



# The Beat of the Dancer

When a dancer dances to the beat of life, a whole new experience is happening for the audience. Miri brings this and more to the stage, both in performance and in life. Her grandfather taught her how to not only hear but to feel the music around her, feel the beats all around. Any time Miri is dancing there will always be someone watching. Always someone to enjoy her movements. There comes a point when Miri is crossing over from loving her work to only work. Time will tell how she handles this.

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The percussion section is playing now, keeping a beat that sinks into the hearts of the audience, they can feel it through the floor and in the air. As they watch the dancers, they see feet hitting the stage at the moment the percussions hit their mark. They feel the beat as if their own feet touch the ground, feel the beat in their chest, the speed of the beat gets the adrenaline pumped up of everyone in the room. The lights begin to change with each new sound being heard, the soft glow of purple and blue is sliding around the stage keeping up with the percussion instruments’ beat. Making swirls along the floor, following the feet with every step, stomp or satchet.

In comes the string section, adding their flow to the dancer’s bodies, and the mood of the room shifts yet again. The feet and arms now flow with the ebbs and waves of the sounds singing higher and higher from the strings. Now the yellow and red lights enter with a dance of their own, highlighting a new set of dancers who have joined those still keeping up with the percussion with the blues and purples.

The merge of light, sound and movement has everyone in the audience spellbound, no one is moving, in fact, they are all leaning forward to make sure they don’t miss a moment or movement of this performance. Without warning a single clarinet begins to play, the perfect pitch rises above all the other sounds. A parting of the dancers reveals the smallest of dancers coming out to bring the new sound to life. New amazing heights and feats are being met, the dancer with the trill of the instrument are in perfect sync.

All eyes are watching this small dancer unify everyone with the sound and pitch of the clarinet. The new movement now begins to join the audience with the dancers. The trill of the clarinet gets higher and higher, the small dancer twirls faster and faster, weaving in and out of each dancer who is following the flow of the strings and the beat of the percussion.

Black

Silence

The whole stage freezes, no movement, no music, no lights.

Slowly the audience begins to clap, faster and faster the hands go, a new rhythm begins. This time coming from the audience. After a moment or two, soft lights are on the stage, there are two rows of dancers, the percussion dancers and the string dancers, the first group comes forward and bows, the audience applauds with shouts of bravo. The first group splits and walks back to form two lines. The second group steps forward and takes their bow, more screams and shouts. Finally, the two original lines have formed an aisle for the smallest of dancers to come forward. The crowd is now standing on its feet. The lights dim again and the dancers walk backwards watching the audience. The stage’s curtain comes down slowly and the audience has yet to stop applauding.

The dancers gather around each other, not leaving the stage yet, they are quietly holding on to each other, overwhelmed by the response they are receiving, some tears are shed. Since the audience hasn’t stopped the curtain begins lifting again. The dancers turn and see the opening again. As a group they walk forward and span out along the front edge of the stage.

First, they all look down at the orchestra and they hold out their hands and begin to clap for their accompanists’ performance. The members of the orchestra stand to their acknowledgment and in appreciation, they bow to the dancers and then turn to do the same to the audience. The dancers look up and applaud the lighting people the same way; they begin to blow kisses to the audience. Joining hands, the dancers take one more bow and walk back under the curtain that is now coming down.

The audience begins to leave having been exposed to an emotional rollercoaster of sights and sounds. Each person walking away smiling and talking about how much they were personally affected by and enjoyed the night’s entertainment.

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Miri barely slept last night, still feeling high from the reaction to the performance at the Gregg's Theater. Nothing can bring her down today. The power of the orchestra pushed the dancers to their very best, the lighting people helped them find all their markers on the stage, everyone pulled together to make the performance into more of an experience than something to watch.

Miri assumes she is the only one who came home to an empty apartment last night. Most of the people hooked up with each other from the production before they left, a few are married and left with spouses. Miri chose to go on her own, she didn't need to celebrate with anyone; the audience gave her all she needed. When she finally did fall asleep last night, she slept knowing that she and the clarinet player gave the audience a performance of a lifetime and they, with their applause, gave her a blanket of appreciation to fall asleep under.

Today all the performers are required to show up at the theater to hear what the director and producer felt about the production. Whether or not the financial backers will let them continue. Miri does not think they will go on. Last night's audience was there because of a charity function performance. Each one of them paid top dollar for their seats and the charity received 60% of the earnings. They probably aren't the typical theater goer in which to judge by. Still, she knows she did her best and the audience showed her they enjoyed her performance.

All that aside though, she has never affected a group the way she did last night. As she was moving to the motion of her clarinet she found herself physically part of the sound coming out of the instrument. Her ears heard the sounds, they flowed through her veins and into her feet and all the way through to her fingertips. Her feet felt the beat and motion of the percussion sounds and moved accordingly. The producers and directors allowed the last dance to be somewhat of an improvisation. Most likely the cast could not redo last night's ending even if they tried. Close but definitely not exact.

