

❖ JUDGE'S CHOICE ❖

Ode to an Unknown Neighbour

I saw her sweeping the sidewalk, determined,
With every stroke, to remove every speck,
Every crumb, every vestige of impurity.
Dressed in black from her neck to her knees with
The skin-toned, stockings rolled up to the hem of her dress.
A man's worn leather sandals on her flat feet.
A bright babushka adorned her head
With tiny flowers of pink and red.

She swept with zeal and purpose
And something antediluvian and obscure.
I marveled at her fruitless labour
And, continued down the road.
Day after day I saw her sweeping the sidewalk -
Getting rid of the dirt and the dust.
When the leaves fell she swept them as well,
Single-mindedly purging her personal hell.

One day our eyes met, exchanging a furtive glance.
I'd like to say there was a friendly twinkle in her eye
But it was black, black as pitch and dour as death,
And it told me nothing of who she had been.
She looked almost guilty that
She had allowed herself to break from her sweeping
And she picked up with fervor,
Leaving me alone, an unsolicited observer.

Snow blanketed the streets
No sweeping left to do for the old woman.
Her broom rested peacefully next to the front door,
As the snow piled up.
Every day for a month I passed by that house -
The lonely wooden broom lay in the exact same spot
And behind curtained windows not a movement, nor sound
And finally, a "For Sale" sign stuck in the ground.