

White Peonies with Coffee and Rum by Russell Sacks

She approached me with a bunch of white magnificent peonies. We looked into each other's eyes, to connect and grade one another.

Earlier that day, we had purchased matching Abercrombie & Fitch coats for the coming winter. I took her hand and ordered coffee and rum, our favourite drink. Feeling her fingers and the energy that flowed into me filled me tremendously.

A saxophonist busker was playing A Love Supreme by John Coltrane. It sounded good.

Emersed in our private silence, we leaned close at the high wooden counter. We indulged in the now - sipping, tasting and feeling joy in each other's loyalty. We savoured the smells of flowers, new coats, coffee, rum, and the caress of the music and of our hands touching. The instant was bliss.

A few more moments, a few more and sips.

Then I asked what it felt like to carry her trauma.

She glared at me, her green eyes deep as jade and still as rock. She tilted her head towards me and stared through my eyes for an age. The sound of the saxophone spun a web around the frozen moment.

She knew that I was aware that she had blood on her hands.

Her eyes narrowed, her pallour darkened, her lips moved but I heard no words. I felt only the warmth and the moisture of her autumnal, rum-scented breath. Her chest heaved.

She put both palms on the wooden counter. The gap beneath her sleeve revealed the breathtaking pair of tennis bracelets, a gift from the Aga Khan's family.

She spread her fingers very widely. I had seen her do that before but never knew why. Strong, elegant fingers, sensual, nurturing. A delicate index finger that could squeeze a trigger expertly even under duress.

She spoke slowly, in a murmur. "Imagine you have a sharply pointed stiletto in your breast coat pocket. Sometimes you are aware of it. You worry about it piercing your skin, wounding you. Often you imagine falling on it, been impaled, suffering a slow, agonising, eternal wound, but death does not come."

"That is my past." she hissed.

Then her tears welled, her full, curved lips tightened. "Just let me cry." she whispered. Her levee broke. I held her to my chest.

"Just let me cry. Hold me, and just let me cry. I've fallen on my stiletto and it's pierced my heart" she whispered again.

Her fragrance blended with that of our new camel hair coats and the aromas of coffee and rum. These scents focused my mind sharply. I felt her vulnerability, more fragile than porcelain.

A Love Supreme bound our lives together. Her body slowly metamorphosed from fragility to tremendous strength.

I knew then that she would protect me forever.

~~~~~

## **White Peonies with Coffee and Rum**

**Written by Russell Sacks in November 2023**

**Posted on the CHOL 'Share Your Stories' website in April 2024**