

Under Alien Skies by Yossel Birstein

Upon the death of Pinkhas Goldhar

Translated by Leigh Fetter

I won't let my shoulders tremble at all
though your sudden death breaks me up inside.
We lower you down
lower and lower –
we will raise you up, you will rise again like bread.

You were the first one here, the pioneer,
to feed the Yiddish word with your own
flesh and blood.
As for us, we came only
later – later,
to repeat after you as In the Beginning: *Ki-Tov*, it's good.¹

Who in this far-off land strengthened your arm?
Who, with Job's patience, nourished your loneliness here?
But now, this country will be close to us,
closer still – alas – this foreign earth.

Though the night comes shuddering out of me I confide:
I won't let my shoulders tremble at all.
I don't know who should now be the guide
but I, not yet called upon, will keep sentinel.

You it was that affirmed my darkened dawn,
now my notice will mark your death,
we lower you down
lower and lower –
we will raise you up, you will rise again like bread.

1947.

¹ (Ed): In the beginning: *Bereshith* = Genesis