Ballet Besties

Indu's Time to Shine

The

Ballet Besties

Series

Yara's Chance to Dance

Indu's Time to Shine

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Ballet Besties

Indu's Time to Shine



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Piccadilly

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To my parents who have been my greatest support throughout my training and career.

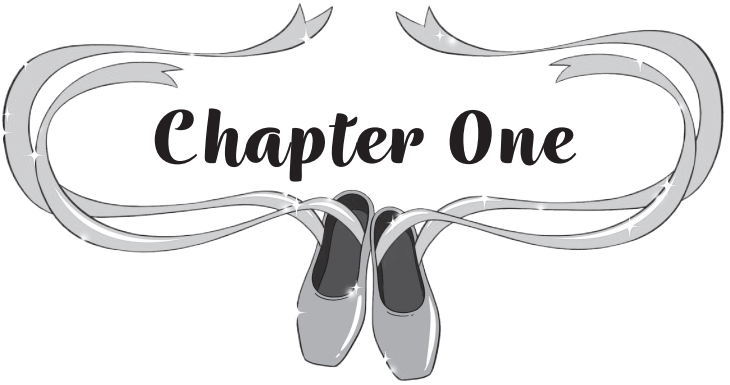
Y.N.

To all parents who always want the best for their children.

C.S.

To my family, who supported me when decided to follow my true passion.

P.F.



Chapter One

When Indu stepped into the kitchen for breakfast, her mum was already dressed for work in her blue hospital uniform. To Indu's surprise, she was stacking a random assortment of books, shoe boxes and bags of clothes.

'What's going on, Mum?' asked Indu. 'Are we moving?'

'No,' said Mum. 'I'm just decluttering. I want to sell these things I don't need any more.'

'Don't sell anything of mine,' said Indu, thinking of all her books.

'Pack rat, you are,' said Mum with a chuckle.

'Holding on to things, just like your grandad.'

Before Indu could reply, the doorbell rang.

'That'll be Yara,' she shouted, as she rushed to the door.

Yara was one of Indu's best friends. Their mums took turns taking them to school, although it was usually Mrs Madani because Mum often had to do double shifts at the hospital.

Indu opened the door and beamed at Yara and her mum.

'Hi, Indu,' said Mrs Madani. 'Ready to go?'

'Yup! Bye, Mum,' Indu called, as she picked up her bag. 'Don't give away my stuff and don't forget today's our first class back at Shimmer and Shine – it's the new term, remember!'

'I won't forget,' said Mum. 'Have a good day at school!'

Shimmer and Shine was more than a ballet class

for Indu. When she was younger, she'd learned Bharatanatyam, an Indian traditional dance, but she always got bad stage fright when it came to performing, and eventually gave up dancing. That was until a few months ago, when she had enrolled at the local ballet studio to try to overcome her fears. She'd made new friends there – Yara, Momoka, Dante and Charlie – and while she was still very nervous about being in front of an audience, she had loved learning to dance again.

On their way to school, Indu and Yara walked ahead of Mrs Madani.

'Are you excited about Shimmer and Shine?' asked Indu.

'Super excited,' said Yara. 'And I've got a new leotard and skirt. I grew taller over the holiday and don't fit into my old kit any more.'

Indu wondered if hers might be a tad small too.

Maybe no one will notice it, she thought. She knew she couldn't ask Mum for a new one yet – they didn't have a lot of extra money for luxuries. A new leotard, ballet tights and a chiffon wrap skirt every term would be just that: a luxury. If Indu did need them though, Mum would try to find her pre-worn ones. 'It's good for the planet,' she would say, 'and for the wallet.'

'Look,' said Yara, interrupting Indu's thoughts and showing her a picture of her kit on her phone.



Indu smiled. 'Ooh! Love that olive-green colour.'

'Thanks!' said Yara. 'Hey, did you practise during the break? I didn't miss a day!'

Indu grinned at Yara's exuberance when it came to ballet.

'Yeah, of course. Probably not as much as you though,' said Indu. 'I also did loads of reading. Did you know humans glow in the dark like fireflies? You can see it through special cameras.' Indu loved all things science, maybe even more than she loved ballet. She wanted to be a neurosurgeon one day.

'Cool!' said Yara. 'I wonder what new steps we'll learn today.'

'I can't wait to see everyone,' said Indu. Even though they had started a group chat and kept in touch during the break, they hadn't had time to see each other much. Once or twice, they'd met at Mrs Madani's patisserie, Cake Walk, but that was all. 'I

miss dancing together,' she added.

'Me too,' agreed Yara, as they turned towards the school gates.

That evening, as had happened a few times lately, Mum had indeed picked up another double shift. Mrs Madani met Indu and Yara at school and walked with them to Shimmer and Shine. Indu worried about Mum working so hard, but Mum always laughed it off when she brought it up.

When they arrived at the studio, Indu gasped. A new sign had been hung outside, with *Shimmer and Shine* sparkling on an indigo-blue background, surrounded by little stars.

'Look over there!' cried Yara, pointing at the ballet poses that had been painted on the studio door.

