Hallow Hallow (Poetry)

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HALLOW HALLOW
ANNA SALVANIA

For Thanksgiving, my mother and father took me to Disney World
I was seven
My mom bought me a Belle dress
There was not a thought of hesitation in my heart when I dressed up in that gold gown and licked pretzel salt from my fingers for a week
As I aged, ‘you can’ts’ slowly stole pieces of my innocent heart until I found myself with a hollow place in my chest
Why can all the people around me decide what I am and what I am not just by looking at the color of my face?
Nothing is stopping me from being Belle except for everybody’s stubborn idea that she looks nothing like me.

It’s always been simple to discern derogatory comments from sincerity but how can my grandmother, my Lola, who has so much to take pride in
Who crossed oceans to buy pair after pair of black and red orthopedic shoes and warmed her children with a hairdryer until they fell asleep
Could still think that the world would have treated her better had she been born with vibrant blush in her cheeks and the sky in her eyes?
Who needs the sky when she has green, salty mangoes in her fingernails, rich earth in her hair, monsoon on her breath, kidney bean and ube on her lips?

Racism feels like being self-conscious about face swaps and everything that has to do with the Regency Era and how people always assume you don’t sunburn and every theatrical production that was written before 1980 because you can hire seamstresses and order blue and black wigs but you cannot bleach a face

In another sense of costuming,
October is the only time of year when it’s explicitly encouraged to try on new identities with face paint and spidery eyelashes and glittry, gory costumes and shove sugar past your lips and celebrate imagination but Halloween has always made me anxious
‘Will they know who I am if I wear that?’
‘Is this anachronistic?’
‘I look nothing like her.’
There has always been patriotic pressure shoving my shoulders down
And it makes for good headstands
But I’m searching blind, groping in the dark for an honor that’s been crammed down my throat dripping in ostensible
hamartia
I have no idea where to find pride, the place in my chest where it should be is empty
Monopolized by those who cannot see past the prism of their own palm

To the boy who assumed I spoke Spanish
To the girl who told me I was an unwanted friend because my skin is brown
To the man who told my father that his skin matched the color of the pile of dirt in the empty lot next to our house
To the boy who praised racist jokes
To the friend who made them about me because I “could handle it”
To the lady who told a little girl that she could not be Little Red Riding Hood because Little Red Riding Hood
has porcelain skin, listen:
The colors of my skin should not be my most distinguishable feature
We are obsessed with physicality so
it does not matter how straight my nose is or if I have mermaid hair or if I feel hollow because I haven’t eaten since
5 o’clock last night or if I have perfect curves or if you can see my ribs and clavicle when I do a backbend

I want to be recognizable for stardust in my eyelashes and vision slingshotting from my knuckle crack
For my perpetually hopeful eyebrows and hardboiled gaze
For the thousands of letters I’ve written to my future daughter
and the sanguine backs –of –my -knees that emanate confidence,
for the sharpness of my mind

My Lola’s favorite dessert consists of coconut chunks, shaved ice, sweet milk, slippery Jello
She makes one for all her grandchildren, then sits down to eat hers

And I cannot help but wonder:
Would the world have treated her better
had she grown up with eating American pie
instead?