

TOMAS VENCLOVA

*Translated from the Lithuanian by Rimas Uzgis*

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.

175

*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.*