

Bonus Chapter - Portion of *84 Ribbons* salvaged from the circular file.

Sometimes I write something that doesn't fit. This part of chapter ten moved the story to Steve's POV. Since the story is from Marta's POV I needed to drop it. But, I thought readers would gain a sense of Steve's motives if they had the opportunity to read this. Also, it shows how his interest in Marta grows from their initial meeting to include his fascination with her ability to dance.

Notice also that Marta's attitude toward Steve is altered in the book. I received lots of feedback during my critiques that Marta was a tease and that was off-putting.

When you read the book, you'll notice that I salvaged some of the details as I rewrote the story. It's true, it's hard to 'kill you darlings' so here are some of mine, just for you.

Paddy

Steve Goes to the Ballet

Steve held the ticket in his hand. His father shook his head and said, "If that's what you want; the ballet ticket is yours."

Now he found himself sitting in the third row for opening night, hemmed in by elderly ladies in swishy black dresses. Attending the ballet was meant to impress Marta. Football games and rodeos were more his style. He'd sit through hours of those events. He doubted he could sit through the first half of a fluffy ballet.

The auditorium filled. Rancher wives and the town socialites arrived in fancy dresses with glittery jewelry, towing their husbands whose only concessions to a tie were skinny string of colorful braided rope with a metal slide. A few men traded in cowboy boots for dress shoes. Steve wore his dress boots,

black slacks, and a long sleeved white shirt. He adjusted the silver arrowhead slide on his noose-like string tie and cleared his throat.

Every young female ballet student in the valley arrived in black patent leather shoes and long fussy dresses with their hair pulled back in sleek buns. They rushed toward the stage to stare into the orchestra pit, watching the players tune up. Then they returned to their mothers and sat down looking like tomorrow might be Christmas and they'd received an early present.

Steve flipped through the program until he found Marta's name in the small print listing the corps dancers. He checked his watch for the fifth time, sat forward then back in his seat accidentally kicking the seat of the lady in front of him. She turned. He smiled. She frowned and turned back to talk with her seatmate.

The lights dimmed and brightened. The last of the audience strolled to their seats and settled in. Steve removed his tie and opened his collar.

Applause began slowly and increased in volume and enthusiasm as the conductor stepped to the podium. Tap, tap, tap. His skinny baton struck the edge of his music stand. Steve checked his watch again. Only ninety minutes and he'd be free to take Marta out and maybe steal a few kisses.

Dusty Dan from the Billings' radio station KRWX stepped onto the stage. More applause erupted. The guy who played country music all day now stood at a lectern wearing a tuxedo with a black string tie. He smiled, nodded and began reading the story of *Coppélia*. Did Dusty Dan like ballet or did he get roped into

reading the description? Would he or any of the cowboys in the audience accept watching men in tights jump around? Not likely.

Dan finished the narration. The overture began, dragging on, moaning at times like a sad cowboy ballad. Marta assured him he'd get bored and be ready to leave early. Somehow he'd prove her wrong. He needed all the points he can get with her, even if it meant sitting through as much of a fru-fru ballet as he could handle.

He shifted on the wooden seat, trying to get comfortable as the curtain lifted. Colorful sets covered the back and edges of the stage as dancers dressed in peasant costumes strolled and posed to the music. It appeared to be a eighteenth century village in Europe. Hm-m. Might not be too bad after all.

He spotted Marta in her peasant dress wearing pastel flowers and ribbons in her hair. Her arms and her feet moved in perfect unison to the music: fast steps, light steps, slow steps. How did such a little bit of a girl look so powerful?

The dances and waltzes evolved into solos. Those dancers stayed in the center while Marta and the other peasants moved along the edges. The men in tights strolled and lifted the women soloists then disappeared.

Suddenly the men reappeared and began leaping and spinning. Whoa. They moved with strength, more agile than many football players he knew. Oh lord. If he said that out loud he'd become a joke on campus and at the paper. And, couldn't they wear longer jackets or shirts to show less of their... uh... bodies?

First intermission Steve moved to the lobby with the men who two hours earlier were herding animals and plowing fields. They stood in small groups nodding politely and pulling at their shirt collars while their wives stood in clutches eyeing each other's outfits and gossiping.

"Steve?"

He turned to see Tracy Simms approaching. Oh, great. Not Tracy. They'd dated all spring until she dumped him for the college quarterback.

"Hi, Tracy."

"When did you decide you liked ballet?"

How could he answer that? Tracy was such a gossip. She'd willingly ruin his reputation if he wasn't careful. "I'm filling in for the regular reporter. She wasn't certain she'd arrive in time." He hoped she bought the story.

"Must be boring for you. Don't you usually cover sports and hearings?"

