

**Mia S.**

# Silence

Deep breaths. I can do this. What was that breathing technique Mrs. Wang taught us? Oh right, breathe in for three, hold for four, and breathe out for five. “You got this” Alice whispers in my ear. I take a deep breath and walk on stage. The hot lights radiate off of me as I feel like melting. I close my eyes to center myself as the silence of the crowd fills my ears, I feel a panic attack coming. I push away any feelings of nervousness as the music starts. I turn around and strike a pose, and I can feel the happiness centered around dance come back to me. As the music hits my ears, I can't help but smile, I find myself hidden in the song and breeze through a dance that is normally hard for me. Not only am I breezing through it but I'm enjoying it. For a couple of minutes, it feels like I'm just a leaf blowing in the wind like I don't have a worry in the world. I feel free. I finally feel like myself. Then I see my mom.

She's sitting in the front row of the audience with her white shawl wrapped around her shoulders and a stern look on her face. She's sitting next to my dad who actually appears happy. It is the first time I've seen him happy, but it's somewhat blocked with his phone which he seems to be using to record. Sitting in my mom's lap is my little sister Lilly. She's blonde, smart, and the favorite child. My parents adore her and brag about her 24 seven. She normally yells and runs and can never sit still but at my dance competition, the competition my parents wouldn't allow me to compete in, she sits still. Perfectly calm, staring straight onto the stage practically begging me to mess up.

I take my attention off them and refocus on the music. My next few pirouettes are shaky, but I quickly regain balance. I fall back into my momentum. I feel myself dancing with love and passion and with determination. I pour my heart and soul into my piece and as I walk off stage, I hope the judge and my parents can see that. After watching all my friends dance their solos were all called back onstage for awards.

I cross my fingers hoping my hard work will pay off. My friend Zoe gets 7th place, 4th goes to Alice, and as the time is ticking away, I can feel my parents glare from the audience. “Our junior division

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solo first runner-up goes to McKenzie Jackson” I force a smile and walk up to receive my medal not wanting to see the disappointment on my parent's faces. All I wanted to do was prove them wrong, to show that I am good at something, that I'm not a disappointment but even I can't do that. By winning second place I just confirmed my parents' suspicion that dance was a waste of time and something I'm not even good at.

The car ride home is long and silent as nobody wants to break the tension in the air. The silence is painful and unbearable but has to be better than talking to them. As we turn the corner on 6th street signaling the 5-minute point from our house Lilly breaks the silence “I think you did great out there sissy” I can't tell if she's doing this to act nice or if she truly means it so I just say “thanks but it wasn't good enough” the car then turns back to silence but this time it's more bearable. I can hear myself think and feel calm again although I know that the upcoming events are going to be far from calm.

As we reach the house I run through the door into my room, unable to see the look of disappointment on my parent's face for one more second. An hour passes and I start to get hungry. Another hour later I decide to go downstairs to get dinner. When I reach the kitchen I overhear my parents talking about me, without wanting to disturb them I put my ear to the door and wait, excited to hear what they said about me.

“Why did she go without our permission” my mom yells to my dad “I don't know honey” my dad calmly replies “But you can't deny that she was good out there. She owned the stage” “Not good enough to get first though” my mom says, “Who cares about one silly medal what matters is that she enjoyed it and just think if she could do that good without our support, without dance lessons, and without nonstop practice think about how good she will be with it.” “I just want her to be so successful in life. I don't want her to settle with mediocrity” My mom says while sniffing “I know. I know. But she showed us what she wanted and it's our job to respect that. It's time to let her free.” My dad replies still calm but firm this time.

Unable to bear the awkward silence I rush through the door giving my mom and dad the biggest hug ever. “You won't regret this,” I say “Trust me you won't regret this” I'm so happy that I rush upstairs

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to tell Zoe and Alice that I'll be joining them in dance classes. Alice texts back first, "This is only the beginning," she says, and I can't help but agree.