

I never disturbed your pride and your languor—  
His alien power was to blame.  
A cold, cold cloud overshadowed my day—  
Your day was more radiant than mine.

You'll merely recall—when I go to my rest

And vanish beyond the blue sky—  
The song that I once used to sing with you,  
And that you would repeat after me.

1 November 1903

### THE FACTORY

Next door, the windows are all yellow.  
As night draws on, as night draws on,  
The people gather in the gateway  
Until the squeaking bolts are drawn.

And then the gates are shut and fastened,  
And on the wall, and on the wall,  
Someone in black, someone unmoving,  
In silence stands and counts them all.

I hear him from my coign of vantage  
With copper-throated voice ordain  
That those foregathered in the courtyard  
Should bend their tortured backs again.

They'll go inside and then, dispersing,  
Bale after heavy bale they'll heave;  
And in the yellow windows—laughter:  
Those poor were easy to deceive.

24 November 1903

66

### FROM THE NEWSPAPERS

She rose by the Lights. She blessed the children.  
They dreamed a happy and beautiful dream.  
Then, with her head almost touching the floor,  
She made a low bow for the last time.

Kolya awoke with a blissful sigh,  
Still dreaming, although not asleep any more.  
The window-panes rattled and then were silent.  
Somebody downstairs had slammed the door.

Hours passed. A man with a tin badge  
On his big, warm hat came round. He tried  
Knocking and waiting a number of times.  
No answer. The children were playing inside.

A cold and merry Christmas-tide.

The children were playing at hunt-Mummy's-headscarf,  
The one she put on as she left every morning.  
Today, she had left the red kerchief  
behind.

They hid it away in every corner.

Dusk stole on. The children's shadows  
Danced on the wall by the street-lamps' light.  
Somebody climbed up the stairs, counting.  
Came to the last. Wept. Stopped outside.

And knocked. They opened. In came a fat neighbour.  
She'd brought them some broth. She made a big  
fuss.

"Eat it," she said. She went down on her knees,  
And, bowing like Mummy, made the sign of the Cross.

Mummy's not suffering, rosy-cheeked children.  
Down on the railway she laid her head.  
Thank you, thank you, dear fat neighbour.  
Mummy just couldn't... It was very sad...

Mummy's all right. Mummy's dead.

27 December 1903

5

67

\* \* \*

Down by the river, a sick man reeled.  
Beside him a lumbering wagon train rolled.

A fair was en route for the smoking wens.  
Lovely the gypsy girls, drunk their men.

They joked and they screamed as they rode down  
the track.  
The man struggled on with a bale on his back.

He begged a lift home from the gypsy band.  
A girl bent down and she reached out her  
hand.

He ran to the wagon as quick as he could,  
And on to it hoisted his cumbersome load.

The strain was too much, there was foam on his  
lips.

The gypsy girl took on her wagon a corpse.

On the seat right beside her she gave him  
a place,  
The dead man lurched forward and fell on his  
face.

And, singing a song of the free, happy life,  
She drove the dead husband back home to his  
wife.

28 December 1903

\* \* \*

Harsh the wind howls on the bridge through  
the pillars,  
Under the snowdrifts there hums a black  
thread.

68

Miracle speeds beneath my sleigh runners,  
Miracle sings to me over my head...

Miracle world, you've turned heavy and  
dreary--  
Songs that you sing, snow, and bonfires aglow...

Miracle, leave me, I'm tired and I'm weary,  
Miracle, vanish back into the snow!

28 December 1903

\* \* \*

My beloved, my prince, my bridegroom,  
In your meadow of flowers you're forlorn.  
On the opposite bank I have blossomed  
Like a plant in the ripe golden corn.

I am catching your dreams as they pass me  
Like a palely translucent white flower.  
When I'm in full blossom, you'll crush me  
Like a weary and white-chested charger.

Oh, trample the immortal within me--  
But for you I shall cherish the fire.  
I shall timidly light a church candle  
During prayers in the pale morning hour.

You will stand in the church, white of visage  
To the queen of the heavens you'll go--  
I shall sway like the flame of the candle,  
You'll respond to the thrill that you know.

