



MIKOLA AURAMCHYK

Meeting of Old Ponymen

To Pavel Besposchadny

You were, it's clear, a ponyman by vocation,
But I, my friend, was a conscript ponyman.
I close my eyes – in tense imagination
I see it, like some awful dream, again.

That pit in smoky Ruhr I still remember,
And there not I, another, bowed in grime,
A skinny skeleton scarecrow I resembled,
And on the wall a shadow bent, not mine.

You worked in your own homeland with your fellows,
And Plover was the name you gave your steed,
With sharp-pricked ears, and mane like flying billows,
Who with his hammering hooves struck sparks indeed.

Don't tell me any more of him this evening,
How down the mine he knew your word so well, –
My heart, just like a wounded bird's, is beating
And burning with my memories, as you tell.

I had a nag whose foreign tag was Teufel,
But I called him Poor Devil more than once,
Although I did not know his name meant Devil,
And called him Poor old Devil just by chance.

In that Ruhr pit he was the only person
To whom I might have said a word, you know –
But all the same, when I spoke Belarusian,
He didn't understand "Gee-up" nor "Whoa!"

With trustful eyes, intelligent and tearful,
He looked at me with such a longing glance,
As though he understood, and found it awful
That to exchange a word we had no chance.

Those living eyes of his grew cold and glassy,
From constant dark and tears he grew half-blind,
And they reminded me, how in that darkness ,
There waited me a fate of similar kind...

The mist is rising. Here the warmth of twilight
Dies in the avenue, in the chill of night.
It seems an ocean somewhere has grown quiet,
Beyond the dewy poplars' green-walled height.

And further – steppe, the pitheads and the slagheaps –
One takes the other's arm beneath his own,
They stroll, those former drivers of pit-naggies,
Along the street of this Donbas small town

1957

Translated by W. May