

# A PLAGUE OF ANGELS

by  
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My house is infested with angels.  
Tiny creatures, smaller than bees,  
they swarm through my rooms  
ever since Christmas  
when they flew off the tree  
and scattered like shining sand  
into the air.

They sleep on the carpet  
and impudently ignore  
the menacing growl of the sweeper.  
I find them in my pockets  
hiding from my startled hands.  
They go through the wash  
and come out singing.

They fall out of my books,  
calling my attention  
to long-loved poems  
and old abandoned dreams.  
Here is delight, they say,  
back here, where you left it.

I have called an exterminator  
but he says his license  
doesn't permit battling angels,  
maybe I could try a bug bomb.

Here's one now, swimming in my tea.  
Have you ever swallowed an angel?  
How does a doctor explain  
wings on an ultrasound?

If only they were larger  
or presented in streams of light  
from cotton candy clouds,  
their hair sprinkled with stars  
and wearing Christmas card halos.

But this—this galactic swarming  
like golden sawdust,  
settling into my hair  
as intimate as dandruff,  
darting into my ears and whispering.

A hushed insistent sound  
like summer gathering in sycamores  
surrounds me after dark.  
I shake music from my pillowcase  
and try to get their humming  
out of my head.

Every morning I open my eyes  
and it is the first day of summer.

They have invaded my closet.  
I open the door to a dazzling cache of light,  
every mothbitten sleeve and threadbare elbow  
candidly illuminated,  
every linty pocket glowing from within.

Why have they come in here?  
Thick as ants on spilled honey  
myriads of small laughing pests  
are gathered on my oldest jacket,  
dancing wildly over the lapel pin.

They are as naked as glowworms.

You could dress an angel  
in almost anything:  
a scrap of ribbon from a birthday box,  
a rose petal,  
a strawberry leaf,  
but they find raiment shameful,  
never having gone  
beyond the innocence of Eden.

Their breasts glow like opals  
and their bodies shine  
like gold nuggets under the sun.  
When the lights are out  
they dart about my bedroom  
like fireflies in from the orchard.

You could not x-ray an angel;  
the machine would short,  
leaving black holes in the film.

This sustained high chatter  
becomes a white noise  
pleasing as summer wind chimes  
or ceaseless harness bells.

What do they discuss,  
twittering from the ceiling?  
They speak in sonatas;  
their gossip is as light  
as air blown through plum blossoms.

Do they know what discoveries  
are stirring in the earth's belly,  
what spent dust is due  
to return to its origins?

They vibrate like a harp  
but do not seem to care for  
music as we know it.

Bach and Handel make them laugh  
like children hearing something new  
and not quite explainable.

They listen for a moment  
and return to their own humming,  
rather like Philip Glass  
but imbued with memory and scent  
and understanding of infinity.

I haven't had a chance  
to observe one of them  
at close range. They don't hesitate  
to tangle themselves in my hair  
or perch on my shoulders.  
They settle like snowdrifts  
below my kitchen windows  
but won't sit still  
under a magnifying glass.

Remembering how as a child  
I caught fireflies in a jar,  
I creep upon them with a sieve,  
careful not to mash them,  
and turn it over them.

They flow through it like  
some singing liquid, laughing  
as if they have learned an enticing game.  
A tiny continuous galaxy,  
they stream through the mesh  
emerging into formations  
of shining starbursts, blinding spirals  
and brilliant, kaleidoscopic blossoms.

They don't like cobwebs.  
Yesterday I came upon one of them  
struggling like a fly on flypaper,  
trying to free himself  
from a gluey net  
by a basement window.

I unstuck him  
ever so delicately  
and wiped his wings down  
with a scented swab  
but he didn't even say thank you.  
Instead he stood in my palm  
and flew into a rage—  
no pun intended.

In a small shrill voice  
he reminded me  
that cleanliness is next to godliness  
and said I should keep a better house.  
After all, he said, you never know  
when you might entertain angels unaware.

With all due respect, I said,  
I am perfectly aware  
of this unbidden intrusion  
and anyway, I said,  
if I have the stories straight  
you are here to protect me,  
not the other way round.

Hoo hoo hoo, he laughed,  
that just shows how much you know.  
Angels are an endangered species.

Look, I said,  
if God doesn't want angels  
to fly into cobwebs  
he shouldn't put them in harm's way.  
It would be all right with me  
if he didn't make cobwebs either.

They are molting.  
Blizzards of minute feathers  
fine as dandelion down  
drift into the corners,  
cloud my vision,  
float up my nostrils.

Caught in this avalanche,  
I am a sneezing volcano.  
Laughing, they bless me  
again and again,  
their voices a chorus  
of tiny crystal bells.

One, more inquisitive than the others,  
alights on my thumb at breakfast.  
His name is Jasper.

He is deeply curious  
about the toast and marmalade  
disappearing into my mouth.  
I offer him a sweet drop  
on the end of a toothpick  
which he declines.  
Angels do not eat.  
He wants to know what I do with it  
and where does it all go?

It is awkward  
and somewhat embarrassing  
to explain body functions  
to an angel but I try.  
He is interested.  
Angels do not need toilets.

I want to know how he got his name,  
who decided to call him Jasper.  
Nobody decided, he says.  
I have always known who I am.

Is that what it is to be an angel?—  
always knowing who you are.

They have gone, and good riddance.  
There isn't much privacy  
with a houseful of angels  
tangled in your eyelashes  
and peeking into your ears.

Sometime in the night  
they faded away like late summer.  
My life has returned to normal;  
my sanity and profanity are intact.

Still, there are little things:  
Several lost buttons  
have reattached to their garments  
and the curtains dance rapturously  
even when there is no breeze.  
The bread rises without yeast.

The house is as empty as a desert.  
Silence presses on me like a vise  
except when I boil water  
and the teakettle sings *gloria, gloria*.

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