

# New Poetry by Sofiia Tiapkina: "To Forget or Not Maybe," "Grasping the Sky," and "Airless Embrace"



THE SILENT SKY / *image by Amalie Flynn*

**to forget or not maybe**

to forget or not maybe  
to fight for memory or not  
i'm here i'm she  
lying on my back underneath me  
blue cherries of bruises ten backs  
all pierced by bullets all riddled  
no one seems to cry here this defenseless death is unshared

with any and all  
i look around at people all around still people these old  
trees outside what a spring so wildly  
blooms and dies with a scream  
i rise from my knees or maybe just  
think that i rise i was a teacher  
what remains of the school now  
walls shrubs suckle blood from the soil  
i taught them to never  
kill people and now  
i'm face to face  
with the killers of children hands and face changed the maples  
turned perfectly crimson too soon  
broke my  
spine and soul i would tell them if i still taught never kill  
anyone  
i rise from my knees call out to god  
god i accept everything i  
understand the end of life  
i accept it i am desecrated  
why do you punish me  
with this life  
after death

## **Grasping the Sky**

Inside us: a piece of  
sky, blue and rusty,  
smelling of winter and  
gunpowder.

Who will see us as we crawl, chasing  
the shadows of the clouds?  
She reanimates the land.

The bombs, and bullets, and bodies took  
its breath away and send it straight into cardiac arrest.

The scars of war are on her palms and tongue,  
but she keeps going because without the land,  
her heart will stop, too.

Land—земля—zemlia: a greenplace, a birthgiver, our bread.  
She puts her hands around it and tries to close off  
the wounds of horror and destruction and  
deathdeathdeathdeath  
that the inhumans opened with their hungry teeth.  
Sometimes, when the blood stops rushing through her ears  
or between her fingers,  
she hears the echo of “brotherly nations,” “local  
misunderstanding,”  
“child actors.”  
The land moans under the weight of  
countless bones.

We carry no  
prophecies under our skin.

The silent sky  
floods our mouths.  
Who will hear us climb up  
the lifeless mushrooms?

He rebuilds the house.  
A new foundation in place of his ancestors’  
home built with tears. The missile took  
the walls, but the kitchen table is still  
standing in the middle.

House—будинок—budynok: a warm place, a safehold, our nest.  
He drinks tea at the kitchen table.  
One year anniversary,  
he feels the explosions  
reverberating through his ribs.  
His daughter would have turned three.  
His wife would have put a pot of

lilacs by her crib.

He drinks tea at the kitchen table of a murdered house.  
It's hot and bitter, and for a minute, he forgets  
a new future of new houses with  
no one inside.

Everything we wanted  
was in the sound  
of the sky without  
the stench of corpses.  
Who will remember us if  
the task ahead will take a generation?

They reconstruct their homeland.  
Too many questions, too little time: where  
do they fit between now and then;  
how do they embezzle millions yet fight corruption  
as never before; what are dignity and justice and fairness  
if the debris of a shelled hospital hide  
the broken pieces of mothers and newborns.

Homeland—Батьківщина—Bat'kivschyna: a free place, a seeing  
glass, our hope.

They won't live to see it without blood and tears  
soaking its black ground. How do they repair machine-gunned  
hearts?

How do they rebuild a cracked-open sky?  
They reconstruct their homeland as the bombs  
try to bring them to their knees. Too many  
questions, too little time. But the question,  
"Will we live?" is not one of them.

Millions of hands breaking the chains  
shout the answer louder than  
air raid sirens.

Inside us: a whisper  
of summer, when sunflowers  
grow from the ash.

Who will catch the birds  
pecking out a path between  
the sky and wheat fields?

No one. Our wings hold the glory of freedom.

### **airless embrace**

i miss you like i miss the sky  
cold so painfully blue  
angels must have  
dripped blueberry juice  
from the clouds  
i want to tether myself  
to the sky-whispers  
embrace them bury my  
face into their warmth  
but it doesn't make you here  
i stalk the shore scooping  
up birds beaks  
black with blood  
you used your skirt  
to wipe off the  
red from their feathers  
why did you  
let go  
the earth drinks soot  
i'm thirsty for  
the sound of  
your smile  
under the winter sun  
on the shore  
i pick the nightingales  
curl my toes to find  
the damper sand  
the soft homes of crabs below

i hold the memory  
of your hair  
between my fingers  
i miss you  
until i fly out of  
the soil's arms  
and the sky  
catches me  
in its thousand  
blue hands