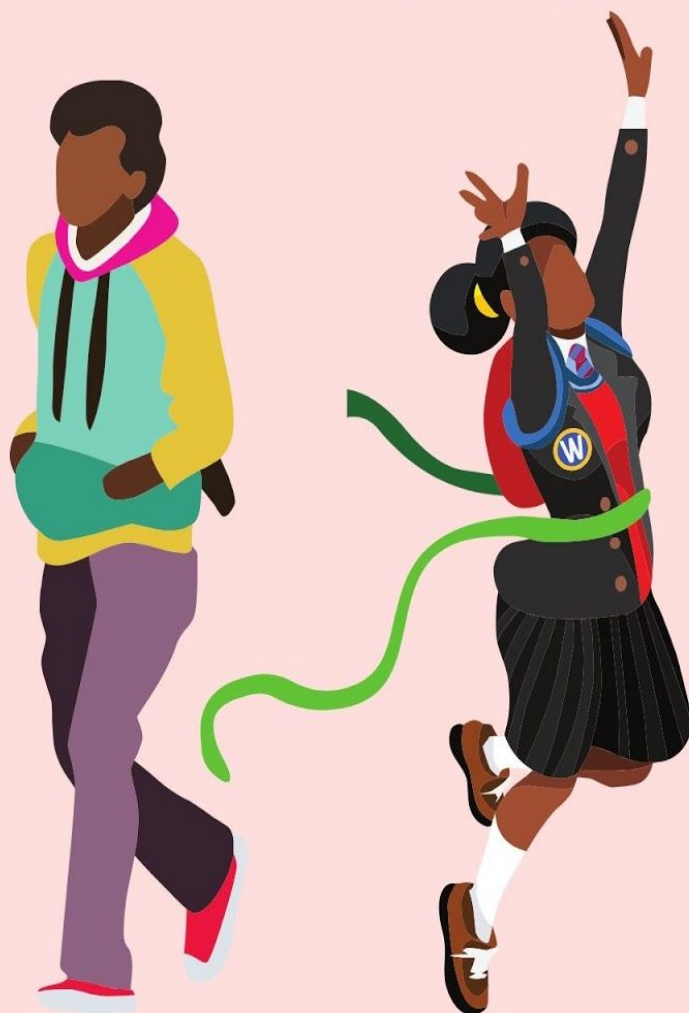


SPLINTERED BEAUTIES:

Lonely Midnight

BY SABRINA WIGFALL





Act I - The *Faithful* Spirit

"Good morning Ms.Maisley," Syre grins, the roundness of her cheeks contorting into something beautiful as she boards the city bus.

"Oh! Look what we have here! If it isn't Syre the great," Ms.Maisley responds, smiling a smile so bright that it never quite reaches her eye, but she lies well enough that Syre couldn't call it. "Where are we off to today?"

"To the grocery store ma'am, I gotta keep my mama quiet, or else we'll be on the channel seven news." She jokes, placing a grateful hand on the cheerful driver's shoulder

Though Syre was joking, there was some truth to her statement. Her mother was a nightmare even if she wouldn't say it, but that doesn't mean she can't think it.

Both women laugh it off, and Syre pays her way in before eyeing a middle seat. She never really liked sitting in the back because it never sat well with her spirit, and she never liked the front because it felt too personal. Thus, she absolutely loved the middle because you could see everything *yet* nothing all at once. Depends on the perspective of the day, you know?

"You know Syre, you are the only woman in Johnson's peak to wear such bright colored suits? There are not many women who could risk having men think-"

"And who cares what men think? Every day I go from point A to point B and sometimes to point C if I'm feeling risky. No need to stall any further, yes?" Syre says, nonchalantly, as she rests her tensed back against the soulless seats and raises an eyebrow with disinterest.

Ms.Maisie knew to leave well enough alone, but it never stopped her from projecting her traditional values on others. It was just strange that a beautiful middle-aged woman like Syre has no husband, and

she wears suits with makeup. None of those things sound normal in a given situation, and maybe they never needed to.

Syre was easily as tall as the next average-sized woman, but sometimes she felt taller than every woman. She didn't fit the criteria of what a woman would like, and she didn't act like it either. Her hips were wide, her nose prominent, and her posture was poised in the most elegantly slouched way there was. What other women possibly looked like that?

