

Purple, warm and wet. The rain splashes against her face, runs down in rivulets, drops like tears, melds into the good earth with a syncopation akin to the beat of a drum. A sax blasts to the thrum of that drum in her head and she, hearing the melody, raises her hands in praise to the darkened skies, twirls and dances, her feet kicking against the wet dirt, creating divots of joy.

What is that she hears? The wah-wah-wailing of a mournful guitar joins the musicale, its tones purple and blue, spouting soulful notes, daring those who hear to stop the dance, to truly listen. To remember when they were young, beautiful, when the earth was greener, the skies clearer, and clouds looked like bunnies instead of menacing faces.

The guitar is crying harder now, its plaintive sadness gutting her insides, replacing the joy. Something is wrong, something is gone from her. It has drifted away into the heavens, has left her looking up into a sunless sky, gray clouds bleak with a grief that was not there before.

In the distance, moving through a copse of trees is a figure. She slowly makes out the man as he approaches, his steps measured and sure. Dressed in a teal suit with vest, dark curls escaping the scarf tied around his head, he's small and sylph-like. A purple guitar hangs casually from his right shoulder. Even though he's several paces away, she feels his eyes capturing her. The purple rain still falls, soaking through her dress, leaving lilac traces on its white cotton.

The sound of the guitar closes around her, even as the instrument hangs unstrummed and unsung.

"Who are you?" she asks the man.

"You called me," he says. He smiles and as he does, his eyes glitter like brown diamonds, as luminous as the white pearl teeth that contrast skin of honey, milk and cinnamon. The curls peeking from the scarf are lustrous, his face, clean-shaven. The smile is sardonic, hiding some sort of wisdom he has yet to elaborate on.

"Called you? I don't even know you," she says.

"I heard the lyrics in your heart. My guitar must have heard them to, 'cause it started playing all on its own. Can't you hear it?"

Yes, she did hear it. The guitar was reaching out to her even though no fingers touched its strings. It moved through the key of G sharp, a medley of chords that kept beat with the crying tears of the sky. Plunk...plunk...plunk...

Not a drop of rain touched the man as he stood there, his head keeping the rhythm of the phantom guitar. He was as dry as though he stood beneath a glaring sun on a Summer day.

But it wasn't Summer. It was Spring. April, to be exact. A time for rain and sad skies that blemish the sun's visage, give it tears.

"The song...it's too sad. I want to hear something happy," she demands of this mystical musician who knows her heart, hears the song within her, plays it back to her.

"It's up to you. I am simply the echo of your soul. I go where I'm called, to put music to the lyrics. You, and all those like you, you are the ones who write the songs. I simply play the notes."

She closes her eyes, wishes the sadness away. With all her might, she slowly clears the skies, pushes the rain away.

A new thrumming. Something sun-inspired, a beat defying the April rain begins to play all around her. Makes her move her hips, sway to a breeze coming up now, soft, seductive, drying the beads of wetness on her dark skin.

A distant drum joins in, a kettle drum. A cowbell. The lilting keys of a piano.

The man swings the guitar around, moves long, dexterous fingers against the taut wires, strums out a rhythm that weaves in and out, ribbons of notes, rests, chords taking form around her, dancing along the curvature of her hips.

Wah...wah...wah...

She dips one hip, follows with a thrust to the air, her ass as taut as his strings, bumping to the glory of his song. Her song, actually. New lyrics flow from her heart, praising life, love, even pain. A bass joins in this hedonistic cacophony. In the distance, screaming horns crash the party.

The sunbeams touch on the previously sodden soil, and green tendrils of grass begin to peek through the mud, looking upward as young witnesses to her rebirth.

The man is no longer looking at her, but has his eyes lovingly trained on his guitar, as though it were a woman in his arms, sensually writhing to his ministrations.

"What is her name?" she asks him, for some reason ascribing a feminine essence to his instrument.

"Joy Fantastic," he answers without hesitation, as though the question is one he has been asked before. He's looking at her now, a small smile breaking.

"Joy," she says the name back to him. It seems like a fitting appellation for a guitar.

"Joy goes with me wherever I'm called, I would never leave without her," he adds. "She's always gonna be in the mix somewhere, singing to the universe."

"The universe? That's a big audience," she teases, even as she moves, even as he plays.

