

Katrina Millan, 2017

## The Birth of a Galaxy

You were born on a Tuesday, a bundle of small bones in a pink, moist skin, on the same fortuitous evening that a man in Tucson, Arizona, looked through a telescope and saw an entire galaxy bloom into existence. For the first time in history, scientists were watching the phenomenon of celestial birth, and you had just slid your way into a new and violent mode of being.

One billion suns ignited in the largest light show that humanity had ever seen at the exact moment that your tiny lungs filled with their first breath of air, and as an astonished professor in Berkeley, California, surmised that the swirling mass of gasses and electrons must be three times the size of the galaxy in which you resided, a nurse was removing the layers of warm human viscera from your jerking limbs.

While the eyes of a dozen people were fixed on a time and place other than your own, another man was spilling coffee on a chart of the stars, and another was calling his wife to tell her the news, and another was rubbing his tired eyes, overcome by the weariness of knowing that he had just seen the single most beautiful thing he would ever witness in his entire life. While these and a hundred thousand other brilliant occurrences found their places in the world, so did you.

You did not know any of this, of course. You did not know that scientists were observing a giant blue mass filled with stars, one that was getting ready to collapse and give birth to more. You did not know that these men were scrambling to find an explanation for the existence of

what seemed to be a black hole, a destructive, dying star, in the midst of something so new and pure. You did not yet know that a person could be curious, or intelligent, or confused, or that time and space were both interchangeable and inseparable.

What you knew was that the world was white and loud and painful, that some void inside you that you would later come to know as *hunger* was calling out to be filled, and that your screams of panic and terror were being greeted with the smiles of those that had pulled you from that red, soft interior that was the first and last place you would ever feel like a natural human being.

As your mother lay, too exhausted to give you a name, and your father cradled you in his arms, his hot tears dripping onto you and running down your face to mingle with your own, the world had forever changed. And as your father counted out twenty reasons he loved you on your fingers and toes, people in lab coats and tweed suits were doing the math and discovering that the phenomenon they had just witnessed on that January the 6th, 1987, had occurred 71 billion trillion miles from Earth, meaning that they had just watched a galaxy being born 12 billion years ago. Already, those who knew you and watched the stars were confusing coincidence for meaning in a universe of brilliant chaos, and they may have been right.