149th Street Notebook

Amy M. Alvarez

The psychic on the corner toted grocery bags past neon
signs in her windows, run in her stocking inching up shin.

I scooped garter snakes from sidewalk cracks. My cats captured cicadas—
fluttering green jewels in their pink mouths. Ma never let us keep them.

That corner always needed a streetlight:
boy's blood on asphalt given as testimony.

I can still see sunset behind the church steeple.
Above juniper's canopy: magenta sky and crows, crows, crows.

It wasn't lost on us that the expressway was named Utopia.
There never was any question, was there?

Cobalt Poets Series # 708 ~ May 5, 2026 ~ first published in *The Missouri Review* and later in the book *Makeshift Altar*

Amy M. Alvarez is the author of *Makeshift Altar* and the winner of the 2025 American Book Award and CariCon Poetry Prize. Born to Jamaican and Puerto Rican parents in New York, New York, her work focuses on race, ethnicity, gender, place, and social justice. Selected as one of 2022's *Best New Poets,* her poetry has appeared in *Ploughshares, The Missouri Review, Poetry Foundation,* and elsewhere. She has been awarded fellowships from CantoMundo, VONA, Macondo, the Virginia Creative Arts Center, and the Furious Flower Poetry Center. In 2022, she was inducted as an Affrilachian Poet. She has taught at public high schools in the Bronx, New York, and Boston, Massachusetts, and at West Virginia University. She currently teaches writing and literature at Boston College as an Associate Professor of the Practice.

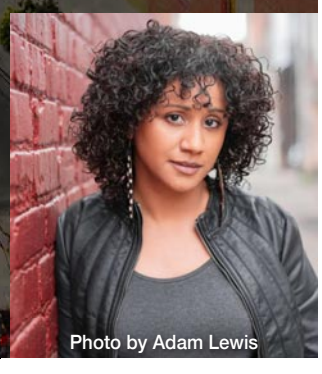

Photo by Adam Lewis