



GEORGE BOWERING

KERRISDALE
ELEGIES

Tablet

For a few hours,
for a summer,
we think we know them,
these young men in three-coloured caps,
playing
the game of boyhood,
brief in our eyes.

Do they play for us,
or are they performing
the ancient demands of their decorated bodies?

They wear their names on their backs,
but they wear costumes designed a century past,
of gentlemen meeting of a Sunday on the grass.

The white ball acts upon them as a stone in a pool,
They run, they bend, they leap, they fall
to the patchy green carpet,
walled away from the factory city.

The eye up high for a moment catches
a soft human Diamond,
a star
twinkt in a moment by the hurl, the ex-
stacy of the thing among them.

The giant at first
leaps then tumbles,
his feet quick to return
to artificial earth.

What holds him there
is not anywhere.

The wrinkled neck of the third base coach
mocks his uniform,
or vice versa.

He wears no spikes,
but shoes like slippers.
His stomach falls over his double-knit belt.

His statistics lie like the skeleton of another man
in yearbooks out of print.

He never stands in the coach's box, as if
afraid it might be a grave.

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Beauty is the first prod of fear,
the young
shortstop knows it but does not say it.
Tobacco

bulges his cheek,
his movement speaks
of his parentage,
a swan and a gangster.

He is simple for three hours.

He knows the ground between his feet.

You play thru your injuries,
you play

hurt,
you knew it was waiting for you,
you remember your first bad arm,
it said your pension would be full of pain.

You hit the ground every day,
knocked over in the middle of your grace,
a green apple hitting every branch
on the way to the sun-beaten orchard floor;

your team-mates' play called it into being,
your fall
seen a hundred times on the screen,
a way down, and out.

You bounce up
without a smile,
but the crowd says 'ahh,'
and you look quick at your manager,
dad,
were you watching me.

He is looking in his book,
but your sore body grins
all the way back to the dugout,
unaware of your steps over the grave.

Already the stands are noisy
with the call for some hitting,
cuts the pain from your knees,
hides in the shade,
will serve unwritten fate,
will find a fatness,
to throw yourself to earth again,
let me in.

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Baseball angel,
lighten the air,
one white rainbow today,
the lovely red dirt all over his flannel.

Extra
basis.

And shine bright shadows on the tan skin
of that sweetheart with the odd designation:
ball girl.

I watch her blossom these years,
call her Debbie though I don't know her;

she sits in a simple folding chair next to the stands,
glove on her hand,
blonde hair spilling from her cap,
long tan thighs,
tall white sox.

She is not baseball at all,
but a harmless grace here,
a tiny joy
glimpsed one time each inning,
when she bends
and, oh God give us extra innings,
picks up the ball.

We applaud, and nature
is good.

Les humains savent tant de jeux l'amour la moure
L'amour jeu des nombrils ou jeu de la grande oie
La moure jeu de nombre illusoire des doigts
Seigneur faites Deigneur qu'on jour je m'enamoure

Watching the game of work,

I wonder at the big owe
how dark in my heart is the place where we all
could not make the play,

fell to earth crooked,
swung a bat too late,
threw far over the fielder's head,
cringed in fear of the hardness,
or the coach who scorned our fear.

Diamonds,
this green diamon at Little Mountain,
where these younger than we leap and run and fall
like our older brothers,
where we shout inanities
from our high wall,
our wit echoes loudly
from the right-field fence.

This is not
poetry,
neither is it play;
it is life
whether you like it or not,
money
changes hands,
the sun goes purple and gold
behind the trees,
the lights come on bright,
the ball is white,
and someone
has to pay for it.

Dear spooks:

if there were a domed stadium between the
[stars

upon whose astroturf athletic lovers
made plays beyond the hearts of these heroes,
daring ozone catches in deepest centre,

stolen base

in a cloud of crystal,

delightful silent hand-shakes

at home plate —

and if they could arouse the crowd
of long-ghosted millions to a standing ovation,
a thunder-clap around the park,

would that throng
cast blossoms of immortality over nine heads,
bring at last a satisfied smile to the face
between these shoulders here on earth,
on the road,

in last place?

