

May I Have This Dance?

A play by Danielle Gallo

STORMCLOUD

I'd never been much of an optimist before--
I'm grey, full of rain, and I always bring storms.
I like when it's cold and when the wind blows,
And take joy in the most unpleasant of forms.

If the sun shines, I shudder. If flowers bloom, I wilt.
I sit high in the cumulonimbus cloud castle I've built.

I take pride in my dreary, bleak, periwinkle doom.
Nothing but sadness and rain, until one day--BOOM!

No, I don't mean the lightning; that would have made me content.
No, something else happened, and it was quite the event.

It was an average day, I remember, September the 4th.
62 degrees, with a high chance of rain.
It was my time to shine, so I rolled into the sky,
Ready to flood them with showers, and fill up their drains.

*Enter ELLA and MOTHER,
walking down the street.*

As I splashed New York City with drizzle, then eventually torrent,
The people got angry and cursed at the sky.
They rushed like ants in a hurry, speeding for cover,
But then I spotted a girl out the corner of my eye.

She didn't furrow her brows, or shoulder-check strangers,
She didn't scramble away or scrunch her face up at me,
This little girl, with her yellow rain boots,
Was the most gleeful girl in New York City.

Her face beamed with joy, and she pointed at me,
Tugging on her mother's purple raincoat.
And when she smiled at me with her unbridled wonder,
I felt myself starting to float!

(which is saying something for a cumulonimbus cloud-- we aren't usually known for "floating.")

Raindrops splashed against her bifocals, but she didn't seem to care,
The droplets formed hearts on the glass.
She dashed through my puddles and giggled and stomped;
As city slickers rushed by en masse.

Her mother said:

MOTHER

Ella, please stop, you're getting all wet
And I don't want you to get sick.
You're making a mess, and we're already late,
I need to get you to ballet class-- and quick!

ELLA

But mommy, look at the puddles! See how they splash!
I'd rather stay here and play, than go to ballet class.

MOTHER

Well you don't have a choice. Now out of the rain!
Ballet in New York is expensive and you're being a pain.

STORMCLOUD

With a whimper she went, and trudged along with her mom.
But not before squinting up at me.
She blew a kiss to the clouds, splashed one more time,
And said:

ELLA

Thank you raincloud, for making me happy.

STORMCLOUD

Well, that was all that it took! And from that moment I knew,
That gloom was no longer in store.
No one ever enjoyed me, let alone thanked me,
Not once, not ever before.

So when the Sun tapped my shoulder, and told me time's up,
I sighed, and the end of the day drew near.
I settled into the magenta sunset,
Smiling safe, high in the stratosphere.

Dreaming of Ella and her yellow rain boots,
I waited and waited till the forecast said rain,
And every downpouring, for years on end,
Ella would splash in the puddles while her mother complained.

Now fashion yourself 8 years later; New York City,
(I know, I know, bit of a drought).
Finally the forecast called for me once more,
And I sauntered, full of droplets, on out.

Now Ella was taller, and outgrew her boots,
And wore converse and Hot Topic graphic tees.
She carried a backpack double her size,
And was right about at the age where boys lose their cooties.

Ella was walking home from school with a few of her friends
Off to study geography, history, and mathematics.
But, excited to see her, I stormed and I poured,
I even threw in some thunder...(I've always been one for dramatics!)

Her friends yelped and screamed, and whipped out their textbooks,
using Chem 101 for cover.
But Ella just beamed, and told her friends not to worry:
She was herself, a rain-lover.

She said:

ELLA

Guys, guys, now wait! I know it seems gross,
And we don't want to get soggy and wet.
But let's play some music, even just for a bit,
And you'll see that rainstorms aren't a threat.

*ELLA begins playing "Unwritten" by Natasha Bedingfield,
or something similar,
And dances like a maniac up and down the street.*

Dancing in the rain is one of my hobbies,
Cuz you can be messy, and who will care?
And who can resist forgetting the pressure of homework?
This liberating opportunity's rare.

This song is the best, and the rain doesn't change that!
So come on and dance with me!

