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Beautiful Boys

Francesca Lia Block

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Angel Juan and I walk through a funky green fog. It smells like hamburgers and jasmine. We don't see anybody, not even a shadow behind a curtain in the tall houses. Like the fog swirled in through all the windows, down the halls, up the staircases, into the bedrooms and took everybody away. Then fog beasties breathed clouds onto the mirrors, checked out the bookshelves, sniffed at the refrigerator—whispering. We hear one playing drums in a room in a tower.

Angel Juan stops to listen, slinking his shoulders to the beat. “Not as good as you,” he says.

I play an imaginary drum with imaginary sticks. I am writing a new song for him in my head.

He sees something on the other side of a wall and

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picks me up. I feel his arms hard against the bottom of my ribs. Jungle garden. Water rushes. Dark house. Bright window. A piano with the head of Miss Nefertiti-ti on top.

“You look like her,” he says. “Your eyes and your skinny flower-stem neck.”

“But she doesn’t have my snarl-ball hair or my curly toes.” My toes curl like cashew nuts.

He puts me down and messes up my messy hair the way he used to do when we were little kids. Before he ever kissed me.

A black cat with a question-mark tail follows us for blocks. He has fur just like Angel Juan’s hair. Angel Juan crouches down to stroke him and I stroke Angel Juan. We are all three electric in the fog. The cat keeps following us. I hear him wailing for a long time after he disappears into the wet cloud air. Angel Juan has one arm around me and is holding my inside hand with his outside hand. It is our brother grip. We are bound together. My outside hand is at his skinny hips, quick and sleeky-sleek like a cat’s hips. I could put one finger into the change pocket of his black Levi’s.

I want to take his photograph with his hand at the

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cat's throat, his eyes closed, feeling the purr in his fingers. I want to take his picture naked in the fog.

The shiny brown St. John's bread pods crack open under our feet and their cocoa smell makes me dizzy and hungry.

Then Angel Juan stops walking. It's so quiet. Nothing moves. There's a shiver in the branches like a cat's spine when you stroke it. The green druggy fog.

I remember the first time he ever kissed me. I mean really kissed me. We had just finished a gig with our band The Goat Guys and he put his hands on my shoulders. His hair was slicked back and it gleamed, his lips were tangy and his fingers were callusy and we were both so sweaty that we stuck together. Our eyelashes brushed like they would weave together by themselves turning us into one wild thing.

I say, "I think I missed you before I met you even."

"Witch Baby," he says. He never calls me that. Niña Bruja or Baby or Lamb but never Witch Baby. I start to feel a little sick to my stomach. Queased out. Angel Juan's eyes look different. Like somebody else's eyes stuck in his head. Why did I say that about missing him? I never say clutchy stuff like that.

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“I’m going to New York.”

New York. We were going to go there. We were going to play music on the street. What is he saying? He just told me I looked like Nefertiti. He just had his arms around me in our brother grip.

“You’re always taking pictures of me and writing songs for me but that’s not me. That’s who you make up. And in the band. I feel like I’m just backing up the rest of you. I’ve got to play my own music.”

“Just go do it with her,” I say.

“There’s no her. I don’t even feel like sex at all. Nothing feels safe.”

For the last few weeks we’ve been snuggling but that’s about it. I’ve been telling myself it’s just because Angel Juan’s been tired from working so much at the restaurant.

“But we’ve only ever been with us.”

“Do we want to be together just because we think it’s safer? I need to know about the world. I need to know me.”

Safer? I’ve never even thought of that.

My heart is like a teacup covered with hairline cracks. I feel like I have to walk real carefully so it

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won't get shaken and just all shatter and break.

But I start to run anyway. I run and run into the fog before Angel Juan can go away.

By the time I get back to the house with the antique windows, I feel the jagged teacup chips cutting me up. I go into the dark garden shed. The doglet Tiki-Tee who has soul-eyes like Angel Juan's and likes to cuddle in the bend of my knees at night whimpers and skulks away when he sees me. Skulkster dog. I must look like a beastly beast with a cracked teacup for a heart. I lie on the floor listening for the broken sound inside like when you shake your thermos that fell on the cement.

We used to lie here hugging with a balloon between us. Angel Juan's body floating on the balloon, his body shining through its skin. Then the balloon popped and we giggled and screamed falling into each other, all the sadness inside of us gone into the air.

All over the walls are pictures I took of Angel Juan. Angel Juan plays his bass—eyelash-shadow, mouth-pout, knee-swoon. Angel Juan kisses the sky. Angel Juan the blur does hip-hop moves. There's

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even one of us together in Joshua Tree standing on either side of our cactus Sunbear. It's like Sunbear's our kid or something. We're holding hands behind him. You can see our grins under our suede desert hats and our skinny legs in hiking boots. I never let anybody take my picture unless it's Angel Juan or I'm with Angel Juan. If you saw this picture you'd probably think that Angel Juan Perez and Witch Baby Secret Agent Wigg Bat will be together forever. They will build an adobe house with a bright-yellow door in a desert oasis and play music with their friends all night while the coyotes howl at the moon. That's what you'd think. You'd never think that Angel Juan would go away.

That's why I like photographs.

And that's why I hate photographs.

I want to smash the lens of my camera. I want to smash everything.

When I feel like this I play my drums. But I don't want to play my drums. I want to smash my drums. So I'll never write or play another song for Angel Juan. "Angel Boy," "Funky Desert Heaven," "Cannibal Love." I wish I could smash the songs and the feel-

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ings the way you smash a camera lens or put your fist through the skin of a drum.

