

Dancing Bare

Dancing Bare is the at times risqué tale of an innocent young man who swaps the suffocating confines of middle class New Zealand for love and liberation in nineteen-sixties London and Europe. Revelling in the freedom conferred by anonymity, he becomes an actor, stripper, rent boy, lover, teacher and dedicated traveller through Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, where travellers were uncommon and countries still retained many of the differences that made travelling so interesting. Rigby meets with a wide variety of people, life styles and customs, eventually settling in Paris where the state did not consider his sexuality to be a criminal offence.

A moving and amusing story of hope and love, sex and sexuality, theatrical showmanship and artless innocence, laced with a little philosophical speculation in the pursuit of true love.

Also by Rigby Taylor

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Cover: the Author in Cap d'Antibes, 1962

*Dancing
Bare*

By

Rigby Taylor

The laws of god, the laws of man,
He may keep that will and can
Not I: let god and man decree
Laws for themselves and not for me;
And if my ways are not as theirs
Let them mind their own affairs
Their deeds I judge and much condemn
Yet when did I make laws for them?
Please yourselves, say I, and they
Need only look the other way.
But no, they will not; they must still
Wrest their neighbour to their will
And make me dance as they desire
With jail and gallows and hell-fire
And how am I to face the odds
Of man's bedevilment and god's?
I, a stranger and afraid
In a world I never made.
They will be master, right or wrong
Though both are foolish, both are strong
And since, my soul, we cannot fly
To Saturn nor to Mercury,
Keep we must if keep we can
These foreign laws of god and man

A E Houseman.

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Gay, autobiography; sex; rent boy; acting; theatre; stripper;
London; Paris; nineteen-sixties; teaching: love.

Set in times New Roman.

Oh who is that young sinner with the handcuffs on his wrists?
And what has he been after that they groan and shake their
fists?
And wherefore is he wearing such a conscience-stricken air?
Oh they're taking him to prison for the colour of his hair.

'Tis a shame to human nature, such a head of hair as his;
In the good old time 'twas hanging for the colour that it is;
Though hanging isn't bad enough and flaying would be fair
For the nameless and abominable colour of his hair.
Oh a deal of pains he's taken and a pretty price he's paid
To hide his poll or dye it of a mentionable shade;
But they've pulled the beggar's hat off for the world to see and
stare,
And they're hauling him to justice for the colour of his hair.

A E Houseman.

1... In the Beginning

When I was a lad, public buildings boasted portraits of King George VI anxiously observing liberalism displace the colonial cringe that had for so long stifled New Zealand social discourse. Ladies still ‘dressed’ for Afternoon Tea, but royal tittle-tattle, recipes and fashion now competed with politics, social welfare, child psychology, fresh air, callisthenics, naturism, and cold showers. Mother bravely resisted indulging in the last three, but considered them essential elements in the upbringing of her only son who had begun life looking like a refugee from Belsen.

One warm afternoon an odd impulse sent me straight from cold shower to Sitting Room. The malignant glass-eyed scrutiny of a dozen dead foxes decorating the padded shoulders of twelve severely corseted dames; their own eyes concealed behind spotted veils adorning absurd little hats, stopped me in my tracks. Ample bosoms heaved and dainty teacups froze ’twixt lap and lip. In that instant I knew the brothers Grimm had told it true – people *could* be turned to stone!

Quelling the urge to scarper I assumed an air of artless innocence and clambered onto the copious lap of the most formidable presence in the room; my Godmother. Buoyed on a cloud of powder and lavender-water I kissed her cheek; snagging the veil in my teeth. She disentangled us, held me at arm’s length and boomed, “Never kiss someone when your hair is wet, child!” before dumping me unceremoniously on the carpet and plonking a dry kiss on my forehead; a stamp of approval that allowed me to ignore Mother’s nervous flick of the head towards the door and assume my usual duties – handing round plates of club sandwiches and *petit fours*. Later, with calculated cuteness I fetched the coats of departing matrons and held open the front door; stoically enduring pats on my ‘adorable brown botty’ while Mother was congratulated on producing such a darling little man.

Mother’s irritation at losing her independence by not becoming a war widow was manifested in a distinct cooling towards her recently returned husband, an embarrassing transfer of her affections to me, and an assumption that her spouse’s duties and obligations began and ended with the provision of food and shelter. She was a good, caring and supportive mother and I thought I loved her, but I suspect it was more pity than love. In retrospect, however, it was unforgivable that through

constant complaining and manipulation she should drive a wedge between father and son that lasted forty years.

Flag-waving homecoming parades had done little to raise the spirits of battle-scarred soldiers for whom home was not quite the paradise they'd held in their hearts through years of filthy war. Experience of foreign lands, exotic customs and people with entirely different expectations of life, made them aware of the shroud of bigoted conformity that had stifled New Zealand since guns, disease and religion delivered British 'Justice' and near extinction to the Maoris.

Battalion reunions degenerated into drink-fests; for to recall the truth of war was to relive the nightmare and fuel a new found fear of others. And always the nagging question. Why? What was it all for? Cancerous guilt for surviving when mates and brothers had died, poisoned joy, shattered families and bred a generation of morose alcoholics, and distant fathers in whom depression, irritability and an overwhelming sense of anticlimax stifled the words, thoughts and actions of love and tenderness.

