

Under Alien Skies by Yossel Birstein

No more to do with the roar

Translated by Miriam Leberstein

I have no more to do with the roar of the city
and no more to do with the hearth of my neighbour.
Door murmurs to door signing like the deaf
“Who was it that halted him in his tracks?”

It isn't the beautiful sky or the sun
nor is it the day, autumnal and windy
but a kind of a bell ringing out its command
which resounds in my head “you are guilty... are guilty.”

Why am I guilty? I don't know why.
The tragedy is spreading like weeds through my life.
My dear ones that died visit during the night,
they demand sorrow of me, but I have none to give.

They stand by my bedside, immovable, stubborn
staring in silence, as is their habit
as I lie outstretched in my cushiony bed
dying of surfeit, not from privation.

And what happens next? Nothing else happens.
I wake to a morning splattered with sunlight
and try to forget in the taste of my bread
the world that visits my bedside at night.

But a bell keeps on ringing: “Know this, you are finished –
and what is more – you have been cut adrift.
You have no more to do with the roar of the city
and no more to do with the hearth of your neighbour.”