Miri doesn't think it matters if they say there are no more performances, she has something in her back pocket that she is dying to get started with. She is small physically but she has shown them all that size doesn't make you a better dancer, that long legs don't make you capable of doing more. Miri sets herself in motion to get to the theater on time, she hates being late unlike some of the others who have egos larger than the doorway entrance and believe there really is a thing called fashionably late and that they are entitled to oblige by that. Which to them means, any time they show up is the right time, figuring people will wait for them. That they *are* that important.

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Miri walks into the theater and finds she is the first of the dancers to be here. Part of her is not surprised but the rest of her is very disappointed. She greets all the orchestra members that are there and the lighting crew. The clarinet player who worked closely with her runs up to her and gives her a big hug.

"Oh darlin you were wonderful last night. I can't believe you heard my every note. I watched the video with the orchestra this morning. We've been here since 7:00 this morning so we could see the whole performance. Oh, I'm so proud of you, you stole the show." He hugs her tightly and kisses the top of her head.

"What do you mean you saw it? I didn't know we were being recorded." She says.

"Really? No one told you? Oh darlin, we were all recorded last night, they highlighted the orchestra as well as the dancers, the whole thing. It's going to be shown on public television for their next fundraiser. They said they aren't even going to have to do any editing. The cameramen were blown away by you.

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Everyone told me so. They think we must have practiced for hours and hours together privately.” His words come out as excited as he can make them.

The orchestra director praised him last night and again this morning when they watched the video. “Come Miri, the orchestra director wants to talk to you.” He takes her hand and brings her to orchestra’s director.

“Miri! I only have one word, perfection. Down in the pit we don’t always get a chance to see the performance going on, but watching the video this morning. Yeah, perfection is the best word I can come up with. Well done my dear, well done.” He puts his hand out to shake hers.

Miri shakes his hand but is still in shock by the reaction of the orchestra. Surely the rest of the dancers deserve as much praise as she does. She and Maxwell walk back into the auditorium to see who has come in so far. Miri stops walking and stares at the seats in the audience. All she sees are orchestra players, lighting people, make-up people, stagehands, no dancers. Not one of them has bothered to show up yet.

“Maxwell, this is wrong. We were all told the time to show up. It’s not very respectful to not be here.” Her hand is on her heart. This looks very bad on the performers, she thinks to herself. As if they think they are too important to show up. She finds herself breathing heavy, but not in an excited way, in a fearful way.

Maxwell puts his hands on her shoulders and bends down a bit to look her in the eye. “Miri, my dear, you can’t be hurt by their inaction. Come on, take a deep breath. That’s a girl. Do it one more time. You ok?” he asks

“No, I don’t mean to be hurt but yes, I am calmer we can go sit down now.” She says softly not even trying to hide her hurt anymore.

As Miri and Maxwell get closer to the ‘audience’, the people there start clapping. Miri looks around to see what they are clapping about, she looks on stage and only sees the producer and director there. They are smiling at her too and joining in the clapping. Miri turns to Maxwell with a questioning look on her face.

Before he answers the producer begins to speak. “Miri, please come sit down among your fans.” He says. Miri walks slowly and Maxwell pushes her lower back to the front of the audience chairs. All the while her head shaking no.

“Miri, we made this get together early in the morning because we knew you’d be the only one to show up. However, if anyone did show up we’d make them understand who the real star of the show was last night. The simple answer is you. Well, you and Maxwell here. After reviewing the video last night and this morning I think everyone here is in agreement that your match-up is like no other on stage right now. You allowed yourself to be free with the music while the others were clearly choreographed. When you see the video yourself, you will see the difference.

As the people around you already know, the theater did not pick us up as a permanent performance. They loved the work for the charity and said we helped raise a lot more money than they would have on their own. Happy people open wallets, they told me. Many gave extra money after seeing your performance.

But the good news is that the orchestra director and I would like you and Maxwell to work together again. In a production catered to both of you. There were two people here last night that offered to back this project up if I can make something happen. All you have to do is say yes and I’ll make this new show happen.” He looks down at her and she looks to Maxwell who smiles at her.

“This is not true.” She whispers to him

“Yes, yes it is, my dear.” He says smiling even bigger than before. He had no idea this was coming, his insides are going to explode right now. A private production featuring him? His dreams aren’t even this good.

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She looks behind her at the orchestra’s director. He befriended her the first day this production was being put together. “Miri, you are a musician’s dream. You don’t only hear the music, you feel the rhythms and when we all saw the video that is what we saw, the beat is inside you. The music only let you release your own beat. I speak for this whole orchestra when I say we’d love to be part of any production that features you.” He smiles at her.

Miri looks around the room, she stands to see everyone around her. They are all smiling. The producer speaks again, “Miri. You’ve shown exemplary behavior throughout this whole production. Your promptness shows you care about your work, it is a shame so many others don’t share your level of respect. You bring cheer each day and your inner love for your work, keeps us all trying to do our best for you. That’s right. For you. So, what do you say my dear?” he asks.

Miri does not know what to do right now. Before she gets a chance to answer some of the other dancers mosey onto the stage laughing with each other as if nothing important is going on in front of them. Miri respects others and their talents, she does not understand why so many in this particular group don’t respect anyone except themselves.

“You said it would be with Maxwell and this orchestra?” she asks.

