

effiction STORYBOOK

STORYBOOK

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An *effiction* 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

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CHAPTER 3

Illicit Blade of Grass

Original Story: Jon Pierre Solomon | Lead Writer: Metofeaz Litigatti | Adliberations: John Lazoo, | Action Sequencing: Jon Le Mac | © 2009 John Reyer Afamasaga

PART 1

Jon Pierre Solomon, a *Pacifican* as he likes to explain, leans against a wall as he swaps the cigarette in hand for a pencil.

The fair in the small French town bears no effects of the German invasion that rolls through the country.

JPS, when things get tight and the questions are insurmountable, quickly takes his cap from under his arm and places it square on his head as two spick and span American soldiers pass by and acknowledge the unshaven private. No sooner have they passed than he notices a woman, in her thirties, who keeps glancing his way. The older woman is more curious than hungry he surmises, so he smiles back. Three days now he has been without one, and the deprivation shows its reward in the flow of material both in quality and quantity. He looks forward to what insight into a woman's mind and soul she will give him as she now begins unashamedly to make her way toward him by checking out the stalls to which she has just been.

By the time she reaches him, he has already turned. "*Bonjour*," he manages. She quickly comes to his rescue. "I've been abroad," she smiles, "but I'm no broad." Her wit makes him smile and puts him at ease as he places the pencil in the leather covered book and closes it.

The nearest watering hole is a hop, skip, and a stumble for the pair who already appear intoxicated. She holds his arm with both hers as he carries her basket of flowers and his knapsack into the moderately up market establishment where a group of soldiers congregate at the bar.

A corporal approaches him as he places the basket and his knapsack down on the bar. "You seem detached from your company, private; may I offer assistance in communications?" JPS slowly places his arms shoulder-length apart on the bar as he assumes the same stance with his legs. He has a serious look on his face. The corporal advises him, "I am not MP. I'm offering help if you require any." JPS looks around at him and then down the bar at the ranking officer and the rest of the group. "You already fucked me; why don't you do it again!" The corporal is not sure what to say. JPS winks at the officer who begins to laugh out loud, bringing the entire troupe to fits.

Luckily Jon Pierre's story of trauma falls upon the ears of an officer whose background in psychology makes him empathetic to the deserter's ordeal.

After a couple of rounds with real soldiers, Jon Pierre is left alone to enjoy the company of the woman who is by now totally taken by his story.

Later that evening, Jon Pierre and the older woman drag each other up the stairs to a room.

During the evening, the woman had kept reminding him of the party in the valley where her vineyard and home are located. Each time he brushes it off, until she mentions it was to be held at her neighbor's house—none other than the home of the French singer Rozelle Zofen. Now as the woman lays face down on the bed, waiting for the shoulder rub he has promised her, she again asks whether he will be there. This gives him an excuse to ask another question about the notorious man-eater and confirmed *femme fatale* Rozelle. "I read somewhere she used to walk the same paths in Vienna as Sigmund Freud, even passing him on a number of occasions." The older woman looks around at him as he busily searches for something in his knapsack...

PART 2

Musicians, actors, magicians and performers, from Paris and as far as word has reached, converge on the spot blessed by Nature's caressing elements—the sun and breeze, which carry the scent of ripe grape, Lavenda, and other wild notations to the senses that they delight and also arouse.

Rozelle Zofen, a stunning looking creature somewhere in her twenties, flutters just as a butterfly would tease all who are in awe of its beauty.

She finds the older woman, her confidant, and whispers in her ear, "When's he coming?" The woman, whose house light Rozelle watches on lonely nights, pretends her nervousness is because of his pending arrival and not because of the young woman's presence. "He said to me as he wrote in his hand-bound leather book 'When the sun was straight in its runnings...'" The singer sighs at the sign of her attractive friend being within love's reach. Rozelle thinks of what she's about to say in English, "You say he's young?" Her eyes sparkle.

Rozelle applauds the actor whose Macbeth was both humorous and enlightening as a magician drags his props to center stage—a mound, the highest point on her front lawn. When the mustached man summons the hostess to be his lovely assistant, Rozelle obligingly makes her way through the crowd seated and standing. The sun is coming down from its highest point as she bows and then curtseys to the audience before she steps behind the magic man.

Rozelle spots her friend who waves at her just before she is blindfolded by the performer who has everyone's attention.

Another truck loaded with free men and women with flowers weaved through their hair passes the Soldier. The vehicle slows down, but he waves them on, as he'd rather deal

with the butterflies he encounters, their messing with his insides evident from his thumping heart at the prospect of meeting Ms. Rozelle Zofen, whom he'd seen in pictures in trenches, magazines, and posters folded by soldiers who had ripped them from walls where they had hung.

