REVIEW

Mon corps donné pour vous, by Marouane Essadek

by Nicolas Becard

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In a chilling story, Marouane Essadek lifts the veil on American eugenics through the fate of Carrie Buck, forcibly sterilized and turned into a legal precedent: Buck v. Bell.



📖 *MON CORPS DONNÉ POUR VOUS (My Body Given for You)*

In this chilling and little-known story, Marouane Essadek lifts the veil, or rather the lead blanket, on an entire chapter of American history. A hidden, sick side: that of a handful of men who, across the various states and with the help of the highest legal bodies, would, on top of segregating the Black population, mutilate thousands of women (and men, to a lesser extent) in the name of a deadly doctrine: eugenics.

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When Emma Buck gives birth to little Carrie on July 3, 1906, she knows nothing of the tragic fate taking shape. She doesn't know that the madness of men lurks in the shadows, ready to annihilate her, and above all that her daughter's name will cross the twentieth century.
What seals the Bucks' fate is the deliberate disappearance of a man (well, well), Mr. Buck, Emma's husband, Carrie's father. A single mother, in segregationist Virginia, with a small child: alea jacta est 🎲

Emma's life of poverty turns out to be a windfall for the Dobbs couple, who take advantage of her distress to take Carrie away from her by shamefully pointing to her failings as a mother. Behind this false charity hides the cynicism of Alice Dobbs, a Thénardier-in-chief, who sees in taking Carrie in a source of labour, a cut-price maid and a real punching bag.

Separated from her daughter, Emma leads a dissolute life, dependent on the charity of Charlottesville's residents, occasionally selling her body. First disqualified in her role as a mother, she now sees puritan society attack her standing as a woman, judging her immoral. The axe falls: with Mr. Dobbs's help, Emma is sent to a colony, a true detention centre where all the disqualified end up, "the socially inferior."

At 17, Carrie is raped and made pregnant by a member of the Dobbs family. Appearances must be saved, fast: judged immoral in her turn, she is convicted and shipped off to the colony after the child is born. The Dobbses, ashamed of nothing, adopt the baby. In a sad twist of fate, it is in this confinement that Carrie will at last be reunited with her mother, never forgotten, always loved.

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The story of Carrie's fate, pieced together from archives, is interspersed with chapters devoted to learned men: scientists, jurists, politicians, theorists, all from great lineages. Each, in his own corner (while watching the others and communicating with them), develops the same delirious ideas of pure blood and the inferiority of certain races, with an obsession with "cleansing" their country.
Once the laws are on their side, they are free to sterilize wholesale every population declared a threat to their privileges.

Carrie Buck's name will be etched in history: her case sets a precedent. The Buck v. Bell ruling will even be used as an argument by the Nazi defence at the Nuremberg trials, some of whose judges, let us remember, were American, while at the very same time sterilization was still practised in the United States. One thing is certain: Americans will never choke on consistency.

A gripping read, in which you feel all the tenderness and hard work of the author so that, if not to pay tribute to Carrie and, through her, to all these victims, at least her name does not fall back into oblivion.

— Nicolas Becard

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