The Newest Ballerina

by andlat

Dalton paced back and forth outside of the dance studio, waiting for his little sister to come out so he could escort her home. He thought it was so dumb that he had to do it just because his mom was working a little…

The Costume Box
2022

Chapter 1

The Newest Ballerina - Chapter 1

Dalton paced back and forth outside of the dance studio, waiting for his little sister to come out so he could escort her home. He thought it was so dumb that he had to do it just because his mom was working a little late. She was only a year younger than him, so why did he have to escort her home? He turned as he heard the door open, but it was just one of Emily's friends. Courtney or something? He could not remember.

"Hey, Dalton, Emily wanted me to come tell you that she's running a little late, so she figured you could come inside and sit down to wait for her." Dalton sighed.

"Fine." He walked past Courtney or whatever her name was and into the dance studio. He saw a few girls in yellow tutus standing around, but none of them were his sister.

"Where is she?" He asked.

"Changing." Courtney replied. "I can take her there if you want." Before he could even answer, she had grabbed his wrist and was pulling him along. "They won't mind a boy being back there, I'm sure." He tried to explain that he did not really need to go to the changing room to find Emily, but another girl grabbed his other wrist and he soon found himself going through a door into a changing room full of girls. They all grinned as if they were expecting him.

“There you are!” He said to Emily, trying to act normal, even as every eye in the room was on him. “Let’s go.”

“Can’t.” Emily said.

“Why?” He asked with a sigh. Emily smirked and clapped her hands.

Every one of the girls leapt into action, grabbing Dalton and stripping him down to his skin in no time flat. His hoodie, jeans, and everything vanished as the girls passed them out of his sight. He tried to fight and claw his way out of the veritable hoard of girls, but many hands made light work and they found it a matter of a few seconds, it seemed, to pull panties, white tights, and a yellow leotard with attached tutu over the scrawny boy’s body. By the time they led him over to a mirror, his shaggy hair had been rearranged into a downright implausible tight bun atop his head.

“What the?” He and every girl in the room turned as the door opened and a navy leotard-clad instructor stepped into the room.

“Yellow tutu? You’re one of mine.” She said, pushing Dalton by the shoulders out of the changing room. Emily followed, her street clothes making her look more masculine than her brother in his flouncy tutu.

“I’m going to go to the mall, little sis.” She called to him as the instructor shepherded him over to a group of girls dressed identically to him. “I’ll be back in two hours to take you home!”

Dalton groaned as the teacher finally said that class would end in ten minutes. Two hours! Two hours of prancing around in a tutu and tights, feeling like a complete dork! Worse, the girls who had done this to him had somehow gotten word to the girls in the class with him, so during breaks, they made sure he could not sneak off to the changing room, giggling and telling him both how pretty he looked and how terrible he was at ballet.

"I'm not supposed to be good." He muttered, careful not to speak too loudly. If the teacher found out he was a boy in a tutu and tights, he did not know what would happen. He groaned as he once again had to dig the leotard out of his butt crack. How did anyone stand wearing this stuff? The wedgie, the bouncing tutu, the weird way the tights rubbed against his legs.

"Well, Miss Andersen's going to make you stay late if you don't get good soon." One of the girls said. "How's it feel having her have to adjust your arms and legs for even the most basic stuff? You're really bad!"

"I don't want to be good!" Dalton insisted.

"Then why are you even in this class?" Another girl asked.

"You know why." He hissed.

"Alright, ladies. Back to the barre please." Miss Andersen called. Dalton shuffled at the back of the group, but that was not good enough for the teacher. "I want you" she touched his shoulder. "Right in the middle where I can keep an eye on

you." Dalton shuffled over, grumbling at the litany of giggles around him. Why did girls always giggle? It was so annoying, and seemed to get more annoying the more girls they were. Surrounded by giggling girls was almost enough to drive Dalton crazy!

He felt the breath of one of the girls on his neck as he took his place on the barre. Were they really going to be that close together? He was so clumsy, he might cause them all to topple like dominos. He snickered a bit at the funny image, but he knew it was sure to get him in trouble with the stern teacher.

"I'm serious. I think Miss Andersen might actually make you stay late." She whispered. "This is pliés, so all you gotta do is watch the girl in front of you and do exactly what she does. Who cares if you look like a complete sissy? You're already wearing a tutu, right?" Dalton shuddered, but nodded. It was, he thought, good advice at least.