“Yes, none other, I wouldn’t have it any other way.” The producer says.

Maxwell takes her hand in his and stares at her and smiles, “What do you say, partners?” he asks.

Miri stands up to be at the same height as Maxwell is sitting, she leans over and hugs him. “I hope I don’t disappoint anyone.” She whispers to him.

Watching this exchange, the producer asks, “Is that a yes?”

Miri looks at him and nods her head, she has no words. More of the dancers have come in and assembled on the stage as if they own it. The producer turns to see them all looking as if they are still asleep. “Ladies and gentlemen there will be no more of this production. You can all go back to bed now.” He says as disappointed as Miri was.

They start to grumble about having no reason to come in then, about getting their last paycheck, about needing a job and asking what else they can do for him. To him the sounds of graining voices crying out like small school children is quite a disappointment.

“I will be starting on my next production but it is already full. You’re dismissed, your last check will come in the mail.” He turns to leave the stage, but before he leaves he turns to see Miri looking sad and watching the other dancers, he catches her eye and smiles at her and nods before he leaves the stage.

Several orchestra players have already come up to Miri and congratulate her. “Hey what’s with the attention to the little one?” One of the dancers asks. The others look over and see a crowd around her.

One of the string players looks over at the dancers on stage and say, “The only little dancers I see are on the ones on the stage.” He tells them in disgust.

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Miri and Maxwell have been meeting each other every day at a dance studio. Sometimes one of the other players come and they jam for a while as she dances to whatever it is they are playing.

The orchestra’s director sometimes shows up to these sessions as well the producer, they are trying to figure out where to go with this type of production. What kind of tempo do they want to keep up, how long do they want to make the show, how long will people sit and watch one dancer. These are the thoughts they need to figure out.

Miri stops in the middle of a session and looks at the producer, “Maybe we need to audition other dancers to see if they can follow the same kind of rhythm. I don’t think I’m good enough to do a whole show myself. It is very daunting.” She says shyly.

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“I’ve been thinking about that. But where would we find the type of dancer you are? The kind that can show the sounds of the music by their movements? Miri a deaf person can watch that video and know the sounds that came out of the clarinet. Do you understand what I’m saying?” he asks.

“I can’t be the only one sir. Maybe it would be best to ask dancers who aren’t already professionals. The kind of dancer who is still willing to be taught how to think about dancing. Personally, I learned from my grandfather.” She says.

“Your grandfather was a dancer?” he asks.

“No, he is a musician and told me that my body was my instrument in showing sound since I could not make any of my own on the instruments he tried to teach me.” She smiles being able to quote her favorite person.

“A wise man, I’m sure. If he is still alive I’d love to speak with him.” The producer says.

“Really?” she asks.

“Really.” He says, thinking that any man who taught his own granddaughter to personify sound with her body is someone he’d like to meet.

Miri dials her grandfather and in a shaking voice she says, “Poppop? The producer of the production would like to speak with you.” She pauses a minute and hands her phone to the producer.

He takes the phone and walks out of the room. Maxwell begins to play, the bongo player catches up and compliments his beat, the violinist picks up his instrument and adds his own touch to it, Miri closes her eyes and absorbs the sounds, she begins to move to express all that she is hearing with her body.

The producer walks in to see this happening. There are two men with him. Everyone continues to play as long as Miri continues to dance. A third man walks in and he begins to whistle. Miri knows that whistle, she turns to see her grandfather standing there smiling. She runs into his arms.

“Maxwell, everyone, this is my Poppop.” She says with pride.

“Mind if I take hold of that bongo?” he asks.

“Go ahead sir.” The player steps aside.

“Ok Angel, let’s show them what you’re really made of. Maxwell?” he looks to Maxwell who holds up his clarinet ready to play “Beat first, high notes second then we can bring in the lower sounds.” He looks to the violinist who nods.

The three musicians begin to play, Miri closes her eyes again and begins to move with her grandfather. He always knows exactly how to get her moving. He knows what her body responds to, every dancer has their own beat he always told her.

After a few minutes the producer begins to clap and so do the other two men. “I’m sold. Ok, Miri, you are right, we can’t do this as a one woman show, but you will be our featured dancer. Mr. Harold here will be the one to help us find the dancers to work with you, ones who can dance the same way as you. I also like your idea of finding those who aren’t set in their ways yet. This is going to work ladies and gentlemen, bigger than we originally thought. Much bigger. Ok, let’s meet here in four days; that will give Mr. Harold time to get the word out about auditions.

Maxwell, bring your clarinet to the auditions, Mr. Harold will be here too and a couple other people. Miri, you bring yourself, that’s enough to fill a room.” He smiles at her.

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Miri and Maxwell have been spending a lot of time together these past four days. Maxwell has pulled in three of his favorite orchestra players to join them each day at the studio. They have been recording each session to help decide what to use and what not to later on.

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Miri loves all the time she has been spending with Maxwell and the guys. Especially Maxwell, she has talked to her grandfather about him numerous times. He likes Maxwell too and says he thinks there is a reason why his playing is so in tuned to her. Miri blushed the first time he said that to her. Maxwell is older than her and a lot more successful. She doesn’t think he will be romantically involved in her for more than a moment. He only likes the way they work together.

