

War Memorial

by Marina Kraiskaya (Brown)

Autumn bends the Pacific toward early dusk.
The cut-globe dome of Love Library glows,
burning through gradations of blue. Names ignite
within my newspaper's fading columns of ranks,

scenes, homecoming queens. A man
from my northern town was among the first
to be gathered in its war accounts of surgeries,
flights from basic training, rushed marriages.

Young soldiers write home of cleaning, shooting,
the nostalgia of the field—all leather and fresh-
cut grass before the courses in the air, the years
of anti-submarine patrols and impossible blades.

They write of a flooded hospital in northern France,
of ambulances pushed through mud. Of calling for
the missing. Shrapnel in a foxhole in the Rhineland,
bronze arrows gliding through Algiers, Bastogne,

and Luxembourg. Moving breathlessly
through Corsica and Italy, their tents held up
with field artillery. Beds improvised in sheds in
burnt-out pastures or quiet mausoleums. They write

of taking barefoot blood tests in Buddhist temples
near Osaka. Of beating foreign girls at ping-pong.
A wooden oxcart on a narrow path pulling water
from the river. Bread lines snaking through each city.

Amusing children with a scatter of new English
words and cracking little eggs that sizzled under
smoke-filled skies. Vague about the night when no one
could keep from firing into the dark of the Alboran

though the planes had gone and the sea was quiet.
They report new battle stars, air medals of silver

oak-leaf clusters. A December typhoon and the loss
of four destroyers. Free-flying bombers flashing

in Hawaiian sun. Palms burning across Guam. Japanese-
Americans in the Philippines mistaken for the enemy and
questioned by all sides. A man from Nebraska finds his distant
relatives at the barbed Swiss barricade but cannot reach them.

A doctor dies to save supply ships for the Navy Cross.
After breaking past the Ardennes line—after the Battle
of the Bulge—Bill says, *the swimming was just fine in Norway*,
and the men played football at the edges of the runways.

They will return to fight the Wildcats and the Spartans.
To libraries, diners, lamp-lit dances, classes in astronomy and art.
Journals and the rags of German labor camps locked in the attic.
A father will teach high school. An officer will learn to sail.

I look to you, sweeping somewhere across the European sky. Fold
my page into itself like a starched white shirt. Come to the jagged edge
of the memorial, California granite cut by words from 1945: *After
that one look at my home, I've been repaid tenfold. And, I wish*

I could tell you everything, but I know that is impossible.