Returning to the dance studio, Emily was surprised to see that Dalton was still part of the class. Even more surprisingly, he seemed to be keeping up, though admittedly the yellow tutus were the beginners, so it was mostly foot and arm positions and basics like that. All the same, he blushed and stumbled as he saw her standing there, watching him.

"Focus!" Miss Andersen said. "I would hate to make any one of you girls stay late for extra practice." Emily giggled, determined to find out just how many times Dalton had been threatened with that. This whole scheme was just too good.

She sat down in one of the chairs by the door for parents to watch their kids. Well, daughters, Emily thought as she eyed the line of yellow tutu wearing ballerinas. And there, right in the middle, taller than any of the others, was her older brother. It was too good to be true.

Why on earth was he still in the class, she wondered. She had assumed that he would hide in the changing room until she returned with his clothes. Not that she had them, but she figured he would think she did. Could it be that he wanted to be in ballet? No, there was no chance of that. She would know if he secretly wanted to do ballet.

“Alright, that’ll be all for today, my beautiful ballerinas. Keep up your stretches and we’ll meet back here next week to continue learning le beau ballet.” The girls began to disperse from the barre. Emily watched Dalton, expecting him to make a dash for her. Or, given the large window behind her, probably the changing room. Judging by his face, that was exactly what he had in mind, but everything immediately became clear as she watched the other students surround Dalton, blocking his chances of escape as they peppered him with comments about his dancing. Smiling smugly, Emily slowly made her way over.

“Hey, everyone, I think my brother wants to go get changed.” The girls giggled and moved as one toward the changing room. Dalton, too embarrassed to even look his sister in the eye, shuffled after them, his tutu bouncing and flouncing just the same as theirs.

Emily followed them in. She had a good feeling her humiliated brother would need some help. He quickly removed the leotard, but stopped as he looked around for his clothes, blushing as he saw the girls around him in various states of undress.

“What’s wrong?” Emily asked, smiling at her brother in nothing but his tights, the peach panties they had forced him into showing through them. It was amazing he had put up the fight he had with an entire class of girls determined to dress him for ballet.

“Can’t find my clothes.” it came out all mumbled and strung together, but that was what Emily assumed he had said. She looked around, frowning. “Where’d you put them?”

“There were like a dozen of us.” Emily said. “So, I dunno what happened.” She shrugged. “Just put your leotard and tutu on. You can change at home.” He made a strangled sound.

“They’re not mine, Emily! Where’s my stuff?”

“I don’t know!” She said, matching his annoyed tone. “Let’s go though. Mom and dad’ll be home soon and they’ll wonder where we are.”

“I’ll just tell them you” his face turned red. “You made me” Emily’s disdainful scoff forced him into silence.

“Made you what? Your little sister dressed you up and you decided to take a full ballet class? Yeah, I bet that’ll go over well.”

“They… they wouldn’t let me leave.”

“He’s right.” One of the girls chimed in, having overheard their conversation. “But it was for his own good.”

“Yeah, if Miss Andersen catches someone hiding in the changing room, she makes her do exercises in front of the whole class.”

“He would’ve been here all night with how clumsy he is!”

“That’s true.” Emily said with a smirk. “But just think what a dainty ballerina he would have been by the end of it!”

“My clothes.” Dalton seethed, completely sick and tired of the giggles of girls. Emily nodded, sobering.

“I guess I’ll check the lost and found. Can’t imagine there are a lot of boy clothes in there, right?” She hurried off to the front door, all but certain one of her friends had deposited his clothes in there.

Sure enough, every bit of Dalton’s clothes were in the lost and found bin, but they were not the only things. She smiled eagerly as she found a skirt and a pink t-shirt. It was plain, but still girly.

“Perfect.” She said, noticing the little white bows on the sleeves of the t-shirt. She hurried back to the changing room. Dalton was now all alone, sitting on a bench still in just his tights, not even looking at the yellow leotard and tutu beside him. “Sorry,” Emily said, trying her best to sound convincing. Her parents could always catch her in a lie, but Dalton was

nowhere near as observant as them. “This is all I could find!”

“I can’t wear this.” He said, staring at the clothes in her hand.

