

MARCUS WICKER

**Who in their right mind thinks they can put a stop to hip hop,
if it don't stop 'til I stop, and I don't stop 'til it stops?**

—for Maurice

So wrap your cultured-up skull around this. I woke
to a red cross stenciled onto mismatched logs

and “The Entertainer” weeping from a black baby
grand—each note a hound dog’s droopy ear. Hear

me when I say, I was lost. Stranded at a teen arts camp
so north in the U.P. I was hearing southern tongues.

Some flannelled blond man trailed a finger in the air.
Bumped cha head perdy good there. Reckon ya

twisted that ankle on this. He aimed at my foot
with the bottom of a snapper’s lacquered shell—

hazy compact, reflecting a dark, faceless me. *Am I
in heaven?* I asked. He cackled at that; shaking his

bronze leather face at the wall, *No, no. 'Least not like him.*
My vision steadied on a hunchback boy in a yellowed white

tee as I rose from the cot. His erratic, thunderous sniffing
spooked words in my throat: *Is he going to be all right?*

—*Oh yeah. That there’s just my little boy, Tim. Been
carryin’ on like that since a babe. Just a’cryin’ and*

playin’ piano that way. Go’on over and say hello.

I joined the boy of five or six at the small black bench

and forced a nervous smile. Timmy’s glassy blue eyes
kept time with a wooden metronome. His pupils shrank

and grew. Shrank and grew; dilating on each upbeat.
What if I said he wrapped my hands around his

wrist? Would you think me stoned as Snoop Dogg
at a slain rapper’s wake if I told you he stared? That

MARCUS WICKER

he wept and played? You think I'm talking shit.
His pupil's penny-sized screen flashed small

looped horrors: the snapper's shriveled head
lopped off with a boy scout knife; a muscled teen

pissing on an old, vagrant man, drooling snuff
on courthouse steps; the night clerk's nose stud

nailed to a bloody boot heel. You better believe
I bounced; hopped toward an exit. But Timmy

kept on playing, drilling notes into me
like a downpour thumping a well.

True story. The boy never left that room.
Go ahead. You can ask me how I know.