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Performance Poets

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PERFORMANCE POETS

Dressed in boots and camouflage,
 shooting an empty pistol he leaps
 over tables, over chairs, ranting
 about Serbs, apartheid, faulty pop-top cans.
 The teacher mutters, "Ambitious,"
 classmates shuffle papers,
 a woman works on a hangnail.

Swaggering back to his desk, he listens
 to a girl in a drifting black dress
 whisper her "Ode to a Prairie Flower."
 The teacher murmurs, "Lovely,"
 students applaud.
 He sneers, gazes out the window,
 secretly admires her images.

Next day he pours out a love lyric —
 a longing to care for the girl
 as if she were a philodendron on his coffee table.
 His voice cracks, his hand reaches toward her.
 She snickers.
 Laughter spreads like a virus through the room.

Shoulders hunched, collar up,
 he muscles the departing poets aside,
 runs home, fills his notebook
 with thoughts from a new mine:
 how her pale eyes glint hard as diamonds,
 her laughter sweeps him away.

— *Constance Vogel*

CHICAGO

Off the train we move,
 person to person
 recycling gas-fumed oxygen
 sharp angry honks
 screeching tires
 whooshing air brakes.
 You welcome me, Chicago
 wrap your arms around
 so tight
 I suffocate.

— *Patricia Petros*