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## War Games

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# War Games

*To Wilfred Owen*  
Mike Vanden Bosch

At six we threw stones at all tin signs  
or cans or mailboxes until we'd grieved  
our child-wide world of wonder with grenades  
our cheeky hands could clutch and heave.

Then we slung smooth stones with sling-  
shots cut from crotches of a tree branch,  
breaking high windows we could barely see,  
our fun tripling with our mindless range.

One silent sacred Christmas we got a begged  
for bee-bee gun and then shot pigeons, even  
turtle doves, unarmed feathered parachuters,  
night spies invading from the darkened heaven.

At sixteen we stashed bee-bee guns with  
slingshots and bought rifles until ripe  
with power we could shoot ring-necked  
pheasants, even a neighbor's shy white

lambs we couldn't see. By twenty we could,  
with decorum, have sweetly lobbed burning  
bursting bombs on unseen enemies, not once  
thinking of cheeks we should be turning.

(This poem appeared in the 1998 edition of *Lyrical Iowa*, a publication of the Iowa Poetry Association.)