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Angel

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Angel

Abstract

It possible that I'm an angel. No, not possible, really likely. After all I'm black. Blacker than most African. An' I born in these Americas. Black like night, like a kinda velvet, an' in my secret places, I got this dark musty pink like those rare orchid. Three, four hundred years of clean, pure blood. Is not that I want to sound like Nazi. What it mean is that we aint had the opportunity to enjoy the advantage of ravage: You 'complish anything is because you half-white, otherwise you black. A little bit like Ben Johnson: Canadian win gold medal; Jamaican found guilty of drug taking. Instead everybody want to keep we down. In we place. Is so some of we does smile a lot. But it have compensation. Is not possible to confuse who you really is. In my family a lot of we take the opportunity to be mostly happy in weself, respectable, polite, hardworking. But we learn early to talk we talk. An it seem like each generation we does grow more beautiful. Cheek bone higher, hair thicker and more curly, neck longer, head perch right on top, small and round. Every bit a we the right size, 'cept the eyes. They getting larger, blacker, deeper. Way way back from them fort in Ghana, from them ship, we could see what pass next. Is how we never there when massa come.

CLAIRE HARRIS

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It possible that I'm an angel. No, not possible, really likely. After all I'm black. Blacker than most African. An' I born in these Americas. Black like night, like a kinda velvet, an' in my secret places, I got this dark musty pink like those rare orchid. Three, four hundred years of clean, pure blood. Is not that I want to sound like Nazi. What it mean is that we aint had the opportunity to enjoy the advantage of ravage: You 'complish anything is because you half-white, otherwise you black. A little bit like Ben Johnson: Canadian win gold medal; Jamaican found guilty of drug taking. Instead everybody want to keep we down. In we place. Is so some of we does smile a lot. But it have compensation. Is not possible to confuse who you really is. In my family a lot of we take the opportunity to be mostly happy in weself, respectable, polite, hardworking. But we learn early to talk we talk. An it seem like each generation we does grow more beautiful. Cheek bone higher, hair thicker and more curly, neck longer, head perch right on top, small and round. Every bit a we the right size, 'cept the eyes. They getting larger, blacker, deeper. Way way back from them fort in Ghana, from them ship, we could see what pass next. Is how we never there when massa come.

Not like them others

Not like any she

lying in bed as in a grave such thin night nesting in her silence
 stifling the cabins while his spurs drag at dust ring against
 pebbles yard fowl disturbed by his passage flutter squall their
 resentment flambeau winging ahead of that confident curs-
 ing stride crack pale on thatch spreads down to stain baked
 mud floor his step on door stone his boot in the door and
 she dry bony weaponless

he trapped in the movement of a mind contracting mounts
 thrusts his weight bearing down his cock battering her open
 she stares at the ribbed sky listens to this woman who stifles her
 groans true slave to his hand and she despises her her
 empty anger her fear of dying who can not hope can not
 curse *her judgement as is the judgement of women self accusing*

Is the jerk when the bus stop what bring me back. I think is perhaps I'm the first angel what we grown. I work as a Teacher's Aide cum Secretary for a Catholic School Board. The workwoman worthy of she hire only in the sermon on Sunday. So I ride the bus. I does like it. For one thing I have is to leave home by seven o'clock. That time in the Calgary morning it so crisp an cool. The air so clean. Bridgeland so quiet, you hear ssswissh every time a car pass. Most days I don't meet nobody. Except the Alsatian. He live three houses down the road and every time he see me he does jump up an go into a frenzy of wagging and barking. An everytime the old man and the wife what live there does come to they window and glare at me. The man aint know he own dog. This morning Roman out do heself. As always I nod God-be-with-ye, smile with a sweetness I aint have no power over. It dont have nothing to do with what on my mind. This morning I think every one must see the light glowing in me. Though I know they can't. It like this every time there have a big job. An angel job. By the time I get to the bus stop, it didn't have no more than just a hint of electricity left. I being charged while I walk this place. Greening grass glowin on soft hills; the Bow river giving off a silvery shimmer; all the soft pastel houses have this gleam. I did turn off Marsh Road and walk down to the corner of Meredith where the bus stop on Edmonton trail, right there opposite the second hand furniture shop. Furniture on the sidewalk already. Sad, shiny, kitchen chairs. The kind what lavender and chrome. A dresser and two bookcase.

Mrs. Timmmins was already waiting, I figure I a little later than usual. She turn an give me this smile. Is a real sometimish young girl. If it aint have nobody else there she does talk. Otherwise is just nod. In truth, she don't even know she does do that. She practically unconscious. But this morning she start up at once 'bout she boss. Is the same old story: He like she better than he like everybody else, but he nicer to this other lady in particular, because she does hand it out to anybody what is a boss in the company. Is a sad sad thing. I always think that one way of improving the human design, might be some sort of recording device in the brain so we could hear weselves. Clinically. At any rate, the child simply don't have the courage of she own conviction. A good thing too. I see the husband once. Only the sulky mouth tell you what brutality sleeping in him. Handsome as sin.

