing her books were hers. These rooms held lots of trauma. She was raped by a Tinder hookup in her own bed. After washing the sheets, she could still feel him there. After moving rooms, she could still feel him there. She always kept a minimum of six pillows on her bed. She watched them fall to the floor as she was being fucked by those nineteen strangers. Comfort was always a thing that mattered most to her, so much that she spent most of her time throughout college in these rooms, curating the comfort. Falling into it. Trying to let it swallow her. Sometimes she was with other people, but mostly she was just alone.

The Sternbergs

The central family in the series is based on mine. Sonya's character corresponds to me, Samira's to my sister Sima, Levi's to my father Mark, and Zoya's to my mother Irina.

Many of these stories are true. Those that aren't are me filling in the blanks, and sometimes making things happen the way I wish they had. Even the true ones aren't always so true. The truth is in the feeling.

SONYA STERNBERG*THE HEROINE***BIO**

When Sonya was seven, her father took her and her younger sister to see Swan Lake at Lincoln Center. That was the first time Sonya ever fell in love.

She got completely obsessed with ballet very quickly after that. She'd taken dance classes before, but never seriously. At a tiny studio in a small town in upstate New York, the love she felt for ballet grew and grew. And grew. It became a kind of pathology. It was the first drug she ever took, and it got her high every day. She liked the way it made her feel. It made her feel pretty...maybe even beautiful. Being the best ballet dancer in that little studio made her feel important and valuable. It's not like she ever felt that way at home. Or really anywhere else.

When she was 12, she found out ballet had a dark side. It happened at her first ever audition. She knew she didn't look like the other girls. She knew there was a reason the auditioners averted their eyes. She realized she was nothing but an embarrassment.

But she decided to keep fighting. She was still in love, enough to overlook the toxicity of the relationship. She figured if she was at her very thinnest, she might have a chance. That's what her mother kept telling her.

She hated the feeling that her mother and father were obsessed with her body. As she got older, she started to realize that the whole world was. She imagined what was going on in other people's heads when they looked at her, especially in the studio. Eventually all she could think about was her reflection in the mirror, and her reflection in other people's eyes. She saw a monster.

Sonya tried multiple times to starve herself, but that only resulted in bingeing, which only made her feel worse. She ate at night, so no one would see, or comment. She loved ice cream, and she would lie when her mother asked who'd eaten it all. It felt like cheating, and she thought she would crumble from the guilt of it.

Her freshman year of high school she started taking the train to New York City every day after seventh period. She'd gotten into a school called Manhattan Academy of Ballet. From September to January, she was happier than she'd ever been in her life.

But the pressure got to her. She was sad every day, and by February she was crying on every train ride. She just sat in her seat and cried, and she wanted people to look because she wanted someone to ask if she was okay. No one ever did. She would look up at the ceiling and ask a god she didn't believe in why ballet didn't love her back. She never got an answer.

Then there was a day in May when she did a lot of fucked up shit to herself and to other people, that resulted in her mother pulling her out of the spring gala. From then on the pain and the loss was so big that there was nothing to do but lie in bed. One day her eyes fell on a safety pin on her bedside table, and she drew it across her wrist. It bled a little, and it turned out that it made her hurt less inside, so she just kept doing it, and it got worse. Ballet had broken up with her.

When it was time for her to go to college, she started thinking that maybe it was weird that she was still a virgin. When she got to school she lied about it and thought about her old ballet partner, Sam. Everything she did became about trying to feel, or not feel. She still saw a monster that she couldn't escape from. She got rid of all the mirrors in her room. She developed an addiction to weed.

She lost her virginity, at long last, to Tinder. She hooked up with nineteen guys. Some were teenagers, some were in their

thirties. Some were sweet, and some said they were going to the bathroom and went home instead. One raped her. She fell in love with them all, and they all shattered her.

She was 20 when she met Jack. She fell for him...hard. But then, she fell hard for every crush she ever had. The difference was that he fell for her too. She got scared of the pain, and she ran away. But they couldn't stay apart, and she finally had the requited love she'd been yearning for her whole life.



Flesh and Bone, 2015



Me, 2012

FACTS

Sonya is insecure.

Sonya hates herself.

Sonya has a bad case of body dysmorphia.

Multiple people have compared Sonya to Eeyore.

Sonya's fifth grade teacher said she was "pensive".

Sonya has always had trouble keeping friends.

People have always found it easy (or necessary) to abandon Sonya.

When she's extra depressed, Sonya likes to watch reality TV.

Sonya grinds her teeth.

Sonya finds it exceedingly difficult to take care of herself.

Sonya is artistic.

Sonya believes in therapy.

Sonya loves more powerfully than she, or anyone around her, can handle.

Sonya loves to read.

Sonya is an open book.

Sonya loves musical theater, even though her ballet friends make fun of it.

Every night Sonya goes to sleep with the TV on.

Sonya always needs to feel like there's someone talking to her so she can feel like she exists.

Sonya loves *The Catcher in the Rye*.

Sonya loves Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*.

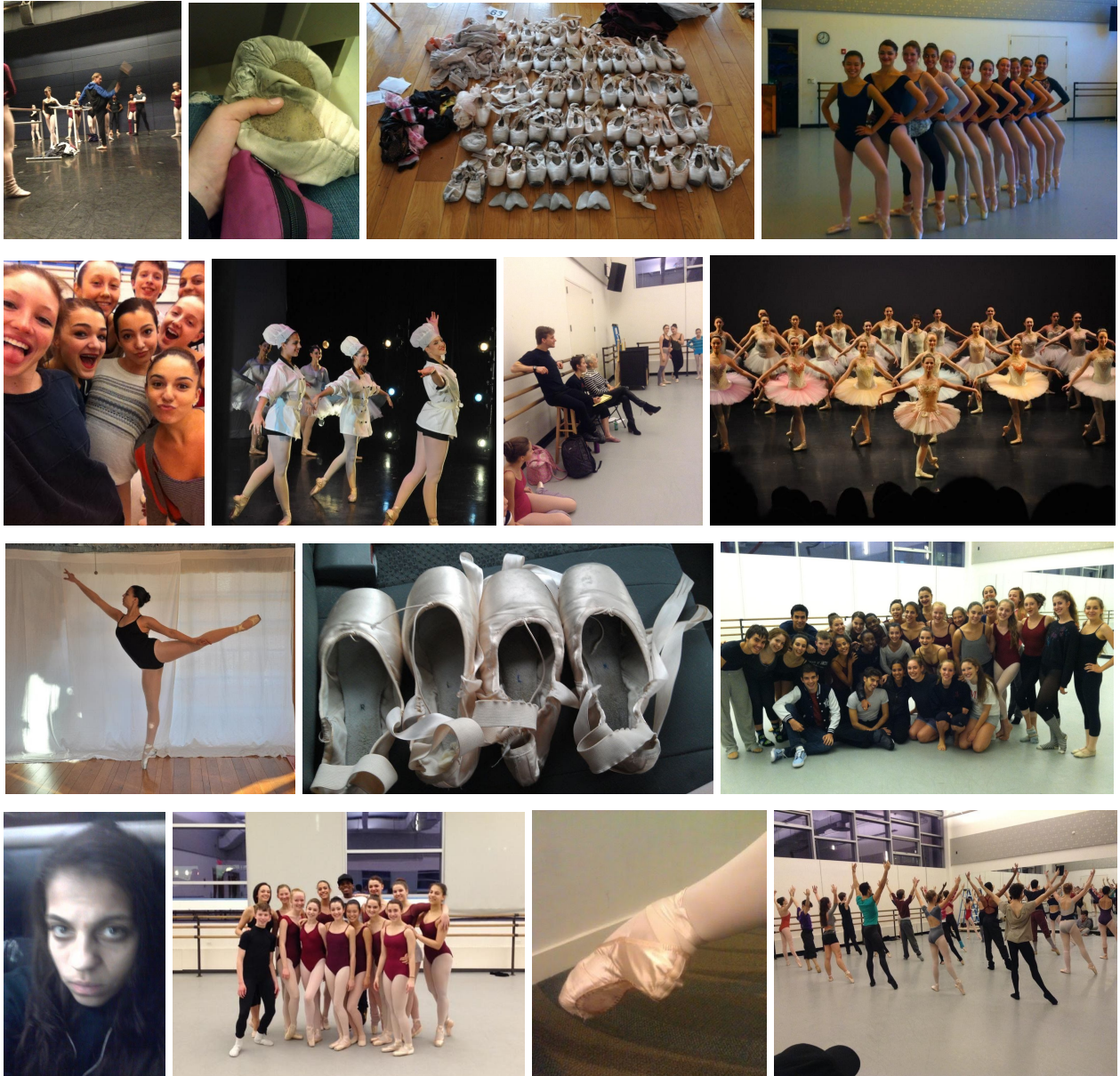
Sonya has a very weak sense of self.

Sonya would rather walk on the grass than the path.

SONYA'S PLAYLIST

HEAD IN THE CEILING FAN - TITLE FIGHT
 DIZZY ON THE COMEDOWN - TURNOVER
 DIZZY - TITLE FIGHT
 DELICATE DREAM - SHANA HALLIGAN
 CUT ME OPEN - BALANCE AND COMPOSURE
 K. - CIGARETTES AFTER SEX
 CEMETERY DRIVE - MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE
 AT THE BALLET - A CHORUS LINE OBC
 DREAM A LITTLE DREAM OF ME - DORIS DAY
 SPACE SONG - BEACH HOUSE
 MYTH - BEACH HOUSE
 GOROD - AQUARIUM
 SOUL MEETS BODY - DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE
 MY BODY IS A CAGE - ARCADE FIRE
 MOTHER STANDS FOR COMFORT - KATE BUSH
 BLOODY MOTHER FUCKING ASSHOLE - MARTHA WAINWRIGHT
 MOTION SICKNESS - PHOEBE BRIDGERS
 THE COME ON - JANIS IAN
 FADE INTO YOU - MAZZY STAR
 GUM - MOOSE BLOOD
 TODAY IS NOT REAL - THE FRONT BOTTOMS
 THE MOST BEAUTIFUL BITTER FRUIT - LA DISPUTE
 505 - ARCTIC MONKEYS
 MURDER YOUR MEMORY - TITLE FIGHT
 THERE IS A LIGHT THAT NEVER GOES OUT - THE SMITHS
WHAT I DID FOR LOVE - A CHORUS LINE OBC

MIRROR SHARDS



SAMIRA STERNBERG

BIO

Samira grew up in her sister's shadow. For the first thirteen years of her life, she wanted nothing more than to be just like Sonya.

But then Sonya's breakdown happened, and Samira learned to resent her older sister and all the care she required. Samira decided she wanted to be her own person, and that the only route to that was to put distance between herself and her family. She poured her heart into her studies and her friends.

But at night, she woke to the sound of her sister crying, and walking into their mother's room. She heard Zoya's gentle voice over Sonya's sobs, and she wished she was as fucked up as her sister. Then maybe her mother would use that voice with her, too.

But it didn't happen until Sonya left for college, and her mother started paying attention to her again. But at night Samira rolled over onto her side and looked across the room to see Zoya passed out in Sonya's bed, sometimes still clutching an empty wine bottle. Samira would take it, rinse it out, and put it in the recycling bin. Then she would get back in bed and fall asleep facing away from the place where Sonya used to sleep.

All this only fueled her resentment and she rejected her mother's attempts at closeness. She knew she was still living under Sonya's storm cloud, and she was angry. She made the lightning.

She met Roy when she was fourteen. Their friend group called themselves the Nerd Herd, because they all knew they were the smartest kids in their class. They partied together every weekend, and together they discovered how great drugs were. Samira liked that Roy was a nice boy, and she liked that he always listened to what she had to say. He never had much to say back, but she was okay with that. She also liked that he wasn't

really like the rest of their friends, even though she loved them. But he wasn't interested in trying molly, and she didn't like the crippling depression that lingered for days after. She preferred getting blackout drunk, and she knew Roy worried about her, but there was a lot she didn't want to think about, and a lot she wanted to forget. At graduation she walked across the stage with a hangover and a ton of concealer under her eyes.

She and Roy had sex for the first time the summer before their freshman year of college. It made her feel triumphant that she crossed the finish line that was losing your virginity before her sister, even though it turned out to only be by a couple of days. She was thin, petite, and pretty, and she knew she had that over her sister, too.

After a tearful goodbye party at her house, Samira left for NYU. She got to the city and immediately felt she'd finally found home.

She met Jose the second day of orientation, in a dorm room over PBRs and a spliff. It was the first time she ever tried tobacco. They went on a walk, and stayed out till the sun came up, strolling through the village and telling each other things they'd never told anyone else. They fell in love and he kissed her at 5am at the door to her dorm. She pulled away at first, because she'd told Roy they'd stay together. But he was still upstate and she figured she'd break up with him first thing in the morning. They ended up fucking that same night, and she realized that Roy was weak.

