

“Who Amongst Us Can Judge”

by Faye Srala

“Anyplace is heaven, just as long as I’m with you.”
—“Just as Long as I’m With You” Pat Boone, released in 1956

He was devilishly handsome, she a rare stunner.
In a swing dress she stepped out in blue suede shoes
on a warm evening in June that summer.
Anyplace was heaven with Pat Boone, blues, and booze.

My mother ran from a fruitless farm
during a full moon one Saturday
straight into that attractive sergeant’s arms—
my sister’s conception was such a cliché.

Oh, the promise of an American serviceman,
how completely liberating. Poverty torpedoes
self-confidence and prudence, please understand.
She trusted he’d deliver her from scarcity’s sorrow.

Her future as a respectable lady
replaced a longing to belong. Her rescuer,
a temper in shadow. The first baby
persuaded the union, the second her anchor,

and in between the two she started screaming.
Fury’s tentacles shackled us from the first
moment of my awareness. Instinctively soothing
to a young child are sounds of birds,

but the rasp of my mother gasping for air
struck a bolt of terror in my soul.
Two impotent angels shed tears on top of the stairs.
At a tender age, I knew she was no longer whole.

A woman on her wedding day never thinks,
I wonder if I’ll live through it? He took his leave,
(that war veteran couldn’t handle his own conflict),
between my first day of school and measles.

Merciful silence heralded hunger,
instead of deliverance, poverty again hugged her.

Faye Srala is a retired chemist living in Idaho, and a current creative writing major at Idaho State University. Her father was a Vietnam War veteran. While she believes her father was very brave in war, the reality for GIs returning home from Vietnam was harsh. She connects her broken family with the lack of support her father needed from both the government and from the community. She grieves for him and others like him. Faye earned a BS in Chemistry from the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs and an MBA from the University of Utah. Her work can also be read in *The Account: A Journal of Poetry, Prose and Thought*. When not busy writing, she bakes decadent desserts, drinks wine, and hikes off those calories in the extensive Idaho wilderness.