

## Three Poems

Aubrey Roemmich

### Laughter Is Warm, But So Is Fire

The house is loud,  
a little bit on fire,  
but the laughter is warm.

Cards are spewed on the table  
along with grudges and forgiveness.  
Food, and drink, and the fact that last year the parents  
forgot their daughter's birthday are  
crammed in the kitchen.

Did she forgive them?

No, not really, but she doesn't bring it up anymore.

One cousin, two cousin, three cousin, four.

Dr. Suess used to be read in this house,  
but he long ago vacated these walls...

the walls, the walls, the walls tell all—  
the secrets, the lies, the failures.

What makes a house a home?

What makes a group of people family?

Because in the midst of it all they're lonely.

Lonely and longing for something they can't have?

Or maybe they can?

No one is quite sure but they're all adults with mortgages,  
they have their lives together.

Delusional and demented they

dance down memory lane reminiscing on the  
good, the bad, and the ugly.

There's nothing like a family gathering to bring out the sharks—  
sharks, they're all sharks circling for blood  
(at least *I* didn't major in art history).

Poke and prod. Pinch and snap.

The house is loud, a little bit on fire, but the laughter is warm.

Despite it all there's love.

Real honest love.

The type of love you don't always find,  
but seems to be forged into the familial structure  
(I hate this person, but I love them regardless).

Loyalty, joy, and shared experience all mixed together to  
create a volatile concoction of...

Love? Happiness? Heartbreak? Loyalty? A never-ending sense of  
belonging?

To something, somewhere—  
somewhere I have a family.

A family that loves me and I love them.

Isn't that all anyone can ask for?

A house that is loud, a little bit on fire, but filled with warm laughter?

## UNWILLING MARTYR

the HOLY GHOST wants you to feel it  
 again, the HOLY GHOST has made a lake  
 of itself. you can take it into your lungs.  
 the HOLY GHOST animates your blood cells  
 and moves your arms like a marionette.  
 wading through the shallows the lake  
 opens like moses commanded it. trekking  
 a mountain the HOLY GHOST burns you like a  
 dry bush and etches it commandments  
 into your back. the HOLY GHOST wants you to hurt  
 again. no more hiding in the whale's stomach,  
 it spits you into the deep end and the  
 HOLY GHOST makes the doll dance. across the  
 water your heart skips like a  
 stone. wrapped in a crown of thorns he denies you  
 three times and the raven eats your eyes.  
 blind, blind, blinded by rage your ribcage  
 is a stained-glass window and the single red  
 candle signals from your liver. the HOLY GHOST  
 lines the chain-smoking angels up your  
 spine and wrenches your jaw open. bloody wine  
 poured into gaping mouth, staining your  
 teeth and labeling you "sinner." knees  
 bent before pillars of salt holding your lovers  
 hair in your hands, the hangman's noose  
 seems so inviting occupied by judas' swinging  
 feet and skeletal smile.

\*First three lines are borrowed from Brittany Cavallaro's poem *Leitmotif*.

## Tough

There's something in the ground here,  
Something that keeps me close.  
Like the Joads figuring things out,  
I hear the sweet call of oranges  
And grapes,  
But this land is my home.

Home

Home

Home

There is a resilience that my great-grandparents possessed,  
They passed it to my grandparents,  
And my grandparents passed it to my parents  
Who passed it to me.  
A resilience that is woven into bone,  
And calloused hands,  
And warm smiles.  
A resilience that is the root of a family's tree.

"We're tough," I used to hear people say.  
The same people that survived blizzards.  
And floods. And tornados.  
Tough could be synonymous with stubborn.  
But stubborn implies stupid and these  
People are not stupid; they're  
Tough.

I hear the sirens call,  
They are promising sweet fruits  
To eat. But seas of gold are just

As inviting for weary feet.  
Rolling hills, and windy plains  
Sweep me away, but I always  
Follow the river back.

Back to home  
And tough people.  
Back to windswept gold  
And nice strangers.  
Back to solid ground  
And the lullaby of a quiet night.

**Aubrey Roemmich** is currently an undergraduate student at the University of North Dakota. After her graduation, she hopes to attend law school and get an MFA in creative writing. She aspires to be a literary lawyer and work in the publishing industry. She spends her free time reading, writing, and listening to music.