

The Serpent and the Water Maiden

A Mind Wander by Lisa Hering
October 31, 2019

Music by RelaxDaily
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XULUBg_ZcAU

There is a ballet on stage in front of a huge audience. There is a woman dancing, and a man behind her, lifting her, spinning her, balancing her. Two dancers, dancing seamlessly entwined as one unit. He picks her up by the waist. She jumps into the air. He brings her down again, one toe softly on the ground and one leg lingering in the air kicked high behind her with her back arched and her arms held gracefully in the air in a curve around her face, her fingers touching above her head. Then she rests one hand on his shoulder while the other reaches behind her to merge with her raised leg.

She wears a light blue dress with pink ribbons around the waist. They are flowing in the wind. Hundreds of crystal and pearl beads dot her dress and appear like drops of water. His appearance is striking as he is dressed in white. He has gorgeous, piercing dark eyes that seem to see all. His hair is black as night. It seductively dips across one eye, keeping a part of him hidden. A graceful smile and large dimples project from his aura. He dances with her like a gentleman, bowing and waiting, holding and propelling. She is like clay in his hands, and he molds her as he sends her in this direction and then in that direction, to the heavens and back like water shot above head in a fountain. He is in the center and watches everything. Nothing escapes him. She is the flower that blooms around him. She is the splashing water in the fountain. She is what they watch. But he designs their movements. Around and around they swing in each other's arms. Her sienna hair reaches out as she spins and jumps. Toe to knee, spinning on one foot. Pirouette. Then, gracefully, a bow with one leg bent and the other stretched out towards him. She looks down to the ground. He awaits her answer. She looks up at him, unsure, waiting for his next move.

Then, her outstretched foot kicks high as she turns and leaps in the opposite directions, now running away from him. And he follows her, running to keep up, heading her off. She stops, he takes her hands which are two fists. He looks deep into her eyes. She has a look of fear. Is he trustworthy? Will he make her, or break her?

He takes her by the waist, but hesitates, as if asking for her approval. She relents, and allows him to lift her into a soaring position above his head. She trusted him. Arms outstretched. They circle, and he gently sets her back down on her feet. She plies (plee-ays) and her arms gesture downward in a semi circle of soft acceptance.

The audience claps thunderously. The two dancers take a bow. A standing ovation. The curtain begins to fall. They bow to each other, and then back again towards the audience. It sounds like a roar. She gets the fleeting thought of her first few days of practice many years ago. A young dancer. A juvenile. Frustrated. Not getting it right. Falling. Slipping. Crying. Sometimes forward progress. Sometimes only failure. She wanted to quit many times. Once, she did just that. She changed from her leotard and tights into a casual dress of white with black crisscrosses, a black belt, and red shoes. She walked from the studio onto the sidewalk outside, bag in hand, never wanting to return.

The streets were busy. New York. Taxis, buses, bicycles, cars, every imaginable type of transportation. Pedestrians everywhere. She passes a fountain in front of a library. A concrete figure is in the center of a large pool spewing forth water. Many coins have been tossed in with hopes and prayers of wishes and desires. The energy is high with flashes of light emanating as the water which has been spewed out descends back to earth and hits the pool of water. The center figure is a serpent with scaly skin and a serpentine tongue. Water spouts high into the air from his lizard lips. His large eyes catch her and hold on to her. She walks around the fountain and his gaze follows her. She can't escape him.

“What should I do, Lizard Lips?” she asks. “Do I go back, or keep going forward?” He says nothing, but continues to listen and keep her in his view.

“Surely you must know,” she says to him. “You’ve been around a hundred years. You’ve seen people just like me. What have they done? What choices have they made?” Still, he says nothing. She continues to circle around the pool and catches him from every angle.

She sits on the edge of the fountain and removes her red shoes. She rubs her bare feet. “Mr. Lizard Lips,” she mumbles to herself. “I’m talking to a lizard in public.” She shakes her head at her own uncertainty and desperation.

“What have I become?” she asks. “A person who would talk to a lizard, and the lizard won’t even answer.” She looks down at her feet and her shoes in sadness. Then, a shadow moves into her view, the shadow of a person, a man. The shadow eclipses her entire viewing area. Surprised, she breathes in quickly and looks up.

It’s him. But she’s never seen him before. “Can I help you?” she asks almost in anger.

