

Fantasia del Amore

by James Lynn Smith

The ladies watch me, entertained and awed. I do my best to connect. Maybe one will fall in love with me, the way I did, if only my artful movements are enticing enough. Then I can speak words of seduction and instruction to save myself from eternal confinement. I now understand what I must do, but still feel deceived and heartbroken.

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Last year I returned to my former house after earning sufficient income elsewhere that I could now concentrate on my passion. It was a large, rambling structure, and I converted part of it to a gallery of illumination art. This housed paintings which featured the play of light on objects and clouds similar to that of the artist Turner. It also contained my own inventions in which light behind translucent canvases shone through colored filters and gave an ethereal quality to the abstract work observed. Later I fashioned movement for the filters which shifted ever so slightly and created morphing scenes much like the Aurora Borealis or multicolored gases passing between stars punctuating a midnight blue.

Best of all was a projector arrangement I developed. Inside, an intense white light beamed through a multicolored art object set on a small internal turntable and was focused by the lens onto a large screen. The slow rotation created a dazzling array of moving, colored patterns, similar in some respects to psychedelic art, but much gentler. Recorded music and sounds were blended for accompaniment to enhance moods of beauty and mystery. Audiences loved it. My performances never palled because the rotating object in the light was different each time.

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The house was wooden with concrete piers and one back corner always had a problem with soil erosion during rains. Suspecting a small sinkhole near the corner, I inspected a depressed rock and soil area when I found a gorgeous crystal, unlike anything I had ever seen. Approximately the size of a bar of soap, it was mostly clear, but at certain angles beautiful colors appeared, and at others it was iridescent. The crystal had a strange feel in my palm, as though a restless current were living inside.

At once I took it to my gallery and put it on the little turntable in my projector. The colors and movement on the screen were gorgeous so I added music. With the gradual rotation, I saw among the random, changing features a shape that resembled a human leg.

I waited five minutes for rotation to bring that angle to the screen again and it was not only a leg, but a torso. As I stared, disconnected shapes coalesced into the form of an elegant, raven-haired beauty dressed in Grecian style attire, a full-length, white skirt connecting to an upper part with plunging V-neckline. A shapely thigh was visible through a slit in one side of the silken fabric. Though white, the dress appeared iridescent at different angles. She then moved her bare arms upward in graceful arcs and began a solo dance to the music. My breath quickened as the beauty of both subtle and seductive posturing riveted my attention. Then she paused and appeared to face me.

“Come closer,” she said. I looked at the music speakers. The sound seemed to come from them, but also the screen.

When I approached, the classic beauty of her smooth, soft face captured me. Her eyes were a light brown shade so the pupils were distinct. I saw jeweled earrings beneath the long, loose waves of hair falling down her back.

“How is this happening?” I asked, feeling as if melting inside.

“That is of little concern,” she answered with a slight smile on her full pink lips. “I am waiting for you.”

“But *where* are you?” I stammered.

“A part of my soul is imparted to the crystal, but my full person is beneath your feet.”

“Beneath my...what do you mean?”

“Where you found the crystal, dig deeper in the depression and you will find me in an underground chamber. I am waiting for you.”

“I don’t understand any of this. How did you get there?”

“That doesn’t matter. Maybe you will remember me in lives beyond lives. Maybe not, but I know you, and I am waiting...waiting.” The dying echo of her last words accompanied the slow morphing of her form into simple abstract shapes.

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You have to understand. The lonely void in my life was not cured by visitors to my gallery or townspeople I barely knew. It was not reason but passion that drove me now; the woman’s face burned in my mind, and I didn’t even know her name. She appeared a goddess, but one in need.

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The next morning I took a shovel out to the depression and began scooping dirt away. The deeper I dug, the firmer the ground became, except for the center which finally broke through to a deep, dark shaft in natural rock and clay. The slant was such that I could descend on foot, if careful. I took my flashlight and struggled downward into it. Much farther in, it leveled out and led to a great chamber. My flashlight was hardly sufficient, but it didn’t matter for the walls had a faint luminescence. I listened carefully and thought I heard a voice in the distance, echoing throughout the cavernous space. I followed the sound until the surroundings began to appear as a large underground room. Instead of rocky, floor-

to-ceiling boulders and massive stalagmites, sculptured columns and tiled flooring appeared. Light came from sconces on the walls that held flaming torches. Then I saw a slightly elevated platform with curtains hanging about it. I approached with caution and parted them to see a massive round bed with lush, deeply colored pillows.

