

HEALERS

By Jarron Williams

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SYNOPSIS: Andrea comes from a family of nurses, a long tradition stemming from the women in her family's intense desire to heal. As Andrea's monologue to a temp agency unfolds, we realize that her family has a darker legacy. The women in her family have often been victims of domestic abuse, a trauma Andrea has only recently escaped from. Andrea begins to connect her family's pattern of seeking damaged and abusive men with cultural expectations placed upon black women. Andrea's story is filled with vulnerability as well as strength in the face of great trauma. Her truth is often difficult to stomach and beautifully poetic. Her journey is one of struggle, growth, and eventual autonomy in her situation.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 female)

ANDREA WATTS (f) A middle aged black nurse. She's been recently fired from her job and is seeking new employment.

SETTING: Temp agency office in an urban United States city.

TIME: Morning. The present.

AT START: *ANDREA WATTS is seated with a temp agent, obviously fed up.*

ANDREA WATTS: Why you asking me that? I need a new job cause my unemployment is up. I know I'm overqualified; I just need a new job. Don't worry about the damn details. Yes, I used to work at the Pediatric Cancer Research Institute downtown. I was a nurse. My mother was a nurse. My mother's mother was a nurse. Even my mother's mother's mother was a nurse. Granny always said we was a family of healers. Granny told me that her grandma told her about her granny who used to massage the backs of slaves that had just been beat 'til they couldn't feel the stain of a whip no more. Lord knows that only a nurse can be innocent with red hands. Caressing the backs of men dripping in blood and singing to them. The way my mother sang to elementary school kids in the hood. The way my mother's mother sang to soldiers in Vietnam. The way my mother's mother's mother sang to parents as she picked the tar and feathers off of somebody's baby. The way I sang to my babies whenever they started to think that life might not have been worth fighting for no more. A family of healers. A family of broken women.

I became a nurse because my mother used to tell me about a little black girl she met that had cancer. When her hair started to fall out, she thought the schoolkids would do that thing you see them do on TV. Cut they hair all in unison to show love and support for their peer. But no. Momma told me that they just called that little girl ugly. Called her manly, and stout, and ugly. They beat her down 'til she ain't have no fight left in her no more. I saw my momma cry for the first time when she told me that story. So, that's why I became a nurse. Cause little black girls from the hood don't get stuffed toys from strangers or soccer teams filled with kids with shaved heads, no. They get the same thing this world has always given a black woman and that's nothing.

But you know why my mother told me that story? It was when I asked her, "why you always let daddy hit you like that?" She told me that story to let me know that black girls were strong enough to endure anything. Anything. I always wanted to say to my momma, I

never did, but I always wanted to say, “that story ends with that girl taking her own life. What kind of strength is that?”

You know why my momma became a nurse? Grandma would tell my momma stories too. Grandma talked about, not just talked about, *educated us* with stories of little brown kids in brown schools that drunk brown water. My grandma told my momma about the miscarriage she had in high school. She went to the school nurse and that man aint did nothing but tell my grandma that that's what she deserved for being a whore. Thought it oughta teach her a lesson. So, my momma spent her life working in a school where she told little black girls that their periods were nothing to be afraid of. That ginger ale can't cure a fever and ya need to go ya ass home. I tried asking my grandma why she became a nurse and all she would tell me is that, “we are a family of healers.” Which I took as code for her old ass don't remember.

But you know what else run in the family? My mother's mother's mother was married to a bricklayer. He took his hard-working hands, them rugged hard-working hands, and he would choke the life out of her. Grandma would tell me that her momma would always wear this thick gold necklace that never matched shit she was wearing cause them brick laying hands always found their way around my mother's mother's mother's neck. I learned after that story to never again ask how her daddy ended up in jail. And my grandmother—my mother's mother—she used to beg my granddaddy to go to the VA and get help. She would beg him. She would BEG HIM! When he finally got tired of this strong woman, with these thick legs and war-torn hips telling him how to heal himself, he beat her black and blue. Purple and yellow. Then red. I keep my grandmother on a table in my living room cause we couldn't put her in a casket. And when my grandma died... my mother left my daddy. I got a call on a Sunday morning saying she was driving all the way to Virginia and she wasn't looking back. ...Then I got a call on a Monday afternoon saying that my mother had been murdered. Murdered by my daddy.

I never got a chance to tell my mother that I followed in her footsteps. I never got a chance to tell my mother's mother that I followed in her footsteps. For what? I was embarrassed. I thought it would be silly of me to be concerned with my own body 'cause from Monday to Saturday I told kids with cancer that they could do it. That they could fight it. That they could beat anything that beat them down. So, when my husband punched me in my rib, I would punch him back. We'd keep going 'til I blacked out and woke up the next morning thinking that was strength. Thinking that getting beat down made me strong. Thinking that getting beat down is what got me my black card—no—my *black woman* card. Well you can tell my mother, and my mother's mother, and my mother's mother's mother, that they can keep that shit! 'Cause I'm tired of collecting scars just to show off as rewards. My mother's mother would show me the marks running down her legs and tell me that those were her stories! Her stories. The only kinda person that uses bruises to tell stories is a person that ain't got no voice to tell 'em with. A person whose greatness is measured by how close she can get to the stench of death without puking. You can keep them damn stories. Let them get buried with ya. I don't want 'em no more. You can keep 'em!

My husband would always ask me when I was gone give him kids. I would laugh and joke that my babies at the clinic was all the kids I needed. He'd laugh with me and he'd crack that smile. Kept saying he was gone put a baby in me eventually. My momma told me one day, I'mma make a little healer of my own... You know my husband crawled into my bed one night after I got home from work. One of my patients died that day and I wasn't up to talking to him 'cause his conversation wasn't worth a damn. He crawled over me, and told me to let him make me happy. Let him make me happy. I done let him beat my ass for years, why the fuck I gotta let him do anything else! He forced his way into me but I was too tired to kick or buck. I just laid there on that bed whispering, "no," as if it meant something to him. After that, I was pregnant. He was so excited. I just remember how his excitement made me want to vomit. How his cheers made my throat numb. So, numb I couldn't swallow my spit, so I let it drool out of me like some kind of rabid dog.

I would pop Vitamin C into me, downing them pills like they cured cancer. I did that 'til I felt blood drip onto my panties. I told my husband like I was strong, "Ya baby's dead!" I lifted my bloody panties up to him as proof. He snatched me up and threw me against the wall. He stomped on me. He spit on me. But, I didn't care! I smiled! I smiled knowing that I would never have a daughter. That I would never raise a healer! A little black girl that wasn't gone do nothing but search the world high and low for a broken man just so he can break her back! The world don't need no more DAMN HEALERS! Not from my womb. Cause who gone heal us?! Who gone heal us, huh? Who was gone heal my baby!? Who was gone heal my mother?! Who was gone heal my mother's mother? And my mother's mother's mother's mother's mother's mother! Who was gone heal her whip wounds?! Who was gone pick the tar off of her?! Who was gone stitch my grandma's broken leg or my mother's broken jaw? Who?!!! Cause ain't nobody has! Ain't nobody ever healed us and nobody ever will.

I got up from that ass whooping the same way I got up from every other one... thinking I was strong. I put that Vaseline on my chin and walked my ass to work cause my husband took my car. One of my babies asked me, "what happened to you?" I told that little girl that I tried to heal somebody that couldn't be healed. That's why I need a new job.

THE END