

The Right Moves by Yeemay Chan

“Lena, are you listening?”

I was listening. I just couldn’t believe my ears.

“W-what did you say?” I stammered.

“Do you want to join our dance team?” the girl asked impatiently. “We win the talent show every year, and we need a new dancer.”

I still couldn’t believe it. The teachers sponsored a talent show each spring. It would be a huge night, and Maya Herrera wanted me to be on her dance team.

“Sure,” I said.

Maya glared at someone behind me, her pretty face looking like she had tasted something sour. “Not *her*, though,” Maya said loudly. “Just you.”

I didn’t have to turn around—I knew who she meant. “Uh, sure,” I mumbled again. Maya was already heading back to the “popular table” when I felt someone tap on my shoulder.

“What happened?” Lola asked. When I saw her confused face, it was like waking up from a dream.

Lola Reyes and I had been friends since we were little kids. Lola was a smart, funny friend.

But at school, Lola just didn’t fit in. I had never noticed when we were alone, but it was obvious to all the kids at school. Lola’s hair was frizzy and her thick glasses made her look a little like a fish. Kids in grade school could be mean.

Eight years later, Lola was as strange as ever. Girls in our school wore trendy, brand-name clothes, but Lola sewed hers. Most kids talked about TV shows and movies, but Lola didn’t even have a TV. She stood out like a sore thumb.

Sometimes, it was embarrassing to be around Lola. People said rude things about her hair, clothes, glasses—even about the fact that she got really good grades. Lola was always able to ignore what other people thought. I wasn’t.

“You’re going to be in the talent show?” Lola asked. “That’s great, Lena! I’m going to participate this year, too!”

“You are? What are you going to do?” I asked.

Lola smiled. “Oh, I’ll think of something.”

I pictured Lola in front of a huge crowd. I was worried already.

The weeks passed quickly, and I barely saw Lola because I practiced every day with Maya and the team. The other dancers already knew the steps, so I worked hard to keep up. It wasn’t as fun as I thought it would be. The other girls were picky and critical.

As the day of the talent show came closer, I felt more and more nervous. I didn’t want to stand out from the rest of the group, so I worked day and night to learn all the right moves.

Finally, the talent show came. Backstage, excitement and nervous tension filled the air as groups practiced one last time.

Lola found me and gave me a big hug.

“You’ll do great!” she said.

“I don’t know,” I whispered. “The other girls think I’m not good enough.”

Lola stopped smiling. “Lena, you care too much about what other people think,” she said. “You’re a great person and a wonderful dancer. Just be yourself.”

Soon, I was taking my place on the stage.

“Don’t mess this up,” Maya hissed as the music began.

Surprisingly, I didn’t. I remembered every step and every move. Before the music was over, the crowd was cheering. Maya’s team had won another talent show.

Lola was the last singer to perform. As the music started, I recognized the song from an old movie we had seen together a million times. It was hard to hear because the crowd was whispering and moving around. I heard some giggles. For once, Lola didn’t look like she was ignoring their comments. She looked scared.

“This ought to be good,” Maya whispered loudly next to me.

I looked at Lola. She was standing alone, her homemade dress shimmering in the light. Her eyes were shimmering, too. At last, I made a decision. For years, I had counted on Lola’s encouragement and support. Now it was my turn.

I stepped onto the stage. Behind me, Maya gasped, but Lola saw me and smiled. Together, we faced the audience and sang our favorite song. We weren’t very good. In fact, we were terrible—and the crowd let us know it! When we finished, there was a little applause and a lot of comments that I didn’t try too hard to hear.

As we walked off the stage, I knew that Lola wanted to say something, but I just laughed. Soon, Lola was laughing, too. I was done with the talent show. I was done with Maya and her dance group. And I was done trying to find all the right moves.