

Excerpt from
Brown Girl
Dreaming
by
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Woodson

second daughter's
second day on earth

My birth certificate says: Female Negro
Mother: Mary Anne Irby, 22, Negro
Father: Jack Austin Woodson, 25, Negro

In Birmingham, Alabama, Martin Luther King Jr.
is planning a march on Washington, where
John F. Kennedy is president.

In Harlem, Malcolm X is standing on a soapbox
talking about a revolution.

*Outside the window of University Hospital,
snow is slowly falling. So much already
covers this vast Ohio ground.*

In Montgomery, only seven years have passed
since Rosa Parks refused
to give up
her seat on a city bus.

*I am born brown-skinned, black-haired
and wide-eyed.*

I am born Negro here and Colored there

and somewhere else,
the Freedom Singers have linked arms,
their protests rising into song:
*Deep in my heart, I do believe
that we shall overcome someday.*

and somewhere else, James Baldwin
is writing about injustice, each novel,
each essay, changing the world.

*I do not yet know who I'll be
what I'll say
how I'll say it . . .*

Not even three years have passed since a brown girl
named Ruby Bridges
walked into an all-white school.
Armed guards surrounded her while hundreds
of white people spat and called her names.

She was six years old.

*I do not know if I'll be strong like Ruby.
I do not know what the world will look like
when I am finally able to walk, speak, write . . .*

Another Buckeye!
*the nurse says to my mother.
Already, I am being named for this place.*

Ohio. The Buckeye State.
My fingers curl into fists, automatically
This is the way, my mother said,
of every baby's hand.
I do not know if these hands will become
Malcolm's—raised and fisted
or Martin's—open and asking
or James's—curled around a pen.
I do not know if these hands will be
Rosa's
or Ruby's
gently gloved
and fiercely folded
calmly in a lap,
on a desk,
around a book,
ready
to change the world . . .