

Stepfather

by Anna Cianciolo



Image: “Conflict Resolution” by Aurore Uwase Munyabera. “Stepfather” was written by Anna Cianciolo for *Rattle’s* Ekphrastic Challenge, July 2020, and selected as the Artist’s Choice.

Two rings.

The man who answers
your call
has a soft, Texan drawl.

Mom is out. He asks
how you are doing.

You think: Dad
must have had a
Midwestern accent, but
for forty-some years you failed
to notice, and now you can’t
remember
his voice, like Dad couldn’t
remember you
in the end.

The Texan man makes mom
coffee, and
they drink together,
on quiet mornings, before
church
or bowling
or packing lunches for the poor.

two rings

on the table. For their wedding,
you painted them
mugs—
one “Mr.” and one “Mrs.”

The Texan man knows you
and he both love
peanut butter, and (Mom,
if she would let him!)
he would give you the jar
and a spoon, and
you two
would eat it together, like kids
eating ice cream.

People say: Dad
would have wanted Mom
to be happy, probably
like the Texan man’s wife
would have wanted him
to be happy. But
those loved ones

have passed
on, and survival is the matter
at hand—gripping
what’s left of a life with
a hole in the middle, and
throwing it out

to each other,

two rings.