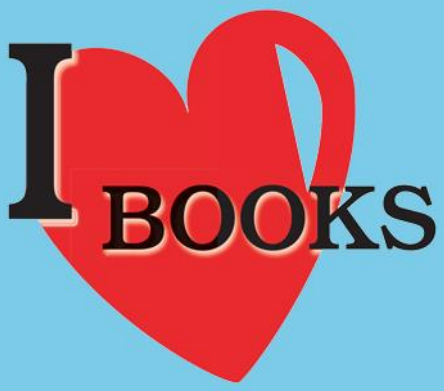


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To Magali Messac, the ballerina
on the cover of the magazine

1

The Ballerina

It is a chilly night in December. I stand backstage wearing leg warmers and a sweatshirt, but I'm still shivering.

"Five minutes, Michaela!" I hear. It's time for me to dance. I stretch my



legs and point my toes to get them ready.

I check my tiara to make sure it's not loose, and fluff out my pink tutu.

The knots in my pointe shoe ribbons are tied nice and tight. I wouldn't want them to slip off during the performance.

I peek through the stage curtains and see the eager faces of the audience.

They are waiting for the ballerina to appear.

The music begins, and my heart beats fast with excitement. I fly on to the stage. I am the ballerina!



2

The Orphan Girl

Long before I became a ballerina, I was an orphan in Sierra Leone, a country in western Africa. My parents died there in the ongoing war. I was sent to an orphanage, where children without parents live.

There were twenty-seven children in the orphanage, but I was the only one with a condition called vitiligo. The vitiligo made some of my skin lose its colour. I have white spots on my brown skin.

Some of the other children laughed at my spots. They called me names, and I often felt sad.

One girl never laughed at me. Her name was Mia, and she became my best friend. We shared a grass mat to sleep on at bedtime. We shared our rice at mealtimes. Mia sang to me and told me stories. I taught Mia how to play new games.

Sometimes I would miss my parents very much, but I would not cry in front of the other children. Instead, I would sit



at the orphanage gate alone and let my tears flow.

One windy day, a magazine blew down the road in front of the gate. I reached out and caught it.

A pretty picture of a woman was on the front cover of the magazine. She wore a short pink dress that stuck out

