I am a dancer. I may not be all curves or radiatiating an air of pose around me. I don’t have my nose in the clouds nor am I weak

When I danced, my brain stopped sprinting a mile a minute. The music resonates deep within me and sheer exhilaration perpetuated through my bones. I remember my astonishment when realize that I was smiling as I confidently swayed to the beat of the music. The world around me faded to black and I was one with the melody.

Blazing white stage lights pricked my eyes, as I blinked rapidly to keep from tearing up. An eerie silence blanketed the audience and my werring brain suddenly came to an halt as I anticipated what was yet to come. Trepidation coursed through my veins and a sob was lodged deep into my throat. My stomach felt like it was infested with spiders devouring me from the inside out, clawing through my skin. The jarring melody of orchestrated violin music echoed from the speakers. I just stood there, onstage, as still as a cinder block. The auditorium was much **too big and the music was shrill.** Without my consent, my arms judded out in a ponderous manner, as I unsuccessfully improvised a number in place of the well rehearsed dance choreography I had slaved to learn in the preceding weeks. After what felt like an **eternity**, the music faded to black, leaving the tension in the air palpable. In that moment, all I wanted was to scream until my lungs give out; I wanted to cry until I had no tears left in **me; but** what I wanted most was to bury myself deep under my dark blue comforter, depleted of all the emotion. It felt like it was judgement day and I was burning at the stake. This had to be one of the lowest, most embarrassing moments of my life. However histrionic as it may seem, my life as I knew it would never be the same again.

For the majority of my life, my perception of myself has been defined by how others labeled me: a loser, mediocre dancer, ugly, unathletic, worthless, callous, pondero**us, va**cuous. I was a magnet that attracted only negativity. I would belittle my accomplishments and deride myself for not being the best sister, daughter, or friend. Every infinitesimal event was cataclysmic. All my prior shortcomings, disappointments, and embarrassments replayed inside my head with no way of making it stop. It was as though a record played was stuck on repeat. It took me years to realize it, but dance was the tether that pulled me back from the **rabbit** hole my brain dove head first into.

Every week at practice I was forced to heave my weights and workout for the hour before we began the choreography. My thighs, abs, and biceps burned as though on fire. Being unable to endure the burn, I would collapse out of the position. My eyes would constantly flit to the other dancers and wonder how they were able to fight through the pain and why I wasn’t able to. I felt week and inferior to those around me. It didn’t help that I would have to go to school the following day and be surrounded by those who were prettier, smarter, confident, and artistic than I. I didn’t want to live in my own body; I wanted to take my fingernails and claw myself out. And so, I slumped my sholders and ducked my head when menuvering though the crowded high school hallways.

Again this pattern would continue, and every week my dance teacher would push me farther than I thought I could go. I remember her telling me one day that I had potential for success and my only limiting factor was my propensity to give up easily. With that sentiment, something suddenly clicked. When I danced, my brain stopped sprinting a mile a minute. The music resonates deep within me and sheer exhilaration perpetuated through my bones. I remember my astonishment when realize that I was smiling as I confidently swayed to the beat of the music. The world around me faded to black and I was one with the melody. An ich tickled the back of my head. Why hadn’t I used that same easygoing, confident, and determined persona in every other part of my life? Why had I given up on myself so easily? In that instant, I felt buried under the scrutiny of myself and everyone around me. It slowly picked at me until I had nothing left. I felt broken, but bit by bit, I re-built myself.

I realized that I had to let go of my ego and inferiority complex and accept my myself for who I was. I had to come to terms with the fact that everything in life wouldn’t go my way, but I could control my reaction. I learned that I have to work hard for want I want instead of just expecting the results. Sure, maybe I wasn’t the embodiment of paramount success, but I didn’t need to be. I wasn’t confined by the meretricious lexicon that others threw at me. I forced myself to open up and take what I wanted. I forced myself into leadership positions, hoping to quell my terror of openly speaking in front of an audience. A malignant prickling metastasized in my stomach and chest, but the more I persisted to breakout of my comfort zone, the more that familiar dull throbbing faded. Starting a conversation no longer elicited a **heart attack → mental break down**, but instead gave me the opportunity to forged a lasting connection.

A month later, I strutted onto the stage of another auditorium. This time, I didn’t feel on the brink of buckling under the weight of the scrutinizing gazes of the audience or the hefty headset of my traditional Indian dance costume. My stomach slowly started to churn again, but instead of succumbing to the anxiety, I acknowledged it but let my mind remember the overwhelming joy I felt when I danced. After all, if dance has shown me anything, it’s that if I set my mind to something I can achieve it. I closed my eyes and remember the person I came to be. I am tenacious, unique and intelligent. I am artistic, athletic, and compassionate. I inspire and motivate. I felt a warmth spread throughout my entire body as melodic flute filled the air. I finally found myself and with that I twirled onto stage on cue with the rhythm.

Learnt to appreciate and the little things in life