Up above you, I'm quiet as a candle,  
And before you, as sweet as a flower.  
I am waiting for you, my dear bridegroom,  
Still your bride, and your wife evermore.

26 March 1904

69

See—over the waves to us bright ones  
It's bringing the darkness of night."

"Oh, no, look again, father:  
What a colourful flag it flies!  
How high is the sound of its singing!  
How its beacon dazzles the eyes!"

"But that is a siren singing.  
We must go without more ado...  
Look, a mist is crawling towards us,  
And the ship has already turned blue..."

But his daughter begins to weep,  
For she's heard the call of the deep,  
And she wants to swim out to the blue,  
Just to make her dream come true.

July 1905

### AUTUMN FREEDOM

Now I'm out upon the open highroad,  
Gale wind blowing—bushes toss and sway,  
Broken rocks dispersed about the hillside,  
Thin and meagre seams of yellow clay.

Autumn's running wild through the wet valleys,  
Baring to the view earth's cemeteries.  
Far ahead, in hamlets by the wayside,  
Glow the vivid red of rowanberries.

There it is, my gaiety that dances,  
Jingling, jingling in the shrubs somewhere!  
And your sleeve, with brightly coloured  
patterns,  
Signals like a summons from afar.

Who inveigled me on to this highroad,  
Smiled on me as in my cell I lay?

84

Or was it a mere psalm-singing beggar  
Called to travel down that stony way?


No, I was not summoned on this journey;  
Let the going, then, be light enough!  
I shall hear the voice of tipsy Russia,  
Rest my limbs beneath a tavern roof.

I shall sing about my own good fortune,  
How I drowned my youth in drunkenness;  
Weep upon the sorrow of your ploughlands,  
And forever love your boundlessness...

Many of us—free, and young, and graceful—  
Never loving, find eternal sleep...  
Shelter us within your vast horizons!  
How can we, without you, love and weep?

July 1905. Rogachevskoye Highway

\* \* \*

A girl in the little church choir was singing   
Of all who pine on an alien shore,  
Of all ships outward bound for the ocean,  
Of all who remember their joy no more.

Up into the dome her voice went soaring,  
And on her white shoulder a sunbeam shone,  
And in the darkness, all watched and listened  
As the white dress sang in the light of the sun.

And all imagined that joy was nearer,  
That ships had found their haven of rest,  
That weary people in alien countries  
Had found a happier life at last.

Her voice was sweet and the sunbeam was slender,  
But high at the Holy Gates, as in pain,

  
85

An infant close to the mysteries wept  
That nobody ever comes back again.

August 1905

\* \* \*

In the howling cold of the night out there,  
I sought for a ring in a field of stars,  
And see—there's a face in the lacework pattern,  
In the lacework pattern a face appears.

Her snowstorm trills come floating over  
And draw the brilliant stars in a train;  
Like a summons, the jingles ring out a crescendo  
On the blizzard's upsurging tambourine.

With a gentle crackling the fan was scattered.  
Ah, what it means—not to drink or to eat!  
But eyes looking north bring me, cold as I am,  
Tidings that burn with inspiring heat.

And, twining shrouds above the instant,  
In stars of blizzards wrapped all around,  
Away you drift into snowy twilight,  
My own forever predestinate friend.

August 1905

\* \* \*

Now the bright wind's dying down  
And grey eventide draws on.  
On the pine branch settling,  
Raven plucks a sleepy string.

In a land so dark and alien,  
What will you recall of me?

86



1891

They were born in like sorrow, and suckled  
With like joy at the breasts of their mothers.

In the pall of the daytime's departing,  
Our own destiny's meaning was clear:  
The last sunset combined and commingled  
All its colours for us out of fire.

We were guarded by no raging dragon,  
We endured no Gehenna of torment.  
Time's waves very quickly engulfed us;  
We were fated to last but a moment.

(O ~~Signor~~ 204 the above poem)

\* \* \*

In the taverns, the side-streets, the byways—  
An electrical waking dream—  
I sought those of infinite beauty,  
Those forever enamoured of fame.

