

John Reyer's Edition of the

STORYBOOK

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*An *etfiction* foundation Text*

Conjoining Stories from the Poet Soldier's STORYBOOK and moments they inspired.
Accompanied by adjoining poems from the POEMBOOK.

By John Reyer Afamasaga

SUMMARY

James is comfortable in the warmth of the June night; his mother's voice as she reads from the STORYBOOK is a fine replacement for the hot chocolate they cannot afford...

CHAPTER 2

Lilies, lilac, and lavender — Little Lazoo

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PART 1

Rozelle Zofen, a woman wild with passion whom circumstance appears to have no authority over, slowly pulls her sheer black stocking to some place up her slender leg. She does the same to her other leg, and then she ensures the thin fabric is suspended in place by hooking braces to their tops.

Through the wall, she can hear the soldiers who await her begin to become restless. They begin to throw objects on stage that mostly miss their target—an older version of her she fears. The bottles hitting the wall of her dressing room begin to dent the wall. Each lump in the wall replaces the one she swallows.

Backstage, the young woman waits as she is presented to the unruly crowd. Her name “Mademoiselle Rozelle Zofen,” spoken through the microphone, amplifies her spontaneity as it arouses the audience who has come to hear her, see her and be entertained by her. The bottles are slammed down in unison on the tables where the soldiers lean waiting for her, their jeers in English combining to become one she fathoms, “Rozelle! Rozelle! Rozelle!”

The chanting dies down as the guitarist’s fingers begin to find the notation’s intended magic.

Rozelle focuses on the spotlight’s circumference, and then the microphone which stands alone within the light.

A gasp is heard as she steps out and onto the stage littered with glass and wet from liquor. As she enters the light and finds the mic, another cheer goes up, ending in her plea, “*Bésame, bésame mucho / Como si fuera esta noche / La última vez...*”

The hour long performance leaves the singer parched. The audience converging on her is no longer thirsty with lust; instead they are eager to be close to her. A young soldier with camera waits in front of the stage as groups gather to get a shot of her in their midst. “Drink.” She motions with her hand and already the word is passed along the line where a glass is returned to Rozelle.

She signs her name on the last forearm and then kisses another handsome soldier on the cheek. As they call out to her, she smiles for as long as they can see her, and then she sighs.

PART 2

Tonight, Rozelle stands on the balcony looking out over the valley, her eyes trained not to look at the path leading to the house.

The singer listens to new material for her repertoire. “Love Letters”—the song that plays—renders feelings from a recent event she wishes to banish from her memory, but as the words flow, “Love letters straight from your heart...” her defenses cascade into pieces that offer little or no resistance to love’s powers.

Rozelle closes her eyes as she recalls the feeling of his touch on her, and then his scent comes as he finds the place he wants most. Nerve endings alarm heightened senses, sending her further on, to a yonder he made her believe exists.

As the song fades, she opens her eyes and quickly accepts the reality that again falls flatly upon her like a blanket of misery.

The pool beneath her is not as deep as what she feels for herself.

The twelve statues that surround the water are as useful to the lonely woman now as they are on a fine day when they and their presence loom over her as she lays naked, bearing all on top of the blue and cool water.

She makes her way down the stairs to the statues.

Eleven of the statues constitute and therefore account for men she had fallen for. The twelfth figure she erected to balance the configuration; hopefully, its namesake will one day return. Weary to think all the others had vanished into thin air, she refuses to call the twelfth one by his name, opting to summon it by the name the “Thinking Creature,” from a trait she associates with the most recently departed.

Of late, the twelfth statue has begun to show signs of weathering. Its composition, without corroding, has colorized into the hue of the many sunsets Rozelle spent around the creature, musing over its reason for having been carved into her landscape. And on given nights, the monument made of immovable mass would defy physics and provide her company by seating itself beside her on the ground so they could converse.

Tonight she studies each statue from a distance, as she ponders which one she will conjure into life, even if just for a moment to satisfy her will.

She scours their bodies as she recalls each one’s essence, the thing that made each one memorable.

Suddenly, Rozelle’s senses are overcome by a sensation more intense than she has ever felt. She feels it coming from the twelfth statue.

She rejects the projection from fear it will scar her the worst and walks toward a different statue. The act is over within minutes.

As the panting woman regains her breath, she gives a smile to the Thinking Creature that she instantly wants to retract. Tears come to flush away guilt meant for someone else.

Slowly, Rozelle Zofen gathers her clothes as she regains her composure. With her head down, she climbs the steps to her abandoned abode.

That night, the Thinking Creature must have bled tears as once again he watches the beautiful woman, who is solemn from being alone in a world where she is wanted...

In the morning, she no longer wonders about the fatigue she has been feeling; instead, the sickness begins to concern the independent woman.

Looking up from the bowl she is bent over, Rozelle glimpses herself in the mirror with all the worries of a normal woman who has experienced the hardships of marriage.

She corrects her posture as she brushes hair from her face, stuck there from the saliva and mucus her vomiting has produced.

She smiles at her reflection, and then unwittingly but enforcedly, she takes her left hand with her right and places it over her stomach.

