

*Angels*  
Matthew Weiss

*Prologue:*

Cooling unwashed hair,  
 the darkened eyebrows,  
 scars on her cheeks,  
 a face of skin,  
 always shifting--  
 grave, alive--  
 she knows three dozen people.

Little houses--apartments--  
 the husband waits on her--  
 life was simpler when it was arranged,  
 it was a conspiracy for the good,  
 by the smarter for the better hearted,  
 against the law.

An angel comes--  
 angels always come--  
 in groves--in stony alcoves--  
 terraces--  
 they materialize out of the cloud  
 that bursts like a squinting eye--  
 with a train--without baggage--  
 from a crowd--entering--exiting--  
 angels come, wordlessly,  
 or rather, without thinking--  
 no thoughts, no thinking,  
 no motion, but accepting--

“It will perhaps be said, that  
 the soul thinks even in the soundest sleep,  
 but the memory retains it not”--  
 like in the moment of sleep,  
 when fantasies and profusions  
 are no longer effort, but come  
 in a moving form already--  
 art--  
 and in that space, angels,  
 they're understood  
 without effort.

Daphne and Apollo, perhaps,  
 when she was desperate  
 for her life,  
 always a condition unanticipated,  
 before the names that others have used  
 suddenly align with experience--  
 even in the most arcane books  
 the soul lifts itself out--  
 a rose spreading its wings like a flower--  
 this women--her hair  
 made of bending, golden stuff--  
 not at all aged--  
 with a heart-breaking face--  
 smiles artlessly, painfully,  
 hanging on the hand  
 of her expressions--  
 there--

against the tree--  
 alone with the angel, insubstantial,  
 a rope of light,  
 but to her--  
 overpowering, embraceable--  
 this angel takes her face--  
 in his hand--  
 and presses in her cheeks--  
 this angel envelops her lips,  
 and holding her up,  
 this angel wraps her arms  
 around him,  
 fixes her hands to his shoulders,  
 illuminates the fat of her body  
 and draws from her her skin--  
 holding her--  
 clothing himself in it--  
 this angel loves her  
 unexpectedly against the tree--  
 the pollen falls on their folding skin.

Then the eternal music peaces,  
 and hears softly--  
 the angel disappears--  
 into the leaves, mass,  
 a restaurant, waiting, queued--  
 the angel departs,  
 unresisting, along a line--  
 she returns

fresh, blessed, revolting,  
 and embraces her children,  
 precious,  
 and lets her husband take her,  
 having given her everything  
 to the angel  
 who saved her.

*Next:*

This woman wakes up,  
bloating, but happy,  
in the first hour of consciousness,  
as if she were in the backseat--  
car, rain, night--  
unable to attend to anything--  
the house smells like tea tree oil.

She is submerged--  
is she anything different?--  
and watches a flock of birds  
direct themselves from far away,  
in a cloud that passes before her--  
the birds transforming into skyscrapers,  
antennae like beaks,  
winged foundations  
glitter like windows--  
they alter direction, too,  
yearning to stretch ahead,  
and leaving,  
only to be replaced by another,  
an always shifting skyline.

The essence of rebellion  
is the hunger for freedom even  
from loved ones;  
nobody knows what rebellion is,  
what isn't.

In the city she sees her angel--  
she heard about him from a friend--  
nobody else was listening--  
with a crowd of high school students  
in the United States,  
trying to get into a bar--  
this angel talks to the bouncer,  
and like a woman telling stories on a rooftop,  
without giving away herself--  
or else, giving all of herself away--  
you wouldn't have known--  
the angel tells the single joke,  
the joke that sparkles like a mystery,  
unverified,  
beyond the crescent of the attainable,  
drawing the unhappy out of the fabric they're wrapped in  
with a single cut of a fine blade--  
and all days spent in loving conversation  
were just dull attempts at hitting on it  
by reason, by chance.

