

Good ground

Before I was born, my kin
owned things. A corner store.
Two- family flats. Good ground.
We grew: round fruit
Thick-bark. We lost it all
and no one calls to explain
how. The living let lies fall
from salt-slick tongues.

Not grown enough. Don't recall. Who told you ?
I comb through the obituaries
but they too lie close-mouthed.
Maybe death is the only truth.
I keep trying to come home;
everywhere I'm from is theory.

Everywhere I'm from is theory.
I gather a bouquet of maps,
and mark: we were here. Under
the factory. In front of that old
Catholic church. Where the eggshell
house was torn out the frame —
Yes, there, under the freeway's
thin ankles.

My husband and I buy a house
on the West Side. Paint the dining
room tangerine. Walk to the park,
ballooned with barbeque, blunts, laughter —
oh the laughter floating, bubble- thick.
You gotta be from here to get the joke.

It's not funny, but it is. *They* done put
-of all things- a cocktail bar
at the corner of my granny's old block,
where her once house sits
fragile and sucked dry.
How long has it been since I flew
from the garages roof, soaked
my bruise in her old clawfoot tub?

Can I tell you a secret? I didn't want

that house. Not then. I wanted everything
stainless. Forgive me for needing
land that I was the first
to walk on. I already belong
to them, all of them.

Daughter of all of them.
Daughter of hymns and riots.
Daughter of the remnant left
When flames licked the whole town.
Granny says *we got people* down
in Georgia, the Carolina's, Alabama. She makes
me take their first and last
names, last rumored location

Good girl child, but I lie
when I vow to visit them
while I'm in town. Instead
I workshop. Craft talk. Fellowship. Buy books.
How do I look South for the living
when I last took the trip for the dead?

All I remember of the trip South
is Detroit's frozen arms shoving
our minivan, full and cranky, all
the way to Orangeburg. I want to say
it was a good service—that my great-
grandfather's body looked *nice*, his hands
waxy, well-tended fig leaves.
Before we put him in the ground,

what looked like a snake sprung
from the yard of our distant kin.
I can't picture the casket, but I still
hear my cousin's howl of laughter
so loud it shook the magnolias.
Look at us: so city, spooked by the grass.

Look at me: so city that I won't consider
leaving, though winter grips my neck
with its blue blue fingers each November.
Ain't no rest here, but why should I give up
my house, my aunties up the way, my church

on every corner? My Black folks
my hallelujahs, makeshift cousins,
my gatdamn- can't nobody outdo us.

We all know New Detroit
got sticky fingers. See how it stole
Cass Corridor? Midtown?
Belle Isle? The family market?
My granny's house? Is this the bounty
her mama brought her here for?

Her mama migrated here
after the first riot, years before
the second. I plead for stories
about Georgia: *What made y'all flee?*
Would you ever leave us and go back?
She swears she's here to stay, but

the only honesty is death. Before, I did not care
that there is no family burial plot.
Forgive my morbidity. Time does what it wants.
Granny dictates details of her funeral, gives
everything but where she wants her body to rest.
I'm not ready to lose her, first to God, then
to the southern land that held her and my kin long
before I was born. What love will I own then?