How to Mourn a Brown Boy

G l e n n N o r t h

—after “Mother and Child,”
mixed-media art by Ada Koch

—for KC Mothers in Charge

Prepare while he is still alive.
Know that from the moment
your belly swelled with him
he was in the crosshairs.
Tell the boy to pull up his pants
to walk with purpose, pursue greatness
but know that it won’t protect him.
After expending your maternal energy
realize there is a competing trilogy
of blood, bone, and bullet.
If it has been 48 hours
since your last phone conversation
strengthen your index finger
for numerous redials.
Know his haunts as well as
his homies and his honeys
so they can be properly interrogated.
Have a statement prepared
for the reporters who pretend
to care, practice the 1,000-yard stare
so you can look into the camera
and plead with the perpetrator
to turn himself in. Cry out
for the folks in the neighborhood
who saw something to come forward.
Don’t expect them to.
Save one tenth of all your earnings
to cover the reward money.
Stock up on candles and flowers and teddy bears to adorn the shrine where you will find the body outlined in chalk. Discover the thin line between funeral and circus. Every member of the family or community need not offer a eulogy. Have an array of photos prepared for the Rest-in-Peace T-shirts that will need to be printed. Clear out cabinet space for all the napkins, paper plates and plastic cups that will be left over after the crowd in your home disappears. Learn to live with the silence. Realize that in the darkest hour a mother’s arms have the ability to embrace ghosts. Steel your heart against that moment each morning you awake to the returning grief. Arrive at the conclusion that there is no substance on earth that can fill the hole but God can comfort the space around it. Help the hood discern the difference between snitch and witness because senseless murder is everybody’s business. Become initiated into the sorority no woman wants to belong to. Know that tomorrow it will be another mother’s son inking the headlines. Go to her. She will need you.