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CHEER

"Pilot"

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3rd Revised Network Draft
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CHEER

MONTAGE

Hot Chelle Rae wails "I Like To Dance" over FAST-CUT SHOTS of collegiate cheerleaders in action throughout history. We start with the all-male "yell squads" of the early 1900's -- muscular dudes in uncomfortable-looking letter sweaters with the distinctive Green and Gold school colors of Memphis' LANCER UNIVERSITY.

These historical images INTERCUT and V.O. LAP WITH TALKING HEADS, current young cheerleaders in contemporary Hellcat uniforms, short skirts, sexy midriff-exposed tops on the girls, muscle shirts on the guys.

TALKING HEAD: **SIERRA SLOANE** (21), a petite and peppy Texan with fierce intensity.

SIERRA

The Lancer Hellcats are the oldest competitive cheer squad in the country. I'm here for the legacy.

Now it's the 1920's. The first-ever female cheerleaders in flapper haircuts, wearing long buttoned cardigans over turtlenecks. Still looks pretty damn uncomfortable.

TALKING HEAD: **ALICE VANDEMARK** (20), a willowy beauty with jaded New York cool.

ALICE

I'm in it for the competition. Knowing I'm the best. Good training for the real world. Plus Memphis has the best music.

We next move into the 1970's and 80's, and see footage of organized CO-ED COMPETITIONS. The athleticism becomes more pronounced and the stunts become breathtakingly dangerous. Muscular guys ("bases") toss acrobatic girls ("flyers") into the air, balance them on palms, etc. It's hard, grueling work. These girls have calf muscles like marble.

TALKING HEAD: **LUIS FAMOSA** (19), Cuban, easy and laid-back, seriously unserious. If he weren't doing this, he'd probably be surfing.

LUIS

My frat buddies dared me to try out as a joke.

(MORE)

LUIS (CONT'D)

It turned out to be the hardest thing I've ever done, harder than football and wrestling. That's what I love about it.

BEAUTY SHOTS of the Hellcats working out in a gym. Serious sweat and sinew, befitting serious athletes. These aren't your typical high school cupcake cheerleaders.

LUIS (CONT'D)

Plus, I get to look up girls' skirts all day --
(living the dream)
-- Viviendo el sueño.

TALKING HEAD: **PATTY "THE WEDGE" WEDGERMAN** (20), ballsy, fearless, cheerfully profane.

WEDGE

The Hellcats are a family. A loud, ball-busting, occasionally incestuous family. My kinda people.

Now we're into the LATE 1990's. We see former Hellcat star (and current coach) **VANESSA HODGE**, in her early 20's doing amazing tumbling stunts in competition. The Hellcats win. CLOSE ON smile Vanessa, waving the victory trophy, having the time of her life with her celebrating teammates.

TALKING HEAD - SIERRA

SIERRA

I'm also here to learn from our coach Vanessa Hodge, who led the Hellcats to a four year winning streak way back when she was cheer captain.

(suddenly worried)

I said "way" back. It makes her sound old. You'll edit that out, right?

TALKING HEAD - **VANESSA**, now somewhere around age 32 wearing athletic attire. She's an elegant, striking African-American, a tough but loving taskmistress.

VANESSA

Don't tell me they're not athletes. Our bases hold 250 pounds on their shoulders. Our flyers get launched 25 feet for basket tosses.

(MORE)

VANESSA (CONT'D)

Our tumblers take passes that could
get them into the Olympics. But
they choose Lancer.

Now we whip past the sights and sounds of Memphis. Musicians
busk on Beale Street. Pretty people make the scene on the
Highland Strip. The Redbirds play AutoZone Park. Barbecue
everywhere you look.

VANESSA (CONT'D)

They choose to sweat. To bleed.
To push themselves to the breaking
point. They choose to compete, win
and find out first-hand what it
feels like to be a champion.

And finally the bustling campus of Lancer itself. Lush green
lawns, grand Jeffersonian architecture, diverse student body.

VANESSA (CONT'D)

See you at nationals -- we will be
the ones holding the large-ass
trophy!

A LANCER UNIVERSITY CREST fills the screen along with a...

TITLE CARD: "CHEER"

A cheerleader FLIPS through FRAME at warp speed, WIPING US...

EXT. LANCER CAMPUS - PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

Late afternoon practice. The Hellcats jam through their
paces. Vanessa barks orders from the sidelines.

VANESSA

Sierra! Squeeze tighter -- you're
making Darwin work too hard!

ANGLE ON: A SMALL GROUP OF TOWNIES,

hanging out under the bleachers with nothing better to do
than drink beer and watch the cheerleaders practice.

VANESSA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

You wanna make the castle, you
gotta get your head in it!

The only girl in the group is **MARTY BERGER** (21). She's a
townie too, but the pile of textbooks beside her tell us
she's also a student. Marty is wicked smart, an acerbic
outsider.

She's also athletic, but covers it with a punky, Gwen Stefani vibe -- light years from the conventionally pretty cheerleaders across the field. She's shooting the shit with **DAN PATCH** (24), a shambling charmer.

DAN

What makes a person decide to become a cheerleader?

MARTY

Science. Over time, all that pep builds up pressure. If they don't vent, their heads explode.

Vanessa blows her whistle. The Hellcats form a human pyramid with flyers being thrown into position by the bases.

MARTY (CONT'D (CONT'D)

I don't trust any culture that builds pyramids, human or otherwise. Egyptians enslaved the Jews, Aztecs did human sacrifices...

DAN

Freemasons put pyramids on money. And gave Dan Brown something to write a lame book about.

MARTY

They've earned their spot in hell...

Marty eyes Sierra doing a "shoulderstand," a difficult stunt in which her base tosses her into the air and catches her on his shoulders to form the next level of the pyramid.

MARTY (CONT'D)

...Right next to the cheerleaders.

Marty aims an imaginary bow and arrow at the pyramid, which is three cheerleaders high. It's pretty damn impressive.

MARTY (CONT'D)

Okay, Patch. Call it.

DAN

Mmmm... Ponytail chick. I want her head above my mantel.

MARTY

You want her head in your lap.

DAN
(mock shock)
Marty. My delicate sensibilities.

MARTY
Do not actually exist.

Marty lets fly with her imaginary arrow.

The pony-tailed cheerleader, Alice, shoulderstands, completing the pyramid. Suddenly, she SLIPS --

-- creating the illusion that Marty's "arrow" has just toppled the pyramid. *Which has just happened.*

Marty gasps. Dan and the slacker dudes bust a gut laughing as the surprised Hellcats extricate themselves from an unseemly tangle of well-toned arms and legs.

DAN
Marty shot the cheerleaders!
Outstanding! Who's next? The mayor? Can't shoot the president anymore, he's cool.

MARTY
Knock it off. That girl is hurt.

Marty points. Alice rolls on the ground, holding her arm, in pain. Dan shoves her playfully.

DAN
Smile. They're only cheerleaders.

EXT. BERGER HOME - DAY

A modest row home, adjacent to campus. Marty zips up on a bike, chains it to the mailbox and grabs the mail. She wears ear-buds. Ludacris's "How Low" pounds from Marty's iPod.

INT. BERGER HOME - DAY

MUSIC CONTINUES. PAN ALONG an ego wall: Framed photos, plaques and ribbons of Marty in her younger days as an award-winning gymnast. Marty on the balance beam, Marty on the uneven parallel bars. Nothing recent though.

FIND MARTY, curled up on the sofa, bobbing her head to music as she studies. The decor cues us that this isn't a dorm or any type of student housing. Marty lives here with her single mom whom we'll meet shortly. Marty eats leftover take-out and highlights passages in a Pre-Law textbook.

She shuts the book, her brain full. She carries the takeout container to the kitchen and dumps it, still grooving to the music. She's got some fierce moves for a skinny white girl.

She notes the unopened mail. Bills. Marty picks up her mom's checkbook. Time to deal with life.

TIME CUT. Marty pays bills, carefully noting the balance in the checkbook ledger. She opens an envelope from the University. She reads the contents. Her face falls.

MARTY

No. No!

