

## **Patan Bridge**

**by Shelley McNamara**

For months I have crossed Patan Bridge,  
Stopping to watch the tent houses,  
Reflecting off the liquid mud,  
Like a smudged painting.  
Above the rooftops, mountains cut  
Like a scalpel through the plastic haze,  
Wrapping around the city's rim.

For months I have watched women worshipping  
Water thrown into the air with their washing,  
Wind blowing sails into their saris,  
Blurring the mundane,  
Children clicking tongues  
Sliding along the water.

On this day, men encircle the flame, blazing  
From the concrete slab underneath the bridge,  
Struggling for breath with each step,  
Pushing each other forward, while

A baby is wrapped in linen  
Tied like a gift with rope  
And attached to a brick

Until later, in the boat, rowed to the middle  
Handfuls of ash thrown like seeds in a barn yard  
Fall like dust onto the surface of the river,  
Dissolving the image of the village,  
As the baby is lowered like an anchor  
Into the river.