

## Midnight

Temitope Sholola

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My mother  
like her mother  
and all the women  
before her  
birthed midnight.

1.  
I was born on the hottest day of August.  
*Temitope; Mine is worthy of praise.*  
My skin was so dark, ash and soot mistook it  
for ruin.

*Oyinkansola; Wealth and honey*  
The day that bore witness to my birth, scoffed at the certificate.  
Couldn't find anything to praise among the blood and  
generational pain.

Saw the bitterness that coursed through my veins and said  
*This must be Yetunde's child,*  
*she is already screaming*

2.  
*"Tell your mother to stop crying"*  
I saw her break down.  
Her body a twisted serpent, skin scaled like anguish shanked her open,  
loss be a poised poison, a tight smile tucking the sob underneath the tongue.

My mother could make misery  
look like  
a light rouge shade of lipstick

Could never cry on the Sabbath.  
Could never let her foundation streak.

The day that bore witness to my grandmother's death  
recited scripture at dinner.  
Rubbed my mother's shoulders and wrapped my father's silence in aluminum.

My mother flooded her bedroom in tears  
And yelled at me for getting salt water on the carpet  
*Didn't I tell you to hold your lips?*

My belly button burned that night,  
The umbilical cord that linked us broke.

Grandma died before I met her  
Before she could trace stories of survival into my fists.

I wanted to ask her if I  
too will birth midnight.

## Midnight pt.2

I saw my mother

cry in a bathroom.

Sorrow sunk its teeth into her skin,

and harvested a pound of flesh.

She sobbed like someone set her afire,

body: a boundless vessel of ash and mass.

The girl in me didn't know how to hold a home

never saw decimation on a Saturday

afternoon.

All the women who have raised me

can lull a man into a death bed.

Have always sharpened knives

to the sound of their husband's heart beats

Pray that their enemies face God's wrath

And slip open clothing pins into their lover's aso ebi

I heard when Eve ate from the tree of knowledge,

she spat up seeds of sin.

Told Adam that she stained her palms

with the universe,

and he laughed when she offered him the world.

Her mouth, cherry red,

with blood and wisdom.

Now, every time a woman cries,

she chokes on the apple core lodged in her throat.

Pain must be the ache of sacrifice

the insanity of giving until you runneth over with

thirst.

Pain must be a worn out jigeda

glass beads stretched and scratched with time.

I know that we must wear our pain with pride,

arise, a penny brown phoenix,

We must love in the same way brown,

sweet and spread in silence.