Kung Fu to Tutu

by andlat

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The Costume Box
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Chapter 1

Kung Fu to Tutu

There she is, Jason thought as he saw the girl before him. Her gi matched his, but atop her dark blonde head was a floppy pink bow. This isn't ballet, he had thought every class, a notion that only occurred to him because there was a ballet class next door.

“What are you staring at?” Kelsie asked, tightening her gold belt around her waist.

“I'll tell you when I figure it out.” She scoffed and turned away. Some boys were nice. Some boys were ok. Some boys were dumb. But then there was Jason, who might be the worst boy ever.

“Let's start with a joke.” Sensei Steve said, stretching his arms across his torso as he sauntered over. “Why can't a nose be twelve inches? Cuz then it'd be a foot!”

“More like my weiner.” Jason muttered to Ricky next to him.

“Ugh.” Kelsie muttered under her breath. She looked over to the other girls for support. “Seriously. Grow up, right?”

“I know.” Sophie mouthed to her.

Kelsie focused on the katas they were learning, but it seemed like Jason was always goofing off or doing something that showed he thought he was a lot more talented than he actually was. And that hair! Was that gel making it so spiky

or had he just not washed it in a week? Someone should bust him down a peg. Or three. Kelsie thought. Her increasingly creative visions of his comeuppance powered her through the rest of class.

“Why do you even wear that bow?” Jason asked as everyone was drifting toward the locker rooms.

“Keeps my hair out of my eyes.” They traveled up to his spiky hair. “We can't all use an entire bottle of gel.”

“My hair's cool.” Jason said defensively.

“It's gross.” She retorted.

“It's aerodynamic.”

“Oh, yeah. That's why you tripped during every other kick, right?” Jason's face turned almost as pink as her bow.

“I'm better than you.”

“Sure.” She knew there was no chance of that.

“I am!”

“Uh-huh.” It was amazing how he seemed to be getting more and more worked up when she wasn't even saying anything.

“I'll spar you. Anytime, any place.” That sounded like a line from a movie.

“Why not right now?” Jason clearly did not expect that.

“Uh”

“Come on, Jason. You can take her.” One of his vile little friends hissed in his ear. Ricky? That sounded right.

“Uh, sure! Let's go.” Kelsie shrugged and checked to make sure Sensei Steve had already disappeared into the boys’ locker room to keep them from roughhousing.

“Alright.” She walked to the center of the mat, shaking her head as Jason's friends were psyching him up. Hope I don't embarrass him too badly. She thought.

“I'm gonna rip that bow out of her hair.”

“What is your obsession with my hair?” To be fair, she was as disturbed by his hair. Even when he shook his head, it stayed still. How much gel was even in those spikes?

“It's like something a ballet girl would wear.”

“A ballerina?”

“Uh, yeah. I'm gonna beat you so bad, you're gonna switch to ballet.” She started to roll her eyes, but inspiration came from the most surprising places.

"Actually, that sounds good."

"Huh?"

"Loser switches to ballet down the hall." She extended her hand. Jason felt a twinge of doubt, but he saw his friends looking. He could take her! He grabbed her hand and gave it a squeeze, the smile never leaving her face.

“Let's do it.”

They took their places and Jason got into a ready stance. Almost immediately, Kelsie gestured for Jason to come at her. He grinned, her overconfidence only making him more sure of his own victory. He charged at her. There was a flurry of motion and he found himself flat on his back.

“Must've tripped.”

“Must've.” She agreed, a bit smug.

“That was awesome!” Jason glared at Ricky.

“You got lucky.” She shrugged and assumed a ready position again. This time, he thought, I won't take it so easy on her. He barely even had time to think before she somehow managed to throw him seemingly over her head. He landed with a whumpf!

“You tried your best.” She said, patting him on the head. “Ew. How much gel do you have in your hair?”

“Shut up.” He muttered.

“I think this settles it. I'll come to your first recital.” She grinned and he got to his feet. Hoping to catch her by surprise, he lunged at her. He smirked as she did seem taken aback, but then she recovered. They wrestled for no more than five seconds before she pinned him to the mat. “Just for that.” She said, panting slightly. “I'm taking your gi.”

“What?” Kelsie seized her opportunity – and Jason’s pants – before he could really comprehend what she had said.

“Are those ninja turtles?” Kelsie all but guffawed as Jason

stumbled to his feet and pulled the top of his gi down. “Not gonna tell me? We'll all see ‘em once you give me the rest of your gi.”

