

## Ode to a Grandmother I Never Knew

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She is a hard-working person  
With a clean apron  
Wiping her hands on a towel  
Tied to her apron string.

She has the uncanny ability  
To press laundry  
While the dough is rising  
And telling one daughter  
That her braid is too loose  
Another daughter  
That her sweater needs mending.

She can spot a fallen hem  
From a block away  
Throw open a window  
And call that daughter home  
Before the neighbors see her "like that."

She buys bananas from the back of the truck  
That pulls up at the corner  
And notes the exact price in her ledger—  
Black, with precise handwriting  
Mastered in third grade  
Under the watchful eye of her own mother.

She plays cribbage every night  
With a husband I will never know  
Who works at the train yard  
And at the college,  
Bringing home insignificant funds  
That get recorded in the ledger  
Along with the income of the children  
Who live at home and pool  
Their resources during the depression.

She quilts a blanket  
From old shirts, torn by a nail  
Ripped by her hands  
Stored in a rag basket  
Cut into squares  
Pieced together with tiny stitches  
Transformed into a blanket  
That will travel across country by train  
In a hope chest that I will find in an attic

Two generations later just when  
Motion sickness has dropped me  
Into a life I don't recognize  
I wrap myself in its embrace  
And hear the whispers of Ma Mémère—  
*Tu es fort comme moi, ma belle fille*—  
The grandmother I never knew.