

One Step, Two Steps

Fenu T.

“Sarah Grace Jones!” Ma’ hollered from the kitchen. I projected out of my bed. I could tell I was already late because my sister’s bed was made. I scrambled out of my bed and ran to my closet. I didn’t have enough time to shower this morning of course. I took my light pink plaid dress with the white collar. It was my favorite dress. It hit just above my knees and it had beautiful puffy sleeves Ma’ had got it made for me about 2 years ago. Since I’m small it still fit. I put my frilly white lace socks on and rushed to the breakfast table. Since everyone else had already woke up, all that was left was 2 pieces of bacon. I stepped out the door into the warm sun and began a fast-paced walk to school.

“One step left, one hop right,” I pondered in my head. The steps made a captivating dance when performed. I’ve always had an adoration for the arts. When I say the arts, I don’t mean painting and such. (Everyone knows I ain’t good at that). I mean the ballet dancers, the tutus, and how they move their bodies so fluidly to the music. Ma’ always thought that type of stuff was a waste of time and money. Well, anything we wanted was a waste of money. Since Pa’ couldn’t find a job anywhere, we were living paycheck to paycheck. My older brother Ken loved to do anything physical. Although my older sister Maya Lynn, could really carry a tune. I’m quite sure that contributed to my love for dance.

That particular day at school felt different, but I don’t know why. After school I always went to “Miss Macie Laine’s Ballet Academy”. Not to Join a class of course. Just to stare through the window. I would give my left arm just to be able to take a single class. I knew that would never happen though. Although today was the day. I curled my hand against the knob of the door and opened it. I took one step in. Then one step led to two steps. I stood there and looked around. All the women were in there with their babies in pink tutus and such. They all kept giving me snooty looks. Till’ one woman said, “I didn’t know the colored children were allowed to be in here.” Ma’ always told me that even though segregation ended a little while back in Mississippi. Some people could still be ugly on the inside. I believed her of course, but I never actually thought I would be in a situation such like this. I still stood there just observing.

Then, I saw it. A girl floating on her pointe shoes. It was like nothing I’ve ever seen before. Miss. Macie Laine came and stood right in front of me. The way she stared at me was piercing. It cut through my small soft heart. The words she

said I will never forget. “Do you really think you belong here sweetheart, just look at you?” I knew when she called me sweetheart it wasn’t like when Ma’ said it. When Miss. Macie Laine said sweetheart it was to cover up the ugliness of her heart. A single tear ran down my face. I stood there and looked at her. Pa’ always said never to walk out of a situation looking like you just lost even if you did. I turned around. I took not one but two steps out the door. 2 just seemed to be my lucky number, but it didn’t seem to be too lucky at this moment.

The Next day after school I went back to the ballet academy. This time I was prepared. I had on my black church stockings, My Mary Janes, and my favorite swimsuit. Now that I look back at it, I realize how ridiculous I looked. Did I care, No. I was determined. I positioned myself in front of the window just so that I could see the dancer from yesterday. I copied her moves to the absolute best my tiny 11-year-old body could. I continued to do that for about a couple weeks. Then, I realized that I needed more. I went to the library and checked out the only two books they had on ballet. I read those front and back cover to cover until I knew all the terms and how they were supposed to look.

It was raining one day, and I didn’t know if I should go to my little spot on the sidewalk. I still went though, and I'm glad that I did. The lady that cleaned the place let me that day since it was raining. I was permitted to stand in the corner of the class. The view was 10 time better, and I could hear what the teacher was saying. All the girls gave me a strange look except for one, Jane the ballerina from the window. I looked different than they did I was colored, they weren’t, I hadn’t taken, a class they had, they had nice pink tights, leotards, and ballet slippers, I was wearing a swimsuit, black stockings, and Mary Janes. I knew most the terms she was repeating, and I could execute most of them well. After class the one girl who didn’t give me weird looks came up to me. “Why don’t you just sign up for a class?” she said. Before I could answer she was already leaving. I knew I couldn’t because my parents could never pay for it.

That night a lady from the studio made a call that changed my life. She saw that I had potential just needed some proper critiques. She agreed to let me take classes if I helped at the front desk. After discussion, my parents agreed to it. 10 years later I tell this story to my daughter, Jane, as a prima ballerina.