

GRACIE – INTERNATIONAL BALLET DANCER



Gracie performing

Gracie sat on her balcony at Taroona, overlooking the River Derwent, not far from Hobart city. She had returned to her land of her birth, oh so many years ago now. How long had it been? She now lived alone with her memories of the many glorious years when she was an international ballerina star.

She sipped irregularly at her cool drink. It was summer and hot. She made a point every day to enjoy a cool drink at this time on the balcony pondering on what was. She reached for her sunglasses as the sparkling waters from the river were reflecting the sun's rays. Her grandchildren will be visiting her later today, Timothy, Elderslie and Jimmy, children of her daughter, Anastasia and her husband Benny.

Gosh, she said to herself *I am near eighty now*. She heard whispers that the family was preparing a massive party in her honour, but she wasn't keen, but she did not want to disappoint their enthusiasm and of course it was done in love. She would have to endure it.

There was a time of course when she was an international ballerina. She was idolised by the crowds and she admitted she revelled in the attention. City after city, country after country, London, Sydney, Rome, Paris, New York, even Moscow, England, France, Italy, Spain America, Australia, Hungary, Canada and so many more. She performed on the best ever stages throughout the world, acclaimed by all as the prima donna of the ballet world.

But she missed Stephan, her late husband and the only man in her life and the only man she loved. Stephan was Russian and first saw him when she was performing as one of the

chorus in Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake long before she became a star in her own right. Steph's (as she affectionately called him) full name was Stephan Sokolov. He as she was, only young when they met.

He was performing with the Russian Imperial Ballet of world renown. Gracie thought he was the most beautiful man she had ever seen. She watched him from afar during rehearsals. She had been fortunate enough to gain a scholarship to study under the famous Russian ballet teacher Polina Semionova, one of the best of the world. So far from her home in Tasmania she travelled to St Petersburg in Russia to be trained under this most strict, but professional ballet teacher. In her time she was, as Gracie had become, internationally acclaimed and famous. Gracie found St Petersburg beautiful, but at times more cold than she could ever imagine. Russia was a lovely place, the people generally friendly and sincere but it was very different to the land of her birth. Nonetheless, she had the opportunity to be taught by Madam Semionova, so one had to endure the harsh weather and in the end it was all worth it. It took years to get to the top of her profession, but because of the instruction of Madam Semionova she made it. Was it easy? Gracie chuckled to herself and answered her own question, "*far from it*" she said.

Then her mind returned to Stephan. His ballet moves as expected were graceful, beauty in movement. He was a natural with his body turning like a dove. During a break in rehearsals they had retired to a back room of the ballet academy where they rested and drank refreshing beverages to recuperate their bodies that received much stress and strain. As they sat, Gracie's eyes were drawn to Stephan and he sensing as one does in such circumstances, returned the stare and smiled at her. Gracie's cheeks reddened, but she enjoyed the sensation. They looked away somewhat embarrassed, but out of the corner of their eyes they continued to view each other, although secretly.

To Gracie, Stephan was perfectly formed. His body was sleek and slim as a ballet performer should be. His hair was golden, his eyes that grey blue of many of the Russians she had met, his skin white as ivory and his teeth as perfect as a god's. His physical form was proportionally wonderful and his profile was typical of a Classic Greek facial features. She thought he was absolutely magnificent. There was clearly a strain of Viking in his make-up, also Slavic and she suspected an Aryan influence, perhaps German. She would learn too, that he was an accomplished pianist.



Stephan at the piano

In turn, Stephan considered Gracie to be a graceful doe, somewhat enchanted by her Anglo-Keltic features. He marvelled at her loosely hung medium brown hair, her mid blue eyes and her taped facial features. He thought too she was perfectly proportioned and when he eventually learnt that she was from Tasmania, a place he knew nothing of, he was enchanted even further.

That was long ago. As the years progressed Gracie's fame grew and she moved from being in the chorus to parts where she was one of four or five, then duets, then she was dancing solo....in time she was a star and her name was in lights. Stephan's fame also grew, both falling deep in love as their careers progressed. Then while on a trip to Venice in a quite corridor of St Mark's Cathedral the two children slipped away from their guardians and from the ever watchful eye of the company's management. Together they giggled as they ran as far and as fast as they could with the managers accusing each other of not knowing where they were. With arms outstretched and high voices they charged each other with neglect, until Ivor, the head manager screamed, *"Quiet! We must find them, the performance is at 8 o'clock and they should not be out alone, they should be at the theatre preparing for Princess Mary of Denmark will be in the audience, wanting to see a fellow Tasmanian like Gracie perform."*

"Go. Seek every corner of this wretched place. Ask everyone if they have seen them, go," he ordered and so in panic they scattered hoping to find the runaway children, Gracie and Stephan.

