Last Year at Betty and Bob's: An Adventure

Sher Doruff

Published by Punctum Books

Doruff, Sher.
Last Year at Betty and Bob's: An Adventure.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/84175

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=2921729
A black man and a Betty, Bob was often off-balance. He took his politics and his philosophy seriously as did the other Bs, but he was an exception to their rule in oh so many ways. Both—neither. And ... and ...

He'd bonded with Red and missed her. She'd been his link to collaboration, to mixing it up with others. He felt the scissor cut of the sever, the cleave, now that she was dust in the wind. He was on his own, no matter how crazy comfortable the Betty gatherings felt.

“I have this funny feeling,” Bob whispered to IRB. He’d fallen hard for them since they’d joined the group. It wasn’t their toned bod (he told himself) or their enthusiasm for all things cosmopolitical that grabbed him. “I’ve got a sinking feeling my concerns ... my art ... is wanking bullshit like Yellow always says.” IRB nodded. Bob couldn’t tell if it was a nod of agreement with his doubts or an empathetic gesture. He suspected his infatuation with IRB might have something to do with their uncanny likeness to his boyhood heroine, Bessie Coleman. But he might be projecting. The remembered warmth of his grandmother’s stories flooded his dreaming with the thrill of adventure,
the twinkle of starlight in a pitchblack sky, the waning blue of the vanishing point on an ocean’s horizon. This was the stuff of his future perfects, his will have beens.

Next to the cellophaned Panther poster on his bedroom wall he’d pinned up several photos of the aviator that he’d cut from a tattered second hand book he’d found in a Strand dustpile. His grandmother had told him bedtime stories of Bessie’s barnstorming exploits, her bravery, her remarkable resistance to racial profiling. “She was the first woman of African-American descent to earn an aviation pilot’s license, Bobby. She had to go all the way to Paris France to do it coz there was no way she was getting into a pilot’s school in the US of A with two strikes against her, that being black and female as she was.” “Did
Whoa Black Bessie

she fly around the world Grandma?” he remembered asking. “No Bobby, she died before that was possible. You’re maybe thinking of Amelia, but she didn’t make it either. Anyway, Bessie died in a senseless way, falling from an old plane she’d bought herself, a tuna fish can with wings. A real aerial acrobat she was. A daredevil flying loop-dee-loops. Anyway, she didn’t have her seatbelt on when her dodgy plane went belly up mid-air, a wrench in the gearbox they said. Sounds like a bad joke but that’s the truth of it. She dropped 2000 feet they say.”

As a kid, Bob would often dream of Bessie falling through the Floridian air. She always wafted like a skydiver or an angel, seeing things through her goggles no one else had seen, feeling things, remembering things, as if she had all the time in the world to float on a future. This dream always included a bright yellow single propeller plane trailing a metallic banner, fluttering in the sky like a giant water moccasin waving through prairie grass.

After the revolution, more of the same