

## REQUIEM

1935-1940

No, not under the vault of alien skies,  
And not under the shelter of alien wings—  
I was with my people then,  
There, where my people, unfortunately, were.

1961

## Instead of a Preface

In the terrible years of the Yezhov terror, I spent seventeen months in the prison lines of Leningrad. Once, someone “recognized” me. Then a woman with bluish lips standing behind me, who, of course, had never heard me called by name before, woke up from the stupor to which everyone had succumbed and whispered in my ear (everyone spoke in whispers there):

“Can you describe this?”

And I answered: “Yes, I can.”

Then something that looked like a smile passed over what had once been her face.

*April 1, 1957*  
*Leningrad*

## Dedication

Mountains bow down to this grief,  
Mighty rivers cease to flow,  
But the prison gates hold firm,  
And behind them are the "prisoners' burrows"  
And mortal woe.  
For someone a fresh breeze blows,  
For someone the sunset luxuriates—  
We wouldn't know, we are those who everywhere  
Hear only the rasp of the hateful key  
And the soldiers' heavy tread.  
We rose as if for an early service,  
Trudged through the savaged capital  
And met there, more lifeless than the dead;  
The sun is lower and the Neva mistier,  
But hope keeps singing from afar.  
The verdict . . . And her tears gush forth,  
Already she is cut off from the rest,  
As if they painfully wrenched life from her heart,  
As if they brutally knocked her flat,  
But she goes on . . . Staggering . . . Alone . . .  
Where now are my chance friends  
Of those two diabolical years?  
What do they imagine is in Siberia's storms,  
What appears to them dimly in the circle of the moon?  
I am sending my farewell greeting to them.

*March 1940*

## II

Quietly flows the quiet Don,  
Yellow moon slips into a home.

He slips in with cap askew,  
He sees a shadow, yellow moon.

This woman is ill,  
This woman is alone,

Husband in the grave, son in prison,  
Say a prayer for me.

## III

No, it is not I, it is somebody else who is suffering.  
I would not have been able to bear what happened,  
Let them shroud it in black,  
And let them carry off the lanterns . . .  
Night.

1940

## IV

You should have been shown, you mocker,  
Minion of all your friends,  
Gay little sinner of Tsarskoye Selo,  
What would happen in your life—  
How three-hundredth in line, with a parcel,  
You would stand by the Kresty prison,

## Prologue

That was when the ones who smiled  
Were the dead, glad to be at rest.  
And like a useless appendage, Leningrad  
Swung from its prisons.  
And when, senseless from torment,  
Regiments of convicts marched,  
And the short songs of farewell  
Were sung by locomotive whistles.  
The stars of death stood above us  
And innocent Russia writhed  
Under bloody boots  
And under the tires of the Black Marias.

### I

They led you away at dawn,  
I followed you, like a mourner,  
In the dark front room the children were crying,  
By the icon shelf the candle was dying.  
On your lips was the icon's chill.  
The deathly sweat on your brow . . . Unforgettable!—  
I will be like the wives of the Streltsy,  
Howling under the Kremlin towers.

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1940

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Minion of all your friends,  
Gay little sinner of Tsarskoye Selo,  
What would happen in your life—  
How three-hundredth in line, with a parcel,  
You would stand by the Kresty prison,

Your tempestuous tears  
 Burning through the New Year's ice.  
 Over there the prison poplar bends,  
 And there's no sound—and over there how many  
 Innocent lives are ending now . . .

## V

For seventeen months I've been crying out,  
 Calling you home.  
 I flung myself at the hangman's feet,  
 You are my son and my horror.  
 Everything is confused forever,  
 And it's not clear to me  
 Who is a beast now, who is a man,  
 And how long before the execution.  
 And there are only dusty flowers,  
 And the chinking of the censer, and tracks  
 From somewhere to nowhere.  
 And staring me straight in the eyes,  
 And threatening impending death,  
 Is an enormous star.

1939

## VI

The light weeks will take flight,  
 I won't comprehend what happened.  
 Just as the white nights  
 Stared at you, dear son, in prison,

So they are staring again,  
With the burning eyes of a hawk,  
Talking about your lofty cross,  
And about death.

