“Ok, let's do that again”

The music stopped abruptly. My eyes were fixed on the mirror as a drop of sweat came running down my left temple, my muscles aching. It was only mid-May but the temperature of the studio was already unbearable and I had been practicing this piece for 4 whole hours, incapable of satisfying the choreographer. A hand on his hip, the other stroking his chin, he stared at the floor for a few seconds, thinking. Before he started his usual critique, I collapsed to the floor to catch my breath, using the excuse of retying my pointe shoes. This task turned out to be more complicated, my vision being blurred by fatigue and the stifling heat. “Well…” Finally lifting his eyes, he left his sentence hanging in the air. His hard, unyielding gaze sent shivers down my spine. I knew what was coming after this kind of sentence opener : harsh remarques, comments on my posture, my arms, my legs or anything he could find to nitpick. I had become completely . He continued, exasperated “your phrasing is completely wrong, you end up no longer being in rhythm. From the beginning” I let my chin fall on my chest, overwhelmed. My jaw clenched in frustration.

Finally finding the strength to get up, I walked towards the back of the room to get back into position, while everyone scrutinized my actions. As the hours passed, the studio had emptied, only the major roles remaining, their replacements, a few teachers and, of course, the choreographer. It is strange how this small audience terrifies me more than that of the big theaters. Maybe it is their expertise, maybe it is their physical proximity. Regardless, their presence only made this situation more humiliating.

I positioned myself, took a deep breath, and the music started again. I tried to apply all the corrections he had thrown at me throughout the last half-hour and also anticipate all those he still hadn't pointed out. Having done this variation again and again, I didn’t even have to think about the movement sequence anymore and could solely focus on the details. I was reaching the end of the solo,  when “Stop”. I completely froze. Everyone else in the room held their breath. “Again” he said sharply. The sweat on my skin felt like a second layer of clothing, heavy and suffocating. I swallowed hard, nodded timidley and went back to the beginning position. The music began once more. After a few seconds “Stop,” he said once again. I didn’t know how much more of this I could take. Yet, I went back into position and the music started again.