

knowledge is

*written after sarina patel's between my ba & the god of death*

the way my great-grandmother nina knew  
the power of the spoken word: a poet, but not in the traditional  
sense. open mic nights: nina telling the family not to talk on the  
phone during a storm, to avoid calling in the sky. my maternal  
grandmother, nana, moved words like magic: a poet  
just one arrangement of syllables and a smile could evaporate tears,  
alter the past, change the future in a flash of aching rib, soften a  
heart, let her live for another lifetime long after the sky had opened  
up to invite her home

the language of my grandmother, the same  
sharpness found in salt, pursed lips, and trimmed family trees, the  
no-nonsense know-how that trains the tongue to house a warning as  
direct yet definition-incognito as *your daddy*  
*ain't no glassmaker or you'd make a better door*  
*than a window*. her words:  
brilliance she built imbedded in braided language  
thick as the curls weaving themselves into each other  
atop my head, alliteration

my pistol-in-her-pocketbook ancestors with me at the kitchen table,  
scrabble tiles spread between us, would be the ultimate writer's  
workshop, the quintessential black wordsmiths' convention i'd tell  
my nina that she'd always delivered  
truth in her spoken word; science had confirmed that  
landline calls when lightning sprawls itself across the full-to-bursting sky  
were a danger as sure as our brown bodies are born to die she'd look at  
me, say that we been knew. the knowing came from bones, not beakers,  
and my nana would quip

that we've always known the pull of our poetry  
the magnetism of our mouths, the force of our flesh  
if we invited lightning in for a little *flash* fiction  
how could it ever refuse us?