MONTAGE
May 2017
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I do not remember much of what happened... All I can remember were those two strangers and what they've done to me...

I had awoke in a strange place - a warehouse chock full of large masses of edibles. I was lying on the floor behind a giant box of granola, unsure of how I got there. I couldn't move. A sharp pain pulsed through my entire body. I was suffering from what appeared to be a large gash in my abdomen, perhaps a stab wound. I had no choice but to stay perfectly still on the cold ground, any of my movements could potentially be fatal to my injured figure.

Hours passed. My hands became heavily bloodied due to attempts to keep my wound from spilling any more liquid. My mind became fuzzy and my vision blurry as I looked up. The sounds of footsteps echoed through the warehouse as the two figures approached my defenseless body. My milky white wings twitched at the sight of a young man and woman. The man’s beige hair flipped in his motion as his maroon orbs met my own turquoise ones. The young woman did the same, clementine ponytail flipping behind her as my orbs only met one emerald eye, the other hidden behind her curtain of tangerine locks. Both of them wore a deep pine green bandana over their nose, draped past their jawlines. The pair glanced at each other and nodded.

"P-Please... help..." My words were almost inaudible as the beige haired male carefully lifted me up in his arms, a groan escaping my lips. The ominous pair slowly strolled out of the warehouse with me in custody, my body being taken to a strange black car. My heart began to race tremendously as the orange haired woman opened the trunk. Fear arose as I was gently placed inside. The man that carried me looked at his partner.

"Get the kit." The sudden recognition of his voice struck me as I looked at him in my lying form.

"W-What are... you going to do... t-to me...?" Realizing it was a little easier to speak in my new position, the maroon-eyed young man looked down at the wound, than back at my features. "I'm gonna patch you up. Sew up that hole and make you better." As I heard those words, my anxiety lessened to only nervousness as the emerald-eyed young woman emerged from the darkness of the night with a first-aid
kit and a flashlight. As she turned it on, the beige haired male opened
the box and pulled out a small bottle and opening it as the scent of
vodka filled my nostrils.

“Drink this.” Knowing of the calming effects of the alcohol, I took
the bottle from his hand and chugged the substance, some of it
dripping onto my blood-stained cerulean polo shirt. Drops also landed
on my ragged jeans as I gave the empty bottle back to the young man,
who was now wearing white rubber gloves.

“This will hurt. Do not move.” The tangerine haired female had
just finished threading the needle as my heart rate increased, knowing
what will happen next. The maroon-eyed man took the small sewing
needle and his fingers began pinching the exposed meat together,
painful moans escaping my lips as I tried my hardest to keep from
fidgeting and kicking his palms away from the wound.

“Be quiet.” Emerald orbs glared at my suffering form as the
puncture of the needle sent a strange and uncomfortable feeling shoot
throughout my nerves. The feeling continued for a few long minutes
until I heard the snap of the rubber gloves
the beige haired male had
been wearing.

“It’s all over.” As I turned my head fully towards the ominous
pair, the world around me soon became dark as the trunk slammed
shut. My inability to move had me resort to screaming out for help. A
long while after, my energy soon depleted to zero as my eyelids shut
and my body began to finally rest.

I had woken up in my own home, on the couch that I was
planning to replace. The window across from me showed no sign of
sunlight, I suspect I was asleep for two or three hours. Sitting upward,
I noticed I was in no pain. Unbuttoning the two buttons at the bottom
of my new white polo, I pulled back to see only a light scar and
butterfly stitches following it. My breaths quickened as I checked my
phone. No one called, however there was a voicemail from an unknown
number. I touched the play button and put the smartphone on speaker.

“Hello, Miss ‘Chocolate Maker.’” At the sound of the voice, I
immediately froze in fear. It was the voice of that man with deep red
eyes. What scared me most is that he knew my occupation and possibly
my address.

