

Jennifer Byrnand

ANGEL DUST

Newspaper headline screams: *Teenage girl raped, pregnant*

— Why? Why me?

— Why you? her father moaned. Why'd you have to do it? What did you do to encourage him?

— S/he, she replied.

— What?

— Why me?

— It wasn't my fault, she told the police doctor. I was just going for a walk when out of the blue

— Girls these days. Careless. *Asking* for it. Going about dressed like tramps

— You *must* be able to give us *some* sort of description.

— S/he was ... light.

— Light?

— Talk about coming on a midnight clear. It's true, I didn't do anything to encourage it. I was just walking. Just out walking.

Why me?

— Start again, from the beginning. You were out walking.

— Yes.

— Right. You were out for a walk, about midnight ... what were you doing walking outside at midnight?

— What did you do to encourage him?

— S/he.

— What?

— One night ... midnight, which is relevant only if you happen to be a witch. I was out walking. Fresh air. Free time. I'd just finished work
— Work? You're fourteen. Too young to work. Too young to be out at midnight. What did your father
— It was a bright and moonless night. Did that come out right? It was bright and clear. Midnight. There was light. It felt ... ooh. It felt. There wasn't anyone else there.
— Who was it?
— There was just me. No one else there.

— The medical report indicates that intercourse of a sexual nature took place, Your Honour. The girl denies it.
— Yes. Pregnant. Seven weeks.
— As for the disease. The girl denies intercourse. Prior to, during or following the assault.
— No, no damage. No signs of a struggle. No wounding. The girl denies intercourse.
— But is pregnant?
— Yes.
— And the disease

Can angels transmit disease?

— There was light, she said, and a feeling. S/he touched me. There was no one else there. It felt

— Fucking angels are at it now, said my feminist friend. Objectification. Exploitation. Commoditisation. S/he my arse. *He*, she means. Always he.

— The sons of God looked upon the daughters of men and saw that they were fair. She was fair. Blonde. Natural blonde. Always a bit of a tart, her dad said, though she was only fourteen. Never knew what

— Who'd have thought that angels

WHY ME?

After fourteen weeks they decided not to terminate the pregnancy, in spite of the disease. I was stuck with it. *He* blamed me. My teacher, my dad, my social worker, my police officer. Blamed me. I was just outside, that's all.

Not looking for anything. How could I have encouraged it? I was just out, not expecting a thing. Then there was light, and a feeling

— She still goes out at night, stupid tart.

— I asked a minister a few days ago. Do angels? I asked, and he said no. So I looked up Genesis and read him that bit about the sons of God, and he gave me three valid replies. All explaining what it meant, and how it couldn't, and even if they did then, why they couldn't now. But I saw light, and there was this feeling, I said.

By twenty weeks I could feel movements all the time. Little feet, little hands, little wingbuds. The doctor — another doctor, not the same one — examined me, did a scan. No sign of wings, s/he chortled. I smiled weakly. Disease gone. For now.

Second teenager raped. No suspects, say police.

— If you'd just look at these pictures, carefully. There's someone out there. Raped you. Raped this other girl. Same signs. Look carefully. He could strike again.

— S/he.

— What?

How can there be a mugshot of an angel? All you see is light. It's mostly in the feeling. How can that be rape? There's no assault, no touching. Just a feeling.

— And the consequences, said the minister.

— Yes, the consequences.

She, the other teenager, also said no rape. We'd raise hell if it were rape, we told each other. Her feminist friend said any exchange without mutual consent is rape. But with no sweat, no hot breath, no hairy limbs. No skin. No words, even. Just light, and a feeling. But still, she said. You're the one with the disease. You're the one with God knows what growing inside your uterus. Ask Io, ask Leda.

Thirty weeks now. Definite strong impulses from the womb. Navel poking out. Stretch marks on thighs and breasts. Consequences. Back ache, sore legs, piles, weak bladder. Wing buds poking up under my diaphragm.

At least the disease is cured. Another scan, this time less conclusive. But no wings, for sure. S/he growing well.

why me

— Her father is down, depressed, discouraged. His daughter, pregnant and clapped out at fourteen. Why me. A slut, a tramp. And will she cooperate with the police? Hell no. What do these girls expect, poncing about at night, showing all. And not even to cooperate with the police. Light. She's mad. A mad whore tart.

Nearly at term. She's in hospital now all the time. Sick. Blood pressure high. Little girl hips and back stretched and strained. Trying to explain the difference between angels and boys. About not having been raped, but not being a tart either. Might write a thesis on it if I ever finish school, if I survive the birth, if I ever

Delivery time. Scream, piss, strain. Breathe properly, you stupid girl. Fuck you, it's *me* in pain. Not you. *Why me?* Scream, strain, pant. There's blood and water and light. Harsh light. It wasn't like this on telly.
— Okay, *push!*

She pushed till the veins on her eyebrows burst and left her looking like a surprised clown. Pushed and strained. Screamed. Lots of blood and water. Natural processes are quite revolting really.
— I think we're getting there.
— *We? I'm* doing all the work. *I'm* getting there, you mean.

A nurse came up behind me, propped me up so I could peer down between my thighs to watch s/he appear. I watched. I pushed. I strained. No s/he. Just a cloud of light, that's all.

There was panic in the ward. Lost the baby, they said. Misplaced. Overlooked. Not dead.
— Light, she said. Light, and a feeling. That's all.