

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.
