

# FINE LINE

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*“Behind every exquisite thing that existed, there was something tragic.”*



*Fine Line* is a fictitious short story that explores what happens to a person when what they have been yearning for, what inspires and forms their being, is taken away. Inspired by the artistic medium of ballet, fluidity and descriptive language will allow the reader to immerse themselves in the journey of an individual that has everything, then, nothing.

## SUBMISSION CATEGORY : CREATIVE WRITING

I always loved the color green. The color of envy, possessive and materialistic. The color of poison ivy, a disease that has no end. The color of moss climbing across graves, reminding that the world will never stop. But most importantly, the color of the lace sleeves that twirl down my arms as my dress brushes against my thighs. There's a roar as I raise my arms and tilt my head upwards. The light is the colour of silkworms, translucent and ardently beautiful. One. Two. The beat of the orchestra makes my breath hitch, my fingers twitch ever so slightly, the only physical sign of annoyance. Too soon. My feet pivot as I move, graceful but not quick, towards the center of the stage. I skip first position and move to an alteration, leg extending and arms reaching in an arabesque to touch the stars that dangle from the ceiling. Slowly, carefully, and controlled I allow my leg to drop down. I envision myself stroking the precipices of mountains and sending ripples into the brilliant cerulean of waterfalls. I am alive. Skin stretches tight across my cheeks as I smile, wide and bright, fluttering my eyelashes. Mechanical fog sweeps across the stage in ethereal beauty, swirling around my lone figure as the music reaches a crescendo, rising high above the hushed whispers of the crowd. There are no faces, just inky blackness as I begin to spin. The audience is a desolate landscape, not a ripple of movement as certainty of my glorious purpose buzzes through the confines of my being. I am everything. Euphoria bubbles to the surface of my throat and I'm almost dizzy with elation, a high that explodes in every hue of orange, red and yellow. I'm washed away in an explosion of feeling, each fluid movement leaving a shadow of heavenly existence. One. Two. Three. The tambourine claps as I brise and sounds of joy from backstage stroke my ears as I continue, a flower blossoming, blooming, into exquisite existence. One. Two. Three. Move. One. Two. Three. Move. Fire twists up my ankles, burning, aching. Still I push. I turn the unearthly flames into sun-drenched kisses that slip off my toes and bleed into the shiny wooden floor. Each gesture speaks more than a thousand words, laughing at the futility of being, yet being enthralled at the knowledge of love.

I am her.

I am Esmeralda.

I speak her story with my limbs, gripping my audience in dream-like maneuvers. Sweat coats my brow, but not enough to leave the tiniest indent in the heavy powder that enhances every feature of my face. One. Two. Three. Keep moving. Keep dancing. My arms ache with exhaustion and I catch myself before I stumble. The fire is savage, wild and all-consuming. Thoughts collide like waves on an empty shore in my mind. I can't remember the last time I ate a proper meal. I can't

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remember the last time I got a good night's sleep. No matter. One. Two. Three. I put everything into my variation. The beat restlessly pushes against the cages the conductor confines it in, begging to escape, to be free. One. Two. Three. I leap, my foot pointed out and I'm soaring, skin shimmering as if coated in milky moonlight, finger tips stretched further and further to meet the misty clouds that decorate the stage-

The wooden floor is coated with polish, too much. My foot lands and splays, arms flailing for something, anything, as the very foundations for my dance turns to quicksand.

All I hear is my shortened gasps stretch into minutes, hours, years as my head rebounds off the ground.

I'm on the floor, green silk pooling around my thin frame. I blink slowly, the stars twinkling above.

"Emma. Emma, it's going to be okay." Pietro is in front of me, grasping my hands in his.

Why am I on the floor?

"Pietro, Phoebus isn't on for another two dances." I frown as my voice whines in broken syllables, his brow is crinkled, rich brown eyes shining with pity.

"Just breathe. You're okay. Remember. One. Two. Three." His voice cracks as he looks down and away.

I struggle to sit up but a searing pain lurches through my leg. With horror I push my arms up to look at my ankle. The bone gleams under the stage lights, blood coating the shiny floor.

"No. No, no, no." I start to scream as pain floods in, wriggling to stand, to avoid what comes next. What flows through me is lava, opened palms on open flames, sharp and hot. Jagged bone scrapes across my skin, a deadly blade that bites and claws. My voice warbles, a goat to be slaughtered as the ground splays red mist in an abstract painting, each line a portrait of my misery.

"Shh, shhh. Don't move." Pietro's voice is shattered glass as he strokes my head, the dark curls springing under his fingertips. Pain explodes in a cacophony of broken dreams as I fall backward, tears rivers that carve into my skin.

We both know what this means.

