Tap Tap Tap

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The Costume Box
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Chapter 1

Tap Tap Tap

"This has to be torture!" Brayden muttered, hoping that his mom could not hear him since she was already out of the car. She rapped on the window and he unbuckled his seatbelt.

"I'm glad your sister got a ride with Tina. She'd be so distraught to see the brother she loves being so grouchy about going to her show." Brayden only grunted. "It's a short recital and it'll mean the world to her." She sighed. “Pull your pants up.” Brayden begrudgingly tugged his pants back up. “No one needs to see your underwear. They’re here to see your sister’s dance class.” Brayden rolled his eyes. “Just give it a chance. I bet you’ll like it.”

"I don't like ballet. I'm a dude!"

"It's not ballet. It's tap."

Brayden slouched in his chair, glad that his mom did not seem to mind it. Why did she make him leave his phone in the car? This had to be the stupidest thing ever.

“Ladies and gentlemen, our show is about to begin.” A voice announced.

“Great.” Brayden muttered. This was going to be bad.

Brayden soon realized it was even worse than he had imagined. A group of girls dressed as flowers came out and began to dance in unison. Tap, tap, tap. Tap, tap, tap. He

rolled his eyes and groaned, slouching farther and farther down. Maybe he could fall asleep, if it was not for all that tapping.

Tap, tap, tap. Tap, tap, tap. Why could he not get it out of his head? The tapping seemed to vibrate through him, as if it was becoming a part of him. A chill ran down his spine.

"Where are you going?" His mom whispered.

"Bathroom." Maybe it was the desperate look on his face, but she let go of his arm and allowed him to hurry out of the auditorium.

In the silence of the hall, the tapping in his head seemed even louder, as if threatening to overtake his every thought. Where was the bathroom? He saw a door and hurried toward it. Men's Room. Perfect. He would hide in there until the recital was over. He threw open the door and charged inside.

"What? Backstage? How?" He whispered, deeply confused. He turned to go back out, but all that was behind him was a pile of old props. The door was all the way over there. How had he come so far so fast?

“There you are!” A voice hissed behind him. Brayden nearly jumped out of his clothes as a hand touched his shoulder. “Cutting it a little close, aren’t we?” The woman whispered, turning him to face her.

“What? Who are”

“Hush. You’re almost on. Why are you not dressed?”

“Dressed? Wha”

“I have a spare costume here.” She handed him a sparkly red leotard with an attached tulle skirt. He made a face and tried to hand it back to her. “Oh, no you don’t. We don’t do stage fright here. You’ve worked much too hard to chicken out now.”

“What are you talking about? I don’t”

“Get undressed.” She said. Brayden tried to argue, but the stagehand or whoever she was gestured for another person to come over. Now outnumbered, the scrawny teen found it impossible to stop the two women from undressing him down to his boxer briefs and forcing him into the little girl’s dance costume. His feet protested as they pushed shiny black Mary Janes onto them, but they fit enough that he knew they would never let him take them off.

“Here’s the rest of your group.” The first woman said. He blushed, trying to tug the tulle skirt down. His underwear was poking out below the leotard. How was this okay?

“No, you need to listen to me!” He said. His shoes tapped as they pushed him over to the girls dressed the same as him. He stood at least two heads taller than any of them and looked undeniably male. All the same, the teachers surveyed the group.

“Big smiles, girls! You’re on!” The dance troupe grabbed hands with Brayden in the middle of them and began to tap out, unperturbed by Brayden’s awkward stumbles. He tried to

pull away, but it was as if his hands were glued to the girl's on either side of him and he emerged out onto the stage, the tap tap of all their shoes like thunder in his ears. "Big smiles!" The instructor whispered from just off-stage. Horrified as he was that he was out under these bright lights, dressed as he was, Brayden felt his lips part as his face forced itself into a joyful smile. Unable to let his smile fade, Brayden had no choice but to try to follow along, tap tap tap. He hoped his clothes would still tap tap tap be offstage when he was done. Somehow, *tap tap tap *he knew they would not be. His mom tap tap tap would never let him live this down. Tap tap tap.