

1

INT. WAGNER PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL, CAFETERIA, BROOKLYN- DAY 1

A GROUP OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN AND LATIN-AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETES stand shoulder to shoulder in a circle, staring down towards -

THE SOUND OF A FIGHT coming from the floor.

The athletes lean in, registering each GRUNT and SMACK.

Between the rows of toned, athletic legs, TWO TEENAGERS can be seen, flopping around on a BLUE RUBBER MAT.

OMARI, 15, SCRAWNY BUT AGGRESSIVE, is on top. Beneath him, a pair of THICK, EBONY legs scrape the mat for leverage.

TEENAGE BOY 1

Shoot, Omari! What are you waiting for?

TEENAGE BOY 2

Watch the legs!

FLOP! GRUNT!

MAN'S VOICE

Get to your base, Mo. Your base!

Inside the circle of athletes, COACH PHILLIPS, 30s, with a OLIVE, ITALIAN COMPLEXION, squats to get a better look.

This is not a fight, it's a wrestle-off.

Toes jam into the mat; MO, 14, the bottom wrestler, gets some leverage, pushing up.

COACH PHILLIPS

Watch, Omari! You're riding high!

Coach Phillips checks his stop watch for the time.

On the edge of the mat, KEVIN, 14, looks on, worried.

SLAM! OMARI GRUNTS.

A WHISTLE BLOWS.

The older wrestlers shake their heads - *pitiful*.

COACH (O.S.)

All right, Mo's starting at 112.

A WAVE OF MURMURS as the circle breaks up.

On the mat, Omari and Mo untangle. Omari, still on his back, slaps the mat, ANGRY.

Mo sits up, panting. This is not the winner we expected. Mo has a fierce stare, athletic frame, and the chest of a young woman.

COACH (CONT'D)

(to Mo)

That means you lose three pounds by tomorrow.

Mo nods, adjusting her knee pad, as a FEW TEAMMATES pat her on the back with an "All right, Mini."

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

Rest of you, hit the showers! You all stink.

Mo looks up at them, catching sight of Omari stomping off, Kevin on his heels.

Coach steps in front of Mo, blocking her view of the boys.

COACH (CONT'D)

You're wrestling Conrad Schultz tomorrow. You know who that is?

Mo shakes her head.

COACH (CONT'D)

He's quick. Gotta watch his outside single.

Mo glances past coach towards the boys exiting the gym. Coach waits for the door to close behind them, then squats down to eye level.

COACH (CONT'D)

Look, worrying about other people isn't gonna help you win tomorrow. You keep your mind on the match. You understand?

Mo locks eyes with Coach and nods.

2

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE THE CAFETERIA/GYM - MOMENTS LATER

2

Mo bursts out of the gym door.

The last of the ROWDY WRESTLERS piles into the boys' locker room. Mo watches them disappear behind the closing door.

3 INT. GIRLS' LOCKER ROOM - EVENING

3

A LOW HUM and steady DRIP, DRIP, DRIP - the quiet a stark contrast to the boisterous boys.

Nestled in a cell of rusty lockers, Mo sits alone on a bench, untying her sneakers.

A SWINGING DOOR cuts through the silence. GIGGLING AND FOOTSTEPS follow.

Two PRETTY TEENAGE GIRLS IN DANCE PANTS AND TANK TOPS patter in. An AWKWARD EXCHANGE OF FAKE SMILES as they stop at a locker pulling out toiletries. One girl slides a tampon into the waist band of her pants and catches Mo's eye.

Mo looks back down and pulls off her sneakers.

PRETTY GIRL (O.S.)

Homo.

Mo looks up but the girls have disappeared around the wall, GIGGLING. She shoves her sneakers into her bag.

4 INT/EXT. WAGNER HIGH SCHOOL, STEPS - EVENING

4

Now in jeans and a fitted tank top, Mo hurries towards the school exit, a gym bag and back pack hanging from each shoulder. Despite the GOLD HOOP EARRINGS and COMBED HAIR, her broad shoulders and wide stance still scream "athlete."

