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Signs of Past Battle

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Signs of Past Battle

Todd Vens

“Alexander Nevsky” reeled through the auditorium;
what did this victory at the River Neva mean
to the audience of mocking students?
When in rehearsal we sang, “Zhivym boitsam pochyot
i chest, a myortvym slava vechnaya,”
was I praising the battle or wishing to be
back at the dark theater with my hand upon
Tanya’s thigh?

The first concert, the audience of
old alumni slept on, dreaming of fig newtons, slim bodies
in white, fleece dresses, picnics, sex underwater.

I missed that bus, moving singers through the South:
Florida, Oklahoma, Mississippi, Georgia.
Russian words and propaganda were met with quiet
appreciation, sleepy and exquisite,
wherever the bus stopped.
I had already gone when they returned,
my hands deep in fields of blood.
The mezzo sang in city after city
that she would fly to her lover.

We flew — me, my lover —
never far enough from the honest soil.
We’re fighting in dead fields,
knowing the music is trivial,
but still listening.

Belleau Wood

Jim Dietz

I camp in the clipped grass
on the open plain called centerfield,
a graveyard for fly balls,
even when Ruth comes up next inning.
The wool sleeves cling to my body,
sticky from yesterday’s rain,
lingering to haunt me once more of you,
a reminder of what once was
a nightmare on a grassy field
with men running
from station to station,
holding close to their position,
crouching
sprinting
diving,
not worried about the dirt
as shots whiz past,
kicking up dirt and sod,
crackling every so often,
and we raced to our dugouts,
and I couldn’t think of anyone but you,
lying on that summer field, holding
the red seams of your intestines in,
crying “Oh God! Oh God please!”
as I wait for Comb’s fly ball
to come down and strike my glove
like that whistling mortar shell
thirteen years ago.

