



One Shining Soul

Wayne L. Wilson

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A woman with mystical powers exposes Angelenos' disunity on the basis of race, gender, and faith in the thoughtful novel One Shining Soul.

Wayne L. Wilson's spellbinding novel *One Shining Soul* imagines how modern Americans would react to a new Christian prophet materializing as an unassuming Black woman in Los Angeles.

Joseph kept his soft-spoken daughter Olisa's abilities secret for years. Born amid the chaos of the LA riots in 1992, she is plagued by visions of angels, can feel when someone's death is near, and can heal people of debilitating illnesses and injuries. When Olisa brings a stabbed gang member back from near death on a crowded Santa Monica beach, reporters pounce on the story, saying that she has been blessed by God with healing powers.

Joseph is desperate to protect Olisa, but he relinquishes control when his intelligent mogul son, Noel, sees Olisa's gift as a business opportunity and Olisa agrees to let him handle her public relations. But Noel's work on that front devolves when he gets greedy and proud. Tension rises and suspense builds as the public relations campaign spirals out of Noel's control. The book careens toward a heartbreaking ending that decries disunity on the basis of race, gender, and faith.

Joseph narrates, his voice humble, honest, and searching, as when he says to Olisa of himself and Noel, "The problem is your father and brother are two ignoramuses who have their own stuff to work out. I guess I haven't been as great a father as I thought I was." His perspective offers a slight distance from Olisa and the events of the story, making her powers seem all the more mystical and mysterious. To him, Olisa is his precious, quiet daughter whose independence and wisdom made her entrance into adulthood graceful. Noel, on the other hand, disappoints his father with his egotism despite his overwhelming educational and financial successes. The juxtaposition of how Joseph treats his children exposes his faults and values and compels Noel and Olisa to evaluate how their upbringings shaped them.

Action scenes, as when riots erupt after a concert where Olisa heals someone in front of the crowd, are relayed in cinematic detail that makes the magical realism of Olisa's powers stirring. Though they, too, are delivered in exquisite visual detail, the series of flashbacks at the beginning of the novel slow its pace, though. Lengthy conversations between Joseph and others also impede the book's progression.

Sly references to Joseph's soul food restaurant add flair to the worldbuilding, as when he witnesses a confident man entering a room "as effortlessly as butter melting on a hot roll" and wonders if his "soul would be stewed in the iron Dutch ovens of hell." Local and historical details further flavor Joseph's observations of the greater Los Angeles area and the modern media landscape.

Exploring unity and neighborly love in a world corrupted by skewed media, *One Shining Soul* is an elaborate, inspiring novel about a contemporary Jesus figure.

AIMEE JODOIN (September 26, 2024)

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