He quickly finds "The gateway without a letter box leading up a dirt track to the house you'd imagine was haunted." Further up the track, he places his sunburned hand on the old wooden gate with rusty hinges; then he stops as he surveys his appearance. His boots are as dusty as his demeanor. The sun he looks up at makes it impossible for him to wear his jacket. He brushes the front of his white singlet with his hand and leaves a mark. He rubs his face covered with growth; then he places thumb and finger in his eye sockets to ensure there is no excretion there. He moves his shoulders by throwing one forward and then the other, "One, two." The action instantly contracts his muscles and carves lines that define his body. He smiles, having in a moment groomed himself to meet Ms. Rozelle Zofen.

"*Qu'est que c'est...*" the blindfolded woman's hands find their way around the space where the magician has told her to guess the answer.

His first sight of her in a vulnerable state helps ease his anxiety. Then he spots the older woman who pretends not to notice him. He quickly picks out a spot on the grass where the sun will shine for a long time. As he makes his way there, he again looks at the person who invited him, but she still does not care to pay him any attention.

Finally, the magician unveils the object from behind his cloak. As Rozelle feels it, she bursts out in laughter. The magician quickly exits the performance area while the musicians appear to take their places.

A drummer brushes his snare. A flamenco guitarist begins to pluck his strings, as a violinist and the flute player join him in the next bar. Still blindfolded, Rozelle feels the accordion player exasperate his instrument with air as one of the girls with flowers in her hair is behind Rozelle, untying the blindfold. The last of her band carries his upright bass. He places the instrument that towers over the singer next to her, and then he slides his fingers the length of its long neck, once, twice; as his fingers find the note she awaits, the black cloth comes off to reveal her eyes.

The heads and limbs of the seasoned talent surrounding the star move as their bodies express individually their appreciation of the one who now sings. "'S wonderful! 'S marvelous!"

The work of two Russian Jewish boys from Brooklyn has a sentimental value for many in the crowd. Jon Pierre, himself of mixed blood, senses a feeling of solidarity in the French countryside on a summer's day. The woman who sings the words "'S wonderful! 'S marvelous! You should care for me!" has already exceeded his expectation. She smiles as her hand displays all for which she is grateful.

He decides to get comfortable and changes from his seated position to lying down on his front. His spirit stirs enough for his hand to begin to itch to etch the event he is decidedly happy to be a part of now.

The singer's gaze—a trained one, he suspects, which has no prejudice but only the aim of making all whom it falls upon feel like the one—finds him looking up at her. He stretches his hand as his position away from the adoring crowd makes it uncharacteristic that she should again within a short period of time be looking his way.

As the song comes to its end, he looks around as some of the crowd now notices him. Even the older woman, whom he lifts his brow to, is making her way toward him.

Rozelle smiles at her friend as she sits down next to the soldier who sits up and crosses his legs.

The flute player and violin player begin to build the beginnings of the next song, and now the flamenco player adds its Latin flavor. Rozelle looks out over the valley and then back at the soldier and then her friend, "*Bésame, bésame mucho,*" she announces to the crowd; the applause makes her close her eyes as her hips begin to sway. The bassist and drummer respond to a look Rozelle gives them as her head turns and then her eyes open. She confirms the moment for Jon Pierre with a look as she begins, "*Bésame, bésame mucho / Como si fuera esta noche / La última vez...*" The older woman watches him as he is captivated by the beautiful songstress.

He smiles at the woman next to him as she says, "You've already caught Rozelle's eye." He responds, as he exchanges smiles with Rozelle, "Not hard when you're the only one over this way." He now tries hard to give the woman whom he met first, and who invited him to be in the singer's company, his attention. "I'm indebted to you for inviting me here; you know that, don't you?" The woman plays with her hair as she offers her friend a forced smile she hangs onto while Jon Pierre manages to keep his eyes off Rozelle and on her.

The singer finishes her set and the crowd rises to its feet as she bows to its applause. Jon Pierre Solomon watches her make her way toward him, stopping to return a compliment to anyone who manages to catch her by her arm.

On her arrival, she immediately puts him at ease by grabbing her friend and hugging her and then kissing the older woman on the cheek. Now she holds the woman's arm as she finally says his name, "Jon Pierre, ah?" He feels a need to explain the name, "Jon Solomon, or JPS," but she is not in need of an explanation. As she looks at the book on the ground, its pages lift and then fall in the breeze he enjoys.

The three of them walk to the table where he finds food.

Once he is through with the food, he is handed a bottle of red wine, which he studies before he goes back to the spot where the sun still shines.

