

from Autobiography of my mother

By Dora King

The beginning was a burning drip of fire and sand
from a diviner's tray:

"You will pound your womb into ash; carry your bulbs to the pyre"

That vast body. That loss, that one
line from many tongues.

I was wide, fleet footed
Free. I swallowed the plea
opened my hands
to her underneath
to her colored seas

I am the sea, the sea, the sea, I am not

A disaster loomed between fits of raptured sky
turned inside out,
a child then stone then bones for the sea

The last came broken at the knee
in defiance, she swelled then repelled
the curse

I will bear fruit from his dark dance

I am draped, I am called
I give
each one I bear I name, and
when I recede the emptiness gapes
Salt without taste

from the beat of the xylophone and the hum

I am a key to the hymn
A thread for the shredded mind drowning a doll.
A song for one who howls grief into a soft mist.

Sing you last, low with the wolves, Sing, you last impeccable leaf.