

AMBER MCBRIDE

SOUTHERN GOTHIC (FOR THE BLACK BOY)

Our meal begins at a pine table surrounded by finely dressed haunts.
The table wears a black cloth, to hide the blood in its veins.

One white man at the head of the table, with a loaded gun passes
the bread but charred and oozing something vile and ruddy red.

He shoots one of us between the eyes, reloads, and sends the bread back.
So, we recoil and try again sitting up straighter.

It starts with: we could have been anything, day-weavers or exotic holy food.
We could have been blessed—devoured in riot, and easily reborn.

It starts with a ghost, who thinks it is flesh. This time at a cedar table saying:
I received so many flowers I could no longer smell death on myself.

Stage left: enters boy—first name Wolf, who has never heard rain. He swears
the cypress rain-stick sounds like stars. Which of course mimics rain.

The haunt who knows nothing of death thinks that death feels like living.
Which should be inaccurate. Which should be a lie.

The deck is guillotined; the tap dancer moving over the puddle also sounds like stars—
and rain, batons cracking black heads and tiny heads knocking the floor.

Tea appears when it starts raining bodies. When everyone is stuffed which should
be impossible because food falls through our hazy guts to the floor.

We pretend to eat, but keep nothing—so thick-less we float.
So, we float, shuffle seats and begin again.

Hate is a concept that only love can understand.
Which is absurd you don't need a partner to dance.

The black boy haunt at the end of the table has a bullet lodged in his stomach—
the hole still aches freshly, wine seeps from it rudely.

The man with a gun claims he will shoot anything—dead or alive.
He aims between the eyes and shoots us each again.

Stop searching. There is no trail to this grave—death comes
like vultures promised meat. The crime devoured before it is seen.

The bullet in my head cries like love—without control.
Like a corpse decays like laughter—without a care for time.