

Praying Mantis

by [Steven Deutsch](#) (June 2024)



Praying Mantis– Werner Drewes, 1944

Praying Mantis

We always celebrated Easter
with a bucket of KFC,
coleslaw, and biscuits
at the picnic table
in that little park
by the school.

No bonnets, no frocks,
no parades.

I was seven or eight

the first time
we pulled up in the old
Packard Eight
to unload lunch.

All of a sudden,
my potbellied dad
jumped backward
nearly losing the chicken.

He pointed to the windshield
where the oddest bug
I'd ever seen
sat goggle-eyed
and grooming.

We had learned
from an early age,
that mantises
were never to be disturbed.
"The cops will lock
you away," my brother offered—
presaging his future,

I got up close to stare.
All angles—joints and eyes.
But, I was eight—
the skinniest guy in the neighborhood—
no meat, just joints and blue eyes
that popped from my head.

Two bugs sharing a windshield
as the sun starts down.

Roaches

Dad said the tenement shuddered
when the furnace finally
flamed out.

It was 1 A.M on a February
Saturday, and by sunrise
there was no way to stay

warm. We wore
everything we owned
and huddled over the kitchen stove.

Around us,
Brownsville burned.
The tenements

and brownstones
had not been kept up,
and needed repairs

that went beyond
string and tape.
The landlords fled

“to wherever cockroaches
go in the day,” mom said,
with her usual flair

for words.
We moved in with
mom’s mom

for the next few months
in a tiny apartment
on Riverdale Avenue.

My grandmother
hated my father
and fought with my mom,

but at night
and in the morning
I was warm.

Seven Mountains

At the top of this hill
is the cabin we shared
when so young
and unworldly

we thought that spring
would last forever.
It was beautiful here.
How could we know

how flimsy
our futures were.
Most nights
we'd sit on the porch

and watch a truck
or two struggle
up seven mountains—
long before the four lane.

Long before our lives
said hurry up.
Time knows
just one direction—

up and over

and on.

Remember the blues
harmonica I once

played. Tunes so
hauntingly sad—
we never understood why,
did we—until time explained it.

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Steve Deutsch is poetry editor of *Centered Magazine* and was the first poet in residence at the Bellefonte Art Museum, helping to create Stanza, a room dedicated to poetry. His Chapbook, *Perhaps You Can*, was published in 2019 by Kelsay Press. His full length books, *Persistence of Memory* and *Going, Going, Gone*, and *Slipping Away* were published by Kelsay. In 2022, his full length book, *Brooklyn*, was awarded the Sinclair Poetry Prize from Evening Street Press. *Seven Mountains* will be published this summer.

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