

# The Sweater of Vladimir Ussachevsky

By John Haines

Facing the wind of the avenues  
one spring evening in New York,  
I wore under my thin jacket  
a sweater given me by the wife  
of a genial Manchurian.

The warmth in that sweater changed  
the indifferent city block by block.  
The buildings were mountains  
that fled as I approached them.

The traffic became sheep and cattle  
milling in muddy pastures.  
I could feel around me the large  
movements of men and horses.

It was spring in Siberia or Mongolia,  
wherever I happened to be.  
Rough but honest voices called to me  
out of that solitude:  
they told me we are all tired  
of this coiling weight,  
the oppression of a long winter;  
that it was time to renew our life,  
burn the expired contracts,  
elect new governments.

The old Imperial sun has set,  
and I must write a poem to the Emperor.  
I shall speak it like the man  
I should be, an inhabitant of the frontier,  
clad in sweat-darkened wool,  
my face stained by wind and smoke.

Surely the Emperor and his court  
will want to know what a fine  
and generous revolution begins tomorrow  
in one of his remote provinces...

(1967)

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