

BLOCKED

(an excerpt)

Written by

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Lynn tries to look cool, shakes her head no, holds this for about two seconds before starting to crumble. John crosses to her, hugs her, leads her back to sit on the bed. Holds her there for a moment while she quietly sobs until he realizes he's left the water running in the bathroom and breaks away to shut it off. He comes back sit with her on the bed.)

JOHN (CONT'D)
It's not that bad.

(she nods yes it is)

JOHN (CONT'D)
No, no, it's not that bad

LYNN
Yes. Yes it is. My dad is even calling. My dad.

JOHN
Oooh-kay? And...?

LYNN
And I can't get out of bed and if I read another review I'm going to puke. Again. They're actually making me vomit.

JOHN
It can't be that bad. Let me see.

(he crosses to her laptop; she beats him there and slams it shut)

LYNN
NO! If you haven't seen it, I don't want you to see it. And there's something else.

JOHN
Okay.

LYNN
Look.

She opens the laptop. Slowly, carefully, she starts to type and then ducks and covers quickly, looking expectantly DSR. John looks at her, really concerned now. She can see he doesn't see. This is confusing.

LYNN (CONT'D)

I try to write, a response, or an admission of guilt, or an excuse, or apology or a self-righteous, indignant defense of the work...or when I'm not crying I try to create something else that is *this* moment instead of *that* one. And every time I start, *every time*, something flies through the window. Like someone is trying to hurt me.

JOHN

Okay. (*gathering her things*) Let's take a walk. You've been in here too long. Which is good. It's fine. You needed to be here but let's go out now and breathe a little. Right? Let's go do that.

LYNN

I tried that too. I don't think I can. I thought I could maybe when you came in because the door had opened but now I probably can't again. It would have been better if nobody saw me like this. I'm sorry you're seeing me like this. Good God...(pulling it together)
I'm...

She goes into the bathroom and starts brushing her teeth. John looks around the room, at a loss. On a strange impulse, he walks to the door and opens it and closes it. He goes to the desk, opens the laptop. Nothing is on the screen. He tries to guess her password...this is a no go. He opens the notebook by its side and rifles through. All blank pages. Then he goes to the sink and starts the process of washing two coffee cups. Lynn has moved on to brushing her hair and tying it up.

JOHN

Do you want to take a shower?

LYNN

I probably should.

JOHN

Okay.

LYNN

You don't believe me.

JOHN

That there are ghost projectiles
and you're trapped in your
apartment? No.

LYNN

You've known me my whole life.

JOHN

That's why I don't believe you.
You're better than this, Lynn.
Tell me what it said.

LYNN

It said--. It said that I'm...It
said so many things.

JOHN

That's great.

LYNN

What?

JOHN

I mean that is really, really
great.

LYNN

I read them and now I'm unable to
bathe myself and everything is
breaking and it's 'really, really,
great'?

JOHN

You just had a real failure.

She starts to cry again.

JOHN (CONT'D)

No. You stop now. You had a real
failure. Which means you did
something worth talking about.
You're in the game now. It feels
like you're on the outside but
you're in it now. And that is,
really, really great. And it won't
feel that way for awhile but it
will eventually.

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

And you should stop being a pussy and share your work with your friends too because then we'll be able to show up for you *before* you fall apart and maybe we can even be there when you have a victory because that will happen too.

LYNN

You can't say that to me.

JOHN

That was a good pep talk, come on.

LYNN

No, you can't call me a pussy. You know, as my work reflects a *(reciting)* "deeply internalized self-hatred that reflects itself onto a canvas of ugly stereotypes and amateurish caricatures. The only thing novel about Ms. Smith's work is that she has reached new lows in appropriating the history, spirit, and struggles--in a way that is astonishingly offensive--to communities of color, women, anyone who cares about LGBT-QIA rights, immigrants or the poor working class this country was built upon. Furthermore, the piece blatantly shows the inner workings of a so-called artist who has revealed not only the underbelly of white privilege but has shown the world the artistic heart of white, second wave liberal feminism that is at once naive and deeply condescending. Ms. Smith has no respect for culture besides the ignorant view she holds of her own. This type of art is dangerous and it's disturbing that LACMA would stoop to showing this kind of..."

