

Dirty Brown Soles

The first storyteller of my life
was my Grandmama Lee.
I sat at her feet before I knew
how long she'd walked
and how hard she ran,
where the lines on her soles hailed
and the stories they told.
Styrofoam plate in one hand
silver fork in the other -
we ate macaroni, baked chicken
slathered in cream of mushroom
sauce and onions. Now,
I can cook that with my eyes closed.
She told me of our ancestors,
of chocolate people born in
cotton fields and immersed
in the Mississippi River.
She told me, with hushed breath
we been bathed in white from jump
but somehow we got dirty anyway.
She told me of Daddy and his sweet tooth
the bullet that flew through his head
making mush of her favorite man.
Spoke of Mama and her evil words,
beatings, starving, and sobbing.
I still marvel at how alike they look.
She muttered about Nemiah
how absent he was. my daddy
was named by his nurse
cause he was born breech
and almost killed her.
She poured tales of niggas
into my palms,
before I knew what a nigga was.
I absorbed it, cause gramma trusted me
with the wrinkles in her feet.
I drank it, cause she aint have no one else.
Because I grated cheese for the
macaroni and beat the eggs
till they was thick and yellow.
Cause I knew her love
through the fork in my hand,

through the rasp in our voices,
and the length in our legs.
I haven't sat at her feet
in a long while.
Hundreds of miles away
from black eyed peas and corn fields.
I hear her stories in my voice,
Daddy's pain in my words
and I know she is still with me.
I didn't know my feet would get tired so soon.

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