ILONA MARTONFI

Mikulás nap (Saint Nicholas Day)

In your childhood house
sixth of December, Mikulás nap
in the morning
mother braids your hair
ties it with red polka dot ribbons

buttermilk boiling
on the woodstove

reddish-yellow Beno on the chain
chickens’ cackling.

Bavarian chalk hills ridge
Danube river boglands

rubble on the old airfield strip
ice-covered bomb craters

you live in an old Luftwaffe hangar: Halle # 7
two-story red brick house attached to a factory shed

roofless hallway
leaded windows, blasted

unpainted cement floors
short white cotton curtains.

Grandmother Mariska’s Lebkuchen
chocolate Mikulás in cellophane

Dominican nuns in long black habits,
pigtailed Magyar refugee girl of nine
in the classroom, movie days,
blinds hang closed,

Herr Lehrer, Anton Mathes,
fourth grade teacher, molesting you.

Ilona Martonfi is the author of three poetry books, Blue Poppy (Coracle Press, 2009), Black Grass (Broken Rules Press, 2012), and The Snow Kimono (Inanna, 2015). Ilona has published in Vallum, Accenti, The Fiddlhead, and Serai. She is also the recipient of the QWF 2010 Community Award.

DONNA LANGEVIN

Dinah Nuthead*
Saint Mary’s Historic City, Maryland, 1660

You leering old lawyer!

How easy to guess your thoughts
when I grip the press’s long black handle
we call the devil’s tail.

My bosom bouncing and heaving
as I push and pull the lever
that lowers the platen on to the press board
after the letters are inked
I wager you wish you were Old Nick himself unlacing my bodice while I pump his tool that never tires unlike your own member.

Later, when you doze like a dog by the hearth waiting for your contracts to dry
I stroke a G and a D, and pray you never discover
I’d give a slice of my soul to learn the couplings of letters that can spell the sun, moon and stars the secrets of warts and wings and fly me past drudgery.

I can’t stop playing with the alphabet-blocks lined up in the devil’s hell-box though I’m scared by the i’s severed head the teeth of the E and the Y that insists on asking why must a woman who teaches herself to read be suspected of witchery?

*Dinah Nuthead helped her husband run a printing press in St. Mary’s Historic City, Maryland circa 1660. Though she probably knew the letters of the alphabet, she couldn’t read or write. At that time, judges, lawyers, and clergymen were the only ones who were literate.

Donna Langevin’s latest poetry collections include In the Café du Monde (Hidden Brook Press, 2008), and The Laundress of Time (Aeolus Press, 2015).