

THE MARKET

The can just misses me. Mama yanks
my arm so hard my shoulder sparks.

We're past rusting grapefruit piled
like slave castle cannon balls,

tan brick soap canyons, red pepper
ravines before I can know, was it

the beggar's throat or his swinging can
that rasped? The morning cooking

fires' soapy haze lifts over open
smoldering gutters, bare-chested men

performing surgery on plastic
lighters. I close my eyes to piss shit tang,

market mammies wailing prices,
transistor radios' bezerker music: gusting

sermons, flame songs, zigzagged
chatter. Inside the incense woman's

slowed weather Mama stops.
I look up at her midnight

sky hands exchanging
ideograms for *Lemon seller, here?*

and *No, this way, there*, on scraps
of blue air. Off again following

women balancing firewood bundles
on their heads, stepping past silent

paint smear birds flickering
in cages, burning palm oil

cloud-huddles, open-crated
miniature turtles, crab planets

massed in deep buckets, used
shoes slabbed like brown leather

fish. Something's rivuleting the red
ground green. By the lemon alley

Mama drops my hand. I watch
one man stretch a bush rat onto

a bike spoke roasting rack. My arm's
knuckled by something almost cold.

The beggar again, crouching,
can handle looped over smudged wrist.

Leprosy has eaten his hand down to a paw.
He rubs five smooth nubs into my arm.