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Summary: My Best White Friend, Cinderella Revisited

Patricia J. Williams's piece "My Best White Friend" is a piece of satire which attempts to illustrate the cultural gap that separates whites and blacks, as well as show how our society caters to white standards of beauty. In the piece we see two female friends, one white and one black, discussing things like make up, men, celebrities and throughout the conversation, making some observations about race. We see how each of their experiences divides them, despite the fact that, race aside, they have many other things in common. This piece shows us how the average black woman views herself, especially in comparison to white women, and what it is like to grow up and live everyday in our world as an African-American woman in general.

We begin with the two women getting ready to attend a party. In this section we become familiar with how each of these women were brought up in terms of race, and how that translates into the way they now view themselves. The black woman explains how her white best friend was brought up with stories of princesses, white horses and knights in shining armor, and compares this to the stories she was told in her childhood: "...stories my mother raised me on: about slave girls who worked their fingers to the bone for their evil half sisters, the "legitimate" daughters of their mutual father, the master on the manse, the owner of them all..." (809). This comparison helps us to further understand how each of these women see themselves in regards to (or lack there of) their race. The black woman describes how her white best friend is trying to

assist her in transforming into a “trophy wife”, but she knows that this is something exclusively reserved for white women, as she was taught growing up that she would always be the underdog, while the white woman was told that all girls could become princesses.

In William’s piece we also see how the two view each other, and race in general. We learn that in a community apparently dominated by white people, the white woman believes that the black woman is her only friend of color because of class and the socioeconomic hierarchy, while the black woman knows that this is because of race and how she is an exception to the societal rule which divides people based on their race. At one point, the white woman says “People should stop putting so much emphasis on color - it doesn’t matter whether you’re black or white or blue or green” (810). A few sentences later, in response to a remark made by the black woman about the color names of make-up portraying “racial envy”, the white woman insists “We’re all sisters under the makeup” (810). This reveals the substantial difference between the two women, which is that because the white friend is white, she can view race in these cut and dry terms, saying things like “...it doesn't matter whether you’re black or white...” or “We’re all sisters...” because she doesn’t have to worry about these things in a realistic way, while the black friend understands the true consequences race has on your life and the way society views you.

The black friend then goes into depth about how she appears to the outside world as a result of being a black woman. She describes an encounter she once had with a white man at a party, who became deeply infatuated with her simply because she spoke intelligently, a skill he presumed no black women possessed. The black friend later goes into depth about how black women are put into this box where they are neither feminine nor masculine, and are portrayed to society in a very dehumanizing way: “We black women are figured more as stand-ins for men,

sort of like reverse drag queens: women pretending to be women but more male than men” (812). Black women face a myriad of problems - many caused by how society and the American system has set them up to fail - that require them to be “stand-ins” for men, and yet this is exactly the thing that society mocks them for.

At the end of all of this, the black woman asserts that, despite the injustices that naturally come with being a black woman, she does not envy her white friend. She accepts who she is and the life that she has been given. She accepts that black women just can't simply be Cinderella's. They have to find their own way. Though it is unfair, it is the way our society is set up, and she is ready to continue on as a strong and independent woman, despite the hand she has been dealt.

Works Cited

Williams, Patricia J. “My Best White Friend: Cinderella Revisited” *Callaloo* 19.4 (1996): 809-813. Print.