"Here's my stop," Syre says, shooting up from her seat, and down the walkway as passengers eyed the dark skin beauty "Thank you again, Ms.Maisley. Until we meet again?"

Syre gives her yet another famous million-dollar smile and the doors bust open, immediately, engulfing her into September's irregular wrath. Her wild kinks roam free as the polluted air soaks in its moisture and embeds itself within each curl. The smile that once graced Syre's lovely brown face had dwindled when she landed in front of the large intimidating building. She stepped in front of this building long enough to know that no one would ever openly walk-in, but when they did come out, it was always in tears, and from what looked like peace, but she could never call it.

"You know, If you go in there, God will never forgive you. I know you like to be a different little Syre, but there's just something better left to deal with yourself." Ms.Maisley says, the seriousness etching into her slightly aged features as she subtly glances between Syre, and the traffic up ahead. "The grocery store is at least a block away and you always choose to stop here."

Syre understood what scolding was and when it was happening, but this sounded like a concise threat. She didn't take too kindly to those considering she worked in the attorney's office as a lawyer. However, as a lawyer, she also understood when and when not to react to simple-minded people. So, she smiled big and fluttered her thick lashes once then twice and a third. It'll be a cold day in hell if Syre ever acted on impulse rather than logic.

"Ms.Maisley, there's more to life than public transportation. Walking is a privilege that is not easily accessible. So, who would I be if I didn't set an example? Besides, my mama and I's church is just across the street, the word of god isn't just for Sunday."

Anyone within a mile radius could see the gears turning in Ms.Maisley's head as she pondered Syre's words carefully. Whether she was able to detect Syre's sarcasm well or not, she chose to not respond to it directly. Instead, she chuckles to herself and revives the engine before asking rowdy passengers to keep their voices to a minimum.

"In that case, you continue to be good Syre the great," She praises, as she shuts the back doors and looks into the small rear-view mirror " The faithful spirit."

The two strong-willed women exchange longing looks when the squeaky front doors close, and the tension is left to bounce between their promising lands. Ms.Maisley pulls off in what seems like a hurry and Syre is left alone, as always. She clutches her expensive purse to her chest and exhales every worry. And at that moment, Syre wasn't sure if she was protecting herself from Ms.Maisley or her from herself. It doesn't matter because she's left standing in between the holy church and wicked therapy office.

"That's me. The faithful spirit." She whispers, to no one in particular, and rests on the bench nearby idly



Act II - Bloody Mary

"Mama," Syre says, shuffling across the hard wooden floor, as she folds her cotton clothed arms with patience "It's time to take your medicine. It's a little after nine. I was fair to you, so be fair to me."

Syre's mother, Mary, was a gentle soul, and a survivor of many obstacles. Mary was there for the civil rights movement, and she knows more than

anyone what pain is. The pain that she felt was something both indescribable and insidious. And Mary never talked about it even though Johnson's peak city officials always requested that she speak around Black history month. Maybe some things are better left to deal with yourself.

"Fair to you? I raised you, hence, why you're able to say those things to me now." Mary mouths, strolling past Syre, and into the living room where she sat in her bastard, deceased, husband's seat "Now come over here and gimme my medicine. And don't have me waiting no more."

Syre takes a deep breath and grabs the medicine kit from the old fashioned kitchen before sitting next to her mother. She readjusts her seating position and rolls up her sleeves to the elbow. This always had

to be the hardest part of her day, and not because she needed to stick the needle in her mother's arm either. Mary could be so troublesome when she wanted to be, and it's always when they got together.

Her mama huffs with irritation and rolls her eyes not so subtly.

Mary may have been a grown woman, but she acted like the biggest baby.

"Stay still Mama before I stick you in the wrong place. Then, you'll blame me for that too."

"Blame you? You little heifer, you! I don't always blame you. If I ask you to do something the first time, then I expect it to be done."

The two women loved each other very much, and there's no denying that. However, they could never seem to coexist with one another. Syre moved out the moment she turned eighteen and didn't bother looking back once things had spiraled out of control. It didn't improve nor not improve their relationship, and they both knew that, but at least Syre could be safe by herself. Maybe some things are left better to handle yourself.

"There," She says, slowly removing the needle and tossing it into the small bin before patting the bandaid over her mother's arm. "If that's all that needs to be done, I'll take my leave."

"To where? The grocery store. That seems to be your favorite spot downtown, huh?"