"Music is universal, cosmic even. It connects everyone to every string that vibrates in space, to the quarks and the novas and the black holes that hide even more universes. It rings the bells, crashes the cymbals, sends the biggest bang through time. Do you know the astronauts...I think in Apollo 10 or 11...said they heard the stars whistling. So cool. Before there was life, before the explosion of the stars that sent dust in every direction, that formed the galaxies, that grew the planets, that settled into the oceans, that formed the exoskeletons of the tiniest creatures who pulled themselves outta of the primordial ooze...there was this..."

He hits a note that reverberates physically, casting shades of extreme colors in the air, colors that dance in time with her own motions. Purple morphs into red, sending out threads of blue, green, tinges of yellow and a color she has never seen before.

"How do you know so much?" she asks, listening to the song as it lengthens into a funky riff, as his guitar punctuates with a blast of sound.

"Because I am music, I am time, I write the songs the whole world sings. I'm the ballad crooned by a man sending his heart to another, I'm the lullaby sweetly whispered to a newborn babe, the dirge that sends humankind forward when they transition into the ephemeral, the warbling of an off-tune melody, the harmony of a choir on key, I am the lute, the lyre, the glockenspiel, the damn triangle even... Without me, there would be no joy, no expression of those inner songs that the world needs to hear. Think how a song connects us, touches on that vulnerable chord within each of us, tells us we are not alone, that our joys, pains and sorrows reverberate with another's joys, another's pains, another's sorrows, that we are one, no matter our differences, no matter our distances. Music brings us together in one big, cosmic party. It tells us that we are not dancing alone."

She stops the dance, clarity growing. He keeps on playing, the song growing stronger, deeper.

"Then, when I'm alone...you're there?" she asks.

"Whenever you reach for a song, when you reminisce about a tune that touched you in some way...yeah, I'm there."

"There have been times when a song just comes, sometimes when I'm just waking up, or when I'm trying to fall asleep..."

"Yes, a lullaby," he smiles. "Sometimes the song is trying to tell you something..."

"My mother, she had a song that she loved. Now when I hear it, it's like she never went away, that she's talking to me somehow."

He nods. "She is. She wants you to know that she isn't really gone, that she hasn't really left you. Music connects not just those on this earth, but those traveling the light fantastic, the ones who no longer know sorrow. They're members of a celestial choir and it's all cool."

"Were you always a god?" she asks, slightly swaying her hips again.

He shakes his head. "I have lived many lives, have taken many forms, to be a god would be limiting. I was here last in the incarnation of a man, but I've transitioned again and moved into a different hemisphere. But, like your mother, I have not really left. I will be here in the music that threads and connects, that makes you think and feel, that calls you to dance beneath a rainy sky. That moves your hips to the funk, that makes you praise the clouds and the sun in a gospel lyric. We, all of us, are made of stardust, and when we go back to dust, we simply ascend to the stars."

He stops strumming, looks into her eyes.

"I am your lyrics, I am the things you want to tell the world. Now, give them back to me..."

She knows what he wants and she gives it to him.

*"So many love songs are sung,
But what do we really know of love...
The love that stretches beyond time, to the skies
That is more than just a thrill in our souls
Words that soothes us
When we think we're alone,
That holds us when we're on our own.
That shows us how to laugh, how to cry,
How to live, and even how to die..."*

She stops, a flush in her face from embarrassment.

"I don't really write the songs, so it doesn't rhyme much," she says. "But I do know what I feel..."

He smiles again and she notices only now, that he has an adroit beauty that is not particularly male or female. It simply is.

"Don't ever be sorry about those words there in your heart. They are you and they will always call me. And I'll set them to music..."

And he does, singing the song back to her, letting his guitar, Joy Fantastic, create the harmony, an underlying chorus. He's a troubadour serenading her and she feels affirmed. The grief from earlier passes as does any storm...at least, for now. There's a flicker of sun in her heart, mirroring the sun beaming from above. The clouds do look like bunnies again...for now.

And strangely, with the heat of the sun, a miracle.

Precipitation that isn't rain.

Despite the heat, she notices the crystalline shapes, feels the cold as they touch her flesh.

Snow.

"That's strange, it's snowing on an April day..."

He hits a note, looks up and nods.

"Yeah, sometimes it snows in April."

She smiles as she sways to another rhythm rising all around her, strains tickling the growing flower buds that weren't there a minute before.

Think that there are lyrics somewhere in his words.

And she continues to dance as he turns and begins to walk away, leaving his music in his wake.

Sharon Cullars
April, 2016

