

BRADFORD WRITES  
University of Pittsburgh-Bradford  
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## White Wings

By Brenae Warner

I was nine when mamma and grandma flew. One day they grew big white wings with feathers and flew, or at least that's what auntie told me happened. She said that one day all people would fly, that they would leave this place and begin a new life in a better one. I wasn't there the day they got the chance to fly, but each time I think of them I think of the regret I feel because of what I did. I think of the day I caused trouble...It happened like this. My brother and I were spending the weekend at grandma's place, just like we did every month when we left poppa. My mamma also stayed at grandma's place. My older brother told me that she never left.

"How come I never get to see mamma?" I pouted at my brother. "I wanna go see her," I said.

His caramel-colored nose scrunched up and his thick black eyebrows furrowed in anger. "You ain't allowed, you know what grandma said."

I matched his expression, the same caramel colored nose turning up, the same thick eyebrows furrowing and my small lips pulling back as I yelled back at him. "How come you only get to see her sometimes? I neva do, she's always locked up in the room across the hall and I can't see her. It's not fair! It's not fair!"

He yelled back at me, "Well, life ain't fair!"

At that moment, all sense of reason left me. I knew the rules but I didn't care. I wanted what my older brother had, I wanted to see mamma. I ran across the hall of the small apartment, my small feet slapping against the carpeted floor. I reached mamma's door and began to jiggle it

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and tried to force it open. My older brother saw me and ran right past me to go get grandma, who had been sleeping in her room. Sleeping the cancer away, or at least that's how poppa explained it to me.

I began to move more frantically and began to bang my shoulder up against the door. My breath became heavier and shorter as I threw my small body against it, and my long braids slapping the side of my face as I moved. It was at that moment that I began to hear the sound of grandma coming out of the room. Her round body began to move slowly towards me. "Baby, stop that," said my grandma. Her voice was always sweet and soft and never did it raise enough to yell. Grandma rarely got angry.

"No, I wanna see mamma!" I yelled.

Grandma looked at me, her coco brown eyes full of warmth "I'll let you see her tomorrow, okay?" She asked as she moved to stand in front of me, her five foot four frame towering over my four foot four frame.

"No!" I screamed back, "that's what you always say!" My grandma went silent and I did too for a moment. Then I spoke. "I'm staying here all night if I've gotta." Grandma sighed at me before she walked away. I did this a lot, I would always threaten to never move and grandma would usually bribe me with a bunch of things until I left. But as time passed the bribes stopped and I would sit out here until I grew hungry or bored. At that moment, however, I told myself that I would not waver, that I would not give up. I don't remember how much time passed as I sat out there alone until older brother came. In his hand he held a small brown bag. He always had that bag when he went to see mamma. Grandma told me it was a bag of special treats that mamma wanted. He came to stand in front of me

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“Move,” he said, kicking me a bit.

“No!” I screamed back.

“Fine,” he said before he started to walk away.

“Fine, I’ll move” I said. I knew that older brother had the key to mamma's door and so if I didn’t move it wouldn’t open. I got up and walked to the living room that was at the very end of the hall. I moved behind the wall peaking at brother as he grabbed the key from his pocket, the same key that I attempted to look for each time we came, the same key that was always kept hidden. He stuck the key in and jiggled the door for a bit, and after a small click the door opened. Now was my chance. I got up and ran as fast as my small feet could take me before my brother could enter the room and shut the door. I ran and ran and caught up to him. I pushed passed his body and entered the room.

A strong pungent smell hit me as soon as I walked in. It was a smell I would later come to know as alcohol. I looked around the small empty room and saw nothing but a mattress on the floor. Mamma laid on it. Her frail and small body that was slowly deteriorating laid on her side facing the one window the squared room had. I ran up to her and began to shake her. “MAMMA! WAKE UP,” I yelled. Mamma stayed still, her body only shaking as I frantically moved her from side to side. It was at this moment that grandma walked in. I think my older brother had gotten her after he saw me get in. Grandma stared at me as I shook mamma. The room was nearly full of silence aside from the squeaking of the mattress as I pulled mamma from side to side. It was at this time that I began to grow upset at mamma.

“Why won’t she answer me, grandma?” I asked. Grandma didn’t say anything, she simply walked up to me and began to pry me off of mamma. I began to scream and thrash

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around, my body shaking and my hands flailing. “Let me go! Let me go!” My screams got louder and louder. And soon enough older brother had walked over trying to pry me off too. I remember thrashing my fists about frantically. It was at this time that my vision had become blinded by tears, and my nose leaking streams of snot.

“LET ME GO,” I screamed, hitting grandma in the stomach. Grandma heaved and began to cough very heavy. Her chest moving fast and her body almost folding in half. My brother on the other hand had grabbed my arm and started to pull me away from grandma and out of the room. I thrashed around kicking and hitting him all over his body. He had stopped and stared at me, his face becoming softer and almost tired looking.

“Queenie, please stop” he said. I’d never seen my brother with that expression before. At that moment he looked almost like a stranger to me. But even as my brother pleaded, my own anger did not subside. I began to cry harder and scream louder. I remember soon enough growing tired of fighting my brother and allowed him to drag me out of the room. I remember looking back inside just before he shut the door to see grandma sitting at the end of the mattress near mamma holding her chest, as she attempted to catch her breath. I remember seeing the brown bag brother brought with him on the floor and spilt over, with a small bottle of liquid right in front of it and a needle that fell halfway out of the bag. I don’t remember much after, but I do know the next morning me and brother left to go back home to poppa. After we got back home poppa said that we wouldn’t be allowed to visit grandma for a while. He said that she needed time to rest. Some months had passed by and auntie had told me that my momma had flown away, that she had grown big white wings and took off to a better place. She told me it was

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because of something called diabetes. She said it was making her sick, and that she grew wings so she could rid herself of the sickness.

Around this time I had also found out that grandma had gotten worse. Poppa told me that her cancer of the stomach had gotten really bad. When I heard the news, I couldn't help but blame myself. I blamed myself for what happened to grandma. Maybe if I hadn't hit her she would be better. I called her the same day I found out, crying and telling her I was sorry. She told me that "it would be okay," but grandma had lied. It wouldn't be okay. A couple of months after the incident auntie and poppa told me that grandma grew her white big wings and flew away to join mamma. I remember poppa holding me and older brother, whispering that everything would be alright. I don't know how long I cried that night, but I do know as I cried, I prayed and prayed and wished and wished for big white wings of my very own.