Mo hurries down a set of stairs, passing Omari, Kevin and a FEW OTHER WRESTLERS.

KEVIN

You know you got lucky, right?

Mo stops halfway down and looks back up at the boys.

MO

How you figure?

KEVIN

No guy's gonna go all out on a girl.

MO

Please. He can't even beat me.

OMARI

Yeah cuz you cry every time I cross face you.

MO

You're the one calls time every  
time I get you down.

OMARI

Whatever, Million Dollar Baby.

MO

Yeah, that's right. Whatever.

Mo continues down the stairs, the boys' SNICKERS fading  
behind her.

5 EXT. INDUSTRIAL BLOCK - A FEW MINUTES LATER 5

Mo hurries past a line of warehouses, her cell to her ear.  
Her face registers no answer. She ends the call and hits re-  
send.

6 INT. WAREHOUSE GARAGE - EVENING 6

STACKS OF LUMBER slide out of the back of a OPEN BED TRUCK. A  
pair of gloved hands pass them down to another WORKER.

Pan up to reveal- DARREL, 30s, AFRICAN-AMERICAN MAN, in the  
back of the truck. His thick shoulders and intense eyes are  
reminiscent of Mo. In the pocket of his BEAT-UP JEANS, a  
phone buzzes. He puts his hand on it, as if to still it.

MAN'S VOICE

Stack it against the back wall.

Darrel looks down at a WHITE-HAIRED, CAUCASIAN MAN, 50s, in  
carpenter jeans and a t-shirt, who instructs THE WORKERS  
carryING the lumber into the warehouse.

The carpenter turns back to Darrel.

CARPENTER

The rest can go out front.

Darrel turns back around, crossing the bed of the truck to a  
PILE OF BLACK INDUSTRIAL BAGS. He grabs a couple and tosses  
them few over the side.

MO (O.S)

Dad.

Darrel swings around to see Mo peaking over the back of the  
truck. He looks behind him towards the carpenter who has  
disappeared into the warehouse.

DARREL  
There an emergency?

MO  
No.

DARREL  
So? What I say about coming 'round  
when I'm working?

MO  
I gotta talk to you.

Annoyed, Darrel tosses two more GARBAGE BAGS over the side of  
the truck and hops out after them.

7 EXT. PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

7

A bag in each hand, Darrel crosses the front parking lot  
towards a pile of industrial waste. Mo scurries after him.

DARREL  
So? What you sweatin' so bad it  
can't wait til I'm home?

MO  
Coach wants me to start tomorrow.

DARREL  
Start? I thought you was just  
working out with the them.

MO  
Jahari got injured so we wrestled  
off for his spot.

DARREL  
So?

MO  
So... I beat the other kid.

Darrel tosses the garbage bags onto the pile.

DARREL  
You beat the other kid?

Mo nods. Darrel glances behind him than pulls out a pack of  
cigarettes.

DARREL (CONT'D)  
Well I tell you what: you got some  
good genes.

Darrel lights up, letting out a long waft of smoke. Mo holds back a grin.

MO

I gotta drop three pounds though.

DARREL

Please. I dropped twelve once in a week for city finals.

MO

(excited)

For real?

DARREL

Shoulda seen the look on that guy Redman's face. Shit was hi-larious.

Mo laughs, her braces catching the street light.

DARREL (CONT'D)

Three pounds. That's just water weight. Just gotta use the plastic.

MO

Will you come tomorrow?

DARREL

You know I gotta work. What you think pays for that metal smile?

Darrel shakes his head and starts back towards the truck.

MO

You could just come for my match and then go to work.

DARREL

What you even need me there for?

MO

I dunno. Give me pointers. The kid from Calgary's supposed to be ripped.

Darrel retrieves two more bags and heads back towards her.

DARREL

That's what you got a coach for.

