Where The Sun Shines Best
This is a work of fictive poetry. Names, characters, places and incidents are either products of the author’s imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or to persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.
THE YELLOW leaves are trampled over by the black boots of three soldiers from the Moss Park Armouries; in uniform, intended not to be seen, nor identified, for their intention and profession is to kill to shoot from a distance, clean and perfect and wipe their minds clean, erase all imperfection of marksmanship. War. War has been declared. War. It is all that’s on their minds. War; and the intention for war declared upon Moss Park.
THERE ARE three other men standing as if at attention, though they are no soldiers; one man’s posture is stooped with old age, another is hampered by Saint Vitus’ Dance, uncertain in his balance and his gait, all three men, crippled civilians, taking puffs from one cigarette, from hand to lip, smoking their jewel of luck found amongst the rotting cold leaves that numb their fingers. A cough drop will clear their lungs, after each passed puff, will make them high, will turn Canada into Florida jaunty and warm, for five minutes, the life of their happiness, and clear the head, to unlock the lungs and watch the pure white smoke rise over their heads, precious as the breath they breathe in this crisp December cold.

THEY ARE passing the stub, passing it, standing under the bodies of maples and the other trees, their names not taught in geography classes in Barbados. They were not names learned by rote and heart, carried here to this wide country of snow and wind and whiteness, to take pause on their daily long journey, their constitutional, in Moss Park, common in its uses, and users, not always swept; condoms, discharged bullet-casings decorating, in silent boasts of manhood, the shooting of anger, desire, hunger after the flesh of women, cheaper rates now that they are east of Jarvis, east of Church and McGill, the prices lower the farther east you go.
I HAVE walked on these artificial, rolled-up leaves, long-lasting and long out-living the fall of foot and instep, flowers of cream plastic, a patch of two red ones, boasting virulence in a man who has lasted longer than the red and yellow fallen leaves from the trees whose names I do not remember.

SQUEEZING THE last puff of joy from the joint disappearing like spit on the lips, they move like soldiers in disarray, shaken by the battle, ragged, marching, “Easy!”, coming in my direction. I can see the last spit of marijuana cigarette leave the lips of the man walking in fits, alcohol and broken legs that barely balance him, who laughs and jogs and plays like a doll sculpted from the two stick-spines of a popsicle. He spits a smouldering last blob of phlegm from deep inside his chest and walks in a straight line, leading his two companions, dragging his feet in the thick dying leaves.
THE LEAVES make the same sound as the poisonous dried black pods of the shack-shack tree in an un-tilled field in Barbados. His head is cut off, beheaded suddenly by my window that is too small to frame his shoulders. No rhythm to their footsteps as they walk like three men on stilts. And I stand and think of popsicles and of men made of cloth dropped from the needle-worker’s sewing machine. And I think of walking in the burning sun in Old Havana, in a square, the playground of dictators; once; now an ordinary square for tourists and the poor and prostitutes; turned into a museum of contemporary knick-knacks and dolls, piece-work for Cuba’s poor and indigent, the works of artists, and the frustrations of poverty: row after row of golliwogs that stare me in the face, locked eyes of brotherhood, and womanhood. I am embarrassed by my pity, as the whores are following me, sticking to my black skin, like leeches, like moles sucking the pity out of my Yankee dollar bills.

MOSS PARK Armouries where men just past puberty wait, their heads buried in the silken pages of the Holy Bible, praying for the luck of the draw and the trigger, to return to this park. They come from the ticky-tacky suburbs where identical and monotonous backyards clean as Pyrex bowls after cornflakes, raked clean as skeletons, as if from plague and household germs, and the influenza from pigs, and bacon at the same hour of suspended morning.
AND YOU are left alone, fumbling with the cord knotted round truth and stupidity and loyalty, thick as the dust you will breathe in Kandahar, if you get there still, to carry out the killing ordered by war, and patriotism; witnesses are absent, and there’s no “bloody Book of Law,” a page of calculus, perhaps, to complicate the way you see things, and camels, and humans, picked out in your sights.

CULMINATING WITH the international success of The Polished Hoe in 2002, Austin Clarke has published ten novels, six short-story collections, and three memoirs in the United States, England, Canada, Australia, and Holland since 1964. Storm of Fortune, the second novel in his Toronto Trilogy about the lives of Barbadian immigrants, was shortlisted for the Governor General’s Award in 1973. The Origin of Waves won the Rogers Communications Writers’ Development Trust Prize for Fiction in 1997. In 1999 his ninth novel, The Question, was shortlisted for the Governor General’s Award. In 2003 he had a private audience with Queen Elisabeth in honour of his Commonwealth Prize for his tenth novel, The Polished Hoe. In 1992 Austin Clarke was honored with a Toronto Arts Award for Lifetime Achievement in Literature. In 1997, Frontier College in Toronto also granted him a Lifetime Achievement Award. In 1998 he was invested with the Order of Canada, and since then he has received four honorary doctorates. In 1999 he received the Martin Luther King Junior Award for Excellence in Writing. In 2012, he won the $10,000 Harbourfront Award. Among his other achievements: Winner of the 2002 Giller Prize and co-winner of the 2003 Trillium Book Award for The Polished Hoe.