



Angels in Stone

Tanja Kobasic

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Tanja Kobasic's *Angels in Stone* is a supernatural thriller about a woman and the lengths she goes to for a chance at "happiness." The seedy characters populating the novel—from voodoo priestess to rich philanderer, from harelip saint to sadistic slaver—are vividly drawn. This is a descent into evil, and while sometimes melodramatic and awkwardly written, it's a whole lot of fun.

Main character Claire Preston-Lockwood has an attitude problem; she might even be evil, but at the very least, she's a cold, calculating businesswoman. After Claire struts (wearing great heels, of course) into a showdown between good and evil, the novel delivers page after page into which readers can sink their teeth. Those who enjoy pop fiction will love to hate this woman who will do anything, even summon the devil himself, for a baby. But is Claire really an "angel in stone"? Or is she good at her core?

Angels in Stone is set in contemporary New York City but bounces between those city streets and fifteenth-century Brazil. Kobasic writes of slavery, violence, and redemption in sweltering jungles with the same attentive flourishes as modern infidelity and blackmail. In this excerpt, Kobasic tells of a slave who paints wallpaper, after a beating by his master: "Tiny droplets of his blood miraculously hit one of the walls in perfectly even dots. The slave had to finish each rose, using his own bloodstains on the wall as a guide. Manuel said that if the walls were not finished ... he would hang the slave by his feet, cut him open, and use his blood to complete the painting ... the slave made sure the walls were done in two days."

There is a lot going on here—Christianity and voodoo, Satan and God, angels and demons, beauty and ugliness, all vie for the reader's attention. The ancient evil of Brazil, for instance, has convoluted ties to Claire's situation and is fascinating in its own right. Although the ideas wind together in complicated ways, they ultimately do not impede one another. The story, outrageous as it is, succeeds as pure entertainment.

Kobasic's writing will not win any awards for understatement, but her effortless creativity and striking characters will win over readers who like an undemanding thriller. The prose would be stronger after a sweeping edit for extraneous words and expository dialogue. In some instances, Kobasic uses words that clash with the tone. For example, as the priestess relates facts about her remarkable life, the author writes that she is "prattling on." The verb rings false for the gravity of the communication.

In her afterword, Kobasic writes that *Angels in Stone* began as screenplay. It is certainly well drawn and tight enough in plot to make an exciting film. Overall, Kobasic tells a noteworthy tale, and readers will likely see more of this talented storyteller's work as she develops her craft.

LEIA MENLOVE (April 8, 2013)

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