“I'm not.”

“You lost.” Kelsie said.

“You did.” Ricky called from the sidelines.

“She's better than you, dude.” Theo added.

“And they don't wear gis in ballet, so you don't need it anymore.” She lunged and he dodged, but not quickly enough to keep out of her reach. Kelsie grabbed his shirt and tugged, snickering as she saw his green and white briefs. She managed to strip him, laughing as he fled into the locker room, his gi and pride left behind. She nodded approvingly as the boys followed him.

“Are you really going to join ballet?” Ricky asked as Jason dressed, fighting back tears of embarrassment.

“I have to.” His voice quivered, but he knew a deal was a deal.

Mom and Dad were a bit confused when he told them he had quit karate and was joining ballet, but they agreed to take him to buy what he needed. The night before his first day of class, he tried on his white t-shirt, black tights, and the black ballet shoes. Mom said everything fit the way it should, but he could not get used to wearing tights.

Mom suggested that they all get into their pajamas and have a movie night. The movie she picked was about a boy quitting

boxing and joining ballet. Willingly! Jason knew she was trying to make him feel better, but he still wished he could still do karate. At least Mom and Dad had not asked what had happened to his gi.

“Excited for tomorrow?”

“Not the tights.” Jason said after a moment. They were so tight!

“Superheroes wear tights.” Dad said.

“But not ballet slippers.” At least they were black.

“We can call them ballet shoes.” Mom said. “I'm sure the other boys will be wearing the same thing. You'll feel less self-conscious as part of the group.”

Jason got to ballet the next afternoon and realized Mom was wrong: there were no other boys. Just about a dozen girls in fluffy pink tutus. A few of them giggled as Jason was directed by the kind teacher to stand at the barre amongst them, wiggling slightly to try and get his tights to sit more comfortably. He glanced at the door, half expecting to see Kelsie there, checking to make sure he had shown up. She wasn't and he wondered if he had taken it too seriously. What if she had just been joking? The teacher clapped her hands and he took a deep breath. He was in ballet.

“Wow, she doesn't miss a thing.” Jason murmured as he drank from his water on a break, having had his feet adjusted by the teacher about a hundred times by his count. Nicole, who had introduced herself immediately and seemed pretty okay for a

girl in a tutu, nodded.

“She wants us all to be our best.”

“You're telling me!” Jason had hoped with all the girls who seemed to want to be ballerinas with all their hearts, he would be able to slack off and fly under the radar. It had taken maybe thirty minutes into his first class to realize how wrong he was.

“It's cuz you're a boy.” Nicole explained with a toss of her head. “Boys are so much more rare in ballet, so the teachers always zero in on them.”

“They want you to feel like an integral part of the class.” Abigail interjected. “And you'll be super useful once we get to a higher level and you get to start doing lifts.”

“Isn't there another boy? I swear I saw one once.” Jason asked.

“Oscar died.” Nicole said. Jason stared at her until she laughed. “Naw, I'm just kidding. No, you're the only boy. It makes you special!” The girls stashed their water bottles and Jason wondered if he really was going to be in ballet for years. I'm supposed to be learning kicks. Now I'm stuck wearing ballet slippers and doing frappés and pirouettes! I gotta get out of here.

Last night, Jason had hoped that one or two of his friends might show up for moral support. Now, he was glad they didn't. He didn't want anyone he knew to see him hopping from hula hoop to hula hoop, hands on his hips. He definitely didn't want anyone to see him tiptoeing along in a line as the

girls sang some song about their tutus. No one had said ballet involved singing! The teacher had told him it was just for learning rhythm, but he still had this horrible image of him as a singing, dancing, tights-wearing dork. He especially didn't want anyone to see him in the group hug that closed class, a single boy all but smothered in pink tulle tutus. At least he got to bow to the teacher while all the girls curtsied.

After the first day of class, Jason was smart enough to accept he needed to practice outside of class. That night, after he showered, he made sure his bedroom door was locked. Then he pulled down the blinds, making double and triple sure they were down. Then and only then did he stand in the middle of his room where he could see himself in the mirror. He ran through the arm and foot positions at least a dozen times before he felt like he was getting better.

