

STEPS

written by

Candice Clifford

2120 S State College Blvd 1015
(408) 612-1699
candicejclifford@gmail.com

INT. CHURCH - MID MORNING

A wedding is in it's final moments. A sign reads "WELCOME TO OUR NEW BEGINNING JOSEPH DAGNEY and KAYLA BANKS."

The church is soaked in sunlight, the pews are full of people radiating energy, and the bride, KAYLA, and groom, JOSEPH, stand side by side facing the officiate.

KAYLA is African American, in her late 20's. She's got a perfect smile and sparkling eyes: the definition of a beaming bride. She sneaks a glance at her soon to be husband.

JOSEPH is Caucasian, also in his late 20's. His shaggy, long hair is slicked back, clean and classy looking. He glances back at his bride and is awe struck, his eyes watering ever so slightly.

KAYLA nudges him a bit. JOSEPH laughs.

Their wedding procession beams along side them. A diverse group of friends and loved ones.

JOSEPH and KAYLA turn to face one another.

JOSEPH lifts KAYLA's veil.

OFFICIATE

May your life together be blessed
with prosperity and good health.

Down the line, each groomsmen has got tears in his eyes. The last guy is unsuccessfully holding back sobs.

OFFICIATE (CONT'D)

May you relish in life's plateaus
and rely on one another during
seasons of change. May the trust
you place in one another be the
firm foundation of the home you are
about to build. May you always
remain open with one another and
allow your love to thrive on
honesty and integrity.

Down the line, each bridesmaid has got excited smiles and watery eyes.

OFFICIATE (CONT'D)

May all the years to come be filled
with moments to celebrate and renew
your love. Through the challenging
and peaceful, the new and old, the
big and the small -

The brides procession ends with little STEPH, the closest to her mother, arms crossed and a sour look on her face.

STEPH is 8 years old with wild, natural hair that's been forced into place for the occasion. She has the beautiful complexion and features of her mother skewed into a pout-y scowl.

KAYLA and JOSEPH frame the officiate and stare longingly at each other.

OFFICIATE (CONT'D)

- may you find ways to explore this relationship and be open to all it has to offer. Take on each others burdens, celebrate each others victories, and encourage one another to always strive for greatness.

The officiate smiles.

OFFICIATE (CONT'D)

I now pronounce you, MR. and MRS. Joseph Dagney. You may now kiss the bride.

KAYLA jumps into her husbands arms. The audience erupts in joyous applause.

STEPH rolls her eyes in disgust.

The bride and groom rush down from the alter. "STEPS" appears on the steps behind them.

WIPE AWAY

STEPH run's down the stairs, in her soccer gear, and they transition from the carpeted steps of the church to the wood grain steps of their home.

INT. HOME - MORNING

STEPH runs into the kitchen. Her cleats are at one side of the living room, her backpack at another. She races back and forth.

JOSEPH stands in the kitchen fresh pancakes and an array of breakfast food in front of him. He has that goofy/proud dad look on his face.

STEPH stops at the kitchen counter for a second and looks at the food then up at Joseph.

JOSEPH is loading a plate of pancakes up with whip cream, chocolate sauce and sprinkles. He slides it over to Steph, a sly look on his face.

STEPH glances at it then takes a piece of bacon from a different plate and runs off.

KAYLA is waiting in the door way, dressed in a suit for work. STEPH runs past her and KAYLA shrugs.

JOSEPH's face falls. He scratches his head and squints his eyes, thinking. He takes a bite of the pancakes as he does so.

The tea kettle starts to whistle behind him and he jumps.

EXT. MIDDLE SCHOOL SOCCER FIELD - AFTERNOON

A whistle is blown.

STEPH trudges to the pick up area from the field with her gear and looks around for her ride.

JOSEPH sits in the car at the pick up. As soon as he sees her he waves wildly.

STEPH grimaces and walks up. The front seat window is rolled down.

STEPH takes one look at the seat then goes for the backseat.

JOSEPH tries to make eye contact with her through the rear view mirror but she looks away and out the window.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREETS - CONTINUOUS

As they drive STEPH leans out the window. Her hair is fluttering in the wind. She places her hand outside the window and moves it along with the wind currents.

She starts to daydream and imagine her hand is a dolphin riding those wind currents. Another dolphin begin jumping around with it, clicking joyously. That dolphin leads her hand, flips around then comes in close and nuzzles her dolphin with its nose.

