



My Seventh-Grade Life in Tights

By Brooks Benjamin

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Football hero. Ninja freestyler. It's seventh grade. Anything is possible.

All Dillon wants is to be a real dancer. And if he wins a summer scholarship at Dance-Splasion, he's on his way. The problem? His dad wants him to play football. And Dillon's freestyle crew, the Dizzee Freez, says that dance studios are for sellouts. His friends want Dillon to kill it at the audition—so he can turn around and tell the studio just how wrong their rules and creativity-strangling ways are.

At first, Dillon's willing to go along with his crew's plan, even convincing one of the snobbiest girls at school to work with him on his technique. But as Dillon's dancing improves, he wonders: what if studios aren't the enemy? And what if he actually has a shot at winning the scholarship?

Dillon's life is about to get crazy . . . on and off the dance floor in this kid-friendly humorous debut by Brooks Benjamin.

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"I couldn't stop smiling. Equal parts **hilarious and heartwarming**, Dillon's journey to find his people and his place in the world will charm everyone lucky enough to come along for the ride."--**Jessica Cluess, author of *A Shadow Bright and Burning***

"A rollicking, big-hearted breakdance of a book. It's **a story about friendship that's got all the moves**: humor both sly and slapstick, a diverse cast of characters, and a winning narrator who's trying to learn how to follow his heart, find the beat, and dance his pants right off." —**Kate Hattemer, author of *The Vigilante Poets of Selwyn Academy***

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for MY SEVENTH-GRADE LIFE IN TIGHTS:

"Equal parts jazz hands and karate chop, with a dash of football and a pirouette of pure heart. Dillon and the Dizzee Freeez are en pointe. **This book will rock you!**"--Kristin O'Donnell Tubb, author of *The 13th Sign*

"An earnest first novel with a solid message about **finding out who you are on your own terms.**"--*Kirkus*

"**A fresh and winning debut about the power of self-expression.**"--*Booklist*

About the Author

In sixth grade, Brooks Benjamin formed a New Kids on the Block tribute dance crew called the New Kidz. He wasn't that good at dancing. But now he's got a new crew—his wife and their dog. They live in Tennessee, where he teaches reading and writing and occasionally busts out a few dance moves. He's still not very good at it.

brooksbenjamin.com

@brooksbenjamin on Twitter

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I stared deep into the world of two-faced backstabbery.

And it was all inside my phone.

I never would've found the website on my own, but I'd set a Google alert about a month earlier for become a real dancer. I'd also set up one for ninja movie audition and free concert in Sunnydale, but those never gave me anything useful.

This alert was different. I leaned against the bathroom sink and scrolled down the page. Dance-Splision, the biggest dance studio in east Tennessee, was giving away a three-week summer scholarship in June to one lucky dancer. And this was the last week they were taking submissions.

At the bottom was a picture showing a wall of their dancers, each one posing like the show had just ended and the crowd was cheering so hard the ceiling was about to cave in.

I imagined my name in a Broadway show program:

Introducing twelve-year-old Dillon Parker, dancing some awesome style and definitely not the lame ninja freestyle one he made up.

Below the picture was the Dance-Splision slogan: Where real dancers are made.

Those five little words had me trapped in a bathroom with my crew waiting for me outside.

A real dancer.

Every time I thought about it, my stomach twisted into a knot. But there was no way I could go through with it. Not without hating myself afterward.

“Dillon, you almost finished?” Kassie’s voice crept in through the door crack and yanked me back to earth.

I shoved the phone into my pocket. “Um, yeah. Just need to, um--flush.” I pushed the lever on the toilet, ran the water for a minute, and opened the door into my den.

“Dude, we thought you fell in or something,” Austin said, standing behind his camera, cleaning his glasses on his shirt. “Kassie was about to send Carson in to pull you out of the plumbing.”

Kassie laughed. “Okay, we’ve got time for one more run-through.” Her eyes landed on me. “You up for it?”

“Yeah. Definitely.”

She pulled her jet-black hair into a ponytail. One curl fell down over her forehead. It always did that. Like that one bit of hair refused to go along with the rest. That was totally Kassie. A rebel. Some of the kids had teased her when she first moved here from Haiti. But she’d never let them bother her.

“All right, we’re rolling,” Austin said, then glanced at the lights flickering above us. “Hold on.”

Carson let out a loud groan. “Perfect. Last practice before school starts and we’re going to look like we’re dancing in a lightning storm.” His entire body perked up. “Ooh, that might actually be cool. Let’s start before it turns normal again.”

“Trust me, it looks terrible,” Austin said. “We need to invest in some lights. This place is a cave. And don’t get me started on the smell. It’s like someone farted in an old shoe.”

“The lighting’s fine,” Kassie said.

