

The Yellow Room

by Tawnysha Greene

When Daddy's mother gets sick with cancer, she moves in with us to the yellow room upstairs. Momma lays blankets on the couch, on the floor for us, saying, *She won't be here long.*

Daddy picks her up from the hospital and she's dressed in a pink nightgown. He carries her up the steps and she holds his neck the way I do when Daddy brings me to bed, her arms bruised, covered with needle marks.

Momma stretches a baby gate across the bottom of the stairs, closes the door to the yellow room, tells me not to look. She climbs the steps in the mornings with trays of rice cereal, comes down with diapers, dirty sheets.

Momma plays cartoons loud for me in the den, long after she thinks me asleep, so that I can't hear Grandma call after the ghost she sees in her room—the son she drowned when he was a boy.

Momma and Daddy keep a small, brown diary on top of the refrigerator of what Grandma eats, how much she sleeps, what she says, and when they are both upstairs, I climb the countertops, peek inside.

I see Momma's loopy letters in cursive, Daddy's sharp script, the *As* and *Os* big, *Ts* crossed low, pages full of the yellow room. *She says, they're in my room, they're going through my things.*

I slip it back when Momma and Daddy come down the stairs and hide under the blankets on the floor, pretending sleep. Daddy's face is red and he's holding Momma. The room upstairs is quiet.

Daddy tells Momma of the years his mother didn't take her medicine, chased him and his brothers with a butcher knife through the house, tied their wrists and locked them in the closet, made them sleep with her in her bed. *It was the way she loved us*, he says.

I listen to them talk for hours of the crucifixes she hung in every room, zip lock bags of jellybeans kept in her dresser, and the knives she laid out on the porch before her husband left her, washed and dried, set neatly by copper pennies.