“You’re the dancer, are you not?” he asks.

“I am a, was a, dancer, yes,” she says with an unsteady voice. “How do you know me? I’ve never seen you.”

“I dance in the same studio,” he replies, “usually in the next room over from you.”

“Oh, well, it’s a pleasure to meet you,” she says with a fair amount of sarcasm. Then she adds, “I’m not really a dancer. I just go to the studio. I, I try a few things out, but they usually don’t work.”

“You are a dancer,” he says. “I’ve seen. I’ve watched.” He speaks with a slight Latin accent. His eyes are large and sincere. His appearance comforts her, but she resists this.

She is unsure what to say. “I’ve never seen you,” she says. “I don’t remember you. You are no one to me. I cannot give a chance to someone who is invisible like the wind. And anyway, I can’t dance. I’m not going there anymore. I can’t go there anymore. I’ve given up.”

“Please,” he says, “give me a chance.”

She looks up at him. His eyes are questioning. Her leg is outstretched and bare as she lowers her body to touch her toes and rub them. “Give you a chance at what?” she asks. “I’ve no talent. If you’re a dancer, then you need to find someone else.”

“Not so,” he says. “I implore, give me a chance.”

She looks at him again. “Give you a chance at what? I don’t know what you mean,” she retorts. “I’m washed up. I’m no good.” But his dimples enchant her as he smiles gracefully at her.

“You try too hard,” he says. “With you, it’s natural. You just need to close your eyes and forget about everything else. I can show you. I can show you how to be you. I have seen this woman dance, you, and there is nothing that can match her when she is herself.”

His words have captured her attention and her mouth drops in wonder. He holds out his hand and she accepts.

They are in the studio. “Close your eyes and forget about me,” he says. “No one is with you except the wind. I am the wind.”

She closes her eyes and she feels the pressure of the wind on her back. She leans backwards into it. The wind swirls her around. She allows it. Her muscles are tense, but then, she senses the sound of the fountain and she sees the serpent, but he does not see her anymore. He is a serpent in a fountain, and he shoots water in the air and allows it to come back down to earth. And she is lifted up high and shot into the air like the water from the serpent’s mouth. She is afraid of this sudden movement, and she quickly opens her eyes with a gasp. He is smiling beneath her, waiting for her to come back to him, his arms open. Her eyes are on him as she falls back to earth. She wonders, “Is he the serpent? Is he my rock? Will he make this fountain work?”

She lands in his gentle hold and he sets her down, their eyes never leaving one another’s gaze. “Close you eyes,” he repeats. “Remember who you are, and be within yourself.”

She closes her eyes again for a moment. They now swirl around and around and he allows her to spin out. She opens her eyes, and she is no longer tense. She turns into his body curve like two spoons. His hands massage her back as they slide from her waist to her shoulders and then to her spine and neck. She can think only of her muscles stretching out, releasing their tension. His hands are warm, soft, slick, magical. He turns her to face him as his hands slide from her shoulders down her arms to her outstretched hands while they still circle each other, as though they were in the round pool of a fountain. He was the serpent, dark and beautiful, chiseled lines, strong eyebrows lending a firm but caring look, and his eyes, his eyes always on her.

The Serpent and the Water Maiden

She was the water maiden. He directed her and she dazzled the audiences as she splashed the front pages of the entertainment world. She was cool and refreshing. She made people feel fresh and new. He was her wind, her power, her strength. He was the maestro. His choreography was flawless and natural. He knew just what to do with her. He knew instinctively where and when to launch her through his body and release her above. She was his instrument, his expression, an artist with his medium, a conductor with his symphony. She was the flower that sprang to life. A painter without paint will never have a painting, will never show his skill. The paint on its own is still beautiful, but can be so much more when placed perfectly and skillfully on the canvas. A serpent can shower the water into the air, but it is the water that knows how to flow and form individual droplets and splash down into the blue pool with endless tiny crowns as the droplets hit the water's surface and go under, only to come together again and find the force that will take them up again. He is her power. She is his expression. Alone, they would both lose their immortality. Together, their perfect complement is not only history, but present and future. So long as there is man, they will be remembered.

She often walks to the serpent fountain and sits on the concrete edge of the pool. He is always there, steady and dependable, his eyes watchful, watchful of the water.