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**Spicy Guy**

Carol Kavanagh

I dash along the spice trade route  
down the alley across streets  
dodging motorbikes and cars  
to the bakeshop's back door  
fling it open and clatter down the stairs  
into the darkness.

From cavernous ovens  
the light of licking flames caresses  
greased tables piled with rising confections  
spread out there by my bakery boy.

Flinging off his apron  
snapping it with a flourish  
cinnamon sprinkles fly out  
turn copper by fire's light.  
Inhaling, I leap into his arms.

When we are married  
I will love him all the more  
as we kiss at day's end and I taste  
the sweet sting of cinnamon still on his lips.  
From his collar I'll catch whiffs  
of the only perfume I love.

On laundry day  
I won't wash his white uniform  
only lift it to my nose and inhale  
then fold it carefully  
and place it nicely under my pillow.



unknown internet photo

## The Insect that Changed My Religion

Carol Kavanagh

I used to gently bat mosquitos away — to my peril —  
Now, I'm deaf to Buddhist sayings —  
'Compassion for all beings,'  
'They wish to live as much as you do.'  
'Do no harm.'  
'Do the least amount of harm.'

My own motto is: 'A clean sweep before sleep.'  
I survey the tent ceiling, check every corner.  
Swat, swipe, clap mosquitos between my hands.  
Got 'em all.

Click. Flashlight off.  
Ah, the woods at night:  
smells of moist grasses, whoosh whoosh of tree's leaves  
loon's iridescent cry, and owls who who

Lazing down into sleep a high-pitched whine at my left ear.  
I slap that side of my head. Surely I got her.  
A minute later, half asleep, more whining  
like a motor boat far away on the lake.  
Ouch!  
Click. Flashlight on. She's nowhere to be seen.  
There she is. It's war. I swat, swipe, slap mercilessly. I flail wildly.  
Click. Flashlight off. Plop goes my head on the pillow.

In the morning the battle-field of my tent's walls are blood-stained  
Where my head lay on my white pillow, a halo of blood-turned-brown  
attests to the crown of thorns I endured during the night.

My impact statement:  
Red spots erupt. Red welts arise.  
I can locate every bloody eruption on my body — blindfolded.  
Forget unpleasant. The itch is a pit of despair.  
I apply salves, gulp anti-histamines.

What about self-defence? For the summer season  
I won't be practising Buddhism. I'm sticking with Christianity  
which says absolutely nothing about insects.  
I like their idea of the 'just war'.



Angllin Lake, Sask.  
Photo: Bob Kavanagh

## A Visit to My Grandparent's Farm

Carol Kavanagh

A farm was built and grown by my grandparents  
but they are gone from it and from this earth.  
There's not a trace of white farmhouse or red barn  
or chicken coop or shed or smokehouse.

Long ago the earthly womb surrounded them  
with its amniotic sky, its waves of wheat  
It gave them a home, raised them  
made them suffer, made them happy.

All that remains are the lilac trees they planted  
in a nice neat row. What remains now  
are grandma and grandpa in the lilacs.

The leaves and branches swirl in the wind  
the lilac trunks bend and skirts of green  
bow down to the earth.



Farm buildings in Alberta on a misty morning  
Photo by Carol Kavanagh



Photo by Carol Kavanagh

## Inner Critic

Carol Kavanagh

My inner critic has been reading other poets' poems "which are really good — unlike yours," she said.

I morphed into a muffin with red smarties for eyes and a downturned mouth of liquorice.

"Other poets' poems need to be pondered, figured out and even deciphered. Yours can just be read."

I froze like an ice cream cake with pink rosettes but all blocked up. I wouldn't thaw for weeks.

She whipped me into a frenzy with:  
"Why don't you let the doctors open your brain for a lobotomy —"

A what?

"It prevents seizures of the imagination. Otherwise, you'll never be good enough to get published in the *literary* magazines."

"Some people *love* my poetry."

She meringue-d me with:

"Wouldn't your time be better spent taking care for the poor? The laundry is waiting. You have no underwear."

I said: "Thanks for sharing."



Photo by Carol Kavanagh