

Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered

It was my first summer stock experience both as a dancer and a choreographer. I was young, awkward, falsely confident, and tortured inside. You were older and glamorous and made everything you did seem effortless.

I started dancing when I was four. Like many little girls, it was an activity my mother put me into—but unlike most little girls, I fell in love with it. Stepping off the cobblestone street into Mrs. Hackney's School of Dance just in time to see the older girls finish their class took my breath away. From my first plié, something inside me told me this was where I belonged. Then, at the end of that class, Mrs. Hackney has us stand in two lines. Line one is for those who want a mini marshmallow, and line two is for those who wish to have licorice. As I stand there looking at myself in the large mirrors, trying to decide which I want. I have no idea that this moment is entwining food, dance, and body image—solidifying my path.

You glided from one side of the stage to the other. You were patient no matter how poor my instructions or how frustrated I became. Others snapped back or stormed out, but you never did. You were always kind, calm, and ready to work.

I'm fifteen and dancing in *Oklahoma* at the local Dinner Theatre and decide to skip dinner between shows. A woman in the cast strokes my head and asks me if I'm okay. I lean into her, feeling nurtured, and unknowingly make the connection — "If I don't eat, people will pay attention to me."

You never commented on my eating habits or gave me attention for not eating. When others questioned my smoking and diet coke consumption versus my food intake, you only smiled and left the room. Then one day in the dressing room, it was just the two of us. I looked up from where I was scrutinizing the size of my thighs, and our eyes locked in the make-up mirror. You asked me to come sit by you. As always, you looked like you were glowing from the inside out. You were wearing all black, and your hair glistened golden under the lights. You patted the chair next to yours. I sat. "You will always hate your thighs until you learn to love yourself," you said. "But I can't love myself until my thighs are thin," I answered. Your eyes flashed with sadness and quickly returned to compassion. You put your hand on my face and said again, "you must learn to love yourself." Then you walked out. I had no idea what you meant by "love myself."

Several months later, I'm back in New York and rehearsing for another show. Someone loans me a book. There's a chapter on self-love. I devour it. It makes me angry because I still don't understand. As I pick myself apart during long rehearsal days in front of the studio mirrors, I think of you. Sometimes I see your eyes calmly looking back at mine — you have no judgment.

You've unlocked a curiosity in me. I know this because no matter how much I suffer at my hand, I'm always looking to understand what it means to love myself. So I keep reading, and finally, one book cracks the darkness in which I live. I read that book repeatedly for months before I'm willing to try any of the exercises in it. Eventually, I'm brave enough to try what the author calls mirror work. I look into my eyes—this makes me think of you. Then per instruction, I say "I love

you" to my reflection. This makes me so sick I won't try it again for months. Be do try again, and again.

I think of you often over the years. I try to remember your name. You float into my consciousness whenever I'm struggling like a glamorous Obi-Wan Kenobi. I hear you singing Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered, the song you sang in Pal Joey all those years ago, and it speaks perfectly to how I have felt about you over the years.

It's been decades since we met. But those short three weeks with you in summer stock changed my life. I think in truth; they were a part of what saved my life. I'm no longer a dancer. I went through many dark nights with my eating disorder, but I continued to fight to learn to love myself because of you. It wasn't just what you said that day in the dressing room. It was who you were —how you were.

These days I'm a writer, life coach, and self-love advocate who works with women to create and live lives they love. I take your legacy seriously and do my best to be representation for others who struggle with loving themselves and those who can't even imagine what it is.

So to the lady in the dressing room who bewitched, bothered, and bewildered me, I thank you and want you to know your legacy lives on.