

# Song for Inherited Teeth

*Nathaniel Ricketts*

Our mythologies are in our mouths. In mine,  
old-world famine, four walls for whole families,  
stories nestled between cracked, crooked teeth.

The dentist reads me through a microscope  
and asks about flossing. Look, my teeth  
aren't just mine. Whole histories hide in my mouth,

the one I inherited from my father and his mother  
who testifies I'll never lose my sight but I'll pay  
for my teeth, stained and crooked

like the family dentist who double-dipped  
on our two union insurance plans,  
history that rotted in my father's mouth

and died in his throat. Now I have my own plastic card,  
courtesy of the university. I've quit the candy and Coke  
to keep at least a few crooked teeth,

so when the new dentist asks about flossing again,  
I'll tell him yes, then wonder if he can read  
the stories between these crooked teeth,  
the genealogies I own in my mouth.

