

"why don't you  
dance" by raymond  
carver essay sample



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## **“ Why Don't You Dance” by Raymond Carver Essay Sample**

The story is set in suburban America in the 1970'es. The main character, who remains nameless throughout the whole story, hast just moved his whole bedroom out into the street, lamps plugged in and all. The time is backed by the appliances - the boy turns on the TV set and makes minor adjustments, and you get the feeling, that he is turning the knobs to get a sharp picture. Also, in the seventies, everybody had a TV but it was still, as it is today, a rather big expense.

The characters are: The man (the main character), the girl and the boy, who is the only character in our story to be called by his name, Jack.

The man is middle-aged. In the beginning of the story, he brings out a lot of things from his home, and most of them are gifts. The nature of the things, suggests that they are wedding presents (a box of silverware, a record player, a muslin cloth). These are typically things you would get a couple of newly-weds for their shared home. Something has happened to his wife leading the man to put his life and sorrow of his lost wife on display. She has either died or left him to the solitude of being a divorcee. The man seems empty and has a melancholy about him. There is something very sad about putting your bedroom - the most intimate room in a house - out in the street for everyone to see the emptiness - of his house and of himself. He is inviting people in but never wonders why the cars passing by do not stop, as it occurs to him, that he would not have stopped either.

The girl is naive and shallow. She has an air of promiscuity about her. She keeps asking Jack to lie with her on the bed, and even asks " what if.." in the story thus suggesting that they have sex right then and there. The boy laughs but for no good reason. Her exhibitionistic nature cannot help her asking that question and when the man asks the couple to dance, she jumps to the chance of putting herself on display. She shares a moment of intimacy with the man but we are never told exactly what is going on between the two in that sequence. She feels his breath on her neck, pushes her face into his shoulder and pulls him closer. Could be they are just dancing but could also be that they are having sex. I think they are dancing closely and that the intimacy they shared when dancing confuses the girl to the extent that she has to tell everyone about it afterwards as it touches something in her that she has not experienced before; something that she cannot fathom. Her relationship with her boyfriend Jack, seems very shallow and based on something physical rather than something emotional.

Jack corroborates my theory - he is more interested in the TV-set and reluctantly participates in the dancing. Also, he claims at one point to be drunk from the whiskey, offered to them by the man, but has not had any of it. Jack is a pretender and turns the other cheek when his girlfriend dances, as I think she does, with the man. In doing so he is also the passive bystander and gives even more weight to the theory that their relationship does not have emotional depth.

The theme could be a variety of things. To me it seems it is the process of going through a period of grief. The man mourns the death of his wife and wants to let the whole world know that he is hurting. He craves female  
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company and when he finally has female company in his yard, it is a naive girl, who does not know any of his records and drinks watered down whiskey. Drinking a whiskey and dancing could be a ritual performed by him and his wife and so he looks for someone to come and perform his ritual with him as he misses it terribly. He more or less gives his stuff away to the young couple to rid himself of the reminders of life with his wife.

The man is basically lonely and by saying that he is, I have also arrived at my conclusion as to what the message of this story is. " Why don't you dance?" gives us the message that loneliness is one of the saddest human emotions and in order to rid yourself of it, you need to be open and let people in. You cannot be alone forever.