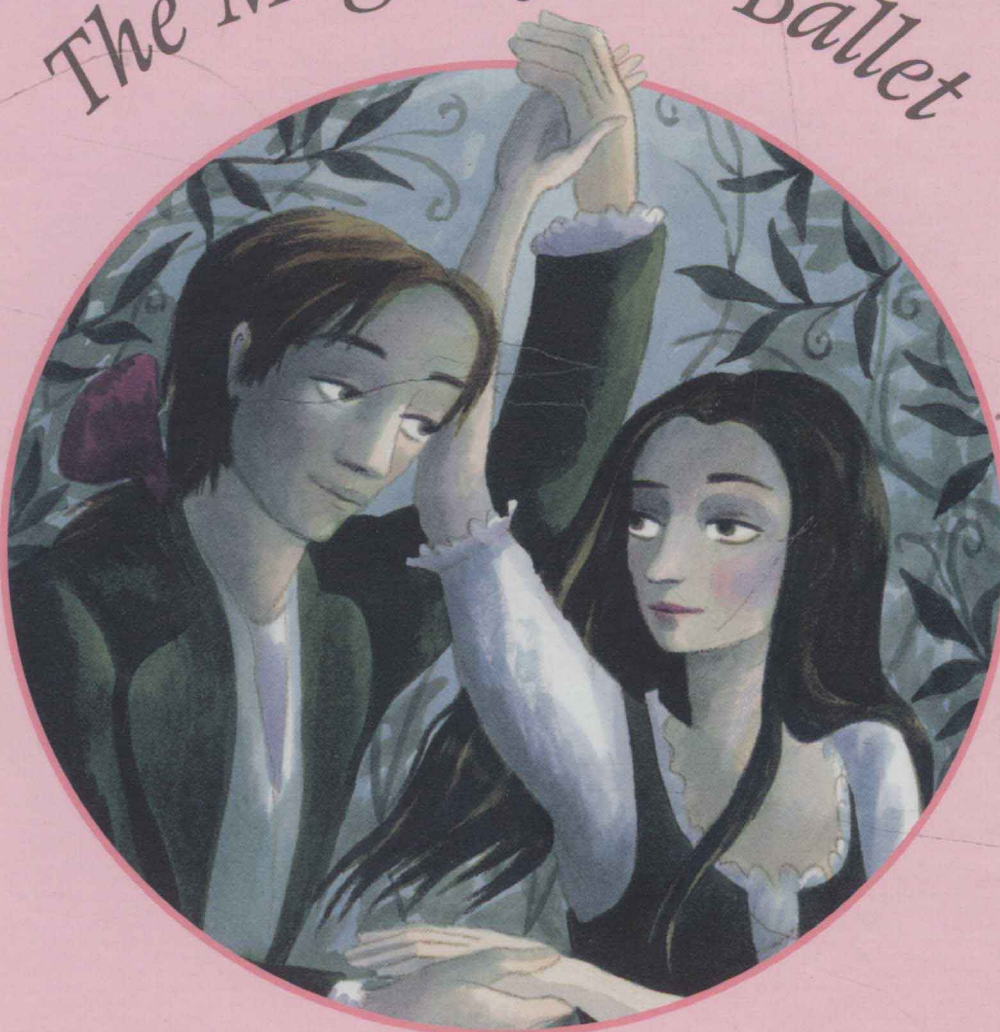


# *The Magic of the Ballet*



## *Giselle*

ADÈLE GERAS & EMMA CHICHESTER CLARK



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# *The Magic of the Ballet*



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RETOLD BY ADELE GERAS

ILLUSTRATED BY EMMA CHICHESTER CLARK



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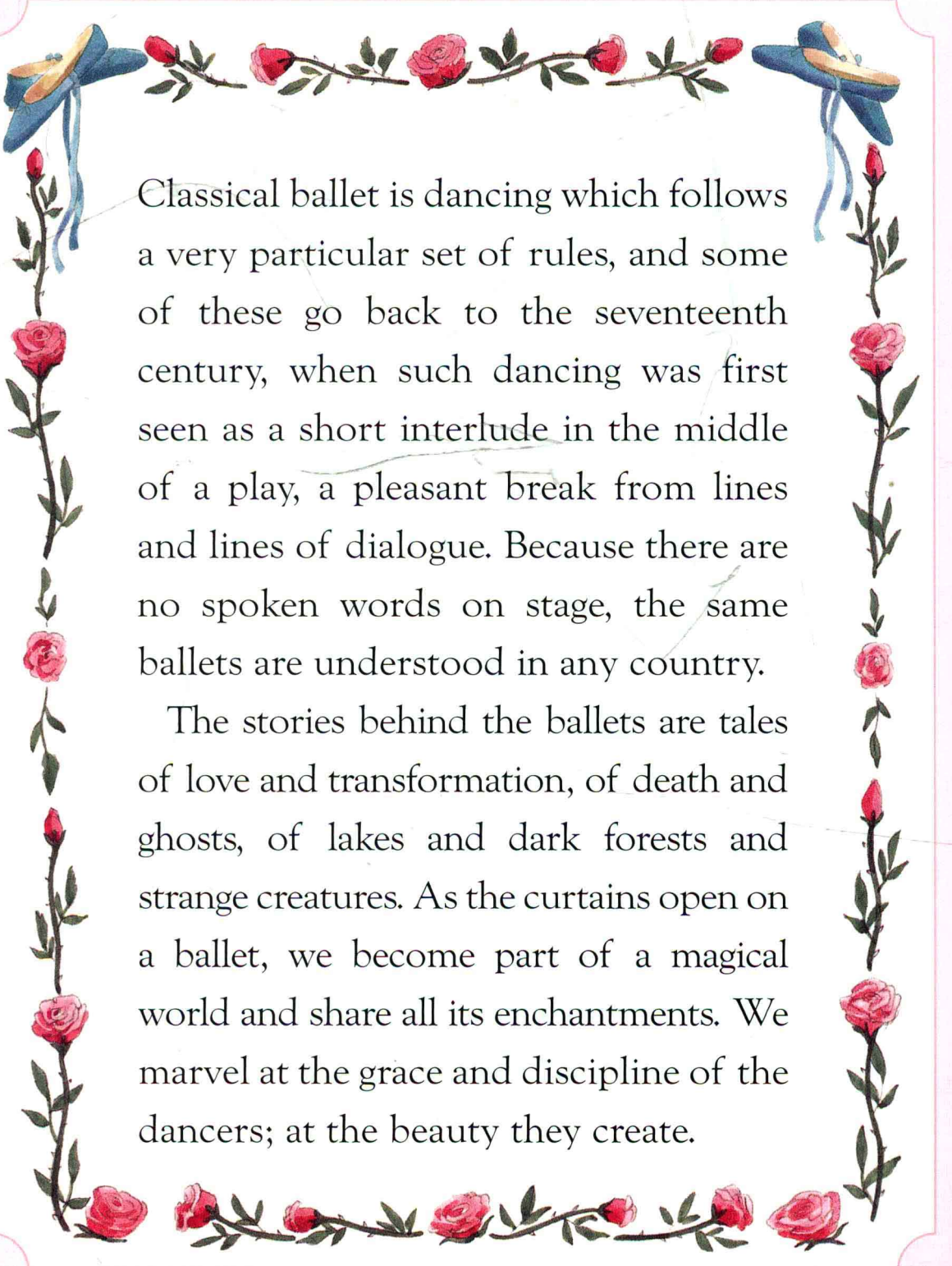


# *The Magic of the Ballet*



HUMAN BEINGS LIKE TO move their bodies in time to rhythm. Even the tiniest babies enjoy being rocked or gently bounced as you sing to them, and we all know how feet long to move when we hear a strong and exciting beat. "That's toe-tapping music," we say, and what we mean is we would like to dance to it.

