

The Waltz

By Jay Miutz

His feet moved swiftly beneath him.

Her hands were gently clutched in his as they danced across the shine of the deep brown wooden floors.

The hall was grand, lit dimly by the candles that burst like flares atop the shadows of the corners, casting vibrant beams over everyone amongst them. He glided, almost floating, hand in hand with her. He knew every step and yet felt as if he was not in control. His neatly polished shoes stepped forward and back, between her legs, together and apart pausing with each rhythm. Together they were lost in the beats of the bass drum, the roll of the snare and the soft tones of the violins that seemed to hang about the crowd.

He could not remember such an exquisite event, one that tingled his senses as much as this. The warmth of the room, the soft melodies, and the sound of pattering rain on the glass roof above. He glanced lazily upward, his eyes hesitant to look away from his partner. It was a mesmerizing swirl of blue and grey clouds that serenaded the attendees with the background noise of summer rain on the perfectly clear panels. He was lost in the sounds for a moment, but once again he brought his eyes to the woman before him.

She was beautiful.

Naturally so, the kind of beauty that cannot be masked or hidden. She had an innocence about her, a soft presence that was warm and welcoming, flooding into his heart. He didn't know her and yet she felt so familiar. Her flowing white dress looked as though it had been made just for her. It fit her, perfectly, accentuating her curves, drawing his every attention. It draped her slender frame like a delicate cloth. Her brown hair neatly arranged around her shoulders, her emerald eyes refusing to break away from his. A stare that gazed into his soul and put him at ease as they waltzed, with his hand on the small of her back.

She was angelic.

Graceful in her motions, stunning in her presence, it was as if she glowed with an elegance of comfort that cast a spell upon him. They stepped in time as he extended his arm and she twirled gently, her dress billowing in the movement. He pulled her back in with ease as her delicate hand fell upon his shoulder, as though it belonged there. The notes of the music filled the air with a jovial warmth, one that was illustrated by the haughty smiles of those all around. Gallant men dressed in neat tuxedos, lavish women in summer dresses with curious smiles and intrigued eyes as they gazed upon his partner. She was the most splendid in the room.

Gentle in her way.

He caught her stare again; endless green pools of sincerity stared back.

A grin ran wide across his face as he continued to survey the room. The hall was wide with its high ceiling and again he could hear the roll of rain above. They were protected beneath the glass panels, caught in this world of melodic serenade and serene moments. Those who danced did so in a whimsical manner, hands clasped with another, spinning and twirling each other in delight. Some watched on in joyous wonder as neatly dressed waiters with young fresh faces purposefully navigated the crowds with tall flutes of bubbling champagne. He caught one man's eye who glanced at him with a welcoming nod, a simple wink and a raised glass.

Amazing.

Everything was neatly arranged and lavishly decorated, even the attendees. He himself wore a well pressed black tuxedo, with a stiff collar and a red rose boutonniere on his chest. It was held in place by ornate pins, arranged fittingly in patterns of pearl and gold. His company wore the same, as he looked past his partner, across their faces and then returned his eyes to hers. Just beyond her endless gaze, and the debonair crowd, was a curious light.

It grew from behind the shadows of the onlookers and seemed so intriguing in its presence. It fascinated him, a golden beam that seemed to pull at his soul, he wanted so badly to see what caused it. His feet matched the music as he caressed her with his arm, gliding smoothly toward the light but she led him away with ease. He stepped again, she gave a coy smile and together they spun. He no longer faced the light. They danced, never being any closer to the beams, yet never wavering in their movements.

Together they spun tight in one another's grasp. He made another attempt toward the glimmering shine; she stayed close, his hand pressed against her dress. It was so soft, so ethereal, almost as if he was touching nothing at all, the tips of his fingers numb to feeling.

Suddenly he faltered; his feet became stiff and stumbled over the no longer familiar motions. He hastily caught his balance against her. Her rose kissed lips parted only for a moment to reveal a smile that made his heart skip, but suddenly it disappeared. He extended his reach once more to twirl her; she spun with ease, but released his hand, stepping gently backward.

His heart skipped again as his hand hung empty. She began to fade back into the daze of onlookers as the breathe escaped his lungs. He staggered as her emerald stare broke from his. His smile faded with confusion. He looked about the jovial faces blurred in his vision; a waiter stepped forward to take his balance. The welcoming grin had vanished; rather in its place the young man had eyes that seemed sullen and battered. His knees buckled as his head dipped, struggling to tear the air with breath. The crowd remained motionless. His chin fell upon his chest. Staring with heavy eyes downward, a crimson ribbon seemed to flow from the rose neatly pinned to his chest. It swelled with color and spread across his shirt.

He collapsed.

Staring upward at the swirling clouds once again but now no glass panels stopped the heavy drops from entering his realm. They fell upon his face, cold, as they gathered with his tears and rolled down his

cheeks. The bass drums boomed again and the whole world seemed to shake, snare drums rattled off like gunfire, there were no subtle notes from violins, only sirens. A hand reached out to grasp his stiff tuxedo collar, in its place was a tattered and red stained green canvas jacket.

He struggled for breath pulled up by the hand of a worn face before him. Narrow eyes scanned the dark brown mud that surrounded him, the heavy shadows that dashed about, and the clash of noise engulfed him. He looked down at the feet that had guided him so well, only to find his polished shoes gone, and nothing in their place. His breath began to vanish, stripped from his lungs. Again his chin fell to his chest; a crimson rose had bloomed on the green canvas jacket that cloaked him. Its petals spread with rapid motion, across his chest with a warmth on his skin. The ornate pin was gone, only a hole remained.

A hand fell upon his cheek as he dropped back, his breath staggered, his eyes unable to open.

But he could feel the warm touch upon his face as he was no longer struggling for air...

She let her hand drift back to his shoulder, his feet moved in line with hers. Once again the soothing notes floated among the crowd as they seemed to glide across the floor. His arm held her out, she spun, wrapped in her beauty but did not depart. She returned to his arms, to his gaze and to his smile. His heart did not skip a beat, nor beat at all, caught up in the grandeur of the night. They stepped in time, toward the beaming golden light from beyond the hall. They moved closer as she clasped his hands in hers, leaning into him. Intertwined they waltzed without waver as the others disappeared from the room.

It was only her before him as the light grew brighter. Her gentle lips pressed against his as one thought crossed his mind: she was angelic.

Together they twirled, hand in hand, into the light.