A SOUND BYTE LIFE

NEVILLE DEANGELOU

A Novel

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To see the world in a grain of sand
And heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour.

William Blake
Auguries of Innocence

PROLOGUE

The Project! In six phases Void emptied of chaos bloomed a magnificent garden; delightful, sentient, divine, reflective. *Excellent.* Then in its seventh The Designer rested.

The Tree knew this *ecstasy.* Bliss.

Ubiquitous. Regenerative. Everlasting.

The Project Designer knew The Tree knew.

They all knew The Tree knows and can see the shapes of things unseen and in its bearing feel what's never been felt, and glean. This masterpiece - human - quickened by an inbuilt desire for 'wanting' (*resourced for gardening*) was much too new to 'knowing' (*in course of understanding*) and urged to stand clear of The Fruit in preference for precious plenty less swift to daring.

Brilliant.

But the Rebel spotted an opportunity (*impulse*) and vexed for having been tossed from preeminence cleverly seized upon that chance.

Intelligence.

The Twelve (Shubael, Raziel, Cassiel, Zadkiel, Carmael, Michael, Uriel, Taniel, Raphael, Jophiel, Gabriel, and Azrael) were elsewhere, so The Rebel's rebels, exercised in full possession of choice and acutely aware of this slick opening (*curiosity*), pounced.

Chaos.

These - Beelzebub, Leviathan, Asmodeus, Berith, Astaroth, Verrine, Gressil, Sonneillon and Belial - having been tossed from The Hills of Ecstasy in the catastrophe, i.e., the rebellion Lucifer the narcissist led, relished this comeuppance, for these nine knew at each and every dare curiosity spins its

wheel, at each and every doubt its chain slips. They knew doom! In it there is death and decay, and in decay there is nothing left to lose, and in death there's nothing more to gain. Lucifer slipped his lure into the spinning wheel and waited.

They all watched.

The chain slipped.

The wheel stalled.

Vengeance!

Ecstasy met pain.

Death fed decay.

So they waited.

The Architect awoke and beheld this vengeful mockery reverberating through stormed leaves. *"Failed! Fouled by impulse. Foiled by finality of exclusion, by fallibility of surety, by indelibility of Judgment. Pure inelegance. Humanity crushed. You've lost."* Hmm. By the throes of The Tree, shook and tossed, seeds of the design's tidal phase - Beauty - burst and through its emerald green bloomed.

Perfection!

CHAPTER ONE

THE WHISPER

"Beauty is the splendour of truth."

Breathe.

Satellite images tell a different story.

Corroborated by hundreds of videos and dozens of images dispatched before the blackout, each of which is forensically verified, this brutality was no crackdown of criminals terrorising communities and burning businesses; this was the breeding of an unadulterated evil.

Some folks can walk onto the pages of a stranger's life and re-write it and that stranger having beheld neither pen nor ink, not a wiggle of intention, remain unaware such a folk can be family, as feud or friend, then one day stand before a mirror lost or die bewildered dried to dust.

"Have you ever . . ."

"This is absolute," Matt interrupted with a stir of his flexed hand, as if wafting clasped ambience into clefts of his being, "the - absolute - best. I've been to Italy. And Thailand. And India. And the West Indies. Privileged. Ate from the most loved plates on each and every continent but Antartica. Ah! Yes. This is the one!"

Carmen inhaled.

Matt cuddled another delicate bite. "Perfection."

That sound!

Hm. A raindrop?

Chef Bailey kept his cloistered kitchen spic-and-span, genius for a cook reputed for creating smart eclectic Farm Fresh dishes. He grabbed his cellphone. “Budram, how we stand?” His nose flared. Patrick the boy-cook noticed. “Give me a timeframe.” Patrick looked toward the hazed mountains, beyond the sapodilla trees. Vultures. “Jeez! OK. I’ll take the hogfish and cassava.” Chef tucked his phone, scooped servings of souse intended for two chatty regulars, soccer phenoms, sons of the Caribbean, tabled on the eastern veranda, handsome view of the silvern moon floating a back of jagged mountains.

