**Beginnings are Brutal**

Claire Scott

Like the first day of kindergarten

when no one spoke to you except the teacher

who mispronounced your name. No one

sat next to you during snack when your mother

hadn’t packed anything. Too blitzed

to get out of bed. You watched

other kids eat chips and Cheetos,

chatting away while your stomach rumbled

and you pretended everything was fine.

You wanted to go home.

But you learned, didn’t you. You made a friend,

played jacks, joined in kick ball

and started to look forward to school.

What of moving to senior housing

on the twenty-third floor, overlooking

a parking lot filled with scraggly weeds

and spent syringes. A miniscule apartment

built with Mongolian gerbils in mind. No room

for your books. Ta-ta Austin and Steinbeck.

Dishes and pots and pans balanced like Jenga

towers on a tiny shelf over a two-burner stove.

Giving up a spacious kitchen and garden

because your knees are too cranky to pull

fractious weeds and you can no longer read

recipes for Fettuccine Alfredo or crispy fried chicken.

Dinner at 4:30, bingo at six.

People shuffling on tennis ball walkers

down faded halls that go on forever,

like Migraine headaches or irrational numbers.

Memory care available in case. Nurses

patrolling the corridors like prison guards

waiting to catch you stepping on a crack.

*Fantasia* screening at seven.

Will I learn to live out the dull days, watching

my few hairs fall out, wondering about a wig.

An inmate held against my will. I want to go home.

Waiting for the excitement of Mr. Drake’s

or Miss Walter’s demise to break the monotony

with a little coffee and poppy seed cake. A few

speeches from kids and grandkids, filled

with saccharin stories that all sound alike.

Endings are brutal too.