The first couple weeks went by without anyone coming to visit. It made sense, Jason realized one day as he tugged his tights on. Mom had told him to roll them on to avoid ripping and he hoped she had not found the one pair he had torn and hidden in his wastepaper basket. They didn't ask what happened to my gi. He reminded himself. He shuddered as he remembered that day. He hoped that it had already been long enough for everyone to forget or at least would be once school started in a few weeks.

“Jason?” There was a knock at the boys’ changing room – formerly a storage closet – door. “Five minutes until class.” Jason pulled on his ballet slippers and walked to the barre, taking special care to move like a dancer. He was so focused

on that, he did not notice the girl with a pink bow peeking from the door.

Kelsie grinned as she saw Jason, but had to hurry to get to karate. She dashed down the hall, grinning. His swagger was gone, replaced by some sort of weird, graceful walk that made his butt swish. She would have to sneak back over here during the water break. That much was for sure!

When Sensei Steve released them for water and bathroom breaks, Kelsie's bare feet barely touched the floor as she raced back to the door to the ballet studio. She stood right out in the open and grinned as Jason spotted her.

Kelsie had to fight down a laugh as she saw a line of girls in their tutus and there, among them, doing the same move as them and looking quite miserable, was Jason! Sure, he was in black and white, but she knew it still must've been eating him up inside to be doing ballet just like those prissy girls. She could tell Jason was trying to avoid her gaze, but what was the point? You're the only one not wearing pink, goofball. She thought.

She looked him over, smiling as she thought back to Jason in his gi, Jason who made rude comments and told ruder jokes – Jason who once threatened to beat up a second grader! – before erasing that Jason from her memory. This was the only Jason she wanted to remember: Jason the tights-wearing ballet dancer, Jason who looked so meek and quiet as he pointed his foot just like the girls in front of and behind him.

"Nicole, frappé." The teacher said. The girl tapped her foot

on the floor. “Good. Jason, frappé.” Kelsie grinned as the teacher immediately stepped over to him. “No, don't watch your foot. Arm straight out, chin up. Swan neck, remember? And now frappé. Good! Better.” Sure, when you really thought about it, ballet class was a lot like karate. Every move had to be done just so, but ballet was… delicate… dainty… girly! And she had gotten Jason the jerk to do it. Sure, it would have been hilarious if he had had to wear a tutu, but seeing him do the same moves as the girls was still magical. Kelsie returned to karate, promising herself she would make regular visits to the ballet class.

Kelsie did just that. She almost felt proud. In barely any time, he had gone from a swaggering wannabe tough guy to skipping around the room in tights and slippers, hands on his hips. There was something almost admirable in how he was giving ballet his all.

“Why do you keep poking your head in here?” A girl demanded during one of Kelsie's visits. “Curious about ballet?” Kelsie looked her over in her tights and tutu. Kelsie obviously did not hate pink, given her bow, but there was such a thing as too much of a good thing.

“I was just trying to say hi to Jason.” She said, hoping that that might be her way in.

“He's busy.” The girl said, looking over her shoulder at him. “Go do your dumb kicks or whatever. We're all busy.” Kelsie looked beyond the girl just in time to see Jason do some sort of prancing step along on his tiptoes. She walked away,

laughing not out of derision, but delight. Delight at just how different Jason was now.

It took a few more tries but finally, everything aligned and Kelsie saw Jason by himself. She marched over to him, relishing the look of worried surprise that crossed his face for a moment. Even the slight step back he took was a shift from one dancer pose to another.

“Uh hi.” He said.

“No spikes in your hair?” Kelsie asked. Jason only shrugged. “How's ballet going? Bet you're glad the boys don't wear the same thing as the girls in ballet like they do in karate.” Feeling daring, she patted his shoulder. “Or do you have to earn your tutu like a belt in karate?”

“No!” Jason sputtered.

“Well, I don't know. I've never taken ballet.”

“What do you want?” Jason asked. “Gonna let me back in karate?”

"It's just you and me, so you can drop the boohoo I miss karate thing. The way you're prancing around, I think your parents should've put you in ballet forever ago. I just fixed their mistake, really.” She grinned. “Oh! that reminds me.” Kelsie pulled her phone out of her pocket and showed Jason a photo of a girl who looked a few years younger than them, but bore a strong resemblance to Kelsie. “Recognize her gi?”

“You gave her mine?” Jason stared in disbelief.

