<p style="text-align:center">"Clair de Lune"</p>

"Do you know what you look like right now?" I had asked my sister while boarding the overly crowded L train.

"I think so," she replied, "Why? Do I look okay?"

"You look great! I mean, do you *really* know what you look like? As if you were looking directly at yourself? Let's say, from my point of view?"

"Kind of. Why?"

"Because I know exactly what I look like right now. Almost like a mirror image. For the most part, I know how I look at all times. Is that normal?"

"I guess… Why do you ask?"

<p style="text-align:center">~</p>

I had spent the better part of my twenty-two years of life staring at myself in mirrors, almost twenty hours a week. I would watch the way my body contoured and flowed, consistently trying to optimize the delicacy of my movement. I had memorized every curve of my physique, perpetually striving for unobtainable perfection. I was intimately acquainted with my blemishes, routinely trying to mask them from the reflection sternly peering back at me. I was aware of the places my hair would refuse to lay flatly, the infinite rolls of skin I wished to chop off, the boney protrusions jutting from my feet, and the splotchy complexion of my skin. There was always something to critique.

Growing up a dancer, I was constantly bombarded by the blunt reality of my own image. There was no escape from my appearance. The duality of dance perplexed me. I was invigorated by progression yet discouraged by the environment. It always felt as though no facade would ever suffice. Much of your value in dance is based upon outward appearance. Ultimately, your body is your product. And it better be worthwhile.

I started dance at the age of three, training in all styles. In the beginning, I was only focused on the joy it provided. When I was only seven, my ballet instructor didn't shy away from instilling the primary methodology in all of us. I remember the analogy she commonly repeated, "Suck in those tummies! You don't want to spill your bowl of salad!"

Over the next fourteen years, I worked extremely hard to perfect my appearance. I was beginning to accept my body, but nonetheless, it was never enough. By age seventeen, I decided to quit. I was trying on my solo costume for the first time that year. It was a bikini set with no skirt, shorts, or tights. I remember staring at myself in the mirror, despising the way I looked. I ran to the bathroom, cried quietly into my dance bag, and drove myself directly home.

For most people, classical music is a peaceful escape. In my case, it brings an onset of subtle anxiety. Memories come flooding back of Marley floor, barre, rosin powder, careful evaluation, and sucking in so harshly I felt like I would pass out. I was overwhelmed by heartbreak when I listened to this music because, although I embraced dance for so many years, I had allowed it to defeat me.

That is until I decided to take up piano my senior year. Granted, I never became Beethoven myself, but the idea of reclaiming this music was soothing. I was never sure why I felt so compelled to teach myself this instrument, but I've realized it was a reclamation of my past, pride, and self-worth.

The first song I learned on the piano was "Clair de Lune" by Debussy, my ballet instructor's favorite score. This was also around the time I started to fall in love with writing and language. I had found ways of creatively communicating with the world that wasn't dependent upon my body.

Now, every time I see my reflection, I am reminded of how far I have come, choosing to accept my flaws and love myself regardless.

And in the past few years, I've taken a liking to classical music, too.