



Wings of Soul

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DIDDYBELLE AWOKE TO THE USUAL CLAMOR OF HER NEIGHBORHOOD. The echoes of the morning resounded loudly, each element a voice of a chaotic orchestra; a gunshot, crying babies, varieties of screaming, and several different types of sirens. In the background, Diddybelle could hear the gentle ‘pop-fizz’ of a cap being flipped off a half-gallon breakfast bottle of Black Stallion Malt Liquor.

The scarlet sun crept over the tops of the tenements on 135th Street in Harlem early on that particular summer morning. ‘Mama’ Simone Macusa rolled up the battered steel shutters at the Calloway Homeopathic Health Shoppe and unlocked the brightly painted door with the only handcrafted stained glass window in the neighborhood. The little store she founded in 1930 was widely renowned and had been the subject of many magazine and newspaper features over the years. Granted, most people who passed through the portals of Calloway’s were delusional in their ‘ailments’, but a little henbane leaf and mariphasa seed mixed with fresh horse urine never hurt anyone, at least not that Mama had ever heard.

Today was special for Diddybelle, since it was one of the rare times when she performed one of the traditional rituals of her race. She took an herbal bubble bath in her Pyrex loaf pan, toweled down with half a washcloth and donned her best custom-tailored denim and black leather outfit. She fastened her tiny gold-plated chain link belt around her waist and strapped custom-made, dual stainless-steel-razor-sharp, one-inch daggers to each leg.

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Her studded leather armbands finished the preparation to face a new day. In the mirror she thought she looked “hot,” with two full-color snake tattoos winding down her arms and the black widow spider on her lower back.

“Yeah, the kid will get a bang out of this,” she thought.

Mama Macusa was waiting for Diddybelle in the back room where they prepared the herbal medicines. Today, Diddybelle was to grant a special birthday wish for Mama’s 11 year-old, honor student niece Shaniqua, who would return home from school around 3 PM that day to drop off her books. Shaniqua was supposed to go with her mother for a movie and birthday dinner. But before that, Diddybelle and Mama planned with Shaniqua’s mother to surprise the girl by granting her a special magic wish.

“What do you think she will wish for?” Diddybelle asked Mama.

“Lord, who knows young girls today,” Mama relied. “I would guess it would be something expensive like a video iPod or clothes. Or it could be a trip to Disneyland, DVD’s or CD’s. The possibilities make my head swim.”

After breakfast, they went to work stocking shelves and cleaning. Before they knew it, it was lunchtime, so they started working on a pot of gumbo. That idea was short lived when the brass bells jangled in the front room. Clients! Mama Macusa peeked through the beaded curtains and gasped.

“Just what I needed today!” she mumbled under her breath.

The customers were familiar to Mama, the elderly Lahdidah Sisters, dyed-in-the-wool hypochondriacs. They were weekly drop-ins for small talk and smaller purchases. Contricia Lahdidah was the tall, white-maned one. The short, blue haired sister in the faux-antebellum outfit was Enigma Lahdidah. Both were dotty, but solid, “old Black money” from the 1900’s and regular cash customers worth the weekly ear-bending.

“How are you, Dearie?” Contricia greeted Mama as she came through the beaded curtains carrying two complimentary cups of hot Whambango herbal tea.

“Oh, just dandy,” Mama replied.

“That tea smells so good,” Enigma commented to Mama. “Our stomachs have been a mass of Boy Scout knots this past week.”

“I don’t have a clue as to what started our problems,” Contricia chimed in.

Mama gritted her teeth as the sisters continued on *ad nauseum* with graphic descriptions of their intestinal ailments.

“What *have* you two been eating?” Mama inquired.

“Nothing out of the usual,” Enigma replied. “Except for the Taj Mahal party the night before at our church to raise relief funds for New Orleans survivors.

I’ll bet it was that spicy, curried Tandoori goat.”

“Just wait here. I have exactly what you need,” Mama said as she rushed to the back room where Diddybelle was rolling in her chair, stifling her laughter. Mama wasn’t wasting her considerable talents on these zanies. She crushed up fifteen Zippy Seltzer tablets into fine powder, mixed in a bottle of Pepto Bepto, poured