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Susan Terris' poetry books include THE HOMELESSNESS OF SELF, CONTRARIWISE, NATURAL DEFENSES, FIRE IS FAVORABLE TO THE DREAMER, POETIC LICENSE, and EYE OF THE HOLOCAUST. Her work has appeared in many publications including: *The Iowa Review*, *Field*, *The Journal*, *Colorado Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Spillway*, *The Southern Review*, *Volt*, *Denver Quarterly*, and *Ploughshares*. For seven years, with CB Follett, she edited *RUNES, A Review Of Poetry*. She is now editor of *Spillway* and a poetry editor for *Pedestal Magazine* and *In Posse Review*. She had a poem from *Field* published in PUSHCART PRIZE XXXI.

Terris has a prior career in the field of children's books where she had 21 books (mostly young adult fiction) published by Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, Macmillan, Scholastic, and Doubleday. In addition to writing & journal editing, she does freelance editing of book-length poetry manuscripts and teaches workshops on "The Making of a Chapbook". With CB Follett, she hosts a series of weekend workshops taught by David St. John.

FORBIDDEN FIRE

Beyond violets and johnny-jump-ups,
Beyond the railroad ties:

A fort, a blanket, matches.
Like all secrets, a place of omission

With a spring-wild pond for girls
Thin as April sap, lithe as snakes

Shedding skin. Girls' print dresses,
Slick with pond scum, dry on low bushes,

As twig-fire warms bare white
Bodies, as beetles click, ravens cry.

But what of the man who crosses
The trestle—dark of face, foul of breath.

Aha, he says, *hotdog, hot damn, lookee*.
The girls freeze. *Tinkerbelles*,

He says, *backing up, away. Willis*,

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Succubi, Vivian girls, Heeby-Jeebies.

THE LAST TIME THIS WATER SAW LAND, IT WAS IN AFRICA

The last time this parrot saw fish,
it was flying over an island purpled by sunset.

The last time this pebble skipped across
a white sand beach, it was tossed
by a man with a parrot on his shoulder
and a fish in his creel.

The last time this key saw a lock,
I was on an island with the man, the parrot, the creel,
the fish, and a hot golden ball at the horizon.

But winds were fierce, the man and the light
unforgiving. So I shook
sand from my shoes, locked my suitcase,
and caught a plane.

In my hand, one smooth pebble
and a notebook lined with Caribbean clichés.

SEA SNAKE

The sea cave is ink, bled azure at the mouth.
First, I am there treading water, as seals mimic

mermaids, as wave-slap masks the shuffle
and whinge of bats,

as the future—a faceless snake—undulates past;

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and I deny echos coiled inside me.

Then the cave yawns open, and you appear. This is
better than the dream of Haleakela,

where we hunkered in the old caldera while you
shredded Egon Schiele's volcanic art.

Schiele? Volcanic art? O the fractured
logic of nightmare with its crackle of disaster.

*Fear is only as deep, says an ancient proverb,
as the mind allows.* Mine, yours: deepwater caverns,

where magma surges up, steams

DIPTYCH: MESSAGES

-Flotsam & Jetsam

After Limantour Spit, we barbecue mussels
On Drake's Beach, fly the 30 foot dragon kite,

As the children roam, collecting treasure: a boot,
Bucket with a hole, a strand of knotted pearls.

Daughter, donning the pearls and a sea-grass crown,
Declares herself queen, so we build her a driftwood

Castle, circle it with the dragon and crowd in
Body to body. Flotsam, for this day, protected, safe.

≠

-Jetsam & Flotsam

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Messages in bottles—we float them from Bolinas
Lagoon. Help. . . moonrakers have kidnapped us

At Duxbury Reef. Help. . . we are living the wrong
Lives. Where have the children gone? Can we go, too?

Discard. Discard everything. Throw all dead weight
Overboard. Lighten up. Don't look back.

Where are the life preservers to hold up our heads?
Is this life a life? Beware: here there be dragons.

STASIS, HE SAYS, IS NOT THE OBJECT

Falling birds as white scraps of paper,
The mountain spiking a wreath of fog.

