

**Yasmine Beverly Rana**

**Dance the Orange**

Characters: Sara (*Early-Mid-Forties*)  
Kevin (*Late-Thirties*)

Setting: *The Studio Museum of Harlem, New York City*

Time: *Late afternoon*

*Stanley Whitney's painting Dance the Orange is magnified up-stage. A bench is placed downstage. Museum visitors Sara and Kevin consider this vibrant work of art.*

KEVIN: You missed the crowd.

SARA: Good. I prefer it this way.

KEVIN: I do too. Are you a fan?

SARA: I'm becoming one.

KEVIN: You didn't know of Stanley Whitney's work before?

SARA: Not the way I should have.

KEVIN: What's changed?

SARA: (*Gestures to painting*) This.

KEVIN: It's quite a painting. There are other paintings in the show.

SARA: I know. They're wonderful and vibrant, but this . . . I don't know. I read about it a few weeks ago and had to see it.

KEVIN: Is this your first time here?

SARA: Only my second.

KEVIN: The show's closing today.

SARA: Do you work for the Studio Museum of Harlem?

KEVIN: (*Laughs*) No.

SARA: Are you a painter?

KEVIN: No.

SARA: A patron, then.

KEVIN: A neighborhood patron, yes.

SARA: It's a great neighborhood.

KEVIN: That's why I live here.

SARA: I had wanted to come earlier, but . . .

KEVIN: You were too busy.

SARA: I hate that excuse. I hear it from friends and colleagues when I ask them if they've read that book that got a glorious review or seen that exhibit written up in *The New Yorker*.

KEVIN: Maybe they are too busy.

SARA: Posting Facebook comments or Tweets or Instagram pics? They have time for that, but not for *this*?

KEVIN: You're not a fan of social media?

SARA: I'd rather have this.

KEVIN: You could have both. Sort of. Kind of. Oh, maybe not. People waste their time.

SARA: I was waiting to come here with someone.

KEVIN: But he or she was too busy.

SARA: No; he just didn't want to come with me.

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KEVIN: Hm. Sounds like a waste of time.

SARA: I can't say that. I should say that. Maybe I don't care anymore, so I frankly don't know what he is.

KEVIN: He couldn't *Dance the Orange*.

SARA: That's what it was!

KEVIN: I know.

SARA: How do you know?

KEVIN: Because there are two kinds of people: those who can do the dance and those who can't. He can't. I'm sorry. I shouldn't assume. I don't know you; I don't know him.

SARA: You know enough.

KEVIN: I was too personal. I apologize.

SARA: No. You're exactly right. He wouldn't take the risk.

KEVIN: And you would?

SARA: Yes, I would. I did. I still would. What exactly is the risk?

KEVIN: Paint what you want. Large and bright, with absolute abandon, with complete disregard to what anyone else is doing, as long as it's you.

SARA: He couldn't do that.

KEVIN: Then he couldn't *Dance the Orange*.

SARA: How do **you** do the dance?

KEVIN: Not like this. Not like Stanley Whitney or Rilke.

SARA: I bought the *Sonnets to Orpheus* after reading about this exhibit. I was on the subway, turning the pages until I found the words. I wanted to share those words with someone else, with him, which I did. Then I wanted to share this painting, this moment, with him.

KEVIN: Which you didn't.

SARA: But I did with a stranger.

KEVIN: (*Checks phone*) You still have another half-hour until closing. Maybe he'll show up.

SARA: I don't think he will. Did you come here with someone?

KEVIN: No.

SARA: Why not?

KEVIN: I'm selfish for wanting this painting for myself.

SARA: I've intruded.

KEVIN: I don't mind. Actually, I did want to share this, but I couldn't. What did your non-dancer say when he read the poem?

SARA: Firstly, he didn't read it; I read it to him. Secondly, he's not really "mine" at all.

KEVIN: Now I see.

SARA: What do you see?

KEVIN: The one who wouldn't take the risk and do the dance. You picked the wrong person.

SARA: No, he picked the wrong person. I'm not like that.

KEVIN: Like what?

