

A quilt survives  
its makers—  
it survives what bodies can't—  
a fray at the seams  
replaced with thread  
and patience—

Women pieced the Star  
of Bethlehem from scraps cut  
into diamonds out of Liberty  
of London fabric. They backed  
and bound its batting,  
becoming the Freedom  
Quilting Bee. Remember  
they had borne such stars before,  
yanked them from their beds,  
sent them to New York  
to pop bold as art  
as they always did  
on some clothesline  
in Possum Bend.

And what is a quilt but skin?  
What are these, united,  
but states sewn together  
by blood, the silky weave  
of time?

Everybody houses  
everybody homes  
every body beds  
lays on down  
pulls up the covers,  
closes eyes, then dreams.

So much can be remembered  
in a quilt, in the thread  
and the fiber.  
We can fly away  
from black soil, white bolls—  
in this, the soft folds of our hands,  
the dexterity of our black fingers,  
we can remember home—  
the patterns our mothers made in cloth  
before we were stolen  
like fabric tucked under white arms.

The Crazy Top  
laid out like patches  
of land, one boundary  
natural, another  
man-made, stitches  
like branches of willow  
woven. You got to  
swing a leg high  
to cross over.

The top.  
That's the pretty.  
All those patterned bits  
pieced together.  
The quilting.  
That's what holds  
top to the backing.  
The piecing tells one story.  
The quilting tells another.

In 1858, there were 7,251 white citizens  
of Greene County, Alabama.  
In 1858, there were 23,598 black slaves.  
How many miles could we measure  
in twenty-three thousand quilts?  
Could we string them all together  
to make a fence, a rope?  
How much could it keep in—  
who could it keep out?

The Jones Valley  
Sampler: stitched home,  
school, and church. The album  
of fig, pecan, watermelon,  
cotton, all that's growing.  
Each quilt is a landscape  
to lay over our bodies  
at night, burying us  
so we sleep dead to the world.