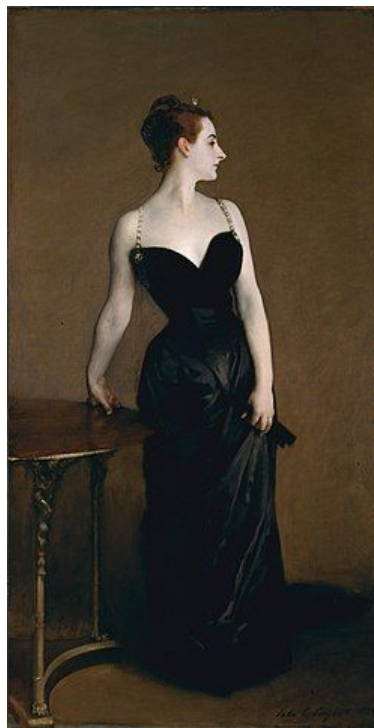
When she broke up with him hours later, Jose was still in bed with her. He held her hand. Roy cried and Samira couldn't believe she'd ever dated someone so effeminate. She stopped feeling guilty in a couple of days.

In the city, she finally felt free. She didn't feel like she was constantly underwater, longing for air. She felt like she was finding out who she was, with Jose by her side. She couldn't remember ever being this happy.

But her sister was clingy, and Samira learned to feel like Sonya was holding her back. She told Sonya that, no, she wasn't forgetting about her and she still loved her, but part of her still wished that she could forget.



My sister Sima, laughing, 2018



John Singer Sargent, *Portrait of Madame X*, cc. 1884

FACTS

Samira has a strong sense of self.

Samira is a very funny person.

Samira is so. freaking. cool.

Samira is glamorous.

Samira takes really good care of herself.

Samira is embarrassed about her acne.

Samira fits in the best out of herself, Levi, and Sonya with their extended family.

Samira likes to watch people, especially Sonya, eat the food she cooks.

Samira likes to bake things and smell them, and then throw them away.

Samira has black hair, just like Levi.

Samira can't live without coffee.

Samira used to say she wanted to be the editor-in-chief of Vogue.

Samira is extremely ambitious.

Samira doesn't like herself nearly as much as Sonya thinks she does.

Samira goes through a phase in high school where she wears a lot of makeup and watches lots of Youtube tutorials.

Samira once bullied another girl in middle school. She's still sort of proud of that.

Samira considers herself to be very informed.

Samira is not as good a dancer as Sonya, but she's a better actress.

Samira regrets doing dance instead of musical theater.

Samira feels more comfortable talking to her friends about her problems than she does her family.

Samira is very uncomfortable talking about sex.

Samira has her first kiss before Sonya does.

Samira has never had an orgasm. She's scared of it.

Samira always needs to be in a relationship.

Samira will fight to the death to protect her friends.

Samira feels closer to Levi than she does to Zoya.

Samira loves musical theater.

Samira doesn't like being influenced by other people.

Samira loves *The Catcher in the Rye*.

Samira is like a cactus.

SAMIRA'S PLAYLIST

THE REAL SLIM SHADY - EMINEM

KOOL THING - SONIC YOUTH

LOLITA - LANA DEL REY

TROUBLE - CAGE THE ELEPHANT

PLASTIC FLOWERS - THE FRONT BOTTOMS
WHITE RABBIT - JEFFERSON AIRPLANE
TRUTH HURTS - LIZZO
ALL THE GOOD GIRLS GO TO HELL - BILLIE EILISH
HERO - FAMILY OF THE YEAR
YOU SHOULD SEE ME IN A CROWN - BILLIE EILISH
VENICE BITCH - LANA DEL REY
KILLER QUEEN - QUEEN
WRITE IT ON YOUR HEART - BAD BAD HATS
PRIMADONNA - MARINA
FELL IN LOVE WITH A GIRL - THE WHITE STRIPES
GOLDEN BOY WITH MISS KITTIN - RIPPIN KITTIN
SEVEN NATION ARMY - THE WHITE STRIPES
MINDKILLA - GANG GANG DANCE
LONELY BOY - THE BLACK KEYS
BREAK STUFF - LIMP BIZKIT
SOFTCORE - THE NEIGHBOURHOOD
SAFER IN THE FOREST/LOVE SONG FOR POOR MICHIGAN - LA DISPUTE
RED LIPS - SKY FERREIRA
BRAIN STEW - GREEN DAY
I'M NOT OKAY (I PROMISE) - MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE
FAKE PLASTIC TREES - RADIOHEAD
TEEN AGE RIOT - SONIC YOUTH
WHAT I DID FOR LOVE - A CHORUS LINE OBC

LEVI STERNBERG

BIO

Levi was a quiet kid. He loved to read, and that's what he spent most of his time doing. He liked the Hardy Boys, because Nancy Drew was for girls. He loved his father, who was a judge, and his father loved him because Levi was the smartest of his brothers. His mother was severe. Actually, both his parents were, but at least his father liked answering his incessant questions.

Levi liked learning how things worked. He liked to understand things, totally and completely. But he didn't understand how his brain worked, and why it seemed to work so differently from his brothers'. He never asked his dad that question, though.

When he was 10, he fell off his bike and broke his jaw. That whole summer, he stayed in his room alone, his jaw wired shut. When his brothers hypothesize about him now, they agree that they can trace his illness (whatever it is) back to that day.

His mother played the piano, and she spent years trying to learn Mossourgsky's Pictures At An Exhibition. By the time she died, it still wasn't perfect. Sometimes Levi imagined that it was that piece that killed her, and not the cancer. The quest for perfection, and the explosion that happened when it turned out, time and time again, that the quest had no end. It was infinite. Levi thought about infinity a lot. He thought about the Golden Fleece a lot, too, but he knew it was just a story, that the fleece never existed. Once he realized that, he kind of forgot about it.

Levi knew his brother Dan was cooler than he was. In fact Levi felt often that he was the runt of the litter. His two younger brothers were twins who were never apart, and Dan had a group of friends, all of whom were as tall and handsome as he was. Levi always wanted to be a part of that gang, but Dan excluded him, over and over again. One day he got so annoyed at Levi that he and his friends dumped him in a garbage can in the school

hallway. After that, Levi retreated further into himself and spent even more time in his room with his books.

He got into Harvard, but even that wasn't his to be proud of, because Dan had gotten in two years before. He didn't know how he felt about that. He didn't know how he felt about anything.

After college, Levi went on a world trip, visiting 100 countries, which had been his goal. Sometimes he'd only stay in a country for a few hours before catching a train or plane to the next. He loved meeting people and getting to know them and their cultures. He even made it to Cuba in the middle of the eighties. He chronicled his adventures in a leather bound journal, which he lost when his backpack was stolen in Malaysia. He never really wrote things down after that. But he brought back a shot glass from every country he set foot in, even though he didn't really drink. They just seemed like the perfect souvenir.

The truth was, he felt confident when he wasn't in America. That's why when he met Zoya, he charmed her and swept her off her feet. It took him five years to propose, but he did, and they started a family.

The job Dan got him (because he couldn't seem to find one of his own) took them to Tashkent, Uzbekistan. He got fired because he took an unauthorized trip to Iran. He brought home another shot glass.

He spent two years depressed on the couch in Moscow, letting his relationship with Zoya rot. Eventually the family moved back to the States and he went to culinary school, but after he graduated he got fired from every restaurant job he ever managed to get. He chalked it up to ageism.

Levi never really knew how to deal with his daughters. He felt like he was always fucking up, but he didn't know how to change, even though as his kids got older they told him exactly how. But he still couldn't.

When Sonya had her breakdown, he withdrew from everyone. He made a hobby of baking sourdough bread and eventually started selling it. He never talked to his kids that much, except to tell them to practice their instruments, but when Sonya fell apart, he stayed away. He knew how miserable she was, but that was only in his periphery. He figured her therapist would sort it out.

Samira was easier. She knew how to be jovial, and she knew how to talk about things other than her feelings. She also didn't feel awkward not talking, which Levi liked. He felt they could exist on the same plane, which was something he never felt with Sonya.



My father, Mark, the world traveler, cc. 1997

FACTS

Levi would never admit it, but he is a sentimental man. He likes to hold onto things from the past; old newspapers, magazines, VHS tapes.

Levi likes fast food even though he is a professional cook.

Levi loves people.

He is a paradox; he loves spending time alone but there is a piece of him that is very lonely. His heart overflows when he gets to interact with interesting people.

Levi doesn't like to think or talk about the past.

Levi is a traveler and a wanderer; emotionally and literally. He still hasn't found his way.

Levi goes through phases of obsession.

Levi cannot keep a room clean worth a damn. And he also doesn't seem to care. He has his own bordering-on-psychotic method of organization.

When Levi and Zoya divorced, he started dating other women almost instantly.

Levi has some kind of obsession with Russia, especially in the Soviet era.

Levi is Jewish.

Levi is the black sheep of the family.

Levi was the first and only one in his family to get divorced.

One time a kid in middle school called him a kike in the locker room, and he punched him in the face. The only time he's ever been in a fight.

Levi's mother was staunchly against drugs and marijuana.

When Levi is baking, he often burns his arms on the hot oven. He likes it. Sometimes he does it on purpose. He thinks the scars make him a real baker, and he wants everyone to know.

Levi only likes his coffee black.

Levi likes snapdragons because they grew in his mother's garden.

Levi really likes to make lists.

Levi's alarm clock is from the 80s.

Levi's car was once hit by a train.

Levi loves his gold Ford Escort, which the girls don't like so much because it's a two-door.

Levi loves musical theater; something he passed down to his children.

Levi always wears the same outfit: Too-big chefs' pants, a t-shirt tucked in, and black non-slip shoes.

Levi is often charmed by small animals.

LEVI'S PLAYLIST

SURREY WITH THE FRINGE ON TOP - OKLAHOMA OBC

CHEESEBURGER IN PARADISE - JIMMY BUFFETT

COMFORTABLY NUMB - PINK FLOYD

RIVER - LEON BRIDGES

BE OK - INGRID MICHAELSON

WHEN YOU WERE YOUNG - THE KILLERS

ONE WAY TRIGGER - THE STROKES
THE SOUND OF SILENCE - SIMON AND GARFUNKEL
NUMB - LINKIN PARK
AMERICAN PIE - DON MCLEAN
I'M SO BORED WITH THE USA - THE CLASH
LENINGRAD - BILLY JOEL
TO EVERYONE IN ALL THE WORLD - RAFFI
LEAVING ON A JET PLANE - PETER PAUL AND MARY
THERE'S NO CURE LIKE TRAVEL - ANYTHING GOES OBC
JAPAN - KERI NOBLE
THE ROAD TO MALAYSIA - ROBERT ARTHUR
BACK TO BALI - DOGS
PEOPLE WILL SAY WE'RE IN LOVE - OKLAHOMA OBC
WHAT BAKING CAN DO - WAITRESS OBC
EMPTY CHAIRS AT EMPTY TABLES - LES MISERABLES OBC
IF I WERE A RICH MAN - FIDDLER ON THE ROOF OBC
TRADITION - FIDDLER ON THE ROOF OBC
ON THE STREET WHERE YOU LIVE - MY FAIR LADY OBC
WHAT I DID FOR LOVE - A CHORUS LINE OBC

ZOYA STERNBERG**BIO**

Zoya grew up in the sixties and seventies in St. Petersburg. She lived in a tiny Soviet one-bedroom apartment with her parents. She'd sometimes wake up in the middle of the night to the sound of them fucking. They never knew she was awake. She closed her eyes and tried to go somewhere else.

What she heard was everything she grew up knowing about sex. Sex was masochistic, sex was painful. You were supposed to be scared while you were fucking. Sometimes you were supposed to cry and ask him to stop, even though you knew he wouldn't. But she thought that was the good part. Her mother liked it.

As a kid, what she wanted most in the world was to go to the Vaganova Academy and become a ballerina. She passed the Academy every day on her walk home from school. It was out of the way, but she liked watching those girls go in and out. She saw their bodies and she thought they were angels. Sometimes she'd manage to look in a window and see them in class, and she'd just watch. She longed to be inside. She longed to be in heaven.

When she got home every day, she'd watch tapes of the Kirov performing story ballets and try to memorize the steps. She'd dance in the living room. Sometimes her father would watch and clap for her, like she was on stage. If her mother came into the room, Zoya would stop before she saw. Raisa had already told her too many times that they couldn't afford it, and even if they could, she'd never get in. That broke Zoya's heart every time. The only place she had enough privacy to cry was the little closet off the hall that housed the toilet. Her mother had survived the Siege of Leningrad, and didn't like it when her daughter cried.

In the summers, the family would go to their *datcha* in Ukraine. Raisa would stay home and gossip with her sisters, and Misha would take Zoya to the beach. He had a tattoo of a flower on his ankle. The Black Sea wasn't actually black.

She would ride out on her father's back, half a mile or more. Zoya loved her father because he was strong, and because she knew he'd protect her. She also knew her father was gentle, and he didn't actually want to hurt her mother. What she didn't understand was why he did. Raisa had once accused Misha of cheating and in the screaming match that ensued, she had held up a knife and threatened to chop off his dick. Zoya thought maybe that had something to do with it.

