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The Seduction of Yahu-El Betshintav

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Abstract

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Additional Keywords

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THE SEDUCTION OF YAHU-EL

BETSHINTAV

by David Sparenberg



Recently an angel of heaven descended to earth. She was not one of the fiery *seraphim*. Nor was she an androgynous angel, an *ofan*. Her name was Yahu-El BetShinTav and her origin was among a lesser order of the heavenly hosts.

In her earthly guise, Yahu-El was tall and slender, it being a matter of some difficulty for an angel to bear too much physical weight. She had large, brown eyes, reminiscent of a young deer. Her silken hair, dropping straight to the small of her back, was the color of Oriental ink. Her complexion was the color of dark brown sugar and her face conveyed a captivating blend of sensuality and refinement.

Outwardly, Yahu-El was a remarkably beautiful woman. Her only flaw--and this an invisible one--was the extraordinarily large opening in the bone plates at the top of her skull, from which an incessant flow of energy issued, linking her life with the worlds above.

Angels, as is widely understood, possess no individual knowledge beyond that with which providence provides their specific rank. Hence, with the exception of the Ancient of Days and those towering, formidable archangels who come before the throne of glory, they do not have our human sense of contemporary history. Angels live instead in the dimension of mythical time, fixated on the mysteries of the beginning and the end, forever reenacting some sacred ritual or drama.

(It is because of this mode of temporal appreciation that angels and earlier generations of mankind were so intimately involved. As it is written in the beloved Torah: "It was then, and later, too, when the *nephilim* appeared on earth--when the divine beings cohabited with the daughters of men, who bore them offspring. They were the heroes of old, the men of renown." The significance of which is to teach us that the antediluvian heroes, as well as the later great ones in the house of Israel, were giants of the spirit. They had learned to understand and activate the angelic portion of the human soul.)

Notwithstanding this deeper but more delimiting nature of experience, all angels have a distinctive sensibility toward issues of justice and injustice. It was this latter faculty, in fact, with its measure of independent speculation, subtly attuned, like the balances of a jeweler's scales, that permitted Yahu-El to decide in favor of her earthly visit.

Initially the idea presented itself in a dream, as a sort of shadow, whose slender voice whispered seductively in her inner ear. As the dream recurred, in that special way angels have of dreaming when the dream becomes lifelike, as if it were a wish instantly embodied, Yahu-El felt compelled to confide in others of this peculiar yearning, haunting her intellect and heart.

"Hush, El BetShinTav!" she was cautioned. "It is not wise to give every strange thought a nest to roost in. Or every stray bird a voice with which to sing."

Whenever she persisted in presenting her case, the rebuttal was always: "El BetShinTav! Do you need to be reminded of our brother, Lucifer, once the brightest among us? How he fell, with so vast a multitude in his wake, like a huge comet dragging its heavy tail ten thousand miles behind it! Would you be of that kind?" she was questioned with stern rebuke. Then she dropped her head, abashed.

No, Yahu-El did not need such dreadful warnings. The very mention of Lucifer was enough to make her shudder. And yet, for all of her powerful dread of going astray, the dream insistently pursued her.

Over and over it presented itself as a hazy, elongated figure, who held in her cupped hands a shining blue sphere. From this miniature replica of earth a hundred billion small, symphonic sounds arose, bleeding into a single note of invitation and longing. This plaintive tone, swelling up from the spinning ball balanced in the fingers of the contoured fog, poured into the young angel's head; sometimes like sweet, sorrowful weeping, sometimes like a storm of complaint.

What was Yahu-El to think? Her piety concluded that this vision, as with all else in her angelic world, came as a strong message from God.

So it happened that one summer's evening, as the sun was disappearing behind the Pacific rim, the heavenly dweller, Yahu-El BetShinTav, swam down on a late fading ray of sunlight. And her virgin feet for the first time touched the body of *adama*, earth, planet of the race of Adam.

From the beginning, Yahu-El was offended by the world of men. Not nature, which in many respects was still beautiful, even modestly heavenlike, but the destructive works which men had made affronted her every sensibility.

There were the nightmarish impressions of so many sprawling, crowded urban centers, slithering with artificial glamor and crime, panting arrogantly under dense clouds of industrial pollution. The waterways choking with toxic waste. The disruption of so many vulnerable life forms. The unnatural diseases, breeding off the unnaturalness of human self-sufficiency. And the domination of the planet by an irreverent will toward exploitation and defeat.

