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Fever Palm

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Fever Palm

A fever palm is an ancient reckoning
for bud of abscess and trembling fit. In desert that was blue
lie skeins of a broken lifeline.

Candy-coloured water jugs tease the tongue with their emptiness.
Fins that Helios charred litter the southern strand.

How quickly the skin burns, how livid the scars.
There has always been thirst. Then there is a thirst
that susurrates always: a dry wadi, seed grasses withering.

Come from fire into a cavern dripping moon milk,
a fantastic underworld of a limestone karst.

Once was an ocean of ponderous breadth,
midnight a silk shroud against the Inquisition's squint:
so many epochs to learn a single, shining world.

And the wine-dark sea of gods rowing to some tragic victory,
the page wrinkling in a summer rain—we've lain in graves myth-made,
borrowing names against the whirling elements,

have crawled over rock face mapping composite
and licking our own sweat, mouthing facts at the wind.

How to live as heat's confederates, cattle seeking pasturage
beyond the steel fences. We'll be beautiful horned skeletons.

Or we will live.

How small, says the noontime shadow, its tail flickering.

CAROL ALEXANDER is the author of the poetry collections *Environments* (Dos Madres Press, 2018) and *Habitat Lost* (Cave Moon Press, 2017) and the chapbook *Bridal Veil Falls* (Flutter Press, 2013). Alexander's work appears in a variety of anthologies and journals. She holds a PhD in American literature from Columbia University.