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. LANCER CAMPUS - MOMENTS LATER

Marty bikes along the path, weaving expertly around pedestrians. She's a girl on a mission. She pulls up to the University Center, drops her bike and runs inside.

INT. UNIVERSITY CENTER - MOMENTS LATER

A place where students hang out. School store, game room, lounge and the campus pub. Marty heads downstairs to...

INT. UNIVERSITY CENTER - PUB - MOMENTS LATER

A rathskeller type snack bar that serves food and drinks. Marty's mother WANDA tends bar. Wanda is a party girl who never quite grew up. Marty's the parent in the relationship.

MARTY

Mom, what is this?

Marty slams down the notice.

WANDA

Oh. You weren't supposed to see that. They send those to scare you into paying. Are you hungry?

MARTY

It says my scholarship was cancelled. Last semester!

WANDA

The university cut back fringes for university employees.

MARTY

Fringe? My scholarship is not fringe! It is central to my life.

WANDA

It'll be fine. The union says they can't pull scholarships from enrolled students.

MARTY

But they did!

WANDA

Yes, but they can't.

MARTY

But they did!

WANDA

See, they can't. The union is taking them to court and everything.

MARTY

And how long will that take?!

WANDA

You're the one studying law. Why not ask one of your professors?

Marty swallows her exasperation. Deep breath.

MARTY

This bill is three months past due. I've got a week to pay or I'm barred from classes.

WANDA

They say that to scare you.

MARTY

It worked!

WANDA

I didn't tell you because I didn't want you to worry. Everything works out eventually. You'll see.

Marty walks away, beyond frustrated. Wanda calls after.

WANDA (CONT'D)

You sure I can't fix you something to eat?

INT. ATHLETIC CENTER - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

A hand writes "HEALING" on a bare arm in sharpie. The scribe is Sierra, whom we're finally meeting up close and personal. This Texas magnolia has titanium petals. She takes herself and the sweet science of cheerleading way too seriously.

SIERRA

This will provide inspiration and speed recovery.

ALICE (O.S.)

Sure it will.

The arm being written on, belongs to Alice, the cheerleader who fell. Her hand is in a hard splint. She's in a bitchy mood. Maybe it's the pain... or maybe it's just her.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Wish you could have inspired Luis not to land on my friggin' hand.

Luis, looks up from stowing gear and smiles, unruffled. We can't help but notice he's ripped -- tossing girls into the air is apparently great exercise.

LUIS

You slipped and knocked down the pyramid. And I'm the bad guy because I *fell* on you?

ALICE

It was clumsy. You don't pay attention and it shows.

LUIS

Reality de la Alice.

Helping Luis stow equipment is Patty, whom we also met briefly. She's a female "base." Unlike petite flyers Sierra and Alice, Wedge is big and beautiful, like a plus-size model. Utterly comfortable in her own skin. She grins, never one to pass up an opportunity to bust balls.

WEDGE

Relax, Luis. It's just her bitterness talking.

ALICE

I'm not bitter.

WEDGE

Some girls don't like being dumped.

ALICE

Uh, I dumped him.

LUIS

Not how I remember it.

Luis manages to say things like this without coming off mean. He's clueless, not callous.

WEDGE

She fell, maybe hit her head.
Retrograde memory loss happens.

ALICE

Wish I could be giving you both the
finger right now. Oh wait, I have
two hands. Yay.

She lifts her other hand, but Sierra stops her from giving Luis the finger.

SIERRA

No more negativity.

Sierra jots "TEAM" on Alice's good arm.

SIERRA (CONT'D)

TEAM. "Together Everyone
Accomplishes More."

Alice scowls and jerks her arm away.

ALICE

You're a circus freak.

Alice scrubs her arm with a washcloth.

INT. ATHLETIC CENTER - ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE - DAY

An exit to the locker rooms, another to the corridor. Vanessa works a schedule on a computer. BILL CURRAN (60's), crusty, head of the Lancer athletic department, walks up with football coach **RED IRVINE** (30's), a handsome rogue who never lost the boyishness of youth.

BILL

How's Alice?

VANESSA

Hairline wrist fracture. Doctor says she'll be out of commission for the next four to five weeks.

Vanessa eyes Red suspiciously.

VANESSA (CONT'D)

You here to gloat?

RED

Here as football coach. When a cheerleader is needlessly injured, it affects my boys' morale. Whatever hurts football, hurts everyone.

BILL

Knock it off, Red. Go get coffee.

RED

Yessir.

(to Vanessa)

Lotta girls getting hurt since you came aboard. People are starting to notice.

Red exits.

VANESSA

Jackass.

CURRAN

You know he's been taking trustees out for fancy dinners, trying to get you fired.

VANESSA

By blaming me for injuries? Rhia threw her back out moving a desk. Tammy Morton had a skiing accident.

CURRAN

The trustees are a bunch of stubborn old men. They believe what they wanna believe. What is it with you and Red anyway?

VANESSA

It's ancient history, and has no bearing on the job. I've loved this squad since I was a Hellcat, and we will make it great again.

CURRAN

Well, hurry the hell up. If the Hellcats don't place at Nationals this spring, you're out.

VANESSA

This is my second semester on the job. I've got to build a foundation. Whatever happened to a honeymoon period?

CURRAN

The squad's on a five year losing streak. The trustees aren't feeling very charitable.

He exits out to the corridor.

SIERRA (O.S.)

We can place at nationals.

Vanessa whirls around. She didn't realize Luis, Sierra and the Wedge were in the doorway to the locker room, listening.

VANESSA

How long you been standing there?

LUIS

Relax, half the athletic department knows about you and Red.

VANESSA

That's great. Really fantastic.

WEDGE

I don't see how we even get past qualifiers. I hear Southern Christian is on fire this year. And with Alice out, Sierra's our only decent flyer.

SIERRA

We'll find someone even better.

WEDGE

Like who?

SIERRA

I'll schedule tryouts for the end of the week. Hellcats! Hellcats! Go big green!

VANESSA

Seriously? Are you really this perky?

SIERRA

You should see my sister Alma.
Diagnosed hyperkinetic. You could
churn butter on her lap.

Sierra heads out. Vanessa shakes her head and returns to her work. Wedge and Luis exit to...

INT. LANCER CAMPUS - ATHLETIC CENTER - CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

WEDGE

So why am I in the half that
doesn't know the good gossip?

LUIS

Red's been bitching to the football
team since Vanessa got hired last
year. Dudes talk to dudes.

WEDGE

If you wish to stay a dude, spill.

LUIS

Way back when Red was an assistant
coach and Vanessa was cheer
captain, they had an affair. After
six months, Red tells his wife he
wants a divorce. *Without* telling
Vanessa first.

WEDGE

What a doof.

LUIS

Vanessa got weirded out and broke
it off. Red's wife creamed him in
the divorce.

WEDGE

A broke doof. The most dangerous
kind.

INT. LANCER CAMPUS - BURSAR'S OFFICE - DAY (DAY 2)

Marty sits with a FINANCIAL OFFICER who scans her records.
He's sympathetic, but a bit clueless.

OFFICER

So until last semester, you were
beneficiary of our scholarship
program for children of university
employees.

MARTY

Yeah, my mom works at the UC pub.

OFFICER

That was an ugly cut. Hurt a lot of students. One option is a student loan...

(hands her a form)

It requires a co-signer. Does your Mom have a decent credit rating?

Marty laughs bitterly and hands back the form.

MARTY

Like I said, she works at the UC Pub. What else ya got?

The Officer pulls out another form.

OFFICER

You can fill out a FAFSA. Try for some government aid.

Marty looks at the form.

MARTY

This is due October 1. That was last week.

OFFICER

You'll be applying for next year.

MARTY

Next year? What do I do till then?

OFFICER

Take a nice vacation. See the world. Travel broadens you.

MARTY

You have to understand. I've been taking care of my mother since my dad left eleven years ago. I wash her clothes, I make sure she's fed. I buck her up when her heart gets broken, which is basically always. I pay bills, work weekends. Do you know what gets me through?

OFFICER

If it's drugs, don't tell me. I'm obligated to report it.

