

Elara and the Ghost of Seraphina
By Sophia Le

Elara yanked the ribbon of her pointe shoe tighter, the satin icy against her sweaty skin. Tonight wasn't just any show. It was the Halloween Gala at the old Blackwood Theater—a place everyone whispered about being haunted. Every dancer at Blackwood Ballet Academy dreamed of performing there, feeling the stage creak under their toes, but Elara? Every time she looked at that hulking building, something cold crawled down her back.

The stories about Blackwood drifted around, as thick as the autumn fog outside. People said a prima ballerina, Seraphina, died onstage a hundred years ago—her ghost has been stuck inside those walls ever since. Supposedly, she only showed up at Halloween galas, looking for a dancer with enough spark to take on her grace. Elara always rolled her eyes at talk like that. She prided herself on being logical. Still, she couldn't shake the weight of all that history pressing in on her.

That night, Elara was a woodland sprite in the final act—a light, silly bit after all the heavy, dramatic dances. She loved this part: the skipping, the quick turns, and the way her costume caught the light and shimmered. But backstage, waiting to go on, she noticed the air turn icy. Then she smelled something strange. Not the usual mix of hairspray and dust, but flowers, sweet and sharp.

Out of nowhere, a whisper slithered into her ear: "You have potential... but lack fire." Elara jumped, spinning in place. No one stood there. Her heart pounded. She told herself it was just nerves, but that scent of flowers stuck to her, weird and unsettling. The music swelled. Elara stepped onto the stage. Spotlights blinded her for a second, but as her vision cleared, she saw something that made her heart skip. There, at the edge of the stage, bathed in this weird, impossible moonlight, stood a woman. She was impossibly graceful in a faded white tutu. Shadows hid her face, but her eyes—Elara swore they glowed.

The woman lifted her hand, and Elara felt yanked forward by some invisible force. Her body moved on its own, not with the steps she'd drilled into her bones for months, but with something wilder, more raw, and more alive than anything she'd ever danced. The audience gasped. Their voices melted into the rising music.

Elara felt like she was floating outside herself. She leapt higher and spun faster, her body pushed by an energy that wasn't hers. It was thrilling—and terrifying.

Then, in a leap bolder than any she'd tried before, her ankle twisted. Pain shot through her leg. She stumbled, falling toward the edge. Instinctively, she squeezed her eyes shut, waiting for the crash.

It never happened.

Instead, an icy hand caught hers. The woman—right beside her now—sent a shock jolting up Elara's arm. "Embrace the spirit," the woman breathed, her words like a gust of wind. "Become one with the dance."

Fear melted into understanding. Elara opened her eyes and saw Seraphina, clear as day—tragic, beautiful, her eyes full of longing.

"But... I'll be trapped here too?" Elara whispered.

Seraphina's smile was sad. "Not trapped. Changed. The dance never ends, and you can join it if you want."

Elara looked out at the audience. It wasn't just faces anymore—more like a whirl of color and emotion. She glanced at her own body, balanced on the edge, then back at Seraphina.

A choice opened in her chest. Give in to fear, or let go. Stay safe, or leap into something unknown.

Elara breathed in deep. She pictured the steps she'd practiced, but this time, she let the fire Seraphina lit in her burn through every move. She let go of Seraphina's hand and stood tall.

Eyes open. She danced.

Not as a sprite, not as anyone else. As herself—fierce, electric, alive—carrying a piece of Seraphina with her. She moved for Seraphina, for the crowd, and for herself. When the music faded, silence filled the theater. Then, a single clap. Another. Suddenly, the applause crashed over her like a wave.

Shaking and breathless, Elara bowed. She glanced at the stage's edge. Seraphina was gone. Only the ghost of that floral scent lingered.

Backstage, Elara checked her ankle. Sore, but not broken. As she started to take off her pointe shoes, she froze. These weren't her old, scuffed shoes. These were immaculate, glowing white satin, embroidered with tiny silver stars. Seraphina's shoes.

Elara smiled, a wild thrill running through her. The legends were real. And now, she carried a little magic too. Halloween—and ballet—would never feel the same.