

## FIRSTLY, SECONDLY

by Yisroel Shtern (1922)

translated by Miriam Koral (2005)

Love-struck twilight has fallen down. On the hill stands Night,  
in both her hands – the storm.

The stillness of the rivers drowned itself from shame -  
darkness tore out their fresh red tongue.

Mute distances scream out how far the night has reached,  
dousing beloved help.

My heart will tumble out, close the windows.

Dusk's fragrance wafting sweetly over his palate,  
the fisherman, gold-remnants in his eyes, yet holds his net,  
pulling out...his full-grown, black, thirsty image.

We mirror ourselves in the storm.

Clouds scream deeply, seven-heavens deep,  
in the night we fall in over our heads  
letting slip dark crimson childhood from our arms...  
Freezing winds pierce the firmament's tender skin.

My heart will escape, close the windows.

Shadows wrap loneliness in cooled cloths like a child,  
lead her to the hazy border between field and twilight,  
where trees live bent  
under the yoke of keeping too much silence...

So we close our eyes – swing, swing evening-wind!

We squeeze our eyelids tight: little points...little lights...dance...float...

life is a sleep arrayed in colors that hurries for a stroll –  
so who is knocking on the farthest gate?

And if we open ourselves up:

the regretful-blue-embracing earth and sky  
slashes our throats in a flash.

The streams flow like bloody veins, enticing to deep wet graves  
people and their yearning.

Our red eyes swim into the distance, where the darkest edge  
is already thundering night's song

and the first stars laugh  
meanly

with hollow silver eyes.  
Roofs have nowhere to hide  
and tearing pieces from themselves,  
throw sacrifices to the storm...  
    And my heart? – Close the windows!

How can one be alone?  
The storm is here, and Mankind's in the storm - and as distant from himself  
as clouds – from heaven...

Is someone still below?  
Earths clutch storms to themselves, onto their shoulders, while Man is distant  
from himself,  
a lifted wing...how can one be alone?

How can one be a stone, the stone's no stone, the stone is hot -  
cooking sweet cobblestones of blood.

Who lives alone these days?  
In angst-sweat, lonelinesses run up the spiral staircase of the wind  
to scorch, in the flaming horizon, hands emptied of tears --:  
maybe their guilt hangs there...

How can one be alone and clean and deep? - calls the crystal of a river  
to its sandy edge - where someone stands weeping  
in envy of the fish...

The hearts' outflow has broken its banks.  
They stand - Dawn and Noon and Evening - up to their bellies in flood.  
The stillness sails this way and the boat heaves...

How can one be alone?  
In the dream dreams the storm, like an iron tongue  
in a silver bell...

Twilights awaken the silk from their daydream,  
and tear themselves from their blue bed with a cry: Dark clouds are coming  
  
and we are going under!

Who is alone now?  
On the tired matted panes night falls like a curse.  
Never before has she revealed such a great wild mane.  
The windows shudder, their skinny frail white frames just fall apart.  
In the darkness the walls cave in, hung with heavy shadows,  
like pictures  
of dead loved ones. Who lives alone these days?

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