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ПОЭМА
ДЛЯ
Русских Друзей

Poems for Russian Friends

David Dunn

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Introduction

A force is at work in the world with which historians, politicians, diplomats, and businessmen have not yet reckoned: the powerful attraction between people once separated by ideology and ignorance. The hearts of tourists, citizen diplomats, and now entrepreneurs, will be captured, broken and finally transformed by a passion for connection which arises in spite of all attempts to hold it back. Even ten years ago, who could have supposed that on such a global scale, the familiar, prudent, and expected would all be set aside and ruined by life demanding to be reunited with life?

A visit in Moscow for two weeks before, during and after the abortive coup of August 19, 1991, is the occasion for this reflection. These poems are a way of saying thank you to many beloved people who are now friends in Russia—and not a few Russians, Byelorussians, Ukrainians, Czechoslovakians, Germans and others who are new friends in Europe and America.

I know that the upheaval of all that has been is first, and last, an assault on the heart. I hope that you find courage to create what must be built.

David Dunn
19 December 1991

History

It seemed to me, a great arm of history
reached out across the miles and embraced us.
For once embraced, we could not refuse to go,
and having gone, we could not return alone.
Having touched, we can not forget,
and remembering, we will always dream together.

We Throw Ourselves

We throw each other into us,
all passion and longing,
born of years of separation.
Eyes burning with hope and despair,
our dreams turn easily into tears.

Speeding Toward Moscow

Cars and busses sped toward Moscow
filled with people who might have come from Toledo or
Topeka,
some bright, round faces full of life,
some weary, drawn and dark,
ruined, I suppose, by stifled tears.

There, crossing the Moscow River,
playing with young Sergei on the bus,
watching the faces of Moscow streaming by,
such pain consumed my heart,
tears poured down my cheek,
startling both of us.

It was my first Russian lesson:
you must embrace pain to love Russia.

She Rode the Bus

She rode the bus across the Moscow River,
a pretty face was all I could see.
The rain ran down the window,
like tears on a lonely Sunday afternoon.

Arbat

The singer's ditty
and delicate lace,
prints and paintings
and the python man's call,
are a scoff at hardship,
a hat tossed high,
a smirk on the face
of a desperate cry.

The Moscow Metro

The Metro is a world of mirrors:
lovers kissing and flying skirts
running to get on;
thinkers sitting silently,
behind the steel din,
waiting to get off.

The Metro is filled with dreamers
yearning to emerge into reality.

No Young Man Would Dare

We climbed to the top of the arched bridge
and stood watching the soldiers up the canal.
People passed trying to act as if nothing had happened.

We walked toward the tanks, clutching each other,
terrified of coming close, afraid of staying away.
It was dusk and you noticed a light in a window.
I noticed the barrel of a machine gun.

People passionately debated the coup
while the young soldiers watched,
trying to look nonchalant.
The people were aflame with desires
no young man would dare extinguish.

Courage

The roar of armored personnel carriers
and the ratta-tat-tat of submachine guns
have not a fraction of the power
of food and flowers laid beneath the turret of a tank,
of fathers, mothers, and little children
come to enquire after the status of your conscience,
of tears for the dead and prayers for the living,
and dreams which can not die nor be forgotten,
for food and flowers and little children,
and the courage to begin again.

The Magician

I can not forget your revolution,
the thrill of the edge,
the luxury of feeling history.

It was a magic moment,
when life was full of passion
making love with the magician of history.

Other Peoples' Mud

I could see over the heads of the crowd,
You carried us so high;
My feet hardly touched the ground.

Life was appalling and exciting,
Full of energy and necessity.
Other peoples' mud does not feel so deep.

Electric Arms

You and I have been imprisoned by years of lies,
held hostage by terrorists of heart and mind,
afraid of letting either of us know the other.

We strain at the bars keeping us apart
with desperate longing to find the truth
and courage to embrace it.

Charged souls so long apart
must feel somewhere deep within,
so great a need to be united,
they will do foolish things
to find each other's electric arms.

Miracles

**We met and walked by the Moscow River,
shared poetry and peanut butter,
danced and talked late into the night,
wrote songs, sipped tea,
wondered about each other's lives
and tried to make sense
of history and foolishness.
Your eyes were the window of your heart.**

**I was healed by meeting and broken by parting,
turned inside out and touched
where I did not know I could be reached,
And now I alternate between elation and bewilderment,
not knowing whether my pain is my own
or that of friends abandoned half way round the world.**

**To have experienced all these things
and known the wonder and amazement,
of both surprise and terror,
only confirms my greatest hope and fear:
that the future will contain
even greater miracles.**

Looking for the Truth

I was locked behind a wall of language and
had to claw my way brick by brick
just to look you in the eye,
though when our gaze finally met,
you led me to the bottom of your heart.

And now, knowing your life is full
of grief and yearning I can not share,
I find uneasy peace in the rhythm of letters and longing,
separated from truth whose bottom I will never find
because you are the only one who knows the way.

At the very moment I need most to speak,
I am in an agony of silence,
longing to be together and
not knowing if will ever be.

Eyes and Ears

I could not see but for your eyes,
nor hear without your ears,
nor understand the taste and smell of things
without first sensing your surprise,
that all I touched felt strange and new,
that every step was full of fear
you could not know nor understand,
because you had eyes to see and ears to hear,
what I could only try surmise.

Departure

Our departure was the final blow,
for I do not know if we shall ever meet again.
It is the pain of a lonely heart
unable to recall the face of a friend.

Awakening

I awaken and you have come again;
I feel you pressing closely at my side.
I watch you listening eagerly to every conversation
and casting knowing glances in my mind.

I cling to memories of our time together
Like a drowning man his life preserver.
I wonder why I was not drowning before
and that salvation is so great an issue after.

Mornings

Mornings are the hardest,
when I must dismiss you from my mind
and concentrate on mundane things.
It is like refusing a drink of water in a desert
or saying good-bye to your beloved
embarking on a long, uncertain journey.

Silence

Silence is not golden and
no news is not good news.
Either is a sad reminder of feelings
I had begun to cherish and expect.
We are too close to ever again abide
silence and no news.

Trying to Remember

Half a world away
I am homesick and travel weary
trying to pretend I am at your side.
Sunrise to sunset is a lifetime
holding the continents within my mind
and our life apart, together, in my heart.

Rain and cold are comfort
compared to the bleakness
of not knowing the content of your life.
Searching my dreams
For news and revelations,
I know only the silence of listening to the night.

Ruin

How is it that my heart has been stolen,
my mind captured, my spirit taken hostage by a dream
to be reunited, to become one, to be made whole,
to return, to rediscover, to remember?
You have such tremendous power
it seems impossible you can not see it in yourself.
I plead with you; you must know this:
what you do not see has ruined my life.

Sunday Afternoon Walk

On a Sunday afternoon walk in the park
can you enjoy the sun on your arms?
Can you laugh at the squirrels
throwing twigs on the path?
Can you marvel at the cackle of starlings in the trees?
Can you wander slowly, full of thoughts,
drinking in the fall air?
Can you see the colored leaves
and smile at the changing seasons?
Can you feel light and free
and full of wonder?
Does life invite you to
a Sunday afternoon walk in the park?

Fog

When the fog hangs low,
life is so heavy with confusion and doubt,
it seems unapproachable and dim.

When the fog lifts and the day is clear,
life is so full of destiny and fire,
it is hard to bear the brightness of the light.

History burns the fog away,
opens my eyes, and lets me see;
what I thought was fog is me.

