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Nel Mezzo Del Cammin Di Nostra Vita

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TOMAS VENCLOVA

Translated from the Lithuanian by Rimas Uzgiris

NEL MEZZO DEL CAMMIN DI NOSTRA VITA

in memory of Konstantin Bogatyrev

As middle age overtook me,
I lived but learned how not to be.
Death was a member of the family
and took up most of the flat.
Drop by drop, I domesticated her,
and even asked her not to touch me.
Every morning, I saw what seemed
the most beautiful city of Europe's east,
where iron waits patiently,
and rotting reeds rustle in the mist.
I found stone, brass knuckles, a steam engine,
and, when lucky, some gasoline.
I ate, slept, and drank in death.
I tried to give her purpose and a meaning.
At times, I would forget her. No one
can really grow accustomed to her.

I unlocked the hallway door.
My heart skipped a beat,
and grew heavy in my chest.
In this state—
death could come
just like that.

Author's Note: Konstantin Bogatyrev (1925–1976) was a poet and dissident killed outside his apartment door in Moscow. Many hold secret agents of the police responsible.