

Seventeen year old Marta Selbryth realizes her dream of becoming a professional dancer when the Intermountain Ballet Company in Billings, Montana invites her to join their 1957 season. To her surprise, her life on and off stage is overrun with problems she never imagine possible.

Madame Cosper, the artistic director, is a demanding woman who once danced as a prima ballerina. Marta begins their association poorly when she mimics Madame, is caught and faces possible expulsion. She's given a second chance in the form of dancing the unpopular character roles during fall and winter performances. Marta determines to do the roles with confidence in hopes of proving to Madame that she's up for every challenge.

Marta chooses to live a boarding house close to the ballet company. The owner, Mrs. B., allows her to use the basement to practice. The two male boarders are supportive and friendly. Carol, the young college student who shares a bathroom with Marta, ignores her. Mrs. B. lowers Marta's rent after Marta offers to help in the kitchen and bake for the boarders.

Marta and two of the new corps de ballet dancers, Lynne and Bartley, build a support system calling themselves the three dancing musketeers. Their weekends and free time spent together becomes an important lifeline through their first year.

When a young reporter, Steve Mason, visits the ballet company to write a piece for the local paper, he's attracted to Marta and pursues her. He becomes her tour guide and a love interest. During an autumn trip to the mountains, Marta falls; her injury isn't severe but Madame is furious saying Marta acted carelessly.

Marta dates Steve but refuses his suggestion that they become a couple: her focus on dancing takes first place for her time and commitment. Steve attends every performance in hopes of impressing her with his sincerity and to change her mind about being half of a couple. He finds he enjoys watching her dance.

The company tours the region during Nutcracker season. Bartley introduces Marta to diet pills to help her survive the rigors of living out of a suitcase and dancing in their tour towns. Marta continues taking the diet pills to control her weight and to boost her energy during their arduous schedule even after the tour ends.

Marta is pleasantly surprised when her mom arrives for the holidays to see her dance. They enjoy their week together until she overhears her mom and Mrs. B. wanting 'to fatten her up'.

After Christmas, Steve plans a New Year's weekend at his family's mountain cabin with their friends. Marta and Lynne arrive early to prepare for the party but, minutes later Marta falls from the icy porch and breaks her ankle. Her career is instantly placed on hold since the recovery takes four months and includes recasting her ankle when it doesn't heal properly the first time. Marta needs to pay her bills so she takes on sewing tasks from the ballet company and secures two part-time jobs in town.

During this same time, Steve takes an internship in San Francisco and Bartley joins a ballet company there. Marta rejects Steve's promise bracelet that makes them a couple so he leaves without saying good bye. Marta experiences her first signs of jealousy over Steve's and Bartley's chances for success, imagining them dating and enjoying time together in San Francisco while she struggles to regain her normal life. Depression creeps in as loneliness and her inability to dance or exercise properly drags on.

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Lynne's aunt arranges for Marta and Lynne to teach four young girls the basics of ballet. They use the basement in Marta's boarding house as their dance studio. Seeing the young girls dance eases her self-pity.

After Marta's second cast is removed she begins exercising and retraining herself in hopes of rejoining the dance company. She's excited when Steve returns to Billings and they renew their relationship. An urgent call from Bartley's mother takes Marta to Pennsylvania where she's shocked to see Bartley's condition and thinness. Surely the diet pills both girls take are not the cause.

Within a few weeks, Bartley dies. Depression overpowers Marta again. Diet pills, eating next-to-nothing and watching her friends go about their daily lives leads Marta into a downward spiral. Mrs. B. confronts her, encouraging her to seek help to overcome her problems suggesting counseling sessions with Ms. Wilson a psychiatrist Mrs. B. knows. Their sessions help Marta handle her problems.

Re-tryout for the dance company brings Marta back to practice with the other dancers and to work with Damien Black, the dance master. The corps dancers ignore her presence. The night before her audition as Marta is practicing she feels her strong ankle pop. She's told to stay off it but she's determined to dance through the pain and new injury.

The audition is not successful. When she asks Madame to allow her to audition again next year, the answer is no; she won't be ready by next fall. Marta tells her friends she'll be returning home to Bremerton to rebuild her strength and figure out her next step.

