

Papi, I Can See Your Bones

After Frank Gehry's 1986 sculpture "Standing Glass Fish" on display at the Weisman Art Museum in Minneapolis, MN

I sit on the floor of the Weisman below the sculpted fish.
Oiled fingerprints webbed on the diamond panels
refract light as shadows onto the white wall at my back.
The rays penetrate the body—wooden spine
twisted around the sharp edge of the ceiling.
I can't help but see my father in this fish, bent
body propelled up and away from my wall.
I don't know the courage that first pushed him from home
or rather, as a fish hooked at the lip, pulled him north
of the border wall. My father as a Pacific sleeper shark
who caught the hook between his teeth, gnawed
the wire into masticated spindles he swallowed
as a Salvadoreño boy, drilled steel into his wooden bones,
that self-constructed skeleton he shielded with glass,
and the stories he told me like shards glued to his skin.
Now he has launched himself skyward, body contorted
at the waist from his own drive and face angled up
away from me, daughter left anchored to the ground.

Yet from the floor he's tilted half-toward me,
my shield. Light filters through his Plexiglas armor.
I can see through him, the black tape stuck to his fin,
as though he might fall apart at any moment.
How beautiful the ground would glitter in his dust.

Saw my mother learn to unlove my father, her bags packed like a hermit crab, her white shell impenetrable. My father, the wind, howling

Title from Safiya Sinclair's poem "After the Last Astronauts Had Left Us, I"

My mother's shadow
 puppet display collects
 dust in the corner
 of our basement black
 paint chips sprinkled
 around the floor as radioactive
 fallout or debris
 from a volcanic eruption
 an eruption like my father's
 rage the rages that leave
 residue caked
 in our pores for days
 after each blast so
 we hide in corners
 as spiders melted in dark-
 ness legs crumpled
 up under our feathered
 bodies my sisters and I peering
 with too many eyes
 out at our mother
 as her face collapses
 under the years her body
 smaller and
 her smile flattened.

My mother's shadow
 puppet display disappears
 in the move to their new
 house I think until
 one day when helping
 my father dump
 salt into the basement
 tank (as well-water
 purification from their dirt-
 packed yard) I see
 it behind him folded up
 as three black boards
 the hinges rusted but somehow
 my father or maybe
 my mother has hidden
 it away carefully
 balanced it under the stairs

I can see
the moon-crescent and
irregular stars my father
carved for her in the wood
nearly a quarter century
ago a gift from his hands
before there were children
before the volcanos shifted
earth and sky to follow him
up the coast of Central America
demons from his past
carrying echoes of *abuelo's* hand-
me-down neglect and
as he thanks me for helping
with the salt and the water
thanks me for coming home even
I think maybe I can
unfurl my legs I can
imagine him carving into soft
panels staining them black I can
imagine my mother's youth
her happiness at his gift
her face relaxed just
how it is captured
in our dusty family
photos her smile eating
into her full cheeks.

Portrait of Two Mothers

In a gesture that shocks my father shocks my mother shocks her family
 Nana hands my bundled body to Grampa and nods her head toward the door
 wordlessly asking Abuela to join her on a walk. And so the story goes:
 my mother's mother and my father's mother the two oldest mothers in the room
 wrap winter around their wrinkled bodies outside the house gathering their coats
 tight like straightjackets (Abuela smelling like the basement mothballs
 and searching for the sun against the snow) Nana speaking English
 and Abuela responding Spanish two grandmothers in two different conversations
 but their laughs like summer melting the iced puddles beneath their feet.

Portrait of Two Fathers

My sister hands caulk to our father
 from a crusted dispenser
 in Grampa's bathroom. Papi chips
 at the tub tile he resealed
 years back at his wife's, our mother's,
 request. His hands cloak the wall
 in stiff plastic papering
 waterproofing the walls
 like the inside of a foreign hive
 when Grampa returns too soon
 from the store, taps the door open
 exposing the two silent bees
 (Maeve and Papi cleaning debris from tile fallout).
 His shouts startle them as he waves his arms
 ushering them out his house.
 In his curmudgeonly exasperation
 without Nana (his compass)
 he forgets or rather omits
 the words *thank you*.
 Instead grabs Papi by the arm,
 white hand on brown skin,
 attempts to hand his son-in-law cash
 not like family like the hired help, the brown-
 skinned Latino landscapers
 who cut his lawn every other Sunday.
 Papi pulls away.
 Pulls away so readily
 like etched muscle memory
 and when my father turns his back, Grampa folds
 the bills into my sister's fist.

Language Gap

My father stands poised on top of the diving board heels stacked
against the grainy platform Just as he lifts one foot
to saunter toward the pool (my sisters and I wait
along the edge of the water to measure the length of his dive)
we hear the distant rumble accompanied by the high-
pitched whistle of another aircraft approaching He plugs his pinkies
into his ears staring almost past the sun it seems where the dark
silhouette looms larger larger still He yells at me
gestures with odd flaps of his elbows to cover my ears (I don't
like to do that though I listen until my ear drums ring
louder even than the plane-thunder though later he rages
that we—and here he lumps my sisters in with my transgression—
that we will go deaf) you see he is a condor
coming in for landing against the back edge of the diving board
a cliff over the dark water littered with exhaust-soot
his fingers splayed and thumbs extended like horns
out the sides of his head but even as his mouth opens and closes
his words dissipate in the space between us somewhere
over the hot cement and the plane flies over us low the belly swallowed
by my father's head I watch the horizon
between the plane and the treetops wonder
if the wheels might skim the leaves this time I think I see them shudder.