

INTRO — THE LITTLE COOCHI SNORCHER THAT COULD

In hundreds of interviews with homeless women in the last thirteen years, only one woman was not sexually abused as a little girl or raped as a young woman. For most of these women, “home” is a very scary place, a place they have fled. The shelters are ironically the first places many of them ever find safety, protection, or comfort.

This is a woman’s story as she told it. What isn’t in the story is the fact that this woman met another woman in a shelter, and they fell in love, and through their love, they both got out of the shelter system.

THE LITTLE COOCHI SNORCHER THAT COULD

*(*Southern, woman of color)*

Memory: December 1965, five years old.

My mama tells me in a scary, loud, life-threatening voice to stop scratching my Coochi Snorcher. I become terrified that I’ve scratched it off down there. I do not touch myself again, even in the bath. I am afraid of the water getting in and filling me up so I explode. I put Band-Aids over my Coochi to cover the hole, but they fall off in the water. I imagine a stopper, a bathtub plug up there to prevent things from entering me. I sleep with three pairs of happy heart-patterned cotton underpants underneath my snap-up pajamas. I still want to touch myself sometimes, but I don’t.

Memory: seven years old.

Edgar Montane, who is ten, gets angry at me and punches me with all his might between my legs. It feels like he breaks my entire self. I limp home. I can’t pee. My mama asks me what’s wrong with my Coochi Snorcher, and when I tell her what Edgar did to me she yells at me and says never to let anyone touch me down there again. I try to explain that he didn’t touch it, Mama, he punched it.

Memory: nine years old.

I play on the bed, bouncing and falling, and impale my Coochi Snorcher on the bedpost. I make high-pitched screamy noises that come straight from my Coochi Snorcher's mouth. I get taken to the hospital and they sew it up down there from where it's been torn apart.

Memory: ten years old.

I'm at my father's house and he's having a party upstairs. Everyone's drinking. I'm playing alone in the basement and I'm trying on my new cotton white bra and panties that my father's girlfriend gave me. Suddenly my father's best friend, this big man Alfred, comes up from behind and pulls my new underpants down and sticks his big hard penis into my Coochi Snorcher. I scream. I kick. I try to fight him off, but he already gets it in. My father's there then and he has a gun and there's a loud horrible noise and then there's blood all over Alfred and me, lots of blood. I'm sure my Coochi Snorcher is finally falling out. Alfred is paralyzed for life and my mama doesn't let me see my father for seven years.

Memory: thirteen years old.

My Coochi Snorcher is a very bad place, a place of pain, nastiness, punching, invasion and blood. It's a site for mishaps. It's a bad-luck zone. I imagine a freeway between my legs and I am traveling, going far away from here.

Memory: sixteen years old.

There's this gorgeous 24-year-old woman in our neighborhood and I stare at her all the time. One day she invites me into her car. She asks me if I like to kiss boys, and I tell her I do not like that. Then she says she wants to show me something, and she leans over and kisses me so softly on the lips with her lips and then puts her tongue in my mouth. Wow. She asks me if I want to come over to her house, and then she kisses me again and tells me to relax, to feel it, to let our tongues feel it. She asks my mama if I can spend the night and my mother's delighted that such a beautiful, successful woman has taken an interest in me. I'm scared and I can't wait. Her apartment's fantastic. She's got it hooked up. It's the seventies, the beads, the fluffy pillows, the mood lights. I decide right there that I want to be a secretary like her when I grow up. She makes a vodka for herself and then she asks what I want to drink. I say the same as she's

drinking and she says she doesn't think my mama would like me drinking vodka. I say she probably wouldn't like me kissing girls either, and the pretty lady makes me a drink. Then she changes into this chocolate satin teddy. She's so beautiful. I always thought bulldaggers were ugly. I say "You look great," and she says "So do you." I say "But I only have this white cotton bra and underpants." Then she dresses me, slowly, in another satin teddy. It's lavender like the first soft days of spring. The alcohol has gone to my head and I'm loose and ready. There's a picture over her bed of a naked Black woman with a huge Afro. She gently and slowly lays me out on the bed and just our bodies rubbing makes me come. Then she does everything to me and my Coochi Snorcher that I always thought was nasty before, and wow. I'm so hot, so wild. She says, "Your vagina, untouched by man, smells so nice, so fresh, wish I could keep it that way forever." I get crazy wild and then the phone rings and of course it's my mama. I'm sure she knows; she catches me at everything. I'm breathing so heavy and I try to act normal when I get on the phone and she asks me, "What's wrong with you, have you been running?" I say "No, Mama, exercising." Then she tells the beautiful secretary to make sure I'm not around boys and the lady tells her, "Trust me, there's no boys around here." Afterwards the gorgeous lady teaches me everything about my Coochi Snorcher. She makes me play with myself in front of her and she teaches me all the different ways to give myself pleasure. She's very thorough. She tells me to always know how to give myself pleasure so I'll never need to rely on a man. In the morning I am worried that I've become a butch because I'm so in love with her. She laughs, but I never see her again. I realize later she was my surprising, unexpected and politically incorrect salvation. She transformed my sorry-ass Coochi Snorcher and raised it into a kind of heaven.