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Category: Short Story

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## **Panic on the Stage**

It's finally the night. The biggest night of my dance career. The performance that will set the precedent of who I am and what I can bring. This is the first time I will be performing as a professional. My dressing room is filled with legends. The smell of hair spray is so potent that I have a headache. Makeup and costumes are strewn everywhere. How do people keep up with what's theirs? I'm the only tap performance. It's underappreciated to say the least, but I'm hoping this night will start something. I tie my shoes as tight as they can, double knotted. It's practically cutting off my circulation, but better than them falling off.

"Maria to the stage," the intercom tells everyone. I'm listening for Lola. I'm two after Maria I'm pretty sure. I thought I would be nervous, but I'm actually quite tranquil. Red lipstick, gold hoops, and tap shoes always make me feel more... in control. I ran through my dance earlier, and it was better than ever.

My phone starts ringing. "Hello?" I say warily. Probably a solicitor.

"Hello, we have contacted you because you are the emergency contact of Regina Thomas. Is this Lola Thomas?" Regina's my sister, and I don't appreciate a random number contacting me and using her name.

Over the intercom comes, "Next performer to the stage." Better make this phone call fast.

"Who is this exactly?" I ask with tension and impatience.

"This is UAB hospital. Your sister was sent here after school with a fever. We believe it is a critical condition of COVID-19. Her vitals are rapidly decreasing." My phone slips out of my hand, and I fumble to catch it. "We've contacted your parents, but your sister insisted that we call you as well."

The news has made my adrenaline start pumping as if I can do something. "I'll be right there."

The lady responds in a sympathetic voice, "I'm sorry ma'am, but no one is allowed inside the hospital, except for patients and doctors. She's also not in a position where she can talk on the phone right now. I suggest you continue with your daily life, and we will keep you updated."

"Ok. Thank you." That's all I can mutter out.

"Have a good day." She ends the call. What a stupid comment. How can I have a good day when my sister could very easily die from our global pandemic. I'm going to be sick.

"Lola Thomas backstage please." No. I can't go on stage now. My phone dings with texts from my mom. I guess she's reading my mind. She tells me to give it my all for Regina and that I better not back out. She knows how I am. I mean, I know there's nothing I can do, but how can I perform right now.

The stage director starts pushing me to go backstage. Somehow my body is going, but it feels like I'm spiraling. "Ladies and Gentlemen, Welcome to the stage Miss Lola Thomas."

Everything is happening so fast. I don't even have time to decide if I want to do this. My feet are betraying me by

walking out to my tiny tap board. The music starts. My timing's off. Uh oh. I'm moving my feet, but I can't hear the taps. All I hear is a ringing. I continue to do the dance that I've memorized so perfectly, hoping that my inability to hear myself won't matter. My muscles are tensed up, and I feel that my body doesn't have the movement range that it normally does. I take a moment and close my eyes. I recenter myself. I feel like I'm going to throw up, or cry, but the ringing is beginning to die down. The audience looks fuzzy through teary eyes. Somehow, I'm still dancing. It's definitely not the choreography though. My body's just letting the music overtake. I let my emotions show and simply do what feels good for my body. I feel like my world is dying because all I can think about is "my world" in that hospital bed. I feel like a train-wreck, but it's as if I'm all by myself.

I start to get my wits about me. As the music continues into the build, a swell of emotions bursts over me. My feet go as fast and as hard as they can. I might dig a hole into the earth below me. Ugh my calves. They're squeezing so hard. I feel it will create an explosion in my muscles. My ankle gives out, and I fall. My chin scrapes against the corner of the tap board, and my shoe goes flying off. I double knotted both, right? I drag my foot with the tap shoe and decide to make this into something. I start tapping on the floor like I've seen my b-girl friends do. I start to explore and just see what's possible. My body goes in new directions, and my feet hit new tones. Well, I guess I should say foot. I make my way back up to standing and finish the routine one-footed doing my most complicated steps. Why would I use the other when I can't use it to make music anymore? The music fades, and it's like my heart finally relaxes. The audience screams and cheers. I jump because ha, I forgot I was on stage. I grab my shoe and walk off. That was the biggest applause of the night. I walk through the wings to the dressing room. People tell me how amazing it was. I don't really care though.

I say my thank you's and take my bags out the door. It's cold and the breeze feels wonderful on my neck. It's easier to breathe out here. My phone is blowing up with new opportunities and compliments. As I walk home, I think about the choices I made on stage and how my head is swirling with ideas. I'm ready to see my parents. I have a newfound strength. Among my mom's many other texts, she says that Regina is not doing good at this moment, but the doctors are seeing improvement fast. Now I'm crying again, but this time it's from relief.