When she got her period, the only reason Zoya didn't assume she was dying was that her friends had told her what it meant. When it happened for the first time, she didn't even tell her mother. She just stuffed her underwear with cotton balls wrapped in toilet paper until it was over.

After college, Zoya taught English and guided tours of the city. Good English was a commodity. She liked that it made her valuable. She met Levi through one of these tours; he was a guide, too. There was attraction immediately. He was charming, and handsome enough. Plus he was American, which her mother hated, and Jewish, which her mother hated even more because she thought it meant he was low-class. After a series of serendipitous meetings, and more than a few dates, she moved to America with Levi. She finally stopped thinking about ballet. But he didn't know she was an alcoholic.

It was clear to Zoya that Levi had flaws, but she was willing to overlook them. It didn't matter to her that he stayed at Columbia grad school for six years and never finished his dissertation, or even that his mother sent her to the library to do his research. They got married, but, too soon after, it went sour. She stayed with him though, until four years after Samira was born.

Levi was greedy in the divorce, and Zoya moved to a trailer park, which was embarrassing. Eventually, though, she had enough money to get a nice apartment, which was better. Until Sonya's breakdown.

Zoya ached for her daughter, but sometimes caring for her was too much. So she started drinking again. Ballet and the loss of it were her daughter's now, and she didn't like the memories that sprang up. She dreamed of tigers.



Felix Vallotton, *The River Neva, Light Mist* cc. 1913



My mother, Irina (left), and a friend, cc. 1977,
St. Petersburg, Russia

FACTS

Zoya is a warrior.

Zoya is SO beautiful. She ages well, too.

Zoya is judgmental.

Zoya is often the smartest person in the room.

Zoya likes feng shui.

Zoya is a Jungian psychoanalyst.

Zoya has a big imagination.

It is very hard for Zoya to give attention to things she doesn't care about.

Zoya was crushed by the death of her father.

She didn't orgasm until she was in her mid-20s.

Zoya has a deep nostalgia for Imperial Russia.

Starting at around age 10, Zoya starts to encourage her daughters to masturbate so that they "know what they like".

Zoya reminds Sonya of a rose set on fire.

Zoya's daughters make fun of her for her tacky taste in clothes and jewelry.

After the divorce, Zoya didn't date for almost a decade.

Zoya has very particular taste in men. And everything.

Zoya is an alcoholic.

Zoya often struggles with money.

Sometimes she is disgusted by her daughter's body. She hates herself for it.

Zoya often gets very lonely when her kids are at their father's house.

Zoya pushes through things. She pushes through pain, hardship, and the very bottom.

When Sonya has an elementary school art assignment to make a model of her hero, she chooses Zoya.

It's really hard to impress Zoya with gifts.

Zoya works on Fifth Avenue.

Zoya is definitely a cat rather than a dog.

Zoya is a mystery to most people.

Zoya often calls herself fat in front of her children. She's not fat.

ZOYA'S PLAYLIST

GRENADE - BRUNO MARS

GOROD - AQUARIUM

I ONLY WANT TO SAY - ANDREW LLOYD WEBBER

GOD IS A WOMAN - ARIANA GRANDE

MONEY - PINK FLOYD

SWEET DREAMS (ARE MADE OF THIS) - EURYTHMICS

AQUARIUS (LET THE SUNSHINE IN) - THE 5TH DIMENSION

HEY JUDE - THE BEATLES

HOTEL CALIFORNIA - THE EAGLES

HOUSE OF THE RISING SUN - THE ANIMALS

HOPE IS A DANGEROUS THING (...) - LANA DEL REY

HERE WITH ME - DIDO

WHITE FLAG -DIDO
 THE LAST UNICORN - AMERICA
 DARK PARADISE - LANA DEL REY
 THANKS FR TH MMRS - FALL OUT BOY
 STUNNER - MILKY CHANCE
 HOLDING OUT FOR A HERO - BONNIE TYLER
WHAT I DID FOR LOVE - A CHORUS LINE OBC

* * *

Kiss today goodbye
 The sweetness and the sorrow
 Wish me luck, the same to you
 But I can't regret
 What I did for love.

Look, my eyes are dry
 The gift was ours to borrow
 It's as if we always knew
 And I won't forget what I did for love.

Gone
 Love is never gone
 As we travel on
 Love's what we'll remember.

Kiss today goodbye
 And point me toward tomorrow
 We did what we had to do
 Won't forget, can't regret
 What I did for love.

-What I Did For Love, from A Chorus Line

FRAGMENTS



CODA



Serenade, Manhattan Youth Ballet, June 2013

To me, this image epitomizes the bittersweet pining and sorrow that Sonya constantly feels. This is the encapsulation of everything she wishes she didn't lose.

These people were my friends. Once, I lived among the angels. It's palpable when I look at this picture. It's mine, and it's hers.

"I will be *among*, in a way I haven't been before. It's a new thing to be among: all my life I'd thought my only choice was to be extraordinary, as if to compensate for some lack. There is freedom in failure; I know that - how could I think otherwise after living with the body's collective breakdown? Maybe it's art enough to try to build a life against the breakdown. Maybe that's enough."

-Paul Lisicky, from *Later: My Life at the Edge of the World*

PRE-PROFESSIONAL EPISODE 1:
SUPERNOVA, STELLAR CORPSE

Written by

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2013. INT. MANHATTAN ACADEMY OF BALLET THEATER - NIGHT

TEASER:

A moment of silence in the black box theater, and...

The first chords of TCHAIKOVSKY'S SERENADE FOR STRINGS IN C MAJOR burst into being at fortissimo.

According to GEORGE BALANCHINE'S CHOREOGRAPHY, the curtain opens on TEENAGE FEMALE BALLET DANCERS on stage in formation, all wearing the classic BLUE TULLE COSTUMES. They stand with their hands up, as if shielding their faces from the moonlight.

The movement begins against an ethereal blue backdrop. Only their arms move, all together, slowly, the very picture of serenity, femininity, and sublime beauty.

Perfectly in sync, their hands come to rest by their brows.

A motionless moment, and their feet turn from parallel to first position. Their heads are bowed, epitomizing the demure old-world feminine.

In fifth position, they raise their heads and look towards the ceiling, opening their arms and chests to the divine. It's an image reminiscent of crucifixion.

Here, we begin a series of INTERCUTS (Tchaikovsky heard throughout) with a BLUE ROOM that matches the background of the stage, but like a place in a dream or fantasy. The next, more sprightly phrase of the music begins, and right after the battement:

- BLUE ROOM: C.U. on SMALL STRIPS OF BLUE TULLE - same as the dancers' costumes - as they float languidly from the top of the frame and past the bottom, disappearing.

- SERENADE: The Dancers jump and twirl into the first formation change.

- BLUE ROOM: The STRIPS float, and we start to hear the snip...snip...snip... OF SCISSORS working over the music.

- SERENADE: In swirls of blue tulle, the Dancers sway and float like angels.

- BLUE ROOM: The strips fall into a pile on a studio-like floor, but we still don't see where they're coming from.

- SERENADE: The girls rise and fall, onto pointe, off of pointe, leaning, swaying, like they're being pulled by some invisible force.

- BLUE ROOM: A drop of BLOOD falls onto the pile in slow motion and we watch as it splashes, sending little droplets flying.
- SERENADE: The Dancers run to a corner of the stage, then move four at a time into a new formation, their bodies creating perfect geometrical shapes and patterns.
- BLUE ROOM: INSERT; Female HANDS and ARMS, the hands cutting strips of the TULLE from a copy of the COSTUME the dancers are wearing on stage. The pieces fall as she cuts them off.
- SERENADE: The formation changes again and the Dancers link their waify arms at the elbow.
- BLUE ROOM: The girl's hands continue to snip away at the costume, less and less of it remaining intact.
- SERENADE: Through the formations, a SOLOIST leaps onto the stage in a series of grand jetes.
- BLUE ROOM: We hover over SONYA, 15, long brown hair, 5'7 or so. She cuts the costume, looking down at it, thus we can't see her face.
- SERENADE: The other Dancers go into a reprise of the soloist's leaps following one another around the stage.
- BLUE ROOM: The last snip - the TAG from the costume. It says "L". Sonya cuts it in half and lets both halves fall into the pile with the rest of the dismembered garment. Bodies in a mass grave.
- SERENADE: A climactic moment - all of the themes seen previously return in an overwhelming frenzy.
- BLUE ROOM: As Sonya looks upward to the hovering CAMERA, the opening of Tchaikovsky's piece returns in an accosting recapitulation. The SCISSORS fall from her hand and clatter to the floor beside the pile of tulle strips. She closes her eyes.

Cut to black, beat.

A blank MIRROR fills the frame, shatters, and explodes.

TITLE: PRE-PROFESSIONAL.

2012. INT./EXT. LEVI'S CAR - OUTSIDE J&V DANCE STUDIO - DAY

The car is parked in front of a tiny, dingy small-town DANCE STUDIO covered in flaking red paint. SONYA, 14, sits in the back seat.

LEVI, 52, black hair starting to grey, barely 5'6, is behind the wheel. ZOYA, 48, striking and harsh, is in the passenger seat.

They all sit stiffly, Sonya's shoulders approaching her ears. She frantically twists a strand of hair around her finger. Her other hand digs its nails into her ribs.

Levi's breathing is shallow and Zoya clasps her hands together tightly.

Levi cuts the engine and we are thrown into silence.

Beat.

LEVI

Shall we?

None of them move. Sonya sits pale-faced and barely breathing.

Zoya turns to look at her and speaks in an accent that sounds like if a Russian learned English from a Brit.

ZOYA

Let's just maybe go already.

Sonya lets out a little whine.

LEVI

Don't whine.

SONYA

Fine, come on.

They move to get out of the car. Levi walks around it to meet Zoya and Sonya at the door to the building.

Sonya tries the door. It's locked; she knocks. Silence on the other side.

Sonya grabs Zoya's hand. Zoya gives it a squeeze. Levi spots this, resentful. He looks back at the door.

Then - FOOTSTEPS. They approach, grow louder. They hear the lock CLICK.

INT. DANCE STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Sonya, Zoya, and Levi sit in a narrow, windowless entranceway lined with cheap folding chairs. Posters of dancers in precarious-looking poses are haphazardly taped to the walls. Sonya looks at them one at a time. There's a little door with a window into a littler studio.

Sonya looks at the myriad TROPHIES from dance competitions past that clutter the area.

FLASH: We see one of them smash on the floor.

Across from Sonya, Levi, and Zoya sit VIRGINIA, 60s, severe on first glance, small, dancerly body, and her husband JOSEPH, 60s, kindly face.

Joseph smiles at Sonya, who sits with her arms crossed. She timidly turns the corners of her mouth upwards at him.

Zoya gives Sonya a nudge. Sonya looks up at Virginia and Joseph, who look at her, waiting.

SONYA (CONT'D)

I have to tell you something.

VIRGINIA

We figured.

She looks at Sonya, who drops her gaze to the floor - can't hold it. We hear her breathing, loud in her ears.

Joseph clocks her discomfort. He speaks gently.

JOSEPH

Go ahead.

She looks up at him, on the brink of tears. This look she does not let go of.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

It's alright.

Sonya tries to gather herself, but her lip starts to tremble. She looks like she's REALLY about to cry, but -

She stops herself. She looks back and forth between the eyes of Virginia and Joseph. There is a new determination there, and an apology.

SONYA

(slowly)

I think...I have to leave.

Neither Joseph nor Virginia look surprised. Virginia nods. Joseph gives Sonya a reassuring look, though the corners of his mouth are turned downwards. He nods too. Sonya glances at her parents, shocked at V+J's reactions. They look back at her with similar bewilderment.

JOSEPH

We understand. We know it's...what you want. We guessed it as soon as you left for Pennsylvania...

SONYA

(eyes wide)

Oh.

Silence for a beat.

VIRGINIA

So.

She claps her hands together in front of her.

VIRGINIA (CONT'D)

What is your plan?

Sonya looks to her parents. They gesture, "Go ahead."

SONYA

Well I...I just thought I'd...maybe...NPSB? I don't really know what's best...

She glances at her parents again, then back at V+J.

SONYA (CONT'D)

I mean...what do you think?

Zoya and Levi nod.

ZOYA

(to Virginia)

We thought we could ask you...you must have some good advice.

Virginia and Joseph exchange a look.

VIRGINIA

Well, if you really want to do this, you ought to do it right.

JOSEPH

Give yourself the best chance -

VIRGINIA

Yes. These local ballet schools aren't going to cut it. Every day, you need to drill, you need to train.

JOSEPH

She knows.

VIRGINIA

I do.

They both sit and look at Sonya. Bemused, she looks at her parents. Virginia addresses Levi.

VIRGINIA (CONT'D)

(warning tone)

Levi, music is going to have to take a back seat this year.

LEVI

Hmph.

Everyone suppresses an eye-roll. Levi crosses his arms.

VIRGINIA

Here's my advice: get her into the city, at least a few days a week. Audition for a few schools, see where you get in, and take the train down.

Joseph nods.

JOSEPH

Yes. We know you...we know you can handle it. I know you love it. I told you Balanchine would have liked you, remember?

