

Script Analysis: "I, Tonya" — Scene By Scene Breakdown

[Scott Myers](#)

Here is my take on this exercise from a previous series of posts — [How To Read A Screenplay](#):

After a first pass, it's time to crack open the script for a deeper analysis and you can do that by creating a scene-by-scene breakdown. It is precisely what it sounds like: A list of all the scenes in the script accompanied by a brief description of the events that transpire.

For purposes of this exercise, I have a slightly different take on scene. Here I am looking not just for individual scenes per se, but a scene or set of scenes that comprise one event or a continuous piece of action. Admittedly this is subjective and there is no right or wrong, the point is simply to break down the script into a series of parts which you then can use dig into the script's structure and themes.

The value of this exercise:

- We pare down the story to its most constituent parts: Scenes.
- By doing this, we consciously explore the structure of the narrative.

- A scene-by-scene breakdown creates a foundation for even deeper analysis of the story.

This week: *I, Tonya* (2017). **You may download the movie script [here](#).**



Written by Steven Rogers.

IMDb plot summary: Competitive ice skater Tonya Harding rises among the ranks at the U.S. Figure Skating Championships, but her future in the activity is thrown into doubt when her ex-husband intervenes.

I, Tonya

Scene-By-Scene Breakdown

By Nicole Leydecker

gointothestory.blcklst.com

P.1–3 We are introduced to each character through a series of interviews set in present day. Tonya Harding

(44), former Olympic figure skater and first U.S. woman to land a triple axel, has the same hairstyle from 1994 and is proud she always embraced who she was, a poor redneck. Jeff Gillooly, Tonya's ex-husband, couldn't be happier that his name became synonymous with hurting somebody. Lavona Harding (70), Tonya's mother, jokes that the bird perched on her shoulder is her sixth and best husband. She explains that she is the one who drove Tonya to her competitions and sewed all her costumes, yet Tonya thinks she is a monster. Diane Rawinson (60s), Tonya's coach, prim and proper, states that people either loved or loathed Tonya. Shawn Eckardt, Tonya's ex-bodyguard, brags that Jeff and Tonya originally wanted to take out Nancy Kerrigan, but he informed them there are other ways to disable people. Martin Maddox, sleazy former Hard Copy reporter, jokes that today's media is now just as bad as Hard Copy was.

P.3–5 Flashback to forty years earlier. Tonya is three and a half years old and is with her mom watching Diane coach kids ice-skating. Lavona pesters Diane to coach Tonya but Diane refuses due to Tonya's age. Diane quickly changes her mind as soon as she sees Tonya skate. Cut to six months later, and four year old Tonya wins first place in a skating competition against seven to nine year old girls. Four years later, Lavona berates an eight-year-old Tonya from the bleachers, not allowing her to be friends with the other kids or

even to use the bathroom. Tonya wets herself on the ice and Lavona forces her to keep skating.

P.6–7 Scenes cut between Lavona's interview and Lavona beating eight year old Tonya, slapping her, kicking a chair out from under her, hitting her with a hair brush. Lavona justifies her behavior due to Tonya performing better when she was enraged. She claims that Tonya was a well-adjusted girl off of the ice.

P.7–9 Twelve-year-old Tonya shoots rabbits with her father, Al Harding. Tonya complains about her mom forcing her to wear her skating outfit on school picture day just so they can use the photos for competitions. When she got teased, Lavona's advice was to spit in their milk. Her dad hopes that Tonya behaved better than that. They both admit they have so-so feelings about Lavona, but they care for one another.

P.9–10 Tonya is skating and killing it with her triple jumps. Lavona and Diane argue about cleaning up Tonya's image.

P.10–11 Al skins rabbits as Tonya dances around the yard. Tonya mentions how if she wanted something she had to come up with a way to get it. Tonya walks around at school in her homemade rabbit fur coat and flips off a girl that judges her.

P.11–12 Lavona screams from the doorway as Al leaves the house with the last of his belongings. Tonya begs

him to take her with him, but he says he'll be working long hours and won't be able to take care of her. She's dumbfounded as he drives off.