Lynn breaks down again

JOHN

That is not a direct quote.

LYNN

(she nods that it is)

JOHN

You memorized it? (*beat. new tactic*) Jesus. It said that? (*mini-rant*) God that pisses me off. The mind-reading. Like everyone with a master's degree or a Facebook page thinks it's perfectly acceptable to read the mind of the artist. As if they're in your head. As if they alone understand the intention of the artist. Like it's so obvious. Like it's right there on the page in black and white--without the thought that maybe--just maybe, there's another opinion that might, just *might*, have some value.

LYNN

You don't want to see it?

JOHN

The review? Yes, I told you I do.

LYNN

No. You aren't even going to ask to see the piece?

JOHN

I know you aren't those things. I don't need to see it.

Beat.

JOHN (CONT'D)

(*checking his iphone*) They did not call you out on offending every minority group in America.

LYNN

They did.

Beat.

LYNN (CONT'D)

Can you please put that away?

He does.

JOHN

That's taking intersectionality a little too far.

LYNN

What?

JOHN

You know, Crenshaw (*he gets no reaction*), she came up with this term because there was nothing to address that people might be dealing with multiple forms of oppression right. Like being a black person, *and* a woman, *and* queer might all be affecting the way that person is able to move through the world.

LYNN

Yeah, yeah. I used to think my vagina was enough.

JOHN

What?

LYNN

I mean, I used to think my vagina was like a shield.

On a look like: Jesus is she this crazy?

LYNN (CONT'D)

Not an *actual* shield. But that my experiences as a woman...saw this whole different world...and my permission to *show* that world...that what I was saying through my work--that that in itself was somehow illuminating and risky because it wasn't mainstream but it was protected from those people who didn't want to hear from, from...I don't know...the...*oppressed*.

JOHN

The oppressed?

LYNN

Yeah. It's like I got kicked out of the club.

JOHN

The club. That you *want* to be in?

LYNN

(Lynn starts to crumble again) No, of course I don't want to be oppressed...I just want my giant vagina art-shield to work.

JOHN

And that's a visual that I will never get rid of.

Lynn succumbs.

JOHN (CONT'D)

You're crying? No, no, no. You don't get to cry about not being in a club that you were never in. You don't get to cry that you are straight, and white, and a woman. That's retarded.

LYNN

You can't say that!?

JOHN

I can say whatever the fuck I want. I'm a black man.

LYNN

(as if he's proved her point) You see?!!

JOHN

No. I don't. Because I can say that in here. With you. I can get loud and indignant and say what I'm thinking because you're you and you *know* me. But I go outside that door and all the rules change. Out there, you and I do or say the same stupid thing and I might land myself in a coffin.

LYNN

(still snotty crying) Well...that's a bit dramatic.

JOHN

Well, when you're done epitomizing white fragility maybe we can go take a walk and test the theory.

LYNN

Fuck you.

JOHN

Am I wrong?

LYNN

I am telling you I am broken,
broken about being lambasted by
every non-binary, blogger of color
and you're going to lump me into
some pile of white fragility?

I am hurt. I am. So fuck you.
Get out.

JOHN

Put your shoes on.

LYNN

I will not. I don't want to listen
to you.
I don't want to see you.

JOHN

The mirror just a little too clear?

LYNN

Get out! I can cry in here. So
fine. Let me be fragile in here.

JOHN

Suck it up.

LYNN

Get out! You are in MY house! MY
house. And I don't want you here
anymore.

He goes to the door. Turns to her, then, not unkindly:

JOHN

Are you broken because someone
called you a bad person?
Or are you upset because you made a
bad piece of art?

*Long beat. She throws something at him, misses, but hits the
wall. Hard.*

LYNN

LEAVE!!

Now he's pissed. He takes the final few steps to the door. Tries to open it. It will not open. He pulls on it again. Lynn jumps up and goes to the door.

LYNN (CONT'D)

YOU SEE!

JOHN

Your door is stuck.

LYNN

I told you! I told you I couldn't leave!

JOHN

That's what you meant?