Sonya nods.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

You said you couldn't imagine a life without dance.

He looks at her with a paternal love.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

That's valuable. Hold onto it.

Sonya nods again, tries to smile, fails.

VIRGINIA

And if it doesn't work out, just do it because you love it.

A look of resentment crosses Sonya's face, but she keeps nodding. She looks at the floor. Tears gather in her eyes again.

SONYA

Thank you.

Virginia reaches out and takes Sonya's hand.

VIRGINIA

We'll miss you.

SONYA

(sincerely)

Me too.

She flicks away her tears.

2002. INT. SONYA'S ROOM - DAY

Grey outside. Sonya, 4, sits on the edge of her bed hugging a pillow. Blue walls, white accents, pictures of Disney princesses.

2017. INT. COLLEGE CLASSROOM - DAY

Sonya, 19, now looking heavier, sits in class, picking at her scalp. She brings her hand away and a PIECE OF SKIN has come off. Her fingertip is bloody.

INT. BALLET STUDIO - NIGHT

FANTASY:

Sonya, 14, stands in the middle of an MAB studio. Bright lights. She's dressed in her BALLET UNIFORM, hair in a bun, pointe shoes, burgundy leotard.

Beat as Sonya approaches the MIRROR.

She looks at her reflection.

The lights turn off.

2002. INT./EXT. ZOYA'S CAR - DAY

Sonya, 4, and SAMIRA, 2, very cute, black hair in a bowl cut to match her round cheeks, sit in the back seat as Zoya pulls up to a MONTESSORI SCHOOL - a little blue house. Little Sonya looks nauseated.

Zoya, 38, gets out and walks around the car to let Samira out of her car seat.

She lifts her, holds her with one arm as she starts to unbuckle Sonya's seatbelt. Sonya shakes her head, tries to resist.

ZOYA
(in Russian)
Come on, Sony, it's time to go.

SONYA
(in Russian)
Mom, I don't want to go. I'm scared.

ZOYA
(in Russian)
Don't be scared.

She starts to unbuckle Sonya, who starts to cry.

SONYA
(in Russian)
Mom, no! I don't wanna go, I don't wanna go!

ZOYA
(in Russian)
Sony, stop. Stop crying! It's okay, Sony! You'll be okay.

Zoya stands Samira up on the ground, trying to keep a grasp on her hand while she deals with Sonya.

She near-drags Sonya, kicking and screaming, out of the car.

Sonya gags and vomits on the ground.

ZOYA (CONT'D)
(in Russian)
Sonya, Come on! Jesus!

Sonya continues to bawl. Zoya, with difficulty, wrangles her girls and heads into the school.

INT./EXT. ZOYA'S CAR - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Zoya collapses back into her car. She takes a deep breath, mutters:

ZOYA
Jesus fuck.

...and drives away.

INT. MONTESSORI SCHOOL STAIR - MINUTES LATER

Sonya walks up the stairs in a line of other STUDENTS. They stairs are steep; she stumbles and starts to crawl up them. Behind her, and older boy, BRENDAN, 6, pipes up.

BRENDAN

You have to stand up.

Sonya looks at him, wary of him.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)

Get up, stupid.

Sonya stands up and heads up the rest of the stairs, upright. Brendan walks beside her, scoffing.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)

I saw you throw up before. Why do you talk weird?

SONYA

(Russian accent)

I don't talk weird.

BRENDAN

Yeah, you do.

Sonya says nothing.

INT. MONTESSORI SCHOOL ROOM - LATER

Interactive EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES, such as unit cubes, letters, etc. Line the walls. Children are busy learning and playing, but we don't see Sonya.

In the corner of the room is a LOFT with a ladder, blankets, pillows, books.

We find Sonya here - burrowed in a nest of blankets and pillows, shaking and hiding.

INT. L+Z'S ROOM - EVENING

Sonya, Samira, and Levi lie in bed, the girls on either side of him. Samira is curled under his right arm looking at the pages. Levi reads to them from Tom Sawyer.

LEVI

"...in order to make a man or a boy
covet a thing, it is only necessary
to make that thing..."

Sonya lies on her stomach to the left of Levi, her head
turned away from him. There's a WINDOW above her head, and
she plays with the cord that controls the shades, twisting it
around her finger.

It makes a little noise and Levi stops reading.

LEVI (CONT'D)

Sonya, are you listening?

SONYA

Uh-huh.

LEVI

Okay, what does the word "covet"
mean?

SONYA

I don't know.

LEVI

Fine.

He reads the sentence again.

LEVI (CONT'D)

Now do you know?

Sonya is silent. Levi's brow furrows in understated anger.

LEVI (CONT'D)

Go to your room. Come back when you
know what it means.

Sonya gets out of the bed. As she's walking to the door, we
see her youth and tiny body in sharp relief. She grumbles:

SONYA

Why?

LEVI

Because you want to be smarter. Go.

Sonya looks pleadingly at him, but he doesn't budge. She
turns and ambles out, her head hanging.

2012. INT. JOHNSON BALLET - DAY

Zoya, 48, stands by Sonya's, 14, side as she unpacks her FLOWERED DUFFEL BAG and gets ready on the floor. DANCERS surround them wearing WHITE LEOTARDS.

Zoya's POV: Zoya looks around at the waifs, ribs visible between their almost-non-existent breasts. She looks at her daughter, eyes her generous A-cups and absence of visible chest ribs. A look of disgust crosses her face. And then, she can't help herself:

ZOYA
(in Russian)
Listen.

SONYA
What? Let me concentrate.

ZOYA
Look, if you don't get in here,
we'll keep trying, okay? I mean
Sony, these girls look -

Sonya snaps her head around to look at her mother, suddenly angry.

SONYA
What, better than me?

Zoya stops.

ZOYA
No...I don't know how they dance,
but you must see that they are...

Sonya inhales sharply, eyes closed.

SONYA
Mom. Please stop. I can't handle
this right now. Can you just let me
audition? God...

Zoya falls silent, pursing her lips. Her face hardens.

She straightens and walks across the room, sits in one of the chairs arranged there, facing away from Sonya. She takes out her phone and starts thumbing through it, Sonya watching her.

Sonya looks back down at her dance bag, digs through it, stops, looks back at her mother.

She calls out to Zoya.

SONYA (CONT'D)

Mom!

Zoya looks up from her phone, looks at Sonya. She makes a gesture like, "What?!"

SONYA (CONT'D)

Come here, will you?

After a beat, Zoya gets up and walks back over to her daughter. She clasps her hands in front of her and stands by Sonya's side, looking straight ahead.

SONYA (CONT'D)

Mom?

Zoya looks down at her icily.

ZOYA

(in Russian)

What?

Sonya mumbles.

SONYA

Can you hug me?

Beat.

ZOYA

Yes.

She crouches down and they hug. Sonya holds on tight and closes her eyes. Zoya pulls away first.

ZOYA (CONT'D)

(in Russian)

Come on already.

Sonya looks away. She readies herself for the audition, looking around at the others, already defeated.

1973. EXT. VAGANOVA ACADEMY, ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA - DAY

Zoya, 9, walks home in her SCHOOL UNIFORM: a short brown dress with a white apron. As she passes the Academy she stops and gazes up at it.

A few TEENAGE DANCERS walk past her into the building. As the door closes behind them, she tries to peek in.

INT. ST. PETERSBURG APT - DAY

Zoya sits in front of a tiny TV cc. 1960s, gazing unblinkingly at a grainy image of the KIROV BALLET'S SWAN LAKE; the Dance of the Little Swans.

She stands up and tries to imitate the movements.

The dance ends and she rewinds the tape to the beginning and tries again to learn it. She rewinds again.

2012. INT. L+Z'S ROOM - DAY

Zoya, 48, sits on the bed, gazing at a FRAMED PICTURE on the bedside table - a black and white photo of herself at 9 beaming over her shoulder at the camera, arms out to the side, in front of the little soviet TV, playing the Dance of the Little Swans.

Her gaze moves to another PICTURE, one of Sonya on stage in a tutu and pointe shoes. She looks down at her knees.

1973. INT. ST. PETERSBURG APT - LATE AT NIGHT

Zoya, 9, lies in bed. Sounds of SEX come from her parents' bed beside her. She pretends to be asleep.

RAISA (O.S.)
(in Russian, whispered)
Please...hit me...ah...ah...AH!

Zoya hears the grunts of her father, her mother letting out a whimper of pain.

Zoya wraps a pillow around her head. She closes her eyes, tension in her brow.

2012. INT. JOHNSON BALLET STUDIO 1 - HALF AN HOUR LATER

Sonya, 14, stands at the BARRE and stretches her back, which is impressively flexible. It's obvious - everything else is right, but her body is wrong.

The OTHER DANCERS talk to each other. They titter behind their hands, looking at Sonya. She looks self-consciously down at the floor.

A man, MR. JOHNSON, bald, dressed in black, middle age, enters and everyone goes quiet.

JOHNSON

We begin.

C.U. on Sonya's face, she's sweating.

HARD CUT TO:

2013. INT. A ROOM - NIGHT

We see Sonya's, 15, face - long hair a mess, shining with tears. She is lying on the floor of a room, sobbing in anguish. Pools of red and black PAINT are on either side of her, getting in her hair, on her face.

Cut to black.

2020. INT. COLLEGE BALLET STUDIO - DAY

Sonya, 22, stands at a barre in ballet slippers, leggings, and a t-shirt. She's gained 80-ish pounds since we've seen her last.

Other DANCERS surround her, chatting, stretching, being the way dancers are.

She avoids looking anyone in the eye.

She looks in the MIRROR, her reflection fatter than reality as always. She runs her hands down her body, feeling around for something to adjust.

She eyes the body parts of other people...a thigh, a flat stomach, the nape of a neck, an upper arm.

She walks quickly to a back corner of the room and along the wall, watching her reflection fluctuate with the curves of the mirror. She stops at the spot where she looks the thinnest.

Absorbed in her REFLECTION, she walks forward to a barre within the "good" strip of mirror. She finds a place in front of another DANCER, petite but not anorexic-looking, blocking her view.

The girl rolls her eyes. She looks over at others near her. They catch her eye, look at Sonya, and giggle derisively.

Sonya doesn't turn, doesn't notice. She is hypnotized by her reflection. Eyes fixed on her body, she does the same back stretch as in the Johnson audition.

She stands in FIRST POSITION, does some little PORT DU BRAS.

She puts her arm out to second.

FLASH: We're in another studio, but we only see Sonya's (much smaller) arm. A weathered hand laden with rings slaps her elbow, we hear the word "UP!" In the distance. A red mark appears at the site of the slap.

Sonya snaps back to reality. No one is by her side, no one has touched her. She looks at her arm, it looks normal. She turns towards the barre, puts her leg up on it. She stretches, body flat against her leg, hiding her face.

2012. INT. JOHNSON BALLET STAIRS - AFTER AUDITION

Zoya, 48, leads a hyperventilating Sonya, 14, down a set of stairs.

Before they can get down the flight, Sonya collapses on the stairs, sobbing. Zoya sits down next to her and takes her by the shoulders.

ZOYA

Look at me - look at me! Don't do
this here. Stop, NOW.

Sonya keeps crying, shaking her head. Zoya shakes her, but she doesn't stop crying.

ZOYA (CONT'D)

Stop! People will hear!

SONYA

I DON'T CARE! SHUT UP! SHUT UP!!!!

Zoya shakes her harder.

SONYA (CONT'D)

STOP!!

Zoya stops shaking her but grips her shoulders hard.

ZOYA

LOOK AT ME! LOOK HOW CRAZY YOU
ALLOW YOURSELF TO GET!

She slaps her. Sonya can't stop sobbing.

SONYA

HOW CAN YOU SAY THAT TO ME? WHY
WOULD YOU DO THAT?!

SONYA'S POV: Her mother's face, talking, or shouting. A loud buzzing suddenly accosts her (and us), like feedback on a bad sound system, louder and louder. She clasps her hands over her ears and pulls her knees up to her chest.

She screams, but we can't hear it.

JUMP CUT TO:

Suddenly she's in Zoya's embrace. Sonya struggles against her mother's arms to no avail.

Finally she stops struggling. Her mother holds her, whispering, squeezing. Sonya surrenders control, goes limp in Zoya's arms. The tears stream silently.

Zoya gently rocks Sonya as they sit alone on the stairs. Zoya looks around a a loss, holding her daughter.

2020. INT. COLLEGE DANCE STUDIO - EVENING

Sonya, 22, stands at a barre, POINTE SHOES on. The lights are off, but the floor-to-ceiling windows provide enough purple evening light to see by.

Sonya looks in the mirror. Disgust.

She surveys her arms, legs, stomach, face.

FLASH as she looks in the mirror: Her reflection, 80 pounds lighter, in tights, pointe shoes, and leotard.

She brings her hands up to her cheeks. She digs her nails into her them, hard. Her entire body shakes from the strain of gripping her skin. She holds it for a few seconds, then lets go. We see ANGRY RED MARKS on her cheeks - some look like they might bleed. She lets out her breath slowly, more relaxed.

She turns towards the barre, away from her reflection.

