

# Jan Zábřana

THE LESSER HISTORIES



*Translated by Justin Quinn*

## The Lesser Histories

Jan Zábřana

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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.