Capture the Flag

In this game we try to burn down the house cooking foreign foods on a holiday no one knows to celebrate. We fumble our way into the bedroom—glass doorknob lost, screwdriver in hand—and sleep curled in one bed holding forth with the overseas operator. Each word is an echo punctuated by beeps, seconds ticking into years of missing family. We come from nowhere, from Cleveland, from Baghdad named for dictators and distant relatives like shady garden patches full of uneatable vegetables, frying pans still smoldering in a snow bank, Iraqi sausage patties charred on a paper napkin.

We came to Detroit for a funeral and never left the all-electric house, ivy smothering bricks, birds nesting in chimneys. We perched ourselves on a tree that didn’t grow up but out. We ran the streets, feet tagging the center island, safe. Games named for actions never realized: capture the flag, ghost in the graveyard, Marco Polo. The object always to appear normal, American, unafraid, fast as doors slamming, borders closing, between us and them language peppered with the wrong words, customs that dissuaded friendships beyond the front porch, flight path forming above roof lines even as it disappeared.