As they go over speed bumps her hand and the other dolphin jump to the rhythm of the bump.

The car comes to a sudden stop. The dolphins scatter and STEPH breaks out of her day dream.

STEPH sits up and looks at JOSEPH in the rear view mirror questioningly.

JOSEPH raises an eyebrow and smiles mischievously. He looks out the window. They've arrived at the local Mall.

JOSEPH looks back at Steph. Antsy with excitement, he does a little drum roll with his hands.

STEPH gives him a questioning look then unbuckles and exits the car.

INT. MALL - AFTERNOON

JOSEPH grabs STEPH's hand in an animated way and whisks her through the mall. He comes to an abrupt stop and she almost runs into him.

STEPH looks up and sees "FORM-A-FRIEND" (ie Build-A-Bear).

JOSEPH eagerly ushers STEPH in.

INT. FORM-A-FRIEND - CONTINUOUS

JOSEPH excitedly starts browsing through plush options.

STEPH, arms behind her back, looks at the bears seriously, like a teacher examining a student's work.

JOSEPH is torn between the purple stegosaurus and the dalmatian. He looks up and STEPH who is two steps ahead and already getting her brown teddy bear sewn up.

JOSEPH apologetically puts down the dalmatian. He walks away. A couple seconds later he goes back and grabs the dalmatian too.

JOSEPH stands in awe in front of an infinite wall of plush clothes, the dalmatian under one arm, stegosaurus under the other.

STEPH walks down an isle labeled "Professional Wear." She stops at the army uniform for a moment and stares.

JOSEPH, waving obnoxiously, pulls her out of her trance. STEPH looks up and sees him holding up a soccer uniform, same color as hers.

STEPH is excited for a moment before she notices in JOSEPH's other hand he holds bride and groom attire.

STEPH's face falls a bit. She shrugs.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

JOSEPH sets his laptop down on the kitchen table and pulls up a chair to the right of STEPH.

STEPH looks up from her homework briefly then looks back down.

JOSEPH tries to take a look at what she's working on, but STEPH moves her elbow onto the table to block his view.

JOSEPH sighs and gets back to his work.

STEPH closes her Math book, gathers her stuff and walks away.

JOSEPH looks defeated for a moment. He thinks and taps his finger on his keypad then catches a glance of their family calendar on the wall. Saturday is circled and it says, "GAME DAY".

JOSEPH smiles and snaps his fingers.

EXT. SOCCER FIELD - MID MORNING

JOSEPH is pointing his index finger to the sky.

"FINAL COUNTDOWN" begins to play as KAYLA and JOSEPH, in bad ass slow-mo step out of their car and onto the soccer field.

STEPH stops her warm up and looks to her mom and stepdad.

To the beats of the song, different parts of JOSEPH and KAYLA's game day attire is shown off: Joseph's got an afro, KAYLA's in face paint, and they both sport make-shift jersey and soccer knee highs.

STEPH, embarrassed, rolls her eyes and kicks the ball back to her teammate.

FADE IN:

Spinning soccer ball transitions to a medal hanging around STEPH's neck.

INT. ICE CREAM PARLOR - AFTERNOON

STEPH stands in line for ice cream with JOSEPH and KAYLA, hardly able to stand still from excitement. They get to the front.

STEPH presses her face up against the glass.

KAYLA puts her hand on her shoulder, as a mom warning, and STEPH pulls her face off the glass.

An employee comes over and STEPH picks out her ice cream.

JOSEPH, next to her chooses his.

The employee hands STEPH her triple tiered ice cream. Mint, cookie dough, and chocolate.

STEPH looks at it in all it's glorious-ness as the employee dashes some rainbow sprinkles on top.

STEPH goes to take a bite. JOSEPH nudges her.

STEPH glances over, annoyed. He has the same exact flavors as her. Rainbow sprinkles and everything.

STEPH glances to her mother's ice cream: a double scoop of rainbow sherbet.

KAYLA goes to take a bit but STEPH quickly switches their ice creams.

KAYLA looks to JOSEPH and they tilt their ice creams to each other in cheers. As they pull apart the ice cream parlor transitions to the beach.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEACH - MID DAY

KAYLA and JOSEPH sip two bottled sodas together. They sit close together and share a a towel on a perfect beach day.

A kite takes off into the bright blue sky.

STEPH, tongue out and intensely focused, guides the kite with ease.

A large gust of wind blows through and the kite flutters aggressively. The string starts slips.

