**Mathilde**

Synopsis

Based on real events, this film is the story of the love of Nicholas II, the last Emperor of Russia and the great ballerina Mathilde Kshessinsksa.

The young heir to the Russian thrown has fallen in love with Alix, the granddaughter of Queen Victoria of Great Britain. His father, Emperor Alexander II, tries to convince his son not to make a rash decision and to consider other suitors. Alexander shows Nicholas photographs of elegant and graceful ballerinas, all of whom would do anything to be with him.

The imperial train is involved in a horrific accident. The emperor is able to save his family, but at a terrible cost to his own health; and now his days are numbered. As heir to the throne, Nicholas understands that his own care-free personal freedom will die along with his father.

Nicholas’ uncle, the Grand Duke Vladimir, arranges a major contest for the Imperial brigades. A huge encampment is set up, dotted with officers’ tents; with ballerinas among the many spectators. From the very outset, the attention of Nicholas is drawn to the young Mathilde Kshessinsksa.

There is fierce competition among the participants in the contest, vying for the prize of a kiss from one of the ballerinas present. The masked winner crosses the finish line, but is in no rush to claim his reward. He has passed through flames in order to be close to the object of his affection; but she is already nowhere to be seen in the grandstand. She has already been led away by Nicholas.

Now alone in the tent with Mathilde, Nicholas is overtaken by reticence. Mathilde, unlike the other girls, is perfectly aware of her own value and doesn’t throw herself at Nicholas; even if he is the future Emperor. Their first rendezvous is intruded upon by the masked winner of the contest that suddenly bursts into the tent. Lieutenant Vorontsov, the man hiding behind the mask, is ready to kill for Mathilde.

The envy of the other ballerinas for the new darling of the heir to the throne becomes immediately apparent. Mathilde’s appearance in front of the royal family is subject to an unpleasant surprise when the strap of her dress is cut and the bosom of the young beauty is laid bare on stage; however she completes her performance with dignity.

Meanwhile, Chief of Police Vlasov is following the fate of the detained Vorontsov. He is subjected to torture and experimentation in the laboratory of court physician Doctor Fischel, whose methods are highly unorthodox. Vorontsov is totally obsessed by Mathilde and has taken leave of his senses as a result. Vlasov can see just such a future in store for Nicholas.

Nicholas brings Mathilde to the Imperial palace. At the very height of summer, Nicholas arranges for the palace to be decorated like a winter wonderland, because winter is the favourite season to Mathilde. The first moment of intimacy between the star-crossed lovers is invaded by the Empress Maria Fedorovna.

Nicholas is forced to defend his love for the beautiful Mathilde. He manages still to introduce his chosen one to his father, but the dying Emperor mistakes her for Alix; the heirs’ first love and a favourite of the royal family.

The fleeting affair of the heir to the throne escalates into a whirlwind romance which is most unwelcome in court. The widowed Empress does not even wait for the end of the period of mourning and is already preparing to marry off Nicholas. To this end, not only does Alix arrive in the country but also adopts Orthodoxy. She soon learns of the existence of her rival, Mathilde.

One of Doctor Fischel’s experiments spirals out of control and Vorontsov manages to escape. In a ruthless confrontation he kills the doctor and goes on the run. Mathilde’s life is now in danger. Vlasov, who has been charged with putting an end to the romance between the heir and the ballerina, decides to use Vorontsov to this end.

Mathilde appears at a ball where the newly invented film projector is being showcased as companion to Andrew, the brother of Nicholas. Nicholas manages to speak to her for a moment; but Mathilde returns his letters to him and now their relationship is over. The marriage of Nicholas and Alix takes place and the newlyweds travel to Moscow. The subsequent coronation is of an unprecedented scale. Thousands of people from all corners of the country travel to Moscow to be a part of the amazing event. But first Nicholas must use his final chance to keep Mathilde in his life.

In Moscow, Nicholas presents Mathilde with a floating theatre, and exact miniature copy of the Imperial theatre. He promises to come to her immediately after he explains his intentions to his mother: Nicholas has made his choice and is ready to turn his back on the throne. Mathilde is drawn to a noise, but discovers Vorontsov. He ties her up and takes her to the boat; but Vlasov’s people set it alight. Nicholas arrives to find the boat ablaze. He hears Mathilde’s final cry for help. A heartbroken Nicholas is certain that Mathilde is dead.

The coronation takes place. Mathilde suddenly appears in the cathedral, she is still alive. She tries to convey something important to Nicholas but they are mobbed by the crowd. There is terrible news from Khodynka.

The celebration turns into a disaster. No-one had expected more than half a million people to gather at Khodynka. The tragedy costs the lives of almost two thousand people and they can’t even remove the injured from the scene in time. Nicholas finds only the after-effects of the monstrous crush. Now his future is the people, for whom he is Emperor and protector.

He will go on to bear his cross and climb with it to the Calvary of the Russian monarchy. She will go on to claim glory for the ballet of the great Empire which will soon be no more. Only one thing will survive them both: the passion which could have changed the history of Russia.

A love that became legend.

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