"Mama, if you have something to say, then I'd rather you say it."

"What do you want me to say? You come here every other day to give me my shot and then leave. Leave to god knows where. Could be to somebody's bed for all I know." Mary scoffs, pushing down her sleeve and raising her eyebrow accusingly

"We're not talking about my sex life. And for the record, I go from here to my home and sometimes I'll stop at the store. What crime am I committing, hm?" Syre replies, laughing in disbelief and storming off to the kitchen with Mary hot on her trails

"Don't walk away when I'm speaking to you, little girl! Ms.Maisley dialed me today and told me about what you're doing. I forbid it! I tell you! I will not accept this from you!"

"And I'm just supposed to accept everything about you, huh? How is that fair, mama? I'm a grown woman, and you continue to treat me like a child."

"Syre! You will always be a child as long as you are in my house. I know what you're trying to do. You are deflecting the situation like always because you're scared."

"That's real rich coming from you. Mother like daughter isn't that how the saying goes." Syre spat, angrily as she peered over the island counter at Mary, who gripped both seats in a rage with her wrinkled knuckles.

And then it happened.

Mary had *slapped* Syre across the face.

It left both women flabbergasted, and neither of them could utter a word. However, what astonished the two of them is when Syre had slapped her mama back.

In the Black community, it was unheard of to hit your parents back out of respect for them. They could disrespect you, but you couldn't disrespect them. It didn't matter the context of the situation, you aren't allowed to speak, or hit back no matter what.



"How dare you put your hands on me? Have you lost your mind? I am your mother!" Mary shouts, raising the same hand that had brushed against Syre's face moments ago and pointed at her as if she had been betrayed

"How dare you put your hands on me? I am your child! You are supposed to protect me from the world, and yet, you place your hands on me. You are the real devil."

"You know what, Syre? If you don't want to be here, then go! I'm sick of this attitude and you don't know how to be honest." Mary shouts, throwing her hands up in frustration and shaking as the rage spreads throughout her body.

"Honest? Fine, Mama! I've been going to the therapy office, is that what you wanted to hear? Is there anything else you want to take from me?" Syre pleads, her composed posture not matching her state of mind. "I haven't gone to any sessions. I just go to observe it for a little while, then I leave."

Syre felt so tired mentally. All she wanted to do was see her mama's face even if that meant arguing a little as always. However, the things between them turned from bad to worse within a matter of minutes. Syre had acted on impulse and slapped her mother back. She didn't feel good about it, because to her it meant Mary had won. She broke down a wall Syre had so carefully built.

Syre pauses as she tries to think of a comeback, but nothing forms in her mind. So, instead, she shrugs and lets out a watery laugh.

"I'd be happy to, mama." Ever so quietly, Syre brushes past her mother and puts on her dark-colored boots. The same boots her mama gifted her for her birthday earlier in the month. "Take your medicine tomorrow morning, please."

And that was the end of that saga. Syre threw on her wool coat and wrapped her brightly colored scarf around her head, then walked outside into dusk.

She begins to sway in the vacant streets of Johnson's peak while extending her arms as far as they could. It was just her and the moon dancing alone. Syre and the moon had a lot in common. They were always alone, giving out light to people who don't deserve it and wishing they could be somewhere else.

They were best friends to the very end, and only the two of them knew Syre's worth.

It was just them.

Two splintered beauties in the lonely midnight.

Bloody Mary.

Bloody Mary.

Bloody Mary.



Act III - Redemption

It's been two weeks since Syre had spoken to her mother. Neither woman reached out to the other, and they were beginning to worry. This is the longest they've ever been away from each other.

'Is she dead?' The two women pondered. If this was true, then they'd be informed, yes? Right?

That night Syre lied in her red double brassed bed and just talked to the moon. She knew the moon couldn't talk, but it didn't matter, at least someone, or something was listening.

Anyways, it was morning now and September 23, 2019, to be exact. Syre had gotten an unusual text from her mama, and she thought about ignoring it, she really did, but she couldn't. Mary asked for Syre to attend Church with her to pray for their relationship, and at this point, Syre lost faith in her faith. Nevertheless, She would do this too because she wants to make her mother happy. Her mother's happiness is her happiness essentially or something like that.

