

I wear you like a memory, Nicolas Seranio, Fourth Place

I wear you like a memory

They tell me I have my father's face
But I know my features belong to my grandmother
They belong to Shirley

Our faces are round
With a glassblower's cheeks
All orbiting a bulbous nose

Sometimes I like to imagine them
Back in their home of Kingston, Jamaica
Sniffing the char of roasted breadfruit
Or savoring the last morsels of curry goat and callaloo
Before they dance down her throat

The same throat they find the mass
A time bomb of flesh
That leaves no room for boiled dumplings or beef patties
Only liquids

My parents pulverize her food down to the atom
Made unrecognizable
And her face follows
She is all angles now
As islands of bone emerge from the receding fat
Her sunken cheeks an offering bowl
I had never felt her ribs until we hugged for the last time

I learn of her passing on my way to the operating room
And I let myself shatter briefly
Before promptly returning to work

I intend to schedule my grief
As I know she must have
Between the pummeling of her husband's knuckles
And the whimpers of her three little ones
Between working every job at every hour
Only to cut her feet on shattered glass
After Oakland robs her once again
I know that grief is a luxury

I carry her face to her funeral
And even soggy with tears
It stirs the souls of all who know

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Every crease a lyric
Every smile a eulogy

What a gift
To carry this legacy and to comfort others
With this face