



Free: Short Stories

Anika Nailah

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In spare, elegant stories reminiscent of the writings of Harlem Renaissance writer Dorothy West, Anika Nailah illuminates the emotional, spiritual, and social realities that shape—and sometimes destroy—the lives and dreams of ordinary African Americans.

The stories in *Free* offer a moving, strikingly original perspective on how cultural experiences and social assumptions impact our lives. The characters include young children trying to cope with the mysteries of adult behavior, adults striving to define themselves in a society unwilling to accept who and what they are, and elderly people looking back on the often difficult choices they have made. They all share a yearning to be free of the ties imposed by others, ties that bind their bodies, minds, or spirits.

"Trudy" depicts a battle of wills between a black salesclerk and a white customer, shining a harsh light on the bigotry of the 1950s. In "My Side of the Story," a little boy struggles to understand why his mother has abandoned him despite her claims that she loves him. "All These Years" is a touching vignette about a couple married for fifty-four years who reminisce about the attraction they felt at their very first meeting and realize that the magic still remains. In the aptly titled "Inside Out," a man who has adopted all the trappings of the white world—the hair, the clothes, the speech, the attitudes—finds himself still ostracized in his office and gently mocked at home by a wife who embraces her blackness with pride.

In probing the interior landscapes behind the everyday faces her characters assume, Anika Nailah brilliantly exposes the injustices and struggles African Americans confront, the skills they develop in order to survive, and the psychological and spiritual costs of survival.

From the Hardcover edition.

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