



DERIL en POINTE

*A Swan
House Ballet
School Mystery*



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**Chicken
House**

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For my boys



1

The Trouble with the Lilac Fairy

‘OK, fairies – one more for luck.’ Mr Lamont squints into his phone. ‘Can the Lilac Fairy move to the front? And Golden Vine, you to the back. *Milly*, did you hear me? That’s it – a bit further back. Smashing. Everyone smile for the camera. Let’s hear you say “Scarlet Slipper”.’

‘Scarlet Slipper!’

‘Smiley face, *Milly*. And again . . .’

‘Scarlet Slipper!’

Flash.

Little black spots dance before my eyes.

‘Perfect,’ says Mr Lamont. ‘Let’s go, everyone.’

His silvery quiff bobs up and down as he rushes us into the wings of the theatre. ‘Now remember what I said, fairies – Enchanted Garden, nice soft arms. Songbird, fluttery hands. Golden Vine, flicky legs . . .’

I inspect my legs. Trembly? Yes. Flicky? No.

‘Lilac Fairy, take your ti— Willow, what’s the matter?’

Tears pool in Willow’s eyes. ‘It’s no good – I can’t dance.’ She rubs the scar under her tights. ‘It’s my leg. It’s hurting again.’

Mr Lamont frowns. ‘Your leg? But the accident was years ago.’

‘It wasn’t an accident,’ snaps Willow.

The other fairies look at me like they always do. Slightly suspicious and not entirely friendly.

I bite my tongue but the words sneak out between my teeth. ‘It *was* an accident, Willow.’

‘No it wasn’t. You were so mean!’

My cheeks burn. She’s right about the last bit.

Mr Lamont pulls a hanky from his navy-blue blazer. ‘This is no time for arguments. We can’t compete without you, Willow. We need our Lilac Fairy.’

Willow dabs her eyes. ‘I suppose the show must go on.’

‘She’s sooo brave,’ coos the Fairy of the Songbird.

I sigh and peek around the curtain. I’ve known Willow Perkins since we were in Ballet Tots. I still remember the smells of angel cake (her) and wee (me) mingling as we did the hokey-cokey. I remember

the day she got her scar, too. Willow won't let me forget.

Onstage, the founder of the Scarlet Slipper Ballet Prize nudges her glasses up her powdery nose. 'Your Royal Majesties, my Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, esteemed Judges. It is my great pleasure to introduce . . .' Dame Anna Popova blinks up at the Royal Box. She clutches her pearly throat. She gasps and drops her speech.

Someone runs on and picks it up. Someone else runs on and runs off again. The audience begins to rustle. When you're 102, people must think you've popovered your clogs every time you reach the end of a sentence.

Dame Anna does a no-need-to-call-an-ambulance-just-yet shake of her wispy, white head. 'Where was I?' she says. 'Ah yes. It is my pleasure to introduce the last of the schools competing for the coveted Scarlet Slipper trophy.'

The fairies crowd behind me and Mr Lamont points up at the balcony. 'Your mother's arrived in the nick of time, Milly. Same seat as usual.'

I beam up at the box next to the royals. Mum's been on tour for three long weeks. I wave into the darkness and Willow does too.

Dame Anna warbles from the stage, 'Dancing the Fairies Variations from *The Sleeping Beauty*, I give

you –’ she flutters a hand drooping with diamonds –
‘LAMONT’S SCHOOL OF DANCE!’

Mr Lamont smiles. ‘Off you go, Milly. If you dance half as well as your mother, we’re in with a chance.’ A little titter passes from fairy to fairy.

Willow gives me a push. I troop behind the Fairy of the Songbird and take my place onstage. The clapping dies. The lights dim. Silence falls over the theatre like fairy dust. The conductor lifts his baton and Mr Lamont holds his breath.

Five minutes later, Mr Lamont breathes out. Four of the fairies have fluttered and flicked without a wobble. The audience is spellbound.

My turn next.

As the music plays, my skin begins to tingle. Who cares about Willow Perkins when you are the Fairy of the Golden Vine! My toes point, my fingers zap, my legs flick. I *bouffée* one way, whirl the other. As I fly across the stage, I wish I could dance for ever, but Willow is waiting. As I curtsy, she whispers behind me, ‘Out of the way, Milly. Your mum’s here to see *me*, not you.’

Willow Perkins is not a nice person.

Trouble is, I’m the only one who knows it.

As Willow begins to dance, my foot twitches. It inches out. It can’t seem to help it. Willow is so close . . . just a bit further and . . .

WHAT AM I DOING? *Mum would never forgive me!* My foot snaps back, but my legs are tired and I stumble sideways.

Bwumph! Into the path of a twirling tutu.

As the Lilac Fairy crumples, the audience gasps. The lights go up and my eyes shoot to Mum. It was an accident, they say. But Mum's not there. I search for a sparkling tiara, a twinkle of sequins, but I can't see her. I can't see anything – the theatre's too blurry.

Mr Lamont helps Willow to her feet. A bead of sweat drips off the end of his nose. 'Willow, where does it hurt?'

'Everywherrrrrrre.'

'Oh dear, oh dear. Milly, what *happened?*'

'I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to, I – I . . .'

'SHE DID IT ON PURPOSE!' wails Willow.

I blink back up at the empty box. *Where is she?* 'Mr Lamont, when did Mum leave? Did she see Willow fall?'

Mr Lamont's quiff shakes from side to side. 'I don't know, Milly.'

The wailing stops. 'Well, I do.' Willow's violet eyes flash in triumph. 'She saw what you did to me and died of shame. *This* time she won't forgive you, Millicent Kydd. *This* time she'll disown you FOR EVER!'