“How ya feelin’? I hope I was able to help you feel so much
better.” The mocking tone of his voice didn't sound like the way he did
when he healed me. I kept listening closely.
“My partner and I will DEFINITELY visit. I do have to remove those stitches, y’know. We’ll be seeing you in three weeks. Later.” The voicemail had ended, leaving my whole form shaking from my wings to my toes. I began to breathe slowly and allow my wings to fade away into my body in order to halt my fears as my roommate, Oichi, opened the room door.

“Oh, hi Yumiko. You're home late. Where were you?” Knowing how much Oichi would panic, I calmed my heart rate and glanced at the pink-haired woman with a smile. “I was working overtime at the chocolate factory. You know how much I can't resist chocolate.” Seeing my roommate enter her bedroom, I looked down at my phone, than at the window. Many questions entered my thoughts, however I didn't ponder for long as I stood up to change and cook.

Right before I went to sleep, I observed my stitches. The scar underneath appeared to be from a knife of some sort. However strange it may look, there was nothing that could be done as my body relaxed under the crimson bed sheets.
Five days later we were standing barefoot listening to the waves hitting the shore. I enjoyed every uncontrollable wave that came at us, every dash of wind that hit my and Leyla’s face. Most of all, I enjoyed her smile. She was young, but she knew pain.

“Can I sing for you, daddy?” she asked me.

“Of course.”

“What can I sing?”

“Whatever you want, sweetie. Whatever you want.”

Everything became irrelevant in front of that one simple word on a letter from the Department of Angels: Irregularity. I was being summoned. I had to come to the Ministry of Protection and speak to my angel. I checked the date. It was sent over a week ago. *Shit.* Leyla forgot to tell me that we had gotten mail. I started sweating. I moved as fast as I could. I packed all the necessities; there was no time to be thorough. Some pictures, little bit of clothes.

“Leyla!” I screamed.

I searched through all my drawers. I found my birth certificate. Burned it. Family tree documentation? Burned that too. No traces. I ran into the garage and took my canister of gasoline. I started pouring it around the house.

“Daddy?”

Hearing her voice would always make me smile. My ten-year-old daughter.

“Do you remember the drill, sweetie?” I asked her.

“Yeah,” she replied, still sleepy. It was 10 in the evening, past her bedtime. She held on to her teddy bear, Mr. Snuggles, she named him.

“Well, sweetie, you have to get your stuff now. Just like we practiced.”

She simply nodded and went to her room. She knew what to do. I kept on packing. Flashlight, batteries, canned food. Who knows how long will we be out there. I checked the drawer under my business desk. My berreta was there. I packed it with the other stuff. As I was hurrying to get everything ready and spread gasoline around the house, I heard the doorbell. It was long past curfew. For a moment there, I stopped breathing. It wasn’t until the third or fourth ring that
I managed to pull myself together. I looked at the stairs. Leyla wasn’t there. She was still up in her room. Good.

I opened the door and saw two gentlemen, dressed completely in black, wearing long leather coats and fedoras. I glanced at their arms and saw the badges. Wing signs: Angels.

“Good evening. Mr. Smith I presume?” said the taller one.

“Yes.”

“We are instructed to accompany you to the ministry. Apparently, there is an irregularity on your family tree. Do be kind and come with us.”

“Of course, sir. Let me just get my jacket.”

As I reached for my hunting knife that was just hanging there, next to my jacket behind the door, I looked to see if Leyla was still getting ready. She was. Good. They never even saw it coming. One of the advantages of a soul – crushing system, is that when dogs of the system come to you, they don’t expect you to have a soul to fight. Which is also why they ended up with knife shaped holes in their chest. I put them in the closet and closed the door. That’s why Leyla didn’t see them when she got down.

“I’m ready, dad.”

My sweet little girl. She looked so brave with that backpack twice her size. I told her before, that when the time comes to put that backpack on, we would leave our home for who knows how long. She trusted me so much in my ability to protect her. I was her dad, after all.

She sat in the car. I told her to close her eyes and start singing. She started singing Johnny Cash’s “God’s gonna cut you down.” How on earth does she know that? As I threw the flaming match at the living room, burning everything we were leaving behind, I saw the one picture I didn’t pack: the one from our wedding.