P.12–13 Fifteen-year-old Tonya bullies a girl out of her way as she skates. Watching on the sidelines are eighteen-year-olds Jeff Gillooly and Shawn Eckardt. Interviews: Tonya says she had no idea why Jeff was watching her practice. Jeff asks Tonya out as Lavona watches them from the stands.

P.13–14 As Tonya gets ready for her date, her stepbrother Chris steps up behind her and grabs her breasts. Tonya immediately beats him down with her curling iron. Interview: Shawn brags that he told Jeff to go after Tonya, so if it weren't for him, no one would be talking about them today. Jeff takes out Tonya on their date and Lavona is with them. Lavona grills Jeff with various questions and asks if they had sex yet. Tonya and Jeff are mortified.

P.15–18 Jeff and Tonya connect as he works on his truck. Tonya says Jeff was sweet to her in the beginning, but started hitting her a few months into their relationship. Various shots of Jeff beating up Tonya and then telling her he'll never do it again. Tonya explains she stayed because she thought this was normal behavior. Interview: Tonya laments that the whole world freaked out when Nancy Kerrigan got hit one time, but for her it happened all the time. Jeff

denies hitting Tonya and claims that she hit him. Cut to nineteen-year-old Tonya shooting a gun at Jeff. Tonya denies that happened, and Jeff says that happens later in the story.

P.18–19 Lavona notices the bruises hidden under Tonya's make up and tells her she's an idiot who thinks she deserves to be hit. Tonya blames Lavona for her wanting to stay with Jeff. As Tonya gets up to leave for practice, Lavona demands she kiss her goodbye. Tonya hesitantly kisses her mom and Lavona cannot connect.

P.19–20 Twelve months later. At the competition ice rink, Tonya is smoking and looks like a punk rocker, while all the other skaters look angelic. She hits the ice to ZZ top, really wowing the crowd with her skating. The judges are not happy with her look or music choice. The crowd boos loudly once they hear the scores. Diane tells an upset Tonya that the judges want someone who is more conventional. Tonya declares that if she can do a triple jump the judges will be forced to give her high scores.

P.21–24 Lavona beats up Tonya because of her low scores. The fight escalates to the point where Lavona throws a knife into Tonya's arm. Interview: Lavona claims that every family has their ups and downs. Jeff says that Tonya needed to get away so they got a place together. Jeff watches on as Tonya sews her costume. He encourages her to go back to school; she's worried

she's not smart enough, but he tells her if he can get a diploma so can she. Jeff says they were living a life of domestic bliss.

P.24–26 The crowd boos as Tonya's scores are revealed. Tonya jumps out onto the ice and screams at the judges to give her fair scores. They pointedly tell her they judge presentation and maybe she should pick another sport. Back in the locker room, Diane informs Tonya that telling the judges to suck her dick might not help her scores in the future. Tonya throws one of her skates at Diane's head, barely missing her, and then fires her. Interview: Tonya blames her behavior on puberty.

P.26–27 Jeff and Tonya get married. Tonya admits she was young and dumb but it made sense that they got married so she could have good benefits and insurance. Lavona tells her daughter you fuck dumb not marry dumb.

P.27–28 Interviews: Martin, Diane, Lavona and Jeff relay how difficult it is to attempt a triple axel.

P.28–31 Tonya is with her new coach, Doodie Teachman (late 20s), at the 1991 Nationals. An audience member heckles Tonya. Doodie tells her to prove everyone wrong and attempt a triple axel. A pumped up Tonya skates onto the ice. Doodie nods over to Lavona, and Lavona turns around and pays the

heckler some money. The crowd goes nuts as Tonya becomes the first American woman to attempt and complete a triple axel. The judges finally give her the scores she deserves. Tonya reflects that she was the best figure skater in the world and for the first time she felt loved.

