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Dance Academy

SERIES ONE

EPISODE 1
BLOCK 4

"Learning to Fly"

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1 **EXT. WEBSTER'S PROPERTY/PADDOCK - DAY 5**

1

TARA, TARA (V.O.)

An MP3 player changes tracks and a tiny headphone is inserted into one ear. Bracingly loud rock music fills the world.

One flip-flopped foot dodges ants in the dirt, as it stretches out its kinks. A hand gracefully extends up and onto an iron railing.

We pull out to meet TARA WEBSTER - fifteen and ethereal. She's using the paddock gate like it's a ballet barre and practising her port de bras.

We're in Mallee country. Dry, vast, Australian. Last stop before you hit desert.

As Tara sinks back into a beautiful arch she closes her eyes.

TARA (V.O.)

*When I was little I wasn't so clear
on the whole gravity thing.*

2 **EXT. WEBSTER'S PROPERTY/MACHINERY SHED - DAY (FLASHBACK)**

2

FIVE-YEAR-OLD TARA, TARA (V.O.)

FIVE-YEAR-OLD TARA stands on the roof of a machinery shed. She is wearing a blue nightgown, a pair of fairy wings and her tiny toes are curled over the edge.

TARA (V.O.)

*And my imagination got me in a lot
of trouble.*

Five-Year-Old Tara grins and jumps. She starts to fall in slow motion through the air, looking out in wonder at the tilting view. The golden paddocks stretch to the horizon.

TARA (V.O.)

*So I broke my wrist when I landed
but there was one moment when time
stopped.*

The sky freezes. Five-Year-Old Tara is suspended in the air.

TARA (V.O.)

And everything made sense.

3 **EXT. WEBSTER'S PROPERTY/PADDOCK - DAY 5**

3

TARA, NEIL WEBSTER, TARA (V.O.)

Fifteen-year-old Tara continues her port de bras beside the paddock gate.

TARA (V.O.)
*From then on I've always known that
 in another life I could fly.*

She stretches her arm above her head in the classic ballet position, turning her face upward to catch the sun.

TARA (V.O.)
*And that's why in this life I
 dance.*

A LOUD HONKING CAR HORN suddenly disturbs the serenity.

Tara opens her eyes and belatedly realises that a FARMER'S UTE is ambling towards her. A flock of sheep is waiting to get through the gate. The dogs are barking. She's been daydreaming. Again.

Tara scrambles to unlatch the gate and swing it open. As the sheep are herded through, her dad NEIL WEBSTER leans out the window.

TARA
 (anticipating)
 I'm sorry!

He shakes the apology away.

NEIL WEBSTER
 Auntie Bev just called. The post's
 on its way.

Tara's eyes widen. A combination of terror and adrenaline.

NEIL WEBSTER
 Go.

Tara doesn't need to be told twice. She grabs the QUAD BIKE that's parked beside the gate and takes off through the sheep. Her dad watches her nervously.

TARA (V.O.)
*Right now, there's a letter that
 could change my life.*

TARA, TARA (V.O.)

Tara is careening down the hill on her quad bike. The wind is blowing her hair in angry tangles beneath her helmet.

TARA (V.O.)
*Because I don't just dance. I want
 to be a Principal Dancer in the
 National Ballet Company.*

4 CONTINUED:

4

Pink cockatoos flap overhead. The post box hovers at the end of the dirt road.

FLASHBACK TO:

5 **EXT. SYDNEY CBD - DAY 1**

5

N/S FEMALE DANCER, N/S PEDESTRIANS, TARA (V.O.)

It's peak hour in the city on a Monday morning. Taxis and commuters battle it out beneath the towering skyscrapers.

TARA (V.O.)

*And everyone knows that means going
to the National Academy of Dance.
Nowhere else comes close.*

The lights change and a flock of pedestrians cross the street. One GIRL has her hair in a bun and walks with her feet out-turned like a duck. She is unmistakably a dancer.

6 **EXT. SYDNEY "THE ROCKS" FOOTBRIDGE - DAY 1**

6

N/S TALL GUY, N/S TINY GIRL, N/S DANCERS, N/S CIVILIANS, TARA (V.O.)

TARA (V.O.)

*This was my year to audition. My
one shot.*

A gaggle of DANCERS cross a footbridge. Some are eating breakfast on the run, others are gossiping energetically. A TALL GUY is piggybacking a TINY GIRL. They're all good looking, clearly elite athletes. The civilian passersby know to move out of their way.

7 **EXT. NATIONAL ACADEMY OF DANCE - DAY 1**

7

TARA, N/S STUDENTS, TARA (V.O.)

TARA (V.O.)

*And I thought I was ready for
anything.*

Tara stands outside the National Academy of Dance, with a small suitcase by her side. She is looking up at the imposing building, fear mingling with excitement once again.

The gaggle of dancers push past as they enter their building.

TARA (V.O.)

I didn't have a clue.

8 **INT. ACADEMY/CORRIDOR - DAY 1**

8

TARA, KAT, N/S MALE DANCER, N/S BALLET GIRLS, N/S STUDENTS, N/S TEACHERS

The corridors are alive with activity. Dancers, auditionees and teachers, all moving purposefully in different directions.

Tara emerges from a crowded registration room, clutching a pile of forms. She stares at the map they've given her. Lost.

Tara attempts to ask a MALE DANCER for directions but he doesn't seem to notice her. She tries another group of older BALLET GIRLS but they just keep walking past.

Tara glances at her watch - it's 8.50am and she's running out of time. Everyone else is already dressed for class.

