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Opening Extract from...

Young God

Written by Katherine Faw Morris

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YOUNG GOD

Katherine Faw Morris

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For Don

ONE

NIKKI IS ALL TO HELL. A boy jumps off the cliff in front of her. She peers over the edge, watching him go.

"Nikki."

She clenches her toes. The river is druggy and yellow and slugs next to the bottom road for miles before suddenly whipping itself into rapids and dumping, white and frothy, over the edge of this cliff.

"Nikki."

Sixty or seventy or eighty feet below is the swimming hole.

"Nikki."

"How far down is it?"

"Like a hundred feet," Wesley says.

Wesley squats near her feet. He wants to stick his dick in her. Nikki yanks tight all the bows of her bikini, hot pink. It used to be Mama's. Now Mama's too old to wear it. Nikki has been thirteen forever.

"You gonna jump?" Wesley says.

"Nikki," Mama says.

Nikki puts her hands on her hips, which are sharp like weapons.

"What?"

"You," Mama says.

Mama points at Nikki.

"Come down here."

Mama points at the book bag.

"So that me and him."

Mama flips a finger between herself and Wesley.

"Can jump."

She lets her finger drop off the cliff.

"Now."

Mama is down on the bank of the swimming hole. Nikki is dizzy as she looks back at Wesley. To her left the mountains crawl like a slow blue animal. These are just their foothills. They're lumpy and green.

A little girl died here last summer. She went off the wrong side. When they dragged the river they found her caught in a cave. Mama told this to Nikki on the way over. She was turned and watching Nikki in the backseat like she's some odd creature. Like Mama always does when she sees her. Mama's voice was rattled by the car engine. The little girl's head was smashed in, Mama said, like a basketball bitten by a dog.

"You gotta go off over there," Wesley says.

"I know," Nikki says.

"Do it then."

Wesley jabs his beer at a shrub growing out of a crack in the riverbank. This is the jumping-off place. Everywhere else is the wrong side. Nikki bends at the knees and moves her feet one by one. With a lunge she grabs the head of the shrub. Now the river flings its white froth at her. The falls roar in her ears.

"I'll go first."

"No," Nikki says.

"Just walk down on the path," Wesley says.

"No."

"Nikki," Mama says.

"God," Nikki says.

Since she is going to die she would like to be remembered, spoken of in the backs of cars in words that shudder. Nikki pictures this. She turns the shrub loose and stands up.

"Nikki."

She slips a step and then jumps.

“SHIT, SHIT, SHIT,” she says.

SHE SMACKS INTO THE SWIMMING HOLE. Sinking like weights are on her feet until she remembers she can kick. She comes up gasping and touching all around her head. The river is witch-tit freezing. Shivering up at the falls she laughs to herself. It's at least two hundred feet down, she thinks.

Wesley's a stick figure flailing the long roaring drop. His shorts puff out. His yelling goes loud. His splash dumps a cold sheet of water over Nikki's head. She screams.

She swims from him. With one hand Wesley clamps her head and pushes it under and holds it there. His stomach is the hairy yellow of every other shape she can hardly see. She kicks him. She tries to pull his shorts down around his hairy yellow knees.

He slaps water in her face after he lets her up. He floats away on his back, grinning. She swims at him. She jumps up and grabs him by the skull. He squeezes her around the waist and she squeals.

"Quit it," Nikki says.

"Nikki," Mama says.

Nikki wraps her legs around Wesley. Then she squirms away from him. As soon as he's free he slips underneath. He swims for the bank. A jumper's spray lashes Nikki's back.

"Watch out," she snaps.

She swims slowly after Wesley.

"What the hell was that?"

"What?" Nikki says.

Nikki pulls herself up on the bank. It's a bunch of boulders.

"You heard me calling you," Mama says.

Nikki twists river out of her hair and doesn't look at them. Wesley's been up on the bank the whole time it took Nikki to swim here, sometimes on her back and sometimes underwater. He lounges next to Mama.

"Sit with this bag," Mama says.

Nikki sits where she's standing. Her butt bangs rock.

"You're lucky I ain't called DSS on you yet," Mama says.

"Whatever," Nikki says.

