SARAH HUGHES

Sarah Hughes earned a PhD in English from Georgia State University. Her work has been recently published or is forthcoming in *Atlanta Review*, *Southern Literary Review*, *Review Americana*, *The Anthology of Georgia Poetry*, and *Atticus Review*, among others. She teaches at Mercer University.
MY HOMETOWN

You would never come here on a whim. The ocean of my childhood was crab grass and powdery dirt, pathetic landscapes, the town dump teeming with possums. We had nothing to cheer for—no winning teams, no movie stars to call our own—just a gospel quartet that made its rounds like a bullet in a chamber.

Only, at a homecoming dance, a blonde girl was caught under the gymnasium bleachers, kissing a black boy’s penis. Suddenly, riots. My father had a hammer. I never saw him use it.

I couldn’t even pretend to fight. The grammar school’s gravel drive provided ammo for a substantial battle. We left the rocks on the ground. There were warnings everywhere, like foghorns, though I had only seen foghorns in books.

In social studies, Mrs. Simmons peered over her bifocals. *Stick to your own kind, hear?* We were eleven, terrified of sex. Less than a handful of girls were secretly bleeding.

Meanwhile, the teenagers kept coupling. Their wild hands squirreled up each others’ sweatshirts while grown-ups plotted revenge.
THE SHARECROPPER’S SON

The dead snore through their own stories. Those farmers buried in country graveyards, their long-suffering hands rotting in the dirt, mean nothing to me. What matters is the tale of a boy dismantled by a machine. With no money for a doctor, the others laid him on a sour mattress under a pecan tree and turned back to work.

My grandmother, not yet ten, kept watch. She brought him water in a tin cup. She trembled at his gravel breath. He had no warning for her, or advice. This boy was too young to have known a woman. Only his suffering was a truth he could pass down. He believed in what he’d never thought not to believe in—ascension, and a white choir robe, and some immaculate treasure his fevered hands had never held.