

LINEAGE

Just before they cut off
my grandmother's breast

my mother drives all night
to Alabama to see her.

The sky like oil.

The houses darkening.

The next day they embrace,
drink jug wine

from plastic cups,
do not speak

of the time lost between them.

My mother looks out
at the Gulf in December, still hot
and moist.

Her clothes stick to the air.
Her skin sags.

My grandmother hobbles
to the water;

my mother calls,
Now we are both old, mama.

I know she sees it—evidence
they will both die

and die unresolved
with the other.

In dreams of my mother dying
I remember her screams,
her whale eyes,

the eyes that punished
and pardoned



my sass-back mouth
until we grew old enough

to be honest
in our dislike for each other.

Tonight in a dusty mirror
my mother feels her breasts,

her lips stained with wine.

The crickets wail
through the screen door.

The clear moon.

And elsewhere
in the mirror

I grope mine,
the same strange flesh,

the tender heaviness
we carry.

