

**The Last Time I walked With the Flamethrower**

By Cassandra Rockwood-Rice

Cassandra Rockwood-Rice coordinates a monthly reading series at The Beat Museum in San Francisco. Her work has appeared in *The New Delta Review*, *Rip Rap*, *Hawaii Review*, *The Lifted Brow* and elsewhere. Cassandra holds a BA from California Institute of Integral Studies and an MFA from California College of the Arts.

### **The Last Time I Walked With the Flamethrower**

When summer ends I reflect on the last time I walked  
with the flame thrower. I knew to stay away, by then, my skin  
scorched and keloid in places where embers had lodged.  
He said he was out of lighter fluid, this time. He said  
sorry, he knew how hard the infernos had been on me.  
It was a long winter. I told him how I barely moved until spring,  
even then my lungs smoke-filled for months at the thought of leaving.  
But how I easily forget the way he vanished in the monsoon, how he  
would not come if there was even a chance of rain. Of course  
when they told me to invite my angels in, that's when I called,  
that was when hunting season began, that was when I learned  
about two kinds of light determined by the distance in between.  
He told me there'd be berries in the deep arid woods. Parched,  
my mouth watered and I felt like a desperate creature.  
The entire woods will be full of berries, he said, Let's go!  
His lips were bright crimson stained, mouth incandescent within.  
We went into the tinder, kindling cracking beneath our feet.  
It won't be long now, he motioned, Come, blueberries will burst  
between your teeth, black raspberries so tart and plump  
they drip when you touch them. See my mouth, he said,  
and as he turned toward me, his lips parted to reveal  
his tongue, a match lit to consume everything.

