

# Mi Di Once Bawl Fi Di Belly Weh Mi Wah Dash Weh Now

By Courtney Conrad

## Crib Monkey

The elders huddle around the kitchen table  
with their withering wombs and tearful eyes  
to speak of nights sprawling out on their backs  
awaiting their newborns' cries. Now old enough,  
the elders in my family demand me to swell  
and add to the world. Upward palms and tilted heads pray,  
summoning motherhood upon me.

The time has come for me to lie in a fluorescent  
sterile room that feels more like a morgue. My nurses  
are scurrying rats with superficial examinations,  
dodging queries like traps. *Try hard to keep quiet,  
not cause trouble*, they say. I arrive at the threshold  
of pain that leaves me in the fetal position. No form  
of back-and-forth rocking soothes this torment.

My baby rips his way out as if he wants nothing  
to do with me. They whisk him away and leave me alone,  
hands tied down to the bed, nurses say *beware of the crib monkey*.  
Every inch of my body is sore. Bits of me beg for stitches,  
still, the doctors busy their hands with everything and anything  
away from me. I wait hours before being poked and prodded  
like a piece of meat. Not a washing or a cup of tea.  
Later, I see my baby, dents in the sides of his head,  
blue-faced, purpled lips as I try to scream life back into him.  
I am now pregnant with twins, loneliness and rage.

## Duties

Wake up. breastfeed.  
 Stay hungry. Stay tired.  
 Soft hum. Rock child.  
 Nap child. You clean.  
 Child wakes. Change nappy.  
 Cook breakfast. You taste.  
 Husband eats. Pack lunch.  
 Rock child. Nap child.  
 Clean kitchen. Bathroom.  
 Master room. Nursery.  
 Laundry. Wake child. Bath time.  
 Breastfeed. Grocery shop.  
 Prep dinner. No rest. No exercise.  
 No therapy. No pampering. Beware.  
 No nagging. Keep high sex drive.  
 Be fun Mom. Devoted wife.  
 Available friend. Helpful sister.  
 Good daughter. Breathe in. Breathe out.  
 Don't stop. Don't complain. Don't crack. Commit. Commit.

**Mi did once bawl fi di belly weh mi wah dash weh now**

I am a sooty sort of Black.

I split, only for my baby to look one way.

No need for me after the final push.

The nurse holds him, I take a peek to see  
orange hair like his grandma's famous carrot juice.

Skin pale like soursop flesh, not even brown like ginger.

I bawl out *wah dis Fahdah God, dem tief mi pickney,*  
*cah dis one could neva be fi mi.* I cannot hold the bugger,  
he is not mine; so his father cradles him day and night.

On our first park stroll, I confess my innocence on a loop  
when suspicious eyes pry, hands flag down patrol officers,  
treacherous mouths widen to report the possible kidnapping  
of my own 'son'. As if my shattered appearance gives nothing  
but motherhood; my to-do lists are as long as the runs on my pantyhose.  
Maybe, I ought to whip a breast out for them to see,  
a nipple wrung drier than a dishcloth. Irritation swaddles me  
as I wait to feel more mother than nanny.

**Do You See What I See, Do You Hear What I Hear**

In the middle of the night, by the foot of my bed  
a handbag's dark womb births a rat the size of an infant.  
His cries, an inescapable microwave beep. The infant climbs  
up the walls and onto the ceiling, and peers over me insisting  
that I am his mother and that the toilet bowl snoring beside me  
is his father. The infant sticks me up with a blow dryer  
and demands to suck lava from the two cotton balls on my chest.  
His eyes do not grow weary but mine are overflowing red paint tins.  
The fridge climbs upstairs and enters my room, opening to sing him a lullaby.  
No, this is not a dream or nightmare but reality, and mine alone.  
My mind doesn't belong to me when I go days without sleeping.  
Now, I sit in a hospital room, sandwiched between the doctor  
and a police officer. The officer reports that the rat I strangled  
last night was my newborn. My mind unborns him every day.  
I can't recall the white gloves, forceps, or the push.  
I can't tell where the tearing begins or ends.  
Did he ask me to rock him to sleep?— permanently.

## You Took My Wife and You Took My Child

This should be the happiest moment of our lives but the agony creeps in before we can even scribble his name on the birth certificate. There are no joyful snapshots of the two of them or the three of us. My wife enters the delivery room humming gospel tunes, trusting that the good Lord gives with no intention of taking away. He gives me my son but takes my wife. She leaves the delivery room with a host of demons. Hopelessness, rage and worthlessness inject her, close to an overdose. Our son, a scorching pot she doesn't want to hold. She says *I feel less woman when my non-lactating breasts sit inside our son's mouth like boulders. He pinches and scratches at this ungiving body and who am I to blame him?* When no one is looking her forks, knives and pliers pinch and scratch at her body. She says *the appliances in our home speak all day, at full volume*, so I am the only one hushing our son's cries. He tries to take what he's been missing from his mother from me, reaching for my dry hairy nipple. She obsesses about his breathing as if she is the only one deserving of taking his breath away. She yanks my arm, almost out of socket, giggles uncontrollably as she details her plans to kill our newborn, me and herself. The madness accelerates daily. My son and I wake to wonder what we will survive, a duck-taped mouth gag, dinner seasoned with rat poison or a hammer to the head. I know this isn't the woman I married, her eyes tell me so, I can see the fight against all her destructive urges. The pleas for me to save her. Each day she believes she fails as a mother and wife. I join her, believing I am an atrocious husband and father. Everyone comes to see the evidence of a destroyed woman, marriage, family– but no one sticks around for the full story.

## Mother Monster Mourner

We interrupt this broadcast to alert you  
about the monster next door  
she may have already convinced you  
that her teeny tiny being is the monster  
when in fact he is the prey born to suffer.  
At no point does her hands grow weary of being a noose.

She tells our reporter, *no one else to blame but the son,  
always reaching for attention with the pervasive smell  
of rotten diapers and deafening wails.* No lullabies utter  
out her mouth. The last straw is unknown.

A source close to the monster says *she doesn't bother putting on a show  
of tenderness, no imprint of guilt.* Most women fantasize about full wombs,  
baby names swirl in their mouths since playground days.

The sane find this tragedy incalculable.

Meanwhile, her brain labours to defend the monstrosity of her motherhood  
there are many ways to look at this poor, uneducated, single monster.

Normally, the story is of killer fathers and doting mothers,  
there are no popcorn bowls and entertained eyes for this news .