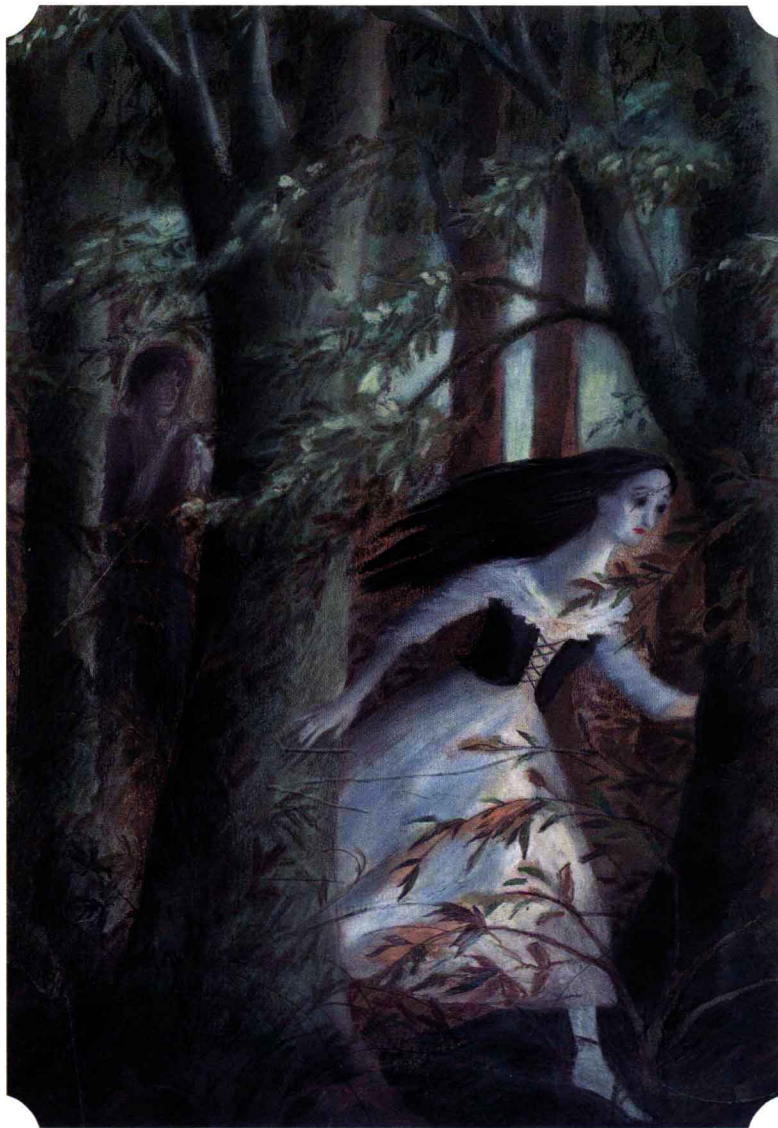
There are many different kinds of dance: folk, disco, ballroom, tap and so on.

A decorative border surrounds the text, featuring a central horizontal branch with several red roses and green leaves. At each end of this branch is a blue bow with a yellow center and a long blue ribbon. Vertical branches with red roses and green leaves extend from the horizontal ones down the sides and across the bottom.

Classical ballet is dancing which follows a very particular set of rules, and some of these go back to the seventeenth century, when such dancing was first seen as a short interlude in the middle of a play, a pleasant break from lines and lines of dialogue. Because there are no spoken words on stage, the same ballets are understood in any country.

The stories behind the ballets are tales of love and transformation, of death and ghosts, of lakes and dark forests and strange creatures. As the curtains open on a ballet, we become part of a magical world and share all its enchantments. We marvel at the grace and discipline of the dancers; at the beauty they create.





*'It was Giselle's voice, and I was filled with  
a happiness I thought was lost forever.'*

# Giselle



EVERYTHING THEY SAY ABOUT old age is true. I find that I remember in the clearest detail everything that happened to me in my youth, and yet I would have difficulty in telling you what I ate this morning when I awoke.

Sometimes I forget how quickly the years have gone by and when I catch sight of myself in the glass, I do not recognize the white-haired, old man I see. This cannot be me, Albrecht. Albrecht was tall and straight. He had clear blue eyes and a smiling mouth. And he was loved, oh yes indeed. I may have forgotten many things, but the memory of Giselle's love for me still remains. I think of her every day, and there is a small, vain part of my soul that rejoices to think she never saw me as an old man. To her I am still young.



