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This Is the Rope
A story from the Great Migration

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This is the rope my grandmother found beneath an old tree a long time ago back home in South Carolina.

This is the rope my grandmother skipped under the shade of a sweet-smelling pine.
This is the rope my grandfather used to tie the few things they owned to the top of a car that drove my grandmother, who was a mother now, from South Carolina all the long way to a place called New York City.
This is the rope my grandmother held tight to as my grandfather drove real slow past the people and big city buildings that seemed to go on and on and on ...
This is the rope my grandmother used to dry the sweet-smelling flowers she grew in small window boxes reminding her of the flowers back home. Where the land, she said, went on and on ...
This is the rope my grandfather strung so that my mama's diapers could blow dry in the hot city breeze.
And this is the rope my mama tied around a small duckie's neck, then pulled it along, singing quack, quack, quack.
This is the rope my mama held out to the girls on the block, her new Brooklyn block, a home of their own that they finally owned.

mama asked shyly, Anybody want to play?
This is the rope my mama first tripped on as she sang with her friends.

“Miss Lucy had a baby, she named him Tiny Tim...”
This rope my mama’s brothers took from her room for some crazy game that little boys play.
This is the Rope my mama found again, ten years later, when my grandfather said, We Need a bit of rope to tie these things down inside this car, like that rope we used to have from back home.
Then he drove with my mama, off to a college far away from the city, while my grandmother waved.
This is the rope my mama placed on the piano around family photos and me just a baby.

And then a bit bigger already reaching for it.
This is the rope my daddy used when he showed me the way to tie a sailor's knot.

Two times around and pull it real tight. You want whatever you make life, my daddy said, to last …
This is the rope my mama turned as she waved to my daddy and taught me to sing the Miss Lucy song out on our sidewalk right here in Brooklyn, just last Friday night.
This is the rope that held up the sign saying "We Are All Family" at our picnic reunion in the big park up the street from our home.
This is the rope, thread bare and graying, that I traded with Grandma for a brand-new one.

Then I jumped a new jump: B, my name is Beatrice, I come from Brooklyn ...
As my family smiled proudly, and the sun began setting, as Grandma held on to her rope from back home...

... and her long-ago memory of sweet-smelling pine.
The End