Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Carrie Lynn Hawthorne: Three Flash Fictions

Carrie Lynn Hawthorne · Thursday, November 11th, 2021

Lock and Key

"Was this your first time?" He fastens the lock from his locker onto my wicker bed, slipping the key into his pocket as he zips up his jeans. It's the last day of ninth grade, after school.

I lie back on the bed, covering myself with a sheet. I put on some Chapstick.

I don't want to tell him he wasn't the first. This was the first time that counted. This was the first time I wanted it. This was the first time anyone needs to know about.

"Let's never do that again," he says. Those eyes, full of regret. He thinks I'm innocent. He will always see me this way. My reflection in those eyes is just how I wish I could be.

Fifteen years later. In our retro tiled bathroom, I sit in the pink bathtub, surrounded by piles of tiny, iridescent bubbles. If I listen carefully, I can hear them pop, which sounds like cackling laughter. Like a clock ticking off the last moments of our life together. Knees drawn up to my chest, I am swollen with months of gluttony. The light has gone out of my eyes. I stare off, barely aware that he is there.

"I don't deserve you," he whispers.

Sitting on the edge of the tub, he scrubs my scalp with his fingertips. Rubs a bar of French soap across my shoulders and down my back. The way he touches me, as if my body were his own body, knowing every mole, every divot, every ache. He pours a cup of water over me, rinsing it all away. But he could never make me clean. Not the way that he expects.

He will stay. I will go.

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Baby Hand

Before I was born, my mom dropped a piano on her right hand, chopping off all her fingers. After twenty-six reconstructive surgeries, she was left with nothing more than a fleshy claw.

I developed a habit of hiding from her in the middle of the racks at Mervyn's. It was only when I was running away from her that I noticed– she couldn't catch me. She could catch up, but she just

couldn’t grab on; I’d easily get away. I could see in her face that losing me was her worst fear. This made it my favorite game in the world. No wonder she had to resort to a leash.

Later, I would lay my head on her lap, like a puppy. I would listen to her stomach gurgle and she would run her custom acrylic nails through my hair. Sometimes she would wrap me in a towel that was hot out of the dryer.

“Shh, go to sleep,” she would say, running her fingers over my mouth like she was closing a zipper. Sipping her iced tea, watching soaps, she was her own private island. Behind her eyes, her entire lifetime was a secret room only she could enter.

The year nature decided I wasn’t a little girl anymore, there was a great earthquake. Our house crumbled, and we lost everything. My mom got Valley Fever and she wasted away on a hospital bed in our FEMA housing. A part of her lung was removed; she was drowning in our living room. A nurse was by her side at all times. As I wandered in the field behind our complex, I discovered a bottomless gash in the ground, an offshoot of the San Andreas Fault.

I would lie awake in my new bedroom, my mother downstairs, suffering through her decision to live or die. I didn’t know yet how to pray. I would often think of that crevasse in the field, of stumbling into it unaware. My mom, the only person left I could cling to. Her baby hand, hanging over the edge, roped with I.V.s carrying deep antifungals. Her stiff fingers, frozen into a reach, unable to close around my wrist. She was unable to grasp, unable to save me from going down. She hoped I’d fly. But first I’d have to fall.

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So Gold

“I’m sorry, but we don’t allow visitors in your room. You and your boyfriend can talk out here.” The nurse leads Vince and me to an outdoor patio, where we sit in plastic chairs facing a locked metal security gate. She stands nearby, arms crossed.

“They say I can come home just as soon as my new meds kick in.”

“About that…your mom is at the house. She’s packing up your shit.” Vince looks me over, rubbing his temple and playing with his eyebrow.

His favorite band shirt hangs on me like a nightshirt, coming apart at the seams. I droop like old vegetables forgotten in the crisper. Like the rose he just brought me from 7-11. Still cut off from life, not guaranteed to reattach.

“You don’t want me anymore. You want to throw me away. Like everyone else.”

He shakes his head, a dismissive sigh. “You tried to kill me.”

“I don’t remember it that way.” I curl into the chair, wanting to go back to bed.

“My mom says I can’t be with you anymore. She says I can’t have kids with you, or a life with you. You might pass this on, this… disease.”

“You’re dumping me? In a mental hospital?” I pinch the shirt, twisting the motheaten cotton,

making a little hole with my nails.

“Our life has turned into this… this scary movie. I don’t even know what’s real anymore.”

There is a long silence.

I trace a scar on his eyebrow. He got it in a fight over another girl while we were broken up. It’s the evidence that he exists outside of my horizon.

I close my eyes. “Do you remember Cypress? Floating in the Mediterranean Sea. That circle of old Greek women, they stand in the water, chest high, and they sing, cause the sun is rising and it’s a new day.”

Vince blinks, wide eyed. “The water is so warm; the sand is so gold.”

I open my eyes. I kiss his palm. I close his fist. I say, “Keep this forever.”

The nurse is watching us.

He gets up to leave. “I’ll need my shirt back.”

I watch him go.

I sit there for a long time.

The nurse offers me a popsicle.

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