All the streets were half-tipsy with shouting,  
There were suns in shop-window displays.  
Oh, the charm of those feminine faces!  
'Oh, the men with their arrogant gaze!

These were tsars, to be sure, and not rovers!  
I went up to an old man nearby.  
"Was it you that adorned their slim fingers  
With those pearls that no fortune could buy?"

Did you give them those furs of all colours?  
Were they kindled with sunbeams by you?  
Did you paint their lips vividly scarlet,  
Did you tint their arched eyebrows dark blue?"

The old man never gave me an answer,  
Went to dream somewhere else, out of sight.  
But I stayed there, mysterious, radiant,  
Just to drink in that music of light.

108

But they all went on walking straight past me,  
And each one hid the hope in her breast  
That she'd fly into blue realms forever,  
Being different from all of the rest.

And as couple sped by after couple,  
A bright angel, I hoped, would appear,  
And initiate two into heaven  
In the pavement's excitement, down here...

But a dwarf was observing us, huddled  
On a dangerous ledge, very high;  
And to us, it was like a red banner,  
That bright tongue poking out in the sky.

December 1904

\* \* \*

See, on those big shallows  
Life's barge gone aground.  
Cries and shouts of workers  
From afar resound.  
On the empty river—  
Singing and dismay.  
Someone strong takes over  
In a coat of grey.  
Shifts the wooden rudder,  
Gives the sail a hoist.  
Slides the boathook over,  
Presses with his chest.  
Now the red stern buds,  
Slowly swings away.  
Soon, the coloured houses  
Glide more swiftly by.  
Now they're looking lively,  
Almost lost to view,  
But it's most unlikely  
That they'd take us too.

December 1904

109

THE STRANGER



Above the restaurants each evening,  
The air is close, warm, stifling,  
And raucous drunken shouts of greeting  
Float on the foetid breath of spring.

Far off, above the dusty side-streets,  
Above the drear suburban skies,  
The baker's sign gleams faintly golden.  
Somewhere a fretful infant cries.

And every evening, past the crossings,  
With bowlers tilted, cocksure swells  
Go promenading with their girl-friends  
Along the banks of the canals.

Over the lake, the creak of rowlocks;  
A woman's voice shrills suddenly.  
Inured to all, the lunar disc  
Leers fatuously up in the sky.

And every evening in my wineglass  
I see my one and only friend,  
By the mysterious, bitter potion,  
Even as I, subdued and numbed.

Close by me, at the neighbouring tables,  
The sleepy waiters stand about,  
The drunkards have the eyes of rabbits:  
*In vino veritas!* they shout.

And every evening, at the appointed  
Hour (or is this just a dream?),  
A girlish form in silken garments  
Stirs in the misty window pane.

She threads her way among the drunkards,  
Never escorted, all alone,  
And slowly breathing mists and perfume,  
Sits by the window on her own.

And ancient, long-forgotten legends  
Float from her swirling silken things,

The hat, trimmed with black plumes of mourning,  
The slender fingers sheathed in rings.

Enchanted by the nearness of her,  
I look beyond the veil's dark film,  
And see a far shore of enchantment,  
And a remote, enchanted realm.

Unfathomed secrets are vouchsafed me,  
Somebody's sun is made my own.  
Deep down into my soul's recesses  
The acrid, bitter wine has gone.

And ostrich feathers, lightly drooping,  
Are swaying slowly in my brain,  
And fathomless blue eyes are radiant  
On the shores of that far domain.

Locked in my heart there is a treasure,  
At last, at last, the key is mine!  
Yes, you are right, you drunken monster!  
I know it now. There's truth in wine.

24 April 1906  
Ozerki

\* \* \*

Before the twilight hour, descending  
Into the swirling gloom below,  
I saw out in the murk before me  
My sister's features, full of woe.



She walked along with soundless footsteps.  
Behind her, all the darkness stirred,  
And in the dales and in the gullies  
The sighs from countless breasts were heard.

Whence into rain and cold, dear sister,  
Do you go with this dismal throng,  
Whom famine's scourge drives to a living  
Death of eternal wandering?