Yet as genuinely horrendous as these external features were, they only served to inform her angelic intellect--which an angel experiences with every modicum of energy her identity possesses--that, by the universal law of correspondences, these symptoms but pointed inward to the direful crises of the human soul.

It was in the raw and naked streets of men's cities, and in the unclean depths of men's and women's eyes, that Yahu-El encountered the causes of her greatest woundings. The vulgar and ugly circuses of violence: slander, assault, rape and murder. The despoilments of poverty. Neglect of the sick and elderly. The homelessness and prostitution of children. The addictions: drug, alcohol, varieties of hate-fostering isms, degenerating immorality, and cultural and political perversities.

But beyond all else, she was shocked by the callousness and indifference of humanity toward its own kind. To Yahu-El it seemed as though the most rudimentary mammalian instincts had been eclipsed, as if the most ordinary responses of the soul were anesthetized. (For indifference is a faculty wholly absent from the possibilities of the heavenly hosts. Each and every angel, having been created from some particular sympathy of the Ancient of Days--whether that attribute be harsh or soft, brooding or luminous--is incapable of this ultimate failing.)

During her early weeks on earth, Yahu-El BetShinTav frequently stopped strangers in the streets, complaining to them in a commonly angelic fashion. Passionately she would lament: "O how the one winged dove drips blood on these failing houses!" Or: "The blinded bride will not be wed. The wedding gifts are stained with weeping. Hush! There is mourning beyond the silver gates, wailing beyond the gold. The orchard is laid waste."

To what avail? In spite of her exceptional womanly beauty, she was thought to be mad. Our world, which Yahu-El had come into, had no authentic ears now for poetry, nor any reliable eyes for the visions of visionaries, whether angels or prophets.

From day to day and week to week, Yahu-El noticed herself lapsing with increasing frequency into a peculiar, puzzling reticence. She was, in fact, becoming much like the fabled Diogenes who, silent and lantern in hand, wandered through old Athens in search of an honest man.

On a damp, autumnal night, while she walked along a dirty, urban street past a blackened alleyway, a voice urgently called out behind her. "You there, sister! I know you!"

Turning slowly, Yahu-El saw a besotted, middle-aged man stepping hurriedly under the beam of the nearest street-lamp. At first she thought she was only looking at another of the innumerable, emaciated souls subsisting pointlessly in the thoroughfares of the world's big cities; but her attention was captivated by the distinctively twisted, ashen hue of this individual's face.

The man leered at her, his bloodshot, yellowed eyes filled with a wild chemistry of incredulity and anger. "Well, soak my hide in piss!" he finally exclaimed, spitting a huge glob of sticky saliva onto the pavement.

"By the Old Fart's hairy ass!" he went on. "I never expected to see the likes of you in this day and age. Howdo, chicky!" he chortled, and a lascivious grin curled his long, lugubrious mouth. Quickly he struck a pose, like that of a terra cotta stallion, one leg cocked highspiritedly before the other,

while his large, bony hands lewdly caressed his narrow hips. He pranced sideways, then a little forwards, shaking his dye-streaked hair like a mane.

Noting that this antic did not make a favorable impression, however, the stranger resumed his speech in a sober tone. "You are certainly not one of these pathetic earthlings," he frankly informed Yahu-El. "That fountain gushing from your headtop, refreshing your body with a shower of scintillating colors, points to a higher origin. I've lost the geyser myself. But I'm not so dim that I can't tell the difference between matter and energy--between their kind and ours." He winked, but then looked hard at Yahu-El, the former expression of anger flowing back into his diseased eyes.

Startled by both this direful gaze and the implications of the drunkard's statement, the angel straightened herself apprehensively. "No! But you are not--" she halted abruptly, as a quiver of fear rippled nervously over her face, distending her nostrils, clenching her teeth, fluttering her eyelids.

*"O Lucifer, light-bearer,
brightest of the sons of heaven!
How you have fallen from amicable grace
into exilic perdition."*

"Isn't that how the old hymn goes?" the stranger asked sanctimoniously. "But excuse me. Sorry to disappoint. I beg your ladyship's pardon. I am not the gentleman nor any of his nearest kin. My name is Orric. One of the band, certainly. But not so infamous as to have entered either scripture or profane literature." With these words, Orric bowed with mock antiquity.