“Boss!” Patrick offered. “Why don’t you farm your own meats? Stop making-do; you got this huge field. Times are new and I got good buddies. We’ll make you famous; you’ll be a billionaire.”

“Your mouth to God’s ear.” He smiled then murmured, “Never count your chickens before they’re hatched, but I appreciate your confidence. Thanks.”

Fumbling, smiling, Patrick accidentally backhanded misplaced sea-salt into Colonel Gaston’s ordered metemgee. He gasped and glanced to see if Chef noticed and grabbed at the air swallowing his chopped breadth.

Decorated dishes. Serving platter of chicken foot souse, impeccably garnished. Hands readied. Not the gueridon! Chef hoisted a loaded bamboo tray, shoulder square, eyes plump, hips flexed, paced across the dapper Peter Styles Chambers, angled pass a last-chance couple he acknowledged sideways, passed twelve birthday Bajans - raving smiles - sparkling beauty, and stepped through Mary’s Arch out onto Bailey’s

Veranda, pleased to serve two breezy athletes - amber and molten gold - tightly tucked!

“Here comes life,” Kai said.

“Life?”

“Marrow for the soul. The secret sauce.”

“It’s raining; it’s raining.” Raheem pointed.

Chef inhaled mist. His dimpled dazzle bespoke whispers of a drizzle fanning the frizzled folds of a tree-tied hammock, ah, just a moment, lost in love’s warmth; but duty calls.

Kai stalled him. “Who’s that guy by Sober’s window?”

“Why?”

“A man? Eating alone? In public?”

“Courage. Dignity. Confidence.” Chef said, less dimpled, then left and whispered two messages urgently dispatched to the kitchen via Knella - a wait staff - then went directly to Colonel Gaston and his charming guest at Table 24. Matt, Table 13, did not notice him go there. He signalled the floor manager to summon Chef Bailey.

“Right away, sir. How is our service?”

“Creme de la creme.”

“Thank you, sir.”

The manager clicked his Table iPad. Tapped it!

Matt Q?

The name popped a pep in his step.

But Chef was not in the kitchen.

And he tried not to panic.

That sound!

Hm? A leak in the roof.

A world splintered into factions is easily conquered. She knew that. Her father drank hard and died of liver disease. His father came home from the war in a box. She was seven. Unseen. Her mother, deep faith, raised six children in a hut

alone on this dry and dusty farm. Two died. Her three brothers left. Overseas. But rain does not fall on one roof alone. Then her mother died. She was seventeen. She built this mansion: The Big House. Everyone loved The Big House. That's her picture beneath the leak. Rose Alicia Bailey.

Every table was seated.

Steady hands.

A swirl of drizzle.

A crooner's delight - pone - perfected, compliments of Chef Bailey, as handed down from his grandma is to be parsed on receipt and partook in this manner: slice an easy bite with served knife, pick with served fork, each to feed the other - together - with arms interlocked. Eyes will tell the story: goodbye or confetti.

At Knella's instruction Patrick took this delicacy to the chamber's last-chance couple. Table 6. "Compliments of Chef Bailey!" He said then told them how to serve each other this sweet pone, perfected. "Enjoy."

Neither looked at the other.

Each sliced a triangular bite.

Interlocked as told, he picked his slice with trembling fingers and fed it to her brittle lips which trembled then parted. She took his slice in tears. He took her slice in pain. They knew somewhere they made a huge mistake. Their cheeks twitched. It isn't lack of love; it is the work it takes to heal the break. Neither knows when it happened; it was a slow drift, inevitable perhaps, a word flung here, a word dropped there, a slight, a slop; neither knows what; just a realisation that neither was next to the other. That slow drift. Little by little by little. Then gone! He fed her another slice. She took it. It is so hard for men to speak their vulnerable needs - intimacy, companionship, solace - when the only

reputable means afforded for enjoying such comforts is sex. It's a damned dirty deal men have bargained onto themselves. They've imprisoned tears and freed anger. Their hardness is weak. It's a dumb deal. For women too. Not heard. Not seen. Just expectations. And preparations. It's a darned dumb deal.

