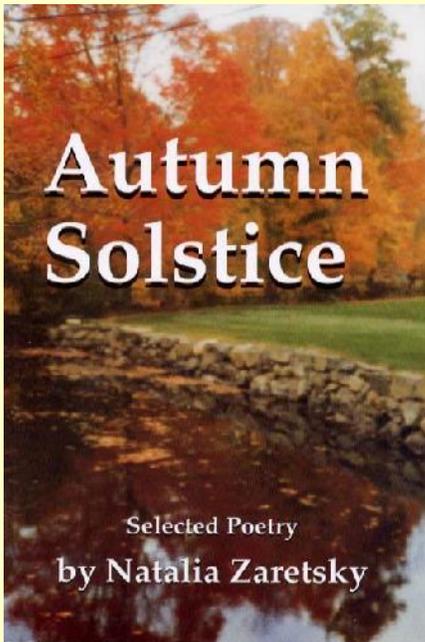


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### AUTUMN WOODS

I like to roam in the woods,  
when dashing threads of cranes  
stitch through the autumn sky  
above the morning chilly dew.  
On a transparent spider web  
attached to air, moist drops  
glisten under cool sunrays  
that sift through feathered clouds  
and weaken on a lone snailing path.  
and a brown carpet rustled  
under my intruding feet.

I like to roam in the woods,  
smell musty bark,  
catch a drifting maple leaf  
that floats down in a slow mood  
from disrobed embarrassed trees,  
as if they hibernate in grief  
of losing their summery attire.

I like to roam in the woods,  
see branches still carrying  
trembling leaves on brittle stems,

that swing and swing,  
and blend my breath with autumn  
and whisper along with mild wind:  
next spring, next spring, next spring.

September, 1987. Connecticut

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#### OLD VENETIAN GARDEN

(Inspired By Trio Grapevine By Inessa Zaretsky)

The arch of a wrought-iron gate,  
carved in a thick stone wall.  
Behind it is a dormant garden,  
drown in the noon lethargy.  
Twirled, knotted vines  
dotted with tiny purple flowers  
sprawl down the wall's rough grayness,  
over moss and silver patina.  
A surprising summer rain  
disrupts the stale air  
with taps on its marble frame  
and popping bubbles on a pond.  
It patters on evergreens, bushed around,  
on a gravel path, flanked  
by pointed slender cypresses,  
on the darkness, ran into the deep.  
Rain stops as suddenly as it began.  
Through the lacy canopy of trees  
sunrays cautiously seep  
on glistening lilac leaves,  
floating with their own purpose  
between the shadows of clouds.  
The old garden awakened  
for a short moment,  
slips again into a doze  
of midsummer stillness,  
simmering glare  
and hazy after-rain perfume.

February, 2000

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*Blackbird*

## WOMAN CROSSES SIXTH AVENUE

Manhattan at noon is a daymare.

The opaque ribbon of cars and pedestrian stream  
cross each other with a wearing city's rhythm.

Tall trucks, like ships, sail above noise,  
rodents of unruly taxies scurry among them.

Long, three-axled, limousines, like dachshunds,  
stretch from one light to another.

A woman with a cane and scared eyes,  
in a long coat and hat,

pulled down to her brows,

stands firmly on a curb,  
waiting for a light to change.

Each year shortens her walks -  
now the library on 42nd Street  
or benches in Washington Square  
are a world away.

"Do I need that stupid lettuce?

I could have done without it.

Why didn't I wait until six?

Surely, the crowd will be thinner.

Why didn't I listen to the weather?

It is sixty-five instead of winter."

The light changes,

she starts crossing her Red Sea -

cars on both sides loom scary.

"Has the green become shorter?

Before I always had time to get to the other side.

Forget lettuce - just an ice cream

in the outside corner café... when I get there."

DON'T WALK what an annoying sign,

as if saying, stay home, don't walk, don't breathe, don't live.

But I still do, don't I?"

February, 2002

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#### MAN TRIES TO HELP HIS SON THROUGH LIFE

My son, a freshman, lost his sleep, stopped eating.

"What happened, son? Are you in love?"

"I think I am.

She is pretty, slender, smart and funny.

In the first row every week I wait for her lecture,  
for her tight jeans, her laughter, how she turns her head."

I knew her, years ago she tutored my daughter.

I looked at my son - handsome, tall, bright.

I had an idea, a small plot, unusual for a father.

I called and invited her for lunch.

We met. She looked good in her slim pantsuit,  
with a charming and curious smile.

Strangely, my tirade didn't shock her.

"I think my son is in love with you. I know

how love with an older woman thrills and hurts.

Once I had that wonder. She took me to the top,  
but I didn't know how high the top was.

As a wise father, I beg you to give him that chance.

My wife would kill me, if she knew -

she wouldn't be able to accept a woman her age  
as her son's inamorata.

Please - fate gives, but once."

(I can't even imagine talking to a man of my age  
about my daughter's infatuation with him.)

