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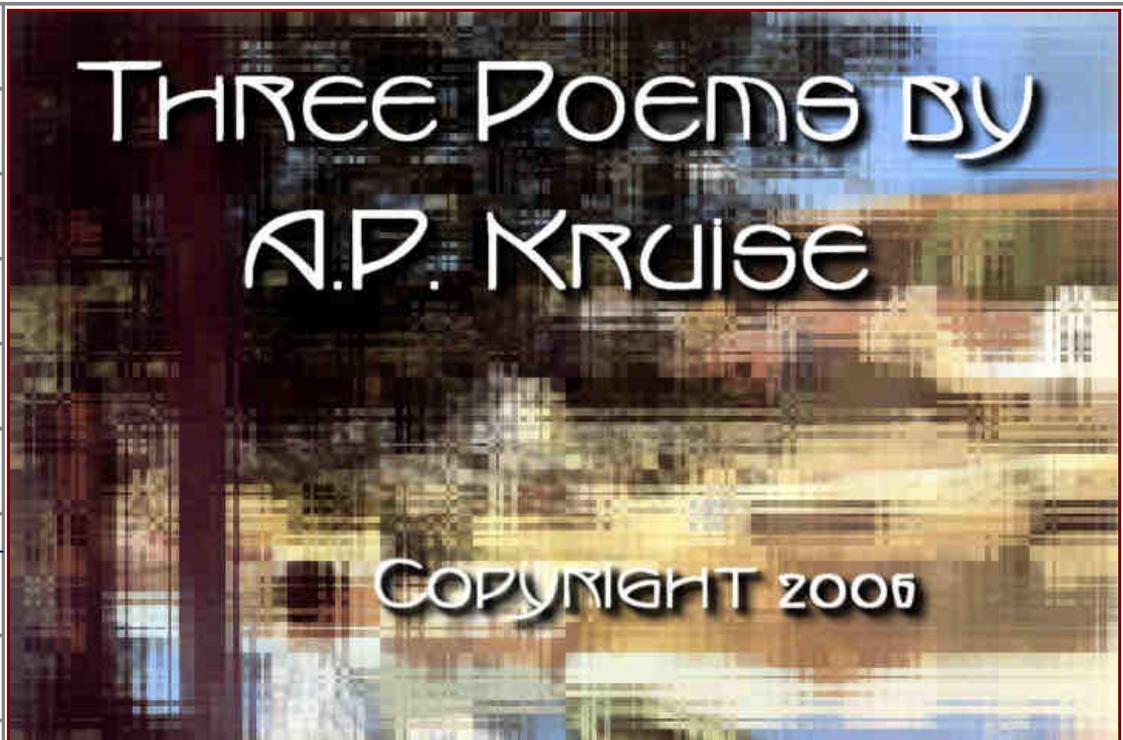
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Short Story of a Short Man

He walks without bending his knees
like he's trying to seem taller.

He tells me
NO

He crashed
a plane once
skinned the backs of cows.
They bled into fertilizer.

I shake my brain.
He writes to me:
"I used to fly."

Tonight is his free night.
His wife at school.
His dogs fed.

He asks me to go
to the river
where the big rock lies
and grass turns into straw.

The river where I kissed
the first husband
the first teacher
the first boyish grin.

The river where cops patrol
and a tongue never tastes salty.

The river where coal
and steel and nuclear waste
and air and soil

and butane
reflect off water.

What is Left

Across the bar
she sits
ice cubes melting
in the palm of her hands. She stares at him
with charcoal eyes.
Red light flickering above the pool table
blurs his vision.
He knows of her.
He smells her tobacco breath.
Her outline close enough
he can touch her chewed fingernails.
He hears her scratchy voice.

“Darling, don’t leave.”

He sips his drink
the wine turns stale
the air turns raw.

He sits
in silence
and thinks

about the snow that’s coming
and how quickly it will pass.

Elegy for Trishy

Two cigarettes
after the plane ride from West Palm,
and you come to sleep
on the family room couch
for the last time
Christmas 99.
Oh the sweet smell of Virginia Slims!
filtering in from the back porch.

We would never visit.
Not enough of anything
to fulfill the promises
my mother made.
Your last stroke
drove her to buy
another pair of shoes.

God burned you
with nervous ashes
and we all saw
your pale skin tighten
around your bones.

I had to find a place
to cough
and smoke
and think
about the black asphalt
hitting the soles of my shoes.
A place where weeds can bud
and human footsteps
can only be heard
past the stillness of trees.

A.P. Kruse will graduate from the MFA program at Goddard College this July. Her poetry has appeared in *Pitkin in Progress* and *BloodLotus*.

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