

Dawn

No one stops for my frantic gestures. My calls for help. I know they see me. Dawn is closing in and a pregnant woman will weigh them down. I step off the curb and face the oncoming car. It will have to stop or hit me.

‘Lady! What are you doing?’ the driver yells.

‘Hospital!’ Another pain hits me and I groan, leaning into the bonnet.

‘There isn’t time. Move!’

‘Yes. There. *Is!*’ I roar as my waters break, splattering the road with blood and mucus.

He hesitates. My skin bubbles even though the sun is still below the horizon. We both know it isn’t long until I add to the incinerated corpses littering the sidewalk.

‘Okay! Okay!’

I clamber in, slamming the door behind me as his foot reaches for the accelerator. My head cracks against the window with the squeal of the wheels, shoving me into the plastic moulding of the handle.

A guttural growl rolls up inside me, prises my lips open and punches its way into the echo chamber of the car. Bouncing off the roof and pouring its pain back down on me. I pant fast and sharp, snatching at the feverish air. My bare legs peel away from the cracked vinyl seat as I reach one hand between my legs. The head is there.

‘Faster!’

He swerves around the bend as my stomach contracts and solidifies again. I need to push. I don’t want to. Not here. Not now.

‘What’s happening?’

‘It’s coming!’ I lift my knees, fill my singed lungs and bellow with everything I’ve got.

Dawn

My hands, shaking and snake-skinned, cradle the matted head as it rips its way out of me. Squeezed into silent existence to join this ashen world.

And there she is. My life. My future. My tiny bloody mess.

‘You stopped,’ I whisper.

The driver shrugs with one shoulder.

The car screeches in front of the hospital as the sapphire sky edges its hem with gold.

I pull at the door handle and stumble out. Baby scooped in one hand, innards in the other. My feet pound the scorched asphalt as the sun casts out its fiery fingers reaching for my heels, ankles, thighs.

Blisters sizzle and pop in a race up my calves. A scream pierces the crackling air. I glance over my shoulder, and it howls again. Dragging me forwards.

I’m so close. Another step. Then another. So close.

The cry gets louder. Stronger. It’s near.

My head falls forward and my heavy eyes blink once, twice, three times. A shutter release for the perfect image as she draws in the dense air and confirms her announcement to the world. *I’m alive.*