"Sir Orric I was called in bygone centuries. Now it is only Gustav Orric. I'm Orric the Seducer to my oldest cronies and Lusty Gus to my newest pals. Personally, I prefer Orric, plague-bearer, if you are up on the latest rage. My specialty is virgins, male and female.

"Should your ladyship be interested in the game," he added, clicking his tongue and snapping his fingers robustly in the air, "I have a convenient spot nearby." Here Orric flicked his thumb over his shoulder, toward the lightless alley, and mindlessly grinned. This time his lips had the peculiar appearance of a scaly, grey snake that, having swallowed its tail in its mouth, tugged and coiled in an inescapable captivity of self-possession.

"You will, after the initial twinge," he assured, "find the sport amusing. In fact, it will leave you feeling practically human." A rough, vulgar laugh erupted from Orric and he began gyrating his pelvis, as he panted and sighed with feigned intensity.

By means of this dance, he moved so close to Yahu-El that she could feel his liquor-saturated breath pulsing against her. Involuntarily, the angel waved the air clean before her nose.

Orric took immediate offense at this gesture. Again he changed tactics and began questioning her sharply. "If you are not down to get it, hon," he barked, "why are you here? Don't tell me Big D has lifted the ban on descending? Or



maybe we are finally approaching the long-awaited, dreadful day? Damn the crackers! Sweat rocks! Sugarpop!"

Suddenly Orric caught himself short in his obscene ecstasy and commenced sniffing the air, like a curious dog, while his eyes ran savagely over Yahu-El's head and body. "What's this I smell?" he chuckled coarsely. "Why, smells like the sweet stench of independence. Striking out alone. Galaxy hitchhiking." He sniffed and sniffed and sniffed.

"Why, smells like rebellion. Smells like anarchy. And once your foot's in it, the shit stinks." Orric howled maniacally at his own clever words, twirling around and throwing his arms out with idiotic abandonment.

"What is it then? Minister without portfolio? Wandering strumpet? A streetwalker? A tourist without papers? Passport! Passport! Passport!"

There followed now an interval of tense silence, in which both parties stood staring into one another's eyes. Finally, Orric said with cold contempt: "You ice me. You really ice me. But we're family, so let's be straight. If you're not joining the club, why hang around the clubhouse?"

Yahu-El felt the heat coursing into her throat and cheeks. "How dare you interrogate me like this, adversary? In your miserable state you should be ashamed to even stand in my presence. Save your crude trickery for the poor, vulnerable creatures of this plane. I am not your prey and never will be."

"Ah!" Orric shrieked. "So that's it? Damn the cracker! An indignant bleeding heart. Oh, hot! I love it. 'Poor, vulnerable creatures...' What naive charm! An heirloom! So...disarmingly anachronistic. And to think that the Old Man still has somebody like you on his side! Joy, but it must be comforting to his senility."

He could not stop himself from heckling her and loudly repeating "A miracle! Bless you. A miracle!" as he looked the angel over from toe to top with false admiration.

"Oh, hon!" Orric blurted out, his long tongue lolling from his mouth like a drooling dog. "Off on your own to see the six day wonder and its little people! What elan!" And Orric licked a finger and painted it over his eyebrows before puckering a loud, smacking kiss on the night air.

"Really, sister, cut the crap. Let's call the circus animal by its circus name. The rodent is a rat." He leaned forward and hissed his words seductively. "Man is a fratricide. A graduated fratricide, he's a genocidal entrepreneur. A connoisseur of the macabre. Ergo: Man is a scum sucking, self-devouring parasite who will not be satisfied until he had eaten his species, his mothering earth, the atmosphere, the stars and even Big D himself.

"On the subject of homo sapiens, the Old Man was wrong." Orric professorially pressed a finger to his temple, indicating madness. "'We need not pick the bones to prove the skeleton,' said Dr. Raven to Nurse Crow."

Then, for once, the fallen angel's countenance appeared genuinely serious. "You've been around awhile now and your witnessing is drawing the same conclusions mine did ages ago. There's no point denying it. We're close and I can read you like a book."

With these words, Orric grinned mischievously a third time. "Why not," he suggested, "to paraphrase the noble Job, curse Dad and join the gang?"

