

First Eulogy

Characters in novels say things like
“You are the only one who understands.”
They are born with little.
They scramble through life, collecting bruises
And ragged scars.
Or elegant ones, depending on the light.
They leave last words worth quoting.

I have not asked about your last words,
Yet.
That you closed your eyes and quietly died, like going to sleep
I consider a blessing.
For you, yes,
And for us.

“Blessing” meant the sign of the cross.
Meant anointment, protection.
What comes that brings peace,
What comes that balances suffering
Is a blessing –
The uncomplicated pleasure of my son in my arms,
The relief between need and demand,
Like overtaxed muscle stretching into ache and ease,
The ability to – or refusal not to – remember.

That morning you peeled cucumbers
With a woman so foreign to you
She might have been anyone.
In the photograph you are a team,
Aproned, relaxed, smiling.
I remember one platter after another of sausages, meatballs and chicken,
An enormous bowl of the tomato, cucumber and onion salad
You had made all my life
But that was, for her, a novel concoction.
I had brought a delegation of diasporic loved ones
Home to feast. The night before,
White gown and all, we had celebrated
Inside familiar rituals, and now we coalesced
Into simple camaraderie.

When the cousins, the in-laws, the other bereaved told me
To look inside your casket
Lest I regret not completing that ritual,
They promised me I would not see
The face I would remember.