

Soundings

Salt

Dixon stood listening to the water whistle and hiss till it sweet him like one of the Bailey girls from down the hill. Only a look but it was enough for the women to know they didn't want Dixon watching the children. The river had already snatched the tallest one everyone said favored the Seven Keys man, *ca fe she lip heng like 'im n' red with 'im warnin'*, Mudda Ramsey would say but we were told to pay her nomind as her brain had taken in water. The girl was like a mountain peak with two carvings on her left cheek, a perch for Johncrow's landing each morning. Mainly it was the way she sang, so beautiful it felt like it was raining inside the church, when she was done a cool breeze would stroll through the room like a benediction. The Mudda's knew her spirit was strong, it wasn't too long before one of them escorted her back to the chairs that half-way through the sermon acted more like a barricade for the Spirit. That's when I noticed Dixon running his hand up her leg and remembered that the Keys man said if I talked everything my eyes saw my mouth would tear. It was a Sunday when the stream hurried like little kin, bringing news of her tongue loose in her head, teeth gutted and her cream dress, lying torn on the water they say, *a salt it salt* like her.

Two poems

While She Waits for a Heart to Arrive

(a Prayer)

In a backroom
where stories & names
are exchanged
& forgotten
in the same breath
I begin to speak
a truth that burns falls apart
in my mouth –
ash & dust that cannot
be put back together
as God
put us together mother
& daughter

This evening
I pray for rainfall
the way gravel
can be raised into a mountain,
while my mother waits
for the traffic lights to change
I pray for rain
to slick the wheels
wheels that do not

stop

my mother's eyes -
a handbag spilled
in the street lips
rolling back
& forth in a tube

Soundings

The light was red
but the driver kept going

stop

she said

stop

I said
but he kept going

& the brother
on the bottom bunk
heard nothing
& my mother
turned over
& the lights out

There were no eyes
so the lights were green
& God
was on his knees
swallowing a pitchfork in an alley.