

CRUMBS OF BLACK BREAD

by Uri Strisover

1.

Darkness, the plane slows on the smooth runway

"Priletheli" (we have arrived).

Russian is bandied in the air

At eight degrees below zero

Frozen, unsmiling faces

WELCOME TO DNEPROPETROVSK

Sliding on stairs of ice

Ankle gets twisted, grasping broken railing

It's alright to stare at a fur hat

Forbidden to look into extinguished eyes.

2.

Walking a curved path between unfinished structures

Black overcoat bending under snow

With thousands of frozen years compiled

Ice covers naked trees

Branches yearning to be covered with a blanket.

Seven small children

Sleeping in one bed

A man in underwear roaming a kitchen

Which is a bathroom, which is a bedroom.

A little girl eating, her chin dripping

Smell of cabbage in a plate, clings to a coat

A broken pipe leaks stains onto a tin pot.

3.

A peeling flowered wallpaper covers wall

Pale blossom doesn't fade in the noise

A wall shakes

A roaring train? Falling snow?

A blind man sweeps flakes

Collects ice into a pile.

His head shifts with the wind

His frozen feet buried in snow.

4.

A little lady sings:

"I shall play on an old violin".

Her eyes invite a tear

Droplets of music fill the room.

Man's fingers amble over violin

A lad is on the drums.

A clarinet accompanies old songstress

Bellowing her days, my days

The days of my parents, their parents.

She Colors words in Russian and Yiddish

In a brown dish of Shabbat

Brushing me clean of black-bread crumbs

At Friday night's meal.

Kissing an ancient princess

On wrinkled cheek

squeezing my body into a long coat

Black hats close in on me.

(Translated from the Hebrew by Asher Tarmon)