STEPH is about to loose the kite when JOSEPH jumps in.

Taking control, JOSEPH guides the wild kite until it's subdued. He smiles.

STEPH's face hardens. She drops the string and walks away.

The kite flaps in the wind and flies across the screen.

INT. ROLLER RINK - MIDDAY

A floor guard quickly skates by STEPH.

STEPH holds onto the wall that wraps around the skating floor, scared of stepping out.

KAYLA skates up next to her and takes her hand. They tediously step onto the floor together.

The music changes to "Staying Alive". A spotlight lights up the middle.

A skater in short shorts, knee highs and an obnoxiously colorful shirt moon walks into the center of the floor. He dances like a pro getting the attention of the entire rink.

He hits his last pose and points right at STEPH. It's JOSEPH.

STEPH slips a little bit then skates off on her own.

JOSEPH skates over to KAYLA and whisks her around in a circle.

KAYLA's hair gets all messed up in the process. JOSEPH kisses her forehead and smooths her hair.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

JOSEPH smooths the hair of a manikin with his hand. He sits on the floor, legs crossed, staring down this bust with hair like Steph's. He has a look of intensity on his face.

Brushes and hair product scatter the floor.

STEPH sits next to him playing with the hair on her doll.

KAYLA is behind her, Steph's hair in hand. She puts down her comb and has just finished separating Steph's hair into rows.

KAYLA holds up three sections of hair.

JOSEPH grabs three pieces like her. He watches intently as she begins to braid STEPH's hair into cornrows.

He looks down at his manikin and begins trying to copy Kayla.

KAYLA begins to speed up a bit to finish her braid.

JOSEPH panics a bit and tries to speed up.

STEPH, who is trying to french braid her dolls hair, hears JOSEPH grunt and glances up.

JOSEPH's hands are tangled in the manikins hair. He pulls a couple times cautiously then gives one big yank that removes some hair from the manikins head.

STEPH's eyes grow huge.

KAYLA grimaces humorously then hands him a squirt bottle labled "leave in conditioner".

JOSEPH blushes then sprays the conditioner on the next row.

FADE TO:

EXT. KITCHEN - MORNING

JOSEPH sprays the slider door with cleaner and wipes it down with a cloth. He looks at the clean door, smiles and nods. A job well done.

STEPH, dressed for school, runs in from behind him and places her hands on the door to slide it open.

JOSEPH's face falls and he rolls his eyes.

STEPH is running around the backyard in a panic searching for something.

JOSEPH notices she is holding a tiny backpack: her doll's.

JOSEPH begins looking around the living room but quickly finds the doll sitting at the top of a tree house play set in the corner.

JOSEPH grabs her as STEPH walks back inside. Her face lights up as she sees the dolls and races over to rescue her. She races by without a thank you.

JOSEPH shrugs and shakes his head, smiling. Then looks back to the play tree house.

He squints his eyes, thoughtfully.

FADE TO:

EXT. BACKYARD - MIDDAY

JOSEPH, up in a tree and nails in mouth, squints and wipes the sweat from his forehead. He is finishing the final touches on a tree house.

KAYLA, dressed in her work suit, opens the slider and guides STEPH, still with her backpack on from school, into the backyard.

JOSEPH wipes his forehead and looks down to see them. He waves and looks back at his work.

The treehouse is rough: less princess cottage more Tim Burton. A piece of roofing slides down. JOSEPH tries to catch it and misses.

STEPH cringes and goes back inside.

KAYLA gives him a hesitant thumbs up, blows him a kiss, then steps inside.

JOSEPH exhales and hits his head against the treehouse. Another tiles falls.

A whistle blows.

EXT. SOCCER FIELD - MID DAY

The ref drops the whistle from his mouth.

The board shows the game is tied up.

JOSEPH and KAYLA cheer for STEPH as she races down the line with the ball. She makes it to the goal and takes the shot but misses right as time runs out.

The other team goes wild as STEPH stares at the ball in disbelief.

JOSEPH and KAYLA's faces fall.

Tears begin to form in STEPH's eyes. A teammate comes over but she shrugs them off.

EXT. SOCCER FIELD - LATER

JOSEPH has all the lawn chairs and coolers packed up and in his hands.

STEPH approaches them with her bag and her gear.

JOSEPH and KAYLA try and console her but she walks right past and straight to the car. She gets in and slams the door.

