

Oranges and Losing You

Clara Anderson-Cameron

I watch from a careful distance,
The way your brain betrays you
I watch as my mother loses pieces of you,
And therefore herself
Nothing is more terrifying and sickeningly sure
Than the deepening twilight of a gentle mind

*It's years ago, I'm sobbing as mom drives away
The night stretches endlessly in front of us
My brother is in another room and you are
With me, soothing me, but I can't be calmed*

The slow progression of loss rips through a few
Generations at a time
Do you remember, Grandma, the smallness of my
Soft baby hands, of my mother's?
Can you still smell it, that fresh baby smell
When they handed her, swaddled, to you in the bed?

*You line up small toy bowling pins by the doorway,
I stop crying to watch you work,
We don't have a ball, you note, and we
Set off into the house searching for something to use*

You taught me how to use a soup spoon
Each time we sat down to eat last week,
I listened and nodded, and each time I learned something
Not new, but precious
I learned three times where to place it while setting a table,
I learned that your hands shake more, these days

*Your eyes light up and you exclaim,
Aha! In the excitement of the hunt, I'm no longer afraid
I can still see the look on your face
When you point to the orange sitting unpeeled by the sink*

You were a little girl once, Grandma
Just as I was, just as Mom was
Were you afraid of the dark then?
Are you afraid of it now? Is it awful to un-become?
We three are knotted together like stitches looped between knitting needles
Someone is pulling on the tail, you're falling apart, coming quietly undone

*It's dark outside the windows when we start to bowl
Rolling the fat orange over creamy linoleum
Cackling at the crashing of pins and I
Can feel those thousand dimples in the waxy peel*

We will write out the rest of our lives
With the same letters you used before us
I can see them falling from your lips
And I rush, to collect them with cupped hands
Grandma, tell me more, tell me everything
Do you remember that night with the orange?

*Oh, the backs of our hands were
Smoother then, and skin was pulled taught,
See how we loosen with age,
See how mother becomes daughter
Keep me as long as you will,
In the back of your mind that slips,
sleepily, into a blackness so sweet
And so soft. For you, Grandma, I'll remember it all.*

Clara Anderson-Cameron is a junior at the University of North Dakota, majoring in English and minoring in French. She plans on attending graduate school after UND and hopes to eventually join the world of publishing and editing. She spends much of her free time writing and reading and gets outdoors as often as possible, with her favorite music as an important backdrop to all activities.