Segue 12: Fall 14

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Segue is published once a year in August. We accept submissions via email of high quality fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction between January 1 and April 30 (closed May through December), and writing about writing year-round. Before submitting, please read past issues to understand the sort of work we publish, then read our submission guidelines.

Segue

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Regret

I am sorry I didn’t return your call
or answer your second call, or return
your text or email or Facebook message.
It is hard to hear when I am turning, turning,
pulling down computer-lidded eyes, packing up,
walking away. Did you know I wake in the night
thinking of you—yes, thinking of you—wondering
why I didn’t return your call, or answer your second call
or kept my phone on silent for days and then for weeks
or didn’t type a response while the computer-
lidded eyes remained propped open toothpick style
for so very long? Don’t get me wrong. I love you.
And I have tried to hear you ring and ring and ring,
like phones used to ring when we were children,
when we all jumped up and ran a mad-dashed race toward
the large yellow-belled instrument, wanting to know
who it was and my sister would win and she would
answer breathlessly and sigh as she surrendered
the plastic dogbone to me, and then you and I would talk
for hours as I leaned against a bright orange kitchen wall
with my fingers sweating and wrapped tight around
the heavy receiver, and I miss you, even more now since
the empty message voice turned up to stop your clear rings
in their tracks, in the way I wish it could stop all that is now
turning, turning, pulling down, packing up, walking away.
Author Notes

Andrea Witzke Slot writes poetry, fiction, essays, and academic work, and is particularly fascinated by the spaces in which these genres intersect. She is the author of the poetry collection To find a new beauty (Gold Wake Press, 2012), and recent work has appeared or is forthcoming in Southeast Review, Poetry East, Bellevue Literary Review, Mid-American Review, Mezzo Cammin, Nimrod, Tupelo Quarterly, Spoon River Poetry Review, The Chronicle of Higher Education, and in academic books published by SUNY Press (2013) and Palgrave Macmillan (2014). She lives just north of Chicago with her husband, the youngest of her five children/step-children, and her crazy West Highland Terrier Macbeth.

About the Work

This particular poem, “Regret,” was sparked by the constant feeling of being too busy in our lives—too busy to write letters, amble around the garden, take go-nowhere walks with friends, and make long, catch-up, just-for-the-sake-of-it phone calls. The poem came to me slowly over a period of time, as they often do, but was initially prompted by the experience of waking in the night thinking, “Why didn’t I call so-and-so back? Why didn’t I answer that email?” Then I’d feel terrible and send him or her some telekinetic love. The second experience that sparked the poem is in direct contrast to the first—the long hours I once spent in my youth chatting to friends on our yellow house phone, long before the advent of texting, cellphones, or any kind of social media. I have powerful images of the large, bulky, screwed-to-the-wall phone we used to use. In the 70s, we didn’t even have “cordless” phones, so we were quite literally tied to the wall, which meant standing within a ten-foot radius of the handset. Our phone was located in our kitchen, too, which was painted in my mother’s favorite color—bright orange—so the color imagery as well as the buzzing centrality of family life in that kitchen were key accompaniments to those phone conversations.

When writing and developing this particular poem, the most difficult part was getting the flow and movement between now and then and back to now to unfold in a way in which time matters. In my prose as well as my poetry, I rework poems relentlessly as I attempt to create the right tone, music, and metrical lengths that allow images to linger in the reader’s mind for the right amount of time and then connect easily and smoothly to the ones that follow. The easiest part of writing the poem was having strong images already in mind—my computer, the midnight sorrow, and the old phone in my childhood kitchen. The poem is an apology of sorts, too. As much time as I spend at my computer writing, I am not always good at returning emails or phone calls.

And the craft of poetry? To me, writing poetry has always been about trying to create an image and sensation that is as powerful in words as it is in my head and heart. This means creating a kind of movement in a piece that will make the subject come to life and, I hope, make readers feel
and think differently about the way we live our lives. When I reread the poem, I feel reminded of the urgent need for me to take the time to call my sisters, friends, parents, and extended family more often. And if just one reader is likewise prompted to make a long overdue phone call after reading the poem, then perhaps the poem has succeeded in its goals, however small they might be.

Andrea Witzke Slot on the Web

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