

Under Alien Skies by Yossel Birstein

A visitor on my doorstep

Translated by Leigh Fetter

I clean away the plenitude from my table,
remove my wellbeing, as if another's clothing.
A visitor is on my doorstep –
come to stay for ever, he's intending.

He sits down at the table by me, near,
to wait until these become my own:
the misfortunes of his body,
his sadness, and his fear
which lies hidden beneath his load of silence.

On bowed shoulders his head is firmly set,
and I can tell he waits for me to say:
I want to be humiliated like you,
like you I also want to be depressed.

I don't know if I tell him that or not,
but over me starts swaying low
the heavy fate of my father's lot
which my father too hid silently below.

It may be that my father – it is he,
this visitor seated by my side
silent, heavy and constricted, as if awaiting
my forgiveness for some wrong he's done.

But it could also be, the visitor is simply me,
and I'm beside myself, by sorrows overcome –
waiting for a word to rise in me
waiting, to tell myself something.