And then she slowly came up to me  
And held her torch high in the night,  
And all that is not seen on earth  
Was bathed in gentle, flickering light.



And there, in ditches by the roadside,  
Shuddering all over, I could see  
The signs of torments past describing,  
And bodies writhing helplessly.

Once more the guttering torch was lowered.  
She smiled and left without a sound,  
As nebulous and as aetherial  
As was the darkness all around.

I still cannot forget those faces,  
The empty eyes that could not see,  
And that long file of famine's victims  
Forever stands in front of me.

*September 1906*

*A COLD DAY*



It was in church that I first met you,  
A blissful garden was our home,  
But now through evil-smelling courtyards  
To curses and hard work we've come.

We've walked past all the factory gateways,  
And in each window we have seen  
How heavy lies the yoke of labour  
On every back bent low in pain.

And now we've come to our new dwelling  
With a low ceiling overhead,  
Where people have abused each other  
Worn out with toil till nearly dead.

You held your skirts up, lightly threading  
Your way through sleepers on the floor,

120

But even sleep was like invective  
In that foul corner over there...

You looked at me over your shoulder  
As if I could allay your fears,  
And down my cheek there slowly trickled  
A single, shining, drunken tear.

No! Happiness is sheer illusion—  
Our youth went from us long ago.  
Toil ages people prematurely:  
I wield the hammer, you must sew.

So sit and sew, look through the window;  
Work harries people everywhere,  
And those for whom life's somewhat harder  
Sing endless songs, hour after hour.

I shall be working close beside you,  
You won't remind me of the time  
When, looking at the tumbler's bottom,  
I drowned my heart's despair in wine.

*September. 1906*

*IN OCTOBER*

October has arrived. How dull  
And drear the capital!  
A weary chestnut pony wanders  
Around the yard at will.



As light as thistledown, a snowflake  
Flutters upon the wind.  
A scraggy-looking little fir-tree  
Tosses upon a mound.

Oh, life was easy, life was young,  
But now my time is gone.  
A boy is shivering, blue with cold,  
Out in the yard, alone.



121

And everything shall go on being  
Just as it was of old:  
The pony and the little urchin  
Do not enjoy the cold.

And I've been sent with no good reason  
Up here into the loft.  
No one has listened to my theories,  
I've no tobacco left.

But, of my own free will, I want  
The life that's also free.  
Since I began to drink, there's been  
No happy star for me.

The star's lost in my wineglass—surely  
Not till the end of time?..  
But now my soul's cheered up once more—  
It's back, that star of mine!

Look, look—it sails across my vision,  
Sways in the window-pane...  
And now the real life is beginning,  
And wings shall soon be mine.

And when I go, I'll even take  
All of my property.  
I've found my own true powers at last!  
One shout, and I can fly!

I fly, I fly to that small boy.  
Through whirlwind and through fire.  
All shall be as it was of old,  
Save that I won't be here!

October 1906

\* \* \*

Night. The city has simmered down.  
Behind the big window

122

All's quiet and solemn,  
As if the man were dying.

But he just stands there sadly,  
Distressed by failure;  
His collar open,  
He's looking up at the stars.

"Stars, stars,  
Why am I so sad?"

He gazes up at the stars.

"Stars, stars,  
Where does this yearning come from?"

The stars tell everything.  
Everything's told by the stars.

October 1906

### WINDOWS OVER THE COURTYARD

I've only one hope still remaining:  
It's to stare right down into the well  
Of the courtyard. It's dawn. And the washing  
In the half-light gleams spectrally pale.

I hear come to life far beneath me  
The language of long, long ago.  
Forgotten on somebody's window,  
The slim yellow candles still glow.

On a roof alongside the eave gutter,  
There's a hungry cat stealthily creeping.  
To weep—that is all I have left now,  
And to watch you there, peacefully sleeping.

You're asleep, and outside all is quiet,  
But I'm ready to die of ennui,

123

And a foul, hungry demon is knocking  
At my temples inexorably.

Hey, sun, take a look through my window—  
But no, you'll pass by and be gone.  
I'm just like the sun in the winter,  
I'm just like that foolish old sun.

