

## **Miss Universe**

By. Rebecca Avakian

Eudora's skin is cold as ice, piercing through my hands as I drag them atop the dining room table. Their deadweight and lifeless eyes have plagued me since I found them on the entryway floor to the colonial estate. I was supposed to paint them today, my canvas bag and paintbrushes abandoned where I found Eudora. My muse a now useless corpse.

To describe Eudora is easy and complex at the same time. Unlike the grey complexion they have now, I would describe them as golden. An aura of warm gold wrapping around glowing bronze skin. Eudora emanates power and assurance of life, angelic in every sense of the word. That essence is draining away from them laying lazily on the mahogany wood.

I have to save Eudora, bottle up as much of them as I can, but how can I do that? My eyes trail leisurely down their unmoving form. Eudora wore their signature white afro and golden floor length cocktail dress. They put in so much effort for today, tears bud in my eyes, and I should honor them for that.

My hands steadily assemble canvas and brushes and paints, retrieved from their isolation. Eudora poses on the table I left them: head tilted back, throat bared, fabric clinging skin, right leg hanging off the edge, and wide unblinking eyes. The sun filters through the window casting a radiance off Eudora's clothes, like molten gold encasing to preserve their body. I start to paint Eudora.

I decide to erupt a burning halo in the painting around Eudora's head. While they took the Angel nickname lightly, it has always had a chokehold on me. How else can I describe their

divinity? Eudora's angelic nature has been apparent since I met them as a child, that fiery warmth present in their watching eyes. They were my babysitter.

I remember the wonder and appreciation I had for Eudora those years. Late nights filled with icy slushes, fast food, vogue and vanity fair magazines. Some nights when my parents came home yelling, Eudora would patiently wipe away the tears. Their hands I remember burning a brand into me when they left town. I could never forget Eudora, so I add warm hues and flickering flame to their hands.

Deciding what to paint when it comes to Eudora comes at a great cost of my sanity and life. My existence has always been for them, and I have always felt empty. All I want is Eudora. I finally had everything, but now Eudora lies dead on the table and a facsimile on the canvas. I am alone again just like when Eudora had to leave town because of my father.

While I had to deal with my parents' divorce alone, I never blamed Eudora. The night Eudora left town, I watched as they ran bare to the world with my mom on their tail. My dad blamed my mom, and she pointed accusatory fingers toward Miss Universe on the television screen. I add shimmering constellations in the dips and turns of the golden fabric Eudora wears in the painting.

Miss Universe, a drag queen filling headlines, and Eudora are one in the same. I was angry at Eudora for leaving me, but their fame made it easy to watch them. I started to dress boldly in the same pieces as Eudora during my teenage years apart. My tastes strayed around the color gold because that color belonged solely to my Eudora.

I have to face the truth of the eyes peering back at me, and record them correctly on the canvas. This painting has to be perfect, to memorialize the summer I have had Eudora. Is that

why they chose to wear that dress today? To remind me of meeting them again at my high school graduation?

The paintbrush lifts away from its progress detailing Eudora's golden brown-flecked gaze. I can't believe I almost forgot. Eudora tried to leave me again after graduation.

A strangled laugh fills the room, and a hot shock shoots into my stomach. The paintbrush escapes from my hand as I topple the canvas over. Paint spills to mix with my stomach acid as I lurch on the floor. I'm drenched in cool sweat, peering up to the table where Eudora stares back blankly.

"I felt guilty," Eudora says with unmoving lips, "I shouldn't have slept with your father."

"Fuck that, you tried to leave," I say while struggling to get off the floor.

"I needed to feel wanted. If it makes you feel better, I never loved him."

"I've always wanted you. You left and tried leaving again. Do you not feel this?" I wrench Eudora's freezing hand over my burning heart.

"Yes, and I love you."

"I love you too."

"No," Eudora's lips are left in a half smile, "you can't love if you don't know who you are."

Eudora's laugh echoes throughout the room as I fall back in pain, the canvas breaking my fall. Their skin was burning into my hands.

The night sky is littered with a clear view of the stars. Eudora's colonial estate removed enough from light pollution to allow star gazing. Trees dot along the sprawling estate with

common dogwoods, oak, pine, and elm. The natural beauty comes from the flowers handpicked by a gardener, but I only have eyes for the universe.

I look away and run a hand along Eudora's exposed leg. Nails catching in the skin like fabric.

My efforts to take off the garments left me with richly made fabrics, but also a way to keep Eudora's memory bottled up with me. The gold cocktail dress drapes around my figure similarly to Eudora's, and I hold the white afro wig in my lap.

"You can't let me go, can you?" Eudora says beside my ear. I'm lying on my back over their stomach.

It's almost as if it's several nights ago and I'm holding Eudora's hand on the balcony, gazing out over the estate. Crisp fresh air instead of the stench currently emanating from the body below me.

"No, I can't," I tell Eudora, "I won't, you're my purpose and my everything."

"You'll need to. Everything goes away."

"You're my Angel, immortality becomes you. You can possess me."

I say it as a promise that stays in the air of the room, and I lift myself on elbows to peer down into Eudora's face.

"You're the one keeping me here."

"So do it. Take my heart, my brain, my soul, my pain, my love, and my hate. I'm yours." I rest downward, forehead to forehead.

"I'm yours," Eudora repeats.

"For how long? I wait hours and hours in silence. You keep getting worse."

Eudora gives me a half smile with stars dripping down their face and say, "You've always worried too much."

I let out a silent scream, banging my fist onto the wood next to Eudora's head. Did I find a way to keep them? I will always be able to remember and honor Eudora, but where will the warmth they give be?

Shoving away the corpse, I hear a squelching thunk on the floor, and escape the room. I will succeed Eudora as Miss Universe and live on in their memory.