



I CAME OUT IN THE WORLD LIKE "THIS":

bright and burning,
a brilliant little Black star,
weighing every bit of seven pounds, seven ounces, measuring
nineteen and a half inches long.
cesarean cut right through Ma's center,
smack-dab in the middle of hot July on the
seventeenth day in the year 1981.

I was carefully carved fresh from her flesh at a hospital on a
military base in Freehold, NJ,
where Pop was training to be an airman basic.
same way, same place, same space where my sister Tamu was
born just seventeen months before.

my whole body arrived on fire,
flaming from the warmth of my mother's womb.
medical records say I was an infant prone to ear infections that
raised my internal temperature well beyond a boiling fever.
I was three when I bubbled over 102.7 degrees Fahrenheit.
made me tug at my lobes a little too hard for Ma's comfort,
doctors put some tubes in there to help cool down the noise.

they fell out a few months later while I was dancing circles
around my shadow.
wound up scarring some tissue on one of my eardrums.
now I be tripping on vertigo.
it's like the world be spinning around if I climb
far too high and try
to look too straight up toward the sky,
or stare too deep down beneath the earth's belly.

I was in eighth grade when the flames brought me scarlet fever.
spread these sensitive-ass bloodred bumps across my entire body,
causing some pain to rise up in the middle of my chest.
emergency room doctors said Ma brought me in just a few
moments before
the infection punched its way into the second layer of my
beating heart.

legend has it, my being here was a close call too.
apparently, Ma, twenty-three, pregnant (unplanned) with me,
drove a four-door powder gray Dodge Diplomat with tires that
foolishly assumed
the tread on their rubber wheels was deep enough to skate slick
on smooth black ice during cold winter.
round rubber dummies didn't test themselves first: CRASH!

Me and Ma: us: we slid like lava on concrete water.
her belly becomes an inflated safety airbag bracing all my
bouncing.
we both survive unscathed,

save for the twenty-three railroad track stitches Ma had stapled
across her forehead.

I remain submerged,
baked golden brown,
birthed by scalding summer.

Ma always tells the story of our accident whenever she's explaining
to other people
why I am *the way I am*.
her "baby": funny, curious, clever, smiling, singing, dancing,
joyful, carefree, bright, showy,
a ball of colorful energy, making life fun for us all.
she'll say to them, while looking at me,
"*something* must've happened to him, because that boy ain't been
right since."
and then she'll chuckle with a sweet laugh that don't hurt.

unlike last year, when I turned sixteen,
and Pop echoed Ma's tale with a gallon of sour sugar
that still stings me in some place I don't yet have the language for.

for real for real,
I'm far too afraid to discover what *it* might actually mean,
because whenever I think about what my father *actually* said,
the Boogeyman creeps out from some dark corner of my bedroom
closet
and I can't get any sleep at night.