

**DOWN & AROUND**  
**by: Oryna Schiffman**

**SYNOPSIS**

JAY STADLER, a hardened, hyperactive police-officer-turned-social worker risks his life when he befriends ANGEL PEREZ a tough Cuban teen and reluctant gang member with a penchant for Mambo dancing. As they take on the syndicate in a crime-infested suburb of Chicago, they discover a force more powerful than the school system, the FBI and the mob – song, skit and dance.

**TREATMENT**

With his new social work degree in hand, and another girlfriend on her way out, former cop Jay Stadler is hired to spearhead the state's first police-based social services program. He moves into Maybrook, a gang-addled Chicago suburb, and blows his budget on a truckload of basketballs. His first case – ANGEL PEREZ, a sixteen-year-old macho Cuban who's just developing a taste for cocaine at his father's Ma Casa Club ("the old man's powdered milk factory") when he's suspended from school.

Angel harbors a secret love of Mambo dancing, which he learned from his grandfather in Cuba. To him, bouncing balls sound like congas, and dribbling looks like Perez Prado hip swerving. Jay soon realizes it's not basketball that's going to keep his "swerving ass off the streets." Jay gets Angel's suspension revoked under the condition he commits to a rehearsal schedule and high school talent show performance. Because he knows nothing about dance and blew his budget on balls, he is forced to call his ex fiancée, MICHELLE SILVER. The dancer-turned-aerobics instructor who, five years ago decided Jay wasn't "breeding material" after he blew off his own engagement party, is currently the rec center director in the bordering affluent suburb of Riverview – safely outside of Angel's gang turf which is monitored constantly. Michelle's willing to let Angel attend the after school hip hop dance class, in exchange for his teaching musical alphabet to the tots class.

"Riverview Rec Center?! That's where the poor kids go," declares MRS DUNNE, Riverview Garden Club President and mother of sixteen-year-old violinist HILLARY DUNNE. Hillary's college advisor suggested she volunteer at the center because she's low on community service hours. Desperate to escape the "toxic wasteland" of a household where parents "stay together for the country club discount," Hillary is willing to play her violin for tots learning the alphabet. At first, "this macho moron" she's forced to perform with grates on her, but eventually, the sheer elegance of his limbs moving through space mesmerizes her, till she nearly forgets the alphabet, but learns to improvise and really enjoy her violin.

Hillary's father ETHAN, a thrill-seeking trader, doesn't even remember which instrument his daughter plays. He's always working or entertaining clients. He speeds into Ma Casa's lot just as Angel's father HENRICO hangs the CLOSED sign. Angel is moping the floor when jittery Ethan bangs on the window. Henrico scolds him for coming after hours, but lets him in, begrudgingly. Ethan catches a glimpse of Angel's Mambo Kings t-shirt disappear into the kitchen, as he enters to make his large quantity purchase.

Once Angel spreads the word on the streets of Maybrook that Jay is cool, other gang members begin to trust "White Feet," as they affectionately call the new social worker that offers rehearsal as a detention hall alternative. Faculty is skeptical at first, but soon the newly formed dance troupe has entered a statewide hip-hop dance competition, which could result in a cash prize for the school theatre department. Angel's obsession catches on. One after another his homeys take the "no gangs; no drugs" pledge and leave the streets for the stage. Or so it seems. Till Angel's best friend Gloria is murdered by drug dealers before his eyes.

Devastated, Angel reverts to cocaine. Jay's passionate, almost violent intervention causes Angel to break down, spilling all his dangerous secrets. He thought he was safe because of who his father is, because his father is known for servicing the cops. This explains why Maybrook POLICE CHIEF SPINNER isn't returning Jay's calls or investigating the murder – he is in on the deal. Police officers buy and sell the drugs they're supposed to intercept, and ensure protection money is paid to the mob by local drug operations. For years Angel has known it all. He's seen it all. But he can't prove any of it. And now, his best friend lies in the crossfire of it.

Jay becomes obsessed with finding Gloria's killer, despite warnings to avoid local cops, who quickly get wind of his efforts to engage the DEA and CIA. When Angel's father hears his son is hanging out with "White Trouble" he insists Angel go live with his grandmother. "Got his Grandpa's feet, let's hope he don't got his Grandpa's luck!" No kid of his is going to starve dancing like his father did in Cuba!

Knowing that Granma is powerless over her cocaine clan, Jay secretly allows Angel to move into his apartment – just until he's kicked the habit and brought Gloria's killer to justice. Jay has a slew of testimonies from gang members who have sold drugs to police officers, and asks them to record their stories for the CIA agent HAROLDSON. They refuse. But word gets out that they've been asked.

