

## The Conception (excerpt from “Caleb”)

I always knew Caleb and I always knew he was different. I knew my child. From the time of his conception I felt him I felt the difference in me. A stirring, an abnormal warming. It was like nothing I had ever felt before this quickening. Three days before we made him, my husband Corliss and I had had an argument about something my mother said to him and he thought I had taken her side. It was pretty bad. We barely spoke to each other for 2 days. To make matters worse I spent 1 night at my sister Bernieces just to get away so I didn't have to deal with him for a minute. I came back that next morning. I didn't see the car so I thought he was gone. But when I got to the door I could hear Miles horn sounding like I felt, like he was looking for something he couldn't see but knew was there. Just as I got the key in good Corliss opened the door. Underneath his deep blue robe he had on his fruit of the loom t-shirt and shorts. There was a tear that lay harbored in the corner of his eye. A shy crystal. It was so disappointed with myself cause I wanted to taste it. His lips trembled as he smiled. He said “Im wrong and Im sorry baby.” His voiced cracked on “sorry”. I stared at his lips the full red bloom of the tones that coated every other part of him. His skin was much smoother than mine, like he had been dipped in it and left to dry. He was confectionary. I stared at them those lips so as not to look too long at the thick rising that began to bounce against those immaculate white briefs of his. I wanted to hold out for more than just that sorry-ass “sorry.” I wanted some snot to fall, not just his one shy tear. I wanted to see him to weep and moan. I wanted his face buried in his hands and fresh cut flowers in a new crystal vase. But by the time he closed the door behind me my panties were down way below my raincoat. I had forgotten it was 8 in the morning. Tuesday. People were still making their way out their doors on to work and there I was with my dress hiked up and him finger painting circles inside me for the whole working world to see. He pull me inside and slammed the door. We went at it like we had no other reason for living. It was all nature no thought nor sentiment both of us cussin each other like two drunk old harlots in the alley. I couldn't believe the thing we were saying to one another. Sacred obscenities. We never did it like that. Never so naked and raw. Not before nor since. The memory still embarrasses me not cause we were so nasty but because I liked it so. We lay there all damp and funky in the darkness. He reached to turn on the ceiling fan but I pulled him back down. I liked this molten air just the way it was. Hot. Wet. Thick. The smell

of it. Hmm. Well, soon enough it would be all gone. I wanted to savor it. The evidence. I knew I would need it all to justify any remnants of regret. Yes, There was a difference, the morning after me and Corliss made him. I thought at first this difference this stirring was illness. Some bug I must've caught. I didn't know but I knew it was something else. My heartbeat quickened and I felt hot and cool sprinkles beneath my eyelids. The whole day. Not like a heart attack, more like my whole body was gearing up for something, it was revving itself up from the very core of me my heart on out through my vessels drenching every organ every cell with life force. I thought it must be an infection and my blood cells are simply mounting a defense. That's the way Berniece explained it. She said that when something invades the body like an infection or even a transplanted organ, your blood cells rally like an infantry organizing its attack. I had no idea that this was no infection that it was actually an invasion. I had no way of knowing that inside my fold a miracle had taken root. My body simply had to prepare itself for the little alien that had nested. Later on that night I turned in early only to lay awake and think. I listed all the possible afflictions and as I prided myself on generally not catching colds I knew this must be serious. Later that night, I heard soft sobs in the wall above my head. I looked at the clock and then wondered who could this be this woman weeping outside our apartment at three in the morning and how strangely sound carries through air and brick. I thought of Corliss. He let me see him cry once he did not try to hide his face He looked me in the eye. His was a terrifying cry not loud, not quite human, more like some tiny creature wresting itself from a trap. The pitch of Corliss cry was at once sweet and unbearable. This was how he made love also. But it wasn't him this time. It was me.