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The Persuasion of Miracles

by R. A. Morean

Rosie Lucia Sanchez did not believe in miracles.

"Anymore," she would always add. Because, you see, at one time she did.

When she was young, very young, she played in the vegetable garden in soft warm dirt, squashing swollen tomatoes with her hands while her grandmother laughed.

"Rosalita, my baby, you dance like a wet puppy," Mama Ginnia said and laughed again. With her round powdered arms she stripped Rosie naked and turned the spigot on the hose and water choked and gurgled and sprayed over Rosie washing away mud and grit. Rosie remembers the heat of the afternoon, the sun on her back and streams of splashing water as Mama Ginnia rubs her skin and washes her clean and cold. Then her Mama Ginnia says, "Oh Rosie watch this," and the old woman flicks the hose quickly straight up and then down and the stream of water breaks into an arch of singular round blobs of silver. But this wasn't proof of miracles, this was just a trick of gravity.

It was when her grandmother cried out a little cry and sank to her knees, the hose dropping the grass and water suddenly spreading all around them that Rosie Lucia heard the words she would keep.

"Sweet Jesus in heaven. Stars, Rosalita, you have stars on your back."

She could feel her grandmother's wet touch as she lightly traced something along her back. It tickled and she squirmed.

"No, no, no. Be still--Oh, my baby." Her grandmother, still kneeling, turned her around to face her and she hugged little Rosie, hugged her hard and whispered fiercely in her ear, "they must have landed on you when you flew through the sky to us."

And then her grandmother lightly kissed every star on Rosie's back.

She, Rosalita Lucia Sanchez, carried with her the stars. Stars.

This was what she thought hotly to herself when her brothers teased her, when her mother asked her too many times to brush her teeth or when her father threatened his belt. When she lay in bed alone in her dark room, when she got lost at the department store, when a man in yellow truck looked too long at her, she found comfort in knowing she carried stars.

I wear the stars she would say, sometimes even out loud, and she was

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filled with the movement of the earth and the song of whales and the invisible strength of the wind all because stardust touched just her. It was a miracle.

When she was eleven, she kissed William Bolivas behind the bungalows at school. Kevin Reed looked and saw and told everyone after lunch. William never spoke to her again and the next day, the other children laughed. When Rosie got off the bus that afternoon, three sixth grade boys waited until the bus left to circle around her.

I wear the stars, I wear the stars, I wear the stars...

Hubert Alvarez began by trying to knock her books out of her hand and she kept swinging them high, to the left, then to the right, weaving, to keep them safe. Kevin Whitehead, stupid Kevin Whitehead just laughed. Then out from the corner of her eye she saw Danny Almond reached out, swift, darting, and he grabbed her shirt. She tumbled backward, tripping over her shoes. He dragged her a few feet until she fell, her books scattered and papers flew, but what scared them all was the sound of her shirt ripping.

She sat on the warm cement, her hands skinned, her sleeve torn at the shoulder and her shirt pulled out from her skirt. Kevin Whitehead stopped laughing.

"Let's get outta here, come on," he yelled. "Come on!"

Her books were strewn across the sidewalk and her shirt flapped in the hot summer breeze. She screamed at all three as they ran, "I have stars on my back! Stars, stars, how dare you, I'll tell my Daddy!" She stood and furiously gathered up her books.

The next morning she saw Kevin standing in the hall talking to another boy. He glanced at her and grinned and then whispered something to his friend and they both laughed. She gripped her books tight and walked past him.

I wear the stars, I wear the stars, I wear the stars...

"Hey, you, wetback," came from behind. She did not turn around, she did not face him but she heard clearly as his voice rose above the clatter of feet, and children's voices, and ringing lunch bells: "You moron, those aren't stars, they're moles, Rosie posie, you got a back full of ugly old black moles!"

She cried when she sat in her mother's lap while her mother tried to smooth her hair. She cried even harder when her mother told her they were only freckles.

The alarm clock in Rosie's room is set for 6:15 am. She does not want to go to work today. She is a nurse at St. Joseph's Hospital. Her shift

begins in forty-five minutes and in the twenty years since she lost her stars, she has seen no miracles.

The reason she does not want to go to work is because Dr. Patrick O'Shaunnesy proposed to her last night. Pale Dr. O'Shaunnesy with his dead white, speckly skin and thick red hair. "Patrick" she called him on their first date to the Redding Bull where they both drank too many margaritas. Patter is what she calls him now, is what she's called him for the last two years. Then, last night, Patrick was used again.

His "Please," the urgency it carried, was the most awful part of the night. It is the part which nudges her awake before the alarm sounds, keeping her between wakefulness and sleep, between decision and purpose. More of his words come to her in an uncomfortable rush.

"What is the issue. I don't understand. Tell me please."

She sighs and rolls over, seeing with eyes still closed that this is a confession, that he does not understand how her parents will always greet him with cold civility, how laughter will never be spontaneous, how her father will never embrace him, how her brothers will always suspect him for his white skin and how her mother will cry because he does not share their past. How can you not understand, she asks again and again and again.

