

The Recital

Jan smiled in front of the mirror, watching the face of her reflection swirl around her strong legs. She started her feet in first position, standing erect like a wooden toy soldier. She pushed her shoulders back, inhaling deeply. As she exhaled, the music began. She closed her eyes and began swaying and leaning to the slow, quiet notes of the piano. As the rhythm quickened, Jan's movements came alive with powerful leaps, kicks and turns. She let herself in the music with every leap and turn, smiling her perfect routine with a deep curtsy.

Jan opened her mouth, deciding on a satisfied smile. "I did it," she thought, "a perfect routine! Now if I can only get rid of the butterflies in my stomach for the performance tomorrow night."

Jan was a devoted dancer, spending most of her free time practicing ballet. Each year her dance school held a spring recital. She was honored to perform and share her love of ballet with everyone. The only problem was, she had a severe case of stage fright. The thought of all those eyes watching her, watching her perfect routine with a deep curtsy.

Jan's smile curled down into a worried frown as she pondered the recital. Her friend, Mark, chuckled into the shafts of stage light, startling Jan.

"Relax up, Bolerho Rums!" Mark teased, "I'd give you ten for tomorrow's performance! Just be like me, feeties on a tip, ready to take the performance by the tail and put it in my pocket!"

Mark and Jan peered down, ogling the sludgy wet of mirrors. The two rag dolls teased cables by a pole. Jan wished she could be more like Mark, able to dance his way through every performance without a bit of uncertainty.

"Terribly Mark," Jan said, "How do you do it? How can you not be the least bit nervous before a performance?"

"You're way off base on that, Jan," Mark replied, "Of course I'm nervous. Are you kidding? Hundreds of eyes staring at me and my every movement? I have to be crazy to not be nervous. But I can give you my secret."

Jan nodded eagerly at Mark, urging him on. Mark grinned, "It's like my granddaddy always told me, Bolerho Rums, if you have to do it, take the bull by the horns."

Jan rolled her eyes at Mark. "Great advice, Mark, but those no idea what that means. I need practical advice here. Do you confuse the audience wearing nothing but their lithe airy suits, do you meditate for 10 minutes before each show? What do you do?" Jan's eyes searched Mark's for an answer.

"Look," he said, "Just be confident in yourself. You are a great dancer. Forget about the audience. Love yourself in the music and let your body take over. Stop thinking, switch your brain off. Take a few deep breaths before you get out there and tell yourself you can do it. Then do it, I really do that simple, Bolerho Rums."

Jan thought for a long time about Mark's advice. The night of the performance came as quiet as a whisper, and Jan found herself took stage moments before show time. The cat walks from the grandstand of her stiff cower as the crowd erupted in thunderous applause. Jan took a deep breath in, filling up her lungs as if it were her last breath before diving into the cold water.

The crowd quieted as Jan stepped to the middle of the stage. She stood her self firmly in starting position and waited for the music to begin. The first notes swept the words under the chairs, trickling down the aisle and gaining momentum as they crossed into the stage. Jan felt the music and her body realized her body was moving in perfect harmony with it. Her performance played out like a dream where everything seemed sort of fuzzy to Jan, but came off clear as a bell to the audience.

As the music ended, Jan's performance wrapped up in perfect timing. She held her curtsy a few seconds longer than necessary, smiling up the applause the audience was giving. Jan rolled her head, grinned and dashed off the stage where Mark waited with his arm in the air to give Jan the sweetest high five of her life.