Tara notices a funky girl, around her age, having a fight with a junk food vending machine. This is KAT.

KAT

Think you're clever, don't you? I'm gonna wipe that smile right off your... (face)

TARA

(breathless)

Hi. Dressing rooms?

Kat looks over and takes in Tara who is smiling earnestly - a total innocent. Kat grabs the map.

TARA

Are you auditioning? Isn't it exciting?

KAT

I just peed a little in my pants.

Tara reacts - was that a joke? Kat grins and passes her back the map.

KAT

You're here, make a right there.

TARA

Thanks.

Tara races off down the corridor, weaving her way through the throng of students.

KAT

Don't mention it.

Kat gives the vending machine a high kick. A flood of chocolate bars fall out.

9

INT. ACADEMY/BOYS' DRESSING ROOM - DAY 1

9

TARA, CHRISTIAN, ETHAN

Tara drops her dance bag down on the bench. She looks around at the empty, silent dressing room and glances at her watch - it's 8.55am.

Tara hurriedly pulls her t-shirt over her head. As it covers her eyes, reveal -

A sixteen-year-old boy, CHRISTIAN, sitting in the shadows. Gorgeous in a troubled kind of way, he watches Tara with mild interest.

Back to Tara who is down to her bra and is reaching into her bag for a leotard. She glances in the mirror and spots Christian sitting behind her. Even though the bra isn't see-through, Tara's arms fly at breakneck speed to cover her chest. Deer caught in headlights.

CHRISTIAN

Don't let me stop you.

TARA

I have pepper spray in my bag and I'm not afraid to use it.

Christian protests innocence.

CHRISTIAN

I was just sitting here, minding my own business...

TARA

In the girls dressing room!

CHRISTIAN

Pretty sure those are urinals. Unless you can go standing up...

Tara looks around at all the distinctly male paraphernalia and realises she's been had. She turns back to Christian, disliking him immensely.

TARA

Can you turn around please?

CHRISTIAN

You might need this.

He picks her t-shirt up from off the floor and dangles it in front of her. A grin twitches at his lips.

Tara wants to snatch it back but can't because it would mean moving an arm. And Christian knows it. Tara's jaw is clenched as he slips the t-shirt between her fingers.

CHRISTIAN

So is it an attention thing?

Christian turns around and Tara tries to scramble into her clothes but she's all thumbs and fingers.

TARA

What?

CHRISTIAN

Stripping in front of strangers.
'Cause that's cool, I'm sure there
are support groups...

Tara meets his eye in the mirror.

TARA

If you're looking I swear I'll...

The door opens and ETHAN enters the dressing room. Popular and charming, he's a few years older than Christian.

Ethan looks between Christian and Tara. She's still scrambling into her top. Ethan laughs.

ETHAN

Sorry guys. I'll come back later.

TARA

No it's not... (what you think)

But he's already back out the door. Tara can't believe this is happening. She looks over to Christian, who doesn't hide his amusement.

TARA

I'm glad you find this so
hilarious.

Tara grabs her bag and dashes after Ethan.

INT. ACADEMY/CORRIDOR - DAY 1
TARA, ETHAN, TIM, N/S STUDENTS

Tara catches up with Ethan who is striding through the corridor.

TARA

Wait. That wasn't anything. I mean,
obviously, it was something but it
wasn't... (*what you think*)

ETHAN

(interrupting)
No judgment.

Tara gives up trying to explain. She grabs his arm.

10

CONTINUED:

10

TARA

Please, you have to take me to the girls dressing room. It's an emergency.

Ethan looks down at her desperate face.

ETHAN

Come on.

He leads Tara down the hallway. She stumbles to keep up.

ETHAN

So... Audition week?

TARA

Is it that obvious?

ETHAN

(teasing)

No. I mean, you've got that wide-eyed Bambi thing going on. And your t-shirt's inside out but...

Tara looks down at herself and cringes yet again.

ETHAN

It's a good look. Here.

Ethan takes off his own T-shirt and puts it back on inside out. A passing friend (TIM) whistles appreciatively.

ETHAN

This is you.

They've reached a door at the other end of the corridor. Ethan flashes Tara a brilliant smile and she makes eye contact with him for the first time. It hits her hard.

TARA

Thanks.

Tara can't look away. Ethan notices and grins again.

ETHAN

Good luck.

Tara's face is burning as she watches him saunter away. She glances down at her watch yet again - 8.59am. Tara flies into the dressing room.

11

INT. ACADEMY/CORRIDOR - DAY 1

11

TARA, MR KENNEDY (O.S.)

A voice booms out over the empty corridor.

11 CONTINUED:

11

MR KENNEDY (O.S.)
 Welcome to the National Academy of
 Dance -

Tara tears through the hallway, now dressed in a leotard and ballet tights.

MR KENNEDY (O.S.)
 - the top school in the country and
 among the most prestigious training
 institutions -

12 **INT. ACADEMY/STUDIO - DAY 1**

12

TARA, CHRISTIAN, KAT, ABIGAIL, SAMMY, GEORGIA, MR KENNEDY,
 MISS RAINE, PATRICK, N/S AUDITIONEES (GIRLS AND BOYS)

Tara bursts into the studio, hair in disarray.

MR KENNEDY
 - in the world.

A room full of immaculately dressed dance students and a panel of teachers, MISS RAINE, PATRICK and MR KENNEDY turn to stare at her.

TARA
 Sorry.
 (beat, louder)
 Sorry.

