

# **BOSSA NOVA BEAT**

**BY**

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She was late and he was nervous. Glancing yet again around the sumptuousness of the art deco dining halls, Raphael wondered if he had chosen a suitable meeting place. It was true, he admitted to himself, he wanted to show off; show off his wealth, his success, while underneath he still harboured the shame of the coward he believed himself to be.

Why had he left it so long, to return? Even before the aircraft landed, he inhaled the exotic Brazilian air, rushing up through his nostrils and throughout his whole body as if changing his molecular structure, because suddenly, for the first time in many decades, he wanted to dance.

They had been musicians back then, during Rio's dark past. Celeste a singer, Raphael a pianist and songwriter; they had strolled past this building many times, penniless teenagers on their way to the club where they performed. They would laugh and say, "when we are rich, we'll eat the finest Portuguese chocolate!" The youth on the street had no guns to fight the military, but their yearning for freedom was expressed through harmony and melody, the samba, the bossa nova, an electrifying Brazilian beat that wound its way through the narrow paths, up into the hills and down into the ocean. Through the magical embrace of the music, the spirit of the people transcended the might of the dictatorship. To play, to sing, to dance; they understood that this was their rebellion.

Raphael's attention was drawn to the entrance. He didn't recognise her at first, her large size, decked in a flowing green sequined gown, a face thick with powder and eye shadow. She had been small, petite, he thought; yet almost five decades had passed, and catching his reflection in one of the enormous ornate mirrors was reminded that he, too, had aged. But when she moved, walking towards him with a distinctive flamboyant sway, he knew, that was Celeste.

“Raphael! My old lover!” she laughed, hugging him close before arranging herself on the seat. “I can't believe it, after all this time!”

“Celeste, it has been so long. Every year, I planned to come back, but, work, wives, children...How about you? Did you ever marry?”

“No,” she smiled, and seeing his look of concern added, “Oh, not because of you my dear! You remember the strict laws at the time, no divorce possible, imagine that! I only wanted the music, and that has remained a steadfast lover.”

Realising this may have unintentionally sounded like sarcasm, she quickly asked him about his life. She sipped her coffee, nibbling the sweets, as he pulled out his photographs, his two wives, and two divorces, his children. His ranch. After some time, they began to talk about the past, to which they both belonged.

“Was it bad, after I left?” he asked, hesitantly, no longer boastful. “I did try to follow the news, but those days, it wasn't easy.”

“For a while, yes, but all things pass, don't they? We were soon back, me, Frankie, and Juan, in the clubs.”

They both fell silent, unsure of what to say, recalling how Raphael had become bolder, in his music, with his criticism of the government, until one day his cousin had rushed into the club.

“Raphael!” he had grabbed his arm, “You must leave, now, I heard they are coming for you!”

Raphael's teenage arrogance had suddenly evaporated. He had run, sweating in the evening heat and humidity, through the steep back alleys that led to his family home, bursting through the door, wild with panic.

“I told you to stop writing those songs! Hanging out with those people!” His mother was hysterical, but his father was calm.

“You must leave tonight, your uncle in America can offer you work.” He had placed his large palm on Raphael's shoulder and squeezed, the first and last act of closeness Raphael experienced with his father. He did not think of his friends

Frankie and Juan, of Celeste. Only of running, far away. He had been grateful, to arrive safe, in America.

Raphael sighed, as Celeste reached over and patted his hand.

“I think I need my nap, getting old now, Raphael. Maybe we can meet again tomorrow?”

After leaving the dining halls, Raphael stood by the ocean, feeling as if he had never left, as if the decades in America had been nothing more than a dream, an illusion that he had passed through in some strange ghostly form. He had never belonged there, he belonged here. It was only here he felt alive. The music was calling him back and regrets dug deep into his heart.

Raphael moved from the ocean to the back streets, finding himself in old familiar territory, where the clubs they had once performed in had been vibrant with the thrill and expectations of youth. Was it possible, he could hear his cousin's voice?

*“Raphael! They are coming for you!”*

He began to run, pounding the sidewalks with the beat, a beat of ancient African drums, a resistance that had survived the centuries, the language of music that spoke of oppression yet freedom. He raced, falling into a darkness, gripped by a fear so intense; the threat of prison, of torture. Finding himself outside his house, hearing his parents' raised voices within, he paused, then continued to run until he arrived at Frankie and Juan's apartment. They dragged him inside, with curtains drawn and lights out, huddled together in the darkness. He could hear the sound of ocean waves, drums from a faraway continent, the loud thumping of his own heart.

They barely moved, speaking only in whispers, but by morning it had passed; the fear, the panic. He felt a lightness, sitting at his friend's piano, with pen and paper, an eagerness to write songs, play music, defy the government. To give himself up mind, body, and soul, to the pulsating Brazilian spirit.

### Author Biography

Julie began writing in her sixties and has been published in the online magazine *Flash Fiction Magazine*. Shortlisted (with commendation) for Scottish Arts Trust 2022 flash fiction, published in their anthology *Beached*. Shortlisted for Cranked Anvil/Periscope competitions, longlisted for Oxford Flash Fiction summer 2022. Published in *Blink-Ink*, issue #50. Winner of Secret Attic September Flash Fiction contest. Short story published in Wicked Shadow Press *Abominable* anthology.