Her tight body offers no answer to her examination, so she exhales to relax muscles, letting gravity uphold what's meant. Still, her belly is taught to be firm, feeling taut with no sign of any growth therein.

When the phone rings, she becomes dismayed at her appearance. "Mustn't utter a word of this discrepancy. Tut tut, a foreign body within is a non event..."

As she nears the telephone—one of her prized possessions for being one of the first of its type in France, a gift from statue number one—she pulls her night gown close to hide what she may be carrying.

PART 3

Previously...

The sun lazies upon the worldly woman who lies on her back in a bed of lilies, lilac, and lavender. She smiles into the sky as she sings in perfect pitch, "'S wonderful! 'S marvelous, you should care for me. 'S awful nice! 'S paradise!" Her superb softened voice envelops her gifted aura.

The Poet Soldier, a name she has fated the rugged looking man with, writes in the book covered by animal hide. He's neither wealthy, nor is he startling to look at like those before him, but he has her heart in his hand as it moves to the end of a page.

"Is it about me, or the many?" Rozelle asks as he looks up from his work and smiles peacefully at the glowing beauty he has only known for days. "It's about me, and how out of the many, you'll be the one I'll remember," he jokingly replies, which makes her close her eyes as he places his pen down and rolls over so half of him is on top of the singer for whom he has seemingly fallen.

With her head back, Rozelle sees upside-down the edges of the paddock through the wild flowers; the view is as panoramic as it is dizzying for her...

Today, Rozelle wanders through the woods to the edge of the field of flowers. In one hand, she has the book she managed to pry from him at the railway station. Inside the book of poems are two letters from the writer, proclaiming his undying love for her and his word that he will return right after his next post.

She summons courage to step into the place carpeted by blossoming flowers; to help her through, she begins to sing the new song she has just about learned: "Love letters straight from your heart." As she gingerly puts another foot forward, her movement looks more akin to walking on burning coals than floating upon Nature's beauty. Her voice begins to shake as she dares herself to take the next step. "Keep us so near while apart." As her leg extends, her senses darken, bringing the woman to her knees. She sways in vertigo and then falls face down upon the flowers she had feared.

Deep in the subterrain of all that one has seen, smelt, sensed, heard, feared and admired is a story—one that cannot be told by the trained mind that deals with the daily vigor of analysis, cognition and language—a story which has no boundaries and is slave to no formula.

Inside the dense darkness, Rozelle becomes warm. His voice is familiar, but its connotations, even before his sentence is complete, are gloomy considering the girl-like behavior she displays in her delight to see him again. "His name will be Lazoo."

Suddenly he is gone. As she stands up, the field of dreams is at a slant; she balances herself by leaning with the incline, but then she begins to slide with the decline. The

statues rise from all points of the paddock, but then with the sun's appearance, they seem to weather. Now their dust forms a twister, and she finds herself in its eye. Her hair is blown around her face as she begins to lose control of her arms. She manages to think of his voice. Immediately the field is flattened, and the statues, she quickly accounts for at least half a dozen of them, are walking away from her.

She spots him; he has a knapsack he flings over his shoulder as he looks around at her. As he walks, he mutters to himself; she wants to help him say what he has to say. She hears his voice and begins to shout herself, "He wooed and it made them coo." She begins to hasten her step as he nears the parameter of the dimension; she fears if he leaves he will never return to her.

She reaches the edge of the paddock to find that she is again facing the field she had just crossed. On the opposite side of the field she sees him, his head down as he fades into the woods, his dress appropriately camouflaging him.

She turns around, conscious of her state, and mindful of what she had brought with her: the POEMBOOK and his letters. She scours the paddock again in front of her for signs of the items. She hears something, which makes her clutch at her stomach—the sound of a baby she believes. Her hands feel a mound, which her eyes do not see. She brushes her hand down the front of her to confirm what she now wishes to be true, but the more she checks, the more it feels as if her stomach is concaving. She stops suddenly at the whim of her body and is instantly bent in two as she vomits violently.

As she finishes the bodily function, she notices the day is once again bright with the beautiful flowers around her knees swaying chantingly in the breeze's wake. The sound of the baby is somewhere within the flowers that brush against her legs. His head she sees as he crawls toward her. Now she sees his hazel green eyes as he senses her making the cheeky and already adventurous being look up and smile at her.

A lone cloud finds its way into this once cloudless day. It finds a woman spread upon the sunned plain of wild flowers. A trail of blood leads to the place where her body is splayed the way it was spread in a moment of desperation. One hand is upon an open book whose pages blow in the wind; her other hand clasps letters, their waxed seal melting from her grip.

Rozelle smiles at the baby making its way through the flowers, and then in the distance she sees a boy; his curly black hair makes her smile at him. A butterfly joins them, making her believe everything will be fine from here on. But then the baby notices the boy too and begins to crawl in his direction. She wants the baby to come to her, but the boy beckons the baby to him.

The dead flowers matted in blood begin to dry as the sun reaches its highest point for the day. The woman's head moves, and then her arms push her body up as she looks down to see for herself what has happened to her.