

YAHYA FREDERICKSON

Keeping My Father

1943, somewhere in the Indian Ocean

Deep below the cauterizing deck,
below the tepid waves, down,

through layer after layer of soldiers,
just before the Negroes and the bilge,

my father hunkers in his bunk,
his stomach full of ocean green

and glutinous. Late in the afternoon,
he rises again for air to the deck,

where games of poker crank on,
to be broken up only by foreign shore.

Threading around them to the bow,
he sits, always the same promontory.

By the time I am born twenty years later,
he will not recall the name of the black soldier

who always sat nearby. But he cannot
forget the Lucky Strikes and the plans,

the big plans each had for his separate life.
This is where I keep my father in the war:

on a patch of tropical sea stitched
by fluorescent flying fish, sharing a match,

a dream out loud with a dark man
on the bow of a ship bound for Bombay.



YAHYA FREDERICKSON teaches at Minnesota State University Moorhead. His second chapbook *Returning to Water* was published in 2006 by Dacotah Territory Press. His poetry has appeared in *Al-Masar*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *The Cream City Review*, *Flyway*, *River Styx*, *Quarter after Eight*, *Quarterly West*, and other journals. Contact information: 910 19th Ave. S. Moorhead, MN 56560 Email: yafreder@mnstate.edu Phone: 701-261-3154