

Carol Morosco

Pandemic



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Chapter 1

Mya's Story - Present

Something bad was going to happen. Something was coming to kill people. Mya kept hearing her teacher's words echoing in her head.

After school, Mya hurried home. She wanted to ask her mother if what Mrs. Eggers told the class was true.

Mya Bennett ran past all the familiar sights of her neighborhood. She didn't stop to pet Mr. Burke's yellow dog tied to the lamp post. No hungry peeks into the doughnut shop window. No jumping over the cracks in the sidewalk. She needed to get home fast. She could hear ambulance sirens screaming in nearby streets. *Have people started dying already, she wondered?*

Mya quickened her pace and burst through the front door yelling, "Mom, are you home?" She stood still listening for her mother's voice. No sound. Mya hadn't expected her mom to be home. Her mother was most often at her shop, Bennett's Dancewear until 5 o'clock. Checking her watch, she would have to wait another hour. Maybe more because Lori Bennett was the owner of the store, which made custom costumes for dancers in Philadelphia and, sometimes, she worked late to finish a fancy dance dress on time.

Mya sighed and went into the kitchen. She hated waiting for anyone or anything. It took forever for Christmas to come and longer for her birthday, and endless waiting for their beach vacation and an eternity, for her to get her own phone, the one that does everything, text, photos, and, yes, calling. All her friends had one. Not her. Everything was one gigantic, long wait.

Mya sat at the kitchen table. She ignored the peanut butter crackers and the can of juice her mother had left for her snack. She didn't want to eat or drink or do anything. There was a large knot in her stomach. The only thing she wanted was to hear the click of the key in the front door. Ahh, there it was. Click. Mya flung herself out of the chair and ran down the hall.

"Mya, what's wrong?" asked her mother, after Mya threw herself at her. Her mom dropped her purse and held Mya in her arms. "What happened?"

“It’s not what happened; it’s what’s going to happen. To everyone in the world.” Mya burst into tears.

“Honey, tell me what’s wrong,” said her mom.

Mya told her what Mrs. Eggers had told the class. “Is it true?”

“Well, yes and no,” answered her mom. “Let’s go sit in the living room and I’ll explain.”

Side by side on the sofa, Mya’s Mom began, “There’s a virus that started in China…”

Mya interrupted, “What’s a virus?”

“It’s an illness people can get from others who have it. It’s bad germs that get into a person’s body and makes them very sick. Do you remember when you had a very bad cold? You had a fever, a sore throat and ached all over.”

Mya nodded and said, “But I didn’t die. I got better.”

“That’s right, but some viruses are very powerful and sometimes, not all the time, people don’t get better. The virus is so strong, it takes over and the very sick can’t fight it so they die.”

“Is this virus coming to our street in Philadelphia?”

“Mya, sweetie, we don’t know much about the virus. The scientists and doctors are learning about it and they will tell us what to do to stay safe from it.”

Mya sniffed and swiped her hand under her nose. “I want us to be safe.”

Mom smiled. “We will do everything they tell us to do to stay safe. I can promise you that.”

Mom picked up a large bag which she had dropped on the floor when she came in. “I want to show you this dance outfit. I just finished putting on the silver beads and the rhinestones.”

Mya gasped when she saw the ballerina dress, saying, “It’s beautiful.”

The overskirt was purple tulle sprinkled with shiny little gems, looking to be stars. The top of the costume was a darker purple covered with bright lavender glitter.

“Mom, this is the most beautiful costume you’ve ever made. Who gets to wear it?”

“It’s for the top dancer in the Pennsylvania Ballet Company. I’ve spent hours on it to make it just the way she wanted it.”

“Well, if she doesn’t like it, I’ll take it,” announced Mya holding the dress up in front of her.

“It’s a little too big for you.” Mom smiled.

“I’ll save it for when I’m the top dancer in the ballet company.” Mya twirled and danced her way into the kitchen to eat her snack.

Later that night, Mya lay in bed thinking about what Mrs. Eggers had said and what her mom had told her. She decided her mom was right, the doctors and scientists would keep everyone safe. *Mrs. Eggers was worried about nothing. After all, the virus was on the other side of the world in China; too, too far away to come to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.*

The next day in school, Mya didn’t know why but she felt angry at Mrs. Eggers. She couldn’t even look at her. Her teacher’s words still buzzed as stinging bees in her head, ‘*Something’s coming and it can kill us.*’

“Mya is something bothering you?” asked Mrs. Eggers, who had noticed the frown on Mya’s face.

