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A Face From Widely Circulated American Magazines

Faruk Šehić

as we walk through a forest tunnel
 above us hangs the unmoving December sky
 the stars squint through the braided treetops
 at seven o'clock in the evening
 cold needles on the ends of a hornbeam's branches
 they fall off and break on the aqueous foliage
 the southern wind blows
 I remember The Damned Yard
 the dementia of ghosts in the air
 branches rub on each other
 they creak like the jaws of skeletons in a house of terror
 under greasy uniforms
 my body is a sweaty bedspring pressed down by gravity
 and fear
 we go on a patrol of a fire-swept zone
 the swamp grass is moist and its long blades
 lick our fists which squeeze dark metal guns
 a burst of glimmering bullets goes behind a hill in a large arc
 like a necklace of serially connected falling stars
 I do not think they will make my wishes come true
 in a dull body that thinks of the heat of a fire, cigarettes and food
 of Azra's face that I cannot put together in my thoughts
 of 89 Marshall Tito Street from which I was driven
 of a half-liter bottle of beer that I often dream of
 like a metaphor for freedom
 we have come to the embankment of the railway
 the stones are coated with a soft frost
 my watch post is right there
 anonymous and meaningless by the wooden tie
 I watch the surface of the Una rippled by tiny waves
 thick darkness of water
 it is war, they say, revolution in the purest form
 my grandpa Bećo Šehić founded a chapter of the Communist Party in Bosanska Krupa
 together with his brother Ismet he spent two years at Jasenovac
 they were both partisans

my other grandpa, Almas Sedi?, fought with the Red Army on the Srijem front
I am in a bad war
a hundred of my fellow soldiers, whose faces I still remember, were killed
the dead are a pile of unknown names and surnames on wooden grave markers
in an exceedingly bad war
none of them will remain eternally young
like Che Guevara
a face from widely circulated American magazines.

Translated by Sara Elaquad – © 2007 Sara Elaquad

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