

## **Hospital Bath**

I am wheeled into a dim room  
each joint aching, like an old wooden trawler  
battered by the North East Coast.

A young student nurse gently lifts  
my limbs, sponging each in turn,  
combing out tangles as if I were a mermaid.

Her gingham shift smells of soap powder,  
her ear lobes pink, two daisy clips stemming  
a rush of curls.

She's never felt ropes of pain  
unwind into black water, but her touch  
smoothes away blood and sweat.

Tenderness, like a waltz or slow prayer,  
astonishes me. She hands me my sleeping son  
wrapped in a hospital blanket.

Anne Caldwell

## **After the Flood**

Do you remember the stench of animal hides,  
that unholy cramming together,

the racket of snorts,  
groans from the lower decks?

Do you recall the creak of the clinker boat,  
night after godforsaken night,

the wind in your heart,  
my sickness?

That morning, my darling,  
clouds were scuttled. You blinked

into the sun's disc, stared at uncharted water,  
fresh archipelagos on the horizon.

Forty days and nights  
had turned your lips papyrus-dry.

Our prow nudged land. Our bodies  
were two new coins, minted in light.

Anne Caldwell

**Slug Language. Kitchen. 3am.**

Pure tongue,  
their bodies write out  
the glow of a pearly button  
burst from a pale silk shift  
the sheen of a vulva.

They have criss-crossed my lino  
all night, wound together like a nest of snakes  
to smear the soles of my feet  
with their silver calligraphy.

I print the whole house with desire.

Anne Caldwell