

ONE TANGO FOR THE LOVE

By

Nelly Shulman

“Since the war started, I haven’t danced even once,” Margarita said.

Max stopped under the streetlamp, casting the golden glow on the molten blackness of the canal. The damp sea wind scattered the clouds over the city roofs and the trembling light blurred before his eyes.

Her back was dangerously close to him. Leaving a café, Max gave Margarita his scarf.

“The nights are still cold,” he explained. “I will ask the sisters to find you a second blanket.”

Max could not invite her to stay in a neglected apartment, where his life dragged on in the cluttered bedroom. After the death of his wife, Max did not bother to look into other rooms. Instead, he arranged for her to stay in the monastery hotel. Realizing she was a refugee the sisters fussed over Margarita. Max reached for his wallet, but one of the nuns shook her head. “This is our duty,” she said. “Your friend can live here for as long as necessary.”

Max had no idea how long it would take. He and Margarita did not talk about the war.

Her blond hair fell over the scarf, and she stopped at an old wrought-iron lattice.

“I have not danced,” she repeated. “It is strangely quiet here.”

A late boat purred around the turn of the canal, and the sound of footsteps echoed under the stone arches around them. Max took his time listening to distant laughter. An overwhelming wave of grief washed upon him, and he barely managed to respond.

“There are no cars in Venice,” Max said. “It is still too cold for tourists, but later the city will be crowded with people.”

Her graceful hand rested on the damp granite railing. Max wanted to touch her bony fingers and wrap his palm around the narrow wrist. The whirlwind tossed the hem of her black coat. Margarita stared stubbornly at the ghostly radiance of the pale moon smeared on the water.

“I cannot dance now.” The woman fell silent for a moment. “But I want to.”

Max pulled out his phone. Margarita told him that before the war she was a tango teacher.

He awkwardly said, “You can, because if you do not dance, then why,” he waved at the domes and spires, “why all this?”

Margarita took her hand away from the stone. He waited for a slap in the face and shuddered at the touch of her cool fingers.

“We can, but it is crazy because we,” her voice faltered, “we cannot either ...”

Max pressed the button, hoping for his favorite tango. He had not danced since his wife died. Margarita's hand rested on his shoulder and Max thought about his country destroying hers.

The old melody flew over the canal, and Margarita whispered, “You are right. Why all this if there is no love?”

The wind shook the lantern and her coat slipped down. Margarita threw a scarf over Max's shoulders, joining them in an embrace, leading him in the dance.

Author Biography

Nelly Shulman is a writer currently based in Berlin. Her work has appeared on *JewishFiction.net*, in the *Vine Leaves Press Anthology of the Best 2021 Flash Fiction* and in various literary magazines. She is a winner of two writing awards.