

## Queen of Monaco Street

by Jordan Finley

Grandma Wyatt was a high-roller and a witch rolled into one perfectly lit cigarette, the ashes of which dust the chambers of my ribs. I choke on her when I think too much about how deeply I miss our old house; her arrival in Point Loma decades ago made her the first Black woman to integrate the community. In her house, the walk-in closet in the hallway, with a lock on it that could never stop me, was called *the cedar closet*. Grandma Wyatt's dresses were hung high so I could only reach the fur lining at the bottom if I reached up on my tippy toes the way I was taught in Miss Liz's ballet class. *Relevé*. I learned how to dance when I was 3 years old and I never stopped. Grandma Wyatt must have done her share of dancing in the pretty dresses too precious for me to touch; at parties serving on silver too special for us to use. My house and my life are full of things that belonged to Grandma Wyatt, from the *nice jewelry* Mommy gives me for Christmas to the name I carry every day. Jordan Marie Finley. Jordan, *born with the strength of rivers for which she was named*. Marie, to carry on the memory of Mary Elizabeth Perkins Wyatt.

She died a year before I was born, yet sewed me a Christmas stocking with her passing hands, and tucked a book inside. *For My Granddaughter*. The only pictures I can find of her walk a tightrope between luxury and magic: posing in a gold silk top tucked into velvet cheetah print pants, seated at a Vegas slot machine in a red velvet coat with black fur trim, balancing a cigarette between jeweled fingers and smirking at the camera on Halloween night. The Hawaiian shirts Ster dug out from a moving box have *Tropicana* in the label, and *Wyatt* printed underneath. Were they made for her, or was she made for fountains of gold?

Every time I look in the mirror, I wonder how much of her is staring back at me. Were her eyes dusted with gold? Did honey drip from her hair? Did she pick and poke at her body or love it with the ease and grace I've endlessly heard about? I should not remember a woman I have never met, but I do.

