

XIV

With the frenzy of an old snake shedding its skin,
the speckled road, scored with ruts, smelling of mold,
twisted on itself and reentered the forest
where the dasheen¹ leaves thicken and folk stories begin.

5 Sunset would threaten us as we climbed closer
to her house up the asphalt hill road, whose yam vines
wrangled over gutters with the dark reek of moss,
the shutters closing like the eyelids of that mimosa²
called Ti-Marie; then — lucent as paper lanterns,

10 lamplight glowed through the ribs, house after house —
there was her own lamp at the black twist of the path.
There's childhood, and there's childhood's aftermath.
She began to remember at the minute of the fireflies,
to the sound of pipe water banging in kerosene tins,

15 stories she told to my brother and myself.
Her leaves were the libraries of the Caribbean.
The luck that was ours, those fragrant origins!
Her head was magnificent, Sidone. In the gully of her voice
shadows stood up and walked, her voice travels my shelves.

20 She was the lamplight in the stare of two mesmerized boys
still joined in one shadow, indivisible twins.

1 dasheen: tropical plant with large leaves

2 mimosa: tropical plant whose leaves close or droop when touched or shaken