Her friends begin to dance, letting go of themselves little by little in the rain

H-E-L-L YES! The rain makes it better!
Doesn't this feel so FREE?!

*The girls dance, wild and unabashed in the rain.
It's as theatrical and awesome as you always wanted
your dramatic, Disney Channel teenage moment to be.*

STORMCLOUD

So Ella and friends let their homework soak,
While they partied it up in the storm.
And when the song ended, drenched and breathless,
They bolted inside, where they could get warm.

All except Ella, of course, who took a moment of solitude
Out in my tempest, as it subsided.
She wiped the rain droplets off of her glasses,
And smiled at me (to which I was delighted).

“Hey Ella!!” I called out, in the language of clouds,
Hoping my droplets would emulate morse code.
“May I have this dance?” I stuttered like a fool,
So sweaty (or is that just vapor?) that I could explode.

She stared up at me, and squinted her eyes,
Like she was solving a parabolic equation.
I held my breath. She started to smile.
I'm beginning to regret my flirtation.

I braced for the worst, but all that she said,
Was a simple and resonant:

ELLA
Okay.

So we made music out of windchimes
And percussion out of thunder
And both of us started to sway.

ELLA
We left room for Jesus! I'm not a disgrace!
(But I doubt even Jesus needed this much space)

*ELLA and STORMCLOUD dance together. It's romantic and silly all at once.
After some time:*

MOTHER

ELLA!!! Get inside! Are you insane?
What are you doing out in the rain?!

ELLA

I'm coming, I'm coming, don't get your panties twisted,
Just had to say hi to this cloud before it had drifted!

MOTHER

I don't understand you. Just get inside.

ELLA

(to STORMCLOUD)
Until next downpour,
I love you. Goodbye.

(a moment where STORMCLOUD just floats, blissful, and alone.)

STORMCLOUD

See, the thing about rain clouds, you must understand
Is that no one smiles at you-- I know it firsthand.
People grumble and trudge and generally groan,
So I'd never met someone who made me feel special right down to the bone.

(STORMCLOUD looks down, notices, maybe audibly, that they have no bones)
Oh shut up.

Who would have thought-- me! With all my doom and gloom!
That I would feel *sunflowers* starting to bloom?
My little heart once cold as snow,
Now struck with Cupid's velvet bow.

I'll rain forever and ever to see Ella's face,
No sun or moon can ever outshine!
No heavy eyelids or exhaustion will ever set in
Because I am simply floating on...my perfect Cloud Nine.

I'm counting the days 'til I can drench the city again,
So NYC citizens, hold onto your shingles!
For Ella I shall spare not a single expense,

And this will be no ordinary sprinkle.

ELLA

Now we take our story forward, picture fifteen years later.

I'm freshly twenty eight and on fire.

I'm studying for a master's in Business with a minor in Bio

And I'm the real deal-- a Southwest Frequent Flier.

I'm a power suit girl and I straighten my hair,

And I wear mascara that's more expensive than your apartment.

Where I work, happy hours are business card exchanging events,

When it comes to networking, I am the queen of the schmooze department.

I don't have time for little girl games,

Can't have my head up in the clouds anymore.

I'm gunning for CEO and it's a boys club battlefield,

So my ballpoint pen is a weapon of war.

So I'm power walking to Zumba class in my 2 inch platforms

Carrying my enormous LuLuLemon tote.

When suddenly rain clouds begin to amass

And shit-- I forgot my raincoat.

I keep my head forward as it starts to pour,

I grumble and plod my way through the crowd.

I don't even let myself glance up at the sky,

For fear that I'll see that old cloud.

When on the sidewalk beside me, stopped at the crosswalk,

I see my neighbor, little Jane.

She's about five or six, and blissfully dancing

And stomping in puddles in the rain.

She bounces and beams down Fifth Avenue,

Her green rain boots squeaking as she steps.

I started to droop, lost my Powerful Stance.

(to the audience, directly, a plea)

Don't hate me! It's all just complex.

But then Little Jane's mom starts to shout at her,

Calling her all sorts of names.

