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Territory

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Territory

*Under the shade of the mulberry trees,
he leans through the DoSoto's rear window
arranging samples of carpet and tile,
moulding and cove base, furniture brochures
and carpet tack with its blue nails
as gnarled as shark teeth, and then he stacks*

*the odd suitcases of carpet squares, front-to-
back, back-to-front, their plastic handles
clicking like steel against their binding's
brass rivets. And I hear in their sad tinny echo
a question tapping its way from out of my past:
where are the things he brought me from his world?*

*Where are the cardboard models of Las Vegas's
Showboat Hotel? Where is the steam that steamed
from the spout of the gigantic coffee pot
on top of the Coffee Pot Cafe? Where is the drugstore
book about the Sioux and Buffalo, and where is the child
awake at night waiting for his father to return*

*out of the black road of his territory and livelihood?
The child is waiting still, and he counts the trinkets
of affection he's amassed: the manufacturers' notepads
and calendars, rulers and pencils, penknives
and keychains—all those things that say where his father's
going, where he's been. And as if thirty years is only*

*the time it takes to walk to the front of the car,
I watch my father open the driver's door, take out
the large pinata dog, the one we hung from the clothesline,
then blindfolding ourselves swung wildly with a stick,
until we cracked its paper ribs and spilled the guts
of candies and toys into the brown dirt of the yard.*

—Michael Collier