

Maraschino Cherry

From *Mara, Marietta: A Love Story in 77 Bedrooms* by Richard Jonathan

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In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated

With the applause my beating heart conspires to leave me breathless; I look into your eyes and see you are as stunned as I. What have we witnessed? Spiders in mating display? Matador and bull in the ceremonial kill? Karateka demonstrating combat stances? Aye, from our seats in the grand circle, we have seen the reinvention of ballet; we have seen the vestiges of academic virtuosity extended, accelerated and given a power that electrified the stage. Yes, in the Palais Garnier, two dancers in a pas de deux astounded us. Did they feel in their vertebrae, did they sense in their sinews, that this choreography is destined to endure? As the purity of their movements burned away all embellishments, did they know the erotic charge they were generating would lay bare our hearts? Unearthly angles and undulations, the steely majesty of wrenching turns: Who is the man with such a kinetic imagination? Helical motion and counter curvature, audacious extensions and volumetric form; off-kilter dynamics and casual contortions, high kicks and thrusting hips: Who is the master that conceived this miracle? Feline, vulpine, feminine, the sex and venom in a push-pull attack; virile, fluid, visceral, the violence and grace of a split kick snapped back: Who is the man who, in mingling the demonic and the divine, has resuscitated the corpse of classical dance? Forsythe. William Forsythe.

Was it his freedom that allowed him to turn the page on the past while preserving it in palimpsest? Was it his freedom that inspired the composer to write such unremittingly ecstatic music—telluric, architectonic, empyrean? Aye, was it his freedom that gave a spring to our step, a grace to our stride, as we stepped, hand-in-hand, into the night outside?

The walk

Silence burns along the edge of my breath, the gleam of metal in your eyes reflects it: Down the Avenue de l'Opéra, through folds of night stitched together by electric light, we walk as if we were meant to be. Marietta, in this relentless Haussmannian order, the quiet dissymmetry of your dress moves me; in this static Apollonian perfection, the flow of your silhouette inspires me. It's because of me, you said, this experiment with a Japanese dressmaker; it's because of me your wardrobe no longer reflects the person you feel yourself to be. Look!

Swaying to your walk, the dynamic imbalance of black drapes its spartan elegance around your body. Slung over your shoulder, the flowing lines of your beggar's bag are a *mise en abîme* of your body. Who is the man who thus imbues form with emotion, shape with idea? Strawberry red are your lips, strawberry red your ankle boots; side-swept is your hair, sheer its flaxen fall. Are you happy with the self your new dress brings to the surface, are you happy with this possibility of who you can be? Your soft boots are silent on the tarmac, no click-clack measures your stride. Now, as we wait at the intersection, what is it that sets our interlocked hands swinging? Can ideas ever be as palpable as pirouettes, mental images as immediate as movement? May dance rescue us when ideas deplete the world, may we seek refuge in the erotics of knowledge! Onward! Look how your boots sculpt your movement, see how each step you take renews a moment of being! Behind you, your coat, your cloak, your cape—what is it?—catches the breeze. Paradox and contradiction, question answering question, the work only valid through the life it conveys: That is the message your movement relays. Who is the man who so artfully investigates your moving body, who is the man who so sensually envelopes your intimacy? Yamamoto. Yohji Yamamoto.

Was it his freedom that inspired you to supersede the dualisms of fashion—individuality and conformity, sex and success, man and woman—and refuse the game of the shifting erogenous zone? Was it his freedom that made you accept that black doesn't distract, that the face is the site of the soul, that in the serenity of your beauty you are free? Aye, was it his freedom that made you approve the red on my lips when you'd kissed me under the arcade?