## THE MAGIC OF THE BALLET

Giselle lived in the village of . . . but no, the name has gone. No matter. It was a collection of small, well-kept cottages that clung to the side of a hill where the forest ended.

I was hiding in this village, I confess it. I had become bored with palace life, with ceremony, with decorum, and all I wanted that spring was to roam through the woods like a peasant, hunting when it suited me.

It wasn't really even Bathilde I was escaping from. Our families had arranged that we would be married. Bathilde was considered to be a beauty and her father was the Duke of Courland. My parents persuaded me it would be a splendid alliance, and I reluctantly agreed. My flight to the village was a last chance for the kind of freedom I knew I could never have as a married man, nor as the future Duke of Silesia.

If it were not for Giselle, I should probably have returned to the palace within days, but





## GISELLE

once I caught sight of her, everything else in my life shrank away and I never gave the palace or my duty a single thought. I found a cottage and paid the owner money to rent it, and I took the name of Loys.

How can I find words to describe Giselle? I loved her from the very first moment I laid eyes on her, and she loved me too. She was pale. Her hair was like ravens' feathers. She danced for happiness, but there was always something fragile about her. I don't know how to put it more accurately. Always I had the thought in my mind when we were together, 'be careful, oh, be careful,' for I knew she could so easily be hurt.

Hilarion, the young gamekeeper in the village, adored Giselle too. He could see that Giselle and I loved each other, and his jealousy grew and grew.

On the morning of the harvest feast, I came very near to telling Giselle who I really was.

## THE MAGIC OF THE BALLET

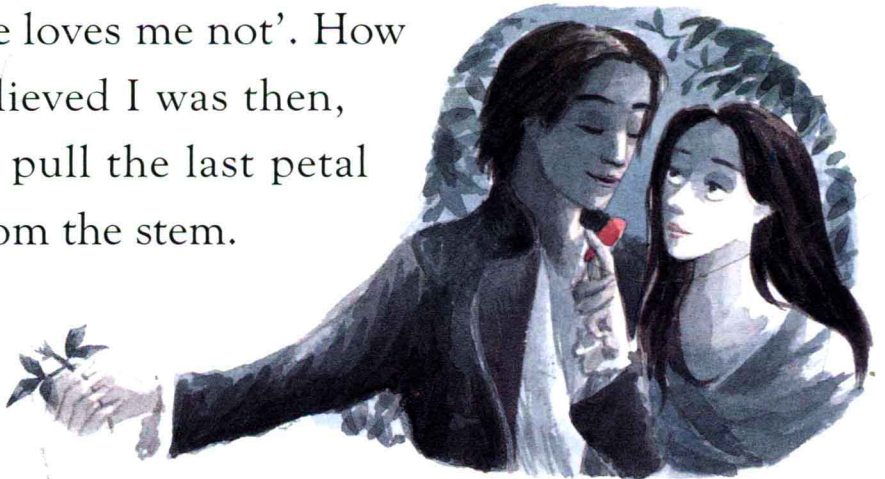
She had been teasing me, asking me why it was that I was different from other men she had known, and begging me to tell her where I had come from and who my family were.

“It doesn’t matter,” I answered. “You are my family, my whole world. You are the one I love.”

“Oh, but do you? Do you truly? Let this flower tell us.” She picked a late rose and began idly to pluck the petals from it. “He loves me, he loves me not . . . ”

“Will you believe a flower that knows nothing of how I feel? Will you not believe me?”

Suddenly I was filled with dread at what Giselle would do if the last petal fell on ‘he loves me not’. How relieved I was then, to pull the last petal from the stem.



“I love you! You see? Even this rose knows this is the truth!” I cried.

Giselle smiled, happy for the moment.

“Go with the others, Loys, to gather the last of the harvest, and I will stay here and prepare the feast,” she said.

And I went. I went gladly. I thought myself the most fortunate man alive, striding away with the others into the valley while the September sun shone all around us, as golden and sparkling as the wine we would soon be enjoying. Try to imagine my joy as a bubble, and look at it now, catching the light. Soon it will burst, and neither I nor anyone else will ever lay eyes on it again.

