

excerpt from "Windfall" by Jamaica Baldwin

Sometimes, I am reminded that so many of the references I carry
in my body are occupied by white women and I am lost

in an ocean of memories, worlds beneath worlds
of ocean that should be kept hidden, as all sacred things
we want to keep from being policed must be kept hidden. Like

language. Once, I learned Morse code. Spent a weekend
at Pidgeon Point Lighthouse with a ham radio, tapping greetings
to kids in Russia then waiting for their response in return.

When I think about lighthouses, I think of us eager to reach across
borders, or that Sinéad O'Connor song about the woman forever

waiting for her man to return from sea, but when I think of men
who disappear, never to return, there's always the image of my father

who made a practice of it until leaving was the one thing he perfected.
In death he's become a soft-spoken man, not silent, but quiet.
Not a whisper, but a windfall. When he speaks, I'm only a kid reaching.

I'm a woman alone in a lighthouse with underwater memories, always
waiting. Some nights, I search my body with a flashlight for signs of a future.