papa  
you didn’t remember me the   
past few years  
i was a ghost in your mind  
a shadow of the girl i used to be  
  
papa  
you remember the war  
you remember sitting in your shame  
as you read the signs that reduced you  
that told you that you were less than  
you were a king  
raised to be an oak tree  
strong and proud  
and then the batons came  
and then the rocks came  
and then the flames came  
so you left your home  
sweet sticky Georgia  
to find a land where your daughter  
could be black and  
not be on the endangered species list  
  
papa  
you didn’t remember me but  
you remembered the anger  
you were not an angry man but  
when the white men spit on your  
daughter  
black and beautiful  
you spit back at them  
how dare they defile a growing queen  
  
papa  
i wish you remembered  
i wish they hadn’t broken your mind  
i wish they hadn’t made your hands  
shake  
feet shake  
legs shake  
temple shake  
you could not rebuild it in three days  
like the messiah you loved so much  
i wish your mind wasn’t a clock  
wasn’t a tidal wave that kept spinning   
the same thoughts  
i wish they hadn’t burned your oak   
tree armor   
to the ground  
the same way they burned your home  
  
papa  
i miss you  
your blackberry skin felt like home  
your crooked smile still does  
but only in the pictures now  
  
you told me i was your favorite  
chocolate shop  
sweet and brown  
back then i hid my face in my hands  
  
but papa  
now  
i wish i could turn my face up to you  
and wrap my arms around your scent  
cooking greens and apple pie and   
promises i wish i could keep  
  
papa  
your voice is far away now  
i am still caramels and chocolates  
but i wish you could have seen me  
grow into   
steel and iron  
  
i can still remember every wrinkle in   
your forehead  
the veins in your hands  
the depth of your laugh  
your spine, strong  
even after years of wear, decades of war

papa  
when they put you in the ground  
i could not cry  
i had to save all of the salt  
in my body  
so that i could remain the sea  
salt caramels you so loved  
i didn’t want to fade away  
and become a ghost like you had  
become  
i wanted to keep every part of me that  
you loved intact so that  
one day you would be able to recognize me  
as an oak tree  
salt and iron  
glorious melanin  
a queen  
  
you always talked to me about how  
energy cannot be created nor  
destroyed.  
when i walk into the sea, that is where   
your energy is most potent. That is   
where i feel  
most at home