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Translation Of Selected Poems By H. Kruk

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* * *

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

* * *

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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