

Morning blisters her  
tongue like a lit match.

She shifts the baby in her  
arms and walks and finds  
she can't stop. Not since  
the day the baby flashed  
into being, shrill voice  
first. She thinks the baby  
will burn through her if  
given the chance. She  
consumes distance with  
her stride as the blazing  
sun bends her vision like  
light on the water.

Crossing shadow—she  
sways in the coolness to  
calm the baby. Father  
took her fishing, before  
he and the lake both dried  
out. He once made her  
stock the boat, then  
dumped out what was  
burdensome. “It only  
supports so much,” he  
said. He flicked away the  
extra items. The boat  
lifted. She stood on shore,  
observed the shift from  
silt to mud to dirt.

Rocking, she decides, is a  
lie of momentum for the  
baby's sake. She toes at  
the earth, considers how  
it's just dry mud and how  
that's just murky water,  
and it's all cold, dark, and  
wonders if this is similar  
—an unburdening of sorts  
—as she bends over and  
cradles dirt, fine as ash,  
presses it to the baby who  
wails, thrashes, and is  
snuffed out.

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