

Reflections

by Izaak Icek Trachtenberg

(from unpublished poetry collection, translated from Polish by Kasia Tota)

Sitting at home as if in a prison without bars,
I see my youth from so many years past.
I ponder, and think how distant it appears,
Now, toughened as steel, through what haven't I lived.

ii

Carefree childhood, peaceful home,
Awakened by the church bell every day.
It roused the older ones, hurrying them off to their tasks
At the house on Kapucynska familiar to all.

iii

Father worked alone to support everyone
And all were satisfied, I give you my word.
Altogether, ten souls lived in that home
With our mother's heart at the service of all.

iv

Later, being older by a dozen or so years,
Only Edzia remained at home, and I, her brother.
Father without work, days of deprivation

Youth still carefree, but now eating dry bread.

v

Then came September, 1939,

When the Hitlerian dragon swooped into the city.

The streets became empty, the church bell stopped beating,

Subjugated souls, the city ceased breathing.

vi

The nation split itself in two:

Those who escaped, and those who stayed behind to form a graveyard.

I was of those who escaped,

Carrying with me in my heart all who had remained.

vii

I left behind a city trampled by soldiers' boots,

Fenced-in by a "Zona" of thorns on wire fences.

And who would have expected I'd never see them again.

My heart bleeding, a lifetime of crying.

viii

As some say, I chose the better way.

I left behind Hitler's hangman, but travelled to the Russian one.

I left behind camps of death, the nation's graveyard.

I opted for something better, a slower death, a hunger more gradual.

ix

Communism at work, what wonderful paradise,
A mangy nation, a cursed country.
It was a miracle I got away,
Leaving my youth there, losing my health.

x

A longing pulled me back to Poland, it simply rushed me there.
I sensed misfortune, something my heart hadn't yet known.
I was met with ruins, cities full of dead bodies.
Oh, where is my city, where can I take a step?

xi

To Lublin I did not return. In Wroclaw I settled.
I had lived through suffering, but was going to pull through.
I started a family, a second home,
The church bell no longer roused us before work.

xii

I worked quietly, peacefully, becoming a person of stature.
And, somehow, the person in me lived.

