

SCENE 1

[Lights up on a boombox, in the most uninviting rehearsal studio you can think of. Fern and Brendon enter from two different sides of the room, stop, pose, make eye contact. They take off running towards each other. He lifts her off the ground. They seem intensely focused. Then:]

FERN:

"Lift yourself upon your feet, lift yourself upon your feet..."

[Brendon puts her down.]

BRENDON:

Fuck's the matter with you.

FERN:

Chillax, B.

BRENDON:

When I'm midway through an eight count and trying to spin you five feet off the ground, you want me to be focused, so maybe don't mutter Kanye West the whole time?

FERN:

I can't help it. I think of it every time I do a lift now.

BRENDON:

Well, thanks a fuckload, now I will too. I've only got a thousand four hundred sixty three lifts this weekend.

FERN *[to the tune of Lift Yourself]*:

"A thousand four hundred sixty three..."

BRENDON:

Can we finish running so I can get to the Book of Mormon?

FERN:

Yeah, you're the one who wanted to stop.

BRENDON:

Cause you won't stop singing.

FERN:

Relax, Boo. It's just so catchy.

BRENDON:

If you want me to be "catchy" too you'll focus.

FERN:

Good one!

[He preps for the same lift. She mutters, in tune:]

FERN:

"Let's get it on..."

BRENDON:

Fern, for once could you just—

[Brendon stops short, grabbing at his back in sudden pain. He curses under his breath.]

FERN:

Oh Brendon. Is this still a thing?

BRENDON:

Obviously!

FERN:

You need a doctor.

BRENDON:

I've been to doctors. They all say it's all in my head. Which is SUPER helpful!

[She goes to change the music. Still in pain, he pushes himself up. She starts the CD. He halfheartedly starts movement.]

BRENDON:

I hate this dance.

[She hugs him. After a moment, he pushes her off and dances with more energy. She watches and bops along with him.]

FERN:

Remember when I said I didn't like my duet with Eileen?

BRENDON:

Sure.

FERN:

I changed my mind. I like it. Now that the feathers are glued.

BRENDON:

Not the best reason to like a dance. Do you really think it's gonna win? She drags the age up by a whole division.

FERN:

Eileen wins in her own division too!

BRENDON:

Sometimes. Depends on how she's feeling that day.

FERN:

She's good lately.

BRENDON:

Remember she fucked everything up at Starbound.

FERN:

She has panic attacks, my mom said.

BRENDON:

She's a hot mess, my mom said.

FERN:

Have you ever had like a panic attack because you had something caught in your throat? Like when you swallowed a pill and it won't stay down? Like the other day I took a pill and it got caught in that in-between spot in my throat and stomach or lungs or something and then I couldn't get it down, but also couldn't get it back up so I was worried I would puke, so I had to wait to puke for like an hour and I really wanted to puke, but I like, couldn't? You know what I mean?

BRENDON:

No. What the fuck. [*He thinks for a second.*] Do you wanna take a break?

FERN:

We probably shouldn't. Remember all those push-ups we did last time Ms. Casey saw us?

[*Brendon acknowledges this. They go to opposite sides of the room, Brendon visibly hurting. Fern looks out the window.*]

FERN:

Oh look!

BRENDON:

Now what?

FERN:

The sun is rising.

BRENDON:

How magical.

[*Prep for the lift. Blackout.*]

SCENE 2

[EILEEN is surrounded by an overwhelming display of makeup, hair accessories, sewing tools, and costume pieces. She's trying to untense while making a bun in her hair. The bun's working out better. KELLY enters, wearing a shirt for Performance Edge, with added text: "Fern's Mom." She starts clearing a spot for her own makeup kit.]

KELLY:

Make way, missy. Your mother has sent me to check in on you.

EILEEN:

I'm fine so far.

KELLY:

Do you want me to finish these feathers? I just did Fern's.

EILEEN:

That's okay.

[She sets up her own kit with feathers and glue and starts working on Eileen's top.]

KELLY:

How do you feel about the duet?

