

THE  
SPOON  
RIVER Poetry Review

Chris Green

Frost versus Frost

Unmovable at center court, feet fixed,  
he preferred labored rallies, a back and  
forth between earth and heaven, Hardy-esque  
swings at suffering—the old resentment.

In the end the only way I could beat  
the old man was to make him run,  
what he hated, the dainty promiscuity  
of drop shots, re. early Edna Millay,  
a flip wrist, the spin of the false-realistic.

I'm the other Frost, not the father, but Carol,  
the boy with the girl's name who kills himself.

His best advice, the one fathers use—  
“Keep your eye on the ball”—never worked.  
Instead, I followed his repertoire of grunts and *fucks!*,  
the violent swipes he'd take at his thighs:  
quick to hit and hate himself, his games  
fits of rage and regret, he went mad  
at his own mistakes, every fault  
his fault, any loss the win it might have been.

He said, “We were sent here to destroy  
each other in honest competition.”  
Frosts are notorious for loss,  
our narrow lives beaten into meaning.  
I know Pop's famous dictum about tennis.  
He knew between living and writing  
the difference is art,  
that a father may be an author,  
but a poem is no son.

A man between, he built a bare green  
rectangle between the barn and house,  
between the poor cow he never milked before

noon and our home that he ruled with fear.  
As if we were characters remembering his poems,  
we did what we were told;  
he worried we were all crazy, even  
himself. What was it in his truisms:  
He said, "Poetry begins with suffering  
and a sense of wrong, with homesickness  
or lovesickness";  
he also said, "There's nothing after this."  
We lived it room to room. He turned to me once,  
suddenly afraid, and said, "People never change."  
I said, "We can't go on living if that were true."

We never could escape the blue haze of hills,  
the stink of wood smoke, balls thrown over the stone wall,  
the reality of farm-house dung or bleat  
of sheep mid-backswing. Walls need repair,  
the grass mown, apples literally picked.  
Tennis was just another landscape.

When he discovered me dead, he made  
the same face as when he lost—his strong brow  
crossed with what I like to think was my win,  
disgust with himself, and general sadness.  
Finding my smile in place, I recall clouds  
came over his great moon as he reached  
down, moved my mouth.

His favorite time to play was dusk.  
He liked creeping moonlight, the glowing white lines  
of tennis at night.  
Our last match was in November, winter  
was coming on, it was getting dark,  
and it began to snow.

Our running made great sliding footprints  
as if faster than our normal selves  
or giants playing at something small.

As it blew, it wasn't skill, but chance,  
no old farmer and son, but the fun  
of almost falling, two glad souls playing  
on green-painted asphalt, laughing like boys.  
One last game before all disappeared into snow.

## Fast Forward Foreign Film

You don't care if I die of sorrow!

*(woman holds cross to her heart, leaves fall, 1940's, a farm)*

Ciao.

Ciao.

She's still in love with you.

*(priest on bicycle, motorcycle with side-car, a barn)*

Nando is such a good man!

*(rabbits are shot)*

Do you know who she slept with?

Half the town.

*(soldier argues with woman in fur stole)*

*(the maid hides)*

*(sign of the cross)*

*(horse drawn cart)*

*(preparing for the engagement feast)*

Ciao.

Ciao.

Ciao.

*(the moon)*

Grandpa finish your soup!

Dear God...

*(more bread)*

*(dumb woman from France, distinguished older man)*

*(rain)*

*(rushing train)*

*(a soldier winks)*

*(eyes meet, families eat)*

*(politics)*  
*(pastries)*  
*(accordion)*  
*(the ring)*

The angel of death is just over your shoulder.  
*(man with heavy eyebrows dies)*  
*(sex in a horse stall)*  
*(confession)*  
*(farewells)*

Ciao.  
Ciao.

*(sun-dappled woods)*  
*(fade)*  
*(dramatic violin, piano)*