MARTY

Hope. The hope that I can graduate from a decent school, move far, far away and live like a normal person. Kill my hope and you kill me. I have to stay in school.

The Officer shrugs, at a loss.

OFFICER

As I said, we have a lot of students in the same boat. Our discretionary funds are long gone. I wish you'd come to us sooner.

Marty nods, devastated.

MARTY

I wish I'd known sooner.

OFFICER

If it helps, there are some niche scholarships. Odd little things from speciality groups. There's a catalog outside.

INT. BURSAR'S OFFICE - OUTER OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Marty glumly thumbs through a catalogue. She gripes to a bored RECEPTIONIST.

MARTY

Oh, great. They have a scholarship for students with the last name of Van Valkenberg... one for people fluent in Klingon... and one for those interested in pursuing a career in the potato industry. I don't know where to start.

The receptionist looks up, tired of listening.

RECEPTIONIST

If you flip to the back, there's one for very sarcastic people.

MARTY

Glad you can find joy in your job.

As Marty continues to flip through the catalogue and take notes, Sierra enters. She pins a bright neon flyer announcing "CHEERLEADER TRYOUTS" to a public bulletin board. The receptionist brightens when she sees her.

RECEPTIONIST

Hey Sierra. Hellcats taking us to nationals this season?

SIERRA

You know it, Mona.

Sierra plops a folder onto the counter, festively bound with a vinyl cover and colorful ribbons for brads.

SIERRA (CONT'D)

I'm dropping off my scholarship papers for Mr. Rabin. Can you see that he gets it?

Marty looks up, suddenly interested.

MARTY

You applying for a scholarship?

SIERRA

I have one now. For cheerleading.

MARTY

Cheerleading.

SIERRA

It comes with being a Hellcat. They need us fierce and focused. Eye on the prize.

MARTY

There's a scholarship for cheerleading? For being a football groupie?

(to receptionist)

Did you know about this?

SIERRA

You did not just call me a groupie.

MARTY

Nothing personal against you.

SIERRA

It doesn't get more personal than calling someone a groupie.

MARTY

Groupies jump up and down in skimpy outfits screaming adulation for masculine fantasy figures. Beyond that, we're splitting hairs.

Sierra gasps with indignation.

SIERRA
Take that back.

MARTY
What are we, in grade school? I
call no take-backs.

Sierra steps forward, pissed.

SIERRA
Don't make me come down off this
porch. I will.

MARTY
Are you actually threatening me?
Physically?

SIERRA
We are an NCA competitive sport.
We spend twenty hours a week
practicing. We bench press twice
our body weight and run a seven
minute mile. We compete with broken
thumbs and twisted ankles smiling
through the pain. We are athletes!

MARTY
Back in Dollywood, maybe.

Sierra tries to slap Marty, but Marty catches her hand.

MARTY (CONT'D)
Wouldn't you rather get right to
the hair-pulling?

Sierra wrenches her arm free, incensed.

SIERRA
I'm not letting some grubby little
goth insult the Lancer Hellcats!

SIERRA (CONT'D)
And you'd best be afraid,
because I've got me a squad
of lean, hard champions that
will troop on down to
whatever gas station you work
at and knock that smart mouth
clean off your face!

MARTY
Oh my god, did you just call
me "goth?" You don't even
know what goth is, you
peroxide whack-job. Yeah,
let's have a cheerleader gang
war! I'll text some of my
brooding vampire cronies and
we can all throw down!

Both girls are breathing hard. They've stopped the room.

SIERRA (CONT'D)
Everyone's staring.

MARTY
We should leave quietly.

SIERRA
Count of three.

They silently count, turn and exit in opposite directions.
As she exits, Marty notes THE FLYER for cheer tryouts. Ugh.

EXT. VIDEO STORE - DAY

Marty stands outside a video store with her bike,
deliberating, agonizing. Making a decision, she enters...

TIME CUT -- Marty emerges from the store, DVD in a bag.

INT. BERGER HOME - DAY

Marty enters, locks door, closes blinds, making sure she's
alone. Then she pops out the DVD and sticks it into the
player. *WE FIND the title of the movie: "BRING IT ON."*

She moves furniture, clears space in the middle of the room.

As the movie begins, Marty imitates the cheerleader moves.
She does a standing back flip and knocks a lamp into one of
her framed gymnastics photos. She rights the lamp, surprised
as we are that she can still pull it off. Off her grim
resolve...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

EXT. SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY - PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

Big cross and a banner "HOME OF THE CYCLONES." The CYCLONES, a group of perfect white Christian cheerleaders in perfect white uniforms practice routines. They're more conservatively dressed, way less sexy than the Hellcats, and show zero ethnic diversity. It's like watching the Osmonds in their heyday. Their guys are huge, way more powerful than the Luis, Wedge and the Hellcat bases we've seen in action.

REVEAL THE WEDGE

She's on the sidelines, surreptitiously videotaping the rehearsal. A SECURITY GUARD hurries up.

SECURITY GUARD

What are you doing?

He grabs her camera, takes out the tape.

WEDGE

I'm sorry, sir. Is there a policy?

SECURITY GUARD

Cheerleaders come from other schools, steal routines.

WEDGE

Are you making fun of me? Does this look like a cheerleader's body?

She slaps her butt, making the guard uncomfortable.

SECURITY GUARD

Oh, I didn't mean anything by it.

WEDGE

I just wanted to get some footage of the Cyclones to show at our potluck this Sunday. All the girls at my church are huge fans.

(points to cheerleaders)

See Donny? One there at the end?

He's so cute. I would totally abstain from having sex with him.

She eyes the tape hopefully. The guard sighs and returns it.

SECURITY GUARD
Go on. Get out of here.

WEDGE
Thank you, sir!

Wedge runs off, smiling to herself. Sucker.

INT. LANCER ATHLETIC CENTER - VANESSA'S OFFICE - DAY

Luis, Sierra, Wedge, Alice and Vanessa, all in uniform. ON VIDEO, they watch the Cyclones rehearse, dismayed.

VANESSA
Their elevators are flawless.

SIERRA
I can't go half that high.

ALICE
It's not you. Those guys are
monsters.
(a bitchy look at Luis)
I wish our bases had that power.

LUIS
They're probably juiced.

SIERRA
It's a Christian University. They
don't take drugs.

WEDGE
Or drink. Or dance. Or get laid.

ALICE
Jesus is the wind beneath their
skirts.

VANESSA
Well, it's clear we can't out-power
them. So we'll need another angle.
Something to set us apart.

SIERRA
And fast. Qualifiers are in a week.

VANESSA
We've got our work cut out for us.

A hunky base named DARWIN (23), Asian, sticks his head in.

DARWIN

The wannabes are done learning the steps. They're waiting for you.

VANESSA

Let's pray for a ringer.

Vanessa grabs a clip board and the gang exits...

EXT. LANCER CAMPUS - PRACTICE FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

A sign: "HELLCAT TRYOUTS TODAY."

Nervous HOPEFULS sit in the bleachers, waiting for their turn to try out. Each has a big numbered sticker on their back so the judges can take notes.

Alice and Sierra are seated, the judges. Luis, Wedge and some ND HELLCATS are in position. Vanessa addresses the hopefuls.

VANESSA

I am Coach Vanessa Hodge. At the table is cheer captain Sierra Sloan and her secondary Alice Vandemark. We need flyers for airborne stunts, so I hope you brought your A-game. You've had a chance to run the routine, so let's see who among you has what it takes to be a Hellcat!

The hopefuls jump up, cheering and whooping, lousy with ersatz spirit. More laid back is

MARTY -- at the top of the bleachers with Dan. She's dressed in Converse sneaks, sweats and a "HOME TAPING IS KILLING MUSIC" T-shirt. She wears a sign identifying her as "#26."

Marty rises to join the other hopefuls.

DAN

You realize this is insane.

MARTY

Painfully aware, thank you.

Luis calls up to Marty.

LUIS

Move, #26! Stragglers will be shot!

He's smiling, so it's okay. Marty heads down.

DAN
Don't trip, #26!

Marty ignores him. Dan laughs.