Austin poked his head out from behind his camera. “Oh, sorry. I thought I was the director.” Carson opened his mouth, but Austin cut him off before he could speak. “Come on, guys. I already feel stupid recording these. It’s not like y’all can’t just do it yourselves. Let me at least make it look good.”

Austin was right. He recorded all of our routines even though we really didn’t need him to. But he said he’d let us all be zombies in a short film he was making next summer. That was enough to convince us he should help out.

“How long will it take before the light stops?” Kassie asked.

Austin grabbed a pillow and tossed it at the ceiling. It smacked against the clear plastic cover and the light instantly stopped flashing. Austin let out a quick laugh like he was surprised it had worked.

We got into our first position, squished together closer than we should’ve been. My den was pretty small, even with the furniture pushed out of the way. Austin hit play on Kassie’s phone and the room filled with a

low, electronic bass groove.

Kassie moved first, flying into a perfect triple spin. She was a blur, twirling at sonic speed.

Next up was Carson. He jumped, his long, skinny legs stretched out into a perfect split. I couldn't have drawn straighter lines with a ruler.

I was next.

I closed my eyes and let the song pour into my muscles. Just like Kassie had taught me. I pretended the top of my head opened up on a hinge and the music filled every empty space inside me. And then .??.

A deep breath.

Feel the music.

Become the music.

Let the lid snap shut.

And take off.

I did a spin-drop, landing on my knees and windmilling my arms. I used the momentum to pop right back up and unleash a set of moves I had pieced together from some of my favorite dance movies and kung fu flicks. Jumps, kicks, twists, punches, a little pop and lock--I tried it all. My dad always says it looks like I'm having a seizure when I dance, but what does he know? The most dancing I'd ever seen him do was when he dropped a paint can on his toe last year.

My karate action didn't really seem out of place most of the time. They were the only moves I was good at, so Kassie always made sure our routines had some sort of fighting part to them. They had to, or I wouldn't have had anything to do. I'd just have been a statue in the background while the other dancers did all the cool moves.

My first few punches and kicks felt great.

But that's where the epic ended and the epic fail began.

The more I saw Kassie and Carson flow across the floor like a pair of dance swans, the more I felt like I was just flailing around, trying to keep up. So I threw my weight to the side, planting one hand on the floor for a one-handed cartwheel. I'd seen Kassie and Carson do it a million times. It couldn't be that hard.

But my elbow buckled and I crashed to the floor, smacking Kassie's shoulder with my foot.

"Ow!" Kassie's hand flew to her arm.

"Cut!" Austin yelled, stopping the music. "Dude, what're you doing?"

I scrambled to my feet. "I'm so sorry! Kass, are you okay?" Great. I finally muster up the courage to try an actual dance move and I end up breaking our best dancer.

“Everyone all right?” my mom called downstairs. “I heard a scream.”

“We’re fine, Mrs. Parker. Thanks,” Kassie yelled. She worked her shoulder around, then asked me, “What happened? Did you trip or something?”

“I think he was going for a roundoff.” Carson dragged his hand through his blond hair. He turned to Austin. “Or did he just fall again?”

Austin shrugged. “All I saw was a foot flying through the air. And not in a cool way.”

I sat on the back of the couch. “I’m sorry. I just wanted to do something besides punch and kick all over the place.”

“Why?” Kassie asked. “You’re awesome at punching and kicking.”

“Yeah, only because I don’t know how to do anything else.”

Carson took a drink from his water bottle. “But that’s sort of your thing.”

“I don’t want my thing to just be punches and kicks, though. I wanna be able to do moves like you two, but you won’t teach me.”

“Not again,” Austin mumbled, slapping the screen closed on his camera.

Kassie hopped up beside me. “I asked you to join us because you were doing all those karate moves, remember?”

I did. It was the first week of sixth grade. She’d found me after school practicing the kata I had to remember for my green belt. I’d told her I wasn’t dancing.

She’d told me I really was.

“The whole reason I started this crew was to make a statement,” she said now. “That dance isn’t about rules and technique. It’s about expression.”

“But I’ve gotta start learning some real moves eventually.” I looked up at Carson. “You’re not the only one who wants to go pro one day, you know.”

His eyes dropped. I hoped it was because he felt sort of bad for not helping me more and not because he knew no choreographer would hire someone with a fake dance style.

“I don’t even wear real dance clothes. I mean, why am I the one who has to dance in jeans? Can I at least wear my football pants or something?”

“Yeah, let him wear those,” Austin said. “It’s about time they saw some action.”

“You’re funny, Austin,” I replied. But he was right. The only action my football pants ever saw was when I got a splinter in my butt last year after I sat down on the bench. I wasn’t even sure why I stayed on the team.

“Our clothes are our uniform. It’s another way we express ourselves,” Kassie said. “Three different dance styles, three different uniforms. I already told you to buy some baggier jeans.”

