

Pink Lemonade with Concrete Backwash

By LaToya Thompson

The guards passed out pre-made sandwiches. "Turkey," I said. It had the white creamy stuff on it. So did the ham. Pass. I sipped the pink lemonade. My stomach cringed, but hunger was the least of my problems.

By morning, the concrete slab I paced would know more about me than anyone. The crease of sunlight caged in the window faded into a humming halogen. Though not loud enough to drown out the reel in my head. Neither was the cold. And it was on everything. Even the blanket, a scouring pad, was like adding an ice pack to a freezer.

"What a world," I scoffed. My words did not stretch above a whisper. But unlike in my home, they dared to exist. "I can't call the police for what he did to me." My sandals scuffed the concrete. "It's not a crime to betray your wife, lie to your wife, manipulate your wife."

What he did was invisible. Even to me. No evidence of his demeaning war upon me. The shame bombings that came without warning. The mines set off by my need to express my needs. The decoys and traps deployed to bait me into combat.

I had no proof. Only my voice. But my words were propane and my tongue a match. Nothing helpful happened when I spoke. The little I said, sent smoke signals to church folks. But those self-described Jesus lovers only knew how to use fire extinguishers called Forgive-Him-and-Pray.

"Forgive him? Pray? Go to hell!" I seethed.

I pressed my forehead to the wall. The marital nightmare reeled within me. My body broke into a sweat. That is one way to cry. Postpartum, my body heat inflamed, causing rancid body odor. Deodorant was useless. He blamed me. The audacity. It was not my fault I got pregnant. Also not my choice to get pregnant. He thrust pregnancy in me. The worst of those Jesus lovers argued, "Your husband was only loving you."

My hands found the wall begging to absorb the cold. I turned and slid down. My nails clawed my shoulders. Despite the sweat, I needed to pee. No toilet paper. No paper at all. The sink was there. Yet, it was stingy. Only drops and splutters of water. It was an option, but not one I liked. "Fuck it." I sat on the toilet seat and went. Yanking off my panties, I wiped. Then, rinsed. Later, repeat.

Standing up, throbs torpedoed against my skull. I wrapped the scratchy blanket around myself and went downstairs to use the phone. The 10-minute warning for lights out sounded. The bellowing television in the corner did not care about my pain. I picked up the receiver. "Hi, could I please get some ibuprofen?"

"Ibuprofen?" she asked and stated.

"Yes, please," restraining my irritation.

"Ma'am, this is jail," she shot.

"So, is that a no?"

"That's a no."

"Ok, thank you." I hung up.

Another lights-out warning. Back to my cell. I peered out the door's window waiting to see the darkness. Suddenly, I was desperate for a construct of time. At dinner, an inmate said lights-out meant it was midnight. I could still hear the television. Maybe I could track the hours that way. Then, booms and clicks. Lights out. Door locked. I lingered before the headache forced me to lie down.

Unfortunately, the lights stayed on in the cells. I yanked the blanket over my head. Mucus began to drain down my throat as my mind raced toward what I would do after bail. The only certain decision was that I would not go back with him. "Hell, no," I muttered, pulling myself into a taut ball.

Somewhere between awake and asleep, I heard the television blaring. It felt like sand was in my throat. Snot was filling my nostrils. Again, no paper of any kind. The sleeve of my hooded sweatshirt and the blanket sufficed. Even the indecisive water from the sink gave relief. I nagged my body to sleep. Just like at home, except better. He was not here.

The loudspeaker blared and the doors unlocked. 6am. In the window, I looked for sun rays. But its bars still glowed from the halogen. My pounding head forced me to the first floor where I was met with honey buns and more pink lemonade. I chewed, chugged, and chatted until the hearings started at 8am.

When it was time to appear, we lined up. The guards cuffed us and escorted us to the courtroom space. The guard motioned at me. When the door

opened, the light glared. I was told to state my name. Then, the judge cited the charges against me. I knew it was a felony because of my attire, but hearing it, my resolve evaporated. I nodded and was dismissed.

Back at the holding area, the guard removed the cuffs. I avoided eye contact and went to my cell. I needed to pee, and my eyes wanted to cry. On the toilet seat, I did both. "Felony. Felony. Felony." I jabbed my nails into my thighs and wailed silently. My tears exploded on my face.

By lunch, I was more solid, beyond numb. I plopped onto the metal bench and sipped pink lemonade. An inmate told me she heard my name at the guard's station. At least two calls, she said. Bail was coming, but it needed to happen soon. Or I would get transferred to the county jail.

The sun's rays were determined to shine. But I stopped caring. Caring meant breaking and caving. Concrete has a way of teaching that. It has no give nor yield. That slab of concrete had one job: do not cave in. An hour later, the loudspeaker buzzed that I was being released. I focused on each step of concrete from my cell to the holding area door. The door unlocked. I stepped out. I was not going to break.

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