

**STILL LISTENING**

**Angela Patten**



**salmonpoetry**

## Fire Song

On Saturdays the coalman in blackface  
upended his sack in a dusty heap at our back door.  
Father shovelled the jagged lumps into our shed  
where jackdaws rose beaked and furious  
to squawk at him from the flapping dark.

Mother, acolyte to the gods of the hearth,  
knelt down to rake the ashes after breakfast.  
She carried cinders in a bucket to the yard,  
twisted newspapers, criss-crossed kindling,  
erecting an altar of coal and turf  
that pulsed with a tabernacle light.

When father arrived at six o'clock we froze in place  
looking for clues to gauge his mood.  
He stood with his back to the fire  
rubbing his hands together,  
rainwater pouring off his bicycle cape.  
'The poor we have always with us,'  
he muttered as steam rose from his trouser legs.  
'And to him that hath not, even that which  
he thinketh he hath shall be taken away.'

She shooed the cat from his chair,  
eyeing us into obedience,  
then raked the fire to give us  
alphabets on our legs  
and make our chilblains burn.

She fed him with the meat that men must have.  
We gathered around the table to watch him  
mix Coleman's mustard in a wooden bowl,  
the spoon trembling in his workman's hands.

Three thousand miles and a lifetime away  
the radiators hiss and spit like vipers,  
reminding me to mourn that hub of heat  
around which we clustered, drawn together  
by a light we thought perpetual.

## Voices

Hearing your unfamiliar voice on the telephone,  
I try to imagine your ordinary life –  
a grainy black and white photograph of  
a landscape somewhere in the Midwest.  
Cornfields on either side, the road  
slithering uphill to a flat horizon  
where the lens of the eye stops down  
to let in a whole sky full of light.

While I'm standing here against an  
empty Vermont backdrop, dark trees  
looming by the side of the road,  
a light glimmering in a field,  
the land pulling into itself,  
closing up for the night,  
the sound of your voice falls like water  
down the parched creekbed of my inner ear.

My former husband used to curl around me,  
whispering the names of the American  
presidents in chronological order  
as I folded into sleep. They marched  
through my dreams in single file  
like sheep to history's slaughter.  
The shapes of their names lingered  
for a while, then one by one went out.

Tonight I'm searching the spaces between your words,  
trying to coax two halves of a split image  
to coincide, adhere. Static on the line.  
The twanging cadence of a country station  
cuts sporadically in and out.  
But I'm nothing if not persistent.  
Hearing you talk I'm listening twice –  
once for music, once for meaning.

# I CAN SEE HER WHITE SWIM-CAP BOBBING LIKE A BUOY IT'S MOTHER'S DAY SHE'S RESCUING HERSELF THIS TIME

The author of the best-selling novel "The Daylight Marriage" and "The Daylight Marriage" returns with a new novel, "The Daylight Marriage" (Doubleday, \$24.95). The book is a story of a woman who is trying to find herself in a world that is constantly changing.

The author of the best-selling novel "The Daylight Marriage" and "The Daylight Marriage" returns with a new novel, "The Daylight Marriage" (Doubleday, \$24.95). The book is a story of a woman who is trying to find herself in a world that is constantly changing.

The author of the best-selling novel "The Daylight Marriage" and "The Daylight Marriage" returns with a new novel, "The Daylight Marriage" (Doubleday, \$24.95). The book is a story of a woman who is trying to find herself in a world that is constantly changing.

www.saltmariocoetry.com

€10.00  
ISBN 1-897648-50-2



9 781897 648506

©2004 by Salt Mari Co. All rights reserved.