ANGLE ON JUDGE TABLE

Marty passes Sierra. Both girls recognize one another.

MARTY
Oh God, you're a judge.

SIERRA
(cold)
Captain, actually. Good luck.

Luis ushers the stunned Marty.

LUIS
C'mon, 26, take your place.

Marty takes her position, presumably doomed.

ALICE
You know that one?

SIERRA
I tried to slap her yesterday. She
has fast hands.

As the girls gather on the mat and space themselves out,
Vanessa flips on Lady Gaga's JUST DANCE.

VANESSA
Five, six, seven, eight!

The hopeful cheerleaders move in unison to the music.

Girls HANDSPRING backwards across the mats, flashing blinding
white teeth, smiling like their lives depended on it.

Heads bob mechanically, arms SHOOT up in V-formation. They
bound off the mat and straddle their legs in a TOE TOUCH
JUMP, then land in a tucked position.

TIGHTER SHOTS on individual girls. Some are good, some not.
One looks like a stripper. One is great but appears to be
12. One has a great body, hideous face. More than one girl
falls on her ass. One aspiring flyer appears to be a dude.
Sierra, Vanessa and Alice react like "American Idol" judges.

ALICE
Someone put 11 out of my misery.

VANESSA

Oh, I can't watch this.

SIERRA

Is that... an adam's apple?

While the group shake their hips and glide two steps to the RIGHT, Marty glides to the LEFT and COLLIDES with another girl. Shit. She struggles to regain her footing.

The girls take two steps forward for another TOE TOUCH. But Marty is a half step late. Her rhythm thrown off.

ALICE

Don't worry about 26. She's toast.

But Vanessa's had her eye on Marty, too. She's not so quick to dismiss her potential. She shouts --

VANESSA

26! Relax! Count it out.

Marty picks the steps up and is back in the line with the others. But three counts later, she steps RIGHT, when she should step LEFT. Alice and Sierra exchange scornful looks.

ALICE

Hopeless.

IN THE BLEACHERS -- Dan buries his head in his hands. Yikes.

VANESSA

Chill, 26! Just have fun!

Marty pauses for a beat. A deep breath, then...

Suddenly, she's doing her own thing. A mash-up of styles: she ISOLATES and POPS her chest and shoulders in the style of krumping, she LEAPS into the air, legs aloft, graceful as anything George Balanchine ever staged.

ALICE

What the hell is she doing?

VANESSA

She's dancing.

SIERRA

That is not what we do.

VANESSA

No. It is not.

Marty does a PERFECT PIROUETTE, then CRASHES into a gutsy break-dance move: a one ARMED PIKE FREEZE - both legs suspended in air, parallel to the ground. One hand supports her body weight, free hand reaching out toward her toes.

Marty's body is FROZEN for a few beats as she waits for the judges to pick their jaws off the floor. Marty bends her knees and KICKS OUT, propels herself upright to standing.

ALICE

She doesn't know the choreography.

But Vanessa is riveted. Marty's dangerous, sexy performance is intense -- more "top model" than zippy cheerleader.

SIERRA

And what's with the facials? She's not smiling, she doesn't look happy. A cheerleader never pouts.

A switch has flipped inside Marty. She executes a perfect tumbling pass: ROUND OFF, BACK HANDSPRING, BACK FLIP.

Luis leaps out of his seat and cheers -- that rocked!

LUIS

Yeah!

Propelled by her body's momentum, Marty finishes off with a 360 DEGREE TWISTING ROTATION (known as a "full" in cheer parlance) in the air, legs straight as a metal rod. She lands effortlessly.

SIERRA

Oh my god. Did she just do a Full?
It took me six months to hit that.

Alice purses her lips, unimpressed.

ALICE

Well, that's you.

The routine wraps up and the girls jump in the air, land on the mat with a loud THUD in SPLITS. Marty looks around, realizes she's behind, JUMPS and also lands in line, in perfect splits.

VANESSA

Nice work. Take a breather.

The group dissipates. Marty passes Luis.

LUIS

Where'd you pick up those moves?

MARTY

Townie bars. Been going since I
was sixteen. We close down
Republic every Saturday night.

Marty shoots a look at Vanessa, Sierra and Alice conferring.
She looks like she's gonna be sick.

MARTY (CONT'D)

So, Captain Blondie over there --?

LUIS

Sierra.

MARTY

Can the other two outvote her?

LUIS

I guess. Why?

MARTY

No reason.

LUIS

I know she nearly crapped herself
when you landed the Full.

MARTY

Landed the what?

LUIS

Mami, you are green.

From high above, Dan watches the muscle-bound cheer-jock
flirt with Marty. He's not thrilled.

JUDGE'S TABLE

They go through the list and compare notes.

VANESSA

Next is #26.

ALICE

No way.

VANESSA

I like the crazy dancing thing.

ALICE

It's weird.

VANESSA

It's different. We need to mix it
up or Southern kills us at
qualifiers. Sierra?

Sierra doesn't answer.

ALICE

Hello, Sierra?

Off Sierra's indecision...

INT. ATHLETIC CENTER - CORRIDOR - LATER

A huddle of expectant hopefuls. They allow Sierra respectful distance as she enters and posts a list of who made the cut. Once Sierra is gone, the girls crowd in like guppies vying for a sprinkle of fish food. Most girls are disappointed, a precious few are elated. Once they're gone, Marty enters and walks to the list. Her eyes are closed.

MARTY

And... open.
(eyes still closed)
Open now and...

Another beat. She opens one eye. Breathes a sigh of relief. Her name is on the list! Marty looks around to see if anyone is watching, and does an exuberant cartwheel.

INT. LANCER ATHLETIC CENTER - LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Alice changes the splint on her hurt hand. It's tough going one-handed. Red passes by, sees Alice, enters.

RED

Can I help you splint that?

Alice looks up, shrugs.

ALICE

Knock yourself out.

TIME CUT. Now Red sits beside Alice, finishing helping her.

RED

Me and the boys felt awful when we
heard about your injury. Ask me,
Vanessa pushes you girls too hard.
Puts the entire program at risk.

ALICE

Accidents happen. I'm just lucky
there was no serious nerve damage.

RED

Thank God for that.

ALICE

Cuz then I wouldn't be able to feel
your hand.

She glances down. Red has his hand on her leg.

RED

Touche.

Red smiles and slowly removes his hand.

ALICE

Is this how it works?

RED

Mm?

ALICE

Compassionate coach reaches out to
impressionable cheerleader,
charming her with his sensitivity
and warmth. When her head clears,
she's staring at the roof of his
Expedition, panties around her
ankles.

Red laughs hard.

RED

How'd a little thing like you get
so cynical?

ALICE

Close proximity to guys like you.

RED

Alice, you are terrific. I hope
you're back on the field soon. I
only wish Vanessa saw the same
potential I do.

This hits a nerve with Alice.

RED (CONT'D)

Bumping Sierra to Captain. You put two years into the squad, then a little nobody like Sierra transfers in from another school and leapfrogs you?

ALICE

(unconvincing)

Sierra's good. It was Vanessa's call to make and she made it.

RED

Still musta hurt.

ALICE

Yeah, well. I'm happy where I am.

RED

Girls like you are never happy where they are. Get well soon.

Red rises and leaves. Alice stews.

EXT. LANCER CAMPUS - CHEERTOWN - NIGHT

Fraternity row. A hopping scene, good-looking young people socializing, looking to hook up and avoid their studies.

Wanda's car is parked by one of the houses. Marty pulls bags from the trunk. A sign identifies the building as "BARKER HOUSE," but someone (maybe Sierra) has neatly painted the nickname "CHEERTOWN" above the official name.

WANDA

"Cheertown?"

MARTY

They force all the cheerleaders to live here. It supposedly promotes spirit. Rah.

WANDA

Well, it seems a waste when our house is barely off-campus.

MARTY

It keeps me in school. Do you understand how close I came to having to drop out? The position you put me in?

Wanda ignores the confrontational tone. We're starting to get the sense she does this willfully.

WANDA

What's important is it all worked out. I told you there was no reason to worry.

Marty bites her tongue. Why start a fight?