EILEEN:

It's fine. I wish Ms. Casey had seen it again before we left.

KELLY:

I'm sure she meant to. Might have lost track and really thought she saw it.

EILEEN:

I get it.

KELLY:

Your mom and I real excited for it, though. When you and Fern are together, it just works. It's like it's meant to be. I wish it could happen a little more but I know you were always busy with those older kids. And now you're both in the Teen division. I feel like it was just yesterday you were running around with pigtails doing that Old McDonald routine. Time flies.

EILEEN:

Yeah.

KELLY:

I bet you'll win with this swan routine.

EILEEN:

Me and Fern, yeah. Me and anyone else, I don't know.

KELLY:

I know those older teens can be pretty intimidating but you two are just as good.

EILEEN:

What glue are you using?

KELLY:

Just something or other from the house. Might be a little old. It stuck a little better to Fern's top.

EILEEN:

Want to use mine? I just went to Michael's a couple days ago. [*Kelly ignores her.*] Kelly, they're going to fly off during the dance.

KELLY:

It'll work out just fine. I wouldn't send you out there without a plan.

EILEEN:

I know.

KELLY:

I'm not your mom, but you know she had to stay backstage and take care of your sister. She's too little be doing her own quick changes yet. But you're our grown up girl, no need to worry about you. No one's ever worried about Eileen. Our little grown up.

EILEEN:

Thank you.

KELLY:

I remember when you were little. As soon as you learned what a dance captain was, you marched right up to Ms. Casey and said that you were going to be her next dance captain. Imagine! All of four years old and ready to take charge.

EILEEN:

Really, you don't have to do the feathers. I can do them, it'll take like ten minutes, and we're not going on until two-thirty so—

KELLY:

Oh no, I'm sorry, dear. Here I am, going on and on. I didn't mean to make you nervous. I know you're perfectly capable. In fact, I came over to do it for you, just to help you out. Give

your brain a break for a sec. Let you get into the zone without having to go blind gluing three dozen feathers.

[Eileen pulls a feather off of her skirt.]

EILEEN:

I think the hair dryer would help.

KELLY:

No need, dear. You were spot-on before—you have plenty of time for it to dry before this goes on stage.

EILEEN:

If they come off this easily now, they'll never stop once we do that first aerial. They'll be everywhere. It'll take the staff forever to clean them and then everyone's gonna get pissed at us.

KELLY:

The stage manager might miss a couple. But that's fine.

EILEEN:

Someone could slip and really get hurt on just a couple.

KELLY:

Do you know what's going on right after you?

EILEEN:

Some tap trio.

KELLY:

It's called Stupid Cupid or something?

EILEEN:

Yeah.

KELLY:

From Baltimore Baton and Dance Team?

EILEEN:

Yeah.

KELLY:

Those tap shoes can sure be slippery.

EILEEN:

Yeah.

KELLY:

I saw them rehearsing outside their dressing room earlier. Such clean noises. The whole routine looked great. Sharp, clean movements. Great all around. All their little tappers are really so good there.

EILEEN:

I'll get my hair dryer out. It will only take a sec.

KELLY:

Nonsense! Look at this.

*[She runs her hands on the feathers briskly.
Only one comes off.]*

KELLY:

See? You're good to go. You have plenty of time, but why don't you go check in with the stage manager and let her know you and Fern are ready to check in?

EILEEN:

They're coming off.

KELLY:

If they miss a couple, then gosh, I guess those kids need to pay more attention, right? Kids these days. So distracted.

*[Eileen stares her down. Kelly needs to
break eye contact first.]*

KELLY:

Never mind. You're right, dear. The stage manager will get them. And if they miss a couple, well now, whose fault would that—gosh, it looks so pretty on you! Our grown up girl. Our big little Eileen.

*[Kelly packs up
her kit and exits. Eileen watches her leave.
She strokes her feathery skirt, considering.
She takes out her bun and starts redoing it
tighter than ever. Blackout.]*

SCENE 3

[Lights up on a rehearsal studio, a liminal space with room for dancers. FERN is standing in place, eyes ahead, searching for her point of focus. She finds it, and begins practicing her turns.]

