

SILENT DANCER

TEN MINUTE PLAY

By Mike Willis

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SYNOPSIS: *Silent Dancer* is the story of a crippled high school girl in a wheelchair due to a car accident. Caitlyn studied dance from an early age and in all probability, she will never dance again. Dancing was Caitlyn's life, and on the verge of giving up, she meets Duwayne, who, instead of pitying her, goads her into continuing with her physical therapy in an effort to walk again.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 WOMAN, 1 MAN)

CAITLYN.....A high school girl. She is crippled and confined to a wheelchair, the result of a near-fatal traffic accident. Prior to the accident, she was extremely popular and very outgoing. The accident has left her despondent and bitter. She has lost hope of ever walking again, or more importantly, realizing her dream, which was to someday become a lead dancer for a famous ballet company. She comes from a well-to-do family and her clothes, designer jeans and sweater, reflect that.

DUWAYNE.....A high school boy and recent transfer student. Duwayne is a loner and street-smart. He is wearing baggy jeans and a loose fitting shirt. On his head, he wears a baseball cap cocked off to one side. When he speaks, he comes right to the point. His brash demeanor is used for protection, hiding any hint of weaknesses he might possess from those around him.

SETTING

A high school commons or lunchroom. There is a long table stage right and another stage left with chairs. Up stage center there is a banner hanging announcing auditions for the musical Oklahoma.

TIME: The present.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Silent Dancer is easily performed on a bare stage with props. The part of Duwayne can be played by a female with some minor changes in dialogue and staging.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Silent Dancer was first performed as a forensics contest piece at Platteville High School, Platteville, Wisconsin with the following cast:

CAITLYN..... Jenna Kelley
DUWAYNE..... Matt Rogers

AT RISE:

A single pool of light comes up on CAITLYN, sitting in her wheelchair DSR. She holds her schoolbooks on her lap.

CAITLYN: *(Aside to the AUDIENCE.)* I used to dance. It was my life . . . at least up until six months ago. *(Indicating the wheelchair.)* Now, this is my life. My mom started me in ballet when I was six, and I've been dancing ever since . . . ballet, modern, jazz. Well, almost since . . . as you can see, I've stopped dancing. I stopped the minute that pickup truck slammed into the passenger side of my dad's SUV. The driver of the pickup was fiddling with his radio, looking for a station playing some music, and didn't see the stop sign. I guess you could say it *all* has to do with music. His search for music on the radio was the cause for me being unable to dance to it. To add to the irony of the whole thing, my dad was driving me to, of all places . . . dance class. Yes, I'm bitter. Why me? I ask myself that every day. I scream it in the middle of the night . . . *why me?* And guess what? No one has ever been able to give me a decent answer. *(Mimicking.)* "These things just happen, dear, there's no accounting for them. You need to get past this and get on with your life." On with my life? My life is over! Dancing was my life.

The pool of light fades and the lights come up on the rest of the stage. CAITLYN wheels her chair over to the stage left table, moves a chair aside so she can get her wheelchair up to the table, and proceeds to look through her school books. DUWAYNE enters from stage right. He is carrying schoolbooks and listening to music through a pair of headphones. DUWAYNE crosses to the stage right table and drops his books on it with a thud, startling CAITLYN at the other table.

CAITLYN: *(Startled.)* What?

DUWAYNE: *(To CAITLYN.)* Hey. Scared ya, huh?

CAITLYN: No.

DUWAYNE: *(Taking off headphones.)* Sure I did. I saw you jump.

CAITLYN: *(Angry.)* I didn't jump!

DUWAYNE: Oh . . . well, excuse me. It looked like you jumped.

CAITLYN: I don't care what it looked like. Now, go away and leave me alone.

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DUWAYNE: Whoa . . . attitude, I like that.

CAITLYN: I don't care what you like.

CAITLYN gathers up her books and begins to leave, but DUWAYNE holds the handle of her wheelchair stopping her.

CAITLYN: *(Continued.)* Take your hands off my wheelchair.

DUWAYNE lets go, but blocks her way.

DUWAYNE: Hey, okay, chill a second . . . let's start over. I'm Duwayne.

DUWAYNE puts out his hand to shake, CAITLYN ignores it.

CAITLYN: I don't care who you are. Now, let me by.

CAITLYN tries to get around DUWAYNE but ends up dropping her books. DUWAYNE picks up her books and places them on the table. CAITLYN turns back to the table and begins straightening her books.

CAITLYN: *(Continued.)* Go away . . . just go away.

DUWAYNE: I've got no place to go.

CAITLYN: Go to class, go stand in heavy traffic . . . go anywhere, just go.

DUWAYNE: Why are you so angry?

CAITLYN: Why am I so angry?

DUWAYNE: Yeah, why are you so angry? All I'm trying to do is to introduce myself, say hi.

CAITLYN: Look, you're new around here, right?

DUWAYNE: Right.