Maxwell watches Miri glide around the studio and his heart beats with every touchdown of her foot, every swing of her arm or twirl of her body. Every time she arches her back he wants to run and catch her and hold her into his arms. Poppop has already given him permission to approach her about dating but he is scared. Miri is, well, she is Miri. The other performers love her too, they all see the potential of this show and are very excited to be a part of it.

“Miri, let’s go, the first set of dancers are here to audition. They’ve been watching from the other room and now understand what we are looking for. So, come sit next to your Poppop and we’ll let the musicians do what they need to do to inspire the dancers.” Mr. Harold says.

The first three dancers come in, the bongo starts to set a beat, only one dancer is moving, the violinist is playing now, giving a melody to the beat, still only one dancer is moving. When the clarinet begins to play the other two dancers join in with very disjointed, choreographed movements, probably something from a previous performance.

Both Miri and her grandfather shake their heads. Maxwell is the first to stop playing, he sees it too. Poppop dismisses two of the dancers, to the third he says, “I think you have your own beat my dear. Welcome aboard, please walk out through this door and there will be someone there to explain what is going to be going on and what you need to do.”

“Thank you sir, thank you for believing in me.” She says with tears forming in her eyes. Miri walks over to her to give her a hug, she understands what it means to be believed in.

This continues for the next couple of hours. When the final three dancers are finished, they have only found a total of six people to be part of this production. Only one of them being a man. The producer said he really wanted eight. Mr. Harold calls to tell him what he has, “We only have two more sets of three dancers coming tomorrow. How should we handle this?” he asks.

“If you can’t find two more on the same level, then we will deal with six. The orchestra director has already come up with the first half of the score in which they will dance to. It involves many solos by various instruments, always beginning and ending with the clarinet and our little dancer.

Now, all of these dancers you’ve found, they, what is it you say? Use their body as their instrument?” the producer asks.

“At the end of the day, all of them, including Miri were in the studio, they were having a great time it barely looks like work when you watch them. I’m confident we will have a fantastic and unique production.” Mr. Harold says.

“Good to hear, we have the theater to practice in, our backers told us last night. First day of production will be on Monday. See you all there.” He says and hangs up.

Miri has never worked this hard in her life, it has been the most exhilarating four months of her life. Working with the orchestra director directly has been an experience most dancers don’t get to have. The group of musicians that were picked out have really brought the music alive that the director has composed. It was decided that a full orchestra was not necessary for this type of production.

This is all new for everyone involved, musicians, dancers, lighting, stage crew, everyone has been given freedoms that they have never been given before. Opening night is in three days and they are already sold out for the first month.

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"Maxwell, would you like to come over for dinner tonight?" Miri asks

"Um, sure Miri, you want me to bring take out?" he asks.

"No, I'd rather cook if that is alright with you." She says.

"I'd love to." Maxwell has been so preoccupied with learning the new music and practicing with Miri that he hasn't had time to stop and think about her as anything more than the visual to his sound.

The rest of the afternoon is going to take forever, now that he knows what he will be doing afterwards. About damn time, he thinks to himself. He looks at Miri and watches her, watches how she helps guide all the dancers into a euphoric state of dance. Sometimes it takes all his concentration to keep playing because he is caught breathless watching them, watching her.

This is the first production he has ever been involved with where the musicians are on stage with the dancers. Everyone is part of this show and each and every person has been given the utmost respect by the director as well as the producer.

"That's a wrap ladies and gentlemen! Even though opening night is close, I want everyone to take tomorrow off. We all need a breathing day. The intensity of this production is going to carry us for a long time. I hope we can all keep it up. As a music director I've never felt so exhausted. Here is to us!" he lifts an imaginary cup to toast everyone around him.

Everyone applauds and then they gather their belongings and begin to leave. Maxwell walks over to Miri, "Ready to go?" he asks as he offers her his arm.

She willingly takes his arm and they walk out of the theater together, making a clear statement to everyone around. Moments later her phone buzzes, *'hey baby, its Poppop, in case you're wondering, he has already asked my permission, I like him, see where this goes. ☺'*

Miri smiles and looks up at Maxwell. "You asked Poppop if you could go out with me?"

Maxwell looks at her and grins, "A long time ago, I haven't built up enough courage to ask you though, thank you for taking the first step." He pauses, "Do we need to get any groceries?" he asks.

"No, I told you, I have food in my place, I prefer to cook myself. Are you allergic to anything?" she asks.

"No, I'm known in my family as the human garbage disposal." He says with a bit of a blush.

"Good to know, I was planning on making pesto chicken. I'm sure you'll survive." Miri laughs.

The two of them walk the rest of the way talking easily and laughing. "Here we are." She says in front of her apartment. Maxwell follows her up the steps to her apartment in silence. He is not sure what to do with himself right now.

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"Morning Miri, thank you again for the wonderful dinner and the great company last night. I had a great time." Maxwell says

"Maxwell, you thanked me last night, three times. I didn't do much, I made a simple dinner and we sat and played board games and laughed at each other." She smiles on the phone.

