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Unraveling

Heavy traffic for a Saturday
as the missionaries make their rounds
door to door.

Under the grapefruit tree,
we hear the bell ring twice and wait.

He laughs at my stupidity
and explains how it's not morning,
but grief.

With a kindness unlike any ever known,
he points to the prettiest rock in the yard.

Not being one for words,
I stroke the side of his face like a lover,
but all he wants from me is a glass of water.

I walk backwards through branches, over shit, to safety
-- Surely they've left by now.

When I return, it's Christmas.

He smiles, full knowing

I forgot on my way down the hall.

"What took so long?"

Before I can answer

he's gone,

leaving me with a feeble minded reply.

Veterans' Parade

Marked the page with a strand of hair
that landed safely on the bathroom tile.

He swore he'd return it one day
instead kept it as a souvenir.

When in need he reads the part

about the soldier who dreams
he's falling through a hole on the way to Paris.
He wakes mid-fall with his young wife beside him
and although he wants to shake her out of her slumber
to tell her what it all means,
he remembers to forget,
and rolls over in hopes of
returning to where he left off.

Tonight these words bring him
the closest he'll ever be to the man
who sees more of himself
in the neighbor boy
cradling a football on top of a float
streaming in purple and gold
than the blond boy
barely ninety pounds soaking wet,
waiting for a scotch breath bedtime story
about a man who wore a tall hat.

Without clearing his throat – hasn't caught the old man's cough yet –
he tried to make her understand.
There it is
repeating the words as if they were his own.
She wrote it down, properly and concise,
but couldn't tell him what he wanted to hear.
He flicked his Camel on the floor,
ignoring the ashtray on the table
then shuffled the ashes surrounding his feet.
She retraced her steps,
looking in the same spot
knowing it isn't there.
When the snow melts and it smells like mud
it'll surface
shining bright, almost brand new.

While walking the dog

Riding with his shirt open,
they follow him and shriek.
Scarecrow blonde parted down the middle,
pointing to where all the filth gathers.

Hesitating at being a gentleman,
backward swagger, hand down his pants,
he'll release it on the count of five,
he swears
and they know he means well.
Taunting their backsides, he stutters on three.

One chews on the end of a braid,
while the other watches
the Mexicans,
kind, consistent faces
knowing better than to peek.

So obedient, coming when called.
They run past the window
hiding overhead.
He pulls tight – courtesy has never been his strong suit –
and now it's gone.

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Not quite sure what to do with herself after receiving her MA in English from Eastern Illinois University, **Mandy Solomon** moved to St. Louis, MO. When she wasn't schlepping plates at an "upscale diner," Mandy sent out countless resumes, which is how she ended up in Arizona. Currently, Mandy is an Instructor of English at Arizona State University and also teaches part time at Mesa Community College. Mandy has read her work at the Dignity House, a rehabilitation center for former prostitutes; and to fortunate friends who have offered her an ear. The *SNReview* is her first publication.