VOICE:

What is spotting?

FERN:

I'm doing it.

VOICE:

What is it?

FERN:

While I spin, my head stays focused on something, until it's time for the next turn, and then my head whips around.

VOICE:

Keep going.

[The turns get more frantic.]

FERN:

My head and body are actually turning at different times.

VOICE:

Keep going.

FERN:

I face forward as long as possible.

VOICE:

Keep going.

FERN:

I do this so I don't get dizzy. And so I don't travel while spinning. And. And.

[She wobbles.]

VOICE:

Looks like someone needs to review the basics a little. Fern, when are you going to learn that spinning is about more than throwing your weight around?

[Fern glances down at her body .]

FERN:

For balance too, right?

[*She preps for another turn.*]

Right?

VOICE:

How many hours a week are you in ballet?

FERN:

Four without a private.

VOICE:

Did you remember what we talked about with your mother? Upping it to six hours?

FERN:

But it's only in the mornings.

VOICE:

Fern, it's up to you, but I'm telling you there's a noticeable difference once homeschooling starts.

FERN:

I like school.

VOICE:

What do you love?

FERN:

Dance. Yeah.

VOICE:

I can't make the decision for you.

[*Fern rubs her stomach, looks queasy.*]

FERN:

"Lift yourself up on your feet..."

VOICE:

You're already dancing with the older kids—Jade, Madison, Eileen—did you know Eileen started homeschooling at your age? Look how far she's come.

FERN:

"Let's get it on..."

VOICE:

You have such talent. It would be a shame to waste it.

FERN:

I think I need a Pepto.

VOICE:

You can't run for a Pepto every single time you get a note.
Let's take it from the top of your first solo.

*[Fern obeys, prepping and beginning her solo, not
looking like she feels any better.]*

Blackout.]

READ ONLY

SCENE 4

[Brendon rehearses a solo in a small patch of open space. It's easy for him to run through, but he's still tense. Music plays in the background, coming from the nearby stage. There's a general din of dancing children practicing their solos or changing their costumes. Colorful lights. MARC enters and starts watching the solo; it's not a surprise, he knew where Brendon was rehearsing. Brendon stops short, waiting for something, then continues.]

MARC:

Sorry. *[Brendon ignores him.]* Didn't mean to spook you.

BRENDON:

It wasn't you.

MARC:

Ah.

[He watches for a few more seconds, then checks his phone, pretending not to watch.]

BRENDON:

I have it memorized.

MARC:

Oh, I didn't say anything.

BRENDON:

I only stopped because—never mind.

MARC:

Kind of a distracting area to rehearse.

BRENDON:

If you're easily distracted.

MARC:

Are you from Performer's Edge?

[Long pause of consideration. Brendon finishes marking through his solo.]

BRENDON:

Performance Edge.

MARC:

And you're one of their only boys. How many dances are you doing this week? I forget if there's a maximum here, but... let me guess... twelve? *[off Brendon's look]* I was right.

BRENDON:

Tomorrow. *[off Marc's look]* Twelve tomorrow alone.

MARC:

And then more on the weekend. Wow. I really admire you guys. Sometimes just getting my kids to do show up to rehearsal is like pulling teeth. More interested in prom these days than dancing. How many solos are you doing?

BRENDON:

Three. For now.

MARC:

Oh yeah. And I assume you're going for the title prize too.

BRENDON:

Only on the musical theatre one.

MARC:

Mr. Energy Works.

BRENDON:

That's the one.

MARC:

Yeah, I've only got one trying this year. His name's Tyler Edwards. I think he's your age? Same division at least.

[Brendon tries not to show it, but he bristles just hearing the name. He restarts running his solo.]

MARC:

He's kind of on a streak, so.

[Brendon goes for a bigger turn or trick, but he does feel something in his back.]

MARC:

You okay?

BRENDON:

Yeah. I just get these. Something in my back. It's fine.

