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## English as a Second Language: In Memory of a Lesley College Student

Donna Cole

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Donna Cole

The slender girl sat in front of a computer,  
wrestling with swooping sentences running

Faulkner-like down half the page, describing  
Cambodian festivals, fireworks, long, fragrant

evenings, and telling stories of her childhood:  
Once, for lack of diligence in school, her mother

beat the soles of her feet with a bamboo stick  
(permitted in her culture, she explained).

Arriving home, her father ordered his wife to  
bathe his daughter's feet and never to strike her.

A sweet memory--she had shone in Father's eyes,  
the beautiful father who had died in the war.

Of the war years, she said little: her family languished  
in a relocation camp; there was never enough food.

Some weeks, her face bleak and stiff, eyes dull,  
she would tell me about not eating, not sleeping.

It might have been midterm exams that ignited dreams,  
sounds, whirling thoughts, disabling her for days.

It might have been--nothing at all--  
that we could see.

I heard from her once after graduation;  
then the news that she had taken her life.

She had wanted to write powerful English  
with no errors; she had wanted to be a doctor.

I remember the beautiful young woman,  
determined, brightly laughing.

I remember the sleepwalker, remote, wooden,  
horrors swirling just behind the eyes. I remember

how deeply she felt the gaping loss of her father,  
who had named her -- Leakhena -- "Perfection."