

“The Enchanted Tutu”

Iris Xu '27

Thud thud thud

The soft echo of pointe shoes hit the Marley floor on the stage of the Royal Ballet Theatre as Mia rehearses the difficult Black Swan variation before her big performance. Tonight marked the most important night of her career so far – a performance of Swan Lake as the lead. The curtains were closed, so this was her time to prepare for the storm of a performance, which had over two hours of runtime ahead. The familiar feeling of nerves fluttered in her stomach, but she tried her best to push them aside.

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The beat of her heart pounded louder and louder, matching the tempo of her steps as she turned and leaped across the stage. As she elegantly moved through her routine, the other dancers watched backstage with a mix of admiration and envy. Mia was only seventeen years old and was a member of the corps de ballet, yet she was selectively offered a principal role by the head of the Royal Ballet.

“Can you believe it? Mia, from the corps, dancing as the lead! Only principal dancers get roles like that!” whispered one dancer to another, her voice filled with jealousy.

“Yeah, but it’s not fair. I’m eight years older than her, and I’ve been here longer, but I have never even had the chance to perform a demi-soloist role, let alone a principal one!” replied another, her eyes narrowing as she watched Mia’s graceful movements.

“Dancers, time to check in backstage! Hurry, the curtains open in one hour! Finish up the stage makeup, clean up the hair, and change into costume. The stage is open for practice.” Mia was hurrying to the changing rooms to finish some last-minute preparations when the stage manager suddenly stopped her to deliver a package.

“Mia, this just arrived for you,” she said, handing over the package. “It's addressed to you personally.”

Mia’s curiosity piqued as she took the package, noting the elegant handwriting on the label.

She read out the message,

“For the most talented dancer I know.
Wear it with pride, but remember,
all magic comes with a price.”

With a quick “thank you,” Mia tore open the packaging to reveal the most beautiful tutu she had ever seen.

The bodice was a cream white, adorned with delicate lace appliqué, and covered with rhinestones that sparkled in the light. The skirt, which was made from layers of the finest tulle, fell into place like soft waves.

“It's... it's stunning,” Mia whispered. “But who could have sent this to me?”

The stage manager shrugged, clearly uninterested. “No idea, but it's yours now. Try it on and make sure it fits before the performance.” Mia nodded, her heart racing with excitement as she slipped it on. Even the hooks felt premium. She felt something different in the air, a sense of magic as if the fabric of the tutu was infused. Flashbacks of her childhood came to Mia's mind. She remembered her grandmother, who was a prima ballerina, whose stories had motivated Mia's passion for dance ever since she was a little girl in a hot pink children's tutu. One tale, in particular, stood out in her memory — the legend of a magical tutu that granted incredible dancing abilities, but at a cost. Despite her grandma's warning, she couldn't resist the allure of the tutu. Mia added more bun pins into her perfect French twist for security, and hairsprayed every baby hair down to blend seamlessly with the rest of her beautiful brown hair. Mia picked up her tiara, pinned it in, and finished her whole look off with a bold, red lip.

Now that her makeup was complete, and her stunning tutu was on, it was time for her grand entrance. The Swan Lake corps de ballet was already on stage.

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Their pointe shoes echoed in unison on the stage, matching the beat of Mia's racing heart as she stepped onto the Marley floor of the stage. The lights dimmed, and the spotlight was on her, the Queen of the Swans. Her tutu sparkled in the white and blue stage lights and made her look absolutely ethereal. She took a deep breath, centering herself before beginning the performance of a lifetime.

With each step and turn, Mia poured her heart and soul into her dancing, aided by the magic of the tutu. Her adrenaline kicked in, and as she danced, she felt a surge of power and grace. The audience was captivated; their eyes were glued to her each and every movement. She perfectly transitioned between the roles of Odette and Odile, as if both roles were made for her, embodying both the purity and innocence of the white swan and the seduction of the black swan.

As the final notes of the music faded away, Mia stood on stage, feeling proud of her performance. The audience erupted into applause and gave her a standing ovation. Mia took her final bow, her tutu hugging her like a warm embrace.

After the performance, she was approached by the artistic director of the Royal Ballet. She was a tiny but animated Russian woman wearing foundation two shades darker than her skin color and a bright orange-red lip. Mia almost laughed at the sight of her, but thankfully she held it in.

“Mia! That was wonderful! You have completely captured all our hearts with your dancing! I am so proud of you! Next performance of Romeo and Juliet, you will play the lead role of Juliet! Remember, keep it up! All eyes are on you...” She said in her Russian accent before skipping away.

Mia felt a fluttering in her stomach, but it wasn't the good kind. But as the days passed and rehearsals for future performances began, Mia's obsession with perfection began to consume her. Everyone's eyes were on her. Everyone had huge expectations for her to become the next big star. The Artistic Director's words lingered beside her throughout everything she did:

All eyes are on you.

She pushed herself harder and harder, ignoring the signs of fatigue and strain that constantly plagued her body. She pushed herself beyond her limits, to unhealthy points. She continued practicing day and night until she was satisfied with herself, but she never was, constantly striving for perfection. She practiced so much that she forgot to eat, began to see stars, and blacked out constantly.

“Mia, Mia! You're pushing yourself way too hard,” her friend and fellow dancer, Charlotte, warned one day during rehearsal. “You need to take a break, give your body time to rest. I'm worried. This isn't healthy.”

But Mia brushed off her concerns. “I’m okay,” she replied. “I need to practice. Juliet is an extremely difficult role. I NEED to get it right.”

She was determined to prove herself worthy of the opportunities she had been given. She continued to push herself to the edge, completely oblivious to the toll it was quickly taking on her health.

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The sound of Mia landing a Grand Jeté and collapsing, her body filled with pain and exhaustion. She had fallen completely unconscious. She was rushed to the hospital, where doctors discovered multiple stress fractures in both her feet, a broken elbow, and severe malnutrition from her rigorous training.

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Mia’s heart pounded as she lay in her hospital bed, surrounded by concerned friends and family. She realized the true cost of her ambition. Like her grandma had warned her, the magical tutu, with its promise of new opportunities and perfection, had a cost. And that cost had drained her of everything that was most important to her—her health, her happiness, her passion for dance. But it was already too late. She would never be able to dance the same. Ever. Again.

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The sound of Mia flinging the tutu into a fire. She watched the tutu go up into flames. The rhinestones on the tutu sparkled for the last time before burning into ashes , as she said goodbye to this chapter of her life.