Up the stairs onto the balcony,  
the woman throws  
a life-renewing,  
demonic laugh;  
the angel gets the kids in,  
climbs onto the bed,  
and carries the blankets with him,  
covering her with a coat of sleep,

like the real gentleman who gives her what she is to be,  
 even though she's all sorts of things,  
 or else, other things for other people.

There is nothing done in itself,  
     but for a woman,  
     for someone to be--  
     always an exception,  
     but rulelessly--  
 and knowing it, nevertheless,  
     a man is cut in half--  
 the angel saves his life.

Across the street,  
 getting coffee--  
 wake her up, wake her up--  
 he should be grateful;  
 the angel joins her to the intellect of God,  
 and in the light of those emanations,  
 carried like a notebook  
 in the folds of her coat,  
 he has another chance--  
 thought he lost it  
 when he heard her laugh--  
 to be good at another's life,  
 just so to come back to his own,  
 forever different, worse, or else wiser--

There is certain movement  
 in the dance of knowledge  
     and experience.

With the ease that poets dream of,  
 she intellects doubtlessly  
 the essence of her characters--  
 and like a poet encompassing  
 all his history and his people's  
 in a single verse,  
 she makes pointers,  
 monuments--  
 only the chapter headings survive--  
 the skyscraper birds,  
 the convincing guy,  
 the woman on the roof,  
 the one joke,  
 the grateful man,  
 the strong person,  
 the memorization, like stars--  
 the last when she came to self-consciousness,  
 and running again and again through her list  
 of things to remember,  
 she sees them laid out, standing in for wholes,  
 peeking out like the stars,  
 who, when night is silent,  
 see the secret loves of men,  
 and mark down their names,  
 so that when they wake up,

at the end of the revolution of their spheres,  
 they may relive all the nights  
 they have experienced,  
 or else,  
 imagined.

*Next:*

Like a few uncertain poets,  
 they knew they only had to believe in poetry  
 itself to live, but it was a matter of habit,  
 of how they were raised--why they liked books,  
 being dark magicians, growing huge enough  
 to eat all the brains of their school-mates--  
 that they did *that* in particular; but *that's* enough,  
 to live.

To write poetry, however, you had to really believe;  
 and the more you read, the harder it is to believe anything--  
 paradoxically, since everyone's talking about the same thing--  
 in truth, sometimes moments of disorientation would occur,  
 when the weirdness of everything would manifest itself,  
 but most often the weirdness was caged up  
 by a thorough-going, yet reasonable  
 distrust of the workings of human mind--  
 sometimes they wanted to study it,  
 how half the world takes pleasure in pleasure,  
 seeking it, indeed, loving it,  
 and how the other half despises itself  
 for taking pleasure in something so obvious,  
 especially since, where do you draw the line?  
 especially since, one's always teetering on the edge  
 of pleasure now, pleasure later,  
 or the pleasure of getting to the bottom of the mystery  
 of the weirdness of everything being here  
 (in general, if you know what I mean)

and the displeasure at the enormity of the task  
 and the discouraging fact that, whereas for many years  
 poets had assumed they were discovering,  
 they were really creating,  
 at the same time that their counterparts, the scientists,  
 made it quite clear that no one should trust anything  
 in their own heads,  
 since experience can't tell you  
 anything about how it works,  
 or what it *is*,  
 which, you must admit,  
 was a fair point--  
 although poets had probably always known it,  
 but at least had a bit of doubt on the matter--  
 hence the value of the soul,  
 which everyone admitted  
 nobody knew anything about,  
 but which was regarded as *holy*, that is,  
 whatever it was, it wasn't dismissed--  
 these days one generally chooses a life of pleasure,  
 or of research, and it's difficult to reconcile the two,  
 if you are the sort of person who wants everything  
 to cohere inside--  
 either you cozy up in your own mind,  
 comfortably dismissing the prospect of discovery--  
 we would have found it by now!--  
 or else spend most of your time trying to escape it--  
 the mind, or minds in general;  
 so you can see it was much easier

