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Dead Vlei

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Sandra Meek

Dead Vlei

A thousand years beyond water.

Black skeletons of thorn trees spelled
against iron-red dunes, azure-

true sky: spine
of a sentence, each letter's serified branches worn

away from the page—

What we took root in
burned to a blister. White sun cracked

to a white-clay palm, pan born of the flood that deserted us
to a noose of castled sand. By the end

we lived as the dead. Stalled

into gesture. Mummified
specters. Charcoal our patina,

our core—like propped-up driftwood, shadows
casting shadows, only our arms

breaking skyward—

World too dry to bear
even the tiniest insects, what might

have devoured us: we balanced
there, your taproot seared

to black hoof, my cauterized skin,
nearly fossil—*Till death do us part*, did someone

really say that. But the rain

never came. Air too vacant to hold salvation all
that kept us standing.