

Magic Dance

By Jeffrey R. Paine

"I saw you dancing with her."

(Silence)

"It was hot. Not a cloud in the blue sky. And you were dancing."

(Silence)

"And the dust you kicked up. I saw it. Your feet made the dust fly off the ground."

(Silence)

"And then you kissed her. You kept dancing, but you kissed her on the lips. And you both smiled and laughed."

(And still I remained silent. I said nothing. There was nothing to say. It was all true.)

"Did you think that no one would see you? You were dancing in the wide open. Anyone could have seen you! I saw you!"

(Silence)

“Damn it, say something! Don’t just stand there. Say something, you bastard!”

(But I just stood, looking out over the dusty desert, those last few hundred feet before the sand became part of the beach, and then the ocean. A strong breeze came off the ocean. It smelled of salt and humidity. But it was desert, as hot and dry and scented of scorched rock as any in the world. The salt and humidity reminded me of her lips. The blue of the ocean and the sky reminded me of her eyes. The dunes and ridges and gentle swell of the incoming waves, her body. The breeze, her hair, her voice...)

“Who was she, anyway? Some local slut you....”

(I was surprised how fast I moved. I had her arm, her wrist, was twisting. She stopped talking suddenly, a flicker of pain and terror in her eyes, suddenly turning to triumph as fire blazed in mine. She gasped as I let go, pushing her away. I let go, and turned back to the ocean, the sand, the breeze. She gave me a sidelong look, rubbing her wrist.)

“Must have hit a nerve there.”

(I still said nothing. What was there to say?)

“Well, I’m packing. It’s time for us to go.”

(She busied herself, packing away the last few things, loaded them into the car. I just stood on the porch, looking out at the sea, feeling the breeze. It was so simple, the water, the sky, the sand and rocks, the few plants that grew, harsh and gnarled. Eventually, she came up to the porch, took off her sunglasses and looked up at me.)

“Come on now, or we’ll miss our plane,” she said.

(I finally broke my silence.)

“I’m not going.”

(The first words I’d said in hours.)

“Is that all you’re going to say? Of course you’re going. You’ve got to be back at work in two days. We’ve got to catch that plane.”

“Why did we come here?” I asked.

“You have got to be kidding,” she said, a look of disgust crossing her face, twisting the tone of her voice.

(I said nothing, just continued to look at her.)

“All right, then. We came here to be together, to try to find something, hell, anything, we may still have in common, to try to put our marriage back in order. We came here to get away from work and our families and our friends, so we wouldn’t have any distractions. Now get in the goddamn car and let’s go.”

“We came here to find magic,” I said.

“What are you talking about? There’s no magic. There’s just you and me, and a very strained relationship, and a plane that we have to catch,” she said, exasperated.

“So you didn’t feel anything this whole week we were here?” I asked.

“What? Oh, sure. By yesterday, I was almost happy being with you. First time I felt like that in years. I felt like we were really making some progress. Until I woke up from my siesta this afternoon and saw you dancing on the beach with some other woman.”

(I looked at her and shook my head.)

“There was no other woman. I was dancing by myself.”

(Fury twisted her face. After a moment, words began to tumble out of her mouth.)

“You...bastard! Don’t you stand there and lie to me like that. I saw the two of you with my own eyes!”

“You said there isn’t any magic. I guess that means that for you, there must be some other woman.”

“Huh?” she said. “Aw, Jesus H. Mouse! You’re going nuts, aren’t you? Look, just get in the car and let’s go. Let’s get out of here. We can talk on the drive. We can talk on the plane. We can talk to a marriage counselor when we get back home.”

(I just looked at her, looking up at me.)

“When was the last time we really kissed?” I asked her. “I mean a real, sweet, deep, soul kiss? I like to kiss, but we don’t, not anymore. We haven’t kissed in years. We haven’t kissed all week that we’ve been here. Even when we were making love.”

“You kissed your native slut,” she shot back.

(I shook my head.)

“There was no other woman.”

“Oh, god, you make me so fucking mad sometimes!” she almost screamed.
“Let’s just get in the car and go, okay? We can talk about this later.”

“You said that there is no magic, but there was no other woman. I was dancing by myself on the beach, but you saw me with another woman. I guess that makes it pretty clear,” I said.

“It makes nothing clear, you jerk. Why are you doing this to me? Oh, never mind. Now just get in the car and LET’S GO!”

(She turned and motioned to the car.)

“You don’t believe in magic, do you?” I said. It was not really a question.
“You don’t believe in love, do you?”

(She made a choked, gurgling noise, and stomped to the car. She opened the door and pulled out two of the bags, my bags, and dropped them on the ground. Dust sprang up around her feet and around the bags. She slammed the door and turned to face me.)

“Well? You coming?” she yelled.

“When was the last time that you said ‘I love you’ to me?” I asked.

(Years, I was sure. I couldn’t remember, but I was sure it had been years.)

“Ahhhh!” she said, her teeth clenched.

(She slammed her hand down on the car’s hood. She climbed into the driver’s seat and started the engine. She glared, a look of contempt and hatred, through the windshield at me, then gunned the motor. Rocks and dust flew as the car rocketed and swerved out of the driveway and onto the road, tires squealing, back toward town and the airport.)

“There is magic,” I said, to myself because she could no longer hear me. Magic is the same thing as love. There was magic because I danced on the beach by myself, imagining myself with the woman I had married, a woman who loved to dance and loved to kiss and who loved me, and whom I had loved, once.

And she had seen me dancing with another woman.

There is magic, but there is none for her.

I stood for a long time, watching the waves roll onto the beach, feeling the desert heat and salty moisture of the sea.

Sky. Sand. Water. Wind.

Magic.

Remembering the dance, that salty, delicious, humid kiss in the parched desert air.

In time, I might learn to love myself again, I thought to myself. And then, after that, I might learn to love another woman.

But for now, there was no other woman.