“Yeah, my dad said I didn’t need another pair.” I fell back onto the couch cushions, staring up at the light that had started flickering again. “Guess I’m stuck being the fake dancer with the wedgies.”

Kassie slid down beside me. “Look, the fact that you don’t have all that technique is why we love your dancing. Me and Carson went through the brainwashing at our studios. Which is why I only have one rule: studios are for sellouts. They’re all business, and dancing’s all art.”

Carson leaned over, staring down at me. “In a way, you’re lucky. When you dance, you don’t have to worry about lines and feet and hands. You just get out there and move.”

“Exactly!” Kassie said. “You just need to keep doing the moves that feel right. The moves that fit. Your dancing is pure. Which makes it awesome.”

It felt great to hear her say that. But I was tired of pure. Pure was just another way to say You have no idea what you’re doing, but thanks for making us look good.

Austin held his phone out over my head. “Hate to break up the group hug, guys, but my mom’s here.”

Kassie’s shoulders dropped. “All right. We’ll pick back up on Saturday. Before we go”--she sat up on her knees and put her hand out, palm down--“let’s make our promise.”

Carson put his hand in. Austin was next. I peeled myself off the couch seat and lifted my hand, letting it hover over everyone else’s.

“The crew comes first.”

That was the oath. The promise we made every practice.

I could practically hear the dancers on the Dance-Splosion website whispering inside my pocket. Wondering what I was going to do. Betting on whether I was going to end my summer with a big, fat lie.

Kassie’s eyes narrowed. “Everything okay?”

“Uh, yeah.” My hand fell on the pile. “Everything’s good.”

Kassie was the last one to leave. She took a few steps up the stairs and stopped.

“I just--I hope you know I really do love your dancing. Like, a lot.”

“Thanks, Kass. I love yours, too. A lot.”

I pretended to smooth down my hair, hoping my hand would hide the ball of pink my face was turning into.

“Cool. You need help with the couch?”

“Um, no. I’ll get it. Thanks.”

She waved and left.

My crew was my family. But they didn't understand what it was like for me. The more we danced together, the more I felt like I didn't belong. Kassie and Carson had chosen to leave their studios. I'd never even set foot in one.

I was the outsider in a group of outsiders.

My chest ached at the thought of what I was considering. As soon as the door upstairs closed, I pulled the website up on my phone.

Dance-Spllosion. Where real dancers were made.

Don't do it, my brain screamed. Studios are evil, and you're evil for just thinking about doing this!

My eyes stayed glued to the screen. Before I knew it, I was selecting a song from my playlist: "We Will Rock You" by Queen.

I pushed play and switched to video mode. I sat my phone on the coffee table and hit record.

"Hi, my name's Dillon Parker. I'm twelve years old and I go to Sunnydale Middle. I hope you like my dance."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Agatha Roughton:

The book *My Seventh-Grade Life in Tights* can give more knowledge and information about everything you want. So why must we leave the great thing like a book *My Seventh-Grade Life in Tights*? A number of you have a different opinion about book. But one aim that book can give many data for us. It is absolutely suitable. Right now, try to closer together with your book. Knowledge or facts that you take for that, you could give for each other; it is possible to share all of these. Book *My Seventh-Grade Life in Tights* has simple shape however, you know: it has great and large function for you. You can look the enormous world by wide open and read a reserve. So it is very wonderful.

Elizabeth Bello:

Now a day those who Living in the era everywhere everything reachable by connect to the internet and the resources within it can be true or not demand people to be aware of each facts they get. How people have to be smart in receiving any information nowadays? Of course the correct answer is reading a book. Reading through a book can help people out of this uncertainty Information specially this *My Seventh-Grade Life in Tights* book because book offers you rich details and knowledge. Of course the knowledge in this book hundred per cent guarantees there is no doubt in it as you know.

Jessica Bowman:

Within this era which is the greater man or woman or who has ability to do something more are more treasured than other. Do you want to become certainly one of it? It is just simple way to have that. What you have to do is just spending your time not very much but quite enough to possess a look at some books. One of many books in the top list in your reading list will be My Seventh-Grade Life in Tights. This book that is qualified as The Hungry Hillside can get you closer in turning out to be precious person. By looking upward and review this e-book you can get many advantages.

Fern Gooding:

As we know that book is important thing to add our understanding for everything. By a publication we can know everything we want. A book is a pair of written, printed, illustrated as well as blank sheet. Every year seemed to be exactly added. This publication My Seventh-Grade Life in Tights was filled regarding science. Spend your time to add your knowledge about your technology competence. Some people has diverse feel when they reading any book. If you know how big good thing about a book, you can feel enjoy to read a reserve. In the modern era like now, many ways to get book which you wanted.

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