"Although, to be candid, the trade isn't what it formerly was. The Adamites have made so much of hell themselves, you will hardly find one of us with more than a bureaucratic interest in his work. Even Lucifer, if you'll excuse the pun, has gone dull on the job. Today, the devil isn't demonic, he's absurd."

Orric stared vacantly down the street, swayed a little on his unsteady legs, then glanced around at the neighboring darkness. "Still," he continued, "you can learn from the humans. They are excellent technicians. They've expanded

the horizons, pumped up the subterranean. Although the bottom has dropped out of the real estate market. You know: hell-history, history-hell..."

He pulled his wet, rumpled clothing tightly about his wasted body and shivered, sucking in a long breath of moist air. The initial expression of incredulity and anger flashed back into his eyes. "What can you expect from a pack of dying animals?" he queried, coughing up a mouthful of phlegm and spitting on the pavement as he had before. "Oh, they think. But the processes are screwed. Every system inevitably ends in chaos.

"I suppose," Orric added maliciously, "you're impressed by their suffering? I can tell you about that. There's a philosophy here, Johnny: the big fish eat the little fish."

But no more! Yahu-El had heard enough. Her fallen brother's words were poison to her. They raced like serpents through her body. They conjured images from her memory that stung at her like giant scorpions.

Lifting her hands, covering her ears, a soft, dulcet hum issued rhythmically from her throat and Yahu-El began to whirl around--spinning faster and faster, until all sensual impressions merged into an indistinct blur. Amid a flurry of multicolored sparks, her presence contracted into a tiny, luminous point that suddenly sped away, leaving a thin, vaporous trail behind it.

Hours had passed, while angels need but moments to traverse centuries or continents. Yahu-El sat, with her knees drawn up to her chest, halfway between a pair of defoliated trees. Above her, to the right, a huge spider web spanned the two lowest branches. Before her the land unfolded in small, round undulations. Fog curled between the foothills and in the gullies.

She thought of the confrontation with the fallen angel, Orric, and how his caustic address had brought to a head attitudes already fermenting inside her. She could not deny that there was much accuracy in Orric's acidic words. At the same time, they were words without truth, having been spoken cynically, without mercy.

To be certain she had, with her own eyes, witnessed the epidemic usage of devastating drugs: cocaine, crack, PCP, heroin. She had heard the hollow formulas of politicians who promised a kinder, more caring future, while their policies ground the bones of the poor, and nation after nation armed and overarmed in perpetual preparation for omnicidal warfare. She had smelled the decay of societies and tasted the rancid foods of paranoia and deceit. She knew that conditions for staggering multitudes were often worse than the bitterest words could convey.

Yahu-El puzzled over many matters. The human rhetoric of high ideals and the evidence of base behavior. The genuine impulse toward liberty and the recurrent submissions to bloodstained tyrannies. The destruction wreaked upon the environment sustaining planetary life. And yes, even the deathwish dragon, hidden but vengefully emerging from within this catastrophic pattern, the coils of its hideous body grotesquely tattooed with symbols of hatred and evil.

If there was a time to go home, Yahu-El knew that she had reached it. Layer upon layer of weariness and grief lay heavily within her. She put her head between her knees, shut her eyes and listened patiently for the deepest voice her essence contained.

Rapidly she travelled through the wounding period of her earthly adventure, back through the time of her poignant dreaming, back through pristine happiness and further, until she came at last to a clear, shining ball of light. Out of this luminous source, gradually swelling, indomitable, there chorused the lines of the psalm: The earth is the Lord's and all that it holds/the world and its inhabitants.

The song sounded through her like a sweet, healing balm and tears flooded her eyes, spilling to the ground beneath her. Perhaps, Yahu-El told herself, smiling, you are becoming one of the Eternal Weepers (those angels who never cry for themselves but cry always over the pain of others).

As the refrain of the psalm kindled a spiraling fire inside her, she knew that she could no more return to her world above now than she could acquiesce in the cynical conclusions of Orric. Despite the abhorrent negativity and nihilism that had spread throughout much of physical reality, Yahu-El had also witnessed authentic love and compassion, had also looked deeply into the unrealized possibilities of life. Despite the fact that many souls had died, or were nearing death, while their bodies continued to live like *golem*, like mere animated clods, she was also convinced that others waited for the awakening of the winged powers within them. She had sensed the yet undelivered cause of planetary justice and the still orphaned need for planetary rejoicing.