Indu smiled. 'Looks like Mrs C came through.'

Mrs C – short for Dame Audrey Clougston-

Willmott, the owner of the studio – had promised to refurbish the building during the break, and Indu thought it looked fantastic now.

Just then, Momoka arrived. 'Oh my shimmers,' she said, gazing at the beautiful sign. 'Have you seen the inside yet?'

'Not yet!' said Yara. 'We were just going in.'

'Then what are we waiting for?' said Indu. 'Come on!'

She pushed the door open and immediately stopped. Yara and Momoka almost bumped into her, but then peeped over her shoulders into the studio.

'Oh my shimmers,' whispered Momoka again.

There was a new shock-absorbent dance floor and shiny floor-to-ceiling mirrors. The polished wooden barres, attached to the mirrored wall, were gleaming too. A grand piano stood in one corner of the studio, and ballet scenes were painted on the other walls.



‘This is so cool,’ said Indu.

‘Welcome back, girls,’ said a voice from behind them.

Their teacher, Miss Diamond, was wearing a black leotard and a white knee-length chiffon skirt. She had a big smile on her face as she noted their reactions to the new studio. Next to her stood Mrs C, dressed in an orange and purple trouser suit, with a big orange bead necklace and a twinkle in her eye.



'Hi, Miss Diamond,' said Indu. 'Hi, Mrs C – this is . . .'

'Amazing!' said Momoka.

'Like a dream,' whispered Yara.

'So you like it?' asked Mrs C, chuckling.

'We *love* it,' said Indu, and her friends chorused their agreement.

'Come on then.' Mrs C beckoned to them. 'I'll give you the grand tour!'

They followed Mrs C as she began at the locker room.

'Ta da!' she announced, flinging the door open.

Inside, sparkling new lockers lined opposite sides of the room, and down the middle was a long bench with dark green velvet seats. The two other walls were covered in ornately framed mirrors with an arch of light bulbs giving the changing room a backstage-theatre feel. Parts of the walls were painted in colourful patterns and there was a cosy corner with beanbags.

'Look up!' cried Indu.

From the ceiling hung a beautiful lamp that looked like a sun spreading its bright rays.

'This is a *real* dance studio,' said Yara.

'Because you are all *real* dancers,' said Miss Diamond, joining them.

'So what do you think, girls?' asked Mrs C.

Indu sat on the bench and looked around in wonder. 'It's perfect,' she said.

'Thank you, Mrs C,' said Yara. 'When you said you were going to refurbish, we weren't imagining this!'

Mrs C laughed. 'A refurbishment worth doing is worth doing well,' she told them. 'Right, Sophie, I'm off. Keep me posted on how you all get on in the new space.' With that, she turned on her heels and left.

'We should be getting on with today's class,' said Miss Diamond. 'So I'll see you out at the barre soon!'

After a few more minutes of taking it all in, the girls got ready. As their other classmates started to arrive, they arranged their hair into buns, put on their ballet tights, changed into their leotards, and put on their full-sole leather ballet shoes. They twirled in front of the new mirrors with big smiles on their faces.

'Where are Charlie and Dante?' asked Indu.

‘Late as usual?’ chirped Momoka.

They left the locker room and almost bumped into Charlie and Dante, both changed and ready to dance.

‘Can you believe this?’ asked Dante. ‘Or am I in a dream? Was your locker room as plush as ours?’

Momoka looked surprised. ‘You have your own locker room?’

‘Yup! Separate locker rooms for boys and girls instead of the shared one,’ said Charlie. ‘I definitely wasn’t expecting that!’

‘Time to begin!’ called Miss Diamond, as the rest of the class assembled in the studio. ‘Welcome back, everyone. Firstly, I’m going to walk you through the warm-up exercises, just in case some of you have forgotten what to do over the holiday.’

‘I haven’t,’ Momoka called out.

Indu’s palms felt clammy all of a sudden, and

she wiped sweat from above her lips with her sleeve. Sometimes she couldn't shake the feeling that everyone else was a better dancer than her.

Her worries soon faded though, as Miss Diamond led the class through gentle head and shoulder rolls, followed by slow calf raises while holding on to the barre.

'This helps to strengthen your ankles and will assist you in keeping your balance,' Miss Diamond said, as she checked everyone's posture.

They moved on to jumping jacks and frog stretches until everyone was warmed up. Next, Miss Diamond guided them through the five arm and leg positions, to refresh their memories. Indu was grateful for the reminder and the instructions.

'We're going to review all the barre exercises we learned last term,' said Miss Diamond. 'Now, we must always master the steps that work the right side of

the body, and then the left side, at the barre. Only then can we move on to the centre exercises. Who knows why?'

Indu quickly lowered her gaze to the floor. She remembered something about balancing. *But what if I'm wrong?* she thought.

'Because when we move to the centre, we have to balance ourselves,' said Yara.

'And we need to learn to shift our weight from one leg to the other when we repeat the same steps on both legs,' added Lauren.

'Exactly,' said Miss Diamond. 'I can see some of you haven't forgotten the work we did.'

Indu smiled a little to herself. She'd known the answer, even if she hadn't actually said it aloud.

