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## Story Of Dance And Rain

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I AM TWENTY. IT RAINS AND WE DANCE AROUND IN A CIRCLE. We hear the sound of the rain on the corrugated iron roof. An animated percussionist's jam session stirs the entire rhythmic section in a frenzied mood. The music strokes rotate between sensuality and frenzy. Between a slow sound and jerks of a crazy submachine gun. We are alone that night. Two people in love. You curl up against my heart. Hesitating between relaxing and scratching like a terrorized feline. This desire of vengeance in your eyes. "Why did I in front of you wrap myself around this ebony sculpture on the dance floor. Why did I hug her so close? Eh, admit it. Anybody could see that that you craved the desire to do so. You could not stop yourself from fondling her. To glide your hands along her back. You all but, nearly touched her buttocks. Besides, I don't know what kept you." Words yelled between the teeth but whispered in the murmur of the rain and the rumpling of bodies.

I smile. I am twenty. I won't tell you that your jealousy is not justified. I have not even kissed her yet. I who very early tasted flesh as a forbidden fruit offered to a hungry man. Mere glances of connivance between us at the university some time ago. And a restrained strange attraction. Like to prevent a vehicle of which we would not have any control from going off the road. Then two or three phone calls. Long like nostalgia. From the native land. Of a lost love or friendship. We call each other to say nothing. Aragon's poems and Prévert's. Laleu's or d'Avers'. Phelps' also. Which one of the two had asked or offered his/her phone number?

I am twenty. Twenty-one may be. It rains and the music plays for us. Isolated in the middle of so much disturbance. Like a boat whose strength defies the entire ocean. Time stopped. Since yesterday. Since a long time ago. Since I have known you or have dreamed to know you. As a matter fact, have I existed before? There are some who will acknowledge that I did but I don't recall that anymore.

It does not rain yet. Across mine your gaze is riveted to inaccessible dreams of suffering and love. The wave of the night. They cross each other. Reluctant. Before stepping in the music people sway their hips in a demented motion. Mute dialogue. Sometimes disturbing sometimes conciliating from

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<sup>1</sup> A *péristyle* is a voodoo temple where people gather for ceremonies.

which we are both excluded. What could they probably have to say? I get up. Go by your side without talking to you. You join me again on the dance floor. Under a huge arbor similar to a big *péristyle*<sup>1</sup> located in the middle of the backyard. Far from the jumble of the tables and the bar. We pretend to dance. Your eyes riveted to mine. “You wanted it. Admit it.” I turn my head away and ignore your question. You sink your nails in the nape of my neck. I look at you and smile. A yellow smile. It is not part of the game. You feel my stiff body resisting your embrace. A light wind floats in the air.

The rain suddenly starts roaring. Its heavy vertical drops penetrate the flesh of the earth. Keeping us from getting off the dance floor. Compelling us to continue playing the music for a long, never-ending dance. We dance. That we become giddy. With our eyes closed we have no sense of time of the day and night. We did not dance to the music that alternates with the murmur of the rain. Our steps lead us to another tempo. Music that our minds quietly transmit to our awakening bodies. Yours I imagine intoxicated with the moment of old declaimed poems until the end of the night and the patience of the family members wanting to use the phone. Mine drunk with rum-coca. Cuba is a free woman in my mind. People restlessly dance around us. Sing in chorus with the musicians. It feels like carnival.

We dance. Our steps harmoniously coordinate without ever sharing any common recollection. Our bodies lightly touch, wrap around each other, let loose come closer. The sweet warmth of your breasts against my chest. (You don’t wear a bra. As usual. I know the answer. “Why bother? They’re so small.” So tiny that I consider it a sacrilegious act to put my huge hands around them. I heard that you gave birth. They must have gotten bigger. Will your son [or your daughter] know one day that they had nursed me before him/her?) Two young fawns raise their heads to tickle my torso with their tongue. They have always reminded me of Solomon. In my rigorously sabbatical childhood I did not know that the Song of Songs was a love poem. Such things are not spoken of in the Book of Books. But you’re not Solomon’s model. Otherwise he would have talked about your buttocks. Of this double splendor carrying in its cadence your youth and my craziest fantasies. Happy reminiscence of Africa from your mixed heritage.

