

## Soft Places

Billy Woods

Strange places slept  
Woke eyes wet, a dream of death  
Bad dreams are only dreams  
What a time you chose to be born  
Cold world, run water till it steams  
Burns like woman scorned  
Grey is the day you realize she doesn't care anymore  
For sure  
Jaw set, sign the form  
Sky hard, wind raw  
Cats paw, outside the A-rab store  
The ragged gathered in the beast's maw  
Ahab washed ashore  
Black, two sugars!

This is not my block  
This is not my hood  
This is not my stoop  
This is not my room  
This is not my mother's lap  
This is not my brother's beat  
This is not my father's scold  
I might have lost my teeth  
These walls are painted weird  
The neighbors barely speak  
Her other partner's queer  
Secrets in tangled sheets  
Dingy brassiere hang on the wall like a wreath  
She creeps, she creeps, she creeps

The news says "Two dead, two fled."  
Iron hands, faces lead  
In grey areas broke the bread  
Shame burning, hid his head  
Night terrors  
Claw at legs from under beds  
Life's errors  
Carried you here like pall-bearers  
Cracked mirrors  
Fierce squalls, gripped the mask aghast  
Mother turns away appalled  
Cold wind harbinger  
Surrounded, suddenly unfamiliar  
Silently, they all point the finger  
"That's the nigga!"

Vacant lot, the wing spot  
The liquor mart, the dollar store  
Ready vodka, make a blast  
They huddle close with open sores  
Afflicted, condition - contrition  
Color-coded vile tops look like candy from distance  
Vinyl shop with glam rock window  
Mannequin akimbo dozing  
Frozen moments folded  
Tucked inside of 40 Belows  
Last rite for Franklin Ave soldiers

No condolence  
That's not an omen that's an eviction notice  
Hold it

Sold it  
Rash moment  
Those beans better've been magic homie  
"Gotta have hope jack!"  
Go 'head and quote it  
Smile broken when they broke in  
Blind how they stole him  
Rip un-woken  
Fog rolling off the ocean  
Wandering ronin lay down prepared to meet that final opponent  
Looping Saharan cellphone music  
Greets the retreating Romans  
Rope and limb, woods dark  
Trees groaning  
Then he rose and wept without knowing

Cash on the spot  
Stuck it out  
Couple hundred thou  
Took that joint pension  
Bounced south  
Red clay tobacco field  
Left a three family shell in gentrified hell  
Tooth and nail  
Pissing in the wishing well  
Neighborhood borders keep shifting  
These names keep switching  
When the bodega starts to stock the red beer papi  
Wet the fear  
Red race tripping  
Pinch face pull 9 whistle  
Snatch kindles  
"Look alive killa! "