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A Bible Story

It took less than two minutes to know
Sharif would never be offered
coffee or tea in my parents' house.

Mama wore her apron
like an Orthodox robe,
refusing to sit at the kitchen table.

Your daughter has told me
so much about you.

Words pegged and hung
dripping with the sweat
of Sharif's bravado.

Baba raised his finger like a slap
then turned it into a gun
pointed at the door.

Mama's fingers fidgeted
like captured birds
inside the deep pocket of her apron.

Under the table, my hand
gripped Sharif's thigh
to steady our fall.

Unlike the shrewd wise men

who planned their travel
and their gifts,
I ignored the cross
made from dried grass,
threaded through the bars
of their screen door;
their makeshift scarecrow.

I delivered to them
a Muslim
wrapped in a love
torn
by conquerors and wars,
by words in a birth-marked book,
by years of stab or run.

Angela Costi

Angela Costi studied Law/Arts at Melbourne University and completed the Professional Writing and Editing course at RMIT. She is the author of four poetry collections. *Honey and Salt* (Five Islands Press) was shortlisted for the Mary Gilmore national prize 2008. Her poetry, essays and reviews have been published in a number of peer-reviewed journals, most recently an essay for [Cordite Poetry Review](#) and a poem for [Backstory – history journal](#).