WANDA (CONT'D)

What do you say we celebrate? We'll drop off your stuff, go out for ribs, find some guys to buy us drinks...?

MARTY

After we drop off this stuff, I have to actually unpack it. And get sleep. Because I have three hours of classes and three hours of cheerleading rehearsal tomorrow.

WANDA

I think they call it practice.

MARTY

Whatever they call it, it's going to kick my ass. I'm still sore from the audition.

(before Mom corrects her)

Tryout.

WANDA

I miss you already.

Now Mom's getting weepy. Perfect.

MARTY

You work on campus. I see you every day. Whereas I am facing a house full of alien cheerleaders. If they don't accept me, I'll get cut from the squad, lose my new scholarship and end up working the grease gun at Jiffy Lube.

WANDA

Marty the martyr...

MARTY

Yes, I love it when you call me that.

(MORE)

MARTY (CONT'D)

Now if you'll excuse me I have to go bond or instigate a pillow fight or something. I love you, good night.

Marty picks up her bags.

WANDA

Can I come meet your new friends?

MARTY

Good night!

Marty heads up to the front porch.

INT. CHEERTOWN - COMMON AREA - SAME TIME

The Hellcats (usual suspects plus our ND extras) watch a football game, Titans vs. Colts. Everyone's totally into it.

There's a knock at the door. Alice is closest. She gets up and answers. It's Marty with her bags.

ALICE

You don't have to knock. There's a swipe card for your ID.

MARTY

Oh. Okay. I'm one of the new girls. Marty.

ALICE

I know who you are. I voted against you. Got overruled. Democracy's a bitch.

Alice rejoins the group, leaving Marty with her bags.

MARTY

(under her breath)
So are you, apparently.

The group cheers a play in the game, not noticing Marty. Off Marty, isolated, uncertain and out of her element...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

INT. CHEERTOWN - MARTY & SIERRA'S DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Marty enters and throws her bag onto the bed. This is a double room that has been expanded into a double single. Everything is bright pastel colors and extremely feminine.

Marty is a bit repulsed, particularly by the matching coverlets with Lancer logos sewn upon them. Marty inspects the wall. Many photos and clippings of Sierra cheerleading all the way back to a cheerleader halloween costume she wore as a toddler. Along with it are a number of awards, ribbons, etc. Marty smiles at this ego wall, perhaps reminded of her own back at home.

Sierra enters.

SIERRA

Hello, Marty. Welcome to Cheertown.

MARTY

Can we start over? I'm sorry about the other day. I was in a crap mood, I went looking for a fight...

SIERRA

I've put that aside. Vanessa thinks you can help us beat Southern Christian next week, and that's what matters. That's why I voted for you.

MARTY

You did? Seriously? After everything I said?

SIERRA

You can make up for your appalling rudeness with hard work and perseverance.

Marty shrugs, fair enough. Sierra bustles around opening the closet, drawers, etc.

SIERRA (CONT'D)

I've allocated half of the closet space for you. The furniture is mine, but I prefer the upper drawers.

MARTY

I'm a bottom, myself.

Sierra stares blankly.

MARTY (CONT'D)

That's just a joke.

SIERRA

Mm, we should come up with a signal for that to avoid confusion. I've earmarked half of my linens, coverlets and towels for you.

MARTY

If by coverlet you mean bedspread, I've already got one.

SIERRA

It's nicer when it matches, don't you think?

It's not up for discussion. Sierra turns to the desk.

SIERRA (CONT'D)

I've cleaned out a desk for you and lined it with shelving paper. What kind of light bulbs do you like?

Marty has no answer. It's going to be a long semester.

INT. CHEERTOWN - SIERRA & MARTY'S ROOM - DAY

Marty wakes up. Blearily looks at clock. 7AM. Sierra is already up and dressed.

SIERRA

Morning. I'm off to the gym. See you at practice. We'll fit you for your new uniform.

Sierra flounces out.

MARTY

Yaaaaaay.

Marty drags herself out of bed.

INT. CHEERTOWN - HALLWAY - DAY

Marty emerges from her room in a robe carrying a towel and shower kit. She walks into...

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

A co-ed bathroom. This is the central room with stalls and sinks, fair game to either gender. Two doors lead to separate shower rooms for guys and girls. A couple of guys step out of the men's shower area in towels.

Marty opens the door to the girls' shower area.

INT. BATHROOM - SHOWER AREA - CONTINUOUS

Shower stalls with frosted doors. Patty the Wedge is here, towelling off from a shower, not remotely self-conscious.

WEDGE

Yo, Marty.

MARTY

Hi. It's Patty -- right?

WEDGE

Everyone calls me "The Wedge."

Alice steps out of the shower and grabs a towel.

ALICE

In or out, you're causing a draft.

Marty's not thrilled by group nudity, but when in Rome. She enters, hangs up her robe and wraps a towel around herself.

She sees Wedge's arm has the word "STRENGTH" written on it.

MARTY

What's with all the writing?

WEDGE

It's Sierra's thing. It's supposed to be an inspirational mnemonic.

MARTY

Does it work? You look pretty strong already.

ALICE

The Wedge can't afford to coast. She's barely keeping up with the guys as it is.

But Wedge is too smart to let Alice bait her...

WEDGE

(to Marty)

Like Luis. He's physically bigger, so he has more power than me. You'll get to experience those steel-belted arms first-hand, since you're replacing Alice here as his flyer. They used to date. Did you know that? It was a big thing when they broke up.

ALICE

This girl is not replacing me. I'll be back in a month or so.

WEDGE

A lot can happen in a month. Better not coast.

The Wedge exits. Now Marty and Alice are alone.

MARTY

Alice. I understand you didn't want me. But I'm here now. I think we should try --

ALICE

-- You won't be around long.

MARTY

Huh?

ALICE

The Hellcats are short on flyers at a crucial moment. That's the only reason a dangerously inexperienced outsider got a foot in the door.

MARTY

I tried out like everyone else.

ALICE

You're no flyer. You're petite and you can move. That's it. And the weirdo dance moves? Forget it. You're a tumbler at best, and we've got more tumblers than we need. Once I'm back, you'll get bounced.

MARTY

Unless I... oh what's the word... prove myself.

ALICE

In my experience, when you're done with a band-aid, you rip it off and throw it away.

A beat.

MARTY

Oh, I'm the band-aid. Got it. Do you invent your own catty metaphors, or is there a book?

Marty steps into the shower. Alice fumes. She then notices Marty's robe and towel hanging on a peg. Alice impulsively grabs both and exits.

INT. BATHROOM - LATER

Back to the common area. It's empty. After a beat, we hear:

MARTY (O.S.)

Oh, crap! Crap!

Marty has just noticed her robe and towel are missing. After a beat, Marty peeks in from the girls' shower room. We hear some guys showering in the next room. Marty runs into the common area and peeks out the door to the hallway...

HER POV OF HALLWAY: ND-Hellcats gossip. Marty looks around, panicked. There's nothing with which to cover herself!

The voices from the shower area grow louder. Someone's coming! Marty runs into a bathroom stall and shuts the door.

INSIDE THE STALL

Marty perches on the toilet. We hear the voices of Luis and some ND male Hellcats.

OUTSIDE THE STALL

Luis, wearing a towel, checks for feet and opens the door.

INSIDE THE STALL

Marty is hunched on the toilet, pleading with her eyes.

LUIS

Wow. Shower and a show.

MARTY

(desperately whispers)
Help me.

Luis winks, then shuts the door. Under the stall door, Marty can see his bare feet turn away. Suddenly, Luis' towel drops. We hear him yell to his buddies:

LUIS (O.S.)
Yo -- this look crooked to you?

ND HELLCAT #1 (O.S.)
Ugh!

LUIS (O.S.)
I think maybe I slept on it wrong.

ND HELLCAT #2 (O.S.)
(laughing)
Put it away!

LUIS (O.S.)
I need a splint or something. Hey,
come back! I need help! Dudes!

Luis' feet kick the towel under the stall door for Marty. We hear him chase his laughing buddies out into the hall. Scandalized O.S. squeals from ND FEMALE HELLCATS as Luis streaks the hall outside. Marty gratefully grabs the towel.