“I have a little headache,” answered Mya. She thought *a headache you’ve given me.*

“Well, if you need to see the clinic nurse, let me know.”

Mya wanted to say, *you’ve given all of us headaches and worries about this stupid virus. It’s just plain mean of you,* but instead she replied, “Yes, Mrs. Eggers. I will.”

After school, Mya scurried down to the basement to practice her dance moves. The modern dance class was tomorrow and she needed to be ready. She was working on her aerial a very difficult move to do. Even though her dance teacher showed the class many times how to do it and worked with each dancer, guiding their arms, legs and bodies as they twisted in the air, Mya struggled with it and never completed one. Her friend Carrie had learned fast how to do it. Mya wasn’t mad at her but she was jealous and worried Carrie was going to be a better dancer than she was. Mya decided she needed to practice aerials every day, which was hard because after school she wanted to help her mother, too.

Mya’s family was small, just Mya and her mom. Her father had died when she was two years old. As hard as she tried, she couldn’t remember him at all. Mom had shown her lots of family pictures of all of them together. He looked handsome and kind but she didn’t remember how he walked or talked or if he played games with her. Mom said her father had loved her ‘to the moon and back’.

She said he would throw her up in the air and yell “Mya is going to the moon and back.” Then her father would catch her and they would laugh. It

was a cute story and Mya wished she remembered it.

Today, in the basement, she wondered if he would be proud of her now that she was no longer a cute baby, but a grown girl who gave her teacher angry looks.

She got back to work practicing her aerial.

Crash. Bang. “Ow, ow, ow.” Mya sat up and rubbed her head and elbow. She looked for blood on her hand.

“Mya, what are you doing down there?” Mya’s mother, Lori, yelled from the top of the stairs. “Are you hurt?”

“I’m OK,” answered Mya. She put a light touch to the top of her head and could feel a bump forming under her hair.

Her Mom soon appeared. “What happened?”

Mya sighed. She knew she was in trouble. “I was practicing my aerial and I crashed. I’m OK.”

“Let me see,” said Mom as she checked her arm and felt Mya’s head. “There’s a bump here. You banged it hard. Where is the mat you’re supposed to use?”

“I’m sorry. I forgot to put it down on the floor.” Mya stood up and walked over to the rolled up mat. She kept it under her ballet barre. She slid her hand over the ballet barre attached to the wall. Cool, smooth, and sturdy. A gift from her mom, the barre was her most favorite thing in the whole world. It made her feel as a professional dancer.

She started to unroll the mat.

“No, not now. One bang to the head is enough for the day,” said her mom.

“But how am I going to be a good dancer if I don’t practice?” Mya asked. She threw the mat down. “Tomorrow is dance class and I wanted to show the aerial to my teacher. The other girls learned how to do it months ago. I’m the only one in the class who can’t.”

“Mya, you’ve been trying for weeks now. I think it’s a hard thing to throw your body up into the air, twist, and then land on two feet without falling.”

“It’s not hard for them.”

“And it won’t be hard for you when you learn how to do it, but you always must use the mat to protect yourself. Do you understand?”

Mya went to her bedroom and was changing from her leotard to jeans and a sweatshirt when she all at once realized an odd thing, her mom was

home early. She never was home before 5 o'clock on a weekday. She should be at the shop.

Taking the stairs two at a time, Mya went down to the kitchen to find her mother. "Mom, why are you home so early?"

Her Mom turned from washing lettuce at the sink and dried her hands on the towel. "It's no big deal and I don't want you to worry but the business has lost a big account."

"What?" Mya asked.

"We had just started working on ballet outfits for a modern dance company. Pretty flowing dresses in yellow, green and sky blue. You would have liked the design, Mya."

"Mom, just tell me what happened. Not how the costumes looked."

"The dance company called this morning and canceled the order."

"Why? Didn't they like what you were making?"

"No, no. That wasn't the reason. The manager told me they weren't sure they would be able to perform on the stage."

"Why couldn't they put on a performance?"

"He was afraid the virus would be here in Philadelphia and the show would be canceled. So he canceled."

"I know the virus began in China. Where is it now?"

"I heard on the news, it was on the West Coast and also, in New York City."

"New York City, New York, right next to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania?" Mya stared at her Mom.

Mya walked slow up the stairs and closed her bedroom door. She sat on her bed and thought, so now it begins. It's one state away. Soon it will be here. Mrs. Eggers was right.

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