I remember now the name of the night-club: “*Zombi*”. It sounds awful. We could have chosen “*Feu vert*” (Green light) the other well known club in this northern city. But the group wanted to go to “*Zombi*”. Well, well there was another group with us that night. I remember now. Angelo Ricardo Adelina Florencia Antonio Teodora Marina...

Where are they while we are dancing? We modestly hug each other.

The rain stopped a long time ago. The music also. And we keep dancing. In the middle of never-ending conversation of couples waiting for the next song to play. The music starts again. You take my hand and invite me to go outside. Thousands of stars add to the beauty of the night. The earth exhales fresh and heavy effluvium. You don’t speak. I follow you like a good dog without asking any question. We go into the night by the main highway on the sea side. Fifteen minutes after you

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## Calabash

jump over the rail you hold out your hand to me. Too proud of myself as a young beau I refuse to take it. You are going to see what you are going to see. I jump and land with less flexibility than you. You burst out laughing. And your laughter mixes with the undertow. Dying with it. Your virginal body lying on the waves. I dream of you while swimming by your side. Lost in an old dream of love. I have a hard time writing about it today. One will say these are poet's words. But I don't invent anything. I swear. If there is poetry it is from that night. The black suns of the night met in your mysterious eyes. What an idea to swim in the ocean at such a time! (Ten years later and thousands of miles away I laugh when I think of it today. Such a crazy idea could only come from you. Unpredictable. Prudish and debauched at the same time.) It is a bit chilly. The heat of the day totally vanished. I take off my shoes and I move away from you. The contact of the sand under my feet. I carefully step on a few pebbles. I leapfrog like a tight-rope walker. You call me. And you lay back on the water as if it were a bed. I guess it must be cold.

The others join us on the beach. Noticing our presence in the dark. I keep my eyes riveted on the Big Dipper dreaming of taking you far away from this world. Your head deep in the ocean past midnight. They are all there: Antonio Teodora Angelo Marina... You come back shivering and wanted to warm yourself in my arms. The others are ready to tease us. Their insinuations stop our gesture. Our kisses in suspense that night. We could have been kissing so passionately. Like our dreams. The desire to fight. To change our country. And our youth bursts with passion. Like an angry guitar. Volcano of words about past and future injustices. About the father the son who had watched us growing from birth on. We knew nothing else and we could only speak. All that more important than our bodies that night.

I smile when I think of how you got this wicked initial by fate. Do you remember how often I used to tease you. But you are kind in spite of the Nazis. Despite your initial. It was a game for young people to play. Happy and angry. You know I have always chosen the right path because I stand by our anger. Which sustains our fiery twenty years. Of course thorny. I have been walking through these dreams. My steps retracing our memory. Confusing at times with it. Sometimes I look forward to having other beautiful dreams. As if my life depended on it. But when I have dreams I don't dare go into them.

The rain slowly starts again. That night the rain will always start again. Like when we get away from the ocean. The rum-coca imperceptibly penetrates into the land of my twenty years. With you in my arms. Close to my heart. Heavier than I thought. I have a hard time climbing the forty steps of the royal university to get to the dorms. Boys and girls separated according to their affinities and boldness. I should have known that you're not bold. I drop you without saying good night.

Not very far your eyes looking for mine. I always pout when I don't get what I want. As a child I was spoiled by three women. Entirely devoted to my whims. Frightfully maternal. Besides I don't know if they came from Egypt ... or nowhere. Maybe my inner cinema is playing a trick on me. A

girl gets in trouble if she does not bow to my whims. I am the only person who can watch this film I screen.

How many months have passed since that night? How many moons and tides? How many swings, furtive smiles on different dance floors? Exchanging glances during classes and managing to avoid the teasing of the others. Talking on the phone until dawn declaiming Aragon's or Préverts poems. Laeau's and D'avers'. Davertige's also. Until we meet that Saturday. A few days before the big separation.

