

## Wilderness House Literary Review 9/2

*William L. Alton*

### **The Desert**

Why would you come to the desert so late in life? The sun roars here. You come from water and wind. Spring is the only rain here. Wild flowers dress the stones and dunes for a short time before everything is burned brown and gray as ash tossed carelessly from a fire. What are you looking for? When the cacti grow, they grow tall and round, their needles reaching for the flesh around your ankles. You have to be careful where you walk. Wear a hat and sunglasses. Protect yourself from the dust that rises in the wind all summer and into the fall. Did you come here to die? Your bones would be a lovely addition to the chimes hung from the junipers. I don't understand your desire. It strikes me as foolish and a little wild hearted. This is a place people pass through, but you've brought everything with you and set up a new life for yourself. What happened to your family, your friends? Am I being too forward? I just want to understand.

**The Funeral**

A black cloth covers the table. A candle burns dimly in the center of it in front of the photo of him hugging you by South Twin lake. Juniper trees grow in the background, bent in like old women after a life of work and ponderosa pines straight as soldiers. His body is hidden in a box on a stand at the front of the church. A priest says his prayers, ticking off the beads of the rosary. You deliver the eulogy, telling of the time you dropped cherries out of a tree onto a passing car and how he brought you into the house with a stern word. When you finish, we carry him out to the hearse and to the graveyard with its pile of dirt covered with green plastic tarps and the chairs lined up under the canopy. We leave him there, in a hole they will fill when we have all gone home to mourn and eat.