

# Wade in the Water

By Tracy K. Smith

*for the Geechee Gullah Ring Shouters*

One of the women greeted me.  
I love you, she said. She didn't  
Know me, but I believed her,  
And a terrible new ache  
Rolled over in my chest,  
Like in a room where the drapes  
Have been swept back. I love you,  
I love you, as she continued  
Down the hall past other strangers,  
Each feeling pierced suddenly  
By pillars of heavy light.  
I love you, throughout  
The performance, in every  
Handclap, every stomp.  
I love you in the rusted iron  
Chains someone was made  
To drag until love let them be  
Unclasped and left empty  
In the center of the ring.  
I love you in the water  
Where they pretended to wade,  
Singing that old blood-deep song  
That dragged us to those banks  
And cast us in. I love you,  
The angles of it scraping at  
Each throat, shouldering past  
The swirling dust motes  
In those beams of light  
That whatever we now knew  
We could let ourselves feel, knew  
To climb. O Woods—O Dogs—  
O Tree—O Gun—O *Girl, run*—  
O Miraculous Many Gone—  
O Lord—O Lord—O Lord—  
Is this love the trouble you promised?

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