

Kiel M. Gregory

STEALING FROM GRANDMOTHER

I remember being paid by mother
in cubed, seedless watermelon
to steal the pack of Marlboro Red
out of her purse.

I hid them in the piano bench,
buried under Mozart and Beethoven.

Mother was incredulous when Gramma
stepped outside for a smoke.
“You said you took them?” she said to me,
her face scrunched up with emotion.

(Gramma had a carton in her Cadillac.)

At first, I felt guilty for stealing from grandmother
at mother’s command.
Then I felt guilty for having failed,
turning from my mother to look out the kitchen window,

watching the last wisp of smoke curl from Gramma’s
small, fine nose after exhaling between her slightly-parted lips.
She looked happy, seeing something the rest of us couldn’t
somewhere above the horizon’s tree line.

Now, twenty-three years later, I feel
guilty for not being able to give you back your
breasts
or your
cigarettes.

I want you to be happy again
and show me what it is you found
somewhere between the tops of the trees and
the cloud ceiling.