EXT. PRACTICE FIELD - UNDER THE BLEACHERS - DAY

Marty eats takeout with Dan under the bleachers.

DAN
So we gonna hit Republic tonight?

MARTY
Practice, exam, second exam, more
practice. You're gonna have to
seduce Rosalie without me.

DAN
Rosalie's not my type.

MARTY
Your type is a girl who says,
"Sure, Dan, I'll sleep with you."

DAN
(shrugs sheepishly)
Okay, that's a little true.

MARTY
More than a little.

Across the field, the Hellcats assemble. Time for practice. Marty doffs her bomber jacket to reveal a workout sports bra and shorts. Dan mock-recoils from Marty's exposed rack.

DAN

Jeez, come on, put those things away. Are we cheering or hooking?

MARTY

A little of both, actually. Time to start earning that scholarship.

She shoves her jacket into her bag.

DAN

You sure college is worth all this?

MARTY

I'm going to graduate, pass the bar up North and work in a DA's office where everybody talks in flat Yankee vowels.

DAN

C'mon, how can you leave Memphis?

MARTY

Mom. Lives. Here.

DAN

I live here too. That's gotta count for something, right?

He says it very casually, but we see him search her for a reaction. She doesn't give up anything.

MARTY

If I were gonna stay for something, I'd stay for the ribs.

DAN

Oh, you did not.

They both laugh. Clearly, banter is safer. Marty fist bumps Dan and runs off to join the Hellcats. Dan watches thoughtfully, bitter-sweetly.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

EXT. PRACTICE FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

The guys (and the Wedge) work on tossing the flyers into the air and catching them in a cradle hold.

Marty hustles up to Sierra and Vanessa.

VANESSA

Marty. With Alice out, you and Sierra are my first-string fliers.

MARTY

What does that mean?

VANESSA

It means you've got a ton of work to do between now and qualifiers this weekend. It'll be hard, but we'll get you there. Sierra will show you the fight song, which is a basic 16 count combo. You'll do it thirty times in any given event, so memorize it.

Marty nods. Sierra locks her body into place.

SIERRA

Start legs hip width apart.
(shouting)
And GO BIG GREEN! EVERYBODY SAY GO
BIG GREEN!

VANESSA

So it's: arms low V. Clap. Arms high V. Touch left, hip, hip.

Marty follows the basic foot and armwork.

VANESSA (CONT'D)

Good. Now step it up, put some real energy into it. Power!

Marty moves with Sierra. Arms snapping, hips popping.

SIERRA

GO BIG GREEN. EVERYBODY SAY GO BIG GREEN!

VANESSA

POWER! I wanna hear you, Marty!

MARTY

Go big green. Everybody say go big green!

VANESSA

Like you mean it! You love this!

MARTY

(a mighty bellow)
GO BIG GREEN!!!

VANESSA

You'll get it. Practice in the mirror, in your car. LOUD.
(a beat, then)
Moving on. Hit your hip one, tuck two, kick three...

Vanessa and Sierra do a HIGH KICK that ruffles hair.

VANESSA (CONT'D)

...touch four, wind it up five, toe touch six...

A JUMP that seems to defy gravity.

VANESSA (CONT'D)

...land seven, clean it up eight.

Bodies rigid, stiff and flawless.

Marty follows along, does the combo once. She gets it, but her body flows a more naturally to the steps, less rigid.

Shakira's "Give It Up to Me" kicks in. QUICK MONTAGE CUTS: Marty and Sierra go through the 16 counts dozens of times...

- Marty's style rears away from stiff cheer-style and into funkier, more stylistic dance. Sierra reacts, appalled.

- Vanessa is getting into it, joins them. After a half-dozen or so times running through the routine, she starts to put a little more GROOVE into her hips, more SHAKE into her booty. She and Marty smile at one another, this is fun.

- Sierra executes the routine precisely the same each and every time, not one errant hip or flick of her hair. Vanessa stops Sierra. Way too white. She motions for Marty to show Sierra the move.

- Marty puts her hand on Sierra's hips to show her the new moves. Vanessa joins. Sierra, Marty, and Vanessa do the combo. *Sierra smiles, starting to get into it.* Now all three are pretty funkified.

- Now the other Hellcats have joined in. We're seeing the two styles mesh -- Marty's odd moves with the vocabulary of traditional cheer. It's awesome, hot and sexy. Feels almost like a dance production number. As the song wraps up, Marty punctuates the combination with an impressive BACK FLIP.

MARTY

WOO!

VANESSA

Nice work. Very nice.

Marty glances to see if Dan saw how cool that was. She's disappointed to see he's no longer there. In his place,

COACH RED IRVINE

Now watches practice. He grumbles to a nearby Bill Curran.

RED

What the hell is Vanessa teaching these girls? She's got 'em dancing like goddamn strippers.

CURRAN

(appreciative)
She sure does.

INT. PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

Practice is still in progress. The girls are all sweaty from the exertion. Marty sips from a water bottle, exhausted.

VANESSA

Okay. Time for partner work.
Marty, you're with Luis.

Luis joins Marty.

MARTY

Thanks for the save this morning.

LUIS

I'm a sucker for a damsel in distress. Plus, I like getting naked.

MARTY

Me, not so much.

LUIS

Too bad, you got the body for it.

Marty blushes -- first time we've ever seen her speechless.

The guys hold the girls' shoes in one hand, the girls teetering over head. (This move is called an "Awesome.")

LUIS (CONT'D)

You're going up, baby.

Marty's eyes go wide. Shit.

INT. PRACTICE FIELD - SAME TIME

Sierra towers several feet off the ground, one foot in each of Darwin's hands (he's her base). Darwin tosses Sierra into the air. When she reaches maximum height, she kicks both feet up to head height, and sails downward, butt first.

Darwin catches her in cradle position. Perfect BASKET TOSS.

Luis reaches for Marty to do the same. She pulls away.

MARTY

I'm sorry, no.

LUIS

What?

MARTY

What if you drop me?

LUIS

I won't.

MARTY

I believe you believe that.

VANESSA

We having a problem?

MARTY

Look, in gymnastics it's just me. If I get hurt, I own it. I can't just -- in the air -- I mean, what is wrong with you people?

SIERRA
(knowingly)
She's getting mental.

Marty shoots her a look. Was that an insult?

MARTY
Don't make me come off this porch.

VANESSA
It's cheer slang. It means you're thinking of all the bad things that can happen. In cheer, we sometimes have to lie to ourselves. Create a world of best possible outcomes, where everything works out right. I fly fearlessly into the air with a big easy smile, because I know my team won't let me hit ground.

MARTY
Yeah well, life's not like that.

VANESSA
Not always. But when you expect the worst, you tend to get it.

This lands with Marty. Vanessa blows her whistle.

VANESSA (CONT'D)
Line up for suicide drops!

Marty looks alarmed. Don't like the sound of that.

EXT. PRACTICE FIELD - DAY

A HELLCAT FALLS THROUGH FRAME IN SLOW-MO to eerie beautiful music like Sigur Ros' "Festival." Graceful, hair and skirt billowing as she executes a perfect PRETTY GIRL DISMOUNT. After a beat, she flies back into frame and pulls her leg behind her to a standing SCORPION.

Normal speed resumes and we CUT WIDE.

This is a fear-busting exercise. A line of Hellcats are positioned at the very top of the bleachers, about thirty feet in the air. One by one, they take a leap of faith into the waiting arms of a team of bases waiting below with a trampoline (Wedge, Luis, Darwin, ND-base).

The Hellcat hits the trampoline a second time, flips elegantly into the air and lands gracefully on the grass.

SERIES OF SHOTS: All the girls take a turn jumping, twisting and spinning. It looks scary and fun at the same time.

TOP OF BLEACHERS

Now it's Marty's turn. She stands atop the bleachers, alone with Sierra. Marty hesitates, afraid to jump.

ANGLE ON VANESSA

She calls up with a bullhorn.

VANESSA

Remember, positive outcomes only,
so smile! Your team will never let
you hit ground!