I’m sorry Clara. I wish you could see your little girl.

As I got into the car, Leyla stopped singing. We were driving in silence for a long time before she asked me.

“Daddy, why do they call themselves the Angels?”

Cause they are a pompous uneducated bunch.

“I don’t know, sweetie. They just do.”

“And what is their job?”

“Well, Leyla, they bring in enemies of the Empire.”

“So, does that mean we are the enemies now?”
I didn’t answer. I didn’t know how.
“Is that what happened to Millers? And Shangs? And Lecturas? Were they all taken by the Angels?”
“Yes, honey. Please, stop.”
“But they were good people! What happened? Why were they taken?”
“Because of how they were born. Or rather, of how who they were born as.”
“But we are different, aren’t we? That’s why they didn’t get us!”
“They found an irregularity.”
“What does that mean?”
“I DON’T KNOW! OKAY? I HAVE NO IDEA.”
She started weeping. She covered her face with her hair and held Mr. Snuggles tight. I exhaled deeply.
“I’m sorry, honey. I didn’t mean to.”
She sat there silently. I might as well tell her what I know, there isn’t much I can do anyways.
“This was when I was young. Long before your mother and I had you. There was no emperor or empire. It was just a state. I wish I could tell you that it was just one bad day, one bad election. In truth, the world was just constantly in conflict. Just when it seemed that some of the problems would resolve, the Angels made their last stand. Of course, they weren’t called the Angels back then. They were called the supremacists.
I could hear her breathing over the sound of the engine. She was calm. But she was awake and attentive. She was listening.
“It’s hard to put a date on it now. At some point, the state became an empire. The man chosen by the supremacists - an emperor. And all of a sudden, there were these checks, controls, tests and whatnot. Many failed just because of what they looked like.”
“Like, their hair, daddy?”
So naïve.
“Their skin, sweetie.”
She just couldn’t understand ethnic diversity. She couldn’t picture it.
“After some time, tests and checks became a little different. They looked into your past, your hobbies, anything you were connected to. If there were even a slight problem, you would get a note. “Irregularity.” That’s what it would say.”
“What does that mean, dad?”
I could hear the fear in her voice. She was smart. *Got it after you, Clara.*

“That means, sweetie, that you will be taken.”

We drove for some time. The night was silent. It was curfew and at this point Angels didn’t even bother patrolling the streets.

“Where do we go now, daddy?”

“Wherever you want, sweetie.”

“I want to see the sea.”

“Alright. Ocean is as good of a place as any. Let’s go see the sea.”

I was certain that they didn’t patrol the streets at this time. I was wrong. They held up the sign that said “Stop.” So I did.

A man approached us. Cold sweat broke out on my forehead.

“Birth certificate and family tree,” said a sleazy man while he was chewing tobacco. *Who does that?* He lifted his fedora and nodded at my little girl.

“What’s the magic word?” I asked him.

“Faster,” was his response.

I turned around and reached for my bag. I whispered to my daughter to cover her ears and eyes and to start singing.

“Just one second, sir.”

I could see that he grew impatient. His partner came to his side. *Perfect.* I found my berretta. That was when Leyla started singing.

“Oh, say can you see by the dawn's early light…”

The partner was in shock. The sleazy one was ready.

“GET OUT OF THE CAR! NOW!”

“…what so proudly we hailed at…”

That’s my girl. You couldn’t sing that song. It was considered to be against the Empire. As the sleazy one was reaching for his gun, I put one right between his eyes. The partner was as frozen as he was when he first heard Leyla singing. Good. Moving targets are hard to hit.
“Take a deep breath,” Sorchalena thought to herself as she slowly walked into the aged, dimly lit hospital room. It was nine o’clock and the windows mirrored black shadows. As her eyes peered the floor, she noticed how shiny it was, and suddenly pinched her nose as the scent of rubbing alcohol encircled her. The room was rectangular shaped, with beige walls and white blinds. Beep. Beep. Beep. The sound of the heart monitor machine led her eyes to veer upwards, where she saw her aunt Niama lying on a narrow, metal bed. Niama’s curly black hair was splayed across the white pillow that supported her fragile head. She was neatly tucked in beneath a thin white linen sheet. This would be the final night that they would share together. Sorchalena forced her heavy feet to transport her to this woman that she wholeheartedly loved. Sorchalena extended her right hand to cling to Niama’s wrinkled, bronze-skinned hand. “I thought you wouldn’t make it in time,” her aunt whispered.