CAITLYN: So I'm going to cut you some slack and clue you in on a few things.

DUWAYNE: Okay, clue me, I'm all ears.

CAITLYN: For one thing, what rock did you crawl out from under?

DUWAYNE: What?

CAITLYN: Your clothes, you dress like a bum . . . or is that some sort of gang look you prefer?

DUWAYNE: It's just the way I dress. It's who I am.

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CAITLYN: Well, I hate to be the one to break it to you, but who you are isn't the type of person who goes to school here. This is an elite school, everyone here is being prepped for college.

DUWAYNE: (*With sarcasm.*) Elite school? Wow, I didn't know. You mean rich kid's school, don't you? And what's this prepped, garbage? Is that like where the kitchen-help in some expensive restaurant *preps* the salad before they serve it?

CAITLYN: It means to prepare you for what you're going to study in college.

DUWAYNE: How would I know what I'm going to study in college? I haven't gotten through high school yet.

CAITLYN: Exactly. That's why *you* are in the wrong school.

DUWAYNE: Because I can't be prepped? Ya know that's a bunch of bull. So, what are you being prepped for?

CAITLYN: (*Pause.*) Nothing.

DUWAYNE: Nothing? Well, I guess you're in the wrong school too, then. Funny, I had you being *prepped* for something.

CAITLYN: I was . . . I was in music. I was going to be a dancer. I was going to go to college and continue studying dance and someday teach or be a choreographer.

DUWAYNE: So, what changed?

CAITLYN: What changed? Are you blind as well as dumb?

DUWAYNE: (*Pointing to CAITLYN'S wheelchair.*) The wheelchair?

CAITLYN: First guess, amazing.

DUWAYNE: So, what's wrong with you, why you in the chair?

CAITLYN: Not that it is any of your business, but I was in a car accident.

DUWAYNE: Then you paralyzed, or what?

CAITLYN: Or what.

DUWAYNE: Or what, what?

CAITLYN: I'm crippled, alright? My legs were crushed in the accident.

DUWAYNE: Can you walk at all?

CAITLYN: If I could walk, do you think I would be in this chair?

DUWAYNE: Chill, just askin'.

CAITLYN: Well, stop askin'. It's none of your business . . . and what's with the word chill, anyway?

DUWAYNE: It means cool down, calm down, take it easy, ya know?

CAITLYN: No, I don't know . . . and furthermore, I don't care to know.

DUWAYNE: Then why'd ya ask?

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CAITLYN: Stupid I guess, maybe some of you is rubbing off on me.

DUWAYNE: For a poor little rich girl, you sure got a chip on your shoulder. It could be worse, ya know.

CAITLYN: How? Please, enlighten me . . . how could it be worse?

DUWAYNE: To start with, you could have been killed. All you are is crippled, you could be dead.

CAITLYN: Dead would have been better.

DUWAYNE: I don't think so.

CAITLYN: It doesn't matter what you think. It matters what I think, and I think it would have been better, okay?

DUWAYNE: No, it's not okay, rich girl.

CAITLYN: And stop calling me rich girl.

DUWAYNE: Sure.

DUWAYNE crosses to the stage right table picks up his books and begins to leave. He turns back to look at CAITLYN, who is on the verge of tears. DUWAYNE crosses back and sits at the stage left table next to CAITLYN.

DUWAYNE: *(Continued.)* Look . . .

CAITLYN: Will you please go?

DUWAYNE: It's just that I don't understand why . . .

CAITLYN: What you don't understand is that dancing was my life. Take that away from me and my life is over.

DUWAYNE: I don't believe that.

CAITLYN: But I do . . . and that's all that matters.

There is a moment of silence and then DUWAYNE starts to leave, but stops as CAITLYN begins to speak.

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CAITLYN: (*Continued.*) Dancing was all I had in this world. Contrary to what you might think, money isn't everything. Dancing was what kept me going, it sustained me, it was like food for my soul, it was my way of communicating to the world . . . it was my voice. Now, I feel like I'm starving and have lost any means of telling people how I truly feel inside. It's like I've lost my voice box to cancer and I can't talk. I just sit here in this chair . . . silent. The silent dancer, unable to communicate, unable to express herself through her dancing . . . (*Anger building.*) that same dancing that for the past eleven years was the center of her life. So, there it is. That's how I feel. Make light of it if you want, but that's the way it is.

DUWAYNE: (*Pause.*) Dancing is that important to you, huh?

CAITLYN: Yeah, that important.

DUWAYNE: Then why are you giving up?

CAITLYN: What?

DUWAYNE: You said so yourself, you aren't paralyzed.

CAITLYN: No, but I'm crippled, I can't walk!

DUWAYNE: No, well, not right now . . . but, you're not paralyzed.

There's a big difference between crippled and paralyzed, even some unprepped dummy who doesn't belong in this rich kid's school knows that. So what's the doctor say? Does he say you'll never walk?

