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"Minghun," "Hearts," "Lament"

Elisabeth Murawski

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Three Poems

ELISABETH MURAWSKI

Minghun

A family has lost a daughter.
She will be our dead son's
bride. We pay 10,000 yuan
to the fixer. It doesn't matter

she is plain, if she died
by drowning or with fever.
Was she stupid? Clever?
Single, she qualified.

Now our son can't complain
he has no wife. And she
will climb our family tree
in the afterlife. A crane

flies overhead, the sign
of longevity. Whose?
Not our son's. Maybe those
who loved him? The line

of mourners winds uphill
to the burial ground.
Yellow soil's heaped in a mound,
waiting and final.

We've killed a pig, chickens,
for the feast. Side
by side, the dead lie wed
in their coffins.

Hearts

I am playing a game with my father.
 Neither of us is any good at it.
 We take turns winning and losing,
 keeping score, his word against mine.
 He's more than I bargained for. Witness
 the invisible bruising, the bell
 he's a master of. He summons
 and I appear, swan dive with him
 into the river he was thrown in
 as a boy, swim or die. We take
 from each other what we can, hearts
 clenching, afraid of what lies
 beneath, the water below
 yielding, solitary as a birth.

Three Poems
 ELIZABETH MURAWSKI

Mingus
 A family has lost a daughter
 She will be our dead and a
 bride. We pay 10,000 yuan
 to the fiancé. It doesn't matter
 she is plain. It she died
 by drowning or with fever
 Was she stupid? Clever?
 Strange, she painted
 Now my son can't complain
 he has no wife. And she
 will climb our family tree
 in the attitude A crane
 this overhead, the sign
 of longevity. Witness
 Not our son's. Maybe those
 who loved him. The line
 of mourners winds uphill
 to the burial ground.
 Yellow soil's heaped in a mound
 waiting and flush
 We've killed a pig, chickens
 for the feast, side
 by side, the dead lie wed
 to their coffin

Lament

A freak celebrity, London's toast,
 wife of Rolfe, honest woman
 punished by ruffs

and layers of civilized stuff,
 when she looked into
 the white man's mirror,

could she see her face
 as the river held it first
 before the current swept

her merry hips away?
 Powhatan's daughter, no one's,
 turning a cartwheel

naked as joy,
 restless as a leopard
 spurning confinement,

alive to the sacred
 beating of the drum:
Matoaka, come!