No Flowers but Inside

VIEVEE FRANCIS

What, what, what—is how that song chimed in wilderness.
~Sherwin Bitsui

But I hear where
like a streak of lightening across an ever black sky

the way the sky spreads from the center outward
during the storms I remember: flat sky, flat land

panhandle and getting a handle on daughters, and
a good hand on the chicken that thought
its circling meant escape

but, there is that part of the state where the winds
demand a puritan's stance to any change,

any anguish. Always: buck up and smile

Always—doesn't matter—I refused

and the belt like a blackened copperhead
found its way not just on but into

    my skin

then below where I found the wild

    geraniums within.
About the author

Vievee Francis is the author of four books of poetry: The Shared World (Northwestern University Press, 2023); Forest Primeval (TriQuarterly Books, 2015), winner of the 2017 Kingsley Tufts Award and the Hurston Wright Legacy Award; Horse in the Dark (Northwestern University Press, 2012), winner of the Cave Canem Northwestern University Press Poetry Prize; and Blue-Tail Fly (Wayne State University Press, 2006). Her work has appeared in numerous journals, textbooks, and anthologies including Poetry, Harvard Review, Yale Review, Best American Poetry, spin.com, and Angles of Ascent: A Norton Anthology of Contemporary African American Poetry. She is also the recipient of a 2024 Guggenheim Fellowship and a 2021 Aiken Taylor Award for Modern American Poetry. She is a Professor of English and Creative Writing at Dartmouth College.