

Blood and Rain

by Tawnysha Greene

On the night I start my first period, Momma hears me in the bathroom and comes in, but doesn't seem surprised at my bloody pajamas, the pink water in the sink as I try to scrub them clean. She motions me to the bathtub as she takes the pajamas, draws a bath, and talks quiet of things she says I now need to know, ones she calls, woman things.

She says my body can have babies now, is getting ready to be a wife, mother when I am older, but I must keep away from things that are not of God. She gets a piece of paper and draws our family in pen and the ink smears, because her hands are still wet from the sink.

We are stick figures in the rain and Daddy's form is tall and his head is big. Momma draws herself next to him, shorter and with long hair, then she draws my sister, then my brother is littlest of all. She draws a figure away from them, one taller than my sister, but with long hair like Momma's, and I know that it's me. She draws thunderclouds overhead, then a big umbrella over Daddy and my family, a little umbrella over me.

"When you come of age," says Momma, "your family can't protect you like when you were young."

She says that God will pass judgment now, that she can't protect me from the rain if I ever do or say something wrong. "God knows," she says. "He always knows."

She draws the clouds bigger, darker, and makes more raindrops coming down. They miss the big umbrella over my family and hit me instead. My umbrella isn't strong and falls through. The rain comes more and takes over me, long lines she draws up and down my body, the ink smearing again until I can't tell who or what was there before.

"You see?" she asks.

I nod, and she puts the drawing away, pulls a towel off the rack, and holds it out to me. She gets me new pajamas and after she puts

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new sheets on the bed, she covers me up, and kisses me good night.

When she leaves, I look out the window and search for the thunderclouds Momma drew, and they are everywhere. There's no rain--there hasn't been rain in weeks--but the clouds are dark without the sun, and I can't see the stars.

When we had looked at the stars in the mountains, Momma had pointed out the North Star, said we could use the stars as a map to guide us home if we were lost, but tonight, I don't see it. I don't see any of the stars and become afraid when I can't tell where North is, where anything is, at all.

