



Elena Dunaevskaia

translated by Emma P. Popek and James R. Russell



To Mother

A snowy, and final, straightway.
We trudge together, you with me in spirit.
I am afraid that you will slip on ice.
Bent over, you sluggishly advance
but do not drop behind me today.
And pain, anger and concern are gone.



The residue is tenderness and guilt,
for leaving you alone all too much,
for marveling at you too short a time,
for not inviting guests to cheer you up,
for cutting short your old woman's words,
too slow for my constant life of hurry.

Remorse and tenderness swept over my being
when in a hospital's revolting ward
I stoked your legs, rash-ridden, worn, and tired.
I thought you were my duty and my work
and finally I realized, too late,
your stubborn love's I was a stubborn child.

You were so large and bright
and emanated so much warmth that
friends, like birds, would flock to you for basking.
Made noise, made chaos, but the bond
between this life and you was strong
and, I believe, is lasting.

And as I live, although without much sense,
and see your smile as alive as ever,
and necklace beads, and hands with old-age spots,
imagine I'm kissing them again.
And cannot read the mourner's kaddish for you,
because between us there is no farewell.

Translated by Emma P. Popek

The Prayer

God, do not leave me, God, help!
God, do not leave me for I am in the dark.
God, help me for my heart's a dry well.



God, save this soul among dead souls.
God, give me light for my eyes are black pits.
God, forgive for what may not be forgiven,
God, I am nothing but dust in your hand.
Forgive me, God, for what I did or did not

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Behind the curtain

But it's not real life they'll show you,
Only Maya's curtain's vulgar painting,
Behind which a savage brute in epaulets
Is standing. He always skimps on the rehearsals,
On paints, on air, on light, on food,
And smirks: You think you're searching
For revelations where things intersect?
The backdrop of the northern lights will flash and disappear,
And all the multicolored dream of Shelley
Will disappear behind it. And once again the swings:
To the right, then the left, first jazz, then an accordion.
The ugly mug winks: Here everything is fake,
And there's not a moment to recall, with all the grating and clanging,
That the blood was real in this play.

Translated by James R. Russell

The Night

Slowly the concept
Unfolds its meanings
As a rose unfurls its petals



One by one.
But in the middle
The black explosion of an emptiness
Like the black tongue
Of a tensed flame
Upon which are silent
Rivers underground,
And roads,
And our fates.

Translated by James Russell

Elena Dunaevskaia, born 1950, lives and works in St Petersburg, Russia. She is a poet and translator of English poetry and prose, a member of the Writers' Union of St Petersburg. She started writing poetry at the age of seven. Her poetry was first published when she was sixteen (1966), after the early seventies a long gap in her poetic publications followed, her style and ideas being inconsistent with Soviet standards. After the beginning of perestroika her poems were published first in the Russian press in the USA (1989), later in major Russian magazines. Her book of poems "Pismo v Pustotu" (Letter to the Void) was nominated for North Palmira award (1998), her collection of poems «Vkhodnoy Bilet » (Entrance Ticker) won her the second prize in Anna Akhmatova poetry competition (2015). Her works have been published in numerous magazines and anthologies in Russia and abroad.

As a literary translator she was among the winners of 1998 Soros foundation competition. Her favorite poets are Osip Mandelstam and William Butler Yeats.