MARC:

I knew it was something hurting you. You kept stopping but a kid like you wouldn't come to a comp without his Mr. Energy Works solo fully memorized. Do you mind me asking—is it muscle spasms?

Lower back? *[Brendon stares at him]* Oh, sorry. This must be weird. Some teacher from another studio asking you about your body. I'm from--

BRENDON:

South Torrington Tap.

MARC:

You've heard of us.

BRENDON:

Hard not to.

MARC:

Yeah, our social media really took off this year.

BRENDON:

No, I meant because of the tapping. You're loud.

MARC:

We've got other stuff too. If you're ever interested in exploring a couple hip hop lessons--

BRENDON:

No.

MARC:

Anyway, I'm Marc. *[Marc holds out his hand.]* And you're Brendon Pierce from P.E. Kinda famous around the northeast comp circuit.

[Brendon shakes his hand, not without some degree of caution.]

MARC:

I've got a series of exercises I have for what you're experiencing. You're at that age where the aches and pains start cropping up and you have to figure out how to deal with it now. Especially a kid as talented as you with his whole career ahead of him. I wouldn't even charge for the first meeting, I just hate seeing people your age in that much pain. But listen, it's kind of hard to concentrate on relaxing your muscles when I'm yelling at you over this music. Which hotel are you in? Fairfield Inn like us, right?

[Marc has not let go of his hand. Brendon pulls back, looks over his shoulder.]

BRENDON *[pointedly]*:

Yeah, I just gotta go run my solo with my teacher, she's waiting for me backstage.

MARC:

Sure. Text me when you're done rehearsing tonight. Here's my card.

[Brendon takes it. Marc exits. Brendon's back hurts. He sits on the floor, clutching the card, crushing it. Lights shift.]

READ ONLY

SCENE 5

[JACKIE, wearing a pantsuit, walks up to the side of the stage, ducking into a corner. She has a microphone, a score sheet, and a makeup bag. She takes out a pocket mirror and starts touching up her makeup. Eileen startles her.]

EILEEN:

Ohmygod you're like my favorite emcee.

JACKIE:

Thank you!

EILEEN:

Definitely better than all the others we had this year.

JACKIE:

Oh wow! Thank you again!

EILEEN:

Were you at the Allentown regionals?

JACKIE:

Yes, that was me! I remember you too! That Black Swan duet was absolutely gorgeous.

EILEEN:

It's gotten so much better.

JACKIE:

I can't wait to see it.

EILEEN:

Can I get a selfie with you?

JACKIE:

Gosh, yes, that's so--

EILEEN:

So I was wondering, like, you know that duet with the two girls, the Cupid routine? They were rehearsing back here earlier?

JACKIE:

Oh yeah, Stupid Cupid?

EILEEN:

Yeah, Baltimore Baton and Dance?

JACKIE:

I think they're performing tomorrow. With you—you're doing a

swan routine then, too? There's so many great dances tomorrow, so exciting, right?

EILEEN:

I thought that blonde girl from Stupid Cupid was injured during her rehearsal. Right? I saw her over here with all her teachers.

JACKIE:

During rehearsal?

EILEEN:

Was she okay?

JACKIE:

She did hit her toe or something, but she'll be good to go for duets tomorrow, last I heard.

EILEEN:

Oh. How--?

JACKIE:

Apparently she has some sort of numbing medication for her toe.

EILEEN:

Oh. Okay. Like a cream?

JACKIE:

I don't actually know. You'll have to ask her when you see her.

EILEEN *[a lie]*:

I'll definitely do that.

JACKIE:

When I was a kid in these comps, once, I broke my toe and my parents injected my toe each day.

EILEEN:

With what?

JACKIE:

I don't know, I put my eyelashes on while they did that. It worked pretty well for a few hours.

[Jackie puts her mic and sheet down to focus on fixing her eyelashes.]

JACKIE:

Imagine, I used to be better at doing my eyelashes when I was fourteen than I am now. Look at me. What a mess!

