

Backbone

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Every day, light ribboning my mattress,
morning announcing itself in the flame
that turns the blinds to shadow puppets,

and in my first act of waking
my eyelashes unlock
some new vision--maybe of a woodpecker--
its red wings folded neatly as kerchiefs.

I feel the now-familiar ache of my back, my spine
twisted, it seems, like a slim road in Barbados;
yes, my body a dimly lit street, tough to walk--

maybe it is my grandmother's voice, some message
curled at the base of my spine-- my grandmother singing
or laughing or sounding my name. The syllables unraveling
like a road, moving, yes, like a small red car laced in moonlight
gingerly surmounting a hill.

Or, the pain above my hips
now leads to my grandmother's doorway,
the white door crowded with hibiscus, water lily, desert rose,
monstera leaning, even in bright, bright morning, toward late summer moon.

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I can hardly walk
and my grandma is calling my hips,

my toes sunned or shadowed in tall grass, my eyes fixed on a lizard frozen to
the white wall

she is calling witness to this and the slow ritual of Sundays:
wide hats lining the small curve of road
where the church door is already open.

It has been fifteen years since all of this
and macaroni pie
and coucou and still, old men slamming dominoes,

now my backbone asks me to make the walk
into the rice-scented kitchen, the stretch of okra, lime, cornmeal;

into the living room where I last saw them dance:
my grandfather's fingers soft as rain on her shoulders,
the trumpet of an old song, vining, plant-like,
their dance holds me too, like shade.