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## ELISAVIETTA RITCHIE

### Four Potatoes

"They'll poison you, green," Aunt Tanya warns.  
"Such a waste.... Potatoes are all one needs  
for a meal, topped with sour cream, dill ..."

I bought them beige, if pocked and scarred,  
from the REDUCED FOR QUICK SALE cart,  
did not shade them from treacherous light.

But I grew up with tales of potato famines,  
the knowledge that wealth and life can disappear  
with a drought, revolution or war, so hoard

those holey clothes, expired tinned fish, rutabagas....  
Four dangerous spuds, like stones in a stream green  
round their gills, loll weeks in my chipped brown bowl.

Suddenly now the bottom ends (which side is the top?)  
sprout rosy goose barnacles: tiny green fingers probe air  
the way tentacles fathom the sea. A miracle born of neglect.

Might these nascent—roots? tendrils? leaves?—transmute  
into creatures to stalk the yard, or feed the neighbourhood....  
I seize the cleaver, chop, plant sixteen cubes in my window  
box.

### Mudang

Albeit women and of the wrong caste,  
in Korea, shamans are treated with honour.

They heal, prophecy, exorcise evil  
spirits by beating on drums and gongs.  
And they speak with the dead.

Here, poets have similar roles  
although seldom believed or honoured.

We beat the drums of our skulls,  
whack the gong into the night,  
write to dead fathers, lovers, children—

as if they might answer us,  
as if we could heal any one.

*Elisavietta Ritchie's poetry appears earlier in this volume.*