A promise, like a pomegranate,
Bleeds when it is cut,

This blood-letting more painful than most.
Each seed another bitter sweet. Don't

Count. Counting confuses the future.
Consider terror, yet don't wrap it

In the cotton wool of everyday.
Let the paper birds fly. Let the bloody seeds

Burst. Let the fog keep its secrets.
No matter what you do, he—discarding

Red fruit—will turn towards
Whiteness, step over the crest and vanish.

GOLDFISH: A DIPTYCH

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--Science has proven the goldfish
has a memory of a second and a half.

1)
Tale of the Goldfish

Look, there's a castle,
submerged so its world is magnified
in water tepid, dense, and hazed with algae,
but I see a willow, a sun, a dragonfly.

Look, a castle—
sun light slicing through its blue doorway,
and before it a startled mermaid poised on a rock
amid roots and stones and burnished shells.

Look, there's a castle,
and I angle through the door and out the window,
finding everything static and without intent,
yet behind me I sense an approaching shadow.

Look—
distortion pools an open doorway,
where sun shines on a rock with no mermaid,
where I sense shifting stones and jaws of darkness.

Look, there's...

2)
A Man Is A Goldfish With Legs

Look, there's a castle,
where Circe can turn seamen to swimming pigs
while the universe expands and expands,
so beware of solar glare in the morning.

Look, a castle—
and at its hearth, a tornado flame spirals clockwise,
but below are continents of ice, stress lines radiating,
and wherever you are, there you are.

Look, there's a castle,
where I've put a pearl in the hollow of my throat
to make sure I'm alive, and if there's no forked lightning,
Venus will shine in daylight by the crescent moon.

Look—
see how Circe appears with the telltale pearl,

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and Venus floats between fire and ice,
so, wherever you are, may her lightning give you pause.

Some days — it's not even a second and a half. Look , there's....

PATH TO INNISFREE

In some lost universe where Innisfree
had a rock with an iron handle,

before e. coli or giardia,
they knelt at the edge of streams,

cupped clear water in their hands
and drank to quench their thirst.

Then, lake isles were still safe havens
for the young and unmoored.

Then, they roasted stolen horse corn,
baked berry pies in a campfire oven.

They didn't know embers could grow cool,
or that the waxed moon would wane.

How careless they've become yet careful.
They drink now from plastic bottles,

But have lost the path to Innisfree.
The moon is dark. The fire is out.

Disease and dis-ease. What they have
Taken, must all be returned.

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UNDERCUT

We're holding hands, breathing hard. The overhang, a gneiss cliff, part of a canyon, should last forever, yet as we pause here—rock can't withstand the persistence of water—the Salmon is claiming it. Basins are rounded by it, polished until we shield our eyes from the glare. Slowly, the rock-strewn current scours a wilder path. Above us, a fever of red-orange lichen and firs silvered by moss. Below, the canyon's undercut, once stone, now burly chutes, and each day the river-song grows deeper. While we gaze, rock is disappearing. Nothing is static. Not lichen, not fir, not water, not breath.

CROSSWORDS

--for Myra, 1914-2009

She dropped a Kleenex on the floor so I would pick it up. She had me tweeze the long, black hair from her chin.

What's a five letter word for soap plant?

When I wore the lace jacket she bought in Thailand, she took a nail scissors to the tag, so it wouldn't show through.

Can you name Hamlet's castle?

She wouldn't discuss her miscarriage, why Father punched Arthur, or if joy meant more than buying glitter and shine.

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What's a four letter word for a tennis player?

She threw a glass of water in my face,
and dared me until I threw one back.
Now aren't we having fun? she said.

Why was the Hatter mad?

I can handle my own medications, she
insisted. But I can't sleep in a hospital bed,
and I want all my rings here with me.

Who climbed up the water spout?

She left crosswords and cross words,
left before I knew how to grow old.
She left possessions but little to possess.

How many years make up a score?

You are not in charge here, she cried.
Not the boss of me. And, listen—I liked you
better when you were younger. . . .