Because I refuse to, he says finally.

If you refuse to understand this, nothing will work, she said and kept the ring in the box.

The ring. She sighs again and wipes a hand across her face, her eyes still closed. On her dresser is the black velvet box, snapped open like a clam shell and there sits the beautiful ring. She does not see how the morning light is making little rainbows spill against the wall.

Softly, there is an electric click and her eyes open. The voice she had risen to every morning for the last two years begins with, "And that's the weather my friends. Hot sunny, a little humid, nothing to sweat about just enough to keep things interesting if you know what I mean...Just about another perfect day in great old L.A."

Rosie swings both legs over the edge of the bed. The voice follows her as she tosses covers back up, runs the shower, brushes her teeth.

The sound of the shower drowns the voice out and Rosie stand under the water and waits for some answer to come to her. She cannot will an answer and the question will not go away. Marriage does not seem possible. This is all she can fathom and feel from this murky place of lost pride, family history, and ruptured culture.

She looks at her skin. It is very dark.

"Hey sister, you trying to be as black as me?" said Charlene just two days ago while they were getting lunch and she laughed, they both laughed. Charlene married a white Italian chef, they have two children, they live outside Burbank, they had one brown cross painted on their front door three years ago. Rosie ticks off the facts as she dries herself with the towel.

"Fear is a worthless ingredient to add to your life." Mama Ginnia told her this many years ago. Fear is not like magic, however. It is real. And it must be dealt with.

The voice comes back to her as she opens the bathroom door. She cannot imagine a job where you have to talk this much everyday, about nothing and suddenly she is irritated.

"And that is about as weird as--"

She flicks the radio off.

Rosie Lucia Sanchez could not believe in miracles.

Patrick lays beside her, speckled and white, long and thin. The velvet box still rests on the dresser, unopened since Maria snapped it shut two nights ago night.

For the second time this week she has awakened before the alarm, before the voice on the radio and anything is possible during these moments of quiet: the weather, the days events, the outcome of crisis are all suspended in the twilight of early morning.

Patrick came to her last night. Late. After long night in the emergency room and after midnight, with a bunch of dusty pink roses which did not mask the smell of his fear, his anxiety that all he wanted would be lost in some ephemeral argument.

"Look," he said, after she let him in, after they began a conversation that then deteriorated. "Do you understand? Do you understand how little faith you have in the people who love you?"

The roses were thrown to the ground, and she cried for a while and then it was his turn. Then they made love slowly, carefully, and though she was annoyed, she did not tell him.

Afterwards, he rolled over, his back to her and she wept, silently, full of pity for herself and for him, for his inability to see an issue that would forever divide her, forcing her to tread water, perform uncomfortable balancing acts, to forever be split into two: one half with him, the other with her family. One half in a relationship of love and trust and friendship and in the contemporary light of give and take, the other shrouded in love, honoring trust, where friendship is subservient to history, and all is wrapped in honor and duty, saving face, and becoming another stone in the family foundation. Neither on its own was difficult, but the straddling of the two would break her.

"But I will be here. I will be next to you," he had mumbled, moving over, trying in his exhausted sleep to put an awkward arm around her.

The same new old argument.

Rolling over on her stomach, Rosie watches the sunlight filter in through the window, pink in the pale morning. Patter stirs next to her, the bed jiggles as he moves close. She does not move, does not lean into him and closes her eyes, pretending to be asleep. Gently she feels him tug on the sheet. It slips from her shoulders to her waist and stops there. And then, in touches echoing her grandmother's she feels him touch her back, feather touches, quickly, one after another and she knows he knows she is awake.

"This is what made me fall in love with you, you know."

He kisses her at the nape of the neck. His breath is warm. He is not thinking clearly, not thinking of ways to make her open the velvet box. He is groggy with too little sleep and can only tell the truth.

"What?"

"This," he says again, touching her again, the same way in the same places, in the same order. "The Phoenix."

A yawn stretches his next words. "You know, the constellation." A pause. "You have stars on your back, Rosie Sanchez."

She moves so swiftly, he cannot see her. Her arms are around his neck and he is startled by the urgency of her embrace, more fearful of her face, wet and hot, and then, a single sob makes him jump. He tries to pull back for a moment, to gain perspective but she struggles with small movements to hold him tight and after an instant, he relaxes.

His heart is pounding. He does not know, cannot know, the persuasion of miracles, but her own heart flutters and in the quiet between them, she feels hope.

R. A. Morean (Rebecca Morean) writes a mystery series under the name Abbey Pen Baker about the daughter of Sherlock Holmes (St. Martin's Press), has published over two dozen short stories in *Piker Press*, *Ploughshares*, *Crone*, *Mused* and more. As a *Salon* contributor, articles and essays have included issues relating to health care, atheism, digital media, parenting and education. She has appeared on radio and television and is president of the board of the Antioch Writers' Workshop. A professor of English at Sinclair Community College, she also teaches creative writing workshops throughout the Miami Valley focusing on short fiction, the novel, YA novels and screenplays. She also contracts as a development editor. Read more about her at www.ramorean.com

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