

The Game

by Tawnysha Greene

When we visit our cousins in the mountains, we sit in a circle in their room, talk about our parents while our parents talk about us downstairs. When they tell us to go to bed, sleep on the floor, we turn out the lights, share more in the dark.

We play a game about whose daddy is stronger and they say theirs, we say ours. Their daddy smashes a hole in the wall with a single fist. Our daddy punches through a window, doesn't flinch at the broken glass, his blood. Their daddy uses a belt and they take a flashlight from under the bed, show me bruises not yet gone. Our daddy uses the horse whip, the BBQ cleaning tool with the jagged edge when Momma's not home, and my sister takes the light, shines over her legs where there are scars.

We take turns with the flashlight, hand it over without turning it off, and the beam bounces off the ceiling, walls, before catching on skin, bright beneath the light. A neck, bruised green. An ear, stitches along the back. A broken tooth.

We pull our pajamas off, hold ourselves out, twist down, around, point to our shoulders, our sides, our backs. We touch the places now, feel the hardness of bone, where new skin etches together under the light until we can't tell where one person ends and another begins.

