Woodland Wedding and Other Stories [1]

March 4, 2015 Flash Fiction [2]

Flash Fiction by Anna North



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Woodland Wedding

Carla was the one who put them up to it. She found the old wedding dress in the bottom of her mother's trunk and made Beth hold still while she pinned it in the back. She picked the white flower for Ronny's buttonhole and used a wet comb to flatten down his hair. I just carried Beth's train as we walked into the woods.

We were seven years old that spring. Carla was nine. Her eyes were two different colors; we would do anything for her.

That day, she led us to the most beautiful place in the forest, a clearing at the edge of the gorge where the maple branches curved to form a bower. The morning rain still glittered on the leaves; the grass was new and as fine as hair. Carla set the couple up against the backdrop of the gorge. She told me I was the photographer. She told me to make my hands into a lens.

Next, Beth and Ronny had to say the vows. They were to love, cherish, and obey one another till death did them part. They repeated the words shyly, haltingly, and Carla made them do it again until they could speak unblushing into each other's faces. Then she told them to kiss and they did so, once, with a little clicking sound. I pressed an invisible shutter button and felt real pride at having gotten a good shot.

Then she told them to step back. Ronny looked at Beth, and he looked over his shoulder, but they didn't move.

"You have to," said Carla, "or you aren't really married."

Beth began to cry, but she didn't run, and she didn't drop Ronny's hand. I took a picture as the tears rolled down her cheeks.

"What are you afraid of?" Carla asked. "You can't get hurt on your wedding day."

It came to me that she was wrong. I was old enough to know what would happen if they stepped back into the gorge. I thought of running to them and pulling them away. But I had to hold the camera. So I stood where I was, and they stepped back, and I snapped a picture of the bare air where they had been.

Cheese Baby

When my period came again, a day ahead of schedule, I carved myself a baby out of cheese. I only had enough for the head at first, so I had to go out and get two more blocks and melt the whole thing together with a candle. You probably want to know what kind of cheese I used. Cheddar. Brie was too soft; Swiss would have made him look pockmarked, and the other children would have made fun of him. Of course, I know he isn't a real baby. I have named him Bobraham.

It's amazing how much you can do with a cheese baby. I dress him in a little hat; I push him in a stroller. I take him to the park, and the other women coo over him. They freak out when I let them get close, but that is pretty much how people react to me, too. I tell Bobraham not to worry. Yes, I talk to him. It's actually weirder not to.

Oh, I worry, though. There are lots of things to stress out about with Bobraham that you wouldn't have to consider with a real baby. Mold, for instance. I cut it off with a little paring knife. It doesn't hurt him. Then there's always the issue of melting. Luckily, Bobraham was born in the winter, so we have a couple of months to plan for that. I am thinking ice packs.

And of course there's the question of a father. I am a traditional woman; I think a baby, especially a boy baby, needs a male role model. This, as you may have guessed, is why I am writing to you. I think you will find me and Bobraham

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very easy to live with. He is quiet, naturally, and you can eat bits of him if you get hungry in the night. As for me, not everyone considers me attractive, and many people have described me as strange. But I am the type of woman who does what she can with what she has, and over time I think you will come to find this appealing.



Before She Met My Father

My mother's first husband was a weasel, plain and simple. They got married in Kentucky; it was legal there at the time. They spent their wedding night in a tent on the riverbank, eating trout that Mama's husband caught in the dark water.

A year they lived together like that, barely getting by. He fished, and she taught school. She wore long-sleeved blouses to cover up the bite marks on her arms, but she could never get the musk smell out of her hair. The other teachers gossiped about her constantly. They made sure to show off the gifts their men bought them—silk scarves, shiny rings. Mama never got anything from her husband, except scabs and tick bites and, once, the long white ribcage of an eel.

He ran off in the end, of course. Slipped away one night, leaving her with nothing. He wasn't much as a husband—Mama admits that now. But oh, she always says, his claws, his sable fur.

Art Information

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Anna North's writing has appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle,* the *Atlantic, Glimmer Train, Nautilus, Jezebel, BuzzFeed*, *Salon,* and the *New York Times*, where she is a staff editor. Her first novel, *America Pacifica*, was published in 2011, and her second, *The Life and Death of Sophie Stark* [5], is forthcoming from Blue Rider Press in May 2015. These TW stories originally appeared on her personal blog.

Why is this flash work fiction?

> These stories are fiction because they originated not in the real world, but in my brain. Of course, sometimes something from real life will inspire me to write fiction, but the stories still feel like they come from inside. And more often than not, they exist in their perfect form only inside my head—my goal in writing them is to get as close to that form as possible.

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