

*The 2003 Editors' Prize Contest Winners*

THE  
SPOON  
RIVER Poetry Review

*David Keplinger  
Runner-up*

More Entries from the Notebook of Anton Chekhov

"I refute it thus," a certain scholar said, upon hearing that the stone does not exist. He kicked it, he stubbed his toe really bad on that mystery. Over the surface of the stone, electrons were already erasing the mark he left. That didn't stop him from kicking it again, and yet again, until he'd broken the foot altogether: the bones crushed inside the boot like chalk.

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From the cloakroom a woman appeared, carrying his false leg. She gave it to the man who had fallen. "We're just like a puppet theater," he said, pretending to beat her with the leg.

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A historian: "The whole adventure didn't even happen to me. It's not my story. Look to that hill. Where the old school had been, a new school was built. Where the other children had played, these children wore masks and sang and danced. Like you, I have heard about the other children: how only their jaws were discovered."

\*

For this man, there is a heavy burden to be whole. First, he must become a nothing. A hotel room: he and his lover fast asleep. For this man, is the snow suddenly worse? Is it her husband who bangs on the door? The man will have to rise to ask the banging in. The night is cold and he is naked as he carefully lifts the bolt.

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They are discussing the interior of the apple. The Admiral proclaims it "a darkness and a whiteness at the same time." The other guests are constantly laughing at him. He has spent so many years at sea he can no longer walk without holding onto things.

He would not go to sleep until his father came home. To stay awake the boy would review the faces on the obsolete coins in his collection. In the dark he could name the date and worth by the wear on the face. Other contents of the box he preferred not to touch: the cicada's white thorax that had flinched for a day, the knife his father gave him. His father had instructed him to keep the knife: it having belonged to someone who was dead.

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Years before his career in economics, P. was a very resistant child. One night, he was unfairly sent to bed. They came and turned out all the lights. One half-hearted cricket started up. He had no use for it. The sun still hadn't set: he had no use for it.

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As proof he showed them the photographs he'd taken at restaurants, the blurry figures eating their blurry meals. In the background, a man was playing a violin. The playing arm appeared to be longer than the other. The face of a waiter was a splotch, his eyes unreadable. "You see?" the photographer said, "Nothing holds still in this age."