The Bright Waterfall of Angels

Susan Firer
of dream, on the cusp of moon, I see myself young and white nightgowned walking deep at night through the Highland Zoo that surrounded my French grandmother’s house. From the bay window, my mother calls me back; her voice is a clarinet. When neon was new, and every yard was filled with cherry and apple trees, the plaster saints I lit candles in front of always had bare feet, and it never rained stones. Then, my mother on hot nights slept with her head on a windowsill. Now a freeway runs through her place of those dreams. Still within walking distance, some nights I go and watch the cars’ lights burst shining from black then disappear into stars, into peonies, then prayers.

THE BRIGHT WATERFALL OF ANGELS

Everywhere that summer there were angels, hanging over the lake piers deflated with prayer, blowing like soap bubbles past night windows, flying from the weekend colored skirts of young girls. In August, under the full moon, I walked Oakland Ave., and a night bus, windows burning yellow with angels, passed. And still, I could see people praying for more bird angels, drug angels, kaiser roll angels, money angels, love angels, health angels, rain angels. There were angels with hearts large as bagpipes who circled our village’s ice cube houses and flew bright loud into our bang nights. There were angels in movie houses and in sweet corn stands, and angels who dropped like catalpa snakes from summer. One angel followed
me into our Chang Cheng Restaurant. Where were the angels that summer when the neighborhood women were being hunted and ripped open like field animals? Or when the man who walked away from DePaul Rehab gave up on my garage? When I came home from “The Wizard of Loneliness” the Flight for Life helicopter was landing in my front yard. And a young man was leaning against my garage, his throat an awful open clown smile.

Rivers and steams of dark blood ran down the alley. All the children awakened by the helicopter ran barefoot and pajamaed through the actual blood and night. Mary, the neighborhood nurse, kept telling everyone there was a murderer loose. “No one could do that much damage to themselves. I’m a nurse, I’m telling you that no one could do that much damage to themself.”

And the police, and firefighters, and pilot, and attendants their rubber gloved hands filled with the moon, and someone held up the knife the man had used on himself. Off they rolled him on a cot into the helicopter. When they took off lighted and loud into the midnight sky, I saw angels of despair, windfull and spinning happy on the helicopter blades. There were angels who wrote their names on leaves, and show-offs who rode August’s tornadoes. Nights the sky was often a thunder of angels, a heat lightning sky, where angel wings fit together in crossword puzzle perfection. At the State Fair that August, the great chefs of Wisconsin came to convince the world of the superior beauty of carved cheese over carved ice for table centerpieces, and although originally
they had come planning to carve cows and swans, always the cheddar blocks turned to the gold cheesy beauty of angels. Angels hid behind apples, behind goldfinches, hid in foot-high Mexican-stuffed toads who stood forever on their back legs, their front legs shellacked forever into playing red painted concertinas. And if someone would have come to you as many years as you are old ago, and told you: You will be slapped around, a man will cut your mouth open, only because he says he loves you, and you will have to give up lovers, before they are, and children before they are yours; friends will call you from sexual assault centers and their stitched together voices will tell you things done to them that you will never be able to forget. Some friends you will bury and children and parents, too. (Your mother and father will breathe flowers from their graves.) Your body's skin and bones will cartwheel around you, tilt-a-whirl around you until you are nauseous and dizzy and uncertain. The money angel will never like you; often you will sleep with razor blades. Often you will fall out of the trap door of yourself and have to climb back up and start over, and sometimes the angels will help and often they won't, and you can never count on either. And if someone had come to you, as many years ago as you are old right now, and told you all this, and more, would you sign up for the bright waterfall of angels? Would you be silent? Would you whisper, or shout: Bring on the tour, the bright waterfall of angels tour?