Flushed bright red, Tara edges her way over to join the group. A particularly intimidating woman, MISS RAINE, darts her an icy glare. If looks could kill...

Tara turns her attention to MR KENNEDY - the director of the school.

MR KENNEDY
 You have already been selected from
 thousands of dancers however we
 have room in first year for just a
 few. Over the coming days, it's
 your job to prove you should be
 among them.

Tara looks around the room at her competition and takes a deep breath.

13 **INT. ACADEMY/STUDIO - DAY 1**

13

TARA, KAT, SAMMY, ABIGAIL, CHRISTIAN, MISS RAINE, PATRICK,
 GEORGIA, SEAN, BONNIE, N/S AUDITIONEES (GIRLS AND BOYS)

Mr Kennedy's speech is over and auditioning students are all preparing for their first class.

One girl is working her pointe shoe, bending her foot into an incredible arched position. Another chats to a friend while using a foam roller to loosen her thigh muscles. A boy - SEAN - practises a series of jumps in rapid fire. The girl beside him practises her fouettes, also trying to psyche out her competitors. A boy's knee is strapped, bloodied toes are bandaged, leotards are adjusted.

PATRICK, the boys ballet master, calls over the noise.

PATRICK

Can the boys finish warming up and follow me next door? Girls are staying here with Miss Raine.

MISS RAINE

Patrick, may I have a word?

Miss Raine leads Christian out of the studio. He's dressed in boardshorts and a singlet instead of ballet clothes, not seeming the slightest bit interested about being there.

Once the adults have departed, Kat grins wickedly and presses play on the mp3 player she's connected to the stereo.

Tara and the other dancers look startled as anthemic electronic music blares out. Munching on a chocolate bar, Kat looks up at Tara who is walking towards the barre.

KAT

Hey. Did you find the dressing room okay?

The group surrounding Kat turns to Tara. She meets Kat's gaze, trying not to show the practical joke upset her.

TARA

(guarded)

Fine. Thanks.

A flicker of remorse crosses Kat's face.

Tara takes her place at the front of the barre and begins to warm up. She watches Kat through narrowed eyes as she starts dancing around to the music that's playing. Kat works the room, generally trying to loosen the tension, by grabbing people's hands and getting them to dance with her.

ABIGAIL (O.S.)

So you met Kat?

Tara turns towards the voice. Two girls in matching skirts and leotards are mid-stretch beside her. They've contorted themselves into positions where it's impossible to tell which body parts are where.

TARA

Yeah, she sent me to the boys
toilets.

From her upside down viewpoint, one of the girls - GEORGIA -
shudders.

GEORGIA

Yuck. Did it smell?

The other body unravels itself and a beautiful girl, ABIGAIL,
smiles at Tara. She looks like a perfect ballerina.

ABIGAIL

Listen, we were all at the Junior
School together. Kat's lots of
"fun"...

GEORGIA

And not untalented.
(off Abigail's look)
What? She's not.

ABIGAIL

But the staff know that if
someone's friends with her, then
they're not really serious about
dancing.

GEORGIA

Bad impression to make in Audition
Week.

Tara looks at Kat. She's just accosted an extremely nervous
boy called SAMMY, who is following the other boys out of the
studio. He squirms as she tries to make him dance with her.

TARA

Got it.

ABIGAIL

I'm Abigail. This is Georgia.

TARA

Tara. Webster.

ABIGAIL

Cool. You and I are roommates.

She smiles again with perfect teeth and Tara smiles back,
amazed by Abigail's flexibility as she goes into a hyper-
stretch.

GEORGIA

Nice leotard.

Tara glances down at her powder blue leotard - it seems
babyish by comparison.

TARA
My mum made it.

The other girls share a glance, attempting to hide their smirks.

ABIGAIL
So I know it sounds, whatever. But I have this thing about...

Abigail indicates to where Tara is standing. Tara doesn't know what she's talking about.

GEORGIA
Abigail always stands at the front of the barre.

TARA
Oh, of course. Sorry.

Tara hastily goes to stand behind the other two girls. Abigail beams.

ABIGAIL
We are going to have such a great week. I can feel it.

Tara smiles as well - she's made some friends!

The music cuts out abruptly and everyone looks up just as Kat executes a spectacular move. Miss Raine has re-entered the studio.

MISS RAINE
Thank you Katrina. If only the same energy went into all your dancing.

Miss Raine's gaze sweeps the room, taking everything in.

MISS RAINE
To the barre ladies. Let's begin.

INT. ACADEMY/STUDIO - DAY 1

TARA, ABIGAIL, KAT, MISS RAINE, GEORGIA, N/S AUDITIONEES (GIRLS)

Girls Classical: Class has begun. The girls are lined up along the barre and are moving in sync. Tara looks calmer as her body performs the familiar adagio exercises. She glances around the room, excited about being here.

Miss Raine is walking along the barre, making notes on her clipboard and correcting the students as she goes.

MISS RAINE
Developpe up and sustain your turn out girls. Really square your hips.

Miss Raine passes Abigail.

MISS RAINE

Good. It's Abigail, isn't it?

Abigail nods, pleased she's been noticed. Miss Raine looks around the room, clapping her hands together.

MISS RAINE

This is about proper placement everyone. Not height.

She reaches Tara who is putting artistic flourishes into her port de bras. Tara smiles winningly, enjoying herself. Miss Raine doesn't smile back. She looks Tara over, like she's a piece of meat.

MISS RAINE

Does that look like a nice line to you?

Tara looks at her reflection in the mirror - she's not sure. Annoyed, Miss Raine grabs Tara's leg and lowers it to a position that is well below everybody else's.

