

### **Fictional Mothers #3**

My mother is becoming a fiction,  
receding behind me in funnels of film star  
cigarette smoke like a cheap screen.  
(There was always something between us.)  
She had ambitions in Technicolor, surround  
sound, fast forward, freeze, jump cut, montage.  
She built herself like a visual jazz.

It wasn't magic. Spells. Alchemy.  
She drew borders like she painted  
her mouth, contoured lines, lips laminated.  
She was a compendium of cosmetic tricks,  
generic glamorous lies and waxy thick  
cherry-red lipstick, fake British accent  
and absurd tragedies I believed.

I absorbed each shabby counterfeit syllable.  
She was half-Cherokee and orphaned.  
She watched a brother burn to death  
in a back country shed in an autumn  
of milk weed and golden rod yellow  
as an inland sea.  
(All interiors are fluid.)  
She was mistress to a Spanish count  
with a villa in Malta.  
She graduated Summa cum Laude in two years  
and spent summers in North Africa sleeping  
in caves, subsisting on berries and fish,  
shoplifting cameras from turistas.

Of course, she was beautiful.  
Rules are irrelevant for women with eyes  
like crushed iris. She smokes and calibrates  
her mascara in the mirror. We converse  
through glass, her face bulb-lit and magnified.  
I'm permanently peripheral, behind, on the margin,  
in shadow, in postures of submission.  
She is naked, trailing a red mantilla  
like a stripper's boa.  
In cantinas she barter her body for wine  
and sport. Stars embroider her skin.

Now she is leaving, fading, finding trains  
to hometowns that don't remember her

or her made-up cinema names. The new  
math hasn't reached the provinces yet where  
Anna became Angelica and Mildred=Madeline.  
Bernice to Brittany. Golda to Gwendolyn.  
It's not a complicated sleight of hand.  
No physics or critical theory.  
But those farmers can't even add.

My mother is departing with her bark skin  
translucent paper-thin outer shells.  
She's an insomniac in a pauper's grave.  
That's a lie. We don't bury our dead.  
We burn them and toss the ashes.  
Cemeteries are reserved for presidents  
and movie stars. The rest get six feet  
of dirt off a highway in a county we  
didn't know exists and won't visit again.  
The confused directions to the remote hole.

No wreaths or annual memorials, either.  
No brass bands or neighbors bereaved in black.  
In my nation, death is not in fashion.

We are an astonishment of disappointment,  
mute by circumstances we didn't transcend,  
not with psychiatrists, doctorates and volunteer service.  
Not with hemispheres, the globe  
consumed in increments of passport stamps.  
So many points of entry, so much ink  
and we are gutted past empty.  
Further discussion is impolite.  
Inscriptions in granite are still permitted----

*Here lies a woman who bent the truth  
until her daughter broke*