JOSEPH and KAYLA look at each other. She walks ahead. He sighs and follows.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

The three sit at the table eat Chinese takeout.

JOSEPH scarfs his noodles and eats as if he's starved.

KAYLA uses chopsticks and takes her time.

STEPH just pokes at her orange chicken.

JOSEPH looks at STEPH then at KAYLA. A coy smile forms on his face. He motions with his head towards STEPH like "Watch this."

JOSEPH
(clears his throat)

STEPH doesn't react.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)
(clears it again)

STEPH looks up.

JOSEPH has his arms crossed, a serious look on his face and a noodle hanging over his lip like a long mustache.

STEPH is unimpressed.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)
(grunts)

STEPH's expression does not change.

KAYLA laughs.

JOSEPH sucks down the noodle and kisses KAYLA.

That's the final push for STEPH. She pushes her chair back aggressively and runs up stairs.

JOSEPH moves to follow her. KAYLA stops him and shakes her head.

JOSEPH gets up to start cleaning plates and hears things being knocked over and thrown.

KAYLA
Shhh, shhh.

STEPH sobs.

Tears form in JOSEPH's eyes. He grabs for a necklace hanging around his neck and fiddles with it between his fingers

INT. HOME - LATER

JOSEPH is sitting on the couch with popcorn and a movie ready.

KAYLA comes down stairs.

JOSEPH gives her a concerned look.

KAYLA waves him off and joins him on the couch. She cuddles up next to him and the movie starts.

INT. HOME - LATER

KAYLA is asleep on JOSEPH. The TV is still on but the movie has finished.

STEPH comes down the stairs rubbing her eyes. She blinks a couple times then sees them asleep on the couch together.

STEPH stops. Her face falls. She runs back up stairs.

Her feet thumping on the stairs wakes JOSEPH.

JOSEPH blinks a couple times and looks up at the staircase.

INT. STEPH'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

There's a timid knock at STEPH's door.

JOSEPH cracks the door and peeks in.

STEPH's bedroom is all askew from earlier: pillows have been thrown, a stack of books knocked over, toys scattered.

As JOSEPH scans the room, a better glimpse of STEPH's room reveals post cards from different beaches lining her cork board, a large photo of her swimming with dolphins and her biological father hangs on the wall, and a surf board hides in the corner.

STEPH sits on her bed crying with her back to her door. Hands to her chest, she grips something small very tightly.

STEPH sniffs and looks up to see JOSEPH. Quickly she turns her back to him.

JOSEPH enters cautiously and sits down on the bed near her. A military portrait can be seen vaguely behind him.

A chain dangles from STEPH's hands. She's holding dog tags.

STEPH shifts her position to protect what was once her father's.

JOSEPH looks down and inhales deep.

They sit together a moment.

JOSEPH shifts then exhales the breathe he's been holding. He reaches down his shirt and pulls out dog tags of his own.

STEPH looks to him. Her eyes widen.

JOSEPH removes the dog tags and cradles them in his hand. He rubs his fingers over the raised corroded metal. It reads "Morgan Dagney." He extends his hand out to STEPH.

STEPH carefully traces the name on the tag. She looks up at JOSEPH who's got tears in his eyes.

STEPH wipes her eyes. She embraces JOSEPH, leaning into his chest and crying softly.

JOSEPH raises his hand to stroke her hair. He hesitates a moment before going for it. He kisses the top of her head and hugs her tight.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

KAYLA wakes up the next morning to light streaking in. She looks around and realizes she's alone.

KAYLA get's up and walks upstairs.

INT. STEPH'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

KAYLA cracks the door open and peaks inside.

JOSEPH has STEPH in his arms, the two of them asleep. Their dog tags hang around their necks and catch the morning light ever so slightly.

KAYLA clears her throat a bit.

The two blink a bit as they slowly wake up. They look at each other then up at KAYLA.

KAYLA smiles.

JOSEPH ushers her over.

KAYLA joins them on the bed, sandwiching STEPH between Joseph and herself.

They lay together, a family.

JOSEPH glances at STEPH's father's photo. He smiles and has his first "good" idea.

INT. HOME - MIDDAY

JOSEPH hangs STEPH's father's photo up on the wall next to a photo of his father.

JOSEPH steps back. He, KAYLA and STEPH stand together and look at their fallen soldiers, forever a part of their family.

JOSEPH kisses STEPH's head and she smiles, her eyes glistening with tears.

THE END