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YOUR NOSE IS GONNA GROW

Lionel Williams

One bleak fantasy morning in the long ago, I was born in a deep-seasweat that went womb, soft womb, I feel so afraid womb in the county hospital in Oxnard, California. I looked like the other splib babies except for my red kinky hair, my pine wood color and my big red ears that didn't look at all like you would expect an ordinary splib's ears would look. But the length of my nose was something that made everyone ponder. My nose was long where the other splibs noses were short, thin where theirs were thick, and sort of rounded in various places where theirs were square. But the most peculiar thing about my nose was that it gave the impression of still growing, and the problem was that I was born with a longer nose than any other splib baby in the hospital. In addition, when I got older I had to wear bifocal eyeglasses and when I was born I looked like a sad-eyed orphan doll, for a lingering sadness seemed to hang over me like a halo.

My parents were very upset about my appearance; especially my nose; my father going so far as to suggest that perhaps I wasn't his; but my mother assured him no one could be as ugly as I was and not be my father's child. My mother was afraid that with such a deformity as a long nose that I might have brain damage; but the doctor told her that I was a normal baby in every way except for the shape of my nose, and he went on to tell her that it was merely a superstition to believe that my nose would grow any longer, or that its length was due to any unnatural conditions such as black luck or some kind of evil; its length was just one of those things that happens, that's all.

But my various relatives didn't believe the doctor's explanation about my nose at all. Those relatives on my father's side said my nose was the fault of my mother. If she hadn't been the sort of woman she was: running around with other men, and so on, the Lord wouldn't have made my nose so long. But those relatives on my mother's side said my nose was an outward manifestation of my father's sin. My father being a crazy man, a man who lived in dream worlds, a man who let women make a fool of him. And then, there were those relatives, god-mothers

and aunts, women, old with wrinkled black faces and putty-grey hair sprouting from beneath wide floppy hats, who said my nose was a warning from God, that my life might go all right so long as my nose didn't grow any more, but if it started to grow, and that was why it looked as if it wasn't through growing yet, the growth would be a sure sign that I had done something in my life to trouble the waters, and that I would end up sinking.

Then those relatives with the black wrinkled faces and putty-grey hair would look at me and shake their heads and moan and groan and sing prayers to God that He wouldn't let my nose grow any longer. Then they would file by me and each one of them would kiss my nose in turn, and each one of them would place a silver coin on my nose for good luck; the coins and, I've now come to think the luck too, I would immediately shake off with glee.

And though I knew what the doctor had told my mother was true, that it was silly to think that people's noses grew, the warning of my black relatives worried me, and I tried to be good and stay clear of trouble; but this became very nervewracking, for I was constantly running into people, situations that made my nose throb and hurt, because any growth, any worthwhile change in your life is usually accompanied by pain; and to keep from suffering while you live is usually impossible.

When it came time to name me, in order to make up for my nose, it took my mother and father almost two weeks before they could find a name they thought would be suitable for me. At the outset, it was decided that I would be given a special name, not one of those everyday common sprob names such as Bill or Joe, or heaven forbid, Sam. And so, my father and mother had my relatives bring them all sorts of books that gave the explanation of royal names. But it was one of my aunts with the wrinkled black faces who finally helped my father name me, my mother tired of the waiting and confusion having given up long ago. My aunt said she had a vision about the Apostle Peter and she said that Peter should be my name. Before officially having me christened my aunt made my father kill a cock and boil him with his feathers on for good luck.