

FADE IN:

B-ROLL: KANSAS CITY - MORNING A montage of Kansas City's skyline at dawn, transitioning to rush hour traffic. The camera pans to the entrance of a modest ballet school.

INT. KANSAS CITY BALLET SCHOOL - DAY A group of excited children, around 8 years old, chatter and giggle in colorful tutus. MARIE (8, wide-eyed and eager) stands among them, her small frame radiating determination. The TEACHER (30s, kind but firm) kneels to Marie's level.

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TEACHER

Marie, do you remember your steps?
Are you ready for your first solo?

Marie nods nervously, clutching her hands together.

MARIE

I think so. I practiced a lot.

TEACHER

Good. Remember, it's not just about
the steps. Feel the music. Be the swan.

Marie takes a deep breath, nodding again.

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INT. THEATER STAGE - MOMENTS LATER Marie steps onto the stage,
the spotlight illuminating her small figure. An excerpt of "Swan
Lake" begins to play. She hesitates for a moment, then moves

with graceful but childlike determination. Her movements capture the audience's attention.

The scene lingers for 10-15 seconds, showcasing her budding talent and focus.

FADE TO:

EXT. CANNES TRAIN STATION - DAY Marie (15, nervous but determined) steps off the train, a large suitcase in tow. The vibrant Cannes station bustles with activity. She looks around, bewildered, clutching a piece of paper with the academy's address written on it.

MARIE

(in broken French to several passers-by)

Excusez-moi, where is...uh... où est l'académie de danse Cannes?

Finally a passerby points her in the right direction, telling her in quite good English, and with a smile. Marie nods in thanks and begins walking, her eyes wide with both awe and trepidation. She exits the station, stepping into the sunny streets of Cannes.

The camera lingers on her as she glances down at the address again, taking a deep breath before setting off.

FADE TO:

EXT. CANNES - EARLY MORNING The sun rises over the serene coastal city. A faint breeze carries the sound of gulls over the cobblestone streets.

INT. CAFÉ - EARLY MORNING A small, cozy café. MARIE (16, lean, poised) sits at a table with her MOTHER (40s, elegant, proud) and FATHER (50s, distant). Marie sips a hot chocolate, excitement mixed with nerves evident on her face. Her MOTHER stirs her coffee, watching her daughter closely.

MOTHER

Marie, you haven't touched your croissant. You're not nervous, are you?

MARIE

No, maman. Just... focused.

MOTHER

Focused? Or something else? You've been quieter lately. Is something wrong at the academy?

Marie shakes her head but avoids her mother's eyes. Her FATHER glances up from his phone, his tone clipped.

FATHER

If she's quiet, she's focused. That's good. No need to coddle her.

MOTHER

She's sixteen today. A little encouragement wouldn't hurt.

MARIE

(defensive)

It's fine. I'm fine. Really.

Her mother leans forward, lowering her voice.

MOTHER

You can tell me, Marie. If you're feeling inadequate, if the instructor is being too harsh...

MARIE

(defensive)

Maman, please. I'm doing fine. I've worked so hard. I just... I want today to be perfect.

Her mother studies her for a moment, then nods.

MOTHER

Then make it perfect. You have everything you need to succeed. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

Marie smiles faintly, but her grip tightens on the mug. Her father sighs, impatient.

FATHER

Let's not make this a therapy session. The bus will be here soon.

EXT. BUS STOP - LATER Marie and her parents wait for the bus. Her FATHER scrolls through his phone, indifferent. Her MOTHER stands close to Marie, trying to reassure her with small smiles.

MOTHER

Remember, no matter what, we're proud of you.

FATHER

Just keep your head down and work harder. That's how you succeed.

Marie says nothing, but her jaw tightens. The bus arrives, its doors hissing open.

INT. BUS - CONTINUOUS The bus is bustling. Marie sits next to her MOTHER, silent now. Her MOTHER pats her hand. Behind them, two JEALOUS CLASSMATES (both 16, polished but catty) whisper, barely hiding their smirks.

CLASSMATE 1

She thinks she's so special.

CLASSMATE 2

Clumsy. Always trying too hard.

Marie glances back at them, her confidence wavering.

INT. BALLET ACADEMY - LOCKER ROOM - MORNING Marie changes into her ballet attire. Her FRIENDS (three diverse European teens, supportive) chatter around her.

FRIEND 1

Happy birthday, Marie! Sweet sixteen!

MARIE

Thank you. Today feels... special.

FRIEND 2

It should. You're the hardest worker here.

Marie smiles, tying her ribbons tightly, but the tension in her shoulders is clear.

INT. BALLET STUDIO - LATER The studio is grand, with mirrors lining the walls. INSTRUCTOR (50s, strict, French) stands at the front, calling out commands.

INSTRUCTOR

Première position! Tendu! Et un,
deux...

