

Jan Zábřana

THE LESSER HISTORIES



Translated by Justin Quinn

The Lesser Histories

Jan Zábřana

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This poetry collection was first published in Czech as *Stránky z deníku* by Československý spisovatel in 1968. In 2020, Host published its comprehensive *Jan Zábřana: Básně a povídky*; this English translation, however, was started earlier and is based on the edition of *Stránky z deníku* that appeared in *Básně*, a collection of three books of Zábřana's poetry, published by Torst in 1993.

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San Fabiana

*Move then with new desires,
For where we used to build and love
Is no man's land, and only ghosts can live
Between two fires.*

Cecil Day Lewis

*Poetry without junk is boring.
(Básnictví bez veteše je nuda.)*
Vítěslav Nezval



PART I

SUMMER 1944

The season's last horse races. They're off!
The fall, the finish... That day a card
for him from S... A dog howls of
the war, and smells the knacker's yard.

The Great Dictator on release.
His father honeys the tobacco.
July! A heat that's full of ice.
Assassinations. Miracles also.

From the butcher shop of Omaha,
the SS Argonauts withdraw.
Sterbe, Erika... sterbe wohl...

The baths. Hay fever. Cyrillics stain
the surface... Now, once more, in vain:
not thus in Russian, not at all.

DEAD GIRL REMEMBERED

It's ever closer now, the star
that saw the urnfield culture passing.
Back then it shone down from afar
on the local girl, dead at the crossing.

Innocence shrives the guilt to come:
it chooses and whites out the graves
of people who will leave behind them
nothing – a few stones, scattered staves.

The future simply loses sight
of them – tossed from quick carriages,
raped by drunk uncles, crushed by trains.

There's just some pubic bones, picked white
in clay, in ditches where dogs piss,
on throughways with the stink of foreskins.