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Salad Days

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Salad Days

There used to be smoke standing on every corner and hovering just behind each shoulder, sitting politely at round tables ordering food from teenaged waiters. And I used to eat cigarettes, chocolate wrapped in paper, inside rooms wrapped in paper and asbestos. We didn’t know so much and there is so much we still don’t know. My mother, her curfew was sunset and her seatbelt was her sister’s arm strapped across her chest. My father first learned to type on a sheet of printed paper. Both have welt marks from teachers’ belts and twigs and bloodied knees from kneeling. My father’s soles are callouses. My mother’s hands are raw. Once she lashed a belt across my thighs. Then she cried. And I still scour sites for tastes of childhood treats, buy jelly hamburgers inside nostalgia stores. I have at twenty-two enough books to make a bygone king blush with jealousy. I hold Plato in my palm. I stand outside and cast my eyes to the sky where there’s so much I can’t see, so much gazing down at me.

—Alixa Brobbey

This poem won second place in the 2022 Clinton F. Larson Poetry Contest, sponsored by BYU Studies.