MISS RAINE

Forget the flourishes. You need to concentrate on your technique.

Tara bites her lip, attempting to do what she's told, but her leg starts shaking. Miss Raine makes a sharp slash on her clipboard and glides past.

Tara turns her eyes straight ahead and takes a deep breath.

CUT TO

LATER

Girls Classical: The girls have finished at the barre and are working in the centre of the room. Tara is in the back row of the group that's performing. Drenched in sweat, she faces left when she should be facing right and wobbles badly in the pirouette.

She looks up just as Miss Raine makes another mark on her clipboard. The music ends.

TARA

(out of breath)

I've never even seen half these steps.

ABIGAIL

How long have you been dancing?

MISS RAINE

Ladies, I want a simple chase pas
de bourree, glissade into grand
jete. Abigail can you demonstrate?

Abigail runs to the corner of the room. The music begins and she executes the steps perfectly, soaring high in the air.

MISS RAINE

Use your plie. Good.

The music continues and one-by-one the girls travel down the room. Tara watches as they all perform flawlessly. Even Kat is impressive, though she tosses off the steps like she's not really trying.

MISS RAINE

The ending Katrina!

The girls blur past as Tara gets closer to the front of the line. Suddenly, it's her turn. Tara's heart is pounding as she begins to dance...

15 **EXT. ACADEMY/CAFE - DAY 1**

15

TARA, ABIGAIL, KAT, ETHAN, GEORGIA, N/S STUDENTS

A piece of mashed potato slips off its fork and lands onto a plate with a loud SLAP.

TARA

It was a disaster.

Tara, Abigail and Georgia are sitting in the Academy's outdoor cafe that overlooks the water. Abigail and Georgia are picking at their salads, staring with morbid fascination at the Shepherd's Pie Tara is eating.

GEORGIA

It really wasn't.

TARA

I crashed into the barre.

ABIGAIL

You made an impression.

TARA

You guys made a better one.

Abigail tosses back her hair, pleased with this. Tara sees Kat walking in her direction, with Ethan by her side. The other girls follow Tara's gaze.

GEORGIA

(conspiratorial)

Ethan Karamakov. He's going into third year.

TARA

Are he and Kat... *(together)*?

ABIGAIL

He's her half-brother. The better half.

The girls tune back into the Karamakov conversation.

KAT

Don't worry Golden Boy. You can report back to the parentals that I'm here, as requested. Dancing my heart out.

Ethan swipes the cake off her heaving lunch tray.

ETHAN

Yeah. If only that was true.

Kat walks away and falls into the first seat available - at Tara's table.

KAT

Is this seat taken?

ABIGAIL

Actually we were having a private... *(conversation)*

Kat ignores her. She turns to Tara.

KAT

Hey, oops about before. I'm crap at giving directions.

Tara doesn't know how to respond to this. Abigail snorts.

KAT

A bunch of us are heading out after class. Do you want to come?

Abigail pushes her chair away from the table.

KAT

I'd invite Abigail but it'd interfere with her sit-ups.

Abigail stalks away, Georgia follows closely behind. Tara looks between them and Kat. It's an obvious snub.

TARA

Thanks but... *(I can't)*

Abigail calls out, impatient.

ABIGAIL

Tara?

15 CONTINUED:

15

Tara awkwardly stands up to follow the other girls.

TARA
(apologetic)
I just want to concentrate on my
classes this week.

Kat bites into her burger.

KAT
Standard bunhead response.

16 **INT. ACADEMY/STUDIO - DAY 1**

16

TARA, ABIGAIL, KAT, MISS RAINE, GEORGIA, N/S AUDITIONEES
(GIRLS)

Girls Classical: The first day of Audition Week continues...
Now wearing pointe shoes, the girls are chaineing down the
room. Tara is red-faced and wobbly, compared to the other
girls who skim across the floor as if it is effortless.

CUT TO:

Miss Raine walks behind Tara clapping out the beat as she
turns. Tara falls out of the turn and Miss Raine keeps
clapping, her hands just beside Tara's head.

CUT TO:

Miss Raine watches Tara for a moment in the chaines - she
seems to have it under control. Miss Raine makes a small tick
on her clipboard.

Tara then immediately stumbles in the turn and Miss Raine has
to make another slash.

CUT TO:

Class has ended. Tara removes her pointe shoes and rolls up
her tights. Her toes are blistered and the blood has soaked
through her tights.

17 **EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - NIGHT 1**

17

NIL CAST

Flying over the Academy and up a sandstone cliff-face, we
reach a golden terrace house that stands on the very top of a
hill. The lights of the city twinkle in the background. The
Sydney Harbour Bridge hovers omnipresent, a near neighbour.

Glowing in the moonlight, this is the Boarding House.

18

INT. BOARDING HOUSE/TARA'S ROOM - NIGHT 1

18

TARA, ABIGAIL

Tara is lying exhausted on one of the beds in the dorm room she is sharing with Abigail. She looks over and watches with morbid fascination as Abigail performs sit-ups on a pilates ball like some sort of energiser bunny.

TARA

I need air.

ABIGAIL

It's after ten. You'd be breaking curfew.

TARA

Seriously? I'm not allowed outside?

ABIGAIL

They're really strict about us leaving the Boarding House.

Tara nods and, frustrated, exits the room.

19

INT. BOARDING HOUSE/STAIRCASE - NIGHT 1

19

TARA

Tara sits curled up on the stairs. She's talking on her mobile, homesick but doing her best not to show it.