“It’s either this or wear your leotard and tutu.”

“But”

“Seriously, I don’t have time to run home and grab your clothes.” Dalton’s eyebrows rose. “No. We need to hurry.” She smiled. “I think there’s another ballet class in a bit. Do you want to join them?” Dalton grunted a no. “Then throw on the skirt and shirt. Just over your tights. You can even wear your ballet flats home.” His jeans, shirt, and underwear missing was one thing, but Emily would have to figure out how to get his sneakers home. Those were expensive.

“They’re not”

“Dude. You just did two hours of ballet. Like full-blown, frou-frou in a tutu ballet.” Dalton’s seemed to both pale and blush at the same time. It was almost impressive, Emily thought, even if he seemed like he might faint. “So put on that skirt and tee and let’s get home so you can change.” He sighed. “It’s either that or I take them back to the lost and found and you wear the leotard. And we take the bus home.” Dalton groaned, but pulled the shirt on.

“Can I take the tights off?”

“They hide your hairy legs, but if you want.” Emily smirked as he had not even mentioned the bun he still had. He looked downright feminine even now. She did not point it out to him,

but she felt relieved. There would be far fewer chances of getting sidetracked if everyone just saw two sisters walking home.

They left the changing room and Emily directed him away from the lost and found. She had pushed his clothes down under a few abandoned sweatshirts and jackets, but she did not want to take any chances.

“Want to sign up for lessons for real?” Emily teased as they passed the bulletin board. Dalton glared at her, slowly returning to his old self, even if he still did not have a single scrap of boy clothes on his body. Emily smiled sweetly as they left the ballet studio and Dalton’s time as a ballerina behind.

Chapter 2

The Newest Ballerina: Recital - Chapter 2

Still mad about the ballet class he had had to take, the last place on earth Dalton wanted to be was at Emily's ballet recital. He had tried to tell his parents he had homework to do, but they had insisted he support his sister.

"No one does homework on Friday night anyway." His mom said. So Dalton now found himself standing in the lobby, waiting to go inside as his parents had what sounded like the single most boring conversation in history with other grown-ups. If only they had bought his lie about homework, he could be at home, watching a movie or playing a game.

"Oh! Dalton, would you quick run this backstage?" His dad handed him a duffel bag he had been holding.

"What is it?"

"Emily insisted she needs it and I forgot I had it until just now." Dad said with a shrug. "Just go quick. We'll be sitting down soon." He forced the bag into Dalton's arms, signaling the conversation was over. "Thanks, bud."

~ D ~

Dalton stepped backstage. He grimaced as he saw girls swarming everywhere in their tutus. It was like none of them were where they needed to be and had to all get there at once.

He spied a few guys who must have been high school seniors chatting away, but their bolero jackets and tights were as foreign to him as anything else. Where was Emily? With his luck, she was as far away from the backstage door as possible.

He weaved his way through ballerinas. Did none of them realize that the tutus and tights and all that made them look like giant five year olds, regardless of age? He thought he recognized a few of them from his ordeal a few months before, so he hurried on, searching for his sister. He had seen her recital outfit earlier. Why had he not paid more attention? Right, he had been fighting with mom about having to wear 'a nice shirt'. Well, he still felt like a dork in his button-up and slacks and he was definitely sticking out like a sore thumb back here. Where was Emily?

A group of girls walked past him in a single file line, their yellow tutus identical to the one he had worn. He hid his face behind the duffel bag. He should just give up. Whatever was in this bag was clearly not that important if Emily had forgotten to grab it.

"Yeah, I'm gonna start it tomorrow. I swear, they pick like the worst books." That was Emily's voice. He marched straight toward her, not even caring who got in his way.

"Here." He thrust the bag at his sister, who looked at him with delight.

"Oh, wow! I almost forgot about this, thanks, Dalton!" She grinned. "Now we can get ready."

"Like I care."

"You should." Emily said. "Grab him, girls!"

"Help!" Dalton had thought long and hard about when the girls had ambushed him and dressed him up like a ballerina, promising himself he would never be caught by surprise again. Unfortunately, reality proved otherwise. He tried to fight, to get free, to do anything other than call for help that would never come as the girls stripped him and dressed him in an identical sparkly white and blue tutu, leotard, and tights to what they wore. Last time had just been for class. This time, it was a big recital, so Dalton's head was held firmly in place as the girls did his makeup.