October 1906

\* \* \*

Around my lair I wander,  
Downcast and gloomy-eyed.  
The dismal organ-grinder  
Will come and sob outside...

About the life of freedom  
That I shall never share,  
About the roving steppe-wind,  
And springtime in the air.

But why should that concern me?  
I wander, lost, alone.  
The pendulum goes *tick ... tock...*  
The candle's burning down.

My one hope's in the window  
Down there that I can see.  
The clothes she wears are radiant,  
She'll come and visit me.

And, frowning, I shall tell her—  
And for the hundredth time—  
How I have irritated  
So many friends of mine.

Again we'll find contentment,  
Tranquillity and peace...  
The icon lamp is burning,  
The heart is at its ease.

124

Why does she come so often  
To talk to such as I?  
Why does she pass the merry  
Thread through the needle's eye?

Why does she chat away  
With such blithe cheerfulness?  
Why does she bow her head  
And shyly hide her face?

How cold it is, how poky  
In here when she is gone!  
The lamp that's in her window—  
When will it shine again?

My face is even whiter  
Than is the spotless wall...  
Again I will be nervous  
Next time she comes to call...

There's nothing to be scared of  
And nothing need be lost...  
Must I admit my feelings?  
Must they all be confessed?

What can I tell my shy one?  
That my gloom's put to flight?  
That with the wind come snowflakes?  
That my room's full of light?

7 December 1906

### THE FIRE


Leaping, darting into sight,  
Tongues of fire are on the wing,  
Golden splashes of the night,  
Town moths flitting, fluttering.

Smoke has curtained off the building,  
Dark crowds rush there, flowing past.

125

Sailor, is it sweet, the cleanest,  
Softest winding sheet of all?

14 November 1909

ON THE ISLANDS 

Stone columns, whitened by the blizzards,  
Elagin Bridge, two lights once more,  
A woman's amorous voice, sand crunching,  
A horse's whinny—all as before.

Two shadows, merged in one while kissing,  
Glide with the runners of the sleigh,  
But, neither furtive nor yet jealous,  
I have this new one in my sway.

Yes, it's a melancholy pleasure  
That love, like snow, must surely pass.  
Oh, must we, must we always promise  
The old, eternal faithfulness?

No, she is not the first I fondle,  
And I, punctilious and severe,  
Will make no semblance of submission  
Nor ask for royal domains of her.

No, I count up each time, with careful  
Geometer's consistency,  
Bridges and chapel, biting wind,  
Those barren islands that I see.

This is a ritual: simply straighten  
The shaggy bearskin as you go,  
Embrace the slender waist, be witty,  
Speed through the darkness and the snow,

Remember button-boots so slender,  
And fall in love with ice-cold fur...  
No lover's rapier shall transfix me  
At some grim duel because of her...

168

No mother with a lighted candle  
Waits in the doorway anxiously...  
No wretched spouse behind closed shutters  
Begins to burn with jealousy...

What made last night so full of radiance,  
What gives tonight all its allure,  
Is but the ball's continuation,  
The move from light to dark—no more...

22 November 1909

IN THE RESTAURANT 

I shall never forget it (there was or was not  
Such an evening): the sunset's declining  
And dwindling fires had consumed and divided  
the sky;  
In the yellow light, street-lamps were shining.

I was there, in a window seat. The place  
was crowded,  
And the fiddles sang amorously,  
And I sent you a single black rose in a glass  
Of champagne as gold as the sky.

You glanced over my way. Embarrassed, but boldly,  
I met your cold stare, and I bowed.  
And you said to your escort, "That man's in love,  
too,"  
In a tone that was cuttingly loud.

Straightaway, as in answer, the strings began  
playing,  
All the fiddles struck up in the band...  
But a young girl's contempt was the answer you  
gave me,  
A scarce visible move of the hand.

Of a sudden you left, like a startled bird,  
You passed me, as light as my dream...

  
169





*THE NEW AMERICA*

Time of festival, wonderful festival,  
But no star through the clouds can be seen...  
You lie under a fierce, raging blizzard,  
O ill-fated home country of mine.

