

Sassafras

My people used to have a tale
about a tree with leaves like hands:
three fingers, two fingers, one.
When I was a girl I knew the story
by heart. It had something to do
with something undying - love or spirit,
or maybe faith. A topic along those lines,
inspirational. But I forgot the rhythm
of the words, and then the words themselves, until
all I could do
was look at this tree, and wonder: *Sassafras*
albidum, cinnamonwood, smelling-stick tree
with omnipotent roots, how did my people
come to know you? How did they come
to thin their winter thickness
with your brew? The insects flee from your oil
but I could lie in your arms all night,
trying to remember
our past.

Caitlin Kight