

Written by Bethany Livers

FADE IN

INTRO - CLOSE UP OF DANCERS FEET DANCING AND MOVING FLUIDLY
On stage, slightly dark The camera does a close-up on **Neveah**
as she stares.

INT - DANCE STUDIO FRONT DESK - DAY

Neveah, 12 years old, African American, is taking a payment
from a dance parent at the studio. Neveah's dance teacher,
Mrs. Alice, poised, White, tall, appears out of the blue.

MRS. ALICE

Neveah, you have been working all
evening. Come and join the class.
We only have 45 minutes left.

NEVEAH

I'm fine.

Neveah slouches slightly in her chair. Mrs. Alice pulls up a
chair and sits beside her.

MRS. ALICE

I understand that you enjoy working
here, making a little extra cash,
but we need you in class. There's
no point in your mom registering
you every semester if you're just
going to work at the desk. I'm sure
she'd like to see her kid dance in
the spring show... right?

(softer)

You're really talented, Neveah. I'd
hate to see you give that up.

Neveah looks at Mrs. Alice with a very muted look. She
doesn't want to hear it.

NEVEAH

Ok. I'll come in now.

Mrs. Alice smiles and leads Neveah to the studio.

CUT TO:

INT. DANCE STUDIO - LATER IN THE DAY

Neveah looks around, her heart filled with a joy her mother
has never witnessed.

MRS. ALICE

Alright, Neveah, go stand next to Josie at the barre. You can follow her lead.

Neveah walks over to **Josie**, any ethnicity, taller than Neveah, appears older, and stands in first position. Josie side-eyes her, making it very clear she thinks she's better than Neveah.

JOSIE

(mock sweet)

Oh look who decided to show up. Long time no see. Are you poor or something? We're only twelve, and you work... full-time. It's kind of ridiculous.

Neveah wants to say something but swallows it, focusing as Mrs. Alice begins the next barre combination. The camera zooms out, showing the entire dance class performing the barre combination. The camera zooms in on different dancers, landing finally on Neveah. Neveah finishes a grand pli  and glances up at the clock (camera zooms in). She rushes out of class, grabs her bag, and heads to the bathroom to change. She emerges wearing a fancy dress and heels. She pauses, takes a deep breath, and checks herself in the mirror, nervous but determined.

CUT TO:

EXT. WALKING TO A LOCAL FOOD PLACE - DARKISH OUTSIDE

The camera follows Neveah's lead. Neveah has headphones in her ears, walking calmly to the beat. She arrives at the restaurant and sits. The camera zooms in on her phone as she texts her mom that her friend just left the dinner and she's ready to be picked up. Neveah's mom, Tina, a Black woman in her mid-20s, pulls up in her car. Neveah gets in. Neveah exhales quietly as she closes the door, her face blank.

CUT TO:

INT. TINA'S CAR - FOCUS ON BOTH FACES (ANGLES SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

TINA

How was the dinner? What friend was it with again... what's her name? Jennifer?

NEVEAH

With a very mellow and bored voice
 No, Mom. I haven't talked to
 Jennifer since the 4th grade. It
 was with Bette. You met her once or
 twice

Tina gives an "Oh... okay" expression.

TINA

Well, I hope you had a good time.
 You've been out with your friends a
 lot lately! Looks like somebody's
 Mrs. Popular.

Tina chuckles softly, trying to lighten the mood. Neveah's
 expression remains blank.

TINA (CONT'D)

Oh, honey I forgot to tell you that
 your Dad's work trip got extended
 to next month, so it's just us. If
 you need anything just let me know.

NEVEAH

Anything?

TINA

Of course! I mean... as long as
 you're not asking about them dance
 classes
 (laughs)

Neveah doesn't laugh

NEVEAH

Mom, I truly don't understand what
 dance ever did to you. And besides,
 it's me, not you. Nobody is making
 you do anything

TINA

Now hold on, Neveah. You can
 disagree with my decisions, but
 you're not going to talk back to
 me.
 Tina sighs, glancing at the road as
 if reliving old memories. Dance is
 an unhealthy sport that no child
 needs to be a part of. It causes
 all kinds of issues. I would know.
 As soon as I quit ballet, I was a
 happy child again.

(MORE)

TINA (CONT'D)

It took up too much of my childhood in a bad way, and I'm not letting you go through that.

NEVEAH

But Mom, I'm not you and-

TINA

Neveah, this conversation is over. As if you were actually going to ask me that anyway. (Voice starts to fade) Always starting arguments over nothing. Zoom out of the car swerving into the garage, The headlights sweep across the garage walls before the car disappears inside, both Tina and Neveah get out of the car, close the door, and walk inside.

CUT TO:

INT. NEVEAH'S BEDROOM, NEVEAH IS ON THE BED - NIGHTTIME

Neveah watches videos of Alvin Ailey dancers, Tina walks in. Neveah shuts the computer immediately. Tina looks suspiciously at her

TINA

Girl... what were you watching?

