

POETRY | FALL 2021

A Partner's Secret

By Brian Ascalon Roley

She does not know that in childhood
I spoke with a speech impediment.

These days my students bring in notes
inform me they have hidden or not so hidden
disabilities
for which they are entitled
accommodations they discuss openly
to the class.

But my childhood occupied
a different time. High school
classmates put an autistic girl in a trash
can with impunity, and teased a deaf boy
relentlessly in front of hippie teachers.
Back then a stutter
was something my psychology
professor (who wrote the famous textbook)
made fun of while I sat silent
in a Wesleyan auditorium
and the artsy girl next to me
laughed so hard she cried.

At 17, I learned my father once had one
too. He confided in me as we left the theater
after watching Michael Palin
tormented by the actor everybody loved, Kevin
Kline, to the Westwood audience's delight
and I blushed
realizing that Dad had noticed
that I'd laughed too

when Palin had to swallow his beloved pet
fish because he could not utter
proper words.

Brian Ascalon Roley is a professor and 2020 National Endowment of the Arts Literature Fellow. He has received additional fellowships, research appointments and awards from the University of Cambridge, Cornell University, the Ohio Arts Council, the Djerassi Foundation, Ragdale, Hambidge, the VCCA and others. His books include *American Son: A Novel* (W.W. Norton), a *Los Angeles Times* Best Book, *New York Times* Notable Book, Kiriya Pacific Rim Prize Finalist, and winner of the Association for Asian American Studies 2003 Prose Book Award, among other honors. His fiction, nonfiction, hybrid work, and poetry have appeared in numerous journals and in anthologies published by Norton, Penguin and elsewhere, including several bestselling books in the Philippines. *The Last Mistress of Jose Rizal and Other Stories* (Northwestern University Press) appeared in 2016. Most recently, *Ambuscade* (2021) won the Finishing Line Press Open Chapbook Competition. He is currently Professor of English at Miami University of Ohio. More info at www.brianrole.com

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