Patrick peeked.

A lit candle?

Just then he crossed paths with Table 24's two waiters.

"What did you say?" The colonel's companion asked.

"I didn't say anything." All smiles. All eyes. "My lips never moved. What did you think I said?"

She searched him quizzically. "Go placidly . . ."

"Amid the noise and haste."

"You did say it."

"No."

"You whispered it."

"No. I know it, The Desiderata."

"And you didn't say it?"

"No. I felt it."

"Strange."

Aside, their waiters approached. "Compliments of The Mansion, our Beef Rendang in place of the metemgee you ordered. Chef Bailey recommends it."

"He told me. And I'm all for trying something new."

"And you ma'am?"

"Eva." She smiled. "My first meal at The Mansion. I heard lots about your metemgee. Beef Rendang, you said?"

"Yes, ma'am, Eva. I vouch for it. Savor each bite."

The moon sat atop the fog-cleared mountain, drizzles dissipated, shiny leaves dripping, air freshly minted. "Did you

know," Kai revealed, friskily chumping his last chicken foot, "there are no straight lines in nature."

Raheem shrugged. "Really? I bet I can kick a ball straight through your face before your eyes remember how to blink."

"You are ugly. Straight lines are illusions. For some reason humans place trust in weird imaginings. You know what else are illusions?"

"Let me think. Got it. Your mummified brain and . . ."

"Past, present and future."

"So yesterday didn't exist, huh?"

"Nope. Total Illusion!"

"Lost your memory? I can bring it back like this."

Kai giggled. "Game on! I have the perfect place."

Raheem laughed. "Ahhh! It's this souse, isn't it?"

"M-hm. Chicken foot. Okay. Encore. Let's go."

"Oh. Serious! Can you survive an apocalypse?"

"Survive? Conquer!"

"Let's go."

The sound! It's gone.

Hm? We'll never know what might've been. His name was Elbert Frank Cox. Yes. We'll never know what might've been. Her name was Cecilia Payne. Will we ever know? Guess. A story is parlayed about an unknown lad who late one day for school was struck by lightening. Burnt to a crisp. When they came upon him and uncovered who he was, guess who, Albert Einstein. This story is not true of course, but if it were, will we ever know what might've been? Table 28. Black shirt. His name is Treyvon.

The house manager found Chef. "Table 13; it's Matt Q."

"I know."

"He is asking for you."

"Who is at Table 32, Sober's Window?"

The house manager checked. “I remember him arriving. Straight-up cool. Amari Jabari. From the blacked out region.”

“He told you that?”

“No. I can tell. His accent. His eyes. His demeanour. You know. Where else? Gotta be.”

Chef sighed. “OK. Let him know his dinner is paid.”

“Yes-sir.”

Shoulders square, hips flexed, commanding, Chef waltzed over to Matt whose table he had waited of respect. “Yes, sir.”

“I asked for the Chef.”

“I am he.”

“Chef Bailey.”

“That’s me.”

“You?”

“Yes, sir. Chef Bailey Jr.”

“Ah! Senior, please.”

“I am sorry sir, he is not here; he’s still recovering.”

“Oh! Is he . . . um . . . does he still own The Mansion?”

“I do. Always did. Since grandma Ali passed.”

“Aha. Misunderstanding! Pardon me. I am Matt Q.”

“Pleased you’ve selected The Mansion. How is dinner?”

“Perfect. May we exchange contact?”

“Absolutely.”

Matt sparkled. “The Mansion is a jewel. Magnificent. This meal, its name doesn’t do it the favour it earns; make it royal. Top of the world. I love it. I’ll send you an offer that will change your life forever.”

Oregon’s deciphering of the SBL Pairi continues!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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