back when when experience could be *trusted*--  
 in the same way, these runaway poets  
 knew that poetry was all their own value,  
 and knew at the same time that knowing  
 that fact made it impossible to write poetry,  
 since poetry has to believe in itself,  
 not the poets--  
 and so they would rip themselves in two  
 just to sit down and write,  
 forget half their lives just to expect a line,  
 since everything they felt had been thought around,  
 and what was worth thinking was unclear--  
 by the way,  
 this is not one of those stories,  
 in which what people feel  
 turns out to be right all along--  
 all of it's very stupid--  
 and yet, how many nights,  
 the sounds of an ancient city outside,  
 the dawn breaking against the holy roofs,  
 women taking wishes from the Wailing Wall,  
 wishing not for something  
 but that something,  
 that the beautiful man  
 in his late eighties  
 from elsewhere  
 but having seen the blocks of his life  
 rearranged into the rainbows of Paul Klee  
 and the gutted, overhanging terraces

of the city of Tel Aviv,  
 where on the beach  
 this man would sometimes walk,  
 wrapped up in his grey robes,  
 his beard like glossy wire  
 against the sweat of his face,  
 his book in his pocket,  
 eating hardboiled eggs,  
 one after another,  
 forgetting to read,  
 but his face unchecked,  
 breaking into the mystery  
 that rises and leaves  
 from the eyes of other people,  
 like the stained glass windows  
 of a man like Chagall,  
 but hiding his own face  
 with a fold  
 when an overdressed poet  
 (for the weather)  
 tried to take a picture of him,  
 twice,  
 and left him penetrating into the horizon  
 imagining he could see  
 just the tips of Barcelona,  
 where his daughter,  
 born in the United States,  
 very tall and flat,  
 with a face that hung

on his own expressions,  
 was married to a Spaniard,  
 much more rugged than she,  
 and was kissing him  
 in their apartment  
 by the beach  
 that, with a smile  
 as if which concealed a secret,  
 she boasted about  
 kindly  
 to her students,  
 teaching graduate classes  
 in Comparative Literature,  
 where an academic  
 could believe in the work  
 even as they believed more  
 in the life that runs through it--  
 poetry teaches the wrong lesson,  
 but to the right people--  
 every woman wanted to hold his hand,  
 large and serious  
 and sit atop his belly  
 while he allowed it  
 and watch him from behind the screen  
 that separated them  
 from the men who were dancing  
 to the prayers beyond it,  
 and later loving them,  
 as they argued about the best way,



since all of it  
 was an excuse for a loving argument,  
 like all the best things,  
 all sorts of centering distractions,  
 and grounds for sharing memories,  
 and reliving the past,  
 but not merely in images,  
 but with a commentary of thought,  
 since for pleasure to be perfect  
 all faculties of the soul  
 but alight with interest,  
 and the body must align  
 with the imagination,  
 the imagination  
 with reason,  
 and the very hanging lights  
 on the screen of the brain  
 must dance in a global pattern--  
 it all sounds very stupid--  
 and yet, the poets dreamed  
 of women dreaming about men  
 or else other men,  
 and were enraptured by the doubt,  
 whether images  
 conquered the fear of abstraction,  
 which itself is an abyssal unknown,  
 or whether the face of the unknown,  
 abstraction, contained the comforting eyes  
 of something containable,

that real life would always break  
 into the pieces of disappointment--  
 where are our disappointments manufactured?--  
 and whether they would have been happier  
 if they had inherited a market stall  
 from the time of Jesus  
 standing under the same stone overpass  
 beside the same stone ramparts  
 carrying the same lovely trinkets,  
 ushering people in,  
 from where they sit  
 at the threshold,  
 smoking cigarettes,  
 watching people's faces--  
 the real ones--  
 or whether happiness was the thing  
 at all--  
 we've covered that already.  
 Like all real poets, they came to the Holy Land  
 to be disappointed.  
 Like all real men, they wanted to be angels,  
 for the bus crash,  
 in which they would keep their hands outstretched,  
 the whole time,  
 through the windshield,  
 through the air,  
 to the ground,  
 hands scraping against the pavement--  
 they would run through it again and again