"What are you going to do with your day off today?" he asks.

"I was going to go visit the cemetery to my grandmother and my father. I want to tell them about the show, then I thought I'd take care of the apartment, clean it up a bit, take a long shower and sleep, lots and lots of sleep." She laughs.

"Do you think you can squeeze a lunch in with me? I'd like to bring you over to the best Italian place in the state." He smiles knowing his mom has been asking to meet her for weeks now.

"Sounds perfect. I'll meet you downstairs around 1:00." She says and hangs up quickly.

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“Oh Daddy, what do I do now? If this doesn’t work out we have to work together for the next couple of months at least.” She sits down, wondering what she is getting herself into.

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Miri has had no time to rest in the past few months, performances take a lot out of you when you do them every night, six days a week. As much as she loves the idea of this particular production, she is losing her love of performing. She has no life, she wakes up and does her stretching so she can get to work, at work they have a couple hours of rehearsals and then there is the performance. The only breaks they have are for eating and those aren’t even very long.

Yesterday, after a particularly hard week, she said something to the producer by accident. He did not seem surprised at what she said. She is very anxious now to go into work to see what will happen with what she said. Will he replace her permanently? More importantly, will she care? Miri goes through her usual morning routine and heads over to the theater. Her heart is really not into this today and she does not know how she will pull off the performance tonight if she can’t feel the music, people will be able to tell, she is positive they will.

Miri decides to walk this morning, maybe the rhythm of the city will help her get back into the groove. She does not turn on her own music to listen to either. Only the sounds around her. As Miri passes a construction site, she stops to listen to the rhythm of the machines. Bong, shriek, bong, shriek, bong, bong, creeeeeeeak. Now she walks a few steps more and listens; ping, ping, ping, chug, ping, ping, ping, chug, chug, ping, ping, ping, chug clash! Now she walks back over to the first group of sounds, her eyes are closed, her body feeling the sounds. Miri begins to feel the sounds, they are penetrating her as any traditional instrument would. The harder sounds are hitting her in the chest the smoother ones are rolling down her legs to her feet and they’re beginning to move. Miri has yet to open her eyes, she is standing there and letting the natural sounds get inside of her. She does not need a traditional instrument to get her moving, she needs the simplicity of a natural rhythm. Miri’s arms have begun to move and before she is even aware, Miri is moving to all of the rhythms of the construction site.

The men and women working there have noticed her and are watching the performance. A couple of them are even recording it. In the recess of her mind, Miri begins to hear the familiar sound of a clarinet. It could be a whistle at the site, but that makes no sense. Without wanting to stop, Miri takes her surroundings in and continues to dance. At one point the shrill of the clarinet brings the dance to a halt. There are many people clapping around Miri. She turns to face the clapping and sees that most of them are the workers of the site. Miri waves and smiles at them. One man approaches her, “You are the dancer from the Gregg Theater aren’t you?” he asks.

“Yes, yes I am.” Miri says shyly.

“I have my program here with me in my pocket, would you sign it?” he asks.

“I’d love to.” Miri says much more cheerfully than she spoke to herself earlier this morning.

“And you sir? Can I get yours too?” he says over Miri’s shoulder.

Miri turns around and sees Maxwell holding on to his clarinet, he holds it up like he is toasting her with a wine glass. “I came to pick you up but your neighbor said you left already, this is the natural way to walk to the theater. Are you mad?” he asks.

Miri watches as Maxwell signs the man’s program. “Here you go sir.” He says.

“I hope I didn’t bother you all this morning.” Miri says to the construction worker.

“On the contrary, I think you gave new meaning to the sounds we take for granted. We hear them so often we forget that they are rhythmic, thank you. Everyone is sharing their videos. I hope you don’t mind.” He says.

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“I dance for myself mostly, but when others appreciate what they see and enjoy, well, that’s a real treat to me. Enjoy.” Miri leans over to him and kisses his cheek. She turns and slides her hand inside Maxwell’s arm. “Ready?” she says happily feeling as if she has found what she needed in order to carry on with her day.

Maxwell takes Miri’s hand and covers it with his other hand. “Feeling the rhythm this morning Miri?” he asks.

“Actually I was feeling nothing when I woke, I used the sounds of the city to wake me up this morning. Maxwell, can I tell you a secret?” she asks.

“Sure. Everything ok?” he asks.

“I made the mistake of talking out loud yesterday after practice, the producer heard me.” She pauses and takes a deep breath. “I said I was no longer feeling this. I said I think the production has reached peak. I love to dance Maxwell, but being forced to do this kind of grueling schedule and work, well I’m losing my love of the rhythms you produce so beautifully. So, this morning I went looking for it. Poppop told me that if I ever forget how to feel it, I should stop. I couldn’t be happier being part of this production, but what do I do now?” she asks as she stops walking.

Maxwell turns to her, “You do what you need to do. If you need to give notice today, then do so. Things like this happen all the time. Not everyone stays throughout a production.” Maxwell watches as Miri’s face goes from her happy self to very concerned. “How about you call Poppop after rehearsal today and see what advice he will give you.” Maxwell says softly.

