

John Kristofco

Sister

One of four of us remaining,
victim and combatant both,
refugee inside the house our father built,
as innocent and guilty as anyone
who looks out for herself,
finds a way from here to there
and back.

She is choked off by the things
that fill her rooms and halls,
sitting in the middle like a cinder,
raised by a sun that never gave a damn
whom or what it scorched or shaded,
faded like the colors of our parents' walls,
painted over, pock-marked from a pitted life,
she stares out at the world that hardly noticed,
glaring "what's your problem?" as it passes on
to lives unlike the one that holds her there,
bent within a body that's surrendered,
though she's never shown the instinct
of raising up her flag.

The World of Geology

1960

A gift when I was twelve because
I gathered stones, kept them in a box,
set them out to see.
I wrapped it in clear plastic,
held it like a sacred text, careful not to stretch the spine,
smelled the print and paper every time.
I'd nod off at the science but surrender to
canyons, rivers, mountaintops,
the brushstrokes of the planet,
ten million years' 'before and after,'
just a heartbeat in the universe.
It reminds me now, as then,
how small we are,
how short our miles, days,
and is as much to hold as read
like the geode's lifetime
that looks at me in pity,
at the frail skin and bone,
the enormity of ignorance,
the absurdity of pride.

Orbit

we watch the comet come, go,
throw off embers of its life
to scratch a language from the night
like us,
make sense of awkward orbit,
'nothingness,' made up like 'time,'
to label things we cannot understand,
straight line doctrine
in an ever-curving world

John P. Kristofco, from Highland Heights, Ohio, is professor of English and the former dean of Wayne College in Orrville. His poetry, short stories, and essays have appeared in over a hundred different publications, including: *Folio*, *Rattle*, *The Bryant Literary Review*, *The Cimarron Review*, *Poem*, *Grasslimb*, *Iodine*, *Small Pond*, *The Aurorean*, *Ibbetson Street*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Blueline*, and *Sheepshead Review*. He has published three collections of poetry, *A Box of Stones*, *Apparitions*, and *The Fire in Our Eyes*. He has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize five times.