

## THE FINAL WHISTLE OF A BEER LEAGUE GOALTENDER

by Brian Bell

Every Friday night, he strapped on pads,  
deflected the chides about his performance  
more deftly than he would the pucks lobbed at him on the ice.

One night I had eight goals on him;  
he would laugh mildly and curse me  
with his gray self-deprecating moustached lip.

Forty-six years were too few to dedicate to hockey.  
In his remission he looked forward to again squeezing  
his now balded head back into his mask  
for a least a few more years.

Goaltenders rarely lose games;  
the clock simply runs out;  
the buzzer sounds.

They buried him in his beloved  
Rangers jersey and equipment.  
His glove only, his waffle was his weak side.

As I approached him lying there this last time,  
I took a worn puck from my suit pocket,  
intent on placing it behind him as a lasting reminder.

"I will haunt you," he threatened in my mind,  
and I took him at his word.  
I pressed the spalled puck into the soft leather of his glove instead.

Content to know that this was his final save,  
that his finest breaths steamed out from the bars in his mask,  
and quickened each time the enemy approached.