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My Mother in Sepia

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My Mother in Sepia

She wears the perfect pearls and cashmere
sweater of a schoolgirl posing at sixteen.

A cloud of russet hair surrounding forehead,
eyes just lifted from a leather book.

Each edge emerges softly from its brown
cocoon to flutter toward adulthood.

Those were the sepia years before the war
turned everything to black and white—

the beau whose bones would bleach by
the side of a road in the Philippines;

her father, who would disappear into a dark
mountain, the crash site marked by a small

white cross. Now my mother's edges
blur again, her eyes no longer see to read,

gray shadows where the letters used to be.
She never talks about the war—all the loss

has softened like a steady rain, a day that will not
brighten. Beside her sits the sepia photo in its frame.

What do you miss the most? I ask her, looking
at the curving lip and glowing cheek.

Books, she says, I miss the books.

-Meredith Davies Hadaway
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