

## AMERICAN GROOVES

Every night between Flo's *Kiss my grits*  
and the Brooklyn poetry of *Up your nose*  
*with a rubber hose*, suburban families sang along  
with the Jhoon Rhee Self-Defense jingle  
and kids all across College Park begged for lessons.  
One tied her black robe's sash around  
her forehead, another leapt from the couch  
to karate-chop the plastic flowered TV tray,  
spilling peas like marbles on the carpet. Sure,  
the ad was shoddy, probably shot in Rhee's  
dank basement, his kids mugging it up  
for the camera, but the song was catchy,  
the phone number memorable. *Call*  
*USA-1000, Jhoon Rhee means might for right,*  
a girl lip-synched broken English, *Nobody*  
*bothers me*, dukes clenched close to her chest,  
and everyone listened:

a mother double-checked  
the locks, slamming a hip against the door,  
her neighbor scribbled Rhee's number  
on the back of an envelope, even the dog  
cocked a floppy ear to the speaker. No matter  
that the Rhees' house sat next to a mini-mart  
on the south side, the sign spelled *defence*  
with a *c*; tykes and parents flocked  
to their wood-paneled basement—wall-to-wall  
straw mats, cabbage sizzling in soy sauce upstairs  
where Mrs. Rhee handed each mother  
a complimentary egg roll.

And then  
they stopped coming, just like that. The Rhees  
rented out their basement, watched neighborhood  
kids skateboard in the street from their window.  
On the other side of town, they imagined, parents  
said, *Such a cheap hobby, and so close to home,*  
doled out their measured affection: a hug  
for a bruise, one kiss per cut. And the tears—  
there were none. When suburbia discovered the article

*Jhoon Rhee Killed in Mugging*, parents tucked it away somewhere safe, and all afternoon helped their kids build a ramp in the driveway: the whole family filing knots smooth, forgetting how wood wears each season, wheels traveling in the same crooked grooves.