

Two Poems · *Khaled Mattawa*

SANIYA'S DREAMS

In the year I shared a room with her, I would ask my sister to let me smell her hair and run my fingers through it. It was long and black, and shined like a new piano. She would comb my hair and tell me how I was prettier than a girl. One afternoon in May we took a picture. She showed it to her friends and told them how she was the daughter of Haroon Ar-Rasheed and I was her slave boy, a gift from Charlemagne in exchange for a clock. She told them I was an angel who descended with Gabriel to teach Solomon how to speak to the nightingale, but I refused to return to heaven because I fell in love with her, Queen Sheba. She told them I was prettier than Joseph and she was Al-Aziz's wife who kept me beautiful with a potion she had bought from the magician who mummified King Tut.

On her wedding day, my sister placed the picture in her jewelry box. She kissed my cheek and begged me not to grow. I talked to her yesterday on the phone. She said she still has the picture and shows it to her children. She tells them when I was her slave I ran away aboard a ship to Marseilles where my mother lived. From there I was sent to the Court of Ferdinand and Isabella. They gave me to Columbus who traded me for gold to the Indians. The Indians had no use for me; they needed neither angels nor slaves. My sister tells her children I am now settled near a river called the Tennessee, where I pawned my wings and chains when I ran out of rent money. My job is selling flowers to strangers and at night I dance with women who cannot pronounce my name.