She grabs Little Jane's wrists and drags her along,

And barks, “Don’t play in the rain.”

I shake it off, and head into Zumba.
Check my phone, but then remember I’m friendless.
When did I stop enjoying my life?
Seems my list of bad choices is endless.

At least I’ve got LuLu and Gucci and Prada
But I will say I miss my stormcloud friend.
Maybe I’ll schedule some time to hang out,
But shit. I’m all booked up with meetings this weekend.

STORMCLOUD

Now imagine yourself another week later.
What? How am I? Please, don’t even ask.
I got too caught up with Cupid and roses.
I just need to remember: only rain is my task.

I’ve gotten a bit greyer since you last saw me.
Though the sun optimistically calls it “cadet blue.”
I mostly spend the non-rainy days on Netflix.
I’ve marathoned Tiger King and Love is Blind, too.

The doctor of my love sickness is angry
That his prescriptions of romance are not kept. (*shrugs*)
Hey, be honest, does my cloud look fatter?
No? What about from the left?

The sun says it’s time for her 30 minute break,
It’s my shift, and now often I’m late.
Well let’s stretch it, boys, here we go again (*does some mediocre apathetic stretches*)
Guess it’s time to precipitate.

ELLA

The downpour once more, at another inconvenient time!
I’m heading out of a meeting near Central Park.
When who do I see, playing in the meadow?
Little Jane-- where is her mother? It’s getting dark!

I rush over to her: Hey Jane, where’s your mom?

JANE

I went on a walk all alone!

I was sick of being cooped up and all she does is yell,
So please Miss Ella, don't take me home!

ELLA

But Jane, oh honey, it's beginning to rain!

JANE

No no no no! Please, I'm begging, Miss Ella!

ELLA

I see you're wearing your rain boots, so you're just fine,
But sadly I don't have an umbrella!

JANE

I don't want an umbrella! I like to dance
And splash and play in the rain.

ELLA

I did that too, when I was your age....

....

You know what? Screw it. I'll dance with you, Jane.

*ELLA and JANE dance and splash recklessly.
The embodiment of "dance like nobody's watching."
As the dancing subsides, the rain still pours.*

Come now, Jane, I can see that you're tired.
And we have to beat the traffic from the Yankees.
The only thing harder than dealing with raining buckets
Is hailing New York City taxis!

So I delivered Jane home, and gave her my coat,
But didn't go home right away.
While the rain still poured, I knew I had some apologies to give
And some things that I wanted to say.

No need to wipe my glasses since I switched to contacts,
So I stepped into the downpour and squinted up at the sky.
And as I searched for my cumulonimbus acquaintance,
I heard someone in the atmosphere let out a sigh.

I knew it was them, and I locked my eyes on that cloud,
Gathering strength to say something-- anything-- out loud.

A heaviness weighed on me, colored in violet guilt.
“Hey,” I called out. “I’m sorry for the distance I’ve built.
Long time no see, but I suppose that’s my fault.
Mind if you drizzle on me so that we can talk?”

STORMCLOUD

Long time, no see, indeed.
I’ve missed you... Why did you leave?

ELLA

Things got tough growing up--
And as I got older, the pressure kept rising.
But that’s no excuse for abandoning you
which is why I’m apologizing.

I replay memories of summer storms and icy drizzles
And though I tried to hide from it, I couldn’t, you see.
Because you brought me bliss in those cloudy afternoons.
I confess now that we two are meant to be.

And though I’m sure I caused you some pain,
I’ve learned: you can’t have a rainbow without any rain.

STORMCLOUD

I’m glad you came home, into my heart.
I couldn’t stand the idea of us being apart.

ELLA

Wait! I have a surprise! Stay put right there!

STORMCLOUD

Okay! I will! I promise, I swear.

*ELLA runs inside her apartment, emerging wearing
a pair of bright yellow rain boots.*

ELLA

Been saving these in my closet for when the moment was right!
Now I’ve got a question, if you’d answer by chance:
Whattaya ya say?
May I have this dance?

They dance. ELLA beams. STORMCLOUD rains so hard it nearly floods the whole of NYC. End of play.