

Silkie

by Anne-Marie Cusac

WINNER OF THE
2006 MMM PRESS BOOK PRIZE
SELECTED BY PATRICK LAWLER

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2008 Outstanding Achievement in Poetry award from the Wisconsin Library Association.

“Anne-Marie Cusac captures a time when animals and human beings share desires and inhabit the same skins. This collection recounts the story of the Silkie (sometimes referred to elsewhere as Selkie), seals who are able to transform into human beings.

In this ambitious collection, the ink from Cusac’s pen goes incredibly deep into the archetypal realm. The lyrical evolves into story, and story evolves into voice, and the dramatic voices evolve into mythic resonance. This is big poetry. Not shimmery self-consciousness. Not superficial playfulness. Not ineffable shrines to the quotidian.

This poetry is as fundamental as rocks.

It captures a terrible longing and a powerful want. Its themes are terrifyingly powerful and disturbingly beautiful.”

—Patrick Lawler

“*Silkie*, with its historical detail and rich sense of place, beautiful language, startling psychological acuity, and profound awareness of the worlds of work and love and nature, is a triumph of the imagination. A narrative in lyric episodes, an allegory or myth of love and difference, a meditation on passion and heartbreak, this poem sequence enthralls and compels us with its myth of ‘the beastly human.’”

—Reginald Gibbons

“Anne Marie Cusac’s *Silkie* tells a tale of love between that mythical creature of the sea and an all too human woman in poems that are stunning, brave, and original. The poems are full of the sensuality of the body and the longing of the soul, each poem deftly wrought to reveal a world both real and transcendent.

—Jesse Lee Kercheval,
author of *Dog Angel*

BIO

Anne-Marie Cusac’s poetry has appeared in *Poetry*, *Iowa Review*, *TriQuarterly*, *The American Scholar*, *The Madison Review*, and *Crab Orchard Review*. Her first poetry book, *The Mean Days* (2001) was published by Tia Chucha Press and won the Posner Book Award from the Council for Wisconsin Writers. A recipient of a Wallace Stegner Fellowship at Stanford University and a Wisconsin Arts Board Individual Artist’s grant, Cusac was for ten years an editor and investigative reporter for *The Progressive* magazine. Her investigative reporting there won several awards, including the prestigious George Polk Award. She is a professor in Communication at Roosevelt University and a contributing writer for *The Progressive*.

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wild enough

There were stories
about girls wild enough,
one in particular, Dulsie
in her pale green halter, the faint
shadows around her nipples, the way (we all noticed)
they changed in the school air conditioning,

the school yard cigarette
between her lips.
Those lips
could do anything: the scornful
smile, the sneer, the break
into warmth no one ever expected.

She could
start screaming
and still hold a cigarette
in the corner of her mouth. When she
breathed it in, her eyelids
drooped, and she looked to the side, as if

she whom we thought
so known, so physical,
so summed
in the calf muscles flexing, the wonderful
body stretching from the arched
foot through the fingers, all of her was lost

the moment
she tasted
the cigarette,
and we didn't know her.
Girls like her, wild enough
to sleep alone on the beach,

not once for kicks,
but again and again.
The seals
can spot a girl like that, can see
the light her body throws off, and everything
we miss about her body.



There were stories
of how she woke
in the dark
and the sound of lapping waves. The tide
crept almost to her feet but didn't
touch her, and the body

six inches from hers
wept its heat.
It was the one
she needed, the sand
giving under her shoulders, right there.
Later, she woke again, tide long out.

The body that
had what?
Loved her?
was gone. In the shallows
paddled a harbor seal,
watching her the way they watch us.