She takes a breath, and stands up on her new pointe shoes. She rolls through one foot, the other foot. Stands on pointe, bends her knees to get over her pointe shoe box, straightens them. We can still see the beauty she used to have in the lines of her legs and feet.

She turns around, looks over her shoulder into the mirror.

2013. INT. SONYA'S ROOM - DAY

Grey outside. Sonya, 15, sits on the edge of her bed hugging a pillow. Walls: jet black and blood red, plastered with pictures of band members.

She moves her arm and we see the pillow is stained with BLOOD.

2012. INT. MAB - DAY

Sonya, 14, walks to a SEATING AREA outside STUDIO 1, Levi, 52, behind her. The GIRLS about to take class look at her; we don't know her, who does she think she is? They all stretch and foam roll and talk shit.

There are BOYS; male dancers. Fascinated and wistful, Sonya looks at them.

She tears her eyes away to put on her TECHNIQUE SHOES. When she looks up she sees that the dancers are making their way into the studio.

She glances at Levi. He tries to nod encouragingly, but it doesn't look right, and it doesn't help.

Sonya gets up off the floor and adjusts her LEOTARD, rolling up the leg holes (this is something ballet dancers do to make their legs look longer). She picks up her dance bag and walks it over to Levi. He takes it, puts it on the floor at his feet. He's holding a battered DANIEL SILVA NOVEL.

She turns her back and goes into the studio.

INT. MAB STUDIO 1 - CONTINUOUS

Sonya stretches at the barre, playing the flexibility card.

She attracts glances; someone eyes her movement resentfully, and two others look her body up and down and exchange a judgy glance.

INT. OUTSIDE STUDIO - SIMULTANEOUS

Levi stands by the door to the studio, looks through the glass at Sonya in her audition, sees focus. He goes back to his book.

INT. MAB STUDIO 1 - CONTINUOUS

MONTAGE:

- Ballet class: tendus, port du bras, frappes, developpes, etc.

- An auditioner eyes Sonya.

- The class moves to centre; tendus, adagio, turn combination, jump combination.

- We see that Sonya is a good dancer...but her body is simply WRONG. The proportions aren't bad, she's got long legs and good feet, she's not fat - she's just...larger.

END MONTAGE.

The AUDITIONER approaches her and inspects her port du bras.

TEACHER

Let's make sure that arm...

She takes Sonya's arm lightly and adjusts its shape.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

...is nice and strong at the elbow.
That's it. Good.

She nods and gives Sonya an approving look. Sonya tries to avoid beaming with pride. Some of the other girls throw her vengeful looks; WE'RE not getting that kind of attention...

2013. INT. SONYA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Sonya, 15, sits on her bed with a pile of DESTROYED POINTE SHOES beside her. There's a smaller pile of intact ones on her other side.

She reaches over to the intact pile and picks up a particularly beat-up PAIR.

FLASH: those shoes, clean and pretty, clutched to her much smaller chest. A squeal (O.S.)

Back in her room she holds the shoes tenderly, sits for a moment with them in her lap.

She stands up, goes to the CLOSET, and buries them in sweaters on the top shelf.

2012. EXT. OUTSIDE MAB - MINUTES LATER

Sonya, 14, and Levi, 52, stand on the sidewalk. Levi looks at her.

LEVI

Do you still wanna go to the next one?

Sonya contemplates for a moment.

SONYA

I don't know...I'm tired and I got in here, so...maybe we don't have to?

LEVI

Home?

A little smile crosses Sonya's face. Her shoulders finally relax.

SONYA

Yeah, I think so.

The two of them start up the street toward COLUMBUS CIRCLE.

2017. INT. DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Sonya, 19, and a group of other COLLEGE KIDS party. Around her is grape Four Loko bacchanalia. Music plays, people dance, drink, smoke, flirt. WEED is getting passed around everywhere.

Sonya sits in the corner of the bed, by the wall. ANYA, 18, dark hair, Russian accent, perfect nails, sits beside her. They're both stoned.

Sonya gazes wistfully at a dude, TOM, 19, across the room, who's talking up another GIRL. She giggles prettily. Sonya gives a barely-perceptible eye roll. She takes another hit of the joint she's smoking. She nudges Anya.

SONYA

(coughing)

Dude, I hate myself.

Anya blinks, slowly turns her head toward Sonya.

ANYA

What?

SONYA

Look.

She gestures to Tom. The girl he's with is laughing over-dramatically, playfully smacking his chest.

Anya turns her head to see.

ANYA

Don't even look.

Stonedly she puts her hand on Sonya's face and turns it away from Tom and towards herself.

ANYA (CONT'D)

I love you.

Sonya puts her hand on Anya's face, too.

SONYA

I love you too.

They start to crack up. Anya takes a strand of Sonya's hair and runs her fingers through it.

ANYA

(laughing)

And you have such beautiful hair.

Sonya mirrors her, both their hands on each other's faces and in each other's hair. They laugh.

At a hint of motion, Sonya's eyes dart to the doorway. She watches Tom and his girl go out the door and close it behind them, absorbed in each other.

Sonya slumps back into her spot on the bed and leans back on the wall. She and Anya exchange a look.

SONYA

Sad high.

She makes a sad face at Anya.

ANYA

Bitch, just get a Tinder. No more sad highs.

She takes another hit.

SONYA

Sad orgasms, then.

Pause. She sighs. She brings the joint to her mouth again.

SONYA (CONT'D)

Hah, orgasms. I've never even so much as kissed...

She looks at Anya, who has curled up on the bed hugging a pillow, eyes closed.

Sonya looks away and hits the joint again, put out, slumping even more.

2012. INT. MAB THEATER - AFTERNOON

Sonya, 14, and Levi, 52, sit in the THEATER; the black box from the teaser. Other BALLETT STUDENTS and their PARENTS sit around them, with more PEOPLE filing in. Levi surveys the scene, BOOK in hand, a finger marking his page.

His elbow slides over and touches Sonya's; she recoils and pulls her elbow away.

Sonya clocks a few BOYS coming in through a pair of double doors. One BOY in particular, 17, tall, handsome, catches her eye. She gazes at him absentmindedly until, feeling her eyes on him, he looks in her direction. Her eyes dart down to her hands, resting in her lap. Blood rushes to her face.

She glances sideways at Levi, who's now buried in his book.

2013. INT. LEVI'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Sonya, 15, emerges from the hallway, lugging a huge, overstuffed TRASH BAG.

She arrives at the trash can and exhales.

In one motion, she takes the bag from the bottom and dumps the whole thing into the trash. In goes ballet. Some spills onto the floor.

She surveys her work. Pink satin and pieces of her cut-up SERENADE COSTUME sit atop old banana peels and eggshells. We see her face as she looks down at her shattered old life.

She tears her eyes away and leaves, not bothering to clear anything off the floor.

2004. INT. BALLETTOMANIA - DAY

Sonya, 6, and Zoya, 40, walk into "BALLETTOMANIA", a local dance supply store. Zoya holds Sonya's hand tightly.

Displays of tights, leotards, shoes, and accessories hang on walls and racks. Zoya goes off to browse.

Sonya's gaze darts toward the POINTE SHOE DISPLAY. She looks at it longingly.

ZOYA

How about this one, Sony?

Sonya turns toward Zoya's voice. Zoya holds up a pale pink cotton LEOTARD. Sonya shrugs.

SONYA

I guess.

ZOYA

Here, let's go try it on.

Sonya follows her mother to the fitting room.

2012. HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

Sonya, 14, sits in the dark as a projector plays a VIDEO about star death. Sonya rests her head on her desk, eyeing a BOY sitting across the room. She sighs, blinks serenely.

Two BOYS whisper behind her, and her brow furrows as she listens.

BOY 1

...Yeah I finally fucked her last night.

BOY 2

Mazel tov. How was it?

They snicker.

BOY 1

You Jew. Her tits were like nonexistent.

BOY 2

No shit.

Sonya looks subtly down at her chest.

BOY 1

She keeps texting me trying to get me to let her suck my dick again.

They snicker again.

Sonya steals another glance at her crush. He doesn't look back. She lays her head down on her desk and watches a star explode and die.

2004. INT. BALLETOMANIA FITTING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sonya, 6, followed by Zoya, 40, enter the little ROOM. There's a MIRROR, pink walls, and a whimsical-looking, rickety chair.

Zoya helps Sonya off with her clothes.

ZOYA
(in Russian)
Keep your underwear on.

Sonya does, and she takes the PINK LEOTARD off of the hanger. She puts it on and looks at Zoya, who immediately dives in to adjust it.

Zoya tugs at the leotard, kind of aggressively.

ZOYA (CONT'D)
(in Russian)
You don't think it's too small?

SONYA
No, not--

Zoya keeps trying to adjust the leotard. She steps back and looks at Sonya's body, still unsatisfied.

ZOYA
I'll go ask if they have a size bigger.

Zoya leaves the dressing room.

Sonya sits down on the chair, glum. She hears the muffled voices of her mother and the salesperson.

Momentarily, Zoya returns, another leotard in hand. She reaches out to hand it to Sonya, who takes it and puts it on. Zoya inspects her.

ZOYA (CONT'D)
Better.
(in Russian)
Should we buy it?

Sonya nods and starts to take it off.

INT./EXT. ZOYA'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Sonya sits in the back seat while Zoya drives.

SONYA

Maybe we should have gotten a black one.

Zoya tsks.

ZOYA

Of course not. Pink looks good on you.

SONYA

Everyone else wears black.

ZOYA

So? You'll be my little white swan.

She smiles at Sonya in the rearview mirror. Sonya tries to smile back.

She leans her head on the cool glass of the window, watching the countryside as it rolls by.

2012. INT./EXT. LEVI'S CAR - DAY

Levi drives. Sonya sits pensively in the back seat for a second, her BALLET BAG on her lap. Then she takes a chance.

SONYA

Dad?

LEVI

Yeah?

SONYA

Why don't I have a boyfriend?

Levi is quiet. Sonya waits, hopeful.

He looks at her in the rearview mirror.

LEVI

I...well, you're...I don't know.

The corners of Sonya's mouth turn downward.

Beat.

SONYA

Did you bring me any food?

LEVI

No, sorry. I forgot.

2013. INT. LEVI'S HOUSE BATHROOM - NIGHT

Sonya, 15, hoists herself up onto the counter, holding a razor comb and some hairspray.

Cross-legged, she sits in front of the MIRROR. She raises the RAZOR COMB to her eyes and we see a flash of metal. Sharp.

Sonya fingers her long ballet HAIR.

She takes a strand near the front of her face, hesitates, and starts combing. Vigorously combing and cutting, she aims the falling hair into the sink.

She gets a little too vigorous, and nicks her finger on the razor. It BLEEDS. She just sucks on her finger for a moment, and keeps going.

2004. INT./EXT. LEVI'S CAR - DAY

The DARK GOLD FORD ESCORT sails down a rural road. Levi, 44, driving, Sonya, 6, and Samira, 4 and still cute, are in the back. They're both in their dance clothes.

The original Broadway cast soundtrack of LES MISERABLES plays from the car's built-in CASSETTE PLAYER.

Sonya sits on the right side, her head leaning on the cold window. She lifts her tights-clad legs off the seat and brings them down again, watching her thighs spread. She frowns. Samira sits on the left, still in a car seat.

Sonya lifts her head from the window and looks at the little RING OF FOG left there - she watches as it disappears to the sound of Fantine's death.

She starts as the car veers right into a GAS STATION and stops in front of a pump.

Levi gets out of the car, leans his head in.

LEVI

I'll be right back.

The girls nod and he leaves. Sonya flinches as he slams the door too loud in her face.

Sonya watches his shrinking form through the windshield as it approaches the gas station.

She observes him: too-big checkered CHEF'S PANTS, a tucked-in T-SHIRT with the Cook's Illustrated logo splayed across it, and nonslip black SHOES.

She has to look away.

Looking down at her lap, a beat.

The locks on the door click and Levi comes back into view. He opens the door and gets in the front seat, turns around to look at the girls.

We see the car from outside as Levi hands the girls a LOLLIPOP each, keeping one for himself. They all unwrap the candy and Levi drives away.

2012. EXT. TRAIN STATION - 20 MINS LATER

Levi's, 52, car pulls up in front of the station.

INT./EXT. LEVI'S CAR - TRAIN STATION - CONTINUOUS

Levi puts the car in park and looks back at Sonya, 14.

LEVI
Go, go, go, kid!

She doesn't even look into his eyes.

SONYA
Can't you just drive me?

LEVI
You're gonna miss it. You'll be fine alone. Come on, it's easy.

SONYA
I don't know.

LEVI
Have fun.

She looks at him, nods, takes a breath, and gets out.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - CONTINUOUS

We watch as Sonya gets out of the car and books it into the station.

INT./EXT. METRO NORTH TRAIN - MOMENTS LATER

Sonya throws herself into a seat just as the bell rings. As she gets situated and the train starts to move, we see Levi running down the stairs to the platform through the train window.

EXT. PLATFORM - CONTINUOUS

Unseen by Sonya, Levi stops running and watches the train leave, his daughter aboard alone for the first time in her life.

