

My grandmother hands me her rosary

A garden was placed in my mouth since birth,
fruit bruising in the heat,
a woman taught to swallow her own wanting.
The story grew ribs and walked beside me,
slept at the foot of my bed,
reining in my desires.

I learned to kneel before I learned to speak,
catechism's fluorescent light humming
like a nervous system.
The eyes of saints, suspended in plastic,
fixed past me
as if holiness required
looking away.

God grew smaller over time,
folded and refolded
until the creases stayed,
kept in a drawer beside the word "no."
Love ironed flat
so it wouldn't wrinkle the doctrine.

The rosary's cross is smaller than I remember:
rose gold, worn down to a soft dusk,
the beads cool in my palm,
like something once alive.
They carry the grease of her thumb,
the imprint of decades spent asking
without ever raising her voice.

It feels less like a weapon
and more like a door left slightly ajar.

And I hate that my hands close around it.
I hate that something in me leans forward,
a tide answering a moon
it pretends not to believe in.

I do not want the garden.
I do not want the dogma.
But I want whatever keeps her
from collapsing into the dark.

So I stand there, at her bedside,
holding the small metallic spine of her faith,
wondering if belief is a wound
that never stops glowing,
or a light
that only works
when you close your eyes.