Saying good bye is difficult but Marta knows she must leave. She shares a good-bye dinner with Lynne promising to stay in touch. She mends her relationship with Steve by accepting the promise bracelet and telling him that she loves him and will keep a place for him in her heart. She boards the train then laughs and cries when she sees the banner Lynne and Steve hold up outside the train.

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### **Chapter 1**

Marta Selbryth, age seventeen, travels alone to Seattle to audition for the Intermountain Ballet Company and dances for the directors Madame Cosper and Damien Black.

### **Chapter 2**

The following week she receives an invitation to join the company. Her excitement fills the house with energy. Days later, her bus trip to Billings, Montana ends in disaster: her luggage and the promised greeter are no-shows. The inn clerk befriends her and helps her find a place to live.

### **Chapter 3**

Marta meets Mrs. Belvern and selects her boarding house as her new 'home'. The other boarders, except Carol are friendly. When Marta offers to help Mrs. B. with dishes and baking, Mrs. B. reduces her rent.

### **Chapter 4**

Marta borrows a bike from Mrs. B., arrives at the ballet company with no dance clothes and discovers she's days late. When frustration overcomes Marta. She mimics Madame's mannerisms. When Marta realizes Madame is watching, she assumes she'll be dismissed.

### **Chapter 5**

Marta apologizes. Madame berates her but gives her a second chance. The lost luggage and boxes from home arrive providing Marta a distraction as well as a chance to settle in.

### **Chapter 6**

Mrs. B. offers Marta the basement as a practice studio. On Sunday Marta and her new corps dancer friends, Lynne and Bartley, drive out to tour the area. On her return, she happily discovers the two male boarders made repairs in the practice space.

### **Chapter 7**

Lynne and Marta work on their turns after hours and overhear Madame speaking with a mystery man. They sneak out, pretending they hadn't listened in. Bartley invites Lynne and Marta to her home, offered to her by rich friends of her parents. The girls' friendship grows stronger.

### **Chapter 8**

A local college student and newspaper reporter, Steve Mason, arrives at the ballet company to gather information for an article. He sees Marta and a spark ignites, he asks her to show him around, hoping to begin dating her. His forwardness sends her dashing into the boarding house. Steve brings flowers the next morning to repair their budding relationship then he drives her to morning practice.

### **Chapter 9**

Madame confronts Marta falsely assuming Marta and Steve spent the night together. Over the following weeks Steve and Marta get acquainted and begin touring the area during their free time. Steve asks for her help in writing a series of articles about the ballet company.

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### **Chapter 10**

Madame selects Marta to play the dreaded role of Caraboose, the evil fairy in Sleeping Beauty as punishment for her earlier mimicking. She performs well despite the quick changes. Steve attends the ballet to impress Marta but becomes intrigued by the dancing he sees. That evening, instead of flowers, Steve gives Marta a tattered ballet book he's found. Her opinion of Steve softens.

### **Chapter 11**

Steve and Marta write a second article just before Marta is given a second dreaded role: Mother Ginger in the Nutcracker. During this same time Carol, her fellow boarder, begins creating problems for Marta.

### **Chapter 12**

Steve drives Marta to his family's mountain cabin for a day in the forest. She injures herself when she falls into the stream. Marta's mad and frightened about what Madame will do and demands to be taken home.

### **Chapter 13**

Madame sees Marta bruises and rants about her irresponsibility. Steve meets up with Marta and begs forgiveness since she hasn't returned his calls; Carol didn't pass on the messages he left for Marta.

### **Chapter 14**

The Company begins a regional tour with the Nutcracker. Bartley introduces Marta to diet pills to help handle her exhaustion. Marta discovers that they help her stay trim and continues to use them beyond the tour's end.

### **Chapter 15**

While talking at Lake Josephine, Marta and Steve reconcile from the stream disaster. He buys her a 'Montana winter coat' and asks for tickets to every performance. Meanwhile, Marta prepares for her first Christmas away from home.

### **Chapter 16**

Mom surprises her by coming for Christmas and the Nutcracker. They spend the holiday week together with Lynne and Steve joining the celebration. Marta over reacts when she hears her mom talk with Mrs. B. about needing to 'fatten up Marta'.

