My mother liked her mother and all the women before her birthed midnight.

1.
I was born on the hottest day of August.
Temitope; Mine is worthy of praise.
My skin was so dark, ash and soot mistook it for ruin.
Oyinkansola; Wealth and honey
The day that bore witness to my birth, scoffed at the certificate.
Couldn't find anything to praise among the blood and generational pain.
Saw the bitterness that coursed through my veins and said
This must be Yetunde's child,
    she is already screaming

2.
"Tell your mother to stop crying"
I saw her break down.
Her body a twisted serpent, skin scaled like anguish shanked her open, loss be a poised poison, a tight smile tucking the sob underneath the tongue.

My mother could make misery look like a light rouge shade of lipstick

Could never cry on the Sabbath.
Could never let her foundation streak.

The day that bore witness to my grandmother's death recited scripture at dinner.
Rubbed my mother's shoulders and wrapped my father's silence in aluminum.

My mother flooded her bedroom in tears
And yelled at me for getting salt water on the carpet
Didn't I tell you to hold your lips?

My belly button burned that night.
The umbilical cord that linked us broke.

Grandma died before I met her
Before she could trace stories of survival into my fists.

I wanted to ask her if I too will birth midnight.
Midnight pt. 2

I saw my mother
cry in a bathroom.
Sorrow sunk its teeth into her skin,
and harvested a pound of flesh.
She sobbed like someone set her afire,
body: a boundless vessel of ash and mass.
The girl in me didn't know how to hold a home
never saw decimation on a Saturday afternoon.

All the women who have raised me
can lull a man into a death bed.
Have always sharpened knives
to the sound of their husband’s heart beats
Pray that their enemies face God’s wrath
And slip open clothing pins into their lover’s aso ebi

I heard when Eve ate from the tree of knowledge,
she spat up seeds of sin.
Told Adam that she stained her palms
with the universe,
and he laughed when she offered him the world.

Her mouth, cherry red,
with blood and wisdom.
Now, every time a woman cries,
she chokes on the apple core lodged in her throat.

Pain must be the ache of sacrifice
the insanity of giving until you runneth over with thirst.
Pain must be a worn out jigeda
glass beads stretched and scratched with time.
I know that we must wear our pain with pride,
arise, a penny brown phoenix,

We must love in the same way brown,
sweet and spread in silence.