And yes, beyond doubt, humanity desperately needed a renewal of instruction. So she would remain on *adama*, and she would teach. Yahu-El would teach people the magical prayers of the heavenly wheels, the *ofanin*. She would teach them *yihudin*, the uniting of unities, and ways to bring a strong zeal for righteousness and purity back to the earth. She would teach them not to celebrate the event of enlightenment prior to earnest labor; not to treat an intimation of cosmic beatitude like a piece of private property; not to escape alone into solitary salvation, but to stand in the firm virtue of redemptive solidarity. She would teach, even if only to a few individual men and woman, the angelic reverence for life. And she would tell stories of the non-material worlds, worlds of affirmation and power, extending endlessly beyond our own--each existing only to help and be helped.

When words were no longer sufficient for her needs, Yahu-El would teach with the silence of her presence. For angels have a profound, palpable silence with which to communicate their essence. As the poet, Paul Claudel, has written: Qui a goute a votre silence/Il n'a pas besoin d'explication. (He who has tasted of your silence/has no need for explanations.)

So too, wisely, when the unclean burdens of humanity were beyond her endurance, Yahu-El would return for solace to those coastal hills and commune with the dignity of the trees. Yet the direction of her commitment was strongly planted in her intellect and heart. The work of *tikkun olam*, the mending of the world she would willingly partake in,

could only be done with a living generation--even if in the demi-hell of history, until history had also been redeemed.

Yahu-El thought of the hostility in the eyes of her lost relative from the night before. She had been grappling with the human confrontation with death, with the fragility of consciousness, and the despair of being overwhelmed by anxiety and a sense of nothingness--so many dark abysses alien to her angelic substance. But she was beginning to understand this tumultuous ambiguity and how even Orric's anger was but the defensive turn of his disintegral suffering. So had even he become all too human.

By now the angel's hands were full of tears, and the shining tears clung to her delicate fingers. The sun was slowly painting the landscape before her with a full palette of colors.

Yahu-El rose to her feet. Drop by drop she began placing her tears on the silken strands of the web beside her. "If willed," she whispered, "I shall find a person for each tear I shed and midwife the angel portion of each soul."

Thus, due to the heavenly being, Yahu-El BetShinTav, and the decision she reached after meeting with her fallen brother Orric, we latter inhabitants of the earth can still lay claim to legitimate hope.

THE PUPPETS

by lala heine-koehn

*The woman behind me is cutting a tree
to crush me and if it must, his hand, holding
mine. She will have him, even without it.
But the path takes us up, mindless
of the tree and the vengeful woman.*

*Do you know of her love for you--
that she would rather have you
lose your hand than to be holding mine?
But he is intent on telling me about the plight
of the little puppets who live in a maze of blue
ropes (azure, he said, the colour they use
to paint skies in medieval religious paintings)
who were programmed to be always nice
but were never taught to open doors.
I must meet them, he insists, taking hold
of my hand more firmly as we climb the path.*

*Above, the puppets are waving at us
from behind doors criss-crossed with ropes:
We love you, we love you! they chant
as the robot uncrosses the doors:
get away, don't crowd, you're only to be nice!
their eyes are brimming with happy tears
midget-sized like they.
We love you, we love you, we do, we do! they chant
squeezing my hand inside his as if it were one
as we stumble into the blue maze.*

*'The woman who loves him wants to crush me;
she would rather have him lose
his hand than to be holding mine...'
my whisper bounces off their ears, to the floor.
'She loves him, she loves him!' they dance
around us, squeezing his other hand.*

*'We have a present for you' pulling us
toward a pyramid of chocolate squares threatening
to fall. 'Break them, break them' they squeal
jumping up and down.
inside each square, sticky with caramel,
is a piece of paper: 'We love you, we love you!'
with shining eyes they watch us eat them one by one.*

*How lucky for them to be roped off
from where you and I live, he tells me
coming down the path with my hand
inside his pocket.*

THE DEATH OF SUN AND MOON

by Janet P. Reedman

*The Moon stood in the shroud of night,
a crone who waned and sank
billowing pale deathlight, into a fog
that drank brightness from her hair,
her eyes, until she withered and died,
her ashes falling cold as ice
to choke the sun,
who lay in a grove of oaks,
a king in mail of rusted gold,
growing still and cold as night slipped away
and no stars paraded across the sky
and no faded moon blew a misty kiss
to help him rise and greet the day.*