Syre tiredly climbs out of bed and sits in front of her expensive, vintage vanity. She applies her usual makeup look that consists of minimal eye shadow, blush, mascara, and nude lipstick. Her natural hair had got the best of her over the past week so she decided to cornrow it last night. Normally, her mama would do her hair, but she substituted as best as she could. The braids were freshly done, but not as neat and precise as her mamas.

She sighs and places on a wave cap before reaching for her latest wig. Nonetheless, she didn't put it on right away and instead strokes the synthetic hairs as she thought of what freedom looks like.

Syre softly touches her hair and breathes in deeply. She quietly reminds herself of her worth and to think positively. She couldn't go outside in cornrows because people will perceive her more masculine than she already presents. So, she put on her wig and got dressed in a pretty spotted blouse and black skirt. Something unfamiliar to wear, but she had embarrassed her mama once with hanging around the therapy office, so she needed to do this. She practices smiling while putting on her coat and grabbing her purse.

Try to keep a warm house. I'm gonna need it when I come back.

"Mama?" Syre questions, quickly stepping off the bus in her usual spot and seeing Mary wearing a similar attire as she cuddles a cup of coffee. "What are you doing? The church is over there."

Mary glances at Syre through her thick lashes but continues to say nothing. She hands her the cup of coffee and waves off Ms.Masie when she stares at them in confusion.

"I'm going to therapy with my daughter. What's the problem? You've got a bus to drive and these people have places to be." Mary scolds, glaring from Ms.Maise to the nosy passengers. She firmly grabs Syre's free hand and drags her inside the brownstone.

Syre is in shock at her mother's sudden change over the past few weeks, and she's sort of afraid because she doesn't know what to expect next. They were in the place that people as old as her mama considered to be evil and sinful. Yet, here they were.

The two women approach the front desk and explain their reasoning for being there. The receptionist was short but patient and explained to them the available services and asked for them to fill out some paperwork while she looked for availability. They agree and sit close together even though they were miles apart.

"Mama, you don't have to do this. I know you don't want to."

"Who said that I didn't want to do this? I'm doing this for you, Sy." Mary replies, almost offended at the insinuation as she fills out the paperwork for the two of them " We need to make this right. And I don't think we can fix it alone anymore. Not after what happened."

Syre attempts to say something, but she can't bring herself to. She watches her mama turn in the paperwork before sitting next to her again. Syre wants to hold her hand but decides against it. She has shown too much emotion today.

The two of them sit in silence as they wait and it takes no more than a half an hour before they are called.

"Dr.Lisbeth will see you two now. She's right down the hall and to the left."

The two disheveled women say their thank yous to the receptionist and make their way to the back room. When they enter, there's a brown skin woman with thick glasses and a causal suit waiting with a pencil in one hand and a notepad in the other.

"Welcome ladies, my name is Dr. Gerogia Lisbeth. I'll be assisting you today if that's alright?" She jokes, reaching out a hand to both women, causing them to laugh in comfort, "You must be Syre, and you must be Mary."



Both women nod their heads and sit across from one another, making the distance known between them.

"So, what seems to be the problem today?" Dr. Lisbeth asks, looking between the two of them inquisitively but choosing to not comment on the tense energy.

"My mother slapped me, and I hit her back."

"Syre!"

"We're in therapy, right? You said you wanted to be here, so let's be honest. Do you remember that? I'm not honest with her enough, apparently. Isn't that funny?" She says, slamming her purse down on the mahogany coffee table and sitting straight up almost defensively

"You're so sensitive, Sy! I suggested that you were being dishonest, at the moment, not that you're a dishonest person. Now you're just telling on yourself." Mary replies, pointing an accusing finger at her, and then at the Dr.Lisbeth

"Oh! So now I'm telling on myself? That's so rich, mama! Excuse me for not being the faithful spirit that you wanted me to be."

"Apology accepted. I swear had I sent you away as I started to then you would've never..."

"Never what, Mary? Syre wouldn't have done what?" Inquires Dr.Lisbeth, leaning in closer to the woman to make eye contact and try to coax an answer out

"I wouldn't have fallen in love with a woman."

The room fell flat shortly after Syre admitted the truth. Syre and Mary make and maintain intense eye contact. Both of their eyes are filled with so many emotions and they are *so* very tired.

"Okay, so this sounds like the conversation that needs to happen. I don't think it's about the fight.

There's something deeper, and I want you to talk it out. Syre, please?"



