

In the early afternoon on June 15th, 1999, a cesarean is performed

By Julia Peterson

I.

Not baby A but B
Chin to chin
Foot to head
The person with whom I shared a womb
Would
While we fit
Share a bed

A single voice was what was heard
We were happy with that
Our wants each other's needs
Our failures and triumphs so closely intertwined
I questioned whether there was a god in our design

When I looked at her
I saw me
Her eyes
Her hands
Her words spoken as I spoke them

If she was "dark"
I surely wasn't "fair"
Couldn't see what others seemed to see so clearly
Were so eager to voice
So ready to share

Our separation wasn't a choice
But different lives lived
Shaped by society's fixation:
Our bodies' expression of melanin

II.

Race: White

Ethnicity: Irish, European

Words spoken to others

In the mirror we could not match them to their meaning

Classmates

Equated pigment with fraternity

Questioned us

As though pulling apart a work of fiction

Her struggle with diction

The name she carries

Rose

Rosalita

I'd call her fondly

A future regret

Exaggerated syllables

Rolling guiltless off my tongue

Words that bounced

Off the checkered cafeteria floor

Down the nearest hallway

Knocking against classroom doors

With elementary school came Living History

Me: Julius Caesar

She: Harriet Tubman

Maybe the last time she chose her identity

Later

Rose became Rosa

When in middle school we learned of Civil Rights' history

A comparison not to her bravery

But to her skin
An endless
White
Male
Echo
Rosa Parks!

With suburban high school came the questions
A teacher's being
"What are you?"

Came the comments
Came harassment I'd urge her to report
Only to earn the retort
"It's fine."
Unimaginable that I too waged war on her body's design

When
My call was heard
Repeated down hallways and across campus
Endless
Rosalitaaa!

When
The school police officer stared her down
Hands at his waist
And
Looking to me for an explanation
I met the fear in her eyes with the anger in mine
Responded
"It's because you're black."

III.

When the most interesting thing about you is being a twin
Photo evidence is in order

Inevitable surprise
Followed
Inevitably
By “Only in the eyes.”
I’d provide
“People assume she’s Latina.”
Icing on the cake
Surprise
Looks like my sister’s of another race

There came a time when only yearbooks connected us
Size ten font sole proof of our fraternity
We’d grown mute
Better to not divulge what’s immediately disbelieved
Refuted by the skin beneath the sleeves of our favorite shirt

Mom would reveal our relation at parent-teacher conferences
Express frustration later
Fail to understand the nature of our secret
Let alone why we would choose to keep it

See
Race was never on the table
It sat stiff in the refrigerator
Left with us in the morning
Thawing at school

Its trail of cold liquid sent everyone skidding
Left my ears ringing
An endless explanation:
Fraternal
Not identical
That’s why

The answer given never sufficient
For peers and educators alike

Those to whom we've been a test
Of boundaries drawn

Divisions:

Race

Ethnicity

Lines

When placed beside me

Her body crossed in white society