The pages of the book in front of him lift themselves when he looks around to see where she is.

The musicians play on their own as the Soldier's hand finds the pencil, which he puts to the page. He enjoys the momentum that gathers when he hears her comment or laugh at someone's conversation.

When he is deep and lost in that place, she seats herself next to him. Aware she is beside him, he continues to carve deeply into the story he has been writing for some time, but only now has found its reason.

She looks down at the words as she utters, "Impressionist?" He squints as he looks around and up at her; the sun behind her makes her even more appealing; her darkened features, which he cannot make out, bring him a vision of what she would look like in moonlight. When he doesn't answer her, she comes down so she is lying on her stomach next to him.

She smiles at him as he places the pencil down. He looks at the page in front of him as she now runs a finger over his work. He imagines the way the fine indentation of his words feel to her soft skin.

She turns over onto her back and lies there for him as he is once again inspired by her beauty.

As he ends another page, she turns onto her stomach again. She plays with the grass, choosing one blade in particular which she places in her mouth.

As she rolls over onto her back, tresses swept by the turn cover her face. And when she is on her back, the blade of grass in her mouth appears in between the hair. She giggles and blows with her bottom lip; the blade of grass floats up as her hair falls aside her face. He catches the blade of grass, which she now wants back in her mouth. She tries hard not to laugh as she holds it open waiting for his gift to her.

It was like his voice was thrown from the mountains that contain the valley, by the sun about to dive from the sky that day. As he holds the blade of grass, she is interested to see what he will do with it.

Unbeknown to the Soldier and Rozelle, all eyes and ears in the gathering are now on them. The man who teases Rozelle's senses with the blade of grass finds a particular place in his book; he looks back at her as he reads:

"Sun seeker, with such fine and beautiful features."

She grabs the piece of grass from him and holds it in both hands against her bosom, as he continues.

“The promiscuous dirt and then the dirty but illustrious dust; how is it they both know?”

Rozelle’s eyes are shut tight as she savors his breath upon her.

The musicians begin to support his fledgling but controlled inflection with ambience from feathered touches of their instruments.

“Where you were to fold, so one fine day you’d be the ground beneath the one, the one that I adore...”

“... Promiscuous dirt, illustrious dust, how is it you know?”

He delivers the last words, and then he closes the book. She opens her eyes to find him looking at her. He wonders to himself what on her unforgettable face he most wants to remember. Then her eyes meet his, giving him his answer.

Later that afternoon...

The sun is hidden behind the hills but for its orange glow that blends light and darkness. Rozelle watches the Poet Soldier, a name she had already decided on, converse with members of her band. He employs hand gestures, the little French he has, and famous names to get his point across. She holds onto his book; she has spoken with many of her friends about translating the poem he has dedicated to her. She remembers his tone, and the way he delivered the words, and the more she understands the meaning of the words, the more she entwines her being and his, like she twirls the strand of hair around her finger until he notices her. Then she stops the habit and replies to the person talking to her.

She has already asked where he is staying, but he chooses not to believe he will be so lucky to have met her, dined with her, recited one of his favorite poems in her presence and then bedded her. He notices the way she holds the POEMBOOK to her, and he already feels lucky. Much luckier than he did this morning when he was evicted from the third hotel in as many days. He compares the insides of a prison cell to sleeping next to some or any woman, and then he remembers he is in the countryside and a barn could be as near as trouble and probably closer than a hungry woman with a double bed.

As a fairy tale would have it, the setting sun on the marvelous day is soon replaced by a moon just high enough above the hills for the ATMOS to colorize it.

He busies himself with another task, which endures him to the help. She bids farewell to some more guests and then notices the light from her friend’s house. Tonight the curtain is closed, and like the moon, the lantern is colored by the orange hangings.

She looks around and sees him scrubbing a tabletop, earning his keep, suddenly making her realize he is not as confident as the artist he is.

Jon finds something to prolong his stay.

One by one the help leave until he and Rozelle are alone.

He has a pitchfork in hand which he uses to pile rubbish onto the heap. He senses her behind him, but he doesn't look around.

She calls out to him as he rests his arm on the handle and takes out a cigarette, "Jon Pierre." He doesn't look around as she takes a bottle of liquor and walks toward him. He lights the smoke as she arrives at his side. She takes the match from him after he's done and pours liquor over the heap and throws the flame onto the rubbish.

The flames that rise high up into the night illuminate their faces.

PART 3

The days had passed by more quickly than he could remember. As he had slipped out of her bed that morning, he caught himself believing he could stay another day, or week, or even months. But as he collected his clothes and knapsack, he caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror and quickly corrected the fleeting fantasy. She would have ended it anyhow, throwing him out sooner or later.

