Davy Crockett Is Just Fine [1]

April 17, 2017 Flash Fiction [2]
Surrealism [3]

Story by Angela Readman

Finalist for the 2016 Talking Writing Prize for Flash Fiction of the Absurd

Earlier that day, so many people wanted their picture taken outside the cabin it was hard to stand still. Grandmothers draped themselves across Davy Crockett, knees bent as if they wanted to can-can, instead of calling to their cameras. “Is the flash on? You sure? Take it, and we’ll grab a cream tea.”

We were in the land of scones and jam. The Isle of Wight was the first holiday my mother and I attempted, and it wasn’t what we expected. There were no children in the hotel, just me, and no singles. We ate pineapple gammon dinners and shuffled to the ballroom to see couples do the St. Bernard’s Waltz. One lady waltzed with me while her

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husband bought bingo books, but when he returned and invited my mother to try, she shook her head with a smile. She smiled all week so no one would notice we were lost.

The coach load of seniors dispersed, but not before we made someone take our picture with Davy Crockett. My mother laid a lily-white hand on the statue's arm. I grabbed the hand opposite, like he might lift me up for a piggyback.

"I felt something there," she said later, "did you?"

I did. I felt a flake of paint fall off his finger, as if he wanted to take our hands.

In the village store, we bought postcards, a snow globe of a hovercraft, and a set of wire cutters. Whatever we felt couldn't be explored with people looking. It had to be done after dark. The park was in floodlight. She snipped the wire and peeled back the fence, as if holding a door. We walked past the still rides and the closed cola stands. It had rained. Under the lights, rows of rain glistened between the logs like a silver-lined page. I lay a hand on the cabin. It wasn't made of logs after all, but plastic. My mother stood between Mr. Crockett's hanging arms.

He was much taller than she was. Taller than my father even, whom she once said was the only man who ever made her feel able to stand up straight. She rested her hand on a fiberglass chest and dusted off the fingerprints.

"Ladies…." Mr. Crockett bowed his head, touching his cap, just like we knew he would. "Would you like to come in from the cold?" He held out an arm, and we followed him into the cabin.

There wasn't much inside, but some benches and a lath table where people could eat their rainy-day sandwiches. He sat down, and my mother joined him, thigh no more than a raccoon-width from his.

"Do you wanna hear about the time I killed a bear?" He told us all about bears and what to do when we met one. Stand tall. Bang your pans, act bigger than you are, and, if all else fails, wrestle. "It has to look you in the eye and know you're not afraid." He looked at my mother and asked, "Are you afraid?"

"I don't know," she said, "sometimes."

He proceeded to tell us how to live in the wild. Set a trap. Skin a rabbit. Salt the fur, work it into a mitten. She rested her head on his shoulder and breathed it in. It was all good to know.

"And another thing," he said, "you should always have figured out how you'd kill a man, *if* you have to, so you'll always survive."

I yawned. I was starting to fall asleep by the fire painted on the wall.

"Are you cold, child? I can build a real fire. I can cook a real meal."

"It's fine," she said, squeezing his arm, "just like this, we're fine."

And it was. Until sunrise, we warmed our hands on painted flames, until Davy Crockett excused himself, went outside, and became static again.

It was never spoken of afterward. We developed our photos; they were all solo portraits. My mother: sea-swept and cuddling a cardigan or perched on a deck chair with shopping on her knees. Me: wearing a cap or holding up a Mr. Whippy as proof we'd had fun. Only outside the cabin were we together.

Flickers of it came to us, once we returned home. We cooked rabbit stew and whittled small animals together at night. I carved an otter. She made a hare. For two whole weeks, the holiday continued, a breather from perpetual personal ads, letters, blind dates, and phone calls where she laughed and laughed and laughed.

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Art Information

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Angela Readman's debut short story collection *Don't Try This at Home* (*and Other Stories*) won the Rubery Book Award in 2015 and was shortlisted for the Edge Hill Short Story Prize. She is also a prize-winning poet. Her folkloric poetry collection *The Book of Tides* was published by Nine Arches in 2016.

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> I was clearing out the attic, and I came across a scrapbook I'd made on vacation when I was a little kid. It had nothing but postcards and leaflets from the Isle of Wight in it. There were a couple of photos, but they all seemed to be of people standing next to fiberglass sculptures. It got me thinking.

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