

HONORABLE MENTION
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Secondhand Starvation

My mother used to love having staring contests with her own reflection.

Tracing her cellulite with the edge of her fingernail

while pinching leftover pieces fat she couldn't starve away.

My mother enjoyed pulling at the hem of her shirt,

and lifting it up to take spoonfuls of her stomach,

as she pocketed slices of her thighs trapped between her fingers.

Mama was once called a "crack head" by our family.

They'd continually pointed out the way her hair shedded and left patterns of baldness that ran over her entire cranium.

When my loved ones started calling me a "big girl", and told me I could melt the imperfections off my figure like warm butter,

I wanted to be tiny like mom became.

Mommy used to diet all the time.

Fifty percent of her bloodstream ran on caffeine tainted coffee,

and the other half thrived off the way plume from a cigarette descended in

her empty belly.

She chewed gum to erase the foul taste of ash in her mouth.

Mom walked in the middle of a rainstorm, and when I warned her she

could get ill,

I think a small part of her knew she already was.

My mama's baby girl is entertained by the

shifting of a scale,

and the way her frame seems to expand every occasion she undresses herself

with her swollen eyes in the bathroom mirror.

She begins to run her fingers across the rough texture of her

stretch marks.

Plucking undesirable thickness on her hips

and pulling at the softness of her upper arms.

Mama unintentionally showed her how to work her way around the inches,

that appear more like miles.

She used to always look at her mommy,

and saw nothing but radiance emitting from her heart.

Now, she doesn't understand the definition of pretty.

The genetic curse of Anorexia invades the lungs

as we pass our breath from one generation to the next.

Like second-hand smoke,

we unknowingly inhale the obsession in until we become

addicts.

Judge's remarks:

This poem is a brave exploration of body image inheritance. It is both accurate and surprising that the poet draws a parallel between the damages passed down by ruinous preoccupations with the (im)perfect female body and the potential ravages of secondhand smoke. This is original treatment of an almost universal psycho-social phenomenon that effects virtually every young woman in America to one degree or another. It is also as painfully personal as it gets.