

For A Dancer extended version.

Angelina gasped in delight as the beautiful vision glided across the tv screen; the dancer as delicate as a butterfly, wore pure white feathers in her hair, her back displaying delicate glistening wings. This was Swan Lake at its finest. She begged her parents for a dress “Just like that one” and there, at just three years of age her obsession began.

For Angelina’s fourth birthday she received a jewellery box. She was enthralled. She wound the key carefully time after time to watch the ballerina in her pink tutu spin gracefully to the music.

The following birthday’s gift was ballet lessons. Angelina was a natural and took the lessons very seriously. She grew her shiny dark hair, which was transformed into a bun each Monday evening before class. Life was simple and happy. School, dancing, and of course her treasured music box.

As time passed, Angelina became more focused on dancing. Her box of soft toys lay neglected. In bed one evening winding her music box, she glanced across the room. An idea flashed into her mind “Why have I never thought of that before?” Jumping from the bed, she dragged the unused toy box across the floor, carefully positioning it in front of the dressing table. She clambered on top and posed gracefully, feet in fifth position, hands elegantly above her head, the light above shone down forming a soft glow around her body. “Perfect” she smiled, as a warm feeling of peace enveloped her.

Angelina spun around and around on her box, glancing critically into the mirror making sure that each hand movement was perfect.

By the age of nine Angelina was an accomplished ballerina and received her first pair of pointe slippers. She took to them beautifully, practising faithfully each night on top of her home-made music box which still concealed the neglected teddies.

For the school Christmas play, Angelina won the most sought-after part. Lydia, (also a dancer) was angry. She had worked hard for this part, but as normal Angelina was the golden child. “You should never have got that part; you are too fat for a fairy princess”. Angelina shrugged off the envious comment, but a tiny seed of doubt had been planted in her mind.

Arriving home, she went to her bedroom to change. She undressed and studied herself thoroughly in the mirror, pinching the skin at her waist, she concluded that Lydia was right, and the tears fell. She vowed never to be called that word again.

“Angelina, your tea’s ready.”

“I’m sorry mum, I’m really not hungry tonight.”

“That’s not like you, what’s wrong?”

“I don’t really know Mum, I just feel a bit sick.”

And that was how it started. The tiny portions, mouthfuls of food being sneaked from her plate into tissue paper and hidden up her sleeve to be flushed down the toilet at the earliest opportunity, the endless glasses of water being drunk to fill her up.

As Angelina grew taller, her body became thinner. She became so painfully thin that she looked as if she could snap in two. She began to refuse invitations to friends' houses, because it was so hard to refuse their offerings of meals without appearing rude. She became increasingly isolated but consoled herself with her dancing.

Every night she wound her hair into a bun, put on a ballet dress and shoes, got onto her box. "Alexa" she ordered, "Play Swan Lake", then she danced and danced. In her mind's eye she could see the stage and the audience and hear their gasps of joy and applause. she could feel the heat of the lighting and smell the stage make-up. While the rest of the family were downstairs watching tv, Angelina was perfecting her beautiful graceful, isolated dance.

Once she had exhausted herself, she would get ready for bed, wind her music box up one last time and watch the dainty little dancer spinning around.

Occasionally as she was practising, someone would call upstairs "Are you ok up there?" "Yes, I'm fine, I'm practising for the dance school exhibition." This year's play was Chitty Bang Bang and naturally Angelina had won the part of Truly Scrumptious. She was so excited to perform the scene where Truly danced on the music box. The part was made for her.

The final dress rehearsal came. Here was Angelina, aged 13, but dress size 8. The costume that she wore was too skimpy to hide the protruding shoulder blades and hip bones. She noticed people glancing over at her as they all sat on the hall floor eating their packed lunches. She slowly and carefully unwrapped her tin foil package, which contained six shiny green grapes and one cream cracker. She gradually and deliberately nibbled away at the edge of the cracker, stopping every few seconds to take a gulp of water from a glass bottle.

Three boys glanced over and whispered behind their hands. One of the boys sniggered. Angelina pulled at her cardigan and wrapped it tightly around her body. "Oh no" she thought, they think I am fat. How can I go on stage tonight with people staring at my body?" She crumbled inside, and head down, asked the ballet mistress if she could go home. "That's fine Angelina, your routine is perfect anyway. See you at 6:30 this evening."

Angelina hurried home and went straight to her room. She took her favourite pink sparkly tutu from the wardrobe. She absolutely adored it, it skimmed her knees and it sparkled under the light. It showed off her slim muscular shoulders at their best. She pulled on her pink pointe slippers carefully lacing the ribbons, ensuring that the lacing on each shoe matched each other perfectly. One final glance in the mirror confirmed that she looked perfect.

Angelina placed her mobile phone on the dressing table pressing 'record video'. She stepped onto her box posing, ready to begin her dance. "Alexa, play For A Dancer". She pirouetted and swayed gracefully until the final line of the song "In the end there is one dance you'll do alone" she elegantly lifted her arms up, checked that dressing gown belt was in place around her neck, and with her muscular right leg, powerfully kicked the box away.

Inspired by **For A Dancer by Jackson Browne**. In memory of my best friend, Michelle Jodie

1059 words