

### **That time I was Aretha Franklin's niece**

You came back from New York one winter,  
red fox on your shoulders, whole planets on your fingers.  
As you brushed off snow in the doorway,  
C.L. saw you from the pulpit and glowed.  
All heads turned to watch you float  
towards the humming choir in heaven-blue robes.  
You winked at me, tipped your beehive –  
my cue to leap from the family pew to your side.  
We crossed the stage, my newly polished shoes  
belittled by an authority of heels, high and suede,  
on the wooden floor. I swore I heard the piano  
'hallelujah' as you drew the old stool towards it,  
steadied yourself to testify. If you ever needed sheet music,  
I was the one you'd ask to turn the thumb-worn pages  
that a hurricane of quavers may lift the roof off  
this earthly building and catapult our prayers  
out beyond the saints and stars. Red nails rattled  
the keys to Detroit and the timbered bones of New Bethel  
tapped in time to 'Jesus, be a fence around me'.  
Briefly, I was a harmony rising on your mighty wings.  
Your voice the only god I was ever willing to worship.