NEVEAH

I was just watching a compilation of funny videos.

Tina raises an eyebrow. "Hm." She continues walking.

NEVEAH (CONT'D)

So... Do you need anything?

TINA

Dang! Are you trying to rush me out?

(laughs)

I just wanted to tell you that I'll be working late tomorrow, so if you have anybody you want to hang out with tomorrow after school, they'll have to bring you home.

Neveah smiles, knowing that she can stay at dance longer tomorrow

NEVEAH

Okay! I'll probably just come straight home from school, but I'll let you know

Tina smiles and starts walking out. Tina glances back one more time, her face softening slightly.

TINA

Goodnight, Neveah

NEVEAH

Goodnight

Clip of Neveah pulling the covers over herself, and going to sleep. The soft glow of the laptop screen fades as the room goes dark.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Neveah and Tina sit together at the table, eating breakfast. An awkward silence hangs between them. Tina smiles at Neveah, who looks unimpressed and ready to leave. Her backpack hangs on the arm of her chair. Neveah taps her fingers on the table, her eyes fixed on the clock.

TINA

Remember, I won't be able to pick you up today. Did you figure out anything for after school?

NEVEAH

No, Mom. You told me this at 11:30 last night. When exactly would I have had time to ask anyone to hang out? Besides, I told you I want to just come straight home

Tina doesn't know what to say. She gets up and starts clearing her dishes.

TINA

Okay honey, I was just asking

Tina grabs her purse and a folder for work, then heads for the door. Tina hesitates for a moment at the door, then forces a smile.

TINA (CONT'D)

I'll see you tonight after school

Tina exits the house. Neveah watches her leave, then pulls out her phone to call Mrs. Alice. Phone rings, Mrs. Alice picks up

NEVEAH

Hey Mrs. Alice, I will be able to stay a little longer today in class. Maybe I can work for an hour and a half and then join class. I'll be able to take ballet and tap today!

Neveah beams as she shares the news.

MRS. ALICE

That's great. I'll see you then.
pause Oh, also I will have your check today Neveah's smile flickers, but she quickly hides her disappointment. Neveah smile somewhat fades, but she still visibly happy through her eyes

NEVEAH

Okay! Bye Mrs. Alice!

She hangs up, grabs her bag, and walks out of the house.

CUT TO:

INT. DANCE STUDIO FRONT DESK- EVENING

Neveah stares at the clock, waiting for it to hit 5:30 p.m. so she can go to class. The clock finally hits 5:30 p.m. She jumps up from her seat and hurries to ballet class.

NEVEAH

(under her breath)
Finally.

CUT TO:

INT. DANCE STUDIO, TAP CLASS/LATER THAT DAY

Wide shot of the entire class tap dancing—Neveah clearly stands out as one of the best. Her feet move with sharp precision, her expression focused yet joyful.

The camera zooms in on Neveah's smiling face. Mrs. Alice turns, visibly impressed. Camera zooms in on Mrs. Alice.

MRS. ALICE
(smiling)
Beautiful work, Neveah.

MRS. ALICE (CONT'D)
Okay, everybody, time to move on to
the rudiments we worked on last
week.

Her voice fades slightly as the camera zooms out. The sound of tapping fades as the camera pulls back, Neveah's face glowing with quiet pride.

CUT TO:

INT. NEVEAH'S BEDROOM - NIGHTTIME

Tina comes in from a long day at work. Neveah rushes downstairs to greet her mom.

NEVEAH
Hey, Mom! How was work?

TINA
It was a long day,

Tina sighs, clearly exhausted.
I'm guessing you came straight home
today?

NEVEAH
Yep! I finished all my homework and
even got a compliment from my
teacher on how well I'm doing
academically.

TINA
Oh I'm so glad. Well, I'm about to
go take a shower. You go get some
rest. Tomorrow's Saturday and I
know you've been working hard in
school. Don't you have a test next
Monday? Or sometime next week?

Neveah chuckles

NEVEAH

That's the week after next, Mom.
See you tomorrow.
(smiles)

Tina smiles back

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Montage of Neveah getting ready for school, zooming in and out on various actions. Neveah ties her shoes, brushes her hair, and throws her bag over her shoulder. In the final shot, Neveah shuts the door, Tina standing just behind her, watching. Tina lingers in the doorway for a moment after the door closes, her face unreadable.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON - COUCH

Neveah is on the phone with Bette voiceover continues over on-camera shots.

NEVEAH

Hey girl, how was your day?

BETTE (V.O.)

It was good, pretty chill. What about you? Neveah lounges on the couch, absently flipping through her phone.

NEVEAH

Same. I'm so glad we didn't have to dance today. Ballet made me so sore the other day

Tina comes in from the corner of the living room, silently listening

BETTE

I know right! I made my mom get me some Epsom salt. I was in so much pain. *laughs* Well, at least that was the last rehearsal before the show. Neveah doesn't laugh, her expression distant.

