

Surveys, Maps, and Mothers: L

Latitude

my grandmother married a cold man
and had three babies before he left,
my mother married a violent man
and had four babies before he left,
this latitude travels through generations—a tangled line
of leaving, fatherless daughters, the stillness of a closed door

Legend

a guide in the margins,
teaching myself how to be loved, a guide
for someone else reading my map to help them understand
what I try to hide

Linear feature

lines on a map, such as roads, railways, and rivers—man
changes a terrain's surface to create progress and order, mothers
have daughters for new places to hide old wounds

Lithography

documents, evidence of a life,
only reveal main coordination points—birth, marriage, divorce, death—the rest of a life
told in stories from mother to daughter, some details inferred,
others sought for hours in the cold glow of a screen, women leave
behind images, but parts of the impression refuse
to be transferred or saved

Longitude

abuse isn't always a noticeable bruise, it can be quieter longitude, a lifetime
of distance, our mother isolated us—
no school, no friends, no other family—for ten years, a family language
of only speaking to my mother and sisters while she locked us away
in a motel room or car or house—a cut tongue from mouth—
at 18, I couldn't order my own food in a restaurant, look strangers
in the eye, or speak on the phone, isolation taught me
to be less human, a wild animal terrified and weak, clinging to its pack