'Right, let's begin the barre exercises,' said Miss Diamond. 'Follow my lead.'

They ran through the basic movements they'd

learned last term: *plié*, *tendu*, *rond de jambe à terre*, *battement fondu*, *battement frappé*, *développé*, and, to finish off, *grand battement*.

Indu watched Miss Diamond carefully. She couldn't really practise much at home – the tiny two-bedroom flat had no space for a barre – but she was pleased to note that her body still remembered all the steps.

'Well done! I think we're ready to move to centre work,' said Miss Diamond. 'Let's try the *port de bras*.'

Miss Diamond explained that, for this move, the lower part of the body stayed still in fifth position, while the focus was on the arms. She choreographed a sequence that took them through all the arm positions but in various orders. Everyone practised this exercise twice, first with the right foot in front in fifth, and then with the left foot in front.

After that, they moved on to tendus, right side

and left side, then Miss Diamond taught them *glissés*. It was similar to the tendu, except they had to lift their foot off the floor once they'd extended their leg, to challenge their balance.

Eventually, it was time for everyone's favourite: *pirouettes* from the corner! Miss Diamond set a lovely exercise – a waltz travelling forwards and backwards, then side to side, with a few pirouette combinations.

Once they started moving around more energetically in the centre of the studio, copying Miss Diamond, Indu's heart soared. Dancing with her friends, moving together like birds in formation, made her feel so free –

BUMP!

Indu knocked against Dante, who jumped back to avoid a head-on collision, which tripped Charlie, who ended up stepping on Momoka's feet. They all collapsed on the floor, giggling.



‘That was the best choreographed collapse I’ve ever seen,’ said Miss Diamond.

‘Sorry!’ said Indu, accepting Yara’s hand to pull her up. ‘I think I went the wrong way.’

‘No need to be sorry,’ said Miss Diamond. ‘As long as no one’s hurt. It’s important to pay attention to the other dancers around you though.’

Indu nodded. ‘Can we do it again, Miss?’

Miss Diamond smiled and restarted the music.

By the time they stopped for a break ten minutes later, Indu felt happy and flushed, as she went to fill her bottle at the water fountain. She wouldn’t have felt at home in a dance studio a year ago, but all that had changed. This temporary hobby she had agreed to try out had turned into something that made her feel joyful. Even though she wasn’t like her friends, who dreamed of becoming professional dancers, learning ballet had become important to Indu.

‘Earth to Indu!’ called Dante.

Oops! Her water bottle was full, and Dante gently pulled it away from the fountain.

‘You OK?’ he asked.

Indu smiled. ‘Just enjoying being here,’ she said.

As Momoka, Charlie and Yara joined them to get water, Miss Diamond called for their attention. ‘Please can everyone assemble in the centre and sit on the floor? I have some news to share with you all.’

‘I wonder what it is,’ said Momoka.

‘Maybe she’s brought cake,’ said Dante, a hopeful and hungry gleam in his eye.

‘Why does your brain draw a straight line to cake all the time?’ joked Charlie.

‘Come on, let’s sit down,’ said Yara. ‘I want to know what the news is.’

When everyone was ready and quiet, Miss Diamond started to speak. ‘Last term, we performed

The Sleeping Beauty to save Shimmer and Shine. Now, thanks to all of you, we have a permanent studio that has been renovated beautifully by our patron, Dame Audrey Clougston-Willmott.'

Indu nudged Yara and grinned.

'Mrs C is the best,' called out Dante.

Miss Diamond smiled and nodded. 'I've been talking to Mrs C and to Gus, who you all know runs the ballet shop in the high street and is my best friend.'

'Talking about what?' asked Dante.

'Shh!' whispered Indu. 'Let her finish.'

Miss Diamond continued, 'About putting on a show every term. It would give us a goal to work towards and help you all to gain confidence when dancing for an audience.'

As she noted the smiles around her, Indu's heart sank. She'd hoped that last term's show was a one-

off. Dancing in class, practising with her friends and hanging out with them at the patisserie was fun, but getting dressed up and performing? That was the opposite. In *The Sleeping Beauty*, Indu had felt anxious and panicky that she might miss a step or fall or mess up a routine. People watching her and seeing all her mistakes wasn't something she wanted to experience again. It was why she'd given up dancing in the first place.

'This is going to be great,' said Momoka. 'I'd love to learn another ballet.'

'Hang on!' said Charlie. 'Miss Diamond, is that why you've installed those lights up there, and railings for curtains?'

Everyone looked up and a series of *ooh*s and *aaah*s sounded from the class.

'Ah! Well spotted,' said Miss Diamond. 'We want the studio to be a performance space too, yes.'

‘Which ballet are we going to perform?’ Yara asked eagerly.

‘I can’t tell you just yet, as Gus and I are working on a little surprise,’ said Miss Diamond. There were a few groans of disappointment. ‘You’ll know very soon though! In the meantime, are you all happy to dance a show again?’

‘YES!’ the class chorused.

Except Indu. It didn’t matter which ballet it was. She didn’t want to perform in front of people at all.