A stinging sensation irritated Sorchalena’s eyes and she realized her vision was becoming blurry. Endless tears began to flow as if each one encapsulated a memory that she shared with her heroic aunt. “How did this happen, auntie Niama,” she murmured as her shoulders trembled and her heart rattled. Niama replied, “It is the way of life Lena. We are brought into this world to color life and give it meaning. When we ascertain the essence of youth on this planet, our souls must intertwine with the energy of the stars to light the way for others behind us.” Her words of wisdom echoed into my soul. Niama struggled to inhale a deep breath as she continued, “In order for me to be released from this world, you have to sing the song of love.” Niama’s brows furrowed together as she tried to remember the lullaby that was sung to her as a child eighteen years ago. “I don’t remember the whole song!” she sadly declared. Niama replied, “Sing what you can and I’ll be able to find my way.”

Sorchalena saw how determined auntie Niama was to hold on until she was ready to let her go. Sorchalena spoke with a shaky voice as the words to the lullaby quivered from her lips. “L-L-Let your love be sweet like cinnamon, may your words paint the beauties of the
truth.” Auntie Niama’s face lit up as she recognized the words she had worked so hard to instill within Sorchalena. Sorchalena rubbed her fingers over the smooth gold cross that dangled on her necklace. “Allow your heart to cherish memories, and remember that you’re never alone, for my soul will fuel the stars to make your dreams come true.” Niama’s radiant smile warmed Sorchalena’s heart and she realized that she had to be brave for her aunt. She thought of the future and the legacy that she would carry on, and knew that it was time to let her spirit fly. She sat on the cool, squeaky hospital bed and faced Niama. “I’m ready Auntie. Are you?” she asked. Niama squeezed her hand and gave one full nod. Sorchalena stretched out her legs and curled next to her aunt on the bed. She began to share her favorite memories she had shared with Niama, who was her favorite person in the world.

A blinding light caused Sorchalena to stir. The rays of the sun were seeping through the blinds. The absence of the beeping caused the room to oblige silence. She had forgot where she was until she felt a cold, stiff hand. A soul was gone, but a new star was created.
The Little Red Flower
Ermithe Maurancy

Rosy cheeks, long beautiful hair. Her skin is as dark as pure chocolate. Her eyes shine like the moon. Her lips are as sweet as honey cones. Her feet are short, her body is round and thick like a beautiful fresh plum. The young man who sat across the street could not stop gazing at such a natural wonder. The young man was a sculptor who liked to carve any of nature’s wonders. He liked to sit at his window and look at the young lady sing by the riverbed.

Every day at six o’clock in the afternoon the young woman would sing for the fishes. She would sing for the birds, the trees and the deer. She would go by the river to sing and comfort the dying little red flower. “One day I will marry her, our children will be beautiful. I will take care of her, I will make her happy” said the young man.

The next day she returned to the riverbed to sing for the little red flower. She would sing for the little red flower until nightfall. She would sing for the little red flower until her tears started flowing with the river. The young man who sat by the window would contemplate her the whole night. He would carve her very little flaws for they were perfect in his eyes. “One day I will marry her, our children will be beautiful, and one day I will turn her tear drops into diamonds.”

The next morning there was a weeping sound coming from the village. Everyone gathered around the village square. The young woman went into an eternal sleep. Some people said that she ate the red flower. The young lady will no longer share her tears with the river. The sculptor continued to carve nature’s wonder until his heart faded away.
I have a gift

Anya Nova

I have a gift
I can hardly believe it
I never thought this could happen to me

I have a gift
But I'm feeling selfish
I want to keep it all just for me

I have a gift
But I'm too afraid
I don't want it taken from me

I have a gift
And I'll always cherish
how it was given only to me

I have a gift
I think I'm ready to show you
will you unwrap it with me?