"Hold still!" One of the girls scolded. "I'm using a soft brush, but it'll still hurt if I poke you in the eye!"

"Help!" He yelled. Could no one hear him?

"We're trying to help you!" One of the girls said. "Hold still!"

"Goddammit! Let me freaking go!" He knew if he actually swore, Emily would tattle in a heartbeat. There were too many of them and nothing he said seemed to matter in the slightest.

By the time they were done, Dalton's makeup matched theirs. A blue tinsel scrunchie held his hair in a tight bun like theirs, the ribbons of his ballet slippers latticed up his legs like theirs.

"Let me go!"

"Fine. We're done." The girls stepped back and he got to his

feet, feeling a bit shaky with the satiny slippers on his feet in place of his solid sneakers.

"Where are my clothes?" The girls all giggled.

"You'll get them back after we dance." Emily held up the duffel, now locked shut with a zip tie. Dalton, horrified, pushed past Emily and her friends. He would find mom and dad or, better, hide in the bathroom and try to get all this stuff off. Emily and her friends weren't even chasing him! It was only when he saw the yellow ballerinas in front of him that he realized this was all too easy.

"There you are." One of them said. Up close, he could tell the tutus were slightly different from what he had worn during that class. "Figured you'd find your way into a tutu again. Your sister's told us all about how you secretly wear her tutu all the time. That's why you snuck into class that one time, right?" He glared at her. He knew she knew what had really happened. They all did. "Let's get this lost ballerina back to her group."

"No, stop! I... I" they pushed and pulled their captive back over just as Emily and her friends were all gathering for a photo.

"Oh, one more. Join your friends. Quickly." Dalton found himself pulled right into the middle of the group of ballerinas, every one of them dressed identically to him. "Perfect. You" the photographer pointed to the girl in front of Dalton. "Move just a bit to the left so we can see everyone. There. Perfect. Big smiles! This is for Facebook! Smiles!"

Flash! Flash! Flash! It felt like a hundred photos before finally, they were allowed to move.

"Ready, Dalton?" Emily asked, keeping her brother close to avoid another attempt at escape.

"You... you can't really..."

"You're dressed for it!"

"I don't know... the moves... and stuff." Emily laughed.

"Don't worry. There's a few groups in front of us. We'll teach you." She giggled. "But really, all that really matters is you get out on stage with us."

"Yeah, right." He scoffed. "Even I know you've been working on this stuff for months. There's no way I can learn it in like twenty minutes." Emily nodded knowingly.

"Yeah, but again, all that really matters is you get out on stage with us."

"What? But" Dalton's face paled as he realized what Emily meant. Every eye would be on the boy dressed like a ballerina stumbling around. By the time he got off stage, if he didn't break his neck, everyone would "know" that he had sneaked backstage to dress up and that was all that mattered.

Chapter 3

The Newest Ballerina: Parade - Chapter 3

"Dalton! Get out of bed this minute!" Dalton jolted awake, sitting up and rubbing at his eyes.

"Wha?"

"Did you forget?" His dad asked incredulously.

"Forget what?" That was met with a sigh.

"You promised Emily you'd help with her parade float."

"What? When?"

"Don't you play dumb, mister. You're not getting out of this. If you promised her, you're doing it."

"I didn't!" Why would he? Emily's ballet studio had a float in the town parade and why on earth, after everything that had happened, would Dalton want anything to do with that?

"Uh-huh."

"I swear!"

"Why would your sister lie?" Because that's all she does. Dalton thought acerbically. He almost expected Emily to be peering at him with a smirk behind dad, but he could hear her laughing about something downstairs. Great. "Get dressed or I'll drag you downstairs."

"I'm in my underwear!" Dalton tugged the blanket up over his navel.

"Then you'd better get dressed." He started to close the door. "Don't make me send Emily up here." Dalton was just about to throw the blanket off in frustration when his dad opened the door again. “And you better not sulk all day.”

“Dad!”

“You volunteered to help and my son is going to stay true to his word.” He closed the door, adding through it. “That’s what a man does.”