“I want to do this on my own. Come, we’re going to be late.” She says in a voice that comes out a bit short. Miri thinks on his words, she doesn’t want to call her grandfather, she wants to be on her own. She is not a baby. She wants to be an adult. She’d love to be in a relationship too but after her one dinner with Maxwell, they became so busy with the production that he either forgot about her, or decided that she was too young and too new to this business to get involved with.

He always lets her slide her arm into his, it’s nice to walk with him, but lately, well actually for a long time, Miri has felt this is a one-sided relationship. She likes Maxwell, he understands her, most of the time anyway. How can you care about someone and tell her to leave so easily? Miri sighs and continues to walk along to the theater with Maxwell.

~ ~ ~

Rehearsal is over and Maxwell can’t find Miri anywhere. “Has anyone seen Miri?” he asks the stage full of people.

“She left with her Poppop about ten minutes ago Maxwell. Didn’t you know?” a dancer asks curiously.

He nods his head indicating that he now remembers this information so they don’t think he doesn’t know. On his way out of the theater, Maxwell passes the producer “Maxwell, can I speak to you?”

Maxwell turns to the producer, “Something up?” he asks.

“I’ve spoken to our original backers as well as the director. It seems we may have to shut down.” He says.

“Shut down?” he asks.

“In the beginning, our theater sales were amazing, but it has tapered down and we are worried that we would end up going out because of bad sales. It is better to go out on top. Our thought process is; to advertise that the show is closing in two weeks, people will run to see the final episodes, this always work. We go out on top and the video sales go through the roof. I wanted to let you know first since you were one of the reasons this whole production started to begin with.” He says.

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“Have you told Miri?” Maxwell asks.

“We had a long talk in between rehearsals. Personal question?” he asks.

“Um, sure.” Maxwell answers.

“Are you actually dating Miri or simply using her as arm candy. Because I can tell you right now that there will be an entire orchestra who will beat you senseless if you harm her, forget about her grandfather.” He says.

Maxwell takes a step back in shock. Outside of that one dinner, they haven’t dated at all. Not that it’s any business of theirs. He has picked her up from rehearsals and even walked her home many nights, but their conversations have stayed to the production. With the production ending, he will have to rethink if they are friends or if they want to be more.

“Sir, I respect you as a producer and you have done an amazing job with this production, but contrary to popular belief, I don’t hold the same familiarity as others do. I like to keep my personal life, personal. What I *will* say though is that hurting Miri has never crossed my mind.” With that he walks out of the theater.

~ ~ ~

“Poppop, are you ok with the closing of the production? I mean this has brought you back to working on the thing you love most and given you a nice paycheck you weren’t expecting.” Miri asks.

“Miri dear, I’m fine. Like you said, I wasn’t expecting this money, feels like a retired man’s lottery actually. And besides I’ve been able to see you almost every day for the past few months. You’re my girl Miri, we’re connected.” He says.

“Poppop, you’ve given me my life. You taught me how to live in a world full of rhythm. If it wasn’t for you I’d never find my inner beat. But Poppop, I don’t think I want to get paid for this anymore. I want to dance for fun. Like I did at the construction site. I told you about that right?” Miri says.

“Ok Miri, what else do you like to do? Do you want to go to school? Because if you do, I’ll be happy to support you in that. You know your father always wanted you to go to college. He used to say you belonged doing math like your grandmother. It was me who told him that your creativity isn’t in numbers.” He looks at her sincerely. “I stilted that college opportunity. I’m sorry honey.” He says with his hands wrapped around hers.

“No, I think I needed to find this part of me. If I never found this I’ll bet I would have gone on to something else and I would have wondered what was wrong all the time. But now I know myself, I know what is inside of me and I am still not quite 30 which means Poppop that I have my whole life to do something else and if I ever need an outlet for my restlessness, I’ll know what to do. You gave me that, I’ll be forever grateful.

How about we go for an early dinner then we go sit in the park and watch people behave badly?” Miri smiles at her grandfather.

“Best offer I’ve had in weeks.” the two of them continue to walk along the avenue laughing and leaning into each other.

~ ~ ~

Maxwell sits on the park bench and thinks. Many months ago, he was completely smitten by Miri. Or was he? Was he enchanted by her talents only? The way she responds to his music? Is she as beautiful in person as she is in his own mind? What does he want from her, is there an us? So many questions running through his mind. He sits with his head down in his hands, pushing his elbows further into his knees.

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“You’re a damn fool Maxwell. A damned fool.” He whispers to himself.

Maxwell continues to stew on all of his thoughts, he has no idea how much time has passed until his phone begins to ring. He fumbles it out of his pocket, “yes?” he asks sounding groggy.

“Maxwell?” Miri asks softly.

“Yes Miri.” He says feeling tears rising into his eyes at the sound of her voice.

“Um, well, the thing is, the performance begins in ten minutes. Are you ok? Where are you?” she asks.

Maxwell looks down at his watch. He has spent the better part of three hours sitting here on the bench if it is almost performance time. He sits up to see where he is, then he exhales. “I’m in the park. I’ll be there soon.” And he hangs up before any questions could be asked. Maxwell runs at top speed the few blocks to make the performance on time.

