

# Which Delta Did You Mean

by Margaret Jones Bolsterli

The one I carry like a template from childhood  
and place over every new landscape  
hoping to find it again:  
that huge flat luscious land under a limitless sky  
with cypress trees and knees in shallow water  
the one with the sound like drums  
my dancing pony's hooves made on ground  
rich enough to make a broomstick sprout;  
the one with tales of the courage  
the old ones brought to cut the forest  
and rip a life from that land  
wild enough and wet enough to nurture vipers,  
mosquitoes, chiggers, army worms, boll weevils,  
ticks and fevers unknown in the civilized world;  
the one where gentleness and manners were treasures  
a family passed along;  
the one where white and black with careful courtesy  
respected intertwined lives for generations . . .

Or the one I drive through now:  
land lying flat and open under the limitless sky  
raped to produce more than even that rich soil was meant to;  
crops covered with cancerous poison  
to kill the weeds and endless insects;  
white and black at odds in a pot boiling over  
after simmering for almost two hundred years;  
recognition of what it cost to tame this place  
and who it was who paid the price;  
admission that the old ones who marched off to war  
to defend their right to own human beings were wrong.

What haunts us now is knowing they are both the same:  
stanza two an overlay of stanza one  
or vice versa, each a template for the other. ▲▼▲

# Four Poems

by Jo McDougall

## Manners

I don't want to see my dead mother's face.  
I want her face down,  
her hair fanning out like fog  
as she floats in a watery scrim.  
If I saw her face, I might speak to her  
and she speak back.  
We might resume our history.  
We might be happy,  
and that would be unseemly.

## Sleeping into Words

Falling almost asleep driving,  
I hear words merging in the radio,  
distant, distant again.  
Feathering around me,  
they form a wall, believing in me,  
betting I will never leave.

## She Speaks to Someone Dead

Dead and gone, as they say.  
But where?  
Into gauze, dusk, a plate of milk?  
Between the wood and silver of a mirror?  
Inside an acorn in a squirrel's mouth?  
You've never sent a sign.

Wherever you are, don't visit.  
At last, after slopes of time,  
Sunlight has stepped into the house.

## Rivers

Rivers are born unlucky.  
They bloat. They freeze.  
They curate dead bodies nibbled to lace.

You may think them postcard picturesque,  
calm as storks,  
winding through aspens.

What do you know?  
This is not their warp. They rankle, they plot.  
They have the soul of a snake.

And yet, they seduce.  
You stand on the banks of a majestic one,  
gawking.  
It sends a rat to your ankles. ▲▼▲