

CARRIE CONNERS

Unchained

At the gym I recognize an earworm, the buildup to the crescendo of that Righteous Brothers' tune. Seems an odd choice for workout fuel, until I listen closer and realize it's a sped-up hip-hop riff: *When we sober up, will you still be mine?* Then, I'm eleven years old again, too tall, tight coils of hair, honking the tune on my alto saxophone, reading sheet music from the tilted metal music stand, in love with its drama, the audacity of the high notes. Over and over, trying to coax vibrato from the reed to heighten the theatrics until the insides of my lips are raw from pursing over the zippers of my braces. My poor parents. Mom fixing dinner after trying to teach eight-year-olds to divide, Dad drinking coffee, just waking up, on night shift at the mill. The song was everywhere, *Ghost* had come out, and though I eyerolled its romance, declared the pottery scene disgusting, the song made me swoon, wonder if another person would ever make me think of sighing rivers, if I would ever inspire someone to write a song with a high C held over eight long beats, if I'd ever get out of this room that I shared with my older brother with worn, forest green carpet and twin beds across from the WV state pen that inmates kept escaping from, that the state said would close down after the last riot, whose prisoners, hanging long-limbed out the barred windows, whistled as I walked to elementary school.