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## Firm Roots

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“Where are your parents from? You look mighty dark, my boy. They must be from deep in  
Uganda, they have the most beautiful hue.”

He surely can't know where they go. His crooked pale blue gaze scans me in puzzled fascination,  
as if my skin cannot possibly be of this land

“Oh, so you know your roots! If I knew mine, I'd be speaking Swahili and wearing my dashikis  
and Kente cloth all day, everyday! Why don't you do that?”

I do not know my roots, but instead I find myself laughing with her

What good is a mangled root, knotted and ripped at its fibers?

Roots with stitches and patches give the plant an illusioned nourishment

Before long, the dehydrated, weary, weeping branches begin to hallucinate, hazily squinting at  
the romanticized soil for affirmation

How grounded are we really? What does roots mean for *my* people?

As a *disrooted* people, pulled away from the soil,

I see pieces with jagged edges

Shards drenched in blood of revolution and injustice torn by those who toyed with them or did  
more than just push their way in

Salvaged fragments have yet to be revealed by those who are burdened with them, bits of the  
edges worn and forced to be forgotten

Through the generations we pass on

A genealogical jigsaw puzzle,

Half the pieces missing,

Spat on, mutilated,

Boiled in dark syrupy sweetness, burned for amusement,

Chewed up by teething infants learning of a supposed discovery

We take what pieces we can and make a mosaic above ground

*\* This piece shares a title with the jazz composition Firm Roots by Cedar Walton*