[Eileen watches, making sure Jackie's distracted. She reaches for the scoresheet slowly. She takes it and holds it, but]

doesn't look at it, too busy making sure Jackie doesn't see. Finally Jackie looks up and reflexively snatches the paper.]

JACKIE [recovering]:

Ha! Sorry! That was a way overreaction. But these are private, okay?

EILEEN:

Oh. Sorry. I didn't know.

[She definitely knows. Jackie is aware. A staredown. Eileen has to break it.]

JACKIE:

Did you want to take a selfie?

[Eileen starts to walk away. JACKIE lets her and resumes fixing her makeup. Eileen looks over her shoulder at JACKIE. In a small burst of anger, Eileen throws the quickest physical tantrum you've ever seen, one quick burst of furied motion.]

Jackie looks over at the noise but Eileen is gone.

Blackout.]

SCENE 6

[The liminal practice space. Brendon, looking bored, executes a few nearly perfect turns.]

VOICE:

You clearly know how to spot very well.

BRENDON:

Could you imagine if I didn't? At this point?

VOICE:

Can you tell me when spotting would not be effective?

BRENDON:

If you wanted to change your focus point.

VOICE:

But then you would still spot, wouldn't you? You would just be changing the spot while you turned.

[Brendon tries it.]

BRENDON:

Then I guess maybe if you wanted to travel... without changing your focus point.

VOICE:

Then that would be considered--

BRENDON:

No, that's wrong. It's still spotting.

VOICE:

You interrupted me again.

BRENDON:

I'm sorry.

VOICE:

Third time this rehearsal. Twenty five pushups.

[He obeys. At some point, he is visibly in pain.]

VOICE:

Push through it.

BRENDON:

That makes it worse.

VOICE:

Make it happen. *[He makes it happen.]* A chief reason you would

not spot is for aesthetics. Sometimes turning the head disturbs the motion of certain turns. If you wanted to keep a calm appearance, spotting might interfere. Try it and see. [*He does not.*] Right now or ten more push ups.

BRENDON:

I don't understand this. I know how to spot. Why are you doing this? Why do you always do this?

[The voice pauses. Maybe out of anger, maybe sympathy, maybe pity. The pause is just long enough for Brendon to really regret speaking up.]

VOICE:

You understand how to spot but you don't know why. That's always the case with you, Brendon. You think the judges can't tell? Intention is such an important part of choreography.

BRENDON:

I don't understand.

VOICE:

You'll have some time to figure it out. This rehearsal is done.

BRENDON:

No no no we have like half an hour left. We have to run this like three more times at least. I have to go against that Tyler kid and-- I can't end early again, my mom's gonna freak out.

VOICE:

You should have thought of that before you sassed me through an entire private and fell out of your turns not once but twice during the large group rehearsal yesterday.

BRENDON:

I have so many dances tomorrow.

VOICE:

WE have so many dances tomorrow. It's not just about you. Your fellow dancers are counting on you, and we need to start groups strong. Finish your push-ups.

[He does until he can't. Blackout.]

SCENE 7

[Fern and Eileen in matching costumes, obviously for some festive, maybe culturally appropriative Latin-themed dance. They are doing partner stretches.]

EILEEN:

Heard you're gonna start homeschooling after summer.

FERN:

I think, maybe.

EILEEN:

Your mom was telling everyone you're for sure gonna do it.

FERN:

I'm starting hip hop classes.

EILEEN:

What, like on top of ballet?

FERN:

I wanna do a hip hop solo next year really bad.

EILEEN:

Dude. That's gonna take like forever to learn. You're gonna have to be in class all the freaking time.

FERN:

I'll do it if I can do a hip hop solo.

EILEEN:

Don't tell me you actually think you're going to do a Lift Yourself solo.

FERN:

It might happen.

EILEEN:

They wouldn't submit something inappropriate.

FERN:

Maybe it won't be.

EILEEN:

It's Kanye West. What about Bruno Mars?

FERN:

Ew. No.

EILEEN:

Can you seriously picture Ms. Casey choreographing, and teaching you, and rehearsing, and registering a Kanye West solo? She