

1981

# Endurance

Carolyn Forché

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## Endurance · Carolyn Forché

In Belgrade, the windows of the tourist  
hotel opened over seven storeys of lilacs,  
rain clearing sidewalk tables of linens  
and liquor, the silk flags of the non-  
aligned nations like colorful underthings  
pinned to the wind. Tito was living.  
I bought English, was mistaken for Czech,  
walked to the fountains, the market  
of garlic and tents, where I saw  
my dead Anna again and again,  
hard yellow beans in her lap,  
her babushka of white summer cotton,  
her eyes the hard pits of her past.  
She was gossiping among her friends,  
saying the rosary or trying to sell me  
something. Anna. Peeling her hands  
with a paring knife, saying *in your country  
you have nothing*. Each word was the tusk  
of a vegetable tossed to the street  
or a mountain rounded by trains  
with cargoes of sheep-dung and grief.  
I searched in Belgrade for some holy  
face painted *without hands* as when  
an ikon painter goes to sleep and awakens  
with an image come from the dead.  
On each corner Anna dropped  
her work in her lap and looked up.  
I am a childless poet, I said.  
I have not painted an egg, made prayers  
or finished my Easter duty in years.  
I left Belgrade for Frankfurt last  
summer, Frankfurt for New York,  
New York for the Roanoke valley

where mountains hold the breath  
of the dead between them and to each  
morning a fresh bandage of mist.  
New York, Roanoke, the valley —  
to this Cape where in the dunes  
the wind takes a body of its own  
and a fir tree comes to the window  
at night, tapping on the glass like  
a woman who has lived too much.  
*Piskata, hold your tongue, she says.*  
*I am trying to tell you something.*