“Yeah, turns out you were wearing girl's size 7 this whole time.” Kelsie snickered. “Oh, and Olivia's already a gold belt, so if you ever feel like a rematch, maybe I can tap my little sister in and make it a fair fight.” Jason glared at her, feeling like his old self again.

“Excuse me? Young lady? This isn't your class.” A few of Jason's new classmates smirked triumphantly as Kelsie rushed out of the room, though she liked the mental image of Jason prancing over to a bunch of pink girly-girls for comfort.

Jason was surprised how little his latest Kelsie encounter rattled him. He had a recital to prepare for, so that took up a lot of his time, and it seemed like every time he was getting the hang of ballet, something more advanced suddenly showed up.

With the upcoming recital firmly on his mind, Jason nearly ran into a bunch of his old classmates.

“Hey, Jason!” Theo said. “Haven't seen you in forever.”

“Uh, yeah, been busy.”

“Is ballet fun?”

“Uh” Jason saw his chance. “It is. You all should join!” He forced a grin.

“Geez, did they brainwash you or something?” They all backed away from him and Jason sighed. It was worth a shot.

“Everyone gather by the water fountain!” The teacher called as Jason walked into the dance studio. “Today's the day!

Recital costumes!” Jason noticed a rack of white tutus all in a row. He scanned them looking for the odd one out. They all looked identical. His heart raced and he grabbed Nicole's arm.

“She's not making me wear a tutu, is she?”

“Don't be silly.’ Nicole said. “I've told you. Boys in ballet don't wear tutus.”

“Then where's mine?”

“Here's an idea.” Nicole teased. “Maybe that lady who's been teaching us this whole time will give you yours when she calls your name.” Jason stuck his tongue out at Nicole, who returned the gesture when Jason was called over to receive a plastic-wrapped package. The girls all flocked around the rack, grabbing their tutus and heading into the changing room to try them on.

Jason ripped open the packaging and looked over what he had. White tights, white ballet shoes, and a tunic that had a row of gold buttons, though nearly as much glitter as the girls’ tutus had had.

“I guess it makes sense it's like just the boy version.” He muttered as he stepped out of his sweatpants, but he had hoped for something more cool.

He rolled the tights up his legs, pulled on the tunic, and took a deep breath. He did not dare look at himself in the mirror, so he walked to the changing room door with his eyes scrunched tight. He knew he looked like a total dork, so why even bother looking to confirm what he already knew?

“And here is our grand dancer!” The teacher exclaimed. “Oh, uh” she rushed over and nudged him back toward the changing room. “Why don't we stick with the black tights today?”

“Why?” Jason looked down and blanched.

“And be sure to wear white, um, undies until after the recital.” The teacher seemed as embarrassed as Jason as he dashed back into the changing room.

The day of the recital arrived at last. Jason sat at the dinner table, barely able to eat. What if someone he knew was there? Hadn't Kelsie promised back when she… he shuddered, still not liking to think back to that day. He could only half remember it, but he had had a dream – a nightmare even! – where he had been dancing on stage in a tutu and Kelsie had come to tug down his tights.

“Even my dreams are about ballet.” He muttered.

“Got nerves?” Dad asked.

“Yeah.”

“Don't worry. You'll do great. Your teacher has nothing but good things to say about you. And you're our son.”

“Well, I'm the only guy. She needs me.”

“And you want to make a good impression, so I want you to take a shower, comb your hair, and brush your teeth.”

“Ok, mom.”

At her own house, Kelsie was also getting ready. She had expected it to be a little difficult at least to figure out when the recital was, but there had been a poster hanging right outside the karate classroom. She had contemplated making Jason autograph it for her, but that would spoil the surprise, wouldn't it?

Kelsie could not be sure if it was just Mom being Mom or if she had hoped it would deter her from insisting they go to the ballet recital, but Mom had told her she needed to wear a dress. Mom and Olivia wore a dress too and Dad even put on a tie. She would have worn a dozen dresses in exchange for Jason the Jerk's ballet debut!

“Not that I told Mom that.” She told her reflection as she made sure her bow was just right. That was what had started it all. She simply had to wear it!

Jason stood nervously before the mirror backstage, shifting from foot to foot. This was it. He was wearing his tights and his sparkly tunic, trying his best to remember the old Jason who looked so badass – not that he could use that word without getting into trouble – in his gi.

“Shoulda kept my big mouth shut.” Jason muttered.

“Jason? Are you ready? We've got to get your stage makeup on.” Makeup? Could this get any worse?

