

## **The Empty Stage**

The curtain hung still, heavy and quiet. Thirty minutes before showtime, our lead actor sat in the hallway with a fever, too weak to stand. The auditorium buzzed with parents and teachers waiting for the lights to rise. Everyone turned to me, stage manager, clipboard in hand, eyes wide with questions.

I had memorized the script after months of rehearsals. Still, stepping into the role felt impossible. My first instinct was to cancel. But when I looked at the cast - some whispering lines, others clutching props - I realized they followed my calm. If I froze, the show ended there.

I gathered everyone in a circle. We cut one scene, shortened another, and reassigned lines. No one complained. Each person volunteered to cover what they could. I gave clear cues, marked changes with tape, and rewrote notes in the wings. The director nodded from the back row, trusting us to lead ourselves.

When the curtain finally lifted, the stage glowed brighter than I remembered. My voice shook on the opening line, then steadied as the rhythm returned. Every pause found its answer. Every movement landed close enough to keep the story alive. By the final bow, we stood taller, not because everything went perfectly, but because we had refused to give up.

After the applause faded, I stayed behind, watching the empty stage. I realized leadership isn't about holding control. It's about noticing what others need and creating space for them to step

forward. That night, my role changed from organizer to anchor, keeping balance when plans fell apart.

Since then, I've carried that approach into group projects, volunteer work, and daily routines. When deadlines tighten or confusion spreads, I return to the same instinct: gather the team, share the load, move one step at a time.

In college, I want to join organizations that rely on collaboration and quick thinking, such as student theater or peer mentorship programs. Courses in communication and project management will help refine the skills I first learned under stage lights. I'm drawn to environments where creative pressure turns groups into teams.

The stage taught me that strong leadership grows in quiet decisions, not titles. Each choice under pressure showed that trust builds faster through action than instruction. That understanding stays with me wherever a plan starts to wobble.