Night had robbed the academy of its daytime colors, yet there was comfort in the dim lights that cast shadows of our advances against the bare studio walls. Silhouettes of roundhouse kicks, spin crescent kicks, uppercuts and the occasional butterfly kick danced while we sparred. She approached me, eyes narrowed with the trace of a smirk challenging me. “Ready spar!” Her arm began an upward trajectory targeting my shoulder, a common first move. I sidestepped — only to almost collide with another flying fist. Pivoting my right foot, I snapped my left leg, aiming my heel at her midsection. The center judge raised one finger.

“POINT!”

There was no time to celebrate, not in the traditional sense at least. Master Pollard gave a brief command greeted with a unanimous “Yes, sir” and the thud of 20 hands dropping-down-and-giving-him-30, while the “winners” celebrated their victory with laps as usual.

Three years ago, seven-thirty in the evening meant I was a warrior. It meant standing up straighter, pushing a little harder, “Yes, sir” and “Yes, ma’am”, celebrating birthdays by breaking boards, never pointing your toes, and familiarity. Three years later, seven-thirty in the morning meant I was nervous.

The room is uncomfortably large. The sprung floor soaks up the checkerboard of sunlight piercing through the colonial windows. The mirrored walls further illuminate the studio and I feel the light scrutinizing my sorry attempts at a pas de bourrée, while capturing the organic fluidity of the dancers around me. “Chassé en croix, grand battement, pique, pirouette.” I follow the graceful limbs of the woman in front of me, her legs floating ribbons, as she executes what seems to be a perfect ronds de jambes. Each movement remains a negotiation. With admirable patience, Ms. Tan casts me a sympathetic glance.

“Point.”

There is no time to wallow in the misery that is my right foot. Taekwondo calls for dorsiflexion; pointed toes are synonymous with broken toes. My thoughts drag me into a flashback of the usual response to this painful mistake: “You might as well grab a tutu and head to the ballet studio next door.” Well, here I am Master Pollard, unfortunately still following your orders to never point my toes, but no longer feeling the satisfaction that comes with being a third degree black belt with 5 years of experience quite literally under her belt. It’s like being a white belt again — just in a leotard and ballet slippers.

But the appetite for new beginnings that brought me here doesn’t falter. It is only reinforced by the classical rendition of “Dancing Queen” that floods the room and the ghost of familiarity that reassures me that this new beginning does not and will not erase the past. After years spent at the top, it’s hard to start over. But surrendering what you are only leads you to what you may become. In Taekwondo, we started each class reciting the tenets: honor, courtesy, integrity, perseverance, self-control, courage, humility, and knowledge, and I have never felt that I embodied those traits more so than when I started ballet.

The thing about change is that it eventually stops making things so different. After nine different schools, four different countries, three different continents, fluency in Tamil, Norwegian, and English, there are more blurred lines than there are clear fragments. My life has not been a tactfully executed, gold medal-worthy Taekwondo form with each movement defined, nor has it been a series of frappés performed by a prima ballerina with each extension identical and precise, but thankfully it has been like the dynamics of a spinning back kick, fluid, and like my chances of landing a pirouette, unpredictable.