FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Factory of Tears
Valzhyna Mort
Elizabeth Wright, translator
Franz Wright, translator
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The Factory of Tears is a real place in Valzhyna Mort's eponymous collection of poems. In fact, its productivity rate is higher than the Department of Transportation, the Department of Heart Affairs, and every other governmental institution this unnamed country. Of course, the factory is also a metaphor for people turning their sorrow into something else, into poems for example. Victims—the murdered, starving, betrayed, and lonely—are at the center of this collection, yet no one gives up and rolls over. A betrayed lover runs down the other woman; a grandmother believes famine is healthy; the murdered haunt their killers; and the empowerment provided through language is endlessly satisfying.

Like many other young poets, Mort is obsessed with the power of words. Unlike most other young poets, Mort navigates the theme with grace and audacity that belie her age. In "A Poem about White Apples," she suggests, "we were learning / to get to the core of everything with our teeth." Despite the humility suggested by that word "learning," Mort is already there, at the center, and no subject is off-limits. The very first poem of *Factory of Tears*, "Belarusian I," maintains, "our mothers have no idea how we were born / how we parted their legs and crawled out into the world / the way you crawl from the ruins after a bombing." Not even infants or the bombed are passive in this collection.

The energy that leaps from these pages is the impressive work of poet Franz Wright and his wife, translator Elizabeth Oehlkers Wright. Together, they have seamlessly delivered this Belarusian voice into English. Mort initially received attention in Belarusia (former Soviet Union) with her first collection, *I'm as Thin as Your Eyelashes*. She has also participated in many international poetry festivals and has been featured in anthologies of Belarusian verse. *Factory of Tears* is the first Belarusian—English translation published in the United States. We hope it will not be the last from Mort, a poet who can, as in "Grandmother," transform pain into "the embrace of a very strong god / one with an unshaven cheek that scratches when he kisses

you.”

Erica Wright