

Nocturne Homeward

Tennessee, I'm headed for the long rains
that bitter your cities, sure as the stone fruits I smuggled
to my sister's bedside the winter she couldn't speak,

the warm lilies and white lamps I used to soften the stench
of blue, moth-bitten bodies and rum so she wouldn't be scared
anymore. All December, we mourned the storm

that once was our shepherd, who hurt like something godlike
and unattainable. Dearest, I'm stepping back through the syllables
of you—the slick Southern drawl that serenaded us down

the river we rinsed our shirts in for years, the field of shadows
where our childhoods sanctified the earth like insects burning. Look:
the hilt whose small violences I deified at the cost of our lives,

unquestioning. The pink cowgirl boots Tommy Thompson
gave me when we moved to Texas, where I helped Momma set up
a sound machine in the nursery. She wanted fake storms,

and I wanted owls circling. My sister wanted to see the stars.
For years, we watched riverwater rise, chimeric, over the roof.
We built a citadel of plums. We sang the felled levee's

lament. We dreamt of softer worlds and snake killings,
of a Nashville wracked with tornadoes. We listened for the ax
and the ignition every night as our father severed

the serpent's head and drove over and over and over its body
to be sure. We prayed to our mother's dark curls on the floor of
her shower as she prepped the house for storms we never saw

coming. How else to prove we will survive these rains,
as we've survived all others? Momma, take this offering—
apocryphal fruits I bear to you, and you alone, in this cold,

fated silence. I will build a place for us, I promise.