**Austenitic Class**

On the banks of the Mahoning, from “salt-lick,”

Better suited to Urban Dictionary’s “made a fool of,”

Stands a city whose knees are wobbly with rust,

Whose Golden Age we call Once Upon a Time, Long Ago,

Back in the Day, slow to corrode.

Its streets, full of bird-song, raspy from smokestack fumes,

Once shining like steel, now modge-podged in bitterness

And broken back fragments, crushed-pill powder, and sugar-spun promises

Paid for by ancestors with last names full of consonants,

Or donors playing savior to a crumbling community

Whose heart is a cold blast furnace.

Mystery bomb fragments still litter the North Side,

Particles lingering from the summer of ‘62,

Violence has always had a place here.

Missing limbs, and bullet wounds,

Shotgun shells, silver-sleek and whistling,

Beaten bodies under ghost white sheets,

Their bruises blossoming in the night.

In the City of You, we bury our grief.

Mass on Sunday, a memorial at the end of the week,

Black suits shine like coal, bills left unpaid by the stove.

A whisper of love: “Didya eat?”

In Youngstown, darling, life is sour.

But sometimes, it’s watermelon-juice-dripping- down-your-chin sweet.

You can “have yourself a happy,”

Gathering like briquettes in union halls, and at cookie tables,

Making footprints in the iron dust with steel-toed feet.

In Youngstown, we cling to the past, hold hands with our lore,

Too stubborn to wait for God to settle the score.

After all, we are the austenitic class, resistant to decay.

We build tomorrow on rusted pillars of ore,

Proud to surrender ourselves to the clay.