Stand Your Ground

LAUREN K. ALLEYNE

I. The Crone’s Case

They came with teeth and busy hands
for what was mine, built with my own hands.

Here in the forest, you are predator or prey:
The choice lies heavy, like stones in your hand.

I named this hovel my country, this forest
a war I would win at any cost. I would hand

over nothing, take as tribute whatever dared
cross my borders. I made weapons of my hands.

Those two tiny terrorists were my rightful spoils.
They made their fate the decision of my hands.

Evil? Witch? Those are not my names. I feared only
for my safety, wrested it back from their hands:

II. Gretel’s Defense

Bile coated our tongues, our stomachs empty of any
sustenance, we pounced—hungry

and so heartsick for home we were greedy
with longing—reached for what sweetly

beckoned us. The house smelled insistently
like welcome, drew us like memory.
The pleasure was so brief. Illusory. How foolish to have believed candy and kindness to be synonymous! Surely we should have learned by now how cruelty can look human, wear the face of family. We are children. Or were. Before we learned the lie of safety.

About the author

Lauren K. Alleyne serves as Executive Director of the Furious Flower Poetry Center and a Professor of English. She is author of two collections Honeyfish (2019), Difficult Fruit (2014), two chapbooks Dawn in the Kaatskills and (Un)Becoming Gretel, and co-editor of Furious Flower: Seeding the Future of African American Poetry. Her work has been widely published in journals and anthologies internationally, including venues such as The Atlantic, The New York Times, and Ms., among several others. Alleyne, who hails from the twin island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, has been recognized with an NAACP Image Award nomination for Outstanding Poetry (2020), the Green Rose Prize from New Issues Press (2017) and has been shortlisted for the BOCAS Prize for Caribbean Literature and the Library of Virginia prize for poetry (2020). In 2022, Alleyne was awarded an Outstanding Faculty Award from the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia.