

Skipping Girl

Dedicated to the Murphy Home housing project, Baltimore, MD

They say she skips rope in an empty lot
down by Martin Luther King Boulevard.
Down where the Murphy Homes used to brood
over vacant houses and wino sidewalk eulogies,
that's where she still keeps a rhythm in the dark.
They say she wears the frilly white hand-me-downs and
saddle shoes that she wore to church on the day she disappeared,
and she has lost one of the plastic barrettes that held a pigtail in place.
One of the cops on midnight shift says that he's seen her playing
in the weeds and garbage where they found her tiny body
flayed open all those years ago.
And there's an old araber who says that his horse gets spooked
down around there,
because she loved animals
and still tries to stroke its hide
and ring its bell.
Everyone says that when the sirens fade away,
and the boom-box parties wind down in the projects,
you can hear a baby falsetto chanting a double-dutch rhythm,
and answering the call of a strange man in a plain white van.