

MAHALIA MELTS IN THE RAIN

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1 **EXT. BALLET STUDIO - DAY**

Classical music swells across the screen. A couple of leaves fall from the orange-tinted trees. The camera slowly approaches a ballet studio. Big windows display a small group of TEENAGE BALLERINAS moving in perfect unison. Slender and beautiful, they dance to be observed.

CUT TO:

2 **INT. HALLWAY OF BALLET STUDIO - DAY**

LITTLE GIRLS in pink leotards wait to get into the studio. They are mostly Caucasian, except for MAHALIA (9 years old, afro hair) and her mother ANIKA (40s, hair straightened, cascading down her shoulders) who is busy chatting with some of the other MOMS. Timid, Mahalia stands close to Anika but keeps looking over at a couple of girls laughing together, longing to go join them.

DAISY (9 years old, long light brown hair) and ABIGAIL (9 years old, brown curly hair) are standing back to back trying to assess who is tallest.

ABIGAIL

Ok, fine, you're taller.

DAISY

See. Told ya!

Abigail leans on Daisy and raises herself up on her toes.

ABIGAIL

But look who's taller now!

DAISY

Oh yeah? What about now?

Daisy jumps in the air to show how high she can jump. Abigail laughs and does the same. Gathering up all her courage and confidence, Mahalia walks over to the other girls.

MAHALIA

(shy)

What are you guys doing?

ABIGAIL

(to Daisy)

Mahalia's probably taller than you.

(to Mahalia)

Turn around.

Mahalia turns around and Daisy puts her back to hers.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

I don't know. It's kinda hard to tell.

Daisy places her hand on top of her head and moves it over to Mahalia's, her hand grazing Mahalia's afro hair. She turns back around with a smug smile.

DAISY

Close, but I'm still the tallest.

(adding)

Your hair's so funny, it's like a sponge.

Mahalia shrugs, feeling uncomfortable but not knowing what to answer.

The hallway doors open. The older ballerinas walk in, talking amongst themselves and ignoring everyone else. They are at that ripe age where they have everything society tells them they should want: beauty and youth. MS. LARA (30s, short hair in a bob) is right behind them.

MS. LARA

(to the younger girls)

Ok girls, time for class.

Anika waves to Mahalia who offers a small smile in return as she heads towards the hallway doors. Other girls greet their mothers as well.

MS. LARA (CONT'D)

I want to see everyone ready in first positions at the barre.

Anika sees that Mahalia's trying to make her way through the doors, but OTHER GIRLS cut her off, forcing Mahalia to hang back. Anika frowns, wanting to intervene, but Ms. Lara gets the mothers' attention.

MS. LARA (CONT'D)

Don't forget the photo shoot is on Sunday. Call time is at 9 am sharp!

Ms. Lara guides the girls towards the doors.

MS. LARA (CONT'D)

Come on, girls. Let's go.

CUT TO:

2A INT. BALLET STUDIO - DAY

Mahalia looks at a couple of girls' long beautiful hair as she follows them into the studio. She then places herself behind Daisy at the barre, watching as Daisy ties her ponytail.

MS. LARA

I said first positions everybody! Let's start with the pli   exercise. And 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8...

The girls follow her orders, straightening their backs and elongating their necks. As Ms. Lara closes the door, the camera backs away, the window in the door framing the girls as they begin their class.

3 EXT. BALLET STUDIO - EVENING

Mahalia waits for her mom to come pick her up. Daisy, Abigail and a couple of girls are goofing around not too far from her. Mahalia looks over to them but decides not to go join them. Her mom pulls up in her car. Mahalia hops in and shuts the door.

4 I./E. CAR - EVENING (DRIVING)

Mahalia stares blankly out the window, quiet. Anika observes her daughter through the rearview mirror for a moment, then:

ANIKA

Hey, I was thinking... maybe you're getting old enough now to come to the hairdresser with me.

Mahalia hears her mom, but doesn't react.

ANIKA (CONT'D)

We could get your hair straightened so you can look all nice and pretty for the shoot on Sunday. What do you say?

Mahalia brightens up.

MAHALIA

Really?!

Anika smiles.

5 INT. HAIR SALON - DAY

A little intimidated, Mahalia sits in the crowded hair salon next to her mother.

Reggaeton music pulsates in the background. Mahalia observes the women milling around the place. YOSELIN (Hispanic, 40s, dressed in tight jeans and a sparkly top), the owner of the salon, speaks loudly in Spanish to the THREE OTHER HAIRDRESSERS, all Hispanic as well, clearly telling a funny story.