"Oh, it's okay. It's part of an intern's job."

"Don't fall asleep!" Tracy touched his sleeve as she sashayed away.

Steve ran his fingers between his collar and his neck deciding he needed fresh air.

The night sky sparkled with stars, reminding him of the way Marta sparkled when she spoke of dancing. She moved with boldness and grace so why did she act shy with him?

He checked his watch and walked down the block to stretch his legs. Only another hour and he'd have Marta all to himself.

When he re-entered the lobby the auditorium doors were closed. Music drifted through the now-empty space. As he reached for the theatre door handle, a man emerged from the curtained entry. "I'm sorry, sir. You can't enter now."

"What?"

"You'll have to wait for the second intermission," the usher said.

"Why?"

"There's no late seating, sir."

"But I work for the paper."

"Sorry sir. There is no late seating."

Steve checked his watch. "How long until the next break?"

"Twenty-five minutes, sir."

"Is there a back door or something?"

"Yes, but like I just said, you can't enter during the performance. There is no late seating."

Steve paced the lobby then returned outside. Marta would never believe he'd gotten locked out. He'd promised himself to stay for the whole ordeal. If she saw his empty seat she'd think he'd left or not bothered to come.

The chill in the air didn't affect Steve; his body remained overheated from his error. He sat on the steps, paced the front of the building, and checked his watch so often the hands had no time to change position.

When a group of men emerged from the building and drew cigarettes from their pockets, Steve pushed inside and shot to his seat wondering how he'd find out what he'd missed without confessing his absence to Marta.

The lights dimmed and brightened. The orchestra resumed their seats as the overture of *Sleeping Beauty* began after another introduction by Dusty Dan. This music sounded familiar. The women dancers wore short dresses that stuck out like bouncing plates. When he spotted Marta, she resembled a living, breathing fairy. Considering how short she was, Marta's legs looked amazing long.

Before he could fidget or ruffle the program the ballet ended. Like the storybook fairy tale, the princess falls under the spell of an evil fairy, pricks her finger on a spindle and sleeps one hundred years. The prince finds Aurora and awakens her with a kiss. Everyone lives happily ever after. If Marta would let him awaken her with a simple kiss, his day would be complete.

The soloists bowed first, then the others. The house lights came up. He checked his watch. 10:00. Where had the time gone?

Steve paced the front steps waiting for Marta. Where is she? Was he waiting at the wrong door? Had she left without him because she thought he'd failed to come tonight? He'd give her ten more minutes.

Suddenly she appeared. He smiled and hurried to meet her. "Hi, Marta."

"Hi, yourself. Well, newspaper man, what did you think?"

"It was great; you were great," he said as he took her hands in his. "You looked beautiful."

"Where we in the same auditorium? I was the evil fairy in *Sleeping Beauty*."

"Oh, I guess I missed that."

"Where did you sit, Steve?"

"In the third row. Didn't you see me?" Steve stepped back from Marta and felt nervous as he waited for her reply.

"No. The footlights blur the audience. All we can see are the front section of the orchestra and the first row of seats."

He exhaled, wiped his hand over his face then reached for her hand again. For the first time in years he felt uncomfortable with a date. He looked at Marta's profile in the dim street light. She wore no makeup, her wet hair was pulled back in a pony tail, yet she glowed. She fidgeted under his scrutiny.

"Are you thirsty or hungry or anything after all that dancing around?"

"Sure," Marta said.

"Let's grab a snack at the ice cream parlor."

As they walked down the block, he locked his fingers with her. She didn't pull away. His heart raced out of control. What was going on with him?

The ice cream parlor was crowded with families fresh from the ballet. The little girls looked like the ones he'd seen in the auditorium. No tables or chairs were available. That might be the best news he'd had today. "Let's get a cone and drive to the lake, okay?"

"Sounds like a great idea," Marta said.

They stood in a long line and ordered. Marta asked for a scoop of strawberry ice cream; Steve ordered chocolate.

"Are you tired?" Steve asked as they walked down the street toward his car.

"Yes, but I'm also excited. That was my first professional performance."

"You didn't look like it was new for you. All of you danced like you'd done it a hundred times."

Marta laughed. "We probably danced each selection more than that."

During the short drive to the lake, Marta held both cones upright and licked away any drips that escaped each cone.

"Hey, don't eat all of mine," Steve said as they slowed to turn in to the park.

"I'm not. Just keeping the drips from running down my hands."

Steve pulled up to the far end of the gravel parking area. He turned off the engine, rolled down his window and hung his arm out the opening.

The night was quiet. Only crickets and frogs interrupted the silence. The moonlight lit Marta's profile.

