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WHEN THE DANCER BECOMES THE DANCE

*Art is not the truth. Art is the lie
that helps us understand the truth.*

Pablo Picasso

The phonograph whirs as its needle lowers, then
violins whisper the key into the lock on
the door, his pistol from the holster. He lays it
on the desk. The flame wavers before lighting his
cigarette. Alone, he paces in the office,
fingers brushing gleaming wood of the furniture
as he passes. The dark ballerina appears,
begins dancing to his music. The violins
lift her into *arabesque penchée*. He reaches
out to stroke her cheek, but she shimmers into the
shaved scarecrow-girl, into dust fluttering in the
sunlight cascading through closed windows. Winter light
embraces him before he dons his uniform
jacket. As each button sighs he becomes the still
partner in the ballerina's *pas de deux*, his
hands skimming smooth fabric. The ballerina and
violins encircle him. Each time he tries to
take her hand, the other girl touches his, then blends
into sunlight, pure on his outstretched hand. Bass and
violas glide him to the chair behind his desk.
He readies the weapon, caresses the metal.
The ballerina pirouettes *en manege* as
he holds its steel length to his jaw, cheek, and temple,
eying her. With each whirl toward the windows, the light
flickers her into the pale girl, into itself.
Ballerina, scarecrow-girl, sunlight, violins
dance *ritardando*. When they glint into the pale
girl again, the trigger jerks under his finger.

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The late autumn sun croons to his back as he writes.
He rises, paces, smoking foreign cigarettes.

The paper mountains on his desk avalanche. He
flicks on music, pours a drink, resettles himself

behind the desk. Violins harmonize with the
scratching of his pen. He remolds some paper hills,

signs others. Suddenly, from beyond his window:
shouting, swearing: *Schmutzige Jude! Hure!* He

twists toward the window, views his guard goading one of
the prisoners: a pale girl, a shaved scarecrow in

faded garb, seems to move, *lento*, to the music.
Toller Hure! the guard growls. The officer shouts

to the man to silence him. The violins soar,
buoy the girl in *arabesque*. Her motion fixes

him: his cigarette burns his fingers. He dashes it,
curses. He positions the phonograph nearer.

The frail scarecrow floats, turns. She pauses after the
crescendo, the neck of her gown fluttering, eyes

opaque. The guard escorts her with the butt of his
rifle. Every morning after, the Kommandant's

music swells his garden, the girl's stiff body sways
near his window, the sun glows on his ashen hair.

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The troupe of tattered women undulates behind
the high barbed wire fence. The chorus of guards' dogs

is almost hoarse. The Kommandant emerges from
the shining car, his sleek boots mirroring the dull

mud. The women's sixpointed gold shrills at him, snipes
at the guards, who scurry to do his orders. His

first inspection lasts hours. Some of the women
swoon as he strides past. He requests them brought forward,

presents them a pistol-gift to remind them of
proper etiquette. All that day, in the rain, the

guards flash, the dogs' leashes tense in vibrato, the
camp inmates invoke alabaster before the

dark of his uniform. Soon the camp trills under
his touch. Nights, his boots on the desk, he conducts the

phonograph with cigarettes: violins partner
the smoke on its delicate dance to the ceiling.

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Before the curtain falls on the first movement of
the new ballet, one of his friends has declared the

five of them desperately in love with the *prima*
ballerina. He scoffs, but through the second half,

the purity of her *grand jeté*, silver-white
in the darkened theatre, infatuates his

beryl eyes. After curtain call, he lets his friends
persuade him backstage. Her lashes are long on her

flushed cheeks. Not having brought roses, they present her
cigarettes. Her laugh forgives. Her has smoked his, so

when they nudge him, his uniform pockets are bare.
He clicks his heels, bows formally: *my duty and*

obedience, leans to graze his lips on her cool
fingers. His friends hush. On their way home, they spy an

old couple with yellow stars. They truncheons and boots
remind the two they are breaking sunner curfew.

His brass knuckles order them to remember who
they are. Then he and his friends saunter home, humming

tunes from the ballet. He hymns the black of her eyes,
the streetlamps casting haloes around his blond hair.

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In the humming auditorium, the spectacled
speaker raises his arm, shouts: *we are the sword of*

the revolution, and, all around, blond boys leap,
cheering, to their feet. They worship the soldiers

guarding the speakers. He and his friends parade the
brilliance of their own black uniforms. *We pledge to*

you loyalty and bravery, they intone, bass
and tenor expanding the auditorium.

We swear obedience, they chant, *even unto*
death, as God is our witness. Then they may salute.

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He cheers *continuo*. Next, at their permanent
table in the local tavern, the age-mates toast

each other, serenade their guns, practice aiming.
That night, in his room, he and music salute the

mirror, admire the contour of the weapon.
He mimes his new face, directs the melody from

the phonograph with the gun, abruptly salutes.
The bleached curtains applaud, arching toward him. He grins,

hugs himself, dances to bed, collapses, pistol
swaying in violins' rhythm. *Meine Ehre heisst Treue*,

he refrains, *my honor is my loyalty*. The
spring breezes shroud his eyes, lullaby him to dreams.