

# Professor Einstein's Living Proof (an excerpt)

by Yasmin Elaine Waring

## Light

*"I can escape the feeling  
of complicity in it only  
by speaking out."*

The professor arrives on time, sockless. The former a sign of his polite upbringing. The latter, his lack of pretense and high comfort quotient. His ankles bared as he steps from the backseat of a pea green four-door Packard convertible. The touring sedan a reluctant perk for the modest old man. Wearing a shapeless sack coat with a Peter Pan collar and no lapels, his hair glowing translucent in the noonday sun is neatly combed—to the disappointment of some anticipating wild locks that mimic an electro-magnetic field. The professor is ushered outside into a garden that may have resembled Gethsemane, the Hall having overflowed capacity. Wearing the robes of a gushing faculty member too happy to share his regalia with the most famous scientist in the world who has touched down on this small university to discuss more than the physical relativity problem. "My trip to this institution was in behalf of a worthwhile cause. There is a

separation of colored people from white people in the United States. That separation is not a disease of colored people. It is a disease of white people. I do not intend to be quiet about it." There are children present. His eyes rest on a little girl with thick braids and skin the color of *printen*, a German gingerbread. After, waiting her turn to shake the hand of the man with the strange accent, he bends down close to whisper in her ear. His white hair reminds her of Moses from her Sunday school picture books. "Don't remember anything that is written down," he says. She replies to his riddle, "I like my stories better too." The professor is overcome with laughter. Eight years later, when *Brown v. Board of Education* is unanimously decided, a year before his springtime death, he will remember the gingerbread girl, and the Emperor Robeson in their anti-lynching crusades, and the dismissal of Du Bois' false indictment when he volunteered as a witness. For the last leg of his Lincoln trip, the professor is escorted to a small classroom. Nervous students wait, forming a narrow arc around an empty blackboard dusty with the remains of proofs and quadratic equations. Taking a chalk stub from his pocket, he starts to write on the board. He stops. Dropping the chalk, he faces the room. An immutable law of physics apparent: darker colors absorb more light. His class is radiant. The professor opens with a question, "Are there physically preferred states of motion in nature?" Several hands shoot up simultaneously. He picks the

gentleman with the bow tie in the first row,  
leaning forward to hear his response.

--For my father, Joseph Henry Waring, the mathematician