She smiled. "Want a lick of strawberry ice cream before I start eating the cone?" Marta said as she handed him his chocolate cone.

"Sounds like a deal I can't pass up." Steve leaned in, skirting the cones to kiss her cheek. When he did, he tipped his cone. Chocolate ice cream dripped onto his shirt. He jerked and knocked Marta's strawberry cone against her nose.

Marta gasped then giggled. "I usually eat it with my mouth not my nose." She grabbed a napkin from her lap and wiped her face then used the last corner of the napkin to wipe Steve's shirt.

"Thanks," he said as he captured her hand.

Neither spoke. Marta left his hand in his. They finished their cones while stealing glances at each other.

"You look beautiful tonight. Just like you did during the ballet."

"Thanks. Did you like the solos tonight? I hope to earn one next year."

"I liked everything, even the evil fairy." Steve hesitated. Should he tell her about getting locked out? Naw. Ballet was her life. Telling her might be a deal-breaker. She might be disgusted by his actions and decide to never see him again.

A car pulled up nearby, crushing the gravel as it came to a stop. Probably teenagers coming to make out. Why here, why now? They'd ruin his plans to steal a few kisses, maybe something more.

He rubbed his palms on his slacks and leaned against his door as he slid his arm across the back of Marta's seat, grazing her ponytail.

"You're quiet tonight," she said. "What's going on in your head?"

"That I have a new appreciation for what you do. Is it hard to keep all those dances straight?"

"No, each piece of music feels different. Are you writing a piece for the paper?"

"Naw. Just curious now that I understand ballet."

"After one evening? You think you understand ballet?"

"Yeah," he said.

Marta laughed and shook her head. "Steve, you are amazing."

"What's your next ballet, Marta?"

"*The Nutcracker*. I'm certain you'll know that music. But, first we do four weeks on tour."

In the dim light, he noticed how her pert nose and her prominent cheekbones created interesting angles. She was a keeper: talented *and* pretty. "May I continue driving you to practices when you're in town?"

"If you'd like. We'll add weekend rehearsals with the children who dance in the Christmas party scene. I don't expect you'd be around for them; you're off the hook, Mr. Fluff."

"I'll drive you as early or as late as you like. Can I get Nutcracker tickets now?" he said hoping she'd appreciate his intentions.

Marta brushed her fingers over his clean-shaven jaw, then flicked his cheek. "No. Ask your friend Miss Fluff in November. She's a nice person even if she is a dan-cer."

Steve captured Marta's hand. "She's a tease, that's for sure."

"May I have my hand back, please?"

"May I kiss you first?" he said as a strange tension traveled through his throat. He put one hand on her cheek and inched closer.

Suddenly, the space between them filled with a cool breeze. Marta sat pressed against the passenger door with her arms crossed over her chest and her face turned toward the passenger window.

"Guess that's a 'no'."

"We'd better go," she said.

"Why?"

“I'm really tired. It's been a long week. Tomorrow we have rehearsals at one as well as an evening performance.”

He straightened, started the engine and shifted the car into reverse. His pudding insides returned to normal as he focused on driving to the boarding house, wondering where he'd made his mistake. Girls, women, usually liked his slow, causal approach. He sensed Marta would have walked home if given the chance. Why was she so skitterish? It was only going to be a kiss.

At the curb by the boarding house, he turned on the dome light and handed her a small, flat package wrapped in rose-colored paper. “I found this in the used book store. I thought you'd like it. The cover says it's ballet without tears. I want you to always be happy and, well, uh, I ... Open it.”

She undid the wrapping and lifted out the small tattered book entitled, *The Ballet Lover's Pocket Book*. The dust cover flaked off as she opened the book. She clutched it to her chest. “Thanks. Did you read it? It might be more for you than for me.”

“I thumbed through it,” he said. “The author knew a lot about ballet and costumes and scenery. She plays the guitar so she can't be all bad. Anyway, read the inscription.”

He watched her face as she read the words aloud: “You'll always have me as your audience of one.” She closed the book and reached up both hands, cupping Steve's face inches from her own. “You know, for a cowboy, you're sweet.” She smiled and kissed his nose.

He reached for her hands, just as she opened the car door. He hopped out and rounded the car to her side. They stood together, leaning against the car.

“I need to go. I plan to sleep in ‘til noon.”

“May I see you or call you at 12:01?”

“Yes, but not a second before noon, promise?”

He so wanted to kiss her but he restrained himself and walked her up the steps. “Night, Miss Fluff.” He waited as she unlocked the front door then headed back to his car.

As he headed home he thought about their time together this evening. She acted shy, but danced boldly. Which was the true Marta? He’d need to find out if he continued to see her and, he did want to see her again and again and again.