Much later, during that long, infinitely black night while we watched over Giselle’s body before her funeral, her weeping mother told me what had happened. I hear her words even now, half a lifetime later. I still wonder if there was anything I could have done differently that







would have prevented Giselle's dreadful end.

"We heard the horns, and the hounds baying," her mother told me, "and soon a hunting-party arrived in the village. Everyone gathered round, for we had never seen such grand people. Princess Bathilde was the most splendid of all, in a gown the colour of a dark red rose. Everyone was falling over themselves to offer hospitality. Giselle helped to serve the wine, and Princess Bathilde was struck with her beauty and grace."

Here Giselle's mother paused and wiped the tears from her eyes. "Bathilde asked my poor daughter question after question. She begged her to come to the palace as her own serving-lady, but when she found out that Giselle was in love and soon to be married, she smiled kindly.

'It is my loss,' she said, 'and you shall have my own necklace as a wedding-gift.'

She fastened a chain of gold filigree around Giselle's neck and my daughter danced away to




show the wonderful present to all her friends.  
The royal party came into my house to rest




before their homeward journey, and then you came back from the vineyards and the festival began. My daughter had been chosen as the Queen of the Harvest. How joyously she danced! Do you remember? Oh, oh, I cannot bear to think of what has happened!"

And I, even though I cannot bear it, am condemned to turn it over constantly in my mind. I remember how we danced, and then







how Hilarion came rushing from my cottage brandishing my sword. Wine had given Hilarion courage. He parted us, Giselle and me, by placing the blade between us and his face was twisted with hatred.




“You are the son of the Duke of Silesia, and not Loys at all. I have the proof.” He turned to the villagers. “He brought too many possessions with him for a humble peasant. He has deceived us, and he has bewitched you, Giselle, with his false promises.”



The royal party came out of Giselle’s cottage to see what all the shouting was about, and Bathilde caught sight of me at once.



“Albrecht!” she cried, “What are you doing here among these simple folk?” She ran to my side and said, “See, Giselle, I too have my betrothed. This is Albrecht, and I hope that you will be as happy in your marriage as we in ours.” And each word was like a dagger in my poor Giselle’s heart! Giselle turned to me.





“Please say that she is lying, Loys,” she whispered. My mouth was full of ashes, and my heart was as cold as a stone in my body. I could say nothing.

Do you believe that someone can die of a broken heart? I had thought it was a fanciful notion, invented by lovesick poets, but that was before Giselle’s death.

She tore at the necklace Bathilde had given her and it snapped as though it were no more than a thin string of silk. Then she took my jewelled sword from Hilarion and plunged it into her side. How could he have let her take it? How could he have prevented her? She had the strength of despair in her hands. Still, it was not the wound that killed her. I did. I killed her as surely as though I had squeezed the life out of her with my own hands. She danced like a marionette with broken strings. She danced like a doll with no life left in her. Her soul flew out of her



## THE MAGIC OF THE BALLET

before our eyes. The anguish in her heart drove all reason from her and she fell at last into her mother's arms.



The feast was over. No one moved for a long time. Then Bathilde's party left the village. There was nothing they could do. No one was interested in them any longer. We were numb with grief, all of us, and hardly noticed the departure. There was nothing left for us to do but mourn.

“I should throw you from this house,” said Giselle’s mother, “but my daughter loved you.” That was how I came to watch all night over Giselle’s body, until her funeral the next day.

Do you believe in Wilis? They are the spirits of young girls who have died before their wedding day, deceived by their lovers, tricked by lies. There were tales told about them by country people. It was said they appeared at midnight, on the swampy shores of a hidden lake, led by their queen, Myrtha, who was tall and white and merciless. The Wilis danced till the first light of dawn, and as the sun’s rays touched them, they dissolved, every one of them, into thin mists, stretching and curling and hovering over the water. If an unfortunate young man were to meet one of them in the dark, he would be enchanted by her beauty and she would dance with him, in and out of the black trees in the moonlight, and her white, white arms would wind themselves like smoke