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The Death of Kropotkin

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THE DEATH OF KROPOTKIN

Emma said there had been snow
and a keen wind sighing in the withered branches
And I imagined little details
sheepswool caught in the thorns
red berries
and a prophet's dead face on the pillow.

She said he had died in peace
and the eternal intelligence on his brow
had seemed like a light
in the dark unlit hut
And I imagined
steel-rimmed glasses on a side-table
and eyes forever hidden.

She said there had been a great concourse of people
walking out from Moscow
or the nearest station
poor humble people — Lenin had let them come
to sidle lovingly past
his silent form.

Several hundred people, simple people
fur caps down to their ears
their padded trousers crisscrossed with string
standing there on the obliterated road
waiting for the cortège.

P O E T R Y

Dmitrov was the name of the place.
They took his body to Moscow
and there formed a procession
perhaps a mile long
old revolutionaries, young students
and children carrying wreaths
of holly and laurel.

They marched five miles
carrying the black and scarlet banners
and I imagine the feathery snow falling
gently on his bier
gently on the bowed heads
and the patient streets.

But when they reached the burial place
the snow had ceased
and the winter sun
sinking red
distained the level glittering plain.

A river of glowing light
poured into the open grave
all the light in the world
sank with his coffin
into the Russian earth.

It was seven versts outside Moscow.
On the steps of their museum
the Tolstoyans had gathered

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to play mournful music
as the cortège passed.

Dark then it was, and silent.
I remembered, said Emma, the cairn on the mountain ridge
a heap of stones and broken branches
with tokens attached of horsehair or rag
and the cry: "The waters before us
flow now to the Amúr.
No mountains more to cross."

No mountains more to cross for you
dear comrade and pioneer.
You have crossed the Great Khingán
travelling eastward into rich lands
where many will follow you.

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