LYNN

Yes! And now you can't leave either.

(Beat)

What does it mean?

JOHN

(disgusted) It means your door is stuck.

(tries the door again)

Great. *(releasing the knob, frustrated)*

I see, right...Lynn gets a bad review and the *whole world* conspires against her, including not only local media outlets, but also the entire online art world and yes, yes...even her front door. And to make matters worse anyone foolish enough to move into her immediate vicinity gets sucked into the vortex of bullshit she's created for herself.

Yes.

It's all clear to me now.

LYNN

It was not just local. I got national press...Dick.

JOHN

Really? *(he pulls out his cellphone)*

LYNN

What are you doing?

JOHN

Now, I've got to see.

LYNN

No! *(he hesitates)* Please.
Please put that away. I'm standing
right here. Please don't take out
your phone. You know I hate that.

JOHN

Yes. Sweet, baby Lynn. My little
technophobe.

LYNN

I'm not afraid. I just remember.

JOHN

Remember what?

LYNN

I remember when if you took longer
than an hour to respond to someone
nobody thought you were dead and
felt they needed to check on you.
I remember when nobody expected you
to be available all. the. time or
expected you to check your messages
every three seconds.
And I remember when the person in
the room with you was more
important than whatever was on
your...your...facebook
or...myspace, or whatever.

JOHN

(remembering) Myspace...

LYNN

I just hate everyone being
so...public. So...available.

JOHN

Shut up. You begged your parents
for a pager just like the rest of
us.

LYNN

Yeah. Until I realized it was just
one more way for people to send you
shitty messages...ugh...304.

JOHN

(under his breath) 304? *(laughing)*
 ...God, I forgot about that. Who
 called you a hoe on your pager?

LYNN

I don't know.
 It doesn't matter.
 It was just the first time I
 realized "mean" could be directly
 transmitted into my pocket...or
 heart...or whatever. Without me
 even having to call back the
 number.

JOHN

(making fun a little) You've always
 been sensitive.

LYNN

You realize that we are the one
 generation who is fluent in all the
 world's technology but actually
 grew up without it?
 I mean, we *remember* having to
 actually pick up telephones and
 stay in one place to talk on it--
 and write down messages...for *other*
people...and then we had to deliver
 those messages, *face to face*, to
 said people.
 We had to type our school papers on
 typewriters and got to use our
 parent's phone, if we were lucky,
 and we remember call waiting being,
 like, *revolutionary*.

JOHN

(dry) Those were the days.

LYNN

They were.
 When whole *relationships* didn't
 happen over text message and you
 couldn't find something out on your
 iPhone in two seconds.
 You had to work to find and learn
 about the things that were
 important to you. *With other*
people.

JOHN

(Gesturing at her with his phone)
And people couldn't share bad
opinions of you so fast.

LYNN

Yeah...That too. 304...the
beginning of the end.

JOHN

I think you're the only person I
know who still goes to the library.
This stuff is archaic. *(Referencing
the fax machine and record player)*
Does it even work?

LYNN

Of course it does.

JOHN

You sure? When was the last time
you received a fax? 1992?

LYNN

I'll have you know my doctor asked
me to fax her a form just last week
*(Waving a paper at him. He takes
it).*

JOHN

(reading) "Message completely
received".

LYNN

It's very comforting.
Confirmation.

*(John tries the doorknob again. Door won't budge. He goes
to the window & looks out and down. Contemplates.)*

LYNN (CONT'D)

You're going to climb out the
window?

JOHN

It's tempting.

LYNN

We're four stories up.

JOHN

Yup.

LYNN
You'll get hurt.

JOHN
Mmm. I'm just afraid someone will think I'm trying to get in, instead of trying to get out.

LYNN
(Regarding the phone) Please put it away? *(He does; relief.)* Do you remember playing Nintendo at your house?

JOHN
Cause your dad wouldn't get you one?

LYNN
They were expensive. Yeah.

JOHN
Yeah.