In the snows, in the steppes, in the forests  
I can see not a sign of your face.  
Is there only this terrible vastness,  
This bewildering, infinite space?

Sinking down in the depths of a snowdrift,  
I climb into a ramshackle sleigh.  
Wretched Rus of the bleak Finnish marshes,  
In no sumptuous coffin you lie!

You pretend that you're just an old woman,  
You pretend that you're pious, though poor,  
That you're prayer, and the chiming  
of church bells,  
And those crosses—yet more, and still more...

But your blue frankincense very often  
Seems like something far different to me...  
No, beneath the bright Muscovy headscarf,  
It's no pious old face that I see!

For behind the low bows and the candles,  
Behind prayer, upon prayer, upon prayer,  
I hear other words whispered in secret,  
I see cheeks that are young and on fire.

Further, further... The gusty wind rises  
And sweeps over the cold, barren waste...  
And a bush by the way tosses skywards  
Like the stole that's held up by a priest.

But beyond the flood tide of the river,  
Where the feather-grass bows to the ground,  
There's the free, bitter odour of wood-smoke,  
And a faraway trumpeting sound...

Can it be the Polovtsian armies,  
The fierce Tatar encampment again?  
Are the bright Turkish fezzes like wildfire  
Sweeping over the desolate plain?

But no prince's brave standard is flying,  
And no helmets are dipped in the Don,  
Nor does Varang's fair grand-daughter languish  
In Polovtsian thralldom, alone...

And no fierce Cossack pigtails are flying,  
And no hetman's bright pennants are seen...  
No, those black shapes are tall factory chimneys,  
Those are factory sirens that scream...

The way over the steppes is unending—  
Steppes, and wind, and more wind—till there comes  
A many-floored factory building,  
And townships of working-class slums...

In the wilderness, savage, wide open,  
You're the same, yet no longer the same.  
You have turned a new visage towards me,  
I am stirred by a different dream...

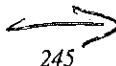
The black coal—subterranean Messiah,  
The black coal—tsar and bridegroom out here,  
But the voice of your stone songs, O Russia,  
O bride, tells of nothing to fear!

The coal groans and the salt becomes whiter,  
And unceasingly screams the iron ore...  
Yes, above the bleak steppe-lands, the rising  
New America shines like a star!

*12 December 1913*

\* \* \*

The Petrograd sky was all turbid with drizzle  
And a troop-train was bound for the war.



Platoon after platoon, men with rifles  
and bayonets,  
Filling carriages—more and still more.

On that train, in a thousand hearts suddenly blossomed  
Parting's anguish, the torments of love,  
Strength, youth, hope... In the far distant sunset,  
There was blood in the clouds up above.

As they settled themselves, some struck up  
the *Varyag*,  
And some the *Yermak*, out of key...  
And they shouted "Hurrah!", and they joked,  
and they laughed,  
And they crossed themselves secretly...

The wind snatched up a leaf that was fluttering  
down,  
The guard's lantern winked on, began swaying,  
And beneath the black clouds the high-spirited  
bugler  
Announced it was time to be going.

And the bugle wailed shrilly of martial glory,  
And all present were filled with vague fear,  
Till the rumbling of wheels and the engine's  
hoarse whistle  
Were drowned by a long, rousing cheer.

The last coach's rear buffers were lost  
in the darkness,  
And then silence descended till dawn.  
As if grimly announcing: "It's time!",  
a long cheer  
Floated back from the fields in the rain.

No, we didn't feel sorry or sad, despite  
rain-clouds  
As far as the eye could see.  
That was steel—that was clear, tough,  
reliable steel;  
What avail could our sorrow be?

For such pity is drowned by the flames  
of the fires,  
Drumming hooves and the thunder of guns,  
And such sadness is laid by the poisoned mists  
rising  
From the bloody Galician plains...

1 September 1914

\* \* \*

To Z.N. Hippus



Those born in eras of stagnation  
Cannot recall their chosen way.  
Children of Russia's terrible years,  
We can't forget a single day.

Years of the holocaust! Could there be  
Tidings in you of hope or madness?  
From days of war, from days of freedom,  
A bloody glow shines on our faces.

