

GIFTS FROM MY MOTHER

This is how I remember her: the black shine of her hair like an oil slick, her skin cocoa in the mornings, dark espresso beans by night, the way she jutted her hip, so it was a curve you wanted to round. That's how I remember her on those evenings when she'd leave me in the car to go across the street to Sharkey's Bar and Grill—me, a ten-year-old girl, wanting to know what she said to those men to get them to buy her drinks.

She'd always come back with something for me: a tiny umbrella on a toothpick, and I knew she'd been drinking mai tais with an older man, profusely sweating in the heat; white long-sleeved shirt rolled up to his elbows.

A shot glass full of maraschino cherries, and I knew she'd been flirting with the help for Long Island iced teas, most likely the bartender. But those cherries were sugary and false, and left my tongue feeling like plastic.

It had to be the green olives that were my favorite. Green olives and I knew she'd been sipping straight-up martinis with a certain suave gentlemen who wore a black dress shirt, short sleeves for the humidity, who knew how to keep the drinks coming, knew not to ask why she took the olives from her glass and collected them on a napkin to the side.

And when I ate them, I could taste the sting of gin; once, instead of the sweet sliver of red pimento, I bit into something hard. Deeply sucking into that pit, I imagined what it felt like for a man to slide his hand up your dress in a bar.

Tiny gifts given to me after closing, my mother was always thinking of me that way.

