

A Circle of Hands

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Despite the glory of fame, I wouldn't even want to become famous because once I have children, I want to care about them, their lives and their feelings. Unlike my mother who laps up her time in the limelight like a cat does milk, leaving little of her attention for my sister and me. So when she proudly announced that we were moving away from forgettable New Jersey to New York City, where her chances of getting on Broadway were greater, I wasn't one bit surprised. But I was more than one bit dismayed. Don't get me wrong, my mother is an admirable woman. On top of acting she is raising me and my sister Rosalind alone. But leaving the lush leaves, the gentle breezes, Aster and Grace, my attic room, and everything else that I have known since I was a child? That was hard. But what was even harder was riding through my neighborhood, my town, my state, my world up until then, for the last time - watching nature and wonder bleed into the grime and concrete of NYC - with my sister and my mother singing show tunes and exclaiming how *simply wonderful* life would be in "The Big Apple." They are the same. Same brown hair, brown eyes, hobbies (especially clothes and makeup), ambitions, attitudes, and everything else. They didn't even notice my tears. Why can't I be the same, too?

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Now, sitting in my new, dull white room in our new and dull fifth floor walk-up apartment on the Lower East Side, I feel empty. I look at myself in the giant mirror across from my bed. What someone who didn't know me would see is auburn hair, piercing green eyes and round wire rimmed glasses. But what they wouldn't see is the pain that is whizzing inside of me. My sister, the budding actress, the apple that didn't fall far from the tree, the drama queen, told me that "the air was full of opportunities and excitement," but all that I feel in the air is pollution. I don't really care if Rosalind's apple turns into a tree digging its roots into the "culture of NYC" beside

my mother. I am already the apple that tumbled miles from the tree, so why can't I roll back to New Jersey?

Tonight, my mother tells Rosalind that she is old enough to "babysit" me and exits. Not a word to me. As Rosalind and I dig into our take-out, I write an email to my best friend Aster. *He* would have consoled me; *he* would have listened to my feelings; *he* would have noticed my tears. I start crying just thinking about the times that I would miss with Aster and my other best friend, Grace. They are probably having a lot of fun without me. I don't think that Rosalind even notices my tears this time either. When I look up she is cheerfully posting photos of her room at every angle possible to Instagram with a broad grin on her face.

Something to add to the list of "worst things" about moving away was that I had to say goodbye to my dance community: my teachers, my friends and my dance studio. They were all very close to me. I'm going to have to find a new dance community here and start all over again. I miss New Jersey and my friends and community. There aren't really any particular outfits or makeup that I miss like my mother and Rosalind do. Except for one shirt. It's my favorite; I got it as a post-performance gift from Grace. It says: "Without dance, what is the pointe?" I'll miss it. Not so much the shirt, but all the experiences I've had and memories I've made in it. I finish the email and send it with a heavy heart. I take out the book that I am currently reading: a feminist retelling of *The Nutcracker* that was my "moving away" gift from Aster. I've been in *The Nutcracker* every year since I started dancing, when I was five. Suddenly, I hear my phone ping with a text from Grace:

➤ **hey lisa when we were at that sleepover you left this**

After that comes a picture of my “Without dance, what’s the pointe?” shirt. I let out a little squeal. I am so surprised and ecstatic.

- **lisa? should i send it to you?**
- *that would be great. i was literally just thinking about it.*
- *i’m starting school soon.* I respond with a bittersweet feeling.
- *i really miss you.* I add right after.

And a few seconds later that response I had been waiting for came:

- **i miss you too. hope school goes well. sending you courage and luck!**

“Please pass the water.” I whisper grinning at the interaction I just had. Without looking up, Rosalind hands me the water pitcher. She lets go before I take it and spills it all over my book. I shriek and lift my sopping book in the air. The ink runs everywhere and it’s apparent that I will have to forget this fond memory of home as well. Another physical memory from home, lost and gone forever.

“It’s going to be okay! Everything is going to be okay, Lisa. Don’t worry,” she reassures me with fake cheer, still not looking up from her phone. Clearly she doesn’t understand how important the book is to me.

“Does everything always have to be okay? Why don’t you just say sorry? It’s not *your* place to tell me whether or not you ruining my favorite book is fine and dandy or not!” I scream. She is always happy, excited and full of optimism. Even about things that she doesn’t understand. This book clearly doesn’t matter anything to her so why does she get to say if it’s okay or not?

“Geez, Lisa. I didn’t know that it was *so* precious to you. Can’t you just get a new one? Put a smile on your face for once.” She always acts like I don’t understand. But I do.

“Just like you put a smile on your face while you get “new life” in the ‘big city?!’” I yell. She is taken aback by this comment. She looks up from her phone and into my eyes. Suddenly, her face turns softer, more considerate and I think we’re about to have our first moment of connection since we moved to this unfamiliar setting. But just then, my mother gets home from wherever she was. She is carrying an envelope in her hand. As soon as Rosalind breaks my gaze, she starts cleaning up the mess that she made, apologetically. My mother opens the envelope not acknowledging that there are other human beings in the room that she is inhabiting currently. She quickly scans the words and lets out a deep guttural groan.

“Why me?! Why now?!” she groans.

“What is it mom?” my sister asks with the instant sympathy that somehow my mother deserves but I don’t.

“Guys, get ready for a giant shopping trip!” She says wearily, “Our luggage has been lost on the way here. We have nothing now.” Rosalind’s forced smile fades.

“I was counting on those bags! My entire life was stuffed into those suitcases!” she explodes. Gone is cheerful and happy Rosalind. I myself am dismayed as well. My photos of sleepovers, school pictures, dance recitals, certificates, friend’s letters, birthday cards and other evidence that I had a life in New Jersey were all in there. Now it *really* is like starting over. My mother’s made-up face falls and suddenly we are all weeping. All of us have different reasons, motives, methods of coping and memories. But we all now have something that was of importance to us gone. New Jersey for me and suitcases for them. We join hands and face each other. We are a group of individual strong women. But we aren’t alone. We are joined by a circle of hands.

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The next day we all march over to the clothing store down the block. We go in, shop, and we are out within an hour. We build back the clothing that we had lost. We are determined. This isn't hard for me. I only had sweatshirts and jeans to begin with. But even though they are pretty much the same as the ones that I just bought, the thought of never seeing them again makes me burst into tears.

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It's Sunday before school starts and I am nervously searching my closet to find my outfit for the next day. Not that what I wear matters to me greatly, but I want to feel confident, on the first day when I'm surrounded by a sea of unknown faces. There is a knock at the door and I hear a thump and then feet walking back down the hallway. I open the door and pick up a package. I tear it open and out slides the well-worn "Without dance, what's the pointe?" shirt. Grace sent it! Although it's a memory that I don't need an object to recall, I am still glad to be holding it in my hands. Suddenly, I hear the noise of metal hitting the floor below me and I bend down to see what it is. I see it's a locket that opens three ways. One face is mine, one is Aster's and one is Grace's. I can tell it's the one that I had found on the internet a year earlier and showed Aster. I now know I will feel more confident with their warm, smiling faces around my neck.