MO

Yeah, but even Coach says you could show me some things -

Darrel tosses the bags onto the pile.

DARREL  
Your coach don't know shit about me-

BOSS  
Hey! Amigo!

Mo and Darrel both turn to see, THE CARPENTER, standing by the van, waving his arms.

CARPENTER  
There's three more bags here!

DARREL  
(under his breath)  
No shit.

Darrel nods to the carpenter, then turns back to Mo, his patience run dry.

DARREL (CONT'D)  
You bust your teeth tomorrow, I do not want to hear it. I am not paying for that shit twice.

Mo closes her mouth, hurt, as Darrel heads back to the van.

MO  
I'm better than you were, you know.

Darrel stops and turns around.

DARREL  
Is that right?

MO  
(challenging him)  
Yeah. That's right. Come tomorrow if you don't believe me.

Darrel hesitates, then -

MAKES AS IF TO RUN TOWARDS HER. Mo takes off, SQUEALING. She runs as fast as she can down the block, LAUGHING.

She glances back over her shoulder. Darrel stands at the van waving her off like she's not worth the chase.

Mo's feet pound the grass. Sweaty bangs cling to her forehead under a thick WOOL HAT.

Now in a PUFFY DOWN COAT, Mo loops around the dark, deserted field, silhouetted by POOLS OF YELLOW STREET LIGHTS.

9 EXT. PROJECT HOUSING COMPLEX - NIGHT 9

Mo runs up a path that weaves through a complex of identical drab buildings, passing TWO TEENAGE GIRLS on a bench WITH A BABY CARRIAGE.

10 INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT 10

Soggy plastic wrap peels off a sweaty torso.

Stripped down to a sports bra and running pants, Mo pulls the last of the plastic off her waist. She looks down at her bathroom scale, takes a deep breath and steps onto it. She closes her eyes and says a silent prayer.

CLOSE-UP ON: BATH SALTS raining down into a steaming tub of water.

Mo sinks down into the water, her hair floating around her face like seaweed.

11 INT. MO'S APARTMENT, KITCHEN - NIGHT 11

Cheap wood cabinets and a sink full of dishes are illuminated only by the faint light from the refrigerator.

Her hair freshly braided, Mo eyes its contents.

PACKAGED GROUND BEEF, SODA, PUDDING...

Mo pulls open the vegetable drawer. A lone apple rolls from one side of the drawer to the other.

SOUND BRIDGE - HEAVY BREATHING as we cut to:

12 INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT 12

A living room that doubles as a bedroom: Sheets are strewn across a WORN couch. MEN'S CLOTHES spill out of a rickety dresser that holds up an OUTDATED TV.

A PIZZA COMMERCIAL BLASTS from the TV.

A DEEP INHALE as -

Mo rises up into frame and back down again, doing push-ups.

A TEENAGE DRAMA RESUMES on the TV.



Mo flops onto her stomach, picks up the now gnawed-at apple, and takes a TINY bite. Fixed on the TV, she chews slowly, then -

Leans over and spits the chewed up apple into A BOWL.

13

INT. MO'S BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

13

Mo sits in bed clipping her finger nails, the wall behind her a collage of TEEN IDOLS and old, peeling stickers.

She dumps the nail shards into a trash by the bed and sits back up. She looks down at her FRESHLY PAINTED RED toe nails, then leans down and checks to see if they're dry.

Mo curls up and stares at a cluster of OLD WRESTLING TROPHIES on her night stand. Among them is a WORN PHOTO OF A WRESTLING TEAM, their dated singlets clearly from another era.

She scans the ROWS OF PROUD MEN, fixing on A LEAN WRESTLER in the back, one of only three BLACK ATHLETES on the team, the eyes unmistakably Darrel's.

Mo reaches for her phone. The time reads 1:30 A.M.

Mo scrolls through her address book, stopping at: DAD.

She looks at his number, clicks on it, and starts typing:

"What time you get off tonight?"