The piano starts, and the dancers move to the rhythm. Marie's movements are precise but visibly tense. The INSTRUCTOR watches, hawk-like.

INSTRUCTOR

Marie! Non! Arms too stiff. Again.

Marie adjusts, concentrating harder. The INSTRUCTOR interrupts again, this time switching to English.

INSTRUCTOR

Do you hear the music? Or are you just counting? Dance is not mechanics, it is art.

MARIE

(frustrated)

I *am* listening. I feel it. I've been working on this all week.

INSTRUCTOR

(scoffing)

You think one week erases months of mediocrity? You lack articulation in your movements.

MARIE

(protesting)

That's not fair. You always criticize me more than the others. It's because I'm not from Europe, isn't it?

The other dancers exchange surprised glances. The INSTRUCTOR steps closer, his voice icy.

INSTRUCTOR

Do not play the victim, Marie. This has nothing to do with where you are from. It is about what you bring to the barre. Your movements are clumsy. You lack refinement. And you think passion can replace precision? It cannot.

MARIE

I've improved. I know I have. I've worked harder than anyone.

INSTRUCTOR

Hard work is not enough. Artistry cannot be forced. You will never be a prima ballerina. You simply do not have it.

Marie stands frozen, the words cutting deep. The room is silent. Finally, she turns and runs from the studio.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS Marie grabs her coat, tears streaming down her face. Her FRIENDS call after her.

FRIEND 1

Marie, wait!

Marie doesn't stop.

EXT. BALLET ACADEMY - DAY Marie runs down the steps, her coat flapping behind her. She keeps running, through the streets of Cannes.

EXT. SEASIDE - DAY Marie reaches the edge of a rocky shoreline. She collapses to her knees, gasping for breath. Her sobs are muffled by the sound of waves crashing against the rocks.

MARIE (V.O.)

Sixteen years. Eleven years of dancing. And just like that... my dream shattered.

She looks out at the horizon, determination beginning to replace the despair in her eyes.

MARIE (V.O.)

But dreams can change. Maybe the fire in me was never for them.

FADE TO:

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - MORNING The city comes to life in a montage: the skyline, the Brooklyn Bridge crowded with pedestrians heading into Manhattan, cars exiting the Midtown Tunnel into the city, and people waiting at the 57th and Lexington Avenue bus stop. A bus pulls up, and commuters board.

EXT. CHAMBERS STREET SUBWAY STATION - MORNING MARIE (22, confident) emerges from the subway, dance bag slung over her shoulder. She pauses for a moment to glance at the map on her phone, then strides purposefully toward Gibney Studios at 58A Chambers Street.

INT. GIBNEY STUDIOS - STAIRWELL - MOMENTS LATER Marie climbs the narrow stairs to Studio 4, her steps echoing slightly. She reaches the door, takes a deep breath, and enters.

INT. GIBNEY STUDIOS - STUDIO 4 - CONTINUOUS The room is spacious and filled with light. A WOMAN CHOREOGRAPHER (40s, poised, commanding) stands near the mirrors, reviewing notes on her tablet. She looks up and smiles faintly as Marie enters.

CHOREOGRAPHER

You must be Marie. I've been looking forward to this.

Marie nods, setting her bag down carefully.

MARIE

Thank you for the opportunity. It's an honor to meet you.

CHOREOGRAPHER

Let's skip the formalities. I want to know who you are. Why New York? Why leave Cannes before finishing your second year?

Marie hesitates, then speaks with quiet intensity.

MARIE

Cannes was a dream. But it became clear... it wasn't my dream anymore. The focus was too narrow. Classical ballet was everything, and I realized I wanted more. So, I took a chance. I came here to freelance and to study on my own.

CHOREOGRAPHER

(intrigued)

That's a bold move at 17. Freelancing isn't for the faint of heart. What brought you to Steps on Broadway?

MARIE

A friend recommended it. I needed to keep training, and Steps has such a diverse range of classes. That's where you saw me, wasn't it?

CHOREOGRAPHER

(nodding)

Quite by chance. I was scouting someone else, but you caught my attention. There's a rawness to your movement... a story you're telling. Why contemporary, though? Why not classical or modern?

Marie takes a deep breath, her passion evident.

MARIE

Contemporary speaks to me. It's limitless. I've been inspired by companies like Nederlands Dans Theater, Ballets de Monte Carlo, and Ballet Jazz Montreal. Seeing their work made me realize that dance could be more than form. It could be freedom. And in New York, watching Juilliard students and smaller companies like YYDC... it felt like I'd found my place.

The CHOREOGRAPHER studies her, impressed but measured.

CHOREOGRAPHER

You've done your homework. But passion alone doesn't cut it. Show me what you've got. Let's see if the fire you speak of translates to the floor.

Marie steps into the center of the studio, her focus sharpening. She adjusts her posture, preparing to dance.

FADE OUT.