

## The Spirit of Venice

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Sometime, not too long ago there was a girl, not unlike someone you know, who dreamed of travelling the world to write and to tap dance. People who knew this thought it quaint, but not realistic. Quietly, they waited for her to get a real job and calm down. `But I don't want to slow down!` thought the girl, mad that she was expected to soon give up the frenetic energy that kept her alive. The magic of tap was that the patterns never stopped, that the intricate rhythms of life were acknowledged, praised and realised in a whole, single body- her body. She believed that patterns were meanings and meanings and patterns were stories and stories and meanings and patterns were all there were. "If I can always dance or write inspiring rhythms", thought the girl, "then I, and whoever is listening or watching or reading, will be happy and motivated". And so, in search of rhythms to imitate and create- to find in the world and in herself, the girl bid farewell to everyone she knew and lived and flew to the other side of the world. To Paris, then London, then Italy.

1. There was something in the coffee that morning that tasted of adventure. As warm and rich and heart startingly strong as Venician coffee always was, there was an added bight of intrigue. And so the girl accepted the leaflet that the waiter handed her and took the time to ponder the picture. The masked characters on the card were performing a scene. It sparked an idea...

2. The girl hurried off on her mission: she must find a mask and she must tap in Venice today! The waiter had seen her look and waived the bill. He knew, like most, that there were plenty of

mask shops in Venice that weren't going anywhere in a hurry and that the girl had the rest of her life to tap. But he had seen in her eyes and urgency for the present. He knew that if that hunger wasn't fed, it would quell. Once he himself had wanted to travel to Hollywood, to become a movie star. As a child he always told people that that was what he would do. But somehow, at some point, he allowed himself to be convinced that this dream was nothing but a cliché. And one day he realised that he had drunk one too many espresso and was still in Italy. He had failed to use the (caffeinated) energy to propel him on his journey. To this day he may very well be still serving coffee in his home town. It is a fun life and he is happy and stable, but he always always wonders... When he saw the air around the girl slightly shimmering that day, he remembered his own passions and wished her good luck.

The girl crossed many a bridge she's never crossed before. However, she was in such a rush to find a mask and with it a fresh performance identity, that she didn't notice when a tap shoe came loose from its tie to her bag and dropped onto a step.

3. Mask shops are as common in Venice as Lingerie shops in Paris. But somehow this didn't make it easier for the girl in search of the perfect mask for her tap dance. A long-time "people watcher", the girl understood that everyone wore masks eighty percent, if not a hundred percent of the time: masks of indifference, work masks, intimidation masks, compassionate masks; there were cultural masks and age masks, party masks and mourning masks. They were usually formed of a combination of the wearer's individual perception of their particular act, and of their interpretation of the viewer's expectations. Today the girl needed a mask that was plain enough to show a range of

expressions but sure enough to give her a fun, firm tap character.

As many masks as she saw and tried, none seemed to be right. Perhaps she was distracted... between mask shops, the girl caught glimpses of a mysteriously masked figure. But when she'd turned her head, she'd find it just to be a gondolier wearing sunglasses, rustling up business on the cobbled paths.

4. Within every city where creativity breeds, there are forces at work that most people don't see. These forces may be felt by some, but they are usually dismissed in the same moment; the artists may taste or inhale them, but usually take or leave the inspiration without knowing or seeing the source. But... very, very occasionally, the force of creativity will appear as a figure. In Venice, that figure is appropriately masked!

There was something in the crisp air that morning that stirred the Venetian spirit. The Spirit wasn't quite sure what it was... a combination of rich coffee tastes, a quickening of the flow of the canals, the collective pasting and painting and trying on of masks and something else.. there was something else. The Spirit of Venice arose and trod over the old bridges, searching for the thing that had stirred it. It walked for hours, climbed over and under canals, boats, bridges, by gondoliers, tourists and mask makers. It wasn't until early afternoon that the spirit of Venice spied a tap shoe. The Spirit knew that this was what had awoken it.

5. Sometimes mischievous, sometimes impatient and sometimes teasing was the masked figure. When no owner of the single tap shoe appeared, the Spirit ran with the shoe, took its energy to fly high into the sky, to recharge and to sweep, to back flip

through space. With the shoe's magic, it became lightning then thunder, then rain.

Then it returned to the land and time of the people of Venice. Finished with its play, it prepared to toss the show over the Ponte de Pantelon, to feed the deeper resonances of the city's creativity.

6. "No-ooo...." Just as the masked figure was about to let the shoe fall and drop deep deep down to forever feed the canals, another figure appeared. Not used to being seen, the mask was taken aback. The other figure had just time enough to reach out and grab... The struggle began. The struggle became a fight for strength, independence, for will and for identity. As the energy levels balanced, though, the fight became a dance, a fast, cheeky, spinning, twirling, flying dance. This dance then became a play, a play of life, a play of refusal to give over, a play of desire. This play became a snapshot, a frozen moment in time. To this day, some tourists of Venice at the time, have a beautiful crisp photo of the freak lightning on the Ponte de Pantelon bridge late one winter afternoon.

The other figure, of course, was the girl. She had believed in her mission strongly enough not to dismiss her intuition. The third time she had spotted a figure that turned out to be a gondolier, looking suddenly too innocently or deliberately styled, in his stripy top and straw Panama hat, she changed her attack. She stopped looking in mask shops and began to follow her feet. Ready to break into spontaneous tap, she discovered she'd lost a shoe. She retraced her steps and just returned to the Pont de Pantelon in time to find the masked figure... and what a beautiful mask the masked figure wore... but it was about to dispose of her shoe! The girl tore away the tap AND the mask. Then she found a piazza for her dance. She tapped all the rhythms

of the day, of the heat of the city`s soul. She tapped the tastes of the coffee, the flavours of the clouds, the rush of the canals and the dreams of the people. The waiter was amongst the crowd that gathered as the tap grew in momentum and began to quench the people who, although surrounded by water still needed, needed to drink. He was alone in understanding part of the story behind the energy. He was not alone, however, in receiving the elation, the tides and rushes that the tap rained.

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