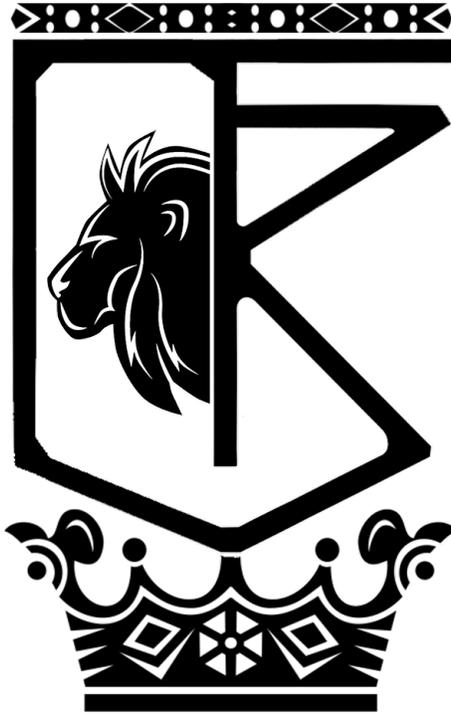


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VIAJE

BY

TRENT RHODES



Eliza shed tears. Slowly, they dripped down her rosy cheeks; one managed to plop into her coffee. It created a ripple that her watery eyes absorbed. She looked around, attempting to prevent more tear release. Emotions mixed. She felt simultaneously sad and elated, passionate and grateful, as if she passed on to a new world. The experience took her back again to her childhood and where she first started.

The ballet.

“No, Liza. Raise the toe this way,” Mari said. She mimicked the posture while explaining. “Put more pressure on the toe. Both of them and you’ll see how high you can reach. See, there you go. Good, good. Hold it. As much as you can.”

“It hurts!” Eliza responded.

“For now, it’s okay. It’s new. You have to get used to it. You’re already so good and this move is going to make you better.”

Eliza forced a smile. She understood and did her best to fight the pain. “I know.” She applied more pressure and after a few tries was able to stay up. “Got it!”

Eliza was 6 years old at the time and through consistent training and hints of inborn talent, she quickly rose to fame at the International School of Ballet. By age 12, she won 7 awards and featured in numerous magazines. Mari took the opportunity to capitalize on her growing popularity and skills by developing a social media campaign. So not only was Eliza amazing in person and on screen, she was followed on Twitter, Liked on Facebook and pinned thousands of times on Pinterest. One Instagram photo could set off a chain of 100+ comments and dialogue.

This grandiose emergence of the young ballerina shook the world. Eliza rapidly earned entry into the Olympics and took home 6 gold medals. She was 18.

“You must be so tired after all of the training!” One interviewer asked during a press conference. “How do you do it?”

“Well I’d say lots of focus, practice and pasta,” Eliza responded. “Pasta goes a long way to keeping you energized. Quick hint. Hint hint.”

“Eliza, what makes you passionate about the art?” Another journalist questioned.



"I've always loved it, ever since I started training when I was 6. The feeling never left me and I've always gone along with it. Just the right fit at the right time, and with the right amazing coach I'd say."

It was that question that changed her life. During the conference and days after, she went over the question and her answer again and again. Rehearsed it in her mind. Then she realized she pretended to believe what she said. Outside, to everyone else, it sounded genuine, on target and in sync with the flow of events. Internally, however, she felt a sudden emptiness after acknowledging that...

She never truly loved to do ballet.

She never loved flexibility practice.

She never loved the competitions.

The awards and medals meant nothing to her.

Fame did nothing for her life satisfaction.

Eliza wanted something more and was just then courageous enough to acknowledge the realization. At age 22, she suddenly disappeared. Her interviews were canceled, performances came to a halt and all communication with the wondrous ballerina ceased. Even her best friend and coach, Mari, could not locate her. The day she decided to quit her search and accept the conclusion she might have been kidnapped or murdered, she received a note:

**Dear Mari,**

***How've you been? Too casual a question, right? Sorry for my disappearance, but you should know that I'm alive. I am fine, safe and living well. It's great to not see yourself all over television sometimes. What do you think? I wanted to write to you because you were the first person to really believe in my talents at the school. You saw something in me and helped me use it. Remember when we had that conference and the guy asked me why I loved ballet? I gave him a really good answer. Eloquent. But then I realized, it wasn't true.***

***Despite everything we earned together, the money and access and probably where I could've gone if I kept going, I didn't really love it. I wasn't happy. So, instead of gradually dropping off and creating a ruckus and having the media criticize me for 'losing it,' I just left. Cold turkey. No looking back. It hurt so much but also I felt a huge weight taken off. Didn't have to live by anyone's expectations.***



*So, here I am, in this land where no one recognizes me, searching for what I'm really passionate about. Have I found it yet? I'm close, and when I do find it, I'll know because it'll come to me without the fame, money or other enticements. I can do it just because I love it and, if those other things come my way from it, then so be it. We got to eat right? Hope I haven't offended you in any way. When I return, you'll be the first to know.*

*Your Student Always,*

*Eliza*