

the city that welcomes one in its ice-cold fashion,
where the nightingale ceases to sing and the pine-wood
loses its smell,
where not only man is enslaved,
but the flower, the bird, the horse and the humble dog
as well.

Gentle reader, as you read these lines,
reflect for a moment and note this down;
the angular picture you scan
is the town.

Why, man feels just like a flower:

Don't pluck him, don't break him, don't tread on him!

Sinful City

The city of factory owners, boxers, millionaires,
the city of inventors and of engineers,
the city of generals, merchants, and patriotic poets
with its black sins has exceeded the bounds of God's
wrath:

and God was enraged.

A hundred times He'd threatened vengeance on
the town,

a rain of sulphur, fire, thunderbolts raining down,
and a hundred times he'd taken pity.

For he always remembered what once he had
promised:

that even for two just men he'd not destroy his city,
and a god's promise should retain its power:

just then two lovers walked across the park,
breathing the scent of hawthorn shrubs in flower.

**You have skin pale like
a snowdrop . . .**

You have skin pale like a snowdrop,
but a mouth fragrant like a rose.
The words of love are monotonous,
what shall I do with them now
that I am waiting for your reply
and in confusion hurrying for it.
You have skin pale like a snowdrop,
but a mouth fragrant like a rose.

But don't deceive me in the end,
let the fear that screens your eyes
vanish quickly, please look —
like the snow that fell last year.
You have skin pale like a snowdrop,
but a mouth fragrant like a rose.

translated by George Gibian

Autobiography

Sometimes
when she would talk about herself
my mother would say:
My life was sad and quiet,
I always walked on tip-toe.
But if I got a little angry
and stamped my foot
the cups, which had been my mother's,
would tinkle on the dresser
and make me laugh.

At the moment of my birth, so I am told,
a butterfly flew in by the window
and settled on my mother's bed,
but that same moment a dog howled in the yard.
My mother thought
it a bad omen.

My life of course has not been quite
as peaceful as hers.
But even when I gaze upon our present days
with wistfulness
as if at empty picture frames
and all I see is a dusty wall,
still it has been so beautiful.

There are many moments
I cannot forget,
moments like radiant flowers
in all possible colours and hues,
evenings filled with fragrance
like purple grapes
hidden in the leaves of darkness.

With passion I read poetry
and loved music
and blundered, ever surprised,
from beauty to beauty.
But when I first saw
the picture of a woman nude
I began to believe in miracles.

My life unrolled swiftly.
It was too short
for my vast longings,
which had no bounds.
Before I knew it
my life's end was drawing near.

Death soon will kick open my door
and enter.
With startled terror I'll catch my breath
and forget to breathe again.

May I not be denied the time
once more to kiss the hands
of the one who patiently and in step with me
walked on and on and on
and who loved most of all.