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Red and blue lights flash, suffocating me in a cocoon of flurried movement. Hands strap me to a cold board and lift, a failed attempt to carry me to safety. The ambulance is artic, nondescript,

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frightening, and my heart pushes to escape my ribcage. My heart begs me not to look, not to put it through more anguish.

I do not listen.

As we round the corner to leave, I turn my head towards the building. To see the letters LA ESMERELDA carved into the building. To see them take my name down. To replace it with someone new.

When my screams begin it's not because of the pain.

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The Doctor prescribes pain killers and recommendations but I don't respond. A compound fracture. Count to three. Count to three. Count to three.

One. It took the ambulance 45 minutes to reach me. Two. By then, I had already entered the bone healing process, where a blood clot was found around the brake to stop blood. Two. No, wait. My brain is a broken carousel, each spin wrong and off center. One. I am on to the next stage, two to three weeks. Two. The Doctor says it's called "fibrocartilage callus" and is where my bones begin to refuse together. Three. The next two weeks are dedicated to cells building my hard bone, replacing the fibrocartilage. Three. I freeze, his voice a distant echo. My timing, my counting is off. One. My breath is shaky, my chest heaving with desperation. One. The final two weeks are made of fibrocartilage being replaced by a newly formed hardbone. Three. I place my hands in my head and scream and scream and scream. The Doctor has his hands on my arms, voice worried and tight with concern. One. One. One. One. It would be months until I could begin to train again, even longer before my foot would step on stage.

I don't bother to try and compose myself as I sob.

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Pietro picks me up, tanned arms supporting my waist as I hobble to the sleek car perched on the crooked curb. He tries, he really does.

"You could talk to Director Paul? See if he can do anything?" I muster a frail shrug at his suggestion, icy numbness entering my chest.

That night, I feel him leave the bed.

The absence of his warmth is cold water against my body, his graceful footsteps replicating a gazelle in the savannah as he walks out to the balcony.

Tears prick my eyes at the sound of the lighter, the smoke as it passes through his lips.

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Hobbling into work my suspicions are confirmed. Bodies move like a rising tide, fluid and strong. I don't bother watching the rest of the recitals, I know if I did, a wave of jealousy would wash over me, gripping me with foamy fingers and dragging me along gritty sand until my back was ripped, raw pink flesh and torn skin. My feet carry me past the dozens of posters lining the walls, a missing slot where my picture used to be. I stop at the cast poster, my body poised at the center, "Behind every exquisite thing that existed, there was something tragic," I whisper as I tear my fingers down the center of my face.

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It's a week after when they send me the brochures, wrapped in brown paper, crinkling at the sides. That night Pietro comes home late, slipping into bed with the scent of rosemary and lavender. I'm too exhausted to question it.

**SHARE YOUR KNOWLEDGE! UNLEASH YOUR INNER BALLERINA.**

The bold letters flow pink across the glossy page. They want me to teach, to inspire. I bite my cheek, letting the metallic taste flow between my teeth as I crumple them up and throw them in with the trash.

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The next morning, anger spurs me towards the auditorium, sharp and tangy. I limp on crutches with as much energy possible, fuelled with rage at their arrogance. Shocked faces greet me, my appearance dishevelled and messy, a clear difference from the perfect polished porcelain dolls that stare back. I enter backstage, limbs shaking with restless agitation. That's when I see them. The same green costume, fitted to a dark haired girl. She is small and slight, a sparrow. Pietro stands next to her, smiling as she speaks, hands waving gracefully. He replies to something she says and she laughs, the sound of pristine summer, her hand patting his shoulder. My heart sinks as he looks at Esmerelda, the tilt of his head so familiar. I watch as they walk towards the stage, sides brushing together. Desperation fills me at Esmerelda and Phoebus, slipping gracefully away with every breath. My everything. I turn, taking wonky steps to the room I used to call my own. The star that used to say my name has been removed, replaced with another. I swing the door open and with inconceivable rage rip open drawers to reveal dozens of products. The cabinet holds my costume and I tear it away, sharply pulling off my clothes until the bare air nips at my skin. Shivering, slivering into the costume, I look into the mirror. Green highlights the pale

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parlour of my skin and I press powder after powder upon my face, accenting my eyes, nose, cheeks. Finally, I am finished. The girl staring back is unrecognisable. Black runs like spiderwebs down her white powdered face and lips as red as Dorotheys slippers pull back with the same eerie glow that intertwines around the pupils of her eyes.

She is an untamed beast.

With shaky hands she picks up the plastic dagger from the dressing table and holds it to her heart, the gold beautiful against the green of her dress. The crowd cheering as the curtains rise spurs her on.

“I am Esmerelda.”