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My feet scuttled across the black Marley dance floor. The final note of the jazz song ended our routine.

“Good, ladies!” our teacher exclaimed. “Now let’s go back to the beginning. Since Rose won’t be here, we need to change the formations for this weekend’s competition.”

I raised my eyebrows. *Did we just lose a teammate?*

During break, I asked her, “Where’s Rose?”

My teammates looked up from their water bottles, curious.

“Girls, Rose has been hospitalized,” our teacher explained softly. “She was diagnosed with anorexia.”

Gasps. We had danced with Rose since we were all five years old. Rose? Hospitalized for an eating disorder?

My friend nudged my arm timidly. “Is this real?”

I could only shake my head.

“She was so skinny,” I whispered.

“I know. How could she think she was fat?”

Nobody could answer that question.

Months later, we were happy to hear that Rose was slowly recuperating after counseling and parent involvement, but she never returned to dance.

Sadly, the dance community fosters a toxic culture around body image. From hip-hop dancers to ballerinas, dancers are taught that their weight and outward appearance is vital to success. It is normal for a teacher to reprimand a student, “I can see your lunch. Suck in your stomach!” It is

normal for a student to oblige, afraid to make their teacher call more attention to their body in front of the class. It is normal for a student to dread seeing their reflection in the mirror.

To make matters worse, dancers frequently see videos on Instagram or YouTube of other dancers who display idealized versions of grace and beauty. Stereotypes arise: dance is for skinny girls. Dancers must have long, thin limbs. The unrealistic standards of the dance industry are all over social media, and the passion that a dancer once kindled gets buried under the illusion of a “perfect body”. Dancers starve themselves.

I wrote to my teacher.

“Can you please select performers based on an array of body types and focus on our art? That’s what the production people do with sets, costumes, and makeup. As a dancer, I always want to remember the joy and wonder that brought me to dance. Please, do it for Rose.”