

## Crawling into the Oven

I crouch by millstone abandoned  
twice as tall as myself. Smoke  
drifts from the field, crater created  
by bomb. Look! On hands and knees I  
climb the stairs of windmill, haul  
myself up to the platform.  
Like the tongue of chameleon  
a wooden beam protrudes, curls  
earthward. On my belly I'll  
inch down its scars and snarls.

Brick bake-house long abandoned, dough  
machines dusty with flour. Father's  
furnace that once glowed red. A taste of ashes.  
The house  
of memory darkens.

\*\*\*\*\*

It is night. The women leap  
from their straw mats, stab at a pile of clothes,  
jump—no time to grab the babies—out  
the window, out into stubble of barley, leaving a trail  
of undergarments. Snow on felt caps enter  
uniformed strangers, fumble with candles, roam  
through the house. Out the window,  
out into the field they stalk, following trail. On pallet  
abandoned, two young ones  
hiccup, too frightened to scream, too stiff to  
cling to each other.

\*\*\*\*\*

Song rises in layers, blurs earliest thought:  
Tales of fishermen on Volga, of Russian sentry  
guarding Mother Russia. Father  
in Ukrainian prisoncamp of war  
learned the songs, the musical lingo.  
Again darkness comes on.  
By the coal stove, Mother  
mends our socks and clenches her teeth.

There is a windmill and a bake-house  
in my first remembrance, empty footpaths, burned-out  
barley fields. Silos inaccessible  
beyond the stairs. Pigeons coo, Who  
goes there? Mother and Aunt Gerta  
crawling into the oven to hide.