He rushes into the dressing area and changes, grabs his instrument and finds his place on stage with only moments to spare. Miri looks at him from across the stage. She knows something is wrong, she will ask him later.

When it comes to his solo with Miri, the improv part, Maxwell finds himself playing a rather solemn melody. As he sees Miri dancing, the look in her eyes, he sees a look of worry, she smiles at him. Not at the audience or anyone else, only at him. His melody picks up and the percussion follow suit. The notes of his clarinet begin to speak the words to her that he has been afraid to speak all of these months together.

He loves this woman before him, really does. He wants to know all about her. He continues to play, now beginning a happier rhythm, rolling into a softer rhythm, then he slides towards sensual, he feels it, Miri feels it, the audience feels it. Everyone on stage does as well.

Without notice, everything goes black, sound and lights all at once. Performance over. Miri finds herself panting like she never did before. Her hand is on her own heart, she is staring at Maxwell still, in the darkness of the stage, she knows he is staring at her too. In the still of the darkness, Maxwell gets up from his seat and crosses the stage quietly to where she is standing, with little or no regard for where they are, he bends down and pulls her in for a very intense kiss. Neither of them notice the curtain rising until they hear the applause from the audience. He looks down at her and whispers, “My thoughts exactly.” Miri smiles at him, takes his hand and they walk to the front of the stage to bow, she turns back to call all of her fellow dancers to join them in a group bow.

The orchestra players join in a line behind them. The crowd has not stopped clapping. This feels as if they have started all over again. The response from the crowd keeps going on. With a signal from the sidelines, everyone begins to walk backwards waving to the audience. The curtain comes down and all the dancers run to Miri to give her hugs and kisses.

“Miri, that was the best one yet.” One says.

“I want to grow to be like that. You inspire me.” Another one says.

“I hope that kiss felt as good as it looked.” Said a third with a smirk.

The orchestra is attending to Maxwell in the same way. One of the stagehands comes to the crowd on stage and says, “Producer wants to speak to everyone, please change and meet him back on stage in five minutes.”

Everyone looks from one to the other not knowing what is going on. People scatter to the dressing areas and change quickly. They all meet back on the stage and sit down waiting for the director.

“Ah good, you’re all here. Hell of a performance tonight. Without you knowing what was going on, you all seemed to pull out your A game tonight, I for one appreciate that fact greatly.



We were approached three weeks ago by an independent movie maker who saw an early performance and wanted to film our performance, edit where necessary, and produce it for sale all around the world. The air in the theater tonight could not have been more contagious. Sweeny you did a phenomenal job on strings tonight and Carny? Those drums never sounded better. Really, everyone pulled out all the stops. I don't know how you knew what to do but you did. I won't even comment on Miri and Maxwell's performance." He pauses as everyone laughs. Maxwell squeezes Miri's hand in his a little bit more, his heart and body parts still feeling the effects of that kiss.

"That kiss is now immortalized in film. I don't think you could reproduce something like that if you tried. But no worries, we all felt it. In fact, I heard more than one patron comment that your whole performance felt like you let them in on an intimate part of your life. Others said they have never before been affected like this by a dance number.

Then when I started asking about people's opinions, everyone had a different favorite part. Christian, your early number received high marks from many patrons. All those spins in the air grabbed them, good for you. Overall probably our best night so far. But don't feel any pressure, I know it won't be like this again. Nights like tonight only come out once and we were lucky enough to capture everything on tape.

The movie maker says he plans on entering our show in many of the competitions he knows worldwide. Don't worry, I gave him all of your names and told him nothing is done without every one of you listed and that each and every one of you receives equal royalties. I had my lawyer look over the agreement many times to make sure this would happen for your benefit. I'm sorry I did all of this without telling you but it was so last minute by the time all the papers were gone through." He stops again to look for reactions.

"Sir, can we get a copy? I mean, I'll buy one myself actually. I know my family would love to see tonight's performance. After they see what I do, I'm sure they will show it off and want more copies." One of the orchestra members asks.

"Let me ask him now, how many of you would like your own copy?" He looks around to see that each and every member of the cast and crew has their hands raised. He nods, yes tonight's performance was something special and why shouldn't they be able to show this off? He sends the text off to the man in charge of the production of this movie.

"We'll know soon." He says holding up his phone. "Now, we all know that we are ending this in only two weeks. If you're smart, you'll look now for auditions coming up. Our show is ending on top and it will be fresh in other producers' minds right now. If anyone needs a reference letter I will be happy to write one. I have never said that to a whole cast before, but this one? Yes, each and every one of you. That goes for all of the crew as well." He smiles and pulls out his phone to read a text.

"Good news, he is happy to make them, he will charge you only his costs as you were the performers. He says he will have them ready before the end of this production. Ok ladies and gentlemen go get a good night's rest. I have a feeling the next two weeks are going to be full houses especially when word gets out about tonight." He smiles at Maxwell. Good for him, he figured it out and it looks like Miri is very receptive, he thinks to himself.

~ ~ ~

Maxwell and Miri walk out together as they have many times, only this time their fellow cast-mates are congratulating them as if their kiss was an announcement of some kind. They are both smiling when they finally make their way out to the street and begin to head home.

