

Excerpt from the play

SKITTLES

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Rīga

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SCENE ONE. Three rehearsals before the concert.

Lights.

We see three young people energetically and enthusiastically performing a dance routine. They seem quite professional – except for one youngster who is unable to keep up at times. It is hardly noticeable at first but becomes increasingly evident. The effect is comical, even though it is obvious that the young man feels deeply uncomfortable. A male voice rings out from above. It is their teacher.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: Stop!

The music stops abruptly. The dancers stop and peer into the distance.

Pause.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: Juris, what was that?

Juris clutches his head and begins to pace around the stage, taking tiny steps and staring at the floor.

Pause.

Everyone is watching Juris. Juris keeps pacing and staring at the floor.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: Alright, let's try again. Laura, please, the accent in the first two 8-counts is up, not down. Zane – good. Patriks – more energy! Juris?

Juris squats, still holding his head in his hands. Then he lifts his head and peers into the distance.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: *(Sighs)* Exhale, inhale, calm down. Count to ten! Tell yourself: 'I can do it.' Say: 'I am great!'

Juris exhales, inhales, counts to ten out loud. The rest of the dancers watch him.

JURIS: I can do it. You are great!

VOICE FROM ABOVE: Not me – you!

JURIS Me – I am great!

VOICE FROM ABOVE: Starting positions. Let's go!

The young people take their starting positions.

The lights go down, then up again. The youngsters perform their number. Juris is doing even worse than the time before.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: Juris!

Juris is trying to keep up with the steps, but it looks like he's forgotten the whole sequence.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: JURIS!!

Juris is desperately trying to do better, but the harder he tries the worse it gets.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: JURIS, JUST WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!

Juris is doing everything he can to improve his performance, but it is in vain.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: Stop!

The music stops abruptly.

A long pause. Everyone's looking into the distance – except Juris. For a moment Juris shuffles his feet, clutching his head again, then starts to repeat the choreo on his own; he fumbles again and starts over.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: Juris?

JURIS: I can do it!

VOICE FROM ABOVE: Juris, stop!

Juris stops dancing.

JURIS: *(To himself)* I am great.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: When is the school anniversary concert?

JURIS: On Friday.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: What day is it today?

JURIS: Tuesday.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: And how are you dancing this?

JURIS: Badly.

Pause

JURIS: Like a piece of rubbish.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: Is anyone from your family coming to watch you?

JURIS: My mum.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: Your mum. Zane, who's coming to watch you?

ZANE: Mum and Dad, maybe also my brother.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: Mums, dads, brothers, sisters, relatives, friends, all the teachers, school benefactors, donors, perhaps your future employers. It would be nice to put your best foot forward, Juris.

JURIS: I'm trying.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: From the top.

Everyone takes their places.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: Laura, where's your hair tie?

LAURA: Back at the dorm.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: Run and get it!

Laura runs off.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: Now we all wait for Laura.

Everyone waits.

Long pause.

After a while, Laura returns, very much out of breath.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: Places. Let's go!

Darkness. Lights. Everyone dances, it is obvious that Laura hasn't recovered from her sprint. Juris completes two 8-counts and freezes.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: Stop!

The music stops abruptly.

JURIS: I'm sorry. So sorry. I blacked out. It just went completely dark in front of my eyes. Please, it was not on purpose.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: Okay, I see – Juris can sit down, Klāvs is taking his place.

Juris clutches his head, squats for a moment, then goes to sit down.

Pause.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: Klāvs, please!

Pause

LAURA: Sir, didn't Klāvs write and tell you?

VOICE FROM ABOVE : Tell me what?

LAURA: That he won't make it to the rehearsal today.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: No. He hasn't written me at all. Why isn't he here?

LAURA: Well, you cut his number.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: Yes, but he's a substitute for the dance! Where is he?

Everyone looks a little sheepish.

LAURA: I think he's ill.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: I hope he really is ill, because he's not getting a third chance. You tell him that! Well then. We have to stop for today. And we will need an additional rehearsal...

LAURA: What?

VOICE FROM ABOVE: You have a free period at ten past nine tomorrow. I'll see you then. Everyone plus Klāvs.

ZANE: But we have a history test after that.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: At what time?

ZANE: Ten o'clock.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: So we will have almost an hour. And Klāvs had better bring a note from the doctor.

PATRIKS: But that is our only free period.

ZANE: And we have a history test after that.

PATRIKS: Sir, it's the only time we have to prepare for the test.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: I understand – but you just saw how poorly we did today. Juris can't keep up, Klāvs skips school, and all you have left on the schedule is a single rehearsal on Thursday! Just the one! You are not ready.

ZANE: Sir, please, we still have to write an essay tonight, we really will not have any time to study for the test.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: I promise you will try to keep it as short as possible. We'll have a run-through of the number with Juris and with Klāvs, and then we'll see who can do it better. And then I will let you go.

The young people on the stage look tired, anxious, cornered.

VOICE FROM ABOVE: See you tomorrow!