Mahalia's eyes move over to look at the WOMEN SITTING IN THE WAITING AREA. These women are all black. They're all in comfortable weekend wear, spruced up with fashionable accessories. A woman next to her is having a very long conversation on the phone while another boringly flips through a magazine.

ANIKA (O.S.)

Mahalia, come on, let's go, it's your turn.

Mahalia looks up at her mom who's already up and then notices Yoselin gesturing over to her. Mahalia gets up, and follows her mother.

CUT TO:

6 **INT. HAIR SALON - HIGH CHAIR - DAY**

Yoselin cranks up the chair so Mahalia is at a comfortable height for her. Mahalia's visibly nervous. Anika stands close by, smiling at her reassuringly.

Yoselin mixes a white creamy mixture vigorously. She parts Mahalia's hair and starts to apply the hair relaxer that will straighten Mahalia's natural hair.

CUT TO:

7 **INT. HAIR SALON - HIGH CHAIR - LATER**

Mahalia looks at her reflection in the mirror, the sticky-looking mixture is all over her hair. Fascinated, she's about to touch, but Yoselin does a sign with her finger, no no no. Yoselin, who is wearing thin white plastic gloves, continues to work the product into Mahalia's hair, making sure every strand is covered.

YOSELIN

(with an accent)

You let me know when it starts burning okay?

Mahalia nods, her worries suddenly resurfacing. Yoselin moves away. In Spanish, she asks NASHALY, a younger hairdresser who is wearing a cleavage top and chunky heels, to keep an eye out for Mahalia.

They look back at Mahalia and nod. This only adds to Mahalia's concern. Anika puts a hand on her shoulder to comfort her.

ANIKA

You okay honey?

Mahalia nods.

ANIKA (CONT'D)

You have to tell us the minute you feel like your head is getting hot.

MAHALIA

If I wait too long, is my hair gonna burn?

ANIKA

(smiling)

No honey, but we have to leave the product in until it works and then wash off the chemicals.

CUT TO:

8 **INT. HAIR SALON - SINK - DAY**

OVERHEAD VIEW of Nashaly rinsing Mahalia's hair. There's discomfort on Mahalia's face. She stares at the ceiling.

MAHALIA'S POV of the neon lights and drab ceiling tiles, then CLOSE-UP on Mahalia's face as the pain goes away and she starts to relax. Water keeps splashing near her eyes so she closes them.

The sound of the water mixes itself with the women's continuous chatter and the ongoing music.

9 **INT. HAIR SALON - HIGH CHAIR - DAY**

Mahalia is back in the salon chair. The reggaeton music has been turned off and the volume of the small television hanging on the wall has been turned up. Nashaly's hands work fast and efficiently as she puts rollers on Mahalia's long straightened hair, but the young hairdresser is more focused on the TV than on her work. She points to the actress with her head, making a comment to the other hairdressers about her appearance.

Mahalia looks at the television at the very pretty actress in the telenovela, wondering what they could possibly be saying about her. As Yoselin passes by and reprimands Nashaly for being too loud and chatty (in Spanish), Anika approaches Mahalia.

ANIKA

I'm gonna run out and get us some food.
If there's anything, call me on my cell,
okay?

MAHALIA

Okay.

Mahalia watches as her mom talks to Yoselin before walking out. A little bell rings as the door opens. Mahalia suddenly feels very alone.

10 **OMITTED**

11 **INT. HAIR SALON - HAIR DRYER - EVENING**

Still under the dryer, Mahalia eats some take-out Caribbean food with appetite. It's not the easiest thing to do while keeping her head under the dryer, but the food is tasty so she manages. Anika who's sitting in the waiting area also eats from a take-out container. The mother and daughter exchange a smile, a little bonding moment between them.

CUT TO:

12 **INT. HAIR SALON - HIGH CHAIR - EVENING**

Yoselin puts the finishing touches to Mahalia's hair which is now completely straight. Mahalia moves her head from side to side. Her hair moves fluidly like Daisy or Abigail's hair. Mahalia's impressed; she likes this new sensation. She's never felt so pretty and confident.

13 **EXT. HAIR SALON - NIGHT**

It's raining out. As Mahalia's about to step outside, her mother stops her.

ANIKA

You can't go under the rain like that.

MAHALIA

Why not?