She stares at the text, then holds down the back space.

She re-types:

"Match @ 5 @ Stevens. C u there?"

Her thumb hovers over the "SEND" button. She clicks it.

Mo sets the phone back down, grabs the photo and turns off the light. She slips the picture under her pillow, lies back onto it and closes her eyes.

SOUND BRIDGE -

WOMAN'S VOICE

113.

MO

Wait...

14 INT. STEVENS HIGH, GIRLS LOCKER ROOM - AFTERNOON 14

RED DIGITAL NUMBERS FLICKER from 112.2 to... 111.9.

In a sports bra and shorts, Mo stares down at the scale and exhales, relieved, as a NURSE writes the number in her book.

NURSE

Arms.

Mo holds out her arms and watches as the nurse circles around her, examining her skin like an artifact.

NURSE (CONT'D)

Nails.

Mo holds up her clipped nails.

15 INT. STEVENS HIGH, GIRLS LOCKER ROOM - AFTERNOON 15

CLOSE ON - MO'S BACK, as an ACE BANDAGE wraps around her SPORTS BRA.

Mo tightens the bandage around her chest. She checks her flattened profile, then pulls another sports bra over it.

16 INT. STEVENS HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - AFTERNOON 16

BLACK WARM-UPS WIZ by.

In her YELLOW SINGLET, Mo jumps up and down next to the Wagner team bench, watching the Stevens wrestlers run drills.

BOY'S VOICE

But Coach. What if I, like... touch  
her in the wrong place?

Mo turns towards the voice.

Next to the stats table, where two RED-LIPPED GIRLS set up the score board, CONRAD SCHULTZ, (15), SHORT BUT TONED, confers with a GRUFF, OLD-SCHOOL COACH (40s).

STEVENS COACH

Just go easy. It'll be a quick win.

Conrad looks over at Mo and catches her staring. He glares at Mo and then looks back at his Coach, rolling his eyes.

Mo looks away. Up in the bleachers, parents and friends dribble in... But no sign of Darrel.

COACH  
Hey! Mini!

Mo spins around to see her team gathering for a huddle. Omari shoots her the evil eye as he lumbers towards the group.

TEAM HUDDLE -

In the middle of the group, Coach looks over his clipboard.

COACH (CONT'D)  
We're going a little out of weight order. We start with 190 up to Jay, then back to Kevin and then Mo.

Mo peers in at him through the mass of bodies.

COACH (CONT'D)  
All right. Hands in.

A PILE OF HANDS. Mo's just makes it, on top.

COACH (CONT'D)  
1, 2, 3...

WAGNER WRESTLERS  
Hard!

COACH  
Hard what?

WAGNER WRESTLERS  
Hard work!

Hands fly.

17 INT. WAGNER TEAM BENCH - AFTERNOON

17

A MATCH is in full swing. But Mo's focus is not on the mat.

Her eyes are glued to CONRAD, every inch of muscle on him.

Mo's knee bobs up and down. She stills it with her hand and looks out into the bleachers. Still no sign of Darrel.

Mo reaches into her gym bag and pulls out her cell phone, then changes her mind and tosses it back.

CHEERS from the Stevens team bench.

Mo looks up to see -

Kevin, on the mat, PINNED.

OMARI

Shit.

Hovering behind the bench, Omari looks on, frustrated. He catches Mo's eye and huffs off.

18 INT. STEVENS GYMNASIUM, WAGNER CORNER OF THE MAT - LATER 18

Mo pulls a HAIR COVER down over her pony tail. Coach adjusts her head guard, tightening the strap under her chin.

COACH

Remember, he's like a spider. You leave a leg out, he's gonna grab it.

Mo looks across the mat at Conrad, JOKING around with his teammates. One of them makes a lewd gesture:

STEVENS WRESTLER

Give her the Saturday Night Ride!

COACH

Hey. Where's your focus?

Mo turns back to Coach who snaps her head gear on and gives her a gentle shove onto the mat.

