

## I Only Remember Fireflies

Chicago had no more claims to me  
screaming babies and police sirens had stopped  
and I could take my fingers out of my ears  
and I could breathe again  
and I could. . .  
We had arrived.

Crickets is having some kind of party  
dancing and singing  
outside my window

Their music is keeping me awake  
one song keeps time with my  
heartbeat as I lay here—  
still.

The bed is damp with my sweat  
I wait for a breeze to wander in  
but it doesn't come

I hear whispering from the next room  
drifting like incense through paper-thin walls  
I wonder if Mama is telling our secrets  
or just white lies.

I wipe the palms of my hands  
on clean, crisp white linen—  
My fingers feel for the creases in the sheet.  
It testified to the strength my grandmother used when she ironed  
pressing down hard  
until the edge of each pleat could cut you.

I am at peace.

The two day journey on the Amtrak train  
was almost a memory.  
All aboard, ma'am! All aboard!  
Bound for Texarkana, Texas.

He lifted me up and onto the platform  
At one in the morning  
I'd lost my little red coin purse  
changing trains in St. Louis  
Mama said we couldn't stop to look.

I close my eyes  
inhaling the scent of fresh cut grass  
silence overwhelms me.

Tomorrow umma scrub  
the grime and dirt of tenement ghettos off me.  
It had gotten clean under my fingernails  
and down into the roots of my hair.

The smells too. Yes.

The stench of drunk men's urine  
and cheap Wild Irish Rose wine  
spilling down back alleyways  
had gotten mixed all together  
ending up at the bottom of the steps.  
our door was left unlocked. . .

Tomorrow umma get clean.  
Umma use the Ivory soap  
Grandma always keeps on the bottom cupboard shelf.  
And umma take a bath in the big metal wash tub  
that hangs outside on the back porch. Yes.

Tomorrow umma skip down the dirt road  
until I reaches Aunt Hattie's house  
and sip sweet tea under her big shade tree.  
And umma have all summer to  
swing on the rope behind the smokehouse  
and chase chickens  
and catch fireflies,  
and do whatever six year old girls do  
when they enter paradise  
after being in hell.