In truth, makeup was a bit of a misnomer. The volunteer, who was someone's mom, slicked Jason's hair back and told him he was very handsome. He looked at the variety of ballerina

troupes running around, giggling and felt like he was an explorer who had found his way to the Land of Girls. The backstage door opened and Jason's eyes widened as three teenage boys walked in.

“Oh! You'll want to watch their performance.” The mom-volunteer murmured in his ear. “I bet that'll be real inspiring.” Jason could only nod as they walked out of sight. Why did they look so cool when he felt like a dork?

“Jason, c'mon.” Nicole said, grabbing his hand and dragging him along. “We're on after the Baby Ballerinas, y'know. Well, the Baby Ballerinas and the beginners.” He knew she loved Pixie Sticks and the way she was talking, she had to have had a whole bunch of them.

Time seemed to pass in a blur and suddenly, Jason was taking his place in the lineup, the girls’ tutus tickling his legs in their tights. This was it. Showtime.

Kelsie shifted in her seat as she saw Jason come out on stage at the end of the line of ballerinas. She grinned in expectation, but could not help but be impressed when Jason did a leap and seemed to hang in the air for a moment before descending back down. That feeling dissipated as he joined the line of girls in their frothy tutus and began to do the same dainty, delicate, girly steps as them, all with a big smile on his face. She knew that the teacher probably told them all to never stop smiling, but it felt impossible to match this dancing boy in tights with the dorky jerk she had thrown to the floor of the dojo. All too soon, the performance was done.

Jason did that weird walk forward and bowed as the ballerinas curtsied on either side of him. His smile seemed genuine in that moment as everyone applauded. Attention's attention, Kelsie reasoned.

The performance over, Jason felt relief wash over him. With the bright lights, he had hardly been able to tell if anyone was out there. He had spied Dad sneaking down the aisle to snap photos of him. I hope I look good, he thought.

“Oh, they're so pretty.” Nicole sighed beside him. Jason became aware that his classmates surrounded him on all sides, staring adoringly out at the teenage ballerinas on stage. Jason watched too, mystified at the strange way they were able to balance right on the tips of their feet. That didn't even seem possible! He gasped as the older boys he had seen earlier came bounding out and lifted the ballerinas high into the air. They were so strong! So cool. Nicole snorted beside him and reached over to close his mouth. “That'll be us someday.” She whispered. Jason could only nod once again.

Leaving the auditorium, Kelsie grinned once again to see the dancers waiting in the lobby for their adoring public. She made a beeline for Jason, noticing the way he stared at the older dancers.

“Earth to Jason!” She said, snickering. “Guess you don't mind ballet, huh?”

“Uh.”

“I told you.” She whispered, smirking. “Ooh, can I get a

photo?” She suddenly announced, beckoning for her dad to come take a photo as she none too gently pushed Nicole aside.

“We miss you in karate, Jase.” Sensei Steve said, holding his phone up. “Smile, kids!” Sensei Steve was Kelsie's dad? Suddenly so much made sense.

“I don't really like girly stuff like this.” Kelsie said. Jason glared daggers. “But you were good. It's just those snooty frou-frou ballerinas.” Nicole made a noise of disapproval and Jason glanced at her with a knowing smile.

“So, can I go back to karate?”

“Huh?” Kelsie looked at him, confused.

"I did a recital. I even posed for a photo with you! That's enough, right?"

"What do you mean?"

"I can quit ballet!"

"What? Why would you want to? You've gotten so good! Plus you've missed a ton in karate. We have higher belts now, you'd just have to catch up.” Kelsie patted his cheek. “You're right where you belong.” She walked away.

“I don't know why you'd want to do anything with her.” Nicole said. “You need better taste in girlfriends.”

“Girlfriend?” Jason's eyes widened.

“Did you enjoy the ballet?” Mom asked as they drove home.

“Sure did.” Kelsie said with a grin.

“You know, there's a ballet summer camp not far from here.”

“Mm.” Kelsie said, still thinking about Jason.

“With your newfound interest, should we sign you up?”

“What?” Kelsie started paying attention. “No, I just went to… to support Jason.”

“I think it'd be good for you.” Dad said. “After all, Jason seems to enjoy it.”

“And we're always telling you to try new things.” Mom said in that tone that sounded like she was just thinking about something, while also making it clear her mind was made up. Kelsie gulped, her eyes widening.