Emily barely looked at Dalton over breakfast, which only made him more suspicious. He knew she still remembered the recital, often recounting his stammered attempt to explain the situation to Mom, Dad, and the furious teacher still in the recital outfit. She had to be planning something! Maybe I can slip away during the walk to the dance studio. To his irritation, Emily insisted Dad drive them there.

"I'm gonna be walking for the whole parade! Please Daddy?" Her voice was so simpering, Dalton almost felt sick. They'll probably think I'm faking it, he thought grimly as he climbed into the car. At least he got to ride in the front seat. Mom still told him he had to wait until he was thirteen, but Dad was more lenient. Besides, his birthday was only a month and a half away. Thirteen. Dalton knew it would just be like any other birthday, but something about it felt special, like he would stop being a boy and become a man.

“Now remember.” Dad said to Dalton. “You’re going to help your sister. You know she’ll tell us if you’re not helpful. But, Emmy bean?”

“Yes, daddy?”

“You do not torment your brother. He’s doing a very nice thing helping you out.”

“Of course.” Dalton did not buy her innocent act for a second. He knew something was up and he would not let his guard down until he knew what. Probably not even then, he thought. If they even mentioned the recital, he would leave right then and there. He took a deep breath before following Emily into the studio.

Emily almost immediately forgot about Dalton, running over to her friends and chattering excitedly. Dalton figured they were talking about the parade, but as he stepped closer (still taking care to keep his distance) he heard them chatting about a boy at school. He sighed.

“Uh, I thought you needed my help with something.” Emily looked as if she had forgotten he was there and his heart leaped as he worried he might have just sealed his fate. A moment later, however, he relaxed as she pointed to a pile of cardboard boxes.

“Sure, I almost forgot. Can you go move those into the storeroom? We were decorating the float last night and there's just a bunch of stuff we don't really need.” The next twenty minutes were spent carrying things for the girls. He half-

expected them to follow him into the storeroom and make him put things in just the right place, but they seemed barely to even notice him outside of giving him ‘now that please’ vague orders. He adjusted his shorts as he stared at the boxes. Some of them were weirdly heavy, he thought. No wonder the girls needed my help. Still, something did not sit right with him. He knew he was paranoid, but didn't it make sense to be? Last time he was here, he had been forced into a yellow tutu and made to take a ballet class!

“Anything else?” He asked.

“Since you're offering so nicely, can you take our bags into the locker room?”

“Do you know where it is?” One of Emily's friends – he could never keep their names straight – asked. They all giggled, but returned to their conversation as he gathered up the six duffel bags they had tossed on the floor. Something felt off. What was it? Was it just how quiet the room seemed with only Emily and a couple friends here, their voices echoing throughout the cavernous space? Dalton turned to push the locker room door open with his butt.

“Get him!” Shit. Six bags.

Even though it had happened twice before, Dalton's head still spun at the speed with which the group of girls stripped him and forced him into everything a ballerina wore, from panties to tights, tutu to slippers. He fought and kicked and even tried to bite, but it was no use. The girls, Emily and her friends among them, pushed and pulled Dalton out of the locker

room in a magnificently broad pink tutu. They dragged him over to a small stool right in front of a mirror and set to work on his face, hands, and hair. Dalton tried to speak, but no words would come from the onslaught as brushes ran over his eyelashes, acrylic nails were fixed to each finger, and his cheeks were squeezed to force his lips into a pucker for lipstick. Spray filled the air as the girls did something that smelled downright awful to his hair. With girls all around him, Dalton could not even see the mirror until they stepped away and he stared, agape.

“Pretty ballerina in her pretty pink tutu.” Dalton could not even look to see which of Emily's friends had said it. He was too busy staring at his reflection. His face was made up right down to his pink lips, his fingers now had long, elegant nails, and his once brown hair was now a striking blonde, pulled into a snug ballet bun. Thanks to the leotard giving him the illusion of breasts, the boy had been transformed into the very image of a ballerina.

He tore his eyes away as they filled with tears, but it only made him feel worse to see all the girls in their street clothes while he was a ballerina from the tips of his toes to his ballerina bun. His gaze fell on a poster on the far wall of a ballerina in grand jeté. She looked the most like him, almost to the point where he had a feeling she had been the inspiration for his new look.

“Don't cry, Dalton.” Emily said, surprisingly gentle. “You're just going to join us for the parade and then you'll be able to go back to your old self. The blonde even washes out.” She

looked him over. “Good work, girls.”

