

I recall at four--
 being told Grandma
 Nina was no more.
 My father was
 trucking out west
 carrying idahos east.
 My mother told me
 when Nina died--
 she died of a cancer.
 It haunted me--
 Grandma Nina passing
 on malignant genes.
 Bertha's sister Ebba
 like Tallulah--
 Bertha, Gertrude Stein.
 Ebba drank much
 too much my mother said
 like your grandmother.

Nina, a Margaret Dumont—
 Her husband, an Adolphe
 Menjou.
 Nina loved whiskey
 more than her husband
 my father or me
 Nina died drunk
 died malignant
 died on purpose
 Before she lost
 her memory my mother
 told me a truth.
 She never cried
 for my father's mother's
 or for my father.
 I never asked
 how Nina died.
 Or lived.

The baby needed
 someone to hold him
 as if she loved him.
 The carcinogenic idea
 of a genetic
 inheritance
 metastasized to my brain
 infinite
 cells of obsession.
 I am afraid
 of cancer, suicide,
 and living alone.
 Nina's body, dust
 or ashes, unknown
 to me as she is.
 Last year I stayed in New York
 at the Pickwick Arms,
 in a Pod,

now, a funky stop
 among TripAdvisor
 who share a bath.
 I have dwelt
 in a fire circle
 for a generation.
 My parents died unhappy
 with their child
 without their child.
 I'm not sure now:
 was Nina her name
 or was she Nana?
 We are not feeling lucky
 enough to trust ourselves
 to Google;
 this poem for Nina
 must be in the cloud.
 We depend on it.

GENEALOGY

JAMES PENHA



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Nina jumped
 from a fifth-floor bath
 of the Pickwick Arms Hotel.

I'm swaddled
 in Nina's unsteady
 8 millimeter arms.

Later a splicing
 machine made me
 the family archivist

and my father's
 black and white movies
 were read all over.

Nina's sister Bertha--"Ah,
 Nina and her grandson"
 at the epic premiere.

I've no Grandma
 Nina in my memory
 but Nina on film.

Please recycle to a friend.

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Cover is a mural detail
 from the Pod Hotel
 (formerly Pickwick Arms)
 NYC

Origami Poetry Projects

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