

Jess

We are below the shattered row house-
the creeping-vine row house that keeps
watch over North Avenue like an opiate mother
nodding slowly, arching slowly over a newly
empty crib.

We are below the shattered row home
that is turning green with that
ivy that urgently comes to live in
the broken pieces of Penn North,
and she is telling me that she can smell
soul food from Mel's,
can smell lake trout and white bread
that soaks up the grease
from a block away.

This is the same row house shadow,
just days ago, in which she talked about
the old guy who asked how much extra he had to
pay to slap her-
how much extra he had to pay
to slap a white girl
with his thick crooked hand.

"Because he wanted to see a good bruise,"
like an open-palm signature
that would swallow her whole face.

And the redness is less now,
and her hands are swollen now,
and she is asking me if I can smell the
grease of the sizzling fish,

and if I can hear the boys
calling out a block away,
and how long do I think it will
take for the verdant fingers to completely
enshroud this empty, weeping house.