“He looks like a ballerina, but does he move like one?” Dalton glared daggers at the girl who had said that. Serena? Was that her name?

“He did take one ballet class.” Emily said.

“Forever ago.”

“And you danced in our recital, didn't you, Dalton?”

“Yeah, until he got yanked off stage.” They all grinned at the memory.

“Don’t worry.” Emily said. “I’ve made arrangements for some of the best ballet teachers to come and get him all ready for our parade.” She looked him up and down. “God, that’s a lot of pink.” She murmured to herself.

“Emily.” Dalton said, hoping he could get through to her.

“You said you'd help out with the parade.”

“I never did!”

“Alright, fine, yeah. I lied, but honestly, dressed the way you are, you might as well help. You aren't seeing your clothes again until after the parade.”

“Emily, seriously,” whatever he was about to say died away as the door opened and a group of girls walked in.

“We're here!” Dalton's face fell. That was… the entirety of the Yellow Tutu class. Oh, no. Emily had said… no. No way.

“Ohmigod. Dalton! Is that… Emily…” the girls seemed to move in a mass until Dalton found himself completely surrounded. Everywhere he turned, there was a seven or eight year old girl gazing up at him.

“Wow, Dally.” Meghan said. “We know you love being a sissy ballerina, but you really outdid yourself today.” He turned away from her and the gathered girls cooed.

“He's trying to twirl!”

“We'll work on your pirouettes first then.”

“No, make him arabesque!”

“Has he warmed up?”

“Shuddup, Grace.” It was a cacophony of little girl voices and Dalton was trapped in the middle of it.

“Girls, how about you start with his parade walk?” Emily said, grinning. Dalton gulped.

~ D ~

"No, no, no! You have to walk like this!" She snapped into the exact pose Dalton had been trying to do and walked in a tight circle, so elegant and graceful, Dalton felt like she and he were two different species. "See?"

"I can't do that." Dalton said.

"Come on! If I can do it in shorts and socks, you can do it in tights."

"Well, it's easier for you!"

"I'm 8, you're 12."

"But you're a girl. Is what I meant"

"And you're living your dream as a pink, blonde ballerina. Now point your toes like you mean it!"

"Sure, you're at a disadvantage since you're technically a boy," Meghan said. "But we won't quit until you're doing it perfectly!"

Dalton could not believe it, but he almost missed that day in ballet class. At least there, there had been the teacher to keep the girls reined in. Now he was completely at their mercy, the flock of girls watching him from all angles to make sure he walked exactly the way they wanted.

"Feet one in front of the other like you're walking on a tightrope!"

"Don't stomp. Put your feet down lightly."

"Quit trying to watch your feet! You can't even see them with your tutu in the way!"

“Stretched feet, stretched feet!”

They forced him to go around and around the studio and he seemed certain of their plan: he would probably have to walk like this in front of the float while they all stood on the float in their ballet things, waving and laughing at him. Or would he follow the float? Either way, he thought, he wasn't really

going to do it. He would walk normally. They couldn't make him stop, go back, and do it again in the middle of a parade!

He felt like he was getting the hang of it, but the girls refused to be satisfied. They would move en masse to the far side of the cavernous studio and force him to float along after them at the measured, graceful pace. The slightest error and they ran in a wide parabola to make him have to work as far as possible.

“Alright, I think he's got the hang of it." One of the Yellow Tutus said.

“But-” Meghan began, but she glared her down.

“Let's have him do leaps.”

~ D ~

Try as he might, Dalton's leaps just were not up to the girls' expectations. He could not believe how sweaty he was getting jumping around in a tutu and thin material.

"You still look so clumsy!" Marihya observed.

"Well, it's hard." He panted. He felt like he had improved over the last few attempts, but he was not about to start arguing that.

"Hmm" was her only response. She turned and looked at Emily, who was all but lounging over with her friends. "Hey, Emily! How old is Dally?"

"Twelve." Emily called back. "Almost thirteen."

"Yeah, a twelve year old ballerina should be able to do leaps like that." Meghan snapped her fingers. "So, you've got a choice, Dally." Oh, god, Dalton thought. "You can either keep going on leaps because you're a twelve year old ballerina or we can do something easier, like what we do."

