

How far would you go to achieve your dreams?

Red Dress

It's 1980. Fame has just been released and girls across the world are donning legwarmers, dreaming of the stage. For 12-year-old Ellie Fitzpatrick, dancing is life itself. Fame and The Red Shoes aren't just movies; they're a creed.

But Ellie's life is not the movies. She lives with her newly single mother behind a factory, struggling to survive.

Then Max Buddle, an aging impresario, offers Ellie a spot in his travelling vaudeville show as a dancer. All she'll have to do is pretend she's 16, don a set of falsies and she'll debut at the Coffs Harbour RSL Club. It's a dream come true.

Miles from home, Ellie is introduced to show business, and wannabee nymphet Tammy, Max's 15-year-old daughter. The pair set about becoming the stars they know they are.

On opening night, Ellie is deliriously living the dream. But the notes session afterward brings her crashing to earth. "Study Veronica," Max tells Tammy and Ellie. "See where you're going wrong." Crushed, Ellie stares at the statuesque blonde with triple D bust. "What's she got that I haven't?"

It's sexy young singer Stuart who gently takes Ellie aside and teaches her to deliver what Max is looking for. Not ballet but bump and grind.

Ellie takes to the stage pouting and flirting and is an instant sensation. But with her newfound sexuality comes problems. Overnight, Vernon the magician starts making sexual advances. And her only true ally, Tammy, is furious at being upstaged. By New Year's Eve, Ellie and Tammy have lost themselves in pills, booze, seduction and humiliation. Ellie wakes to find Tammy overdosed on the floor.

After Tammy's resurrection, Ellie becomes the scapegoat for all the failures of the troupe. Her childlike illusions are shattered and she realises home is where she longs to be. But Ellie won't quit. She is a professional.

Through her resilience and power, this young girl speaks her truth and in doing so reminds all the performers of who they really are. Reminded of the magic by a 12-year-old girl, the last show of the Buddle's Starlight productions is a triumph.

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