

Lullaby for a Jewish Child in Germany
by Yisroel Shtern (1939)

Translated by Arnie Goldman (2006)

Sleep, my child, the sun's fallen down
And is badly hurt, but you mustn't frown.

Sleep, my child, the evening's long gone,
It's late, late, though our time's yet to come.

See, the day has bowed down, ashamed and red,
But you don't yet know, child, of shame or of death.

Many days for you, child, will still be kept open,
Your mama must watch now so you can lie sleeping.

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Sleep, child, they've already risen, the stars.
No one can know what will come of their fears.

Both he whose heart's heavy, and he whose is light,
We all grow from within, like a tree in the night.

But beautiful fruit can come from a black tree
For your tiny hands; I so want this to be!

One day your hands will make sinners pay deep,
Meanwhile sleep, my dearest, my little one, sleep.

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Sleep, my child, it is still soft, your bed...
Close your eyes tight, don't hear what I've said...

Of my blind thoughts, what sense could you make?
They tremble with fear at the path that they take.

How far will they go, these un-silent nights?
Someday others will curse — and you will be right.

Good fellow, night and stars as one will be shining!
But sleep now, don't hear how your mama is crying.

My holiest child, you're already asleep,
And a boat grabs the moon and swims over the deep

Until it arrives at a forest so tall
Where every tree is centuries old

And along with their roots, crawling up from the deep,
Come past generations, our letters to receive –

The silvery letters brought by the moon;
And they write us back on the night sky's blue.

First the boat sails itself home to our place
And a smile of joy comes to your sleeping face.

And you and I, dearest, are no longer alone –
Sleep, child, sleep, it's so lovely this dream.

Warsaw, July 28, 1939

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