My Aunt Olive and the “Painter”

By margaret melinda soto

My Aunt Olive once told me she lived through an attack by a Panther. “Painter”, is what she called it. The “painter”, attacked my granddaddy too, and he lived through it too.

I was only four, but even I knew the power of a true life, solid black, Panther. I sat mesmerized; she told great tales of how a panther was, “scratching at the door”, of the little cabin, in the woods of southeastern, Kentucky. Her daddy, my granddaddy, fought the panther off, using only a bucket or something.

Now, the problem with this story is, because I was only four, she said “painter”, so I imagined a Giant Paintbrush. I didn’t understand at all. Why, in the first place, did a paint brush even want to get into a house? Excuse me cabin, one room, twelve people.

My Aunt Olive told me one time when she saw the Panther,with her own eyes, “AKA Painter”, and it was as long as her bed, and she lived through it. My cousin, Janie, Aunt Olive’s daughter, and I trembled in utter fear. How could it be that this creature, is roaming around the hills of southeastern, Kentucky? Which end did it stand on? If it was the brush side then surely the bristles would become frayed. If it was the handle side, how did it walk? Janie had no answers. I didn’t either.

Olive just ended the story by saying, “AND that is WHY, little girls, you don’t go outside in them hills, in the middle of the night,” and we agreed.

No, we won’t go, even if the outhouse is outside.

My Aunt Olive told me that one time a “painter”, attacked her daddy, and he lived through it. She said he was riding a horse over the mountains, coming home. “ It twar in the mittle of the night and he felt something jest ah running after him.” She told us. We didn’t dare even breathe. “He had a small pouch of fatback hid in his saddle bag” she said in a low tone that reverberated, ”ah takin care of his family.” The Panther didn’t want just a small pouch of fatback, “IT WANTED HIM.” We began to whimper, “nooooooo Aunt Olive”, even Janie called her Aunt Olive, even though she was her mother.

He took off, Grandpa and his horse, running like the wind, with that cat right behind them. The Cat slashed open the saddle bag and the fatback fell out. Grandpa came straight home and got his gun.

Being only four, I didn’t even want to hear what Grandpa did then. Janie didn’t either. We promised never to go outside without an adult with us. Me and Janie held hands and promised to never let go of each other. We was scart of the painter.

 Hell, we wouldn’t even consider going anywhere.

 Olive fell instantly asleep. We didn’t get why a “painter”, would even want a piece of fatback. Wouldn’t he want a bucket of paint? We snuggled down under about ten homemade quilts, in Aunt Olive’s bed, secure, because even if a big ole “painter” came in here, he would have to have get across my Aunt Olive first. She and her daddy had lived through numerous attacks.

 And there she was bigger than life, sleeping like a big ole bear, Janie next to her, and then me. Those were the happiest days of my life. We talked about the “painter”, coming into the house and grandpa and Aunt Olive , “fighten em off ”, into the night, Janie and me, until Aunt Olive told us to “ SHUT UP, cause the “painter” was listening to every word we were saying and was going to come in here and tear us all to shreds, any minute now.”

Oh My Dod…….

 We shut up.