I have a gift
From the most high being
That a being could ever be

I have a gift
and it's mine and mine only
the gift is the giving, you see

I had a gift
well it's yours now
I hope one day you'll set it free
Sprouting
Katherine Knutsen

Finger rebellion
Metacarpal hellions
These hands are sick of Styrofoam
If it's not real leave me alone.

Your steel enigma bound me for years
My tender heart held you so dear
Well, ice queen
My teenage dream
Has long thawed out and I'm not seeking steam.

Chasing fire
Yearning for grit
The kind that braves the storm
And dances in its midst.

Soil is royal and I want to get lost in it
Let the life seep back into my wounded spirit
Raw, pure, organic love
Peace below, hope above.

For a time, I thought my wings were clipped
My new persona seemed tame, my freedom stripped
Convinced I'd never fly again, I buried myself alive
Darkness be damned, I'm back, ready to thrive.

Scratching the surface
Oh so nervous
Far from worthless
I deserve this.
Silent Night

Ermithe Maurancy

Children don’t play like they used to.
For they have to think about their tomorrow.
There is no cry of pure laughter into the nights.

Empty streets, with no light.
The old lady who sells dry roasted peanuts across the street
has no oil in her lamp.
Her light starts to fade away into the night.

“Please ma'am let me have 1 gourde
of dry roasted peanuts.”
“I can’t sell anymore my dearest son,
for there is no more light for me to see”.
There will be no supper tonight,
there will be nothing more than a rumbling stomach.

The miseries of life have crushed his imagination.
There is no such thing as Père Noël,
there is no such thing as a free mind running through the nights.
There will be no Christmas this year except for tears and weeping sounds.
It seems like Père Noël has forgotten about them.
**Distortion**

*Clairetza Felix*

Such a beautiful mind
Beautiful mind,
Beautiful mind
And yet she is stigmatized
Sting
The penetration of hatred piercing that skin
And the scratching
And the itching
And the rubbing
How the eyes stare with shame
How the times haven’t changed
But the flowers

Prickling,
Poking
Stretching
But the discomfort
And it shakes me
It trembles me
The taste of salt lingering, like a backhanded compliment
And I weighed myself down into the puddles
Go away go away

What is the color of your soul?
Can I taste the clouds?
Sum of one into someone into no one
How the flames smoke

What is the price?
Bearing down
Your first love
And it’s pushing
And it’s reaching
And it’s gasping
The pulse of it strong
Black, blue, my bruise
But the flowers
This Is My Country
Gina Piro

Thirteen Stripes...
Odd, yet beautiful,
Simple, but powerful.
Though they have spirits of their own, they are limited:
Dancing only when the wind allows.

They, too, gaze at the stars in wonder and awe,
Longingly as generations past,
Heartily as generations present,
Hopefully as those to follow...
But only if the wind allows.

Thirteen million dead
In the name of the stripes.
But they, too, may dance
And encourage the living to join them
In the everlasting swaying of the thirteen stripes...
But only if the wind allows.
A Persistence of Brooklyn Memory
(An Italian sonnet inspired by Richard Gere's character from
Brooklyn's Finest)
Raya Dimitrova

Dirty laundry, dusty sills, half-empty bottles, a stopped watch-
The only memory of where the stains on the socks are from.
The watch arrows melt in the humidity of a so-called home,
Measuring the bio-rhythms of a heroic end-of-watch.
Nothing can numb the memory, but another glass of Scotch,
Whose burning turns into a bucolic cottage the building made of chrome.
He can share that dream with a hooker, while sharing rum,
In the obscurity of a Brownsville basement infested by a roach.

