

STEWART MANLEY  
**AMONGST THE LOTUS**

Glowing golden cores peeked from behind,  
Mauve and cream blades that opened ever so softly,  
To the rhythm of the living.

Fluttering arose then quieted in the cool recesses of the banyan,  
Its roots drinking deeply from the edges of the marble green pool.

The paddy had died some weeks ago,  
Its detritus leaving a haze in the air that lingered,  
To form a thin film that coated the lungs of the silent bullfrogs.

The polliwogs, their fat tails flopping in the warming mud,  
Took a breath, scrambled to the shore, and dove,  
Where they were momentarily frightened,  
By the monstrous faces of lotus roots swirling in the lumbering currents.

Chocolate gouramis stirred from their slumber, gliding upward,  
Their hazelnut bellies throbbing, eyes blurry, minds yet adrift,  
Tiny razor teeth found the limp cuticles and began to gnaw,  
Barely discernible above the clicking  
Of the paddy crabs who had discovered the badi beads,  
108 clacks for 108 afflictions.

The rising sun now cleared the mist, warming the pond's mirrored surface,  
And in its reflection the flies could see their own beautiful green eyes,  
Endless orbs of optic nerves searching restlessly,  
For the puddinged puddles of coagulation that sloughed off the maroon robe,  
Like an old man slipping from his bed with regret to find he had not yet died.