### **Chapter 17**

Lynne and Marta drive to Steve's family cabin to prepare for a holiday weekend. Marta falls off the icy porch and breaks her ankle. Lynne drives Marta back to Billings where a doctor casts her leg telling her to expect a 15 to 20-week recovery. Marta is devastated and waits for her Mom to arrive. Eventually they argue over Marta's eating habits.

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### **Chapter 18**

Marta quizzes her mom about her father's fatal fall. She expresses worry over her own hospital bills. The doctor releases Marta but warns her to follow his orders. She moves into the depressing downstairs boarding house room to avoid the stairs up to her room.

### **Chapter 19**

Marta misses her mom as soon as she leaves. Lynne helps Marta exercise and work on a new ballet article for Steve. Bartley returns and announces that she's joined the San Francisco Ballet Company. Lynne and Marta feel happy for her success but sad about her leaving. Bartley visits with Marta before she leaves town.

### **Chapter 20**

Steve receives an internship in San Francisco and asks Marta to accept an expensive promise bracelet to seal their commitment. She refuses causing him to leave without saying good-bye. Later, they reconcile during a long distance phone call.

### **Chapter 21**

Out of frustration bed head and searching for something to do, Marta cuts her hair super short. Lynne is shocked but arrives with news: her aunt suggests they teach ballet basics to four young girls. Planning and sewing for them boosts Marta's mood.

### **Chapter 22**

On Valentines' Day Steve surprises Marta by flying home and taking her to the cabin for a snow break. They stay over night which allows time for their relationship to deepen.

### **Chapter 23**

Marta's bone has not healed properly; her leg is recast. Now she must find a way to earn money and pay her bills. When Marta secures two part time jobs she worries about all the sitting and lack of exercise. She's afraid she'll gain weight so she increases her dose of diet pills.

### **Chapter 24**

Time moves slowly as Marta trudges from one job to the next. Depression pulls at Marta. Mrs. B notices and confronts her suggesting she speak with a professional.

### **Chapter 25**

Marta reluctantly meets with Miss Wilson, a psychiatrist, and finds it eases her depression. Anger returns when she discovers Carol is spying on private discussions with Mrs. B. Luckily, the little girls begin ballet lessons taking Marta's thoughts off herself.

### **Chapter 26**

The cast on Marta's ankle comes off. Marta exercises to excess, sleeps through her theatre job and is fired.

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### **Chapter 27**

Steve returns and reunites with Marta. She learns her anticipated June audition will be the weeks earlier in mid-May. The little girls recital will take place in June.

### **Chapter 28**

Marta is concerned about not hearing from Bartley so she calls San Francisco and leaves a message with a closed-lip butler. She waits to hear back from Bartley.

### **Chapter 29**

Bartley's mom calls Marta and asks her to come to Philadelphia. Bartley is in a private clinic until she recovers from the affects of too many diet pills. Marta visits with her only to be shoved to the floor for not bringing diet pills. Marta returns to Billings, conflicted about her promise to tell no one about the trip or about Bartley's condition.

### **Chapter 30**

Marta's exhausted the next morning but begins rehearsing the audition selection with the corps dancers who ignore her return. Shocking news arrives: Bartley is dead. Lynne confronts Marta about her use of diet pills as they plan and host a memorial for Bartley.

### **Chapter 31**

The night before the audition, Marta practices her dance and injures her strong ankle. She's determined to audition anyway. In her gut she knows if she doesn't, she'll be cut from the company. Her worst fear is released; her dancing isn't strong enough. She's released from the company.

### **Chapter 32**

Marta exits the audition and tells Steve and Lynne she's been dismissed. She walks away to be alone to think. The next morning Steve waits outside her window in case she wants to talk. They drive to The Rims and to breakfast where Marta tells him she's returning home to recover and decide her next step.

### **Chapter 33**

The little girls arrive at the boarding house with cards and cake to say good-bye. Later that week, Marta has dinner at Lynne's. Steve shows up. They drive to The Rims and he asks her to reconsider accepting the promise bracelet. This time she agrees and tells an overjoyed Steve that she loves him.

### **Chapter 34**

Marta returns alone to The Rims before leaving Billings. She says her good-byes at the boarding house then leaves for the train. As the train pulls out, she sees Lynne and Steve holding a surprising banner. Marta's train moves west.

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