

Angelic

by Yvette Wielhouwer Managan

Remembering his body makes me think of Egyptian cotton sheets dried in the sun. He smelled crisp and clean even after sweating hard. His hair fell in golden spirals down his cheeks, his back, over his forehead, and captured light just like the gilded halos on fourteenth century Madonna and Child paintings. His blue eyes were those of a small boy at the beach who watches waves curl around sand dunes for the first time. His hairless skin glowed cool and white when I painted him. He collected moonlight and held it under his flesh until I needed to see it and then it exploded out of him and nearly blind me. I could not put it on the canvas although I tried. Lord how I tried.

I met him in High School. He was my best friend's brother and should have been off limits. He was fashionable and soft spoken. He held the world in his hand, ran his delicate fingers over its mountains and dampening his palms with the oceans. His artwork was lively yet not inspired. His name was Carl and he left me breathless. When we met behind the band shell in Central Park, behind his sister's back, we touched tenderly and then without control. He'd whisper, "Come ride your chariot. I will take you to the heavens," and off we'd go.

I was tall and geeky, hid under oversized smocks. When he sculpted my form, he said I glowed. He kindled a fire within me. It spread and we met in secret to quell that burn, under cover of the shrubs that skirt the lake in Central Park. It only burned more brightly. We met and singed ourselves for years. We met through marriage and divorce, through heartbreak and death. Wrapped up in our lives, we'd vacation in each other. We met through seasons, and we met in the woods behind the carousel. I'd wrap my legs around his thighs

and he'd wrap his arms around my back. "Come ride your Chariot. I will take you to the heavens," he whispered, and off we'd go.

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On a New Year's Day, we met at Times Square, with Carl's sister and John, the man who'd just broken my heart. Carl's spiral curls had darkened and were shorter. Small hairs escaped from the white skin off his cheeks. He fidgeted under the sodium lights and stepped side-to-side, over the previous night's fallen streamers and confetti. I searched his face, tried to meet his eyes but they floated around me, a buoy in rough seas. Carl's sister moved closer to John. We'd planned to see a movie, but suddenly I wasn't in the mood.

"I'd rather walk through the Park," I said and looked toward dry trees beyond the stone fence. A cold wind picked up strands of my hair, taking them with it, and pulled me away toward the darkening park, with its leafless branches and blazing memories. "I'll walk with you," Carl said. "I don't want to see it either." John and Carl's sister joined hands, turned away, and walked into the theater. Carl and I watched them until the doors slammed shut, then we wandered into the Park. To the band shell, I thought, as I laced hot fingers through his. He looked at me, said, "Tonight I am a bad god," and he slapped his cheek, leaving a mark that blazed for minutes.

He said it again. "Tonight I am a bad god." He raised his hand to strike. I stopped his movement with my palm.

"No Carl. What are you doing?"

"The salad has roaches in it." he replied.

I dropped my jaw and held his hands. Carl looked to the sky. The birds were silent. Clouds hid the newly rising stars. Carl dropped his gaze to our clasped hands, sighed, and wiggled his fingers. He

pulled his from mine and walked away. I shivered. All traces of the day were gone. In darkness, I walked over the small hills, round bends, to the subway station and I went home.

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Today, I stand on the corner of 72nd and Broadway, right in front of the Papaya King. A homeless man picks through the steel mesh garbage can. He opens a Burger King bag and removes a half-eaten sandwich. As he bites into it, I see his white face, almost alabaster. I find this disconcerting. The flesh should be grey but it's not. He drops his sandwich and rushes toward me, his hands outstretched. Fingers peek through holes in his gloves. His body is slender under an old army coat, many sizes too big. Ringlets bounce under a black watch cap. "You!" he shouts. "You! I know you! You are also a bad god!" and I know it's Carl. His eyes are still those of a small boy in wonder at the beach, struggling now in the roiling surf.

I turn and walk swiftly away, my face hot and red.

"Your Chariot is here!" he calls after me. "Come ride your Chariot!"

