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Tenth Grade

gossamer

I never expected eternity to escape into fleeting presences. The taste of tender nostalgia still curls in billows upon my tongue, ever so sweet now that moments have grown into memories. I still remember: Mama's vibrant laugh, my own creative zeal, the summer when things fell into place. And still, now, they fall. Over and under and over again.

Summer 2016 was painted in childhood. I remember the two of us: giggling, sticky peach juice on our fingers, honey oozing from the tree bark, ice-cream cones left to melt on the asphalt. We were at your grandmother's house in the middle of nowhere, where the apricot orchard stretched on for acres and sun rays. I hear the raspy rustle-chime of sea breeze through the leaves, see the river simmering with heat-haze. Years unraveled in reverse. We were always reaching for each other, never quite touching. You called it gossamer—said that you felt tiny spiders instead of butterflies and that they spun webs of chiffon over your eyelids, letting you see me clearly and silken all at once. The feelings grew so big and beautiful in my chest that they ached, they writhed, they became their own creatures, without names.

In that life, it started raining the second we whispered each other's names. In the next, the world stopped breathing right before we touched. In another, we jumped into the lake at dawn and never came up for air. I wonder if the water remembers your name, the frame of our bodies; if it ever keeps track of the things it washes away.

Autumn was idle and scribbled with waiting. Together, Mama and I watched the time pass. She never expected the air to move so slowly during our chrysalis. CeCe had moved away from home to chase sunlight in sunken places and the house had become cool in her wake—a dim sort of quiet where smiles feel heavy and our skin waits for an abstraction that we can't recognize. It was something like longing. I remember: Mama's quiet cooking, streams of smoke curling through the parlor and swelling into clouds of spice, our quiescent conversations embellished with lilt of home and comfortable breathing. I can still hear the thrum of the stereo before it released the fiery, golden jazz. It would vibrate softly, warming up its insides before the CD swirled around a few times and brass trumpets soared through the aluminum gaps. We were clement back then; afloat. She called it gossamer—said that we were delicate in those moments, empty, but that there was a new luster around the two of us because we both knew the feeling

and that was enough. We were bound in a world of temporary loss and our spirits acknowledged it, wordlessly. Those tender moments pulled us closer and tighter still, until we melded into one warm laugh and sank into the quietude.

In that life, CeCe came home before we habituated her absence. In the next, Mama and I carried each other's vulnerabilities and laughed to keep away the quiet. In another, the three of us flung our bodies to booming sounds, rhythmically, exuberantly, until the rainfall crescendoed the warmth. I wonder if autumn falls slowly like the three of us did, desperately almost; if it ever pauses before crumbling into a dusk it won't remember.

Spring that following year was littered with blazes of red. I remember: grassroot blades poking my bare legs during stretches of spring, the aroma of pale coffee wafting through busy classrooms, the hum of city streets as they buzzed with movement and kaleidoscopic bodies. I was in the metropolis then, nestled into the far corners of hidden hillsides where the schoolyard met the garden and everything bloomed. I ate unripe berries during stupors of rebellion and the piquant juice dribbled down my glossy cheeks. I can still hear the melodic bustle of squirrels through thorny bushes and the youthful peal of laughter as it rips through sticky air. My reflection was vacant back then, outlined only by the guise of my own melanin and its opalescence. Confidence drowned in meek juxtaposition, like crushing velvet with honest hands. I wrote for hours and time-lapsed indecisions, painting sun-filled fields of idealism and getting consumed by the way that the flowery words curved across the porcelain pages greedily. I called it gossamer—said that there was luminescence even in the breakable things and that passion during lonely breaths amounted to more than dust. Spring's warmth expanded into heat and my newfound passion transformed fluke-filled creativity into artistry. Cerise imbued all mundane things and the city burst into fervor as I made, I created, I wove words of the past until they became new, reincarnated memories.

In that life, I glided above the firmament with ink-winged seraphim. In the next, I met a thousand faces that burrowed themselves into the light places of my mind. In another, I encountered them all again, wading away from the past and pushing towards the current in some lagoon, lukewarm and seagreen with softness, distant from time but close to the feeling.

Winter was rendered in realizations: you didn't expect me to float, Mama didn't expect me to bleed, I didn't know that things go before you want them to. In those moments, I realized that the going is always on time. Fragile limbs cracked under new avoirdupois, childlike bonds were replaced with deep affections, ivy tendrils sprawled further from grounded roots as April faded into July. I kept pieces of myself, back then, clutched them to the palisades of my heart and committed them to memory thrice over. I became enamored with every version of myself and my memory craved the steadiness of presence, of eternity, of self. It reached back into the

sounds of the past, the images of a former me, the taste of all the time. They rest in that pocket too, with the fragments of who I used to be.

In this life, I reconcile them into a collage. In the next, each facet juts out uniquely and paints a simulacrum of time, owned and relinquished and blurred. In another, it'll be called gossamer—an absentminded, gentle-woven reverie of the past.

Perhaps I'll find you there. Perhaps I'll find me there. Perhaps I'll be found.