

**For the Curious (1921)**

**by Yisroel Stern (<sup>1</sup>)**

Translated by Robert Friend (1987)

When someone asks me who I am,  
I send that someone to my nights.  
The first night says:  
A grave.  
No stone has yet been raised.  
He flew about as quiet  
as a dove,  
and somewhere fell asleep  
like a dove.  
No one cried over him,  
and no stone has been raised.  
But sometimes while the world laments  
somehow so softly  
and as white  
as a white dove,  
the moon in the middle of the sky  
stands still  
and with a long finger points  
toward the window of a little house:  
he died here!  
The second night replies:  
Always in love –  
once with a day that sailed away  
in a ship of gold across the sea  
and once with a day that cradles still  
within my lap and sleeps its fill,  
until in red-blue ink  
God scrawls across the sky:  
Wake up... wake up... wake up!  
Always in love,  
he could stand for hours  
in the midst of the sleeping town  
and burn and burn  
between two suns.  
The third night looks down:  
Still – still.  
Streets –  
shops –  
poles –  
parks –

still – still.

A path –

a bridge –

a stream –

a mill –

still, still.

But somewhere near a fence

creeps someone bent.

Is it the watchman?

Is it a thief?

A watchman maybe who's also a thief?

The third night looks down

and at her side the clouds

drift, drift, wobbling as they drift.

When someone asks me who I am,

I send that someone to my nights.

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1.) Ed., 2006: We are grateful to Faith Jones at NYPL for providing images from the author's publication of this poem, in the first issue of the magazine *Ringen*, January 1921. (pp. 29 – 30). It is of interest that the author's surname is given as Stern and not Shtern (the *shin* is dotted). Otherwise there are minor differences only from the 1951 Polish edition given here on our website, as follows:

1.7 comma after *vi a toyb*

1.10 no punctuation at end of line

1.29 the third *shtey oyf* as well has 3 dots after it (and no exclamation point)

1.30 follows without a paragraph break

1.41 the second *shtil* has no punctuation after it

1.47 follows without a paragraph break

1.49 follows without a paragraph break

1.51 has a paragraph break after it

The 1955 book's version is identical with the Polish edition. They use the modern spellings – 1921 still had *inmiten*, *gasen*, *krumen*, etc...

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