ANIKA

It'll ruin your hair and it won't look good in the picture tomorrow. So until then, you stay out of the rain, okay?

Mahalia nods.

ANIKA (CONT'D)

I'm serious Mahalia.

MAHALIA

Yes, Mom.

Mahalia secures her hood on her head. As they walk out, Anika opens up a big umbrella and takes Mahalia under her arm to make sure she's completely shielded from the rain.

14 **INT. BALLET STUDIO / HALLWAY OF BALLET STUDIO - DAY**

Upbeat classical music leaks out of the studio. Daisy, Abigail, and Mahalia sit side by side on a bench. They're all dressed in their fairy ballerina costumes, waiting for their turn.

DAISY

(looking over at Mahalia)

Your hair is different.

ABIGAIL

(warm)

It looks nice.

Mahalia smiles, feeling just like the other girls for once.

MAHALIA

Thank you.

Daisy moves off from the bench and goes to take a peek at ANOTHER GIRL in their class getting her picture taken. The PHOTOGRAPHER snaps a shot, then Ms. Lara approaches the girl, fussing over her costume, making sure she looks perfect. Seeing Ms. Lara has her back turned to them, Daisy walks back over to the girls, a mischievous look on her face.

DAISY

Let's go outside.

Mahalia and Abigail exchange a look. They know they shouldn't.

ABIGAIL

But we haven't taken our pictures yet.

DAISY

Just while we wait.

ABIGAIL

I don't think it's a good idea.

DAISY

Come on. We'll be careful. Race you!

SLOW-MO as Daisy starts to run down the hallway and Abigail and Mahalia catch up to her.

15 **EXT. BALLET STUDIO - DAY**

Still in SLOW-MO, Daisy gets to the propped-open door first. Mahalia and Abigail pile up behind Daisy as they realize it's raining lightly. They hesitate for a moment, but Daisy decides to advance into the rain. She stretches out her arms and looks up at the sky trying to collect the tiny raindrops in her mouth. Abigail joins her and twirls around under the light rain.

We see the two girls happily dancing around in their pretty costumes. Meanwhile, Mahalia is frozen at the door, frowning as she stares up at the rain coming down from the grey sky. Then:

ABIGAIL (O.S.)

Come on!

The SLOW-MO STOPS. Abigail pulls on Mahalia's arm.

MAHALIA

No!

Mahalia detaches herself from Abigail. Daisy approaches.

ABIGAIL

(to Mahalia)

But it's so much fun!

MAHALIA

I can't.

DAISY

(challenging her)

Why not?

MAHALIA

None of your business.

DAISY

Stop being a baby.

(adding)

What? Are you afraid you're gonna melt
cause you're made out of chocolate?

Daisy laughs and goes back out under the rain. Abigail stays behind, looking down and feeling sorry for Mahalia. The two girls look at Daisy who's jumping around freely.

MAHALIA

You don't have to stay.

Abigail hesitates, but finally goes off to join Daisy. Mahalia turns away and walks back into the building, determined not to let her emotions take over. Behind her, we can still see the girls jumping around and having fun.

CUT TO:

16 **INT. BALLET STUDIO - DAY**

It's Mahalia's turn to take her picture. The photographer places her. Mahalia assumes a ballet pose, somehow managing to paste on a smile.

17 **EXT. BALLET STUDIO - DAY**

It's raining heavily now. Mahalia waits outside the school under the overhang of the roof in order not to get wet. She looks down at a puddle on the ground, looking at a distorted reflection of herself.

ANIKA (V.O.)

So? How did it go?

Mahalia looks up and sees her mom standing in front of her holding out an umbrella to help her get to their car. Mahalia's only answer is a shrug. They walk in silence to the car. Anika opens the door to let Mahalia into the passenger seat. Mahalia gets in the car without looking at her mom, lost in thought.

17A **INT. CAR - DAY**

Mahalia's POV as she looks at the raindrops falling on the foggy car window. CLOSE-UP on the pattern the rain is making on the window. Mahalia's finger moving along the glass, as though she could control the direction of the raindrops. Anika gets in the driver's seat. Through the rearview mirror, she looks at a dispirited Mahalia.

ANIKA

I'm sure the pictures will turn out great. Because you're beautiful, inside and out.

(turning to face Mahalia)

You know that, right?

Mahalia nods faintly. Anika keeps talking, trying to fill the silence, but Mahalia's no longer listening to her mother, the sound of the rain drowning her voice out.

THE END