Holding her hand, I looked into her eyes.

I sensed she would be glad that someone,  
(why not this slender youth)

at least for a tasty while to spice her life.

"I know that you are interested in music, art.

I promise tickets to theater, exhibits, concerts,  
and you will teach him that, also, won't you?

Please, take him."

She smiled.

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### WAITING...

We always wait for something

from a cradle to the white shroud.

A baby waits for a soft puppy of a mother breast,  
its mouth and hands are ready to grab  
something sweet and warm.

We wait for a birthday,

hoping for a bicycle, a ticket to a rock concert,

for a letter to fish out from a mail box,

inviting for a college fun

in another state - far, far away.

We wait for love that smashes us

with a storm, wind-burns, lusty heat.

We wait for a bus on our way to work,

for a trip to Hawaii, Cancun, or just Florida,

for a wind to blow away mid-life problems

that we get ourselves into at forty or fifty.

We wait for the first day, when we don't need

to set an alarm clock,

but already start missing a job's tedium.

We wait for a call from son or, at least, a grandson.

Then we move from living to memory,

furnishing with wants and waits

for anything, something... Miracles?

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*Tamara And The Demon*

## VADIM

*(Excerpts from the novella in verse)*

*Love is a scar that never heals.  
If it heals, it wasn't love to begin with*  
-Knut Gamsun

*April 1979, Moscow*

In the doorframe against the daylight  
you, a slender youth, appeared.  
You burst into my life,  
suddenly condensed into one month,  
my faun, my Greek god,  
a Demon from Wrubel's painting,  
big hands, hovering above the keyboard,  
with dark, wavy hair, deer-like eyes.

You gave me your shameless youth.  
I gave you all of me.  
You came and went, came and left.

*December 1979, Moscow*

What wind blew you  
into my house now and then  
after midnight, drunk?

I filled a tub, took off your clothes,  
sank you in a bubble-bath,  
sobered you with my kisses.

I led you, anew, to my bedroom,  
into the night's shortness  
of your solids and softness.

Leaving a dent on my pillow,  
you walked away from my mornings.  
Your youth was too reckless,  
too shallow for my love.

Still, why did a mischievous wind  
swing my door wide open  
and blow you into my ready arms?

*January 1980, Moscow, Russia*

Oh, was it really you in a doorway,  
out of crispy winter  
with snowflakes on eyelashes,  
a shy smile and a rose in your hand?

I knew you would come not drunk, not at night.

Velvety you glanced,  
slowly you undressed me,  
embraced my knees,  
Don't ask me why I was away so long.

Was it love that cloaked us?

*December 1980, Moscow, Russia*

After three years of the ordeal,  
soon I would leave this backward country,  
escape lies, fear, hatred.

Those three years were full of you.  
You were my reality, my dream -  
I had to give up on both.

I knew, there would be many other things -  
the Louvre, Carnegie Hall,  
Rome on the Hills, Galilee's groves.

But my heart gasped for the last breath of you.  
I measured time by you.  
What to wish for now, this moment?

*December 1980, The plane Moscow -Vienna*

To numb the grief of our good-bye  
I gulped a glass of vodka,  
before the last ride to the airport.

The plane took off to...forever.  
I should have been excited - instead, I cried.  
It was over - last kiss, last sigh.

*September 1988, Paris, France*

Miles, years, borders lay between  
that last dreary Moscow day  
and a sunny September in Paris  
when we met in the little Place du Louvre  
by the fountain in a small ornate terrace.

It took me seven long years  
to free myself from you,  
for love to chime away, not far -  
just to somewhere in the deep.

I loved... not you, but my past in you -  
a sudden leap into the youth of heart.  
You loved... not me, but your memory of me -  
sound of the sad Shadow of Your Smile,  
my love that turned your wasted life around,  
your short happiness of having me.

Boulevards, bridges over Seine, small cafés...  
until the morning light.  
Your life - music, family, France  
my un-aging thirst for life.  
Snapshots.

A chance embraced us in Moscow,  
then two strands of time, born in pain,  
carried us into different lifelines.  
In Paris they entwined for a short moment  
before the ocean separated them again.

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*I gotta buy some lighter underwear*

## INTERVIEW

Where do you like to read your poetry -  
at a concert, conference, in a college auditorium?

Mostly in my kitchen to utensils,  
or on my deck to chipmunks -  
they are quiet and quizzically attentive.

Where do you like to live -  
in a house, apartment, city, country cabin?

It doesn't matter - just live dangerously -  
I keep at night my back sliding door unlocked,  
and fly and drive and hike everywhere.

Where do you like to walk -  
in the woods, streets, in the mall?

Surely, on the moon -  
there I will weigh six time less  
and feel exceptionally good.

Where do you like to make love -  
on a thick rug or on a waterbed?

Actually, I prefer in my dream -  
without failure, it is always good,  
no matter who is in it with me.

February, 2002

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