

Raising the Glass *in celebration of the 2006 City of Victoria Butler Book Prize finalists*

Moon on the rocks of another lonesome idea;
sunset has long poured its tonic over dark
and bound you to a solitary chair.
A window box of night stalk sugars

the outside air that floats in through the screen
like a dream you wish you now were having
asleep with the rest of the city, all those bodies
unfettered by words.

But here you sit, prisoner of the lockdown hours,
banging your tin cup on the bars of memory
for whatever will come to slake your thirst
and pour for you a cocktail to raise to your fellow captives –

to that writer who orders his maid to handcuff him
to his desk and lock the door behind
until he drags the day's words out
like hostages at knifepoint'

to the white dress floating behind
the bolted attic window, the unreachable staircase
that spirals down to earth, her caged hymn
buzzing like a bluebottle in your ear;

to the man who sharpens pencil after pencil
and sets them in rows on his desk, bone
upon unbroken bone, dry kindling for bushfires,
arrows to shoot into jungle darkness;

to the poet rushing down the black river
on his shoddy raft, poling the depths for speed, on the lam
from whatever his imagination won't let him shake,
a return to the block and the chain-gang shuffle.

To freedom, you raise the glass. To the crooked sentence
sneaked like a secret hacksaw past the warden of the mind.
To a word slipped like a perfect key into your cell.
To the word that springs you into the generous light of day.

by Carla Funk