

## Hunger

By Frederick William Schroeder IV

Closely, I watch  
Nanny savor her orange  
as sweet citrus dribbles down her chin.  
She offers me a slice,  
but I don't even like oranges.  
She offers, again.  
That's okay, I say,  
I can just get my own.  
Her eyes fill with hurt.

I come from a family of scroungers,  
of the dirty kids in class  
whom you shouldn't play with,  
who bathed using a damp rag,  
who wore the same outfit every day,  
who couldn't afford lunch,  
but that was fine, they weren't hungry anyway.

This is not about depression.

At home, they had nothing.  
The only thing Nanny has from her childhood  
is a photo, faded and ghostly,  
of a mother who died when she was eight.

She had a doll, once,  
made from a rolled up sock.

Nanny wasn't poor, though.  
She had a bed,  
shared with a sister  
who acted like a mother,  
and they kept each other warm.  
Nanny had pets, too,  
mangy mutts and stray cats that no one else wanted,  
but her older brothers gladly took in.  
She had neighbors even,  
mostly Italians, some black,  
all without money.

A man in the box,  
Nanny describes her first radio.

A fond memory:  
Every Friday, the best speller would win

a chocolate bar, the full sized kinds  
that could be broken up into smaller pieces  
and shared with one's family members.  
Nanny spent her nights  
studying long lists of vocab words,  
collecting knowledge,  
in hopes of making a sweet exchange.

Dragged along the sidewalk, losing pine needles,  
the family's first Christmas tree.

I come from stomach pangs as a motivation,  
a reason to hoard  
words and stories and feelings on paper,  
to work endless hours  
even when the work is awful,  
to stay alert past the point of exhaustion  
or I might lose a finger  
like the girl at the other end of the assembly line.

This is not about depression, but about  
working for that first new pair of shoes,  
being the only one in the family to go to college,  
and relying on oneself.

I listen to Nanny's childhood tales,  
memorized by now,  
as I eat my orange slice  
in sour annoyance.