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Gone Gentle

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Gone Gentle

Mike Vanden Bosch

Bert feels born to fight; from boy to man,
though his Father tempts him daily to mercy,
he fights all comers. At eighteen, two beers

fog his windows, twist his fists into weapons.
Cops coax in parrot voices, preachers preach
peace, but Bert swats sermons off like flies.

The army calls, but bayonets bore him, so he goes
airborne, floating like a crow behind enemy lines
to find new foes. His fists now grip rifles, but thrills

elude him until a spirited recruiter enlists him.
Retraining lasts until Time's a fist in Bert's face.
Like a sturgeon on a gaff, he wriggles to be free

until love uncurls his teeth-scarred knuckles.
His feet look for narrow roads, his hands hunger
to heal, his arms arc to hug. He visits pilgrims

clutching to life's rim, puts knuckles around his
harmonica, and until he dies, plays "Old Black
Joe" into the fog in which gray children gaze.