

Lee Sharkey

## Tashlich

I kneaded a loaf of my failings and fed it to the fish.  
Sleepless, worn thin by presumption,  
pierced by regret, I stumbled, fumble-tongued.  
I woke. Something was golden and riding the wind:  
either it was small and close or it was large and distant,  
maybe a spider dancing on a thread,  
maybe a leaf in a languid loop de loop  
I was drawn to enter.  
For a moment I had the integrity of an envelope,  
for a moment I was a bush flowered with bees,  
a beaver pond's stilled eye.  
Then wind swept in a tunnel where leaves came tumbling,  
first gold, then terra cotta. One step, another.  
One mother's child, one father's darling following,  
bent-kneed, wind-combed—  
My friend says we are all strands in the web of life,  
ethereal beings waiting to taste the flowers.  
I have Jewish feet and a feet-on-the-ground stubbornness;  
I'm not much for such vocabularies. Where I come from  
whoever heard of an afterlife.  
But mother said *spoon* and I said *spoon*,  
mother said *Don't touch the filthy ashtray* and I said  
*Here mommy, filthy ashtray mommy said don't touch.*  
Words travel through pitch-dark centuries  
to touch my recalcitrant body.  
*Ruach*, they say and I say *ruach*.

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*Ruach*, Hebrew for "breath"

