

LYN LIFSHIN

When I Pull On the Velvet

The threads pull from what held them
like a woman who can't wait to
get away and I think of some woman
in China, bent over a table with

out enough light, pulling the material
to fit a shape, as she won't in
her small house. She thinks of the
girl she wanted to keep, the

smallest black haired baby her
husband snatched up, ran into the leaves.
She didn't ask, didn't need to.
Some nights she dreams of her lost

daughter in the garnet sleeves,
of buttoning the top button to keep her
warm, sews the sleeve to her own sleeve. It
would be better to have kept her inside, some

thing turning to stone inside her. She could
have wrapped the baby's cry in crushed velvet,
never let her husband near. She loves the son
she had later, but it's the daughter moaning

under the floor, wailing for cloth the colour
of blood, begging her mother to keep at least
an eyelash, a whip of hair to stitch more
velvet, keep at least her ashes, bones to plant

near the river as if some thing could grow from
all that's gone

**It's Garnet or Blood,
Depending on How You Look at It**

The velvet's unravelling a
little, the way petals
toward the end flop open
like an old sick woman's

thighs, no longer worrying
about modesty. The threads
fray, a paler colour on
their own like skin peeled
from a finger. The woman

who stitched these shoulders
in China in a basement with
no window or light felt
her life was that shrivelling
skin. When her husband took

their daughter, she wanted
her heart to turn leathery,
wanted to be the red cut off
a fruit and thrown into the

highway. It was a girl she
told herself, we couldn't
keep her. At first she
bundled the velvet, rocked

it close to her like a child
at her breast. On the dampest
days, a stickiness near the
buttons, the faint smell of milk

Lyn Lifshin's most recent books include The Marilyn Munroe Poems (Quiet Lion Press, 1995) and Blue Tattoo (Event Horizon, 1996). A collected volume of her poetry, Cold Comfort, has just been released by Blacksparrow Press.