

# The Ground

*Jericho Brown*

I think my dad thinks he apologized to me  
Today in my backyard. We were on our  
Knees. We were not praying, though  
I understand us as men dedicated  
To the ground in a religious way.  
Behind my home on our four knees  
Not praying but digging, we searched  
For something I can't remember  
Among rows of collards and tomatoes  
I wanted him to see because a boy will  
Show off for his dad even after  
He is a man. The sun burned on, and  
I got a tad nervous about digging once  
I caught the tail end of a snake or thought  
I did as I pulled up clumps of black earth  
With my bare hands, still less wrinkled  
Than his. I can't remember why  
I would have my daddy bent in the dirt  
Digging like a mammal with me because  
He stopped to wipe his forehead  
With the back of his sweaty forearm  
And said, "I suppose you think you could  
Have done everything without me  
Being hard to you" and went silent as if

To acknowledge I had any perspective  
At all on my early life as it relates to his  
Cracked, clayed hands that hit whomever  
Had a heartbeat in his house, the first one  
I ever called home. I don't remember  
A thing after that silence and very little  
From before – Have I eaten today?  
Yesterday? Did I ever eat or am I  
A hunger growing food that can't satisfy  
Me? I am bereft but must have  
Guided him up when he finally stood  
Again, and I do know neither of us cried.  
God is in the ground, which is where  
The living go when they die. That old  
Man can't make me cry no more no more.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Jericho Brown**, a Member of the American Academy since 2021, is the Charles Howard Candler Professor of English at Emory University. He is author of *The Tradition* (2019), for which he won the Pulitzer Prize, *The New Testament* (2014), and *Please* (2008), and the editor of *How We Do It: Black Writers on Craft, Practice, and Skill* (2023).

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