Hetty’s Tale

An enslaved woman in British Jamaica went into premature labor after being stripped naked, tied to a tree, and flogged incessantly by her master with both whip and cow skin. She died a few days later.

To own it—
the cattle prod
the cow skin
her back, neck, calves
the child in her belly

To own it—
the fatigue
of the beating
she kept on
taking taking taking

To own it—
the rage
the loss
of the cow the loss
of the stillborn child

To own it—
the fear
of the loss
of the cow
of the woman who latched it

so loosely
it took flight.