

JEE LEONG KOH

Childhood Punishments

Once, when I struck a boy, my father raised a belt
in the small smelly bedroom my grandfather slept in.
The studded leather strap snapped, and snapped, and the welts
answered in a stinging song to the strong silent man.

Not so when my angry mother rubbed my tongue
with fresh cut chili for inventing fine new lies.
The fruit stung me to blubber volubly my wrong
and beg her face to stop. That sissy I despise

and wonder whether the red chili's hot dry mouth
or the dark gleaming length of the worn leather strap
poisoned far more the part of man the child would be.
I confess, Father, I worship a man's brute strength,
and in the massive words I start, stutter, and stop
have too little regard, Mother, for honesty.



KARTIKA  REVIEW

ISSUE FOUR, WINTER 2008