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## Budding Ballerina

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**BUDDING BALLERINA**

Jessica Gonsoulin

(For Remy)

Big brown eyes  
staring around a door  
at ballet school

Almond eyes lit up  
poised in a door  
another afternoon

Couldn't get dressed.  
Where's the black leotard?  
Hanging by the washer.

Next comes the bun,  
hair to be pulled back  
smoothly like a tire.

First, the pony tail.  
Hair is distributed,  
fastened with bobby pins.

Long, wild hair  
is not long confined.  
A quick elastic band.

Out the door to the car.  
Left on the kitchen table:  
Pink ballet shoes

I waited until two months after to take the test. I figured... I mean, I couldn't tell— If I had said something *then*— If I had gone to the hospital, or called the police, or told *someone* right *then*... it would have made it all real. Every bit of it. And I can't let it be real. Because, you know, I always thought it had to be a *stranger* to do this to a woman. I never thought it could be a "friend."

But that's fine. It's fine. You know, I've got it under control. I'm fine, I'll just take care of it, and that'll be that, and we just won't speak of it. So I've been picking up extra shifts? So what? That is perfectly normal, thank you very much. I mean, I'm a teenager. I need stuff. That's not so unusual, right? I mean— Just four hundred dollars, I— I can have that in a few weeks, I— No, it's fine. I'm okay. I'm calm. I'm fine. Really.

But...

You see, the thing that nobody ever tells you about certain "problems," is that the farther along— I mean— you know, the longer you wait, the more expensive it is. So... by the time I was going to have the money, more weeks had passed, and the price had gone up. It's almost funny. I guess you can put a price on—

But, you know, that's fine, it's... It's not the end of the world, I— I'll be okay. I can get through this, I can ... I'll be...

Hey, you know, Mom— Mom has been, you know, she's getting stronger, and her tests look good, and she's, she's pulling right along, just— just watching funny movies, and playing with the dogs, and... and being a Mom to Megan and I.

So that's good. That's good news. That's something to celebrate, but, you know... for me— for both of us— time keeps on ticking, and... Sometimes, when I'm alone, and the steady beat of Mom's monitors tells me she's asleep, I go into my room, close my eyes, ball up my fist and... I just close my eyes, make a fist and... And then I stop, and I wait, listening for any sound in the hall, any sign that I'm not alone, that someone is watching over me, that someone might find out.

Megan's at work, or out with her friends, and Dad got out long before this became his problem. It's just the four of us tonight: Mom and her monitors, and me and my problem.