

Angels with Dirty Faces: Three Stories of Crime, Prison, and Redemption

Walidah Imarisha



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"There was a time I believed prisons existed to rehabilitate people, to make our communities safer. . . . When I saw for the first time (but not the last) a mother sobbing and clutching her son when visiting hours were up, only to be physically pried off and escorted out by guards, I knew nothing about that made me safer. This is the heart of this country's prison system. And the prison system has become the heart of America."—Walidah Imarisha, from the introduction.

This is no romanticized tale of crime and punishment. The three lives in this creative nonfiction account are united by the presence of actual harm—sometimes horrific violence. Walidah Imarisha, a sexual assault survivor, brings us behind prison walls to visit her incarcerated brother Kakamia and his fellow inmate Jimmy "Mac" McElroy, a member of the Irish gang the Westies. Together they explore the questions: People can do unimaginable damage to one another—and then what? What do we as a society do? What might redemption look like?

Imarisha doesn't flinch as she guides us through the complexities and contradictions of transformative justice, eschewing theory for a much messier reality. The result is a nuanced and deeply personal analysis that allows readers to connect emotionally with the stories she shares, and the people behind them.

Walidah Imarisha is a writer, organizer, educator, and spoken-word artist. She is the co-editor of *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories From Social Justice Movements* and author of the collection of poetry *Scars/Stars*.

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