

*Marianne Poloskey*

## **Against Their Will**

For people leaving the war  
in layers of clothes not yet torn,  
outgrown, burnt, stolen or lost,  
it was the hottest August ever.  
Staying together in groups,  
they trudged country roads  
like chain gangs, sweat burning  
on sun-blistered skin.

On and on they walked,  
day after day; falling  
into sleep at night, they dreamed  
they were still walking. One step  
for the sins of the fathers,  
one step for the sons, one step  
for all those who suffocated  
on their own screams.

The children did not yet know  
what they had lost  
and the old men had forgotten  
why they were dying  
by the sides of the road.  
But the women, refusing  
to stay and wait for the houses  
they were promised,  
walked away from all the lies  
planted in the earth.

Refugees forever searching,  
they knew they would never again  
harvest the fruit in the trees.  
These were the wives  
alone against their will, mothers  
who opened the curtains  
to cover their children with stars.  
These were the women  
who never spoke of their strength—  
who took nothing away,  
but gave up everything.

## The Return

From the outside, the house looks small  
but there is plenty of room.  
No one will toss in a grenade,  
we will not keep you against your will.  
The entrance is also the exit,  
so come on in.

I have baked your favorite cakes  
and chilled champagne to celebrate your return.  
Where there is laughter, you are safe.  
No need to speak in hushed tones.

With the bullet holes repaired,  
the house has grown into a new coat  
of paint; and the ivy,  
climbing higher than ever,  
seems to recognize you  
back from the war.

The air is scented with fresh-cut grass,  
windows shine in the sun. No one  
is looking in, and we are  
no longer afraid to look out.

The cries you hear are from children  
playing by the river. The table is set,  
flowers smile in their vase.  
When my father plays the harmonica,  
we will sing and dance as before.  
Just one more step, and you are home.

## Closing the Moon's Eye

Like a stone  
I cling to a sloping path.

Shaped by fire and war,  
my surface is smooth,

but if pushed, I will roll  
down the mountain,

I will gather a fury of snow  
and bury the village

that buried my first life,  
so that no army

will ever find me again.  
I still do not trust

the rain's gossip  
or the brook's promise of eternity,

but when the flood comes  
I will not drown, nor peel

like pages in a book.  
I was given much more than I need,

and am content.  
Now, having learned

to repel the sun's sting  
and to alter the shape of the wind,

each night I practice  
closing the moon's eye with my sleep.

MARIANNE POLOSKEY'S poetry has appeared in *North American Review*, *Connecticut Review*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and *WLA*. Her work is also included in the anthologies "Red, White, and Blues" and "American Diaspora." She has written poetry book reviews for *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Rattle*, and *Smartish Pace*, and judged Valparaiso University's 2003 Wordfest poetry competition. She is the author of "Climbing the Shadows."