

Lidija Cvetkovic

## ESCAPE

I awake to havoc in the yard. Overnight  
winds have torn gourds from a vine;  
as I gather their entrails of pulp and seed  
I hear the morning news: they may be sending  
ground troops to Kosovo. That's it—no more  
certified excuses, no hiding place or disguise.  
He'll be drafted.

*Do you remember the bridge we cycled across  
that summer—  
The bridge across to Jasika. You were fifteen,  
effeminate—  
It's been bombed; no lives were lost—  
the line cut off before I could say—*

The gums are peeling themselves back to youth.  
Strings of bark fine as a newborn's hair  
blood licked and matted at the base of the trunk  
where sap crusts. Skinned to smooth limbs  
the pallor of death, they cling to strips of bark  
like used bandages, not ready to discard  
what has been, not ready to face what is to come.

At first it was a tingling then pain in his arm  
till he couldn't hold a gun or pull the trigger.  
The paralysis made him useless. At home  
he recovered feeling in his arm when he began to  
sew and write. Now he takes sedatives at night  
stands by the window watching "fireworks"  
across the Belgrade sky.

In the monastery he lights candles  
for the living and the dead, prays to the God  
he's come to believe in ... *let's meet in Amsterdam,  
on a bridge—Lets—* though he knew as well as I  
... but it's dreams keeping him alive.

Since I cannot redeem the beauty of the yard  
I head for the park. At the edge  
where lantana spreads, three tunnel drains echo  
trickles and drips trapped in their rusty throats.  
At my approach, a heron, dipping its charcoal beak  
into the stream, retreats.