

on mother's day, our first together.

by Megan Spencer

one morning in december
under the new born moon
i am split open. in the operating room
a scalpel cuts a smile across my rounding belly
i come apart to make a way for you.
i am flesh then vessel then canal, then empty
and just like that we are two.
red wet and swollen faced
you enter the world beneath glaring white light
dark curls slick and sticky like a baby bird
soft bones, ears folded shut.
you too are there in this room
where everyone has a job to do.
when you came your lungs were still readying
and i needed more time to teach you
how to breathe in this sharp demanding world.
i am trying to convince you to stay
how to make you choose this unforgiving place
that snatches up anything loved by black girls
especially black girls themselves.
i am afraid of everything.
you are smaller than anything i have ever loved
or held. barely a papaya in my open hands.
will you swim in the ocean one day?
will you eat salted tomato sandwiches in august?
obsess about the way light moves through water?
will i have time to read you lucille clifton?
there is language and color here
i promise if you wait there is more
than these tangled and infinite wires
and this constant threat of rupture.
there is a sky out there,
i pray your tiny feet grow roots
into this terrifying earth
and not the moonless black night
dusted with stars.

Megan Spencer is a black feminist artist, scholar, and mother. She is a PhD student at the University of California Santa Barbara in the United States, where she studies black feminist ecology, specifically how black women's visual art and literature show us connections between ecological crises and various forms of racial, sexual, and state violence.

This poem was written for her daughter. It reflects on the author's experience of her daughter's birth and the process of coming to understand her precarious entrance to the world as part of a pattern of black women's disproportionate vulnerability to preterm labor and birth. Megan believes that poetry is part of a black feminist tradition of moving between thought and feeling, and has been a necessary aspect of healing from birth trauma.