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“I bought Chinese food last night but never ate. I know it’s not as good warmed up but would you care to join me?” Miri asks.

“I would love to. Are you sure there is enough for two?” Maxwell asks.

“Oh, um, well.” She sighs. “I’m kind of a Chinese food nut, when I order I usually order five different things and pick at all of them.” She tells him a bit embarrassed.

Maxwell stops and pulls her to the side then tilts her chin up, “I do that with Italian foods.” He smiles then bends down to kiss her again, this time a bit more privately as they are near her apartment building. And definitely taking a lot more time.

When Miri pulls away she rests her head with her chin to her chest to catch her breath. “Don’t take this the wrong way but if I don’t eat I will be completely useless later on.” She smiles up at him.

Maxwell kisses her forehead and turns her around to finish walking to her place. This time it is comfortable silence that is between them. Miri opens her apartment door and walks straight into the kitchen to take out the food she has. She takes out a couple of plates and serves one dish then the other, she puts one in the microwave and turns to see Maxwell standing almost right behind her, smiling at her. “What?” she asks curiously.

“You ordered all of my favorite foods.” He laughs. “Not even kidding. Hot mustard?” he asks.

“You bet!” Miri pulls out a whole bottle of it and puts it on the table. The two of them eat quietly together. Miri is the first to speak, “After a hard night of dance I’m always starved. I come home every night and eat a large meal then I pass out on the couch. Wake up at 3:00 in the morning and finally go to my bed. What is your schedule like after playing in a show?”

“Schedule? I have none. Sometimes I grab food on the way home. I don’t like to eat beforehand because if anything makes you gassy it is really hard to hold in a burp while you’re trying to play a clarinet.” He laughs.

Miri begins to laugh harder than she has in months. “Oh my” she holds her side, her tears are coming down her face because she can’t seem to control her laughter. Maxwell is laughing as well, it is an old joke with musicians but when he sees how much joy she is getting out of it, it brings him to laughter too.

“Well, in case you’re wondering I don’t know too many dancers who eat beans before a performance either.” The two of them laugh even harder now. “Oh Maxwell, this is too crazy. Come, let’s clean up and head to the couch.” She says.

Miri looks at her watch, because their show is early, it is only 10:00pm now. She should be exhausted, and normally she is but who could fall asleep after that stage kiss? The whole number, he was talking to her, first he was quiet almost solemn, like their first date, then the tempo picked up and so did the pitch of the instrument, but then he shifted again and his eyes and his notes were peering right through her and all of her feminine parts reacted at once, she gave it back in her movements. But now what? They have yet to be so physical with each other and now would be a giant step instead of a gradual one. She takes a deep breath, throws out the garbage and turns to see Maxwell standing right behind her again.

“The way I see things we have two choices.” He smiles.

“And those are?” she asks.

“I can pull you in close for a night we won’t soon forget.” he says softly.

“Or?” Miri swallows and tries to calm her heart from beating out of her chest.

“We can snuggle on the couch, watch a sappy movie and if we fall asleep, we fall asleep.” He whispers and places his hands on her shoulders.

“I’d love a movie, is that ok?” she asks.

“Perfect.” He smiles not knowing if he is ready himself for such a venture but he needed to say what was on his mind.

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~ ~ ~

For the past two weeks, Maxwell has come back to Miri's apartment to watch a movie and snuggle with her. After the second night they decided that it was official, they were a couple. Miri called her grandfather to let him know. He was thrilled.

Tonight, is their final performance, true to his word, the movie producer made copies for everyone in the cast and handed them out three days ago. Miri and Maxwell watched themselves that night, and when the kiss came in the movie, the one in her apartment lasted even longer.

Now, as she walks to her last performance with this cast, Miri walks in smiling. The mood is very mixed. The one thing they all agreed on is that they have never worked as hard on any production before. For those who are new to performing, they have been given quite an education. Maxwell walks in behind Miri and grabs her shoulders and kisses her cheeks one at a time from behind her. He then whispers to her, "Can't wait for the after party tonight." Then he walks away.

Mr. Harold walks in back stage, "Hello everyone, ready for tonight?" Everyone greets him with cheers. He walks directly to Miri, holds her in his arms. "I couldn't be more proud of you. This has been a great ride honey. Have you decided what is next?"

"No, but Maxwell and I have been much closer these days." She smiles at him.

"I saw the tape." He grins at her and leans down to kiss her on the cheek.

~ ~ ~

The final production went as it has been for months, flawlessly. There were multiple standing ovations and calls of 'bravo' by the audience. The third curtain call finally ends the production. Backstage there are hugs and tears and promises to keep in touch. The producer pops some Champaign and salutes each and every member of the cast and crew individually. By 10:00 in the evening everyone has left and Miri and Maxwell are headed back to her apartment again.

At the door to the building Maxwell says, "Miri, I'm going to be honest with you. I don't know if I will be able to leave tonight." He says hoping she doesn't see his heart literally beating through his chest.

Miri grabs his hand and pulls him in through the front door. "I put clean sheets on when I woke up this morning." She whispers walking up the stairs pulling him along smiling.

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