



Seed in Snow

Knuts Skujenieks

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This first US publication of Knuts Skujenieks—one of Latvia's foremost contemporary poets—is the author's most important and widely-translated body of work. Convicted in 1962 of anti-Soviet sentiment, Skujenieks wrote these poems during seven years of imprisonment at a labor camp in Mordovia. Vivid and expressive, this collection overcomes the physical experience of confinement in order to assert a limitless creative freedom.

A Love Poem

*I would like clarity. To exclude
A relationship's tangled yarn.
Not a word.
Let reaction suffice.*

*So. Only so. And if the two of us
Are pitched alone against the world,
That we can instantly swing about
From face-to-face
And stand back to back.*

*Would that be too much?
But a poem cannot be written
If one awaits the bullet
From the back,
And not from the front.*

Knuts Skujenieks was born in 1936 in Latvia, where he studied philology and history at the University of Latvia. In 1962, he was convicted of anti-Soviet activity and served a seven-year prison sentence in the Mordovia gulag. While there, he sent out many poems in letters to his wife, which were first published in 2002 as *Sekla sniega* (*Seed in Snow*). A polyglot, Skujenieks has translated into Latvian such poets as Lorca, Ritsos, Neruda, Vallejo, Galczinsky, and Tranströmer. He has received the highest literary and state honors in Latvia, as well as awards across Europe, including Sweden's Tomas Tranströmer prize, and his poetry has been translated into more than thirty languages. He currently lives in Salaspils, Latvia.

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