

Ode to a Grandmother I Never Knew

by Peggy L. DuBlois

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.