

THE INVISIBLE CITY

by Lauren Ladner

The invisible city has no bones—they vanished
long ago, subsumed
by Yazoo clay (which is no joking matter,
young lady; it won't be funny when it's a sinkhole
in your yard), our fickle friend
who changes with the rain:
an arthritic knee
with an invisible city sitting
on top.

Who builds a city on Mississippi quicksand?
Long-dead antebellum politicians
laugh at us from their graves;
today, their children's great-grandchildren
pray and suck their teeth from suburbs
built after 1964.

We are a city sinking faster than Venice, a city
of fine sand rushing through a sieve:
victim of gravity and time in more ways than one.
Just skip to the end—
because don't we know how this ends?
Invisible citizens
wait in lines for long-launched lifeboats;
cars dodge the collapsed places
where the city's bones used to be—

only the Yazoo clay stares back,
red and indifferent.