

## Storyteller

My grandfather laughs when I ask him the name of the bar he took my mother to when she was a baby. *All of 'em*. He doesn't tell me about the '65 Mustang – how he wrecked it while driving drunk down Topeka Blvd. – how my mother, no older than three, flew out the window and the cops found her in a field. *I got a scar just like yours* my mother shows me. In D.C., my grandmother shows me a photo of her fourth husband, who died while visiting home in China. *I keep your photos in a drawer somewhere close*, she says when I ask why there are no photos of us on her walls. My mother calls from Dallas, says my father wants a book about him. *Now why would you want that?* She asks but mails my book to L.A. anyway. My grandfather says we should all visit my grandmother – tells me I should drive up from Albuquerque, pick him up on the way. My grandmother laughs: *He's still in Kansas? Good*. My mother never talks to her sisters, feels they are ashamed of her hue. It's why they never visit. *I came out of the same fucking pussy they came out of*, she says. *Write a poem about that*. The Mustang was repoed, I'm told, because he couldn't keep up on payments. *Bullshit*, my mother says, *you stick with my story, it's better*.

## Reunion

### I.

Almost midnight, your sister blooms  
into a bruised heart, miming  
your father's fists, recalling  
how your mother *just stood there*

*smoking*. It's not heartbreak.  
Not yet. Only a teenage girl  
after school *using furniture*  
*polish as deodorant*. He called

*me a stupid, country girl*.  
*Said they should have left me*  
*in Korea*. The car straddles  
both lanes, you just want

to get home. *Do you understand*  
*why I never called*. *I didn't*  
*hate you, but you understand*.  
*Do you understand?* Standing

in the Holiday Inn, you hug  
the hurtling bones of your sister,  
not because you understand,  
but because you remember

the stray cat on Halloween,  
and how you wanted to keep him –  
so you put the cat in the bag,  
and grandmother made

you throw all the candy,  
sticky with fur, away. Your  
sister took the blame, took  
the beating. And you placed

all those years, and the people  
inside them, deep into the earth,  
and kissed each gravestone,  
and haven't eaten a mary jane  
since.

## II.

But it's not heartbreak  
until the next day  
having breakfast  
with your mother  
and her nurse and  
there's nothing  
you can say  
to get her  
to remember  
your name  
until you show  
the photo  
of your father  
in uniform  
her in her white  
gown and she calls  
his name  
so you call him  
and put her  
on the phone  
and she tells him  
she misses him  
and when is he  
going to come  
and take her  
away? And what  
can he say except  
*I'm on my way*  
and when she passes  
back the phone  
it's back  
to soggy pancakes  
and stale coffee  
and before  
he hangs up  
your father asks:  
your son will write  
about us still  
right?

my father raises his shirt

tattoos cover his chest,  
stomach, nipples, *some  
are older than you.*

A bottle & two  
glasses of bourbon  
between us, a swig left  
for me, more for him,  
though he doesn't take  
his time – shoots it  
like a man half-  
drunk and longing  
for reunion. I don't  
know what to say,  
save drink another  
glass, touch his chest –

Arlington

It's spring, it's fiction, it's fact, it's scores of women who left  
their homes and families by coercion or force or desperation,

survival or love, and if you squint hard enough  
they all look the same. It's 1961, it's Fort Belvoir, Virginia,

it's built on a plantation, it's Dukie Oh promising  
to stay in touch with other Korean brides

while she packs to move to Kansas to live  
with her husband's family. It's one seat, it's two foreign

bodies, it's her baby girl in her lap. It's 2018,  
it's Arlington, it's the obituary calling her 80,

it's no one knows, it's my mother's loving  
her mother's last lie. How she knew the years

could be used against you. Sex. And Color too  
Dukie realized too late. It's none of us

stepping up when the pastor asks *who wants to share  
some of the good times they had?* It's how there's so few

of us left. It's the terrible truth, it's my mother  
purchasing her own plot the day her daughter died.

It's one last drink before lift-off, it's the little girl  
on her mother's lap, it's my mother

who looks forward, looks back  
to a place she'll never return: says *Kansas*

*is death. And fuck death.* It's a promise  
she knows she'll break.

Interview featuring korea & lilt perms

*You oughta had called her.*

I'll call her tomorrow. Ah, here they are.

Mama, her sister, her sister's husband, her two boys.

she was already pregnant with me

looked like

one of them old hotels

flower train

handmade

*I never seen her with long hair.*

here.

*Where?*

there.

Siri's in

That's Siri back

that's a family picture right there. You know what I mean?

look here  
at first, and then I come up on it. I'm out in the cold.

I can't remember this  
she holding me right after I was born

*Shit it was cold when you was born.*

that's probably why I'm so sickly now.

*born in the winter, you should be used to it.*

That's what daddy say, now you sound like your grandpa

He said well you was born on the floor in a blizzard. You can't stand the cold. I said Hell no!

crying, my eyes was tight right here cause I been  
hair. one of them lilt perms white people's

*You mean like lye or something?*

No, lilt was like a foam you take the roller and  
put the spongey paper on it and roll it up. And then put this foam on it.

*Did it hurt?*

No, it didn't do shit

*Well you said your eyes was tight.*

Cause I was tender headed