
Diana Cejas

Degeneration

I wish that memories were like movies. Images in Technicolor with wrap-around sound. Something that I could pull from my mind in the middle of the night, to wrap myself up in my grandfather's garden, in sun-warmed grass beneath my feet, in the sunburn that I got when I was eight, when I ran beneath the open sky for hours and sweated through my clothes, when wind and play knotted my hair into riotous tangles. Something that I could call to mind as I needed it, then put it away to keep. I know better. I've read the articles. I can categorize the types of memory, dissect through skull and dura, identify the amygdala, the hippocampus, find each structure that processes, interprets, stores. I know that memories can be like movies, but I know that memories can be like photographs printed on linen or tissue paper, the ink bleeding through, staining everything. I know that calling up one memory means calling up the memory of that memory, the facsimile of that moment printed in grayscale. Something that can fade, that will fade in time. I know that. I remember my grandfather in the sun, the mole on his cheek, the pomade in his hair, I remember his belly poking through his crisp white shirt. I remember me small and burnt and gangly. I remember how he called to me, how my name sounded different, sounded distinctive, how he pronounced it so carefully. I remember how he wrapped his hand around mine, how heavy and warm his hand felt on mine. I remember him three decades later. I remember him tethered to his bed, settled beneath crisp white sheets. The stink of ointment and sickness and urine and recirculated air. I remember his eyes, wide open and unknowing, the irises the same color as mine. He smiled and asked me to tell him my name. Forgot who gave it to me to begin with. I wrapped that memory in tissue paper. Wrapped the other in his linen shirt.

