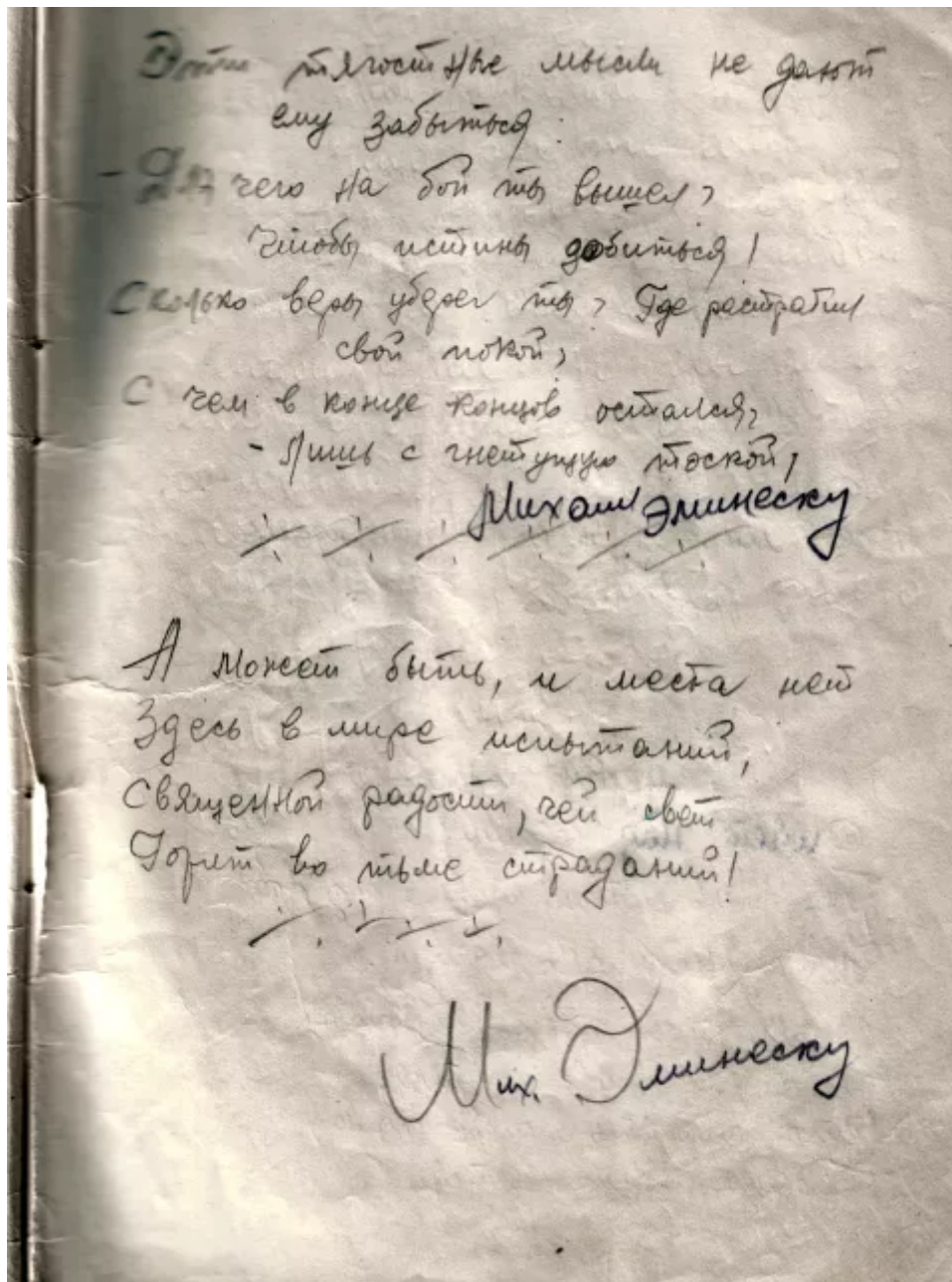


Page From Esfir Dener's Camp Diary



This is a page from my camp diary that I kept from 1951-1954. I wrote with a pencil because pens were forbidden. These are two quotations from poems by my favorite poet, Mihai Eminescu, in Russian translation. The first quotation says that a hero went out for a battle to fight for the truth, but all he had in the end was anguish. The second says that there are no joys in the world of trials. In 1951 I was sent to the transition prison in Nyrob settlement in Perm region and then to Shunia camp. I was kept in the barrack for criminals. This was terrible! They smoked makhorka tobacco and cursed terribly; they were just swearing all the time. They made lesbian love behind a sheet curtain and smoked hashish delivered from Central Asia. What was I to do?! Fortunately, there was a cultural/political unit where I could borrow books to read. There were shelves with books on them. I turned to the other side and, thought, 'My God!' - Guess what I found there: Mihai Eminescu, among books by other writers. This was a sign of God - and it meant that I wasn't going to stay there in the camp and in exile forever! I took this book into my shaking hands, put it on my plank

bed, closed my eyes, saw the graves of my mother and father and swore an oath that I would never drink, smoke drugs, make lesbian love, and that I would never lose my humanity. Never! Because I had no father, no mother, and if I fell there would be no one to give me a hand.