

Review: "Angel of Greenwood" by Randi Pink

You can know what is coming and still not be prepared.

That is the case with *Angel of Greenwood*. I knew this story would end in massacre. I first learned of Greenwood in my early twenties. I say "of," and not "about," because I didn't initially understand the scope of the violence white residents of Tulsa perpetrated against the thriving Black community of Greenwood.

That being said, in my mind, this is first and foremost the story of Angel, the fierce caretaker, and Isaiah, the poet. It is first and foremost a story of love. Of each other, of family, and of community. One thing I appreciated was the way the reader gets to know Greenwood through the eyes of Angel and Isaiah. You get to walk down the streets with them, smelling flowers in bloom and meeting the neighbors. Sometimes you even get to laugh alongside them. Randi Pink does a beautiful job of immersing the reader in Greenwood. Not only that, you can feel how keenly this is home for the two main characters, home in a way that many Black Americans at the time did not get to experience.

This is something both Angel and Isaiah struggle with throughout. Though they have differing perspectives, Angel grounding herself in the works of Booker T. Washington and Isaiah carrying around a well-worn copy of DuBois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, they both struggle with the guilt of living in Greenwood. The guilt of getting to live in a thriving, self-sufficient, supportive Black community. In their minds, it was both blessing and burden.

Randi Pink reveals in the author's note that this story was initially set in an imagined, everyday version of Wakanda. She just wanted to write a story of two young Black people falling in love unencumbered. When she learned of Greenwood, she reimagined her story in the real-life version of the community she had dreamt up. A place that was eventually destroyed.

I nearly wrote "community," not "place," but that doesn't feel right. People lost their lives. Homes, businesses, and even the church were burned to the ground. But the white mob that invaded Greenwood on the night of May 31st, 1921, was not successful in destroying the community because community is not a place, but rather the connections, love, and care shared between people. That was very much still alive.