He rounds the corner into the small village made famous since Rozelle's arrival. The baker and a few merchants open their doors as the sun replaces the moon to light their daily activities. The baker throws the Soldier the odd bun from his dozen. "Jon Pierre, where are you going?" He smiles as he replies, "Thank you, *monsieur*." His stride is wide as he steps toward the train station at the end of the street.

As the soldier marches down the vacant street, his hand crosses his body to ensure the weight in his knapsack is the POEMBOOK. He confirms the weight on his back, causing him to feel some guilt for taking it from Rozelle's bedside table where it had rested after he read it to her at night. He had written in it each day as she had made him wild with her passion for him and his work.

The sound of his boots seem to echo, but the small village buildings are no barriers for the sound of his marching to rebound off. Then he realizes someone must be following him, so he speeds up without increasing the frequency of his steps, relying on wider strides. He relaxes his body in case he has to move suddenly from an attack behind him.

A cat runs across his path. Then it turns suddenly to its right and heads for the railway station, where his eyes are firmly focused.

He wishes for the cat's fleet paws as it makes it to cover. The steps behind him double, then triple till they are so quick they will put his would-be assailant on his back within moments.

He decides to run and take a bullet in the back, ending it all, at the hands of a lesser man.

The short distance to shelter is like a dash through an open field raining with enemy fire. He reaches the platform; his hand grips the building, and he flings himself around to be behind a wall. He stands to attention close in the corner, waiting for the sound of steps to transpire. As he waits, he begins to feel his heart beat. His paled complexion has time to redden before he feels the wet sweat begin to make his outer jacket cling to his skin. His heavy breathing, which he tries hard to control, is the last of his body's noticeable reactions as he watches a dog and its wagging tail pass in front of him.

Another sound; someone down the street puts him on alert again as he sees the cat at the end of the platform prance not once, but twice on the tips of its paws as the dog moseys on up the platform.

When the sound fades, he allows himself to bend in two. The knapsack falls from his back and he drops an arm, letting the bag fall to the ground.

It takes a minute or so for the soldier to regain some composure. In the meantime, the cat has sat down in front of him. He muses over the cat's friendliness; he compares it to the dog's uncharacteristic behavior as it stands looking at him and his new feline friend from further up on the platform. He reaches for the knapsack as the dog wags its tail, as if to say it is okay with him that he engages the cat it was chasing in some sort of relationship.

The Soldier stretches his neck in a circle, careful not to frighten his captive audience of one, as he opens the POEMBOOK.

As he looks at the animal looking up at him, he remembers Rozelle by the cat's piercing eyes. His hand quietly turns the pages until he finds the now dry bookmark. The withered blade of grass sticks to the opposite page, and as he flattens the book, it falls perfectly into where the pages are bound.

As he takes a deep breath, he notices the dog has come down the platform and is now standing within a step of them. Its tail wags and its tongue is out.

Jon Pierre Solomon smiles at him. "Every dog has its day, mate; today's mine, ah?" The dog groans, and then it barks once as it chases its tail. The performer laughs as he looks at the cat, still patiently waiting for him to begin, "The way to woman's heart is just that." The cat closes its eyes as if it agrees with him.

The young man clears his throat as he holds his book out in front of him, favoring the left side for his one working eye to read the words.

The dog barks again as it turns to the west, and then way off in the distance, he hears the train as he gains confidence from its sound gaining on him.

*“Sun seeker
Fine features
Promiscuous dirt
Illustrious dust
How is it you know?”*

Another sound enters the band of rhythms that now play in the shell where he is cocooned—a rattling as bicycle wheels race toward the station.

As he looks down and away from the words he’s memorized, he sees the dog has seated itself next to the cat. However, the golden-fleeced pup faces the train tracks making for an interesting and amusing sight.

The cat looks up at him as if she beckons him to continue. “Oh, sorry,” he says as he finds his place...

*“Where to grow
So you can be
The ground beneath
The one to be
That I adore”*

He hears the bicycle being placed against the wall of the station.

*“Seedling inkling
Blinking thinking
Pushed be there
Germinating making
Omens them crumbling”*

The train coming allows him to lift his voice. He doesn’t look at where the voice says his name as he looks down at his audience.

*“Pushed up there
Fall free from hand
Then evenings and mornings
Has reached up there”*

The train pulls up, and as the conductor pokes his head out at the small station and the engine lets off steam, Jon Pierre Solomon jumps on board. He finds a seat. He looks out the window as he recites the words he must now remember, “Illicit blade of grass, Promiscuous dirt, Illustrious dust, how is it you know?”