

New Poetry by Phillip Sitter: “Krakivets, Odyn” and “Elemental”



WINDOW / *image by Phillip Sitter*

Krakivets, Odyn

I wasn't a medical volunteer – only came in with a backpack,
an overweight suitcase,
all the baggage of the past eight months and a heart to pump
into here
the ability to stop someone's bleeding in whatever capacity
and degree I could.

But that would've been too much nuance for that moment,
with me just being able to count to not much more than eight
in Ukrainian
and the guard's English and tone more apt to counting to
three.

I've already forgotten some of the exact nuances of that moment.

Did the guard ask me through the open car door, over the empty driver's seat in the dark, "What were you doing in Ukraine?" or something more like "What brought you to Ukraine?"

For almost a week? Your first time, with emphasis on *now*?
Incredulity, perhaps, that someone would choose to come to a war,
unarmed, at least in the Kalashnikov sense.

Was he holding such an automatic rifle, a worn cousin of the one I'd fired in Texas -just precaution-or was it only a fellow guard I saw cradling the legacy of an empire chasing again the impossibility of restoring itself

by unloading terror upon
and blasting through flesh
of people like him or me?

I tried to answer the guard's questions but he got frustrated and he waved us on to keep the line of hundreds of vehicles moving toward Poland,
as foreign fire engines and weapons re-supplies for firefights came in the other direction.

And with that, we crossed the line – after the Polish guards searched the car, anyway.

One side, the imminent threat of death from the sky above – and not on the other.

Those night skies, no light on the ground to obscure the stars or guide the drones.

I slept well, except when I cried myself to sleep the last night in Kyiv at the thought of having to leave you, brother, in all this.

Your big windows in Lviv didn't bother me much.

Neither did the lights in the sky out your windows in Kyiv,

lights that moved in the darkness.

Elemental

Hydrogen, the sun's power
sends light 93 million miles
to give life to the sunflower
that stands for hope in all our trials.

Nitrogen and phosphorous, they make the sunflower fields more
fertile.

When used in explosives and incendiaries, they add more shock
and awe to a projectile.

Oxygen, the spark of life in my lungs.
I would give you the last of it from my chest,
my last breaths, if suited best,
for a continuance of your song to be sung.

Heavy stuff, uranium.
It's not all gone as quickly as in a flash,
not for many or most.
Did I mention half-life with strontium-90?
Like calcium, it seeks bones as hosts.

Carbon, the basis of life as we know it.
If I had to, could I recall any debt to be owed it?

Could all I've ever sent off to be recycled
be traded to rebuild your body, your blood, your soul?
Enough to make you whole?
With enough left over to also recreate the man shot off his
bicycle?

Our bonds are strong.
Between two hearts, two time zones.
Subatomic critical mass, but love more than chemistry and
physics alone.