

LEONARD KRESS

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*Surplus*

It was one of those army surplus jeeps,  
World War II vintage, the kind you'd see  
advertised in the back pages of comic books.

99 bucks, unassembled, crated to the Colonel's  
house, for his son who built it from the ground up.  
The son, a senior in high school, who shared

his father's military bearing—buzz-cut,  
axle-straight, nothing surplus about them,  
and like the jeep, built for combat terrain.

The father was off in Vietnam and his son  
had his own mission—to transport his band of younger  
friends back along the path through the woods

to the most level and pristine football field ever,  
all the more pure for its lack of bleachers and fans.  
To get there he had re-trench the rutted road,

12 of us crammed in the uncapped windshield-  
less jeep for the 20-minute scuttle to play.  
If I had to describe it now, at this very moment,

I'd say it was as choppy as the final *presto*  
movement of Shostakovich's 6th symphony,  
written on the eve of war. I say this, watching

my daughter on the far right of the stage  
(the world stage) scraping and slapping her bass.  
A ride just as perilous as our jeep run.

We had no equipment other than a ball,  
no goal posts beyond the perfect hedgerows.  
It was to be a game of touch, but it was always more.

It's only now—as I ride out the vertiginous music—  
that I recall the huge fenced-in farm tract  
along the path, with its put-to-pasture racing mares,

and dusty oval where their offspring were pushed  
beyond endurance, prodded, poked, whipped  
into a froth of speed. Or the unshorn lambs,

floating like rain clouds over the hillside,  
their twig-legs an undecipherable scrawl—  
that if it spelled anything, spelled for us

the littleness of everything but the bump  
and grind of slipping gears and our destination.  
Which was, I learned years later,

the back lawn of a secret Mental Hospital  
that catered to children of the international  
rich and famous. Which explains those perfect

striped silhouettes in the huge barred  
casements, above our huddle, shifting when one  
of us went long or button-hooked. And once,

following a wild kick into the pines,  
while the others horsed around by the jeep,  
I saw her—the steel magnate's vision-prone

daughter, the exiled Romanian princess,  
Cary Grant's secret mute sequestered child.  
Having earned ground privileges—

she already had all the others—after  
her third series of electroshocks.  
I know this to be true now, though

I could only intuit it then. For there is  
always the wild ride back, tossed  
and jostled, nearly ejected from the jeep.