TARA

(into phone)

Yeah. It's incredible mum. The girls here are amazing. I mean, some of them are stronger than I am but that's... you know... *(to be expected)*

Tara tries to keep her voice steady.

TARA

(into phone)

Uh-huh. It's definitely everything I thought it would be.

20

EXT. SYDNEY - TIME LAPSE

20

NIL CAST

Night becomes day over the the Sydney skyline.

21

INT. ACADEMY/STUDIO - DAY 2

21

TARA, ABIGAIL, KAT, GEORGIA, MISS RAINE, N/S AUDITIONEES (GIRLS)

INTERCUT WITH:

22

EXT. ACADEMY/WHARFSIDE - DAY 2

22

TARA, ABIGAIL, GEORGIA, KAT, HAZEL, N/S AUDITIONEES (GIRLS),
MISS RAINÉ (O.S)

Girls Classical: Tara is now wearing the same leotard and skirt as Abigail and Georgia, dancing behind them at the front of the barre. Miss Raine is walking the room.

MISS RAINÉ

Every year girls come into this studio thinking that wanting to dance is enough to make them dancers. It isn't.

Miss Raine approaches Tara who smiles once again. Miss Raine looks past her, unseeing. She doesn't bother to correct her.

MISS RAINÉ

You need to get your head out of the clouds.

CUT TO:

Tara, Abigail and Georgia are walking across the wharfside. With linked arms, Tara is in the middle of the two girls, and firmly under their wing in their matching leotards.

MISS RAINÉ (O.S.)

And critically assess yourselves and those around you.

Tara's eyes are wide as Abigail provides commentary on the other girls they pass.

ABIGAIL

Can't turn. Terrible feet.

GEORGIA

Low extensions.

ABIGAIL

Uncoordinated.

They pass Hazel and Abigail and Georgia share a smug glance.

ABIGAIL & GEORGIA

Breasts.

Tara turns back to the slightly developed girl, Hazel, who is laughing with Kat. Tara meets Kat's gaze.

BACK TO:

Class continues in the studio. Tara is trying hard but Miss Raine grabs her leg and lowers it again.

22 CONTINUED:

22

MISS RAINE
Face your physical limitations. Not
everyone is born a dancer.

23 INT. DOCTOR'S EXAMINATION ROOM - DAY 2

23

TARA, ABIGAIL, KAT, DR WICKS, MISS RAINE (O.S.), N/S
ASSISTANT

Tara is lying on a bed in the doctor's examination room. DR WICKS, has Tara's right knee bent to the side. She moves her lower leg to a right angle position, using a Goniometer (protractor) to calculate her hip rotation.

DR WICKS
(somewhat amazed)
That doesn't hurt?

TARA
(shaking her head)
Should it?

Dr Wicks ignores her and talks to her ASSISTANT, reading the measurement off the Goniometer.

DR WICKS
(quietly, impressed)
85 degree passive turn-out, but no
strength.

Abigail is hovering by the door. She doesn't look pleased with this assessment.

CUT TO:

Kat is dancing around the otherwise empty examination room with the skeleton. Dr Wicks comes back into the room.

KAT
Doc, I'm worried he's anorexic.

CUT TO:

Abigail lies on the bed as Dr Wicks calculates her turn-out.

DR WICKS
Don't force it. You'll damage your
knees.

ABIGAIL
I'm not. This is natural.

Dr Wicks looks doubtful. As she turns her back to confer with her assistant, Abigail lets the mask drop and we see how much of a strain this is for her.

23 CONTINUED:

23

MISS RAINÉ (O.S.)
 Most of all, prepare yourselves for
 a lifetime of hard work,
 sacrifice...

24 INT. ACADEMY/STUDIO - DAY 2

24

TARA, KAT, ABIGAIL, GEORGIA, SAMMY, CHRISTIAN, MISS RAINÉ,
 PATRICK, N/S AUDITIONEES (GIRLS AND BOYS)

Mixed Classical: The boys are waiting on the sidelines and the girls are performing in the centre of the room. It's grand allegro.

Tara is dancing between Abigail and Georgia, struggling in a series of difficult cabrioles.

MISS RAINÉ (O.S.)
 ... and, more often than not,
 disappointment.

Georgia suddenly lands badly and crashes to the floor.

Tara's POV as everyone races over. Miss Raine strides down. Georgia is screaming.

MISS RAINÉ
 Don't crowd. Where does it hurt?

GEORGIA
 My achilles.

Tara's face has turned white. She takes a step back as more people block her view. Abigail stands beside her.

ABIGAIL
 (quietly)
 If it's snapped, she's out.

Abigail goes over to the barre to keep her muscles warm. Tara stares, shocked, as Patrick lifts Georgia up and carries her out of the studio.

25 INT. ACADEMY/STUDIO - DAY 2

25

TARA, MISS RAINÉ, N/S AUDITIONEES (BOYS AND GIRLS)

Mixed classical ballet class is over and everyone is dispersing. Tara hesitates for a moment and then approaches Miss Raine who is packing up at the front of the studio.

TARA
 Miss Raine? Hi. I'm Tara Webster.
 Number 59.
 (beat)
 Do you think Georgia will be okay?

Miss Raine glances at Tara and continues what she's doing.

MISS RAINE

I'd be more focused on your own future if I were you.

Tara swallows nervously.

TARA

Right. I don't know what's wrong with me this week. I'm not always this bad.

Tara smiles. There's no acknowledgment.

TARA

And the thing is I really want to be here so...

