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Translation Of Selected Poems By H. Kruk

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Recommended Citation

H. Kruk, Sibelan E.S. Forrester, M. Kalyna, and B. Pechenyak. (2017). "Translation Of Selected Poems By H. Kruk". *Words For War: New Poems From Ukraine.* 110-113. https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-russian/273

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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

words For WAR 111

* * *

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

* * *

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

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* * *

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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