Long pause.

DUWAYNE: Well?

CAITLYN: He said with a series of operations and a lot of physical therapy, I may be able to walk again . . . but I'd never be able to dance.

DUWAYNE: And you believe that? I can't believe that someone as angry at the world as you are would believe something like that . . . that you'd never be able to dance again. As a matter of fact, I bet if I told you somethin' like that, you'd do anything you could to prove me wrong.

CAITLYN: Probably. You seem to bring out the worst in me.

DUWAYNE: Maybe it's for the best. Maybe all you need is someone to tell you to quit feeling sorry for yourself and to get your butt out of that chair . . . start doing your physical therapy and learn to walk again.

CAITLYN: Easy for you to say.

DUWAYNE: Yeah, you're right about that, it is easy for me to say, but . . .

CAITLYN: For your information, physical therapy hurts.

DUWAYNE: I'm sure it does. If it didn't hurt, it . . .

CAITLYN: Oh, no . . . don't go giving me that old cliché, "no pain no gain." How many times have I heard that?

DUWAYNE: I don't know. I don't know how many times you've heard that, but it seems to me if you want something as bad as you seem to want to dance, you should be willing to work for it. What I think is that you want to sit in your comfy chair on wheels and have everyone feel sorry for you.

CAITLYN: (*Angry.*) You don't know anything!

DUWAYNE: I think I do. I think you, little miss rich girl, are afraid of failure. I think that you are afraid that if you put in the effort and learn to walk again, but you still can't dance, the whole thing will have been a failure. Tell me I'm not right?

CAITLYN: (*Pause.*) I told you to stop calling me rich girl.

DUWAYNE: (*Not meaning it.*) Sorry, I forgot.

CAITLYN: If I can't dance, it is a failure.

DUWAYNE: Wrong. You need to look at it as if being able to walk is a success instead of not dancing is a failure.

CAITLYN starts to leave.

CAITLYN: I have to go, there's a meeting for the school musical and I'm going to be late.

DUWAYNE: You trying out?

CAITLYN: (*Irritated.*) No, I'm not trying out. I was choreographer last year, but now I guess I'll see if I can be prompter or do something backstage.

DUWAYNE: How come?

CAITLYN: How come, what?

DUWAYNE: How come you're giving up on the choreographer thing?

CAITLYN: I'm not giving up. A choreographer is a dancer. They design and direct the dances.

DUWAYNE: I know what a choreographer does. You're giving up . . . you're quitting.

CAITLYN: I'm not giving up.

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DUWAYNE: Yes, you are. Just because you can't dance yourself doesn't mean you can't still stage the dances. Beethoven didn't quit composing music just because he went deaf. Helen Keller didn't quit writing because she was deaf and blind . . . and so little miss rich girl shouldn't quit choreographing just because she can't dance.

CAITLYN: My name is Caitlyn.

DUWAYNE: Finally . . . well then, Caitlyn shouldn't quit choreographing just because she can't dance.

CAITLYN: Beethoven? Maybe I underestimated you. Maybe, you're not as stupid as I thought.

DUWAYNE: Yes, I am.

CAITLYN: Yes, you are what?

DUWAYNE: As stupid as you thought.

CAITLYN smiles at this

DUWAYNE: *(Continued.)* It's just that I remember things about people that I admire . . . people with guts.

CAITLYN: Like Beethoven and Helen Keller?

DUWAYNE: And maybe Caitlyn the little rich girl, if she ever decides to get out of her chair on wheels.

DUWAYNE stands.

DUWAYNE: *(Continued.)* Hi, my name's Duwayne. I just transferred here. I know what you're thinkin' . . . he's dressed like a bum right? No, this is just who I am. No frills, totally unprepped Duwayne, that's me. And who might you be?

DUWAYNE extends his hand and CAITLYN pauses, then reaches out and they shake hands.

CAITLYN: Caitlyn.

DUWAYNE: Caitlyn . . . so Caitlyn, can I walk you to class?

CAITLYN and DUWAYNE start to gather up their books.

CAITLYN: I'm not going to class, I have a meeting for the school musical first?

DUWAYNE: School musical, huh?

CAITLYN: Yeah, you should come and audition. Do you sing?

DUWAYNE: Like a rusty hinge.

CAITLYN: Do you dance?

DUWAYNE: Nope.

CAITLYN: Me neither.

DUWAYNE: Really? You look like a dancer to me.

CAITLYN: I do? Well, I'll admit I used to dance a little.

DUWAYNE: But you don't any more?

CAITLYN: Not right now. I'm resting, taking a break for a while. I'd compare it to a singer not speaking so she can recover from a case of laryngitis.

DUWAYNE: I see . . . so you're a silent dancer?

CAITLYN: Until I regain my voice, yeah.

DUWAYNE: Sweet.

DUWAYNE takes CAITLYN'S books and they both exit upstage left as the lights fade to black

THE END