Miss Raine snaps her case shut. She finally turns to Tara.

MISS RAINE

So I should just take your word for it? That you're not always this "bad"?

TARA

(stunned)
I don't know.

Miss Raine sighs. She flips through her clipboard.

MISS RAINE

Webster is it? You're fifteen?

Tara nods. Miss Raine looks her up and down.

MISS RAINE

Your technique is what we'd expect of a twelve-year-old. Physically, you have potential, which I assume is why you're here, but so do a lot of girls. I don't think you're ready.

TARA

(quietly)
I have to be.

Miss Raine gathers up her belongings and sweeps out of the studio. Tara stands alone in the empty room. She becomes smaller and smaller in frame, lost in the cavernous space.

Tara sinks down onto the floor of the stairs. She leans her head back against the wall.

SAMMY (O.S.)
 Problem shoulder blades. Weak ankles.

Tara sees Sammy. He's in a similar position, looking like he's had a similar day.

TARA
 Behind. Technically.

SAMMY
 At least you can catch up. I need to be genetically re-programmed.

Tara smiles, despite herself. Kat is racing up the stairs. She takes in Tara and drags her to her feet.

KAT
 Great. You're coming with me.

TARA
 (suspicious)
 What? Where?

Sammy waves goodbye to Tara as she's led by Kat up the stairs.

KAT
 There's an end-of-year Academy party happening on the roof.

TARA
 I'm not really in a party... (*mood*)

KAT
 Negative, bunhead. Take your mind off things. C'mon, what do you have to lose?

They've reached the top of the stairs. Tara sees her point.

TARA
 Do you think I can go like this?

Kat contemplates Tara's dance clothes. She obviously has some ideas for improvement.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE/ROOFTOP - SUNSET 2

TARA, KAT, CHRISTIAN, N/S OLDER STUDENTS (BOYS AND GIRLS)

Tara enters the roof-top of the Boarding House. Dressed in Kat's clothes, she looks a lot funkier but not like her usual self. She looks out at the party. The city lights twinkle in the distance.

Kat expertly leads Tara through the party. The music is pumping and Tara's eyes are wide as she takes in the National Academy of Dance students celebrating the end of the year.

KAT

Do you know Christian? He's auditioning as well.

Tara sees that Kat is talking to the guy from the dressing room. They make eye contact. It's awkward.

CHRISTIAN

Training bra. Didn't recognise you.

KAT

(laughs)
What did he just call you?

TARA

(firm)
Nothing.

Christian looks amused, like he can see right through her.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE/ROOFTOP - SUNSET 2

TARA, KAT, CHRISTIAN, ETHAN, TIM, ETHAN'S MATE, N/S OLDER STUDENTS (BOYS AND GIRLS)

It's later and Tara is wandering around the party by herself. She takes a sip from her drink, trying not to appear conspicuous as everyone has fun around her.

On the other side of the party - Kat is in full flirt mode, laughing at something Christian has said. Bored, he looks up and his eyes meet Tara's. She looks away quickly.

Tara crushes her plastic cup and goes to leave. As she turns around, she comes face to face with Ethan. Her heart skips a beat.

ETHAN

Hi.

TARA

(startled)
Kat invited me. But I'm just... I'm just going to go.

ETHAN

Stick around. I'm Ethan by the way.

TARA

I know.

There's an awkward pause and Ethan grins. At that moment two of his mates accost him.

TIM
 (to Ethan)
 Who's your friend?

Tara turns around and Tim recognises her instantly.

TIM
 No way. You're her.

TARA
 Who?

Tim turns to the other guy beside him.

TIM
 This is the newbie who got her gear
 off in our dressing room.

A group is starting to form around Tara. The colour drains
 from her face.

TARA
 It wasn't like that.

Kat joins them at that moment. Ethan looks uncomfortable.

KAT
 Brilliant story, isn't it? When I
 heard...

ETHAN
 (warningly)
 Kat.

KAT
 ... I thought wow. You're, like,
 famous now.

She shakes her head in wonder at Tara's supposed ingenuity.

TARA
 But I would never deliberately...
 (do that)

She turns to Ethan, wanting him to believe her.

TIM
 Bonus points for enthusiasm! All
 the newbies should be more like
 you.

Everyone laughs. Tara looks like she's about to be sick.
 Feeling their eyes on her, she steps back and at that exact
 moment knocks into the girl behind her who is carrying an arm
 load of drinks. They spill over Tara's borrowed clothes.

Tara stares down at herself - total train wreck. Kat giggles.

TARA

I have to... (go)

Tara races away, stumbling slightly in Kat's shoes.

ETHAN

Nice Kat. She's just a kid.

KAT

She's the same age as me!

CROSS TO:

Fighting back tears of humiliation, Tara passes Christian on her way to the exit. She snaps at him.

TARA

What did I ever do to you?

Before Christian can answer, Tara has left the party.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE/TARA'S ROOM - NIGHT 2

TARA, ABIGAIL

Tara flops down onto her dorm bed.

TARA

I am never leaving this room again.

Abigail looks smug as she stretches on her bed, flicking through a dance magazine.

ABIGAIL

That will really help your dancing.

Tara groans and puts her hands over her face.

TARA

It wasn't meant to be this way.

ABIGAIL

(amused)

What way was it meant to be?

TARA

I don't know. Like a dream come true.

Abigail bursts out laughing.

ABIGAIL

It's everybody's dream. That's a given.

With a thud, this registers with Tara for the first time.

