

2021 MCC Creative Writing Contest

Second Place - Fiction Category

“Bruises” by Kennedy Betancourt

I tapped my trembling finger on my coffee cup, the heat of it burning through my skin. I waited in silence for Marcel to return home. It had only been less than a month in this new house, but that’s all it took for me to realize that there was something else within this house that wasn’t supposed to be here.

I hear the door open. Shoes softly patter against the floor, telling me my husband is home and the door opening wasn’t another trick. His presence calms me, knowing a human was here with me.

“Suzette?” His smooth voice echoed through the house, bouncing off of the bare walls. I couldn’t put photos of us up. They’d be knocked off during the night.

“In here,” I reply, my voice wavering in the air. I’m terrified. I’m terrified to be alone in this house. I’m terrified to know that I can’t defend myself against this thing. I’m terrified of something happening when my guard is down.

“Hey? Are you okay?” He questions, setting his keys onto the counter and taking a seat next to me. His tone was light and unknowing. He didn’t know because he was always at work. The spirit never showed itself to him, almost making me feel like I was going crazy. Almost? I did feel like I was going crazy, absolutely insane.

I clench my jaw, resting my hand on the glass mug, feeling fear drip down my spine. How would I explain this to him? Tell him that I want to move again? Tell him that there is

someone else living in this house that I can't see? We haven't even been here for two months. He's going to call me psychotic.

"Hey, come on. What's the matter?" He asks more firmly, taking my hand and sliding it into his own. His hands were rough and familiar. I glance at him, seeing genuine worry float through his pupils.

"Marcy," I say, clearing my throat, "there's..." I'm at a loss for words. How do I tell him this? How do I explain?

"Suzette, you're scaring me." He squeezes my hand tighter, showing me how he's now having anxiety as well. "Tell me what happened, please."

"I can't, Marcel," I breathe out. My heart was racing. "You won't believe me. You'll call me crazy. You'll throw me into a mental institution."

He suddenly looks confused. I would, too, if I were in his shoes. "Sweetheart, I won't. I promise. Just tell me what-"

"There's a spirit in this house," I spit, my lungs failing to keep my breathing steady. "It hit me. I felt it touch me. It touched me, Marcel."

He sits there astonished. His lips part slightly, but no words come out. Then the grip on my hand is gone, and I feel my heart break. He thinks I'm crazy. He's going to leave me.

"What? Are... did you get hurt?" He stands up and grasps my face, searching it for bruises or cuts. He moves away the hair on my forehead, revealing the bruise that had already started to develop. His fingers brush it and I wince, the sting wearing off after a second. "Are

there any more bruises?” He goes to the freezer and grabs out some ice. Putting it in a bag, he brings it over to me.

I watched his movements carefully, unsure of his thoughts. He presses the cold bag to my head while listening to what I had to say.

“The force knocked me into the laundry room wall, Marc. I-I couldn’t see if there were more bruises, but I’m sore.” Tears clawed at my throat. The memory of what happened only a few hours prior replayed over and over.

“Okay, so... this spirit hit you into the wall? Show me.”

I walk over to the laundry room. The wall had a huge hole in it, broken from me falling into it. My body shape and size fit it perfectly. There’s dust covering the floor; I hadn’t been back in here to clean it. I was in shock. I crawled away, a scream caught in my throat. After realizing what happened, I stayed far away from the area. I sat in the kitchen, in that very spot, and waited.

“Oh my god...” he gasps, grasping my upper arm. “How... and you’re sure you didn’t trip? Maybe you dropped a sock and slipped on it. Maybe-”

“Marcel,” I hush, catching his attention. “I walk into the kitchen at night to get a drink, and I can feel eyes on me. Things move around by themselves. Things disappear. It’s okay if you don’t believe me. I didn’t expect you to. I know what I felt, and I know it wasn’t a damn sock.”

I said those words almost angrily, but with an understanding of his theories. He was trying to find something reasonable to blame it on because there was no way in hell he was going to believe a ghost could harm his wife. I knew better than that.

“We just moved here, Suz. Can you...” He seemed almost hesitant to ask. “Can you just be more careful until I can figure everything out?”

*Be more careful? Are you kidding me?* He doesn't believe me. He's not even trying to believe me. He thinks I accidentally did it. He thinks since I hit my head, I remember it wrong. *Is this the part where he throws me into a mental institution?*

“It's not that I don't believe you. I'm just... skeptical. I can't just believe this without having solid evidence. You could've just mistaken one thing to be another.” He gets worked up trying to explain himself without trying to upset me.

Too late. I guess a hole in the wall and a bruised up wife wasn't enough.

“Marc, relax. I know what I felt, but hey, maybe you're right. Maybe I remember it wrong. It's fine. Let's go eat dinner and talk about this later. Deal?” I strain a smile, feeling my lips wobble.

“Deal.”