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Kharkov Park

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The Shot Lady

by Lorna Van Gilst



Aunt Rena, Grandma's sister—the professional woman—
uniform crisp and white,
cap starched and pointy,
perched smartly over wispy curls,
soft high-boned cheeks pinked with rouge,
front teeth patched with bits of gold—

She smelled of antiseptic
and talked to Mother in hushed hospital tones
across my prone aching body,
showing neither sympathy nor shame
as deftly she pulled down my panties
to rub one hip with the cold cotton ball of alcohol
and shoot in a jab of penicillin—

talking all the while
as if it were a normal thing
to jab bare bottoms with syringe
and then seal the painful business
with a cold antiseptic swab.

Kharkov Park

by Lorna Van Gilst

This city park where I sit perched
on chiseled stump
carved deep with characters I cannot read—
a backwards Я, inverted Λ, a pointed steeple on a tower ,
the head and thorax of a little bug —
mysterious symbols, perhaps of flowering Ukrainian romance—

This city park has logs and stumps for seats
and well-worn paths for walks
that criss-cross through the verdant wayward grass.
No power mower shears and shapes the lawn,
No power blower puffs away the leaves.

The order is a pattern self-imposed,
familiar paths across a stretch of green,
walkways of trust between the gray uncertainties.