

**The First Two Pages: “Pentecost” by Eve Fisher**  
**From *Me Too Short Stories: An Anthology*,**  
**edited by Elizabeth Zelvin (Level Best Books)**

The *Me Too Short Stories* anthology gave quite a few of us a place to tell a story that we knew all too well. “Pentecost” is set in small town Laskin, South Dakota, and in my first couple of pages, the return of the native shows how conservative a rural small town can be:

It was a big deal when Darla Koenig was inducted as the first female pastor in Laskin, South Dakota. Small towns are highly resistant to change, and even though it was 1990, there were still many people in Laskin who didn’t believe women should be pastors at all. Luckily, none of them were members at St. Paul’s Lutheran. But then, as Jack Elstad, the pastor of First United Church said, “Country churches have to take what they can get these days.” His wife, Joan, capped it: “After that scandal with the church secretary and the organist? St. Paul’s is lucky to get anyone.”

I think we can all guess what happened between the secretary and the organist, which is a foreshadowing of worse to come.

Meanwhile, everyone has Darla under a microscope:

Darla was a widow, with one daughter, Berry, in grade school. They moved into the Dakota View Apartments, a cheap apartment on the first floor. Portia Davison, one of Darla’s parishioners, reported after a welcoming get-together that the Koenigs had a lot of old furniture and more books than anyone would know what to do with. Janet Olson, the school librarian, said Berry was smart as a whip. Wade Sillerson said Darla looked a lot older than he remembered, and he didn’t like her hair. Just about everyone tried to get her on one of the committees, clubs, and boards in town, but she told everyone that she had to get established before she could tell where she could do the

most good. Linus Scholte, pastor of the Netherland Reformed Church, said, “Where she could do the most good? Maybe the idea is to do her good by letting her in and showing her how we do things around here.” His wife Joanne said, “Maybe she’s shy,” without looking up from her knitting.

A couple of points: Darla’s husband must have died fairly recently, because Berry is still very young. The Netherland Reformed Church is ultra-conservative; but there’s a flicker of independence in Joanne. Meanwhile,

Berry was wild about dancing, so Darla signed her up for ballet classes. They met on the third floor of the old Laskin City Building, in a large space with genuine hardwood floors. Laskin was an old fashioned town, and almost every little girl still took piano and/or ballet for at least a year or two. Since boys also took piano lessons, there were at least half a dozen piano teachers in town, but Mary Lenvik was the only dance teacher. Her monopoly—and her marriage to Orville Lenvik, the VP of the local bank—meant that she had the leverage to persuade the city to let her put up mirrors along one wall and portable bars despite the fact that the room was also used for various meetings.

“Wow!” Darla said, looking around the dance studio. “This is so huge compared to the old armory. That’s where we used to take dance classes.”

Mary Lenvik cocked her head slightly. “When was that?”

“Almost forty years ago. I was six years old and chubby with it. Mrs. Bodegaard was the teacher, and she did not hesitate to let me know I had no future.” Mary’s foot lightly tapped the floor. “But I loved it anyway. I’d have done more, but my father got a job down in Lincoln when I was nine, so we moved, and my ballet career ended. It’s a shame you don’t have showers up here. I remember how sweaty we all used to get.” Mary winced. “But this is great. I’m renting the office at the end of the hall. Our apartment’s too small for a home office, and almost everyone at St. Paul’s lives in Laskin, so this will be handier for office hours.”

Darla settled in. Her daughter was happy at school; she was reasonably happy at St. Paul’s. On ballet nights, she worked late, and sometimes she went over to watch her daughter and the other girls

practice. The sound of their feet slapping, sliding, thudding on the sprung wood; the familiar smell of young sweat; the multiplication of curved arms in the mirrors; the sound of classical greatest hits—all mingled in a hypnotic nostalgia that sometimes hurt.

Everyone seemed amazed how quickly she learned everyone's name and found her way around, forgetting the fact that she'd actually spent her childhood there. Sometimes Darla found it hard to believe herself. People had changed so much.

Meanwhile, we have the scene. An old building in a small town. A banker's wife who's in charge of everything. The young girls, all lined up in front of mirrors, in a much used room. Offices all around—and considering how old-fashioned Laskin is, Darla is undoubtedly the only woman renting one of them. What happens is going to happen here. To very young girls. And whoever the predator is, Darla will know him, despite what changes age has wrought, because she was born and bred there. And once she was a very young girl, in a much used room.

#

**Eve Fisher's** mystery stories have appeared regularly in *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*. Her website is [www.evefishermysteries.com](http://www.evefishermysteries.com); she's part of the mystery writers' blog SleuthSayers. A retired university history professor, Eve still writes historical articles, including "The \$3,500 Shirt—A Lesson in Economics," which appeared on the BBC and became part of an economics textbook. Her science fiction story, "Embraced," was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Eve is president of the Alternatives to Violence Project in South Dakota, leading non-violence workshops in prisons.