

Flying leap

"What have you got to lose?"

"My dignity? The odd limb? My lunch?"

"Ah, but if you bottle it, you'll lose face!"

Roderick Palmer steered his gaze from the tiny patchwork fields far below to Alex's triumphant grin alongside him. Accustomed as he was to wearing a suit and tie, Roderick was feeling decidedly hot under the collar of his skydiving kit. Despite the fresh air blasting through the aperture which stood ready and waiting for his exit, beads of perspiration glistened on his forehead. He shot the instructor a look of ill-disguised terror and was further alarmed when his voice emerged a couple of octaves higher than usual.

"Alex, you've got to understand that I'm used to being in full control of every situation I find myself in, master of my own destiny. Fling myself out of here and I'm at the mercy of the elements. What if I forget what to do? What if the parachute doesn't open? What if I don't land right? What if...?" The rest of this interrogation fizzled out like an empty life.

And what if you take a chance for once? thought Alex, but said instead "Every possible risk has been assessed, the gear's been triple-checked and you've done the training; you really don't need to worry. It's perfectly normal to be apprehensive and I promise you the adrenaline will work wonders for your enjoyment of the jump!"

Roderick's innards made their own involuntary leap. Then another of Alex's words gave him pause for thought: enjoyment. It was one thing volunteering for such an escapade for the sake of a worthwhile charity, but it came as a revelation that he was meant to enjoy it too. It occurred to him that enjoyment was actually a bit of an alien concept. When had he last really enjoyed himself? Had there been chances in the past that he'd failed to take that could have enriched his life? Probably, but it had always seemed more prudent to play it safe, stick with what he knew he was good at. Maybe it was high time to rise to the challenge. Or descend, as it happened.

He gave Alex a thumbs up.

"Ready to jump?"

"Ready to fly!"

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