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# Poetry

by John L. Stanizzi

## Apology

He asked me to step inside the book room;  
he wanted to say  
he was sorry for being a dick  
in my class.

6' 2", must have gone 240,  
a little doughy  
but strong, I'm sure;  
he's only 17.

Said, "I don't wanna mess up  
the rest of the year.  
We still got three-quarters left."

Out in the hallway  
the indistinct sound of the bell,  
and the muffled industry of teenagers  
gloriously vulgar,  
incredibly beautiful,  
horny as they'll ever be.

But inside the musty book room  
just me and this big sad kid.

I guess I shifted my weight a little,  
a movement that implied *shake hands?*  
or perhaps *ya' need a hug?*

For a fraction of a moment  
the kid's right hand moved slightly,  
a faint twitch that travelled  
up his arm and into his shoulder,  
responding to the offered hand  
then the hug,  
and ending in neither.

That's when the tears came.

"My life is all screwed up, Mr. Stanizzi.  
You don't even know.  
All the bullshit about  
the spoiled rich kid  
gets whatever he wants.  
I started working for my old man

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when I was in first grade.  
*First grade.* Still do.  
And yeah he puts gas in my car  
but that don't make it OK  
for him to be such a prick.  
I get in trouble  
he'll kill me.  
And my mother.  
Screw her.  
I haven't talked to her  
in two years.  
And I ain't gonna tell you  
what *she* did.

I shook his hand  
and said it would be OK,  
even though I didn't believe it.

I never did find out  
what the kid did for his father,  
what his father did to him,  
or what his mother did for whoever,  
but I did wonder how it felt  
to see love as a weakness.

I also wondered what it meant,  
really meant when he said  
he'll kill me,  
pondered what it was like to believe  
your mother was a whore,  
and questioned if it was  
worth those tears,  
worth that kind of fear.

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## **Orient Point at Dawn**

From the Connecticut shore  
Orient Point hovers just inches  
above the surface of the sound  
as distance and light  
recreate, erase, distort,  
until what's left is a bar-code of gray silhouettes,  
beveled patterns of inarticulate shadow  
through which the first glints of sunlight  
needle dreamy sleepers to stir.

Once I took the ferry  
from New London to Orient Point  
and Clem's knotty-pine bungalow,  
cool beneath enormous conifers  
and filled with ocean knickknacks;  
the yard was softened by rusty needles  
hewn by off-shore winds,  
and the mourning doves

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hung shiny round notes on the humid afternoon.

I cooked shrimp translucent pink,  
and at dusk drove back to the landing  
to guess which of the tiny silver figures on the sound  
was the ferry carrying you to the point.  
The water-soaked jetty leaned  
this way and that against the tide  
and into the half-light,  
akimbo ties, heavy, never dry;  
a gull at the shoreline  
ran down tiny hermit crabs  
tossed ashore by the thousands,  
fielding them as they tumbled on the ebb,  
swallowing them whole,  
and then there was your ferry.

The clarity of this morning  
begins to fill in the blanks on Orient Point  
and what remains now  
are flashes of color  
from years ago in small places  
which are way over there now,  
across the water  
and held in faintest shadow.

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## Nests

*Point O' Woods*  
*South Lyme, Connecticut*

A beard of rusted grass  
streams from a robin's beak  
and the cottage whispers  
with the sighs of sleepers.

The robin flies beneath the cottage  
where the string floors  
of three nests  
reach down into the musky air  
under the floorboards.

Baby grackles screech themselves hoarse  
from an invisible nest  
in that tree right there,  
and two more nests are pressed  
up under the eaves  
of the leaning garage.

The radio says to brace ourselves  
for heavy weather,  
a line of storms that will rake across us  
and toss our things around.  
It is impossible to ignore the storm,  
its gray face paint,

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its floribunda of lights-out clouds  
that short out the horizon  
over and over again.

For now the heat squeezes us,  
a hot breeze muffles  
the industry around the marsh,  
and a lady bug has careened into me,  
crashing into my arm  
where she rests for a moment,  
folding her luxurious wings  
back into their brilliant red case.

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**John L. Stanizzi 's** first book, *Ecstasy Among Ghosts*, was published by Antrim House Books ([www.antrimhousebooks.com](http://www.antrimhousebooks.com)). His second book, *Sleepwalking* (also with Antrim House) was released in October 2009. New poems have just been published in *The New York Quarterly*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Rattle*, and *The Wild Goose Review*. He's a former Wesleyan University Etherington Scholar and Poet in Residence at Manchester Community College and Middletown Public Schools. Besides SNReview, his poems have appeared in *Passages North*, *The Spoon River Quarterly*, *Poet Lore*, *The Connecticut River Review*, *Stone Country*, and many others. His work has been nominated for the Pushcard Prize twice. He's an Adjunct Professor of English, Manchester (CT) Community College, and he teaches at Bacon Academy in Colchester CT, where he is Theater Director Emeritus. In 1998 The New England Association of Teachers of English named Stanizzi The New England Poet of the Year.

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