

## **Kaiya**

by Anna West

In a future language, one we are just beginning to learn,  
the word *Kaiya* means *what we hope for all daughters*.

In the future, when women gather  
with wisdom plump and laughs like water shaking off of treetops,  
when hands outstretched to hold newborn daughters,  
let them in that future call out to one another, *Kaiya!*  
And let it mean  
she shall be tall; let it mean  
her shoulders shall be broad,  
that she shall wear loud colors,  
and teach the teachers  
a thing or two.

Let the word *Kaiya*, like a lock, hold its roots curled tight.  
And the linguists will say the etymology of *Kaiya*  
developed in Baton Rouge, come by way of New York, Miami,  
by way of Haiti, by way of transatlantic memory broken and reassembled  
so many times, those two syllables like a crochet twist  
woven into sound. A bridge, *Kaiya*, between a mother's wish  
and a daughter's journey. *Kaiya*, an echo of many mothers stretched back  
as in lineage and stretched over as in cross-the-street,  
as in the capacity to be a neighbor, wherever you go.  
In that name we all become mothers looking on  
as she moves across time, admiring the way *Kaiya*  
got this thing figured out, so young,  
those boys didn't even have a chance to catch

*Kaiya.*

I want to write your future  
into the language itself.

I want words to do what a body cannot:  
to fill the planet with the boom of your voice.

I want to resurrect what it felt like to stand with you,  
two mountains.

How I saw the long horizon of hope reflected in you,  
both my girl-self and the kind of woman I am trying to become.

In your face, in your “Ms. West, listen to my new poem,”  
in the way you raised a hand in every class, every meeting, every public forum  
because you knew you mattered, knew your hands were the body politic,  
your words an earthquake meant to set us right.

*Kaiya*, where even do I begin?

How do I carry your name into this world without you, *Kaiya*?

Anna West, August 2016