P.31–32 Interview: Jeff explains that Tonya was now a completely different person and wasn't interested in him anymore. Tonya fights with Jeff over small things like not having any Dove bars in the freezer. Jeff doesn't know how to handle this change so he punches her. Tonya says she finally had enough and moved out.

P.32–34 Tonya is wearing a gold medal and is standing next to Kristy Yamaguchi and Nancy Kerrigan.

Interviews: Martin lists off all the competitions Tonya wins then says the skating community did not want someone like her representing them. Tonya says that she and Nancy were friends, but the press pit them against each other just to sell papers. She wonders, who would actually bash their friend's knee?

P.34–38 Jeff and Tonya argue over the phone about the restraining order she placed on him. Jeff is infuriated that she keeps hanging up on him. He grabs Shawn and they drive over to the competition she is at. Shawn brags about his special ops expertise and states that they need to blend in. Jeff ignores his friend and screams a big "fuck you" to Tonya as soon as he

sees her. Tonya smiles.

P.38–39 Montage of Jeff wooing Tonya back. Tonya admits she just wanted to be loved so she took him back. But then, everything turned to shit. Montage of Tonya skating and falling as she trains for the Olympics.

P.39–40 Olympics, Albertville, 1992. Tonya, a bit overweight, walks out onto the ice with her coach Doodie. The announcer notes that Tonya arrived late and missed the opening ceremony. Her skating picks up speed as the announcer excitedly talks about her making history at this very moment, she jumps –

P.40–41 Interview: Tonya says she broke her skate blade during practice, and when they replaced it all of her jumps were off, so it wasn't her fault. Flashback: two months earlier — montage of Tonya drinking with Jeff, Doodie checking Tonya's weight. Back at the Olympics. Tonya is watching the other girls get awarded their Olympic medals from the TV in the locker room. Tonya explains she came in fourth behind Nancy and was happy with that, even though she thinks it wasn't fair.

P.41–44 Interview: Jeff says that the next part in the story is not true. Cut to various scenes of Jeff beating up Tonya, and the police showing up. Tonya divorces him. Jeff barrels into Tonya's apartment, pulls out a

gun and threatens to kill her and himself. Tonya escapes outside and Jeff shoots at the ground by her feet. A fragment from the bullet goes into her head. Jeff throws her into his car and blames her for his actions. The cops pull them over, take Jeff's guns and then send them on their way. They do nothing to help Tonya. Interview: Lavona complains that her storyline is disappearing right now, as her bird squawks on her shoulder.

P.44–47 Tonya is now a waitress bussing tables. As she exits the restaurant, Diane is waiting for her. Tonya admits to messing up her skating career. Diane tells Tonya she has a second chance, the Olympics will be in next two years instead of four. She asks Tonya to lose the heavy metal and blue nail polish. Montage of Diane checking Tonya's look, a ballet teacher instructing her on how to be graceful, exercising, skating well but still receiving low scores.

P.47–48 Tonya ambushes a skating judge as their car and asks why she's getting low scores. The judge admits that she's not the wholesome American family image they want. Tonya asks why can't it just be about skating?

P.48–49 Tonya goes the diner Lavona works at to inform her she's training for the Olympics. Lavona is suspicious of her motives and calls her a taker. She asks her mom if she ever loved her. Lavona rants that

being nice doesn't get you anywhere and Tonya should be thanking her for the way she was treated. Tonya calls her a monster and walks off.

P.49–50 Tonya calls Jeff wanting to get back together. Interview: Jeff wanted their relationship to be like it once was. Cut to Tonya covering her face with make up to hide the bruises. Tonya muses she planned on dumping him as soon as she made the team.

P.50–51 Interviews: Tonya, Martin, Diane and Lavona all mention "the incident". Jeff says everyone remembers the incident differently. An image of Tonya hitting Nancy with a baseball bat. He says he told the FBI what really happened, but the press got everything wrong.