29 CONTINUED:

29

ABIGAIL

No one's going to hand it to you on a silver platter. You have stand out, prove to them you're special.

Abigail goes back to her stretching. Tara watches her, lost.

TARA

I don't know how.

Abigail shrugs, enjoying playing teacher.

ABIGAIL

I can show you.

30 **EXT. SYDNEY - DAY 3**

30

NIL CAST, MISS RAINÉ (O.S.)

It's a new day in Sydney. A ferry crosses the Harbour. The rides at Luna Park hurtle around and around.

MISS RAINÉ (O.S.)

For the last week we've been assessing your technique in the classroom.

31 **INT. ACADEMY/STUDIO - DAY 3**

31

TARA, KAT, ABIGAIL, MISS RAINÉ, N/S AUDITIONEES (GIRLS)

Repertoire: The auditioning girls have congregated in front of Miss Rainé.

MISS RAINÉ

Tomorrow, in your final audition, we're looking for how you perform a real dance. How you tell a story.

Abigail stands on one side of Tara. Kat is on the other.

KAT

(whispers)

Where did you get to last night? It all got a bit hectic.

She's trying to apologise but Tara pointedly ignores her.

MISS RAINÉ

The ballet is The Ugly Duckling and the solo you'll be doing is when the duck discovers she is actually a swan.

32 INT. ACADEMY/STUDIO - DAY 3 32
TARA, KAT, ABIGAIL, MISS RAINÉ, N/S AUDITIONEES (GIRLS)

INTERCUT WITH:

33 EXT. WEBSTER'S PROPERTY/PADDOCK - DAY (FANTASY SEQUENCE) 33
TARA

Repertoire: The auditioning girls are marking through the choreography. Miss Raine is fiddling with the stereo, flicking to the right track.

MISS RAINÉ

Ladies, get ready to do a run through.

Abigail grabs Tara's hand and stops her from moving up to the back of the room.

ABIGAIL

Front row.

TARA

She'll see me.

Tara pulls away. Abigail rolls her eyes and yanks her back.

ABIGAIL

That's the idea. All right, on the rare occasion I get nervous I imagine myself on stage. You should probably picture yourself somewhere.

Abigail is flippant but Tara nods, nervous. The music begins and the girls take their positions.

ABIGAIL

Failing that, follow me.

The music swells. Without time to think, Tara raises one arm into the classic ballet position. She closes her eyes.

CUT TO:

Once again, Tara is standing beside the paddock gate, one arm gracefully arched above her head. She begins to dance...

The breeze rustles through the wheat paddock. Red dust circles the air.

Soon Tara is spinning and leaping, faster and higher with every step. She's beautiful to watch and smiles wide. She's finally forgotten to be scared. She performs the final grand jete en tournant and then bourrees around...

BACK TO:

Mid-turn, Tara is back in the studio. The music ends. She seems lost for a moment, caught between both worlds. Tara looks up and realises that Miss Raine is staring at her. So is Abigail.

MISS RAINE
Webster, isn't it? You altered the choreography. Why?

TARA
I don't remember.

Tara looks frightened but Miss Raine studies her intently before moving onto Abigail.

MISS RAINE
Abigail, there was a coldness now. I want to see what's beyond the steps. You could learn something by watching Tara.

She turns to Tara and grants her the tiniest of smiles.

MISS RAINE
It was surprisingly good.

Tara is stunned. Abigail's face is expressionless.

INT. ACADEMY/GIRLS' DRESSING ROOM - DAY 3

TARA, ABIGAIL, KAT, N/S STUDENTS (GIRLS), N/S AUDITIONEES (GIRLS)

Tara bounds into the dressing room, still on a high from class. Abigail has changed out of her ballet clothes. She turns away when she sees Tara.

TARA
I was looking for you. Great class.

Abigail glances at the leotard Tara is wearing.

ABIGAIL
I need that leotard back.

TARA
I was going to wear it tomorrow. For luck.

ABIGAIL
Mum doesn't want me lending it anymore.

Kat is eavesdropping on their conversation on the other side of the room. She raises an eyebrow.

34 CONTINUED:

34

TARA

Okay. So, do you still want to practise later...?

Abigail stalks out of the dressing room. The door shuts behind her.

KAT

Guess not.

Tara looks at Kat munching on yet another chocolate bar.

35 **EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - NIGHT 3**

35

NIL CAST

The Boarding House looms in darkness. Everyone's asleep.

36 **INT. BOARDING HOUSE/TARA'S ROOM - NIGHT 3**

36

TARA, ABIGAIL

Except Tara. Abigail is snoring softly in the next bed, wearing an eye-mask. Tara checks the alarm clock - it's 3.15am.

Tara rolls onto her back and stares up at the ceiling, frustrated. Unable to sleep, she listens to the sounds of the city. The TRAFFIC ROARING past her, the SIREN of an AMBULANCE. Tara tries to block it out with her pillow but if anything it just gets louder until it's deafening.

Tara finally sits up. She's got to get out of here.

She grabs her ugg boots and her mobile phone - it says she has a new message.

As Tara slips out of the room, we see Abigail lying still in bed. Her eyemask hasn't moved but she's stopped snoring.

37 **EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - NIGHT 3**

37

TARA, ABIGAIL, PHONE VOICE (O.S.)

Tara steps outside into the fresh air and looks back at her bedroom window, one floor up.

For a moment it seems like there's a shadow at the window. The curtains move slightly and then the shadow is gone.

PHONE VOICE (O.S.)

You have one new voice message.