2013. INT. SONYA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sonya, 15, lies in bed, expressionless, still, limp, in front of her COMPUTER. Screamo music plays from a turntable.

The red and black walls, plastered with pictures of BANDS, scream "I AM SO DEPRESSED!" The inside of the door has a million stills from THE OFFICE taped to it. An ELECTRIC GUITAR is on a stand in the corner.

She's on TUMBLR - her feed consists of pictures of girls with thigh gaps, blue hair, and tattoos. They smoke cigarettes, wear oversized band shirts, and share passionate kisses with equally tattooed boys. Some porny photos of those girls fucking those boys, and pictures of bands that echo the ones on the walls; skinny dudes in tight jeans playing guitar at shitty, ill-lit venues.

FLASH: a male dancer's HANDS on a female dancer's WAIST.

She lets out a whimper and rolls over onto her other side, away from her computer, looking at her phone.

INT. HALL OUTSIDE SONYA'S ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Levi's house. Samira, 13, petite, now as beautiful as she was cute, walks down the hall and stops in front of Sonya's unembellished door. She listens; hears a guy screaming to a pair of gritty guitars.

Her hand moves for the DOORKNOB, but stops. She sighs and hangs her head, then continues down the hall.

INT. J&V DANCE STUDIO - NEXT DAY

Samira sits on the floor of the "big room" with a few other bubbly DANCER GIRLS, all around her age. They stretch, banter.

Samira sits in a split and rests her head on her front leg, unmoving.

One of the girls, JASMINE, 14, busty, looks over at her.

JASMINE
Samira, you okay?

Samira looks at her.

SAMIRA
Oh yeah, I'm fine.

Pause. Samira's eyes return to her leg.

JASMINE
You look mad or something.

Samira looks at Jasmine again. Now the other girls - TAYLOR, MELANIE, OLIVIA, RACHEL - are looking too, questioning.

SAMIRA
No, I'm not mad. It's just...it's hard with my sister like this.

All the other girls slump in sympathy.

SAMIRA (CONT'D)
But it's fine...it's fine.

CLOSE on Samira's face, on the verge of tears. She sniffles.

The other girls shake their heads, gather around her, and hug her together.

Samira squeezes her eyes shut and hugs them back.

2012. INT. METRO NORTH TRAIN - CONTINUOUS

Sonya, 14, sits on the train reading THE GOLDEN COMPASS by Philip Pullman.

The windows go black as the train enters the tunnel to Grand Central Terminal.

As the train lurches to a halt at the platform, Sonya's eyes run over the last LINE of the book: "So Lyra and her daemon turned away from the world they were born in, and looked toward the sun, and walked into the sky."

Sonya closes the book and anxiously starts to gather her things.

INT. GRAND CENTRAL - TWO HOURS LATER

Sonya emerges from a bathroom, bun in her hair.

She looks around her and locates the SIGN leading to the SUBWAY, walks toward it.

2004. INT. J&V DANCE STUDIO - AFTERNOON

Sonya, 6, stands at a barre in a tiny, scrappy ROOM; one third of the equally tiny, scrappy studio. The barre is skinny and looks like it could give out at any moment.

She stands a few feet away from the other DANCERS in the class; a group of thin, catty-looking six year-olds who are giggling and joking together.

Sonya looks away from them, into the mirror, trying to tune them out. She is larger than they are. She is by no means fat, but she is certainly big-boned, and tall for six. The other girls wear BLACK LEOTARDS, pink tights, and leather ballet shoes. Sonya is the only one in PINK.

TEACHER (O.S.)

Okay, girls, plies.

The girls disperse reluctantly, dragging their feet. Sonya looks ahead, left hand on the barre, ready to start class, focused and studious.

She steals glances at them in the MIRROR. They keep tittering away and only face all the way forward once the music starts in earnest.

We hear the signature CRACKLE of a RECORD PLAYER needle making contact with vinyl.

The teacher, KRISTEN, late 20s, red haired, very stocky, comes into view for the first time. Her gait is lazy, her movements half-hearted; she's not someone who should be teaching a ballet class.

PIANO MUSIC wafts from the record player. The sound is wavy; the record is warped.

Kristen demonstrates the movements. Her technique is terrible, and the girls don't watch. They carry out the plies: two demi, two grand in first; two demi, two grand in second, etc.

The other girls look just as lazy as Kristen does. The lines of their arms break at the elbow and they keep turning around to talk to each other.

Sonya watches them in the mirror. She is clearly trying much harder than they are. Contempt crosses her young face.

2013. INT. SONYA'S LEVI'S HOUSE ROOM - MORNING

Sonya, 15, stands in front of her MIRROR wearing black SKINNY JEANS, black COMBAT BOOTS, EYELINER, and an obscure metal-looking BAND TEE. SCREAMO MUSIC plays loudly from a TURNTABLE.

Flatiron in hand, she straightens her hair. Her COMPUTER is open on the floor next to her, playing a youtube video called "How I Do My Scene Hair". The girl on the screen has electric blue sideswept hair and too-thick eyeliner. Her outfit matches Sonya's.

Sonya glances down at the screen every few seconds, trying to follow the video.

She fiddles around with her hair some more. When it's good enough, she reaches over to her bed and picks up her 2012-era ANDROID PHONE.

She opens the camera and starts taking some selfies. She looks depressed as hell in all of them...but also kind of cool in a certain emo way.

2012. INT. MAB STUDIO 2 - AFTERNOON

Sonya, 14, stands in a STUDIO, surrounded by other DANCERS. Everyone has POINTE SHOES on. They talk to each other, but she doesn't engage. The BOY from orientation is a few feet from her, also not talking to anyone.

Sonya stands stiffly, a crease in her forehead, her breathing shallow. Her arms are wrapped around her torso, nails digging into her sides, anxious. She clocks someone on the other side of the room taking a bite out of a BANANA.

PETER O'HALLIGAN, an elderly teacher with a lumpy TUMOR visible on the side of his neck, walks into the studio, leaning on a cane. Everyone goes quiet, as per protocol.

PETER

Find your own partners. Quick,
quick.

Sonya looks around frantically as everyone pairs off. Her gaze falls on Orientation Boy, who's looking back at her.

They point to each other, both shrug, and chuckle. They move to close the space between them.

ORIENTATION BOY

Hey, I'm Sam.

He extends his hand to Sonya. She takes it like she's not used to shaking hands.

SONYA

Sonya.

Pause; bit of an awkward silence. Sam clears his throat.

SAM

So, you ever partnered before?

SONYA

No. I'm...I'm really nervous
actually.

SAM

Just don't be like, a bitch and
you'll be fine, seriously.

They laugh.

SONYA

Okay, I'll try.

They stand next to each other, waiting for instructions.

2017. INT. SONYA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Sonya, 19, sits in an **ALCOVE** and blows smoke out of an open **WINDOW**. She holds a **JOINT** in one hand and her **PHONE** in the other as she swipes through **TINDER**.

JUMP CUT TO:

Sonya sits in the same place in a different position, still smoking and swiping (different day, or maybe just a different time).

The JUMP CUTS continue until:

Sonya is no longer smoking the joint. She pulls a cigarette out of the pack of Marlboro 27s on the windowsill and places it in her mouth. She brings the LIGHTER to the tip, but:

DING. Sonya taps the icon at the top of her phone screen; it's a message from a skater-looking dude about her age with bleach-blonde shoulder length hair and a cigarette hanging out of his mouth: "hey"

Sonya pauses, then immediately starts typing.

2013. INT. PHYSICS CLASSROOM - DAY

Sonya, 15, enters. A TEACHER writes on the BLACKBOARD, STUDENTS talk amongst themselves. A group of BITCHY GIRLS sit in a corner gossiping, laughing.

She spots an empty seat next to a blonde girl, ASHLEY, who's texting. She takes a chance and walks over.

SONYA

Hey Ashley. Can I sit here?

Ashley looks her up and down and tries to hide her judgmental expression.

ASHLEY

Yeah...sure.

Sonya pulls the chair out and sits. She looks at Ashley, who's turned her attention back to her phone.

Sonya looks over at the Bitchy Girls. Another blonde comes up to them - it's ARIANE, 15, skinny. Rage takes over Sonya's face and her ears ring.

She looks down at her desk, and digs her nails into the palms of her hands.

2004. INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Sonya, 6, Levi, 44, Samira, 4, and Zoya, 40, sit around the TV.

Zoya gets up.

ZOYA

Be right back.

She leaves the room.

INT. L+Z'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Zoya appears and hurries to the walk-in CLOSET. She enters and we see the light go on inside it as the door closes.

INT. L+Z'S CLOSET - CONTINUOUS

Zoya stands on a stool and rummages around behind a bunch of sweaters crammed on a high shelf.

She finds what she's looking for, pulls it out; a FLASK. She unscrews it, takes a swig. She sits down on the floor of the closet, leaning on a set of drawers.

2013. INT. MUSIC LESSON ROOM - LAST PERIOD OF THE DAY

Sonya, 15, sits in a chair, her VIOLA CASE in her lap as she unpacks her instrument. She slumps in her seat - defeated, exhausted.

Surrounding her are three or four other STUDENTS, a Japanese girl, HANA, among them. She glances at Sonya, who doesn't notice.

LIZ, the teacher, with mid-length curly hair and makeup that somehow makes her skin look ashy and yellow at the same time, walks in, smiling enthusiastically.

As she hands the closest student a tuner, Hana clocks Sonya looking close to tears.

INT. BALLET STUDIO - NIGHT

FANTASY:

Same studio as in previous fantasy, as if continued.

Sonya, 15, practices a VARIATION in a ballet studio, complete with BARRES and a PIANO. Leotard, tights, pointe shoes.

She stops dancing and looks around, as if sensing something if off...

The walls are all mirrors. No windows.

She looks up and down to find that the ceiling is a mirror, and so is the floor. The room is harshly lit from an unseen source; her imperfections are in sharp relief. The barres and piano are gone and there's nothing to hide behind.

She exclaims in fear and panic, runs into a CORNER, curls up in a ball, and buries her face in her knees.

She looks down at her feet as if she's felt something and sees her pointe shoes and ribbons getting tighter, tighter...

Frantically she tries to untie them - no luck. She breathes more and more heavily, hyperventilates. Her feet almost look like they can burst.

Sonya looks at her reflection - the shoes themselves are not getting tighter, but she is getting bigger.

She tries to scream, but can't.

Cut to black.

2004. INT. L+Z'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Levi, 44, enters the room, rubbing his eyes. The bedside light is on and he sees his wife, 40, passed out in her clothes, semi-covered by blankets.

OSCAR, a large, elegant orange cat, is asleep beside her. Hearing Levi, his eyes open and he looks at him, sorrowful somehow.

Levi takes off his pants and shirt, fixes the blanket, gets in bed, and covers himself and the sleeping Zoya.

He takes a paperback SPY NOVEL from the floor on his side of the bed and starts to read. Before he can get very far, he's asleep.

2013. INT. MUSIC LOCKER ROOM - AFTER LESSON

Sonya, 15, dejectedly puts her instrument in its LOCKER. Hana looks at her, standing in front of her own locker. She calls over.

HANA

Hey!

Sonya looks at her.

SONYA

Hey.

HANA

Sonya, right?

SONYA
(incredulously)
Yeah...what's your name again?

HANA
Hana.

Beat as Sonya nods.

HANA (CONT'D)
NOT Hannah.

Another beat.

HANA (CONT'D)
You weren't in orchestra last year,
were you?

SONYA
No, I uh...I quit for a while.

HANA
Oh. Cool.

Beat.

HANA (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Taking the bus?

Sonya finally manages a SMILE.

EXT. IN FRONT OF SCHOOL BUSES - FIVE MINUTES LATER.

Sonya and Hana talk in front of the buses, throngs of other STUDENTS surrounding them. Sonya's mood seems to have lightened - she doesn't slouch and is more animated in her speech.

SONYA
...I like a lot of metalcore and
pop punk...I'm kind of a shameless
scene kid. Or maybe not so
shameless.

Hana laughs.

SONYA (CONT'D)
What about you?

HANA
Oh, I'm more of an indie person.
But I have a pretty open mind.

Sonya uses a mock excited tone to cover up her actual excitement.

SONYA

Yay, let's share some music!

HANA

Haha, sure. Well I'd better go...I'll see you tomorrow in orchestra?

SONYA

Yeah, totally. See you tomorrow.

Sonya watches as Hana turns and goes to find her own bus, smiling despite herself.

INT./EXT. SOMEWHERE - SOMETIME

FANTASY:

Sonya, 15, stumbles through a seemingly infinite expanse of white FOG, with nothing visible anywhere.

2017. INT. DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Sonya, 19, sits up in bed and brushes her HAIR. She draws the brush out and inspects it: lots of hair in the bristles.

She pulls out all the hair, scrunching it up in her hand. She rolls it between her palms until it forms a perfect little BALL.

She takes a MASON JAR from the cardboard box she's using as a bedside table and drops in the ball of hair, atop many others like it. (NOTE: This is her DETRITUS JAR. It contains artifacts of pseudo-self harm, including balls of hair, torn-off scabs, skin she's picked off her scalp, and peeled-off nail polish. She carries it everywhere.)

