Tassels

Steve Lawless*
Tassels

In the fields only the little things are real.
Is it the heat?

Her eyes are clear green, clear green,
speaking of raw life
with the edges smoothed,
cooled.
But this is before the sun begins to hiss.

It rained once
and the drops hung from her lips,
streaks of wet dust down her face.
It turned her hair
blacker than night.

They say she has the vision
and feels things
but she touches my arm
and looks to the ground,
whispering what I am not allowed to hear.

I feel things too.
I know there is something
cold and hard as her daddy’s face
and close as the cuts on my hands
but hidden in the glare.
Sweat in their eyes
they say....
but that’s not it.
When the sun is high and white as the belly of a snake
she comes to me.
We walk to the bus together,
to the noon meal
choked in these smoldering fields.
She pulls gently at the shirt
that already clings
to my back.

I remember the blue, blue sea
when I too was young.
I choked on the water
and couldn't understand
why my daddy laughed.
I know now
and I work my row.

She works slow,
eternal days
and I struggle to help her
but each time we leave
her eyes are swollen
and blistered.

When dusk comes
I sit inside adobe walls
and wait.
But the night will never cool the glare
and the bottle is dry as smoke.
Cold stone years
between me and her.

-Steve Lawless