But Mama's already walking away. Nikki watches Mama walk toward the trees that hide the path. Earlier Mama made the sourest face, when Nikki came out of the bathroom wearing the pink bikini.

"What's wrong with her?" Nikki says.

Nikki leans back on her hands. Wesley flicks his cigarette over the backside of the bank where the river sneaks out.

"Watch that bag," Wesley says.

He takes his time wandering after Mama. He reaches up and folds his arms on top of his head. He could do better, Nikki thinks. He's too young, for one thing. She scoots over to the book bag. She thinks of throwing it in the water and how they would both freak out.

She feels a man staring at her. Her pulse picks up. But when she looks it's just a little boy.

"What?" she says.

Up on the cliff Mama and Wesley come out of the trees.

"Move," Nikki says.

She waves. Mama is not nearly close enough to the shrub though she is at the very edge, peering over, scratching up and down her leg.

"Mama," Nikki says.

Mama turns her back to talk to Wesley like she can't hear. Nikki rolls her eyes.

From down here the waterfall doesn't look so tall. Not more than sixty feet, Nikki thinks. Somebody jumps off with his arms swinging circles and she just shrugs. Mama is laughing at something Wesley said. Her heel slides off first.

Mama tries to catch herself but on the wrong side there is no shrub to grab. She falls down the rock wall, not the falls. Her head slams two big jags before she drops into the swimming hole with a huge splash.

All around Nikki is a sharp suck.

MEN WADE into the swimming hole. Nikki watches them. She watches the water fall behind them.

Wesley snatches the book bag and rips her up by the armpit. He's saying something.

"Let's go, let's go, let's go."

He pulls her up the path.

Nikki does not get to see Mama, if her head looks like a dog-bitten basketball or not.

SHE STARES AT HERSELF in the mirror of the medicine cabinet. She wears a bandanna tied around her mouth and nose so only her eyes show.

"OH. MY. GOD."

From the TV two girls moan. Wesley watches girl-girl porn only. He looks like he's asleep but when she puts her hand on his knee his eyes open. They're on the couch side by side.

Nikki climbs on his lap. Wesley stares at her. Because his pupils are the tiny heads of pins his eyes are the greenest green. He touches her hair.

"I like the pink."

It's Kool-Aid. Nikki kisses him. She sticks out her tongue. It's bad, the girls at the group home say, to kiss with no tongue. He moves her back and forth by the hips. After a while he unzips her shorts and has her stand up and wiggle them down.

Her panties are really the pink bottoms of the bikini but he doesn't seem to notice. She shoves them to her feet. She kicks them under the table with the bag of Mama's clothes. It's a built-in table. This is a camper.

He holds his dick in one hand. It's tall and pink.

"Oh," Nikki says.

"Come here," Wesley says.

His voice is raspy. It's dried to a husk. She straddles his lap again. She puts her hands flat on the wall behind them. She pushes with her whole weight. She bears down on him.

"Goddamn, I can feel you shaking," Wesley says.

His dick only jabs her. She wonders what's wrong with her.

"I'm harder than a fucking brick."

Nikki grits her teeth.

When she finally feels him slide inside it is not at all like she thought and much more like a jackhammer. She watches the wall behind them jerk up and down.

"Huh," Wesley says.

"Oh. My. God," the TV says.

He lets go suddenly. He pulls his dick out and flops it on her stomach where it convulses and spews warm white goo from its head.

"Ha," Wesley says.

Come, Nikki thinks. Also it's bad not to swallow come. Nikki wipes her hand up her stomach and then licks it. It tastes a little salty and mostly like nothing.

"You can stay here if you want," Wesley says.

OUT OF THE CORNER OF HER EYE she scowls at the redneck girl. The redneck girl has crunchy curls. She has big square tips. She taps them on everything. She giggles like a turkey. She's old like Mama, twenty-nine or thirty. She's been here three days. She's been the one sleeping in the bed with him.

On the couch Wesley sits between them. This girl taps her nails. She taps them on her beer can. Nikki stands up. She puts her hands on her hips. She does not have to put up with this.

"Where are you going?" Wesley says.

"I got a daddy," Nikki says.