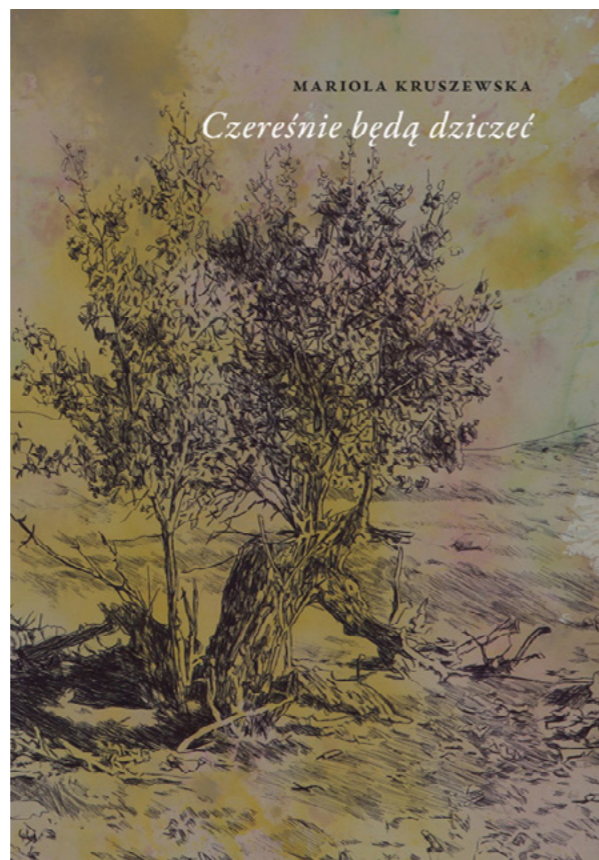


# Cherries Will Grow Wild



## Captivating short story collection that reads like a novel

The collective heroes of Mariola Kruszevska's book are Polish repatriates, or rather exiles after the Second World War, forced to leave their homes and everything that was familiar to them and move into a foreign world, called – for whatever reason – the Recovered Territories. There are also some displaced Germans among the book's characters, as their fate is also important to the author. In the endless journey to the new homeland, a child is lost, someone else falls ill and will not be able to stand up again. And upon arrival, we read, "They stumbled over rubble, lack of water, fear of thieves and the return of Germans. (...) They dismantled wartime barricades. They buried people. They buried animals. They buried history. They sowed new reality, ready to quit it at any moment and go back to their place". They did not know yet that there was no return to lost territories in the Eastern Borderlands, and in the new place everything seemed temporary, fragile, uncertain. The new reality will also bring new threats: on the part of the Soviet "liberators", still throwing their weight around, and the allegedly native authorities,

imposed by force. They will remain distrustful of it, but they will have to come to terms with it, just as they should deal with what is here and now. And they must lick the fresh wounds inflicted on them by history; first and foremost, the one whose face had well known features, namely of the Ukrainian neighbours from Volhynia.

Mariola Kruszevska's book is a collection of stories. It consists of thirteen texts entitled, for example *Appletree*, *Black Currants*, *Potatoes*, *Winter Crops*, *Sunflowers* and *Jasmine*. While reading, however, we realise that it is one coherent story in which individual threads overlap, the characters enter into relationships with one another, sometimes we only move with them to another place, or go back or forward in time. The author (b. 1965) used to be better known as a poet. *Cherries Will Grow Wild*, awarded in the Bolesław Fac Literary Contest of the City of Gdansk, indicates that she has even more to say in prose.

Krzysztof Masłoń, translated by Katarzyna Popowicz

Mariola waited for her husband; she couldn't leave without him, not now. She felt as though somebody had thrown her, in the middle of the day, down a chasm from which she couldn't climb out of on her own. She spent weeks in fear, just looking out for him. She didn't let the children leave the house, even during the day. She carried a small linen bag under her blouse, resting on her breast, containing money and items of jewellery the Russians hadn't found, ready to flee into the forest at any moment. She barely slept. She couldn't eat and she was tormented by nausea – and not just in the morning. She cried into her pillow and beat her fists against her belly. Every evening she fervently prayed for a miracle. And one day it occurred. August returned, haggard, distressed by news about the new world order. Several other farmers also returned from shifting the contents of a looted factory onto Soviet trucks. But not all her prayers were answered.

"We have to leave, dad," he explained mildly, chewing some bread. "We can't stay here. They're clearing out whole villages, whole towns. They're taking everything. The Russkies will be back, they'll be back and won't be shifted for a long time. They're saying this'll be Poland. We have to get out, while there's still time. We must take what we can and hide the rest till we're back. They're setting up camps for people like us, they'll help us."

"Be quiet!"

"You don't understand anything, dad. We've lost the war. Nothing will change now, not for the moment at least. The time has come for accounts to be settled. Dad, I heard in town... Heini's dead. Heini, who would never hurt a fly, killed himself. You didn't like him much, did you? They raped his daughter, she wasn't even fifteen, you remember her, and his wife... They were screaming, but no one helped them. Then they killed them, throttled them. They say that's how the new authorities will be running things. He was left all alone. Hanged himself with his belt. And where was it? Outside the town hall."

"A coward! Just like you!" Günter spat into August's face. "That's enough of your idle talk. If you want to leave your fatherland then go, you coward. Take your family and your whining wife and head for the hills, but without me. I'm not giving up this house or this land. It's mine, I built it with my own hands. I'll watch over it. I won't let it go to waste! This lot will blow over. You and the rest will be back. I'll watch over it. Somebody has to."

"You'll die. They'll kill you and burn the house down."

"I built it myself, every brick, every beam... I planted

trees. I'd sooner burn it down with these hands than let them get their filthy mitts on it. Over my dead body, over my dead body!"

"Dad..."

"Out of my sight! Pack up what's yours and go!" Günter struck his cane so hard on the wooden floor he made a dent in it. He went out into the farmyard ruddy with anger. He took a deep breath, trying to calm his thumping heart. He thought about his father and his father's father, about all the generations that had built houses, barns, planted apple trees, currants, jasmine shrubs, sown winter wheat and grass. He caressed the fence tenderly, as though wanting to assure it that it was in good hands.

When August and his wife and children set off, pushing their heavily laden handcart, Günter didn't go onto the doorstep. Only when their shapes began to recede into the distance did he hobble to the door, touched by a sudden thought, open it and shout his son's name out several times. He called him back with a vigorous wave of his cane. He hugged August with all his strength and kissed him on the forehead upon which he made the sign of the cross.

Excerpt translated by David French



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### Poetry collections published

*Bywam kobietą* (2011)

*Wczoraj czyli dziś* (2013)

### Selected awards

Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński Poetry Prize ORPHEUS (2014)

Bolesław Fac Literary Prize for debutants, awarded by the City of Gdansk (2016)

Józef Mackiewicz Literary Prize (2017) – nomination