

A Poem by Lynn P. Elwell

Rust-Belt Rinpoche

I took the red-eye East to see my father for the final time. My mother met me at the baggage carousel and following a perfunctory hug asked; *You're not wearing those football shoes to the funeral are you?* pointing to my scuffed Dexters. *Any chance there's vermin in that ?* She meant the beard I had grown since our last meeting. *Did you bring a suit?* I confessed I didn't own a suit.

So off we went to Andy's Clothiers, a run-down haberdashery beside a derelict steel mill on a soot-encrusted street in the town of Braddock, Pennsylvania. The July heat and humidity pressed down upon us like a malevolent blanket. Andy was a man of ample girth and his lime-green polyester shirt was soaked with sweat. The sparse hair on his bald head resembled strands of black seaweed.

Andy, make him look good she demanded and Andy responded: *He always looks good, you just wished he'd dress a little better.*

The hefty tailor's rejoinder hit me like a dope-slap. I had the urge to shower him with Lotus blossoms and pronounce him Rinpoche. However, the thrumming of the rickety ceiling fan, the constant buzzing of horse flies lulled me into a kind of dreamy trance.

Through half-closed eyelids, I watched as she chose the ugliest suit in the store -- an ill-fitting monstrosity with a green metallic sheen. It was the perfect costume for the painful week that lay ahead.

Funeral over, I sat on the runway in a West-bound plane wearing my Dexters and beard. My funeral suit remained behind -- stashed in an airport dumpster.

Lynn P. Elwell is a retired research scientist and teacher. He has had poems published in over a dozen literary journals including: *Poem*, *Blue Unicorn*, *the Oyez Review*, *Passages North*, *Ship of Fools*, and the *Homestead Review*.