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CHANDA FELDMAN

## In the Mirror

Mornings my father wiped a circle clean in the mirror steam,  
a towel wrapped around his waist, his face lathered  
with a pale gold powder mix from his porcelain mug.

A shaving blade scraping against his jaw, then dipped  
in the sink. His wax kit and scissors laid out for his moustache.  
Some mornings, I rummaged in his closet, past the suits,

the camouflage vest—its elastic slots for rifle shells—  
his army jacket, a dashiki, for the checkered shirts my mother sewed  
for him long ago. On the floor were his racked shoes

that I polished, the bag of toothbrushes and cotton cloths  
I used for buffing between the stitches of his Johnston & Murphy's.  
Whenever he was fitted for a suit, I accompanied him,

examined his sleeve, the subtle woven colors  
in the wool's weave as my father stood in the trifold mirror,  
its infinite reflections of him. I wore his old ties

with ankle-length skirts and combat boots. I watched  
as he wrapped a half Windsor knot and slipped it  
over my head, cinched it closed at my neck. After school,

I stacked cordwood beside him in the yard, worked  
the weed whacker, the chain saw, and he let me sip  
from his double shot of Jack. Chamber music on the stereo,

we'd grill in the backyard, sit through dusk's mosquitoes,  
fireflies, June bugs, and moths. I didn't know my own  
strength, my father said to convince me my hands

were as good as his—that time passing me the garden hoe  
to cut a chicken snake sprawled on the warm floor  
of our garage—that I was the best son or daughter he could have.

## Demonstration

At the county extension service in the old downtown,  
I spent after-school hours in my mother's office—  
the green-glass building next to the city farmers' market

held in the parking lot each week—the entrance lined  
with dark-stained oak cabinets, quarts  
of tomatoes, the perfectly suspended fruit-flesh

in red liquid. Men holding Chinese food cartons  
of soil, like purses, from their gardens and farms.  
The soil needing to be fixed, the levels adjusted,

they'd puzzle over results laid out like blueprints.  
My mother, a home economics agent, working  
upstairs in the demonstration hall and kitchen,

the double-burner stove tops, the steaming silver pots.  
In her hairnet, a lab coat over her blazer and  
satin blouse. I sat in the chairs for the audience

with my homework until she called me up  
to the platform to dip pH sticks to read the acid  
contents. I'd slip the skin off peaches, level tablespoons

of salt for brines. My mother taught me  
each step: the maceration, the strawberry-rhubarb  
slurry heating to frothing, the sugar thermometer

rising to the gelling temperature of precisely 220  
degrees. My mother pouring the fruit into scalded jars,  
the room billowing with sweetness.