

## ILONA MARTONFI

### Mikulás nap (Saint Nicholas Day)

In your childhood house

sixth of December, Mikulás nap  
in the morning  
mother braids your hair  
ties it with red polka dot ribbons

buttermilk boiling  
on the woodstove

reddish-yellow Beno on the chain  
chickens' cackling.

Bavarian chalk hills ridge  
Danube river boglands

rubble on the old airfield strip  
ice-covered bomb craters

you live in an old Luftwaffe hangar: Halle # 7  
two-story red brick house attached to a factory  
shed

roofless hallway  
leaded windows, blasted

unpainted cement floors  
short white cotton curtains.

Grandmother Mariska's Lebkuchen  
chocolate Mikulás in cellophane

Dominican nuns in long black habits,

pigtails Magyar refugee girl of nine  
in the classroom, movie days,  
blinds hang closed,

Herr Lehrer, Anton Mathes,  
fourth grade teacher, molesting you.

*Ilona Martonfi is the author of three poetry books, Blue Poppy (Coracle Press, 2009), Black Grass (Broken Rules Press, 2012), and The Snow Kimono (Inanna, 2015). Ilona has published in Vallum, Accenti, The Fiddlhead, and Serai. She is also the recipient of the QWF 2010 Community Award.*

## DONNA LANGEVIN

### Dinah Nuthead\*

*Saint Mary's Historic City, Maryland, 1660*

You leering old lawyer!

How easy to guess your thoughts  
when I grip the press's  
long black handle  
we call *the devil's tail*.

My bosom bouncing and heaving  
as I push and pull  
the lever  
that lowers  
the platen on to the press board  
after the letters are inked  
I wager you wish  
you were Old Nick himself unlacing  
my bodice while I pump  
his tool that never tires  
unlike your own member.

Later, when you doze  
like a dog by the hearth waiting  
for your contracts to dry  
I stroke a G and a D, and pray  
you never discover  
I'd give a slice of my soul  
to learn the couplings of letters  
that can spell the sun, moon and stars  
the secrets of warts and wings  
and fly me past drudgery.

I can't stop playing  
with the alphabet-blocks  
lined up in the devil's hell-box  
though I'm scared  
by the *i*'s severed head  
the teeth of the *E*  
and the *Y* that insists on asking  
*why must a woman  
who teaches herself to read  
be suspected of witchery?*

*\*Dinah Nuthead helped her husband run a printing press in St. Mary's Historic City, Maryland circa 1660. Though she probably knew the letters of the alphabet, she couldn't read or write. At that time, judges, lawyers, and clergymen were the only ones who were literate.*

*Donna Langevin's latest poetry collections include In the Café du Monde (Hidden Brook Press, 2008), and The Laundress of Time (Aeolus Press, 2015).*