In the meantime, both were having a time of their lives. Like free children, they gaily and merrily pranced before St Marks, shooing the pigeons as they did, oblivious of the drama they were causing to those they left behind. They then stopped and looking at the wondrous cathedral of St Marks they walked towards it and entered into its cooling and sensuous atmosphere. Inside they saw hordes of tourists, clicking their cameras, taking

selfies and acting obnoxiously as tourists can. Gracie and Stephan grabbed each other's hand and with smiles covering their faces they sought out where they could be alone. They found the exact spot, in a corner away from the crowds with a statue of Mother Mary cradling the baby Jesus and looking down on them. They fell silent and Stephan let go of Gracie's hand. She was curious when he fell on to his knees before her and in almost perfect English with just a light Russian accent, he said, *"I love you my dove. In this holy of holy place with the Mother of God smiling upon us, can there be a more serene place to ask your hand in marriage?"*

Gracie put her hands to her mouth. *"Yes, yes,"* she cried. On that instant Stephan pranced up and threw his arms around her while at the same covering her with kisses. Their ideal moment was interrupted when Ivor with a loud voice, which the priest on duty pursed his lips with a *"Shhhh"* said *"You two get back to the theatre. We are due to open with a couple of hours."*

Gracie and Stephan saw his wrinkled face and his panic expression then together they burst out laughing, which infuriated him further. They were so happy.

In the end they told the world of their impending marriage which at first shocked those associated with the company, but when the management saw the wonderful possibilities in regards to world-wide publicity they warmed to the concept and gave the marriage their blessing.

Gracie and Stephan were married on a marvellously bright spring day in Vienna to which both parents travelled and attended including granddad. Phoebe and Keziah were part of the marriage with Reuben and Elijah dressed in fabulous suits. There was a great amount of attention and their photograph appeared in numerous magazines and on television shows.

After their marriage they performed together and became the most famous couple in the entertainment world. Glorious places demanded to see them perform, not only Vienna, Rome, Paris, New York, London, but Tokyo, Bucharest, Milan and then there was the invitation to perform at the Sydney Opera House. Gracie was over joyed. It wasn't Tasmania, but at least it was Australia.



Gracie and Stephan performing the Nut Cracker Suite in Stockholm.

As soon as the international stars landed on Australian shores there was frenzy of media attention. Gracie had come home. She had returned. When she got off the VIP jet and was escorted to the terminal she was presented with a huge bunch of red roses by the local ballet academy of whom of course she was their heroine. They were then escorted to their massive suite at the six star hotel in the city. There they rested for an hour until there was a knock at the door. Gracie ran to the door and opened it excitedly only to see dad and mum, Phoebe, Reuben, Keziah and a beaming Elijah whom she had learnt was now a famous AFL football star playing for Hawthorn. She embraced them all; they entered and were welcomed by Stefan who was only too happy to see them all.

“But where is grand-dad?” Gracie asked. “He said he would be here.”

This was followed by another knock at the door. Gracie waltzed over and opened it. There was granddad, *“Sorry,”* he said, *“I missed the lift.”* Gracie laughed and embraced him. It reminded granddad so much when she was a little girl.

The performance of *Sleeping Beauty* at the Sydney Opera House was outstanding with not three but four curtain-calls. The audience went wild. They could not get enough of the adored couple.



Sydney Opera House

Everywhere they toured in Australia they were welcomed as though they were royalty. There were photographs galore in the local newspapers as they were such a photographic couple. It just happened to co-incide with a visit of King William and Queen Catherine. In the hallowed halls of the Governor-General's home at Canberra they were presented to the royal couple. Gracie respectfully curtsied while Stephan bowed. Then following the example of the royal couple, the King and Queen of Australia, they began waltzing much to the applause of those who were attending the gala ball.

In time their Australian tour was over and the ballet couple of international standing resumed their tours of the major spots of the world.

Grandad followed their itinerary with a great deal of pride. She knew that Gracie would be a great success and kept a scrap album of her and Stephan's career.

Then tragedy struck.

