



Tumbletoes

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Kids, Magic

Once upon a time, on a cold January day in London, a frantic mother was weaving her way through the busy, narrow street with her 10-year-old daughter in tow. It was only five o'clock and the sky was already dark, not that there had been much light during the day. The little girl, named Lea, was catching glimpses of faces as she was passing, all with the same gloomy demeanour as the January sky. It was the bitter time between Christmas and spring, where the happy festivities had gone and past, and now it is back to work and school for everyone. With nothing but the cold and permanently grey sky for the next few months. Unfortunately for Lea, she also had the same downcast feeling.✕

Today was the first ballet class of the year, and for Lea. She had been so excited to receive her tutu for Christmas. Casting her mind back, she had torn apart the carefully wrapped present, tossing the scraps left and right and squealed with glee. "Remember to take it easy now and listen carefully to your teacher", warned her father.

Unfortunately, she had been too excited to listen and register her father's advice, and on her first lesson today got a bit impatient and tried to do a pirouette just like the teacher had. It had resulted in her landing flat on her face. All eyes were on her, she was stunned into shock. The silence that followed felt like an eternity, and then gradually her classmates began to point and laugh at her, she became the laughing stock for the whole class. "Twinkletoes? More like Tumbletoes", sneered one of her classmates, all the other girls then continued to refer to her as 'Tumbletoes' for the rest of the lesson. Her face flushed with embarrassment just recalling the issue, she was already dreading her next lesson tomorrow. She hung her head low again as she trailed after the mother when she noticed something glistening on the pavement. She bent as to tie her shoelaces and picked it up, to Lea it looked like an expensive stud earring, "Someone must be missing it", she thought, and pocketed

it. They eventually approached the front steps of their terraced house and her mum ushered her in quickly to warm up by the fireplace.

The evening passed by quickly and soon it was time for bed, Lea had polished up the shiny item she found and put in on her bedside table, she will hand it in to a lost and found tomorrow she thought, and slid between the cool sheets and wriggled around under the covers hoping for the bed to warm up quicker. Her mother read her a bedtime story, one of the fairy tales from her new book for Christmas about faraway places and magical creatures, which temporarily eased Lea's mind from the day.

"Do I have to go ballet tomorrow?" pleaded Lea, "I made such a fool of myself today, what if they all laugh at me again tomorrow and call me Tumbletoes?"

"Of course you have to go, you shouldn't let one minor setback stop you from trying again," scolded her mother, before kissing Lea goodnight. Lea said goodnight to her line of stuffed animals, which are arranged neatly along her bed, and reached out to switch off her bedside lamp. She paused temporarily as she caught a glimpse of the snow globe next to her light. It was a beautifully decorated snow globe of a castle in Europe which her uncle gifted to her from his trip last winter, knowing her love for fairy tales, and this one looked exactly as you would picture a magical castle would. It stood magnificently on top of a hill, surrounded by forests and mountains, with bright turrets and illuminated windows, everything topped with a layer of snow, like icing sugar, delicately sprinkled on top. She always vowed to herself that one day she would visit there herself. "Oh, I wish I never had to go ballet again and disappear into a fairytale where there are always happy endings", Lea wished aloud. She switched off her light and shut her eyes, with her humiliating tumble replaying in her head along with the sneers of her peers, before she finally drifted off to sleep.

Now, it just so happens that the 'earring' Lea found belonged to a dream fairy, in fact, it was her wand. The fairy had been frantically searching for it ever since she realised it was missing, which to her guilt was probably a while later to when she had dropped it. She was feeling desperate as was unable to find it by nightfall, normally at this time, she would be visiting houses to cast dreams. She happened to pass by Lea's window whilst she was pleading with her mother, curious, she flew inside. When Lea had turned her light off, she noticed something glowing dimly on the bedside table. To her delight, it was her wand! Full of gratitude, she wanted to repay Lea for taking good care of it. Remembering Lea's conversation with her mother, she decided to cast a spell...

Lea awoke to find bright sunrays piercing through the curtains, "Oh, I must have overslept," worried Lea, for surely it is not that bright at 6 am in the morning. However, as her senses slowly began to awaken she realised those were not her curtains and this was not her room! For her modest size bedroom and contents have been substituted with a grand design fit for a queen! She jumped up and went to fling her curtains open, instead of the row of narrow terraced houses and busy street she was used to seeing, it was a forest with mountains in the backdrop! Not only that, but she was miles higher than the third storey, which was where her bedroom in the attic was.

