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# The Horsefly Angel

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## The Horsefly Angel

Some believe that God has the face of a man, with a beard as white as time, wrinkled eyes, and some sort of logical, calculated wisdom. They believe he has standards of good and evil, moral and immoral, beautiful and ugly and that all creatures fall into some order. Even Angels. They see Angels with feathered wings, marble lips, clean limbs, and eyes like pale-blue stars, hovering above us all, watching us, and making sure we don't outstep our mortal lines. I have different ideas about Angels because I have seen the work of one.

It was night shift in the Emergency Room of the Sebastian Beach Memorial Hospital and I was hard at work while all the nurses talked and the Doctor slept in his lounge. It didn't matter how much I did, because there was always something more to do. I cleaned bed-pans, emptied Foley catheter bags, mopped, wiped, drew-blood, gave Electrocardiograms (EKG's), took out the trash, changed the oxygen tanks, stocked rooms, and anything else the patients required or nurses demanded. My job as ER tech put me at the bottom of the mythological totem-pole. I was the hyena-face at the base of the pole, and had to laugh to keep my sanity, to keep my shoulders loose.

It was four in the morning on a Saturday in December when I met my angel. The nurses were all at the station and I was wiping down the counters. Beth was telling all the other nurses about a show she had attended on Friday at her church. It was a program called POWER LORDS, SERVANTS OF CHRIST in which huge men composed of more fat than muscle broke baseball bats, smashed wooden boards, broke concrete blocks, and exhaled into hot water bottles until they popped.

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“I couldn’t believe it when the biggest one, Big John told the audience he was still a virgin at twenty-eight years old. What faith! My husband didn’t believe him, but it doesn’t really matter if he told the truth or not because what he said will be a good influence on the kids,” Beth said.

“I think that’s just plain sad,” replied another nurse named Ron, “and you know they splinter those damn bats before they break them. And they pre-crack the concrete and weaken the water bottles with a pump.”

“Well the kids love the POWER LORDS, SERVANTS OF CHRIST, and they give them positive role models to look up to. None of them does drugs because they all take polygraph tests.”

“What about blood tests, Beth,” Ron said, “or urinalysis. How often do you see a patient come in here and get a polygraph test to find out whether or not they just shot a spoonful of heroin in their arm?”

“They do that too, I’m sure they do that too. the POWER LORDS, SERVANTS OF CHRIST . . .”

“Why can’t you just call them the POWER LORDS? Why do you always have to say the whole thing. God isn’t going to zap you with lightning or something if you leave off the last part,” Ron said, “and what about money. how does the church pay for them?”

“People make love donations into a hat. At the Friday show they got seventeen-hundred dollars for their flight expenses, food, hotels, and whatever else.”

“I think they should take that money and use it for medical research or feeding people or something more worthwhile,” Ron was saying as a truck as big and black as Texas at night pulled up in the restricted zone where only ambulances are allowed.

All the nurses got up, and I put on gloves. I didn’t know what was going to come in the door, but I was ready to work. We found no driver in the truck, although Ron said he heard a door slam shut. We had no time for scenarios. The security guards were

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woken up from the couches in the hospital lobby, the Dr. was roused, and we all went outside to have a look.

At first glance, I thought it was a small whale wrapped in a sheet, but then I saw the hooves. It was the largest horse I had ever seen. A blanket was wrapped around its ribs and someone had written "This horse was struck by lightning" in many different languages. The phrase was written in Italian, French, Spanish, English, and Portuguese. The blanket was soaked with water and the ink ran. Dr. Anaison pulled back the blanket and put a stethoscope on the dark ribs of the horse. A horsefly landed on his hand, but didn't sting him.

"He's got a rhythm, but its irregular. Let's get him inside. I'll help."

"We don't have room for horses, Dr. Anaison," Beth said, "I'm the charge nurse and this is going to look really bad for me to have a dead horse in my ER."

"Don't help me then. Go smoke a cigarette like you usually do. Go talk about God. I'm going to help this horse. Move." Dr. Anaison said.

"I'll go get a bed," I volunteered.

"Bring the portable heart monitor too, Xavier, the one with the de-fib."

We had the horse on the bed in about two minutes, and rushed him into the cardiac room. His legs were sticking out like trails of black ash left by bottle-rockets in flight. None of the nurses came in the room because Beth had advised them against it. "Beyond the call of duty," she later said. But we needed to start an I.V. and get some drugs in the horse. He was breathing too hard for his heart to keep up. Ron ran in with a razor, said something like "what the hell", shaved a patch on one of the horse's legs, and put an I.V. in. The veins on the horse were like the Nile.