She clicks on her phone, sees a Tinder message, opens it. It's the guy from before: "u wanna chill sometime?"

She abruptly clicks her phone off and falls back onto the pillows, looking at the ceiling, holding her phone to her chest.

2013. INT. LEVI'S GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

Sonya, 15, enters the GARAGE, where Levi's beaten-down FORD ESCORT rests. She groans when she sees it.

As she walks through, we see chaos; full trash bags upon full trash bags, countless paper shopping bags full of recyclables, never-used, rusty keys hanging on the wall, a mess of tools on a table in the back, loose screws all over the place, boxes seemingly still unpacked from their move nine years ago, a dirty freezer with a door that doesn't completely shut.

Sonya wrinkles her nose. She moves toward the entrance to the house, encountering some camping supplies spilling out of a closet door, carelessly left open. She huffs as she steps over them.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Sonya tries to sneak past the kitchen, but:

LEVI (O.S.)

Sonya!

Sonya stops, closes her eyes, lets out a breath, and reluctantly drags her feet into the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Levi, 49, is at the counter, mixing an almost comically huge BOWL of BREAD DOUGH.

LEVI

How was your first day?

SONYA

It was fine. Can I go? I need to lie down.

LEVI

Don't you have stuff you should be doing?

SONYA

No.

She turns to leave, but he stops her again.

LEVI

Johanna Chung told me she got into Harvard.

SONYA

I don't care about Johanna Chung. I need to lie down.

LEVI
You should talk to her, I can give
you her phone number...

Sonya turns away to open a cabinet.

SONYA
(rolling her eyes)
Mhm.

She reaches into the cabinet and grabs a TWINKIE.

LEVI
Do you really think you need that?

Beat.

Sonya draws her hand back, but then defiantly takes the cake
anyway.

She gives Levi a hardened look, and swiftly leaves the room.
We stay with Levi:

LEVI (CONT'D)
(loudly, after her)
I thought you wanted a boyfriend!

We hear her retreating footsteps, then the slam of a door.

INT. SAMIRA'S ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS/CONTINUOUS

As Sonya's door slams, Samira stands before the inside of her
bedroom door, wearing HEADPHONES - her music is loud; we can
hear it faintly - screwdriver in hand, installing a simple
LOCK.

INT. SONYA'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sonya storms into her room, throws her stuff down on the
floor and herself into bed.

She lies on her back, looking up at the fan. Layers of dust
rest on its blades.

Beat. She looks to the door, listens.

Hearing no footsteps, she turns over onto her side and opens
her BEDSIDE DRAWER. She extracts a tiny cardboard BOX, opens
it. Inside is a stack of spare RAZOR BLADES for the comb she
used to cut her hair. The top one has some DRIED BLOOD on it.

She removes it, turns it over on her fingertips.

A heavy expression emerges on her face. She looks like she's been sad forever.

Holding the blade, she flops onto her back again. She takes a deep breath.

FLASH: pink satin ribbons.

Back to Sonya on the bed.

FLASH: a ballet dancer doing a turn in a studio. We cut mid-turn.

Sonya rolls onto her side. She rolls up the sleeve of her jacket and turns her forearm over. We see layers of parallel horizontal CUTS, some faded, some not.

She brings the blade to her wrist and makes a shallow slice. She puts the razor on her bedside table and rests her head on the pillow, watching a very thin stream of BLOOD trickle down her arm.

2004. INT. LEVI'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Quiet.

Sonya, 6, and Samira, 4, sit on the couch. They look worried - Sonya's shoulders tense, Samira cuddling her blankie and sucking her thumb. Sailor Moon is on the TV, but they're not really watching.

The sound of Levi, 44, cooking comes from the kitchen; pots and pans clanging, a metal whisk against a metal bowl. Something sizzling.

Sonya looks at the digital CLOCK on the cable box. 9:51. She clicks her tongue to the rhythm of the seconds as they flash.

Sonya looks to the kitchen. She calls:

SONYA

Dad?

LEVI (O.S.)

What?

SONYA

Where's mom?

Levi comes out of the kitchen and looks at her.

LEVI

I don't know, Sony.

SONYA

Why isn't she home yet?

Suddenly the LANDLINE rings. Levi picks up.

LEVI

Hello?

Beat as he listens.

LEVI (CONT'D)

...This is he.

Sonya and Samira watch as his face falls, then hardens.

LEVI (CONT'D)

Zoya? ZOYA. Stop. You're drunk...

He listens. Sonya approaches him.

LEVI (CONT'D)

You are drunk.

Sonya kneels down and lies like a dog at his feet. He pays her no attention. Samira looks on, both girls sensing the desolation, the anger, the fear.

LEVI (CONT'D)

YOU ARE DRUNK! YOU. ARE. DRUNK.

Sonya, at his feet, starts to cry quietly.

LEVI (CONT'D)

YOU'RE DRUNK! SHUT UP NOW! YOU'RE DRUNK.

BABUSHKA, Zoya's mother, late 60s, tiny and round, grey hair in a perm, emerges from the stairs, hearing Levi screaming into the phone.

BABUSHKA

(in Russian)

What's going on?

Levi, still screaming into the phone, waves at her to be quiet.

Babushka hastens over to Sonya, on the floor. She picks her up and leads her over to the couch where Samira is shaking.

BABUSHKA (CONT'D)

(to Sonya, over Levi's screams)

(MORE)

BABUSHKA (CONT'D)

What is going on? Why is he
screaming?

SONYA

(in Russian)

I don't know. Mom...

Samira starts to cry too. On either side of Babushka, they
cry into her shirt, looking toward Levi in fear.

He slams the phone down.

LEVI

Jesus fuck. Jesus FUCK. Jesus
fucking Christ!

His yells sound anguished, the loudest thing in the world.

He walks over to the hall closet door (O.S.), and reemerges
in the living room, throwing on a jacket.

LEVI (CONT'D)

(in Russian, heavy
American accent)

I'll be back. Don't wait.

He thunders down the stairs (O.S.), leaving the girls
clutching Babushka.

INT. GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

Levi gets into his car, slams the door hard.

2017. INT. DORM ROOM - ANOTHER NIGHT, ANOTHER PARTY

Sonya, 19, Anya, Tom, MARYJO (red-haired, unintelligent),
MATT (blonde, stupid, kind of creepy), CAILEY (ditzy, blonde,
inconsiderate), and BEN (tall, brooding, absentminded) sit on
the floor in a circle, passing around some WEED. A game of
Monopoly sits between them.

Cailey's head is in Ben's lap, and everyone else is in
various other states of physical contact with one another.
Empty and full BEER BOTTLES abound, some being sipped.

Tom drains his beer and slams it down on the game board.
Everyone looks at him, disrupted.

TOM

We are never gonna finish this
game.

He looks around at them, his eyes stopping on Sonya for a fraction of a second. She perks up.

TOM (CONT'D)

Are we?

There are some drunken/stoned murmurs of assent from around the circle.

Tom fiddles with the bottle a moment.

CAILEY

(lazily)

Spin the bottle?

Tom smirks.

BEN

Again? We just played.

Anya jumps in, suddenly attentive.

ANYA

Sonya still hasn't! Play for Sonya, guys!

Sonya looks at Anya like "dude, shut up!" Some people groan as they right themselves. Sonya looks around frantically.

SONYA

No no no, you guys, we can all just go to bed. Right? Aren't you guys all just so tired? I mean, right? What are we, in middle school?

She laughs awkwardly. By now everyone is awake and into the idea.

SONYA (CONT'D)

We don't want to do this, right? I mean, it's Cailey, she's just constantly horny!

Cailey gives Sonya a dirty look and grabs the bottle out of Tom's hands. She brushes all of the pieces off of the Monopoly board and onto the agitated Sonya, who shakes them off. Matt stares blankly at the newly-vacant board.

MATT

I was about to build a hotel.

Sonya watches, panicked, as Tom sets the bottle down in the middle of the board.

CAILEY

Sonya spins first! Since she wanted
to do it soooo bad.

She gives Sonya a catty smirk. Sonya turns away, looks at the
bottle. Everyone waits until she reaches her hand out and
spins.

Lo and behold, it lands on Tom.

CAILEY (CONT'D)

Okay, I dare you...

SONYA

That't not how this game works.

CAILEY

...to go in the closet and Sonya,
you suck Tom's DICK!

SONYA

What? But--but--that's not--

Everyone cheers. Sonya locks eyes with Anya, who shrugs and
mouths, "I'm sorry". Sonya tries to protest as she and Tom
are ushered into the CLOSET, and the door shuts behind them.

2004. INT. LEVI'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Levi, 44, sits, breathing heavily, for a moment.

Something in him snaps; his expression changes and with no
warning - he bangs his head right on the steering wheel as
hard as he can.

He does it a few more times, faster, then stops.

He rests his head on the steering wheel and a sob escapes
him.

Beat. He lifts his head and his expression is totally blank.

Haphazardly he puts the car in gear and crookedly backs out
of the garage before speeding away.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sonya, 6, Samira, 4, and Babushka listen to the sound of
Levi's MOTOR getting fainter as it disappears.

1970. INT. LEVI'S PARENTS' LIVING ROOM - DAY

Levi - 10 - sits and reads on the couch while his mother - EILEEN - practices the PIANO; Pictures At An Exhibition, MOSSOURGSKY.

Eileen hits a wrong note, and Levi looks up from his BOOK. She goes back and tries again. Levi's eyes flick back down, then up again when she messes up the same part.

EILEEN

Shit!

As she starts the passage again, Levi gets up from the couch and leaves the room.

INT. LEVI'S ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Levi lies on his BED and tries to read.

He can still hear his mother playing. Every time she messes up, her exclamations of frustration get louder, her playing more frantic.

Levi closes his eyes and throws his book aside.

EXT. STERNBERG YARD - MINUTES LATER

Levi rides his bike around to the front of the house.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - CONTINUOUS

Levi pedals past his three BROTHERS, playing in the front yard, and down the street.

2004. INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Levi, 44, storms into the police station, a RED MARK on his forehead. He arrives at a desk behind glass, manned by a SERGEANT.

SERGEANT

You Zoya Sternberg's husband?

LEVI

Yes. Levi Sternberg.

Levi looks left to see another OFFICER leading Zoya, 40, toward him.

Levi says nothing.

He takes Zoya by the arm aggressively and they walk out.

INT./EXT. LEVI'S CAR - STATION PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Levi practically shoves Zoya into the passenger seat before getting in himself. He slams the door.

LEVI
Zoya, what did you do?

Zoya says nothing, only looks at him, bleary-eyed.

1970. EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

Levi, 10, pedals vigorously down the street, his house still in view.

His front tire snags on a TREE BRANCH and he is pitched forward over the handle bars. His face makes contact with the pavement and there's a CRACK.

He yells in pain, blood gushing from his chin.

His brothers look up, and the oldest, DAN, rushes inside as TOM and ANDY (twins) run toward Levi, a few yards away.

2013. INT. SONYA'S ROOM - DAY

Sonya, 15, lies in bed watching a show and messing around with her phone.

Without warning, the door opens and Levi, 53, stands in the doorway.

He stands there for a second while she pulls the BLANKET up to hide more of her body. He looks at her fixedly.

LEVI
Have you practiced?

Sonya's eyes flick away from his.

SONYA
Yeah.

LEVI
I didn't hear it.

SONYA

You never hear anything.

Levi stands there a second longer.

LEVI

Practice.

He leaves, not bothering to close the door.

When she can no longer hear his footsteps, Sonya drags her feet to the door and closes it.

1970. INT. LEVI'S CHILDHOOD HOME - LATER

Levi, 10, and Eileen enter through the front door.

Levi's mouth is WIRED SHUT, jaw broken. He can't speak.

He starts toward the stairs.

EILEEN

Going up to read?

Levi nods and goes up the stairs defeatedly, his head hanging.

INT. LEVI'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Levi lies on his bed, staring at the ceiling. He reaches into his mouth and fingers the wire. His eyes fill with tears.

Pictures At An Exhibition comes wafting from downstairs again.

He blinks and wipes his eyes. All expression drains from his face as he stares at the ceiling.

EILEEN (O.S.)

Shit!!!

2017. INT. CLOSET - NIGHT

Sonya, 19, and Tom stand inside the closet, pressed together in the tiny space. CLOTHES hang in their way and Tom pushes them aside. Sonya hugs herself and digs her nails into her ribs as he gets even closer to her. She tries really hard not to look at him as they whisper.

SONYA

This isn't how spin the bottle is usually played, is it?

TOM

It's how we play.

SONYA

Why?

Pause as Sonya's breathing accelerates.

Tom wraps his arms around her. He strokes her hair. She begins to relax in his embrace.

TOM

You don't have to suck my dick.

SONYA

(into his shoulder)
Thank you.

Beat as he holds her.

TOM

We can kiss, though.

Sonya stops breathing.

TOM (CONT'D)

If you want...

SONYA

I've...we can?

Finally, she looks up at him.

He presses himself against her, pins her against the wall, too tightly, by her wrists.

