

Hilary Clark / ANGELS

1

Most invisible body, the past hovers over our daily gestures.
Tar soap, running water, wet hand on the door. In the third
season, autumnal, we are visited by angels as light as leaves,
their faces pocked and blackened by decay. We assume the past
like an armour of light, our glass bodies licked by fire. And
turn to our reading, marking the pages, finding familiar spirits
where the lines break, and we raise our heads, wondering

Most invisible body, angel of shame bathes in kerosene and fire,
draws her sari round her blackened face. Leaves turn to smoke
and earth, curling in the burning wind. We assume the past,
drawing its blue flame about us. And this is the key: that we
may find spidery messages where the lines hinge, a few tea
leaves, flakes of ash

•

Late in the white night, we are touched by fingers softer than a
breath. Something not dead but unformed, a space, a brief pause
before words. We turn in our sleep. The moon and its hologram
float over the frozen city. In the morning a sudden thaw, and
icicles in the eaves grow cloudy and weep. We shut the front
door, kiss, and go our separate ways, treading carefully, walking
into the unspoken

you turn on the computer, spectral letters float up from
invisible rooms. quiet murmur, speech turned inward. its memory
has always anticipated you, you are a minor disturbance of its
perfection, nothing more

troubled, wanting to write about angels, you think of that hawk
earlier, worrying the air overhead. you walked awkwardly through
the long grass, waving your arms, fearing the bird might not
distinguish between fieldmouse and you. nervous, you plunged on,
the hawk joining others screaming above

“there may be as many varieties of angels as of birds.” this is
how you want to begin, a clever natural history (field angels,
sea angels) but something begins to break in, your true familiar,
memory. sullen angel who visits you late at night before
sleeping, in the interval between waking at dawn and the last,
exhausted dream. who visits in the slough of the afternoon, as
you doze over a book. you come up behind her as you write,
dogging her key by key, word by word, until she turns

but you cannot see her face, or not clearly, and you digress,
doodling through the dictionary. white angel of distraction,
black angel of spleen. green angel stinking of over-ripe cheese.
red angel flicking a fox’s tail. blue angel leaning on a

doorway, smoking

tiny bird-bellied angels swoop from the eaves,
others creak in the grass as you lift your eyes and see her
watching you, your twin angel gazing at you as you gaze, writing
as you write, her poems unfolding like children's paper
snowflakes

and you remember her hands pulling you into the light, a presence
unspeakably familiar, hands stroking your skin, feeding you.
angel of sugar, angel of milk blue as melting ice. something
shivers and cracks, you're on dangerous ground, she grows pale
and vanishes among her snowflakes

white letters, darkened rooms. you press save,
turn off the machine and in the sudden silence hear crickets,
their broken song

3

First lesson

Wishing himself dead, Elijah said, "It is enough," and slept. But the angel wasn't having any of it, hauled him up and barked, "Eat," pointing to a cake baked on hot stones, a jar of water. Elijah ate and drank reluctantly, curled up with a great sigh to sleep. But the angel slapped him out of it, ordered him to eat again. His gorge rising, Elijah forced down another cake, more water, and stumbled off on his journey (forty long days and nights) to Horeb, mountain of God. The angel absentmindedly pointing the way

Homily

Now why do angels so often appear in sleep, or on the feathered edge of sleep? Silvered, iridescent, they might seem to be mere creatures of the dreaming brain, delicious disturbances of the electric aura, subtle emanations (rose, honeysuckle) of the erotic lobes. But no, oh no they are *real* — fireflies, ardent spirits pursuing us, weaving their luminous envelope around us. Angels stand glowing at the crossroads of life, beckoning to each of us: in our lesson, the angel draws the prophet inward, into the most intimate recesses of the soul; and so does the "still small voice" of God whisper to us when, deep in the night, we reach Horeb, and surrender to the mighty wind, the earthquake, and the fire. As well, Yahweh's lovely messengers bring us

spiritual food, which we refuse to our great loss. Elijah's angel offers him a simple cake, but this cake, too, is spiritual nourishment. "Take, eat, this is my body": can we not hear our Lord's tempting words when the angel invites Elijah to eat not one but two sweet cakes baked on hot stones? Is there not, then, a foreshadowing of "Drink this, all of you," the chalice of precious blood still, here, a jar of pure water that quenches the prophet's thirst, cools his swollen tongue? Like Elijah, we need this divine sustenance, this manna, if we are to walk forth, day by weary day, on our own journeys, our forty days and forty nights in the bleak desert, watching, waiting for messengers, those dark raptors, oh! coming after

Silent reflection

eat me drink me mmmm alice's little seed cake bottle of cordial
tasting of toffee, turkey and hot buttered toast falling asleep
she fell down a rabbit hole a bossy white angel with pink eyes
waistcoat and a pocket watch was her undoing

"angel at the

crossroads" who or what *was* that by my bed the other night as I
lay half-asleep he's right about the erotic lobes faint scent of
rose skin like silk or is it milk I dreamed of eating at a table
laden with fruit biting into kumquats figs the apricots had a
slight tang or was it a first whiff of rot I ate and ate till I
was ready to burst woke up feeling sick and that scent, stale,
still in the air

and on to our journey in the wilderness
etcetera Elijah's jar of cool water didn't Christ say I thirst
I remember as a child dipping my paintbrush into a jar of fresh

water turning it pink or blue or green after a while a brown
sludge but before that in the newness of the colours I would
paint angels their hems and wings wet touched with light

white morning sheer curtains gust out
 writing, you are drawn to devotions
 contemplation hungry for form, its spacious rooms
 angels floating, rapt, in the corridors

this is the poem, thinking her face indistinct
 stippled with half-shadow, sun
 as one, waking from the dead, said
 to the woman do not touch me, I am not yet
 home the poem is only half-born
 emerging from the tomb, blue light of desire

on the other side of music
 on the other side of sleep a fine rain falls
 wetting eyelash, pale cheek you move to touch
 her face, it is your face new
 yet utterly familiar

milk, breath skin brushing skin
 a pause slow love, its wet caress
 the child smiles in the loveliness
 and her face bends closer, wondering

as he said to the woman go, tell the others
so you kiss her face turn
and enter the form that house
you have been building, always, within you
preparing a place for the others