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LINES Letter of Intent

To Whom it may Concern:

Fact: I have an anxiety disorder. Two years ago—perhaps even two months ago— I would never have included this sentence in a statement of my artistic goals. Throughout most of my dance training, anxiety was a part of myself that I hoped above all to deny into disappearance someday. Today, my journey to accept, understand, and live beyond my anxiety is a principal motivating force in my life, and since I have chosen dance as my discipline, my anxiety disorder is of the utmost relevance here. In the past year, I have evolved from desperately wanting to be ‘normal’, and wanting to have a ‘normal’ dance career, recognizing that my courage and effort in persevering toward a professional career in the face of injuries, daily panic attacks, and the emotional incapacitation that followed my father’s death gives me a unique and powerful set of experiences that I must use to help others who share my dreams and difficulties. In doing this, I also show those on the outside that the stigma that pigeonholes those who suffer from anxiety disorders and other mental health difficulties is both damaging and incorrect. We can rise above our chemical fear, we can overcome, and we can succeed in a discipline as competitive and demanding as professional dance, because we have everything to prove— to ourselves, and to the world at large— and because we have a deep faith in the healing power of artistic movement, and a desire to share this with those who might not otherwise have the courage to try. Nearly one-fifth of the American population will suffer from an anxiety disorder at some point in their lives, yet under one-third of those people will have the courage and means to seek treatment. In this, as in all things, education is power, and I believe that, through dance, we can educate anxiety-sufferers, clinical and ‘normal’ alike, out of their frightened solitude, and bring them hope.

There are several ways I have considered going about achieving this goal, and I am open to exploring conventional and unconventional opportunities in the process. One day, I think I would like to start a touring dance company for people with anxiety and mood disorders, but I believe that’s a dream for the future, when my vision has been evolved and clarified through years of experience. More immediate goals involve getting my yoga certification while continuing serious dance training; my first love is ballet, but certain paradigms of classical ballet

teaching have been incredibly damaging to my own mental health, and I have seen so many friends damaged, physically and mentally, as well; in my experience as both a teacher and student of ballet I believe that the beauty of the classical aesthetic could be combined with the mindfulness training of yoga to produce dancers who are both well-trained artists and mindful practitioners of dance. I am also interested in fully realizing the aesthetics of classical ballet and modern dance simultaneously in my own body. I love elements of each style, and believe that ballet and modern have so much potential to inform each other, yet so many dancers seem to feel that they are forced to “take sides” when choosing a form of dance to seriously pursue.

This year, I have been exploring these concepts in my own body and mind, and my mental health has actually managed to improve explosively in tandem with my ballet and improvisation techniques. These accomplishments, which I had previously thought to be mutually exclusive, are in fact inseparable. This summer, I plan to return for several weeks to the small ballet school in my hometown where I got my start as a dancer, and will begin to workshop some concepts of mindful ballet as a guest teacher there.

I want to include a caveat about my submitted solo work for this audition. Because I am not able to rent studio space as an underclassman at Barnard/Columbia, this video was recorded a couple of years ago when I was in a pretty dark place with anxiety, having just had to move home from New York with severe panic attacks and agoraphobia. I am extremely invested in attending this training program, but it is too late to film something new, so I have included it in my application as a vision of who I was when anxiety was severely limiting my life. This is visible in my dancing; watching the video today, my current self aches at the fear, self-limitation, and unwillingness to let go that is evident in my interpretation of the choreography. Each line is taken just to the point where I feel safe, and then withdrawn from; my own unwillingness to trust myself beyond my own knowledge of the rules and edicts of my teachers frustrates me. This is a portrait of who I was, the person and dancer I am trying to outgrow, and a dated expression of my movement potential. It isn't by any means the ideal material to send as an audition, but it does serve a purpose: it represents my own inveterate knowledge of the people I will dedicate my artistic life to helping, because I was one of them. Thus the fibres of my conscious being reach through time in three directions: back, to help that struggling girl, to prove to her that she can rely on herself; forward, to help those who suffer as she does; and finally into the present, to embody my movement with a burgeoning sense of fullness, vitality, and trust.