P.51–54 At the practice rink, a policeman informs Tonya that she received a death threat. Interview: Jeff says this freaked her out so much she didn't want to skate. So he had an idea. Jeff suggests to Shawn that they send a death threat to Nancy Kerrigan right before nationals to mess with her head. Shawn agrees and says they can fly someone to Massachusetts where Nancy is from and have them send the letters from there so it doesn't lead back to him and Jeff. All he needs from Jeff is a thousand dollars to hire some guys.

P.54–56 Shawn's guys, Derrick Smith (29) and Shane

Stant (22) drive in their getaway car. Cut to Jeff and Tonya listening to a garbled message on their answering machine explaining where Nancy Kerrigan trains. Tonya writes it down. Interviews: Tonya denies writing any note and says the FBI must have found that piece of paper in a random dumpster. Martin says the piece of paper had Nancy's training location and times. If they were going to mail the letters why did they need her training times? He says Jeff can change his story all he wants but he confessed he was guilty to the FBI. Jeff confirms to the FBI that Tonya was in on the plan but the plan was to just mail letters.

P.56–57 Jeff gives Shawn a thousand dollars. At the practice rink, Shawn asks Jeff for more money for his "operatives". Jeff asks Shawn to call it off. Shawn asks Tonya what she thinks and she goes off on him saying he's not a secret agent, just a fat nobody who lives with his parents.

P.57–59 Interviews: Both Jeff and Tonya say they were sleeping when it happened. It's January 6th, 1994 at the Detroit Nationals. Derrick and Shane are in the parking lot prepping for what's about to go down. Shane walks right past security, snaps open his baton and strikes Nancy's leg. He runs off and jumps into the getaway car.

P.60–61 Interview: Martin surmises no one had any idea that something could be done like this, especially

by two of the biggest boobs in the industry. Tonya and Jeff are on the phone freaking out to the news that Nancy broke her knee. Footage of Nancy screaming "Why??" plays on every TV station.

P.61–63 Jeff confronts Shawn and asks why they didn't stick with the plan and send letters. Shawn brags that the money will be pouring in now that every skater will want a bodyguard. He admits to being the one who called in the death threat to Tonya. Jeff can't believe it as Shawn asks for more money to get his guys out of Detroit.

P.63–66 The crowd cheers Tonya on as she lands her triple lutz at the Nationals. Jeff watches her on TV as he sends a money order. Lavona is emotionless as she watches Tonya skate. The announcer comments that Tonya's performance most definitely earned a place on the Olympic team. Martin explains how Shane bungled the whole operation and left a huge trail of phone and bank records for the police to find him.

P.66–72 Tonya is soaking up the attention from photographers and has her mind on future endorsement deals as Jeff tries to focus her on getting their story straight. Too late, the FBI shows up. Jeff and Tonya bumble their way through questioning and get caught off guard when they are asked about Derrick. Jeff asks Shawn how the FBI knew about Derrick. Shawn denies saying anything. A quick montage of

Shawn bragging to anyone who would listen that his team got hired to take Nancy down. Cut to 48 hours after that, the FBI questions Shawn and he blames it all on Jeff.

P.72–74 Shawn calls Jeff and asks him to meet up at midnight and to bring money to help him get out of town. The FBI nod approvingly at Shawn once he hangs up. Jeff pulls up to the restaurant at midnight and notices two black sedans in the parking lot. He informs a sweating Shawn if he knows anything about Nancy he will be forced to report it to the authorities. Shawn realizes Jeff knows he's wearing a wire. Jeff quietly leans into Shawn and tells him he made his bed and has to lie in it.

P.74–76 Diane's husband, Bob, a lawyer, informs Tonya and Jeff that Shawn was arrested and claims it was all Jeff's idea. Tonya starts to spill the beans but Jeff stops her by squeezing her arm. When they leave, Jeff yells at her to keep her mouth shut. Tonya studies Jeff and realizes there is more to the story. She asks him if he is the one who planned this. Jeff punches her in the face. Interview: Tonya says once he hit her, that's when she knew it was him.

