

Angel and a Half by Pooja Lulla

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Author Pooja Lulla's debut book, *Angel and a Half*, published by Roopa & Co, has the archetypal angels of good and evil as the main protagonists.

Christian children are told the story of two angels- one black and one white being perched on their shoulders. The white angel inspires the child to do virtuous deeds while the black angel eggs the child into doing all sorts of mischief. It's up to the child to decide which angel's advice he wants to follow.

Author Pooja Lulla's debut book, *Angel and a Half*, published by Roopa & Co, has the archetypal angels of good and evil as the main protagonists but these angels happen to be identical twin brothers. Pooja doesn't just explore their personalities in just black and white; in fact she uses a riot of colours in the physical description of each angel.

The novel unfolds in Heaven, Hell and England, on Earth as it was in the 19th century. Heaven's Achiever, Angel Aggie, is smitten by the Devil's daughter, Luciferra, and before long they are husband and wife. The old stork brings them two bonny baby boys in blue satin diapers. Though alike as peas in a pod, they seem to be as different as chalk and cheese in their personalities.

Dev, the baby older by six minutes has an eternal impish twinkle in his eyes and is forever up to mischief whereas the younger brother, Sam, peacefully plays with his father's halo. When Sam sprouts wings and Dev red horns it is evident that Sam has taken after his angelic father and Dev after his mother.

Sibling rivalry intensifies as the twins grow older when Dev tries to undo all of Sam's good deeds on earth. Little does Dev know that he is after all half an angel, equally as capable as Sam to show himself and everyone on earth the path of virtue.

A striking feature of the novel is the use of sensuous imagery with colours in myriad shades and hues. Indeed a child's paint box birthday gift from heaven contains paints of almost of whole palette of the colour blue- Sky Blue, Midnight Blue, Ocean Blue, Baby Blue, Bubble Gum Blue, Inky Blue, Powder Blue, Icy Blue, Turquoise Blue, Berry Blue, Cornflower Blue, Navy Blue, Aquamarine Blue, Robin's Egg Blue, Bluebell Blue. The angels use Heaven's paint box to brighten up faded flowers and make the world look as pretty as a picture.

If Heaven is sweetly sensuous, Hell is fiery and vibrant. Coals sizzle, monsters groan and volcanoes erupt. Or yet a weirder noise 'aaork'- a hybrid of a frog's croak and a dog's bark is shrieked by Hell's demons. Hell's kitchen brews bat broth by the Wicca, Chameleon Chowder, Bandicoot Bisque, Porcupine Pie and Slug Stew.

The Devil's favourite nephew, Beezlee, inspired by the legendary fallen angel, Beelzebub, is not the evil fly as shown in classical literature, but a beastly green monster and part reptile, with three green eyes, four green arms, a filthy tail, and a cavity in each and every of his dirty yellow fangs. And the king of Hell, the Devil sits on a Throne of Bones.

Sometimes Heaven seems bland in comparison to this dynamic Hell, especially when St. Peter has to stuff cottony cloud in his ears, for the endless medley of the longest and shrillest songs of Heaven's opera is no music to his ears. Little

wonder then, that St. Peter gets nightmares that Heaven has turned empty and a gigantic 'House Full' sign is displayed outside Hell.

Pooja's delightful description of Hell makes it a very dynamic place, just as Milton did, with his glamorous description of Hell, in Paradise Lost. So is Pooja, like Milton, 'of the Devil's party without knowing it'? Does she in a way eulogise Hell?

Pooja answers confidently, "Hell is fun only for the characters that rule it. Heaven is a wonderful place where lots of delightful things happen. It's a place where birthdays are celebrated with parties and games and picnics high up in the air, where all your heart's wishes come true and where you feel no pain. You get to do wonderful and magical things like brightening faded flowers and making halos from rays of light. So, in a way, the book eulogises Heaven and tells you how it can be yours.

Though Pooja's book does celebrate the triumph of good over evil, hailing 'yummy deeds' and rewarding 'the fallen devil'- never ever does it get didactic in its approach but has abundance of rib-tickling comedy. We hope to see an animated film of Angel and a Half in near future. As Pooja says, "The screenplay will follow the book very closely, but there's going to be a whole lot more. More characters, more conflicts, more songs and more fun!"

And what will Pooja's next book be about? "Maybe a space-age saga set in the far off future," she says.

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