He kisses her. Her mouth looks awkward at first; it's obvious she's never kissed before. She's resistant, but gives in.

2005. INT. SONYA'S CLOSET - CONTINUOUS

Sonya, 7, and Samira, 5, are nestled in a BLANKET inside Sonya's closet. They hold each other, listening.

LEVI (O.S.)

Fuck you, Zoya don't you dare bring that up! Other people have needs, you're not the only one!

ZOYA (O.S.)

Like who, the children?! I fucking know! Do something about it instead of sitting on your ass all day because you're a failure!

LEVI (O.S.)

Don't talk to me about failing!
You're a fucking drunk, Zoya!

The girls flinch when they hear a CRASH and a YELP, as if Zoya's body has hit the floor.

ZOYA (O.S.)

You want me to call the police?!
I'll call the fucking police!!

Sonya holds Samira and Samira holds her tattered blankie as their parents keep going at it.

2012. INT. MAB STUDIO 2 - EVENING

Back with Sonya, 14, and Sam. Sonya watches the teacher go through the combination, trying not to look in Sam's direction. She wraps her arms around herself again, pinching her sides harder than before.

PETER

Got it?

Mumbles of assent rise from around the room.

PETER (CONT'D)

Fifth position.

Flashing Sam a clammy smile, Sonya gets into fifth in front of him.

The accompanist starts playing, and Sonya rises onto pointe with the rest of the girls. Sam's hands meet her WAIST.

We watch Sam's hand wrap around Sonya's waist slowly, his fingers gently gripping her sides in place of her own.

At his touch, Sonya breathes in sharply. Suddenly she looks jubilant, electrified. She gives Sam a huge smile in the MIRROR, which he returns.

INT./EXT. CAR - NIGHT

FANTASY.

Sonya, 6, sits in the backseat. Someone who looks like Zoya, but not exactly, drives, someone like Levi beside her. Things are calm. Sonya gazes at her pseudo-parents.

Sonya leans her head on the window, serene.

Suddenly there's something wrong. The sky darkens. She looks ahead; pseudo Levi and Zoya are gone. No one is driving.

Sonya looks through the windshield, and the car is heading towards a CLIFF.

Sonya feels around the interior of the car. She tries the doors, all of them, looking repeatedly to the windshield and back.

The car accelerates...closer and closer to the DROPOFF.

Sonya gets more and more frantic, moving faster, beating the windows with her fists.

She looks to the windshield again. The car reaches the end of the cliff.

2017. INT. COLLEGE CLASSROOM - DAY

Sonya, 19, sits in class as the professor speaks.

She scratches her head. She brings her hand down, looks at it. On her fingertip, a little FLAKE OF SKIN. Some BLOOD.

Surreptitiously, she leans over, reaches under the table, and unscrews the top of her DETRITUS JAR, in her backpack. She flicks the skin flake off of her finger and into the jar with the rest of the detritus of her body. She screws the top back on.

Her phone buzzes and she checks it under the desk. Message from Tinder Boy: "???"

She drops her phone into her bag beside the jar, as if it's burned her. She turns her attention back to the professor.

2012. INT. MAB STUDIO 2 - EVENING

PARTNERING CLASS with Sonya, 14, and Sam.

On pointe, in passe, Sam lets her fall forward slightly. He catches her, they do the same to the side, and to the back, in tandem with the rest of the class.

Sonya's face tells us that she's EUPHORIC. At the end of the combination, the class stands together in FIFTH.

The music ends and people relax.

As Peter demonstrates the next combination, Sonya looks at Sam, who's watching and marking, with her mouth the slightest bit agape.

She looks at his hands; strong, big, and beautiful, like hands in a Renaissance painting. Her gaze travels up his arms, veiny and pale as they go through the motions. She looks at his chest, muscular and lean, moving subtly under the classic form-fitting white t-shirt of a male ballet student.

PETER

And then lift up, beat, beat, beat,
beat...and bring her down
slowly...and plie.

At the sound of the word "lift", Sonya head snaps around to the teacher, and she immediately wraps her arms around herself again, pinching the skin under her leotard.

PETER (CONT'D)

Okay, here we go.

He cues the accompanist. Sam offers Sonya his hand. She goes completely RED and takes it.

As soon as she's facing away from him, she takes a deep breath, and the music starts.

She glimpses herself in the MIRROR and she sees a flash of herself--but it's not an accurate reflection. It's much heavier than she actually is.

Sonya gives her head a slight shake and focuses again.

The class starts the combination. Sonya is sweating bullets; the lift is coming up.

And suddenly the LIFT is upon them. Sam lifts Sonya, holding her waist. She goes up high, she floats down, just as she's supposed to. She beams.

The combination finishes, and Sonya turns to Sam, euphoric:

SONYA

Great job, man!

She gives him a high five.

SAM

Yeah, dude!

He holds her hand for a fraction of a second longer than he needs to. They catch each other's eyes, and Sonya's smile widens.

Perky and confident, Sonya jokingly moves to her position in front of Sam in an over-dramatized ballet walk. They laugh as she settles into fifth in front of him.

The teacher starts showing the next combination and Sam takes her waist as they mark it together.

2004. INT. MEDIATOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Zoya, 40, and Levi, 44, sit at a table across from the MEDIATOR. The mediator slides a sheet of PAPER across the table to each of them; divorce. It's snowing outside.

Levi looks over at Zoya, who has picked up a pen and is signing without hesitation.

Levi looks down at his paper, identical to hers. Slowly, he picks up the pen resting by his right hand.

Zoya finishes signing and looks over at Levi, but he is signing his document and doesn't look up. She turns her gaze back to the mediator. She exhales, pursing her lips.

1974. EXT. BEACH - DAY

Zoya's father, MISHA; tall, former sailor, swims out into the OCEAN, Zoya, 10, on his back. He stops, treads water.

They look around at the open water. Zoya holds tight to her father and smiles at the serenity.

2017. EXT. WATERFALL - WINTER - NIGHT

Sonya, 19, stands on the bank of a waterfall wearing a warm COAT. Anya is beside her.

ANYA

I don't know, dude. What if you get sick?

SONYA

It's okay, I do this every year.
It's a tradition. Usually I'm here alone.

She looks at her PHONE.

SONYA (CONT'D)
Forty degrees. Perfect.

ANYA
Hm.

Sonya takes off her coat, her pants, her shirt. She dips a toe in the water, shivers.

SONYA
Shine a light, will you?

Anya shines her phone's FLASHLIGHT onto the WATER.

Sonya wades in until she reaches a DROPOFF. She jumps in and her head disappears under the water.

Underwater, we see her weightless.

FLASH: Tom in the closet, kissing her, his hands on her wrists.

She bobs to the surface, gasping, moving her hair out of her face.

ANYA
(calling)
Sonya? You okay?

Sonya just breathes, treading water, looking up at blackness.

2012. INT./EXT. METRO NORTH TRAIN - NIGHT

Sonya, 14, sits on the train, hugging her ballet bag.

FLASH: She floats down from the lift, Sam's hands on her waist.

She smiles softly.

Her phone BUZZES in her lap. She looks down at it, gasps in delight.

A NOTIFICATION from Facebook: Samuel David has accepted your friend request.

She immediately opens her phone and opens a message tab. She types: Hi! Wanna be partners again next week?

She stares at her phone intently. He answers quickly: Sure!

She clicks her phone off, beaming. She bounces up and down in her seat, exploding with happiness.

2013. VICTORIA'S SECRET FITTING ROOM - DAY

Sonya, 15, and her EMO HAIR put on a BRA. Zoya, 49, speaks from behind the door.

ZOYA
(in Russian)
Let me see, Sony.

SONYA
I can do this myself.

ZOYA
I just want to see.

Sonya huffs, then opens the door, and Zoya comes in, closes it.

Zoya surveys her daughter.

ZOYA (CONT'D)
Sony, you're popping out!

Zoya tries to touch Sonya's breast, protruding over the top of the bra. Sonya smacks her hand away.

SONYA
Stop!

ZOYA
We need to get you fitted. Put your shirt on.

Sonya groans, looks at her mother. Zoya gives her a look: what are you waiting for? Sonya unhooks the bra.

INT. VICTORIA'S SECRET - CONTINUOUS

An EMPLOYEE measures Sonya's chest. Zoya and Samira, 13, watch.

V.S. GIRL
What size are you in now?

SONYA
34A.

V.S. GIRL

Wow...girl, you're in the wrong size. I'm getting 34D.

Sonya looks at her mother, shocked. Zoya shrugs at her: I told you so.

Samira catches Sonya's eye, but quickly looks down at the floor. Sonya looks away, mortified.

2005. INT./EXT. METRO NORTH TRAIN - DAY

Sonya, 7, and Samira, 5, sit across from Levi, 45. They all read. Sonya looks up.

SONYA

Dad, where are we going?

Levi looks at her, the hint of a smile playing on his lips, marking his page with his finger.

LEVI

It's a surprise.

The girls smile at each other, giggle.

SAMIRA

Dad, can I have some water?

Levi reaches into his BACKPACK and passes her a BOTTLE, goes back to his book.

Samira drinks. Sonya looks at her, smiles slyly. Sonya tips the bottle toward Samira's face and laughs as water spills all over Samira, who immediately starts to cry. She puts her hand over her mouth. Levi turns on a dime.

LEVI

Sonya, what did you do?!

Sonya shrinks in fear, presses herself into the corner of the seat. Levi yells at her at the top of his lungs.

LEVI (CONT'D)

Sonya, you IDIOT!! Why the fuck would you do something like that?! What is WRONG with you??

OTHER PEOPLE on the train turn to look.

SONYA

It was a joke...I thought it would be funny.

LEVI

Idiot. You fucking idiot. You
stupid, stupid child! Samira...

He reaches toward Samira and pulls her onto his lap.

LEVI (CONT'D)

Let me see, sweetie...

Samira, still crying, takes her hand away from her mouth and we see that her lip is BLEEDING.

Samira cries into his shoulder.

SAMIRA

It hurts!

LEVI

I know, Samira, I know. She's
bleeding, Sonya!

Sonya is still making herself as small as she can, watching Levi try to comfort Samira.

SONYA

I'm sorry! I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm
sorry!

LEVI

(still yelling)

You're sorry...NEVER do that shit
again, do you hear me?! Never.
Idiot...

Sonya sniffs. His eyes flash to her and she flinches, recoils.

The train comes to a stop and people stand to get off. As they pass, they address Levi:

WOMAN 1

You shouldn't have kids if you're
going to treat your little girl
like that. Shame on you!

MAN

You shouldn't be a father.

WOMAN 2

Shame on you...no child deserves
this.

LEVI
(as they all pass)
Oh, fuck off.

Sonya looks at Levi, a new edge in her gaze.

2017. EXT. WATERFALL - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Sonya, 19, sits on a ROCK wrapped in a TOWEL, looking at her phone. We see Anya's hand come into the frame, a JOINT between two of her fingers.

Sonya takes it, opens TINDER. She looks at the message from Tinder Guy again: ???

She takes a breath, types: sure, when's good?

She takes a hit of the joint.

ANYA (O.S.)
Aren't you cold? You should get dressed.

SONYA
I'm okay...in a second.

She watches pensively as the message sends.

2005. INT. LINCOLN CENTER THEATER - NIGHT

Sonya, 7, Samira, 5, and Levi, 45, find their ROW, ABT PLAYBILLS in hand.

LEVI
(sweetly)
There you go Samira.

She enters the row and Levi looks down at Sonya with distaste.

LEVI (CONT'D)
Get in.

Sonya gets in and sits, followed by Levi. He gives her the cold shoulder.

LEVI (CONT'D)
Samira, switch with Sonya.

Samira and Sonya both get up, switch seats. Sonya hangs her head, looks down at her playbill.

On the cover, A dancer as Odette, stationery in limbo. She looks sideways at the other two, Levi inspecting Samira's lip again.

The lights go down and he stops.

The SWAN LAKE OVERTURE begins. Sonya turns her attention to the STAGE, dejected.

We watch her face as the DANCERS come on stage. We see the pain she's feeling gradually melt away, and then she is enchanted, captivated. She is hooked.

2017. INT. SONYA'S DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Sonya, 19, lies in bed facing the wall. An ASHTRAY with joints and cigarettes sits on the windowsill, smoking steadily. There's a TOWEL over the SMOKE DETECTOR.

A HALF-HOUR COMEDY (like The Office) streams from Sonya's computer, but she doesn't laugh, doesn't react. She lies with her eyes open, her back to the screen.

SAME FLASH AS BEFORE: New pointe shoes, a squeal.

Sonya blinks.

Abruptly she moves the blanket aside, gets up, and walks to her CLOSET.

She reaches out her hand for its DOORKNOB, retracts it. C.U. on her hesitant HAND.

...But she opens the door and reaches up to the TOP SHELF. She digs through her sweaters and pulls out that one special pair of POINTE SHOES.

She goes back to the BED and sits, the shoes resting beside her.

She puts them on, ties the RIBBONS with deft hands.

She covers herself in the blanket again, lies down, and closes her eyes.

END OF EPISODE 1.