

Motherland

Morning breaks with her last breath, laid on a bed,
white as an unlined page, in contrast to her skin. Black
ink shows at the neck, more beneath the blouse –
strange tattooed self, whole body scarred till I look close.

There's all the world she's known, her lost Jamaican home,
lush land across wide shoulder blades. A stream flows
from her waist. Large breasts are hills. She climbs up
to the family crop. Her navel leads towards a road.

Bright lights along her gut, dim to an austere house.
She cleans for the white priest – *Master* to his flock.
He forces her to kneel, prayers not the ecstasy he seeks.
Her belly swells, the child born dead. She has to leave.

The image of a ship floats along one thigh. Waves crash
in cellulite on either hip beside White Cliffs of Dover.
A hotel near the Harrow Road displays this sign:
No blacks allowed. She cleans ten rooms,

but cannot board with other maids. Hard to believe
religion is the first thing she seeks out. A Pentecostal church
where she meets Dad is etched across one shin,
his bold face on the next, beside a high rise flat.

Her nurse's uniform is pictured on her inner thigh.
His goodbye note is copied on both feet. She tiptoed
to old age, asked me to bathe her when she died.
I didn't know she meant to wash her life away.