1939

## VII

### The Sentence

And the stone word fell  
On my still-living breast.  
Never mind, I was ready.  
I will manage somehow.

Today I have so much to do:  
I must kill memory once and for all,  
I must turn my soul to stone,  
I must learn to live again—

Unless . . . Summer's ardent rustling  
Is like a festival outside my window.  
For a long time I've foreseen this  
Brilliant day, deserted house.

*June 22, 1939*  
*Fountain House*

VIII  
To Death

You will come in any case—so why not now?  
 I am waiting for you—I can't stand much more.  
 I've put out the light and opened the door  
 For you, so simple and miraculous.  
 So come in any form you please,  
 Burst in as a gas shell  
 Or, like a gangster, steal in with a length of pipe,  
 Or poison me with typhus fumes.  
 Or be that fairy tale you've dreamed up,  
 So sickeningly familiar to everyone—  
 In which I glimpse the top of a pale blue cap  
 And the house attendant white with fear.  
 Now it doesn't matter anymore. The Yenisey swirls,  
 The North Star shines.  
 And the final horror dims  
 The blue luster of beloved eyes.

*August 19, 1939*  
*Fountain House*

IX

Now madness half shadows  
 My soul with its wing,  
 And makes it drunk with fiery wine  
 And beckons toward the black ravine.

And I've finally realized  
 That I must give in,  
 Overhearing myself  
 Raving as if it were somebody else.

And it does not allow me to take  
 Anything of mine with me  
 (No matter how I plead with it,  
 No matter how I supplicate):

Not the terrible eyes of my son—  
 Suffering turned to stone,  
 Not the day of the terror,  
 Not the hour I met with him in prison,

Not the sweet coolness of his hands,  
 Not the trembling shadow of the lindens,  
 Not the far-off, fragile sound—  
 Of the final words of consolation.

May 4, 1940  
 Fountain House

## X

### Crucifixion

*"Do not weep for Me, Mother,  
 I am in the grave."*

#### 1

A choir of angels sang the praises of that  
 momentous hour,  
 And the heavens dissolved in fire.  
 To his Father He said: "Why hast Thou forsaken me!"  
 And to his Mother: "Oh, do not weep for Me. . ."

1940  
 Fountain House

## 2

Mary Magdalene beat her breast and sobbed,  
 The beloved disciple turned to stone,  
 But where the silent Mother stood, there  
 No one glanced and no one would have dared.

1943

*Tashkent*

## Epilogue I

I learned how faces fall,  
 How terror darts from under eyelids,  
 How suffering traces lines  
 Of stiff cuneiform on cheeks,  
 How locks of ashen-blonde or black  
 Turn silver suddenly,  
 Smiles fade on submissive lips  
 And fear trembles in a dry laugh.  
 And I pray not for myself alone,  
 But for all those who stood there with me  
 In cruel cold, and in July's heat,  
 At that blind, red wall.

## Epilogue II

Once more the day of remembrance draws near.  
 I see, I hear, I feel you:

The one they almost had to drag at the end,  
 And the one who tramps her native land no more,

And the one who, tossing her beautiful head,  
Said: "Coming here's like coming home."

I'd like to name them all by name,  
But the list has been confiscated and is nowhere to  
be found.

I have woven a wide mantle for them  
From their meager, overheard words.

I will remember them always and everywhere,  
I will never forget them no matter what comes.

And if they gag my exhausted mouth  
Through which a hundred million scream,

Then may the people remember me  
On the eve of my remembrance day.

And if ever in this country  
They decide to erect a monument to me,

I consent to that honor  
Under these conditions—that it stand

Neither by the sea, where I was born:  
My last tie with the sea is broken,

Nor in the tsar's garden near the cherished pine stump,  
Where an inconsolable shade looks for me,

But here, where I stood for three hundred hours,  
And where they never unbolted the doors for me.

This, lest in blissful death  
I forget the rumbling of the Black Marias,

Forget how that detested door slammed shut  
And an old woman howled like a wounded animal.

And may the melting snow stream like tears  
From my motionless lids of bronze,

And a prison dove coo in the distance,  
And the ships of the Neva sail calmly on.

*March 1940*

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