Translation Of Selected Poems By H. Kruk

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A WOMAN NAMED HOPE

it rained for four straight months
knocking down crops, trampling gardens
they came as new recruits
diligently watering the roadside bushes
as long as they could to slow their march to foreign war

and none of us knew

where the war zone actually was
no one understood the true scope of the losses
when a woman called Hope came to lift our spirits
she had no intention of dying

each person, she told us, carries their own war
and a weapon

they’ll clutch to the end,
and victory is a whore — she doesn’t care where she lies
she belongs to anyone

and we listened to a roll of thunder leave her throat
while she sang to us strange marching drills and lullabies
every drop of her saliva a balm
containing the poison of love

because every woman, she warned, knows this kind of love
that brings her low, shoves a gun barrel in her mouth
and does not kill her. After, the rains pass through her,
troop after troop
washes away the blood.

Translated from the Ukrainian
by Sibelan Forrester and Mary Kalyna with Bohdan Pechenyak
like a blood clot, something
catches him in the rye
though in life
what is fair?
so he is annoying with his limping
through the hospital courtyard missing
a limb, as if he’d been limbless
in those unmiraculous fields,
so saturated with blood, no foot can fall
without grasping its own absence,
entered into war’s tedious register
where limbs, faces, bodies are rejected
like blood from mismatched donors —
his unit’s all scattered throughout the rye fields —
he begins to gather them up when he closes his eyes . . .
the women bring food, clothes, medicine
and, as is their habit, sit at his feet

Translated from the Ukrainian
by Sibelan Forrester and Mary Kalyna with Bohdan Pechenyak
three sets of three

someone stands between you and death — but
who knows how much more my heart can stand —
where you are, it’s so important
someone prays for you
even with their own words
even if they don’t clasp their hands and kneel

plucking the stems off strawberries from the garden
I recall how I scolded you when you were small
for squashing the berries before they ripened

my heart whispers: Death, he hasn’t ripened yet
he’s still green, nothing in his life has been
sweeter than unwashed strawberries
I beg you: oh God, don’t place him at the front,
please don’t rain rockets down on him, oh God,
I don’t even know what a rocket looks like,
my son, I can’t picture the war even to myself

Translated from the Ukrainian by Sibelan Forrester
like a bullet, the Lord saves those who save themselves,
like the bullet that the man in a trench
saves for his own temple

beyond the boundary that separates us from them
the harvest birds chirp to you that already
your son is kicking in the womb

hide yourself in a fir tree's needle, in a tiny boy's
face that falls through the junipers
to search for you

in a field that lies fallow, in the living soil,
you left for him the heaviest words:
"Fatherland" and "dad"

a Fatherland, passed from father to son,
replacing his father — one so young —
anyone would weep

"but God, let him feel, in his bones
that he is my last, truest bullet,
save him for me, oh Lord . . ."

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by Sibelan Forrester and Mary Kalyna with Bohdan Pechenyak