My father, an African American man with a short, chunky frame. 
i used to pray he would disappear at times, 
And in a way, he did. 
Leaving a wedge in the door he built with those swollen hands. 
A slit just small enough to slip my body through back and forth. Quickly, but always quietly.

i spent my youth swallowing my words whole 
Then forgetting how to speak. 
And constructing this lopsided rockpile of skewed reflections until it towered over my small stature.

i can't remember the details and i don't ask.

i only remember that one day he was here drawing clown masks and painting crooked red smiles on our faces, and the next he wasn’t.

My father, whose skin feels like sandpaper when i kiss his cheek. 
i wonder if he doesn't quite recognize me anymore, or if he only pauses because he sees the way i look like him when i smile. 
we fumble around ‘i love you’s and ‘goodbye’s because he gets nervous when he talks to me, and because i am his daughter, i get nervous when i talk to him too.