

## Sea-skins

*'and the angry waters dashed themselves against their narrow bound'*

(Phoebe Cary, The Leak in the Dyke)

In the ruins of this floating house, there's comfort in simple cycles:  
the click, click, click of spinning wheel,  
small wooden beads; the next round of medicinal pills

I have a dermatological condition that involves  
shedding malignant layers

A physician displayed my skins on a bulletin board,  
stuck pins in the scabs, voodoo style  
He banished me to a moonless sea, told me I was a sinking boat,  
made so many holes in me, I was anyone's for the taking

Pirate-nurses tied my tongue to a stone,  
and flung it overboard

Who can blame them?

All I want is to get to the X, get drunk, or get into a hammock  
with strange seamen, because that helps me forget  
what's unfurling in the future

Some mornings cold waters engulf the sun,  
waves pound the portholes, and all the life-rafts go limp

Mostly I'm trapped with my babies  
in a darkened hull,  
floodwaters rising *exactly as predicted*

Injustice is a hard rash to soothe: each circumnavigated wound  
is like the Dutch boy's small finger plugging that dyke

My spine is a displaced mast, my navigation ataxic:  
Consumptive cells conjure up  
yet another metastatic colony,

but on the keyboard-rosary, *click, click, click,*  
a new poem surfaces: sleek-skinned, seaworthy,

set to survive invasive latitudes and longitudes —  
a savvy sigh, a seabird's song,  
a swift and salient filling of the sails