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Fighting Spirit

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The Fighting Spirit

by Mike Vanden Bosch

Paul was a fighter—learned from his Pa.
Fearless as a boy he fought all comers, though
between fights, his Pa tempted him to mercy.
At eighteen, two beers down, Paul prowled streets,
fists hungry for teeth; lone cops let him punch
but preachers torpedoed him from the pulpit.

He fought only harder, vowing to be his own man.
The army called him but bayonets bored him,
so he went airborne, became a trainer,
and taught others to fight without mercy.
Years later when his son brawled at a bar,
Paul was at his side—a whirlwind of fists.

It was not surprising that a pro-AM recruiter,
needing a fighter, signed Paul, but how
he used too much beer, a road cop, and an aged
father made the watching world wonder.
First the *Press* printed “Drunk Driving,”
prodding Pa the next day to call on Paul.

Pa hawed until the words came from the wind:
“Paul, you’re fifty, I eighty—still your Pa.”
Fifty years of fathering, but now it hammered,
for Time too was a fist in Paul’s face.
Like a spirit on a hook he squirmed to be free
but slowly uncurled his teeth-scarred knuckles.

From that day on he walked down narrow roads,
hands hungry to heal, arms hungry to hug.
He visited lost pilgrims clutching to life’s rim,
placed his fingers around his harmonica, and
until he died, played hymns of love and mercy
into the nights of shriveled and fearful children.