

Section Seven on Czysta Street

Translated by Beni Gothajner and Andrew Firestone (2014)

They don't use whips to beat us here.
Hearts that pound
don't let the sun arise with joy
at dawn.

And evenings with red swollen feet
pass wretched and alone,
pass into bodies
and emerge as wails.

All night we listen to the heavens churn
and think: "we will be burned up from inside,
lie thrown about, like trees felled in a storm:
any moment the world can slip from our hands".

You resist – and hold on tight to the lapels
of your life, and pare the skin from an orange;
but the knife falls from your grasp and suddenly
you notice: your fingers are dead.

The days drag on here. Either
they end with storm-winds
or pass without a trace,
like children's tears.

Now we awake in terror – a fire burns in our town:
in beds 20, 18 and 40,
pulses thump with menace – heavy, ill-tiding chimes.

And now on a low foot-stool sit all your neighbour's years
And pale with shame confess: "We have been laid to waste!"
Your neighbour's heart barely beats, weak as
the sound of stockinged feet on Tisha B'av.

People here think: maybe we will fly up
somewhere like a golden bird, for in truth
all walls are falling down, all the walls.
Maybe we'll become blueness in the firmament.
If all the walls are falling down, all the walls,
then we'll be free, and free are those who recognize
the Voice, that calls out in town and river,
in forest and in brick, on radio and on the wind:
"Later you will be Mine and you are Mine now as well" ...

People here bear a dreadful shadow speech
inscribed upon their arms and heads:
"Who picks, like berries, the largest toll of dead?
The pick comes from the Second Section, and from Section Seven".

Living they know: that in the end
all walls will fall, all of the walls.
And the gate will open wide...

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And often one of them sleeps without a sound – silent as the grief
of a lost soul asleep in the arms
of a saint.

1934

FOOTNOTE *

The Czysa Street hospital was "for impoverished Jews" - The 2nd section was surgical and the **7th section**, a building walled off from the rest (similarly to the 8th section for infectious diseases) - was for **mental illnesses**. * we are grateful to Adam Dylewski, Editor-in-Chief, Online Portals, The Museum of the History of Polish Jews, for providing this information.

A Personal note - Andrew Firestone

Later on, with the creation of the Warsaw Ghetto by the Germans, the hospital transferred into the Ghetto, to Leszno st.

My mother's younger sister Ida Czerska worked as a doctor at the Leszno
st Hospital. She had completed all but one year of her medical studies
when the Germans had closed the universities.

On August 6 1942 the entire hospital was cleared in an "akcje", with my
aunt Ida among them, i.e., she was crammed into a train at the
Umslagplatz and transported we expect to Treblinka; that was the last
anyone knew of her. The Red Cross badge she was wearing was ignored.
Many thousands were taken that day.

Her mother survived the War and came to Australia with my parents and
me in 1949 - but was hardly ever seen to smile.

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