It was some time after their marriage, indeed a number of years. By now they had three children, two boys, Reginald (7), Alexis (5) and a daughter Anastasia (3). Gracie and Stephan were on holidays. After a busy programme of performing they had decided to travel to the Swiss Alps to participate in their favourite sport – skiing. As pater and mater had now long retired, they enjoyed touring the world and co-incided their latest adventure by visiting Switzerland where Gracie and Stephan had made their home. They gladly stayed at their luxury house on the shores of Lake Geneva while the prestigious couple went on their skiing trip.

It was a glorious holiday for them. It was wonderful to have a break from the hurley-burley of public attention. They stayed at one of the many cottages that could be hired called *Huttenfeeling auf dem mainensass* (German) which was quaint and located in a quiet spot amongst great beauty.

On this third day of skiing where their spirits ran high and enjoyed the thrill of the speed they experienced when skiing. They laughed like children and once their sport was over they would embrace and kiss.

"Come one more time," begged Stephan.

"What again? No, no Stephan. I'm exhausted. I will ride the cable car down." replied Gracie.

"Don't be a spoil sport," grinned Stephan with boyish enthusiasm. *"I'll race you to the chalet where we can have a hot tot to warm us up."*

Gracie smiled with delight. *"You go my darling. I will rest up and follow in a minute or two."*

Stephan waved and left Gracie with great sounds of *"Swoosh"* as he sped away on his skies. Gracie noticed, however, that he took a different route to the bottom, not the usual one which was recommended.

She watched as he raced away and as she did she admired the great beauty of the scene with the towering snow covered mountains in the background with the valley below showing patches of beautiful green pastures surrounded by rich, tall green pine trees.

While mesmerised by the idyllic scene, Gracie heard a loud sound, much like thunder. Then with horror she saw, gradually at first, great waves of snow beginning to tumble down the side of one of the mountains. It was an avalanche and worse of all, as it gathered pace and quantity she saw Stephan in the way of the impending disaster. She watched Stephen stop, take off his protective glasses and look towards the forthcoming danger, but before he could do anything, the great tumble of snow falling like concrete struck and covered him like a massive blanket. All this before the horrified Gracie. She was stunned, as one would expect, but there was nothing she could do.

Naturally there were rescue attempts, but it proved to be worthless. Stephan, her love was entombed under a hundred feet of ice which would be his last resting place as it was impossible to recover his beautiful body. He would be preserved for all time. Forever young.

Gracie after the tragedy took time off from her busy schedule. However, on the advice of grand-dad who thought it best for her well-being, she resumed work. For the next ten years she returned to the stage and toured the world to much acclaim. Then when she retired from her actual performing, she opened a ballet academy in Vienna which became the most prestigious in the world. She never re-married. How could she? Stephan was the only love in her life. Oh, there were numerous marriage offers of course, from multi-millionaires, Counts and Lords, even an ex-Prime Minister, artists galore, but there was only one Stephan, so she refused them all. She was never lonely. Son Reginald set up his own successful computer business, while Alexis became an equally successful artist. Anastasia

followed her mother's footsteps and while still young, Gracie could see that she too would be a great ballerina.

Time passed and Gracie judged it was time return to her land of her birth, Tasmania. And so, as she sat on the balcony of her home in Taroona she thought of others. Sister Phoebe had a successful marriage and became a well-known teacher in mathematics. Rueben had his own business designing computer games and had established a thriving company. Keziah too married and would you believe became a famous authoress. Brother Elijah became, as said, an AFL football star and after his playing career became a sports media commentator which allowed him to travel the world. On the occasions when he did they met up in such centres as Milan, Copenhagen, London, San Francisco and Rio.

She sipped some more from her drink. *That was so long ago*, she thought. Poor grand-dad had gone to the big library in the sky, after one day when in his own personal library, a whole heavily laden book shelf collapsed on his head from which he never recovered. It was said, however, when they found him, he had a smile on his face. Grand-mother had passed too, while pater and mater had gone down in in a luxury liner the *Arcadia* when it struck an ice-berg while sailing the Antarctic. It was said, it sank in minutes, without time to man the emergency boats and despite frantic calls for help nothing could be done. Gracie shivered...how cold it must have been, but at least it must have been quick.

She then smiled. Would you believe son Reginald (named after his esteemed great grand-father) was nearly sixty. Her children visited as much as they could and they communicated just about every day. Naturally she had numerous nephews and nieces living in close proximity, while her many friends and admirers from around the world still sought her out. She was never lonely, particularly as she had wonderful memories. Ah, she could hear her visitors now....

Oh it has been a full life, she said to herself. *I would not have missed it for the world.*