

Momma's Elephant

by Tawnysha Greene

When Momma keeps my sister and me inside for the day, she lets us play dress up with her clothes in the closet, but our favorite time is when she gets her jewelry box down from the shelf, a tin elephant where she keeps things she had as a girl.

It opens up in the middle and as Momma spreads the necklaces, the two-dollar bill from Grandma, I hold the front half of the elephant, trace its ears, trunk with my fingers. She has a lot of things inside--a half-dollar coin, a costume ring with a purple stone, old pennies--and tells us about each. She has a wallet-sized picture of herself in middle school, and we take turns with it, look at the girl in a red shirt, long hair, listen to Momma share stories about herself, a girl who gazed at the stars with her father at night before her parents divorced, who memorized the constellations, who wanted, above everything, to fly to the moon.

I think of her stories for the rest of the day, the weeks after, remember the drawings she made on a piece of paper of the stars she remembered. It's too early in the year to see them now, so she had marked the stars with a blue pen, connected the dots to make Andromeda, Cassiopeia, told us of the gods behind the stars. We love the story she tells of Perseus, and she saves the drawing she makes of the running man in the sky, his hand in a fist, puts it in her elephant when she sets everything back. Every day after that, we look at Momma's elephant on the shelf when we play, at the things, the constellation we know is inside--of the hero who saves Andromeda, rescues her from the monster of the sea.

