

MARSHA MATHEWS

Strategic Survival

I

Lacy Legs

Sino-China War, Yunnan Province, China 1937-1945

Because the Japanese ravaged homes at Nanking,
wielded swords to chop off heads,
propped one on a gatepost, a cigarette set
between blue curls of lip.

Because the Japanese made women strip,
walk on all fours in circles and bark.

Because Dai Chinese soldiers had pitiful weapons.
They tattooed their thighs—
elegant, lacy swirls.

The hour came.

Fierce Japanese soldiers approached,
encircled, raised their swords.

Only. . . what?

Before them, a thousand exposed male thighs.

In blue-black lace?

The enemy let go their swords, turned back,
running.

II

Tribal Skirmishes

Dulong River, 1660

Too many women made slaves to men,
the next generation of Dulong women
etched their faces, not
with the usual butterfly wings
and peacock feathers. They slashed
their cheeks, mutilated their lips,
repelled
but survived,
raised up family—
flags stippling a future.

Marsha Mathews' first full collection of poetry, *Beauty Bound*, was a finalist at Main Street Rag Publisher's 2018 Book Competition and can be purchased at their Website.