(sotto to bases)

Drop her and I'll kill you slow.

But Luis exudes easy rock star confidence...

LUIS

I got her.

BACK TO MARTY AND SIERRA

Marty is poised to jump, but can't bring herself to do it.

MARTY

Sierra, I can't.

SIERRA

You heard Vanessa. Trust your
team. Can you do that, Marty? Can
you trust us?

Marty bites her lip, turns back to look at the drop.

MARTY

This was a mistake. Alice was
right --

SIERRA

Oh, screw Alice.

Without warning, Sierra gives Marty a little push. Marty teeters a beat --

MARTY

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!

And goes falling into space!

DOWN BELOW -- The guys hustle to catch the flailing Marty.

WHAM! Marty hits the trampoline feet first and bounces high and off-center. Luis catches Marty in his powerful arms.

A moment. The two lock eyes. There's real chemistry here.

LUIS

You okay?

Marty's face goes from utter shock to a wide grin.

MARTY

That... was FREAKING AWESOME!!!

The Hellcats celebrate this small milestone. All, except Alice, watching Marty in the arms of her ex.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

FADE IN:

INT. LANCER ATHLETIC CENTER - LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Sierra pins Marty's Hellcat uniform. It's the first time we've seen Marty wearing Hellcat colors and she looks hot.

SIERRA

You look great.

(inspects Marty's legs)

We'll get some base to hide the bruises.

MARTY

Training's been pretty rough.

(beat)

But I guess it's like that with any competitive sport.

Sierra slowly smiles.

SIERRA

You don't think we're groupies?

MARTY

I do not.

Sierra nods, pleased.

SIERRA

So what happened to you anyway?

MARTY

What do you mean?

SIERRA

You've clearly trained. A lot. Otherwise you wouldn't be able to keep up.

MARTY

I was a gymnast up until high school.

SIERRA

Why'd you stop?

MARTY

My senior year, we made state, so my Mom was there to cheer me on. She brought a date.

(MORE)

MARTY (CONT'D)

And they'd been drinking at lunch. She was screaming, hooting and hollering. All the other girls were looking, wondering who the white trash freak was. I kept praying that nobody would connect her to me.

SIERRA

What happened?

MARTY

I got mental. I missed a jump and fell on my ass. Mom's an emotional drunk, so she comes lurching out of the stands in tears to make sure I'm okay. Everybody's looking, the other gymnasts are laughing...

(beat)

... and then she puked on me.

Sierra stares.

SIERRA

Shut up.

MARTY

I couldn't make that up if I tried.

Both girls laugh.

ANGLE ON NEXT ROW OF LOCKERS -- Alice has been sitting and listening.

SIERRA

So you never went back?

MARTY

I kept at it for a month or so. But I couldn't get her to stop coming to meets. Every time I'd step up to the bars, I'd feel her soul-sucking presence, get wigged out and blow the routine.

Alice makes a face, bored by Marty's old emotional baggage.

MARTY (CONT'D)

I finally stopped trying. Wasn't worth it.

SIERRA

(suddenly concerned)
You didn't invite your mother to
qualifiers, did you?

MARTY

(laughs)
Oh, God no.

SIERRA

Good. We need this win. By the
way, how do you feel about Luis?

MARTY

(flustered)
Good. He's good. I mean fine. Why?

Suddenly, Alice is paying full attention.

SIERRA

He's only our best base. He came
to Vanessa and asked if he could
make you his permanent flyer.

MARTY

He did? And permanent how?

SIERRA

He's first-string, so you stay a
first-string. It's a big deal.
Base and flyer have a special
relationship -- they learn each
other's rhythms and do everything
together, like Batman and Robin.

MARTY

Pretty sure Batman and Robin didn't
do everything together.

Suddenly, SLAM! Alice storms out of the room. Sierra and
Marty exchange puzzled looks, wondering what the noise was.

INT. CHEERTOWN - COMMON AREA - DAY

Alice storms up to Luis, who is watching TV.

ALICE

Is it true!?

LUIS

I was gonna tell you.

ALICE

Vanessa approved this? An amateur over me? My hand will heal!

LUIS

It's not that.

ALICE

You have the commitment level of a toddler. The bright shiny balloon floats by and oh! Oh! Look at that! Better chase it!

LUIS

If I was happy being your partner, I'd wait however long it took.

ALICE

If there's one thing I know how to do, it's make you happy.

She nestles in closer to him, he pushes her off.

LUIS

We should never have hooked up. I thought it'd be fun.

ALICE

It was.

LUIS

If I wanted that much drama in my life, I'd go home for Thanksgiving.

ALICE

(dramatically)
I am not dramatic!

LUIS

And the worst part is, it wrecked the work. And that's why I'm here.

ALICE

You're all gonna bump me down. For that skinny little bitch.

LUIS

Don't get paranoid. I happen to be clicking with Marty. I want the squad to win.

ALICE

And you think the squad has a better shot with Marty in my spot.

LUIS

... It's not an exact science.

He walks off, leaving Alice stunned and alone.

INT. LANCER CAMPUS - UNIVERSITY PUB - NIGHT

Wanda tends bar. Alice walks up in her Hellcat uniform.

ALICE

I'll take a Stella, please.

Wanda nods and serves the beer.

WANDA

I see you're a Hellcat.

ALICE

Yes, I -- Oh my gosh. You're Marty's mom. Wanda, right?

WANDA

Well, yeah. How'd you -- ?

ALICE

The resemblance is uncanny. I would have guessed older sister, but Marty talks about you a lot, so I feel like I know you. You must be so excited about seeing Marty at qualifiers this Saturday.

WANDA

What are qualifiers?

ALICE

Marty's debut. You're going, right?

WANDA

Marty always yells at me when I come to these things. She can be such a diva. Every little thing has to be just so.

ALICE

I know. But she talks about you all the time. You've been a huge inspiration in her life.

WANDA

Really?

ALICE

She's a mama's girl at heart.
She'd kick herself if you missed
her first big event!

WANDA

It would be fun to surprise her.

ALICE

Totally. I'll write down the
information. Got a pen?

INT. UCA GYMNASIUM - DAY

From above, clusters colorful uniforms punctuated with matching hair ribbons. Against one wall, CHEER TEAMS in bleachers. Friends and family sit opposite. The gym floor is covered with a UNITED CHEERLEADING ASSOCIATION logo. The JUDGES sit center, along with an ANNOUNCER.

We FIND our intrepid Hellcats, a cluster of green. They're joined by Vanessa, sporting team sweats.

Sierra passes out little strips of paper. Everyone licks their papers. The guys slap them onto their forearms. The girls press them to their cheeks. Sierra licks one and sticks it on Marty's forehead.

MARTY

Ugh! You licked that!

Marty's tattoo is the Lancer University cartoon tiger.

SIERRA

Grrrr! Grrr! Grrrrrrreeeeen!

The rest of the squad responds with the same cheer. Marty looks around like she's arrived on an alien planet. Vanessa leans into Marty excitedly.

VANESSA

Your first competition. Is it
everything you thought it would be?

MARTY

It's, uh, full-blooded.

EAR SPLITTING MUSIC interrupts. Gary Glitter's "ROCK AND ROLL, PART TWO" blares from the speakers...

ANNOUNCER

ARE YOU REEEEEEEEEEEADY...

The crowd of cheerleaders goes WILD with excitement.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
...FOR YOUR 2010 UCA NATIONAL
QUALIFYING CHAMPIONSHIPS!!!

Marty sees Dan in the audience. She waves and begins working her way towards him.

INT. UCA GYMNASIUM - MOMENTS LATER

An all-girl team is first up. Tiny bird-like women are the flyers. The bases are big and powerful like the Wedge. Marty reaches Dan. He notes her tattoo.

DAN
That's some mad ink you got there.

MARTY
Me and Amy Winehouse.

DAN
You look amazing. Despite the fact that you're dressed like a cheerleader. That part's weird.

Marty smacks him.

DAN (CONT'D)
Been missing your fly moves at Republic.

MARTY
You seduce Rosalie?

DAN
I tried, but ended up banging myself by mistake. I'm nothing without my sensei master.

