

Back Story

~Inspired by *Mending Socks*, a
painting by Archibald Motley, Jr.,
of his grandmother

Born in that junction of nothing and nowhere,
the hardscrabble hamlet of Happersville,
where floods were frequent, sustenance scarce

she grew strong on mother's milk
and the offal offerings of a pauper's table:
hog jowls, pigs' feet, chitterlings

churned carefree days away in her Dust Bowl of a town
torturing doodlebugs with a stick
snacking on roadside clay or Argo corn starch

spoiled as only a poor girl can be, receiving stockings
of pecans and penny candy at Christmas, homemade dusters
and dresses for Easter and checkerboard cakes for birthdays

taught herself to read with secondhand books,
tasting words as prayerfully as a poet with an audience,
sampling syllables like appetizers in a sumptuous feast

precious sustenance in the hovels of Happersville
where frequent floods drowned dreams