

Under Alien Skies by Yossel Birstein

Inside an Army Tent

Translated by Miriam Koral

Huddled inside my army coat
I lie on the rotting straw
tired, so tired,
an aging, old Jew.
Cain's hand is yet wrath
Cain's fist – still a sword.
Cain beats,
Abel murmurs "Strike".

Pleasure rushes, in the hand that strikes;
there's also joy in bending to the ground,
pleasure as well in bending to the ground.
But Cain's paws are so sickening,
even more –
than murmuring "Strike".

So I burrow into my army coat.
What does the green coat want from my hide?
Why do I burrow in the sweat-rotted straw?
So tired. So very tired.
An old Jew.

Oh, in the howl of ghost-talk,
why does my grandfather keep his hands outspread in priestly benediction, still?