

Hromada

by Joani Reese

Hromada* * *

(a whole in pieces for the people of Ukraine)

I: Moscow

They polish words
that do not shine
coupled with cruelty
bound by trope
their twisted tale
of foes friends foes
blunts clumsy feints
toward honest prose
upchucked from tyrants'
liquid mouths who profit
most from snuffing lives
and sweep aside youth's
fruitful years to fumble
for a fist of earth, gone fallow
under February's stars.

II: Donbas

Draftees backpack lethal loads,
some fly spy drones, march southeast roads
to scarify a country, unremarkable
two months ago.

We eyeball screens, dreamy with gore.
Swift Migs hurl shells that rupture, tear.
As sirens blare, we savor snacks.
A billion techno fools watch war unwind.

Our darkened rooms display death, Live!
Most watch in benumbed ennui.

Ukraine unpacks worn guns and garb
while puppet Russian boys depart

their homes for tanks thrust
toward the sun-bright south—
Ripe sheaves of wheat will burn again
as soldiers set Donbas aflame
the same flame that they lit in 2014.

III: Mariupol

The press reports one woman's
curse that Ukraine's golden sunflowers
burst like arrows from the bloody breasts
of Russia's uninvited guests, aslant across
the cobblestones that once composed the lanes
of Mariupol, and now there's no one left
to rape or kill.

Fatigue from three pandemic years
enshrouds the world and wearies fear;
COVID expunged six million lives
this new war thrums the body count.
Retreat impacts a factory whose steel
can't block trajectories that murder
with impunity. The victor or the vanquished,
who will tell?

IV Kharkiv and Fastiv

Her camera captures shadow girls who leak from their respective
shells.

Gashed by marauders, sullied skin can never be stitched right
again.

Healing delayed's an empty cup and sluggish aid can't cover up
the dead spread under midwives' sheets, the disemboweled
who drape the streets of Kharkiv and Fastiv.

V: Dnipro

Ripples, once small, gather in power, soon shrapnel seeds
those yellow flowers in boys who scream before they break.

Face rictified with how he died, one young man can't reverse
his plunge from primacy to lumpen meat that smears the blasted
brick
of Dnipro.

VI: Bucha

Civilian death discovered all around
this town Russia has fouled. New battle
lines appear as babies howl for mothers

gone who cannot comfort them again.

Pink girls ascend a bullet-riddled wall,
eye journalists who stiffen where they fell.
Church bells wail over Bucha, then stop still.

VII: Cherkasy

Sly, covetous oppressors lie,
deny atrocities nearby as endings
lurch toward dates we cannot name.
Remorse never revived rent flesh.
Limbs fetal-curl beneath the sky.
We gape and shake our heads a world away,
watch lives unfurl and furl in Cherkasy.
Who will revenge the wizened child
green eyes pried wide, future erased,
the question she'll forever ask,
"Was I just born too early, or too late?"

VIII: Kherson

Ships burn in port,
smoke blackens tongues.
Bone children tread
on shattered glass.
Kherson, now home
to no one but the dead.

VIII: Kyiv

With ammunition flowing in, a fatigued man, face gaunt with strain, refuses to concede another inch. The world first thought him callow, soft, expected him to scurry off to someplace safe in exiled luxury. Two months go by, no longer naïf, the man still helms this ship of state despite the odds predicting swift defeat. The world astonished that Ukraine still meets each sun, courage the same, to best a man bereft of empathy. Some heroes spring whole from necessity. One could not guess, much less predict, this man would shoulder history, pick up a sword and reverse destiny.

* * *Hromada: *community* (Ukrainian)

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