

The Invisible Line



My mother's face shrank
to the size of a teacup
when she told me about the bad parts of town.

I imagined crossing an invisible line
next to a fire hydrant.
The traffic, footsteps and laughter around me
fell away to a hum—
the beginning of a moaning
from the mouths of new, strange people
who stumbled toward me.

"It starts at this street here," she said,
her finger accusing a thin line in the map.
"On your way to the bus stop,
you look the other way.
You never set foot on that street."

I never set foot.
But once, I looked, and I saw
a gas station where a woman in a purple dress
filled her car and looked back at me.
And past the station,
in the thistly yard of a house like my own,
a boy fixed the chain on his bicycle.
He, too, looked at me
and when I didn't look away,
he waved.

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