We did chat, and I pay attention, but I know this wasn't it. I learn over the years that I must wait until I get told which is my case. The streets so full of the wounded. Once, in the early days, I follow a terrified child all the way up North Hill to she home. She passed me by with such a load of sorrow and fear. Moreover what ever gone wrong the poor little thing desperate. I did keep seeing images of flame round her. Everyone know now, is almost fashionable it fashionable, the desperate secrets what hide behind them well kept lawns, but this was the early seventies. The child take the longest way home, ignoring all the after rain still drip dripping

from the lilacs. Her too long red corduroys scuffing the pavement; her shirt half in half out of the elastic waistband, escaping from the short bright waistcoat. She look and feel a waif of a child. After she disappear behind the closed front, I wait in the wet hedges. And wait. This angel bit is a funny thing. You can't do nothing to help yourself. Not really I mean. I had was to wait there, and wait there till the parents come. And that time I wasn't so sure nobody could see me when I on business. When I hear a police car hooting an shrieking like is a TV, I nearly had heart attack. All my life I respectable. How I going to explain a African woman hiding in the people hedge? All yuhso what still reading so far, know you aint reading because you believe I is a angel. And the truth is if you reading this you literary. Who else going out to buy *Kunapipi*? So is probable you got a good good sense of things; you know the world a real strange place. Still yuhso dont believe. How I go explain to a police man? Anyway, first the car, then a ambulance, then another police car pass me by. Still the parents aint come home.

Finally come six thirty-five a car pull up. A real beauty of a woman, laughing for so with she man, step out the car, and the two of them laugh all the way up the walk. I know how people two-face. I feel this wave of fear rush out to greet them, this desperation. So I listening hard. And is like I move myself and I right there in the room with them. Was a nice room. Anyway to cut a long story short. The parents fussing and looking real worried and thing, because is plain the child terrified. She begin to bawl. Through all the sobbing she say is a accident. Mother think is car. She start running she hand up and down the child to find where she hurt. Child still bawling. She could hardly talk she talk. She say she use it for she exam and put it in she book bag. When she look for it later it gone. Turn out she lose the father gold pen he get award for something. Children aint have no sense of proportion. You is angel for child is nothing but trouble.

By now the major regulars, plus a few others, on the bus. We turn off from the river, and begin the long stretch which takes us to the opposite end of the city. I like this part of the drive. Sometimes you going on overpass it like riding a sculpture. It feel like you soaring, inspite of the smell of bus vinyl, what mix with antiseptic, and Pine Glow an the sweetish sour smell of human story we carry with us. Til we reach the suburbs no other passenger join us. There aint have no stops along that way. Two greying nurses, is like sisters, in their twin mountain parkas, one red, one hunter green, lean over to nod, smile. We exchange chit chat about the weather. 'Hot enough for you?' Mr. Saunders does call from his side seat right in front near as you could get to the bus driver. Starting at seven, he ride back and forth across the city, until the drop in centre open at nine. He think his wife think he working. His clothes still real good, fit him so well. And he have this serious but kind manner. It have only a little grey in his hair. Just enough so he look distinguish.

Today it have the usual school children, and this new young woman with a child. A small boy who insist on standing on the seat near the window. When they step on, my electricity sparkle. The bus driver slow the bus and ask if she could make the child sit down. It work for five minutes then he up again. The driver only looking at the girl in he mirror and she embarrass. She looking grim and pale. Finally the driver call out again, and she had was to hold the little man down. Well that child start 'busing up he mother.

'You fat cow! You bitch! You effing broad!' Everybody in the bus hush with shame for the poor girl. Three years old. He start crying. The swear words bubbling out of a rosy baby mouth. Botticelli angel. The whole time the girl never say nothing to him. Her business in the street, she paralyze with shame. I had was to shut he mouth myself. Is a hard thing to do if you not child angel. And to make matters worse he turn around in he seat and start staring at me. The mother throw a quick glance back to see what he staring at. When she see is me, she dead scared the child going to say something. The poor girl get off at the next bus stop. People looking back see her waiting there in the shelter for another bus. She face forlorn.

I shift, settle back. We come off the over pass and come on to 52 Street N.E. Now it have really heavy traffic. Is about eight o'clock. We start passing by the strip malls, the public housing, the gas stations, the 7 elevens, the A&W's, Pizzerias. I start to put on my English. I have is to clear my mind everytime I go into that school. Is because I sensitive to freedom. It aint have public institution what not like a jail. It aint have... there is no way to socialize people without binding limbs, crushing extremities. A grown woman's foot in a five inch shoe. They up and start...it begins so early, this lopping off of angles. We are coming to the big crossroads just before the Co-op where I get off. For once the lights are green. The driver put on a little speed. We hit the crossroads and is then I feel myself pushed over to one side. As I falling I catch a glimpse through the window. I see the truck coming straight for me. And I see the driver's face fill the windscreen. His desperate hands' a death-grip on the wheel. The whole rig looming huge and terrible. We fling to the side; the bus keel. If you could, imagine a dinky toy and a hand what reach out to right it. Above the crash and screaming, above the shatter and jar, I hear that other angel smile.