

An Advent Monologue by Walter Wangerin Jr.

I love a child.

But she is afraid of me.

I want to help this child, so terribly in need of help. For she is hungry; her cheeks are sunken to the bone; but she knows little of food, less of nutrition. I know both these things. She is cold, and she is dirty; she lives at the end of a tattered hallway, three flights up in a tenement whose landlord long forgot the human bodies huddled in that place. But I know how to build a fire; and I know how to wash a face.

She is retarded, if the truth be told, thick in her tongue, slow in her mind, yet aware of her infirmity and embarrassed by it. But here am I, well-traveled throughout the universe, and wise, and willing to share my wisdom.

She is lonely all the day long. She sits in a chair with her back to the door, her knees tucked tight against her breasts, her arms around these, her head down. And I can see how her hair hangs to her ankles; but I cannot see her face. She's hiding. If I could but see her face and kiss it, why I could draw the loneliness out of her.

She sings a sort of song to pass the time, a childish melody, though she is a woman in her body by its shape, a swelling at her belly. She sings, "Puss, puss." I know the truth, that she is singing of no cat at all, but of her face, sadly, calling it ugly. And I know the truth, that she is right. But I am mightily persuasive myself, and I could make it lovely by my love alone.

I love the child.

But she is afraid of me.

~

Then how can I come to her, to feed and to heal her by my love? Knock on the door?
Enter the common way?

No. She holds her breath at a gentle tap, pretending that she is not home; she feels unworthy of polite society. And loud, imperious bangings would only send her into shivering tears, for police and bill collectors have troubled her in the past.

And should I break down the door? Or should I show my face at the window? Oh, what terrors I'd cause then. These have happened before. She's suffered the rapings of kindless men, and therefore she hangs her head, and therefore she sings, "Puss."

I am none of these, to be sure. But if I came the way that they have come, she would not know me different. She would not receive my love, but might likely die of a failed heart.

I've called from the hall. I've sung her name through cracks in the plaster. But I have a bright trumpet of a voice, and she covers her ears and weeps. She thinks each word an accusation.

I could, of course, ignore the doors and walls and windows, simply appearing before her as I am. I have that capability. But she hasn't the strength to see it and would die. She is, you see, her own deepest hiding place, and fear and death are the truest doors against me.

Then what is left? How can I come to my beloved? Where's the entrance that will not frighten nor kill her? By what door can love arrive after all, truly to nurture her, to take the loneliness away, to make her beautiful, as lovely as my moon at night, my sun come morning?

~

I know what I will do.

I'll make the woman herself my door-and by her body enter in her life.

Ah, I like that. I like that. However could she be afraid of her own flesh, of something lowly underneath her ribs?

I'll be the baby waking in her womb. Hush: she'll have the time, this way, to know my coming first before I come. Hush: time to get ready, to touch her tummy, touching the promise alone, as it were. When she hangs her head, she shall be looking at me, thinking of me, loving me while I gather in the deepest place of her being. It is an excellent plan! Hush.

And then, when I come, my voice shall be so dear to her. It shall call the tenderness out of her soul and loveliness into her face. And when I take milk at her breast, she'll sigh and sing another song, a sweet Magnificat, for she shall feel important then, and worthy, seeing that another life depends on hers. My need shall make her rich!

Then what of her loneliness? Gone. Gone in the bond between us, though I shall not have said a word yet. And for my sake she shall wash her face, for she shall have a reason then.

And the sins that she suffered, the hurts at the hands of men, shall be transfigured by my being: I make good come out of evil; I am the good come out of evil.

I am her Lord, who loves this woman.

And for a while I'll let her mother me. But then I'll grow. And I will take my trumpet voice again, which once would kill her. And I'll take her, too, into my arms. And out of that little room, that filthy tenement, I'll bear my mother, my child, alive forever.

I love a child.

But she will not fear me for long, now.

Look! Look, it is almost happening. I am doing a new thing- and don't you perceive it? I am coming among you, a baby.

And my name shall be Emmanuel.

Ragman: And Other Cries of Faith (1987) © Walter Wangerin Jr.