

Crip Cyn

"Cripple dipple, sinner Cyn—Look at what the cat drug in!"

The boy's yelled in unison as they always did. To which Cyn responded, "Don't y'all ever have an original thought? I swear; I'd rather be what y'all call a cripple, than to be a moe-run." Cyn, named by her momma, Cynamenell Bell Bowerman, hadn't seen them sitting on the porch steps when she rounded the corner of the old house that had once a grand place sitting on the old Taylor plantation. But that was another lifetime. The Taylor house had been long abandoned.

Cyn was looking for the calico kitten she had spotted near the place the day before. She had brought it a piece of her deviled ham sandwich that she had pinched from her lunch earlier at school. Cyn was out of breath because she had run all the way from Buford Middle School, hoping to find the tiny stray before she had to get home. If she didn't get home by 2:50 to roll and rubber band her newspapers, every old man and woman on her route would be on her like a flea on a hound dog.

Not much a nothin' ever happened in Buford or Wickford, but you'd think the news printed on the thin pages of the sparse and predictable Buford-Wickford Newspaper was of monumental importance. Judging by the way that half the residents of Windom Lee Mill Village (Cyn's paper route area) waited impatiently on their porches (or peeking out from behind their front room curtains) for Cyn's arrival. No, not for Cyn, they didn't care whether Cyn arrived or not, as long as the paper did.

Cyn had been delivering the Buford-Wickford Daily News since she was ten years old. She had inherited the route from her Uncle Carson when the TB got the best of him in 1963, but she had been helping him with his deliveries since she was knee high to a dandelion. When Uncle Carson passed on, all the locals said Cyn was too little, and too

young to take over the 112 paper route. What they really meant and didn't say, was she was too crippled and a girl. Cyn was grateful when Mr. Joe John Cox, the Delivery and Distribution Manager of the paper spoke up for her. Mr. Joe John said it wouldn't hurt none to let Cyn try the route on her own for one month, and if she couldn't get the job done, then he would let her go.

There were some complaints the first few months, because Cyn couldn't roll and band the papers, and cover the whole route in the same time it took her and Uncle Carson to do it. Some folks just did not seem to understand that Uncle Carson would have been taking twice as much time, if he hadn't had Cyn helping with half the papers. Cyn tried to explain, but still they complained. Fortunately Mr. Joe John stood up for Cyn and as the time passed her legs and her tiny arms grew stronger, and the time it took her to make the deliveries grew shorter, eventually the nay-sayers relented and the route was Cyn's. For true.

Cyn sure missed Uncle Carson, it had been almost three years since he passed on. Uncle Carson was the only one, grown up or kid, that treated Cyn like she was normal. When Cyn was born with her leg shorter than her right, her daddy, a miner from Kentucky who had come to Buford to work in the cotton mill when he was laid off at the mine, up and left. But not before he told her momma that she must have whored around because no youngen of his would be no cripple.

Cyn's momma lived up to his false accusations after that, and spent most of her nights in the juke joints, and her days in the bed. Uncle Carson, Cyn's momma's older brother had stepped in and was the only parent or friend that Cyn had ever known. He loved her, she knew that he did, and she loved him.

Now Cyn's days were spent fixing for herself, going to school, and rushing home to deliver the paper. The only joy in Cyn's life, she found in her feline family. She had always loved animals; any critter, if it had four legs, she loved it, unconditionally. She

never required an animal to allow her to pet it, hold it, or to come to her on command. She just loved them and cared for them, no strings attached. However, even the most feral cat would eventually come around. To Cyn's pure delight each of her beloved fur-faces would one day, seemingly out of the blue, just walk up and rub against her leg, or crawl onto her welcoming lap.

If Cyn didn't have to eat, go to school, and deliver the paper to get a little money to feed her cats, she would never leave them. She longed to stay in her secret places in the woods so no one would ever look at her with pity again, and where she could protect the only family (other than Uncle Carson) that she had ever known. "Maybe some day", she would think, when being teased and battered by the other kids, or scorned by her own mother for the pain and abandonment her birth had brought to her, "Maybe some day."

"Cripple dipple, sinner Cyn, look at what the cat drug in!"

It was Johnny Moseley, he had always been awful, but lately he was worse than ever, he followed her, and when he caught her alone he would shove or pinch her hard, and laugh when she made any sound of pain. Cyn tried to avoid him, and she tried to be strong when he punched or pinched her, so as not to give him the satisfaction of knowing he had, but the more she tried to avoid him, the more he pursued her. Now here he was, way out at the old Taylor house, and he had his idiots with him. Billy and Sam were smiling their idiot smiles and nodding encouragement. They would say or do anything Johnny told them to. This was not good. Cyn knew she needed to get out of there, fast.