Dumbness prevails: the tolling tocsin  
Demands that all lips must be sealed.  
In hearts that once were so exalted  
A fatal void is now concealed.

And even though above our deathbed  
The flocks of croaking ravens rise,  
O Lord, O Lord, let those most worthy  
Upon Thy kingdom set their eyes.

8 September 1914

\* \* \*

Wild, wild wind  
On panes impinges,

Keeps welling up from deep inside my chest.  
Out in the garden, in the clear night shadows,  
The dogs run round and round the house, barking.  
Here in my own home, I'm just a stranger.  
I have no sense of kinship with my kinfolk.  
People are only slightly less abhorrent  
Than the mosquito that I killed just now.  
The candle has been shining for some time  
Upon the page on which a dull professor  
Nags in my ears, like a mosquito whining,  
That woman here in Russia is oppressed,  
And so her lot is like that of the worker.  
Wait! Here's portrait: silver-haired professor,  
His face all washed, hair smarmed; thirty-five  
Editions of his book so far. But wait!  
You tell me that the worker is oppressed?  
No, wait! This spring, I saw a brave man,  
A worker who will face death without flinching.  
So would his friends. The furnaces will stop  
And work grind to a halt in all the factories  
At once. And then the corpulent factory-owner  
Will bow down at the workers' feet. And wait!  
You tell me that a woman is a slave?  
I know a woman. In her soul there burned  
A sheaf of fire. The wind was in her walk.  
Her eyes were worlds of mourning and of passion.  
And she was of the lightest mortal clay,  
Trembling and willowy. And so, Professor,  
In that one woman's body dwelt the union  
Of all four elements. And she could kill,  
Then she could resurrect. But you try killing  
And resurrecting afterwards! You can't?  
A woman can, and likewise can a worker.

20 June 1907

\* \* \*

In the profound cathedral shadows  
I've read the contents of your scroll;

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Your voice is a prolonged and muffled  
Groan from the choir—and that is all.

I have a need to try and test you;  
There are so many seeking me,  
The look that cannot be repeated,  
The fire that burns eternally.

So here's my scroll in answer to you  
Upon the wall, in that same spot,  
Because, when you were trying to find me,  
Such passionate torment was your lot.

It will be long before you know me,  
At night, all sleep will pass you by.  
Maybe you'll melt like wax and vanish,  
Or maybe you will simply die.

Why should your groanings and your torments  
And woes concern me anyway?  
You're nothing but the clouded vision  
Of other worlds far, far away.

Consider, are you really worthy?  
You have been neither strong nor brave,  
A pitiful, inglorious warrior,  
A slothful and a cunning slave.

And if your sigh, "I love", comes to me,  
A distant echo following after,  
As with a whiplash I shall scourge you  
With my ice-cold and thunderous laughter!

25 May 1908

TO PUSHKIN HOUSE

Name of Pushkin House in our  
Academy of Sciences!

"

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Name we all know and revere,  
More than just a name to us!

It's the ice in motion, ringing  
On the all-triumphant river,  
It's the ships at sea exchanging  
Messages with one another

It's the Sphinx of legend gazing  
At the slow-retreating waves;  
It's the stern bronze horseman racing  
On a mount that never moves;

Our impassioned sorrows by  
The Neva's mysterious flow;  
How we met the grim black day  
With the white night's shimmering glow.

And for us the river opened  
Such bright vistas lapped in flame!  
It was not those days we summoned  
But the ages yet to come!

Minding not the brief deception  
Of the dark, oppressive days,  
We could see the distant future  
In a blue and rosy haze.

Pushkin! We have learned to honour  
Secret freedom after you!  
Lend a hand in stormy weather,  
Show us how to battle through!

Did we not find inspiration  
In the sweetness of your songs?  
Was it not your joy then, Pushkin,  
That bore us on airy wings?

That is why we all revere  
What is more than name to us,  
Name of Pushkin House, in our  
Academy of Sciences!

That is why, as day is ended,  
And into the night I go,  
From the white square of the Senate  
I salute it with a bow.

11 February 1921