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I hooked up the heart monitor as best I could and we got a rhythm, but it wasn't pretty, so Dr. Anaison grabbed the de-fibrillator pads and got ready to shock the horse.

"You're going to be a Doctor, right Xavier?" he said, "I'm going to let you do this for the sake of experience. Hold the pads about a foot apart just under his legs and I when I call clear hold on but don't touch any part of him with your body. He's going into Ventricular Fibrillation so we have to do it now."

I put the pads down and braced myself.

"Clear!" Dr. Anaison yelled. And we did it. He worked the voltage dials and I held the pads. I watched the horse stiffen each time the electricity went in. After his bout with the lightning, it seemed somehow unfair to keep shocking him.

On the third try, I saw something far beyond the natural. Just as I was pressing down the pads, I saw a horsefly on the bloody I.V. port. The horsefly was not sitting on the port, but dancing, smiling, and drinking crimson. When the shock went into the horse, the horsefly's wings lit up, an orange glow swirled around its head and unfurled like a mane between its wings; then it took off, not flying, but galloping towards the ceiling of the ER like a racehorse named LIGHTNING.

The horsefly was glowing so brightly that the nurses saw and went after it with rolled newspapers. I screamed for them to let it go while Jack Anaison told me the horse was dead. As a final effort he infused the port with a heavy duty cardiac drug, but the horse only stiffened. The flat line stayed flat. Meanwhile, Ron had captured the phosphorescent horsefly in a urinalysis cup. He handed me the cup and I took it outside. I felt like a child releasing a helium balloon when I let the horsefly go. It rose up, up----like a shooting star rewinding into stillness.

"I want to get you into med. school, Xavier," Anaison said, "because you care about life. Have you taken your MCAT yet?"

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“No.”

“When will you take it?”

“In ten days, on August seventeenth.”

“Have you taken the prep course?”

“No, its too expensive,” I said, “a thousand dollars.”

“What about a prep book?”

“No, I’ve only studied the basic sciences from textbooks.”

“I’ll buy you a book. Hell, I’ll buy you three books. Come in to the ER tomorrow night and pick them up.”

The Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT) is the bane of beautiful souls, of creative minds, of those who think in spirals instead of lines. I dreaded it because it was designed to destroy confidence and provoke fear. The questions were written like booby-traps and the material that might be covered in those questions had no bounds. I prepared as best I could.

After working a twelve hour night in the ER, I would go home and read notes as I ate breakfast. Then I would study until I passed out, sleep a few hours, get up, and start all over again. After I got four prep books from Dr. Anaison, the last ten days were even more traumatic. I put in at least twelve hours of studying a day. I didn’t mind so much the sacrifices I made of myself, but it sometimes made me physically nauseous that I was missing my sister, Lucy’s childhood at a time when she really needed a big brother. Despite my lack of time for her, she even got up at six in the morning and drove the two hours to the testing site with my mother just so she could give me a kiss on the cheek before I sat the exam.

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The testing room was as cold as an icicle in Poland. I had five sharp pencils and three bagels in my stomach. My nervous system was like a carnival without the fun. I had pains in my chest and my hands were shaking when the test proctor lifted his stopwatch high in the air, pressed the button, and said, "begin."

On the first page of the test book was the Periodic Table of Elements, which is provided as the only reference on the test. I must have spent a good five minutes staring at the symbols. Silver. Nitrogen. Carbon. Zinc. Lead. Californium. I glanced at the first section of the test and the passage was on Convex Mirrors immersed in an unknown liquid with an index of refraction greater than that of water. I felt entombed because I knew that my greatest weakness on the test was finishing all the questions in time. I had taken many practice exams and failed to finish any of them in the allotted time. The moment was overwhelmingly heavy.

I glanced back at the Periodic Table and saw a black splotch covering several of the Noble Gases. At first I thought I was losing my pupils, that one of my pupils had fallen onto the page. Then I saw the splotch rear up on its hind legs and let out a tiny roar. Or perhaps it was a buzz. I saw wings, a brilliant mane, and a glow like the Aurora Borealis in a thimble. It was my horsefly angel.

I watched as my angel danced on the Periodic Table. The horsefly's wings swelled like candle-flames and its grace was like a Mediterranean wind. My angel danced in the way a violin sings, in the way a mountain-goat grins, in the way a ballerina embraces the sea. The dance seemed to last for several centuries. I grew old and was born again. I felt like I was falling in love and I was scared.

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I looked at my watch and there were twenty-two minutes left. When I looked back at the test booklet, my angel was sitting on the letter C. of the first question, so I marked C. on the answer sheet.

The horsefly angel gave me every answer. I found out two months later that every answer was right. Right like lightning, spelled out against the sky, in all the languages of the world.