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Three Poems by Dallas Lee

John Doe

Can't imagine being dead, void of hope, though, Lord
I've tried. I once saw a man's head six-feet downslope

from the railroad tracks where that afternoon

he'd curled up for a nap behind the News-Tribune.

Peaceful as a child's lost ball, the bloodless thing lay.

Police guessed *how*, but *why* was hard to say, the way
the khaki'd corpse slumped north-south between east-west rails,

knees drawn, left hand tucked, right relaxed on a hip, gripping

an unlit pipe. Any chance, I asked, that a crime's
been done, that a murderer staged this casual scene?

"Well," the cop said, "mystery is, why's his head not flat
as a dime? Boxcar wheel lopped it like a guillotine."

Told my wife about John Doe. She said, "Many's the time

I've seen you napping, flopped dead. Face twitching with dreams."

Then I knew. It's not the dying but the being
dead I dread – the vacant, derelict head.

Love Field, 1961

Here's how safe that world was:
a young man could walk a broken-hearted girl
all the way to the gate,

kiss her goodbye, and in a rush of release take the stairs
– right there – two at a time

to the observation deck,
light a Lucky Strike and smoke with cinematic nonchalance
while the DC-3 warmed its engines –

and as the plane
rolled and turned from the gate,
raise a final wave of dismissal, then
– cool as Bogart – flick that smoldering butt

only to see it sucked by the propellers' down-wash
onto the wing and sent bouncing toward the spot
– right there! – where the fuel truck
had just spilt no more than a teardrop

and wonder

wonder by the witness of fifty years imagining
if a world ended then and there –

if any kiss
or even a word of life lived thereafter
could possibly be true.

Monkey Wrench

Patience was plentiful
in our little frame house,
I just never could find it
in my dad's toolbox.

Dallas Lee is a writer with a career in journalism (primarily The Associated Press and The Atlanta Journal-Constitution) and in speech and scriptwriting. His poems have appeared in ConnotationPress, and upcoming this fall), in The Cortland Review and Mia Magazine. He is the author of The Cotton Patch Evidence, the Story of Clarence Jordan and the Koinonia Farm Experiment (Harper & Row). He is a native of Graham, Texas, a graduate of Baylor University, and lives in Atlanta with his wife, Mary Carol.

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