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opening extract from

The Splendour Falls

written by

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ROSEMARY CLEMENT-MOORE

the
splendour
falls

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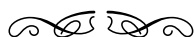
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To Mom.

For a thousand and one reasons.

Genius is another word for magic, and
the whole point of magic is that it is inexplicable.

— DAME MARGOT FONTEYN, PRIMA BALLERINA



Prologue

For months, I relived the pas de deux in my dreams, in that multisensory Technicolor of a memory I'd much rather forget. Nothing ever changed: the backstage perfume of sweat and hair spray. The heat and glare of the lights. The delicious coil and spring of my muscles as I moved through the choreography as if it were a spontaneous outburst of the joy I felt when I danced. The glorious triumph over gravity as Pasha lifted me over his head, and I was untethered, not just from the stage, but from the earth.

If I could have forced myself to wake up then, it would have been better. Like dying happy. But the dance played out in measured beats, as unchanging as a reel of film.

Pasha set me down, soft as moonlight; the orchestra covered the hollow tap of my pointe shoe on the stage. I balanced on one leg, the other stretched up behind me, prolonging the illusion of flight.

I could never say what went wrong in the next eight bars. The stage was clean, my pointe was solid. It wasn't even a particularly difficult combination. Come down to fourth position, port de bras and *changement* to second position and a quick series of *chaîné* turns.

Right foot, left foot, right . . . then a strange crunching sound that seemed to come from inside my head. Without knowing how I got there, I was facedown on the stage, and the murmurs of the audience were escalating with worry. In my dream – my memory – I tried to get up, but Pasha held me down, lapsing into panicked Russian. I didn't have to understand the language to know that something had gone very wrong.

It's funny how so much can hinge on one missed step.

Not funny ha-ha. Funny that the moment that should have been the pinnacle of my seventeen years on this planet ends up making me famous for the entirely wrong reason.

So I really don't mean funny so much as 'tragically ironic'.

Dancers get injured doing the flashy things, jetés and *échappés*. I mean, who the hell breaks their leg on a turn they teach in the tiny-tots class?

Me, I guess. The month before, I'd gotten a full-page write-up in *Ballet Magazine*. The month after, I was a tragic item in a sidebar to an article on insuring your legs, Betty Grable style, against career-ending injuries.

Sylvie Davis, the youngest-ever principal dancer for American Ballet, suffered a compound tibia and fibula fracture in front of hundreds of horrified audience members during her stunning debut at Lincoln Center.

At least I knew how to make an exit.