

Iowa

by Michelle McEwen

Every morning I go to my gate and wait for Kiddie to come out to her gate and give me some news. She stays across the street from me. She starts out standing at her gate and shouting her news across the street before she makes her way over. Some days, she comes out as soon as I'm out there; other days, she takes her sweet time coming out. Never has she gotten to her gate before I got to mine— until this morning.

"I was waiting on you," she said. "I was about to come knock on your door."

"Oh," I said, still in shock at her being at her gate before I got to mine.

"Theresa and Stan moving to Iowa," she got right to it— she wasn't shouting this morning. Theresa is the woman Stan left her for. "Of course," she said, closing her gate and walking toward me and my gate, "Stan didn't tell me. I found out from Ann. She called me early this morning." Ann is Stan's daughter. She called from New York. Ann loves Kiddie— prefers her to her own mama. She hated when Stan left Kiddie.

"What Stan want with Iowa?" I said.

"I don't know," Kiddie said. "I'm still tryin to figure out what he want with Theresa." We both laughed at this, but I could tell she was only laughing to keep from crying. She said, "Theresa's got people there."

"Iowa's nothin special," I said. "At least the part I was in." I was partly lying. I had been to Iowa (Prescott, Iowa) and Prescott *was* nothing special but John-Darren was something special. He took me to other parts of Iowa, though, and those places were so beautiful and so peaceful I had wanted to stay. His people (white folks) made sure I left, though.

"You been there?" Kiddie said, eyes big, as if she was asking if I had been to Mars. She opened my gate, then, and came into my yard. She was sweating and squinting. Most folks would have asked

if she wanted to sit on the porch where it was cooler, but Kiddie likes the sun on her so we continued talking by the gate as usual. I said to her that I had told her before about my time in Iowa but she said she couldn't remember me mentioning no Iowa and that she coulda sworn I said Ohio. She might not have recalled the place, but she sure did remember the who: John-Darren ("I'll never forget you tellin me about that scrawny white boy in overalls with no t-shirt on *or* draws," she said laughing— real laughing). She was talking about the first time I had met John-Darren: he was working in the yard when me and my friend at the time (white girl I went to school with) pulled up to her Prescott people's home. We were there, *years* ago, fresh outta high school, visiting her Aunt Joan, Uncle John, and their tribe of boys. John-Darren being one of those boys. We got back to talking about Theresa and Stan, though, after Kiddie thought she heard her phone ringing.

"That's probably Ann calling me again," she said. "She wants me to come up there to live with her and help her with her kids while she goes back to school." And Kiddie told me how she was thinking about going and how she couldn't see staying here with Stan gone. "It's me always running into them at the supermarket— that's what Theresa don't like. That's why she wants to run off to Iowa."

"Probably," I said, crossing my arms.

"Iowa," Kiddie crossed her arms too, "is one of them places you go when you tryin to keep your man to yourself." Kiddie's eyes rolled then. I had wanted to tell her how silly that was and how folks up in New York probably think the same about down here. I had wanted to tell her that there was no place on Earth a woman could go to keep a man to herself— but she already knew that. Everybody knows that. It was John-Darren who once told me that he felt sorry for women because women spent most of their lives tryin to outrun, outdo, outlive, out-love another woman.

"I'm gonna go to New York," Kiddie said, "and help Ann with those young 'uns. She's having another one you know." I nodded even though I hadn't known. She said, "But can you see *me* in New York— in the city!" Kiddie and I both laughed at that, but this time

(missing Kiddie already and missing Iowa a little, too) I was the one laughing to keep from crying.