Ambient luminescence, play of brilliants, the ellipsis of conjunctive loci: Walking through that architecture, did you, my love, like I, experience light as its fourth dimension? And just before we stepped into the square, did you catch a glimpse of the old theater's insignia? If you did, did you thrill, as I did, at reading the motto, '*simul et singulis*'? Who is the man who dreams of living like that with you, together and yet oneself? Who is the man who believes the quality of being together depends on the quality of being alone? As we step into the rue Saint-Honoré, I imagine Molière trading jokes over a beer with Shakespeare. And then Colette comes to join them, sparking the playwrights to a higher pitch with her ferocious vitality. Those are three who never let consciousness cannibalize the world! Who is the man who, inspired by Will and Sidonie-Gabrielle, vows before you to never let knowledge give things a less alien aspect?

Tuscan columns, empty medallions; denuded tympanum: The Revolution, or the Reformation? Walking by the Oratoire du Louvre, I reflect that our temple is wherever we are, wherever between consciousness and nature we build a bridge of metaphor. Who is the man who wants to worship in that temple with you? To take your hand and cross that threshold, to honour in equal measure naïve perception and conceptual elaboration, intuitive awareness and rigorous thought? Sprague. Sprague the harlequin. Holding your hand and opening his heart to all your presence brings him.

Duc des Lombards

Complexity in quietude, hushed sophistication; sublime understatement, emotion at midnight: So this is tenderness with a steely touch, this is chiselled grace; this is music for late-night lovers, a language not debased. Your body against mine in the plush booth expands my breath and pulse; while my lips delight in your earlobe, my hand pays homage to your heart. Who is the man combining formal beauty with lyrical virtuosity, inwardness with rhythmic propulsion? To your cool red lips you bring the grassy rye of your Manhattan.

– I was given to sudden outbursts, I couldn't clarify my feelings. I'd become full of suspicion, frustrated at my inability to communicate.

In the back of the bar, in the subdued light, you explain how your performing onstage counterbalances your vulnerability off it: In the spotlight, there you feel free.

– I would try to distance myself, and sometimes it worked.

Faithful to your inner promptings, true to your desires against the world's demands, you tried to solve the riddle of being without losing connection.

– I've never been able to conform to the requirements of social life.

Spartan left hand, free-form right; cool, meditative, other-worldly: Who is the man whose lush searching never loses sight of harmonic motion? Who is the man who dances through intricate structure, inventing in the fire?

– And then there's all the horrors of the world!

Maraschino cherry, bitters and sweet vermouth: I sip my Manhattan.

– The world will never work in harmony, Sprague. I'm certain of that. People simply can't pull it off.

Orange-pink and pale vermilion, your drink against black and white; ash-blond and Venetian, your hair in shadow and light.

– That's why, in everything I do, I want a beginning and an end. It's my way of making sure I'll have nothing to reproach myself with, that I haven't been complacent.

– A beginning and an end—we don't always choose them, Marietta.

– That's exactly my point! I want to assume my responsibility, not just drift in and out of things.

– You demand a lot of yourself.

– If I didn't, I wouldn't go on. Why bother? Anyway, the world we've made is doomed.

You sip your drinking man's drink. The whisky seems to have gone to your head—why this sudden access of gloom?

– Music is one way I test myself, to see if I'm still in touch. And that's why, in performance, I come across as I do.

Your fingertips clear the mist on your glass; you take your cherry by the stem and swing it into your mouth. Who is the man whose sonorous fifths exude silence, who is the man who is running to stand still? Rubalcaba. Gonzalo Rubalcaba.

Was it his immersion in the moment that made you nostalgic for the stage? Was it his sensitivity that conducted you to yourself? What do you say, Marietta? Was it his quest for discovery that made you come out of hiding, was it his contained

emotion that made you reveal yourself? And was it his taking himself perhaps a little too seriously that made you do the same? Did you realize it, and is that why you then did what you did? Remember? Sculpting my lips with your lower jaw, working your lips and tongue, you coaxed the cherry out of your mouth and into mine while your fingers, deft in touch, prepared my cock for the place the cherry had been expelled from. Aye, was it for that you did this?