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Tread Soft Here

K.L. Dryk

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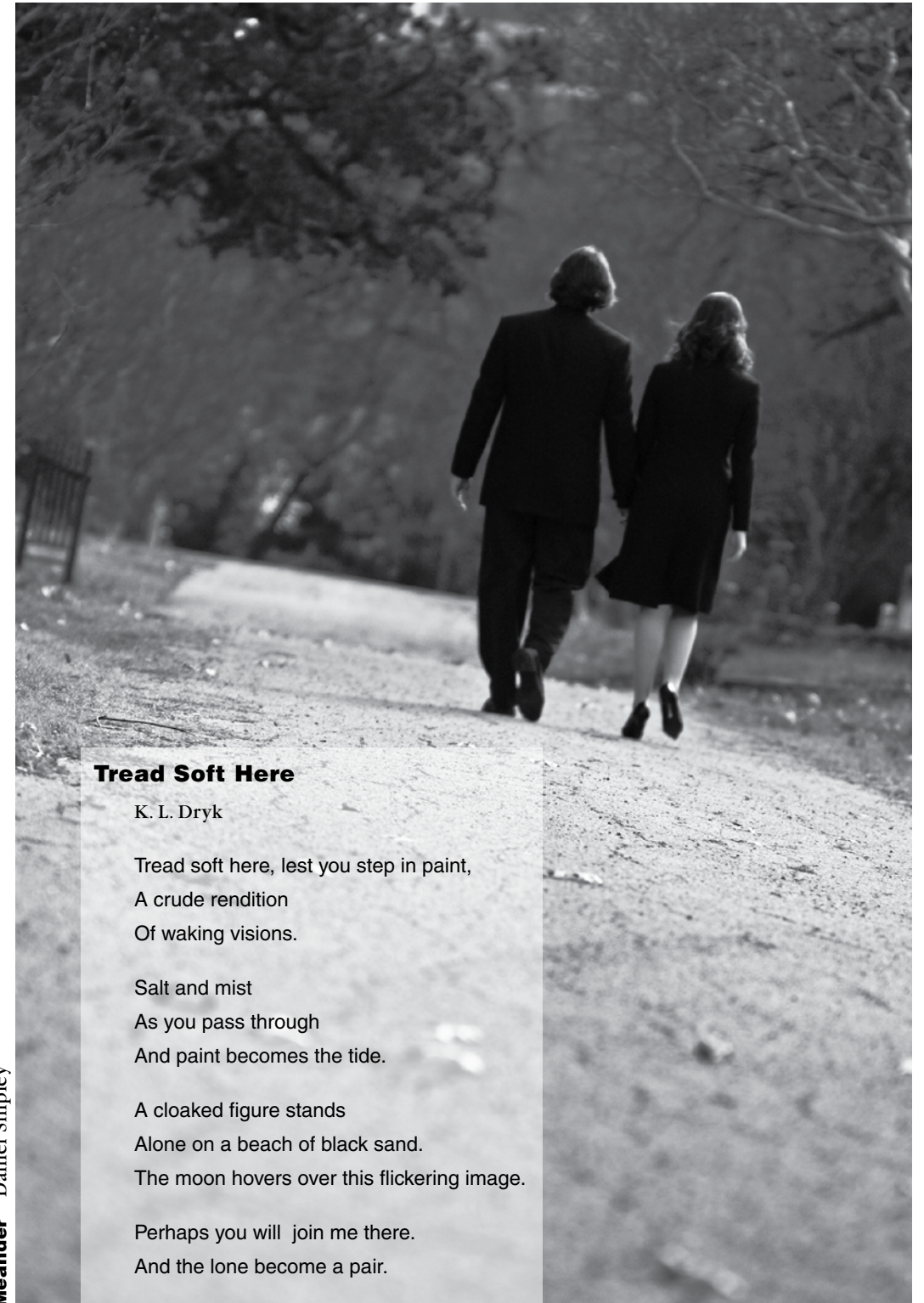
Some of the children in my school made rude comments to them about wearing their old clothes. One day I saw one of the Indian girls wearing one of my own old dresses, but I didn't say anything to her. In fact, most of them didn't speak much English. When I got home from school that day, I asked my mom what I should do. I explained to her that some children were making rude comments to them about wearing hand-me-downs.

My mom said, "It's important to be kind to them, help them, and be their friend. If you see someone wearing your old dress, say, 'You look very nice in that blue dress today,' but never mention that it was your blue dress before it was theirs. That would be unkind. They are a proud people. As you know, you have two great-grandmothers who are Indian. They are proud of their heritage, and you should be too."

As an adult, I have continued to work with people with disabilities. I worked in church as an interpreter for the deaf and later in the public schools, signing for deaf children at all grade levels.

Adelma had opened a whole new world for me that I never dreamed would ever be within my reach. Even the time I spent alone drawing cartoons in the back of my third and fourth grade class has proven valuable. My students today are delighted when I draw pictures of them, such as my sketch of the three second graders standing in front of a row of computers and staring through a window into the adjoining class. Not only are they delighted to see themselves in the picture, but their parents often ask for copies. My hearing impaired students are especially fond of my sketch of myself as their interpreter wearing my "Hands in Harmony" choir shirt.

It has been many years since I was that little girl in elementary school who couldn't read and was sent on errands or simply sat alone in the back of the classroom drawing pictures. As I look back, I can see how being excluded, though painful at the time, was in some ways a blessing. The experience helped me develop my talents and my sensitivity to others. In all reality, dealing with my disability has helped to make me who I am today.



Tread Soft Here

K. L. Dryk

Tread soft here, lest you step in paint,
A crude rendition
Of waking visions.

Salt and mist
As you pass through
And paint becomes the tide.

A cloaked figure stands
Alone on a beach of black sand.
The moon hovers over this flickering image.

Perhaps you will join me there.
And the lone become a pair.

Meander Daniel Shipley