She turned on her heel and started to run away as fast as her legs would allow, unsuited as they were for a quick escape, that's when she heard the kittens scream of pain. Cyn whirled around and her heart dropped when she saw the precious little calico in the hands of that monster. Johnny had the little wide-eyed kitten by the tail and was swinging it round and round. "You want me to whack this piece of shit upside the porch post, or you want to come up here and save its useless flea bag life?"

"Please don't! Don't! No, stop!" Cyn cried as she ran up the steps, falling on the last step and finding herself on her knees in front of the three boys. Johnny reached down and with his empty hand he grabbed Cyn by her hair and pulled her head up, looking her in the eye with hatred, he said, "The only thing more useless than a flea infested cat, is a cripple, like you. We gonna rid the world of one useless piece of crap today, and then we gonna make some use of you cripple." He released her hair and grabbed the front of her blouse ripping it to expose her small breast. Again taking her by her hair, he continued, "For the first time in your worthless life you gonna give something back to the people you been taking from all these years."

Cyn managed to ask between sobs, "How have I taken anything from you? I ain't never hurt you, any of you."

"You take from me, from everyone in this community, when we have to watch your disgusting body hobbling around our streets, our school, our town. You take away the beauty and replace it with your ugliness. Your mamma ought to have kept you in the house and done us all a favor, better yet; she ought to have sold you to one of them traveling freak shows. People go to them freak shows to see freaks; we ought-a-not have to see one in our own town, everyday. It ain't right, you ain't right, so now you repay us our kindness, for having let you make us sick for all these years."

Still holding Cyn by her hair, and before she could even try to stop him, Johnny leaned forward and with brute force slammed the little kitten onto the porch planks with such ferocity that blood splattered all over him and Cyn. Cyn started screaming and it was some time before she realized that her screams were not the only ones she heard. Sam was hysterical, he looked as wide eyed and terrified as the kitten had looked a moment before. But when Johnny slapped him across the face with the dead kitten, Sam ran screaming from the old house frantically wiping the kittens blood from his face.

Everything fell eerily quiet, Johnny let go of Cyn's hair and she fell to the floor

like a tear drop. Johnny stood breathing and blowing like a bull, the tiny bloody kitten still hanging lifelessly from his right hand. Billy spoke for the first time, "Damn Johnny, what the hell have you done, damn Johnny, you said you was only going to scare her and make her touch our willies, you didn't say nothin' bout all this, damn Johnny!"

"Shut up, you coward, you sound like a girl, as weak as a crippled little sissy girl, why don't you run away like Sam, go on run you big sissy, run!" Johnny screamed at Billy as he flung the kitten carcass back and forth. It was too much for Billy and he did run, with Johnny's taunting words bouncing off the back of his flapping shirttail, he ran.

Johnny ranted on about weakness, and a lack of loyalty, and cripples. He raged about useless, stupid people, how no one understood, how no one showed no courage no more. At length he seemed to tire of his own tirade and he slowly turned his attention back to Cyn, the object of his anger and oddly enough of his attention.

Cyn lay curled on her side, almost fetal, waiting for the next onslaught of words or fists, powerless, weakened, sad, broken, and waiting. Johnny turned to her and as he knelt by her, she saw the tiny bloodied remains of the beautiful, harmless kitten that she had ran all the way out to this place to see, to love, to care for, and rage filled Cyn. It was her first real rage, and it was absolute. Johnny reached for her with his left hand, and as he touched her exposed breast, she kicked him. She kicked with both of her strong legs, the long and the short of it. She kicked again, and again, and again. Johnny was screaming now, she had kicked him up against one of the old majestic columns that had once made the old Taylor place a thing of beauty and the envy of folks for miles around. Johnny looked like the broken one now, the cripple, and still Cyn kicked. She couldn't stop.

Then he was still, quiet, and Cyn allowed herself to be still as well. Once her breathing slowed and the pounding of her blood ceased to drum in her ears, she sat up. It was over. Cyn rose to her feet and lovingly picked up the tiny lifeless kitten. She walked

home, she did not bother to close her blouse and she carried the dead kitten tenderly held to her bare breast. People saw her and stepped away, no one tried to stop her or question why? After she buried the little calico, she changed her blouse, rolled and banded her papers, and delivered them late to her impatient, critical neighbors.

The police were at her home when she returned from her deliveries. Billy and Sam were with them. Sam had called the police as soon as he got home, and Billy had shown up at his house soon after.

The police had found Johnny dead at the old Taylor house and had already sent the coroner out to pick up his body. Fortunately (and to Cyn's surprise) Billy and Sam had told the truth. After Cyn answered all the officers' questions they left and she fell exhausted into her bed. Lying there, alone, empty and most likely in shock, it startled Cyn when she realized that she was laughing.

Oh my, she thought, "Finally, the Buford-Wickford Daily News will have something to actually report." Cyn laughed until her sides ached and she fell into a peaceful sleep, thinking "I gotta get my rest, I have news to deliver tomorrow!"