She was standing to one side, more radiant and beautiful than her projection the day before. “My name is Elena. I am so glad you came.”

I made a gentle movement toward her. “I could not resist.”

She drew back. “Before we touch, there’s something I must explain.” Her brow furrowed, almost apologetically. “An entity, your mythology would call a god, has consigned me to the lord of the underworld. A punishment for rebuffing advances of that god’s earthly grandson. My belabored pleas to the gods resulted in a condition for liberation. It requires an embrace from a lover, but also his appreciation of a poem for the mind’s consideration.”

I eagerly responded. “Say the poem; I want no barriers between us.”

She looked upward, as if recalling a text, and quoted,

“Power given to Cupid’s dart which carries love to loved one’s heart.
Pursuer beware amore’s ride; connect within, exchange outside.
Dancer’s form to you be given, renewed youth for all you’ve striven.
Fantasia heard from strings of heart; choose to hear or choose to part.”

She grew quiet for a moment and then asked, “Did you understand, will you consider?”

It appeared clear enough, poetic words expressing the stress and ecstasy of love, said as a warning against the bond it created. I looked down and pretended to be in serious thought. Then I gazed into her hauntingly beautiful eyes, and said, “I

understand and accept.”

An instant change occurred within my body. A mysterious force injected life into my muscles as sagging folds of skin tightened. My facial features moved upwards, as if years of struggle were erased. I felt an inclination to leap, to dance...

I heard music, a tempo adagio, and stepped about with an unaccustomed flair, bowing graciously to Elena. Soon the music was allegro, and I felt the need to jump. After doing a *tour jeté*, not knowing where such body training came from, I remembered a line from the poem: “Dancer’s form to you be given, renewed youth for all you’ve striven.” I felt the struggles of the past, to learn, to earn, and find meaning were now coming to fruition in an unexpected way. Elena smiled, showing her even, white teeth, and joined me in a *pas de deux*. With gracious carriage of arms for balance and gesture, she performed an arabesque and then jumped, turning in the air.

Several minutes of joyful dance passed and then I supported her *pirouette*. She was amazingly steady after the spin and we concluded with the ballet *penché*, my hands on her waist as she bent forward and extended one leg behind vertically. Waiting no longer we merged with an embrace and kiss so passionate that anything between us felt superfluous. We turned and stepped in time to the subsiding music toward the large, round bed, leaving a trail of clothing behind. The ecstasy of our union drowned out all other thoughts.

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I awoke, sensing something strange but wonderful had happened. After a minute, I remembered and opened my eyes, seeing and feeling the softness of the big round bed. *This is real, halleluiah.*

When I turned over, no one was there.

I felt for the slight depression where she had lain. Bounding out of bed, I

scrambled about, retrieving my clothes. Despite my search and calls, there was no answer. A sudden feeling, much like falling, overcame me and I felt very much alone...alone in a huge underground vault. Grabbing my flashlight, my renewed, powerful legs carried me toward the entrance to the cave.

There was no entrance, only rocks and clay-like soil. *A cave-in?* A thought began to needle me. Something in the poem: "Pursuer beware amore's ride; connect within, exchange outside." *Exchange?* Realizing my entrapment began with her absence, a tragic reinterpretation of our love unfolded.

I was prey, a victim of the condition for her liberation. Surely, she knew I did not understand that line in the poem. I was now in her place and she was...

A small part of my mind saw beyond this cave, like peering through a periscope. I could see my projector as though watching from the screen in my gallery. Now it was clear to me, the part of Elena's soul in the crystal was now replaced by mine. *I would be the projected dancer on the screen.*

Elena was in my gallery, directing people to their seats in the audience area. Most were women.

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The ladies watch me, entertained and awed. Maybe one will fall in love with me. Then I can speak words of seduction and instruction to save myself from eternal confinement. But I still feel deceived and heartbroken. Elena tricked me into existence as the image of an Adonis with flourishing style. Yet below in a cave, my soul becomes a predator, seeking escape.

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