

Stage Fright Trouble

Briana walked into the room, dragging her backpack, and kicked the door hard behind her.

“Briana! You know better than to slam the door when you come home from school!” said her mother, Garcia.

“Sorry,” Briana mumbled under her breath as she slumped into a chair. “Ms. Vanellope says I have to be in the school play,” she sighed.

Garcia smiled. Ms. Vanellope had been her teacher when she was young, and now Ms. Vanellope was her daughter’s teacher. “If you learn all your lines well and practice often, I’m sure you’ll be fine.”

“No,” Briana insisted. She pulled her script out of her backpack. “Seriously. *The Wizard of Oz*. Not only does it have endless lines, but they are hard to memorize. And I cannot say them on stage!”

Garcia sighed. “Briana, stage fright isn’t a disease. It’s just an obstacle, like a big rock, that lies in the way. You just have to climb over it, and that may not be easy, but you have to learn to overcome the obstacle.”

Briana didn’t seem convinced. “You don’t have stage fright; so how do you know?”

“Of course I have stage fright,” Garcia answered, stroking her tangled hair. “I’ve had it since I was young. But do you want to know how I overcame the obstacle?”

Briana nodded eagerly.

“I was thirteen when I had to sing in a play. I didn’t even have the lead role. It was just a small part. But it was hard. I started by practicing by myself in my room.

“I don’t have a memory as good as yours, so it took me forever to memorize the song. Even worse, it was exceptionally long, seven pages, and the tune was strange. When I tried to sing it, I went off key and could not even get the words right.”

“Wow! Then how did you do it?” Briana asked, her eyes sparkling with excitement.

“I practiced every day. Sometimes I would use a microphone to make my voice seem louder, so I could find less obvious mistakes, and hopefully fix them. Sometimes I would sing in front of the bathroom mirror to see how I looked. My mouth looked all funny, in a round shape, and my face turned red whenever I made a mistake, even if I didn’t have an audience. To make matters worse, my younger brother would sometimes come in and listen. He would usually run out, screaming, after a few seconds. I just sounded terrible.

“The night before the play, I got a cold, but I still had to go to the dress rehearsal and I did as terribly as if I hadn’t practiced. You should have seen Marilee, the girl with the lead role. She was perfect, her hair neatly combed down her back, and her dress glittered with sequins. She laughed at me like, ‘It’s Garcia with the frog voice again. When will she learn to sing like a bluebird?’ It was humiliating. One of my friends, Geraldine, came over and said I did okay, but I knew she was only being nice.

“The opening night, I put on my sparkling blue-and-pink costume. My mother made me wear uncomfortable black leather shoes that pinched my feet. It was all uncomfortable, but I didn’t want to complain, not in front of the girls who teased me. I was determined to do well, even if I didn’t feel well.

“When it was time for me to go onstage, I timidly slipped behind the curtain. Oh, no! I had forgotten the first phrase already! I shot a quick look at my script just before the curtain opened. My voice was dry and cracked, but I managed to croak the song out. I had a stuffy nose and couldn’t pronounce the m’s. My throat was hoarse, and it hurt terribly. In the end, nobody clapped except my parents. I knew I had done terribly. However, when I was walking offstage, something even worse happened—Marilee came up behind me to do her part, and she stuck her foot out. I tripped over her foot and landed on my knees; everyone saw it.

“Now I had a choice. I could be humiliated and run off the stage, or I could walk off the stage as if nothing happened...but do you know what I did instead?”

Briana shook her head.

“I got up and took a bow as if I meant to fall on purpose. Then everyone clapped. Marilee just stood there, her mouth open in surprise. You know, it wasn’t so bad after all.”

“Did you ever go on stage again?” Briana asked.

“No,” Garcia admitted, “but I learned my lesson and it helped me overcome my stage fright.”

“So...do you think I can do this play well if I practice hard?” Briana asked her.

“You have to really put your heart into it. Act like this is something big, not just a school play. If anything goes wrong, use your sense of humor to laugh it off. Then you’ll do fine,” Garcia assured her.

“Thanks, Mom,” Briana said as she picked up her backpack and headed toward her room.

“Now I’d better do some practicing!”