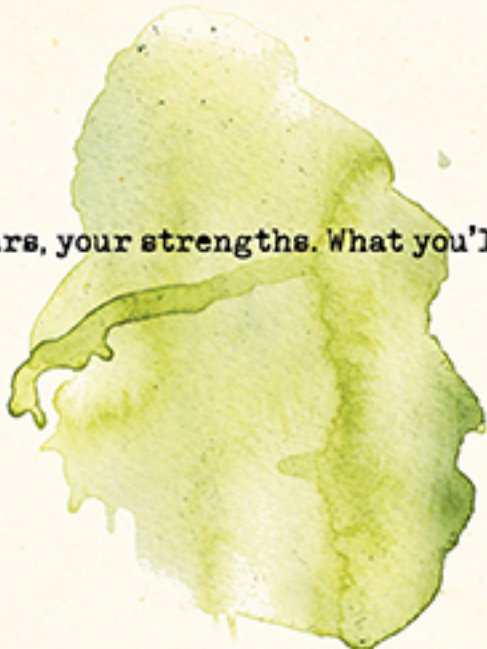


Someone once told me that all the clues to your
life lie in your first memory.

A large, irregular green watercolor stain is positioned behind the text. It has a mottled appearance with varying shades of green and yellow, suggesting a liquid spill that has dried. The edges are soft and feathered into the surrounding paper.

Your fears, your strengths. What you'll struggle with...

...This is mine.



It's January 1982.

I am six years old and sitting in the front seat of my father's Datsun, as we drive along the Florida coast.

It's cold and overcast, and my father is swearing to himself. He keeps looking out the window for some break in the gray, but the sky is immobile, a rusting shipyard of clouds. My mother is in the back. She's worried about me sitting up front. I'm too young to be up here, in the passenger seat, but my father insists.

"He's earned some thrills, Kathy," says my father.

I close my eyes and ask for something fun to happen. Not just for me, but for my father, for my mother in the backseat. I think of the word: "fun." It was one of the first words I learned to spell, and I visualize the letters now; I see us climbing them, ascending the laddered back of the f, scrambling across the top, and then sliding down its canopy into the swooping cradle of the u and up, and down the sloping n...

I open my eyes, but, of course, nothing has changed.

My father is still hunched over the wheel. The sky is still an angry brow. My mother is still nervous and frustrated and watching the road for us. The trees along this stretch of Florida are plain and bare. There were palm trees by our motel, but these look just like the trees at home to me. They're black and wiry and remind me of dead tooth nerves, like in pictures I've seen of rotten teeth at the dentist.

My mother sighs. She's just about to say enough of this--we can all feel it--when suddenly I notice something descending from the gray sky. An object blinking with light.

I press my face to my window.

What is it?

It's small, but flashing
green, and it's falling
toward us.

"Mom," I say.
"Dad. Look!"

