

## Capture the Flag

In this game we try to burn down the house  
cooking foreign foods on a holiday no one knows  
to celebrate. We fumble our way into the bedroom—  
glass doorknob lost, screw driver in hand—and sleep  
curled in one bed holding forth with the overseas  
operator. Each word is an echo punctuated  
by beeps, seconds ticking into years of missing  
family. We come from nowhere, from Cleveland,  
from Baghdad named for dictators and distant relatives  
like shady garden patches full of uneatable vegetables,  
frying pans still smoldering in a snow bank,  
Iraqi sausage patties charred on a paper napkin.

We came to Detroit for a funeral and never left  
the all-electric house, ivy smothering bricks, birds nesting  
in chimneys. We perched ourselves on a tree  
that didn't grow up but out. We ran the streets,  
feet tagging the center island, safe. Games named  
for actions never realized: capture the flag, ghost  
in the graveyard, Marco Polo. The object always to appear  
normal, American, unafraid, fast as doors slamming,  
borders closing, between us and them language  
peppered with the wrong words, customs that dissuaded  
friendships beyond the front porch, flight path  
forming above roof lines even as it disappeared.