LYNN
I loved playing that game...and the duck one. The one where you shot ducks. It's funny now. I thought it was so lame I was never allowed to play those games and now I just think he must have been right when I look at all these two-year olds on iPads...or twenty year olds on dates. *(She mimics looking at her phone; glances up at him and smiles and then looks back down at her imaginary phone)*

JOHN
Okay. *(taking his phone again from his pocket)*. At least let's call the manager to send someone up about this door.

LYNN
Fine. Use mine.

JOHN
Fine.

(he crosses to the phone, picks it up)

What's the number?

LYNN

For management? Um...*(She goes over to desk, finds address book, and flips through, hands him the book. He takes it. He can't believe he's still here)*

JOHN

It doesn't work.

LYNN

Sure it does. *(She takes receiver)*
Oh.

JOHN

(Referencing the pile of bills on the desk) Did you pay it?

LYNN

(She clicks the receiver down a few times) Oh. Here we go. *(Motions him to give her the book. He does. She dials. Waits.)* Hi. Hi, yes. This is Lynn. In 4L. My front door won't open. No...I have the key. I'm inside actually. I know. No. I guess so. Yeah. I guess I'm just stuck. Okay. Ok. Thanks.

JOHN

And?

LYNN

He's sending someone up.

JOHN

Okay.

They wait.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Want to show me that review?

Silence.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Good. Didn't want to see it.

Long silence.

LYNN

I don't know if it was good. I just know that they want it destroyed.

JOHN

Who is they?

LYNN

Everyone who isn't like me? I don't know. (Beat) Why do you make anything?

JOHN

You mean my work?

LYNN

Yeah.

JOHN

We're talking again, now? Okay. (Pause) I make what I do because I have to. I put things into the world to make a world I want to live in. The world is mean and I'd like it to be kind. You?

LYNN

That too.

JOHN

Did you go to the parade?
Of course not, you've been here.
Well I did.
There were these kids playing behind us--a bunch of white kids playing cops and robbers or something. They had these little plastic guns...bang, bang, bang. And it was funny because they were the kids, and maybe friends of kids, of these two people who were obviously on a date. Liz had gone to the bathroom so I was listening. Couldn't not, even with all the noise. And they were feeling each other out, asking those first questions we all make of each other when we're interested but want to make sure we can stay interested. This lady a few blankets down comes over to them and says, 'we have little kids here.

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

They're really impressionable and your kids, I don't think they mean to, but they're pointing their guns at our children. I mean, we're in a public place.' And the dad negotiated with her a bit, he apologized and said he'd give the kids a boundary...was it okay if they played further away. She said yes. She sat back down, all self-righteous.

And then he gave the kids a line they couldn't cross & they started playing again and he went back to his date. He told her he knew those guns were a bad idea but then he also kind of rolled his eyes at the over protectiveness of this lady.

And I tried to think through what I'd think if I had kids. I wouldn't want guns around my kids either, right? But these are these, these dinky orange things and the kids are just being kids. They aren't trampling anybody or cursing or anything. I didn't even really notice them till she came over and said something.

So a few minutes go by and then *another* lady comes over. They were sitting together a few blankets down...these moms with their kids strapped to them. And this lady wasn't as nice--she was real judgmental and insisted the kids stop playing. The boundaries he'd set up weren't good enough. So anyway they made the kids stop but it was interesting to watch this man and woman, trying to be parents in this weird public space but also try and save face in front of each other after being shamed by these women AND tip toeing around talking about it. Testing each other to see what the other really thought. To see if they were safe. If they could say what they thought or, I don't know, roll their eyes without fear of retribution.

LYNN

You gonna bring this back around?

JOHN

Naw. (Pause) No, yeah. I make things because I usually don't sit on that middle blanket. I mean, I was understanding where these ladies were coming from but also I was thinking, Jesus, wrap your kids in bubble wrap and keep em home. I could see why this couple would feel attacked and think the whole thing was ridiculous. I don't usually see the between. I usually have a clear perspective. I see clear. That's why I make things. To share that.

Something flies through the window, smashing the glass. John runs to it, ducks down, jumps up to look at window. He doesn't know what to do.

JOHN (CONT'D)

What the fuck!?

Lynn hasn't moved. This has been happening all day.

LYNN

(Dryly) Weird.