38

EXT. CITY STREET/BOTANICAL GARDENS - NIGHT 3

38

TARA, NEIL WEBSTER (O.S.)

It's the middle of the night as Tara runs across the street in her pyjamas and ugg boots. Her hair streams behind her.

NEIL WEBSTER (O.S.)

(on the phone)

Hi sweetheart. Guess you're not there. I've been thinking about what you said, about not being strong enough. Seems to me you've already forgotten where you come from.

Tara looks up as she finds her herself at the entrance to the Botanical Gardens.

39

EXT. BOTANICAL GARDENS - NIGHT 3

39

TARA, NEIL WEBSTER (O.S.), PHONE VOICE (O.S.)

Tara makes her way through the moonlit Botanical Gardens.

NEIL WEBSTER (O.S.)

(on the phone)

Think of me putting a crop in during a drought year. Takes courage to back yourself. But then you know that.

Tara looks up. She's reached a spot where she can see the Sydney Opera House. Through the trees, it glows like a beacon.

NEIL WEBSTER (O.S.)

(on the phone)

Anyway, I feel like a goose talking into a machine. 'Night princess. Good luck tomorrow.

PHONE VOICE (O.S.)

To delete press...

Tara stands facing the Opera House. She rolls up her pyjama pants and begins to practise the solo.

We pull out, leaving her in the middle of the gardens. She's working hard, giving it everything she's got.

40

EXT. NATIONAL ACADEMY OF DANCE - DAWN 4

40

NIL CAST

Dawn has broken. The Academy is bathed in gold light.

KAT

What's that all about?

ABIGAIL

No idea.

Abigail doesn't give anything away.

CUT TO:

Tara enters the studio. Mr Kennedy looks up, grave, from his place on the adjudicating panel.

MR KENNEDY

Hello Tara.

She smiles nervously at everyone.

TARA

Hi. Should I start?

MR KENNEDY

No. We have some questions.

(beat)

Are you aware it's against school rules to leave the boarding house after hours without permission?

Tara freezes in shock.

BACK TO:

The corridor. The auditionees are piled against the one window where the blinds are partly raised. Sammy has his ear pressed against the door.

MR KENNEDY (O.S.)

... responsibility to your parents... serious safety issue.

Sammy reports back to the others.

SAMMY

He's talking about breaking curfew.

Kat looks over to Abigail.

KAT

Why would they ask her that?

CUT TO:

In the studio, Miss Raine won't even meet Tara's eye.

MISS RAINE

Tara, an allegation has been made and if it's true we'll have no choice but to cancel your audition.

Tara stares at the panel, devastated, as her dream crumbles all around her. There's a rustle at the door and Kat bursts in full of bravado.

KAT

Okay, you can call off the witch hunt.

Everyone looks surprised. No one more so than Tara.

MISS RAINE

You have something to contribute Katrina?

TARA

No, she doesn't.

KAT

Tara, don't be silly.

She turns back to the panel.

KAT

Last night Abigail was snoring. Seriously, that girl needs to do something about her nasal passages. The walls shake.

MISS RAINE

Your point?

KAT

My point is Tara bunked in with me.

Tara turns to Kat, astonished. Mr Kennedy knows Kat well and finds this convenient.

MR KENNEDY

Really?

KAT

Would I lie sir?

MR KENNEDY

Miss Webster?

Tara looks to Kat, who nods imperceptibly.

TARA

(shaken, lying)
I was in Kat's room last night.

Mr Kennedy smiles.

MR KENNEDY

Excellent. Then that's the end of it.

(MORE)

42

CONTINUED:

42

MR KENNEDY (CONT'D)

I don't know about anyone else but
I'd like to see the solo Miss Raine
was telling me about.

Overwhelmed by everything that's happened, Tara slowly moves into the centre of the room. She passes Kat, confused by what she just did. She just saved her life.

KAT

Don't mention it.

Tara looks beyond her to the window where Abigail is watching. Their eyes meet. Tara can't read her friend's expression. She seems coldly furious. But why? Miss Raine breaks her reverie.

MISS RAINÉ

Have you warmed up?

TARA

What?

MISS RAINÉ

Are you ready?

Tara can't answer that. Too much has happened. The music has already begun and Tara finds herself taking her opening position. But her mind is whirling and all she can see are the faces around her - Abigail, Kat, Miss Raine and Mr Kennedy.

The music swells. Can she do it? Tara takes a deep breath and squeezes her eyes shut, blocking everything else out.

CUT TO BLACK:

Silence...

TARA (V.O.)

Somehow, I forgot everything then.

43

EXT. WEBSTER'S PROPERTY/PADDOCK - DAY 5

43

TARA, TARA (V.O.)

FADE UP and we're flying high above the rustling wheat paddocks. Part of the wind and sky, the horizon stretches forever.

TARA (V.O.)

*All the things I didn't know... How
there's way more to surviving the
Academy than just dancing.*

Tara's quad bike enters our view. It's still rushing towards its destination.

TARA (V.O.)
*I forgot about my audition and what
would come next. I forgot
everything but dancing.*

Tara's bike arrives at the letter box. She climbs off, now calm and ready to accept her fate.

TARA (V.O.)
*Because in that moment I remembered
that just to dance is all that
matters. And no one could take that
away from me.*

Tara pulls out the bundle of letters and flicks through them until she finds the one she's looking for.

TARA (V.O.)
*Miss Raine was wrong. I'm ready.
For Dance Academy.*

With trembling fingers Tara rips opens the letter.

TARA (V.O.)
At least I think I am.

CUT TO BLACK

END OF EPISODE.