

## 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.