

Ghost-Town Suites

A dance theatre play

by Naïma Kristel Phillips

**In the shadow of blossoms
There is no such thing
As a stranger**

**a World with its faults
And yet covered
*in cherry blossoms***

**Cherry blossoms –
Humankind shuffles
In their midst!
- my transl. of haikus by Issa**

The stage is in the middle of the room. A piano on a heap of rubble; cherry blossoms hang overhead, sometimes creating shadows. Ruins of a place that was once a vibrant and busy cabaret.

From offstage. Sound of knocking at a door.

Robert

Charlie?

Knocks again.

Charlie! I came back to tell you – Charlie - I came back to – Charlie!

Knocks. Wrestles with the door handle and opens it.

I came back.

Robert, mid-twenties, runs in with a backpack and a bouquet. He stops in his tracks.

Charlie?

Takes in the space.

I...

No, no no no no no.

Take out a paper with the address. Runs out. Comes back in slowly. Really takes in the space. Picks out a plaque from the rubble. Wipes of the dirt.

Ghost-Town Cabaret.
Whimpers are heard from the piano.

Hello?

Silence.

Is anybody here?

Silence.

Anyone?

Silence.

More whimpers. Robert approaches the piano.

Excuse me? Excuse me?

Silence.

I know you're there. I can see your scarf.

Person hiding under the piano pulls scarf out of sight.

I just – I came back to see someone. Perhaps you know her... Her name is Charlie.

Person comes out from hiding. Very cautiously. Maybe with a baseball bat or a broom or umbrella for defence.

Hi there. I don't want to hurt you. I promise.

Person puts down the stick.

Do you know Charlie?

Person shakes head.

She's [describes her].

Person rips a piece of paper and hands it to Robert.

“Man leaves woman
Comes back
Piano in ruins.”

Person laughs.

Are you sure don't know her? You look strangely familiar.

Person shakes head.

Please, I just need to know... I need to know... Is she's coming back?

Person hesitates, then shakes head.

Dead. And the others, gone as well?

Person nods.

No, no no no no no, this isn't how it's supposed to be. I was here only days ago. This... this is a mistake. A nightmare, right? I just need to wake up. I'll wake up and... no, I'm misplaced... I took the wrong turn. Distracted... I'll go back on the main road and I'll go back and I'll go back and -

Person rips a paper out of their notebook and hands it to Robert.

“a World with its faults
And yet covered
in cherry blossoms”

Robert sits down. The truth sinks in.

Who did this?

Person looks straight at him.

Me? No. No, I didn't... I wouldn't... No, I had a job... I don't even know this place. I only came here once. And I met this, this girl and I came back to tell her that – I had a job. I had to go, but I came back because – I wouldn't... No, I would never. I I I – I don't understand. I remember coming here the first time. I never meant to stop here, I was on my way to the city, and - it was such a fluke – I I felt dizzy, I needed to get off the train, and out there was this country side, this place I'd never seen before and I got off, I got off. I I I got off here and wandered the streets of this desolate place. I thought surely no one lives in this place, I didn't even see it on the map. But sure enough, I found this place, this cabaret. Ghost-Town Cabaret – now that's a name that fits a place. And I walked into this world, this world inside a cabaret and it felt like a lifetime, but it was just a day - or two, I can't remember really – only it felt like a lifetime. No, I had to leave, I

had to. I had a job and a duty to fulfil. So I left this place and this woman. I'd fallen in love with both, the place and the woman, in a day and a lifetime. And so I've come back to tell her that. No, I don't understand. Did I do this? I was on my way to the city when, when, when I stopped in this town and it was deserted and I thought surely no one lives in this place, it's a Ghost-Town. You're lying. I never, no, I would never. No –

Person hands Robert another piece of paper.

“See for yourself.”

Light on an object/costume accessory that transports Robert to a memory/dream.

I remember...

He puts the bouquet down on the piano bench and kneels. He takes a moment of silence. Charlie, mid-twenties, enters. There's an eerie feel about her. As Persephone, she comes from the underworld and is a fading memory of her living self. She approaches Robert silently.

Robert speaks to the piano as if it were her tombstone.

Robert

I remember
 the time
 the only time
 when you played the piano
 on this heap.
 I remember
 Telling myself
 This is big.
 I was so small then
 next to you
 and those strings.

Charlie extends her hand to him. He sits next to her on the piano bench. They play together. Charlie sings. Her words are out-worldly (unintelligible) but her voice should touch our souls. She conjures the fading memories of the world they shared before the destruction. Enter chorus.

They embody a world that was vibrant, beautiful and bubbling with idealism for the future. It was a world where people could be idle and dream, but where people did their best to make an honest living. They had very little and yet knew how to enjoy simple luxuries. And as all worlds, it was a world with sorrow and pain and all the things that make us alive. A world with story telling, intrigue, honour and dishonour. Where people could sit around for hours debating the simplest things. And the humblest person is the most educated. Love affairs that last a day and a lifetime.