SARA: Someone who's hidden. A secret, to be kept in the dark. Without an identity. I wasn't the girlfriend or even a friend. I don't know what I was. "The thing on the side?" No one?

KEVIN: Then don't be.

SARA: Who did you want to share this with?

KEVIN: My students.

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SARA: What do you teach?

KEVIN: High school English. Public school.

SARA: That's altruistic.

KEVIN: It's futile.

SARA: It isn't.

KEVIN: I wanted to take my students to this exhibit. And do you know what my principal told me, or rather asked me, "Why?" That's what he said. "Why? Our test scores are low. So, what good will it do? "No one's going to be a painter, a real artist," so what good will it do? Why waste everyone's time taking them to a museum when you should be packing your class of thirty-eight students into a computer lab with five working computers so you could practice for an unfair test written by people living in another world who don't know your kids or their lives at all! When their parents are working three jobs, how else do they get to see art? See this? But I'm not an art teacher, and even if I were, it wouldn't matter because my school doesn't offer art classes anymore, because we need to spend our days clicking A, B or C. No art. No poetry. None of it. So again, what good would it do?

SARA: It's everything.

KEVIN: To us.

SARA: What will you do?

KEVIN: Leave.

SARA: You can't.

KEVIN: Why not?

SARA: Your students need you.

KEVIN: I don't know if I have anything left to give.

SARA: There's always something left to give.

KEVIN: At whose loss?

SARA: Why does anyone have to lose?

KEVIN: Wouldn't it be ideal if no one lost? If no one "underperformed"? If no one failed? Look at yourself.

SARA: What have I lost?

KEVIN: Something. Someone. You're waiting for someone, a life that will never be yours. That's a loss.

SARA: I'm not waiting for him.

KEVIN: You are.

SARA: Not anymore.

KEVIN: Do you believe that?

SARA: You're angry.

KEVIN: I am.

SARA: You hate what you do.

KEVIN: I really don't.

SARA: You wish you had . . . more.

KEVIN: It was never about the "more," the more respect, the more money. It should have been; it would have been easier for me if it had been. But I thought I could do something, something tangible, something not just for the present, but for the future. I can't even teach what I want to teach, what I think I need to teach. Not if it's not on the test. "What good would it do?"

SARA: Don't quit.

KEVIN: Maybe I'll go back to school, get further in debt. Study technology.

SARA: No. you won't.

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KEVIN: You don't know.

SARA: I don't, but I think I know people like us.

KEVIN: Who are people like us?

SARA (*Gestures to Dance the Orange*): That!

KEVIN: Nothing. Ten years into this futility. Ten years of Mondays telling my students about my weekend visits to the paintings they can't see.

SARA: They can through you.

KEVIN: Second-hand knowledge.

SARA: What I know about the world is second-hand. He used to tell me about it: his travels to places I had wanted to work.

KEVIN: And you haven't?

SARA: No.

KEVIN: But you sound like someone who has.

SARA: Do I? That's second-hand knowledge for you.

KEVIN: Is that what you wanted from him? Adventure stories? Sound bites?

SARA: It sounds as if I did.

KEVIN: Go and tell your own.

SARA: As a social worker from a cubicle in a non-profit office in midtown?

KEVIN: Then from somewhere else.

SARA: Where?

KEVIN: Anywhere you've been curious to see. Curious to be.

SARA: It hasn't been for nothing.

KEVIN (*Stands before the painting*): Stanley Whitney had this.  
And what will I have to show?

*Sara removes a copy of Rainer Maria Rilke's **Sonnets to Orpheus** from her bag and proceeds to read aloud.*

SARA: Dance the orange. Who can forget it,  
the way it fights, drowning itself,  
against its sweetness. You've possessed it.  
Its deliciousness has entered you.

Dance the orange. Fling the warmer  
landscape out from you, so the ripe fruit may glow  
in its native breezes! Aglow yourselves, peel

perfume from perfume! Create a kinship  
with the pure, reluctant rind,  
with the juice that fills the happy fruit!

*Kevin turns to Sara who closes the book.*

End of Play