

Michael McDowell

## The Long Beach Theatre

The Long Beach Theatre printed a month's worth of movies in a brochure that opened like our grade-school report cards listing not grades but movies that changed every three days.

Sometimes after dinner our mom would drop us off,  
five siblings, for the current show.

A narrow set of cushioned seats faced forward.  
Wallpaper cornstalks towered over us.

After the movie, we'd walk the two miles home along the beach.  
Far from town lights, we were only voices talking in the darkness.  
We kept the crashing surf a safe distance to the right  
as we walked barefoot on the wet sand.

After it seemed we should be at Seaview,  
we wondered if we'd missed the approach  
and were headed towards Beard's Hollow  
with the rock wall of North Head jutting into the ocean.

We walked with our arms stretched in front of us  
in the absolute darkness, anticipating the sudden basalt,  
wondering about broken fingers, bloodied noses and lips.

With arms outstretched like sleepwalkers  
or a set of Frankenstein's monsters lurching toward their doom,  
we'd stumble onto the deep ruts leading to the Seaview approach,  
find the crumbled rocks of its welcome flat bed, and head inland  
where we knew to expect a glowing porch light,  
a baby brother already asleep,  
and the comfort of sand-sprinkled sheets.