19 INT. STEVENS GYMNASIUM, WRESTLING MAT - CONTINUOUS 19

As Mo jogs to the center of the mat, SNICKERS ripple through the bleachers.

TEENAGE BOY (O.S.)

Wow. They must've been desperate.

Conrad finishes wrapping GREEN VELCRO around his ankle and stands up. Mo kneels down and straps on RED.

STEVENS WRESTLER

Make it quick, Connie!

As Mo stands up, she glimpses -

Darrel, slipping into the gym. In his stained work clothes, Darrel looks especially out of place, hanging back by the door as if to keep from view.

CONRAD

Don't worry, I'll go easy.

Mo turns to Conrad and crouches into position.

MO  
 (taunting)  
 Yeah. Would suck to lose to a girl  
 in front of all your friends.

A flame is lit. Conrad and Mo slap hands, HARD.

THE WHISTLE BLOWS.

Mo and Conrad go head to head like two bulls. Their arms  
 locked like horns, they spin around the mat.

Conrad snaps down on Mo's neck, bringing her to her knees. Mo  
 tries to drag him but Conrad spins and circles out of it.

They re-set, their feet shuffling in a circle.

Conrad shoots for an outside single but Mo blocks and circles  
 out of it. Conrad scrambles to his feet but Mo pummels into  
 him, taking him down with a high crotch single.

THE SCORE CARDS FLIP - "2" for MO.

COACH (O.S.)  
 'At a girl! Break him down! Flat  
 first!

Conrad lands on his base. Mo scrambles to keep him down but  
 Conrad switches out of it, sprawling across Mo's back. The  
 ref holds up two fingers - Conrad's points for a reversal.

STEVENS WRESTLERS  
 Finish her, Connie!

COACH  
 Keep moving, Mini!

Flat on her stomach, Mo struggles under Conrad's weight but  
 can't move him. He reaches under Mo's armpit and around the  
 back of her neck, twisting her to the side with a half  
 nelson. Mo strains against the pull.

From the bleachers, chanting erupts:

STEVENS CROWD  
 Con-rad! Con-rad! Con-rad!

A few of Mo's teammates jump to their feet, shouting.

WAGNER WRESTLERS  
 Look away! Look away!

But Conrad gets her on her back.

Mo arches back into bridge. Conrad sweeps her off her head, but Mo flips back up into bridge; he pulls her down, but she bridges again just as -

A WHITE TOWEL HITS THE MAT. The timer BUZZES.

Mo gets to her feet and runs to the side. Coach hands her a water bottle. She guzzles.

COACH

Nice take-down. But don't go to your back so easy.

Mo brings the water down from her mouth. Next to the bleachers she sees Darrel pacing, clearly anxious.

Coach follows her gaze, catching Darrel's eye. Coach nods at him but Darrel looks away like he didn't see him.

BACK ON THE MAT -

Mo takes her time re-adjusting her hair cover while Conrad waits, flush with adrenaline.

Mo steps up to center, casually, and takes position.

CONRAD

(sarcastic)  
Your hair OK?

THE WHISTLE BLOWS

Caught off guard, Mo is slow to react as Conrad shoots.

Her feet lift off the ground as Conrad slams her onto her back with a double leg lift.

Sound cuts off. All goes white.

Mo gasps. She blinks a few times, the ceiling lights slowly coming into focus.

She turns her head to see, the ref, flat on the mat, watching for a pin, her elbows the only thing keeping her from a fall.

She looks up to see Coach, who motions and shouts, but she can't make out his words.

As Mo regains focus, sound slowly fades back in.

Mo twists to her side, scrambling to her feet and out of bounds.

THE WHISTLE BLOWS.

Next to the bleachers, Darrel shifts, uneasy.

Mo's teammates sit back down again, losing interest.

The ref holds his RED velcro wrist down and GREEN up to indicate Mo is still on bottom.

COACH

Quick off the whistle now, Mini!

Mo kneels down.