BETTE (CONT'D)

Oh I forgot to tell you. I gave Mrs. Alice your Mom's number while you were working. She needs to call her for costume sizes and all for the spring concert

NEVEAH

Wait hold on... Bette you did what?!

BETTE

What?

NEVEAH

Why do you think I've been working so much at the studio? If my Mom knew I took dance I wouldn't be working at the studio! I save twenty percent of what I make and put it toward the class payment. Mrs. Alice thinks it's so that I can shop and have nice things, but no

BETTE

Okay but Neveah, It's been like two years...you literally haven't brought it up at all to your Mom?

NEVEAH

No, Bette I have not. She would flip. Ugh, I can't believe you did that. When did she say she would call?

Tina interrupts from the corner of the room standing

TINA

She already did

Neveah spins around, startled. Tina walks up to Neveah, grabs the phone, and puts it to her ear

TINA (CONT'D)

Hey Bette, this is Ms. Tina. Neveah will have to give you a call back later. Have a good one.

The phone hangs up Tina fakely smiles for Bette and then immediately drops her face Neveah tries to sneak off

TINA (CONT'D)

Neveah... uh-uh. Get your behind over here right now! Neveah nervously comes back to the couch

Neveah

Mom, I'm sorry! I'm really sorry. When you got me that computer for my tenth birthday, an Alvin Ailey video popped up. I became obsessed, it's all I wanted to do. Even to this day I still watch-

Tina interrupts

TINA (CONT'D)

Neveah! Stop! You disobeyed me, you ignored me, you *lied* to me, and on top of that; this has been going on for 2 years! TWO YEARS!

NEVEAH

Mom I am truly sorry I-

Tina cuts her off, her voice sharp with frustration.

TINA

No, don't apologize. It's your loss now. I told Mrs. Alice, you will not be taking any more classes. From now on, I will be picking you up from school at exactly 3:30, and I want your location. Now my gift to you is that you can do this one last concert. You've been going everyday so you might as well. I am extremely disappointed in you, and I should not let you do the concert... but Mrs. Alice convinced me. But don't even dare think I'm going.

Neveah is in absolute shock. She can't believe this is happening. Tears start to form in her eyes

NEVEAH

I'm really sorry, Mom.

She walks away

CUT TO:

INT. BACKSTAGE - SUNSET LIGHTING OUTSIDE (6:30ISH)

Neveah stands completely distracted, her mind elsewhere. She fidgets with her costume, her eyes darting toward the curtain.

GIRL #1

Neveah what's up? Don't psych yourself out! I'm sure your parents are out there, super excited to see their star dancer!

Neveah slightly smiles, almost ready to cry again

NEVEAH

(Softly)

Thanks

Girl #1 walks away

Mrs. Alice enters

MRS. ALICE

Okay, everybody! Places! You'll do great. Remember everything I told y'all during tech week, and I'm hoping all goes well. Now go show them how the Arabesque Darlings do it!

All of the dancers go on stage, starting their **modern** dance piece Neveah is front and center, dancing flawlessly, but her expression is distant. *The camera cuts to the audience clapping enthusiastically. A quick montage shows a few dances passing by.* The next dance is tap. Camera zooms in on the feet and then a close up on Neveah's face She is in the groove, and then all of the sudden she stops Tina has just walked into the audience and is finding a seat Girl #2 gently taps Neveah's leg, snapping her out of it. Neveah smiles and performs even better now Show through editing that a few dances have went by The final dance is Neveah's solo. Neveah starts in position for her solo, and starts dancing In the semi-beginning of the dance, a younger version of Tina is shown, dancing in Neveah's shadow Camera zooms in on Tina's eyes fill with tears as she realizes her daughter's gift. Neveah keeps dancing beautifully (different angles) Dance finishes, Tina jumps to her feet clapping

CUT TO:

INT. BACKSTAGE - DARKISH OUTSIDE

Neveah quickly packs up her dance gear and hurries to the lobby. She glances back at the empty stage one last time, a small smile playing on her lips.

CUT TO:

INT. PERFORMANCE HALL LOBBY - DARKISH OUTSIDE

NEVEAH

Mom—you came!

Neveah runs to her Mom. Neveah's eyes well up, her voice barely holding steady. They hug tightly, holding on for a long moment.

TINA

I'm so sorry I told you not to dance. I let my own past get in the way of your talent. You're amazing, Neveah. Amazing. You reminded me of a mini Alvin Ailey dancer.

(chuckles)

Maybe next summer you can do the company's summer intensive

Neveah stares in disbelief, her eyes shining with hope.

NEVEAH

Really?

Tina smiles and nods Neveah throws her arms around Tina in a big hug.

TINA

While hugging

I am so proud of you

Zoom out on the hug Close-up: Mrs. Alice peeks through the door, smiling softly for a few seconds before gently closing it.

FADE TO BLACK