My father's experiences were not unique. After recovering from the wounds and horrors of being strafed and bombed at *Monte Casino*, he only just avoided cremation in a tank that hit a land mine and exploded seconds after he crawled clear. Everyone else was incinerated. But the only thing he would ever talk about was the pain of having his haemorrhoids removed without anaesthetic. He said it felt as if the doctor was shoving broken glass up his backside and he bit through four thicknesses of blankets to stop himself screaming.

By taking no interest whatever in my schooling, interests, plans and spare time activities, Dad was the perfect counter for Mother's uncritical assumption that I was god's gift to humanity. I admired his physical strength, slim fitness and practicality, and was proud he was honest, hard-working, well liked, uncomplicated and reliable. But I feared his quick temper. He showed no interest in females, sport [except for lawn bowls], cultural activities, religion or politics, and never either encouraged or discouraged me in any activities. I was perfectly free to be me; whoever that might be. What more could any son ask?

The only criticism I received from him in twelve years under the same roof was being clipped over the ears for shoddy table manners, and the occasional irritated sneer of "Professor!" when I was being insufferably knowledgeable. They were important lessons because awareness of one's effect on others and knowing how to behave are the

essential skills of social acceptability. Together with the self confidence engendered by Mother's dotting, I have never felt either inferior or inadequate.

Forbidden to share in my upbringing, Dad ignored me when Mother was around. Away from home and alone together we behaved like casual acquaintances – friendly but not curious. He was not protective and never tried to teach me anything; expecting me to learn by watching and emulating. That suited me perfectly. By the age of ten, when it was his weekend on duty, I was expected to look after Saturday morning petrol sales and spare parts at his service station while he fixed tires and did mechanical repairs in the workshop. I made no mistakes and was never paid.

If I did my jobs around the house without complaining, on Fridays I received a tiny allowance, enough to go to the pictures once and buy a small ice-cream. In my spare time I was free to do whatever I liked – and suffer the consequences.

Our seaside town was invaded every summer by twenty-thousand city-dwellers seldom wearing more than shorts or swimming togs, which in those days were very brief. My string bikini raised no eyebrows on the street, at school or at the 'flicks'. Informality was the rule and men were expected to wear as little as possible, show they had something between their legs, and look sexy. Girls were expected to be modestly sexy in clothing and deportment. The opposite of today. Why and how the roles have reversed is a mystery, but I suspect it's the influence of right-wing religious U.S.A.

During the holidays I had to work and save money to pay for whatever I wanted in the following year. Dad's contribution to my well-being ended with food and lodging. Mother didn't work so had no money. Although I hated toiling in a fast-food kitchen, a grocery store, sweeping up hair and selling cigarettes and condoms in a barber shop... it never seemed unreasonable that I should work for my keep. Every spare minute, though, I spent on the beach.

Making friends was never a problem, but as boyhood became adolescence an underlying tension for which I had no explanation began to surface. I didn't want to go looking for sheilas and sit in the back row of the flicks feeling them up. And I only wanted to be part of the group if they were doing what I wanted. The other guys seemed prepared to subject their wills to the group, and that scared me into avoiding team sports. If I was to fail or succeed it would be because of

my own merits – or lack of them. This stubborn need to feel totally independent means I've never owed anyone anything.

Neighbours and nearby retired couples let me use their libraries and listen to their classical records in return for the occasional odd job. Paper-round clients left me Christmas tips. I was popular as a baby-sitter, and after getting my driver's licence on my fifteenth birthday, several people lent me their cars if I needed one, knowing I was prepared to drive them anywhere, any time I was free. I also became the Doctor's wife's part-time chauffeur when she was heavily pregnant with her third child in four years.

1956 began as inauspiciously as the previous 15 years. The Olympics across the Tasman in Melbourne impinged not at all until my Art teacher, a neurotic, scrawny chain-smoker, asked for volunteers to assist him to make life-sized paintings of Greek athletes to decorate the hall for the School Ball. No one took up the offer, partly from laziness but mostly from fear of proximity to 'the breath of death'. It's thanks to his rotting lungs that I became a non smoker. Eventually, a combination of pity and secret lust for the life-sized reproduction of Myron's *Discobolus* in the school entrance hall, led me to offer assistance.

We worked in the dressing rooms at the back of the stage and the results were abysmal. Sir could not keep the proportions when enlarging. A night of feverish fantasy prompted my offering to pose before a projector while he traced my silhouette. A night of feverish despair, prompted Sir to accept.

"Don't you wear underpants?" he snapped, hurrying to bar the doors. He was impressed with my physique, however, and the results were satisfactory. On completion I asked if he would employ me as a poser for his night classes. "Life model," he corrected primly. Adding, "You are too young." I argued. He resisted. I agreed to remain mute about my contribution to the paintings on condition he would give me a trial. He conceded defeat, although after teaching me for three years he should have realised the threat was hollow; I would never betray secrets. But teachers then as now seldom took a personal interest in their pupils.

Parents were no problem; Dad wasn't interested and Mother thought that as the sun shone out of my backside everyone should have the opportunity to admire it. I presented myself at Sir's studio an hour early for a rehearsal. He explained the sequences – ten one-minute poses, five five-minute poses, one twenty minute pose, supper, and then the same

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