"What on earth is this?" she wondered aloud. Knock knock. Lea swivelled around to face the grand double doors. "Come in?", responded Lea shyly, wondering if that was the right choice. The doors slowly open to reveal a lady in a neat uniform carrying a tray, gingerly stepping in.

"Morning, m'lady, trust you had a good night's rest after your journey here?" asked the lady.

"Oh, it was all right, thank you..." responded Lea hesitantly. However what she really wanted to say was, "And where might 'here' be and how did I get here?". She watched the girl stride across the room to the round glass table and set the tray down. As Lea observed the lady who had started pouring the tea, she built up the courage to ask, "Sorry, madam, are you the lady of the house?". The lady burst out laughing immediately, upon hearing Lea's question, nearly spilling the tea. "Oh me? No, I'm just a maid at this castle, this is the home of the king and queen! You must have knocked your head in your sleep, now hurry and have your breakfast before it gets cold", the maid began uncovering the food. Delightful aromas began to fill the room, wafts of fresh vanilla pancakes with sweet syrup and berries contrasting strongly with the savoury smell of sizzling sausages and

bacon, instantly making Lea's mouth water.

"Dig in! You've got a big day ahead of you," encouraged the maid.

"I-I do?" stuttered Lea in surprise.

"Of course, the annual ice dancing show! You must still be in dreamland or knocked your head pretty hard, you came with all the other dancers! We're all very excited for it," grinned the maid.

"Oh...right," maybe I am dreaming wondered Lea.

"Now, when you're done with breakfast, your outfit is all pressed for you and hanging in your wardrobe, you can head along down to the rink to warm-up and rehearse for the show," said the maid.

Lea still had no idea what is going on, but the food was too enticing to reject. So she happily dug into the food, which tasted as good as they looked. The maid had retreated after she finished, taking the tray of empty plates along with her. Lea walked back to the windows, still stunned by the view and decided to study it some more. It looks so familiar, almost as if she had seen it before. Rows and rows of trees stretched out all around, some with leaves and some without, but all had a thick dusting of snow on top, like a blanket of snow over the entire kingdom. Oh, and the mountains! So mighty and tall are they that the tops reached far up into the clouds, making Lea feel very small. Suddenly, some movement below caught her eye, it was a group of neatly dressed people, likely butlers of the castle she thought. They were heading towards a frozen lake with wooden chairs and chair covers, she watched as they began arranging them neatly. Must be for this ice dancing show the maid had told her about, she deducted.

Slowly, Lea backed away from the window and sunk back into the comfy four poster bed she apparently slept in all night. This must be a dream she decided, none of this can be real! She considered her options, she could possibly hide in this spectacular bedroom until she inevitably woke up, or go out and play. She had missed the opportunity to ice skate before Christmas last year, perhaps this was her chance now, albeit in a dream but after all, she may as well make the most of it.

So she ran over to the impressive oak wardrobe and flung it open. Inside was a beautifully sewn white silk dress with jewels delicately embroidered around the edges of the collar and smaller ones spotted on the skirt and a pair of shiny white skates. She gladly changed into the dress, grabbed the ice skates and jumped into a pair of fluffy boots by the door and headed towards the lake.✕

The corridor outside her room was spectacular and long, she ran along following the path, her footsteps muffled by the immaculate rug that ran all the way down. All the way down the spiral staircase leading her to the grand double front doors. She followed the trail of butlers and chairs to the lake.

“Welcome, welcome!”, greeted a cheery young man with a top hat, who was directing all the other butlers, “Looks like you’re all ready to practise together!”

At that moment a line of brown bears proceeded to go on the lake one at a time and skate uniformly and in complete coordination around the perimeter. “Dancing bears! If I wasn’t sure I was in a dream before, I definitely would be now!” chuckled Lea to herself. Next were ducks to join the lake, she watched in awe as they glided graciously around, fanning out their wings in perfect synchronisation. Many others joined them too, rabbits bounding up and down across the lake, mice spinning on their tails and girls and boys too, creatures great and small all dancing together on the frozen lake.

Lea kicked off her fluffy boots and swapped them for the ice skates before tentatively pausing at the edge. She gingerly lifted her left foot and set it down, like a little child dipping their chubby toe into the sea to test the water. However as soon as the tip of her ice skate touched the lake, an orchestra began to play, feeling as if her feet took over, Lea pulled herself onto the rink and began to glide smoothly along as if she was floating on air. A grand orchestra had appeared at a corner of the lake, providing wonderful classical music accompaniment to the ice dancers, they were led by a smart conductor, a fox with a top hat and coat, gracefully weaving the baton.