"Ooh, I like that idea."

"It's closer to the routine anyway." Dalton almost growled. Routine? Had they been making him do leaps and prance around for nothing? "But it's up to you, Dally. Which will it be? Keep doing leaps as a twelve year old ballerina or are you a Yellow Tutu ballerina?" It was an obvious choice, but Dalton still did not savor it.

"Yellow tutu."

"What was that? Speak up." Did Meghan ever say anything that didn't sound bossy? Dalton wondered before reminding himself she was seven or eight and he shouldn't judge a little kid or call her the term that came to mind.

"Yellow tutu."

"Head up, chin out, shoulders back."

"Yellow tutu!"

"No!" Mariyah giggled. "Your tutu is pink, Dally!"

"I am a Yellow Tutu ballerina!" He all but yelled in his frustration. Emily hated herself. Even with all that, she hadn't been able to record Dalton's loud admission. Could she get them, and him, to do it again? There was no way.

"Geez, we know, Dally. Come on, let's go to the barre and do some tendu warm-ups. You'll like those!"

The girls ran over, but once again ordered Dalton to walk gracefully over. He was wearing a tutu and they weren't after all. Tutu management was the most important skill a ballerina needs to know.

It seemed like hours of torment, even after the walking and the leaps. The parade was at eleven, wasn't it? As if she could read his mind, one of Emily's friends came over.

“Alright, girls, we don't have much time. Let's teach Dalton his parade choreography.”

“You still haven't!?” Dalton roared, frustrated. “I've been in this freaking tutu for hours!” The assembled Yellow Tutus giggled.

“Dalton's right. He took the time to get prepared before you girls even got here. You should show him more appreciation.”

“No! You should give me my clothes and let me go!”

“Oh, Dalton.” Emily said. “You know we can't do that. You're the centerpiece of our float.”

“What does that even mean!”

“Be quiet, Dally, and we'll tell you.” Meghan said.

The girls talked over each other in their excitement to reveal their grand vision: Dalton would be atop a giant music box in all his 'sissy ballerina glory' while they all walked alongside,

waving to the crowd.

“What was the point of teaching me how to walk?”

“You still gotta walk out to the float out back.” Dalton fumed.

“Just think, you get to be in a tutu this whole time!” Mariyah said giddily. “My brother cries whenever we play dress-up, but you're not even that bothered, are you?” Had she not heard him just a few minutes ago? “The choreo is plié, half-pointe with arms in fifth, plié, arabesque and blow a kiss, then up on your toes for a full circle, and then down for a curtsey.”

“I still feel like blowing kisses is a princess thing.”

“Look at Dally. Princess, ballerina, same thing. We'll have to have Dally be a princess for next year's parade!”

Dalton tried to leave his body, but they quickly pulled him down to earth to have him run through the choreography. They giggled when he blew kisses, but he had to admit this was probably the easiest thing he had done all day.

“You promise you won't forget?”

“I promise.”

“Do you pinkalicious ballerina promise?” Dalton had to repeat that and a half dozen other promises before the girls finally relented.

“Alright, me and Meghan will escort our ballerina out to the float so my dad can get him all situated.” Grace said.What did

that mean? Dalton wondered as he followed the pair.

“Nope.” Grace spun around as soon as she caught sight of him in the mirror. “Back you go.”

“Huh?”

“You need to walk right, Dally.” He groaned, but dutifully returned to the barre and began to walk along like the prissiest, sissiest ballerina all the way out to the float, where a man stood. He looked over Dalton, but how could he possibly recognize him as a boy under all the makeup and his outfit?

“I thought it was going to be a mannequin.”

“It was, but Dally here had a better idea and she even volunteered. This way, the music box ballerina can dance and wave.”

“Well, I guess it'll be safe. As long as you're careful.”

“She will be.” The girls giggled. “We're gonna go get ready. Can you get Dally all set up?”

“Sure can.” Grace and Meghan whispered to each other and dashed back inside.

“Alright, you ready?” After listening to giggling girls for so long, a man's voice seemed otherworldly. Dalton was too afraid to speak, so he forced a smile and nodded. “It's a bit of a step up, so… I'll just lift you, sweetheart.” He came over and had his hands on Dalton's sides, just above his tutu, before he even knew what was happening. “Up!” Dalton felt as stiff as a board as he was lifted and set up on the float.