"I fell in love with a girl from the church in high school. She was the preacher's daughter. We would laugh, sing, and cry. Oh boy! Did we cry a lot, especially once we got caught? I loved her so much that it hurt, and when both of our parents-" Syre pauses, recollecting her memory as tears flood her lash line and laugh softly," When her parents found out, they kicked her out the church and the house. They

took her to a bus stop and left her there with a few belongings. And my mother refused to let me see her. Can you imagine that?

The last time I witnessed her beautiful face was when she was dragged out of the church."



"Sy-"

"You hurt me, mama. You hurt me so bad. Words can't describe how much I wish to hate you, but I can't bring myself to. I tried to forgive, and I thought maybe I was sick in the head, so it's what I deserved, but it's not."

Syre says, wiping her tears mixed with mascara on her fingertips and looking directly at her mother

"Sy, I'm so sorry for hurting you. It was never my intention to prevent you from loving who you want. When I was growing up, during the civil and queer movements, I lost so many friends. They were some of the best kind of people, Syre. Many of them lost their lives for being anything more than straight, and I just couldn't see that for you." Mary replies, tears filling her eyes as she rubs her hands together out of anxiousness, "There's not an excuse for what I've done to you, but I want you to know I'm sorry. Sorry for not being the mom you needed, sorry for taking your love away, and I'm sorry for having you when I was a child myself. I projected the negative feelings of my mother onto you, and I'll never forgive myself for it."



At this point, Syre was holding back sobs, and she couldn't stand looking at her mother any longer. Dr. Lisbeth notices the action and nods her head at Mary to approach her. Mary's eyes go wide, but she gets up immediately and hurriedly sits next to her. More tears more Syre as does Mary and even more when Mary engulfs her. The two women for the first time in their lives are being held and comforted which isn't something people believe they

deserve. They are always the comforters and if they show a slight sign of sadness, people expect them to handle it themselves because they are strong. Being strong has nothing to do with being human.

"Syre ... Do you think if you can't forgive your mom right now, maybe you can in the future?"
Dr.Lisbeth quips, staring empathetically at both women as they share a tearful embrace

"Someday. There's a lot that we need to work on, but I'm content with the apology she's given me. She has never owned her mistakes and apologized to me. So, it's a step that she's trying." Syre replies, as her mother wipes her tears and clasps her hands over Marys "Therefore, as long as she tries then I will too."

"I promise you I will baby. Just give me the chance to." Mary says, quickly, and they nod in agreement
"There's just one more thing I need to make right ... Come in honey."



"Syre...?"

"Nev...?"

-



Since they met at the therapy office, Syre isn't the same woman she was before she went. Syre is a grown woman who still wears her brightly colored suits, wild fro, and makeup to match. She still isn't the everyday woman, and that's okay because she's just Syre. No one can be Syre but Syre. She made a choice that day, to forgive her mother and to fall in love once again. She made that choice because it's something she wanted for a change. Syre knew

ending ties with her estranged mother wouldn't rest with her spirit, and denying her longing feelings for Nev wouldn't have helped either. She chose happiness, something she's never had the choice to do, or feel. This is Syre's redemption.

Syre walks along downtown's river as she stretches her arms as far as she can to entangle herself with the moon. She's smiling so bright as if she's illuminating the night and dancing with the currents. She recalls the conversation that she just had with her mother.

"Mama, there's no room for me!" She whines, lying her head in her mama's lap as she kicks her feet childishly

"Then, you make room. Make a place for yourself because no one else will. You will shine. You will be happy." Mary replies, brushing her wild kinks aside and laughing softly

Syre and Nev are planning to move out of Johnson's peak for good and into the big city to start their lives together, the proper way.

She is leaving her mother behind. Syre will *always* love her mama, but she can't stay there forever.

It's time to let go and to rebuild.

It's time for Syre to be free and to be happy.

This time the moon will be following Syre and not the other way around. This time it's not Syre and the moon.

It's not Syre and Nev,
It's not Syre and Mary,
It's Syre and her *younger* self,

"You are redeemed, my love. It's just me, and you. And this time, it's up to us to decide our fate. So let's choose happiness each time." Syre whispers, to no one in particular, and shuts her eyes as she welcomes the fresh spirit of younger Syre.

It's just us.

Two splintered beauties in the lonely midnight.

