FLASH FICTION

A Ragdoll in a Garden

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"Silence in Colours" by Cristina-Iulia Mihalache

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Teresa’s stomach churned as she considered what she was about to do. It wasn’t too late, she could still turn around and leave. She dried her sweaty palms on the side of her tight dress. Her borrowed pointy high heels squeezed her toes. The dress was cut too short for her liking, but her friend had told her that she should wear it. She glanced around the hotel, one of the most elegant in Mexico City.

"Nice place, right?" A short man with a prominent belly and chubby hands approached her. The perspiration beading at the edge of his receding hairline shone under the corridor’s dim lights. He smelled of liquor.

She took a deep breath. "Yes, it is." Her mouth felt dry.

He called the elevator and pressed four. They walked down a hallway lined with lush carpet, moving towards room 403. Teresa’s eyes darted right and left down the corridor, praying that no one would see her.

"Something wrong?" He frowned.

"No, nothing's wrong."

A knot in her throat made it hard to breathe. Her knees shook and her heart raced like a runaway horse. She was afraid she might faint.

The man put the keycard in the door’s slot. Entering, Teresa experienced a wave of guilt. For someone from a poor neighbourhood, the place looked majestic. A large sitting area boasted two chairs with red velvet upholstery, a mahogany center table, a hanging chandelier and flower arrangements. A huge king-sized bed with a delicate silk cover occupied the center of the room.

What am I doing here?

The knot in her throat tightened. Her eyes welled up. The man put his hand on her shoulder and she blinked rapidly, startled by his touch. A shiver went up and down her spine.

"Would you like me to order some champagne?"

"Sure, sure." She refused to meet his eyes.

As he called for room service, she went to the bathroom, wetting her face with trembling hands. She couldn’t stop shaking. The image in the mirror reflected Teresa’s agonizing gaze. A sharp pang of guilt hit her in the middle of the chest and took a hold of her.

You should be ashamed of yourself, the image in the mirror said.

"Yes, yes, I know," Teresa’s tears blurred her vision.

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Why are you doing it then? the image insisted.

"When are you coming out?" On the other side of the door, the man paced the floor, like a predator waiting for his prey.

"Give me a minute," a sheen of sweat broke out all over her body. She looked back at the mirror and thought of a talk she had with a girl from her university class. Teresa had told her she had trouble paying off her tuition and her friend wanted to help.

"You could do what I do. You don’t have to do it often and it pays very well."

"What do you do?"

"*Solo tienes que abrir las piernas,*" the girl said.

"Open your legs?" It sounded demeaning, vulgar and rude. No metaphors or euphemisms could make it any less so.

Teresa left the bathroom as if in a trance approached the bed. Her heartbeat resonated in her ears and her chest tightened. She blew out short breaths to gain control.

She closed her eyes and abandoned her body. Her spirit began the trip she took every time life showed its ugly side: her special place. Her garden was a haven of peace, her refuge, a sanctuary she created in her imagination where beauty and colour abounded.

Spring had arrived with its vibrant colours and aromas. Hues of pinks, mauves and yellows covered the garden. Roses, dahlias and calla lilies reminded her of the small garden in the modest house that sheltered her childhood, in Chiapas, her distant home. Life was so easy then, all its mysteries yet to be discovered.

Meanwhile, her naked body remained sprawled on that hotel bed like a ragdoll. When Teresa opened her eyes, a faint aroma of lavender permeated the air.

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