“There's a staircase up to the dais where you'll be. Dolly, was it?” Dalton nodded again. “You know, I did ballet in college. You're a lot lighter than those girls I lifted.” He laughed.

“Mm.” Dalton said politely as he climbed the stairs, wincing as he realized at the top that he had done the ballerina walk. Maybe it was for the best, to avoid rousing suspicion. Dalton remembered just how feminine he looked. No one would know he was a boy. That at least gave him some comfort as he felt a strap go around his ankle. He could not see what was happening thanks to the tutu and he realized as Grace's dad withdrew from under it that he was stuck on the float.

“Give that a try. Really shake your foot around.” Dalton felt Grace's dad grab his slippered foot. He shook it around. “Hmm, we'll go a little bit tighter. Let me know if it hurts. We really don't want you to lose the foot!” He laughed again before stepping back. “You look great.” He gave Dalton a double thumbs up. “Now for the real fun. Ready?” Dalton nodded. None of this had been fun.

He yelped as the small stage he stood on began to turn, taking him with it. It was not fast or anything, but he was clearly and constantly spinning in place. As high up as he was, he could just stand here and the people down on the ground would probably still remember a majestically pirouetting ballerina.

“Not too fast?” Grace's dad asked. Dalton wondered if he could say yes, but the studio door opened and a flood of girls came out. Were they not ready yet? They were all wearing… their warm-ups. Dalton was all dressed up like a pretty

ballerina and the actual ballerinas were wearing their warm-ups. He felt a weight in his stomach. This was too much.

“She looks great, daddy.” Grace said. “I think we're done and ready right on time.”

“Close enough.” He replied lovingly. “Alright, girls, half of you walk on one side, half on the other. Don't get too close to the wheels!”

“Do your dance, Dally!” A few girls called as the float began to move down the street. The parade had not even begun yet, but he did his best, figuring they would be too distracted to keep him at it during the actual procession.

As the parade began, Dalton could not believe how many people there were, far more than there had been at the recital. From his high vantage point, he could see them all and he knew they could see him. Ever aware of the girls glancing up at him, he did at least a half-hearted attempt at the dance routine, though he blew much fewer kisses than he knew he was supposed to. What could they do to him? They had already turned him into a glorified decoration on their float.

It felt like two days before they finally parked behind the ballet studio again. Dalton kept spinning as the girls began to file inside. They… they weren't going to keep him there, were they? He almost summoned up the courage to call out when the girls who had gone inside came out with parents, friends, whoever. Just so many more people who could see his humiliating situation. He did not see his parents, at least.

Dalton had hoped the parade would be the end of it, but now he had to endure the girls all lining up in front of the float and him for at least a thousand photos. The spinning platform finally stopped halfway through, but only so he could more easily do the poses the photographers called out.

At long last, Grace's dad clambered up onto the float and released Dalton, the girls snickering as Dalton had to slide off of the float and into the waiting arms of some guy a few years older than him. The moment his feet touched the ground, the girls whisked him inside.

To his surprise, the girls seemed too tired to do much more than admire him and giggle a little bit. He felt exhausted himself.

“Where are my clothes?” He said, his throat dry.

“In the girls’ locker room.” Dalton marched off, not even caring if his tutu bounced.

“Dalton! You can't go in there! That's a girls only room.”

“But” he turned and sighed. “Please can someone go get my clothes then?”

“No, no. You can't change out here. That cute boy who you had that moment with might come in and see you in your ballerina panties.” Dalton felt trapped. What game were they playing now?

“Well, what…”

“You can go in,” Meghan said. “If you admit you're a Yellow

Tutu ballerina. You did it earlier.” He felt his stomach drop once again.

“Fine. I'm a Yellow Tutu ballerina.” He knew it was not enough for them. He sighed in tired frustration. “My name's Dalton Sibley and I'm a Yellow Tutu ballerina!” It was only then that he noticed the phones in quite a few hands.

“Wow.” Emily grinned. “I hope a few of us got that.”

“We meet Wednesdays and Saturdays.” Meghan said,

“What? Who?”

“Yellow Tutus.” She grinned. “Since you're one of us.” She held up her phone and grabbed his hand. “Come on, let your classmates help get your makeup off.”