MARTY
I've been training 24/7 for this thing. Once things settle down with the squad, my time'll free up.

Luis stands in the bleachers and whistles, waving Marty over.

MARTY (CONT'D)
You wanna come sit on our side?

DAN
Sitting with the cheerleaders. Lordy. Am I even allowed?

MARTY

I'm new. I can plead ignorance.

She leads Dan around to the other side...

INT. UCA GYMNASIUM - LATER

Marty and Dan return to the Hellcats. Suddenly, we hear:

WANDA (O.S.)

Baby!

Wanda is sitting a few rows back, right next to Alice. Wanda crowds her way past Hellcats, making her way to Marty. She leans forward, gives Marty a big hug and kiss.

WANDA (CONT'D)

All the good seats were taken, and then I ran into Alice.

She waves up to Alice, who waves back, favoring Marty with a big, bitchy smile.

WANDA (CONT'D)

She invited me to sit with the girls. I hope people don't mistake me for a Hellcat.

Wanda does a little cheer move followed by a tiger claw move. It's even more embarrassing than it looks on the page.

Vanessa and Sierra sense danger and approach. Alice leans back, enjoying the show.

MARTY

Mom, you can't be here.

WANDA

How come Dan's allowed?

A beat. Marty doesn't have a good answer for that.

DAN

I'm sleeping with the coach.

He interlocks fingers with Vanessa.

DAN (CONT'D)

Baby, you're looking fine today.

Vanessa yanks her hand back.

MARTY

Can you just go home? Please?

WANDA

Why wouldn't you want me here? I'm proud of you.

SIERRA

I think you should do what your daughter says.

Sierra takes Wanda's arm. Wanda shakes her off.

WANDA

Touch me again, I'll bust your nose. This is between me and my daughter.

MARTY

Fine. Stay. Whatever.

Marty storms away.

WANDA

I'll be quiet as a mouse!

Wanda takes a seat. Vanessa follows Marty.

VANESSA

Marty? What's going on?

Sierra is left alone with Dan. She looks up at him -- she's tiny, he's gigantic.

SIERRA

So. How long have you and Vanessa been together?

Dan needs a moment to realize she's serious.

DAN

We're not. I was trying to take the heat off Marty. It was a joke.

SIERRA

I sometimes miss those. I'm Sierra, her roomie.

She extends her hand. He shakes it.

DAN

Dan.

Dan looks over at Marty. She's enraged by her mom's presence and is unloading to Vanessa and Luis. *Luis has his arm around Marty.*

Dan looks back to Sierra, a plan formulating.

DAN (CONT'D)
Hey, Sierra. You seem cool. You want to go out with me tonight?

Sierra cocks her head, utterly dumfounded.

SIERRA
Is that another joke?

DAN
No.

SIERRA
Then... okay. Yes.

She whips out a sharpie and jots her cell number on his arm.

ANNOUNCER
Next up all Division 1 co-ed teams, report to the staging area.

SIERRA
That's us.

DAN
Yeah.

SIERRA
I should go.

DAN
Okay.

SIERRA
Bye.

Dan watches Sierra join the Hellcats in the center of the gym. He may only have eyes for Marty... but things change.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FIVE

ACT SIX

FADE IN:

The Hellcats are in position in the center of the gymnasium. They're awkwardly waiting for Marty, who sits in the bleachers fending off the worried Luis and Vanessa.

LUIS

Marty...

MARTY

I want no comfort. What I do want
is for the ceiling to collapse
crushing everyone in this room,
starting with my mother.
(glances up)
Not my day all around.

Luis and Vanessa exchange a look. This is bad. The crowd is starting to murmur, is something wrong?

ALICE watches from the sidelines. Coldly satisfied. Red sidles up to her.

RED

Y'know, once we downsize the
Hellcats, we're gonna need a new
captain.

ALICE

What are you talking about?

RED

The trustees feel the Hellcats
aren't pulling their weight as a
competitive squad. It's an
expensive program. If y'all don't
place at nationals, your mandate
will be simplified.

ALICE

What does that mean?

RED

No more scholarships, no more
competitions, no more travel.

ALICE

... No more Vanessa.

RED

Why talk about the past when we can
talk about the future?

(MORE)

RED (CONT'D)

If you'd like to discuss yours,
drop by during my office hours.
(winks)
Or after.

Alice stares in shock as he moves off.

BACK TO MARTY

VANESSA

Marty look at me. Look. This is
the part where you lie. Smile.
The music's about to play and for
three minutes and thirty-one
seconds, you live in a world where
your mother is perfect. Nobody
embarrasses or disappoints. And if
anything scares you or makes you
angry, you can fly away from it.

MARTY

That's the biggest load of facile
crap I've ever heard in my life.

Vanessa cuffs Marty upside the head. From Vanessa, the
gesture doesn't seem remotely mean.

VANESSA

What part of lying do you keep
missing? For the next three
minutes and thirty-one seconds?
You got wings, girlfriend.

Luis extends a hand to Marty.

LUIS

C'mon.

Marty nods, resolved to try. She and Luis join the others.

INT. UCA GYMNASIUM - MOMENTS LATER

The Hellcats begin. A SIREN sounds, followed by a thundering
techno beat -- a wild MASH-UP of music, sounds and SFX.
First up: tumbling passes. Two tumblers run in from each
side and break into unison ROUND-OFFS, BACK HANDSPRINGS, BACK
FLIPS. Marty looks genuinely happy to be performing. Maybe
she's missed gymnastics more than she realized.

The squad moves onto a dance combo with sharp, SNAPPY ARMS
AND POWERFUL KICKS. *They're doing the awesome "Marty-fied"
sexy dance moves and the crowd eats it up!*

THE CYCLONES

Are one exception. They're scandalized by the sexy moves.

RED AND BILL CURRAN

Red looks pissed. Curran bops to the beat, enjoying it.

SIERRA

Hits an ace STANDING BACK TUCK, playing the crowd like a pro.

A MECHANIZED VOICE on the soundtrack instructs us to GET RIGHT TO IT! And the squad lines up to get into a pyramid.

As Marty presses her foot into the Wedge's quad and steps into place as the squad forms several smaller human pyramids. The pyramid in the center is three people high, SIERRA TEETERING ON TOP. Sierra is hoisted into the air and FORWARD FLIPS down into the waiting arms of Darwin below.

The crowd goes WILD. As the rest of the pyramids dismantle, the music switches to KANYE WEST'S "STRONGER."

The team reassembles for the most important part of the routine: STUNTING. As Marty and Luis come together, he sees the worry on her face. Luis sings along with the music --

LUIS

*That that that that won't kill
me... can only make me stronger...*

Marty steps up into his hands and sings:

MARTY

...I can't wait much longer...

Marty's legs shake as Luis raises her up to his shoulders....

LUIS

Steady.

Marty's left leg bends just slightly, not enough for the audience to see, only enough for Luis to feel it.

LUIS (CONT'D)

It's all you. Hold steady.

MARTY

Luis, I can't do this, don't...

LUIS

Lock that knee, you're going up.

There's no use arguing. Marty LOCKS her knee and UP SHE GOES, SAILING INTO THE AIR. Kanye yells on the soundtrack as Marty hits her TOE TOUCH like a pro. SHE WHOOSHES BACK DOWNWARD INTO LUIS'S ARMS. Perfect basket toss!

The team moves into the CHEER portion, brimming with energy.

HELLCATS
GO BIG GREEN! EVERYBODY SAY, GO
BIG GREEN!!

Final tableau! The crowd goes crazy!

LUIS
(to no one in particular)
Did you see my girl Marty? I mean,
did you see my girl Marty?

DAN, WANDA AND VANESSA jump up, clapping and cheering. Wanda tries to run down to the floor.

WANDA
I have to go hug my baby!

DAN
Easy, Trigger.

Dan pulls her back by her belt, preventing her from leaving.

ANNOUNCER
Great score from the judges. The
Hellcats live to fight another day!

The whole squad clusters around Marty. Sierra hugs her.

SIERRA
Way to go, Hellcat.

Marty can't help grinning like a little kid.

FADE OUT.

THE END