

# Praying Mantis

by [Steven Deutsch](#) (June 2024)



Praying Mantis– Werner Drewes, 1944

## Praying Mantis

We always celebrated Easter  
with a bucket of KFC,  
coleslaw, and biscuits  
at the picnic table  
in that little park  
by the school.

No bonnets, no frocks,  
no parades.

I was seven or eight

the first time  
we pulled up in the old  
Packard Eight  
to unload lunch.

All of a sudden,  
my potbellied dad  
jumped backward  
nearly losing the chicken.

He pointed to the windshield  
where the oddest bug  
I'd ever seen  
sat goggle-eyed  
and grooming.

We had learned  
from an early age,  
that mantises  
were never to be disturbed.  
"The cops will lock  
you away," my brother offered—  
presaging his future,

I got up close to stare.  
All angles—joints and eyes.  
But, I was eight—  
the skinniest guy in the neighborhood—  
no meat, just joints and blue eyes  
that popped from my head.

Two bugs sharing a windshield  
as the sun starts down.

## Roaches

Dad said the tenement shuddered  
when the furnace finally  
flamed out.

It was 1 A.M on a February  
Saturday, and by sunrise  
there was no way to stay

warm. We wore  
everything we owned  
and huddled over the kitchen stove.

Around us,  
Brownsville burned.  
The tenements

and brownstones  
had not been kept up,  
and needed repairs

that went beyond  
string and tape.  
The landlords fled

“to wherever cockroaches  
go in the day,” mom said,  
with her usual flair

for words.  
We moved in with  
mom’s mom

for the next few months  
in a tiny apartment  
on Riverdale Avenue.

My grandmother  
hated my father  
and fought with my mom,

but at night  
and in the morning  
I was warm.

## **Seven Mountains**

At the top of this hill  
is the cabin we shared  
when so young  
and unworldly

we thought that spring  
would last forever.  
It was beautiful here.  
How could we know

how flimsy  
our futures were.  
Most nights  
we'd sit on the porch

and watch a truck  
or two struggle  
up seven mountains—  
long before the four lane.

Long before our lives  
said hurry up.  
Time knows  
just one direction—

up and over

and on.

Remember the blues  
harmonica I once

played. Tunes so  
hauntingly sad—  
we never understood why,  
did we—until time explained it.

## [Table of Contents](#)

Steve Deutsch is poetry editor of *Centered Magazine* and was the first poet in residence at the Bellefonte Art Museum, helping to create Stanza, a room dedicated to poetry. His Chapbook, *Perhaps You Can*, was published in 2019 by Kelsay Press. His full length books, *Persistence of Memory* and *Going, Going, Gone*, and *Slipping Away* were published by Kelsay. In 2022, his full length book, *Brooklyn*, was awarded the Sinclair Poetry Prize from Evening Street Press. *Seven Mountains* will be published this summer.

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