

# Lamentation Over the Land of Polissia

a poem about Chernobyl, by the Ukrainian poet, Victor Kordun

Translation by Helen Boris

And we were ordered:  
Dig into the ground  
the live forests and houses,  
dig as deeply as possible  
your wilted life  
into the non-remembrance -  
and abandon this land.

We started to gather our belongings  
and get ready  
to go into the nowhere.  
Hey. Let's take our bread with us -  
our domestic sun made of rye -  
one day it will remember  
its very own fire in the stove,  
and it will bring us back -  
home.

Let us take our cat with us -  
he remembers all the lullabies -  
and one day, somewhere,  
we will have  
to rockabye ourselves  
to our own homeless death.

Let's take our dog as well.  
Let him guard us on our way  
together with our house goblins

and the spirits of our Drevliany ancestors.  
We are all leaving our home together.

And once again we were ordered:  
to leave everything in God's keeping  
and to take with us  
our emptiness and our numbness  
in our empty handfuls.

But how could we leave,  
when our legs and our paths,  
our eyes and our lives  
were staying here forever?

And then our whole life  
tried to rush after us,  
pleading not to leave it alone -  
and we were forced to tear it from  
ourselves  
and to lock it in, abandoned  
in the abandoned house.

And the forest ran after us,  
pleading and pleading  
to let it walk along together with us.  
And we were forced to fell the forest  
And leave for the far away place  
And we were forced to fell the forest and  
cut it up  
so we wouldn't hear its screams

And Mother Earth ran after us,  
grabbing our legs and hands,  
looking into our eyes,  
and trying to talk us  
into taking her along.

And we were forced to chase her back,  
To chase her back behind the barbed wire  
fence.  
And then we took our Polissia's soil  
and wrapped it around  
our abandoned villages,  
around our never lived life,  
around our never-ending forests,  
and we buried our Polissia  
with no burial rites,  
and no after-funeral wake.