GARULFINO, the mob boss whom Henrico pays off to operate his business, demands he "knock off White Trouble". Henrico is already holding the butcher knife over Jay's throat, when Angel turns the keys in the lock. They must explain to one another what each is doing there. Henrico pretends to be checking on his son's whereabouts, then delivers a kicking and screaming Angel to his grandmother's house in the city, where gangster cousins ridicule his efforts. He's told to find his own job. Fragile and frazzled, Angel is lost without both the income from Henrico

and the inspiration from Jay, who has become much more of a father to him. Habit wavers with his will, as cocaine is easy to come by.

Meanwhile, rehearsals at the community center cause a “disturbance of the peace” according to the police officers from across the street in Maybrook, who file a complaint with the Riverview police department and bring Jay a copy. The dance competition is just weeks away. Angel needs strength to kick his habit. The FBI needs evidence. And Jay needs to get out of town. “After we win,” he reassures everyone. Michelle echoes his sentiment. Like the synthesizer and the violin, Jay and Michelle are beginning to harmonize. Angel, however, is losing faith in everyone, including Hillary, who is only able to express affection through her avant-garde violin accompaniment, and never in front of her friends.

Angel’s cousin offers him half of the profit on a drug drop. Now that he can rely on neither Henrico nor Jay, Angel feels he has no choice. The night of the scheduled delivery is the night of dress rehearsal. Angel is skulking down the alley, nimble, hopping over potholes and crates with ease, and listening to music in his earphones.

Meanwhile the troupe is dancing to troupe composition... Jay nervously glancing over his shoulder at the door, awaiting Angel’s arrival...

The beat pulsates louder and louder in Angel’s ears as he follows his iPhone Google map directions.... He is just a block from the house when the troupe song comes on the random setting. He stumbles, clumsy and weak – paralyzed by indecision.

Chief Spinner disrupts the rehearsal with a second warning – that music is disturbing the peace. This time he makes note of all troupe members (who have never been written up for the cars they’ve stolen or the drugs they’ve sold.)

Angel drops the package in a garbage can, and dashes in the opposite direction. He makes it to rehearsal just in time to make it onto the deputy’s list. Troupe members vote to give Angel another chance to straighten up. Jay presents the reinstatement contract, which he signs in blood (adapting a gang- inspired ritual.)

Now there’s no way Angel can return to Maybrook or to Grandma’s. The deeply felt repentance of the ritual lowers her guard and Hillary offers to let him stay in her family’s coach house “No one goes up there but the maid,” she promises. The maid, and their newly blossomed love...

After a failed attempt to videotape Chief Spinner in a drug transaction, Haroldson agrees to join Jay at the competition in Springfield, where they hope the former gang members might feel freer to testify on tape. Haroldson hops on the bus Jay rented for the road trip, and joins the young men and women on their voyage through identity limbo. He dares not interrupt their dreamy talk of bright futures with questions about dark pasts. It can wait till after the performance.

Meanwhile Ethan anxiously enters his “man cave” –only to find the maid cleaning. He darts out to the coach house instead to snort his coke, and discovers the Ma Casa t-shirt he saw Angel wearing the night of his pick up. His daughter doesn’t answer her phone because she’s singing on the bus. His wife doesn’t answer her phone because she’s in a hotel room with the Mexican gardener. Ethan busts into Ma Casa’s kitchen, high and furious, demanding Henrico tell him where Angel and Hillary are. Now both fathers are enraged. Chief Spinner slips out, but Ethan has already spotted his fellow customer. Henrico calls Jay to find out where they are. Ethan charters a private jet to beat the bus there.

When they arrive demanding to take their kids away, Jay convinces them to just watch the show first. The fathers sit side by side watching and listening to the talent they never knew existed, and the stories that force them to face themselves. The performances are so refined and passionate the fathers are stunned.

Henrico promises to send Angel money if he just leaves town and continues to study dance after high school. Ethan promises Jay he will testify about Chief Spinner. He promises Hillary to go into rehab and take time off to live in his own house. The house where his wife is preparing to file for a long-overdue divorce.

Haroldson convinces Jay to drop the investigation and keep doing what he does best – save lives. Including his own. Jay realizes he can’t do it without Michelle. Michelle realizes she doesn’t have to be a biological mother to raise kids. The kids realize they have just made hundreds of people dance and cry.

They wait to hear the announcement of the contest winner, knowing that it doesn’t really matter. They have all already won a new beginning.