

XANDRIA PHILLIPS
from Black Eyewitness Directory

Elmina Castle

at first only the rivers and I wept
for you in your journey (like the waters')
from tropical interiors to the estuary

slap of the ocean's cupped hands
and then your absence became religion

as easily as creating meaning from loss of limb
you fell into crates that rustled from within
to the tune of the wind's phantom chorale

The Good Ship Jesus

you and I spoke the same language
so we cursed and sang and closed each other's
mouth to preserve moisture, and with the ocean
at our backs we shuffled through piles of death

and then you were in that pile, but I never
stopped talking to you—not even after I found
my legs—not even after I found my pupils refused
to shrink in their want for gathering darkness

Tuskegee, Alabama

in a fit, you slapped my fingers onto your
forehead and asked me to pull off the horns
growing there, and I felt and saw nothing,
and I told you these horns were lovely

someone told you that eating chicken would
shrink your brain and darken your skin,
but there wasn't much else lying around,
so I called it duck and pried open your mouth

Angola Penitentiary

I am the one who visits you and I swallow
a key for every year you're put away
and I swallow our entire home and I stuff
books and television shows into my pockets

before I can slip you a single comfort
between your teeth they pick me up shake
me and confiscate everything on my person
into a box labeled CONTRABAND