

MEREDITH STRICKER

A Living Coal

“Maybe at that time God had abandoned us, only hunger was left”

he wanted to speak of the bread made of nothing but no words came
only grey grey grey and grey and blank and blank and no no no no one
bone bone blank grey and no one grey and gone you build a fire
and no one comes this fire gnaws meager sticks cold as killing this fire
enters your body a hunger you cannot answer the mouth cannot
say it nor eat it nor any living thing reach its edge or end when
near death Rilke writes *Ich brenne / I burn* he enters the hunger
willingly or not it doesn't matter he is speaking without metaphor
when life has been stripped away there is nothing it is like—
man's fast-moving cloud or living coal

Note: The poem's opening quotation is taken from the testimony of the poet's great-uncle Peter Stricker in *Jetzt sind wir hier: Gespräche mit Zuwanderern aus der ehemaligen Sowjetunion* (*Now We Are Here: Conversations with Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union*), published in Germany in 2008.