P.76–77 Tonya and Bob meet with the FBI. Cut to Tonya packing her things as Jeff yells at her from outside her bedroom door that she gave him up to the FBI. Tonya almost opens the door but then quickly

opens the window to escape. Tonya tells Jeff the reason she told the FBI was because he did do it. As she throws her suitcase out the window, Jeff asks her what he should do, and she tells him he should just kill himself.

P.77–78 Shawn argues with an interviewer on whether or not he really is a bodyguard and international terrorism expert.

P.78–79 Tonya's home is surrounded by reporters. Cut to Tonya on her way to practice, her fans shouting that they love her and support her. Archival TV footage plays of various news reporters discussing that she might be removed from the Olympics, and that her husband said she knew about the incident the whole time. Tonya soaks up all the attention as she finishes her routine and the crowd cheers.

P.80–81 Jeff, Shawn, Derrick and Shane get led outside of the courthouse in handcuffs. Jeff says he did plead guilty to knowing about the attack but because he didn't report it he got charged with racketeering. He never talked to Shawn again.

Interview: Tonya thought being famous would be fun. She was loved for a minute, but that quickly turned to hatred. The public at large were now her attackers.

P.81–83 Tonya is sewing her costume with the shades drawn as reporters roam outside. Lavona shows up and

tells Tonya she supports her and she's proud of her. For a moment Tonya starts to tear up, until Lavona asks her if she knew about the attack. Tonya searches Lavona's coat and pulls out a tape recorder. Lavona insists she meant everything she said as Tonya kicks her out, only to find her car getting towed. She runs out after it as the press chases her from behind. Martin admits that he would have her tires flattened on purpose just so they could get a shot of her.

P.83–85 Three weeks until the Olympics. At the practice rink, Diane and Bob encourage Tonya to apologize so she can still be in the Olympics. Cut to a press conference where Tonya reads a prepared statement that she did not know about the assault. Tonya and Bob stand before a judge in a courtroom to sue the Olympic committee for threatening to take her off the team. Tonya says the whole world wanted to see a showdown between her and Nancy, which meant she got to stay on the team.

P.85–88 Intercut between Tonya in the locker room getting ready for the Olympics and Jeff getting set up to do live commentary of her performance for Hard Copy. Tonya is having a problem with her laces but is rushed out onto the ice. She begins her routine, then stops, and in an unprecedented move asks the judges if she can fix her skates and start over. The judges let her. Her performance is less than stellar, and Tonya blames it on her laces and the judges never giving her

a fair shot. Interview: Tonya talks about Nancy's reaction to winning 2nd place in the Olympics, that she looked like she had stepped in dog poo when she accepted her medal.

P.88–91 Tonya and Bob are in the courtroom where she is sentenced to three years probation, resignation from the US figure skating association, and banned for life from all figure skating associations and events. Cut to Tonya at home watching a late night talk show host make fun of her as the audience cheers. Interviews: Jeff says he received a two-year sentence and only ended up doing eight months. He admits that Tonya would never have called in a death threat and that he ruined her career. Lavona says she never sees Tonya anymore and she could care less.

P.91–93 Tonya is in a boxing ring getting pummeled, as a hateful crowd cheers on. She says she did what she had to do to stay in the public eye and to pay her bills, and that America wants someone to love and someone to hate. Intercut various shots of Tonya skating and getting beat up in the boxing ring. Tonya gets up, smiles and fights again.

P.93 Title cards: Lavona and Tonya have had no contact. Lavona now lives in Washington State behind a porn shop. Jeff Gillooly is now Jeff Stone, and is married to his third wife and has two children. Tonya does professional landscaping, and is happily married

with a seven-year-old son. She wants everyone to know she is a good mother.

Writing Exercise: I encourage you to read the script, but short of that, if you've seen the movie, go through this scene-by-scene breakdown. What stands out to you about it from a structural standpoint?

To download a PDF of the breakdown for *I, Tonya*, go [here](#).

Major kudos to **Nicole Leydecker** for doing this week's scene-by-scene breakdown.

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