

Jochebed of Ellis Creek

Dark songs lilt through crooning lips
Of a tired young woman alone on a porch.
Rocking, watching the sun set and the tide rise
Alone but for the baby in her arms.

Her breasts crack, dry despite the humidity.
The milk collects in the crevices, and she cries onto
The baby's already wet cheeks.
Neither has stopped wailing in hours.

She could make a basket
Of palmetto leaves and a blanket of Spanish moss.
Lay the child inside and let the waves take her like the river Nile.
The gulls cawing for another woman to cradle her to sleep.

Red-winged sirens call from the spartina
And she wonders how it would feel
To slip out past the dock
And wade until her feet no longer sink into the pluff mud

Across the harbor the bells of St. Michael's ring

She smells the child's head

An attar of powder and saltwater

The baby's eyelids finally shut, with a flutter like a hummingbird's wings

The mother closes her eyes too

And wakes to the sounds of her husband coming home.

He kisses her head, briefcase in hand.

He says, "Looks like you girls had a good day."