Renato Gandia
Excerpt from *Heirloom in the Dark*
Finalist, 2026 RBC/PEN Canada New Voices Award

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The Archive We Inherit

for everything we remember without meaning to

We are not only what we've been told.
We are also the things left out—
the names forgotten,
the languages mispronounced,
the stories interrupted by a glance
or a cough
or the clearing of a throat.

We are the folding of linens
the way our mothers did it,
the flick of a wrist
that mirrors someone long buried.

We are the recipes made from memory,
where no one measured anything,
only tasted.

Salted by instinct.
Stirred by grief.

We are the rosaries in drawers
no one opens,
the dance steps we do half-right,
the songs we hum
without knowing the words.

We are the heirlooms
that don't make it to the altar —
a broken watch,
a pressed violet,
a voice memo
never played.

We are not the archive we built —
we are the one we became.

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Paper yellows.
Photographs blur.
But still —
your hand knows how to hold a mango
without bruising it.

Your tongue remembers
how to say *ay, apo*
when it hurts.
And that is enough.
Not everything must be spoken to be kept.
Not everything lost
is gone.