

Charlotte's Single Step

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Charlotte peered from behind the curtain. As she held it slightly askew, she noticed how soft the velvet felt beneath her fingers. Its texture contrasted the turmoil swirling within her. Almost every seat was already occupied, soon it would be a full house. The crowd seemed rowdy and unrefined, an apparent mismatch for her light, lyrical voice. But they paid to be here, today, to hear her. Her hands were clammy; her mouth dry. She could feel her abdomen quiver with anxiousness. She was afraid. Her heart pumped double time, pounding in her ears. Professionals had trained her, chosen her attire, artfully applied her make-up. She began naturally radiant, and now she was ravishing. Beautiful voice, beautiful appearance, beautiful venue, this was any professional's dream, but she dreaded the next few moments. It was almost time to appear from backstage. Lights already bathed the warm wooden stage planks with amber hues.

Her benefactor believed in her, rented the auditorium, and promoted the event. He encouraged her at every step. Motionless, he sat in the third row, near the aisle, surrounded by wily patrons. He had invited them here to share her talents with them, to introduce her. He wanted to bless them, to treat them, to offer them something otherwise inaccessible to them. This stage, this performance, was his idea.

She faced a quandary. Here in the dim light, behind the curtains, backstage, she could claim to be a serious vocalist; she could feign professionalism; she could speak the trade language without blemish. But, this was her time. Years of practice led to this moment. Everything was flawlessly advertised. She had rehearsed to perfection. Her preparation was thorough. The schedule allowed her to stand here totally rested and completely ready.

Walking out on that stage would distinguish her from stagehands, from make-up artists, from technicians. It was a defining moment. Out there, she couldn't talk about performing, she'd have to do it. She couldn't claim the ability, she'd have to use it. Out there, in the light, before everyone, was the place where performers lived. Once she appeared from behind the curtain, her future was set. Events would unfold. She considered slipping back into the shadows. She considered this last chance to cut and run. But, until she walked into that light, until she walked in front of this audience, until she did what others claimed she could, she was not a performer, nor an artist. Without this step she would only be a dreamer with a wish, but not a professional. Out there was her destiny. She glanced down. Somehow she expected to see a line drawn on the floor in front of her, a line to be crossed, taunting her to choose a side. It was time.

She chose to trust. She summoned her courage. She straightened her posture and breathed deeply. Letting the soft black curtain fall naturally to its place, she shifted her weight and, then, stepped forward. Amber light washed over her. The shadows let go. She had chosen. The imaginary line stayed behind, its taunts silenced by a single step.

I created Charlotte. She is fictitious, but everyone in this room is real, very real. And, each of us has a benefactor, a stage, shadows, and a line. We're being taunted today, choose a side. Out there is our destiny, in the light.