



CHAPTER 1

Anticipating the Story

Tatiana Leskova, as Russian as vodka, as French as Champagne and, for us, as Brazilian as a Caipirinha, has always been an atypical and irreverent cocktail, despite the greatness of her dancing and the immense contribution she has made to Brazil, and, for that reason, a personality who stamps a seal on her work. She is in every way a self-made woman. For Leskova, everything was a matter of conquest. This heiress of 'Les Années Folles' is made up of a composition of factors, obligations and influences. She overcame her insecurities and even her fame (her pride only allowed her to confess her secrets, when already over eighty years of age) and acquired independence and admiration. In a very personal and important way, she created her own artistic personality and myth and lived both intensely, never once abandoning either.

However, Tatiana is not an easy person. She is famous for questioning everything, often to the embarrassment of her interlocutors, and for her irritation, when faced with amateurism, dilettantism and mediocrity. With an elephant's memory, she doesn't allow for mistakes and enters into contact with everything from every angle. At the same time she is both intelligent and intuitive. One can never expect immediate praise from her. She questions the detail of every detail and if something seems odd, or escapes her, she doesn't rest till she's sorted it out. Not so much to store this in her extraordinary memory but more because this fragment completes the whole of the subject in question. Rather than praise, one would need to expect a severe scrutiny, with various mirrors, to reveal defects that need correcting. All true and real, but noted in a critical, untimely manner and combined with her very quick ironic reasoning, they are not always well received, nor immediately understood.





Tatiana Leskova: A Ballerina at Large

Over a period of more than forty years, many tears lined the faces of hundreds, perhaps thousands of students who attended her academy in the Avenida Copacabana and many tears were shed by her Company members at the Municipal Theatre in Rio de Janeiro. However, once dry, very few of those eyes ceased to admire or follow Tatiana Leskova's exultant, tumultuous and so often wise admonitions.

This proud lady, who never lowers her head, has the powers of a chameleon. Her 'Blue Angel' (she really does remind one of Marlene Dietrich in that film) charm is transformed in seconds into that of a hedgehog, if anyone should tread on her toes, or question her honesty in reference to Art. At such moments she is implacable, her viewpoint is unconditional and absolute. She doesn't accept objections and that's the end of it. Today, at her youthful (without any sense of exaggeration or flattery) eighty-eight, Leskova doesn't really want to leave behind this image of ferocity and intolerance.

Born in France at the beginning of the 1920s and having begun her professional career in 1937, Tatiana embarked on a tour in 1939, which kept her 'on board', across oceans and seas and across the five continents for nearly six years, throughout the Second World War. She eventually found her haven in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1944, when on the impulse of a great passion and the possibility of more lucrative work, she fled the dance company and exiled herself there.

Puritan and anarchic at the same time, Leskova is the reflection of a France full of writers, painters, musicians, dancers, revolutionaries and aristocrats, exiles from communist Russia or from the United States (Prohibition), all of whom converged on Paris. She is the heiress of a period in which great avant-garde movements appeared across the world such as Futurism, Expressionism, Cubism, Dadaism and Surrealism. It would be difficult for a person born under these influences to be normal, or shall we say 'ordinary'.


From a very tender age Tatiana experienced the knowledge and hardship of being the daughter of Russian immigrants, deprived of their riches and privileges. At nine years of age, she lost her mother, one of the first Russian aristocrats to become a mannequin at a period






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immortalised by Coco Chanel. Following her mother's death, she also experienced the suffering of separation from her maternal grandmother (the Baroness Nina Medem, lady-in-waiting to the Empress Maria Feodorovna) and her aunts (Kyra Medem Sereda and Irina Medem Bittner) when her father, Georges Leskov, acquired custody of the child. She suffered on the surface, in her soul and in her stomach – first of all at the boarding school to which she was taken, then in the life shared with her father in one small room. Her father certainly loved her but he felt impotent, faced by such an impulsive and delicate little girl (she was very small for her age). Georges, who was an intellectual and spoke five languages, had been a diplomat of Imperial Russia and was, at the time, unsuccessfully trying to be a taxi-driver, coupled with occasional work as an interpreter and translator. He floundered with respect to educating his daughter, dispensing almost military orders, as if he were training a Czarist colonel: 'You must have pride, you mustn't lower your head, you can't lie, dignity is above everything . . .'



They were difficult times. When there was some money, Tatiana would buy a small quantity of meat and macaroni and transform it into 'a weekly banquet' in their small room, which had no kitchen and where food was prepared on a little burner. During her free time, in the place of children's stories, her father read her books on Greek mythology.



Tatiana doesn't bear any grudges about her childhood but she retains traits that engraved themselves in her personality. Nevertheless, she never found it necessary to reject or deny her past. She has always spoken about it plainly. She is a woman of the present, who would never allow herself to be suspended in time. She knows that everything she created is the fruit of her own experience, her tenacity and her youth, which never disappears.