

On Belonging

I.

Look now and you'll see Oglethorpe staring straight down Bull Street. The tour guides will tell you, *He's waiting on the Spanish Cavalry to come*. Two hundred years and then some is a long time to wait for glory, for a chance to swing a sword through something more meaningful than hay bales and linen on the line. Still, we all have our reasons for remaining.

II.

If you want to see my passport, show me yours first. The South ain't a foreign country yet. Here I am, all the same, cloaked in Spanish moss and coated in red clay already. Humidity smacks the tourists and they cry, *Why are we the only ones sweating?* They don't know nothing about the heat down here. July in Georgia can break a fool that don't know his way to water. That don't have the good sense to drink.

III.

On a morning like this, I can see clear to the Savannah River. I can hear the steamboats slicing the water and in my heart I could call this home. As if the naming of such a place is easy. Permanent.

IV.

What you must understand about the South is that I left it once. Escaped up North, hid my drawl beneath my bedsheets—tried to wash it out with every laundry load. See, what you need to know is—the South isn't all sweet tea and pralines—it's not all lynch mobs and the boys in white conical hats either—but there are lines. Lines dividing the street from the corner, the bus stop from the liquor shop—lines dividing my head from my body and a line—thick as salt lick—dividing what we see from what we watch, what we say from what we silence.

V.

The hardest part about claiming a home is the roots. Here in Savannah the city sits on a grid; her squares stitched seam to seam with blocks of people—all of us drifting to the river. Today I walked past the husk of the Mercer House, stopped by the old carriage shop and bought a blue-rimmed tea cup. Tomorrow I'll crash a ghost tour of Bonaventure at midnight, listen to the guide tell the tourists about the bodies buried beneath the cobblestone sidewalks, desecrated by the need for wider streets. Those Yanks and visiting expats won't do anything but shiver a bit against the moist night air, grip their souvenir neon cups and scramble to get back into the light for fear our roots might turn aerial. Some folk don't have the stomach for the truth of what makes a place.

VI.

When I leave Savannah, it will be like a lover walking out for the last time—it will be the swan song of the best chance we could have given this thing. And when I cross state lines to other places beyond the Mason-Dixon, I know I'll feel like I quit something that could've been real—a romance lasting decades, the kind that only ends once one of us goes into the ground, but even then it lasts and lasts.