Chicago

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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