



Simple, simplicity

I enter the classroom. A long and wide room with huge mirrors and a grumpy piano at the corner. Pink tights, ballet slippers and girls stretching their legs, spinning around, jumping, warming up. The wooden floor squeaks as my teacher demonstrates a tour fouette. She turns sixteen times around herself and suddenly stops. "There you go! Eleni, Maria and Sophie, your turn", she says, without even catching her breath, as you'd expect her after this. She is a strong and determined short woman, a true mistress of her art. A teacher from Russia. Mrs Sonia.

Her eighty -five -year- old father, Mr Morianov, who had been dancing for the Tsar Nicholas II of Russia, before the February Revolution of 1917, at the Marinsky Theatre, fled to Greece with his daughter to make a new start. He brought with him, besides his temperament, his professional artistic, though stinging, teaching method. Through his Russian ballet technique, he became a pioneer in his field and actually contributed to the ballet dance evolution in Greece, becoming a raw model which influenced our artistic perception. Just looking at him you can clearly see the reflection in his eyes of the corridors of the Tsar's palace in St. Petersburg, where Rasputin plotted against Nicholas. You may even hear the laughter of young Anastasia, the fourth grand duchess, a charming girl with blue eyes who was a gifted actress and could have been the favourite little ballerina, initiated by Mr. Morianov himself. All this air about him never failed to amaze me and give me goosebumps at the same time, in spite of his old age.

He is always in the classroom, in his wheelchair, portraying the old regime and he is certainly the spirit of the manor, giving instructions to his daughter with his firm voice and marking the beat of the music with his stick. He watches every movement we make and comments on it. He is very austere, takes his job so seriously. This is how he became successful, first as a dancer and later as a teacher. His only daughter, Sonia, inherited his stern disposition and appearance and manages to control five to seven year old children, just with one movement of her eyeballs. I admire her for her stamina and perseverance. "There is no such word as "I can't" in my vocabulary", she often tells the class, "there is only "I don't want".

I stare at her trying to capture her technique, but dance is not about watching, she often told

me, it's experiencing with your body unusual movements, called steps. One two three, one two three and.... the pianist starts to play a slow waltz and the lesson begins, so does the magic spell of the dance routine.

Each time I walk into a classroom it always feels like the first time. I take my first position at the barre and we always start warming up with a grand plie. We do it in all five positions. Then we continue with the rotation of the body. The sound of music has a penetrating impact on me. It arouses feelings, all kinds of feelings that seem to align with its chords. This is a perfect world, where everything is so balanced and organised in its pure simplicity. Simple is perfect.

Salty drops run down my spine. As I stretch my body I can feel each cell wanting to explore every movement and feel the cool breeze caressing my skin. It's a mystical experience, something that cannot be expressed but only practiced and sensed through the entire awareness. I perspire from every pore because the body can't control itself easily and needs extra power. First the brain gives the order to my muscles and then the whole system reacts, not willingly. I shake from the effort to overcome my limits and get to know my abilities. I choose to be here in this new and thrilling art world, in an attempt to know myself better. What an ecstatic sensation! The movements of the dance routine involve human power, commitment, a strong muscular system and grace.

"There you go little lady, one two three, stretch your leg as if you want to touch the sky", a female voice with harsh Russian accent distracts me and I lose my balance. I don't dare move my eyes to see her during the exercise and I can just smell her perfume, a mixture of jasmine flower and cedar tree scent. Nobody saw her coming in the classroom that sunny day at the Cafe de la Gare, in Paris. Prima ballerinas walk so softly almost an inch above the ground.

"You are about to faint my dear child, just breath in and out, while you are doing the arabesque. And make sure you keep it straight...yes push harder on the leg you are standing, to give you more balance, tres tres bien", she encourages me. "Your torso strong like a pilar", she continues firmly, "up up up". Two more releve before the music comes to an end and I could see who was commenting on my arabesque, while dancing the adagio. And there she was, I almost cried. The finest prima ballerina of her generation, Natalia Makarova, was there, like a scene from a movie, talking to us, touching us.

Her blue turban covered half of her forehead, a radiant smile shielding her age. Such an

aristocratic presence inspires one to dance, to create, to live.

I spent more than thirty years of my life in a classroom, improving my technique, fighting against fears and memories, wondering how on earth a human being can ignore gravity and stay up in the air, even for two seconds. Dancers can achieve the impossible.

When I am on stage, I know I can handle the unexpected. A live performance is not an easy task. Sometimes the music stops suddenly so you have to count, to keep the dance going, until it comes back again in a different part of the piece. You have to move on, no matter what happens.

As opening night approaches, you leave everything behind, take a deep breath, prepare yourself to fall into the unknown, to dive from a cliff into the ocean. Well, the stage isn't as vast, neither as blue, definitely not as turbulent as the waters. Nevertheless, stage lights blind you and you give yourself away and get carried on by the music and your capability to master your weaknesses and achieve 'le vol de nuit', into the darkness and out of it, over the city, over the country...

There you go young one, you can finally fly!