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Quraysh Ali Lansana

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ELLISON VISITS GREENWOOD, 1921

Quraysh Ali Lansana*

oklahoma sun an oppressive neighbor
in august 1920. churchgoers settle
after dinner stomachs. deep deuce
a murmuring disquiet: raid at the chandler's.

moonshine & melanin the news on the street.
daddy chandler & one officer dead & young
claude jailed with alleged murder on his shirt
the christian sabbath a buzzing lynching bee.

three white men freed claude from his cage
one thousand armed black men on 2nd street.
mayor & police allow one of three cars
of now unarmed black men to find claude

to return the next sweltering midday without
him, his body rotting meat ten miles from okc
beaten & shot. miss ida had had enough.
her lewis gone years now, she frets when ralph

delivers the dispatch & herbert still too young
to spell KKK. maybe indiana. maybe gary, where
brother works steel. a stop in greenwood to visit
family on way north. hundreds of shops

businesses, elegant houses, hospitals. vibrant
black life in the face of jim crow, so unlike
the deuce. closer to the harlem ralph would know.
gary was not negro paradise. ida jobless, the boys

eating garbage from trash cans. okc was hateful
but at least familiar. dry heat stings black skin
irritable but somehow bearable with family.

* Thank you *World Literature Today* for permitting *Tulsa Law Review* to republish Quraysh Ali Lansana's poem.

highway leads them back to tulsa before 2nd street.

greenwood was gone. black wall street invisible.