in their minds,  
 they would have the presence to keep their hands  
 always outstretched,  
 a kind of intuition,  
 a sacrifice,  
 so that, their hands mangled,  
 they would be preserved,  
 as they crashed into the car of the woman,  
 the woman seen on the roof,  
 on the beach,  
 in the bathroom,  
 in the party of the mind's eye,  
 whom they could lean against  
 and heal,  
 even as they knew two things:  
 that they were not angels,  
 that they couldn't love just anybody.

*Last:*

That skinny girl  
 her bodied envied by her sisters  
 lived through the crash  
 to go out into the woods  
 where she called herself  
 Indian Girl  
 carrying along behind her  
 a little cart with pine cones--  
 she knew how to live.

Once she knew how to live  
 and she had the means,  
 she refused to sacrifice  
 any decision  
 to the law.

When the means were around,  
 no sense in setting limits,  
 but to act rightly,  
 instead,  
 never sacrifice yourself  
 when you have the means.

Always right and wrong, the girl,  
 and like all quiet revolutionaries--  
 who knows what deep down she desires?--  
 principle was never unknown to practice.

and like all autodidacts,  
 she preserved herself to be surprised,  
 and when she went back to school,  
 she called her son on the phone,  
 the weirdness encountered,  
 to ask about the sacrifice, in fact--  
*"In the final calcuation, every innovator works for inertia, every  
 revolution is produced for a canon."*--  
 that every life is always orgainzing itself  
 between now and later,  
 and what is a joy  
 can just as a friend  
 become a stranger--  
 can you do both of everything?--

Her son, having vowed  
 never to masturbate  
 after the day of his Bar Mitzvah--  
 I think he did it that night--  
 had known a porn star,  
 with an interesting story:  
 that she was a psych major  
 at UVA, perhaps,  
 very serious student,  
 who for a little cash,  
 started dancing on tables--  
 this was not unknown--  
 but one day she fell off the table  
 onto the floor--

she hit her head--  
 never went to the hospital--  
 slept it off--  
 but a few weeks later,  
 she dropped out of school,  
 got implants,  
 moved to Miami,  
 took a name,  
 went into porn--  
 she had a monumental face,  
 not at all delicate,  
 nor was her body,  
 exactly shaped,  
 but she let herself  
 get shaped--  
 every one wants some to be there,  
 just to be reached out a grabbed,  
 that is, held,  
 whether in the morning sweaty  
 warmth of a bed in pajamas,  
 when the window is open,  
 and coolness keeps you together,  
 or else, in a frantic state,  
 deadly afraid  
 of now or later--  
 what is the value of a human life?--  
 she was good at being matter,  
 she was good at form,  
 just like a middle school girl, who,

worried for herself,  
 suggests on a worksheet  
 that she might be a secretary  
 since the typing software told her,  
     good at typing.  
 Who made up the story?  
     Was it her?  
 Or was it calculated to arouse  
     those certain ones aroused  
 by the backstories on porn sites,  
 or do those who write these stories  
     never calculate,  
     but intuit the basis for arousal?  
 Would it be the same if she hadn't fallen,  
 if no one mentioned the knock on the head?

There is nothing different,  
 one begins to believe,  
 nothing that can't be changed  
 by a knock on the head,  
 a knock against a tree,  
 by an angel,  
 or a man perpetrating  
 the life of an angel--  
 they are all around us,  
 unmanifest,  
 although the desire for them--  
 even unknown, even in sleep,  
 lessens at times.

We wait unknowingly,  
 even as we know we wait:  
 we can't see what we need to see;  
 if we did, we'd never see it.

We wait for angels to come  
 and draw the expressions  
 hanging by our face,  
 and show us out  
 of this running  
 to fear.