I see the beach again. In the middle of the week. We are alone. Once more. Several waiters cater to us. They knowingly wink at me. We are young and smile. A fisherman paddles towards our direction. He offers us (more to me than you) seafood.

Seafood grilled on fire wood and marinated with lemon juice. Rumored to be aphrodisiac. I don't need that at my age (twenty years old) but I play the game. Talking about game something comes to my mind now. From time to time I slip away to glance at the soccer game on TV. The Brazilian soccer team is playing against another team whose name I don't know. It's the World Cup. It's June or July. You're not happy. But you know my passion for the Brazilian team. You pout. I kiss you on the neck every time I slip away or come back. The game will soon finish. I am happy that Brazil won.

I draw you to me. You resist. I run towards the ocean to pick an algae. I give it to you by way of a flower. Conquered. We walk arm in arm towards the bungalow. We come out shortly. After tirelessly kissing and fondling each other. Not satisfying enough for my twenty year old body. I touch your tiny breasts. I mold them like Canova, hesitated and intoxicated by his own creation. Then my lips greedily devour them like a new born hungry for flesh. Your flesh. But we can't go any further. Because of that other guy you never told me about. (Weird he likes the soccer team "Heavenly whites" the Brazilian rival team. He is as much expansive as I am reserved. As bottle prone as I am sober. He has many qualities and flaws that make the two of us the two faces of your life.)

You will never tell me about it. I will have only guessed. Then I will have understood while living abroad when I learn of your marriage. It must have been your first love. It drives me crazy. Not because he loved you before I did. But not to able to fully express your desire. You will not tell me anything. You keep repeating the same refrain: "Try to understand that I can't." Understand what? And accusing me of being like the others. Only interested in going to bed with you. "But a girl is not stupid."

You become vulgar and that does not seem like you at all. I stop our chaste petting. I become mute. I don't really want to. But it would be impossible for me to talk without being infuriating. Disappointed.

I stayed in bed viewing my inner cinema. An hour passed. Maybe two. Or would it be that a few minutes seemed so long? You ask me if I want to go home. I get dressed. It looks like you want to pay the hotel bill. I walk past you. I give you a hard look stopping your gesture. We get back in the

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## Calabash

car. I start the car. I speed up. You did not ask me to slow down. Probably getting angry at yourself at the world. But you are scared. I know it I feel it. You don't say a word. Like me when I pout. Tense. You put your seat belt on. You cling to the seat. So scared. I press my foot on the gas pedal.

I am infuriated. I am disappointed. I avoid looking at your face. Nor the face of death which comes close under my feet. I press on the horn to free the way. The car speeds along the road. The tree trunks seem coming at me. A final shock ejects me from the car. I feel drowsy and I hear you crying. You will be unharmed by the accident. And I will take the next plane without saying goodbye. With a plastered leg. My body and my mind bruised.

Until that letter. Where you talk about that dance as one of your best memories. The one among those which does not make one suffer contrarily to popular belief. Perhaps it is so because it often comes alone, carried by nobody, by the wind, by a dance, rarely linked to your name or my memory of you. And yet I owe it to you, but don't even try to understand. This memory is particular. To describe it as beautiful is not enough. Strong, tenacious, pure, sensual, innocent? A mixture of all of that? I have rarely found one similar to that one which could define for me the word "Happiness". You say that you sent me a letter "in memory of that night. A way to say "Thank you."

I am in Paris. I pour myself a last glass of rum. It's five years old. (five years old gold Havana club rum). A friend brought it for me from Havana. A fifteen hours flight with a stop in Montréal. I drank it drop by drop for a long time. The bottle is full of history. I invent some other true ones (still my inner cinema). I retell them for my self with the habit of inventing stories for survival. What do I know? Childhood stories that the maids used to sing while cleaning and cooking. Caribbean stories. Stories of crazy people. Dreams of guerrillas (I wonder why this friend of mine always refused to shave himself)...

Sorry for telling you all of that starting with a simple letter and an empty bottle. It is minus ten degrees outside. I feel like taking a swim in the ocean. Paris, Fall 1992 🐼