Some native Americans believe that the drum is the heart of the universe. What happens to the rest of something when you smash its heart?

Then I hear a noise outside and my heart starts going to the beat of “Cannibal Love.” It’s him. It’s him. Him. Him. Him. Hymn.

“Witch Baby,” he whispers on the other side of the door. I don’t say anything.

“I still love you,” he says. “I’m sorry.” His voice sounds different, like somebody else is inside of him using his voice.

I don’t move. It’s hard to breathe. Afraid the broken pieces cutting.

“Let me in,” he says. “Please. I leave tomorrow.”

I sit up like electric shocked. I start ripping the pictures of Angel Juan off my walls. Tomorrow.

“Go away now!” I growl, shredding the picture of us in the desert, shredding Angel Juan. Shredding myself.

After all the pictures are gone I slam my arms against the wall of the shed again, again, and crumple

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down into a shred-bed of eyes and mouths and bass guitars and cactus needles. I am not going to let myself cry.

When I wake up I reach for him—his hair crisp against my lips, his hot-water-bottle heat. I crawl clawing and sliding over the torn photographs to the door. Out in the empty garden it is already tomorrow.

I don't go to school. I lie in the bed of ruined pictures for hours. The shed is dark. Smells of soil and sawdust. Blue and yellow sunflower bruises bloom on my arms.

I remember the time when I was a kid and I first met the little black-haired boy named Angel Juan. He was the first person that made me feel I belonged—like I wasn't just some freaky pain-gobbling goblin nobody understood. Then he had to go back to Mexico with his parents, Marquez and Gabriela Perez, and his brothers and sisters, Angel Miguel, Angel Pedro, Angelina and Serafina. I didn't see him for years. But it was okay. I had myself. I knew that I could feel things. Not just smashing anger and loneliness. But

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love too. It was inside of me. And then on my birthday a few years later Angel Juan came back.

Now it's different because he doesn't *have* to go away. He wants to. And also we've done it—the wild love thing. So I feel like I need him to put me back together every night. After his kisses and hugs it feels like without them my body will fall apart into pieces.

I get up and take the shoe boxes out from under the bed. They are filled with newspaper clippings I used to have on my walls—before Angel Juan. “Whales Die in Toxic Waters.” “Beautiful Basketball God Gets Disease.” “Family Burned in Gas Explosion.” “Murderer Collects Victims’ Body Parts.” Even after Angel Juan I cut them out when we had a fight or something but I'd always hide them under my bed. Pictures of all the pain I could find. A pain game.

“What a world!” says the Wicked Witch in *The Wizard of Oz* before she melts.

The only way I used to be able to stand being in this world was to hold it in my hands, in front of my eyes. That way I thought—it can't get me or something. But when I had Angel Juan I only wanted to touch and see *him*. He was the only way I've ever

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really been able to escape.

Now it's the pain game again.

Night.

Across the garden my family is together eating vegetarian lasagna, edible flower salad and fruit-juice-sweetened apple pie. They are laughing in the beeswax candlelight, talking about the next movie they are going to make and looking out over the ruins of the magician's castle through stained-glass flowers. I wonder if they wonder where I am. They probably think I'm having a picnic at the beach in the back of Angel Juan's red pickup truck. Or maybe by now they all know that Angel Juan is gone. Maybe he told them before me.

There is a knock on my door.

It's him. He's back. I made this whole thing up. He is here with his pickup truck full of blankets and Fig Newtons for a moonlight picnic.

But then I hear my almost-mom Weetzie Bat's voice.

"Honey-honey," she says. "Aren't you going to eat tonight?"

I don't move. It's like I'm a statue of me.

Weetzie opens the door slow. I didn't lock it this

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morning. Should have. She's carrying the lamp shaped like a globe that I gave to my dad a long time ago. She plugs it in and the world lights up.

Weetzie looks around at the torn-up pictures of Angel Juan and the scattered newspaper clippings. Then she sits down next to me on the floor. The blue oceans make her shine.

Suddenly remember. Lifted into the light. Somebody playing piano. Vanilla-gardenia. Weetzie's white-gold halo hair. It's the day I was left in a basket on the doorstep and Weetzie found me like those changeling things in stories, the ones that fairies leave in baskets, strange kids with some mark on them or the wrong color eyes. My eyes are purple. In a way I want Weetzie to lift me up into the light again. But more I want to sink back into the darkness where I came from. I want to drown under the newspaper pain and the shreds of Angel Juan.

"Go away," I growl at Weetzie. But she knows me too well by now. And I feel too old and weak to bite and scratch the way I did when I was a little kid before Angel Juan came. So she just sits there with me not touching, not talking for a long time. I wonder if she can see the bruises on my arms.

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Finally she says, “I wanted to bring you something magic that would make everything okay.” She must have already heard about Angel Juan. “But now I know that magic’s not that simple. I wish I could give you a lamp with a genie in it to make all your wishes come true. But you’re a genie. Your own genie. Just believe in that.”

Supposedly a long time ago Weetzie wished on her genie lamp and that’s how she met my dad and how her best friend Dirk McDonald met his true love Duck Drake and how they all ended up living together. Weetzie thinks life’s so slinkster-cool as she would say because all her wishes came true.

But right now I don’t believe in that magic crap. I don’t believe in anything. All I want is to find Angel Juan.

“I want to go to New York,” I say. My voice sounds gritty. My throat hurts like my voice is made of broken glass.

“To find him or to find you?” Weetzie asks.

Why is she asking me stuff like this like she thinks she knows so much? I want her to leave me alone.

I look at the globe lamp. If somebody said to me,