Conrad steps behind her, reaching around Mo's waist.

THE WHISTLE BLOWS.

Mo flies to her a feet, but Conrad pulls her back down. She tugs on his arms and gets to her feet, but he pulls her down again. Anger building, Mo flies to her feet again, this time earning the escape, but just as she turns around -

Conrad goes right for the double leg lift again, this time throwing in a half nelson, mid-air.

But Mo catches his elbow. Using his own momentum, she rolls Conrad onto his back and...

Pins him from the side.

Mo's teammates fly to their feet... even Omari.

Darrel jumps up and down.

DARREL

That's it! Stay on him now!

Mo has Conrad on his back but only one shoulder pinned.

The ref is flat on his stomach watching Conrad's other shoulder lower under Mo's weight.

Around them a hush fills the gym.

TEENAGE GIRL

Oh my god...

MOTHER

Is that... blood?

STEVENS COACH

Ref! There's blood!

The ref looks up. The Stevens Coach SIGNALS "injury time." Mo looks down at Conrad for blood but sees none.

THE WHISTLE BLOWS

Confused, Mo and Conrad unlock. Conrad scrambles to his feet. Mo wipes her nose and checks for blood. None.

She watches as the coaches confer with the ref. Behind them, she sees her teammates look away, embarrassed.

She scans the whispering crowd, settling on Darrel. But his eyes do not meet hers. She follows his stunned gaze down to-

THE RED STAIN SPREADING BETWEEN HER LEGS.

Coach runs over to Mo.

COACH

It's a crap call, Mo. But you gotta go clean up.

Mo blinks at him confused.

COACH (CONT'D)

You got five minutes. You have what you need, right?

Mo looks past him, locking eyes with Darrel who stares at her helpless and dumbstruck. He looks away, checking his watch as if to remind her of his limited time.

COACH (CONT'D)

Hey!

Mo turns back to Coach, startled.

COACH (CONT'D)

You can do this.

But Mo is distracted again by the sight of -

Darrell, heading for the door.

20 INT. GIRLS' LOCKER, BATHROOM STALL - MOMENTS LATER 20

Under the stall we see Mo's stained singlet slide off and hit the ground. Muffled sniffles can be heard.

21 INT. STEVENS HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS' LOCKER ROOM - MOMENTS LATER 21

Water swirls pink under the faucet as Mo scrubs the blood from the singlet, her forehead damp with sweat.



Frustrated, she stops and looks up at the mirror. A truck could've run her over. She takes a deep breath, holding back a sob, just as -

The locker room door OPENS. FOOTSTEPS APPROACH.

In the mirror Mo sees a skinny, brown arm sticking out from behind the wall. A yellow singlet dangles from it.

Mo swings around.

MO  
Whose that?

THE ARM LOWERS TO THE FLOOR AND SETS DOWN THE SINGLET.

Mo strains to see around the wall, glimpsing --

OMARI'S PROFILE

-- just before his arm pulls back and SCAMPERS away. The locker room door opens and shuts again behind him.

Mo turns back around and shuts off the faucet. She looks in the mirror, opens her mouth and checks her teeth. No blood, all her teeth are still in tact.

She closes her mouth and looks herself in the eye, determination returning.

22

INT. STEVENS HIGH, HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

22

In Omari's singlet, Mo steps out of the locker room and makes her way down the quiet hallway.

As she nears the gym, a FAINT CHANT can be heard.

Mo stops outside the gym door, the chanting louder from behind the closed door. Nervous, she reaches a hand for the door, takes a deep breath and... pushes it open.

WAGNER WRESTLERS (O.S.)  
(chanting)  
Mini-Mo! Mini-Mo! Mini-Mo!

-pours into the hallway.

Mo lingers for a minute, listening, courage building...

Before disappearing inside the gym.

The door CLANKS shut behind her, leaving the hallway deserted and still, the faint sounds of a battle waging on in the gym.

CUT TO BLACK