The watch has stopped, but the memory will always persist
In the joyful tears of a rescued girl,
For whom on the last day he put an uneven fight.
Even though by a prostitute he will only be kissed
And he will never forget the boy deafened while picking a swirl,
Forever will be remembered the finest Brooklynite.
Autumnal Reflections

Katherine Knutsen

Soaking in the essence of a cold, clear night in Brooklyn. I swear, I’ll never tire of moments such as this one: not a soul or sound on the street except the whistling of the wind and the rhythmic tap of my feet, barely aware of the pavement, soul drawn from my very core to mingle with the sugar-plum skies, transported away from nagging thoughts of mundane woes. Soothed by the warm glow emanating from tall silver streetlamps...comforting, familiar beacons since my childhood, bright and reliable, illuminating my path, giving voice to the little tessellating fears wallpapering my skull. I cannot deny them in the soft golden night. Twitching hand at my side, seeking tangible solutions, no doubt, crawls into my coat pocket, grasping at minute threads as though they might unravel, like silken chromatin, bearing a cornucopia of great social sagacity in their coils. The crisp air bears the faintest aroma of cinnamon, suddenly, I am struck with olfactory déjà vu, inescapable, mind flooded with bittersweet memoria. Faces, places, and tiny pockets of pleasure and pain.

I shredded my morals during my uncouth youth, let my body and mind conform to outsiders’ truths, swinging into depths I never could have foreseen. The second coming of Self has been arduous, at best, frightening, at worst...quiet, sacred seasons of healing spent digging my fingernails into the unforgiving walls and crawling unassisted out of the abyss that is depression.

My intrinsic love for learning has returned, with gusto, undeterred, I no longer feel compelled to crouch under a bushel basket, yearning for light. With the return of my wits, there is greater recognition of my personal fortitude. My worth as a young, queer woman who values curiosity, kindness and loyalty above all, an informed anti-speciesist, who respects the sanctity of all life, a steadfast friend with no shortage of love to give. I refuse to deny myself any amount of joy, ever again, because goddamn, I deserve every ounce. Furthermore, anything that saps this electric optimism cannot remain with me. To hell with oblivion, I am finally free, truly alive. Cold fall night, my unexpected muse.
September Evening on the Promenade

Katherine Knutsen

Perpetually in awe of this city...from the weathered cobblestones beneath my feet to the cocky pigeons strutting down the street, to the regal bridge on my right, mighty symbol of Brooklyn, leading to the iconic concrete kingdom across the water. Home sweet home. I can feel the humidity in the air this evening, thick as molasses, coating my skin with beads of sweat. My sunglasses are a blessing against the renegade sun, desperate to hold onto summer. I shield my eyes and peer out at the cerulean sea, momentarily dazzled by the light bouncing off of it. The faint smell of the ocean air is comforting; I can almost taste the salty spray. Several helicopters pass over the city, their unmistakable hum lasting even after they fade out of sight.

I find myself smiling as a young family walks by, a cherubic baby in the mother’s arms. His tiny, plump fingers point at the city and he gurgles appreciatively. Both parents are laughing, and their love is palpable. I watch the father snap a candid photograph of mother and child, and it warms my heart. Further down the promenade, I find an empty bench and decide to rest my weary feet. I’m taken aback by how hot the seat is. The heat is certainly relentless. Pushing a few wayward tendrils of my hair off my damp face, I lean back and take in the splendor before me.

Soaring 1,776 feet into the air, poised to inject the sky with its grand steel spire, the Freedom Tower still takes my breath away every time I see it. It dominates the skyline, commanding respect while simultaneously summoning warm tears to my eyes when I think of what this great city has endured over the last fifteen years. Like a phoenix rising from the collective pain and sorrow of our nation, this resplendent tower is a sign of hope, of resilience, of true New York soul and fierce American spirit. The afternoon is drawing to a close, and I realize that it’s time to go. I linger for a moment, savoring the gentle breeze as I gather my belongings. Slowly I rise, sling my heavy backpack onto my shoulder, and turn towards the exit. A delightful mix of spectators are descending onto the promenade, young and old, all eagerly anticipating a beautiful sunset. I can’t help but turn back...
for one last glimpse of the city I love so dearly. With a small smile upon my face, I make my way to the subway.