

TERRAIN

Crystal Wilkinson

the map of me can't be all hills and mountains even though i've been geographically rural and country all my life. the twang in my voice has moved downhill to the flat land a time or two. my taste buds have exiled themselves from fried green tomatoes and rhubarb for goats' milk and pine nuts. still i am haunted by home. i return to old ground time and again, a homing black bird destined to always return. i am plain brown bag, oak and twig, mud pies and gut wrenching gospel in the throats of old tobacco brown men. when my spine crooks even further toward my mother's i will continue to crave the bulbous twang of wild shallots, the gamey familiarity of oxtails and kraut boiling in a cast iron pot. i toe-dive in all the rivers seeking the whole of me, scout virtual african terrain trying to sift through ancestral memories, but still i'm called back home through hymns sung by stout black women in large hats and flowered dresses. i can't say the landscape of me is all honeysuckle and clover cause there have always been mines in these lily-covered valleys. you have to risk the briar bush to reach the sweet dark fruit, and ain't no country woman all church and piney woods. there is pluck and cayenne pepper. there is juke joint gyrations in the youngun-bearing girth of this belly and these supple hips. all roads lead me back across the waters of blood and breast milk, from ocean, to river, to the lake, to the creek, to branch and stream, back to the sweet rain, to the cold water in the glass i drink when i thirst to know where i belong.