Giddy with delight, Lea had no idea how long she was spinning around the lake for with the other dancers but it felt like no time at all. She was not sure how, but she managed to know exactly where she needed to be and when. She managed to do spins, spirals, bunny hops and crossovers, just like the ones she has seen the professional ice skaters do at the competitions on television.

“Esteemed guests, please take a break and enjoy the lunch we prepared for you as we resurface the ice ready for

the afternoon show!” announced the cheery man. Lea followed the ice dancers who had formed an orderly a queue to dismount the lake and was guided to a seat at the long wooden table had appeared at the side. On this table was a magnificent spread, there was something for everyone, fresh fish for the bears and ducks, generous salad bowls for the rabbits, platters of different cheeses for the mice and soup and bread with plenty of spread all around. Even a hot cheese fondue which was spilling waterfalls of freshly melted cheese. Everyone delightedly tucked in after the morning practice and conversed with another, it really was a spectacular sight.

Once everyone was done, they were encouraged to take a walk around the grounds to walk off their meals and prepare for the big show. A few engaged in a light-hearted snowball fight, some were catching snowflakes on their tongues and some were even making snow angels in the newly layered fresh snow. Lea was just content to observe everyone from the campfire, cradling her mug of delicious hot cocoa.

Suddenly a loud bell resounded around the whole kingdom, it was from the castle’s clock tower announcing it being two o’clock, the show was starting soon! Everyone headed back to the lake which now had a grand, velvet curtain around the front and began their warm-ups, as the audience were taking their seats on the chairs set out in the morning. Lea changed back into her skates and began her stretches. Once everyone was ready they were ushered back onto the rink to stand in their first positions. At exactly half past two, the trumpets began their fanfare, Lea looked around nervously, this meant the king and queen had arrived to take their seats, but she could not see anything as she was behind the curtain.

“Your royal highnesses, ladies and gentlemen and all creatures of the kingdom, welcome!” bellowed the cheery man, “it is my pleasure to introduce to you our annual ice dancing show, let the show begin!”

The curtains began to part until the rink was fully revealed to the audience and vice versa, thus the show began! Lea and the other dancers skated in time with the music and her nerves began to dissipate, she was having so much fun! After the group dances, everyone began to take turns in the spotlight. Lea was last, she patiently waited at the side for her turn, admiring everyone else’s skill in the meantime. One by one the dancers would await their cue before skating to the middle for their solo before gliding off to the side. At last, as the music was speeding up Lea skated up to the centre. This was it, her big moment, she took a deep breath and counted to herself, ‘One..two..and...’.

Lea leapt off the ice in an attempt for a triple axel like she practised, she felt more than heard the whole

audience hold in their breath with her. She was spinning! Now for the landing, her left foot touched back down on the ice again, but her right foot was not ready to balance and next thing she knew she tumbled down onto the ice still spinning. The whole audience gasped, the orchestra went silent, all eyes were on her.

She felt her whole face flush, this cannot be happening! She felt as if she was frozen in time, she remembered in ballet how she had tumbled and was laughed at, and now again? Gradually, Lea realised everyone was waiting for her reaction, their faces so still, so serious. Then slowly, Lea broke into a smile, which turned into a grin, which turned into a laugh. Oh, how silly she must have looked and how serious everyone is! She could not help it but soon she was doubling over in laughter. Then one by one, the audience joined in with her, and the orchestra, and the ice dancers and finally the king and queen, all began to laugh together. Two bears glided towards Lea to help her up and together they all took a bow. Everyone began to laugh even harder.

Lea looked around, she did not feel like a laughing stock anymore, in fact, she felt at ease, perhaps it is not the end of the world when you make a mistake. All the ice dancers now joined the centre and Lea began to skate again with her head held high, the orchestra picked up again and they carried on the show. When the show was over, they all took a bow together and everyone gave them a standing ovation. Lea's cheeks were still flushed as she dismounted the rink, but this was due to exhilaration rather than embarrassment.✕

Processions followed after, and all the ice dancers took turns to greet the king and queen who congratulated them on the show. When it was Lea's turn, the queen asked her, "And how may we address you?".

Lea thought for a moment, "You may call me Tumbletoes, your highness", she replied and dropped into a curtsy. The queen smiled and proceeded to congratulate Lea for her spectacular performance and showmanship.

Suddenly, the clock tower began to ring again this time louder than before and suddenly Lea felt as if everyone and everything was fading away, and all she could concentrate on was the ringing...

Her eyes shot open, the ringing was coming from her alarm clock. "Wow, what a funny dream, was it morning already?" she thought. It was a new morning of a new day, and she was ready for whatever came her way next.

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